

Transcript

Episode 4.26

Book 4, Chapter 26: The Second Task

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 Four, Chapter Twenty-Six: The Second Task.

Lorrie: The Second Task. Harry competes in the second Triwizard Tournament task. The merpeople have taken whatever each champion will most sorely miss, and they all have to figure out how to survive underwater in the lake for an hour to get that thing back. JC, what do you think would be harder for you: facing a nesting mother who is frantic that's something she wants to protect is in mortal danger, or rescuing someone you want to protect from mortal danger?

JC: Well, knowing who they would have taken for me...

Lorrie: Uh-huh...

JC: I think that... yeah. Phew... That's a tough one.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah. Yep.

JC: You have two children, so would they have taken one of your children? They would have taken my kid. That's what they would have done.

Lorrie: Right, obviously. Yes.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't know, but I guess they figure out who or what to take depending on their scan of what would cause the most anxiety in you and the greatest protective

response. I guess either the younger child or whoever is less able to defend herself at the moment, whoever is going to need me more.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I guess a combination of responsibility and the person's vulnerability.

JC: Yeah. That says something interesting about the choices that were made here, though it's unclear to me who exactly chose. Did each of the headmasters choose for their own student? Who chose the people who were going to be taken away?

Lorrie: We don't know.

JC: We don't know.

Lorrie: There's no indication.

JC: I'm like, 'Did it come out of the Goblet again?'

Lorrie: I know. Yeah, no, this is one of those areas where I think if the plot doesn't tell you, then I go to the allegorical meaning. What is this author trying to say? She's trying to show us what Lily Potter felt when Voldemort was coming after her baby. How are humans supposed to react? What is the most champion-like way to react in such a situation, and what are the challenges that you face if that happens to you? Which, to be honest, if you have anything or anything you care about in life at some point, this will happen to you or you'll think it is happening, which creates pretty much the same effect.

JC: It is interesting how that idea of protectiveness plays through all three tasks, that there's someone who's protecting something in each case. I find it fascinating that (from a teacher perspective) at the beginning of this chapter, they're in Charms class and they have decided that this is the ideal time to have a really important conversation that they don't want people to listen to because everyone around them is so engaged in what they're doing and having fun.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That made me laugh as a teacher, because I've seen that. When the kids are like... There's this wonderful thing that can happen (and I love this; not all teachers like this, but I love it) when everyone is engaged in the activity, and it's very much hands-on and very minds on; they're really interested in the outcome of it... The room can become kind of chaotic.

Lorrie: And energized.

JC: There's so much energy, and the kids are so... I feel like they have so much agency that they are just doing things. They'll go and they'll grab a thing that they need, and they'll put things together and they don't ask permission; they just do it, and that's a

beautiful zone. For me as a teacher, it's a beautiful zone to see students in, because they're just taking charge and they're doing stuff and they're learning.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Other teachers look at that and just have a meltdown. They're like, 'This is too much chaos. I can't stand it!' But I look at it and I don't see chaos; I see agency. Anyway... So yeah, I see that in this room.

Lorrie: Well, yeah. It's the natural rhythm of an engaged learner.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's like, 'Ooh, ooh!' I love that this is so classic. This is the kind of scene that I think people picture when they imagine wizard school. What's it like? Well, you've got these teenagers and they're chatting to each other and they're learning these things; they start out being pretty terrible at them and they're all in training... When I think about people having nostalgia for, "Oh, I just want to curl up with a Harry Potter book and feel cozy," this is the kind of thing I picture.

JC: Ah. Pillows flying around the room.

Lorrie: Yeah, while the Trio figure out the mystery of the day.

JC: Yeah, exactly what's going on there. I love it. I get the sense that Flitwick is a really good teacher...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that he's really figured out what he needs to do to get kids to engage in learning how to perform these terms and how to practice them. He's got this plan of, 'Okay, what's the softest thing I can have you banish? It's these cushions,' and this image and all these cushions just flying around, bapping people in the head occasionally, Flitwick himself flying around occasionally when they catch him on. And then in the middle of all this, Hermione's just going *flick* and her cushion's going exactly where they're supposed to go every time, without even really having to think that hard about it. It's just beautiful.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I love that.

Lorrie: The mystery that they're trying to figure out is whatever Harry heard the night before from the Egg and The Eye chapter -- all of those revelations that he has to sort through that he heard from Moody and Snape and Filch -- and he presents them with the issue. "Moody said Dumbledore only lets Snape stay here because he's giving him a second chance or something..." Then we have the classic setup where Ron's guesses

represent conventional wisdom and they all miss the mark, so his cushions go everywhere; one of them even flies out the window.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: He's really, really not on track here, and as you mentioned, of course, Hermione's guesses are all completely correct and they go straight into the box that they're aiming for. Ron suggests the thing that Moody wants Harry to think: "Maybe Moody thinks Snape put your name in the Goblet of Fire!" so his cushion goes awry. Hermione establishes what they've learned so far: "We thought Snape was trying to kill Harry before, and it turned out he was saving Harry's life, remember?" True, and Hermione also says that she trusts Dumbledore and Dumbledore's trust in people. Okay, so these are good constants to lay down as you're trying to figure out the mystery. Then Harry gets to the big mystery: "The odd thing was Snape definitely loathed him..." Also true. Then I love when Harry shocks himself because he gets a cushion right in the box like Hermione, and he says, "I just want to know what Snape did with his first chance if he's on his second one."

JC: Yep.

