

## Transcript

### Episode 5.35

#### Book 5, Chapter 35: Beyond the Veil

**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-Five: Beyond the Veil.

**Lorrie:** Beyond the Veil. Harry, Ron, Hermione, Luna, Ginny, and Neville battle a dozen Death Eaters in the Ministry of Magic. Oooh... So JC, it turns out that yes, it was a trap.

**JC:** Yep, yep. Just the name of the chapter... I was like, 'Oh, no!'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'This is the chapter where it happens.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah, you feel it.

**JC:** I think that I was spoiled for this the first time I read this book way back, because I read it about two weeks after everybody else did...

**Lorrie:** Ah, uh-huh.

**JC:** Because I was still finishing up reading the series when this one came out. I had my copy but I didn't start reading it yet, and I think I got spoiled for Sirius's death, which was sad because I already knew about the ship of Sirius [and Lupin]... I already knew that people shipped those two, and then I heard this through them. "Oh, no, Sirius dies." I was like, 'Oh, man.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It was inevitable, yeah?

**JC:** Yeah. I think it kind of was.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Sirius was not... Yeah.

**Lorrie:** He was too important.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** You can't have all the solo, stripped-down facing the abyss with Sirius still there.

**JC:** That is true. The other thing about this chapter that I know I had forgotten was that it's this relentless battle that goes the entire time.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The pace of it... it just keeps going and it keeps going, and it starts to gradually feel more and more hopeless.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It's a real battle.

**JC:** Yeah, and I think the understanding of what's at stake and what the enemy here is willing to do...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh, and how the kids are using everything they can to fight back... It's terrifying.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It also is, again, reflecting things we see in the world right now that we live in (in the fall of 2025). You would not think that Death Eaters would torture and kill children. You would also not think that children will get hauled out of their beds in the middle of the night by police invading their apartment building, right?

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

**JC:** It's just a reminder of how awful people can be, this chapter.

**Lorrie:** What did you think of the writing of the battle scenes?

**JC:** I feel like the writing did a good job of conveying the desperation that Harry was feeling. It felt like it was never ending.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The terror kept coming, the danger kept coming, and the kids were kind of getting picked off one by one.

**Lorrie:** Oh, gosh... yeah. The damage was real.

**JC:** Yeah. It was a little bit like a horror movie when the protagonist's friends are getting picked off, and just when they think maybe they're safe, they're not. It had that kind of horror movie action sequence feel. I was, a little bit, reading it through my fingers a couple of times. Then there were interesting moments when it would slow down to stop and look at just how fucking weird things were in the Department of Mysteries. That would happen every now and then, which was kind of interesting, but yeah. It felt pretty relentless and exhausting, and it kept going and kept going.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I respected the writing -- the pacing, the adventure tone -- because it just swept me up; I didn't have to think about that. Every once in a while, I would stop to think about the writing, but I thought it did a good job. This picks up right from the end of the previous chapter after Lucius Malfoy's voice comes out of the dark and you realize it was a trap, and then immediately these dozen other Death Eaters emerge from the darkness and they're in hoods and masks (like ICE).

**JC:** Uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** They're surrounding the kids (the kids are outnumbered two to one) and they're ordering Harry to hand over the prophecy. That's the weirdness, right? The Death Eaters all have this sense of anxiety about the prophecy that the kids are innocent about -- What? Why are they all nervous about this? -- and then Harry finally meets Bellatrix Lestrange.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh.

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

**JC:** I think that at the beginning, Harry still thinks Sirius is there (he hasn't really figured out it's a trap yet), and the mocking... That's one of the first things that Bellatrix does: mock Harry...

**Lorrie:** Monstrous.

**JC:** Using this baby voice kind of thing. "Oh, wow, you thought he was really in trouble, ah-ha-ha."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They all laugh, and the moment for Harry when he realizes that it was a trap and he pulled these friends into it, and everyone had been telling him not to listen to the dream and he was manipulated... Ugh. Oh, Harry...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Yeah, the mockery is such a marker of how she's exceptionally monstrous. This is where I say my unpopular opinion that I deplore the Helena Bonham Carter depiction of Bellatrix.

**JC:** Oh, because she's so pretty and cutesy?

**Lorrie:** Yeah, it's not the prettiness; it's that she's campy.

**JC:** Oh, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Book Bellatrix is not campy. Book Bellatrix is the scariest (this is true evil and it's not funny), whereas Bellatrix in the movie is somebody that you want to cosplay and is easy to cosplay.

**JC:** Right, yeah. She's got this... I think when I said 'pretty', what I meant was Helena Bonham Carter is just cute...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And I can't take her seriously as a villain.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** She's like an Addams Family-style villain or something, because she's just --

**Lorrie:** Well, she's a Tim Burton-style villain.

**JC:** Yeah, okay, that's it. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right. It's not the actual evil.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Now I will say that in the final movies, I think she's doing a better job or the script gives her the opportunity of actually seeming a little more evil, but at this point in the film version, yeah, she's just cute.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It's me. I can't look past the cuteness, but there is something about her that doesn't convey that evil that you get in the book.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. She's (in the movies) portrayed as a fun villain. Usually in the writing, this series does a pretty good job of deglamorizing villains, because that's been the eternal problem, right? Who would want to be good when the villains obviously have more fun and have better clothes and everything?

**JC:** Ah.

**Lorrie:** Voldemort... I respect the creation of Voldemort as a villain who does not look like he's having more fun and is not more interesting or more glamorous, but that was a

mistake that I felt like movie Bellatrix fell into. Anyway, Harry meets book Bellatrix and she is scary and revolting, and Harry's confused and making sense quickly of the new information: "The Death Eaters wanted this dusty spun-glass sphere. He had no interest in it. He just wanted to get them all out of this alive..." This is unexpected. Harry now has negotiating power.

