

Transcript

Episode 6.7

Book 6, Chapter 7: The Slug Club

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 Seven: The Slug Club.

Lorrie: The Slug Club. Time to take the Hogwarts Express to school for sixth year, and a lot has changed. Professor Slughorn uses the train ride to convene his first Slug Club of the year. Harry and Draco take their enmity to a new level. All right.

JC: Okay, one of the big themes that stands out to me in this chapter (and then reflecting back on the previous chapters that pops up, too) is the kids are sixteen now (which is an important age everywhere, but particularly in the U.K., I think it's an important age). After that, you're not considered an adult necessarily, but there's more adult-y things that you have access to. There's this way in which even this train ride... Everything that's happened so far is stuff they've done before, but it's fundamentally different.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: The train ride is different, everything is more intense, the trip to Diagon Alley (that we talked about in the previous chapter), and Diagon Alley looks different. We're seeing all these things that we saw in the first book and we're seeing how

different the world is, but also how these kids are on the verge of adulthood now, and that means things look different.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: This is the last train ride that they're going to take to Hogwarts. This is this ritual: everyone who's ever gone to Hogwarts has done the train ride. Everybody, somehow, gets to London and then takes the train to Hogwarts. It's this magical journey, this gateway through which you pass into the next school year. It's the last one, and it is fundamentally different than other ones they've had.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: In the ways that the friends are separated and the ways that they interact with Slughorn, there's this new feeling of, 'Oh, that's what this year is going to be about': the status and impressing people. Oh, it just feels so interesting, the whole thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's very well-managed. This is one of those high achievements of this author in this series: she does pull off, very successfully, aging up the characters with each volume. She does that really diligently, and this year is a major one. We start off the chapter still in the Burrow, and one of the changes that we see is that Harry is pulling ahead of Ron and Hermione in his intuitions and his mental development. He has never been ahead of them before, but now he is very frustrated that they don't see how important it is to keep discussing what they saw about Draco. Ron and Hermione are in the wrong. None of them is used to this.

JC: It's so weird. I remember when I read this for the first time, I was totally like, 'Okay, Harry is on to something here.'

Lorrie: Yes, he is.

JC: The fact that Hermione thought it was like, "Nah..." In the past, that's always meant Hermione was right, and this was this uneasiness. I remember when I read it, I'm like 'I don't know what's happening here, because Hermione's usually right, but I don't actually think Hermione is right here.'

Lorrie: No.

JC: 'What's happening?' That's growing up.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Oh, my God.

Lorrie: That's one of the beginnings, one of the first indications that this is the changing point for Harry starting to pull ahead. I love the humor, too, that Ron and Hermione are tired of talking about what they saw about Draco "after a few days." You can just imagine how boring it must have been. 'Oh, my God, Harry, just stop!'

JC: I know. I love that he's obsessing about this. I think that's amazing.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: Also, this recurring comment throughout this chapter: when Harry realizes correctly that Draco is now a Death Eater and that he's taken the Dark Mark.

Lorrie: Yes! Love it.

JC: And he's absolutely right.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: The fact that everybody's response to that is, "He's only sixteen. You think Voldemort would have a sixteen-year-old Death Eater?"

Lorrie: Right.

JC: Okay, he has in the past.

Lorrie: We've just been talking about this.

JC: We've been talking about that, but also this idea, "Is Voldemort out here carding people or caring about preserving the innocence of children?" Why would Voldemort care about the age of someone that he sees he can use as a tool. He doesn't even care about these people as people.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I don't understand where that idea is coming from.

Lorrie: Right, and it's not like he only chooses very competent adults, because look at some of the clowns that he's chosen. It's not that.

JC: Yeah. He's like, "Oh, I could use you. Yeah. Okay, come on in."

Lorrie: "Perfect."

JC: He doesn't care how old they are. Every time that comment came out, I just wanted to scream at people. "Who do you think this is?!"

Lorrie: Yeah, and Harry is going nuts.

JC: Right. I'm with Harry here. I'm definitely Team Harry.

Lorrie: Yeah. I find it very exciting when he has that moment of inspiration. He has that leap of understanding: 'Draco's a Death Eater.' That's just very exciting and beautiful to me, because of course he's completely correct and he knows exactly what evidence to call upon (that Draco responded to Madam Malkin about the sleeve; that Draco showed something to Borgin, who changed his whole demeanor). Harry's in this frustrated moment where he totally knows that he is correct and he can't prove it at all, and he can't budge the people around him. The two characters I was thinking of who were in that position before: in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Snape knows that Harry Potter helped Sirius Black escape, everyone's looking at Snape like, "You're crazy," and all Snape can do is, with his spit flying, scream, "You don't know Potter as I do!" Here's Harry going, "You don't know Draco as I do!" and they're like, "We know Draco -- twerp, ineffective, always wants to be the main character." "You don't know!" The other person we've just seen is Bellatrix going to Spinner's End and saying, "Snape, you're so full of it. I don't trust you at all," and Snape's saying, "All right, let's talk about this logically." Poor Bellatrix leaves there worse off than she was before, and she was completely correct.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Here's Harry stuck, yeah.

