



and Bard ride to within hollering distance. The footage is relatively raw, with large portions of greenscreen. Lee Pace's horse has not yet been converted into Thranduil's elk.

"We've come to tell you payment of your debt has been offered... and accepted," oozes Pace onscreen.

"Thranduil's going to be very interested to see Thorin's reaction," Jackson explains, effectively giving **EMPIRE** a sneak preview of the director's commentary as Olssen runs through the takes. "He's trying to avoid war, so it is quite a big moment... Ooh, that's good, I like that one."

Pace has just given a particularly flinty line-reading, and you can see how it energises the director — the tiniest piece of the puzzle slotting into place.

Jackson and Olssen have been sifting through footage like this from day one (where Jackson averaged eight or nine takes per scene, second-unit director Andy Serkis delivered 30 to 40). During production, an Avid would be set up in an adjoining tent or in a sofa-softened camper van driven into the wild. If it

rained, there was the option to edit. "We even set up a mobile cart I could wheel around," says Olssen, conjuring up an image of a market stallholder hawking Hobbit offcuts like fresh fish.

Occasionally, Jackson admits to finding himself wishing he had executed a shot differently. Why didn't he tell them to move a bit faster? Then, by take five and six, there they were: running a bit faster. "Old Pete is usually in sync with new Pete," he giggles, not sounding so different from another old friend (or two), precious.

In the cut, Jackson is resolute that the pace and style of the film are governed by dialogue and story. Something, he says, that was equally true on set: "Don't shoot every scene as if it were your opening shot." He recently had *Braindead* digitally remastered (he'll get around to releasing it post-*Hobbit*), and noticed how many scenes were shot without context. "I could have been snappier, faster, punchier," he chides Very Old Pete. "Pick up the pace!"

The point being, context is everything. Which doesn't mean to say he's not having fun devising cunning Steadicam shots out of tight dialogue sequences. You will still

• **Above:** "Saying farewell hits you harder when you finish shooting with the actors," admits Jackson. "Thinking, 'God, this is Ian McKellen's last day as Gandalf.'"

get the Wagnerian apocalypse of Smaug torching Lake-town, and the epic clatter of army meeting army. It is that all this concentration of effort is solely about improving the storytelling.

"I like a lot of my directing in this movie, compared to the other two movies," Jackson chooses his words carefully. "I like the script, I like the fact it wasn't a road movie. I was getting into my groove more than had happened earlier." Due to the expediencies of getting the first and second film finished, the trilogy was shot in more-or-less sequential order. As things began, Guillermo del Toro's exit, a perforated ulcer and an immovable release date had severely restricted his preparation. He had no room to breathe at all, and admits to winging it. "I was just rather thrown off my game. I mean, the actors were great the whole way through, but I am more proud of my part of the job in the third movie than the others. This is the one I will be most pleased with."

Olssen offers up another take of Thranduil, but Jackson is not as impressed. "Hmmm, I just don't know how we are going to use it," he mulls. >