

Happy Ending in Jang Jin's Romance Manhwa *Devil Number 4*: Readers Response Analysis

Salza Rizqiyah Putri^a

^a Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: salzarizqiyah.21039@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Readers frequently use the term "happy ending" to describe the pleasant resolution that the main characters achieve. In the romance genre itself, happy endings are frequently linked to stories in which the protagonist finds happiness through marriage to their loving partner. Readers of romance stories frequently expect a happy ending due to the expanding concept of happy endings and their frequent usage in romance genre works. Thus, the aim of this research is to examine how readers perceive happy endings, particularly in Jang Jin's manhwa *Devil Number 4*. This study used a qualitative method, combining the reader response approach and Stuart Hall's concept of Encode/Decode to analyze the research. It was discovered that the author of this work emphasized that the best ending for the side characters is self-acceptance, and that happiness necessitates significant sacrifice for both the main characters and the side couple. Moreover, eight out of ten participants in this study fall into the dominant-hegemonic reader category, one into the negotiated reader category, as well as one into the oppositional reader category. Based on this research, it can be said that the majority of *Devil Number 4* readers are able to comprehend Jang Jin's message of a happy ending which is a sacrifice in order to achieve happiness.

Keywords: Encode-Decode, Happy Ending, Manhwa, Readers Response, Romance

INTRODUCTION

Happy ending, also known as happily ever after to American readers, is a word to describe the ending of a story that ends happily in either union, victory, or marriage. Romance readers frequently use this term to describe the conclusion of a story in which the protagonist overcomes struggle and ultimately reunites with their love interest or marries. Many readers have grown to expect a happy ending every time they read romance stories due to there being so many of them with this formulaic resolution. This is also supported by the characteristics of the romance genre, which tend to make the plot easier to read by emphasizing narratives with themes of sacrifice, betrayal, and emotions, which will later end with the achievement of happiness for the main character (Velasquez, & Campbell-Meier, 2024). Therefore, this is an interesting phenomenon to research, about how a term like "happy ending" can raise readers' expectations of romance genre stories.

In romance stories, happy endings arise after the story's conclusion, which is marked by the protagonists (male and female leads) overcoming the story's central struggle and ultimately receiving a happy ending as a result of their sacrifice and problem-solving (Hermawan, 2023)). With a formula that has been repeated in several romance stories before, readers always expect a happy ending in the form of a union for emotional satisfaction. Nonetheless, the story is

driven by a series of conflicts that the reader must deal with. Will this increase the reader's expectations that the story will have a happy ending as well? Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine whether the writer's depiction of the conclusion can satisfy readers' expectations for a happy ending and how they react to good endings in stories that emphasize numerous sacrifices as the main narrative. When discussing the reader's perspective on endings, this will address the closure that results from the rhetorical-communicative effect, where meaning is created in the text and interpreted by the reader. Closure itself is a sense of certainty and perfection experienced by the reader when a narrative end (Segal, 2010). Moreover, closure refers to a complex event that has been resolved, resulting in a clear outcome such as the marriage of the protagonists or the victory of the hero (Klauk et al., 2016). Through this closure, readers will generally claim that the story has reached a satisfying conclusion in the form of a happy ending.

In this study, researchers used the work of *Devil Number 4*, a comic published in Korean that was later translated into English, Indonesian, and so on. This literary work was chosen because *manhwa* itself is now a type of literature that has quite a large audience. *Manhwa* is a comic made in South Korea that is published both non-digitally and digitally (Jang & Song, 2017). The digital version of *manhwa* is known as Webtoon (Web Cartoon) (Jin, 2019). LINE Webtoon is one example of a global publication of *manhwa*. With the high demand for webtoon readers, this platform has been downloaded by 100 million people, for *Devil Number 4* the English version has also reached a rating of 9.79 and been read by 1 million people. This demonstrates how popular this kind of literature is right now.

