

## Transcript

### Episode 5.34

#### Book 5, Chapter 34: The Department of Mysteries

**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-Four: The Department of Mysteries.

**Lorrie:** The Department of Mysteries. Harry and friends fly thestrals to the Ministry of Magic to save Sirius. Harry finds the place Voldemort has been showing him in his dreams and visions. JC, what did you think of the world building in this chapter?

**JC:** Yeah. There's a lot of interesting stuff when they get to the Ministry, but it reminds me of... I was thinking a lot about the seventh book when they come back in which they sneak in, not walk in. Well, they walk right in as themselves in this particular volume, but like the seventh book when they sneak in and there's more sneaking in *Cursed Child*. I was thinking about the fact that every time we see characters going to the Ministry, it's not on a school field trip. There's some shit going down every single time they go to the Ministry. I don't know if they ever go and just go, "Wow, look at this place!"

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** There's always something bad happening.

**Lorrie:** Horse riding always makes me think of you now.

**JC:** Ahaha! Oh, my gosh.

**Lorrie:** What about these thestrals?

**JC:** Well, first of all, there's this statement of Luna sitting side-saddle on the thestral, and I thought, 'Ain't no way. No.'

**Lorrie:** 'What?' Yes.

**JC:** Maybe while she's waiting for everyone to get sorted, but at some point a girl's got to swing her leg over and hold on for dear life. There's no saddle.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** Sitting side-saddle was not even a comfortable thing to do at the time when it was in fashion, and there were special saddles that helped you hold on.

**Lorrie:** Oh, God.

**JC:** There's no way she would sit sideways, but anyway, I just... I have to hand wave that one away and go, 'Nope, nope.' As soon as the horses were ready to go, she threw a leg over. Also, the idea of flying all the way to London on a flying horse.... I know that we're supposed to wave our hands and that there's magic involved, but I've been on a plane between London and Edinburgh before. It's an hour and twenty [minute] flight -- and some of that involves being at the airport, but let's say it's a solid hour -- and planes are going 550 miles an hour, right? How long were they on the freaking horses, and how fast were the horses going? The train takes all day.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** I was just like, 'Okay, you just have to suspend our disbelief here that you could spend that long that high in the air with no saddle, clinging on to this really slick horse.'

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God, yeah.

**JC:** There must have been some magic involved. Anyway, my brain was going there because of the reality, and then when they got off of those horses... I don't care how young they are and how fit they are; they'd all be waddling for a while.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Well, I think Ron falls off.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He can't even muster.

**JC:** He also can't see what he's on!

**Lorrie:** As far as I can tell, if they look down, they're just seeing through nothingness...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Straight down.

**JC:** There's nothing there.

**Lorrie:** That's not how human brains can function. That must be so insane.

**JC:** I was just thinking about those -- I've never been to one of these, but I've seen lots of pictures of them -- really tall buildings where there's these glass platforms you can go out and stand on where you just see...

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and just look down and there's nothing holding you up. Right.

**JC:** I'm thinking, 'Mmm...' I'm having a hard time even imagining really trusting that, but you would just have to keep your eyes closed. I don't know what else you would do.

**Lorrie:** I think that must have happened if only to keep out all of the cold, rushing wind getting into your eyeballs.

**JC:** That, too. Yeah, right. 'Would Muggles have seen anything if they looked up?' is my other question. By the time they get to the middle of London, for example... I don't know. There's a lot of hand-waving to be done here about how this magic works, but that's fine. It's a fantasy... kind of.

**Lorrie:** It's beyond our imagination, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** This sets us up in this chapter. So much of this chapter is about things that we mostly can't see or some of us can see but most of us can't, or we can only see a little bit or what we see we don't really understand. This is such a leap of faith.

**JC:** Yes. Yes, yes, yes, that's true. The fact that all of these kids are going with them is really interesting to me, because the last time we saw Harry go... Well, the first time we ever see Harry go into what's essentially a giant maze he has to navigate through, he's got Ron and Hermione with him. The last time we saw Harry go into a giant maze, he came out the only one alive; this time, he's got all these other kids with him, so it's kind of like, 'Okay. Harry, you keep doing this. You keep being lured into these traps and then having to figure your way out.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and he doesn't want them with him because he knows how hard this is.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Now he has to worry about them.

