

HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020

with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 4.37

Book 4, Chapter 37: The Beginning

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 Thirty-Seven: The Beginning.

Lorrie: The Beginning. Harry finishes out the school year after Cedric's death. Dumbledore prepares the student body for the new era they're in, starring the return of Lord Voldemort. Oh, before we talk about this chapter, I want to say that I forgot to mention something in our discussion of the last chapter. There's something Dumbledore says to Fudge about Fudge caring too much about blood status: "You fail to recognize that it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be!" That's the first quote from this series that came to mind when TERFpocalypse started. Deciding that your whole destiny is based on something that was determined at your birth or before? That's a form of evil, which is something that Timothy Snyder said. He said that being predestined that way... that's evil, and immortality -- Tim Snyder said -- is evil in the talk on Harry Potter that has meant a lot to me. So yeah... Anyway, that's an important line, Dumbledore looking at Fudge in disbelief, like, "You can listen to me now, or you can regret later that you didn't."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But this is the truth.

JC: That is interesting, that it's a part of a world that... If you live in a society that has a really strict class system or one which is just racist -- which that applies to every society on Earth -- but it can look slightly different ways depending on where you are. That idea that where you're born determines more about you than what you do and how you grow, so then there's no point in giving opportunities to people.... There's no point in trying to level the playing field, right? There's no point; they're already predestined to be criminals or to never rise as high as these

other people. The fact that Dumbledore is pointing out that this is how the current Minister of Magic feels, even though he seemed like a bumbling oaf so far... The fact that that's his ideology under the surface suddenly underlines the darkness that we're about to head into. He's just seen like an idiot before. Hmm... Actually, no, he's an idiot with some ideology behind him that's really, really harmful.

Lorrie: Harry, I'm glad, has Hermione, Ron and Hagrid to be with, and they don't make him talk.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: He just gets to be with them and be really, really tired.

JC: And there's this feeling in the beginning of this chapter of him just floating through it all, and that's so real, that feeling of numbness. 'I've been through so much, and all I can do is just walk around and go through the motions of my day.' He doesn't want to be in big crowds -- people are avoiding him and whispering about him -- and he's beyond caring about it.

Lorrie: Yeah, he doesn't care. Whatever.

JC: Yeah. That numbness that he's experiencing is a very real response to what he's been through, and in classic Hogwarts tradition, there's no therapy for Harry Potter. 'No, no, we're just getting on with it.'

Lorrie: Although Dumbledore does address issues in the Leaving Feast, and I think he does that well.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Something else that I'm really glad about... Mrs. Weasley asks if Harry can just come directly to the Burrow, and Dumbledore tells her no, he has to go back to the Dursleys' first. Dumbledore's got his reasons, so that's nice. That's the point in Harry's schooling when Dumbledore just comes right out and says, "No, this is something tactical." He might not explain why exactly, but no, there's a reason. Okay, that's better.

JC: Yeah, and we got a little hint about it a few chapters back...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But Harry hasn't figured that out yet.

Lorrie: And then there's this moment that I found jarring in a good way, where Harry is visiting Hagrid and Hagrid says, "Who'd like to come to visit the last Skrewt with me? I was joking!" because that's so strange. Oh, yeah, this is the same year where they were just trying to be teenagers and the Skrewts were terrible.

JC: Oh, my God... The Skrewts were this year!

Lorrie: Right?

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: And that was actually only a week ago.

JC: Oh, I identify with that feeling.

Lorrie: Right? So he's joking, and you can just imagine Hermione and Ron and Harry looking at him like, "Skrewts? Skrewts?! SKREWTS?!" WHAT?!?!" They are beyond adolescence now.

JC: It is funny because the Skrewts were this year.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, Jesus.

Lorrie: Right. That divide that took Harry all year to cross, the one that was so huge at the beginning of this book when Harry and Ron and Hermione are like little tiny kids and they're looking way up at Cedric, who's so assured... That's done. That's in the past.

JC: Yeah, wow. I'm going back a little bit. I was really touched by the meeting that Harry had with the Diggorys.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm really glad that he got that closure, that they believe -- or at least they seem to believe -- the story about what actually happened. They don't blame Harry for it, because Harry's already aware that people are going to blame him; they're going to say he did something to cause Cedric's death. I found it really fascinating that he seems to be taking a lot of comfort in the story that he's telling people that Cedric actually won. He is... I don't know if he's convinced himself or if this is just what he's decided to say, or if this is what's bringing him comfort. Cedric won and that's why they ended up there, and that's... I find that it's very much in character for Harry. He doesn't want the glory of it anyway. He fantasized about the glory all year; he definitely doesn't want the glory under these circumstances.