JC: "Join the club."

Lorrie: Yeah. He's going to have that all year.

JC: Yes. Yeah, this is just the beginning.

Lorrie: Meanwhile at the Burrow, Fleur is planning her wedding, and this is an opportunity for personal growth for Molly Weasley. Oh, my God...

JC: Ugh... It's interesting, because the very girly description of, "Oh, I think I want this color or that color..." She's planning her wedding, and it's so interesting

because we haven't seen a close-up of a really girly, girly character. Hermione is not really like this, and Ginny's not really like this.

Lorrie: No, Ginny's not. Yeah.

JC: Yeah. These little details... It's a very hyper-feminine thing to do, to care about things down to the color of this... Yeah. It's an interesting little moment. It just made me think, 'Oh, we don't see a lot of this in this book.' It stands out.

Lorrie: Yeah. Of course, everything Fleur plans is going to be the utmost in good taste, but she can't do it without flinging insults left and right. She's incapable of saying this without insulting everything. Oy... Well, Mrs. Weasley said, "Don't do your laundry on the last day," but it's the last day and they're all doing their laundry, even Ginny. They make it to King's Cross with the Aurors who have no sense of humor.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: There's no joy in this, but it's efficient.

JC: It's such a contrast to Harry's very first trip through the barrier, where he was on his own and didn't even know what to do and followed the Weasleys through, finally. The contrast here, where there's security Aurors who are basically keeping hands on him.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Now he has to shake them off. "I can go through the thing by myself."

Lorrie: Oh, my God, yeah.

JC: The contrast is really wild.

Lorrie: So they get there... Harry has thought this over very, very carefully and come to an excellent conclusion that the person to speak to about his concerns is Arthur Weasley. It's just impeccably reasoned; he's quite right. It's at least the least bad person to talk to about it. Mr. Weasley has that parent look -- "All right. I can't say I'm surprised. Out with it" -- and, again, is not fully taking Harry seriously.

JC: I do love that Mr. Weasley knew they had snuck away...

Lorrie: Yeah. He's like, "All right..."

JC: In Diagon Alley. He's like, "All right, you're probably going to tell me what you did." I like that the adults are not as clueless as the teenagers think they are. That's really real.

Lorrie: Yeah, and when Harry's like, "But we had to find out." "Of course you did." But we do get the very helpful, promising piece of information that Arthur Weasley's not completely asleep about this: they raided all of Malfoy Mansion when they came to arrest Lucius Malfoy and they took away a bunch of stuff, which really makes you think back, 'Oh, no wonder Narcissa is in such a terrible mood about everything.' If you can imagine... If they took away everything dangerous from Malfoy Mansion, how many U-Haul trucks is that?

JC: Yeah. What's left? Exactly.

Lorrie: Oh, my God.

JC: Including the china that bites Muggles or something that your grandma passed down to you, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. The furniture made of Muggle bones, yeah.

JC: Stuff like that. Family heirlooms. What's so interesting about this, too, is that Harry has placed a lot of hope on this. He thought through it very carefully, and he's so disappointed that Arthur's response is, "Well..." Not to brush him off completely, but kind of; to be like, "Okay, I don't think you should worry about this, Harry." It just reminded me very much of the subplot in *A Christmas Story* -- well, it's not really subplot; it's actually plot -- where everyone Ralphie has talked to about getting a BB gun for Christmas has told him no, and he's like, "I'm going to ask Santa Claus. That's the master plan." When he asks Santa Claus, even Santa Claus brushes him off and says no. Then, he's disillusioned completely, and it's like, 'Ugh!' It just reminded me of that moment of Harry... that was the last person before he gets to school -- who's in the Ministry! -- who could actually do something.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Yeah, no.

Lorrie: Yeah. Since Harry is going to continue to be frustrated on this front this entire book, this interaction with Mr. Weasley is actually more productive than

most in that he learns about the raid. 'Okay, well, there were grown-ups on the case.' They didn't know about the raid before. All right... that's something.

JC: And that whatever Draco is talking about fixing, it's not at his home. It's somewhere else.

Lorrie: Yeah, okay. Yeah. 'We have gotten somewhere, Harry,' but I don't blame Harry for being frustrated.

JC: Yeah. It's very accurate for this age, too, because there is this mental shift where kids are able to functionally behave like adults and think like adults much more. There's when they're young teenagers, and then when they're older teenagers, there's a big jump; Harry has definitely hit this level, but yet adults are still very careful about what they allow teenagers access to. Even though they're recognizing that they have to give Harry more information and they have to take him more seriously, they're still treating him like a kid.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Harry's in that awful zone of, 'I know more than you believe I do, I'm capable of more than you believe I do, and you're not taking me seriously.' Yeah. Oh...

Lorrie: But there has to be a time lag, right?

