

Transcript

Episode 5.26

Book 5, Chapter 26: The Beetle at Bay

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-Six: Seen and Unforeseen.

Lorrie: Seen and Unforeseen. The *Quibbler* publishes Harry's interview. Harry dreams a vision of Voldemort punishing a Death Eater. He and Snape have an intense Occlumency lesson interrupted by Umbridge sacking Trelawney. Here we go with another Occlumency chapter, JC.

JC: But the Occlumency felt like it was just one of many things going on here, so yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The pace of *Order of the Phoenix*, I find very satisfying; there's always so much happening, and we start off with Harry reflecting on the experience of giving Rita that interview where it looks like she does know how to be a real journalist. "Rita had pressed [Harry] for every detail..." She knows how to do this, so you know that she realized the angle had to be factual and non-sensational because this is going to be the account of record to counter all of the Ministry propaganda about what did or didn't happen that night. Whew...

JC: We talked about this a bit last time, too, but Hermione blackmails Rita into this and then Rita does a good job, which says a lot about how much she wants to tell a good story, but she's putting herself at quite a bit of risk here by doing this (going up against the government, going up against Voldemort and his followers). She seems... I can only imagine that she believes that this is the truth the way that she tells it.

Lorrie: Yeah. It also shows that the world of this series is safer than the U.S. situation we're in now in that she feels protected as a journalist. They're not just going to up and kill the messenger.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: That's a comparison that would not have occurred to me on previous reads of this book.

JC: Right. Also, we're recording this at the end of July 2025, and when I see major newspapers printing things that criticize Trump, I feel a little bit of a spark of 'Yeah!' It used to be no big deal to see major newspapers criticizing politicians; now, it feels like they're going out on a limb in a way that it didn't in the past, and that's a weird place to be.

Lorrie: Yeah. What I see is internal conflict in that publication between the journalists who have a certain training and, I think, a dedication to being the Fourth Estate versus the billionaire owner class and when they do or don't decide to impose their restrictions on the journalists, because it's not like those billionaires are going to step in and be reporters. You still need the laborers in place, and some of those laborers come with their own reputations. That's why you have any influence at all in the news business: your reporters have built up a reputation over time. Rita does have that going for her (she is a recognized name), and everyone who has enjoyed her scandal-mongering in the past will give more credence to her report than they would to somebody who's completely dry. Anyway, that's who Hermione has... That's what she pulls out of her back pocket: the jar with a bug in it.

JC: Oh, it's so interesting, too. Rita... I don't remember what happens after this. I don't remember. I would like to have the fanfic spin-off in my head where this is a turning point in Rita's career and she becomes like one of the voices of the resistance here. I don't actually remember what happens, so I don't know, but that's my little hope here in this moment: that Rita realizes how much power her pen can have in a different way than it did in the past and help fight back against Voldemort. But I don't know what happens. I can't remember.

Lorrie: I could tell you or not.

JC: No, I want to find out.

Lorrie: Okay!

JC: I'll just throw that out there for other folks who maybe don't remember.

Lorrie: Yeah. Meanwhile, Hermione then explains all of Cho's behavior to Harry.

JC: Oh, man. There's a little bit of this theme that you see through the books of Hermione being the girl whisperer or something...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Or however you would frame that, where she is explaining to Ron and Harry how girls' emotional lives are and how they work in a way that is very stereotypically gendered, but is not wrong for the way that kids tend to relate at this age. It's so funny. It's funny because there's a little bit of fantasy fulfillment there on both sides. On the one hand, looking back and thinking, 'Wow, if I could just have always explained to those idiot boys why they were being idiots, and here, this character is going to do it'; then from the other direction, 'If only I had a friend who would explain to me what all this mysterious behavior means.' It's just funny.

Lorrie: Or Hermione being the wish fulfillment character again. 'If only I could have been the person at that age who could see why this was a problem instead of the person doing every single last one of these stupid things.'

JC: That is true. That is true, too.

Lorrie: But I came out of Hermione's explanation, thinking, 'Oh, Harry totally has a point. He cannot have been expected to understand any of this.'

JC: That's true, and Harry's not as emotionally mature as either Hermione or Cho -- he's a full year younger than either of them -- and he just has no experience with relationships beyond the friendships he's had since he was eleven.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's had a heck of a lot to do. It's just not his priority, and he hasn't hit the point yet where he's interested in that. He hasn't hit that point of his teenager-dom where relationships become really important to him, so he's just so far behind the other folks that are around him who are interested in that stuff. It takes some time to navigate all that. He's at a real disadvantage here.

Lorrie: Yeah. Just because Cho is more mature doesn't mean that her way of being is any better. It sort of is like, 'Wow, if that's what maturity brings, why would you even want that?'

JC: All the little games...

Lorrie: Oh, boy.

JC: I do like, though, that during this scene we see that Neville and Dean are really being really supportive of Harry having told his story and that Seamus is thinking about it.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: It's so... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That is the hugest thing. That's something that has been in the national dialogue: getting people to admit that they were wrong. If that's what you're holding out for, that's the hardest: that breakdown of pride, of getting people to admit that. Maybe find other ways than holding out for an apology. The fact that Seamus brings himself to it is phenomenal.

JC: Yeah, and Harry doesn't have any expectations. He's like, 'Seamus is going to think what he's going to think,' and then yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, that's an extra gift. We get to see how terrible Gryffindor Quidditch is without Harry and the twins.

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: Oh...

JC: I also love that Hermione, again, is playing the girl whisperer here, where Fred and George like, "How did Ginny get so good at Quidditch? We never let her play with us!" Hermione explains, and then Fred and George are impressed that Ginny actually stole their brooms and practiced on them when they weren't looking. They're like, 'Oh,' and it's so interesting how none of Ginny's brothers seem to know much about her or her life.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And she's the youngest; she was the girl, the baby, all the stuff, and they constantly underestimate her. They learn not to, of course, across the series of the books, but it's just so interesting that they keep underestimating her and then going, 'Oh. Oh! We should have been paying more attention all along.' Yeah. Yeah, you should have.

Lorrie: I always imagine that when Hermione drops this knowledge on them, she doesn't even look up.

JC: Yeah, that was my own little image, too. She's just doing whatever she's doing... Just drops that in.

Lorrie: "Oh, yeah, that's why."

JC: That's so great. It's also interesting here that we start to see the seeds of Fred and George thinking about quitting school. I didn't realize that... Again, I haven't read this in many, many years, but I forgot that that started and you could tell that they were thinking about it from this point. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. I like how there are several pages of just plain good, slice-of-life dialogue around Quidditch. This is one of those moments where that's the nostalgia that people have for the series: this is just characters interacting. I love that Hermione keeps being wrong about Quidditch and they keep being appalled that she doesn't understand how important it is, but she gets the last word and says, "At least my happiness doesn't depend on Ron's goalkeeping ability," and that shuts everybody up.

JC: Yeah, for sure. Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Okay, Hermione, you win that one.

