

## Ep 3.8: Flight of the Fat Lady

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 Eight: Flight of the Fat Lady.

Lorrie: It's Halloween at Hogwarts. You know what that means: something big, scary and mysterious happens and it's going to take the rest of the year to figure it out. Crookshanks keeps attacking Scabbers. Harry can't go to Hogsmeade, so Lupin invites him into his office where Snape happens upon them. And then there's danger...

JC: Ooh. Halloween, Halloween.

Lorrie: Yeah. So, how have you recovered from last week's recording about The Boggart in the Wardrobe chapter, JC?

JC: Yeah. I did spend a lot of time thinking about a lot of the things that we talked about there. Then, honestly, work consumed me, so I stopped thinking about anything else for a while, but this chapter felt like a light dessert in comparison.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What did you notice about this chapter?

JC: When I opened it, the name of the chapter, "The Flight of the Fat Lady"... I was like, 'Okay, here we go.' A little eye roll there... It feels like Flight of the Bumblebee... It feels like the framing of the name is a reference to that, but yeah. That's where I started, was with the name and being reminded of J.K.R.'s writings about people who are fat.

Lorrie: Yeah. Fortunately, for me, the title is there, but then we don't spend a lot of time in the chapter on that issue.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: This chapter... This chapter amazes me, because it establishes that absolutely everybody in it has a secret.

JC: Oooh.

Lorrie: So the Sneakoscope would be going off constantly for absolutely everyone and therefore be useless.

JC: Ooh, very interesting.

Lorrie: And not everybody's secret is a dangerous one, but how can we know that, because it's a secret. Sometimes these secrets seem like they will be dangerous, and they turn out to be really well-meaning at heart. But yeah, be on your guard, and at this point there's no telling where any of this story is going to go. I find this chapter to be magnificently done as a mystery, establishing the complete unknowability of everybody's motives and how that affects their surface interactions. Fun. The first thing I noticed is the sequel to the Boggart in the Wardrobe episode: Lupin has left Neville unprotected. He did this thing where he really uplifted Neville and reached into Neville's abused insecurities and gave him this foundation and this confidence, but then there was something he neglected to do. He neglected to keep Neville protected with this quote: "Snape was in a particularly vindictive mood these days, and no one was in any doubt why. The story of the boggart assuming Snape's shape, and the way that Neville had dressed it in his grandmother's clothes, had traveled through the school like wildfire. Snape didn't seem to find it funny. His eyes flashed menacingly at the very mention of Professor Lupin's name, and he was bullying Neville worse than ever." That part, where the kid who had been uplifted is now exposed to retaliation: I remember that from grade school, actually. The teacher sees a dynamic and steps in and does something, but that's not always safe in the end, and it

requires some follow-through, I think, if you're going to keep the child safe. What's happening here, I think, is that there's a culture among Hogwarts faculty that you don't talk about what happens in other teachers' classrooms, or if you do, you do it privately. Everybody knows what happened. Everybody's heard about it, but it's still sort of unspoken and not addressed on the table openly. It lets the teachers use the students to act out old resentments between them, but it's not something that can be officially addressed. Poor Neville, who started out the whole episode hunted by Snape, is now getting it even worse, and it's not even something Neville did.

JC: It is interesting that we don't know at this point... As a first time reader, you don't know that there's a tremendous amount of history between Lupin and Snape, and you don't know that Neville sort of walked into the middle of that. Lupin really, in a lot of ways, used Neville to get back at Snape.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I know that's maybe not a popular reading of what happened there, but Neville sort of blindly stumbled into the middle of a very intense, old school rivalry and... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Unresolved, and nobody's clean in this. We do know that there is some history, because we

keep seeing that Snape keeps looking at Lupin. Obviously, there's something there, but as with every other mystery in this chapter about interpersonal relationships, we don't know what it's about. We do know that Lupin seems to be a really nice person and Snape is obviously the opposite of a nice person, so it's probably Snape's fault, if we go by the evidence we have so far.

JC: It's also interesting here that everybody -- except the Slytherins, as it's mentioned -- loves Lupin's class, and I think part of that is because everybody knows that Lupin did this thing that made fun of Snape, so there's house rivalry stuff going on. But it's very interesting to mention that everyone loves Lupin's class. It's their favorite class, compared to the other classes that Harry's taking -- Potions, which has always been torture for him; Divination, which is also something that's a really unpleasant experience; and then poor Hagrid and Care of Magical Creatures, where Hagrid has returned to basically the safest possible, most boring subject ever so that he's not on anybody's radar.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This discussion of these different classes... The kids have feelings about these different classes, and some kids really like divination and some of them hate it. All of that made me think a lot about how one teacher can either make or break a subject for a kid.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This happens a lot in math, where there's one math teacher... Somewhere in the 12 years that you take math, there's one teacher who makes it so miserable of an experience that kids go, "I'm done with this subject. I hate it."

Lorrie: "My brain is turned off." Yeah.

JC: Right, and Snape's done that for Potions for a lot of kids. Trelawney's done that with Divination. Harry will never take that subject seriously, and he'll never really have an affinity for it because of Trelawney. Yeah, it's interesting that it reminded me of how important teachers are just for making kids want to learn anything and how that's playing out in this school.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's something that I've told my kids: when you choose classes, it doesn't even matter if you like the subject that much. Choose by teacher. It's really sad when there's a subject that you absolutely love, and the teacher stands in between you and learning.

