



Transcript

Episode 6.21

Book 6, Chapter 21: The Unknowable Room

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 Twenty-One: The Unknowable Room.

Lorrie: The Unknowable Room. Harry tries for the first time to get into the heads of Slytherins and finds out it's not as easy as he thought. Thanks to Dobby, he learns that Draco has been disappearing into the Room of Requirement where Harry can't follow. He disagrees with Snape on dementors. He harasses Goyle. He gets nowhere with Slughorn, partly because he's obsessed with Draco and depends on the Half-Blood Prince to help him out.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Oh, this chapter... The title of this chapter, I find so evocative -- The Unknowable Room, because of course Harry does know this room, and he thinks it ought to be knowable -- but calling it this... To me, it's a connection to the locked room that we saw in the Department of Mysteries in the previous book (which I associate with Snape), and Harry uses Sirius's knife that's supposed to be able to open any door and has never failed with anything else; it just melts the knife. When you try to get into a room like this, blunt force won't do it; magical trickery will not

do it. Hermione says that Harry has to try to appeal to "Slughorn's better nature," so there's something about empathy here: empathy with Slytherins. This is advanced. Harry is really maturing, but I would say also that the series is maturing here because we see the series treating the inner lives of Slytherins as complicated and worthy of respect.

JC: I like that he was flipping through the book. 'Surely, there's going to be something in here...' Hermione says, "Well, you're not going to find the answer in there," and when Harry tells her, "Well, if I hadn't read this book, Ron wouldn't be here now," Hermione's reply is, "You know, if you paid attention in Potions class, you would. This is not rocket science, Harry. Come on." He decided early on that nothing Snape had to say was worthwhile to him, but now he's very interested in what this person who turns out to be Snape has to say.

Lorrie: Of course, when Hermione says, "Well, if you'd listened to Snape in our first year..." Well, the first year, Harry couldn't listen to Snape because Snape was trying to get him, but I like that this is Hermione anchoring Harry on a Time-Turner journey again because she is aware of present-day Snape. She's the one who's in charge of remembering that about him (the way he is now), but Harry is free to get to know the Snape of his mother's day. But that's part of the whole empathy lesson that Harry's going through right now: how could he possibly get to know Snape as they are now when Snape is trying to make Harry's life difficult? He has to figure out a different way to try to empathize with this person or who this person used to be at the same age. Not easy.

JC: And only a task that you undertake as a mature person who has a lot of stability and confidence. It's really hard to empathize with someone you don't like unless you're really secure in yourself and who you are.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you really need to. Why would you bother on your own if this person is actively trying to make your life uncomfortable? Of course, since Hermione is so discerning, when Harry sees *Sectumsempra* in the Prince's book and it says "For Enemies" and decides 'Oh, I want to try this' knowing that Hermione would object, he decides, 'Yeah, let's just do this when she's not around.'

JC: I like that he quietly makes a note of it, and it's very ominous knowing what's coming.

Lorrie: What could possibly go wrong with testing out a spell that says "For Enemies"? Hmm...

JC: They talk about Apparition tests coming up, and I think it's really interesting because this book is doing a thing that I don't remember the previous books doing, where there's very specific information that's actually important for us to have that has just been skipped over. In this case, they've had more chances, they kept going to these Apparition lessons; Harry's managed to Apparate once, Hermione's managed to Apparate several times, and Ron hasn't at all. It just comes up in this conversation and we didn't actually see the lessons, and I think it's interesting because I feel like in previous volumes, everything that was important to the plot we actually saw. This is actually kind of important, but there's just so much going on that this was one that the author could just say, "We'll have a conversation, we'll let the reader know what happened, but we're not going to show it in detail."

Lorrie: Meanwhile, Defense Against the Dark Arts... There's a viciously difficult essay for Snape on dementors, and then here's a moment that really arrested my attention when I was first reading this series: "Harry fully expected to receive low marks on his, because he had disagreed with Snape on the best way to tackle dementors..." and that's all the text says about it. What?

JC: And then he just can't bring himself to care about that, because from Harry's perspective, I can totally see... It's like, "Listen, you know how many dementors I fought in my life? Has anyone fought off more dementors at once than me in memory? No, so leave me alone about this."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Let me just do my thing." Yeah. Now I want to know: what did Snape say that Harry disagreed with?

Lorrie: Right? The first thing that amazes me about this sentence is the way that their disagreement is a disagreement between equals. He doesn't say Snape was wrong, because sometimes Snape is just plain out wrong; it's just that Harry has a different point of view about it. They're colleagues on this, and he does not care that Snape is going to disagree and mark him low because he knows that he's backed himself up. This is more maturity. It's pretty exciting to see this tone that's not about a kid and a teacher, but about two people disagreeing legitimately.

JC: Two very competent, capable people.

Lorrie: Experts.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, they're both experts on this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's interesting that if it was anyone but Snape, Harry would be able to assume that he could just provide an argument for his perspective, but he knows that Snape will not accept his argument, even if it's a good one, right? Even if it's based on a lot of experience. It's got evidence and all this stuff. Snape's never going to buy that because of the personal thing between them, so it's enough for him to go, 'Well, there, I made my argument. Moving on now...' in that kind of confidence. Like you said, it's an argument between equals. Snape's judgment doesn't matter. "He'll give me a low grade. Eh..."

Lorrie: We definitely get the sense that Harry did provide his argument. He didn't think, 'Well, Snape disagrees, so I might as well not even say.' I think he did say.

JC: Yeah. I think he probably wrote a really good essay.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then I thought, 'What if Harry should have listened to Snape? What if, just because the way Harry knows is excellent, it's not the best way?' Because then I thought, 'All right, maybe the word "best" is important here.' He had disagreed with Snape on the "best" way to tackle dementors. Harry knows one way, and that made me think as a reader, 'There are others? What?!'

JC: 'But Lupin only taught us the one way!'

Lorrie: We readers have only been shown one way. What other ways are there?

JC: I think this is such a good example of how... Snape took the Defense Against the Dark Arts job knowing that he would only be here one year (because that's how it works) and also knowing that the kids have had a haphazard education in this, and I can kind of see Snape's trying to make up for... He sees what's coming...

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: And he's trying to make up for everything that they have missed, so it's a hard class this year because he's making it a real class. He's trying to get them back up to grade level and they are not at grade level, and that's always hard. From a teacher perspective, you're teaching Algebra 2 and the kids come in and they can't do Algebra 1, well, what are you going to do? You've just got to give them everything that you can and try to get them as close to grade level as possible, and I think with Harry in particular, I can kind of see Snape creating opportunities to teach Harry new things, and he knows that if he just gets Harry pissed off enough, Harry will pay attention. I kind of see that from that perspective, too.

Lorrie: I think grade level is what he would be aiming for normally. He's also -- tick-tock -- preparing them for real life, or that's what's setting his curriculum. 'Oh, God, what are they going to need to know?'

