

Transcript

Episode 3.17

Book 3, Chapter 17: Cat, Rat, and Dog

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 Seventeen: Cat, Rat, and Dog.

Caroline: Hi, listeners! This is Editor Caroline popping in from the future to tell you that Illustrator Caroline from the past finally managed to finish all the portraits of everyone involved in the day-to-day of the podcast. You can check it out on the website at HPAfter2020.com. This includes Deannah, our amazing transcriber (all donations to the podcast go towards paying her for excellent work!) who diligently reads every chapter before transcribing the episode. This also includes Geoff, the podcast's kick-ass social media manager who handles all the Instagram, Facebook and other business of letting people know on the internet when we have new content; and this includes C.L., our very own young genius composer who made the original theme music that you hear every week. And of course, there's Lorrie, JC, and even myself. Head to HPAfter2020.com to check it out, as well as show notes and transcripts as always. This has been your little out-of-time interlude, which seems apt enough for the book that we're in. And now, back to your regularly scheduled podcast.

Lorrie: Cat, Rat, and Dog. The kids leave Hagrid's cabin. Scabbers escapes from Ron's pocket; Crookshanks shows up and chases him. A black dog appears and drags Ron into a tunnel by the Whomping Willow. Harry and Hermione get beaten up by the Whomping Willow but crawl into the tunnel anyway to rescue Ron. Then the kids meet figures of the past and of legend: a godfather, a werewolf, and someone who has been thought dead for the past 12 years. This is where the Harry Potter series hits a high note as children's literature and stays there.

JC: Ooh.

Lorrie: Wow. JC, how did you feel reading this chapter?

JC: When we recorded the episode about the last chapter, you asked me when was the point where the story really started taking off, and I think it's here, this chapter. This is where I really

fell in love with this series, because so many things are revealed in this chapter and there's so many different perspectives. We realize how wrong we have possibly been about the way we've been interpreting events that this was the moment, the first time through, where I just went, 'Holy shit!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Holy shit! Now I understand why people love this series.' Yeah, it was fun to read it again after a long time.

Lorrie: And how does it feel coming back and rereading?

JC: It was still really exciting. I think the first time I read this, I was still very much in the fantasy genre, and I don't sit as a reader in that sort of fantasy realm, if that makes sense. Seeing the real darkness of this and the horrible things that the kids are experiencing, they're different to me now. It was all fantasy violence before (like the Roadrunner and the coyote kind of thing), and this felt a lot more real and dangerous. It could also possibly be that -- because we've talked about this so many times, that the movies are in my head more than the book -- the stark descriptions of injuries and of violence that are in this chapter came across so much darker than the movie version in my head, so that could be it, too.

Lorrie: Mm-hmm.

JC: But also, we live in a world where bad things are happening to innocent children all the time. Not like we didn't before, but I think that maybe (in this particular moment) the awareness of that is making me have a different reaction to the kids being in mortal peril here than in the past.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That, and then having a kid that's a little bit older than these kids, too.

Lorrie: Older, yeah.

JC: It's like, 'Holy crap!' I think that's it, too: being a parent and having had a child. My kiddo is sixteen, so thinking about -- these kids are, what, thirteen here, right? Thinking about my own kid at thirteen and any of this happening to my kid, that's probably part of it, too. From a parent perspective -- having had a kid that age, thinking about my kid going through the things that these kids are -- it is pretty horrifying.

Lorrie: Yeah. One thing I notice now that I didn't notice while I was rereading: I completely forgot about the author being transphobic. I completely forgot about TERFpocalypse. I was not even conscious of re-entering the space of simply being a reader who's following along with the story. I just was absorbed. I'm saying this not as a good or a bad thing. It's an observation. Hmm...

JC: Yeah, and there's always a bit... It's hard for me not to feel guilty still. I feel like I need to pay some kind of tax for enjoying this work from this author sometimes, and I'm still not... I haven't made my peace with that. I need to read it with this awareness or something, or I need to reflect on the awfulness of the author or I need to do some penance. I need to do some kind of penance for enjoying this somehow. There's a bit of a puritanical thread somehow there that I've enjoyed it, but should I have? I'm still struggling with that, personally, at this point. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I forgot to think about that, because it really swept me up. This chapter, I think, is probably what I, and maybe a lot of people, have in mind when we refute accusations that Rowling was never a very good writer to begin with. I can understand people wanting to say that to diminish her power, but we wouldn't be arguing about this if something hadn't captured a lot of people's imaginations.

JC: Very true.

Lorrie: And I really disagree about her being a mediocre writer. I think she's incredible, and in this chapter especially, we get to stand back in awe, I think, at how many layers she managed.

JC: Yeah, I agree.

Lorrie: But... yeah.

JC: Yeah. Since we started this podcast, I have become so much more sensitive to seeing that. People say, "Oh, it's just... it's an awful series. Why don't you read this instead?" and they'll name something that I've never heard of. Yeah, I could read that, but I know it's not going to grab me like this did. There's this desperate need I keep seeing people have for denying that Harry Potter is good, for denying the power of it, for denying the impact that it had on people's lives. We've talked at length about the impact it's had on our lives, on other folks' lives, and how important it is that you get to own that. Yeah, so I understand. Like you're saying, I understand the need to diminish it, but I think that maybe that works for people who were never into this genre, or who didn't read the books because they were so young that they're just now old enough that they might be interested in reading through the series; they're like, "I'm not, because of whatever. I'm just going to give this one a pass." I get that, but if this was a part of your life in the way that it was part of my life and yours... Oh, yeah. It's not like, "I'm no longer Christian, and therefore I'm going to push away the Bible and everything." I don't know. It's weird. Anyway, okay. I'm ready to talk about this Cat, Rat, and Dog.

Lorrie: Yeah, so the chapter starts off by repeating the alchemy reference from the end of the previous chapter.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: "The very last rays of the setting sun were casting a bloody light over the long-shadowed grounds." All right, we're setting a new standard. The author is signaling, 'Okay, big change is coming,' and she's being ambitious. We see Hermione and Ron being utterly shaken because from what they've heard, they believe that Buckbeak has just been killed. This strikes me as so much more mature than the year before, when Hermione was trying to convince Ron and Harry how important it is to break school rules to find out who is opening the Chamber of Secrets and attacking Muggle-borns, because even though Harry and Ron logically know what's at stake, they can't quite make the leap. They can't believe it, they can't envision it. Hermione can; she's older and she's also the one at risk, but they can't quite. Then here they are, a year later: the way that this functions -- where they absolutely, utterly believe this and go through the experience of believing it -- in one way functions as an amazing representation of what it feels like to be able to imagine where something could lead if you want to fulfill the dream of stopping disasters before they happen. But yeah, at this moment they really believe it, and they can't handle it. It's horrendous.

JC: And they hear Hagrid's wail.

Lorrie: Yeah, and they don't have hope yet of anything, except that they have to accept this.

JC: But they don't have much time to drown in that feeling.

Lorrie: None.

JC: Maybe a minute. Very quickly, we move forward in the story.

Lorrie: So what do we have happen after that?

JC: Well, I think one thing that stands out to me is the role of Crookshanks in this chapter, because he's been a mysterious creature all along.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Hermione acquired him in the last book, right? No --

Lorrie: At the beginning of this one.

JC: Okay, yeah. Right, right. Gosh. It's hard to keep that straight in my head. Okay, so Hermione acquired Crookshanks. Crookshanks has been after Scabbers from day one, and we're meant to think that it's just like a cat's instincts to go after a rat. But at this point, we're starting to see something is up with this cat.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness, yeah.

