

## Azkaban

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(Alan Rickman) and divination witch Professor Trelawney (Emma Thompson, who seemingly copied Tracy Ullman's character in "Robin Hood: Men in Tights"). Professor Lupin (David Thewlis), the new defense against the dark arts teacher, bonds with Harry through his one-time friendship with Harry's parents.

While "Azkaban" begins with the same tired rigmarole of Harry leaving his porcine relatives, director Alfonso Cuarón blurs the train ride to school into an icy nightmare. The film has many of the same tired elements from the first two films — the classes, the hijinks and the detective work — but Cuarón makes the experience more organic than episodic, with heavy emphasis on mood to enhance emotion.

Rather than fighting puberty, Cuarón allows the film's principles to flirt with their changing personalities. Ron is still the goofy

cynic but embarks on adventure without complaint. Hermione is growing into an experienced witch. Harry lives through Radcliffe, who just barely peeks out of his childhood-acting cocoon and shows rage, confusion and hopelessness with more depth.

Cuarón gives the audience playfully subtle foreshadowing of a connection between Ron and Hermione. Cuarón is lucky and painfully patient: before he shot a single scene, he had two films of character build-up. He takes the road less traveled and only hints at the smallest kernel of a relationship without exploring it. Whoever directs the film where this relationship comes to fruition will have himself a huge emotional payoff.

"Azkaban" is the dark but beautiful cousin of the first two films, going deeper into characters and mood. Alfonso Cuarón has completed a cinematic hat trick, and hopefully the next director will keep the spell alive.

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## Wolfe

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electing London's mayor and Greater London Assembly.

Low turnout (which benefits the conservatives) and opposition to the war in Iraq (which benefits the liberal democrats) are expected to deliver Labour a nasty one-two punch. The high cost of simply driving the motor ways to get to the grocery store or to work has also driven up dissatisfaction among voters that may have voted for Labour on June 10, but will now be changing their vote or staying home altogether.

While Labour is still expected to hang on to its parliamentary majority, a disaster at the polls Thursday could be the death knell to Tony Blair's premiership and his chances of being only the third prime minister to preside over three terms. Many voters dislike Blair and his policies but still back the Labour Party. There are also a

significant number of Labour members of parliament who want Blair out, favoring Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown.

Brown, in his position as chancellor, acts like a combination of the secretary of the treasury, White House budget director and director of the Office of Management and Budget. All of this makes him the second-most powerful man in the government, next to the prime minister.

The high-level political maneuvering is the stuff of low-level political drama and has played out as such in the newspapers. The latest rumor has Blair's Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell mentioning to a conservative journalist that, "It's a Shakespearean tragedy. Gordon Brown is like the guy who thinks he's going to be king but never gets it. He's never going to be prime minister."

The quote, reported in The Spectator, was immediately denied by Powell and the Blair

camp, but it still has a ring of truth about it. Regardless, it doesn't matter what's true or not — perception is reality in politics, and the public perception of Blair is not good.

Still, Ken Livingstone, a Labour member and the incumbent mayor of London, said Sunday that dispatching Blair after the anticipated June 10 disaster would only cripple Labour and lay the groundwork for conservatives to make a comeback. Livingstone cited how the conservatives began to fall apart after ditching Margaret Thatcher for John Major, only to lead to a devastating defeat for Labour in 1997.

Whatever happens, it certainly makes for interesting times over here and is at least a little bit better than driving to the local gas station to protest the obscene prices. Just don't ask me to pay for the gas, though.

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