

The  
Rowling  
Library

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# Magazine



## Back to Screen!

*How the new Harry Potter series impacts and fits  
into the current state of the Wizarding World*

Dire  
Vacancies

Magic is  
Metaphor

New covers for  
French Potter

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# Welcome

## A word from the Founder

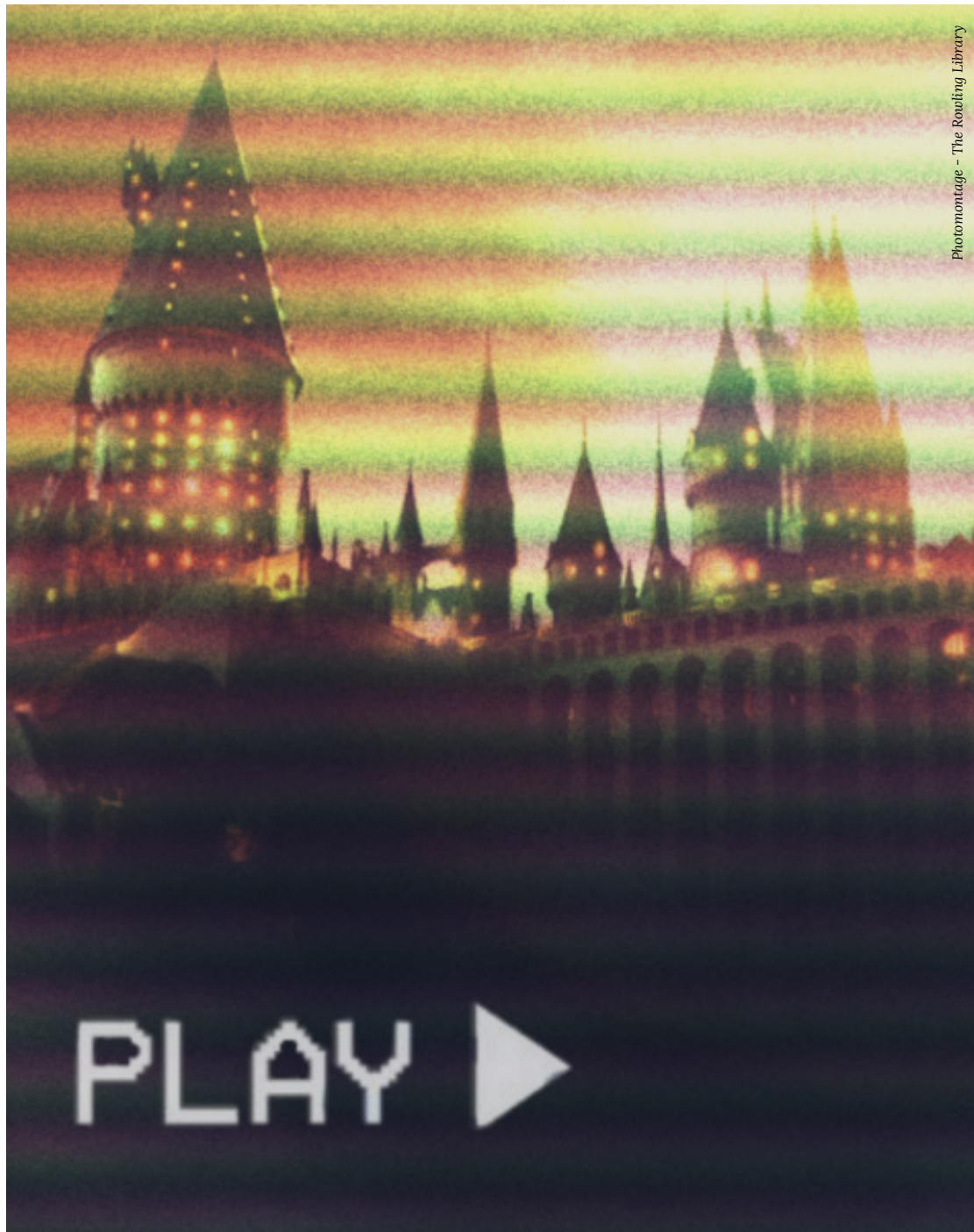
Welcome to our May 2023 issue! As we unfurl the magic of another month, we're thrilled to find ourselves amidst a wave of positive feedback from you, our loyal readers, regarding last month's redesign. The wizards at Otter Studio have successfully bewitched us all, haven't they?

This month, we're venturing deeper into the Wizarding World, with our cover story featuring the highly anticipated *Harry Potter* TV series that was announced just a few weeks ago. Trust us when we say, the excitement is palpable, but how is it going to affect and fit the current state of the franchise?

Our beloved contributor, Oliver Horton, concludes his captivating series on the *Harry Potter* books with a final article on *'The Deathly Hallows'*. His insights have been like Hermione's Time-Turner, allowing us to revisit the magic of the books all over again. In a bit of a twist, Joe Kourieh delves into the Muggle world, exploring J.K. Rowling's *'The Casual Vacancy'*. We are also thrilled to have Jake as our guest writer: he draws from his own life and how he is connected to one of the most significant characters from the series. And yes, your eyes aren't playing tricks on you - Fausto Giurescu's Famous Wizard Cards are back! We know how much you've missed them, and we're just as excited to bring this favorite feature back into your hands (with a new aesthetic, as well, from Otter Studio).

We remain dedicated to offering you a magical reading experience, filled with the charm and mystery that you have come to expect from our magazine. Your feedback, as always, is the fuel that keeps our broomsticks soaring. Thank you for your continued support. We're eager to hear your thoughts on this issue and we look forward to seeing you next month!

Patricio



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Cover art for 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' by Mary GrandPré (Scholastic, 2007)

ESSAY

# Magic is Metaphor

## Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

An article by **Oliver Horton**

**Harry Potter reaches the end of the line in 'Deathly Hallows'. Adulthood beckons, but Voldemort is in a murderous mood.**

Days after coming of age, Harry Potter breaks free of adult oversight and runs away to London. He moves into his own invisible house, 12 Grimmauld Place, and set up home with his two best mates and an elf butler. Errant father and former teacher Remus Lupin crashes the party but is soon expelled. Up yours, granadad. We're grown-ups now.

