HARRY POTTER AFTER 2020
with LORRIE KIM and JC

Transcript

Episode 6.2

Book 6, Chapter 26: The Cave

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-Six: The Cave.

Lorrie: The Cave. Dumbledore and Harry enter a cave where Voldemort has hidden part of his soul and protected it with Dark magic. So, JC, I'm going to start off with the same question Dumbledore asks Harry once they Apparate to these towering cliffs with seawater churning below: "What do you think?"

JC: The location of this cave is incredibly daunting, and the way it's described… It's interesting that it's almost the scariest -- Actually, you know what? It reminds me a little bit of the place that the Dursleys took Harry to. It's the most forbidding place, you can't possibly get there… It's something that they know about from Tom Riddle's past; they know it's the place that Tom Riddle took those two children who came out never the same again, but it's actually really hard to get to, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Why did they go in the middle of the night? Well, because they had to go at low tide. Dumbledore knew they had a window of getting in and out and all this stuff, they'd have to climb down these slippery rocks to get there. Could they have Apparated a little closer? I don't know. Maybe not. The whole thing is written to be impossible, but yet they can do it. They have to swim in their clothes to get there…

Lorrie: I know.

JC: And then I immediately had this moment of, 'When did Harry learn how to swim?' because I'm pretty sure the Dursleys would not have paid for swimming lessons for him. When did he learn how to swim, and then to swim in rough ocean where the waves are beating against the rocks?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: What?! I had so many questions, but I think part of it was just the atmosphere that was set right there -- the forbiddenness of it -- that really sets it up for "This is going to be hard."

Lorrie: This is the trip, the psychological deep dive, of your life.

JC: Those were all the things I was thinking in that first opening continuing from the last chapter, I guess, and then into this one. Good Lord!

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And then as this goes on and how challenging it is to get the Horcrux, this thought of, "Are they all going to be like this?'

Lorrie: Oh, my, that's true.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's one of the things that this particular Horcrux hunt set up: there are more Horcruxes? Oh, no…

JC: There are more, and are they all going to be this hard? How long did it take Dumbledore to find this freaking cave? Dumbledore knew the cave existed. Has he been going to the coast on all these trips and trying to find this particular cave?

Lorrie: The Cave…

JC: It's even hard to see; they can't even see the entrance until they get right up on it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, my God. Dumbledore's holiday spelunking on the weekends or something trying to figure out where the dang cave is. Wow…

Lorrie: Yeah, desperately checking the calendar.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Throughout this chapter, we see very effectively that Dumbledore is at the same time impossibly powerful and really frail and old.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "It was a treacherous descent and Dumbledore, hampered slightly by his withered hand, moved slowly." Oh, he's so mortal and disabled.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry is sixteen and athletic. On the one hand, Harry is just bounding with energy and on the other hand, Harry has never even heard of the kind of magic Dumbledore is doing left and right. And then I found this so thrilling: "With the sudden agility of a much younger man…" Dumbledore sticks his wand between his teeth and then he does a perfect breaststroke; he starts swimming, and that was so exciting. Just the surges of admiration for how powerful he is… Also, shout out to swimming as a sport that people can do that have a hard time moving that way on land, but do not underestimate Dumbledore.

JC: Right. This chapter starts with Dumbledore very powerful and leading Harry there and completely in charge and Harry in awe of the magic he's doing, and ends the completely opposite: with Dumbledore frail and (as we kind of know what's going to happen next) close to death, and Harry the one in charge and keeping him safe.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the fact that he has set out on this journey, telling Harry, "You're the person I'm choosing to entrust my whole life to," and Harry going, "You have made a mistake. Excuse me?" Harry starts out with that mentality, and then we get this crescendo of impossibly advanced magic to heighten the hilarity even more and more. What can anyone do compared to what this incredible magician can do? Harry's cold and shivering.

JC: Oh, the fact that that takes Dumbledore a while… I was actually really glad for this detail. One of the things I hate most in life is being cold and wet.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Hate, hate, hate. I can be cold and dry; that's fine. I can be wet and warm; that's fine, too. Cold and wet is the worst. I hate it. The fact that Dumbledore finally notices and goes, "Oh," and then does this quick-dry spell that makes his clothes all feel like they're warm, like they just came out of the dryer… I could feel that in my body.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Oh, thank you, Dumbledore, for noticing.'

Lorrie: But also, that was one of those things where Dumbledore doesn't remember how it feels to be less powerful, because of course Dumbledore has been comfortable the whole time…

JC: Right, right.

Lorrie: And then he realizes, "Oh, yeah, you don't know how to do this."

JC: "Here's another thing you don't know how to do, child." Yeah.

Lorrie: Harry didn't even know that that was something that a person can do.

JC: Right. "Oh, here's magic that I'm now understanding exists." Yeah.

Lorrie: Impossible to make up this ground.

JC: Harry's wondering 'How the heck do you know we're in the right place?' and Dumbledore is looking around and says, "This place has seen magic." That idea… That's a really cool concept, and I've seen it in many other properties that have magic: Dark magic, especially, leaves a residue that you can sense, another thing for Harry to learn going forward.

Lorrie: Yeah. What I love in this moment is that Harry has no idea if he is sensitive to this because he's shaking so hard. He doesn't know if he's shivering from cold or if he's feeling the magic. It's impossible; he's just too cold. This feels incredibly intimidating to see all of this magic that Dumbledore figures out just by concentrating, and I found as a reader that it feels unfair in a very funny way because this series generally teaches us what spells Harry's learning so that when we get into a situation in the plot, we think, 'Oh, yeah, we learned what spells Harry should probably use. He could use this and that. That's what you would do.' Now -- even as Harry is here intimidated by all this magic -- as a reader, I'm feeling, 'Hey, unfair! We haven't been let in on this, either. Dumbledore's using magic we don't know. Hey!'

JC: I do like that reminder that the magical world is so much bigger than what Harry's learned in school.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I think that's a thing that occasionally -- because we spend so much of our experience in the books (in Harry's perspective) at Hogwarts learning about the world with him -- on those moments when you see an adult in the Wizarding World using some magic, it brings back that wondrous feeling that you had in the very first book.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's one of the cool things here: wow, look at all the things that we hadn't even thought of that you can do.

Lorrie: But also, with no clue of where you're supposed to go to learn these once you leave school.

JC: Yeah. There doesn't seem to be Wizarding University or Wizarding grad school. It's unclear. How do you learn this? Yeah.

Lorrie: And it really sets the stage for the part of the hero's journey we're on where Harry's not ready to go on without this mentor, and I'm reading this as a reader going, 'I'm not ready!'

JC: Yeah, for real. It really does create that stage, especially when Dumbledore says here, "Yeah, getting to this cave was really a challenge, wasn't it? Well, from here on out, the challenge is going to be all the traps and tests that Voldemort has set for us." Immediately, the feeling is, 'Oh, that's going to be so much worse than climbing down these slippery rocks and swimming across this dark, violent, cold ocean and trying not to drown. Oh, it's about to get worse because now it's stuff that Voldemort thought up. Oh, good.'

Lorrie: Yeah. 'That was just the antechamber.'

