

# HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

## Transcript

### Episode 1.5

#### Book 1, Chapter 5: Diagon Alley

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 revisit 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 one, chapter five: Diagon Alley.

Lorrie: So JC, are you ready to talk about chapter five: Diagon Alley?

JC: Diagon Alley, and I'm laughing because my notes auto-corrected to Diagonal Alley, which is kind of funny. There we go. Just had to fix it. Yes. Diagon Alley, which, again, the whole word is a play on diagonally. Yeah.

Lorrie: So this is the chapter where Harry finds out it wasn't a dream. He is being taken into a world where things are suited to him, and he has the resources to learn what he wants and needs. It's time to go shopping.

JC: Yes. This is such an iconic chapter for this series. I think it's iconic in so many ways; certainly in the film adaptation, this is, I think, the moment when everyone watching the film for the first time -- even the folks who hadn't read the book -- just gasped. It's just amazing.

Lorrie: Do you want to start?

JC: Yeah. Before we get to Diagon Alley, there's some things that jumped out at me that I don't know if I'd noticed before or they didn't stand out to me as much. The first one is that this is the only time in the entire series when I can recall an owl requiring payment for its services. Does Hagrid have bad wizard credit? Does this happen again, and I just missed it? Usually owls, they drop their shit and they go. The owl's like, "No, pay me. I don't trust you," or something.

Lorrie: Sometimes they take food.

JC: Treats. Well, this owl is just like, "Give me my money, man. I'm not leaving. I flew a long fucking way to get to this damn island. Come on, give me my money." That just stood out to me

because it's a cute scene and it gives that opportunity from a writing perspective. It lets you know a couple things: it lets you know that owls are magical creatures. These are not normal owls. There's something else going on there. They're a little more sentient than maybe elves. It also gives an opportunity to introduce the money system, which is hilarious.

Lorrie: And how completely illogical it is, just like all British systems.

JC: Yes, exactly. Just like the old British system of shillings and all that stuff.

Lorrie: Florins and half-crowns.

JC: Right. Exactly. I love that all the numbers of conversion are prime numbers. I think that's hilarious, too. I love that. It's like, "Why not? Why not make them divisible math?" That'll make for some really interesting math problems for the kids later on. "What are all the different ways that you can pay for this object?" Well...

Lorrie: It's intuitive. Don't worry about it.

JC: Yeah, it's easy. Simple. That one is kind of fun. Another thing that I was wondering about, just in that whole scene, was when they leave in the morning. First of all, the Dursleys: are they just asleep? Did they bug out overnight? We don't hear any more of them in that chapter, so that's always been a mystery to me. But then when they go out, when Hagrid implies that he flew to the island: How? I'm just like, "How did he fly?" Harry's mystified, too, but at that moment it seems possible. It's like, yeah, but knowing what we know about Hagrid...

Lorrie: Not a broom.

JC: Yeah, not on a broom. It's not the motorcycle that he borrowed from Sirius, for lots of reasons. So how did he fly?

Lorrie: I'm guessing thestral?

JC: That's an interesting idea. And then sent the thestral on its way.

Lorrie: Which would be hilarious to imagine how that looks.

JC: Wow, that's interesting. And there's some other things that are happening here that is on theme for this chapter: this idea of he's reading the paper. Hagrid, he gets the paper delivery. It's such a normal thing... not anymore, but at that time, your dad, your uncle, your grandpa would get the paper. They'd sit at the table, and they'd complain about what's happening in the news. So the fact that Hagrid does this, it seems like it's introducing this theme: the wizard world is just like our world. People have the same problems, magic doesn't fix everything. It just means that they operate in the world a little differently. I keep seeing that theme coming up in this chapter. Hagrid's all, "The Ministry of Magic --" I can't do the accent -- "messin' things up as

usual." It's just like what your uncle would say reading the paper. "Ah, the government's at it again!" Those little details right in the beginning, I feel, are just setting up this idea of the wizarding world: it's going to be this new and magical place, but it's not that different and it's probably going to have the same issues as the world that Harry currently lives in, even though he doesn't necessarily realize that yet.

Lorrie: They have a life. There's a life that once he learns to negotiate it -- once he gets over the culture shock and he's initiated -- can take him along in its rhythm. It's a complete life. There's one element that is not fully developed, I find, in Harry Potter world-building, which is exactly why the wizards have to be in hiding. Because different reasons are given for it, it's incomplete. In this case, Hagrid says, "The magical folks are undercover because if they weren't, they'd be exploited." The word is not exploited. He says, "Oh, everybody will want magical solutions to their problems," but that's what's implied there. There's different reasons given through the series, but you can't question it too much. It just is. They have more powers, but I guess they're outnumbered.

