



‘ELVES, ORCS, ORLAND



O&ME

Actress EVANGELINE
LILLY on her all-action
role in the new
Hobbit blockbuster ►

INTERVIEW *Elaine Lipworth*
PHOTOGRAPHS *Sarah Dunn*

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I dreamed of being an elf,' says Evangeline Lilly. It's not what you'd expect to hear in a Hollywood interview, but we're in Los Angeles to discuss her role as woodland warrior elf Tauriel in the second of Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* films, starring alongside Orlando Bloom, Martin Freeman, Benedict Cumberbatch, Ian McKellen and Cate Blanchett.

The second chapter of the film trilogy adapted from J R R Tolkien's 1937 book *The Hobbit, The Desolation of Smaug* continues the story of Bilbo Baggins (Freeman) and his friends (including Gandalf the wizard, played by McKellen) on their epic quest to win back their ancestral lands from the dragon Smaug (Cumberbatch). Set 60 years before *The Lord of the Rings*, it pits hobbits and dwarves against trolls, orcs and goblins, and reintroduces Cate Blanchett's elf queen Galadriel from *Lord of the Rings*.

Evangeline's character Tauriel 'is a red-haired, pointy-eared, weapon-wielding, orc-killing elf,' she explains. 'She's a very young elf – only 600 years old, unlike Legolas [played by Bloom] who's, like, 1,900 years old.' You won't find Tauriel in Tolkien's original story, though. She was created by Jackson and his co-producer and wife Fran Walsh to infuse the male-dominated story with female energy (the same reason they brought back Galadriel), which may be a cause of concern for Tolkien purists but not for Evangeline, 34. Best known as the fearless Kate Austen from TV's *Lost*, she is dressed today in black leggings and a leather biker jacket: a striking, masculine look, unadorned except for prettily manicured pale blue nails.

'Peter and Fran have read every extra bit of Tolkien, and they're well versed in the types of elves (including female) he created outside *The Hobbit*,' she says. 'There are no women in the book. None. I don't mean to challenge Tolkien; he wrote it at a time when women were sub-citizens. But what message are you sending to that ten-year-old girl who goes to see the movie? If you're going to tell stories about life you have to include a woman in your story.' Besides, she says, 'who wants to watch nine hours of sweaty, ugly, hairy men? I am very proud to be a part of this team. I look at the female company I'm keeping: Cate Blanchett and Liv Tyler [Arwen in *Lord of the Rings*] – really strong, beautiful, gentle women.'

It makes perfect sense that Jackson cast

Evangeline (who also co-starred with Hugh Jackman in the 2011 futuristic action movie *Real Steel*) as his 'kickass, powerful woodland elf'. Intelligent, tough and capable (she worked as a mechanic, a waitress and a flight attendant before becoming an actress), she possesses an independent spirit that was evident throughout *Lost*, the drama that ran for six seasons about the survivors of a plane crash stranded on a mysterious island, for which she received a Golden Globe nomination.

The middle daughter of three, she grew up in Alberta, Canada, with her parents, a teacher and a beautician. The staunchly Christian family didn't own a television and there were no thoughts of Hollywood. Evangeline studied international

relations at university and hoped to make a career doing humanitarian work or as a diplomat. 'I did not dream of acting – it just kind of happened,' she says, acutely aware that, while many aspiring actresses never get the break they dream of, she walked into the job of a lifetime without much effort.

Discovered as a teenager by a scout for the famous Ford agency, she wasn't interested in modelling. 'I am five foot six, I am built of muscle and bone and that is not very good for fashion but it's who I am,' she says. 'Women who look good in fashion are six foot tall, don't have an ounce of muscle and their legs are the size of my arm. I know

because I became friends with Miranda Kerr [the model and estranged wife of Orlando Bloom] when we were making *The Hobbit*. She's not starving herself – that's just how she looks and she's beautiful. After being with her I could look in the mirror and go, "I'm fat and ugly,"' she adds. 'But instead I look in the mirror and focus on what makes me *me*.'

But Evangeline decided to go to acting auditions anyway, to pay her way through university. 'My first real audition was in January 2004. I got the

call back and' – she snaps her fingers – 'by March I'm in Hawaii, I'm on *Lost*. It's wrong that it happened to me so easily, I know.'

Evangeline now lives quietly in Hawaii with her boyfriend Norman Kali (who was a member of the *Lost* production crew) and their two-year-old son Kahekili. (A brief marriage in her 20s was followed by a relationship with her *Lost* co-star and *Lord of the Rings* actor Dominic Monaghan.) These days, she would rather discuss motherhood and writing than acting, and is about to publish her first book, a delightful children's story called *The Squickerwonkers*.

In fact, she says, 'I thought I'd retired from acting when they called me about *The Hobbit*. But as a child *The Hobbit* was my favourite book. When Peter asked me to play an elf in the film, I was so excited – I thought, "I can't say no."' Her next project will be the series conclusion, *The Hobbit: There and Back Again*.

'Tauriel is different from the elves seen so far. I think of the Woodland Elves as a cross between High Elves and pixies. They flit about the trees and protect their realm. The wonderful thing about Tolkien's Middle Earth is there is evil and there is good and there is no grey – it's so easy. Tauriel goes out and cleans up the bad to protect the good.'

