

Transcript

Episode 6.6

Book 6, Chapter 6: Draco's Detour

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 Six: Draco's Detour.

Lorrie: Draco's Detour. The Wizarding economy has changed now that the Death Eaters are on the rise. Harry, Ron and Hermione have a run-in with Draco and Narcissa Malfoy in Diagon Alley. Draco seems happy about something and Harry knows that can't be good. So here we are after six years. Finally, Draco Malfoy gets a chapter named after him.

JC: He's on his way to being a major character, finally.

Lorrie: Finally. So what's your take on this character at this point, JC?

JC: It's really interesting, because when this book came out, I remember reading... I remember I didn't stop. I read this whole book, but then I remember afterwards that one of the big pieces of things that people weren't sure about was "Does Draco have a Dark Mark?"

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That was a big point of contention going forward. All the clues are there, and this book doesn't actually say it, but yeah. Did this fifteen-year-old kid – I think Draco is a little younger than Harry, right?

Lorrie: No, he's a little older.

JC: A little older. Okay.

Lorrie: I think he's a month older.

JC: Okay, so the sixteen-year-old kid (but probably when he was fifteen) over the summer pledged his fealty to Lord Voldemort, yeah. That is a big decision to make at that age, but he's done it.

Lorrie: Yeah. I like that this is one of the ways that this author sets up more and more conclusions that you have to draw on your own. She makes the reader work for it more on purpose, withholding the conclusion. I really enjoyed that, and we see that stepping up.

JC: I think we don't get confirmation of this until *Cursed Child*, right? Not in the text.

Lorrie: Um... Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

JC: None of our heroes see it for sure.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: It's not until *Cursed Child* that he shows them his Dark Mark. They knew he had it, but yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Interesting. That's one of the other things I remember about *Cursed Child*: it was absolute confirmation that Draco Malfoy has a Dark Mark.

Lorrie: The title, Draco's Detour, tells us that it's significant that Draco is diverging from the prescribed path. This is a point where the plot takes a turn. Okay, Draco... He's quite conscious and eager about it. I love how identifiable the tone of the beginning of this chapter is: "It would have been a happy, peaceful holiday had it not been for the stories of disappearances, odd accidents, even of deaths now appearing almost daily in the *Prophet*." Oh...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. We are trying to rally our strength. Meanwhile, we're hearing about war crimes, ICE detentions, school shootings, and defunding of any hospital system that gives medical care to trans kids... Oh, yeah. This beautiful sentence (not beautiful): “‘There have been another couple of dementor attacks,’ he announced as Mrs. Weasley passed him a large slice of birthday cake.” That captures it entirely. You have to try to keep celebrating on purpose in order to counter all of this. Yeah. Same, Lupin. Same.

JC: Yeah. I think one of the things I liked about the beginning of this chapter is that there's this little bit of time during the summer when the kids get to be kids, and this is it. They don't get to be kids ever again after this.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: They get to play in the garden, they get to just relax, they get to hang out, there's plenty of food... This is the last time they're going to be kids, and that's really... Ugh.

Lorrie: And they know it.

JC: And even now, all this shit's happening in the world and they're aware of it. My childhood certainly didn't have all this happening in the background, but I do remember being thirteen, fourteen and realizing that my summers weren't – not my summers, but that childhood (“I can just go play!”) was done. That part of my life was over, and I remember looking around and going, ‘Oh, yeah. We're not going to just play anymore.’ It was really nice to see that they got a little bit of that, even though I think it's the last bit of it that they're going to get. Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and they're aware that it now has to be a conscious choice. They're going to have to block out the things that are threatening it.

JC: One thing I do love in the beginning is the description of the two-on-two Quidditch that they're playing as being basically even because they put Harry and Ginny on different teams...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And that Hermione and Ron... Even though Ron plays Quidditch, they're almost equally awful.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh.

JC: I thought, 'Oh, no.' I had forgotten that this is the chapter where Harry becomes Quidditch captain, which means that now Harry has got to deal with Ron and how bad Ron is at Quidditch. 'Oh, no!' But I love that, though, because Ginny is such a good Quidditch player that it's like, 'Oh, Harry and Ginny can't be on the same team.' I thought, 'Okay, I like that.'

Lorrie: 'And how are we going to accommodate for Hermione?' That was gutsy of her to play. If I were her, I would have begged off.

JC: Okay, well, no one got injured in this, even though poor Hermione still has this black eye from the Fred and George Weasley product.

Lorrie: The punching telescope, yeah. Mrs. Weasley tries to maintain something pleasant for their family celebration, and it has escaped those bounds; she can't anymore. She tries to say, "Yes, well, perhaps we should talk about something different –" and Remus and Bill, two people who always listened to her, just ignore her. It can't be done anymore, and even she knows that. Oh, right, and the thing that they start talking about: they do a check-in, an update, where there was a Death Eater deserter. Karkaroff's body has been found in a shack with the Dark Mark set over it, so that reminds us that Slughorn was right to be afraid, to be on the run. Then they mention a different deserter that was in contrast: "Sirius's brother, Regulus, only managed a few days..." Okay, plot alert. We, the readers, are supposed to remember, 'Oh, yes, and he was, in fact, sixteen when Voldemort recruited him,' even though the characters in this chapter seem to forget that that's a precedent. Okay... Oh, God, they talk about the disappearances. That was chilling to me. That's much more topical. My guy, Florean Fortescue (who's my favorite erudite ice cream man), dragged off...

JC: Yeah. The description of him being dragged off in full daylight...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That one was like, 'Ooh....' Yeah.

Lorrie: He's a threat. He's knowledgeable, he understands about community and history... All right. Totally not the kind of person that they want around. Then Ollivander... No one knows whether he left voluntarily or was kidnapped, but if the other side have got him, it's not so good for us. Already, the students who are going to be first-years coming in... That's a life that they're not going to know. They're not going to have the Ollivander experience.

