

## Transcript

### Episode 5.21

#### Book 5, Chapter 21: The Eye of the Snake

**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 Five, Chapter Twenty-One: The Eye of the Snake.

**Lorrie:** The Eye of the Snake. In an awe-inspiring Care of Magical Creatures class, Hagrid explains the mystery of the skeletal horses. Harry and Cho get a moment alone. Harry has a vision of terror in his sleep. What a turning point chapter we have here!

**JC:** Definitely! Oh, man... A lot happened here in the end of the chapter. I didn't know where this was going.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** I couldn't remember what animals Hagrid was going to show them in the lesson. I had no clue.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** Nothing! But then when we got to the last meeting of the D.A., I went, 'Oh, this one,' and then I totally forgot that the dream happened afterward with the snake, so this whole chapter was a surprise. I had forgotten almost all of this.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and it's like [an] executive function chapter. There are just decisions being made in this chapter about where to move the plot along. It's all done very intentionally in a way that I respect and enjoy. I felt like, 'Okay, the storyteller's in control. I can relax. The storyteller knows what she's doing.'

**JC:** After the last chapter.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. So yeah, after being teased for chapter after chapter after chapter, we get to find out what thestrals are.

**JC:** Yes. I really love the beginning of this chapter. It feels like a classic day at Hogwarts where there are bewitched snowballs, and Harry and Ron are stuck inside because they have to do their homework and Hermione's traipsing around doing things. It just feels very much like, 'Ah, yes, we have a normal Saturday at Hogwarts.' It was kind of a relief after everything.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. When I'm looking at Hagrid's class here, I go through a little journey where I think, 'Okay, this is scary, but not bad' to 'This is actually a really pretty good lesson for Hagrid' to 'This was really good.' That is not a journey I expected to take regarding a Hagrid class, especially because there's been so much evidence building about the ways in which he does not do well and shouldn't have this post, but it occurred to me on this read that his way of introducing these fifth-years to thestrals is what an age-appropriate facts-of-life class looks like and that is something that's been contested. Anytime we get into 'think of the children' education territory, that's always what's being contested with: on the one hand, sanctimonious and harmful fantasies about children being completely sheltered and naive until the night before they turn eighteen or something (we have Mrs. Weasley representing that fantasy; everyone, including people who are sympathetic to Mrs. Weasley, knows that's actually not serving the kids well). Then on the other hand, there's people seriously wondering, 'Why are 11-year-olds being sent into the forest by themselves'? but obviously there's something that has to happen. There's some good point at which it's advisable to tell kids, "You know what? Your brains weren't developed enough to handle this knowledge before, so we did as adults take the gamble that you wouldn't need it until now, but you are now at the stage. We've struck the right balance between 'you're probably old enough to handle this' and 'you may actually need this', and it would be failures on our part if we didn't prepare you." That's the debate going on: was Hagrid appropriate to give this quite advanced lesson to fifth years instead of sixth or seventh years? The answer is, actually, that's what makes him a more appropriate teacher for this class this year than Grubbly-Plank, who would have done everything that you're supposed to do in times of peace where most kids (as is true of any classroom, any bunch of 15-year-olds) would have the standard mainstream "No, we haven't encountered this yet", and then some kids who, unfortunately through chance, grew up about this involuntarily a long time ago. Therefore, where this is concerned -- having witnessed death up close -- they've been in a different category from their classmates for a long time; now this is actually being addressed officially, and the onus is not being put on the kids who are the outliers.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** It's laying bare the way that fate and chance build these inequalities into peer groups. It's teaching, especially after the previous chapter when we got a side of the Hagrid character that I found difficult to slog through. This was such a good reminder to me that this is, by nature, a really complicated character (the purpose that Hagrid serves in this series).

**JC:** It reminds me of... Having worked in schools my whole life, I guess it was probably in the 90s when there was this big shift (in elementary classrooms, in particular) toward just being more aware of the different kinds of families that exist.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Every elementary school class would do Mother's Day and Father's Day things and everything would be couched in terms as if you had a two-parent family, and there became this recognition: lots of kids, for many, many reasons, do not live in that kind of heterosexual household with two parents.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** We shifted towards calling the adults who live in a child's house 'caregivers' instead of 'parents' and things like that; there was a backlash to that from a certain segment of the political landscape, saying that A) we were 'normalizing' ("Obviously, the best place for children to grow up is in a two-parent family, and you're normalizing bad things!") and B) "Our poor, innocent children who are sheltered and live in these environments don't need to know that parents can get divorced or that parents can die." I remember these arguments from the 90s in particular. Children are living this! Even if there are two, three children in your class of 30, you need to make them feel welcome and you need to address this. This is a reality. Come on, children understand this. They've read books, right? It reminds me of that argument.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** "Oh, this is too intense. The children are not ready to learn that when you see death, you see these creatures that didn't appear before." I'm like, "Bitch, that is mild compared to what many of these kids have gone through." It's so interesting that, like you said, this "for the children" argument that we keep having in education -- the reality of what children need to be prepared for and need to be able to empathize with other children about and just need to understand about the world -- we underestimate what they're capable of all the time. We haven't even talked about sex education yet, right? This is just other things about the world, but sex education's a whole other branch of that.

**Lorrie:** There's this phenomenon that I remember (distinctively from being this age) where kids know that for some strange reason, a lot of adults are invested in this double

reality where one of them is the reality that kids know and live and the other is, "Oh, but if we address that, then we're sanctioning it, so we have to have this completely unrealistic state-sanctioned view of what kids should be feeling." You have this situation, for example, where if a kid is suspended because they did drugs, their punishment is to go around giving talks about how you shouldn't do drugs. What is this weird double mentality? Why are we producing the sedimentary layer of lying over -- Anyway, yeah.

