



## Transcript

### Episode 1.16

#### Book 1, Chapter 16: Through the Trapdoor

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 16: Through The Trapdoor.

Lorrie: Hello, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: Are you ready to go Through the Trapdoor for Chapter 16?

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Harry thinks Snape is going after the Sorcerer's Stone and Harry is determined to prevent this, so down he goes and we're going to find out what happens then. Whoo!

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: I love the way this chapter begins: "In years to come, Harry would never quite remember how he had managed to get through his exams." That is such a reassuring beginning to this chapter, because it's so suspenseful and so dangerous. I love that we have to be told right up front: he survives.

JC: Oh, yeah, that's actually a really good point. I've made a note of that quote as well. I was thinking about something different; I love that you pointed out he actually does survive this. That's great to know. But my first thought was, 'He's not going to remember taking exams. I know what's coming!' Of all the things to remember, taking final exams are at the bottom of the list of things he's concerned about. It's not even going to matter. But also, what he's about to do is the real final exam. For Harry, Ron, and Hermione, this adventure they're about to go on is the real set of final exams for their first year, terrifying as that is.

Lorrie: So, what did you notice out of that?

JC: We have this little lull at the beginning of the chapter: they've taken their exams, and now they have a week to hang out. I don't understand how British schools work; maybe it's a boarding school thing. They have this week to hang out until they find out their exams. I guess they just hang out with their friends for a week. That's kind of nice, considering, but there's this wonderful scene of them just relaxing by the lake, and the super casual mention of the giant squid is thrown in there.

Lorrie: Like I love it.

JC: "Oh, there's a giant --" it's just an accepted fact of this world. I had to then go into the little dive of, "Wait a minute. Can squids live in lakes?" It turns out that cephalopods are exclusively marine, so we definitely have an extra magical creature here that can live in freshwater. I don't know why I went down that little tangent, but I did. The next thing that happens is we get this great little paragraph. I don't know if this happens other places in the book, but I love this: we get Harry's Roomba of thought as he goes from sitting by the lake and he sees an owl -- and all owls bring mail. "Hagrid sends me mail." And then we get to, "Hagrid?! Hagrid would never betray Dumbledore," and then "Oh, no!" It's just this hilarious little Roomba of thought as it bumps around inside his head and it gets us to where we need to go, but I find it really funny.

Lorrie: And it turns out that that owl is carrying a piece of significant mail.

JC: Oh, I hadn't thought of that. But yeah, you're right. Oh, THAT owl. Very interesting.

Lorrie: During this time, Harry has stabbing pains in his forehead because since he came face-to-face with what turned out to be Voldemort in the forest, his trauma is reawakened; the connection between him and Voldemort is quite active, and he's had this recurring nightmare. Now, the recurring nightmare includes a hooded figure dripping blood. Harry's life does kind of suck. That's terrifying, and Harry notes that Ron and Hermione aren't as worried about the Stone as Harry is. One of those moments when it's like, 'Okay, there is a difference in privilege. Some of us really do have problems that the rest of you are going to have to sign on to.'

JC: It's interesting, too, that this chapter is where Ron and Hermione do sign on to that. There's that little bit at the beginning where they just don't understand the seriousness of what Harry's experiencing. They still don't have any frame of reference for it. They're not intentionally gaslighting him; they're like, "Just go to Madam Pomfrey; don't worry about it." Neither of them understand yet, but by the end of this, they will.

Lorrie: Neither of them was there to witness the figure drinking the unicorn blood.

JC: True.

Lorrie: The only other person who saw this horrifying sight was Draco.

JC: That is true, who, by the way, fucked off. Did he even make it back? We don't even know that he made it back that night. Did he spend the whole night terrified and huddled up in the woods? We don't know.

Lorrie: I don't know, but he did the right thing.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That was what I would have done. I'm glad he did that. But I had never thought until this reread -- this happens to me every single time I reread this series. There's something new that I've never thought about, and until now it hadn't struck me that nobody -- not even Hagrid -- has been with Harry to witness the terrifying sight of a figure drinking a dead unicorn's blood except for Draco Malfoy.

JC: Which is very interesting, yeah.

Lorrie: Draco now knows what Harry is up against. This is Harry's life; whatever Harry has to deal with, Draco's out of there. No, thank you.

JC: So much for the loyalty of the unicorn-hair wand. Well, that's coming later.

Lorrie: "You be the Chosen One. I'm gone." So, what next?

JC: As soon as Harry has this horrific realization that Hagrid must have given away the secret of Fluffy -- because this dragon egg magically appeared just as he wanted one -- they run down to Hagrid's hut and they have this conversation with Hagrid, who relays that yes, he went to a pub in Hogsmeade and let a stranger in a hood -- who never took his hood off -- get him drunk. He answered all kinds of questions and he bought a dragon egg or won it in a card game. You can just see the children just crumpling. "Oh, Hagrid, why would you do that?" And as the reader, you feel that, too. And even when they run away, Hagrid's like, "Wait, where are you going? Come back." Now they know. They know that someone knows the secret of how to get past Fluffy, and they have a guess of who that is; they're wrong, but that's okay. They're not going to be wrong for much longer.

Lorrie: Yeah, they don't have much time left. They run to McGonagall, who says, "I don't know how you found out about the Stone, but rest assured: no one can possibly steal it. It's too well protected." Now, on first read of this series, I didn't know what she meant, because the kids get through the protections. It was not until a later read that I realized, "Oh, no, she's absolutely right. That turns out to be true. The protections weren't meant to keep anybody out. Oh, okay." The other ones, that is.

