



Transcript

Episode 3.11

Book 3, Chapter 11: The Firebolt

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 Eleven: The Firebolt.

Lorrie: Harry is consumed with rage. Ron and Hermione are fighting. Buckbeak might be executed... but it's Christmas at Hogwarts, so Harry gets a mysterious present: the best racing broom in the world.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: Hey, JC. It's time to talk about...

Lorrie & JC: The Firebolt!

Lorrie: Whoo!

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: So here we have Harry completely in a rage, because nobody has ever told him this super important stuff about his family. "Dumbledore, Hagrid, Mr. Weasley, Cornelius Fudge... why hadn't anyone ever mentioned the fact that Harry's parents had died because their best friend had betrayed them?" Here, we start off the chapter with Harry facing the thing that makes him the angriest in the entire world: people withholding his own story from him. He could pretty much kill them all at this point.

JC: It is interesting, too, that at the beginning of this chapter, we get that emotional payoff that I was talking about in the last episode of "Wow, it just washed over him and we didn't get to see his reaction at all." Then the next chapter is like, "Reaction! Volcano explosion!"

Lorrie: Oh.

JC: Yeah. I also think it's interesting, though, the description of him not really knowing how he got back. On the one hand, it's a cute narrative trick ("... and then he got back"). That's nice to be able to do as a writer, but it also conveys that he's so in his head.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. I totally was with him.

JC: And he's so upset that he can't pay attention to his surroundings. And then, that moment when he goes up to his bed and pulls the curtains around himself... I thought, 'Wow, that's so relatable.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Ron coming in like, "Harry? Okay, yeah, he's not communicating right now. Okay." So yeah, I very much relate to this overpowering rage that he's been feeling, where he's not even in control of it. Very few things make him this angry, and it's always the same thing: "How can you do this to me?" Then he takes out the photo album that Hagrid had given him and he looks up at Sirius' face; he's looking at handsome and laughing Sirius, and it's interesting how the spotlight illuminates a little bit at a time. Now, Sirius is somebody to Harry, and he isn't looking for Peter Pettigrew or Lupin yet; the spotlight hasn't illuminated those people yet. So what else did you respond to in this opening?

JC: I think just the things that you've already mentioned, which is Harry getting this little window into his own story but presented in a way that's really awful, that feeling of "Why didn't anyone tell me about this?" Later, he even mentions that probably even Draco Malfoy knew this and Harry didn't. It's like, oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Again, that feeling of "Why didn't people tell me this?" especially with Sirius Black on the loose. The fact that even Mr. Weasley had said earlier in the book, "Whatever you hear, don't go looking for him," and Harry's like, "Why would I go looking for somebody?" And now...

Lorrie: Yes. "What?!" Yeah.

JC: That is almost like a betrayal on top of it. "Yeah, they knew how I'd react, and then I reacted this way."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But finding out something about your past like that -- overhearing it from other people, with his friends there -- it's the worst. Yeah, I really feel for him here.

Lorrie: Yeah, and he can't trust... Even the adults that he thought he trusted have been in on it.

JC: Even Hagrid, yeah.

Lorrie: And it really emphasizes, yeah, all he has is Ron and Hermione. He can trust them. So here he is, imagining this lie about Sirius (that Sirius had done all these things that everybody is supposed to believe) and he's thinking bitterly that the dementors don't affect Sirius. He's so angry at Sirius that he thinks Azkaban isn't even a punishment for Sirius the way it would be for most people. He says "Sirius Black doesn't feel. He's fine." First of all, this is completely untrue, but it's the problem with being so full of hatred at someone that you demonize them and your empathy for them is killed. It does happen; we have to be careful about it. Snape does this with Harry. Snape says, "Oh, Harry Potter doesn't even feel criticism. It just bounces off of him." Yes,

he does. It's just that you have such strong feelings about it. It's not a stance that you adopt on purpose. It's when you're hostile towards someone; that's something that happens that you have to fight consciously, I think.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Harry is imagining all the things that must have happened when Sirius Black betrayed his parents and -- HAHA! -- went to Voldemort and formed his alliance. None of this is true, but it's so vivid to him that it takes a place of truth in his mind, and this is a dangerous thing that happens to people -- to us -- when it's so vivid. Stories that are not true or may not be true, they become narratives that we believe about a situation, and the power of that really takes over. The fact that he could see it so vividly, even though it didn't actually happen... Ah. The part that says, "A hatred such as he had never known before was coursing through Harry like poison." That really got to me, because I know that feeling (from myself and from other people) that when there are people that have ruined your life or your loved ones' lives so thoroughly, you could almost kill them; you're so angry, you could kill somebody. He would have felt that about Snape if Dumbledore hadn't made the conscious decision to withhold the information from Harry that Snape had been the one to tell Voldemort to go after... This is, of course, setting up Harry to have a tremendous betrayal later when he finds that out, but how can you, in a war, have the boy who can take down Voldemort having classes with the double agent who has repented if he knows that that happened? Because then, I don't think his hatred for Snape could have been controlled. That is a deception, a conspiracy, that I'm actually on board with, knowing that it's going to have an incredible cost to it later when Harry finds out. Wrongful incarceration is another thing (somebody ruining your life or your loved ones' lives) that can cause this degree of hatred, especially when you're wrongfully incarcerated and the people who put you there know that you were innocent or don't care whether you're innocent or guilty. Another example I could think of from the story that could cause this degree of hatred is what Remus feels toward Fenrir Greyback.

JC: We don't find out about that in this book, right?

Lorrie: Later.

JC: Fenrir Greyback. It's later, yeah?

