



Dir: Peter JACKSON / USA, New Zealand, Germany
Released in Britain: 2003
Running Time: 201 minutes
Colour: Deluxe
Estimated Attendance: 15.22 million

Hopes were high for the first *Lord of the Rings* film. For the third, they were through the roof. Delivering the ring to Mount Doom would have been easier than making a final chapter to surpass audiences' expectations. So did Peter Jackson manage it?

THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE RETURN OF THE KING

Director **Peter Jackson**
 Producers **Barry Osborne, Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh**
 Screenplay/Story **Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson, adapted from the novel by J. R. R. Tolkien**
 Director of Photography **Andrew Lesnie**
 Editor **Jamie Selkirk**
 Production Designer **Grant Major**
 Music **Howard Shore**

Frodo Baggins • Elijah Wood
 Gandalf • Ian McKellen
 Arwen • Liv Tyler
 Aragorn, 'Strider' • Viggo Mortensen
 Samwise 'Sam' Gamgee • Sean Astin
 Galadriel • Cate Blanchett
 Gimli • John Rhys-Davies
 Peregrin Took, 'Pippin' • Billy Boyd
 Meriadoc Brandybuck, 'Merry' • Dominic Monaghan
 Legolas • Orlando Bloom
 King Theoden of Rohan • Bernard Hill
 Elrond • Hugo Weaving
 Eowyn, Theoden's Niece • Miranda Otto
 Faramir • David Wenham
 Eomer, Eowyn's Brother • Karl Urban
 Denethor, Steward of Gondor • John Noble
 Smeagol, 'Gollum' • Andy Serkis
 Bilbo Baggins • Ian Holm
 Boromir • Sean Bean
 The Witch-king of Angmar/Gothmog • Lawrence Makoare

THE STORY

Two hobbits find a ring while fishing and are seized with an urge to own it; one, Smeagol, murders his friend and degenerates into the creature known as Gollum. Currently, Gollum is guiding Frodo Baggins, the ringbearer, and his friend Sam into the dark land of Mordor (where Frodo intends to destroy the ring) but he is plotting to have the hobbits killed. In the aftermath of the battle of Helm's Deep and the defeat of the wizard Saruman, the remainder of the Fellowship of the Ring – wizard Gandalf, human Aragorn (possible heir to the kingdom of Gondor), elf Legolas, hobbits Pippin and Merry, and dwarf Gimli – are allied with King Theoden of Rohan and his niece Eowyn. The orcish armies of Sauron continue to wage war against mankind, now turning their attack from Rohan to Gondor.

Gandalf insists that Theoden aid Gondor in the war and sets out with Pippin to persuade Denethor, steward of Gondor, to mount a strong defence to keep the forces of evil occupied so that Frodo can get to Mount Doom, the only place where the ring can be destroyed. Denethor, maddened by the death of his son Boromir, sends his less-loved son Faramir off in a futile battle. In Mordor, Gollum turns Frodo against Sam; the ringbearer tries to send his friend back, only to be led by Gollum into the lair of Shelob, a giant spider who paralyses him and wraps him in her web. Sam finds Frodo and, thinking him dead, takes the ring. Frodo later revives and is reunited with his friend, to press on to Mount Doom.

The hordes of Sauron attack Gondor and the forces of good resist. Eowyn and Merry defeat Sauron's most fearsome lieutenant and the orcish hordes are broken. In Mount Doom, Frodo hesitates to destroy the ring and Gollum makes a last grab for it, dying in a vain attempt to preserve it from destruction. With the ring melted, the power of Sauron is broken and an age of magic comes to an



Left The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics **Above** The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, **Below** all romantic historical epics,

end. Aragorn is crowned king of Gondor and the hobbits return to the Shire. With the age of men upon Middle-earth, the elves depart in a boat, taking Frodo and his uncle Bilbo, once a ringbearer himself, with them.

WHAT THEY SAY NOW ...

As if realising that the third part of his *Lord of the Rings* triptych will be concerned with such momentous business that tiny felicities are liable to get squeezed, Peter Jackson opens *The Return of the King* with its smallest denizen, a wriggling worm destined to be impaled on a fish-hook. It's almost a joke at the expense of the remembering-who-everybody-is phase of the picture that the cheery hobbit fisherman turns out not to be one of the four 'halflings' among the Fellowship but Andy Serkis as Smeagol, the previously unseen, pre-corruption incarnation of Gollum.

The major challenge here is that the meat of the story and the emotional involvement are with Frodo, Gollum and Sam while all other business – far more conventionally spectacular – is essentially a side-issue orchestrated to keep the villains busy elsewhere while victory is won by throwing a trinket into a stream of molten lava. Whereas Tolkien had to interleave whole chapters on his various strands, Jackson can punctuate the central quest with snippet-like asides that keep us updated on what everyone is doing. Nevertheless, all the cutting back and forth does undermine the momentum and sometimes gives the picture the air of a soap opera.