JC: Oh, okay. That's interesting, because that's a question that I have for you later about the tests. Okay, yeah.

Lorrie: Right. That's one of those things McGonagall says up front and then you have to keep it in mind. "What does she mean it's too well protected?" When you hear that and then you see what the tests are, you think, "But... but McGonagall said..." Right; she's not talking about these protections. Then she tells the kids to go back outside and enjoy the sunshine. She leaves, and the kids are about to run off and do whatever they were going to do anyway. Then -- I love this, he does this -- Snape was standing right there. "'Good afternoon,' he said smoothly." I love that he does this. He does these jump-scare appearances throughout the series where you think you're safe. Sometimes they're saying bad things about Snape; then they turn around and he's right there. "Aaah! Why does he do that?" And he's always got that nasty look on his face, like, "I know you were up to something, and I'm here to catch you." Then it goes, "'You shouldn't be inside on a day like this,' he said with an odd, twisted smile." I love that twisted smile. Okay, he's up to something, he knows something. When I was working with the fifth grade reading group -- I love this -- they recognized that this is a moment where he and McGonagall are playing 'good cop, bad cop' on purpose, because they connected those two comments about the weather.

McGonagall says, "Go back outside and enjoy the sunshine," and she must have run into Snape right after and told him, "Go put some fear into those children. They know about the Stone." "Oh, shoot." "Tell them not to go." She's been good cop and he gets to go be bad cop, and that's how these two work.

JC: Oh, that's really interesting. His response to them -- you may disagree with this -- but my feeling of him with that odd, twisted smile and just standing there. The idea of, "Oh, you shouldn't be hanging around here. Someone will think you're up to something," or you think about the Rickman reading of it, "UP to something." It almost comes across to me like he's daring them. "I dare you; make my day, get in trouble, let me expel you personally." That's what it felt like, to me. "I dare you. Try it."

Lorrie: Well, he does make that threat to Harry.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: "If you do any of this, I will make sure..." Yeah, I think he really doesn't want them to get messed up in this. But also, we're at the maximum Snape mystery point of this volume. We're supposed to be thinking, "What is he up to? I don't know, but something." The odd, twisted smile is like, "Well, whatever he's up to, it's not on the surface."

JC: We don't get too many descriptions of him smiling throughout the series, right?

Lorrie: "The odd, twisted smile."

JC: That just stood out to me. "What's he smiling about?"

Lorrie: Yes. Usually, when he smiles, it's a nasty smile.

JC: Another thing that stands out to me about the sequence of events -- they go to Hagrid, they talk to McGonagall, they run into Snape, they try a few more things, and then we find out that Dumbledore's gone -- is that we tell kids if you're in trouble, tell an adult. "Go find an adult, go find a policeman. Find someone who looks like a mom." They do the right thing by going to an adult, and it totally backfires on them; one by one, all the adults who could help them or should help them are just knocked down like dominoes, and it leaves them like, "Well, we're the only ones left. Now we have to act." That terrifying feeling of, "None of the adults are going to help us. They refuse to help us. They can't; they're incapable of helping us. They're so bumbling. They've been fooled." That feeling of, "This is a last resort and we have to take it," just builds up really nicely here.

Lorrie: Yeah, with a little side order of, "Wow, it sucks to be a kid."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So the kids decide that Hermione should go keep an eye on Snape, and here is a prime example of them utilizing the way Snape usually ignores her. They think it's going to work again. This chapter, unfortunately for them, happens to be one time he does see her, which proves he's been capable of seeing her all along. He does see her; he just ignores her, but this time she's lurking outside the staff room trying to be so subtle, keeping an eye on Snape. "Snape came out and asked me what I was doing, so I said I was waiting for Flitwick and Snape went to get him! And I've only just got away! I don't know where Snape went."

JC: Then she had to lie to Flitwick. "I'm worried about my exam." "No, you got 112."

Lorrie: Yeah, the fact that that little detail pays off later is delicious. Then we get Harry's monologue, which I find quite skillfully written. It goes in between fierceness and childishness where he says, "If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I'll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there. It's only dying a bit later than I would have, because I'm never going over to the dark side." It's heroic, and it's also so funny and young. And Hermione and Ron go, "Meep!"

JC: Another thing he says in that paragraph that really stood out to me on this reading was saying that if Voldemort comes back, he's going to turn Hogwarts into a school for the Dark Arts, and I was like, "Well, shit, that happened." Six years in the future, that actually happened, so I thought that was really interesting. Oh, God. I hate that he's eleven and he's already here at this place, but that idea of he's just completely willing to sacrifice himself and his future, even his life, to fix a problem that is not his fault; to do something to protect the people around him, to prevent some future from happening. The idea that he, at eleven, is already having to think like this about his life: I know it's a fairy tale, but at the same time, it's just awful. It's just the start of all the awfulness that Harry deals with throughout the years. You're the only one, and Harry starts to believe it. I think at this point that he's the only one who can stop Voldemort, and God, what a burden to bear as a small child.

