

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 3.1

Book 3, Chapter 1: Owl Post

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 Three, Chapter One: Owl Post.

Lorrie: Owl Post. Harry turns 13 and receives owl post in his bedroom at the Dursleys: birthday cards and presents, a biting book, and a form for his guardians to sign so he can visit Hogsmeade on weekends. So, JC, we're here at Prisoner of Azkaban.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: You have said that this is the book that got you hooked on the series. What are you looking forward to as we start to discuss it?

JC: I'm not exactly sure which chapter... when this book really took off for me, so I'm looking forward to seeing when that happens. Somewhere... I don't know. I can't remember if it was earlier or later in the book, but there was a point in which I went, "Yes! Oh, my God!" so I'm looking forward to figuring out when that was again. Another thing that I'm really curious to see is how the plot with Lupin as a teacher reads to me now differently than it did before. I think every time I've read this book... and I'm not a huge re-reader of books, to be honest. I've maybe read this three or four times at the most. I'm really curious to see how taking off the Remus/Sirius shipper goggles and reading this and thinking about it from the perspective later on, so I'm not thinking about it from a shipping perspective but thinking about it as 'Okay, this guy's been hired as a teacher, and everyone who's been hired as a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher has something really dark going on in their life.' I'm really interested in thinking about that: how that affects the school, how his presence in the school affects my reading of it, and, of course, also looking at the relationship between him and Snape, because I have a different perspective on Snape now than I did the last time I read this.

Lorrie: So you were a Remus/Sirius shipper?

JC: That's where I started, yeah. I definitely started off as a Remus/Sirius shipper back when I was first reading this.

Lorrie: And did you get that from the books, or because there was a community of fic?

JC: That's a good question. I think, probably, I had seen people talking about that ship and that's where I got the idea. I was coming into this also as a Star Wars fan, and I wasn't thinking about the ship-ability of the kids at this point because they were still such children, so I was looking at the grown-ups in the book for all my shipper needs, for sure.

Lorrie: This is the one book out of the seven that has no Voldemort in it, and it feels like Harry's allowed to work through his family and history and emotional issues without Voldemort looming in and taking charge of everything.

JC: That's interesting. I don't think I had thought about it before, but yeah. There's no Voldemort. Wow.

Lorrie: It's more romantic that way. I read this chapter in the new MinaLima illustrated edition that was published in October of 2023, which is different from the large format Jim Kay-illustrated editions; and I did donate the equivalent of the cover price to the Transgender Law Center, which is part of my initiative to offset giving money to the franchise. The MinaLima edition contains paper-engineered interactive elements, such as a Monster Book of Monsters and a paper dollhouse of Hogsmeade (which are incredibly lovely and charming), and they're designed to make the reading experience feel more immersive. For example, the letters that Harry gets from Ron, Hermione and Hagrid are printed on illustrations of what looked like real letters. I find that this makes it harder to read. I'm not sure if it's part of the story or if it's an illustration; it doesn't flow continuously for me, like reading the letters in line with the rest of the text. To me, it's very much a book for somebody who already knows the series. Harry Potter fans -- being who we are -- a lot of people want the feeling of buying a Harry Potter book and we'll buy those same stories, the same texts, in multiple editions, multiple different covers, different illustrations. Another way of knowing that this series is really not going anywhere: cancellation is one tactic, but not necessarily going to win the greater struggle that's happening here. It really felt emotional to me to see the copyright text, "1999 by J.K Rowling, illustrations and design by MinaLima 2023," because I know that a lot of people, a lot of fans will say, "Well, the story doesn't belong to the author anymore; it belongs to us, the fans, who have made fan works from it and taken it into our lives." That always had a little bit of over-protest to me. We can say that as much as we want. I think the story does belong still, at least in great part, to the author, but MinaLima have a much greater claim than most of us to making that statement, because they are the graphic design house that made all of the props for all of the movies. They created the look of Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade and the castle; they created the look of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter in Universal Studios theme parks; and Eduardo Lima is gay, and they have extremely not subtle Pride decorations in the House of MinaLima flagship store every June. By not subtle, I mean things like they have a three-story building that's their shop,

and they have rainbow flag banners that start from the third-floor windows and go all the way to the ground.

JC: Nice.

