

## Transcript

### Episode 5.24

#### Book 5, Chapter 24: Occlumency

**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-Four: Occlumency.

**Lorrie:** Occlumency. Christmas break is over. Dumbledore orders Snape to teach Harry Occlumency. Sirius gives Harry a secret gift. Cho gets Harry to ask her out. Something makes Voldemort happy. JC, this is such a special chapter to me. I find it one of the most difficult chapters of this series but brilliant, and I find that there are so many layers in it and misdirections. There were parts of this chapter that confused me so much that for years, I just gave up trying to figure them out. I just kind of skipped over those parts because I didn't know what was happening. Now, for you, JC, this was your second time ever reading this chapter, right?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** The first time since the book was published twenty-two years ago?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So tell me: how was your experience reading this chapter?

**JC:** Well, you had said going in that this one was going to be a big one, and I knew that you have had a lot of thoughts on it and you had talked about it before. Um... it just felt like another chapter to me.

**Lorrie:** Oh, that's awesome.

**JC:** I don't know what that means. It was just another chapter, so I'm not sure what I'm missing or if there are just questions I'm not even asking, but I feel like this is the point where, as a reader, my perception of Snape would have changed a lot if I were paying more attention on the first read. On the second read, that jumped out at me.

**Lorrie:** Uh-huh.

**JC:** I was amazed. It completely shifted my perspective on Snape, which was pretty cool.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I also found that on this read, because I had experienced Snape as a really interesting character the whole way through, but as you and I have been going through the series for this podcast, I've been noticing, no, he's really a minor player for most of the time. A lot of time, there's a plot going on that has nothing to do with him, and then he once in a while pops up and it's like, 'What's he doing here? He's not even that important.' This chapter changes that for me, and that helped me understand how many readers, by this point, had four and a half books of him just being petty and unreasonable; they've written him off so much that they don't have any patience left to take in new information about his different and expanded role in this rapidly degrading universe. To me, what makes Snape interesting in this chapter is that this is where he becomes a person who is finally forced to confront some things about himself that, until now, he has been in denial about or has projected onto others; this is where he realizes he can't do that anymore. But one of the reasons that I found it confusing is there are so many layers of secrecy in Snape (and shame and also danger), so if you're looking at it from Harry's point of view and from the reader's, I find it impossible to understand, at the moment, what's causing his different behaviors in this chapter. It took me some years to think that maybe Snape is actually trying to teach Harry Occlumency in good faith. That seemed so far-fetched to me at first.

**JC:** Oh, that's interesting, because I just assumed he was. It never occurred to me that he wasn't.

**Lorrie:** Right, but we're doing that read coming to it knowing how the series ends.

**JC:** But I don't think I suspected him in the first place. When Dumbledore says he trusts Snape, I believe Dumbledore. I don't remember ever thinking Snape is going to turn out to be the Big Bad; it seemed very clear to me that he would not, so I never questioned that the Occlumency might be something else.

**Lorrie:** Frequently, I come across readers who... They're very attached to the notion that Snape is only in anything for himself, and they want to believe that some of Snape's attitude in this chapter is to make things easier for himself or that he is always petty (that pettiness is always his primary motivation). I think there are so many motivations happening for him in this chapter that it takes me a while to sort them out, but I do think

that coming into this chapter so disliking Snape that you can't admit he might be doing this in good faith makes it really difficult to understand the chapter, to make sense of it all.

**JC:** Okay, that's interesting.

**Lorrie:** That is a read that I know people have, and I think there are so many details in this chapter that it's just hard to make sense of them if you don't think it's possible that he might be doing some of it in good faith.

**JC:** Yeah, that is interesting.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** As I have said many times, as a reader, I'm just not going there. I'm enjoying a story.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I'm not analyzing it and I'm not thinking that deeply about it, but that 'not thinking that deeply about it' read led me to trust Snape here. I don't tend to overanalyze stuff like this, so I don't think it would have occurred to me if someone said, "Oh, no, you can't trust that he's doing the right thing here." That would have surprised me.

**Lorrie:** But then on the other hand, as a teacher, there are so many things that Snape does in his daily teaching practice that make you appalled and make you wonder how he can think this is an effective way to teach.

**JC:** True.

**Lorrie:** Would that have affected your view of how he is approaching this private lesson?

**JC:** No, because again, I trust that Dumbledore and Snape understand each other. Snape... Even if I disagree with his methods, I cannot deny that his goal is for these kids to learn at every point.

**Lorrie:** That's true.

**JC:** I don't think he's a good teacher, but it is one hundred percent clear that his goal is for them to learn this stuff.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** That's his goal for Harry here, too. "Okay, I'm supposed to teach you a thing, I'm going to teach it to you, whether or not you're worthy. You're probably not going to learn it, but I'm going to do my damndest." That's him, so I never doubt that he wants the kids to learn and that he's doing what he thinks is the right way, even if I disagree with what that way is.

**Lorrie:** There have been other times in this series when Snape has been so personally unpleasant to Harry and where his attitude toward Harry has made Harry so fearful or defensive that it shuts down Harry's ability to learn, and you have just shaken your head in disgust as a teacher.

**JC:** Definitely. Definitely.

**Lorrie:** I was wondering how much of that response you had as you read some of the insults he tossed at Harry in this chapter.

**JC:** I know I've said it in the podcast before, but I am (practically from birth) a *Star Wars* fan, so I tend to see everything through that lens. Even *Harry Potter*; I'm always putting a *Star Wars* lens on it, because that's just how I live in my life. This whole Occlumency scene is such a mirror for me of the scene in the original trilogy, Episode Four: When they're on the Millennium Falcon, they're speeding towards what they think is Alderaan and Obi-Wan Kenobi is like, "All right, fine. You want to learn how to use the Force... Here. We're going to cover up your head so you can't see or hear anything, and this little robot's going to shoot laser bolts at your ass. Now, feel the Force and block them." That scene, if Luke and Obi-Wan hated each other, would have gone very much like this Occlumency scene, but that was what Snape was doing here. It was the exact same kind of "We've got to clear your mind, and until you clear your mind, it's going to hurt. It's going to hurt. It's going to keep shooting laser bolts at your ass; you're trying to figure this out." That's exactly what it was to me. It was Obi-Wan and Luke...

**Lorrie:** I see.

**JC:** If they hated each other.

**Lorrie:** Uh-huh. Okay.

**JC:** That's part of where the switch flipped. 'Oh, damn, my competency kink is going to kick in,' and by the end of the scene I was like, 'Okay, Snape is really kind of hot here.'

**Lorrie:** That really amuses me.

**JC:** Because he's just so fucking competent.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He's always competent, but it just shines here. He's in this situation where he's like, 'Oh, my God, I hate this kid, but he's in this situation. He and Dumbledore have talked about it: 'The Dark Lord is going to be able to put ideas into Harry's head now; that's really dangerous. It's going to put us all and our goal in danger, so I've got to suck it up and deal with this little shit and teach him, somehow, this skill that I know he's probably not capable of learning, but I've got to try.' Then he goes and he, in good faith, tries to teach Harry. He really does, but he's right: the first thing Harry has to do is clear his

mind so he can have control over it, and Harry is incapable of doing that right now in this situation. Snape's not helping, but I have no doubt that Snape's greatest desire is for Harry to pick this up instantly and then they don't have to do this anymore.

**Lorrie:** Oh, God, that would be nice. Yeah.

**JC:** He's frustrated that Harry can't do the simple thing of clearing his mind and letting his emotions go. 'Come on, kid. Use the Force.'

**Lorrie:** You made me realize that this is where I get my argument that Snape is not and did not want to be a teacher by nature. That's not his vocation; that is his espionage post. He's not uninterested in many aspects of teaching, but that's not who he is at core. What he is at core is a spy, meaning somebody who has the ability to balance several different contradictory agendas and make decisions all the time to keep all of those agendas running; that's when you see his competence. He's not competent as a teacher, meaning he's not competent at assessing individual students and adapting to them to make sure that the learning gets across. He's rolling his eyes as a teacher, going, 'When will my punishment be over?'

