

Transcript

Episode 1.14

Book 1, Chapter 14: Norbert the Norwegian Ridgeback

Caroline: 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 14: Norbert the Norwegian Ridgeback.

Lorrie: Hello, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: Today, we're talking about Chapter 14: Norbert the Norwegian Ridgeback. You ready for this?

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Hagrid hatches a dragon illegally; Draco sees it. Harry, Ron, and Hermione get the baby dragon to Charlie Weasley's friends before Draco can get Hagrid in trouble, but then their luck runs out. Mwahahahaha. So, what stood out for you?

JC: I think one of the big things that stands out for me in this chapter -- and I don't think this stood out to me so much when I read it the first few times -- is that what we're really seeing here are the kids meddling in the troubles of the adults, thinking that they can and should help them. I look at this, and Hagrid has obviously been able to take care of himself for all these years. With Harry, Ron, and Hermione, there's this idea of, "We have to protect him, we have to help him, he's going to get in trouble." What's the worst thing that would happen? Dumbledore is going to come down and say, "Look, the dragon's gotta go." I don't know what they think is going to happen to Hagrid. Later on, we find out that there are awful things that actually could happen to Hagrid, but at this point, it's very interesting to me that they're like, "He's one of us, we have to protect him." At the very beginning of the chapter, we see them doing this a little bit with Quirrell as well; they're just trying to be encouraging. This idea that they're freaking 11 years old, but they already have this idea of "we have to protect the adults that we think are vulnerable in our world," that's really interesting to me.

Lorrie: I guess they want to make sure that people in their world don't get away with picking on the weaker. Malfoy wants to pick on Hagrid because he's easy. He's a servant, according to Draco, and offensive and easy to pick off. I guess the kids think if you let that happen to one person, then it's not going to stop. Maybe, but yeah, Hagrid: this chapter really emphasizes what a loose cannon he is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He drinks too much, he has no judgment. When his baby dragon is ripping the head off of a teddy bear, he completely delusionally thinks that it's hugging the teddy bear.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, Hagrid's nature is being very established in this chapter.

JC: I love that this is, I think, one of the first times -- and not the last time -- we see that Hagrid's love for monsters is so present. It's great. It's playing to comic effect very often, but also that idea that there's nothing out there that is so ugly and horrible that it doesn't deserve love; that's such a great thing about Hagrid's character. There's this little dragon that's absolutely tearing apart his whole cabin, and he's like, "Oh, he doesn't know any better." The woobification of the dragon just blows my mind, but yeah.

Lorrie: I also love Harry's line: "But there aren't wild dragons in Britain!" "Yes, there are, Harry: Common Welsh Green and Hebridean Blacks." That's such a 'whoa' moment; he's been in this Wizarding World for so long now, he's totally in it. "No, no. Really?!"

JC: There's whole other layers of things that you don't see. Actually, I really love how Ron is the one who knows all the dragon trivia in this; this is something that you think Hermione could have read in a book, but this is Ron's area, and it's really fun to see him --.

Lorrie: It's totally dinosaurs.

JC: Yeah, that's true. And I also find there's the mention that Ron makes of, "Oh, our lot have to go around making the Muggles forget they've seen them." That made me think how impossible that task would be in this time that we live in now with social media. This is definitely a very 90s take on this, that you could just go over and cast a spell on the film that was in their film camera so that the picture doesn't come out, and then make them forget they ever saw it. Yeah, that's not how it works, though.

Lorrie: Yeah. Throw a drape over the drone camera. Oh, maybe that's why -- you know how sometimes you get drone video of a hawk or an owl coming right up to it and destroying it? The last thing the camera sees is the beak. So then the kids ask Hagrid who has contributed protections to the Stone, and he lists them almost in correct order: it was Hagrid, Sprout, Flitwick, McGonagall, Quirrell, Dumbledore, and then -- wait, I'm leaving somebody out! "Ah, yes, Snape." Harry's shocked, and Hagrid says, "Yeah, you're not still on about that, are you? Look, Snape helped protect the Stone. He's not about to steal it," and that is correct. Hagrid is right about Snape's nature: throughout the series, never does Snape ever covet a magical object. He doesn't want wealth, power or immortality; he is a completely unmaterialistic character. Anything you can do with magic that those special artifacts can enhance, he does it with the power of his mind. He is too defensive to trust in putting something that important outside of himself, which is, of course, the opposite of a Horcrux -- which means putting

something that's central to you outside, 'hor' meaning 'outside' and 'crux' meaning 'cross or center'. Now, Harry has to try to figure out what on earth it means that Snape added a protection.