JC: Yeah. Yeah, I thought that was really interesting. They're shopping for school supplies, and this would be the day that the first-years would go into Ollivander's shop and get their wands. He's been gone for a while, it seems like.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. Apparently, there are other wandmakers that no one knew. Well, I didn't.

Lorrie: No one had to know. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. I was like, 'Okay.' Other wandmakers are like, 'Oh, okay,' but yeah. Imagine the Muggle-born first year family arriving to buy all their supplies to send their child off to Hogwarts, and this is what it looks like in Diagon Alley.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Oh, that's different than the experience that Harry and Hermione had –

Lorrie: Enjoyed. Yeah. Yeah, you mentioned Harry being made Quidditch captain, and Ron delicately alludes to the tension here. He says, "Harry, this is so cool, you're my Captain – if you let me back on the team, I suppose, ha ha..." That's touching and mature, because yes, that is a tension, and he does not take it for granted that he's going to be chosen.

JC: But also that sets up a really difficult tension between the two of them, because Ron knows he has to prove himself and then Harry knows that he potentially is going to have to tell Ron no. Ooooooooh...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That's not good.

Lorrie: All right. Well, they're growing up.

JC: Yeah. Also, when Harry finds that he's been made Quidditch captain, Hermione points out that now he has equal status with the prefects. He can use the bathroom, which is hilarious, but it's also quite a turnaround because the year before he got a lifetime ban from Quidditch. Now he's the Gryffindor Quidditch captain, so it's like, 'Okay, we are back to as close as we're going to get to normal Hogwarts this year for a little while.'

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, this is a year where you have to get everything in place because you don't know how long this is going to last, and things are changing already. Then Molly says that she's not going to go to Diagon Alley for their shopping without Arthur; she has to wait for him to have a day off, and that's a change. Then Ron has not caught up yet and says, "Mum, d'you honestly think You-Know-Who's going to be hiding behind a bookshelf in Flourish and Blotts?" Molly has completely changed her stance and she says, "Fortescue and Ollivander went on holiday, did they?" Ooh, okay... Then it mentions that she puts the clock on her laundry and all nine hands are at 'Mortal Peril' again, so it is a good thing that Remus and Bill talked politics over birthday cake because the kids have to understand, 'No, this is different.' There's just a mention of Mrs. Weasley seeming tense. Yeah, you don't say...

JC: It's so interesting that Bill went to the bank and got money for Harry, which I thought...

Lorrie: Love it!

JC: 'That's interesting.' There's multiple things, though, I find interesting. One is that Harry's kept the contents of his bank account a bit of a secret, but Bill knows. Bill walked into his vault and grabbed enough gold for him. The fact that okay, that's how wizard banking works... I know that Bill is pretty high up in Gringotts, but still. Okay, that's interesting. But also, the fact that the lines at Gringotts had been so long. That's interesting, right? When people start going to the bank and taking our money out, that's a sign of what people think is coming.

Lorrie: Yeah, and the goblins have tightened security because they know that there are shenanigans underfoot. But yeah, that is definitely a feeling that I've known, too. 'Oh, there's going to be a shortage on this.' If you remember when the first COVID vaccines came out and you had to be in certain categories to get one (you

had to be a healthcare worker or something), and if you could get a slot, then you would have to stand in line outside in the cold for hours.

JC: Yeah, except it wasn't cold where I was, but yeah.

Lorrie: Oh, okay. It was over here.

JC: I did have to stand in line, but it was... Yeah.

Lorrie: That's another good indication that there's a change. They get this serious, no-joke Ministry security escort with Aurors that have no sense of humor...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that's another reminder that by this point, the author had been extremely wealthy and powerful for a number of years. This is more like the life that she knows. This isn't a reality that Harry Potter of year one or two would have known because she's not familiar with it.

JC: It's interesting, too, that in the past, they would have taken Floo powder. They would've gone by Floo and they haven't done that in a while, not since the time that Harry went the wrong direction and wound up in the shop he wasn't supposed to. When they've gone to the train station, they've taken different ways of getting there, but I don't think I've seen them go to Diagon Alley in a car before.

Lorrie: Yeah. There was one time when they had Ministry escort before, so this isn't the first time.

JC: To Diagon Alley? Okay, because I was trying to sort out how they'd gone in the past, and I was thinking about the train station versus Diagon Alley. I just found it very interesting that taking magical transport wasn't the go-to.

Lorrie: It's not safe.

JC: Yeah. Thinking about how the Floo Network at Hogwarts was being watched by the Ministry, it just made me think, 'Ooh, wow! Even the Ministry hasn't regained control of their transportation networks, that's interesting,' to the fact that riding in a Muggle car going completely out... I don't know how far the Burrow is from central London. That's probably long.

Lorrie: It's like an hour drive.

JC: Yeah, it's probably a long way and it's a comfortable ride. But the fact that they have to go to the front of the Leaky Cauldron and go in, and then the Leaky Cauldron is empty.

Lorrie: Empty! Oh, that's a pang.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. You start wondering, 'How are they going to make the rent?'

JC: Yeah. Just like every time we've been in the Leaky Cauldron before, it's been teeming with life and all people from all walks of life have been in there having a drink or having a conversation or whatever; no longer. No longer. Now, it's empty.