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He knows that he's made this change, and probably the only person who really understands that is Draco, because Draco has had the same developmental shift.

JC: Yes. That's an interesting theme in this book, too, that I know I spent some time talking about and thinking about. Both Harry and Draco had something changed, and they come back to Hogwarts and they're not thinking about being kids anymore. They're really adults in a way that a lot of people around them are not.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: We see that when we get on the train.

Lorrie: Yeah. So yeah, this train ride is a great opportunity to catalog all the things that have changed. He turns to Ron and Hermione, who say, "We have to go be prefects," so he turns to Ginny and Ginny's like, "I've got to go meet my boyfriend." That's the beginning. That's the first indication of Harry's finally dawning reciprocal feelings to Ginny, which fall into that category of "the protagonist doesn't recognize his emotions yet." Okay, that's the style of attachment we have here. Then Harry has the very unfortunate discovery that wherever he goes, he's surrounded by starstruck girls. They're all staring, they're all whispering about him; it's very unpleasant, and he can't even move because they're all gathered and staring at him.

JC: And he happily runs into Neville and Luna, by the way, who are also getting stared at (maybe for slightly less intense reasons than Harry), but it's a relief to see them. They haven't really changed, though Neville is a lot more confident. I think Neville had a good summer.

Lorrie: Yeah. This is definitely one of those deliberate parallels to this time the previous year, when Harry's on the train with Neville and Luna and they are mortifyingly dorky. Cho comes and walks in on them, and they've got Stinksap everywhere; this time, Cho and Marietta see Harry and run and hide.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He is relieved to be rescued by Neville and Luna from his fans. There's that wonderful exchange where his number one stalker fan, Romilda Vane, says, "You don't have to sit with *them*," and he says very coldly, "Those are my friends." Okay. Obviously, Harry has grown up, everything has changed, and as much as I resent Augusta Longbottom and want to kick her, Neville was able to impress her finally.

JC: Yeah. That idea that his grandmother was so proud of him that she went and bought him his own wand... He is sixteen, and he finally is not using a hand-me-down wand, and it wasn't because they didn't have money to afford one; it was because they didn't think he was deserving of one or something. Yeah.

Lorrie: His individuality was not important; his only purpose was to live up to his dad.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: He had no identity. They didn't care what's inside Neville; they just know that he's not even worth consideration until he can prove that he's at least equal to the lost dad. It's not even not being seen; it's being at a deficit. Before you even dream about anybody bothering to see you, you have to get yourself out of debt first. It's very hateful.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, they were going to have to get him a wand somehow anyway because his dad's wand broke, and his reaction... In the middle of the Ministry battle, when he's got so many worst things happening, Neville's big concern is, "Oh, no, my dad's old wand is broken. My Gran's going to kill me." They were going to have to find a new wand; he has earned his way into being respected as his own person, and it's so stunning. The wand he gets is just about the most beautiful one I can imagine. Cherry wood is exquisite, and of course unicorn hair is broadcasting his purity of heart. Cherry and unicorn hair is the most ravishingly affirming combination I can think of.

JC: Also, it's interesting that he thinks he got one of the last wands that Ollivander sold...

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: But that means that he got to have his moment with Ollivander.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Finally. Finally...

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: That thing that you like to say, that every eleven-year-old gets their moment with Ollivander? Well, Neville didn't until now.

Lorrie: No, he didn't.

JC: There's a way in which Neville -- but they all had a coming-of-age thing happen to them as a result of what happened at the Ministry. There's all these kids that we're seeing that were changed by that, whether they were present or not.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Neville, finally, is fully accepted by his grandmother in a way that he wasn't before.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: And he got to go through the Wizarding rite of getting a wand from Ollivander.

Lorrie: Yeah, who would have respected him at any point. Neville was kept from that rite of passage artificially.

JC: Right.

Lorrie: Unlike Ron, who didn't get it when he was eleven either, but they would have loved to give Ron that experience, and they gave it to him when they had to find some way.

JC: Right. Then we have Luna asking if there's going to be D.A. meetings, and then commenting that she liked the meetings because "it was like having friends." Harry notices a lot that she will say these embarrassingly, completely honest things that kind of make you go, 'Ugh, I can't believe you said that out loud!'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: But here's another one, yeah. "It was like having friends."

Lorrie: Yeah, and Harry can't think of a thing to say to that.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Fortunately, Luna's completely at equilibrium and not even noticing, so he has a moment to recover. Gosh... Oh, yeah, and when Romilda Vane comes to try to rescue Harry from Neville and Luna, Luna saying, "People expect you to have cooler friends than us."

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, they do, actually.

JC: They do, but yeah, Harry's chosen his friends well.

Lorrie: Yeah. Harry is proudly embracing his true dorkiness and his most comfortable place on the social spectrum. If he wanted to, he could go around saying, "I'm the Chosen One. Get out of my way!"

JC: Right, yeah. Channel his inner Draco Malfoy.