She also reportedly has a romance with Orlando Bloom's Legolas in the new film. 'I can't say if it's with Orlando,' she says, flashing an elusive grin. 'But I can tell you that Tauriel kills a lot of orcs!'

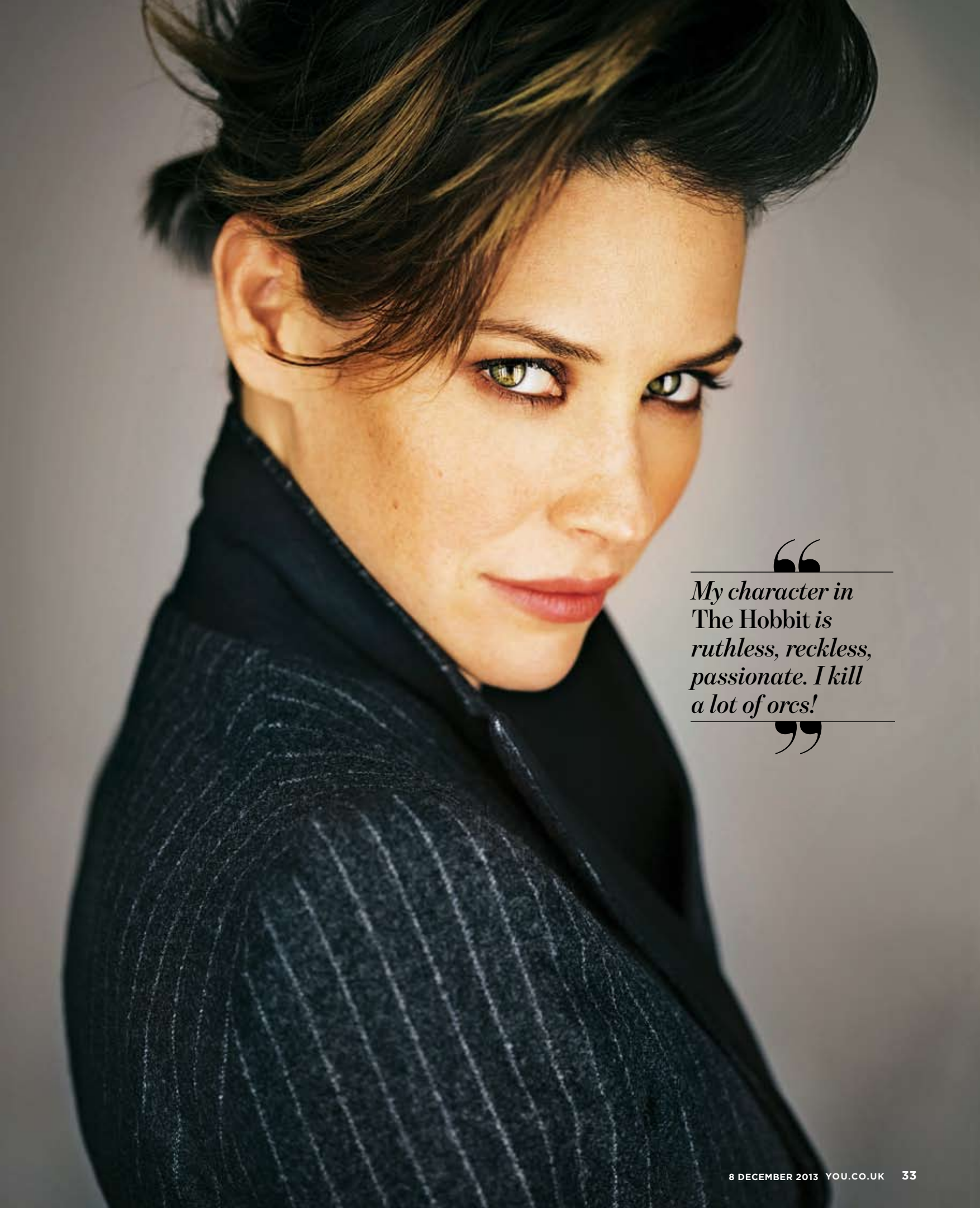
Tauriel is ruthless, she is reckless, she is passionate. She's the one character who is selflessly fighting for justice and what is right in Middle Earth. I took a lot of inspiration from Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*: she is this beautiful, delicate little nymphet but she is also powerful and scary. You wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of Tink.

My son was three months old when I started filming *The Hobbit* and I was still breastfeeding. The first day on set, he took one look at my long red wig and pointy elf ears and screamed his head off; he wouldn't go anywhere near me. I got home that night and was feeding him, and the look in his eyes was like, 'You wouldn't believe what happened to me today, Mum.' Then he got used to it. Now he's two and whenever he sees a picture of Tauriel, he says, 'Mummy, Mummy.'