Lorrie: And they also, for free every June, have these badges, these buttons. If you visit the store, you can get one for free, and they show an owl -- a barn owl, not a particular character in any fantasy series about a small wizard or anything like that. Just a barn owl flying over a Progress Pride flag background. There's nothing to say they can't do this.

JC: Where is their shop, by the way?

Lorrie: It's in London.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, you have to go in person to London to get it; they're not selling it. This is, to me, one of the examples of co-creators of the Potterverse showing that yes, they had a stake in this series. This story means something to them; they are also making it, and they don't agree with transphobia. You will see signs like this from, for example, the Cursed Child casts and crew around the world, you'll see this from Warner Brothers, and you see this from MinaLima.

JC: That's really interesting. For our winter break -- which just happened as we record this -- we went to Italy, which was a trip that we have been planning to take for several years. We flew through London, and there was a Harry Potter shop in Heathrow in the terminal that we were flying out at. I walked past it and I really thought about it: in a previous existence, I would have spent an hour in there, and I would have bought a whole bunch of things. I didn't feel like I could even go in. I thought, 'What would I even buy?' With my kiddo, we both stood and looked, and I was like, "Yeah, kiddo, I don't feel like I even want to go into this shop." I didn't want any official merchandise, none of that. But the idea of something that's been created by someone else... You can argue that all the stuff that was in that shop is probably Warner Brothers or whatever who's getting the money for it. But I do like the idea of buying from fan creators or adjacent creators. That feels different to me, because you're honoring the contribution of someone else's perspective on this world.

Lorrie: There's an interactive museum exhibit that started out in Philadelphia, and I went there. I did not pay admission; I was there covering it for a podcast, and I wore my shirt that Fox Estacado made with her graphic that says "Harry Potter Fan for Trans Rights", and many employees of the museum exhibit came up to me and said, "I like your shirt." And so on purpose, I didn't spend money there, and I was present in the space. It's not that any way of doing it is any more pure than any other way. Truly, there are few ways to do this that are pure. It's a population that exists, people operating within Harry Potter fan space who have this conflict and dialogue going on in their heads the whole time and are making individual decisions uncomfortably about this. You could see with people attending. There was the whole spectrum

of people completely not aware of this; people who are aware and I didn't know where they stood on it; people who are conflicted; people who were hoping that none of their friends saw them there. The chapter itself, though: here we start with Harry doing his homework, in secret, on the topic of witch burning. Witch burning in the 14th century was completely pointless.

JC: Oh, my God. Okay. I don't think that ever rubbed me the wrong way before. Damn, it just felt really... I don't know. It sent so many messages to me about the fact that okay: first of all, they're basically saying that on the rare occasion they caught a real witch or wizard, they didn't burn, so it was pointless. Okay, no. You know how many people died?! So this idea that that's not even a concern... the Wizarding World -- the materials that Harry is reading -- they're not concerned about the innocent Muggles who died horribly. It's not even in the text, in the way that when I was a kid growing up in the South, the text did not talk about the experiences of enslaved people in any way that was respectful or thoughtful about their experience. It just hit me like, 'Oh, damn.' This is really callous on the part of the Wizarding World, and I don't know if it's the author not thinking that deeply about it and just making it funny (because of Wendelin the Weird, who actually liked being burned because it was fun). I couldn't not think about the fact that the innocent Muggles who were executed weren't even mentioned in the book Harry was reading.

Lorrie: My read of this was so different, because yeah, I could not imagine that this author was unaware of the mass violence that occurred in different stages of witch-burning hysteria. We know that Harry's Wizarding World is built on all of this uneasy secrecy, where anxiety about that kind of persecution is never far under the surface. That's why it's such a severe thing to break the secrecy statute. I remember the first time I read this book, I was -- wow -- really taken by that, because I thought this is such a fantasy. I had wondered, how is this author dealing with something that was historically so bloody and terrifying? I thought, 'Well, maybe there's some alternate timeline in which there's some sort of defense against all this.' But yeah, Wendelin the Weird 'enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation' at the stake and not burning at all, and just pretending to be dying in agony: she's letting the Muggles think that the horrendous thing they're employing is actually happening because she can't stop that overall movement. When I read that she allowed herself to be caught 47 times in various disguises, it made me think she had offered herself as a decoy to witch hunters, and maybe this was the author's way of saving the lives of 47 witch hunt victims in her imagination.

