

THE FANTASIST



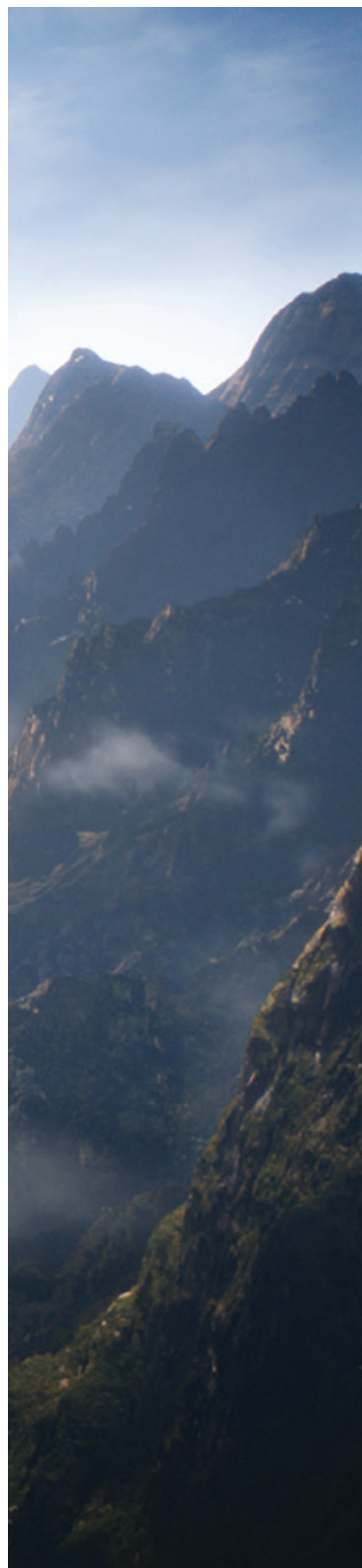
COURTESY PRIME VIDEO

LINDSEY WEBER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ON THE EAGERLY ANTICIPATED *LOTR* PREQUEL *THE RINGS OF POWER*, KNOWS A THING OR TWO ABOUT SHEPHERDING BIG IPS TO FRUITION.

WRITTEN BY ROBERT ABELE

Asking about the intangibles and tangibles of being a successful producer gets an appropriately wide-ranging answer from someone for whom seeing Amazon's massive, billion-dollar *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* series to completion is their current preoccupation. Or, considering the source material, let's use the term "quest."

So what's an intangible tool? "It requires an enormous amount of patience," says Lindsey Weber, an executive producer on Amazon Studios' foray into old-yet-new Middle-earth territory that will premiere September 2. "Obviously we all do our best, and I try to remember how hard people are working for the show. Having a company trust you with this undertaking, then being an employer yourself, it's sort of humbling, and something I think about a lot. These jobs are a privilege, and this one requires literally thousands of pairs of hands."



