

Transcript

Episode 5.38

Book 5, Chapter 38: The Second War Begins

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 longtime HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline. In this episode, Lorrie and JC tackle Book Five, Chapter Thirty-Eight: The Second War Begins.

Lorrie: The Second War Begins. After the Ministry battle, Cornelius Fudge acknowledges the return of Voldemort. The kids recover in the hospital wing and Harry grieves for Sirius. We are at the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, JC!

JC: Amazing! I think this has been ten months?

Lorrie: We recorded Voldemort returning to his body on January 20th of this calendar year (2025).

JC: Which I still think is amazing.

Lorrie: Yes, I still think that's amazing. Now, here we are in the last chapter of *Order of the Phoenix*, and we've just had elections where finally, there was some blue wave pushback to the shock and horror of the past several months, which led me to think... I guess I will say that the Cassandra Gap has closed. The Cassandra Gap is a term that I didn't even think of until us doing this podcast through the past several months. Okay, that's when you're like Harry and Hermione and you know what's coming and you just have to wait for people to believe that such a bad thing

is possible, and try to protect them from themselves as they give away a lot of their rights because they just haven't caught up. But yeah, here we are. It's the week after elections, and the song I can't get out of my head is the rap song that Zohran Mamdani wrote and recorded.

JC: That sounds very much like something from *Hamilton*. That one, or is that something else?

Lorrie: Yeah. It's where the refrain goes, "Chap chap it up," because it's like Ugandan/Indian fusion rap. It's very wholesome.

JC: It is very interesting, though. We wrapped up the previous book around the time that the current administration took office, and then all the horrors that have been inflicted upon us since that time... This book is what we were reading.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Then we just had an election where we had some hope for the first time in a year (for me, at least), and then this chapter ends us on a hopeful note. 'Okay, at least now people are going to maybe believe that Harry has been right all along.' It's wild how this is reflecting reality in ways that I would not have anticipated.

Lorrie: Yeah. We have an "order is restored" kind of chapter here, which I think reflects the catching up of the Cassandra Gap, right? All of this destruction happened; nobody believed it. Now, it is irrefutable, it has been accepted, and now we can assess where we are. The *Daily Prophet* has a quote from Fudge confirming that Voldemort's back, the dementors have revolted from Azkaban (oh, that can't be good), the Ministry believes that the dementors are taking direction from Voldemort (that is definitely a good step toward reality and toward admitting the truth to the public), Dumbledore has been restored to all of the offices that he was stripped of at the beginning of this volume, and the *Daily Prophet* is calling Harry 'The Boy Who Lived' again. The kids are recuperating together in the hospital wing; Hermione is taking ten potions a day and her ribs hurt.

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: And in an obvious but irresistible metaphor, of course Ron has these deep welts because "thoughts leave harder [deeper] scars on you than almost anything...."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Flitwick has left a bit of the swamp from Fred and George as a monument.

JC: I just love the fact that Flitwick, in three seconds... All the teachers were like, "Oh, no, we can't get rid of this." Of course they could all along, but the fact that they got rid of it as soon as Umbridge is gone...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's just so funny, I think. I love that the teachers resisted in so many ways throughout this -- all the resistance they did while staying at Hogwarts to protect the kids -- and that's something that I think about almost every day. The teachers I talk to think about this a lot: when things are getting rough, do you protest by quitting and leaving, or do you stay and take care of the kids, even though what you can do has been restricted and your voice is being suppressed? That's a hard choice to make, so I look at this and I think that's the choice the teachers made: to stay. Stay and resist Umbridge wherever they could and to take care of the kids. Not an easy choice. Also, the idea that the paper... I laugh at it now, the way the paper switched stories. Now, I laugh. The first time I read this, I know that I was just livid. 'How could this happen?!' It seems so much more like, 'Yeah, that's what they would do now.'

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. "There were rumors that Harry was nuts." Oh, yeah, from *them*.

JC: Yeah, they're the ones who published them. Oh, my gosh... But now, I just kind of go, 'Uh-huh...!' Yeah, of course, because the world has changed so much since the first time that I read this book that now I don't trust that most media is telling the truth. Even our local paper here in Austin...

Lorrie: Oh, no.

JC: It got bought by a conservative brand (or the new owner of the paper is conservative), so very subtle shifts started happening in the op-eds and things. The paper came out against some things that were up for a vote in the elections -- some propositions and things -- that the paper would 100% have been for in the past; now they're against.

Lorrie: Oh, geez...

JC: Yeah, yeah. It just depends on where the money comes from, doesn't it? So yeah, which way is the wind blowing?

Lorrie: Yeah. We're also recording this about a week after all of the staff of *Teen Vogue* was fired without notice, and that had been such a strong resistance publication since 2016. It's a really effective strategy to monopolize the media and turn it into a state organ.

JC: Yeah. Yep. So yeah, I have different feelings about that now than I did the first time I read this book, for sure. But I also love that everyone is hanging out in the hospital wing together.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They're curled up on each other's beds and there's a big pile of chocolate frogs, and they're catching each other up. They are... 'team' is not the right word; it's like a family. They are really sticking together, and it's not just Harry, Ron and Hermione anymore; other kids have now been brought into this circle, and that's so important.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, it's so nice that they have a place to relax together and don't have to explain things to each other, although we definitely get Harry feeling separate from the others even then. Ugh...

JC: Yeah, that's true.

Lorrie: But what's new?

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Umbridge...

JC: Umbridge is there, which is wild because they look over and there she is. It's like the camera pans to where she is, which is a surprise. Apparently, Dumbledore went into the forest by himself and came out with Umbridge, and everyone's amazed that there was not a scratch on him. He just went in, got her, and came back out. No one else is capable of doing this, and what we have seen of Dumbledore in the last couple chapters reinforces just how powerful he is. It is interesting that it's always been this reputation of, "Oh, Dumbledore, the only one that he was ever afraid of, and Dumbledore this, Dumbledore that." This book... I

think it's one of the first times that we really see Dumbledore's power and it's really impressive, but this is another piece of it. 'Dumbledore walked in the forest and walked back out with Umbridge.' It says a lot about Dumbledore's moral code, too.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Yeah. He's going to go, he's going to get her, he's going to bring her back out, but then she's just been in a daze. She's clearly been traumatized, she hasn't really spoken; she reacts when Ron makes clip-clop noises, and it's portrayed as funny. Yes, she was an awful person -- she tortured kids, she was a terrible human being -- but everyone is making light of the fact that something bad happened to her in a way that doesn't sit well with me for many reasons. Also, I cannot help but think that there's this strong, underlying subtext here, maybe, that there was some sexual assault that happened. That's my read. Maybe that's not how it was intended to be read by the author, but I don't know how you read this as a woman (as a woman-identifying person) and not feel that. This author is making light of the fact that perhaps this awful person was sexually assaulted as if perhaps she deserved that; this is the same author who has attacked trans people because of some misguided thought that they're responsible for sexual assault of women in bathrooms. I cannot divorce those things in my head. I don't want to feel sorry for Umbridge here, but now Umbridge's situation is a reminder of the author's awfulness to me.