Lorrie: And that line from the author reminds me of in *Prisoner of Azkaban* -- the line, "The empty goblet was still smoking" -- It's almost self-indulgent. It's very fun with big lights flaring: 'Hey, reader, this is it! This is a signpost. This is the setup for the mystery premise for the entire second half of the series.' Okay, here we've got it. Snape has not yet been caught trying to kill Harry, even though he hates Harry. What the heck is going on, and why would Dumbledore trust him? It's a darn good mystery, right? It takes quite a while to unravel.

JC: Oh, for sure. Yeah. And even when it's solved, I recall there were many readers who were not happy with it.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, that's right, because yeah, this is the turn in the series. Up until this point, the series has done a fantastic job of making you really, really despise Snape. In order for this mystery to be as compelling as it turns out to be, you really have to have no redeeming feelings about this horrible person, right? What on Earth could possibly happen so that this complete wretch -- complete petty, vengeful little tyrannical wretch -- has earned Dumbledore's trust? Why would you put him with children just to let him be his true self (which is so very charming)? Why?

JC: The track record of Dumbledore putting people in front of children who probably should never be in children is not great anyway, right?

Lorrie: Right.

JC: You go down the line: we've got Quirrell, who I don't know if Dumbledore knew what was up, but he...

Lorrie: He probably figured it out fairly soon.

JC: Yeah. It was at least contained, I guess. Lockhart, Lupin, and now Moody, who is not who he seems either... It's so interesting to think that every year, these kids have had this person for a teacher who was either genuinely dangerous or such a terrible teacher, or some combination or two. What's the purpose of Defense Against the Dark Arts here? We know there's this idea that this position is cursed (you can only have one person there anyway, so Dumbledore's using it in another way), but it is funny because Dumbledore's established that he will use positions of this school to do things other than teach kids.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: What is Snape's... What's the background of Snape's position?

Lorrie: What are we supposed to make of this?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. It's a darn good mystery and, like I said, Snape has been portrayed as maximally unappealing to really ramp up the stakes on why on earth Dumbledore would trust this guy. Yeah, Harry has focused on the second and first chance issue. There we go. 'Dear reader: the second half of the series will be about this.' That's that lesson, and then Harry has to face the fact that he has no idea how to survive underwater in a Scottish lake in winter for an hour.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Yeah. The only thing that cheers them up briefly is he has this little correspondence with Sirius, but he forgets to ask Sirius for help with this task, so he doesn't get any help. You don't get what you don't ask for (usually), and Hermione and Ron are having no success. The three of them spent days in the library failing. Every bad term paper experience I ever had just came back to me: you're sleep-deprived, you're desperate, you're wasting energy, nothing's happening. Oh, my God. These poor kids...

JC: Yeah. There was even a sentence in there about how Hermione was starting to get frustrated that this wasn't working. This is her go-to (go to the library and do research), and it was turning up nothing. Even Hermione's like, *groans* Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: She's taking it personally.

JC: Library's got the Restricted Section... nothing. Yeah.

Lorrie: Terrible. It's so frustrating.

JC: Definitely. There's a couple of interesting things in here: one is that Hermione suggests that Harry Transfigure himself into something, which is interesting because that's Viktor Krum's strategy.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It's also interesting because Harry says something like, "I should transfigure myself into a frog," which kind of does happen. There's all these little moments.

Lorrie: That's true. My first thought when he said was, 'No, then something will eat you right away. Oh no, that's a terrible idea.'

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: But yeah, we do get to see that becoming an Animagus takes forever.

JC: Oh, is this the first time that we've heard a little bit about how you have to register and all that stuff?

Lorrie: We know that you had to register. They did say that in *Prisoner of Azkaban* because that's when we realize that Harry's dad totally broke the law. If you're an unregistered Animagus and they catch you at it, you go to Azkaban. This is not a cute little thing that they've done. This is genuinely dangerous and they knew it, and Hermione's saying that it takes years to become an Animagus. They had a long time to think about how they were breaking the law. This was not an accident.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: They cannot claim ignorance; it's not something that you casually do. But this is the first time we found out that it's supposed to take years, so yeah, you've got to really commit if you're going to do this.

JC: Though it is interesting that Hermione mentions that in school (was it the next year or sixth year? I can't remember) is when they start working on human Transfiguration, and I was like, 'Oh, that opens up a lot.' I don't know if that ever happens, because in fifth year everything goes out the window. It's like their pandemic year, and then it just all goes to hell from there anyway. I'm actually not sure if they ever do that, but I thought, 'Oh, that's interesting.'

Lorrie: Yeah. It's definitely something that Harry has not covered and the other students have.

JC: So when they get the letter from Sirius, Sirius wants to know when's the next Hogsmeade weekend and the kids all have this reaction of, "Why would he want to

know that?" I don't actually remember, but my first thought was, 'Because he's going to come there and find you. Aah!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's a little bit, 'Aaaah,' a little bit nerve-wracking. "Oh, no, Sirius at risk!"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But also, the fact that the next Hogsmeade weekend is after the second task means it's just unbearably in the future for Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It doesn't exist yet. It will...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But so far in the future, because that's where his brain is at right now. Then I also like that when they go back to Care of Magical Creatures class, Hagrid is just continuing on with the unicorn lessons.

Lorrie: He's learned something.

JC: And Harry says... Hagrid, almost reluctantly, is like, "Yeah, I know a lot about unicorns. Let's study unicorns." He's disappointed that the kids aren't as interested in the cool magical creatures like he is, and that really hit me as a teacher, too. I've taught math my entire life, and it made me think of the fact that as a teacher, I can get really excited about a thing and I can show kids the connections between this and that and here's why this is true, and there will be a contingent of kids who are always like, "Uh, yeah, whatever, fine. Can you just show us how to do it?"

