

Transcript

Episode 5.32

Book 5, Chapter 32: Out of the Fire

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 Thirty-Two: Out of the Fire.

Lorrie: Out of the Fire. Harry believes his vision of Voldemort torturing Sirius. Hermione tells Harry to Floo Grimmauld Place from Umbridge's office to check. Kreacher tells Harry Sirius is gone. Umbridge catches Harry and is about to *Crucio* him when Hermione comes up with a plan. Oooh... Out of the Fire, here we are.

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: What do you think of this chapter and where we are in the story?

JC: Oh, wow... It's so interesting to read this again, because I think this was the point, obviously, where I was just flying through and I didn't slow down for the details. The details... There are a lot of little details that stood out to me a lot more this time. Yeah. Oh, my God, there's so much happening here, especially at the beginning. It was kind of a gut punch when Harry goes to the hospital wing looking for McGonagall, because he's like, 'Who is the grown-up I can tell?'

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: And they're all gone. All the grown-ups that he really trusts, that he knows are going to take care of him and he knows are going to believe him, are gone.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That is like, 'Oh, my God, that's right.' Of course, now he's going to do something stupid because he will realize later that Snape is still there, but he doesn't trust Snape, so not completely. Well, maybe he does a little bit. I don't know. We'll get there, but then when he's in the hospital talking to Madam Pomfrey, Madam Pomfrey says, "I would resign in protest, but I can't abandon the students," and this would not have hit me in the same way previously.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I hear teachers say that all the time. "I hate this. I hate that I have to do this in my job, I hate that the government wants me to put up the Ten Commandments or whatever. I hate that I can't call kids by their chosen name. I hate that I can't ask them how they're feeling or express concern over their mental health. I hate it and I would quit in protest, but then who is going to take care of these kids? They still need someone." That idea of, "At least I know I'm here and I am going to care about them, and I'm going to find a way to get around what I can and still care about these kids." I was like, 'Oh, my God, Madam Pomfrey, I know...'

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I know so many teachers like that right now.

Lorrie: And yet, there are also so many who say, "I know that's what the world needs, and I'm going to suffer and feel selfish, but I have to get out," and that's something that I feel like this story is showing so clearly: when you're in this kind of situation and then you eventually get to the point where you have to get out for some reason, it's really like 49-51. You don't make the decision and then feel clean about it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: You have to think about it constantly, and if you save yourself, the guilt... There are few things a human can feel ashamed about as much as the fear that they're being selfish, which sometimes just means, 'Yeah, you're allowed to want to survive,' but that's always the balance here. I think this is really showing how stressful that is (to be making that decision all the time), and how fortunate Madam Pomfrey is in feeling really secure in her decision at this moment.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "No, I definitely know my place is here." That's a mercy to know that you don't have any problem choosing that, but yeah. We're going to find out between now and the end of the series what it takes for somebody to choose to leave, and that selfishness and survival... That's not the thing that humans use to make that decision.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: But if there's somebody that you need to protect, that tips the balance so that if you leave, it'll protect them somehow. Does that mean that you're choosing that person over all the others you're abandoning? Yes, it does, but if it's only yourself, then no, humans don't decide based on that. Yeah. The last chapter ended with Harry yelling because he has that vision of Voldemort torturing Sirius, and that results in another one of the Potter emergency runs through Hogwarts, the ones where you always imagine a student getting from one class to another. "Oh, there goes Harry Potter. Something's happening. I have no idea what it is, but it's really important."

JC: The screaming and the... yeah.

Lorrie: And he's shoving people out of his way.

JC: Yeah. Like from *Puffs* the musical, where you're just on the sidelines...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Watching all this happen. Yeah.

Lorrie: "Oof! Who just shoved me into the wall? Oh, it's Harry Potter. There he goes."

JC: "Oh, wonder what's going on."

Lorrie: And he can run really fast, you know. He is, from this point on, absolutely triggered. Voldemort... that's what he's been working toward. That's what Dumbledore has been afraid Voldemort would work toward ever since they all got a beautiful demonstration of what happens to Harry when somebody he cares about is in mortal danger. They saw how Harry responded when Arthur Weasley was bitten. Voldemort correctly gambled that this is just a process you can set in motion in Harry Potter, and it will follow that template every time. Voldemort is quite correct, because he's the one who made Harry Potter that way; he's the one who took Harry, a one-year-old, and then attacked Harry's parents and then Harry, creating a trauma that would set Harry's self. Voldemort correctly believes he knows how this kid is wired; he wired this kid. He will find out very, very late at the end of the seventh book that there's something even deeper than that, but Voldemort doesn't have anything deeper than that. Harry had love; Harry was wired by love before Voldemort ever traumatized him. Voldemort was not born into that at all; he was only born into the trauma. That's something about how Harry is wired deep down that Voldemort can't understand; he can't relate to it at all in a way that predates any consciousness from him. But yeah, the triggering -- the trauma that Voldemort implanted in Harry -- goes really deep down, and it actually made me think of Snape being triggered in *Prisoner of Azkaban*. As soon as Snape thinks that Sirius and Lupin are colluding to get Harry out of the castle and then to transform Lupin into a werewolf and kill Harry, he's triggered. He can't process any evidence to the

contrary; he remembers when nobody believed him and how urgent it is, and he just keeps going on that narrative. That's what's happening to Harry right now.

JC: Yeah, absolutely. There's a moment when he realizes the adults are gone and he's thinking, 'What do I do? What do I do?' Then it says, "*Ron and Hermione*, said a voice in his head," and I had a moment of, 'I don't trust any voices in Harry's head right now,' and I'm still trying to decide, 'What was that?' I can't imagine that Voldemort would say, "Run to your friends, Harry," but maybe that was Voldemort. I'm not sure who said that, if that was really Harry's subconscious or if it was something else.