**JC:** Yeah, really.

**Lorrie:** But here, it's kicking in that he has to think simultaneously on a number of different agendas, and then he's in his element. This is who he is at core. From the top, we get the agenda set for us that this chapter is about surveillance because it has the beautiful opening sentence: "Kreacher, it transpired, had been lurking in the attic." Right from that first paragraph, the narrator disagrees with Sirius. Sirius is unconcerned; Sirius thinks, 'Oh, yeah, he probably was there.' Harry and the narrator are both going, 'Uh-oh.'

**JC:** Because he's immediately much happier, Kreacher, not grumbling as much...

**Lorrie:** And he's shooting furtive looks at Harry. Reading this chapter now in the U.S., this is a time in the U.S. when personal data has been eradicated, and anything that has been considered personal (like your Social Security information) has been turned over to agencies that don't have to answer to anybody. That was something that felt really topical to me: Harry making that mental adjustment. 'No, we're going to just behave as though we're under surveillance, whether or not the adults in our lives seem to be on board with this realization.' Something I love, this tiny little throwaway in this chapter: here's Harry in his safe space, playing chess with his buddies, and then Mrs. Weasley says, "Professor Snape wants a word."

**JC:** Oh, wow... Yeah, that was a little bit of a record scratch.

**Lorrie:** Terrible.

**JC:** "What? What?!"

**Lorrie:** Harry is aghast and says, "Snape?" and Mrs. Weasley says, reprovably, "*Professor Snape, dear.*" I thought, 'Wow, that's true. There is never any tension between Snape and Mrs. Weasley.' That made me think, 'There's never any tension between Snape and any mothers.' He's generally kind to mothers.

**JC:** Now, that is interesting. It's like looking at the negative space in a photo.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Where is Snape not having issues with people?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Her children hate him, but she has experienced him all summer as a fellow revolutionary. She has had zero reason to distrust him. Snape shows up and explains that he's going to be teaching Occlumency, "the magical defense of the mind against external penetration. An obscure branch of magic, but a highly useful one." This is interesting that it's obscure, so this is a specialty thing. Then he explains to Harry, "You're not going to tell anybody what we're doing, least of all Dolores Umbridge," which is kind of a thrill. 'Oh, okay. We're on the same side, are we?'

**JC:** Yeah, that's so great. I do love that moment.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. And then this makes me laugh every time: "You'll tell people you're taking Remedial Potions."

**JC:** Yeah. It's a really good cover, though. It's humiliating for Harry, but it is a genuinely good cover.

**Lorrie:** Well, to me, this is Snape making the universe pay for Dumbledore getting Snape to tell the whole world that Snape applies for the Defense position every year, and he's so crappy that even Dolores Umbridge or Gilderoy Lockhart are better than him. We've just seen Umbridge saying, "Why do you keep getting rejected?" and he's like, "I suggest you ask Dumbledore." It just killed him to spit that out, so if the universe is forcing him to do that, then he'll just pass that on to Harry. 'See, Harry, this is how it feels. Feels great, doesn't it?'

**JC:** But it is a good cover, despite all of that. Yes. Yes, and... It's a good cover because Umbridge is not going to be suspicious, and she thinks Harry's being punished in some way...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So that's the best cover.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Harry has to hate going. He has to not enjoy it and it has to be humiliating in some way, and then Umbridge is like, 'Oh, that's great. Snape's doing a good job over there.'

**Lorrie:** 'Oh, good.' Yes. Sirius is there; poor Harry walks in and the two of them are already hating each other, Sirius and Snape.

**JC:** Oh...

**Lorrie:** Sirius asks the right question: "Why can't Dumbledore teach Harry? Why you?" We can't have the answer for the rest of the book, but that is the correct question to be asking. I looked up on Harry Potter Lexicon, and the date of this interaction is January 11<sup>th</sup>; Snape's birthday is January 9<sup>th</sup>, so it is my headcanon that it must have been on Snape's birthday that Dumbledore approached him and explained that this was going to be his big treat for the coming semester.

**JC:** Oh, great.

**Lorrie:** That just seems like the kind of thing that would happen to Snape on his birthday.

**JC:** He'd be giving private lessons to Harry Potter. Oh, great, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Why can't Dumbledore teach Harry? Well, we don't know, but certainly that must have come up in that conversation between Dumbledore and Snape. The fight between Snape and Sirius is so mortifying, it makes me want to crawl under the table every time. They're thirty-six years old; Snape is immature by nature (he has demonstrated that every year) and Sirius has arrested development. Yeah, Sirius starts it. There are a few different times that they confront each other in this chapter, and every time, Snape doesn't start it. He's just trying to do what Dumbledore sent him to do, to make this announcement, and then Sirius -- even with legitimate points, like, "Listen, you're not going to torment my child" -- the first thing he does is say, "Don't give orders in my house"; then Snape retaliates. Sirius devolves into calling Snape "*Snivellus*"... Okay, Sirius has regressed; he's eleven now. Harry starts out seeing that Sirius wants to stand up for him and back him up; shortly into this confrontation, now Harry has to protect Sirius because Sirius is regressing right in front of his eyes, and that's real and painful.

**JC:** Right. It's sweet that Sirius wants to take on this parent role for Harry, and he does it in a way that's just so not helpful, but I see what his intentions are.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I think that Harry does, too, but at the same time, it's not helping. It also kind of either establishes or reinforces this thing going forward, where Harry's not going to feel

like he can confide in Sirius in the way that he hoped to because he doesn't trust that Sirius is going to make a smart decision with any information he gives.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, he's afraid for him.

**JC:** Yeah. He's now, suddenly, in a position of being more of the adult. He has to decide what information Sirius is going to have because he doesn't trust what Sirius is going to do with it, which is what adults have been doing to him this whole time.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. If Sirius has regressed to age eleven, then Harry is older here. That goes right into Harry's fear that if he loves somebody, they're going to die.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Both Sirius and Snape have their points when they're sniping at each other. Of course, Sirius is quite right that Snape has used his position as a teacher of Harry to make Harry's life needlessly more miserable, and then he calls Snape "Lucius Malfoy's lap dog." He's bringing up ancient history that's completely relevant here. "Gee, why don't we trust you?" Well, there's good reason, there's a history... Then Snape shoots back at Sirius with one of those wonderful barbed warnings that is protective without being affectionate, like Draco saying to Hermione, "Oh, you don't want to be around the Quidditch World Cup because there are people out to get Mudbloods." Here, Snape tells him, "Lucius Malfoy recognized you on the platform," which is hostile, but it's helpful; to make this seem more layered, Harry actually shares Snape's worries about Sirius there, even though he obviously hates Snape. This is a really wretched situation for Harry to be living through.

**JC:** True, though the image of all the Weasleys bursting in happy with the two of them with their wands pointed at each other and Harry in the middle with his hands outstretched, trying to keep them from hurting each other... That is funny. That's a funny scene for people to burst into. "What the hell is happening here?"

**Lorrie:** It's funny, it's embarrassing, and it's touching. Harry put his body between them.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Either one of these two guys could totally kill him, and now they're going to go (each of them) against the person that they hate the most.

**JC:** He's fifteen and they're grown ass adults, and he's the one who's in the middle going, "Don't fight, dads," or whatever.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's an incredibly well written, excruciatingly uncomfortable scene. It's so painful and funny.

**JC:** These two people have not gotten over their teenage hatred of each other, to the extent that they're still going to snipe at each other as adults. It's like, wow.

**Lorrie:** And the feeling is so immediate, because we've just seen Harry beat up Draco for taunting his classmates about having dead parents and mentally ill parents. The hatred is for real. It's a beautifully tense, awful scene, and then we have the power of the Weasleys to come break it up. Happy Weasleys... Oh, my goodness.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Nothing can withstand that force. Then we get that fascinating detail that Healer Smethwyck "found an antidote to whatever that snake's got in its fangs." The way we were reading this series as it came out, where everything was a clue... What I remember thinking was, 'Oh, so if one member of the Order of the Phoenix got nearly killed by the snake and they found an antidote, then the potioneer in the Order of the Phoenix has been alerted and has a plan to brew antidote for all of them to carry on their persons forever after, right? That's what I would do if I were them.' It's not a mystery that this is how Arthur Weasley got saved from the brink of death. That was just something that I kept in mind, and I was waiting in *Deathly Hallows* to see if there was an antidote that Snape was carrying with him.

