

Transcript

Episode 3.6

Book 3, Chapter 6: Talons and Tea Leaves

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 Six: Talons and Tea Leaves.

Lorrie: Talons and Tea Leaves. Third-years take new classes, Divination and Care of Magical Creatures, and these are classes that are going to help Harry, Ron and Hermione make sense of the upcoming events of their year. Talons and Tea Leaves, JC. What do you think?

JC: Yeah. Even the title of the chapter made me go, 'Oh, now I remember what's happening.' I remember what we're going to see in this chapter, and I was really excited. It was a very interesting chapter to think about the structure of Hogwarts, the way that schools work, the relationships between people, and some of the background politics of the academia that exists in the Wizarding World. Lots of fun stuff there to dig into.

Lorrie: One of the first things I noticed: I just saw again, on Broadway, the shorter, gayer version of *Cursed Child* where Harry -- father Harry, 40-year-old Harry -- is completely unable to help Albus because he's being ostracized at school. Albus... Life is unbearable for him at Hogwarts. The kids are so mean to him and he goes to Harry for help, and Harry has nothing to give him. The only thing Harry has is to say, "Well, I got through because of Ron and Hermione. Find yourself a Ron and Hermione," and Albus is like, "You're really no help, dad." The thing that's so pitiable and recognizable about this is that nobody helped Harry when he was in that position; it happened to him a lot, but nobody ever saw that he was being ostracized like this and came to help him except for these other 13-year-olds. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle spend this entire chapter doing this bullying thing to Harry. I recall when I was that age and other kids were ganging up and whispering and looking at me and laughing, and I knew that they were talking about me. It was terrifying, even if they didn't end up doing anything. And if there were things about me that they were laughing at every time I did them, then they would all look at each other and burst out laughing; that felt so awful. Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle are doing that, and this is where we begin to see Draco's gift for acting; even though he uses it for a shitty purpose and he's just such a little shit, he is a funny, gifted, talented mimic. He is inventive. He's not only just a bully; he does have some creativity in him. He's doing this stand-up comedy routine, where he's making fun of Harry being traumatized and having a flashback; Harry knows that they're all laughing at him and has whatever feelings people have at age thirteen, when you're walking and you know that everybody's making fun of you, and it's not even subtle. "As they passed, Malfoy did a ridiculous impression of a swooning fit and there was a roar of laughter." They're not even giggling; it's huge, and Hermione says, "Ignore him. Just ignore him, it's not worth it..." That's the only thing anyone does to support Harry through this: his friends just saying, "ignore it," because they can't make it stop. They can't get anyone to make it stop. It's obviously not fair, and that's what we see in *Cursed Child* when people, foremost among them Albus, wonder why Harry doesn't have it in him to step up and help his kid, who's being bullied. It's like, "Well, no

one helped Harry." The only thing Harry ever learned about it was just ignore it, because you can't make it go away.

JC: And rely on your friends to be there.

Lorrie: Yeah. Rely on the other small children.

JC: Yeah. It's so interesting to me. I think about what Draco is doing here; we've seen him do this in previous books, but it reaches a peak here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's so desperate for a way to stand out. He thought, and he had been raised to believe, that he was going to come to Hogwarts and be the king. That's really what he thought, and the fact that he had to be there at the same time as Harry Potter, and Harry Potter was going to have the spotlight, Harry Potter was going to get all these things and Harry Potter was going to be the hero of the story... Draco really desperately wants the story to be about him, so he's looking for ways to draw attention to himself and to stand out. And doing that at the expense of other people, hey, that's what a lot of kids choose to do in that situation; it's not like his parents -- or his dad, in particular -- is going to say, "No, don't do that." Yeah, no, it's interesting to see that. It made me think, too, of the fact that my kiddo's school just did the musical *Mean Girls*.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I saw the show four times because my kiddo was in the orchestra pit playing the drums, but the way that that story was presented with high schoolers actually in it playing high schoolers...

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: All the scenes where somebody's bullying someone else and the whole group of kids on the stage are ganging up on one person were really interesting to watch, because every kid on that stage was good at that. Even though they were acting, they knew what it felt like on both sides, and to watch how well the ensemble acted those scenes was almost chilling.

Lorrie: Ow. Yeah.

JC: I was like, 'Dang, I'm afraid of some of these kids now after watching this.'

Lorrie: I know.

JC: It reminded me how awful... Human beings are awful to each other anyway; it's not just restricted to childhood. But I think many of us, when we think about bullying, we think about being that age, so seeing it come up in the book here -- seeing it come up on the stage, seeing it come up on the news, on social media -- there's so many examples of it. It's a theme in the books because it's a real thing that happens, and it's a real problem.

Lorrie: It's so real. Well, the thing that you're pointing out is one of the realest things of all, which is even if you know it's wrong -- and of course, at every age including thirteen, there are people who know it's wrong and it's bad and don't do that, and there are good reasons not to bully that way. But when you feel it -- when you let yourself feel it -- it tastes so good, especially if the person that you're bullying really, honestly deserves it.

