



“I think of the third film as a psychological thriller.” **PETER JACKSON**

“Chuck it in, we’ll see if it becomes clear later on how we’d use it.”

Everyone in Jackson’s camp is adamant that — despite the late name change — *The Battle Of The Five Armies* is far from a war movie. A better way of looking at it is that the battle is the natural climax of three movies’ worth of storylines funnelling into a particular corner of Middle-earth.

“All the Middle-earth battles have been different because they tell different stories,” Jackson insists. “Here I wanted to do things we had never done before. Obviously there are orcs fighting elves and men, but I wanted to bring in more creatures. The orcs have all manner of creatures. Not just trolls, but creatures they have bred for their armies. They are like the Panzer tanks of the orc armies.”

And in keeping with *The Hobbit*’s general zoological thrust (Thranduil has an elk, Gandalf his eagles, and Radagast his Roscobel bunnies), Billy Connolly rides a pig. “Of course he rides a pig,” Jackson retorts. “Why wouldn’t you want to ride a pig if you were a dwarf?”

Said pig, digital, is actually based on

the director’s three kunekunes — Pikelet, Itchy and Scratchy — adopted after serving as extras in Lake-town. Said dwarf, periodically real, is Connolly’s Dain, whose tribe of Iron Hills badasses ride to the aid of Thorin. In fact, the negotiations between Thranduil and Thorin currently being edited conclude abruptly with Dain’s ‘cavalry’ emerging on an adjacent hilltop.

The dwarves are not only mounted on battle pigs, but battle goats with huge horns. They also have battle rams (as in male sheep). And chariots with spiked wheel-hubs, Ben-Hur style. Or they will do once Weta Digital answers the call of their director’s greedy imagination.

“I didn’t want the dwarf army to be on foot,” he explains. “I wanted their army to have some cool accessories. Then the orcs turn up and have some cool accessories too. A big fight breaks out to see whose accessories are cooler.”

## TAKING THE STAIRWAY

this side of *You Only Live Twice*, or maybe it’s *Goldfinger*, you come to the mo-cap stage. This empty space, not

• **Above:** *The Battle Of The Five Armies* is far from just a war movie — Martin Freeman’s much-changed Hobbit Bilbo studies the Ring. **Top right:** Arrow-king Bard (Luke Evans) inspects his elven equivalents. **Above right:** Thorin on thin ice — uniquely for all six films, the battle will take place in a frozen setting.

dissimilar to a school assembly hall, would in Cameron parlance be grandly designated the ‘Volume’. Here people mostly call it “mo-cap”, although no-one is currently sporting a leotard. And in a nearby kitchen, Jackson’s jovial assistant Seb is cooking sausage rolls.

“We’re shooting some angles of Smaug’s attack on Lake-town,” says Jackson, adjusting an office chair to recline to an agreeable slant. The very sequence that adorns our current cover. Indeed, as the system boots up, various angles of a rudimentary Lake-town and circling dragon appear on the monitors, the beast’s flaming breath a simple yellow cone. “It’ll look a bit better for release,” smirks the director, stepping out on the floor to begin filming.

The luxury of having this network of production and post-production fiefdoms, connected by arteries of fibre optics running beneath the Miramar streets, has had an inverse effect. It makes Jackson feel more indie. This is not a studio outpost, but a community that revolves around the singular talent and idiosyncrasies of Peter Jackson.