**JC:** Oh...

**Lorrie:** Even the nature of Snape's character... Doesn't it seem impossible for him to overlook that there is a known antidote and that he's going to be around Nagini all the time?

**JC:** It did not occur to me, to be honest.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, there's a moment during Snape's death scene (after Nagini has bitten him, but before he realizes that Harry is there) when, with his hands, he's trying to stop the bleeding from his fang bites, and I remember thinking, 'Why is he trying to stop it? Does he have something? Is he going to pull a trick out of his sleeve?' Then he sees Harry and then he stops trying to save himself; he takes his hand off of his bite wound to grasp Harry and transmit the memories. I thought, 'Well, was he reaching for a vial of antidote?' I don't know. There is no evidence either way; all I know is that that's what I would have done if I were a potioneer and Arthur Weasley had been saved just now.

**JC:** I did not think of any of that, obviously.

**Lorrie:** Well, if you had lived in EWE Snape Lives AU territory for all of these years, that would've been a super common question.

**JC:** Okay, that's interesting.

**Lorrie:** For the uninitiated, EWE stands for 'Epilogue? What Epilogue?' That left the field wide open for fanfiction writers to claim that he never died, and the job of the fanfic writer in the beginning of their story is to make that logical bridge between canon and whatever they're going to start arguing. Yes. Anyway, Healer Smethwyck's antidote is a Snape fandom thing.

**JC:** Interesting, okay.

**Lorrie:** I love Ron's succinct reaction to the news that Harry has to have extra lessons with Snape. "Extra lessons with Snape? I'd rather have the nightmares!" What that statement from Ron does is set out, really clearly, that there are three distinct kinds of villains we're being shown in this book: there's Snape, who may not be evil but is so unpleasant that it's bad for your health to be around him because he's going to be so irritating; then there's Voldemort, who's so evil that he's kind of hard to wrap your head around; then there's Umbridge, who's sadistic and authoritarian, and they are villains of completely different types. Extra lessons with Snape is something that ruins Harry's whole return to school. He's just dragging himself through.

**JC:** Yeah. That sentence that this is the first time he can ever remember dreading going back to Hogwarts... It's like, 'Oh, you poor thing.'

**Lorrie:** He was already dreading it before because Umbridge, but then this? Oh, no.

**JC:** Right. As they're getting closer to their time to leave, Sirius is getting more and more pouty...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And it's harder and harder for him to face that everyone's about to leave and he's going to be alone again.

**Lorrie:** I don't think I could have done any better in his position. You can't control that.

**JC:** It's hard. It's hard.

**Lorrie:** And how miserable it makes Harry, too, to see that.

**JC:** Yeah. Then we get the gift.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God, I know. I've been almost dreading talking about it, because that is one of the most heartbreaking things in the whole series to me.

**JC:** Yeah, it is. It really is. Harry's feeling reluctant to say goodbye because he's worried, 'What if this is it?' He doesn't know what's going to happen, and he's correct about that.

**Lorrie:** Yep. Sirius takes him aside and gives him this... The fact that this gift is badly wrapped is so touching. That just really shows all Sirius wants is to get this thing to Harry urgently.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He says, "This is a secret present. It'll let us communicate," and that was exactly what Harry has been actively longing for in the final weeks before Christmas break.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He was like, 'God, I wish I could talk to Sirius. I wish, I wish... We haven't talked to him, the Floo is being watched, he's sulking...' He's been desperately wishing to communicate with Sirius, and Sirius has the perfect solution. They both want this. This ought to have worked.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Had it worked, it would have been so beautiful. Oh...

**JC:** Yes. Ugh...

**Lorrie:** And all of Harry's fears that Sirius was going to get them into trouble... It wouldn't have; it would have bypassed those dangers.

**JC:** Right, yeah. If they just had... Ugh! it's like this miscommunication trope that I hate, but taken in another way.

**Lorrie:** It's so heartbreaking, and the fact that by this point Harry is so scared of losing Sirius that he doesn't even check to see what it is...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's... ouch. Ouch. I try not to think about Sirius holding his mirror and waiting for Harry to show up in it, but the mind goes there.

**JC:** Right. Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Ugh...

**Lorrie:** All right, miscommunication trope at its absolute worst with nothing redeeming.

**JC:** Just pain.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Anyway, Tonks and Mad-Eye Moody get them to Hogwarts on the Knight Bus; again with the surveillance, Tonks says, "Come on, the quicker we get on the bus, the better." Stan Shunpike is about to say Harry's name out loud, and she threatens him and he shuts up... but all the passengers know who Harry is anyway.

**JC:** I did find that part a bit confusing. Why not disguise Harry if they're that worried?

**Lorrie:** I was reading it completely in the context of travel within the U.S. right now being much more dangerous than it has been in other years. A few months ago, I took part in a film screening about queer and trans elders, and some people who had taken part in the film were flown in to be part of this event; the announcer said, "We really appreciate that you came here because we know that you took a risk." Can you just get on with your gender marker-changed passport, or will somebody stop you and take your passport and maybe not give it back or worse? As far as I know, everybody flew successfully and got back home and nothing happened, but "get on the bus quickly and don't shout anybody's name."

**JC:** But everybody on that bus recognized Harry.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The image when they get off the bus -- of the entire three layers of the bus -- all the little noses pressed to the windows, staring at Harry Potter. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And then, yeah, the last word from winter break: we get Lupin reinforcing that all the grown-ups are on the same page. "Harry, I know you don't like Snape, but he is a superb Occlumens and we all -- Sirius included -- want you to learn to protect yourself..." Okay, we have alliances now; adapt to them. Cho!

**JC:** Yeah! I love that they're having two different conversations, and it takes Harry a moment to realize, 'Oh, wait...' He walks away, thinking, 'Wow, I asked her out,' and the reality is that she's probably walking out going, 'Yes, I finally managed to get this awkward pancake to ask me out.'

**Lorrie:** The sweetness of this passage is that they really like each other. That is such a mercy, and that's his one win in this whole chapter.

**JC:** Yeah. Oh, my gosh, these poor kids.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That's the thing that I think is interesting, even going forward with Harry's relationship with Ginny: you have this young romance stuff, and it's all happening with this backdrop of this horrific breakdown of their society and war and everything else, but yet the human nature is still to pursue those things.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and when they get any sort of nice moments at all, you just want to cheer.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He marches to his doom.

**JC:** Oof...

**Lorrie:** He heads to Snape's office, and then we get the big symbol that Dumbledore has completely sanctioned this lesson because we see Dumbledore's Pensieve there.

**JC:** Yes. Interesting, too, that Snape removes three memories and doesn't even say anything to Harry – nope! -- with no explanation, and at the end we see him putting them back.

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** I think we find out later what at least one of them is.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, we see all three.

**JC:** We see all three.

**Lorrie:** They show up in "The Prince's Tale" in *Deathly Hallows*.

**JC:** Yeah, so what Snape doesn't want Harry to know.

**Lorrie:** Right, but it also has the effect of reinforcing when Snape gives Harry blanket permission. As long as those three memories are safe, he just says to Harry, "Go for it." It's weird to think that, with the exception of three specific things, Snape has nothing to hide from Harry.

**JC:** Is he trying to get Harry to learn how to invade his own mind? My impression was he's just doing this as a precaution, but he doesn't expect Harry to be able to come into his own mind.

**Lorrie:** Not yet. Not during the first lesson, but on the other hand, if it's the first lesson, you just don't know how it's going to go.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Right? It could be like the D.A. lessons we've seen, where accidentally you cast the wrong spell and everything comes spilling out. You just don't know.

**JC:** Right, so it felt like a precaution. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** These are the safety goggles that you've noticed nobody ever using at Hogwarts.

**JC:** For sure. I also like that as this starts, Snape insists that Harry addresses him with respect and it didn't feel malicious; it was just, "We're establishing this boundary right here. I know you don't like me, you know I don't like you. We're establishing this professor/student boundary right now, and you will address me with respect." "Okay." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And that's a great baseline, because as this chapter progresses, we see Harry naturally using "Sir" more and more because we see that Snape turns from the usual ogre that he is into a person that has answers that Harry actively wants, and calling him "Sir" comes more naturally.

