

*Harry Potter*

*and the  
Order of the Phoenix*

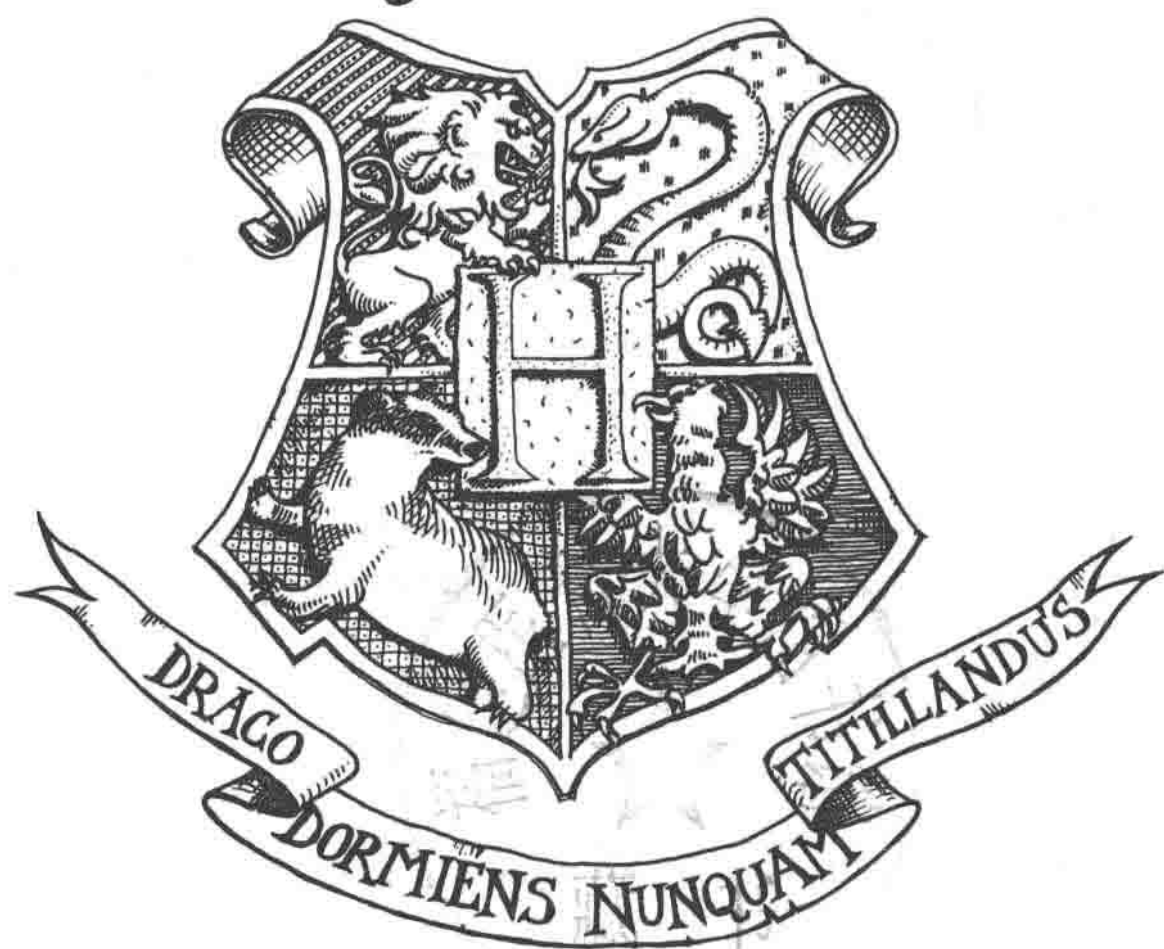


**J.K. ROWLING**

BLOOMSBURY

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Order of the Phoenix*



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LONDON BERLIN NEW YORK SYDNEY