**JC:** It also produces an environment in which children don't feel like they can go to adults when they're really genuinely struggling with something.

**Lorrie:** Why would you? Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, because you're supposed to maintain the fiction that you don't know about the stuff that they don't want you to know about, and they're maintaining the fiction that you're too young...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So when a kid really has an issue, there's no one to go to.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It's a mess. I love the fact that Hagrid here... Harry has not had the chance to talk to Hagrid, but Hagrid is absolutely someone Harry could have gone to and said, "What are the things pulling the carriages, and why can I see them now?" and Hagrid would have been able to explain. It's just really important that kids know that there are adults that they can go to with this stuff, and that that fake wall of 'protect the children' is not there to prevent them from having those conversations, I guess.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, because that is actually a big function of that fake wall. When that fake wall is implemented and weaponized, it does prevent that, because if you are an adult in one of those positions of power -- if you're a teacher or some sort of guide -- and a kid comes to you with genuine need, but you know that you're supposed to spout the party line, then this puts you in the position of transgressing if you meet the kid where they are instead of telling the kid that they don't have the right to be having these needs and they should be ashamed of themselves. We see Sirius do a great job of negotiating that when he delivers Molly's orders verbatim. "Ron, your mother says you shouldn't do this," and then the kids say, "You really think that?" and he goes, "No, of course I don't." Sirius... He's the most wanted fugitive in England, so he doesn't have to be worried or be accountable, but people that are employed by a school district? Yeah, you're put in a position where you will be doing your job against orders if you actually serve the kids you're there to serve.

**JC:** Yeah, and then that doesn't even get into the large set of laws that we're bound by: what we can and cannot talk to children about, what we need to report to the proper

authorities (and if we don't report it, we can be charged with a crime). There's a lot going on there, too, that I don't think the Hogwarts teachers are having to deal with.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and those laws come from so many different directions. Some of them are meeting needs that I trust in (that do good as far as I'm concerned), and some of them are in service of an agenda that I don't trust. Yeah, it's a mess.

**JC:** Yeah. We definitely got a new crop of those that came through in Texas this year around using kids' pronouns and using kids' chosen names. At least at the public school level, we're not allowed to do that anymore.

**Lorrie:** Yup.

**JC:** Anyway, we're off topic.

**Lorrie:** I'm not sure we are.

**JC:** Well, maybe we're not.

**Lorrie:** This passage about Hagrid really impressed me. He's got the kids, he's carrying half a cow...

**JC:** Oh, and he still looks beat up, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. He's covered in bruises of different colors. He walks them into a part of the forest where the trees are so thick that it looks like twilight, so the kids are already terrified. "He turned, shook his shaggy head to get the hair out of his face, and gave an odd, shrieking cry that echoed through the dark trees like the call of some monstrous bird." He is really impressive here and uncanny, and the kids are being led by the right person here. If you're going to go to magical school to be taught mysteries that you can't learn anywhere else, this is what you're going for and it cannot be a completely sanitized curriculum where everything is completely safe. He's teaching them what they need to know -- he's the right person for it -- and then when he knows that most of the kids will see nothing but (invisibly) bits of raw flesh being torn from a carcass and they have no idea of what's doing it or where it's going, that is terrifying. Wow! They better trust Hagrid, because obviously this is a phenomenon that exists whether or not these kids feel equipped to deal with it. Hagrid is standing there looking really calm and saying, "No, I know what it is you're seeing and I'm taking you through it, step by step," and then, of course, everyone gets great reassurance of Hermione going, "Oh...." She doesn't know what she's looking at, but it's a known phenomenon. Hermione knows about, okay?!

**JC:** Yeah. It's interesting that when they're walking out there (because I couldn't remember what they were going to see) and I was like, 'Is it the acromantula? What are we going to see?' I had no clue. The kids are all terrified and Hagrid still looks kind of

beat up, so many of the kids are probably thinking, 'Is the thing we're about to see what did this to him?'

**Lorrie:** Exactly.

**JC:** 'What kind of danger are we being put in?' They have good reason to believe that they might be put in danger, so when it turned out to be the thestrals, Harry was relieved because it was like, 'Oh, God, they're real. That's so great.'

**Lorrie:** 'I'm so glad.'

**JC:** And then I was like, 'Oh, okay. Good. Yes, all right, okay.' But then yeah, you're right. I was also kind of expecting there to be some kids pushing back who couldn't see them; it kind of started that way, but yeah, as soon as Hermione said, "Oh, I know what these are," and as soon as the kids started seeing the cow being devoured by something invisible, then it was like, 'Okay, you can't deny that there's something here.' That was a relief, because after the whole year of Blast-Ended Skrewts, it was really hard for me not to think, 'Oh, Hagrid is going to screw this up.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Hermione had been worried about it, but then it was a relief just to see what it actually was and that he was doing a really good job of introducing the students to the thestrals. I just thought, 'Oh, good. Thank you, thank you.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. This is a demonstration of Hagrid's function in the series. His job -- the reason he exists at Hogwarts in this series -- is to be the intermediary who is of both and neither the civilized and the wild world. He's the person who guides the students between worlds, between states of being, and he shows them how to approach everything on its own terms so you know it's natural; you know how not to be afraid of it. Yes, it's scary, but everything has its own purpose for being. That's who he is, that's what he does. Yeah, it's more important for him to be there when it's not peacetime. This is where the kids are being taught not to be afraid of death, and just the way that the thestrals... They're just horses.