JC: And she's right about that. Of all the things to get angry about... I get it. If you're really emotionally invested in a thing and it doesn't turn out the way that you want it to, I get it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But also, it has nothing to do with you.

Lorrie: Yeah. There's nothing you can do about it.

JC: There's nothing you can do about it. Just because you, I don't know, didn't walk around the house three times clockwise or whatever... It doesn't make any difference, but people get so emotionally invested in the things that they're fans of in so many ways, strangely. Strangely... Hmm, Yeah. The other thing I really like in this scene is this little bit that Fred and George drop: "Oh, we finally were able to figure out how to cure those magic-induced boils from the Skiving Snackboxes, and we learned that murtlap essence will cure it, which we learned from Lee." Oh, Lee got that from Harry; Harry got that from Hermione.

Lorrie: Yes. We have [come] full circle. Yes.

JC: Full circle. Hermione is helping Fred and George. Probably against her will, but I love that little moment.

Lorrie: I like when Harry thinks he has a lifelong ban from Quidditch and Ginny says, "No, you're banned as long as Umbridge is in the school. There's a difference."

JC: Oh, yes, I love that.

Lorrie: First of all, yay Ginny! Of course, Ginny speaks truth always, but this reminds me of something that my dad told me in 2016 when I was really depressed about the political turn of the U.S. My dad was born during World War II and was a child during the Korean War. He said to me, "No regime lasts forever." That made me realize how privileged I've been my whole life thinking that I need to see political change in my lifetime, but it's more common in human history to think we may not personally live to

see change, but we're going to fight for future change. My lifespan is not the same as the patterns of justice that I'm fighting for. That really reset my feelings in a good way, and that's very much what Ginny is making me think of here: you don't know if you're going to personally last as long as Umbridge in this school, but thinking that she can't be in charge forever shifts your thinking to be more hopeful.

JC: Yeah. When I think about the current administration, I frequently imagine a day in the future where this regime is gone...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: For whatever reason. Enough time has passed, people have died of natural causes... I don't even care, but at some point these people will be gone...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I, knock wood, will still be here living my life.

Lorrie: And even if we aren't, somebody is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is going to happen as long as Umbridge is in the school. There's a difference.

JC: One of the things I love about the character of Ginny (and we start to see this more and more) is that she comes in and she lays down truth in a way that no other character does, and I really like that about her and she's just confident. She's not intimidated by Harry or anybody; she just lays it down. "Yeah, this is how it's going to be." I like a character like that, and I especially like that it's a female character who gets to do that here.

Lorrie: Yeah. As a character (when you think about her from the craftsperson's point of view) you have to use Ginny sparingly, because anytime you have the character of Ginny walk on screen or on stage and open her mouth, everything she says is going to be significant. If she's around speaking truth all the time, that's kind of heavy-handed.

JC: I also like that the Gryffindor team lost only by 10 points because she caught the Snitch.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I do have this memory of... I didn't understand Quidditch. I didn't pay that much attention to it when I was reading this series for the first time. This was the first time reading this: I remember having this epiphany of, 'Oh, that's why.' Catching the Snitch ends the game and it gives you 150 points. I never understood why if you caught the Snitch you wouldn't just win. I was like, 'What's the point of this game if you just catch

the Snitch and that's when the game ends?' I didn't get that you could be... The odds of catching the Snitch and losing seem so low. The strategy of the game would be not to try to catch it until you were in a position where it would make you win, but in this case it was so terrible that Ginny did it to put Ron out of his misery.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Let's just finish this." Poor Ron let through something like fourteen goals... Oh, my God, misery.

Lorrie: This is the tactic that we see Viktor Krum do in the World Cup. Why did he catch the Snitch? That brought an end to the game and now Bulgaria has lost. I think it's Harry or one of the kids that says, "Oh, it's to salvage some pride." Okay, all right.

JC: But yeah. I didn't understand, until I read this the first time, this part. I didn't get, 'Oh, that's how Quidditch...' I didn't pay that much attention. Five books in, I'm like, 'I don't know how Quidditch works.' At this point, I was like, 'Oh, I see. Yeah.'

Lorrie: One of the things that can make me blank out of a Harry Potter fandom discussion the fastest is when people start arguing that the scoring system for Quidditch is nonsensical. 'How it should have gone...' Okay, I don't even hear you. I'm somewhere else.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Probably? I don't know. Anyway, it was written by somebody who's not a sports fan.

JC: It feels like a parody of sports. I've always thought that Quidditch was intended to be a parody, a mix of soccer and cricket and all these other sports... Cricket, where the games can go on for a long time until something happens, and the ridiculousness of the scoring, which fits into lots of different sports. I always felt like this was written as a parody of sports and not intended to be real. The fact that it turned into a real sport, which is now called Quadball, and there are university teams... There are international teams; the international Quadball World Cup just happened, and wildly enough, there was a person that I am Facebook friends with (because we're both on the same PTA at the high school that my kid goes to). Her son played for India...

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness!

JC: On the international team, and got to go to the World Cup in Europe.

Lorrie: Wow!

JC: And I'm just like, 'This is wild.' Yeah. The sport that was written to be, in my opinion, a parody of how stupid sports are is a real sport, now that people that I know go and play internationally. What the hell?

Lorrie: Wow. Oh, poor Harry thinking about Umbridge makes him so angry that he can't empty his mind of emotion before sleep the way he's supposed to, which reminds him of Snape, which makes him even angrier.

JC: Angrier. Also, the idea of Umbridge intentionally sitting in front of Harry during the Quidditch game and continuing to look back at him with this gloating look on her face... Wow! The vendetta that she has for this child...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, looking back to make sure she's making his life as miserable as possible. She wants to see it on his face. Goddamn.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's a good strategy. If she can provoke him, that will disempower him; helplessly, there he is, sitting there, getting angrier and more disempowered. He, once again, does not have the guidance to know how you're supposed to dismantle the power of that kind of goading so that you can get some of your own back, so it's just happening. This, of course, does also remind me of the photo of the author that she posted of herself smoking a cigar in celebration of getting anti-trans legislation passed, and this is the tactic she taught us: when you're being goaded, don't let that sap your power. There's a way of being powerlessly angry that can be a distraction and a drain. It's not that it's not infuriating; just remember what you're saving your strength for.

JC: Yeah, that's a really good point. Yeah. I'm starting to think of her as Umbridge here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. A lot of people early on were like, "She's just like Voldemort," and I'm like, 'I don't know.' But now, as we get into this book, I'm thinking, 'No, she's more like Umbridge in a lot of ways,' but I don't know. We don't need to waste any more breath on that.