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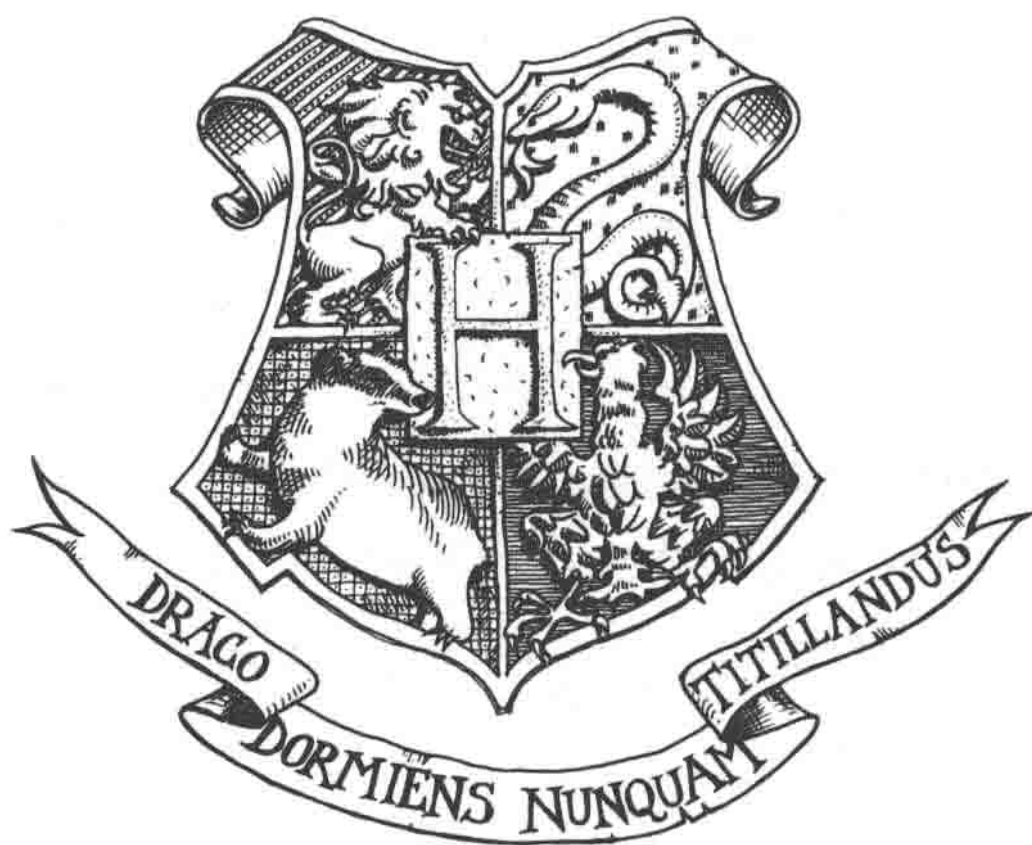
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*(in reading order):*

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone  
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets  
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Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire  
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix  
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince  
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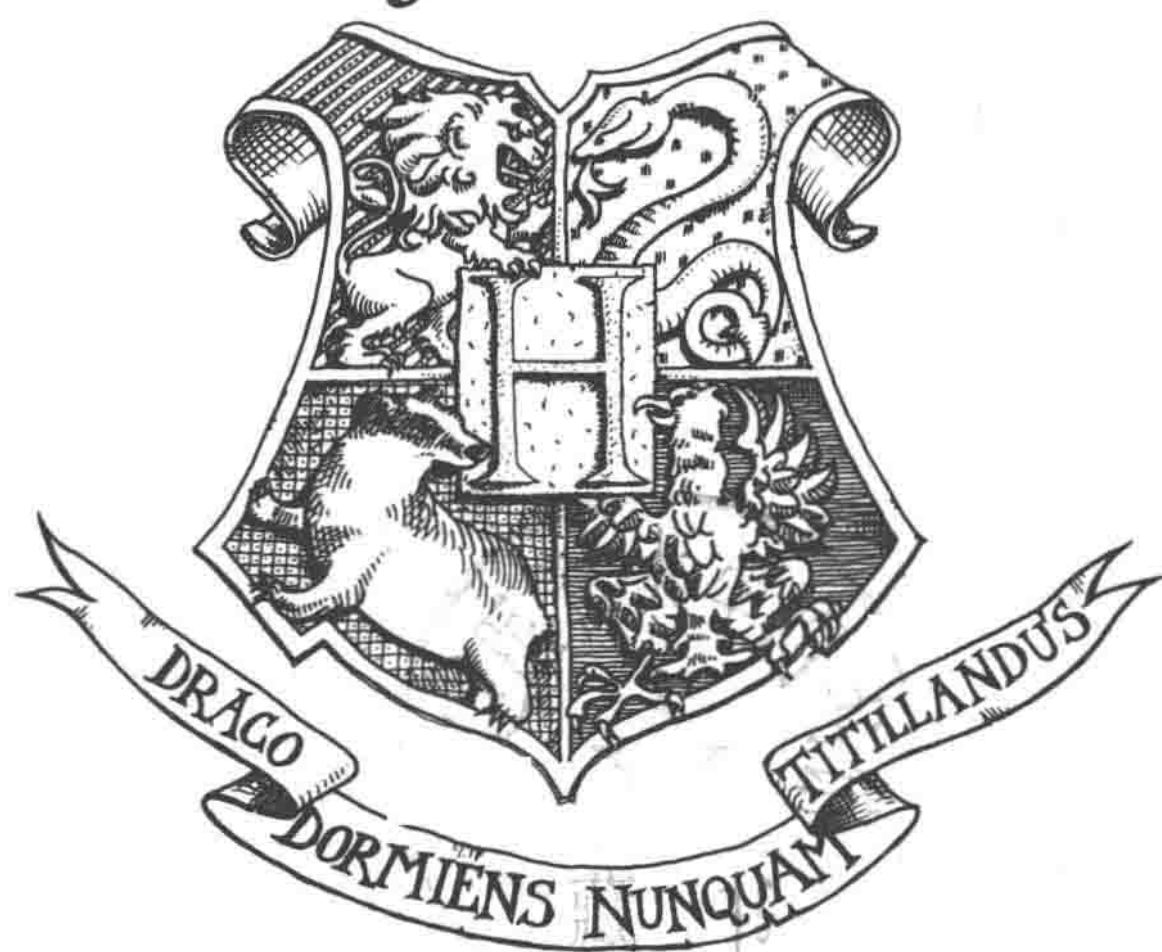
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*To Neil, Jessica and David,  
who make my world magical*





