

Transcript

Episode 8.1

Interview: Cecilia Tan

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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 longtime HP fan. I'm your editor, Caroline.

Caroline: Welcome to Season Eight of the podcast. No, you haven't missed three books' worth of episodes from us, in case you're listening to this around the time of publication, but as you well know from the tagline, HP After 2020 is a chapter reread project. But there are topics and guests that Lorrie and JC wanted to bring on, and so the question of where to put those episodes has landed us here. In the grand tradition of Voldemort splitting off an unintended eighth part of his soul -- or the *Harry Potter* film adaptations becoming eight movies -- this is the start of our open-ended Season Eight, running concurrently with the regular episodes in the regular seasons following each of the seven books. Having said that, Season Eight episodes will be published irregularly at best and will not take up our regular Wednesday publishing slot, so you can consider them very much like bonus content... at least until we finish Season Seven and begin covering *Cursed Child* and the *Fantastic Beasts* movies. With all that out of the way, just as we're about to start Book Four in the main series of the podcast, in this inaugural episode of Season Eight, Lorrie and JC talk with author Cecilia Tan about Harry Potter, J.K. Rowling, writing, queerness, and more.

Lorrie: Hi, this is Lorrie. Hi, JC.

JC: Hello.

Lorrie: And who do we have today as our first-ever guest?

Cecilia: Dun dun DUN!

JC: Our first ever guest is Cecilia Tan, who is one of the most important writers, editors and innovators in contemporary American erotic literature. That's quite an accomplishment! For her pioneering efforts to combine erotica with fantasy and science fiction -- according to Susie Bright -- she's been awarded by RT Magazine with the Career Achievement in Erotica Award in

2015 and their prestigious Pioneer Award. Her works have racked up a number of other awards over the years as well. She's the founder of Cirlet Press, which are publishers of erotic science fiction and fantasy, as well as the author of many books, so we are super excited to have Cecilia joining us today.

Cecilia: I'm happy to be here.

Lorrie: When JC and I launched this podcast, you commented, "Let me know if you ever need a guest," which made me super excited. Instantly, I knew Cecilia had to be our first. What made you want to come on as a guest?

Cecilia: I wanted to come on as a guest because I am very interested in being engaged in this conversation of 'what is Harry Potter fandom and being a devotee of Harry Potter post-TERFpocalypse, and how has that affected our relationships to the work and to the meaning in our lives?' because Harry Potter long ago became more than just a book to me and many other people. It's an ongoing conversation; it's far from over, and I think we're all still formulating those relationships as time goes on. It's not like a thing happened once, either.

Lorrie: So how many books have you written?

Cecilia: I lost count, actually.

Lorrie: Yes! Me, too.

JC: Wow.

Cecilia: I'm a letters person, not a numbers person, and people often ask me, "How many books have you written?" and I'm like, "Well, do you count the thirteen books that the serial was?" I wrote a serial called *Daron's Guitar Chronicles*, which the new print versions are just coming out...

Lorrie: Ooooh.

Cecilia: But I started writing it in grad school in the 90s; it's a 1980s period piece. It was not a period piece at the time. That's the way things were.

JC: Wow.

Cecilia: Now, it's historical fiction...

JC: Oh, my God. I love it.

Cecilia: About a gay guitar player coming out. He's in the closet when the series starts, and one and a half million words later -- which is longer than *Harry Potter* -- at least one foot is out of the closet, let's put it that way. The meaning of being out keeps changing as our lives change and his politics change, and as he becomes more and more of a public figure throughout the series, he has to contend with that. Gee, guess whose real life that mirrors a lot? Yeah, mine, so this idea of the famous person, who suddenly everyone is interested in your thoughts and feelings about sex, is a thing that happens to many of us. Did I think it was going to happen to J.K. Rowling? No. No, I did not have that on my bingo card for crazy things that were going to happen post-2016, say.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: But yeah. Yeah, how many books have I written? The serial breaks into thirteen books, so I count that as thirteen. But yeah, the rest... Some people know I have feather tattoos for every book I've written.

JC: Oh.

Lorrie: Nice.

JC: You could just count the tattoos if you... Yeah.

Cecilia: I should be able to do that, except that then I just did one big one for that serial, so that was a little bit different. Then there's non-fiction books, and it's like, 'Do you count those?' When people say, "How many books," do you just mean novels or whatever?

Lorrie: No.

Cecilia: *The Binge Watcher's Guide* is one of my nonfiction books. I have also some nonfiction books about baseball and whatever, but the thing that I keep forgetting to tell people is that *The Binge Watcher's Guide* actually won an award also.

JC: Oh.

Cecilia: It won an IPPY Award, an independent publisher award, in the pop culture category. Actually, the new paperback has a little, teeny replica of the medal on it.

Lorrie: Oh, I see. Yeah.

Cecilia: I don't talk about this book very much because nowadays I don't talk about *Harry Potter* very much, so I've never really trumpeted how this book won an award in the way that I would have in 2018, say. Yeah, it's been hard. My natural instinct is to be a tireless self-promoter. That's the life of a creative these days, is that you're constantly putting yourself out there and talking about what you did or people don't know. My mom knows.

JC: Oh, wow. I would really love to hear you start off by talking about how you found *Harry Potter* in the first place, and what it's meant to you in your life.

Cecilia: I was working a day job in book publishing, a nine-to-five kind of job, when the first book came out. I want to say I ended up getting a book club edition of it. You know how there used to be the Quality Paperback Book Club, and you had to write to them to say, "Don't send me this month's book" if you didn't want it? I forgot to say "don't send it" and it came, and I was like, 'Oh, what's this?' I was already established as a science fiction writer in science fiction and fantasy, and of course, being a book publishing person, I was like, 'This book's got a lot of buzz. Let's see what it's all about.' I quickly, completely forgot all about, 'Oh, you're reading this for research or for buzz or whatever.' By page two, you're just so sucked into poor orphan Harry's problems and whatnot. I think I read it in maybe one sitting; maybe I walked around, eating with one hand while reading the book with the other kind of thing. Then Corwin, my partner, was on a business trip at the time, and then he came home that night or the next night and he felt kind of crummy and he had a headache. He didn't want to sit up and read; he's just feeling whiny and miserable, and I'm like, "Lie in bed, and I'm going to read you a story." Normally when I say that, it's a much more adult story. I was like, "This is a kid's story." I read him the first couple of chapters, and then the next night he read me a chapter; then we ended up reading all seven books to each other that way, where every night before bed, we would read a couple of chapters, trading off

who was reading. We've never done that with any other book, and we didn't then be like, "Which book are we going to read next like that?" No, we didn't. It was a special thing that was a *Harry Potter*-only thing. Then in the mid 2000s, early 2000s, my career was in a bit of a slump. We went through the post-Clinton years where there was right-wing backlash and erotica was getting harder and harder to market, and my agent was basically like, "Nothing's selling." Three different proposals didn't get sold, and I was like, 'All right, maybe I'm just going to concentrate on being an editor for a while.' I had written a piece of *Harry Potter* slash at that point, almost as a joke. I say 'almost' because it was, in my mind, a fairly serious thing, but I read it aloud at readings. It was a Harry/Snape piece, and I wrote it in order to read it aloud at readings to freak people out. I knew from way back about Kirk/Spock slash and all that kind of thing, and of course being in erotic science fiction, slash fiction often came up in conversation. The whole story of women's empowerment -- not just women, but marginalized people's empowerment -- through their erotic freedom was a big, central part of my career path and so forth and, like many of my forebears, channeled it into this erotic fandom when they couldn't do it openly some other way. I'm one of the few people who was like, 'I'm just going to found a whole publishing house to publish original erotic science fiction, because I feel like it's an important thing and it's a missing piece.' People keep telling me, "Oh, no, no, you can't put erotica and science fiction together because the world will end if the peanut butter and the chocolate touch each other." Then, of course, as soon as I put the peanut butter and the chocolate together, people were like, "Oh, it's delicious!" So that's literally how it happened: I founded Circler Press, I published one chapbook, and all of a sudden people were like, "Oh. Actually, yeah, maybe these things can work." I don't know why it had to be me. If I didn't do it, someone else would have done it, but I was the one who had worked in book publishing and knew how it went, and I had stories that I couldn't sell anywhere else. All the science fiction places said, "We don't take anything erotic," and all the erotica and porn places that would take all kinds of crazy stuff were like, "Oh, no, no, no, but no science fiction." I'm like, "Why?" It was like the geeks and the jocks could never get along or something. I don't know. I don't know why there was this divide. Actually, I do know, because I ended up writing a master's thesis about it, but that would take all day to explain. Sociologically, though, these two things could not come together until the postmodern age and the 90s. I started writing *Harry Potter* fanfic more seriously, more regularly after. I kept reading this story at cons and things, and people kept coming up to me, like, "This is such a good piece of slash. You should really post it to LiveJournal or somewhere." I had friends who were on LiveJournal; I had just not gotten around to it or whatever, so I started my fic journal, actually, before I started my real person journal. Then my career wasn't going anywhere, and I needed to stay in shape. I wanted to keep the writing habit going; it's like use it or lose it, and I think I wrote something crazy like a half a million words of *Harry Potter* fanfic that first year. You can go back and look at any of the word counts on the thing. I thought to myself: okay, first of all, I thought that going to grad school and getting a master's in writing -- which I had done in the early 90s -- was going to be a test of whether I could write enough to keep up; you write a tenth of that in grad school. So yeah, I was like, 'Oh I could be producing so much more.' When I am really into what I am writing, I can write a lot more words than, I don't know, that literary expectation that you were going to carefully craft a couple sentences a day and take a comma out or whatever. I don't know where that idea comes from. I guess it comes from anecdotes about F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway, and that's why we have a small handful of masterpiece books from each of them and not fifty books. I would rather write fifty books that reach many, many more people than spend my entire life just trying to write five good books and then die. Do you know what I mean? That's not how we do it these days, guys.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: At one point, I always said I can't write romance. I write erotica, but I don't write romance. I had drunk the Kool-Aid of the 80s, 90s that said that romance was somehow a lesser form than other fiction, and of course we know now that the only reason people thought that is purely misogyny. There's plenty of bad, hack formulaic mystery. All genres have a range of literary greatness, too; it's just fun and mixes the tropes together. But somehow, independent bookstores would be like, "Oh, yes, we have our Science Fiction over here and our Mystery over here. Oh, we don't carry Romance, no." In fact, they would have an Erotica shelf.