Lorrie: Well, he was the only one so far that ever could. Voldemort thinks he's the only one apparently. But this is also something that is not unfamiliar to me and to some kids, I think: If you grow up in a certain way knowing that your life isn't valued, there's a kind of kid who might be so, so depressed in their disposition that they think, "You know what? I'm not even sure I want to be alive, but that gives me a little bit of freedom. I'm not afraid of death. As long as I'm feeling this way, I'm going to go do things that might, at worst, be a good effort and, at best, might actually have a good result that will bring meaning to my life and make me cling to life a little more." But this is a situation where somebody thinks that they are doomed, which is a little bit like all of us being mortal. You have a life. What are you going to do with it? Harry does not have the trait that adults sometimes accuse children of having, as though children are doing this on purpose to be offensive. You hear how sometimes adults say bitterly of kids: "Oh, kids think they're immortal." First of all, don't sound like that. That's a good thing. They're supposed to because when they don't, it looks like this. Would you rather have this? Second, it means that they think they have a right to life and to the future. Harry doesn't; Harry's come face-to-face with mortality in the horrifying guise of a monster drinking a unicorn's blood. Okay, he's the Chosen One. Ron says all three of them should get under the cloak. That's the first time.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: I was so used to the three of them traveling under the cloak together; I didn't realize, "No, this is an innovation; it's Ron's idea. They're not even sure it's going to work, but they try it; it works," and that's when the two of them sign on. That's the first time that Hermione says, briskly, that, of course, she's going to help Harry get to the Stone. How is Harry even going to do it without them? Ron and Hermione have not even coordinated. They just both independently are sure that this is the thing to do, and Harry can't dissuade them. This is when Harry says, "We'll get kicked out," and this is when Hermione says, "Flitwick told me in secret that I got 112 percent on his exam." She wasn't even going to tell the boys this; it's just information she offers to rebut Harry's objection. This is the first instance we see as readers that Hermione has an

independent study track. There are teachers meeting with Hermione separate from the boys. The boys don't really know about it; we just see glimpses of it in Harry's story that Hermione is always in touch with teachers separately from the rest of the student body. They don't have a gifted track at Hogwarts, but they are treating Hermione differently. Flitwick is not telling any other student this, but it's like, "Okay, no, they're not going to throw her out. They've noted this." We'll see glimpses of this again and again.

JC: That's interesting.

Lorrie: And then poor Neville.

JC: And then poor Neville. Obviously, this is very brave of Neville; the other kids have just been ignoring them, but Neville is keeping an eye on the situation because he knows not to trust them, and he really doesn't want to have to go through this again. And it's so interesting that Hermione lies to his face and says, "No, we're not going anywhere," and no one acts like that is remotely true. No one buys it for a second, which I think is funny.

Lorrie: And that classic exchange where Neville says to Ron, "You were the one who told me to stand up to people," and Ron goes, "Yeah, not us."

JC: "I didn't mean me. It doesn't apply to me." Yeah. That's funny.

Lorrie: Yeah, they have to betray Neville. They have to immobilize the poor kid and say, "We'll explain later."

JC: The whole Petrificus Totalus hex or spell or whatever sounds like something that would be terrifying to experience, like that kind of dream paralysis thing where you can't move. Think of how vulnerable you are in that state; they just leave him on the floor of the common room. Who knows who's going to find him. That's terrifying to think about, and they feel bad about it. The number of hexes Hermione knows at that point is limited. "Here's one I know I can use on you that will shut you up and make you not able to get us in any more trouble."

Lorrie: "We just need to get away." And that's when they begin the first trust leap of this series into a mystery tunnel.

JC: Before we get to that: the whole scene where Harry is pretending to be the Bloody Baron to scare Peeves. First of all, it's a brilliant idea from Harry. I'm like, "Wow, Harry, where'd that come from? That's great!" Also, it brings back that story again that Peeves is terrified of the Bloody Baron and that the Bloody Baron is the only thing that can control Peeves at all, and I can't remember if we ever find out why. What the heck? What could a ghost do to a poltergeist that the poltergeist is that scared?

Lorrie: Well, from Peeves' personality, I think it's just respect. Peeves respects McGonagall. She can make him shut up or leave. Peeves does not mess with Snape, and then Peeves chooses loyalty to Fred and George later on. I'm thinking that with the Bloody Baron, he just recognizes somebody that's formidable.

JC: Yeah, maybe so. And then we have the seven challenges. Before we leap into that, I'm sure that that means something that I don't know. What reference to what Jane Austen book or what piece of Greek mythology does that connect to or whatever? Maybe nothing, I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, people have done all sorts of analyses playing with that -- most of which I'm not sure are really true or intentional, but a lot of them work. For example, some people compare each of the challenges to each of the seven books, which I'm not going to get into because yeah, it kind of works. It's fun to do that. Some of it's just... I don't know; if you're an author, you just pick a number and go with it arbitrarily because it makes structure, and that's pleasing. The one that I like to go with is that it's the tarot card, the Seven of Cups. If you're familiar with tarot, it is a person facing a bunch of choices. It's kind of a queasy feeling, actually: you're looking at seven golden cups and they each have a vision in them, or a desire or fantasy like riches or a castle in the air. Are your dreams trustworthy? Which ones are trustworthy? Are some of them delusional? Are some of them going to lead you to ruin? Are some of them worth going to? If you choose one, then you're actively not choosing the other six. If you choose one, are you committing to something? Can you trust yourself? What do you want? Why are you going that way? It is momentous. It's frightening. It's a little bit paralyzing, maybe. But sevens are choice cards, and the Seven of Cups definitely has an ominous feel to it, mystery. So they get past Fluffy...