— CHAPTER ONE —

# *Dudley Demented*

The hottest day of the summer so far was drawing to a close and a drowsy silence lay over the large, square houses of Privet Drive. Cars that were usually gleaming stood dusty in their drives and lawns that were once emerald green lay parched and yellowing – for the use of hosepipes had been banned due to drought. Deprived of their usual car-washing and lawn-mowing pursuits, the inhabitants of Privet Drive had retreated into the shade of their cool houses, windows thrown wide in the hope of tempting in a non-existent breeze. The only person left outdoors was a teenage boy who was lying flat on his back in a flowerbed outside number four.

He was a skinny, black-haired, bespectacled boy who had the pinched, slightly unhealthy look of someone who has grown a lot in a short space of time. His jeans were torn and dirty, his T-shirt baggy and faded, and the soles of his trainers were peeling away from the uppers. Harry Potter's appearance did not endear him to the neighbours, who were the sort of people who thought scruffiness ought to be punishable by law, but as he had hidden himself behind a large hydrangea bush this evening he was quite invisible to passers-by. In fact, the only way he would be spotted was if his Uncle Vernon or Aunt Petunia stuck their heads out

of the living-room window and looked straight down into the flowerbed below.

On the whole, Harry thought he was to be congratulated on his idea of hiding here. He was not, perhaps, very comfortable lying on the hot, hard earth but, on the other hand, nobody was glaring at him, grinding their teeth so loudly that he could not hear the news, or shooting nasty questions at him, as had happened every time he had tried sitting down in the living room to watch television with his aunt and uncle.

Almost as though this thought had fluttered through the open window, Vernon Dursley, Harry's uncle, suddenly spoke.

'Glad to see the boy's stopped trying to butt in. Where is he, anyway?'

'I don't know,' said Aunt Petunia, unconcerned. 'Not in the house.'

Uncle Vernon grunted.

'*Watching the news ...*' he said scathingly. 'I'd like to know what he's really up to. As if a normal boy cares what's on the news – Dudley hasn't got a clue what's going on; doubt he knows who the Prime Minister is! Anyway, it's not as if there'd be anything about *his lot* on *our* news –'

'Vernon, *shh!*' said Aunt Petunia. 'The window's open!'

'Oh – yes – sorry, dear.'

The Dursleys fell silent. Harry listened to a jingle about Fruit 'n' Bran breakfast cereal while he watched Mrs Figg, a batty cat-loving old lady from nearby Wisteria Walk, amble slowly past. She was frowning and muttering to herself. Harry was very pleased he was concealed behind the bush, as Mrs Figg had recently taken to asking him round for tea whenever she met him in the street. She had rounded the corner and vanished

from view before Uncle Vernon's voice floated out of the window again.

