

Peter Jackson Biography

Producer, Director (1961–)



New Zealand native Peter Jackson is best known as a director for his adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which won 11 Oscars.

Synopsis

Born on October 31, 1961, in New Zealand, Peter Jackson started his prolific career as a child, creating short films with an 8-mm movie camera. Without any formal training, Jackson has directed a number of successful films ranging across all genres. He is most well-known for his film adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which has won numerous awards. He stayed with the Tolkien fantasy brand when *The Hobbit* film series was released.

Early Life

Film director and screenwriter Peter Robert Jackson was born on October 31, 1961, in Pukerua Bay, New Zealand, a picturesque coastal town near the capital of Wellington. "Our house was on the edge of a cliff that sort of plummeted right down into the ocean," Jackson recalled. "It was a children's playground, an adventure playground." His parents were both English immigrants. His father, Bill, was a local authority employee, and his mother, Joan, was a homemaker.

'It was a Friday evening. I was nine years old and I was watching *King Kong* on TV. That night I understood what I would become.' - Peter Jackson

Jackson's family bought their first TV when he was 5 years old, and the world of television immediately captured his young imagination, especially a futuristic English sci-fi show called *Thunderbirds* (1965-66). Jackson's obsession with film began when he saw the original *King Kong* at the age of nine. "I think I still have a rotting puppet of *King Kong* somewhere in my basement," he said. "It was about a foot high. Then I made a cardboard cut-out of the Empire State Building for him to stand on, and I painted a backdrop of Manhattan."

In 1969, the same year that he saw *King Kong*, Jackson's parents received a Super 8 movie camera as a gift. Jackson remembers thinking, "Now I can get my spaceships that I've made, my models, and I can film them, just like *Thunderbirds*." By his early teens, he was using his friends as actors, his parents' house as a set and whatever he could concoct in the kitchen for special effects. Jackson set out to make original movies. He recalled, "I did like a World War II drama film with friends of mine in old army uniforms—kids with big helmets and uniforms that don't fit very well—running around, dug trenches in my parents' garden."

He attended Kapiti College, a state-run secondary school, but dropped out at the age of 16 so that he could get a job to finance his film hobby. "I just wanted to get out of school and into a job, any job, so that I could start saving up for the next piece of film equipment that I wanted," he said.

Amateur Film Work

Jackson landed a job as a photographic lithographer at a local newspaper. He worked six days a week while living at home in order to save as much money as possible to purchase a state-of-the-art camera. Once he had purchased equipment, Jackson set out to create a film. Filming only on Sundays, his one day off, over the next several years Jackson wrote and directed a full-length comedy film about flesh-eating aliens.

To Jackson's great surprise, he received a \$30,000 grant from the New Zealand Film Commission that enabled him to quit his job and finish the film and then a \$200,000 grant to pay for post-production. The finished picture, called *Bad Taste*, debuted at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival, where it became a surprise hit and landed distribution deals in 12 countries.

Professional Film Career

Following the success of *Bad Taste*, in 1989 Jackson made a raunchy puppet film called *Meet the Feebles* that critics alternatively found repulsive and hilarious; it developed a devoted cult following. In 1993, he released his first professional live action film, *Braindead* (released as *Dead Alive* in the United States), which won considerable acclaim among horror movie lovers, despite being one of the goriest films ever made. Jackson broke out into decidedly different territory as the screenwriter and director of the 1994 film *Heavenly Creatures*, a disturbing dramatization of a famous New Zealand matricide case from the 1950s. Starring a then-unknown actress named Kate Winslet, *Heavenly Creatures* earned Jackson an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay.

'Lord of the Rings'

Looking for an ambitious project to test his directorial skills, in the mid-1990s Jackson latched on to the idea of making film versions of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic trilogy of fantasy novels, *The Lord of the Rings*. An avid fan of the novels, Jackson said, "I read the book when I was 18 years old and thought then, 'I can't wait till the movie comes out.' Twenty years later, no one had done it—so I got impatient."

