

‘Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1’ is the Darkest, Loneliest Potter Film Yet

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – While “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1” is the most murky and forlorn Potter film yet, its most grave battle is the internal question between the corporate and creative types. Did the splitting of a single finale film into two parts truly improve on its ability to impart this grand tale or was it purely for financial reaping? From what we see in part one of the seventh film in this franchise, it turns out the answer is a lot of both.

Financially, the film has already smashed a franchise record by earning \$24 million on its Thursday at midnight showing at 3,700 locations in North America. That performance eclipsed a previous record of \$22.2 million, which was set by the opening of the sixth film “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince” at midnight on July 15, 2009. In total, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1” is being released at 4,125 locations on more than 9,400 screens.



Left to right: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.

Image credit: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Delving more into the financials, its first weekend has earned the No. 6 all-time opening slot with an impressive \$125 million. While this is quite shy of the No. 1 \$158 million mark set by “The Dark Knight,” a weekend opening of \$125 million is the strongest in Potter franchise history.

Numbers aside, from J.K. Rowling’s books we know this story grows increasingly dark. And so do the films, with this film being the franchise’s most gloomy and mysterious yet. This movie is much less “for kids” than any of the previous films. The environments are dreary and sinister and the content is the most “mature” we’ve seen in a Potter film so far.

While the film is rated “PG-13” for some sequences of intense action violence, frightening images and brief sensuality, parents should be seriously cautioned about bringing kids around the age of 13. At our screening in Chicago, we saw some kids bolt from the theater in fright after the first 15 minutes.



Ralph Fiennes as Lord Voldemort in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.

Image credit: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Unlike other Potter films where we’re graced with grandiose scenes with explosions of color and the use of a substantial supporting cast, the focal point of this film is just on Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe), Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) and Hermione Granger (Emma Watson). And in contrast to other Potter films that surrounded you with flocks of people in magic school, the paranormal kids weren’t in class at all in this film. Instead, they roam for dangerous horcruxes (wicked necklaces) that they must seek out and destroy.

All the while, the dead Dumdeldore (who isn’t in this film in the flesh) has his past imprint constantly affecting the present and the future of the central threesome in this film. A theme that’s persistently evident this time around is that these three kids are certainly growing up. It’s impossible not to think about how “old” they now look.

You could even see a five-o’clock shadow on Daniel Radcliff’s Harry Potter. And there’s more espousal of raging hormones and teenage curiosity than ever before. This time, we don’t just stop at kissing. Instead, we see a “fully” nude scene (but “artistically” without really showing the body’s vitals) in a sort of orgy, drug-induced kind of atmosphere. It’s a scene out of Stanley Kubrick’s “A Clockwork Orange”.



Alan Rickman as Professor Severus Snape in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.
Image credit: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Aside from the threesome in this film, we unfortunately see very little of Alan Rickman. While he’s typically a shining supporting star in this franchise, he’s not given that chance this time around. Instead, the film is signaling that it’s laser targeting on its three central characters – along with Lord Voldemort – as it evolves into its finale.

The no-nosed Ralph Fiennes as Lord Voldemort, on the other hand, is unforgettable. In a Harry Potter film that focuses so much on the trio of Harry, Hermione and Ron, Fiennes uses his supporting screen time hauntingly with the sense of fury he has mastered from so many previously livid roles. Fiennes is the standout supporting actor in this film.

That said, Dobby – the computer-generated, absolutely loveable protector of Harry Potter with obvious similarities to Jar Jar Binks from the Star Wars movies – steals this film’s emotional show. You can’t help but become attached to this powerfully petite elf who martyrs himself in Harry’s name. Kids and adults alike can be found crying for him as director David Yates and writer Steve Kloves pinpoint the perfect way to use special effects to tear just right at our heartstrings.



Rupert Grint (left) and Daniel Radcliff in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.
Image credit: Warner Bros. Pictures.

Now in terms of the content of this film, you can’t help but feel lonely and depressed. You have a threesome of kids who seem more grown up than they should be on a search-and-destroy mission for horcruxes, which are the keys to Voldemort’s immortality. All the while, the trio is being pulled into the dead Dumbledore’s past to help them find and destroy the evil amulets.

Dumbledore leaves Harry, Hermione and Ron unique items to assist them on their journey together. And because the film’s script says so, they find themselves led into the awkward throw in of the Deathly Hallows. Thanks to Luna Lovegood’s seemingly acid-tripping dad Xenophilius Lovegood (Rhys Ifans), the Deathly Hallows is revealed. This is an old fable in “The Tales of Beetle the Bard,” which is a book left to Hermione by Dumbledore.

The Deathly Hallows comprises a symbol that Harry sees often in this film. Xenophilius divulges that the triangle is an invisibility cloak to shield the wearer from death, the circle represents a resurrection stone to recall loved ones from death and the straight line denotes an elder wand that’s more powerful than any other wand in existence.



Rhys Ifans displaying the symbol for the Deathly Hallows in “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1”.

Image credit: Warner Bros. Pictures.

If the fable is true and the elder wand does exist, then Voldemort will stop at nothing to acquire it. And if he does, it might render the search for the horcruxes meaningless because he’ll be able to wield its orgasmic power. So you have two converging stories essentially sending the threesome on a wild goose chase. Through it all, though, the most important theme of the film is subtle and indirect.

It isn’t discovering and razing the horcruxes. It isn’t all the weakly scripted Deathly Hallows gibber jabber that could have been cut out and feels like it was just inked to fill up more book and screen time. Instead, the central theme of this film is simply about three kids growing up. It’s about their friendship. It’s about their ability to act independently and as a team. It’s about their skill in navigating the real world without being under the typical auspices of teachers or elders.

For the first time, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1” culminates everything these kids have learned – both with their natural and supernatural skills – and forces them to put it all into real-world practice. Without this pivotal theme of maturation, everything these kids have learned would have been all for nought. J.K. Rowling’s novel gives these characters a worthwhile evolution that sets us up for a truly grand finale when “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2” is released on July 15, 2011.

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Because we already know there will be part two for this film, part one’s ending isn’t a typical Potter curtain call. Instead, we see a vital event and then the film feels like it’s just abruptly cut off. The swift goodbye happens by forgivable design so we could literally pick up with the next frame in part two of the franchise’s truly final film.

“Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1” stars Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Ralph Fiennes, Helena Bonham Carter, Alan Rickman, Bill Nighy, Richard Griffiths, Harry Melling, Julie Walters, Bonnie Wright, Ian Kelly, Michelle Fairley, Fiona Shaw and Carolyn Pickles from director David Yates by writer Steve Kloves based on the novel by J.K. Rowling. The film, which is rated “PG-13” for some sequences of intense action violence, frightening images and brief sensuality, has a running time of 146 minutes and opened on Nov. 19,

2010.



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