JC: Ooh, yeah.

Lorrie: That's really sad.

JC: Yeah. I have my pre-service elementary teachers

write an essay at the beginning of the semester when I work with them about what their experiences have been with math. I would say 65 to 70 percent of them have a story about a teacher who was so horrible to them that it turned them off to it forever, and that's always heartbreaking because it's like, oh, gosh. The odds of you getting a teacher like that in math at some point during your life are actually pretty high.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's like, oh, my life's work.

Lorrie: Oh... Well, I'm glad that you're doing it.

JC: But yeah, Snape is doing that for Potions, except he's the only Potions teacher. Well, so far.

Lorrie: To feel a bit better about it, despite how he's treating some of the students, it's nice every once in a while in future volumes to hear that when the kids go for their OWLs and Snape's not standing over them being mean, they actually do better than when he's menacing them. Hopefully, there's a little resilience, and that does happen in real life, too, sometimes. Well, maybe a teacher like that doesn't *entirely* destroy your ability to access that subject, fingers crossed.

JC: Yeah. They recognize that it's an important subject; they are learning something. It does make me think --

and we'll get to this later, I think, in the sixth year. At the end of fifth year, Harry's, like, "I'm done with Potions." He's not taking AP Potions, whatever it is, he's not taking it. Then the next year he finds out, "Well, if you want to be an Auror, you have to take AP Potions."

Lorrie: Yeah. You have to go. Yeah.

JC: He's like, "I don't want to," and then there's a different Potions teacher that year, and then everything that happens in that book will happen. But yeah...

Lorrie: The nice thing is, one way or another, Harry Potter is a fairly competent Potions brewer. Adult Harry Potter, if he has to brew a potion that your average wizard is supposed to be able to brew, he'll be able to do it, thank goodness. Is this because of Snape? No, but it is because of alter ego Snape, we'll find out later; the Snape that doesn't know Harry and doesn't hate him, and doesn't make it awful.

JC: Who actually is a good teacher, yeah. So that's interesting. We'll get to that in about five years.

Lorrie: Yes, we will. All right. Anyway, the situation now is that this really awful dynamic has happened in a classroom. There's all sorts of stuff happening, but officially there's no way to talk about it among the faculty and it's hurting Neville, but oh, well. That's happening, and then Crookshanks keeps attacking Scabbers;



there's this hilarious account of Crookshanks eating a spider and looking straight at Ron like, "I know this is your phobia and I'm going to take my time chewing up each and every one of these legs." Crookshanks is not making a case for himself. Hermione, of course, always thinks, "No, no, you can't be mean to even creatures that are dangerous," so nobody thinks that she's right. This is the start of a major rift between Ron and Hermione. We know Crookshanks has a secret, which he can't tell because he's a cat, a half-Kneazle; Scabbers has a secret, of course, but he's so hapless at this point I don't know if anybody reading this the first time can catch on to that. I certainly didn't.

JC: I didn't either. Yeah, it was an utter shock to me that Scabbers turned out to be someone else. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's not only just a rat, but he's hapless even for a rat.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, and it hadn't even occurred to me... I remember, when we get the big reveal about Scabbers, Scabbers had been around for a while. I know that rats can't live that long, but I was like, 'But he's a magical rat.'

Lorrie: But he doesn't seem to be magical.

JC: Yeah. It's very interesting, right.

Lorrie: Right. So the hints are masterfully done.

JC: Yeah, that is really well done.

Lorrie: You're supposed to know something weird is happening. The rat tonic is not working; he's still losing weight, so that's happening. Then there's the 16th of October, which is one of these autobiographical author Easter eggs: there's the prophecy from Trelawney that the thing you're dreading is going to happen on the 16th of October. Then there's this very funny passage about how Lavender thinks it means that was the tragedy of her rabbit dying, and Hermione is like, "That doesn't even make any sense." Of course, Hermione's right and everyone's glaring at Hermione for this. October 16th was the wedding date between Rowling and her first husband, who was abusive. Does that change the story any? No, but it is something that... I don't want to give up knowing these things. Yeah, I want to know.

JC: It is interesting. If you were going to pick dates for a story that you were writing, yeah, of course you would put in things that are meaningful to you.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Well, maybe. Maybe you do pick random things, but yeah, it's not a surprise that it's a marker of something that was an unpleasant date in her life.

Lorrie: Yeah. And as the author, you have the right to do that. You don't have to think, 'Oh, well, there's no personal trace of the author in the text because the author is dead, so I should obey that law and not put in things.'" No, put in whatever you want.

JC: I really have a lot of sympathy for Hermione in that scene, because that is so familiar to me: that urge to tell someone they're wrong.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? When it's so clear to you... When you're looking at a situation, you're like, "How do you not see this?" It's so clear and logical and then you try to lay it out, and then people are mad at you. "Because you're missing the point." I'm like, 'Oh, God. That's so familiar to me.'

Lorrie: Yeah, because the thing here is her being afraid that this prediction was coming true is making her feel worse. "Look, it's bad enough that your beloved pet has died. You don't have to now feel powerless to the fates and think that this terrible thing is going to happen to you all the time and you have no..." Yeah. Anyway... Hermione is finding no allies.

JC: It's also interesting, too: there's a line in here of Ron telling Hermione, "There's something funny about your cat," or something like that, which I thought was ironic

because there's Scabbers right there.

