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"A fear of anything large and alive, and not easily tamed or destroyed": Kaiju in The Lord of the Rings

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KAIJU, CREATURES, AND CULTURE

In a 1962 letter to his aunt, Jane Neave, Tolkien described some individuals' apparent fear of trees as "a fear of anything large and alive, and not easily tamed or destroyed" (*Letters* 453). Tolkien was well aware of the impact 'monstrous' creatures could have in popular media, regardless of the century of its production, for example *Beowulf*. In his famous 1936 lecture "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien reflected that the poem's monsters "are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness" (*M&C* 19). Tolkien's legendarium features numerous over-sized monsters, including trolls and dragons. There are also potentially dangerous (to their enemies) creatures such as stone-giants, ents, and giant eagles. Sufficient precedence for the inclusion of such creatures can be found in the folklore, medieval literature, and paleontology with which Tolkien was familiar, and need not be revisited here. To this cauldron of story we can also add the popular culture of his time, including H.G. Wells' novel *The Food of the Gods* (1904) and the seminal film *King Kong* (1933).

The publication of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) coincided with the start of the so-called *kaiju* movement in popular culture, featuring giant, sentient, and destructive creatures. Famously originating with *Godzilla* (1954), *kaiju* films have persistently cornered a portion of the popular culture market over the past 70 years; therefore, the genre would be presumed to play a role in audience expectations for the depictions of such creatures in the Jackson adaptations of the novels. In light of the June 2024 limited run of remastered versions of Jackson's *LOTR* film trilogy, I analyze four of his interpretations of Tolkien's giant creatures through the lens of *kaiju* theory – Shelob, the balrog of Moria, and the Watcher in the Water, along with the stone-giants from *The Hobbit* – in parallel with their representations in the source material. It is certainly not my intention to argue that Tolkien himself was intentionally crafting *kaiju*, but rather to investigate the extent to which Peter Jackson's depictions accentuate specific characteristics of these creatures, highlighting their *kaiju* nature.

The term *kaiju*, from the Japanese for "strange beast" (Arnold 2024, 5), has become synonymous with cinematic giants. However, scholars of *kaiju* films (also called *kaiju eiga*) and other related media often differentiate between true *kaiju* and simply unnaturally large versions of real-world creatures, such as became common in 1950s American "giant monster on the loose films," such as the giant ants of *Them!* (1954) (Short 2014). *Kaiju* emphasize their strangeness, uncanniness, and even grotesqueness; we do not expect to come across them in the Primary World, even in miniature versions (Mustachio and Barr 2017, 1; 5). Therefore, many *kaiju*

scholars do not consider *King Kong* (1933) as a true *kaiju*, although the film certainly anticipated aspects of the genre (Arnold 2024, 39; Mustachio and Barr 2017, 5). In Tolkien's world, the giant eagles would not be considered conventional *kaiju*, for example. A traditional *kaiju* film is set in contemporary times, and reflects modern world anxieties and social issues, such as nuclear weapons (as in the case of *Godzilla*), genetic engineering, and environmental concerns (Barr 2023, 9). Jase Short explains that *kaiju* are "mythopoetic creations that help us cope with the fact that we have overshot our place in the order of things. They reassure us of our insignificance in the face of a vast, inscrutable universe that will ultimately swallow us" (qtd. in Mustachio and Barr 2017, 11). He further describes how "kaiju are at their essence something more like forces of nature," drawing upon Japanese "animistic spiritual realities.... Indeed, much of Japanese horror is grounded in this unique sense of the utterly *bizarre* and *grotesque* as a founding principle of hauntings and visitations" (emphasis original; Short 2014). For this reason, *kaiju* films lie at the intersection of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and individual *kaiju* frequently feature fantastical rather than science fiction abilities, such as *Godzilla*'s "atomic breath" (Barr 2016, 11). It should also be noted that while *kaiju* are associated with destruction and danger, they are not necessarily malicious and in some cases are "no more villainous than an earthquake or an animal in the wild. They may do troublesome or even deadly things to humans, but it does not make sense to presume they have malicious intent in many circumstances" (Arnold 2024, 45-6). For example, *Godzilla* saves humanity from even more dangerous creatures in some films (e.g., *Ghidorah the Three-Headed Monster* [1964] and *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* [1971]).