JC: Yeah, I think that's true.

Lorrie: So it's not just toward Harry. What is the best way to tackle dementors? Well, Harry has unusual skill in Defense. Not all of these kids do, so if you teach Harry Potter to summon a Patronus and he does something that's more than most skilled adult wizards can do, you can't take that approach with a class. Most of them won't be able to do that, so from a teacher point of view, if you're going to set an assignment for the whole class, what do you do? Of course, Harry's going to disagree because Harry is unusual, so then I thought, 'Okay, how many ways are there to tackle a dementor?' We have to go to the next volume to find out because we really, as readers, have not been shown. Up till now, the readers have seen the Patronus method, which has many excellent benefits: it gets rid of the dementors. It makes them leave and it protects, therefore, not only yourself, but anyone else, so why wouldn't Snape consider that to be the best way? What are the drawbacks of the Patronus method? It gives away your location; that's going to turn out to be important. We've already seen what Snape said to Tonks about seeing her Patronus: it gives away your heart. That's not always safe (as we can easily imagine from Snape's point of view), and of course, it gives away your identity. You can't be pretending to be somebody; once you send out your Patronus, that's that. Plus, as I mentioned, it's too advanced for most people, and even people who are really good at it can't do it when they're overcome by dementors. These are good reasons to start thinking about alternatives to the Patronus method. I can see how sixteen-

year-old expert Harry, by trying to say, "Are you nuts? The Patronus method is without peer, and here's all the reasons...", why a teacher might patiently wait until he's done before going back to, "Okay, thank you, Mr. Potter." Then I realized, 'No, wait, we did see another way.' Sirius tells us that he got past the dementors by shape-shifting, which is harder than a Patronus.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, that's also something that you can't just teach a room full of kids. That's true.

Lorrie: But it's interesting. 'Huh, okay.' There's something about your mind that can help you evade dementors. Then in the seventh book, what we're going to see is Harry is undercover in the Ministry and he cannot give himself away, because that will then endanger the mission and Ron and Hermione will be at risk; the best he can do (the very compromised, not good thing he can finally do) is just keep reminding himself, 'This is to protect Ron, this is to protect Hermione,' and that will at least keep dementors from getting into his head. It doesn't completely prevent the effects (and it certainly can't protect anyone else), but it keeps him going until he can get someplace safer. If you think about what thoughts he used to defend himself, it's like an internal version of the kind of happy memory that could summon a Patronus. That's one way we see, and as we can imagine, Snape might be able to say anyone can go to that technique; you don't have to be like Harry Potter and super skilled at Defense. Then way at the end, when Harry is walking toward his death with the Resurrection Stone, his deceased loved ones come back to him and we get the phrase, 'they acted like Patronuses to him,' so the dementors can't affect Harry. That's the pure form of this: the magically intensified feeling of being loved is the pure protection. The third way we see is after he comes back from King's Cross, there are dementors all over the place and they can't touch him at all because the fact of his own survival burns warm in him. At this point, he has chosen to return. He has the purest of perspectives; he knows why he's here. He has clarity of purpose, and he's completely free of doubt. He has made this choice, so this is what we're going to see. The one I think that's most relevant to this lesson is the first one, which we get to see Snape deliver in *Cursed Child* when Snape gives the simplest, most direct dementor lesson to Scorpius. He says, "Think about those you love, think about why you're doing this... Think about Albus... One person. All it takes is one person." That's an instance of *Cursed Child* being used to close a loophole to settle a canon debate, but at this point, when we get this tiny little

sentence about the disagreement between Harry and Snape, we don't get any of these details. I find it super evocative, super exciting, and Harry will have to teach himself. Probably, if he paid a little more attention to Snape in this class, he would have had a slightly easier time in the Ministry in Book Seven.

JC: Interesting. That's always the case, though. If he had paid a little more attention in History of Magic, if he'd paid a little more attention... Yeah.

Lorrie: Overall...

JC: It's very human, though. That's very human. That's how our lives go. The number of times that I have wished I had a piece of information, and then later on realized, 'I was taught that at one point; I just somehow didn't hang on to it.' Yeah.

Lorrie: This is not to rag on Harry; overall, Harry retains a lot of information. He does really well! He's not a bad student in the least; it's just that the circumstances he's thrown into are so terrible.

JC: That's true. That's true.

Lorrie: But yeah, I really enjoy the legitimacy of Harry's disagreement with Snape here. I don't think Snape is disagreeing that Patronuses work; I just think he doesn't think that's the best thing to teach an entire class full of sixteen-year-olds.

JC: And that makes a lot of sense. It's making me think I've definitely had times as a teacher where a student came in knowing a lot about something that I was teaching everyone...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And they had such a hard time imagining other options. This happens a lot, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This happens a lot with elementary math in particular, because students who have been really successful at math will come in and they'll say, "Well, just teach the standard algorithms," and it takes some convincing to say, "Actually, no, that's not the starting place, because if you do that... You got through, but look around. How many people love math?" "Well..." "Then let's think about this another way. Let's come at it from another direction." Anyway, yeah, I do see what Snape is

trying to do here and the decision he has to make for everyone in the room. That's really interesting.

Lorrie: This is the first time I've thought about this. This is so different from the impatient way that we've seen him teach Potions. Where he has not been teaching to the majority in Potions, he can't believe how anyone could be such idiots in Potions. It's obvious! Obviously, if you follow the directions, you do it correctly, and if the directions are stupid, you just invent your own. For kids to make natural, normal mistakes in Potions, he just ridicules them; this is quite different.

JC: It's a new prep for him. How long has he been teaching Potions? Ten years to all these different kids and he's watched them; the third time you teach a thing, you just know it. The first time you teach a thing, you're working on all the little bits for yourself because you have an understanding of it, but the understanding that you need to teach it is very different and you build that the first time. The second time you build on that; by the third time you've taught something, you have a pretty good handle, and then you can start riffing on that and really saying, "Okay, this topic, I'm going to..." I think Snape never got to that point because these children infuriated him so much.

Lorrie: They really did.

JC: But this is a new prep for him, so he's feeling out all the corners of it. He's figuring out how to teach it, so I can totally understand that he has a little more enthusiasm for being a good teacher in something new. He also knows how important it is, right?

Lorrie: It's his one chance.

JC: Yeah, and the only time he's going to get to do it, so yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. If he fails, they're going to die.

JC: Yeah. There's some serious motivation here.

Lorrie: Yeah, it's different. These are all things that he spent his entire teaching career trying to teach from the shadows without looking like he has.

JC: So he's got ideas. When he was watching Lockhart, you know he was gritting his teeth. 'Ugh...'