JC: This is just a little thing, but I was so struck by the fact that Harry brings this flute and he just knows how to play it. He hands it out to Hermione, who also knows how to play it, and I had a moment of, "Oh, it's a recorder." This is true for American school children; it's also true for British school children. Every public school child -- okay, not every, because there are places where they don't even have the resources for this or music programs, but that's the classic elementary school music program. As you learn to play the recorder, that's how you learn to read a little bit of music. That's how you learn some basic music theory, learn what music is, and so I was like, "Oh, my God, that's why Ron doesn't play it, because he didn't go to elementary school and learn how to play the damn recorder."

Lorrie: Oh, that's so funny.

JC: But also that they were both good enough at the recorder that it works on Fluffy. You remember when you had third graders playing, trying to make a nice sound on the recorder? The fact that they're both competent at it, that made me laugh. "Oh, my God, they learned to play the recorder in school, and that's what they're doing to calm Fluffy." Wow.

Lorrie: Although I was imagining more like an ocarina, because it's rustic. Hagrid whittled it himself. I don't think it takes much to play it. I don't think it has that many notes probably, and I don't think it takes much to lull Fluffy. There's a simplicity to both Hagrid's intent in creating the flute, and in what it takes to quiet this three-headed beast. I actually am not sure that what American grade schoolers create with a recorder would have lulled Fluffy or driven the poor thing into a rage.

JC: There's also this idea, and I don't think we see this in the Harry Potter universe, but I'm going to bring up the Untamed again. This idea that you can just play music or you can play music and put magical intent into it, and then the music becomes magic, so it's not magic on its own. You have to be intentional about it. I was thinking of that here, too, and I don't think that's the way that it works in the Harry Potter universe.

Lorrie: Well, Harry... didn't it say -- I have to now look this up.

JC: But we also do have Dumbledore at the beginning, saying, "Music: a magic beyond all we do here." At the time, I was like, "When has music come up again?" and you were like, "It does." Now I'm like, "Oh shit, it did," and I totally forgot how important it was.

Lorrie: I thought it said that Harry took the flute because he didn't think he would be calm enough to sing.

JC: Yeah, or he didn't feel like singing.

Lorrie: Yes, he pocketed it to use on Fluffy. He didn't feel much like singing, so yeah, that does speak to your point about intention. Well, if you think your voice is going to shake, maybe you better not.

JC: And then they go through the trapdoor. It's a very old and overused metaphor -- going through the door as a transition into some other part of the adventure -- but I do like the fact that they open the trapdoor and they can't tell what's through it. You can't see. It's just bottomless darkness, as far as they know, so there's a leap of faith. Clearly, the idea of the door as a portal to a new part of your life or to something different -- another thing -- you're going to be changed by it. You're never going to be the same after you go through this door. The amount of bravery that it takes to drop through it...

Lorrie: Ay, yi, yi. Yeah.

JC: Every time I read it, I'm just like, "Oh, my God, Harry!" He's hanging on by his fingertips and he's like, "If I don't survive, let me give you instructions on what to do next," and he says that multiple times, too, in this chapter. But just that whole, "Oh, my God, kid. Wow." I love that.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's a really long drop.

JC: Yeah. I'm surprised no one broke a leg, to be honest. I know they're kids. Oh, but Quirrell also made the same fall, so hey, who knows.

Lorrie: The Devil's Snare -- when they figure out what it is, and they can't remember what to do about it, I love that the rhyme is incomplete. "The Devil's Snare, it likes the dark and the damp," and then we don't get the rhyme to that. We just get to imagine it, which I love.

JC: What rhymes with 'damp'?

Lorrie: Hmm... Clare Moseley, whom we know from fandom: her theory -- which I put in my Snape book -- is that this challenge was meant for Neville. When the teachers were planning the protections, they thought about Harry and his friends; they were watching who was around to go with Harry, and they thought, 'Oh, Neville Longbottom hangs out with them. What can we do that Neville will know how to do?'

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: That's Clare's theory, which I loved as soon as I heard it and I thought was correct. Irvin Khaytman -- who is the author of a book on Dumbledore -- he disagrees, and he thinks this is about testing the trio's ability to pay attention in class. But to me, the other challenges all speak so specifically to one of the kids. I was confused about this one because we don't see them really interact in Herbology. We don't know what connection they have to that subject, and when Clare had mentioned Neville, I thought, "See, now that's the degree of specific connection that I



associate with the other challenges." I thought, "Oh, yeah. No, Neville is part of this story." What do you think?

JC: Well, what's confusing to me about this, though, is that McGonagall was genuinely surprised, I believe. She was genuinely surprised that they knew about the Stone. If the tests are set up so that these specific kids can get through, why? Okay, so there's a whole other big question to ask there: maybe other professors couldn't have known, but who would have known? Dumbledore would know. Did Snape know? Who else knew that these tests had to be things that the kids had to be able to get through, because McGonagall didn't know.

Lorrie: No, they know that they have to create tests for the kids, and that Dumbledore thinks that the kids are going to end up here in that Dumbledore way. "I don't know why you think so, Dumbledore, but sure. Okay. We'll do that."

JC: I guess this is my question, though: the tests are -- if all of these charms and things are to protect the stone, these are all layers of protection.

Lorrie: They're not.