Lorrie: Yeah. We find that out in the fifth book, that it was done deliberately. But yeah, it's the life-ruining, plus the conscious choice on somebody's part to go ahead and do it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then the question of whether or not they feel any remorse about it. Oh... Harry is containing all of that emotion at the moment. There's the tiniest, smallest, most subtle hint here that when Snape sees Neville with Harry and Lupin, he sees the Marauders again; "Peter Pettigrew (who resembled Neville Longbottom)." That's it. That is the single clue. But yeah, Snape is totally having memories of the Marauders when he sees Potter the Second and the little chubby hanger-on, the actual Remus Lupin and the shadow of Sirius Black stalking around somewhere. He probably is remembering... It was not that long ago for him, and it was in the same place that these four people were being dangerous, so it's a very tense situation. And then what really got me was when Hermione and Ron -- they've been talking about this -- they have to talk Harry down. They have to say, "You don't want to actually kill Sirius Black, right?"

JC: And Harry's not really answering.

Lorrie: I don't know. I don't know! You don't understand! He's not saying no, and Ron has to say, very sternly, "Sirius Black is not worth dying for." What that really sharply reminded me of is that I had to do that once: I had to talk to somebody about not killing their abuser. It was not at all realistic; it was very, very far from being a plan. It was the same place that Harry is in now, having just understood that someone had done this, and it's the first grappling with the rage. I was being very supportive, and the person was saying how much they hated whoever the abuser was and that this person deserved to die. I was being supportive and agreeing, and then it suddenly dawned on me: 'Oh, I'm not actually sure that they know that the rules about not ever going after someone and doing vigilante justice still apply. Even if it's the person who ruined your life, you still... No, you can't do that.' There came a point when I had to say, "No, I'm not going to help you hunt them down and punish them." I'm not sure this person would have gone ahead with that. It was really the first flush, but there was that scared moment when I'm like, 'Oh, oh, I can't assume; I have to say.' That definitely speaks to how life-changing this moment is when vague awfulness that has been unclear or suppressed comes into clarity like this. The rage... I thought it was a figure of speech that this person was angry enough to kill, but I could not be sure.

JC: That makes me think, too, about what schools have to do now when they get reports about kids who have threatened violence, who have threatened to come in and shoot other kids or threaten to hurt themselves. This has become much more important in the last twenty, twenty-five years, but it seems like it's getting more and more important as we're becoming more aware of the importance of supporting mental health in schools. Every school has a hotline, or if a child is concerned about somebody else, there's someone to tell and the kids all know who that is. That's happened in my own kid's school, where there was a threat made and the lines were all opened, and if anyone has the information, come and talk to us about this, but that understanding that when people are in that position, bad things can happen; the school is the one in the position of having to step in, make sure that bad things don't happen, and that person gets the support that they need.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you can't tell if it's going to be a false alarm or not.

JC: Right, because of the emotion. Yeah.

Lorrie: You can't be so scared of raising a false alarm that you miss the times that somebody really needs help.

JC: Right? That was the thing that, as you were talking, made me think about Harry in this scene. Ron and Hermione are the only ones who can run this interference.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: You can tell in this scene that they are both scared.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: They're in that position of "Our friend might do something really dangerous and really stupid, and he's too emotional to make that decision. What do we do?"

Lorrie: And they're the only line of defense, because the people they would go to usually are the ones who'd done the betrayal. So yeah, here they are, thirteen and fourteen. They're it.

JC: Yeah. There are a lot of kids who have had that experience, too.

Lorrie: Who really do have to take that on. Jumping ahead to *Cursed Child*, this really emphasizes why adult Harry (when he's talking to his own kid of the same age) has no experience to fall back on to except "find yourself a Ron and Hermione," because really, he did not have anybody else.

JC: This is set in the 90s. This book was written pre-Columbine.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. This book came out at a time when violence in school was not at the forefront of people's awareness in a way that it is now.

Lorrie: Yeah. People didn't have the same assumption of easy access to weapons.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, here is Harry grappling with emotions that are really too big for someone to face, Hermione and Ron trying to put some limits on him, and not having a whole lot of tools to help them, because Hermione says, "The dementors will catch (Sirius) Black, and he'll go back to Azkaban and -- and serve him right!" That's not the strongest of arguments. It's innocent of her, at this point, to think that that's how justice works -- they're all about to find out that is not really how it works sometimes -- but also that there are problems with revenge fantasies. That's a revenge fantasy, that's a clean solution: depending on jails to perform a mental function that takes the complexity and worry off of you. Yeah, they're about to find out that no, it's not that clean. Yeah, so with revenge, like you mentioned before, Harry realizes Malfoy knows. "Remember what he said to me in Potions? 'If it was me, I'd hunt him down myself.... I'd want revenge.'" That actually helps to limit Harry, because if Draco wants him to do something, obviously it must be the wrong choice.

JC: Or the worst thing to do would be to do something that Draco would approve of or would agree with, or to make it look like he followed Draco's advice.

Lorrie: Or that Draco's egging him on.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Hey, Potter, I know what you want to do." Right?

JC: "Hey, whatever works."

Lorrie: Oh, God. It also is foreshadowing, though, that this is something that's going to turn out to be true of Draco: when Harry puts Draco's dad in prison, Draco does hunt him down and get revenge.

JC: Yeah, true.

Lorrie: And then, just in case things weren't complicated enough, we get this tiny, tiny moment: "Ron's pocket quivered."

JC: Oh, my God. The idea that Peter Pettigrew heard every word of that conversation.

Lorrie: Everything, and that is a perfect re-reader moment. Reading this the first time, you can't - I don't know anyone who had clued into who Scabbers was. I certainly had no clue.

JC: No. At this point, yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: At this point, it's just a squabble between Ron and Hermione. It's like, "Oh, my God, and then there's the thing happening with our pets," but that's such a good example of how the series is designed for you to go back and reread. It's an instruction; it's an arrow. Oh, my goodness! I'm going to have to go back and read the whole book, and every time Scabbers is in the background while they're talking about the tragedy of Peter Pettigrew and the encroaching nearness of Sirius Black... Oh, my goodness, no wonder he's losing his fur and has to deal with Ron naively protecting him, which is sweet. Peter Pettigrew is dependent on the goodwill of this boy to staunchly vouch for his innocence, but then he's doing that by keeping him still when he's trying to escape.

