



Transcript

Episode 1.4

Book 1, Chapter 4: The Keeper of the Keys

Announcer: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter re-read podcast, wherein two friends who read the books way back in the day as adults re-visit the series through a post-2020 lens. Your hosts are Lorrie Kim, author of *Snape: The Definitive Analysis*; and JC, an educator and long time HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle book 1, chapter 4: The Keeper of the Keys.

Lorrie: Hello, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: Are you ready to discuss chapter four: The Keeper of The Keys?

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Someone has just pounded on the door of the hut at midnight on Harry's birthday, and we're about to find out who it is. What stood out for you in this chapter?

JC: I think one of the first things is that I hear Robbie Coltrane's voice. Hagrid's dialogue, as I read it, I just hear Robbie Coltrane's voice and that's bittersweet. But he is Hagrid for me. The intersection of the movies and the books.

Lorrie: That's true. Yeah. We could make a chart of the actors and the characters according to how close they come, and I think Robbie Coltrane is smack dab in the middle. He is exactly what I picture. Yeah, good job. What gets me about Hagrid is this is one of those things where I feel like I know the kind of person JK Rowling is, because we're roughly the same age and had roughly the same liberal arts education. Hagrid, to me, is a textbook example of *The Raw & The Cooked* by Levi-Strauss. He's an in-between character; he is partly wild nature and partly culture. He'll wear a suit, but it'll be horrible brown fur; he'll eat and drink, but the plates and cups are enormous; and he is half qualified, he's half magical. He didn't finish Hogwarts; he can do magic, but of a wild sort. The most Levi-Strauss Raw and Cooked moment for Hagrid, to me, is that at one point, I think of the shepherd's pie. They're eating some sort of casserole at Hagrid's hut, and Hermione finds a talon in hers. Whatever is in that isn't supposed to be fowl,

so she just puts it away and she stops eating. I thought, "That is the Raw and the Cooked." Here we have the being that can crash down the barrier between one reality and another, force the Dursleys to acknowledge the other world, and pull Harry through. And he just makes himself comfortable, but nobody told him he could sleep over. He just pulls up his coat and goes to bed.

JC: It's so interesting, too -- and for all the reasons that it's Hagrid -- but one thought that I had reading this is that in a way, Hagrid is the worst manifestation of the magical world that Vernon and Petunia possibly imagine. He's abnormal in every way that they hate: he's unkempt, he's a giant, he dresses weird, he talks with this lower-class accent, all the weird shit he pulls out of his coat, how he behaves so strangely, every single thing that he does. It occurred to me that this is, on the one hand, the best possible person to come in and just scare the crap out of them. But if it had been, for example, McGonagall who had come to this hut on a hill and knocked on the door and just been the stern school marm, it would have been a very different kind of experience. In a way, that would have been -- I think they probably would have felt better about handing Harry over, in some ways. This idea that this is the guy who's going to come and take Harry off to the school where he's going to become just like that, even more weird and abnormal. I found that really interesting, too.

Lorrie: And refreshing, to me. I like how ineffective the rifle is against Hagrid.

JC: That's great.

Lorrie: Whatever pitiful defenses you thought you were going to have, they are meaningless here.

JC: Yes, as an American...

Lorrie: I know.

JC: It's great to see a gun made completely useless so quickly. If only, yeah.

Lorrie: This interruption from Hagrid is so iconic, this whole episode. Sausages and tea at midnight. When my older child turned 11, I woke her up at 11:45. I was frying sausages and boiling water, and I knocked at her door at midnight with the sausage and with a cake that I had decorated, frosted to look like an owl.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: She swore that she would be up at midnight. LIES. No, she looked mildly offended and said to give that stuff to her in the morning.

JC: Wow, in the morning.

Lorrie: Yeah. No, she had sworn that she never sleeps. She doesn't sleep until one or two in the morning. She was really feeling grown up about this. Nope, lies. But yeah, the sausages and tea and the owl: this is a good moment. This is a good moment in English literature.