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And they're just like, "Um, whatever." Hagrid's that way with his magical creatures.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The ones the kids really want to see.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like, "Yes, yes, they're charming, they're shiny. Ugh." But Snape's first day of Potions class, that's his gripe, too: he's facing this group of 11-year-olds and without knowing them, he just assumes that they're all going to be just as disappointing as every other group of 11-year-olds he's ever met.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It's the long-embittered teacher's lament.

JC: Yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: The long, embittered, very hyper-focused nerd teacher.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. It's like, 'Come on, I got into this in the first place because I love this thing so much. I want to show you how much; at least give me something here. Work with me.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. I feel that, Hagrid. I still feel that, and Snape.

Lorrie: But yeah. Being a nerd and knowing how to be a teacher: not always the same thing.

JC: Exactly. For sure.

Lorrie: Not the same skill set.

JC: And then Hagrid says, "Harry, you're going to win the Triwizard Tournament," and I thought, yeah, he kind of does, but it's not a great prize at all.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like 2017 me going, 'Oh, someday before Elon Musk kills Twitter, there will be a time when both J.K. Rowling and Ezra Miller are trending all the time. I'm so looking forward to that!' Hehehehe... Yup.

JC: Oh, my gosh. And then it's interesting that Fred and George are the ones that come to take Ron and Hermione away to take them to... I just found that interesting. The fact that they went with a family member to come and gather them...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Why would Fred and George be the ones that show up to take them away?

Lorrie: Yeah. All of the questions, all the ethics around the danger that these hostages get put into... Let's just not think about that too closely.

JC: Yeah. There's a lot of -- yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Whoo!

JC: And then it's fun, too, while they're going through all the books. They list all these book titles off, and I think this is one of the pieces of humor of the series that I really love. Book titles in this universe are just hilarious.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: One of them was "*Powers You Never Knew You Had and What To Do With Them Now You've Wised Up.*" Wow.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's so many book titles like that, and they're just flipping through these books. Oh... It's a lot of fun. I guess one thing that Harry is going to get out of this experience of spending two, three very intense days in the library is like that sort of speed -- not speed reading so much as going to the index. What does it say about this? Flip, flip, flip, flip, flip. Quickly scanning the page. He's going to build some research skills here, for sure.

Lorrie: Remember the time that we went through a thousand books? Yes.

JC: Looking for any mention of water.

Lorrie: Ugh...

JC: Yeah, and then poor Harry, there by himself because Ron and Hermione are gone. It's the middle of the night... He's still trying to figure it out.

Lorrie: He feels very small to me when I picture him. The other champions are adult size, and in my mind, without Ron and Hermione next to him -- alone, under the Cloak in the dark library -- he just gets smaller and smaller in my mind. Poor thing.

JC: Is he under the Cloak in the library in the middle of the night?

Lorrie: Well, he gets there under the Cloak.

JC: He gets there with the Cloak. Maybe he's not -- I was just thinking...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: How did Dobby find him...?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Maybe he wasn't under the Cloak at that point. Anyway...

Lorrie: Yeah, by that time.

JC: By that time, it's fallen off.

Lorrie: Yeah, and then the misery of him only having ten minutes when Dobby finds him. Oh!

JC: Oh, my God. Okay, all of this is like the worst final exam experience you've ever had, where you cram and cram and cram...

Lorrie: It is.

JC: And you're kicking yourself for not studying earlier or not figuring the stuff out back when you had time and time was ticking down; it's the middle of the night, and then your

alarm goes off and your exam starts in ten minutes. It's like that feeling of, "Oh, my God!" Or not even your alarm; your phone rings because someone called you or something. It's like some completely chance thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. The worst anxiety.

JC: At least he doesn't have time to get sick to his stomach on the way. He's just got to get there. There's that, but... Oh, but then Dobby...

Lorrie: Dobby, yeah.

JC: Dobby tells him that Ron -- cutely saying, "Wheezy, your Wheezy" -- Ron has been taken. Ron is the thing that he has to get back, and then hands him a handful of gillyweed.

Lorrie: Yeah. I was thinking, wow, it's a good thing that Dobby tells him which hostage is supposed to be his, because without that guidance, how was Harry supposed to choose?

JC: True. He was going to get down there and have two of his friends down there, and Cho.

Lorrie: And Cho. Yeah, and a little girl.

JC: Oh, my God, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Fortunately, Dobby tells him, "Okay, this is your quest," and then he says, "I overheard Moody and McGonagall in the staff room talking about how gillyweed helps you breathe underwater," and Harry's like, "Great." Gone. "Thanks."

JC: "I owe you one, Dobby!" Yeah... Ugh.

Lorrie: To be fair to Harry, he does have a record of procrastination, but that wasn't the problem here. He spent days and days and days getting nowhere; it's just that he wasn't old enough for this task.

JC: So gillyweed was something that none of the -- Well, none of the other champions thought of it either, but is it super rare? Was it really not mentioned in any of the books they looked at? Did they just not look closely enough? It seems like something that Dobby could acquire a handful of and hand it to him would probably be mentioned more prominently somewhere, but who knows.

Lorrie: Yeah. We find out later it is possible to get gillyweed and it does get mentioned somewhere, but it's not that common.

JC: Okay, so where did Dobby get it?

Lorrie: We will find out.

