

# 5th 'Potter' casts spell over local fanatics

Area stores celebrate blockbuster book

BY BRIAN MILLIKIN  
SENIOR WRITER

Children's sensations are supposed to die out — it's almost as if they're built that way to make room for the next Next Big Thing. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers, Pokémon, the list goes on. Print the T-shirts, the bed sheets, the stickers and cereal boxes — and goodbye.

Not so with Harry Potter, that unflappable British boy wizard created by J.K. Rowling. His best trick of all has been his popular longevity — Harry just won't go away. That was never more obvious than during Chapel Hill's local Potter pandemonium on the night of June 20, the eve of the release of "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," the fifth and latest novel in the seven-book series.

Forget for a moment the record-erasing 8.5 million first-run copies printed of the latest edition.

Forget that 5 million copies of the book were sold June 21 alone, the book's street date. Forget that the Durham Barnes & Noble alone was rumored to have ordered around 1,800 copies of the book for the event, a commotion unlike any the area's stores have seen.

For evidence of Harry's utter world domination, look only at 195 million — that's the unbelievable number of Potter books in print, not counting the latest volume. That's about one for every two U.S. residents.

"I read them aloud to my children, and then they read them aloud to each other; they're well-read copies," said Pam Webb, a fifth-grade teacher from Chatham

County. She ordered two copies of the new book — both the U.S. and British editions. "But I would stay up late to finish them, then read them aloud the next day."

Webb was at Branch's Bookshop, packed by one of many local Potter release parties on the relentlessly-anticipated evening. The only local independent bookstore, Branch's celebration featured personal touches with a makeshift cave, staff in disguises and homemade sculptures in the corners. The release party burst with enthusiasm for the Potter books.

"Anything that gets kids to read is good," said Jane Kaman, a parent and fan. "(J.K. Rowling) doesn't write down to kids; she challenges them."

Morgan Kaman, 11, planned to read the book aloud with her mother, as they did the past books. "It'll probably take us a couple months to read," she said. "If I try to read it by

myself it'll take me two weeks, but my mom's kind of a slow reader."

A wizard with a pointy hat served punch (deemed, what else, potion), and the kids at Branch's seemed to like him best. A weary parent asked him if there was anything in the brew.

"Any kind of potion you want it to be," he assured her.

One parent at Branch's said loudly, "The best part is that it's not a video game." He said this with an every-parent contempt for overpriced electronics and the PlayStation on his bookshelf. Of course, the Harry video game was available for play at the front of the store, but that's beside the point.

The most remarkable thing about the Potter phenomenon, however, was that it wasn't just for kids. Adults turned out for Harry in full force, too — maybe in fuller force than their under-18 counterparts.

Adults outnumbered the chil-

dren at Barnes & Noble, though a kids' atmosphere reigned. When 12:01 arrived, the first cluster in line was comprised of adults, the lucky first dressed as a satin witch.

But it was a preteen girl who reached her hand over the counter and poked one of the boxes containing the Holy Grail of tomes. "I touched it — I actually touched it," she whispered afterward.

Almost 600 tickets were given out to customers intending to buy one or more copies, and nearly 1,000 people eventually crowded the store. It was the most crowded spot in the area, and for good reason — in addition to readings, magic tricks and photo opportunities with a giant cover of the new book, the store also brought in six live owls.

A countdown to 12:01 boomed through the entire store as the time finally approached, and the night's frenzy finally ended with a thud — the sound the 870-page mega-

bestseller makes when it lands. Since its debut, the book hasn't left its perch atop the charts. It's estimated that \*\*\*\*\* have been sold in two months, demolishing the very idea of records in the book-buying industry. The rabid fans have not abandoned Harry as they abandoned every other so-called children's sensation before him.

After getting his copy at 12:30 a.m., Basie Settle, 12, stood outside Barnes & Noble cradling the book against his chest. He quickly surveyed his feelings. "I'm ecstatic."

June 21 will go down in history, but not as the day Harry landed to the cheers of children everywhere, or when the phenomenon peaked, or even when 5 million books were sold.

It'll go down as the day the video games stood still.

Contact the A&E Editor at artsdesk@unc.edu.

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Sunday (08/24)	11:00am	Worship at University Presbyterian
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