JC: That's the whole theme of *Mean Girls* right there. That's the plot summary.

Lorrie: If they really needed to be brought down because they're actually hurting people -- and this way is a way that you can reach them and every other way they're totally impervious, and you feel the power that you have and you feel it hitting home with them -- God, that feels really good. You're implicated because yes, you can understand why people choose this as a way of life. It's so addictive. It's immediate feedback. It's an immediate rush, and the ability to feel that, to know you have that in you -- to know that, in that sense, you're not better than anybody else -- but to be able to stop yourself in the middle of doing it and abstain, that requires enormous strength. But it does require you to know that you're not better than the people who give in; you also would enjoy doing that. If you're faced with somebody who honestly needs to be limited in some way because they are damaging people and you could control them by bullying and you choose not to, you just have to know. You have to have more strength than just doing that or not doing that. Ooh.

JC: I'm thinking about the Schadenfreude that many of us feel when --

Lorrie: I certainly feel.

JC: When our former president's legal woes are in the news, and that's not even bullying in this sense. It's seeing someone who is a bully get treated in the way that they need to be treated or brought down a peg. Or when someone who was not a very nice person dies, and everybody on social media... You have the people who are celebrating it, and then you have the people who are like, "Oh, we shouldn't be celebrating that someone died." But on the inside, for a lot of us, we're like, "God, I'm glad that human being is gone from this Earth."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. That feeling... you're right. And when other people around you are feeling it and you can acknowledge that we're feeling it, it's like you're part of a community. I'm thinking about Draco in this scene: he's the king. He's somehow more important than Harry Potter because he's the one who's taking the famous Harry Potter down a peg.

Lorrie: And he's the one who's harnessing this possibly universal feeling and making it into something that has momentum that other people can join in on, in which case he becomes their leader, and that's a tempting train to drive.

JC: For sure, especially for someone who seeks power.

Lorrie: Who wants it, yes.

JC: Who wants it so badly, right.

Lorrie: It's guaranteed. If you take that route, if you capitalize on the human reaction to dislikable people -- if you capitalize on that and make it a thing that people can join if they want -- somebody will join you. That's guaranteed. It's easy. Maybe not everybody, but you will gather some power, and that's not that easy to fight. I had an argument with my then 17-year-old when the very unfortunate Amber Heard versus Johnny Depp divorce proceedings were in the news, and it seemed from the evidence that there was a time when Amber Heard was dating Elon Musk and he was seen with a black eye or something. This guy, who is the wealthiest man in the world, was dating this woman who, unlike everybody else in the world, had the kind of proximity and access to him to give him a black eye and he was still dating her. I don't know. I don't know what the black eye was from, but I saw that and I laughed out loud, and my kid was so annoyed with me and said, "Domestic violence is never funny, mom." I was not as remorseful as she would have liked to see, and I looked at her and I said, "It's Amber Heard. At some point, you have to tap the sign." She's like, "Don't blame the victim. You can't blame the victim," and I'm thinking about Elon Musk 'the victim' and I'm sorry, I'm still laughing. I am actually still laughing. What did you think was going to happen if you... Anyway.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: I'm sure she still thinks she's right. You can tell people what not to do with that feeling, but you can't tell people not to have it because the feeling is there. It's what we do with it.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Or maybe the feeling isn't there. There are definitely people who don't feel that, who will say no, and there are definitely situations where other people are laughing, and I'm like, "I'm sorry, I don't find that funny." That's for real, but what you feel is what you feel. It's what you do with it.

JC: Yeah, yeah. I think that's a really good way of thinking about it. Yeah. In addition to Harry's friends telling him, "Just ignore it," I don't know what else you do in that situation either, because it's such a big human issue. I don't know what you do except let the world think that this doesn't bother you, and you're just not even going to give it the time of day. I don't know what else you do, honestly, having been in that situation a few times myself.

Lorrie: Yeah. If you're in a controlled environment like a school, where the whole emphasis of the school is to focus on those behaviors and not let them happen and interrupt them before they get to that point, it can be done. But there's no supervision here.

JC: Yeah. That's true.

Lorrie: Even your most basic school supervision that would be standard in American schools. Now, in my experience -- what my memory is of the time that the story is taking place -- there was nothing. There have been a lot more measures put into place about bullying and interfering with it before it gets to this level. I've seen actual improvement over the past couple decades, between the time that I was this age and when my kids were this age.

JC: Right. Yeah, that's true. There's a lot more attention paid to that concept. I think, too... This is something that I think you would know more than me, but I remember reading somewhere once that the *Harry Potter* books were in that tradition of British boarding school books.

Lorrie: Yup.

JC: And that tradition of boarding school books is that it's not completely like the kids are left to their own devices to form their own society, but there's a lot of that happening. That's a big theme in this genre.