JC: There's so many little fantastic moments in this chapter where Hagrid is doing things that, in retrospect, knowing the world, are just completely normal magical-world behaviors.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the first time that anyone reads this, it's just utterly batshit. After you've read everything and you go back, you can never read it for the first time and capture that with the Dursleys and even Harry, as we're seeing. But that wonderful moment where he's like, "Oh, I need to let Dumbledore know that I've got you," and he pulls an owl -- a really ruffled-looking owl -- out of his coat, and he pulls out a quill and some parchment. He scribbles this letter and he gives it to the owl, and he throws the owl out into the maelstrom. Then the line of, "Just as if it was as normal as talking on the telephone," which is exactly what it is.

Lorrie: Right, and we don't do that anymore. We don't have the thing with the cord.

JC: Exactly. Exactly, where you call the building where the person might be, that you think they are? They're there. Yeah.

Lorrie: And see if they managed to run to the phone before it stops ringing.

JC: Right. This is really texting in a slow-mo way. Yeah. It's like snail texting.

LK: But the owl has feelings. The owl has something to say about all of this. The responsibility of telling a kid something huge that's going to change their whole self-perception, that is enormous. This does happen in life sometimes. Sometimes people do have to sit somebody down and say, "That thing that you thought about your family your entire life? It's actually not true." Sometimes, people show up at your doorstep that you didn't know existed. Sometimes, something that you thought was normal your whole life? Someone has to break it to you that it was horrific abuse and that your whole life has been nothing but trying to adjust to that, and that it's going to take a really long time -- if ever -- to recover. There's someone who's going to have to break that to you. It's very loving of Hagrid to realize that he's got the responsibility to do one of those things, and he just takes a deep breath and does it. And he does a good job of it, and he respects what a monumental change this is going to be. I like that because he's just so big, Hagrid's presence guarantees enough safety so Harry can finally read his letter. Oh, ow.

JC: Which is short and to the point. There's this feeling of, that was it? It was three sentences and a list of supplies? But for it being this thing that's so life changing, to have it just be a form letter in the end, saying, "You've been accepted! Please buy the school supplies, show up by September 1st." That's so interesting. He reads and it's like, "Okay, that's what it said. That's

what they were trying to hide from me this whole time?" But yeah, it represents this whole part of his life that the Dursleys kept hidden from him.

Lorrie: There's this whole world and you've been accepted? What kind of decision-making has been going on about him and he didn't even know? They all know about him. They talked about him, they assessed him somehow. The feeling of somebody realizing for the person, "They knew about me all along?"

JC: And that he's famous. Everyone knows his story, and he doesn't even know his story.

Lorrie: And the betrayal in that is horrific, too. I'm thinking about someone I went to college with, who didn't look for her adoptive parents until she was about 50 and, the whole time I had known her, thought, "Yeah, I'm adopted but it's not a really big deal for me. It's not like a gaping wound." But then as she reached middle age -- it was after her adoptive mother, who she adored, died -- she thought, "Well, here goes," and then she found the people and they had been waiting for her. That kind of destroyed her in the best way, and she just kept saying, "They knew about me all along."

JC: Wow. That is so interesting. There's a story in my family that's not quite like that; it's a little different. My grandmother was the youngest of twelve, and her older sister was a generation older. One of her older sisters -- her husband -- went off to fight in World War One -- this is how long ago this was -- and she had two little kids, I think, at the time he went off to fight in World War One. As it was a long, long time ago, there wasn't a lot of communication. But finally, he came back from the war. He came in at a port, the port of New Orleans, and sent a postcard that said, "I'm back. I'm taking the train. I'll be home in a few weeks." Everyone is so excited daddy's finally coming home. Except he never came and they never heard from him again, and no one knew what happened to him. The story in the family had been that maybe he got into a fight or he got robbed or something happened. The assumption was that he died and that he just never made it, and there's no way of ever finding out because this is 1920 or something. She never remarried because she always hoped he would come back, and her kids grew up knowing that their father had mysteriously disappeared, the grandchildren, great-grandchildren, all this. About three or four years ago, one of the great-grandchildren decided to do 23andme genetic testing; turns out they had half-siblings in Illinois or Indiana, one of those Midwestern states. He hadn't; instead of coming home, he met someone along the way, fell in love, and just ran off, abandoned the wife and children that he had and created a whole new family. Because of the way the world was then, he didn't have to contact them or get divorced. He just didn't go home, so everyone's idea of what their story was and what their father's story was... He wasn't this war hero who had probably been a victim and died. No, he left them and didn't even have the guts to contact any of them again. It was like, "Ahhh, the betrayal."