Lorrie: Yeah, that's right.

Cecilia: But they wouldn't have a Romance shelf, as if somehow Romance was trash. I'm just like, "Do you hear yourself? The one genre that's written mostly by women for women is the one genre that you've decided is trash and everything else is fine? How did you get to that place?" Oh, guess what? Generations of misogyny. Being a punk from the 80s, I was like, 'I can't write romance. I'm too cynical. I'm too this, I'm too that.'" Then I wrote a Harry/Draco time travel romance for a fest, where I didn't even realize it was going to be a romance exactly. I didn't know how it was going to turn out. It was one of these "write a chapter every day" challenges with a different prompt or something. I can't remember exactly what the rules were in that fest, but I was like, 'Where is this coming from?' My agent calls me one day, and she's like, "Okay, I know we haven't talked in a while and everything's been slumpy, but what have you been up to?" and I'm like, "I just wrote a Harry/Draco time travel romance." And when I was done with it, it was exactly 80,000 words and it had a three-act structure, and she's like, "Great, I can start selling into Romance now." I'm like, "What?!" That was right when the ebook boom was starting, and she was like, "There's lots of presses now who are doing cool stuff. Can you write me something that isn't obviously copyright infringement?" I did a couple of romances for digital-first publishers, and at that time the money was extremely good, because that was before Amazon figured out how to keep most of the money for themselves; people were buying ebooks for decent amounts of money. She said, "You need to write next. You need to write, basically, your version of *Harry Potter*," and that became the Magic University series. She was like, "Make them grown-up," and I'm like, "If you think that a large portion of the fanfic we write isn't about what happens after they left Hogwarts..." There is that whole question of 'what is wizarding higher education?' How did Snape become a Potions Master if supposedly education... She said a couple of times, "Oh, no, I decided that wizarding education would end at high school, and then you would go into the trades or whatever." I'm like, "So Snape became a Potions Masters through a correspondence course? I don't think so." Clearly, there's an implication that there is a higher level. Of course, lots of us wrote fics about what wizarding college would be like, and I was like, "Okay, I'm going to write my version of wizarding college, but I'm just going to put it at Harvard; it's going to be a hidden magical university inside Harvard and hijinks ensue." I did not know at the time how important it was that I have main characters who are trans or who change gender and don't use the same labels we do because they're magical, and I did not know then that the whole series would end up getting another life after J.K. Rowling declared herself to be what she is now, which is... What do they call it? 'Gender critical'? We just call it 'trans-exclusive.' They are not trans-inclusive, they are not trans-friendly; they are the opposite. The series has gotten a new life because people keep finding it and being like, "I want something that feels like *Harry Potter*, but where I know that trans people are welcome," and that's what I already got. Okay. I didn't know I was so far ahead of the curve, but once I started

writing fanfic, it was like I could have just written some fanfic and then moved on. Those are the days when they were like, "Oh, you're not supposed to tell people." When some people would go pro, they were told by their publishers, "Oh, now you have to take down all your fics and you have to erase your name from the obelisks." It was the stupidest thing, honestly. You have a built-in audience and you've literally built a community of readers who love your work. Why would you throw that away? But publishers didn't understand the digital realm at all. They thought it would somehow lead to increased piracy or something; they didn't even know what piracy was. I just stayed embedded in fandom: I started going to *Harry Potter* conventions, I started speaking at things, I started doing cosplay, all that stuff because *Harry Potter* was my church, basically. I'm not a church-going person, but *Harry Potter* was the book that brought us all together and we learned all the songs. A subculture was built. I used to say to people, basically, that *Harry Potter* isn't a fandom; it's a lifestyle. Then came, of course, you could start buying *Harry Potter* merch in Hot Topic and places like that; before that, there were people on Etsy or people selling scarves from their LiveJournal pages, and we all knew who to go to. "Oh, so-and-so's making these cool pins," and it's that whole fan economy. I was just really, really embedded in that, and I was not planning to leave this fandom. Little did I know that the creator was going to drive a stake through its heart. So that's me and *Harry Potter* fandom in a nutshell, I guess.

Lorrie: You said that early on, when you wrote your first Harry/Snape, that you read it aloud at gatherings to freak people out. What was it that freaked people out about that at the time?

Cecilia: Well, there were at that time -- this is the early 2000s. Before the mainstream knew about fanfic and before the mainstream knew about slash, it was still an underground thing. This whole concept that, first of all, you would write about *Harry Potter* having sex was very transgressive to begin with. They're like, "But it's a children's book!" Of course, they used to say to me, "Oh, you can't put science fiction or fantasy of any kind together with erotica because it's for kids." I'm like, "Have you noticed that science fiction and fantasy are, in fact, not for kids? They've actually never been for kids." There were maybe the Heinlein juveniles and so forth, but for the most part, this idea that you're supposed to stop being imaginative when you grow up went out the window in the 1960s, but people keep trying to bring this idea back. Now there's all the people who want to criticize Disney adults.

Lorrie: Yes, yes.

Cecilia: Somehow it's bad, and I'm like, "Excuse me, have you not noticed that, in fact, human beings can derive joy from many things?" I keep bringing it back to parallels with sports fandom. Almost nobody (except for the very, very farthest edge curmudgeon) says, "You shouldn't enjoy watching sports because these are games that should be played by children," as if only children can play baseball or basketball. It's as if adults didn't invent these games and create professional leagues out of them, and so forth and so on. The only reason why people don't treat it like that is because people understand that sports fandom is an important part, literally, of their lives, of their familial relationships. People pass sports fandom down from father to son and mother to daughter and so forth and so on, and it's this ongoing thing. Which soccer club you root for in England goes back for generations; people move from city to city here, but they remain loyal to the Red Sox or to the Giants or whoever, and nobody's like, "Oh, that's childish, you shouldn't do that." Somehow sports fans get a pass, but science fiction and fantasy fandoms are still new enough in our social direction that there are still people who will be like, "Nah, this is for kids. Disney adults, bah! Get off my lawn!" Let people enjoy what they enjoy.

Lorrie: This is where I interject to say that Cecilia knows lots about sports and sports fandom.

Cecilia: Yes. My other day job is editing *The Baseball Research Journal*, which is an academic journal about baseball. Baseball history and statistics, yeah.

JC: Wow.

Cecilia: Yeah, yeah. So the thing about *Harry Potter* is that *Harry Potter* was the first fantasy and science fiction-y type thing after *Star Wars*. *Star Wars*, when I was a kid, had a burst of mainstream... I don't know. Everyone knew who Luke Skywalker was, whereas not everybody at that time knew who Frodo Baggins was, and *Harry Potter* was the first thing that I could go into any bookstore anywhere and start a conversation about *Harry Potter* with somebody.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Sports fandom is similar. I can go into a bar, certainly anywhere in the United States, and start a conversation about baseball. Now I know, anywhere in the world, I can talk about whatever sport is their local sport and be like, "Oh, tell me about so-and-so," and there's always some story about how so-and-so the coach is blah blah blah. It's a soap opera that people get involved with, and sports is a way for people to express their emotions in a socially sanctioned way. This is something that you're allowed to express joy, express whatever, when -- especially in post-world War II, English-speaking countries -- you are not really allowed to express yourself to your loved ones otherwise. And certainly in many Asian cultures, there's also that. You don't show your emotions, except when your team wins; then you can jump up and down and scream and cry, or even when they lose, perhaps. Millions of sociology papers have been written about that, and I feel like our participation in fandom is the late 20th century and 21st century way of doing a similar thing: you have an emotional response to the thing you have experienced. The difference is that in sports, you don't know what's going to happen -- it's literally not scripted, it's really dependent on fate and whim -- whereas something that's a fandom that's based on stories, there is a creator there who is pulling the strings. When you look at what's happened with *Star Wars* now, it's proliferated out into multiple television series spin-offs and movies and books. It's such a huge world, and you can enter it at every different level. There's animated ones that are aimed at younger kids. For many people, *Star Wars* is a way of life now; it permeates their culture. *Harry Potter* was definitely something that, for a while, was so ubiquitous in our culture. I go back and I read the *Binge Watcher's Guide* now and I'm like, 'Oh, my God.' You can see how far it's fallen from that moment. I wrote this when it was at a peak, and the reason it didn't keep going up and turn into a full-blown religion is because of J.K. Rowling. Perhaps there's a way in which that's a course correction, and maybe *Harry Potter* was never meant to be a full-on religious way of life, but I don't know. Who can say, two hundred years from now, which things are going to still hold significance?

Lorrie: I want to ask: how do you identify for gender, sexuality, and any other identification you care to throw in there?

Cecilia: So I am a biracial, bisexual, bi-gendered switch.

Lorrie: Okay.

