

# 500 Words or Less Reviews: Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald

\*This review will be spoiler-free.\*

One of the biggest complaints I heard about the original *Fantastic Beasts* movie was that it was so far removed from the original series, it didn't feel like a *Harry Potter* story. To me, it still had a good plot and great characters and is worth rewatching, but I sympathize with that complaint.

*Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald* gives us much more of the original canon in subtle and overt ways, but still does a fine job of keeping the narrative separate from Harry's era at Hogwarts so that it can stand on its own legs and tell a fresh story without the weight of massive book scrutiny.

Eddie Redmayne is back as the peculiar Newt Scamander, who another character aptly describes as a man who doesn't care for power or prestige but for what is right. Scamander may not ever rise to the level of characters like Hagrid and McGonagall in my mind but he is a welcome addition to the *Harry Potter* universe.

They chose Newt's book to be the title of these films and while the films themselves are not truly about the beasts that he loves so much, they do play a significant role in plot development. And Newt unleashes a new, wondrous, Jim Henson-esque creature that steals some scenes.

Johnny Depp is surprisingly quite modest in his titular, antagonist role. For a man who has made a living off of being magnificently weird as unique characters, he doesn't try to do

too much here. I suppose the backstory from the original series, the characters "look" and the script are enough and he doesn't have to be outrageous to bring Grindelwald to life. If anything, I thought he was too subdued.

Jude Law is as brilliant as you would expect and Dan Fogler reprising his role as Jacob is even funnier and more sympathetic than the first go round. The rest of the cast is a mixture of decent to bland.

There are twists galore in this movie but I must see the rest of the series before I can judge them.

On that note, without revealing anything, I will conclude by saying the ending will have people talking until the third part is released. And my only comment in this review is to say that it is imperative to me that they do not make the same mistakes that were made with *The Cursed Child*. As mentioned, a significant part of what makes these movies work so far to me is that they are separated from the seven-book/eight movie story enough that they can let these movies breathe without fear of them clashing with the original. They may be nearing dangerous waters.

The *Harry Potter* brand is clearly at a crossroads. The crucial plot decisions of these next three movies will swing the post-book series material either into the "It was nearly all terrible" or "Fantastic Beasts was fantastic and we barely remember *The Cursed Child*." I'm eager to see the result.

Three stars out of five.

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# 500 + 63 Words or Less Reviews: The Deathly Hallows

It took me almost a year, but I have finally finished my first reading of the 7-book Harry Potter series and it has been quite the ride, one of the best literary adventures of my life. Over the course of my journey I have met wizards, witches, goblins, ghouls, werewolves, house elves, talking portraits, merpeople, centaurs, giants, dragons, and dementors. And this is only a portion of the beings Harry Potter has introduced me to.

While I still consider *The Half Blood Prince* the best book in the series for a variety of reasons, the *Deathly Hallows* is not far behind. It came across to me as the most realistic of the entire lot with its depiction of what a storybook "adventure" would probably be like. There would likely be a lot of wandering about and being unsure as to what to do. People would get irritated with each other, they would get bored with all the wandering around looking for something, and everyone involved would get disillusioned with the whole shebang in varying degrees and forms. Much like the adventure of life itself.

It was also a much different animal in that most of it did not take place in Hogwarts but on the aforementioned climactic adventure. In my opinion, the personal drama that goes on between the three adventurers while the adventure slowly got going is not remotely detracting. In fact, this personal drama made up some of the best parts of the book. There was a heaping helping of meaty characterization to be had there by all three of them.

And there is the other big character of the book who wasn't even around for the vast majority of it. Although he died in *The Half Blood Prince*, Dumbledore's presence is huge in the

*Deathly Hollows*. In much of the book it is as though he were symbolic of the God of Scripture with Harry constantly questioning him and why he didn't explain this or that while he was alive. Whether or not Rowling really meant for this to be the case when she wrote it, I don't know, but the likeness is strong.

We also learn a lot about Dumbledore's personal backstory and that he wasn't perfect after all. Like everyone else, he had baggage, baggage that for him directed the course of the rest of his life. It is brilliant characterization of a character that had already left the world of our story.

*The Deathly Hallows* is a fitting culmination of all the preceding acts. And we take many a sad farewell (for the present) of Hermione, Ron, the other Weasleys, Lupin, Tonks, Mad Dog Moody, Luna, Neville, Hagrid, McGonagall, and many other unforgettable characters that have left on us a lasting impact. Oddly, though, the departure the most emotional to me, was the farewell of the Dursleys. Those Muggliest of all Muggles who treated Harry like so much trash for so long somehow managed to worm their way into my heart. I'll miss them.

