

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 1.1

Book 1, Chapter 1: The Boy Who Lived

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 longtime HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book 1, Chapter 1: The Boy Who Lived.

Lorrie: So, JC, are you ready? Are you ready to start discussing *Sorcerer's Stone* / *Philosopher's Stone* with me?

JC: Yes, yes, I am. I have so many editions of the Harry Potter books, and I thought, "Which one am I going to read?" Because I'm about to go out of town for a few weeks, I grabbed a paper book copy, but it's one I bought in London years and years ago, so it says *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on it. I hit that point where I was like, "I need to read the British version to see if they're different," and the differences are minute, but that's what I'm reading. So yes, I'm ready.

Lorrie: Do you know about how long it's been since you last read this book?

JC: My kiddo and I started to read it when he was seven or eight, so it's been seven or eight years. I don't think we finished it, because as I said in the last episode, it just wasn't his thing. He has other interests when it comes to fiction reading. Since I read the entire thing, it could be close to 20 years, honestly. I'm the kind of person who I'll read them once, and then I move on, so this will be fun.

Lorrie: But yet, even from that one reading, you retain enough to build a community around the story, to have your own relationships with the characters, to talk about the characters with other people. You get a lot from one reading.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: Wow.

JC: That says something about the way these books captured our imaginations.

Lorrie: What are the top five things that stood out for you from the text as you read this chapter?

JC: I have four, because I created this list of eight things, and then I moved them around and categorized them a little differently. But the first thing that really stood out to me: I remember reading this for the first time, and the first chapter felt so fantastical and exaggerated. The author was painting this picture of the most mulish people you can imagine: they're so judgmental and suspicious of everyone around them, and they're noticing anyone who's remotely different. "They're not normal. They're so awful! We're going to pretend these people don't exist!" At the time that I first read it, that felt like such an exaggeration to reality, and it doesn't feel like an exaggeration of reality now. I look around and I'm like, "Holy shit, we live in a world full of Dursleys." That's not as unusual now, and I don't know if that's just because time has passed and social media has changed my perspective of the world -- and 20 years ago, I didn't have the same perspective -- or is the world really that different? I'm not sure, but I just thought, "Damn." Reading that... my neighbors are the Dursleys, honestly. They don't seem like fairy tale villains anymore. They seem like people I know.

Lorrie: Like actual threats.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I noticed something really similar. It's a heavily stylized chapter. I noticed the tone is very fairy tale, and there's also some King Arthur in there. The story of an infant, who's obviously a child of destiny, being switched and brought to another family. It felt like Roald Dahl: the caricatures of Brits, it's a very specific, mid-century, 20th-century caricature of a certain kind of British life, and it's very culturally specific. It helped me know, "Okay, that's what I'm reading. It's not just generic European or generic white or generic Anglophone. It will really locate me in England." Then there was the call-out to Jane Austen, when Dumbledore's described as "light and bright and sparkling," which is how Jane Austen described her own writing. That was such a deliberate wink. I thought, "Okay, this author is really locating us." Then the strong fairytale-feel of Petunia finding a baby on her doorstep, which in fairy tales is like, "Oh, there's a bargain she made early in life, and now they're collecting." So yeah, those influences really set my expectation for what I was about to read.

JC: That is really interesting. Obviously, I am not a literary person, as I've said before. I'm a mathematician by training, so those kinds of literary references I don't pick up on, but that fairy tale feel, 100%, was a thing that stood out to me about this first chapter. Again, it's been a long time since I've read the other books, but I don't remember the other books feeling quite that way, and maybe it was just because I was paying attention to different things. But that idea of her locating the story in a very particular time, in a very particular way, that's really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. I do actually think that the other books are different. I think that the fairy tale beginning is something specific that she did for this, trying to establish the gateway into what kind of story this is and what kind of world it is. Here is where there comes to be some confusion and disagreement later on: because the whole series is written in a number of different genres -- and chapter one of book one is very heavily fairy tale -- we don't question that an infant shows up on a doorstep and that an old wizard with a beard is somehow involved. That's a story we know. That's how fairy tales sometimes start. But we also get Harry Potter the series -- written as novels sometimes -- in which characters are humans with motivations similar to our own, not as archetypes or stand-ins. And then people are furious at Dumbledore: "How can you choose these individuals to foster an infant?" "Couldn't you have called up some social service agencies?" That's a novel. That's not a fairy tale. That's something that stands out really notably to me, is that the way this is written, this chapter, you don't question that this is happening. She signals that through genre. What's another thing you noticed?