JC: This is not an ordinary cat, and, uh... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Ron is running away from Hagrid's cabin, and Scabbers gets away from him out of his pocket; Crookshanks shows up out of nowhere to chase him. Oh, no! There's a moment when Hermione's like, "No, no, Crookshanks!" Now is not the time for this silly side plot. Then the dog shows up, and you realize no, it's not a side plot after all; there is this convergence. All of the plot lines are converging; they're galloping together. I just want to take a moment to enjoy the action verbs that this author has collected for the moment when these plot lines and animals come galloping together. She uses the words 'scampered', 'pelted', 'sprint'. The cloak "streaming" behind the kids "like a banner," which is so comical. 'Thundering', 'skidded', 'sprawled', 'pounding', 'bounding', 'keeled', 'whirl', 'seized'. All of this action is happening, converging at the base of what turns out to be the Whomping Willow. Oooooooh, and when the kids get the blows from the Whomping Willow, they didn't see that coming.

JC: And neither did we, and there's this disorienting moment where... Is it before or after? Okay, so there's Ron's leg being broken, which is horrific...

Lorrie: Yes! Yes.

JC: And it's unclear who broke his leg. It's unclear. I think you're meant to think, oh, the dog just pulled him really hard and he had his leg connected around a thing, and then it broke that way. But after we find out where they are, it could also be that the Whomping Willow hit his leg. It's unclear what happened to his leg, and I think that's really intentional there. The fact that Harry gets hit upside the head... He and Hermione both get hit really hard; their injuries are actually pretty severe.

Lorrie: They are.

JC: That tree could have killed them.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Understandably, in the movie version it was toned down, but this is pretty violent and pretty horrible to think about these 13-year-old kids trying to figure out how to get to their friend, who has been dragged away by a dog into a tunnel with a broken leg.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my gosh. The whole thing is horrible. It's really horrible to watch, to read... but also exciting at the same time.

Lorrie: Well, the adventure, the action just keeps going and going and going, and because these are culminations of plot lines that we've been following, we have to keep going, too.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: We know it's been building to this pitch. The Whomping Willow... Oh, the sentence is "whipping backward and forward to stop them going nearer.... Another branch whipped down at them, twigs clenched like knuckles."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I read it this time as what happens when you get close to the truth about somebody, and that person's psychological defenses start to go haywire at you.

JC: Hmm.

Lorrie: Or even when it happens to yourself -- if you're getting close to a revelation about yourself -- and you can't stop yourself and it's coming and it's coming, but your defenses also start coming up and you just lose it. When we learn later the Whomping Willow was built to defend Lupin's secrets. What it's doing, this is Lupin's defenses. Ooh.

JC: Yeah, that's interesting.

Lorrie: But you can't not go there, because somebody you love is being dragged down there. You have to go.

JC: Something I was trying to remember as I read through this part, too: before I knew who the dog was, what was I thinking was happening? I don't know if I was thinking, looking back, but we've seen this dog appear, it seems menacing. At this point -- knowing that this is a children's book, basically -- on the one hand, I think, intellectually I knew that there's something more to this dog. I don't think I would have guessed that the dog was Sirius at that point, but I thought the dog belonged to Sirius, maybe, and the dog was dragging -- leading the kids to him. I don't know what I thought.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But it's interesting how differently it reads the next time through, because you start to see the ways that Harry thinks. When the dog comes, the dog knocks Harry down and Harry thinks, 'Oh, it overshoot and it got Ron instead.' No, that was intentional. There's all these ways where you really see that Sirius was single-mindedly going after the rat and doing whatever it took to

get the rat, and almost pushed Harry down in a protective way. 'Get out of my way! I don't want to hurt you, but out of my way!'

Lorrie: 'You're irrelevant.' Yes.

JC: Yeah. It reads really differently when you know. That's something that... I think this is one of those chapters that I initially read it, and then wanted to go back and read it again to see how it read differently the second time.

Lorrie: Well, the urgency of the action drags your eyes over the words really quickly.

JC: Yeah. I have a note about that somewhere in my notes that I read it so fast and I had to make myself go back and reread paragraphs. 'No, no, no, no. Go back. Stop. Read the words.'

Lorrie: And that is an awesome achievement from a suspense/mystery writer. Such a good trick, because you can pack hints in there -- clues -- knowing that the reader can't actually stop to gather them all because they're going to be compelled by your narrative. That's some skill.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Then we get that magical moment of Crookshanks knowing how to still the tree.

JC: Right. Oh, and before that, Hermione begs for help. There's a small moment of Hermione saying, "Help! Help!" and then Crookshanks runs forward.

Lorrie: Crookshanks comes.

JC: And it made me think of the Dumbledore line about, "Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Help is going to come in different forms, so when Hermione asks for help, Crookshanks is the one who knows what to do.

Lorrie: Yeah. And all this time, we are not even sure what Crookshanks is up to or why he's so intent, but he's still Hermione's cat.

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh. Then oh, the amazing moment where Harry looks at confused Hermione. "How does my cat know how to do this?" It's almost like an aside. He says, "'He's friends with that dog,' said Harry grimly. 'I've seen them together.'" First of all, 'grimly' is an amazing pun! Here, we have to stop and congratulate Harry for having been correct; he was skeptical the whole year about everybody urging him to succumb to superstition. Death omen, whatever... He really wouldn't let that take over, but he did remain alert about this dog. He kept his mind open, but then I'm thinking he's revealing that he knew something about Hermione's cat all along and he kept it to himself. Why didn't he tell her? And then I'm thinking, 'Oh, right,' because when he saw the dog and Crookshanks together, he tried to tell Ron but it was the middle of night; Ron fell asleep and then there was the Quidditch final a few hours later, and then there was exam week and then Buckbeak. So much has happened. That is how secrets remain untold between friends sometimes. Sometimes, there's just so much going on.

JC: Also, in the middle there somewhere -- I'm not sure about the timeline -- they were not on speaking terms with Hermione, right?

Lorrie: At that point, they were speaking.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Because it was the morning of the Quidditch final, which happened very soon before exams.

JC: There's another piece of this, all through this chapter, that really stood out to me as a dark thing that I don't think I put a lot of emphasis on before, which is Ron's broken leg.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The fact that it's described as being bent out at an unnatural angle.

Lorrie: So painful.

JC: He was dragged through.... How long is that tunnel, a kilometer?

Lorrie: It's really long.

JC: With a dog dragging him and that leg bumping all over the place, it must have been horrific.

Lorrie: So painful.

JC: It's amazing to me, actually, that as they're walking through the tunnels, they didn't hear him screaming. Either that or he passed out. I don't know. Did he pass out from the pain? I don't know. So there's that, and then the broken leg throughout this chapter overshadows a lot of Ron's participation here to me. Some of it is Ron... There's so many endorphins that maybe he's not feeling it the way that he will later. Having badly broken a bone in the time since I last read this, I am aware that the endorphins can take over; people can be looking at you and saying, "Why are you not screaming right now?" and you're like, "I'm actually not in that much pain."

Lorrie: Oh, wow.

JC: "I know I should be and I'm not, and I'm worried about that because maybe..."

Lorrie: You're going to pay for it later.

JC: Yeah, so that, but this whole thing with Ron's leg... There's another line that I'll mention when we get to it that really stands out to me, but we'll get to it when we get to it.

Lorrie: Yeah. They are running after their friend, who's been disappeared in this terrifying way. They "slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very low tunnel." This reading really struck me. God, they must be filthy!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: There's so much dust and dirt!

JC: And this tunnel is one that Harry said he couldn't figure out how to get into before. Who knows how long it's been since someone has been through this tunnel.

Lorrie: Well, we do know how long it's been. This is how Sirius has been...