JC: I almost hesitate to bring this up, but how much do we read into the author having an adult man disguise himself and sneak in to be around these children? How much do we read into that now, or is it just me going... I don't know. I'm feeling anytime that she's doing anything like this, it's making me second guess what her intentions are.

Lorrie: I don't get any weird feelings about this. Are you talking about pedophilia or predatory anything?

JC: I think just the idea that someone who has bad intentions would disguise themselves and sneak into places where they're "not supposed to be" in order to do nefarious things... I can't help but think of that now. Then there's also a line we'll get to later in the book: Ron's horror that he let Scabbers sleep in his bed all this time. Yeah.

Lorrie: I'm not getting that sense from this, because I get a strong sense (of Wormtail's characterizations and motives) that all he wants is to survive and hide and be protected. I don't get the sense that he's up to anything.

JC: Despite the Sneakoscope going off constantly!

Lorrie: He's lying about who he is, but I don't get the sense that he has an agenda other than to save his own skin.

JC: Survive.

Lorrie: Yeah. He is certainly portrayed as doing absolutely nothing, and that is now being disturbed because now he knows somebody is out there who can "rat out" his disguise.

JC: BAH-DUM-CHA!

Lorrie: That wasn't even intentional. Then his safe hideaway is now threatened, and he's thinking very hard...

JC: In his little rat brain.

Lorrie: About what he's going to do to survive this.

JC: Yeah. Sirius knows what really happened, and at this point Pettigrew (in rat form, at least) has to understand that Sirius is coming after him.

Lorrie: Yeah, knows exactly where he is, why he is there. Yeah, he's got to think quickly.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: So yeah, Ron's pocket quivered. Wow, that is going to be something on re-reads. The amount of tension going on in this scene with everybody's different secret agendas is remarkable.

JC: It is funny that every time the Sneakoscope goes off, everybody in the scene is hiding something. That seems to be... The last time we saw it...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Everybody in that room had a secret, Sneakoscope's going nuts. Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay, the Sneakoscope goes off in the scene. Who's hiding what? Is anyone not hiding anything?

JC: Harry's...

Lorrie: Harry's hiding the Grim.

JC: The Grim, that's true. And also... Well, maybe he's not really hiding his desire to go on a little murderous rampage, but...

Lorrie: Right, but he is not telling people how worried he is about this black dog.

JC: Right, that's true. Hermione's got the whole Time-Turner situation going on; then she's constantly traveling through time and doesn't want anyone -- or cannot let anyone know, rather.

Lorrie: Has promised not to tell anyone.

JC: Has promised not to tell anyone. There's Peter Pettigrew, obviously. What about Ron?

Lorrie: I'm not sure Ron is hiding anything.

JC: I can't think of anything he would be hiding at this point.

Lorrie: He is the innocent providing shelter unwittingly.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: So yeah, that Sneakoscope is going nuts. Oi. So yeah, everybody believes that the only part of Wormtail that his mother got back was a finger in a box. Ew.

JC: Yeah, that is kind of gross.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: But also, is that when Peter... when the pocket quivered?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Was it that news or... Yeah, which is interesting.

Lorrie: Or... no, let me see. Oh, no, it's when Hermione and Ron are trying to distract Harry so that he doesn't go off and kill somebody, and they say, "Oh, yeah, we should go visit Hagrid," thinking, 'Yes, that'll distract Harry. We'll visit Hagrid!' Harry says that he'll never know what his parents wanted, because thanks to Sirius Black, he's never spoken to them; that's when Ron's pocket quivers. Ron says, "Let's go see Hagrid," and Harry says, "Yeah, let's go... and I can ask him how come he never mentioned Black when he told me all about my parents!" Hermione and Ron think, 'Oh, that's not where we were going with that, but okay.' That's the best they've got, so they all head out to see Hagrid, and Hagrid is crying over Buckbeak.

JC: This scene of the kids trying to confront Hagrid reads differently to me now, I think, than it did the first time or the previous time that I read this book. A lot of it is: for me, in the last fifteen, twenty years -- however long it's been since I first read this book; fifteen years, let's say, even though I am a middle-aged person -- any innocence I had about the possibility of justice being served, under the right circumstances and with the right argument, has been completely shattered. The kids are like, "No, there has to be something we can do. We can come up with the right argument, we can help you, we can do research," all this. They're trying really hard to comfort him, and Hagrid is basically like, "There's nothing. It's already been fixed."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "The situation is bleak and there's nothing we can do," and the kids haven't figured that out yet and the adult is there. That feeling of the more innocent people in this situation still having hope that things can change if we just follow the legal recourse that we have... Oh, that hit me differently this time.

Lorrie: Hagrid is completely correct; it's simply a matter of experience versus innocence. He is correct that Buckbeak is doomed, even though the hearing hasn't taken place yet. It's all about watching the kids get their innocence ruined, but yeah, they're going to become paralegals now. They're going to help and, well, the effort can't hurt. Who knows? Hagrid says, "Yeh don' know them gargoyles at the Committee fer the Disposal o' Dangerous Creatures! They've got it in fer interestin' creatures!" Yeah, they do. At that moment, oh, this author does something that I love. I love when she does this: when there's a moment that's so emotionally stunning that there are no words, she often has an animal make a noise to emphasize how innocent and unspeakable and real and universal this all is. "A sudden sound from the corner of Hagrid's cabin made Harry, Ron, and Hermione whip around. Buckbeak the hippogriff was lying in the corner, chomping on something that was oozing blood all over the floor." This is reminding me of a book that a good friend of mine is publishing this year. It's out in May; by the time this episode airs, it will have been published. The author is Robin Bernstein. *Freeman's Challenge: The Murder That Shook America's Original Prison for Profit*. It's about somebody who is wrongfully incarcerated and, like Sirius, was very young when he was thrown into prison, was framed for a crime that he always maintained he didn't commit. That changed his personality; the way that Sirius' life, so much of it, was bitterly wasted -- how his nature was permanently changed by false incarceration -- from people who didn't bother to find out if it was true or not. By the time the person is released or gets out, they're not an innocent person anymore by nature; they've been so ravaged by imprisonment that they are the kind of person that people feel okay punishing. They've been turned into a monster, because that's what they've all been saying about Sirius; anytime you see his unkempt, angry, snarling, matted, gaunt face, it's like, "Well, all you have to do is look at him.