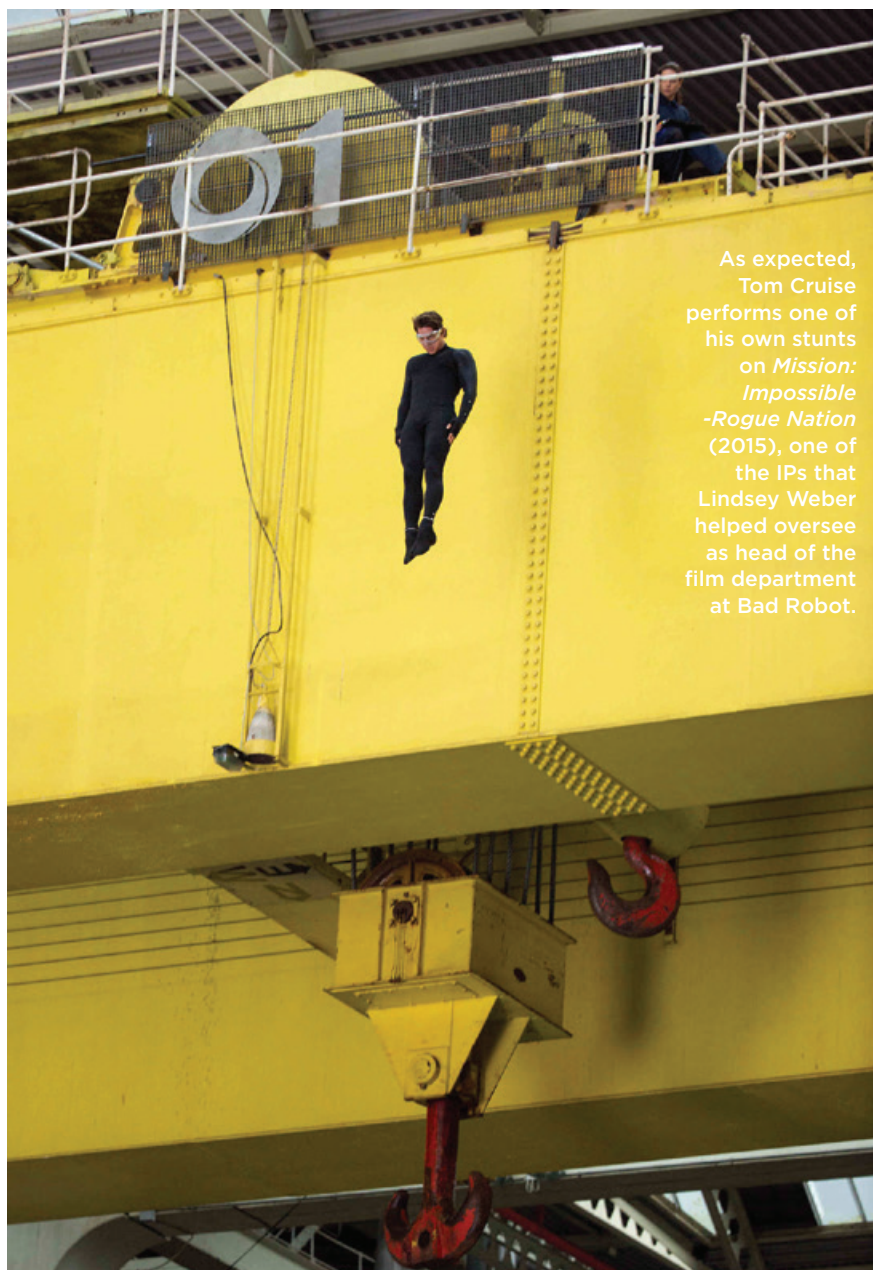
And something tangible? “Muddy set boots are always in the car, available at all times,” she says, laughing. “Because you never know when your fancy dinner shoes need to go away and you have to be standing on a hillside somewhere with no notice!”

HONORING THE SOURCE

Those elemental locations may have changed in the last few years—the first season filmed in New Zealand, where filmmaker Peter Jackson made his six Tolkien epics—while further seasons will be based in the UK. But for Weber, the mission is the same: honoring a beloved intellectual property, fostering the artists making it, and helping first-time showrunners JD Payne and Patrick McKay deliver a knockout show for Amazon on time and on (a still-enormous) budget. “There’s nothing that’s not your problem,” says Weber, who has toiled on the project since 2018. “Which is sort of why I like producing. Because it’s never dull. Every day is different.”

The era of big IPs is different, too, from when Weber was at Bad Robot and in the thick of JJ Abrams’ shepherding of such treasured franchises as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Mission: Impossible*. “I learned an enormous amount about IP management,” says Weber, who joined Bad Robot in 2007 when Abrams was ramping up its movie division, and eventually worked her way to running the film department. “I got to see a lot of thought and care around how these things are handled on the studio side, the production company side, and by the filmmakers. I learned to never stop fighting for the best version of a thing.”

But she describes *LOTR* as “another level of fan engagement and deep passion. On *Star Trek*, we were not speaking to the



As expected, Tom Cruise performs one of his own stunts on *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation* (2015), one of the IPs that Lindsey Weber helped oversee as head of the film department at Bad Robot.

“GOOD PRODUCERS ANTICIPATE PROBLEMS AND WORK ON SOLVING THEM BEFORE THEY CROP UP. AND MOMS MAKE GREAT PRODUCERS BECAUSE THEY’RE CARETAKERS.”

Roddenberry estate all the time, as we are (to the Tolkien estate) on this show. So it's been a really different journey. It calls for a level of craftsmanship and attention to detail because it has stood the test of time for so long. It's just an enormous amount of pressure."

NURTURE IN HER NATURE

Weber's move to Amazon and *LOTR* speaks to how closely she nurtures talent and develops relationships as a creative producer. She first met Payne and McKay at Bad Robot, working with the up-and-coming screenwriters on a variety of projects, always championing their storytelling and invention. When the pair were crafting their *LOTR* pitch to Amazon after the streamer plunked down \$250 million for the rights to JRR Tolkien's books, she became their biggest cheering section and a valuable sounding board.

"I knew their writing, how ambitious and extravagant it is, and their take was amazing," she says. "Their phrase was 'a 50-hour mega epic.' It was film on TV, at the highest possible level. I could only picture how much fun it would be to work on, and when they were hired, I was like, 'OK, make sure you do this, start this way as producers.' Then the people at Amazon were calling me saying, 'Well, you know JD and Patrick really well, how should we help them?' I wound up talking to both sides, truly just as a friend of the court."