One director who has successfully danced at this intersection of genres is Peter Jackson, who credits his interest in filmmaking to viewing the original *King Kong* on television when he was nine years old (Faraci 2005). Sharin Schroeder (2011, 116) points out that Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* "shows a fascination with monsters," citing his director's commentary to the Extended Release DVDs as demonstrating how "his portrayal of monsters was an integral part of his vision of Middle-earth," despite pressures from New Line Cinema to cut rather than augment these aspects, largely for budgetary considerations. She further argues that "Jackson's attempts to create 'real' monsters, though not always following J.R.R. Tolkien's vision for his monsters, do take a similar approach to sub-creation" (Schroeder 2011, 116). In this paper I argue that, despite the fact that his *The Lord of the Rings* films are not *kaiju* films per se, Jackson nevertheless brings a modern *kaiju* aesthetic to these cinematic creatures.

THE WATCHER IN THE WATER

The first *kaiju*-like creature we encounter in *The Lord of the Rings* is perhaps the most mysterious, the Watcher in the Water in the lake outside the gates of Moria. The members of the Fellowship sense the threat and eeriness associated with the creature before it makes its presence known. Boromir pronounces “How I hate this foul pool!” before throwing a stone into the water. Frodo reprimands him, admitting, “I hate this place, too, and I am afraid. I don’t know of what: not the wolves, or the dark behind the doors, but of something else. I am afraid of the pool. Don’t disturb it!” (*FOTR* II iv, 321). As Gandalf continues to ponder how to open the doors, the ripples in the water ominously “grew and came closer; some were already lapping on the shore,” signaling to the reader that something is about to threaten the Fellowship (*FOTR* II iv, 321). The correct password is uttered, and the doors open, and then

Frodo felt something seize him by the ankle, and he fell with a cry. Bill the pony gave a wild neigh of fear, and turned tail and dashed away along the lakeside into the darkness. Sam leaped after him, and hearing Frodo’s cry he ran back again, weeping and cursing. The others swung around and saw the waters of the lake seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end.

Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet. Its fingered end had hold of Frodo’s foot, and was dragging him into the water. Sam on his knees was now slashing at it with a knife.

The arm let go of Frodo, and Sam pulled him away, crying out for help. Twenty other arms came rippling out. The dark water boiled, and there was a hideous stench. (*FOTR* II iv, 322)

Gandalf has the presence of mind to urge them all through the doorway, as “the groping tentacles writhed across the narrow shore and fingered the cliff-wall and the doors. One came wriggling over the threshold, glistening in the starlight.... Many coiling arms seized the doors on either side, and with horrible strength, swung them round. With a shattering echo they slammed, and all light was lost. A noise of rending and crashing came dully through the ponderous stone...” (*FOTR* II iv, 322). Gandalf explains to the company that the creature has piled up boulders and trees behind the closed doors and purposefully barricaded them inside. He cannot explain what the creature is, except that “the arms were all guided by one purpose.... There are older and fouler things than Orcs in the deep places of the world” (*FOTR* II iv, 323). The intentionality of the creature is certainly *kaiju*-like;

it was not simply looking for food in an instinctive way. For example, Gandalf also keeps to himself the recognition that the creature had intentionally attacked Frodo.

