

## Transcript

### Episode 6.1

#### Book 6, Chapter 1: The Other Minister

**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 Six, Chapter One: The Other Minister.

**Lorrie:** The Other Minister. The Muggle Prime Minister of Britain gets an unwelcome update about current events from the Wizarding World. So, JC, it's the start of Book Six!

**JC:** Wow!

**Lorrie:** Yeah! What are you looking forward to in *Half-Blood Prince*?

**JC:** Oh, my gosh, so much. First of all, I was thinking about the fact that this was the first book I bought at a midnight event. I think it came out on a Thursday or a Friday night, but I was out of town that weekend; where I was, I found an event to go to because I wanted to go and buy the book at midnight, because that was the thing that everybody did, right?

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** But I didn't start reading it until the plane ride home, and part of it was because I knew that once I started, I wouldn't be able to stop and I needed to focus on the

trip. But then I really quickly discovered I could not go online at all because of spoilers, and even though this was twenty years ago -- it wasn't like Twitter, whatever social media I was on at the time -- I couldn't go online to the places where I would normally talk to people about the books because everyone was reading it and reacting to it.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** I had to stay away from people that were reading the book until I could get to the airport, and then at the airport I remember I finally sat down at my gate, I opened up the book, and I looked around; I was not the only person reading the book by any stretch. It was the first time that I had that experience of communal reading.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** People on the plane were reading it. People are like, "Oh, where are you at? What chapter are you on?" That was the first time that I got to have that experience with this series, because everything else I'd read after the fact.

**Lorrie:** Wow. Oh, I remember... My kid was a one-year-old at that time, so I did not go to the midnight release, but I went to an independent bookstore and paid the full price the next day. I remember making the decision to really enjoy it ritualistically by settling down and reading all of the chapter titles first (going through one page at a time), and I was so angry because the chapter titles spoil it.

**JC:** Oh... Oh, wow.

**Lorrie:** I was so mad.

**JC:** That's wild. Based on your past experience, you weren't expecting the chapter titles to spoil.

**Lorrie:** Right.

**JC:** Oh, wow.

**Lorrie:** It was also the first one... I had read up to *Order of the Phoenix* (it had already been published), so this was my first brand new... \*gasps\* 'What's going to happen?' Ugh, if I hadn't read the chapter titles... UGH!

**JC:** Oh, wow.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Okay, so then you were spoiled going in, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my God, I'm still mad.

**JC:** Still mad. I managed to avoid being spoiled, but it's funny because it was so long ago that I think because social media was so much more limited then than it is now, I think it would have been a lot harder to avoid being spoiled. But at the time, I didn't have access to social media on my phone then, so I just had to not go online with my computer. I could do that basically for the weekend, or I could avoid going to certain places on the internet. It wasn't like it would be now, where I'm getting notifications.

**Lorrie:** Oh, yeah. Now, even if you try to stay unspoiled, if you get headlines in your email, sometimes it won't cut off in time.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** It was still really fun to read it generally at the same time as everyone else was reading it, yeah -- two days later -- but it was a lot of fun to have it on the plane and to have that communal feeling of looking at folks in the airport reading it and just being like, 'Okay, now I'm part of the *Harry Potter* thing.' When I was in grad school when the first books were coming out, people around me were reading them and I was like, "I don't have time. I can't."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** "I can't do this now."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** So I was always a little bit jealous of how excited people were when the books came out and thought, 'You know, I really should find time to read those,' and this was it. This was my chance to finally do it, so it was fun.

**Lorrie:** To be included, yeah.

**JC:** To be included in the phenomenon that was *Harry Potter*.

**Lorrie:** So to be clear, the chapter titles that I remember were “The Lightning-Struck Tower,” and I remember reading that one going, 'Oh, no. Oh, no. Oh, no...'  
and then the next chapter title is “The Phoenix Lament.” 'Aaaahhhhh! Goddamn it!' And then it said “The White Tomb.” 'AAAAAHHHHH!!!!'

