

Transcript

Episode 1.15

Book 1, Chapter 15: The Forbidden Forest

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 15: The Forbidden Forest.

Lorrie: Hello, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: We are talking today about Chapter 15: The Forbidden Forest. Are you ready for this deep dive into mystery?

JC: Yes, I think so.

Lorrie: Things get realer than real. Harry, Hermione, and Neville have just lost 150 points for Gryffindor because they were out of bed at night. Now, Harry is one of the most hated people in school because all the other three houses wanted Slytherin to lose the House Cup. Along with Draco, they now have to do something dangerous for detention. They are going into the Forbidden Forest with Hagrid to find a badly injured unicorn; they may have to put it out of its misery. It's never explained why Hagrid has to take a bunch of kids in with them to do this, but never mind. We're doing it. We're doing this.

JC: Right. There's so much in here that falls along those lines of, "Okay, just go with it." It's a children's story in that sense, where you just get weird bits of horror thrown in that wouldn't make sense in the real world.

Lorrie: Yeah, I find this to be a very effectively written horror chapter. So, what did you notice?

JC: I think starting at the beginning of the chapter, the intense feeling of being caught and knowing that you disappointed the adults and there's nothing you can do. There's nothing you can say. You just have to take it. Then that followed by the shame of everybody knowing what you did. On top of that, the idea that Neville thinks that they played him for a fool. Ugh, it's just visceral. Oh, it hurts.

Lorrie: Yeah, poor Neville. Ouch. What I noticed and laughed about was when Harry was unpopular, the rest of the Quidditch team wouldn't speak to him; if they had to speak about him, they would call him 'the Seeker'. I thought, 'Isn't that a little bit like fandom consensus on how to refer to J.K. Rowling as the writer?' I do not know where this consensus was reached, if at all. It just sort of happened.

JC: We talked earlier -- way back -- about not saying the name of Voldemort and how we do the same thing with figures in our own lives, that 'I don't want that name in my mouth' kind of a feeling. The amount of disgust and anger that I have to have toward someone before I refuse to say their name is really quite a lot, so the fact that that's how the school is treating Harry when it's not the last time it'll happen.

Lorrie: It's the first of many.

JC: Oh, the peaks and the valleys of his popularity at Hogwarts is just, oh God... gut-wrenching. But there was a funny line in the midst of all this, where McGonagall is telling them how disappointed she is in them, and she says, "Four students out of bed in one night! I've never heard of such a thing before!"

Lorrie: Yes, you have.

JC: Yes, you have! We can name them. I just thought that was funny. I don't know if it was a happy accident or if it was intentionally placed there, but it was funny.

Lorrie: Yeah. So then we have a moment that is super disturbing: when Harry overhears Quirrell talking to somebody, and Quirrell is whimpering and he's saying, "No, no, not again, please," and then Quirrell came hurrying out of the classroom, straightening his turban. I'm sorry, that sounds like sexual harassment to me.

JC: Ooh, interesting.

Lorrie: I got such an intense vibe. And Harry is so perturbed. The inability to say no to somebody who's making you do something, whew. So intrusive.

JC: Wow. No, I hadn't thought of it that way. I didn't catch that; that is really interesting. One thing it made me think about as I was reading it, though, is how the heck did Quirrell get himself in this situation? I guess what we know is that he went off to study creatures somewhere in Europe; somewhere in the forest, he came across what was left of Voldemort.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's a story there, but what it made me think of is these young white boys that get radicalized on the internet, because they're lost or they're looking for something. They're looking for someone to tell them what to do; they find someone they think is super exciting and interesting, and latch themselves onto that person. Then it just gets worse and worse and worse, and it's hard for them to get out of it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's what it rang for me, was that feeling of he's got himself in this situation and he can't get himself out now; he can't even tell anyone. This is the situation that he's in.

Lorrie: No, he can't. Yeah, there's no way out. So then we have Hagrid telling the kids that they're going to be looking for the trail of silver blood, because the injured unicorn has been suffering a lot and there's quite a lot of blood on the trail. This is silver magic again. Unicorns are pure; unicorns are associated with newborns or innocence, so this is magic at its purest, what you're born with. This is your soul. That's what they are. Then the horror writing ramps up. This is so well done: When they hear something and Harry asks if it's a werewolf, Hagrid said, "That wasn't no werewolf, and it wasn't no unicorn, neither." He doesn't say anything else, and they go deeper into the dark forest.

