



Transcript

Episode 6.11

Book 6, Chapter 11: Hermione's Helping Hand

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 Eleven: Hermione's Helping Hand.

Lorrie: Hermione's Helping Hand. The students try to carry on with teen life despite the increasingly dangerous political situation. Some families are pulling their kids out of school. Harry holds Quidditch tryouts and the kids visit Hagrid. Oh... In some ways, very little happens in this chapter; in other ways, it felt so contemporary to me.

JC: Yeah, this is true. Yeah.

Lorrie: I love the writing in this chapter. The narrator tone is so confident to me. There's this way that this author sometimes writes that's very humorous, and it's understated, ironic, and a bit sarcastic. It starts off saying, "The sixth years' free periods were not the hours of blissful relaxation Ron had anticipated...."

JC: Yes. And that's so funny, because I think that captures... My kiddo is a senior in high school. You've also got a senior and you have an older child. That junior year of high school feeling is what I'm getting here, where you're taking five AP classes and this is the year that your grades are going to be super important. Also, it

feels like the year when everything ramps up, and watching my own kid go through that, that's kind of what I was thinking about here. 'Oh, they're juniors,' is what that felt like, yeah.

Lorrie: Also, the timing is terribly inconvenient because it's the time when you've gotten a bit more competent, so you could get yourself to and from parties. If you have extracurriculars, you start to have real friends there and there are interesting things happening, but you have to go do your homework.

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: It's a very inconvenient confluence. Oh, later on in the chapter, there's the same kind of writing tone that I really enjoy, where Harry is looking at somebody hollering at him and the narrator says, "There was a vein pulsing in his temple like the one Harry had often admired in Uncle Vernon's."

JC: There's a lot of that kind of humor in here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that's true. Yeah. I think early in this chapter, there's this comment that nonverbal spells are just now expected in all their classes. This is the first year that they've been introduced to them, and suddenly it's like, 'Okay, now everyone is expected to do it,' which also felt very junior year to me.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's like 'We've just raised the expectations across the board for you. This is now how you have to live your life,' and everybody's struggling.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: So there's that, but there was a similar remark about that: they were looking at people straining, trying to do a nonverbal spell and made it look like they had taken the U-No-Poo from George and Fred's joke shop, so I thought, 'Okay.' There's a lot of little moments like that in here.

Lorrie: Yeah. I remember times in my education when there was that weird jump, where you think, 'Wait, have you seen what they're expecting us to do all of a sudden?'

JC: Yes. All of a sudden.

Lorrie: Scramble, scramble. Yeah.

JC: Yes. Yes, exactly. That's what it felt like to me, though I do love that there was a line about how in Herbology that they are allowed to swear loudly when they get attacked by a plant. I thought, 'Okay, that's good, too.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. You hit that point -- well, at least I did. Maybe other people who are listening don't have the same feeling, but there's a point that you hit with your own children where we don't worry about swearing very early with my own kid, but suddenly it's like, 'Okay, we're just acknowledging that if something bad happens, we are all free to say whatever we need to say to get through it.' Yeah.

Lorrie: The way I drew that line with my kids was I told them, "You have to reach a certain point before the outside world thinks it's not weird if you swear in public. Words are just words, but after a certain point, nobody looks disturbed by it." That's just part of the social contract that you make with whatever society you live in.

JC: True.

Lorrie: Is it good? Is it bad? I'm not judging that because different cultures have different feelings about it.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: But you'll know: at this age, if you swear outside the house, people are going to look at me funny. Is that fair? No, but that's the rule. Every culture has unspoken rules...

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And take that lipstick off. I know it's just face paint. I don't invent the rules of this culture. For some reason, people think that face paint of certain colors at certain ages means sex. I don't know why. Take it off.

JC: Yeah. Ugh...

Lorrie: So, yeah. "That doesn't make sense." "Did I say it made sense? No. Take it off."

JC: Many things in life like that, for sure.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Especially for young women, which we have talked about before.

Lorrie: Well, especially for different races, there's stuff that young men go through that is not so fun either. Here they are struggling away... Harry is now Quidditch captain, so he, for the first time, has to deal with Quidditch tryouts, and the author has him say this precious cinnamon roll sentence: "I don't know why the team's this popular all of a sudden," which then sets up Hermione to be totally impatient and to just explain to him, "It's not *Quidditch* that's popular, it's you!" and then she starts listing why he's so hot now.

JC: And Ron's getting redder and redder over on the side. Yeah.

Lorrie: Ron is suffering.

JC: I love the quote that said, "You've never been more interesting, and frankly, you've never been more fanciable."