JC: Has been getting into... Okay, yeah, so Sirius has been coming through here. Okay, that's how he's been getting in, but... Okay, he's been walking through it as a dog, right? My point is it's probably full of spiders and...

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. There's... yeah.

JC: All kinds of icky things that live in this tunnel, and then this image of them running as fast as they can, but they're having to run bent over because it's so low and it's dark. It just sounds like a horror movie to me.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Not knowing what they're going to find on the other end.

Lorrie: At the end of *Deathly Hallows*, when they take this to see Snape get killed, at that point they're even physically larger and they can barely get through.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: That's such a real detail.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah. In this series, when there are tunnels, you have to take them. Something important is going to be revealed. They get to the room that it opens out into: "Paper was peeling from the walls; there were stains all over the floor; every piece of furniture was broken as though somebody had smashed it." I looked at that description and I thought, 'This is such a good image for a reread podcast.' When you go back into the past to try to remember something and you get there, 'Oh, my goodness, what happened here?' You try to reconstruct what you remember, and maybe there was some trauma there. Also, I have (in less than a week coming up) a college reunion, and I laughed thinking that this is also an image for school reunions. You show up into the past, and there's peeling paper and stains and rubble everywhere. Ah, the kids are so good at this, Hermione and Harry. They're looking around and Hermione whispers, "Harry, I think we're in the Shrieking Shack." Good work, Hermione, yes! Harry looks at the wooden chairs that have their legs ripped off. "'Ghosts didn't do that,' he said slowly." They're very present and they're reading it correctly. Any thought that they're dealing with a haunted house that's somehow in the past? No, no, this is a present danger.

JC: Right. What would do that kind of damage? They live in a castle with ghosts. They know.

Lorrie: Right? That's not what's... Yeah. Then there's that incredibly vivid, living image: "Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust except the floor, where a wide shiny stripe had been made by something being dragged upstairs."

JC: Yeah. I wonder if the author originally made it clear that that was blood and was told to tone it back -- that that was too much -- because you have to know that looking at that, they know that that's Ron's blood dragging up the stairs. They have to, but it's not said, so it's almost more vivid. But I also did wonder: is that something that the author pulled back? Kind of like when they say, "No, take out one F-word and then you can give it a PG-13 rating." Is it that?

Lorrie: I didn't actually read that as blood.

JC: Oh, really?

Lorrie: Although there's nothing to say it wasn't. I read it as such a thick layer of dust (and what happens when you drag a human body through it) that it's this graphic and very urgent cutting through the layers of time to bring the present very much into the past, making the past accessible and relevant to whatever's happening. But the word 'shiny'... It's giant arrows pointing to the narrative. "Go, follow this. This path."

JC: Yeah. It's like neon lights.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And the amount of tension that is in there as they're realizing where they are, as they're realizing things are happening upstairs and that they have to go up there, and then there's a shiny stripe on the floor. The tension is very horror movie. Yeah, it's very well done.

Lorrie: And very clear.

JC: And then, we're really ramping up.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, really ramping it up here. Then they go upstairs.

Lorrie: Most amazing, wonderful, grace gift: that sound of deep, loud purring.

JC: Interesting, yeah.

Lorrie: Something is reassuring. It's a sound that gives some sort of hope; there's some goodness happening here, some innocence. It's not all slaughter up here.

JC: At this point as a reader, I don't know if I trusted Crookshanks or not that first time through. It was unclear what Crookshanks was up to.

Lorrie: It was, but I also have a trust in animal judgment of danger. I don't believe that cats would have an evil agenda and fake purring in order to deceive.

JC: Yeah, I don't think that the cat would be trying to deceive. It would be more that if the cat really has an evil agenda, then it's happy that its evil agenda is coming to fruition. I don't know. I don't know if I trust it. Being a cat owner, cats are really good at deception and really good at purring to get what they want in the moment. Ooh, my cats are really good at that. One of them, in particular, knows how to turn on the charm when they want something and they know how to get you to give it to them. That was part of it to me, too: 'I don't know if I trust this cat's purr in this moment.'

Lorrie: I really appreciate it, though. As a reader, I felt a little bit calmed.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Because my attention is pelting up the stairs and... purring. 'Okay, I'm adding that in. All right.'

JC: Okay, is the cat sitting on Ron at this point? Where was the cat again?

Lorrie: At this point, we don't see the cat. We just hear the purring.

JC: Okay. Is the cat with Sirius? Where is Crookshanks?

Lorrie: "Only one door was open. As they crept toward it, they heard movement from behind it; a low moan, and then a deep, loud purring." That's when Harry and Hermione exchange a look and Harry kicks the door open.

JC: Okay, so they don't see the cat when they hear the purring.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Okay, then we get... Okay. "On a magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings lay Crookshanks, purring loudly at the side of them. On the floor beside him, clutching his leg, which stuck out at a strange angle, was Ron." Crookshanks is purring loudly at the sight of them, which implies that Crookshanks is happy to see them.

Lorrie: He's glad that they followed him. He was leading them the whole time with his bottlebrush tail, like, "Come, you really need to see something. There's something I've been trying to tell you folks all year. Please come, please come. I've been teaming up with other animals. You got to know about this."

JC: It's making me think: there's all these TikTok accounts of these people who have the animals who have the buttons that help them talk, like cats and dogs.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm imagining Crookshanks with a set of those buttons.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: What would Crookshanks say? Hermione with her own TikTok Channel: "What is my cat trying to tell me?"

Lorrie: Uh-huh.

JC: "Keeps talking about a dog." Yeah.

Lorrie: But we also have other animal TikToks: "This dog wouldn't rest until someone came to rescue somebody in danger."

JC: Yeah. Sorry, I can't get the buttons out of my head. "Rat. Lie. Rat. Lie."

Lorrie: "Not. Rat."

JC: "Not. Rat. Rat. Bad."

Lorrie: "Rat. Bad."

JC: "Mommy. Listen. Mommy. Listen." Yeah. Anyway... Okay, moving on.

Lorrie: "The magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings..." Oh, that hit home. That is surpassingly pathetic. That's where they set up for Lupin as an 11-year-old to suffer by himself every month, but it's also loving. I imagine that it's an exact replica of the magnificent four-poster beds that they have in the dorm rooms.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: "You're still a student. We are giving you every comfort we can, and now we're going to back out quickly."

JC: We're going to get to this maybe in the next chapter, but it's interesting to think that this was his accommodation.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: You have a student with a very particular kind of disability, and the school provided accommodations in the best way that they could. Now, they're better; we know more about how to treat Lycanthropy, and now there's medication that he can take so he doesn't have to suffer. There's all kinds of parallels that you could draw with different disabling conditions, but it is very interesting that this whole house.... That tunnel was dug and the whole house was created and the Whomping Willow was planted: all of it was as an accommodation for a student with a disability.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which, as critical as I have been of Hogwarts in their treatment of students with disabilities, it's like, okay, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They really did do something here.

Lorrie: Yeah. Then we have suffering, pained Ron gasping out that this is a trap.

JC: Oh, poor Ron.

Lorrie: Even though it turns out that it wasn't, that's such a fear come true. As a kid, you're always afraid. 'Have we been duped?'

JC: Yeah. I'm thinking Ron is there on the floor, his leg is broken. He's either in agony or he's going to be. He's not really.... He's so full of it right now, probably, and he sees this dog turn into Sirius Black and then he realizes...

Lorrie: Oh, boy.