JC: Reading the Dursleys' distrust of anyone they didn't perceive as normal. The first chapter being from Mr. Dursley's perspective is really interesting, because first, he's afraid of his wife, which is kind of hilarious. He doesn't want to upset his wife -- that's the number one thing -- but also he's just trying to get through his day; then there's all this weird shit happening and he's just determined to ignore it, but it's in his periphery. But him noticing people he called weirdos dressed in funny clothes? My god, that stood out to me in a way that I don't know it would have before. The story opens feeling like such a strong metaphor for queerness already, and maybe that's just knowing where it all goes and putting my own reading onto it. But the way that Mr. Dursley notices people who are different from him, and the way he just dismisses them and just thinks they're weird and they're strange: "Why would anyone be like that?" It feels like we're being set up to think about these Wizarding World people who we haven't met yet as sort of being like a stand-in for an underground queer community or something. "Why are they out in the public? Why are they flaunting this in our faces?"

Lorrie: "How dare they!?"

JC: Yeah. "How dare they do this in front of children," right? It's very much what it felt like, and that's a reading that I can't not see now. This is a point I'll come back to later, but that really stood out to me this time in a way more than I think it did in the past. I was really angry at him. I think the first read a long time ago, I was laughing at him; it felt like he was being set up to be mocked. He felt more dangerous to me this time.

Lorrie: This isn't on my list, but I noticed this time he is open to these things. He sees that the cat is reading; he has to actively shut it down. It's not that he doesn't have receptors to this; it's that he works to deny it. He sees these weirdos, and he feels actively angry at them. That's a connected energy, something about denying this truth, but it's not just he's a stock character. It does have resonance. I noticed that this chapter introduces archetypes: there's the old, bearded wizard; then there's the type that's this stern schoolteacher who loves cats. These are people that we know. Then Hagrid, I remember being so impressed, like, "Oh, he's Hermes." He's the character who shows up when there's transitions. Anytime you go from one place to another or

one state to another, he's the one who shows up and takes you from one to another; which is why at different points, when we were waiting for more of the books to come out, people would be afraid: "Oh, what if Hagrid dies?" I'd say, "Hagrid can't die. Any time anything goes from one state to another, he has to be the one to take you across. He can't be gotten rid of. Don't worry; whoever's going to die, it's not going to be Hagrid."

JC: All those little transition moments are running through my head now, when Hagrid shows up.

Lorrie: When Harry is "dead," who has to carry him? Who rows everybody to and fro? Who picks up Dumbledore's dead body?

JC: And the description of Hagrid, also, is so interesting to me, because the line that stuck with me the first time I read it -- and then it jumped out at me again and I still don't understand it -- is that his feet were like baby dolphins. That feels so ridiculous to me. Does it mean something deeper that I'm missing? I was like, "A baby dolphin?" It reminds me of all these memes where, "Why can't Americans measure anything in standard units?" when we're like, "It was three school buses long." I don't know how big a baby dolphin is. I have no clue.

Lorrie: "Well, my baby dolphin is about this big."

JC: I vaguely know how big an adult dolphin is, but why a baby dolphin? What the hell! It's just so ridiculous. It stood out to me again.

Lorrie: What else stood out to you, then?

JC: We talked about this a little bit. You talked about the idea of, this is a fairy tale, and so it sets us up for, "Here, this mysterious baby shows up." This didn't bother me somehow as much the first time I read it as it did now: this idea they just left a baby on the doorstep in the middle of the night and walked away. I was like, "Okay, I know it happened in the summer, so he wasn't cold, but good Lord." They didn't even ring the doorbell. They just put him on the doorstep and they walked away. And then the image of Petunia opening the door the next morning and screaming because there's a baby on her doorstep as she's setting out the milk bottles. That idea that he was just going to be safe -- this baby who they were effectively putting into hiding -- they're just going to leave him on the doorstep and walk away. Oh, man, it is very fairytale-ish, but also there's something about that that I'm just like, "Wow." I don't know. As a parent, I'm like, "Really?!"

Lorrie: The thing is, it wasn't summer.

JC: I thought it was. What time of year was it when all this happened?

Lorrie: Well, his parents have just been killed, and it was Halloween.

JC: Oh, it was on Halloween. Okay, so it was actually cold outside, then? Okay. I don't know why it was in the summer, but okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. It has a summer feel to me, also, but it wasn't.