Lorrie: So upsetting. So upsetting. "Wait, Hermione, is this an objective assessment on your part? How long have you been thinking this? What do you consider fanciable? Do you personally..." Oh, my God, the torture, the torture... It really sets up the character Harry in a certain way, because it's that fantasy in pop culture, the fantasy of the girl who doesn't know she's beautiful. There's songs about this kind of girl, and it's... Come on, please. Anyway, Harry is currently being set up as that fantasy, like the guy who doesn't know he's hot. Then Hermione runs through the change in his status because now he's not being discredited; all the stuff that the government had been making fun of him for a year earlier people now know is legitimate, and it really is quite impressive, actually, and scary.

JC: Yes, indeed. He's also a celebrity, so there's that layer of it, too.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: I think that's maybe the thing that Harry is aware of at this age. He's been aware of it and it will rear its head again, but this feeling of, "They don't really know me. They see this image of me, but they don't know me, and if they actually knew me, they'd know what a disaster I am."

Lorrie: Oh, gosh.

JC: It's that kind of feeling that he has, yeah.

Lorrie: Duh! Yeah. 'This is definitely better than being ostracized, but nobody explained to me all these new responsibilities that this would bring.' Okay, he's puzzled and he's going to have to teach himself on the fly, which he does pretty, pretty well.

JC: It's not new for him. Because he's growing up, the nature of it changes, but yeah.

Lorrie: When he was in fourth year and people wanted to ask him out to the Yule Ball, then that was just confusing, but now legitimately, he's hot. "Uh, okay... Honestly, I have a lot on my mind right now..." Also, the way that periodically, Quidditch is used as a metaphor in this series for other ongoing struggles... If he's now Quidditch Captain and legitimate and popular and interesting, and all of these people are showing up out of interest, these are who your allies are going to be in the fight.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: It's up to him to realize you have to consider a lot when you're building your team.

JC: Yeah, that's true, though I feel like one of the themes of this series is that you still find your people, but the people that he ends this book series having as his close allies are the ones who have been there all along. There are people like Luna who might come in and you go, 'Okay, yeah,' or Ginny to an extent who become part of the inner circle, but then there's all these other people that he's just like, 'I don't know how serious you are about being my friend.' Recently, I saw part of a documentary about Brooke Shields, and I was just walking through the room when it was on the TV. Someone else was watching it, but I stopped and watched the part where she talked about going to Princeton and how she was so excited to go and

just be a real kid, and how no one would talk to her. She had to be suspicious of people coming up to her and that didn't help, but people weren't interested in being friends with her; they were just interested in being in the bubble of celebrity that she brought with her and how deeply lonely it was.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm thinking here about how that could have happened to Harry, but because he went to Hogwarts at a young age... If he appeared at Hogwarts at the age of sixteen or seventeen, it would've been a very different experience, but the fact that he has people that he knows will call him on his bullshit and will be honest with him and will be there makes a huge difference.

Lorrie: That's actually the argument that Dumbledore had been using for why he had stashed Harry away at the horrible Dursleys instead of having Harry grow up as a celebrity the way Snape accused him wrongly of. Well, if he had come with a swelled head like that, he would have not had the perspective, which no, nobody needs to go live with the Dursleys.

JC: Yeah. That does seem a bit of an extreme way of giving one perspective, but yeah.

Lorrie: There's Harry dealing with the fact that everyone's looking at him now, which is also a reflection. It's a way that the author has an outlet to write about what her life must have been like by that point. Oh, gosh, then Hermione ends with, "And it doesn't hurt that you've grown about a foot over the summer either," at which point poor Ron says, "I'm tall." Oh, ouch, ouch, ouch!

JC: Oh...

Lorrie: There's a lot of that going on in this chapter of people's desires. Desire is so messy. It's so undignified. If you don't fight for your own desires, you're not going to get them, but there are a lot of desires running through this chapter and people messily trying to navigate them. Oh, ow. Then there's this other painful undercurrent where "Harry had received no mail since the start of term; his only regular correspondent was now dead and although he had hoped that Lupin might write occasionally, he had so far been disappointed." That's something that the fandom frequently comments on: the feeling of missed opportunity for closeness

that often comes up between Harry and Lupin, and sometimes people thinking, 'Well, why was Sirius the big godfather? Lupin was right there, too.' Well, Lupin had his own issues that were taking up a lot of energy.

JC: True, true, but that is sad, though. It's the last connection to his parents, excluding the fact that Wormtail is still alive. Wormtail doesn't count...

Lorrie: Oh, yuck.

JC: But Lupin is the last one of the bunch and a connection to his parents, and Harry would really love to have someone reach out to him and give him more information about what his parents were like.

Lorrie: But as other people also have noticed, Lupin is not as much in contact as people might want.

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: There's stuff happening in his life, but instead of a letter from somebody that he cares about, he gets his brand new expensive Potions book and he performs a very snazzy bit of magic where he does a re-binding, despite Hermione having a little fit over the desecration.

