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A relaxing meal at **Brimble's Bistro** The wild side of **Benicio Del Toro** Family favourite visits **The Lake District** Dragons and reefs in **Cairns** One-man Tolkien in **The Big Feature** Relaxation and treats for **Shop Spy**

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THE GUIDE

Charles Ross
P22-23



RINGLEADER



There's surely nothing more disconcerting when you're trying to do a one-man comedy show than being watched in the audience by Death.

This is not merely about dying on stage. Millions of comics have died on stage and lived to quip another day.

This is about the actual figure of Death. Eight ft tall. Clad head to toe in black and occasionally clutching its sides with long, bony fingers.

If that doesn't put you off your stride, nothing will.

"Yeah, that was a surreal one," says Canadian actor and funnyman Charles Ross.

As the creator and sole performer of the One Man Star Wars show, all three of George Lucas's original space adventures compressed into 60 comic minutes, the 35-year-old was used to people turning up to his gigs in fancy dress. He'd think nothing to

bluffer's guide

Gandalf: The mighty Gandalf The Grey himself, aka actor Sir Ian McKellen, watched Ross's show in Vancouver in what the Canadian describes as "the most nerve-wracking performance of my life". Luckily, McKellen gave the show a glowing thumbs-up.

The (York) Shire: During his One Man Star Wars tour, Ross spent a day off in Hull. He says he enjoyed it.

Precious: One of the more unusual places Ross has performed his One Man Star Wars show was in the Canadian Rockies for two German backpackers who paid him \$500 for a private show.

Future: Ross says he may do a one-man show based on another famous trilogy, such as Indiana Jones.

MAN OF MANY PARTS: Canadian actor Charles Ross, in One Man Lord Of The Rings.



One show to rule them all

performing in a room full of Jedi and Ewoks, with a fair few Sith, Gomorian Guards and Jawas thrown in for good measure.

But it's only since he started doing his latest condensed classic, One Man Lord Of the Rings, that things have started to get really scary. That's why, one night, he came face-to-face with Death.

"It wasn't death exactly," he laughs. "It was one of the Ringwraiths, one of Tolkien's undead Nazgul, who turned up one night. I'd had a fair few people dressed up as Hobbits and a few Gandalfs watch the show before – but this guy was really impressive.

"He must have been 8ft tall and all dressed-up in black robes. I've no idea how he saw out of the costume. Or for that matter how the guy in the seat behind him could see.

"But it was quite mind-blowing to see a vision of Death in front of me throughout the whole show."

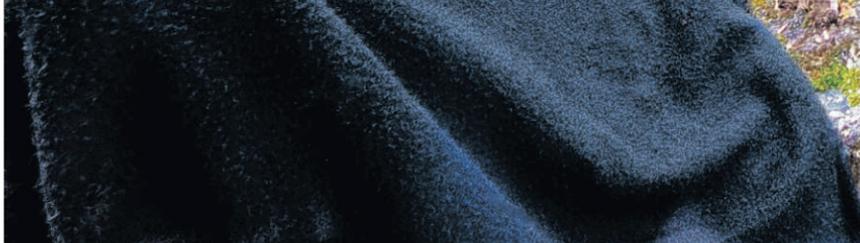
After the global success of One Man Star Wars, which he has performed more than 1,200 times in

80 cities across four continents, it was perhaps only a matter of time before Ross turned his attention to arguably the only other great trilogy of the 20th century – JRR Tolkien's Lord Of The Rings.

Growing up on an isolated farm in the remote settlement of Prince George, in northern Canada, where the winters last for eight months and temperatures can drop to a teeth-chattering -40C (that's enough to chill even a Hobbit's heart), young Ross had no TV and just three videos to help while away the hours.

The first was George Lucas's epic space opera, the second was the mildly titillating Blue Lagoon – best known as the movie where Brooke Shields gets her kit off – and Shogun, the Richard Chamberlain mini-series about a British naval captain lost in feudal Japan.

As a youngster, the budding Jedi spent hours memorising every line of dialogue from Star Wars which, when his family moved to a slightly more social urban environment, eventually paid off when the fledgling actor decided to stop



waiting for the phone to ring and, taking his future into his own hands, create his own one man show.

But while Ross spent many hours glued to his Star Wars video, he spent even longer buried deep in Tolkien's Middle Earth.

"It was a no-brainer for me," says the actor who is preparing to bring his hobbit homage to Hull New Theatre on Tuesday, March 9, as part of a 50-date UK tour. "It was always such an easy choice to make because when I was a child I absolutely devoured Lord Of The Rings.

"Star Wars was my film of choice, but Lord Of The Rings were always the books I turned up. They're such fabulous creations and flights of the imagination that they came in very

handy during long, boring nights.

"When I heard they were making them into films I think I was a little sceptical, like any fan would be, but I think they pulled it off spectacularly well."

In the new one man show, the livewire actor performs more than 40 parts – from central characters such as Frodo Baggins and Gandalf to bit-player Orc henchmen – taking the audience on a breakneck race from The Shire to Mount Doom in a rollercoaster 60 minutes.

Along the way he reintroduces classic characters such as Gollum and Gimli, the dwarf with unnervingly accurate impressions. Check out his version of Gollum on Youtube and you'll wonder why they

ONE MAN LORD OF THE RINGS

When: Tues, March 9, 7.30pm

Where: Hull New Theatre, Kingston Square, Hull

Tickets: £15

To book: (01482) 226655

Web: www.hullcc.gov.uk
www.onemanlordoftherings.com

bothered with the whole CGI palaver for the big screen.

"It is quite physically demanding," says Ross. "Much more so than Star Wars was. I don't know why that is. Maybe it's because I'm 35 now and I

started out doing Star Wars when I was 28 – so physically it's going to be tougher. But I think when I set my mind to doing this, I approached it with the mindset that I wanted to trump Star Wars, I wanted to make this bigger and better. Maybe that's why it's more physical – because I subconsciously set out to create a bigger show."

Although he was undeniably influenced by Peter Jackson's movie adaptations of Tolkien, Ross says he always returned to the source material when creating his show.

"I went to the books and read them, and re-read them and re-read them," he says. "I mean, when you're dealing with a masterpiece, why look anywhere else?"