



Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - the film - how good is it?

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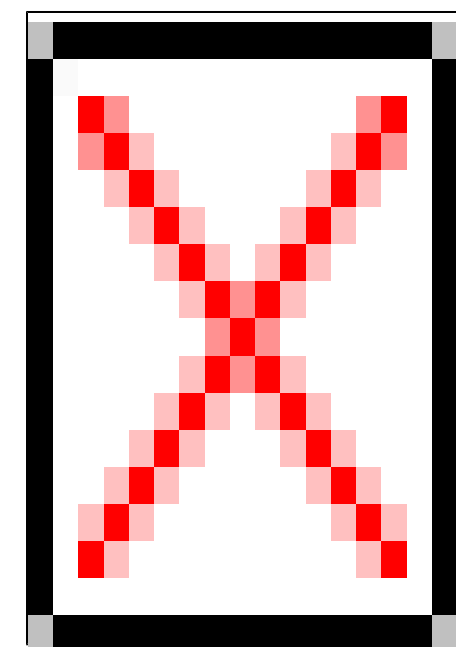
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The film of 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' has just been released. **Julia Eccleshare** went to see it?



The film of 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' has just been released. Does it live up to its predecessors? **Julia Eccleshare** went to see it?

The film representation of Hogwarts has been such a cheering delight that it impossible not to miss seeing it in the latest Harry Potter film 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' which has been recently released. It's like watching James Bond without MI5.

Of course, as with all the Harry Potter films, 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' is only sticking to the book so it is not exactly a surprise that Hogwarts is absent. Its absence also emphasises the darker nature of this story and the shift from magic being for pranks to magic being for real.

So, without Hogwarts what's left? When a book, even a very long one, has to be turned into two films, it is obvious that there's too much to get through in one go. In the very linear films that the Harry Potter books have been adapted into that becomes a much bigger problem. The big story of the escalating war between Voldemort and Harry remains the same; it is now a battle that Harry can only hope to win if he can fulfil two quests, the destruction of the Horocruxes and the mystery of the Deathly Hallows. But two quests involve a lot of travel which veers between being little more than Harry and Hermione on a cold camping holiday which goes badly wrong when Ron stamps off in a huff and needs finding too, and a great deal of magic. The camping holiday offers little except beautiful British scenery in cold weather; characters who can live in a magical world are pretty wooden in a real one. It would be more fun watching Swallows and Amazons.

And Rowling did present the film makers with a major problem when, unusually for a children's book series, she grew her characters up. Now they are three young adults in ordinary clothes playing with wands, suspending disbelief becomes hard. Some nudge, nudge moments about Harry and Hermione's relationship and a dreamy dance sequence which Harry manufactures to cheer them up, feel intrusive. And surely, all boys on a camping trip know not to walk on the ice ? even if he has been led onto it by a silver doe? In contrast, the magic is brilliantly high tech offering any number of escapes and allowing Harry to slip between worlds and evade the baddies in both. When the magic is at its simplest, as when Hermione puts up invisible walls around the tent to ward off the real world, it is at its most charming. But magic needs rules. Why Harry, Hermione and Ron with any number of spells up their sleeves just run over knotty tree roots to escape from the Snatchers is hard to fathom. Unless it is because it leads them to Malfoy Manor and Bellatrix and so to Helena Bonham Carter who gives the best of the cameo performances and the most chilling moment of the film (quite enough to make it X-rated which makes you wonder about who this film is really for), in which case it is more than forgiven.

The return of other favourite adult stars such as Imelda Staunton, Alan Rickman, Julie Walters and Robbie Coltrane as well as Bill Nighy's first appearance as an excellent Minister of Magic also provide entertainment and familiar signposts for those who have followed each Potter film.

But despite the difficulties and the darkness, through 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' shines J K Rowling's exceptional ability to hold the plot together and interweave carefully left threads from the past. It also plays out the ideological battleground over the purity of the magical race, the key theme of the series, in rich detail with the Ministry of Magic even most substantial as a chilling mixture of all known symbolism from both Nazi and Stalinist regimes with some moments of New Labour sprinkled on top. And a smaller theme, the importance of folk stories for all cultures, which can also be traced through the series, makes it point elegantly and originally.

There are some great laughs although, sadly, the first in which everyone is turned into Harry with the help of a slug of polyjuice (which leads to a nice Where's Wally? Moment) is the best which leaves a long, long wait for the next. And, remarkably, especially since it comes from nowhere, there is great and unexpected pathos at the end. No spoilers but, was I the only one who cried?

Julia Eccleshare is the children's book editor of the **Guardian** and the co-director of CLPE (The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education).

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