

# HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

## Transcript

### Episode 2.18

#### Book 2, Chapter 18: Dobby's Reward

Caroline: You're listening to Harry Potter After 2020, an HP chapter reread 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 18: Dobby's Reward.

Lorrie: Dobby's Reward. This is eventful. Fawkes takes Harry, Ron, Ginny, and Lockhart out of the Chamber of Secrets to McGonagall's office, where Mr. & Mrs. Weasley and Dumbledore welcome them. Harry tells all. Ginny goes to recover, and Harry has a heart-to-heart with Dumbledore about his Gryffindor identity before they're interrupted by Lucius Malfoy and his house elf, Dobby. Whoa! And that is the wrap up for Chamber of Secrets. Let's talk about it, JC.

JC: Oh, my gosh, I think one of the first things -- because I had made myself stop, so I got to read this one last night, finally -- they go into the office and the Weasleys are there, and they're obviously really upset; Mrs. Weasley's been crying. And I just had this thought of, 'Oh, my God. They must have been terrified, not knowing what happened to their daughter and knowing that no one can do anything about it.' They're there with Dumbledore and McGonagall being comforted, and there's nothing to be done about it. The terror must have... Oh, my gosh, that's just awful. We hear later in the story that word had gotten out that their daughter had been killed.

Lorrie: That she was dead.

JC: That she was dead. Oh, my... The idea of them sitting there and sobbing, and then the office door opens and in comes her daughter. Oh, my God. My mom senses were like, "AAAAHH!" I don't think the power of that hit me the first time I read this.

Lorrie: It's one of the rare cases where something terrible happens to a kid and the parents get called in. What does it take for a parent to be notified?

JC: Right. What does it take? And I think, too, when they walk in, I also was struck by the contrast between the way Dumbledore is responding to them in the way that... between all the

adults in the room, honestly. But Dumbledore is described as 'beaming' at them; McGonagall is shocked, gasping for breath and clutching her chest like she's having a heart attack or something. And, of course, the Weasleys are grabbing Ginny and sobbing, but that contrast between Dumbledore just calmly smiling and McGonagall being utterly shocked is really interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. McGonagall has some nerves. At major points, she does clutch. She's a lot less regulated than Dumbledore as a person.

JC: I guess it always made me think that Dumbledore knew something was going on. He knew Fawkes left. He had to have known.

Lorrie: Yeah. The Sorting Hat was gone.

JC: Yeah. He had to have known that something happened, and the only person who could have done that was Harry. He didn't seem surprised when they burst in, having brought Ginny back with them.

Lorrie: And by then, everybody would have known that Harry and Ron were missing from the common room.

JC: That's true. Yeah, yeah. That's true.

Lorrie: Ah, yeah.

JC: That's true, too. So I think there's that. Then the other thing that I loved in this moment: the absolute fucking power move of Harry walking in, saying nothing, putting the Sorting Hat, the sword of Gryffindor, and this destroyed horcrux on the desk and just laying them down. This 12-year-old kid walks in with the fucking sword of Gryffindor and he's covered in blood.

Lorrie: I know. I know.

JC: He's like, "And I brought Ginny Weasley back." I'm like, "Holy shit!" Oh, my God.

Lorrie: "And my best friend, her brother, and some clown."

JC: Oh, my gosh. It's incredible.

Lorrie: Here we are with one of the worst feelings that a parent can have. And then this 12-year-old child, who stinks to high heaven, bringing these magical artifacts and plunking them down on McGonagall's desk. I was really struck by the fact that they go to McGonagall's desk, and the school year starts out with Harry and Ron in Snape's office.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: It bookends the action undergirding this message that actually, the grown-ups are united underneath. There is a grid. At the end, when Dumbledore is writing to get Hagrid back, he rummages in McGonagall's desk for a quill and ink.

JC: True.

Lorrie: That is comforting, and I like knowing that the teachers cooperate with each other. That is going to be a good thing to keep in mind later when there's more dissension between them. No, they have this record, and this comes right after that amazing staff room scene where all the Heads of House team up to boot Lockhart out without even consulting with each other.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: It's a tight team.

JC: I think there's also an interesting moment where Harry panics when he realizes that he's not going to be able to explain how Ginny ended up down there, and then Dumbledore looks at him and then changes the subject.

Lorrie: And takes over, yes.

JC: Yeah. There's that moment of Legilimency or something, where Dumbledore looks at him and goes, "Okay," and takes over. That's really cool. It's also really powerful, and you think, okay, Dumbledore has really been here the whole time. Yeah. They can take Dumbledore out of the school, but they can't take... whatever, however that works.

Lorrie: The faith in him and his awareness, and his spies. Fawkes is a spy.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love this sentence: "For nearly a quarter of an hour, he spoke into the rapt silence." That is ageless. Harry has charisma; he's commanding the room. He has matured. It reminded me of a dear friend I have who I watched once do that. There was a whole room full of really powerful people, and when he spoke... Wow. You could hear people breathing; they were hanging on everything. Harry has true power.

JC: It's also the first time... you'll correct me if I'm wrong, I'm sure, but the first time I think in this series when he just said everything. He's told the whole story. Until now, he's kept parts of it to himself, and this time he's like, "Nope, I'm telling exactly everything, how we got here."

Lorrie: Well, he doesn't tell the part that's Ginny's to tell.

JC: That's true. He doesn't tell the part that's Ginny's to tell. Yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah, he tells that he's been hearing voices. Oh, that's terrifying stuff. This is where, from Dumbledore, we learn that Voldemort "consorted with the very worst of our kind, underwent so many dangerous magical transformations." That establishes that there's this whole unseen network of really evil wizards that are going around, having their conspiracies; it's, I think, the first hint that this series is going to go into some truly evil magical territory, because this was relentlessly scary, this book. And wow, there's more where that came from.