Lorrie: I have so many responses, I don't know where to start.

JC: Go!

Lorrie: All right, let's see... From a critical standpoint, I think the author meant for us to feel the worry, the possibility that there had been sexual assault, and to know that this is a worry that is greater when the victim or survivor is female. I think that was a major reason why the person portrayed as leading Umbridge into the trap... She chose a female character, because I think having a male character do that would have been too ghastly. I don't think there was sexual assault. I go carefully into the reading and I understand that this is a topic where the emotions around it that readers bring to it can be so powerful that a word-by-word reading doesn't have the same sway as the overwhelming possible narrative that this was sexual assault. Yeah, of course this has been the topic of so much fandom debate. What makes people think it was sexual assault? First of all, just because the survivor is

female and the people who took her away were all male, that in itself is such an overpowering power dynamic that it's going to suggest itself to us. Then the way that she's acting traumatized and can't really speak strikes fear as something that we can easily imagine happening to somebody who was traumatized in that particular way, although, of course, there are other traumas that can also produce that effect. But this narrative, culturally, is so strong in us that I think the author was very careful about what she set up to suggest and not suggest that this happened to turn the focus on the reader: if you think this, then the text neither proves nor disproves it. It sort of does, but it definitely makes you aware of yourself as a reader and what feelings you bring to the reading of a story. One clue is that she appeared to be "unscathed," and Madam Pomfrey said that she was "in shock." That's all that happened to her, so to me, that is a medical report. Of course, there are such things as sexual assaults that are not physical, but this is like, 'Okay, *that* didn't happen.' Physically, she was not sexually assaulted. Then the way that this author lets the children all laugh at her, male and female, made me think, 'What is she doing here?' My conclusion is that the kids all believe that she was not sexually assaulted. I'm trying to think, 'What is it that I think Dumbledore did, and why do I think she's not talking?' The feeling I got was just how dire her situation was, and then she sees, coming through the forest, the man that she's tried to destroy -- she has done her absolute best to destroy Dumbledore -- has come to save her. We don't know, but I cannot imagine that he says something like, "I'm here to save your undeserving skin." I don't think he's throwing any of that in her face; I think he's just there to save her, and she very much does not deserve that. She would know: why would he do anything other than... If their positions had been reversed, she would have been thrilled to see him executed by a bunch of centaurs. Being face-to-face with that kind of life-debt of extreme mercy and morals at a time when she's had all of her notions of status stripped away completely, she's just one human being (not a very strong one) with no wand, surrounded by very, very strong people (centaurs, all of whom are really mad at her) whose laws she's broken. The image of your mortal enemy that you've tried to destroy coming to rescue you... that's a rough one. How would you feel if you had tried your absolute best to get somebody destroyed and they come to save you? Why? It's not because they love you; it's because you have worth -- because people have worth -- a thing that you yourself don't believe, right? If you imagine her

situation -- there she is, about to be executed by this ring of centaurs, and then Dumbledore comes... That feeling that Harry and Neville and the others had in the Ministry in the previous chapters is that when Dumbledore arrives, *they were saved*. She gets to have that feeling, too? Well, if you had asked her, did she deserve that feeling? I think she would have had very conflicted feelings about that. I think that being face-to-face with the greatness of that humbling mercy and that moral code is world-destroying for her. I am certain that Dumbledore did not cast any magic around the centaurs or antagonize them in any way, obviously; he knew why they were so upset. If he was allowed to leave there with her -- and no further damage was done to her and he was unscathed -- he must have engaged with them in terms that they understood as aboveboard, because these centaurs all have sticks up their asses. They're so, "No, this is the way we do things," which is totally understandable when you see that they've had so much taken away from them by wizards, and then these were the rights that they were guaranteed by treaty. "Oh, you're going to even take those away? Oh, no, you don't." I think Dumbledore was abiding by those agreements, so I think he did nothing that emphasized how wizards are able to subjugate centaurs. No magic, no wands... I think he made reference to their agreements and showed his understanding of their laws and their grievances. I think that they had taken her as a hostage, basically. They have a political treaty, the centaurs, with the Ministry; then this Ministry hack shows up, starts yelling abuse at them, starts howling and casting spells... What the heck?! 'Okay, then. By your own treaty, you just violated this.' I think Dumbledore performed diplomacy. My guess (if I were him, what I would have done): I think he gave them his personal assurance that this was never going to happen again and that this horrible little human is an aberration and not the new way, and that he would make sure that whatever her problem was was not going to be their problem anymore. That's what I think would have resulted in him being able to leave the forest without a scratch (with her no further damaged). Her recognition of how little power her worldview had... I think everything she thinks has just been upended, and she truly saw herself as powerless as she really is. That's my take when I go word-by-word into the reading, because I understand that the overwhelming power of the read that she was sexually assaulted by the centaurs -- that read, which is held by a lot of people -- is deserving of all the respect. It's such a powerful narrative, and the fear that comes along with it... You

have to respect how much fear people feel when they have that reading. But yeah, I think we're meant to know that that fear is always present and I don't think that's what happened here. I look carefully at Ron and Hermione and Ginny all laughing, because Umbridge finally speaks when she hears Ron making clip-clop noises, then she actually comes out of it enough to tell Pomfrey, "No, no, no, I'm fine." I thought, 'Oh, so this is not about rape.' It's funny that Umbridge met the limitations of her power. That was what she had been abusing a whole school with for the whole year: her notions of power, her twistedness, how much she gloated, how much she used that to torment people, and how outrageously she violated what should be normal about who does and doesn't have power and how much over other people. She just reveled in being able to take as much perverse power as she wanted -- and to corrupt other people into enjoying that, too, along with her -- and she met her limit.

JC: Okay, taking that idea -- that what she's doing, lying there in a daze, is struggling with all of that -- it's also very interesting to think that she was there the whole time the kids were reading the newspaper article aloud and hearing that the Ministry is now admitting that Harry was right all along and Voldemort really is back, and all these things that she fervently believed were lies that she tortured Harry for continuing to say. Now the government itself is acknowledging that Harry was right all along, and she's having to lay there and listen to that, too. Wow...

Lorrie: I don't think she ever thought they were lies.

JC: We had this conversation early on.

Lorrie: Yeah. I think she always knew that Voldemort was really back, didn't care, and thought that the important thing was to cover that truth up to further her own agenda, which had to do with centralizing her team's power, Fudge's Ministry.