JC: 'I'm being used as bait to draw Harry here, because everybody knows that Sirius Black wants to kill Harry, and Harry is going to come -- because, of course, Harry's going to come -- and Harry's going to die and it's going to be my fault.' Ron's loyalty here... First, he's like, "It's a trap, don't come in." He's willing to sacrifice himself.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then even later, he says, "If you're going to kill Harry, you're going to have to kill all of us. You can't..."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Ron's loyalty here to his friends and his bravery, basically saying, "I don't care what happens to me; I'm doing everything I can to protect Harry, even in the condition I'm in," is amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's also a good tribute to how robust this mystery is that it's not even the first time that Ron has been targeted by this dog, and yet everybody thinks Harry is always the main character.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: No matter how many times this dog goes for Ron, they're thinking, 'Oh, that's not what he meant to do.'

JC: 'Oops! Oops, he missed Harry. Oops!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Right, right. Harry's got the main character syndrome there. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's an amazingly strong mystery. Even at this point, I have no idea why Ron. Then yeah, we get GASP number one, out of what I think are four major GASP moments in this chapter: Sirius Black is an Animagus! Oh, my God!

JC: The dog! The whole time, the dog -- the Grim -- was Sirius Black! Right, so you think back to all the moments when we've seen the dog.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: At this point, as a first-time reader, you're still thinking that Harry's in danger, right? The dog's been stalking Harry this whole time.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Every time he's come into the castle or showed up in a place, it was Sirius Black, so you go back through all the moments. 'Oh, that's how he got into the castle. That's how he got past this or that.'

Lorrie: 'The eyes in the hedge at Privet Drive!'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'That was Sirius! Oh, too bad he didn't get a bite of Uncle Vernon.' Then we get that first description of Sirius, and as a re-reader, it's heartbreaking.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That he's waxy, he might have been a corpse.

JC: His hair is matted...

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: It looks like he's actually in better shape as a dog than he is as a human.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: That's something that you can't have as a first-time reader, but that is so powerful on every re-reading: the heartbreaking sympathy I have for what this man has gone through and is just about to go through right now.

JC: For sure, yeah. I don't know what your other GASP moments were, but one for me was when he uses *Expelliarmus* on the kids to take their wands. On this reread, looking and thinking, okay, that should have been a clue to me that everything is not as it seems, because if he were really the murderous villain that he was, why would he do that? He's using the very spell that Snape teaches Harry, that this is what you do. Also, it draws a really interesting connection, I think, between Sirius and Snape.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That idea that they both learned this lesson: the first thing you do is disarm. Disarm, don't harm. It sounds like a...

Lorrie: Yeah, a maxim that you should memorize and live by. Actually, my *Expelliarmus* ticker is separate from my GASP ticker.

JC: Oh, okay.

Lorrie: It's GASP number 1 of 4, and that moment is *Expelliarmus* number 1 of 4 in this chapter.

JC: Oh, cool. Okay. Fun.

Lorrie: So yeah...

JC: There's a lot of that, too, for sure. Yeah, everybody's use of *Expelliarmus* here is reinforcing the lesson that Snape taught Harry in the previous book.

Lorrie: It's also introducing one of the main themes of this series, which is, 'Don't kill. Get the full story. You might think what you want is revenge or anger or hatred or murder, but what you really want -- what's really going to satisfy you -- is knowing the full story.' *Expelliarmus*, disarmament, enables the story to be told. Oh, Sirius... His voice is all rough because he hasn't had anyone to listen to him for so long.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: He says, "I thought you'd come and help your friend. Your father would have done the same for me." And Harry mistakes this as a taunt.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: It's so heartbreaking. No, it's not, but there's also that fear -- which is real and present several times in this series -- where Harry is afraid that his 'saving people' thing is foolish (that he was gullible to let that guide his actions) and that's not what it is. It's beautiful, and that's something that we're going to see repeatedly.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Not only is it beautiful, not only does it not matter if you feel foolish, but it's all we have in the end.

JC: So after Black says the thing, "Your father would have done the same for me," he says, "Brave of you, not to run for a teacher. I'm grateful... it will make everything much easier...." Harry misinterprets that, but it made me think, 'What does Sirius think is happening right now?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What's happening in his head? From his perspective, he's single-mindedly focused on Peter Pettigrew, and he has come and watched Harry. He sent Harry the broomstick. That's important, too, but Sirius probably has no idea what the kids think is actually happening here.

Lorrie: Well, we see that in the next few pages.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: We actually get a glimpse into what's happening in Sirius' head via what's happening in Harry's.

JC: That's so interesting to me.

Lorrie: But yeah, he hasn't thought about it.

JC: Yeah. He was a dog, and it's a little unclear to me. I think there is something in a text somewhere about how when you're an Animagus, you don't experience the world quite in the same way as you do as a human.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: So the actions he takes as a dog are probably not the ones he would necessarily have taken as a human, but it's all a mix for him right now. He can't really separate the two after being in Azkaban all this time and being on the run. What's happening in Sirius' head? What does he think is happening and how the kids are reacting to him? He's genuinely surprised that they believe that he's out to kill Harry. He's like, "What? No!"

Lorrie: "Why would you think that?!"

JC: That's really interesting. Part of it, too, is, on subsequent reads, knowing who he is and what he becomes later in Harry's life.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's the worst possible introduction to your godfather.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Harry feels boiling hate towards Sirius (because this is the person who killed his parents) and he can't control it. This is quite real, and two pairs of hands stop him from lunging at Sirius. His friends won't let him be a killer; this is a continuation of the same thing that Ron and Hermione did for Harry in the Firebolt chapter when they realize, 'Oh, he actually wants to go after Sirius Black.' He wants to kill Sirius, and they have to tell him, "I know you haven't even said it, but we know you want to and you can't. Don't. We, your friends, will stop you." So that's happening, and Ron is saying, "If you want to kill Harry, you'll have to kill us, too."

JC: But before that, Ron's standing up with this broken leg, right?

Lorrie: Ow. On one leg, yes.

JC: Holy shit! Again, having had a broken bone -- and it was not my leg; it was my arm -- how did he get up off the floor? How? How?! I'm trying to envision: what was it that surged through Ron that made it possible? Hermione did not help him get up off the floor. Those two pairs of hands were just there; Ron somehow summoned the strength and the endorphins to get himself off the floor and grab Harry and hold him, on one leg.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right?

Lorrie: If he didn't, then Harry was going to get them all killed.

JC: Yeah. That's... wow. First of all, that's how intense Ron's feelings about that were. Then, it's really interesting that right after that, Sirius is very concerned for Ron's leg and says, "You need to sit down before you do more damage to yourself." That's another clue: 'This guy isn't who we think he is.' He's like, "What are you doing, kid? You have a broken leg. Sit down!"

Lorrie: That happens after Ron says, "If you want to kill Harry, you'll have to kill us, too," because after those words, we get this whole paragraph with these words: "Something flickered in Black's shadowed eyes." This sound of friendship and love and loyalty is calling to a different part of Sirius' emotions than his one-track vengeance plot, and that's when he starts sounding like a caring, protective person; he says this totally normal, caring thing to Ron: "Rest your leg." That's the drop of love that can fight against destructiveness. That's introduced into Sirius' one-track mind, but then he remembers, "Oh, there will be only one murder here tonight."

JC: How do you say that and not sound menacing? Come on.

Lorrie: He's, yeah, unhinged, as anyone would be. Then Harry pelts him with accusations and says, "Didn't mind slaughtering all those Muggles to get at Pettigrew..." That's when he tells Sirius back the false story about Sirius that everybody believes, and that's good. Sirius has to hear what it is that people think of him, because he has to see how it's affected Harry. In a larger sense, if you're someone who has been scapegoated (as Sirius was here), if you're a member of a minority that's been scapegoated for societal ills... If people are saying the reason that you are unemployed is because of migrants at the border, then you hate the migrants. Whether it's a murderer or whether it's politicians blaming minorities, what does that story do to the person who is suffering the damage and believes the story? When they see the scapegoat, they will attack. That anger and hatred that Harry feels about whoever hurt him by killing his parents, that is real and it's uncontrollable and it can be manipulated. This is a good moment for Sirius: he has to have a dose of reality. He knew that he had been scapegoated. What does that story make him out to be in other people's eyes? Yeah, he's face to face with it.