**JC:** But I'm also glad that he's there, because I think that we're hitting a point in the story where the more witnesses there are to the world that Harry experiences, the better. Even if these are people who aren't necessarily the ones that have the most clout (who are going to get the most people to listen to him), they're at least people who see what he's going through.

**Lorrie:** And this is showing that the dangers that were Harry-specific in earlier years have now undeniably come to affect everybody.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** There's just no denying it.

**JC:** That's true.

**Lorrie:** He's trying to say, "No, I already suffer. You guys don't have to suffer," and their argument is, "Uh, actually, we are implicated now."

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "You don't have an argument for taking this on by yourself."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Then, after all of that crazy, magical, inexplicable stuff, the thestrals land and then they forage for rotten food in the dumpster.

**JC:** They're such interesting creatures, yeah. They're all... Oh, and you can't see them except under particular circumstances. 'What would Muggles see or hear or experience if they walked by this dumpster?' is the question that I have. I also love that before they take off, Ron's like, "I can't believe I'm about to fly this invisible horse," and Harry says, "You'd better hope it stays invisible," which is funny, but also...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Haha.

**JC:** Yeah. We all know how that's going to go.

**Lorrie:** I love how many details show up in the writing of this chapter that bring that realness, though. Thestrals, no matter what weird stuff they're doing, they're just going to look around for food. The kids, the way they interact with each other... Their throwaway dialogue is so real (Hermione trying not to say -- and succeeding -- "I told you so," or later when Harry tells Ginny to hurry up and she says, "You dawdled long enough at the arch!"). These little things ground it so much and actually reminded me of what was missing. At the end of *Goblet of Fire*, there's that one chapter that you and I were both incredulous about because it was so not a finished draft: the Barty Crouch, Jr. Veritaserum monologue where all the information was there, but there weren't any little details to remind you that this is happening in a place with characters that know each

other. The difference here -- now that the author has more control over her deadlines and she can put in these details confidently -- I feel like I'm with these not only people, but even these weird horses that are eating rotten food.

**JC:** It is very much like horses, though, I have to say. That is what a horse would do, especially after you've ridden it for a long way. That first thing it's going to do is eat food, so that's very horse behavior.

**Lorrie:** And yeah, the kids might notice this and think, 'Wait, is that even okay?' but they don't have time to worry about this.

**JC:** Yeah, and they only vaguely know what thestrals eat, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. 'They can obviously take care of themselves. All right, let's just go. We leave this intriguing side detail. Got to keep going!'

**JC:** "How do they get back home again?" Yeah.

**Lorrie:** They seem to know how.

**JC:** Yeah, I guess they do.

**Lorrie:** Are you ready to go down into the Ministry?

**JC:** I guess we are. Actually, I really like that Luna's whole demeanor here is very calm. 'Oh, yeah, this is the thing that happens all the time.' Yeah, she's just very... Throughout this entire thing, Luna's perspective on this is really different from everyone else's, and it's kind of fun to read.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I also love the mundaneness when they show up and then the Ministry recording says, "State your name and business," and Harry screams what they're there for. "Harry Potter, Rescue Mission."

**JC:** The fact that he, at this point, tells the truth stood out to me so much, because the next time they're in the Ministry, they are totally sneaking in. He listed off all their names. Honey! I hadn't read this in so long, so I was fully expecting him to lie there, and he just listed every single person in his party and then said, "We're on it. We're here to rescue someone." It just felt incredibly naive to me. I was like, 'Oh, honey...'

**Lorrie:** But if they're going to know anyway... If you're going, say, to a government building where all your Social Security information is and they ask you your Social Security number, you may as well give it.

**JC:** Yeah, but I guess also it's the middle of the night, and every person has told him not to... He's going here, basically, after listening to Voldemort. All the circumstances of it...

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. I guess they have to say something to get in, but oh, man...

**Lorrie:** I know.

**JC:** You're breaking in in the middle of the night, kind of. I don't know... It just blew my mind that he just told the truth right there, and then he was expecting to have to show his wand to the guard.

**Lorrie:** Yes!

**JC:** He was totally expecting... Anyway, oh...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It definitely got me down the same rabbit hole. 'Wait a minute. Would lying have made things harder, easier, different, worse, better? Eh, he may as well tell the truth.'