JC: Though it's interesting that Quirrell is the one who's also added a protection.

Lorrie: Yeah, that's one of those 'ask the right questions'. "Well, Snape helped protect it." "But what about Quirrell?" "He did, too." If they had thought to ask that of Hagrid, that Hagrid would have that shifty-eye thing.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What else stood out to you?

JC: Going back a little bit closer to the beginning of the chapter: we're 10 weeks away from final exams, and Hermione is going into study mode. I love this about her, but thinking about kids reading this and looking at Hermione -- I do wonder if, as a kid, I had read this that it would have had an impact on me. "If Hermione starts studying ten weeks out, and she's got all these color-coded things, I should do that." That totally would have had an impact on me as a kid.

Lorrie: "When do you start? Seven weeks out? Oh, you're slacking."

JC: I was a kid who didn't learn how to study until way later in life. I went to crappy schools, probably, but there was no need to, so that idea that you would need to work that hard to study that far in advance would have blown my mind, I think, as a kid. In the other piece of that, she makes a statement: "We have to pass these exams to get into the next year." She just says 'pass'. She doesn't say completely ace. In what world is Hermione not going to pass these exams, first of all? Passing is the bar. But it also raised the question for me: what actually happens to the kids who don't pass their exams? There's no indication that there's anyone who got held back.

Lorrie: Yeah, there is.

JC: Oh, there is?

Lorrie: Well, there's one accidental and one intentional. The accidental one is Marcus Flint, the Slytherin Quidditch player who the author mistakenly had him show up an extra year on the Quidditch team. He should have graduated, but he shows up when he would have been an eighth year; fanon explained that away as him getting held back a year. But the canonical mention of that happens in *Half-Blood Prince*, when Hermione is anxiously awaiting the results of her OWLs. They say, "Well, what happens to students who don't pass?" and Hermione says, "Oh, I asked McGonagall, and they have to do it over with their Head of House; they have to go talk to their Head of House." That comes up later in *Half-Blood Prince* because Crabbe and Goyle keep getting detention, and Snape tells Malfoy, "You have to get them to study more. They're not going to pass if they don't." Oh, right, because Draco says, "Well, I would've had Crabbe and Goyle with me except that you keep putting them in detention." "Yes, because they're not passing their classes." We have Snape as an actual teacher, knowing that if he doesn't somehow shape these boys into something moderately employable, there's not going to be a whole lot of hope for them as adults. And they don't seem to care. They're not helping him; nobody is helping him. He's the only person, as far as we know, who cares about what's going to happen to their lives.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But, yeah. No, people do get held back.

JC: Okay, yeah. Also, the mention of the twelve uses of dragon's blood at the very beginning is a lovely little bit of foreshadowing. Is that the right word? I'm not even sure, but yeah.

Hermione's muttering about the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and then is not necessarily the one who knows everything enough about dragons to help them out of situations, so it's this interesting balance between book knowledge and the practical knowledge when it comes to working with dragons.

Lorrie: And the knowledge that their headmaster's a living legend who has shaped the knowledge of the world that they live in.

JC: Going back to the chocolate frog cards: the other piece of the dragon stuff here that I find so interesting, too, is the scene where Harry and Hermione are hanging out in the Gryffindor common room. Ron comes in and he whips off the Invisibility Cloak because he's been down there helping, and his hand is all bitten by the dragon. The casualness of the Invisibility Cloak used by all three of them now is no big deal. That happened sometime in the last few weeks or whatever.

Lorrie: Few weeks, yeah.

JC: And very quickly, it's become one of the tools of their team, and I love it.

Lorrie: Yeah, I do love that. So, we have eggs -- again, eggs in the series. Hagrid got the egg from a stranger in the pub when he was drinking -- ai yi yi -- and I love Hermione's response to this. She says, "Hagrid, you live in a *wooden house*." Really, if they don't step in, what could possibly go wrong? The kids have to tie up his loose ends. Then when we watch the egg hatch, we get a scene that we then get repeated in the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie: Hagrid watches the egg hatch and then says, "Bless him. Look, he knows his mummy." In the first *Fantastic Beasts* movie, we see Newt watching a baby Occamy hatch, and he refers to himself as the baby Occamy's mother.

