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The Hobbit - the desolation of Smaug: official movie guide **by Brian Sibley**

Publisher: HarperCollins

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This is the ultimate gift for those curious people who like to know what goes on behind the scenes when movies are made. The book is packed with fascinating facts about the second movie in The Hobbit series.

Superb photography showcases the sets, characters, and costumes. Close-up shots highlight the detail of carved furniture, ornate swords, jewellery, make-up and prosthetics. The double-page spreads give an idea of the immense sets.

Readers can open the book at any page and discover information that will capture their attention. The author has delved into all aspects of making the trilogy, from finding the perfect dragon's roar, to sourcing fabrics for costumes both luxurious and beastly. Even the recipe for making thousands of Elf ears is included.

Each of the main characters is given an in-depth profile along with quirky and humorous details. There's a strong sense of family amongst the cast. In some cases, partners and children of the actors have been included in the movie with parts written especially for them.

Readers will be amazed at the dedication of the skilled crafts people involved in the movie, and their attention to detail. Every hair of the fine Elven wigs has been carefully knotted into place, the wigs are washed and conditioned after use, then secured to wig blocks with hundreds of pins. Most of the dwarves' wigs and braided beards are made from yak hair.

The sets are amazing constructions requiring teams of workers. Sometimes the same sets were built in varying sizes to show the contrast between characters such as the huge skin-changer Beorn and the short dwarves.

Of course, the carefully laid plans didn't always work out and disasters happened. For example, just before filming a scene by Beorn's home in Wilderland, a fierce wind toppled the main tree outside his house. The Greens Department set to and built a splendid replica.

Food could fill a book on its own. Every item of food had to be made twice, once at normal dwarf scale and again at a 1.38 smaller-scale version for Gandalf. Food stylist Debbie Logan talks about shopping for exotic items fit for a king.

Regardless of long hours, and often unpleasant conditions, the commitment of everyone working on the movie is impressive. Landscaper Jarl Benzon sums it up when he says, “I love this work: I get massive joy from it!”

Reviewed by children’s book author Jean Bennett

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