

## The Wizard World of Harry Potter: Analyzing the First Four Books of the Harry Potter Series

Peter GRAY

*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the fourth book in the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling, went on sale at 12:01 a.m. July 8, 2000, attracting extensive media attention and long lines of eager buyers at bookstores, many of which stayed open all night and held special events to celebrate the publication of this book (Minzesheimer 11B). At 5.3 million copies (3.8 million in the U.S.A. and 1.5 million in the U.K.), this was the largest first printing of any book to date (Jones 50). Rowling published the first Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, in England in 1997; it was published the following year in America under the name *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The first book became a surprise best seller, and the two that followed it, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, both in 1999, were increasingly successful. At the time of the publication of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the first three Harry Potter books had already been translated into 35 languages and sold more than 35 million copies (Jones 45). What explains the immense popularity of these books?

Two obvious attractions of the Harry Potter books are the compelling character of Harry, an unpretentious boy with special gifts who is forced by circumstances beyond his control to confront an evil villain, and the tightly plotted, swiftly paced action of each story. A less discussed factor is how Rowling first created the wizard world that Harry lives in then carefully enlarged it throughout the four books. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, Rowling created the unique wizard world of Harry Potter by combining elements commonly associated with witches and magic with a fantastic collection of new elements of her own invention. In each succeeding Harry Potter book, Rowling has carefully added details to this wizard world. This continuous enlargement of the wizard world is one of the strengths of the Harry Potter series because the details themselves are fascinating and because the continual addition of information acts as a counterweight to the repetitious nature of the basic plot of each individual book, in which Harry goes to school, faces a life-threatening challenge from the evil Voldemort, and is victorious in the end. Rowling's careful separation of the wizard world and the world of muggles (non-magical people) within these stories is an essential element in the plot of each book; and it also metaphorically separates Rowling's fictional world from the real world, protecting Rowling from charges of promoting witchcraft and, at the same time, giving readers an imaginary world that provides escape from and insights into the ordinary world.

## Introduction to the Wizard World in the First Book

The first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (this paper refers to the American editions of the four Harry Potter books) describes how the infant Harry is placed at his uncle and aunt Dursley's doorstep to be raised by them because his parents have died. The second chapter skips to when Harry is nearly eleven years old. He has been raised by the Dursleys in complete ignorance of his father and mother's magical powers and of the entire wizard world. Harry does not know that his mother and father were a witch and wizard, that they were killed by the powerful evil wizard Voldemort, who also tried but failed to kill Harry, that because Harry survived Voldemort's attack he is famous in the wizard world, and that he himself is a wizard. On his eleventh birthday, Harry receives a letter from the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry informing him that he has been accepted as a student. He has no idea what Hogwarts is or why the letter has been sent to him, but he is eager to escape the mean and stingy world of the Dursleys, so he accepts the letter's invitation. From this point on, Harry plunges into the wizard world and begins to soak up information about this world, which is both different from and parallel to the world of ordinary people. As Harry learns about the wizard world, the reader learns with him, experiencing Harry's delight, and increasingly identifying with the young adventurous boy.

The wizard world that Harry discovers contains many things which have always been commonly associated with witches and magic. The witches and wizards wear long robes and pointed hats. They write with quill pens on parchment, and they fly on broomsticks. They use magic wands to perform spells, charms, enchantments, curses, and hexes. They study from spellbooks and mix potions in cauldrons. And their world is filled with strange and dangerous creatures: centaurs, dragons, ghosts, goblins, vampires, werewolves, and unicorns.

Rowling often builds upon these well-known things, embellishing them with rich new details. Two examples of this are Rowling's description of magic wands and broomsticks. When Harry buys his wand from Ollivander's Wand shop, the reader learns that each wizard's wand is composed of a unique combination of a certain type of wood (ash, beechwood, mahogany, maple, oak willow, yew), is cut to a certain length (in inches), and is filled with a powerful magical substance (unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers or heartstrings of dragons). The wand that Harry purchases is holly, eleven inches, and contains a phoenix feather. Harry learns that his wand is the "brother" of the wand owned by the evil Voldemort: yew, thirteen-and-a-half inches, and containing a tail feather from the same phoenix that provided the feather for Harry's wand. Rowling's descriptions of different types of broomsticks, from ordinary models such as the Comet Two Sixty to the ultramodern Nimbus Two Thousand, are a humorous takeoff on the importance contemporary people often place on brand name sports equipment.