JC: For me, that did tie back to that explanation of Hagrid saying Muggles would want us to use magic to fix all their problems, and the implication there is we already know that that's not going to help. We're just going to cut them off, like, "No." It's better just to stay over here in our lane and not even let them know, and that feels really familiar to me somehow. As adults, I think we have all operated -- as a parent, in your career and whatever -- you hit a point in your life where you're like, "I know how to fix that for that person, but I know it would not be enough. I know they would still complain. I know they would fuck up whatever I did to help them. I'm just going to smile and nod and stay over here." That's what it felt like to me, somehow. That idea of, "I could help them, but it wouldn't actually make a difference. They wouldn't understand it. It would maybe even make things worse, so I'm just going to not."

Lorrie: It's not going to do what they want it to do. One of the biggest growing up moments that's so beautiful and sad in this series, for me, is in *Half-Blood Prince* at the end of the first chapter, when the Muggle Minister for Magic is so confused and he said, "But you can do anything, you're wizards," and Fudge says, "The other side can do magic, too." That's so much a moment of children growing up and realizing that adults can't fix things. It's beautiful.

JC: That is really -- yeah, yeah. I see that connection. If everybody has magic, you can use it anyway you want, so then the fact that you have it cancels out. At the time that we're recording this, the movie *Oppenheimer* is about to come out and that's all everyone's talking about. But again, that idea of, 'you can create something that has so much power, but that power in the hands of a lot of different people means that you get this mutually assured destruction' thing, and it's like, "Okay, we're back where we started." That's the world, that's reality.

Lorrie: To me, one of the recurring themes of this series is the fantasy of grownups. When you're born, you need that fantasy; without it, you can't grow. If someone's not going to take care of you, if someone's not going to be more powerful, bigger than you and full of love, then you can't grow; then, from that moment on, infinite potential for adults to let you down when

adults let things happen. Actually, readers to this day continue with this fallacy, this necessary fallacy, whenever you hear people being angry at Dumbledore: "Why couldn't he keep Voldemort out? Why is it so unsafe at Hogwarts? Sure, send the kids into the Forbidden Forest." That's that fallacy coming into play. It's such a necessary myth that we have because, in fact, no matter how omnipotent you are, you can't fix everything. Dumbledore is a general in a war. War means people die. It's not just that he could keep all harm away from Hogwarts and he chooses not to; he's doing the best he can, because adults can't fix everything. But, you see, even middle-aged and old readers of Harry Potter will still have this, "Wow, Dumbledore fell down on the job." No, it's that that's what you have to learn as you grow up, and that's what Dumbledore grapples with so much every time he has to step away from that fantasy and say, "I can't. If I could protect you I would, but I can't," and that's the big test. That's where Snape comes in; as one of the many characters who gets failed a lot by adults, especially by Dumbledore -- who could have helped him more when he was almost killed and didn't -- that's Snape's second chance. He's trying to see if he can be there as much as possible for Draco and Crabbe and Goyle. He knows he can't save them, but it's worth doing something. That's also the ultimate unfinished business that Dumbledore has with Tom Riddle -- that he tried and failed with Tom Riddle -- but there is somebody who could maybe do that for Tom, and Dumbledore will try to train that person. Alright, what else did you see?

JC: Just in the conversation between Harry and Hagrid before they even get to London; along the way, there's a lot of world-building that happens and Hagrid's just dropping some things into conversation. We get this revelation that Harry's family had money, and they have this conversation about Gringotts; all these little details of, "Oh, you'd be mad to rob Gringotts," or all the high-security vaults are guarded by dragons. Oh, Hagrid's always wanted a dragon. There's so much information that will be important later that's packed into that conversation. It's so interesting. Just reading that, it's like, "Ooooh," all these little things. Looking over Harry's school supplies list, as well.

Lorrie: Delicious.

JC: That was a moment. We've both been parents and we've both gotten school supply lists. I don't know if I've read this book since I've had the experience of having a child in elementary school, get the school supply list, and we have to get three boxes of Kleenex, check. One box of dry erase markers that's clearly for the teacher, check. Four folders, different colors, all that stuff. To see the magical version of that is a lot of fun. I did do a little \*sighs\* at the mention of Fantastic Beasts and Newt Scamander. That hit so differently for a thousand reasons.

