



“For this battle I wanted to do things we’d never done before.” **PETER JACKSON**

I must say,” Jackson agrees, gesturing **Empire** towards a sofa. “Weta Digital wouldn’t say so, they are always under pressure. For some reason no length of time is long enough for CG effects — I guess that is some law. But we have the luxury to spend a bit of time with it.”

Jackson’s inner sanctum is everything you wish it to be: a Holmesian think-space and Indy-like reliquary of World War I insignia, movie arcana, back issues of *Famous Monsters Of Filmland*, and top-of-the-range Apple gizmos. Surrounding the plump sofa and armchairs, an Ent-moot of oak shelves comes festooned with collectibles: Mars Attacks! aliens, Corpse Bride dolls, the Tracy brothers, even two of the eight holographic chess pieces from the Millennium Falcon. That is, the *actual* Phil Tippett-made maquettes from 1977. Near enough everything here is original.

• **Above:** Stick ‘em with the pointy end: Jackson advises Evangeline Lilly as Tauriel on official elven stabbing techniques. **Left:** Gandalf stands firm with the ragtag soldiers of Lake-town survivors — one of the five armies.

The director is in a good place. His daily workflow has been refined to a heavy but unfussy pattern of editing, then monitoring the slow accretion of finished material from his various departments. For the first time in three years, he feels he finally has some breathing space.

“There are three phases of a film,” he philosophises, leaning back to a satisfying creak of leather, “and there is only one that really matters in terms of finding the pulse of the film and that is the editing, the post-production and the sound. You can think you have that in the script. You can go and shoot and experiment with things. But there is nothing else after post-production. This is it, where it really stands up and says, ‘This is what I am, what are you going to do about it?’ Well, actually I am going to give you a haircut and trim your toenails. There is still

plenty of room for creativity.”

He already has a working cut of film three. Apart from the to-do of the forthcoming battle sequence (which we’ll come to), he has only a few shots left to chisel into shape. Without credits, *The Battle Of The Five Armies* currently runs to a positively jaunty two-thirty — an entire 15 minutes shorter than *Transformers 4*.

“This one has got more of a thriller feel to it,” Jackson elaborates, perfectly happy to shorten a *Hobbit*. “I think of this third movie as a psychological thriller with action scenes interspersed in the middle of it. It has got a very tight narrative structure. Three-hour movies don’t tend to be thrillers.”

Uniquely in the Middle-earth canon, *The Battle Of The Five Armies* isn’t a road movie. With the exception of Gandalf’s rescue from Dol Guldur and journey to Erebor, the drama plays out on the dwarvish doorstep, the quintet of factions vying to fill the power vacuum left by the devastating consequences of angering Smaug. Bitterness, recrimination, dragon slaying and dwarvish war pigs are the order of the day. And to help our analogy along — winter will be coming to Erebor too. “Not winter in the *Game Of Thrones*-ish sense,” imparts Jackson, who hasn’t finished season one yet. “There are sprinklings of snow, rivers have frozen.”

What might surprise you is that Jackson is still shooting his movie as well. Utilising technology developed on *Tintin*, he has blurred the distinction between production and post-production. Tradition dictates that script, storyboard, previz and footage will govern how individual scenes come together in the edit. However, where shots in *The Hobbit* are entirely virtual, Jackson can pop down to his mo-cap stage (literally two flights of stairs away), pick up his customised camera and create new shots of the Weta-conceived environments — the computer reproducing his moves on a monitor in a three-quarters-rendered Middle-earth. Shots limited only by Jackson’s dexterity.

“It is like the smallest crew you are ever going to have in your life,” he exalts softly. “Me on stage by myself, basically — it’s like my Super 8 days.” On the second *Hobbit*, he did many of the Smaug scenes this way; on the first, some of Goblin Town. Now he will use it throughout. “Rather than any kind of filmmaking style, it’s going to feel like you are a CNN cameraman in the middle of *The Battle Of The Five Armies*. You’ll have to come and watch — I’ll be on the mo-cap stage this afternoon.” >