**JC:** Yeah, which is very interesting.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, yeah, if he's just going to be an asshole, then you're not interested in anything he has to say, but suddenly it's relevant. But yeah, this whole opening strongly re-establishes how much Snape dislikes Harry as a person. Oh, God... He has not been looking forward to this, and he has a whole range of his usual insults to Harry. He calls him a "lamentable potion maker." I don't think he's any worse than a whole lot of others...

**JC:** True, true...

**Lorrie:** But he annoys Snape. It's just his usual pettiness as a teacher being really reinforced here.

**JC:** But it's got a different vibe to it, in my mind, and I think that's where this felt like such a turning point for me. In his classes, he's doing this in front of other people to humiliate Harry intentionally; he's doing it in front of others. Here, he's doing it in private, and it feels more honest. It feels more like this is genuinely what he thinks about Harry.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He's not doing it to get a rise out of Harry or to humiliate him in front of others. "No, this is really what I think of you."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Some of it's just what Snape is like at rest (when he says, "The mind is a complex thing," and then he smirks and he says, "Well, most minds") and that doesn't have to do with Harry. Snape was like that already.

**JC:** Yeah. It feels more honest. When you said at the beginning we kind of see who he really is here, it's like, yeah. One-on-one, this is the most honest portrayal of Snape that we've seen yet. This is really some insight into who he is.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Baseline: not pleasant. He's still Snape, but then he does answer Harry's initial questions, where Harry says, "Why does Dumbledore think I need Occlumency?" Snape lets himself have some contempt for a moment and says, "Well, obviously..." and then he says it's because Voldemort is skilled at Legilimency. There, we have the introduction of Legilimency as a concept, and Snape explains: Occlumency allows a person to "shut down those feelings and memories that contradict the lie" if you're trying to shut out a Legilimens. He explains that in order to fight off Voldemort's Legilimency, "time and space matter in magic" (which is a principle that we're going to see in action

constantly) and that eye contact matters. Plus, Hogwarts has a ton of magical protections; therefore, until now, Snape and Dumbledore and everyone have been able to ward off Voldemort's attempts to Legilimize from wherever he is into Hogwarts. That is what has changed just now, because now that Voldemort has a shortcut through the connection he has with Harry's scar, that circumvents time and space, that gives him eye contact (if he can see through Harry's eyes), that gets him into Hogwarts protections. Voldemort hasn't been able to perform long-distance Legilimency within Hogwarts until now, and this is the explanation that is parallel to how Lupin taught the private Patronus lessons: you start off by laying out the concepts and why they're necessary and what your aim is. Then Harry asks the important question: "But why does Professor Dumbledore want to stop it?" (because obviously, they've just saved Arthur Weasley's life through it, so that's an excellent question); then Snape eyes Harry, traces his mouth with one long, thin finger... This is Snape actually thinking about the situation and this particular student for real.

**JC:** Uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** We don't usually see him making this kind of effort, but this time he's actually thinking about it and tailoring his teaching to the situation and to these people. Thinking about Harry's case, Snape has to focus here -- he cannot deny that these are important points -- and then when he speaks about this in response, he speaks slowly, "as though he weighed every word." That's one of Snape's tells for when he's engaged in spy multi-think: when he is trying to think what he is conveying and how that's going to look according to each of the agendas that he has to be concerned about, then he weighs every word. That's his mind flitting from all the different angles. He has to answer Harry in a way that will safely help Harry, give him the information he needs, satisfy what Snape is doing for Dumbledore, and satisfy what Snape is doing for Voldemort. He has to look like he's the secret agent for both of his bosses. He has to get information through to Harry. This requires his concentration.

**JC:** It's a big ask for Snape. He's a very good Occlumens clearly, but I think something that really stood out to me later in the series on the first read was that Snape's hatred of Harry protects him against Voldemort's invasion of his mind a lot, and that explains a lot, right?

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** But even here, he's having to really be cautious. If he steps wrong, it's his life, and that does eventually happen. Wow, that's a lot for him to be weighing in his mind and to be thinking through on the spot. It says a lot about his character.

**Lorrie:** What we have here: if Snape is trying to lie to a Legilimens (who is Voldemort), Occlumency allows Snape to shut down feelings and memories that contradict his lie.

The truth -- the emotion that Snape presents to Voldemort for Voldemort to scan -- is his genuine dislike and contempt for Harry. What he is shutting down that would contradict that is that Snape wants to protect Harry anyway, and this is something that helps Snape that Voldemort could not understand: Why would you try to help somebody you hate?

**JC:** Ooh, yeah. That makes sense.

**Lorrie:** Protectiveness without affection is a major way that the Order of the Phoenix hides their agenda from the Death Eaters because they don't have what it takes to understand it. If you think about government policies where you have 'protect everybody, give food and insurance and housing to everybody, including my enemies, including people who want me dead' on one hand, and the other hand saying 'you can take away my insurance and my income as long as people that I hate also get theirs taken away,' these are in opposition, and it's really hard for people who believe one way to understand (deep down) why you would believe the other way. If Snape presents how much he can't stand Harry in his feelings for Voldemort to scan, that's so real.

**JC:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** "Why would you protect him, then? You don't even like him." True.

**JC:** Yeah, true.

**Lorrie:** This matters as Snape is explaining to Harry, "Okay, Legilimency is not like you just march into a person's mind and read it. Legilimency is that you get a lot of strong impressions from somebody's mind, and then you use your own abilities to interpret it." Voldemort is a genius. It is possible to Occlude him, but it's not easy.

**JC:** One of the things that I really like here, that I think I did not understand on a first read or I've missed, was this theory of mind that is being proposed here (that the author, I guess, is proposing). It actually does line up well with what we know about how brains work and how we encode memories, because memories aren't just sitting inside your head.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** When you remember a thing, your brain reconstructs it every single time, which is why our memories aren't reliable...

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** And why two people can remember the same event completely differently. Going into somebody's head, you'd have to (if this were possible in reality) go into somebody's head and cause something to happen that would cause that memory to come forward, which is what happens to Harry here. These memories come forward -- it's not like

Harry is trying to remember this stuff, but they're being triggered – and that's really actually close to how brains work.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Yeah.

**JC:** So I was very impressed, actually.

**Lorrie:** I know, it's impressive. This series and this chapter really hold up.

**JC:** Also, if you think about what it would take to block that...

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** You have to know yourself really well, and you have to have dealt with all of their bad feelings and all the bad shit that's happened to you. You need to have gone through a lot of therapy, you have to have dealt with it, you have to know how to handle that and how not to get swept up in it. That's a lot to ask of anybody. It's a lot to ask of a fifteen-year-old kid, but it's a lot to ask of anybody. This made it clear to me why this was hard - - why it was hard for Harry, why it was something that Snape was good at. I understood how Occlumency works a lot better on this read than I did in the past, and also why Harry has a hard time with it. It makes a lot of sense.

**Lorrie:** So here's Snape speaking slowly. He says, "It appears that the Dark Lord has been unaware of the connection between you and himself until very recently." If you can just think what a frightening change this is and that Snape is getting more tense just thinking about it right this second... Okay, that changes things. Harry says, "Oh, you mean that time --" and Snape says very dangerously, "Do not interrupt me." That marks a change in the mood for me (because I can feel the danger when he says that), but it doesn't feel personal, like "You little shit, don't interrupt me." It feels more like, "No, no, no, this is risky. Don't interrupt me." He's nervous. He tries to continue; he says, "...Such a powerful incursion upon the Dark Lord's thoughts --" and Harry is right there with him. This is super important and he can't help himself, and he interrupts again. He says, "I saw inside the snake's head, not his!" (he's asking for confirmation; this is very confusing) and then Snape yells at him: "*Do not say the Dark Lord's name!*" Again, Snape is really agitated, but it's not exactly that he's hating Harry.

**JC:** Mm-hmm.

**Lorrie:** He's upset about something. Here, he's trying not to call Voldemort's attention to this secret lesson.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It's like, "Don't tag him."

