

## HARRY POTTER'S CREATOR

## 'I expected everyone to reject me'

Continued from A1

wouldn't have approved — no pension scheme, you see.

**QUESTION:** When did you first get the idea for the Harry Potter stories?

**ROWLING:** I can remember the day in 1990 as though it is tattooed on my mind forever. The idea for the stories came to me whilst I was on one of those long train journeys travelling from the North of England to London. The amazing and magical thing is that the character of Harry just popped into my head, fully formed. Looking back, it was all quite spooky.

I remember being so excited that, as soon as the train reached London's King's Cross station, I rushed home to jot down this narrative concept on paper before I could forget anything.

**QUESTION:** Why did you choose the name Harry Potter? Did you base the character on someone you know? And, finally, has Harry got a middle name and if so, what is it?

**ROWLING:** Harry is completely imaginary. I took his surname from a family I lived near when I was a child, just because I liked the sound of Potter, and 'Harry' has always been one of my favourite Christian names. Finally, he has most definitely got a middle name. It's James.

**QUESTION:** Is *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* your first novel?

**ROWLING:** In one word, no. I actually started conceptualizing stories when I was very young. I remember enjoying telling made-up stories to my younger sister Diana. And the first fully fledged novel I ever wrote was a story about a rabbit called Rabbit. However, it was just a precocious child's literary ramblings, and I was far too shy to show it to many people.

**QUESTION:** If you could be any Harry Potter character, who would it be and why?

**ROWLING:** By nature I am most like Hermione, who is one of Harry's best friends — or at least I was when I was younger, so I would probably have to be her. However, ideally speaking, I would most like to be Professor Dumbledore (the Headmaster of Hogwarts). I'd like his wisdom.

**QUESTION:** How long did it take you before the first Harry Potter story was finished?

**ROWLING:** It took me a long, hard five years to complete *The Philosopher's Stone*. The reason so much time slipped by was because, from that very first idea, I envisaged a series of seven books — each one charting a year of Harry's life whilst he is a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. And I wanted to fully sketch the plots of all the stories and get the essential characteristics of my principal characters before I actually started writing the books in detail.

**QUESTION:** Please tell me if you had any rejections when you began writing for publication and how you coped with them.

**ROWLING:** Oh yes. I had lots of rejections. But I expected everyone to reject me, so I was already braced for failure. However, I loved Harry so much that I just wanted to get him into print whatever the cost in emotional energy. Fortunately, I found an agent who believed in me and was prepared to get publishers to sit up and take notice, and finally, in 1996, Bloomsbury Publishing, bless them, took their fate in their hands and signed me up after much bigger publishers had said no — citing such reasons as my first story was too long and complex for the children's market. Look who's had the last laugh!

**QUESTION:** How many hours each week do you spend writing Harry Potter, and what is your best time for writing in the day?

**ROWLING:** It depends. Sometimes I do 10-hour days. Sometimes (like today), I don't get to do anything. I like the 10-hour days best.

Not being a very good morning person, my best time in the day for being really creative is later in the day. In fact, I'm a real night owl and my very best ideas often come at midnight.

**QUESTION:** How many rough copies or rewrites of a chapter do you do before you get it right?

**ROWLING:** Loads and loads and loads. The worst ever was 13 different



**PREMIERE:** Jo Rowling, top, says that she wishes she had wisdom of Albus Dumbledore (Richard Harris), top right, the headmaster of Hogwarts school and one of Harry's greatest defenders. Bottom left, the Gryffindor quidditch team lines up for its first practice at the wizard world's version of polo.

versions of one chapter (Chapter 9 in *The Goblet of Fire*). I hated that chapter so much; at one point, I thought of missing it out altogether and just putting in a page saying 'Chapter 9 was too difficult' and going straight to Chapter 10.

**QUESTION:** What do you think makes them appealing to both young and older people in seemingly all languages and cultures from, as I read recently, Albanian to Zulu?

**ROWLING:** I think — but I don't really know, because I'm not good at being objective about my own work — that as I write primarily for myself, that probably shows in the books. The quirky sense of humour is most definitely mine.

Apart from the adventures, trials and tribulations of Harry himself, my books are, of course, essentially about magic. And magic appeals to kids all over the world. As for myself, I don't believe in magic in the way that I describe in my books, but still being a bit of a kid at heart, I would love, of course, to have magical powers. My Harry Potter books start from the premise: What if magic were real? And I work from there.

**QUESTION:** Harry's sheer courage is, in my view, something which also

appeals to many readers. Would you agree?

**ROWLING:** I would. Despite his very young age, Harry has tremendous courage. I think Harry's bravery impresses both young and old(er) readers alike, because, although he is full of anxieties, he never gives up and gets by on a combination of intuition, sheer nerve and a fair bit of luck.

