



# BACK TO MIDDLE-EARTH

Peter Jackson walks a delightful but bumpy trail with *The Hobbit*

**THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY:** Directed by Peter Jackson. Screenplay by Jackson, Fran Walsh, Philippa Bowen and Guillermo del Toro, based on the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien. Cinematography, Andrew Lesnie. Editor, Jabez Olssen. Music, Howard Shore. Starring Ian McKellan, Martin Freeman, Richard Armitage and Andy Serkis. Warner Bros. Picture, 2012. PG-13. 169 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

**T**he *Hobbit* is not a particularly large book. It's a friendly size, a book that a kid can read happily, without tripping over the endless pages of description — and walking — that fill *The Fellowship of the Ring*. *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* is not the same size. The first film in Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy pulls from Tolkien's seemingly endless trove of Middle-Earth lore, filling out *An Unexpected Journey* until it's more of a war story than the sprightly adventure on which it's based.

Jackson begins with a flash-forward, a snippet of story about the older Bilbo (Ian Holm) that might've been culled from *Fellowship*, and then delves into a long stretch of backstory about what happened to a dwarven mountain fortress, long ago lost to a nasty dragon. The dwarves, after years of roaming the countryside, are ready to storm in and take their home back.

Enter the comfort-loving, pipe-smoking Bilbo Baggins (a brilliantly cast Martin Freeman), the hobbit whom the wizard Gandalf (Ian McKellan) has, for vague reasons, decided should be the final member of the dwarven company. Of the thirteen dwarves only princely Thorin Oakenshield (Richard Armitage) is much more than a bizarre beard and an appetite, but that's what happens when your fellowship numbers fifteen rather than nine.

Here and there in the long trek across Middle-Earth, the film pauses to introduce Radeagast the Brown, a quirky wizard with a curious manner of travel, or to hint at a rising darkness. Most of the additions fit neatly into the film, with the exception of Azog (Manu Bennett), a nasty enemy of the dwarves whom Thorin believes dead (as he was in the source material). The huge white orc is on the dwarves' tail, acting as an unnecessary additional antagonist. With a stolen homeland, a goblin king, trolls and wargs already in play, Azog just clutters the field.

Plenty of familiar *Rings* faces turn up in *The Hobbit*, and New Zealand's varied landscapes continue to excel at playing Middle-Earth, though they're less spine-tingling, less gloriously filmed, as if cinematographer Andrew Lesnie has somehow clamped down on the epicness. This story is on a smaller scale than the *Rings* trilogy, a more human (or hobbit)-sized story about a young man discovering the world is so much wilder and wider than he had ever troubled himself to imagine, and that he, too, might be more than he expected. This sometimes causes a clash of scope: Jackson wants to make both a huge, fate-of-the-world story, and a more intimate, lighthearted tale. But at times, he gets it just right. *The Hobbit* is never a better film than when Bilbo meets Gollum (Andy Serkis) in a cave deep in a mountain full of goblins. Bilbo, intrigued and terrified, finds himself in new territory — and he finds something else as well.

*The Hobbit* is wonderful and frustrating. I kept being taken out of my happy haze by Azog, by the recycled bits of score, by the occasionally hasty editing, and yet I never wanted it to end. *The Hobbit* is a long and bumpy walk worth taking. ■

	THU Dec 20	FRI Dec 21	SAT Dec 22	SUN Dec 23	MON Dec 24	TUES Dec 25	WED Dec 26	THU Dec 27
<b>THE SESSIONS</b> 4:40 ENDS TONIGHT!		2:15 4:45 7:10	2:15 4:45 7:10	2:15 4:45 7:10	<b>A LATE QUARTET</b> 4:45 7:10 4:45 7:10 4:45 7:10 4:45 7:10			
5:35 7:45		1:30 6:10	1:30 6:10	1:30 6:10	<b>OLD GOATS</b> 6:10 6:10 6:10 6:10			
<b>SAVING GRACE</b> B. JONES 7:00 ENDS TONIGHT!		3:45 8:20	3:45 8:20	3:45 8:20	<b>THE PAPERBOY</b> 8:20 8:20 8:20 8:20			
		<b>RARE EXPORTS: A CHRISTMAS TALE</b> 9:30 12:15 9:30 12:15			<b>COMING: ANNA KARENINA</b> <b>CHASING ICE</b> <b>THE LONELIEST PLANET</b> <b>HYDE PARK ON THE HUDSON</b>			
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12:45, 2:25, 4:30, 8:15, 9:45

**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL: WORLDS AWAY (3D) PG**  
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**THE GUILT TRIP (DIGITAL) PG-13**  
11:50, 2:20, 4:50, 7:20, 9:50

**JACK REACHER (DIGITAL) PG-13**  
1:10, 4:10, 7:10, 10:10

**LIFE OF PI (3D) PG**  
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**LIFE OF PI (DIGITAL) PG**  
2:55, 9:35

**LINCOLN (DIGITAL) PG-13**  
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1:10, 3:40, 6:10, 8:40

**SKYFALL (DIGITAL) PG-13**  
12:55, 2:30, 4:05, 7:15, 9:25, 10:25

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12:55, 4:00, 7:05, 10:10

**TWILIGHT SAGA: BREAKING DAWN, PART 2 (DIGITAL) PG-13**  
11:15, 2:05, 4:55, 7:45, 10:35

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**END OF WATCH R**  
11:55, 2:20, 4:45, 7:25

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UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS  
12:20, 2:30, 7:45

**FRANKENWEENIE (DIGITAL) PG**  
5:15

**HERE COMES THE BOOM PG**  
12:05, 2:25, 4:50, 7:35

**HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA PG**  
1:50, 4:00, 6:10, 8:20

**HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA (3D) PG**  
SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$2.00  
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12:45, 2:55, 5:05, 7:15

**ICE AGE: CONTINENTAL DRIFT PG**  
12:00, 2:10, 4:35, 7:30

**LOOPER R**  
12:40, 3:55, 7:00

**THE ODD LIFE OF TIMOTHY GREEN PG**  
12:15, 2:35, 4:55, 7:40

**THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER PG-13**  
12:10, 2:40, 5:00, 7:50

**PITCH PERFECT PG-13**  
12:35, 3:50, 7:10

**SEVEN PSYCHOPATHS R**  
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**TAKEN 2 PG-13**  
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