Lorrie: No.

JC: But that idea of elevating Cedric to being the one who won... "He's the actual Triwizard champion, he's the hero. He died, and I was able to bring him back." That's really comforting to

Harry to the point that he offers the gold to Cedric's parents, and they're like, "No. We're not taking that."

Lorrie: And they start backing away.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Poor Harry's stuck with this poison. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. When the kids are visiting Hagrid, I really love the bit where Hagrid asks Harry, "Are you okay?" and Harry goes, "Yeah," and then Hagrid says, "No, you're not. Of course you're not, but you will be." Oh, that was something so real...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And such a relief to hear. Yeah, when you look at someone, you're like, "Oh, there's no way you're okay. I don't even know why I asked that, but you're going to be okay." Oh... Yeah, it's good to hear, and Hagrid would know.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Hagrid is this emotional mountain in a lot of ways. When Hagrid was gone for a bit in third year, the kids were frazzled about it, but there's something about Hagrid... His size is kind of a metaphor for his steadfastness in their lives as a person, so I like that.

Lorrie: And what he's been through. He's not going to lie to them about how tough things have been.

JC: Yeah, for sure. And then about Voldemort's return, he says, "No good sittin' worryin' abou' it. What's comin' will come, an we'll meet it when it does." That stood out to me. We're recording this on February 1st, 2025, so that summarizes a lot of how I've been feeling the last couple of months, and how I feel going forward. 'Okay, we're in it now, so we're going to meet it and we're going to get through this, but sitting around and worrying about what might happen is actually worse than knowing what's actually coming at you.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We also get the hint that Dumbledore has a task for Hagrid, that he's been talking to Madame Maxime about it over gigantic cups of tea. Oh, and there's also this moment where they're with Hagrid where Hagrid tells Harry that he did what his father would have done, and that gives Harry a chance to smile and feel something good.

Lorrie: I like the way that this chapter takes stock of where we are now, and the Leaving Feast of dreariness is a good place to do that. We have the black drapes... I don't know. We don't get any mention of who wins the House Cup that year. It's just black drapes.

JC: Yeah. I don't think they even did it because they don't play Quidditch, right?

Lorrie: And we get the real Mad-Eye Moody. Oh, that poor man...

JC: Oh, yeah, that hit me differently than I think it did the first time I read it. He's sitting up there and he's twitchy.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The man is traumatized. He's been imprisoned in a box.

Lorrie: For the entire school year.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: No Karkaroff...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Harry idly wonders, 'Hmm, I wonder where Karkaroff is. I wonder if Voldemort's caught up with him yet...' We see that Madame Maxime and Hagrid are completely allies now -- they're just talking to each other -- and we get the look between Harry and Snape, where Snape's eyes "lingered on Harry for a moment" with an unreadable expression and "he looked as sour and unpleasant as ever," which I thought was great. Okay, some things have changed, some things haven't... And then we get the narration of Harry taking stock, wondering about Snape. What was it that Snape had done in Dumbledore's orders? Why was Dumbledore convinced that Snape's on their side? Is Snape being a spy again? Did he go to Voldemort and pretend that he had never gone over? These are things that normally I think this author is a little bit more coy about, but here it's like, 'No, we just have to recap. These are the issues before us.' One of the missing scenes that I do love thinking more about is a couple hours after *Priori Incantatem*. Voldemort has lost Harry Potter once again, he's been thoroughly humiliated in front of his Death Eaters, nobody knows what's happened -- Harry Potter was right there, and he lost him again! -- and then two hours later, Snape shows up. He was the first thing to happen to Voldemort after Harry's escape, and he's the first person who has anything to offer Voldemort -- information, ways to calm him down, backstory on what he has found out about Dumbledore this whole time -- whereas all the other Death Eaters have nothing to offer and they're just running away and looking guilty. So Snape... How did he spin things when he got there? He was the only person who could bring Voldemort some comfort after what was a really bad night for Voldemort...

JC: Yeah, really.

Lorrie: And he did that while he was re-entering that atmosphere, not knowing how it would be when he went back entering this atmosphere of unbelievable tension. The last time that he saw Voldemort, he was twenty-one years old. He was just a little twerp. He was not high up in the organization or anything.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: So yeah, for anyone to come to Voldemort with any information or knowledge about anything at that point must have been really something Voldemort needed.

JC: Oh, yeah. Thinking about how Snape's skill at Occluding undoubtedly -- he didn't have to Occlude before, right? This is not a skill that he necessarily had when he was working with Voldemort before. No, he did work as a spy back then. Yeah.