Lorrie: It's very good that he has that stability, which is part of the argument that Dumbledore has been making since the beginning when people say, "How could you shove Harry with the Dursleys?" He's saying, "Well, it's not ideal, but he does get to be himself and find out what he's really made of and not be raised to shove people out of the way." It's a good thing that Harry is in touch with that aspect of himself, because oh, boy... The rest of this chapter, we get to see how the world is ready to corrupt him.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: If he had any pretensions toward superiority, there would have been nothing standing in his way of just getting weirder and weirder.

JC: Yeah, that is true. You mentioned Romilda Vane comes in and immediately insults Harry's friends. There's such a parallel between Romilda and his first meeting with Draco Malfoy that it sets us up to be wary of her, but I also expected worse things of Romilda because of the way that meeting happened. It's very much like Malfoy coming in and [saying] "I can help you there," and Harry responds to Romilda the exact same way he responded to Draco: "I don't... no." It's just interesting to me that Romilda is introduced that way. It's shorthand for "Don't trust this person." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. "Obviously, everybody can see that we're of higher status." Yeah. Oh, we have this super important, introspective moment where Harry looks at Neville and thinks about how it could have been Neville, and then wonders, "Well, Neville's mom surely would have given her life for Neville, just as Lily did, but would Neville's mom have gotten the opportunity?" It's not just about the willingness; it's also chance and opportunity, and then this truly heartbreaking sentence: "Would there be... an empty seat where Neville now sat and a scarless Harry who would have been kissed good-bye by his own mother, not Ron's?" I think part of what makes that heartbreaking for me is how Harry is not ungrateful. Thinking this is very much also taking into account the network that they all have

provided for each other. Yeah, Neville is not an orphan, but he still had needs, and there they are being friends with him, supporting him, and recognizing that he needs some support.

JC: It is also interesting to me that he's thinking about this other timeline in which things went differently. He doesn't go much further than that, but that made me think of *Cursed Child* with the actual "What if this one thing had changed? What would the timeline be? How would things have gone? What would change, and what would not change?" They gave me a little bit of *Cursed Child*. 'Oh, yeah.'

Lorrie: Yeah, legitimizing AUs as a way of thinking, a way of humans processing how we live. We're going to see that carried through in more than one plot line in this book.

JC: Interesting.

Lorrie: Echoes of what could have been, how did things go... A choice could have changed things. There were many Draco-like people taking many Draco-like detours; what happened after that? We get this tiny little detail that probably is noted and beloved by a lot of readers where Luna describes Wrackspurts as things that "make your brain go fuzzy," and you clear them by flapping your hands.

JC: Oh, yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. That was just a really sweet little self-contained moment. 'Hmm, yeah.' Maybe Ron and Neville are embarrassed by this, but on the other hand, we have just recently seen Hermione flap her hands, waiting for her owl to come bring her her scores. It's like, 'No, maybe it works.'

JC: I guess we're up to Ron and Hermione coming back. They've done whatever duties they have to do as a prefect, and they note that Draco did not do his duties; he just went and sat in a car with his friends, which is very interesting because they speculate about what that says about Draco's character. He loved being a prefect and being able to lord that over people; he's beyond that now. It doesn't matter.

Lorrie: What does it mean when Draco Malfoy doesn't cash in the opportunity to be superior to younger students? Huh... Where is he getting that itch scratched now?

JC: Right. Yeah. Then later on, we'll even get some more hints around that in this chapter, but yeah, it's just so telling.

Lorrie: That can't be good!

JC: Yeah. Also, the jump in maturity that he has made is really interesting to me. Compared to the kid who was practically still screaming "My father..." a few months ago, he is a different person now.

Lorrie: Yeah. Can you imagine if you're walking along and there's somebody that you know [who] always takes bribes, and then suddenly they say, "Oh, no, I don't need them anymore." You would think, 'Oh, God... What? Oh, no. What happened?'

JC: 'What happened?' Yeah.

Lorrie: 'No, bad.'

JC: Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Lorrie: All right, they're worried about Draco.

JC: I love the little humor, by the way, of the moment when Harry says, "Well, what did he do when he saw you?" Ron says, "The usual," and then it says, "demonstrates a rude hand gesture." I love that little humor of that. The author does that really well; we've talked about that previously in other books, but it's just this nice little bit of, 'Okay, yeah.' Everybody who reads this knows exactly what transpired, and it's written in a way that's very humorous.

Lorrie: Yes. "To protect the innocence of our readers (or something), we're supposed to not name the thing that our readers know all people this age do."

JC: Yeah, exactly.

Lorrie: Okay. Whatever. Yeah, it's very meta anti-censorship. Then this poor, stammering younger student steels herself to deliver these invitations to Harry and Neville from Professor Slughorn, getting invited to his compartment for lunch that he has brought himself. Neville, of course, has no idea who this is, and Harry and Neville just look at each other like, 'Oh, we can't say no, right? We have to go.' God...

JC: And the fact that Harry already knows what's going to happen...

