

THE Daily Telegraph

Potter's magic wearing thin

By Emma MacDonald
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MY HEART sinks whenever I hear the words "Harry Potter". With book seven about to arrive on July 21, I still wonder if I'm the only person in the world who has actually read them all - to their children, that is - and on top of it I can't help feeling that for some time the Potter train has been on the wrong track.

Recent Potter books are full of loopy people with no idea of right and wrong (and not just the baddies). Hagrid, who originally rescued Harry from his miserable life with the Dursleys and whom Ron and Hermione also liked, is suddenly portrayed as a dubious character they now shun for no apparent reason.

Also, what example are the recent books showing children? Hermione, already clever, uses a "time-turner" to get extra minutes for school work and performs a spell to shorten her teeth, while another girl puts a magic love potion in Harry's "chocolate cauldrons" to make him invite her to a dance. It's as if Potter author J.K. Rowling is insinuating that cheating, plastic surgery and spiking drinks is acceptable.

In the real world there are signs of a deep waywardness. Could there be any connection with the news that 10 children between the ages of 12 and 14 were recently arrested in Lancashire, England suspected of smashing 230 windows of the train used in the Harry Potter films?

What makes this vandalism even odder is Rowling thinks it's perfectly normal to deface a marble bust in Scotland's Balmoral Hotel, as she did by using a marker pen to write on it (without the hotel's permission): "JK Rowling finished writing Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows in this room (652) on 11th Jan 2007."

As if this battiness is contagious, US scientists have now come up with "a workable design" - not to tackle poverty or drought - but for an invisibility cloak that head researcher at Indiana's Purdue University Vladimir Shalaev says "would work exactly like Harry Potter's".

Perhaps Rowling has vandalised the Harry Potter franchise as well. The research I've done suggests that the craze has really been adults pretending to get carried away (rushing to buy it for themselves or their kids, who more often than not put it on a shelf without reading it) rather than children themselves.

Are these adults, who don't want to grow up, stealing our children's childhood? Aren't children the ones who want and need the magic Harry Potter once offered?

Rowling has said the series has followed the original readers (the 9s to 11s, like my eldest child, now 20, who has swapped Hogwarts Express for Murder on the Orient Express) as they got older and are now in their 20s. But even if it wasn't over-ambitious of her to try and keep people under her spell that

long, why are the books still in the children's section of bookshops.

Never mind. I'll explain to my nine-year-old that we won't be queuing on July 21 because the book has been written for his older sister, even though she won't be queuing for it either.

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