**JC:** And I guess if nothing else, there's a record, so when they come back and say, "Oh, Harry Potter broke in to do something nefarious," there's a record of that.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And the little name badges come out, and they say "Rescue Mission," and that is funny.

**Lorrie:** "Rescue Mission." I love it.

**JC:** That's so funny.

**Lorrie:** It's like, 'Okay, this is a thing.' Oh, I love the atmospheric golden patterns swirling on the ceiling. That movement... it's not just for show; that's happening all the time, whether anyone's there to be awed by it or not. It's so beautiful. I guess I just was really drawn in by the setting, by the mechanisms of the Ministry of Magic and how you can appreciate what the place is when there aren't any people. Last time Harry was here, he was with the trial, and the place was secondary. It was all these frightening people with their weird agendas that were the issue. But here, wow... look at all of this infrastructure. Huh...

**JC:** It's so interesting that I did not really pay any attention to the infrastructure, because everything I saw was like, 'This is a trap, this is a trap.'

**Lorrie:** It is.

**JC:** 'It's two in the morning, and you're being allowed in the building when it's clearly empty. Oh, my God, it's a trap. It's a trap!' That was all I could think the whole time: 'When are they going to figure out...'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I was trying to remember, 'At what point do they realize that the trap has been sprung and they've fallen in it?' It's not until the very end of this chapter -- or maybe even the beginning of the next one -- but oh, my God, that was all I could focus on with all the little details that showed how carefully this trap has been laid for Harry Potter.

**Lorrie:** Although Harry does know it's a trap or something is up because they're not being stopped, they're not being checked, they don't have to present the security... He knows, 'Oh, no, this is something terrible,' but they already knew something was wrong. That's why they're there at all.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** But this has happened to him before. It was in the maze at the end of *Goblet of Fire* where he had no obstacles, so he knew that was a bad sign.

**JC:** Right, yeah. I guess the kids know that Voldemort is entwined with the Ministry of Magic, so they know that...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And Harry thinks that he's going there to do a job (at least this is what he says when he talks to the recording). He's going in to do a job that he thinks that nobody at the Ministry will do because they're too aligned with Voldemort...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** But at the same time, I don't know if Harry at this point doesn't realize that the pathway has been completely cleared for him to come in and do this one thing that Voldemort has manipulated him to do. He doesn't know that yet, and all these little details of, 'Wow, how did Sirius...' I don't know. There's all kinds of things that my head was going through. 'Oh, my God, how did Sirius... How did Voldemort break in? What's going on?' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's Harry. Meanwhile, Hermione has been saying this from the beginning. The trip that Hermione's making right now is a totally different one where she tried to dissuade him, and then when she realized that there was nothing to be done about it and he was going, then she went along knowing, 'This is the whole time what I thought it would be.' I don't know. I think each of them has their own story going on.

**JC:** I definitely wonder what this scene looks like from Hermione's point of view, Hermione being very... This is the Gryffindoriness of her, right? Why wasn't she sorted into Ravenclaw? Well, because at the end of the day, she's going to step up and go "All right."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah. "Okay, let's go. I'll go with you."

**Lorrie:** "Since you must go..." Yeah.

**JC:** "I'll try not to let you die along the way, if I can help it." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and they all know that it goes better when there are more support people, so here we go. It's been so bad at Hogwarts, doing something feels better. They've just escaped the goons detaining them. They have to do something. Turning around meekly and going back to Hogwarts is actually no safer for these particular students tonight.

**JC:** I wonder if Harry feels like he's in that part of the hero's journey. All the dementors are gone, all the protection's been stripped away, and now it's time for the hero to go and save the day. Is that where he thinks he is in the story? Because that's not where he is, but I can kind of see...

**Lorrie:** Well...

**JC:** He's so confident that he's going to go in. He's been so thoroughly manipulated... He's going to be so confident. He knows exactly what he's going to find, he knows how to get there, and the cognitive dissonance of that when that hits him is going to be like... Oof. I'm already dreading that, I think. That's the other thing, though: there's so many things here that make this feel ominous this entire trip in, so I wasn't even looking at the world building that much. It was all just... It's so ominous, the whole thing.