Lorrie: I trust it.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: I think it's him, because this is the culmination of the lesson that he learned starting from the end of the first book. Any one of those children could not have gotten through the maze at the end, but the three of them together could. Yes, there will be a time when there are no grown-ups or when having grown-ups around isn't any more helpful than your doing it yourself. Knowing that you can depend on these people that you've practiced with -- they're actually quite skillful by this time -- no matter how wrong they might be, they'll be less wrong than Harry doing it by himself.

JC: Okay, so we're assuming that this is not a bad voice; this is a good voice. It's good that Harry has hit a point where his instinct is to go get support first and not to just rush off and do things, because there was a time when he would have just said, 'I'm going to protect other people by going and just doing it by myself.' Now, he's like, 'No, I need help,' and he knows who to turn to. That's a really great bit of character development, but also, that's a good human skill, too. 'Okay, don't do this by yourself. Who do you need to run through these ideas with? Who do you need to talk to before you make an impulsive decision to do something that could be really dangerous?'

Lorrie: Also, there will come a point in the near future of this story when he's going to again think, 'No, I can't get them involved because the risks are so high,' and then they and Dumbledore are going to have to break him down and say, "Uh, we understand why you would think that, but you have to override that."

JC: Oh, yeah. The graph is not a line.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There are dips... yeah.

Lorrie: As the stakes grow higher, he has to readjust again and again.

JC: Which makes sense, yeah.

Lorrie: He's not in a bad position here, because if all the grown-ups are gone, they are fifteen and sixteen; they're not completely unqualified for this. They are, by this point, quite skillful. Certainly, we've already seen that there are ways in which they are more than equals to Umbridge. When he goes, "*Ron and Hermione*," and finds them, the first thing Hermione tries to do is she tries to fact-check him, which is exactly what he needs, even if he can't assimilate that information. She's trying to say, "Why would Voldemort need Sirius to get the weapon?"

JC: "And it's the middle of the workday. Who didn't see them going in?" She's so logical here, and the funny thing is that I remember reading this. I do have a memory... I really was in Harry's head and I really believed that Sirius was in trouble, and Hermione was just annoying me on this first read.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Now, it's like, 'Oh, God.' She's trying so hard to be logical, and he can't even hear it because his brain is... He's already in the hindbrain, whatever, lizard-brain activated...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Cannot listen to reason and all that.

Lorrie: Yeah. She's just being obstructivist at this point, from his point of view.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The narrative... He's not in a brain space that can be affected by logic. That's what the triggering of a trauma pattern is going to look like, which is astonishing to me that Hermione is so amazing that at some point she recognizes that and gives up.

JC: Right. Yeah, she understands that and then makes a second plan for how to handle it. One of the things that I do as a teacher educator... I'm not a trainer and I'm not an expert in trauma-informed teaching practices, but it's something that I have some familiarity with. I talked with my students about when you have a child who reacts this way, you can't reason with them. When you start to get the sense that reasoning is not making a dent, here's what you do.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: There's steps that you can take to de-escalate and to get them to a place where they can calm down and think more clearly, and Hermione does those things here. It's like, 'How do you respond to someone who's been triggered in this way?' She does the things. It's like, 'Wow, Hermione!'

Lorrie: She's so amazing!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Here we have the single mention of a really key concept in this story. She names it.

JC: Yes!

Lorrie: "Don't you think you've got a bit of a -- a -- *saving-people-thing?*"

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: The way that's such an inelegant way to describe Harry's trauma response is perfect, because yes, at some level it's no more sophisticated than that. This is the thing that Voldemort knows about Harry because he created it, and Harry is so relatably insulted.

JC: Capslock Harry appears at that point.

Lorrie: Yes! The Return of Capslock Harry! This reminded me of yet another hairy story from my extended family that goes back to Korean trauma and the Korean War. This happened, I guess, about a year ago? Yeah, in the past year. My relative -- we'll call him my uncle. Korean kinship words are much more complex than that, but we'll call him my uncle. In his mid to late 80s, he was senile and he would rave. He would have flashbacks from his sickbed, and his wife and my cousin (his daughter) were finding things out about his past that they had never known. They kind of knew a little of this, but boy, finding out this way was just awful. Specifically, he was imprinted on the moment when he and two of his brothers were children; their only way to survive... They had to cross a river, but it had to be at night. This was the 1950s during a war, so it's not like there were electric lights. They had to cross at night because that was their best chance of not getting seen; it was a river -- it was huge -- and they were three boys. I don't think he was a small child, but he might not have been a teen yet, and it was cold and they did it. Obviously, for him to have survived into his 80s, they managed (he and his brothers) to cross the river, but it's not something he talked about. Then there he was with Alzheimer's on his sickbed and he would be screaming, and that was the story that came out.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: His poor mid-80s wife (who had never known this) and his daughter (who's in her 50s) learned this about what kind of torment had been in him. Yeah. When he was more in control of his faculties, he was able to contextualize that and not make that his whole personality or anything, but yeah, that's a level of encoding in a human psyche that trauma hits. It's in a different space than your logical self, but yeah, it's imprinting. You can't get rid of it. You can work with it, but you can't get rid of it, and that was difficult. That's the thing that Voldemort implanted in Harry; he knows how to trigger, and now he's just monitoring it.

JC: Yeah, because Harry's scar is kind of a low-grade burn throughout all this, right?

Lorrie: Yeah, that's just Voldemort having it monitored. We know that when Voldemort is for real feeling intense emotion so that it leaks through, Harry experiences it as up and down. His scar will really hurt and then he'll see something that Voldemort surely did not want anyone to oversee, and then it'll subside, but it's consistent. Voldemort's just got the CCTV on, watching.

