

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 1.7

Book 1, Chapter 7: The Sorting Hat

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread 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 Seven: The Sorting Hat.

Lorrie: Hello, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: Are you ready to discuss chapter seven: The Sorting Hat?

JC: Before we start discussing this chapter, I just wanted to say I was looking at the back of the book that I'm reading. So this is a paperback edition; I bought a set sometime in the early/mid 2000s in London, a set of four paperbacks of the first four books. This particular edition came out in 1998. There is a quote -- you know how on paperbacks, there's quotes on the back with reviews and stuff. There is a quote of a review from the Times that says, "J.K. Rowling has woken up a whole generation to reading. In the 2020s, thirty-something book lovers will know each other by smug references to Diagon Alley and Quidditch."

Lorrie: Huh.

JC: From 25 years ago, that was the prediction of the Times.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's a little correct and a little incorrect, because it's so much bigger and more pervasive than they predicted. The references aren't smug.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: It's not an insider subculture. Also, it didn't predict the heartbreak of TERFpocalypse.

JC: Yes, definitely.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's more like, "In the 2020s, thirty-somethings are removing their Hogwarts house from their online profiles."

JC: From their LinkedIn profile, as are the 50-somethings, I will add.

Lorrie: Yeah. Wow. There's really a shadow, isn't there? Oof. Well, speaking of your Hogwarts house, this is the chapter where we learn how Hogwarts divides its students into houses. This is the chapter where we get the accidental Myers-Briggs test of the millennial generation. What stood out for you?

JC: That the nature of the sorting ceremony from the perspective of Harry, Ron, and Hermione is so incredibly secret, and that a lot of the kids -- a lot of the first years in the group -- seem not to know what to expect. They're all super nervous. Obviously, this hat is ancient; the sorting has been going on forever. The fact that it's kept that secret is very interesting to me, but the other thing that I was thinking about is that it's very clear that there are kids in the room who know what's about to happen. It feels like one of those pieces of cultural capital where some kids are going into this brand-new, scary situation completely prepared. They know what to expect, their parents have told them, "Here are all the things that you have to do to have all the advantages;" and then there's all these other kids who either don't have access to that, like the Muggle-borns, or whose parents either intentionally or unintentionally withheld that information for whatever reason. It made me think about, "What would it be like to be the kid in that room who knows what's happening, who looks around and realizes that almost no one else does and to continue to keep it a secret?" This is a lot of interesting kid psychology happening there, but also thinking about the class system of the Wizarding World. Interesting stuff.

Lorrie: In this chapter, we meet a lot of what makes Hogwarts so magical and different. We meet the ghosts. What? We see the Great Hall with the golden plates and goblets; sometimes when I'm reading this series, they're just going to school and I forget that they drink out of golden goblets. This is just what they eat off of.

JC: It is really wild.

Lorrie: And this is breathtaking, always, to me: the enchanted ceiling, which is a kind of mirror.

JC: Something that really strikes me about the enchanted ceiling, too: the idea that it looks like the sky outside. There's this entire huge room in this castle where you walk in and you feel like you're outside constantly, and I thought, "That's such a whimsical design choice." But then I thought, I spend a lot of time in schools. So many schools' classrooms are either windowless or have tiny little windows; the kids go an entire day and never go outside. That's really common. The idea that there is this space that you're going to visit several times a day where, even if you don't go outside the building, you at least feel like you're outside. Psychologically, that's really important to kids, and this has been a big thing about having gardens, making sure kids get recess in places where the weather allows it, building schools with courtyards. That's a big

important thing. There's this idea that kids need to have that exposure to sunlight, like plants. I thought, "Okay, that's what's happening here, too. It's an attempt to make this old, big, forbidden castle a better learning environment for kids." This says a lot about Hogwarts.

Lorrie: We encounter the Sorting Hat's song, the first of J.K. Rowling's poems that she embeds in the series. The experience of encountering the author in the song she's written. Partly, she's writing a character -- she's writing the Sorting Hat's character -- because the Sorting Hat has an ego, an identity and a sense of humor. But also, I am a very limited poet. I just can't write anything particularly good, and I see people who are really good at it and think, "I know what they've done; I can't do it." In this area -- in the area of rhyme -- we see it's one of Rowling's more limited areas. Not like, for example, character, where she's unlimited in talent and she can do things that can't be replicated by most authors. Here, I see more of her limitations coming up. When I see it coincide with Slytherin, and the thought of making your real friends in this house and how Harry would feel about that? If he's looking around, he doesn't know where he's going to be sorted and he's thinking, "Oh, they're telling you this is going to be your family," which he's never had. Whatever he has here is going to be a step up. But here are all these children, looking at these houses thinking, "Okay, wherever I get sorted, that's going to be my family." He already knows enough about Slytherin to be afraid that if he gets sorted there, it's going to be not that different from living with the Dursleys.