**JC:** Okay, yeah. Yeah, that tells you what's going to happen.

**Lorrie:** Oh, I was so mad.

**JC:** Oh, no!

**Lorrie:** Anyway... So yeah, what else are you looking forward to with *Half-Blood Prince*?

**JC:** Oh... Things get really exciting and dark and we start to open up parts of the mystery and other characters, Draco Malfoy becomes a much more important character here... I'm really looking forward to remembering how all that plays out.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Because again, I have not read this book since I read it the first time, so I don't remember how that all happens. Yeah. Oh, we meet Slughorn. There's a lot of really interesting, new characters here to think about, we have a new Minister for Magic... things have shifted. Now, people believe Harry. Also, Harry has new knowledge -- not complete knowledge, but new knowledge -- about a situation, so just continuing the journey here, I'm looking forward to that. Of course, some sad things happen in this book, too.

**Lorrie:** To me, this book feels like a symphony. There are so many themes and different timelines running through it and different characters' points of view that are happening all at once, not always from the same decade. These all seem separate, but they collapse into each other and they influence each other. These themes are meant to illuminate for yourself what other people in other eras might have felt and done, but in order to know that, you have to master some pretty highly advanced skills that are completely not magical. The big one: this volume demands of all of the main characters that they have to have the ability to be honest with themselves in ways that are tough for everybody, and when you manage to force yourself to do that, then you have to exercise empathy and your imagination

to guess how what you know about yourself might apply to explain what other people are thinking and feeling. More than any other volume, this volume uses 'show, don't tell,' and it's on the reader to take your own emotions (or the emotions of the character you're following along with) and follow that to understand where the series mystery might be headed. This book shows characters pushing themselves to their absolute limits where they're not sure if they have the character to go that far, but they have to find out. I find that the author accomplishes all of these parallel and intersecting stories seamlessly and very confidently, so to me, this book feels like a masterpiece.

**JC:** Wow.

**Lorrie:** I love it.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh... Well, is it your favorite of the seven?

**Lorrie:** I still think *Order of the Phoenix* is my favorite, and this is a long-standing artistic debate I always have with myself. Is it more of an achievement to fulfill a vision completely? Or is it more of an achievement to break new ground and be super ambitious, even if the result is messy because you're bursting past your own abilities to a new level? *Order of the Phoenix*, to me, is very messy and needed some editing, but it was so ambitious and so dark; this is a completely different, masterful feeling where it's just so competent and I don't feel self-doubt in this author. I feel like she knows what she's doing, and it's pretty mind-blowing how seamless it is. Anyway, I don't know... They're very different achievements.

**JC:** That's interesting, then. Okay. I'm also, again, breaking open a beautiful cloth-bound -- I'm holding it up so Lorrie can see (but no one else can see), but I bought this cloth-bound, gilded page edge with a little ribbon bookmark set that Bloomsbury put out. I can't remember when they came out, so I'm very excited. I've never cracked these open until this podcast, so I'm excited to read this version. It's a very beautiful book.

**Lorrie:** Whereas I have complete loyalty to the battered paperback Scholastics. To me, there are no other legitimate covers; the Mary Grandpré covers are the only ones I will accept. It's always kind of a surprise to me how writing works. How can a completely different-looking book make the same changes in your brain because

the words happen to be the same in them? That's very strange to me. Amazing! We meet the Muggle Prime Minister and wow, this is relentless satire.

**JC:** It's so funny that you say that, because first of all, I love the first sentence in this. It's just such a great way of opening it up that "It was nearing midnight and the Prime Minister was sitting alone in his office, reading a long memo that was slipping through his brain without leaving the slightest trace of meaning behind," which is hilarious.

**Lorrie:** Yes!

**JC:** And then, "He was waiting for a call from the President of a far, distant country..." and it goes on from there, "wondering when the wretched man would telephone...." The first thing that I had to do was think, 'Okay, who is this?' I went back, and it seems like it's supposed to be Tony Blair, thinking about the time.

**Lorrie:** I only picture Tony Blair ever.

**JC:** Yeah, so Tony Blair is the picture, which would make Bill Clinton the president, which is really funny. I'm assuming it's the President of the United States, because why else would he be taking a phone call at midnight unless it was coming from North America, right? Nothing else makes sense, so it has to be the U.S. president.

**Lorrie:** Exactly.

**JC:** But the other thing that's interesting is I remember reading this and thinking, 'Oh, this is mocking the Prime Minister.' Reading it now did the same thing that other things like this have done for me in this series. 'Oh, wow. Wouldn't that be nice just to have... Yeah. Where can we get one?' Oh, my gosh. So yeah, that was a little moment of 'Oh, it doesn't feel as mocking to me now. Now, I have a little bit of longing for the time when the leaders of countries could be characterized this way.'