Obviously, he's trouble." Yeah, by now he is. So yeah, there are a lot of different directions from which this chapter is approaching the danger of assuming guilt, of assuming that there are kinds of people that just deserve to be dehumanized or animals that deserve to be executed. Yeah. Hagrid, for the first time, talks to the kids about his experience at Azkaban the previous year. He says that walking past the dementors that are stationed at the school always brings him back to his recent stay in Azkaban and he says, "'Mind, the dementors weren't keen on lettin' me go.' 'But you were innocent!' said Hermione. Hagrid snorted. 'Think that matters to them? They don't care. Long as they've got a couple o' hundred humans stuck there with 'em, so they can leech all the happiness out of 'em, they don't give a damn who's guilty an' who's not.'" That is something to keep in mind about carceral states. If you love somebody, you have to protect them from being a victim of this mentality. If you love someone, you have to protect them from this. It's not okay. Then we have Hagrid -- this is very depressing -- saying that he "thought o' jus' lettin' Buckbeak go..." and convincing Buckbeak to fly away, "but how d'yeh explain teh a hippogriff it's gotta go inter hidin'?" This is so dark. That is a danger that families have to face when they're fleeing dangerous situations with small children. If you're going to make it safely, if you're going to have your small children survive, you have to do whatever it takes to make them understand that they have to be quiet.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Cheerful, cheerful stuff. I kind of feel bad. I feel apologetic talking about how dark this story is when the story is right here, being this dark.

JC: Yeah, it's dark. It's incredibly dark, and I think it's so interesting here that you get the sense that Hagrid hasn't talked about his Azkaban experience with anyone here. It comes out now because he's just so terrified and so emotional.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But he can't keep it in anymore, and he doesn't mean to unburden it on children, but he can't stop. He's traumatized, and this is his first chance to even say anything about it.

Lorrie: I can imagine he might have talked about it with Dumbledore.

JC: I hope so.

Lorrie: Because just how grave Dumbledore was in the previous book when Fudge was coming to take Hagrid away...

JC: Dumbledore... Yeah, Dumbledore would definitely know.

Lorrie: Know how incredibly wrong this is, and how he's angry at Fudge for not only doing this to innocent Hagrid, but then bringing dementors in to make everybody feel that way.

JC: Yeah, right. And it also makes me -- going back to the last chapter -- wonder, what the hell?! Hagrid could sit at the table with Fudge and have a drink after he was put through that?

Lorrie: Yeah. Like I said in the discussion of the last chapter, that would have been a beta note from me.

JC: Yeah. That doesn't make... especially now, looking at how Hagrid is reacting now.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ugh. Then the fear of going back to Azkaban, and then his notion -- this ties back to your discussion of your friend's book -- that you lose sight of who you are when you're in that situation, and you lose everything that makes you you. That is also really, really dark, but also really true. The way that... if you are... Obviously, I've never been wrongly incarcerated. I could only imagine what it would feel like to be in that situation. Not only has he been wrongly incarcerated, but in a really cruel place where you're not allowed to have any happiness; it's the worst parts of your life reliving over and over. We talk about cruel and unusual punishment in this country, and it's hard for me to even wrap my brain around who would think that that's a good idea.

Lorrie: Well, this is what I was saying earlier about the problem with revenge fantasies, because I think that's part of human nature. If there's somebody that you feel like is so destructive -- that you're so angry at that they deserve to be punished -- you have a fantasy that they would know how that pain feels. When you combine that with our inability to know guilt for sure or with negligence -- people not even bothering to find out if somebody is actually guilty -- you project your vengeance fantasy onto somebody, first of all, that might not even deserve it. Second, does anyone deserve it? Third, does it actually do any good? Is it accomplishing anything?

JC: There's so many examples of this in history, but the one that's popping into my head right now: eight years ago, from the time we're recording this (just about exactly) is when we started to see people coming across the southern border getting put into prisons and their children taken away from them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And how people's responses to that, at least in my memory, were either utter horror or 'serves them right'.

Lorrie: Right. There's a vengeance fantasy there, and the whole issue of family separation was the most direct analogy that I could think of to what Voldemort does. Voldemort is about family separation. He wants to separate children from their families to make more people like himself, because nobody understands how he feels. But if he scars children for life -- by attacking them and removing their parents so they also, like him, don't receive the basic care that humans are born to need -- then he has a chance of somebody knowing how he feels. That's what Harry Potter means to him. He has made a baby that might know how he feels, and then he's going to spend the rest of his life trying to get that baby's attention and try to get that baby interested in healing him somehow, or at least keeping him some company. Family separation... That fantasy, as enacted at the border, was definitely an exercise in us knowing that changes were being made to these humans at the fundamental level in their identities. The way that Harry has a scar for life, it will never go away. He was born to be somebody, and he was changed by Voldemort's attack into someone who's going to have this 'saving people' thing forever, rewriting his whole selfhood. Yeah. Knowing that Voldemort is about family separation made it clearer to me why I have a reading of Voldemort as asexual, and this is not universal. For example, there are definitely people who think, 'Oh, no, of course Voldemort and Bellatrix had a thing', or that Voldemort could be tempted through sexual motivation as well as power or a home or whatever, and I don't think that's where his primary motivations lie. I think it has to do with that essential family nurturing that a newborn needs. That's my read on him.

JC: Yeah. I don't want to kink-shame anybody.

Lorrie: No, yeah, that's totally different.

JC: I know that that fanfiction exists, because of course it does, but yeah. I am right there with you. I don't see Voldemort as having any... yeah. And no shade to people who are ace.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh.

