

Truly Disappointing Trek of ‘The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on December 13, 2012 - 12:48pm

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Rating: **2.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – Twice as many frames per second and another dimension only serve to amplify the notable flaws of Peter Jackson’s truly disappointing “The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey,” a bloated, dull mess of a film that meanders when it should move and stumbles when it should run. Paced like a high school student writing a paper to meet a word count but without anything actually worth writing, this incredibly slow CGI adventure barely merits comparison to Jackson’s masterful “Lord of the Rings” films other than to point out how much this work reminds one of another start to a prequel trilogy that quickly earned fan spite. The only problem with the comparison is that “The Phantom Menace” is arguably better.

Bilbo Baggins (Ian Holm again in the opening but Martin Freeman as a younger Hobbit) is writing another story for young Frodo (an Elijah Wood cameo in the opening scenes) as “The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey” opens. It’s the tale of when Gandalf (Ian McKellen) came to the Shire and pushed young Bilbo on an adventure. The dwarves of Erebor, who we have learned were cast out of their home by a brutal dragon named Smaug and waves of horrifying Orcs, are attempting a return to their homeland and they need a burglar. Hobbits make good burglars. The wizard, the reluctant Hobbit, and the dwarves head off across Middle Earth, getting only part of the way in this first of three films based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s beloved novel.



The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Telling a third of a relatively-small book in a 160-minute-plus film would be a challenge for any filmmaker but it is a particular one for Peter

Jackson, who now has fallen so deep into his own vision of Middle Earth that he's forgotten what first made it entertaining to viewers. After stumbling, bleary-eyed and weary from the "Journey," I went home and watched a bit of "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring" and "The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King" and the comparisons are easy to make, immediate, and not in the favor of "The Hobbit." There's an artistry in those three award-winning films that feels replaced by bloat here. There's an urgency replaced by a sense that every shot, every angle, and every set needs to be adored and admired. Where we felt the need for Frodo to complete his quest, it feels like we're more often being asked to appreciate the filmmaking during Bilbo's. The filmmaking enhanced the story of "The Lord of the Rings" whereas the story merely seems a tool to expand Jackson's technical skills to what will be nine hours of filmmaking. The priorities have shifted. It's no longer a film about a Hobbit. It's a film about a director who has the power to take a two-hour story and stretch it till it breaks apart in an explosion of 3D, 48fps, CGI glory.

There are very few scenes in "The Hobbit" that couldn't have been notably trimmed. The prologue that seems designed to do little more than get Elijah Wood a cameo, the arrival of the dwarves at Bilbo's house that feels like it's happening in real time, the meeting between Gandalf and a few familiar faces that feels designed just to remind you of what you once liked but totally stops the momentum, the troll campfire scene that part of me feels like is still going on and I'm just dreaming my real life – any decent editor would cut an hour from "The Hobbit" on first cut.



The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

To be fair, there are glimpses of what you and I loved in "The Lord of the Rings" movies and what could have been before Mr. Jackson decided to tell this story in the most elongated and frustrating way possible. Some of the visuals, particularly a set piece involving mountainsides that are actually alive that feels like it MUST have come from Guillermo Del Toro's work on the project, have a true power that only frustrates you if you consider how great they might have been in an alternate universe version of "The Hobbit" where they happened in the first act of a single-film incarnation of this story. There's also absolutely no blame that can be laid at the oversized feet of the excellent Martin Freeman, an actor who was so perfectly cast as Bilbo Baggins that the film schedule worked around him. The entire cast, while not as notable as "LOTR" just by virtue of Tolkien's story having fewer characters here, is solid. In particular, Andy Serkis proves he hasn't lost a step as Gollum nearly steals the movie yet again.

I have to wonder if my negative feelings about "The Hobbit" would have been as prominent in 24 frames per second and in two dimensions. There's an artistry to those original films that dissipates when everything is so prominently pushed in your face in all its over-the-top detail. I have seen the future of filmmaking and it is hideous. A film that feels like it's lost all sense of subtlety or character is bound to feel more so in the 48/3d form and I actually look forward to being able to watch "The Hobbit" in 24/2d. Maybe then I'll find more of that magic that pulled me into a filmmaking team's uncommon gift for storytelling instead of just forcing me to come along kicking and screaming.

"The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" stars Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen, Richard Armitage, Ken Stott, Graham McTavish, James Nesbitt, and Andy Serkis. It was adapted by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, & Peter Jackson and directed by Jackson. It opens everywhere on December 14, 2012.



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