JC: Except why put them there unless you expect the kids to go through, and why would the kids go through if they didn't know about the Stone? That's my question. If McGonagall doesn't know they know about the Stone, then why would they know about the test? Why would they go through this maze of horrors basically, this intense final exam, unless they knew what was on the other end?

Lorrie: Well, they know that there is the Sorcerer's Stone at Hogwarts because they all know about Fluffy. And then at Halloween, they know that somebody has found out about this and is trying to get past Fluffy, and that the Stone has to be better protected than that. They know that whoever is trying to get past Fluffy has something to do with Harry Potter, or it might, because Harry, Ron, and Hermione have been with the troll in the bathroom and Snape has been scanning Harry's mind. Why is the high-risk new student somehow mixed up with the troll and the three-headed dog and the Sorcerer's Stone and all this really risky stuff? They know that point of risk is there; then Dumbledore realizes, "We have to protect the stone better, and we have to do something about whoever is trying to attack Harry and possibly his friends because there's a struggle to get to the Stone." Whether or not the kids know that's what they're going after, they're going to end up going where the trouble is. Are they up to it? Can they handle it? Well, this isn't the first or the last time that whoever is evil and after Harry Potter is going to entangle him in some mortal struggle. This is going to keep happening to this child and possibly his friends forever. So, let's see. Let's see. Are these friends going to be good? Because we know for sure, one 11-year-old by himself is doomed, but are they going to stick with him? What do they know how to do? How can we test them? Have they learned? Because, as you said, it's their final exam for the year. What McGonagall means -- that the Stone is so well protected that it cannot be stolen -- Dumbledore's protection of the Stone, which we don't even learn about in this chapter, is all that's necessary. That's the only thing protecting the Stone. The other things are about the struggle that Harry and any friends of his might go through against whoever it is that's trying to steal the Stone. If nothing else, it sends the message to the person trying to steal the Stone that other people are on to this.

JC: The other thing that I've thought about, too, is that because three 11-year-olds working together can get through all of this, clearly a fully qualified wizard should not have any trouble. It

almost creates this false sense of, "Oh, this is going to be easy." If you're a fully qualified wizard, you should be able to get through all these. "Okay, great. Yeah. Great. Chess, whatever. Logic, potion." Despite the fact Hermione later says "no, most wizards couldn't do this," it seems easy; then you get to the real protection of the mirror and there you hit a dead end, so it might trap you there forever. "But it's got to... but I've got to be able to do it!"

Lorrie: Right, but it also means that since these turn out to be easy enough so that any adult could do it -- and any three kids could do it -- that builds in the sense of security that kids would love from schools, from adults. If you get stuck, ask an adult. We understand what's happening. We know more than you. Somebody will come help you. Someone will come find you. You're still in a world where you don't understand what the adults are doing, but that's okay. They kind of are looking out for you.

JC: Kind of. They may let you drown or whatever, but you're taken into the forest and exposed to who knows what. But that's life.

Lorrie: That's the point of disagreement that, I think, has something to do with privilege on the part of the reader. There's a division between readers who are appalled and disgusted that Dumbledore would let children be in danger to this degree, and other people saying this is going to happen to Harry whether Dumbledore helps him or not. Dumbledore can't make the whole world safe for Harry, because if you have noticed: in life, we can't protect everybody, but you can disadvantage children by not teaching them how to protect themselves, when it's going to happen. Yeah. As much as possible, yes, get in there. Get between them and danger. Protect them as much as you can when it's possible. It is sometimes possible, but evil wouldn't be evil if it were that easy to shut out.

JC: I guess one of the things that still bugs me a little bit though -- and maybe I'm misreading this point: McGonagall in particular, because she's the one that we've seen the most other than Snape, seems not to even entertain the idea that the kids know what's going on or can help in any way. She seems to be the one adult who's like, "Get the heck out of here, stay away, I don't want to see you, I'm going to punish you if I even see you anywhere near here, go away from this place" kind of a person. And Dumbledore: we don't see much of him in this book, I guess, but it feels like he's behind the scenes, knowing what's happening and clearing the way when it's needed to be done and making sure that there are safeguards in place. Then Snape is being actively hostile, so we have almost these different extremes of how adults can support or not support kids. They all are well meaning. Maybe not Snape, but they all think they're doing the right thing to protect these kids. I'm thinking about McGonagall's example in particular of the stern adult who's like, "I'm not going to tell you again. No, you don't need to know." "Why?" "Don't. Just listen to me because I said so," versus the other adults in the situation. I don't think I have a point, but it's making me think of all these things about how adults react differently to kids throwing themselves in these situations. Kids in danger, yeah.

Lorrie: Well, partly, each character does what they do. In fiction writing, you create a character, you put them all in this situation, and then you see how they react according to their nature; this is a good textbook example of each of those teachers doing what they do. But I'm going to refer you back to the first chapter, when we see this mysterious man Dumbledore with this mysterious plan, and McGonagall shows up saying, "What are you doing? Why would you give an innocent baby to these horrible people?" And Dumbledore gives her a bunch of non-answers, which amount to, "I have a plan. I'm not telling you. You're going to have to accept my plan because

you don't have a choice. You can try to get some explanations out of me, but I'm not giving you any," and eventually she has to subside and accept that, "Well, I guess you usually know what you're doing. I don't know." That's the dynamic, and I think that's what's happening here, too.

JC: Okay, that makes sense.