JC: I love that Hermione is so excited that he's going to give back the Potions book, because the very beginning of the chapter talked about how the schoolwork had gotten so difficult, but with the exception that... and the quote "Harry's best subject had suddenly become Potions, thanks to the Half-Blood Prince." Ron and Hermione were both very bitter about this, Hermione in particular, and then Hermione sees the new text and is like, 'Oh, finally!'

Lorrie: 'Oh, life gets back to normal.'

JC: Yeah, exactly, and then Harry's like, "Nope, I've thought this through," and does a nice little bit of magic. It's very Hermione-esque to me. It seems like the kind of magic Hermione would have been able to do three years ago.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's cool.

Lorrie: It's so competent and, actually, what I love that might be possibly my favorite part of the whole chapter because it's so fan-crafty. They just made me so happy thinking about fan binding. People do fan binding with particular fanfics that they love -- that they want to respect because of the writing craft that went into it -- but they also do re-bindings of the *Harry Potter* books or other books. There's also this artist, Tai Ericson, who has been quite impressively making art to honor trans people who have been killed because of prejudice by making portraits of their faces using cut-up *Harry Potter* books...

JC: Oh, yes, yes.

Lorrie: Which of course he doesn't pay for, because lots of people, since TERFpocalypse started, have been offloading their *Harry Potter* merch for free; asking for donations of people's no-longer-wanted *Harry Potter* books, he's got all the material he could ever need. He's a very good artist, and it's a really painful series. There's a dark turn that's just as dark as some of the other stuff happening in this chapter.

JC: Which I think we're about to get into.

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, Harry does some crafting here. Then there they are with their newspapers, and Ron says the line that has become... It was iconic to me from the first time I read it, and it's become more and more so: "Anyone we know dead?" You have to say it callously when you're checking the news because it's so awful. During the first orange presidency administration of the U.S., I would think that when I would think, 'Okay, which group are they targeting today? Are they going to go after reproductive rights? Are they going to go after public education? Have they picked a different country to bomb? Have they picked a religion to ban? Anyone we know?' So yeah, the callousness that Ron is developing so that he can face that reality is something that I really recognize, and he's not too young. This is realistic.

JC: It's interesting, because I feel like a year from now in this series, when they're out on their big camping trip running around, that question becomes even more important and even harder to answer because they're desperate for news.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That radio program, if I recall correctly, starts by listing off people who are missing or dead, so that becomes a big question going forward.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Who are we losing?'

Lorrie: As control of media outlets becomes more and more of a difficult issue.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: At this point, they find out that there's news about Stan Shunpike, who has been arrested because he was overheard talking about the Death Eaters' secret plans in a pub, and then the confusion that the kids have over this is so recognizable to me. "Stan Shunpike... Is he just being easily manipulated because he's gullible? Is he ripe to be radicalized because he doesn't have a whole lot of mental resistance to that? Does he even know what he's doing? Is he evil?" "No, I've met him. He doesn't...." It's not that he's motivated by a burning rage to tear it all down, but does that make him vulnerable to being recruited? Is he being used? Was it a mistake? Maybe it was a mistake. This whole uneasiness about, 'Well, he's not going to be the only one...' Oh, the thing that Hermione said, which seems so ripped out of the headlines: "They probably want to look as though they're doing something." The way that this is currently mid-January of 2026 and ICE is putting on a lot of political theater by brutalizing people -- deliberately targeting people who are innocent or non-violent, who have been doing nothing -- to show that they can. And it does -- it makes it look like you're doing something.

JC: Also, we have the story about Stan Shunpike getting arrested just for talking about Death Eater stuff at a pub, which is like, "Wow, that's a little bit of Department of Homeland Security there," and at the same time, there's an article about Lucius Malfoy, who was named as a Death Eater but is still walking around free.

Lorrie: Oh, that's true.

JC: I guess he is technically. No. Is he at Azkaban at this point?

Lorrie: Well, they do have Lucius Malfoy locked up, but if they want to look like they're doing something, then somebody like Stan Shunpike doesn't have what it takes to put up resistance.

JC: Right, so he's kind of easy pickings in that way, and that is kind of reminding me of the current political situation where there's some groups that it's easier to pick on for the government to like you, so it'd look like they're doing something with people who are powerless anyway. Then there are groups that law enforcement probably should be paying attention to, and they're just doing what they do with impunity.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, like if you get a jail sentence for shoplifting a small amount of baby formula, and then Eric Adams is running scams and can't be caught somehow.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, all of that. A lot of this, too: Hermione gets the paper, and she starts getting the evening paper or the afternoon paper or something as well, which I forgot was a thing.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I forgot that papers used to do multiple editions in one day. 'Oh.' I remember, way back in the 90s, subscribing to the paper and then it would say, "Would you like morning?" It was one price for morning, another price for morning and evening, or just evening. You could pick. 'When am I going to have a chance to read it?' That's so interesting that that still exists in this time and in this world. I thought about that. I thought, 'Well, I do subscribe electronically to my local paper and throughout the day, I get bulletins, I get updates through my email, so I'm like, 'Oh, okay, I guess it really isn't that different, because I am getting this magical update of the news into my inbox several times a day.'