JC: Taking a step back: when Filch is walking them down, he's at his creepiest; it's pure horror writing, this whole description of the old punishments back when they used to torture the kids, basically. It's actually unclear to me if this is real, or if he's just trying to scare them. I'm honestly not sure. "I keep the chains oiled in my office." There's all that.

Lorrie: I think that's real. I think he found chains somewhere.

JC: Yeah, why not, and he's sure. Then when he leaves, he's like, "I'll be back at dawn for what's left of them." This idea that they're going to spend the entire night in the forest as their punishment is just like the setup of a horror movie, for sure.

Lorrie: It really is.

JC: I'm laughing, but it really is that way, so that whole setup gets you on edge. Then they go in and he has them split up. No, you never split up in a horror movie. Why would you do that? That's what you don't do, you never split up. I do like that he makes them practice sending up sparks as just a little teacher thing. "Okay, if you get in trouble, send up this kind of sparks; if you find something, send up this one; let's practice now." That's such a teacher thing to do. "Before I turn you loose, show me that you know what we're doing. Okay, now go."

Lorrie: Well, about the chains and ancient punishments: many years ago -- when I was 10 and my mom took me on a quick bus tour of England -- we stopped by the Tower of London, and the tour guide was describing graphically the kinds of torture that people would go through. We would be standing in the buildings where they took place, and it seemed long ago because, of course, it's older than what we think of as the history of the United States of America. But standing there with these Brits: "Okay, it wasn't that long ago; people really did this to each other?" I think when you're in the castle and you've got Filch, who looks like you're not sure what century he's from, it's like, "Ooh, it's a little closer to reality than it might feel for an American reader."

JC: Yeah. Oh, there's also a moment in here -- so Draco is there, as well. Draco's like, "My father, dah dah dah," and Hagrid just shuts that down instantly. Draco, in my mind, I see him like, "Okay, I'm not going to get out of this," which is funny.

Lorrie: Yeah. The rules of civilization don't apply in the forest.

JC: All the werewolf mentions, too, I thought were interesting, because werewolves came up multiple times. I thought, "Okay, that's a nice little bit of foreshadowing of something that we'll see in the future," but also establishing that yeah, werewolves exist in this universe without a doubt.

Lorrie: Yeah, and whatever's in here is worse than a werewolf. Then, the most brilliant comic piece: we meet the centaurs. Oh my God, they are so infuriating. "Mars is bright tonight." Oh, my God, talk sense. "Always, the innocent are the first victims," which makes sense. If I were saying that vulnerable populations are the ones who suffer first, I know what they're saying. "The innocent are the first victims," and then the camera goes on the tiny little 11-year-olds trembling. Hagrid is just so disgusted with them, and he calls them 'ruddy stargazers.' There's nothing I love more than dialogue between Hagrid and the centaurs.

JC: It's so great, it's so funny. Yeah, Hagrid's like, "Okay, yeah, we got that part, but what about -" and they just respond. Yeah.

Lorrie: Hagrid is so rude to them; Harry's always like, "Shut up, shut up," and the centaurs don't actually care.

JC: True.

Lorrie: They don't like it when humans are rude to them, but they recognize Hagrid is something different, so Hagrid can be as rude as he wants. They just serenely go about being mysterious.

JC: That reminds me of that idea that if you're in the forest and you're with Hagrid, you're safe. It's such an interesting thing, and we come back around to that at the end. Hagrid is the one who carries Harry out of the forest in the end, so I love that bookending of that idea, too. But I'm sure that even if you're walking alone in the forest with Hagrid in the middle of the night, looking for whatever's killing unicorns, that would be terrifying no matter what.

Lorrie: Yeah. Hagrid is leading the kids along, blah blah blah, and then he yells in all caps, "GET BEHIND THAT TREE!" Terrifying.

JC: "Everything's fine. AAAHHHH, GET BEHIND THE TREE!"

Lorrie: And then, yeah. Do you have anything before we find the unicorn?

JC: Okay, I do. There's this really interesting exchange between, um... is it Bane?

Lorrie: We meet Ronan first. He's more neutral.

JC: Ronan first.

Lorrie: Bane is the really mean, depressing one.

JC: Ah, okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, Bane is really into policing the other centaurs.