The Trio step up. Hermione Granger tries her darndest to fill the vacuum

left by Dumbledore. Which is the late headmaster's wish, that she slow Harry down, cool his hot head and nurture his kind heart. Ron Weasley becomes an ersatz Sirius Black, brooding and resentful, until rehabilitated by love's guiding light. Despite Dumbledore's Will, it is Ron, not Harry, who wields the Sword of Gryffindor. Harry's fate, body and soul, remains TBC until the final pages; in the balance. Will Harry kill Voldemort? "Neither can live while

the other survives.” As he ticks off Unforgivable Curses – Imperius, Cruciatus – the possibility grows that Harry will commit murder. After all, Avada Kedavra made the Boy Who Lived.

Death has been the final destination of the saga, always, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* takes the stories’ titular hero to the end of the line. Rather than deal out death, Harry must accept the clear and simple truth: everyone dies eventually, even wizard superhero Harry Potter. When Harry makes peace with his own mortality, he liberates himself from Voldemort and can live a normal life. It’s only taken seven years.

## Empty Nest

Activity at Privet Drive, per the formula, establishes aspects of the plot to come. Harry cleans out his trunk and discards most of his belongings, says goodbye to his Muggle family and revisits the cupboard under the stairs. He then enters the wizarding world and sloughs off the skin of his past, immediately losing his owl, his

broomstick and his Moody. Harry is soon cut-off from his magical family, the Weasleys, splits with best mate Ron and breaks his wand. At the book’s midpoint he sheds his clothes and dives into an icy pond, reducing himself to nothing. He also revisits and disassembles several magical institutions, the scenes of boyhood adventures, including the Ministry of Magic, Gringotts and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

The teenage Trio set out to destroy Voldemort’s treasures. Harry shyly gathers his own happy Hallows, sentimental

knick knacks from the people who love him: a watch from Mr and Mrs Weasley, his father’s Cloak of Invisibility, half a photograph taken by his mother, a Golden Snitch from Dumbledore, the Marauder’s Map that connects him to Ginny, Sirius’s mirror. Many of these he conceals in a magical pouch from Hagrid, worn against the chest. Where your treasure is there your heart will be also. Conscious of the power of objects, he bequeaths Regulus Black’s Locket to Kreacher, which acts as an anti-Horcrux, and brings sunshine to the benighted House-Elf.

« *Death has been the final destination of the saga, always.* »

Harry’s kindness to Kreacher, a creature he once despised, is a landmark in Harry’s personal growth. Empathy for the tormented Draco Malfoy comes easy now. Harry feels remorse for the stress he brings to The Burrow. He is awed by Ron and Hermione’s efforts to take care of their families: the ghoul in pyjamas, the Grangers to Australia. He learns to appreciate people beyond their relationship to him, as flawed individuals, and even comes to see Voldemort as a pitiful thing, all venom and no bite. Sympathy for the devil.

Ron tries hard to develop, but is waylaid by jealousy and the Slytherin Locket. His consideration for the Cattermoles at the Ministry and for the House-elves of Hogwarts seals the deal where Hermione is concerned. As the book progresses, Ron becomes subtly more like his future wife, even quoting her in the Room of Requirement barracks: *to general astonishment*. And she changes, too. Hermione has spent so much time in the library that she threatens to turn into Madam Pince. Here, the key text is *‘The Tales of Beedle the Bard’*, one book that Ron knows best. *“Of House-elves and children’s tales, of love, loyalty and innocence,*



Voldemort understands nothing,” says Dumbledore, a 110-year-old sorcerer who adores Sherbet Lemons. Hermione spends a fat portion of this final volume Polyjuiced as various middle-aged women, and must be reminded to stay young at heart. For lasting happiness, she needs Ron as much as he needs her.

## Magic Versus Muggle

“It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live,” advised Dumbledore back in *Philosopher’s Stone*. The Muggle world is the ordinary, non-magical world in which sensitive orphan Harry Potter struggles to cope. *The Deathly Hallows* forces the

gang to tramp around Muggledom, to survive outside Hogwarts’ enchanted dreamscape. For weeks, the biggest challenge is dinner. And the magical plotlines amplify mundane aspects of normal life. What is “Seven Potters” if not a bunch of mates helping Harry to move home? The Slytherin Locket is an egg with a heartbeat, a clue to the kids to come. Ron’s h-anger and insecurity are facts without its undermining presence.

Voldemort’s historic human traits are all Harry’s. The Dark Lord is a child’s fear of dying sculpted into a monster; Harry’s worst impulses given a snake-like mask. Harry cannot hide from death in the magical or Muggle worlds, because Voldemort and Harry share blood and soul. The hatred

of others is a terrible lure, easy to swallow. Dumbledore, we discover, started down a similar path, and Snape. Even dotty Sybill Trelawney rages against the “mundane”, while Hagrid and Mrs Weasley display a distinct wizard-first prejudice. But the Chosen One is strong, and chooses what is right over what is easy. His journey towards a loving family includes the rebinding of the Muggle and magical worlds. He shakes Dudley Dursley’s hand.

Tom Riddle believes himself to be special, and despises the crude matter that is ordinary men and women. Harry’s “deepest nature is much more like his mother’s,” explains Dumbledore. His mother’s son, Harry eludes the toxic masculinity that rushes to claim him. He rejects the crass materialism of his uncle, resists the headstrong recklessness of his godfather, feels his feelings unlike Professor Snape. He does not seek war or the Elder Wand. His instinct is to protect, a way of being that is established by Lily Evans. Harry’s mother is Muggle-born, divine and feminine, and Harry has her eyes. In the extraordinary chapter “King’s Cross” Harry no longer needs his glasses. He sees the world compassionately through her bright green eyes. Harry has grown

into that rare thing: a man in touch with his emotions. Master of love more than master of death, his final thought at the point of dying is of Ginny Weasley.

## Outrageous Fortune

Through a heartbreaking experience, Harry learns to accept death as part of life. The many passages in *Deathly Hallows* represent some aspect of his identity that Harry chooses to set aside. Snape is the repression of feelings, Dobby is subservience, and Hedwig is childhood. The seventh book attacks Harry’s every possible weak point, to test his fortitude. When fun-loving Fred Weasley dies, Harry’s resilience briefly cracks and depression takes hold. He nearly succumbs to the Dementors but is saved by Luna Lovegood, the lighthouse of hope. He gets by with a little help from his friends.

Harry’s bravery is matched with a “remarkably selfless” streak, the will to do the right thing. A lover not a fighter, he finally beats Voldemort with a defensive spell: Expelliarmus! Being expelled is, after all, worse than being killed. When Voldemort dies, he becomes just another cold body, unremarkable, unmourned.



Cover art for *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* by Olly Moss (Pottermore, 2015)

The corpse of Tom Marvolo Riddle is placed in a chamber off the Great Hall: yes, the fearsome bringer-of-death is consigned to a cupboard! In the new beginning that ends the saga, Voldemort, not Harry, is the unwanted thing under the stairs.