JC: There's no connection there, right? No.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, this is not about representation.

JC: No, it's not about representation. It's more that yeah, I agree with you. I think that Voldemort is beyond any human... I don't think the man eats.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't think there are bodily functions happening of any kind, let alone... Yeah. Yeah, he seems like he's beyond any human body needs of any kind.

Lorrie: Which actually now reminds me of Harry not knowing how he got back from Hogsmeade.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: When you have something overriding, taking over your emotions and your thoughts... Yeah, some of your bodily functions just go on autopilot. So yeah, this is all the kind of thing we're thinking while Hagrid is weeping about Buckbeak.

JC: Okay. I have to say one more thing about all this darkness.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's so clear in this case that Buckbeak is innocent and is being scapegoated because Lucius Malfoy has a bone to pick, wants to get back at Hagrid, because of one incident at the school. Okay. It's hard for me not to look at the parallel between that and what the author is doing: scapegoating an entire group of people who have not done anything to her, or whatever. Every time in this book that she points out how innocents are being scapegoated, I want to go, "Uh-huh, and...?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "And?" It's hard for me not to grit my teeth and think about the author when she talks about justice and injustice, at this point.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is one of the things that can't be resolved, that I've seen in me (and in a lot of people) get stuck on over and over again, even though there is and isn't an answer. Rowling, how can you not see that you're doing exactly the thing that you're warning people against here?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Tactically speaking, we have to get over that, because it's happening whether we understand it or not. But there's definitely a fantasy that if somebody just pointed out to her, "Hey, by the way... you might not have been aware, but you are doing what the bad guys are doing here," and the fantasy that she'd say, "Oh, what do you know? You're right! Oh!!!"

JC: Yeah, no. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: "I'm going to have to go soul-search and then apologize!"

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: "And then make reparations!" Okay, that fantasy... let go of that.

JC: Yeah, no, right. It's not going to happen.

Lorrie: And no matter how much I tell myself to let go of that, every once in a while, it does come up again. "Wait a minute, there is no way in which she's deviating from what the bad guys are doing in this scene."

JC: And I think that's the Ravenclaw part of me, and I think maybe for you, too, is that "But don't you see the inconsistency here?"

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: "But logically, don't you see?" Yeah, and that's not how human brains work, no matter how much we love logic and order. The way that our brains work is that we look for evidence that supports our perspective, and we ignore or dismiss evidence that doesn't. It is really hard as a human being to change your mind, even when you have a lot of evidence. It's not how our brains work. You have to work really hard at it and you have to want to change your mind.

Lorrie: Oh, God...

JC: Or be open to it, and most people aren't like that. That's why we're in the mess we're in.

Lorrie: Yeah. With Harry imagining how Sirius must have sold out his parents to Voldemort, we're seeing the strength of that narrative take root in his mind, and what it's going to take to have to convince him that that's not actually how it happened.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But we're also seeing the jump. There is a jump that has to be made when you make a decision to go ahead with your narrative that scapegoats somebody else. There's a way in which you have to make it okay with yourself that you're going after somebody innocent. For example, with some of the arguments I've heard from Rowling about why it's so damn important to make sure that trans women don't get to go to the bathroom because somehow that's going to reduce, statistically, the number of sexual assaults on women -- I don't even... I can't even -- there's a point at which you have to make it okay with yourself that you're going to die on that hill.

JC: Yeah, which she clearly has done somehow.

Lorrie: Yes, and to be okay with justifying it. There's a self-righteous tone that you can hear when people decide to say, "No, I know I'm going to go with this and I don't want to hear your arguments against it." That is the thing that is making Harry full of murderous rage. Whatever stories people told themselves to justify not informing Harry Potter the 13-year-old about how people think his parents died, they knew and they didn't tell him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They made that decision, they justified it to themselves; they don't care how he feels, they don't care how it affects him. Hagrid going to Azkaban: Cornelius Fudge knew that he had no evidence against Hagrid; he made it okay with himself. Dumbledore is trying to say, "Fudge, dementors at the school will not do a damn thing," and Fudge is saying, "Shut up, I don't care, we're doing this." That moment of consciously justifying it to yourself... that's a moment that creates these kinds of strong feelings. We're dealing with all of this, and then we get a genuine surprise.

JC: And it's so interesting, isn't it? We've been talking for a long time and we're just now getting to the subject of the chapter, which is amazing.

Lorrie: We get a Firebolt out of nowhere.

JC: Oooh! So, how did... Did it just appear?

Lorrie: It's in the pile of Christmas gifts.

JC: Oh, my goodness. Whatever the Christmas gift spell is, this got put into the pile, which is interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. The house elves are delivering everybody's gifts; they're at the foot of the bed. Harry gets a sweater, he gets some mince pies (YUM!), and he gets this long, flat package.

JC: It's like, 'Oooh... suspicious.'

Lorrie: Okay... And while they're trying to figure out where it could have come from, we get more genuine hints (clues) about Lupin, where Harry is confused and says, "What d'you mean, he was away? He was ill when I was playing in that (Quidditch) match." Ron says, "Well, he wasn't in the hospital wing. I was there, cleaning out the bed pans on that detention from Snape, remember?" Which is such a great little mystery detail. Oh, yeah... Yeah, Ron was placed to have that bit of evidence. The kids are sleuthing.

JC: It is funny to me, too... What I took from that, I laughed at that line, not because... I guess, the reading that you just gave of it, which is oh, Ron was put there on purpose to notice that Lupin wasn't there...

Lorrie: Right, right.

JC: Did not occur to me at all.

Lorrie: That was a surprise to me.

JC: That's interesting, but what made me laugh is the idea that if you're sick, you would be in the hospital wing. I'm sorry, I'm an American; that's not how it works. If you're sick, you take medicine that makes you not have symptoms, and then you go to fucking work anyway. This is what we do.