JC: That's right. Ronan engages in polite conversation with the kids and says, "Students, are you? Do you learn much up at the school?" Harry goes, "Uuuuumm," and Hermione says, "A bit." Ronan says, "A bit. Well, that's something," and then he goes back to, "Mars is bright tonight." That just cracked me up because, as a parent and as a teacher, watching kids learn -- kids are always learning. It's part of the way that their brains work; they're constantly learning, but they don't know that they're constantly learning because they're in it. You're soaking in it, so you don't know that you're constantly learning. That universal parent experience of sitting down with your kids at dinner saying, "So what did you learn at school today," and they're like, "Nothing." They never do anything interesting. They never learn anything, blah blah blah, but yet

you see it as it goes. I'm sitting here thinking, "Oh, my God, you kids; look what you've learned in the months you've been at Hogwarts. What?" But they're like, "Eh, a little bit." I thought that's so kid to not even recognize how much they've actually learned.

Lorrie: But I think it's also that they're so intimidated by meeting a centaur that when they think of what they've learned, they just went from being incredibly ignorant humans to slightly less ignorant humans. What can they possibly say in front of a centaur?

JC: They just learned centaurs exist, so that seems big. No one's mentioned that before.

Lorrie: Right, which just shows how completely ignorant they are, and then the disappointed way that he just sighs and says, "Oh, that's something, I guess. Yeah, you're not much, you children, are you?"

JC: You have a lot of humor sprinkled in with the horror, it seems.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, it's so great. So the silver blood gets thicker and thicker; then they find it, and this is heartbreaking. "It was the unicorn all right, and it was dead. Harry had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. Its long, slender legs were stuck out at odd angles where it had fallen, and its mane was spread pearly white on the dark leaves." This is the representation of the first of the three questions of the series, as I think of them: Who would try to kill a baby? You look at this beautiful, pathetic, incurably sad sight; to me, this sight is at the crux of the discourse about children's literature and contested content. This image, the purity and defenselessness of children's innocence, is what's being invoked by all sides. For some reason, which I do not understand, there are people who want to ban books who think that telling children about truths that already exist -- like queerness -- is somehow going to hurt this innocence. For me, the pain of J.K. Rowling being anti-trans is that she is a children's author. That means that there's a contract between the author and the readers of trustworthiness, that it's okay to let this person's voice into your child's head. As a child, you trust when you're reading children's literature; as a parent, when you cast an eye over what your kids are reading, you're trusting that. If they're reading something that is not necessarily trustworthy, you have to make sure that they're equipped to resist. If you are sharing the *Harry Potter* series with your child -- if you're reading it to them or discussing it with them -- there's all this emphasis on how Hogwarts is there for everybody. It's to welcome everyone home. Everyone has a place there. Everyone gets a house. Then you learn that Rowling somehow thinks it's dangerous for trans children to receive gender-affirming medical care, or that if they do, that they should be taken from their parents. We -- parents or elders, librarians, teachers -- are the ones having the talks with these kids, the readers, who in real life know from constant experience what it feels like to have judgmental adults around them saying ignorant and extremely threatening things about trans kids right in front of their faces, arguing against these kids getting their own health care from their own doctors, going to their own schools, relying on their own teachers and parents. How do we -- in real-life experience -- dealing with kids reading literature, talk to the kids about the author of these stories being one of those people? They know exactly how it feels to have that kind of person in real life say they welcome all children except them. Bizarrely enough -- to me -- the anti-trans rhetoric talks about theoretical harm to children somehow ruining their innocence when, in real life, we know the actual harm that happens to trans kids and adults as they're trying to survive, including the thing that is so hard to talk about. It sounds melodramatic, but it's not. People who aren't familiar with it might think that this is hyperbole or that we're speaking metaphorically, but yes, there is a heightened risk of violence, suicide attempts, and

overt transphobic calls to action like the ones that Rowling has been issuing since 2019. They have an actual and immediate and frightening effect on people's lives. I have a friend, Brent Satterly, who cosplays drag Umbridge; he is a social worker, and he sometimes counsels queer kids and teens who are in mental health emergencies in hospitals. I asked him and he said, yeah: among LGBTQ+ kids, the mental toll and suicide attempt rates really are higher because of prejudice. I asked if he had encountered people citing Rowling in particular as part of their struggle; his response was so quiet, and tired and just bitter. It was the opposite of melodramatic. He just went really quiet and shrugged and said, "It's a thing." He wasn't exaggerating; he looked like someone who didn't want to talk about it, but he has to. I can't help but remember that this debate is about taking support and safety and care away from kids that are theoretical to some people. And looking at this beautiful thing -- especially with the way that the image of the dead unicorn evokes youth, it has those long, slender legs -- it's just a kid.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: When you think about anti-trans prejudice as a wedge issue driven by people who also then want to take that kind of bigotry against other groups of people, it really makes me think of the centaurs saying, "Always, the innocent suffer first." The defenselessness of it is like, "Fine, go after people who already were struggling to have rights." It really brings it back to the same question for me: Who would try to kill a baby? Why? What is wrong with you? Yeah, this chapter... It was never an easy chapter to read. It was always intense, but it has become exponentially more painful to read in the past few years.

