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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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Save The NYTimes Bestseller List!

Sam Tanenhaus, the Editor of the New York Times Book Review is taking questions this week at asktheeditors@nytimes.com. Since I write for the NY Daily News, it would be inappropriate for me to weigh in, but there's nothing stopping you. One issue I'd love to raise with him: the New York Times bestseller list. When Harry Potter was in the midst of its once-in-a-generation heyday, two or three books in the series seemed to have taken up permanent residence on the bestseller list. Publishers complained that the Harry Potter books were taking up space that should go to real books. Remarkably, the NYT panicked and removed children's books from the bestseller list forever. One big reason the Potter books became such a phenomenon was BECAUSE they broke onto the bestseller list. That means immediate sale pricing and front of the store positioning for any title that accomplishes this. This put Harry Potter in front of lots of adults, the book crossed over and the rest is history. Other books that might have been far more successful if they weren't kept off the bestseller list include the "His Dark Materials" trilogy by Philip Pullman, "Eragon" which is just about to be released as a movie and countless others. Imagine how ridiculous it would be if everyone who listed the Top 10 movies over the weekend decided that animated films were too popular and shouldn't be on the list. That means for the past month, "Happy Feet" wouldn't have been Number One at the box office. Obviously a list of top-grossing movies or top-selling books should be just that: a straight-forward list, not an arbitrary inclusion of some titles and not others. And of course the fears about Potter were absurd. The more recent books have sold so many copies in the first week that they haven't dominated on the children's charts the way the early ones did and the same would have been true for the main bestseller list. So please ask Tanenhaus if he's considering restoring some integrity to the bestseller list and letting it reflect the best-selling books and not just the ones some people think are worthy. Anything else is a farce and unworthy of the paper of record.

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