Cecilia: You can put those words in any order you want, really, but I am Chinese, Filipino, Irish, Welsh. I've always had the double consciousness of insider/outsider, white/not white, born here from immigrant parents. That's several different layers of double consciousness. Then there's

the queer consciousness, where it's straight/not straight. I've always had these gender identification issues where I was convinced at some point in my youth that I was supposed to be born a boy and it just didn't work out somehow, and I'm like, 'You've got to make do with what you got.' I have always been happy with.... I've always been able to live in the body that I'm in, but I often find myself being like, 'Wait.' There's almost double vision sometimes where I'm like, 'This is not me, but in a parallel universe... whatever. Okay, fine.' But I contain multitudes, so undoubtedly one of the reasons I'm a writer is because then all these different aspects of me can come out in many different ways. I use the term 'bi-gendered'. I am not trans, because I am not crossing over to anything; I'm not going anywhere. I am the way I am. Maybe, because of all my different identities that have that double consciousness -- that's where I end up feeling comfortable -- then that's where I've stayed. The classic idea is that the bisexual is some kind of fence-sitter between the gay and the straight. First of all, we didn't even have these categories and some cultures still don't, so the question is, 'Do I need another category that contains me, or do I get to exist where the Venn diagram overlaps?' I know people want to say that there's no overlap, but of course it's a spectrum. Like many things in human existence, there are not just two boxes or three or whatever; it is a spectrum, and then, of course, things can move you up and down the spectrum at different times. Yeah, I've just always been in that middle space in the Venn diagram.

Lorrie: How would you differentiate between non-binary and bi-gender? Is there a difference?

Cecilia: I'm not sure there is a difference. We also have this conversation, 'Is bisexual the same thing as pansexual?'

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: And I think it probably is, and when we get down to the nitty-gritty of what these words mean, the words are too new for us to know because every person uses them slightly differently. If I were 20 years younger, I would probably label myself 'non-binary'; that word is still really new to me, but the identity is probably similar, so yeah. The way I used to describe myself -- the term we used to use in the early 90s -- was 'androgynous.' I have aspects of male and female, but I'm neither, but people are like, "But what pronouns do you use?" and I'm like, "Pronouns are for you, not for me." I'm going to keep using 'she', because I don't have the energy to have this fight with society every single day about pronouns. I'm going to keep using 'she', but 'they' has always fit me better. I contain multitudes; there are literally more than one of me in here, and I've always written in the 'we': the royal 'we', the editorial 'we'. It's always been us doing things; it's always been me and my characters doing things, so forth.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: 'They' would make perfect sense, but I don't necessarily expect people in society in general to be dealing with all of me at once. They only see one face at a time, so they can pick a singular pronoun, and I don't care which one it is. 'He' works, too.

Lorrie: This is where I say that Cecilia also knows lots about linguistics.

Cecilia: Yes. Yeah, my undergraduate degree is in linguistics and cognitive science, and who knew that it was going to be so relevant to so many things. Actually, I kind of did know that as a writer, it was probably going to come in handy. It's a little bit psychology, a little bit neurology, a little bit... Yeah. I've always gotten a lot of mileage out of that degree.

Lorrie: So here I was, writing about *Harry Potter* in my own way, when Rowling decided that she was going to return to Twitter in December 2019 because she suddenly had something to say and it was about trans people. And when that started happening, I remember going online and saying, 'Well, now what do I do?' I knew you had been working on a book, which we now know is called *The Binge Watcher's Guide to the Harry Potter Films*, and I thought, 'Oh.' It was so painful. I bought the book when it was published, but I couldn't bring myself to read it until recently. I just looked up the publication date and it's June 2020. Even though TERFpocalypse -- even though Rowling had been (for six or seven months) already publicly saying some transphobic things, June 2020 was when it really got intense and made international news.

Cecilia: Yeah.

Lorrie: And that was when your book hit publication.

Cecilia: Yep. Exactly.

Lorrie: What? Yeah. What?!

JC: That had to have been really... The timing could not be shittier.

Cecilia: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

JC: Oh, my God.

Cecilia: It took the legs right out from under me. I would have normally done a blog tour and an Ask Me Anything on various *Harry Potter* websites and Reddit, and I did none of it. I went into a hole and was just like, "All right, that's it." Stuck my head in the sand and was like, 'That book is the publisher's problem now,' and they talked about it. They didn't feel like they could really promote it the way they wanted to, because it might be seen to be.... Riverdale Avenue Books -- who publishes *The Binge Watcher's Guides* -- they publish Magnus Books, which is a queer imprint, and they publish the work of Riki Anne Wilchins, for example, who is a big long-time trans advocate. They just published a book of hers that is basically all interviews with families of trans children, some of whom are like, "We're moving out of the state that we're in because we all of a sudden can't get health care for our kids," or "we're afraid our kids are going to be attacked at school." At the time when we're recording this, just yesterday news came out about Nex Benedict, a non-binary youth who died most likely as a result of injuries received while being bashed.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And it's heartbreaking, absolutely heartbreaking. I was writing it in early 2019; that summer, I actually threw a binge-watching party to play-test the recipes and everything the book includes. Basically, if you want to binge all eight movies, here's how to do it either in one day or over the course of two days -- on a Saturday, Sunday. Then a bunch of our mutual friends came over and ate my food, watched the movies and played the drinking games, because of course they were drinking games. The drink can just be non-alcoholic butterbeer or whatever, but one of the rules is 'decide before you start your binge watch whether you're going to allow people to snark during the films or not'. I would say that most *Harry Potter* fans... we've always been a very critical fandom. Part of what made the fandom so strong, honestly, is because everyone's got issues with certain choices made in the books. Long before we knew anything about her politics or anything, everybody has a beef with *Harry Potter* but also loves it. That's baked into it.

The fact that LiveJournal and the rise of internet adoption overall parallels the writing of the books and the rise of the fandom is not a coincidence. I think I have some statistics in the book where I say when the first movie came out, only forty percent of Americans were online; by the time the last book comes out, almost everybody is online. Smartphones have come along, but when it first started, some people still didn't have email. The whole world changed in the course of that ten years.

Lorrie: Yeah. That part of the book where you have statistics... That hurt me to read, because I saw how much effort you put into this, that you cared. You cared about the history of this fandom and what it meant for the culture. There was love, there was joy.

Cecilia: Yeah.

Lorrie: What kind of emotional backlash did you have in yourself when the trans-exclusive tweets started?

Cecilia: Well, I don't know if you know this because I don't know how much you cross over into the wizard rock world, but there's the Wizardrocklopedia. It's a wiki about wizard rock, and many, many wizard rockers (as with many, many slash writers and whatever) are trans folk who discovered their trans identities through *Harry Potter* cosplay. A not-insignificant number of people discovered their trans identities through *Harry Potter* roleplay and *Harry Potter* cosplay, because *Harry Potter* was so big and such a big part of our lives. I was trying to make a list of the people I knew on LiveJournal who went through transition, and it was so long that I gave up.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: It's a demographic, not just a few people we knew.

Lorrie: Yes.

Cecilia: They asked me if I would write an article on the wrock wiki about what, up to then, was the TERFpocalypse. Of course there's been new chapters written since, but at the time when she first published the essay, I went back and put the whole timeline together from "here's where we first started to suspect that maybe things were not so great." Many people held out hope that lots of people make stupid statements or whatever and then they get educated. No. Of course, what we saw was continual doubling down until we eventually got to the root of the problem, which is her underlying fears: how J.K. Rowling became her own villain. Voldemort's whole problem was that he had all these childhood fears; he would rather destroy the entire world and control everyone in order to keep these things from ever coming true than just deal with it, because, of course, there's no therapy or counseling in the wizarding world, apparently. Apparently not in J.K. Rowling's world, either, because if she just dealt with her shit, she could be such a more enlightened human being. Instead, she just doubles down on her fear of men, her fear of trans people, her... Ugh, anyway. My degree is not in psychology; it's in cognitive science. I am not a trained psychologist and I've never met her personally, so all of this is, of course, built on our interpretations of her statements and so forth. But more incisive therapists have done quite detailed breakdowns of what they think, just like we've done detailed breakdowns of what we think is wrong with Donald Trump. Honestly, by June of 2020, we'd been in lockdown for three months already.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: It was like, okay, what else can go wrong? Part of me was almost like, 'Maybe it's time to quit thinking about *Harry Potter*, because the real world is such a big tough place and we are going to have to put on our big boy pants to deal with it all. Maybe those idiots are correct that this is a kid's thing and that adults need to be in charge,' and clearly adults are not in charge. Adults are not taking care of what they're supposed to be taking care of; our governments are not doing the things they're supposed to be doing. But, of course, I was deeply depressed, like many people in 2020.

JC: It was awful at that time, too, to have yet one more thing taken away.

Cecilia: Right, exactly.

JC: People who had been probably paying more attention didn't see it as suddenly being taken away, but I think for me, just in the course of a few months, *Harry Potter* went from a thing that was still a big part of my life to something that I was like, 'I don't think I can engage with this anymore. Maybe ever again.' That, on top of everything else that was going on.

Cecilia: Yeah.

JC: And you had even more.

Cecilia: And we know people who went out and cut their ties into pieces and burned their books. Yeah, okay, we were all very raw and emotional because a global trauma was occurring at the time. Part of me was like, 'Why is this one hitting so much harder, too, though?' Because she's said dumb shit before. She had put her foot in her mouth multiple times, and we had already been through the whole thing of 'it's not gay inclusion if you don't tell us the character is gay until later.' Like with the whole Dumbledore announcement, where she was like, 'Oh, yes, it was always my plan,' and then you go back and you read that first description of Dumbledore and he's got purple sparkly boots and you're just like, 'Oh, my God, so you just put in what to you, a straight person, seem to be gay signifiers, but to us are actually pretty terrible clichés.' When does something cross over from trope to cliché? I know, it's a debate, but part of why you can never take anything she writes in the book seriously -- and then you can never believe anything she says later about it -- is because the *Harry Potter* books, honestly, are satire. They are a satire of the British school system; they are a satire of the class system and so forth and so on. When the books are at their best, which I really feel are the early books, that's why they're funny. That's why kids love them, because even if they don't know what the issues are, they feel somebody's being made fun of here.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Of course, there's also a lot of fatphobia; she's making fun of a lot of people who it's not politically correct to make fun of, but kids love it when somebody's being made fun of. And as long as it's politicians that are being made fun of, we're fine with it. She always said, "I'm not a good world-builder. I'm not really a fantasy writer." There's stuff in there like the one scene where there's a vampire. You guys are familiar with this, right?

