

Gimme a Sign:

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix Book Review

By Jahboh

“See what you have to ask yourself is what kind of person are you? Are you the kind that sees signs, sees miracles? Or do you believe that people just get lucky? Or, look at the question this way: Is it possible that there are no coincidences?”

- Graham Hess, from Signs directed by M Night Shyamalan

In some strange and superstitious way, I totally believe in seeing “signs.” Take for example, four years ago; my dad gave me a calendar filled with pictures of Edinburgh. He had gotten it from his friend who resided in Scotland. I took it and thought, “Where the heck is this place? Well, at least the photographs look okay.” Grudgingly, I hung the calendar in the corner of my room and secretly wished to save up some money for a more decent replacement. A few months later, I got into Harry Potter. I also found out JK Rowling was a native to good old Edinburgh. The calendar was immediately moved to my nightstand. I suppose that could have been luck.

Easter holidays. I was dragged along by my six-year-old brother to the annual show at Barrymore Theater. The movie, free hot dogs, rides on a fire truck...they are a tradition for many families here. Realizing I had to once again sit through another kiddie flick (ah, little brothers) in a room-full of kids who were mostly under eight, I tried to wiggle out of the task.

The movie was Treasure Planet, a recent failed film (box office-wise) by Disney Animation Studios. I had seen a preview of the movie on TV and quickly decided that it was probably one that would fit in the classic Disney formula. Guy meets girl. Villain defeated. Everyone else lives happily ever after. The end. How I wished to be elsewhere as I grudgingly walked into the theater. I hadn't updated my site, last-minute procrastination on school work, hadn't drawn for a week, needed to start reading Harry Potter book 1, etc. etc. Apart from the “homework” excuse, my parents could really care less. After my brother's annoying pleading – mostly for the fire truck ride (why do little kids always find firefighting an aspiring career?) since he can hardly sit through a TV show – I finally agreed.

It was lucky that my parents made me go. In fact it was in some small way, a *miracle*.

For those who have not been as fortunate (just kidding) to see Treasure Planet, here is a basic summary. The movie is, in short, an excellent example of a quest-of-order/ coming-of-age movie. It models the book Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson but the aftermath is slightly different. Jim Hawkins is fifteen, the protagonist, and fatherless. He lives with his mum at her family-run inn. Hawkins is frustrated due to the lack of clear communication with his parental unit and has been arrested by the police numerous times. A teenage delinquent. Feeling equally as frustrated, his mother finally lets him on a voyage in hopes that her son will change with some “fresh sea air.” And change he does. Jim meets up with crewmember John Silver,

who acts like a father, and after some conflict (just rent the film) the boy returns home ready to turn over a new leaf. The theme song's lyrics say it all:

And what do you think you'd ever say

I won't listen anyway

You don't know me

And I'll never be what you want me to be

The movie, in many ways, can be easily related and adapted to normal teenage behavior. This was probably a reason why it never sold well. The movie's audience should be targeted at teens. Instead, I was stuck in a room full of kids belting out the theme song with half of them having no idea what it meant.

This incident passed without much of a second thought. Well, save days I was going crazy about Disney's wonderful animation, but that was about it. After all, there were many more exciting things to look forward to. The new Harry Potter book was coming around the corner. More rumors to add, more evidence to examine, more e-mails to be sent, and more time to stare at the book cover. Suddenly time was short and I was whipping out an article a day on the various spoilers that had leaked. In the few weeks preceding the book release, I had examined every piece of evidence piled in front of me and written every possible sane prediction I could think of. I had listened to Amazon's one minute and forty-five second audio clip at least a dozen times and wondered during sleepless nights what kind of "dark wizard" house the trio was in. Actions of a fanatic, I suppose.

Night of the 22nd, I hurried to Barnes and Noble with my friend for the midnight party. Both of us were dressed from head to toe in wizarding attire. I even paid attention to the detail of adding a blue flame to a lantern I was holding. We had both been at the party nearly three years earlier (and a year before that I was first introduced to Harry) and were surprised to note that the bookstore could actually fit *more* people. The party was a

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blast and we won the trivia contest by coming up with questions no one could answer. Here's a good one: How many galleons, sickles, and knuts does it take to buy a copy of Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them and one of Quidditch Through the Ages? A truly excellent math problem, it is.