Devil Number 4 is a work that primarily combines romance and the supernatural. This story is about a protagonist named Yoon Hanna who lives a life of poverty and lacks ambition. She meets Devil Number 4, a male protagonist, who offers her a soul contract that will allow her to discover happiness. However, before reaching happiness, of course, Yoon Hanna goes through a number of conflicts to shape her personality. As a result, the story follows the formula for a happy ending in the romance genre. In order to investigate how readers understand the term "happy ending" and how they perceive the description of "happy ending" in the Devil Number 4 novel, this study will employ Devil Number 4 as a data source. There are 120 chapters in all, with chapters 1–110 being the main story and chapters 111–120 being bonus chapters created for the Devil Number 4 story's side couples. This study solely includes data from chapters 110 and 120 because the story's happy ending is its main focus.

Happy ending research itself has been conducted by several researchers, one of whom is Heather Schell in (2020) with the title "After 'I Do': Turkish Harlequin Readers Re-Imagine the Happy Ending". In their research, Schell highlights the happy ending of the father and son relationship in the movie *Back to Mr. and Mrs.* They employed reader response in his research, which was then examined through the lens of Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension. According to their research, Turkish readers expect happy endings that emphasize familial connections above romantic interactions between heroes and heroines.

Furthermore, happy ending research was also conducted by Shai Rudin (2020) with the title 'Happily Ever After? Story Endings in Hebrew Children's Literature'. This research was made to explore the diversity of story endings in children's literature books. Rudin utilized a bibliography to examine his data and concluded that while happy endings are not always present in Hebrew children's books, children are more likely to read them than adults, who can appreciate a variety of story endings. Rudin also came to the conclusion children want to read happy-ending stories because they want to experience the escapist effect that these stories provide.

Both previous studies examined the same topic, namely happy ending, yet both studies had different ways to explore their topic. For brief information, the study by Schell used Greet Hofstede theory, while Rudin used a Bibliotherapeutic Approach to explore his study. Similarly, this study also uses a different approach and theory to explore happy endings in romance-themed stories. This study uses the theory by Stuart Hall, Encode/Decode, to explore how readers interpret happy endings in the romance manhwa Devil Number 4. In Stuart Hall's theory, he claims that audiences/readers have three positions in interpreting media or text: Dominant-Hegemonic Readers are those who completely agree with the author's point, Negotiated Readers are able to accept while also negotiating on a particular point, and Oppositional Readers are those who strongly disagree with the author's message or thought (Hambali et al., 2022; Shaw, 2017). Thus, the researcher believes that the readers of Devil Number 4 will be very diverse and have characteristics that determine the form of acceptance.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive design to examine how readers decoded the "happy ending" in Jang Jin's Devil Number 4. The theoretical lens integrated reader-response criticism with Hall's encoding/decoding model, focusing on how audiences negotiated meaning across dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions. Data sources comprised (a) the primary text (Devil Number 4, especially Chapter 110 of the main story and Chapter 120 epilogue/spin-off), (b) naturally occurring reader comments on the LINE Webtoon platform, and (c) semi-structured interviews with readers who completed the series.

Sampling was purposive and criterion-based. For textual analysis, the researcher selected scenes that explicitly staged closure (e.g., confessions and afterlife/domestic snapshots) because such scenes crystallized the work's "happy ending" cues. For comments, verbatim posts were captured from the epilogue thread that explicitly evaluated the ending, including praise and reservations, to reflect a range of decoding positions. For interviews, readers were recruited who (i) finished the series, (ii) were willing to reflect on the ending, and (iii) articulated clear stances on main vs. side characters' outcomes. Two anonymized participants (e.g., ER, LS) and illustrative platform comments were retained to support analytic claims (examples are cited in Findings).

Data collection involved close reading and scene selection, a lightweight comment scraping/copying protocol from the public thread (respecting platform visibility), and 20–30-minute semi-structured interviews over chat/voice. The interview guide probed (1) definitions of "happy ending," (2) perceptions of sacrifice/self-acceptance, (3) views of closure for main and side couples, and (4) personal satisfaction vs. perceived authorial intent.