**JC:** Yeah. "Don't tag him." There you go.

**Lorrie:** When you're writing down keywords, use asterisks. Don't let the bots catch the key – Shh... 'Stan Shunpike, do not yell Harry Potter's name.' Snape is pretty agitated. Of course, the point that Harry's making is super important -- "I saw inside the snake's head, not his!" -- but this point of procedure is taking precedence. "No, don't say the Dark Lord's name." Then Harry says the extremely legitimate rejoinder: "Professor Dumbledore says his name." That's a really important moment because that was drilled into us, the reader, from the very beginning, from the first chapter: "No, you have to say the name. Don't let the fear of the name control you." That has become a truism, and for this point to be changing now from this really suspicious guy who used to love the Dark Lord and worship him.... Okay, why is it trustworthy to do what Snape says? This is a signal times have changed?

**JC:** Oooh... Uh-huh, okay.

**Lorrie:** Your tactics have to change. The thing that you took for granted before because the wise guy with the beard said it... Something has to change. This, to me, reminds me that in 2017, when Tim Snyder published *On Tyranny*, the number one instruction he gave is "Do not obey in advance. Don't do what you know they want." Things are different now. We're no longer in advance; it's here. Things that were important to stand up for and be loud about in 2017... Tactics change. Now, if they're going to actually, for real, get you in trouble, don't go by 2017 rules. Times have changed; tactics must change. Then Snape mumbles, "Dumbledore is an extremely powerful wizard. While *he* may feel secure enough to use the name... the rest of us..." and then he rubs his Dark Mark "apparently unconsciously." He is sounding like he himself here is just a scared kid in comparison to Dumbledore. He's not that much bigger than Harry here. For him to be unconsciously rubbing his Dark Mark... This leads me back to a couple chapters ago when Harry thought about how the Death Eaters all have scars, and he didn't think that's supposed to call our attention to the fact that the Dark Marks work somewhat similarly to the scar in Harry's head; like Harry, Snape also has a way in his body to feel a connection to Voldemort. Voldemort doesn't always control it; as we saw in the fourth book, the intensity of the Dark Mark came and went according to feelings that Voldemort was not controlling, and Voldemort does also use the Dark Marks consciously to make the Death Eaters aware of him. Recently, he's now learned that he can use the scar to do the same thing to Harry. For Snape to be talking about this, Snape cannot address this point without admitting to himself that he has a mental connection with what Harry is going through, too.

**JC:** Oooh... Okay, interesting.

**Lorrie:** As much as he doesn't want to have anything in common with this kid that he doesn't like... No, he does. They have this in common, and this is very humbling for Snape.

**JC:** And he's going to learn that they have even more than that in common.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. There's no way for Snape to continue with this lesson without bringing his personal experience of being at the mercy of this connected scar with Voldemort. Then he snarls at Harry. He answers Harry's question: "'You seem to have visited the snake's mind because that's where the Dark Lord was at that particular moment,' snarled Snape." He's lashing out, and the reason he's lashing out and acting like such an asshole is because he's ashamed; his mind has just gone to how it's his own fault that he has a Dark Mark. Even though we're really accustomed to Snape snarling and lashing out and projecting, the temperature changes in this chapter connect to specific things, and this one is... He's just mumbled about how he has this scar and he does have to answer the kid's question, and he's not in a good mood about it. It has nothing to do with Harry.

**JC:** Right, right.

**Lorrie:** And no one feels shame like Snape. That's not true... Lupin has him beat on that.

**JC:** Oh, okay. That makes sense. Okay, they both up there in the Tower of Shame. They're both up there.

**Lorrie:** And Harry, bless him, is still hanging in there, trying. He says, "And Vol – he – realized I was there?" and Snape masters himself. "'It seems so,' said Snape coolly," and that's something where we're meant to see, 'Okay, Snape does have it in him to just not care when Harry's in danger, but that's not what's going on here.' From this point in this chapter, Snape is, on purpose, making himself sound cold and unconcerned when he is especially agitated because he's trying to bring down his own temperature to remain in control so he can Occlude.

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** Therefore, by this point in this chapter, he does not have the room anymore to just enjoy gratuitously insulting Harry.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** That was an indulgence; we don't have time for that. At this point, he's completely tense and invested. Harry, of course, is right there with him: "'How do you know?' said Harry urgently." These two are really communicating. It's not that Snape doesn't want to tell him; it's that he can't and he explains what he can. "...The Dark Lord is now aware that you are gaining access to his thoughts and feelings. He has also deduced that the process is likely to work in reverse; that is to say, he has realized that he might be able to access your thoughts and feelings in return --" We are back at the theme of surveillance, and this is starkly terrifying.

**JC:** Oh, for sure.

**Lorrie:** And poor little Harry says, "And he might try and make me do things? *Sir?*"

**JC:** Yeah. "*Sir?*"

**Lorrie:** "He might," said Snape, sounding cold and unconcerned." Oh, he is so terrified, and that's the point that what he removes three memories and puts them into the Pensieve. So that was the intro!

**JC:** Yeah, we haven't even gotten to the Legilimency yet. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Having removed three memories into the Pensieve, Snape starts the lesson. Again, this really does parallel how Lupin did the Patronus lessons where he starts by setting a baseline: give the assignment, see what this kid can do, don't give instructions yet.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Test for innate aptitude first. "You may use your wand to attempt to disarm me, or defend yourself in any other way you can think of," which sounds like blanket permission.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Knowing Snape as we do, it kind of feels like a trap, right?

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** Does Snape mean this?

**JC:** "Attack me, I dare you."

**Lorrie:** Harry is wary and says, "Really? Seriously?!" and then Snape says, softly, "I'm about to attempt to break into your mind." The way he says that softly is the creepiest thing ever. "Oh, good. Oh, goody, goody." Of course, he's sinister; he's also trying to escape Voldemort's notice. "We are going to see how well you resist. I have been told that you have already shown aptitude at resisting the Imperius Curse... You will find that similar powers are needed for this..."

**JC:** Interesting.

**Lorrie:** Okay, he's giving a bit of a hint, but he's testing the baseline.

**JC:** But also interesting that he knows that. "I have been told..."

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Oooh... Those are some interesting conversations. Fake Moody despised Snape -- well, the guy who was pretending to be Moody despised Snape -- so what was that conversation like?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** When did that happen?

**Lorrie:** But also, we know that Snape has just been preparing this lesson with Dumbledore.

**JC:** Okay, yeah, so Dumbledore knew.

**Lorrie:** Also, the entire staff of Hogwarts is professionally invested in knowing just how well this one child can defend himself.

**JC:** For sure.

**Lorrie:** Okay. The way that he resisted the Imperius Curse was so exceptional, we do know this. All right, so Snape is not insulting Harry. Then he says "*Legilimens!*" and we get the first set of memories. Ouch... What did you think of these memories?

**JC:** Harry's not choosing these. Somehow, the fear and the helplessness of having your mind invaded is evoking these particular memories is the way that I'm reading it, and times when he was terrified and helpless come up first. The image of the dog and the tree is funny (when he's up in the tree, and the dog's barking and his family is laughing at him), and that's the one that Snape seems to catch on. "Whose dog was it?" and Harry's like, "My aunt's," and that says a lot to Snape because Snape's been really laboring under the impression that Harry's this spoiled brat.

**Lorrie:** Yes, yes.

**JC:** It's the first moment where Snape starts to realize he doesn't know this kid.

**Lorrie:** In fact, he very unfortunately knows how it feels.

**JC:** Yeah, for sure.

**Lorrie:** He had zero reason to project onto Harry that Harry came in all spoiled. That's one of the things from the first day of Potions class where Snape makes it up out of thin air instead of admitting to himself all the complexities, so he unfairly accuses Harry; he can't lie to himself that way now. He's seen this. The sight of Harry's jealousy of the red bicycle... That was painful to read. Oh, there's no envy more pure than a five-year-old seeing that they're just not being favored as a human being. Then he learns about Harry that Harry had a choice with the Sorting Hat and that there's some Slytherin in him... Okay, so now Snape knows this about Harry. He sees Hermione's cat face... Hmm... There's the dementors by the lake. That's a moment that Snape also lived through from

a different angle, but he was there, too. As much as you hate a thirteen-year-old, seeing that this thirteen-year-old had a hundred dementors coming at him... you've got to admit, 'Okay, that was bad.'