JC: We will find out. Hmm. Ooh, so then Harry runs and he barely gets there just in time. Everyone's looking at him like, 'Wow, we thought you weren't going to show,' which almost happened. But everybody else is ready, right? They've got swim clothes on and stuff, and Harry's in whatever he fell asleep in last night. He probably rolled out of (not quite) bed, but oh, my gosh. He must look a mess, his hair sticking up in every direction... Then when he shoves the gillyweed in his mouth and he walks into the water, the idea that he's got his robes on... He's fully dressed in what he would wear to class. The idea of walking out into the lake with all of that... Oh! All of it sounds so unpleasant, and the water's cold and murky. This does not sound like fun.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the other kids are laughing at him...

JC: Yeah. They're all laughing at him.

Lorrie: Because he looks like such a loser.

JC: He looks like, 'Wow, he has no idea what he's doing,' which is kind of true. Ugh.

Lorrie: 'He doesn't know anything, does he?'

JC: And then the gillyweed that he's chomping on... the way it's described, it's like that seaweed salad stuff, except maybe bigger chunks of it that are really hard to chew.

Lorrie: Yeah, and slimier.

JC: Yeah. Every time I have seaweed salad like that, I always think about gillyweed.

Lorrie: Uh-huh, Yeah.

JC: And then I love the description that he suddenly felt like he couldn't breathe and throws himself into the water and it's like, "Ah..." And then the water, instead of being cold, is suddenly...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Nice.

Lorrie: It's not even cold anymore. Yeah.

JC: Pleasant, and it's like he turned into a frog. Kind of; frogs don't have gills, but he turned into an aquatic thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. That feeling of suffocation and how hard it is to breathe goes along for me so well with that time-panic anxiety, which this chapter captures so perfectly. And then yeah, I also was struck by the beauty of that sentence, "The first gulp of icy lake water felt like the breath of life," because this is telling us this is how it feels when you go into an environment that's suited to you, to your skills. If you're not in the right environment for you, it can feel like that, and then, 'Oh, this is where I'm supposed to be.' Suddenly,

everything works; it feels okay. He has webbed hands and feet. Ah... Anyway, that feeling of rightness is fun.

JC: And then he just swims around for a while, trying to figure out where to go.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's grindylows that pop up and attack him and he deals with them.

Lorrie: I feel so bad for those grindylows.

JC: They're just like, "What are these humans doing?"

Lorrie: They're just being themselves and then they get scalded with hot water from Harry's wand, and then his foot connects with a horned skull. That poor grindylo... Ugh. They didn't ask for this.

JC: Then he learns not to swim so close to the bottom after that, which is like...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He now respects grindylows.

JC: And then Myrtle appears again. Myrtle is a very aquatic ghost. She goes wherever the water goes; a little bit disturbing that she can get from the school plumbing system into the lake, but hey, it is a castle.

Lorrie: She is his Fairy God-ghost.

JC: There you go. Yeah.

Lorrie: She shows up. "Hey, you're on the right track! Go this way!"

JC: And points him in the right direction. When we get to the mer-village, this is when my story builder brain starts to go a little crazy, because we get there and it's clear that there's this whole society. First of all, I love the fact that the merpeople don't look like classical mermaids.

Lorrie: Love! Love that.

JC: I really love that detail.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And I always loved it. The first time I read it I was like, "Yes!" because they're not like fairy tale creatures; they're very real. If you actually lived underwater -- if you evolved underwater -- this is probably what you would look like. You would look fish-like or sea monster-like, and you wouldn't... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it really roasts that stained glass mermaid as a sexualized projection.

JC: For sure, yeah. That's true.

Lorrie: "Oh, it's nothing like this."

JC: Nothing like that, right. They have this whole society, they have villages -- one of them's got a grindylow staked out in the front, which is a funny little detail -- and they watch Harry swim by. I'm imagining, for this village of merpeople, this is huge, right? This is such a big event.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't know how much they interact with humans, but they have this whole underwater society; they know that there's the castle there. It raises lots of things for me: okay, there's a village here, so there's a society. Where are the other villages? Hogwarts' lake has this big village. How do they get to other villages? Do they just go down streams? Oh, my God. My mind just kind of went *blown* with all of these questions that I suddenly had, thinking about population stability and inbreeding and all these things, right? How do you have a stable population of merpeople? Do they go overseas? Can they go in the ocean?

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: All these questions I suddenly have.

Lorrie: Do they hitch a ride on the Durmstrang ship?

JC: Right, yeah. Oh, that's a good question, right? Anyway, I had all these thoughts about merpeople, which are kind of irrelevant to what we're doing here. But when they go through the little mer-village and they get to what's the square and Harry sees the people there, there's a big statue... Yeah. They all have spears...

Lorrie: Stone dwellings; they have art...

JC: Yeah. They have spears. They seem to be kind of like a Stone Age kind of culture; that's kind of their technological level. Fascinating! Oh, there's so much to dig into there. I did not have time to actually go looking in the Harry Potter Fandom Wiki and see if there's more of what else people know about the merpeople that I got very excited about from an anthropological perspective.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry goes to the village square. He sees the four enchanted hostages: Ron, Hermione, Cho, and Fleur's baby sister. How is he supposed to choose? Good thing that he's been told. Then we find out that when he tries to interfere with any of the other hostages, the merpeople have clearly had instructions: No, you have to prevent the champions from messing with anyone else's hostage. Okay, that tells him,

too. I love that we get this random thought in Harry's head of, 'Oh, I should have brought Sirius' knife.' That's the only reason to put it in here (to mention that he failed to do that), and that just felt quite real to me. You can't plan for everything.