Analysis proceeded via iterative thematic analysis. First, textual and reader data were open-coded for motifs of sacrifice, reunion/recognition, domestic normalization, and self-acceptance. Second, axial coding was conducted around closure cues (dialogue of confession, proposals/reunions, epilogue "ordinary life" frames) and reader statements were mapped to Hall's positions: e.g., readers who fully aligned with the text's closure signals (dominant-hegemonic), readers who accepted the main couple's closure but resisted side-character outcomes (negotiated), and any readers rejecting the "happy" frame (oppositional). Third, cross-evidence was synthesized between the comic panels, interview excerpts, and platform comments to triangulate claims about how "happy ending" was recognized or resisted.

To enhance trustworthiness, analyst memoing, source triangulation (text, interviews, comments), and an audit trail linking each theme to at least two concrete textual or reader

examples were used. Quotations were anonymized and minimally edited for clarity while preserving meaning. No personally identifying information beyond public usernames (when cited from the platform) was included. Given the qualitative scope and small interview sample, the study did not aim for statistical generalizability; rather, it offered theoretically informed, evidence-based insights into how romance manhwa audiences decoded "happy endings" across character arcs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to answer the issue raised in this research. To address the issue in this research, the primary data, such as Devil Number 4 by Jang Jin, and the secondary data from reader comments on the webtoon line and interview transcript chosen to be analyzed. The data processed using the reader-response approach and analyzed using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory to find answers to the problems that arise.

Due to Line Webtoon's data is very limited and unable to completely solve the issues raised in this study. Several readers of Devil Number 4 participated in direct interviews with researchers; some of the questions asked concerned how readers interpreted the story's ending, some questions focused on how readers perceived the term "happy ending". Before concentrating on the reader's perception of Devil Number 4's conclusion, the researcher asked a few questions regarding the reader's understanding of happy endings. The researcher then makes reference to the claim made by James McDowell and Wijarnika about the word "happy ending" in this interview analysis. Wijanarka argues that a happy ending is the conclusion of a romance narrative that typically ends with the main character's marriage or union (Wijanarka, 2022). The same as James Macdowell believes that a happy ending is a romance genre formula that typically concludes with the main character's reunion (MacDowell, 2014). The following are the results of the interview obtained, which are then associated with the definition of "happy ending" by previous researchers:

"In my opinion, a happy ending in a story is when the main character gets a happy ending. Also, happy endings, in my opinion, focus more on the main character.

Specifically, I think that a happy ending in the romance genre is getting married, and if the trope is slow burn, then it might be in a dating relationship, while for the action genre, it means that the character wins the match." (WR in Interview, 2025)

In this instance, the romance reader above brings that a romance story's happy ending when the protagonist marries at the conclusion of the story. The WR reader's argument leads one to the conclusion that the prior statement of James MacDowell and Wijarnaka's happy ending is consistent. Additionally, seven of the ten individuals interviewed (RD, WR, LK, NR, ER, C, and DS) stated that they expected happy endings when reading romantic stories. Some interviewees also stated that if they read a romantic story with a depressing or tragic ending, they might not be as pleased with their reading experience. Nevertheless, the researcher also found that some readers object with the idea that a romantic relationship must end in marriage or a happy union of a romantic couple. As for example is reader LK with statement:

"Romance is usually synonymous with marriage, so when it comes to romance, I usually expect a happy ending in romance stories. But I think if a story is given an unhappy

ending by the author, in my opinion it is acceptable, since it enhances the reader's reading experience. However, as a reader I prefer to read stories with happy endings for the sake of reading satisfactions.” (LK in Interview, 2025)

The respondent in the previously mentioned interview stated that in the romance genre, happy endings are linked to the marriage of the main characters. However, she claims that not all romances have to end happily; tragic endings can also provide a fresh reading experience, even though many readers may be disappointed. By making those points, reader LK has shown that she agrees with Wijarnaka and James Macdowell's idea of a happy ending, but it also gives the author the chance to be brave and come up with an alternative conclusion. Furthermore, some readers of this interview completely disapproved of the idea of a happy ending. This is because LS's interpretation of "happy ending" differs from James Macdowell's and Wijarnika's.