JC: Oh, my God, yeah. Kicked back, watching the monitor.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's really well written, I think. Harry, when he's being capslocky again, yells at Hermione: "What d'you think all the Occlumency was for, why d'you think Dumbledore wanted me prevented from seeing these things? Because they're REAL, Hermione --" I really like how that is completely the wrong conclusion, and yet completely understandable why Harry would think that after a year of not hearing from Dumbledore.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Yeah, no, Harry, that's not it,' but there's no way to disprove it to him. Oh... Here's Harry with this process going on that he can't stop (and apparently nobody can), and Ginny and Luna hear all the yelling and wander in.

JC: The way that Ginny is portrayed in this volume... I love her.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She's just like... He yells at her, and she just kind of looks at him like, "No, I'm not taking that shit from you." Harry doesn't intimidate her, his fame doesn't intimidate her, and she seems like she's really got her head very squarely on her shoulders, I guess. I don't know, I really love Ginny.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is how the author builds up their coming romance as an equal to him. I guess the Ginny character is the opposite of someone who was groomed to be Harry's wife. It could be gross -- she grew up with him, she idolized him -- No. She went away and got strong like this on her own. He didn't make her.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I also love how Luna says, "When you say 'Sirius', do you mean Stubby Boardman?" Stubby Boardman? Oh, yeah, that's a good reminder to me as a reader. 'Right, Sirius is still a fugitive.' Nobody in most of the wizarding world understands who Sirius is. Oh, yeah, good reminder. When Ron and Hermione and Ginny all pitch in to help come up with a plan, they're good at this.

JC: They're very good, yeah. It's impressive, actually. I love that Ron is the one who's like, "Okay, I'm going to go lie to Umbridge," and I thought, 'Has he ever directly been in trouble with Umbridge? I don't think he has.' He's in a better position than Hermione, being a pure-blood wizard, so he's the best one to go do that...

Lorrie: He is, yes.

JC: Using his privilege in a good way.

Lorrie: Yeah. That's chivalry.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I think that was very interesting, but he's just like, "Yeah, going to do it," but underneath all of this, though -- this whole thing when they're making a plan about how they're going to communicate with Sirius (they have to go to the office, they have to fire-call him, it's super risky, they're making this big plan), and then underneath all that is the present that Sirius gave Harry. Ugh... Yeah.

Lorrie: Ouch. So sad.

JC: He uses the knife, but...

Lorrie: And the knife works!

JC: Yeah, the knife helps, but yeah. Oh, my God.

Lorrie: And that's such a different experience reading for the first time versus rereading, because the first time we read this, we don't know what that present was.

JC: Right. We've even forgotten about its existence, perhaps.

Lorrie: Yeah. Rereading it, the waste of it all is so tragic. It actively hurts. To me, that's a strong argument for the value of rereading this series.

JC: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Lorrie: And it's a good way for humans to have mercy on ourselves. If we think, 'I can't believe I had missed that... I made such the wrong decision. If I could only go back... If I knew then what I know now, then I could have prevented that.' No, you can't, though. Have mercy on your past self. You can't.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I do love -- Harry's still yelling, and when Hermione goes against all of her internal evidence and says, "Here, I'll go with you to Umbridge's office..." Even through his anger and impatience, Harry recognized Hermione's offer as a sign of solidarity and loyalty; he stops in the middle of shouting at her to say, "I... okay, thanks." That's touching.

JC: Yeah. It's so interesting, because he thinks this is a waste of time because he knows that Hermione just needs him to verify that Sirius isn't there. She's going to be verified and Hermione's like, "We're going to call him and he's going to be there, and Harry's going to see that everything is fine." They both have completely opposite... They know that the other person is... Yeah.

Lorrie: "Okay, thanks."

JC: Oh, Ginny's mention of the Garroting Gas...

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Oh, my God! When I read that, I was like, 'Wait, what?'

Lorrie: I know.

JC: "Oh, yeah, Fred and George were planning on releasing this," and she's so good at lying, too; that's the other thing I love about her. When she's monitoring the hall and saying, "Well, go down the hall if you want. We'll have your dead body as proof." This is incredibly violent. This is a weapon of mass destruction.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: Wow... Damn, Fred and George. Man...

Lorrie: They sneak into Umbridge's office -- Sirius's knife works. Harry gets Kreacher, and as the reader sees with a sinking heart, Kreacher looks oddly triumphant and his hands are in bandages. Oh, no... He says, "Sirius isn't home. Master will not come back from the Department of Mysteries," which is not a lie. Then we get something that's even worse than a Snape jump-scare.

JC: I can't remember if we learned this earlier in the book or if we learned this later in the book -- no, it's much later in the book -- that when Kreacher disappeared, he went to the Malfoys or something.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: All of the machinations that have been happening behind the scenes to get Harry to this moment include Kreacher.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Oh, man... Kreacher knows what this is about, and is just gleefully like, "Yeah, we're going to get him."

Lorrie: Yeah, excited.

JC: It's really -- Yeah. The depiction of Kreacher is the complete opposite of Dobby in so many ways. It's so interesting... Dobby's such a good guy, I guess, in comparison and is always trying to help, even if he doesn't help in ways that are really productive, but Kreacher is evil, almost.

Lorrie: He's malevolent, yeah.

JC: Yeah, he's malevolent. That's a good word for it. Oh, man, yeah... It's just really interesting to watch, and you're right. It's with a sinking feeling that you read that, and you're like, 'Oh, no,' especially when you know how it turns out on a second read. It's like, 'Oh, Kreacher...' and Harry doesn't -- there's no time to do anything other than that, because then Harry gets yanked out of the fire.