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Then he sees Cho coming to kiss Harry, and that's the point at which Harry involuntarily says, "*No, you're not watching that, you're not watching it, it's private --*" and Harry does it: he has this natural aptitude. He spontaneously Occludes, and Snape witnesses Harry's natural aptitude for it. All the other memories were negative and destroyed Harry's sense of self; this is a positive memory about connection with another person, and it spontaneously created his resistance. Harry has fallen to the ground, which hurt, and Snape is rubbing his wrist: "There was an angry weal there, like a scorch mark. 'Did you mean to produce a Stinging Hex?' asked Snape coolly. 'No,' said Harry bitterly, getting up from the floor."

**JC:** Harry didn't even know that he did that.

**Lorrie:** He's so not having a good time. Snape, at first, is contemptuous. "I thought not. You let me get in too far. You lost control." Okay, Snape, you're being a jerk; that was exceptional, but that's when he has to say, "To whom did the dog belong?" Okay, he's actually curious, and we will someday find out that Snape knows this family.

**JC:** Oh, right! Oh, my God, I had forgotten.

**Lorrie:** Whatever happened to that hateful, hateful sister? Well, she married the worst people ever and that's who they are.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. He's forming sympathy with this kid, even though he very much does not want to.

**JC:** Right, right. He knows Petunia.

**Lorrie:** That's who they are, yeah, and Harry has no idea. He explains who it is, and well, doesn't that give Snape a lot to think about... Then Snape says, "Well. for a first attempt that was not as poor as it might have been." That is such a stop-the-presses moment. He just gave Harry a compliment. That's a compliment!

**JC:** For sure, for sure.

**Lorrie:** The first time I'm reading this, my heart is pounding; I'm waiting for the terrible repercussions. Harry just physically wounded Snape. Aren't there going to be any repercussions for him? Isn't Snape going to take some sort of incredible, horrible revenge? He doesn't.

**JC:** True, true.

**Lorrie:** It appears that Snape meant it when he said “Defend yourself in any way.” We're waiting for him to kill Harry, and he says, “You must remain focused. Repel me with your brain and you will not need to resort to your wand.” Wait, what? Where's the part where you torture Harry? He's moving on, and Harry says angrily, “I'm trying, but you're not telling me how!” That is one of the most important points. That's an excellent point. This is something that is very much not overt, but it's a major point of this chapter: Snape cannot give Harry direct instructions about how to Occlude. They are there; they are simple. It didn't have to be this hard; it's this hard because Voldemort might come and read about this lesson in Harry's mind, and that way, he would discover how Snape has been Occluding him all this time.

**JC:** Oh, uh-huh. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That is why Snape cannot explain to Harry how to Occlude. This is a really severe limitation on his teaching...

**JC:** True, true.

**Lorrie:** And I'm sure that as a teaching professional in the state of Texas, United States of America in 2025, you know what it is to have to teach something knowing how important it is while being forbidden to talk about certain things.

**JC:** Oh, yeah, for sure. Well, not yet. It's unclear when that will happen. Right now, most of us are -- at the college level, anyway -- most of us are just going to keep going until someone comes and tells us that we can, but at the secondary level, that is absolutely the case.

**Lorrie:** Have you had to remove some keywords?

**JC:** Not yet. Not yet...

**Lorrie:** Oh, boy...

**JC:** But it's coming. Right now, I think most people that I know are just like, “Okay, do it as if it were last year, and then wait for them to tell you ‘No, you have to take that out.’” We'll see when that comes.

**Lorrie:** Harry is saying, “I'm trying, but you're not telling me how!” What Snape can do, instead of explaining to Harry in very simple words how he's supposed to be doing this: he can conduct drills and say things like, “Okay, now close your eyes, let go of all emotion,” and then when he sees what Harry does, give feedback on what does and doesn't work. “Okay, see what you did there? Do that.” Voldemort can't blame him for saying, “This is going to take the same talent that you showed resisting Imperius.”

Snape cannot possibly be punished for Harry having done that, so he can refer to that and say, "Remember that? Do that," which is not at all specific and not that helpful.

**JC:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** Harry, naturally, is enraged. "Let go of his anger? He could as easily detach his legs...." Harry has an excellent point. Harry learns in two years; he does eventually become as good at Occlumency as he needs to be. An expert, in fact. He becomes really good at it. There's nothing in Harry's nature that makes him unable to do this; it's that the circumstances won't let Snape teach him. Snape can't tell; he can only sort of show. To go way into the future to an alternate universe: in the alternate universe act of *Cursed Child*, we see the Snape that's working with Draco Malfoy's child, Scorpius, give this lesson as he would have given it if he had not had any limitations, and it's a really simple lesson. It is what Harry teaches himself the hard way over two years, and the clue is whatever happened with Cho just now, the memory with Cho enabled him to throw off Snape's invasion. "Do that. Do more of that." "What is that?" "Sorry, kid, I can't be more specific."

**JC:** But if you think about when he was learning to cast the Patronus...

**Lorrie:** Exactly.

**JC:** It's very, very similar. You have to find the thing that works for you.

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** In fact...

**JC:** Anyone can tell you what that is.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. There are a lot of ways in which Occluding is the inversion of the exact same mechanism that helps you cast a Patronus. If you want to do it externally, you cast the Patronus out. If you have to do it in your own mind, take the same powers and cast them inward, but Snape can't explain that; what he can do is conduct another series of drills. They go again, and he gets the second set of memories out of Harry where we get a close-up of the dragon, which is honestly very scary. Then we see James and Lily in the Mirror of Erised and then we see Cedric's corpse, and Snape is quite shaken. This is an important point: Snape has just seen evidence that the deepest desire of Harry's heart is for his parents' love, something that Dumbledore has known about Harry since the first book because Dumbledore knows what Harry sees in the Mirror. Now Snape knows; Voldemort does not know this. This is something that keeps being important till the end: Voldemort thinks he knows the true nature of Harry Potter, but he doesn't know this about him and Snape does.

**JC:** Ooh... Uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** This is a contest that Snape ends up winning. This is why Voldemort loses to Snape: Voldemort thinks Harry is most motivated in the world by his “saving people” thing that Voldemort knows about because Voldemort is the one who created that in Harry by traumatizing him, but something in Harry that's even more powerful than that is his longing for his parents and their love. That's what Snape knows. That's something he knows that Voldemort doesn't know; Dumbledore knows this, and that's what they use against him. Also, the sight of dead Cedric reminds him of the stakes, so we get this line after he sees this set of memories: “Snape looked paler than usual, and angrier...” Well, the sight of Lily is going to make him angry at himself, of course. Whose fault is that? Having seen the sight of Lily, the poor orphan kid (that's all Snape's fault) is losing it again in this chapter, which is dangerous. Snape's personality is that when he's worried about people needing to defend themselves, he gets agitated; he gets angry at them. “Then you will find yourself easy prey for the Dark Lord! Fools who wear their hearts proudly on their sleeves, who cannot control their emotions, who wallow in sad memories and allow themselves to be provoked this easily -- weak people, in other words...” He is really losing it here. He's upset in the way that people get when they're agitated and angry at themselves. For years and years as a reader, I didn't really understand the point of the Occlumency lessons because I thought they were advocating denial or repression or compartmentalization in a way that I felt was dangerous. If you have these feelings, is it safe to wall them off? Isn't it healthier and safer to integrate everything you feel? That is something that I was confused about at that time. I didn't understand about strategically setting up boundaries in your own mind to prevent yourself from losing even more joy that you need to survive, especially if you're a person with trauma like Harry, where the damage that some of these memories can do is really costly. You have to set up strategic boundaries in your mind to prevent any more of that strength from being taken over, and this is something that the *Harry Potter* fandom learned in 2020 when as a fandom, almost without discussing it, we stopped saying her name. We just said “the author”. Are we afraid that she can hear us? No, no, we're not -- that's not it -- but it's a similar tactic to when you decide, ‘You know what? I'm going to limit how much of the news I read. I want to stay informed, but not at the expense of my ability to function, because if I can't function, I can't fight back.’

