

***Wicked* (John M. Chu, 2024)**

THIS RECOMMENDATION CONTAINS SPOILERS

Fellow Ozians. Let us be glad. Let us be grateful. The most thrillifying depiction of life at Shiz University (Upper Land of Oz campus), the hallowed academic institution where the central duo of *Wicked's* double protagonist female friendship narrative, Elphaba (Cynthia Erivo) and Galinda (Ariana Grande-Butera), meet as newly enrolled students, is finally upon us. We couldn't be happier. Couldn't be luckier. In time though, it becomes apparent (to Elphaba at least) that something very bad is happening at Shiz. Aggressive assaults on the academic freedom of the teaching staff. The anti-intellectual and xenophobic persecution and ostracization of academics who do not inhabit their bodies, or occupy their place in society, in the way that those in power are demanding of them. Compulsory redundancies (well, kidnappings). And the propagandist usurpation of Shiz's curricula, but especially that of the class taught by History professor Dr Dillamond (Peter Dinklage), by Emerald City stooges, in service to a political agenda being imposed on the education of students, as the tyrannical government of Oz works in cahoots with corrupt university administration to manipulate their learning. There is no voluntary severance scheme at Shiz. No means by which Dr Dillamond might apply for Emeritus status. He is forcibly removed from his classroom, and thence from the Shiz campus. The research culture at Shiz is likewise shown to be driven by this nefarious agenda. One that is poised to hone and cultivate Elphaba's preternatural abilities in the elite academic field of Sorcery, but not so that it might be harnessed in service to Ozian society. No. Rather, that it might be exploited to consolidate existing power structures, and to foment growing societal fears of so-called 'wickedness'. Elphaba comes to realise the horrendible truth; that the explanations being offered up by those she previously trusted for the changes taking place at the university are a crock of Dear Old Shiz. HE in Oz is shrinking. We loathe it all.

Author bio

Hannah Hamad is Reader in Media and Communication at Cardiff University, School of Journalism, Media and Culture. She is the author of *Postfeminism and Paternity in Contemporary US Film: Framing Fatherhood* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), and *Film, Feminism and Rape Culture in the 'Yorkshire Ripper' Years* (forthcoming 2025).