Lorrie: Oh, boy, oh, boy, oh, boy...

JC: He already knows. 'Oh, yeah, he's looking for who he's going to collect.' It's very clear to Harry. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah. He doesn't fill in Neville on why Neville might have been chosen. He could have prepared Neville for this, but it's going to happen anyway. Just let it happen. It'll be clear enough what's happening. It's just amazing to me how one person -- one new person in this school --can change the atmosphere in such a toxic way. It's, in some ways, benign. He's not killing anybody; it's not like Lockhart, who actually wants to kill children so he can sell more books, but it's so poisonous.

JC: It is, and I was trying to think of how that might happen in a school. I'm just thinking of schools that I've been involved with. Schools are full of clubs and they're full of Honor Societies, but the idea of being chosen by this one teacher who sees potential in you... That's something that we really try to avoid, because it's really...

Lorrie: It's really destructive.

JC: Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: But also, it's really hard to uproot because a lot of times, you can't really point to anything that anyone is doing wrong. This is a dynamic that I have seen a lot, where in schools, there's celebrity teachers who have an aura and they have their own self-selected group, and it doesn't have to be formally done. It can just be like, 'Oh, everybody knows that those people are really tight with each other, and they think they're really cool.' There's this charismatic figure at the center who is good at whatever they do, but I'm thinking of some examples (both when I was a student and when my kids have been in schools) where that teacher tried to collect some students and were a little bit rebuffed-feeling when some of the students said, "Yeah, thank you. No thanks!"

"Why wouldn't you? We have so much fun." "Yeah, thank you."

JC: Okay. I guess, coming from a teacher education perspective, we spend so much time talking about building appropriate relationships with students. That just hits all the wrong buttons for me, but for creepy reasons.

Lorrie: Oh, very much.

JC: Why would you be choosing students? Who are you as an adult that you need that to bolster your -- We tell people, "You have your own life. Go have your own life and set up boundaries."

Lorrie: All about a boundary, yes!

JC: We talk a lot about setting boundaries and about making sure that you're not letting students come -- Oh, my God, so many little bells of alarm were ringing in my head about all of this. 'Oh, this is not good.' But yeah...

Lorrie: Yeah. Also with having been in figure skating fandom, this kind of behavior is rampant. At rinks, at training centers, you'll have several coaches on staff, but often there's a star coach, somebody who has really high-ranking pupils and has a lot of expertise; that star coach can be really sane and healthy about it or can run things like this little cultish clique, and it's not really regulated. If there is a culture in place or people with authority in place who know, 'Okay, this is not actually a healthy environment, we're not going to let that happen,' great, you're lucky. But you can't control every little tiny microcosm everywhere, and sometimes, these people get to run it their way.

JC: Yeah. Ugh...

Lorrie: Yeah, ew. Harry and Neville haplessly walk along to compartment C and Professor Slughorn, who has already gathered Blaise Zabini, Cormac McLaggen, Marcus Belby, and Ginny.

JC: This is the moment where I remember, prior to this book coming out, no one knew anything about Blaise Zabini.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: I remember no one knew if Blaise was a boy or girl. Nothing.

Lorrie: Nothing.

JC: And this was the moment of reveal. 'Oh, Blaise is a boy!'

Lorrie: Right.

JC: We get a little bit of Blaise's backstory, which is actually super interesting.

Lorrie: Yes, it is.

JC: A black widow-style witch for a mom.

Lorrie: Glamour mom, yeah. Now that people have confirmation of Blaise's gender, does this have to change any of the pairings that Blaise was written into? No. No, not really.

JC: We just have some more interesting character information, right? Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: I do find that fascinating that Blaise is described as being very good-looking, with this idea that Blaise's mother is this extraordinarily beautiful witch who's been married seven times, and all of her husbands mysteriously die and leave her a lot of money.

Lorrie: Yeah. She just keeps getting richer.

JC: Wow, that's so interesting. Yeah.

Lorrie: Cormac McLaggen. I always picture -- Well, not always, because ever since I saw Brett Kavanaugh have his confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court, that has melded in my mind with my image of Cormac McLaggen.

JC: Wow! Really?

Lorrie: Just blustering and entitled.

JC: Cormac McLaggen, to me, is the high school football player guy. He's really big and beefy and he's not as clever as he thinks he is, but he's been pretty good at playing football. It's that kind of jock who's got a very high opinion of himself.

Lorrie: Yeah. Comes from establishment, yeah, and is going to get into any university you want as a legacy *shudders* and has no inner conflict about it.

JC: Yeah. He's the one who said, "Oh, we were just hunting the other day with Rufus Scrimgeour, before he was Minister of Magic, of course." Yeah.

Lorrie: And Marcus Belby, a Ravenclaw with an anxiety disorder. Poor guy...

JC: Oh, poor kid. Is he the one who chokes on the chicken?

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Okay.

Lorrie: Yeah. He's the one who is the sacrificial character to show what happens when Horace Slughorn blames you for not being as interesting as he hoped you would be.