Lorrie: You don't go home to have your parents protect you daily; you're there, you're living together. Oof. So there we have Draco doing what is undoubtedly a very funny and convincing performance, and Harry being unable to do anything about it but grit his teeth and get through it. Draco is teasing Harry about something that's really unfair. Yikes! All of these things that we're talking about are going to be super important in the next chapter, by the way, so everyone keep your ears open for that.

JC: Ooh, interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And we go right from that into the scene where Fred and George are there with them, and I find it really interesting that Fred and George are like, "Eh, he's just a little whatever." They brush off Draco, and then either Fred or George says, "Oh, yeah, he was losing his shit on the train. He was so scared of the dementors." You get the sense there's a little bit of a deflection there, too, but it's interesting that Fred and George are like, "Eh, whatever." For Harry, it's a very different experience because he's at the center of it, and Fred and George are just like, "Eh, whatever. Everyone knows that he's... Everyone saw him on the train, too." It's that different perspective of slightly older kids.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then they start talking about Azkaban.

JC: Yeah, and then George talks about the dementors and Azkaban as being a place where... So now that we know what the guards do and what they are, we have a sense of what dementors do: how they just suck the happiness out of you. At this point in the story when I read this the first time, that was when I became really horrified. Prison, abstractly, is a place where you go and you're locked up and you don't have any freedom and you don't have any autonomy and blah, blah, blah. This is a place where you don't have the right to be happy; it made me think about how, over the last 20 years, politicians, elected sheriffs, governors, etc. in a lot of states -- a lot of red states in particular -- have made it their mission to make life for prisoners as awful as possible.

Lorrie: God, ouch.

JC: Forced labor, making them wear pink outfits, taking away their food, taking away their air conditioning. There are plenty of prisons in the state where I live where there's no air conditioning. Now, I live in Texas.

Lorrie: Where you could die of the heat.

JC: People regularly die in prisons because of the heat. Awful things. The horror of that... Whatever the crime this person did is not equivalent; they don't necessarily deserve... Anyway, there's a whole conversation around prisons that we could have, but it made me think that this is like in the Wizarding World: they've taken this idea that if you're in that prison, you deserve the worst possible treatment. You don't have any human rights. This is enshrined in our Constitution, the right to happiness. It's not in our Constitution; it's in our Declaration of Independence, the idea that you as a human being have the right to live your life in a way that makes you happy. They don't even get that, so it's such a fundamental human right that's stripped away.

Lorrie: Yeah, if you have gained entry into the part of the population that is covered by that right, which at the time of writing, you and I were not included in.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: And then you got included a little before I did.

JC: Yes, indeed, about 100 years ago.

Lorrie: Yeah, being that we are both cis women, and JC is white and I'm a person of color. At different points, we were granted admission into the category of humans who have these human rights, and those categories remain fluid and contested.

JC: For sure. Absolutely. That reminder of how prisoners lose rights... That idea that somehow as a prisoner in the Wizarding World, you wouldn't ever feel happiness; all you would do is feel horror and despair the entire time you're in that prison. The idea that even everyone knows, "Oh, it will make you mad, it'll drive you insane."

Lorrie: Yes, you will go mad.

JC: You will, because we all understand that that's what would happen: you never get to experience any kind of happiness. And then again, going back to the idea that Hagrid was just sent there.

Lorrie: Ugh. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It wasn't like, "We're suspending you without pay for two months; go sit at home." It wasn't that.

Lorrie: It wasn't, "You have an office job."

JC: Yeah. Right.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's not just failing to provide basic rights. It's actively going out of your way to ensure that people are suffering extra.

JC: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: For the satisfaction of the people on the outside who are thinking about them. It's a place to put certain feelings. "Well, I don't know why prisoners have it so easy, but at least I have cable and they don't."

JC: Yeah, right. There's a whole conversation, like I said, about prisons, but the basics are that there's plenty of research that shows that putting people in prison does not work as a deterrent.

Lorrie: No.

JC: It doesn't help them become better people, especially not the way that prisons have gone. It only does harm. I'm looking at Azkaban in this world and thinking it's taking that and amping it up. Yeah, you're doing such harm.

Lorrie: What it does is brings satisfaction to people on the outside who feel superior. That's a human appetite that we know to respect and fear because it's there, and there's always a potential to harvest it.

JC: Right, turn it against this year's scapegoated group.

Lorrie: Scapegoat. Yup. So fun, fun, fun.

JC: Fun stuff in the children's book that we're reading. Yes. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. So moving on.

JC: Moving right along... One thing that I love in the next scene, and this continues for most of the book, is how good Hermione is at brushing aside questions about her schedule.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She's just so good at it.

Lorrie: Yes, she is.

JC: She just can distract people. She can say, "Oh, that's ridiculous." Yeah, of course it is. Yeah. Moving on. Yeah.

Lorrie: "Quidditch, Ron!" Yeah, she's being accommodated. Now, I had always thought of this as Hermione being on a gifted track; then the last time you and I spoke, you were saying, as an educator, you know that 'gifted track' is actually a benign-sounding term for stuff that was quite exclusionary. I thought, 'Okay, so maybe I am seeing it the wrong way and it's not that she's on a gifted track. Maybe she's getting accommodations.'