**Lorrie:** Yeah. Well, I do find it remarkable how relentless the internal monologue of this character is; he's so petulant, he's so insecure, and he's so vain.

**JC:** Yeah, he is. That's true.

**Lorrie:** He is preoccupied with his own power and he's self-pitying. It's a very consistent point of view about politicians that this chapter is giving you...

**JC:** That's true.

**Lorrie:** And his self-pity reaches its operatic climax when he learns that he has been taking the blame for things that weren't even his fault.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's the worst thing that the world could be doing to him.

**JC:** Right, right. Exactly.

**Lorrie:** That is a really sustained tone of this whole chapter.

**JC:** But again, it didn't hit me as hard this time, because yeah, I don't know.

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** Because it could be so much worse.

**Lorrie:** Power-hungry and petulant would be a really refreshing change at this point.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah, I think that's it, but it is fun. It's fun. I love how there's so many interesting things in here, like the real world and the Muggle world colliding. This whole idea that there's a way for the Wizarding World to connect to the Muggle government and not necessarily the other way around, though probably in the past -- I'm imagining Winston Churchill or somebody like that. I'm imagining Muggle Prime Ministers talking to the portrait and saying, "Look, we need to have a conversation. We're about to be bombed," or whatever. I imagine that there is a way for this, and I wonder how long has this been in place. How long has that portrait been in the office of Downing Street? But also, it's not handled by the staff or anything; the only person who knows is the Prime Minister. That blew my mind when I was really reflecting on it, because that's not typically the way that government things work. There's never just one person who knows. Even the President of the U.S.: when they get sworn in, there's a security briefing that they get, and they learn all the secrets of the world or whatever.

**Lorrie:** The goddamn nuclear football that goes to banquet dinners at Mar-A-Lago.

**JC:** Exactly, and the idea that no, the Wizarding World sets this up so that the Magical Prime Minister comes to meet the Muggle Prime Minister basically and says, "Yeah, here's what's going on, and hopefully you'll never see me again." That is so wild to me, and it feels very old-fashioned in a way that the modern world doesn't really work. Knowledge of how to run the government is distributed across a lot of people, and the idea that even the Wizarding World thinks 'Oh, we can just go tell this one person' just seems really naive to me, because what's that one person going to do? Even he is saying, "What am I supposed to do with this? I can't even tell anyone that this exists." It puts the Muggle Prime Minister in a really bad position.

**Lorrie:** It really lowers his status drastically, which is, I think, the cause of his petulant self-pitying. That's why he's so out of sorts, because if this were important -- if he were necessary to the magical way of running things -- then they would be contacting more people than just him, but you get the feeling that this is really low down on their to-do list.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It's a courtesy.

**JC:** Yes, yes.

**Lorrie:** Oh, and I like the way that this connects with the fact that it has to be the U.S. president calling, because the insult of calling at such a convenient 6 p.m. hour for Washington, D.C.... Surely, you are so unimportant that nobody cares that your whole staff is either going to be at home in bed, or else they're going to have to stay up late. That insult...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** It has to be that, and that cements how inconsequential this whole encounter makes the Muggle Prime Minister feel.

**JC:** Yes, yes. Then there's a little moment when he says, "Well, I can't right now, I'm waiting for a call," and Fudge says, "Oh, we can arrange for the President (and presumably his entire staff) to forget about the call, and then call you tomorrow instead." That...

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** This guy can't even do that, right? He has to be at the beck and call of the American president. Anyway... Oh, wow, you're right about that. He's so disempowered by everything that happens in this chapter.

**Lorrie:** He's impotent.

**JC:** Oh, that's an even better word.

**Lorrie:** Impotent in the original sense, not in the sexual sense.

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. There he is, being humbled. As we have noted several times with *Order of the Phoenix* and continuing now, this chapter is depressing to me because it shows how bad things are, and we in November 2025 in the U.S. are so much worse off than they are.