**JC:** And Lucius Malfoy lets that slip really quickly...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Which is a little bit like, 'Wow, Lucius, that was a mistake.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Yeah. So in this early scene, we see (and Harry sees) that the Death Eaters aren't all that well organized either, partly because Lucius has let that slip, but there's dissension in the ranks because Lucius has to keep reining in Bellatrix. He has to keep her aligned because "Don't smash the prophecy, you loose cannon, you."

**JC:** "Don't hurt Harry. We're not allowed." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Which is another interesting thing that we learn. I think that's one of the first times that we hear that Harry is only to be touched by Voldemort.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The other kids are expendable. That now enables Harry to really physically put himself in front of other people in a way that he would have done anyway, but now there's a reason.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and that's something that continues to be a point of dissension: when Death Eaters let their baser instincts overcome them (their desire to just be destructive or violent), there's some organizing mind of theirs saying, "No, you idiot, don't just kill Harry. There's a degree of finesse that you're missing here." That's something that shows the cracks in the Death Eater ideology really clearly.

**JC:** I also really like (early on in this scene) that Harry says Voldemort's name, and they all react. "You dare!" Then he is the one who says, "Oh, did you know he was a half-blood?" and they're like, "Aaahhh!" But did they know?

**Lorrie:** They did know.

**JC:** Oh, okay. They did know.

**Lorrie:** It's like anti-abortion people protesting at the clinic, and then they bring their own daughters in for a procedure and they say, "But my daughter's not a bad person. She just made a mistake." Then the next day, they're out there protesting again.

**JC:** Right, right. So they do know; it's just highlighting the hypocrisy of them. What I'm thinking about here is the "good immigrants," right?

**Lorrie:** Yes, exactly.

**JC:** Or one of those things that we see often.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, the demonization of whoever they're against makes no sense, but yeah. When he had his rebirth scene at the end of *Goblet of Fire*, he said to them, "This is the gravestone of my worthless Muggle father."

**JC:** Okay, so yeah, that was known. Okay.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Harry's just pointing out the hypocrisy and their outrage, because logic wasn't what they were counting on anyway. In one sense, 'Yes, Harry, who cares?' But in another sense, 'Oh, you don't get to have a say in anything.' Yeah. Every once in a while, when I think about the Jewish people in the Trump Administration dealing with these anti-Semitic colleagues and also charging anti-Semitism, none of it makes sense. They are not far personally from the Holocaust, these individuals, and you can point it out or not (it's not going to make very much difference), but yes, the current U.S. administration is full of the exact same kind of people that they target, like the first lady's parents being immigrants, her son being an anchor baby, and whatever the heck is going on in J.D. Vance's marriage. Whatever.

**JC:** Right, right, but I do admire the sheer nerve of Harry's general strategy to piss them off as a distraction so that the other kids can get ready behind him...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Drawing their ire and just antagonizing them.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Wow.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. They show up there assuming that it'll be really easy to pick off these kids, and Harry's starting to be somebody in their understanding, which is already a win. But yeah, the order from Lucius -- where he says, "Don't kill Harry Potter; you can kill the others or not, it doesn't matter" -- that's chilling.

**JC:** Yes. Then he defends Harry when Bellatrix attacks. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The way that it's not even an order to kill the children... They're so unimportant that it's okay whether -- "That's up to you."

**JC:** Yeah. Ooh, the other thing here that stood out to me in a way on this read is that Malfoy knows that for Harry, getting pieces of his story is important and uses that against him.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** The moment where he says, "Oh, Dumbledore never told you the reason you bear that scar was hidden in the bowels of the Department of Mysteries," trying to take advantage of the fact that they know that Harry doesn't know his story.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They know that he was kept in the dark all this time, and he desperately wants to know about his past.

**Lorrie:** That's been a good theme that's been built up before. The Malfoys always know, and Draco always knows more sooner than Harry does -- "Oh, the fourth year Yule Ball... You don't know what's coming? Ha, ha!" -- but this lays a really good seed of doubt. "Dumbledore never told you...?" because Dumbledore not telling Harry things is huge, and that actually does turn out to be a really terrible, consequential thing here. But then Lucius says, "The Dark Lord had wondered why Harry never came running," and that is hilarious because that gives you a flash view: all year long, the Death Eaters have been called by Voldemort to listen to him over and over again obsessing over, "Why hasn't Harry Potter shown up?" You know that they've had to listen to that night after night after night. God... "The Dark Lord wondered..." So yeah, that's been the past year for the Death Eaters, listening to that. Then we also hear in exposition style that Voldemort discovered during the year that only the people that the prophecies are about can take them off the shelf. Lucius is unwillingly impressed by Harry when Harry figures out, 'Oh, that's why he exploited Sturgis and Bode.' Yeah, yeah. Harry is not as easy to pick off as he thought.

**JC:** And it's interesting, too, because Harry then says, "Well, why didn't he come and get it himself?" Bellatrix basically confirms that the Ministry of Magic knows that Voldemort is back and is ignoring it, and they're benefiting from this ignoring and they weren't ready to push that yet. The idea of manipulating Harry to do Voldemort's bidding served multiple purposes for sure, but yeah, it's just confirmed. All the Ministry knows.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Also, we really get the sense here that this was something that Lucius Malfoy... this whole ploy, Lucius Malfoy is in charge here, right? He set this up, he brought this idea to Voldemort, "This will work." I'm just imagining Lucius getting these visions of, 'The Dark Lord will reward me.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It ain't going to go that way, but yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's also a lonely position for him to be in, because there are not a whole lot of great minds that he can depend upon to help him with this.