JC: I think that's a really interesting way to think about it.

Lorrie: She's getting accommodations for her giftedness, and also, as we see, for her political position as somebody who will be targeted as an exceptional Muggle-born.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And yeah, some of her accommodations -- as is the case when you get accommodations in school now -- some of those are confidential.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: And when she says, "I told you, I've fixed it all with McGonagall," and she's not answering questions, that's like, 'Yes, it's in my 504 plan.'

JC: Yeah. "It's in my IEP," which is education speak -- for people who are listening -- for the special paperwork that people who have any kind of special accommodations will have on file with the school that ensures that they get what they need.

Lorrie: Yeah. "My doctor wrote me a prescription for this and you can take it up with my doctor, but you don't have the right to see my files."

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: So she knows that she has the authority to say, "I fixed it with her. Carry on."

JC: I really like that way of looking at it, because it allows us to think about what other folks in the school might be getting accommodations. It gives me some hope that some things are working well at Hogwarts.

Lorrie: That would be so nice.

JC: Because we don't necessarily know about them.

Lorrie: Poor Neville is not getting any accommodations.

JC: Neville could use a 504 plan, for sure. There's some things there, but I think Neville...

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: But it is very interesting, too, that this is such a clever solution to the scheduling issue that all schools have.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You want to take AP Physics and you want to take AP Music Theory and AP physics, and they're only offered in the same hour. 'Sorry, kid, you have to pick one,' and for the students that you know would excel at both of those, you're like, 'Oh, my God, this sucks for this kid.' Well, here at Hogwarts, they have a solution, but only for the person that they know can really handle it.

Lorrie: This is an exception.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this is great preparation for what we're going to learn later in this volume about a student who was accommodated 20 years ago.

JC: Ooh, that's going to be interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. There are exceptions, and it's nice to see Hermione being taken care of. Then, on their way to their new class in the North Tower, Divination, we meet one of the things that I love about this author: TERF though she is, she's so good at writing minor characters. We get Sir Cardogan, the foolish knight.

JC: I had forgotten about him, and reading that was honestly a delight.

Lorrie: He is comical and delusional and good natured. He never lets you down; every word out of his mouth is hilarious. He frames everything in terms of a quest. He is the personification of a certain trope, of the questing knight who's on a fun adventure. You have to have affection for him, even though you're glad that you don't actually get sucked into his delusions. And he's tireless; no matter what bad things happen to him, he's undeterred. He's just going to carry on. He's perfect. I love him.

JC: I love that they meet him in the middle of an actual quest.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: The idea that the Divination class is at the top of the tallest tower and they're climbing all these stairs; then there's a trap door, they have to climb up a ladder.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's funny because I've worked on college campuses my entire adult life, and there's always that one class that you're like, 'How the hell? Where is this?' It's like a 20-minute walk from your last class, and you've only got ten minutes to get there.

Lorrie: It's not on the map.

JC: It's not on the map. You have to go around a weird corner and you have to go... Yeah. It was a funny exaggeration of that feeling of, 'Where the hell is this class?'

Lorrie: Yeah, and then it's because somebody years ago had to find a space for this one class, and they found this one unused corner. "Okay, that's going to be it."

JC: That's now where the stuff you need for that class is, and that's just where... yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Forever.

JC: Yeah, and that's how institutions work. Now it's there, because nothing changes quickly at institutions like that.

Lorrie: Oi.

JC: That was really, really interesting. They meet Sir Cadogan in the middle of this quest to find this classroom, but it's also interesting that there are so many paintings in this school, too, so he runs through the paintings on the way up the stairs leading in the right direction. I have this image of... I've never been in a castle that wasn't a falling down relic, so I don't actually know, but my vision of this place is that the inside is full of all of these paintings that have so much history and memory captured in them. Yeah, it's so interesting to think about that. Oh, can I tell you my favorite detail, my favorite line that I just remembered?

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, Yeah.

JC: That as he's leading them forward, he says, "Be of stout heart. The worst is yet to come!"

Lorrie: I know!

JC: Which is so funny.

Lorrie: Oh, goody!

JC: It's like, "We've already climbed 8,000 sets of stairs. What could be worse? Oh, no."

Lorrie: That's so motivational.

JC: But yeah, they finally get up there and everyone's at the top of this tower, and they're like, "What now?!" and the trap door opens and a ladder comes down.

Lorrie: The silver ladder falls down. I see. Yeah.

JC: And somehow, it's like that scene from Indiana Jones: "Snakes, very scary. You go first." They're like, "Harry, you go first."

Lorrie: Yeah. Least accessible class at Hogwarts.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. No, incredibly inaccessible, and that's a very interesting way of thinking about what happens next in this chapter, for sure. Let's talk about universal design for learning, yes, and how inaccessible everything that happens in this lesson is.

Lorrie: Oh, boy. Do you want to talk about Trelawney and Divination?