JC: That whole idea of sorting. I feel like this is something that, in fandom circles, we've talked about a lot, but that idea that your personality would be set enough by that age, that you could go into one of these four Myers-Briggs categories. But the other thing that I was thinking about with this whole idea is that's just what life is. You get sorted. I thought a lot about how the choice of -- when I finished graduate school -- what job to take, what city I moved to, what neighborhood we bought a house in, which meant what school my kid was going to go to, what people he was going to meet. All of that profoundly affected his life, and if I had made a different choice, he could have had a very different experience. He's only 15, so he's got a lot to go, but just how those decisions affected him. When I was a kid, I remember reading Frost's "The Road Not Taken" in elementary school and it blowing my mind. That idea of the choices that you make bifurcating into all these different alternate timelines of the way your life could have gone... There were a few times in my life when I was paralyzed over the choice of -- the choice I make here is going to change everything not just for me, but for my descendants. Okay. Going back to the idea of being sorted into a Hogwarts house: you're going to have met people anyway. You're going to have been assigned to a dorm, even if they didn't have it sorted by personality or whatever. I used to have this feeling of, "Oh, I can't believe they sorted them by personality," but then my kiddo went to middle school at a school that did Hogwarts-style houses, but they sorted the kids randomly to them. There was no personality test. It was just, "You're going to go to the house that's red, and the characteristics that we would love you to explore in this house are this, this, and that. Then, when you go to pep rallies, wear red; you're going to cheer for your house, and then if you do great things, you get points for your house, etc., etc." It was randomly going to build a social structure by putting you here, and then you're going to have your homeroom with these kids, and you're going to go to pep rallies with these kids. It's like, "Okay, you can do it randomly; you can do it based on some kind of magical

personality assessment, whatever." It happens in life, anyway.

Lorrie: The fandom phenomenon of Sorting is distinct from what we get in the books. There's also a cultural difference: American readers, I think, have a lot harder time with the Sorting because I think if you grow up in the British system, this arbitrary division into houses is just a given, whereas you'll get more American fans saying, "They should just be one big house!" or "Why should they sort?" or "This predestines you!" It's not how we do things in the U.S. I also love the fandom phenomena such as re-sorting yourself. People will sometimes do that when they feel like, "Okay, I know myself better," or "I understand the houses better." Or, "I want to change or something has changed me," so re-sorting is a fandom phenomenon. Also, hybrid houses or secondary houses: total fandom phenomenon. You can't do that here at Hogwarts: you get Hatstalls, like Seamus Finnegan apparently was almost, but you have to have your dorm bed somewhere. Not so in fandom.

JC: I like how in fandom, you could do it as almost like a Myers-Briggs thing, where you can just put in order Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, Gryffindor or whatever, put it in order. You're an HGS.

Lorrie: Right, or like zodiacs, like Gryffindor Rising. So this is the innocent time when we encounter Sorting for the first time, and we don't know that it's going to become a social phenomenon. The thing that makes this, the real thing, different from any Sorting that fandom does is that you matching up your traits and choosing is half of it and only half; the other half that you can't replicate is that the Sorting Hat talks to you. That is what's missing from any online quiz. That's why it's not the same. When I did my reading group with fifth graders, I went into it assuming that they would Sort themselves, that we would have a nice long discussion about your personality, questions and traits and that people would tell me where they felt affiliated. This was not how it happened. All of them -- very headstrong people who knew their own minds at age ten -- all of them wanted me to Sort them.

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. And they were not kids who normally wanted some grown-up to tell them what to think, but in this case they wanted that. They wanted to be seen, and that was a very frightening responsibility to be given. I was tempted to say, "No, I can't do -- I can't do that. I can't predict your future."

JC: "I don't know you that well," yeah. "I can't actually see inside your head."