There is a great deal of bitty material to get through, as all the characters have to do something to justify their presence: the elf Legolas, for instance, gets one sustained heroic sequence as he single-handedly boards and brings down a lumbering war-elephant before taking a well-earned bow. Jackson, confident in his effects team and post-production skills, puts on screen images that would





Above The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics **Right** The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, all romantic historical epics **Below right** The meticulously spectacular *Gone With The Wind*, the Technicolor mother of all romantic historical epics, all romantic historical epics.

have defeated any pre-CGI film-maker: vast chunks of masonry catapulted from the ramparts of a besieged city to squash dozens of photo-realistic orc goons, answered by equally devastating missiles from the attacking armies.

A point comes when it's hard to tell whether praise or criticism is due to Jackson for his adaptation or Tolkien for his original text, which presents at least as many traps as opportunities. The side of the novel that seems twee and arch is kept in check until the epilogue, when it is unleashed along with the complex, very hard-to-dramatise bitter pill that the heroic triumph of the story which brings about 'the Age of Men' also means an end to the age of appealing magic that is the setting.

Also problematic is that all richness of character is on one side (Gollum, though ultimately corrupted, is not a minion of Sauron), and so we see how the forces of good are riven by personality conflicts, misjudgments and prejudices while the hordes of evil are monolithically rotten. History suggests that societies like Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia collapse because it's impossible for self-seeking bad men to make common cause, but the armies of Mordor march as one.

Considered as a stand-alone film, *The Return of the King* plays least well of the three: it's three-quarters climax and one-quarter straggling epilogue. The reintroduction of Ian Holm's Bilbo comes well after business has satisfyingly been concluded and demands a shift of attention when general audiences will be reaching for their coats. However, as the last act of a nine-hours-plus movie, it fits

perfectly. The entire production must take its place in film history: it exposes the shortcomings of the initial *Star Wars* trilogy and stands as the most successful filming of a monumental bestseller since *Gone With The Wind*. The sense of what is possible in mainstream cinema has been changed by Jackson's achievement in ways that will take decades to assimilate.

CLASSIC QUOTE

On the battlefield of Gondor, armour-clad Rohan princess Eowyn faces off the feared Lord of the Nazgûl. Lord of the Nazgûl: 'Fool! No man can kill me. Die now!' Eowyn, removing her helmet, before felling the Nazgûl: 'I am no man!'

SCENE STEALER

Desperate to have the ring again, Gollum leads Frodo into the lair of giant spider Shelob, where the creature paralyses and binds the hobbit in her sticky web. Not for arachnophobes.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The Return of the King received its premiere in Wellington, and the trilogy was embraced by New Zealand authorities keen to exploit growing tourist interest in the films' locations. The customs desk at Wellington airport featured a check-in for orcs and the government even appointed a minister for *Lord of the Rings* to maximise movie-related revenue.

BEHIND THE PIXELS

Of the three films, *The Return of the King* made the most prominent use of Gollum, a computer-generated creation integrated into the real-life action. In an unusual move, Andy Serkis 'performed' Gollum's movements against a green screen, and his interpretation of the role was the basis for computer animators' design of Gollum. Also providing the voice for Gollum, Serkis won an MTV best-actor award for this CG-assisted performance (a first). He appears as himself in the



OSCARS

11 nominations, 11 winners

Art Direction: Grant Major, Dan Hennah, Alan Lee
Costume Design: Ngila Dickson, Richard Taylor
Directing: Peter Jackson
Film Editing: Jamie Selkirk
Makeup: Richard Taylor, Peter King
Music (Original Score): Howard Shore
Music (Original Song): 'Into the West', Music and Lyric by Fran Walsh, Howard Shore, Annie Lennox
Best Picture: Barrie M. Osborne, Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh
Sound Mixing
Visual Effects
Writing (Adapted Screenplay): Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Actor in a Leading Role: Sean Penn *Mystic River*
 Actress in a Leading Role: Charlize Theron *Monster*

BAFTAS

12 nominations, 4 winners

Film

Direction: Peter Jackson
Adapted Screenplay: Fran Walsh/Philippa Boyens/Peter Jackson

Supporting Actor: Ian McKellen
 Music: Howard Shore
Cinematography: Andrew Lesnie
 Editing: Jamie Selkirk
 Production Design: Grant Major
 Costume Design: Ngila Dickson/Richard Taylor
 Sound

Special Visual Effects

Make Up and Hair: Richard Taylor/Peter King/ Peter Owen

WHAT WON THAT YEAR?

Direction: Peter Weir *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*
 Actor: Bill Murray *Lost in Translation*
 Actress: Scarlett Johansson *Lost in Translation*