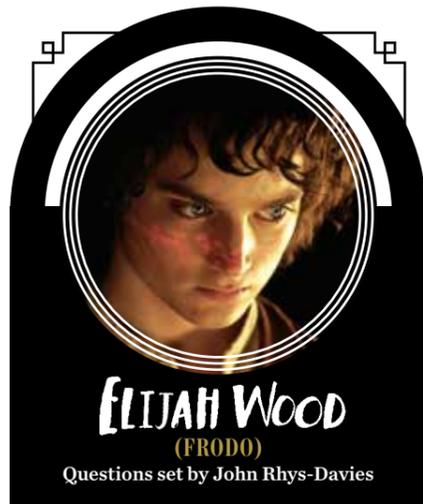


A glowing golden ring, likely the One Ring, is shown resting on a map of Middle-earth. The ring is illuminated from within, casting a warm, golden light. The map beneath it is detailed, showing various regions and landmarks, with the name 'ROHIRIM' clearly visible. The background is dark, making the glowing ring and the map stand out.

# THE RING Cycle

TO CELEBRATE THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF *THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*, WE ASKED EACH OF ITS NINE HEROES TO POSE NINE QUESTIONS TO ANOTHER. PREPARE FOR NOSTALGIA, PHILOSOPHY AND SHOCKING VINEGAR-BASED REVELATIONS

RINGMASTER NICK DE SEMLYEN ILLUSTRATION JUSTIN METZ TYPE PETER STRAIN



**ELIJAH WOOD**  
(FRODO)  
Questions set by John Rhys-Davies

**1 What surprised you most about *The Lord Of The Rings*?**

How intimate it felt. I had nothing to compare it to then, but this quality has become more special over time. All of us embarked on something that had never been done before, tucked away in beautiful New Zealand, and it all felt home-grown, like the world's largest independent film.

**2 Did it open new doors for you?**

Certainly. More profoundly, living abroad for the first time and the personal growth I experienced as a result set me forth on the rest of my life.

**3 Was there any detriment workwise to doing it?**

I don't think so. I definitely remember a feeling of not wanting to rest on the success of the films, but I didn't feel pigeonholed. I just knew I had to keep working and challenging myself.

**4 Have you acquired new interests?**

I DJ as a hobby, which has increasingly become a source of enjoyment and expression. I've always wanted to open a restaurant, as I'd love to marry the creativity of designing a space whilst giving a great chef a place to create. And opening a record store is something I've wanted to do since I was a teenager. Certainly no shortage of things I've dreamed about.

**5 What car do you drive?**

I have a 1984 Mercedes diesel wagon. It's long been a favourite car of mine and I finally found one in excellent condition last year.

**6 I hear you have a new TV series. What is it about?**

It's called *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and it's based on Douglas Adams' series of books. It's difficult to summarise, but essentially a wild, funny, mad detective show with a case that is constantly revealing itself as it goes along. I'm excited for people to dig in.



The Fellowship prepare to set off on their mighty quest. Straight after second breakfast.

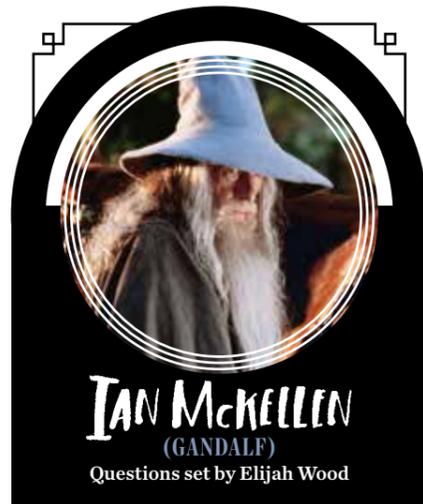
**7 Are you seeing someone?**  
Yes, sir.

**8 What do you say when young people ask about becoming an actor?**

That one should love the craft and have no other motivations beyond that passion. That it takes hard work and perseverance. Don't wait for the opportunities to come to you. Create your own.