The most fascinating elements of Harry's wizard world, however, are the ones Rowling invents. Many of these elements, such as Hogwarts School, the town of Diagon Alley, the

game of Quidditch, and the Ministry of Magic, are central to the plot; and other smaller details simply add to the richness and charm of the wizard world.

The Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is located somewhere in England and is modeled after a typical English boarding school, which students enter at age eleven and graduate from seven years later at age eighteen. Students reach Hogwarts by taking the Hogwarts Express train from platform nine and three-quarters of Kings Cross Station. This special platform, train, and school are all hidden from the view of muggles by strong magic spells. The main school building of Hogwarts is a huge old castle filled with a confusing maze of hallways and stairways, tall towers, dark dungeons, doors that open only to passwords, and the magnificent Great Hall, where the students dine and gather for important occasions. The castle grounds also include a lake and an Enchanted Forest.

All students at Hogwarts live in one of four houses, each of which has its own distinct characteristics. Harry and his best friends, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, live in Gryffindor, known for bravery and symbolized by the colors scarlet and gold, and by the lion. Draco Malfoy, Harry's nemesis at school, lives in Slytherin, known for cunning, whose colors are silver and green and whose animal is the serpent. The rivalry between Harry and Draco mirrors the rivalry between all the students in these two houses, which in turn mirrors the rivalry within the entire wizard world between those who believe in using proper magic and those who use the dark arts (illegal magic). The two other houses, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff, are described in less detail and do not enter as strongly into the story

Just as the names Gryffindor (derived from *griffin* the mythical beast with the body of a lion and the wings of an eagle) and Slytherin (from the *slither* of a snake) clearly illustrate the character of each house, Rowling also gives Dickensian names, clearly expressing each person's character, to many of the teachers and students at Hogwarts. Professor Dumbledore (an old word for *bumblebee*) is the wise and gentle headmaster. Professor Severus (from *severe*) Snape (sounding like *snake*) is the head of the Slytherin House, and he spends much of his time sneaking around and threatening Harry. Professor Minerva (the Roman goddess of wisdom) McGonagall is smart, stern and exceedingly scrupulous. Among the students at Hogwarts, Draco (suggesting *draconian*) Malfoy (with the prefix *mal* meaning *evil*) hates Harry with a passion, and Hermione (sounding like a Greek goddess) is studious, trustworthy, and brave enough to risk her life for Harry. Harry Potter's name works in several directions. Potter is a common family name suggesting that he is just an ordinary boy. As the familiar form of Harold, Harry suggests unpretentiousness; at the same time, Harry is strongly associated with English royalty. Harry is the name of the youngest son of the present Prince of Wales, and it also brings to mind Shakespeare's famous lines in *Henry the Fifth*:

His liberal eye doth give to every one,  
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all  
Behold, as may unworthiness define,  
A little touch of Harry in the night. (Harbage 763)

Finally, there is the evil Voldemort (*mort* is a Latin root meaning *death*), Harry's deadly foe who forces him into a life-and-death struggle near the end of each book.

Rowling created two wizard towns where wizards and witches can live and practice their magic without worrying about being discovered by muggles. Diagon Alley is located somewhere in London and is where Harry buys his unique wizard school supplies before each term at Hogwarts. Hogsmead, not mentioned until the second book, is located near Hogwarts, and it provides a place where Harry and his fellow students begin to learn more about the problems and politics of the wizard world outside the protected boundaries of Hogwarts.

The favorite wizard sport is Quidditch, an amalgamation of several ball games (basketball, soccer, field hockey) played by teams of seven players who fly on broomsticks. Three offensive players called Chasers score by hitting a ball called the Quaffle through one of three hoops (10 points) which are guarded by a Keeper. The Seeker scores by catching a tiny golden ball with silver wings called the Golden Snitch (150 points). Catching the Snitch also ends the game. Each team also has two Bludgers who attempt to knock opposing players off of their broomsticks by hitting them with two large balls also called Bludgers.

Quidditch plays two important roles in these books. First, it is through Quidditch that Harry initially experiences and begins to feel comfortable with his extraordinary wizard skills. During Harry's first broomstick flying lesson, he discovers that he is a natural flyer. He also discovers that he can see and catch the tiny Golden Snitch with remarkable ease, making him the youngest, and perhaps the best, Seeker ever to play at Hogwarts. His experiences as a clutch Quidditch player prepare Harry, and foreshadow the climax of each story, for the emotional and physical rigors of his showdowns with Voldemort. The inter-house rivalry of the Quidditch games also creates a subplot among the students which parallels their struggles in other areas.