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Several times in this chapter, Dumbledore uses the hand that's been so injured that he hasn't been using it all year. He finds where the concealed entrance is to the cave by touching the walls all over with his "blackened fingertips". I had thought that hand couldn't feel anything anymore, so I'm guessing this means that there's something that hand retains about what it felt like to be damaged by this kind of cursed magic that is resonating with the echoes of Dark magic that he was looking for here.

JC: Oh, that's interesting. Actually, my assumption there was just like, 'Well, this one's already damaged. Can't get any worse if I touch something Dark,' but okay, yeah, that makes sense that there would be some kind of a resonance there.

Lorrie: Because it's at a few different points where the author specifies that he's using the blackened dead hand to check things out. That's the hand that finds the entrance, not the hand that he's using to pick up his silver knife or move and hold things with.

JC: That really does pick up that idea, again, that if you have used or experienced Dark magic, you have more of an affinity for it. Or not an affinity for it, but you understand it in a way that other people wouldn't. Yeah.

Lorrie: Now, we get again a grown-up murmuring words in a strange language that Harry did not understand. Now, I listened and I believe I could hear what Snape was saying to heal Draco; I tried listening to what Dumbledore was saying here, and I have zero idea. Do you know? Do you have any guess what Dumbledore is saying?

JC: No, no. No.

Lorrie: But Dumbledore knows what he's doing, and it's working. My closest guess (which is not close) is maybe he's searching for something that had the same kind of intent to repel other people and harm them, or maybe he's looking for something that retains traces of the kind of fear that you would have to feel to need to be this secretive and set up these many traps. I don't know.

Caroline: Producer Caroline here with a note from future Lorrie and JC, who, when recording an episode a few chapters later (Chapter 29), had some more thoughts on this particular point around Dumbledore's injured hand, Snape's repentance, and what words Dumbledore might have been saying, so we're editing it back in here. I'll be back just to let you know when the end of this particular snippet is, and then Lorrie will pick back up with an excerpt from the book.

Lorrie: Snape had stopped; he had been a Death Eater, he had cast Dark magic. He stopped and felt genuine remorse, and Dumbledore knew that the remorse was genuine because that is what made Snape able to reverse Dark magic. If Snape's remorse hadn't been genuine, he wouldn't have been able to do that, but in order to kill Dumbledore, Snape had to mean it when he cast an Unforgivable; he had to turn himself back. He had to go back into becoming a person who could do that -- something that he had forsworn because he reviled it -- and he really couldn't afford to make a mistake. It had to be a one-shot kill, right? He had to commit. He had to become that for real, even though he hated it. It has ripped his soul apart and he can't tell anyone, but does he have what it takes to revert? Is he going to be able to come back a second time? I don't know. It's harder the second time. What a burden; he has multiple burdens, and he has to keep focus. This is the point at which I realized that I could hear what Dumbledore was saying at the entrance to the cave now; even when we just recorded that, I had no idea what he was saying. He's saying these mysterious words -- Harry has no idea what language this is -- but Dumbledore had been running his injured hand over the wall and "murmuring words in a strange tongue that Harry did not understand," and that made me think, 'All right.' Dumbledore, in order to figure out what Voldemort did, had to understand Voldemort's mindset. We're going to find out (we don't know yet) Dumbledore once was as dark as Voldemort and as frightened because that's a thing, right? Voldemort has to hide a piece of his soul because he's so frightened of it. He cannot face it, he can't confront it; he has to put it away from himself, and he cannot afford anyone to be able to find this piece of soul. He is so frightened, and he has to make it so no one can find it. Voldemort has a secret and he has to hide it. He would let countless other people die rather than confront his own secret, and we're going to find out in *Deathly Hallows* and more so in the *Fantastic Beasts* movies that that was Dumbledore, too. He had a secret reason why he couldn't face Grindelwald at a time when the entire Wizarding World was saying, "Grindelwald is mass slaughtering people. You're the only one strong enough to stop him. What is wrong with you? Go!" and he wouldn't. He let World War II rage on for years and years and years before taking responsibility and going ahead and doing it. That's the language, I'm guessing, Dumbledore is speaking: remembering what it feels like to be that afraid, that willing to let that many people suffer and die because you can't face yourself. Of

course, Harry doesn't know that language, but I think Dumbledore was remembering, 'How did I think when I was also this evil?'

Caroline: And now, back to the present and your regularly scheduled podcast.

Lorrie: Anyway, Dumbledore finds the concealed entrance. "Harry did not ask how Dumbledore knew. He had never seen a wizard work things out like this, simply by looking and touching…" Yeah.

JC: It's a good lesson, though, that magic is not this technology that fixes everything; you still have to use your mind and use all of your other resources. Dumbledore's using resources there. He's using the fact that he has this injured hand that was injured by Dark magic. He's using his long study and understanding of Voldemort and what Voldemort might do. He's using his own experience working with all kinds of magic in the past. He's bringing all of his resources to bear here on finding an entrance that he is sure is here and hidden.

Lorrie: Yeah. We are seeing Dumbledore at his comfort level of magical ability. Usually, when we see him running a school, we know that he's enormously powerful and he's using a tiny percentage of his powers. You just can't imagine what this man is capable of, and here, we're seeing it.

JC: If you're reading this book for the first time, you don't know what's coming, but the fact that Dumbledore basically has one more chapter to live and then Harry's on his own… It's like, 'Oh, my God, the sixteen-year-old child is going to have to pick up this task, this mission, and continue on. Oh, my God!' That was on my mind throughout this chapter: the Harry that I know [is] going to have to be doing these kinds of things not alone, but without Dumbledore going forward.

Lorrie: I'm not ready, he's not ready, nobody's ready…

JC: Yeah, no one is ready. No one's ready. Oh, my God! This is also bringing me… You and I are both about to send our babies off to college in a very short time, as of the time of this recording -- in a couple of weeks -- and oh, my God, are they ready?

Lorrie: Oh, boy…

JC: Oh, no! There's a graduation happening here and a transition to adulthood.

Lorrie: Dumbledore finds the concealed entrance. Once he finds it, he points his wand at it and then this outline blazes white. Okay, that's how it is when you solve a mystery. Okay, you found it, it's there; everyone can see it now. And then… Oh, I love this so much: Dumbledore stares at the cave wall for two solid minutes. He's reading. Reading what? Well, nothing that Harry can see -- nothing that I can see -- but he's reading a story there. This is a really hidden story about Tom Riddle where he is looking for it and he has the ability to read it, because even if super

hidden stories aren't legible to most people, they're still there. This very much reminds me of how it feels to be a rereader -- to reread something that I read at an earlier age -- and now I see the stuff that I couldn't have seen before because I hadn't lived that. It's the same cave wall; Dumbledore and Harry are both looking at it, and Dumbledore is reading it. Harry is standing there for two minutes, and I think Dumbledore is holding in his own head a silent dialogue with Tom Riddle, trying to understand how the Voldemort of whatever part of the past it was when he built this protection would (at that age) have thought, what was on his mind. We know how that feels because the whole book, we've been seeing Harry reading the Half-Blood Prince's book and trying to understand the person that Snape was twenty years ago. Knowing what that person's intentions were does turn out to be super important; even though you can't, really, you still have to try. Hermione saying "you have to be more cautious than that" is true, and this is also very, very unfortunately the experience that we are having as *Harry Potter* readers reading this series. To know the author of twenty years ago, knowing what kind of destructive person she has become… Now that she has opened up a fund -- and we all know that her net worth is almost limitless -- that you can apply to if you want to do something to exclude trans people from public life, you have a bottomless resource, potentially. That's who she is now; this series that we're reading is who she was twenty years ago. Here's Dumbledore staring at the cave wall, apparently fascinated by whatever he can make out.