Lorrie: Two different, really emotional things happen for me when I look at that supply list. One of them is the difference between what you want and what you need. That's something that you know more of the more privileged you are. But Harry, never having had any resources or anybody who cared to give him anything, doesn't know the difference yet because no one's ever asked him what he wants. He's never been able to get what he needs. This is the first time he has to learn these things about himself. There's that moment where he wants a solid gold cauldron. He can afford it. Harry never thought he would get an owl. Why not a solid gold

cauldron? What's the difference between getting a potion supply and a solid gold cauldron? He doesn't know. It's all the same to him, and Hagrid's like, "No, it says you're getting pewter." These are rules that he doesn't know because he's never had anything. He doesn't know what's extravagant; he doesn't know what to do when he has more resources than he needs. It's never happened. He has more resources than Dudley. What is life when you have more than you need? How do you equip yourself? How do you ask yourself, "What is it that I want, and what is it that I need? And what's the difference?" And I think about this: I have a very close friend who survived a lot of trauma in childhood, including three different foster homes. We went to college together, and I remember the summer after college, she had a deliberate project: she was going to find out what she likes to eat.

JC: Whoa, interesting.

Lorrie: She didn't know. Until then, it had always been: whatever food there is, eat it quickly and quietly, be grateful if they ask, don't take too much, and don't draw attention to yourself. Especially don't do anything that'll call attention to the difference between your relationship to such basic essentials and the kind of people who take things for granted. That summer, she learned she likes ricotta cheese.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: For the decades since then, when I cooked for her or when we've gone out somewhere, I'll get cannolis with her just because I remember how meaningful that was for her to realize, "I have preferences. I didn't know that."

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: And she found out there are things she doesn't like. How was she supposed to know that? We see Harry experiencing that for the first time here. "What's too much? I don't know." The other direction that this sends me is that the shopping scene or luxury choice passage is such a huge, beloved vital fixture of children's literature. It comes at this point in any story when you've been introduced to the situation, you've been introduced to the child, and we see what kind of change the child is going to have to go through and what they're going to need to prepare; then you have this scene, the one where there's wondrous unimagined luxury and choice opening up everywhere that makes you understand what's possible. It's like a candy store scene. There was a book that was, in the 19th century US, the best-selling children's book which has completely gone out of favor. It's called *The Wide Wide World*, and there's an orphan in it. The way that books go in and out of fashion -- that's hugely telling -- but yet everybody in the 19th century read this book and knew this book. It's like the *Harry Potter* of the 19th century. The orphan girl here -- there's a similar shopping scene, a whole chapter where they take her to the stationery shop because when she goes away, she's going to have to write to people. This girl who has never had anything: she gets a writing desk, she gets fine stationery, and fine pens to write with. It's all very bewildering, and it's really important and delicious. There's a similar one in *Little Women* -- I think *Little Women* may be also out of fashion for current readers, but

when I was a kid that was another one that you could count on a lot of people, especially girls, femmes, having read -- where at the beginning, there's a breakfast scene. They give up a breakfast, and it's hard for them because it's a luxury, but they're giving it to somebody who needs it more. Then a rich neighbor hears that they've done that and sends over an even more lavish breakfast to reward them. These material details, that's a really important thing in children's literature that comes after the establishment of the premises before you enter the action. I think the moment this book was published, the Diagon Alley shopping scene instantly shot to the top. If you listed the few most famous such scenes in Anglophone children's literature, I think it became a classic right away.

JC: Absolutely, absolutely. I think there's so much about that scene. Even stepping back and thinking about when Hagrid takes Harry into the Leaky Cauldron at first, that moment of realizing, "Oh, this was here all along, but you had to know that it was there or you wouldn't see." I did that. Muggles can't see this world, but it's right there, right under your nose. That is really interesting. But also Harry's first exposure to, "This is who you are, this is who people think you are, that you're famous." That moment of everyone in the Leaky Cauldron coming over to shake his hand and being so excited to see him, and how overwhelming that would be to a child, to anyone.

Lorrie: To anyone, yeah.

JC: So he has that experience. The next thing that Hagrid does is take him through a brick wall and into this magical world. So he's just been overwhelmed; now he's going to be overwhelmed in a different way. Now, he also has to experience this choice, this luxury choice that you were describing so well. At the same time, as he's walking through, gaping at everything he is seeing, there's all these little mundane moments that are showing us that this world is really the same. There's a description of the woman complaining about prices.

Lorrie: I love it.

JC: "Oh, what are they thinking?" Or the kids with their noses pressed to the glass, looking at the brooms. All these little things that let you know it's exactly the same, but with magic. It's so interesting. And I think the other thing that I love about that whole scene is that it's such a fantastic example of world-building and showing us what's happening in this world and giving us backstory. It's so well done.

Lorrie: Going back to the supply list. There are two iconic moments that struck me this time. One of them is the original piece of writing that became iconic: an owl OR a cat OR a toad. First of all, that combination of animals is already like, "Huh, what?" and that it refers to witches and familiars. But the way that the "or" is capitalized, that's a meme. If you wrote something in that formation, people would know that you're referring to this. The other one, of course, is the very portentous all-caps, "PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS." Oooh, it's in all caps. Hmm.

