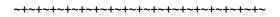
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## Why the Paladin Program? Why the Paladin Program?

Thanks to Ishtar for beta reading.



- "Professor, I thank you on behalf of the readers of *The Quibbler* for granting me this interview for our special edition for the one hundredth anniversary of the defeat of Voldemort."
- "My pleasure, Miss Tanner, *The Quibbler* gave my friend Harry Potter his first fair treatment in the press, and I am delighted to answer your questions now. And congratulations to you and your organization for being recently named the most read daily newspaper in the magical world, for the twenty-third year in a row."
- "Thanks to you for those kind words, ma'am. I know your time is valuable with your teaching and Wizengamot responsibilities. This interview is part of a complex story we're developing, and I basically have one major question for you. Would you please tell us from your participant's perspective, just why did Headmaster Albus Dumbledore instituted the Paladin Program in the summer of 1996? It was a desperate gambit, and created almost as many problems as it solved."
- "I must start, Miss Tanner, with a correction on your statement, based on the opinions of almost all of us who went through the Paladin Program. We still think few problems occurred of any real substance. We overcame; we adapted; we bore the burden. It was a small price to pay for the enormous advantages we received, and still benefit from today. How many more of us would have died without that program? Would we have prevailed at all without it? Harry Potter, who suffered most and benefited most, agrees with me on this. Just ask him.
- "And for all of your readers who are fans of the PlayStation 17 and its full VR5 reality deck sims, these Paladins had nothing to do with the paladin avatars of what was then known as video games. Even though Dumbledore had heard of computers, he didn't see his first computer configured to prevent the machines from melting down in the presence of a powerful wizard until over a month after he named the program.
- "No, Albus Dumbledore derived the name from Charlemagne's knight champions of the Middle Ages, the original Paladins, but now, on to the explanation of the actual Paladin Program.
- "By the end of Harry Potter's fifth year, it had become painfully clear to Dumbledore, that in terms of fighting the war they faced, *Harry himself* had probably been the best Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor that our year had seen to date. Remus Lupin had taught Harry the Patronus charm in his third year, but only to Harry. Most of Professor Lupin's third year classes revolved around Defense against magical creatures, from boggarts to hinkypunks. No fault to Remus Lupin; he followed the guidelines of the day.
- "In Harry's fourth year the Death Eater Barty Crouch, Jr., disguised as Auror Alastor Moody, probably taught the students more than any other Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, but his methods were suspect at best. Professors Quirrel, Lockhart, and Umbridge were complete wastes of office space.
- "In his fifth year Harry had helped his fellow students tremendously in the DA, the Defense Association, also known by its underground moniker, Dumbledore's Army. Harry benefited because anyone who teaches improves his or her skills in the process, but Dumbledore knew that was not going to prepare Harry for the Final Battle with Voldemort, which would surely come within the next two to five years as the Headmaster viewed it.
- "Professor Minerva McGonagall once told me that Dumbledore first conceived of the Paladin Program, through an offhanded comment one night in an Order of the Phoenix meeting. Before leaving, Dumbledore casually said that he wished Harry could finish Auror Training in two years, not just N.E.W.T.s level training.
- "The story goes that Dumbledore froze in place for nearly a minute, then Apparated out of the house without a by-your-leave of any sort. This startled all present because the Headmaster was generally a most polite man. At that time Madam Amelia Bones, who headed the Magical Law Enforcement Division of the Ministry of Magic, arranged for Dumbledore to discuss with the Auror Academy instructors his newborn ideas about training. They all told the Headmaster that any sixteen-year-old would still not have reached the required physical, mental, and magical development

to proceed through the program without serious magical damage.

"They agreed that perhaps a young wizard of that age with the power of Harry Potter just might endure it, but they were skeptical. For the average sixth-year of even better than average abilities, it would be harmful. Dumbledore wanted a program for all of those who would volunteer from that class for the next school year. The Academy instructors thought they had succeeded in changing the Headmaster's mind. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

"That spring term when then-Minister Fudge caused Dumbledore to leave Hogwarts to protect Harry, the Headmaster visited a number of schools of magic around the world. He looked for any advanced Defense training program that would approximate Auror training, but nothing came close to his original ideas. This trip did create in the minds of a number of advanced students also finishing their fifth year, an interest in coming to Hogwarts and being a part of whatever Dumbledore would eventually develop. The names Albus Dumbledore and Harry Potter carried more cachet around the world than they did with the British Ministry of Magic at that time."

Tanner said, "Professor, please excuse my interruption. This is *exactly* what we want for our special anniversary edition, but how, Professor, HOW could anyone possibly not think highly of Harry Potter? I've read the stories. I know the history. But... but the first time he ever acknowledged my raised hand in a press conference I was so overwhelmed by his shear good will towards me. If I knew nothing of him, I'd trust him instantly if he walked into a room. I've seen it happen."