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: So yeah, I don't know. Just that connection between the way that Hermione is getting access to the news and the way that I do... interesting. It's also making me think (this whole scene) about the practice that I banned myself from doing during the first orange president administration, which is to reach for my phone and doomscroll before I even get out of bed. Checking your social media... 'What fresh

hell has descended upon us overnight?' I stopped doing that; this administration, I have not done that. I can't go there, but it feels a little bit like that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Paper comes, and it's like, 'Okay, how much bad news are we going to get now? Just get it over with. Tell us.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, it hits home very close to them because Hannah Abbott's mother has been found dead, and when that happened, Hannah left school and nobody has seen her since. The Patils have taken Parvati and Padma out of school and Eloise Midgen has been pulled out of school, and Ron has been saying, "Well, they would probably be safer here." Currently in mid-January 2026, Minneapolis has shut down the public schools because their own government is raiding the public schools. It's not safe for the teachers or the students. What's happening? I don't know, but is this the right thing to be doing? Are there safer places to be? What is safe? What is even safe?

JC: Yeah, and especially knowing where all this is going in the series, how much worse it's going to get. I'm astounded that people sent their children to Hogwarts the next year at all, considering, but yeah.

Lorrie: What the text says about that is, because there are penalties for not, they wanted to have everyone rounded up all in one place.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If you weren't going to send your kids to Hogwarts, then you would have to go undercover. So yeah, this is hitting quite close to home for the kids and for us. Hermione notes that Dumbledore's seat has been empty quite a lot, and it's not the same kind of Dumbledore's seat being empty as there was in *Order of the Phoenix* when it was because God is dead or whatever; no, God is really, really busy trying to deal right now.

JC: Or back in third year, too. Wasn't Dumbledore gone a lot? My memory for this is not great, but there was another book where Dumbledore disappeared. It was bad.

Lorrie: Oh, second year, when Lucius Malfoy was on the school board...

JC: Ah, that's right. Yeah, okay.

Lorrie: And they were trying to shut down the school by making sure that murders happened.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: Welp, Hannah Abbott's mother is found dead. Extracanonically, we're going to learn that she ends up marrying Neville, and these are people who are going to know how to support each other around that kind of pain with their parents. Oof... Meanwhile, against the backdrop of all that, Lavender is launching quite a savvy campaign to telegraph her interest in Ron.

JC: Yeah, I did find that very real. In the midst of all these dark times and scary news and intense things happening, they're still teenagers.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's still this, "Ooh, I think he's cute." "Oh, she's looking at me." Yeah.

Lorrie: He's tall.

JC: He actually is. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And that description of his walk turning into something of a strut, and it really annoying Hermione and amusing Harry, is funny.

Lorrie: It's so real. It's so awkward, and what are you going to do? If you want something, how are you going to get anything you want if you don't try? Ron could use a bit of a boost.

JC: True. Yeah, yeah. I think after hearing about how Harry's suddenly incredibly popular and fanciable, yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Being stated by a girl that Ron absolutely has feelings for. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: "Look, somebody likes me. Clearly, I'm also fanciable." Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "I'm tall." We all have to go live through Quidditch tryouts.

JC: With Cormac McLaggen, who I guess is a Gryffindor. I don't know why I thought he was in another house, but okay. He's a Gryffindor. Does that mean he's in their dorm room, or no, he's in a different room?

Lorrie: Well, he's a seventh year.

JC: He's a year older. Okay, there we go.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay, that's it. All right. Also, he's apparently a good Keeper. Has he been on the team ever before?

Lorrie: Well, when Harry asks him, "Where have you been before?" he explains, with no embarrassment whatsoever, that he missed tryouts the previous year because he was sick because he ate a pound of doxy eggs for a bet.

JC: Which is very frat boy-style kind of behavior there, to me.

Lorrie: The way he's not embarrassed to even admit that... The way he would do it again...

JC: Yeah. "Yeah, it was for a bet. You know how it is." But before that, he wasn't on the team either, I don't think.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I don't remember his name coming up in any Quidditch before.

Lorrie: No.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: No. He's a new character.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: And wow, that detail about the doxy eggs... Not only has it stuck with me ever since I read it, but it just tells you everything you need to know about this guy instantly.

JC: I don't remember what doxy eggs are. Are they like quail eggs, or are they something worse?

Lorrie: No. They're bugs. They're used in potions.

JC: Oh... Okay. I was trying to envision: is it like caviar? Is it like roe eggs? I was trying to figure it out.

Lorrie: No, it's like eating bugs.

JC: Oh, wow.