JC: All right, so in late October, early November in England, they leave a baby on the doorstep wrapped in a blanket. I don't know. They didn't even put a spell on him. You'd think that be a "keep the baby warm" spell that you could do. A protection charm.

Lorrie: In my mind, there must have been and we just don't know about it, because I just can't handle it otherwise. It's too wrong otherwise.

JC: This is the kind of thing that I think if you were a kid reading this book, it would just fly over your head. "Yeah, of course, they leave a baby on the doorstep."

Lorrie: You just have to accept it because it's chapter one, so you're still accepting clues about what this world is.

JC: A world where they just leave babies on doorsteps. If you think about it from that perspective, it says a lot about what happens to these kids later on and the kinds of things that they're exposed to and responsibilities they're expected to take.

Lorrie: And we're being told that these are wizards, so we don't know what they're capable of, and they don't operate by the same rules that we do. That's actually similar to what I noticed, too. That line, "famous before he can walk and talk," puzzled me for quite a few years because he's 15 months old here. He can walk. There are babies who can't walk at 15 months, but I think Harry James Potter -- the youngest Seeker in a hundred years -- this tiny, quick little dude who can fly? I think he's walking. I think he was walking well before 15 months.

JC: Doesn't he have a memory of being on a broom?

Lorrie: Yeah, for his first birthday. Most babies can say some things by 15 months. He can walk and talk. If you're going to put him in a little car seat or something on the doorstep, this baby could get up and walk out of it. Then I thought, "Why is that? This is very puzzling." A couple years after I first read this, I read that this was based on something biographical: that it was October when she and her newborn, who had been born in July -- they have the same birthdays. J.K. Rowling and her first child both have July birthdays. The child was a few months old, and it was October when she argued with her first husband and he kicked them out. She spent one night kicked out of the house with the baby still in there, just her; for an infant that's only a few months old, I don't know how she survived. That would have been agonizing. She went back in the morning and she got the baby and they left together, so that accounts for the timing, the time of year that this is taking place, but she decided to age the baby up a year so that Harry is not three months old here, as her infant was when she had to leave, but 15 months. I thought, "You know what? This is a bit of residue from that. This is an area where that's showing through, because a three-month-old is more like what I was picturing when I read about this slumbering infant. A 15-month-old? How long can you leave them sleeping by themselves before they wake up and come say--

JC: Wander down the street, eat dirt.

Lorrie: Yeah. But a three-month-old, you can leave them, and they will snooze for a few hours.

JC: Before they scream and wake everyone up.

Lorrie: That was one of my earliest examples of being illuminated by learning something biographical about the author. "Ah, so that's what that's pointing to."

JC: That is really interesting, because that does cast all of that in a different light. The idea of a toddler who's just learned to walk in the last month. You can't keep them in their crib at that time. They climb out of their crib and they wander around. They get into the litter box and do all kinds of things while you're asleep. Again, it's the disconnect.

Lorrie: Someone like Harry who's that athletic, he wouldn't have just learned to walk. He would have been walking at 11 months. He would have been running.

JC: One of those kids that skipped crawling all together and just went straight to running.

Lorrie: Zoom. So, yeah, that was another thing I noticed. How about you?

JC: I think Dumbledore put a charm on Harry to keep him asleep, because that's the only thing that makes sense.

Lorrie: He must've. And warm.

JC: Yeah, asleep and warm. One of those like Confundus charms, too, where people would walk by and no one but Petunia would notice.

Lorrie: Yeah, Notice-Me-Not.

JC: Yeah, something like that. Let's see. Oh, so another thing that I found really interesting here was the whole thing at the beginning where they establish really early about saying Voldemort's name. McGonagall's saying 'you-know-who' and Dumbledore's like, "I've been trying for 11 years to get people to just say his name!" When I first read this -- and really up through book seven -- it was like, "Oh, okay. Yeah, people are afraid of saying his name. That's so weird." It wasn't until the last book where the name becomes a Trace that I understood, "Oh, saying the name... it's casting a spell when you say the name, a spell that can put you in danger." That just made me think about that connection of the last book and coming back and thinking, "How was that working in the pre-Harry time of the war? Was Voldemort using his name as a Trace? Again, was there Dark Magic associated with saying his name? Was it the same kind of thing? That just made me wonder about the connection to that, because Dumbledore's insistence of, "No, it's just a name, say it," and McGonagall being like, "Well, you could say it. He's afraid of you. You're the only one who can say it. The rest of us can't." That didn't register with me the first time I read the book in the way that it did now.