'Dudders out for tea?'

'At the Polkisses', said Aunt Petunia fondly. 'He's got so many little friends, he's so popular ...'

Harry suppressed a snort with difficulty. The Dursleys really were astonishingly stupid about their son, Dudley. They had swallowed all his dim-witted lies about having tea with a different member of his gang every night of the summer holidays. Harry knew perfectly well that Dudley had not been to tea anywhere; he and his gang spent every evening vandalising the play park, smoking on street corners and throwing stones at passing cars and children. Harry had seen them at it during his evening walks around Little Whinging; he had spent most of the holidays wandering the streets, scavenging newspapers from bins along the way.

The opening notes of the music that heralded the seven o'clock news reached Harry's ears and his stomach turned over. Perhaps tonight – after a month of waiting – would be the night.

*'Record numbers of stranded holidaymakers fill airports as the Spanish baggage-handlers' strike reaches its second week –'*

'Give 'em a lifelong siesta, I would,' snarled Uncle Vernon over the end of the newsreader's sentence, but no matter: outside in the flowerbed, Harry's stomach seemed to unclench. If anything had happened, it would surely have been the first item on the news; death and destruction were more important than stranded holiday-makers.

He let out a long, slow breath and stared up at the brilliant blue sky. Every day this summer had been the same: the tension, the expectation, the temporary relief, and then mounting tension again ... and always,

growing more insistent all the time, the question of *why* nothing had happened yet.

He kept listening, just in case there was some small clue, not recognised for what it really was by the Muggles – an unexplained disappearance, perhaps, or some strange accident ... but the baggage-handlers' strike was followed by news about the drought in the Southeast ('I hope he's listening next door!' bellowed Uncle Vernon. 'Him with his sprinklers on at three in the morning!'), then a helicopter that had almost crashed in a field in Surrey, then a famous actress's divorce from her famous husband ('As if we're interested in their sordid affairs,' sniffed Aunt Petunia, who had followed the case obsessively in every magazine she could lay her bony hands on).

Harry closed his eyes against the now blazing evening sky as the newsreader said, '*– and finally, Bungy the budgie has found a novel way of keeping cool this summer. Bungy, who lives at the Five Feathers in Barnsley, has learned to water ski! Mary Dorkins went to find out more.*'

Harry opened his eyes. If they had reached water-skiing budgerigars, there would be nothing else worth hearing. He rolled cautiously on to his front and raised himself on to his knees and elbows, preparing to crawl out from under the window.

He had moved about two inches when several things happened in very quick succession.

A loud, echoing *crack* broke the sleepy silence like a gunshot; a cat streaked out from under a parked car and flew out of sight; a shriek, a bellowed oath and the sound of breaking china came from the Dursleys' living room, and as though this was the signal Harry had been waiting for he jumped to his feet, at the same time pulling from the waistband of his jeans a thin wooden wand as if he were unsheathing a sword – but before



he could draw himself up to full height, the top of his head collided with the Dursleys' open window. The resultant *crash* made Aunt Petunia scream even louder.

Harry felt as though his head had been split in two. Eyes streaming, he swayed, trying to focus on the street to spot the source of the noise, but he had barely staggered upright when two large purple hands reached through the open window and closed tightly around his throat.

'Put – it – away!' Uncle Vernon snarled into Harry's ear. 'Now! Before – anyone – sees!'

'Get – off – me!' Harry gasped. For a few seconds they struggled, Harry pulling at his uncle's sausage-like fingers with his left hand, his right maintaining a firm grip on his raised wand; then, as the pain in the top of Harry's head gave a particularly nasty throb, Uncle Vernon yelped and released Harry as though he had received an electric shock. Some invisible force seemed to have surged through his nephew, making him impossible to hold.

Panting, Harry fell forwards over the hydrangea bush, straightened up and stared around. There was no sign of what had caused the loud cracking noise, but there were several faces peering through various nearby windows. Harry stuffed his wand hastily back into his jeans and tried to look innocent.

'Lovely evening!' shouted Uncle Vernon, waving at Mrs Number Seven opposite, who was glaring from behind her net curtains. 'Did you hear that car back-fire just now? Gave Petunia and me quite a turn!'

He continued to grin in a horrible, manic way until all the curious neighbours had disappeared from their various windows, then the grin became a grimace of rage as he beckoned Harry back towards him.