Lorrie: Yeah. And there is something funny about her cat.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: He is very advanced for a cat since he's not full cat. Yeah, he's special in a way that's similar to Hermione being special. They're a good team.

JC: I want to back up to something a little earlier in the chapter that stood out to me: Oliver Wood getting the Quidditch team back together. It didn't occur to me until this reading that he's a seventh year, which means that when Harry first joined the Quidditch team, Oliver was a fifth year; he was fifteen and the captain of the Quidditch team, and it was implied then that he had maybe been the captain the year before that. I have a high school kid, and the idea that a freshman or sophomore would be the captain of the big team is really interesting because Oliver Wood also says how long it's been since Gryffindor won the House Cup. That makes me think, 'Has Gryffindor had a pathetic Quidditch team all this time?' It takes me back to the first book and thinking about McGonagall being so excited and breaking all these rules so that Harry can get on the Quidditch team. It made me think about that some more, and this idea that maybe Gryffindor has just been really shitty at Quidditch for a decade, and the fact that you have a

fourteen or fifteen-year-old who's the captain... He does a good job, but this would be like... Put that in a modern school situation; there's no juniors seniors who are good enough at this to be the leader. Anyway, it made me think about that kind of school environment. McGonagall and Dumbledore both were really quick to break a bunch of rules for Harry to put him on the team, but I thought, 'Wow, the Quidditch team must have been pretty pathetic.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They were like, "An 11-year-old?! Yeah!" But then if you're captain, it's just a few years older. Yeah. Anyway...

Lorrie: Oh, here we have more secrecy -- adults talking to each other in a way that the kids don't know -- when the kids are lining up to go to their first Hogsmeade visit. Neville thinks he has lost his permission slip -- which is a feeling I understand so well as a forgetful person who loses things, like, "Oh no, oh no, not again!" -- and McGonagall says, "Your grandmother sent yours to me directly, Longbottom. She seemed to think it was safer." That's kind of awesome and kind of depressing if you're in Neville's position, but oh, more things that the grown-ups are saying to each other over the heads of the kids.

JC: Yeah. And then that makes me think about my own kid. My kiddo has ADHD, and there are a lot of times

when my partner and I have had to do that kind of thing, like provide support in the background just to make sure that some things were going to go smoothly. As he's gotten older, we've pulled back on that a bit and we've done more of putting him in the position of being responsible, but I completely sympathize with Neville's grandmother, too. One example of this is when my kiddo needed a water bottle for band. It had to be a very specific, large -- we live in Texas; it's very hot. It had to be a really big water bottle of a particular size. We assumed that he would lose one, so we just bought two. Sure enough, he did; we were happy to have the replacement. We just made an assumption: he's not going to come home with it, and then we're going to wish we'd bought another one. Little things like that that you do to make sure that things go smoothly. We cannot send our kid to band camp without a water bottle; we're going to have a backup. I do sympathize with Neville's grandmother there, too. It's a very familiar feeling.

Lorrie: Well, that's what Trelawney does when he shows up for the first class. She says, "When you break this teacup, the next one... take this one," and Parvati and Lavender saying, "Ooh, she's a Seer." Well, yeah.

JC: She knows kids, yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, the Hogsmeade permission slip scene is really emotional, because McGonagall is doing all this stuff to try to not show that she feels desperately sorry

for Harry. She's going to maintain boundaries and do her job and say, "No, you can't go, you can't go." But yeah, there's this description of him coming to beg her and she's looking down or she's not answering him.

JC: Yeah. "I'm not your guardian. I can't be responsible for that." Ugh.

Lorrie: "Well, also, we've all talked about this, and you in particular mustn't go."

JC: True. Yeah, I don't know how much Hogwarts... I'm thinking about... From a school perspective, yes, you have to have parent permission for this and for that, and if you don't have it, "Sorry, kid, we can't because of liability and stuff." I'm guessing that Hogwarts is not worried about legal liability based on other things that have happened, but yeah, that's also familiar to me from a school setting.

Lorrie: I think maybe Hogwarts is relieved that the Dursleys are so horrible that of course, they didn't sign the slip because they would have had to forbid Harry.

JC: Yeah, I think it would have been a problem for Harry to be able to go to Hogsmeade, for sure. Yeah, they would have had to really think about how to handle that, and now they don't have to.

Lorrie: So Harry's left alone. Ah, it's such a good

description of how bad that feels when he's wandering around and only first- and second-years are around.

JC: They're like, "Hey, Harry, come hang out with us!"

Lorrie: Yeah. He's like, "Oh, my God. No!"

JC: And then Filch catches him in the hall, and Filch is like, "What are you doing wandering around? Go back to your common room," as if the only thing you should be doing on a Saturday is holed up in your common room.

Lorrie: Yeah. What's Harry going to say? "Oh, I'm here because my Muggle guardians are mean to me." Yeah, it's just humiliating. So then Lupin hears him walk by, thinks about it for a moment, and invites Harry into his office. Oh, something's going to happen, huh? Then we get another one of those signs that adults are talking when he says, "'I've only got teabags, I'm afraid -- but I daresay you've had enough of tea leaves?' Harry looked at him. Lupin's eyes were twinkling." 'Twinkling': we're supposed to trust Lupin. That's one of those little words that the author slips in that disposes us toward liking Lupin. "'How did you know about that?' Harry asked. 'Professor McGonagall told me,' said Lupin, passing Harry a chipped mug of tea." Okay, it's this very home-like atmosphere with a chipped mug. If McGonagall told Lupin, "Oh, Sybil's up to her old tricks again," then they surely talked about the boggart in the wardrobe incident, and Snape is not happy, not in a good mood. Whoever



Lupin is -- whatever his backstory is -- the professors that Harry trusts trust him. They're talking over the kids' heads. Okay, we're establishing this: Lupin is apparently a good guy. Hmm... And then we have Harry's secret: "He thought for a moment of telling Lupin about the dog he'd seen in Magnolia Crescent but decided not to." Oh.

