

# Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

A MovieGuide® Review

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN is the best produced of the HARRY POTTER series. The special effects and eye candy are incredible; however, the plot falls apart at the end with a bifurcated premise and a very confused ending that even baffled some of the Harry Potter aficionados at the press screening. Thus, to tie up the loose ends, the movie had to go through all sorts of contortions, mainly because the villain was not set up clearly in the beginning. This is probably due to J.K. Rowling's desire to trick the reader, but it does not work on the big screen.

In the movie, Harry is back home with his miserably middle class aunt and uncle, whom he talks back to and who do not like him. However, they do take care of him and provide for him. When another aunt, Marge, shows up, Harry gets incensed at her comments about his father and mother and "accidentally" inflates her like a monstrous balloon. She drifts away into the sky. Fearing punishment from not only his uncle but also the Ministry of Magic, which forbids students from using magic in a non-magic world, Harry escapes into the night.

The Night Bus, a triple-decker bus driven by a shrunken head and a loony old man, rescues him and takes him to the Leaky Cauldron Pub. There, he meets the Minister of Magic, who unexplainably does not punish Harry but prepares him for his third year of study at Hogwarts. It appears that a dangerous wizard, Sirius Black, has escaped Azkaban Prison and is searching for Harry. It is said that Sirius Black was responsible for leading Lord Voldemort to Harry's parents, who Voldemort killed, and now everyone believes that Sirius Black is determined to kill Harry.

To protect Hogwarts, Dumbledore has enlisted the Dementors, terrifying Azkaban spirit guards who suck the souls out of people. Unfortunately, they continually try to suck the soul out of Harry. At Hogwarts, Harry teams up once more with Hermione and Ron, and, after many subsidiary adventures, they have to deal with Sirius Black, a werewolf and Ron's pet rat.

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN could have been an extremely interesting and exciting movie if someone had just taken the time to straighten out the plot. Reportedly, J.K. Rowling told the filmmakers not to worry about following the book too closely, but they did not heed her advice. They didn't find the through-line, and therefore the movie is a muddle of multiple storylines and multiple endings, with many tricky devil- not *deus- ex machina*<sup>1</sup> events to get the plot back on course. The problem is that there's no clear villain, and the first rule of filmmaking is that the hero is only as good as his villain.

Aside from the dramatic flaws, which will escape many people because of the quality of the special effects and the production, this HARRY POTTER is darker and more demonic than the previous, which is saying something. One person at the press conference noted that every one of the youth in the movie constantly rebelled against authority, that all the authority figures were talked back to and reviled, and that witchcraft was used against the authority figures. Of course, this is the essence of witchcraft—rebellion against the authority of God, who only offers love, peace, joy, and forgiveness, and against all other authority in the name of Self.

Furthermore, meanness and breaking the law are applauded in the movie. Hermione

punches Malfoy as he's sniveling, and everybody thinks she's achieved something spectacular; in fact, there is even clapping in the audience. However, do we really want our children punching other children, especially when they're cowering?

Aunt Marge is clearly mean-spirited, but the punishment she endures is vile. Thus the movie teaches you to laugh at the pain and suffering of other people and to condone the perverse, the mean-spirited and the cruel (the same sort of thing happens in the books, by the way). Throughout the movie, witchcraft is taught in a powerful, dramatic, and interesting way that will captivate susceptible youths and amuse many others.

HARRY POTTER will do well at the box office, but it marks another sad day in the destruction of civilized values. The only light in this tunnel is that the movie will confuse many of the people in its audience.

**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> *Deus ex machina*: 1.) In Greek and Roman drama, a god lowered by stage machinery to resolve a plot or extricate the protagonist from a difficult situation. 2.) An unexpected, artificial, or improbable character, device, or event introduced suddenly in a work of fiction or drama to resolve a situation or untangle a plot. 3.) A person or event that provides a sudden and unexpected solution to a difficulty.

© baehr, 2004. This update is published by the Christian Film & Television Commission (<http://www.movieguide.org>). You'll find subscription information for Dr. Ted Baehr's MOVIEGUIDE® eNewsletter on our MOVIEGUIDE® website.