**JC:** Oh, that is true. Yeah. He's trying to herd the cats behind him at the same time.

**Lorrie:** Oh...

**JC:** Yeah. It almost would have been better in some way if he could've brought a smaller group.

**Lorrie:** An equal somewhere, someone reliable, but no. They're all just these goons.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So while exposition is happening for our benefit, Harry manages to get the kids to spread the plan to each other. That's a magnificent image, that all these kids suddenly release these hundreds, thousands of glass spheres shattering. The waste of these little mini figurines speaking of their prophecies meaninglessly into the void, and then poof! being gone forever... Love that! Love it, love it, love it!

**JC:** Oh, it was painful, though. These are being archived here for a reason, and then you just... Ugh! The kids' lives are worth more than that, but oh, man... There was something inside me that was like, 'Aaahhhh, no!' I also love that the spell they use is *Reducto*; this is one that they learned in the D.A., the lessons from Harry.

**Lorrie:** Yes, they did. Yeah.

**JC:** In fact, many of the spells that they use throughout this battle are things that Harry taught them and prepared them for. He prepared them for this moment personally, and they all fight so hard and they do such a great job.

**Lorrie:** And as Neville said before they got on the thestrals, "So all that D.A. stuff... Was that just fake, or are we really going to do this?" No, they're really going to do it.

**JC:** Yeah. They really do it in this chapter, yes.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, what I love about the dissipation of all those prophecies is that it underlines that prophecies are not actually that important. It's really only if you hear a prophecy and what does that influence you to do with your life... That's what gives prophecies power. Otherwise, they're just words that either you heard or you didn't, or you could hear a prophecy and say, "Yeah, whatever. I'm still going to do what I'm going to do." Or you can be terrified and think, 'Oh, no, what does that mean? I'm now controlled by it,' which is the difference that Dumbledore's been trying to put into play, knowing that Voldemort is a fearful kind of person who might put too much store by it

and trying to build up Harry to know that if you have free will and you believe in truth and you know what you're motivated by, then a prophecy is only just one more thing.

**JC:** Yeah. I guess that's probably... It makes sense that they have these stored and they have the magic setup so that only a person who is mentioned in the prophecy can pick it up off the shelf, right? They are being archived there, but it's not like they're there to be studied or whatever. The only people who can retrieve them are people who are never going to get into that room, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Ordinary people. What kind of paperwork would you have to file to go down and access a prophecy about you?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Right? The other thing that's interesting, thinking about that, is that there was a question mark by Harry's name.

**Lorrie:** Yes! Yeah.

**JC:** Harry was still able to take it off the shelf.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Is the magic... Is that really how it works, or is it because you decide, 'Yeah, I decided this is about me and I'm going to pick it up off the shelf,' and the magic lets you? I don't know. I have some questions about that.

**Lorrie:** Well, I feel like it's a security measure, right? It's like a personal password or something. This is what the Department of Mysteries has set up to prevent Elon Musk's goons from coming in and getting your Social Security number and all your data. Are you ever going to need this? Well, most of the spheres are completely dust-covered. No, you probably won't need this, but nobody else has the business to go in and look at what might or might not have been said about your life. It's a really good security measure.

**JC:** And the fact that it is where it is, too, is... yeah. But also, the idea that they keep them even after the people involved are gone and there's no way... They keep them. That's interesting, too.

**Lorrie:** Well, the mystery here is: what is the interplay between a prophecy and what a human being decides to do with the prophecy and with their life? Is it just that a prophecy foretells what you were going to do anyway, determined by your own internal strengths and flaws? Because every once in a while, there is such a thing as a real prophecy, a real Seer, somebody who's really speaking something. 'Okay, what do we

do with that mystery?' Anyway, it's a great thing for study. It's nobody else's business. Poor Sturgis and Bode, alas...

**JC:** Yeah. Now Harry's holding it in his hand, and he doesn't seem (at least the way that I'm reading it in this chapter) like he is tempted to get this piece of the story.

**Lorrie:** Nope.

**JC:** Its value to him is as a bargaining chip. As long as he has it in his hand, he can protect the other kids, and they have a chance of getting away, so he's not thinking, 'I need to keep us for myself so I can listen to this prophecy about me.' That's not part of his calculus here.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'As long as I have this, we're safe.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The values of this author and the world she created are so strongly portrayed in the decisions that Harry and the other kids make throughout this chapter. When you're really faced with it -- when your friends are literally in mortal danger around you -- who cares? The only important thing is these people's lives have to be saved. That is such a good, strong value that I think the *Harry Potter* generation, the millennials that grew up with this, really internalized. This is a value that a whole set of children growing into adults unanimously, simultaneously imbibed from this international bestseller, which is one of the reasons why there's so much confusion and mass indignation at thinking that it's now okay to throw trans people under the bus. That is not at all what's happening here. It's not like Harry looked around and thought, 'Well, Neville's no use. It's okay if they kill him.' No, no. You engage your sense of protectiveness toward others instantly, and that overrides personal gain, the unknown, whatever it is that your enemies think that they're bargaining for. What overrides everything is that sense of the people that you're with. So yeah, Harry is holding his bargaining chip, the children run. Lucius says right away to "leave Nott," who's injured; Nott is disposable, dispensable, obviously. "Be gentle with Potter until we've got the prophecy, you can kill the others if necessary..." Ugh. The battle is on! Harry, Hermione and Neville go off in one direction; they try to escape through the Time Room and they're chased in there by two Death Eaters, and then there's a moment that thudded into my heart and made me think of you, JC: the three kids dive under desks to hide.