JC: Ah, yes, and then he suddenly becomes a non-person in the compartment.

Lorrie: Yeah. He doesn't get offered food anymore.

JC: He doesn't even get looked at. Wow. It's like he ceases to exist in that room, which is like, "Damn."

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. Was Slughorn wrong? Well, then, Marcus Belby must be punished. God... Ginny, looking quite confused...

JC: Like, 'Why am I here?' Yeah.

Lorrie: And not enjoying being there.

JC: But I do love that as soon as Blaise insults Harry, Ginny's on him. Okay, yes, yes. Here we go.

Lorrie: Demonstrating exactly why she's there. Okay, there are ways to get in the Slug Club without having high status... Yeah. Ginny, as has been noted by us and by every other reader, is also a stand-in for Lily Evans. Obviously, this was how Lily Evans the Muggle-born got into Slughorn's inner circle (or inner esteem) by just having so much vivacious personality.

JC: And ability, yeah. Slughorn saw her hex someone and was like, 'Oh.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: 'That one!'

Lorrie: 'Yeah, this one's going places.'

JC: 'I like her. She's going in my collection.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and you don't have to be anyone to be that. Pheasant and little pies sound quite good, actually, and then I got a really good picture of him making them by hand the previous day, humming along. I'm sure he's quite a good cook, actually.

JC: Oh, that's interesting. I hadn't thought about where he acquired the food, but yeah. He says something like, "All these trolleys on the treats... For a man my age, I can't eat that, but I offer you this cold pheasant." Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and meat pies that are probably harder to digest than licorice wands.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. Bless Neville and Ginny. Slughorn turns to Harry, and you can hear the drum roll and you can feel the red velvet curtains being drawn. "And now... Harry!"

JC: "And now..." Exactly.

Lorrie: "You're going to tell us, all right!"

JC: And even Harry gets the sense that he's been saved for last.

Lorrie: "So, Harry, tell us everything!" Bless Neville and Ginny: they jump in there and act as stupid as possible, claiming that nothing of interest ever happened, and Harry doesn't even have to do anything. He can just sit there like, "Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm." This beautiful sentence: Neville and Ginny "sat clamlike before [Slughorn's] encouraging smile." It's so hostile. 'We know what you're doing. We're not playing.' As kids, you can't actually stop grown-ups from doing their thing, but you can resist as much as possible.

JC: It's also interesting that Slughorn is coming into this situation relying on charisma and perhaps his own reputation, and these kids don't know who he is. All they see is every year, there's been a new teacher at their school who it's either gone well or it's gone horribly. Eventually, it all goes horribly, but they have zero reason to trust this guy. 'Okay, here's the next one.'

Lorrie: Well, that's why you bring good food.

JC: So yeah, it's so interesting. He thinks that he could just swan in and win them all over, and everyone's suspicious. Yeah.

Lorrie: Well, he does do a lot of name-dropping, which does work on quite a few people in life, in general. He doesn't come empty-handed.

JC: True.

Lorrie: If you like that sort of thing, what we're about to see is somebody who would have been thrilled to get an invitation.

JC: That is true.

Lorrie: Finally, the ordeal is over and Harry and Neville can escape the Slug Club, and that's when Harry gets an idea.

JC: He gets a terrible, awful idea.

Lorrie: What could go wrong?

JC: A terrible, wonderful, awful idea. I remember, when I read this for the first time, putting my hands over my face and going, 'No, this is not going to end well. No, Harry. Noooooo!'

Lorrie: Once Harry decides that he's going to put on his cloak and go spy on the Slytherins, then we have a slight genre change. This chapter then becomes slapstick.

JC: Yeah, because none of this is feasible, really. It is not feasible that he could sneak into this tiny little train compartment with his Invisibility Cloak and launch himself up onto the luggage rack --

Lorrie: Noiselessly.

JC: While keeping himself hidden. None of this is real. You'd have to suspend your disbelief completely.

Lorrie: Right, and so many things go wrong in a beautifully slapstick way. He's just a split second late, so he has to put his foot in the door to keep it from closing, and then Blaise (quite understandably) says, "What is wrong with this thing?" and he slams the door repeatedly to Harry's foot, who cannot say "Ouch." Okay, great, the slapstick is starting, and then the description of how Harry gets into his hiding place is hilarious: Harry yanks on the door so Blaise topples into Goyle's lap; during that disruption, Harry scoots in and jumps onto the very briefly empty seat

that Blaise was supposed to be sitting in, hurdles into the luggage rack, and then he crouches in this extremely awkward little crouch. Of course, Draco sees him.

JC: All while staying mostly under the Invisibility Cloak.

Lorrie: Right.

JC: This is so... yeah. You just have to go, 'All right, I'm just going to roll with this. Let's just see what happens.' Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah. A very good physical comedy sitcom could do a really good set piece with this. Harry manages; the Slytherins are all like, "What is going on right now?" As usual, when Harry tries to tell himself, 'Well, Draco didn't notice anything, right?' Yeah, Draco spends his entire life obsessing over you, Harry. He noticed.