**JC:** Yeah, they're just horses.

**Lorrie:** They pull carriages, they take Dumbledore places...

**JC:** Yeah. That's interesting, too. I wonder... We didn't even ask who was pulling the carriages until Harry saw the thestrals in this book, so I wonder how many kids know. If they have older siblings, maybe they know. Is it known that the thestrals do this job, that they pull the carriages every year, or is this brand new news to everyone? It just raised a lot of questions for me.

**Lorrie:** Hagrid's thestrals lesson ends with Malfoy and the Slytherins making fun of Ron and Hermione saying, "Ignore them, just ignore them," and that is exactly what Hagrid has had to do, because guess who has come to inspect his lesson?

**JC:** Oh, it's so awful because in the last chapter, we saw Umbridge come to the door and speak to Hagrid in a completely normal way and have a conversation with him and understand everything he said; she completely disrespects him in this particular situation in front of all these students by just pretending that she has to use gestures and very simple words and speak very slowly and clearly. She over-exaggerates it in a way that she didn't do when we saw her talk to him in the last chapter, and she's doing it in front of the children on purpose.

**Lorrie:** She's framing him on purpose, and it's a performance that she and they are enjoying the heck out of.

**JC:** Right. The Slytherins are thinking this is the funniest thing they've ever seen, and the Gryffindors (at least half of the Gryffindors that we have access to) are getting angrier and angrier. Yeah. Oh, it's just so disgusting.

**Lorrie:** She does such a good job, and it's so difficult to counter it.

**JC:** Yeah, because she's the one in power here.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Hagrid doesn't know what he stepped into; there's no way that he could have in the space of a weekend... I'm sure that someone tried to talk to him, and even if he did know, I'm not sure he could have done anything.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Hermione did try to talk to him; that's what she was doing while Harry and Ron were catching up on homework on Saturday (going to try to explain to him "You're stepping into danger") and he's just like, "No, no, no. I've got a plan, I'm going to stick to it."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But yeah, the demonstration of somebody evilly enjoying the power they have over other people and exploiting it just to prove what they can get away with...

**JC:** There's a lot of examples of that happening in the world around us right now.

**Lorrie:** There sure are. Yeah, yeah, the whole thing: "But don't they realize how it's going to hurt people?" There's that gap where you have to catch up to realizing, 'Oh, they do, but they don't care,' and then there's the disillusionment gap, where you have to admit to yourself, 'It's not that they don't care; it's that that's what they want.'

**JC:** Yeah, that the cruelty is the point.

**Lorrie:** And this is their fantasy; it's not a byproduct and they're counting on decent people to take a while to catch up to that, so that during that time they can move quickly to see how much they can get away with and have in place before people wake up and figure out how to stop them.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's what's happening to Hagrid here. He knows that something is going wrong, but he still has good faith regarding Umbridge. When she says "*Hem, hem,*" he assumes that something normal is happening, and they haven't been able to warn him, "Oh, that's the noise she makes before she ruins your life."

**JC:** Yeah. This whole scene is awful, and it gets worse and worse. Her willfully misinterpreting everything he does and making notes (and then is reading her notes aloud, which we have not seen her do in any other classroom)...

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** It's a performance. She's letting all the kids know what she's doing, and she's doing it in a way that she knows the Slytherins are going to back her up and giggle, and she's almost ingratiating herself to those kids at the same time. I'm sure she has pulled focus groups of Slytherins (especially) aside and said "Who's the worst teacher at Hogwarts?" and gotten stories about Hagrid. The whole thing is a performance.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That's one of the dangers of human nature and life: it's always a good bet to count on appealing to some people's more cruel natures.

**JC:** Oh, yes, and we've sure seen a lot of that in the last decade.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. [In] Any random group of people, somebody is going to have a sadistic streak that is going to eat this up so much that they're going to be yours. You can do anything you want with them; they'll be loyal to you because you've fed that appetite of theirs, which is of course exactly how Voldemort gets his followers.

**JC:** Yeah. It absolutely brought to mind for me clips that I'd seen of Donald Trump at a rally getting a rise out of his base by saying the most awful, racist, terrible, sexist things, mocking people openly in ways that would not have been tolerated a decade ago and the audience eating it up.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And the sick feeling that I always got watching that, thinking, 'What? How is this happening? How is this allowed? How are people just... Why are people like this?' With this scene, it really felt very familiar to me in a way that when I first read this book, I was just flat-out horrified. 'Why would people do this?' Now, I'm like, 'Yeah, okay, I've seen this a lot.'

**Lorrie:** The difficulty of strategizing how to combat the appeal of feeding people's worst appetites... It's a damn good strategy they have.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It is a very dependable part of human nature.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So here we are, reading this series thinking, 'Okay, the moral is that love is stronger? That better be true, because I'm not sure it's going to be.'

**JC:** It also, though, reminds me of the author and her awful tweet where she was on a yacht with a cigar and mocking people...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Or celebrating the fact that she had helped get some legislation passed that was so anti-trans. She was posting that in the same kind of mocking way.

**Lorrie:** Very much so, yeah.

**JC:** Ugh!

**Lorrie:** There's a smugness and a taunting. It's very sobering after she's demonstrated really convincingly in this very, very long story that this is not a trustworthy impulse that we humans have, and then to see her remorselessly saying, 'Yes, I'm going to own this.' Okay. I guess there's no talking to you.

