

The Boy Who ...

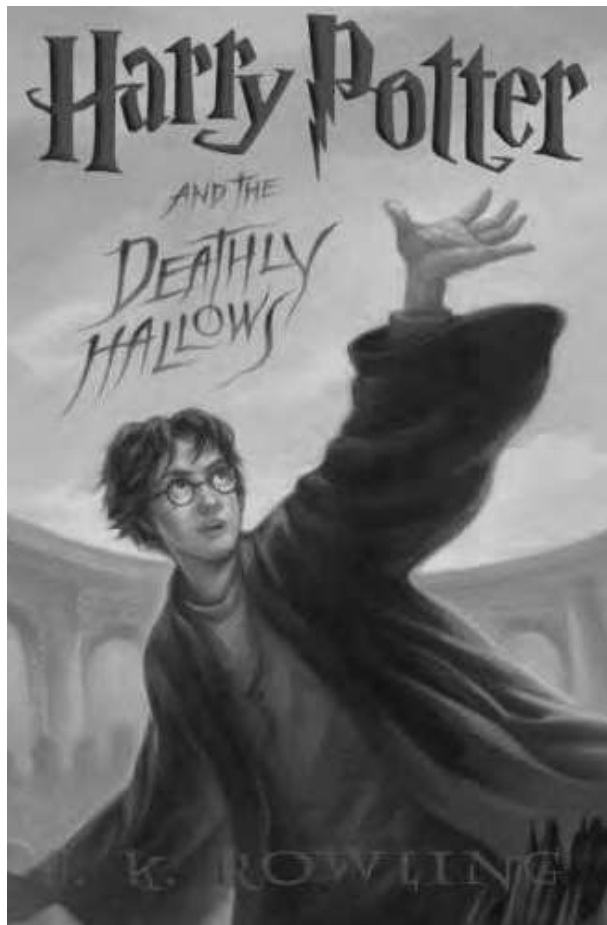
J.K. Rowling's magical tale comes to an end

There's one reason I didn't go to a Harry Potter midnight release party — though at about 11 pm last Friday, I thought about it. It's a simple reason: Had I gone and bought a copy of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, I wouldn't have slept. I would have been up for the next 10 or 12 hours straight, reading, poring, tearing up and reading some more.

I thought I'd be re-viewing the book in this space, but the more I read about it, and the more I flip back through its last few pages, the less I want to do that. It's not that all stories can be spoiled, or that all plot description is meaningless in the face of the popularity of J.K. Rowling's now-17-year-old wizard. It's that, over the last 10 years, Harry Potter became a journey in ways that few things ever have. It became an online fandom that churns out pages and pages of fan fiction (stories — often quite smutty — set in the Harry Potter universe). It became a juggernaut for bookstores and a topic of great discussion in media outlets. It became a way to make friends — just look for the other folks with Gryffindor scarves and Nimbus 2000 shirts.

In there somewhere, sometimes, the story gets lost. The simple, entrancing story with which it all began: a boy learns he's a wizard. And in the real world, a now-mythologized single mother becomes one of the richest people in the world. Plenty has been written about why Harry Potter, why now, why not Philip Pullman or Jonathan Stroud or Diana Wynne Jones or Garth Nix or Jane Yolen or any of numerous other equally (or more) deserving authors of fantasy books for young readers. And at the moment, plenty is being written about how kids, or those who began reading Harry as kids, might not read much else after his story is done. I wish they would, but even if they don't, they've learned something that they might never have done otherwise: that reading is magic.

I'm a hopeless bookworm and a junkie for a fantastical story, and I came to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* with 10 years' worth of excitement, expectation, theorizing and joy; I brought the images of how the characters looked in my head before they arrived in movie form; I brought the distinct memory of the first time I fell in love with Mr. Potter. I was a skeptic but was charmed in the first few pages when I finally picked up the book. I led groups of friends to see the movies on opening night and, when sick



HARRY'S IS A UNIVERSAL STORY OF LONGING TO BELONG

in Australia, convinced a friend who rolled his eyes at Pottermania to pick up a copy of *Harry Potter and Goblet of Fire* to keep me company while I was laid up.

I tell you this not because it's my story, but because it mirrors the stories of a fandom that's about to experience a massive comedown. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* is a lot of things, chief among them a satisfying, thrilling, violent, sad and affecting close to a series that some readers have grown up with and others, already grown, have come to love like little else. Some of us roll our eyes at a few of Rowling's writing hang-ups, but we still snifle at the sad moments. What Rowling did — what Harry does — is present a universal story of longing to belong, and to be important, in a world so alive and so perfectly, sometimes practically, magical that we can't help but wish it were real. It's a story that's been told over and over again: A seemingly ordinary young person who doesn't fit in finds that he or she is crucial to history and capable of far more than ever imagined. It happened to the Pevensie children; it happened to Frodo Baggins. It happened to Lyra Silvertongue, to a wizard named Ged and to a young girl named Alanna who wanted to be a knight. But when it happened to Harry Potter, the whole world seemed to see it at once.

It's time to turn the last page, but not to close the book for good. The journey is over — for now — and while these are stories for re-reading and revisiting, there is never a read like the first.

It's been a magical time.

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