**9 Where do you see yourself being another 15 years down the road?**

Still making films and hopefully directing. And I imagine I'll still be talking about these films: my love of New Zealand, the closeness of the cast and crew, the craftsmanship of the various departments and the new roads they paved, and so much more.



**IAN MCKELLEN**  
(GANDALF)  
Questions set by Elijah Wood

**1 It's been nearly 20 years since we all first arrived in New Zealand. What are your memories of those first months?**

I am the sort of optimist who only remembers the positives. So discovering New Zealand's culture and scenery sums up the joy of it all, and the family atmosphere Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh nurtured.

**2 What were your favourite parts of the country you visited on free time?**

Milford Sound, despite the biting, flying insects. The Coromandel coast in the North Island, where you can bathe in hot water on the beach and stare out at the South Pacific, green and sparkling.

**3 How long did it take you to recover from the constant barrage of script revisions?**

It was tiresome, wasn't it? Particularly for this theatre actor who has spent a career honouring a text, honed and settled before production starts. Still, it kept us on our toes and I always had the paperback hidden in my robe, to refer to.

**4 It's not often discussed that every line of dialogue was re-recorded in ADR for the entire trilogy. Though daunting, I remember it being a very intricate creative process. How was your experience?**

ADR is fun — a technical challenge that sometimes can improve original readings. Has it occurred to you that everyone in Middle-earth wore a wig and most of us a prosthetic of some sort? Feet and ears for you, nose for me.

**5 At the end of all things, I'll never forget returning home and finding it quite bizarre to assimilate to life again. How did you find it?**

A bit different for me, as I've often done wonderful long-lasting jobs away from home. But as it turned out I was back for the three *Hobbit* movies — it was such a joy that you were there too, for a little while.

**6 What felt most unique to you about the project?**

The real thrill — and an unusual one — was to know that millions of Tolkien fans wanted the film to be made. When we returned to complete filming after the release of the first one, there were none of the usual worries about whether our efforts would be appreciated.

**7 What did you keep from your time as Gandalf?**

I keep Glamdring in my hatstand and the pointy hat in the basement, often worn by visiting youngsters. Gandalf's staff is behind the bar in my Thames-side pub The Grapes. Don't tell Peter, but the keys to Bag End are hanging up at home.

**8 Upon visiting Bag End for the first time since it was relocated to Peter's home, I discovered a letter Gandalf had written to Frodo sitting on the mantelpiece. Do you know if he received Frodo's reply?**

I don't recall Gandalf mentioning it last time we spoke. Perhaps he simply forgot — not even wizards are perfect.

**9 How did your *Hobbit* experience differ from *The Lord Of The Rings*? Oh, and I'm sorry about the loud music the Hobbits often played in our shared make-up trailer. (And I miss and love you.)**

So many old friends behind the camera, but

ALAMY, ALLSTAR, GETTY, REX FEATURES



The bar staff at Ian McKellen's pub, The Grapes.

dollar entertainment company and President of the United States. I've had to settle for journeyman actor. *C'est la vie.*

**2 Without checking your website, how many awards have you won?**

Not as many as my mom used to think I should have. Maybe ten? I'm most proud of the SAG Ensemble Award we claimed together for *The Return Of The King*. The statue is quite heavy — I tell folks that it weighs the exact same as my sense of self-worth.

**3 How's the foundation in your mother's memory proceeding?**

Slowly. Thank you so much for asking. We've raised \$46,000, one fifth of the target. This is a generous and beautiful expression of love. At the moment, we are exploring holding a 5k walk/run in the Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, her home town of 30 years. I think it would be a cool living memorial for her. Pretty please stay tuned!

**4 Did you ever discover how Samwise got his name?**

As a half-wise or simple person myself, like ol' Sam, I never saw the need to know.

**5 Where do you keep the sword you were given when you completed *LOTR*?**

The garage, or maybe a cupboard, or in storage with a ton of fan art. I cried heavily through my send-off. I remember being presented with my costume, including Sam's backpack (pots, pans, sausages, elven rope, lembas bread, box of salt) and sword. But the most moving trophy was the wee dress [my daughter] Ali wore as she portrayed Elanor in the last moments of *ROTK*.

