

The Bookseller's Perspective: An Interview with Lisa Doucet of Woozles Bookstore, Halifax, NS

Woozles is a bookstore in south end Halifax for infant to teen readers. The store offers much more than books, however. Educational toys and games, music, and parenting and teacher resources are also sold there. In addition, Woozles employees host workshops and run three highly successful book clubs for teens and pre-teens.

In preparation for this Hotline issue we decided that it would be good to see the world of fantasy literature from a non-librarian's perspective. We asked Lisa Doucet - an assistant manager at Woozle's and an avid fantasy reader - if she would participate in an interview. A summary of her responses follows.

1. At your store, how do fantasy books sell compared to other genres?

It is one of the most popular genres.

2. Who are the most popular fantasy authors among teens?

J.K. Rowling

Philip Pullman

Cornelia Funke

Jonathan Stroud

3. What are the most popular titles?

Airborn - Kenneth Oppel

Windsinger - William Nicholson

Eragon - Christopher Paolini (written as a teen)

The Amulet of Samarkand - Jonathan Stroud (enthusiastically recommended as a personal favourite)

Dragonrider - Cornelia Funke

The Looking Glass Wars - Frank Biddor

City of Ember - Jeanne Duprau

Mortal Engines - Philip Reeve (another highly recommended title)

4. Do you include fantasy books in your teen reading group? How do the teens react to them?

Woozles has three book clubs - one for grades 5-6, one for grades 7-8 and one for grades 9 and up - and a large portion of the books they read are fantasy. The two younger groups vote on two books to read each month, and one of them is almost always a fantasy novel. The older teens talk about whatever books they are currently reading, and there are always fantasies included in those conversations. In prior years, some groups only wanted to read fantasy novels, and it was difficult to get them to expand their horizons. Even the current clubs, which are considered to be the most diverse, still love to talk about fantasy.

5. You describe yourself as a "passionate lover of fantasy novels". How did you become interested in them?

As a child *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy captured my imagination. As an adult, C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* fascinated me as well. When I started working at Woozles I had greater access to a wide variety of excellent types of fantasy, and I discovered fairytale retellings by authors such as Robin McKinley and Donna Jo Napoli. I had prior interest in fairies and folktales, so this discovery made me want to read more and more from within the fantasy genre.

6. Fantasy is often grouped with other genres such as science fiction and horror. What would you consider to be a “pure” fantasy novel?

Books such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Golden Compass*, which create an entirely separate world from the one in which we are living, without making it too futuristic.

7. Have you noticed a change in the way fantasy is being written? Do you think it will change in the future?

There seems to be a lot more of it these days.

A new trend is to set the story in a futuristic version of our world, like the setting of *The Giver*. More books are also being written in the style of Harry Potter, which is not surprising, given the success of the books. In the years to come, fantasy will likely change to reflect the contemporary mood. The futuristic trend will probably become more and more popular. Others might revert back to the style of an O.R. Melling (based on Celtic mythology). As new trends emerge, authors will grab onto them.

8. Academic literature suggests that one of the prime functions of fantasy is to teach a lesson or lead the reader to a heightened level of maturity. Do you believe this is accurate?

It is accurate of a large portion of fantasy novels, but there are others whose purpose and inspiration is simply to provide pleasure and entertainment.

Telephone interview with Lisa Doucet, 30 March 2005.