JC: It's also such painful foreshadowing.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: Oh...of the mirror. Ugh...

Lorrie: And it's also a contrast to Cedric, who did bring a knife, because unlike Harry, Cedric had a plan.

JC: Yeah, true. Yeah, Harry didn't have the knife on him. Hogwarts is thankfully not a place where you would need to carry a knife on you at all times.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But yeah, ugh... Yeah, it did make me think he's like, 'Oh, I wish I had that thing Sirius gave me,' and I have a little 'ow, ow, ow' feeling for the future.

Lorrie: Oh, a pang. Yeah.

JC: But yeah, it's so interesting to me, too, and it's just so very much in character for Harry that he just refuses to go until he makes sure that everyone is going to get rescued; it doesn't even occur to him that the school put these people down here, right? Ron and Hermione got called away; they weren't going to die. No one was going to actually put these kids' lives at risk. They clearly volunteered. It doesn't occur to him; all he sees is, 'these are my friends and these people are in danger, and I cannot leave until I am sure that everyone...'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ugh, it's very Harry.

Lorrie: Well, we also see the way that his anxiety progresses, because a lot of this is because there's nobody else around. If he had shown up and he could see the other competitors, then his mindset would have been totally different, but it's just Harry alone with this. 'Where is everybody?' He's been threatened with a time limit, and a lifetime of not being helped by adults has formed his worldview. So yeah, that creepy feeling that no one is around to help you; it's just you and your conscience and whatever half-informed decision you make at this moment... Oof. I love when the merpeople hold Harry back -- how he is struggling and he's just fighting them -- I love that characterization of that anxiety. When people try to tell you you can't when you want to do more than you can -- people say, "Focus on what you can control" -- and that doesn't always enable you to shut off the anxiety, that sense of urgency. Yeah. Here we see

Harry personify how that feels. 'Limit my desire to save people? Uh, that's not happening.'

JC: Right, especially when he realizes that no one's coming for Fleur's little sister.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's waiting and waiting, and when he goes for her again, they finally go, 'Okay. This is above our pay grade. Go for it, kid!'

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, he threatens them with magic, which is part of that colonial feeling that's happening underwater, too. The grindylows get scalded, the merpeople don't do wands...

JC: Yeah, which brings up all these interesting questions, especially because we found out later that Dumbledore speaks their language. What is their relationship with the magical world? I have questions.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: How did Dumbledore learn Mermish? Because you can't probably study it in school, I don't know. Maybe you can study in school. I'm just like, 'Was there Duolingo for that?' What? How?!

Lorrie: There must be, because I'm sure Barty Crouch Sr. knows Mermish.

JC: Yeah, so there must be a way of learning it, but would that mean that then you would have to go... You can't learn a language in isolation. You have to go and speak it with the people who speak it. It just raises -- and then someone had to arrange all this, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Clearly, there's human and merpeople contact and there's relationships...

Lorrie: And a tradition.

JC: It raises lots of interesting questions.

Lorrie: Yeah. The fact that, obviously, the merpeople are acting according to a contract that they all agreed on way in advance... This is why I think of Dumbledore primarily as a diplomat. He is this way with the centaurs and even with giants, and with house-elves. He's not a revolutionary, he's not a reformer, and he's not ignorant either. He does have respect from these other creatures' societies, so diplomacy is where I put him.

JC: Interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: Whereas Hermione is a reformer.

JC: The other thing that this entire scene made me think of -- with the hostages being held and the mer-village and all, and the competitors having to come and rescue them -- is that it made me think about the tasks on the Amazing Race, if you've ever watched that show. We usually watch it every year when it comes on, and it's where you're going into this place and there's this obviously vaguely constructed, local cultural task you have to complete.

Lorrie: Oh, dear. Oh, dear.

JC: You have all these Americans running in and randomly trying to figure out how to put on these costumes and then do a thing, and the locals are just like, 'Oh, wow.' Then they get their ticket when they're done and then they go on to the next thing. It's kind of what it felt like a little bit to me, too, so there was a bit of, 'Oh, wow.' It's a little bit like a game show.

Lorrie: Yeah, it is.

JC: But with higher stakes. Yeah, so Harry has both Ron and Fleur's sister.

Lorrie: Yeah, and he also gets that contrast again with the older competitors. It takes him minutes to hack away at Ron's bindings; Krum takes seconds to free Hermione. Cedric brought a knife. He didn't even need this rock business.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry's struggling, and when Cedric and Krum show up, he instantly feels so much better.

JC: Because he was thinking, 'How am I going to get all of these people out,' right?

Lorrie: Or 'Am I even doing this right?' If I showed up some place that I was supposed to be and no one else is there, I would question myself. 'What am I doing? Where is everyone?'

JC: He just got there first.

Lorrie: Yeah. Everyone else is having trouble. You're not alone in having trouble. Many years ago, I heard someone propose this parlor game question (which I found quite annoying) where they said, "If you could save only one person, would you save your child or your romantic partner?" I'm like, 'What? Why?'

JC: Oh, right. Yeah.

Lorrie: They said, "Well, anyone who says their romantic partner is somebody who's never had a child." I'm like, 'This is so bogus,' because one thing about saving your fellow adult first is that you can pool your resources to save your child much more easily if you have your ally with you. I saw that so clearly with the great relief that Harry has

when he rescues Ron and then Ron regains consciousness, and the two of them have such an easier time dealing with Fleur's sister than if it had just been Harry lugging these two unconscious bodies by himself. Just knowing that he has an ally and an equal with him, it changes his whole mindset even better than when Cedric and Krum come, because obviously Cedric and Krum have their own agendas; Ron is just there as Harry's friend, and they have this history of saving people together and doing things together.

