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A Movie of *The Lord of the Rings*

**Abstract**
Suggestions for how any film version of *The Lord of the Rings* should be made.

**Additional Keywords**
Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Film and video adaptations
No, no, sweetie-baby! Hobbit, right? Little man, right? They gotta be cute!  

Now that's a hobbit!

A MOVIE OF THE LORD OF THE RINGS?
by Holly Titcomb

Sooner or later someone is going to make a movie of The Lord of The Rings. Devoted fans, those whose passion for the book is such that some amateur's clumsy drawing of a favorite scene seems like an assault on a helpless child, may already be gnashing their teeth with fury at the thought of the mess movie-makers could come up with, or mentally making fervant pleas for the book to be left alone.

But it can't be done. Any great work inspires creativity in the people it touches. A movie is inevitable, however much you may writhe at the thought (what if the Disney people got hold of it -- can't you hear Gandalf saying 'Bibbity-bobbity-boo'?). So rather than wasting efforts in trying to prevent it, it would be wiser to try to help make sure that the movie-makers are as true as possible to the book. Write to organizations such as The Tolkien Society (Ed Heskys, Belknap College, Center Harbor, N.H. 03226) and The Mythopoeic Society so as to keep informed about the movie, who's making it, etc. If you have ideas on how a good movie could be made from the book, write these ideas up for The Tolkien Journal or Mythlore; possibly people in a position to influence the movie-makers will read these journals. Start a movement! An earlier generation cared about Gone With The Wind (believe it or not) the way we care about The Lord of The Rings. Hollywood, afraid of their wrath, made a movie that followed the book even in such details as Scarlett O'Hara's biting her lips and pinching her cheeks to make them redder.

Of course, filming The Lord Of The Rings will be much more complicated, but movies have come a long way both in technique and in acting since then.
The movie should be basically British. Wasn't it Pinewood Studios that made *Blow-Up* and *A Man for All Seasons*? Perhaps they could do this movie with the courage of the former and the beauty of scenery and costume of the latter. Perhaps Alec Guinness could play Gandalf. He has played such a variety of characters, such as his famous eight roles in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, that with the make-up of beard and eyebrows necessary for Gandalf, one would not constantly be aware that he was Alec Guinness. Anyone who saw him as Fagin in *Oliver Twist* will agree.

The movie should draw on international genius, not just on that of one country. One reason is that many of today's best actors and directors are French, East Indian, etc. Another is that the movie will need great actors who are not easily recognizable by English-speaking audiences. For example, the French actress Catherine Deneuve has both the haunting golden beauty and the acting ability to play Galadriel. (On the other hand, her recent successes, particularly *Belle de Jour*, may have made her too well known.) Satyajit Ray, the Indian director of the Apu trilogy, because his country forbids movie clinches, knows how to direct beautiful and subtle love scenes -- a necessity for the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen and also for Aragorn and Eowyn. Claude Lelouch, the French director of *A Man and A Woman* and *Live for Life*, makes movies with a dream-like quality that might be good for Lorien. Blonds from Eastern Europe who have high cheekbones and delicately slanting eyes might play the blond elves, and fair-skinned, dark-haired Eurasians the dark elves. They would seem related to each other and would have a touch of racial exoticism, which seems necessary for elves, without belonging to any single race of mankind.

Setting: The Shire is the English countryside, of course. But for the rest, although Tolkien says it's Europe, European scenery wouldn't do because of (a) overpopulation, and (b) overexposure. Use the Alps for the Misty Mountains and people will be saying, "Oh, there's the place I went hiking last summer," or "that looks like a scene from *The Sound of Music," or "isn't that Mont Blanc?" The Urals in Russia might do. On maps the Misty Mountains look almost exactly like the Urals. Most of us haven't been exposed to Russian scenery much. Other possibilities are Canada, Australia, and New Zealand -- but they are English-speaking countries and Tolkien readers there might not want landmarks familiar to them in the movie.

Music: Apparently Elvish is strongly related to Welsh, and old Welsh tunes could be good for Elven songs such as Galadriel's farewell, although I'm told that's been put to a kind of plainsong on the Caedmon record and that Tolkien approves. I haven't heard the record. Sam Gamgee's troll poem fits perfectly to the tune of "The Fox Went Out On a Chilly Night," and there are some old tunes that fit "The Fall of Gil-galad" and "Bilbo's Song." Tom Bombadil's conversation is always at least half-sung. Some kind of recitative would have to be used for him (rather along
the lines of the movie *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*). But probably most people would prefer entirely original music.

**Hobbits:** They must not be cute — one reason for keeping the movie out of Disney Studios. Normal-sized adults could be used for hobbits, using trick photography to make them seem smaller than the other characters, but it would be technically difficult to pull off really well and highly expensive. What about midgets? There are small, perfectly proportioned adults who have never had a chance to be anything in the acting world except circus freaks or the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*. Midgets as hobbits would help avoid some of the counterfeiting of fantastic forms that Tolkien so dislikes (see his essay "On Fairy Stories").

Many will object to a movie no matter how well it is done, because:

> The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form.... If a story says "he climbed a hill and saw a river in the valley below," the illustrator may catch, or nearly catch, his own vision of such a scene; but every hearer of the words will have his own picture, and it will be made out of all the hills and rivers and dales he has ever seen, but specially out of *The Hill*, *The River*, *The Valley* which were for him the first embodiment of the word. (Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories" in *The Tolkien Reader*, New York, Ballantine Books, p. 80.)

And this also may be why a hearer can't resist trying to embody his own particular vision in some form when he reads *The Lord of The Rings*.

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