JC: There is actually a lot of emerging research showing that when there are laws enacted -- against LGBT folks in general, but against trans people in particular -- there is an immediate effect. In schools, bullying goes up, suicide attempts go up. There's all kinds of negative -- you can trace it right back to that. There's lots of research that's coming out on that right now, so yeah, exactly. When you have important figures -- like the author of this series -- making those statements, it absolutely has a big impact. I think I've talked about this on the podcast already, but the last year was one of the first times that I have had students in my own classes actively anti-*Harry Potter*. If it comes up at all, people will say, "No, I don't want to. We're not going to talk about that. That's a piece of shit." Literally, those kinds of statements. It's been very interesting to see how polarizing *Harry Potter* has become, and you know this just as well as anyone else. But that idea that she has now connected herself and this work with something that is that hateful and has measurable negative effects on human beings, yeah.

Lorrie: And without it being better or worse, it is definitely characterized by the violation of trust in the contract between reader and children's author in particular. Not all children's literature does this, but *Harry Potter* is definitely part of the genre of children's literature that's trying to define goodness. It definitely sets itself up as something with a moral code that children ought to respond to and adopt, and that makes this betrayal stinging.

JC: When I think back to the 90s or even the 2000s, when the people who railed against this particular series were coming at it from a very different perspective -- they were all, "It's satanic," or something, whatever the argument was at the time -- that seems so quaint now. "Wow, really?" Yeah, it's so long ago that that was the issue people had with it. I was thinking about your comment before about parents: when your child is reading something and you don't completely trust the author, how do you handle it? It seems like there's a lot of people out there who just want to rip it out of the hands of the child and say, "No. Not only are you not going to

read that; no one else is allowed either, because I'm going to do the dumb thing where I'm going to go to the library and check them all out or whatever." There have been so many times in my life as a parent when my kid has been -- usually, it's been something on the internet -- has been reading something on the internet that made me question, "Okay, do I trust what this person is saying?" But that's when you teach your child how to look critically at things that they're reading, or let's think about it. A human being wrote this. Where are they coming from? What do you think their perspective is? What's their agenda? Why are they putting this on the internet? Who are they trying to convince? What do they gain? What kind of benefit do they get from people believing this? Who is it hurting? Who do you know who fits into the category of people that it's hurting? That's not a hard conversation.

Lorrie: No, it's not.

JC: In my mind, it's not. It's not a hard conversation to have with a kid, but you're teaching them how to engage with media in a critical way. I know that maybe not every parent has the time or the energy to engage in that with their kids, but this is what school librarians do and this is what teachers do as well. The idea that there are people who just don't trust teachers and librarians to do that is infuriating to me. I know, some people just want their children to believe whatever their parents say and then reject everything else in the world, and that's not how kids work. It's just not, and it's not setting them up for any kind of success. And we've gotten off topic.

Lorrie: No. Yes. No. All right, so we hear a slithering sound. The slithering sound, it is the cloak that Quirrell is making, but it's obviously meant to be snake-like. Then the hooded figure comes crawling on its belly -- crawling across the ground like some stalking beast -- goes to the wound in the dead unicorn and starts drinking its blood. Harry, Draco, and Fang are witnessing this complete loss of innocence, this violation of nature. Malfoy screams and bolts. What a sight of horror. But the hooded figure makes eye contact with Harry. "It got to its feet and came swiftly toward Harry. He couldn't move for fear; then a pain like he'd never felt before pierced his head. It was as though his scar were on fire." This is so scary.

JC: It is scary, but at the same time I have this record scratch moment of, "Wait a minute." We know this is Quirrell with Voldemort stuck on the back of his head. How is this movement happening? Who's actually drinking the unicorn blood? How -- what? Okay, bear with me. We get the sense that it's Voldemort's face on the back of Quirrell, so is he crab-walking on the forest floor to get to the unicorn? Is the head attached to a digestive system? Or is Voldemort possessing Quirrell until he possesses his body? I don't know. I'm very confused.

Lorrie: That's what Voldemort does, yeah.

JC: That was my reaction to the horror, was to stop and pick it apart. I don't want to feel the horror. What I want to do is pick apart these little things that don't make sense to me, because that's how I deal with it.