“Happy endings are not always happy. Sometimes in some story plots when the main character ends up with a separation, I think it can be called a happy ending. Because, in my opinion, when they force themselves to be together, it doesn't necessarily mean that both of them can achieve happiness and may end up with a split or a painful ending. So, I think a happy ending is when both characters understand that continuing a decision can have repercussions in the future.” (LS in Interview, 2025)

According to the two previous researchers, Macdowell and Wijarnika, happy endings in romance typically involve the primary protagonists getting married and finding happiness again. Nevertheless, this person has a different viewpoint on what is considered a "happy ending." The true meaning of a happy ending, in her opinion, is not just marriage and unity but also separation for mutual gain. It is clear from the argument that reader LS is utterly distancing themselves from the idea of happy endings as proposed by earlier research.

Happy Ending Depicted in Devil Number 4

The representation of a happy ending in Devil Number 4 is depicted in chapter 110 (main story) and the spin-off in chapter 120. To be able to know the depiction of a happy ending in Devil Number 4, these chapters will be analyzed using the Encode process proposed by Stuart Hall in his model theory. First, a table containing the conclusion of the story taken from the resolution in the main story as well as the spin-off resolution was attached. For a more complete explanation, it is explained in the sub-chapter below the table along with the dialog as supporting evidence.

Table 1. Devil Number 4's Epilogue.

No.	Characters	Epilogue (Chapter 110)	Spin-off (Chapter 120)
1.	Devil Number 4 / Saho	He regained consciousness after 10 years in a coma.	A debate between Hana and Saho about Saho insecurity.
2.	Yoon Hana	Witnessing Saho awaken from a 10 years coma	Giving Saho an explanation about true happiness means for her.
3.	Devil Number 3 / Lee Sejoon	-	Regained full memory of him and peace, then proposed peace afterward

No.	Characters	Epilogue (Chapter 110)	Spin-off (Chapter 120)
	Peace / Yurim		Knowing Sejoon got his memory back and proposed to him.
	Lee Joon		Lee Joon fully accepted himself as the catalyst of Peace and Devil Number 3.
	Mika	Accepting the truth, she is not an angel anymore with open arms.	Self-Acceptance: Seeing somebody love get their "Happiness"

Happy Ending in Main Story

Since Devil Number 4's primary plot is coming to the end, the author exclusively concentrates on the protagonist ending in chapter 110. The author used dialogue from the major characters to show that, despite a number of challenges, they eventually achieve happiness, even if Jang Jin does not depict this clearly. *Devil Number 4* main character's ending can be seen as a "realization of true love." This is demonstrated in Chapter 110 with the following discourse:

'All I want... is for you to be happy.'

'Across time and space?'

'What should we call this feelings'

'...that is attracting each other even stronger than a forced contract...'

"I love you"

"Why did I never say this before? Why couldn't I tell you this when you have told me numerous times?"

"I love you. I want to be with you"

(Saho in Jin & LINE Webtoon, 2020)

Through the dialogue above, Saho eventually begins to understand the feelings she experiences and identify their significance. This is because Saho struggles to understand the meaning of love throughout the narrative because he is a devil and is not required to feel love for people or other living things. Saho confessed *"I love you. I want to be with you,"* signaling the culmination of recognition and commitment. As a result, Jang Jin's portrayal of the two characters' happy ending above follows Saho's (Devil Number 4) understanding of the true meaning of love.

Happy Ending in Spin-Off

The spin-off's problems are less significant and usually lead to the main character's quest's happy end, while the author occasionally highlights secondary characters. It appears that this is relevant to Jang Jin's work. *Devil Number 4*. As part of their work, Jang Jin added 10 chapters outside of the main series.

Main Characters

Jang Jin offered us the start of the flashback of Devil Number 4's major characters in the final chapters of the spin-off (120). The flashback started with an extensive conversation between the two main characters, in which they discussed the anxiety they experienced.