I did most of the stunts myself and I busted my knee doing a jumping kick into an orc's head. I had to do another week of stunts on my bad knee and I thought those scenes were going to end ►



From top: Evangeline as Tauriel in *The Desolation of Smaug*, and as (left) Kate Austen in *Lost*



“
*My character in
The Hobbit is
ruthless, reckless,
passionate. I kill
a lot of orcs!*
”

◀ up looking terrible. But there is a shot where I bend backwards and evade an orc's weapon, and it looks great! I don't think archery is my strongest talent. I have a terrible habit of pulling the bow string too far back, and once when I let go it ripped off one of my prosthetic ears.

It's important to me that I retain my feminine identity, because I don't want to teach young women that they should pretend to be a guy.

We are as capable as men, but we are very different. Having strength and poise and confidence, and fighting for what you believe in, are the virtues of a powerful woman. Where a man might consider it strength to kill his enemy, a woman might consider it strength to forgive her enemy.

My dad drilled it into our heads that my sisters and I were smarter than any boys, and more talented. He would say, 'You're better than any boy and you're way better looking.' I don't think that's necessarily true. Obviously there are wonderful people of both sexes. But my dad sure believed that we were the coolest people on earth. He gave us a great foundation to go into the world as confident as hell.

I used to work as a mechanic. I would crawl under trucks greasing the mechanisms so they didn't get rusted. I can change a tyre, and change the oil in my car, and I can probably change an alternator if I needed to. But now I have men in my life who do that for me, so I don't bother.

New Zealand [the film location for Middle Earth] is like America in the 1950s. It's quaint and sweet and safe and friendly. Children are much less jaded, family values are still strong. It felt like coming home because New Zealand and Canada are both children of the Commonwealth. There were lots of British actors – and Cate's Australian. When I'm on an American film set, for the most part everybody is drinking coffee. On *The Hobbit* set everybody was drinking tea.

I feel partly British because my grandmother was English and she never let go of her English accent till the day she died. She was a war bride. My grandfather was a Canadian soldier – he fell in love with this beautiful nurse and they went to Canada and lived happily ever after. We all love tea and the Queen and all those British traditions. The minute you walk through the door in my family, the kettle goes on.

I love Prince William and Kate: they're wonderful. I think how difficult the job is that

“
I've never lived in LA. I've never even worked in LA. Can you believe that?
”

ESSENTIALLY EVANGELINE

MY STYLE is androgynous. I like clothes that are comfortable and give me a feeling of being at ease and powerful at the same time, and that have a slightly masculine edge to them.

ROLE MODEL Katharine Hepburn. It's a cliché, but she is amazing.

FOR THE RED CARPET I like Elie Saab's designs [below left]. His last collection was to die for. I've recently been falling in love with the Holmes & Yang line, created by [the actress] Katie Holmes and Jeanne Yang. They do clothes with a masculine edge and they do them beautifully. But for comfy clothes I am a big thrift-shop shopper.

FAVOURITE BOOK *A Fraction of the Whole*, by Australian author Steve Toltz, is such a romp. It is hilarious and wonderful.

I'D LIKE TO BE STUCK IN A LIFT WITH...

Drew Barrymore [below right].

I would love to pick her brain about how she's built her incredible film empire and her approach as a businesswoman. I would make her talk me through it from beginning to end.

SAVING UP FOR my future. I hate spending money. I never want to have to work. I want the freedom to say no to jobs that I don't want to do. I'll never be broke because I save.



Kate's taken on and I admire that she's chosen to put her love for this man ahead [of all that]. It would have been a lot easier for her to have just been a normal person. I really hope that they'll be happy.

My grandparents on my father's side were missionaries in Africa and my father grew up in Nigeria. He spent his first five years living with ants and snakes in the bush. My grandfather was a Baptist minister out there, and when they came back he weighed 90lb. They had been starving with the locals.

When I was 18, I went on a [missionary] trip to the Philippines. I lived in the jungle in a grass hut for three weeks. I loved that experience. I was asked to go back and work full time as a teacher in the village, and I said yes, but my parents said no.

I've never lived in LA. I've never even worked in LA. Can you believe that? I went from Vancouver to Hawaii to New Zealand and now I live in Hawaii. Is it paradise? I think paradise is what you make it – you can find paradise anywhere you go. I really do think I live in paradise, but it's not just specific to Hawaii.

Writing is my passion. I wrote [the first draft of] my book when I was 14, and I worked harder than I've ever worked in my life to make it a reality. I got my first grey hairs! It is about a travelling group of marionettes. To me, it's a product of my English/Irish roots, because it is a bit dark and a bit naughty. My two-year-old son loves the title. Every time he sees it he says 'The Squickerw***ers.' I always go, 'no, Squickerwonkers, honey'. And then he goes, 'Squickerwickers'. But when I try to read it to him, he's bored within five pages. He needs to get a little bit older before he enjoys it.

I'm very grateful for my acting career because it has enabled me to do my writing.

I've written a couple of novels that need to be edited, and I would love to do a nonfiction book about beauty and self-esteem, because I get a lot of young women asking me questions about those issues. Looking in a magazine and saying, 'I want to look like her' will always make you the ugliest version of you. I want to tell girls that the first step towards becoming beautiful is accepting who you are. ▀

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug will be in cinemas from Friday