"Ah, Miss Tanner, at your age, in your early thirties, you've never known our world without the stories of Sir Harry Potter, the Boy Who Lived, the Final Victor, Spell Monger Magister, former Minister of Magic, Headmaster Emeritus of Hogwarts, holder of the Order of Merlin First Class with two Clusters, ensigned Patriarch of the Potter, Black, and Ollerton family lines, public benefactor, and professional Quidditch star. And you will never want to mention his titles in his presence. He despises the inherent attention, though he looks fondly on his years as a Quidditch player and as Headmaster.

"And I cannot guarantee your safety if you mention how many decades he's topped Witch Weekly's Best Smile List."

Tanner smiled and said, "That fact is on page one of our Reporter's Handbook at The Quibbler."

"So, Miss Tanner, at the start of the summer of 1996, Harry Potter had just been proven correct about Voldemort's return after being slandered by the Minister of Magic and the *Daily Prophet* for over a year. And before you call that paper the yellow journalism rag that it is and was at the time, you must remember that it was then considered by most to be as respectable as your own *Quibbler* is today.

"At the start of that summer holiday, he was the smallest Gryffindor his age and smaller than most a year behind him. He was depressed and distraught because of the recent death of his godfather, the noble Sirius Black. Also, Harry feared for the safety of his best friends, and he felt very guilty about having lead them by accident into a fight with Death Eaters.

"He would frankly tell you that he was a physical and mental mess at that time, and one of the last persons anyone should follow.

"Of course that last part isn't true. Though he was exhausted and stressed beyond most human limits, I'd have followed him into the gates of perdition and back at that very moment, and I can name many others who would have been with us. But *Harry* thought of himself as nearly useless that day he rode back to London on the Hogwarts Express.

"Now, back to the Paladin Program and what it really was that summer, not in legend. Those who volunteered had to have a certain grade level in the appropriate classes, and commit to fairness to all, pureblood, halfblood, and Muggle-born alike. I hate to use those disreputable and archaic terms of the day. Yes, I see by the shock on your face how distasteful those words are, but they were backwards times, and Harry had not mobilized us to change things yet. We still had Death Eaters to fight and he had a Dark lord to kill. First things first.

"Volunteers had to:

- Agree to treat and defend all alike.
- Have or bring up their grade levels to the point needed to qualify academically.
- Take the Paladin Acceleration Potions series to mature them physically, mentally, and magically to where they could enter the pre-Auror training that September.
- Participate in all other summer Paladin Program activities including controlled 'visits' with members of the opposite sex to help with their emotional growth.
- Maintain all physical exercise requirements that summer and during school.
- Enter the Paladin Program curriculum at the start of the school year and maintain acceptable grade levels.

"There were a number of other rules I wish Dumbledore had insisted on, but hindsight's always clearer than foe glass.

"So on September first in 1996, we Paladins were all physically, mentally, and magically ready to start a pre-Auror program. But we were still emotionally not prepared. We never reached that maturity level while at school, and did not until we really were two years farther along.

"That, Miss Tanner, is all a Paladin Program participant was at the end of summer in 1996. Oh, all except Harry Potter. He still complains while with friends from that day that he can never do anything the easy normal way."

"But... but, Professor, what about the stories of superior height and strength? What about the fact that you were all gorgeous and handsome, more powerful than any wizards or witches around? You were the greatest magical class to come along. You are legends."

"Stand, Miss Tanner. There, now. You are not of extreme height for a woman, but you are 5' 9", correct? You are an inch taller than I am. For all of his presence, Harry Potter stands at average height. Just ask him; he won't mind. The tallest of us was Dean Thomas, God rest his soul. He was 6'

4". That is tall, but not legendarily tall. As far as looks were concerned, we had a few very beautiful women and handsome men in our group. I dare say I might have been considered pretty, but no beauty. We were an average class as to looks. We stood straight and tall for our heights, and the program whipped us into excellent physical condition, but anyone who exercises as we did would be in similar shape.

"If a physical advantage existed, then it is the fact that I have been able to maintain my strength and agility all of these years through proper diet and exercise. And though I'm approaching one hundred and twenty years, I've been told objectively I look like I am in my seventies. All Paladins appear thus; it is a small benefit compared to the price we've paid.

"Miss Tanner, please tell the truth about us Paladins. Harry Potter will ask it of you. Every surviving Paladin will do the same. I guess we've accomplished some admirable feats and made our mark on our world since those terrible days. But if you need legendary heroes and heroines find them among our fallen.

"We all have feet of clay, and we've made far too many mistakes for adoration. Harry Potter himself will gladly regale you with his many failings, but before you report them ask one of us to clarify his remarks. He's still too hard on himself, and too modest.

"Albus Dumbledore with all his goodness and shortsightedness, Harry Potter with all his successes and failings, all of us with our too human-ness, and the dead with all their bravery - all cry out for nothing but the truth, Miss Tanner."

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## Thanks for reading and reviewing.

**Disclaimer---** What belongs to J K Rowling is J K Rowling's. Everything left is mine, I guess, but remember the old adage: "There is nothing newunder the sun."

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Cheers!