Lorrie: And if anyone looks like they're about to call the ambulance, you have to scream and tackle them before they hit --

JC: "No, I can't afford it! My children get to go to college still. Please!"

Lorrie: "No, please!"

JC: Yeah. That was like, 'Wow, why would he be in the hospital just because he's sick?' I had a moment there. You know what I mean exactly, don't you? Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Ah, U.S.... U.S. 2024.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Yes, rereading Harry Potter after 2020... Here we are.

JC: But, of course, we know that he had transformed and was curled up asleep somewhere after taking the potion, so that's why he's not in the hospital wing.

Lorrie: Wherever he was, he wasn't watching Ron clean out the bedpans.

JC: For sure. Also, how interesting that Hermione can just come into their dorm room when the opposite is not true, once again. Very interesting.

Lorrie: Well, lucky for her. I'm sure she'd rather be in the boys' dorm than stuck with Parvati and Lavender excluding her as usual. Not that she wants to... Yeah. That must have been so uncomfortable all that time.

JC: Yeah, we never really get the view of Hermione in the dorm, do we?

Lorrie: Being uncomfortable. She's in the common room.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Not putting on makeup.

JC: Yeah, true.

Lorrie: So yeah, Hermione thinks right away that nobody should ride this broom, and all I can think of is the Trojan Horse from The Iliad.

JC: "It's a really great horse! Come on, Hermione! Look at it! We should bring it inside!"
Hermione's going, "I read this story!"

Lorrie: "Nooooo!"

JC: "Nooo!" And you can see, the way that she's described, she knows what she's going to have to do and she's already dreading it. "Ugh, these stupid boys. I'm not even going to argue with them. I'm just going to..."

Lorrie: "They're already mad at me. Ugh..."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "No, of course they're not going to be careful with this thing. Ugh!"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If anybody had been trying to get them this way, it totally would have worked.

JC: Right. It makes me think of the scene, too -- it's obviously, very clearly referencing that scene from Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

Lorrie: I don't know. I haven't watched it.

JC: Okay, yeah. There's a whole Trojan Horse reference in Monty Python and the Holy Grail. Anyway, yeah... but they forget to get inside it.

Lorrie: Well, nobody believes that this is going to work, but it works in the previous book when they feed sleeping draught to Crabbe and Goyle by injecting them into chocolate cakes after they've had three helpings of dessert at the Christmas Feast, and then they just placed the cakes out.

JC: It's very Wile E. Coyote-esque, for sure. There's no way the Road Runner is going to fall for this. Yeah.

Lorrie: No. And what do they do? They see cakes and they eat them.

JC: Right, and Hermione's like, "You're not much better than Crabbe and Goyle."

Lorrie: Amazing. Amazing.

JC: Yeah. "How can you not see through this?" Ugh...

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Hermione is left to be the nag. The pocket Sneakoscope goes off. We get another clue: Harry's thinking, 'Rats do only live three years.'

JC: 'Yeah, wow! This one sure has lived a long time. Weird.'

Lorrie: 'Should be about time for him to kick off.' Here we have this genuine mystery, and then they all go to Christmas dinner. "There were only three other students, two extremely nervous-looking first years and a sullen-faced Slytherin fifth-year."

JC: Oh, that poor Slytherin fifth-year.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Miserable.

JC: To have to sit at this table with all... Oh.

Lorrie: And all I could think was, 'I hope all three of them got book deals.' *The Time I Had Christmas Dinner with Dumbledore and a Werewolf and the Boy Who Lived.*

JC: Oh, my gosh. "The Golden Trio." Wow. It is interesting, that feeling of... There are all these minor characters who witnessed this whole thing, and you're just like, wow.

Lorrie: Wow.

JC: What must that be like?

Lorrie: Yes. "And then the Divination Professor came trailing in..." Oh, my God. "And the chipolatas were really good." That one line when Dumbledore terrifies that first-year student by saying, "Derek, have you had any of these chipolatas?" I thought, that's all we need for fanfiction, that this Derek is a first-year and he has sausages. His whole character and his whole life story is just unspooling in front of my eyes with his own little category on Archive Of Our Own. Oh...

JC: I do love that they're all sitting at the table together and eating dinner, and if you think about who is at that table, it's like holy crap! Snape is sitting there, Dumbledore. It's like the worst Thanksgiving dinner ever, somehow.

Lorrie: The Slytherin who would rather be somewhere else...

JC: Oh, my gosh, and the two little first years who are like, *groans*... Yeah, it's amazing. It's amazing.

Lorrie: Thinking of it that way, having Trelawney trail in last is really the icing.

JC: Oh, my gosh. I have to say the interaction between McGonagall and Trelawney is beautiful through this. McGonagall doesn't even care that there are children at the table. She's just going to be sarcastic and rude at every opportunity. There's no...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Yeah, yeah. It's so clear that McGonagall does not like her, has no respect for her, and she doesn't even care if there are children sitting there. She's like, "Hmm... oh, really? Hmm... Guess we'll risk it."

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: My favorite one is, "Tripe, Sybil?"

Lorrie: Yes, and Trelawney gives her a dirty look.

JC: And it goes on and on and on.

Lorrie: It does.

JC: It's so funny.

Lorrie: And then there's this moment that stuns me, because it's so incredibly mean to Snape.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Where Dumbledore offers Snape a Christmas cracker. Of course, the joke begins in that Snape is the last person in the world that you would offer a Christmas cracker to. "Yay. Sure." But it's his boss; he can't say no, so he pulls the cracker. "With a bang like a gunshot, the cracker flew apart to reveal a large, pointed witch's hat topped with a stuffed vulture."

JC: What the hell?!

Lorrie: Wow.

JC: That's so specific.

Lorrie: Is this a thing? No, it's just there. So who is taunting Snape here? Is it Dumbledore? Is it the narrator? Is it the author? Is it the plot? Has this book become sentient on its own and joined in on taunting Snape? What?! What the heck? This is not presented as Dumbledore making this magically into a thing to taunt Snape with. The book is doing it to Snape.

