

“I’VE LEARNED HOW TO ENJOY MY FAME, RATHER THAN RUN AWAY FROM IT...”

With the multiverse-spanning **Spider-Man: No Way Home** and videogame adventure **Uncharted** on the horizon, things are looking very good for Tom Holland right now. He tells Total Film about the responsibility of playing the world’s most famous superhero, life in the public eye, and why he might just swap acting for carpentry.

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With great power comes great responsibility; an Uncle Ben adage that’s arguably worn thin over the years. Yet, for Tom Holland, the current on-screen incarnation of Spider-Man, the words weigh heavy on his shoulders. “When they cast the young kid in Spider-Man to replace me, whether it’s next year or in five years, I’ll take it upon myself to teach them about the responsibilities of being Spider-Man,” he tells *Total Film* in October 2021. “Because it’s huge. It’s absolutely huge. Every time you walk outside that door, you’re representing Spider-Man.”

The 25-year-old takes a moment. “It’s tough,” he continues. “It’s taxing sometimes. Because sometimes you just want to go to a pub and get absolutely wasted, and not have to worry about the ramifications of the

public scrutiny of: ‘Oh my God, what do you mean you got drunk?’”

There’s no denying the world’s spotlight is firmly on the young actor. When Holland posts on Instagram, news articles follow. When he says anything that could remotely be associated with the upcoming Spider-Man movie, *No Way Home*, and the rumoured multiverse of Spider-Men that could potentially appear, thousands of video essays appear on YouTube. And when he leaves his Kingston home tomorrow, having just served 10 days in isolation after being pinged by the NHS due to potential exposure to Covid-19, no doubt some wide-eyed kid will ask him for a photograph.

And while sometimes it’s tough having the responsibility of being Spider-Man, it’s also equally rewarding. “When you meet these ➔



SPOTLIGHT

➤ young kids, and they're at the age where they can't really figure out whether it's real or not, it's so exciting," he says. "I always do the accent and chat to them. It's really fun. And it's a responsibility I've really loved carrying. But, when someone else takes my place, I will be sure to give them some advice about how to deal with it and give them my number, and basically say, 'Whenever you need me, mate, I'm here.'"

Before Holland passes the spandex to someone new, he has – at the very least – one more outing as Spider-Man. *No Way Home* marks the final instalment in the *Homecoming* trilogy and looks set to take the series in a new direction. "It's not fun, this film," he says. "It's dark and it's sad, and it's going to be really affecting. You're going to see characters that you love go through things that you would never wish for them to go through."

That change in tone offered Holland new ways of looking at Peter Parker, a character he's returning to for the sixth time. "Peter is always someone who's looking up," he says. "He's always really positive. Whereas, in this film, he feels like he's met his match. He's like, 'I don't know what to do.' That was an aspect of the character that I'd never seen before."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, that darker feel comes partly thanks to a rogues' gallery of villains set to appear opposite Holland. Alfred Molina returns as Doctor Octopus from Tobey Maguire's films, the trailer suggests Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin will show up, and there are unconfirmed reports of Jamie Foxx's Electro zapping in from the Andrew Garfield-verse. However, there's also a fellow Avenger who looks set to rumble with Peter: Benedict Cumberbatch's Doctor Strange.

"Throughout the course of the film, their relationship breaks down," Holland says. "Rather than being colleagues – they don't become enemies, but they're definitely not friends. Spider-Man always wants to please everyone. He always wants everyone to be happy. And then, in this instance, that's not the case. It's an interesting relationship. It's very, very different from the one of Tony [Stark] and Peter. But it's a fun one. Spider-Man and Doctor Strange are a great mix."

With Cumberbatch, Molina, Foxx, a returning Zendaya, and more, the cast of *No Way Home* is irrefutably stacked. *Total Film* lists off the names – mentioning rumours that Garfield and Maguire may also appear – and asks whether, with all these actors working alongside him, Holland felt any need to prove himself among them.

"Everyone puts their trousers on in the same way in the morning," he says, no sweat. "It was interesting having those guys come in because they have a certain ownership over Spider-Man in their own way, and..." He pauses. "I'm talking about Alfred and Jamie and those guys. To see Alfred come in, and



In his most famous role, with Zendaya as his MJ.



With Mark Wahlberg in the upcoming *Uncharted*.

have to adapt and change to the way that the films are made, but also the change of director, and also [the fact that] I'm now Spider-Man. It was really interesting to see these actors adapt and evolve, and change what they were doing to fit the modern era."

Wait a second! Was that a minor slip hinting at multiple Spider-Men? Holland shuts down our line of questioning. "People don't believe me when I say that they're not coming back, but people are going to have to believe me at some point." He laughs. "The first time you see Doc and the rest of the characters that come back, it's so exciting – and it's such a huge moment in cinematic history. It's three generations coming together."

Perhaps Holland can talk about his character's recent cameo in *Venom: Let There Be Carnage*. Can we expect to see him duking it out with Tom Hardy's symbiote? "I genuinely don't know," he says. "It was really exciting to be a part of that film. Obviously, Tom Hardy is one of the greatest actors in the world. I'm happy to say that he's a lovely bloke. But I haven't really given it very much thought."