It was also, she grasps now, an inadvertent employment application. Weber's belief in their vision, and readily available advice, eventually spurred Payne and McKay to ask her to come on board for real. Weber says she didn't it see coming. "I loved television, but pictured my life being in film," she says. "Those were the stories I was most interested in growing up. I worked in a video

Star Trek Beyond (far right) was made on Lindsey Weber's watch at Bad Robot.





COURTESY BERLETTY FRENCH / PARAMOUNT PICTURES

store when I was 16. My first Hollywood job was at Ed Pressman's company. I love script development. But as things became more about the preexisting franchise in the film world—with the focus on big opening weekends narrowing the field of the kinds of movies being made—things became less interesting sometimes. It was JD and Patrick who talked me into TV as the future."

Now, as the lead creative producer and an in-house television producer at Amazon, she's overseeing an operation that's requiring her and the producing team to find ways to blend the feature acumen required for maintaining high values with the episodic-minded efficiency needed for longform narrative. Having a five-season commitment helped when it came to setting up the show's infrastructure, and so did throwing out preconceived notions of how a series is made. "We're able to take the longer-term eye to it all and do some really forward-looking things on the technological perspective and the resource perspective in terms of sets and costumes," says Weber. "We really have to look at this as its own beast."

She's realizing, also, that a career like hers never stops evolving. "The more you learn, the more there is to know," says Weber, who is already

implementing what was gleaned from making season 1 into the filming of season 2. "It's what I really love about television. There's always another level of proficiency you can get into, whether it's technological or structural or how you work with a crew, or information flow."

CHANNELING GALADRIEL

Now that she's immersed herself in Tolkien's Second Age of Middle-earth, Weber knows which of the author's characters she'd most like to be: regal elf Galadriel, who, played by Morfydd Clark, will be seen in *The Rings of Power* hunting down a gathering evil and needing to convince others of her concerns. "I really love how in touch with her gut instinct she is," says Weber. "It's beautiful to watch. Producers tend to be a cerebral, neurotic bunch, and watching her charge through the world of the show, determined to achieve her goals, is really satisfying."

Asked if she believes women naturally make great producers, Weber says yes. "I think it can be easier to hear difficult news from a woman," she says. "Women are generally emotionally intuitive, and that can be helpful in situations where lots of people are working together in high-pressure situations. I've found that men will often let down

COURTESY JASON BELL / PRIME VIDEO

their guard more with me than maybe they would if I were a 6-foot-tall man.”

Weber is a parent, too, of an 8-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son, and she can easily draw a line from a mom’s radar to a producer’s mindset. “All day long, we walk into rooms and assess what’s going on, thinking about the big picture, trade-offs,” says Weber, whose husband, Mike Weber, is a producer too. “Good producers anticipate problems and work on solving them before they crop up. And moms make great producers because they’re caretakers. You need to know how to instantly toggle between a firm hand and a loving shoulder to cry on.”

Though working on *The Rings of Power* has meant acclimating to episodic storytelling, navigating a pandemic, moving her family twice—first to New Zealand, now to London—and often spending long hours away from them, she doesn’t see her work as stressful. “It feels joyful,” she says. “I’m doing something I believe in. I’ve learned how much I love it.” ■

The filmmakers behind Amazon’s upcoming series *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*, perform their magic on a New Zealand soundstage.



COURTESY BEN POTTFESTEN/PRIME VIDEO

NEW MEMBERS

PRODUCED BY TRAINS THE SPOTLIGHT ON SOME OF THE GUILD’S NEWEST MEMBERS, AND OFFERS A GLIMPSE AT WHAT MAKES THEM TICK.



ZAK KILBERG

Zak Kilberg, an executive producer on such films as *The Mauritanian* (2021) and *Buena Vista Social Club: Adios* (2017), credits his parents for his choice of career

path. “My parents introduced me to live theater when I was very young,” says the founder and CEO of the production company Social Construct. “I immediately gravitated to creative storytelling and performing arts. It took several forms over the next few decades, first as an actor, then writer and director. When I realized it was the producer that ultimately selects the stories that are told, I began focusing my energy exclusively toward that work and skill set.”

BUCKET LIST

Kilberg describes Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert’s *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, which he saw at SXSW in March, as a model project for “the way that it combines genres so effectively while holding together a complex and deeply moving human narrative. Completely absurd, crazy and fun. It just felt like the impossible film to make. For my bucket list, I’d like to make a few impossible films.”

ROAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT: “Simply working closely with great producers and witnessing the way they navigate the countless obstacles and challenges that come along with the work we do has been invaluable to my experience. To name a couple names, Bruce Cohen and Bill Horberg have both been incredible mentors and collaborators to me over the years.”