

An excerpt from Chapter 27 of "For Entertainment Only" by Keith Stern

As I arrived, an army, made up mostly of real soldiers loaned by the New Zealand army, marched up from behind a ridge. I was thrilled to see the flags, then poles and finally the armor-clad soldiers and cavalry as they crested the hill. I had reached Middle-earth at last.

I was looking forward to seeing the Gates of Mordor where one of my favorite character actors, Bruce Spence, was playing the "Mouth of Sauron." I knew Spence from his work on the *Mad Max* films and *Where the Green Ants Dream* for Werner Herzog. Unfortunately, his costume completely covered his face! Huge false teeth and bloody gums had been fitted into his mouth, making it almost impossible for him to speak. Spence struggled to deliver his first line, "Sauron The Great bids thee welcome," as Peter Jackson shot take after excruciating take. As Spence neared a breakdown, they gave up. His appearance was cut from the theatrical release. Later, when they had more time to put together extended versions, they were able to painstakingly assemble the short scene frame by frame, with overdubbed vocals.

I watched from afar as Viggo Mortensen shot close-ups as Aragorn on horseback. It seemed to me he was going way over the top, making faces for the camera. That night's rushes proved me absolutely wrong. He was, of course, magnificent and understated.

Unit Production Manager (UPM) Zane Weiner had set up a hotel room with a projector where the daily rushes were reviewed each evening. Motorcycle couriers took exposed film, as it was unloaded from cameras, to labs in Wellington, where they were processed and delivered back to Ohakune, near the national park that was standing in for *Mordor*. Zane arranged pizzas for the audience of nervous actors and crew, anxious to see how their day's work had turned out, at least in rough form on a small screen.

I stayed behind after everyone left except Peter and Zane, as the UPM juggled reels for the director to review shot after shot of flames big and small against a black background, looking for just the right fiery effects, probably for the Balrog. I left after about an hour of that! A director's work is not all glamor, sunglasses, cigarette holders, ascots and funny hats.