Lorrie: Right. But when you look at a bunch of 10-year-olds, all looking at you hopefully, saying, "Well, here's how I answered all these questions about my personality. What do you think? Where would you put me?" And you realize no, I've got to step up. So I did and it was risky, but I tried not to give in too much to the self-doubt and just try to answer a request given to me by a child, entrusted to me by a child. Of course, the Sorting Hat doesn't *tell* you; it has a *dialogue* with you, so that does build in a little bit more ease. And you do have the cases like Neville, where Neville wrongly says, "No, don't put me there," and the Sorting Hat says, "I'm putting you

there," but that's quite rare. It wasn't that I was completely without guidance, but that was a scary moment and it just made me think, "Okay, that's an important element of sorting." That's also a good thing to remember when you're an adult around children: that you do have a responsibility to reflect them back to themselves in a respectful, clean, affectionate way.

JC: As someone who's been a teacher my entire adult life, that is such an important piece of it. Even when you give kids feedback on something, on a piece of work: to be able to reflect back the effort that you can see that they put into something -- even if they took the completely wrong track or they went in a direction that was not in the rubric or whatever. To be able to look at their work and say, "Okay, what did they do here," and to acknowledge that, even as you're saying, "I need you to redo this because you did it wrong, but I see all the" -- little things like that make a huge difference for everybody, not just for kids.

Lorrie: Yeah. Look into somebody and say, "What do we have here? Where can we put you so that things will work for you?" I love that there are people who are straight down the middle a type, other people where they could do well in more than one place, and other people where you just have to guess. And that distribution feels real to me.

JC: Seamus and Neville were both mentioned as kids that the hat had a hard time Sorting; it's extra canonical that Hermione also took a long time, but it's not in the text.

Lorrie: No, it is. It's in Order of the Phoenix when she --

JC: Oh, she says it in Order of the Phoenix. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. She invents the Protean charm on the DA coins, and that's when all the Ravenclaws say, "How come you're not with us?"

JC: Ah, okay. I was looking for it. It's so funny because when I was reading this, I was looking for the moment of Hermione. I do understand the tendency to like, "Oh god, I wish I had written it this way and I'm just going to retcon it later." That's what it felt like to me, honestly. But that idea that both Seamus and Neville took a long time is very interesting to me.

Lorrie: I also love the students that we only know of by name: Mandy Brocklehurst. Sally-Ann Perks. These people also went to school with Harry Potter. These people also were trying to study when Harry has a fainting fit and has to be taken to the hospital wing.

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: Hearing their names -- a huge part of encountering the series was the faith that the author knew stuff about all these people that she wasn't telling us, that they were real. We were getting the curated version that she gave us, but there was the fantasy that she would tell us more and more and more and more. When she was asked about people that are only mentioned in passing, she would say, "Oh, yeah, that person, blah blah blah," and that was a

part of being in this fandom. The extensive worldbuilding, the knowledge that it's there, and it is visible, even if not legible.

JC: I think that's something that connects also to my other big fandom that I have loved for my entire life, Star Wars. Part of it is that that universe is so huge because so many people have contributed to it, but even early on, George Lucas is, perhaps, also a problematic figure in many ways. But people would ask George Lucas, "What about this character?" and he would have a whole backstory. "Oh, yeah, blah blah blah." He had really thought it all out and had an answer, and even if it was an answer that the fans would look sideways at or think, "That doesn't really work with the rest of the universe," it didn't matter. The fact that he had enthusiastically thought all of this out was really important.

Lorrie: And those are two different things happening. One of them is the consistency of the world itself, which the original fantasizer doesn't always get right. But the other thing that's really important -- which is why the author isn't "dead" -- is that we're getting a portrait of a mind, a person and how they tell their story. Even if we don't like it and we think the story should go another way and then we have to go and write it, knowing how that person would have seen it through is its own complete and whole thing. I think that happens with reading fiction in general, just because what is fiction? We're getting to see inside another person's mind. It's not that the story exists in its pure form, and the author is the imperfect vessel. No, the author is the story. You can take it and you can join in and you can make your own, too, and you can do it collaboratively. There are lots of ways to make stories that are not single-author stories. This is an extraordinarily large and detailed universe that happens to be a single-author story. So yeah, Sally-Ann Perks. I have no idea, but she has her own life. Oh, then there's the famous -- love, love, love -- Dumbledore having a few words: "Nitwit! Blubber! Oddments! Tweak!"

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Iconic.