Lorrie: He did have to before, because he turned.

JC: Undoubtedly, those skills have only gotten better in the last fourteen years. Did Snape anticipate, do you think, that this was going to happen? Was he as shocked as everyone else? What do you think about that? Was he preparing for this moment for the last fourteen years, or did this catch him off guard?

Lorrie: Well, I think he's had all year to notice that the Dark Mark is coming back, and every time Karkaroff crashes his classroom and wants to talk about it, Snape says, "Get out of my classroom." He has been talking about this with Dumbledore, such as the time that Harry comes to say Barty Crouch Sr. is on the grounds and Snape won't let him in to talk to Dumbledore; Snape and Dumbledore had just been talking about this. Then when Dumbledore says to Snape, "You know what I have to ask you to do? Are you really ready?" and Snape says yes, they have gone over what story Snape can tell Dumbledore that will have so much content and be so compelling that it'll catch Voldemort's interest and distract him away from whatever might give away that Snape is actually being a double agent right now. But Snape has not been that great at Occlumency so far because first of all, he's out of practice. Second, we have seen Barty Crouch Jr. (as Mad-Eye Moody) win over Snape, where Snape was trying to Occlude and Barty Crouch Jr. said to him, "Spots that never come off... you know what I mean?" and Snape breaks; he's the one who clutches his Dark Mark, and Barty Crouch Jr. just laughs in his face. No, he has not been a particularly impressive guy all year. Yeah, last time he saw this guy, he was twenty-one. Is he going to be able to pull this off? He has no idea.

JC: He's got to rise to the challenge really quickly.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of course Voldemort's not in great shape at the moment.

JC: True. It's going to be interesting for me, I think, to start reading the next book going forward and really taking a look at what Snape was doing, because I think that the first time I read (certainly) the fifth book, I did not have the perspective on Snape that I do now. I don't think I did by the sixth book either, yeah, so this is going to be very interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. From this point on in this series, so much is going on at the same time. There are so many plots happening, so many agendas that the author leaves deliberately subterranean for people to figure out. Yeah, no, it takes several reads to realize, 'Oh, all this time, if you're a secret agent and you're only rising in the estimation of the person that you're secretly betraying, you must be doing this and that and this and that. Huh...' Voldemort sure does not have a whole lot of choice right now among the people that are supposed to be supporting him. The Death Eaters are people that he's just beaten up for not caring that he was suffering really badly for thirteen years. He doesn't have that much faith in them at the moment. The best of them is Wormtail. For Snape to come and be competent and to have information? Oh, okay, okay. Instead of groveling like Avery and presenting himself to be the first one for *Crucio* or being a greaseball like Lucius Malfoy saying, "Well, if you've been a better communicator, I would have come look for you..."

JC: "If you'd have just let me know, sent an owl..."

Lorrie: Yeah. The other guys are making Snape look good.

JC: I think it's interesting, too -- going back to that moment in the Great Hall -- that Snape looks away and then Harry continues to watch him for a little bit. That stood out to me, and I don't know... In the past, Harry could not stop looking at Snape quickly enough -- "Ugh, I can't even look at him!" -- and now he's seeing him differently.

Lorrie: And Snape's got something to hide.

JC: Yeah. It's another bit of maturity there for Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't just see Snape as this cardboard cut-out evil teacher; now he understands the picture's a lot more complex. He doesn't know what the picture is and he doesn't particularly like him, but he knows there's more going on there, and so there's something to look at now that there wasn't before.

Lorrie: And usually when Harry's looking at Snape, Snape is out to get Harry and is feeling vengeful, and right now Snape is not; he's got his own worries. Harry has a bit of an advantage here, because Snape is the one who's like a student. He's like a young kid setting out on some task or homework that he's not sure he's big enough to handle. Harry's just tired.

JC: Yeah. I feel tired for him. The image of the black drapes in the Great Hall...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yeah.

JC: The somber atmosphere of it all. It was that kind of feeling like when I go to a funeral, I'm not looking forward to it, right? I'm dreading the emotions that are going to come, but also knowing that it's going to be cathartic.

Lorrie: You have to do it. If you don't do it, your body's going to need it. It's going to build up until you go do it.

JC: And that's the thing that you do with other people, right? It's not just you alone going... It's you going to be around other people who are feeling the same thing, and that's really important for human beings.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's important for us to share our emotions with other people who are feeling those emotions, and that connects us to other people. That's what helps us get past things that we're stuck on or things that are poisoning us: share them with other people. That's the point of a funeral in some ways, so I'm glad that Dumbledore -- that the school has decided to give the kids this opportunity to remember Cedric in this way.