Lorrie: Yeah. Just remember how to keep yourself strong mentally. So there's Harry being angry, and Voldemort is getting into his head: "He had the strangest feeling that this time he was going to get lucky at last, and find the way to open it." Voldemort is putting more images of the door into Harry's mind. We are watching Voldemort get better at this. If Harry had ever been told that Occlumency is the thing that will help you protect people that you love, then he would have been better able to resist being consumed with curiosity, but he's undefended; he doesn't know that's what it's for. In 2016, we finally learned exactly what direct, simple words Snape would have used to give Occlumency instructions if he had been free to do that with Harry. We get that in

the *Cursed Child* script, which we know that Rowling was involved with minutely. She didn't write it, but she went over every line with the script writers. In *Cursed Child*, we see Snape teaching Scorpius how to block out dementors. It made me wonder, when I saw *Cursed Child* Snape spell it out, if Rowling had concluded that she's been a little too subtle with this and if people didn't realize that there was a simple lesson that Snape couldn't give. *Cursed Child* Snape says, "Think of something else, Scorpius. Occupy your thoughts.... Think about those you love, think about why you're doing this.... Listen to me, Scorpius. Think about Albus. You're giving up your kingdom for Albus, right? One person. All it takes is one person." It's not just like, "Don't think about something." It's "Think about something else. You can't just sacrifice; you have to commit to something more compelling." We know this approach would have worked for Harry if Snape had been able to spell it out for him because Harry is actually already doing it. He has been so worried about Sirius that for months now, he has already been blocking his own thoughts anytime Sirius is concerned. Anytime Sirius is trying to get in touch with him, Harry says, "Oh, I'm not going to be responsible for putting Sirius in danger." He won't do anything. Harry will not even think about doing anything that might risk Sirius' safety. Two years from now, when Harry masters Occlumency, that's exactly the kind of mechanism he calls on, that kind of protective emotion to Occlude. But since Harry right now is being expected to follow instructions without any explanation on faith alone -- also, without the reinforcement of the trust that he would feel if Dumbledore and others had been more forthcoming with him -- then he can't make that mental connection. This is a good lesson for us, the readers: when you are trying to be mentally strong against some sort of attack, don't motivate yourself by thinking, 'What can I give up?' It's more like, "What can I work toward or for?" Which, to me, is quite relevant in the endless debate about how pure we must all be in boycotting official licensed *Harry Potter* products or any mention of the series at all. The line of argument that I find quite unproductive: even referring to *Harry Potter* somehow increases this author's social power so that we're impure if we do it. You can expend a lot of fandom energy policing each other about how pure people are about giving up something; that is not going to get us very far. That's a hard way to win, but if you think, 'No, what are we working toward? What are we fighting for?'... If you're fighting for trans rights, if you're fighting for strengthening the ability to resist transphobia, if you're fighting for visibility -- for protest, for funding organizations, for legal challenges, for encouraging people's emotional strength, for peer support, for hotlines, for daily affirmations, for strengthening your personal relationships -- people who are under fire from transphobia get reminders that the people who are actually in your life actually know that you're valuable and know who you are on the inside. This all may be political bullshit, but you're a human who is brilliant and lovable. If you're working for that, that is going to get all of us a heck of a lot farther than policing each other about whether or not you have somehow increased J.K. Rowling's social power by making a reference to *Harry Potter*. The amount of effort in

where you put it and who you're actually trying to protect and uplift... Be mindful of that. Here's poor Harry not being told what he's working toward; he's only being told what to give up, and it doesn't work.

JC: Ooh, very interesting. Yeah. It's such a good point. I don't think I had thought too much about how Occlumency was supposed to work. You had mentioned a couple times that Harry finally masters it in the last book, and I just have no memory of it; when that comes, I'll be like, 'Hey there it is.' I also forgot about that bit of *Cursed Child* -- t's been years since I've seen *Cursed Child*, too -- and I don't think I would have put that together either because I wasn't thinking about it in that way, but it is very interesting that there's so much magic and protectiveness throughout this series and that you're not just doing this for yourself but protecting other people. The idea that holding onto your love for someone else (your desire to protect someone else) is this source of power, and you have power that is so great that it can protect you from someone like Voldemort just because you care for other people. That's... Wow! That's really amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's the idea of this series. This is something that I think it's culturally American: I was raised with this cultural narrative that it's so sad that we individuals can't love ourselves as much as we love our friends. If we look in the mirror and say, "Oh, I look fat," but then somebody who is bigger than us says, "Oh, then you must think I look disgusting." "No, I don't! You look fantastic! You're sexy, you're vibrant." "Well, if I am, then what are you?" "No, I'm still fat." Why can't I praise myself and think highly of myself? That is not something that I've ever really made much progress with, but if you flip it this way... If you think, 'Well, never mind then,' if it's a feature and not a bug in human nature... Defending ourselves is iffy sometimes, but standing up for other people that matter to you? Oh, that... That is an endless font of energy. Well, use that then. People who would never lift a finger to help themselves will do anything possible to defend somebody that they care about.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Okay, that's strength. That's power. If you get a collective together and you just assign each other 'this is who you're going to fight for,' yeah. As a collective, you will be much stronger than if you each have to develop self-sufficiency. That's, I think, the message that this author is getting at with her somewhat biologically determined belief that maternal love is the source of all power. Well, you don't have to be a mother, but that protective love is the source of more power than a lot of other kinds of love. But yeah, it was only on this read of this chapter that I realized, 'Oh.' What Harry is doing (which is later going to be sad) by just blocking out thoughts of Sirius... he's actually Occluding. Why is he refusing to think about that? Because he doesn't want Sirius to get hurt. Oh, you know what? That's human. Okay. Find it, isolate it, practice it, use it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Let's talk about Hermione.

JC: Okay. I love this whole sequence that is coming up. Hermione is so brilliant. I'm just going to assume that Hermione thought through all the ways that the *Quibbler* article thing could go and thought through the scenario that would turn out the best for everyone, set all the pieces in place, and then just sat back and smiled as all the pieces fell and everything worked out exactly as she had planned.

Lorrie: So satisfying.

JC: It's so satisfying.

Lorrie: So exciting! I like the demonstration, the workshop that this chapter gives us for how to respond to reviews. If you are a fanfic writer or any sort of content creator, then you have had the delightful experience of having to figure out how to deal with random reviews from randos, which could be like, "Oh, I didn't like one second of your video. Therefore, you should go kill yourself" or whatever. It can be anything. Can you just never read any of your reviews? Well, there might be important information there, especially if you're trying to communicate something to the outside world. How do you handle it? We see Harry's friends making a committee.

JC: I loved that.

Lorrie: Yeah, and they divide up the task. Harry does dip in and read in a couple himself, but they are all there for each other, and then they can gather together and discuss what they have found after in support. If you are going to be reading all of these things by yourself, then you will spiral.

JC: Yeah, true. Yeah. You'll focus on the things that trigger your insecurities... yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: And maybe you can ignore them and just never read them, which I know some people do. Harry is not in a position to do that right now because he's trying to get a message out, so he does have to monitor how it's being received. So yeah, anyway... Excellent lesson in how to deal with reviews.

