

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE:

The beauty of the Harry Potter series like the James Bond franchise is that, even though we know our hero will win out at the end, the films still captivate our psyche. It is our hero's journey through plot twists and ingenious encounters that holds our attention and fascinates us.

I wonder if J. K. Rowling got her inspiration for this series through the Bond movies; exchanging Bond's world of spies and evil doers with Hogwarts's school of magic and mythological characters. But while the Bond movies are pure escapism; the Potter films are about one's life journey disguised as fantasy.

In this, Rowling's fourth installment, Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe), now 14 years old, will ultimately fight once again evil in the form of mercurial Lord Voldemort.

The film series' third director is British Mike Newell, whose previous credits include the romantic "Enchanted April" and the darkly violent "Donnie Brasco." Newell doesn't miss a beat and this Potter entry fits seamlessly into the previous three films.

The film has its usual cast except for Michael Gambon adequately replacing the late Richard Harris as Professor Dumbledore and Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody as a new character devilishly played by Brandon Gleeson. He becomes Potter's confidant and protector. Ralph Fiennes plays the malevolent Lord Voldemort.

The film begins around a goblet of fire in which willful contestants place their names to enter the yearly Triwizard Tournament between three academies. The one catch is that contenders need to be 18 years old. Once placed, a contender's name cannot be removed. Potter's name, though 14, is placed in the goblet. He is reluctantly trapped into the game. The tournament replaces the old Quidditch game and is far more dangerous and deadly.

The parade and entry of the contestants and their classmates in the Grand Hall before the tournament has a 1930s Nazi "Triumph of the Will" feel to it. The entrants' schools entrance is magnificently choreographed.

The boy's Durmstrang Institute is represented by the "he-man" Viktor Krum, and the girl's Beauxbatons Academy is represented by the "pixie" Fleur Delacroix in their baby blue outfits. Hogwarts School is represented by the "clean cut, the boy next door" Cedric Diggory, and Potter.

The tournament consists of each contestant fighting a terrifying fire-breathing dragon, an underwater survival sequence with biting, slithering mermaids, a deadly and seemingly endless "smothering" maze that leads the winner to an unexpected encounter. All three events seem European, and certainly British fascinations. The staging is both fiercely intense and breathtaking.

In between the events in the tournament, a grand ball takes place between the schools that very much signifies a coming-of-age, especially for our three main characters (Potter, Hermione played by Emma Watson and Ron played by Rupert Grint).

Both Harry and Ron face the most terrifying moment that a 14 year-old can encounter. And that is, asking a girl out to the big dance. And for Hermione, it is waiting to be asked.

As in most Potter movies, not all the characters are what they seem. Treachery abounds, and all in the name of steering the viewer into unexpected avenues and ironic twists of fate.

But the film also has wonderful comic relief, like reporter Rita Skeeter (played by Miranda Richardson), that seems to revel in her paparazzi like image. And burly and hairy Hagrid finds love in old age in the form of the headmistress of the Beauxbatons Academy.

This is a worthy entry in the series. The adapted script writing by Steve Kloves and ingenious characters and incredible imagination introduced by original writer Rowling make for a thrilling ride emotionally and intellectually.

The film is clearly darker in tone and atmosphere. The reluctant hero, Potter, takes on the role of the hero's journey much like in Joseph Campbell's books on mythology.

And the rebirth of the "Dark Lord" character related directly to Potter himself might lead the series into an even greater mythological journey of wonderment, fate and discovery.

157 Minutes

MPAA Rating: PG-13 (for sequences of fantasy violence and frightening images)

Rated: A-

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