**JC:** Oh, yeah.

**Lorrie:** What did that make you think of?

**JC:** Oh, yeah. Oh, man, the fact that there were desks in there at all is interesting, but yeah. They're hiding under desks, and then the Death Eaters who are in there look under the desks. We're in horror movie territory as well as school shooting reality

territory here. They're being hunted. But you know what? I think in this part of the chapter, Neville's actions stand out to me so much because over and over, he stands up and casts a spell, he gets kicked in the face, his nose is broken... he does not stop. His wand gets broken, he does not stop. He is like this action hero and never going to quit, and you start to see it in this chapter or this part of the chapter. Oh, my God, Neville...

**Lorrie:** But he's also incompetent in a way that shows this is his first battle. Harry totally knows what he's doing because he's been doing this for years; Neville... It's like those athletes where their first big international is the Olympics.

**JC:** Oh...

**Lorrie:** He casts *Expelliarmus*; he succeeds in disarming the Death Eater and also Harry.

**JC:** And also Harry.

**Lorrie:** Right? And he would be nowhere near this successful if he hadn't trained himself so hard during the D.A. meetings, but it also means that Harry has to worry about him. As a parent, that's sort of the feeling when there's some sort of emergency and you have to worry about your kids and they're trying to help you; sometimes they do, but you also wish that you were there by yourself so you wouldn't have to worry about them, and then once in a while, they trip, right? Ugh...

**JC:** Oh, yeah. It's like the visual in my head: your kid breaks a glass in the kitchen and everyone has to stop moving, and you have to figure out how to get your barefoot child out of this pile of glass while you're also barefoot.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and the kid's like, "I'm so sorry, I'll clean it up." No, no.

**JC:** Yeah, exactly. Oh...

**Lorrie:** In the Time Room is one of the most eerie, brilliant images of this series. It's up there with Voldemort in the back of Quirrell's head. The Death Eater whose head goes back and forth between being a baby head and an adult head just on loop...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Holy... that is eerie.

**JC:** Yeah, and the fact that his head just passes through the glass like it was a bubble, and then it shrinks down... Oh, my gosh.

**Lorrie:** And the rest of it is just this big, hulking, grown-up. Just the image.... Anything that should be an adult that's grotesquely baby-like is such a creepy image of power gone wrong anyway. I think it is a bit problematic, but the term 'man-baby'? It's not only men... Obviously, the author is also a billionaire who doesn't get told 'no' very often now

because of that level of wealth and power, but this combination of power and petulance and tantrumming and lack of limit is just grotesque. Then comes a moment that I find really confusing and totally (in a good way) stops me short in this chapter: Hermione saying, "No, you can't attack the Death Eater when his head is like that. You can't hurt a baby." What did you think when you read that?

**JC:** Yeah. Well, first of all, he pulled the jar off of his head, except he pulled it off when it was in baby form and now he's stuck like that, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So yeah, Hermione is like, "No, you can't hurt a baby." The entire series is about who would hurt a baby, first of all, but also, is that what's happening in his head?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** I don't know. I just had questions: is his head really back to infant state? What? I don't know what's happening there.

**Lorrie:** I know.

**JC:** Ugh... But Hermione is instantly like, "No, we have to hold ourselves to a moral code here, even though these people are just going to kill us and are picking us off." Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And Harry's looking at her incredulously.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So if you were one of the kids in that moment and this gigantic Death Eater is coming at you but his head is shrunk, would you have attacked him or would you have left him like Hermione was saying?

**JC:** I think I would have run. I think I probably would have thought this is my chance to get away from this one. "Let's go!" Yeah.

**Lorrie:** I think I would have Stunned him. I don't think I would have left him like Hermione. I was stopped short, because in my mind, 'Okay, he may be a baby head, but...' Anyway, it was really fascinating. This is one of the strongest areas of this chapter spelling out this author's moral code in this universe that non-aggression is the way to go. You defend yourself. It's not non-violence; you do defend yourself when you're attacked. You defend yourself against Dark Arts, but you do non-aggression. You don't cause permanent harm, or that's the choice that these kids keep making. The spells that they use on the Death Eaters... I kept wishing (while reading this scary chapter) that they would do spells that would take these Death Eaters out permanently so they'd be like, 'Okay, now that one we don't have to worry about anymore,' but they don't. They do

these spells that defensively incapacitate temporarily and then wear off so quickly that the same Death Eaters come back. They use *Expelliarmus*, they use *Colloportus*, they use *Stupefy*... These things can only stop them long enough for the kids to try to get away. Okay, that is the moral universe that this chapter is setting forth.

**JC:** It also made me think about... These are the spells that Harry taught them, and these are the spells that Harry is good at, too. I was thinking about when fake Moody introduced the Unforgivables. He said that you have to really mean it in order for it to work. He was like, "All of you could cast the Killing Curse at me, and I would just barely get a scratch because you don't have the reserves of anger and resentment that it would take to make it stick. You have to really mean it." There's a message here that I'm kind of getting that kids aren't that; they don't have that yet. There's still some innocence here that even if they tried to cast things that were more permanent, it wouldn't work. I think this is why *Sectumsempra* is such a moment in the next book because, at least in my memory, it's the first time that Harry casts a spell that does awful, awful damage and he didn't intend for it.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** They haven't even been given... You have age limits on what people get access to. 'No, you're too young to get access to these things that could really do harm without you having to really work for it.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and there's also the corollary that is going to be expounded on in the next two books where the more damage you do, the more it affects you. It does something to you to have caused that kind of damage.