**6 Will you ever do a New Zealand marathon?**

It is possible — you know I completed the Ironman triathlon in Kona, Hawaii, last October? Ironman invited me to participate in one of their New Zealand triathlons, in the shadow of Mount Doom [Ruapehu]. I'm seriously considering it for March 2018.

**7 Would you like to be a guide at what remains of *Hobbiton*?**

No. I wouldn't mind building a Hobbit hotel there, though.

**8 Did you ever have another tattoo?**

Not yet. But I like the idea of someday getting a tattoo of my running charity #Run3rd's colourful logo.

**9 Will you give my love to the family?**

I can't give them something they will never lose. The impact you've had on Ali was greater than you could ever know. She studies drama at Harvard and did a report on one of your Shakespeare masterclasses (thanks, YouTube). Okay, I will give them your love. But, it's only polite for you to accept ours right back :-)))



**SEAN ASTIN**  
(SAMWISE)  
Questions set by Ian McKellen

**1 Coming from an acting family, was there ever anything else you imagined doing?**

By 14, I had decided on three modest goals: world-class filmmaker, CEO of a multi-billion-



**1 Why haven't we seen each other in forever?**

Because we are both busy, successful people with families and we live well over an hour away from each other. But you will always be in my heart, Hobbit brother. Also, you smell of vinegar.

**2 I heard you got hurt. Are you okay?**

Hmm, this week? I'm always getting hurt. I want my dead body to be strewn with scars. I broke my foot in Bali and healed poorly. So, I needed surgery to make sure all my toe and foot bones behave well moving forward.

**3 Are you ever going to manage Manchester United?**

Ha, I wish. Manchester United is one of my happy places. I converted many people to United fans. Including you!

**4 What is the state of your body, vis-à-vis tattoos?**

I think I have 12. My last one says, "What matters most is how well we walk through fire."

**5 If there is ever a Goonies sequel, would you be in it?**

Of course! It's one of my favourite childhood movies. Up there with *Labyrinth* and *The Dark Crystal*. I want to go down into the treasure spot!

**6 You spend so much time with deadly creatures [in TV show *Wild Things With Dominic Monaghan*]... do you think people can be poisonous too?**

You mean venomous? Certainly in terms of energy. We are all sponges to other humans' vibes and want to empathise. But I will not seek out complainers or blamers. Good vibes only.

**7 Which Beatle would you be and why?**

Even though Lennon is my favourite, I think he was in hell a lot of the time, so living as him might be torture. George seemed to have the most fun. Great garden. Gorgeous women. Cosmic.



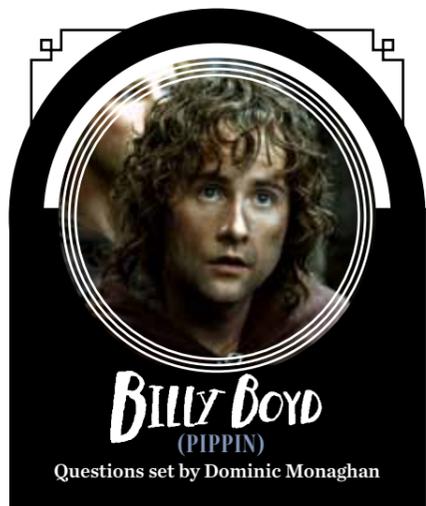
**8 Are you happy?**

With these questions? Seventy-one per cent. In life? Of course! My foot is irksome but my life is an A+. I'd give myself a solid 86 per cent currently. Also my little nephew makes me beam.

**9 Whatever happened to that black car?**

*Empire* readers should know that Sean sold me his BMW 318i after I moved to LA. Yes, sold it to me. From one millionaire Hobbit to another with barely a tuppence to my name! After buying it I had to sell my body on Hollywood Boulevard. Thankfully, my body is tight like a Ukrainian gymnast's and I made the money back in days. Well, nights.