**JC:** Just like there's no talking to Umbridge. There's no reasoning with Umbridge in this series. It's so fascinating to me that Umbridge seems to be the one completely irredeemable villain in this series.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Even Voldemort... Even we, here on this podcast, talk about Voldemort as he needs this resolution, he needs someone to feel what he's feeling, all this stuff. Voldemort we're able to talk about with more sympathy than Umbridge. Umbridge is the worst villain, I think, in this entire series, and that's the one that I find myself comparing the author to right now.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's the consciousness. The hope with Voldemort is that there is part of his own mind that he doesn't understand, and Dumbledore acts (and is correct) the whole series like he knows about it and that there's hope of being able to get to him that way. The problem with Umbridge is that she doesn't have that kind of empty spot; she knows exactly what she's doing, and you can't reach her by appealing to her conscience at all. That's different, again, from Barty Crouch, Jr, who is just crazed.

**JC:** Yeah. Right.

**Lorrie:** He's a true believer; she's not. She knows what she's doing and she chooses it.

**JC:** Yeah. She's choosing it, she knows what she's doing, and she's unreachable in the same way that we talked about before and that others have talked about: the author is unreachable.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Nothing is going to change her now.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** She's lost to us.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Anyone is capable of becoming whole again as long as there's still alive, but it's not on us to do anything but defend ourselves against them. So yeah, Umbridge frames Hagrid, and it's clearly going to work because she's so advanced in her technique, almost admirably so. Eventually, this comes to a close.

**JC:** When they're walking up the hill afterward, I really like the moment when Hermione thoughtlessly says that she wishes she could see the Thestrals, and Harry says, really quietly, "Do you?" She immediately goes, "Oh... Oh, I didn't mean that! I didn't mean that."

**Lorrie:** "Sorry, sorry."

**JC:** I understand that impulse of wanting to know all the things, and sometimes you can only know some things because you had to go through some shit to get there. Hermione knows that, so she instantly pulls that back, but it's just a beautiful little moment between the two of them.

**Lorrie:** That's why I'm going to jump in with my perennial defense of Ron (a couple books from now, he's going to be leaving the others in the tent): you can be mad at people for not having the life experience to know, but being able to experience this for the first time when you're an adult or nearly an adult... That's the dream. How did people get this knowledge? Not any way you would want. Is it better that they know? Yeah, that's an advantage, but it's a privilege to be ignorant about this still at this age. That's the world that your elders are fighting for. Are we safe to talk about Harry not looking forward to Christmas break?

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. Though I do want to say that Ron is getting a little better at not letting Malfoy provoke him, or at least it seems that way.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Maybe he's learning how to handle it a little better.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Poor Ron.

**Lorrie:** Anyway, the Gryffindor Quidditch team has bigger problems than Ron now.

**JC:** Oh, my God.

**Lorrie:** Ron is never going to be the worst player on the team anymore...

**JC:** Hey! Yes, this is true.

**Lorrie:** Now that the third stringers have been brought on to replace Harry and the Weasley twins... and Ginny Weasley. Yeah. Harry now thinks that he's going to be alone at Hogwarts for Christmas because Hermione's going skiing (which is hilarious) and Ron is going home, and Hogwarts isn't Hogwarts anymore. There's not going to be any D.A. over Christmas break, there's no Quidditch for him... Everything is horrible. It's the first time that it hasn't been a refuge for him, and I really like that we get this whole long paragraph documenting that change before Ron says, "Oh, wait! No, of course you're coming."

**JC:** "I just forgot to tell you." Yeah, okay.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "I was supposed to tell you a couple weeks ago."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That was a really good way to illustrate the change when (as I feel often living in the U.S. now, where I've been a citizen my whole life) the U.S. that I love... It's very real to me, in my head and in my experience, as a U.S. that is being dismantled at the moment. It's not going to change my love for it, but it's going to exist at the same time as a U.S. where much worse things are happening, and seeing Harry not want to stay at Hogwarts for Christmas was very similar to that feeling.

**JC:** Yeah, and the pain of that, too, knowing that in the past, Christmas break was this time when he would have lots of time to relax and he would fly on his broom and then have the Christmas Feast.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** There's no feasting this year. I don't even know. Was there a feast at the beginning of the year? There must have been, because that's when the teachers were introduced.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** But then all these other feasts seem not to be happening. There's also this interesting thing of Hermione going skiing; it's such a reminder that the Muggle world is completely oblivious to everything that's happening here, and how I feel this too in my life. There's all these awful things happening in the world, and then other parts of life just go on. All these awful things are happening, and we're still taking our kid on college visits and going on a vacation and doing all these things that feel very normal with this feeling of 'I don't know what the future is going to bring, and all I can do right now is keep doing things that feel normal.' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Are they worth doing on their own? If so, then let's do them. Something that's similar to this: there's a new area of the Wizarding World of Harry Potter theme park in Orlando, Epic Universe. There are new rides, there's the French Ministry of Magic... It sounds and looks incredible, and there are three reasons why I can't go and I don't think I'll ever go. One of them is that I've had more money in other years for vacations, but right now our family is being affected by a lot of the job cuts that have been happening under this administration. There are whole classes of jobs that have been cut, and I don't know where people's money is coming from. It's harder to get equivalent jobs in the shrinking field outside. We have had more money for vacations at other times, and we couldn't do that now, even if I weren't boycotting the Harry Potter theme parks because they are the single biggest source of revenue for J.K. Rowling and her initiatives that she funds to make sure that trans people don't get human rights.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And even if I weren't, just staying the heck out of Florida because basic U.S. citizenship rights stopped being enforced in Florida years before the concentration camp that's currently being built there now. I have seen videos and travelogues about the new expansion to that amusement park. It looks incredible.

**JC:** That's interesting. That's funny, because I didn't know that it happened. I don't follow any Harry Potter stuff at all.

**Lorrie:** It looks phenomenal. I'm not even sad that I can't go. It's the same way like, "Oh, that looks nice..."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But there are so very, very many reasons why it's not an option anymore.

