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Orlando Bloom Biography

January 13, 1977 • Canterbury, England

Actor



Bloom, Orlando.

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Orlando Bloom is best known for playing the elf warrior Legolas Greenleaf in the epic film trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*. His ability as an actor was appreciated by critics, but the bigger story was that over the course of the three films Bloom attracted an enormous number of fans. Although his naturally dark features were disguised by a waist-length blonde wig, blue contact lenses, and pointy ears, young girls the world over discovered a new heartthrob. Bloom's success as Legolas opened doors for the classically trained English actor, who has gone on to appear in a number of other critically acclaimed movies. In addition, he became one of the hottest young properties in Hollywood, making *Entertainment Weekly*'s "It list" in 2003.

Early bloomer

Orlando Bloom was born on January 13, 1977, in Canterbury, England. His mother, Sonia, ran a foreign language school; his father, Harry, was a human rights activist, lawyer, and author. Before moving to Canterbury the elder Blooms lived in South Africa, where Harry Bloom (1913–1981) was a fierce fighter in the struggle against apartheid, a policy of racial segregation. When Orlando was only four years old, his father died after suffering a stroke. He and his older sister, Samantha, were raised by their mother, who had a profound effect on her children.

Sonia Bloom was a businesswoman, but she was also a true lover of the arts. She even named her son after her favorite English composer, Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625). While growing up, Sonia frequently took Orlando and Samantha to the theater, and encouraged both of them to attend drama classes and Bible reading classes. By the age of eight Bloom was appearing in school plays, and he and his sister were competing in local festivals. As Bloom recounted to Siobhan Synnot on the *scotsman.com* Web site, "You had to read out stories or poetry, and we always won."

His introduction to the theater made Bloom decide at an early age that he wanted to be an actor. Acting was also a positive outlet for Bloom, since it helped him work through some early childhood problems. For one thing, as he told Synnot, he was "quite a chubby kid." Part of the chubbiness came about during his recovery from a skiing injury that happened when he was nine—while Bloom was recovering, he moped about the house and ate candy bars. A more serious issue arose when he was diagnosed with severe dyslexia, which means that he has trouble reading and processing language. While attending St. Edmund's School in Canterbury, he was often teased about his poor spelling.

"I'd really like to take a role that doesn't involve a sword."

At age thirteen Bloom received another blow when he learned from his mother that Harry Bloom was not his real father. His biological father (and Samantha's as well) was a man named Colin Stone, a longtime family friend who was also Bloom's legal guardian. In interviews, Bloom has sometimes seemed uncomfortable talking about the issue, but the revelation does not seem to have caused a great deal of disruption. As he explained to Synnot, "I was lucky, I had two dads.... As long as I can remember, Colin has been a good friend, but I always thought Harry was my real father."

(Fast Facts for Orlando Fans

- Bloom considers himself to be incredibly accident prone. He has broken both his legs (in skiing accidents), his nose (a rugby injury), a wrist (while snowboarding), and a toe (crushed by a horse). He has even suffered a few skull fractures. For example, when Bloom was a toddler, he toppled off a kitchen stool.
- While filming *The Lord of the Rings* films in New Zealand, Bloom and the other nine actors who made up the "fellowship of the ring" became so close-knit that they decided to get tattoos. Bloom has the elf symbol for the number nine tattooed on his forearm.
- Bloom is an excellent sculptor. He studied sculpting in school and hopes to one day have his own sculpting studio. As Bloom explained to Catriona Hawatson of the *Sunday Times (UK)*, "It is important to exercise different creative areas of your brain. It balances you."
- Around his neck Bloom wears a number of charms and trinkets. Some of them are gifts, such as a key ring that was given to him by Johnny Depp; others are things that Bloom has found on his travels, such as a shell from Thailand, a prayer baton from India, and a silver ball from Tokyo, Japan.