JC: And I love that it just happens spontaneously, and also that the owls are lining up. There's tons of mail that gets dumped down, and Harry's like, "What is happening?" Hermione immediately goes, "Oh, the article came out, that's what happened," and they all jump into action.

Lorrie: Yeah. I find it very touching how much the owls want to do a good job.

JC: Yeah, and they're messy, too. I'm just imagining the amount of bird shit that is everywhere in this castle, because yeah.

Lorrie: The phrase "treading in the butter"... Oh, eww, eww!

JC: Yeah. Where have those talons been? Oh, my God, yeah. Oh, boy. Then, of course, Umbridge notices and comes over.

Lorrie: There's nothing to be done about this.

JC: I love that Harry... There's no reason to hide it. Just tell the truth. "Oh, I gave an interview."

Lorrie: There's nothing he can do about this as this is happening.

JC: Yep, yep, and there's nothing she can do about it either. She can ban, which is where it kind of goes from here. She can punish him after the fact, but there was no decree saying you can't give interviews to magazines on your days off. "There was no rule against it, so I did it." Well, there'll be a rule now.

Lorrie: Yeah, and she shows her hand when she goes directly to, "Any student found in possession of the magazine *The Quibbler* will be expelled." She has gone to such an extreme there that she has signaled her desperation.

JC: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Ooh, okay, so she's losing; now everybody will believe that this interview contains nothing but the truth.

JC: And Hermione is delighted.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, it's just beautiful. Hermione probably thought this was a possibility...

Lorrie: Right. But oh, look at that.

JC: And when it happens, Hermione's like, "Yes! This is exactly what I needed."

Lorrie: "I was hoping for this. I wasn't depending on it." It shows right away that the Ministry is weak because they fear the truth. If Umbridge had responded in a less desperate manner, then they wouldn't know that so much, but now she's just put the stamp of truth on everything.

JC: So at the time that we're recording this (and who knows what this will look like by the time this recording actually comes out), the Trump administration has recently done a complete about-face on the Epstein files. It feels very similar to this to me where Trump started railing on social media against his followers, who were still obsessed with the Epstein files (as he framed it). "Why are you so...?" He's campaigned on this, he's talked about it for years, and then he completely does an about-turn and says, "No, why are you still obsessed with this? My real supporters..." It feels very much like this. It's

such a desperation, such a quick change, such a complete "la la la, I can't hear you" kind of thing. It feels very similar to this to me.

Lorrie: Yeah. The degree of desperation increases your faith in whatever the truth of it is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I wish that censorship did always have this effect on readership. In some cases like this one, it might; often, though, book bans and censorship really do reduce people's access. It's comforting to see that this is one of those times where no, it actually helps your cause. It doesn't always, though... If you're trying to build momentum for some publication of yours by trying to get it censored, yeah, don't. It's not an efficient way.

JC: Not an efficient way of doing it.

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: I do love, though, the very teenage way that the kids, in the same manner that they would have hidden porn or something (something they're not supposed to have) inside a textbook...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're doing that with the *Quibbler* now.

Lorrie: Yeah. "Hey, children, cheating!"

JC: Yeah, and they're using magic that they either learned in school (or they learn from siblings or they've learned from each other) in the same way that kids will disguise notes... Well, back when I was a kid and the notes were actually with paper, the way that kids would disguise notes and pass them to each other. All these little things that teenagers will do to communicate with each other, we see that here. How many copies of the *Quibbler* came into the school? I don't know, but everybody seems to have gotten their hands on one using magic. Yeah, it's really fun in sneaky ways. I love it.

Lorrie: Having replicated, yes.

JC: I love the fact that it's clear that everyone has read it...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Even the teachers, and the teachers are very subtly giving Harry pats on the head.

Lorrie: Yeah. The teachers expressing approval... Even Cho overcomes all that teen awkwardness, and she comes and thanks him because this is what she's been needing

the whole time. She has wanted an in-depth account of what really happened that night, and that's what she got.

JC: And then we get Seamus coming over and basically apologizing and saying, "I believe you now, and I sent a copy of this to my mom." "To me mam."

Lorrie: Brave.

JC: To tell her that this is the truth and... Oh, man.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then the lovely little moment with the Slytherins whose fathers were named, and noting that they can't even say anything to Harry about it because then they will reveal that they read it...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Which is an expelling offense. Of course, this is assuming... My first thought is, 'Oh, they're going to get expelled.'

Lorrie: It's a really complicated moment. I like that we see Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle with Theodore Nott. This is a 'Slytherins are real people' moment, where of course they have people that they go to school with that they're not friends with but they will talk with. But to have boys know that their fathers have just been named in this really dangerous way, you have to wonder, with these teenagers, how much did they know? Did their fathers brag to them, or did they say, "No, this doesn't concern you, you guys stay safe and ignorant"? How frightening is this for them? How close are they with their fathers anyway, being in boarding school and all? What a terrifying moment for them, and everyone's going to look at them and know. This is already a school where being a Slytherin gets you that kind of suspicion anyway, but now there's going to be a distinction made between generic Slytherin and these actual Death Eater families. So yeah, these boys have just become way more vulnerable and they knew this kind of tension was rising anyway; they've known it since last year, but now it's out there and the government's involved and their dads' names are in the paper. That's scary. What are they going to do, write to their dads? Ugh...

JC: Yeah. It makes me wonder what kinds of conversations are happening in the Slytherin common room.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: How are these kids processing?

Lorrie: And Snape... This is his job, because absolutely no other grown-up in Hogwarts gives a shit what happens to these horrible children. He knows what it's like to be this

lost, and if he doesn't care for them and show up for them, nobody will. Wow. Then Harry goes to the Gryffindor common room and everybody's asking him to relive the interview... They so believe him now. They will always believe him now. The people who live through this moment for the rest of their lives will be able to remember, "Oh, yes, I was there."

JC: Yeah, "When the truth came out." There's got to be, too, a little bit of group-think happening too, right? Even if you were skeptical, if you were in that common room, you'd be swept up in the excitement of it. "Harry's ours. He's in our common room, and he's the one who told the truth and he knows all this." You would get swept up in it, the way that the group is coming together there.

Lorrie: The thing is, too, that when Harry answers their questions, he had not been giving details before because there was no point in him even trying to communicate any of this, there was such a wall. But now that they're asking him questions, you can tell when somebody recounts something for real in the details -- in their manner -- that they're telling the truth. There are signs of truth that Harry's not even planning intentionally that are landing with his listeners, where somebody will say, "Well, I guess he could have been lying, but I heard him and I think he was telling the truth." That's something that isn't possible if you don't have somebody's ear to begin with, but now he does, so it's worthwhile for him to explain what happened. Then he runs away from the chaos of the common room.

JC: But I do love that there's that poster that Fred and George have made with the giant image of the cover with Harry saying shit. It doesn't say this, but you get the sense that it would be the equivalent of "Fuck Umbridge" and stuff like that, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. "Eat shit." Yes.