Lorrie: In *Deathly Hallows*, it turns out that Voldemort put a Taboo on it that year, so it wasn't enforced before. It's a similar principle to the Dark Mark; he just wants people to pay attention to him, so if you have a Dark Mark, then you get to know all his moods and the taboo extends that. If you're thinking about him, that allows him entry into your mind or your whereabouts or whatever. Another thing that stood out to me on this read was that what I think of as the three questions of this series are all set out here in the first chapter. The three questions are: Who would try to kill a baby? Why did they not succeed? And what does the rest of the world have to do to bring that baby to adulthood? They explicitly discuss all these things and establish them as questions that are going to take a very large number of words to answer and many years to answer. It's amazing to set out those questions, and to think how ambitious it is that you're going to take this long and this many pages to spin out how complicated an answer it is and to have it be a rewarding story. That's impressive. Honestly, that's impressive, because these questions don't get answered by the end of this first book, even though it's a situation of an author with a seven-book series in mind, not knowing if they're going to get another contract, simultaneously writing *Sorcerer's Stone* as a standalone and as also book one of seven. Technically, it's quite a feat. I'm impressed.

JC: Yeah. I remember being confused about that whole bit about how Voldemort tried to kill Harry, but couldn't. It was interesting to go back and read it again. I feel in the second book too, there was-- it wasn't really until about the third book when you learn about Unforgivable curses, where that made sense to me. But I remember reading that, and every time it came up again, it was like, "What do you mean you couldn't kill a baby?" The idea that it was a particular magic spell, somehow, didn't occur to me. I'm imagining he's got a giant axe or something, and there's a shield that prevents him. How hard is it to kill... If you're evil and you decide you're going to kill somebody, then you just do it. There's a thousand ways you could do it. Why didn't it work?

Lorrie: "I killed everybody else."

JC: Yeah, exactly. Why not this one? I remember being stunned when I got to that point in book three, where I think it's Lupin -- is this correct? No, it's Moody.

Lorrie: It's book four.

JC: It's book four, okay. Sorry. Yes. This is how long it's been since I've read them. So in book four, when Moody says, "Only one person is known to have survived Avada Kedavra, and I'm looking at him right now," I remember going, *GASP*. All of that made sense, so coming back and seeing that bit now and thinking, "Oh, wow. I remember being like, Why couldn't he just freaking kill a baby? What was up with that?" It's very interesting to think about how all that played out later on, but also it made me think about the fact that Voldemort was so wrapped up in his own hubris of, "I can do anything I want. I can kill anyone." It never occurred to him that something could go wrong, and we learn a lot more about that later. But if you just have to kill this one person, it seems like you would pick the way that would guarantee your success; he was just so confident in his own ability that he chose the one way that was never going to work. I find that a really interesting thing to establish in the very first chapter, that oh, this is a villain who somehow undermined himself, and then we're going to spend the rest of the series learning about what that means and how it happened.

Lorrie: Yeah, and all these questions you brought up: Why isn't this working? These are all questions that Voldemort asked himself every day. This was driving him nuts. It's not too early to say my take on why it didn't work. I think it was a dream come true for Voldemort, for the first time in his life, to feel a limit, and that the terrifying thing for an extremely brilliant, and powerful, small child is to discover that nobody can stop you from hurting people or doing anything you want. It's terrifying because when you have a small child experiencing things like anger and destructiveness, what comforts them is to have grown-ups say, "I know what you're feeling. I can contain it. You're allowed; eventually, it will subside. If you damage things, that damage can be put right, or if it can't, you'll have to learn how other people handle it when they also destroy things. This is a human thing. Eventually, you can modulate it and people still love you. We won't let you do too much harm; you're still a child." And that is the opposite of what Voldemort experienced from birth. There was nothing he couldn't destroy; nobody could stop him. Nobody could even tell he was doing it. That is what created his rage and terror. Then there was a prophecy that somehow this baby was going to be born, and something was going to be so special about this baby that Voldemort, "Okay. What is it? What is it?" He goes and he tries to kill the baby, and whatever it is, which he doesn't understand, finally there's a more interesting answer. Is it going to come true -- finally, for the first time in his life -- that somebody is going to be able to tell him something about why his life is such pure hell? No one else can tell him. This baby had better either just up and die obligingly, or grow up and answer. "What do you know that I don't know? Do you have answers? No one else has answers. Except Dumbledore, who sucks. I don't want to hear what Dumbledore says. I want to know what you say because you're like me."