JC: Yeah, it was definitely a lot darker than I remembered.

Lorrie: This book is super dark, and it's not leavened with as much fun as the other books. Even Order of the Phoenix has more moments of joy than this. I think the author learned; here with the sophomore effort, she has to create a big bad that's as compelling as the one in the first book, but she has to raise the stakes. So yeah, I love Dumbledore modeling some really good crisis care by saying, "Ginny has been through a terrible ordeal, there's going to be no punishment," and he steps in right when the Weasleys, especially Mr. Weasley, start in on this very natural, parental bit of almost hysteria. They're about to scold her.

JC: Yeah. They do, actually. Yeah. Mr. Weasley's line, which is a really interesting one, says, "What have I always told you? Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain!" which is a really interesting line.

Lorrie: Which is a great piece of advice.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: And she responds really upset and defensive, and Dumbledore steps in on this bit of parenting. He won't let that kind of parenting happen right now. Thank you, Dumbledore. I love that piece of advice from Mr. Weasley; I think it's excellent in an era of AI and bots and misinformation.

JC: Ooh. Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: When you hear something -- when you read something that's meant to influence your opinion -- for goodness' sake, check out the source first.

JC: Yeah, yeah, for sure. The first thing that I thought, too, when I read that was, 'that is good advice for all these years later'. I'm trying to think back what would have been the equivalent of that at the time this book was written. I'm sure there were... was the National Enquirer? What was the equivalent of this kind of thing?

Lorrie: No, there was always biased information out there.

JC: Yeah, but not in the same volume, I think.

Lorrie: No, but that was an era of chat rooms, when people were adjusting to the reality that anyone could impersonate a trustworthy person online. They were luring people -- maybe even as young as Ginny -- preying on their loneliness or lack of experience and vulnerability into giving up things that were dangerous. But in every era, there's something like that. As technology changes, as media changes, you do have to update the way you look for where the brain is.

JC: Yeah, that's true. Dumbledore's line when he's telling the Weasleys to kind of calm down there, too: "Older and wiser wizards than she have been hoodwinked by Lord Voldemort," which I think that's a reality check. "This was Voldemort. This wasn't your daughter being silly; this was serious."

Lorrie: Yeah. "Let up," and it's not a parenting thing.

JC: "You wouldn't have done any better." Yeah, I love that. Like what you just said, he's not going to allow that kind of parenting. He's going to keep in mind that Ginny's been traumatized; he's going to make sure that she gets taken care of, and then reminding everybody in the room that she actually went through an ordeal that most adults would not be able to handle.

Lorrie: Which is not to say that the Weasleys do bad parenting. It's to say that their response is completely natural. I don't think there's any other response possible from an overwhelmed parent, considering the emotional state they were in. Then they see her, and you can't control what pours out of you at that moment. I don't think it's that they did anything wrong. It's just that it's good to have people around that can read the room and trust and have some authority.

JC: Yeah, and he redirects them in a way that it seems like they need.

Lorrie: At that point, the mandrake juice is bringing people out of Petrification, and Dumbledore says a line that resonates on so many levels for me. He says --

JC: I know what you're going to say.

Lorrie: Well, I want to know what you think I'm going to say.

JC: Oh, I think you're going to say that "There has been no lasting harm done" line. Is that where you're going?

Lorrie: That is! What made you correctly assume that was what I was going to say?

JC: Because Ron says, "So Hermione is okay?" and Dumbledore says, "There has been no lasting harm done," and those aren't the same thing. Dumbledore is not going to stand there and say, "Your friend's just been through a really traumatic experience. She'll be okay

eventually; she's not okay right now, and you need to keep that in mind." That's how I read it, but I thought it's a really wise way of saying that.

Lorrie: Right, and Ron himself is not okay, either.

JC: No one is okay at this point.

Lorrie: No. I mean, acromantulas.

JC: They've all been through an ordeal.

Lorrie: He thought his sister was dead, he just fell miles beneath the school, this guy was about to Obliviate him. Oh, my God. I find "There has been no lasting harm done, Ginny" to be such a soothing thing to say, because when you have just scared yourself with how much damage you just did and very nearly could have done, it's not that you didn't do damage but it puts a limit on the terror -- your fear of yourself. It reminds me, actually, of pregnancy advice books. When you don't know that you've been pregnant and you go on a drinking binge, and then you find out later, "Oh, no, I was pregnant. Did I just harm the fetus? I didn't know." The self-incrimination can be so awful, because what can you do? I think it's "What To Expect When You're Expecting"; a really mainstream book is saying, "Don't worry about what you've done up till now; the baby's fine. Just don't drink from now." I remember thinking, 'That is so merciful, because really, what are you going to do?' This is not about things that you could have done in the past. This is about being practical. Don't scare yourself; scaring yourself can happen, and it's not good, so there's that. But also, this line is a clue to a major dividing line that can't be crossed, that's important to both Dumbledore and Snape. Most things can be reversed or healed or somehow reframed. Time Turners are good for that; you can go back and reframe something. You can't undo it -- you shouldn't undo it -- but maybe you can understand it differently. But most things can be reversed somehow, except -- in this series -- for death. Nothing can bring back the dead. That's the line, and that is lasting harm. And if you have somehow been involved with somebody's death, even if it was completely innocently or completely inadvertently, it will hurt your soul. You may not feel like you've split your soul if you weren't evil, but it hurts. It does damage your soul. We learn later that both Dumbledore and Snape are irreparably haunted by the parts that they've played in people's deaths, and therefore they -- those two -- will do anything in their power to prevent children under their care from suffering the same way, even if they hate those children as Snape does. Snape ensures that when Harry casts Sectumsempra, there's no lasting harm done. What he says to Draco in the bathroom is, "There may be a certain amount of scarring, but if you take dittany immediately, we might avoid even that." Then Draco, when Dumbledore talks to him in the tower -- before Draco lowers his wand -- Dumbledore says, "No harm has been done. You have hurt nobody, though you are very lucky that your unintentional victims survive." That's essentially, to me, the same thing as, "There has been no lasting harm done, Ginny." Dumbledore gets Snape to kill him in Draco's place. Dumbledore gets Harry to surrender to Voldemort instead of aiming to kill. Both Harry and Draco, because of that, get to live to feel that there was no lasting harm done from their actions against those two opponents. By that time, they have both done a lot of harm; they've both cast