Lorrie: Yeah. It was the bustling crossroads. I like that we get these little tight plot details in this chapter. Harry thinks: "Now he came to think of it, he was not sure the Ministry knew about his cloak." That's a tiny little world-building detail that the author is spackling in, and the other one that I noticed was Molly mumbling to herself, "Hermione wants new dress robes." Right, because later in this book, she's going to go to a party where they wear dress robes, and she can't very well wear the Cinderella gown that she wore to the Yule Ball two years ago. This is the kind of attention that the author is able to pay in this volume that she was too rushed to put into *Goblet of Fire*. I'm just noticing this is part of what makes this book feel so competent and seamless to me. Oh, yeah, not only is the Leaky Cauldron now a ghost town; there are security posters all over Diagon Alley (wanted posters), but it hasn't become as much of a ghost town as it's going to be the next year, because now a few windows are boarded up. Not all of them yet...

JC: Oh... I found such an interesting mirror to the first book: when Hagrid takes Harry through the Leaky Cauldron and he opens up the portal to Diagon Alley, we walk through and see oh, it's the magical world. This time, they walk through and it's completely different.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It is going to get worse, but the fact that it's as bad as it is... It's such a quick way of showing us how bad things have gotten and how quickly...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: As a tool for us to directly come here to the first time they went through this portal.

Lorrie: “Don't linger, don't shop alone.” Then we have the changing economy: there are pop-up stalls that look really shabby, and they sell sleazy amulets that obviously aren't going to work. They're just taking advantage of superstition, fear that has been stoked on purpose. In an overly literal comparison, we've been getting headlines like “reduced access to vaccines,” “childhood vaccines no longer recommended,” and at the same time, it's now easier to get Ivermectin over the counter, something that so totally does not work. Not coincidentally, it's the creation of ignorance and fear and then exploiting that fear. How sleazy... and evidence that their government is more functional than ours is at the moment, because in response to these sleazy amulet things, the government has put together Arthur Weasley's new job. That's not a thing that we would be experiencing right now, but Arthur is bugged by these quacks, and Molly says, “Yes, but don't go arresting anyone now, dear, we're in a hurry.” I really appreciated how relatable that was. “Okay, yes, fight fascism, but you have to make choices and protect your kids first.”

JC: And sometimes, you just have to get your shopping done.

Lorrie: There are priorities, yeah. They have to make this choice too, which turns out to be a bad choice, but it's not clear that there was a better one where they decide to split up. Okay, that has terrible consequences, but it was also important to be quick and to avoid overcrowding. Maybe there's just no winning here... Mrs. Weasley, of course, is correct that Hagrid was not adequate security for Madam Malkin's, but if they had lingered and taken too long, we know what would have happened then, too.

JC: It is interesting, because Harry is excited to see Hagrid, and we had to see Hagrid here because Hagrid is the one who takes them through gateways. Also, Hagrid is too big to go into Madam Malkin's shop.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Hagrid has limits. Things can happen inside the shops that Hagrid can't... If it happens out in the street, Hagrid can help, but yeah. There are some disadvantages to Hagrid being security here, as we see.

Lorrie: Yeah. Hagrid figures it should be safe because he's still used to how it was. Then we hear that horrible voice...

JC: Okay, one of the things that I love about how this scene starts is that the first thing we hear is sixteen-year-old Draco complaining that he should be able to shop by himself.

Lorrie: Yes. "Not a child..."

JC: And his mother is not interested in letting him shop by himself. That's such a reminder that even though he's about to become a very dark and dangerous character in this book, he's still a teenager.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: "Mom!"

Lorrie: Yeah, and he's saying the extremely immature protest that he's not a child anymore.

JC: Exactly.

Lorrie: You can just imagine how whiny he sounds.

JC: A combination of whiny and posturing. He's learned how to do that from his dad, so there's a lot of instances in this chapter where he falls back on what his dad would have said or how his dad would have treated people.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's that first taste of being a big man. Draco is unforgivably rude to Madam Malkin.

JC: Yes.

Lorrie: The way he talks to her is astonishing. "Watch where you're sticking that pin!" And then the altercation that Draco and Narcissa start with Harry, Ron and Hermione... It's kind of shocking how hostile it is.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: This is really threatening. The thing that Draco says to start it off is so low, it hurts. I guess I'll say it out loud: "If you're wondering what the smell is, mother,

a Mudblood just walked in.” Well, there's no mistaking the intent behind a comment like that, is there?

JC: Yeah. I'm trying to imagine being in Narcissa's place there. Oh, wow... What if your child said something like that? Narcissa just doesn't even blink. There's not a moment in here when Narcissa tries to rein Draco in.

Lorrie: Yeah. There is a moment where Madam Malkin looks to her like, ‘Aren't you going to tell your son to behave?’ No. Actually, Narcissa is exactly as awful as Draco here. Huh...

JC: Yeah. She's also not parenting him anymore. The only thing she can do is cling and hope for the best for him, not for society or in general. She's lost him here, and she knows it. I think that's the thing that's standing out to me. Interestingly enough, Harry doesn't know this yet, because Harry doesn't even look at Draco; Harry directs all of his comments and his threats to Narcissa. He goes to the person he assumes is the adult in the room and not Draco. Draco is still beneath his notice.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He doesn't recognize that Draco is functionally the man of the house or whatever now; he still thinks he's just like this whiny little Death Eater wannabe, but he goes to Narcissa. He and Narcissa are the one who had the – That really stood out to me, because one of the big things that happens pretty soon in this book is that Harry starts to notice, ‘Draco is dangerous, and I should pay attention to him,’ and he isn't doing it yet.

Lorrie: Yeah. Draco's on the rise.

JC: He's still just a little annoying shit to Harry right now; he hasn't become more interesting yet.