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: Here we have this interesting gendering of something that's actually a gender-neutral, nurturing function that doesn't exclude men. Whatever stu... mess is going on with this author in general -- totally aside from that, it means that even though Lily's sacrifice is couched as maternal love and protection, if we take Hagrid and Newt calling themselves 'mummy', then it's not only female caregivers who can cast this kind of blood magic. Of course, Hagrid feminizing himself: that's just another thing about him that doesn't have boundaries. To me, he comes across as very male-presenting, and completely without embarrassment about knitting in public or calling himself 'mummy' or crying.

JC: Oh, yeah, that's interesting. I was just trying to think that if there were any other instances, you would have noticed them already. I was thinking to myself, too. I guess the way that Hagrid cares for magical creatures throughout the series really is a very maternal care for these creatures. He loves them like only a mother could. It's that stereotype of 'a face only a mother could love.' That really is how Hagrid approaches all of those creatures throughout the series that he takes under his wing, so to speak.

Lorrie: Yeah. And we have this real-world effect that this has had on readers, because on the one hand -- overtly in the canon -- this is a series where it's very difficult to find a good father. There are lots of fathers who are characters in this series, and they range from terrible to worse than terrible. But the effect that has on a readership is: is this series saying that fathers can't be good parents, or that the only way for a man to be a good parent is to think of himself as a mother? Uh, that doesn't seem right. One thing that is essentialized in this gendering or parenting is that often in this series, Rowling writes about maternal instinct as having a specific kind of greater strength. Norbert -- later in the series, we find out -- is actually female and is Norberta, and you find that out because female dragons are apparently a lot more vicious, which comes into play when protecting their young. Of course, in real life, men -- fathers -- who are parents have the same hormonal shifts when they become parents as women do; men go through postpartum depression. It's not that different. It's not as essential and binary as this is making it out to be. This is one of the areas where I think, from the beginning, people were a little skeptical about the binary gendering in this series. But yeah, here we have Hagrid being completely nurturing and, for better and for worse, he calls himself 'mummy'.

JC: The dragon hatch scene is really interesting. You've got this little creature that falls out of its egg. I love the description of it. I think it's really cute in that it sneezes some little sparks and it's very adorable. But then someone is seen through the window, and then it turns out that it was Draco Malfoy and he's running back up to the castle. There's this idea of, "Oh, no, he's running off to tell someone," but he doesn't. Finally, he's got a little thing he can lord over them; he's been looking for it for months now. He's got a thing and he does lord it over them for the next couple of weeks. It's interesting to me that he does it that way, that he doesn't think, "Oh, I'm going to go off and I'm going to tell somebody, and Hagrid's going to get in trouble." It's not about Hagrid. It's about getting the trio in trouble, and he tries very hard to get that done.

Lorrie: He's got a plan.

JC: Yes, yes. It's very interesting and very scheme-y, to me. Hagrid is beneath Draco Malfoy's interest. Harry is the one he really wants to take down, Harry and the whole trio. When he comes to the hospital and comes to visit Ron in the medical...

Lorrie: To taunt him.

JC: What do they call it? It's not the hospital.

Lorrie: Hospital wing.

JC: Hospital wing. When he comes to visit Ron... Why would he come to visit Ron in the hospital? No, he comes to taunt him.

Lorrie: And to take a book.

JC: And take a very important book, it turns out.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love that Madame Pomfrey totally knows what happened -- totally knows who bit Ron's hand -- and says nothing. She keeps a lot of secrets. She's very discreet. She keeps patient confidentiality; this is true, probably, for some of the professors, too, that she knows stuff going on and she just says nothing. There's a higher calling for her. I also love that there's so much classic trio feeling in this chapter. It's very warm: when the egg is starting to hatch, Hagrid sends them a note. Here's this line, and you just picture their little 11-year-old selves: "The three

of them put their heads together to read the note." Later on by book six or seven, they're too big to do that, but right now the bonding is just adorable, and it's happening between the reader and the characters. And then we get a bit of Harry's sass, too, where something bad happens to Draco and Hermione says, "I could sing!" "Don't," Harry advised her." That has nothing to do with his abuse, the Dursleys, or his scar. That's just his personality. He's funny.

JC: We have the whole plot to get the dragon and take it somewhere safe. I love the idea of Charlie organizing this, no questions. "Oh, there's a dragon at Hogwarts? Yeah, great, come on." There's no, "What the hell?" or "Where did this come from?" "No, no. It doesn't matter. Yeah, we'll take it, sure." It's really interesting. I guess in a world where you could really only write letters and then send them by owl to Romania, apparently, it's hard to have long conversations. But Charlie's like, "Oh, yeah, of course. Yeah."