I gave it away after it almost killed me on my driveway. I was having it towed and it pinned me to my house. I was very close to death. Maybe the closest I've been. So yes, Sean Astin almost killed me. After taking my cash. I love you, Sean!



**1 What has been the greatest lesson of being a dad?**

Seeing the world through a new pair of eyes. It teaches you how exciting everything can be if we really try to look at it anew. How joy can be everywhere if we open ourselves up to it.

**2 Which historical figure do you most identify with?**

This is so hard because it will always sound egotistical. Can I identify myself with Stan Laurel? I'm not that funny! Gandhi? I'm not



that good! But to answer off the top of my head I would say George Harrison. When I read about him or see him talking I can identify with his thinking. He loved to create but was not overly comfortable with promoting.

**3 What inspires you more than anything else?**

The size of the universe. I find if I just sit and think about it, it makes me happy and somehow inspires me.

**4 Give an example of a genius.**

Prince. Probably no-one had a bigger impact in my growing up. So sad that he passed away so young.

**5 Which existing song do you wish you had written?**

I could easily pick a Prince song! But to mix it up a bit, I will pick one from George Harrison. Can



about being bad at something. Oh... and learn a language.  
To 100: If you could live again, where in the world would you spend most of your time?

**9 You are stranded on an island. You can know only one concept fully and truly. What is it?**

Meditation.



**1 Is there a Shakespearean character you would like to play?**

I would, at this time in my life, choose either Shylock or Timon. Of the female characters, Margaret of Anjou.

**2 If you could speak one other language, what would it be?**

Arabic. I speak a little, but would like to be fluent: it would allow me to better understand, and more ably try to make myself understood, in countries that have Arabic as their primary language. It would also give me a better chance to do something concrete, in the field, to help refugees in and from the Middle East.

**3 If you could play for one sports team in the world, which would it be?**

As an attacking midfielder for Club Atlético San Lorenzo de Almagro, of Boedo, Argentina.

**4 If you could live one day over, which would you pick?**

I would rather not live any day over again. Things have been, are, and will be just so, and justly so.

**5 Is there a scene from Tolkien not in the films that you wish was?**

I'd like to have seen what Peter Jackson would have done with the character Ghân-buri-Ghân, the chief of the Drúedain, wild men of the Drúadan Forest. Seeing him lead King Théoden and his army of Rohirrim through the forest to join the fight to save Minas Tirith would have been thrilling.

**6 If you could eat one thing right now, what would it be?**

Cedar-wood campfire-roasted Agria potatoes with aioli sauce on the side.

**7 If you could kiss me again, would you?**

I am anxiously counting the interminable minutes that pass until it happens again.

**8 If you could own any piece of art, what would it be?**

*A Poplar-Lined Road At Sunset, France* by Minerva Chapman.

**9 If you could play with one band, who would it be?**

I would love to tour with guitarist Buckethead, with the accompaniment, as needed, of high-tide surf in winter, running up and down a gravel beach, the morning tunes of song sparrows, different kinds of rain on a variety of tin roofs, and Johnny Hartman singing Irving Berlin's *They Say It's Wonderful* from the 1963 LP *John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman*.

I'd play piano and maybe sing now and then, or recite poems — and we'd jam together in ancient movie houses and natural outdoor settings, with projected silent movies for inspiration. Movies like Dreyer's *The Passion Of Joan Of Arc*, Murnau's *Sunrise*, Vidor's *The Crowd*, Steiner's *H2O*, or Reiniger's *The Adventures Of Prince Achmed*, as well as anonymous home movies. Or perhaps simply just you and me, a guitar, a piano, and your lovely voice. And Buckethead ought to come with us — why not?