Lorrie: Yeah. I like that Hermione is the one who whispers to Ron and Harry, “No, don't, honestly, it's not worth it...” and Ron and Harry draw their wands anyway. Okay, they're being allies. Hermione is the one being targeted, and it is not for Ron and Harry to say, “We're not going to stand up for you.” No, they are. Then we see how emboldened Draco feels when he sneers, “Like you dare do magic out of school...” But I have a different read on Narcissa from what you just said. I don't feel like she has lost... She has lost Draco a bit here, but it's not that she would

have reined him in if possible; she escalates. She's actually vile on her own. She says to Harry, "If you attack my son, I shall ensure that it is the last thing you ever do." Is that a way to talk to a child that's your kid's classmate? Do you go around threatening bodily harm, threatening attack, to students that are your child's age? What the hell is that? That is not how a grown-up is supposed to talk to schoolchildren, to somebody who has already beaten her husband (who literally tried to kill him). Narcissa is not just letting Draco take over; she's escalating on her own. Harry is so over it and says, "Going to get a few Death Eater pals to do us in, are you?" and Madam Malkin is scandalized and says, "Really, you shouldn't accuse – dangerous thing to say –" which makes me bitter because they are better off than we are. Remember when you couldn't say 'Nazi'? Now, it's just an identity.

JC: I feel for Madam Malkin in this situation, too, because...

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yes!

JC: A woman needs to make a living!

Lorrie: "Why are you doing this in my shop?"

JC: Yeah. She's like, "Take your political squabbles..." She's just trying to sell people robes. Oh, God...

Lorrie: What is she going to do if they start? Yeah. Obviously, if they start fighting, Draco is not going to care if he ruins her shop.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Narcissa says, right to Harry's face, "Dumbledore won't always be there to protect you." She is threatening Harry's life, because at this point, having gone through the Unbreakable Vow, she is banking on knowing that Dumbledore is going to get killed really soon, either by Draco or by Snape. She is a very unpleasant person, Narcissa. I have to try to understand people who dislike Snape so much because of where he was for most of the series that they don't take into account the work he did to transform quite a bit by the end, because I know that there is quite a powerful feeling of pro-Narcissa gladness when she at the end makes the decision to buck Voldemort. I'm so revolted by her Nazi mom act here

that I look at that and think, 'Yeah, but that wasn't because she became a better person or had any more sympathy toward Harry.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: That was totally self-serving.

JC: Draco is the center of her universe, and that trumps all of her other interests. That's what I see in her character, and I'm sure you have things you can say that will actually tell me that I'm wrong, but that's the big thing I see for her. Draco is the center of her universe, and she will do or say anything to make sure that Draco is safe, so her threatening Harry here is part of that. It's about making sure that Draco is safe, even though in the next scene he's going to escape her view and go work on this thing that Voldemort has set him to do that she's terrified of. At the end, when she makes the deal with Harry, one hundred percent protecting Draco is all she cares about.

Lorrie: Well, at that time it is. At this time, I think she's also really been shaken by her husband getting sent to prison. As much as Draco is part of her world, he's not home for most of the year, but Narcissa and Lucius are together (or were together) every day and their whole family's power depends on his wealth and status. When he gets sent to prison like a common criminal, you can imagine that she didn't think that was possible.

JC: Right. I'm thinking, from her perspective, Lucius getting sent to prison is some travesty of justice, right?

Lorrie: Yeah, right.

JC: Whatever she thinks. I'm thinking about these wealthy, Republican wife kind of people when their husband (who's been in cahoots with all kinds of bad stuff) gets arrested and sent off to jail, and then this idea of circling whatever resources I have left to protect the kid that I have or to protect whatever assets I have left. I'm trying to think of a real-world analog, but I don't keep up with these people enough to know.

Lorrie: It's indignation because the rules weren't meant to apply to them. She's not arguing that Lucius didn't break any laws; it's just that laws only apply to lower classes. The analysis I saw was that, for a certain kind of white supremacist

viewpoint, it's not that there are crimes and you get punished when you commit a crime; it's that there are people who are criminals. Whether those people have committed a crime or not, there's a class of people that are criminal by nature. Then there are classes of people who aren't criminals, whether or not they commit crimes. Even if they commit a crime, you don't arrest them; if you do, then that's a violation of the natural order or something.

JC: Yeah. Okay, I think I understand something a little more now. I think that I'm putting Narcissa in this category of the beautiful wife of a rich and powerful guy. I think that's what I'm doing here, and maybe that's not actually a good way to think about the relationship between Narcissa and Lucius. I'm thinking of Melania Trump here. I'm thinking about someone [for] who this is a political choice to marry this particular person. I'm not thinking about the relationship between her and Lucius as being something genuine so much as being transactional, so I'm seeing her as protecting what she can scrape together of what's left of this deal that she made, but that may be a completely incorrect assumption that I'm making there about who Narcissa is and what motivates her.

Lorrie: I think that's more fanon than canon.

JC: Maybe so.

Lorrie: It's also an archetype, because Narcissa is pretty. She is the kind of person that you might think would be easy to slot into that archetype, but the canon evidence we see is that she and Lucius have a relationship of equals. They talk about things that are important to them, they make deals. Narcissa is genuinely upset when anything bad happens to Lucius because she actually cares about him as a person, and they make decisions about Draco together. Socially, their social standing was equal.

JC: I think that there's something that appeals to us about this idea that just because they're rich, they can't possibly be happy or have a functional relationship. There must be something more nefarious there or that it's fake in some way.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: That's a very American way; I think in Britain, too, it's probably very common. Why would these two wealthy and powerful people end up together? It can't possibly be because they actually like each other. There's something in it for them.

