'Lord of the Rings' the greatest film trilogy of all time

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With no major releases this past weekend, I started my anticipation for this weekend's "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey" by taking part in a Saturday marathon of all three "Lord of the Rings" films in theaters, and Director **Peter Jackson** can't possibly outdo himself.

Of course, Saturday was the first time I had experienced the "Rings" films in a movie theater since I last saw the third installment, "Return of the King" on the big screen in 2003. It was a marvelous time, even though it took over 12 hours to watch all three (11:15 a.m. to 12:45 a.m. the next day, with 45 minutes in between the films).

This weekend, Jackson returns to **J.R.R. Tolkien's** Middle-Earth for "The Hobbit," which will be the first in another trilogy taking place in Tolkien's fictional world. Based on the novel, "The Hobbit," Jackson and New Line Cinemas decided to draw the story out into three films.

I had hoped Jackson would just stick to a two-part story, as was originally announced, but with the addition of a third film for "Hobbit," I can't help but think there's no way it can live up to what Jackson achieved with "Lord of the Rings."

That trilogy is easily the greatest film trilogy of all time and over the weekend I couldn't possibly think of any other trio of films that could stand up to them, except maybe **George Lucas's** original "Star Wars" films, if for no other reason than the cultural impact they had.

"Lord of the Rings" was mostly considered impossible to film, given the fact that the books are extremely long and complex and so beloved around the world, it would be nearly impossible to

achieve an acceptable adaptation.

Given the ways that most book-to-film adaptations go, I was worried when the first movie came out, that it wouldn't live up to its source. There are many who love the novels that were not happy with the films, and as I loved all of Tolkien's work growing up, there were aspects I wish had been different on screen, but there is no way the adaptations could have been any better.

Budgeted at only $285 million back in the late-90s, all three films were made simultaneously in New Zealand and production lasting almost eight years.

Jackson and the production crew brought to life a world that millions had pictured for decades while reading Tolkien's books, and put so much detail into the endeavor, the little things made all the difference.

I love Jackson's use of models and miniatures to create real environments on a huge scale, where special effects are added for enhancement and the amazing talents of concept artists filled every scene in "Lord of the Rings" with astounding backdrops and beautiful settings.

It's something that is becoming all-too-rare on big-budget films, where green-screens and motion-capture fill in the spaces. I'd rather watch a film that used real sets and miniatures with computer effects on top of those real places than Lucas's all-green-screen world of the second "Star Wars" trilogy.

Now, coming up on "Hobbit" I couldn't be more excited because I fell in love with the book when I was in grade school. But, with the use of 48-frames-per-second and 3D, I am fearful of what the product will look like.

"Return of the King" won 11 Academy Awards, making it only the third film to ever do so, along with "Titanic" and "Ben-Hur."

“Ben-Hur” just so happens to be one of my favorite films of all time, and I consider it to be one of the best ever made. The greatest Bible-epic was itself a massive undertaking that almost didn’t have the funding or the physical space needed to be made.

That film, in 1959, was made on the largest movie sets ever constructed, with thousands of extras, and millions of costumes. When I first saw “Ben-Hur,” it was one of those films my father convinced me to watch because it was in color and he told me about the famous chariot race.

He didn’t tell me it was almost four hours long.

But it grabbed me in a way no film had ever done before, and after seeing them again on the big screen, there is a lot of “Ben-Hur” in “Lord of the Rings.”

The biggest weakness of “Lord of the Rings” for most audiences is the length of the films, like “Ben-Hur.”

But they are totally worth every moment.

I just hope “The Hobbit” is even half-as good as “Lord of the Rings,” because it can’t possibly surpass what has already been achieved.

‘The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey’ opens Friday, Dec. 14, is rated ‘PG-13’ with a runtime of 169 minutes.

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