Lorrie: Doxies are pests that they have to spray out of the wall hangings at Grimmauld Place.

JC: Uh-huh. Okay, yes, that's right. Okay.

Lorrie: You really, really don't want to be eating doxy eggs.

JC: A pound of them would be a lot.

Lorrie: A lot.

JC: It seems like if it's a Potions ingredient, it'd be like eating a Tide pod.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: What are you doing?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Oh, Lord... Okay.

Lorrie: Right. Yeah, so Harry is looking at this phenomenally thick-headed specimen...

JC: Who's apparently also very broad...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The description of him as being very wide.

Lorrie: I'm imagining broad shoulders, a lot of muscle, and he's really entitled. He's very wealthy, he comes from a lot of privilege... It's a really clear picture of a kind of person that I would steer clear of. Oof...

JC: Yeah, absolutely. But it's also interesting to me that all of this scene shows how far Harry has come. Harry's had a lot of interesting things happen in his life around Quidditch, from when he was a first-year and he'd never even heard of Quidditch (and had to be introduced to the game before playing in the first game) to all the things that had happened, to being banned (lifetime ban from Quidditch by Umbridge) to now being the captain. It's interesting, too, to me because in this country, the way that youth sports are run is so different. This sounds like a club that a kid is running; there seems to be no adults involved. Harry has to make all these decisions. He is the one who picks the team. He's the one who runs all the practices. That's a big freaking job for a student, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Wow! Oh, my gosh, that's a lot of responsibility, and now suddenly he's the one who has to manage this. The other thing that I find interesting about all of this is that there are a lot of students trying out for Quidditch. It's fifty people before they even get to the serious candidates, and not all of them were even in Gryffindor, but the last ten were Hufflepuffs who just came just for whatever reason. I'm like, 'How many kids are at this school?' It doesn't seem like there's that many somehow, and yet...

Lorrie: They're all coming out of the woodwork.

JC: Did every single Gryffindor come to try out for the Quidditch team? Oh, my God.

Lorrie: Not usually.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: That sentence... That single, self-contained sentence, "The fifth group were Hufflepuffs," makes me laugh every single time.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Sometimes I just go about my day, and that sentence comes into my head and makes me happy. Of course, they all came in a gang, being Hufflepuffs. "Hey, let's go do this." They wouldn't have come individually, but Harry on the spot does one of those things that you frequently point out: he's almost unrealistically good at

teaching, where he looks at this very large crowd and thinks, "All right, everybody, fly once around the pitch." That automatically...

JC: Knocks out a lot of people.

Lorrie: That was such a good, simple test.

JC: Right, exactly. Yes, yes. It is funny that so many people came out for Quidditch. A lot of the first-years couldn't even fly.

Lorrie: Right!

JC: What were they expecting to happen? But I don't know. It almost felt like, to me, that there were some conversations behind the scenes. Either "we have to go because we have to be part of this" or "we have to go to support Harry and show that we're all super excited about him being Quidditch Captain," or "we want to go see Harry Potter in action," or something, right? Yeah.

Lorrie: No, it's that because Harry is so much older, and being a Quidditch Captain is so much more established than what you feel like you are as a first-year student. They don't realize that they're inconveniencing him. They just think that this is something that you're allowed to go do. This is something that I've encountered when you go to bridal shops (where you try on wedding dresses), where they won't let you unless you say what's your wedding date or what kind of venue. They have some pre-screening questions to make you at least lie and invent that you really have a wedding coming up and that you're not just there to overtax their staff by putting on wedding dresses as entertainment. If you are... "You know what I want to do? I want to go try on a very expensive dress that I have no intention of buying." They don't have the authority to stop you; they have to treat you the same as if you're seriously going to pay their bills, so they make up something. But is there a law against wasting people's time this way? No, and if you're not invested in it, what do you care?

JC: But it made me think of cattle call auditions for theater or whatever, where it's just like, "All right, on the off chance that we're going to find a really great talent, come on through. You have one minute to impress us. Okay, next!" Yeah. That's kind of what it felt like, and Harry... "Yeah, okay, show me how you can fly," and

that eliminated a heck of a lot of people. It was a good decision in the moment, for sure.

Lorrie: Yeah. "Tell me your fiance's name." "Uuuhhh..."

JC: "Tell me how you met. Tell me all the things..." Yeah. I do like, too, that when we get down to where he's picking his students, it looks like he's got some tough choices, but it's very interesting to me that all three of the Chasers are girls and they're all very good. That's who won out, and that's one of the things that I think is so interesting about Quidditch as a concept: the author was very determined to create a sport where there was no gender divisions.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't know if anything like that... Does anything like that actually exist in the world where there's a sport that people play at a high competitive level, other than Quad Ball, where gender doesn't matter? I don't actually know.

Lorrie: You're asking the wrong person. I have no idea.