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** ‘Do I feel guilty at remaining blissfully ignorant?’ No, because what is the point of being overwhelmed so that you just open yourself up to the Dark Lord?

**JC:** True, true. Yeah. That's a good analogy, actually.

**Lorrie:** That took me years to figure out, because I was worried about repression. I knew that there are negative consequences if you compartmentalize too much.

**JC:** Oh, that's interesting. I didn't think that hard about Occlumency, to be honest. 'Shields up' is kind of what it feels like to me. "Here's how you construct a shield in your brain so that no one can come in and take things that they shouldn't have access to." I didn't think any further about what you have to do to be able to put that shield up.

**Lorrie:** Well, the danger, though, is that Voldemort is the extreme of compartmentalization. Voldemort's emotions are so painful that he has chopped himself into parts and put magic spells on those parts so that they can't reintegrate. That's bad; you go that far, you are in major trouble. That's been Harry's strength: when he's cornered, he can call upon giant eruptions of love and wholeness to counteract all these forces against him. That has been what he's relied on for survival up until this point, and now suddenly he's being told, "No, shut down, compartmentalize," and he's being told this by a guy who's really not trustworthy. This is very difficult. This is Harry's extremely understandable confusion. Then they go again, and Snape sees a third set of memories: Petunia's husband hammering shut the Hogwarts letters box, the dementors again, and then he gets Harry to remember the windowless passage that he's been dreaming about all year. Jesus... When Harry sees this, Harry makes the connection and he gets this enormous jolt. He realizes, 'That place I have physically been (that I am remembering) is the same place that has been showing up in my dreams...' Harry is yelling, "I KNOW! I KNOW!" and he doesn't even know what he's doing or where he is; he just shouts. "His scar was prickling unpleasantly, but the voice that had just issued from his mouth was triumphant." We have two different things happening in that sentence: one of them is the scar prickling means that Voldemort is now in his mind. Until now in this lesson, Voldemort was not aware of it. The prickling means that the jolt of emotion that Harry's just had is so major that Voldemort felt it... Voldemort has now been alerted that this thing is happening, so he's now checked in on what Harry Potter is doing; lo and behold, Harry is in a lesson with his number one spy guy, so this is extremely interesting to him. Harry's scar is going to prickle a lot from this moment because Voldemort's watching, and then the way that this is not attributed: "But the voice that had just issued from his mouth was triumphant." The narration doesn't tell us whose voice that is... Is that Harry's or Voldemort's? That's supposed to remind us of the times that Harry has dreamed from Voldemort's perspective, and he doesn't know whether it's him or Voldemort or both. Whose triumph is this? Well, Harry certainly feels a triumph because this has been bugging him for months, and of course, Voldemort would feel a triumph because yes... 'Yes, we've managed to make a connection here.' Harry has that out-of-body experience where he hears a voice coming out of his own mouth; he doesn't know who it is, and this time Snape had lifted the spell before Harry had even tried to fight back. Snape has stopped this because he sees something; he sees this. He sees what that is and is like, 'Oh, no...' He may have felt in his Dark Mark Voldemort's jolt as he observes this. This is the kind of thing that the Death Eaters feel in their Dark Marks when Voldemort has such an emotion that he's not controlling it. He

may have felt it in his Dark Mark, he was definitely monitoring Harry by Legilimizing him, and therefore he definitely saw the door that Harry's been thinking about. Snape, like all the other Death Eaters, has had to listen to Voldemort go on and on and on obsessively about this door for months. If you can just imagine how they've been sitting there, listening to him drone, he knows all about this door; from the Order, Snape knows that they have been constantly on guard duty around this door. This door has been a big problem in Snape's life from every side for months and months and months; now Harry Potter has made a connection about this door while Voldemort was watching, and Voldemort is having enormous parties about this at the moment. Snape didn't know until this moment that Voldemort had gotten so far into Harry's head with this door. This is the first time Snape is realizing that Harry has been dreaming about this door a lot, so that's scary information already, but there's no time to be scared about that because now, he has to be scared that Voldemort is now aware. This is a horrible moment of convergence, so if you can imagine all of Snape's agendas and fears coming to converge on this one moment, he had better stop Legilimizing and stop right now and lift the spell. Harry, of course, is still dealing: "He was still savoring the moment of blinding realization as he rubbed his forehead..." He is so preoccupied with the actual thought that he doesn't even think about Voldemort being in his scar.

**JC:** Mm-hmm.

**Lorrie:** This also shows us how Voldemort has been the times that he's gotten so emotional that Harry has clued in, but Voldemort doesn't even think, 'Oh, Harry Potter might know what...' You're so into the moment itself that you don't even worry about who might be watching. There's Snape with dread, and Harry says, "What's in the Department of Mysteries?" "What did you say?" ...Harry saw, with deep satisfaction, that Snape was unnerved." Harry says, "I think Voldemort wants something from it," and Snape has to shut him up. "*I have told you not to say the Dark Lord's name!*" It's too late. "Harry's scar seared again, but he did not care. Snape looked agitated." Oh... Now Snape is going to have to try to keep Harry contained before Harry makes any more connections or blurts out something. Harry notices "he was trying to appear cool and unconcerned." Oh, God... "There are many things in the Department of Mysteries, Potter, few of which you would understand and none of which concern you, do I make myself plain?" Oh, boy...

**JC:** Yeah, and Harry's going to miss what he's trying to say there because he can't say it directly.

**Lorrie:** Meanwhile, Harry's scar is hurting; it's becoming more painful, Voldemort's all excited, and Snape realizes that very soon in the near future, he's going to be explaining to Voldemort why he didn't push Harry's mind further to Voldemort right here, right now. Snape does the only thing he can do: he ends the session.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Helplessly. "You are to rid your mind of all emotion every night before sleep -- empty it, make it blank and calm, you understand?" Even saying that, Snape is taking a risk. This is how Voldemort is learning that Snape is teaching Harry Occlumency. He didn't know about this until now. Snape should have told him, so now he's going to have to account for this. "And be warned, Potter... I shall know if you have not practiced..." Yeah, Snape, whatever.

**JC:** It's just so funny because Harry is clearly not going to do that, but Snape is correct that that will be a really good thing for Harry to work on. Oh, my God, but yeah, it's funny.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. By this point, the possibility that Snape and Harry could be on the same page about anything is so shot. At this point in the chapter, the author has accomplished a whole lot, but with Snape's ill temper, she's now covering up with the possibility: maybe Snape is just being mean to Harry for no reason as usual (or inexplicable reasons as usual). Also, introducing the doubts, which are extremely effective and a lot of readers believe because of how effective it's been. Is Snape just trying to upset Harry to make him more vulnerable to Voldemort? Is he on Harry's side or not? Is he trying to sabotage these lessons on purpose? Why is Snape giving these orders to Harry and punishing him for failing to follow them without giving any instructions? Snape has been so successfully an asshole to Harry in so many ways for years leading up to this that it's a really difficult conclusion to reach, and we don't actually have the information. At this point, Snape puts his memories back (these are things Dumbledore knows about; Snape doesn't want Harry to see). "Harry felt shivery; his scar was still aching, he felt almost feverish," which is excellent mystery writing, because we (the reader) do not know if the Occlumency lesson is what's making him feel worse or if it's that the Occlumency lesson has brought up flashbacks of terrible memories (if that's making him feel worse), if it's the momentousness of him having finally made that huge connection that's been bothering him for months, or is it that he had so much emotion that Voldemort's now sitting in his scar and that's what hurts so much. Yeah, this is something where we later learn that this is similar to when Umbridge touched Harry and then he felt something, and he's like, 'Is she evil? Is this just coincidence?' How on earth is Harry supposed to be able to trace each possible cause to determine what it is? This is part of what makes this, in my opinion, such a difficult chapter to interpret because this is obviously important. We're obviously supposed to try to figure this out, and there's so many clues. Harry goes back to Ron and Hermione, and all he can say is, "I don't like Occlumency much..."

