

# This Week in Films #5

written by edward j rathke | February 4, 2015



This last week was pretty hectic so I only ended up watching three films, which is not a bad number, but it's fewer than desired. Anyrate, I think I made it count because the three films I watched are all extremely different and all extremely awesome in their own ways.

Here they are:

- *The Hobbit: There & Back Again* edited by David Killstein
- *The Secret of Kells* by Tomm Moore & Nora Twomey
- *Killing them Softly* by Andrew Dominik

## ***The Hobbit: There & Back Again (2015)***

Okay, so this needs a bit of an explanation. We're all aware of the trilogy that Peter Jackson made and released over the last three winters. We know it's bloated, poorly received, and is generally the opposite of good. Well, since the release of the third film, certain professional editors have gone into the nine hours of mess Jackson dumped on the public and have whittled it down to a proper Hobbit film, which resembles the book, to the best of its ability.

One such version was made by [David Killstein](#), and I watched it recently. However! Since I downloaded his version and watched it, he's taken down the links. It looks like another editor did the same thing he did, and now they're working together to make a definitive edition, which is to be released in April.

So this version of *The Hobbit* is about three hours and twenty minutes. How he got there is explained on his [site](#):

**No** elf/dwarf love triangle – **No** necromancer adventures – **Kili sacrifices himself for Bilbo** at the end instead of Evangeline Lilly (who's not in this film at all) – **No** orcs (until necessary in the Battle of Five Armies) – **Laketown** is about 10 minutes – **Bard does not use his son as a bow** – and the full story in all **less than the length of "Return of the King."**

After about **312 new edits and cuts and almost 5 hours removed** from the trilogy, this single film combines the three Peter Jackson movies into one immense epic that accurately tells the story of Bilbo, while maintaining what new ideas and battles have been implanted in Jackson's retelling (such as the Battle of the Five Armies containing orcs instead of goblins).

I watched it and it's really fantastic. He made so many great choices when it came to editing it down, and there's only one edit in the entire thing that felt sort of jolting as a viewer. Ever since I saw and was immensely disappointed by Jackson's first film in the trilogy I've been saying that someday we'll get a really awesome three hour version.

I assumed this would be from the studio and Jackson himself, but I think it's even better that they're not involved.

Killstein can be ruthless with the material because he's not invested in it. Orlando Bloom and the Kate from *Lost* are now in the film for a combined total of about two seconds and Bard's part is heavily reduced. Stephen Fry and the white orc are now cameos rather than big figures in the story.

Now we have a version that reminds me of the book I remember loving as a child. It's more whimsical and heavily focused on Bilbo, as it should be.

I think the biggest problem with the trilogy was how messy everything became. Jackson wanted an ensemble trilogy but had to invent most of the characterisation. Plus, Martin Freeman is such an amazing hobbit, it's a pleasure to see him carry this story. And it really is pretty great. It has some scares, plenty of laughs, and it loses a lot of that overbearing atmosphere that Jackson pushes onto the viewer. His confusing heavy atmosphere with epicness is a huge failure of his, but this version corrects a lot of that.

I'll let everyone know when it comes back online, because it really is the best way to see *The Hobbit*.

It's also a reminder of why the internet is so awesome sometimes.

## [The Secret of Kells \(2009\)](#)

Somehow only seeing this now, even though I lived in Ireland when it premiered. I even saw the Book of Kells! I was studying at Trinity College, where the book is held. It's something I should've seen ages ago, but it was nice just to finally see it, late or not.

It's a beautiful film and a rare kind. I absolutely love the visual style. It feels like a popup book but it's also so vivid and powerful. It manages to match the style of the actual Book of Kells while adding to it in meaningful ways. The images really come alive with this style, which is most certainly cartoonish, but also quite real. It feels like the only way a story like this could be told, and that's a tremendous effect. To hit the aesthetic so perfectly that it just tastes natural and organic.

It's an exciting adventure story about scholars and scholarship.

It's an unusual topic but it feels so vital and true. When the Vikings came and broke apart the great empires and civilisations of the western world, there was a very real fear that all knowledge of the past would burn up with their pillaging. The Book of Kells is one of the oldest books in existence

and the Irish kept a great deal of western civilisation alive. Scholars saved history.

It wasn't armies or kings or popes.

And that's what this film is about, but more than that, it's about the power of words and the magic of books. How words and writing can combat the darkness of the Dark Ages, can save the bits of culture left behind by the fallout of Rome.

While there are some very real bits of history in here, it's much more of a fantasy. A brilliant fantasy film where the strongest magic is literacy. Even the fairies can't combat the darkness, but a young boy named Brenden can. He defeats a snake god through his ability to write, which is an exciting and illuminating scene in the film.

But, yeah, so much love in here. The Vikings are big and brutal and metal as our legends say they are. The threat is real and it's common people who rise to meet it, who grow to stop it and turn it back the other way.

Ireland is in my bones and in my blood and I feel great attachment to the country and culture. Not just because I lived there, though that's certainly a part. I remember the year I spent there so vividly and the history I learnt of the Irish. It's the kind of history that hits me emotionally rather than intellectually. Though I'll never feel the pain like those born and raised in Ireland, I feel it all the same. You wouldn't guess from my name, but half my ancestry leads back to Ireland, and my great grandfather's cousin fought alongside Michael Collins in the revolution against the British.

His name was [Richard Mulcahy](#).

## [Killing them Softly \(2012\)](#)

Here we have intensity! Man, this film is sometimes relentless.

It's a brilliant noirish kind of crime film with great performances all around, but it's the visual style that really got me. Every scene is shot and directed so perfectly. I love when a director has a real eye for the camera, because shockingly few do. When you can give great characters, interesting dialogue, and intense sequences of movement while never losing that pristine aesthetic—well, you're above and beyond most of us.

It's actually a very simple story and many probably wouldn't need the ninety minutes this film uses, but even more would use even more screentime to give you half as much story, personality, and character.

Because despite being a film about crime, murder, drugs, hookers, gambling, and revenge, it's really about the people involved.

There's a lot of dialogue in here. This is something I typically dislike, but Dominik manages to never make it feel chatty. It feels real. The way he does that is have the characters talk about more than just plot points. We have

Gandolfini rambling and drunk in a terrific scene at a bar. We have Pitt saying very little but having a lot said to him by a lot of people, but always remaining in power.

It's an interesting thing. Pay attention to the power dynamics here.

Very impressed by this film. It takes its time to get to where we know it's going. I mean, really, we know where it's headed. We know how this will all play out, but there still manages to be enough surprises in here and enough interesting people to keep you watching.

I love this film, in all its darkness and brutality.

The biggest failing of the film is the CGI. I think it's almost criminal that it got into the film. Even more criminal that someone didn't watch those scenes and drag that CGI kicking and screaming back out of the film.

It truly is a travesty to have it in there, in an otherwise near perfect film.