

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 2.16

Book 2, Chapter 16: The Chamber of Secrets

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 Two, Chapter 16: The Chamber of Secrets.

Lorrie: Chamber of Secrets chapter.

JC: Wow, we're getting there.

Lorrie: Yeah, this is where it's all happening. The boys visit Hermione and they find her hint about the monster's identity. Ginny gets taken into the Chamber of Secrets. The boys go to save her, and they take Professor Lockhart with them.

JC: I had forgotten about so many things in this chapter. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Ooh, yeah. Tell me. Tell me what you experienced as you re-read it.

JC: I think this is the point at which -- The author is good about doing this all the way through, but toward the end of the books, in particular, we hit this pace where it's really hard to stop at the end of a chapter because everything is left on this cliffhanger of what happens next. I love that feeling of it. I think it's really fun. It makes it hard to close it and put it down and wait, and I'm not reading ahead. I'm waiting until the day before we discuss this to actually read it, so I'm not cheating at all. That's interesting to experience again.

Lorrie: That's hard to do. At the end of these books?

JC: Yeah. It is.

Lorrie: That's one of the things that's so remarkable about this series, is that she hits that pace every time.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: For sure. That's when you look up and it's 2 A.M, and you're like, 'I'm still reading this book. What the heck?'

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness. Yeah.

JC: As a 12-year-old, maybe. Not me; I was in my 30s by that time. I guess it starts off with some interesting things. First of all, the irony of them realizing that there's this clue that they've had all along and in the form of Moaning Myrtle, and now they can't get anywhere near the place and they're like, "No!" The irony of that is... That's actually a fun irony. And then the announcement that they're still having final exams. 'In one week, here they are, and I'm sure you've been studying all along.' That feeling of, "Ohhhhhhhh." Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, that was just mean.

JC: Exactly, exactly. And of course, we also learn that the Mandrakes are mature enough now to be slaughtered and stewed, so it's time to wake up the people who've been Petrified. The first thing that -- I can't remember if it's Harry or Ron now -- thinks is, 'Oh, no, Hermione's going to wake up just in time for final exams, and she won't have had time to study.' This idea that they should just leave her...

Lorrie: Yeah, that's Ron.

JC: Yeah. 'Don't do that to her.' Yeah.

Lorrie: I liked when Harry was thinking about this, and he was supposed to be transforming a pair of white rabbits into slippers. That's just the kind of adorable little 'oh, yeah, magic' detail that sometimes I forget. I get so swept up in their world. 'Oh, my God, that's really cute. That's where those slippers come from.'

JC: Oh, my.

Lorrie: Yeah. He goes, "What had he learned so far this year? He couldn't seem to think of anything that would be useful in an exam." That made me laugh because that's the thing you always pick up on as a teacher. Kids, you teach them a ton of things all year, and then they just go blank. They don't remember anything they've learned, but that's also a setup to remind us that Harry has learned nothing from Lockhart this year. He's only learned one useful spell in Defense Against the Dark Arts.

JC: Yeah. In Transfigurations, he's actually learned a heck of a lot. The last time we saw them doing a lesson in that class, they were trying to turn something into a needle.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah? It was a very small, little thing.

Lorrie: A matchstick.

JC: Yeah. A matchstick or something like that, and now you're trying to turn a pair of living rabbits into slippers. That is a huge -- that's like saying, "I haven't learned anything in math all year," but you've learned Algebra One. Um, you learned a lot. Oh, my God, yeah, that's a really great point. And it is very much like kids, because the learning has happened so slowly, they don't realize that it's happened. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's hard to remember back.

JC: Yeah, to when you didn't know this thing,

Lorrie: And when you do that, when you show them at the end of a school year how far they've come from the beginning, they have a proper sense of awe. "Oh, wow." That's also useful to show them: every once in a while, kids will be frustrated and discouraged because adults know so much more than they do and are so much more accomplished. And I have calmed kids by saying, "Think about how much more you know than you did a year ago."

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: And remind them about something that they were learning a year ago and how natural that comes to them now, and then I say, "Think how much older I am than you are." And then, when they think of that, then I say, "That's how much more powerful you're going to grow."

JC: For sure. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "It's not about me. It's about you, kid."

