

Weta chronicles truly two out of the box

THE ART OF FILM MAGIC
20 years of Weta

Weta
HarperCollins

By BRUCE MUNRO



There will be many a whispered “my precious” when Weta fans get their hands on the new two-volume *The Art of Film Magic — 20 years of Weta*.

For Kiwi film buffs, *LOTR* devotees and special effects connoisseurs, the twin volume set, which comes with its own hard-cover box, is an image and information treasure trove.

There is so much information that it is wisely broken into two chunks; *Weta Workshop — Celebrating 20 years of Creativity* and *Weta Digital — 20 years of imagination on screen*.

Both volumes have a quality look and feel — a worthy addition to the coffee table or the bookshelf. But the use of two authors, and a different layout aesthetic in each book, makes them two distinct entities and a more interesting package.

Weta Workshop is written by Luke Hawker. He has worked for the company for more than 15 years as well as working elsewhere in the industry as a technician, stuntman, writer and actor. His book is a detailed overview of how the company grew, from the fateful day in 1988 when Richard Taylor and Peter Jackson meet on the set of a television commercial to its fruition as a Wellington-based, multi-award-winning conceptual

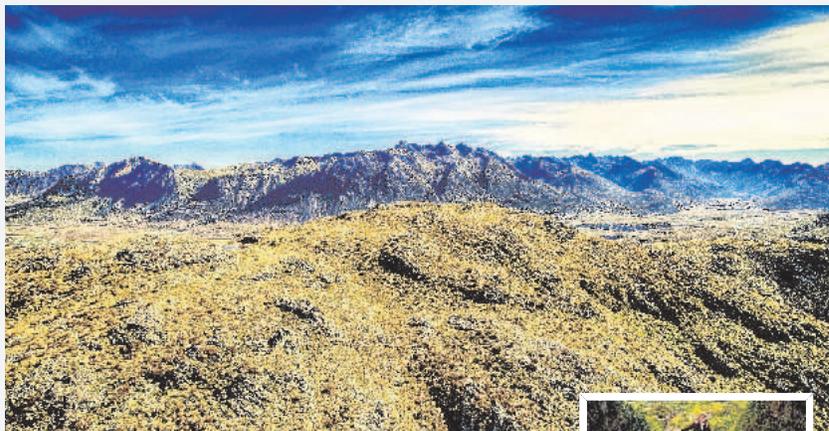
design and manufacturing facility serving the global entertainment industry.

Everything you warmly remember about Weta projects, from *Meet the Feebles* and *Heavenly Creatures* to *Lord of the Rings* and *Avatar*, is covered in an easy-to-read style on pages packed with images that look like a mix of marketing stills and scrapbook favourites. There is also plenty of information that most readers are unlikely to already know and which fans will consume with eager delight. What book did Taylor's partner Tania Rodger find in the abandoned Miramar paint and resin factory they hoped would become their new studio? How many times did William Mosley's armour have to be rebuilt to accommodate his growth spurts during filming of *The Chronicles of Narnia*? What do they add to glucose syrup and food colouring to make excellent fake blood? The answers are all inside.

Weta Digital has a sleeker, more technical, look and feel.

It is a celebration of the art and the artists who have made Weta Digital one of the world's premier

Guide to finding Middle-earth



The wild and remote landscape of Southland's Mararoa Saddle (pictured) provides a backdrop for the escape of the dwarves from Erebor in the prologue of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*.

It is just one of the spectacular Southern locations used to embody Middle-earth by filmmaker Sir Peter

Jackson and featured in Ian Brodie's *The Hobbit Location Guidebook* (HarperCollins).

Perfect timing as the final *Hobbit* instalment hits the big screen, and holidays, sightseeing and adventures off the beaten track beckon.

Review: ODT books editor Helen Speirs; Photo: Ian Brodie.



visual-effects companies.

The book is written by Clare Burgess, who has worked in film production and as a director, the past dozen years with Weta.

Without getting bogged down in jargon, and using Weta projects as

examples, the book is an absorbing introduction to all aspects of digital film-making.

As well as chronicling the fabulous film projects Weta has undertaken, the book is interspersed with stories by various

Weta employees describing their work and their experiences.

The Art of Film Magic is a fabulous monument to the wonderful world of Weta.