The seventh book ends “19 Years Later” on a platform in the real King’s Cross station. Characters appear in and out of the mist, but there are no wands or spells. Famous uncle Ron has just passed his driving test. Because this scene is resolutely Muggle. The references to magic, such as running the trolley at the barrier, are follies for children, like Ron’s silly jokes. The wizarding world is a traumatised orphan’s imagination at Mach 10 with its hair on fire. Now that Harry is whole, a father in a loving family, magic can be simply fun and games.

## Perchance to Dream

The story belongs to Harry Potter. Everyone else exists to serve his emotional needs. The author began with one character, the boy with the lightning scar, and worked out from

there. The books’ sorcery captures our imaginations, but their emotional truth wins our hearts. Harry faces his fears, which are all our fears, the universal fear of loss. Before Hogwarts, Harry feared death as some abstract thing that stole mum and dad. But with experience comes understanding and, finally, self-actualisation. At the culmination of the Battle of Hogwarts, Harry stands where Dumbledore stood, in the school’s Great Hall, and delivers a lecture to Lord Voldemort on magic and love. Harry has gone from pupil to master, and kept his soul intact. And recovered his mind.

The point of view in *Deathly Hallows* is pointedly Harry’s, yet the narrative continually merges him with other characters. Five friends and Mundungus Fletcher transform into Harry for the “Seven Potters” aerial skirmish. Harry becomes a Weasley for the wedding of Bill and Fleur, tries being a Ministry tough guy to recover the Locket, and turns old for the return to Godric’s Hollow. These are aspects of Harry, present and future. He also tours Europe as Voldemort, and lives the memories of Severus Snape and the wandmaker

« Being expelled  
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Gregorovitch. Omniscient, virtually omnipresent, Harry lives and dies; he lives again. The Boy Who Lived takes control of his own story. His holly wand organically develops sufficient artificial intelligence to shoot golden fire. Because, as Snape well knew, Harry Potter has no time for rules.

*The two men appeared out of nowhere* — is the opening line of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The concluding book salutes the writing process, the act of creation. In the beginning was a blank page and then: two men. Next: “A handsome manor house grew out of the darkness.” In “King’s Cross”, Harry conjures up the late Albus Dumbledore out of the misty air. This is how the Hogwarts headmaster first arrived, in *Philosopher’s Stone*: “as if he’d just popped out of the ground.” Do these characters exist at all, or are they merely extensions of Harry’s

dreamscape, part of a story he told himself to make sense of his parents’ tragic death? “Of course it is happening inside your head,” says R.I.P. Dumbledore, “but why on earth should that mean that it is not real.”

If the wizarding world is Harry’s dream, then it is a good dream, a dream to heal a grieving child. Upon surrendering to death, the final hurdle, Harry wakes naked and tranquil, as serene as Luna Lovegood. With a thought he summons what he needs: warm robes, an old friend. This blank white space is Harry’s creative plain canvas. He is clean of scars, as if his story has yet to be written, as if his character is not yet defined. And he is permitted to choose, to write his own ending, whether life or death, a train ride or a duel. Uncle Vernon would disapprove, but misty, spectral “King’s Cross” station represents: the imagination. ♦

# Back to Screen!

ESSAY

How the new Harry Potter series impacts and fits into the current state of the Wizarding World

PLAY



On April 3, Lucas Shaw released an exclusive scoop on Bloomberg that shook the *Harry Potter* fandom: HBO Max was close to finalizing a deal with J.K. Rowling to produce a series set in the Wizarding World. Contrary to speculation about a prequel or an adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, the series would adapt the seven books of the boy wizard saga.

Shaw's scoop was confirmed a week later, during the unveiling of Max (Warner Bros. Discovery's new streaming platform), by Casey Bloys, Chief Content Officer of HBO and Max. J.K. Rowling will be a producer on the seven-season series, with each season based on one of the *Harry Potter* novels.

As expected, fans welcomed the

news. The call for a TV adaptation of the books has been made for years, giving enough time to each character to develop and to each scene to be faithfully adapted. However, some fans voiced their opposition, arguing that a re-adaptation is unnecessary given the recent and faithful film adaptations (this author disagrees with that last point).

The initial reaction from the fans who received the news in a positive manner was to imagine what parts unadapted in the films might be included in the series: locations like St Mungo's Hospital, the Hogwarts kitchens or Ravenclaw's common room, or events like the Quidditch World Cup (the match itself is notably absent from the *Goblet of Fire* movie) and Tom Riddle's memories, or even characters like Peeves, who

had his moment of glory in the recent *Hogwarts Legacy*. Of course, we can spend hours imagining what we would like to see in this new series, but the purpose of this article is different: how will this series affect the Wizarding World franchise and its commercial level?

In the visual aspect, the official announcement included the Hogwarts castle that we all know from the movies: will it be reused for this new series? This decision, which seems to be still pending, will significantly impact the franchise. Reusing sets, costumes, and essentially the same visual identity would simplify some aspects: existing merchandise (like robes and wands) would remain "valid", but new designs would generate new sales for fans and collectors alike. The matter of sets is slightly more complex: changing Hogwarts, Diagon Alley, and Hogsmeade would mean, for example, that the Universal theme parks would be inspired exclusively by the films.

What will happen to children who grow up with this new series instead of the original movies? Will they be attracted to those places in the same way if they look different in their minds and on screen? A prime



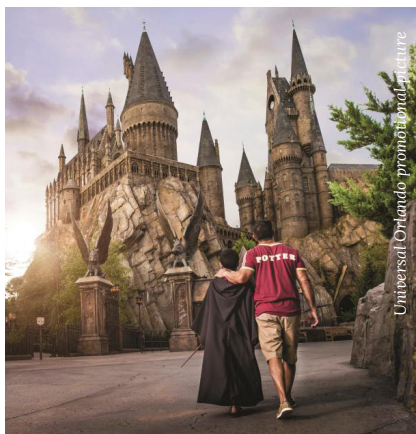
example would be the Studio Tour in Leavesden, where people can visit the studios where the *Harry Potter* films were shot and tour iconic sets. If the Max series shows a different Great Hall, those sets will have even more nostalgic value, since the "current" version of them on screen will be different.

Aside from the commercial and product level, this new series also affects the "lore" of the Wizarding World. It will inevitably create a Cinematic Wizarding World and a TV Series Wizarding World, which due to their own nature will be hard to connect. The main consequence is that the *Fantastic Beasts* films will belong to the Cinematic Wizarding



World due to their connections and dependencies on the Harry Potter films.