**1 Is there a scene from LOTR you would want to reshoot?**

I wouldn't say I'd like to reshoot anything, but I wouldn't mind going back and doing it all again. The first one, anyway :)

**2 What character have you most enjoyed playing in the theatre?**



Macbeth. The darkness of the story always fascinated me. I first saw it performed with Ian McKellen and Judi Dench in Wath-upon-Deerne near Rotherham and found it totally enthralling. I suppose it was always an ambition to play the part and I went on to do so in the West End. But basically, I just like evil shit!

**3 Did you watch Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy?**

Yes, I did, and was very impressed. It was so interesting to see characters like Bilbo and Gandalf in their early years. The landscapes and ancient woodland settings jolted my memories of being on the set of *Lord Of The Rings*. And you in full costume, fishing in a river in the middle of the night like a nutcase.

**4 When were you last in New Zealand?**

Unfortunately, I haven't had the chance to go back since we finished filming. One conciliation is that my daughter married a Kiwi earlier this year. He has a large family there, so we'll always have a place to stay when I make the journey back one day.

**5 Which of the books you've read this year is your favourite?**

My favourite, as usual, is the one I am reading presently. Which is *Berlin Noir* by Philip Kerr.

**6 I've been preparing some new trees – Basque Country oaks, a silver birch, and a few sugar maples. What have you been planting lately?**

Some weeping silver birch and willow. I intend to plant more saplings of elder, hornbeam, dogwood and hawthorn every autumn, so in time I'll create a small wood with various leaf colours. My garden is a mixture of topiaries and evergreens, with areas of wilderness you can get lost in.

**7 What is the worst injury you have ever suffered?**

I fell through a glass door as a child and almost lost my leg. It was hanging off and took me nearly a year to recover. But I'm alright now, thanks.

**8 Do you believe we humans have free will?**

Yes, I believe we have if we allow it to thrive and develop, without the impositions of propaganda and prejudice. Free will can only flourish when we are surrounded by art, literature and music.

**9 It has been a while since you and I have seen each other – I believe the last time was at the Empire Awards a few years ago – and I miss your company. I cannot for the life of me remember whose turn it is to buy the next round. Do you?**

I think it's yours. Actually, I don't remember either. I do remember sharing a bottle of whiskey with you, which you took up onto the stage when you won your well-earned award. (After your critique of Russell Crowe.) It was a fine night.



Here: Under siege in the mines of Moria. John Rhys-Davies' Nokia 6310i just out of shot. Below: Viggo, Sean, award and whiskey: ingredients for a memorable night.



**1 Do you find yourself always having to explain the meaning of your LOTR tattoo?**

All day and night.

**2 Have you still got any of the stuff you nicked from the set?**

Er... I did not "nick" anything! I was too young and innocent for that. Actually I lie, I may

have somehow managed to wander off with an elven brooch.

**3 Where do you call home these days?**

Between the US and the UK. Too long in one and I crave the other. I've called Shanghai home for the last two months: I am here filming.

**4 What is your TV guilty pleasure?**

Most recently *Stranger Things* – reminds me of the Americana I watched and loved on TV growing up. I tend to wait until the whole season is out and then binge.

**5 What do you believe is most destructive to the soul?**

Are you forcing me to think and feel, Sean? Well, Albert Einstein, one of the wizards of our time, said "stupidity, fear and greed". There's a lot of that around, particularly if you turn on the news. The antidotes are courage, wisdom and compassion – which are coincidentally the qualities of most Hobbits. The rest of us elves and humans have to work harder to manifest them.

**6 The last time I enjoyed your company was in a pub in North London on a hot summer's afternoon. What memory occurs to you of us together?**



Remember when you and I got stranded between two landslides? We were driving from the top of the South Island to the bottom. We all know how you hate to fly and this was a way to avoid that flight down. The rain started just before we left and didn't stop for 12 hours. We had to manoeuvre around tree debris and I remember thinking, "I wish this car was a 4x4." Then we drove up to a landslide that had taken out the whole

road. We had to turn back, only to be told while refuelling at a petrol station that there'd been an even bigger slide in the other direction. We had to be on set the next day, so ended up being choppered out in torrential rain and howling wind. It had compounded into your worst nightmare! I'll never forget those white knuckles of yours clapping my knee as the chopper took off.

