

REVIEWS

FILMS



Adventure Martin Freeman prepares for his dangerous trek

The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (12A)

In the early part of the noughties, going to the cinema at Christmas time became a real event because of five simple words – **The Lord Of The Rings**.

Director Peter Jackson's fantasy trilogy based on J.R.R Tolkien's books may have numbed the backside with their running time but rate as three of the best adventure flicks of all time.

And we're about to go through it all again as **The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey** is the first of three annual returns to Middle Earth over the next couple of years.

This first part of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings prequel focuses on Hobbit Bilbo Baggins (Martin Freeman) as he is asked by wizard Gandalf (Ian McKellen) to travel to the Lonely Mountain with a group of 13 dwarves to reclaim a treasure stolen by the dragon Smaug.

Like **The Lord of the Rings**, I haven't read **The Hobbit** book so I can sit back and enjoy the story without knowing what's coming and this opening instalment is first-rate fantasy cinema.

Jackson returns behind the camera after Mexican Guillermo del Toro pulled out of the production.

From the super opening where Bilbo tells the story of an attack on the dwarves' mountain, with nice little teasing shots of future 'big bad' Smaug, Jackson brings massive, sprawling, CGI landscapes to gorgeous life using swooping and soaring camera work.

Del Toro receives a screenplay credit, along

A journey well worth taking

with Jackson and long-time collaborators, wife Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, and they stick to the successful blend of action, humour and emotion used in the **Lord of the Rings** trilogy.

Sore bums again? Yep, it's over two-and-a-half hours and some scenes drag.

It's slightly more kiddie-centric too with dumb Cockney trolls and cutesy hedgehogs.

Freeman steps into original Bilbo Ian Holm's hairy feet and his traditional panicky mannerisms and mystified facial expressions work well with his curious but fearful character.

McKellen is wonderful and the dwarves, including Brits and Irishmen Richard Armitage (Thorin), Ken Stott (Balin), James Nesbitt (Bofur) and Being Human's Aidan Turner (Kili), are good fun, although some get lost in the shuffle.

And what a strange sight it is to see Tim from **The Office**, Adam from **Cold Feet** and Harry from **The Vicar of Dibley** starring in a big

budget blockbuster together. **Lord of the Rings'** favourites Elrond (Hugo Weaving), Galadriel (Cate Blanchett), Saruman (Christopher Lee) and Gollum (Andy Serkis) make fleeting appearances, the latter in a too-long scene with Bilbo.

Action highlights include a dwarves versus Orcs flashback, our heroes trapped in the middle of a battle between stone giants, and a Mines of Moria-esque sequence in the goblin caves. **The Hobbit** isn't the instant classic **The Lord of the Rings** movies were but still rates as a magnificent cinematic experience to end 2012 on a high.

It's great to be back in Middle Earth.

Remake is worth a look

Total Recall



DVDS

Sci-fi thriller in which Colin Farrell stars as a factory worker who visits a revolutionary company that can turn his superspy fantasies into real memories. But when the procedure goes horribly wrong, the line between fantasy and reality blurs as he becomes a man on the run.

Fast-paced action but lacks the wit of the original.

The Watch

Ben Stiller, Vince Vaughn, Jonah Hill and Richard Ayoade are the unlikely leaders of the "The Watch" in this outrageous comedy about a group of guys who must finally take control and find their inner heroes when their quiet suburban lives are threatened.



Despite having plenty of comedy muscle, this has too many weak gags.

GADGET

Wizard of awes



Magic Wand TV remote

If your old, remote control is on its last legs and you fancy adding a touch of magic to channel surfing, then this is just what you need. The Magic Wand works with most devices and allows user to control the TV with the flick of a wrist.

£44.99 from iwantoneofthose.com

Alice's Wonderland return

Not content with green-lighting a new **Star Wars** trilogy, Disney are planning a sequel to their take on **Alice In Wonderland**.

The 2010 first movie received a luke-warm critical reception but made over \$1 billion at the box office, so perhaps it's no surprise that original Alice Mia Wasikows-

ka (pictured, right) could be heading down the Looking Glass once again.

Michael Bay has cast two unknowns alongside Mark Wahlberg in **Transformers 4**.

The **Last Airbender's** Nicola Peltz will play Wahlberg's daughter, with **Home And Away's** Brendon Thwaites as her biker boyfriend.



The Dragunov Deception

A love of remote places and Buddhism took Mark MacDuff to the tiny kingdom of Bhutan in the 1990s which later provided the inspiration for his first book – a thriller set in the Buddhist nation devoted to peacefulness.

Main character Michael Harding travels to eastern Russia to write about the plight of the Siberian tigers but he stumbles on the wholesale theft of religious artefacts and the Russian authority's seemingly valiant attempt to bring the criminals to justice.

Meanwhile, Russian undercover agent Yantar Valesky is pursuing a criminal gang who are stealing Buddhist art treasures and selling them through the auction houses of London and New York. Both Michael and Yantar are pawns in a deadly game where grand thefts are caught up with political machinations.

The Dragunov Deception is available via Amazon.co.uk for Kindle or other eReader devices for £4.49.

BOOKS



MUSIC

You are Now Leaving the Future by The Procession

The debut album from a band made up of four friends who originally met at university, this is indie rock that manages to be perfectly fine without ever really scaling the heights.

Stand-out track is the upcoming second single, **Call You**, featuring guest vocalist Emma Redhead. Otherwise, it's all a bit too samey.

Mario still the Nintendo master

Super Mario Bros U (Wii U)

WHAT'S a new Nintendo console without the outing of a brand new Mario title?

The latest **Super Mario Bros U** fits the bill perfectly, offering the best 2D Mario experience since the series' sidescrolling NES heyday.

Letting the entire game be played on the GamePad as well as your main TV screen, it's a challenging

return to the mushroom kingdom.

This is a fact heightened by the introduction of a brand new Challenge Mode, which tasks you with beating tough levels within increasingly complex rules.

This title offers classic fun with a modern twist. It's without a doubt the **Wii U's** first must-have.



Classic but Mario's update is worth the wait

GAMES