Unforgivables. But that line that Dumbledore and Snape crossed and regretted for the rest of their lives, they did everything they could to prevent those kids from having to know that. The merciful limit it places on self-blame is something that I'm really grateful to Dumbledore for modeling here.

JC: I love that you've pointed out that idea of harm done or lasting harm done, no harm done. That's a theme that we're going to see going forward, because I don't think I had thought of that before. That's cool.

Lorrie: A really major theme in this series is the agony of self-blame. Guilt. You can't reason somebody out of feeling the guilt. Logic didn't bring it on, and logic isn't going to make it go away. That's one of the mysteries that gets exploited in several different ways as well: suppose you have that, and logic can't absolve you. What can make it better? You can't make it go away, but you can maybe make it better. It's not going to be easy. How do we do that? Or do you want to just give up? No, don't just give up. You can still do something. But at this point, they're still children, and Ginny's being sent off for hot chocolate.

JC: Yeah. I love how there's a theme of chocolate being a thing that will cure what ails you throughout this series, too.

Lorrie: It does, yeah.

JC: That's something I have taken into my life. I have to say: before I read this series, chocolate was a thing that was possibly -- and we'll talk about this in the next book, won't we?

Lorrie: Yes, we will.

JC: Yeah, that chocolate was a thing that was not a forbidden treat, but it felt a little bit naughty for all the societal reasons of, "Oh, it's got sugar in it. Oh, it's blah, blah, blah." This series really shifted my perspective on that. No, actually, taking pleasure in small things is part of life and you should let yourself enjoy it, and chocolate was one of those.

Lorrie: There's a reason why eating a bit of chocolate makes you feel better.

JC: I like to think of it as magic, too, still.

Lorrie: So Dumbledore manages to send everyone out of the office. There are four hundred more points for Gryffindor now.

JC: And the Special Awards for service to the school, which is amazing because this is exactly the award that Tom Riddle won fifty years ago.

Lorrie: But correcting that, he won it falsely. This one is correctly awarded.

JC: Yes, this one is good. And I love the fact that we forget that Lockhart was there.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Until there's this line that Ron's blush is compared to the Valentine flowers that Lockhart produced, and it's like, "Oh, he's still here." None of the adults recognized him; not a single adult in that room looked at him. Not even Molly Weasley. No one looked at him and thought he had anything to do with this.

Lorrie: No. Completely vacant. Irrelevant. Yeah, no, Lockhart comic relief pays off beautifully: that comic timing of a joke that you set up and then you forget about it, and then it shows up.

JC: I also love the line there, when Ron explains what happened in the Chamber of Secrets, that Dumbledore says: "Impaled upon your own sword, Gilderoy!" It shows that Dumbledore knew what was up; he knew who Lockhart was, what he had done...

Lorrie: What he was going to be doing, yeah.

JC: Yeah. And then Lockhart's like, "I don't have a sword, but he does."

Lorrie: "That boy has a sword."

JC: My God. He goes to St. Mungo's after this...

Lorrie: Yeah, forever.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: So once everyone has been cleared out of McGonagall's office, Dumbledore comes right to the heart of it. He says, "And so you met Tom Riddle. I imagine he was most interested in you..." And there it is. Tom Riddle is interested in Harry, not the other way around. Ugh, just the one-sidedness of it. And he explains to Harry that Harry is a Parselmouth because "he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar." This is a metaphor in the series that I feel like is really robust and stands up throughout: that crime victims have insight into their attackers without ever having asked for it; because criminals hurt people to do what was done to them, it creates other people who are like them and makes them feel less alone. That's the thing about Voldemort, Tom Riddle: he was so, so alone, and by attacking Harry and orphaning him, he inadvertently made somebody that would know how he felt. Oops.

JC: One thing that stood out to me about that line, too, is that unless I'm much mistaken, "he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar," and Harry says, "Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?" and Dumbledore says, "It certainly seems so." I don't remember... I don't know where in the timeline Dumbledore realizes that Harry is a horcrux. At this point, does he know that or suspect it?