JC: I can't dig into it too much, because obviously she's not burning after a while. That was one of the points of the witch burning, was that if they don't burn they must be a witch.

Lorrie: I guess she must have done some sort of illusion, and then, I don't know, made them see a burnt mess.

JC: Oh, man.

Lorrie: Yeah, the fantasy is not very robust because the historical reality is so grim.

JC: But it also reminds me of watching my own kid go through history classes. In middle school, especially, it felt like what he was reading in history was designed to capture a tween's attention rather than actually convey any kind of history. I remember there was a day when he was in seventh grade and it was Texas history that year; they were reading about the Indigenous people who lived in Texas before the Spaniards came through and smallpox wiped everybody out, so a really long time ago, and the way it described the Indigenous people was so incredibly disrespectful and racist that it was...

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: I finally had to step aside and say, "I can't. This is awful." My kiddo, we talked about it -- we were all online at this point; it was during the pandemic -- and he wrote a big, long letter to his teacher explaining why it was racist and citing sources. We put a lot of work into this. We had time.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yes.

JC: You know how it was back then. And it was a really great learning experience for both of us, but he sent it to his teacher and his teacher wrote back a very thoughtful reply and said, "Yeah, this is district curriculum. Thank you for pointing this out. I'll pass this on to the head of the Social Studies curriculum for our grade and let them know." But basically saying, "Yeah, we all have to use the same materials, and you're right, this is not okay." But it made me think about what Harry's reading: it's that same thing. "How do we catch a 13-year-old's attention? Well, we're going to talk about Wendelin the Weird. We're not going to talk about the fact that Muggles slaughtered innocent Muggles." Anyway, I don't know. It made me think about watching my own kid's history curriculum go by in wild ways.

Lorrie: Well, we know, though, that this is also setting the stage in this volume for the story about Peter Pettigrew or Sirius Black murdering masses of Muggles.

JC: Interesting. I hadn't thought about that.

Lorrie: That was what made Sirius Black such a fugitive: he endangered the secrecy of the Wizarding World so grievously, and that's what keeps him a fugitive.

JC: It's not the murder.

Lorrie: Yeah, right.

JC: That's so interesting. Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's the fact that it was in plain sight of Muggles. Yeah, right, because Sirius turns out to be equally feared by Muggles and wizards. He's a crossover threat.

JC: Right, so another thing in this first chapter: maybe this is the last book where this happens, but so much of this first chapter felt like filler to remind us what we're reading. It felt annoying at this point because if you're on the third book, you know that Harry's a wizard, you know that the Dursleys hate him, and you know that he goes to Hogwarts. Oh, my God. There were multiple sentences I was just skimming as I read and I was like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah. We know, we know, we know.' We're actually going to see a little bit more of that in this chapter even, because the Weasleys are in Egypt and Hermione is in France, and both of the letters that Harry gets from them are talking about looking at the Wizarding history in the place that they're in. I love that kind of depth that it adds to the universe. I think that's the first time we've seen that in the series. We haven't really stepped outside of the Wizarding World of Great Britain until now, but it's like, 'Oh, yeah, of course there were ancient Egyptian wizards, and of course all those curses they put on tombs were real, because they were wizards.' And Hermione being in the village and France and being like, 'Oh, I can look into the Wizarding history here,' and that idea that if you just look, you'll see it. I grew up in the South, and I was an adult before I was able to look at the place I grew up in and see the physical evidence of the systemic racism all around me. I just didn't see it, and then once I knew to look for it, it was like, 'Holy shit. How did I not see this before? How did I not see the redlining in my hometown? How was it not obvious to me?' I feel there's a little bit of that for me, too, that it reminded me of this idea: once you know to look for things, it changes your perspective and then it's all around you.

Lorrie: So what did you notice, JC, about the beginning of this chapter?

JC: I think, first, that Harry's attempt to give his phone number to his friends at the end of the last book completely backfired. He's like, "Call me this time," not realizing how much that was going to freak out Uncle Vernon.

Lorrie: I guess nobody's... yeah. Nobody's ever called Harry before.

JC: This is a good point. I bet so. The fact that anyone was asking for Harry at all, let alone who's asking in such a very weird way. If Hermione had called first, it might have been okay because she would have known.