Lorrie: "I don't know why Dumbledore thinks these three small children are going to go after the Stone, but they did knock out a troll, and we didn't think they were going to do that either."

JC: Interesting. So, I guess, back to the challenges. Before we move on from the Devil's Snare, there's the classic line where Hermione doesn't know what to do and she's like, "But we don't have any wood to start a fire," and Ron's like, "You are a witch; you've been making blue flames this entire time." And even after she goes, "Oh," and she does it, he's still like –

Lorrie: "I can't believe you!"

JC: Yeah, exactly. It's really funny.

Lorrie: And we see that line pay off much, much later in the series, too. The next one is the charmed keys, and then we get our next clue that this is specifically tailored for these children. "Not for nothing, though, was Harry the youngest Seeker in a century." We're supposed to remember back to when Flitwick runs into Harry the morning he gets his new broom, and Draco says, "Oh, you're going to be in trouble now. You're not supposed to have a broom." Then Flitwick runs into them and beams at Harry and says, "Professor McGonagall told me all about the special circumstances." Flitwick is actively proud of Harry. Okay, we know: Flitwick, flying, Harry Potter, got it. And then the chess pieces. This one was scary to me.

JC: It is really scary. And the interesting thing about this one is that I think I saw the movie before I read the book. I'm pretty sure I did because I think I was in graduate school when these things were happening, and I read nothing outside of what I had to. I remember the scene in the movie didn't seem as scary, and I know it's because it was a movie for kids. It wasn't as scary as the one in the book. I remember reading the book for the first time and going, "Oh, my God, he's not sitting on the horse piece. He's not sitting on the piece. He *is* the piece." Also, there's a couple of points in the game when Ron briefly loses track and Harry and Hermione are in danger, so when he gets hit he actually does physically get attacked by the White Queen. That is really scary.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's beautiful to show that when these friends have elected to put themselves in danger out of loyalty to Harry, they are putting themselves in danger. They don't *have* to be at physical mortal risk the way Harry is; they're *choosing* it. They're choosing it not only out of loyalty, but because there's a chance that if they put themselves in the line of danger also, that Harry's risk will decrease. It's very touching. It's very much like, "I'm taking myself -- my safety, my body -- and putting it out there on the line for you, because I like you." And Ron choosing to be a knight, which is obviously supposed to be significant, so I had to puzzle over that a little bit. "Oh, chivalry. That's what it is." Because of the Gryffindor traits, chivalry is the most difficult one to understand. What is chivalry? It's not a concept that we use in contemporary speech that much because it means being on a horse; whatever that used to mean, that's not what it means now. What did it mean? It meant if you were privileged enough to have a horse and to be on one, and you saw people beating -- assaulting, taking advantage -- of other people, you could charge them on a horse and use your privilege to stop this abuse of power. Now, it does mean

that you get mixed up in it. Chivalry is: women and children would get robbed, nothing you could do about it. Someone on a horse comes by, charges them and says, "No, I'm not going to let this happen." Chivalry is the use of your privilege when you don't *have* to put yourself in danger to help somebody who doesn't have the same privilege. That's the position that Ron is in as a pureblood. Also, his expertise with wizard chess shows that, too, that he has this knowledge that's passed down through the generations. So he's choosing to be a knight, and then we get the line that really resonates for me throughout the whole series where Ron snaps at them, "That's chess. You've got to make some sacrifices," because Hermione and Harry go, "Oh, no. Oh, no." "Yes. Oh, yes." And then the line about what happens when he decides to sacrifice himself, this is so stark. "She struck Ron hard across the head with her stone arm, and he crashed to the floor. Hermione screamed, but stayed on her square. The White Queen dragged Ron to one side. He looked as if he'd been knocked out." The kid is 12. Yeah. He went into this knowingly, and they couldn't have done it without him.

JC: I think one of the things I love about this scene is the way that their teamwork has gelled, and that they know what each other's strengths are. Ron is still at the beginning, "Now, don't be insulted, but..." and they're like –

Lorrie: "We're not insulted."

JC: "We know this is your strength. You tell us what to do, and we'll do it." God, that's great. I love that.

Lorrie: And McGonagall has noticed. These are her kids playing chess in the common room over Christmas break. She's noticed. Then we get the troll.

JC: So we've left Ron behind on the floor.

Lorrie: Passed out.

JC: And they're like, "He'll be fine, we hope!"

Lorrie: "No time to worry about this."

JC: I think the troll in the next room is very interesting, because now we know why there was a troll in the castle earlier. "Randomly, there's a troll. Why is there a troll in the castle?" Okay, now it makes sense, because that was Quirrell's addition to this whole big scheme. This troll got knocked out by some kids, and "well, maybe we shouldn't use that one. Let's get another one." But that answers the question of 'what the fuck was a troll doing in the castle?' And no one seemed to blink about the fact that it got out, but not "why is it here?"

Lorrie: Yeah, and now trolls are old news. Just step over it.

JC: I also love that it was basically knocked out the same way Harry knocked it out, too.

Lorrie: Bonk!

JC: A bonk in the head should do it. All right.

Lorrie: And then we have the protection that thrills me, of course, as a Snape fan. This is the Seven of Cups tarot card. "This is the seven bottles: you have to choose, and you have to be super careful about which one you choose. There are seven choices. Which dream do you want to follow? Who do you want to be? Be sure of your choice. The wrong one might be fatal. You're

about to accept a drink from a magical being. That drink may enter you into some sort of binding contract. Whatever happens, that drink will change you and it'll be your fault because you chose it. So, be sure." This is the test that Snape has written just for Hermione.

