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Your Life

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THE SUMMER OF POTTER

Harry Potter film, book have Central Jersey fans harried but exhilarated

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Potter

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Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," the film adaptation of the fifth book in the series. Forty years ago was the Summer of Love; this year might be known as the Summer of Potter.

Two years ago, the franchise enjoyed a similar double-shot with the premiere of "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" (the movie version of the fourth book in the series) and the publication of "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" (the sixth book). This year, however, anticipation is even greater because of the conclusion of Harry's adventures and attendant theories about how his story will end.

Kim Roth, 11, of Westfield is one of the fans counting down the days to July 21 with mixed emotions.

"It's kind of sad that it's ending, because I enjoy the books so much," Kim said. "But J.K. Rowling is such a great writer, I know it will be a good ending."

For Grace Roth, Kim's mother, reading the Harry Potters gives her as much pleasure as it does for her daughter and her 14-year-old son, Nick.

"I look at the main characters (Harry and his friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger), and I think that these are regular kids," Roth said. "Even with their magical powers, they go through regular fears and joys. It comes through that these kids are really human."

Potterpalooza

Throughout Central Jersey, bookstores and libraries are gearing up for the book release with a variety of events, including midnight parties and games.

The Lambertville Public Library is preparing PotterPalooza for July 20 and 21, an evening of activities and demonstrations. The parking lot in front of the library will be transformed into a replica of Harry's world, with sets and backdrops by Lambertville artist Sean Mount.

The library also is planning a replica of the Tri-Wizard Tournament (featured in "The Goblet of Fire"), in which contestants battle dragons, rescue friends and complete a maze. The evening will also include a screening of the film of "The Goblet of Fire" and live music.

How will the new book end?

SUPER SUMMER READER



On July 21, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," the seventh and final volume in the Potter series, will be published. According to Potter author J.K. Rowling, there are some serious twists and "deathly" situations ahead. How do you think the book (and therefore, the series) will end? Please tell us! Write to Features Editor Damian Fanelli at dfanelli@c-n.com, and we'll publish your theories at www.c-n.com and in upcoming Tuesday editions of the Courier News. And if you're still not a member of the Super Summer Reader club, fill out the big coupon below and send it in!

For a review of "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," see Wednesday's Courier News.

"We did the PotterPalooza for 'Order of the Phoenix' and 'Half-Blood Prince,'" explained Jennifer Sirak, children's librarian for the Lambertville Public Library. "But this year it's on a much larger, grander scale."

For educators, booksellers and librarians, the Harry Potter experience has had repercussions beyond seven best-selling books and five (and counting) popular movies. It has sparked the interest of a new generation of readers, brought generations together in their appreciation of literature and jump-started the fantasy genre, which once had been ghettoized.

"I think it's done wonders," declared Harvey Finkel, owner of the Clinton Book Shop. "It's gotten kids to read, and it's gotten them to read with their families. It's been wonderful to be part of this."

Finkel admits, however, that the immediate impact of Harry Potter has been limited to fantasy.

"You see some (Potter fans) trying out a little science fiction and a few adventure series," Finkel said. "It hasn't crossed over as much into other genres. But we're trying to get people to keep reading."

Sirak agreed: "The job of parents and librarians is to sustain the literary momentum. This is a unique time in children's literature. The Harry Potter series came out at a time when parents were hoping to get their children to read and when they wanted to find books to read with their children. Now, we want to keep that going."

Growing up with Harry

An aspect of the books that has sustained interest in Harry Potter

has been the fact that Harry's world has become more complex with each novel. As readers have matured, so has Harry himself, and the books reflect that.

Frank Laritz, 18, of Raritan Township, feels that he has grown up with Harry. He read "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" the summer before third grade; now he is preparing for his senior year at Hunterdon Central High School.

"I've always liked the magic aspect of the story," said Laritz, who has turned his 13-year-old sister, Alyssa, on to the series. "It's so entertaining. I've read just about all the books twice, and they're still as enjoyable the second time around."

Katie Monigan, 16, of Lambertville admitted that she wasn't much of a fantasy fan until she read "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" in third grade.

"That spurred my interest to read the first two books, and I've been a fan ever since," she said.

Monigan is particularly intrigued by what she calls the "intellectual aspect" of the Potter series. She noted the use of alliteration and allusions to mythology and other literature greatly appeal to her.

"I think reading Harry Potter has definitely got me reading more," she said.

"It's been interesting that kids have not outgrown Harry Potter," added Elena Kruglyak, bookseller for the Town Book Store in Westfield. "The first two books are geared for the younger audience. Once you move into book 3, you deal with serious issues. Book 4 had the death of a classmate. In books 5 and 6, you dealt with the battle of good and evil. Harry has to weigh the choice between doing what is right and what is easy."