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THE VANCOUVER SUN

Young fans already dreading the end of Harry Potter: Huge lineups greet the release of the sixth book in the series

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Readers engrossed in the magical world of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels are already dreading the end of the series, just days after the worldwide release of the sixth book over the weekend.

"I'm really scared for the last one. I don't want them to be over," said 16-year-old Carrie Huebener who had read more than half of Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince by Sunday afternoon. She bought the book as soon as it went on sale just after midnight on Saturday morning at Vancouver's Kidsbooks on West Broadway.

Eleven-year-old Nicholas Loewen, dressed up as a wizard in a black cape, pointed hat and a yellow-and-red-striped scarf outside Kidsbooks, said he was "kind of sad" that there is only one more book planned in the popular series. "I wish there would be more."

Huebener and Loewen were two of about 3,000 people who waited at Kidsbooks to buy the latest volume in the series. Part of the street was closed in anticipation of a large crowd for a party organized by the local bookseller. Mayor Larry Campbell, dressed as Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore, led a short procession of "Owl Post" delivery trucks to the site.

About 1,700 books were distributed within about 20 minutes at the Kidsbooks' Vancouver and North Vancouver locations, according to co-owner Kelly McKinnon. The two stores sold between 2,500 and 3,000 books over the weekend.

"It was really well organized," said 19-year-old Maria Fumano. "They said everyone would have their book in 15 minutes, but I think it was in 10. I got my book within a minute of 12:01 a.m."

About 100 Chapters, Indigo and Coles stores across Canada also held "midnight madness" events to coincide with book release. Exact numbers of books sold were not available from Chapters, Indigo and Coles stores across Canada, but company spokeswoman Sorya Gaulin said there were about 1,200 transactions a minute in the first two hours after the book's release.

Amazon.com reported worldwide sales of 1.5 million copies of The Half-Blood Prince through advance orders, with Amazon.ca spokeswoman Sarah Jane Gunter saying the book was the online retailer's largest-ever new product release.

Since the first Harry Potter book was published in 1997, more than 270 million copies of books in the series have been sold in 61 different languages around the world.

Readers and retailers had their own explanation of the success of the Harry Potter series. Carol Hemrick, a teacher-librarian who waited outside Kidsbooks for several hours Friday evening said the books had the right combination of detail, character and story to "connect to what's important to kids."

Abbotsford resident Trevor Kozak said J.K. Rowling "does a good job at telling a story without dumbing it down. She's very good at getting the mood, tone and timing just right."

Kozak's nine-year-old son, Josh, said Rowling "makes you feel like you're right there. You can see the picture in your head."

The fact that readers have kept up with the series as they get older is another reason for the novels' success, said Gaulin.

Local readers of the latest Harry Potter novel said the book lived up to their expectations, being a far darker, more action-filled story than the previous books.

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