

Page 1

Cinema
Exclusive on set

Page 2

Caption: In July 2013, as Martin Freeman and Peter Jackson looked on, Sir Ian McKellen shot his last scene as Gandalf

Title: The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies

On December 10th the last journey to Middle-earth opens in theaters. Cinema was on set and saw devastated cities and elves smeared with blood

Page 3

Cover Story

“After these battles, a little drama is quite enticing” – Peter Jackson

Caption: Although Bard the Bowman is only vaguely described in the book, the character plays a central role in “The Battle of the Five Armies.”

Page 4

Caption: “The Tinkerbell of Middle-earth: “She is sweet, but you shouldn’t get into it with her,” Evangeline Lilly warns about her character, the Ninja-elf Tauriel

By Philipp Schulze

Thick snowflakes fall quietly on the crumbled city walls of Dale. Richly decorated wells and gates, now overgrown with grass and weeds, testify to the former riches of the kingdom in the north of Middle-earth. And houses, slippery paths, and a row of rotten trees give an impression of the catastrophe that must have happened here. 171 years ago, Smaug the dragon breathed fire on Dale and laid waste to the city.

Now the metropolis at the foot of Erebor is once again the scene of death and destruction. Frightening Orcs have begun to hunt the men who have fled to the ruins of Dale from Esgaroth. With swords and axes drawn, they fight their way, screaming loudly, through the narrow allies of the ruined city. And are finally defeated by the elves of Mirkwood. After the massacre is over, Thranduil (Lee Pace), the king of the Wood Elves, looks both wrathfully and sadly upon his fallen comrades and the dead bodies of the orcs, when Gandalf (Ian McKellen) rips him from his thoughts. The sorcerer clothed in a grey gown begs Thranduil for help against the powers of darkness. But Thranduil responds only: “The elves have

already shed enough blood in this land.” “Thanks!” director Peter Jackson calls out, on this day, and makes the orcs jump several more times over the elves’ blades.

It’s getting gloomy in Middle-earth. For the conclusion of the trilogy created by J.R.R. Tolkien and finished in 1937, Peter Jackson lets all hell break loose in Middle-earth. Just as he did in his last “Lord of the Rings” adventure, “The Return of the King,” he closes his epic with massive battle scenes, tragic losses and abysses of the soul (see the sidebar). To do this, In June 2013, the New Zealand director assembled his actors one more time for six weeks in his idyllic hometown, Wellington.

Sidebar: the plot of the film:

While Smaug destroys the harbor city of Esgaroth, the dwarves seclude themselves in Erebor around Thorin, who is gradually falling victim to madness. As the wargs and the orcs set course toward the mountain, elves, humans and dwarves rally in the “Battle of the Five Armies” against the enemy, under the influence of the Necromancer.

Page 5

“Peter has the whole story in his head and leads us to his ideas” – Richard Armitage

Page 6

Hopping, fighting, jumping: As the dwarf Thorin, Richard Armitage approached his physical and psychological limits

Page 7

It was a challenge for the actors. “It’s now been two and half years since I stood before the camera for the first time as Bilbo,” says Martin Freeman. “Since that time I’ve worked on many other projects. So I needed some time at the beginning to put myself back into the role of the Hobbit.” The glimmering chain mail (mithril shirt) that he will wear in the next scene may have helped him as much as Jackson’s perfectionism. “Peter knows, even before he has shot a scene, how he will edit it,” reports Ian McKellen, who’s had the number 9 in elvish tattooed on his upper arm, representatively for the nine companions from the first “Lord of the Rings” films.

The word “pickups” normally sets off alarm bells in production circles. After all, one associates them above all with the studio’s reaction to poor test viewings. Not here. Due to the vagaries of the weather, some scenes couldn’t be shot. On top of that, new ideas for closing the final chapter of Middle-earth are always ghosting around in Peter Jackson’s head. So some scenes he’d already written two years earlier, others just last night. “I don’t believe we’re finished,” McKellen jokes. “I’ve said goodbye to Tolkien’s world many times before.”

In spite of Jackson's passion for the subject, many fans were skeptical at the beginning about how the three-time Oscar winner would expand the 300-page model of the book to a three-parter. Anxiety about a bloated fantasy spectacle was high. Jackson answered with two emotional 3D epics, for which he drew on the appendices to "The Return of the King." He invited characters like the Ninja-elf Tauriel (Evangeline Lilly) and had familiar characters like Legolas (Orlando Bloom) return against the plot of the novel. In this way, Jackson developed his own unique vision of Tolkien's world. Without surpassing the master.

Caption: Always armed with a mug, Peter Jackson explains the next fight scene to elf king Thranduil (Lee Pace). The cantankerous orc in the background probably already knows what will come to him in the next two minutes.

Page 8

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Page 9

Side: Cinema editor Philipp Schulze on the Dale set on Mount Crawford.

Even after all the years in Middle-earth, the fifty-two-year-old appears not to be able to believe what the team has brought together for him. In order to make a ruin out of the city of Dale, it had to be ravaged. Over a period of about six weeks about 130 artisans prepared statues, pillars and buildings from plaster, cement, and wood, in order to capture the entire power of destruction of Smaug the dragon. And yet another location suffers under the monster: Esgaroth. For three months, the Venice of Middle-earth – including 54 houses, boats, and canals – was erected in Stone Tree [sic] Studios in the Wellington suburb of Miramar. At the end, the largest stage set built for this production falls victim to flames.

Next to a series of sets he built himself, Peter Jackson is relying on countless special effects, above all in the Battle of the Five Armies, which forms the center of the Film. "After this battle," he says, "the idea of shooting a little drama is quite enticing."

Page 10

"What I like so much in part 3 is the connection to the first 'Rings' Films," says Sir Ian McKellen, referring above all to the return of Sauron