

JUDGING HARRY

Toledo-area fans predict how Potter series will end

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Please, please, please do not give us a *Sopranos* ending.

We don't want the black screen of ambiguity when it comes to the final installment of the Harry Potter series. We want answers.

Will Harry vanquish Voldemort but die in the battle? Or will Harry live to make the fight against evil his life's work?

Will Dumbledore come back? Will Snape turn out to be a good guy? Will Ron and Hermione survive and live happily ever after together? Will that smug little creep Draco get his comeuppance?

While Harry Potter fans wait for author J.K. Rowling to give them the answers this weekend with the release of Book 7, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, fans are speculating about how the tale of the English boy wizard will end.

Claudia St. Clair has a bad feeling about things. After all, Rowling announced last year that at least two characters will be killed off.

"I'm fearful that Harry may need to be sacrificed in order to save the wizarding world," said Ms. St. Clair, 55.

Unsure that she wants to face that possibility alone, she's arranged to take off work on Saturday and read the book with a friend.

"When I read the last book I was crying by myself in the middle of the night and there was no one that I could talk to because I didn't want to spoil the book for anyone," she said.

One of the big issues that fans debate is whether Harry is a "horcrux" - that is, if he serves as one of the places in which Voldemort has hidden a piece of his soul in order to become immortal. If the young wizard is, it could mean trouble as he tries to defeat the Dark Lord.

"He'll just have to go find all the horcruxes and destroy them all, and I think he might have to destroy himself because I think he might be a horcrux," explained Yezzen Adya, 17, of West Toledo.

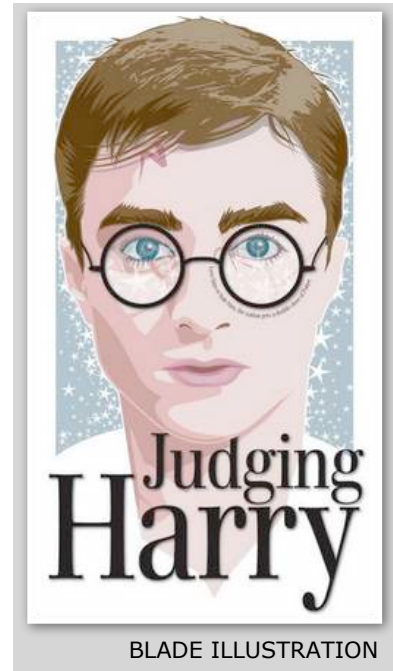
Alissa Romstadt, 21, would love for the story to end with a happily ever after - Voldemort defeated, Harry as the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and Ron and Hermione as the scene's new power couple. Failing that, there are a few things she'd like to insist upon.

"I need there to be a definite ending," she said. "All the other books have not ended, which is what you expect from a series, but I think this has to have finality in the end."

Oh, and one more thing.

"I don't want to see Harry Potter and Cho Chang end up together because I don't like her," said Ms. Romstadt, of East Toledo. "Mainly because what girl isn't in love with Harry Potter?"

Diane Woodring, 16, of Old Orchard, has done more than think about the end of the next Harry Potter book. She's written it.



Her entry in a contest by the Miami Herald newspaper to write the book's last chapter won an honorable mention. The bad news? It has Harry dying, fulfilling his destiny and becoming a national hero in the process.

"I believe that he has to go," she said. "He probably will lose a lot of other friends along the way, too."

Some fans, like Bridget Cushard, 14, of Bowling Green remain more optimistic. She's confident Harry will survive.

"There wouldn't be much point in killing him off because [Rowling] would have a lot of people angry with her," she said.

Instead, she expects Voldemort to get it in the end. And why not throw in a few other bad guys too, like Lucius?

"Snape needs to die too with him," Bridget added. "I don't like him either. Grrrrr."

There is speculation among some fans that deceased characters could make a comeback.

"I think that Dumbledore [the murdered headmaster of Hogwarts] is going to come back and help Harry and then he's going to die again," predicted Baxter Chambers, 12, of Bowling Green.

That's wishful thinking to Layan Elwazani, 13, also of Bowling Green. While maybe something like time travel could allow Harry to communicate with Dumbledore, it would be bizarre if he was still alive, she said.

There's almost too much to consider.

Brian Timm, who at age 14 calls himself one of the biggest Harry Potter fans in Lucas County, says he and his friends have thought it all out and they agree on at least one thing:

"As Harry flies off on his Firebolt, which is obviously his broom, he flies off to meet Voldemort for the final battle at Godric's Hollow. He jumps off his broomstick, but his broom keeps flying off and impales Draco Malfoy."

Brian won't mind if a few others die too, like Professor Umbridge.

"Just because she's a freak. Everyone wants her dead," the Sylvania Township resident said. "I'm surprised she isn't already."

If the heroic Harry dies, it will be sad but ... well, maybe it would be for the best.

Brian explained: "Unless you want some [stupid] author doing something like adding a series on what Harry's job will be, you kill him off."

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[< previous](#)