Time could not have passed faster. Soon, I was one of the first in line to grab a copy of the book (having obtained a place ticket at 8:30 that morning, lol). As we were waiting for the clock to strike twelve, I realized that this was the first time (since book 2) I would be

older than Harry in the book. He would no longer be a role model to look up to, but rather a comparison to my past. For a fleeting second, a fifteen-year-old Jim Hawkins

popped into my mind. I quickly dismissed the thought figuring that, no; Harry certainly wouldn't act like that. Quoting from Sorcerer's Stone, "How very wrong I was."

After seizing the book, (oh my, it's been three years) and jumping into the car, we pulled out our flashlights and started reading right then and there. Saturday and Sunday were devoted to locking myself in my room and reading eight hours straight. Luckily, I stopped Sunday afternoon due to the fact that I could barely remember who "Kingsley" was and why this "Widdershins" person kept on popping up. It was lucky that I did because the Department of Mysteries made much more sense Monday morning than it probably would have the night before. And of course, the death; so anti-climax and unexpected. It felt surreal as I gazed at the sunny and quiet summer day knowing that Harry had just lost his dearest friend.

At that time, I wanted to put the blame on someone. The scapegoat was obviously Harry. Dear Harry who has always been someone to look up to, dear Harry who I thought would always be safe (and Dursley-less) in his utopia, dear Harry who I quickly dismissed as not the type to be angry or frustrated. Just as she had been in every book prior, JK Rowling was once again, a step ahead of me. I had always followed Harry loyally in the previous four books, hardly noticing that he was the only narrator. Book 5, is the first book which I now stray from Harry's actions and the first time I wonder how many details he has left out from the previous years.

Book 5, although not a favorite book, was the only way to plunge Harry into reality. Suddenly, everything is not black and white. Sirius sums it all up when he points out to Harry, "Yes, but the world isn't split into good people and Death Eaters,"(302, Book 5, US Ed). An alternate version of the same statement is made by Professor Snape, which is a bit more harsh, "You have no subtlety, Potter. You do not understand fine distinctions"(530, Book 5, US Ed).

The paint has been mixed into shades of gray and has brought anywhere from sudden sympathies to surprised disliking.

James Potter. The kid was the Head Boy, a respected student, and a Quidditch player. He had a great group of loyal friends and considered "in" by many at Hogwarts. Order of the Phoenix brings a new face of James. A boy whose ego is so big, Lily claims she's surprised he can mount a broom. We learn that he struts around school, hexing anyone who is in his way. Not quite the hero we first thought.

Severus Snape. The greasy-haired, mean-tempered Potions master I highly disliked. It was his fault that he went into that Shrieking Shack 6th year and serves him right. I almost want to add a, "But Is He?" We learn of the constant taunting and belittling of Severus only because he "exists." Also implied, was the violence he witnessed growing up as a child. The first time I have felt sorry for this guy.

*"Yes, but the world isn't split
into good people and Death
Eaters."*

- Sirius Black

Albus Dumbledore. The endings of each book are mostly tied into pretty bows because readers can depend on him for all the answers. After all, he's the only wizard Voldemort is afraid of. Dumbledore admits though, that his weakness was he shielded Harry from the truth a bit too long.

Neville Longbottom. Always the one to be picked on, Neville certainly shows his true Gryffindor courage in Book 5. He brazenly attacks Death Eaters during the Department of Mysteries confrontation, risking his life. I'd personally love to see him take down one of these people in the future. A LeStrange, perhaps?

Remus Lupin. I hate to find fault in this most beloved teacher, so I'll just excuse them due to the fact that he has been turned down by society for too long. Once he finds a friend though, Remus rarely corrects their mistakes, but rather tends to be more passive. In other words, "he likes to be liked."

Molly Weasley. Loving, caring mother of all the Weasley's. Her weakness? She's too overprotective. Molly certainly needs to step back a bit and allow her kids to know what's going on.

Percy Weasley. A strict but very intelligent Weasley, Percy should be a very useful guy. Unfortunately, he uses his skills the wrong way and becomes power-hungry to the point that family no longer counts. We should have suspected him earlier when he was checking out the book, *Prefects Who Gained Power*.

Sirius Black. Kind, loving, heartwarming godfather, we all believe Harry would ultimately live with him. The first shock is when we learn of his past. The poor guy had to live with a family of pureblood wizards who liked the idea of Voldemort. Also we learn more of Sirius's rashness and hardly knowing whether to treat Harry like James or not. In combination with other events, his attitude led him to his downfall.

Ginny Weasley. Always the shy type especially in front of Harry, Ginny pulls out a few tricks from her sleeve. We learn that she a pretty darn good hexer and a bit of a rule breaker. For all those Harry/Ginny shippers, I think this lets her deserve Harry even more than an old childhood crush would.