JC: Yeah. Every set of rules is a history lesson: it's there for a reason. What's the reason? Then we're going to learn more about it.

Lorrie: Tom the bartender is one of the first characters we encounter in this series that's sort of not human. He's human, but he's more like a guardian spirit. Madame Pince is like that; the trolley witch is like that; Madame Pomfrey, to an extent. It's like a tree nymph. Not a god that has a lot of powers; just has one guardian duty, and that matters to them more than anything. Tom is... what is he? He's a toothless walnut. It turns out later to be important how old he is, because he knew Tom Riddle at the same age. But yeah, he is the threshold figure, the doorway figure, and you pass through his domain. And ageless; he's a semi-magical personification of a function. Yeah, that's part of the magic. Of course, Diagon Alley: something that now we take for granted because we've lived with this piece of literature in our culture, but that is something that was really revolutionary at the time when Sorcerer's Stone first came out. All of the word play that Rowling uses and how she twists the language itself to open up possibilities in your mind while you're reading the story, that really was novel and delightful and genius. The parallel that I can think of now is you realize that we're not that far from the 10th anniversary of *Hamilton*. Now it seems like, oh yeah, of course. The things that *Hamilton* pioneered now seem like, "Of course, they always existed, they were always possible." But when it first debuted, the newness of how much it synthesized was just -- we had cries of joy, it was so new and beautiful. But yeah, Diagon Alley, that's all. If you're going to list some of the word play that opened up new imagination for people, I think that phrase would be part of it. What next did you see?

JC: Well, the first thing they do, they wander this alley and there's all of this stuff that you can't touch anything yet because you need the money, so they go to the bank. My interpretation of it the first time I read was, "Oh, of course, you have to go to the bank and get your money." Now reading it, I'm like, "This world is built on capitalism just like ours, but in a worse way." It's late 19th century, early 20th century capitalism, not the more socialism blended capitalistic society that we live in. I thought that just hit me again, like, "Oh, dang." Then they go down to the vault, they meet the goblins, which is a whole other thing to talk about there. They meet Griphook, which is... fun to see Griphook at this point; they take the fun ride down when Hagrid almost gets sick -- which is also kind of humorous -- but they get down there. First of all, when they open the Potters' vault, this green smoke comes out, which I didn't notice before; I had a moment of, 'Surely, that means something. It's not just atmospheric; I don't know what that might mean. I know the vault hasn't been opened in 10 years. I don't know what's happening here, but the green just stood out to me. Why is it green? That means something.'

Lorrie: The magical world has only primary numbers for currency and only secondary colors. It's a kind of queer offness. You have to think about everything.

JC: Right. So Harry opens the vault, and there's a shit ton of money in there. Okay, so then we've introduced a class system.

Lorrie: Yes, we have.

JC: It's very clear. That's replicating things that we see in the world, too, and Harry for the first time is like, "Oh." This is some information about his place in this world that he didn't have until that moment, and that shifts things for him, too, because he's never been that. He's never had that kind of power. He doesn't know what it's like.

Lorrie: He's never had an allowance.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He's never even had money for a pack of gum.

JC: Yeah. That's really interesting for him, and he deals with that as the books go on, too. But one thing that made me think about reading it, as an older reader looking at it again, is: where are James's parents? The only grandparent I can think of in this entire series is Neville's grandmother. I don't know if the Weasleys had grandparents; certainly, Dudley didn't seem to have grandparents. Harry seems to have no grandparents. I grew up in a small town, and grandparents were a big part of everyone's lives -- your grandparents, your cousins and extended families -- and the wizarding world seems like it would be very much the same way because things are so insular. So where are all the grandparents? And my first thought was -- I'm sure you have things that you could add to this -- the fact that an entire generation seems to be missing maybe felt a little bit like the author's experience of growing up as a boomer in post-World War II England, that grandparents were just not there because they had died or whatever. That was the first thing that I thought of. But the absence of grandparents stood out to me so much in that moment, thinking that, "Well, where are they? What happened to them?" No one has grandparents except for Neville, who doesn't have parents.

Lorrie: Well, partly, I think the quickest way to make sense of this is that this is the fairytale aspect. In order to tell the story that she's telling, you have to be unguided in this way. That's what she's getting at. You know Potter Puppet Pals and Neil Cicierega, who I love and I think is a genius. I saw him at a con once, when somebody asked him something; he had his Harry puppet and you could ask Harry anything, and Neil would have Harry answer. Somebody asked Harry about this, how he felt about not having parents; Neil, in a completely casual, friendly, straightforward way said, "Well, are you familiar with the hero's journey? Yeah, in order to go on the hero's journey -- which is my story -- it was necessary for me not to have parents. Yeah, that's pretty sad. I do miss them." I just died laughing. That's really what it is. And I know that there have been interviews where people asked Rowling about this, and she said, "They died because that's what I needed for the story."