Lorrie: Well, an important thing is that if everybody who has a piece of memory about the person gathers together and then you pool your resources, then everyone leaves with more of that person.

JC: That's true. I've definitely had that experience of going to a funeral and to the reception or whatever afterwards, where people are eating and telling stories; some of those stories are things I've haven't heard before about older relatives, and those are the ones that are my memories now. I remember that.

Lorrie: Yeah. They're very comforting. It's nourishing.

JC: Right, when you get to the point that people are laughing.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Laughing about the antics and what a wild experience that was, or after the funeral when you hit the point where you're laughing, that's a good place to be.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's what Harry sometimes gets from Lupin and Sirius about his dad, is these bits of humanity; at the way, way, way end of this series, that's what he's going to get from Snape about his mom. These returns of humanity that belong to the people who loved the departed person... That's a way that love survives beyond death and strengthens you beyond

death, and that is your job as somebody at a memorial or funeral to do that for other people and to get it from other people. I'm sure this is not particularly relevant to this... I've been thinking it's been two days since Dick Button died. I briefly worked with him. He was 20th century figure skating in the U.S., and he was very, very kind to my kids and to me. It's not tragic that he died - - he was ninety-five, plus he achieved everything possible for one human being to achieve in a life -- but the thing that made me feel best after being sad about him going was when -- I had forgotten this! When my younger kid was four, we went to a three-hour-long dinner where there were my husband and me, and then the next generation of people were in their 80s and 90s. Dick was eighty-three that year, so my poor four-year-old had to sit there and behave for three hours past her bedtime.

JC: Wow!

Lorrie: So Dick deliberately sat himself next to her -- and he sat so that she would be on the side that he could hear better on -- and he spent the entire night entertaining her.

JC: Oh, wow. That's a gift.

Lorrie: Right? Mostly, he stole fries off her plate (which she found annoying, but he did it humorously), but then there was this one time where we got served ice cream and he said very seriously to her (because he was obviously a very knowledgeable man) that this is really specialized cream that comes from special cows. "The ice cream from these cows gives off heat instead of being cold. Here, put your hand over it and feel." My four-year-old puts her hand over it, and then he smushes her hand into the ice cream and she's indignant, and then he says, "This ice cream also smells different." She looked at him and she said, "Ha!" She wasn't going to fall for it, and I just remember thinking, 'Wow, he really understands four-year-olds.' He got that precise level of where a four-year-old can be fooled and how to get them in the space where they're like, 'I'm not going to be fooled again,' and that's what he did for three hours to keep my kid from losing it at this 'old people' dinner.

JC: That's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: That's the perfect example of a story that makes people smile and think about what an amazing person this was and what a gift this person was, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. He was a two-time Olympic champion, he basically was ABC Sports in the 1970s. He was brilliant -- he had a JD from Harvard -- but he spent hours... This is what he did with his talent. For my kid. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that's amazing. That's such a great story.

Lorrie: Yeah, and I forgot that until he died on Thursday. 'Oh, yeah...'

JC: That's amazing.

Lorrie: And to me, this is what it means when we say that a portrait at Hogwarts has the essence of the person. It doesn't have the person in it -- the portrait has no feelings; there's none of that person left -- but for the benefit of the people remaining who want to keep getting the wisdom from who this person was (what they might have known, what they might have seen), the portrait is there as a mnemonic to gather whatever you or people around you might have known about that person that could help you in the present moment. Yeah, remembering what Dick Button did for my four-year-old was a really good reminder that taking care of people's young kids is a super worthwhile thing to do with your giftedness, and he wasn't too good for that.

JC: That's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah. I like how Dumbledore says these very personal words about Cedric, about his personality. Cedric was special, but just that Dumbledore goes into the personal... This is such an important thing to reaffirm at a time like that: the individuality of a person who's gone is important, because that's the opposite of how Cedric was treated when he was killed. Then he just bluntly says right out, "Cedric Diggory was murdered by Lord Voldemort," and just like Harry no longer being an adolescent, the school is no longer kids being shielded from the real world. Well, at this point, the real world has come to you, and Dumbledore says, "Yeah, the Ministry doesn't want me to tell you this and some parents might not want that, but that's what happened." Also, Wormtail never gets any credit; Wormtail's the one that actually did it.

JC: True, true. Such is Wormtail's existence, yeah.

Lorrie: Yep!