Lorrie: Now, to say one last thing about this disagreement between them that I love so much: if Harry heard Snape's argument for blocking out the dementors with your mind and not getting rid of them, I can imagine Harry dismissing this as really selfish. "What, you're only going to save yourself? You're not going to do anything about all the misery that the dementors are causing everybody around you? Of course, it's less effective. Why wouldn't you just try to drive the dementors away from everybody, even if that does put you more at risk?" Harry here has not yet learned from experience that sometimes it's better to sub-optimally just survive if that means that you remain undetected for now. That might end up protecting the people you care about more in the long run. This is just pure growing up. It is super age-appropriate. Anyway, this was me in 2005 reading this line for the first time, going, "Wait, what? You disagree with Snape?" And how much fun for us as the reader that we've gotten this really intimate look at why Harry justifiably champions the Patronus method as being really good, having taught it himself to people who probably would never have been able to master it without his specialized teaching.

JC: I wonder if that's a sticking point for Harry, too, because he was able to teach other fifth-years how to cast a Patronus Charm. I think almost all of them could do it by the end.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Maybe there's a bit of frustration on his part, too. "Come on, Snape, I taught them. You could just do it. Just do it."

Lorrie: Right.

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that's where it's like, "You know, Potter? Sometimes it's not the safest."

JC: And that's the thing that Harry doesn't know yet.

Lorrie: He'll figure it out. He'll figure it out real fast, yeah.

JC: And he's going to find out.

Lorrie: Anyway, that's obviously one of my favorite little tiny sentences.

JC: It's also a really great example... You talked before about how one of the things that these books are really good for is teaching kids how to read, how to analyze on this level, and that's a really good example of one little sentence or two that we just spent 20 minutes talking about, right? That's another good example of that, and there's lots of good examples of that in these books.

Lorrie: And it's also a good example of re-reading, because we don't find out what on earth Snape could have possibly been championing instead until after we read the seventh book and then go back to this question. At the moment that we read this line, we have no evidence of what Snape thinks would be so good that it's better than the Patronus method, but he does think so, and I'm sure Harry did get a bunch of red ink that he promptly ignored. Well, Hermione very, very correctly says Harry is not going to be able to get the memory out of Slughorn by magic; he's going to have to persuade Slughorn. This is all about completely new methods that, of course, nobody's going to want to help Harry figure it out because everyone wants to defend their own secrets. You don't want to teach people how to crack your secrets.

JC: I really like that she says, "Dumbledore said that only you could get the memory," which means that the only way to do it is a way that only Harry could think of. It's not a way that someone else could just do, so it's not going to be in a book. It's not going to be a trick.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's something that only Harry can do. Yeah, and that's really profound and very insightful of her.

Lorrie: We get the Spell-Check Quill wearing off.

JC: Oh, my God, the Spell-Check Quill. I love the Spell-Check Quill messing up.

Lorrie: I love it.

JC: It's so funny because at the time this book came out, Spell-Check was a thing in Microsoft Word, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But now it's just ubiquitous. If you're texting on your phone, it will correct things. There are entire things that I know that I type wrong every single time, but I'm in the habit of tapping that pattern of buttons and my phone fixes it for me. When I'm suddenly in another spot where I can't... It's like garbage comes out of my fingers because I'm so used to that correction. We live in a world where that is so ubiquitous now, and here where Ron is doing it, it comes across as cheating. I just found that really interesting, twenty years on. 'Oh, wow, does anyone...?' Yes, we teach kids how to spell -- yes, people know how to spell -- but the idea that a Spell-Check Quill might be considered cheating is kind of interesting.

Lorrie: I love the phenomenon that this so beautifully chronicles: when it gets it wrong, it gets it so wrong.

JC: Which is great. Yeah, that's actually helpful; then you really know when it's time to get a new one. Yeah. It's expired, apparently.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The name... I can't remember exactly the name --

Lorrie: Roonil!

JC: Yeah. Isn't that the name of a wizard rock band?

Lorrie: Yes, yes. Roonil Wazlib is one of my favorite wizard rock band names. It's unforgettable. It's so completely not Ronald Weasley's name.

JC: It's so funny. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. It's so undignified.

JC: "It won't even get your name right." Yeah, exactly. I think that's the funny thing about that: you know you're going to write your own name correctly.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Ron was not going to misspell his own name, so the fact that the quill messed that up is really funny.

Lorrie: Okay, Roonil Wazlib.

JC: And then we get this cute little moment where Hermione offers to help him and Ron says, "I love you, Hermione," and Hermione turns pink and says, "Don't let Lavender hear you say that," which starts a whole conversation about how Ron really wants to break up with Lavender but doesn't want to have to do it. He wants them to have broken up without having to do the breaking-up, which feels very sixteen-year-old boy to me or seventeen-year-old boy.

Lorrie: I sympathize, because really, the only way out is through. There's no clean, easy way; he's going to have to do the process, and it's going to be unenjoyable in every moment.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Ugh, and of course this is profound and unchangeably true. He says, "The more I hint I want to finish it, the tighter she holds on."

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's just how humans are, and I have sympathy for both of them.

JC: Yeah. Lavender really wants this relationship and doesn't know... It's very clear to Lavender the direction it's heading, but she's just clinging because she's like, 'What can she do? She could be more loving. She could cling harder. What am I doing wrong?' I can just see it. It's like, 'Oh...'

Lorrie: Yeah. Ouch. So yeah, of course, why would he want to go through all of this? Ugh...

JC: I also love that while this is happening, Hermione is correcting his spelling, and she just taps every word and it fixes itself. I just thought, 'Dang, Hermione, what a powerful show of magic.' Whatever that Quick Spell Quill is doing, Hermione can just do. She doesn't need to buy a quill to do this; she could just fix her own errors with her wand. I'm like, 'Oh, it's so badass.' I love it.

Lorrie: That must happen to you all the time with people using calculators...

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: Where you look at them...

JC: "Really? You needed your calculator to add 45 plus 25? Really?!" Yeah, stuff like that.

Lorrie: It doesn't teach you anything new about yourself or about math; it teaches you about the majority of other people and how different their brains are.

JC: For sure, yeah. This is something that we've done -- Okay, so my kid... Me being a math teacher, I had a lot of interest in helping him develop certain math skills, and it's kind of a running joke in our family now when he does something that he reaches for a calculator for that I'm like, "Do you really need the calculator for that? Let's think through it." He kind of rolls his eyes, but then he does it, and then sometimes he'll do it anyway and then he'll go, 'I didn't need a calculator for that,' after the fact. It's kind of a bit of a running joke in our house, but yeah, that idea of there's magic... Each of us has this in some way. There's some magic that we're really good at that it's just shocking to think that not everybody has it. They have other magic -- they do different things -- but yeah.