JC: It was just so funny. I actually sat down and I was trying to think, "Okay, is there some meaning to these words that I just have never really considered before?" I really tried to come up with something, and it was like, "Maybe no, maybe they're just words." That's the whole point, is they're just random words that sound funny.

Lorrie: Yeah, I don't love it when people try to stretch a point. I have seen people try to sort the houses according to those words or to make theories.

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: And I think it was meant to show whimsy. I think it was meant to interrupt -- in an entertaining, loving way -- the stereotype of what a headmaster could be and to show that this one is different. I also think that the Dumbledore of the first book is more based on real people than the Dumbledore who becomes a character in the later books. Because another example

here is that horrible school song that Dumbledore sings, and all the teachers get that look: "Oh, no, not this again." Even the students get that look, except for Fred and George. That's a quirky characteristic of Dumbledore that she doesn't bother with in later books, when she has a more urgent story about this character to tell. But here we get, "No, he's a weirdo; he's weird and great." Ooh, and then this sentence hurts so much: "The Dursleys had never exactly starved Harry." The only people who have to make that distinction -- "Was I starved, or wasn't I?" -- are people who were starved. You get that with violence, too. It's like, "Was I bullied, or were they just being normal?" Look, if you're wondering that, then people who have mistreated you are putting the burden of defining that mistreatment on you, so you're stuck there; trying to figure out where on that line you fall can distract you from the unbearable realizations of just how bad it really was. Oof. If it had just come out and said the Dursleys starved Harry, I don't think it would hurt that much. Not as much as the Dursleys had, never exactly. But yeah, the way that he never got enough, he was never allowed to think he could get enough? Oof.

JC: If he liked something, it would be taken away from him, just because.

Lorrie: You can't show that you like something.

JC: Yeah, because other people will use it against you.

Lorrie: Yeah, oof.

JC: Yeah. That bit stood out to me, too. I think there were some other things that were going on at the same time that were interesting, where everyone was telling their stories. I thought it was interesting that we didn't hear Harry tell his story to anyone, but we hear Seamus' story, and then Neville's story really stood out to me...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yes!

JC: Because he just comes right out and says, "Yeah, everybody thought I was a Squib until..." and the uncle who did a bit trying to scare the magic out of him by doing these fairy tale things that are incredibly violent and traumatic, but also funny.

Lorrie: Crazy.

JC: Yeah, exactly, just batshit. But it was fine; everyone was happy when he bounced and all that stuff. I think I found it interesting because I know that kid because I've been that kid, where you know that you're so weird and awkward. First of all, you don't necessarily have a filter to know that I shouldn't be telling people this stuff about myself; I'm just going to say it because I can't think of anything else to say about myself. I'm just going to be honest. There's that piece of it, but there's also the piece of: if you're expecting that people are going to be mean to you about something, maybe you just put it out there. You're just like, "Here, I'm just going to own the way that I'm weird or different from you, and I'm just going to put it out there," so there's a bit of that, too. But I don't think that's what Neville is doing there. I think it's more that slight socially

awkward kid who doesn't know not to say, like I once famously did, "Oh, yeah, my dad moved out and he took the furniture out of the guest bedroom to take to his new apartment, so now we get to have a playroom and it's going to be awesome. We're going to move all our toys in there." Just telling people this. It feels like that to me, too. It's a little bit of neurodivergence and a little bit of putting it out there, putting yourself out there, and we don't get the sense that anyone at that table was judging him for it. Maybe they were, but Harry couldn't necessarily judge him for it either, because Harry didn't know. This is all from Harry's point of view. Anyway, that story that Neville told made me sit and think about Neville a lot, about how much we learned about Neville's story and that he was raised by his grandmother and all these extended family members because of his parents being killed. Obviously, his story is very similar to Harry's, and how interesting that the story could very well have been swapped.

