

ART & BOOKS

Is Fantasy a growth industry?

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The last few years have seen works of fantasy topping the box-office and best-seller lists alike.

Since 1997 when J.K. Rowling published her first *Harry Potter* novel, Pottermania has been spreading worldwide. Block-buster films and carefully monitored merchandising have ensured that the Potter pandemic thrives. Many people have benefited from this boom. According to *The Sunday Times*, Ms Rowling is now wealthier than Her Majesty the Queen. Warner Brothers, who have the exclusive film rights, have more than prospered as the last film they released grossed \$284.4 million at the US box office. Mattel who bought the rights to market *Harry Potter* toys has been doing equally well, while the city of Oxford is most grateful to the wizard boy whose fans come and visit its dreaming spires in droves.

In the wake of *Harry Potter*, other fantasy epics such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* were taken from the book-shelves to the screen. Both books had been literary classics for a long time before Hollywood producers showed interest: J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy was written in 1954 and 1955, while C.S. Lewis wrote the seven volumes of what would later be called *The Chronicles of Narnia* from 1950 to 1956.

The Lord of the Rings films became box-office hits almost before the first episode, *The Fellowship of the Ring* came out in 2001. It made more than 2 billion euros and earned director Peter Jackson a string of prizes. It is estimated that the trilogy pumped about US\$200 million into the New Zealand economy, boosting the tourist trade for many years to come. *The Lord of the Rings* has now been turned into a musical. The production opened at the beginning of February in Toronto, with big investors hopeful it is going to become yet another success. Air Canada, for example, contributed as much as C\$3 million.

With 85 million copies sold and translations in 29 languages, *The Chronicles* are the second best selling fantasy books in the world after...*Harry Potter*. But it took a while before they were turned into a film. At the time special effects were not state of the art yet and there was no computer-imaging program that was powerful enough. Disney eventually took up the challenge and the first of the seven part epic "*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*" came out last Christmas. It was also shot in New Zealand. This is a good opportunity for Disney to try and catch up with Warner Bros. Next December, Disney will present the second episode of *Narnia*, before the fifth *Harry Potter* movie which is due to come out in June 2007.

Other studios are vying for their share in the fantasy market. Century Fox is now entering the battlefield with *Eragon*, the first volume of *The Inheritance Trilogy* by Christopher Paolini, being billed as the ultimate blockbuster for next Christmas.

Sources: "New Frontiers, Current Cinema," *The New Yorker* 5 December 2005; "Parsons sees Time Warner exceed forecasts," *The Times* 26 February 2006; "Lord of Rings is now a musical," *The Sunday Times* 26 February 2006; "Harry Potter and the all-too-rare windfall," *The Economist* 18 July 2005; "Harry Potter and the synergy test," *The Economist* 18 November 2005; "Harry Potter and the merchandising gold," *The Economist* 19 June 2003; "Praise the Lord," *The Economist* 4 December 2004; "The big book index," *The Economist* 5 January 2006; International Movie date base : <http://www.imdb.com>