Lorrie: Yeah. Umbridge grabs him by the hair, and then she drags his head backwards as if she's going to slit his throat. This is terrifying. She's got her Inquisitorial Squad with her (who were all Slytherins); they're gloating, and Draco especially is gloating. Draco gets to disarm Harry -- he gets to take Harry's wand -- and the other Slytherins have Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Luna, and Neville. The amount of gloating and sadism that's swelling in this room... There's such a feeling of dread and momentum. Oh, this is a moment of ascendancy for this kind of sadism.

JC: And the whole thing... Okay, you think about where these kids came from, right? It was bullying and name-calling and hexing each other with pranks that were really annoying and not great but not life-threatening, and it's come to this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's something about this scene that took me back to January 6th.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The people who were watching that and gloating are the people who were calling for people to be killed. "Hang the vice president!" It's that kind of feeling of the Slytherins in the room; they're seeing this happening, and they're all egging it on. They're like, "What's going to happen? Oh, she's going to *Crucio* him? Yeah!"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's no breaks there. Oh, man.

Lorrie: Yeah. The desecration is feeding into a gloating. Umbridge asks if Harry has been trying to contact Dumbledore, Hagrid or McGonagall. She's taunting him by naming the people that she has chased out. As I was preparing for this recording, there was news that the Northwestern University president has been forced to resign by this administration, and that's been happening at a few colleges. That happened at UVA, and it was so topical.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Then there's something that is crude, obvious, and so effective: the author writes the abuser's way of thinking into this chapter, where Umbridge says more than once, "I have no alternative but to force you."

JC: "You've left me no choice."

Lorrie: "Whatever bad thing I'm about to do to you, you know you made this happen, right?"

JC: "It's your fault." Yeah.

Lorrie: That's so classic, and just because we know it's classic doesn't make it any less chilling.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Ugh... She sends Draco for Snape.

JC: And then Harry -- Okay, I love this, and I was really looking forward to your interpretation of this whole thing. I really want to know what you think, but that moment when Harry goes *gasps* 'Snape is in the Order!' He forgot that Snape is an adult who could help in this situation, and then his mind is spinning. 'How am I going to communicate this to him?' Oh...

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, it's profoundly compromised, isn't it? This is a masterpiece of writing. Is he an adult? Well, he hasn't always done so well on that metric. Is he really in the Order? Maybe. Does he want to help Harry? Historically, no.

JC: But it's interesting that no matter what Harry feels about Snape, Harry knows that Dumbledore trusts Snape and Harry has internalized that.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: In this moment of need, he has to trust that Snape...

Lorrie: He has to try it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It all comes down to this feeling: 'Will this hold? Will Dumbledore's trust in Snape turn out to be justified? Is their alliance going to hold? What can you depend on?' You can't depend on Snape's goodwill toward Harry. You can't depend on his internal sense of honor and maturity.

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: Uh...

JC: It's like, 'Yeah, what side are you really on?'

Lorrie: It's such a gamble, yeah. Even if he does help Harry, is that going to put any of your doubts to rest? Not necessarily, but this does mean that it's not completely barren of hope as Harry thought. Oh, yeah, no, there's still somebody he has to work with.

JC: There's still one grown-up here.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: Kind of...

Hosts: Nominally.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: The other thing is when Snape walks in... You know that one GIF of the guy walking in with the pizza and the room is on fire?

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: That's what I think of Snape walking into this room, and I would love to have a Snape POV. What is he thinking when he walks in with the pizza and goes, 'Holy shit, what's happening?!'

Lorrie: This is the classic Snape tell: you know that his mind is racing when he acts like he doesn't care at all. You know that he's noticed Hermione when he completely ignores her. Snape walks in... He's "looking around at all the pairs of struggling students with an expression of complete indifference." When he looks indifferent, you know he's going, "Hmm," clocking everything that's happening. Meanwhile, Harry is doing the exact same thing: Harry "kept his face deliberately smooth and blank..." This is a Harry who actually has learned a lot about Occlumency despite the travails, because in previous volumes we've seen Lucius Malfoy do this (he did this at the end of *Chamber of Secrets*) and we see Lupin do this in *Prisoner of Azkaban*: when you know you're in trouble, suddenly your face is completely opaque. Harry's doing this, and Snape matches him with that expression of complete indifference. Already, we the reader see they are experienced. Harry has learned some things, and we know that this well-written character, Snape, is in a situation where he cannot give clues to Harry about what he's really thinking. Not right in front of Umbridge... Yeah, he manages to get quite a lot of information out.

JC: One of the things I love about this scene is that Snape's utter disdain for Umbridge is on display.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: That's fun to read. That's fun. I think one of the things that I come away from the scene with is that Umbridge doesn't really know a lot of things that are going on. There's

stuff happening and there's stuff that she thinks is happening (which is not happening), and then there's stuff that's really happening that she has no clue about, so she's just grasping at straws here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The fact that Snape is able to come in and cut her down a few notches with a few words and disdainful looks is really amazing. In front of all these kids, right? He has no fucks to give. It's amazing.

Lorrie: Yeah, and no matter what side he's on, one thing that is true of every side he's on is that he has no fear expressing that Umbridge is the lowliest of the low in his opinion.

JC: Yes. That's amazing.

Lorrie: He doesn't want his Slytherins to feel any more comfortable with her than he wants Harry and his friends. The first thing he says... When she demands more Veritaserum, he says, "You took my last bottle to interrogate Potter." He did not need to give that information to all those students.

JC: Exactly. I love that, and then criticize the way... "I told you to only use three drops. You should still have plenty of it left," and she's like...

Lorrie: "Uh, uh, uh..." Yeah. He's exposing her as unsafe, sadistic, incompetent.

JC: Incompetent. Right.