JC: Grandparents are a connection to the past. They're this bridge between the past and the present.

Lorrie: Resources. Yeah.



JC: They're not your parents, but they're invested in you and they're there to guide you, and to be there when your parents can't or won't or whatever. That absence of grandparents across the board really jumped out to me this time.

Lorrie: One thing... the wealth in the vault means two different things that work against each other, to me. One of them is the obvious privilege: "Well, Harry Potter is an heir." Nobody else would have had that particular ease. Some people might have had some money; most people would have had little or none. His story is completely different: he wants for nothing, which frees up that aspect of the story, so there's that. And then the other thing I think of, which is more allegorical and, I think, probably more what the author had in mind, is that you think of wealth as symbolic, emotional resources; to do this, to make that allegory, is, in itself, very privileged. That's the core problem right there. Well, yeah, wealth and privilege are allegorical if you can afford it. But the fact that he had all this wealth but it was locked up and he didn't know about it? When you're a human, all humans have the exact same wealth of lineage as any other human. We all have the same number of relatives and ancestors. Do you know about them? Can you claim them? Are they part of your identity? Do you have the right to them? He has them, he has a lot. There was a ton of love, though none of it was accessible to him. Now he is opening up the vault and it's there. He doesn't know what it means, but it has been there and it is his. Then the contrast, which we get in the second book, I think, to the Weasley vault -- which is very nearly empty -- but they are wealthy in terms of love. Their wealth is in circulation. Yeah, they don't have the resources, but nobody would prefer Harry's vault full of gold to having this vibrant family all around you that knows you so well and will pull together and that you like spending time with. Obviously, the preference would be to have this vivid life. Yeah, their vault is empty, but in the allegorical sense they have a lot. The fact that the money in the vault operates on this heavily symbolic level while having inescapable, real-life implications about privilege and resources, that's tricky.

JC: Again, the lack of family history there. As a reader, I'm wondering -- and I kind of imposed it on Harry, too -- how did they get all this money? What did they do? What was the family occupation? Are they just generational? This is generational wealth. Where did it come from? There's so many questions here. Mmm. As we go forward, the first kid that Harry meets -- will meet very soon -- is Draco Malfoy, who is also a wealthy kid. That whole idea of setting up those two as they could have been really similar: that Harry comes from an old wizarding family and he's just as wealthy. It's so interesting. You look at the Malfoys and go, "Oh, yeah, where did they get their money?" But really, you could ask the same question of the Potters.

Lorrie: And it turns out that, I think, they made their money in trade. They invented Sleekeazy's Hair Potion.

JC: Really?

Lorrie: I believe that's the backstory. Yeah, because with British wealth, the question is always, has the labor movement happened yet? Can this be something that you can feel ownership of because you put work into it, or are they just slavers and plantation owners going back

centuries? Well, we know where the Malfoys fall on that. They were not shopkeepers or whatever. But anyway...

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't think we can put off talking about Draco anymore, can we?

JC: We have to talk about Draco. Yes.

Lorrie: So Draco.

JC: Draco. I think I said in one of the first episodes that Draco was one of my favorite characters for many reasons, but I just see him as this parallel kid to Harry, even though Draco and Harry are not friends. Draco represents this other version of Harry that could have existed, it feels like to me, so it's interesting to see them set up this way here. And you have little Draco who has no idea who he's talking to, has grown up probably homeschooled, only played with other kids that were like him, and he's just talking to Harry in the way that he assumes all other kids talk.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Being a parent of a kid who's, frankly, pretty socially awkward, watching my kid fumble talking to other kids -- especially at that age -- it felt very familiar. Of course, you're going to talk about the things that you're into, and you're going to say the things that impress your parents and that your cousins will tolerate. He's talking to Harry in the only way that he really knows how; he's not intending to be a little shit, but that's how he's coming across to Harry. And he's only really coming across to Harry that way because it hits this note of Dudley in Harry's head. Harry's like, "Wow, you sound like a bully. You're saying the kind of things that my awful cousin says." The fact that this sets up this conflict between Harry and Slytherins that carries on through the rest of the books, and Draco wasn't even trying to be an asshole. He was just being a kid.

Lorrie: Draco doesn't know.

JC: He has no idea.