(Budding actor

Bloom left St. Edmunds when he was sixteen years old to join the National Youth Theatre in London. After two seasons he won a scholarship to train with the British American Drama Academy. While there he auditioned for parts on television and in theater. Bloom then spent three years studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, a prestigious London school that was the training ground for such newly famous English actors as Ewan McGregor (c. 1971–), Joseph Fiennes (1970–), and Ben Chaplin (c. 1969–). In 1998 Bloom made his first film appearance, a small, one-line part in the movie *Wilde*, about English playwright Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Several movie offers followed, but a serious accident put a brief crimp in Bloom's career and had a life-changing effect on the budding actor.

When he was twenty-one years old, while shimmying along the drainpipe of a friend's apartment in an attempt to open a window, Bloom fell three stories and broke his back. The possibility that he would be paralyzed was very real. Metal plates were bolted to his spine and he wore a back brace for almost a year. Bloom also endured months of rehabilitation. As he told Allison Glock of *Gentleman's Quarterly*, the accident made him realize how lucky he was to be alive. He recounted to Glock how one person in particular helped him to put things in perspective: "I had this one great teacher who came to visit and said to me, 'This is going to be the making of you.' And it was."

Miraculously, Bloom recovered enough to return to his regular life at Guildhall. Just two days before graduation, in 1999, he found out from his agent that director Peter Jackson (1961–) had chosen him to appear in his film trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, which was based on the fantasy trilogy written by English author J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973). Originally Bloom had hoped for the role of the human named Faramir, who is introduced in *The Two Towers*, the second film in the series. Jackson, however, felt Bloom was perfect for the role of Legolas Greenleaf, the elf warrior of Mirkwood. Since Legolas is one of the main characters in the story, it meant that Bloom would appear in all three films of the trilogy.

(Joins the fellowship

The Lord of the Rings is the epic tale of nine warriors (four hobbits, two humans, a dwarf, an elf, and a wizard) who must form a fellowship in order to save their mythical world of Middle Earth from destruction. It is a sweeping adventure story, and bringing it to the screen was a major undertaking. In an interview with Henry Cabot Beck in *Interview* magazine, Bloom admitted that it was more than a little intimidating for his first big role to be in such a major movie. The young actor spent months preparing to play Legolas, since the role required him to be an expert at archery, sword fighting, and horseback riding. After recovering from his back injury, Bloom welcomed the physical challenge. "It was like winning the lottery," he told Beck. "I mean, imagine being flown to this amazing country and being taught how to shoot a bow and arrow, learn to ride horses, and study swordplay."

The "amazing country" was New Zealand, where cast and crew spent almost two years filming the three movies. While in New Zealand, Bloom and his costars became very close, forming almost a family bond. Bloom was considered the daredevil of the bunch, since he spent what free time he had bungee jumping, snowboarding, and learning how to surf. In addition, he performed most of his own stunts. During one scene Bloom fell from his horse and broke a rib. He was back in the saddle within a few days.

The trilogy was released over a three-year period. *The Fellowship of the Ring* was unveiled in 2001, followed by *The Two Towers* in 2002, and *The Return of the King* in 2003. All three movies broke box office records and all three were critically acclaimed. In 2002 Bloom received an award for Best Debut at the Empire Awards, sponsored by the British film magazine *Empire*. He also won the Breakthrough Male honor at the 2002 MTV Movie Awards. At the same time, fans around the world catapulted the young actor to fame. Synnot estimated that after *Fellowship* was released, almost thirty thousand Internet sites sprang up that were devoted to the handsome Brit. Before *The Two Towers* had even opened in theaters, there were over one million Orlando Bloom Web sites. The modest Bloom explained away the phenomenon to Kate Stroup of *Newsweek*: "Legolas is a good, safe guy for girls to pin their dreams on."

(Life after Middle Earth

While working on *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bloom took a small role in director Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* (2001), a movie about the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu in Somalia, East Africa. The film was a case of art imitating life: Bloom played a U.S. Army Ranger who breaks his back falling from a helicopter. The part was small but pivotal, and Bloom was applauded for his efforts. Just two years out of school, the twenty-three-year-old actor had appeared in two of the top movies of 2001, and he was just getting started.