JC: How different would the story have been if he had just said, "You know, I did see a..." Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, and here's Lupin keeping up a really calm facade. How badly would it have been shattered if he'd heard that. Whoa.

JC: For sure. Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry's no slouch in the secret department.

JC: I didn't even register that one, honestly, as a secret somehow. Maybe it's because we're inside Harry's head for most of the story, so it's just there. But also, it's not the first time and not the last time that Harry will know a thing that is important to the story that he doesn't feel he can tell anybody else about. That feels par for the course for this series. I didn't register.

Lorrie: I really respect Harry for this, because everybody's trying to tell him what the black dog means. He's really reserving judgment, which we're going to find

out later is parallel to Lupin being told what it means that Sirius Black is doing this and that, and Lupin reserving judgment until he sees for himself. I do respect this kid knowing, "You know what? Everybody's so eager to tell me, and I'm going to keep this to myself. Even this really nice-seeming teacher that McGonagall confides in... I'm not going to tell him right now."

JC: It's interesting to me, too -- thinking about the relationship between the teachers that you were just mentioning -- that all these people went to this school.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: McGonagall knew Lupin and Snape, and Sirius Black and Harry's parents. All of them were students there and everyone saw the dynamic, and there's this whole backstory that you could argue is also part of Harry's story that they all know, which is a theme that keeps coming up, and Harry has no clue about any of this. To the extent that anybody in the place knows, McGonagall knows what happened between Lupin and Snape. The idea of going back and teaching in the high school I went to sounded horrible to me. I was like, "Oh, my God, no!" I was a high school teacher, but I know people whose dream is that. I have students who are like, "I want to go back and teach at my high school," and I'm like, "Wow, what's that like?" But in the case of Hogwarts, that's the only option. But that dynamic of, "I knew you when you were a kid," oh, wow, that's so

interesting. There's so much that they all know that Harry doesn't know here.

Lorrie: And the interesting position that McGonagall is in, as an elder, is that she was closer to Lupin because she was closer to all her Gryffindors.

JC: True.

Lorrie: Knows that there is this bad history between the Gryffindors and Snape, but has built up a really good colleague relationship with Snape over the past several years. But now, his childhood bully has come to join the staff, and McGonagall is closer with him. They're much more comfortable with each other, so what dynamic is that? She'll know that these two 'boys' are going to have feelings about each other -- not comfortable feelings -- and she has known them, too, and she has to be professional, so it's fraught. Then Harry lies. Lupin says, "Anything worrying you, Harry?" "No," and then immediately asks why he wasn't given a chance with the boggart. Then Lupin explains, and Harry is shocked; he had expected Lupin to deny that he'd done any such thing. This is wonderful! Harry loves when adults tell him the truth.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, what a relief! And then Lupin says, "Oh, I thought you were going to see Voldemort, but you were

going to see dementors." He calls Harry wise for that. "Harry didn't know what to say to that, so he drank some more tea." I love that sentence. That is perfect characterization of how it feels to be thirteen and you're talking to a grown-up. "Uh, okay."

JC: I found that whole comment interesting, that Lupin says... I can't remember the exact quote, but it's something to the effect of: what Harry fears most is fear, and that he finds that very, very wise or very interesting. I spent some time thinking about that quote, because what obviously comes to mind is the FDR quote, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," so I thought, 'What does Lupin mean by that, that fear of fear is actually wiser than fear of any particular person or thing?' I thought that was interesting, but I guess Lupin has had a life that we, at this point in the story, don't really know a lot about, though Lupin has spent a lot of time with fear and understands how powerful it can be. I don't know. I just spent some time sitting with that quote and that idea, and thinking about it.

Lorrie: What do you think he means by it?

JC: I'm not actually sure, but one guess would be that it's probably a surprise to Lupin that a child Harry's age is able to look past the monsters in his life and think about the larger concept of what being afraid of those monsters -- how that can rule your life, how that can take charge of your life. Maybe what he means there is

that understanding that the fear itself is a bigger, controlling force than the actual monster.

Lorrie: I didn't think, until you brought it up just now, that this is actually a good counterpart to Lavender believing that her rabbit's death justified the fear from Sybil Trelawney's prediction, because if you're afraid of Voldemort, that's not very empowering because you have no control over where he is or when he's going to come back or what he's going to do. But if you're afraid of your fear, that's more empowering because you can actually do something about it. You can learn tactics to manage it, which Lupin is just about to teach Harry, and that's the argument that Hermione has just lost with Lavender.

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: Do you really have to be afraid of portents, too, on top of being upset? That's not empowering, but for Harry to have that mindset... 'Okay, can't do anything about Voldemort, but you can do something about managing your fear.'

JC: Yeah, and that goes back to the beginning of this book, too, when Harry finds out that Sirius Black is potentially going to murder him, and he's not that upset about it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's like, "Eh..."