JC: Right, because then Dumbledore puts the hat on himself.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I have to assume that Dumbledore knows what happened with Lupin and Snape.

Lorrie: So Snape has to look at it for the rest of dinner...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Snape... the way his mouth goes all thin and he pushes it away. "Okay, I know what you guys are doing." He doesn't get up and leave; he has to sit there, and Dumbledore's cheerfully wearing the hat. He is reclaiming the look for men. There is that, because I had someone say, "Well, Snape looked terrible in that outfit, but Dumbledore would have rocked it." Okay, here's Dumbledore.

JC: But yeah, it does beg the question: Why was there that particular hat in that cracker, and then what did Snape think about why that particular hat was in that cracker? He doesn't want to be there. This is the last place he wants to be, though, and one of the first things that happens is in front of these little kids, these little shits, that he hates.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Who he thinks are there to make his life and his job miserable. He gets this reminder, so who's responsible? And he also has to sit here.

Lorrie: Yeah, and because it's Dumbledore, he can't complain. He can't get up. He can't do anything about it.

JC: Yeah. Right.

Lorrie: One thing, I guess, is that Dumbledore must have had a talk with him probably about how he had treated Neville, because the whole Boggart in the Wardrobe scene was retaliation for that. Snape, he's not having a good time, but he is accepting this from Dumbledore; he's accepting that he's sitting there, looking at his hat. Maybe he understands that, after how he threatened Neville and made him possibly poison the toad, that no, he's going to have to sit there and take this. But yeah, the element of this that always stops me cold is the way that you can't really tell who's doing this to Snape.

JC: Yeah, that's true. And honestly, my thought on that, on this read, was it's the author.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The author thinks that it's a funny joke, and it's so funny we're going to do it again. The author's transmisogyny is in my head.

Lorrie: And it's the assumption of universality: that every reader is going to enjoy Snape being reminded about how thoroughly he was routed alongside Harry, Ron and Hermione, who obviously have not forgiven him, and will probably never forgive him for what he did to them and Neville and everybody in that Potions class. Are we all one? Do we all think this is just as funny? Well, Snape definitely does not have the upper hand here, and while we have this emphasis on Dumbledore's authority over him, we have Dumbledore saying, "'Severus, you've made the potion for him again?' 'Yes, Headmaster,' said Snape." That's something that Harry should take in when he's worried. Whatever's going on with this potion, it's under Dumbledore's supervision. Wow, clues everywhere, none of them making any sense. A little bit less lost than Ron and Harry, Hermione sends the boys back to the dorm because she says she wants a word with McGonagall. It is nice that Hermione does have an ally; here is somebody who thinks the way she does -- somebody in power, somebody who'll back her up -- because boy, Ron and Harry don't. Lupin doesn't. Snape thinks the way she does, but doesn't want to hear it. But yeah, she does get to go to McGonagall.

JC: And we find out what, then, pretty soon after. One thing I wanted to ask about before we actually leave the Great Hall: Trelawney had said that when thirteen are dining, the first one to rise is the one who's going to die, so I was watching very carefully. Then Harry and Ron stand together...

Lorrie: At the same time!

JC: Yeah, so then it's kind of a joke, but neither of them are the first people at that table to die. Multiple people at this table are going to die.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Yeah, so I just wondered... I was looking for there to be a little bit of consistency or something there, but it looked like it was just pointing out that Trelawney says stuff all the time. Sometimes she hits on some truth and most of the time she doesn't, so that was the way I ended up reading that.

Lorrie: Yeah. A lot of fans have scrutinized that passage, thinking, "Well, did Dumbledore stand up when she came?" Yeah, but there were only twelve then.

JC: Oh, okay. Yeah. Interesting. But anyway, no one seems to take it that seriously.

Lorrie: No, well, McGonagall is there to say, "Uh-huh."

JC: "Uh-huh. Sure. Yeah, great. Okay." Suspiciously, Hermione stays behind, and at this point we already know that Hermione does talk to Professor McGonagall occasionally about things. She has yet another secret there that they're talking about.

Lorrie: Oh, poor thing.

JC: Ron and Harry innocently go back to the Gryffindor common room to admire the broom.

Lorrie: With their eyes all shining. Yeah.

JC: And then...

Lorrie: Hermione is hiding behind a book that's upside down with her forehead turning red. That poor child...

JC: She did what she had to do, but oh, she knows that she's going to pay for it.

Lorrie: And she says, "Because I thought -- and Professor McGonagall agrees with me -- that that broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black!"

JC: Which is true.

Lorrie: And it's beautiful how that can be true, and yet she was wrong. But no, it's a good thing she had it checked.

JC: Yeah, for sure. Yeah. They talk about how this broom is ridiculously expensive.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It'd be like showing up and giving a kid a Porsche.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: It's stupid. It's stupid expensive.

Lorrie: You're not even allowed to have a third-hand used car, and instead... the ostentation. It's not normal.

JC: Yeah. It is so over the top as a gift. On the one hand, at the end, we find out who it's from and it makes sense that Sirius spent that much money on this gift. Also, he was at the Quidditch match when Harry's other broom got destroyed, so he probably feels so guilty.

Lorrie: Yeah. He knows, and he also probably doesn't expect to be living very long. If he does what he's set out to do, he knows what comes after. It's his one chance to send some love to this kid that he was supposed to take care of.

JC: And it's a Christmas gift. He's his godfather and the Christmas gifts he was never able to give. Yeah. I remember when the movie version came out and the Firebolt was completely removed from the plot; it was added in at the very end, and fans were pissed off. The whole Firebolt plot was completely removed. Okay, fine, you can say in a movie, they had to simplify the story, there was a lot going on. But oh, the fact that this Firebolt comes the way that it does in the book is just really meaningful when you know what's happening.

Lorrie: So here's where I do the thing to you. Here's where we bring up Jane Austen again.

JC: Oh, and I have no idea. I only vaguely know who Jane Austen is, so yes. Okay, tell me about it.