JC: Yeah. "Eat shit and die." Yeah. It's so... Oh, my God.

Lorrie: It's very, very much against the rules.

JC: Yeah, and very clever. Again, they're really good, those two. I also love that we learn that the *Quibbler* is sold out and is going to get a second print run.

Lorrie: Right, to the shock of everybody involved with the *Quibbler*. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Again, it's the BuzzFeed thing where it's like, "Wait, BuzzFeed reported that and it was true? Wait, what? Oh, BuzzFeed's saying *this* now? Hmm..." Yeah, it's really interesting. It's really interesting to see this moment where things are shifting and information is getting out in unconventional ways.

Lorrie: Yeah. Something already existed that was never used that way before. The image of poor Harry running away and cooling his scar against the window is so

pathetic. That is so... Ouch. This whole time that all of this upheaval has been happening... Obviously, Voldemort has had something major going on in his life at the same time, so he's been really emotional and that has inflamed the scar, which tends to get Harry nauseated. We can tell that whatever is happening here, Voldemort is unconsciously connecting with Harry here because the nausea for Harry only happens when it's that strong. Ugh, he feels unwell... Then he has a terrible dream where he once again conflates his point of view and identity with Voldemort's, and this time it's not Nagini; it's actual Voldemort's perspective, and in the dream, Harry is completely merged with Voldemort's identity. He sees his own hands and they have long white fingers, and he feels his own cold anger and he's much taller than usual. This is terrifying. I find the writing here so good. There's this line that I love: "A cracked, age-spotted mirror hung on the wall in the shadows." What a great way to show how Voldemort is so run down without saying so outright and to remind us that this is Harry seeing a reflection of his own identity. Great! Great, great, great stuff, and we know that this connection is involuntary. Voldemort is not planting this in Harry's consciousness, because it's showing all of Voldemort's failures with Bode and Avery. Voldemort would not want Harry to be seeing this, so he's not manipulating this; he's too upset to be in control, and he doesn't know Harry's watching. Sometimes Voldemort knows what he's doing; sometimes no, this is beyond him, too. We see how affected poor Ron is when he's trying to get Harry to wake up from this terrible dream and saying, "Is it dad? Is it that snake?" Oh, yeah... After what Ron and his family have just been through, the fear for him is now almost as direct as it is for Harry. Wow, this is striking home. Now, because of this dream, Harry and Ron know a lot, lot, lot more about the weapon than Dumbledore ever wanted them to know.

JC: Right. We also learn that Lucius Malfoy has had a big role in this, placing Imperius curses on people. Yeah.

Lorrie: They're learning how these things work, they go tell Hermione, she pieces more together, they piece the timeline together, they figure out how Sturgis Podmore got involved... Yeah, they know a lot now.

JC: Yeah. I like how quickly Hermione puts it all together, and then turns around and says, "But you shouldn't even be knowing this." Harry gets really angry, and again, with the limited information Harry has, this seems like a really useful skill to be able to see what Voldemort's doing. He can spy on Voldemort. Without the full picture of information and without really understanding why it's important for him what could happen, he doesn't really know what kind of danger he's in or what danger he's putting other people in. Again, he doesn't have all the information, and it's like, 'UGH!' I can totally see why he thinks that this is a good thing that he's getting this information, that he's getting access to Voldemort's mind.

Lorrie: It's hard to resist it, too, because all of them are so hungry for this information. In order to be able to overcome that curiosity, they have to have something of value that would be more compelling. Hermione lecturing him this way doesn't address the root trouble, which is that there is a lack of trust and communication from Dumbledore that would explain to Harry why he should be invested in blocking it out. She can harp on this as much as she wants, but it's that lack of trust that's causing the break, so it does not help at all for her to tell Harry, "You should forget what you saw." That is not how people work. The mind connects information whether you want it or not. Of course, Ron suggests that Harry should go to Dumbledore, and Harry suggested right away, "That would have helped," but Dumbledore has done that adult thing where he has blocked the lines of communication with a teenager by being unavailable. You do that with a teenager, oh... You're going to have to work to earn that back. Dumbledore has ordered Harry to Occlude without figuring out a way to trust him with an explanation. That was Dumbledore's job as a grown-up. "Why isn't he explaining it to Harry?" Because it's dangerous. "Well, you're going to have to find a way, because without that piece, this isn't going to work." This is always what happens when authority figures alienate teens this way that are in trouble; this reduces the teen's resources and it makes them more vulnerable to trouble. Alas...

JC: Yes. Yes, and we can think of a hundred examples of that from the real world. This is also what I was frustrated about several episodes back when Sirius brushed off Harry's concerns. It was this kind of thing where Harry's going to make assumptions whether he's got the correct information or not, and if he doesn't have enough information, he's probably going to get the wrong idea and it's not going to help anything, so yeah. That line that people have to walk of how much information is actually going to be harmful to you versus... That's really, really complicated.

Lorrie: Right, and Sirius has to brush off Harry that way not because he himself believes in it, but because Dumbledore told him to. Okay. I also feel protective of Dumbledore here, because I know that it's very easy as readers to think, 'Well, why doesn't the omniscient wizard with the beard do a better job of this?' Well, that is a very human response to 'Where were the grown-ups?' Sadly, having been a grown-up for some time, I can tell you I have failed in this way many times and well, I didn't do a perfect job there.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Were there bad consequences? Yes.

JC: Well, hindsight is always... That's one of the torturous things about hindsight. I live in central Texas where (at the time of this recording) several weeks ago, there was really horrific flooding and lots of people died, including a lot of children. It was horrible. Right now, what's happening in that area is a lot of finger pointing; now that the recovery

efforts are wrapping up and the funerals have happened, the political fingers are getting pointed and people are digging up accounts of 'Well, this organization was going to set up a warning system and then this government organization said no.' Again, we can look back and we can see the string of bad things that are mistakes that were made or choices that were made that led to this awfulness. There's nothing we can do about it now, but looking back is painful.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "We could have made a different choice here," and they made a choice for probably what seemed like a good reason at the time because no one could see into the future and see how it will go wrong. It's complicated and messy and awful.

Lorrie: Yeah. Eventually you will gather lessons from this to hopefully make things a bit safer in the future, and that's wildly out of proportion to how terrible everybody feels right now and all of the agony that goes into the finger pointing. I don't know how much people can help all the agony right now. If you open your mouth to assign blame, it's maybe going to come out a lot more emotional than you want it to just because it's so awful.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dumbledore should have done better. When you think about what he was actually terrified of, that's how human brains work. You're scared of something, then you can't really be optimal about it.

JC: Yeah, for sure. Then we head right into another Occlumency lesson, which is not going well. We also get this little comment that these have been going on for a couple of months now, and I don't know how often they're happening; I don't get a sense of that, but several times a week, I guess, so for a couple of months. Snape has seen an awful lot of Harry's awful childhood memories at this point and knows a lot more about Harry than he probably even wanted to know, and also is realizing that he is still connecting with Voldemort.