Lorrie: "Okay. Come at me."

JC: It's that idea of, 'What is being afraid of this person going to do? It's just going to... I don't want to live in being afraid all the time.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And you're right, there's power in that.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then that's what the dementors do, actually, is leave him with only those awful feelings.

Lorrie: Yeah. Then Lupin looks at Harry and the way he's talking and says, "So you've been thinking that I didn't believe you capable of fighting the boggart?" That is really insightful of Lupin. Yes, Lupin, that's exactly what's been bothering this kid. Wow. And as soon as he says it, Harry feels better. He's like, "Okay, don't worry about that." After Lupin and Harry reach this understanding, there's a knock at the door. Snape enters. Uh-oh. Whatever is about to happen is not going to be boring, at any rate. Lupin and Snape both, in general, have a lot of secrets, but it's going to turn out in this scene that it's Lupin who has all the secrets, which

is unexpected but awesome storytelling. What do you think of this scene when Snape enters and looks around and... Let's see: "He was carrying a goblet, which was smoking faintly, and stopped at the sight of Harry, his black eyes narrowing." Why? What is going on in Snape's mind at the sight of Harry there?

JC: He's got to be reminded of James. He's got to be reminded of these people that made his life hell when he was in school, and there is Lupin with Harry. I think he was probably taken back in time and reminded of why he hates these people in the first place.

Lorrie: 'Oh, God... it's starting again.'

JC: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So Lupin has already done things that mocked Snape. What's he going to cook up with Harry, because I think Snape probably thinks Harry would be on board with that.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah. In my mind, when Snape looks at Harry this year, with Lupin on staff and Sirius Black on the loose, I imagine that Snape sees him as Potter the Second. Eventually, after we get to the end of this book, when I come back and reread this scene, I realize that's not what Snape was thinking, but it takes me a lot to come back and reread this because that surface reading — that he's being reminded of Lupin with a Potter — is so compelling. Snape has good reason to remember that not fondly. That cover story that's covering up what

Snape is really thinking when he's watching the two of them together works so effectively, I think a lot of readers take it at that and don't reread it. That's one of the things that makes this book such a brilliant achievement to me, is how effectively it works on every level. Of course, we don't trust Snape at this point; whatever he's thinking can't be good.

JC: Okay, so I have no idea what you're going to say. I have no clue; my mind is spinning. 'What could it be? What is he really thinking?' The only other thing that comes to my mind is the fact that, since he's bringing in the potion -- the werewolf Midol that he's bringing -- there's some kind of... 'Why is he hanging out with children this close to the full moon?' That's the other thing that pops into my head here.

Lorrie: Well, that's the general problem with hiring somebody that has a chronic illness that is very poorly understood and very poorly managed. But later on in this book, we're going to find out why Snape didn't think it was a good idea for Dumbledore to hire Lupin, what he remembers Lupin doing to him in the past, what Sirius Black is supposedly out on the loose to accomplish, and what Snape thinks is the relationship between Lupin and Sirius.

JC: Okay, so does he think, then, that Lupin is going to deliver Harry to Sirius Black?



Lorrie: It took me several reads of this book to realize that's what's going on.

JC: Ah, okay.

Lorrie: Because if you look at Snape, he's coming in with the goblet — which is smoking faintly — walking into the office of this guy he can't stand, having done this special thing that only Snape can do, brewing this really finicky potion, bringing it to him, and then sees Harry in his office, "his black eyes narrowing." He, like Hermione, has been trying to tell Dumbledore, "Don't hire him, I know he's in league with Sirius Black," and Dumbledore saying, "No, you're wrong." No one's believing him. The word that gave me chills when it occurred to me what Snape thinks is happening here, and has reason to think this even though he's completely wrong: Snape thinks Lupin is grooming Harry to trust him. He thinks Lupin has an ulterior motive that is very much against Harry's interests. Snape is in this position of being the only person who thinks this and it's about a kid he hates. The hiddenness of what's happening secretly in Snape's mind is that this is Snape's trademark that nobody can understand because it's so statistically weird: the trademark of wanting to protect somebody he doesn't like. Snape is not a cuddly, warm person to begin with; isn't particularly protective except in this petulant, immature, retaliatory way around his Slytherins; obviously cannot stand Harry and also many other Gryffindors; and isn't getting any emotional support or

belief from his boss, and yet is left with this protective urge both toward Lupin (which is not personal) to keep him from this terrible transformation and worried that Lupin is going to be working some sort of agenda on this kid that Snape doesn't like. Meanwhile, everybody else thinks everything is just fine, and is just looking at Snape like, "What is your problem, Augusta Longbottom? And by the way, why are you even being meaner than ever to Neville?" which he is. So here's Snape walking in with this smoking goblet, looking at the nice teacher and the kid who isn't allowed in Hogsmeade (who looks exactly like his dad). Lupin then does this amazing job -- or actually, I should say the writer does this amazing job -- of showing that Lupin is really nervous and is covering with this cascade of adverbs and adjectives. "'Ah, Severus,' said Lupin, smiling." He's smiling pleasantly. Every time Lupin is pleasant and smiling, you're like, 'Okay, he's scared, he's covering up.' He's so pleasant on the surface, and Snape is, unlike Lupin, completely unworried about being unlikable on the surface. Grumpy as hell. "Snape sat down the smoking goblet, his eyes wandering between Harry and Lupin." Why? What does he think is going on between them? This mystery is so good. It's so well written, and Lupin is cheerfully saying, "'Oh, grindylow.' 'Fascinating,' said Snape, without looking at it. 'You should drink that directly, Lupin.'" He's so not here for all the pleasant small talk, and he comes off totally as the jerk here. "'Yes, yes, I will,' said Lupin." He can't talk in front of Harry. Harry is there with his super secret potion being delivered, and yeah, he can't