JC: Yeah. I like the fact that he takes his time with that, because I think it's modeling for Harry that even with all the power Dumbledore has and all the knowledge that he has, there are things that you have to stop and consider and really spend your time thinking through.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I like that, and I also like that for us as readers because that's telling the reader, 'This is not where the hero rushes in and knows what to do exactly." Sometimes, you don't know what to do, no matter how much power and knowledge and wisdom you have, and you have to stop and really sort through it all and figure it out. Taking the time to do that is important and valuable.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I love that, because I think that there's such a trope in hero stories -- the hero knows what to do and rushes it and does it -- and in real life, we really want people to stop and think more and understand that that's an important part of the process of solving a problem. As someone who teaches people to support young minds developing their own skills at solving problems, I appreciate when that's modeled.

Lorrie: What I think is so amazing (that the author has achieved in writing this chapter) is that we really see how uncertain this method is and how you truly cannot be sure of anything, and how likely it is that you're wrong -- possibly extremely wrong -- because Dumbledore is off. He has the wrong guess several times in this chapter and he goes off in the wrong way. Sometimes he's doing the best he can, sometimes he should have listened to Harry, and there are times where (as rereaders) you go back knowing that after Dumbledore's death, Harry figured out that

he was right all along. Dumbledore has been saying this whole series, "Now, I could be wrong, I'm just guessing," and when Harry was younger, that was funny. "Oh, yeah, right, like any of us is going to be more right than you." Now, we're at the point where actually, Harry might be more right than Dumbledore, but that doesn't mean you can say, "Oh, I don't know what I'm doing. I refuse to try." No, you have to. You have to do your best.

JC: Yeah. 'Who else is going to do it?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'Is anyone more qualified? No.'

Lorrie: No.

JC: 'Do I know what I'm doing? No.'

Lorrie: 'How much time do we have?' Yeah.

JC: Yeah, it has to happen. Yeah. I'm not comparing myself with Dumbledore at all, but the times in my life when I have felt like, 'Oh, shit, I'm an adult…'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'I'm the adult here,' and that moment of looking around and going, 'No one else can do this but me. I guess I'm the adult in the room. Okay… I don't really know what I'm doing, but I'm going to pretend like I do.'

Lorrie: Gosh. Then we get a moment of almost comedy here where Dumbledore is disgusted because he looks at what Voldemort has set up here and he says, "Oh, surely not. So crude." He's judging Tom.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Oh, a blood sacrifice?! Ugh!'

JC: 'That's so overdone.'

Lorrie: It's so teenage.

JC: It is very like something that a younger Tom Riddle… I can see, 'Oh, a blood sacrifice…'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Dumbledore's disdain for it is amazing, because Tom Riddle (especially at that point) would have thought that a physical sacrifice is the big thing. Causing someone pain as if there's not worse things... I thought, 'Yeah, A) that does sound like something that a younger person would think,' but the other place it took me to was knowing the author's feelings about motherhood: that idea that every person who has given birth has had the experience of physical discomfort and pain being worth the result. Maybe not every single one (because maybe some of them didn't want to be there and etc.), but in general. People who want to be a parent and who give birth, that idea that there's pain that is worth bearing for love... Many, many people who give birth go into this knowing that that's coming, right? That idea that there's pain that's worth it for love is something that obviously Voldemort would not understand, and I think that it's really interesting. It's not just that people who give birth understand this -- many, many people do -- but Voldemort in particular would, at that age, have had no clue. 'Oh, physical, torture is the thing that I can make people do anything with.' Well, actually, there are worse things…

Lorrie: The hilarious thing is that later on in this chapter, Dumbledore is about to find out that not all of Voldemort's ideas were so crude.

JC: True. That's true.

Lorrie: This moment is fun, and then I think it's such a powerful moment when Harry doesn't even understand what it is, but he has this powerful feeling that he should be the one to cut his own arm, not Dumbledore. It's like chivalry; Harry's young and strong. He thinks he's the expendable one, and Dumbledore almost laughs at this and he says, "You're very kind, Harry, but your blood is worth more than mine." What the heck?!

JC: That also rings clear to me as a parent, as a teacher, as someone who's had many, many times in my life when I've been in charge of young people who weren't even mine.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Of course, it's going to be me. What?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: No, I'm the one who's going to be standing in front of you when the bus is coming.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Dumbledore's like, "Of course, Harry's blood is worth a lot," but also, of course Dumbledore is going to be the one. That's a no-brainer.

Lorrie: "But we can't afford to lose you, sir, in any way," and how ominous it is that Dumbledore is talking about how valuable Harry's blood is… Uh-oh. The door opens… Dumbledore gives it some blood, the door opens, and then they get this vast, dark cavern with an eerie green glow

in the middle of a gigantic lake. Dumbledore says that Harry should walk with him and "be very careful not to step into the water." Okay.

JC: Was all of this here, or did Voldemort create this? It seems like it's too perfect for his purpose for him not to have created it, but also a vast underground lake that you can't even see the other side of… That doesn't sound like something that's naturally occurring. Is this one of those things where you go into the tent and it's been magically enlarged?

Lorrie: It probably is, considering that he probably had no upper limit on how much he wanted to pack in there eventually.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, the whole thing is obviously cursed.

JC: Yeah. Okay, there's this lake and Dumbledore knows enough to go, "Yeah, whatever is in that water, it's protecting… That can't be good. Don't even…"

Lorrie: And that he has made the decision to dole out information about it to Harry a step at a time. "We're going to do this a step at a time," and they walk on and on and on. This thing just goes on forever… At some point during this walk, Harry feels stupid but says, "Can't we just Summon the Horcrux?" He thinks this is really dumb, and Dumbledore's like, "Great idea!"

JC: "Go for it!" Yeah. I love that it feels a bit like a teaching moment. "Okay, go ahead. Try. What's the worst that will happen?" It's like, 'Oh, no.'

Lorrie: It's also the "Did you try turning it off and on again?"

JC: "Did you try restarting your computer?" Yeah.

Lorrie: It also makes me think, 'Okay, so these are the kinds of tests I bet Dumbledore is running rapidly through his head when he stands there, just looking at something.' It's like, 'Well, we can try this, we can try that.' Then Harry says, "What about this test?" and I love that Dumbledore says, "Okay, Harry, you do it." He's really enforcing that Harry has something to contribute.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: "Yes, Harry, we are partners on this outing,' and that's one step up. 'Harry, believe it, do it,' and then Harry gets the jump scare of his life.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, God…

JC: Something leaps out of the water like a weird whale or something or a tentacle and splashes back down. Another thing that is standing out to me here is that Dumbledore is teaching Harry how to do this because Dumbledore knows he hasn't got much time left.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He knows that this is maybe the only time he's going to get to take Harry on one of these, so he's teaching at the same time. When he points out that it was really good to try a simple test, what's the simplest way forward? Instead of eliminating, going, "Well, that's not going to work. That's too stupid," "No, let's try it."