Lorrie: Yeah. My take on Neville's story comes from a different background, which is that this is a genre thing. This is British humor; you'll find this in Dickens, you'll find it in so many novels about ugly Brits. Just depressing, ugly, weird Britain, the weird people you find in Britain, and the conversation stoppers they just casually drop. He's like, "Oh, yeah, he wanted me to learn to swim so he threw me off the pier and I almost drowned." By the time you can even think that's incredibly cruel, he's already moved on to some other atrocity. Of course, all of his relatives have to be a thousand years old; he couldn't possibly have an aunt or uncle who's in their 40s. And the way he says, "Oh, yeah, my great uncle Algie was dangling me out the window one night in the cold" -- it's so casual that his aunt comes by and brings him a meringue, and he takes it and drops Neville. And it has to be a meringue, right? It has to be this desiccated, old-people dessert. The way that he says one mind-blowing thing after another, and the way there's absolutely no response from any of the kids: that's British humor. This is not the first person these children have encountered who gets treated this way. Maybe these children are lucky because they have parents and aunts and uncles to intercede so their horrible great-uncles don't get access to them the way Neville's do. But this is what I meant when I said that there are some genres where Rowling's mastery is untouchable. In terms of writing rhyming verse, she's human; we can see it. In terms of this kind of characterization and evocation of a national literary tradition: Neville's introductory monologue, oh, my god. Master stroke.

JC: Oh, that reminds me -- just backing up a little bit: when Harry first goes up to sit on the stool and be Sorted, there's this really cool quote that the Hall erupted into whispers and the quote was "like little hissing fires." I just thought, "Oh, damn, that's evocative." Wow, you could just sit with that sentence for a while and think about what it means and what it feels like.

Lorrie: Now here's something that doesn't show up in this chapter that doesn't pay off until the very end, a million words later: we get three house ghosts. There is no mention of a fourth. She hates Ravenclaw.

JC: That's true, yeah. We don't see the Gray Lady.

Lorrie: No.

JC: And later on, she just appears as if we always knew she's there, but hmm.

Lorrie: She's voiceless; she doesn't have a lot of story. We get the Bloody Baron, who we find out later is connected to her. We get yet another questionable use of her fat issues with the Fat Friar, which I don't think is bad. It's just that we're all jumpy when she talks about fat now.

JC: Oh, my god. Yeah. Don't we have the Fat Lady portrait coming up?

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like, "Okay, it's not bad. We just don't know what she's going to do." Then we have something that doesn't mention Snape but is about Snape: Slytherins have got the Cup six years in a row. Dang. He has had a streak since he was 25 years old. Knowing that his kids are so hated in the school, he can't do everything for them; there's some things he can't help them with, but he's going to get them that House Cup if it kills him. He'll do what it takes. Coming from a Ravenclaw, of course, my perspective is this house point system is so arbitrary and illogical. In my headcanon, Ravenclaw is always dead last because Ravenclaws can't have faith in the system. It's meaningless. Meanwhile, Snape: "Of course, it's meaningless, but I'm going to go for it because my kids need this." So a 25-year-old -- who's now 31 -- he got it six years in a row. That tells you something about this guy, about my guy.

JC: We get our first Snape spotting not long after this, right?

Lorrie: We do.

JC: Cleverly disguised, with Voldemort looking in Harry's direction, basically, through the turban. Then Harry's scar hurts, and we get this whole misunderstanding. That, and then Percy's statement about Snape always wanting to teach the Defense Against the Dark Arts classes, and we set Harry and the reader up to be suspicious of Snape from the very beginning. My memory of this is that it becomes very clear in later books that Snape was never after Defense Against the Dark Arts. Is that correct?

Lorrie: I agree with that reading. I don't agree that it becomes very clear.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: At least judging by how many readers don't realize that. I'm just going to take a moment to smile over my guy Snape and how much I love him. So he's been dreading this moment since he was 20, since he caused Lily and James to die -- or 21, I guess. And Dumbledore said, "When he is in danger, you're going to help me." Snape's life has been counting down to this horrible moment when he gets to see this kid that he gave this terrible life to. Well, he doesn't know yet. He does not know yet what kind of life Harry has had. Lily's child comes to school, and he is runty and starved and abused, and we later find out he's prone to headaches. Oh, this is not good. Somebody's got a guilty conscience for a very good reason, and this is going to be his job from now until Harry graduates or Voldemort kills him, whichever comes first. So yeah, he takes a look, and we see the first time that he takes a look into Harry's eyes. And we don't

know: does he also sense that there's a bit of Voldemort looking at Harry and that he's looking because this is the first time that he has to check in on his duties? Because we do know that people who share the Dark Mark, they can get flare-ups of sensation. Probably, Voldemort's not strong enough for that to be happening right now, but that's something that is a possibility whenever Snape is looking at bad things that might potentially happen to Harry. We get this wonderful packed moment -- everything packed into this one moment -- where Snape's sitting next to Quirrell, looks at Harry and Harry's scar hurts. Harry correctly surmises that Snape doesn't like him at all, and that's a constant that is already established and never wavers; they always hate each other, and Harry would not have hated Snape, but Snape came to this already hating a little kid and made Harry hate him back for reasons that Harry has no clue about, aren't his fault at all. And God, yeah, the feeling that something about Snape is going to bring proximity to that pain.

