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***The Hobbit: the Desolation of Smaug - Visual Companion* by Jude Fisher**

Publisher: HarperCollins

RRP \$29.99

This detailed overview of the second movie in the Hobbit series is a superb guide to the *Desolation of Smaug*. Readers are given the backstory of the first movie then introduced to the main characters in the dramatic continuation of the dwarves' quest to regain their mountain kingdom and treasure.

Long ago, Smaug the dragon devastated the Kingdom of Erebor, destroyed the ancient city of Dale, and caused the elves to retreat to their woodland fortress. How can a band of brave but ill-assorted dwarves under the leadership of Thorin Oakenshield, along with one small hobbit, defeat such a fierce, magical adversary? Middle-earth has been reduced to groups of diverse creatures who look after their own, but are suspicious of outsiders and fear the evil that stalks the land.

The well-designed, hardback book is an excellent companion to the movie, based on the classic novel, *The Hobbit*, by JRR Tolkien. The in-depth biographies of the characters give an insight into the history, beliefs, and prejudices of the individuals. They are a fascinating mix of bombastic bravery, distrustful survivors, some are noble and powerful, some vain and venal, while others are downright evil.

The large-size pages are packed with clear, colourful images from the second movie. The cast of characters are shown in their finery or ragged clothes, complete with weapons and determined expressions. Splendid sets and grand scenery make an impressive background to the challenge of removing Smaug the Magnificent from his mountain of glittering treasure. Beware - do not look into his gleaming eyes!

Reviewed by children's book author Jean Bennett

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