**JC:** Right, right.

**Lorrie:** The defensive spells that the kids are using now... Their self-image is intact.

**JC:** Yeah. Right. It's so interesting because I had this conversation with my own kid a lot, who is seventeen and very angry about the world sometimes and has ideas about what might be the way to fix the situation that we're in, and they often involve a lot of violence. My response to that is often that if you do that kind of violence, you pay for it with your own integrity and mental health. It's not a victimless crime, even in the sense of 'yes, there's a victim,' but you're also harming yourself when you harm other people. It took me a while to realize, 'Oh, my God, I'm getting that from this series.' That's an effect this series has had on my life: you don't just hurt other people and then not suffer yourself. You always suffer, too. It rebounds on you in some way, and that's interesting because I'm definitely seen that in this chapter, too. The kids are avoiding, like you said, doing anything that would have an incapacitating, permanent effect on any of the Death Eaters. It's a question: are they doing that because they aren't able to do anything more

permanent? Is it that they're choosing not to do something more permanent? That's unclear.

**Lorrie:** This is making me remember something really interesting: I saw this process play out where someone had been violent, and the solution given was for that person to go take a self-defense class. That self-defense class really taught techniques and helped people distinguish between levels of threat and to be able to get familiar with and choose the level of response that they would enact during times of pressure and threat, and that acts of violence sometimes occur when you don't have the experience to be able to distinguish that you're threatened; you just lash out, but you don't have any control. You don't have the experience or the knowledge to know, "Between one and ten, is this a seven?" "I don't know, just crank it up to eleven." That maybe isn't what you intended or maybe you didn't know what you intended because you don't have the experience, but the practice and the discipline of the self-defense allows you to think about, 'Do I want to incapacitate the other person permanently? Do I want to do it just long enough to get away?' It doesn't tell you which philosophy you have to espouse; it just gives you more experience in practice and control, which is what we see with Neville and the other kids that have had this over and over again in the D.A. (which Harry intentionally drilled into them by choosing what spells to teach in his lesson plan against what Zacharias Smith would have wanted so you know your own power better). That's something that... I see this often in resistance movements when people are feeling really (for good reason) oppressed and threatened and under threat for bodily harm. "Go ahead and take some self-defense classes, because possibly, paradoxically, it will help you see the humanity in the people that you're afraid of."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** "It'll help you be more merciful and connect better." That's a really kind of beautiful thing that has been built up so slowly and carefully, chapter by chapter, in this volume: showing the painstaking method by which these kids go from not knowing self-defense (and being prevented from learning self-defense by Umbridge and the curriculum) to being shown the very basics from Harry and how he avoided the really sophisticated stuff and said, "No, what you have to know is yourself. You have to be grounded in yourself and in the basics." We've seen that this book, over hundreds of pages, has shown rather than told that these kids are using spells that they've really internalized.

**JC:** Yeah. I do like this idea (and Harry does that in this book) that when you're afraid and you're not sure what's coming, training yourself, educating yourself is the best defense that you can give yourself. That's the best thing you can do. If you're afraid, okay, go learn. Go learn something about the situation.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, and that's what they did here. That's what Harry did. He trained them.

**Lorrie:** Oh, gosh...

**JC:** Yeah, thankfully.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and it's so serious. Dolohov knocks out Hermione to the point where Neville and Harry think she might be dead, poor Neville's nose gets broken, and then Dolohov (because he's been silenced) gestures to Harry, "Give me the prophecy or you're going to get treated the same way." Harry says what we should all know and rehearse: he says, "Like you won't kill us all the moment I hand it over anyway!"

**JC:** Right, right, which is true.

**Lorrie:** Don't listen when bullies say, "Adopt our new rules, or we're going to cut hundreds of millions of dollars from your university funding."

**JC:** Yeah. When Trump says, "Hey, here's a special deal," and when you look at the terms of the deal, it is completely not to your benefit to take it. There's the promise (the dangling) of some special things, but the rules say 'we can take it away from you at any time for reasons that we aren't going to specify.' Hmm... Are they going to do that? Of course, they're going to do that. Are you going to get what you want? No!

**Lorrie:** If we answer 'yes' to their demands, then they'll leave us alone forever, right?

**JC:** Oh, right, exactly. That's exactly what's going to happen. Yeah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** That's pretty much what we're dealing with in the real world right now, yes. Harry, yes, don't give it up.

**Lorrie:** Yes, Harry, thank you. "Like you won't kill us all the moment I hand it over anyway!" Thank you! That is correct. Don't bother. Don't negotiate with terrorists.

**JC:** Right. Oh, the idea of Hermione getting taken out, the way that it happens and her going, "Oh" or something like that right before... Oh, no. Okay, yeah, that's scary.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** But then Neville is going to carry her. He has no wand because his wand got broken; it doesn't seem to slow him down.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He's like, "No, I'm going to keep fighting," so he's got Hermione's wand and he's carrying Hermione. Ugh... I just want to hug Neville. He's pushing so hard.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He knows he's not the best fighter Harry has, but he is not going to quit. Ugh...

**Lorrie:** And the reality that he's lived with since he was too young to even know... Finally, what he's fighting is equal to the conflict that has made him miserable his whole life. 'Yes, these are the people that did this to me.' This is what he faces all the time in his head. Then they run into the others; Ron is totally disoriented, Ginny's ankle is broken. Ron, in disorientation, summons a brain. Ooh!