JC: Yeah, definitely, definitely. Having that perspective is really important. The mention of final exams made me think about the fact that my kid is about to take final exams in a week (as of the time that we're recording this) in the mid-year final exams. I've been helping him study for his Pre-Calc final; I have been doing the problems in parallel with him, is what I've been doing. My background is that I'm a math teacher, but I haven't taught Pre-Calc in a really long time, so it's been an interesting exercise for me. But what we're finding is that he is so good at it now. He doesn't think he's good at it, but watching me do it -- me with a PhD in math, mind -- and watching me make all these little dumb mistakes that he stopped making months ago because he finally was able to pay more attention to these details. Even when he's getting frustrated, I'm

doing the problem next to him and I'm like, "Look, you're doing better than I am, and I've taught this class before. You're fine, you're okay," and I think it's been eye-opening for him to realize, "Oh, I really have learned a lot, and my head is really in the right place for this if my mom, who hasn't seen this material in a decade, is struggling to keep up with me." Yeah, yeah, you're going to be fine. So yeah, that feeling of, "What did we learn? Oh, wait, we really did learn a lot, even though it happened in such small increments that you maybe didn't notice."

Lorrie: Oh, then the next thing: Ginny is on the verge of speaking up finally, even though she gets interrupted unintentionally by Percy. But that is similar to what you're talking about, where you have to work on it for so long. She's been working on the courage to say something all year. It also reminds me of when Dumbledore asks Harry, "Do you have anything to say to me at all?" and Harry... he thinks about everything and he can't do it. He can't bring himself up to that huge precipice, and he says no. So Ginny, with higher stakes, has finally reached that point and she's about to, and then no, they lose the moment.

JC: So, what do you think she was going to tell him in that moment?

Lorrie: I think she was going to confess that she's the one who's been opening the Chamber.

JC: That's a lot of confession to do over the breakfast table in the middle of the Great Hall, but I guess when else are you going to do it?

Lorrie: When else are you going to do it? Yeah.

JC: Yeah. As I was reading this chapter, I wondered if that's what she was going to confess or if she had some inkling of what was going to happen next, and that's what drove her to say something because she was so scared, but I don't know.

Lorrie: I'm not even sure if it was anything in particular. Just knowing that it had gone way beyond her ability to deal with it herself, and knowing that he had known about the diary; she got it back before it could harm him, but now it's far beyond her abilities, too.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: So he already knows about the diary.

JC: That's really interesting. Do you think she took the diary back because she was afraid for Harry?

Lorrie: I think it's a combination. What we see here: when Percy interrupts, he totally misses that Ginny was about to confess that she's been opening the Chamber and almost killing people because he has this petty guilt about his secret that he has a girlfriend. That happens to Ginny too; she has been pouring out her crush to the diary, and that was one of her terrors because it's so vulnerable and awful to think that that secret could reach the person that you're crushing

out on, even though she's also sent him a public Valentine and people cruelly are taunting her in public about this. I think that's part of why she wanted to get the diary away. How unbearable would life have been if the diary repeated back to Harry all of the embarrassing things she said about him?

JC: I had not even thought about that. Yikes. Yeah.

Lorrie: So that's part of it, but that's nothing compared to the fact that she's been losing consciousness and that people have been ending up almost killed and that she's already killed animals. She wakes up with blood and feathers. This is dark, dark, dark. And just the thought that you've lost consciousness and you've hurt people and it's been escalating, and you're trying to get away from this damaging abuser. That's so terrifying. If you flush something down the toilet and the toilet won't accept it?

JC: Oh, man. Wow. That's pretty bad.

Lorrie: And just spews it back out, and then it goes and finds the person that you most want to protect from it. As this thing has so much power, it's been gaining more and more agency over manipulating her, and now it's found Harry? Who knows what it's going to do next? People are dying, or about to die. Roosters are dying. People are next.