JC: True. I guess, too, they're under pressure with the time running out and not knowing what's going to happen if you don't rescue these people. There's something about putting someone in this incredibly anxiety-inducing, terrifying position and saying, "Now make a decision." It is really hard to think through what the possibilities are, and it's just like, "Quick, make a choice, make a choice, make a choice," right?

Lorrie: Yeah. Oh, God... Yes, and if you make the wrong choice, it's all on you.

JC: Yeah. Yeah. There was a movie back in the 80s called *Sophie's Choice*, which I think anybody who's of a certain age knows exactly what that is. Just the horror of, "No, pick one. You get one; pick one."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the other one's just taken away immediately. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yuck. Then you have to live with it.

JC: Then you have to live with it for the rest of your life, yeah. Ugh... It's a terrible position to put people in, though Harry was not supposed to have been put in that position; it could be that instructions were given, but because Harry was late, he missed all of that. For all I know, they said a little bit more. Who knows...

Lorrie: But on the other hand, if this is allegorically testing conditions that real people find themselves in, it is quite realistic to be in a position where you don't even know what's the best and most moral thing to do, and that's part of what you have to figure out. Other people seem to be just following directions. Is that right, though? Harry's hostage is based on his pre-adolescent emotional bonds; Cedric and Krum are post-adolescent, they have their romances. This bond that they call on for Fleur -- that she's being a protective older sister -- that's beautiful. That's a really beautiful side of her I love.

JC: Yeah, it wasn't the guy she went to the Yule Ball with.

Lorrie: No.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And it's not, say, Madame Maxime, either, whom she would revere, but isn't her responsibility. This is very much calling on a protective, stronger, and more vulnerable person dynamic, which really shows up when we see Fleur's response to having failed. I love the reverse of Harry feeling the wonderful water when the gillyweed takes effect; now that the gillyweed doesn't work anymore, the "wonderful, cold, clear air was making his wet face sting." Oh, that's beautiful, too. Yeah, it kind of did remind me, 'I love breathing. Breathing is great. Being able to breathe is so great.'

JC: It's also interesting to me that the champions and Harry in particular spent all this time trying to figure out, 'How do you just survive underwater for an hour? What could I do?' and they had such a hard time. Dumbledore, or whoever put those four people underwater, were just like *silence* and they were going to be fine for as long as they needed to be down there. Yeah. Clearly, there are other ways of doing it that none of the champions even knew about.

Lorrie: Oh, and once Harry shows up and the competition part of it is over, the merpeople are smiling at him. They're friendly! I found that really charming, and they're kind of proud of him.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, so much so that they go to talk to Dumbledore about it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That says something about their culture, I guess, maybe, or they recognized in Harry something that they value.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They were like, 'Okay, this person, this human... Here's what this human did. We did not expect it. This is what we are used to humans doing; this one wasn't like that.'

Lorrie: 'This is what you said would happen, but you need to know.' Yeah. Oh, I was also so touched by Percy looking younger than usual because he was worried about Ron.

JC: Yeah. It's interesting that lots of folks were chastising Harry. "Oh, they weren't going to let us drown..."

Lorrie: Starting with Ron, yes.

JC: Yeah. But the fact that Percy was so worried made me go, "But were they?"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Percy seems to have a little bit of the inside line on all of this, right?

Lorrie: But even if you know it's fake, the feelings still come up. We're hardwired this way. When Fleur is hysterical -- that poor woman -- and she's hurting people trying to get back into the water, I identified with that binary feeling she has so much. She says that because she failed to save her sister, she deserves zero points.

JC: Yeah. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: And I thought, 'Okay, that binary feeling is absolutely what I recognize.' She feels like the worst sister in the world right now, and they're trying to say, 'No, you deserve partial credit.' Grappling with that whole issue as a parent or caretaker, if you feel like you've failed to protect somebody, you're going to have to spend the rest of your life grappling with the issue of possibly giving yourself partial credit. That's not how this emergency system works in human brains.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: We see that with Winky: that poor creature, just distraught. Yeah, you can heal and recover... That's not an option based on the way she's hardwired; the distress is going to continue. I think I might have brought this up before, but this is where the biography of the author is undeniably present in my mind -- I don't know... Did I bring this up before? Have we talked about this? -- where it must have been one of the worst feelings of her life when her first husband, who was abusive... This was when their child was -- let's see -- would have been three months old, because the child's birthday is around the same time as Harry's birthday. The fight that the author and her first husband had where he kicked her out of the house was in October, the same month that Harry gets orphaned, but what we know from newspaper reports is that that night that they had a fight and he kicked out the author, he kept the baby in the house. She was the mother of a three-month-old, kicked out of the house with her baby still inside.

JC: That makes my boobs hurt just thinking about it.

Lorrie: Doesn't it? Doesn't it?!

JC: I can't even... Yeah. Ugh.

Lorrie: Right? And with the baby's other parent -- who is violent and is manipulating the situation -- there she is, outcast, having been beaten. I'm sure that whatever concern she has for herself or distress against the spouse, that's one thing, but the agony of worrying about the baby -- and what that does in your body, knowing that the one person that you care for that's your whole reason for existing right now -- that person is without your guidance. That must have been physically intolerable.

JC: I can't even wrap my brain around that.