JC: Yeah. That whole scene when Dumbledore says he was murdered by Lord Voldemort and everyone gasps and looks around, then he says, "Yeah, yeah, I'm not supposed to tell you that. They don't want you to know, but I'm telling you anyway because you need to know what's coming..." I thought, 'Wow.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: As someone who works in schools and works in education... Holy moly. Yeah. Yeah, we're heading into an era...

Lorrie: Yes! As someone who's just been told by the government, "the government official policy is that the truth is a lie, and that if you go against our policy, we will punish you." Okay. Now what do you do, then?

JC: And then what do you do? Right. This is, I think, a question that a lot of people are going to have to be asking themselves how they're going to answer, certainly in the rest of the school year. One of the ones that I'm most... Where do I even start with what we're even the most worried about? Here's an example of one, though: there was an executive order -- and I'm going to get the details wrong -- that essentially said that teachers in schools should not be calling students by names or pronouns that do not match their sex assigned at birth, and if they do that, then they will be punished for that. The school will lose federal funding.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: None of this is legal, right? Not a bit of this is legal.

Lorrie: None of this is enforceable, but yeah.

JC: Or enforceable. It's only enforceable to the extent that schools or school boards decide they're going to enforce it. We're in the middle of a nationwide teacher shortage, so if teachers just across the board said, "No, we're not going to comply," they would have to fire a lot of teachers. Would they do that? Sure. I think that in Texas they would, because our state legislature is about to pass a billion-dollar school voucher program, or they're going to try to.

Lorrie: I hate this.

JC: Yeah. I think that there's a whole... "Sure, let's destroy the schools, and then we destroy the ways in which children are taught the things that we don't want them to be taught in the first place. Okay." We're going to see in the next book efforts to control schools and education, and this is going to be a big theme. The timing of this for me, personally, is going to be really interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: Depending on where you are in the world as a Harry Potter reader, your experience of this series as escapism or fantasy or as documentary reality differs.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And the relationship that the U.S. generally had to the *Harry Potter* series during the first decade or two that it was published, I think, had a lot of cozy, comforting Christmas and Halloween fantasy escapist vibes. It is not the same vibe now, but I do remember earlier years reading this and it seeming more allegorical and not so exquisitely literal as it does at this moment.

JC: Yeah. Certainly at the time that I read this, it did not seem literal in that way. Yeah.

Lorrie: Although at some point somewhere in the world, it always was for somebody.

JC: Yeah, right. It seemed like something that was far away...

Lorrie: It was.

JC: Like it couldn't happen. Yeah, 'It couldn't happen where I live,' but yet, here we are. Or to the extent that I thought that it had happened. At the time that this was written, there was a push by school boards in certain states in the U.S. to not allow the teaching of evolution and science, for example, and that's the extent that it would have been. But the fact that Dumbledore has made the decision to say, "I'm just going to tell you. I'm going to use the power that I have -- being the headmaster of the school, being one of the most respected wizards currently alive -- to tell you the truth and tell you this is what's happening..." He's banking on the fact that the kids believe him and trust him, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. He has some capital...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And Fudge has made it clear that there is actually no way for Dumbledore to comply. It's really one of those things where if you look at the rules and they absolutely can't work for you, well, you're going to have to break them, so use your judgment then.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is a feeling that has become more and more familiar to me in the past several years, especially since pandemic: the feeling that there was a time when I could look into the future several years in advance and make rough plans. Then, especially once pandemic started, I found that I could plan a couple weeks in the future -- sometimes as much as six weeks into the future -- but after that, I would think, 'Well, there's no telling. Are we going to be in the middle of another surge at that point? Will something else have changed? Will some sort of market have crashed? Will this or that vital, essential thing be in shortage permanently? I don't know.' Dumbledore at this point clearly has lifted whatever multi-year plans he has and he's going on a much shorter schedule, and when he does the very correct thing of honoring Harry for risking his own life to bring Cedric's body back, we see the first division. All of the students, including Malfoy and the other Slytherins, had stood to honor Cedric Diggory's memory; then, when Dumbledore honors Harry for taking that risk, Draco and several other Slytherins don't stand. Alright, here we go. It's starting.

JC: It's interesting, too, because I can't remember if Dumbledore's message came before or after this. He talks that one of Voldemort's powers is that he has this ability to sow distrust and discord, and that it's really important for us to stay united and to work on those bonds of friendship and trust, and the only way that we're going to get through this is if we stay together. I thought that's also very relevant.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, that comes right after.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I love that he deliberately says that all the Durmstrang and Beauxbatons students will be welcome back here at any time. Will any of them be worth mistrusting? Maybe -- who knows? -- but you can't do that. You have to make the statement right away. No, people and your intrinsic honor... That's what we're going to honor more than anything. Then he says the thing that rightly became a classic line and still helps: "Remember, if the time should come when you have to make a choice between what is right and what is easy, remember what happened to a boy who was good, and kind, and brave..." That struck home the first time I read it; that strikes home every time for me. "Between what is right and what is easy..." That's a good moral compass.