talk about this. "I made an entire cauldronful." I love that so much. Snape is such an unpleasant person, people are thinking, 'Can we even trust what he's doing?' In my head, Snape has made the entire cauldronful because if he could, he would grab Lupin by the ankle and dip him in the entire cauldron. People are saying, "Well, he dislikes Lupin so much. Does he even want to give him wolfsbane? Wouldn't he want him to suffer?" No. Snape is all about defense. If you can't prevent your boss from hiring somebody you don't trust, you can at least try to prevent the thing happening that you're afraid of, which is that this person isn't safe. His job is to brew the wolfsbane. He will brew an entire cauldronful, and he's going to stand there until Lupin drinks it.

JC: It also occurred to me -- that moment when he says, "I brewed an entire cauldronful, you might want to drink that" -- that's one of the first times that he is directly dropping hints about Lupin. We see later in this book that he starts dropping more hints about Lupin's nature, because he's like, "I can't be the only person who worries about this," or whatever is going on there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then Hermione is the one who picks up all the hints, but this felt like the first hint. "Come on, Harry, there's something going on here. Rub two brain cells together."

Lorrie: Yeah, I don't think Snape is doing this for Harry's benefit.

JC: Yeah, I would not say 'benefit.'

Lorrie: Yeah, no, the position that Snape is in here I so identify with as somebody who sees somebody being not only self-destructive, possibly, but dangerous to others, but you can't make somebody take their medicine. You can't make somebody... say somebody has a really bad habit that is harmful to the people around them. You can't stop them from doing that. You can try. You can make it super easy for them to avail themselves, but at some point you can't make it happen and you have to watch the people around them make their own decisions about how much proximity and trust they're going to have around this, because people have their own struggles. That's part of Snape's constant anxiety in life as a human being, is being frantic. 'Why don't people care about defending themselves enough? What do I have to do to get people to defend themselves? Do they not know how bad things can get?' Some people have an excuse to not know because they are children. Lupin has no excuse to not know how bad things can get, and yet here he is possibly not going to drink this potion. It's a feeling that I identify with. Oi... Trying to keep people safe who maybe don't want to keep themselves safe. "There was a look in his eye Harry didn't like. He backed out of the room, unsmiling and watchful." The reader has to think, what is that

about? Backing out? What does Harry think is going on in Snape's mind? What does the reader think is going on in Snape's mind, and what is it really? This is so well written. Oh, wow! So yeah, here's the 13-year-old sitting in an office, and here's grown-ups doing stuff that he has no idea what they're feeling about. "Harry looked curiously at the goblet. Lupin smiled." Lupin... I don't know if this is how anyone else reads it, but I read that and I thought, 'Oh, he has appeasement behaviors, or that's how it feels to me.' If people decide to look too closely at a situation, he's in danger. He has to make it so that they think, 'No, no, everything's under control.' So yeah, Snape has brewed him a potion that is protection without affection -- Snape's signature in life -- and then Lupin explains to Harry, so refreshingly, "I've never been much of a potion brewer." This modesty after Lockhart is so realistic and nice. "I'm good at some things, not at others, like everybody." The way that sugar doesn't help... I have this Korean friend who is a Harry Potter fan, and we realized, 'Oh, my goodness, now we know what wolfsbane tastes like.' It's Chinese medicine herbs; it's one of the tenets of Chinese medicine that it has to taste bad for you if it's going to work. I don't necessarily agree with that, but boy, that stuff can taste really terrible. Yeah. After we thought that, in my mind, Snape, if he were Korean, would be like one of those scary ladies that mixes up Chinese herbs for you and then stands there and yells at you to drink it, and you do because you're so scared of them. Then Lupin confuses Harry further by saying, "I am very

lucky to be working alongside Professor Snape." That's a new one. No one has ever said that about Snape before. This is all very confusing. It's awesome! Harry, quite naturally, "had a crazy urge to knock the goblet out of his hands." That is so natural, and it is awesome that Harry is learning to fight an overwhelming urge in this really mature way because it might not be right... the same way that he's refusing to believe automatically that the black dog is a Grim. It's like, 'Well, that would be the instinctual response. I don't have all the information yet.' Harry's controlling -- it's great. What Harry does know is the grown-ups know something and they're not telling Harry. Then Harry does this adorable, hapless 13-year-old attempt to put Lupin on his guard, maybe: "Professor Snape's very interested in the Dark Arts... he'd do anything to get the Defense job," and Lupin's like, "You don't say." Yeah, the kid is really worried Lupin knows more than he does; Lupin won't take the bait, but he's not free to reassure the kid. If he had a clear conscience on this, he could have said something to Harry, like "Yes, I see your concerns and it's fine." No, he can't. He really is hiding something. Then the master stroke, the end of this passage: "The empty goblet was still smoking." It's almost too obvious, it's almost self-indulgent, but I love it there. It's like, "Yes, I, the writer, have just pulled off a masterpiece of a scene. I know it, you know it; have fun figuring this out for the rest of the book." So yeah, lovely set piece. I don't know about you, but after I read that, I knew a lot less than I did before.