Lorrie: No, it's not stupid.

JC: And even if we're pretty sure it's not going to work, you're going to learn something from it and you will have eliminated something. That's a good strategy in your life.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is why people always say, "Okay, if you lose a thing, when's the last time you remember having it? Use the simplest strategy first, and when you have eliminated that, then you can move forward." That's just a good problem-solving skill.

Lorrie: We also get reminded (for plot purposes) that there are things that can resist Summoning charms, so that's a good little detail for the author to fix there for herself. Yeah, here's Dumbledore easing Harry step by step. He didn't tell Harry that that thing was going to happen, but now Harry knows.

JC: At this point in the chapter I was thinking, 'Did Dumbledore already know what was in the water and just wasn't telling him?' but that reinforced to me that Dumbledore didn't actually know what was in the water yet. He could guess, but he wasn't sure until… 'Oh,' and then he's like, 'Okay, now I know what's in the water.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Then we get another delicious scene of what it looks like when Dumbledore picks up on something just by being super sensitive and super powerful, like when he looked around that house and saw the armchair and he's like, 'Oh, that's Slughorn.'

JC: So when he finds the chain and he senses the Dark magic, this is another thing that makes me think from a teacher perspective again. I'll just say for the listeners: it's August of 2026 when we're recording this, so I'm preparing for this semester. My brain has gone back into this mode of thinking about everything through a teacher lens, but when you watch someone who is an expert in your content area doing a thing, it can look like magic…

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: But really, they're just noticing details that you can teach yourself -- you can learn through lots of practice and education how to do -- so it looks like magic when a mathematician looks at a problem and just goes, "Oh, what if we think about it this way?" and the students are like, "How?!"

Lorrie: "How did you…?!"

JC: "What?! How the hell?! I would never think of that!" It looks like magic in the same way. Dumbledore is teaching here, and I love that he notices things that Harry hasn't learned to notice yet, but Harry now is aware. 'Okay, if I just keep working on this' -- well, maybe Harry's thinking this -- 'eventually, I'll be able to notice that too, or this is a thing to work toward.'

Lorrie: Harry has had the beginnings of this. All year long, he has been totally right about Draco. He's only sixteen, so he hasn't been able to prove it, but when people have dismissed him, that has not made him doubt himself at all. Breathtakingly, Dumbledore finds something, and now this visible green copper chain is there and it raises this tiny boat. Wow.

JC: Yeah, and this is like crossing the river of the dead literally, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: It's like that image of taking this really spectral boat across this really dark water. I was like, 'Oh, my gosh!' Also, there's a lot of green… Everything associated with Voldemort is green, and I had a moment of wondering, 'Why green? Why did she pick green to be the color of evil?' In this whole series; it's not just this book.

Lorrie: Yeah, but then we have Harry's eyes.

JC: Oh… Hmm.

Lorrie: I think it's just that it's uncanny. It's beautiful; it's jewel-like here. The light coming from the center of the lake… It's misty, but also there's so much jewel imagery, like the light from their wands reflecting off the water. I think it's just that secondary colors are uncannier… Orange and purple and green, if you're going to look around at Halloween witch costumes or something.

JC: Yeah. Green is also this color that we often associate with people being sick. This is gross, but it's the color of mucus when you're really sick; there's lots of sickness imagery, even though green's a color I associate with nature and beautiful things and relaxation.

Lorrie: There's definitely that, yes, but I think the British Isles tradition of witches having red hair and green eyes is just like, 'Okay, this is just uncanny, whether for good or evil.'

JC: Ooh, I haven't thought about the amount of redhead… That's interesting.

Lorrie: So Dumbledore explains, "Magic always leaves traces, sometimes very distinctive traces. I taught Tom Riddle. I know his style." We have been seeing that through this volume, Snape totally knew that Harry wasn't brewing those potions on his own. This is, in my life as a reader, what it means to know something about an author from reading what they wrote. A person was behind this; you read something else they wrote, it's the same person. Fortunately, for all of us, we have Dumbledore to confirm that this boat is safe and whatever horrible, dangerous things they're doing, it's okay to climb into this boat and go wherever it takes you.

JC: Right, and Dumbledore's like, "Voldemort would have wanted a way to get over there to check on his Horcrux, right? Yeah, he needed a mode of transportation, and we're going to take the same one that he set up for himself." "Okay, but is it going to be safe for us?"

Lorrie: Yeah. Climbing into the boat is not going to start the conflict that is obviously going to happen at some point; it's postponing it. Then Dumbledore, with his usual humor, says, "I think we must resign ourselves to the fact that the things in the water will, at some point, realize we are not Lord Voldemort. Thus far, however, we have done well. They have allowed us to raise the boat," which reminds me of the protections around the Mirror of Erised from the end of the first book. The other protections might keep out a lot of people, but really, the only one that matters is the final one.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's the only real protection, and that's where the person has put all their faith. There are challenges; you have to team up, you have to get over them. Eventually, there's going to be the one where you face the thing. We're not there yet. The boat is too small: Harry says, "It doesn't look like it was built for two people. Will it hold both of us? Will we be too heavy together?" and then Dumbledore chuckles. Oh, God, that is so patronizing and so demoralizing and it turns out to be wrong, but Harry doesn't know that yet; Harry doesn't know that in this book. Dumbledore laughs and says, "Voldemort will not have cared about the weight, but about the amount of magical power that crossed his lake. I rather think an enchantment will have been placed upon this boat so that only one wizard at a time will be able to sail in it.… I do not think you will count, Harry." Geez…

JC: I love that. Yeah, "I think it unlikely that your powers will register compared to mine." I was like, 'Dayum! Damn, Dumbledore! Way to instill confidence in this child you're handing this whole mission over to. Okay.'

Lorrie: And then we'll find out later that Dumbledore was correct in guessing that Voldemort must have put in some sort of scale for magical power. He came to the wrong conclusion here because he wasn't thinking evilly enough. In Chapter Ten of *Deathly Hallows*, Harry remembers this boat and he thinks of it as the boat that was "bewitched… to carry one wizard and one victim toward the island in the center."

JC: Ooh…

Lorrie: We don't see how Harry came to that conclusion; the author writes it so that the reader receives it as Harry being certain. This is a really good example of Dumbledore when he says he's just guessing and he could be wrong. It's better for Harry (and for everyone) that Dumbledore makes a guess and he has some of it right, but no, he's not right. The boat has registered them not as one very powerful wizard and tare weight, but as Dumbledore and a victim.

JC: This whole thing… I love the claustrophobia.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: I don't like horror -- hate it! -- but I can admire the skill with the sense of claustrophobia as they're both crammed in this little tiny boat. Harry can't even sit -- he's just crouching at the front of the boat -- he can't not look down into the water, and the darkness is described as having a 'physical presence.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: [In] The little tiny boat, they're just going across this incredibly dangerous, very still, very quiet… It just feels really claustrophobic. Again, it's like you're being transported across the River Styx or something here.

