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## Movie Review: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

By Donna Schwartz Mills

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Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban  
review © 2004 by Donna Schwartz Mills

Studio: Warner Brothers

MPAA Rating: PG for frightening moments, creature violence and mild language

Mom Rating: 5 out of 5

Kid Rating: 5 out of 5

Cast: Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Michael Gambon, Gary Oldman, David Thewlis

Writer: Steve Kloves

Director: Alfonso Cuarón

It's shaping up to be a wonderful summer for family films. Hot on the heels of "Shrek 2," which is still breaking box office records, we now have the third installment in the "Harry Potter" series. I firmly believe that years from now, our children will be showing these films to our grandchildren with the same reverence we now hold for "The Wizard of Oz"... only with Harry, we will ultimately have seven classic fantasy adventures to enjoy.

Many Hollywood types were surprised when young hotshot director Alfonso Cuarón accepted this job after the success of his racy hit, "Y Tu Mama Tambien." It was later revealed that J.K. Rowling herself was such a fan of Cuarón's filmed version of "A Little Princess" that he was actually \*her\* first choice to helm Harry's debut. Chris Columbus ended up bringing the first two novels to the screen, and some critics lamented that Columbus was a little too faithful to

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the books. There was much speculation that Cuarón would bring a more daring touch to "Azkaban." However, Columbus is still on hand as a producer, and this film doesn't veer too far away from the world he already created for the screen.

The one big difference between this film and the previous ones are that so much of the action takes place outside Hogwarts castle, but that's as much a reflection of Rowling's book as any decisions made by Cuarón.

"The Prisoner of Azkaban" is a transitional chapter in Harry Potter's story, bridging the wonder and discovery of the

first two books into the darker, more dangerous tone of those that follow. Harry and his friends are now 13 years old and fully experiencing the emotional ups and downs of adolescence. Because of his tragic history and difficult living situation, Harry's feelings are a little more intense. Where a normal teenager may have the urge to slam a door in anger, the rage of a teen wizard can do some actual harm (which he demonstrates to comic effect).

Once again, Harry arrives at Hogwarts under the vague threat of mortal danger. Sirius Black (Gary Oldman), a legendary murderer, has escaped from Azkaban prison, and we soon find out that the entire wizarding world expects that Harry will be his next victim. Searching for Black are the prison's creepy guards; ghostly creatures known as Dementors, who disturbingly take an interest in Harry. In the course of the year, Harry learns more about his past — and gets closer to the understanding the circumstances that led to the death of his parents, Lily and James.

Much of his new-found knowledge is provided by Professor Lupin, a new teacher with a dark secret, portrayed by David Thewlis. It turns out that like the dreaded Professor Snape (Alan Rickman), Lupin was a classmate of Lily and James Potter. Unlike Snape, he was their friend — and he takes Harry under his wing.

The "Harry Potter" series seems to be employing the entire population of good British actors. In addition to Thewlis and Oldman (who are both wonderful), this film brings us Emma Thompson as a flakey teacher of prognostication and Julie Christie as a witchy pub owner. Michael Gambon

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replaces the late Richard Harris as headmaster Albus Dumbledore. Gambon's is a more robust and mischievous portrayal, and while he's very good, Harris' frailty brought more poignance to the role.

Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint (as Harry, Hermione and Ron) are growing into very attractive young actors who can really carry the action, and director Cuarón gets the most out of them. This is good, but it's at the expense of veterans Maggie Smith, Robbie Coltrane and Alan Rickman. Rickman makes the best of his diminished presence by stealing every scene he is in with drippy malevolence.

Like the previous "Harry Potter" films, this one is rated PG for some frightening moments, so parents should evaluate whether their younger children can handle it or not. I felt this one was a lot safer for the little ones because the

dangers Harry and his friends face are more psychological: There is no face-off with the evil Voldemort (just wait until movie #4!) and nothing as graphically scary as the giant snake and spiders we saw in the last film. What you have here are the spooky Dementors and a werewolf; if your kids could handle "Scooby-Doo" without nightmares, they should be fine with "The Prisoner of Azkaban."

The movie feels a little more disjointed than the previous two, which may be due to the need to condense the action into 136 minutes (which is pretty long for a film these days, especially one targeted to families). Potter fans may miss some of the details revealed in the novel, and those who aren't familiar with the book may have a few moments when they have trouble following the story. My eight-year-old daughter, who enjoyed it very much, left with several questions about what was motivating Professor Lupin and Sirius Black. She wants to see it again... but in the meantime, she is actually reading the book. A movie that is entertaining \*and\* inspires your kids to read? There's nothing better than that...

Former entertainment industry Donna Schwartz Mills now feeds her movie habit by dragging her little girl to every family film that comes out, often on opening day. She says she can't wait for her daughter to turn 17. Read more family film reviews at <http://www.Family-Content.com>.

## **The Wonderful World Of Harry Potter Audio Books**

**By David Rehem**

Ever since J.K. Rowling created the character known as Harry Potter, who at the age of 11 finds out that he is in fact a powerful wizard, the world was taken by storm and the Harry Potter mania hit every book stores, movie theaters and video games. Not only that, with the boom in internet shopping and the recent introduction of Harry Potter audio books, the phenomenon continues to spread and now, downloadable Harry Potter audio books in different audio formats such as MP3, OGG, etc, Harry Potter audio books on CD/DVD, and Harry Potter books on tape are available for purchase.

Harry Potter Audio Books are available in the United States for \$25 to \$60 dollars. To give you a better idea of the pricing structure, here is an example - "Harry Potter and The Sorcerer's Stone" is available on 7 CDs lasting in total 8 hours 25 minutes:

CD 1: 73'59 minutes CD 2: 73'57 minutes CD 3: 72'48 minutes CD 4: 69'27 minutes CD 5: 71'30 minutes CD 6: 74'00 minutes CD 7: 66'16 minutes

This can be purchased for a total cost of about \$50.

Harry Potter audio books that have been released and available for download/purchase include -

· Harry Potter Audio Book 1 : The Sorcerer's Stone · Harry Potter Audio Book 2 : The Chamber of Secrets · Harry Potter Audio Book 3 : The Prisoner of Azkaban · Harry Potter Audio Book 4 : The Goblet of Fire · Harry Potter Audio Book 5 : The Order of the Phoenix · Harry Potter Audio Book 6 : The Half-Blood Prince

In the American edition of the Harry Potter audio book series, Jim Dale, a singer, songwriter, and actor from Rothwell, England, is the voice of all the characters. His work on the Harry Potter audio book series has won Dale a Grammy Award (2000); one Grammy nomination each for Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, and Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix; and two AudioFile Earphone Awards. For the UK edition, Stephen John Fry, an English comedian, author, actor and filmmaker, is the voice.

The Harry Potter audio books have been highly praised by many, who regard it as an exceptional educational activity for dyslexic children and younger kids who can not read yet. For children who dislike reading books, once they listen to the Harry Potter audio books and become familiar with the stories, it may be able to guide and encourage them to start reading the Harry Potter real books. In addition, the Harry Potter audio books can teach them new words, accurate pronunciations, and proper speaking techniques. However, critics have also accused the Harry Potter audio books of encouraging children to read lesser than they would usually do in normal circumstances. Others have also blamed the audio books of stealing away the imagination and creativity of the children.

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