Lorrie: Also, on a different level (which I think you probably felt somewhat as a teacher), he is showing that one of her offenses is how much she disrespects the work he does.

JC: Oooh... Yeah, that is true.

Lorrie: "Yeah, I brew Veritaserum. It takes a month; no one else can do it. You don't just come in, take a whole bottle, drown a kid with it, and then say 'I need more' like yelling is going to make it happen."

JC: Yeah, that's true. The fact that she revealed to him her ignorance of his subject...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then demands that -- We were talking before this call about the eternal fact that state legislatures make laws about education and the people who are putting forth these laws don't know what they're talking about, and how frustrating it is for teachers and school people to have to deal with the fact that these people don't know. It's like, 'Wow, you want me to do all these things, and you don't know the first thing about what my job

is like.' It's very much that same kind of feeling for me. 'You don't even know what it takes to brew this potion, and you're demanding I go make some right now? What?!'

Lorrie: Yes, and yelling louder or threatening punishment isn't going to make Veritaserum brew itself any faster...

JC: Nope.

Lorrie: Believe it or not.

JC: Yeah. Also, I wonder if it's even true that he doesn't have any more.

Lorrie: We find out later that there are two different layers of safety built into this.

JC: Ah, okay.

Lorrie: I may as well go and tell you.

JC: Sure.

Lorrie: No, of course he has more Veritaserum, and what he gave her was fake anyway.

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

Lorrie: There are several points in this volume where there's more than one layer of safety. If she doesn't know that it takes a month to make it, then she's not going to know the difference between Veritaserum and water.

JC: Yeah, okay.

Lorrie: But he is going to take this opportunity to reveal just how crass she is in front of students who need to be warned against her (without threatening his own personal stores of Veritaserum in the least) and just watch her flail, knowing that he has tapped into her personal guilt that yes, she did get warned -- "Don't waste the stuff" -- and only an actual horrible idiot would have poured the whole thing in. Getting caught out like that... You can stop people from scheming if you can catch them on their own flaws like that. Sometimes, that's the way to get people: "No, you know you don't know what you're doing." She could have pushed further, but she didn't because he caught her. Then she says, "I have just found Potter using my fire to communicate with a person or persons unknown!" Snape shows "his first faint sign of interest." That's his cue to turn and make eye contact with Harry. Ugh... How did this come across to you when he does that, when they make eye contact?

JC: Oh, and then Harry is trying really hard to convey what's happening. Harry's like, "Read my mind. Come on, read my mind. Read my mind!" It's really interesting. The fact that this is even an avenue of potential communication and that Harry trusts that if

Snape just sees what's happening, Snape will take some action... Oh, there's just a lot of interesting stuff happening there.

Lorrie: I am agnostic on Harry and Snape as a romantic pairing. I can completely see why Snarry shippers ship it; this is a major Snarry moment.

JC: Is it? Wow.

Lorrie: Well...

JC: That makes sense, but okay. Yeah. Also, that's a NoTP for me. I don't go there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: No offense to people who do, but no, thank you.

Lorrie: No, yeah. This shows that they know how to do this; in fact, their natural state is to be able to Legilimise each other. It has to be artificially interrupted. Snape has to throw Harry out of his office before they start reading each other's minds more and then laying more truth open to Voldemort; Snape has to increase the personal hostility between them so that that negative feeling can interfere with their ability to understand each other, but their natural state when they make eye contact is that they can do this and they know how to do this. In fact, they practiced it over and over.

JC: True.

Lorrie: They know exactly how to do this. Snape turns to Harry and makes eye contact and initiates this: "His cold, dark eyes were boring into Harry's, who met his gaze unflinchingly, concentrating hard on what he had seen in his dream, willing Snape to read it in his mind, to understand..." They just fall into what they know how to do. Meanwhile, of course Snape has to maintain the surface illusion, which has the ring of truth to it: "Unless you wish to poison Potter -- and I assure you I would have the greatest sympathy with you if you did --" That's how Snape covers this. He can fool people who would never imagine that you could actually want to help somebody that you personally dislike. This whole theme of this series that the most difficult but also highest form of protectiveness is protectiveness without affection... This reminds me of this thing that happened locally in Philadelphia politics last weekend, over Labor Day weekend 2025. We have a state rep named Malcolm Kenyatta. He's a Black gay young man -- he's thirty-five -- who is also currently the vice chair of the Democratic National Party. He was so disgusted with racist politics within Pennsylvania that have defunded public transit in Philly that he protested by walking from Philadelphia to the state capital, Harrisburg, which was 105 miles.

JC: Uh-huh.

Lorrie: One of the things he was proving was that it's not true that a Black man can't walk in the white, rural parts of Pennsylvania -- people are just people -- just like, it's not true that the white rural people in Pennsylvania can't come to Philly. You can come to Philly. You can have a good time. He can walk through these parts of Pennsylvania and talk to his constituents, too. People are just people, and it was amazing to watch him with his selfie stick, walking through Amish country. What he said was he does not care if the SEPTA riders, the public transit riders that he's fighting for, are Democrats or Republicans. The people he was fighting against thought, 'Oh, you're only trying to fight for your own people.' "No, I'm not." He thought that it was everybody's right, even if they were people that were set up against him. That's how you help anybody: by saying, "No, you don't pick and choose who deserves help. Humans have dignity. Humans deserve help." Anyway, that was so much on my mind with local news as I was reading this.

JC: Interesting, yeah.

