THE LORD OF THE RINGS

CONTINUING **dreamwatch**'S COVERAGE OF THE LONG-AWAITED FANTASY BLOCKBUSTER, MORE OF THE CAST TAKE US INSIDE MIDDLE-EARTH...

FAERIE QUEEN

CATE BLANCHETT joined the cast of **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING** as "Queen of the Elves" Galadriel, who guides Frodo on his quest.

Words: Jenny Cooney Carrillo

Cate Blanchett has moved from Queen of England to Queen of the Elves.

By now Cate Blanchett will probably be a mother. Looking radiant in an Alberta Feretti black maternity dress during a recent interview at the posh Savoy hotel in London, the 32-year-old Australian actress revealed her baby was due mid-December and would cap one of the most productive years of her life, personally and professionally. She's not exaggerating. With six films shot in the past year and another one already waiting in the wings, when she returns from maternity leave next year she won't be dropping from Hollywood's radar screens anytime soon. Coming up first, Blanchett will be seen playing Galadriel, Queen of the Elves in the highly-anticipated first of the Tolkien epics, The Fellowship of the Ring.

It has certainly been an incredibly busy year for you...

I think the last year was just a feast. It was quite extraordinary. I knew at the beginning of the year I was doing The Gift and then The Lord of the Rings. The rest of the year was an open book. Then all of a sudden Heaven got up and running, then Bandits got a slot, Charlotte Gray got its money. Then [director] Lasse Hallström came to me and asked me to do a week of work on The Shipping News. I don't think every year is going to be like that, but I'm meant to be working in the first half of next year with Joel Schumacher on a film about the murdered Irish journalist Veronica Guerin, so it's not going to stop.

What can you tell us about The Fellowship of the Ring and your role as an Elf?

Queen of the Elves no less [laughs]! By the time I got to New Zealand they'd been filming for about nine months... I was there for a month and it was one of those once in a lifetime experiences. The sets were so extraordinary.

"The Lord of the Rings has gripped people ever since the books were published, The Hobbit too."

- Cate Blanchett

I'd never worked on anything that was that technical, but I loved the books and wanted to work with Peter Jackson because he's a genius. But I did want the ears too! What fascinated me about Peter was that even though there were obviously so many technical things to think about, he was absolutely about actors, contacting actors. In the end all that other stuff dropped away and it became just about the dark truth, which is part of the book.

What do you think is the fascination with stories like Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter, the two big fantasy films of the year?

I think Harry Potter is a wonderful fantasy for children. I've got many friends who are obsessed as adults, but Tolkien was an Oxford professor and a linguist. I think what he has created is a timeless odyssey that a lot of other books and fantasies have really drawn from over the years. They're not simply fairy tales, but a moral

odyssey about confronting the evil within oneself. The trials that Frodo and the Fellowship have to go through are really profound and quite archetypal, so that's probably what the obsession is. I also had to speak Elvish for this film. I was amazed to learn there are communities of people who get together and speak Elvish! We had an Elvish expert who was absolutely fluent in Elvish. Then I learned that there's people who also get together and speak Klingon [from Star Trek], so it was a whole new world to me which I found quite fascinating [laughs]!

Do you think there is something significant about the fact both magical worlds will make it to the screen at the same time?

I think The Lord of the Rings has gripped people ever since the books were published, not only The Lord of the Rings but The Hobbit too. My first connection to Tolkien was his letters to his son, The Santa Claus Letters, so I don't think the obsession is simply now. Maybe it's just that they're being filmed now. I always find it very strange the way our collective unconscious has similar things coming out at the same time with similar sentiments. I do still think Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings are very, very different films with very different aims and the sources are also very different.

Above:
Cate Blanchett had to learn to speak Elvish for her role, but not Klingon...

You became a household name after your Oscar nomination and Golden Globe for Elizabeth. Do you sometimes pinch yourself about how your life has turned out?

I remember I got a letter from [director] Ingmar Bergman and I almost fell off the chair that he even knew who I was! When things like that happen to you, you just think "I can't quite believe I'm here." I think it's that continual sense that actually keeps me going, because I've worked with some great directors and I do find my situation sort of fantastic and extraordinary. You can't be immobilised by it. You sort of have to take the compliment and keep working, otherwise it would be very daunting.

What can you tell us about the movie Heaven, directed by Tom Tykwer [the German director of Run Lola Run]?

It was a very dark, intense experience because we shot in a prison cell for about three months, which wasn't particularly pleasant. So it was great to go from Heaven to Bandits and then Charlotte Gray with a little Lord of the Rings thrown in [laughs]! I recently saw a final cut of the film and I don't think I've actually bee of a film that was – I don't want to sound wanky – but it's very Zen. It's almost like a layers have been stripped away. I think it w brave of Tom to take on a script by Kiewslowski, who is such an auteur. His se bilities are so different to Kiewslowski, but was a great choice to direct because he's n pale imitation. I hope I always know Tom a get to work with him again.

How was your experience working on Charlotte Gray?

I found out I was pregnant towards the en that shoot, but we had a great time and th locations in France were quite extraordin At one point the film was conceived to be bilingual film, so I pulled out my high sch French books. Heaven, the film with Tom Tykwer, was in Italian and English, so I'd to learn Italian, but it was decided to be a English language film in the end so I didn have to get good enough...

In The Shipping News, you play the estran wife of a reporter [Kevin Spacey] and your character dies in a car accident pretty ear What was the attraction to that role?

I think I die on page nine of the script [lau which was great, because she is so obnoxio and unrelentingly horrible to him that no would want to watch someone that revolti for the entire movie! Once again I think it just the difference in the character I want play and the thing of not knowing if I coul it. And Lasse is a great audience and he cr such a buoyant atmosphere on the set. Th great thing about Kevin is that he just wer with it too. I said to Kevin and Lasse "You tell me if I am going too far," because I wa going for it. Kevin was great to improvise

Any plans to cut back on working after the baby?

As a child I was very inspired by my moth work and the stimulation she brought bac home by doing something for herself with other people. So I guess it's just a day at a and life will have to change in some way... husband and I are incredibly open to char We'll just play it by ear, but obviously ther be another priority, a different priority. W keep working and keep our lives parallel t work, I hope.

You've lived in London for a while. Any p to move back to Australia?

I've been incredibly homesick this last ye and I find that the more I move around, worse it gets. Australia is in my blood an what I understand. I think what I loved a Australia, growing up, was that it instille with a healthy sense of curiosity about th of the world. You don't grow up thinking you're the centre of the universe, like if y grow up in New York. Australians also tr lot and that, for me, is a huge contributi factor to our creative sense and how we formulate ideas. To impart that to a chil think would be invaluable. ●

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