

Movie Review - Harry Potter & the Deathly Hallows Part 1

Written by {ga=mitch}

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Last year, I wrote an article titled [“Why It Is Impossible to Review Harry Potter”](#), where I stated that I couldn’t really do a decent review of a Harry Potter movie due to the fact that I was such a fan of the series.

So what do we have here? A review of “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.

Let’s all break into a chorus of “liar, liar, pants on fire”.

I watched this movie at the midnight showing when it was first released, along with what seemed to be 2,000 of my closest friends. This was the first time I’d ever been “invited” to the midnight showing by my wife. Previously, she had always went with our two kids as kind of “their thing”, and I was relegated to the chopped liver category, attending the movie later on that

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weekend. As it turns out, the “traditional thing with the kids only” was a ruse my wife used because in reality, she wanted to see the movies TWICE in the first weekend, and since she won’t go to a movie alone, she needed me to skip the first one.

Long story short; one of the kids couldn’t make it to the midnight showing, so I received the call up from AAA for the big event. (And then my wife took the other kid to see it on Sunday).

One thing I love about midnight showings? Uhm...well...OK, not a damn thing. The multiplex was showing it on eight different screens at the same time, so everyone was trying to be in the lobby at the same time, of course. I’ve seen better organized riots.

And then you have the packed theater with a bunch of younger idiots who don’t seem to realize that their overlapping conversations (yelling matches) from halfway across the auditorium don’t interest me in the slightest. Nor did the fact that two minutes before the movie started, who comes up and sits behind us but two women carrying a two year old and an infant. To a movie that won’t be over until 2:45 AM. I was tempted to text Social Services on them.

So has this round-about, totally fascinating storytelling gotten you to forget about the hypocrisy of me writing a review after saying I couldn’t? No? Oh, well...get over it, or click on another link (“How to Win Friends and Piss Off Everyone Else”, by Mitch Cyrus).

As flippant as I’ve been so far in the review, the movie itself is the polar opposite. A dark, moody, somber tale of loneliness, bravery, friendship, sacrifice, loss and betrayal that is as far away from the first Harry Potter film from 2001 in terms of subject matter and target audience as “The Hobbit” novel is from “The Lord of the Rings”. I even went back a few days later and watched “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” again for the first time in probably seven years, and was simply amazed at the differences...and I’m speaking about much more than just the fact that these three child actors are now young adults.

The majority of the Harry Potter films have been about the Hall of Fame collection of Distinguished British Superstars who have carried the weight of the earlier films, and provided much of the buzz. Richard Harris, Maggie Smith, Alan Rickman, Michael Gambon, John Hurt, Robbie Coltrane, Julie Walters, Jason Isaacs, Kenneth Branagh, John Cleese, Ralph Fiennes, Timothy Spall, Gary Oldman, Emma Thompson, Julie Christie, David Thewlis, Fiona Shaw,

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Richard Griffiths, Brendan Gleeson, Helena Bonham Carter, Imelda Staunton, and Jim Broadbent having appeared in at least one of the films...and add Bill Nighy and Rhys Ifans to the club for this one. An absolutely amazing collection of acting talent that I've never seen before in a series.

But for this film, they are almost an afterthought. Some get two or three scenes, like Bonham Carter and Isaacs as the villainous Bellatrix Lestrange and Lucius Malfoy as they threaten our heroes. Most of the rest have perhaps one or two small scenes, like Snape and Hagrid...while Maggie Smith's Professor McGonagall is not seen at all.

What this leaves is a film that focuses squarely on Harry, Ron, and Hermione, and therefore must be carried by the acting talents of Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, and Rupert Grint. And the three of them astounded me with their performances.

Everyone knows what happened at the end of "Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince" (if not, why the hell are you reading this? Oh, and skip to the next paragraph, because I'm about to give a spoiler). Harry has lost his mentor, Professor Dumbledore, and the Dark Lord Voldemort's power is now unchecked as he operates freely. Voldemort needs to destroy Harry to come to complete power, but Harry still has friends trying to protect him; which leads to an early battle that immediately shows you that this is no kids movie.

Refusing to endanger everyone he knows and cares for, Harry strikes out on his own to find and destroy the remaining Horcruxes, which are items that contain fragments of Voldemort's soul...leaving him immortal as long as they exist. Naturally, Hermione and Ron refuse to leave his side...and so they go off alone on their mission; devoid of any "adult" assistance.

While they are in hiding in the wilderness, the film has a very similar feel to when Frodo and Sam went off alone into Mordor in "The Two Towers" and "The Return of the King". Isolation and dread permeate the three friends as they go forward, almost without hope. As could be expected under the circumstances, the situation puts a strain on their psyches and their friendship, resulting in several scenes of raw emotion that truly establish Radcliffe, Grint, and Watson as actors with a very bright future ahead of them.

There is far less frivolity in this film than in any of the others. Casual observers may think "of

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course there is less”, but they would be dismissing the fact that the light humor has always been a hallmark of these films; perhaps less and less in each subsequent movie, but still always there. This time? Almost none at all.

No Quidditch matches, no goofy spells from the older Weasley twins, no exploding spells gone wrong that leaves Neville Longbottom with a soot filled face, no comical screw-ups from Ron. In fact, Hogwarts is not seen at all in this film.

But how can you expect a lot of chuckles in a film which has Hermione starting out by removing from her parents’ memories every trace of her existence, for their own safety? Watson was wonderful in that scene showing the utter heartbreak as she saw herself fade from every picture in the house; becoming every bit the orphan that Harry has been. And then there are the deaths of two characters we’ve known for several episodes after the first big battle. So no, this is not going to be anything but tension filled.

In addition to the three main actors, credit must be given to director David Yates. Fans of the books (which I have still not read), have been critical of his direction in the last two films, but are near universal in praise in how he has handled this material. All I can say is that in looking back at the first films done by schlock-meister Chris Columbus, Yates has done a masterful job...almost matching the visions and moods created by Alfonso Cuarón in “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban”, considered by many as the best of the series.

As much as Yates, Watson, and Grint mean to this film, it would all be for naught without the performance of Radcliffe as the title character. Many have wondered whether Daniel Radcliffe will end up being typecast as Harry, unable to break out of that role for anything else...similar to what seems to have happened to Elijah Wood after “Lord of the Rings”. I didn’t think so a year ago, and after this film, I am positive that he will have a long and distinguished career ahead of him. Wood has been somewhat limited by his physical appearance to step away from being a Hobbit. Radcliffe can drop the glasses, change his hair style, and then step away from looking like the boy wizard, and allow future audiences to strictly look at him as an actor. And I don’t think it will be long before Emma Watson takes the crown of “best young British actress” away from Keira Knightley.

But that’s the future. For the present, it is a joy to sit and watch this story work towards its conclusion. What a stroke of luck this franchise has had; to cast three children with no real acting experience, and then have them go through childhood into puberty and then into

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adulthood, all the while staying out of trouble and cultivating acting skills that no one could have thought possible when you saw them first as 11 year old children.

I cannot wait until next July when this draws to a close, although I will miss them all. This movie ends on a very somber note, but hope is still there...although you know that while Part 1 was very introspective and foreboding; Part 2 will be much more action packed. And even more emotional.

I'm not going to give a rating on this...I'm a fan, and an unapologetically one at that. But if you've watched any of the other films, you owe it to yourself to get to the theater for this one.