Lorrie: This is really going back to the dementor essay, because that distinction (where you have to put aside the fact that something comes to you so natural you wouldn't even think twice about it, and then see that other people need a whole support system to do this)... Snape never bothered with that about Potions. He kept his whole disbelief and impatience that anybody would need to do this the long way, and here with Defense Against the Dark Arts, he is not having that attitude at all.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And it's not that he isn't just as gifted -- he is obviously the Defense master; he's so defensive. It's not that; it's that he cares to think about what the majority will need, and that's why he's been such a shitty Potions teacher the whole time. Not to say that he isn't also doing Defense teaching wrong, because he's just as sarcastic here, but he does have a different mindset.

JC: Yeah. I'm enjoying the idea of Snape getting excited about teaching something new for a variety of reasons, but just for knowing that he does have an academic mind. I can really appreciate him thinking, 'I get to teach this class,' and then laying it all out and taking some joy from that -- getting excited about what he's going to do -- and at the same time going, 'Oh, these little losers aren't going to be able to do

any of this.' But what would it be? He's always wanted to teach this, and he has all this knowledge to give and laying it out and knowing he's going to get to try it. I can see Snape being excited about that in his own Snape-y way.

Lorrie: This is so funny. You'd think that I would have thought a lot about this series, but there's always something new, a new angle. His approach to teaching Potions versus Defense comes from two completely different parts of his personality: Potions is more academic for him, but Defense is the part of him that actually cares to help people save themselves. The end result of making sure that people know how to stay safe... That's more important to him than process or competitiveness or whatever he uses to grade people for Potions. For Potions, he doesn't care what happens to these kids; he wants to poison their toads, he watches them blow themselves up, whatever.

JC: He's just assuming that he'll sieve off the ones that are worthy at the end. The ones that are worthy will move on to the N.E.W.T. class. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Here, he's actually agitated when people aren't able to protect themselves and he wants to help them, which is an interesting trait to have if you're misanthropic, but he does have it. For somebody who really, really doesn't like teaching, Snape can't stop caring in some ways. Anyway, this is always a good way to get him: he can think that he doesn't want to teach, but then he has to watch other people do it so badly.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: "Well, if I have that position, I know how I would do it."

JC: Yes, and I have to say that is very real to me. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Very real to me.

Lorrie: Well, here he is, in that position finally for a few more months. Then, when the common room is empty of all but Harry, Ron, and Hermione, that's when the house-elves have instructions that they can appear to give Harry a report. The three of them get startled out of their skins because Kreacher, followed shortly by Dobby, Apparates into Harry's presence. 'Oh, wow, was not expecting that!'

JC: Which is something that the house-elves can do, even though you're not supposed to be able to Apparate within their castle. Hmmm...

Lorrie: And we get to see Kreacher be *the* embodiment of malicious compliance.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: He waxes poetic about Draco in the way that he thinks would most annoy Harry, accurately. He is a master of loopholes. Eventually, Harry says, "Okay, shut up, Kreacher. Dobby, what has Draco been doing?" and Dobby says, "Oh, he's been going to the Room of Requirement."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh...

JC: And Harry has this moment of the heel of the hand against the forehead. Duh! 'D'oh! How did I not see this?'

Lorrie: "Thank you, Dobby."

JC: It's so interesting to me, too, that we have these two house-elves, one of whom used to be bound to the Malfoys and the other who wishes he were.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What an interesting pair!

Lorrie: How much they hate each other... Whoo! Dobby says that Draco's been going with a variety of other students who keep watch for him. Hermione correctly disagrees with Harry's assumption that he'll just be able to get into the room, because Harry's like, "Oh, yeah, I know that room." Don't underestimate Draco... Then Hermione says the only reason Draco could get into that room in fifth year was because "that stupid Marietta had blabbed," which I really appreciate as someone who does not think that the punishment for Marietta was too harsh. I appreciate this reminder that Hermione is not sorry for the spots that she gave her, and I don't think the author thinks she should be. If Hermione felt guilty about that... We know how Hermione is when she's sorry that she did something, and we don't get any of that here. After the elves leave, that's when Harry has that really exciting realization. What was your reaction as a reader when you watched Harry put it together that all of the little girls have been Crabbe and Goyle?

JC: Ugh... Okay, I was confused at first because I did not remember this detail at all and I was like, 'Wait...' It felt a little bit like *deus ex machina*. 'Wait a minute, what? Suddenly, there's a big vat of Polyjuice? What? What?!' I don't even know that detail, but then it hit me that the author was having boys disguise themselves as girls because they were up to no good, and I just got angry. Yeah, I think that was my reaction: 'You've got to be shitting me. Really? Really?!' Yeah. That was all I could think about at that point.

Lorrie: I also find it impossible to read any of these plot points without being affected by present day J.K. Rowling.

JC: Yep, yep.

Lorrie: I'm not trying to make trouble. I'm not trying to make this a hate fest on J.K. Rowling. I'm just observing and documenting the experience of being a *Harry Potter* reader in 2026.

JC: Yeah, no, I don't mind making it a hate fest. I was really pissed off.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Why little girls? Why little girls?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Why... I'd forgotten this detail. Even in the last chapter, I thought he was literally recruiting little Slytherin girls, which sounded like something he would do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Just stand here, and if anyone comes, drop these scales," threatening them with harm to their families or whatever.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: But upon reflection, it's like, 'Okay, that would actually...' Harry had given him the advice to make sure that he kept his friends close, so he's taken it in that way. But yeah, disguising as little girls... I guess the opposite of Crabbe and Goyle would be a little first-year Slytherin girl, for sure, and maybe not even dressed as Slytherins, whoever they are.

Lorrie: Yeah, it doesn't even say that. Yeah.

JC: There's also the case that they are disguising themselves as someone, so does that mean that there are two of this little child running around the castle right now? That's kind of weird.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, and we're putting some kid, a little first-year, in the position of maybe getting in trouble for something they didn't do. There's a lot of that going on that you can just dig into the plot and go, 'Okay, well, this is not a great scheme by Draco. Whatever.'

Lorrie: It's so risky.

JC: It's very risky, but then I cannot divorce the author's transphobia from this idea. 'We're going to take Crabbe and Goyle and we're going to disguise them as girls so they can go and support this evil plan.' Really? Really?!

Lorrie: It is disturbingly close to the image that this author currently has of what a trans person is.

JC: Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: She doesn't seem to think that a trans person is who they actually are. She seems to only see them as somebody who's under false pretenses for some nefarious purpose...

JC: For some nefarious purpose, exactly.

Lorrie: That should be stopped. Why?

JC: And that it's a disguise. It's a costume they're putting on in order to do something bad, and has nothing to do with identity. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The closeness of those two interpretations makes this even harder to see as an artifact of 2005.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: It is definitely a text that has been rewritten because the living author has changed and continued to put out words.

JC: Yeah. In my ignorance and my privilege, I never even had that reading before.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It never occurred to me in 2005, and I'm sure there were people who did side-eye that. People side-eyed the more obvious example of putting Snape in Neville's grandmother's clothes; I didn't really even see that when I first read it. I was also reading the books really fast, trying to get to book five; this one is a little more subtle, but it would never have registered with me back then the way it does now.