Lorrie: Well, we know that it occurred to him -- when he saw the destroyed diary -- that he was looking at a destroyed horcrux, and that had been minutes ago. Right now, Dumbledore is in 'taking care of people' mode, and he has to counsel Harry right away. He's also thinking, 'Oh, I have to get Hagrid back. Let's have a feast. I have to think about the Board of Governors.' I'm thinking if I were Dumbledore, this would be one of the things that's bubbling under the surface mid-level, because first you have to take care of the people. Then you have to do the administrative work for your job; and then when everything is finished -- probably around three or four AM, when the kids are loopy on feast food and everybody is taken care of -- that's when probably, I imagine, Dumbledore will sit down and sigh heavily and think over the mysteries. That's what we've seen from his pattern, and we know he doesn't sleep. He can't sleep. And yeah, I imagine that he and Fawkes leave McGonagall's office and head up to his office, and he gets to settle in after his exile. Yikes. Dumbledore... oh, his loneliness is something that echoes for me.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So at this point, his main priority is counseling Harry, and Harry says the beautiful vulnerable thing, the statement that's a question: "'So I should be in Slytherin,' Harry said, looking desperately into Dumbledore's face." This is, to me, such a valuable and subtle ongoing theme. The way that -- if you're a victim of trauma -- you have to sort through who you are and who you were meant to be originally, how much damage has changed you; if you've lost yourself, how much you're defined by what somebody else did to you. It was terrifying for Harry; the way he understood Parseltongue without knowing anything about whether that skill was native to him -- or the fact that it was super uncommon; it was just there -- it felt the same as when he found out that he knows how to fly. He didn't know where that came from, either; just that they both come really naturally to him. How was he to know which one he was born with and which one he wasn't meant to have? Okay, he inherited flying from his biological parents. Is one skill evil and the other one good? Does that matter? And when you are an orphan or otherwise separated from your family of origin, how can you know who you are? This is a question that no matter how nurtured somebody is from chosen family and adoptive family and found family, this question cannot go away. It's scary, so Harry is desperate and he looks at Dumbledore. Then we get the line that I think some people probably consider the most influential line from this series: when Dumbledore says, "It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." That's a rule for sorting. The fandom phenomenon of sorting is that you sort on your values, not on your traits. Your urges -- the things that if you could do that would fulfill your soul -- that's more important than figuring out if you're predestined for anything. Just because somebody thinks that you're destined, you don't have to do that. You do what's going to fulfill your soul. Then the most reassuring phenomenon ever: when Dumbledore says, "Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that out of the Hat, Harry." Just the reassurance of that, it's so resounding.

JC: I think another thing that that bit of the story meant to me as well this time: I love that idea that it's the choices that we make that are the most important rather than the circumstances in

which we find ourselves. Where my brain went with that was thinking about trans folks: just because -- under the circumstances you were born -- you were assigned a particular gender, doesn't mean that that's how you have to stay. You can make a choice to live your life the way that's going to be fulfilling to you. I really read that sentiment into this, knowing that the author went the direction that she did... It's yet another moment where I thought, while she betrayed her principles -- because that's such an important theme throughout these books -- it's the choices that you make that matter more than the circumstances that you were born in or the trauma that you experience. It's you taking control of your life and you making choices and deciding how you're going to live your life. That's a big value in these books, and yet she did the things she did and said the things she said.

Lorrie: There's truth, and truth is what makes art. Artists, when they are being artists, are closer to truth than when they're being regular human beings, which they also are. If we could always live up to our best artist output, then there wouldn't be any such thing as art. That would just be life. But no, this author is a good artist and she created a truth, and she (the person) is not living up to it. But this message that magic is the thing that reaffirms your true self... Magic is what happens when you feel at peace. Magic is what happens when you summon yourself at your extreme, and that can tell you, "No, this is me, this is where I'm going, I know what I'm doing." That basic equality and individualism... the point that the individual experience of being yourself matters. It matters more than society, it matters more than other people's expectations. That is why this series became an international hit phenomenon and era-defining story collectively, because that's true, whether anybody -- including the author -- argues with that principle later.

JC: I think this, too, is making me think about how -- throughout our discussions of the book so far -- we rejected the idea of 'death of the author' and we're thinking about it from the idea of the two biographies, meaning the book is a text and you bring to it your own experiences and you interpret it through that. You're looking for things in the text that explain -- It almost sounds like I'm describing a religion now, doesn't it? You're looking for things in the text that are going to help you with your own life, or you're going to connect with in some way. Those truths are things that are -- you're right. They're true, and we all recognize them as true and important, even if the author herself is not living up to the truth that she wrote about.

Lorrie: And like later Voldemort and his influence on the diary written by a 16-year-old, what we know later about an author changes the way we read their long-ago text, it doesn't change the text; it just means that our biographies have changed based on what we've taken in, so it affects how we read it. Similar to Harry sorting out, "No, this is good and valuable; that is something that I didn't invite in, but it exists and it's affecting me," rereading this series post TERF-pocalypse is me finding, "Oh, I loved this series then because this felt true to me," and it's still true and it still does that for me. I still love the parts that resonate, and I don't need to give all of it up. The truth of how Dumbledore manages the emotions of everybody in this scene, that's all still true for me. I don't feel the need to give any of that up.

JC: Yeah, that's a really good point.

Lorrie: Because it's too late, anyway. I've read the books.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: And I took them in.

JC: "They did affect me, they did change my life. I can't take that back. But I don't want to, either, because they changed me in good ways."

Lorrie: Yeah. I think rejecting everything that is even touched by this series... It's a little bit too afraid in a way that I don't need to be. I think that's giving power in a way that is jumpier than we need to be. We don't have to be that nervous, but it does require some sifting. It does require some work, which I find worth doing.

JC: One question that I did have at the end of this, though: the whole idea that the Sorting Hat is taken to Harry. The Sorting Hat basically gave Harry the sword of Gryffindor. Harry asked for help; the sword of Gryffindor falls out of the Hat, which is the Hat affirming in a lot of ways that yeah, you really belong in Gryffindor, because here you can summon this weapon. Does Mr. Weasley's warning apply to the Sorting Hat, is my question. Do we trust the Sorting Hat? Where does it keep its brain? I don't know. It just made me think. There's lots of magical objects in this series that it's not obvious how they're working, and it made me think about Mr. Weasley's warning. Which ones do we trust, and which ones do we not?

Lorrie: Well, one thing that we know about the Sorting Hat: it keeps its brain in the trust of the Headmaster and all the teachers, and the generations of people who have gone through this ritual and can tell you, "Well, who knows what it is, but we all trust it." Does the Sorting Hat have its own agenda? Well, once a year we get to hear it rhyme.

JC: We get to hear its song, yeah, which often seems to have an agenda, for sure.