Lorrie: Yes.

Cecilia: Harry goes to a party and there's this one vampire standing there with a glass of red wine, looking at it sadly because obviously he wants blood instead of Merlot or whatever it is, and that's just a throwaway. We never hear about the vampires again; the vampires don't come

back in the wizarding war as an important plot point, nothing. It's in there to make fun of something. It's in there to make fun of wine snobs or whatever she felt like making fun of that day. Part of the delight of the books is that there's so much in there, but this is also why there's so much fanfic because we're like, 'Wait, you never explained this, so I'm going to take this little throwaway thing and I'm going to explain it.' The books are so incomplete in some ways that that's why there was this huge door for us to barrel through and set up our tents. There are fantasy worlds that don't feel that way. Everything feels complete, and you're just like, 'Oh, that's a nice little fantasy world over there,' and we didn't feel the need to go in with our hammers and chisels and change it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

JC: Build a whole new town. Town hall, school.

Cecilia: Exactly. A whole university, a whole whatever.

JC: Yeah.

Lorrie: Did you end up reading the gender manifesto essay on her website?

Cecilia: I think I did eventually read it, but I had to read it piece by piece essentially. First, I read it through your eyes and other people's eyes. Several people I follow on Twitter -- this is back when Twitter was functional --

Lorrie: Yes.

Cecilia: Would take apart different pieces of it, but then when I wrote the wizard rock thing, I'm like, 'I have to go and read it.' There's a trans YouTuber named ContraPoints who does long video essays about all kinds of stuff and has an hour-long breakdown of the reaction to it, and every paragraph [is] a different thing. First, I saw everyone else's reactions to it before, because every time I tried to read it, I bounced off, essentially. I was like, 'I can't even engage with this.' Yeah, eventually I dug down and was like, 'All right, now it's my job to read it.' For a while, I was just leaving comments for people like, "Thank you for reading it so the rest of us don't have to," because I was like, 'I can't be the one this time,' but then eventually I had to do it. Now I've blocked most of it out again, because now it's also been superseded by additional comments. Right at the time when we're recording this, she just, this past week, had a whole thing of basically Nazi denialism.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Where someone was talking about how the Nazis literally burned everything from the institute -- all the research -- and most likely killed the trans librarian and researcher, and Rowling says to this person, "In your fantasies! You're making that up." We're not making it up; it's history, lady! Now at this point, she, just like many right-wing fascist supporters, can't believe in facts anymore because they contravene her worldview now. Her worldview is so set and ossified that she can't take in actual facts.

Lorrie: Yeah. About a year ago I was part of the organizing committee for MISTICon, which is a Harry Potter convention, and we all felt so grateful and happy to have you as a member of the community because you came; you offered programming; your presence there was such an important part, you led programming that helped people enjoy. But I think all of us, including on

the organizing committee, were not sure until the event actually started if it was going to work or if we were all too broken.

Cecilia: Yep. Yep. Yep.

Lorrie: What about you? Had you made any decisions about being in *Harry Potter* fandom or not, or was it just how you felt that day? How did you decide that you were going to go to this event?

Cecilia: I knew that as soon as there was any noise about a MISTI reunion that I wanted to be there, but I feel like because of what this fandom has been through essentially, we've gone back into the closet in a way.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Of course, I've spent my entire life -- every time I see a closet door -- kicking it down, but this time we're putting ourselves in the closet, because we don't want our open support of *Harry Potter* to seem as if we are supporting J.K. Rowling's political views. There are people who use it as a way to seem like wearing a Gryffindor scarf now can be some kind of anti-trans dog whistle, and it's just like, oh, that's so gross. You can find them on the internet, people going around sticking anti-trans manifestos onto phone poles in Brooklyn under the name 'Dumbledore's Army'.

Lorrie: Oh, gosh.

Cecilia: Yeah, it's bad. It's like, 'Oh, God, couldn't you guys have latched onto some other fandom?' But no; no, they can't, because the leader has agglomerated all these anti-trans voices who use her as a symbol, and those people read *Harry Potter*, too. Yeah. I don't know if you've read a really brilliant essay that Penny Red wrote recently.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Yeah. Laurie Penny has a great essay that was in the British Museum's book on their fantasy display. They just did a fantasy exhibit where she boils it down really beautifully to two sentences, three sentences, where she basically says the reason we all loved *Harry Potter* in the 90s was because we still believed in this dream that the British (but also the U.S.) government was feeding us about liberalism: if we had our token multiculturalism but everyone essentially stayed in their class places, it was all going to work out and we would have our happy ending. Of course, now we know that those promises have all betrayed us. Now we know that racism is still alive and well, that class division is only getting deeper, so forth and so on. She's like, 'That's why no one loves *Harry Potter* anymore. We have all sadly been forced to grow up and reckon with the fact that none of these promises came true, that the promises were a lie.' I'm like, 'Holy crap. Yeah, I think you're correct.' As a member of Generation X, I've been thinking for a long time that we squandered the Clinton years essentially. We thought we won; once we got rid of Ronald Reagan, it's like, 'Okay, we've made it.' No. Remember when Hillary Clinton went on the *Today Show* or *Good Morning America* and she said there was a vast right-wing conspiracy? She was correct.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: She was absolutely correct.

JC: She's been correct about a lot of things.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: There was, in fact, a vast right-wing conspiracy that was gradually dismantling everything that was good about post-war America and trying to re-establish everything that was terrible about it. We just had the Voting Rights Act gutted by Supreme Court justices who are like, 'A Black man was president, so there's no racism anymore.' Now, of course, we know -- beyond any shadow of a doubt -- that the court is extremely corrupt and has been bought off by lobbyists the same way that senators are bought off.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: It's like, 'What?!' The underpinnings of all our institutions are crumbling, and like I said, we've all got to put our big boy pants on. But yeah, when I went to MISTICon, I didn't know what was going to happen either, honestly. I was like, 'Is this fandom... Is this going to be a last goodbye, or are we going to find real solace in each other?' I found that weekend to just be really healing, where it's like, 'You know what? The thing that brought us together was our belief in creativity and goodness, and that good-hearted people can, in fact -- even when they don't have all the answers -- still make positive change.' That's the message we all were taking from those books. Even though Harry is absolutely a dumbass a lot of the time and really does not know what's going on, he powers through by his moral strength and eventually comes to question some of the things he does, but it ends when he's seventeen, so he never really finishes that arc. I don't believe the epilogue actually existed. The author needs to have a beacon to swim towards, but the beacon doesn't have to be in the book. Anyway... She wrote seven books, but really she wrote one.

JC: It's like if you read a fanfic, and at the end of it somebody puts in the end notes, "And then what happens next is this and this and this and this. BOOM!"

Cecilia: Right, and then it's like, 'Nah.' Until you have actually written those nineteen years intervening, I don't believe that this is what really happened, because stuff changes when you're in the middle of... She talked about how things had to change as she went along. There was originally going to be more of Draco's point of view, she talks about, which of course, some of us are like, 'Someone please find those notes, because I really want to know.' She went back and forth on Draco's character so many times. There was a point where the films were starting to get popular, and Draco basically goes from being a major antagonist in the books to... He disappears for a little while.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And she talked about how she felt people were liking Draco too much, and that the only reason that they liked him so much is because Tom Felton was so appealing as a human being.

Lorrie: Yeah. That wasn't it.

Cecilia: It was not it.

Lorrie: No.

Cecilia: But she never understood why people like Snape, either.

Lorrie: Not that Tom Felton is not appealing, but that wasn't it.

Cecilia: Right. Exactly, but that's not why people are suddenly becoming Draco fans, because of the movies. The person who, in fact, was the most affected by the movies and changed what she did was her.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah.

Cecilia: But yeah. Draco disappears, but he's already been woven into the fabric to be too important. In book six, he suddenly has to become super important again, and she's forgotten how to write him by then because she's been too busy with other characters and trying to suppress people's love of him. That was the first warning sign to me that this was not a creator who had a healthy relationship with either her fandom or her books: these statements that were essentially, "I'm trying to control what people think about..." I'm like, 'You put it on the page, but what people take from it, you can't control.'

Lorrie: I guess, though, at the scale that she was getting, I have to feel like any writer gets weirded out whenever there's a mass response to something you've put out there. That's just the nature of it.

Cecilia: Probably, but you have to realize that once you've put it down and put it out into the world, it's like a child; you don't get to control them anymore. They've left the nest, but we of course know plenty of parents who try desperately to control their children's lives right up until their children are retirement age. I know people who are still in these control fights with their parents, and I'm like, 'You've got to let 'em go.' You put into them everything you can. You cannot control the reader.

Lorrie: You can't.

Cecilia: Reading is actually a form of performance art where you, the writer, are providing the script, but the reader creates the performance in their mind.

Lorrie: Would you say that the *Harry Potter* fandom is more trans than fandoms of some other source materials, or is it just all fandom?

Cecilia: Is *Harry Potter* more trans than other fandom? I think it is. I've been in a couple of other fandoms, and maybe some of that is just because I spent so much time in... The slash writing community, first of all, which is very not only open to experimentation with identity and so forth, is part of the point -- I feel, for a lot of people -- the reason they are writing slash. As an editor of professional fiction where people were writing erotica, many, many, many of my authors went through transition after writing from a different point of view and realizing, "I'm on to something. I've discovered something about myself through writing this story. Oh, I'll write more." Numerous, numerous authors. I feel like that was going to happen, especially when you had a very, very female-forward fandom. Never female-exclusive. It's never all about women, because the mainstream media wants to be like, "Oh, slash is straight women writing gay men," and I'm like, "It's so much more complicated than that."