JC: It is interesting. Like with all good mysteries, the first time you read a book is a completely different experience than the second time you read the book, and you can never really go back and get back in the headspace of what you thought and what you felt the first time. It's interesting to try to strip away what I already know and think about, all those years ago, what I thought was happening in the scene. I can't really... Yeah, it's hard to do it.

Lorrie: It's hard, yeah, but you can feel the layers of rereading that you went through as you re-re-re-read this. Wow, and there's still more to discover, which is the weird thing to me and why I respect this series so much. Yeah, it's amazing enough for an author to write something and then you go, "Oh, my goodness, I have to go back and reread that. Huh, I didn't see that. Wow! Now I understand." But for that to keep yielding more information after multiple rereads -- I respect that. That is one of the things... There are definitely several schools of criticism that accuse Rowling and *Harry Potter* of not being good as literature -- of being derivative or not well written, or that she uses too many adverbs or whatever. I don't agree because of how much more it yields for me every time I still continue to reread, even though I don't even know how many times I've reread. I do think it was all intended there, because for Snape to walk in, look at this kid and Lupin, be wary, deposit this tricky potion and then back out... We're not imagining that the author wrote secrets into that scene --

secrets in history and suspicion, and everybody having agendas that nobody else knows about. Also, how very wrong every character is about something in the end, which is, I think, the difference between a good, competent writer of mystery and a great one: that she even has room for everybody to be completely wrong about something in a really natural way, and they don't all learn that about each other, either. The reader will know how everybody was wrong, but the characters continue to not know about each other; that continues on in future volumes as well.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You see why they have misconceptions about what's going on, and no, it does not get all cleared up. So Ron and Hermione come back from Hogsmeade. I love this line: "A shower of brilliantly colored sweets fell into Harry's lap." They really love him!

JC: They tried so hard to make up for the fact that he couldn't go.

Lorrie: They're like, "However much things suck, we thought about you the whole time."

JC: "We even tried to bring back butterbeer for you, and we couldn't do it." Yeah.

Lorrie: "But it's not that we didn't try!" Yeah, so they



bring back all of this child love in the form of these beautiful candies, and then it's so satisfying when Harry tells them what happened in Lupin's office. It's so satisfying to hear Ron say, "Lupin drank it? Is he mad?" Yeah, that is a large part of the response to this whole scene: what the heck is going on?! And then they go to the Halloween Feast.

JC: Is this the first time that Harry's actually gotten to enjoy Halloween Feast?

Lorrie: Let's see...

JC: Because the first year, it was the troll.

Lorrie: Yeah, the first year there was a troll in the dungeon.

JC: The second year, they went to the Death Day Party.

Lorrie: The Death Day Party.

JC: Yeah, and then the whole thing happened with the Chamber of Secrets, so I feel like this is the first year he's actually gotten to enjoy the damn feast, and we know something's going to happen because it's Halloween.

Lorrie: Even though he didn't get to go to Hogsmeade beforehand, but all right, all right, the feast is good, even

though he's quite grumpy about it. Then at the feast: "Was he imagining it, or were Snape's eyes flickering toward Lupin more often than was natural?" Okay, what is Snape suspecting Lupin of? Meanwhile, Lupin's like, "Blah, blah, blah," talking to Flitwick, more evidence that the rest of the staff totally trusts Lupin. Whatever Snape is suspecting Lupin of... After the feast, they go back to the common room and the Gryffindor portrait is "slashed so viciously that strips of canvas littered the floor; great chunks of it had been torn away completely." Wow. Then we get the delight of Peeves narrating what happened. This is my favorite thing ever that Peeves says: he calls Dumbledore "Professorhead," and says, "Nasty temper he's got, that Sirius Black." Amazing cliffhanger. Wow.

JC: Yeah, there's a lot of questions that come up then. How did Sirius Black get past the Dementors? How did he get into the castle? It's really building up this mystery about, 'Who is this person, and how powerful is he that he was able to escape Azkaban?'

Lorrie: Why tonight? Was it while everybody was out at Hogsmeade? Why are all the other teachers talking happily to Lupin, while Snape keeps looking at him suspiciously? And the carnage... Okay, one thing we do definitely know about Sirius Black is he really is violent.

JC: It's also interesting, too, that Peeves has clearly known for a while that Sirius Black's in the castle and he

hasn't told anybody.

Lorrie: Well, has he, or is it just that he happened to see this?

JC: Well, this seems to be news to everyone. If Peeves had told anyone that Sirius Black was there, then they would have locked down the school. That's kind of the whole reason the dementors are there. That was my thought, was that Peeves didn't rush right off to report this news to anyone. He's like, "Lalala..."

Lorrie: Yeah, although I don't think he had that much time, because I think he's reporting what just happened.

JC: Oh, okay, so you think it just had happened. Okay.

Lorrie: Because Sirius would have known what time the Halloween Feast was happening.

JC: Yeah. I don't know how long the Halloween Feast was, but I assume that Peeves had known for -- I don't know, who knows -- an hour? Yeah.

Lorrie: For several minutes, yeah.

JC: But he didn't ring an alarm like he would if a kid was out of bed at midnight, where he starts banging pots and pans to bring Filch running.

Lorrie: No.