Lorrie: Ouch. Yeah. What does it mean that your whole life you didn't know about your own story and everybody else knew and was talking about you? Some people were trying to get your identity to you; other people were trying to prevent it for their own incredibly petty, dirty, despicable reasons, and some whim of theirs they thought was worth more than your entire

identity and history. It can be argued that with the Dursleys, it could be more than a whim. Somebody did lose a sister, but the way they're not being very introspective of that bit is hateful and realistic. I'm sure we all have seen people behave like this; could you just go a little bit further into yourself a little and just try to dig a little deeper? Because you are toying with someone else's entire identity.

JC: There's a moment -- that I don't think I noticed reading this before -- where Petunia starts ranting about... it's called a rant in the text.

Lorrie: Yes, she is ranting.

JC: And there's a line about how it seemed that she'd been wanting to say this for years, and I thought, "What was stopping her?" I had a moment of all the years -- the last year of reading a lot of Ask Aubrey on Twitter, where it's all relationship stuff or r/relationships. I was like, "Wait a minute. Whose idea was it to not tell Harry any of this? Whose idea was it to keep all this from Harry? Was it a joint idea? Was it Vernon's idea? Did she just go along with it?" I think at the beginning, he wanted to protect her. Vernon wanted to protect Petunia. I'm not implying that Petunia is innocent in all this at all, but it just made me think, "Oh, Vernon said, 'This is how we're going to deal with this situation,' and she didn't get a choice but to go along with it and she didn't completely disagree." But I think later on, we do learn that she's not as cold-hearted as she seems to be. This is her nephew by blood. This is her sister's son, and even though she's got a lot of anger at her sister and resentment, this is still her nephew. Anyway, I need to stew on that some more, but that really stood out to me, as if she had been prevented from telling Harry things that she knows she should have told him.

Lorrie: The thing about the Petunia/Vernon relationship is that I don't think it's completely sketched out, because your interpretation is completely possible. It's also, given what we see on the page, completely possible that she had clung to Vernon and begged him to provide enough of a stable life, of a conventional sort, that would make her feel secure so that she would have a sense of self that would be equal to the narrative that she had this brilliant sister who was a witch, and then this horrible tragedy happened. All along, every single thing that happened to Lily was against the backdrop of Petunia being completely unexceptional. She had feelings, but she didn't have anything else. She had no gifts. She wasn't the person that her parents were excited to boast about. She wasn't chosen for anything. Her only strength was in being normal. So we do see at the beginning -- I think it's the first chapter -- where Vernon's thinking, "Well, who could blame poor Petunia, considering what she had for a sister." I think he felt sympathy for what a hard thing this was for her to deal with, and I think having him protect her was part of the deal of her marrying him because they are a couple. They do want to be together.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: But I am sure that their relationship is not fully fleshed out as characters in a novel, where in a novel the characters' emotional states -- their motivations -- have to be consistent. They have to stand up to scrutiny as consistent people, but they're not being presented in this

part of the first book as characters in a novel. They're being presented as stock figures in a fairy tale even though when they do things, like have dialogue that goes closer to novel -- where they have individual motivations -- but this is part of the genre shifting that happens, especially in Sorcerer's Stone. Are we reading a novel, or are we reading a fairy tale? In the fairy tale, we have these two people who, for whatever reason, they like each other, they like convention, they are threatened; it does start to creep in, though. Is she afraid of losing him?