**JC:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** They have the environmental disasters, they have climate change with their unseasonal weather... I remember in 2016 when Trump's campaign was filling the atmosphere in the U.S. with so much more hate speech than we had experienced before in my lifetime in a mainstream way. I remember when I went back to this chapter, "the dementors are breeding" was such a good image for how that feels... the heaviness and the way that you don't even know what they are. What are you fighting? Do dementors ever die off, or do they just keep replicating?

**JC:** That's gaining power and growing. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** What makes them go away? Nothing? Just that feeling of something all poisoning and you can't even pinpoint it; you don't even know how dementors reproduce. What are they doing to breed? Nobody knows. Yeah, I remember how apt that felt in 2016, and we have just blown right past that now.

**JC:** That is true. That is true.

**Lorrie:** Oh, you know what made me envious so much? That Herbert Chorley is removed from office for quacking. I'm so envious.

**JC:** Yeah, wow. What's that like?

**Lorrie:** I thought, "Well, we have R.F.K. Jr. A worm ate his brain, according to him, and we're still stuck with him. I now realize, 'Oh, yes, and he's even a quack.' Oh, my God!

**JC:** 'He's even a quack.' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Apparently, sometimes he goes out in public and people quack at him like ducks, which I love. I think it's amazing.

**Lorrie:** Ugh, ugh, ugh...

**JC:** But yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, so it would be super nice if quacking would actually result in removal, but we don't do that anymore.

**JC:** Yeah. No, we don't. We do not. I think one of the things that I really love about this chapter is that it gives us a view of an alternate version of history where there was this magical connection, but yet the magical world didn't interfere at all, just let the Wizarding World know. The mention of the previous Prime Minister reacting badly to the news of the existence of the Wizarding World... I had to go and look it up. I was like, 'Who would that have been?' That was John Major, who lost to Blair in a landslide in 1997, so I thought, 'Okay, that's very interesting, the idea that John Major did not react well to the existence of the Wizarding World.' Also, the fact that the newly elected Prime Minister -- let's call it Tony Blair. This wizard steps out of the fireplace and then said, "Hey, let me tell you about this whole..."

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** What a mind fuck that would be, and then that idea of, "What am I supposed to do with this information?" He was like, "Well, you know..." "Why hasn't anyone else told me?" And he's [Fudge] like, "Are you going to tell anyone?" It has that feeling of "No one would believe you."

**Lorrie:** No.

**JC:** All that... That idea that the Wizarding World has that kind of power to take the person who's a leader of a country and put them in that position of course

makes me think, 'Okay, there's a Wizarding World in the United States, too, presumably. How do they do it, and where are they right now?' So many questions, and it's great world-building, I guess is what I'm saying. I love the world-building implications.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. The way that this is all designed to make the Muggle Prime Minister feel stupid... "Surely you've realized what's going on?" How is he supposed to realize it when the wizards don't explain it?

**JC:** Right.

**Lorrie:** But this also is something that is so relevant to any disinformation age: the human inability to ever be certain which things are conspiracy theories and which things are true (even though unbelievable) if you know how to read them. How are you supposed to know? Most people don't have access to whatever evidence could actually help you figure these things out. We're going to see this play out with Harry this whole volume, where he actually does have enough experience and good hunches to be correct about his conspiracy theories and his own best friends don't believe him. Dumbledore and Snape... Not that he's talking to Snape, but it's not that Dumbledore doesn't believe him; Harry is not of an equal stature, so Dumbledore doesn't have to admit any of it to Harry. Harry, like this Muggle Prime Minister... What's he supposed to do with this information?

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Just because he has no power over any of it doesn't spare him from the distress.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** This is, I think, a really good example of what I meant when I said that there are different points of view, different characters, different story lines: what you see in one illuminates how characters and situations in another part of the story are also feeling. The impotence... But what I do know, just as a citizen of the U.S., is people in power really do have secrets that would totally shake the public if we knew what they were and I have no idea what they are. Some of them will turn out to be like, "That can't be. I thought that was just like X-Files or something." I'll never know; I don't know what they are, but I do know that they do exist and we do

what we can with the common sense or evidence that we have, but especially if we can't influence it all, what are we going to do? That level of constant doubt and impotence in the face of the human need to put stories together into sense is very easily manipulated. Humans are always primed to make up conspiracy theories, so if somebody wants to manipulate you and they can tap into that, that's really hard to combat. One thing: when you see a bunch of people following a totally incorrect conspiracy theory that engages their need, you can see this fear of appearing stupid is something you can see being engaged cynically by people saying, "Well, have you ever thought about... Why is that? Why is that?! Is it because the people in power do this and that?" I don't know. You can't prove it or disprove it if you're not actually around the power. Oof, yeah. The sad truth for the Muggle Prime Minister in this scene is that there's just nothing he can do about it.