Confession and Realization of True Happiness (Being Together). This is demonstrated by the following conversational excerpt:

"I felt insecure"
"When I opened my eyes, I was completely Helpless."
"I was only human on the outside..."
"... and there was nothing I could make you happy..." Saho dialogue

"What are you talking about?"
"You're my everything, I only stayed alive so I could see you again."
"and I plan on sticking around as long as I have you" Hana dialogue

(Saho and Hanna in Jin & LINE Webtoon, 2021, ch 120)

Saho is unable to fulfill his promise to Hana to bring her happiness as a result of his careless devilish behavior. The two agreed that finding happiness was the goal. Since their connection is based on a contract, he forged with his devil powers, Saho's insecurity is legitimate. Hanna, however, contradicted this idea since she realized that, to her, happiness meant having Saho around as a result of her life's events. It is proven by Hanna dialog *"...I plan on sticking around as long as I have you"* that also reorients closure from supernatural contract to ordinary companionship. Jang Jin describes how Hana's character evolved and how she started to understand what happiness meant to her in this chapter. Jang Jin's argument that Saho's ability must be given up for a happy ending is further supported by the dialogue passage above.

Side Couple

In this spin-off chapter, author Jang Jin focuses more on providing secondary plots that deal with supporting characters such as Mika, Seo Joon, and Peace (Yurim) (Devil Number 3). Jang Jin's focus to the plot is evident in the spin-off chapter in chapters 111–117, which emphasizes the side couple Peace and Seo Joon as well as Lee Joon as one of the connecting characters. Jang Jin's portrayal of Lee Joon's happy ending can be summed up as self-acceptance. Lee Joon's email to Peace (Yurim) in chapter 120 (Epilogue) serves as evidence of this:

Hello. Peace.
I'm not sure when you'll read this email, but here goes.
Human life seems so short to an angel like you.
I'm not asking you for anything. But could you just wish me a good life?
In return I'll wish for your happiness.
I bet there's never been a human who wished for an angel's happiness before.
think of it as helping each other out.
Take care.
From Lee Joon.

(Lee Joon in Jin & LINE Webtoon, 2021)

Before completely accepting his life decisions, Lee Joon had certain doubts, which are discussed in chapter 111 (Spin-off) of his self-acceptance process. But in the end, he was the catalyst for Peace's (Yurim) and Lee Seo Joon's (Devil Number 3) relationships. As evidenced

by Lee Joon's email to Peace (Yurim), he does not ask for a response in order to erase the memories of the past; instead, he only hopes for a good life. This hesitation→acceptance arc is resolved in the epilogue, situating his happiness in reflective self-reconciliation. Thus, by reaching complete self-acceptance, Jang Jin characterized the happy ending or closure of Lee Joon's character. Despite the fact that he must accept rejection from his prior love interest and recall unpleasant memories for the spin-off, Jang Jin attempted to depict the happy ending of Devil Number 3 (Lee Seojoon) and Peace (Yurim) as the "reunion of True Love," which is further emphasized in the epilogue chapter (120).

"Marry me, Peace!" Seo Joon
"Silly, we're already married!" Peace

(Seo Joon and Peace in Jin & LINE Webtoon, 2021)

When Devil Number 3 took on the form of Lee Seo Joon, Peace (Yurim) made a significant sacrifice out of grief over his death and loss of memory, which left Peace alone in his life. Even though it took a while, every attempt to bring back Devil Number 3's memories of Peace eventually succeeded, bringing them back together as lovers. Seojoon's memory recovery precedes proposal—Peace knows he "got his memory back and proposed," tying cognitive restoration directly to closure through commitment ritual. Moreover through the dialogue *"Marry me, Peace!"* and *"Silly, we're already married!"* It can be determined as a closure signifier (marriage). The Devil Number 4 spin-off story by Jang Jin emphasizes the extent of the sacrifices made by these two loves. Despite having to make significant sacrifices, this resolves appropriately at the end of the last chapter by giving these individuals a happy ending in the shape of a reunion of real love.

Extra Character

Furthermore, another character that Jang Jin emphasizes his existence is Mika. This individual is crucial to the growth of the main character, Yoon Hana. Being an angel entrusted with Yoon Hana's protection from birth conditioned Mika love. Mika Self-Acceptance: Seeing somebody love gets their *"Happiness"*.