JC: I have a couple of questions. If Harry have been sorted into Slytherin, do you think Snape would have felt differently about him from the beginning?

Lorrie: I think the cause of Snape's feelings toward Harry are guilt. When we see him in *Deathly Hallows*, finally face-to-face with the letter that Lily wrote to Sirius talking about the absolutely ordinary day that her one-year-old had -- which is, in a nutshell, everything that Harry craves most in this entire world -- that's what Snape took away from Harry. What he sees now is nine and three-quarter years of deprivation that he caused. If this child were put into Slytherin and he had to be responsible for him and be closer to him and try to protect him, then the evidence of what Harry had been robbed of would have been in his face more and more and more, and his hidden knowledge of his complicity would have rubbed up in his face more and more. I don't think that the Gryffindor-Slytherin divide is as significant as what happens to a person when they have to grapple with their own guilt about what they've done to ruin another person's life who's a child, especially one where you know the parents -- you know how that mom would have felt. "This is my baby. I'm dead. Will you take care of my baby?" "No. In fact, I'm crap. I'm a bad person. No, I cannot take care of your baby, although Dumbledore is making me anyway."

JC: At this point, what does Snape know about Quirrell?

Lorrie: Dumbledore and Snape know that the position is cursed, so anyone who gets given this position is already under Snape's watch. Snape is the actual Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher except during the years when there's a real person who's qualified, so he's not when Lupin is there because Lupin is qualified to teach that. He wasn't when Mad-Eye Moody was there, because the real Mad-Eye Moody was qualified. Actually, fake Moody did a darn good job. But when there's somebody that Dumbledore is trying to use the curse to get rid of, like Quirrell or Lockhart, then Snape is the default undercover Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. He knows to keep an eye on this person right away, because we find out later every year that Snape and Dumbledore go through leaving the paper trail, where Snape applies for the position and gets rejected. We see that through this year, whenever something happens that calls for the Defense teacher and Quirrell shows up because that's his job, we see Snape there a split second later. So yeah, he knows that something's wrong with this guy, and if there's

some connection happening between Quirrell and Harry, Snape knows that it's his job to monitor.

JC: But he hasn't figured out that Voldemort is there yet, right? I guess we'll see as we get into the book when that seems to happen.

Lorrie: So Voldemort has only just moved into the turban. There's a way Snape keeps his eye on things and starts to build theories, so he might be wondering, but I think he hasn't seen enough yet to know.

JC: Okay, yeah. It is interesting to me that in the book, I don't think this is as clear. In the film version, there's that very clear moment where Alan Rickman as Snape, when Harry's scar hurts, his eyes immediately go to Quirrell. That felt like something that had been intentionally added in to build towards all the Snape stuff that comes later. I was looking for that in this reading; I didn't see it in the same way.

Lorrie: It's not there, but I would think that Snape would be on it, just because Snape's real job is to be a spy, and you have to collect all the data, even though you know that some of it you're just going to throw away. He's already suspecting Quirrell. The arrival of Harry Potter is all his nightmares come true. This is the first day of his real job that he's been putting off for six years, winning the House Cup; here's this guy who went off for a year or two and now is all weird and has been put into this other position, and the Harry Potter kid is clutching his scar. Okay. We'll see what that means. The Percy lines are very well-handled. This is the introduction of the unattributed, never attributed rumor that he teaches Potions but he doesn't want to. Everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job, knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape. First of all, we have no evidence that he doesn't want to teach Potions. He certainly likes it better than he likes a lot of other subjects; he doesn't *want* to be teaching *anything*. Clearly, this is not his calling. Everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. We find out later that this rumor is unauthored intentionally, so that's the first introduction. And here's the J.K. Rowling signature: knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape, where you say a truth and you don't say which way the meaning falls. Does he know because he loves the Dark Arts? Does he know because he has set himself against the Dark Arts forever? Or the prevailing narrative that Snape and Dumbledore are trying to propagate, which is that he's trying; he's in recovery, but he's going to slip. So that's a trademark of this series and this author. Yeah, it is true that he knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, and we'll learn after a million words that the way in which he knows a lot about it is very rare and crucial, and not everyone can do this. And if you lead an innocent life where you never get this ability, good for you; that's better. But if you know a lot about the Dark Arts the way Snape does, that can give a purpose to your life, no matter how guilty you feel about the incredible, irreversible damages you have done. He's 31. Oi. He's a very old 31.

