

## SCHOOL'S IN FOR SUMMER ANATOMY OF A SCENE FROM

# Harry Potter AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Whenever John Huston was complimented on the screenplay for his directorial debut, 1941's *The Maltese Falcon*, he modestly scoffed that he'd simply handed his secretary the Dashiell Hammett novel and told her to type it up in screenplay form. Huston repeated the tale so often that it became the stuff of legend though, as detective Sam Spade might say, "That's a load of hooey." After 10 minutes of comparing book and movie, you notice incidents skipped, characters expanded or cut, emphases shifted. Yes, the book is cinematic as hell, but it took a screenwriter to turn it into cinema.

Some books—J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series among them—seem so vivid, visual and pre-structured into scenes that they should adapt to the new medium like buttah. Even pros, however, need to remind themselves that no novel becomes an instant movie.

Steve Kloves, screenwriter for the first four (and forthcoming two) *Potter* films, decided in 2004 to take a break and hand over the writing of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* to Michael Goldenberg, whose experiences with filming novels like *Contact* and *Peter Pan* made him intimately familiar with the adaptation process. Yet, he thought this one would be relatively easy because "it's already so narratively rich, full of incident." It did end up being one of his best work experiences ever,

but it took him time to gain the confidence necessary to magically transform a worldwide best-seller into a viable movie.

### The Background


As *Order of the Phoenix* begins, Harry, now 15, has had a worse than usual summer. He won the Triwizard Tournament at the end of his fourth Hogwarts year, but at a frightful cost: the death of his friend and co-competitor Cedric Diggory. For reasons unknown to Harry, the summer has gone by with no word from his mentors, godfather Sirius Black and headmaster Albus Dumbledore, or his best pals Ron and Hermione.

What's worse, the Ministry of Magic refuses to believe Harry's claim that the Dark Lord Voldemort has returned and installs the simpering bureaucrat Dolores Umbridge as the school's "High Inquisitor" charged with shutting up Potter and repressing all departures from orthodoxy. She turns the all-important Defense Against the Dark Arts class into a theoretical seminar, terrifying Hermione and Ron that their entire class will be rendered powerless whenever Voldemort makes his move. So they approach Harry (who has beaten Voldemort twice before) to teach his defensive skills to volunteers in a secret society that takes the name "D.A.," or "Dumbledore's Army."

In Rowling, the idea for the D.A. is broached on page 330, but it's 56 pages later before Dobby the elf locates a meeting place for the dissident trainees; the so-called "Room of Requirement," which Hermione explains in the film is "also known as the Come and Go Room. [It] only appears when a person has real need of it and is always equipped for the seeker's needs." (Harry sees it more poetically: "It's brilliant. Like Hogwarts wants us to fight back ...") The first meeting of the D.A. occurs on page 396 with brief references to training sessions inserted from time to time into the next 200 pages before Umbridge discovers the group and shuts it down.

In sum, then, the Room of Requirement and its action appear in the novel at various times over 300 pages of text.

That works in prose fiction where it's natural to intercut the ongoing D.A. training with the other events of the Hogwarts fall term. And a series of brief, unrelated training scenes are fine in a novel because none of them has value in itself—the main purpose of the D.A. is to set up what will be the third-act confrontation between the kid wizards and Voldemort's followers. But movie scenes take up time and attention. They have to offer more than mere set-up for what's to happen later on.



Daniel Radcliffe returns as Harry Potter in  
*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

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