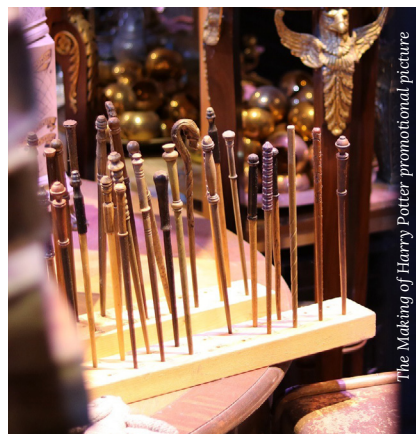
These connections and references span from visual props (like wands or Daily Prophet newspapers), locations (Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic), to visual effects: such as when wands become linked through a lighting spell in regular duels (which should only occur if the wands share the same core). If the Max series decides not to reuse these visual concepts, there will then be an unspoken separation between both worlds, and, for example, Eddie Redmayne's Newt Scamander will belong to the movie world of the Wizarding World. If the series decides to reuse all of this (which would be absurdly strange, as it would be like re-filming the *Harry Potter* movies with other actors), one could even still say that *Fantastic Beasts* is connected to the



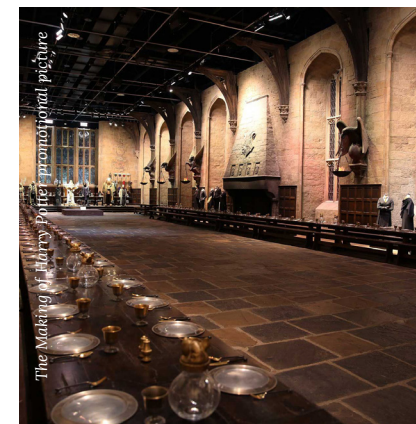
original movies: in their promotional videos, there have been flashbacks of Michael Gambon's Dumbledore.

While this may seem strange because we are accustomed to how Disney operates with its most important franchises (Marvel and Star Wars), it is not entirely new, and not specifically for Warner Bros. Until very recently, DC operated in the same way: television series were not connected to their cinematic counterparts (except for some cameos or nods), and that worked very well (the argument, one could say, is that it was a matter of budget, something that we believe will not be lacking in the new *Harry Potter* series).

It is true that this division allows the creators of the television series to have more creative freedom. They will not be so tied to the events and



aesthetics of the movies, allowing them to explore new directions in terms of plot, character development, and visual design. This could result in a more original and fresh reinterpretation of the *Harry Potter* saga, but on the other hand, this could result in some confusion among fans. For example, if a character is portrayed significantly differently in the television series compared to the movies, this could generate a debate about which is the "correct version" of the character (spoiler alert: none, the "correct version" is the one from the books). Furthermore, if certain events or details of the lore are contradictory between the movies and the television series, this could create inconsistencies in the general understanding of the *Harry Potter* universe, especially for those who only consume it through these adaptations and not the original material.



The potential division of the Wizarding World into two separate concepts, the Cinematic Wizarding World and the TV Series Wizarding World, undoubtedly presents a complex future. Navigating through this intricate maze of potential confusions and debates will be a daunting task. However, this division also opens the door to a host of creative and commercial opportunities. It could allow for the exploration of new narratives, the reimagination of beloved characters, and the creation of a television universe that can complement and expand, rather than simply repeat, what has already been established in the movies.

Another challenge the *Harry Potter* series will face is attracting and maintaining a new generation of fans. For those who grew up with the books and movies, the series will be

an opportunity to revisit and deepen their love for this magical universe. However, for the new young fans, who may not be as familiar with the original material, the series will be their first exposure to the magical world of J.K. Rowling. This is where the balance between fidelity to the original material and innovation becomes crucial. While familiarity and continuity can attract lifelong fans,

immerse themselves in a new product at the same time, allowing them to be surprised together and enjoy it in a way that was not common before.

However, despite the complexity and challenges this project may represent, there are reasons to have faith in the series. The fact that J.K. Rowling is on board as a producer is, without a doubt, an encouraging factor. Her involvement ensures a direct connection with the original source and the preservation of the spirit and magic inherent to the Wizarding World. Her faith in the project, openly expressed, invites us to share that confidence.

Lastly, the television series is, almost undoubtedly, the ideal format for the adaptation of the *Harry Potter* books. With more time to develop the plot and characters, the series has the potential to capture the depth and richness of the books in a way that the movies, due to time constraints, could not. Regardless of the challenges that may arise along the way, this new television adventure represents an exciting promise: the opportunity to immerse ourselves once again, and with greater depth, in the beloved magical world of *Harry Potter*. ♦

freshness and novelty are essential to catch the attention of younger viewers. The series has the chance to reinterpret the world of *Harry Potter* for a new era, incorporating contemporary themes and visual styles that can resonate with the younger audience. At the same time, it is a unique opportunity for those parents who want to introduce their children to the Wizarding World. For the first time, they will be able to



"It is easily the most professional and thorough collection of facts about the 'Wizarding Phenomenon'"

[HogwartsProfessor.com](http://HogwartsProfessor.com)

"An extensive and descriptive work of non-fiction, 'Secret History...' is a Harry Potter buff's dream."

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## SECRET HISTORY OF THE WIZARDING PHENOMENON

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NEWS

# The Running Grave

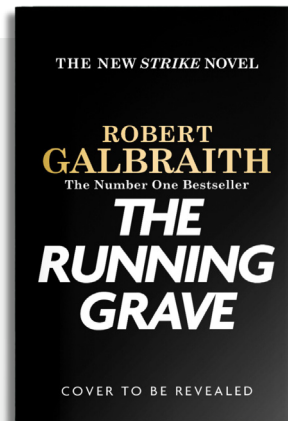
In the last week of April, the quiet murmur of the literary sphere grew a bit louder with the news of the publication date for *The Running Grave*, the latest installment in the series penned by J.K. Rowling under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith. The seventh book, which will carry forward the adventures of Cormoran Strike and Robin Ellacott from where *The Ink Black Heart* left off, will be unveiled on the 26th of September, boasting approximately 900 pages.