Bloom continued to appear in films that challenge him physically, and he also shared the screen with some of Hollywood's more established heartthrobs. In 2003 he costarred in *Ned Kelly*, a shoot-'em-up movie about a notorious Australian outlaw. Australian hunk Heath Ledger (1979–) played the lead, while Bloom portrayed Joe



Orlando Bloom (left) and Diane Kruger in a movie still from *Troy* (2004).

© Warner Brothers Pictures/Zuma/Corbis.

Byrne, a member of Kelly's gang. Although he was in a supporting role, Bloom stole the spotlight. According to Lisa Schwarzbaum in *Entertainment Weekly*, "The effortlessly charismatic Bloom ... dims our interest in Ledger every time the two share a scene."

In 2003 Bloom also costarred in a big-budget Disney picture, *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, based on the Disney theme park ride of the same name. This time the leading man was Johnny Depp (c. 1963–), who played Captain Jack Sparrow. Bloom took the role of blacksmith-turned-pirate Will Turner. Once again the fearless actor had to test his skill with a sword. The difference this time was that Will Turner had an onscreen romance, which meant that fans were given a look at Bloom's first onscreen kiss.

More sword and dagger work came his way in 2004, when Bloom joined Brad Pitt (1963–) in the film *Troy*. The movie is an epic account of the Trojan War, the ten-year battle of Greek legend between the Greeks and Trojans. Bloom played Paris, Prince of Troy, who ignites the seeds of war when he carries off the beautiful Helen, queen of Sparta.

(Bona fide star

Midway through the making of *Troy*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* was released, and it became apparent that Bloom's star was ascending in the leading man department. According to *Troy* costar Diane Kruger (who played Helen), when the filming started no one really knew who Bloom was. But when *Pirates* came out, she told the Web site *Teen Hollywood.com* that "it was pretty extraordinary to witness someone going from basically nothing to having girls screaming whenever we stepped out the door."

Bloom seemed to handle his newfound celebrity well, perhaps because he got a few pointers from some of the biggest names in the film business, namely Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt. For example, while shooting *Troy* in Malta, an island nation in the Mediterranean, Bloom and Pitt were mobbed by fans. Bloom explained to Synnot that Pitt was very calm, and directed him to just keep walking: "Don't stop walking and we'll be fine. If you stop, it can get really scary."

But Bloom wanted to be more than just a pinup star; he wanted to sink his teeth into deeper roles. And he managed to do just that by choosing a different kind of part in *The Calcium Kid*, a low budget British comedy released in May of 2004. In sharp contrast to his tan, tousled look as Paris in *Troy*, Bloom transformed himself into a nervous milkman who, through a series of strange coincidences, ends up fighting the world boxing champion. As he told Synnot, "It was just something completely different. I needed to do it."

Bloom also spent 2004 wrapping up work on at least two other films, *Haven*, a crime drama featuring Bill Paxton (1955–), and *Kingdom of Heaven*, which reunited the young actor with *Black Hawk Down* director Ridley Scott. He was also slated to appear in a sequel to *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

From almost dying in a fall in 1998 to starring in some of the biggest movies of the 2000s, Orlando Bloom has experienced an almost meteoric rise to stardom. He has become an international idol for scores of young female fans, and may even become the model for a new generation of stars. Those who know him have described him as charismatic but also sensitive, thoughtful, and polite. Gregor Jordan (c. 1967–), who directed Bloom in *Ned Kelly*, summed it all up when talking to Synnot, stating that Bloom "is going to be huge because he's a good actor and he has incredible presence. There's a reason why girls go crazy for him. There's just something about him that makes people want to sit in the dark and watch him on the movie screen."

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And for the record, I'm against unjustified zoning restrictions that increase housing costs in cities. Then you get people asking for rent control, which makes matters worse.

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Doesn't Coronavirus put into question the widely held assumption that dense, walkable cities are better than the suburbs? I think it's fine to acknowledge that

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