**JC:** Oh... Also, one of the things I like about the beginning or part of this scene is that we see how Fudge has interacted with the Prime Minister over the course of the last five books that we've read.

**Lorrie:** Yes!

**JC:** That's really fun. I actually really enjoyed that when the Prime Minister came through the first time, in order to prove that magic was real, he turned the teacup into a gerbil and then just left the gerbil. Left him with a gerbil in his office that he had to deal with, and he ended up giving it to a kid in his life. I just thought, 'Oh, my God, that's such a metaphor for the way Fudge operates in general.' It's like, 'Well, there. Not my problem.' Oh, my God, so yeah. But yeah, they take us through the fact they tried to remove the portrait because he was like, "I don't want to deal with this." The portrait in the office is there. You cannot remove it, they couldn't do anything around it, which is fascinating to me. Okay, yeah, that's some pretty good magic right there. Then we also learn about all the different times that Fudge has come to check in with the Prime Minister to give him an update (and looking more harried every time), but also, it reveals some stuff about things that Fudge knew all along that he would never cop to. He knew that Dumbledore had been saying for years that Voldemort was not dead and that he could come back at any time; he knew that, and said that as far back as the third book when Sirius Black escaped Azkaban. He admits to the Muggle Prime Minister that Sirius Black was actually innocent.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** All this stuff... The hilarity of saying, "We're required by law to let you know when we're bringing dangerous creatures into the country." Muggle Prime Minister is like, "What? Dragons? They're real?! What?!?!?!?"

**Lorrie:** What I loved about that is how cleverly that tells us, 'Oh, yeah, they're importing three dragons,' because they don't know yet that the Goblet is going to spit out a fourth name, and then that makes me think about how they must have scrambled. "Oh, no, where are we going to get a fourth dragon?!"

**JC:** To get a fourth dragon... Oh, my gosh, I never thought about that. They had to come up with a fourth dragon...

**Lorrie:** How quickly --

**JC:** And then go back to the Muggle Prime Minister, maybe...

**Lorrie:** That also explains why the Hungarian Horntail... I think that's clearly the fourth dragon, because Harry's dragon is more dangerous than the other three. I love how that's tucked in. Basically, though, I'm really respecting how much mileage the author gets out of the recap of bringing the reader up to speed at the beginning of a new volume. This is miles away from *Chamber of Secrets*; that's her second book, so you can see her laboriously doing what the editors told her to. "Harry played Quidditch, a Wizarding game that you fly on brooms"; you see her stressing over it. This is the most packed way to bring the reader up to speed, and so much characterization gets accomplished through it; so many of the themes get established, and it's funny on its own. This is an example of what I mean when I say this author feels so confident to me in how many layers she achieves with every task she sets out for herself in this volume, and just the way that by the end of the chapter, not only are you caught up on the previous five volumes, but you have a really individual sense of this particular Muggle Prime Minister.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That's the high skill involved. I have respect.

**JC:** I hadn't thought of that section as being the recap, partly because I can't imagine that anyone would pick up this book and go, "Oh, I think I'll start with the sixth volume of a series and just see what all the fuss is about," and this wouldn't

be enough information for that. For me, I think what I really loved about it was that it situates that this time has been intense and special. Perhaps John Major barely saw... I don't know. John Major was Prime Minister for a long time, but maybe he did see Voldemort the first time; maybe he did see that first, but this idea of "Oh, you probably won't see much of me," and then he does means that something's happening, and the fact that it's a little bit more intense every time means that shit's going down. 'It's getting dark out here. Things are going on.'