Lorrie: The people that he's fighting for... Would he personally feel aggravated by them? Yeah, probably, but then he puts in another layer of protection for Harry. He says to Umbridge, "Most venoms act too fast to give the victim much time for truth-telling...." That's one of Snape's constant ways of protecting Harry: to remind in this case Umbridge, but more generally Voldemort, 'Don't kill Harry Potter. His death is not worth to you as much as what you could get out of talking to him.' Does Snape really care about keeping Harry alive? Not personally, no. That's the layer of safety that Snape is providing here. "Snape looked back at Harry, who stared at him, frantic to communicate without words." The two of them are still willing to keep cooperating; how frustrating it is Snape can't give any indication, but he's not abandoning Harry, which frustrates Umbridge completely so that she's shrieking. "You are being deliberately unhelpful!" Which is yes, true. Yes, yes, he is. Yes, he is, and the reader gets to see, 'So this is what it takes for Snape to get on probation finally, is it, after five volumes of him acting atrociously and never getting put on probation for any of his teaching?' No, it's when he refuses to give up Harry Potter to Umbridge. That gets him on probation. Okay, he's on probation now.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: But then she says that revealing thing: "I expected better, Lucius Malfoy always speaks most highly of you!"

JC: Oooh.

Lorrie: Okay. She doesn't even know what she's doing when she's gambling on Death Eaters as the more likely allies to whatever her agenda is. Okay, so she's been assuming that Snape's a Death Eater. Okay... And she's been strategizing with Lucius. Okay. Huh... What did you think when you read that line?

JC: I think I thought that's a check mark for Snape's covers working. I think that was more what I was thinking. I hadn't thought about how much that meant that Umbridge was aware of who was a Death Eater and how much she was collaborating or cooperating with them, or relying on them for information. I hadn't really thought about that. It was more like she believes she knows who Snape is, and it's the image that he has projected: he's definitely on the side of... He's definitely on that side. But the thing is that we've talked so much throughout this podcast about the reasons why Lucius Malfoy would speak highly of Snape, and they don't have necessarily anything to do with Snape being a Death Eater. It's more that he's the one adult in the school who is making sure the Slytherins are okay. It's kind of funny that of course, Lucius Malfoy's going to speak highly of him; this is the one teacher who gives a shit about his kid from Lucius Malfoy's perspective.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Interesting, though. Yeah, I hadn't thought about it from the political aspect.

Lorrie: "Snape gave her an ironic bow and turned to leave." It's one of those moments where the reader sides with Snape. That feels good.

JC: Yeah, it's like 'Middle fingers up!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's kind of like that. That's what it feels like. It's so great.

Lorrie: He's consistent, and that is comforting at this point. Meanwhile, poor Harry... Harry has gotten no reassurance. He has to think of something. "He's got Padfoot at the place where it's hidden!" Poor Harry...

JC: And go see Snape's eyes closing, like, 'Oh, God, kid...'

Lorrie: "I know, kid, I know." Harry has to be sure, and I can't blame Harry -- he has had no reassurance -- but yes, Harry is confirming that the thing they were all afraid of has happened: Voldemort did get into Harry's mind. He knows for sure that Snape has been focused on this possibly happening, and he's saying yes, it has happened. "Snape looked around at Harry. His face was inscrutable." All he can do at this point is show Harry that 'I'm paying attention'. He sounds cold and he's playing dumb in front of Umbridge, but he is signaling to both Gryffindors and Luna and Slytherins among the students that, well, he's against Umbridge, which puts him on Team Harry and possibly puts him against Umbridge's ally, Lucius. Huh... Then he says the thing. Oh, this thing has so many facets to it, it's really touching: "Crabbe, loosen your hold a little." If Neville Longbottom dies of asphyxiation, he says, "it will mean a lot of tedious paperwork, and I am afraid I shall have to mention it on your reference if ever you apply for a job." I find that so painfully touching. He's the only person who cares about Crabbe's future. Here

he is, watching his students just get poisoned by Umbridge appealing to their least wonderful qualities and how gleefully they're taking to it so naturally, and he hasn't given up on Crabbe. He's been wondering, 'What am I going to say?' He doesn't want this to be happening. Meanwhile, we know for sure that he does not personally have affection for Neville, but he's trying to protect Neville; this is, again, the protectiveness without affection. Plus, the thing that makes Snape such a genius character is that he's, on the surface, so damn funny. The whole thing about tedious paperwork is literally true. That's so funny on its surface that you could just be amused by this without even thinking beyond what it means that he cares about Crabbe's future, but yeah. Imagine being the only person in the whole damn school who cares that Vincent Crabbe even deserves a future and that it's against what Crabbe thinks... Crabbe doesn't care. Ouch. So yeah, Snape does what he can for hopeless Vincent Crabbe and hopeless Neville Longbottom before he leaves. God... Anyway, that's my read. I wonder how many readers, if you gather people and ask them how they interpret that comment from Snape, if you would get a different reading from every single person. What got you when he says this?

JC: I think that it seemed like deflecting from what Harry had just said, distracting.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Going back to his whole sort of disdainful 'I don't care about these students, but...' It felt like, 'Okay, he's going to distract from what Harry just said by being Snape, being mean,' but then noticing that Neville was quietly being asphyxiated in the corner... That's protecting Neville, so yeah...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: In a very Snape way. I think that that was just the way that I read it. I didn't think about it, honestly, as him caring about Crabbe. I think I read it more as him signaling maybe to Harry that he sees what's happening in the room and I saw him as protecting Neville there, which I thought was kind of interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: I do like the interpretation where he's genuinely concerned about Crabbe's future, because you're right. Crabbe and Goyle are such throwaway, stereotypical, stupid bully characters, and it's hard to envision them having a future beyond being Draco Malfoy's sidekicks or whatever. I don't envision them in the future. I can't even remember... Do they show up in *Cursed Child*?

Lorrie: They are mentioned.

JC: They're mentioned. Okay, so they do have a future. Wait, no. Does one of them die?

