

Feature



King's Man Kathe Gust*

A Passion for "The Lord of the Rings" and a chance meeting with Bruce Hopkins lead to the re-creation of a famous Rohan warrior.

Re-creating two sets of Rohirric armor from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* was a five-month effort, nights and weekends included. While my husband and I were not the first to try and replicate some of the armor from that film, we did choose two of the more complicated outfits.

We already had several costumes copied from those in the films, and in particular some court costumes from Rohan.



Kathe with Tolkien's grandson Royd (left) and actor Bruce Hopkins, who portrayed "Gamling" (right)

I suppose it was only natural for a guy who revels in the nickname "Phil-o-den" to lust after Theoden's battle armor. It was also natural for me to tell him that the King of Rohan really should have a sidekick instead of a niece. I bought a mustache and beard.



Bruce Hopkins as "Gamling". Photo from New Line Cinema.

I have been fortunate enough to meet Bruce Hopkins, who portrayed Theoden's lieutenant "Gamling" in the films, on several occasions. When he learned that we were making the armor and I was going to try and fill his shoes, he was gracious enough to tell me some of the major themes he bears in mind, and what emotions colored his portrayal, when he was on the set. I guess



Kathe channels Bruce Hopkins at the One Ring Celebration in 2006. Photo by Matt Beals.

Editors Note

Kathe Gust received the Best in Show Workmanship award together with her husband Philip as King Theoden in the Costume-Con 26 Sci-Fi / Fantasy Masquerade.

his coaching must have worked. The first time I wore the armor on stage at the One Ring Celebration 2006 in Pasadena, several people later told me they thought I really *was* Bruce, making one of his usual unannounced special appearances.

I don't propose to discuss Theoden's armor in this article; it had some rather complicated sections, but many of the techniques used for Gamling are the same for both. I also don't plan to discuss the creation of the cloth undergarments or cloaks either, except to say that finding a photo of what Gamling wore under his armor was tough. Bruce came through again with a photo on his [web site](#) showing Gamling without his armor in two scenes cut from the film.



Image cut from "Two Towers" showing Gamling's undertunic. Photo from New Line Cinema.

From a discussion with Daniel Falconer, a Weta designer who worked on the armor, we discovered that the film armor is rather heavy. It doesn't weigh as much as metal armor, but must be substantial enough to hold up under film abuse. We thought we

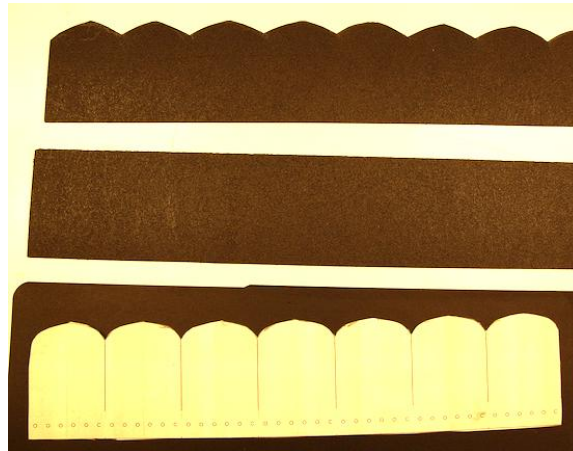
would try to go as lightweight as possible with ours, since we did not plan to actually fight in it.

I knew that Weta used PVC pipe for their chain mail, so we decided to look at using some type of plastic for the armor plates. We finally selected black ABS sheet plastic for all parts of the armor that would normally have been made of metal.

Scale Construction

Scale sizes were estimated by making a paper mock-up of Theoden's mail skirt. Gamling's scales were then estimated to be near the same size based on counting the scales in the costume and comparing to the Theoden mock-up.

The basic scalloped shape of the scales is cut in long strips from the plastic. I used a pair of Cutco brand kitchen shears (they can cut through a penny!). Wear gloves to pad your hand, and don't do them all at once. When your hand starts to go numb, you have been at it too long! Holes were punched along the top edge of the strip with a GBC



comb binder punch. The scale strips are then painted on the glossy side of the plastic with Krylon hammered metal paint. We used silver. Do not paint on the textured side of the plastic, as the texturing will defeat the hammered appearance of the paint. When the silver dries, break your heart by grubbing up the nice shiny scales. Dry-brush with black and/or rust paint so they look used.



When dry, the scales were bent on the edge of the kitchen counter by hand. After

that, they are partially cut through and again you must pace yourself. Too much heavy cutting can lead to nerve irritation in your hands.

Leave about 1/4 inch at the top that is not cut. This was cut through after the scales were sewn on to the base garment made of denim. The scale strips were stitched by hand onto the prepared base, and clipped through wherever needed for ease of motion. I finally wound up clipping all the scales, but it was easier to sew them on as strips than as single pieces.