Lorrie: They seem to really... Yeah. The fact that they work through problems by discussing them makes them stand out among couples in this series.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. Here's the thing she says to Harry that really just chills me toward her and makes me not able to think, 'Aww, but she's really a mom at heart!' "I expect Potter will be reunited with dear Sirius before I am reunited with Lucius." Do you say that to teenagers? Do you look a teenager in the face and say, "I can't wait for you to get killed," and taunt him by bringing up the loss of his godfather that just happened a couple months ago? This is so totally Narcissa's version of Draco going, "My dad is rich and your dad is dead." She's not just saying that to protect Draco. She's a piece of work on her own. Why do they hate Harry? Because Lucius is in jail for having tried to kill Harry. How is it any of this Harry's fault? And why did Lucius try to kill Harry? Because Harry survived a murder attempt as a baby. It really stood out to me on this read how, if I have a hard time understanding why people hate Snape based on books one through four and ignore all of the character development from book five on, I have to remember me being so scandalized by Narcissa in this chapter that I want to stay very, very far away from her. There are real people like that.

JC: Oh, yeah, for sure. That's what I think is very interesting. I one hundred percent believe that that is a real person. She is a real person. She is not a fictional character, you know what I mean?

Lorrie: No, you can find them anywhere.

JC: Yeah, one hundred percent. You don't have to go very far on social media before you run into people exactly like that. Do people say that to teenagers' faces? Yes. One hundred percent, yeah. Think about a community with refugees in it, and the kind of shit that people will say to the faces of those people. Yeah. She doesn't even seem like a caricature to me at this point.

Lorrie: No.

JC: She seems like a very real person who exists and behaves this way.

Lorrie: Something that makes this scene really work is that the setting is retail, because that is a very common, easy place to see this kind of clash. Narcissa would not be running into Harry Potter in her normal social circles, but everyone has to go to CVS. Madam Malkin is trying to ignore all of this, which never works. She can't go anywhere; she's there and they are in her shop. Then when Draco drops that huge clue that he's sensitive about his left sleeve all of a sudden, then he rips off the robes that she's been tailoring to him and throws them on the floor. This is disgraceful behavior. Madam Malkin serves him, and then she's just super glad to be rid of them, but for them to flounce like that -- first, insulting her, and Narcissa's flouncing right along with him -- how can you live with... What kind of behavior is this? They're not okay people. They're horrendous.

JC: The people that I know who've worked retail have stories like this.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: That's what's interesting about it, is that it's not...

Lorrie: That's not a caricature.

JC: It's not a caricature. This is absolutely the way that some people behave, and this is how Draco has been raised. Draco's been raised to think that this is okay.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I'm sure you've had that experience of being in a place of business and seeing people, seeing someone treat workers pretty much like that.

Lorrie: Oh, my God...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, the customer is not always right...

JC: For sure.

Lorrie: But also, Draco and Narcissa are flouncing because they actually are losing this confrontation. Harry more than stands up to Narcissa and her disgusting threats on his personal safety, and Draco really does have something to hide up his

left sleeve. They've got to run before things get worse for them, so they have to pretend that it's because the shop is beneath them.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: They're actually retreating.

JC: Yeah, in the way that when someone realizes that they're not going to be able to get out of this situation, except maybe with some perceived dignity intact, like they did.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah. It's like, "Well..."

Lorrie: "I didn't want it anyway."

JC: Yeah, exactly. That's what it feels like, for sure.

Lorrie: So yeah, Draco has to take out his feelings with the insult of throwing the robes on the floor for Madam Malkin to pick up, and then Madam Malkin makes an absolute mess of waiting on Harry, Ron and Hermione and rushes them out as soon as humanly possible. I'm glad that she doesn't take it out on them.

JC: But this is her busiest time of year, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: School robes? Oh, my God, to have this happen during the time when she's counting on... Sales are bad anyway because of everything that's going on. Oh, it's adding to her stress.

Lorrie: And this is the beginning of it, right? If Draco comes here and this fight just happened, then the next time anybody comes to the door, it's like, 'Oh, no, is this going to happen again?'

JC: Right.

Lorrie: So that was tense.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Hagrid is like, "Oh, yeah, but they wouldn't cause a scene," and Harry doesn't even try.

JC: I'm still laughing about the fact that it was all about Harry and Narcissa.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Draco was just there. Draco has not yet risen to the level of importance in Harry's mind here --

Lorrie: "My left sleeve!"

JC: Which is funny, yeah. That's going to change very soon. I love the little detail that they don't even bother buying Potions ingredients because they're not taking Potions anymore.

Lorrie: No. Hermione is; they're not.

JC: Yeah. They're like, "No, we don't need to buy anything here."

Lorrie: They're looking for Weasley's Wizard Wheezes because they don't realize yet that they don't have to look for it.

JC: This is one of my favorite scenes. It's almost taken us back to how magical Diagon Alley felt in the beginning. It's like their shop is one of the only bright spots left in Diagon Alley, and it is interesting that they're doing such bustling business when other places are starting to board up. That's really interesting to me. That says something about Fred and George, that they are like, "Yeah, here we are." They walk in and the place is busy, and there's all kinds of incredible magic happening all around. They have employees! What?!

Lorrie: They do, who call them Mr. Weasley and Mr. Weasley. It's more than bright, though; it's garish and it's sensory overload. It's not just like, "Wow, this is amazing!" It's like, "Oh, my..." It's like a punching telescope; it's like, "Wow, that hit me in the eye!" I thought, "What does this remind me of?" It reminds me of a casino...

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Because there's something sleazy about it, too.

JC: Yeah, like walking into the "DING, DING, DING, DING, DING, DING!"

Lorrie: Yeah, and those flashing lights and people offering free drinks so that you'll gamble more.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: It's like anything trickster. It's completely disruptive in a good and bad way, and it is not ever entirely safe.

JC: Also, as we see a little bit later, yes, they're on the side of Harry and everyone else, but that doesn't mean that they can't be used by the other side...

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: As we see a little later. They're not neutral, but there's some danger there.