JC: Him being Harry or Vernon?

Lorrie: Vernon. Is there going to be some point at which he says, "I married you thinking you were normal and wherever you go, there's going to be giants and people bending my rifle. No, I've had enough." A few times, we do see Vernon decide that he's had enough, and then it's up to her to find out, "Does he love me enough, so that if I tell him, "No, I'm overriding you, I'm taking a stand," is he going to say, 'Okay,' or is he going to say, 'That's it, I've had enough?'"

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: It can go many, many different ways. We don't have enough evidence to choose one characterization over another. It is very incomplete and I think that's because it's a fairy tale, but these people are so recognizable that I do experience them as characters in a novel and I want to know: who's afraid of losing who and what here? In terms of fanfiction, it's good and flexible because you can take it a number of ways and be plausible, but I don't think it's one of those cases where you can analyze the characters from this text and come up with a single conclusive read.

JC: And it's interesting to me that that's what I want to do, but I don't remember wanting to do that 20 years ago when I first read this book. I was completely interested in Harry's story, so the fact that 20 years later -- and I'm 20 years older -- that I'm trying to understand Vernon and Petunia: What the hell would bring you to treat a child this way? What could happen? And you're right, they're fairy tale characters, they're the fairy tale stepparents. They're not really analyzable in the way that I want to analyze them. That's really interesting. I hadn't thought of that.

Lorrie: Yeah, because what we see right now in this chapter, with Hagrid coming to confront them, is that Hagrid is pulling out to the forefront their rationalizations for why it's okay to get away with treating a child this way. Every lie they've told themselves about this, he's mercilessly hoisting right up to the surface, and then they whimper.

JC: I think that's one of the things that I find also really interesting about this is that on a first read, you're looking at things through Harry's perspective and from the perspective of a child who's been powerless against people who've been abusing him his entire life. This is such fantasy fulfillment, to see another adult come in and say, "No."

Lorrie: A bigger one.

JC: Yeah. "You should not have been treated this way. This is horrible," and tell them off. That's fantasy right there.

Lorrie: It is such a fantasy. To have them not argue; to have him say, "Dursley, you didn't tell him?" and Vernon just shrinks. Yeah. So this chapter introduces the central mystery of the Harry Potter series: why couldn't this mass murderer kill this baby? What was it about this baby? And it takes a really long time to answer that question, doesn't it?

JC: It does. It's what, about two million words or something like that?

Lorrie: It's a million.

JC: A million, okay.

Lorrie: And I am in awe that that one question could be sustained over so much story, and we get closer and closer to the answer gradually. Over a decade and over a million words we inch closer to the answer. And then by the end, the answer can be found; it is given, but we have to look for it and we have to still interpret it. It's not just spelled out for us. I love it. It's the pure central mystery of the series and, unlike some things from *Sorcerer's Stone*, the very first time it's laid out like this remains valid through any sophisticated convoluted change in the level of writing in this series. For example, this is also a chapter where Petunia says that Lily came home with frog spawn and was turning teacups into rats or something. Now we're like, "No, she's not, because you're not allowed to do magic!" That happens when you spend 10 years to write a seven-book series. You don't know that the publisher's going to okay books two through seven.

JC: Sure, sure.

Lorrie: You think this might be it, right? But the way that Hagrid poses the central mystery, it holds up through the whole series, and that is impressive. Also, the way he sets forward the existential mystery of who and what Voldemort is, and whether or not he's dead and why he's not dead. "Don't know if he had enough human in him left to die." That answers the whole thing.

JC: Wow. That's a big clue right there.