Lorrie: There was a nod to fat shaming here: "The distant, grunting snores of his enormous cousin, Dudley." You could have just left out that one adjective. It would have been fine.

JC: Right. What was the point of that?

Lorrie: What else did you notice?

JC: Okay, the image of the two owls carrying Errol, because they flew in bringing stuff. It's funny for one thing, but also we get some little hints here in this chapter: the owls in the Wizarding World are presented as being really sentient beings with the ability to communicate to each other a lot. The fact that an owl just shows up in France... Hedwig goes to France where Hermione is, knowing that Hermione is going to want to give Harry a present. What the heck.

That's a long way to fly, but maybe owls fly through some kind of magical wormhole. I don't know. So the two of them carrying poor Errol is funny, the school owl looking very proper.

Lorrie: That they took responsibility for the elderly owl, and that Hedwig thought that the way the Dursleys treat Harry is disgraceful. She thought, 'You know what? I'm going to do something about this. This is awful. This child deserves presents.'

JC: Yeah. What are owls in this universe? Yeah. Now, did Errol come all the way from Egypt, is my question, because that's where the Weasleys are.

Lorrie: There is that, yeah.

JC: But they know Errol is kind of old and not that well. Why would they send the owl from Egypt? I don't know.

Lorrie: One way or another, though, they're getting presents to Harry.

JC: Yes, which is really cool to see. It sounds like this is the first birthday for Harry where people have remembered it and sent him things, and how much it means to him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Somebody loves Harry. This is so much better than last year, when he wasn't getting his mail at all.

JC: Yeah. "Here's something that you will like," like Hermione giving him the Broom Servicing Kit, which is like, "Oh, yeah, that's great," and also recognizing what Harry is good at and interested in. This is what a good friend does. They know. They see this, and they're like, "For you, you're going to love this." It's so thoughtful, and it's cool that Harry has people like that in his life.

Lorrie: Then we see that the photos in the Daily Prophet are black and white. The Wizarding newspapers, the photos can move, but they can't do color printing.

JC: And I was wondering, too: most newspapers, at the time that these books were written, were still doing... I think USA Today was the one that was doing color in the 90s, as I recall, but most of them were still black and white because it was cheaper.

Lorrie: Yep, by a lot.

JC: For something people are going to look at once and then throw away.

Lorrie: Yeah. Apparently it was 1997 when the New York Times started using color photos on the front page.

JC: Oh, I remember.

Lorrie: This is good for setting this as a period piece, and more important now than it would have been when the book was first published. 'Okay, black and white photos, this is old.'

JC: Yeah, I think it was cute. The letters were written so much in the voices of those characters. I hear Hermione in particular through her letter; Ron's letter was more verbose than I think either of us would have expected of Ron, but it was like we have to give the backstory here. It's so cool that the Weasleys got to do this trip though, too. I think that's great, and the idea that if you won a lot of money, you would spend it on an experience.

Lorrie: Yeah, together.

JC: Yeah. 'Let's do that,' instead of saying, 'Oh, we're going to fix up our house or whatever.' That idea of, 'Okay, we're going to take a trip together, something we've never been able to do, and we're going to go visit Bill and we're going to...'

Lorrie: How much does it cost to carry that whole family anywhere?

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: This is enough to cover everyone.

JC: And this was also the point at which I started thinking about 'how do wizards travel internationally,' and we haven't been introduced to Portkeys yet. How would they get there? Where would they stay? If Arthur Weasley has a hard time navigating in the Muggle world, where do wizards stay when they go on vacation in other countries? Do they just go straight to a Wizarding town? I just spent a couple weeks where we went to Rome and Florence and Venice.

Lorrie: Visas.

JC: Yeah. What kind of visa do you need? And then at the federal government level, the Muggle government is aware of the Wizarding world, because you would have to be. It's one of the things that when you become president...

Lorrie: Yeah, one of those secret things.

JC: They suddenly tell you all the secret things, and that would be one of them. That's on the list.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you look all ashen afterwards.

JC: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah, exactly. Aliens exist, magic or whatever, I'm putting it on the list.

Lorrie: Oh, no.