JC: Okay, that's interesting. I thought we had a different conversation earlier in this podcast and maybe I just remembered incorrectly, but either way, that's over. Everyone knows the cover-up; if her self-imposed task was to cover it up, it's out of the bag now. There's nothing to be done, and she's having to lie there and listen to all of this. Also, to hear things like that Flitwick could have cleaned up the swamp all along... He just waited until she was gone.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Which she might have known...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But yeah. One thing we know for sure, though, is that she was making up all of that terror on her own; it wasn't on Fudge's orders, because there were things he didn't know about. 'Okay, well, the boss is going this way. All right.' She was hoping that he would fall in line with her plans; that's not happening. Her star is falling.

JC: Ah, yes. In the meantime, poor Harry is sitting there and feeling more and more removed from these people. He hasn't told the others about the conversation he had with Dumbledore.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I don't know. Has he even told them that Voldemort possessed him? Did they know any of it at this point?

Lorrie: It doesn't say whether he's told them that. He hasn't told them that he has heard the prophecy -- he hasn't told them what was in it -- and here we have the setup for the final two volumes and Harry's misunderstanding. He's afraid that he's going to have to tell Ron and Hermione that "he must be either murderer or victim, there was no other way...." Of course, we find out in the end that he is neither murderer nor victim and there is another way, and we get the next two volumes to figure out how on earth this author is going to get us there, but that's what he believes at this time. That's all that the reader has been told at this time, although as a reader, you sit there thinking, 'Mmm, I really don't think this author is going to make this boy into a murderer, so let's see how she does that.' This knowledge is separating him so badly from them, combined with him being out of his mind with grief over Sirius. Oh, it was so relatable to me when he couldn't handle being around them anymore; he just makes up, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to go see Hagrid." He just makes that up.

JC: Which I had forgotten until he actually went down to Hagrid's hut: Hagrid has been missing all this time! Hagrid left and has been in hiding, and the fact that he could just go see Hagrid... Oh, things are being set back to rights.

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yeah. So yeah, but that feeling that Harry has that he's not at home anywhere -- he's not at home in his own skin, not with his friends -- Ugh, yuck. Then, of course he runs into Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle on his way out.

JC: And we learn a little bit here: we learn that Lucius Malfoy is in prison now, and that's apparently why Draco is angry at Harry. Apparently, Harry has ruined his life because he did a thing that sent his father to prison, which is just... Okay, yeah. But I think there's some interesting things happening in this scene: Harry's dealing with such big things that these are just little mosquitoes coming to bite him, right? He's like, 'Ugh...' Of course, then Snape shows up. You've said before Snape always shows up just when you don't want him to, and yeah, Snape shows up. I love that he shows up here, and then this line from Harry. "What are you doing, Potter?", and he [Harry] says, "I'm trying to decide what curse to use on Malfoy, sir."

Lorrie: I love it.

JC: What it reminds me of is that scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Indiana Jones thinks Marion is dead and he's sitting in this bar drinking; Belloq, the Frenchman who works for the Nazis, comes in and confronts him and says something about the ark. "It's a radio for talking to God!" and Indiana says, "You want to talk to God? Let's go see him together. I've got nothing better to do." It's an iconic moment. He has no fucks left to give. He's like, "Let's just do it, let's go," and that's how Harry reads to me in this scene.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The fact he can say, "I'm just trying to decide what curse to use on Malfoy, sir..." It's Indiana Jones with no fucks to give in my head, and I love it so much. That's where he's at.

Lorrie: "Why, what did you think I was doing? What does it look like I'm doing?"

JC: Yeah. No fucks left. It just says so much about his mental state right there.

Lorrie: "Any suggestions?" Yeah.

JC: Yeah. We'll find that out in the next book, won't we?

Lorrie: Boy... The thing about Draco... Yeah, it's so unspeakable when Draco's mad at Harry. Lucius would have been just fine if Harry hadn't brattily put him in prison. "Okay, Draco, what do you think Harry should have done in Harry's position?" Draco's position is so bad. He is, of course, terrified and wretched because his father has gone to prison, and the position he's in as a family member is like, 'Well, I guess I've got to continue his work,' which is no hardship considering how much he hates Harry, but that's the only tack he can take because it's not like he's going to go to Harry (who he can't stand) and say, "Oh, you were right when my father did -- I don't even know what he did to you, scary stuff." He can't, and he doesn't really fully know what his father did either, which is terrifying. That's what we see from Draco and Crabbe and Goyle: they're all three in this position where their lives have been upended and their fathers didn't tell them what they were doing. There's such a horrible creeping fear: 'What was my father doing? On top of what's going to happen to him, what's going to happen to me?' When Harry very impatiently says, "Well, I'm terrified now. I s'pose Lord Voldemort's just a warm-up act compared to *you* three --"

JC: That's so great.

Lorrie: Then they all look stricken, and Harry says, "What's the matter? He's your dad's mate, isn't he? Not scared of him, are you?" Harry is putting his finger directly on the problem: the bad position they're all in is they're just children and they just learned that their dads did something so scary that whatever happened, something terrible happened. Harry then wanders into their view and they just have a lot of feelings to take out on him, but he very clearly knows a lot that they don't. It's not like they can go around saying, "Well, my father's innocent!" No. What did their fathers do that they weren't telling their kids? And if it goes wrong -- suppose Voldemort is mad at them -- what does that mean for their futures?

JC: Draco Malfoy, along with Crabbe and Goyle, makes me think a little bit about Trump's youngest kid. Is he in college yet, or is he still in...?

Lorrie: Yeah. He's at NYU.

JC: Okay, so he's... Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. There's been some drama around that.

JC: But when his father was first elected, he was just a kid in private school, granted, but a kid in school. The parallels there for me... He probably had to deal with a lot of people saying awful shit about his father, and then he had to go through and sort out 'which of this is true?' and 'where do my loyalties lie?' Yeah, oh... I do feel for that kid. I don't know anything about him and maybe I shouldn't feel sorry for him at all, but it makes me think about Draco here. I do feel bad for Draco. I see Draco getting older and he's about to make some bad choices, but he's been kept in the dark about just how awful his father is.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Wow, yeah. I feel bad for him. The fact that Harry knows more about what his dad is up to than he does... Ooh. Yikes.

Lorrie: Yeah. Draco's been trying to be "I know more than you do" the whole time, but this...

JC: Oh, right. That's been Draco's thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, there are a lot of parent/child dynamics this is reminding me of. There were the adult children of people who were at January 6th who turned their parents in and knew, as they did that, that it was heartbreaking and that their families were really torn apart by this. There are children of really horrifying politicians who disown them and want nothing to do to them, like Mitch McConnell's kids.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: Or going back even further, like Ronald Reagan's son.

Lorrie: Oh, yes. Ron Reagan, Jr.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: You have to make a choice; you can't opt out. Draco, Crabbe and Goyle are all really scared at this moment and don't know what to do, and Harry despises them. Draco accurately predicts that their fathers "will be out in no time" now

because the dementors aren't guarding the prison anymore, and Harry knows this is perfectly correct. Yeah, they are going to get their dads back, and this is not going to be over anytime soon. Then when Snape catches them, Harry doesn't even hate Draco that much compared to how much he hates Snape.