JC: We see here, again... Crookshanks coming in again, defending Sirius and even fighting the kids.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Crookshanks is like, 'No, you've got it wrong.' If the cat had the buttons, it'd be like, "No. Mad. Mad. No."

Lorrie: "Stop. Stop."

JC: "Stop. Stop." Yeah, it's really interesting.

Lorrie: Crookshanks, yeah, at this point is the POV character. He's the point-of-view character that's saying, "No, no, wait, everybody... There's too much going on. Hang on." I love, too, that Harry forgets that he's short and skinny and thirteen, "whereas Black was a tall, full-grown man," because Sirius is simultaneously cadaverous.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And weak and wasted, and also very powerful. That's just good writing to me; I just love that. Then we get this surpassingly pathetic, painful sequence of Harry punching Sirius in the head and Hermione and Ron joining in, and they beat him and they get their wands back from him. Yeah, of course they should be doing this based on what they believe is happening, but it's so pathetic and painful.

JC: Sirius Black seems really fragile in this moment. There's a moment where he's choking Harry, but he's doing that because he's trying to protect himself.

Lorrie: He has to, yeah.

JC: He's easily overwhelmed by these kids. It's also interesting to me...

Lorrie: Yeah, there's three of them.

JC: Yeah, and that he doesn't deny his role in the death of Harry's -- So when Harry's leveling these accusations at him, I think Sirius has lived with that guilt the last 12 years. He's like, "Yeah."

Lorrie: It's not helping at the moment.

JC: But he feels that, for sure.

Lorrie: His guilt is not... They are in two different stories at the moment.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But the moment when they get their wands back from him is *Expelliarmus* number two. They've done that and they're not planning to use their wands against him, but they get them back. Yeah, when Sirius says, "I don't deny it" -- that he killed Harry's parents -- that is a theme that recurs throughout the series: no matter what is happening, Sirius did not kill his parents. Not even Snape killed them.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: But everybody's guilt overrides all of the other evidence. That's human nature, and not everyone feels this way, but this author and her characters do. And the heartbreak... The theme of this volume being the wish for time travel. "Oh, I made such a bad mistake! If only I could go back, then..." Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That wish. Then Sirius telling Harry, "If you knew the whole story..." That's part of the theme of this volume, too: get the perspective. If you condemn somebody -- if you scapegoat and condemn -- that cuts off the perspective, and the perspective is -- you might not know it, but that's what you really want. Harry's arguing with this, and he says, "No, that's all I need to know: that you killed my parents. No, no, don't do that. You sold them to Voldemort." When Sirius says

to him, "You've got to listen to me; you'll regret it if you don't..." the thing that I find so thrilling and beautiful about that is that he has now realized, in this scene, something that he didn't realize just like a minute earlier: he's getting a chance to tell his story. He thought he was going to live and die without that chance ever. He didn't think he was ever going to use his voice. He didn't think there was a reason to think what he looks like to other people. He thought he was already a dead man walking; he might as well finish the job and get Pettigrew before he croaked. No, he is suddenly getting a chance to tell his story. That's a real rush of life returning to him. It's real intense.

JC: We talked a lot about Harry desperately wanting his own story, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Here, Black is offering him a piece of this story, and Harry is so consumed by his anger. I'm skeptical a little bit that it's entirely his own anger, but he's so consumed by this anger that he doesn't even want it. He's just saying, "No, I don't care, I want to kill you." We haven't even been told how people use magic to kill others at this point.

Lorrie: True.

JC: So Harry's murderous intent here is really interesting to me, because what was he going to do?

Lorrie: But we have here a conflict in Harry: what's happening here is that there's Sirius starting to appeal to him saying, "No, no, no, hang on. It's important that you should listen to this," and Harry is still riding his rage where he says, "No, I'm going to kill you". We see that conflict starting to happen; we see these two opposing forces start to work on each other. Harry starts to rationalize to himself: what if he had to kill the cat, too, because Crookshanks is doing the same move that Ron did, where Ron says, "If you're going to try to kill Harry, you have to go through me." Crookshanks is now settling over Sirius and saying, "If you want to kill Sirius, you have to kill me first." We see Harry rationalizing to himself. If Crookshanks was prepared to die trying to protect Black, that wasn't Harry's business, and the rationalizations get weaker and weaker. You can feel the conflict move, and we can use that as a parallel to what might be happening in Sirius' head: that all this time, he's thought, 'Well, there's nothing left in my life except killing Peter Pettigrew,' and then this kid is giving him this opportunity. 'No, I'm going to change my goal. Telling a story is suddenly a possibility. There's suddenly value to that. I want to live for that. It's important. This is important. Hey, kid, kid!' We see the chemistry inside a person's head when that changes, when their own bitterness or vigilante rage starts to be countered by something emotional; then we see the parallel that is set up (that is going to come into fruition three volumes from now) when Harry goes through the exact same process that happens with Draco. When he's got his enemy at wandpoint, can he do it? Can he do it? This is what he's been waiting for; there's nothing standing between him and doing this murderous act, and he can't do it. Why not? The seconds lengthen, and he stands there. While he's standing there, there are these footsteps that come running up the stairs. What was he waiting for? If you commit the murder, you don't get the story.

JC: And there's also that really weird moment where "*Do it now!*" Was that a voice in his head? On this read, I read that as the bit of Voldemort that's in him saying that, because it sounds like it's a voice coming from... It's in his head, but it's not him. That's how I read that.

Lorrie: I read that as one of the warring instincts.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: If you were going to do that, now would be the time. But whatever it is, it's cut short because someone comes thundering up the stairs, and clever, clever Hermione knows exactly what to do: she screams for help. When the footsteps come up the stairs, then the child is released from that decision moment. The moment's passed; now what's happening? Is there a grown-up? A grown-up is coming. That's one of those moments that makes Harry Potter a children's series: when you really need a grown-up, the grown-ups actually do show up, unlike in real life. So the door bursts open. The wording of Lupin bursting through and assessing the situation quickly: he's fully tense and he takes in everyone who's there and what the scene is. That is such a beautiful setup for the parallel that we'll have later with Snape coming in to Draco holding Dumbledore at wandpoint, waiting for a grown-up to come rescue him and tell him what to do; actually, it turns out that hearing more of what this person had to say was more important than killing them. That's when we get *Expelliarmus* number three: "Lupin caught all the wands deftly..." Oh, that's... That's hot, actually. Advantage, Lupin.

JC: It's like a real grown-up has arrived who is competent.

Lorrie: Yeah, okay.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I have trust in him at this moment; he's in charge. Whatever he thinks he's doing, he knows what he's doing. *Expelliarmus* number three. Okay... Now what?

JC: He disarms them, and I think the kids are kind of caught off guard by that, because at that point, the three of them have their wands trained on wanted criminal Sirius Black and the first thing Lupin does is take their wands away.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which is like, 'Okay, wait a minute. What was that about? What are we doing?'

Lorrie: 'Okay, but we trust this guy.'

JC: And then it's interesting, too: I feel like I was watching Lupin look around the room and start to put it all together, and he very quickly... He and Sirius have a conversation that completely goes over the kids' heads, completely goes over the reader's head the first time.

Lorrie: Goes over my head. Yeah.

JC: But the second time, you know exactly what they're talking about.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And very quickly, he asked the right question right away and it's something he's clearly been wondering.