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That is the end of my 500WoL. Here is my personal ranking of the seven books:

1. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
2. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
3. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
4. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
5. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
6. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
7. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

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# 500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

It has been almost three weeks since I have finished [Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince](#). I have actually been nervous about this one and wanted to approach it with a respectable amount of honor as the most literarily well-rounded of the lot.

[Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince](#) clocks in at 652 pages, immediately setting the stage for the plot of the rest of the book during a cryptic meeting between Severus Snape and the Black sisters. It is during this encounter that Snape makes an unbreakable vow with Narcissa Malfoy in which he will be obligated to help her son, young Draco Malfoy, with a Voldemort-ordained task. The plot of the rest of the work flows from this Malfoy/Snape mission.

In essence, the book is really about Snape himself. This fact makes the mysterious naming of the book itself especially ingenious. If you have read this far into the article, you are passionate enough about the franchise to already be familiar with the story. Assuming that is the case, it is in no way a SPOILER to say that Malfoy and Snape accomplish their mission, with Snape ending Dumbledore's life in the lightning-struck tower.

One of the very best and most fascinating characterizations in the entire franchise has been embodied in the person of the relatively rarely seen Dumbledore. But Rowling makes up for that rarity here and with much magnificence. There are too

many amazing Dumbledore scenes to name. And then he goes out in high style with one of the best funerals of all time with even the merpeople and the centaurs showing up to pay him homage.

The central theme of this work was very clear and extremely well exemplified: love. Love is everywhere: Tonks and Lupin, Bill and Fleur, Ron and Hermione, Harry and Ginny, and, um, Ron's passing "thing" with Lavender Brown. Ron also has an unfortunate encounter with some love potion. To cap it all off, Dumbledore talks more deeply in *Half-Blood Prince* than in previous books concerning Voldemort's one true weakness, which is his inability to love, a "fault" that would be his undoing.

Although they have been present in every book, I have found that Rowling is getting better at the long stretches of "information relation." At this point, they feel like very natural points of the dialogue instead of contrived and stilted manifestos. It worked better than ever in *HBP*. In fact, I would say that the dialogue as a whole was one of the book's most winning points. The humor was especially strong. I don't think Rowling has given me as many belly laughs in any previous work. Although the examples are legion, the best humor, in my opinion, probably came by way of the person of Luna Lovegood.

The dialogue, the honed prose, the final glories of Dumbledore, the humor, the love, etc., etc., etc, and so forth. For these reasons, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* has taken first place in the HP house of my heart.

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# 500WoL: Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

Are you tired of these *Harry Potter* reviews yet? Are you as fed up as the poor Sirius relegated to spending his days in a dilapidated old house that he loathes? Are you as fed up as Harry was for pretty much this whole book? Well, humor me for three more journey's into the magical world of Hogwarts, will you? I'll be upfront with you about something. While I thoroughly enjoyed most of *The Order of the Phoenix*, I do consider it the least among the five *Harry Potter* books I have now read. And I think it is a lesser work for three reasons.

First, it's too long. In my review for [The Goblet of Fire](#), I said that while I think smaller literary works are usually better because the author has honed it and taken out all or most of the fat, I do concede that long works can be great and also well-honed. The long *Goblet of Fire* is an example of this. With very few rough spots and fatty tissue, Rowling honed it to a sharp edge from beginning to end. *The Order of the Phoenix*, not so much. It was too long and too full of fat and fluff. Thus, it was a bit duller of edge. I think *Order of the Phoenix* would have been just fine and dandy with 100 to 150 less pages.

There are a couple of other lesser reasons I place this in a decided last place of these first five. Second, there is much less imaginative detail than in the preceding books. There is some, I know, but less. Loved the imaginative description of their cleaning the worn down 12 Grimmauld Place, the inherited home of Sirius Black. But there weren't as many imaginative details after this. Way too little of the ghosts, too little candy and Quidditch and magic and wonder and the fat lady. The third reason was Harry's almost continual bad attitude throughout the book. It is totally realistic for a boy of his age and in his very problematic situation in life to

experience such angst, I suppose. But it doesn't add to the enjoyment when a book's main protagonist is so unlikable most of the time.

Despite these bad things and despite my putting it at the bottom of the list, I absolutely do not consider this a bad work or that I have wasted my time. Thoroughly enjoyed it and you will too. Saying it is the worst doesn't seem right. Instead, lets say it is the least of the best. Plus, it contains several very key elements of the overall story and centaurs, giants, lots of intriguing side plots, and the sadistic Professor Umbridge. Not to mention the string of very authentically moving moments after about page 500. I consider these most touching moments in the series so far. But be warned: Here you're going to face dangers more ominous than O.W.L exams. So gird your minds, boys and girls, gird your minds. That is all.