JC: Yeah. In the next book, this will change, but at this point, Draco is just scenery. He's just really annoying scenery, and he has never been that important to Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It is interesting how that changes, but yeah, it's not about Draco. Draco really wants to be the main character; he wants to be... Yeah, but he's just not. It's like, 'Honey, you're not the antagonist. You really aren't.'

Lorrie: But I didn't recognize until now, 'Oh, that makes sense to me': the way that Draco is blaming Harry for what happened to Lucius ('No, Draco, Lucius brought that on himself') and the way that Harry hates Snape, because in his mind, Snape somehow arranged for Sirius to die. It's like, 'Yeah, that really wasn't it.' But how awful Harry feels right now... That, combined with the many long reasons that Snape has given him to dislike him, I guess it's beyond control. I think Harry is feeling the same way that Draco, Crabbe and Goyle are. The grief and the confusion and the fear must be overwhelming. Yeah, and then when Harry says, "I'm trying to decide what curse to use on Malfoy, sir," Snape is so outmaneuvered. "Uh... Fine. Put your wand away."

JC: But I love that he does smile here, right? He's thinking, 'Wow, he just opened that door for me. I get to punish you now,' but he only was going to take away ten points from Gryffindor? That doesn't seem like very much. Then McGonagall interrupts and shows up. Much like the children who came in to rescue Indiana Jones from the confrontation with Belloq in the bar, McGonagall comes in and bestows a bunch of House points and then takes off Snape's ten, but it's so interesting that ten points just felt like nothing compared to...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my gosh. He's taken away ten points from people in class for looking at him the wrong way.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is ten points? Wow, Snape.

Lorrie: Oh, God... This is a super important moment for me in the series. When McGonagall shows up, Snape is so happy to see her.

JC: Ah.

Lorrie: How relieved he must be, because he actually likes her. "Professor McGonagall! Out of St. Mungo's, I see!" She bosses Crabbe and Goyle around, she makes them take her stuff, and then she enters into something that I think Snape finds comforting: they bicker. "House points, meh meh meh meh meh..." and the way that she's being smug that she's adding House points and the way he's grumbling about it, I think they like that. I think it makes them feel like, 'Oh, thank goodness you're back!'

JC: It's normal.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is how they normally interact without the pressure of having to deal with Umbridge and everything else. This is just normal behavior.

Lorrie: They have this rivalry about Quidditch, about the Houses. The way that she smirks and says, "Okay, I'll give you those ten points," and how he's like, "Urgh... lost that one," they're having fun. That interaction is one of the ones that makes me feel most like, 'Oh, it's been such a long year.'

JC: Yeah. It also definitely stood out to me, all the things that you just said. I was like, 'Oh, okay, I didn't notice,' but it did stand out to me on this reading that Snape did not object to any of those points.

Lorrie: No.

JC: There was not even a flicker on his face that was described. She just awarded, what, 300 points? "Okay, great..."

Lorrie: 'Can't argue.'

JC: "But take off the ten for Harry!" That was... yeah. That's also a sign to me that Snape is not terribly vexed by this interaction.

Lorrie: No. Really? Ever since the previous year when Harry named which Death Eaters showed up for Voldemort's rebirthing, Snape has known that he's going to have to be daddy to these boys and that it's all going to go in a direction that he can see and it did. Seeing the three of them ganging up on Harry, there's really no denying what the situation is and what an uphill battle he's going to have as their only champion in the school. Somebody where, regardless of how he really feels about their fathers or about Voldemort, those boys have nobody else.

JC: True, and he's still hopeful that they won't turn out badly. He's not given up on them.

Lorrie: Yeah. Whether he has hope or not, you can't give up on them. It might be that no matter what you do, they go bad, but it's for sure if you give up on them, they'll go bad. People deserve to have somebody have faith in them whether or not they're going to go bad, and if he doesn't, who will? Also, remember what happened to him when he was their age, so he's not in a good position here, but it must be really striking at his heart seeing them spluttering like this and knowing that Harry has every reason in the world to not respect them. Yikes! This is not kid stuff.

JC: And it's interesting, too: when Harry exits the scene, leaving them behind, the next sentence is "The hot sun hit him with a blast," and that was a strange way of phrasing that because he's leaving. He's turning his back on people who were going to hex him, and then we get that and it was a little bit jarring. 'Uhhhh... Should you turn your back on these people so quickly?' That made me pause for a moment.

Lorrie: But I think he knows that with McGonagall and Snape forming that alliance again, when the two of them are in power like that and in cahoots, there's really nothing... Not even Draco.

JC: At least while we're here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Things are different on the train.

Lorrie: Well, Crabbe and Goyle are gone by this point because they've had to carry McGonagall's stuff up to Gryffindor Tower.

JC: I love how she just enlists them. She's like, "Here, you look like strapping young lads. Carry all my shit up to my office up eight flights of stairs." Yeah, that's great.

Lorrie: What can they do?

JC: They can't say anything but, "Yes, ma'am!" That's so great.

Lorrie: I like that we get that reaffirmation that McGonagall is a professor for everybody. She doesn't just only teach her House.

JC: Right. I love, also, that she uses her crotchety old lady privilege here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. The cane in her hand because of her leg situation and she's been in St. Mungo's, and she can just order these people around and they're like, 'Oh.' Yeah, I love it.

Lorrie: But then Harry makes his way to Hagrid's hut, and everything is so wrong-feeling because Sirius is dead and that's that. Hagrid tries to be comforting, and sadly for Hagrid, none of it lands.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He's not even doing bad; those were really great, legitimate attempts, and... nope.

JC: Yeah, and how quickly Harry is like, 'I should not have come here.' "I need to go visit Ron and Hermione in the hospital." It's the same excuse mirrored.

Lorrie: That was funny.

JC: Yeah, that is funny, but oh, yeah. It's great to know that Hagrid is okay and that he was just hiding out. He's still worried about Grawp, which I had forgotten about Grawp again, happily.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: No one's reminded of him again, sadly.

Lorrie: Oh, no.

JC: His existence... But yeah. Oh, when Hagrid says, "But Sirius went down fighting, and that's how he would have wanted it," it took me back to this memory I have. I was a student teacher with a teacher who was this really interesting guy, and he was probably older than my parents, but not that much older. His big hobby was riding motorcycles, and every summer he would go do these big motorcycle tours (that's how he used his summers as a high school teacher). I knew his kids; his kids went to the school. I think it was my first year in grad school and he passed away very suddenly, and I don't think he was even sixty; I think he was in his late fifties, so it was very sudden and very shocking. He was a single parent and left behind two kids who had to go live with a family member, and it was really traumatic. In the middle of the school year, his students were scrambling... It was really sad. I remember, at the funeral, talking to one of the other teachers who had known him for years, and I was freaked out by the fact that he was so young. I was like, "He's not that much older than my parents. This is scary."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I said, "He had all these dreams he was still going to do. He was looking forward to all these motorcycle trips he wanted to take and all this stuff," and I remember this other teacher said, "Don't feel sorry for him. He got to do a lot of the things he wanted to do, and that's really rare." Basically, she was saying he got to take all these great trips. "Don't feel bad for him that he didn't get to do those things," and I was so angry in response I didn't know what to say, so I connect with Harry. Hagrid's like, "That's how he would have wanted to go down, fighting," and Harry's like --

Lorrie: "He didn't want to go down fighting!"