JC: Hermione's recognition of that in this scene: she's smiling, she's relieved, she's delighted. "This was for me. I know how to do this. Most wizards \*hair toss, hair toss\* couldn't get past this one." It's just like, "Oh, someone recognized that I could do this."

Lorrie: Yeah, and someone knows that by this time, it's going to be only Harry and Hermione. He has thought about this. They know what order this is going to be in. They know who's going to stay with Harry to do what and for how long, and there are clues that Snape has put in there to tell her, "Yes. Miss Granger, this is for you." He has written the clues in logic and text, and he has used colored flames. These are the languages of Hermione's power; he has seen her all along. This is what it looks like when Hermione's seen by Snape; this is her one assignment from him this year. Yeah, I come back to this again and again through the series: "Hermione let out a great sigh, and Harry, amazed, saw that she was *smiling*, the very last thing he felt like doing," and that's a part of her nature that I am crazy about. No matter how dangerous life is: when she gets a happy brain moment, she smiles. "I'm about to be killed," and she's like, "No! Oh, wow. That's cool." And she says, "Brilliant! This isn't magic! It's logic!" and you see hearts pouring out of her, she's just so happy. So she looks at it, and she understands that Snape has arranged for only one of them to get through the flames to the Stone, but there's enough potion for both of them to get back. She understands that's what he planned, and she drinks it; Harry is worried, and she says, "No, no, it's not poison, but it's like ice." It's changing her. One of the lessons that Snape teaches her over and over again is you are not the main character. This is the point where you turn around and go back. The hero -- whoever this story is about -- goes on, and that's not you. You turn around. Then, once she proves that she has read Snape's clues correctly and she has drunk the potion, she never has to fear his poison again. She always understands Snape, which is uncomfortable for him and a damn good reason why he tries to avoid her, not talk to her, and not make eye contact. But she does not have to fear that he is going to poison her ever. She's not afraid of him. This protects her against flames, so she does it: she turns around and she goes back. And this is where I bring in one of my favorite pieces of fanfic I have ever read. It is called "Poetic License," and it's by a writer named Delphi P. Smith. And here is the prompt: "First year genfic. Professor Snape receives a thank-you owl for the delightful logic puzzle. To show her gratitude, Hermione has rewritten his clue to make it a much better piece of verse, with earnest analyses of the flaws in his version and suggestions to help him improve as a poet."

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: Because the rhyming verse is not very good, honestly.

JC: True. It's true.

Lorrie: It scans very poorly. It's not the best effort in this volume, and I thought it was a little out of character for Snape. "Oh, come on, you can do better than this." Well, he didn't write it. Rowling did.

JC: Mmm. True.

Lorrie: And I thought, 'I'm not satisfied,' because the logic is good. The puzzle is good. The colors, the imagery, the potions, the horrendous lurking threat. "Did he really put fatal poisons in there?" "I don't know." "Who wants to test it?" "Not me." All that is awesome. The rhyming verse doesn't quite stand up to it.

JC: True.

Lorrie: But that's me being super picky and also not a child reading this. But then I imagined how incredibly irritating it would be for Snape to get that letter from Hermione, and I really enjoyed that because for some reason, irritating Snape is one of the great joys that I can imagine.

JC: You wrote an article once about Hermione recognizing Snape as a teacher -- or I think it was about the teacher-student relationship between them -- and you were relating it to your own experience of being a student in Korea, and that what Western readers often will perceive as Snape being unnecessarily hard on kids is actually something that Hermione recognizes as, "I'm trying to teach you something here." That's always stuck with me. Hermione recognizes that when maybe the other students don't.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's not my favorite way to teach. I opted out of that system, but this really grumpy authoritarian way: Hermione doesn't take it personally. Harry does because for Harry, Snape personalizes how mean he is to Harry. It is personal there. With Hermione, his basic message to her is, "Shut up, you're not special," which isn't pleasant. It's not what I would choose, but it's not personal either, and she doesn't take it that way. So then we get more: to me, this is such an important Hermione moment because she is still on the theme of the Seven of Cups, where you choose who you become. This is a turning point in her character. She chooses: when she says, "Harry, you're a great wizard, you know," and he's shocked because she's obviously brilliant. She says, "Me? Books and cleverness, there are more important things -- friendship and bravery! Oh, Harry, be careful." That line... so many people, me included, have puzzled over this over and over again. It's very unsatisfying and meant to be significant. Okay, she's making a huge choice here about who she is. This is one of those Gryffindor, not Ravenclaw, moments. It's not quite convincing to me because I'm not sure we have seen why she thinks friendship and bravery are more important than books and cleverness, yet she's only had friends since November. But she's choosing, and there are two choices that I see happening here in a Time-Turner sort of way. One of them is, I think, the author, because I read this series as the author being somebody who once would have chosen Ravenclaw -- who thought of herself as intellectual and not quite valuing the right things and therefore had gotten herself into some messes in life -- and she wished she had valued love and friendship and togetherness more.

JC: Yeah, I wish she had done that later in her life, too. Ironic. All the things you're saying, there's some great irony in there.