Yet, the press release revealing this news also held two intriguing nuggets that cannot be overlooked. The first is a celebratory gesture, marking the 10th anniversary of the publication of *The Cuckoo's Calling*. A special commemorative edition, "produced with exclusive artwork," is set to be released. Whether this entails a unique cover art or interior illustrations remains shrouded in mystery, with

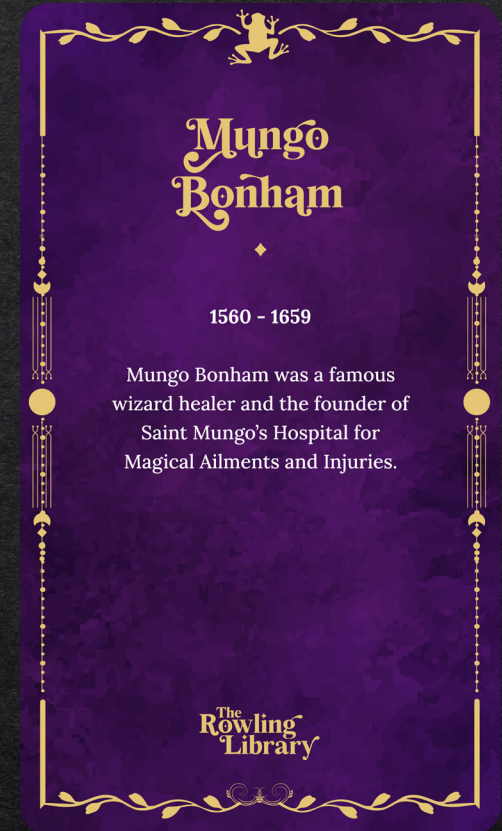
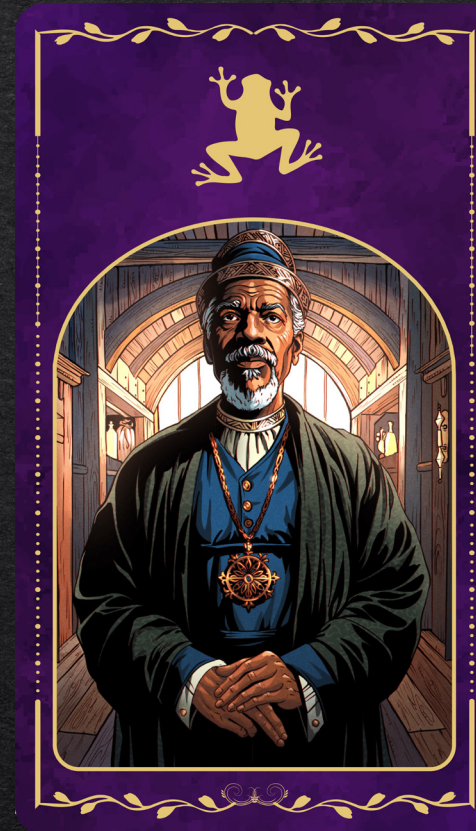
no further details or even a release date being disclosed at this point.

The second piece of information, potentially more significant for the series' devoted followers, is the confirmation that the saga will consist of ten books in total. While Rowling has hinted at ideas for future books in various interviews, this is the first time an exact number has been explicitly stated. Therefore, fans can look forward to four more books in Rowling's second literary saga following the Harry Potter series.

*The Running Grave*, by Robert Galbraith, is set to be published on September 26 by Sphere in the United Kingdom, and Mulholland Books in the United States of America. Prepare to mark your calendars for what promises to be a captivating addition to this riveting series. ♦



## Famous Wizards Card Collection



Cut around each side, then stick them together to create your own collectible card!



ESSAY

# Diré Vacancies

**How key absences in Rowling's  
standalone novel create a thematic  
contrast in the Harry Potter series**

As J.K. Rowling's first novel published after the completion of the *Harry Potter* books, *The Casual Vacancy*, by its very existence, inspires an analysis in relation to her beloved fantasy series. Now, there's certainly no direct comparison to be made between the magical seven-part bildungsroman and this standalone small-town drama. It would be an apples-to-oranges comparison. But in what way does *Potter* influence the latter? What is the relationship between these stories? Could a novelist possibly publish a follow-up work to such an illustrious series without some overlap between the two? *The Casual Vacancy*, it seems, is

a kind of homage to *Potter*, but more so, it acts as a contrasting thematic reflection of it.

## From Harry to Barry

The initial *Potter* reference that underlies the novel is hard to miss - *The Casual Vacancy*'s central figure (the character whose sudden, stark absence underpins the entire story) is, after all, called Barry. In quite a *Potter*-ish manner, Barry is plagued by persistent head pains, with this discomfort acting as a direct link to his doom. In the book's introduction, Barry's chronic headaches culminate

in an agonizing fatal aneurysm. The similarities between Harry and Barry essentially end there though. Unlike the thinly built moody teen with the messy black hair, Barry is a stocky, ginger-bearded jokester. Once again, a direct comparison would basically be apples to orange (pardon the pun, my ginger friends). And the differential between these central characters is a credit to the author - it'd be a disappointment to see a carbon copy of her iconic main character taking up space in Rowling's follow-up work, which, in its moment of publication, offered an opportunity for Rowling and her fans to indulge in her literary talents from a completely different angle.

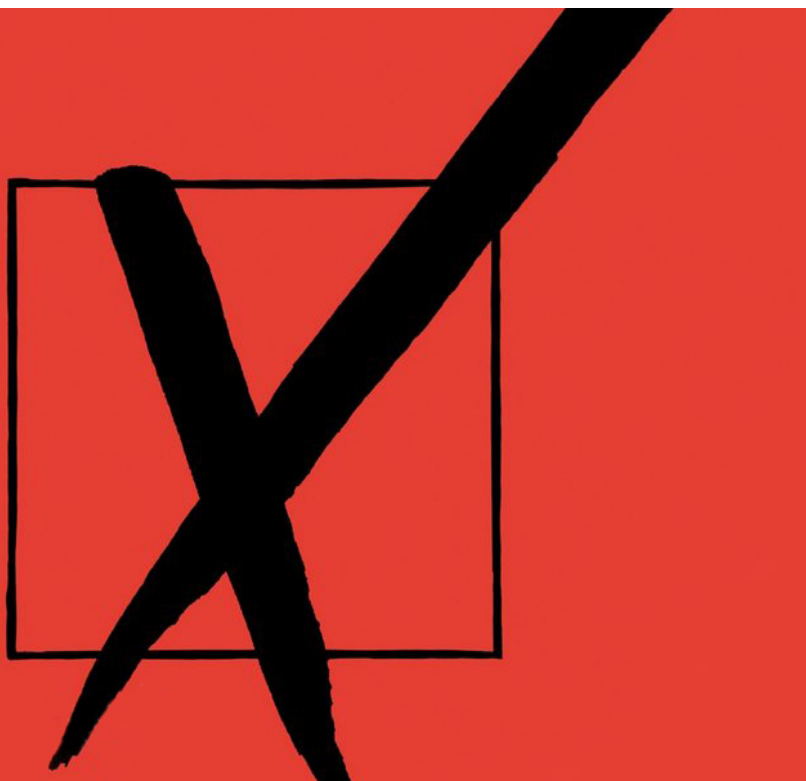
But that pivotal post-*Potter* moment (as rich with opportunity and anticipation as it may have been) was still a time of mourning. *Potter* was finished. That era had come to a close. *Potter*'s end (considering what an exhilarating end it was) left a sudden gaping cavity in our souls, and in our lives. We can hardly begin to imagine the void it left in the life of J.K. Rowling. She, it seems, used this sudden void as a jumping off point to craft this quirky and upsetting novel. *The Casual Vacancy*, as it happens, begins when Barry does the very thing that Harry never got around to,

despite so many opportunities - he dies.