**Lorrie:** I don't think he has that hero's journey feeling here because his overriding emotion for this all is desperation to get to Sirius. I don't think he feels like he has a plan or anything; he just knows that he has to go. He goes to the plain black door, finally, after a year of obsessing; he reaches that door and it swings open -- talk about ominous and the path being laid. All right, as soon as he gets to the door, it swings open and then he's in that terrifying, large circular room with twelve unmarked identical doors and this marble floor that's so shiny it looks like a reflecting pool and it rotates. Oh, God, that is so scary.

**JC:** But at the same time, I do like that this is our explanation for why it took Voldemort this long. This explains all the feelings and the dreams of, "I'm almost there. Aaaahhhh!"

**Lorrie:** Ugh, yeah.

**JC:** And Voldemort was apparently never smart enough to do what Hermione does, which is to mark the doors they've gone through.

**Lorrie:** Although Voldemort does have Rookwood, who was an employee of the Department of Mysteries. Rookwood was actually giving him floor plans and stuff, so he did have a definite advantage over Harry here.

**JC:** But it still took him a lot longer than it took this group of kids.

**Lorrie:** Yes. As we know, every time Voldemort has a setback, Harry's scar is full of angst. 'No! Drat those kids!' Right?

**JC:** Exactly. I do find that part of it kind of funny. "Oh, we have Hermione with us? Yeah, we're going to be fine."

**Lorrie:** Yeah, we hope. Well, anyway, we'll be much better off than if we didn't.

**JC:** Yeah, that. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Okay. This is really a funny experience, because often you go into ecstasies over world building and I didn't even notice. I'm loving the world building here, and you're caught up in the emotion.

**JC:** Yeah. It's a reverse of what we normally do around here.

**Lorrie:** I guess it's different kinds of world building that appeal to each of us, because I'm thrilled with this because this is all mysteries of the human mind. These are all allegories of human nature that they study in the Department of Mysteries and that the author has mapped into the architecture of this floor of the Ministry, so I'm just ecstatic and loving the physical form of how these wizards study the deepest secrets. Not how to kill people, not how to gain power over people - which is Departments of War or Treasury or whatever -- but this is 'what is the nature of time? What is the nature of consciousness? What is the veil between the dead and the living?' This is what it looks like if you were to study those things. Oh, my God, this is where Voldemort wants to meet Harry.

**JC:** It's also interesting -- now that you've raised that -- that if you wonder what they do in the Department of Mysteries, they really are looking at what are the big mysteries of life and of existence.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That's what it is, and what's striking about that is right now my kiddo (who's a senior in high school) in his English class, they're reading *1984*. I've been reading it along with him and discussing it with him because I wanted to have the experience that you and I have had/are having right now. I have not read *1984* since 1984, when I was in middle school and didn't really understand it; reading it now (not only with all the life experience that I've had, but with the experience of living in the United States as it is right now), it's completely blowing my mind.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So there's that, but also all of the different government departments in that book where the names are the opposite of what they're really doing (the Department of Truth is all about constructing lies). Here, it's like the Department of Mysteries... No, it's what it says on the tin. That's what they're doing. Actually, I hadn't made that connection until just now, but yeah, that's exactly what they're doing. They're thinking, 'What are the big mysteries of the universe, particularly the human experience of the universe?'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'This is the place where we're going to study those.' Wow!

**Lorrie:** I think this is my fantasy that's more secure than the reality we're living in, because I want to dream that the deepest mysteries are being studied by politically neutral...

**JC:** Qualified people.

**Lorrie:** Intellectually honest, non-partisan people who take their job seriously.

**JC:** Oh, my God, this is the dream of the academy, and the world we live in right now as of the beginning of October 2025 is being sort of systematically chipped away at.

**Lorrie:** This is the department where, if this were in the U.S, they would be defunded right now.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Their coordinates would be given out publicly...

**JC:** All the workers would have been furloughed, yeah.

**Lorrie:** And the least qualified conspiracy theory podcaster would now be put in charge of it, right?

**JC:** Yes, which is all, I think, about to happen in this universe, right? They're coming. We're a little bit ahead of them on that.