Lorrie: We're going deeper and deeper into the curse and Dumbledore saying, "Be careful not to touch the water."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: When Harry sees the corpses, I actually draw comfort as a reader from what this author has written and put into Dumbledore's mouth, where he says, "There's nothing to be feared from a body, Harry, any more than there is anything to be feared from the darkness…. It is the unknown we fear when we look upon death and darkness, nothing more." That actually comforts me.

JC: I like that, too.

Lorrie: Here we have Dumbledore showing Harry that Voldemort has made an army for himself of Inferi so that he could exploit their power and their numbers without ever having to deal with the free will of another being. Dumbledore says "they fear light and warmth." I guess the Inferi have some little bit of sentience.

JC: Or is it like the way a bacteria will flee a predator bacteria?

Lorrie: Right. They're not completely nothing, but they're not the humans that they used to be; there's something there, and Dumbledore knows how to deal with them.

JC: Later on, Harry is kicking himself for forgetting about the fact that Inferi are afraid of fire or of, again, light and warmth. I also forgot because I was in the moment of, 'Woah, there's zombies coming after him!'

Lorrie: I know, I know.

JC: And I also forgot that oh, wait, he was taught what to do here. He does know.

Lorrie: 'We didn't practice this!'

JC: Yeah. 'We didn't practice this, but we did learn it once.'

Lorrie: But really, how often are you going to need this?

JC: How often are you going to run into a horde of zombies trying to drag you into a lake? Oh, there's also a funny line in here: when Harry first notices all the Inferi lying under the surface of the lake, Dumbledore says, "We don't need to worry about them at the moment," and Harry says, "At the moment?"

Lorrie: Uh, what?!

JC: Wait, what?! Yeah, not now.

Lorrie: One thing at a time.

JC: Not now.

Lorrie: Yay!

JC: That will come, but that would have been a good moment for Dumbledore to say, "Harry, you do know how to defend yourself against Inferi, don't you?" and for Harry to re-register that, but no, we didn't do that. We just kept going.

Lorrie: But he had stuff to focus on.

JC: True.

Lorrie: 'Be very present.' So they get to the "small island of smooth rock in the center of the lake", and it holds a basin full of phosphorescent emerald liquid. Dumbledore does all of his tests and it won't let him in at all, so he concludes the one thing he could probably do (that Voldemort planned) was drink all of the potion.

JC: That is so weird.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: 'What do you mean, I have to drink all… What?! Yes, we thought through everything else and we tried everything else…'

Lorrie: Everything else, yeah.

JC: 'The only thing left is to drink it.' Then, yeah, Harry is as horrified (as is the reader) that Dumbledore would just drink a strange potion.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: This feels like Potions 101: don't taste the potion. When Harry says, "What if it kills you?" Dumbledore says, "Oh, no, that's not how Voldemort thinks. He wouldn't want to kill them, not until he finds out more about who they are."

Lorrie: So that's another place where Dumbledore turns out to be wrong. Harry worries that if you drink the potion, you're going to die, and Dumbledore's like, "Oh, no, no…" Harry is incredulous. "We're talking *Voldemort* here --" and Dumbledore sounds completely wise and completely convincing when he says, "He would not want to *immediately* kill the person who reached this island. He would want to keep them alive long enough to find out how they managed to penetrate so far through his defenses and… why they were so intent on emptying the basin." That is totally incorrect, we find out.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: There is zero sign that Voldemort ever put in any notification system for himself when this potion was drunk. It has been drunk before, it's being drunk now; he has no idea. He did not actually expect anyone to survive.

JC: Right. Especially, I guess, because the potion also makes you really thirsty, the only source of water is the lake that triggers the Inferi.

Lorrie: Exactly.

JC: So was Dumbledore lying to Harry here, because Dumbledore knows what he has to do?

Lorrie: No, he's sure. "Oh, no, no. Voldemort… He wants to know how we got here." No, he doesn't; he just wants you dead, but before you die, he wants to make sure you suffer. Voldemort, what he wanted was to know that whoever is here is going to suffer and then submit to his control. How economical and efficient it is to just add to the numbers of his army of dead

this way. You're going to suffer, you're going to go do the thing that's going to take your humanity away from you and your free will, and just turn you into another one of his tools.

JC: And if you were there by yourself, you wouldn't even get as far as finishing the potion.

Lorrie: Right. You would stay alive long enough to take yourself to the water to drink it, because if you're going to just die right there, then that's a waste of a perfectly good corpse.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So Dumbledore is wrong.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Voldemort doesn't think anyone's going to get past this. Dumbledore also tells Harry, "Do not forget that Lord Voldemort believes that he alone knows about his Horcruxes." This is something that is confirmed later in *Deathly Hallows*: "Harry made to speak again, but this time Dumbledore raised his hand for silence." Dumbledore should not have done that; he should have let Harry continue, because it would have been super useful at this point to hear Harry out and then go over what Harry should do if the potion works so fast that Dumbledore won't have time to think about what to do next because Dumbledore knows that it might incapacitate him. I'm not saying Dumbledore is supposed to be perfect; just that he was correct to say he's not always right. This is something that's happening in this chapter over and over again: Harry's different perspective turns out to be valuable and not always wrong. Dumbledore's basically right: he asks Harry to commit to forcing Dumbledore to drink all of the poison, no matter what. "Harry hesitated, looking into the blue eyes that had turned green in the reflected light of the basin." I'm not white; I come from a race where everybody's eyes are brown and the color of people's eyes is not a meaningful thing, but this author puts a lot of stock into the color of people's irises. Harry's hesitating into the blue eyes and now they've turned green, so I'm wondering if this is like, 'Okay, this is the moment where Harry is going to have to take care of Dumbledore instead of Dumbledore taking care of Harry.'

JC: It does make me think about anime and manga where the eye color of the characters is symbolic of various things about their character. That idea of a changeable eye color thing feels like it's a very magical, mythical kind of a thing. Harry's eyes are green, right?

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And from this point, he's going to have to take care of Dumbledore.

JC: Yeah. Does Dumbledore have any idea what this potion is going to do? He must know that it's going to make him suffer in some way. Does he have any idea what the suffering is going to

be like? At the beginning, he was like, "Oh, how crude, the blood magic." Does he here think, 'It's going to make me feel physical pain?' Because what he ends up with is this horrible psychological pain. Is that a surprise to Dumbledore?

Lorrie: I think he understands how bad the effects will be and he doesn't know what it's going to be, but he figures that it's probably meant to take somebody almost all the way out somehow. Harry desperately says, "Why can't I drink the potion instead?" and Dumbledore says, "Because I'm much older, much cleverer, and much less valuable." How can Harry be more valuable? Well, he's the one Voldemort identifies with. He's the only person who can finish Voldemort, so his work is going to come later; he has to survive this. Dumbledore has been close to death all year; he's about to fulfill his end-of-life work, which is equipping Harry to face Voldemort in the future, so this is absolutely Dumbledore's ordeal to undergo.

JC: Right. Throughout this entire thing, Dumbledore knows [that he's] close to the end.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is the last chance to teach Harry things, but he's not going to tell Harry that. That would not be helpful to Harry in this moment.

Lorrie: There's no time, yeah.