Lorrie: Oh, geez...

JC: He's been thinking, 'Did I have it wrong this whole time?' He gets his confirmation, and then they have this embrace, which is...

Lorrie: GASP moment!

JC: My little Sirius/Remus shipper heart was like, 'Oh, my God!' So yeah.

Lorrie: Second GASP moment: plot twist! The moment when he disarms the kids, Harry stands there and he feels empty. "He hadn't done it. His nerve had failed him. Black was going to be handed back to the dementors." I want to pause on that moment for a second, because... I'm not saying this is right or good, and I am very glad that it didn't happen. I am saying this is a real thing that I've seen with survivors of abuse: this desire to not let justice take its course, but to personally avenge -- to personally kill -- I've seen that happen. It's a real feeling. No, it's not good -- yes, of course it should be prevented -- but that feeling is real, and that feeling that Harry has of let-down is real. I'm very glad that it's in there. Yeah, and then Lupin says, "Where is he, Sirius?" And you're thinking, 'Where's who? What?' At that moment you don't know, and Sirius doesn't know. Where is Lupin asking this from? Is he with Sirius? Is he thinking Sirius is the enemy -- What? "Where is he?" The two of them assessing each other, having this silent, screaming catch-up conversation just by looking at each other, and that is covered with the sentence: "For a few seconds, (Sirius) didn't move at all." Then he slowly, slowly points at Ron; then Lupin realizes something and goes, "Oh, unless *he* was the one... unless you switched... without telling me?" There's more than a decade of realizations taking place within seconds. This is so intense. So yeah, Sirius... Plus, he's getting a glimpse of Lupin. This is Lupin. Is he a friend? Is he foe? He gets to see Lupin make the connection of Sirius' exoneration in real time. That's worth living for; he didn't think he was going to get that. Then Harry asks the obvious question: "Professor... what's going on?" That is what it feels like to be a kid. It's so unfair. All this kind of thing is happening all the time and nobody ever bothers to explain it to the kids, and the kids are in danger. The indignity of being a kid... Yeah, oh, "embraced Black like a brother." To me, that's the third GASP plot twist, because I very much remember reading this the first time going, 'What?! What just happened?!'

JC: And it's meant to feel like all the suspicions that anyone had of Lupin this entire time were correct. There's this weird moment where you're like, 'Was Snape right the whole time?'

Lorrie: 'What?!' Yeah. That moment is quite a long moment.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. Ugh.

Lorrie: So yeah, "Harry felt as though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach." Just sit back and enjoy this writer, that she has built this and sustains it at this level. Oh, we're invested. We're letting this happen to us as readers. And why is Hermione always so far ahead of all of us?

JC: Yeah, and then we get all of this... What's really interesting about the next few lines, where Hermione's screaming, "I DON'T BELIEVE IT!" and then Hermione says, "I didn't tell anyone! I've been covering up for you --"

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: That... Oh, my God. There's a lot happening here.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But this idea that Hermione knew that he was a werewolf, has known for a long time, and intentionally -- again, talking about secrets -- did not tell anyone. Didn't tell Harry and Ron.

Maybe... I don't know, did she take her concerns to a teacher? Who knows, but she knew all along and just trusted the system, trusted that...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: It's really interesting that... "I've been covering for you --" That's the one that really stuck out to me.

Lorrie: Yeah. It hurts, doesn't it? And I have in caps, "THIS IS SO DARK ACADEMIA."

JC: Yeah. For sure.

Lorrie: I mentioned that I have my college reunion coming up. I may have mentioned this particular drama before: that reunions at this college always remind me of somebody that I kept secrets for, and I didn't want to be keeping secrets for her. We weren't friends. She never asked me to; she just assumed that all of us who, because we were fellow resident students, could see (and sometimes had proof) that she just assumed that we knew she wanted it to stay secret, and would we? Why would we keep this secret for her when she may be our enemy? When someone depends on others to keep their secret without ever having had the conversation, you're in that position where you have to judge the entire time: is it the right thing to do to keep this person's secret for them? You don't have the whole story; they may be working against you, and it's a very bitter position to be in. Right now, Hermione is full of regrets, because "I've been covering up for you" is partly a cry of, "I went through all of this. Look what was asked of me. Nobody even asked me directly, but I took this on and every minute I had to decide for myself what I was seeing." That's a lot. And Lupin begging her, "Let me explain." Yeah, the real story is much better; the real story is worth it. This series is always about laying down weapons to talk. It reminds me of a tiny moment in book six where Harry is losing a Quidditch game. Draco has sent a proxy to be the Slytherin Seeker in a Quidditch game -- Harper, his name is Harper -- and Harry is going to lose the Snitch to him. He has to think, "What can I do to keep this kid from getting the Snitch before me?" He says, "So, how much did Malfoy pay you to come play instead of him?" and that startles Harper so much that he fumbles and Harry gets the Snitch. That's always what's going on here: the real story is the thing that people crave. Voldemort, in their very final battle, having to find out if Harry knows one final secret. Why has Harry Potter been kept alive all this time? Because Voldemort wants to know if he has anything to tell him. And Hermione -- oh, genius Hermione -- sums up the situation in this incredibly succinct sentence: "Harry, don't trust him, he's been helping Black get into the castle, he wants you dead too -- *he's a werewolf!*" That's my third GASP moment. "*He's a werewolf!*" In many ways throughout the series, Hermione and Snape to me are different versions of the same character, and nowhere more strongly than in this chapter.

JC: Yeah. I love that Lupin's reaction is, "Okay, one out of three. Failing grade, Hermione. That's a failing grade."

Lorrie: He's so hostile to her. That 'one out of three' comment is so angry and threatened. It's cold.

JC: Yeah. It's interesting there, but then he says, "I have not been helping Sirius get into the castle and I certainly don't want Harry dead...."

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: "An odd shiver passed over his face." "Yeah, I'm a werewolf, but I'm not what you think I am. I would not endanger Harry in that way." Yeah, it's really interesting.

Lorrie: But the other two things -- that he hasn't been helping Sirius and that he doesn't want Harry dead -- they don't even count unless he comes clean about being a werewolf. It says here that he's "remarkably calm" after the "ringing silence" when Hermione says he's a werewolf. Yeah, when you get to tell the truth, there is a calm to that, because it's been so taxing to Lupin to have to judge every single minute what kind of secret to keep. But yeah, no, obviously it's time to say he's a werewolf. Then this moment is so heartbreaking and pure: when Ron whimpers and Lupin is still Lupin, he goes to help Ron because he's concerned about this kid.

JC: His leg is "sticking out at a weird angle". We still have this horrifically broken leg going on.

Lorrie: And then he sees the difference that stigma makes and Ron says, "*Get away from me, werewolf!*" Lupin stopped dead," and that is so pure and painful.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That is monstrosity, that is stigma. It happens when people are recoiling away from you, but your impulse was to come to them with love.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: That's... Ugh.

JC: This is where I think the queer metaphor works really well with Lupin. "You know me, you've known me, you trusted me."

Lorrie: "I'm still the same person."

JC: "I'm still the same person."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I was about to help you, and now knowing this one thing about me that I obviously cannot even help -- this is just how I am -- that's enough for you to be completely repulsed by me." God... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The scapegoating -- or the monster, or the fear narrative -- is strong enough to override, at least in the moment, what you knew of the human relationship that you've set up, which is the struggle that Lupin has been having in his head about Sirius this whole year. On the one hand, the mass murderer story; on the other hand, the person I knew. Ron has just heard about this, and honestly, 'werewolf'... That's a pretty big, big thing to learn. He's just learned about this, and he's also having a bad night, Ron.