Lorrie: It's the entitlement, but it's also the scorn for Hagrid as a servant. He's dropping clues left and right that he is somebody that Harry would never want to know, and my take on Draco's perspective on this is, "Why doesn't this kid like me? Is it something I said?"

JC: He doesn't have a clue.

Lorrie: Yes, Draco, it's everything you said. And speaking of *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda directly mentioned that this scene of meeting Draco first -- and then Ron and Hermione -- is the pattern he followed to have Hamilton meet Aaron Burr first, and then his buddies.

JC: Oh, that's interesting. So first, you meet this person that you hit it the wrong way with and you get the wrong impression.

Lorrie: And it's going to define your whole life.

JC: It's going to define everything. Wow, that is very interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the superior way that Draco... if Draco knew who he was talking to...

JC: Isn't that interesting? What would be different if Draco had said 'what's your surname' first? How different would it have been? Yeah.

Lorrie: Then after that, we have the infamous comment from Hagrid: "There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin." As far as I can tell, that may have been intentional during book one because maybe the author didn't realize that later on, she was going to be more subtle about it. But there's also room for it to look like it's just Hagrid being misguided, more prejudiced. On the other hand, everything else Hagrid has been telling Harry to initiate him into this world has been reliable. So, in order to pass this off as Hagrid just being short-sighted or prejudiced, I don't think the evidence supports that. I think it's that there came a point with this author, as her books became more popular, when she understood that it was going to have to be more subtle. Also, she got enormous pushback from the readers, because I don't think she intended the four houses to be considered in as balanced a manner as the readers immediately took them to be. She accidentally wrote Myers-Brigg.

JC: Yeah, which is amazing.

Lorrie: And did not realize that people were going to take it so seriously, and that she had to go do her homework and couldn't just say, "Oh well, that's where all the villains go." No, that's not how life is. And it's a good thing for her that she got this feedback and incorporated it, because, of course, that is what her story demanded. It was a much better story once she started being more realistic about how a quarter of the human population can't just be dismissed. There's rich things going on here. But yeah, this is an artifact of when this was a standalone children's book that was a fable. And then there's Ollivander.

JC: Ollivander's. Does he buy the other stuff before he goes to Ollivander's?

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. The wand comes last. He buys Hedwig.

JC: So you get Hedwig, which... can I just nitpick something? This description of Hedwig being asleep with her head under her wing: owls don't sleep like that. This bugs me every time I read it. I even Googled it today just to make sure I was right about that. How do owls sleep? How do snowy owls sleep? Owls, their necks don't work like that. They don't put their heads under their wings. That's ducks and swans. The owls literally close their eyes and sometimes they tilt their

head back, they tilt their head forward. They just close their eyes. This is an owl who is sentient; why do I care? But also I do care, so anyway. That made me crazy. Anyway, that is interesting. But another thing that popped up for me that I don't think I noticed before was that they maybe started getting potions ingredients, and there are unicorn horns for sale. A big stack of unicorn horns. Knowing what even comes later in this book, I thought, 'Okay, this is in broad daylight. You're not going down a back alley into one of those dark magic shops. There's just unicorn horns here, and that feels really meaningful. What we learn later is that this is even worse than elephant ivory. It's like rhino horn; what you have to do to get rhino horn is evil. Why are there unicorn horns for sale in this shop where kids are buying their school supplies? What?!

Lorrie: I can only imagine that they were naturally harvested, when a unicorn...

JC: But like rhino horn, how do you know? Does it say ethically sourced unicorn horn on the side, or are unicorn horns renewable? Do they keep growing them and shedding them like deer antlers?! I don't know. This seems like a little thing for me to get stuck on, but it just jumped out at me. Unicorn horns.

Lorrie: And yet, if you're entering Diagon Alley for the first time and you're looking around at these shops, oh, my god. What do magical shops have? Of course, they have unicorn horns. For this point in the story, it works. Later on, when we get into the real, powerfully deep world-building details and we demand consistency of this world, we can't go back and rewrite the earlier books.

JC: That was in the same book, right?