JC: Yeah, but we know (especially on a second read as the readers) there are many reasons why Dumbledore will be taking on the difficult parts of this, but that's one of the big ones: he knows he hasn't got much time left. Why waste Harry's youth and power in any way, in addition to him being the older one and being the teacher and all the other things?

Lorrie: Yeah. Whose quest is this? This is Voldemort and Dumbledore. This is not yet Voldemort and Harry. Dumbledore drinks twelve cups full of this poison; starting from the fourth one, he needs Harry to make him do it (he can't do it on his own volition), and the fourth one is when he says, in this frightened voice that Harry has never heard from him, that he wants to stop. I do not come from a Christian tradition at all. I understand that many Christian HP scholars, such as John Anthony Dunne, have written about how this scene parallels Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

JC: Oh, interesting.

Lorrie: The twelve cups that Dumbledore drinks is a parallel to Jesus praying to God, "Let this cup pass from me." What is this huge responsibility? He doesn't want to do it, but at the same time, he's going to follow anything that is God's will about drinking from it.

JC: I just had *Jesus Christ Superstar* lyrics in my head when you were saying that. I'm not Christian either, but I love *Jesus Christ Superstar*, so I was just like, "Oh, that line, 'Take this cup away from me because I don't want to drink its poison.'" Oh, my God! Wow… Never made

that connection before. Sorry for my singing voice to anyone listening; I'm still getting over my cold.

Lorrie: John Anthony Dunne connects that parallel to the title of this chapter. There's a quote from his essay that says "Gethsemane is reasonably evoked whenever a protagonist anticipates their death, wrestles with the weight of it, expresses a degree of reticence, and then commits to going through with it. Gethsemane is simply a version of the archetypal 'inmost cave'." There's also… My ignorance is really not helping me here, but Jesus saying, "I thirst."

JC: Oh, yes, I remember that from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, too. Yeah… Oh, wow. Okay, I've never made that connection before.

Lorrie: I am so grateful for the teamwork of *Harry Potter* scholars. This author wrote a really long series and packed it with cultural references from so many traditions and the Christian tradition is the one that she is in, so this is something that would have resonated a lot for her and for a great many readers. I recognized that there was something powerful here without having the slightest idea what it was…

JC: Ooh, that's interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: And I'm very glad for other people writing essays that show me, 'Okay, that's what Dumbledore is doing here.' He doesn't want to do any of it; he's going to do it. He has enlisted Harry to be his support in going through with it, knowing that he is absolutely not going to want to do it. We get this prescient line: "Hating himself, repulsed by what he was doing…" That's a description of Harry's feelings as he goes through with what he's agreed to help Dumbledore with that's going to be very important compared to what Snape goes through in following chapters, because in order for Harry to do what he and Dumbledore have agreed Harry's going to do, he's going to have to lie to himself, to Dumbledore… He's going to have to do all sorts of really dirty, underhanded things, trusting that the suffering he's going to force Dumbledore to go through is for a purpose that is going to turn out to be sound. Oh, boy… Harry follows the orders and he feeds the potion to Dumbledore while Dumbledore goes through the experience and moans and wants to stop. At this point with the fourth cup, we don't yet (as readers) know what kind of suffering the potion is causing; just that he's suffering. The first place Harry starts -- he's still a kid -- he starts to appeal to Dumbledore's authority. "You told me you had to keep drinking." 'You're still the grown-up, right? Remember?' Dumbledore totally does not want to; Harry then shifts with the next cup, trying to be a supportive peer ("It's all right, I'm here --"), and then with the next cup, Dumbledore says, "Make it stop," and that's when Harry crosses over and has to be a grown-up who lies. "Yes, this'll make it stop." He's taking responsibility. This is a kind of lie that you sometimes have to tell, and it hurts, it's awful. Then Dumbledore's ingested so much of the poison that he starts screaming and he says, "Don't make me, I don't want to…" We still don't know (as readers) what *it* is, and Harry has committed to the lie and says, "Nothing's happening to you, you're safe, it isn't real, I swear it isn't real --" That is so heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking that Dumbledore obediently drinks hearing this, because it's the same logic that people use to keep someone grounded during a PTSD flashback or

something. "I know you feel like this is real, but it's not real. It's not really happening." In that sense, yes, there's something happening inside Dumbledore that's not happening in the physical world, but it really is happening in his head, and this potion is only getting worse and worse in intensifying it. It's the opposite of mindfulness; it's twisted. Harry persuading Dumbledore about this is in order to make it even worse. There is Harry committing, and then with more potion, Dumbledore confesses that there was something that was all his fault: "I know I did wrong, oh please make it stop and I'll never, never again…" What is he remembering? Whatever it is, he's reliving a memory of guilt. This is the point at which we see the genius tactic: that Voldemort has designed a potion that will defeat his intruders just by turning whatever is already in their own minds against them. He doesn't have to tailor this to anybody; he can just turn them on themselves. It's sort of like a dementor potion, right?

JC: It's making him relive the worst things he's done.

Lorrie: This gives us a clue, possibly. Maybe this way of going into somebody's mind is the kind of thing he did to those first victims -- the orphans Amy Benson and Dennis Bishop -- because we have been told that they were never the same again but there was not a mark on them, and they said that Voldemort never did anything to them. As I've said before, my theory is that what he did by going into their minds was removing whatever they had experienced and remembered of love and connection that they had that made them grieve that he didn't have so that they also would be unable to grieve like him. It would make them quieter.

JC: Oh, my God. Sorry, you just said that and that triggered this whole thing in my head. I'm getting into parenting things again, but people have this idea that when babies cry, you just let them cry and leave them in a dark room…

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: And they'll eventually stop.

Lorrie: Because you've broken them.

JC: Which is horrific to me as a parent, yeah, because you just broke their belief that someone would come and help.

Lorrie: They're trying to communicate, and they're being taught that nobody's listening.

JC: Yeah. The 'Voldemort cry it out' method. Oh, boy.

Lorrie: Well, Voldemort did not have to go through that because he was born knowing no one would listen.

JC: True.

Lorrie: These other kids are crying because somebody once listened. They still had hope.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They still knew that they had the birthright to somebody listening, even if they would never get it; Voldemort, I believe, went in and removed that so that they just didn't have that hope at all. There was no place for their need to go. Anyway, that's my theory.

JC: That's really interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: That is the sadness -- the dark, deathly cave-like sadness -- that is the confrontation in this chapter. Dumbledore is pleading, "Don't hurt them… please, it's my fault, hurt me instead…" We see Dumbledore's guilt is something about not being able to protect other people from the consequences of his own bad decisions or shortcomings. At this point, Dumbledore's hammering his fists. Ouch! "Not that, not that, I'll do anything…" Dumbledore, pleading with somebody, has joined Lily Potter and Narcissa Malfoy as one of the characters who says they will do anything to prevent somebody else from getting hurt, and poor Harry is saying, "We're nearly there, Professor." This is actually slightly a relief. By this point, Harry knows he doesn't have to persuade Dumbledore to drink anymore. Dumbledore seems to know that he has to do this -- he has committed to doing this -- and he drinks willingly, even though he's screaming the whole time, "I want to die!" There's one cup left of this potion and Dumbledore screams "KILL ME!" Harry has to say, "This one will," and promises it'll be over. That's true; it will be over because Dumbledore… this is a thing he has to do. Then he rolls over onto his face (having finished the potion "with a great rattling gasp"), so of course Harry is terrified that he's dead -- as am I, the reader -- but yeah, Dumbledore did it. He drank the cups that were his to drink, and now he's craving water.