JC: So when you were just talking about how Voldemort was as a kid -- no one could stop him and he had no limits -- it makes me think about the fact that Harry was in the opposite situation. Harry had his magic and his power squashed and denied at every possible moment up until the time he went to Hogwarts. It's almost like Harry knew nothing but limits. He had a kind of equally loveless childhood, but the limits that were placed on him were very different. The idea was that he was not an exceptionally powerful wizard. He just happened to have this thing happen to him. He was kind of an average wizard, as far as other kids his age go, but you would think that in a Muggle household, you know, he could have done magic sort of willy-nilly, and his power could've grown unchecked. He could have had all those folks quaking in their boots like Tom Riddle did, but instead he had this family who knew what he was capable of and squashed it at every opportunity. It wasn't good parenting, but it was also that sort of parenting like The Matrix, where it's authoritarian. There's this whole permissive thing where you're allowed to do anything, like in Tom Riddle's experience. On the other end of that is that super paternalistic, control-everything-you-do. "We're not going to allow you any freedom or any independence." They were on opposite ends of that spectrum, which I think is really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. Also, I wouldn't say that they had similarly loveless childhoods because the 15 months that Harry had, his identity formed by feeling things, expressing them to his caregivers, and having them respond and make changes in his environment in response. Holding him comfortingly, smiling at him, basically acknowledging his existence and how powerful it was: that's in place for him by 15 months. That was never in place for Voldemort from the moment he was born. That's why Harry, growing up with the Dursleys, has politeness -- which is, of course, not any help to him. If they say, "Don't make any noise," he'll try not to make noise. He knows that's how humans are supposed to interact with each other. Voldemort doesn't have that; nobody ever responded to him. He was just nothing but his own consciousness in a world that wasn't helping.

JC: Yeah. Did he live his entire life in an orphanage? Because Harry grew up in a family. Okay.

Lorrie: Merope came pregnant to the orphanage, gave birth there, and died. The orphanage, while not malicious, was understaffed, so it was not so much permissiveness as neglect. It wasn't malicious.

JC: The child psychology here is fascinating. As we get into the next couple of chapters in particular, I'll probably be thinking a lot about how Harry could have developed into the person he did in that environment. It's going to be interesting to talk about, but that's for next time.

Lorrie: Did you have anything else that stood out for you from this chapter?

JC: I think those were all the points that I listed.

Lorrie: Well, the last one that I noticed: after *Deathly Hallows* was completed, it's always interesting to go back to the earlier books and marvel at how well they were set up; how amazingly things that were foreshadowed this early on developed into powerful things later, like young Sirius Black, then we don't hear about him for two books. Some things fall by the wayside and demonstrate that this was a series in progress. "Oh, nothing ever came of that." Something that amazes me is the payoff when McGonagall says to Dumbledore, "You have the same powers as Voldemort. You're just too noble to use them," and we don't find out about that until the end of *Deathly Hallows*.

JC: Oh, you're right. Dang. Yeah.

Lorrie: Dumbledore is not a better person than Voldemort in many ways. He did want to; he had to do everything in his power to stop himself, because it would have tasted so good. When he sees the Resurrection Stone in the rain, he grabs for it. He's just craving it. "God, that would be so good," and then it blows up in his face.

JC: But at that point, he's got the wand and the cloak, right?

Lorrie: McGonagall is giving him credit for being too noble to use them, and he's saying, "You're making me blush," because he's not quite too noble to use them. He's trying. That's who he would like to be. That's who he manages to be more days than not, but we don't know that yet. And yet that line is there, and the premonition feeling was so powerful. I really was blown away by that. Did anything about reading this chapter now feel different from what you remember of reading it in the past?

JC: Yeah. I talked about this earlier, that the fairy tale set-up of it seemed too real to me. Now? The first time I read it, it felt much more like a fairy tale. And now it's like, oh shit, this is like people that I run into at the grocery store, or people that live down the street from me. It feels like the world is full of Dursleys now, in a way that I either wasn't aware of before or that it wasn't as much in your face before or something. You've just got to go on Twitter or Facebook, and you'll see people just like that and worse. They felt like fairytale villains to me in a way; now, they just feel like normal people, which is kind of interesting.

Lorrie: Well, they're more empowered now.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: They have more representation in government.

JC: That is true.