Lorrie: What I remember being more struck by in 2005 is how creepy it is that they're only transforming into first-year girls and not first-year boys. I assume first-years partly because it's easier for Draco to overpower them or manipulate them, but it wouldn't have been that much harder, if at all, for it to be boys. But he's only doing girls.

JC: Yeah. Why?

Lorrie: Yeah. The creepiness there was more what struck me at the time.

JC: There's also a creepy factor, too. Here's the thing about Polyjuice: later on when there's seven Harrys in the next book, I remember there being a bit of a joke of Harry being like, 'Okay, while you're changing your clothes, don't look.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This idea of Crabbe and Goyle having access to little girls' bodies is really also very creepy to me, because I don't know those two very well and I don't have a reason to trust them.

Lorrie: No, yeah.

JC: Yeah, so why... Yeah, I don't know. Would it be worse if it were little boys or better? It'd still be... Yeah.

Lorrie: Whatever it is, it's creepy.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: I did also think about the point you said about 'Are there two of these little girls running around now?' and I thought, 'Well, Draco did know that Harry did this to Crabbe and Goyle back in second year. They locked up Crabbe and Goyle for a while so that it would look like there was only one Crabbe and Goyle running

around. So yeah, from the Draco point of view here, it would have been less risky to let there be two running around because he doesn't know when he's going to get the opportunity to go make another attempt at the Room of Requirement. It's not like he can see the opportunity and then go and make these children unconscious; they have to be ready to go. It is less risky.

JC: He has to have a supply of hair.

Hosts: Yeah.

JC: He went and cleaned out somebody's hairbrush, or got Pansy to do it or whatever, right?

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, the risk of having these girls run into a duplicate of themselves is just a risk he's going to have to take.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oof...

JC: And how did he even get genetic material for this process? That's also creepy. I don't know, but then again, Draco was trying to murder someone, so all the casualties along the way are not on his mind. He doesn't care, as Hermione noted in the previous chapter or someone noted in the previous chapter.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Whoever's doing this doesn't care what happens along the way. True.

Lorrie: I can imagine just a Summoning Charm, because my mind went the same place. 'Well, what would I have done? I guess a Summoning... that part's not that hard.' You live in the same dorm day in and day out.

JC: I forget that Summoning Charms happen. That's true. I forget about that.

Lorrie: Right, but this is the humor of me trying to play by the rules that this universe has given us. That's not how magic works, right? I also imagine there must be fanfic somewhere from the point of these first-year girls; they've just entered Hogwarts and they don't understand what's happening to them. What is this? If anybody knows a fanfic from the point of view of these girls who wonder why they've lost track of time or why these scary sixth-years are looking at them

this way, please send me a link because I would love to see. We also have Harry making the realization that it's the mind inside the body that determines somebody's gender, not the sex of the body that they're in, which is something that 2026 Rowling does not seem to understand. Harry says, "Malfoy must've been inside the room at the time, so she -- what am I talking about? -- *he* dropped the scales..."

JC: Yeah, that stood out to me, too. Harry got the pronoun right!

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Well, from that perspective, anyway, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Also, Harry says something that is not quite fair. He says that Crabbe and Goyle are stupid enough to do what they're told, even if he won't tell them what he's up to. Excuse me, Dumbledore makes Harry and Snape do the same thing all the time.

JC: And I'm not convinced that... Okay, this is just me as a bit of a Malfoy stan. I kind of think that Draco listened to Harry's advice and thought, 'You know, that has worked for Harry all these years, and maybe I should tell Crabbe and Goyle a little bit of what I'm up to. Not the full plan, but not leaving them completely in the dark because if they're in the dark, they're going to be bumbling and they're going to run into shit, and that's probably not good.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I can see Draco going, 'Oh, okay, all right,' so I think that he might have taken Harry's advice a little bit there.

Lorrie: He has to. He can't afford for this to go wrong.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Crabbe and Goyle... We have seen them be grumbly and chafing about this in exactly the way that Harry and Snape are when Dumbledore does it to them. Crabbe and Goyle... You can't just dismiss everything they do as stupid.

JC: True. They're presented as very two-dimensional -- even one-dimensional -- characters, but they're these hulking goon kind of characters. There's this

stereotype of those kinds of people just being stupid and the book plays that up for humor, but it's also not fair.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I have this fantasy... I want these fanfics (and then I probably would never read them because I don't have the time), but I kind of want a fic from their perspective where they're actually pretty smart, sensitive people and they're not the hulking goons that Harry seems to think they are.

Lorrie: I have read some, and they were worth reading. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Okay, cool.

Lorrie: I love this moment where Hermione is recombobulating, and she's stunned and betrayed. She says: "'Do you mean to say,' said Hermione in a hushed voice, 'that that little girl whose scales I repaired --'" Oh, that's subtle. How disorienting is it when you realize you've been deceived, even though did anything bad actually happen, but no, it was a breach of trust because Hermione was in good faith and she was extending kindness; then what is it like on the receiving end to receive consideration and kindness from somebody that you really despise? It reminded me of a very small episode of my life where it was an older white lady who was a figure skating judge and I treated her so respectfully, and then I found out later that she was this person who online had been trolling me in a really ugly and inept way, homophobically, the whole time.

JC: Oh, my God...

Lorrie: So the whole time that I was being really sweet and respectful and kind to her and feeling honored that I had met her, she knew that she was... And then all I could come out of that with was, 'Well, at least I had nothing to be ashamed of.'

JC: Wow. I think that idea of 'someone's being nice to me and I have been shitty at them behind their back' or vice versa is probably an experience a lot of people can identify with.

Lorrie: Yeah. Does it change anything? Yeah... But the political arena -- that divide between someone saying, 'Oh, yeah? Well, you even want benefits for people who are your enemy?' Yes. Yes, I do. You can't understand that, I guess. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, even Mitch McConnell deserves healthcare. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. When they're talking about 'How can Draco be forcing Crabbe and Goyle to do this?' Harry says, "Well, he's showing them the Dark Mark," and Hermione says, "The Dark Mark we don't know exists." That's a good, useful moment, because, oh, I see. In canon, this moment -- this doubt -- has been intentionally planted, this canon debate that went on and on and on. Does he (Draco) or does he not have a Dark Mark? We're supposed to not be sure. That's of course, again, something that *Cursed Child* took the opportunity to settle.

JC: Yeah. I remember that moment the first time I ever saw *Cursed Child*, which was... I don't even know, the teens, 2010s, somewhere in there when that came out in London.

Lorrie: 2016.

JC: 2016 in London, and when he pulls his sleeve up, I had a moment of *GASPS* "It's canon!"

Lorrie: Right.

JC: The movie really implied... I don't think the movie showed it, but the movie version really implied that he did; showed him pulling up his sleeve, though we didn't see what was on his arm or something like that, but I don't remember now. Been a while.