JC: Oh, can I also say that both Hermione and Ron mentioned that Percy is Head Boy, and in the photo he's wearing the Head Boy badge on vacation. Oh, my God. On a fez. 'Oh, my gosh, Percy.' Clearly, that's very important to him.

Lorrie: It is very important.

JC: But it is kind of funny that that's his identity.

Lorrie: He worked for it. He worked for it so hard.

JC: He sure did. So another thing that makes an appearance here, by way of Hagrid's birthday gift to Harry, is the Monster Book of Monsters, which is a fun idea of this book. You're going to learn about monsters, but you have to tame this monster first, and it's also hilarious that none of the kids really figure out how to deal with this book for a long time. Hagrid assumes that they'll figure it out, just like Hagrid makes other assumptions.

Lorrie: Well, of course. Yeah, that's a really cute bit of writing, too. There are a couple of paragraphs when Harry is stalking the book; the book is obviously mildly malicious and it's lying in wait, and Harry has to outsmart it.

JC: Also, Hagrid's letter: it's short and sweet, but you could sense he's so excited. He's so proud that he's going to get to be this teacher, and he's not telling them yet. A little surprise.

Lorrie: He's saving it up. I didn't think about it until now: this is to make up for the fact that he just came from Azkaban.

JC: Oh, interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: Formally, it's that he's been cleared of the old charge that got him expelled in the first place. But in terms of emotion, the fact that Hermione gets a Time-Turner to make up for all of the months of schooling she missed, and Hagrid... 'Yes, Cornelius Fudge sent you to Azkaban for PR. Well, we understand what you went through, and you deserve something.'

JC: The interesting thing, too, is that this is the book where we find out how terrible Azkaban is, and we didn't really know in the last book. We didn't know about the Dementors, and it wasn't, "We're sending you off to be locked up." It was, "No, we're sending you a place where you're going to be subjected to torture." It adds a darker layer to Hagrid's experience in that book.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this can't be repaired. The damage done is permanent.

JC: Yeah. Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Which we're about to find out happened to somebody else for even longer.

JC: Indeed. I guess one more thing about the Monster Book of Monsters that I wanted to say is that when C.L. was in the fifth grade, I was a room parent that year and the teachers requested a Harry Potter-themed winter party. I have talked about this on the podcast before.

Lorrie: Yes, you have.

JC: But one of the crafts that I decided I wanted to make was Monster Books of Monsters. All the fifth graders made them. This is a thing you can actually look up online, on Pinterest or whatever. They're really easy to make and they're super cute, but little tiny notebooks that are two inches by four inches -- little, tiny spirals. Then you buy fake fur and cut the fake fur into the right sizes, and you hot glue the fake fur around the little notebook. And then you can put on googly eyes, you can cut out little felt teeth and make it look kind of vicious and everything. I had the kids make them that day and they were adorable. Oh, my gosh, it was one of the best crafts I've ever done with kids, because the kids knew what it was and they were so excited to make their own version. Some of them made them cute, and some of them made them scary. It was really fun. A craft that I recommend for children: making little mini Monster Books of Monsters.

Lorrie: Somebody gave me once a very large Monster Book of Monsters that was from Universal Studios, and if you pull the tongue, then it retracts and it makes a raspberry sound.

JC: Oh. I feel like I've seen one of those before, maybe in a store.

Lorrie: Yeah. When I worked with the fifth graders in our reading group, I had to think about this so hard because I wanted there to be a long discussion, but I didn't want it to get out of hand and I'm not a teacher. I don't have a lot of experience with keeping children around a table quietly, so I thought, well, how am I going to prevent them from talking over each other? Instead of a talking stick, I'm going to say, "Whoever is holding the Monster Book of Monsters, you're the one who's allowed to talk, and you signal the beginning and end of your turn by pulling the tongue." I thought that would make it fun for them and it did, but there came a while when it was actually slowing things down.

JC: For sure, yeah. I can see that.

Lorrie: Yeah, so after two sessions, I think we stopped using it, but we also actually mainly stopped using it because by then the tongue had ripped out and it wasn't working anymore.

JC: Wow. The one thing I can imagine too, though, is that in that setting, you're establishing this is the way this is going to work in this little community: we're going to take turns. And after you

go through the process of physically doing the thing to take turns, it gets in everybody's heads and then we'll just know. At that point, we're used to it. You establish it, then you don't need it anymore.