JC: "He didn't want to go down at all! What are you talking about? He wanted to live. He needed to live his life. Why?!" Oh, I connected with that really hard. There's nothing Hagrid could have said there.

Lorrie: No. Yeah. Hagrid did nothing wrong, but it just wasn't going to work.

JC: Yeah. Ugh... So yeah, it's just sad.

Lorrie: So yeah, Harry ends up going by the lake for hours by himself.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, God, what a terrible, terrible time.

JC: Just processing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I get that, too. Sometimes you just need time. You just need time, and being reminded of how everyone else's lives are just going on around him... All those kids, they're laughing. 'Yeah, great. They didn't just see their godfather die, and they didn't just find out that they're the subject of a prophecy.' You can just hear the monologue in his head, looking around and realizing that the world is really going on and no one cares.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's a level of which no one cares about your personal troubles, and wouldn't it be nice if you didn't have to care.

Lorrie: This is an interesting iteration of the theme that love is the greatest power, because Harry sits there thinking, 'Yes, I know. The other students now believe me that Voldemort... I don't care. Yes, I know I'm a marked man. It's going to be me or Voldemort in the end. I don't care.' Missing Sirius makes all of those other things unimportant. That's not a fun part of love being powerful, but it's part of the package. Perspective... Oof. But just in case we were going to be too sad about Harry, then Umbridge tries and fails to sneak out of Hogwarts.

JC: That was funny. This is the same day, I think, maybe? Or it's within a day, maybe of when they were in the hospital wing and she was still looking dazed. That was a point at which I thought, 'Okay, she must have been doing better than we were led to believe in that moment if she's able to try to sneak out.' The fact that Peeves chases her off and nobody does anything to help her...

Lorrie: Uh-huh. Nope.

JC: They're just like, 'Oh, yeah, there she goes.'

Lorrie: 'Oh, pity...'

JC: 'Good luck, Peeves.' Yeah. 'That Peeves, I tell ya...' Yeah. They're just like, 'Don't let the door hit you on the way out.'

Lorrie: 'Or maybe let it hit you.'

JC: 'Let it hit you. We don't care. Either way, it doesn't matter.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's a little bit of humor before we get another gut punch.

Lorrie: Well, it's catharsis because I read that thinking, 'May all tyrants be driven away in similar fashion.'

JC: Ugh... yeah.

Lorrie: Anyone who has stayed with the story this long deserves that collective moment of relief.

JC: Yeah. Oof.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: If only I could believe that that would really happen... Of course, we see her again; she comes back.

Lorrie: She does, but we did have that moment.

JC: Much like other tyrants in our lives.

Lorrie: I know. I'm dancing around the next subject, and you almost brought it up and I cut you off.

JC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's good. That's great.

Lorrie: But I can't avoid it anymore. All right, you start.

JC: Oh, yeah. Harry goes to pack up his trunk, and then he finds the gift from Sirius; he finds the mirror. I remember, as a reader reading that for the first time, my brain immediately went to, 'Oh, my God, all this time he could have been talking to Sirius.' All the wasted opportunities...

Lorrie: Ouch.

JC: Anytime that he needed to talk to Sirius, I'm like, 'Oh...' It was just like, 'Ugh.' I'm imagining Sirius sitting and staring at the mirror and wondering if Harry's going to show up. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yes! 'Why doesn't the kid... Did I offend him? Oh, shit...'

JC: 'Oh, he doesn't want to talk to me.' Oh, it's so bad. Ugh...

Lorrie: 'He doesn't love me. Who would want me as their godfather?' Oh...

JC: Oh, it's so sad, all those miscommunication tropes, but the author doesn't have Harry wallow in that feeling here. Rather, he thinks that maybe he can still talk to Sirius through this mirror, that maybe magic works that way. Even as a reader, I'm going, 'Honey, no. That's not how this... Oh, no. Harry, don't get your hopes up.' But it's also very realistic.

Lorrie: It super is. He's still in 'bargaining'; he hasn't reached 'acceptance.'

JC: That is true, yes.

Lorrie: I think it's still five-second rule. 'No, I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Come on, this world does magic. I've seen all sorts of incredible stuff, and none of it was important compared to this. This is so important. Surely, surely, surely...' No.

JC: Yep. Ugh, so that's sad.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then he shatters the mirror.

Lorrie: Yeah. That is, I think, the detail in this series that hurts the most for me to read, the awfulness of this grief. He tried... They all tried. Then he runs after Nearly Headless Nick to try to get the ghost to get him out of accepting the inevitable, and the ghost runs away from him.

JC: The ghost is, like, 'Oh, no. I knew this was coming. This always happens.'

Lorrie: "My least favorite."

JC: The interesting thing is that Nick has been a comical character all this time, and this is the first time that I really appreciated that Nick was a human being, and part of the tragedy of Nearly Headless Nick's story is that he couldn't let go.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He didn't move on into whatever sense that means in this book series. He's clinging to something that he can never have again, but he's still clinging, and you get the sense that he made a choice and he can't take it back.

Lorrie: No, he can't.

JC: He can't be liberated and move forward. No one can come along and release him. He's just here and he's sad about it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He realizes he made the wrong choice, and he knows nothing more about death. Just because he's a ghost doesn't mean he knows anything about death. He knows nothing else and he can't help, and he dreads having this conversation yet again. For 400 years, kids have come to him. Aww...

Lorrie: And he would hope that kids would go the other way and not take his choice.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: In a way, I can imagine him being in a similar situation to Snape, looking at the kids and going, 'Oh, please don't do what I did.' If he sees people at risk of making that ghostly choice, he must feel pretty bad about it. 'No, you don't want to do that.' Just the way he said, "No, Sirius will have gone on." Oh... Although that is comforting. 'Okay, no, Sirius was a whole person. Okay.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Fortunately for Harry and for all of us readers, he finally finds somebody who knows how to connect with him in a way that makes him feel a tiny, tiny bit better.