In fact, the future of Holland's Spider-Man appears to be unknown. That's not because he's avoiding talking spoilers; the notoriously loose-lipped South Londoner seems genuinely unsure about what's next for Peter Parker. "I don't know. I don't know. I genuinely don't know," he repeats. The speed of his words

SONY



Facing Alfred Molina's Doc Ock in the highly anticipated *Spider-Man: No Way Home*.

come true. I wanted to feel him looking out in wonder and enjoying a change in his life.”

There’s no time for carpentry just yet, then. We turn once more to the web-crawler in the room. Peter Parker will forever be a major part of cinematic history. Has playing the iconic role changed Holland, both as an actor and a person?

“Absolutely,” he says. “I’ve grown and changed in the best ways possible. I really learned how to stand up for myself. When you first start making these films, you’ve got to do as you’re told, and you don’t think anything of it. But as time goes on, you realise that you’re an actor in your film, and you need to protect yourself. Sometimes I’ll say ‘no’ as a full sentence. I’ve learned how to stand up for myself, how to behave in a professional capacity when you’re the leader. I’ve learned how to enjoy my fame, rather than run away from it.

“It’s been an amazing experience. And as an actor, I’ve found so much confidence in my ability, through having this safety blanket that is Spider-Man. It’s like a playground for me. Somewhere where I can play freely, and make

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– so often rushed like every other excitable young man – slows down. “It’s something I’m thinking about a lot, and it’s something that’s on my mind all the time. But I just genuinely don’t have an answer for you.”

In a recent interview, Robert Downey Jr. said that Holland’s “on planet Marvel right now” and that, when you’re on planet Marvel (as Downey knows all too well), it’s hard to see life beyond the MCU. Holland disagrees.

“I started acting when I was 11, and I’m now 25,” he says. “I just think there are endless opportunities for me to do what I want, and doing what I want might not be in the film industry. It might be completely separate. I might go and be a carpenter for two years, and take a big break, and come back. Or I might not come back. I might go away, and get married, and have kids, and just disappear for the rest of my life.”

Holland, of course, would be no normal carpenter. Whatever comes next, he carries the baggage of being one of the world’s biggest stars. Just days before we speak, he posted an image of his MJ, Zendaya, onto Instagram. The picture was accompanied by the heart-eyes emoji – and it set the blogosphere on fire. It’s tough, he says, keeping his private and public lives separate.

“It’s the price you pay. We’re so lucky to be doing what we’re doing, and to live our life the way we can, and to do the things that we get to

do with this job. My day-to-day life, it’s pretty boring. I go to a golf course. I see my mates. I go home. I’ve sort of given up with Instagram.”

So, if you don’t see Holland on socials, don’t worry. “I’m very happy,” he adds. “I’m very happy, and in love, and my friends are great, my family are great, and everyone’s happy and healthy.”

For Holland, now is the time for reflection. His career, after all, has been so much more than Spider-Man: following early parts in *The Impossible* and *In The Heart Of The Sea*, he’s tackled roles including a PTSD-afflicted veteran in *Cherry*, a troubled son in Netflix’s *The Devil All The Time*, and will soon play convicted rapist Billy Milligan in *The Crowded Room*. “It’s the biggest challenge I’ve ever taken on, and probably ever will take on,” he says of the upcoming series. “It’s keeping me up at night, a little bit, thinking about doing it.”

Before that arrives on screens, Holland’s shedding the awkwardness of Peter Parker to become Indiana Jones-like adventurer Nathan Drake in *Uncharted*. Unlike in the videogames on which the film is based, *Uncharted* features a Drake who’s a “young kid” instead of a mid-career, swaggering wise-cracker. “He’s wide-eyed,” Holland says of his version of the character. “He goes on this adventure that’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and a dream

mistakes. And sometimes those mistakes are the birth of the best idea, and that’s where the character’s growing from.”

Total Film’s time with Holland is nearly up. There are a million more questions to ask – about *Spider-Man*, or *Uncharted*. Yet, this moment, as Holland decides whether to continue as Spider-Man or spread his wings, doesn’t suit asking about multiverses or cameos or what’s next. Instead, we discuss what advice Holland would give to his younger self.

“I would basically say, ‘Don’t do anything for the money,’” he says bluntly. “I would really, really try to teach my younger self that money means nothing. Money is just a number on a screen. Then again...”

He stops. The tone changes – his inner Peter Parker breaks through. “You know what? Scratch that. I wouldn’t tell my younger self to do anything differently. You only learn from mistakes, you don’t learn from winning. All the things I’ve done wrong have helped me end up where I am today. I haven’t done anything terrible that I would go back and change. So, yeah, I would probably just let him get on with it, if I’m honest.”

Like Uncle Ben, then, Holland has good advice to give.

SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 17 DECEMBER. UNCHARTED OPENS IN CINEMAS ON 11 FEBRUARY.