Lorrie: Yes, it was, but we still haven't thought about the nitty-gritty of the economics of this world yet. Later on, we understand that there's a trade in unicorn hair. We haven't thought about this yet. Ollivander is one of my favorites. He is the quintessential Ravenclaw; we don't know, we never find out that he's a Ravenclaw. That is extra canonical. After the series was closed, he was identified, but he's obviously a Ravenclaw because he has no morals. He sees absolute value in magic, and you need that if you're going to be a wand maker serving everybody who needs a wand. Harry is totally creeped out. "Oh, he just likes power. He doesn't care if it's good power or bad power. This is scary. I, a Gryffindor, have morals. I am not sure I like this." And when his scary eyes gleam, he says, "Oh, terrible, but great," and he's kind of getting off on it. And I'm reading this going, "This is why people hate us. This is why people don't like Ravenclaws because we scare them." Ravenclaw is, in my opinion, Rowling's shadow house, not Slytherin. I think she used to identify as a Ravenclaw, and we see traces of that in this book where she was appalled by herself and wished she had had a stronger moral core. Rejected that part of herself, rejected identifying mostly as somebody intellectual and embraced more of a Gryffindor value system, thinking that would keep her right better. That is, I think, why Ravenclaws don't get a lot of thought or airtime in her series and are viewed a bit suspiciously, because some of us Ravenclaws do have morals, let me just say. But I do feel some house pride at the Ollivander character, because, in my opinion, this scene: huh, everybody can have a different opinion and we're all correct. In my opinion, the scene in Ollivander's shop is why

Harry Potter became an international sensation, because this is the scene that insists that no matter who you are -- no matter what unimportant, insignificant 11-year-old you are -- you get your time in Ollivander's shop. There's a wand for you, and he will take as long as necessary to find it; if he can't find it, he'll make you one. What matters? There's only one thing that matters: who are you, and what will make your magic shine the best. We'll know that it's not the right answer if your magic doesn't sparkle forth. We'll keep looking; we haven't found it yet. If you're uncomfortable, we will keep looking for you. He doesn't care who you are. You have a true self. That is the important thing. This has everything to do with transphobia. But yeah, Ollivander won't rest until he finds your magic. You'll know it when you feel it, and sometimes it's not about things you've accomplished or powers you have, but about your hopes and your potential. This is, to me, the core value of this entire series: you matter. Your inner self matters. There is a true inner self. That's what magic is.

JC: What's striking me as interesting, too, listening to this: I had been wondering why the film version reinterpreted this scene in the way that it did. It reads differently to me than the film version that I saw, where it feels much more like Harry tried three wands and bad things happened. It was like, "You grabbed the wrong wand," and shit flies off the walls; whereas when you get the right one, it's like, "Ooh," a choir of angels, you get a spotlight and a fan. That felt really different from the description that you just gave, which matches very much what is in the book: if you have the wrong one, nothing happens.

Lorrie: Something happens. Not the right thing. You can make do.

JC: Yeah, like that idea you can use another wizard's wand, but it will never quite be the same.

Lorrie: It's not the same as people caring what you need.

JC: But that distinction between if you picked up the wrong one, bad things are going to happen versus what was actually in the text. I know that as they're telling the story. It's easier to show it visually than to describe it. I get it. But it does re-interpret that scene quite a bit, and change the meaning of it a little bit.

Lorrie: There are real-life situations in which the wrong wand or tool can make something that bad happen.

JC: I'm thinking about Ron's broken wand.

Lorrie: Yeah, or people who have access to guns even though they have a history of violence and they have mental illness. That's not good. Also, we mentioned ADHD before. People who have ADHD where, if they're being taught in school in a certain way -- if they had accommodations -- they could learn it; but instead, if they're taught to do it like someone without ADHD, then they do it wrong and then are badly punished for it and blamed and labeled. That's another thing where that's the wrong wand.

JC: Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: Better to have no wand than to do this, then you make it like it's their fault. It's worth it to keep looking.

JC: Yeah, that each individual person is worth it. So that brings us back around to the idea, thinking about -- from an education perspective, from a parenting perspective -- finding what is going to work for each kid.

Lorrie: And sometimes you haven't found it. There are plenty of times in real life, when people don't find the thing that makes them feel at home and rested, but to be told, "Well, we're going to give up on you?" That's a kind of despair I don't believe in. I think keeping looking, knowing that that feeling of ease is something that all people crave even if not everybody is lucky enough to get it, that feels important to me.

JC: Yeah. There's also this interesting moment in this scene where Ollivander knows the details of every wand he's ever sold; he looks at Hagrid and he can tell Hagrid what wand Hagrid had. "Oh, but your wand got snapped, right?" Hagrid says, "Oh, I still have the pieces," and Ollivander's like, "And you don't use them, right?" Clutching the umbrella, Hagrid's like, "Oh, of course not," and Ollivander's like, "Uh-huh."

Lorrie: I would never.

JC: But that also made me think about the fact that Hagrid does magic really effectively. He's learned how to use a broken wand to get along. Thinking back to this metaphor, it wasn't that Hagrid... Well, Hagrid was -- Okay, that's a whole other thing. We're going to get to the Hagrid story in the future, several months down the line, probably. But that idea that Hagrid took the broken pieces of his power and lined them back up in a way and made it work for him, and he had to figure out how to do that and he survived?