JC: That really visceral image of her waking up with blood and not knowing where it came from, that feels really powerful, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We've talked a lot about how there are these coming-of-age storylines or metaphors in this text. I think that one, too -- when girls first get their period, you're changing into something but you're changing to something that's powerful and dangerous as viewed by society; you're supposed to keep that secret and be ashamed of it, be ashamed of the blood, especially at that age -- is such a powerful thing to deal with. I think about Ginny waking up covered in blood. There are multiple reasons that a 12-year-old girl can wake up covered in blood, and all of them are bad at this point, as far as Ginny's concerned.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, it is really interesting. That imagery is really powerful. Also then, we have Ginny, as you were saying before, coming in to perhaps confess to Harry what's really been happening, and then Percy comes in. And, of course, then it's all about Percy, right? It's young girls getting dismissed; their ideas, their expertise with their fears, whatever, their joys just getting dismissed. It's all about Percy and how apparently Ginny walked in on Percy, what, snogging Penelope Clearwater or something? And yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. But also, it's the guilt, because the petty normal guilts of human life really do loom so large in each individual person's psyche, and that's the kind of thing that Tom Riddle knows and exploits. And later on, we're going to see the same thing happen to Harry all the time. It's actually happened to Harry already in this volume when Dumbledore says, "Is there anything you want to tell me?" Harry thinks about all of his little petty secrets, because at that age, you don't know what's going to be forgiven and told, "Oh, that's just normal." Or what's going to be like Parseltongue. "You thought that was normal? You're a freak."

JC: Yeah. Right.

Lorrie: It's hard to know, and that's something that's a constant in people's consciences is, "Oh, no, that thing, that secret of mine that I'm ashamed of that I need to protect." Even if they're not ashamed of it, if it gets out, people have power over you. They'll taunt you, and that happens.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: The taunting has been non-stop in all directions throughout this volume, and certainly Ginny's been getting a lot of it, so it's a really scary moment. And that feeling of it slipping away when Percy comes up. Ugh. When Harry and Ron lie and McGonagall catches them and she mistakes the boys for being concerned about Hermione, and then she cries...

JC: Oh, that was so interesting.

Lorrie: That was really moving.

JC: She was so inclined to believe them when, in every past instance when she caught those particular two out where they weren't supposed to be, bad things were about to happen. But somehow, her emotions... I had forgotten that moment in the book, and I was honestly shocked that McGonagall believed them. In my head, I was like, "Okay, she's going to -- oh, she's going to walk them to the infirmary herself. Yeah, you might not have been going there, but you're going there now." No, she just let them go and walked away.

Lorrie: No, because it's been eating at her. She's been grieving and worrying over these people. And to be fair to the boys, it's not that they weren't worried about Hermione; they had been visiting her all the time until they were forbidden, but yeah. Then they're like, "Uh, I guess we have to do that now."

JC: I love how easily they manipulate Lockhart.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh.

JC: And they do it with non-verbal communication. Harry says a thing, and Ron's like, "Yeah, me too."

Lorrie: "Oh, yes."

JC: They don't even have to communicate about it. It happens so quickly. Even for the reader, it's almost too quick. These two know each other so well and they're such a team now, and I love it.

Lorrie: And he falls right for it. And then, oh, I get such a pang for Hermione. She's lying there, Petrified, completely unable to help herself. She has done everything she possibly can; she has solved the mystery that no other child or adult has been able to solve -- including Dumbledore -- and she is voiceless and powerless. Immobile. She is dependent on a half-blood boy and a pure-blood boy to pick up on her clues and do what it takes to save her and everyone else. This is such a stark demonstration of privilege differences. Wow, she really worked much, much harder than everybody else with so much less agency, and she can't do anything more than this.

JC: So, the people who are Petrified: are they conscious, or do you think that they're just out, unconscious the entire time they're Petrified?

Lorrie: We don't hear about any of them talking about any mental processes...

JC: About the experience.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right. Okay, because that's an even more horrifying prospect, honestly. The idea, yeah, of lying there, not knowing.

Lorrie: Ugh. Yeah, because we do hear about similar instances where people are conscious, like Montague, the Slytherin who gets almost killed in the Vanishing Cabinet. He is conscious and terrified the whole time. The big one, of course, is Voldemort when he has no body and no power, except the ability to possess. He is conscious, and he would feel pain if he had a body to feel pain in, but it's excruciating. And we don't hear that about the Petrified people.

JC: Okay. Yeah, so hopefully they were just unconscious the entire time. This always stuck out to me that no one had ever seen the paper in Hermione's hand until this point. It feels like such a little... I don't know. How many times have Ron and Harry gone to visit her? How many times have people come to check on her? No one has seen this piece of paper, and it's an entire page from a textbook crumpled up in her hand? That one little detail, it's funny. There's something about that that always bugged me. Really?!

Lorrie: If we're going there: also, would Hermione really tear a page out of a book?

JC: Honestly. That doesn't sound like something Hermione would do.

