

## Featured in The Nerd League

### By Katie Knecht

[spoiler alert]

I had nothing to complain about. With the announcement of “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child”, the wonderful wizarding world of Harry Potter was open to me again. I had two friends willing to commit to buying tickets to the play in London and planning an international trip surrounding the event in order to see it in real life. Ten months after tickets went on sale, I found myself in the West End on an August evening, in a line wrapped around the block, surrounded by Hogwarts robes, wands, and flying spells.

I hadn't yet read the just-released script or any play reviews in anticipation of this night. Amid the excitement, a heavy fear settled on me: What if the play ruined everything? What if it sucked and paid no respect to the beautiful world presented in the collection of seven books I had read many times over? I panicked at the thought that JK Rowling hadn't written the script herself. But, I reminded myself, she had approved it and put her name on it, which I naively imagined came in the form of reading over Jack Thorne's shoulder as he wrote. It was a new adventure, I told myself. A new method through which to take in the magic.

We entered the dark and cool Palace Theatre and found our first-floor seats amid a chattering, selfie-taking audience. I scoured the playbill; the images of the actors were promisingly dark and alluring. The house lights lowered, illuminating a backlit window on the stage in King's Cross Station, and we were plunged into the epilogue of “Deathly Hallows”, almost verbatim, and I found myself smiling: we were back in JK Rowling's world.

I loved the play for many reasons. The acting was phenomenal. Jamie Parker as Harry played a convincing adult version of the young man who struggled to escape the turmoil attached to his name. Noma Dumezweni turned Hermione into the boss-ass lady we all knew she would be, running the Ministry of Magic. Paul Thornley embodied the humor and subtle kindnesses of Ron nearly perfectly. Sam Clemmett played a convincingly torn and teenaged Albus, hoping to please his father Harry, yet seeking to rebel against him. Draco and Scorpius were wonderfully portrayed by Alex Price and Anthony Boyle respectively; for me, Scorpius stole the show with his subtle tics of awkwardness, his shyness so unlike his father's abrasiveness, and his kind heart that he wore on his sleeve.

The magic on the stage was enthralling: Harry, Ron, and Hermione disappearing through the Ministry of Magic's phone booth; Polyjuice potion transforming actors onstage; seamless dueling between Harry and Draco, complete with lit wands and soaring bodies. The production of the play was magnificent, and I do not use that word lightly. Perhaps the most comparable theatre production I've seen is “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night”, which is almost entirely

propless. “Cursed Child” makes use of props, but it does not rely on them; this was old-fashioned theatre magic.

The story itself ties into plotlines laid out in JK Rowling’s seven-book series, including the turning of time (shoutout to the Death Eater with the regressing head from “Order of the Phoenix”), which was comforting in a way that felt like a hug from an old friend, and exciting in that we were shown a fresh perspective on the plots we have come to know so well. In one of the final scenes, we relive the night of the murder of Harry’s parents. It’s emotional and poignant onstage. That we ended on such a familiar yet powerful moment worked well.

I still haven’t read the script on the page, and I’m not sure I will. The issues I had with the play had only to do with the script; I fear I would like “Cursed Child” far less without the fantastic performances of the play’s actors and far-reaching theatre production. At first glance, the pacing is faster than the speed filter on Snapchat, and it’s nearly impossible to keep track of what world we are in when we’ve gone back to the past four times in two hours.

On the subject of plot, who the hell is Delphi? When we find out that she was not only evil, but *Voldemort’s daughter*, I wanted to throw my hands up; I was frustrated with the lack of development for a character that did not exist in Rowling’s world. Sure, she could be evil – how would I know? Rowling never added anything to the plot without a million miles of context and reasoning behind it, so this felt like a cheat. And are we honestly expected to believe that Voldemort – self-serving, preservationist, unloving Voldemort – had sex with Bellatrix Lestrange? Does that mean that, in “Deathly Hallows”, Bellatrix was pregnant or that Voldy Junior was chilling in a crib in a back bedroom of Malfoy Manor as Bellatrix tortured Hermione? I could buy into Voldemort procreating via a powerful potion or spell – Bellatrix would totally have offered herself up – for the purposes of keeping his bloodline going, but imagining Voldemort having a sexual encounter is laughable. In these ways, the script asked too much of us.

There’s a scene in which Harry demands that Minerva McGonagall monitor his son Albus’ actions via the Marauder’s Map (what up, Moony, Padfoot, and Prongs?). Aside from this being entirely impractical, I was shocked to see that McGonagall eventually agrees and follows through with Harry’s request to keep Albus and Scorpius apart. The McGonagall I know doesn’t take shit from anyone, least of all from Harry Potter no matter how smoothly he uses Floo Powder to slide through her fireplace and into Hogwarts. I found this bit to be unnecessary, not believable, and, frankly, anti-feminist. PS – What’s up with Albus and Scorpius being clearly in love and not doing anything about it? It’s 2016. It’s cool! No need to throw a random female love interest for Scorpius to avoid controversy. What a missed opportunity to highlight a cause Rowling herself feels strongly about.

So, no, I had nothing to complain about when I found myself able to see “Cursed Child” with the original cast in London (NBD). But I can critique, which is good, because that’s what I just did. I realize that tickets to the play are sold out through 2017, so I understand if you want to read the script, but to feel the real magic you must see the show. It will likely eventually run on Broadway

and elsewhere. Then again, when's the last time I turned down another peek into the world of Harry Potter? I'll always come back for more. Always.