Lorrie: That is THE answer right there. Can you just pause and think about what it is to be an author saying, "Oh, I've got this million-word series in me and I don't know if the world's going to publish my story or not, but I'm going to take as long as I need to take to answer what that means." Hagrid's take on it is succinct and correct, and that lays out for Harry what he's going to have to do to bring peace to this guy Voldemort. He's going to have to restore enough humanity in Voldemort to permit him to do something as natural and merciful as die. That's the task ahead of this 11-year-old. I love it.

JC: Listening to Hagrid -- I was listening because, as I said before, I kept hearing Robbie Coltrane in my head. It struck me while reading this that even though Hagrid comes across -- later on, we find out a lot of things about his backstory that might seem to make him less trustworthy in some ways and certainly lots of people think he's not that trustworthy, but we know Dumbledore trusts him. Looking back, reading through this, he tells Harry so many things about his background and some of it is phrased as if it were speculation, but almost all of those things are things we know turned out to be true. That was really interesting to reflect on, because I kept looking for, "What does Hagrid..." he's not presenting it as, "This is the truth, I know what I'm talking about," but still almost everything he says is 100% true. As you just said, you can find the main question of the series, the answer to that question, and the things he tells Harry right at that first meeting, and that's really fascinating,

Lorrie: Then there's the beauty of recognition, of integration, when Harry says, "This is a mistake. I'm not a wizard," and Hagrid smiles and says, "Never made things happen when you were scared or angry?" And that is such a huge, frightening, human moment when you start to put your own pieces together. The integration of things that you didn't have the full knowledge or permission to understand about yourself, the bits of evidence that you didn't let yourself piece together? Integration: it's validating, and it's wonderful, and it's so painful. Every time Harry goes back to remember another piece of evidence: well, first of all, those bursts of magic were forced out of him by abuse. Second, every single bit of it is, "Everybody knew but me. They didn't tell me about myself." Every time he comes to a new realization, then that reminds him, "I'm being invited over into the other world where I'm behind. I just learned about this now; what are they going to expect of me, and who's going to help me there? Nobody I know now. Maybe giant guy will help." We know people having that kind of realization in real life, when people say things like, "You are this way because you have ADHD; you're not lazy. The reason why everybody else could do this easily, and why you always got punished, is because for your kind of brain to get that goal, you're supposed to do it this other way that they don't know about. Here, try it!" Then if you try it and it works, that's very upsetting.

JC: True.

Lorrie: And you can't very well go back and kill everybody who made you do it the other way for your whole life. What are you going to do? Just because you now know the right way to do it and you meet other people who understand and do the same thing doesn't erase all the flinching from the decades of yelling you had to endure, and the punishment for doing it in a way that people believe you were doing intentionally to somehow cause trouble. You get motives ascribed to you, and then you get punished for those motives. Harry's like, "I swear I didn't do it on purpose. Why are you punishing me?"

JC: "I didn't make my hair regrow on purpose."

Lorrie: No. And what is with that world's ugliest haircut anyway? That is the single horriblest haircut I could possibly imagine. Yeah, the integration is painful and I know that we've been going back and forth about the queer allegories. Partly, I'm a little hesitant about the queer

allegory reading of all of Harry Potter living in a closet, because it's so obvious. It's a very obvious parallel in so many ways; and yet, at the same time, we are absolutely sure -- or I am, at least -- that it wasn't the primary intent of the author. Some people would be writing this as a queer allegory; that's not what's happening here. It works, but it wasn't planned that way. Here's an example of something that's almost too embarrassing to mention: is the obviousness of the threatened high school for Harry being Stonewall High.

JC: We did mention that last time. You're right.

Lorrie: We know that is not a reference to the Stonewall Inn. Just because we Americans are reading this going, "Oh, yeah, it's in Greenwich Village. I got my now 15-year-old a t-shirt from there last spring when I was there."