**Lorrie:** This is the thing I believe in, whether I have proof or not. This is what I want to believe in: these things that are really important, that there's a place somewhere where it matters what we find out about it. This is the higher or deeper authority that Voldemort is looking for in this meeting that he craves with Harry Potter. This is the only way Voldemort can seek some answers: summon Harry Potter together and look into these mysteries together, because he can't do it on his own. Nothing he's done in his unthinkable evil magical career has helped him get any closer to any of these truths, so he needs this boy. Oh, clever Hermione with the burning X. Oh, thank you, thank you. The death chamber with the crumbling arch and the veil that flutters... Oh, that is so breathtaking to me! The stone steps and the benches and everything crumbling, and

how beautiful and terrifying it is... Oh! I love that this is an image that I didn't have before (and that I always will now because of reading it here in this series), and the way that it has a different effect on each kid depending on their relationship to these mysteries; how it scares Hermione instantly, and that Harry doesn't even notice how he's being compelled by it. I love that he hears this whispering and murmuring, and there's Luna listening to the same and Ginny and Neville being drawn there, and Hermione (thank goodness) able to snap them out of it. Oh! I like the truth that we get, which is that the only thing that can reach through Harry succumbing to this power is the urgency of worrying about Sirius. This protective feeling about another human... That is something that can overpower even obsession or sometimes even addiction, things that take us over against our will. It's very much like when Harry was looking into the Mirror of Erised as a first year and Dumbledore saying, "It's really powerful. You can't let this take you over."

**JC:** It's so interesting to me that this is something that they're studying. How did they construct this? Where did it come from?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** There's just a lot of questions that I have about this, and the first thing, of course, is I think, 'Oh, this is where Sirius will die.' But also, it's like a lab with something really dangerous and mysterious in it, and there are wizards that come in every day wearing, I'm imagining, a white lab coat or white robes...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** With clipboards and they make notes. What the heck?! It's really interesting. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's their job.

**JC:** And this Department of Mysteries... There's so much foundational stuff happening and really deep stuff happening here that this is the one department that I wonder, 'What's their connection to the Muggle world?' Do they collaborate with Muggle researchers? If they're supposed to be apolitical -- let's assume that they're apolitical and they're really engaged in study -- then it feels like this would be something that they would connect to the Muggle world. In the room with all the brains in the jars... Do they collaborate with neuroscientists?

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** I have lots of questions.

**Lorrie:** Or maybe this is one of those cases where you and I as Muggles... There are people in our Muggle world that we don't realize they're wizards. We see this obsessiveness and 'shaking it off' happen to Harry again in book seven where he gets

obsessed with the thought of the Deathly Hallows, and then he breaks out of it again finally when he remembers the people that he wants to take care of. That's a major message of this series: yes, there will be things that lure you, but if you're wondering 'does anything have the power to interrupt obsessiveness or bad trains of thought,' this is something that does. Then there's my favorite, aaahhh: the locked room, the one that you can't do anything about. You can't get in, there's no handle, there's no nothing.

**JC:** Yeah. Sirius's knife gets ruined trying to open it.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. What did you think of it?

**JC:** I guess in the moment, I thought there's two possibilities: one is that it's just so unknowable that you can't even open the door -- you can't even get in -- or it's so dangerous that they have extra, extra security on it so that only the person who researches that can get in. Those are the two things I was thinking of.