JC: He waited until he could reveal it in a dramatic way.

Lorrie: He hung around.

JC: Yeah. "Oh, this is going to be good."

Lorrie: He hung around to see the fun. 'Professorhead.'

JC: 'Professorhead,' yeah.

Lorrie: What a great cliffhanger!

JC: There's a moment actually before they go to the feast: they're talking about everything that happened at Hogsmeade, and then there's this moment where Hermione checks her watch. It's such an interesting little transitional moment, right before it: "He told them all about the goblet. Ron's mouth fell open. 'Lupin drank it?' he gasped. 'Is he mad?' Hermione checked her watch. 'We'd better go down, you know, the feast'll be starting in five minutes.'" There's something about that, a couple of things there that stood out to me, and I'd love to hear your take on it. It felt like... The idea of looking at your watch, like, 'Sooooo, moving right along,' the change of subject -- she didn't like the whole topic of Lupin and the potion, that somehow that was something to change the subject from. Also, I think this is the first mention of a wristwatch that I recall seeing. I thought that was

interesting. It feels like such a Muggle item; I can imagine wizards with pocket watches, but there's something about Hermione wearing a wristwatch that feels like that's a very Muggle thing to do. Then, obviously, Hermione and time: she's got to keep track of time this semester.

Lorrie: Yes, she does.

JC: I would love to hear if you have any other thoughts on that moment.

Lorrie: Well, we do have watches. Ron gets a watch when he comes of age.

JC: Ah, okay.

Lorrie: Molly gives Harry a watch that had been in the family that doesn't work -- and she's really apologetic that it doesn't work -- but he's like, "No, no, I'm glad I have an heirloom." Also, Harry wears a watch, which we learn because it stops working after the underwater challenge in the fourth book.

JC: Oh, okay.

Lorrie: So they do have watches, but yeah, this is a really good marker of Hermione setting the beginning of the window of time that Sirius has to break into the Gryffindor common room. Also, she has been needing

to keep track... Yeah, obviously. She must be hungry all the time this year. Most of the kids have a certain number of hours between meals, and she has that plus.

JC: Right. Also, I wonder -- maybe we've talked about this before; if we have, I apologize -- if you have a Time-Turner, is she only allowed to use it to go to class?

Lorrie: That's what she says later.

JC: Okay, okay, cool, because I was like, if you had the Time-Turner -- and knowing Hermione -- it'd be like, "I have six hours of homework to do, and I only have three hours. Flip, flip, flip!" If it's midnight and everybody's asleep and you're doing homework, flip it back, get yourself another hour. That's totally what I would have done, but maybe she's only allowed... Because when is she doing all the homework?

Lorrie: No, that comes up. We will see that discussed directly later, because that's one of the themes that builds. It hasn't started yet, but it's going to build. In this volume is the awfulness of fearing that you're going to let down somebody who has gone the extra mile for you. If you're a child and there's an adult who has risked themselves to try to help you along, what if you let them down? That's your worst fear. So yeah, we do find out that she has specifically been allowed this Time-Turner only for redoing classes and not for anything else.

JC: Okay, but yet she's still somehow expected to fit all of that in. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: She'll manage. It's such a good metaphor for being a minority and having to do twice as much work for half the credit. Suppose you have to do all of your school work... Maybe you're somebody who is doing an accelerated course so that you can graduate earlier and not have to pay as much tuition if you can knock a year off, but you also have to work your way through school, so you have to spend those hours at a job. Well, when are you going to actually do the homework? I don't know... when you're supposed to be sleeping. The increasing crankiness of Hermione through this year as she gets more and more sleep-deprived is so realistic and well done and parallels how much Lupin has to struggle, because he only has 75 percent of the time that everybody else does due to dealing with his chronic illness. So yeah, being an oppressed minority is, in fact, harder. Yeah. Well, I enjoyed that chapter. What did you think?

JC: Yeah, we ended up having a lot more to say about it... As often happens, as we will continue to happen. Ooh.

Lorrie: Well, you know how I get when Snape shows up. It's like, 'Oh, good, now we're really going to get into it.'

JC: Oh, one more thing that I wanted to mention is that

there's a few appearances of Draco Malfoy in this chapter, and in every single one, he is insulting someone. First, he's insulting Lupin and comparing him to Dobby the house elf. Then he's desperately throwing snowballs at Harry. "You're afraid of the dementors!"

Lorrie: "The dementors say hi!" Yeah.

JC: It is the stupidest shit, right?

Lorrie: He's so impotent.

JC: Yeah. It's funny because he's in the background trying to do anything to get Harry riled up, but it's not working because Harry's got bigger shit on his mind.

Lorrie: It's like he's hopping up and down for attention and he doesn't realize that his mic is off.

JC: For sure. It is interesting to see these little tiny drops of that in here. He could have been left out of the chapter entirely, but no, there's these little moments of, 'Oh, that's right, he's still there trying to get Harry's attention.' So yeah.

Lorrie: He's still lodging the complaint that he's not the main character.

JC: Yeah. He's reminding us, "I should be the main character, and I'm not."



Lorrie: "Excuse me!" Yes.

JC: For sure. So yeah.

Lorrie: So, the next chapter is Grim Defeat.

JC: I have no idea what this chapter is about. I cannot remember, so I'm looking forward to finding out.

Lorrie: Yeah, this book is taking us places. Whoo! I will talk to you then.

JC: All right!

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