Harry moved a few steps closer, taking care to stop



just short of the point at which Uncle Vernon's outstretched hands could resume their strangling.

'What the *devil* do you mean by it, boy?' asked Uncle Vernon in a croaky voice that trembled with fury.

'What do I mean by what?' said Harry coldly. He kept looking left and right up the street, still hoping to see the person who had made the cracking noise.

'Making a racket like a starting pistol right outside our –'

'I didn't make that noise,' said Harry firmly.

Aunt Petunia's thin, horsy face now appeared beside Uncle Vernon's wide, purple one. She looked livid.

'Why were you lurking under our window?'

'Yes – yes, good point, Petunia! *What were you doing under our window, boy?*'

'Listening to the news,' said Harry in a resigned voice. His aunt and uncle exchanged looks of outrage.

'Listening to the news! *Again?*'

'Well, it changes every day, you see,' said Harry.

'Don't you be clever with me, boy! I want to know what you're really up to – and don't give me any more of this *listening to the news* tosh! You know perfectly well that *your lot* –'

'Careful, Vernon!' breathed Aunt Petunia, and Uncle Vernon lowered his voice so that Harry could barely hear him, '– that *your lot* don't get on *our* news!'

'That's all you know,' said Harry.

The Dursleys goggled at him for a few seconds, then Aunt Petunia said, 'You're a nasty little liar. What are all those –' she, too, lowered her voice so that Harry had to lip-read the next word, '– *owls* doing if they're not bringing you news?'

'Aha!' said Uncle Vernon in a triumphant whisper. 'Get out of that one, boy! As if we didn't know you get all your news from those pestilential birds!'

Harry hesitated for a moment. It cost him something to tell the truth this time, even though his aunt and uncle could not possibly know how bad he felt at admitting it.

'The owls ... aren't bringing me news,' he said tonelessly.

'I don't believe it,' said Aunt Petunia at once.

'No more do I,' said Uncle Vernon forcefully.

'We know you're up to something funny,' said Aunt Petunia.

'We're not stupid, you know,' said Uncle Vernon.

'Well, *that's* news to me,' said Harry, his temper rising, and before the Dursleys could call him back, he had wheeled about, crossed the front lawn, stepped over the low garden wall and was striding off up the street.

He was in trouble now and he knew it. He would have to face his aunt and uncle later and pay the price for his rudeness, but he did not care very much just at the moment; he had much more pressing matters on his mind.

Harry was sure the cracking noise had been made by someone Apparating or Disapparating. It was exactly the sound Dobby the house-elf made when he vanished into thin air. Was it possible that Dobby was here in Privet Drive? Could Dobby be following him right at this very moment? As this thought occurred he wheeled around and stared back down Privet Drive, but it appeared to be completely deserted and Harry was sure that Dobby did not know how to become invisible.

He walked on, hardly aware of the route he was taking, for he had pounded these streets so often lately that his feet carried him to his favourite haunts automatically. Every few steps he glanced back over his

shoulder. Someone magical had been near him as he lay among Aunt Petunia's dying begonias, he was sure of it. Why hadn't they spoken to him, why hadn't they made contact, why were they hiding now?

And then, as his feeling of frustration peaked, his certainty leaked away.

Perhaps it hadn't been a magical sound after all. Perhaps he was so desperate for the tiniest sign of contact from the world to which he belonged that he was simply overreacting to perfectly ordinary noises. Could he be sure it hadn't been the sound of something breaking inside a neighbour's house?

Harry felt a dull, sinking sensation in his stomach and before he knew it the feeling of hopelessness that had plagued him all summer rolled over him once again.

Tomorrow morning he would be woken by the alarm at five o'clock so he could pay the owl that delivered the *Daily Prophet* – but was there any point continuing to take it? Harry merely glanced at the front page before throwing it aside these days; when the idiots who ran the paper finally realised that Voldemort was back it would be headline news, and that was the only kind Harry cared about.

If he was lucky, there would also be owls carrying letters from his best friends Ron and Hermione, though any expectation he'd had that their letters would bring him news had long since been dashed.

*We can't say much about you-know-what, obviously ... We've been told not to say anything important in case our letters go astray ... We're quite busy but I can't give you details here ... There's a fair amount going on, we'll tell you everything when we see you ...*

But when were they going to see him? Nobody seemed too bothered with a precise date. Hermione