**JC:** Yeah. It's not an option for a lot of reasons, but even on top of all of that, the price of going to something like that is so outlandish. I don't care how much money you have and how ignorant you are of J.K. Rowling -- people spend their money how they want -- but oh, my God, the tickets to those theme parks are just so incredibly, horrifically expensive.

**Lorrie:** So yeah, it's irrelevant to me, but yeah, it sure does look great. Here's Harry's thinking, 'Well, I guess I'm staying at Hogwarts and it's not a joy anymore.' Then I love this: as soon as Ron says, "Are you kidding? You're coming with me! Of course you're coming with me," then Harry has a beautiful problem: he's worried what to do about Sirius.

**JC:** Oh.... Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Well, obviously, we can't invite Sirius; Dumbledore would kill us all, plus Sirius and Molly hate each other.

**JC:** And he's imagining Sirius being alone at Christmas with Kreacher, pulling a Christmas cracker. It's like, Awww...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I actually hesitated over that line about him pulling a lonely cracker with Kreacher. 'Is that too much?' No, it's perfect. I'm happy for Harry that he has this problem to worry about, though. He has somebody to love.

**JC:** And someone that he could spend Christmas with. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Family that he could spend Christmas with. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's such a luxury to have people to worry about. Then we move on to the final D.A. session of this calendar year where we see once again that J.K. Rowling is the master of mortification. Harry sees Dobby's Christmas ornaments.

**JC:** 'What?! Dobby, what were you thinking?' It's the worst thing you can do to a teenager. The worst!

**Lorrie:** A hundred of them? Shining baubles with Harry's face on them, and it says, 'HAVE A VERY HARRY CHRISTMAS!' Oh, my God.

**JC:** Oh, wow... There's this thing that happens now -- and I don't think this is just in Texas; I think it happens everywhere -- where you can buy this giant cutout of your kid's face and take it to events where you then humiliate your kid by holding up this giant thing of their face. You see this at every sporting event, you see it at band competitions, you see it at graduation... It's a thing that people do now. I don't know how much they cost. They're huge -- they're poster-sized -- and you just see people going to high school events here with this giant picture of their kid's face. I don't know how the kids feel about it, but I can imagine that my child would say, "No! No!" That's kind of what I thought of here: all those "big head posters" of Harry's face is what it was imagining in the scene.

**Lorrie:** There is definitely a kind of personality that enjoys this...

**JC:** There must be.

**Lorrie:** But I'm not part of that world. God... Fortunately, Harry manages to get all of them down. Aye, aye, aye.

**JC:** Yeah. This is the funny little bit about the mistletoe where Luna looks up and says, "Oh, there's mistletoe," and Harry jumps out from under it, like, 'Oh, no!' Then she says, "Oh, good idea. They're probably infested with nargles."

**Lorrie:** Best not to ask. I love that we get Zacharias Smith again. He is the human embodiment of the voice in your head, and yet somehow this author writes character so well that he's also a very real person in my head and so very kickable. But no, it's a good job. He's smarmy... We get one of the most beautiful sentences to me in the entire series. It's so beautiful: "Neville had improved beyond all recognition."

**JC:** I also wrote that sentence down, and I love how this shows the power of a good teacher. Yeah, beautiful.

**Lorrie:** Every time I have ever read this book and I come to that sentence, I read it a few times over. I just want to relive it again and again and again.

**JC:** Yeah. I also love that Harry's planned out what he's doing here. You don't get the sense that he's really spent a lot of time planning it – a lot of it is just his good instincts -- but he comes in and he's like, "Okay, we're going to wrap up the semester by reviewing and practicing everything we've learned," and that's a really good idea.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That is exactly what you would do to cement things into people's heads before they're going to go away for a break. That is how human brains work, and he should probably start with a review when they come back. He's so naturally good at this. I'm still mad that he didn't go back to Hogwarts to be a professor in the future.

**Lorrie:** We can see where he gets the idea to do it this way. He gets instant feedback when he does his check-ins around the classroom. Anytime he says, "Okay, everyone practice," and then he just goes around and observes, and then he says, "All right now, practice again and again" between first, second, and third tries, he sees, 'Okay, that actually works. I'm going to take that evidence and use it.'

**JC:** Yeah. This is what we teach teachers to do.

**Lorrie:** I know. Are you about to cry?

**JC:** I'm just so amazed at how he's just naturally good at it, because... Yeah, it's great.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It also shows that when you know exactly why you're teaching students something and they know exactly why it's in their best interest to learn it, the motivation

line is unbroken. This is the opposite of Binns teaching history; there's nothing appealing about it, and this is, "No, we know why we're doing this." It just reaches right into talents that they have in them already. Oh, beautiful! He gets to teach them to practice Stunning spells in the way that Ron took one for the team in the previous book and learned, "Oh, yeah, when you want to learn stunning, somebody has to fall on the cushions again and again and again. Thank you, Ron! Now we know how to do this." I like that it says the room isn't big enough for all of them to practice that at once, so they've divided in half and the other half watched, and that's not bad. That has its own advantages.

**JC:** Yeah, absolutely. Observing other people, yes. I could talk a lot about why that's valuable and how you use that as a teacher. There's a whole way of teaching students how to engage in debate which involves [what's] often called a fishbowl. Probably people listening may have experienced it, but it's where you put students who are going to be in the first round of the debate into the center of the room, and then you have everyone else sit around the outside and take notes on what they observe; then you swap people in so everyone gets a chance to participate and then to observe, and to reflect on what they observed and reflect on their participation. It's a really valuable way to teach people how to participate in debates, and yeah, Harry's digging into that method of learning here. Yes, yes.