**JC:** Oh, that moment when he says, "*Accio brain...*"

**Lorrie:** Oh, no, oh, no...

**JC:** And everybody stops. What is going to happen? Even the Death Eaters are like, "What?!"

**Lorrie:** 'Oh, shit.'

**JC:** The fact that everyone stops to watch is very eerie. Very eerie.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Oh, gosh, then there's this moment that really resonated with me after January 6th of 2021. Harry decides that what he needs to do is draw the Death Eaters away from the others, so he holds the prophecy visibly over his head and runs in the opposite direction so that the Death Eaters will chase him. Do you remember the police officer, whose name is Eugene Goodman, who diverted the rioters on January 6th?

**JC:** Uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** He was just a cop who saw what was happening, knew that there were people to protect, and on purpose acted in a way that they would chase him and put himself in that line of danger and it worked. Yeah, just the fact that this battle scene -- when I first read it, school shootings were not the thing that they are now.

**JC:** Oh, wow.

**Lorrie:** We didn't have classroom drills all the time where people hide under desks, and then later on we got January 6th and I have this image of this one citizen police officer drawing the rioters toward him, away from people that he wanted to protect. These are things that became less innocent in my status as a U.S. reader since I first read this book. Yeah, nothing in the world has changed except that where I live has made me more knowledgeable about this.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It's a very different feeling. 'Oh, yes, I know this happens elsewhere in the world, too. Oh, yes, I remember when that happened to us.' Oh, Harry... When he draws them away, he escapes into this new room and it turns out to be the death chamber.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, and I have this punch in the gut of, 'Oh, no.' I don't know, the first time I read this, if I knew. I knew that eventually something was going to happen to Sirius, but when he goes back into the room at first, it's just him and Neville and the Death Eaters. Yeah. But that ominous arch...

**Lorrie:** So this is a moment where I had a moment of thrill at the prose. This passage changes the rhythm of the prose: when Harry gets into that room, he falls down "steep stone step after steep stone step..." You cannot read that at the same pace that you've been reading most of this battle chapter. Most of it is rushing into rooms, they're screaming, they're attacking. That makes you stop. You have to go at that rhythm, right?

**JC:** Interesting.

**Lorrie:** "Steep stone step after steep stone step..." I feel it. I feel the bumps in my own body, how it feels when you fall down stairs. He had been running full tilt, room to room; suddenly in silence, he's crashing slowly and unstopably while everyone watches. There's nothing you can do to stop it. I have to look that up in poetry.

This is called a "molossus". M-o-l-o-s-s-u-s. This is a term I had never heard of before, but I had to look up 'what is it called when there are three stressed syllables that follow one after another?' There's no stressed and unstressed syllable, there's no flow; it's just like each one stops. Molossus, that's what this is. "Steep stone step after steep stone step." That's Harry falling into the dais that has the archway on it, and then, totally terrifying, he climbs onto it. Oh, God, this is scary. The Death Eaters are laughing at him because they think they have cornered, which they do.

**JC:** And then I forgot that Neville, with his broken nose... "He's dot alone! He's still god be!"

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** And then Bellatrix steps forward.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and he says... This is so undignified, and he really is just being a baby where he says, "*STUBEFY! STUBEFY!*" and it doesn't work because he's just an incompetent... His intention is pure, but no, he can't pronounce, he can't enunciate. This is when Lucius's face is flushed with pleasure, Bellatrix looks "transported, alive with excitement," and this is the contrast when I've had people say to me, "Oh, Snape is a sadist." No, this series shows you what sadism actually looks like. This is different. This is what they live for, Lucius and Bellatrix.

**JC:** It's also interesting that Neville couldn't pronounce the curse or the hex there, so it wouldn't work. It made me think about accents and what is the interplay of language and casting a spell. If you were a wizard who grew up in France, for example, would you have different spells? What happens to a person who has a speech impediment? I had

a lot of thoughts about how important... Do people need accommodations that they have to learn? Like if you're dyslexic, you need to learn how to retrain your brain to do the task of reading. How does that work for the connection between language and spells? Anyway, that's just a little thing that went off in my brain at that moment.

**Lorrie:** No, that's in the next book. They go into that.

**JC:** Oh... Well, hey.

**Lorrie:** Not exactly, but with nonverbal spells.

**JC:** Ah. Okay, that's right, they do that.

**Lorrie:** And wandless magic. The reason Neville has a hard time with this is because he hasn't mastered this spell so that it just works. He can do it, but he's still at the point where... There are some things where I can do things, but I have to find the instruction manual first; then there are other things where I know how to do this. He's just a kid. He still needs some help.

**JC:** And just a kid who then gets tortured by Bellatrix.

**Lorrie:** Oh, yeah.

**JC:** I forgot that this happened.

**Lorrie:** And she's so happy to get the chance to fill in her bingo card.

**JC:** Yeah. That's... yeah.

**Lorrie:** Oh... So yeah, she has her fun. Again, this chapter shows the value system so clearly: "Harry did not have to think; there was no choice." When he sees that's happening to Neville, he's about to hand over the prophecy. It's a really firm value system. That's something that fans of the *Harry Potter* series believe in more than they believe in following J.K. Rowling and whatever her mind is serving up in 2025. Yes, she created this series. Yes, she is now advocating against rights for trans people. This is a clear choice. Ever since the beginning of TERFpocalypse when Rowling was saying, "If you believe in me, if you follow me, then you're going to fight against trans rights," the *Harry Potter* fandom did not have to think there was no choice. 'No, we stand with our people. You can have it.' If you think about the day in December of 2019 when she broke her Twitter silence with the first super unmistakable volley of TERFpocalypse, it was that day where *Harry Potter* fans -- different *Harry Potter* fan groups -- said, "We unequivocally reject this. Sorry to say goodbye to our years of partnership with J.K. Rowling, but goodbye." That lack of inner conflict that Harry has in this moment he's watching Neville get tortured... Okay, that's something that to me is the soul of the disagreement between people who retain *Harry Potter* fandom and separate from the author's transphobia. Well, Harry doesn't have to hand over the prophecy yet because...