Lorrie: Yeah, and of course, anyone who wants to say that *Cursed Child* isn't canon is free to do that. There are many people who say that.

JC: Well, you know...

Lorrie: Hermione reminds Harry he's supposed to be concentrating on Slughorn, not Draco, which is such a major theme of the last two books: obsessions can be a reaction to reality being just too difficult to deal with. They are a distraction, and they're also a reaction to the reality that you're running away from. Dumbledore has had that problem in his life, and he is both rightly and wrongly afraid that this is going to happen to Harry, too.

JC: I had never thought about that that way, and that is really true. When there's a thing that you know is going to be hard and you don't know how to approach it,

getting distracted with something that you feel like you can spend some time on... Dang.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, that is exactly what Harry's doing there. Wow.

Lorrie: And Hermione refuses to feed it.

JC: "No, you need to get this done."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's like me with my kid, who's putting off doing a project.

Lorrie: Ugh, yeah.

JC: And he's doing anything but the project. "Well, I think I'm going to have this math homework next week, and I'm going to go ahead and do it in advance." "No, do the project. Come on, kid, don't do this to yourself." I feel for Hermione here and I understand Harry here. Yes, wow.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, and that feeling that Harry has. Well, if she's going to be like that, he's just going to avoid her and continue to give into the obsession. I do recognize that quite well.

JC: Yep, as does my child.

Lorrie: "Harry watched her go feeling slightly disgruntled." Oh, that disgruntled feeling... That is it. That's the pricking of your conscience when you know you're rationalizing to yourself that it's okay to choose the wrong path.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: In retrospect, yes. In retrospect, someday you might wish you had heeded that disgruntled feeling.

JC: Oh, wow, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. We see quite a few characters, including Dumbledore, and we're about to see Slughorn. Oh, that disgruntled feeling... 'No, I'm just going to go be myself and do what I want to do.' Well, Harry's feeling it now. Then we get the

breakfast scene coming up after that, where they're sitting around the table and Hermione's reading the paper.

JC: Yeah. At breakfast, she tells him that what he needs to do is to figure out how to persuade Slughorn to give him the memory using his powers of persuasion, and I'm sure Harry is kind of like, 'I have powers of persuasion? What? That's worse.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Searching the library for the right spell to use is like, 'Okay, that's something I know how to do.' Coming up with a way to persuade a grown-ass adult (who's a powerful wizard) to do something he doesn't want to do that not even Dumbledore could persuade him to do? Harry's like, "Are you kidding?"

Hosts: Ugh...

Lorrie: She is, of course, right, and how is anyone supposed to be doing this? Yeah. We saw Voldemort persuading people to part with their treasures. Voldemort was smooth; Harry, not so smooth.

JC: Not so smooth, yeah.

Lorrie: Then Hermione reads the paper and she gasps, and the question that Ron's been asking this entire year, which feels so current and contemporary: "Anyone we know?" Because that is the risk, right? That's been contemporary life. Okay. In the news, who's being targeted today? Is it trans people again? Is it queers in general? Is it libraries and librarians? Is it legal immigrants? Is it birthright citizens? Is it farmers? Childhood cancer researchers... That's who's being targeted today. Canadians! Oh, God...

JC: Or people that Trump just wants to get revenge on. Are they being singled out or arrested today for a social media post? Hmm... Yeah.

Lorrie: So yeah, that whole "Anyone we know?" question is quite current. And then -- oh, gosh -- we see that Mundungus has been sent to Azkaban for impersonating an Inferius just to commit a crime, which is so grossly reminiscent of people pretending to be ICE so that they can assault women -- *yuck* -- which of course is easier because ICE is also pretending to be real. It's just goons dressing up in whatever tactical gear they have in their own closets. Yeah. Hello, contemporary resonance... Harry makes several attempts to get into the Room of

Requirement. He tries his damndest to imagine himself experiencing life as Draco so he can get the Room of Requirement to open, and it will not budge. This is the first time in Harry's life that he's sparing a thought. *I'm trying to see life as Draco Malfoy...* He's got a lot of ground to cover.

JC: I think Harry feels a lot of ownership of the Room of Requirement because it did so much for him in the previous year. It was a home away from home, and then we'll see next year it's also going to be a bit of a home away from home for people. I think he takes it personally a little bit.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "What do you mean you're locking me out? You're favoring him? Don't you know what he's up to?" Yeah, the Room of Requirement doesn't take sides.

Lorrie: Right, right. Thoughts and prayers to the Drarry fandom for this line. Will you do the honors? Will you say the line?

JC: I will have to... I think I know it from memory, but I was going to look. It's something like, "*I want to know what Draco Malfoy's doing inside you...*" Is that the one that you're thinking of?

Lorrie: It is that, but slightly more urgent. It's the most urgent thought of Harry Potter's entire life at the moment.

JC: "Harry tried every variation of 'I need to see what Draco Malfoy is doing inside you' that he could think of for a whole hour, at the end of which he was forced to concede that Hermione might have had a point: the room simply did not want to open for him."

Lorrie: He does need to, yes. Yeah, I don't think I could say that line without laughing.

JC: It's more like, "I need to see what Draco Malfoy is doing inside you," something like that.

Lorrie: Ay, yai, yai, yai, yai...

JC: I remember reading it for the first time going, "HAHA!"

Lorrie: Oh, my God!

Hosts: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. Every time I see that line, I feel every spot on this earth that Drarry fandom exists, all having a simultaneous reaction to it.

JC: And there's a lot of that in this book. I think the interesting thing is... We talked about this a bit in the previous episode, but this is the first time that Harry really notices Draco Malfoy. Because of *Sectumsempra*, I remember reading this and they were folks who afterwards said, "Oh, that just killed the Drarry ship," and it's like, "Actually, no."

Lorrie: Or not.

JC: No. No, it didn't. It did not; it just put fuel on the fire, yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, yeah. We get classic Snape giving us a classic classroom experience where it starts off with Harry being one second late and he takes points off of Harry; then it goes into Snape insulting people's essays, which previously were about how to resist Imperius. Then he puts down his students, and also he puts down the "smelly sneak thief," Mundungus Fletcher. Then he, for good measure, picks on Harry and he mocks Ron. He's sarcastic at Ron and he takes more points off Gryffindor, so we really get all [of] Snape's greatest hits in just a few minutes.

JC: What I really like there, though, is that it is a classic, but also Harry and Ron are talking back to him (which goes about as well as it always goes, but they're just so done). When they were younger, they would never have said anything because House points would be taken off and they would get detentions and all, and there's just this sense that it doesn't matter anymore. There's a little bit of senior-itis happening here. They're not necessarily putting themselves on the same level as Snape, but it's more sniping of adults to each other than an adult to a child.