Lorrie: I guess times are desperate, and she was probably in a big rush, actually, come to think of it.

JC: Yeah. You think of a bunch of ways you could have done that on that one. This one's dramatic and certainly...

Lorrie: It's charming.

JC: Yeah, it worked. It worked.

Lorrie: Yeah. And the sweat-inducing stressful time they have trying to get it out of her fist without it tearing. At first, I was like, 'You guys are wizards. Do it by --' and they don't know how.

JC: Ah, that's interesting.

Lorrie: They're still just little kids.

JC: Yeah, little kids who are about to go on quite another horrific adventure. Though, I find it fascinating that the first thing -- this is the first time I think in the series and maybe the only time where their first thought is, 'We have to go tell a teacher what we've learned.' It's not, 'We have to go and save the castle by ourselves.' It's, 'We need to go tell someone. Let's go find McGonagall.' That was stark to me, because in the past, I don't think they trusted that an adult would do anything, so I wondered if the idea that she trusted them to go up to the hospital wing, if that was a little bit of that, 'Okay, maybe we can trust her, maybe she will believe us because she just believed us.'

Lorrie: Well, Ron believes that Lockhart would go after the monster, because that's the self that Lockhart has been presenting the whole time as a crusading Defense master. It's, I think, partly youth, because Lockhart certainly has given them no reason to believe in him.

JC: True.

Lorrie: One major time that Harry thinks about having to go tell a teacher is in *Order of the Phoenix*, when there's nobody left. Dumbledore has been banished, McGonagall has been taken to St. Mungo's. And then suddenly it occurs to him there's one person left: there's Snape. So there are times where they realize, 'Wow, we really can't handle this.' But yeah, Lockhart spent all year telling them that this is exactly the kind of thing he specializes in.

JC: And we get the wonderful scene in the teachers' lounge.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, I love the teachers' lounge!

JC: Which is one of my favorite scenes of this entire book, to be honest.

Lorrie: It's so satisfying.

JC: The passive aggression, the way that Snape is the one who leads it, the way that they all work together. I think here, you really see that the other teachers respect Snape and trust him. As much as the kids don't like him, you don't see that animosity between Snape and the other teachers.

Lorrie: No. They work as colleagues. Well, first of all, the teachers' lounge is such a hilarious space in life. Not anymore, but in my day, the teachers' lounge, you couldn't see for the cigarette smoke.

JC: Oh, that was true when I was in high school, too, for sure. Not when I was a teacher, but when I was a student.

Lorrie: And they were all so funny about it. They were like, "Yep, we're just addicts trying to get through the day." So they go to the teachers' lounge, the teachers talk the way teachers do; then, when Lockhart interrupts the already concerned mobilized team with his stupid presence, it was like watching an inning of baseball. Snape throws out the pitch and then they load one base after another, and then finally, the last batter hits a home run and the bases are loaded. We hear from the head of each House, and then -- just like Harry and Ron deceiving Lockhart -- these people have not coordinated.

JC: Yeah, that's true. And it makes me wonder if they've done it before. Has this kind of conversation happened before, or has it been saved up for this moment?

Lorrie: I think they are aware, usually, that there's some Dumbledore plan that they can't mess up. 'Dumbledore has his reasons, so just tolerate it.' But this is such an emergency. Normally, they have some reserves set aside to handle Lockhart and keep him from making things too much worse while they manage the crisis. This time, they don't have time for that.

JC: Right. That's true.

Lorrie: So McGonagall says, "Well, that's got him out of our hair."

JC: Yeah. And that's what's so interesting is that the whole point is they know he's not going to do anything. The whole point was to get him out of their hair. "Go away."

Lorrie: "We don't have the energy to babysit you, Lockhart."

JC: Right. "We're going to give you a task that we know you won't do."

Lorrie: "We're going to scare you. We're going to get you to scare yourself." Snape knows exactly how to play him, and that supports the take that Snape manipulated him earlier to think that he had proposed the dueling lessons and then take credit for Snape's idea.

JC: And then we get the revelation that the person who has been taken into the Chamber, presumably to die, is Ginny. That image of Ron just sliding down to his knees next to Harry in the cabinet, and then you can only imagine all the things that are probably going through their heads. Ginny was about to tell them something. 'Maybe she knew this; we didn't listen. We had all these chances to do something about it.' Just all the regret that you can kind of hear swirling inside their heads, along with the horror of no one even knows where this is. Not even the teachers can save Ginny now. What do we do?