Finally, Harry Potter. He's been a wonderful narrator in the past. Now, JK Rowling has let him "grow up." Harry becomes moody and angry, this is quite a contrast to the Harry readers remember from the first four books. He sometimes even ignores his friends and makes quick decisions.

Introducing the other side of all these characters is what makes Order of the Phoenix unique. Rowling has once again outsmarted us and given many of her characters a three dimensional look. Another way to relate this to the real world.

Many new places, names, and faces have been introduced as well. They obviously add on to the Wizarding Community and as Rowling said in an earlier interview, "Harry's horizons are literally and metaphorically widening as he grows older. But also there are places in the world that I've been planning for so long and thinking about for so long that we haven't yet explored, and it's great fun. That will happen in book 5, too; we go into a whole new area, physically, an area you've never seen before, a magical world." Several of the new characters are brilliant additions and so are a few of the places.

We meet metamorphmagus Nymphadora Tonks, who is a complete klutz. Yet, she certainly adds a younger and spunky contrast to the older members of the Order.

Also, readers can be almost positive that by introducing the concept of metamorphmagi, there is certainly more than one.

Another excellent addition is Luna Lovegood. Rowling calls this girl the, “anti - Hermione.” She couldn’t be more right. Willing to believe in anything, this girl may appear very strange at first. Later, we learn that she shares many traits with Harry including being able to see the mystical horses, Thestrals. This girl will definitely make a return with perhaps a visit to the veil! With Luna, anything’s possible.

Finally the character we hate, Professor Dolores Jane Umbridge. She and her plan to dominate the school was evident from the beginning as she slowly built on her ‘Educational Decrees.’ Rowling has obviously introduced politics to the wizarding world. Readers familiar with the book Animal Farm (by George Orwell) are reminded of the similarities between this evil woman and pre-Russian Revolution.

Obviously, one of the physical places is the Ministry of Magic. Harry finally scores a visit to this government building. Prejudice is evident when he first steps into the Atrium. A large fountain contains a wizard and a witch serenaded with slavish centaur, goblin, and house-elf. We are reminded that Rowling hates bigotry, and thus, the fountain is eventually destroyed. A bit of symbolism there, hopefully. Also, located in the Ministry is the Department of Mysteries. It echoes one of the themes in the books; as one gets older, life becomes more complex. The maze-like structure offers only questions to be answered. If Harry wants to meet certain people, he will surely return.

Another important place is obviously St Mungo’s Hospital. Here, Harry and his friends witness the terrible ordeal Neville’s parents suffer. It allows them to befriend the boy, who becomes a vital member of their gang.

With no doubt, many of these characters and locations will make a re-appearance in the next two books.

It’s always interesting to note the lessons and morals hidden in the Harry Potter books. According to Rowling, “those lessons, they grow naturally out of the book and I suppose they come naturally from me.” Book 5, being the darkest, certainly contains many lessons on life and death.

One of the biggest tasks Harry must make is to choose between what is right, and what is easy. Harry doesn’t seem to make the best of choices this time around. First, in an effort to rid of Voldemort entering his mind, Professor Snape starts teaching Harry Occlumency lessons. It

seems that Harry really cares less about them and constantly forgets to practice. Although Professor Snape is not the greatest teacher, Harry should have stuck on for the good of the future. Harry

also steps over the line when he performs an Unforgivable Curse. Even though it may seem to be easy, it definitely leads eventually to the dark side. If this was Star Wars, Harry would already have joined the Sith.

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Another lesson is the fact that Harry needs to realize adults are not always there. With Umbridge's bat, she has already warded off the most dependable adults in the school. Namely, these are Dumbledore, McGonagall, and Hagrid. Harry later becomes furious with Dumbledore thinking, "On the contrary, he felt even angrier that Dumbledore was showing signs of weakness. He had no business being weak when Harry wanted to rage and storm at him" (834). The boy certainly needs to accept this fact or he would never be able to confront Voldemort.

It's great to read a book and not even know that the reader is learning.

Is there light at the end of the tunnel? Hermione certainly seems to think so. We can finally be rest assured that people finally start to believe Harry. He is no longer known as crazy or delusional, but rather "The Boy who Lived."

Returning to Treasure Planet, I seem to recall a newer and more mature Jim Hawkins. Regardless of whether Harry dies in the 7th book (I hate how Rowling chooses not to say), I am tempted to believe that he will grow out of this moody phase into a more mature wizard who can take on Voldemort. Book 5 is definitely the stepping stone to the last two books.

As to those signs, I think Book 5 deserves another re-reading. Don't you?