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HOGWARTS FOR MUGGLES

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For David Baggett
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THE MARAUDER’S INDEX 279
In 2004, there was an important literary event involving Harry Potter that didn’t require sleepy parents to show up before midnight at bookstores around the world with hyperactive, well-costumed children trembling in anticipation of a new adventure and completely unable to sleep. It didn’t involve J. K. Rowling writing something new or even leaving her home for a special appearance, and it never sparked front-page newspaper headlines or special television news bulletins. It was the surprising publication of an unexpected book: *Harry Potter and Philosophy: If Aristotle Ran Hogwarts*, edited by the philosophers David Baggett and Shawn Klein.

What made this a remarkable occurrence for Harry and his fans and the broader world of readers is that it demonstrated the range and depth of attention this ongoing story was receiving, not only among kids, teens, and imaginative young adults, but also throughout the professorial ranks of the academic world. The wizards of wisdom in our colleges and universities were taking note of Harry’s remarkable story and were finding in it great ideas and lessons for life. Courage, duplicity, friendship, happiness, justice, love, and ambition joined issues of good, evil, death, and freedom, among many other topics, in this remarkable examination of themes to be found in the adventures of Harry Potter as they unfolded before us, book after book.
When I was initially asked to write an essay for that first collective philosophical look at the deeper themes in the Potter tales, I must admit that I was simply perplexed. At the time, I wasn’t a Potter reader. I thought these were just books for kids. But after one of the editors of the project vigorously assured me that the Harry Potter stories were for everyone and were entralling people of all ages around the globe, I cracked open the first volume mainly out of curiosity and then, like many adults before me, was instantly hooked. In no time at all, whenever I prepared to sit down to read, I felt a strange urge to dress up in black robes and a tall, pointed hat. I breezed through the first four volumes, which were then the only ones in print, and subsequently began to read each one again, slowly, while awaiting the new books, savoring the intricacies of the story and the sparks of wisdom I started to see everywhere.

By the time the series was complete, I had read most of the seven large volumes six times through, and with deeper insights as my reward each time. There was much more going on in Harry’s world than met the casual glance, and far beyond the hidden skullduggery and secret machinations of the many characters. Ideas were percolating under the surface. Real wisdom was suffused throughout the pages. The former classics major Joanne Rowling was not merely a masterful storyteller, but was also a talented weaver of profound perspectives on some of the things that matter most in our lives.

I was inspired. I quickly wrote an essay on what I saw as one of Harry Potter’s central attributes, his courage, and then could not stop writing. In no time at all, I had written an entire book of my own, examining the philosophical insights to be found in these incredible stories that were linking the generations like perhaps nothing else in our time. I had to wrap up my book and send it in for publication right after Rowling’s sixth volume of her planned seven installments came out. So I ended up holding my philosophical breath for a good while in anticipation of the concluding storyline and what it would
say about my take on the earlier books. I’m happy to report that I was able to breathe a great sigh of relief when the series ended and all of my major interpretations had held up. But I had not had the last word, as a philosopher, on Harry and his friends.

This exciting new book that you now have before you, *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy: Hogwarts for Muggles*, is a fresh and distinctive report on the great ideas in the series. All of the authors of the chapters have had the advantage of thinking through their chosen issues and writing up their conclusions after the entire Potter storyline was complete and Rowling had even had her say in public about things that never made it into the pages of the official texts. The philosophers and other top Harry Potter experts who are gathered together here offer new voices and new perspectives on many of the most important ideas that come up in the books—some of which can be genuinely life changing. Reading this book will be like putting on a Philosophical De-coder Ring. It will show you vital aspects of the deepest story that lies behind these famous novels.

The dust has settled and the air has cleared. The great battle is over, and the surviving characters have gone on with their lives. It’s time to take stock and cast a long view over the most remarkable literary phenomenon of our time and to see what it says about some of the ultimate issues we face in our lives. As you read these pages and personally grapple with their important issues, you will experience anew the real magic that will forever animate J. K. Rowling’s immortal tales.