**QUESTION:** How do you cope with the aggravation from strongly religious people who have reacted against the Harry Potter stories, accusing them of witchcraft?

**ROWLING:** Well, mostly I laugh about it and ignore it. Very occasionally I get annoyed, because these extremist religious folk have missed the point so spectacularly. I think the Harry books are actually very moral, but some people just object to witchcraft being mentioned in a children's book. Unfortunately, if such extremist views were to prevail, we would have to lose a lot of classic children's fiction.

**QUESTION:** Does your daughter Jessica read the books before anyone else?

**ROWLING:** No, though she's pretty



**YOUNG STARS:** Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe) is bracketed by best friend Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) and staunch ally Hermione Granger (Emma Watson). Hermione comes closest to herself, says Rowling.



annoyed about that. She's only 7 and I think it would be a horrible burden on her if I told her plot secrets. She already gets surrounded in the playground and interrogated.

**QUESTION:** Did you have a real school in mind when you invented Hogwarts, the school for wizards and witches that Harry attends?

**ROWLING:** No, I've never been anywhere like Hogwarts. If only! I went to a very ordinary British comprehensive school.

**QUESTION:** So why did you set most of the Harry Potter stories in an exclusive British boarding school — albeit an unusual one for wizards and witches — when you yourself went to a non-fee-paying comprehensive school?

**ROWLING:** People often ask me that question, and they usually add the further query that with my books' public school dormitories and quaint traditions, isn't it all just too British for international tastes? But you know what? Wherever I go in the world, children and their parents seem to like the Britishness of the stories, even if they are probably getting an idyllic and rather surreal view of the British public school system.

**QUESTION:** The second page of your books always features the Hogwarts school crest. Contained within the crest is a motto written in Latin. What does it stand for?

**ROWLING, laughing:** It means 'never tickle a sleeping dragon.' Good sound, practical advice.

**QUESTION:** When your readers are asked to talk about some of their favourite aspects of your books, the curious wizard sport of Quidditch often comes high on their list. Some of the readers of this interview may still not be quite sure what Quidditch is all about. Can you help?

**ROWLING:** Quidditch started in the 11th century, at a place called Quidditch Marsh, which you probably won't find marked on maps. Originally it was quite a crude game played by wizards on broomsticks, and over the subsequent two centuries they added more balls until it became the game we know now.

**QUESTION:** Why are there no less than four balls whizzing around in Quidditch?

**ROWLING:** When Quidditch was first invented, teams started off with only one ball — the Quaffle, which is the ball you use for goal scoring. Then there was the addition of the two Bludgers to make things a bit more dangerous and interesting, and finally you've got the most important ball of all — the tiny golden ball with wings called the Golden Snitch. The story about the Golden Snitch is so long and convoluted that readers should buy my Harry Potter companion book called *Quidditch Through The Ages*, or there is a pretty detailed description of Quidditch in the first half of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

**QUESTION:** Does it bother you that in America, they changed the names of your books? Consequently, American audiences will be going to their cinemas to see *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, whereas in Europe the first book and its film version is, of course, being released as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Why the difference?

**ROWLING:** This change came about at the request of my American publishers. They only changed the title of the first book, but, to be honest, with my full consent. I wish I hadn't agreed now, but it was my first book and I was so grateful that anyone was publishing me, I wanted to keep them happy.

**THE HARRY POTTER FILM ...**  
**QUESTION:** Do you feel that the forthcoming film, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, will take away the imagination and magic from the books?

**ROWLING:** Well, obviously, I hope not. I'm excited about seeing the film, but then no film could ever ruin my fa-

## Movie is faithful to book, relieved author says

STEVENAGE, England (Staff) — Author J.K. Rowling says she's "enormously relieved" filmmakers remained faithful to her blockbuster book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, on the eve of the movie's world premiere in the British capital.

The film, shot at locations around England, will be screened tomorrow before cast members and a star-studded audience — though not Rowling, who saw the film for the first time at a private screening last weekend.

"The first time I met Chris Columbus, the director, he promised me two things: He promised me that he would remain as faithful to the book as he possibly could within the con-

straints of the film; and, he promised me that he would have an all-British cast. He kept both promises," Rowling said.

She cited several scenes she found to be "moving," including Diagon Alley, the shopping arcade where the young wizard buys his books and uniform; Hogwarts School, a grand castle where Harry attends school; a troll fight; and Quidditch, the airborne ballgame played by Harry and his Hogwarts' classmates on turbo-powered broomsticks.

"They really do look as if I'd imagined they would inside my head. So, obviously, that's the best thing for the writer of the original work."

— Betsy Powell

Continued on next page