"I'm not..."
"...an angel anymore."
"That doesn't matter now, the most important thing is..."
"All I want... is for you to be happy" Mika
 (Mika, Jin, 2020, ch.110)

"... yeah, she doesn't recognize me anymore."
"four comes along sometimes, but his of the demonic realm have been replaced with something similar from the human world"
"The two of them are just an ordinary couple now." Mika
"That's great. isn't that what you wanted?" Devil Number 313

(Mika and 313, in Jin & LINE Webtoon, 2021)

Mika had to face the repercussions of her decision to betray her god in order to love and protect a human, Hanna. transforming into a human. Mika's declaration "*I'm not... an angel anymore*" marks a decisive self-redefinition; she relinquishes celestial identity without loss of purpose, framing acceptance as happiness. Nevertheless, her later remark that Hana and Saho are "*just an ordinary couple now*" affirms contentment through others' happiness—Mika's acceptance is relational, not only self-referential, moreover Mika's dialogue also an explicit diegetic cue that the story world recognizes their post-quest normalcy—an emblematic romance closure device. By doing this, Jang Jin gives Mika's character a closure or happy ending that accepts who she is. This is also a fresh interpretation of the idea of happy endings, emphasizing not just the romance between two lovers but also the acceptance of one's own happiness when one's loved ones achieve happiness.

Readers' View of Happy Ending

To be able to find out the diversity of readers' responses to the ending of *Devil Number 4*, two data *points* were taken from the LINE Webtoon comment sections, and readers were also interviewed. Interviewed readers will be given several questions about the reader's interpretation of the word "happy ending" and then several questions about the reader's understanding of the depiction of the ending in the *Devil Number 4* story work.

Dominant-Hegemonic Readers

The author's message to the main character and side couple in *Devil Number 4* of Dominant-Hegemonic Readers is that happiness requires significant sacrifice, while the author provides a happy ending for the supporting characters in the form of self-acceptance, which suggests that despite their hardships and sacrifices, not everything can be obtained and that the best way to find happiness is to accept their chosen path. Therefore, readers can be categorized as dominant-hegemonic if they can accept that the happy ending of the story is a sacrifice that leads to happiness—in the form of self-acceptance for the side characters and unification for the main character and side couple. In this subchapter, readers who belong to this position are seen from all comments uploaded to the comments section on the LINE Webtoon platform.

"Ugh my heart. This was one of the best epilogues I've read. I can't express how much I appreciate this story. I absolutely love it and it was amazing. It's Just so darn beautiful. My chest is tight from sadness and the tense excitement and love I have for these characters in their character world. I love this story I can't wait for your next one author."

(Chandler Fay in Jin, 2021)

Chandler Fay's comment above demonstrates how completely accepted the author's depiction of *Devil Number 4*'s happy ending is. Even though the epilogue chapters offer a number of Jang Jin-proposed "happy endings," the statement "...one of the best epilogues" shows that she agreed to the happy conclusion. Fay classifies all characters as having suitable happy endings, despite Jang Jin's depiction that each character has a distinct ending. Chandler Fay's user comments can therefore be classified as a dominant-hegemonic position.

Eight out of ten respondents (SA, RD, WR, LK, NR, ER, C, and DS) indicated throughout the interview process that *Devil Number 4*'s ending can be categorized as a happy ending, according to the interview data regarding the reader's opinion of happy endings. Five people (SA, RD, WR, NR, and ER) agreed that the story had a happy ending and highlighted the plot that impressed them. According to the results of the following interviews:

"I think Mika and Lee Joon's ending is categorized as getting a happy ending in a different way. Lee Joon, although his love was unrequited, accepted his fate gracefully and became a catalyst for other couples. While Mika maintained her sincere feelings, she gained peace in accepting reality. Both get emotional development towards a more peaceful direction."
(ER in Interview, 2025)

Reader ER values happy endings for supplementary characters, whereas the other readers concentrate on the main character. In this instance, reader ER stated that the Devil Number 4 story's happy ending extends beyond the protagonist to include supporting characters like Mika and Lee Joon, each of whom finds their own path to self-acceptance. Since reader ER can fully understand the writers' descriptions, yet certain readers are unable to fully decode the goals of the writer, reader ER opinions can be categorized as dominant hegemonic.