**JC:** The chapter ends with trying to establish these doubts, and it's because I know that I trust Snape that all of that... I was just like, 'Eh...' It didn't even land on none of those

things and I could see how Harry was doubting it, but Snape basically saw that Voldemort got something he wanted out of Harry because of that session; that probably wouldn't have happened if Snape hadn't have been doing that, and Snape has very much an 'Oh, shit' reaction. On the one hand, he's going to be rewarded, probably by the Dark Lord, for that; on the other hand, he's now got to go back and tell Dumbledore what happened. "The worst possible thing happened here, and you really want me to keep going with this. What should I do?" He's walking this line. Oh... This job just got a whole lot harder.

**Lorrie:** From Voldemort's point of view, how exciting is this! Snape, who he believes to be completely loyal to him, has been given this unprecedented access?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "Great! Here's what I want you to do, Severus..."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** How is Snape going to successfully satisfy this demand from Voldemort and make it seem like he's making progress while protecting Harry?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Well, I don't know, he's going to have to figure that out. Hermione says the basic thing, "I expect anyone would feel shaky if they'd had their mind attacked over and over again," which is true in itself. Harry is never going to know what it feels like to have Snape Legilimize him without Voldemort watching. The discomfort of just plain old Occlumency, Harry's never going to know; he's always got the extra painful version.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Obviously, from now on, Voldemort's going to want to have a whole advance schedule from Snape. "Okay, tell me what time. I'll be there early."

**JC:** "I'll bring Starbucks."

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Oh, my God.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Harry, little fifteen-year-old sack of pain, stumbling back to the common room where Fred and George won't shut up and the planner shames him.

**JC:** Though there is this interesting moment where Hermione, for the first time, seems impressed with what Fred or George have done.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I like that moment because Hermione's like, "Ugh..." and then she's like, "Wait a minute... That's actually really good."

**Lorrie:** "You're good."

**JC:** "How did you do this? How did you do that?" That bit of respect from Hermione is like, 'Okay, yeah.'

**Lorrie:** And poor Harry is so completely jumpy and he's feeling sick again, the same way he was when he had the vision of the snake. Too much intense connection with Voldemort makes him throw up; it makes his whole body sick. To make things worse, then he has a whole separate attack of even more severe pain where he didn't even know his own name, and he has the "maniacal laughter... ringing in his ears.... Jubilant, ecstatic, triumphant..." He's suffering so much that Ron has to hit him, and it's a moment before he comes to... "The happiness was draining out of him, but the laughter continued..." When Ron hits him, then he can separate back into separate consciousness (Harry and Voldemort), but he is still laughing wildly. He can still hear that laughter coming out of his own mouth. That's Harry's job: try to hold on to himself and be in the present.

**JC:** That's really scary, too, that Voldemort now could just do that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Ron says Hermione said "your defenses will be low at the moment, after Snape's been fiddling around with your mind," which is misdirection from the author. "He could not help feeling that his first foray into Occlumency had weakened his mind's resistance rather than strengthening it..." Of course now, with knowing how the series turns out, we know it's not that; it's just that Dumbledore and Snape can't keep up with all the strides Voldemort's making. Voldemort already got in farther, and they're saying, "Oh, no, we have to teach this kid Occlumency," and during the first lesson, Voldemort gets even farther. They can't catch up; it would go more easily if Snape were able to tell Harry how to do it, but he can't.

**JC:** It just made me wonder how much Snape and Dumbledore discussed that aspect of it; Snape says, "Well, I hear that you can throw off the Imperius Curse," so that tells me that they did discuss it. "How am I going to do this without the Dark Lord finding out?" and Dumbledore is like, "Well, he can do this, so maybe build on that." But now, Snape has to go back to Dumbledore and say, "Welp, that didn't go well."

**Lorrie:** Ugh... To me, the ostentatious presence of the Pensieve (and this whole ritual that Dumbledore had obviously helped plan) really underlines they talked about it. Snape was not just thrown into making a lesson plan on his own; they talked about this.

This is my read of what was going on with Snape, and it's quite disorienting to me often when I come across a lot of common reads from other fans who think, 'No, he was messing up on purpose to dislike Harry.' I'm like, "Maybe... I don't know. That's not what I read."

**JC:** Yeah. I don't see any evidence in the text for that reading. This is just me and my opinion: you would have to willfully ignore a lot of stuff for that to be true.

**Lorrie:** But this chapter does throw a whole lot at us, and I think it has exponentially more confusing, different layers and directions in it than most chapters do. Yeah. We have Harry and Snape facing each other, which is every bit as fraught as Snape and Sirius trying to hex each other in the kitchen; then we have absent Dumbledore from a distance having ordered this, and we have absent Voldemort from a distance trying to connect into this call.

**JC:** Yeah, trying to hack in, hack Harry's brain.

**Lorrie:** And succeeding. All of this happening in this poor child's head with this teacher with his hands tied...

**JC:** Right, right.

**Lorrie:** Watching, going, 'What do I do? What do I do? What do I do?' We know, from him having put three memories in the Pensieve, that Snape has his own important things at risk here. This does not depend only on his altruism regarding Harry Potter; he's got stuff at stake.

**JC:** My first read with it was that there were things that he didn't want Harry to know, but now I'm like, 'Oh, there's things he doesn't want the Dark Lord to know.'

**Lorrie:** Correct.

**JC:** He's not worried about Harry knowing.

**Lorrie:** That is the thing that once readers make that connection, then they can understand, because the point that we see a few different times in all of these Occlumency lessons is that when Harry does stuff that we think Snape's going to be mad at him for, Snape doesn't even care. He doesn't have any issue with anything between him and Harry; he's worried about what will happen to all of them because the Dark Lord has access now.

**JC:** Which makes a lot of sense when we get to Snape's worst memory later.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He's not lashing out at Harry necessarily. It's not about Harry knowing.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** It's about if Harry knows, Voldemort knows, and that puts Snape in danger. Oh, that's cool. That's interesting.

**Lorrie:** If Voldemort sees things, he doesn't have the emotional intelligence to put them together a certain way; if Harry sees those things, Harry does.

**JC:** And Harry feeling affection for Snape is kind of the worst thing they could happen to Snape, or sympathy for him. Anything other than hatred is not going to be good.

**Lorrie:** Because they're all hiding behind Snape's true antipathy for Harry. That petty, unreasonable dislike of a child... That's their saving shield. If you dissolve it, you're in trouble.

**JC:** Very interesting.

**Lorrie:** I find this chapter so much fun.

**JC:** It is very interesting, and it sets us up for more of these really fraught interactions going forward, but we're starting to also see just how much danger Harry is in here, because it's like, 'Oh, shit, now, Voldemort can manipulate him.'

**Lorrie:** He's in so much danger that even Snape is worried.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Snape is long past enjoying Harry's discomfort. He doesn't even think of that anymore, although Harry is not past enjoying Snape's discomfort.

**JC:** True, true.

**Lorrie:** That moment when he's like, 'Oh, I've just freaked out Snape,' is like, 'Oh, just shoot that into my veins!' So yeah, I am impressed with this author. I love the incredibly complex character of Snape and how she could make it so that even though he's doing this amazingly complicated thing, he's also such a person -- such a character -- that you can fully hate him for how petty and mean he is to this child.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He has to think about Harry as a person in order to make these Occlumency lessons effective.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** That's the only way that they're all going to survive: he has to think about Harry as a human being. The thing that he wants less than anything in the world... He's just going to have to do it. Yay, Dumbledore! Thank you! So yeah, he doesn't enjoy his life --

he doesn't enjoy being himself -- but he'll do what he has to do, and that that makes this character really valuable to me.

**JC:** Yeah. The complexity of his character is just really mind-boggling, honestly, and it's only going to continue. Like you said, he's kind of been a minor annoyance in the background for a lot of what we've seen so far, but his role kind of got shoved to the front here.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, and from here on out, he's a lot more important.

**Lorrie:** Well, he has what it takes... Just barely. It's certainly a more fulfilling job for him than teaching. I don't know if this is what he was meant to do, but no one else could have done it. That's my guy! Kind of an asshole...

**JC:** Kind of?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The next chapter is called The Beetle at Bay.

**JC:** I'm assuming this is a reference to Rita Skeeter, maybe.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Yep.

**JC:** And we haven't seen what happened to her. She'd been kept in a jar this entire time.

**Lorrie:** We'll find out.

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