The death of Barry Fairbrother - a major player in his town of Pagford, beloved mentor to some, dogged political rival to others - leaves a void in the lives of the members of his community, just as the end of *Potter* left in ours. Where once there was something so engaging and enriching, suddenly there was a vacancy. This is where parallels between *Potter* and *The Casual Vacancy* are potent: not in what's present in the story, but in what's absent. And importantly, the things that are missing from *The Casual Vacancy* are often those that define *Harry Potter*.

## The Missing Foundation

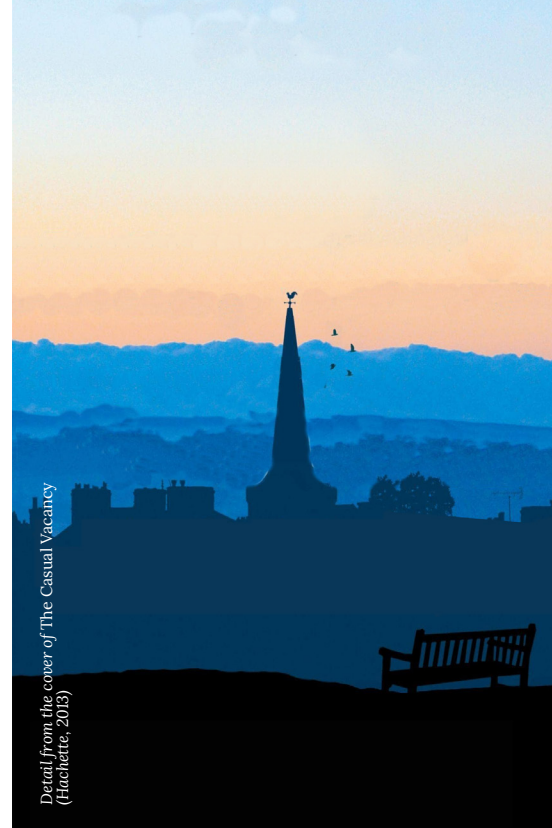
The most destructive absence that runs through *The Casual Vacancy* is a stark lack of parental affection, experienced by the majority of characters. This can be understood as a brutal reinforcement to the key theme of *Potter*: its insistence on parental love as a pathway to survival and success. The love and devotion of Harry's parents is so strong that it is felt, and even seen, from beyond the grave. His scar is an ever-present reminder of Harry's



parents' sacrifice, the embodiment of their devotion. James and Lily even present themselves in physical form to aid and encourage Harry during his duel with the newly restored Voldemort in Book 4's climax - a scene during which Voldemort's deserter father (whose absence would spur the villain's evil crusade and ultimate self-destruction) is also present as an interred corpse beneath their feet. This coalescence of parental influences is so important to Potter that the scene forms the axis upon which the whole series rotates. And there are plenty more parental successes on the good side of the Wizarding World. The Weasleys and Grangers, from complete opposite ends of the magical spectrum, lovingly support two youths of such quality that they play key roles in rescuing Britain from Voldemort's clutches. Potter fans can surely think of yet more examples of positive parental influences in the series. In a daunting contrast, the majority of characters in *The Casual Vacancy* experience a dismal lack of parental love and support. There is nothing casual about such a vacancy, which often imbues in them a profound darkness and inability to succeed.

Consider, as a forthright example, Krystal Weedon - fatherless local

troublemaker and promising student athlete, whose chances of success are undermined gradually by her mother's heroin addiction, then very suddenly by the death of her coach and mentor Barry Fairbrother. Krystal's tragic downward spiral forms the skeleton of the novel as the consequences of Barry's absence grow in magnitude, resulting in Krystal's climactic suicide following the drowning death of her little brother Robby. There are two heart-rending ironies in Krystal's downfall (in keeping with Rowling's mastery of the art of irony), both rooted in her twisted relationship to motherhood. The first is that Krystal learned from her mother a sure-fire means of self-destruction, and found the necessary kit waiting for her in her home: the spoon, the needle, the flame, and enough smack to deliberately stop her heart. The second irony is that Krystal causes the death of her brother (and subsequently ended her own life) by attempting to become the very thing that was denied to them both - a devoted parent. In her final hours, Krystal hatches a misguided plan to become impregnated by her psychopathic classmate and occasional sexual partner Stuart "Fats" Wall. Once pregnant, she planned to tap the resources of the local welfare program to create an



idyllic home as a shield against the traumas of her youth. Krystal is proof that, when left to raise themselves in a harsh world, kids will often seek to construct beneath themselves the very foundation they were denied, running the risk of toppling over in the process. In this case, Krystal's efforts end in utter tragedy.

Unlike Krystal, who clings as long as she can to her social safety net before falling through to her death, Harry Potter is awash in support. As Dumbledore explains, after the death of James and Lily, wizarding families lined up to adopt The Boy Who

Lived. Even though he experiences neglect and cruelty at the hands of the Dursleys, even their presence is yet another embodiment of his dead mother's support, since her blood, shared by Petunia, imbues their house with an unbreakable defense, ensuring his survival. Being at the very pinnacle of Wizarding society, Harry never experiences anything like the writhing desolation of Krystal and Robby. However, the parental destitution of *The Casual Vacancy* does not only exist among the lowest of the low. Quite the opposite: consider Shirley Mollison, who bestrides the town of Pagford queen-like (and also quite Umbridge-like) as the wife of its political top dog Howard Mollison. Shirley is supremely powerful and brimming with confidence. Until, of course, near the end of the story, she discovers that Howard regularly cheats on her with his business partner Maureen. In the moment when this realization comes crashing down on Shirley, she is haunted by the memory of her mother, who was an abusive drunk. The ghost of Shirley's mother jeers at her as she grieves for her broken marriage, a purely negative presence mocking her in her darkest hour. From Shirley at the top, to Krystal at the bottom, the misery of parental dysfunction is prominent across the

entire socio-political spectrum of Pagford.