JC: Now he's craving water. The fact that Harry doesn't immediately reach for the locket freaked me out this entire time, because I was like, 'How long until the potion resets? Come on, just grab it. Just grab it!'

Lorrie: This is the flaw in the plan of human beings. No, the person is more important. Harry barely even notices that they've gotten to the goal. No, Dumbledore is possibly dead and now he's craving water; oh, whatever he craves, Harry had better give it to him, right? When somebody needs you, that's what you're going to do, and Harry discovers that the only way to get water is to disturb the dead. Oh…

JC: I really appreciate that Harry realizes that this is the trap that Voldemort has set and he knows what's going to happen, but he does it anyway.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's a really interesting moment because again, I always keep going back to the film version. [In] The film version, it's clear that they've written it so that Harry doesn't think; he just

runs to the lake. They don't even do the thing where he tries to fill the glass -- he just runs to the lake without thinking -- but here in the book, he thinks through it. He's learned what Dumbledore has taught him. What would Voldemort want here? What did Voldemort plan to happen? Harry knows what's going to happen, but he goes for the water anyway, which I think is interesting.

Lorrie: "*Aguamenti, Aguamenti*," and you can practically hear Voldemort laughing. 'Oh, I already thought of that.' Yeah, we know you, Voldemort. Of course, your sick mind would have done this next. That's obviously the right answer. That's what you would want. That's why you bothered to stock the lake with zombies.

JC: So why does Harry choose to get water from the lake anyway, knowing that it's walking right into this trap?

Lorrie: The options are: something will happen and you can try to think of a way to fight it and maybe get out of it, or just give up and let the most important mentor of your life just suffer and die. Then what? How is Harry going to get out of there? As some political activists have said, 'No, we don't know if that tactic is going to work, but what we do know is that doing nothing to resist has never gotten us any good results,' and Harry certainly has seen, even on this trip, that there will be situations where you can do something -- you can figure out a way -- so all right. Meanwhile, Dumbledore is gasping and begging for water and looking like he's very nearly dead. Okay, here we go. Whatever Voldemort has planned for us, we've gotten this far.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: We get this slimy, white hand gripping his wrist, which totally reminds me of Trelawney with her bony hand in the previous chapter.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: She's just in a fog spouting nonsense, and then suddenly you get this bony hand and it's terrifying. Harry does all his tricks and they work a little bit; none of his magic can hold off an entire army of the dead.

JC: Even *Sectumsempra* again, which is interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. They don't have blood!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: They don't have feelings. The writing of this sentence really awes me: Harry is about to drown and "become one more dead guardian of a fragment of Voldemort's shattered soul…" All of these Inferi have just been killed and reanimated to do only Voldemort's will; that's what Voldemort wants from other beings.

JC: Who are all these people? Where do they come from? How long have they been there?

Lorrie: I don't know.

JC: Yeah. That's a question I kept asking myself because I think they were people, right?

Lorrie: Some of them are kids.

JC: Yeah, so I just kind of wonder: how did Voldemort get them all there?

Lorrie: Yeah. Does he just have a Vanishing spell? Every time he kills somebody, their corpse automatically just --

JC: Yeah, and goes to the vault here. Yeah, I just had a lot of wonderings. Every person -- every body -- in that lake has a story about Voldemort taking them down somehow.

Lorrie: Although, you know that's not necessary; he could have just bought a lot of corpses off of eBay.

JC: He just went to the morgue.

Lorrie: He didn't have to kill them all himself.

JC: True.

Lorrie: It could just be reanimated corpses that he just got.

JC: It's like, "I know a guy..."

Lorrie: Yeah. We know he has no qualms about disturbing the dead. Yeah, we don't know where he got them.

JC: I also think most of them are probably Muggles, because why not? Muggles would be extremely expendable and easy to get, probably.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And it really brings home the fact that this is a mass murderer.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry is being dragged into the lake.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Just when it looks like Harry is going to become an Inferius, something happens and he finds that Dumbledore has cast "a ring of fire." The protective love of needing to save Harry's life has roused Dumbledore from near death, which I'm sure as a parent, you know exactly what kind of surge of energy that is. He's nearly dead, but he can do this incredibly powerful thing; the Inferi are bumping into each other, trying to get out of the way. Dumbledore, almost as a side note, takes the locket from the basin, and then we get this moment that's a merciful sentiment toward the Inferi: "... the bewildered Inferi accompanying them to the water's edge, where they slipped gratefully back into their dark waters." I don't actually know if the Inferi are sentient enough to feel gratitude, but I as the reader totally feel the relief of thinking, 'Oh, let the dead rest. Don't have this violation of nature.'

JC: It's amazing to me that after a certain amount of time, Dumbledore was either able to push through the effects of the potion or it wore off because he stopped asking for water and he doesn't get water anytime soon. I like to choose this idea of he just powered through it because he's Dumbledore, but Voldemort maybe had not planned for someone being able to do that. [He] just was so sure that all of his protections were going to work that there was no consideration for what if someone does survive this and just powers through.

Lorrie: I guess the desperate need for water is only to trigger the Inferi to come get you, so now the Inferi are on the move.

JC: Maybe that changes it, yeah.

Lorrie: Because he did get a little water. Dumbledore has just enough energy to keep the fire going. Harry is in charge of everything else (getting them into the boat, getting them back to shore) and Dumbledore mumbles, "The protection was… after all… well designed," so he is giving Voldemort his props. 'Okay, that wasn't crude.'

JC: He has to concede, "That was actually better than I thought it was going to be."

Lorrie: Respect, yes. Dumbledore does what an elder should do and he starts praising Harry for how well Harry had done, and Harry says, "Save your energy." Dumbledore manages to mumble, "The archway… it's going to want blood," and Harry says, "Just show me where. I'll do it." He knows what it feels like to need to be the adult.

JC: Yeah. This is the shift that I love: Harry's just in charge from here on out. He's like, "I'll Apparate us back." Before, at the beginning of this, he could not have done that, and now he can.

Lorrie: He has to.

JC: Now he can Apparate Dumbledore. Yeah.

Lorrie: It's just that the stakes and the pressure are really high; he'd better. He doesn't even have his license.

JC: That's true, and Harry is good under pressure. That's a thing that I think I like.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Also -- and this is my experience, too -- I'm the kind of person who does not fold under pressure; if it comes, I get super calm and I'm like, "All right, let's go," so I identify that in Harry. It's just like, 'Oh, he'll do it because he has to.' Dumbledore notes that one person alone could not have gotten through the protections, so I kind of went back and forth between 'Is it that Voldemort couldn't imagine that someone who would come for his piece of his soul would have friends who would be willing to go through all of us with them?' Was it that, or was it that he thought, 'Whether you're one or whether you're many, I've got the bases covered?' That was something I found myself wondering.