**Lorrie:** When I first encountered this and I had that response, I thought, 'Okay, this is different from the rooms.' You know the fairy tale of Bluebeard, the scary domestic violence mass murderer who keeps marrying innocent young women and telling them "You can go into any place in the castle but this," and then the brides go and then they see all the other previous brides that have been murdered? It's dangerous, and then Bluebeard shows up and says, "I warned you." Of course, it's very dangerous, and this felt the opposite of that. I felt not like, 'Oh, they're being warned' and the worst danger is coming from that, but it was sort of like the refusal. The 'no' gave some sort of security to me, and I thought, 'Oh.' This is possibly a very Gen X quality I have: boundaries are sexy to me. This is like, 'No, you can't.' Little toy gadgets like Sirius's knife? 'No, we're not kidding. We're not kidding. You can't come in here.' Or there is obviously a way to get in here. 'You little explorers... no. This is not part of your game.' Later on, especially, I realize -- and the fact that it's Sirius's knife that can't get... This is very dime store Freudian, but it very much is like, 'No, no entry here,' and in the most slightly embarrassing dime store Freudian way I associate this room with Snape in all ways and it's sort of like, 'No.' Sirius is very phallic and has this masculine energy, and Snape is very like, 'No, I have powers that aren't so showy; they are defenses.' To me, the energy that keeps this room sealed is exactly what this whole volume has been showing us about Occlumency. There are things that you should be able to open them and you should be able to go in, but there is some sort of power that will seal it completely and it's not common. It's hard to know what to do when you're faced with it, but the harder you try and the bigger guns you bring in, the more frustrated you're going to get because that's not the way in. I love Hermione; she is so priceless in this scene. She just says, "Right, we're leaving that room."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Love, love, love. Ron says, "I haven't gotten there yet. I'm not as far along as Hermione." Ron says what I'm thinking: he says, "But what if that's the one?" Yeah, maybe they're guarding it because that's really where you have to go, and Hermione matter-of-factly says, "It can't be, Harry could get through all the doors in his dream." Oh... yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You're right, you're right. I feel like, at that point, I'm being taken care of as a reader; Hermione is ahead of me and guiding me, too. 'Oh, yeah, okay. Something super mysterious is behind there, and we are not going there right now.' Oh, the time room... Gorgeous! The "beautiful, dancing, diamond-sparkling light," the crystal bell jar and the clocks everywhere... All that mortality, ooh! Maybe this is because I don't read fantasy -- that's not a genre that I usually enjoy, and I know some people read it all the time, so this might just be really old hat to people where this kind of beautiful, fantastical description is commonplace -- but to me, this "billowing, glittering wind" and the jewel bright egg, the hummingbird that hatches and then falls and then goes back into it... Oh, that just was so beautiful to me. It makes me think of mortality as a really beautiful jewel, and whether we manage to understand and appreciate it during our time or not, it's just going to keep going, so it's on us to wrap our brains around how beautiful this is. It's behind the time room that they find the place: "high as a church and full of nothing but towering shelves covered in small, dusty, glass orbs." Okay... with the handwritten labels. Oh, love that! You'd think that with all of this incredible mystery that it would be something more than that. No. Some old guy with a quill pen did some cursive on a label. Some of these orbs are glowing and some have blown out, and it made me think, 'Yes, at this depth of mystery, no instrument can help you. The only thing you can rely on at this level of precision is human discernment,' and that's something I learned from figure skating judging. There is a lot of stuff you can do through measurement and recording and video playback and numbers and comparisons, but you always get to the point where you can't measure the real soul of it except by human comprehension -- by human affect -- so the handwritten labels are just such a beautiful touch to me.

**JC:** I hadn't thought about the fact that they were handwritten because I'm like, 'What else would they have done?' They don't have any technology to do it differently, so that's interesting.

**Lorrie:** Well, this is a series where McGonagall taps the schedule with her wand and then your class schedule just appears on it, so they could have just done that.

**JC:** But it's still her handwriting, right?

**Lorrie:** I don't know.

**JC:** I always thought it was her handwriting. I thought that was how we knew she wrote the letters.

**Lorrie:** Well, she signs them. The letters are signed by her.

**JC:** Anyway, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** There's this giant room and every single orb in there is a prophecy, and they've labeled who said it and who they said it to and what it concerns, right? Those are the things that are being labeled, and then they've just collected them all here, so then my question is it's a record. What does any of that mean, I guess? Which is why it's in the Department of Mysteries; also, because they can't be retrieved except by the person that they were about, you can't even study them; they're just being kept here, and when the lights have gone out, does that mean the people that were concerned about them have moved on, passed on or dead? Is that the idea? All the little details in here that I'm thinking about, like this Indiana Jones-style warehouse of identical storage devices... Okay, what are we doing with these?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Some of them are completely worthless; some of them are and always were meaningless; some of them might be really important, or are they? I just love that we know that some of them have blown out, but it doesn't say why so that we readers can think about that. Oh, love it. The kids are all looking way up and around at all of these dust-covered orbs, and Harry's trying to convince himself, 'Oh, yeah, yeah, Sirius... I would have felt it if Sirius had died.' No, he's losing conviction. 'Yeah, Harry, nobody's there.' Oh, God... Whatever has been driving him is being overtaken by the evidence of this overwhelming place they're in, and then it's Ron who sees the sphere that has Harry's name on it and it's glowing dully -- it's been untouched for years -- with "a date of some sixteen years previously..." Huh... We get the initials -- who said it to whom -- *S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D, Dark Lord, and (?) Harry Potter*. Oooh! Did you stop to figure out the initials?

