

GQ Article

Translated by: 'Professor of Narnia'

How does this film differ from the previous two films?

It's shorter, the story develops rather quickly, and it's much darker. Thorin is deep inside the mountain at the beginning of the film, it's almost a metaphor illustrating his descent into madness. The old Thorin is obsessed over the gold rather than having any concern over the dwarves. He's suffered through his quest to slay the dragon—it becomes the incentive for his anger which ultimately causes chaos in the mountain and lights the fuse to war as the people of Middle Earth are consumed by greed for the treasure.

Which scene in "The Battle of Five Armies" would you wish for the fans to see?

I think it's the scene where the dwarves arrive at Erebor to start taking control of the situation. I believe this preparation for battle is what I'm most excited about, it's the last 45 minutes when the stories all come together with the thrilling battle scenes.

In your transformation into the character of Thorin, did it actually take 3 hours for the make-up and hair?

It's about 2.5 hours. Tami Lane, Gino Acevedo, and Kate Brown were the make-up artists and there's Peter King and Jennifer Stanfield who helped with the hair and beard.

How did you feel the first time you saw yourself in the mirror as Thorin?

I really liked the transformation into a new character and for this one it's taken to the extreme. I liked his eyebrows, his hairline, and the grey highlights. I actually liked Thorin's costume in this film—there's black leather and the chainmail armor. It's lighter and easier for movement than some of the other costumes, it's more suited for a battlefield than for casual wearing. There's also a cloak, a shield, and his crown which portray his wealth and noble position. I think it reflects his greed and his stubbornness well, like his responsibility to carry the burden throughout the journey.

What is the most enjoyable aspect of playing Thorin?

I'd have to say that a character who gradually descends into darkness is an interesting role to play—how to make Thorin have morality, loyalty, nobility, and for me to respect him and become fascinated with him. Then to allow the character to fall deeper into madness, becoming more psychologically disconnected and irrational—without knowing if he could be redeemed. That's the most enjoyable part of this role.

You've read "The Hobbit" as a child. Do you still remember how you became fascinated by it?

It helped expand my imagination, I read it once and over and over again. I believe it's the reason I became an actor. When I read it I heard the characters' voices in my head, I saw the world Tolkien described, I went on an adventure with the dwarves and I was sad when it ended. After that I read "Lord of the Rings"; Middle Earth is a magical place that releases your imagination, it's a place I'd love to visit. I want to see the kingdom of Erebor with my own eyes.

What differences do you see between the book and the film?

There are many differences. Peter tried to elaborate more on character details than what Tolkien had described. It's like taking Tolkien's seeds and planting them to expand the species. One definitive example would be Thorin's feelings as the king of the dwarves, or the adventure in Erebor—Peter interprets them but still holds onto Tolkien's intentions.

How was your experience working with Peter?

He's the greatest director, he's the ultimate creator of the fantasy genre. It's like what Tolkien wrote about the fantasy genre, it doesn't have to feel like a fantasy world but it has to feel like it could happen in the real world, it must have a beginning and seem quite real. Peter's imagination is unlimited, he has a remarkable vision, even though he likes to direct actors he also brings in new technology. The most important thing is he always thinks of the fans, he's always meticulous over every detail in the film so that the fans will be thrilled. Working with Peter has been the most incredible experience in my life. He never does things ordinarily, it's always epic, thrilling, humorous, the production is beyond expectation. He always is unexpected and I always try to do the same for him.

You've recently returned to the stage in Arthur Miller's play "The Crucible." How did you prepare for this role?

I spent eight weeks in general preparation, starting with a visit to Salem, I read many books and Miller's notes. Then we had five weeks of rehearsals with our director Yael Farber. We created the setting of Salem for the characters to live in and to find the truth which Miller had strived for: the reality in his world during McCarthyism in the 50s and the truth that resonates in my mind today.

Do you prefer filming movies or performing on stage?

I'd have to say I like both aspects of acting. I like the audience to share our emotions in the theatre each night, the sound of gasps and sobbing but I also enjoy the development of a character over the course of a film. There are changes and my feelings for the character change from the first day of shooting. Filming also allows the opportunity for new takes to try playing things differently each time—while on stage we must keep the heart of the story consistently throughout the eight weeks but we can change the game. It's like playing football, we just know the rules and how to play; however, each night the game can be played differently.

Where would you be on Christmas night this year?

There'll probably be my family and friends around a huge dinner table and I hope I'll be on top of a snow-covered mountain by New Year's.