JC: Yeah. Going back to Dumbledore's speech. There's the moment where he gives them the warning about not going to the third floor unless you want to die a very painful death, and everyone just kind of shifts around and looks at each other like, "What?"

Lorrie: "Was that a joke?"

JC: It's just so darkly funny, and that's the one line that I remember. Every time I have seen the movie version around other people, everyone laughs because it's just like, "What the fuck?! What?"

Lorrie: It's not a joke.

JC: It's not a joke, but it's funny.

Lorrie: He wasn't kidding.

JC: He wasn't kidding. Oh, it's so funny.

Lorrie: What kind of school is this?

JC: "What have we got ourselves into?" Exactly. The way that Dumbledore is introduced as being this "who knows?" kind of character, it's great.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the Britishness of it.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: This is a very British brand of "what the fuck?"

JC: Yeah. The school song, which was left out -- okay, the school song. I wanted to come back to it because Dumbledore's like, "Pick a tune and sing;" people are picking different tunes and different tempo, and he's just standing there. I'm just imagining this cacophony of whatever coming at him, and he's just soaking it all up like it's beautiful music. That says a lot about the kind of teacher that he is and the person that he is, and that he's unleashed this chaos. As a teacher, I love unleashing chaos in a classroom when it's all creative and the kids are working toward a thing. I've done this before where I've been in classrooms, where I have let kids go on a project and you get them all ready and you say, "Okay," and then you wait, and they're vibrating in their seats, and you're like, "Okay, ready, set, go!" They run and they grab their stuff and they do all the things, and it's chaos and it's loud and everything is flying everywhere, and you're having to move around a lot to make sure no one's actually killing anybody with anything or any particular tool. They have so much fun, and it all comes together. I love that I thrive in that; there are other teachers who could not even stand to be in the room with me when that was happening. They're like, "I have to leave because I have so much anxiety that someone's going to chop a hand off that I gotta go." Or, "It's so loud in here that I can't hear myself think. I'm out." It made me think that would be me, inviting in this chaos and then allowing it to run its course. Even when the Weasleys are doing their funeral version, he directs them and then it stops. Then he's like, "Aah." Then he says this amazing line of, "Ah, music, a magic beyond all

we do here." I sat there and thought for a little while, "Where else do we see music coming up in this series?" and I couldn't think of anything. Is that just a one-off?

Lorrie: No.

JC: Or am I missing a big theme, somehow?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I am missing a big theme? Okay. All right, then don't spoil me. I'll figure it out, but I'll just put that out there. I need to really think about that, about where we see the music coming back again. I think because I've been thinking about other stories where music is a much more obvious theme... maybe I'm not seeing it here, but I will come back around to it.

Lorrie: Although, I do think that Dumbledore loving music in this way is one of those things that's a first book artifact of Dumbledore being based more on a real headmaster who must have loved music, because we don't get this in later books. We have here on his chocolate frog card that he loves chamber music; that ends up being a dead end. I would have been thrilled to find out in a later book, "Oh, I was listening to a concert." No. There's plenty to be said about him without that, but yeah, he likes music.

JC: It is fun though, this chaotic singing of the school song contrasted with the freestyling of the Sorting Hat. It does set you up with, "Okay, there's going to be music here, but it's not going to be like any music you've ever experienced before."

Lorrie: Then we get a moment that has given rise to a deeply emotional, pervasively held headcanon: Percy directed the girls through one door to their dormitory, and the boys through another door. We learn later that Hogwarts, the sentient castle, has its own method of determining gender, and will reject you if it thinks you're a boy trying to get into the girls' dormitory.

JC: But it doesn't work the other way around?