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Wait. Yeah, okay. There's only... okay, right. Sorry. I'd forgotten what happens in the future.

Lorrie: Well, yeah. Snape caring what happens to them is very subtle and buried, but there is a throughline and it starts at the end of *Goblet of Fire* when Harry names their fathers as having been present at Voldemort's rebirth. We see Snape respond really viscerally to that because he knows what that means for the children of people who are about to be incarcerated. Then we see again in the next volume that he has constant worry about what's going to happen to Crabbe and Goyle, which Crabbe and Goyle don't share in the least. Eventually in Book Seven, we see that Snape has lost that battle, and that's quite realistic. There's so many rewards for Crabbe and Goyle to go down this path. There's their personal predilections and then there's the reward here, and they've never been rewarded for being good students. If they try to play that game, why would they want to? But he cares. Yeah, that's something that you wouldn't know it from just this one statement -- you have to really see the throughline. We do know that we don't see evidence of anybody else caring what happens to them, but that is something that counts when you're dealing with somebody who's nearly an adult who has a choice about what they could do with their life. "Are you sure you want to go down this path?" Whether or not they feel like they have a future, it does come into it, but yeah. Imagine having to write Crabbe's references, because obviously Snape is the only one he's going to go to if he needs one.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Malfoy, the identical but much cleverer person from that population: "Malfoy was watching [Umbridge] with a hungry expression on his face." He's seeing all sorts of potential for his own agenda here, and this is a deliberate echo of Wormtail from Snape's Worst Memory because "watching hungrily" is the phrase that the author uses when Wormtail can tell that Sirius and James are about to torture Snape.

JC: Ah, yeah.

Lorrie: He's getting all excited.

JC: Oh, that's interesting. Okay, yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: This is a human trait that exists that we have to watch out for, and Umbridge is the lead sadist in this scene. This is a debate that I have with a lot of Snape haters: I make a distinction in sadism between Snape and Umbridge, because there are things he does (especially in books three and four) that show him being really mean to students, and I don't think it's the same as what Umbridge is going through here. "There was a nasty, eager, excited look on her face..." She's panting... She has this physical response to the anticipation that she's going to get to torture Harry; we see that kind of physical response from Bellatrix, we see from Voldemort. We don't see it from Snape.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: We get gloating from Snape; we don't see this.

JC: Yeah. Snape's cruelty feels more calculated to serve a purpose. This doesn't feel like it serves any purpose other than Umbridge just really wants to do it.

Lorrie: Yeah. She's giving in.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: There's that horrifying 'these kids are not small children anymore' feeling when she points her wand at different parts of Harry's body. Yuck!

JC: And the other kids are just standing there. 'What's going through all their minds?' is an interesting question. They've been taught that this is an Unforgivable, that this is illegal...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And the only one who really steps up to do anything is Hermione.

Lorrie: She tries. She tries, "The Minister wouldn't want you to break the law," which is when Umbridge shows that she has crossed that line and she says openly, "What Cornelius doesn't know won't hurt him." That's a moment when we see, 'Okay, that's become open now,' and then she volunteers the information that she was the one who ordered the dementors to go after Harry without Cornelius knowing.

JC: There's, what, eight people in the room?

Lorrie: She's just saying it openly.

JC: She's just saying it like she has no... She's so sure of her own power.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's not even any thought of, 'Maybe I shouldn't be admitting to this in front of all these witnesses.'

Lorrie: Yeah. The checks and balances have eroded on that front, and she's complaining, "They were all bleating about silencing you somehow -- discrediting you --" Okay, that confirms that even though the Ministry at that point wasn't willing to go ahead and be this overt, yeah, they were all trying to do that to Harry. This is so horrifying... Yeah, she's about to commence torture.

JC: After telling him that she's the one who, this entire time... When she says this, that she was the one who sent the dementors, what it would take for someone to send the dementors off... How did she have access to dementors? There's some questions

there. What position was she in that she even had the power to do that, did it without telling Fudge this, and then sat in the room at Harry's trial knowing that everything he was saying was true? This entire year, she's known all along that he's telling the truth, so there's a point... Along the way, she kind of comes across as a little bit ignorant of the truth. On a first read, it feels like she's just ignorant of the truth, like she's hearing and believing what she wants to believe. She's believing Fudge blindly and then enforcing his vision, but this is the point at which it's like, 'Oh, no, she does know the truth and she's known all along.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that's really chilling to go back and put all of the interactions that she's had with Harry in the whole book into the context: she has known all along that he was telling the truth.

Lorrie: "Who do you think would want to send dementors after small children like yourself?"

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She's depending on other people's incorrect faith in human nature to earn her some time to get away with these crimes.

JC: And that also makes me think about (in the current political situation that we're in) the way that many people who watch the Trump administration have for years said when Trump accuses someone (his political enemies, someone) of some kind of wrongdoing, he's talking about himself.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Right? He has done the thing, and it's a distraction to accuse someone else of doing it. That's what that reminded me of, too, here.

Lorrie: Yeah, that accusation is confession.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She's about to start *Crucio*, which by now everybody knows she's genuinely capable of doing it, and that's when Hermione realizes she has to make up something -- anything -- to stop it and shows astonishing abilities of improv. She's clearly making this up as she goes along -- she has no grand plan -- but I love the way she finally gets Millicent Bulstrode off of her. She's been trying to pull away and there's no chance -- Millicent Bulstrode is eight times stronger than she is -- but she cries into her robes, and Millicent is so grossed out that she drops her. I thought, 'That's a classic self-defense move, right?' They're expecting you to try to pull away; if you pull them in closer, then you get a momentary advantage. They're not expecting that. Yeah. If you imagine her

breathing humidly into Millicent Bulstrode's robes, which probably are made out of something that doesn't breathe... Ew, gross, gross, gross! Harry, because he has spent years and years working with Hermione, notices, 'Okay, she's not crying. I see that.'