JC: Yeah, that line really stood out to me on this reading. Well, it would stand out to you in any reading, but that felt really relevant now, too.

Lorrie: We get some lovely moments with my guy, Viktor Krum.

JC: Yes!

Lorrie: I love him!

JC: We have Fleur and Krum come seek Harry out to say goodbye.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's so nice.

Lorrie: "You were really part of our lives; we know what you're made of now. We have personal bonds." Ever since the first time I read this line, I've heard it in Viktor's voice so often. "Karkaroff did not steer. He stayed in the cabin and let us do the work." That is so typical. That is such a good characterization of that kind of person.

JC: Yes. Yeah, the bitterness that he expresses there... This person was his headmaster. Well, now, that headmaster's fucked off, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Maybe it's probably clear to everyone from the Durmstrang school where he's gone and what he's done. It's also clear what Krum thinks about that and which side he's on, which I love.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it's an important reminder. When you're in a country with a leader that is harming your own people and you didn't vote for that leader, then you don't support him. Why would you think that other people support the dictators in their countries? Sometimes if you know that there's some sort of really scary dictator, then people will view (with suspicion)

anyone from that country. No, no, no, these people are suffering from the dictator more than anyone. You cannot assume that somebody from a country supports whoever is in power.

JC: Right, and I would say that that also applies to people who live in red states in the United States.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Just because you're from Alabama or Texas doesn't mean you agree with or endorse or voted for any of the things that your leaders are doing.

Lorrie: And that you suffer directly from what they're doing more than anyone else. Viktor says, "I liked Diggory. He vos always polite to me. Always. Even though I vos from Durmstrang -- with Karkaroff," so good for Cedric. He knew that.

JC: Which makes me wonder what was happening in Viktor's life this entire year. Was he getting shunned by lots of the Hogwarts students because... He was a celebrity, but what he just said implies that maybe he wasn't being treated well by the other Hogwarts students.

Lorrie: He definitely was supposed to act in a certain way, according to Karkaroff, whether or not he felt it, and if people were going to dislike him for it, well, that attitude was coming from somewhere. He was supposed to be echoing Karkaroff's policies in everything he did.

JC: And he pulls Hermione aside for a little private chat...

Lorrie: That doesn't last very long.

JC: It doesn't last very long, and we also don't really hear anything about the contents of it at this point, yeah.

Lorrie: But it makes me a little sad, because he likes her so much more than she likes him. Awww...

JC: Yeah. It's funny that Ron finally gets his autograph.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's been wanting to ask for an autograph all year and having really mixed feelings about this guy, and then at the end, he asks for the autograph.

Lorrie: That's mature of him.

JC: And that Krum takes it as a peace offering.

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: Yeah, he kind of... yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oooh, and then we're on the train...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And we get one of the really awesome big reveals.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Well, first we have Hermione's media literacy, where she says that she looks at the Daily Prophet and says, "If you ask me, Fudge is forcing them to keep quiet," which at the time when the Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post are changing their editorial content based on the oligarchs who own them and their loyalties, it particularly hits home. But I'm so glad that Hermione can look at news and understand that that's the kind of control that's being exerted. Yay for her. Then she enters this whole phase of her voice trembling with triumph as she finally figures that the coast is clear, and she can take the boys' attention to tell them what she's been up to. Do you want to do the honors and explain what she's done?

JC: Oh, well, yeah. Just that she's captured Rita Skeeter in beetle form and has been keeping her in a little tiny jar with a shatterproof or a breakproof spell on it so that Rita cannot transform back. Rita's very not happy about it, but Hermione's got her number now.