**Lorrie:** "You said I didn't have to worry about this."

**JC:** Yeah. I think that it definitely emphasizes that oh, it was actually was bad. It wasn't just Harry.

**Lorrie:** No.

**JC:** The world -- things were actually getting worse in the world, and Harry's experience of it was real, I guess.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. I think it's more about catching up the reader who is familiar with the story, but maybe hasn't thought about it all in one timeline in a while. You're re-entering this world: 'Oh, wow! Actually a lot has happened. Whoa!' They get to restate the central mystery (is Voldemort still alive?), and the bumbling way that Cornelius Fudge states this true mystery: "That is -- I don't know -- is a man alive if he can't be killed? I don't really understand it, and Dumbledore won't explain properly --"

**JC:** So again, Dumbledore is the one who has all the knowledge. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** We have that impotence and the petulance that we're so familiar with from Fudge (and we're seeing it in the Muggle Prime Minister as well) as if Dumbledore is withholding the information only just to emphasize the power difference, which is not what's happening here. Even if he did explain it to Fudge, would Fudge be able to understand it or would he just dismiss it? That's a good reminder of what is the central mystery in the series. Oh, gosh, this is so depressing to me: the mass breakout from Azkaban. I could only picture the January 6th people being pardoned and sprung from prison.

**JC:** Oh, uh-huh.

**Lorrie:** Ugh...

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** And all the political assassinations, which we have had and we have seen. We've seen successful assassinations, and we've seen attempts that did a lot of damage. Sometimes, I think about what happened to Paul Pelosi and I just can't believe that's real. What? Or Josh Shapiro's governor's mansion being burned... What?! These things are real, and that's not even the politicians who are actually -- Anyway, I found this very, very, very depressing. Then you have the unbelievable, everyday depressing feeling that the dementors swarming and breeding are too much like ICE.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, that was pretty depressing.

**JC:** Yeah. They're not under the control of the government at all, really, these creatures; they're getting worse, and the mechanism for that is not explained to us. The way that it's even stated they're breeding puts up a wall of, 'Oh, I don't think I want to know anymore. I don't need any more detail than that. I don't need to know the mechanics of how that's happening.' But just that sense of 'Oh, it's getting worse and we all know' through this chapter, seeing it from the Muggle Prime Minister's perspective, is interesting because it positions the reader as being in the know while the Muggle Prime Minister is not, so all these words have a different meaning to us than they do to him. We're not in on the joke, but we know what's happening, and that idea that the dementors are breeding and they're multiplying in some way... We know what that's going to do to the world.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** That was a moment of... Yeah. I think that what you said at the beginning about that feeling that you started to get in 2016 of 'Oh, wow, look around, things are going to get worse' and how much worse they have gotten... Every day, I see something that continues to shock me. It's like the bottom has not been reached as far as what this government and the people who represent it will do. To me, that's the essence of that. I see that and it feels like a dementor to me when I see a stupid tweet from a government agency that's mocking people.

**Lorrie:** So embarrassing.

**JC:** It's embarrassing, but it's also... Ugh, it just sucks hope out of me, which is what it's intended to do.

**Lorrie:** Yes, the degradation.

**JC:** Yeah. All of that feels like dementors to me, and the idea that it's getting worse is like, 'Ugh.' Yeah.

**Lorrie:** I just had a very sad blast from the recent past remembering Hillary Clinton being mocked for saying "vast, right-wing conspiracy."

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** There's a classic example of a Cassandra Gap...

**JC:** Oof, yeah.

**Lorrie:** Because she has a remarkably, depressingly high record of her once-mocked pronouncements turning out to be borne out.

**JC:** She is like Cassandra at this point. That's amazing.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, yeah.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh. Yikes. Yeah. Then, I guess, what's really interesting here is that after all of this, we learn that Fudge is no longer the Minister of Magic and that instead he's... Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That I envied so much! Oh, my God! Wouldn't that be lovely if incompetence would get... Oh, that would be so nice!

**JC:** Yeah. Wow, that his supporters in an uproar said, "No..." They didn't even explain how it happened, but he's no longer the Minister of Magic because he has done such a terrible job of leading them the last however many years. Apparently, he's been the Minister for Magic for a long time, so that was just like, 'Oh, God.'

**Lorrie:** Well, [when] he became Minister, it was supposed to be Barty Crouch Sr., but then when Barty Crouch Jr. was revealed as a Death Eater, that was when Barty Crouch Sr. got shunted aside and this incompetent buffoon took his place.

**JC:** So it was about a decade ago. Well, no, decade plus six years. Okay, we're about sixteen, seventeen years ago, because it was right after the war.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. That was right after Neville's parents had been tortured.