Lorrie: Yeah. So Harry's having a great time with all these birthday cards and presents, and then he gets the Hogwarts letter and there's a permission slip. "Get your parent or guardian to sign this slip, and then you'll have permission to visit Hogsmeade on weekends," and his heart sinks instantly, because of course. You can't expect the Dursleys.... Why would they give him this enjoyment?

JC: Yeah. He knows that they're not going to sign it.

Lorrie: First of all, they don't want him to have any fun ever, but then it's making the Wizarding World more real. It's acknowledging exactly what they don't want to acknowledge. The line from the book says, "It would be wonderful to visit Hogsmeade on weekends; he knew it was an entirely wizarding village, and he had never set foot there," and that felt to me like the feeling of going to a con where there are fellow nerds, or going to a queer Pride event where you're not the only one. The incredible affirmation that you feel when you see not only are you not the only one; there's an entire community with a history and a network. There are people who have access to that, and people who don't. Can you imagine, if you grew up like that, how different that would be from somebody who's never had access and didn't even know such a thing existed? So no, of course the Dursleys want to disempower him by never allowing such a thing.

JC: And that's actually a catalyst for a lot of things that would happen in the book, too. But yeah, Harry looking at it and just... Ugh. He already knows.

Lorrie: But to me, the secrecy involved in Hogsmeade -- in that this entire village has to be kept secret from Muggles -- and how threatening this whole world is to the Dursleys, this does tie back in to Wendelin the Weird and how her triumph and resisting being burnt underlines how impossible it was to win over that. What could you do about the witch burnings? Nothing.

JC: Something else that stands out to me about the whole permission slip thing: considering everything that has happened at Hogwarts in the last few years -- we have the Chamber of Secrets is opened, kids are getting Petrified, three-headed dogs -- considering all the dangerous shit of kids getting sent out into the Forbidden Forest for detentions, why is this the one they have to have permission for? There's something about that that I find funny.

Lorrie: It's hilarious. Yeah.

JC: It just seems like the school's covering its ass.

Lorrie: Yeah, very much.

JC: At one point, some student went to Hogsmeade and got in so much trouble that now the school's like, "Screw it, we have to have parent permission from here on out," but they don't have to have parent permission to do other dangerous things that happen. It's kind of funny.

Lorrie: Yeah. The first flippant answer that always comes to my mind is, "Oh, it's insurance." It's a liability issue.

JC: Don't know if the Wizarding World is as litigious as American society, but it's funny to think about.

Lorrie: Well, they're always worried about things going badly enough at Hogwarts that they're going to have to close to school.

JC: True.

Lorrie: And there are things that they accept responsibility for because they're within Hogwarts grounds, but they can't control what goes on in Hogsmeade.

JC: True.

Lorrie: There are bad actors within the Wizarding World and they can't control all of that; that's not under Dumbledore's oversight. But the castle itself has all of these spells to protect it, and that is something that Dumbledore can control. Hogsmeade is not under his control at all. He can't.

JC: And two, you have pubs and things. Kids are going and drinking alcohol. It's interesting. It is funny. "Oh, now we want the parents to give permission for all this stuff to be happening."

Lorrie: I think all of the emphasis on how Hogwarts is the safest place to be because Dumbledore can protect you... this does introduce the concept that there are places where Dumbledore or your parents can't protect you anymore. Second and First years aren't allowed there; by Third year, okay, you're allowed. You can step outside, but like the Restricted Section -- needing people to be a certain age before they can go -- this is also like, okay, the fact that there's an age restriction on this and parental permission is teaching the kids to recognize that you have to have some alertness about you to do this. There is a danger. It's desirable, it's very desirable, but know that we're trusting you.

JC: Yeah, and that idea that that's the age at which you want kids to start having more independence and responsibility and feeling like they can go and do things like that, which unfortunately -- for your youngest and for mine -- was exactly the time that the pandemic happened.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So that idea, at that age, that my kiddo would have been able to go and wander around in a small town, I'm like, yeah, no, that didn't happen. They missed that.

Lorrie: Yeah. To me, it feels like, 'Okay, you've ridden the subway a gazillion times on this route; this is the first time you're going to go alone. The route isn't going to change, the fee isn't going to change. You'll probably see the same --'

JC: 'You know what you're doing.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'But let me know that you got there safely.' Then there'll be people like Neville, where you would just know. 'No, he's not ready. He will get lost.'