Lorrie: Government has been dismantled in ways that we didn't know could happen in the US when we first read this. And even though it's true, me saying that partly reveals gross privilege on my part because, of course, depending on who you are, you always have some knowledge of the ways that things do or don't function. But when I saw the Capitol be invaded? Okay, honestly I didn't think that could happen.

JC: You're thinking about the Ministry of Magic falling?

Lorrie: Yeah. There's some degree of investment of power in a Dursley-ish point of view that I was familiar with in other nations and other cultures. I had a belief that the US wouldn't do that, and then I watched that be eroded.

JC: Yeah. That really hits it. That pain of thinking that wouldn't happen here. "We're better than that." No, we're not. We're not better. Our society is just as bad at picking a scapegoat of the week or the year and then legislating them out of existence.

Lorrie: I was always aware of that tendency, but I thought there were more safeguards than there are, or maybe there had been more safeguards than there are. For me, something that's different reading it now: for a long time, I felt very betrayed by Dumbledore abandoning this baby to these abusers. Now, after having thought about the series for a while, and also after having looked at the work of Lumos, which is the JKR foundation that works on getting children out of orphanages into smaller settings. Ideally, you would want to get somebody into a family home and if you can't do that, at least to a group home with a better ratio of caregivers. Best to make sure that they have some contact with their families, even if it's not loving contact; the outcomes make a huge difference if you're connected to somebody that helps you know that part of who you are and where you come from. Now I understand what Dumbledore choosing to leave Harry with relatives is representing, but it's not obvious. It's quite buried. Did your awareness of Rowling's transphobia affect your reading experience this time?

JC: Yes. Previously looking at this, on my read was that she was mocking people like the Dursleys. Now, that's her. She's one of them.

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: The way that Vernon Dursley looks at weirdos dressed in funny clothes, I thought she's become that. And that was really like, "Ugh."

Lorrie: Yeah, I have a child-like feeling of, "Why can't you see this? You know. How can you see you're not doing this?" No matter how informed I try to be, or how hardened or how cynical or how practical, that child-like betrayal feeling is still there. I'm bewildered.

JC: That was almost from the first paragraph, I felt that. Part of it was because I had set myself up for that in a way: I had already been thinking for years about the story being about being queer, being different, and how society looks at people who are different. But yeah, that was like, "Oh, god. Do you not see? How do you not see that you're becoming that? You've become that." It's going to be very interesting to continue along with that theme. Obviously, I haven't read these books in a long time, but with that kind of awareness, I was surprised at how hard it hit me from the start.

Lorrie: What are some thoughts that arose for you while reading this chapter, other than referring directly to the text? Anything personal or meta?

JC: I think a lot of it was me trying to remember what happens in later books and thinking, "I wonder how many connections I'm going to see." There were things that were piquing my thoughts, like the letter that was mentioned. "Oh, yeah, that comes up again later." So a lot of it was just, "Oh, there's so many connections that I'm going to be able to make," and that was exciting to think about. But the other ones are ones that I've already mentioned, though. This idea of the fairytale feel of it not being as strong as I remember. Too much has happened for me to be able to accept this fairy tale. Now, I wanted to dig in and go, "Why? What did you know, Dumbledore, at this point? What did you know that you're not telling anyone else?"

Lorrie: In the past, I was appalled that Dumbledore didn't even leave Petunia any money.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: That was an element of practical life that kept intruding on the fairy tale setup. Of course, if you look at it from an allegorical viewpoint: when life suddenly gives you an unexpected, huge burden and responsibility, you don't get a stipend. Of course, that's how it happens. It's quite right that he didn't leave her any. And yet, I guess what it pointed me to was when Petunia is set up as somebody that's purely hateable, and all I could think was nobody who is essentially a single parent-- she's in a household, she has a husband, but she's doing all the parenting. Nobody who is single parenting a one-year-old wants another one-year-old. Nobody. Awful. How was she supposed to feel about this? Isn't anyone helping her? Doesn't she even get any money? No. And then the way she gets hated for not providing love. She's tired.

JC: True. Dudley is a lot.

Lorrie: Ay yi yi.