**Lorrie:** These lessons are such a pleasure to read about.

**JC:** They really are. He's the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher!

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and then he leads them off with the promise of Patronuses after break.

**JC:** Oh! Leave them with a little taste of what's to come.

**Lorrie:** And he tells them that they've made him happy. He says, "You guys have gotten really good."

**JC:** It's great. The D.A. arc of this book is one of my favorite things ever.

**Lorrie:** So beautiful, and it always gets me whenever there's evidence that we should not only trust teens, but really respect them and let them show us their expertise. To me, that's one of the great functions of children's literature. When you see that -- if you go into it as an adult reader of children's literature, assuming that, 'Oh, it's just children,' and then you read something like that -- it's humbling; then you see the kid readers of these books looking completely natural and at home with this level of familiarity with their own competence. I'm sort of reluctant to talk about Cho because oh, those poor kids...

**JC:** Oh, my gosh. I love how awkwardly they both hang back.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The other kids leave... Harry's re-stacking the cushions and making sure they're perfectly stacked very slowly, and she's hanging back and telling her friend, "No, no, go ahead. Go without me. Go on."

**Lorrie:** "No, I'm okay."

**JC:** It's just so awkward. It's very clear that Harry has no clue what to do. He was just like, 'I just wanted her to tell me a Merry Christmas,' and she's thinking, 'I'm going to kiss him.' The distance between their expectations is hilarious.

**Lorrie:** I feel so bad for her, because she knew what she wanted to do and she couldn't. She was overwhelmed with all the other emotions. She wasn't going to overwhelm him with crying; she, in fact, had planned on purpose to not, and she couldn't help it because these poor kids went through this.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** You're not supposed to have this kind of awful grief when you're just trying to kiss another teenager.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** You're just supposed to say, "Oh, I like you, we get along."

**JC:** "Oh, look, mistletoe." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. You're supposed to have the freedom to do that and they don't, and she can't stop crying for it. Oh, gosh... And she apologizes. She knows exactly what's happening to her and she can't help it, and she apologizes. Meanwhile, Harry is quite rightly terrified because they're dealing with survivor guilt.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Everyone's favorite.

**JC:** Yeah. It is really interesting that she's thinking about Cedric and what would it have been like to be in the D.A. with Cedric. What would he have thought of this? She doesn't know that he doesn't know this stuff, and Harry's like, "No, no, he knew it. He knew it."

**Lorrie:** "He knew it."

**JC:** "He knew what he was doing. Don't doubt that."

**Lorrie:** That's a beautiful thing for them to be able to do [for] each other about their memories of Cedric. Whatever happened to him, he did know this stuff, and it's a mercy to relieve yourself of that guilt. 'Was there something we could have done?'

**JC:** No.

**Lorrie:** No, actually; there wasn't, and he was good. Then we get this massive clue to the mystery of the series where Harry [is] so over it and he says, "If Voldemort really wants to kill you, you don't stand a chance," and she just says baldly, "*You* survived when you were just a baby." Harry (again, still over it): "Yeah, well, I dunno why, nor does anyone else, so it's nothing to be proud of." There, they've just explained why Voldemort has never been able to kill Harry Potter. "If he really wants to kill you, you don't stand a chance." Well, he really did want to kill Cedric and he had no reason to care, so there went Cedric. Cho manages to get something out that she had planned, which is so beautiful, where she's still crying but she says, "You're a really good teacher, you know. I've never been able to Stun anything before," and I thought, 'Oh, that's beautiful to let the reader fill in Harry's POV.' They're like, 'Oh, she's stunning.' That was lovely.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** And it's true.

**JC:** And then she says that she likes him in the very teenage way of "I *like* like you."

**Lorrie:** Yeah!

**JC:** It's very cute, yeah. It's awkward and sweet and lovely.

**Lorrie:** They manage to make some progress. Good for them! Oh, and the beautiful detail that he could count her freckles...

**JC:** Yeah. When she points out the mistletoe, I think he says something about nargles. It's really cute. I love, in the movie version, how they played that up when she says, "What's a nargle?" and he's like, "No idea"; in the movie, I thought they really did a good job with that, and I'd forgotten that in the book, it completely fades to black. I was like, 'Oh, yeah, it is like a YA kind of a thing. They're not going to describe the kiss, but it's very clearly implicated what happened.' It's very cute, but also it's like, 'Oh, wow.' In culture (I assume this happened in most cultures), we place so much value on the first kiss, so it's like, 'Oh, we've watched Harry grow up, and now we get this moment.'

**Lorrie:** I was really impressed the first time I read this. 'Oh, wow, look at that strategic choice on the author's part to do a hard fade-to-black.' It's respectful. I don't think it's the only good choice; she could have done it a number of ways that I would have liked. 'Okay, we're not going to be voyeuristically sitting in on Harry's first kiss. Okay, okay.' What I'll always remember: before I had read any of the *Harry Potter* books, my husband was reading this one in hardcover when it had just come out and suddenly he laughed out loud really hard. I think I was half asleep and like, "What?" and he goes, "Harry gets to first base." Then he stumbles mindlessly back to the common room, and

yay for Hermione knowing how to get him over the awkwardness of explaining what happened.

**JC:** But I really do like the way that he isn't sure if he wants to tell anybody. He wants to keep it to himself and process it, and I thought, 'Oh, that's so real.' I really do remember feeling that way as a teenager. I didn't even want to tell my very best friend that I had kissed someone or made out of someone, and it was not about shame at all; it was more I wanted to hold on to it and keep it private, and I didn't want to have to process it in front of another person until I was sure I had processed it myself. I found that really real.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The process of making that your own and part of your history... You don't want to expose it to outside influence and possible negativity while it's still in flux. It's not done yet, and the way Harry feels about this is going to become super important a couple chapters from now.

