



Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe) and Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch) visit the theaters in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Dark, Fast and Sleek

Phoenix doesn't quite rise to greatness

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX: Directed by David Yates. Screenplay by Michael Goldenberg, based on the novel by J.K. Rowling. Music, Nicholas Hooper. Cinematography, Slawomir Idziak. Starring Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint, Michael Gambon, Imelda Staunton, Gary Oldman, Ralph Fiennes, David Thewlis, Maggie Smith, Evanna Lynch and Matthew Lewis. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2007. 138 minutes. PG-13. ★★☆☆☆

For legions of obsessed fans, a new Harry Potter movie is a thing about which to rejoice *and* to complain. We get to see beloved characters brought to life beautifully against stunning settings; we believe, we thrill, we sit open-mouthed with awe when the film gets it right. And we also leave the theater rattling off lists of things we wish we'd seen and things we were certain were too vital to the story to leave out. Dumbledore's Pensieve? Treacherous house-elves? Statues that come to life? Not here.

But to the credit of director David Yates and screenwriter Michael Goldenberg — both new to the series — *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is, for the most part, a sleekly streamlined version of J.K. Rowling's 870-page book. As the Potter novels get darker and thicker, the films get more elegant (though Mike Newell's *Goblet of Fire* was a bit patchy), more sophisticated, more grown-up — rather like their stars. Harry (Daniel Radcliffe), Hermione (Emma Watson) and Ron (Rupert Grint) are now 15, turning lanky and trim, their cheekbones emerging from once-childish faces. Sadly, Hermione and Ron are relegated to sidekick parts here, their characters underdeveloped, but the actors make the best of it: Grint's mellow demeanor and Watson's breathless excitement combine to accent Radcliffe's troubled frown.

And he should be troubled. The Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge (Robert Hardy) is waging a nasty campaign against both Harry and Dumbledore (Michael Gambon), insisting that their claims that Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) has returned are nothing but a play for power. Paranoid and stubborn, Fudge seems even more timely a character

now than he did when Rowling's book came out in 2003. Worried that Dumbledore is plotting against him, Fudge sends an undersecretary, Dolores Umbridge (a creepily perky Imelda Staunton), to Hogwarts as the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Authoritarian, quietly vicious Umbridge is the enemy for much of *Phoenix*. Her students will learn theory, not spells; she will not be questioned, not even by other professors, let alone by children.

Order of the Phoenix concerns the uprising that happens when one's government — or one's stand-in headmaster — refuses to see what is right before its eyes. Outside Hogwarts' walls, the adults of the Order meet and seek intelligence; inside, Harry and his classmates rebel by learning. If the grown-ups won't teach Harry and crew how to defend themselves, they'll just have to find a teacher among their own ranks. And who better than a boy who has escaped the dark lord four times already? (If you find yourself wondering if the talent Mr. Potter shows as he encourages his peers to disarm an enemy or conjure a luminous patronus suggests what his adult career might be, you're not alone.)

Yates has the grace to let some of the story's themes float rather than hammering them home and to let the difficulty of being different manifest itself in the wispy sweetness of Luna Lovegood (a perfect Evanna Lynch) as well as in Harry's anger and frustration. In the lineup of Potter films, *Phoenix* is on the side of Alfonso Cuarón's *Prisoner of Azkaban*: dark, detailed, clearly aware that there are greater things at stake than the results of one's wizard tests. But, frustratingly, the magic falters in the end; the climactic scenes come and go without building, or releasing, tension. The film's biggest misstep lies in rewriting the story's climax so that our young wizards and witches don't get the fight they've earned — the fight they need in order to understand just how dangerous things have gotten. Harry, despite his growing circle of friends, still stands alone in this sense. The boy who lived is the only one who has really seen the darkness. **EW**

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