Lorrie: Their allegiance is to the god of commerce. The whole trickster thing is that if you don't have tricksters to disrupt things, then abusive power can just go unchecked and unchallenged. But just because you have this kind of disruptive energy does not let anyone off the hook; you still have to have your own moral compass. They're just providing the energy; what you do with it is up to you. They're not in the business of deciding that only nice people get their stuff. That is very much against what they believe in, because who decides who is good and who's bad? That whole way of thinking may turn out to be really dangerously wrong, but they'll give anyone the tools. Oh, here we have AI.

JC: I noticed that, too. Yes, that stood out to me.

Lorrie: Goddamn quills...

JC: The quills that not only check your spelling, but write the right answers for you. I was like, 'Oh my God, it's AI.' Yeah.

Lorrie: That's totally AI, because the charms on them will wear off really quickly.

JC: I also liked the Patented Daydream Charm that was not for sale to under-sixteens.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. That is totally when people are in class reading AO3.

JC: Yeah, yeah, or looking at whatever they're looking at. Yeah. The sixteen line is funny because that's very much like an England thing. Instead of eighteen, it's sixteen. The idea that you have these Patented Daydream Charms... What are you daydreaming about? What's happening here? Even Hermione is impressed; Hermione's like, "Well, that's... Damn!"

Lorrie: "Oh, the search function on this thing..."

JC: Yeah. Whenever Hermione is impressed by Fred and George is always a fun moment. Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah, and it seems clear to me that the Daydreams Charms are not like hardcore porn. You can get away with this in class. It is definitely smut. I love how specific... 'What tropes and ships and prompts do you favor?'

JC: That's funny. "You need a distraction, but it may cause drooling." The side effects were funny.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There are other side effects that could be listed there that were not, but it was kind of funny.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Oh, and then Fred has the cure for Hermione's black eye.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Oh, yeah. Fred's like, "Yeah, we've gotten plenty of bruises because we are testing these things on ourselves."

Lorrie: The unspoken thing here is that Hermione has been saying, "I can't go around looking like this forever." We know that Marietta is going around with the SNEAK pimples, so I wonder: would this ointment work on Marietta's and she just doesn't know about it? Anyway, that's what leads to my headcanon (completely not based in canon at all) that Marietta's pimples can only be removed by her genuine remorse, but for people saying, "Well, how can Hermione have heartlessly caused facial disfigurement to a girl?" Well, no. When it happens to Hermione, she doesn't like it either.

JC: Yeah. It's not like Hermione has not suffered facial disfigurement before.

Lorrie: True. But yeah, this one was scary, because no matter what she tried, it was resistant. All right, there's some heavy-duty industry secret that Fred and George can let her in on.

JC: I also really like that they accidentally stumbled into this defensive magic business, which is so interesting compared to what Arthur is trying to battle on the streets. Their shit works.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: And it works so well that the Ministry is a client.

Lorrie: And they're so shocked because they didn't know that the general population was so inept.

JC: Oh, that one hit home.

Lorrie: That's what shocked them. They're like, "But this is just basic stuff."

JC: "What do you mean you can't perform a Shield Charm? Harry Potter taught us how to do that last year. What?!"

Lorrie: Right. "No, the entire government is going to be better off with these." Okay.

JC: Wow, yeah. Okay, this is the thing that made me think -- I know that I live in this... I wouldn't call it an ivory tower, but I work in a university and I am surrounded by people who are pretty well-educated, but more than that, interested in learning and interested in things, and knowledge is a currency. I have lived my entire life in a world where it was more important to know things and to be good at things than it was to have money or to have power.

Lorrie: Yeah. Right.

JC: Every now and then, those two things butt up against each other just a little bit, like, 'Whoa, what's happening here?' But every now and then, I will see a comment on social media or something that will remind me, 'Oh, that's right.'

Lorrie: Oh...

JC: 'Most people don't (for whatever reason, often generally through no fault of their own) understand this thing.' Mathematics is my area, and the amount of math that people don't know is sometimes shocking to me. I'm like, 'Wow.' It's a little bit like, 'Oh, my God. I spent my entire career trying to make sure that people learn this better, and look how little I've accomplished.' That idea here that most people

can't do even the most basic of defensive magic, for me, is like most people don't really understand what fractions are. Oh, my God...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Whenever I run into that in the wild, I'm like, 'Oh, okay, that's right. That's right. Yeah, yeah. Not because people are stupid; it's because it's the fault of our education system.' Okay. Going back to Fred and George: they can't cast a Shield Charm. Why not? Because no one taught them. Why weren't they taught it? Uuuhhhh...

Lorrie: Because Voldemort cursed the curriculum...

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: And withdrew funding and made it illegal to --

JC: Yeah, exactly. Ugh...

Lorrie: Dolores Umbridge went into the classrooms with a clipboard, and if she found people teaching these things...

JC: Then she wrote them up, yeah.

Lorrie: And said it's not Ministry-approved.

JC: And then somehow (going back generations), if most people can't cast a Shield Charm (we're talking about the last twenty years of Hogwarts)...

Lorrie: Voldemort's been bitter for quite a while.

JC: Yeah, so it really is an interesting nod to how defensive magic was taken out of schools, right? It's a long game. It's one of these Republican long games to destroy public education.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: That's what it comes back around to me as. Holy shit, this has been going on for a long time, and if people can't defend themselves on a very basic level -- people can't do critical thinking or media literacy, or just basically being able to do things without having to turn to AI -- that feels like an intentional long game to do

damage to society so that people have to rely on something else. They're the same to me, these two things.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: There's our post-2020 reading.

Lorrie: Oh, God, it's so awful.

JC: That feels different now than it definitely did the first time around. Yeah, that's been wild, the last few years. On the one hand, we have this agency telling us not to vaccinate children; on the other hand, there are newspaper articles about a measles outbreak here or a whooping cough outbreak there, and it's like, 'Wow, we really can't connect the dots as a society?'

Lorrie: Apparently not. Yeah. Are you ready to talk about the worst thing that Fred and George sell?