Negotiated Readers

Readers who reject one of the author's messages—such as self-acceptance or sacrifice—but nevertheless view this novel as having a happy ending are the readers who fit this description. The platform's (LINE Webtoon) comments section contained readers with a negotiated position. This group of readers is distinguished by their acceptance of the happy ending for the main character but rejection of the outcome for supporting characters like Mika and Joon.

"I dunno, I really love the ending and I just binge read the whole series, but it seems sort of bittersweet? Like it's really god and I couldn't ask for better ending but my heart (especially for Joon and Mika, like their both happy but...idk 🤔) I think it's because they're all separated. Like they've been through so much together but now they've all living their separate lives. I dunno I just had to tell someone how I felt after reading this series."

(@Hot dog in Jin, 2021)

While acknowledging that they agree with the happy ending of the Devil Number 4 story, the reader with the username hotdog in the comment above expresses disapproval by pointing out that Mika and Joon, who both make the same sacrifice as the main character, do not receive the same "Happy ending." Reader Hotdog is seen as a negotiated reader because, while the reader accepts the happy ending that the main character is shown to have, they reject the happy endings of the supporting characters and are unable to understand the author's point of view. While for reader's views on Devil Number 4 happy ending, reader LS categorized it as a negotiated position. This is due to:

"Since I don't really classify happy endings particularly, a marriage or separation can both be considered happy endings. So I can categorize this story as also having a happy ending. However, I feel that it's more satisfying for me, if they do not make a big sacrifice like turning into a human for love and making a scene for the people around them; it's better to stay as they are so as not to mess up the stagnant situation for everyone."

(LS in Interview, 2025)

In contrast to most readers who think the story's happy ending is suitable, Reader LS thinks that Devil Number 4's best end is the separation of the two main characters. Because the reader feels that being apart is preferable to being forced to remain together while negatively affecting others for their own benefit. She categorizes Devil Number's finale as a happy ending even if she thinks the word "happy ending" is too general. It is clear from reader LS's arguments that she is classified as having a negotiated position, meaning that while she acknowledges that Devil Number 4 has a happy ending, she also objects to the way the ending is presented since she believes it is better taken.

Oppositional Readers

Readers in these situations respond in ways that are regarded negatively, such as rejecting the idea of making sacrifices in order to achieve happiness or accepting oneself as a vision of a happy ending for supporting characters.

"ah I feel like there are a lot of loose ends, and this ending chapter was super rushed :/ why was he asleep for TEN years? Just headcannon on it was less time ig"

(Yadonushi in Jin, 2020)

Yadonmushi's opinion contradicts Jang Jin's end result, which appears rushed and leaves some sections unable to solve the flaws that previously surfaced. They once again imply that the idea is rejected by expressing their expectations for the main character and casting doubt on the rationale behind the plot's inclusion, as evidenced by the phrase "Why is he asleep for TEN years?" Saho should not have been in a coma for more than ten years. The reader above is viewed as an oppositional reader since they are unable to understand the ten years of sacrifice that Saho and Hanna must make in order to be fully united as lovers. As for the interviewed readers, Reader IO can be categorized into oppositional readers; here is the evidence:

"The ending of Devil Number 4 is unfair to every character who has made sacrifices for the main character. Why does the main character get their best happy ending while the character who has sacrificed must get a big impact? Like Mika, who sacrificed herself and then had to become human as a consequence, so I consider the ending of Devil Number 4 unfair."

(IO in Interview, 2025)

The Devil Number 4 story's unsatisfactory finale for secondary characters like Mika and Lee Joon was brought up by reader IO as an unfair conclusion. She emphasized the instance in which the character made a significant sacrifice for the main character, Mika, who was prepared to make sacrifices for the two characters and even became a human as a result. This, in her opinion, is unjust since a fair ending should give each character the same portrayal of how things end; if the main character marries, then all of the characters must also get married. Reader IO's rejection falls under the category of oppositional position, which she may understand and accept because the author depicted a nice ending for the supporting characters—self-acceptance.