**JC:** Okay.

**Lorrie:** People wanted Dumbledore, and Dumbledore said, "For reasons best known to myself, you really don't want that." People didn't believe him, but I think he was right. Oh, boy... Yes, in this fantasy series, a badly bungling politician is recognized so widely to have done poorly that the people demand his ouster, and he is now doing the scut work.

**JC:** Yeah. He stays on as an advisor for the new Minister of Magic. He doesn't stomp off to his Florida resort and pout for the next four years and demand that... Right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** He's going, "Okay," and then he's like, "Well, I'll do what I can to help." Wow, even Cornelius Fudge is better at this.

**Lorrie:** Oh, my goodness.

**JC:** Oh, my God. Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. But in case the Muggle Prime Minister thought he was low down on their priority list, he finds out that he was even lower.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** No, no, this guy... He's not even getting paid anymore.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** So Scrimgeour shows up.

**JC:** Yeah. I don't remember very much about him either.

**Lorrie:** Yeah. He completely dominates both of them. He doesn't have time for them, and we find out from his very brusque, bothered attitude that they planted Kingsley in the Muggle Prime Minister's office.

**JC:** Which is yet again the disempowering of the Muggle Prime Minister. He's like, "You can't take away Kingsley!" "No, no, we put him there."

**Lorrie:** Yeah. "Thought you said you liked him." "Uh..." Yeah.

**JC:** Oh, my God, amazing.

**Lorrie:** And that is such a fantasy: that there is a body of power somewhere who are still grown-ups enough to have qualified people that they can plant.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** Oh... In this world, there are still grown-ups in charge for now.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** We will see...

**JC:** That's true.

**Lorrie:** Over the next two volumes, we will see that power erode, but as of this chapter, they're still in charge and they still have some grown-up power.

**JC:** Oh, my gosh. Also, what they're worried about is that someone will get to the Prime Minister and put him under an Imperius Curse (and they have evidence that that someone is already trying to get closer), and the Prime Minister doesn't even know what the Imperius Curse is, probably. They're just saying words at this point, but they're telling him, "Yeah, no, you've got your security detail, but it's not enough. We have to step in and provide you more security," disempowering him even more, right?

**Lorrie:** Yeah. "Or you'll be quacking, too."

**JC:** "Or you'll be quacking, too." Yeah. Wow!

**Lorrie:** Then we get the convergence of all of this powerlessness and resignation in that amazing, naive moment. It comes to a turning point for denial and naivete where the Muggle Prime Minister says, "But you're *wizards!* You can sort out *anything!*"

**JC:** "You can do *magic!*"

**Lorrie:** Right, and that so profoundly reminds me of a misreading of this series that makes me nuts, where American readers in particular will say, "Why didn't Dumbledore just do this or that?" Oh, you're still in the fantasy that somebody somewhere is a grown-up, and if things are going bad, it's because they didn't come in and do their job. 'If we could just get their attention, then they would come fix

this.' That is maybe not the reality that they're living through, where they're seeing how bleak it is and they're desperately doing whatever they can, but some things can't be fixed. There is that gap, that deep desire for somebody to believe that there's somebody who's so powerful that if they wanted to, they could just come fix it. Then there's that really devastatingly kind explanation from Fudge, "The trouble is, the other side can do magic too, Prime Minister," and it's the kindness that just sets the final closing doom on that.

**JC:** Yeah. It's interesting because when the Prime Minister says that, Scrimgeour looks at him with incredulity.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** 'How stupid are you?'

**Lorrie:** Yes.

**JC:** And Fudge is the one who shows a rare bit of empathy. 'OH... oh. This is something that I see you don't understand about the magical world.' Wow...

**Lorrie:** 'We didn't want you to have to know this.'

**JC:** And the fact that it's Fudge who can do that... That takes the characterization of Fudge that I've had in my head... There's something about this whole chapter, but that one line in particular makes me re-evaluate everything I thought I knew about Fudge.