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: But of course, you're going to reduce it to that because that's what gets the clicks. It's like, 'Ooh, soccer moms are into butt fucking,' and it's like, 'Yes, yes, they are. Are you surprised by this?' I don't know, people are continually surprised by the depth and breadth of human

sexuality. Don't even get me started on *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was a *Twilight* fanfic essentially where they just took the vampire part out. Just replace vampirism with sadism and BOOM, not a surprise. But the thing about *Harry Potter* fandom in particular is that over time -- with everything taking place in society first of all -- overall, I think we were in a period where there was a big rise in trans identity. The generational changes that were taking place had that going on. For example, to contrast *Harry Potter* fanfic fandom to *Twilight* fanfic fandom, the *Twilight* fandom (like the *Twilight* books) was much more interested in upholding a heteronormative dynamic, whereas the Potter books -- which were not romances, because they were about all this other stuff and we're the ones putting the romance in -- we put much more queer stuff in basically, much, much more queer stuff. Because it was a female-forward fandom with male-forward cast, you had a lot more people discovering the transition in that direction, which is not to say we didn't have plenty of people going the other way also (which we also do). There are so many things in there that encourage you: Polyjuice... there's all these things that are about transformation and the way the characters could transform themselves that we were like, 'This is being underutilized.' Animagi -- the Marauders all becoming Animagi -- is this idea that, through magic, you could transform yourself drastically. Of course, anyone who's feeling either dysphoric about their own body or out of place in society is going to glom on to that kind of thing. I feel like it was, if not more trans people in the fandom, much more trans-forward. I know many, many more trans people who were leaders in the fanfic community and in the con-running community than I do in other fan communities, because there was a way in which gender identity and change of identity was central to our fandom ideas in a way that it isn't necessarily central to every other fandom.

Lorrie: What I had noticed -- after the pandemic started to ease and we started having *Harry Potter* gatherings again -- was the ones I was going to were so overtly pro-trans, trans-centric, trans-led.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: And I was wondering: I wasn't sure I agreed with Penny Red's observation that people don't love *Harry Potter* anymore. The phenomenon that I've encountered when I've talked to people -- like my sensitivity reader for my *Snape* book, Charles Waltz, who was definitely one of the people that had explored different gender identities through *Harry Potter* fandom before transitioning -- was after we talked about the storm of emotion following J.K. Rowling's thoughts about trans people. After that, when we talked about the actual content of the series, there was a renewal or a reconnection to the original joy of just the story. That was actually something that I think people had been sad about saying goodbye to, and that when you re-enter it, it's actually still there for me and I found for some other people, too. To that, when you were writing *Binge Watcher's Guide*, and after TERFpocalypse when you've thought about it, is that something that's been true of you or has the love in you changed for it? Or is it still there?

Cecilia: The love is still there, and why I call it a closet is because what's not there anymore is the open, public display of it. I'm a boycotter. I don't do anything that puts money into J.K. Rowling's pocket, so I won't go to Universal. I will not go to see the play again. On the other hand, if there's a local production of *Puffs*, which is an off-Broadway production of *Harry Potter* parody...

Lorrie: That I laughed out loud watching.

Cecilia: Yes. 'Seven Uneventful Years At A Certain College of Magic and Magic.' Yeah, it's fantastic and really, really fun, and clearly has deep love as well as deep criticisms of some things that go on in the books. I feel like there's so much media out there now that is essentially post-Potter; you can't write a magic school book now without engaging in some way with *Harry Potter*. There's a book out right now called *To Shape A Dragon's Breath* by Moniquill Blackgoose, which is essentially an anti-colonialist deconstruction of not only Harry Potter but the whole magic school trope and dragons, so just read it. It's really great. It just got on the finalist list for the Astounding Award, which is the Nebula Award for Young Adult, and it's really, really great. But yeah, you can't write a magic school book essentially without engaging with, somehow, that this nine-hundred-pound gorilla exists in your genre, but you're going to see people doing it because we have an entire generation who grew up writing and reading *Harry Potter* fanfic and deconstructing it in their minds constantly. You're seeing so much and sometimes it's very, very subtle, and other times... Somebody was saying to me you can read -- what's Casey McQuisten's book -- *Red, White, and Royal Blue* as a Harry/Draco AU, and I'm like, 'Oh, of course!' I don't think Casey thought of it that way probably when she was writing, but who knows? I don't know.

Lorrie: Well, she did have the *Harry Potter* references, which she then took out.

Cecilia: Right, which she then took out, because then she was like, "Yeah, these are," but they were in there to be in-jokes.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And it's like, 'All right, you know what? We don't need these in-jokes because we're in the know already.'

Lorrie: Well, it was a pre- and post-TERFpocalypse change.

Cecilia: Yeah, I know. There's lots of things that one can dig out, but all the tropes that exist in *Harry Potter* and in *Harry Potter* fanfic existed before that also. 'Enemies to lovers' was not invented by Harry/Draco fanfic. It just happens to be a really good one to do, because everyone knows that antagonistic relationship already. The fun of writing that fanfic is that even people who are only passingly familiar with *Harry Potter* understand the rivals kind of thing.

Lorrie: Do you love Draco Malfoy?

Cecilia: I love Draco Malfoy. I think Draco is... As soon as you start treating him as a real character and not as a satire representative of the upper classes -- as soon as you age him up the slightest bit or make him have any form of maturity -- his whole character changes. We had so many friends who hated him, hated him, hated him, hated him and couldn't understand why I wouldn't write more Snarry and why I kept writing more Harry/Draco. I'm like, "I'm writing both," but I wrote way more Harry/Draco in the end, and of course, they had read the books and so forth. But then when movie six came out, some of them basically came up to me afterward and they were like, "I never realized what Draco was going through." Yeah, he's the victim on their side, essentially. They're trying to make him into the Dark Side's Harry Potter, and all he wants is the approval of his parents.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: First, he wants the approval of his parents, and then as soon as Draco wants to become his own person at all, everything has to change. There were so many things in the filming of the movie where they kept trying to fix Draco's character, where they were like, 'This kid needs an arc in the films.' He starts to get lost because he gets lost in the books. There's one mention somewhere in one of the interviews around middle of movies four and five, where he's like, "I went from essentially co-star to extra." Tom Felton said this.

Lorrie: Yeah, yeah. It's true.

Cecilia: Right. Then he eventually comes back and has a bigger role, but ultimately the filmmakers decided that they couldn't overreach. There's an ending they filmed where Draco throws the wand to Harry before the final duel with Voldemort. There's a lot of stuff about who's got whose wand in that final book and movie; in the end, in the movie version, they never explain whose wand it is, where Harry gets it, and whatever. It's just, BAM, he has a wand and you're like, 'Okay.' It's such an important part of the *Deathly Hallows* -- whose wand is in charge of what and whatever -- and in the movies they just throw all that out the window because it's too subtle, so in the end you're like, 'Where does Harry get that wand?' 'I don't know. Movie magic.'

Lorrie: JC, do you also love Draco Malfoy?

JC: Yes, yes, I do. Yes, we've talked about this on the podcast already. I have so much love for Draco.

Cecilia: Yeah, yeah, and it's clear that J.K. Rowling did not. She didn't want to go there. Not that there wasn't plenty to do with Harry. Like I said, it's not a romance; it was not all about the two of them, but one of the most crucial moments in the entire series -- and I know you guys haven't gotten there yet -- is in the scene in Malfoy Manor, where Draco doesn't identify Harry.

Lorrie: Doesn't give him up.

JC: I'm clutching my heart.

Cecilia: This is the first time the two of them are seeing each other since Harry almost killed Draco in the bathroom.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: But is Harry thinking, 'Oh, shit, this is the kid that I literally almost killed, except Snape saved him, and what a psychopath I am'? No, he doesn't think that. Does he think, 'Oh, this is the kid, the last time we laid eyes on each other, I literally almost killed him. Now, he's going to get his revenge.' No, Harry has no thoughts of that kind at all. Harry is just like, 'Oh, that's Draco Malfoy,' but there's no internal thought at all and we never find out what Harry thinks about the fact that Draco then is like, 'No, I can't tell, I can't be sure.' Never, anywhere in the series, is there a thought of, 'Did Harry feel relieved at that moment?' We never know what Harry thinks about the fact that Draco did this, which I can only take as a sign that Harry is so traumatized by that point that Harry is not processing. How much of that is that J.K. Rowling was not processing by that point? She's like, 'I've got to write this damn thing and finish it off,' and that's why the body count is so high: she's just like, 'I've got to get rid of all these loose ends and bring this thing in for a landing.'

Lorrie: And you're talking like a writer. Yeah.

Cecilia: Yes. Yeah.

Lorrie: Definitely, [there are] people who wonder what ails *Deathly Hallows* who are not writers, and then there are people who are writers who look at the task of parking this giant thing.

Cecilia: Trying to bring it in for a landing, yup.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And breaking off as little of the fuselage as possible, but you have to meet the text where it is, too. On the one hand, as fanfic writers, we can rewrite our endings any way we want; as readers, as literary critics, we have to take the canon as it is and deal with it as it is. Tolkien's got lots of loose ends, too; more than *Harry Potter*, most likely, but when there's something of epic length, everybody doesn't get their neat arc, necessarily.

JC: It's funny. I'm not a writer by training at all, but as a fan, that doesn't bother me (having loose ends). I know it would bother a lot of people, but for me, that just leaves space for all of the fun that we can have in fandom.

Cecilia: Right. Right. Exactly.

JC: So yeah, it's funny that y'all are talking about the flaws of the book, and I'm like, 'Hmm.'

