

WORDS **MATT MUELLER**

## THE FRANCHISE OF THE DECADE HARRY POTTER

Spellbinding. Simple as that. Total Film talks to producer David Heyman about the magical books that became the biggest movies of the noughties...

It's not just \$5.4bn in lifetime grosses that makes *Harry Potter* the Franchise Of The Decade. It's the way it's grown up with its fans and its fans have grown up with it, watching three friends blossom from the awkward, stilted tykes of the first film into turbulent, passionate teenagers. It's the way that it's kept pace with its hipper rivals (hello, *Twilight*) but been unafraid to shed some of its younger, weaker-willed followers along the way by refusing to flinch from its dark side.

*The Philosopher's Stone, The Chamber Of Secrets, The Prisoner Of Azkaban, The Goblet Of Fire, The Order Of The Phoenix, The Half-Blood Prince and The Deathly Hallows...* With the last of JK Rowling's seven-course feast currently being filleted into

a huge two-part finale to allow us more time to savour this majestic phenomenon, we sit down with David Heyman, the producer who first recognised all that *Harry Potter* could be, to discover how Rowling's lush magical realm was brought to life in such stunning fashion...

**There must have been a real push-pull over the years about how to keep the die-hard Potter fans happy while attracting newbies...**

Absolutely, but it's nowhere near as calculated as that. The books have grown up and so too the films. And I suppose that means that some of the youngest fans might be lost along the way. For some of those who were watching at the beginning,

**Growing up in public: (below) Daniel Radcliffe and co have matured in magical fashion; (below right) Mike Newell taking charge of Goblet Of Fire.**



there was likely a point where *Harry Potter* became no longer cool. But for the most part we've kept a huge proportion of our audience.

**Every film in the series has been pitched as 'darker' than the one before...**

It's something that the press build up more than we do. I don't think six was darker than five necessarily. But because *Harry Potter* began as a much younger film in spirit, people are very cognisant of its maturation. But there's never been a single meeting where we sat down and said, "OK, how do we make this darker?"

**Was it always your plan to use edgier directors as the franchise proceeded?**

It's easy to write history looking backwards but in the moment we just looked for the best director for the part. I chose Alfonso Cuarón for the third film because he'd just made *Y Tu Mamá También* so I thought that he would bring magic and passion and a keen understanding of teenage life to the film. With Mike Newell, it felt like, "How wonderful would it be to have a Brit director?" With the fifth, the world was becoming more political and David Yates did such a brilliant job with *State Of Play*.

**Was it the success of the films that gave you the luxury of choice with your directors?**

The studio had the ultimate say and there's no question that both Alfonso and David were edgy choices at the time. You can imagine what the studio thought Harry, Ron and Hermione were going to get up to having seen *Y Tu Mamá También*! But they never tried to get us to play it safe. They have always encouraged us to be as bold as we have been.

**Did any filmmakers ever turn you down?**

Spielberg decided not to do the first one. But beyond that, no.

**At various times, we've heard that the three leads have been reluctant to sign up for the next film. Was that ever a serious threat?**

That's not true. Both Dan and Rupert would sign on



immediately to each one. Emma was always the most hesitant of the three and that was because she was the most thoughtful. Not that the others weren't, but for her it was a bigger decision because school was hugely important to her. For Emma, there was always more of a choice to be made. She wanted to a certain degree a normal life. She wanted to go to Brown University and we're working the [*Deathly Hallows*] schedule so that she can do that.

**Was there anything in the books you would have liked to have filmed but couldn't?**

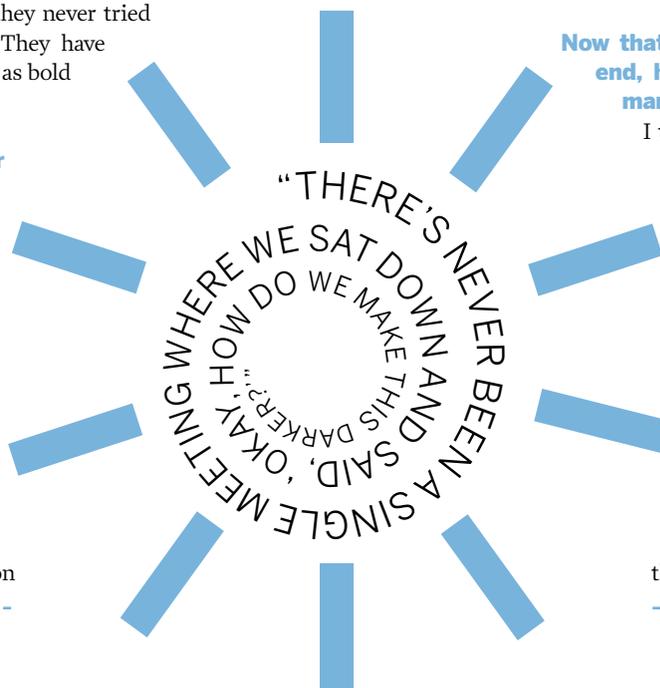
Plenty! Each film we have to cut things out, although less so on *Deathly Hallows* because we're splitting it into two. But I would have loved to have filmed more of Voldemort's back story; I'd liked to have spent time with Hermione's [elf rights organisation] S.P.E.W. So many things...

**Now that you're approaching the end, how are you planning to mark the occasion?**

I turn 50 on July 11 and that's when the last film comes out so I don't know what will happen. Mid-life crisis?

**Are you anxious about it coming to an end?**

It will be hard. We're all looking forward to new ventures but at the same time I think we all appreciate that we'll never have it like this again. There will be an emptiness, no question there will be an emptiness. **E**



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