

ly saw an English countryside change in his lifetime. The pastoral quality that he loved was eroded away by engines and machines. That's what he mourned.

That was part of Tolkien's appeal in the Sixties. Did that aspect attract you, too?

Uh, no. I just like the stories [laughs]. I didn't read them for any particular theme or message. Although it's certainly in there.

Making big blockbusters looks like a forced march. Is making a movie of this scale as grueling as it seems?

Yes [laughs]. There's creative opportunities all the way through the day, and that's the thing that you have to keep trying to put at the forefront. But there's also a schedule. There's also the need, when you walk on the set in the morning, to have a certain amount of script pages that you have to shoot that day. You have to compromise. So it is grueling. There's continual pressure to somehow let the creativity not get buried under that stress.

Do you still enjoy it?

I don't - shooting the movie is not my favorite part of the process. I love writing, and I love postproduction. That's great, because you start to reassemble the film and you sit there and you start to really put the film together, finally. The shooting of it is the most stressful part of the process.

With all the advances in technology, which you clearly love, do you ever worry that storytelling will fall by the wayside?

No. No. No. No. No. Look, we're human beings and we want stories. We're always going to be entertained and have our emotions touched by humanity and by things that we recognize in our own lives. So whilst every now and again we'll be happy to watch a bubblegum film, it's never gonna be the only things that get made.

What's going on with this new frame rate you've introduced? You shot "The Hobbit" at double the normal frame rate to make it seem more lifelike. But there was a lot of backlash about it at Comic-Con.

I'll give you a brief summary: We made a decision to shoot *The Hobbit* at 48 frames a second, twice the frame rate of a normal theatrical feature film. The higher frame rate gives you the illusion of the real world. It gives you a feeling of life. It's immersive. It really looks fantastic. It just has a seductive quality, and it frees us from everything that has constrained the frame rate over the last 80 or 90 years. Probably 20 percent of the cinemas will screen the 48-frame version, and we will see how audiences react to it.

Do you think audiences were just a little freaked out, because it was so lifelike?

No, no, no. It's gonna be cool. When you see it playing, your initial thought is "Wow, it's different," and different is always something we have to get our heads around. But I've always been a guy who's

had faith in myself. This isn't a decision that's driven by what audiences want. It's not driven by anything other than what I think is cool. If I think it's cool, the chances are, hopefully, that other people will too. I've always been happy to take a gamble on myself.

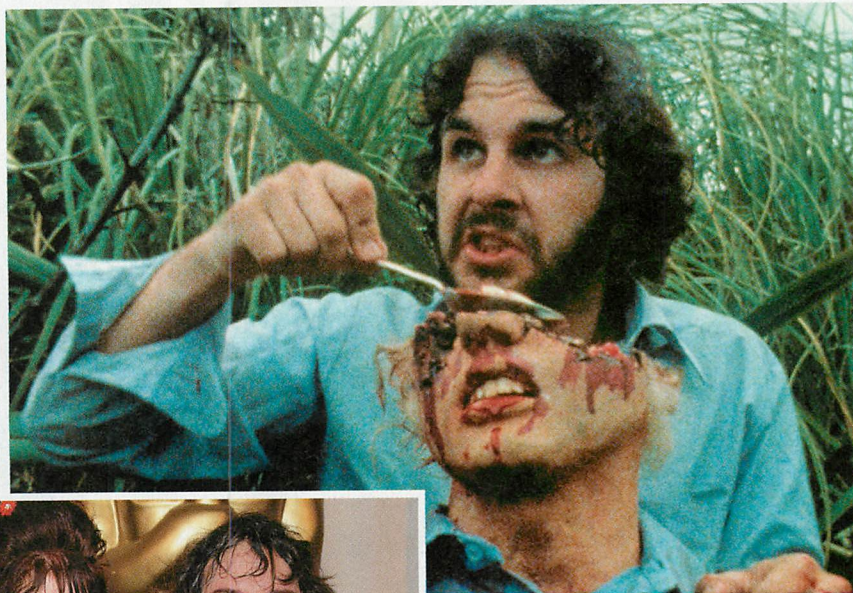
It's interesting that you say that, because you did gamble on yourself. Your path to being a director was an unusual one. You left high school at a very young age to go to work. Is this a course you'd recommend to other people?

I've always had a philosophy that if you want to be a filmmaker badly enough, there's nothing to stop you going out and

are. You have to show how you're not gonna ask for anything. If you've got the talent, you're gonna manage to fight your way to a career, but it has to be a fight. If you don't have that fight, you shouldn't even be thinking about doing it in the first place.

So what keeps you motivated? There's no white whales for you anymore.

I just get excited about stories. I've always felt that I make movies for myself. I'm not somebody that has a great deal of interest in what the world wants to see. I have to get excited about a project myself and to the point that it becomes a film that I desperately want to see. So therefore I start the process of trying to make it so



CREATURE FEATURE Jackson got his start making slapstick horror flicks in New Zealand, like 1987's *Bad Taste* (above). With his wife after they won Oscars in 2004: "She's the only person, ultimately, I trust."

I can see it. It sounds a bit simplistic, but that's the heart of it. That's the truth.

Who do you enjoy as a filmmaker?

I get inspired when I see great films. It drives me. I love Spielberg's films, Scorsese, Jim Cameron. I've got pretty commercial sensibility. If I could meet a single filmmaker, it would be Buster Keaton. He's my favorite because he wrote and directed and obviously acted in his best films. I can watch Keaton films forever and still laugh.

What's it like working so closely with your wife, Fran Walsh? If I worked with my wife she would probably kill me....

She's the only person who I ultimately, totally trust and believe would make the same decisions as me. Fran does an enormous amount of work that I can't do. She's a producer on the film as well as a writer. She's my partner in all sorts of ways. And I totally trust her instincts. Everything she chooses and decides is exactly the same as the decision I'd make. She's the only person I've ever met that I feel that safe with.