Lorrie: That's something that happened to this author, and I can't help but remember that when I look at the passage of Fleur going crazy because she was physically unable to go rescue her sister. Yes, the grindylows made it physically impossible -- she could not do it -- but is that going to make her feel like, 'Okay, well, I tried. I get partial credit.' No, she's going nuts, and this is one of the clearest examples of me thinking I'm not going to read literature separated from details of the biography of the author. I find it more rich, more human and rewarding to integrate what I know into my reading of it.

JC: I don't think I ever thought of it in completely those terms before, but it's making me think to things that I have read that I thought, 'I don't know if I particularly get where the story is going,' or 'this detail strikes me as weird.' But then finding out that it's something that really happened to the author puts it in a whole other light, and it's like, 'Oh, I see why this person wanted to tell the story this way.' That makes sense. I think that I've had that experience before without thinking of it so explicitly, but it's very interesting. I think, 'Okay, that's where this is coming from.' It's coming from a real human experience that this author wanted to include as part of this story, and I think that's... Or maybe it wasn't even -- it probably was conscious at this point, but even if it's not, there's a lot to be learned from looking at the biography of the person who created this art. You can do that with visual art as well.

Lorrie: Yeah. Any art.

JC: You walk through an art museum, look at these modern pieces -- I'm not an art expert by any stretch -- and just think about what was going on. Why did the person convey this? Why this light? Why this darkness? Why these colors? There's so much to learn about a person from looking at their art.

Lorrie: One experience I've had -- well, sometimes like this, I read something and I go, 'Oh, I can feel it. I know what they're feeling.' Other times, I'll read something and I'll be so perplexed. 'I don't recognize this feeling. I don't know why the artist did this.' But then in my life, something will happen and I'll think, 'Oh, I just didn't know,' and then it has been comforting to me to go back to art that I didn't understand before and get some guidance. If this really horrendous, painful thing happens to humans, how do you process it? If there was an artist who I encountered the way they processed it, I'm going to go get comfort and knowledge. This is something that we found out -- especially during pandemic lockdown, when humans were trying desperately to get any sort of sanity, to the extent that we maintained our sanity during lockdown -- artists had a lot to do with creating the streaming shows and the music and the books that we could cling to. What's the purpose of art? It's to help us in these emotional extreme moments and to show us how other people have dealt with it when the part of the human story that we're going through was in their lives. What do you do with it? Definitely, the entire Harry Potter series is about how to react to all of the turmoil and emotions around either

having a mother and losing her, or being a mother and being subject to the overwhelming power of those emotions that you can't control. So yeah, the power of a mother's love is great. This series is the story of how incredibly powerful that is, but you as the person feeling it don't have a whole lot of control over it; it wouldn't be that powerful if you were not also at the mercy of how it feels. So yeah, poor Fleur losing it. Oh!

JC: And all the cheek kisses that Harry and Ron get. It's very sweet. She's barely paid attention to them before, but suddenly it's like, 'Oh, you helped.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'When I couldn't do it, you stepped up.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Even Ron... she knows that Ron helped her sister make it back to shore, so she's like --

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: It's really sweet, this outpouring of gratitude and emotion.

Lorrie: Yeah. Somebody in the world helped you. It's not only you, yeah.

JC: Yeah. I think, too, just for Fleur, she's kind of... I think all the champions, probably up to this point, you're focusing on yourself. This is a competition, right? Maybe that's a moment that for Fleur, it was like, 'Okay, this wasn't just a competition anymore,' right? Getting past the dragon was one thing, but then this... This is so much more personal.

Lorrie: Yeah. Let's not think too hard about whatever consent Gabrielle did or didn't give to this. The way she looks so confused when she comes back to consciousness... Did they get her from France for this? Did they ask her parents' permission?

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: I wouldn't have given permission for my eight-year-old --

JC: To be put under a lake somewhere in Scotland? What?

Lorrie: No. No.

JC: That's... yeah. I hadn't even thought of that.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: She wasn't there, you're right. She wasn't there at Hogwarts.

Lorrie: No. They had to go get her.

JC: Oh, my gosh. Wow.

Lorrie: Oh, God.

JC: Does that mean that her parents were somewhere in the audience?

Lorrie: Right?

JC: Oh, boy. Yeah. "We're just going to take your eight-year-old off to Scotland for a couple of days to visit her sister, who's currently competing on Survivor."

Lorrie: So yes, reading this allegorically is my strategy, because if you think too much about the logistics, your brain just stops working at some point.

JC: It's a little bit like, 'Whaaaaat?!' Then there's the whole Viktor Krum... I feel so bad for Viktor Krum. He's trying so hard to be like, "Hermione!"

Lorrie: "Hey!"

JC: "I just saved you."

Lorrie: "I did it!"

JC: And Hermione's so excited for Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She can barely spare a glance for Viktor Krum. It's like, aaawww, poor Viktor.

Lorrie: Although it is nice to know that Harry is a threat to somebody. Viktor Krum never disrespects Harry. He never thinks, 'Oh, what is this child?' He thinks Harry is a legitimate competitor for Hermione's attention. He thinks Harry is a legitimate competitor for things like flying and rescuing hostages, and I like that. I love Viktor Krum. I think he's great.

JC: Yeah. I don't know if I ever thought that much about his character, but I'm thinking so much more about him this time through. He was always like, 'Yeah, Viktor Krum, Viktor Krum,' but now it's like, 'Actually, wow.' It's starting to see what the --

Lorrie: No, he's my favorite boyfriend in the series.