JC: Yeah, I know. That's what I'm thinking. I'm thinking even horseback riding, where you think the horse is the main athlete; the human is also an athlete, but those are even divided by gender. Anyway, I don't know. Yeah. I'm wondering because I don't know, but I just thought it's so interesting that this author put all that effort into creating a sport in which gender does not matter, and then things went the way they did.

Lorrie: Yep. Well, Harry has found himself a really promising team, and I do love that his strategy to try to protect Ron's fragile ego backfired spectacularly, and he unwittingly set up the largest audience of the whole day.

JC: Oh, man, he thought he was going to put it off to the end. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, no. So yeah, for the Keeper tryouts, Cormac McLaggen, the unpleasant human, saved four great penalties. Wow! And then suddenly, bizarrely, shot off in the wrong direction on the fifth and last one. Okay... Harry is of course thrilled and relieved.

JC: 'Oh, thank God.' Before that, Ron had actually saved all of the goals that came at him, too.

Lorrie: Ron goes after.

JC: Oh. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. Fortunately for Harry's nerves, Ron saves all five; that makes it a clean, legitimate decision and no one can blame him for putting his best friend on the team. Then he turns around and Cormac McLaggen is red in the face and blocking his path and saying, "Give me another try!" Just the hatefulness of how entitled this boy is is so unappealing.

JC: For sure. Also, he's correct that something wasn't fair, but he doesn't exactly know what it was. He has the sense something happened that wasn't fair there, but he's like, "Well, his sister gave him an easy one," and he has all these excuses. "I deserve another chance." Yeah, it's very entitled and very like, 'Okay.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But it's also interesting that this is the 1990s and there are no parents involved.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh!

JC: Because all I could think was, 'Imagine if Cormac McLaggen's parents were there, and they were to come down and yell at Harry in Harry's face.' The parent entitlement piece is missing from this, happily, and that was the first thing that came to my mind. 'Oh, wow, it would be so much worse.'

Lorrie: Yeah. I don't know what the difference is between private boarding schools and public schools. It seems like Hogwarts has possibly, intentionally, made it a bit of a barrier for the parents to come in and throw their weight around. What I'm used to with my children's schools is people saying, "We really encourage the children to learn to advocate for themselves." Their polite way of saying, "We hate parents. If a parent even steps foot on the ground, exterminate them immediately."

JC: Yeah. There is this incredible balance. As someone who's been involved in PTA for many years, I've done a lot of volunteering in schools. There's this balance between... For school administration, you need parent help to function because you're underfunded, and there are some things that just won't happen unless parents come in and do it, libraries in particular. School libraries need so many parent volunteers to function; they just don't have the budget... If they have a librarian these days.

Lorrie: If there's libraries open.

JC: Yeah. Then they need parent volunteers, so there are things for which schools absolutely have to have parents coming in, but they have to keep this balance between their volunteers and they're not here to curry any favor for their own kids. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: As a parent, I know that I felt that as well. I'm doing a lot of things for the school, but I have to make sure that I'm not talking to any teachers in a way that makes them feel like they are obligated to give me more attention than anyone else because of all the work that I'm doing for them. It's a really weird balance, so Hogwarts avoids that completely, which sounds kind of refreshing, actually.

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, there's etiquette. You want to be one of those parents who is productive, helpful, and doesn't make problems, a parent who leaves things better off than before they came.

JC: Sure.

Lorrie: And if you can telegraph that that's the kind of parent you are, you will be greeted with so much relief.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If you're a parent who comes for the drama, that's not helping anything or anyone, least of all your own child.

JC: For sure. For sure.

Lorrie: Well, Cormac has internalized his privilege, so he's bringing the drama all by himself. Fortunately, Harry doesn't know, at the time that Cormac confronts him, that Cormac is justified in thinking something was off. Harry is completely innocent when he says, "No, Ron won it fair and square." Then Harry has the nasty surprise of finding that when he says, "Oh, yeah, God, what was with him? He looks like he'd been Confunded," Hermione is suddenly turning colors.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, Miss "My Potions book is cheating" is suddenly doing what? Desire and the things that you're secretly doing to deal with it... Ugh, it's running all over the chapter and hypocrisy.

JC: So does Ron ever find out that Hermione did that, or is it a secret between her and Harry?

Lorrie: I think Hermione and Harry, without ever discussing it, know that they would never destroy Ron's already fragile confidence by letting him know that they interfered, that anybody interfered.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And this is really on Hermione.

JC: It is such an interesting choice for Hermione to make in that moment.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's very un-Hermione-like, but I can see the train of thought there. The strain that it would put on the relationship between the three of them if Ron was not on the Quidditch team, and Hermione already knows what kind of a person McLaggen is. There's a lot of things... Hermione is making a judgment here and doing something that is highly unethical -- highly, highly unethical -- but honestly, I'm shocked that this doesn't happen more often in Quidditch.

