

# P

BRIEFING

## THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES

RELEASED: December 12

DIRECTOR: Peter Jackson

STARRING: Martin Freeman, Richard Armitage, Ian McKellen, Luke Evans, Benedict Cumberbatch, Lee Pace, Evangeline Lilly, Billy Connolly

PREVIOUSLY, IN THE HOBBIT... Bilbo (Freeman) and the dwarves got to Erebor and awakened and enraged the dragon Smaug (Cumberbatch), who's flown off to take it all out on Lake-town. There awaits the heroic Bard (Evans), armed with the only viable dragon-killer to hand: the black arrow. Meanwhile, Gandalf is in a cage at Dol Guldur.

WHAT ARE THESE FIVE ARMIES OF WHICH YOU SPEAK? Dwarves, orcs, elves, humans and eagles — the hordes set to scrap spectacularly at Erebor over Smaug's hoard.

### PORTSMOUTH ROAD

'post', an entanglement of grey buildings housing editorial, production and mop-up is the engine room of The Hobbit trilogy and a monument to its irrepressible landlord. The carpets are thick. The seating is comfy. The communal zone boasts jukebox, cappuccino maker and The Lord Of The Rings pinball. Even in the toilet, some wisecrack has tacked a portrait of Saruman to a cubicle door (perhaps, in the hope of accelerating the post-production process). And, naturally, there is a corridor lined with mint 007 posters.

It is opposite You Only Live Twice, and next to Moonraker, or that might be Live And Let Die, you'll find the door.

The month is June, more-or-less winter in Wellington and its leafy suburbs, which would normally signal a fresh session of supplementary shooting in the annual cycle of Middle-earth making. Except all that was achieved last year, while they still had their cast under contract. For the first time, the relative straightforwardness of post-production — the not inconsiderable ploughing through editing, sound, scoring, picture, and special effects until winter strikes the Northern Hemisphere — is enjoying the latitude of its own extended edition.

Thus this morning we are led through this unassuming door into what appears to be an empty cupboard. **Empire** is momentarily confused. Have we taken a wrong turn? Been ushered, to the embarrassment of everyone, into a former stationery hoard long since raided of staplers and good Birus? Fool of a writer! A secret mechanism has been triggered, hidden gears set in motion, and the central shelf panel slowly swings open. What lies beyond isn't Narnia, but Peter Jackson in a leather armchair staring dreamily into a Colbert Report mug filled with tea (Stephen Colbert is a Tolkien nut).

"Things are a hell of a lot easier,