JC: There's several things that they sell, and I'm not sure which one we're talking about, but let's go.

Lorrie: Well, you talk about the products.

JC: The Instant Darkness Powder caught my eye, because I know that that's going to be used for bad purposes later in this book. Also, interesting that they import it from Peru, which is a little nod to, 'Oh, the Wizarding World is a lot bigger than just Europe. How interesting!' Somehow, Fred and George have extended their networks a little bit, and they are aware of products around the world that could be useful in their business. But I think you're probably talking about the love potions.

Lorrie: Sigh... which are marketed only to girls, and there's no reason for that. It's a choice that the author is making. I think it was just too awful to her to also have to market them to boys, because then there would be absolutely no disguising that they are absolutely rape drugs. That's all they are; there is no difference between love potions and rape drugs.

JC: It's also interesting that they've made them last for 24 hours. That is such a specific little time frame. What would you accomplish in 24 hours if someone loved you? There's only one thing, right? If you really wanted someone to fall in love with you and be your partner and be your best friend and all this stuff, 24

hours wouldn't do it. It's very clear what the goal of this is. Then when the love potion wears off, how is that person going to feel about you? It's so clear what this is for.

Lorrie: Yeah. What can't be undone after 24 hours once the horrified person realizes that you have slipped them a love potion?

JC: It also is interesting that this pops up here, because I think we start learning about Tom Riddle's background in this book, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, so here it is. This love potion is just sitting on the shelf here. 'Oh, it's a product. Oh, it's cute. It's pink. We're selling to school girls.'

Lorrie: Ginny and Hermione are among the target audience for this product; there's a whole crowd of girls oohing and ahing over them and giggling, and Fred and George pull the patriarchal thing and say, "Oh, but we're not selling them to Ginny." Fortunately, Ginny has no patience for that kind of double standard. We also see Ginny portrayed here as very cunning; Molly is yelling at Ron for flipping off Fred and George, and Ginny immediately steps in to say, "Mum, can I have a Pygmy Puff?"

JC: "They're so cute!"

Lorrie: Yeah. Instantly gets Molly off of Ron's case.

JC: But also, not like she was just looking at these love potions, right? Also, yeah, I think that Ginny (being the baby of her family) is probably the one who knows exactly how to manipulate every single person in her family.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: She doesn't have to talk to all of them.

Lorrie: And defuse things. Yeah.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And she gets the Pygmy Puff.

JC: Yeah, she gets a Pygmy Puff. That's true. Her mom can't say no. The idea of the love potion... One of the things that makes it really dark is not just the whole 'it's a date rape drug,' but it's really close to the Imperius Curse. Hmm... We do see someone affected by one of these later, but then there's this constant threat throughout the rest of this book: 'Oh, someone might slip you a love potion in your pumpkin juice. Oh, ha ha, then you act like a fool for 24 hours,' but that's like being put under the Imperius Curse. Ooh...

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

JC: Very dark.

Lorrie: It's one of those areas where I can hope that eventually the Ministry realizes that this should be one of those banned or restricted substances. You can't just go around dumping Veritaserum into people's drinks. That's highly regulated.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Perhaps love potions are under the radar but shouldn't be. Yeah, it's non-con, but I find it very accurate that despite how serious the implications are, they're also considered naughty and legal.

JC: When we were kids, there were urban legends around the idea of date-rape drugs that were romanticized in a weird way, and there were entire movies about this idea that there were things that a boy could put in a girl's drink that would make her completely open and crazy horny, and would make her just completely throw herself at them. That was before Rohypnol and things like that really became part of the public consciousness, but there was always this idea of Spanish fly or something like that.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: That's what it made me think of: something that I don't think really existed but this idea of, 'Oh, what if there was something?' Basically, the idea of a love potion that would make this person lose all their inhibitions, and da-da-da-da-da. I'm thinking about the author being slightly older than us and having grown up with a lot of that floating around, too, and it was never innocent at all. The implications are very dark, but that idea that it's out there in public consciousness, that there

might be something that would have this effect on you and you should guard against it...

Lorrie: Well, the fantasy is very powerful and universal and good, I think, but when you have the reality of actually being able to override somebody's free will and bodily autonomy, no, you do have to step in.

JC: Right. There's always been this idea of aphrodisiacs. Humans have always had this... I think all cultures have certain foods for certain things that are thought to be aphrodisiacs.

Lorrie: The fantasy... I have absolutely nothing against the fantasy of it, but you do have to know the difference between fantasy, reality, consent and bodily autonomy.

JC: Right, yeah. I think that's part of what's missing here, and that's what makes it dark, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The love potion... It's not that it will open up your inhibitions and you'll do something that maybe you really wanted to do, but you didn't have the courage or whatever, right?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not that. This will make you do a thing that you do not feel and do not want.

Lorrie: Whose choice is it?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Are you taking it yourself because you want the effects? Or is somebody making the decision for you that, for 24 hours, what they want you to think and feel is going to take you over and not what you want? It's consent. Well, it's naughty and it is universal, I think, in human culture throughout time, and that this is a fantasy and sometimes a reality. It is exactly the kind of thing that you would find in a naughty trickster emporium. Safe? No. Disruptive? Yes. Interesting? Definitely.

JC: Another thing that's interesting is that Fred and George's shop is a place where you can trust that the magic is real.

Lorrie: Yes!

JC: There's all these carts on the street where you know it's junk and it's fake. If Fred and George are selling it, you can trust that it's going to work. That's the interesting thing about their shop; that's why the Ministry is buying the shielded objects from them, because it's like, 'Okay, this is legit.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's not like you bought it off of an ad in the paper that was just junk or whatever. No.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: This is real.

Lorrie: This is not the Kwikspell course.

JC: Yeah. Right, right.