Jason Fisher (2008) offers three possible literary sources for the Watcher, “the sea-monster in Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870)... Jörmungandr aka Miðgarðsormr, the giant sea-serpent of Norse legend... [and] the Leviathan of the Bible.” The mythical sea creature generically known as the *kraken* (Lee 1884, 325) is also frequently offered as a possible inspiration (e.g., Grison 2021, 368; Petrozza 2024). Given that all we know for certain about the anatomy and physiology of the Watcher is that it is a large, many-tentacled, freshwater creature, we cannot align it with any Primary World beast, as the giant squid, *Architeuthis*, generally credited as the inspiration for the kraken myth, is an ocean-dwelling creature (Grison 2021, 368). Given its size, destructive nature, intentionality, and uncanniness, it certainly fits the classic definition of a *kaiju*. Tolkien also uses the effective storytelling technique of keeping his dangerous creature largely unseen. In analyzing this vignette in the book, Allison Harl (2007, 62) notes “that which cannot be seen is often much more threatening than that which is visible. To see a thing is, in a sense, to have a measure of control over it, to have some power to resist it. Frodo expresses his sense of helplessness as he feels, rather than sees, the presence of the monster.” This technique is often effectively used in *kaiju* films to ratchet up the dramatic tension; for example, Godzilla is only visible for about eight of his debut film’s ninety-six minutes, while the *kaiju* of the more recent film *Cloverfield* (2008) is fully visible onscreen for less than five minutes in total (Barr 2016, 33).

Peter Jackson openly rejects this “less is more” strategy in his film adaptation. In the director’s commentary, he notes that he had to fight with the studio to keep the Watcher: they felt it was “unnecessary,” although he personally “loved the notion of the scene. I thought the film needed a good monster sequence at this point in time” (*FOTR* Extended Release DVD, Chapter 33 “Moria”). Jackson changes the roles of a stone-throwing Boromir and chastising Frodo for Pippin and Aragorn (consistent with their characterizations in the film) and compresses the dialogue to simply “Do not disturb the water.” Frodo still appears to sense that something is amiss. The most significant changes to the scene are threefold; first, the Fellowship enters into Moria before the creature attacks, but after seeing the dwarf corpses second guess that decision. When the Fellowship runs back into Moria after freeing Frodo from its tentacle, the creature roughly tears down the entrance, trapping them inside, instead of building up a barricade behind them. While the result is the same, the emphasis on the destructive nature of the creature in the film more closely aligns with the *kaiju* template. Most importantly, Jackson spends more time with the attack, and clearly shows the creature in full. As in the novel, the creature intentionally attacks Frodo, and releases him after Sam hacks at the tentacle (done by sword rather than knife here). However, Jackson includes a

second attack, where multiple tentacles first push the other Hobbits away from Frodo while intentionally picking him up and holding him over the water. As Legolas, Aragorn, and Boromir attack the creature, we see its mammoth head emerge from the water, and after looking directly at Frodo, opens its threatening, teeth-filled mouth, and intends to devour him. Freed from the creature's grasp when the tentacle lifting him is hewn off, Frodo falls into Boromir's arms, and the Fellowship runs into Moria, with the creature in full pursuit. Indeed, the creature's entire body is seen leaving the water and following them onto the shore. While one can argue whether or not this clear view of the creature adds to or detracts from the power of the scene, its unnaturalness, large size, destructive power, and intentionality are undeniable. Jackson's Watcher is clearly a *kaiju*.

THE BALROG

In a 1954 letter to Naomi Mitchison, Tolkien described the balrog as “a survivor from the Silmarillion and the legends of the First Age,” one of the “spirits of destroying fire, chief servants of the primeval Dark Power of the First Age” (*Letters* 270). Joe Abbott (1989a, 20) aligns their characteristics with “Surt, the guardian giant of Muspellsheim... one of the nine worlds of Norse mythology... the world of fire and the home of the fire-dwellers.” In the novel Legolas uncharacteristically misses taking a shot at the orcs of Moria when he is filled

with terror. The ranks of the orcs had opened, and they crowded away, as if they themselves were afraid. Something was coming up behind them. What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it.