Lorrie: Right. Yeah, we don't know about --

JC: Right? It seems like a no-brainer.

Lorrie: Yeah, but the way that Hermione rationalizes... She justifies her terrible decision by saying, "Well, you wouldn't have wanted somebody like him on the team anyway." It's true. Cormac McLaggen is a terrible team player, and we'll see that play out later in the volume. Harry would have been in a really bad position if Cormac had been the best performer (because he would have been a really bad misfit with the rest of the team), and the bad position Harry would have been in is that the other choice is his best friend. Yeah. Anyway, Hermione is now justifying that she has saved Harry from being in that dilemma. No, Hermione, you really shouldn't have done it, but both of them will take this secret to their graves. They

will never let Ron know that it's not that he didn't get on the team on his own; they just interfered with somebody else.

JC: Yeah, and he did make all five saves.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He did. Okay, so if Hermione hadn't done that, assuming McLaggen got the fifth save, then they would have had to do another head-to-head, I guess, just to see. The odds that Ron would have saved all five goals the second time around are probably lower, especially under that pressure. You see how it would play out, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, Harry now knows something about Hermione; she's really not having a very good year. Under that atmosphere, the three of them take a deep breath and go to apologize to Hagrid, who has been giving them the silent treatment since they didn't show up for his class. They all feel incredibly guilty and they miss him a lot. Hagrid is very, very hurt and lets them know.

JC: It's hard for me not to be the teacher educator in this moment. I really had this moment of, 'Okay, yeah, but Hagrid, you're the adult here. You cannot make these children do this.' They regard him as a friend, but he cannot be their friend in return because he is a teacher and an adult. I just wanted to go and pat Hagrid, give him a cup of tea, and say, "We need to talk. As your mentor, perhaps, or supervisor, let's have a talk about this. Yes, you have all these feelings. It is not fair to put them on these kids."

Lorrie: Yeah. That's the Hagrid character the whole time, right? There are times when he's very much a grown-up. Then there are times when he's even stronger and more protective than a grown-up, and then there are times when he's a child.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that's all right. That's who they love, and that happens... That intervenes in a good way to break the tension here because he's so upset over Aragog dying that he presents himself vulnerably to be supported by these kids again, as usual. When Hermione offers to help, despite Ron losing it -- "No, no, no, no, no!" -- fortunately, she doesn't have to make good on that promise, but that's all it takes for Hagrid to feel like, 'Okay, We're all okay together again.' Thank

goodness, because he really was hurt. Oh, we get a little world-building detail: there are no more Time-Turners. Whatever happens in the rest of the series, don't think that there might be a Time-Turner rescue; there won't be, there can't be.

JC: Not until *Cursed Child*, when one mysteriously turns up. Two mysteriously turn up, I guess. Spoiler alert!

Lorrie: And a half. Yeah. Oh, I didn't quite understand what was happening here: they see later that Cormac McLaggen can't even walk through the door. He ricochets off the door frame when he's trying to get into the Great Hall, and I thought, 'Is that because he's just like a big oaf?' No, no, he's still Confunded. Oh...

JC: Oh, wow. That's interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. This really was not an okay thing to do to him.

JC: Wow. It's not a 'quick and it's done.' It has lasting effects. That's interesting.

Lorrie: Well, she didn't want to take any chances, I guess.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: Harry looks at Hermione and says, "But wasn't that dishonest, Hermione? I mean, you're a prefect, aren't you?" "Oh, be quiet."

JC: It's also interesting that one of her justifications is that he was saying nasty things about Ron and Ginny while she was sitting there. He pissed her off.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Piss off Hermione at your own peril, I guess.

Lorrie: Yeah. Still shouldn't have done it.

JC: True, but it is a little bit satisfying.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's completely satisfying. I don't want him on the team either, but this is the narrative that Hermione is suffering through right now. She's so uncomfortable that she's doing this, and at the same time telling off other people for doing the same thing. It's not so much that she's being hypocritical; it's just that she's being uncomfortable the whole time about everything, just like Ron is, on the

one hand, throwing tantrums about other people being popular and then on the other hand trying to think how he can get himself into this next phase of adolescence that is dating. It's all very uncomfortable, and that's when you get Slughorn, who so does not make anything better.

JC: Ugh.

Lorrie: Oh, just the way he poisons the atmosphere I find really irksome. I guess it's so common.

JC: And he's so genuinely clueless about it. His whole world view is really built around people who have status. 'Of course, everyone's going to recognize it because I recognize it.' It's that 'chasing status' thing and the very clueless thing. "Oh, well, I'll just talk to Professor Snape." It's the worst thing he could do, and there's nothing Harry can do. Harry can see how it's all going to play out, but there's nothing he can do about it.