Lorrie: Yeah, they're not just trying to profit off of hope and ignorance. This is brand loyalty, right? 'Okay, I trust these makers.'

JC: They have become, in the space of a few months, incredibly powerful figures in the Wizarding world.

Lorrie: They are the gold standard.

JC: Yeah. Very interesting.

Lorrie: Yeah. Can you trust the FDA? Can you trust the CDC? No, but these people know what they're doing.

JC: They do indeed, and Harry is one of their backers.

Lorrie: Yeah, although it hasn't been safe for him to confess that yet.

JC: That's true.

Lorrie: The whole Weasley Emporium is this extremely potent location in the Wizarding world, in this universe. Amazing stuff, or as Hermione says, "I'm sorry to say, their stuff probably works."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If I were them, I would put that word-for-word on my products. "Hermione Granger: Sorry to say..." What better guarantee...

JC: Oh, man, yeah.

Lorrie: Then they see the thing.

JC: I like that when they see Draco sneaking away alone, finally having shaken his mother, the first thing Harry does is [he] gets out the Invisibility Cloak and tells Ron and Hermione to get under it with him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: It's so interesting, because I feel like in the previous book, he would have gone by himself; his first instinct is, 'We all three have to go,' and they don't hesitate. They all go. It's so team. I love that they're a team.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: From the start of this book, they're like, "Okay, we're in this together." That's great.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, that's a good thing. Even though splitting up was one of the themes of this chapter, they know for this you don't. Boy, after they barely survived the Ministry battle, yeah, it's no wonder they think that. They get under the cloak, they fall into formation, they trail Draco, and they discover that Knockturn Alley is even more deserted than Diagon Alley, which makes me say, "I don't love Knockturn Alley, but it's kind of sad."

JC: Everybody is scared and staying home, even people who would normally be up to possibly no good.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yeah, Draco's heading straight for Borgin and Burkes. Thank you, Fred and George, for providing the Extendable Ears, which they can immediately put to good use to eavesdrop and find out that Draco... What he wants is to learn

from Borgin how to fix something and to keep another one of those things in the store safe. Okay, they figured that out -- they don't know what it is -- and then we see Draco taking his new bullying powers out for a test run. Newly made big man here threatening Borgin, enjoying it and watching it work. It absolutely works. He invokes Fenrir Greyback and says, "Oh, I can have him come and visit you." Again, he's treating retail workers like absolute scum where he calls Borgin, "You stupid little man" -- totally uncalled for -- and Borgin responds by bowing. Oh, God...

JC: That statement: "Borgin made a bow as deep as the one Harry had once seen him give Lucius Malfoy." That's what Draco was going for. 'I am my father now.'

Lorrie: He's been promoted.

JC: Yeah, and it worked. He's getting the respect (from certain parts of the community, anyway) that he believes is due to him by his name and his birthright and all that.

Lorrie: Right, and they know that he has just shown Borgin something on his arm.

JC: Do they know it was his arm? I'm trying to remember in the text, because in the movie, they make it very clear that he pulls up a sleeve. In this chapter, I was looking for that, and it was not clear that it was his sleeve or his arm. "'No,' said Malfoy, and Harry knew just by his tone that Malfoy was sneering. 'Perhaps this will make you more confident,'" and then "he moved toward Borgin and was blocked from view by the cabinet. Harry, Ron, and Hermione shuffled sideways to try and keep him in sight, but all they could see was Borgin, looking very frightened." Then Malfoy basically says, "Don't tell anyone," and then Borgin instantly goes from being very condescending to being respectful.

Lorrie: And it's in the next chapter that Harry remembers that he showed Borgin something, but it does not mention the arm.

JC: But there's only one thing he could have done without words to make Borgin change his entire tune that quickly, right? Yeah. The context clue is pretty clear there, which is interesting, because now I'm looking back and I'm like, 'Why was this controversial?' I think because people just didn't want it to be true.

Lorrie: People didn't want it to be true. Yeah.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: It's because we didn't know yet. If you cross over like that, is it ever possible to cross back, or are you lost forever? Then we get Hermione being the least sneaky undercover agent ever.

JC: Hermione's usually better than this. I was shocked about this moment.

Lorrie: This is hilarious.

JC: I find this moment wildly... Hermione, what were you thinking? She's usually better than that.

Lorrie: Yeah. She checks her reflection in the window first. Okay, that's not going to help.

JC: Well, she did just come out from under the Invisibility Cloak, so there's no telling what her hair is doing.

Lorrie: Oh, my God. Yeah, she comes in going sneak, sneak, sneak, and Borgin throws her out and puts up the CLOSED sign.

JC: Right, yeah.

Lorrie: Ron is quite accurate to say, "Well, you were a bit obvious," and Hermione, very defensively, calls him "Master of Mystery," which is hilarious. Those two clowns... totally not in the same league that Draco's just been promoted to.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Hermione is about to have a really rotten year. From the Hermione standpoint, this is a no-good, terrible year for her. Everything this whole year is going to be just a bit off. She's going to be wretched. Oh...

JC: When I read this the first time, I had no idea what Draco was talking about. 'What? What?!' The mystery route, what Draco was doing (which starts here), what is he up to? Draco Malfoy's up to something.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: For this (finally) second read, it'll be interesting to see how all his clues look on the other side.

Lorrie: Then Harry, Ron, and Hermione sneak back and totally lie to Hagrid and Mrs. Weasley and say that they've been there the whole time.

JC: "Oh, yeah, we've been here the whole time. You just didn't look very hard."

Lorrie: Yeah. "It's your fault." Didn't Harry just promise Dumbledore that he was going to do nothing foolish while he was with the Weasleys? Well, lucky for Harry, they made it back without incident.

JC: True, true.

Lorrie: The next chapter is called The Slug Club.

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