JC: Yeah. That's what's so interesting: Draco knows he's there the entire time, so everything that Draco says in this scene is intended to convey -- he's working on a couple different levels.

Lorrie: Yes.

JC: He's conveying, "Yeah, I'm so beyond... I'm so above all this school shit. Whatever. I'm just here because I have to be. I have bigger things coming." He's got that, but he's also saying it for Harry's benefit.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: He's letting Harry know... He's giving Harry just enough information to pique his interest, but not really tell him anything.

Lorrie: It is a very well-handled multi-level performance, Draco. Draco always was capable, but now that he's a little older and he has a mission, he's super-powered. There he goes, performing, and all of his cronies are reacting in a way that must have been extremely satisfying for Draco.

JC: Even though he's acting like he's above all this, it is still very much of this age.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: He's laying there with his head in Pansy's lap and she's petting his hair and, very jealously, trying to gauge what he thinks about other girls. He's ignoring it, but also he's not. Yeah.

Lorrie: 'Keep it coming. Keep it coming.'

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And we get the refutation. There is movie canon that Crabbe can't read, but yes, he can. He's reading a comic, so Harry can read along with him, in fact. Then Draco finds out that the Slug Club was convened without him. He's really not okay with this. He tries to cover it up; he fails miserably.

JC: But he knows why he wasn't there, and that is going to fuel his anger. It is an injustice! His father was taken away to Azkaban, and now everyone is pulling away. Even people like Slughorn should be collecting Draco, but he's afraid to because Draco's father was -- I can just see the whole, "It's an injustice!"

Lorrie: He's just fuming.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Yeah, and Blaise tells him the piece of evidence: No, he doesn't want anything to do with Death Eaters. He didn't want anything to do with Theodore Nott, either.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Draco sees his stock falling. Not so good... He has even more incentive to brag, so he pulls out the Draco Malfoy sour grape tone and says, "I might not even be at Hogwarts next year... I might have -- er -- moved on to bigger and better things." What?!

JC: I like that he says that knowing he has an audience with Harry.

Lorrie: Yep.

JC: Just dropping, "You think I'm beneath your notice..." He's probably still stinging about Harry not even looking at him in the dress shop. 'Yeah, you should be watching me. I'm dangerous.'

Lorrie: 'Yes, I am.'

JC: 'I'm the one you should be worried about.' It's very much like that.

Lorrie: 'I'm going to show everybody.' Yeah. Oh, then Draco says this thing that is very chilling in our era where they say, "But you're not going to finish your schooling?" and he goes, "No, education is not important anymore." Who cares? Voldemort's not going to count what O.W.L.s you got. He says, "It'll be all about the kind of service he received, the level of devotion he was shown," which all I could see was those kids who dropped out of college to join DOGE...

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: And then were indignant because suddenly all their friends have stopped talking to them, and then DOGE shut down. I don't know what became of them now, but they were sold this vision of a shortcut to being masters of the universe. They somehow were so hungry to be told that story and to buy into it that they accepted it so quickly and easily. So yeah, here's Draco falling for the same thing, claiming that there's going to be a new world order where it doesn't matter what you know. God... What could go wrong?

JC: But he basically admits that Voldemort has given him a special job to do. He says it differently than he said everything else. Everything else was boasting and prideful; this one, he says it very quietly. It was interesting.

Lorrie: "Maybe the job I've been given is something you don't need to be qualified for. Maybe it's something else." Oh, boy... There's also that uncomfortable parallel between that kind of autocratic regime (where it's all about currying favor) with the bad atmosphere that Slughorn has introduced on the carriage on the Hogwarts Express with his whole favoritism economy. It all is sick. Yuck. I'm glad that we have the counterbalance of, for example, Neville getting his own wand at last. Okay, look, this is how you get that nasty taste out of your mouth: remember what matters. Remember what's really individual to people in making sure that that's what you honor, because yuck.

JC: It's interesting that the way that I originally read this scene (back when I read this in, what, 2006 or whenever this came out)... I had been a high school teacher in the 1990s in a school where there was a lot of gang activity, and I would see when boys in particular (it would happen to girls, too, but mostly boys) would go from just being a kid to being in a gang, and you could see the shift.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Suddenly, the swagger that they had, the other kids would treat them differently... They would literally get a tattoo that would then change the way everyone interacted with them. That happened, so when I read this the first time, that's what it made me think of. Then that idea of, "None of this matters. Getting a school degree doesn't matter. I'm going to be out here making all this money and I'm going to have everything I want, and I don't need school to do it." The first time I read this scene, that was all I'd think about: those boys that I knew and what happened to them, and how other kids responded to that sudden power that they had come into. The interesting thing about Pansy dotting on Malfoy here is that I saw girls doing that with those boys. The girls who had previously just been school girls suddenly would come in and their makeup was different, their behavior was different; then they would be pregnant a few months later. The way that the gang activity had infiltrated into the neighborhoods and into the school did things like this. I remember reading that and just having that very visceral reaction of 'I know what's happening here,' and it's interesting that it feels different on this read. Part of that's because I haven't been in a high school with a lot of gang activity, so it's not the first thing in my mind. It's a different read, but I'm sure that's still a very valid read for a lot of people in a lot of places.