Lorrie: Well, I think we're meant to see a serpent in this figure, so it's Quirrell sliding on his belly. Because the hooded figure drinks, I think we're meant to see that it is the way a humanoid figure would drink. We do know later in the series that Voldemort's thing is to possess other creatures and use their bodies, so it's not like Voldemort has a separate mouth on the back of Quirrell's head. He's using Quirrell's whole body because it doesn't belong to Quirrell anymore; it belongs to Voldemort now. And when it sees Harry, then it becomes human again; it becomes a serial killer again and comes toward him. Then I thought, "So Voldemort and Quirrell: Does

Voldemort want to kill Harry here, or does his damaged soul want to reunite with the fragment of it that's in Harry's scar?" I think it's both, and poor Harry is feeling the pain that you would feel when the thing that traumatized you for life is happening again right now.

JC: But he doesn't know yet who this is.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't quite know it's Voldemort yet.

Lorrie: No, he doesn't.

JC: He just knows that his scar hurts and he's just seen his horrible thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. And then a miracle occurs: Firenze the centaur charges the figure and chases him away, and after a minute or two, Harry's pain passes enough so that he can see again. Firenze says, "The forest is not safe at this time, especially for you." That just makes me feel every bit of warning as a hunted minority. You know how there's travel advisories right now? There are some groups of people, like me as an Asian person: "Don't go to Florida." This is not like conventional wisdom. This is stated outright: "Do not go. There is a travel advisory. This is a hostile territory. You're not protected there. The law has been changed so that you're not protected there. It is now legal to hunt you, and those who would like to are feeling empowered." Draco says this to Hermione in Book Four, when they're at the World Cup and the Death Eaters are torturing Muggles. Draco gives Hermione a not entirely unfriendly warning, where Harry, Ron, and Hermione walk by and they say, "Well, she shouldn't be out here." So yeah, "The forest is not safe at this time, especially for you." Harry, it's getting real. Get out.

JC: I just have this flash of feeling about the fact that when we get to Book Four, that's like 2016.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: When suddenly it became okay to be racist and homophobic and all these things in public in a way that it wasn't necessarily okay before. Suddenly, people could just be Death Eaters in public again or hassle Muggle-borns, and it was okay because what was going to happen? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. And that's, yet again, one of those moments when we realized that in some countries -- like we in the US -- some readers had the experience of reading this more as an allegory; then there was a regime change, and it became more real. There are readers in other countries -- or in the same country as we are, but in different social and racial classes -- for whom this was never allegory; it was always completely real. Firenze gets Harry on his back and then the inter-centaur policing starts, and they say, "Are you a common mule? Are you a donkey?" They're so angry at Firenze for breaking centaur code and offering himself as assistance to a human. I am not Christian; I'm not familiar with most of the instances of Christian allegory in this series. That one, though... Okay, I got that one. Firenze is arguing with Bane about what the death of the unicorn means; it means, for Firenze, that it's time to choose a side, and Bane won't have that. Firenze says, "With humans alongside me, if I must." Firenze is choosing a side; he's being brave and he's exercising free will. He's abandoning the policy of no-engagement because Firenze recognizes that this is the point at which no-engagement degrades into complicity. Bane, being a traditionalist, may never reach that point, but if he does, it's certainly going to be a long time from now.

JC: I thought it was interesting that Firenze was also described as being younger -- obviously younger than the other ones -- so my first thought was always in his post-adolescent idealistic phase, where he's like, "I can change things, I'm feeling empowered to pick a side and make a difference in the world," and the other centaurs are like, "Eh, we've been looking at the stars for a thousand years." That was one of the things that struck me there as well, but that idea of Firenze saying, "Okay, I'm making a choice to do something instead of sitting back and just looking at what's been foretold and watching it unfold." That is a really interesting piece of characterization. And we've just met these centaurs; we don't have any world-building about them or really understand much about them at all. But that's a lot of information, that one little piece of this chapter about what they're like.

Lorrie: And it's so funny to be just dropped right into the middle of a community's old in-fighting.

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: They've been having this conversation forever.

JC: Harry's like, "What did I do? I offended all the centaurs. This one invited me on his back, I promise."

Lorrie: And he's right. "I don't want to be here!" "Don't question; just go." That's the whole chapter. Don't question; just go.