JC: "Got a picture of my kid posing in front of the Stonewall Inn." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. "She was wearing it yesterday." Just because we see that, we can't mention it because first of all, it's way too obvious and second, we know that's not what was intended. There's an act, when reading and interpreting, of having to sort through what you know you're bringing to it, and what you doing as a reader trying to know how to comprehend the writer in the story that they're giving you, why they're giving you that story, and why you're reading a different story at the same time. "Oh, so you just never understood why everyone else seemed fine and normal and why you're having such a hard time? Did you ever consider you might be gay?" *gasps* "No." "Yes. Do you know there's whole places you can go where everyone's gay?" "Really?" "Yes. Do you know that they've been watching you this whole time, taking bets on when you're going to come out?" "Fuck them!" "Did you know that your aunt and uncle were going to be sending you to conversion camp?" "Didn't you ever wonder why, when these strange-looking, strangely dressed people saw you in the street and waved at you, and you waved back and why it freaked out your aunt and uncle?" This is not the intended reading, but darn if it doesn't just keep coming up again and again.

JC: Definitely. Tying back to something that you were just saying a bit ago about kids with ADHD or some kind of neurospiciness that they're learning how to navigate, another thing that I think I'm going to keep looking for as we go forward: I'm a college professor and I work with pre-service teachers, and we talk a lot about helping first-generation college students navigate this new world that they don't know how to navigate. They don't have the resources, or no one in their family can tell them anything about how to be successful in college. I have had multiple students who come from parts of the state of Texas where there's a lot of poverty; in the state that I'm in, if you graduate in the top seven percent of your high school class, you are granted automatic admission from the university that I teach at. They just get a letter in the mail one day -- almost like a Hogwarts letter -- that says, "Hey, you've been admitted to the University of Texas. Please reply here if you want to attend." It's like they get a Hogwarts letter. They don't even have to apply; they just get a letter saying you can come. For some of them, this is a surprise and they had no idea, and I've talked to many students for whom it was literally that experience of, "Oh, okay." They pack up all their stuff, everyone in their family is just like,

"Wow." It's maybe more like Hermione's experience of, "Okay, we're really proud of you. This is great! Go!" but they have no way to know how to navigate this. I think for Harry, but also for Hermione -- I'm going to be looking for that theme a bit, too -- that idea of being first-generation, of being Muggle-born, and how those two experiences might compare here.

Lorrie: Yeah. Hagrid shouldn't have transfigured Dudley.

JC: Oh, I had that written down, too. Oh, my god. I don't think I noticed that before in the way that I did now. This is the grown up, middle-aged person reading of this. Dudley? Okay. Yes, he's been a bully to Harry all his life. Dudley was not involved in this conspiracy to keep Harry from knowing about anything. Dudley did not say a freaking word; he was in the corner freaked out, watching everyone scream at each other. He did nothing.

Lorrie: Being eleven.

JC: Being eleven. And I get that there's this childhood fantasy of having your bully get what they deserve but...

Lorrie: Hagrid didn't even know he was a bully.

JC: No, no. Why pick the kid? Oh, my god. I was really angry at Hagrid. He had nothing to do with this. It's not okay.

Lorrie: It's hard to enjoy. This is totally what fake Mad-Eye Moody does, turning Draco into a ferret, that shocks McGonagall. You're not supposed to punish an adult by hurting their kid. And if he had turned Vernon into a guy with a pig's tail...

JC: Vernon deserved it!

Lorrie: He was doing something right in front of Hagrid to deserve it. Dudley was just being a kid; he was just related to Vernon.

JC: Yeah. That really bothered me.

Lorrie: Obviously, it's a pig because he's fat.

JC: Yes, it goes back to the fat thing.

Lorrie: He's visibly fat, and therefore Hagrid thinks he knows enough about Dudley to know what Dudley deserves. There's really no way in which any of this is okay. Oy!

JC: It goes back to me side-eyeing the author really hard. "Really?" I don't even blame Hagrid, because at that point, it feels out of character for Hagrid. Knowing what I know about Hagrid for the rest of the series, that moment just felt wrong.