Lorrie: But yeah. Institutions that we have faith in... Sometimes, faith comes from our trust being ratified by how we see other people trust and turn out okay trusting it.

JC: I've been going back to the idea of AI and disinformation campaigns and things like that; that idea of looking around and seeing what people -- whose opinions we respect -- seeing what they're doing with this information, how they're using it. As a teacher, one of the things that obviously a lot of teachers have been thinking about lately is, 'Okay, if AI is here, how are we going to use it in teaching in schools? How do you teach people to be skeptical of the things that it spits out?' It's a starting place. Now what do you do? How do you verify this stuff? How do you dig in? It's that idea of thinking about who to trust. What you were just saying about institutions and how we look to people around us to see how to respond in these situations, that's actually a really good way of thinking about it, I think. The Sorting Hat has been a Hogwarts tradition for centuries, probably. I don't know if we know how old this Sorting Hat is, but it definitely has the faith of all of the people who run the school and all the people who've been through it before.

Lorrie: It's totally legitimate to ask people, "You've been through this. What was your experience?" That's one of the strongest tools we have for knowing what to trust.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: So okay, we have Dumbledore getting back to business, and then Lucius Malfoy bursts in.

JC: Like he owns the place.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, he's desperate. It's like he was in the bathroom or something, and just ran out half-dressed.

JC: They're not even in Dumbledore's office, which amazes me. He clearly stormed in and said, "Where do I find Dumbledore?" and people just pointed, "That way."

Lorrie: Yeah. We learn from Lucius Malfoy that the school board has finally grown a spine, and they managed to get together and reveal that Lucius threatened them. And when Lucius realizes that this has been revealed, we see Occlumency. "His face was suddenly masklike."

JC: Ooh, that's a great point. I hadn't thought of that. He closes down. You're right.

Lorrie: Yeah. Uh-oh, he's guilty.

JC: And he knows that Dumbledore...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oooh. Yeah, that's fascinating. You would have to be a decent Occlumens to have lived around Voldemort for as long as he did. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Dumbledore brings a really serious and true accusation against Lucius of trying to frame Arthur Weasley's daughter for attacking and killing Muggle-borns as part of a political rivalry between them. It's true, but wow, that's a heavy accusation to lay out in the open like that. So yeah, Lucius better be Occluding right now, because anything he says can be used against him. Then Harry says the thing that Dumbledore can't know: Harry accuses Lucius of planting the diary; he knows when it happened and where. Lucius takes out his frustration by abusing the person he can, which is Dobby, in front of all of them.

JC: He also says somewhere in there, and I think it's maybe around the time that Harry says, "You gave Ginny the book." Is that when Lucius says, "Prove it?"

Lorrie: Yeah. And Dumbledore says, "Oh, well, we can't prove it because it's been destroyed."

JC: But the "prove it" is the point where it's like, "Ooh." Why would you say that?

Lorrie: He knows.

JC: Unless he knows that they can't prove it, and everybody in the room knows that it's true at that point. Yeah.

Lorrie: They are redefining the terms of the standoff between Lucius Malfoy and the Dumbledore/Harry team, and Lucius leaves. You know that, okay, he's going to try again; he's going to have to change tactics. And that's when we have the final power move of this novel, and Harry succeeds in his cobbled-together plot to trick Lucius into freeing Dobby; once Dobby considers himself free, we immediately see some of Dobby's power, which is a lot. Once he's a free elf, he can attack Lucius to defend Harry. There's a lot going on in this scene.

JC: There is, and one thing that's interesting is that the book describes Lucius as "lunging" at Harry. The film version has Lucius about to cast the Killing curse, which always struck me as, "that seems extreme." But I also know that the author approved things on set and nixed other things, so it seems if she didn't want that to have been his intention, she would have said, "No, that's not what he was going to do there." I think; I'm just guessing here, but it always struck me as interesting that the film version implied that he really would have killed Harry then if he could, he was that angry. He would have done something really bad.

Lorrie: Well, he was a bit out of control.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Trying to think about what the author did and didn't authorize in the film versions is always sort of iffy, because I think she gave a lot of leeway to the filmmakers to change the story. We also know from interviews from Jason Isaacs and Tom Felton that they did do quite a bit of improv with their characters for this movie, and Jason Isaacs has such amazing actor instincts. He got the gist of this character gorgeously.

JC: Yeah. He's so good, and I also have these memories of him being lit with the Morticia Addams lighting, where there's just a line of light across your eyes and everything else is a little bit in shadow. He was beautiful.

Lorrie: Oh, I just thank him so much for how much joy he had and conveyed in this role, and it's the knowing joy of a Jewish actor playing a Nazi.

JC: Ooh, interesting. Like the Hogan's Heroes effect.

Lorrie: Yeah. He was up-front about bringing that sensibility to his portrayal.

JC: Yeah, so we can't say that Lucius really would have killed Harry in that moment, but he was definitely going to do some damage.

Lorrie: By the time he stormed in there, he was already in a state.

JC: The other thing that's fascinating about all of this is that Dumbledore seems to know what Harry is up to.

Lorrie: Yeah, he's very calm.

JC: And he just lets Harry do it. He is completely convinced that this 12-year-old kid can handle Lucius Malfoy. Wow.

Lorrie: "Sure, go ahead."

JC: Well, he just slayed a basilisk. Why not? He can handle a Death Eater. Oh, my God. I guess I would love to know what's happening in Dumbledore's head. We talked about what's going to happen later, but the amount of trust that Dumbledore is already placing in Harry at this age is pretty stunning.