JC: Another thing that really struck me as interesting reading this one this time around, too, was that the centaurs were basically all saying, "We already know what's going to unfold; we've seen it. It's all written in the stars, and we shouldn't interfere." So this idea that they know what's going to happen in the next seven books -- just like the author apparently, and us now -- they know what's coming. And Firenze does, too, which is part of the reason why he wants to help Harry here. He's like, "Kid, I know what's in your future," and there's a line a little later on where Harry is talking, I guess, to Ron and Hermione and says, "Bane thinks Firenze should have let Voldemort kill me; I suppose that's written in the stars as well," which was like an 'Ooooh' kind of a moment read.

Lorrie: Yeah, I'm going to get to that later.

JC: That's exactly what happens. Yeah, we'll get to that one a little bit later. Oh, and then I guess Firenze's the one who tells Harry that Voldemort's not completely dead, and this is a revelation that changes everything for Harry. It was all about Snape before, but now...

Lorrie: No, there's something worse. Remember there's something worse? A lot easier to think about Snape, isn't it? It's not so easy to keep Voldemort in focus, because it's so terrifying. Yeah, there's that line: "Do you know what unicorn blood is used for?" That's when we get into the deep horror of this book. Unicorn blood? It's to make yourself feel better because you think you're the lowest of the low, but you will dehumanize someone else and say, 'No matter how low I am, I'm better than you.'" You fight against the rights of somebody else and you demonize that somebody else in order to justify it, scapegoating groups of people in order to have a place to put your own self-loathing. Why do you have the right to kill a unicorn and drink its blood? "I'm better than the unicorn. It can't protect itself. I have mastery over it." Firenze says, "That's because it is a monstrous thing to slay a unicorn. Only one who has nothing to lose and everything to gain would commit such a crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and

defenseless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life -- a cursed life -- from the moment the blood touches your lips." We don't know it yet, what eventually the series will tell us is when you have done something like that -- when you've hurt somebody that badly in order to deal with your own feelings of self-loathing -- if you're ever going to be a whole person again, you're going to have to face that you did that. Hurting somebody this defenseless for such a reason? That's a lot to face.

JC: There's obvious real-world connections there and this idea of Voldemort at the end... wow, this is too big of a point.

Lorrie: This chapter, yeah. It's all in here.

JC: I don't even know where to go with that. There's so much right there to say.

Lorrie: Yeah. I think that captures this chapter perfectly.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry says, quite reasonably, "If that's what happens when you drink unicorn blood, why would you do it?" And Firenze says, "Unless all you need is to stay alive long enough to drink something else, something that will bring you back to full strength and power, something that will mean you can never die." This is where I just break entirely and I'm just going to have a little fit now: I don't know why. I don't understand why Rowling is targeting trans people and using 'think of the children' as a wedge issue. What profound fear is she attempting to appease in this way? Why is she doing this? I don't know. It shouldn't be a sticking point for me; I should just leave it. It doesn't matter if I understand or not; just go and fight! But I genuinely don't know. I have a friend, Lookfar, who is a long-time Harry Potter fan; she's also a Jungian therapist, and she says, "The usual assumption among Jungian therapists is that this kind of reaction is based on one's Shadow self. There's something about yourself that's just too awful and fearful to bear thinking about directly, and it's a measure of how awful and unthinkable it is in yourself when you project this violently onto somebody else." Okay. That sounds right. I still don't... I don't understand. It's so painful. Then we get a rare moment in this series where we get words repeated, so you know this is super important. It's a repeat of Hagrid's words about Voldemort: "Some say he died; codswallop, in my opinion. Don't know if he had enough human left in him to die." This is one of those insights that is set forth in the first book that stands up to every repeated volume and comes to glorious fruition and payoff in the ending. That is exactly what's happening. So, they finally get out of the forest, and Harry's in the common room telling Ron everything that happened. He's still shaking; at this point, he thinks Voldemort is in the forest, and Ron keeps whispering, "Stop saying the name," as if he thought Voldemort could hear them. And of course, Ron is right: Voldemort is in the castle. He is close enough so that sometimes he and Harry can feel each other's proximity. That's when Harry says, "So now all I've got to do is wait for Snape to steal the Stone; then Voldemort will be able to come and finish me off. Well, I suppose Bane will be happy." This is the moment where Harry realizes in the series he's doomed. He may as well give himself the choice to fight, since he's going to be doomed no matter what. And then Hermione -- bless Hermione, I love her so much -- has a word of comfort: she reminds Harry, "Dumbledore is protecting you." This is true. And more importantly, to me, the centaurs might be wrong.