The wizard world is governed by the Ministry of Magic. In the first book, the Ministry is only briefly mentioned, but its main job is clearly defined as "to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 65). In the succeeding books, the Ministry's efforts to keep the wizard world a secret are described in *more detail and take on greater importance*.

In addition to these major aspects of the wizard world, Rowling fills the Harry Potter books with a plethora of intriguing, often humorous details about the wizard world. Many of these simply add to the general atmosphere. For example, wizard money consists of Knuts, Sickles and Galleons: twenty-nine Knuts make one silver Sickle, and seventeen Sickles make one golden Galleon. There are many magical gadgets such as the Put-outer, which looks like a cigarette lighter and turns on or off nearby electric lights with a flick of its switch, and the Remembrall, which is a large glass marble filled with white smoke that turns red if the owner has forgotten something. Wizards play chess with figures that are alive; players tell the pieces where to move rather than actually picking them up and moving them. The students at Hogwarts enjoy special wizard candy such as Chocolate frogs,

Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, and Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, which truly come in "every" flavor, from the usual favorites to such undesirables as spinach and liver and things even worse. The people pictured in wizard photographs and paintings move rather than being just frozen images as they are in ordinary photographs.

At the same time, some of these seemingly trivial details are also important keys to the plot. Wizard chocolate frogs come with cards of famous witches and wizards, similar to packages of bubble gum with baseball cards. The first chocolate frog that Harry ever eats contains a card about Hogwarts headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, and the explanation on the back of the card contains a vital hint about the origin and purpose of the Sorcerer's Stone, which Harry and most first-time readers fail to notice. In the denouement of each Harry Potter book, Rowling neatly ties up and explains all the clues that were placed in seemingly minor details of the story. Thus, readers have the satisfaction of seeing the plot neatly tied up, and they find it enjoyable to reread the books, catching all the hints and clues that they missed the first time through.

## Expanding the Wizard World in Books Two, Three, and Four

The plot of the second Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, revolves around Harry and his friends' efforts to discover where and what the Chamber of Secrets is and why someone is using it to threaten Hogwarts students. In the course of telling this story, Rowling adds several major facets to the wizard world.

With the character of Dobby, Rowling introduces house elves, small magical creatures that work as servants for wealthy wizards. House elves dress in rags and display complete subjection and loyalty to their masters. However, they have magical powers of their own and a keen sense of right and wrong. Dobby is an anomaly among house elves because he lets his sense of right and wrong overpower his loyalty to his master in his efforts to help Harry avoid the dangers of the Chamber of Secrets. Dobby plays only a minor role in book two, but he and other house elves appear again in the following books.

As Harry and his friends Ron and Hermione struggle to discover the location and understand the purpose of the Chamber of Secrets, they learn more about the history of Hogwarts and about different types of wizards. Most importantly, Harry learns the history of how Tom Riddle, the head boy of Hogwarts fifty years ago, became the evil Lord Voldemort. Harry also learns about three subgroups of people in the wizard world. Squibs are people who were born into a wizard family but who do not have any magical powers themselves. Mudbloods, an extremely derogatory term, are witches or wizards who were born to a mixed blood family (one parent a wizard the other a muggle) or ones born to two muggles, which is the case of Harry's good friend Hermione. And Parselmouths are wizards who can speak snake language, Parselmouth. The ability to speak Parselmouth is rare and is usually associated with wizards who practice the dark arts. Both Voldemort and Harry are Parselmouths. All this information adds complexity to Harry's worldview, which until

this point painted the wizard world in simple terms of good and bad; Harry begins to see the wizard world in shades and degrees of desirability and undesirability.

Rowling also describes the Ministry of Magic in more detail and gives it an expanded role in the second book. She introduces three specific offices of the Ministry: The Board of Governors of Hogwarts School, The Improper Use of Magic Office, and The Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office. Arthur Weasley, the father of Harry's best friend Ron, works for this last office, and his specific job is to prevent wizards from using muggle items in such a way that muggles will learn about the wizard world. Whenever a wizard is careless or malevolent enough to let muggles observe something magical, Arthur Weasley and his colleagues in the Ministry perform a Memory Charm on the muggles to erase the magic event from their memory. The ministry actively prevents wizards from interfering with muggles to insure the safety of muggles and to preserve muggles' ignorance of and disbelief in the wizard world.

In the third book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Rowling uses the story of Sirius Black's escape from the wizard prison Azkaban and his dramatic encounter with Harry to add new elements of darkness and fear to the wizard world and to elaborate further the story of Harry's parents, especially his father, James Potter.