Lorrie: This is the most amazing, well-managed tribute to Jane Austen. Rowling is on the record as saying that she loves that Jane Austen did this, but she's never going to be able to pull it off as well. There is the Jane Austen book *Emma*; there is a surprise secret gift in it, and it is tremendous. If you know Joanna Russ, who was a lesbian feminist science-fiction author -- amazing author -- she wrote a book called *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, and she said she once made an entire English lit class scream by saying, "Who gave the piano to Jane Fairfax?" That's all I'm going to say about that, because if this is not spoiled for you and anyone who has not yet had the pleasure of reading *Emma* by Jane Austen, I'm not spoiling this for you.

JC: Okay. I've seen *Clueless*; that's the extent of my understanding. I don't think I've even seen a movie version of *Emma*. Wow.

Lorrie: I remember reading *Emma* for the first time and I didn't know that that was going to be a big thing, but I remember that Jane Fairfax gets sent the piano and I remember reading that and suddenly realizing that there was only one person it could have been from. I think I might have gasped out loud. "Wow!" The moment you have that realization, explanation after explanation just starts unspooling in your head as you understand what it says about, 'Oh, and they can't do this or say that because society is like this and like that, but this is human nature.' Oh, my goodness, it just goes on and on and on and on, and nothing is said about it. It's just left as a mystery, and the fact that it's a mystery is amazing in itself. And it's working this way, I think, in the Firebolt chapter. Why is there this broom? Why is it so ostentatious? Why is it so suspicious, even though it turns out to be fine? What passions have all come together in this wildly ostentatious, inappropriate, mysterious, dangerous gift that turns out to be not dangerous at all? Just full of love and money, and replacing a gift that was already in itself inappropriate and ostentatious from two years ago? This child of destiny with the only two people in the world he can trust, and now one of them has just turned in his broom.

JC: And McGonagall is nice about it. She's like, "Okay, we just need to check it. You're going to get it back if it's fine. Just let us check it. It's only two weeks."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it's like, "Nooooo!"

Lorrie: That's been her role the whole book. She's been the one who has said, "No, you can't go to Hogsmeade," and there's just enough of her humanity under there so that you know not only does she really feel for Harry, but she's really being there for him by being an adult with boundaries. Even when you don't like the answer, it's really nice to know somebody's being a grown-up, because Lupus and Snape sure aren't, and where is Dumbledore? Meanwhile, all the other adults are busy breaking the law or whatever. So McGonagall... that combination of sympathy underneath and steadfast boundaries is really comforting.

JC: For sure. The thing is that, since it's McGonagall, you know that if the broom is fine, she wants Harry to have it.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: She has no problem with him having a really nice broom. It's not the gift itself.

Lorrie: I'm sure she can put her chin on her wrist and imagine the victories coming to Gryffindor.

JC: Victories, exactly. So it's great that it's her, because Harry knows that McGonagall is going to be on his side here. Yeah, he doesn't want the broom taken away.

Lorrie: She's not unwilling to bend a rule here and there for the glory of Gryffindor Quidditch.

JC: For sure, for sure.

Lorrie: Yeah, we have the beautiful homage to the mystery in *Emma*. It works, I think, really well, and it really thrills me how passionate this one object is and how devoid of malice. But really, if you were going to come up with a conclusion about whether this is dangerous or not, you would be really an idiot to not think it was dangerous.

JC: I think I said before, it's right out of the Road Runner and the coyote.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: You're going down the road and there's...

Lorrie: All these arrows pointing "HERE".

JC: Yeah. "Here, go here!" "FREE FOOD!" or whatever. It's so Road Runner and coyote.

Lorrie: "NOT A TRAP!"

JC: "NOT A TRAP!" Exactly. "PROMISE!" Yeah. Yeah. And Harry is hapless here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: His eyes are glazed over by the glory of the most amazing broom that he already wished for and told himself he couldn't afford.

Lorrie: Oh, there's a scene in *Wayne's World* with an electric guitar that's like that. They always come and ask the salesperson to take it out so they can pretend that they're going to buy it. They're totally not going to.

JC: Everyone can relate, yeah.

Lorrie: This is a very well-written book. The number of secret hidden agendas colliding at so many levels; the amount of misinterpretation; the amount of genuine goodwill and love behind all of these disagreements and fights; the depressing inevitability of corruption at the top, and human willingness to throw other people under the bus for nothing; and the inevitable conclusion that sometimes, if you care about people, you're going to have to break the rules or the law to protect them and you can't be neutral. You have to take sides.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: At what point are you going to say, "My personal safety and security are more important, I'm not going to," and at what point are you going to say, "There's really only one thing I can do if I care about this person"? And who benefits by putting people in that position? Do we have to be in that position? No, actually we don't. We wouldn't have to if things were running the way they should be. One of the things that should be happening is even if we are absolutely sure a story is true, we should check it out. I don't know. Is this how you thought this chapter was going to feel?

JC: No! We always dig out these layers of meaning that surprise me, honestly. My notes for this chapter weren't even that long, and yet more than an hour later, here we are. It's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I always end up feeling kind of bad. When you have me talking about Harry Potter, I always go dark, and I always kind of feel bad about it because it's a children's story. People love it. It's happy. It's full of love.

JC: The whole series is fucking dark. The kid has to be sacrificed like a pig at the end, basically.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's a Jesus metaphor in the last book. Yeah, it's pretty dark.

Lorrie: But he does get a really kick-ass Christmas present this year. Wow!

JC: That is true. He does.

Lorrie: It's amazing.

JC: And he eventually gets to keep it, which is great.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the chipolatas were excellent! So, next chapter is *The Patronus*.

JC: Oh, my gosh. Here we go.

Lorrie: It's just one heavy hitter after another!

JC: Here we go. Yep, yep.

Lorrie: Well, I guess we'll recover before then, huh?

JC: Yep!

Lorrie: Alright, I'll talk to you then.

JC: Okay!

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.