Lorrie: Well, they're going to turn into Snape, right? They're going to be taken in by the immediate reward (and then spend a lot of time regretting it later), but it's also the appeal of some populist politics. "Well, maybe you couldn't get an education or have your individuality treasured because you came from a really rough background. Well, we're going to make a world where not only does that not matter, but we spit on it." So yeah, we're watching this happen, and in the background of this whole volume is the dread of (we find out later, Snape) anybody who has gone through this and made it to adulthood, sees it happening, and wishes that kids that they care for wouldn't fall for this because it makes things so hard. But yeah, right now, we see Draco really starting to feel the rewards come in (flexing for the first time) and then sending the others on ahead, continuing his performance while Harry goes, 'Ooh, he has no idea I'm here. I'm going to get to find out something. Ooh, ooh...'

JC: Oh, Harry... It is a very powerful moment, though. I remember actually looking forward to seeing what the film version of this would look like, because I thought, 'Okay, we're going to get this really dark Draco. Draco's being a bully up until this point, and here's where it's like no, he's actually dangerous...

Lorrie: He's scary.

JC: For the first time. I thought that the film version (with this all-black suit he had on and everything, and they had done his hair differently) they really leaned into that. But yeah, he hexes Harry and then taunts him, stomps on his face, breaks his nose, throws the Invisibility Cloak back over him...

Lorrie: Master touch.

JC: Which was an interesting moment, because I thought, 'Okay, Harry had mentioned earlier, "Who knows he has an Invisibility Cloak and who doesn't?" I guess this is something that Draco knows.' It's interesting to me that he didn't just take it.

Lorrie: I know.

JC: That's interesting. He leaves it on him.

Lorrie: Well, we continue with the slapstick. Once Harry realizes that he's just been immobilized, he topples in slow motion, and he's still in that ridiculous posture where he was crouching. He falls slowly... What an undignified position to be in, and painful. While that's happening, we think, 'Oh, right, Harry is not the only one who has suddenly improved his ability to put clues together.' Draco gives the strong evidence, just like Harry did early in the chapter, "Yeah, I heard Goyle's trunk. I saw your trainers." They're quite evenly matched, but yeah, his whole choice to take the cloak and then just put it over Harry to really intensify the humiliation as opposed to stealing it...

JC: Which would have come in handy to Draco during this school year.

Lorrie: Yeah. The whole tableau, and what it tells us about Draco's mindset, is the restraint. He could have done anything to Harry. He could have killed him.

JC: He could have killed him at this point. Yeah.

Lorrie: Instead, he delivers a message from his father and enjoys putting Harry in his place, and then he just goes and resumes his life. Okay. I'm thinking of it not as good or bad; okay, that's a lot of information about where Draco is emotionally at this point. But yeah, it's understandably really not okay with him that this has happened to his father (to his family), despite the fact that it wasn't exactly Harry's fault.

JC: Right. Yeah.

Lorrie: But the way that Draco does this methodically and the way that he's thought it through, and then how he says quietly, "They're going to maybe find you back in London," it's threatening. It's scary. You're scared for him, but you're also scared of him, right?

JC: But you're absolutely right that there's a lot of restraint here. He breaks his nose, which is bad, but he could have done so much worse; the fact that he doesn't is interesting to me.

Lorrie: Yeah. It's like, "I don't want to take you out. I want to hurt you." Then the last detail sent me on a memory trip where he takes care to tread on Harry's fingers as he leaves, and I got the sharpest memory. In the nineties, there was an ACT UP protest that I was in, and one of my friends (who was a gay man with AIDS) ended up on the ground, and the cops ended up taking him into a holding cell. This one cop didn't do it performatively, but very quietly stepped on my friend's finger and ground it into the sidewalk. It wasn't to teach him a lesson or anything; it was just to relieve some of his bigotry. I remember looking at my friend's bare finger being treated that way, and my friend closing his injured finger into his fist and rubbing it, not saying anything. He didn't say, "Get off my finger." He just was hurt. Yeah, this is about what happens when you have somebody else under your power and you make choices about emphasizing that power difference, and yeah, all the hatred that people can feel for each other. Well, the next chapter is called Snape Victorious.

JC: Wow!

Lorrie: Yeah. This is going to ramp up!

JC: Yeah, okay. When I saw the title of the chapter, I was like, 'Okay, what does that mean?'

Lorrie: Right?

JC: There are a couple of things that I remember happening, but okay, I'm going to find out, I guess. What is Snape Victorious about?

Lorrie: Right, and with a title like that, the author better deliver!

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