Cecilia: Right.

JC: Just open the door.

Lorrie: Well, Cecilia, in *Binge Watchers*, you do something that's a game that JC knows that I love to play, which is 'If I were her beta.'

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: There's a way that I deal with... A lot of *Harry Potter* fans will feel hostility toward Rowling. "She didn't write this the right way, she didn't give me the story I wanted, she made a mistake. I'm angry at her. Mom, how could you?" I try to think she's a person, although not somebody that I'm ever going to meet. 'If I were this person's beta, what suggestion would I make? This is what I think I might prefer based on where I think you're going,' but say it in a way that the other person can hear. Not for their sake -- they're never going to see this -- but just for me to feel some control. I wish I'd marked it, but there is a point in *Binge Watcher's Guide* where you literally do that, where you say, "After decades of editing, I think that I would say, 'Yeah, as her editor, I might have suggested this or that to her.'"

Cecilia: Right, right. And it's clear that as the series went on, they got less and less edited. The first three books are so tight; they're really, really well edited. First of all, as the movies and the books were both taking up her attention then, and as the deadlines for the books got more and more important because it was literally... I think her publisher was essentially telling her, "You can't miss your deadline, because if you do, the whole book industry will collapse." They were not overstating it too terribly much, honestly.

Lorrie: There was some truth to that.

Cecilia: We were at a stage where independent bookstores were closing in droves. We went from five thousand independent bookstores in this country to five hundred in this space of ten

years. That is a major change in an industry, and mostly those stores were replaced by Borders and Barnes and Noble. Now, of course, Borders is out of business, because guess what? People still want books. They still want to read them, and maybe books are not the greatest thing for the capitalist expansion urge. They have a low margin of profit, and you have to carry many, many, many of them to make everyone happy. Independent bookstores always got a huge lift out of every new Harry Potter release, because then it wouldn't be just the night of the release party; as more and more people came into the store to buy the book, it would lift sales for six months afterwards because of the number of people who had to keep coming in to pick up a copy. 'My nephew made off with it, I need to get another one'; and then while you're in the store, you bought ten other things. Foot traffic is king. Something that drew people into the stores, like a big bestseller like that, was gold. Think about the pressure that was on her shoulders. She was still technically a first novelist.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: She's writing one long series; even though it was broken into books, each one was still really her first time around. I can't imagine... I can imagine it, but I cannot imagine surviving the pressure that she was under, because I'm sure they were telling her. Then there was the big gap between books four and five; five is a giant tome because she was struggling and just trying to figure out, 'How does this come out?' I read all the interviews with Steve Kloves, who is the screenwriter. I've read absolutely every word that I could find, and he basically was like, "I had to be true to the books, but I had to be like, 'How do I fit this into a film?' I had to really work with her, and I really had to work with my own intrinsic understanding. 'What's special about this, what's essential about this?'" Really, the edits of the later books are the films, as far as I'm concerned.

Lorrie: Yes.

Cecilia: And they didn't end up doing the thing of, 'Oh, we're just going to change the ending and have Draco be a hero; give Draco a redemption moment that he doesn't get in the books.' They ended up really hewing pretty closely, as closely as they could, so they don't create much; they mostly reduce. The Sectumsempra to "redemption moment" gap is one that I like to point out, because a lot of people are like, 'Oh, shit, you're right.' Unless you've read the books from Draco's point of view, do you realize that? But let's face it: when Harry almost kills Draco with Sectumsempra, he's still mad that he had to go to detention about that.

Lorrie: Well, I see it differently from that, because reading it from Snape's point of view -- that he has to manage these two boys, one of whom he hates and the other one who's being a problem -- I actually think that us not knowing what Harry thinks about Draco not giving him away, I think that's on purpose. There's a whole arc: Harry not responding to Draco saving him, Harry casting Unforgivables with Draco's wand. All the Unforgivables that Harry casts successfully are with Draco's wand, and this is meant to be subtle. By the end there, she was being non-obvious with things and leaving a lot of things for people to figure out.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: But the interchangeability of Harry and Draco that gets stronger and stronger until the end? Their magic is the same. It doesn't even matter which one of them is doing it.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: I think it was intentional. If the world hadn't been the way it was and if the pressure on her had been different, she could have had another edit.

Cecilia: Right. Right, exactly. Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Lorrie: Thinking about the books this way and about the author this way, and holding that in my brain at the same time as knowing where her mind seems to be these days, I am undergoing character growth involuntarily.

Cecilia: Right, right, right. This is the thing: I don't feel like her turning out to have a worldview that is antithetical to mine necessarily means she's a bad writer.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: This is the tricky part. Is she a bad person? Probably. Is she a bad writer? No. Would I have edited some things differently or written some things differently? Of course, but every writer is different. I don't think people still appreciate what a task it was to let *Harry Potter* be what it is. This is one of the things: there are some people now, of course, who are like, 'I always knew that she was a hack,' and this and that. I'm like, 'Being a hack and being a bad person are not the same.' This equation of, 'Well, okay, the more morally distant you are from me, the worse a writer I consider you to be...'

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: That doesn't work; that's not true. But that's what people want to do, in the same way they also now suddenly want to criticize her appearance and all these other things. That's not cool, people. We don't do that. As a contrast, we've been talking about Orson Scott Card a lot in the science fiction and fantasy community because he openly campaigned against gay marriage and that kind of thing. What's so interesting about Card, of course, is his early books are really, really chock full of homoeroticism, but a lot of it is probably subconscious on his part. Again, I'm not Orson Scott Card's therapist, so I can't tell you whether he is a closet case or it's his own suppressed, internalized homophobia coming out. I don't know, but what we do know is that he publicly campaigned against gay marriage, and a lot of people went out and burned his books as a result. They were just like, "Oh, *Ender's Game* was one of my favorite books when I was in junior high school, and now I'm tearing it up and I'm never going to let my kids read it." This is a similar thing: there are people now who won't pass on *Harry Potter* to their kids. They're like, "Yeah, my kids want to discover it on their own, I guess. I won't stop them, but at the same time..." There probably are some people who are stopping them. They're like, "Nah, don't read that. Read this instead. Here, read Seanan McGuire instead. Read Ursula Vernon instead." It's going to be up to the next generation to decide what they think of *Harry Potter*, and is it one of these things where, fifty years from now... Assuming that Florida isn't completely underwater by then...

Lorrie: Oh, goodness.

Cecilia: Those Universal theme parks... Are those Universal theme parks still going to be there, or will it have been torn down and rebuilt as some other thing? They took out the *Jaws* ride to build one of the *Harry Potter* rides. Do people miss that? *Jaws* didn't have a fandom, though. They were not people who were showing up in shark costumes (because *Jaws* is from an earlier era, too), whereas Star Wars Land in Disney, you are assuming that's going to be there for generations.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: We've been assuming that *Harry Potter* is going to be like Peter Pan. It's going to be something that just lives on for generations. Or Winnie-the-Pooh. People don't even read the original Winnie-the-Pooh books anymore sometimes, but every kid knows Winnie-the-Pooh. What's the trajectory of *Harry Potter*? One thing that we touched on a little bit earlier, but we didn't state as explicitly as I'm going to state right now: there has always needed to be a divorce, a separation, between the creator and the creation. The creator and the creation are not the same. The author and the book are not synonyms. They're not the same. Writers put a lot of stuff into their books that come out of their subconscious, both good and bad.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: We know that she had a liberal urge. She considers herself an anti-fascist.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: That is the breadth of the diversity of the characters. Even if it is neoliberal 90s tokenism, we can criticize it as that here on the left wing, but it's still so important.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: That's the thing. When I first started going to *Harry Potter* conventions, I had already been going to conventions like Worldcon for almost twenty years before that, and that is a very, very white fandom. Not completely, but just a very, very white fandom. It is. Worldcon fandom is a subculture, really. It's not just, 'Oh, these people happen to be the people who like science fiction books.' The way you get into going to one of these cons usually is you know somebody who went, and then people tend to know other people of their same ethnicity, and on and on. Plus, science fiction books were very white for quite a long time; it's only really now that we're seeing the full breadth of diversity, because publishers have really turned their attention to it, too. Fantasy worlds that are not just generic European... There's so much to be explored there, so there's a lot of Korean, Chinese, Japanese and Malaysian stuff coming out now, which is fantastic, as well as African. But to get back to the writer and the book are not the same: when I first walked into my first *Harry Potter* convention, I was like, 'Where did all these people of color come from? Where have you guys been?'

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And me being the amateur anthropologist that I am, I just went around asking people. It was my first time meeting tons of people I had known on LiveJournal.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Literal hundreds of people. This was Terminus in Chicago in 2008. It was my first time literally meeting hundreds of people that I had known pretty intimately online. Some of them I knew; we had beta-read for each other or we had done role-playing things together. 'My Draco and your Harry have been having a thing for a while, but we've never met in person.' Of course, in LiveJournal, everyone's picture is usually of Harry or Draco or a pendant or whatever; nobody had pictures of themselves. Those are the days of the internet where you didn't use your real name. You didn't use anything.

Lorrie: You didn't do that.

Cecilia: It was pre-Facebook. Maybe there are one or two people who had a picture of themselves in cosplay or something, and you also didn't know ages. It was like, 'Wow, okay.' First of all, so many people were actually queer and I didn't know.

Lorrie: Yeah. Yes!

Cecilia: I didn't know because a lot of people didn't really talk about their real lives. I did, but a lot of people did not.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: So many Asians, so many more Black creators than I was expecting necessarily to be there. That was one of the reasons why I feel like there wasn't as much racial infighting within *Harry Potter* fandom at that point: we didn't know. This is actually ideal in some weird ways. But I went around asking people, 'Why are you here? How did you get into [Harry Potter]? What made you decide to spend hundreds of dollars to fly here from some far-away place to get a room in the hotel, to pay the registration, to buy a robe, all this stuff to participate in this in person?' They were like, 'This is the first fandom where I knew I belonged. This was literally the first fandom where I saw myself represented, either on the screen or on the page. That's it, bottom line.' I was like, 'Holy crap!' This whole 'representation matters' thing isn't just about, 'Oh, you give kids a better sense of self-esteem and blah, blah, blah.' These are adults who are just like, 'Oh, that right there is for me because I see myself.'