Lorrie: He adapted. It's not ideal.

JC: And Ollivander recognizes it and calls him on it, but then is like, "Okay." Again, there's no morals there. "I'm just acknowledging the truth of what's happening here." Okay, yeah. Very interesting. And the pink umbrella.

Lorrie: Love! Yes. That's one of those gender markers of Hagrid; that and the canary yellow circus tent that he's knitting on the Underground. He reads as very masculine, and he does these very stereotypically feminine things, too. He's just too big for boundaries.

JC: Yeah, yeah. It's such an interesting character.

Lorrie: Oh, and the owls: to continue the theme of the importance of who you are, that everybody is magically somebody, the fact that owls can find you without an address. That's magical.

JC: Right. In a lot of other fantasy / magical media that I've been in, there's other mechanisms for doing that. How do you get a message to the person you need to get a message to? There's no phones or anything, but obviously, the post can't necessarily find you. It's so interesting to see that as a theme again. You have to be able to... there's a way, in your hour of need and your desperation, that you can contact this person you really need to contact, and the idea that owls and Patronuses are the ways to do that here is very interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, this is a universe that's built on an assumption of inner truth.

JC: Oh, yeah. Speaking of Patronuses -- which, again, later, but it's very interesting. Another thing that stood out to me this time, that I don't think I noticed as much before, was Harry's sadness at the end of this chapter. I think that when I read this the last -- it's been a long time, again, and also because the film skips over this, too: this idea of oh, we're introduced to this magical world; next, we're going to go to Hogwarts. But there's this moment of Harry sitting in Paddington Station, getting on the train by himself, and being sad that he's been introduced to this amazing world but he has the feeling that he's not going to fit in. It's more than just that adolescent, "what's going to happen to me?" It feels foreboding. Maybe it does because we know it is, but that really stood out to me: that bit of, 'it should be all exciting, but Harry knows better.'

Lorrie: It's partly culture shock, and partly it's being an orphan.

JC: Somehow.

Lorrie: It's also letdown. Well, he doesn't have a whole lot of guidance. Okay, well, what he had before wasn't any good, so here goes. Okay.

JC: Also, that recognition that the person who has been appointed his guide -- who's the first person that he's connected with, Hagrid -- is looked down upon by people he's met and is an outcast. I can imagine that, too. You think, "Oh, this is the person who's going to be my guide here," but it turns out that they're actually not really a part of that world in the way that maybe you would need them to be or that you thought they might be. That, too, feels a little bit unmooring.

Lorrie: I actually think that works in Harry's favor. That makes Hagrid more relatable to him. He doesn't feel awkward about asking Hagrid basic questions. If it had been McGonagall, she's not very cuddly.

JC: Sure, yeah. I think that Harry connects with Hagrid, and for exactly that reason. It's more like -- Okay, this is maybe my own personal spin on it. I'm relating it to myself, obviously, but that

idea of when I was a young professor and I would have graduate students coming to me, asking me to be their advisor, and my first thought was, "Oh, I can't do this, I don't know enough." But then everyone else would say no, and I was the only one left; they would beg, and I'd say okay. I tried to be a good advisor, but I knew that I was not good at this yet. I didn't know enough, I didn't have enough experience. There would be a point where I could see them figuring out that I was not good at this, and that's what it's reminding me of. When you realize, "Oh, I can see how this person is struggling and they're my big connection." Not that it's a bad thing for you, but it's just that empathy of, "Oh, the world is complicated." I don't know where I'm going with any of that.

Lorrie: Status is complicated.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. And to recognize that this person who has given you so much already does not have the status within the world that you think they should have, and there's nothing you can do about it.

Lorrie: But it remains relatable, and it becomes a point of power for Harry and his friends later in the series that because there's a bit more equality between them and Hagrid, they can legitimately help Hagrid.

JC: Hmm, true.

Lorrie: It's a different kind of relationship, and, I think, a good one. So, JC, the next chapter is going to be The Journey from Platform Nine and Three Quarters. How are you feeling about that?

JC: Another iconic moment. Yes, yes. The number of times that I had actually been in Kings Cross Station and walked by and touched the platform Nine and Three Quarters wall that has been set up there, yes. Taken photos there, and yeah. And multiple experiences of walking through at different amusement park / movie studio locations. Yeah. Oh, and then I should tell -- I won't do it today, but I will tell the story next episode about the time that I created this experience for your birthday.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes, oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

JC: Yes, I'm looking forward to it.

Lorrie: Yeah. I can, at that point, also tell the story of my child getting her wand at eleven, which I forgot about today because I was thinking about Harry.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: All right, we will talk about that and I look forward to that very much.



JC: Yay!

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