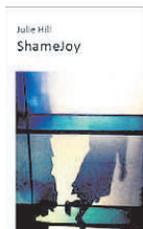
Bruce Munro is an ODT features writer.

Crazy characters and strangely enticing scenarios merge here

SHAMEJOY

Julie Hill
Giant Sparrow Press

By JESSIE NEILSON



Auckland-based writer, playwright and documentary maker Julie Hill has branched out on her own with *ShameJoy* (Schadenfreude), a collection of nine short stories commenting on aspects of contemporary popular culture.

Wellington publisher Giant Sparrow Press announces itself with this slim collection of crazy characters and strangely enticing scenarios.

Hill's stories share a preoccupation with mixing lighthearted snippets of real life with more sinister, often historically-based alternative realities.

The collection opens strongly with the bizarre *Pavlova Debate*, speculating on how continual indignation over ownership of specific cultural icons could result in an all-out Antipodean War. While the themes are meant to be slightly ridiculous, some, like that one, are not beyond possibility.

In *Whistle Solo* we are privy to the imaginings of heavy metal band members, who, in their past

wanderings, have brought in a “death-cold swirl of Moscow snow spray”.

Hill's rendition of mad personalities and fantasy/reality draws on the historical backdrops of the Cold War, the Iron Curtain, and associated German and Russian political history, as well as features of '80s kitsch Western landscapes such as karaoke machines, bad dress sense and loud nightclubs. Such features merge in these stories to leave discomforting impressions and blurred connections between “normal” life and the darkly whimsical.

Given Hill's background in theatre, these stories would translate brilliantly into a dramatic production.

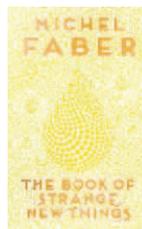
Jessie Neilson is a University of Otago library assistant.

One man's struggle with love, loss, God

THE BOOK OF STRANGE NEW THINGS

Michael Faber
Canongate

By CUSHLA MCKINNEY



Although he is most famous for Victorian epic *The Crimson Petal and the White*, my introduction to Michael Faber was the brilliantly disturbing sci-fi horror *Under the Skin*. His latest novel *The Book of Strange New Things*, an exploration of religion and its translation through alien eyes that reminded me of Mary Doria Russell's masterpiece *The Sparrow*, is equally strange and unsettling.

When evangelist preacher Peter Leigh is hired to a ministry position on Oasis, humanity's first off-world colony, he imagines himself following in the footsteps of the earliest Christian missionaries. As it turns out, his fellow employees are in no need of his services — carefully selected for their phlegmatic nature and lack of emotional ties to home, most are content to live day by day, eschewing drugs, alcohol, violence and sex — but the native Oasans have been awaiting his arrival with great anticipation.

Delighted to find a ready-made and receptive congregation, Peter

quickly involves himself in their community, spending weeks at a time living among them and sharing the teachings of the Bible with a small but dedicated group of self-titled Jesus Lovers. It is a pastoral existence centred on the basics of daily life; eating, sleeping, and the harvesting and processing of a versatile native plant into staple foodstuffs that they exchange with the colonists in return for human medicines. Indeed the greatest challenge of Peter's ministry is purging the New Testament of the 't's and 's's that the Oasans struggle to pronounce.

The problems of Earth seem a very long way away, and were it not for the fact that his wife, Beatrice, is struggling to cope with a series of crises that leave her questioning her own belief in God, Peter would be content to remain on Oasis forever. Instead he finds himself

struggling to connect with and support his partner in life and faith. The oratory that comes to him so easily in his sermons eludes him in his letters home, and the biblical quotations that spring to mind as he seeks to ease her distress are worse than useless. Eventually he is forced to choose between his mission and his marriage, between a life in peaceful, time (and passion)less Oasis and a return to the delights and dangers of Earth.

Because it is told through Peter's eyes, the narrative is framed by and imbued with his Christian perspective, a technique that initially left me decidedly ambivalent, as did the overt symbolism of the setting. As the novel progressed I decided there was scope for a more ambiguous interpretation and subtler allusions (the Lotus Eaters perhaps, or an inverted Orpheus and Euridice?).

It was not until I learnt Faber's wife was terminally ill during the writing that the full significance of Peter's feelings of separation and helplessness became clear.

The Book of Strange New Things is a profound examination of one man's psychological and emotional struggle with love, loss and God.

Cushla McKinney is a Dunedin scientist.