Lorrie: I am pretty impressed with Voldemort's strategies. If I had done that much work, I would have been pretty secure-feeling, too.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: There's nobody more powerful than Dumbledore, and Dumbledore is not going to get out of this alive.

JC: So you have to have two. Going back to that idea of a wizard and a victim, which is how Regulus was able to do this, you need two competent people in some way to get through this, at least in this case. Who was the wizard and who was the victim? It took the two of them working together to get in and out.

Lorrie: Okay, I see where the author is going with this from your framework, which I'd never thought about. What Voldemort would not have been able to understand is that it would take two people, but one of them would have to be willing to be self-sacrificing.

JC: So not a victim, but someone who was willing to take on that sacrifice.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's the thing that Voldemort maybe couldn't imagine someone doing.

Lorrie: Right. Regulus got through that way, Dumbledore got through that way, and that's what we see with the chapter invoking Gethsemane with somebody saying, "I know this is the biggest sacrifice. I so don't want to do it. Don't make me do this. Okay, I'm going to do it."

JC: So that's the thing that Voldemort would not have been able to understand that someone would do.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's the way to break through his protections…

Lorrie: Right.

JC: And Voldemort just did not anticipate that someone would do that.

Lorrie: Doesn't understand that this is a possibility.

JC: Okay, that makes a lot of sense to me.

Lorrie: That fits with the logic of this universe and that fits with the logic of this author, who is not dead and is a person…

JC: Right.

Lorrie: And we're in her universe.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And it's a damn good story.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: So Harry promises to Apparate them back, and that actually strengthens Dumbledore. His support works, and it leads up to this chapter ending that just slays me every time. I think it's the most resonant chapter ending of this whole series, where he tells Dumbledore not to worry: "'I am not worried, Harry,' said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. 'I am with you.'"

JC: Aaahhh… It's like that one emoji with the tears streaming down the face (😭).

Lorrie: Oh… Chills!

JC: That captures what I feel about that, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and despite me living in the furthest reaches of heathendom, even I know that this is taking from the power of knowing that people hear God saying "I am with you."

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: That's how you know you have strength. You don't imagine that God's going to say, "I am with you," meaning you're the source of strength. This is calling back to Chapter 4, which is the first time Dumbledore takes Harry by Side-Along Apparition and they're going to see Slughorn, and he says to Harry, "I do not think you need to worry about being attacked tonight." "Why not, sir?" "You are with me."

JC: Oh… Nice.

Lorrie: That's the beginning of this book, and now here we are at the end, and Dumbledore is absolutely sincere in saying that he knows he doesn't have to worry because he's with Harry.

JC: Approximately four chapters from the end.

Lorrie: Yikes! Yeah. It's not always point-for-point like this, but this author does do ring-cycle chiastic structure and this parallel is absolutely intended, and what a resounding success of a piece of writing that is. It hits everything. Even without any of these allusions, it's so moving. She had set this up in the previous chapter when Hermione is worried and says, "Harry, you're going to need the Felix Felicis," and Harry says, "I'll be fine. I'll be with Dumbledore."

JC: Oooh.

Lorrie: The setup and then the delivery… Ah. Dumbledore has been God-like. Harry has felt secure anytime he knew Dumbledore was with him. But how can it be -- and yet, it is -- that now that Dumbledore is dying and he's putting all of his trust in Harry, that he is right to do so? Oh… This cracks me open with utter grief because the love and power around this and into this chapter brings me back to before TERFpocalypse.

JC: Oooh…

Lorrie: This hurts so much. This brings me back to when I loved J.K. Rowling.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: This was December 2016, which was a month before Obama left office. It was a really frightened time. This was back when Twitter was a force for good.

JC: We're really going back in time now. That's almost ten years ago!

Lorrie: Twitter was something that enabled revolutions to occur. Twitter enabled resisters to get information out there and communicate with each other. Twitter could cause good change. Twitter could help you fight. Lin-Manuel Miranda, who I do still love -- that is something from that era that I still have faith in is the genius and the political vision of this writer. Lin-Manuel Miranda tweeted a thread that he titled "POP CULTURE EVENTS FROM WHICH I HAVE STILL NOT

RECOVERED MANY YEARS LATER," and one of them he tagged Rowling with the end of this chapter: "I am not worried, Harry. I am with you." Rowling replied to that tweet, "Cannot tell you what this means (from you), because this moment is one of my very favourites," and Lin-Manuel Miranda replies to her, "HBP is my favorite PRECISELY because of this reprise of Dumbledore's 'You are with me' at the beginning."

JC: Ooh…

Lorrie: Then he says this compliment that I saved: "You're deadly with a reprise, maestro."

JC: Oh, man.

Lorrie: So in December 2016, I loved J.K. Rowling so much and I love Lin-Manuel Miranda, and times were so dark and uncertain and frightening, and we know now we were absolutely right to be frightened. Seeing this convergence, this conversation, between the two of them really nourished me. That was such a moment of thrill. I was so moved to see this exchange and I saved it; now, in 2026, I grieve for the time when I was able to love this author. Now that she is aligned with Elon Musk, I grieve for that time when she was proud of being a writer…

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that was before my love for her was completely ripped into pieces, because the greatness of this chapter ending… It's all still there. It's not any less moving to read it now; it just has a much more complicated, much more grief-stricken meaning…

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: That has to do with how knowing the author and the present changes the way I read the words that have not changed.

JC: That's been a big theme of this entire podcast experience, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The words haven't changed, but everything else has, so how do you experience art in a different point in time?

Lorrie: Even since we started recording about this book, the author has done greater damage.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, just in the last few weeks.

Lorrie: Yeah, and this book is about the experience of what you do when you read something that somebody in your life wrote twenty years ago, somebody who has changed since then.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And the constant for me, which I find reassuring, I have doubted so many times. Is what I'm doing obscene and without value because it's a violence to even give any attention to anything that J.K. Rowling wrote? I've been thinking, 'No, there's real emotion there; that's why it hurts.' If she were just another disgusting billionaire that had no prior connection to my emotions, then it would be a whole different thing that she's becoming this evil.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Let me go back to where the love was.' Oh, no, it was real. It's still in force.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That's why this is different. That's why this is something that I have to keep coming back to.

JC: Yeah. I think that there are many things in my life that I can think through that are maybe similar.
The first thing that comes to my mind is that I grew up going to a Southern Baptist church [and] left that version of Christianity and Christianity all together at a pretty young age, but the damage that that did to me did not affect my love of Christmas, which is very strange. I love Christmas; I celebrate very secularly, of course, but I love the songs, I love the decorations… I love everything about it. You could argue that there's nothing much Christian about the way that we celebrate Christmas in a secular way, but there are Christmas songs that bring tears to my eyes to this day because they're powerful and beautiful, even though I have no connection to and, in fact, have some trauma around some of the actual experiences of Christianity. Just because that religion is not a part of my life doesn't mean I can't go back and look at the parts of it that we're meaningful and still enjoy them and embrace them.

Lorrie: They hit some place that's really deep, and that's somatic. You have people who are refugees from a country that was extremely genocidal, but there are things about it that if they hear or experience or taste that they will still weep. The next chapter is called The Lightning-Struck Tower.

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