Lorrie: "We love dragons. Sure, we'll pick one up. Throw 'em in the sack."

JC: Yeah, and the fact that they know that it's, "We'll pick it up at midnight. Be sneaky. There you go."

Lorrie: "You know how."

JC: It makes you think, "Okay, what happened at Hogwarts in previous years?" There's just a lot going on here.

Lorrie: That's also their lives as semi-outlaw, rugged dragon people. I love them. It says, "Charlie's friends were a cheery lot." They're so glamorous. They're hot.

JC: And having fun and smiling.

Lorrie: They're adventurous, yeah. And Charlie says, "Oh, they rigged up a harness." They what? They're so impressive, and this makes me realize: actually, from their point of view of these young adults, kid Ron and his two kid friends are actually impressive, too. Not everyone's got a little hatchling dragon that they need smuggled out to another country. Just the fact that, "Oh, yeah, our friend Charlie says, 'My kid brother -- the youngest one -- he's got a dragon and he's got these two friends, so meet them at the top of the tower at midnight. Rig something up!'" And they show up and, "Hey, thanks, kid!" You can imagine them ruffling their hair. There's some respect there, and I feel like 11-year-old -- or I guess by this point, he's 12-year-old Ron. If we told 12-year-old Ron right now that these really cool guys were thinking that he was a junior one of them, he would be surprised. "Yeah, you're actually cooler than you think."

JC: Poor Ron is still in the hospital wing, though, so he misses the pickup. I don't know if he is or not, but he wasn't there. The idea of Harry and Hermione lugging the dragon in its crate -- under the Invisibility Cloak -- from Hagrid's hut all the way to the castle, all the way to the top of the tower. Doesn't Hermione have a spell for this?

Lorrie: She doesn't know it yet.

JC: Oh, my gosh. I love that the author just glosses over how freaking hard that would be. With just a little bit of, "Okay, yeah, they got it up there; they don't know how they did, but they did it," that kind of thing.

Lorrie: No, she doesn't. She doesn't gloss over it, because they have an incredibly difficult time until they see Malfoy getting into trouble. Then the task of dragging the dragon up becomes so much lighter after that.

JC: Yes. So Malfoy gets caught, and the image of McGonagall having him by the ear was great, while he's spewing stuff that sounds like nonsense but is one hundred percent true. "Harry Potter's got a dragon!"

Lorrie: "Ah! Do you think I would fall for that?" Right. I looked it up: that's not the only time Malfoy gets dragged by the ear. Okay, first of all, dragging a kid by the ear: that's not very effective. It's not like they can't break free. This is a humiliation tactic; this is authority. Someone drags you by the ear, that means that you don't dare question them and their reproaching you, and you pretty much think you deserve it or at least that you can't get out of it. It's a reproach. Also, she shows up in her tartan bathrobe and a hairnet, but somehow she's not ridiculous. Later on, when we see what Snape sleeps in, it's like, "My eyes, my eyes!" But with her -- even though you catch her like this -- it's funny. Of course, it's tartan, but it's still dignified. It's like, "Look, you made her get out of bed." She's still formidable. So, he gets dragged by the ear, and the other time that I recall that he gets dragged by the ear is in *Half-Blood Prince*, when Filch catches him trying to sneak into Slughorn's party. There, again, it's an instance where, "You know what you did. You know what? You're in the wrong. I've got you by the ear." But yeah, very undignified. And I like that the Invisibility Cloak lets the kids see and gloat over this scene.

JC: That would be the fun of having the Invisibility Cloak, in some ways. That's the whole "What would you do if you were invisible" question. Yeah, you would want to be able to get away with stuff or see things that you weren't otherwise allowed to see.

Lorrie: I want to see every single time Malfoy gets humiliated. I want to be there.

JC: I like, too, that McGonagall mentions that she's going to talk to Snape about him.

Lorrie: Oh, boy.

JC: I would love to hear that conversation, actually.

Lorrie: Oh. That's one of my favorite things about this series -- it's there, but it's very beneath the surface -- is the working relationship between McGonagall and Snape. They work together beautifully; they love working together. They're friends, and it's hard to see that sometimes. There's also a little bit of flirtation: when McGonagall says, "Ugh, Quidditch. I couldn't look Snape in the face for weeks." They have a little back and forth going about House rivalry, and it's for fun, and they do 'good cop-bad cop'. Actually they're about to do that in an upcoming chapter, but yeah. No, I think they really enjoy working together.