Lorrie: So they run to Lockhart, because he's been saying all year that he does this sort of thing, and he says the thing that makes me want to strangle him the most: "Books can be misleading." He is doing that psychopath thing of blaming readers for being gullible. There's a contempt for the people that he has fooled, a justification. "They deserved it. If they were dumb enough to fall for that, then they deserve anything I can do to them."

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: That is just so ill.

JC: And that's a little too close to the way that some political figures operate.

Lorrie: I know that Lockhart comes across as mostly comical and mostly harmless, and there are so many villains in this series that are more overtly terrifying. But I find that he's underrated as a scary person. To me, he's really up there and evil because he's so conscious and cold.

JC: This is the scene where the reveal to the reader is just how much he is conscious and cold, and how manipulative he is. All along, he's been presented as a buffoon, as someone who's not really capable, who's just faked his way through everything. But then the kids get him basically monologuing like a Scooby-Doo villain here and he's talking about how he does it, and it's incredibly chilling to listen to him.

Lorrie: Well, here's something interesting that happens. There is this ongoing fantasy among media consumers (readers, viewers, fans) that if there's something an author or creator has done that's really problematic, there's this fantasy that you can reach them and get them to fix it and reissue something with a less offensive, more enlightened version.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: When *Me Too* first started, wasn't there a whole movie where... Was it Kevin Spacey who got edited out?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Super expensive. And when TERF-pocalypse started, and Rowling was first horrifying people with her transphobia, I think it was *Red, White, & Royal Blue* that had had Harry Potter references. And since it was getting a lot of reprintings anyway, there were reprintings where those references were changed to something else.

JC: Oh, that's interesting.

Lorrie: So here we have a rare instance of this happening in the Harry Potter series. When Lockhart is explaining to the boys why it was so very necessary why the world needed Lockhart's versions of these stories instead of the real histories, he says: "The witch who banished the Bandon Banshee had a hairy chin." That was not in the original when *Chamber of Secrets* was first published. He said she had a 'harelip'.

JC: My version said 'harelip'.

Lorrie: You have an earlier version.

JC: They changed that?

Lorrie: By 2004, the U.S. and U.K. editions both said 'hairy chin' because, as far as I can tell, I had heard that Rowling -- obviously, she had to authorize it, but apparently 'harelip' was considered to be too insensitive, even though you know this was about this person Lockhart being so insensitive. But it just wasn't funny and they changed it, which, of course, raises questions of, "Okay, so we don't want to offend people who have cleft palates, but women with hairy chins is okay."

JC: Okay...?

Lorrie: That's a whole other thing.

JC: Sorry, as a middle-aged woman, I am regularly plucking the hairs off my chin, thank you very much.

Lorrie: Or... yeah, gender things.

JC: Yeah, or even... right, going in that direction, too. That is interesting, because I think about other instances that I know we've talked about on this podcast of characters saying horrible things about other people, but it was very clear that it was the character. That's... wow.

Lorrie: I don't have actually strong feelings about this being an instance where Rowling authorized a change when there are so many other instances that she could have changed and didn't. First of all, no author can -- and I think no author should -- go back and purge every single problematic thing. It's just an interesting blip in the state of the world that fans and readers have to accept that this is an ongoing, ever-present fantasy that readers have, because

we construct the author as a person that we could communicate with. We're receiving communications from the author, we're receiving their writing; and we have this fantasy that we could give feedback and say, "I wouldn't do that. Don't do that. This is why. If you knew how this hurt me, you wouldn't do that." And yeah, here's an instance where it did happen and I think, quite rightly, she doesn't do that anymore because I'm sure she gets told every day by a whole lot of people how she should have written her own books, and some of those I would agree with and some of those I would not.

JC: That is really interesting. I didn't know. That's how old my versions of the book are, and I have five or six different versions of the books that were all bought in the early 2000s. Yeah, I'm probably never going to buy another set of them. Yeah.

Lorrie: There's that moment, and then there's the beautiful payoff moment of this whole volume: when they cast *Expelliarmus* on Lockhart and they say, "Shouldn't have let Professor Snape teach us that one."