JC: Yeah, and this is making me think, too, about Nearly Headless Nick's situation. Ghost stories are common across all cultures. This common theme that ghost stories have (ghosts remain because they had some kind of unfinished business and they cannot let go of it)... This idea that that's what it takes to make a ghost (something you have to want so badly) cross-culturally, this seems to be the case. You have to want something so badly that you could not move on to the afterlife without seeing it taken care of, and that's even more damaging to the soul of this

person; this is a world in which people have souls. Oh... yeah. Yeah, but you're right that it provided (even in the first read, but definitely on this read) a little bit of relief for me to know that Sirius was leaving it behind.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. That makes it sound like Sirius would argue that his death was for a purpose, that it wasn't meaningless, that he's ready to move. He felt good about where he was in his life and he could let go.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's some relief in that.

Lorrie: So much of his life he didn't get to live fully, but yeah, he was present enough to do that.

JC: Yeah. Harry is still... The bargaining phase is rapidly turning into something else.

Lorrie: Oh, God, yeah.

JC: Yeah, and then he runs into Luna, who is such an interesting character at this point in the series. I love this little glimpse into Luna.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Luna, where she's been so strange and weird and ethereal and flighty, and then we finally get this scene where it's like no, she knows exactly how people view her and she's just decided not to let that bother her.

Lorrie: Yeah. We've seen with Harry, when Crabbe, Goyle and Draco are being shits to him, he's like, "Oh, yeah, you people... whatever," and it might be some of that going on, too. She's like, "Oh, yeah, they bully me. They take my stuff." But this always is so touching: the way that she's serene saying, "Oh, yeah, my mom died and I'm still very sad about it." She has both that super calm way of saying it, and also you know she's devastated. That combination is startling and touching enough to get through to Harry. "But I've still got Dad." Ouch!

JC: And then she also heard the voices coming from behind the veil, so she is this person... She is confident. I guess I'm thinking about... I'm an atheist, so I don't

have any beliefs on this regard, but there are lots of stories (and I actually do know a couple of people) who had a really serious health incident where they almost died and then had a vision of the afterlife that really made them think, 'No, I shouldn't be afraid of death because I know what comes next.' Luna has that. "Oh, yeah, I heard them. You heard them too, right? Yeah, they're there." That's interesting, too.

Lorrie: It's definitely a change from earlier in the chapter when Harry felt like there was nobody on his side of things who understood where he was, and Luna can say, "You know those voices you heard?" "Oh, yeah." She's not trying to make a connection; she's referring to something that he actually already knows. "Okay. All right." It's not like she's making light of how upset he must be, because clearly she's upset enough about her mom to just accept this life where these mean Ravenclaws steal her shoes and stuff. Give them back, you little jerks!

JC: Oh, the way that she says, "Oh, they always do, but they always return everything. It always comes back in the end." Wow, how did she get to that point of serenity?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "I'm not going to be angry about it. I'm just going to wait. It'll come back. I'll just appeal to their better nature and say, 'Hey, I know, you took my stuff.'"

Lorrie: Yeah. "It's time."

JC: "It's time to give it back." Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: Yikes! Yeah, that's not fun, Luna, what she had to go through... Yeah, and Harry is just so embarrassed by how miserable it is for her and how she's just matter-of-factly describing, "Yep, this is my life."

JC: Yeah. He feels sorry for her, but she doesn't feel sorry for herself, which is interesting.

Lorrie: It's like her life is like that, whether or not Harry Potter sees it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and she's used to people not caring. Yeah, that's just real, that exchange... Everything about that is so real, and it works on Harry; he's not completely by himself. That's good, and I guess he misses dinner that night.

JC: He misses so many feasts, which makes me sad for someone who was underfed or has been.

Lorrie: On the other hand, he didn't have to go listen to whatever Dumbledore was going to say. That was part of why he was dragging his feet on going to the feast at all: he thought, 'Oh, no, Dumbledore's going to talk about all of that. I don't think I can handle it.'

JC: And everyone will turn and look at Harry...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. I don't blame him.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that's when he runs into Luna, who is late for the feast because she's trying to get all her stuff back. That's good. Yeah, because that was a rough time the year before when we the readers sat through Harry having to listen to talk about Cedric. Dumbledore had to acknowledge Harry Potter did something really brave and everybody's staring at him; well, we get spared that this year. Harry doesn't have to go through that, and we the reader don't have to go through that either. Yikes... Yeah, we get to skip right over the feast and go onto the Hogwarts Express.

JC: Hogwarts Express, which is between the two worlds.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: There's so many interesting things that happen on this train. It's like adults, with a couple of exceptions: there are no adults.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: You can eat as much candy as you want; there's no adults. You can hex people; there's no consequences.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: A lot of lawless behavior happened on the school buses when I was in school.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: There was one adult, but they were driving the bus.

JC: Right, because that was back before... Yeah. I remember I was in marching band in high school, and the amount of sexual activity that happened on the bus on the way back from things... It's funny, because by the time my kid was about to be in marching band, there were multiple parents on those buses. That was not going to happen. It's funny that back in the eighties, it was like, "Yeah, all right, whatever."

Lorrie: Yeah. Who's going to control it?

JC: There's probably an eighteen-year-old driving the bus, too, right?

Lorrie: No. It was an underpaid, cigarette-voiced. Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, but somebody who just had no patience for any of this.

JC: Oh, that's true. That's funny. Yeah, we had a lot of high school kids. Once you turned eighteen, you could get a bus driver license, so there were a lot of high school seniors who drove school buses; they would get paid for that, and they would get early release to go get their bus and go get the kids. Then their friends would sit at the front of the bus with them, and I learned a lot.

Lorrie: Oh, boy. Oh, boy.

JC: In middle school, I learned a lot from listening to the bus driver and their friends talking on the school bus.

Lorrie: Oh, my goodness.

JC: It was the eighties!

Lorrie: Well, here they are on the Hogwarts Express, and it's pretty much the same thing. So yeah... Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle are trying to get their revenge on Harry, but oops!

JC: Yeah. They plan to ambush him, but they do it in the wrong place in front of the wrong people, and they get hit with so many hexes that they are unrecognizable.

Lorrie: They're oozing.

JC: They're oozing, described as slug-like (like "slugs stuffed into Hogwarts uniforms"), and then the kids just put them on a luggage rack and leave them there.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Which is funny, but also incredibly disturbing. It's funny in a sense of, "Ha ha, we got our juvenile revenge on these three characters" (and we all we know that Malfoy's going to get his revenge in the next book), but I can't help but wonder what happened next. Did they not get off the train and their moms were there (because their dads are in prison)? Their moms were there...

Lorrie: Oh, my gosh, yes.

JC: "Where are our kids?" and they go and search the train and find them like that? I don't want to have sympathy for Death Eaters, but from a parent perspective, yeah, really disturbing to find out that this could happen to your kid (they could spend the entire train ride like this) and that no one helped them.

Lorrie: Although sometimes these hexes wear off, so I'm imagining that they might have only looked half like slugs by that time...

JC: Yeah, maybe.