**JC:** Oh, yeah. Okay, I think I know where that's going, but then we have this really hilarious moment where Hermione draws it out of him with a very blunt, "Okay, did she kiss you?"

**Lorrie:** "Is it Cho?"

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** I really appreciate how practical she is about it because she's not going to humiliate him. She's not going to tease him. She's not going to make him struggle with how to say this.

**JC:** And the really adorable Ron asks, "How was it?" and he says, "Wet," and then it's like, HAHHAHAHA! That's clever writing.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The iconic awkwardness felt by every reader. 'Uuummm...'

**JC:** Yeah, and Ron's reaction... Oh, it's so fun. It's really cute, too, because at this point Ron has never kissed anybody. I'm not sure about Hermione; I would like to wager that she did kiss Viktor Krum.

**Lorrie:** Well, Ron is going through that exact same thought process here.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, he is, and Hermione is also writing a really long letter to Viktor Krum at the same time.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Ron's first response is so cheerful. He puts up his hearty cheer for his pal, and then he starts thinking; then you start seeing his doubt start to come in as he realizes, 'Oh.' They're all moving into a slightly older category of teenage life. Okay, what does this implies for Ron? You see that happening, and after the whole iconic wet

moment where everyone thinks and nobody says anything, then we get the even more epic moment where Hermione gives this accounting of every single thing Cho must be feeling at this exact same time, all of which makes perfect sense. The way she opens her mouth and delivers it point-by-point in one breath is completely realistic to this character, and my favorite thing is that she punctuates the entire delivery with the really practical, true observation that Cho must be worried about how all of this is affecting her Quidditch performance. She sure shuts up those boys...

**JC:** And then the interchange after that that is so iconic it was kept in for the movie: Ron's "One person can't feel all that at once, they'd explode." And then, "Just because you've got the emotional range of a teaspoon..." That's beautiful.

**Lorrie:** It is iconic.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But Ron is also not entirely wrong about observing this whole scene in a way that Hermione misses when he's looking shrewdly at Harry and says, "What if he doesn't want to ask out Cho?" Hermione says, "Well, don't be silly. He likes Cho," but Ron is on to something. Harry is, of course, super intimidated by how he's supposed to do this normally intimidating thing of asking out somebody who is even older than he is...

**JC:** Who's had a boyfriend before.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and what a boyfriend. Meanwhile, there's all of this grief and this crying and shared trauma. Yeah, you can't just be uncomplicated about that aspect. What on Earth is he supposed to do? It's kind of nice -- sad, but nice -- where he wishes Sirius could show up and talk to him about girls. Yeah, if they weren't under this authoritarian regime that's policing all the fireplaces, that's exactly what Sirius would be for.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** In this case, even better than having a parent, because it's not awkward if it's your uncle or the friend of your parents. You don't want it from your parents. It would have been perfect... Oh, well, they're living in an autocracy; they can't do it.

**JC:** But there's this beautiful thing that Harry thinks, and he thinks, 'That's what they should teach us here: how girls' brains work.' My reaction to that was an immediate 'Yes!' Wouldn't the world be a better place if men were required to learn how to empathize with women in school? How different would our world be? Can we please teach young men how women's bodies work? Can we teach them how to empathize with people whose bodies are different from theirs? We could teach everyone that, but I'm just thinking about in terms of power, raw power in society. Oh, my God, wouldn't the world be a different place... Yes, Harry, please.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Hermione's what he's got, but she's so far ahead of him that it's going to take a while for him to digest what she's told him. And then, oh... Ouch. We see Ron awakening and having painful, painful jealousy of Viktor Krum. Ouch! Another iconic exchange that I laugh every single time: "What does she see in Krum?" "Well..."

**JC:** "Well..."

**Lorrie:** "I s'pose he's older, isn't he... and he's an international Quidditch player...."  
"Yeah, but apart from that..." I love it!

**JC:** Yeah. "What did she see in that guy who's basically a sports hero and internationally..." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** The thing that I love is that underneath it all, Ron has a point. What Hermione sees in Krum is all stuff that Ron could also do. She likes that Krum cares what she thinks. She likes that Krum has a mature outlook, which Ron is fully able to grow into. It's not like, "Oh, don't even try, Ron." It's like, no, those flashy things... They're not the important ones. There is validity to his question, too, although Harry's answer is for the ages.

**JC:** I see a lot of things online where young men are trying to figure out what young women want, and they have it all wrong. "Oh, I'm super buff and I have this great job," and they've detailed what they think women want without ever actually asking young women what they want, and then they're completely confused as to why all these things they're doing are not getting young women hanging off of them (or at least not the young women they want to hang off of them). All these conversations always come back around to, 'Well, if you just listen to them -- if you treat them like a human being -- then those two things would really go a long way because these young men are not doing this.' When I think about Hermione and Viktor Krum's relationship, the fact that she can write him a really long letter... And it's been a couple of years, right? They've been writing to each other, so I assume he writes her big long letters back.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, he cares.

**JC:** He reads what she wrote, he comments on it... They're having this interaction, and that's what Hermione wants, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That's what any young woman wants: someone to see her as a human and take her seriously and engage with her on the same level that she's at. Oh, boy... Yeah. So yeah, boiling it down to "He's a Quidditch star" is... Yeah, that has nothing to do with it.

**Lorrie:** That's adorable, and I really like the implication that Hermione has more and more and more to tell him because they're going through stuff at Hogwarts that Viktor

would have insight about from the regime he's been under. What is she telling him?  
Well, what's been going on.