Lorrie: She's blackmailed her, because Rita would go to Azkaban if Hermione revealed that she's an unregistered Animagus, and instead of turning her in -- which Hermione has no reason to have faith in the Ministry at this point.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: And even if she turned Rita in, would that stop that campaign of misinformation that Rita's been furthering all year? Hermione's taking it into her own hands. Oh, and she smiles at the angry beetle. This is so satisfying, and she has struck a deal with Rita. It's not unreasonable. She says, "One year. You're going to stop spreading misinformation for one year, and I'm going to let you out in London," so there's a limit to it. Once this happens, then Rita will know that she is never to call this particular person a 'stupid child' ever again. This is who she's dealing with now. Hermione doing this to Rita Skeeter is something that the fandom is somewhat split on, because there are some people who find it so horrifying and feel betrayed a little that Hermione is seen as such a role model among fans when she's done things that are super scary like this and ethically 'Ehh... Should she have done this?' I am flatly in favor of Hermione having done this. I have been both an activist and a journalist, and my stance on this is that the truth matters and you cannot always rely on the law to legislate that journalism has to be true. You cannot, because laws are made by people who have agendas, but the truth is

important in itself. I like thinking of Hermione and her scary powers as the childhood version of the incredibly powerful witch we know she becomes later. If people think, 'Well, is it okay that Hermione did this?' Well, I don't know. Is it okay that she's living in these times? Is it okay that this is happening? I think of it more as when you imagine middle-aged, super powerful Hermione, and you think, 'Wow, what was she like as a kid? What was she like at school?' you could look back on this and say, "This... This is what she was like." Could people tell at that time what she was going to be? Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, they could.

JC: No, it's funny... It never occurred to me until you said it that Hermione should not have... That maybe there were people who thought, 'Oh, no, Hermione imprisoned Rita Skeeter, that's so horrible!' That never even occurred to me. Honestly, the only misgivings I had about the whole thing were that this could backfire spectacularly on Hermione.

Lorrie: Mm-hmm.

JC: She's holding this over Rita, but we're about to head into an era where all Rita would have to do is go to the right person and tell the right lie. I don't think Hermione's protected herself enough here. I'm a little worried that Hermione is pretty naive about how much blackmail material she actually has over Rita, but okay. I think that it actually does work out in their favor.

Lorrie: Well, what Hermione has found out all year is that there is nothing Rita Skeeter won't stoop to to ruin people's lives for a news story. She will out people as half-giants, she will call teenage girls 'ugly' in print and spread rumors about their sexual behavior... There is nothing protecting her from Rita right now. No one's doing anything. What's she going to do, make an enemy of her? That's already happened.

JC: Well yeah, no, I think I meant letting her go at all. That's what I'm worried about. The moment she lets Rita out of that jar... Oh, boy... Yeah, I don't know. I'm a little bit on Team 'Rita in the jar as long as possible'.

Lorrie: The other thing that Hermione has going for her is that she's not the only enemy Rita's ever made. There are other people who would be very interested to know that, "Oh, that's how Rita Skeeter knew what was going on in my private office. Hmm..."

JC: That's true. That's true. She could make it well known this is how Rita Skeeter gets her information.

Lorrie: She broke the law, yeah.

JC: Yeah, and that would make it hard for Rita Skeeter to keep doing what she's been doing, regardless of whether she actually gets punished by the law, because we're heading into a time in this series where...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Who knows?!

Lorrie: The law reflects only whoever's in charge of enforcing it.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But on the ground, it makes Rita's job harder if people know that this is how... And also probably makes it more likely that someone's going to squash her.

Lorrie: Oops!

JC: "Wait, I see a beetle, and I'm having a private conversation. THWACK! There." That'd be a scary form.

Lorrie: It is. Very vulnerable.

JC: That's a scary form. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I thought Peter being a rat was scary, but...

Lorrie: I know. This is even...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, I find that very empowering to know that there is something you can do to counteract malicious lies. I think the truth is something that's worth honoring, and I think this may be my favorite thing Hermione ever does.

JC: It's so satisfying.

Lorrie: Yes! It's brilliant.

JC: It is really satisfying. The only way you can get your revenge on Rita Skeeter would be to put her in a bug jar. Oh, yes.

Lorrie: Yeah, and no one else has managed it. This isn't justice. This may not be mature of me, but it is, I think, deliberately set up by the author that the thing that signaled to me that it's okay for Hermione to get this revenge is that Rita called her a 'stupid girl'. It's like, 'Oh... Oh. You're going to regret that.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, you think you can do anything you want to this child because you're older and more powerful. That's what you're taunting her with.

JC: And the number of times in this volume that Hermione said, "I'm going to get her back, I'm going to get my revenge," it was like, 'It's definitely happening.' It just ratchets up every time she says it.

Lorrie: Right, because it's about who she thinks she can profit off of and exploit based on her assessment of how powerful they are. Hagrid? He's not very bright. She can do whatever she wants to him. Hermione? Oh, she's a teenager. Do whatever you want to her. Haha! No. Yeah, it's the power imbalance and the smugness about it that's really satisfying to see upended.