Lorrie: Yeah. It's really amazing how much difference that makes.

Cecilia: Yeah. Yeah. It's like, 'Okay.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Credit to her for that. On the other hand, it was still tokenism and there were still issues with some of the clichéd representations and so forth, but at least it was a start. But that's the thing: it's a start, not the end goal.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: Like so many of our politics, [rather] than wanting to go to that next step, people who were comfortable at the step we're at are like, 'No, no, you guys are going too far.' Actually, no.

Lorrie: No, we'll just have fun over here.

Cecilia: Right. Yeah, yeah.

Lorrie: 'We're throwing a party. You can come if you want.'

Cecilia: Right, but that's the thing: we always divorced *Harry Potter* from J.K. Rowling in some ways. Even back in 2008, we were already saying *Harry Potter* belongs to us and not to her, which isn't to say that I was one of those people who got mad at her, like, "You're writing Draco wrong!" You're writing what you're writing. You're writing what your inner muse is telling you, but sometimes you wish that writers would -- I wish Orson Scott Card had dealt with some of his stuff earlier and maybe he hadn't turned out the way he did; his life story would have been different as a result. But no, that's not how it went. Or how many other creators who people are like, 'Oh, yeah, so-and-so supported the literal Nazis, so-and-so was this'? Yeah, we've got a lot

of problematic creators, because guess what? The first reason people go out to write a book isn't because they are already a saint.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Part of me was like, 'Look, we already thought of Harry as ours and not hers.' Why this in particular put a stake through the heart of it was possibly because we were already so vulnerable in 2020. Everybody was so traumatized already, possibly because it was already such a trans-forward and trans-led fandom. A lot of our really significant leaders and influencers -- if you want to use that 21st century term -- when they were like, "Yeah, I'm burning my ties," that's heavy, man. A lot of call-outs and people being like, "Take your house affiliation out of your Twitter bio now, or you're supporting transphobia!" I took my house affiliation out not because I was afraid people were going to call me out about it, but because yeah, this now can be an anti-trans dog whistle.

Lorrie: Yeah. And there are people who said, "No, really, any sight of J.K. Rowling or *Harry Potter* reminds me of my struggles. It's instantly frightening." I don't want to frighten people.

Cecilia: Yeah.

Lorrie: The people that I actually care about and know.

Cecilia: Yeah. It's literally triggering. People use that word pretty loosely now, but to be triggered is to have an unwanted and uncontrolled emotional response to something.

Lorrie: Yeah, that can be quite severe.

Cecilia: Right, and the last thing I need -- Okay, I'm doing it now. I just triggered myself. The last thing I need is to be bursting into tears.

Lorrie: Ouch. Ouch, ouch.

Cecilia: It hurts. It still hurts. Yeah, part of me is like, 'I don't want to see it,' but at the same time, if my brother accidentally had another kid now and when that kid got to be ten years old wanted a Hogwarts letter, would I send it? Absolutely.

Lorrie: Are you proud of the *Binge Watcher's* book?

Cecilia: I am proud of it, actually. I think it's a really great example. It's part of a series -- there's *Binge Watcher's Guide to Doctor Who* and these different things. When the publisher asked me if I wanted to write a *Binge Watcher's Guide*, they were going to let me pick whatever I wanted.

Lorrie: Oh, wow.

Cecilia: I was like, 'Well, I don't watch much television.' I'm too busy writing to be consuming media most of the time, but when I do, I do it as a binge. When I'm going to watch something, all right. 'Now the series is over, we're going to finally sit down and watch it.' We binged all of *Wednesday* in one day, or *The Mandalorian*... 'All right, this week we're going to get through all of *The Mandalorian*.' I did a lot of research; I used all my academic research skills to write this. The thing that's different about this book compared to a lot of other books that are about *Harry Potter* and about the films: most of the books that are about the films are either from film critics or are from film creators in some way -- the design of *Harry Potter*, the costumes of *Harry Potter*. This book is a guided tour by a fan for fans of the series, so I wrote it almost like a travel

guide. 'I'm going to bring you to this world, and we're going to go through it movie by movie -- in the same way that we would go neighborhood by neighborhood through my favorite city -- and it's literally called *Binge Watcher's Guide*.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: 'How can I guide you through literally watching this, including what you could eat, games you can play?' I took it literally. There's a way in which you can read the book instead of going to the... People like to read travel guides without actually going to the place.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: You can re-experience watching the movies through my commentary if you want. Oh, my God, I did so much research -- my research file was humongous -- but it was so much fun to research, because that was when I was doing that research before the TERFpocalypse, so it was still fun.

Lorrie: You had joy.

Cecilia: What a great excuse to dig into *Harry Potter* fandom some more, and to dig into all this stuff about the movies. The saving grace for me is that every single person involved with the movies -- except for Ralph Fiennes, who played the villain, of course -- directors, screenwriters, all the actors, every single one of them felt the need to make a trans-positive statement or a disavowal of J.K. Rowling's position. Every single one of them, which tells you something.

Lorrie: Yeah, it does.

Cecilia: And I'm like, 'Well, thank God,' because then that means I can still actually watch the movies guilt-free as long as I am not renting them. I'm not paying for them; I have them on DVD already, so I can re-watch them any time if I really want. And I still support fan creators.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Right. I still support people like Fox Estacado (whose t-shirt I'm wearing right now) and people who are making fan art or pins and things, even though I don't wear the pins in public. I'm in the closet now about my *Harry Potter* fandom. We've gone back to being a subculture instead of being a branch of the mainstream. That's how it feels, so we have things like MISTI Reunion or Wizarding Retreat Weekend; I went to that, and that was really sweet. It was a small group of people -- literally a spiritual retreat center -- except it's all wizards. We did these classes that were like a Reiki workshop, and then we did a Horcrux Hunt in the woods. It's a fandom where we care for each other.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: We're trying to be here for each other. But yeah, so many things have taken Harry Potter out of their name. The Harry Potter Alliance is now Fandom Forward.

Lorrie: Quadball.

Cecilia: Yeah. It's not called Quidditch anymore. What used to be the Harry Potter Meetup is now the Urban Wizard Social Club, and yep, that's how it's going to be. We've gone back to code words.

Lorrie: Ooh, yeah. JC and I have been really enjoying going through the series chapter by chapter just on its own merits, and there's been joy there. Is that something that you can see yourself feeling?

Cecilia: Yeah, I can, because every time I open the books, I find something I'd forgotten about or whatever, because there is so much in them. Like I said, fifty percent of the reading experience comes out of the reader, not out of the writer, so if you had this experience before, you're going to have at least some of it again. I'm sure there are people who are like, "No, it's ruined. Can't."

Lorrie: "Can't." Right.

Cecilia: 'There's a drop of blood in the milk and the whole carton is ruined.' But as fanfic writers, we were already critically engaged with it, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: We were always questioning and finding our own pockets in it where we could live, and also finding parts we disagreed with or were like, 'All right, I just don't count that,' or 'I'm just going to ignore that part.' 'The epilogue? What epilogue?' That kind of thing.

Lorrie: Yeah. 'I'm going to write my own better version.' Yeah.

Cecilia: Right, right. 'I don't count this,' or 'This was a writing mistake or an editing mistake.' God knows you can't count anything from the interviews; she can't remember the names of her own character sometimes, so you can't take anything J.K. Rowling said in an interview as canonical at all. You can take it as a starting point for an understanding or for a fic or something, sure, but can you take it as a sign from above? No. No, you can't. We know it better than she does in a lot of ways, because we've reread it so many times. She's the one who was like, "Oh, I used to have to go to look at the Harry Potter encyclopedia online myself because I couldn't remember. My notes are a mess."

Lorrie: Which is probably healthy.

Cecilia: Exactly. Creators are going to create, writers are going to write. There's going to be stuff in there that you were conscious you were putting in, there's going to be stuff that you were not conscious you were putting in, and there's going to be stuff you left out that you are not conscious of why you left it out.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: It's always going to be up to the reader to figure out what level you want to engage at.

Lorrie: How much of your social circle -- of the people that you interact with, that you love -- what percentage would you say is queer, trans, somehow gender-queer in some way?

Cecilia: I'd say a pretty large portion, but also because I've spent a lot of my life in queer activism circles, so those are the people I know.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: From my college LGSA days, before there was a B or a T in it.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: Moving to Boston and getting involved with the Bisexual Resource Center here, for example, and the Bi Women's newsletter comes from here and a bunch of things like that. And then I was the keynote speaker at a bunch of the bisexuality conferences in the 90s and 2000s. In fact, I think I wrote that first Harry/Snape fanfic at a bi-conference at Princeton University. I think the conference was called Endless Possibilities. 'BI' had to be capitalized, because every bi conference has to have a pun on the word 'Bi-' or Bi-cause.

Lorrie: Right.

Cecilia: We're very into puns and double meanings, because we've got the double consciousness. But, yeah, I think it was at the hotel that they put me up in outside of Princeton during that bi conference where I wrote that first Harry/Snape thing. It's called 'Potions Lesson' and I've never posted it.

Lorrie: Oh.

Cecilia: Never posted it anywhere, and every now and then I still crack it out because it was written so long ago.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: It was written in 2004 or something, so we still didn't know what Harry and Snape were going to be like by year seven. I think we were only at book four or whatever at that time.

Lorrie: Excellent.