Lorrie: Because we know that Hermione is a lot like what Rowling was as a girl and also not, and there are some ways in which Hermione is a good person, a model citizen, even. Braver, and more pure of spirit that Rowling wished she had been more like that as a child. I think that's one of those areas where we see Rowling thinking, 'What if I had chosen Gryffindor at that age? You can be smart, you can even love logic, you can be smiling in the face of moral danger. But choose this more, really. Let's see: how would my life have been better and different if I had done that?' The other Time-Turner moment I see here is, in my mind, Hermione and Snape are two versions of the same character. We already have seen that their minds work the same way.

She's the only person who gets him sometimes and he wishes that she wouldn't, but in a Time-Turner way: when you go back to the past, you don't want anyone to recognize you, and he just wishes this person would not look at him. If he had been able to go back and do everything over... he thought he was so smart, he thought he was so great, he did not value his friendship; he didn't apply the lesson that he should have learned from the friendship he had, and look what happened. If he could go back, what would he choose? He sees Hermione, who is also like him in some ways, having morals, having strength of character, making choices that he didn't know how to make at the time. All in all, that moment where Hermione is saying friendship and bravery, she's abdicating her potential claim to the crown of being just the brilliant student of the year. She could have really claimed that role, and she's voluntarily abdicating. She's giving up power, a little bit similar to Dumbledore giving up power and saying "I'm never going to be Minister of Magic. No, I could be; everybody wants me to be. It looks obvious that I should be. No, I'm turning away. I'm choosing this other thing instead for my own reasons. It's always going to be slightly the wrong fit. That's okay." It's a meta conversation between Hermione and some grown-ups -- the author and Snape -- that totally excludes Harry, and she's almost like another grown-up here. She has this moment -- she makes some decisions -- it intercepts with Harry's story, but it's not the same story; then she walks out of Harry's story and back into her own for a moment. The Potions puzzle is a source of great joy for me. And also, when I was holding the fifth-grade reading group -- we reenacted the actual thing with seven thermoses of different colors and different shapes and different sizes, I put them all in the correct order, I had the clues on different scrolls and they worked as a team to figure out which one it was -- I had them choose the correct one. The ones that held death in their insides were these cubes of sugar -- well, lumps of sugar -- that had been molded to look like skulls. And the potion -- the correct one -- was just hot water in a thermos. Then I had them brew the Sorcerer's Stone, which was just herb tea bags that you put sugar in, and there, now you've made the Elixir of Life. Yeah, figuring out which one it was and following the instructions and brewing it... they're fifth graders. It was great, and they were, working as a team, totally able to choose the correct one.

JC: It's a magical experience that you set up for them, too. I know so many teachers who have tried to use this series -- and get kids interested in this series -- to motivate lots of things, and I think that's a lesson I would love to see in a classroom, honestly. That's cool. Oh, I guess one more thing about the ice. I'm not sure if the ice, the way that the potion -- except that the ice lets you walk through the fire, if that means anything in particular, but it did stand out to me that idea of you drink this potion, it feels like ice in your veins, and then you walk into hell, basically. Okay, you're protecting yourself as you walk through these flames into essentially the next level of this as hell. I find that interesting, too.

Lorrie: Whatever Severus Snape has brewed for you, are you going to accept it and have that be the thing that keeps you alive? I guess you are. Okay. Is it pleasant? No, of course not. Snape brewed it. Yeah. He's a lot of yucky things, but he is trustworthy.

JC: As we find out.

Lorrie: And then we get the amazing moment where it says, "There was already someone there, but it wasn't Snape; it wasn't even Voldemort." The most amazing cliffhanger.

JC: Yeah. And we're going to get to that one next time. The last chapter.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Yeah.

JC: I have to admit I couldn't stop reading there. I kept on reading. I was like, "Screw it, I'm going to keep on reading. Even though I know what happens, I couldn't stop."

Lorrie: Who stops reading there?

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: I would like to go and find random people, saying, "When you read this and/or when you read it to your children, who on earth stops there and says, 'Well, good night?'"

JC: That's cruel. Yeah.

Lorrie: When we did this with the fifth-grade reading group with this chapter, it was a very fun exercise to lead them gradually to realize that, if a bunch of first-years can get through these protections and a grown wizard got through them all with no problem, maybe these protections weren't meant to protect the Stone. Getting them to realize that was really fun and gradual, and I got them to comb back through the story to find quotes with page numbers. Find the clues about when and how the teachers would have thought up each of the protections, and then they can start to put together a timeline. When did they discover that they needed to change the protections? In what order were they made? Why do you know that? "When you find the single piece of evidence, it's there. Trust me, it's there. Go back and find it," and then they find it. "Oh, my God, that's right," and they remember, "Yeah, yeah, because he said that." That's how you write. That's how you put in clues. This is such a good text for teaching kids how to be readers. The fact that it's set up as a treasure hunt this way, and it's so rewarding, that's exactly how it feels when you find everything. "I found the clue. It's shining. Oh, I'm using it. So that's why I packed it. It's coming into use here." It's real and it's fun, so yeah. And then the next chapter -- which, as we've established, we don't think that many people wait very long to read -- is the final one in the book, and it's called The Man With Two Faces.

JC: My goodness.

Lorrie: Yeah, so needless to say, I'm looking forward to discussing that one. How about you?

JC: Definitely, definitely. It will be exciting to have gotten to the end of a book, and that's a big milestone for our podcast. I'm very excited.

Lorrie: Well, I will talk to you about it then.

JC: That's right. Yay!

Lorrie: Yay.

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