Lorrie: And the subject matter is important. Snape can nitpick, but they actually have to know this. Seamus has asked about Inferi, and after insulting people for a while, Snape says, "The Inferius is a corpse that has been reanimated by a Dark wizard's spells. It is not alive, it is merely used like a puppet to do the wizard's bidding." Badly behaved as he is, Snape is actually imparting something that they're all super interested in learning. The relevance is unquestionable; they're all engaged. We see Grindelwald do this (reanimate a corpse) in the third *Fantastic*

Beasts movie, *The Secrets of Dumbledore*, and it does not go well for him. Grindelwald is actively researching how to solve the problem of wanting other beings to do your will when they are interfering by having wills of their own. Seeing *Secrets of Dumbledore* (which chronologically came before Voldemort's rise) makes me think, 'Okay, Voldemort must have studied and continued Grindelwald's methods, and Dumbledore must've known to expect that.' I love the *Fantastic Beasts* movies.

JC: I don't think I've seen *Secrets of Dumbledore*. That doesn't sound familiar to me at all.

Lorrie: It's a mess for a variety of reasons that I'm super excited to get into someday. There are many elements of that movie that you can see were core to the vision, and many elements that are not at all core to the vision forced onto the movie by the unexpected need to close out the series that was supposed to be more than three movies long, and then suddenly the third movie has to be the final one. A lot of script doctoring had to happen and it's a mess, but I think Grindelwald reanimates a Fantastic Beast that he kills and then passes off as alive. That's what all of this is about: autocrats wishing that they could just harness the power of the masses without the masses disagreeing with them inconveniently.

JC: Yeah, yeah. Just happen to worship the golden statues of ourselves...

Lorrie: Ew! Oh, gross. Ugh!

JC: A contemporary event in May of 2026, for folks listening to this in the future.

Lorrie: Not a golden calf. Then Snape tells them that they're going to have to study *Crucio*, so he is really teaching them what they need to know -- Unforgivables, dementors -- and more or less, they are probably learning something.

JC: The text doesn't really say anything about this. Snape criticizes their essays on the Imperius curse, but I wonder how Harry did on that. I really am curious, because Harry is decent at throwing it off.

Lorrie: Yeah. No, Harry's gifted. Yeah. They run into Moaning Myrtle, who gives them the intriguing information that there's a boy who's been crying in the bathroom. Vulnerable, lonely... Huh.

JC: He feels like he's being bullied and he's very sensitive and he cries a lot, and she feels like he and she have a lot in common... She's talking about Draco, and I think that's another beautiful little tidbit there for the Drarry fandom folks, but it's very interesting that he's... I think Harry and Ron don't know who this is at this point.

Lorrie: Yeah. No, they don't.

JC: But it's very interesting. I think, even on a first read, I knew that was Draco. I was like, 'Oh, okay, yeah, yeah. That's the only person it could be that would make sense.' That idea that he has this inner life where he's been given this task and he has no choice but to do it and he's trying his best but he's struggling, and he doesn't really want to do it but he's doing it because if he doesn't, the consequences are dire... He's really in a bad place.

Lorrie: Yeah, and that the isolation he is living through is designed, is an intrinsic part of this whole horror.

JC: Right. He's not been able to confide this in anyone, none of the people that he would normally trust.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Has there ever been a time so far where Harry had something hard he had to do and he had to keep it a secret from everyone? He couldn't tell Ron and Hermione, he couldn't tell Sirius... Has that ever happened?

Lorrie: No, Harry has never been forced into secrecy by this kind of threat.

JC: Right. That's a lot.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And I like that even though the book doesn't make it completely clear this is Draco here, we're meant to understand that it's Draco and that Harry and Ron just don't see it, but I like that it humanizes Draco here and makes you think about what's really going on in his life.

Lorrie: This is what I mean when I say I think the series is growing up here, that this is a respectful look at the interior life of a Slytherin character that we would

not have gotten in earlier volumes. They're not caricatures here; they are characters.

JC: I'm just annoyed that when Myrtle jumps into the bathroom, the first thing Harry says is, "This is the boys' bathroom. You're not supposed to be in here."

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my God...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I can't not read that this way now. Did Harry have to say that in that moment? Harry's been in the bathroom, wasn't supposed to be, and had been chastised for it; Myrtle has shown up when Harry has taken a bath before. It's not like this is an uncommon occurrence at Hogwarts with Myrtle, but the fact that he felt like he had to point out (or that the author felt like the character needed to point out) that this character was in the wrong bathroom when she lives in the pipes, and that's all she does is go into bathrooms... I couldn't help but read the author's transphobia into that.

Lorrie: I wish we were not in a timeline where bathroom discourse is being used to hound an entire group of people out of public life under really heavy threat. Life still goes on; teenagers who are old enough are going to Hogsmeade to practice Apparition. Harry and Draco are not old enough -- they are later in the year, their birthdays -- so of course, Harry immediately plans to attempt another assault on the Room of Requirement, knowing that Draco would also see this as another opportunity to go do whatever he's doing. Hermione says to focus on Slughorn, and Harry says, "Well, Slughorn's been avoiding me." Yes, he has, Harry... And then we get this chapter in which Harry is trying to imagine life from Draco's point of view and, just generally, Slytherin point of view. We get another step toward Dark Harry.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: This is very much like "No, Harry's not pure." It's not like he's a perfect person and Slytherins are all evil. Yeah, going toward this direction is something that is part of most people. This is my least favorite thing Harry ever does.

JC: Wow. That's saying a lot.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. He sees Goyle Polyjuiced into the same little girl who had dropped the scales a few days ago, and he sneaks up behind her and whispers, "Hello... you're very pretty, aren't you?" This is unequivocally a premeditated threat of sexual assault. *Yuck!* I wish Harry hadn't done that, but that's not how fiction works.

JC: True, true. He doesn't feel any... I one-hundred percent believe that he would never have said that to any random girl, but his hatred for Goyle is enough that that feels like an appropriate threat to him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Oh, you're going to Polyjuice yourself as a little girl? Let me tell you what kind of danger you're putting yourself in." That's what it feels like, but it also feels slightly out of character for Harry to me. It's a bit much.

Lorrie: Yeah. Also, Harry's never been an eleven-year-old girl, so it's not like he's saying, "Oh, let me show you how it feels to be me." It's not that. He has thought about Goyle putting himself in a position where he's committed to trying to be convincing as a tween girl. Goyle has had to have all these new and uncomfortable perspectives on what it might take to pass as an eleven-year-old girl, and Harry has thought about it and he's addressing that; to address it, Harry is assuming and claiming a position of relative age, privilege, and gender privilege to punch down. He's sexually harassing Goyle knowing that Goyle won't be able to fight back as himself, and the way Harry laughs after this... That's the thing where I have to challenge myself as a reader. 'Why do I want to not think this is the real Harry? No, this is a book, this is a series. These are elements of this character. Incorporate this into my understanding, into my reading.' Harry laughs; he's having a Dudley experience. He's enjoying this, and then we have this, I find, very chilling sentence: "It gave Harry a most agreeable feeling of power," and there's no accompanying moralization from the narrator or the author, like, "...and he shouldn't have had it," or we don't have Hermione popping up to say, "You know, Harry, you shouldn't..." There's nothing like that. It's presented, and as a reader, I find myself not trusting the author here.