JC: Oh, that moment of... because that comes from Harry, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That line. That really stood out to me, too, because I thought... So this admission that Snape was the real Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher all along, and that Harry's aware of it. It's the most cutting thing Harry can think of to say in the moment: "I know who my real teacher was this year, and it wasn't you." But it's really perceptive. It's unusually perceptive of Harry, I think. I'm surprised.

Lorrie: What does it take for either Snape or Harry to give the other one credit for anything? It does happen. They each do that a couple times in this series, and it almost never happens. So, when it does, okay, this is important. It's one of those things like, 'Wow, Harry never thought he could hate anyone more than Snape. This git... this git isn't even worth hating.' I like that they get Lockhart to admit, "What d'you want me to do? I don't know where the Chamber of Secrets is." That's another one of those chilling moments to let us know he's aware the whole time that he's just a front. Wow, that's cold.

JC: For sure. It's chilling, but at the same time, it's funny that they walk in and he's packing up. He's going to leave town. He's done. He's out of here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That "the jig is up" idea.

Lorrie: Snake oil salesman.

JC: Snake oil salesman is heading out of town. That's humorous. And the fact that the boys stand there and stare at it like, "What?" It takes them a moment to understand what's really happening here.

Lorrie: Yeah, just how depraved he is.

JC: Yeah, because they thought he was just a buffoon. They didn't realize the depth of what he was really capable of until, I think, that moment. And then once they realized it's like, "Oh.

Lorrie: "Oh, you're nothing."

JC: "You're nothing. You're coming with us."

Lorrie: "You're a hostage now." Yeah, I guess that's the closure of the "Snape and Lockhart as parallels on opposites" equation: that just as much as Lockhart is one thing on the surface, and then you find out to your horror that he's something completely disgusting underneath; Snape is horrendous on the surface, then you find out, possibly to your horror, that no, there's a lot going on there. Oof. He's a lot of bad things, but he is also substance. So then we get them dragging him to Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. They find the spot where the opening to the Chamber must be, and they realize that there's only one way to open it up. And I love this moment so much: Ron says, "Harry, say something. Something in Parseltongue," and Harry thinks about it and realizes he has only ever been able to speak Parseltongue when he has been face to face with an actual snake. So he stares at the engraving that you're supposed to imagine as a snake, and he says, "'Open up.' He looked at Ron, who shook his head. "English," he said. Harry looked back at the snake, willing himself to believe it was alive. If he moved his head, the candlelight made it look as though it were moving. 'Open up,' he said. Except that the words weren't what he heard. A strange hissing had escaped him, and at once the tap glowed with a brilliant white light and began to spin." Oh, I love this so much. The conditions do not have to be reproduced. It does not have to be a snake in front of you. What has to be reproduced is the person's magical state of mind. That's what's real. That's why, when you read a book of fiction, it changes you, even though you haven't been through the adventures that you've read about. This is why visualizations work. And in the final part of this series in King's Cross, when Harry says, "This has all been happening in my head?" and Dumbledore says, "Yes, but why does that mean it's not real?" That's what this is. Harry has spoken Parseltongue, so he knows how it feels to speak it and he has to reproduce that feeling. I'm in the minority on this one. This is a super unpopular take: in the seventh book, Ron speaks Parseltongue and he opens the Chamber, and there has been widespread mockery of this plot point, saying, "You can't just do that imitating the sounds." And I don't think he does just imitate the sounds.

JC: Right. We talked about this a few episodes back about the fact that he's been carrying Slytherin's locket around for a while.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that came after that part of Tom Riddle's soul possessed him. He knows how it feels to be possessed by Voldemort, and Ginny also knows. That's what gives Harry this

power of speaking Parseltongue is that he has part of Voldemort's soul in him all the time. It doesn't mean that you can speak Parseltongue all the time, but it does mean you know how that feels. You know how it feels to have been forced to think about this criminal that you never invited into your life, but since he has forced you to think about him, you have insights into him that other people who were not his victims don't have. Because to defend yourself, you have to. You have to think about: who is this person and what are they? What about me is still me that they haven't touched, and what about me has been changed because they've invaded me? Well, Harry has this bit of soul in his head, and he realizes he can, in fact, reproduce what it feels like to tap into Voldemort's abilities and he speaks Parseltongue. He opens up the chamber.