JC: "She's sobbing, but there are no tears.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Then Hermione picks on the thing that is Umbridge's weakness, where her own fears and agenda are prominent in her mind; if you can speak to those, then you can distract Umbridge from the truth. Hermione says, "He was trying to speak to Dumbledore!" Okay, that's what Umbridge wants most, right? Then Hermione does this thing that is so bitter: she says the dumbest thing ever because she knows how stupid the world thinks she is. She says, "We tried the Leaky Cauldron, we tried Three Broomsticks. We even tried the Hog's Head." Duh, stupid... That's how Hermione has experienced people thinking somebody her age would think. She's even betting that this is going to be convincing to the Inquisitorial Squad, who has sat through classes with her for all these years.

JC: Mmmm...

Lorrie: It works. This is the degree to which this child has been underestimated her whole life; she is using it here, and Umbridge totally falls for it. "Idiot girl, Dumbledore won't be sitting in a pub..." Seriously, Umbridge? That's what you think this child would come up with? No, this is how badly she gets underestimated on a daily basis that she's trying to weaponize here, but oh, that really was bitter to read. Ugh... It worked, and Hermione does something that I found so brilliant: she uses the mystery of how nobody knows what the weapon is. She's convincingly confused about what it is, so she can't be Legilimised. This is a demonstration of how Dumbledore's layers of security work. 'Well, why do you keep people ignorant?' So they can't be tortured into revealing the truth. There's some point at which you know you can't get anything further out of this. Hermione is really held safe by not having the faintest clue what this supposed weapon is, and she can use that to push Umbridge into giving herself away -- which Umbridge does, and she volunteers all this information about what she's afraid this weapon is. "So this is a weapon against the Ministry that Dumbledore has ordered you guys to help with?" "Yes, in fact."

JC: "Yeah, let's go with that."

Lorrie: "That's exactly what it is. I'm afraid you've got us. Yep!" Oh, God, this is so high stakes. Then Hermione tries to be clever and say, "I'm not showing... *them* where this weapon is," meaning Draco and the other Inquisitorial Squad people; that backfires because Umbridge is going totally on, 'Well, if Hermione doesn't want that, then we'll cut off her ability to get what she wants.' Hermione pivots to a much more effective strategy, which was not her original idea but works so much better. "Let them see it, I hope they

use it on you!" *gasps* Yes! She accidentally finds the thing where she can openly refer to how much she hates Umbridge and how everyone hates Umbridge, including her supposed ally students, and this totally hits home.

JC: Yeah, yeah. It's very good. It's very good. Uses her paranoia against her, and in doing so protects all those other kids. At least, that's the way that I read it. Even the Slytherins... She wants as few people to get hurt as possible, and she knows that if they take a whole crew out to the woods, a lot of those kids are going to be in danger. I assume -- and I don't know at this point if she knows that's where she's going -- she's minimizing the casualties here.

Lorrie: And minimizing the moving parts that she has to worry about, because she knows that everybody's coming in with their own agenda.

JC: It's that same kind of protectiveness that you talk about Snape having, at least that's how I read it; she's protecting even Millicent Bulstrode. Even her, yeah. She's protecting the others here.

Lorrie: Umbridge catches the look of eagerness and greed on Draco's face. This is an alliance that is built on their own agendas. They're all using each other. Of course, Umbridge doesn't trust him; this alliance is not built on trust. Of course, Draco's in it for himself and he's all excited -- 'Oh, oh... An opportunity for me to get what I want" -- and then he is sulking because Umbridge won't let him have it. Yeah, he's being such an amateur here. He's like, "No, no, I think we should come and help you," and then Umbridge says this thing that's just so purely hateful. She says: "It does not sound as though this weapon is something that schoolchildren should see." Right, because they might use it to defend themselves.

JC: They might use it to depose you.

Lorrie: Even though they're the ones who made part of it, and it's being used against -- Yeah. She's exposing all of her limitations with everything she says, showing more of what she's afraid of and what Hermione and Harry can use against her. She says, "All right, it's just going to be you two. Harry and Hermione, take me wherever it is."

JC: I wonder what... Yeah, because I know what's coming, but I wonder what she's thinking about here. These kids are going to take her... They're unarmed...

Lorrie: Right.

JC: They're going to take her to the weapon. Is her plan to get there and then kill them? I'm wondering what her plan is at this point. Is she thinking, 'They're going to show me the weapon, they're going to show me how it works. Then I'll have this and then I can...'

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't know.

JC: She can get rid of the witnesses here.

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't know, but she's armed and they're not...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And she's not afraid of the law...

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And she thinks Hermione is really stupid.

JC: Fatal mistake there. Fatal mistake.

Lorrie: Ugh. Then arbitrarily, the chapter ends. Aaahhh!

JC: Into the fire, indeed, or out of the fire and into the frying pan or however that idiom works.

Lorrie: Yeah. Out of the fire into... We don't even know. Yeah. The next chapter goes back to what you were talking about with Madam Pomfrey. The next chapter is called Fight and Flight. At what point do you stay to protect? At what point do you leave and why?

JC: It also goes back to that idea of when your trauma has been triggered. Those are your choices.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Reasoning through it is not one of the options. There's two options...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And somehow the 'and' implies that we're doing both of them.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Okay.

Lorrie: Well, I guess we have to wait to talk about the next chapter.

JC: This is the point at which if you're reading this for the first time, it's like, 'Leave me alone! I'm holing up in a place where I can just read this and no one will bother me. It's three in the morning, and I've got to keep going!'

Lorrie: 'Oh, my God!'

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