

# The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies (2014)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hours 24 min.

Our Content ratings (0-10): Violence 5; Language 2; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star ratings (0-5): 4

*For the word of the Lord is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.  
He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord..*

*The war horse is a vain hope for victory,  
and by its great might it cannot save.*

*Psalms 33:4-5, 17.*

*Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live.*

*Proverbs 15:27*

Peter Jackson's final part of his adaptation of Tolkien's novel begins with a bang. Knowing that fans are well aware of how the second installment ended with a cliffhanger, he begins with the dragon Smaug's revenge attack on Lake-town. Aided by special effects, the shot of the dragon flying over the sleeping town and spewing forth its fire upon the rooftops is impressive. Equally impressive are the shots of the panicked villagers, roused from their slumbers and crowding into their boats to escape the holocaust. This sequence of fiery death from the air brings to mind scenes of the Nazi's blitz on London, or maybe the Allies firebombing of Dresden during WW 2.

What will probably be Peter Jackson's Tolkien swan song (the estate controlling the author's other works are refusing to release any more film rights) ends with almost an orgy of film violence that will please those who love special effects-enhanced screen action.

Although Bilbo (Martin Freeman) and Gandalf the Gray (Ian McKlellan) are important, the middle half of the film *really* belongs to Luke Evans as Bard of Bowman and Richard Armitage as Thorin the dwarf king. The Bard emerges as the hero by shooting down Smaug and then leading the townspeople to seek refuge in the Lonely Mountain. Once the treasure deep in Lonely Mountain is recovered from Smaug, Thorin changes, reveling in all the vast amount of gold that he goes back on his word to share it with the others. In Tolkien terms, the "Dragon Sickness" that consumed his grandfather now has taken hold of him. He refuses to allow entrance or to share the treasure with the citizens of Lake-town as he had promised. He becomes a danger to the other dwarves as well who have good reason to expect a 14<sup>th</sup> share in the treasure along with Bilbo. Bard the Bowman tries to reason with him to prevent a war between the dwarves and the elves who have amassed an army outside the caves of Lonely Mountain. And there also are other armies assembling, notably that of the Orcs that Sauron has been creating in order to conquer Middle Earth. There is a scene depicting the almost insane Thorin's inner struggle that is especially well done, the vast gold in the cave becoming a pool that sucks its greedy possessor into its depths. Sobered by this nightmarish view of his doom, Thorin returns to sanity, shaken, but now ready to act as a true king should. He had refused to take part in the intense fighting going on outside his sanctuary, with the result that the divided allies of elves, humans, and a few dwarves are in danger of losing *The Battle Of The Five Armies*. Upon returning to his sanity, he rushes forward into the fray.

I realize that younger fans will relish the climactic battle

sequence more than the above. Filmed with incredible special effects, the band of heroes fight with the ferocity of the cornered righteous, the dwarves with their hammers banging over the Orcs, and our human and elf heroes (including the female Tauriel [Evangeline Lilly]—Jackson needs to appeal to women views also) slashing, dodging, jumping, and taking on three or four Orcs at a time. There are some important casualties so that the action goes into slow motion, receding into the background, so that those who cherish them can have a moment to mourn them. Jackson's creative workers have come up with some impressive creatures, such as the elf king's magnificent moose antler-equipped steed, as well as various Orcs, one giant specimen bred with a huge head and stone designed to knock holes into castle walls. This creature hurls itself at the wall, killing itself in the process, but succeeding in making a breach for the invaders to rush through. What an ending, based on an incident given so little space in the novel itself!

Leaving the theater I felt confirmed in my opinion that Jackson's adaptation of the slender novel is a hugely bloated affair. There are none of the quiet moments of the LOR trilogy where any of the characters reflect upon themselves and their quest. So much of the action itself is so unbelievable that the sequence becomes cartoonish, at least for this skeptical viewer—such as Legolas running up a series of stones cascading down from a fallen, disintegrating tower that has formed a temporary bridge across a chasm, Or the heroes so easily dispatching several heavily armored Orcs at a time—if this armor can be so easily penetrated, then Sauron should punish the armorers! So, while I enjoyed this trilogy, it is not one that I wish to own because I have no desire to take the great amount of time to watch it again. I can find just as much action in the LOR series, and also find food for thought in the ruminations of its characters. Maybe this third part would have been enhanced had Jackson been able to figure out a way to bring Gollum back. Who knows?