Lorrie: Yeah. Slughorn goes right up to Harry and Hermione, he invites the two of them; it's like Ron's not even there, which is so real. There's no good way to be in that situation. It makes everybody in the situation uncomfortable in a bad way, and for once, Snape being such a reliable asshole is actually getting Harry out of something he doesn't want, even if it's not going to be in a good way.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: How wary it must make Harry to know that he's being invited to something as the bait. He's the prize; everyone's going to come to this party if they know Harry's coming. Oh, God...

JC: Instead, he's going to be sorting flobberworms without gloves. That's what he's going to be doing instead of going to this party. There's also this theme through all this of Harry being so hungry and things keep getting in his way of eating, and Slughorn is this thing that gets in his way of eating. Ugh!

Lorrie: He does get to eat dinner.

JC: Which is a relief.

Lorrie: I checked, because that was in *Chamber of Secrets* when they're starving. They go to the ghost dinner and then they really, really want Great Hall dinner, but no, they happen to get stopped by....

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, Slughorn is being disgusting; Ron has been made into a non-person by the way he talks right through Ron. The kids look through the *Daily Prophet* again and report no findings after the raid on Malfoy Manor. Harry is dealing with the same mystery, Ron and Hermione are rolling their eyes at him again...

JC: But it is nice that Harry's thought is that Arthur took him seriously.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Arthur went, and that's a relief. 'Okay, someone listened to me.' Yeah.

Lorrie: And it shows that people are quite right to think, 'Wow, Harry Potter is really at the center of everything,' because he says, "Oh, yes, the secret tip that is being reported in the newspaper was my secret tip." He really is influential. That's the atmosphere everything is operating in when Ron is sulking in the common room and staring at Lavender and saying, "Well, as I'm not invited to any parties, I think I'll go to bed." Oh, my God...

JC: We get a little bit more world-building here that I think is really good for us to know, little clues for the mystery, that Hermione tells Harry that everyone was searched with these (very invasive, apparently) secrecy sensors. I'm guessing this is like going through the thing at the airport where you have to put your arms out and they wand you down, which says Malfoy could not have brought anything with him because some things got confiscated from students along the way and their owls are being searched. Okay, this is all very familiar territory. Too, this idea of seeing people being cautious about their communication.

Lorrie: Yeah, "wipe your phone." Yeah.

JC: "Be careful about what you say, and don't put anything on your phone that could get you in trouble if someone somehow grabs it and forces you to open it up," or the joke about your FBI officer who's watching all your communications.

Lorrie: Not so funny.

JC: Yeah, not so funny now, but it reminds me of all of that, too.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, surveillance. It's real.

JC: It's surveillance; also, no dangerous objects. "We're trying to protect you," which is true. We all walk through metal detectors all the time now. I can't remember the last time I went to any public event where I did not have to walk through the metal detector. We live in this post-9/11 world where that's part of life; the assumption is that someone is going to bring something dangerous, and then we all have to go through this extra trouble because of that. That's what they're experiencing here, too.

Lorrie: Oof. Yeah, then Harry gets that message from Demelza Robins where Snape lets Harry know that he's going to be sorting rotten flobberworms with no protective gloves. Yeah, that's at least comforting: no matter what is changing in the world, the hatred that Snape and Harry have for each other remains constant.

JC: Oh, my gosh. It is funny, too, that Snape did the thing where you send a messenger -- "Here are the exact words to use" -- and the messenger has to repeat them, which is funny, and uncomfortable. This is her Quidditch Captain; she really doesn't want to have to say these words, but yeah.

Lorrie: Well, at least everybody knows that it was Snape and not her phrasing it this way.

JC: But yeah, as a fourteen-, fifteen-, sixteen-year-old person, yeah, it's still very uncomfortable.

Lorrie: "Thanks, Demelza."

JC: Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah. Well, no matter how famous the Chosen One gets, he still has to do detention.

JC: Oh, yes. "No need to bring protective gloves." I just... Considering the detentions that Harry had to do the year before, he can hardly complain. It's also

like, 'This is bad science. No, don't. Come on.' Again, thinking about... Yeah, you cannot punish people by taking away their PPE. That's not okay, but all right, Snape.

Lorrie: Well, Snape's lab, Snape's rules.

JC: Yeah, there's no OSHA in this world.

Lorrie: He's not even teaching Potions anymore.

JC: Why is Harry sorting Potions ingredients if he's not teaching Potions anymore? Wait, what?

Lorrie: Because Snape is in charge.

JC: 'What's the most unpleasant task that I can make him do?'

Lorrie: 'How can I put Harry Potter in his place?' Yeah.

JC: Wow.

Lorrie: Well, this is how Harry gets punished for Slughorn. This is Slughorn's fault.

JC: Yes, it is one hundred percent Slughorn's fault. Harry's going to do this detention either way, but Slughorn made it worse, for sure.

Lorrie: Next chapter is called Silver and Opals.

JC: Ooh, okay.

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