JC: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Which the centaurs themselves say, that they've been wrong in the past. She says, "It sounds like fortune-telling to me, and Professor McGonagall says that's a very imprecise branch of magic." In other words, it's in the interpretation. Just because it sounds a certain way doesn't mean you have only one choice about how to understand it. You might hear something and think that means you're doomed and you have no choice, but is that true? Are you sure? Are you sure there's no other way to understand it? We've already seen with the centaurs' disagreement that they think, "Well, it's written in the stars," so some centaurs think that means, "Well, then, we can't and we shouldn't do anything to fight it." Firenze is saying, "It's in the stars; we're fighting it! There's nothing that says we can't." And here we have Harry thinking, "Okay, if Voldemort's coming for me, what am I going to do? Just wait? That's not what that means. It doesn't mean I just have to wait and nobody has to do anything to help me. No." And then -- beautifully, mercifully -- the chapter ends with confirmation that Hermione was right, because he gets the cloak back in his bed with a note from Dumbledore -- who by this time has received the report from Hagrid, knows Quirrell has just tried to attack Harry, knows that escalation is only going to increase from now on -- and the note says, "Just in case." It's been delivered to Harry in his bed. "Yeah, I am here. I am your protector, and nobody's telling you that you're imagining this. This is really happening and I'm here."

JC: I love that moment of recognition there for Harry. Dumbledore is aware of everything that's been happening; the fact that the cloak was found and then returned in this way but on this night in particular, that Dumbledore knows what's happening. Not only is there Dumbledore watching out for me, but also Dumbledore is trusting Harry to make choices here. Dumbledore's not saying, "Stay out of it," like McGonagall and Hagrid. Dumbledore is letting Harry make his own choices. For whatever reason later on, you start to realize, "Oh, okay," but to have that kind of faith in this 11-year-old kid and say, "I know that you're thinking about this, and I'm trusting you to make your own choices about how you're going to be involved in this," that's really big. "Here, I'm going to give you this protection back. I know what you're going to do with it." I think about being a parent or a teacher, and seeing a kid in a situation where you don't know if they're going to be able to handle this or not, but you just have to think, "Okay, I've prepared them, I've given them the tools, and now it's their turn to take it. I can run in with a safety net if I need to, but maybe I won't be able to get there in time." It's just... Wow. That's big.

Lorrie: Here's a long-term thing about discussing this series: I do not believe Dumbledore has any manipulative intent toward Harry. I think that's the majority view in the fandom: that Dumbledore has questionable motives, that we trust him to look out for Harry, and then we find out later that, no, he wasn't that trustworthy. After thinking about it a lot, I think we're meant to question right up to that and see how that might have been possible. My conclusion is no, it wasn't suspect; he was doing something right, and no, he was not using Harry for his own ends ever. But, just like any parent or elder or guardian, he was sometimes not doing it with enough conviction because his heart was failing in him to think of the pity of a little kid having to go through this. When he let his heart fail him that way because it just seemed too unfair, that's when he faltered. This is what repeatedly in this series, later on, gets called 'the flaw in the plan.' When you know what you should do, but you have so much tenderness you can't bring yourself to do it, that's when mistakes happen. This will come up over and over again in the series: what are Dumbledore's motivations? Is he suspect? Is he not as good as we are supposed to think he is? I don't think he's suspect. I don't think he's manipulative. I don't think he used Harry, but I think I'm in the minority. I also think the blessing of Dumbledore's attitude toward Harry is that he never tries to tell Harry, "Your life is not as bad as you're making it out to be."

JC: "It's not in your head."

Lorrie: No. Harry has to try to convince –

JC: No gaslighting here.

Lorrie: No. Even with Ron and Hermione, Harry has to say, "Well, fine. You guys didn't lose your parents to Voldemort. Stop acting like it's okay to be all comfortable." There's always teachers disagreeing with him, saying, "Oh, no, I'm sure you're imagining it, I'm sure it's not that," and he's practically screaming, "What do I have to do to convince people that this is actually happening? I'm not making this up." But people don't usually suffer as much as Harry suffered, so they don't have anything to compare it to. Also, they don't want to believe it.

JC: Yeah, yeah, that's a big thing.

Lorrie: Here, this is the rage I have felt ever since 2016, especially dealing with people who have more privilege on some issues saying things. Do you remember, during the 2016 presidential campaign, there were actual living queer people who claimed -- who believed -- that Trump was a pro-queer president, or would be?

JC: I honestly don't remember that, but I'm sure it happened.