**JC:** The cavalry arrives, and where do they come from? How did they find them? It is so hard to navigate this place, so the fact that they appear just at the right moment is like... \*exhales\* That's like, 'Okay, this is a story. That's right.'

**Lorrie:** Well, they could have come earlier. It would have been the right moment earlier, too.

**JC:** That would have been, yeah. They could have, for sure, but they come the last moment that they can.

**Lorrie:** We get Sirius, Lupin, Moody, Tonks, and Kingsley. They show up; the grown-ups are here and they take over the fighting. When this happens, Macnair (who is so terrifyingly muscular) almost strangles Harry to death. Neville, bless him, gets Macnair to let go by poking him in the eye with Hermione's wand.

**JC:** Just the stab...

**Lorrie:** You don't have to do this sophisticated magic; you just jab him. That works still. You can take out a dragon with a conjunctivitis curse, yeah. There's that one brief moment of Harry and Sirius battling side by side... Ouch.

**JC:** And this reminded me that the movie version changes up the dialogue just slightly...

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Where it goes from "Good one, Harry" to "Good one, James," or he just says "Good one" in the book.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah, and Harry in the movie version is sort of highlighting the fact that Sirius wants James back when he looks at Harry. I hadn't realized that there was that distinction until I read this chapter and I was like, 'Oh, that didn't happen in the book. Oh...'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, in the book, Sirius is not thinking that way.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Sirius knows who Harry is.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Lucius curses Neville's legs... I love this. It's so absurd and undignified. I love this. That's how the prophecy breaks: Neville's legs are flailing, and absurdly, goodbye prophecy!

**JC:** The absurdity of that is funny, partly because the kids have been using the kind of hexes that school kids use. They've been using *Petrificus Totalus* and things like that,

and this is the first time that we've seen Lucius reverting back to... This is something a kid would cast on another kid, so it's interesting that that's the one he picks. Of all the things that he could have said, that's the one that comes out, this freaking middle school prank curse.

**Lorrie:** Yep. So there's Neville kicking and breaking the prophecy, and I love this too: only Harry and Neville see this happen.

**JC:** Ah, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Nobody else knows. This prophecy that's so damn valuable to the Death Eaters and to Voldemort... Poof! Gone.

**JC:** And they don't get to hear it, right?

**Lorrie:** No. The little mini fig goes "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," and then just... unheard.

**JC:** And that's it. It's just gone, yeah. Oh, my gosh. After all of that... All of this has been about that thing and it's just so fragile, and now it's gone.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. There's really only so much stock you should put in these enchanted glass orbs. They watch that happen, and then... Oh, what did you think of what happens next?

**JC:** When Dumbledore comes in, and looking pissed as fuck. I love that... white-faced and really angry.

**Lorrie:** Oh...

**JC:** Ugh...

**Lorrie:** Yeah, and Neville's face is transported.

**JC:** And Harry's like, "We're saved!"

**Lorrie:** Yeah. "Harry felt a kind of electric surge charge through every particle of his body -- *they were saved.*" Wow, has this book been a long time building up to this moment. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages of Dumbledore or God being absent and how it feels, and now this is every dream come true. I, as a reader, had given up hope. I didn't see this coming.

**JC:** Yeah, because again, it doesn't happen in the movie. At least I don't think it does, and I've seen the movie multiple times since I last read the book, so when Dumbledore made this appearance, I gasped. I was like, \*gasps\* 'Dumbledore is here!'

**Lorrie:** So many unthinkably bad things have happened to the kids in this year and nobody came to save them, so I didn't think Dumbledore was going to come now, either.

**JC:** Right, right. Oh...

**Lorrie:** The narrative goal of the reader getting broken or these characters getting broken through this year of, 'Oh, yeah, but that's so awful. That can't happen.' Yes, it can. Over and over and over and over again, that goal was so successfully achieved that Dumbledore showing up here is a shock to me.

**JC:** Yeah, you're right about that. It was almost like I had forgotten about him. I had forgotten that he exists. He'd been off doing a thing, right? He left in a blaze of glory.

**Lorrie:** He'd been chased out, yeah, and once he shows up, it's effortless for him. He overpowers the Death Eaters just by thinking it, practically. Wow!

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. No matter how much I try to be realistic and temper my fantasies, yeah, I think the blessing of this kind of unexpected saving must be a built-in feature of my human nature.

**JC:** Yes, we have kind of forgotten about Dumbledore -- he's not really been a fixture in this book -- but the idea that someone could do that, that one person could sweep in and be the grown-up and fix all the things, is such a fairy tale fantasy.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Right? I almost don't believe it even at this point, because it's like, 'That's so unrealistic,' as if everything else in this chapter has been realistic in any way (like the little magic details and things), but part of it is because this battle that they've gone through doesn't feel as far-fetched as it did probably the first time I read this. The arrival of Dumbledore from a story perspective is like, 'Oh, gosh, Dumbledore's here finally,' but from a 'connecting this to my real life' perspective, it's wishful thinking. 'If only...'