Lorrie: Well, this is one of those times where people who are absolutists about the author not existing -- which is somewhat incorrectly called 'death of the author.' People who say it does not matter what the author intended, the text is the text and stands alone: that shuts off the possibility of a reading like the one you just gave, where we don't trust the writing to say this is a consistent character Hagrid. Our trust breaks down, and we say the author pretty much wrote a consistent Hagrid, but where this is concerned, that's the author breaking down, "I don't hold the character responsible for it. When I do my profile of Hagrid the character, I'm not going to hold this as a formative core element of this character." This is the one where I'm going to say -- The way I put it is if I had been her beta, I would say, "Are you sure you want to do this, because I'm not sure this is consistent with the character that you've been trying to portray earlier in this chapter." For me, the other main example for that -- which is a huge bone of contention -- is the incident where Lupin coaches Neville to turn the boggart into Snape wearing his grandmother's clothing with heavily sexist, trans-misogynistic overtones. Do we hold Lupin accountable for all of that transmisogyny, or do we say, "I'm not sure if that was the character consciously molded, or if that's the author coming through." This is a reading that isn't possible if you declare that the only way to read is purely the text and don't perceive of somebody called the author and don't ascribe anything to them. Well, yeah, but that is actually how books are written. They are, in fact, written by humans.

JC: Humans, who are problematic beings often.

Lorrie: And who sometimes succeed in writing a completely brilliant, multifaceted, consistent character, but generally are humans and do a roughly reasonably good job with some slips here and there.

JC: Yeah. I really appreciate that characterization of the whole 'the author is dead' philosophy, because that is something that I've seen for 20 years in fandom spaces where people are talking about whatever media that they're into, whether it's a book or a movie or whatever. That's such a good way of thinking about it, that it's not perfect. You're going to find holes in the plot. You're going to find moments where characters are acting in ways that are just not consistent. Not consistent in a way that this goes beyond that humans are sometimes not consistent, but you're like, 'Okay, that really doesn't work for this person; that really violates their entire moral code, and it's more than just a slip.' I think that's a really great way of humanizing the author, for one thing. But also -- as we talked about in an earlier episode -- letting you take some control over the way that you are responding to things that you're uncomfortable with. You don't have to just say, "Well, It's in the text, and therefore it's part of the story. If you read this, then you're accepting this awful thing. You're an awful person, etc." I think that idea of being able to step back and say, "Okay, this was written by a person who has flaws," and you can pick out moments where you can see those flaws. And as a reader, it's important to go, "That's the author."

Lorrie: And it's not the same for every reader, because some other reader could say, "No, that is a cornerstone of that character for me, and this is why."

JC: Interesting. Yeah, true.

Lorrie: There's a show I love and have watched.

JC: I know what you're going to talk about.

Lorrie: You do know, don't you?

JC: This is great. I do know. Please talk about it. This is a great example.

Lorrie: It's BBC Sherlock, and Sherlock the genius is talking to his exponentially more brilliant sister, who plays the violin exquisitely. He says, "It's beautiful." And she says, "Is it? I never know if it's beautiful. I only know if it's correct." I don't actually recall who says what, but the question coming from that conversation is: if it's only about whether it's correct or not, then what's the point in *beauty*? And that made me so happy. The point of beautiful art -- the reason why it strikes us -- is because human imperfections mean that sometimes there's a really deep vibrant note that we can strike within ourselves with the literature. Only somebody who's flawed and makes mistakes can also go that far in the other direction and hit a truth that's so resonant that it's worth doing everything to read this book, to tell your friends to read it, to make clothes that remind you of this book, to do your hair so that it reminds you of it. It's the mistakes that permit art, but you have to know that there are going to be these things that may or may not be mistakes. There's also the possibility that what you think is a mistake is actually you not interpreting it correctly. If you think, "You know what? Let's just go into it. Maybe I'm wrong." It's happened to me with this series so many times where I think, "Oh, that was a mistake," and then I really think about it. "Let me just take it at face value and see what I can find," and then I realize, "Wow, I can't believe I was about to miss that because I thought that I knew what I was reading, but I didn't." And that happens. I'm really looking forward to talking about the many, many times in the series where I will say, "I thought I knew what that meant, and it made me angry." And then I thought, "Let me go see if I was wrong," and then something really beautiful opened up for me. However, in this case, I don't think Hagrid should have transfigured the kid.