Cecilia: It was a projection into the future. Harry is of the age of maturity by the time this incident occurs. I don't keep demographic statistics, but I'd say the majority of people that are in my close local circles are people that I knew either through BDSM community stuff or through queer fandom, and then the rest I know through science fiction/fantasy fandom subculture stuff or *Harry Potter* subculture stuff. Yeah, just a large portion.

Lorrie: Yeah. As JC and I have been working through the chapters on this podcast, it's just been occurring to me that's, I feel like, who I'm talking with and to: people who have a plurality of queer folks in their lives and our relationship to *Harry Potter*, because that has separate issues from a mainstream conundrum. 'What to do with Harry [Potter]?' Warner Brothers must wake up every morning trying to figure out, 'What is our relationship to the *Harry Potter* franchise, or readers who don't have any idea that there's an issue with J.K. Rowling and gender at all?'

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: We're working through that and we're finding joy in the actual series, and that has felt very touching, very moving.

Cecilia: Well, that's why the podcast is such a great idea, too, because it invites people to re-experience it from a point of view of, "We're well aware of what's going on, but we're going to read it anyway."

Lorrie: Yeah. It's not that I didn't try many other approaches also, because I think a lot of us (as we were sitting in lockdown) had lots of time to soul search about this -- what we can and can't do, where we can and can't be effective -- and then as we have seen since 2020, a lot of really frightening politics happening around trans issues, knowing we have to guard our resources.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: We have to make sure that we put the fight where it can be most effective. We've had a lot of time to think about that.

Cecilia: Yep, yep, yep. Well, you have to guard your joy, too.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: If there's one thing we've learned, it's that you can't be caught up in the doom scrolling cycle 24-7; you're not actually helping anyone, especially yourself, by just doing that. For a while, okay, yes. When we were in the early part of the pandemic, and it really was important to be constantly trying to bring in new information, where we're like, "Okay, now we're figuring out the stuff about it being airborne. Now, we're figuring out this." I meet people every day -- I'm in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which is the most overeducated place on the planet -- and I still run into people every day who are like, 'Oh, I had COVID two weeks ago, and the guidance said to stay home for five days and so I did; then I started going to work again, and now half my department's out.' 'Of course they are! Did you test before? Were you on Paxlovid?' They're like, 'What's that?' I'm like, 'How do you not see ten advertisements for it every day?' How is capitalism failing so bad, they can't even make money on this. How is everyone so ill-informed? Well, we've had progressive destruction of our informational media, and the amount of misinformation that's being spread willfully by political forces is also horrendous, everything from anti-vaccination to you name it.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: And some people are thinking, 'Well, what is our job as fantasy writers?' Our job as fiction writers of any kind is to build empathy for the other.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Period. That's what we're here for. That's what fiction does: it reminds people how it feels to be someone other than yourself. I have an essay in *Uncanny Magazine* about this right now, about the cognitive science basis for this belief.

Lorrie: I love that essay. Yes.

Cecilia: Aristotle believed this -- and many philosophers throughout history have believed -- that fiction writing (storytelling, drama, all of this) was good for the soul and that it was a liberalizing influence, and that it made you more charitable towards your fellow humans; now we have proof that is really what happens. When you experience a story, your brain makes a certain kind of plasticity that if it didn't have [it], then you can't empathize with others; when you can't empathize, what do you have? You become a psychopath. Yeah, far too much of our culture is on the psychopathic path right now. Whether some of that is literally caused by social media, where people are like, 'Oh, I see other people all the time, but I see them as other,' so it reinforces that they are 'other' -- or they're overloaded from too many negative images and too many whatever, and so they shut down and are unable to engage -- all of that. Humanity is in a rough place right now.

Lorrie: After 2016, I noticed the role of artists, fiction writers, becoming more conscious of this purpose. That was compounded severely during lockdown, when we would have all lost our

minds if we hadn't had shows to watch or books to read. Artists were literally keeping the race alive.

Cecilia: Right, right.

Lorrie: And that's a consciousness that I'm bringing to reading *Harry Potter* post-TERFpocalypse. Are we pure? No. Most of us are not as impure as whatever J.K. Rowling is going through at the moment, publicly, in front of everybody...

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: But no, impurity is part of the extraordinarily fallen world we appear to be living in at the moment.

Cecilia: Yep. Yep.

Lorrie: But the joy, yeah... Finding it has been sweet and exciting and surprising.

Cecilia: That's awesome.

Lorrie: And yeah, no, we obviously all have to get together more often, because we have to be conscious of this. Joy doesn't necessarily make itself in times like this; you have to be conscious of making it.

Cecilia: Well, here's hoping that we muster up another MISTI Reunion sometime in the future.

Lorrie: Did you look at *Binge Watcher's Guide* recently? Did you look over your book recently?

Cecilia: I did. I reread a little bit of it prepping for this, because what did I say about this? Yeah, there are some things in it. They were instantly dated, basically, the moment June 2020 came along, oh, my gosh. When I wrote it, it was with the expectation that everything was just going to continue upward; the fandom was just going to continue to grow, and that it would continue to be a thing handed down by the generations. That chain has been broken. So many people I know, who couldn't wait till their kid was ten so they could send a Hogwarts letter, are like, 'Nope, we're having a Barbie-themed birthday party this year.' Those parents are feeling heartbreak, where they're like, 'I really thought this was going to be a thing that was going to be part of our family forever,' and part of me is like, 'Look, some things skip a generation, too.'

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: I also don't know... We talk about Harry Potter being like Alice in Wonderland or like Peter Pan. I think there were a lot of things that were problematic about Lewis Carroll and JM Barrie, but we don't talk about them now. Those things don't even matter to us.

Lorrie: Yeah.

Cecilia: Those guys have been dead for a long time; at some point in the future, J.K Rowling will have not been alive for some time, and the text will either continue to stand and will grow on its own or it won't.

Lorrie: I've already had the experience of queer parents wringing their hands because their children want to read *Harry Potter*, people who used to love *Harry Potter* and now are overwhelmed by the transphobia are exactly the kind of people who will say, "My child wants to read it, I'm going to let them, even though it's making me nuts."

Cecilia: Right. Right, right. Well, okay. Let's read it together, and then let's talk about the oppressive class system that is still in place in the wizarding world that has led to the inequities that are destroying England right now, for example. Doesn't mean that I'm necessarily going to have a macroeconomics conversation with a seven-year-old, but seven-year-olds understand when something's not fair.

Lorrie: Yes.

Cecilia: They really do.

Lorrie: No, they do, and it's so rich. There's really good fodder for conversation. That's the population that I'm talking to, because the first three years of TERFpocalypse for me were an experiment in cancellation, and I think it's a different era now. It's not going anywhere.

Cecilia: Yeah.

Lorrie: So I hope creators and artists just keep making things, because it's better to have the conversation, I think.

Cecilia: Yeah. And there's still going to be things like *Puffs* going on, things that parody and deconstruct *Harry Potter*, while at the same time standing as a homage to it. I'm waiting for the first gender-swapped casting of *Cursed Child*. Somebody out there's going to do it. In fact, I would lay odds that there will be an all-drag queen *Cursed Child* fundraising production of some kind/parody production at some point, because that apple is just sitting there waiting to be picked. It's a golden apple from the goddess of chaos, but it's waiting to be picked. I don't know if you saw it: did you see there was an all-drag queen production of *9 To 5* recently?

Lorrie: Gosh. No, I didn't know, but yes.

Cecilia: You know the classic movie with Lily Tomlin...

Lorrie: Dolly Parton, yes.

Cecilia: Dolly Parton. Of course, that whole movie is about misogyny, the strict gender roles, the boss who has failed upwards, and all that stuff is so relevant now to our current political moment. Yeah. There was, recently in San Francisco, an all-drag queen stage production of it, and I'm like, this is a meme that needs to spread to other all-drag queen productions of things where the mere changing of the context into a drag context deconstructs so many things.

Lorrie: And that urge is actually there in the *Cursed Child* productions. I did go recently to see it on Broadway.

Cecilia: Right, since the rewrite to be a single night. Yeah.

Lorrie: Right. It's shorter and gayer. It's much, much gayer.

Cecilia: This is what I've heard, yeah.

Lorrie: Yes. Any mention of either Scorpius or Albus being interested in any female person has been removed.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: It's just not there. They're only interested in each other. Yeah, it's clearly romantic, but you can tell that everybody -- this is Broadway, right? All of the cast, all of the crew, all of the volunteers who are ushers... Everybody is super queer.

Cecilia: Yep.

Lorrie: They're part of that culture within *Harry Potter* fandom, and they do get a lot of crap from the public who say, "How can you be affiliated with this? You're transphobic." There's some truth in that angle also, but within that, yeah, you've never seen anything quite so queer as a post-TERFpocalyptic gathering of *Harry Potter* fans sometimes.

Cecilia: Right.

Lorrie: But yeah, just looking at what all the ushers were wearing and also the ways that the actors can tweak their line delivery, there is something going on there.

Cecilia: Yep.

Lorrie: So I can imagine what you're picturing coming from within the actual community. Yeah.

JC: Thank you, Cecilia, so much for talking with us today.

Lorrie: Thank you so much. Thank you.

Cecilia: You're very welcome. I'll talk about *Harry Potter* anytime.

Lorrie: Yeah. Apparently, so will I. Well, thank you for joining us, and thanks for kicking off our interview series.

Cecilia: You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

Caroline: You've been listening to *Harry Potter After 2020* with hosts Lorrie Kim and JC. You can find show notes for this and all other episodes at HPAfter2020.com. There, you will also find ways to support the show, contact the hosts and more. If you like what you heard, consider giving us a review on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. *Harry Potter After 2020* is produced and edited by Lorrie Kim and Caroline Rinaldy. Original music was composed by C.L. Smith. Thank you for listening.