JC: We talked about this earlier on: as teachers, they both have very high standards. They both have high expectations for how students are going to behave in their classroom. They handle misbehavior in completely different ways. As we established: McGonagall does play favorites, though it's much, much more subtle than it is with Snape; with Snape, it's different. He's got a different thing going on, but as teachers they have a lot of things in common, compared to anyone who ever teaches Defense Against the Dark Arts.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's mentioned that they both have the ability to keep a class quiet just by talking. Yeah, I trust in their authority in the classroom. My headcanon for them -- this is totally just me

entertaining myself -- is that sometimes, when teaching gets draggy, that they meet up after hours, they trade parchments and they grade each other's students just for fun. "Ugh, thirty scrolls on Switching Spells." "Here, pass it over."

JC: "Why did I give them two feet? Why?!"

Lorrie: "No, noooo! Ugh."

JC: That's another thing, too. They get these ridiculous amounts of homework. Okay, as a teacher, I could say that you have to grade that shit. Unless you're not, which that happens, too.

Lorrie: No, but Snape is.

JC: Yeah. Oh, my God, and that's a lot of work. Eh, it's a lot of long hours.

Lorrie: It really is. But that's also one of my favorite things about Snape. He doesn't even want this job -- he doesn't like children, he doesn't like teaching -- but when he gives homework, he covers the scrolls in red ink. He gets into the details. He does care. You don't have to like a job to desperately want to do it well just because that's your nature.

JC: True.

Lorrie: I just kind of love that about him.

JC: That's interesting. It's got to be wild though, to be a teacher at this school and have Harry Potter show up and then have all this stuff happening. You don't know he's got an Invisibility Cloak, but then you find out later that Dumbledore knew the whole time. The kid's been sneaking around at all hours, got an Invisibility Cloak. What the hell? Oh, my God. Yeah.

Lorrie: Although I don't know if they ever find out that Dumbledore snuck it to Harry. I don't think they do. They know that James had it, and it's not surprising that James's brat is doing the same stuff. But I'm not sure they know that Dumbledore dishonorably talked James out of the cloak; then James went and died, and Dumbledore's had this guilty thing on his conscience for all this time until the tween shows up and he slips it back and says, "Here. Don't tell anyone."

JC: And then they leave it on the top of the tower.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Yeah, and that's something where it's like, "Okay, they're not used to having it yet." Yeah.

JC: And my first thought is that it's bungled up at the top of the tower. Oh, no! I don't think they're able to go back and get it for a while, are they? I can't remember. Let me see.

Lorrie: Well, it shows up in the next chapter.

JC: Okay, we'll see then.

Lorrie: Right, because the next chapter is called The Forbidden Forest, and it's the consequences of their luck running out.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: But then it becomes something way bigger than that. It's a good cliffhanger.

JC: Actually, it is. Yeah.

Lorrie: The cloak being left behind, yeah.

JC: "Oh, we are in trouble now, aren't we?" Is that what it is? Something like that.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. Oh, no.

JC: "Well, well, well, we are in trouble. They left the Invisibility Cloak on top of the tower."

Lorrie: Oh, crap. Yeah.

JC: Filch, so scary looking.

Lorrie: Yeah, he's the light, diet version of Snape.

JC: But I love how creepy he is with his creepy cat. He's cultivated this feeling of... to be a Squib and to be in that school and that situation, you would have to carefully cultivate an image that would frighten the kids into doing what they're supposed to do. You'd have to work at it.

Lorrie: I don't get the sense that he works at it. I get the sense that his life is so terrible that his crankiness comes naturally. Yeah, and it doesn't work on the kids, either; they don't listen to him.

JC: Well, yeah, they don't, but also they have the sense that he's always looking for a reason to get them in trouble. That keeps them out of his way.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's better if he doesn't catch you. Yeah.

JC: He can't get his shit done. "All these damn kids. This damn school!"

Lorrie: I did read a corrective fanfic that immediately became a soothing headcanon for me: where Filch quits his job at the castle and goes out into the Muggle world to do building maintenance, and is shocked to find out how much he's worth per year. "Well, what can you do?" He lists all of the things he did by himself around this enormous castle -- all of the repairs he made without magic, all the things he maintained -- and he is highly in demand.

JC: That's great.

Lorrie: Yeah, his sense of self-worth completely flips.

JC: Oh, wow. That's amazing.

Lorrie: So, I'm looking forward to this.

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.