JC: He would have been really good for Hermione, I think.

Lorrie: That, plus the narrative of him being the exploited but valiant athlete from behind the Iron Curtain.

JC: Right. Yeah. You kind of want to... I'm sure that there are fanfics where he defects and comes to Hogwarts.

Lorrie: I'm not sure there are, or if there are, there's not enough. Anyone who's got a rec, send it my way because this is so real life.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And it's of the era that Rowling is from.

JC: Uh-huh. Yeah, right.

Lorrie: But yeah, Viktor Krum is obviously a defection risk.

JC: He's even told Hermione that he likes Hogwarts better than Durmstrang.

Lorrie: Yeah, and as soon as he says that Karkaroff's nose appears from over the fence... "If you defect, how can we exploit you?"

JC: Exactly. And then when they all get their scores, I'm really thrilled that Harry got rewarded for what he did, even if it was out of the time limit and all that stuff. They did consider that, except then Ludo Bagman shoots a dirty look at Karkaroff. *Almost* all the judges agreed... He still did pretty well.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love that they know to consider the bigger picture. I love their consideration of Harry's dilemma -- he was the "first to reach the hostages" -- so it's not even like he was incompetent. He could have won it that way, but he delayed it because he had this other determination to return everybody to safety, not merely his own hostage. Viktor and Cedric didn't have that dilemma, because when they showed up, Harry was already there.

JC: So it was a competition for them. Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, they didn't ever have to worry what was going to become of Ron. Also, with Viktor freeing Hermione -- and then just leaving immediately with Hermione, knowing who his Headmaster is -- he would not have gotten any credit for helping out anybody else. He would have been punished.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: It's easy to imagine Cedric wanting to help the others that are not his hostage.

JC: But he was the third one to get there, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The last paragraph of this chapter, or the last two paragraphs, are about how Harry's just... the relief that washes over him when he's like, 'Oh, my God, it's over.' This task has been hanging over his head ever since the dragon thing, and he put it off and he had to figure out the egg. Then he had to figure out -- Everything he has been through to prepare for this, it's over.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's done, and he doesn't have to worry about the next one until freaking June.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Oh, it's so real.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We've all had those things in our lives which there's been some huge deadline or some big thing that you had to work your ass off for, and then it's done.

Lorrie: You get to sleep.

JC: Ah! Things like that, where you have a moment of, "Oh, that's right, I got it done! It's over. It's in the past." That relief...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, I know that feeling, and it's so nice.

Lorrie: I think when the merpeople are smiling at Harry, that's the moment that I feel exactly that. 'Okay, it's over. It's over. You're good.'

JC: Okay. "'It was over,' Harry thought dazedly as Madame Pomfrey began herding the Champions and hostages back to the castle to get into dry clothes... It was over, he had got through... He didn't have to worry about anything now until June the 24th..." Yes, yes, yes. And then the very last sentence of this chapter is great: "Next time he was in Hogsmeade, he [Harry] decided as he walked back up the stone steps into the castle, he was going to buy Dobby a pair of socks for every day of the year."

Lorrie: I love that, that whole feeling of gratitude. Gratitude is a really important element to this whole trying to be a responsible, emotional human being. We see it with Fleur, and it's part of the whole emotional packet that Voldemort lacks. Voldemort doesn't feel gratitude; it comes along with love.

JC: I also really love the fact that -- I've said this before -- Harry's the champion, but he's not doing this on his own. There are so many people who help him...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Who give him hints, who support him, who provide him with things he needs. I like that idea that at the end of the series, he has to walk out into the woods to face Voldemort alone, but even then he's not alone, right? This whole kind of "You're never alone... The task before you may look insurmountable, but they are always people who are going to help you." I love that piece of this story that you don't have to be a hero by yourself.

Lorrie: Well, I'm going to take your point and drag it into a dark place.

JC: Oh, dear!

Lorrie: It's still topical. Who is alone is Voldemort; he very much does everything alone. He does not have people helping him; he kills them if they try. That's why he wants Harry Potter, because when Harry's there, he's not alone anymore. Harry is the only one he connects with; there's just no place Harry can go to hide from this guy. This guy will come and find him so that he doesn't have to be alone anymore.

JC: That's something to look forward to, Harry.

Lorrie: Ugh, he's been looking forward to it the whole time.

JC: This is just Harry's life.

Lorrie: It really is.

JC: Ugh.

Lorrie: Yeah. But I guess that's a testament to how we're hardwired to desire that feeling of connection that Harry is experiencing that the older competitors sort of take for granted because they just had more experience. They know this is part of it. When the older competitors plus Harry hear that no one's supposed to help you with this, they hear it differently because Harry is less knowledgeable. He doesn't even know what constitutes help. A lot of the things that the slightly older competitors know how to do is because they received help from people in the past as part of their education. How is Harry supposed to know these things and compete with them without help? So yeah, I'm a little breathless. Okay, we're out of the water...

JC: Yeah. Oh, my God. It's a relief. Okay, the second task, we've done it.

Lorrie: Can we have some hot chocolate?

JC: I hope that's what they're getting in the hospital wing.

Lorrie: Yeah. Next chapter is called Padfoot Returns.

JC: Ooh, we're going to Hogsmeade, I assume.

Lorrie: Yeah, on the next weekend.

JC: All right, which Harry has not even been able to think ahead to. That's going to be like, "Oh."

Lorrie: Right! "Hogsmeade? What's that? Who cares?"

JC: Right! Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Life goes on. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah! Well, I'll see you there.

JC: Okay!

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