It came to the edge of the fire and the light faded as if a cloud had bent over it. Then with a rush it leaped across the fissure. The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire; in its left it held a whip of many thongs. (*FOTR* II v, 344)

This “dark figure streaming with fire raced towards them,” and Gandalf orders the Company to flee even as he turns to face this foe (*FOTR* II v, 344).

We are given few other specific details, other than fire coming from its nostrils (*FOTR* II v, 344). Indeed, Tolkien's vague description that “the shadow about it reached out like two vast wings” has infamously led to a debate as to whether or not it literally had wings (e.g., Abbott 1989a, 21; Gee 2014, 127-8). We are, however, given another hint of its true size: “suddenly it drew itself up to a

great height, and its wings were spread from wall to wall; but still Gandalf could be seen, glimmering in the gloom; he seemed small, and altogether alone: grey and bent, like a wizened tree before the onset of a storm” (*FOTR* II v, 344).

Intentionality – check; destructive power – check; uncanniness – check. But what about its size? In the only other major appearance of balrogs in the legendarium, the fall of Gondolin, they are described as “double” the stature of the Elf Lord Glorfindel (*BOLT* II 194), i.e., hardly monstrous. Indeed, in an earlier draft of this scene the balrog of Moria is described as “no more than man-high yet terror seemed to go before it” (*Treason* 197). Christopher Tolkien draws attention to a “pencilled note” in which Tolkien reminds himself to “Alter description of Balrog. It seemed to be of man’s shape, but its form could not be plainly discerned. It *felt* larger than it looked” (*Treason* 199, emphasis original). However, this still seems to fall short of the definition of a gigantic creature.

Peter Jackson clearly went full-in *kaiju* in his rendition of the balrog. As the Fellowship is surrounded by goblins in the great hall, we hear an ominous growl and the goblins scatter in fear. Gandalf recognizes the danger and warns the Fellowship that it is a “a balrog – a demon of the ancient world,” to which Legolas responds with an expression of open fear. In his director’s commentary, Jackson admits that the scene of the Fellowship trying to escape via the bridge is “enhanced from what’s in the book.... The introduction of the balrog didn’t happen quite in this way but we just wanted to make a sort of rollicking Indiana Jones-type sequence” (*The Two Towers* Extended Release DVD, Chapter 36 “Bridge of Khazad-Dûm”). Jackson notes that the balrog presented great technical difficulties for the special effects team (given the way that fire behaves visually), but they drew upon Tolkien’s connection of the balrog with shadow and flame as closely as possible. He also openly confirms that he intentionally gave his balrog wings (because that is how he personally interpreted the description in the book). Jackson’s balrog has clear classic demonic echoes, in terms of its horns, and is far larger than Tolkien’s description, literally dwarfing Gandalf and correcting the main difficulty in classifying it as a classic *kaiju*.

SHELOB

In the aforementioned 1954 letter, Tolkien notes the name “Shelob” is simply Common Speech for “‘she-lob’ = female spider,” and “is represented ... as descendent of the giant spiders of the glens of *Nandungorthin*, which come into the legends of the First Age” (*Letters* 270). Humphrey Carpenter recounted that when Tolkien was

beginning to walk, he stumbled on a tarantula. It bit him, and he ran in terror across the garden until the nurse snatched him up and sucked out the poison.

When he grew up he could remember a hot day and running in fear through long, dead grass, but the memory of the tarantula itself faded, and he said that the incident left him with no especial dislike of spiders. Nevertheless, in his stories he wrote more than once of monstrous spiders with venomous bites. (Carpenter 2000, 21)