Lorrie: Yeah. I love the segue into this section. It's one of my favorite segues in this whole series: Harry "tried to push the matter to the back of his mind. Unfortunately, the back of his mind was no longer the secure place it had once been. 'Get up, Potter.'" The way that this makes "back of his mind" a figure of speech but then turns it into an actual space that I'm envisioning, and then getting Snape's voice in your mind is such a jump scare. The way that Snape's voice is always ominous and disapproving... That is so not a voice you want in your head.

JC: Yeah, really.

Lorrie: That just always impresses me. That signals a shift in time and setting (this is two weeks later) and it shows us exactly where we are not only as Harry in Snape's office, but very specifically he is once again involuntarily on the floor because it's another unsuccessful, unimpressive attempt at Occlumency, and you know that Snape's floor is unusually cold and very hard.

JC: Yeah. Not a good place to be.

Lorrie: All of that transition into time and space is just so impressive to me in this very cleverly written segue. Snape... you can kind of imagine him sifting through all of Harry's very disorganized flashbacks to childhood trauma (pushing them all aside, looking for something specific), and then he's asking about the memory "concerning a man kneeling in the middle of a darkened room." That's what he's been looking for, and Harry's like, "Uh, what man?" Then we get that low, dangerous voice from Snape asking, "[You do know] why I am giving up my evenings to this tedious job," which answers a fan question about reading these scenes: Yes, Snape actually wants Harry to learn Occlumency. That resentment from him is unmistakable. Then he switches mood a little bit and he says meanly, "Perhaps you actually enjoy having these visions and dreams, Potter. Maybe they make you feel special -- important?" It's a little hard to read that, because of course Snape has had this misapprehension about Harry from the beginning that Harry thinks he's so, so, so special; meanwhile, Harry just wishes that none of this stuff happened to him at all, but also at this moment Snape has to probe to see if Harry has in him the same susceptibility that Death Eaters do. "Do you like being made to feel special by Voldemort?" Because that is one of the biggest ways Voldemort gets people. He's testing, "Is that one of the reasons why you're not shutting this down, Potter?" and he's finding out no, Harry's not like that, which makes him pretty unusual. Then he says meanly to Harry, "You are neither special nor important," which is totally a lie, but Harry would love it if that were true that Voldemort didn't obsess over him. "It is not up to you to find out what the Dark Lord is saying to his Death Eaters," which begs the important question: Okay, if it's not up to Harry, is anyone else on the job? That's when Harry says, "No -- that's your job, isn't it?" Now, I don't know about you, but when I read that the first time, I was terrified for Harry.

JC: It's so interesting because you're expecting Snape to lash out, and Snape doesn't.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yeah. I read that line and go, 'Is Harry going to be in trouble for this?' When I expect Snape to be mad and to punish people, all I know is that I can't even imagine what terrible ways he has of punishing people. I don't even know what he's going to do, and that's the shocker: no, Harry's not in trouble for this at all. Snape thinks about that question for a really long time, and then he's shocked. I'm falling off my chair reading this: "Yes, Potter. That is my job." What? What the heck?!

JC: Oh, that's amazing.

Lorrie: One of my first responses to that is, "Wait, wait, wait, Dumbledore cannot possibly have authorized that answer. What?!" What did you think when you read, "Yes, Potter. That is my job."

JC: I'm of many minds there, but one thought is that they're coming to understand each other. They don't like each other, but they're coming to understand each other.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I think that for Snape, it would be satisfying to have somebody other than Dumbledore see him and understand what he's doing...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Even if it's fucking Harry Potter.

Lorrie: Right!

JC: Okay! That's my read on that.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's actually good that it's Harry, and Harry's experienced this with Snape, too: how satisfying it is to force your adversary to admit that what you're up against has been really difficult. You're not just a piece of crap. I thought, 'Well, whether or not Dumbledore authorized this, he's not around to stop Snape.'

JC: True.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah, everything that Harry has been suffering by wondering, 'Where is Dumbledore in all this? I could use some support, Dumbledore,' Snape has been going through that, too. If Snape answers Harry's question correctly, would he be jeopardizing anything? This is what he takes a long time to think: if he tells Harry the truth, is he jeopardizing his own standing with Dumbledore? No. Is it dangerous with his standing with Voldemort to say, "Yes, this is my job"? No, no, no, that's fine. Is he jeopardizing his own standing in the lesson as an authority to Harry? No. The truth is, actually, it checks out in every single one of his agendas. This is what it looks like when Snape stops hiding his agenda and tells something, the rare thing that is true about himself from every perspective. Wow. Not only is this not going to jeopardize his standing with Harry, it's going to put Harry in his place, which is cherry on top.

JC: Yeah. When someone thinks they're insulting you and you just go, 'Yeah,' you are defanging the insult and taking back power in a way.

Lorrie: This shocking moment... The biggest shock is that an adult is giving Harry Potter an actual answer.

JC: That is true. Yeah.

Lorrie: That is the first time in this whole book that any adult has answered Harry about any of the extremely relevant questions that Harry's been demanding. Who knew that adult was going to be Snape?

JC: Now, that is interesting. I hadn't thought of that, but that is interesting. Okay, all the shit I have been complaining about for many episodes now, and Snape is the first one who just cuts through the bullshit and is like, "Yeah, I'm telling you the truth."

Lorrie: So not expected. This God-forsaken year -- and I say "God-forsaken" deliberately because Dumbledore's absence is like the absence of God -- the good guys are losing, Dumbledore cannot be reached. Somebody somewhere is being a grown-up, and he is taking on a dangerous duty so the kids don't have to fend for themselves. That's what Snape is doing by telling Harry, "It's not your job to find out what the Dark Lord is." "That's your job, isn't it?" "Yes, it is." In this moment, Snape has been seen correctly and acknowledged, which is something that (by definition as a double agent) generally cannot happen for him, even though like any other human, that's something that he psychologically needs. In the same moment, Harry has been answered and the two of them have connected, and we know that connection is the force that empowers successful Occlumency.

And boy, these two... I guess you don't have to like each other to strengthen each other.

JC: Yeah. I think that's what's so fascinating about the Harry/Snape relationship as the books go on: by the end, certainly, Harry has great respect for Snape and everything that he did, but you can start to see it growing and it's begrudging. He doesn't want to have respect for Snape until the very end, when it just all happens.

Lorrie: And you can respect a person without having an ounce of actual liking for them...

JC: Definitely. Most definitely.