## Saving Sukhvinder

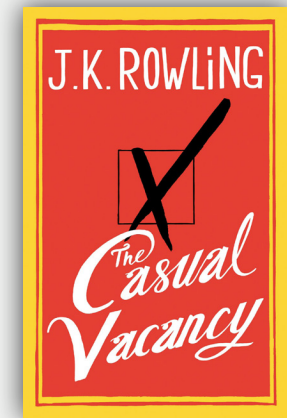
There's also a major structural absence in *The Casual Vacancy* that puts it in stark contrast with the *Potter* series: the one-off novel lacks a distinct main character. This novel jumps frequently from character to character, from mind to mind, offering a matrix of experiences from a host of deeply flawed people making their way in Pagford. Is this very deliberate diffusion of perspective, perhaps, a general homage to the irreplaceable Harry Potter? I believe so. It would be uncomfortable (disrespectful, even) to go straight into a new leading man so soon after *Potter's* conclusion. And, to this day, Rowling has never put her name on a book with a lead character who isn't named Harry Potter. It seems like a cheeky defiance, in a way - a refusal to move on from Harry's starring role in her life. Beside simply provoking a fresh style of storytelling, this absence becomes essential to the tragic nature of *The Casual Vacancy*: by offering no main character, Rowling offers no hero, no central figure on whom we can rely to save the day. And in fact, there are some

inversions of the role of hero in *The Casual Vacancy* that almost mock the very concept.

Take for instance the most pathetic character in the story, Gavin Hughes. A spineless worm of a man, Gavin spends most of the story trying to shuffle off his relationship with his girlfriend without summoning the courage to leave her outright, instead treating her with such disregard as to force her to break it off. Simultaneously, he nurtures romantic feelings for Mary Fairbrother (widow to his deceased best friend Barry), and strategizes how to forcefully usher her out of her mourning and into his own embrace. He's truly a detestable schmuck. But there's one crucial fact about Gavin that is easy to overlook amongst his profound unlikeability: he takes the lead in battling Mary's life insurance company when they try to deny her the payout for Barry's death. Gavin, a lawyer, becomes her legal knight in shining armor, putting in hours pro bono to make sure the Fairbrother family, bereaved and facing an uncertain future, are made financially whole. Importantly, we never see these efforts firsthand. Would our opinion of this awful man be different if we got to watch him giving the insurance company what-for, perhaps staying in his office late

at night, weary-eyed but dedicated to this cause? It's truly a kind of white-collar heroism that Gavin lives out behind the scenes. To deny us this key piece of Gavin's story, and thus damn him to perception as a total jerk, Rowling seems to brush aside the very idea of a savior figure entirely.

The truth is, the real hero of the little town of Pagford is gone - Barry is gone. Rowling cuts him down decisively while so many rely on him, when he had so much work left to do. The only thing that remains of Barry is his grave, as well as the "Ghost of Barry Fairbrother" - an online profile used by a handful of mischievous community members to troll the local message board and smear people. This perversion of Barry's memory is in stark contrast to the goodness he brought to the community, leaving the wound of his absence even more raw. Importantly, Barry's obsession at the time of his death (literally up until the final hours of his life) was advocating on behalf of Krystal Weedon. But he could not save her, and by extension, he could not save poor little Robby, who has no guardian to protect him when the desperate Krystal sets him aside to carry out her misguided final plan. In fact, as Rowling's harshest



## The Casual Vacancy

Written by **J.K. Rowling**  
Originally published on  
**September 27, 2012**

*The Casual Vacancy* is J.K. Rowling's first full-length work specifically for adults. Set in the fictional English town of Pagford, the story is an intricate tapestry of social issues, class struggle, and politics, a stark departure from the magic-infused world of *Harry Potter*. The title refers to an unexpected vacancy on the local parish council after the sudden death of one of its members, Barry Fairbrother, which precipitates a fierce battle for his seat and reveals a complex web of tensions and alliances among the town's inhabitants.

rebuke to the general egocentrism of regular folks, Robby is passed over by nearly every adult in the story as he wanders to his watery doom. They walk right by the lost boy, too stuck in their own heads to acknowledge the danger he's in. It's not a shining knight with a sword that Robby needs, nor a protective magical spell from a powerful witch - rather, a simple act of common decency would do. He does not receive it until it's too late.

The ending of the novel, though undoubtedly sorrowful, is not without grace. There is a subtle and tragically beautiful inversion to the story's lack of a distinctive hero that shines through. In what is certainly the most heroic act of the story, teenager Sukhvinder Jawanda dives into the river to rescue the drowning Robby upon spotting him beneath the rushing current. The context of Sukhvinder's character and circumstances at that pivotal moment are key to understanding the profound impact that her daring but futile rescue attempt has on her own life. Sukhvinder is deeply depressed, mercilessly bullied at school and dismissed by her family as a bit of a disappointment. Her abyssal self-loathing manifests into a dreadful hobby - she spends her nights cutting her arms with a razor

blade, letting the horrific, methodical process and the pain it brings distract her from her melancholy. The one glimmer of hope is her friend Gaia Bawden, a newly transferred student from London who befriends Sukhvinder specifically due to her outsider status. However, Gaia betrays her (albeit unintentionally, while black-out drunk) by making out with Sukhvinder's most prolific tormentor, Fats Wall. This betrayal sends Sukhvinder into a dire downward spiral. When, the next day, her stressed-out mother Parminder

dismisses Sukhvinder as usual, Sukhvinder takes her razor, leaves the house, and forms a disturbing plan: she will use her meager savings to rent a cheap room and spend the night cutting herself. The dark reality is that, whether intentionally or by accident, there's a good chance that Sukhvinder would have ended her young life that night - she was just one overzealous drag of the razor away from leaving this world, never realizing the true value she brought to it.