Henry Gee argues that “Tolkien’s preoccupation with giant spiders is never satisfactorily addressed,” as Carpenter’s story is not “sufficient to explain the prevalence of huge spiders in fiction written decades later” (Gee 2014, 219). Instead, Gee notes that

giant spiders provide remarkably good monsters in a particularly Tolkienian mode. On the most basic level, spiders are creepy, playing on the common horror of arthropods (jointed-legged animals) in general. Our horror at the monster in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* evokes precisely this distaste. Tolkien would have been familiar with the giant ants and so on that were once the staples of pulp science fiction – spiders, unlike trolls, dragons or even balrogs, have an inhuman quality that makes them especially pitiless adversaries.... (Gee 2014, 219)

Gee’s alignment of Shelob with the giant ants of *Them!* and similar “giant monsters on the loose” media downplays her *kaiju*-like properties. However, as Abbott notes, while the “terror” of the spiders in Mirkwood in *The Hobbit* “lies chiefly in their size and physical grotesqueness.... in Shelob we find a deeper terror, a combination of the physical and spiritual that indicates she is more than simply a voracious spider of immense size” (Abbott 1989b, 40). Indeed, Tolkien does not describe her as a spider, but instead “an evil thing in spider-form” (*TT* II ix 332). While “[l]ittle she knew of or cared for towers, or rings, or anything devised by mind or hand... and long now had she been hungry” (*TT* II ix 333), her eyes are described as “[m]onstrous and abominable... bestial and yet filled with purpose and with hideous delight, gloating over their prey trapped beyond all hope of escape” (*TT* II ix 329-30). There is a cruelty here, a drive beyond mere instinctive hunger.

Her monstrous form is described through Sam’s point of view as

the most loathly shape that he had ever beheld, horrible beyond the horror of an evil dream. Most like a spider she was, but huger than the great hunting beasts, and more terrible than they because of the evil purpose in her remorseless eyes.... Great horns she had, and behind her short stalk-like neck was her huge swollen body, a vast bloated bag, swaying and sagging between her legs; its great bulk was black, blotched with livid marks, but the belly underneath was pale and luminous and gave forth a stench. Her

legs were bent, with great knobbed joints high above her back, and hairs that stuck out like steel spines, and at each leg's end there was a claw. (*TT* II ix 334)

The description is classic *kaiju* – large, unnatural, and with purpose (although the only destruction is to the bodies of her victims).

Interestingly, Tolkien again utilizes the classic trope of having the dangerous creature initially unseen by its intended victims. Harl (2007, 62) points out that Sam realizes that they are being watched – he “can feel something looking at us” (*TT* II ix 328) – which is the first concrete sign of danger. In a draft found in *The War the Ring* (203; 205), Tolkien comes to realize that Shelob's eyes must be seen before her entire form. Tolkien makes several specific anatomical deviations from Primary World spiders, in addition to size: he describes Shelob as having “two great clusters of many-windowed eyes” (*TT* II ix 329), indicative of compound eyes (Monster Philologist), and the suggestion of a venomous stinger on her abdomen (Garrouste and Garrouste 2021, 324-5). Again, Shelob is not a giant spider, but a giant creature that is similar in many respects *to* a spider.

Peter Jackson bumps the Shelob scenes to the third film for pacing purposes. In his director's commentary, he acknowledges that his separation of Sam from Frodo prior to the entrance into Shelob's lair is a significant departure from the book, and shares that he has a personal fear of spiders. He freely admits that his depiction of Shelob was personal: “I had a lot of fun making a scene that was scary for me” (*ROTK* Extended Release DVD, Chapter 38 “Shelob's Lair”). As a child he had frequently come across New Zealand tunnel web spiders while digging in the garden, which would send him running screaming for his father. Jackson explains that the final design for Shelob – based on said tunnel web spider – was left until the end of production, and that he wanted it to “feel like a real spider,” which would draw away from its *kaiju* nature, although he added that she “is totally motivated by what she wants to achieve,” again highlighting intentionality. The final design represents departures from both Primary World spiders and the source material: unlike Tolkien's original, Jackson's Shelob lacks horns and a beak. The spider's eyes were also changed for dramatic effect; visual effects artist Joe Wetteri of Wētā noted that while most spiders have eight eyes, given their anatomical placement “it doesn't make for an interesting shot, because you don't know which one you're supposed to look at. So what we did is we moved the eyes around to have the two that you would recognize as eyes on a face. Those were the main ones and the other ones became less important around it” (Monster Philologist 2020). There was also another rather *kaiju*-esque change made to the cinematic Shelob – the face itself. According to visual effects supervisor Jim Rygiel, Jackson explained his intention as reflecting “your 80-year-old auntie, this matronly, dour old woman.... He didn't want the spider to be smiling and giving the evil eye, but

