Ulster boy gets sneak peek at new 'Potter' book

Store sells tome early, but its secrets are safe

By Rebecca Rothbaum
Poughkeepsie Journal

ROSENDALE — Although a mere Muggle, Sylum Mastropaolo managed to pull off the year's greatest trick in publishing.

The 9-year-old Rosendale boy snagged a copy of the coveted new Harry Potter book days before other young Muggles — Potter people without magical powers — like him get their hands on it starting at 12:01 a.m. Saturday.

"It's pretty amazing," he said Tuesday evening during an interview at his home in Ulster County. "Millions and millions of people around the world are waiting for this book."

But take heart Potter fans: Sylum won't spill any secrets. In fact, today he and his family are sending the book, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" on Tuesday — more than three days before the book's official release date. Sylum's mother bought the book at a local store, where a clerk put copies on the shelf for sale too early.

"We're going to do the right thing," said Mike Muldoon, Sylum's stepfather. "We don't want to ruin it for other kids and take away
from the experience of everyone reading it together."

Sylum and his mother, Mandy Muldoon, were in an Eckerd pharmacy in Kingston Monday night when they were startled to see a stack of the books on a shelf.

"I took it up to the clerk and said, 'Is this really the book?' " Mandy Muldoon said.

She said she hesitated to buy it at first because she had a discount card for Barnes & Noble. She snapped it up when she learned the book was selling for $19.99, less than its $29.95 cover price.

Christine Ekblom, the assistant store manager, said Tuesday the books were accidentally put on sale and that the copy Muldoon purchased was believed to be the only one sold.

"They were pulled off an hour after they were put on the shelves," Ekblom said. "It was a mistake."

At the request of British author J.K. Rowling, retailers have been forbidden from selling the book, the sixth in the immensely popular seven-installment fantasy series, before July 16. All but a few of the book's details have been kept secret.

Kyle Good, vice president for corporate communications at Scholastic, the U.S. publisher, said the company had not heard of any other such incidents in the United States.

A handful of people in Canada, however, got a sneak peek at the book when a grocery store in Coquitlam, British Columbia, slipped up and sold 14 copies before it realized its mistake. But a British Columbia Supreme Court judge ordered them to keep it a secret.

Sylum didn't have much of a chance to find out what happens in the book — his mother told him the book was off-limits until he finished the most recent and fifth book in the series.

Still, he did take a peek.

"I opened to the middle of the book and I read two pages maybe," Sylum said. "I didn't want to start at the beginning because I didn't want to spoil the surprises."

Mike Muldoon said that at first, he and his wife had not thought much about getting a copy before the book's release date, even though they had considered attending one of the Harry Potter parties Friday night.

That was until he checked online to see if other copies had been sold
early and learned the readers in Canada who were told to return theirs would be receiving books autographed by Rowling.

Muldoon e-mailed Scholastic Tuesday morning. By the end of the day, and after the Poughkeepsie Journal contacted the company about the leaked copy, Scholastic asked Muldoon to return the book. The publisher promised that Sylum would have it back Saturday, along with some other goodies.

"We're going to put together something nice for them," Good said, although she declined to say whether an autographed copy was in the works. "They're a terrific family who understand the midnight magic and not being a spoiler."

As for the Eckerd that sold Muldoon the copy, Good said the case is still under investigation and it is yet to be determined what may come of the breach.

Most likely, she said, "it could mean that they have put future shipments of Harry Potter in jeopardy."

So would Sylum take one more look at the book before sending it back?

No way.

"I'll take that time and try to finish this one," he said, pointing to "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," the previous book in the series.

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