JC: Is it that the author just thinks that any male person would do this given the opportunity?

Lorrie: I don't know.

JC: Is this saying more about her view of men?

Lorrie: I don't know.

JC: That even her own beloved character would do this if he had the opportunity or would use this to get back at an enemy?

Lorrie: If I had to guess (and I'm not on secure ground about this), I would think that this is the author having a revenge fantasy on people like Goyle. "You know what they deserve. They deserve to know how it feels to be threatened the way young girls are, and my hero Harry has an opportunity to introduce this kind of fear," a little bit like Dudley with the dementors. "Oh, this is an opportunity to give Dudley what he richly needs, which is a look into how it feels." But Harry takes this on with an enjoyment and no regret and no internal ambivalence about it, and I'm not sure if that lack of internal ambivalence is in Harry. Only in Harry and the author, I feel nervous here.

JC: Do you think that this is inconsistent for the character that she's created (she's created a little out-of-character moment here for her own purposes), or do you think this is who she wants us to think Harry actually is, [that] this is what Harry is capable of?

Lorrie: I think more the latter, because in this chapter, when Harry is trying to think more like Slytherins, it's also him getting in touch with the parts of himself that could understand why they do the things they do and how it feels. We know that the first page of this chapter was him dog-earring the Prince's book where it says *Sectumsempra* and he has every intention of trying that out without having any idea what it does. He has to think like these people; he cannot get anywhere with figuring out what they're doing if he doesn't think like them. He's not a pure person who's incapable of enjoying the same kind of damaging behavior. He does enjoy it; he does it here. We know that in the next book, we're going to see him successfully cast an Unforgivable (more than one), so he tries this out. He harasses somebody, he enjoys it, he never pays for it; there are no consequences. What is to stop him from taking this path further? I think that is definitely an intentional building in this chapter of Harry getting more and more comfortable with this, and that it's going to pay off in a couple chapters in a huge way.

JC: Okay, yeah. So back in the first book, we know that Harry was basically a Hat stall; the Hat could put him in either Gryffindor or Slytherin and Harry chose to go into Gryffindor, and that's why the Hat put him there. I guess a question that this is now raising for me is he could have really gone either way, right? How much of that is him as a person, and how much of that is this latent connection with Voldemort? That's always a question that comes up for me and I kind of want to think it's him as a person, because I don't like the idea of putting people in a House box and saying that's their entire personality. People are more complex than that, but I'm just curious about your thought on that.

Lorrie: I think we're going to be seeing more and more, in the series from this point, Harry (as he matures) being able to identify parts of himself that are Slytherin or Slytherin-like that are really him and not having the fearful assumption that anything that's even remotely like Voldemort he just has to put away from himself, because that's what Voldemort does with Horcruxes. If there's something about himself that he doesn't want, he puts it away from himself. Harry is growing up; he's admitting things, he's recognizing and incorporating things, he's synthesizing parts of his personality. This is what you should do when you're growing. If it's like, 'Well, no, what dark parts in me do I have? What does it feel like?' Does he completely condemn anyone who would ever sexually harass somebody who's passing as an eleven-year-old girl? Well, he did it himself and he enjoyed it. Would he do it again? We've seen no reason that he wouldn't. I also do wonder... The book lets us wonder what must be going through Goyle's mind. In previous depictions of Goyle, a fanfic writer could wonder, but you would have to make that leap yourself; you would have to choose to hear the author. The narration is leading us to know that Goyle had a response to this. Goyle is being pressured into feminization, which is something that we know from the Snape boggart incident is a way of punishing male characters that this author advocates, isn't sorry for, and sees nothing wrong with. Goyle has been pressured into feminization against his will by somebody who (to take it back to the previous chapter) views him partly as a friend and partly as a henchman. Goyle has been treated kindly by Hermione just a few days earlier when she fixed his scales (whom he despises), and now he has just learned how people sneak up and talk to little girls. Ugh... This is definitely a more respectful treatment of a Slytherin character than we've seen in this series before.

JC: Interesting. It's Gregory Goyle's No Good, Very Bad Day. There's a fic waiting to be written like that.

Lorrie: It really is. Yeah, a lot of bad stuff is happening to him. Fortunately for Goyle, at least he is permitted to throw the scales and run away so he doesn't have to deal with the rest of this, and Harry enjoys knowing that Draco's on the other side. So yeah, after this quite eventful, exhausting chapter, eventually Harry still can't get the Room of Requirement to open, and he kicks the wall and he hurts himself and he falls over; once again, he gets caught in this undignified position by Tonks, who is so depressed and distracted that she doesn't even notice any of this.

JC: Yeah. Harry's got the Invisibility Cloak and he's hanging out in this hallway, and that doesn't even matter. It doesn't even register.

Lorrie: Ugh... Harry red-herrings us into his suspicion that she was in love with Sirius, and that was Harry trying to get into the Unknowable Room that is the mind of Slytherins.

JC: So he goes down to the Great Hall to meet Ron and Hermione for lunch and learns that Ron actually was able to Apparate, which is kind of funny.

Lorrie: Very nearly!

JC: Very nearly. Hermione was "perfect" in Ron's words, which I was like, 'Aaawww...'

Lorrie: Aaawww...

JC: Then we have this moment where Ron makes a sexist joke and Hermione immediately calls him on it, which I found very satisfying. "'And yet,' said Hermione, coming out of her reverie, 'I doubt you'd find a *woman* who sulked for half an hour because Madam Rosmerta didn't laugh at their joke about the hag, the Healer, and the *Mimbulus mimbletonia*,'" and Ron just scowls. I love that. I love that Hermione doesn't let that pass without commenting on it.

Lorrie: But she's also poking holes in Ron's attempt to be a ladies' man with Madam Rosmerta.

JC: You're going to have to do better than that, Ron. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, Ron.

JC: Yeah. I don't exactly know what's going on in Hermione's head right now. Is she romantically interested in Ron? I'm not completely convinced that she is convinced... I don't know what's going on in her head about Ron quite yet. I don't know where she is on the journey to being in love with Ron. I'm not completely sure, but I do like that she's telling him this is not acceptable. This is where I also think about the author. We talked before about the author writing Hermione as the character she wished she could have been, because a heck of a lot of sixteen-, seventeen-year-old girls would just laugh if they were interested in that boy and they wouldn't push back for a variety of reasons. I like that Hermione does push back; even though she's interested in Ron, she doesn't let him get away with that.

Lorrie: [More] worldly than I am. The chapter after this is called After the Burial.

JC: Mmmm....

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.