Lorrie: It's also the feeling when you're an elder, and having lived a long life, you've done a lot of impure things and you know how not great you are, even if you're a really gifted person. I think Dumbledore is incredibly humbled by this 12-year-old at this moment, because we see Dumbledore idealizing Harry in a way that drives Snape crazy. "Yeah, yeah, Harry is so pure, so powerful." Part of why Dumbledore is so humbled is in contrast to his own self image.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Because, yeah, Harry is amazing, but what is influencing the way Dumbledore is humbled by him is their two biographies meeting. Dumbledore sees the purity of what this kid can do when he follows his instincts, and it's like, "Okay, sure, have at Lucius Malfoy."

JC: "Go for it." Yeah.

Lorrie: "Have fun." And then Harry tells Dobby, "Just promise never to try and save my life again," and that's major foreshadowing, and Dobby does not answer him. He just smiles.

JC: Ah. Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: And now I have to talk about the awkward moment where I have to put on my beta hat.

JC: Oh, this'll be interesting.

Lorrie: Okay. Let me preface this by saying that any writer will have this kind of moment. When it happens, do not panic; just be practical. Stories are words; you can fix them by changing the words. If I were J.K. Rowling's beta, I would tell her: when you write about somebody of a different race who has just been freed from servitude by the hero, do not describe this character's face as 'ugly and brown.'

JC: Oh, Lord. Okay, now I'm going to open my book up because I want to see. Okay, I'm still looking -- Oh, there it is. "The elf's ugly brown face split suddenly into a wide, toothy smile." Daaaaaaamn. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dear author, don't do that. We can fix this. Take out the words 'ugly' and 'brown,' because this makes me feel like I'm reading Scarlett O'Hara's point of view in *Gone With the Wind*.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It does 'other' the character. The reference to a skin color -- any color -- racializes the scene. Even without Dobby's abject, uncomfortable gratitude -- even without that -- by introducing skin color, you have made your 12-year-old boy into a white savior.

JC: Right, for sure.

Lorrie: So don't do that. We can fix this, we can change words. The impression I draw from just weighing everything here is that I think this was subconscious and not intentional; possibly uninformed. I do think that it is informed by white savior narratives subconsciously. When you, a writer, are worried about this kind of thing happening in your own writing or your friend's writing - - because trust me, all humans will reveal this kind of subconscious bias at some point if you're writing a lot of characters. When this is a concern, this is what sensitivity readers are for. You can run it by a sensitivity reader; work through different wording that they tell you does not bring up the same associations. It might be a matter of changing a couple words, it might be a matter of changing a whole storyline, but the reason you do this is because you're a writer. You care about not hurting your readers. You're telling a story, and if you reinforce stereotypes while you're telling the stories, this is going to hurt readers in a way that you don't want. You're writing because you want to bring enjoyment to your readers. You want to share your story. This isn't the worst thing I've ever seen. It's not good, but I don't know any writers who don't do this at some point, and that's what we're here for, all of us: to help each other enjoy stories the right way. That's why we tell stories: to tell other people what's in our minds and share it, and hear back from them what changes it effected in their minds by hearing it. So yeah, that's a true "If I were her beta" moment.

JC: I feel like I need a Control-F here, because I was looking back in Chapter Two (when we're first introduced to Dobby) and I was like, 'Okay, where else is Dobby described with a color?' And when he's first introduced, he's just described as 'bat-like'.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I was looking to see where, and in my head, the Dobby in my head is the one from the movie. I don't see in the second chapter which is where he's introduced. Just a quick scan did not show any reference to skin color there, so that is really interesting that she puts it in this place.

Lorrie: It's very odd, yeah.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: He's described as very 'other'. He's got the giant tennis ball eyes, he has the nervous tics, he's small. But this is startling. It did not make me stop reading the series, it does not make me think that she's the most racist person in the world. Believe me, there's plenty of people vying for that.

JC: There's more to come!

Lorrie: But even with or without that for her, there are people in this world vying for the title of most racist author in the world.

JC: Oh, for sure.

Lorrie: She is not even in the top million for me. This is offensive, but I know really offensive writing that's really dangerous. This is like, look, is this any different from the kind of racism that you have to deal with every day if you're a person of color? No, it's the same thing. When you get up in the morning, you're going to have to deal with this every day. Okay, we deal with it as it comes up, and every person does this towards some group of people in the course of living; we just have to deal with it. So that's a beta moment.

JC: And it's fascinating to me that we changed 'harelip' to 'hairy chin'. Not we.

Lorrie: They did, yeah.

JC: That was changed and not this, or not any of the fat references.

Lorrie: Right. It's just a human decision. It's not like there's a review board. It's not like there's a consensus. It's not like we are the governors of the school and that we get to decide by committee what's wholesome enough. There are good and bad things about having texts be authored by a single person, but authorship by committee so quickly can go soulless.

JC: Oh, for sure.



Lorrie: If you think about movie stories that get changed because of really arbitrary decisions that don't have anything to do with the soul of the story, I will take author flaws. I think author flaws are the same things as author genius, that they come from the same place. So there's that, and then there is a different beta moment. If I were J.K. Rowling's beta, I would ask her to revise the sentence, "Ginny Weasley was perfectly happy again." She's talking about how, now that this has happened, exams are canceled, but everything else is normal. Hogwarts has been restored to normal, which is a great enormous relief, and you have all of the ritual rhythms of a Harry Potter school year. You have the feast; you have Draco returning to looking resentful and sulky, not feeling like he's somehow gaining power from things that other people are doing. But usually, this author is much more realistic about what trauma does to you. So yeah, Ginny Weasley being perfectly happy again: I do want to know that Ginny is more relaxed, but, oh, that poor child.

JC: Yeah, no, she's been through a lot.

Lorrie: So those were my two beta moments.

JC: I'm going to have to look for things now. I hadn't even thought about it from that perspective of looking for beta moments. Okay, when we head into the next book -- which is my favorite one, so we'll see how that goes -- I think I should try to keep my eyes open for these things, too. This is a good strategy.