Lorrie: But yeah, there's that awful moment as a parent when your kid's in trouble and also injured, and you simultaneously are scared and angry. "What happened to my child?" Also, there's that dread of, "What did you do?" Oh... Yeah, it's really unruly here and very much of the era. Oh, then we get a walk-on by Cho and Marietta. Whew!

JC: Well, we get our teen relationship drama update. I love how there's this teen relationship drama that's happening that Harry just has no time for. It's not on his radar, it's not on our radar, and every now and then it pops up and it's like, 'Oh, that's right.'

Lorrie: "Whatever."

JC: This is a high school, and there's drama happening. Yeah, oh my gosh.

Lorrie: Again, speaking from my minority position of being firmly anti-Marietta, firmly pro-Sneak acne: what would Marietta's life be like at this moment (when so much has returned to almost normal) if her tip-off to Umbridge had led to Harry

and others being killed or injured? Because had she done that, Umbridge would still be out and Fudge would still be acknowledging Voldemort, but if there had been more deaths to follow Cedric's, how would Cho feel after Cedric died the year before if somebody else close to her had gotten hurt or killed? Maybe Cho herself would have. But the life that Marietta has right now (walking around with Cho) is so much better than what might have happened, and the hex (the pimples showing up, making her shut up before she did any more damage) saved her. She was going to get into it worse than that before she saw the SNEAK word. Anyway, Marietta got off better than she might have.

JC: I also wonder... What happened between Marietta and Cho is one of the things I wonder, because Cho was really invested in Harry at the time. Yeah, I don't know. I'm just like, 'How did those two make up?' They're clearly friends again after Marietta tried to turn them all in, and Cho would not have come out well in that. How did they repair their friendship?

Lorrie: Well, she sided with Marietta all along, or that's what we see. We see her confronting Harry and saying Hermione Granger is such a horrible person, and Harry says, "She would have sold out you, too," and Cho won't go there.

JC: Okay, so they didn't have a falling out, necessarily. It was more just...

Lorrie: She thought it was too... Yeah.

JC: Okay. Well, Cho justifies that to herself somehow. Yes.

Lorrie: But this is the same series where Sirius Black set up Lupin to become a werewolf and kill Snape, and Lupin didn't confront Sirius on that.

JC: Right. This is how people are with friends.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: It's not that unusual...

Lorrie: Nope.

JC: Particularly at this age.

Lorrie: Yeah. The fact that Marietta, one way or another, is in a position where the worst thing in her life is how much she resents Hermione... That's darn lucky for her.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: She has to wear a balaclava and she has to put thick foundation on her face. Yeah, the mood would have been very different if she had accomplished what she'd set out to do.

JC: Ooh, for sure.

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Ron is clueless about Ginny's love life, but hints that he wants her to date somebody better next time.

JC: Yeah, I love that he's totally shipping it. Harry's oblivious but the reader is not, which is kind of funny. Yeah, the whole drama of, 'Cho is now dating Ginny's ex,' and he's like "What?" It turns out that Ginny is now dating Dean Thomas. "What?!"

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ron is just as clueless about the relationship drama as Harry is. Yep, yep. But I do like when he's nodding his head at Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Make a better choice next time." Hint, hint, hint. Harry's oblivious. Ginny's not oblivious, but Ginny also does not think Harry's available at this point anyway.

Lorrie: And is about thirty miles ahead of Ron on everything.

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: Whatever Ron is saying, it doesn't even matter.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: There's Harry knowing that as much as he hates everything right now -- hates everything and everyone and nothing feels good -- it's all going to be much worse once he meets the Dursleys.

JC: He's like, 'Can I just stay on the train? Can I just live on this train?'

Lorrie: That gave me a pang for Tom Riddle.

JC: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "You want to go back to the orphanage?" "No."

JC: "No. I'll close the Chamber of Secrets."

Lorrie: "I'll just blend in with the upholstery on the Hogwarts Express, thank you."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry gets a big surprise at the station where Mad-Eye, Tonks, Lupin, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, and Fred and George have formed a welcoming party for the express purpose of threatening the Dursleys.

JC: I had forgotten about this, so I was like *gasps*. It was a surprise. It was like, 'Oh, I totally forgot that this happened,' and I thought this is the author basically like patting Harry on the head and giving him a little bit of relief.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Yes, you had a really awful year.' It was so bad, and rather than it just be, 'Oh, God, he's going back to the Dursleys and it's going to be miserable again,' the author gives him a little something.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Actually, it won't be as bad as before because we're going to threaten your relatives."

Lorrie: Yeah, or "At least you'll get to watch your relatives cower," which is also valuable. Annie, the publisher who published the first version of my Snape book... Her theory is that these Order of the Phoenix people together took it upon themselves to rise up against Dumbledore and revolt and say, "We're going to show up and help out Harry at the station."

JC: Ah, interesting.

Lorrie: Because they were angry at how he had left Harry unprotected. I don't agree, although it's a very fun scenario to imagine. It's not at all hard to imagine, but I don't see any evidence for it. I think this is Dumbledore responding to the part

of their conversation where Harry yells at him about how miserable he's always been with the Dursleys. Now that Dumbledore has revealed to Harry, "No, this is why I make you go back there," then okay, we can give the kid a little now. Until this year, he didn't dare tell Harry that he had all these lookouts for him and that people knew he was stuck there, but no, he's told Harry why he has to go. "I know the Dursleys suck. Sorry, kid."

JC: "We'll try to make it a little bit better." The idea of Mad-Eye versus Vernon Dursley is so great.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Mad-Eye Moody's exactly the kind of person who could intimidate Mr. Dursley, and he does. That's great. It's such a great way to end the book. Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: How satisfying...

JC: Yeah, and that Petunia's greatest fear is that Tonks will show up with pink hair at her house and embarrass her in front of all of her neighbors. That's really funny, too, but I like that after everything Harry's gone through, he goes back to the Dursleys -- he knows why he has to go -- but everyone's like, "We love you, we have your back, you don't have to go for long. If we don't hear from you every three days, we're going to show up and freak out your relatives." What a relief to know that he has this.

Lorrie: It's different from where he started out in this book.

JC: Oh, my God, yeah, completely different. At the beginning, he thought he'd been abandoned by the Wizarding world.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, so that's nice.

Lorrie: "Well, Dumbledore tried abandoning him for understandable reasons and Sirius is dead, so we're just never going to make that mistake again, are we?"

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: So here we are finished with *Order of the Phoenix*, a manual for resistance for our times.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: What are some things that you and I have noticed along the way?

JC: Oh, my gosh... I don't even know where to start. A lot!

Lorrie: I know.

JC: A lot. I haven't thought about this, so you must have some things.

Lorrie: Well, you talked about, in the last recording or two, how the end of this book would make you think about all the things we learned about our times as we read through this. I know that --

JC: Oh, I played myself, didn't I?

Lorrie: I know one thing that kept coming to me over and over again, to my unhappy surprise, is we're worse off than they are at this point...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that was not true the last time I really went through this book.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I know that for most of the time that I've been a reader of this series, things were so bad in this volume that I couldn't imagine it. Now, here we are... We have overshot.