Lorrie: Because he said, "No, I'll pass this and that." I remember staring at these people, who seemed to be flesh and blood, to my face going, "How are you believing this? What kind of life have you led that you can believe this, or how badly do you want to think that somebody somewhere is looking out for you?" Those are the stakes around debate about taking rights away from trans people, but especially trans kids. For some reason, we're going straight for that? "Well, how bad can it be? Are there even that many? How does it really affect most people?" And at the center of it are people who know: "Yeah, someday you're going to find out just how stark and awful this is. But until then, you're going to be betraying -- and not being an ally to -- people who are living it right now."

JC: Yeah. It's like, "I never thought

."

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Yes.

JC: And we're seeing a little bit of that now. At the time we're recording this, we're starting to see a little bit of that coming back around. With the thing in Italy recently: they're taking same-sex parents off of birth certificates, and suddenly, you've got some folks in Europe going, "Wait a minute. I never thought the leopards would eat my face."

Lorrie: To me, that is the beauty and the strength of Dumbledore giving a cloak back to Harry and saying, "Just in case." I've seen people in the fandom saying, "What is wrong with Dumbledore that he's encouraging this 11-year-old to go fight instead of swooping in to protect him?" That is a fantasy; Harry's reality is way more dangerous than that. Believing in that fantasy -- which we see later in this series from Molly Weasley -- that horse left the barn already. That's a very nice fantasy; now get out of my way. Like the moment in front of the Mirror of Erised, where Harry the 11-year-old and Dumbledore the sage are bonding over the pain of knowing that there are things in the Mirror of Erised you can never have; to me, this is another soul-to-soul meeting that doesn't have to do with age.

JC: I love that feeling of... "I've got your back," I guess, is one way of thinking of it, but also that someone understands. I don't know if Harry -- even with his friendship with Ron and Hermione, has there ever been an adult in his life who really understands? I think Dumbledore is probably the only one. It's not maybe the first moment where Harry has realized it, but he needed to hear it on this night.

Lorrie: What it means is, "This level of fear and evil that almost nobody else in the world knows: not only do I also know it -- not only do I recognize it and what it means in your life -- but I've dealt with it before. You're not going to be going in there alone, for the first time. That's the power of it: somebody's on your side who has some power and some desire to protect you, and your dad was up against this before you."

JC: Yeah. That's some good stuff.

Lorrie: This chapter... Wow.

JC: There's one more little thing, and this is just a little funny note, but I love the idea of McGonagall dissing fortune telling in a sense. "Yeah, it's an imprecise magic," and Hermione imprints on that. Later on, Hermione in Divination... I love that the idea is already in place for Hermione. She's like, "Well, McGonagall says..." I would trust McGonagall, too. I'd be like, "Yeah, McGonagall, I'm right with you." Anyway, I loved that little note there at the end, in the middle of all the other stuff that's going on.

Lorrie: Hermione versus the centaurs is another funny thing. Hermione, you should have a little bit less skepticism toward the centaurs. You're a little too rigid about this.

JC: But I see myself in that. I love that. I love it.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's good.

JC: If it's not logical, then Hermione's going to be skeptical. You go, girl.

Lorrie: "This is clearly bullshit!"

JC: "Am I the only one seeing this?"

Lorrie: "No. McGonagall sees it, too, so there."

JC: Exactly. I also love the fact that the sun is coming up at the end of his chapter, too. They stayed up all night, and now they've got to get up and go to school. They pulled a horrible all-nighter that wasn't entirely their planning. Oh, God, and they're eleven. I'm just like, "Ugh." I'm thinking about the next day; it's going to be a long one.

Lorrie: Well, that's also what happens at this point in a *Harry Potter* novel. We have now entered the part of a *Harry Potter* novel where people flip the pages frantically, outrunning their own reading pace in their hurry to find out what happens next. Skipping over details and stumbling, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God."

JC: "The sun's coming up, but I've got to keep reading!"

Lorrie: Right, which also then has a real-life analog in the experience in later books if you've gotten this book at a midnight release.

JC: Yes. Oh, so much so.

Lorrie: By the time you've gotten to this part, you don't even know what you're reading anymore.

JC: That's so true.

Lorrie: But it's also the alchemical thing: when the sun rises, when things are turning red, things are about to happen. Yeah.

JC: And they are indeed, because the next chapter is called Through The Trapdoor, right?

Lorrie: Yeah, and that's going to be another ride.

JC: We are almost at the end of this book. Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Two more chapters.

Lorrie: So, yeah, the big action is going to happen in the next chapter, and then the unpacking of it will happen in the chapter after that.

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

Lorrie: I'll talk to you about it then.

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.