JC: This is true. Also, Ron is of the three -- again, Ron is the one who grew up in the Wizarding world, and Ron knows all the folklore, all the lore around werewolves and what they're capable of.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And probably heard stories as a kid that were real. "This is what werewolves can do."

Lorrie: "Do not mess with werewolves."

JC: "Don't mess with them." For Hermione and Harry, they're still very much like a storybook character. It's like, "Werewolves? What?"

Lorrie: Well, Hermione has had a lot of time, too.

JC: Hermione knows, right. But, yeah, I'm thinking about the perspective of...

Lorrie: Oh, he knows.

JC: Being a kid and having heard the stories. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "You know that that plant is dangerous because you grew up here," and everyone's told you about what happened to your great uncle So-and-so, and then somebody wanders through blithely and touches the plant. You're like, "Oh, my God!" Yeah, that level of, "No, I knew this." So, yeah, that's really interesting, too. Ron's reaction there... Yeah, heartbreaking.

Lorrie: It's real, yeah. Honestly, you should be reacting that way in the moments after you find out that some mortal danger is right in front of your face. That's instinct. Then Lupin has to man up. Even though this is hard for him, he has to deal with talking to people who have known this truth about him or who have now learned. With an obvious effort, he gets over the awfulness of being rejected by this child and says to Hermione, "How long have you known?" The way he asks that, you know that he's been wondering that the whole time. She says, "'Ages.... Since I did Professor Snape's essay.' 'He'll be delighted,' said Lupin coolly." There's so much hatred in that; he's so not okay. Then he asks about the lunar chart... This is totally a world-building aside: I realized, 'Oh, gosh. With the Time-Turner, Hermione's periods must have been off this whole year. Oh, my goodness!'

JC: She's gained so many hours a day.

Lorrie: I know, because at first I thought, 'Well, what if they have the same cycle?' Well, no, Hermione doesn't even have a cycle this year -- it's all over the place -- but the Boggart moon, that clue; she says, "Both," and Lupin "forces a laugh." He is terrified of this child -- he has been terrified of her -- and he gives her the coldest not-really compliment. He says, "You're the cleverest witch of your age I've ever met, Hermione." That is not a compliment at that moment; she is angry at him, too, and she says, "I'm not... If I'd been a bit cleverer, I'd have told everyone what you are!" They are not friends at this moment. She's totally Team Snape at the moment, and I am coming back to this because I come back to it again and again and again. My feelings about Lupin... This is a good function of fiction and fictional characters: if there's somebody, a fictional character, that I have a problem with, what is this saying about me and whatever flaw or unresolved issue I have in myself that I'm reacting to in this character? I realized, 'Oh, God, this is an awful thing to realize.' What Lupin was highlighting for me -- with the way he failed Hermione by not letting her participate in the Boggart lesson -- this is something that happens. Any teacher or parent or anybody who works with children, you teach; you're in a position of authority. You're helping, guiding people through it that are under your

care, but you're also going through it at the same time. There are areas in which Lupin is fully confident and unaffected and can guide all the children through their greatest fears, but this is still his own fear showing up in the lesson, too, just as much as anyone else's. And then when the Boggart turns into the moon, he still feels the fear; just because he's used to it doesn't mean he doesn't feel it. And there's this child who can figure out what it means, who has that ability, and he shies away from her. That's when he says, "Okay, for you, lesson's over," and she's like, "But why?" He doesn't even have the mental clarity to answer because he's genuinely harrowed up in himself, and the thing that made me realize, "Oh, God, this is one of the things I'm reacting against," is that this is my parenting weakness. When I'm parenting my kids -- and it's something that either I've resolved in myself or it's not personal to me -- then okay, I can do a competent job. When they remind me of stuff about myself or my past that isn't quite resolved, I fail. I can't be reasonable, I don't show up for them, I'm all weird about it; those are the areas that show up as trouble for them, too, because I have passed on my ambivalence and my anxiety, not modeling a calm way to deal with it. The end result we have here is that Hermione has not been shown how to face up to her own fears and overcome them, because the adult who was supposed to guide her through it had his own feelings -- as happens, inevitably, when you are a teacher or a parent. *Cursed Child* is all about that; Harry can parent James and Lily, his children, but the child Albus -- who has issues where Harry's trauma is still unresolved -- he is a disaster there. When we see Lupin is so cold towards Hermione, he's making such an effort to be present here and to address the moment and saying, "All right, how long have you known?" showing that he's been worried about this. He's doing his best -- he can't run away from it right now -- and she's quite angry with him.

JC: She says, "If I were more clever, I would have told everyone," and Lupin says, "But they already know... At least, the staff do." That feels interesting, too, because it's another moment where, from the kids' perspective, it's like, 'What the hell is going on? They knew there was a werewolf and they let a werewolf teach in the school?' That's this whole other... And they also knew that this was a werewolf who had been friends with Sirius Black. The adults knew.

Lorrie: I don't think they have made that connection yet.

JC: Okay, maybe not yet. That's coming.

Lorrie: Because so many revelations are coming, pelting through.

JC: Oh, my God, yeah. It's hard to keep them all straight. But yeah, the idea that they all knew he was a werewolf, and then Lupin makes the comment, "Well, some of them needed convincing."

Lorrie: Some.

JC: "Some of them. We're not sure." For me as a reader -- at the first time through, even -- it was like, 'Okay, there's something more going on here.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Dumbledore does seem like he allows slightly higher levels of risk than would be realistic in the real world for these kids in this kind of a controlled situation, but something's going on here. But from the kids' perspective, it's like, 'What?'

Lorrie: Not from Hermione's, though, because Hermione already knows this. Hermione, during the whole time that she knew he was a werewolf and decided that it's on her to keep the secret, has already gone through her head, 'Oh, all of the staff must already know this because Dumbledore wouldn't have allowed it otherwise.' It's not exactly rocket science to put it all together. If Hermione can notice, and if Snape has assigned this -- and if Snape has also been looking at Lupin that way all year -- then this must be like the Time-Turner, where Hermione has seen how it works.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: When the entire staff is in on an agreement about managing the school.

JC: Right. She has information and experience that Harry and Ron do not in this area.

Lorrie: Right. She knows how this goes. She was sponsored by McGonagall, who cleared it with Dumbledore and then cleared it with the outside Ministry, so she's been assessing this. She knows, and we have another one of those beautiful moments from Crookshanks where Crookshanks leaps up onto Sirius and purrs on his lap, saying, "He's valid, he's innocent, he's good on the inside." Then we get *Expelliarmus* number four, which is mind-blowing to me: where Lupin gives the children back their wands. What a power move!

JC: Yeah, and puts his own away. "You're armed, we're not. Now will you listen?"

Lorrie: That was jaw-dropping to me. Harry doesn't even know what to do with this move. It's also hot! I thought about if the writer meant this or not; I decided, 'I'm not sure she did, but I want to go with it because it's so hot.' Lupin knows whose wand is whose.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: He gives each kid back their correct wand, and I prefer the version of the story where he totally knows whose is whose.

JC: Well. It does say, "He separated Harry's, Ron's, and Hermione's wands and threw each back to its owner."

Lorrie: Yes, he did.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I like that.

JC: There's six possibilities for how the wands get organized. We did the math and he got it right, so odds are he knew exactly what he was doing.

Lorrie: Yeah, and at a moment of high tension, and he's so in control. Just the power of this move.... It's very stirring, and this is the height of showing that *Expelliarmus* enables the story to be told. He has just stunned them with this confidence. Wow, very powerful. Followed by jaw drop... Um...

JC: What number are we up to?

Lorrie: GASP. The fourth GASP.

JC: Is this four? Okay, this is four. Okay. "The Marauder's Map. I was in my office examining it --"

Lorrie: Yes! He's like, "Oh, yeah. by the way, P.S., footnote."