JC: Yeah, that's really interesting. That's been an interesting feature of reading this at this time, and to see all the different ways that the characters resist is also very interesting. There's an extent to which it is a manual for 'how do you resist?' What are things that you can do to push back, to keep yourself strong, and to keep your ties with your allies strong during times like this? I think there's a lot of good stuff in here that you can see the characters doing. I think about, too... I feel like it was around the time that this book came out that the fandom became very politically focused. Was this when... Well, the Dumbledore's Army thing became a big thing, right? Dumbledore's Army became a metaphor for 'What if fandom got together and tried to help people?' There were big organizations that were started after this book came out in my memory, and I don't think they existed before in the same way. I think that had a big impact on the way that the fans of the series looked at

their own power within the world and what they could do to make changes in areas that were important to them.

Lorrie: Yeah. A lesson that we so very much need to learn all the time is, 'Don't be harder on your imperfect allies than you are on the real enemy.'

JC: Oof... Yeah.

Lorrie: I love just that one moment when Ron takes Harry aside and says, "All right, Hermione and I have stopped fighting, but you have to stop taking it out on us." That is something so good to have in a story that you can point to when people very understandably are so fearful that they don't want to think about the real enemy. They want to go yell at somebody who's right there to give a response because the enemy is beyond shouting distance; the enemy truly doesn't care.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That is a beautiful thing that I think a story accomplishes better than any political argument. I also like that in the story, we see why it's important to learn your own triggers: because the enemy will deliberately attempt to provoke you so that they can destabilize you and you can wear yourself out without them having to do anything. It took me quite a while to understand, 'Why is Snape yelling at Harry? Control yourself!' Oh, that's so helpful. Oh... Okay, you have to practice calming down your reaction because you have to remain emotionally present. Why? Because you have loved ones to protect. If you let your emotions flare up, that's going to work against your ability to protect people. Oh, boy... It's not fun, but being easily provoked is tiring. As I mentioned before in this episode, what I'm now calling the Cassandra Gap (which is what Hermione had to strategize for with the jinxed parchment), knowing that when you're working with people who are in danger but they don't know yet and they won't believe you yet, and they'll be mad at you... If you wait around for them to completely come to that realization by themselves, by that time it may be too late. All right, don't hold up your own plans for self-defense. This gap is unavoidable, it is a constant in life; know that and prepare. Oof. Craftivism.

JC: Craftivism.

Lorrie: Yeah. Make sure that the people you're giving gifts to, actually, that you're not making more trouble for them. Yes, when you want to give money to food assistance, don't bring them stuff from your pantry; bring them money, like they said. Or if you must give food, like they said, don't bring Kraft Mac and Cheese unless you're also bringing butter and milk.

JC: That's interesting, though, because I've made Kraft Mac and Cheese without either of those things plenty of times in my life.

Lorrie: Well, what do you do it with?

JC: You can mix it with water. You just mix it with water.

Lorrie: Yeah?

JC: Yeah. Oh, my God. Yeah, no, that was a staple of my childhood. We didn't have butter and milk, no! Not to spare... Maybe a little splash of milk, but no, you would mix that shit with water. It's fine. You can eat it.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is white people food, so I didn't... What I grew up with was that you mix cold rice with water, and that's a summer refreshing snack when you don't have anything else.

JC: Right. Yeah. Stale bread, you just put it in the toaster...

Lorrie: Toaster does miracles.

JC: And put anything on it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, anything on it. Tomato paste... I made pizza with stale bread. Tomato paste is cheap; we always had it. Just smear a little, like you would do Vegemite, just enough to get the flavor of the tomato. Anyway, yeah. Sorry. I got off-track there, but yes, yes.

Lorrie: Yeah. Knit hats, bake cookies... It does help. Give them to people who affirmatively want them.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Organize, resist. Just as Harry found out, when you know that you're empowering other people and you're getting the energy from working with them, that makes a huge difference. It doesn't even matter how little it is; when you combine with somebody and the two of you combine your powers to do something and cheer each other up and teach each other some good skill, it makes a difference. Just being nice to other people makes a difference. Yeah. I'm so glad that we have this story to point to with some of these points, because we have to learn them over again every time there's some new upsetting setback.

JC: I'm trying to remember where it goes from here. I think I remember... Okay, yeah, no, I do remember, because the sixth book is when all the conspiracies start and we start to unravel the Horcruxes and all of this stuff.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: I wonder if I'm going to think this again. I have in the past thought that *Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth book, is a perfect book.

JC: Wow!

Lorrie: I think it accomplishes so many ambitious themes simultaneously, so deftly and powerfully and simply. It's very confident and the same theme plays out on different levels, levels that are so different that it's astonishing to see that they're all the same theme in how much they reinforce each other. I think it's really masterful. I think, probably, *Prisoner of Azkaban* is a higher literary achievement; I think it does more ambitious things more stunningly, but I think *Half-Blood Prince* is also perfect. Part of it is that there's an ease to it that comes with just competence. The author has really achieved a lot; she's a very experienced writer by this point.

JC: She's definitely written a lot of words.

Lorrie: Well, anyone who's gotten through writing *Order of the Phoenix*...

JC: Oh, my gosh.

Lorrie: You can have whatever criticisms you want (that it's too much), but it was a lot of work. She got a lot done in this volume, and it was difficult. I found that it very much still packs as much of a punch as I remembered.

JC: Yeah, yeah. I feel like I understand it more than I did the first time. The first time I read it, I don't feel like I understood it at all.

Lorrie: I didn't understand it at all the first time I read it.

JC: And I didn't try to read it again.

Lorrie: And then the second time, not that much better.

JC: Because I was like, 'I don't know what's going on here.' I've said before that it wasn't until I watched the movie that I felt like the movie distilled the themes down enough that I could go, 'Oh, that's what that book was about.'

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah. Well, did you like it? Did you like *Order of the Phoenix*?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's rough going, but yeah.

JC: But also very relatable.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I think that's part of what made this read so interesting for me. I could relate so hard.

Lorrie: Unfortunately.

JC: Unfortunately, to almost everything that was happening.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Wow... That made it feel different than it did the first time, for sure.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's a good reminder that this series is an international bestseller. Earlier in this recording, you said that the whole world was different from an earlier time that you read it, but that's not true of every part of the world.

JC: True.

Lorrie: The U.S. is different, but there are people who read this series as it was coming out who were living through this and worse, and I think were really happy to see a story about somebody who got it in a way that I totally did not back when this was first published. The next chapter, Chapter One of *Half-Blood Prince*, is called The Other Minister.

JC: All right.

Lorrie: I'm so looking forward to it.

JC: Wow! *Half-Blood Prince*... Oh, my gosh!

Lorrie: I know.

JC: Amazing. Okay!

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