JC: Well, one thing that stood out to me at the beginning is the description of Professor Trelawney as a large, glittering insect. I find that really interesting, because the fragility of her -- the way she flits around the room and this feeling of... She just is. You can't really follow the logic or there's no logic or reasoning; she's here, she's there, she pronounces things. I thought that the idea of thinking of her as an insect is very interesting.

Lorrie: I guess it means, too, that, no matter how much of a charlatan she's being, you can't be too mean to her, because that word 'fragile' you used... Yes, that's right. If you come down on her too hard, she'll break because it's obvious that there's something pathetic about her. If you just look straight at her and say, "You're faking it," well, what then?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I found, this time on this reading, a great admiration for how hard she works. She knows that she doesn't have the Sight daily. She knows that by those qualifications, she's a fraud, but these divination methods are real subjects. There are things that you and I as Muggles know about, like scrying and tea reading and tarot cards. These are things with a human history and meaning, and even learning what they are and what they have meant to people over the ages, that is a thing that is worth studying; she can provide that even if she doesn't have the sight most of the time.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And any bit of theater that you were hoping for, she will bust her butt to provide for you. "Would you like the red scarves over the lamps? Would you like the sweltering incense? I will provide that for you. I will have the jangly bracelets."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She dresses for the job.

JC: And she does a really good job of starting the class. Not in a very different way, but not unlike Snape. She sets the tone from the first moment, and you have to look at her and you have to listen to her, because she's just constantly moving, constantly predicting things and constantly calling students' attention to things. It's really quick-paced, and it's almost from a teaching perspective. I'm like, 'Okay, this is designed to tell the students, from day one, this is how things are going to go in my class. This is what you can expect, and put your attention on me.' From a teaching perspective, I'm like, 'Wow, she's good.'

Lorrie: I know. I respect her a lot more than I ever have when I'm looking at it this way, because she gets up in the morning, she does her job.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You can't say that she didn't prepare her day's lesson.

JC: That's true. It's also interesting that some kids in the class are instantly like, "Yes, 100 percent believe her," and then there's some kids who are hanging back and skeptical. That makes me think of two things: one thing it makes me think of is that, for a lot of reasons, kids -- and we as people -- like to divide people into, 'you're either a math and science person, you're either a STEM person or you're an English arts and whatever person.' I felt a little bit of that tension in this lesson. Being in a STEM field myself, I often hear students say, "Well, I'm just not a math person, or this is not my thing. This is what I'm good at." I'm seeing that here in the classroom: there are kids who are totally 100 percent like, "Yes, this is what I'm here for, this is the kind of magic that I want to know more about," and other kids who are just completely disdainful of it. "Nah, this is..." Hermione being one of them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Hermione's like, "No, I'm not going to put any faith in this."

Lorrie: "This is bullshit."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I love the skepticism, because that's some of the best comedy writing in the series. The thread of Harry and Ron having no gift for this, and when they say, "Well, what do you see in your teacup?" and Harry says, "A load of soggy brown stuff." Every time they talk like that, it's hilarious, and Hermione, of course, is very snappish about it. I realized on this reading I really like what lesson we draw from all of this, because Trelawney is going for the cheap win, like Malfoy was trying to with making fun of Harry. If you engage people's fear about uncertainty and about the future, then you can give them a narrative that they are more prone to believe. She says, "This is the Grim. It does mean death," so that fear is always there, but if she tells you this is what it means, that story could be more powerful than any other possible interpretation. And Hermione, I love when she just looks at it and says, "I don't think it looks like a Grim." That's right. Thank you, Hermione. It might be, or it might be something else. Then when Harry says, "Well, I did see a great, big, black dog," Ron loses it and says, "But that's a Grim!" and Hermione's like, "You don't know that." We are finding that if you don't let fear tell you the answer before you've found out, you're not going to get the real story, which is so much more interesting. This gets reinforced in the next class when they show up to Transfiguration and McGonagall turns into a cat and nobody even notices, and she's like, "This isn't about me, but why aren't you guys even paying attention?" Then she goes, "Oh, Trelawney." What McGonagall is saying is that if you let fear write the narrative, it depresses your critical thinking abilities. When she gives the whole thing about, "She always predicts somebody's death, and so far nobody's died," Harry actually feels better. He feels his ability to think critically returning; he's not thinking, 'Oh, for sure, it's not the Grim at all.' He is thinking, 'Well, I've seen this thing, it's super

ominous. I don't know what it means,' but he's gotten back to, 'I don't know what it means and it's important.' We have returned to the atmosphere of this book, which is, 'Something weird is happening -- no, we don't know what it is, keep your eyes open -- but don't let fear tell you what it is, because that will actually reduce your ability to deal with it.'