**Lorrie:** Well, he's had to confront himself in the past several days, which is what I meant earlier when I said that this volume shows people pushing themselves to their limits, possibly past what they thought they could do. Fudge is an example of one of the characters having to be way more honest with himself than was even possible for a lot of his life. No, he didn't want to see himself truly as delusionally self-important, in denial, willing to sacrifice truth and people just for his comfortable little pettiness. No, he has been broken, and the way he's talking (when he's like, "Dumbledore won't explain properly --") he's not pretending to know any more than he actually does. The Muggle Prime Minister here, who is shown as always wanting to look well informed even when he's not, is at a more innocent stage than Fudge; Fudge was there for most of the series, and now there's just nothing to hide behind anymore for him. No, he's not going to pretend to know

anything, and from that broken vantage point, he does have some sympathy to extend to this guy who is going to have to face the same thing.

**JC:** Yeah, yeah. It's just so bizarre to see Fudge as being the one in that position.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, that's been humbled, and it doesn't matter whether he shows this vulnerability in front of Scrimgeour or not, because Scrimgeour's not even paying attention. Fudge is not important enough for Scrimgeour to even care.

**JC:** Yeah.

**Lorrie:** That whole demonstration from Fudge... This volume is going to humble us all. We're all going to have to face the parts of ourselves that we're not sure we're strong enough to face, and everyone else in the world can see these things about us. Just in case you weren't feeling exposed and humiliated enough... Who thought Cornelius Fudge wasn't an idiot? Ehh... Maybe he was alone in that. Well, now we all know. Now, he knows. What are you going to do if the world is in an urgent enough crisis so that we don't actually have time for self-delusion anymore? Well, just give it up and just do what you have to do. When you see other people grappling, yeah, be kind, but that's scary in itself; when we see Cornelius Fudge being kind, then we know, 'Oh.' Definitely, things have gotten worse.

**JC:** Oof.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, oof... That one ending of a chapter really set the tone for the whole volume for me, and I find that in this volume that happens a number of times; the endings of the chapters are so profoundly settling. 'Okay, this is the end of part of the story, and I can sit with this for a while.' This is, to me, very satisfying storytelling. It's not a cliffhanger; it's something else.

**JC:** I feel like the positioning of this chapter at the beginning of this book for me is a signal. 'Okay, we're going to break that divide between the Muggle and the Wizarding worlds.' They're not going to remain as firmly separate, and the characters are going to have to be crossing over a bit more than we've seen in the past. I think that's an exciting turn of the series, because the magical world has been this hidden secret thing and it's bursting out of its containment and it's going to take some work to put it back in. Also, it says that the Muggle Prime Minister is

shown as being so impotent about it all. It's like, 'Wow, all of us would have been in danger, too.'

**Lorrie:** Yep.

**JC:** It still does give you this fantasy that there are people who are working on it. There are grown-ups in the room who are making decisions (and they do mess it up quite a bit), but yeah, there are people who are working on trying to solve this problem. That's a fantasy for sure.

**Lorrie:** Well, this is completely developmentally appropriate for a book that's going from fifteen-year-olds to sixteen-year-olds (along with older teens) losing their naivete and protectedness and seeing that some of the corruption of the adult world is grotesque; people are failing you because they actually aren't really grown-ups, but along with that comes the notion that you have grown in power, and there are still choices you can make that can push for the right thing. With information and recognition of truth comes some power, even while you're being disillusioned and alarmed, and that is a brilliant way to start out a book about schoolchildren turning sixteen. The way that we're starting with changing the nature of the boundary between the Wizarding and the Muggle world in this series, this volume is about to do that with time also with different eras. We're going to definitely see three different timelines all interacting and influencing each other, and the boundaries between those timelines are going to have to be thinned the same way. Yeah. I hope I have managed to convey why I so very much respect and enjoy this book and feel fortunate to be able to let the master storytelling just take me along.

**JC:** Great, and I look forward to remembering what happens in this volume.

**Lorrie:** Yeah, so that's one layer; we haven't even gotten Harry Potter yet, except in the third person. The next chapter, Spinner's End, just takes us to another layer.

**JC:** Ooh...

**Lorrie:** So yeah, there's a lot going on.

**JC:** Hehehehe...

**Lorrie:** Spinner's End. Ooh...

**JC:** Yay!

**Lorrie:** This is a feast for the Snape fan.

**JC:** Yeah. We get to go to Snape's home. Oh, my gosh.

**Lorrie:** Yeah.

**JC:** Amazing.

**Lorrie:** Well, he's expecting us....

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