JC: Harry's like, "You know how to work it?" "Of course, I know how to work it," and even before you get into who he is...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's funny, because it reminds me of the way that I remember being a teenager and really not believing that adults knew how the world worked as well as I did. It was like, 'They can't possibly...' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'They've never had sex.'

JC: Right, exactly.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'They've never kissed someone with tongue,' like that must be a thing kids do.

Lorrie: 'We invented that.'

JC: 'We invented that. We invented the f word.' It has that kind of a feeling to it. "You know how to work it?" "You know what that slang word means?" "How do you know that meme?" Suspiciously, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's adorable, it's really funny, and it's also a really delicate drop of the first nickname. This is, again, the writer setting up a long game and getting away with it, because so many revelations are pelting at you that she can drop this first of the four nicknames knowing that you're too busy to start wondering, so that turns out to be super satisfying. But it's very delicate here. "Of course I know how to work it." The way that Lupin barely even thinks this is worth mentioning; why are you holding up the story here? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. "I wrote the Marauder's Map."

JC: Yeah, yeah. "I helped write it. I'm Moony --" blah blah blah. It also has a little bit of that feel of that meme. "Do not speak to me of the deep magic. I was there when it was written." It feels a little bit like that meme, too.

Lorrie: Yes. The important thing, as far as Lupin's concerned, is that he knew Harry, Ron, and Hermione would go be with their friend when the hippogriff was about to be executed. That was what's important to Lupin. He knew that they would do that, and Dumbledore knew that, too. They both knew this with so much certainty that they made plans around it.

JC: Yeah. There have been adults who have been watching out for Harry's safety this whole time. We've seen that before in the book, but I really like that when Lupin has the map, he keeps it to himself, but he's like, 'Now I can take better care of Harry.'

Lorrie: 'And I know what's about to happen.' Yeah.

JC: Yeah. And he probably also had the thought of, 'Sirius Black is actually getting into the castle. Maybe I can figure out how if I just watch the map at the right time.'

Lorrie: Yeah. The other thing that he hand-waves that's mind-blowing is, "Oh, yeah, you were probably in the cloak." "How d'you know about the cloak?"

JC: Harry's like "What?!"

Lorrie: "Oh, yeah, I've been under that cloak. Everybody's been under that cloak."

JC: "Of course you have the cloak. We know you have James's cloak. That's how it works." Yeah. Yeah, that's so great. Harry really thought he had all these secrets, and these adults are like, "Oh, no, no, we knew that. We knew what you were doing. Yeah, we've allowed it to happen, trust me. We knew exactly what you were doing." And there was a little bit of... Adults do this, and kids don't realize that adults...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Kids think they're getting away with stuff and they put a lot of effort into trying to get away with stuff, and very often adults in their lives will know what's happening, but they don't step in and intervene until they're thinking, "Okay, this is really dangerous and I need to step in."

Lorrie: "Okay, you actually need a grown-up right now."

JC: Yeah. "You do need a grown-up." But for the most part there, at least it has traditionally been this way of, "Okay, they need to learn some lessons. They need to have the chance to explore. What could go wrong? Okay, I can think of things that can go wrong. They're probably not that bad. Let them have it."

Lorrie: Yeah, and if you don't -- if you step in all the time -- then you're endangering them, because then they don't learn.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's also very satisfying when the kids realize, "Oh, so all this time you knew?" "Yes."

JC: "Of course I knew."

Lorrie: This is nourishing for Harry, because the daily reality of his life with his friends is now being interwoven with the daily reality that his father must have lived. This is, at such an experiential level, giving him some of the story that he's been craving. "Wait, my father worked with this map, too. My father.... Oh, I knew this was my father's cloak." Yeah, this is what Harry has been craving.

JC: And the next part of this is really interesting, because Lupin tells the story of what happened this evening: he's watching the map, he sees where they've gone, and then we have this little narrative device where he doesn't name Peter Pettigrew or even talk about the rat. He strings it out, which was not what you would do in reality, but it works in the story.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that's really interesting, because we're thinking, 'Whoa, whoa, what's happening?' But it also raised for me, 'He's watching the map so carefully,' and what comes next are the multiple dots on the map that say 'Harry' and 'Hermione' and 'Ron'. I was wondering about this afterward. I don't remember if we ever get an answer to that, but it just made me wonder.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, Lupin's a little bit busy.

JC: And he was actually really focused on that in particular, so we do have the excuse of when he saw Peter Pettigrew show up on the map, that caught his attention. He wasn't looking anywhere else, right?

Lorrie: No.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So when he gets Ron to hand over Scabbers, and "he gazed intently at Scabbers," oh, Lupin gets to look at both Sirius and Wormtail. Such intense moments after all of these years of doubt and tragedy. "An Animagus by the name of Peter Pettigrew." Sirius gets that line. Lupin and Sirius, at this point, their beliefs have converged. They are a team again. It's the fifth and final GASP of this chapter, and I think this reveal is probably the pinnacle of this series' plot twists of this sort. Did you see it coming? I didn't see it coming.

JC: The first time around, oh, God, no. The rat has just been there this whole time, and he's been a little comic character: a little bedraggled rat that was yet another hand-me-down. I hadn't even questioned the long lifespan of this rat because I was like, 'They're magical creatures. Sure, a rat will live a hundred years. Why not?'

Lorrie: Okay. Yeah.

JC: 'Magical rats. The owls can deliver mail. I'm sure the rat could live longer than two years, right?' Yeah, I didn't even question that. I remember the first time I read this, that was a GASP, and I love that it's the last line of the chapter.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And that's where this becomes a page-turner for me.

Lorrie: That's painful, right?

JC: Yeah. It's like, 'Now I've got to keep going.'

Lorrie: It's against nature to put the book down at this point.

JC: It sure is. It sure is. Oh.

Lorrie: Now I remember when the *Fantastic Beasts* movies came out and there was the reveal that Nagini used to be a woman, there was an outcry -- "Oh, no, that's gross! No, I'm not happy about this!" -- and people not liking this change to canon. I was thinking, 'No, she's done this before.' It's just that in hindsight, people who read the seven-book series -- and then that becomes a thing in the past, a complete memory -- we idealize the seven-book series as complete and whole, but that is not how people experience them novel by novel at the time. With each release, there was difficulty adjusting to various plot points. There was furious debate about whether somebody was in or out of character.

JC: Oh, God, yes.

Lorrie: Whether this was the correct plot twist, whether this was plausible, whether it had jumped the shark. There was a false memory that accepting Peter Pettigrew as a rat was easier than accepting that Nagini had been a woman. No, at the time that we first read this, it was a twist. It was monumental. Whoa.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: It worked, though.

JC: Ooh, it was really hard to stop reading there, but I am making myself go a chapter at a time. I won't let myself...

Lorrie: I don't know why you're doing that to yourself!

JC: Well, I don't know why. I'm trying to keep the feeling of it being more authentic, because I don't remember a lot of these books. I remember the general plot, but it's fun for me to have a discussion around it before I go on to the next one. Sometimes I'm like, 'Does this ever happen,' and you're like, 'Yes,' and I'm like, 'Okay,' but sometimes I don't remember where this happened or if this happened.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm finding that as part of the fun of the re-read: doing it under certain conditions.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. No, definitely. Ah... Well, the next chapter is called Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs.

JC: And it's very short, too. I started flipping ahead and thinking, 'Wow, that's a short chapter. Somehow, I doubt we're going to have less to say about it, though. Even though it's a short chapter, I think we're going to have quite a bit to say.

Lorrie: We're in a different mental story space at this point. I'll talk to you then.

JC: All right.

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.