Lorrie: Which is the point. That is the point of this character. Although I very much sympathize with the fanfic impulse to soften Snape and make him a better, kinder person or somebody who changes, what you gain by keeping him an absolute bastard until his dying moment is this phenomenon of how to do good in the world or be honest, even without becoming a kinder person. Even if it kills you... Would being nice actually kill Snape? Yeah, actually, it would, but there's still a way. With this new connection where somebody has seen Snape (he has been seen) and somebody has answered Harry and a grown-up has actually stepped up and taken a tiny bit of burden off of Harry, now Harry has the emotional stability to hold on to himself in the moment and remain present once Snape attacks him with Legilimency and Snape has felt what it's like to be seen. There's that temptation that's now greater in Snape. 'Wow, it feels really good to be seen. Now, Harry has what it takes to cast *Protego* against Snape's

Legilimency attack, and this is the Shield Charm that we covered in the previous chapter and episode: the charm that causes a spell to rebound onto the attacker so they know how the spell would have made their intended victim feel.

JC: And it's interesting, too, that last time you talked about how the spell was described as being something that would deflect minor jinxes, and then here we see Harry using it to cause to rebound something that is much bigger than a minor jinx. You mentioned last time that he would go on to use *Protego* in ways that were very powerful, and this is my first instance of it that I saw and was like, 'Ooh, that's what we were talking about in the last episode. You could cast *Protego* and make Legilimens backfire on you? Oh, wow!'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: That's impressive.

Lorrie: Yeah, on a man who is famous for being able to block out even Voldemort, but Harry Potter is a Legilimens where Snape is concerned. This is dangerous for Snape; part of it is because Harry's powerful, but part of it is because Snape wants Harry to see him. It feels good to be appreciated, so yeah, they're connected. Oh, Harry reads Snape's memories and the same thing to Snape, where he just kind of calls forth some traumatic moments from his past.

JC: Childhood trauma.

Lorrie: This is the portrait of the moment that a teenager has just grown up enough to recognize that an authority figure in their life is human, so he's just grown up here. The memories themselves are devastating in how vulnerable and relatable they are. The one memory of domestic conflict that Harry sees, where Snape the child is enduring and crying through an adult argument that appears to be his parents... That's the one thing about Snape's background that really sets the stage for a lot of fandom understanding of him as coming from a house of domestic violence and conflict. To me, what that explained a lot of was the vengeful mindset that he developed from childhood as a response, witnessing this kind of real tumult and wishing that he had the power to make it stop. Oh, the memory of Snape being incredibly lonely and being ridiculed as a teen for being sexually awkward... These are things -- If I were Snape and a teenager saw these things, I would be feeling quite defensive at this point. These are not enjoyable memories to have to relive, especially not snotty-faced Harry Potter. At that moment, Snape yells, "ENOUGH!" He does have enough mastery over these terrible feelings to call them to a halt, unlike Voldemort the night before, who wasn't able to stop Harry from seeing how upset he was with his Death Eaters; also, unlike Voldemort when the Killing Curse on baby Harry rebounded on him and he had no idea what the heck was happening, but Snape does know enough about what's happening to be able to call it to

a halt. He is still white and shaking, so it wasn't easy, and this is the point at which I'm pretty sure as a reader that he's going to kill Harry.

JC: That's interesting, because I wrote a note for myself here that says "Snape seems impressed despite himself." I don't have the text open in front of me, so I'm not sure what I'm referring to there, but right after that, Harry sees Snape's memories and Snape casts him out of his mind. Then I wrote, "Snape seems impressed despite himself."

Lorrie: So yeah, what I have here: I'm here as a reader waiting to see what terrible punishment Snape is going to put on Harry for seeing these really vulnerable memories, and he doesn't do anything like that at all. He praises Harry, which shocks me: he says, "Well, Potter... that was certainly an improvement..." What the heck?! There is no way to spin that; that was a compliment. That was a teaching compliment that is all about the progress that the student has demonstrated. There's no other way to interpret that, right?

JC: Right, right. Yeah.

Lorrie: Then Snape takes care of himself. He checks the Pensieve, and then he makes note of Harry's resourcefulness. "I don't remember telling you to use a Shield Charm... but there's no doubt that it was effective..." What the heck? It's another compliment!

JC: "I didn't teach you that."

Lorrie: Right.

JC: "I didn't even mention that it was an option."

Lorrie: Right, and look, it worked. Harry is getting credit right now for his unusual aptitude at Defense Against the Dark Arts and we know (although Snape doesn't) that Harry has just practiced this with the D.A. (so we see the direct results of his D.A. practice and how he's putting it to use), and this is Snape's response to Harry seeing these really embarrassing memories. There's no repercussion on Harry for what he's seen at all; meanwhile, Harry is disarmed by this: "...it was unnerving to think that the crying little boy who had watched his parents shouting was actually standing in front of him with such loathing in his eyes...." Just the enormity of what that encompasses... Harry's understanding is expanding so vastly in this one moment, and he's feeling empathy for him, for this nemesis? A lot is happening inside their heads. There Harry's standing, feeling empathy for Snape, and then Snape goes, "Let's try again, shall we?" Oh, God... Harry is convinced that Snape is about to punish him; he's wrong about that. Usually, when Harry's convinced like this, he's right; this time, he's wrong. What Snape actually has to do is step in really fast right here and seize this moment because Harry has successfully Occluded and Snape can't talk about that. What he can do is try to build upon this through repetition. He can't do anything that will make it look like he's

teaching Harry anything; it has to come from Harry organically. He can't mention the actual instructions in any way that Voldemort can detect, so he has to move really quickly right now. He Legilimises Harry: "He was hurtling along the corridor toward the Department of Mysteries; ... he was moving so fast he was going to collide with it..." Snape is absolutely correct to be super cautious because Voldemort is definitely watching, and Voldemort is being such a mess here. He's making Harry stumble; this is really kind of crude. Voldemort is overexcited. He has watched this... He's been watching Harry read Snape's mind. He's so thrilled. He thinks this is perfect. His dreams are coming true: Snape is right there to help Voldemort come in and control Harry so he can't contain himself, and we see the somatic effects on poor Harry. He's being manipulated mentally, so hard that he's panting and feverish. It takes such a toll, and instead of joining in the jubilation with Voldemort, Snape is going to have to get himself out of trouble for this later. He yells, "POTTER! Explain yourself! You are not working hard enough!" He is furious. I don't know how he's going to explain that to Voldemort later; he's going to have to. Snape is angrier than when Harry saw Snape's own memories. This is something where I know there are a lot of Snape-hating readers who don't want to think that perhaps Snape is teaching Occlumency in good faith, but what do you do? What else do you do with the evidence that Snape is angrier at this than he was about his own subconscious memories? He is not defensive on his own account. Snape, the most defensive man ever, doesn't even care that James Potter's kid has seen these embarrassing past memories because this isn't personal. None of this is expected, and then Snape's natural charm reasserts itself. When he's frightened, he gets really nasty and he says, "You are lazy and sloppy, Potter!" Yeah. Thanks, Snape. That's when Harry asks the question: "'Why do you call Voldemort the Dark Lord? I've only ever heard Death Eaters call him that --' Snape opened his mouth in a snarl." That's such a brilliantly written moment, I'm so excited to read what happens next: "And a woman screamed from somewhere outside the room." That's the point where, when I've done presentations, I've said to people, "This author... she's good, isn't she?" I really wanted to know what Snape was going to say in response. Well, Harry and Snape are being absolutely real with each other, and this is it. We have been taken right up to the edge of what is safe for Harry to know and how much this author intends to reveal of her mystery at this point, and how authoritatively she indicates, 'Nope, this is as far as you get.' This is when a scream interrupts this plotline. She's, this author, very much in control of this story. I'm very impressed. What do you think? That's my roller-coaster read of this passage. What did it do to you?