**JC:** And also knowing that their mail's being watched, what are they able to say to each other? She's writing a lot.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Is it coded? There's a whole other story happening there.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Certainly, if I were in charge of censorship at Hogwarts, I would definitely be reading every single thing Hermione wrote, which she would know. She would know that's happening.

**JC:** Right, so how is she getting around that? Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Right. So much... so much going on here. Then Harry goes to sleep and has a very normal, sad, silly dream about not being good enough at asking out Cho that goes toward him putting up Christmas ornaments shaped like Dobby's head. Love it! That's so normal. Then those scary portentous words: "The dream changed...." How did you feel when you read about the way Harry's dream changed and what it became?

**JC:** Oh, yeah. I was like, 'Oh, here we go,' because this kicks off a whole new part of the story.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Because he is in Nagini. This is interesting because before, he's only really connected with Voldemort's emotions, and now he is connected to Nagini and sees what Nagini sees. It kind of is Nagini in the way it feels. It's interesting that in Nagini form, he doesn't recognize Arthur as himself.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** It's only after he wakes up that he can name the person that the snake attacked as Arthur Weasley.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The doubleness that Harry the person is present, and during the vision is experiencing what another being is experiencing and perceiving. Yay for the author! We get writing from the point of view of a magical snake (Whoa!) and the way that the snake's senses are different ("objects around him shimmering in strange, vibrant colors")... That masterful doubleness. Harry's experiencing this in first person; he's talking about himself as a snake when we know that the snake, whose mind he's in, is female, so this melding of identity... How unnerving that must be for poor Harry figuring out who he is and where his boundaries are and what he's turning into, if anything. Then this fascinating detail about Nagini's character: the snake exerts self-control. "Harry

longed to bite the man... but he must master the impulse... he had more important work to do..." Whoa! There's some natural snake-like desire to bite and then there's this servitude to something else, and it's being shown to us in this not-quite-human mindset. As a reader, all you can do here is shut up and pay attention. 'What? What are we reading?' Then something happens to make the snake use its judgment. There's a point at which the human wakes up and attacks the snake and the snake realizes it has no choice, and then gets to give in to the pleasure of attacking and biting the man. Okay, whatever this is, we the reader are paying attention. We're being shown something completely new. What does it mean? Obviously, it means a whole lot of something, and we're going to be taking quite a while to figure it out and it's scary. Poor Harry wakes up in so much pain, drenched in sweat, nauseated. He's obviously been screaming; the whole dorm room is really scared for him.

**JC:** Yeah. Ron and Hermione know that Harry's scar hurts him and hurts him a lot; they don't know why. I don't know if the others have ever seen this. Have they ever seen Harry having the scar pain? No one has seen it to this level, right?

**Lorrie:** Not to this level, yeah.

**JC:** Seamus and Dean are hanging back and whispering to each other the whole time. They have no idea what's happening.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** We haven't seen much of them since the very beginning when I think it was... Was it Seamus whose parents were skeptical of Harry?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** But it's also interesting to me that Ron is immediately there. Neville goes for help and he goes and gets McGonagall -- thank goodness it's McGonagall -- but Harry is just instantly telling Ron what he saw, and everyone thinks it was a nightmare and Harry's like, "It wasn't a nightmare. Your dad..."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He did tell them earlier that he feels what Voldemort feels, but this is new and it's so imperative that he convinces everybody this is real. "I wasn't just dreaming."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. As fascinating as it is to figure out what the heck just happened to Harry, what he saw and the warning he has to give is even more important, and he's scared that they're not going to listen to him about that.

**JC:** Right. I think that's what makes it interesting when McGonagall comes and he tells her; the look of horror on her face, he misinterprets it. He's like, "I swear it wasn't a dream, I tell you," and she's like, "Oh, no, I believe you." She recognizes what just

happened and what connection Harry must have, and her horror is, 'Oh, no. Things have changed.'

**Lorrie:** Her sentence, "I believe you, Potter..." That's another one of the most beautiful sentences in this series to me. It's such a relief.

**JC:** Yeah, that the adults aren't going to say, "Oh, no, no..."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's not like when Madam Pomfrey shoves him back into bed and puts chocolate in his mouth, because she's recognizing two different things in his account: one of them is, 'Oh, Arthur Weasley and a snake. Okay, I know exactly what you're talking about.' The other is Dumbledore has been worried this whole time that this mental connection with Harry is going to start intruding on him this way, and that was so scary. I can imagine all of them not wanting that to be true, but they've all been scared of this the whole time; so scared that they haven't even told Harry what it is that they're scared of. While Dumbledore did say it was going to happen. It's happening right now.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** We see that Neville was prepared for this moment. This is the chapter where first we know that Neville can see thestrals, and then we know that some changes have been happening in Neville that he's now phenomenally good at D.A., so he's now an ally. He's not the liability that he sometimes has been.

**JC:** Right. Neville becoming more competent in this book through the D.A. is one of my favorite character arcs for him.

**Lorrie:** It's so beautiful. I'm glad McGonagall's there.

**JC:** Yeah, but things change very quickly, because now we're heading into Occlumency lesson territory after this, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Thank goodness for Harry that they do change quickly, because that's what he's been trying to tell them!

**JC:** Yeah, and finally he's going to get some information, but not everything he needs because that's how the narrative works, I guess.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and that's been the question this whole first half of *Order of the Phoenix*: "What do you mean 'nothing I'm going through is important enough for Dumbledore to pay attention to me'? What does an orphan have to do around here to get an audience with a headmaster? Is there anything?" And the answer is 'yes, there is.' 'Oh... All right, then. Some answers, I hope.' The next chapter is called Saint Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

**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](https://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.