But, as Sukhvinder walks along the river toward self-destruction, she spots Robby, and dives in to save him. In the aftermath, her parents discover the extent of her misery and self-harm, and resolve to do right by her. Furthermore, a distinct silver lining materializes in the final pages: we get to watch Sukhvinder transform before our eyes into a strong young woman, spurred on by the traumatic event. She quits the razor, and takes charge of organizing and raising funds for Krystal and Robby's funeral. She is profusely praised by



Detail from the cover of *The Casual Vacancy* (Hachette, 2015)

the community, particularly by the headmistress of her school (this being only the second mentioning of the school's leading authority in the novel - yet another thing which is so present in *Potter* yet so absent in this story). Sukhvinder's transformation is a miniature bildungsroman that rises up rapidly in place of what would likely have been her imminent death had she passed by the river that day without spotting the drowning boy. Robby, in this way, is Sukhvinder's hero, and he is a hero to the many locals whose shock at the accident translates to a renewed endeavor to do better, and be better. Robby is not *The Boy Who Lived*. But he's a boy

who died to remind his community that being a hero need not be an otherworldly act. It can be a simple act - and it is a fundamentally human act.

In reflecting on *The Casual Vacancy* from the standpoint of Rowling's entire portfolio, the theme of parental love (and the stability it provides) looms as large as it was in *Potter*. Why might this be? Sadly, the obvious fact is that the beloved author knows all too well the impact of parental absence, more in the nature of *The Casual Vacancy* than of *Potter*. With one parent estranged and another taken by disease, Rowling's life has been destabilized by this very issue, so it's unsurprising that the theme is woven throughout every work of fiction that bears her name on the cover. To take this void, this agonizing vacancy, and translate it into beautiful works of literature is a kind of magic in itself - and yet, it is simultaneously the most deeply human response possible. In offering the one-two punch of *Potter* and *The Casual Vacancy*, Rowling demonstrates the ability to explore the same profound theme from a variety of perspectives while utilizing vastly different stylistic structures, and thus cements herself as one of the definitive novelists of our time. ♦



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# Snape, Snape, Severus Snape

STORY

***The story of a fan  
who cannot escape  
the Wizarding  
World...***

The Wizarding World follows me everywhere. I couldn't escape it if I wanted to and this will not change until *Harry Potter* fades from popular culture, which doesn't look likely any time soon. Not a week goes by that some person to whom I introduce myself will immediately reference *Harry Potter*. I have to admit that I love it as for the last 21 years I've been a huge *Harry Potter* fan.

I first picked up the *Harry Potter* books in the Spring of 2002. I was vaguely aware of the novels as my Mum had bought the first book and although I'd seen it on the shelf, I never bothered to read it. Just after

the DVD release of the first film I decided I wanted to watch it and knowing it was based on a novel I decided I had to read that first. I drove an hour from where I lived back to my parents house, collected the book and returned to my university halls of residence and opened up to the first page. That evening I read the first half of the book and finished it the following evening. Immediately after finishing *Philosopher's Stone* I drove to my nearest 24 hour supermarket and bought the following three books. I was hooked.

If you are still wondering why I have a unique connection to the world of *Harry Potter* that follows me wherever I go, it's all because of a certain character from the books: Severus Snape. I share my surname with the character who killed Albus Dumbledore.

Like many of the characters in the story, my relationship to Snape is complicated. During that first read of *Philosopher's Stone* it was quite a thrill seeing my surname in the book. It's not necessarily a rare surname here in the United Kingdom, but certainly not too common. The sweet taste of thrill turned to ashes in my mouth as I realised that this was not a good guy. I have a real dislike for Snape, I

hate how obnoxious, bitter, jealous and most of all how abusive he is. I never really feel that Snape redeems himself fully and that's what makes him a great addition to the story. He plays a huge role which is fraught with danger that requires a bravery that so many don't possess but ultimately he is still nasty and bitter. So in short I hate the man but love the character as part of the story and, by extension, the fact that my favourite book series is ever entwined into my daily life. He's possibly the last character I'd want to be named after but honestly,



Severus Snape in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*  
(Warner Bros, 2007)

I wouldn't change it for anything.

But at the same time, I love Snape because it means that, as I said earlier, the WIZARDING World literally follows me around everywhere I go. Not a week goes by that I don't get a comment about *Harry Potter* in reference to my name. My favourite thing is when someone makes a pretty obscure reference to *Harry Potter* and is then extremely surprised when I make an equally obscure reference in reply. I get to chat to people about the WIZARDING World all the time and as a huge fan this is a very nice byproduct of J.K.

Rowling having chosen my surname to use in her books.

The conversation usually starts with the question "Your surname is Snape, like in *Harry Potter*?" and once I confirm that I am a big fan, it goes into talking about our favourite book (*Deathly Hallows*), which houses we're in (I'm in Gryffindor!) and favourite characters. These interactions are great as I could talk about *Harry Potter* all day. But the ultimate interaction is when I'm asked: "Snape, like in *Harry Potter*? You must get asked that all the time?". To this, I reply with a wry smile "Always." ♦

# Auctions

Last month, we introduced a new segment to the magazine. We aim to display the most significant books and other memorabilia put up for auction, along with their sold price.

However, as items related to J.K. Rowling (whether it is from the WIZARDING World, the Cormoran Strike series, or any other way) don't show up in auctions every month. For that reason, sadly we don't have any significant item to display this month... However, we'll keep an eye out and hope we'll have new interesting items to bring to you next month!

Yours kindly, the Rowling Library Magazine writers.

« The consequences of  
our actions are always so  
complicated, so diverse,  
that predicting the future  
is a very difficult business  
indeed... »

**J.K. Rowling**  
in  
HARRY POTTER AND THE  
PRISONER OF AZKABAN

# New covers for French Potter

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of its publication in French, Gallimard Jeunesse recently released a box set of the books featuring the original cover art by Jean-Claude Götting (you can read a review in our issue #74). However, this is not all that Gallimard Jeunesse had in store for the celebration: a new edition of the seven novels with brand new covers will be released in France on May 25th. This is not the first time the publisher has decided to commission a new artist for the *Harry Potter* books, with Jonathan Gray redesigning the seven covers back in 2011.

This time, the person in charge of the new artwork is French illustrator Stéphane Fert. The artist is famous in France for his work on various comic books, although his connection to *Harry Potter* is not new: in 2018 he published a fan-art of Hermione Granger.

The new style of illustrations may seem a bit childish, which is why the

editorial director Thierry Laroche explained: "The first readers of *Harry Potter* are now parents, a new generation has arrived. We want to address them by reaffirming from the cover that *Harry Potter* is a novel for young people."

The books, which will go on sale at the end of the month and will cost between 8.95 € and 15.90 €, have already received positive feedback from fans, possibly for the amount of never-seen-before details on the illustrations. Sharp-eyed fans will be able to spot Hermione turned into a cat (*Chamber of Secrets*) and a young Tom Riddle (*Half-Blood Prince*). ♦



Hermione Granger by Stéphane Fert (2018)



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