JC: We're hitting the point where it's hard and you just flip the pages, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The screaming is very intriguing, so I quickly moved on. Yeah, I didn't think too hard about what I thought Snape was going to say next because it was like, 'Why is someone screaming? What's happening?'

Lorrie: 'Oh, my God!' Yeah.

JC: 'Why is there screaming in the school?' It's not unusual, but yeah, that usually means something. I'd already, honestly, moved on to the next thing at this point.

Lorrie: Tell us what you found when you traced the source of that scream.

JC: Ah. They go, I guess, up into the... I'm imagining that they're in the big entryway outside the Great Hall, and it turns out that Trelawney has been fired and Umbridge is in the process of having her thrown out. Her luggage is there and she's sitting on her suitcases and sobbing and saying, "Hogwarts is my home. I've been here for sixteen years." The students are upset and the teachers are upset... Everyone is kind of paralyzed until Dumbledore comes in and shows that he's been thinking several steps ahead.

Lorrie: Yeah!

JC: Also, I love the fact that when Dumbledore comes in, he knows exactly what the law says he can do/cannot do and he cites all of that law right to Umbridge. He knows how to talk to her and how to get around her, so that's really satisfying. I think I even talked about that a little bit in the previous episode, about the ways that my colleagues and I are already thinking through, 'Okay, here's what the law says. How do we get around it?' so I love that Dumbledore's doing that here. It's very satisfying.

Lorrie: This is unfortunately so incredibly topical.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: The way that Umbridge is doing this right now is because she has only just obtained an executive order from the Minister of Magic that she can evict Trelawney, and Dumbledore stops her legally. At this point, Dumbledore's authority still holds, like when there's a judge that can reverse an executive order for now. You don't know if that's going to still hold tomorrow, but for now it holds, and we see "Harry was revolted to see the enjoyment stretching her toad-like face." Umbridge is so enjoying the humiliation that she's putting on Trelawney and that she's getting to do this in a really showy way in front of everybody, and that theater and how it's being powered by this desire to punish is so very topical with who is being employed, who's showing up to get jobs with ICE. It was rough to see that, to read that. We do have the whole school mobilizing to try to prevent what Umbridge is doing as much as possible; we do have Sprout and McGonagall and Flitwick moving automatically to protect Trelawney, and

that's as close as we get Harry and Snape's mutual understanding to hit before the scream stops that plotline for this volume.

JC: I really like this reminder that Dumbledore is very much still part of everything that's happening. From Harry's perspective, we haven't seen him. We know he's doing stuff -- we don't know what he's doing -- and he comes in here at the end and he's clearly thought through everything. He knew that Umbridge was... He had a plan. He knew what he would do when Umbridge fired someone and he knew it would be either Hagrid or Trelawney, and he had a plan and he had already worked everything out. There's this idea that the moment he heard it was about to happen, he went and got Firenze, brought him back and was like, "Here, I've got your new... because I do still get to choose the teachers." Just all of that... Umbridge, there's nothing she can say because he is quoting the law at her, and she's very law-and-order-focused.

Lorrie: That's also a tiny reminder from the Snape perspective that she can only appoint a teacher if the Headmaster has failed to find a suitable teacher. 'She's here because whatever Snape is, he's not worthy of the Defense Against the Dark Arts position. Umbridge is better,' or so they want everyone to think.

JC: So they want everyone to believe. I also really think it's interesting here that Umbridge's anger seems to be about her authority not being ultimate, or someone slipping through the rules here. I think the first time I read this, I really thought that Umbridge was working for Voldemort; through our conversations and on the second read, I don't think that. I think that she's working for the Ministry. I don't know what she believes about Voldemort, but I think that she wasn't trying to turn out Trelawney so that Voldemort could grab her. That was the way I read it the first time, and this time I think that she's just a convenient pawn here. She happens to be doing the work that would benefit Voldemort, but I think she's trying to get rid of the teachers that she sees... I think she's really genuinely trying to get rid of the bad teachers here. 'This teacher is obviously doing a terrible job of this, and my job is to come in here for the Ministry and clean up this school and to make it better.' I think she's genuinely trying to do that in a terrible way, so that made me read the scene differently than I had read in the past.

Lorrie: Yeah, she's definitely not trying to get rid of somebody to further Voldemort because she doesn't respect Trelawney enough to have any inkling that Trelawney has any connection to the fight against Voldemort. Trelawney herself has no inkling...

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: But it's just that if she wanted to see some heads roll, she was going to go for the most vulnerable. Wow... Trelawney or Hagrid? Pick one.

JC: And between those two, Trelawney seemed like the easier target, I can see.

Lorrie: But yeah, the sense of humiliation as a bystander... Whether you like this teacher or not, as a student watching this kind of destruction of somebody's dignity, that's very painful.

JC: Yeah, and the fact that Dumbledore comes in and says, "No, she's still going to remain in Hogwarts because she doesn't have to be a teacher to be here. I can offer shelter to her, and there's nothing that says -- You can't say that I can't, and I've already found a replacement, a replacement that you cannot possibly have a problem with.' Yeah. He picked the perfect replacement, with the exception that this is not a human being that requires a whole other level of government to come in and say, "Hogwarts professors have to be one hundred percent human," which I don't remember if we head there or not. Probably, but this shows how much he's thinking about the strategy, too, and he had a plan in place, and it made me wonder: what is the plan for Hagrid? When it's Hagrid's turn, what is his plan?

Lorrie: The other thing, too: Dumbledore knows that he can only use these solutions once, just like Harry can only give an interview to the *Quibbler* once. "From now on, you can't give interviews." Okay.

JC: The loophole will be closed. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Dumbledore can do this once, but yeah, the momentum is definitely on Umbridge's side, so you have to be strategic with when you're going to pull this. But yeah, they don't know... Umbridge doesn't know that Dumbledore is extra motivated here, because unbeknownst to Trelawney, she's not safe anywhere but Hogwarts and Dumbledore needs to protect that. That desire to protect is the extra kick that overrides other concerns. He will find a way to make sure that Trelawney doesn't leave Hogwarts.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That was... eventful.

JC: And it was very hard to stop myself from turning the page. I was like, 'UGH!' It was so hard. I was like, 'Nope, nope, nope, nope. Going to make myself wait. We're going to record first, and then I get to read the next one.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the next chapter will also be eventful. It's called The Centaur and the Sneak. Yeah. Ugh, love this volume!

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