instead to have a blank look, though you could still feel the brain thinking.” Wētā employees submitted plastic models of possible heads, resulting in the final vision for Shelob (Bonin 2003).

The deviations from a Primary World spider are significant enough to qualify Jackson’s Shelob as a *kaiju*. While the size of Shelob is perhaps not comparable with Godzilla or Mothra, the camera perspective of one of Jackson’s favorite shots (with Shelob menacingly looming above Frodo in a ravine) clearly pays homage to memorable scenes in *kaiju* films and gives her the impression of greater size.¹

THE HOBBIT’S STONE-GIANTS

After the success of *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, Peter Jackson was finally able to return to his childhood love of *King Kong*, resulting in his 2005 remake. Interestingly, Jackson very intentionally made his Kong as close to a realistic silverback gorilla as possible, with the exception of the size (Faraci 2005). The result was a film that was more “giant monster on the loose” than *kaiju* in tone (Arnold 2024, 49). Perhaps Jackson’s most archetypal *kaiju* in his vision of the Tolkien universe appeared afterwards, in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012). During his travels in the Misty Mountain, Bilbo Baggins and the dwarves witness a contest between stone-giants during a lightning storm. Tolkien says very little, other than they were “hurling rocks at one another for a game, and catching them, and tossing them down into the darkness where they smashed among the trees far below, or splintered into little bits with a bang.... They could hear the giants guffawing and shouting all over the mountainsides” a far cry from the aggressive battle depicted in Jackson’s cinematic revisioning of the scene (*Illustrated Hobbit* 53-5). We are not given a detailed description of the giants by Tolkien, but the insinuation is that they are rather stonelike in nature; in the Jackson adaptation, they literally appear to be made of boulders. In *The History of The Hobbit*, John Rateliff notes a probable connection between the stone-giants and “the legend of the rübezahl, a German storm-spirit who, in the words of Andrew Lang, ‘amused himself by rolling great rocks down into the desolate valleys, to hear the thunder of their fall echoing among the hills’” (2011, 151). Lottie Motz (1982, 71) further explains that the hurling of stones by giants “is a recurrent motif” in folklore and that “groups of standing stones in the countryside or individual boulders near cathedrals or churches are thought to be those which a giant cast in rage or sport.”²

John Rateliff (2011, 144-5) points out that in the novel the giants’ “antics seem more the result of exuberance than malice, but that would be small consolation for any member of the party ‘kicked sky high for a football’.... they

¹ See, for example, <https://screenrant.com/lord-of-the-rings-shelob-book-facts-trivia/>.

² See Larsen (2021, 7-8) for further discussion.

are portrayed as a perilous but almost impersonal force, rather like the thunderstorm itself.” Recall the statement that often *kaiju* are generally “no more villainous than an earthquake or an animal in the wild” (Arnold 2024, 45). Charles Noad called Jackson’s portrayal “radical. Here they are 500-feet-tall humanoids constructed of the very rock of the mountains: they are sides of the mountains come to life,” highlighting their role as a force of nature (Chisholm et al. 2013, 25). The clear *kaiju* nature of the film’s stone-giants has led many to see the hand of Guillermo del Toro in this vignette (Chisholm et al., 2013, 17, 25; Stevens 2012). Del Toro, a self-described *kaiju* fan since a young age (Arnold 2024, 12), was originally hired by Jackson to direct the *Hobbit* films, but delays led him to ultimately leave the project. He retained credit as a writer on the screenplay. Such suggestions were later bolstered in the minds of fans after the 2013 release of del Toro’s *kaiju* film *Pacific Rim*, in which giant robots named *jaegers* (German for ‘hunter’) fight monstrous extraterrestrially genetically engineered monsters openly called *kaiju* in the film.