JC: It's really interesting to me, too, that this entrance has been here this whole time, but Myrtle confirms that the sink has never worked.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So they've had this sink that has never worked, apparently the entire history of Hogwarts, and there's not a plumber who's come by and checked on it? Never? I don't know if that's what Filch does, but that just blew my mind. 'Oh, yeah, everyone knows that sink doesn't work. It's never worked.' This is Myrtle who died like 50 years ago. Okay? We never thought to wonder what was going on with this mysterious sink that never works, and... all right.

Lorrie: On the other hand, that checks with my experience of schools.

JC: Yeah. There's a secret chamber because this water fountain doesn't work or something, I don't know. The other thing about that scene is when Myrtle's talking about how she died, and then she says, "Oh, and I came back as a ghost because I wanted to haunt my bully." That is the thing that a 12-year-old girl would do.

Lorrie: I love that.

JC: That was it. She's like, "That's the reason I came back as a ghost." Wow. But back to the Chamber of Secrets.

Lorrie: Well, then they go down the slimy pipe. Gross!

JC: And the fact that they have to force... They force Lockhart down first.

Lorrie: Kick him down!

JC: Then Harry's like "Yep," right after him. Harry's like, I guess, that sort of Gryffindor characteristic of being brave. But in these situations -- and we see it in the last book, we've seen it in this book -- Harry just has this single-minded focus of, "This shit's got to get done and I'm

the one to do it," and there's just no time to think about fear or something. It's very interesting to see that that happens over and over.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's got this courage that rises up in him when he needs it, and that seems to be his superpower in a lot of ways. Not everybody can do that. Ron was trying to dredge it up when they went into the forest to see the spiders, but Harry can do it. It's really remarkable.

Lorrie: Yeah. And also knowing that there's never going to be an adult to come save you? That helps in this case. "Nope. Look, I'm not waiting around." With Lockhart there to show them exactly what happens when you trust an adult... ugh. Don't even. So, they take him with them, and then he has one last burst of resourcefulness where he manages to briefly disarm them and take Ron's wand. And then we get the enormous payoff of the book-long gag about Ron's wand being so broken.

JC: I love that at the beginning of the chapter, we get a reminder of it, too. At the beginning of the chapter, Ron holds up his broken wand and he's like, "Am I supposed to take my final exams with this?"

Lorrie: Yeah, what's going to happen?

JC: The payoff is amazing.

Lorrie: And we get Lockhart saying the most chilling thing: "I shall take a bit of this skin back up to the school, tell them I was too late to save the girl, and that you two tragically lost your minds at the site of her mangled body -- say good-bye to your memories!" Okay, what was Lockhart about to do to protect his book sales? How many people was he... Wow. That is monstrous.

JC: Children. Children, even. Yeah.

Lorrie: And feeling completely justified. Then his own spell backfires on him, and there are different things this reminded me of. One of them, of course, is Voldemort's *Avada Kedavra* on baby Harry backfiring on him. It's also the attack on trans people from Rowling. For some reason, she decided that this is the hill she's going to die on. Of all things she could use her platform and influence for, this is going to be the issue? And then, at the same time, she's saying one of the reasons she's concerned about having any availability for young people under 18 to start transitioning is that, she says, "If I had had that option, I might have transitioned." She says it as though that were self-evidently bad, and also as though she hadn't just told people she is... This is not a universal response. That's you, Rowling.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: There's something about what people use to attack others that's revealing their own concerns about themselves, and that's a form of defense you can have to say, "Whatever you're attacking, whatever you're sending out, I know who I am. What is this saying about you?" and that can backfire. That's been one of the strangest experiences about all of TERF-pocalypse: that double-take moment when you read Rowling's gender manifesto from June 2020, which I hesitate to refer people to, but yeah. There is this eye-opening moment where she says, "If I had known that was possible, I might have transitioned." Yes, and?

JC: Fascinating. It reminds me of being in conversations with other people around all kinds of LGBTQ rights, and one person remembered being in a high school classroom where one of the young women in the class was arguing, "Well, I don't think gay marriage should be legal, because then all women would just marry other women."

Lorrie: Yikes.

JC: Then the author and everyone in the room looked at her, and she said, "Because we'd all just rather marry a woman, right?" And everyone in the room was like, "Okay, honey."

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: "Honey, you have some thinking to do." Yeah, it makes me think of those kinds of stories of people... not understanding yourself well enough to understand what you're doing to yourself there, and then how you're turning that on other people in a really weaponized way.