Lorrie: Right, so we have an impasse here. The author -- creating this gender test built into the castle -- her version of this cannot be more correct than the headcanon that the castle knows that there's more than two genders. The castle is not looking at your birth certificate to see if you are marked F or M. The castle is looking into *you*. All the headcanons people have of people thinking, "Which dorm am I going to go to?" and then they send you to the wrong one and it won't let you in, and then you go to the one that you know you should go to and it lets you in? Oh. Or people's headcanons about there being other spaces; it's not just two, and maybe Percy doesn't know about it. No, Percy would -- someone other than the author would know about this. She has captured a beautiful, instantly recognizable, resonant truth that there's a magic that recognizes you, and she, the human author, is limited and can't express it. That doesn't make it untrue. This is the point of being an artist as a human being. We're human, we're very limited,

we're flawed. When we are artists and we create our art, then we can concentrate our gifts so that sometimes we can make something greater than ourselves. We can't live up to it. There are many, many ideals in this series. This series to me, in my opinion, is so beautifully written, so inspired, has so many incredibly powerful truths in it that no one person, including the author, can live up to all those ideals. For example, obviously this is a series about equality, and yet the racial tokenism has already hit us. Okay, so an artist is a human. The human side of them can't live up to it. The artist side -- if we're all fortunate and we get a really transformative piece of art, which I think this series is -- then we get a truth that's bigger than that. Percy leading the kids to the two doors to the dormitories: I don't think that's right. I think there are other doors.

JC: I hadn't thought about there being additional doors. The only thought I had really had on that was how we find out later that if you're a boy and you try to go into the girls' dorm, you get kicked out, but that Hermione can go into the boys' dorms, which to me said a lot about transmisogyny and the fact that all of this seems to be about trans women and how TERFs think... all of the stuff around all of that. The author's transmisogyny really stood out to me there. I didn't think about there being a third option. I didn't think about the fact that, "Oh, a missed opportunity."

Lorrie: Yeah, or the place where you can enter through the two doors, but then there's a space when you can access from more than one direction. Oi. Because before TERFpocalypse, I was thinking more about patriarchy and about trying to keep girls virgins. That was the more prevailing narrative I had based on what I see around boarding schools and how people raise teenagers. But yeah, the author has created a situation where our attention is very much on these issues now, and Percy. Percy's personality, also, is sort of binary.

JC: Yeah, he's the agent of the man or whatever.

Lorrie: Yeah, and then we end with Harry's Slytherin dream, where Snape turns into Voldemort, although we don't know that. We just know that his laugh becomes high and cold; he's not yet named. He sees Quirrell and Draco in this nightmare. This is the beginning of Harry's struggle to differentiate himself, his true self, from his trauma. How much of him is really Slytherin? How much of him belongs in Slytherin? How much is he trying to resist that influence? This dream, that's where it starts.

JC: Something that struck me about this -- reading the dream part -- that I didn't catch in previous readings is that realization that Voldemort was there when Harry was sorted into Gryffindor.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What would Voldemort think of that? That idea that Voldemort knew that there's something about this baby -- you've talked about this a lot, this idea that there's something about this baby that is your equal somehow, that this is the person who's been prophesized to be the one

person who can defeat you. To have that person sorted into Gryffindor instead of Slytherin, that must have been an interesting moment. If Voldemort could be that aware, I guess.

Lorrie: Well, he's got nothing else to think about.

JC: That's true. The implication for me in this dream was that Voldemort actually did touch Harry's mind while he was asleep. Is that the reading that you take of it, or do you think this was 100% Harry?

Lorrie: I think his scar has been awakened, and it's certainly an experience. As a first-time reader of this book and this series, there's that moment when you finish reading *Sorcerer's Stone* and it comes to you: "Wait, so Voldemort was there the whole time? Everything I thought I knew about this school year is wrong. How could you think that?" That's almost too much to take in. But yeah, because we hear the high, cold laugh in this nightmare and there's the flash of green light, this is also the beginning of Harry's memories starting to piece themselves back together. Since he's back at Hogwarts, he's encountering these things. Then the memories that were taken away from him, that were discouraged by the Dursleys; this is something that just keeps happening to him when he gets more of his past back. That's, I think, the true psychological metaphor. Okay, well, in real life, we don't have actual Voldemort in somebody's actual turban, but we do know what happens when people go back to someplace that is closer to their history and then they start to recover memories, even ones that seem like they were so long ago you couldn't possibly recover them. Something happens to you, yeah. It's still better than living with the Dursleys. Well, I'm, of course, looking forward to the next chapter, where we get to discuss my guy Snape, whom I love, who is so very messed up and has so very much to answer for, and does not do very well by himself in this. Oh, he needs so much help.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. It's also the first day of school, so I'm going to have a lot of things to say about that, too. But yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, thank you. Talk to you soon.

JC: Yeah.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts, and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.