Lorrie: Because that's what reading is. Part of the joy of reading a book is being the peanut gallery. "Oh, boo. Well, when I wrote my book that was better than this, I did it better because..." You do have some power as a reader. You have opinions, and when you're a writer and you put your fiction out there, you put it out there for that, too. I'm about to get them onto the Hogwarts Express. Do you want to say anything before they board?

JC: Thinking back to Lucius Malfoy: we've talked a bit about the kind of things that Draco has been saying at school, like wishing classmates dead and stuff like that. After the scene with Lucius, it made me think, 'This is what Draco hears at home.' Not that Draco is an innocent little lamb in this, but that idea that kids will come to school and repeat the kind of crap that they hear at home. It does have an impact on them. I thought, 'Wow, that illuminates a little bit of Draco's behavior.' And I think about that; I think about the fact that Jason Isaacs actually talked about that in an interview around the time of the second movie and said, "Yeah, Draco's a little shit, and after you meet his dad, you're going to understand why." But this scene really brought it home to me, again, that Draco is living with this father, who he is desperately trying to please constantly and trying to be like him, and 'being like him' means saying awful things like this: wishing death upon Muggle-borns and things like that.

Lorrie: Yeah. He wants his father's approval, of course.

JC: Right, so there's that. And the other thing: I love the idea of Dumbledore saying, "Let's have a feast," and the school full of children just stays up all night partying.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And around 3am, Hagrid comes back in. It's a rager. Wow. They're all high on sugar, and the staff are actually drinking alcohol, I think, at this point.

Lorrie: Oh, yes.

JC: If you had to stay up all night with a bunch of kids, yeah, you'd probably want a drink to get through it, too, so it sounds really fun. A way to blow off steam at the end.

Lorrie: What a relief. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and also because I think that Dumbledore probably knows that the whole school wants to know what happened, and they're all going to talk about it. They're all going to stay up all night, anyway. They're going to sneak out of their dorm to go to the other dorm. Why not just put them all -- it's like at the end of high school, they put all the kids in the gym and lock the doors, and just say, "Get it out of your system." It's like a lock-in. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, they have been separated from each other. In the evenings, everyone's been in the common rooms.

JC: Oh, that's true, too. Oh, yeah, it's like lockdown is lifted.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, which we didn't get a "lockdown is lifted" celebration like this.

Lorrie: No.

JC: Amazing.

Lorrie: But we did get dancing in the streets in November 2020, when the election was called. We did in my neighborhood.

JC: Where you live, you got that.

Lorrie: Yeah, where I live. Once this has happened and the world has been returned to right, "Harry, Ron, Hermione, Fred, George, and Ginny get a compartment" on the Hogwarts Express, and there they "practiced disarming each other by magic. Harry was getting very good at it." Now that the year has closed, we have removed any reference to who taught that spell. It was just a little window when that reminder was dropped a couple times and now it's gone, so the reader can start to assimilate this as Harry's signature spell, and it's buried where it came from. And there, Harry Potter did learn one thing that year. He has a signature spell now.

JC: And I love the fact that he's already modeling/teaching it to other people. It's already becoming a thing that other people like, "Oh, that worked for Harry Potter when he was fighting Voldemort. I'm going to learn that spell, too." And that pays off, obviously, in Book Five quite a bit.

Lorrie: But yeah, it's trendy.

JC: Ooh, #Expelliarmus.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like hand-clapping games that children teach each other, so it worked.

JC: I also love the fact that the Weasleys have adopted Harry at this point, which, as you would, if this person saved your sibling.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: Oh, my gosh. He's an honorary Weasley at this point. Those Weasley twins, they'll die for Harry now. That's it. Yeah.

Lorrie: And no one can understand how it felt for them to think that their baby sister had died except for this kid. He understands; he was there. Well, Ginny's had a first year.

JC: Oh, my gosh. Poor Ginny.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: Actually, two more things at the very end that stood out to me. One is I really love the idea of Harry giving Ron and Hermione his telephone number. It's so very nineties.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: But also, thinking about the beginning of the book, that Harry didn't get any letters from them and how easy it would be for the Dursleys to intercept his mail: they cannot stop the phone from ringing without cutting off all communication to the outside, which I guess they could. But even if they don't let him answer it, or if they answer it and they know who it is and they hang up, Harry knows that they're trying. That's a very clever way to get around the Dursleys.

Lorrie: Oh, and Caller ID is not really a thing yet.

JC: Right. I'm imagining they have one of those old-fashioned phones you actually hang on the wall.

Lorrie: You have to hang up, yeah.

JC: You have to literally hang up, yeah. And then Hermione, very naively, saying, "Well, won't the Dursleys be proud of you for everything you've done this year?" It's like, "No, they'll ask me why I didn't die when I had the chance." Wow, Hermione, after all this time, doesn't believe that Harry's family is as bad as they are.

Lorrie: Well, is it that she doesn't believe it, or is it just that there are so beyond belief that even though you know the answer, you just have to say, "Wait, they're really that weird, huh?"

JC: Even at this, they wouldn't think, "Wow, Harry really did something." Harry's like, "Nope."

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: Daaaaamn. So that...

Lorrie: Well, we've gotten through book two.