JC: Yeah, that's really interesting. Another layer that I'm seeing in this that I would love to hear your thoughts on: Ron is horrified by the fact that Harry has seen a big dog, the Grim, and the kids, that strikes fear in them; then there are kids who are like, "What?" For me, I'm seeing this difference between the kids who grew up in the Wizarding World and the kids who did not, this access to this folklore or common knowledge that Harry doesn't know. "Why should I be afraid of a big, black dog?" and Hermione is like, "Yeah, no, you shouldn't, that doesn't mean anything." But for the people who were steeped in that -- who grew up in that -- it's a big deal, so I see a cultural clash there, and there are kids who have access to this knowledge; that knowledge, then, you're going to need to be good at this. There's a sense in which Hermione is probably, even if she wanted to, never going to be good at that. I grew up in the South, and a lot of what we read in literature, in high school, were books that had very strong Christian themes, and I'm sure you can relate to this as well. I was raised Christian -- but then by the time I got to high school that was all gone, not religious -- but I remember having conversations with kids in my class who were Jewish, for whom every day going to English meant that everyone in the room recognized all these Christian themes in the books, and they were sitting there like, "Well, okay."

Lorrie: "This isn't my culture."

JC: Yeah. "It's not my culture," and I found it really fascinating to have conversations about that, because it was one of my first experiences of understanding how hegemonic that was and what it felt like for people who were on the outside of that and hearing those conversations. That strikes me as that, too, so there's that piece of it, that there's this cultural piece. But the other thing that stands out to me about this is Hermione's and McGonagall's, and there are people in the Wizarding World whose reaction to Divination is that it's 'woolly.' That makes me think about the Western canon of science and what counts as knowledge versus other ways of knowing that are not Western or white European whatever; how we as a society have really embraced this Western view of science and ways of knowing about the world, and how hard it is to decolonize the ways that we look at what knowledge is, what counts as knowledge and how you acquire knowledge. I cannot help putting that lens on this whole scene, because I'm looking at this and I'm like, 'This is a thing that this author has made up,' but it's pulling in this tension in the school: there are some subjects that are real that have a methodology to it. There's a canon to it, there's research that shows that blah, blah, blah, and then there's other things that we're like, 'Mmm, they don't really count.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, any school in the U.S where you would be studying comparative religion, a religion that's not a majority religion in the U.S is treated as folklore and mythology, but the religion that the majority of the people observe on the weekends, that's different. That's truth.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And if you're going to treat them all as equally made up, that is something that humans have a hard time with. "What do you mean? No, this is real. I believe in this." We're going to see in the seventh book that Hermione has her journey as the equivalent of an atheist. Hermione in the books is not an atheist. Hermione in the books, we see hints that she has faith, but in the sense that she doesn't believe that any of these superstitious things -- like Grims or portents or anything that Trelawney is talking about -- she doesn't believe that those things are scientifically valid; that prevents her from being receptive to the actual mysteries that Harry comes to know, that Dumbledore expects Harry to come to know, in the seventh book. Hermione lags, and she does eventually see the evidence and understand that there's something outside of what she can comprehend through her usual scientific methods. That's exactly the conflict that she and Ron are talking about here when he says, "Oh, you're not going to know what to do about this because Divination is not a subject that you can master by reading," and Hermione is shocked and very uncomfortable. He's right, because even if none of these things are actually true -- even if none of them work -- they are about ways that humans have dealt with uncertainty, and they have become quite developed because humans need that much structure in our imaginative response to the fear of uncertainty. This is how we have made the structure to grapple with this. The way that we have invented these systems to tell the future, to grapple with this: that's where the interest lies in these different forms, and that's what she's teaching. It's not quite right to just dismiss it, as Hermione does, as completely not worth looking at. "You just don't like being bad at something for a change." Ooh, ouch.

JC: And there is that. I've 100 percent been guilty of this my entire life of something that doesn't align with the way that I was taught that the world works or the way that I was taught that you validate knowledge. It can be really uncomfortable to be in that position, where you're like, "Uh..."

Lorrie: "But the scientific method has been so good to me!"

JC: Exactly. Oh. "I know it's been shitty for some people, but yeah."

Lorrie: "But for me, it's really backed me up."

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah. Yeah. I do encourage people... If anyone wants, I'll make a podcast recommendation for anyone who is interested in learning more about this: Abolition Science Radio. I would say it's the last six or seven episodes. One of the podcasters... I'm doing a podcast version of her dissertation basically about decolonizing science education. That's a recommendation that I'll make if you want to learn more about ways of knowing in the world and how they were shaped by colonialism, and yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. What a thrilling addition!

JC: Yeah, so when you're done with our podcast... While you're waiting for our next episode to come out, go listen to that. It's great!

Lorrie: After that, there's a whole other new class to attend. Hagrid is starting his second chance in life, and he is relatably nervous and so vulnerable he doesn't know what he's doing. He is both underprepared and over-prepared.

JC: He is such a 'first day of the first year of teaching'. The fact that he comes to them and says, "I've been up since five in the morning getting things ready." I was like, 'That is so relatable.'

Lorrie: Oh, yeah.

JC: I remember the first day of school my first year of teaching, and I spent the entire weekend getting all the little things ready. I went in that first day and I was there super early and had everything set up, and I was like, "I'm finally a teacher!" It was overdone; of course, I had overplanned, and I remember getting to the end of that day and being exhausted and then sitting down thinking, "I have no idea what I'm doing tomorrow."