JC: This is an interesting conversation, because today is my kiddo's 16th birthday.

Lorrie: Happy Birthday!

JC: Yeah, Happy Birthday to C.L., who is the composer of our music. C.L. is not interested -- has not been interested at all -- about learning to drive, so it's been this very interesting thing for me because my 16th birthday was centered around getting my driver's license and being able to be independent in that way. And C.L.'s just like, 'Nah, not interested. You don't have to sign the Hogsmeade permission letter. I'm not going anywhere.' Okay.

Lorrie: Oh, and looking very far ahead, that's the same thing that Harry can't believe when his own second son is not interested in going to Hogsmeade in Cursed Child.

JC: Oh, wow! I totally forgot about that.

Lorrie: So, can we talk about the fact that the theme music, the intro and outro for this podcast, was composed by a 15-year-old? Thank you, C.L. I'm amazed. My mind is still blown, and the music is so catchy. I find myself having it stuck in my head just as music, and then I'm disappointed because it only lasts thirty seconds. Where's the rest of it?

JC: Oh, it was really fun. I was in the room when he was composing it, and listening to him search for the perfect harpsichord sound was really fun. He just downloaded MIDI and tried them, and he kept tweaking and kept tweaking and kept pulling things. It's so interesting, the process of not only writing the music but then of arranging it.

Lorrie: Yeah. He downloaded new programs for this.

JC: Yeah, yeah. He learned a new tool that he'd been meaning to learn for a while, and learned how to put new virtual instruments into his DAW, which I'm saying words like I know what they mean.

Lorrie: I don't even know what that is.

JC: Maybe someone listening will know what DAWs are and stuff, but anyway, yeah. It was a fun thing for him.

Lorrie: So what instruments did he compose for this? I'm trying to remember.

JC: I know there's a harpsichord. He was trying to go with medieval-sounding instruments, so I think there might be some recorders in there, recorders instead of flutes. But the harpsichord sound he really liked. Also, I think that there's something old and Britishy, medieval-sounding about a harpsichord, so it felt like a good instrument for him.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I had to dust off some decades-old skills of my own because he said, "Oh, well, listen to this, and if you have any feedback -- if there's anything you want me to change, let me know," and I thought, how am I going to indicate that? Oh, I guess I used to know how to read music. "Do you have sheet music for this?" "Yeah, sure," and I got sent all of this... wow. And I thought, okay, I can do this. I can follow along bar by bar and say, "How about you make this louder, repeat this a little more..."

JC: Yeah, it was really cool. It was very specific feedback. He was like, "Wow, this is cool." That was a good experience for him.

Lorrie: I did buttonhole a number of people and say, "Listen to this theme music. He's fifteen." So I did brag.

JC: That's cool. He's very proud of it. I played him the beginning of the first episode so he could hear it. He was like, "That's me!" It's like, yes, it is.

Lorrie: Yeah, no, it sounds so good. Yeah.

INTRO MUSIC -- THANK YOU, C.L., AND HAPPY BELATED BIRTHDAY!

Lorrie: Thank you, C.L., and happy 16th birthday. We've set things up and this introductory chapter has looked so innocuous on the surface, but it has contained the seeds for all sorts of really intense plot lines that are about to happen, including the detail that I completely missed and would never have caught on about the photo of the Weasley Family containing Scabbers, the pet rat.

JC: Right, I forgot about it. Yes. Yes. Yeah, and then the idea that Ron sent Harry the Sneakoscope, and the Sneakoscope was going off and Ron's like, "I think it's broken, it just goes off all the time," and it doesn't go off for Harry. Hmmm, why is the Sneakoscope going off, sitting there next to Scabbers the rat?

Lorrie: It's a pretty good first chapter.

JC: It is, and that image of Harry falling asleep with his birthday cards propped up where he can see them. The first birthday cards he's ever gotten... It's nice. It ends on a nice note, and I don't know if the other first chapters did.

Lorrie: It's comforting, yeah. And then the next one is Aunt Marge's Big Mistake.

JC: That's going to be very interesting. That's going to be interesting to talk about for lots of reasons.

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts, and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.