JC: Right. Yeah. I'm going to call that a mistake with a high degree of confidence.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Hagrid's saying, "Let's just not mention that I did this."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I wish he had transfigured Vernon.

JC: Yeah. I think that would have been so much more appropriate. Yeah. Oh, he deserved it. One of the things that I really love about this chapter is that it's a huge backstory dump. It's a big narrative dump: "Here's all the information that we need to go forward," but it works so well. It's such great writing in that way. All this exposition that we need to go forward: we've established

all this backstory, we know what the big mystery is going to be, we have some hints about how things might go. The start of the world that Harry's about to go into, we're starting to see it and raise all this curiosity about it, but it's all done through the characters. It's just so well done. I can think of so many ways that this information could have been conveyed that would have just not worked well at all. In this one, it did. It's really thoughtful.

Lorrie: This is iconic. The reason why this kind of info dump is a cliché is because of chapters like this one that do it so perfectly that we want to relive that storytelling moment. This is the moment that the giant crashes through the barriers, forces a reckoning, and also brings food. And no one can do a darn thing about it.

JC: Another thing that I think is interesting about all the backstory that we learn: we learn a little bit about Hogwarts, and I find it fascinating. Okay, as an American reader -- I don't think I picked up on this the first time, but after learning more about the universe and then learning more about how school works in Britain and the different kinds of schools that there are: reading this again, it struck me that the way that Hagrid talks about Hogwarts, it is set up exactly like a traditional British boarding school. The structure of it would be immediately familiar to most British readers. To American readers, it just seemed like, "Oh, it's Hogwarts," but it's very familiar to British readers. They have the equivalents of A levels and O levels, all of that stuff. What I find fascinating about that, though, is that if the Wizarding world and the Muggle world are so separated that wizards are just baffled by ordinary Muggle technology and objects -- what's the function of a rubber duck, that kind of thing -- how would the schools be set up so similarly? That doesn't make sense. I had a moment of, "What?!" You could say some conspiracies about the people who work in the Ministry of Education are actually in cahoots with -- whatever, right? There are ways that you could justify it, but I just had this moment of, "Why are the schools set up in such similar ways if these worlds have been so separated for all this time?"

Lorrie: These are things that, yeah, I'm not as fiction-minded as I think you are. As long as the emotional allegory works for me, I'm happy. And wow, this chapter is nothing but emotional allegory. Woo!

JC: Oh, there's one more thing that I wanted to say. Let me just open up the book real quick. The opening line of this chapter is "BOOM!" in all caps. "They knocked again." THEY! I'm just going to side-eye the author a little bit there.

Lorrie: And it's a singular they.

JC: It's a singular they.

Lorrie: Why would anybody need that?

JC: Exactly. I literally read the first sentence, and I had to shut the book and put it down and go, "UGH!" for a moment. Then I reopened it and I kept reading, but yeah.

Lorrie: Well, when shall we meet again to discuss the next chapter, which is Diagon Alley? Are you excited or what?

JC: I'm very excited about Diagon Alley, and I think one of the things I'm excited about -- re-reading this chapter -- is all of the Diagon Alleys I've been to. I've been to the one in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, both in LA and in Orlando, but I've also been to the one in the movie studios outside of London; I have been in these physical places that are replications of the movie version, and I'm ready to re-read this chapter with that feeling of walking through Diagon Alley myself in my head, with the wand in my hand that, if I pointed at things, it makes things happen because in the amusement park version... Yeah, I'm ready for that. And I'm also ready to talk about -- we have our wand stories of our own children that we can talk about. That will be fun, too, to relive.

Lorrie: We do, yeah. Okay. Well, I'm super looking forward to it.

JC: Yes. Me, too.

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