All prisons are places of anger, fright, and despair, but the wizard prison Azkaban is far more horrible than any prison in the real world because of the prison guards called dementors. Dementors are magical creatures that wear dark robes with hoods that completely cover their faces. Their skin looks like decayed flesh, grayish and scabbed. They are blind but they sense people's presence by their emotions; and they draw strength from sucking good emotions and memories out of people. As a teacher explains to Harry, "Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself . . . soul-less and evil" (*Azkaban* 187). A dementor's most terrifying weapon is the Dementor's Kiss in which it clamps its jaws on the mouth of a victim and sucks out his soul.

The darkness and evil of the dementors differs from the evil of Voldemort in that the wizard world recognizes Voldemort as evil and rejects him even as they fear him. However, the wizard world accepts the dementors as necessary evils and willingly overlooks the dementors' horror in exchange for the safety that they provide by guarding the prisoners in Azkaban. Luckily, there are two antidotes to a dementor's terror. Anyone who has been in the presence of a dementor can revive their spirits by eating chocolate; and dementors can be driven away using a powerful incantation called *Expecto Patronum*.

The third book begins with the news of Sirius Black's escape from Azkaban, the first time anyone has escaped from this prison. Sirius Black was convicted of killing thirteen people, one wizard and twelve muggles, with a single curse, and it is widely believed that Sirius betrayed Harry's father and mother, leading to their death at the hands of Voldemort. Therefore, everyone believes that Harry will be Sirius' next victim, and the first

half of the book describes the efforts to protect Harry from Sirius, including the Ministry of Magic's decision to post dementors around Hogwarts, against the wishes of Dumbledore. In the end, Harry, Ron and Hermione meet Sirius and learn the truth: Sirius was James Potter's best friend, and he is Harry's godfather. James was actually betrayed by another wizard, Peter Pettigrew, who then framed the murder of thirteen people on Sirius. When Harry and his friends are finally convinced of the truth of Sirius' story they, with Dumbledore's assistance, help Sirius escape from certain death at the hands of the dementors. However, the rest of the wizard world still believes Sirius is guilty, so Sirius becomes a fugitive, and Harry must live with the knowledge that he cannot correct the injustice of his parents' death or the injustice of the false charges against Sirius.

In the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Rowling expands the wizard world to countries beyond England's borders with the two major events of this story: the final game of the Quidditch World Cup and the Triwizard Tournament. Observing and participating in these international wizard events, Harry learns that the wizard world is even more extensive and complicated than he has yet imagined, and he also learns that nationality and title sometimes hide rather than express an individual's true character.

At the beginning of this book Harry joins the Weasley family to attend the 422nd Quidditch World Cup during the summer before he begins his fourth year at Hogwarts. The Quidditch World Cup is the championship tournament of professional Quidditch, similar to the World Cup Soccer Tournament in size and enthusiasm generated. This year England hosts the final game between Ireland and Bulgaria. The Department of International Magical Cooperation and the Department of Magical Games and Sports are in charge of this event, which requires providing a stadium seating 100,000 people that is magically invisible to muggles and arranging transportation and accommodations for wizards from all over the world. Harry and the Weasleys travel to the game using a portkey, a object which can magically transport someone from one place to another simply by touching it; another portkey plays an important surprise role near the end of this book when it transports Harry unwillingly to a confrontation with Voldemort. At the Quidditch World Cup, Harry is fascinated by the wizards and witches from foreign countries wearing strange clothes, eating unusual foods and speaking different languages, he is thrilled by the game itself, and he is terrified by a mob of wizards who riot during the post-game celebrations. Harry realizes that Hogwarts, with all its traditions, rivalries and accomplishments, is only a small sheltered corner of the wizard world.

While Rowling uses the Quidditch World Cup to expand Harry's consciousness outward to new people and places, she uses the Triwizard Tournament to focus his attention inward to the workings of his and other wizards' hearts. At the beginning of Harry's fourth term, the students at Hogwarts learn that their school will be hosting the Triwizard Tournament, a competition of magical skills between three student champions, each representing a different wizard school: Hogwarts (England), Beauxbatons (France) and Durmstrang (Eastern

Europe). Although only three champions are supposed to compete, Harry is chosen by an unexplained magical fluke to become the fourth contestant, giving Hogwarts two champions. As Harry competes, he gradually learns to look behind nationality and title to see people's true character.