JC: Wow. I really enjoyed, in the end, reading this a lot more than I expected to. I was like, "Well, we'll slog through it and then we'll get to the good ones." There was definitely a lot more meaning in it, I think, this time around. There were -- obviously, because I hadn't read it since literally the first time -- a lot of things that made a lot more sense, knowing what's to come, so there were moments that just read on a different level than they did the first time through. I think I did read this actually twice, but way back, definitely before the ending of the series. I think things we've talked about -- like the political maneuvering; the idea that there are forces outside of Hogwarts that are constantly working to undermine Dumbledore, undermine the school; that there's this constant threat of evil forces trying to come in and create havoc or actually kill people. There's a lot of darkness there in this world, and knowing the implications of some of the things we saw, that really jumped out at me this time. Just knowing that the diary was a horcrux the whole time...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That changes the way a lot of those scenes feel. I think the first time -- before the end of the series, when I read this -- the diary seemed out of the blue. 'Okay, you had to invent a way to bring Voldemort into the second book. Okay.' That's what it felt like, and it felt a little strange, this ghost coming out of a book and everything. Now, it's like, 'Oh, that has a whole other impact now.'

Lorrie: Yeah, it's Harry Potter's first experience understanding who did this to him. 'Why?' Because that person's going to come back, you've got to know something about him to defend yourself.

JC: And thinking of it as 'Here's Voldemort's origins; he was once just a kid at this school, just like anybody else.' These villains come from somewhere, and they were often charismatic and popular and seemed normal to everybody else. Yeah.

Lorrie: And we know that he used to be really, really good-looking, and that's something that doesn't matter to him because he sold that away without a concern.

JC: It was more important to gain power and to extend his own life beyond the natural.

Lorrie: Yeah. He was always able to gain trust from people, but what he really wanted was to seek out other dark wizards and do things that Dumbledore doesn't want to talk about that can't be reversed. All right, we're dealing with someone where, when you have to fight them, you have to be really careful all the time not to become them.

JC: I think a little bit about the comparison with Lockhart, too, because of the description of Tom Riddle leaving Hogwarts and then going around and learning Dark Magic from unsavory wizards or whatever around the world, and it made me think about Lockhart going out and learning about magic and then taking it for his own in a different way. Lockhart, as we saw in the Chamber when he was just going to leave the kids there, he's pretty dark and awful, too. He's not like Voldemort, but he's not a very good person, and he's done a lot of damage and he's hurt a lot of people for his own gain. I thought it was interesting, that comparison between those two characters who went out into the world and took from other people for their own gain.

Lorrie: The thing about Lockhart is he's not deep. Again, coming back to my guy Snape, everything about Lockhart is the opposite of Snape. All right, Snape -- whatever his negative qualities are -- I think being deep is, if not positive, at least fascinating. Yeah, there's more there.

JC: And Snape is so absent from these last few chapters, too. The last time we see Snape is in the teacher's lounge.

Lorrie: Yeah, where he does a great job.

JC: When he helps to dismiss Lockhart, and we don't see Snape again for the rest of the book.

Lorrie: This is a really light year for him.

JC: Yeah. It's about to get busy. Next time, next year.

Lorrie: Oh, he's about to have a really bad year. It's not going to let up. Oh, poor guy. Ugh. I think even people who really, really hate Snape have to admit that he had a rough time during the Prisoner of Azkaban year.

JC: Having to make the monthly potion for his former school bully -- whom he knows is a werewolf capable of slaughtering the kids in the school -- and that Dumbledore let this guy in. Yeah, it's like, "Oh, my God."

Lorrie: Yeah, we're about to have a rollicking good time with Prisoner of Azkaban when we come back.

JC: Yes. All right.

Lorrie: Looking forward to it.

JC: It's my favorite, so I'm looking forward to it, too. I don't know. Will it still be my favorite at the end of this process? That's a question that will be answered.

Lorrie: That's a good question. It's not my favorite and it's never been my favorite, but I've always grudgingly had to admit that, in my opinion, it's pretty much a perfect book. There's little flaws here and there because it was written by a human, but essentially, no, I bow down. It's an achievement.

JC: Interesting. Okay, which one is your favorite then?

Lorrie: I love Order of the Phoenix the most, because I think the ideas explored there are incredible. I think the complexity is off the charts and true, and I think what she achieves -- making the points that she's trying to make about politics and human nature -- stands up to adult or children's fiction, and I admire her mastery. It does have flaws, but that's my rating scale. I don't take off points for flaws if the essential achievement is so monumental that I'm just in awe. I think Half-Blood Prince is also a perfect book and it is better crafted than Order of the Phoenix, but Order of the Phoenix is the one that really blows my mind.

JC: I'm looking forward to reading that one, too, because I think I've only read Order of the Phoenix once.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, it's great.

JC: I'm looking forward to getting into it again. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's deep.

JC: That's cool. And I think when we get there, I'm sure I will talk about this again: that the first time I read Order of the Phoenix, I didn't understand it, and I just moved on. Instead of trying to understand it, I just moved on, and when I saw the film version, I went, 'Oh.' The film version distilled down some things that I had found really confusing; at that point, I wanted to go back and read it again, and I just never got around to it because life, so I'm looking forward to reading it again.

Lorrie: I will say that, when I pretend that I'm explaining this series so that people can explain it to their kids -- because I don't want to say, "No, you, adult, did not understand this the first time you read it" -- the one thing that people most go "Oh, my God" about and admit, "Wow, I never understood that, but I never went back to figure it out," is: what on earth was actually happening during the Occlumency lessons? What was Snape's real motivation? What was really going on? Because those lessons... the more I understood about them, the more complicated and mind-blowing this achievement became to me. She was achieving so many things line-by-line in those chapters. It's a tour de force.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: And I don't think most adult readers -- even really, really discerning ones -- have understood to their own satisfaction what was happening in those chapters. Yeah. That's a long way from now, though.

JC: That's a long way from now. It's like a year from now. Maybe... we'll see.

Lorrie: Oh, let's just read faster.

JC: Yes, there you go. There you go.

Lorrie: I'll talk to you then.

JC: Yeah.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at [HPAfter2020.com](http://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.