However, the commentary by Peter Jackson and Philippa Boyens on *An Unexpected Journey’s* Extended Release DVD suggests that Jackson was significantly, if not primarily, responsible for the shift from the book in this scene. While Peter Jackson openly admits that the characters “are almost a passing mention” in the novel, Boyens laughingly explains how she “knew you weren’t going to let that one go.... I remember when you gave us those pages to read and Fran [Walsh] and I both just had the biggest grins on our face and we both knew that’s what you were going to do.” She later offers “They were so much bigger than I thought they were going to be.” Jackson affirms “I just love the idea of giants who are almost part of the mountain and ... they extract themselves from the mountains... this is the sort of stuff I go to the movies to look at” (*The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* Extended Release DVD, Chapter 24 “Over Hill”). Jackson made one significant change in the characterization of the stone-giants as compared to the book: rather than a game, the behemoths aggressively punch each other as well as throw rocks directly at each other in an attempt to invoke harm. This is confirmed by a line of dialogue by Balin, who calls their interaction a “thunder battle.” In his commentary, Jackson explains his interpretation of their actions by “I always wondered why these giants dislike each other so much.... There must be something very personal going on.” I would offer that instead Jackson was clearly misreading the source material. As previously noted, while *kaiju* have a clear intention, and are associated with destruction, their intention need not be villainous, in regards to humans. The behavior of the stone-giants can still present a clear and present danger to Bilbo and the others without even knowing of their presence on the mountain.

CONCLUSION

Jackson's films are certainly well-known for their copious and impressive special effects; in certain quarters they are similarly infamous for the changes Jackson made to the plot and characterization in order to appeal to a wider commercial market (Bogstad and Kaveny 2011, 8). Similarly, *kaiju* media has increasingly faced tension caused by the "'Hollywood effect' – the desire to increase marketability and consumerism via special effects extravaganza," often at the expense of character development and plot depth (Barr 2016, 179-80). *Kaiju* film fans often express deep-rooted opinions on remakes, sequels, and revisionings involving their favorite monsters – especially *Godzilla*³ – in much the same way as the Tolkien fandom has, and continues, to do.

The passion with which both groups of fans regard various adaptations and remakes of their beloved source material can perhaps best be explained by a commonality between the works and their audiences: a sense of nostalgia both genres invoke. As Jason Barr observes, like Tolkien fans, "[m]any *kaiju* fans were exposed to the genre as children, and, as a result, consistently gravitate to the genre regardless of the perceived quality of the film. To them, *kaiju* film is an *experience*, an emotional response that supersedes more typical audience responses to films" (2016, 169-70). He acknowledges that more generally "[n]ostalgia leads fans to join numerous passionate fan bases, where one can openly embrace a love for *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, and many other franchises, in spite of the possible exasperation of significant others and the sometimes cruel mocking of mainstream pop culture" (2016, 170). Furthermore, he ponders whether this sense of nostalgia is "the primary motivation for *kaiju* scholars, a sort of method of carving out an academic niche while also dwelling in the past?... Are most of the scholars who examine *kaiju* film enjoying a legitimized foray into childhood?" (Barr 2016, 175). Personally, I don't see this as a pejorative possibility. If you replace "*kaiju*" with "Tolkien" this scholar might just have to proudly admit, "guilty as charged."

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³ An example of a widely panned remake is the 1998 Roland Emmerich film *Godzilla*. See Barr (2016 18, 66) and DeVore (2014) for very different opinions on this film.

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