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: Then I'm having a meltdown of, "Oh, my God! This is going to be my life every day for this... Holy shit, what am I going to do?"

Lorrie: "This is so hard!"

JC: "What did I get myself into?!" Yeah. I feel for Hagrid in all of this, because he's worked so hard and he's put so much thought into it. He selected this book that none of the kids have figured out how to open.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, that he thought was the greatest thing in the world. It is kind of the greatest thing in the world actually.

JC: And instead of starting small, he's bringing out this huge fascinating topic and it backfires.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. "Let's start with Hippogriffs!"

JC: "Let's start with this dangerous creature!"

Lorrie: 'Magnificent' creature.

JC: Yeah. We've established that Hagrid doesn't necessarily have a perspective on what's dangerous and what's not.

Lorrie: If I were eight feet tall, yeah, sure.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Oi, yai yai.

JC: But the way that Harry so fiercely tries to protect Hagrid and support Hagrid throughout this section... Does his best.

Lorrie: It's very dear, yeah.

JC: Yeah, but also the fact that the Trio are watching this and they're like, 'This is going to go badly.'

Lorrie: 'Oh, no.'

JC: 'When is it going to go to Hell? We'll do our best, but oh, no, Hagrid. Oh, no.'

Lorrie: 'Oh, no.' And it does go badly. Oh, and we meet Buckbeak, a very important character: a beautiful, majestic Hippogriff who comes from his own culture, and Hagrid is appropriately introducing kids to how you approach people of a different culture (or in this case, Hippogriffs of a different culture). "You are considered polite if you bow. They're not going to trust you if you do this. You might not know it; that's why I'm telling you. When people are insulted, bad things can happen." I do love, too, the way that it's so much like life: when Harry makes some progress and then Hagrid just says, "Great! You're prepared now. Here, ride him. Up you go!" Nobody told Harry he was going to be flying; nobody told him how to fly. The terror that he doesn't know where to grip, and this thing is flying... that is so relatable. But yeah, how many times has that happened to you, where somebody says, "Would you do this?" and you're like, "Yeah, sure, I guess," and they're like, "Great!" Then they dump a load of stuff on you and leave, and you're like, "Where do I hold? I'm going to fall off!"

JC: Yeah, yeah. That's something that was really well done in the film version of this, where Hagrid throws Harry on Buckbeak's back and off they go! That was funny. It was even more of that "here you go!" thing. Yeah. I had forgotten, too, that there were multiple Hippogriffs in the pen, and that the students were all coming out; Harry steps up and, of course, everyone's like, "Harry, remember the thing from Divination? You're going to die!"

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: And that idea that death is this specter hanging over Harry the entire semester now. He doesn't necessarily believe it, but Sirius Black's going to murder him, or he's going to die from a horrible magical accident. Everyone is expecting.

Lorrie: And Hermione is like, "Well, that's not news. Everyone knows Harry's going to die. Carrying on..." Yeah. And the fact that he does so well with this -- the fact that he's the one who shows the other kids that they can, in fact, step up into this lesson -- that really shuts down what Malfoy was trying to do by making fun of him. Yeah, Harry does have all these things that make him do things like pass out when everyone else is only feeling nauseated, but that's because he has real challenges and he's also strong enough to meet them, and Malfoy's not the one who bravely rode the Hippogriff first.

JC: True.

Lorrie: So he's got to do something else.

JC: So then Malfoy has to find another way, yeah. Oh. Yeah. This whole scene, Malfoy is disrespecting Hagrid as a teacher; for anyone who was a good student, that idea of being in a room when people are being mean to the teacher.

Lorrie: Oh, I hate that.

JC: It's so awful.

Lorrie: So excruciating.

JC: It's so awful. I remember sitting through that in high school, and some teachers could deal with it and some didn't know how to deal with it. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and some broke.

JC: Yeah, seeing that happen and seeing Harry and Hermione notice that is like UGH, but also with Malfoy there's this layer of knowing that Hagrid isn't fully human. For Malfoy, anyone who's not a pureblood wizard is beneath him, and so that idea.

Lorrie: It's insulting.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "I'm insulted that he's my teacher; I can take this out on him."

JC: "And the fact that you expect me to listen to this and learn." And Malfoy's obviously not listening, so when he does get attacked by Buckbeak, then there's a bit of, "Okay, well, you deserve that. You didn't listen to any of the instructions."

Lorrie: And he refuses to give respect to another creature, to a lesser creature. "What did you think was going to happen, you rude idiot?" Harry, Ron and Hermione see this being done to Hagrid, and you can't stop it from happening. You just watch it happening, and poor Hagrid finishes up his first day as a teacher drinking himself into shame.

JC: Relatable, to be honest.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, gosh, the number of times that I've had students come out of a lesson the first time they've taught it and come out and cry...

Lorrie: Oh, God.