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## **500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire**

The Harry Potter books have been climbing in page length ever since *The Sorcerer's Stone*. The biggest gulf is between *The Prisoner of Azkaban* and the present book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Like the massive fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (which I will review at a later date), the 734-page *The Goblet of Fire* is a veritable Monster Book of Monsters. I freely admit that I am a very slow reader and that it would normally take me six months to read a book this size. It says a heaping helping about it that I finished



it in just over a month.

I'll go ahead and say it: The first 145 pages are a masterpiece, with the Weasley's reigning supreme. I could have spent the entire book with that family—especially Mr. Weasley. His encounter with the Dursley's in the fourth chapter (“Back to the Burrow”) is one of the funniest incidences...ever. But this is not the only reason these pages are awesome. There is a nearly seamless flow and flawless writing from section to section: The dark opening with Voldemort and Pettigrew; the Dursley and Weasley encounter; the International Quidditch Cup; and the debacle with and introduction to the Death Eaters. Yeah, for this bit Rowling surely summoned the superhuman writing powers.

But like Superman, Rowling has her kryptonite: tedious information relation. What makes it especially ridiculous in Goblet of Fire is that it is done this time by Lord Voldemort, making him come across like the stereotypical villain who has to reveal his whole long story so the hero has time to foil his plans. That is pretty much exactly what happens here. While I loved the scene, it was kind of ruined with Voldemort makes his tedious rant: “First I blah, blah, blah” then I “blah, blah, blah” then “This really long thing happened” and “blah, blah, blah, etc., Mwahahahaha!” All of this leaving Harry ample time to formulate and carries out his escape plan.

I more often go in for the view that with works of writing less is more. The writers of smaller works have successfully honed their craft, cutting out all fat of any kind. This certainly does not mean that a longer work *can't* be great. *The Goblet of Fire* is a perfect example of this happening. Rowling is one of those authors who absolutely needs room to spread her creative wings and shows that more can really be more. The abundance of space here not only allows her to completely flesh out the central Triwizard Tournament plot but also to flesh out more amazing side plots than you can shake a stick (or wand) at.

But like all of the preceding books, the fault I mentioned was still far, far outweighed by the greatness. In part because of the first 145 pages, but also *almost* every single paragraph, character, and plotline of the following 589 following pages, this is definitely my favorite of these first four classics.

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## **500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**

First of all, poor, poor Aunt Marge. How the blazes was she to know Harry was a powerful wizard in training? Why did no one tell her before she made such a huge mistake. Such a horrible thing as being all blown up should never happen to such a kindly, good-natured soul. Kidding. Totally deserved it. Anyway, although I do wish there had been a much greater appearance by the ghosts, this was probably on par with the second book but not as good as the first. There were many other interesting new plot points, characters, and creatures. These are a few of my favorite things: Professor Lupin, time travel (I'm a sucker for time travel), and the Dementors.

For so many reasons my respect for Rowling's creative genius has been bolstered by each of these three books. There were a lot of ingenious, creative touches in this current work. The Dementors as the embodiment of depression: Genius. I have read that as she was writing this book she began treatment for severe depression and that the Dementors were a direct inspiration of this. And the obvious cure to make you feel all better: Chocolate! Madame Pomphrey apparently keeps lots of it on hand, probably taking a nip now and then herself—for

medicinal purposes, you understand.

Most of the dialogue in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is really good. However, there are two pretty sizeable dialogue wastelands in this one. Both are awkward portions of relating a lot of information. The first occurs in the middle of the book. Harry overhears Cornelius Fudge, Minerva McGonagall, Filius Flitwick, and Rubeus Hagrid while they are hanging out at a bar in Hogsmeade. First of all, maybe it's just me but these four don't seem like they would hang out at a bar with each other. It just seemed awkward. Second, the dialogue of this portion seemed longer than it really was because it was not that well written. Same thing for another overlong dialogue wasteland toward the end of the book when Lupin, Sirius, Harry, Ron, and Hermione have another overlong and awkward "information-relating" conversation. While the information related in both was crucial to the plot, I wish Rowling had done it less awkwardly. Rowling is a superior author in many ways, but she is not J.R.R. Tolkien who can get away with this (See "The Council of Elrond," a chapter in Fellowship of the Ring which is almost entirely a long conversation of massive "information-relation).

Where Rowling particularly shines to me is the many small passing details like Harry's mirror reflection talking back to him or the giant squid propelling itself dreamily across the surface of the lake or Dumbledore addressing Dereck, a first year student, at a Christmas party, causing him to turn bright red. These are only three examples of what Rowling does best: Imaginative and insightful detail. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is rife with them. And thus, Rowling achieves another timeless victory.