**JC:** I don't remember what Trelawney's middle name is, so that one, but then it was, like, oh, Albus Phinneas William Brian Dumbledore, whatever it is. I may have gotten some of that wrong, but I was, like, 'Oh, yeah!' (Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore)

**Lorrie:** Right, right.

**JC:** 'That's Dumbledore's initials.' Now I'm imagining Hogwarts trunks with this long string of initials on them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, I remember the first time I read this thinking it should be super easy to figure out who S.P.T. is, but I was hurtling along reading. 'I'll go back later and figure it out.' Oh, just the artful question mark in parentheses... Is it Harry Potter? Hmm...

**JC:** It's interesting that he's called Dark Lord here, too. Even his name is not written on this label...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "*And (?) Harry Potter.*" Trelawney gave the prophecy before Harry was born, so no one knew, and then there's the whole thing about how Voldemort went and marked this baby himself basically. It could have been a couple of different babies or probably even more than that, and he picked it. 'When did this get captured and labeled?' is a question I have.

**Lorrie:** Right. So many questions.

**JC:** Clearly, after... Well, okay. In my mind, after Voldemort's demise, after he marked Harry, because otherwise, how would you know that it was about Harry?

**Lorrie:** Exactly.

**JC:** Where was it in the meantime? Or had it been relabeled?

**Lorrie:** Right. Well, in a couple chapters, we do get the story of the re-labeling.

**JC:** Oooh... Hey! Okay.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Again, no memory of this book.

**Lorrie:** So yeah, this part of this chapter is setting all these questions up really beautifully.

**JC:** Ooh, then yay! Then I'm doing my job as a reader.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I'm asking the questions. All right!

**Lorrie:** You are seeing the questions that have been written in for you.

**JC:** Nice. Good.

**Lorrie:** Hermione and Neville both warn Harry: "No, don't touch it!" They can tell. Obviously, you're not supposed to touch it. It's like those detective shows where "What is this white powder?" and you taste it. "No! Don't taste it!"

**JC:** "Why would you do that?" Yeah, exactly. "But it's got my name on it." Yeah, that's not -- You've been lured to this specific location for a reason.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "Oh, no!" Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And that is the driving impetus of Harry Potter, right? "It's something to do with me, isn't it? It's got my name on." This is the child who wanted his Hogwarts letters; this is the child who wants his own story. It couldn't be clearer. It's his; his story is in there. He's going to take it, at which point we get the drawling voice.

**JC:** I love how they don't even have to name him.

**Lorrie:** Oh, yeah. Oh, we know who this is.

**JC:** That one word tells us who it is. 'Oh, wow, you've built up your characters well. If you can give us one adjective,' and we're like, 'Oh, I know who it is.'

**Lorrie:** Oh, someone we really didn't want.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "Very good, Potter. Now turn around, nice and slowly, and give that to me." The condescension...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Just the hateful, smug evil of it.

**JC:** Yes, and then it feels to me... I have this visual of all of the stickhouse falling down or something, right? Everything just falls down, and the truth is revealed that Lucius Malfoy set all this up for Voldemort. He was the one who told Voldemort that 'if you look like you're putting Sirius in danger, Sirius is maybe the most important adult to Harry. That's the person that you can press.' He's the one who told Voldemort all this stuff and he has been at the Ministry all this time, and he's able to set this up. He knows how to get him to the Department of Mysteries even though he doesn't work there. He's set all of this up, it feels like, but seeing him there is like, 'Oh... Okay. All is suddenly clear.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I get this really funny image of the long night he must have had lurking in the dark, waiting for these kids.

**JC:** And waiting, yeah.

**Lorrie:** And how his heart must have pounded when he heard them finally come into this room and listening to them and their talk, and how much he must have been thinking, 'Come on... Come on. Come on, come on, come on...'

**JC:** And he probably knew that they had come in the building because he probably is the one who set it up so they could come in at 2 AM...

**Hosts:** Yeah.

**JC:** And cleared out the security guard and made the way easy, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's a great moment to end the chapter.

**JC:** Yeah, for sure. At this point, there's, what, a couple of chapters left as the reader. We're frantically flipping to the next one.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The next chapter is called Beyond the Veil.

**JC:** Oh, dear. I did have a little moment of seeing the veil and going, 'Oh, Sirius...' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. We'll go Beyond the Veil next time.

**JC:** We will.

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