JC: It's never as bad as they actually thought it was. Well, in this case, actually, it kind of is bad if he had to carry a student, and then it turns out this becomes a whole big plot.

Lorrie: Right. He didn't have the experience to foresee this. If this were the fifth time you were teaching this course, then he would know. Well, first of all, he wouldn't have started with Hippogriffs, and he would know that you can't bring something as majestic and proud as a Hippogriff to a bunch of 13-year-olds and expect that they're going to follow your instructions.

JC: Yeah. Right.

Lorrie: Fortunately, Harry, Ron and Hermione are so wonderful that they know to go take care of Hagrid.

JC: Then they get a hint there that it's already gone to the Board of Governors, and they start to say, "Okay, this is not going to be good for Hagrid."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and we're getting a glimpse of the things that are going to come.

Lorrie: Yeah, he's right to be nervous.

JC: And also, he knows how tenuous his status is at the school anyway, so yeah. Are they going to throw him back in Azkaban? What are they going to... Yeah.

Lorrie: What's going to happen next? Yeah, and he let down Dumbledore.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: And that is a big theme in this book: when somebody that you totally look up to has trusted you with more than you thought you were going to be trusted with, then the possibility of letting them down is the worst thing in the world. Harry feels that with the Weasleys sometimes.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The Weasleys have changed their whole lives around to accommodate his needs because they care about him, and then he forgets this and he jaunts off to Hogsmeade or whatever. Then when he gets reminded, "You know that everyone is totally putting themselves out for you," then he feels awful. There are at least two other characters central to this plot who have a similar storyline going on, as we will see, where the fear of letting down the trust of somebody that they worship controls their behavior, not always in a good way. Yeah, and here's Hagrid being the third, thinking Dumbledore the great man has given him a second chance, and he's already sent a student to the hospital wing.

JC: And the wrong student, let's be real.

Lorrie: Oh, God.

JC: The absolute worst thing that could have happened, yeah.

Lorrie: Although Hagrid does do the thing that makes Harry Potter a children's series and not, as this author often writes, an adult version of the same story. No matter how bad things are for Hagrid, he is still the grown-up who takes care of the kid. Even though Draco is a horrible human being and totally brought this on everybody -- even though Hagrid sees his career crumbling before him before it's even started -- he still sees bleeding Draco and immediately snaps into the mode of, "Oh no, this child is injured. I will pick you up and bring you to the hospital wing right away. Whatever happens after that happens, but the first thing I have to do..."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Hagrid does not waste a second; he goes right into grown-up mode.

JC: Right. Yeah, that's really true.

Lorrie: And that's what makes Harry Potter a fairy tale.

JC: Oh. Yeow.

Lorrie: There's still that structure in place to take care of the reader. In this world, the grown-ups -- no matter how much you think, 'Where are the grown-ups? What are they doing?' -- there's some degree to which that always does kick in; when it doesn't, like when we get Umbridge in the fifth book, everybody knows that's wrong.

JC: Yeah, that's really true. Ooh.

Lorrie: In fact, that's how this chapter closes: because Hagrid is drunk, Hermione, Harry and Ron have to remind him to sober up; he's being quite disgraceful and he's blubbing, and "Please, don't be like this." But then suddenly, he remembers that Harry shouldn't be out there and immediately he scolds them, and he scolds Ron and Hermione for letting it happen. Suddenly he's a grown-up again, and the kids know he's right.

JC: And he walks them back up to the castle.

Lorrie: He makes them go back, yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: In fact, he's angry at them. "Hagrid strode over to Harry, grabbed his arm, and pulled him to the door." "I am the grown-up here. You're not supposed to be doing this." That re-establishes that Hagrid still is a grown-up, even though the kids have just been taking care of him, so it's still a fairy tale.

JC: Interesting. Oh, that statement is painful though, isn't it? How do you know it's a fairy tale? Because the adults care about the children's welfare.

Lorrie: Because, yeah, they'll still be there for you.

JC: Even though it doesn't always seem like it. Oh, my gosh. Yeah.

Lorrie: And this is part of what I love about contrasting the *Harry Potter* series with what we have of the *Fantastic Beasts* movie series: that is the same story, not a fairy tale, where the adults don't show up.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: That's what really happens. It's really, really good to have brought this chapter to a secure place of an adult taking care of the kids, because the next chapter is one of the hardest ones to deal with in this series not only because of what happens in the chapter, but also because of what has happened between readers and the author.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: The next chapter is called The Boggart in the Wardrobe.

JC: Oh, yes.

Lorrie: And it was never an easy chapter to read. It was always one of the most eventful, super emotional, pivotal chapters in the series. Then after TERFpocalypse began in 2019 and 2020, it became infinitely more turbulent and significant and a chore, but a necessary one if you're a person who has ever felt something significant about this story in the series.

JC: All right, then. Coming up next!

Lorrie: And Snape is at the middle because Snape is the story, and everybody has something to feel about this.

JC: All right. Looking forward to it.

Lorrie: Yeah. 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.