CONCLUSION

The study data shows that nine out of ten readers of Devil Number 4 agree that the epilogue qualifies as a happy ending. Furthermore, eight out of nine people can be categorized as dominant-hegemonic readers since they can completely accept Jang Jin's portrayal of a happy ending in which significant sacrifices are required in order to reach happiness. Regardless of their interpretation of the narrative. In this case, the happy conclusion Jang Jin explains for supporting characters like Mika and Lee Joon can only be completely understood by one reader.

Additionally, one reader is categorized as having a negotiated viewpoint because, although they concur that the devil number four conclusion is typically seen as a happy ending, they also disagree with some of its elements. However, there is just one opposing viewpoint in the interview data, and that is that she felt the Devil Number 4 ending was unfair to the supporting characters since she couldn't understand the joyful ending for the side characters—self-acceptance. Therefore, it can be said that even though each reader interprets Devil Number 4 differently, most readers are able to understand the meaning and depiction of happy endings, especially for the main character. They also understand that either the main character or the side couple must make sacrifices before they can achieve their desired happiness.

Furthermore, seven out of ten readers of romance fiction concur that a happy ending is essential, and they also contend that happy endings make reading more enjoyable, according to the data and research gathered from the interviews. Nonetheless, according to three out of ten respondents, tragic or depressing endings provide for an unforgettable reading experience.

REFERENCES

- Hambali, M., Suyitno, I., Roekhan, & Martutik. (2022). Reader Response on Public Figure Opinion in Social Media. *Webology*, 19(1), 4158-4173. Doi: 10.14704/web/v19i1/web19274
- Hermawan, P. R. (2023). Novel Romance Sebagai Pembelajaran. *Bhinneka Jurnal Bintang Pendidikan dan Bahasa*, 1(1), 28-34. <https://doi.org/10.59024/bhinneka.v1i1.168>
- Jang, W., & Song, J. E. (2017). Webtoon as a New Korean Wave In The Process of Glocalization. *Kritika Kultura*, 29, 168–187. Doi: 10.13185/KK2017.02908
- Jin, D. Y. (2019). Snack Culture's Dream of Big-Screen Culture: Korean Webtoons' Transmedia Storytelling. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 2094–2115. Doi: 10.2307/jj.17331657
- Jin, J., & LINE Webtoon. (2020). *Devil Number 4* (Woombee, Ed.; English Version). Webtoon.com. https://www.webtoons.com/en/supernatural/devil-no-4/list?title_no=1695
- Jin, J., & LINE Webtoon. (2021). *Devil Number 4* (Woombee, Ed.; English Version). Webtoon.com. https://www.webtoons.com/en/supernatural/devil-no-4/list?title_no=1695
- Klauk, T., Köppe, T., & Onea, E. (2016). More on narrative closure. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 45(1), 21-48. 10.1515/jls-2016-0003
- MacDowell, J. (2014). Review: Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema. Cliché, Convention and the Final Couple, by James MacDowell (Z. Zurba, Ed.). *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 99(3), 1-5.

- Rudin, S. (2020). Happily Ever After? Story Endings in Hebrew Children's Literature. *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 26(1-2), 103-130. Doi: 10.1080/13614541.2021.1949232
- Schell, H. (2020). After "I Do": Turkish Harlequin Readers Re-Imagine the Happy Ending. *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, 9, 1-14. Doi: 10.70138/KCOO7755
- Segal, E. (2010). Closure in detective fiction. *Poetics Today*, 31(2), 153–216. 10.1215/03335372-2009-018
- Shaw, A. (2017). Encoding and Decoding Affordances: Stuart Hall and Interactive Media Technologies. *Media, Culture and Society*, 39(4), 592-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717692741>
- Velasquez, D., & Campbell-Meier, J. (2024). Romance Genre and Collection Management in Australia and New Zealand Public Libraries. *ournal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 73(3), 336-361. Doi: 10.1080/24750158.2024.2365475
- Wijanarka, H. (2022). Cinderella Formula: The Romance Begins. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 22(2), 481-489. DOI:10.24071/joll.v22i2.5121