JC: One of the things actually stood out to me actually reading this, too, was Dudley is presented all along as being the worst example of a kid: that he's spoiled, no one ever tells them that he's behaving badly or any of this stuff. But they love him so much, it's so clear. I remember reading once: Abraham Lincoln had two boys, and he basically never disciplined them at all. He just let them run wild, and there was some quote from another politician at the time who said, "Yeah, they could pick up his hat and shit in it, and he would have thought it was the best thing ever." That was the kind of parent he was, and it made me think about Abraham Lincoln's parenting. Dudley's throwing things and screaming, and they're like, "Aww, little tyke." But I thought, "God, they loved him." Originally, in my head, I was like, "Oh, they're terrible parents," but they loved him so much that he could throw shit at them and they'd still love him. I think he turned out, in the end, a better human than either of them. He had rough patches, but damn, that kid was loved. I really came out of this chapter -- and going into the next one, too, I'm going to keep it in my head -- they loved him so much. That's so interesting.

Lorrie: We'll never know how that was warped by their consciousness that they couldn't just enjoy having their baby because this shadow baby was forced into their lives, and then they had to deal with those conflicting feelings. Any normal, loving indulgence that they would have given Dudley if they had been able to choose their family? Now it was resentful, it was defensive. "Yes, I want to love my baby, and no, I don't want to be making double the baby food." "Here, you can get baby food, but not as much as Dudley." Everything has been tainted by that. It's hard.

JC: At the same time that I'm looking at these people as, "Oh, wow, they're much more normal. They're not the fairytale villains I thought they were." They're normal in a lot of different ways, in ways that make me go, "Ugh," but also ways to make me sympathetic to them. I'm finding myself really sympathetic to the Dursleys. It reminds me of when there was a point – do you remember the musical *Rent*?

Lorrie: I'm the wrong generation. I just missed it, but anyway, yes. Go ahead.

JC: So the musical *Rent*: there's this whole story-line where the main characters are fighting against one of their friends. One of their friends married a rich woman, and now he's going to buy this lot that's full of homeless people. He's going to evict the homeless people, he's going to build this building that's going to have condos in it, but the bottom floor's going to be this creative artist space they always wished they had. He has these really great intentions, but because he's evicting all the homeless people, all of his friends turn against him. They're like, "You're just this capitalist scum, blah blah blah," and there was a point in my life when I was like, "You know, Benny wasn't wrong. He was doing it the wrong way, but he was really trying to help his friends. He wasn't as evil as I thought he was the first time I saw this musical when I was like 20." Now I'm looking at the Dursleys like, "They're not completely villains. They did the best they could with what they were given." I'm just laughing at myself because there's this little bit of growing older where you can look at the complexity of a situation and go, "How would I have been in that situation?" I would like to think I would have been a better parent to this kid, but it's not as black and white as I think it seemed to me the first time I read it, even though I was a grown-ass adult then, and certainly to kids. Kids reading this for the first time would think, "Oh, they're like the evil stepmother in Cinderella," but it's much more complicated than that, and I appreciate those levels of complexity.

Lorrie: One thing for me that's different reading it now: the celebrations. You know how the wizards can't help themselves, and they're setting off fireworks and they're hugging Muggles. When the 2020 election was called for Biden, I understood. It made me think of that. Because even though COVID was still raging -- I didn't let myself and my kids go join this -- a lot of people who had been isolating at home swarmed the streets. There were drums going day and night, there were dance parties. There's this one particular intersection where every time the light turned red, hundreds of people would swarm into the intersection and play music and dance; when the light turned green, they would all go back to the sidewalks. I have some of it on video. I took one of my kids in the car, and we drove because I didn't want to be catching COVID. I wanted to be there, so we drove through the intersection and we watched all the people, all our neighbors, dancing. The whole sense of some end has come that we've all been dying for, literally, although the danger is still there. We were in a plague, and this plague had been deliberately worsened by that administration. "Okay, Voldemort's gone. Doesn't mean that the evil is over." But just that celebration, I understood. The other thing I understood differently: as you mentioned, the whole calling Voldemort He Who Must Not Be Named and not wanting to say his name, I had understood that in the literary sense, "Oh, giving names power, blah, blah." I understood it differently when Trump was elected, and I realized I didn't want to say his name because having a person's name in my mouth is physical intimacy. I didn't want his name in my mouth. I didn't want to say it. It wasn't that I was afraid of his power. I just was repulsed.

JC: It's so interesting that you say that, because I'm thinking about all of the pseudonyms that people used to refer to him in different social media spaces. No one wanted to say his name.

Lorrie: Big orange guy. It's not out of fear. It's out of disgust.

JC: And also about not want to attract any of his supporters to your Twitter feed.

Lorrie: Yeah, there is that.

JC: There's a good analogy there, too. If you say his name, they will come.