After winning the film rights in 1997, it took Jackson several years to find a film studio that shared his vision of three separate films all filmed at once on location in New Zealand. New Line Cinema finally agreed to finance the project on Jackson's terms; after a year and a half of filming, *The Fellowship of the Ring* was released to widespread international popularity and critical acclaim in December 2001. The second film in the trilogy, *The Two Towers*, was released a year later in 2002, and the third installment, *The Return of the King*, followed in 2003.

The highest grossing film trilogy in history, with more than \$2.9 billion in worldwide box office revenue, as well as one of the most acclaimed series of all time with 17 Academy Awards and 30 nominations, *The Lord of the Rings* established Peter Jackson as one of the world's greatest directors. *The Return of the King*, widely considered the greatest fantasy film ever made, matched *Titanic* (1997) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) for the most Oscar wins by a single film with 11, including Best Director for Jackson.

In the wake of the enormous success of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Jackson fulfilled a childhood dream by remaking *King Kong*, the film that had so inspired him as a child. Released in 2005, *King Kong* was another box office smash. After nearly two decades of continuous work, Jackson took several years off from directing before returning to direct the 2009 film adaptation of Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones*. He also signed up to work on the film adaptation of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien's prequel to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The story was also split up into a trilogy. The first film in the series, *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, was released in 2012. The sequels, *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*, were released in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

Unlike *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson and film critics alike were not happy with his work on *The Hobbit*, despite it being a blow out at the box office. In interviews Jackson admitted his incredibly strict time constraints enforced by the studios did not allow him to design the film the way he had wanted — (he spent years prepping for *The Lord of the Rings*).

Personal Life

Jackson married Fran Walsh, a screenwriter who had helped him gain contacts in the New Zealand film industry during the 1980s. Walsh co-wrote the screenplays for *Heavenly Creatures* and *The Lovely Bones*. They have two children, Billy and Katie.

As the director of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Peter Jackson is one of the most popular and acclaimed film directors alive. He is the rare director who makes films that are both action-packed, special effects-laden blockbusters and high quality, critically acclaimed works of art. Jackson credits his enormous success to his tireless work ethic, obsessively working and reworking a film until the last possible moment. "There's no such thing as perfection," he says. "You're never finished with a film. You run out of time."

Mark the following statements as T (True) or F (False)

- ☐ 1. Peter Jackson was born a Libra.
- ☐ 2. His hometown is by the sea.
- ☐ 3. His parents bought their first TV in 1965.
- ☐ 4. He made a set for his King Kong toy.
- ☐ 5. His parents gave him a movie camera as a gift.
- ☐ 6. He started shooting movies at home with his friends.
- ☐ 7. After he finished school, he got a job to finance his film hobby.
- ☐ 8. He worked hard to save up for a professional camera.
- ☐ 9. The first full-length movie he made was a science fiction film.
- ☐ 10. He was granted \$230,000 to finish *Bad Taste*.
- ☐ 11. The film was first shown at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival.
- ☐ 12. *Bad Taste* received half-hearted reviews.
- ☐ 13. His first professional live action film, *Braindead*, was renamed.
- ☐ 14. He casted Kate Winslet for *Heavenly Creatures* and won an Academy Award for Best Screenplay.
- ☐ 15. At eighteen, he looked forward to seeing the *Lord of the Rings* movie.
- ☐ 16. It wasn't easy to find a studio ready to finance three separate films all filmed at once on location in New Zealand.
- ☐ 17. All three installments of the trilogy took a year of filming.
- ☐ 18. *The Return of the King*, together with *Titanic* and *Ben Hur*, is widely considered the greatest fantasy film ever made.
- ☐ 19. Soon after *The Lord of the Rings*, Jackson shot a remake of *King Kong*.
- ☐ 20. He stopped working for two decades, coming back with *The Lovely Bones*.
- ☐ 21. *The Hobbit* was another Tolkien's trilogy which he adapted for the big screen.
- ☐ 22. Jackson's wife had contacts in the New Zealand film industry.
- ☐ 23. She wrote screenplays alongside with him.
- ☐ 24. Jackson's films have been reviewed as works of art.