**7 What was it like becoming a father?**

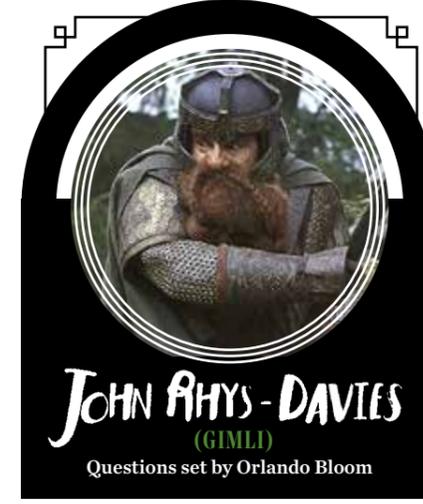
No single moment has had such a profound effect on my life as when I held my son after his mother had endured 27 hours of labour. That should teach any man the meaning of respect for mothers the world over.

**8 As a heartthrob myself, I wondered if you had any tips to stop the signs of ageing? (Just asking for a friend.)**

Being a heartthrob yourself, you'll know that there's only one answer to tell your friend: love. When your heart throbs it keeps you younger. That's why we're called heartthrobs – duh.

**9 What is your passion, apart from acting?**

Mastering the art of living, which I will never do, so that learning curve keeps me thoroughly occupied.



**1 What was the last photo you took on your phone?**

Mock me, would you, you piss-taking, pointy-eared devil! He knows, gentle readers, that I still use the phone I had in New Zealand in 1999, a Nokia 6310i, which has no camera! Actually I have 11 of them, six working at any given time. Tri-band, almost unbreakable, work anywhere in the world. Downside? Battery life. I'm having to charge mine every nine days now.

**2 What advice would you give drama students?**

This sums up everything involved in a successful entertainment career: "The drama's laws the

drama's patrons give And we, who live to please, must please to live." Learn it. Think about it every day of your working life.

**3 What's been your happiest moment?**

You mean apart from holding my children in my arms, exultation between the sheets, flying a plane into a sweet landing? It must have been working with you, dear chap!

**4 Do you regret not getting the Fellowship tattoo? There's still time!**

Tattoo is herd identification, and I'm not a herd animal. That's not to say I think of any of the Fellowship as herd animals. (Animals, certainly!) If you want to show you can take the pain, give a kidney and save a life!

**5 Who inspires you?**

My father Rhys, an unarmed colonial policeman whom I once saw talk down a mob trying to kill a drunken driver who'd hit and killed a child. There were 300 angry people around him and he must have known how close he was to death, but he was calm and serene and carried the day by his authority. What a gift to give a son! To show moral and physical courage at the same time!

**6 When you procrastinate, what do you do?**

Wot! Me procrastinate? Never! What others may perceive as my procrastination is, of course, deep thought, a detailed and exhaustive analysis of the pros and cons of each question and the myriad multi-faceted implications that might result from any seemingly straightforward utterance. A letter from the IRS is as challenging as a game of postal chess with Korchnoi. It's not procrastination – it's Ent-think. Let Treebeard be your model for such deliberations!

**7 What is a skill you would like to learn?**

Brevity.

**8 Can you share one memory from your childhood in Tanzania?**

I saw a slave ship – a *dhow* – in Dar es Salaam harbour in 1955. Saudi Arabia only abolished slavery ten years later. I have a fury against any religion that justifies slavery. It is an abomination and still widespread.

**9 If you could be any animal, what would it be?**

I see myself as an old silverback gorilla, keeping watch for possible places for ambush, whilst the troop grazes. And there are far too many places for an ambush. More than in my youth.

Glad to see you've learned not to capsize canoes. Though looking at the pictures, I'm glad I'm not hanging out with you these days. Stay the course, my elvish friend. Love to you and yours, and all of the Nine and the Greater Fellowship of fans and readers.

PS Say "hi" to Mum. ●