Lorrie: I've been following the author Chuck Tingle on Bluesky.

JC: Chuck Tingle, yes, yes.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: This is a great one.

Lorrie: And he's been saying "He" is his preferred pronoun, but technically it would be "She", because Chuck didn't realize, until he was in a group of people, where they said, "Who would you be if you could be a superhero?" he said Brie Larson, of course, or a famous actor. Everyone stared at him, because he hadn't realized that they had meant 'of your same gender.' And he said, "Well, everybody would rather be. Ohhhhh." And then he thought, 'Okay.' He had thought that part of the experience of being trans has to be dysphoria. He hadn't had any, so he didn't realize no, it's not in itself a miserable thing. "Oh. Oh. Huh."

JC: It's really interesting. I don't think I've ever seen anyone -- As someone who's never really experienced dysphoria of that kind, I will say -- there's other kinds of dysphoria that I probably have experienced, but not gender-related -- his perspective on it was really interesting to read.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Again, being a cisgender person, I don't really want to take words out of anyone else's mouth, but he's presenting that dysphoria is one aspect of the experience of being trans, but it's not a defining aspect. I thought that was really brave of him to say, and he said it in a very thoughtful way.

Lorrie: Ah, Chuck Tingle. Well, to give some background for people who are not familiar with Chuck Tingle...

JC: Oh, yeah. We've just been talking about this person as if everyone knows. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. Chuck Tingle is a category all to himself. He writes porn and horror.

JC: But as a social commentary and parody.

Lorrie: Yeah, and as activism. He started out becoming well known because he had been mockingly nominated for a Hugo Award, and instead of taking it as the insult it was meant to be, he turned it around and cheerfully started marketing himself as Hugo Award-nominated Chuck Tingle.

JC: And now I think it's twice Hugo Award-nominated. Yeah.

Lorrie: And he is a Harry Potter fanfic writer of the antagonistic sort. He is very displeased with TERF-pocalypse, and he wrote a trans Snarry series about Harriet Porber and Snabe.

JC: Yeah. I introduced my kid to Chuck Tingle at some point, because I was like, "You need to know the existence of this person because they're such a force for amazing things." The Tumblr post that Chuck Tingle wrote about not experiencing dysphoria: I sent that to my kiddo, too. A slight Chuck Tingle detour there, but let's see. Where were we? So Ron's wand explodes in Lockhart's hand, which is another thing I forgot to mention, and blocks off Lockhart and Ron. It's interesting because now Harry has to go forward alone, and one of the things that I realized reading it was, oh, this is how it always happens. Something happens to separate Harry from the others, and in the end it's always just Harry on his own who has to go and face whatever has to be faced, and Ron and perhaps Hermione have taken on a side quest to clean up. Ron's got a side quest now and he's going to manage all this, and he's going to do a fantastic job of it. But Harry's the one who has to go forward alone here. Classic Hero's Journey.

Lorrie: Yep. And since this is only book two of the series, this is the first time that we get to see, okay, she's sticking with that formula. In later books, we know to expect it, and then in *Cursed Child*, it gets turned around.

JC: Ah, that's true.

Lorrie: Because he's finally had enough decades of life experience to know that it's okay to trust people to come along. But that's a long way from now.

JC: A few years from now, we'll be talking about this.

Lorrie: Yeah. Nineteen years later plus. So, the next chapter is going to be The Heir of Slytherin.

JC: Oh, my gosh. I think that the scene that this chapter ends on with that chilling... Harry looks at the wall or the seal, I guess, or whatever with the snakes on it, and the snakes seem alive; this time, he knows exactly what to say. He doesn't hesitate.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that image of this kid just being like, "All right, here we go," and he has no idea what he's going to find on the other side.

Lorrie: Everything is so huge.

JC: Yeah. Dun dun dun!

Lorrie: Tiny little Harry Potter going in.

JC: Oh, wow. But he feels fierce here. There's something fierce about the way he moves forward. "No one else can do this but me. I'm the one who has to do this, and I'm going to go do it." That's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I know it's a story, and he is the protagonist and the hero and all that, but still it's hard to think, oh, this is a 12-year-old kid. Next, we get to actually go into the Chamber and meet the real Heir of Slytherin, I think.

Lorrie: Yeah. Seems like we don't have a choice. Uh-oh.

JC: I look forward to it.

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