JC: Yes. Okay, so then another thing happens in this chapter to give us all a chance to feel smug, I guess, which is that Draco and his two cronies come in, first of all to say, "Oh, very clever, Granger, that you've figured this out," and then to taunt Harry about Voldemort being back.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I like that we're told now the kids of the Death Eaters know. There are people who absolutely know the truth and they already knew, and they weren't shocked by it. They're even cheering it on. They're excited about it.

Lorrie: Well, they're feeling empowered at this moment.

JC: They're feeling empowered by it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Feeling empowered by the fact that the guy that they wanted to be in charge is now in charge again, once again is back, and is going to make all you Muggle-loving people pay or whatever, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. They're trying to hitch a ride on this. They, individually, have not done shit.

JC: No, they've just been regular school bullies.

Lorrie: Yeah. They're going to take this opportunity to gloat and he's smirking, and then he gives Harry a lecture. "I told you a long time ago, 'don't pick the losing side', and you did." Wow, Draco, you're not over that. You're still sore about that, aren't you?

JC: It's like, 'Wait, how long ago was that? Wait, what?' Oh, you want to be Harry's friend that bad that now you're going to lecture him. "But if only you had been my friend all along..." Wow, Draco.

Lorrie: Rejection's really not okay. That hurt.

JC: Yeah. Okay, this is the thing I thought of: It's always Draco following Harry around, trying to throw hexes at him and get his attention. Once again, Draco thinks he's the main character.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Harry's, like, 'Oh, God, it's you again. You're so annoying.'

JC: 'It's you again. I'd forgotten about you.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'I haven't thought about you for a solid month.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Wow. You're still here?'

Lorrie: 'You're not very important, are you?'

JC: Yeah. That's... yeah.

Lorrie: And I think there's some artistic license here. It cannot be okay that they all jinx Draco and Crabbe and Goyle like this and just leave them there.

JC: Every person within hearing range fires a hex, and then some of the hexes intersect in not great ways.

Lorrie: That can't be okay, but they seem very unconcerned.

JC: Yeah, they seem unconcerned about it, and they're like, "Eh, they deserve it."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Also, the nonchalance with which they roll the bodies down the hall and then close the door and say, "Anyone want to play a game?" Yeah. Yeah, Fred and George appear...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Yes, and they have also participated in the hexing.

Lorrie: We get the denouement of the novel-length mystery about Ludo Bagman...

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Which is that he's just a two-bit loser.

JC: Who took Fred and George's money and all of their savings, and now it's just gone.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, at least we're rid of him. Then we get something that seems more relevant than ever right now, where Harry thinks carefully about the coming conflicts and decides that the best return he's going to get on his unwanted fortune is to invest in joke chaos as a sanity-saving measure. This is a good investment.

JC: Oh, I had the same thought reading that, when he says, "We're going to need a chance to laugh, so here." He's the first investor in Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, and it's so true. It's so true, that idea that even when things are awful, you need to have moments of joy. You need to be able to laugh and to be with other people and to share joy, and to have music and art and good food.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: You need to be able to do those things.

Lorrie: You have to prescribe those things to yourself somewhat grimly if you intend to not burn out.

JC: I know that I've heard this from several people and I've heard this from my own child. There's this mentality of 'how dare I enjoy myself when people are suffering', and that's so destructive. When the opportunity comes to enjoy yourself in the middle of a horrible time, take it.

Lorrie: Yeah. You can't afford to be upright about this.

JC: You don't win a prize. It doesn't translate.

Lorrie: No.

JC: The joy that you're giving up now doesn't get forwarded onto someone else who needs it. It just dissipates.

Lorrie: Humor or sanity or art or creativity or anything that refuels us is good. We need it. Whether it's good or not, we need it.

JC: For sure. I think that the last scene of this book, where everyone's coming -- all the Weasleys are coming over and like, you know, Harry's getting hugs, he's getting kisses, he's getting handshakes -- Vernon Dursley is just standing over there, seeing all of this and seeing that Harry is loved and has a place in that community.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry has to go back, and he's not going to have a good time and we all know it. Even before the fifth book came out, everybody knows that he's not going to have a good time, but Vernon Dursley has to acknowledge -- stand there -- and is forced to see that Harry has people who love and support him in that world.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So that is the exhausting end of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, and our next episode will be on the chapter Dudley Demented, the first chapter of *Order of the Phoenix*.

JC: We're at *Order of the Phoenix*. I can't believe it! Oh, okay, yeah, I'm excited.

Lorrie: Yeah, me too.

JC: I'm excited!

Caroline: You've been listening to Harry Potter After 2020 with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Harry Potter After 2020 is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.