

MEDIA

Movie Studios Smell Out Teen Spirits

By MICHELLE KUNG

Sequels and prequels are Hollywood summer staples, powering some of the biggest hits that are popular with young-adult viewers. But with the final installments on the way for some big series, studios are hunting for new properties.

Warner Bros.' "Harry Potter" franchise this summer winds down with its eighth movie, closing out a series that has brought parent Time Warner Inc. nearly \$6.4 billion world-wide. Next year, the fifth "Twilight" movie will mark the end of Summit Entertainment LLC's lucrative foray into the world of vampires and their teenage lovers.

To continue winning over those audiences, studios have been snapping up the rights to science-fiction and fantasy book series that have the potential to spin off sequels—and lucrative ancillary products like clothes and memorabilia. A movie from a trilogy of books by Suzanne Collins is one of the most hotly anticipated waiting in the wings, as are films with personnel from the "Twilight" movies.

"The competition for young-adult material and the market for speculative fiction, including books and packaging deals, are picking up," says Erik Feig, Summit's president of world-wide production and acquisitions. "Our biggest challenge now is to

find innovative voices without repeating ourselves so fans don't feel like we're giving them something that's a duplicate."

Like many studios, Summit has bought rights for some series of novels even before they hit bookstores, such as the dystopian thriller "Divergent," due to be published next month.

Popular fantasy novels, comic books and hits from other media are desirable because of their established young fan bases. Studios often option all the titles in a book series at once, so if the first film adaptation is a success, the studios quickly can churn out sequels.

The highest-profile of the new candidates is Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.'s adaptation of Ms. Collins's popular "Hunger Games" trilogy, which has more than 8.8 million copies in print. The series' first film, about a teenage girl forced to compete for her life on a reality television show, has a production budget of roughly \$75 million and is slated for release next March.

Viacom Inc.'s Paramount Pictures recently enlisted the screenwriter who adapted the "Twilight" series to do the same for "Earthseed," the first book in Pamela Sargent's trilogy about futuristic teenagers born from the genetic bank of a spaceship.

News Corp.'s Twentieth Century Fox and specialty division Fox 2000 have at least three

In the Pipeline

'Divergent'
By Veronica Roth
Book series debut:
May 2011
Studio: Summit
Ms. Roth is 22.

'Earthseed'
By Pamela Sargent
Book series debut: 1983
Studio: Paramount
'Twilight' screenwriter
expected to write, produce

Trylle Trilogy
By Amanda Hocking
Book series debut: 2010
Studio: Media Rights
Ms. Hocking, 26, self-published nine e-books.

Lions Gate hopes books in the 'Hunger Games' trilogy by Suzanne Collins, pictured, will form a new franchise among young adults. Some series on which other studios are banking are listed.



young-adult franchises in development. One of them, the "Incarceron" series, about a teenager caught in a futuristic prison, has "Twilight" heartthrob Taylor Lautner attached to star in the movie. Warner Bros., Walt Disney Co., Comcast Corp.'s Universal Pictures and Sony Corp.'s specialty division Sony Screen

Gems also have young-adult fantasy or science-fiction properties in the works.

Developing and producing a successful franchise is far from easy. For every success story à la "Twilight," there's at least one bust like 2007's "The Golden Compass," which cost over \$180 million to produce but generated

just \$70 million in domestic ticket sales for New Line Cinema. After that debut, no sequel was planned.

"Many of these studio options are speculative," says producer Roy Lee, whose Vertigo Entertainment is developing several young-adult series for film and TV. "They wait to see which ti-

ties blow up as blockbusters, and if they don't take off, they don't bother following through."

Studios adapting popular books also now must please young readers who have created devotional websites and faux trailers and communicated with authors via blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

"My fans will put together and send me videos of themselves in film trailers and email me their head shots," says author Alyson Noël, whose "Immortals" series, about a 16-year-old who can learn peoples' thoughts by touching them was recently optioned by Summit in a six-figure deal.

"Movies are not a novelty item anymore; they're a distribution platform and method of communication," says producer Bob Shaye, who has two young-adult fantasy adaptations in development.

When he was co-chief executive at New Line, Mr. Shaye endured flops like "The Golden Compass" but also oversaw one of the most successful fantasy adaptations in recent times, the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

Mr. Shaye warns that the genre may have an expiration date. "I don't expect we're going to be spending the next five years looking for young-adult material," he says. "But for the moment, we believe it's a genre worth pursuing."

Robust Demand Expected for Advance Sales of TV Ad Time

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be robust," said Geri Wang, president of sales and marketing at Disney's ABC network.

The high hopes stem partly from TV's relative strength among ad-supported media. Publicis Groupe SA's ZenithOptimedia predicts that U.S. ad spending on all forms of TV will grow 5.1% in 2011, outpacing overall U.S. advertising growth of 2.5%. The largest ad-spending gains will flow to the Internet, which is expected to register a 13% rise; spending cuts are expected

for newspapers, business publications and consumer magazines, ZenithOptimedia says.

But growth in the upfront is expected to be even sharper in part because of the unusually heated market last fall and this spring for ads sold close to when they air, known as "scatter." Those high prices are likely to prompt advertisers to move some money from their scatter budgets into the upfront this year to avoid paying premium prices for commercial time.

So far this season, TV execu-

tives say scatter prices at times have hit 30% to 40% above the rates in last year's upfront, although some buyers say recent economic concerns have cooled off the market slightly.

To be sure, the negotiating dance between ad buyers and sellers is just beginning. CBS Corp. Chief executive Leslie Moonves said at an investor conference last month that he "would be very surprised" if CBS sold much of its advertising at rate increases below double-digit percentages.

Ad buyers say increased ad rates could push clients to move more money online. "If pricing gets too high, we will look to other places," says Dani Benowitz, head of investment at Interpublic Group of Cos.' Universal McCann, whose clients include Johnson & Johnson, Mastercard Inc., Sony Corp. and L'Oréal SA.

Ad buyers also say they expect to shift more dollars to cable networks, such as Comcast's USA, Time Warner's TNT, and Disney and Hearst Corp.'s His-

ting sizable audiences with more original programming.

Ads on cable networks' entertainment programs are generally cheaper per 1,000 viewers than those on broadcast networks.

Higher prices for TV commercials are, paradoxically, partly the result of shrinking audiences for big broadcast networks, as viewers scatter across the dial. Marketers still view TV ads as an efficient way to reach large audiences.

Meanwhile, the potential that

canceled in the ongoing lockout could distort the entire marketplace. Traditional NFL advertisers may choose to reserve more space than usual in prime-time shows sold in the upfront, looking to hedge their bets, buyers say.

That could drive prices up for networks. On the flip side, some TV executives worry they'll be faced with advertisers that want to back out of those commitments if the games then go on as planned, leaving them with