**Lorrie:** It feels dangerous, doesn't it?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Because as we've been in the U.S. (this is now October 2025) and as we've seen the Supreme Court be bought out, as we've seen various parts of the Constitution be overturned, as we've seen unlawful detention of citizens become the norm... All of these things that should have been stopped, where we kept thinking, 'Surely the Supreme Court will stop this...' No, they won't. 'Surely we can't just hand over everyone's Social Security data to some tech bro.' Oh, well, there it goes. After this happens, we have been trying to tell ourselves repeatedly to get away from this fantasy, 'If this is such an abomination, surely somebody's going to come save us!' and we've had to train ourselves repeatedly to break away from that fantasy. 'No one is coming to save us. No one is coming to save us. Whatever you're waiting for is not going to

happen. You're it. Get up, get out of your chair, get moving.' It feels a little threatening to have the power of this fantasy presented to me again because it's so powerful.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That would be so nice to just sob and lay down the fear.

**JC:** The other thing that it's highlighting for me, too, is I look around the world and I think, 'Okay, I don't see anybody who could do this,' and every time someone pops up who maybe could, I'm instantly brought back down to earth by, 'Oh, yeah, no.' Their values don't align with the Dumbledore figure in my head in the way that they should, or they're doing this for self-serving reasons.

**Lorrie:** The fantasy is so alluring.

**JC:** It is, but the reality is that it ain't going to happen, right? Yeah.

**Lorrie:** We're going to see this later in the second half of *Deathly Hallows* when the problem is that Harry is tempted to fall into this fantasy. 'As long as I can get the Deathly Hallows, I'll be invincible.' Dumbledore, meanwhile, has tasked him with, "No, don't do that. Don't fall for that. You have to go after the Horcruxes. Nothing will save you. You can only save yourself." The lure of that temptation is so powerful.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And here we are at book five of a seven-book series, and it's still a children's series because Dumbledore shows up.

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

**Lorrie:** And he is as strong as we fantasized he could be.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. He overpowers the Death Eaters effortlessly, but he doesn't get there in time to stop the Sirius/Bellatrix battle. They're very evenly matched, I think (Sirius and Bellatrix), and he's taunting her right back and he's laughing. Then that thing happens that I think is quite a wordlessly moving image to me: his body falls backward through the veil and that's that.

**JC:** And it's interesting, too, that it's unclear in the book what the spell was, and if he had fallen in a different direction, would it have been different? That feeling of, Oh... It was like, 'If one thing had been different or if only we hadn't done this...' Anyone who's ever had an accident where you've injured yourself badly, you can look back to the second where you made a little tiny choice that made it inevitable that this was going to happen, and you're just like, 'Oh, if I had just done one thing differently, I wouldn't be in this situation.' I like the fact that the book does that, because the movie version actually

has her cast the Killing Curse, so there's no question. It's not like, 'Oh, he fell into the veil and it just happened.'

**Lorrie:** 'What just happened?' Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. It's the bargaining phase of grief...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Combined with the five-second rule.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** 'I haven't accepted that it happened yet, so if I just go back mentally and do something different...' I love that that reaction to shocking loss is written so integrally into this chapter, that disbelief. Harry is certain that Sirius is about to reappear; Lupin, who has some experience, has to physically hold him back before he runs to the dais and does something stupid. Meanwhile, the thing he sees... I love this: "Harry saw the look of mingled fear and surprise on his godfather's wasted, once-handsome face as he fell through the ancient doorway and disappeared behind the veil..." That's elegiac. That's a little moment of understanding this was a life; this was the entirety of this really quite magnificent man's completely wasted life. It wasn't completely wasted -- there was a ton of love in it -- but it's gone and it was inevitable.

**JC:** Yeah. I'm imagining how Sirius has been trapped in Number Twelve Grimmauld Place and when he gets the call of 'Harry's in trouble.' Not that Sirius was necessarily excited about that, but the fact that he could do something and go fight for Harry... You know that he was ready. "Let's go, let's ride!"

**Lorrie:** Well, I think it's the exact same thing that Harry went through when he saw the vision of Sirius being tortured.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Nothing can stop you. Even if you're stopped in your mind, that's the only thing taking you over.

**JC:** And now... Oh, there's not even a body.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That idea that someone can be taken from you that quickly... I think that's kind of what this scene always made me think of. It can happen so fast, and then the fact that there's not even a body means that the reality of it isn't really even there. He's just gone.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'Oh...' That's really hard, and now poor Harry is going to have to deal with the fact that Sirius... He's going to blame himself. Sirius came here to rescue Harry because Harry got pulled into this trap. Oh, God, Harry's going to have some rough times coming up.

**Lorrie:** It's really powerful that Lupin understands what's happening so quickly that he's right on the spot to hold Harry back, because everything you just said went through Lupin's mind already.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Lupin, whose friends killed each other and has been living twenty years... Sirius gets the warrior's death; he gets the laughing-in-battle death, so they're some dignity to that, but ow...

**JC:** Yeah, and that's where it ends.

**Lorrie:** The next chapter is called The Only One He Ever Feared.

**JC:** Is the next chapter the last chapter, or do we have one more after this?

**Lorrie:** Oh, no, we have two more.

**JC:** Two more, okay. Oh... The Only One He Ever Feared. Well, who is that, I wonder? Hmm...

**Lorrie:** Yeah. So that was intense.

**JC:** But also, that chapter title tells me that we're going to get some answers...

**Lorrie:** Yes, we are.

**JC:** To some questions, and that's a relief after all of this.

**Lorrie:** Well, Dumbledore's here.

**JC:** After this incredible battle, in which these are fifteen-year-old children.

**Lorrie:** I know.

**JC:** Fifteen- to sixteen-year-old children.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** All right. Well, I'll talk to you soon.

**JC:** All right.

**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](http://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.