Lorrie: There's also an element of mercy, because sometimes if you're just reading and you come across the name, that's an eyesore. The whole movement to replace images of Trump with kittens? It's because if you have 24 hours in a day, and you have so much energy to resist the revulsion and dread of the day, do you really want to be expending it unnecessarily? I'm not running away from how bad Trump is. I am not in denial. Trust me, I'm not in denial. It's just that -- would I rather see his name 200 times a day, or 400? I'll take 200, thank you. I'm not running away from anything. It's just, "Oh, somebody turn down the volume, at least a little, so I can hear myself think for one second." That, in an incredibly sad way, became true after TERFpocalypse, when enormous portions of the fandom, including me, just stopped saying her name.

JC: Yeah. I was reluctant to say her name. During this, I kept calling her "the author," using a pronoun.

Lorrie: That became consensus without formal discussion. There were communities that had formal discussion about it, but even without it, consensus suddenly became that people would call her "the author." That was partly because if you say somebody's name, that's an intimacy. "Maybe we need to erect some barriers. I'm putting a boundary here because I respect myself. I don't want to let you in; you've hurt me. You're not okay. You're dangerous. I don't have to let you in."

JC: That is a really interesting way to think about people's reluctance to say Voldemort, but now, you're right. That paints it in a very new light. That's very interesting.

Lorrie: I had no idea that I would think this until after Trump was elected. And then, TERFpocalypse. Holy shit. One of these things had never been my friend; the other one, I thought she was. That's a very down note.

JC: It's given me a lot to think about, though, and I think that for people listening, maybe this is the theme going forward: reading this book with this perspective that we have now, after everything that's happened in the last five, six years, and particularly since 2020. The world is a different place. These books were written in a different time, we experienced them in a different kind of world than we're in now, and it's interesting to go back to the text and think about what it invokes for us now.

Lorrie: The word that's been coming to my mind in the past couple days is "retrieval." I feel pretty strongly that -- at least for me and probably for other people, too -- the solution is not simply to cut loose, abandon, and leave because there's *me* in there. All the associations with this series, some of it I want to go retrieve. That's mine. I'm going to go in and get it, and I'm going to see which parts of it are mine and which parts I'm going to just rinse off. Also, there's information there for me. Remembering what things were like, noticing what has changed, becoming conscious of it: that's power. I don't want to forget. The specifics of encoding memory with fiction are so detailed; that's empowering. It can help you remember, "Wait a minute. There was a time when we thought that if you voted -- at least if you were in certain districts that weren't gerrymandered -- that the person counting the votes might not just dump them somewhere." That was very specific by race and by district, but there were districts where I pretty much thought that the vote reflected reality. And now there is no district in which I'm sure that's happening. I can remember, "Oh, yeah." The big example: do you remember in *Order of the Phoenix*, when Umbridge installs herself as Headmistress, and the head office won't let her in? When those morons in the Trump administration refused to take the Obama administration's transition materials? As all outgoing presidents do, every staff member had prepared files and files of, "This is how it works, this is what you do," and they deliberately rejected them. And then that first January and February in the White House, those morons couldn't figure out how to turn on the White House lights. They didn't know how anything worked because they had thrown away the manuals. What kind of self-sabotaging... Jesus. Anyway, that made me remember the head office rejecting Umbridge. It didn't have to be like this. But I wouldn't have remembered that very depressing but funny episode of the Trump transition if I hadn't laughed at how much it reminded me of Dolores Umbridge trying to get into the head office. "Oh, yeah, that was January, February of 2017 that was happening." Yeah, I would have forgotten otherwise.

JC.: That's a long way from now, before we get to *Order of the Phoenix*, but wow. Yeah, I'm already thinking, the wheels already turning, about things that are happening in schools right now, the school boards taking over. There's so many interesting parallels there.

Lorrie: So, welcome to book one, chapter one. How was it? How did it feel?

JC: It was shorter than I remember, too. I was like, "Oh, this is pretty short." Yeah, amazing.

Lorrie: Does it make you want to go on to chapter two?

JC: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Especially considering that we're heading into the beginnings of the world building, and we're getting to Harry's introduction to the Wizarding World and all the wide-eyed wonder that he feels before he starts to hit the dark pieces pretty quick. I'm looking forward to seeing that and thinking about that again.

Lorrie: I am, too. I am having so much fun talking to you. Thank you for doing this with me.

JC: Yes, thank you for inviting me. This is going to be awesome.

Lorrie: Yeah, I'm looking forward to chapter 2.

JC: And thank you to anybody who's listening.

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.