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# 500 Words or Less Reviews: Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

After finishing *The Sorcerer's Stone* I felt at loose ends, lost, eternally adrift...Not really, but I did greatly desire to continue the Potter story ASAP. And so, after borrowing [\*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets\*](#) from my niece, I plunged into its magical depths. While possibly not quiiiiite as good to me as SS, CoS didn't disappoint. It introduces us to more fascinating characters, creatures, and a brand-new plot.

As far as the characters, the ghosts stole the show. There's Nearly Headless Nick all downcast after not qualifying for the Headless Hunt because he's not technically headless (only nearly headless); Moaning Myrtle who haunts a girl's bathroom and plays a key role in the primary plot; the always hilariously obnoxious and mischievous, Peeves the Poltegiest; and Cuthbert Binns, the ultra-boring ghost teacher of History of Magic who apparently has never realized he was dead. Every stinking time these ghosts enter the story in whatever guise brings more life to the story than any of the living characters.

This is not at all saying that the living characters in CoS are bad. Nor is this downplaying any of the other many superb aspects of this second triumph in the Harry Potter series. But it is also not saying that it's a perfect book. I'm not referring to the heavy revisiting of the plot of SS in the early chapters of CoS. I understand how this was necessary since at the time of the first release of CoS it had been about a year since the release of the first one. Although I do wish Rowling had done more summarizing, her taking the time to rehash was tolerable because of the excellent original plot and writing surrounding it.

No, that rehashing is not why the book is imperfect. The imperfection is in the dialogue. By pointing out that CoS has an imperfection, I'm not saying this makes it remotely an inferior work. While this flaw is there, it is barely noticeable. The dialogue is mostly very fluid but tended to get stilted as though at these points Rowling was tired and just trying to fulfill her quota for the day so she could go to bed. Although these areas don't take up a lot of space (usually anywhere from a paragraph to half a page), these areas came across as lifeless to me. But like I said, barely noticeable.

And there were most of the same adult logic problems that I referred to in my SS review. Don't get me started on the completely arbitrary point system in which any biased teacher or prefect can add or subtract points on a whim. Despite these minor logic annoyances, despite the periodic mini-wastelands, Rowling has successfully created another children's classic. And it is a children's classic. Remember that. Friends who are familiar with the books say they will become heavier, more adult. I look forward to this, but in the meantime, I am fully enjoying and appreciating extremely well-written children's work.

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**500WoL Reviews: Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, or Don't Be A Dursley, or a**

# Review for Literary Snobs

There is a deep, dark part of me that is a bit of a literary snob. That is the part of me that so often resists reading something that is wildly popular because I assume it is only popular because it is popular. When that wildly popular thing turns out to deserve its popularity, well, I'm somewhat surprised. This was the case for me with [Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone](#). I have been telling myself for the past 15 years or so that I was going to read this book series eventually. And I have many friends and family whose literary opinions I trust that have read it and loved it. Still, the dark literary snob inside held me back.

Let me be clear here. I have absolutely no problem with children's novels. Some of the greatest novels of all time have been children's novels. There are many, many great ones. My personal favorites: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Hobbit*, *The Magician's Nephew*, *A Wrinkle In Time*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Although *The Sorcerer's Stone* never quite attains the greatness of the five I mentioned—and probably many other children's classics—I believe it will join their ranks as a children's classic.

I award 1000 points to the house of J.K. Rowling for creating this world of pure imagination. Unless you live under a rock (which sounds excessively uncomfortable so I hope that's not the case), you will probably know that this first book in the Harry Potter series introduces the very magical the orphaned Harry Potter son of two famed wizarding parents. The great wizard Dumbledore leaves the infant to be raised by the horrible Dursleys, the muggliest muggles in all muggledom. Literally the second (“Literally” isn't a meaningless article here. This is literally literally) Harry turns 11 big old Hagrid whisks him off to join the wizard school Hogwarts to begin a magical journey that will extend for six more books. This first episodic adventure was highly enjoyable,

wonderfully imaginative, and chock full of superbly crafted characters. But it is a children's book so keep your adult logical thinking out of it. Such logic will make you question things like having a large school of kids who know how to cast spells on one another, guarding a very precious item with supposedly impenetrable charms that are so lame that even kids can get past them in a few minutes, or allowing students to participate in school-sponsored activities that could easily get them seriously injured or even killed.

But, fellow literary snobs of the world, recognizing these things shouldn't impede your enjoyment of said story. I have been told by those who are already very familiar with the entire book series that it gets even better in further books. Can't wait to continue the journey with Potter. So don't be a Dursley, join the journey.