Initially, Harry is warned by friends, including the trustworthy Hagrid, not to trust Krum, the champion from Durmstrang, because he is a foreigner; however, in Harry's direct dealings with Krum he finds Krum to be completely honest despite his taciturn demeanor and foreign accent. Harry has the opposite experience with Ludo Bagman, head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports and a main organizer and judge of the Triwizard Tournament. Harry begins the tournament looking up to Bagman, who is also a former star of England's Quidditch team, only to discover later that Bagman is a chronic gambler and cheat who has secretly placed a bet on Harry to win the Triwizard Tournament and who has maneuvered to influence the outcome of the tournament in Harry's, and his, favor. Also, several times during the tournament, Harry is faced with a moral dilemma that requires choosing between certain victory or helping a friend or competitor in need. Harry always chooses to help; however, taking the moral high road does not always lead to happiness for Harry, especially when his decision to finish the tournament in a tie with his Hogwarts' classmate, Cedric Diggory, leads directly to Cedric's death at the hand of Voldemort's followers.

In addition to introducing these new major themes in books two, three and four, Rowling also adds abundant new details and subplots, making the wizard world in each succeeding book physically, emotionally and morally more elaborate than in the preceding book. Each Harry Potter book tells a complete story, satisfying on its own. At the same time, each of these stories is just another piece in the puzzle of the entire Harry Potter story, which will not be completed until Rowling finishes all seven projected books, one for each of Harry's seven years at Hogwarts.

## The Separate but Parallel Wizard World

The separation of the wizard world and the muggle world is a cornerstone concept in the Harry Potter books. To give two specific examples, Harry's horrible life as an unwanted orphan in the muggle world helps define Harry's attraction for the wizard world in which he is a beloved celebrity. One primary function of the Ministry of Magic is to preserve the secrecy of the wizard world in order to protect wizards from muggles and to protect muggles from the dangers of magic. The story of Sirius Black clearly illustrates this. Sirius' crime was doubly reprehensible because murdering a muggle is as morally wrong as murdering a wizard, and murdering a muggle also puts the entire wizard world in danger of being discovered. Harry accepts the separation of these two worlds as natural and necessary.

For readers of the Harry Potter books this separation works in two directions:



disassociating Rowling's wizard world from real-world witchcraft and inviting readers to enjoy the wizard world as imaginative fiction. The Harry Potter books have been criticized and even banned in some places for being too violent and for glorifying witchcraft (Jones 46; "Something about Harry" 9A). However, the vast majority of readers have not objected to these books because Rowling has clearly separated the wizard world from the known world of witchcraft. Rowling maintains this separation in the basic plot of each book and by carefully avoiding certain concepts of witchcraft. For example, the word witchcraft is used only in the official name of Hogwarts School, and the term black magic never occurs; evil magic is called the dark arts. Rowling also avoids giving any religious overtones to the wizard world. It is clear that the wizard world is only imaginary and has nothing to do with any other type of witchcraft.

Although the wizard world is clearly different from any other known world, it also parallels exactly the cultural, social and political life of present day England with the simple but intriguing twist that all its inhabitants can perform magic. Harry's wizard life correlates in so many ways to life in the ordinary world—the joys and frustrations of boarding school, strong friendships, bitter rivalries, the thrill of sports, delicious food, cumbersome government bureaucracies, and the need to make moral decisions in complicated situations—but the events in the wizard world are painted in colors more vivid than those in the ordinary world. Like all good fiction, the Harry Potter stories invite readers to follow the protagonist into an imaginary world of exaggerated circumstances and fantastic deeds then returns them both to ordinary life with a heightened sense of what it means to be alive in a world which on close inspection is not always so ordinary. The wizard world which Rowling has created in the Harry Potter series is thrilling in its uniqueness and comforting in its familiarity, and it is a major reason for the success of these books.

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[Abstract]

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In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, J.K. Rowling creates a unique wizard world by combining elements commonly associated with witches and elements of her own invention. In each of the three succeeding Harry Potter books, Rowling carefully enlarges the wizard world. This gradual and careful expansion of details about the wizard world is one of the strengths of the Harry Potter series because the details themselves are fascinating and because the continual addition of information acts as a counterweight to the repetitious nature of the basic plot of each book. Rowling's careful separation of the wizard world and the world of ordinary people within these stories is essential to the plot of each book. It also metaphorically separates Rowling's fictional world from the real world; thus, protecting Rowling from charges of promoting witchcraft and providing readers with a fictional escape world that parallels and speaks eloquently about the ordinary world.

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