Hauberk

The hauberk is a hand-sewn garment of plastic scales over denim. It also has an



embossed leather yoke that attaches to the basic denim garment with 8 Chicago screws. There are grommets in the base garment where the screws pass through it, and there are brass washers to reinforce both the leather and the denim garment so the heads will not pull through. An additional set of 4 rivets were added to the design to keep the leather aligned to the neckline opening of the inner denim layer. The rivets and Chicago screws I used on both sets of armor have a Sunstar of Rohan design and are a discontinued pattern from Tandy leather.



The mail coats in the film open up the back like hospital gowns. The attached cloaks of the royal guards hide this opening, but that would not actually be practical for a fighter. I elected to make my coat open only at the neck. It has slits for and aft for riding (and sitting). It pulls on and off like a chain mail hauberk.

Pauldrons, etc.

To see the actual process of figuring out the basic construction of a pauldron I suggest reading the [tutorial](#) at The Jedi Elf Queen's web site. Those we made are a slightly different shape, but her method is how we derived them.

After testing our models in poster board, I cut the final pattern in ABS plastic and used gloves and clamps of various kinds to bend the pieces into shape over the burner of the electric stove. Gloves are a MUST. The plastic has a very limited range of workability. It gets soft fast and hardens fast also, but can be re-softened more than once. When the curves are correct, glue them in place with ABS glue. Do not be stingy with it. You want the bond to be strong.



All rough places are smoothed with the grinding wheel of a Dremel tool and then the whole is painted. Again, the painting is on the smooth side, not the textured one. Bear

this in mind as you bend and glue. Keep the glossy side out. It is probably also wise to mention here that you can make a positive impact on the final appearance of the pauldrons by trying to insure that the overlapping "seams" where you glue fall as much as possible beneath areas that will be covered later by trim.

Final Assembly

Glue in the lining. My lining is maroon vinyl stripped of its fiber backing and glued to the textured side of each piece. The trim consists of latigo leather cut outs in various horse motifs (which are hand embossed). Brown vinyl piping, which I made, goes around the edge of each piece.

Everything is glued on with contact cement. This seems to be variable in the strength of its bond. You may want to experiment with other adhesives. We began to re-glue pieces of trim with E-6000 (very toxic stuff) as they fall off, based on recommendations from other armor builders.



Pauldron front (left) and back (right) with straps.



Gorget front (left) and back (right) with embossed Rohirric designs.

The last step is to attach the hand embossed straps that hold the pauldrons closed under the arms, and attach them to the mail coat. Matching antiqued brass sandal buckles are riveted to the armor. Another section later gives further details about the leatherworking.

The greaves and vambraces for the armor followed much the same process as the pauldrons, so I will not detail it again here. The main difference is how the bent shape is achieved. These pieces were tightly wrapped around appropriately sized mailing tubes. Then heavily wrapped with 4-6 layers of newspaper held in place with rubber bands. Bake in a 250 degree oven for 15 minutes and let cool. This process does not smell much either, so while I don't suggest

you stand around and inhale the possible fumes, you will not make your home uninhabitable or your oven unusable. Best done in warm weather with the windows open for safety.

Gorget

Gamling has a very beautiful and elaborate gorget of silver and gold. The pattern was worked out after hours of staring at photos by our metal embossing specialist, and consists of the ever-present horse head motifs and botanical designs, with the addition of triskelions like those on the leather yoke.

The gorget is constructed on a base of 6 pieces of ABS plastic. The pattern was embossed on appropriately colored

embossing metals by hand. Embossing metals are very thin soft metal sheets, or heavy foils, which can have designs traced into them with a stylus or other tools, and will retain the shape of the designs. These were glued to the plastic sections and the ABS sections then glued to each other. The edges of the various sections were trimmed with cromed ball chain and airplane cable. Embossed leather straps and buckles were added to each side.

This photo shows Gamling's finished gear, with part of the scale mail coat at the bottom of the photo.



Leatherwork

At this point I want to devote some space to the leather and metalworking. Before taking on this project we had never done metal embossing, ABS plastic construction or leatherworking. We were very fortunate to find kind and experienced people who took an interest in what we were doing and gave us excellent advice. If you are embossing leather, you must use either latigo or vegetable tanned leather. If you use commercial dyed upholstery leather, the embossing may not last. Vegetable tanned leather accepts both dyes and special paints if you need a specific color.

Gamling's belt was my first assignment. The belt is embossed vegetable tanned leather. The design was taken from photos of the Rohan royal guard belts on display at various events. It was embossed into dampened leather with a small ball-headed stylus. The vegetable tanned leather was sewn by hand onto a latigo leather base, which was also embossed, then trimmed and punched after the scale mail coat had been completed, to insure correct placement of the fastening holes. I needed to be sure the belt would be long enough to go over both the mail coat and the



padded belt I wear around my waist to make my figure more cylindrical.

The design on the belt is colored with a



brown fabric dye pen. This is like a felt marker. The pen gave me much better control of where the color went on the leather than a brush would have done. The edges of the belt leather were burnished (I used a scrap of the leftover silk from the shirt) and the latigo parts of the belt were dyed on the edges.

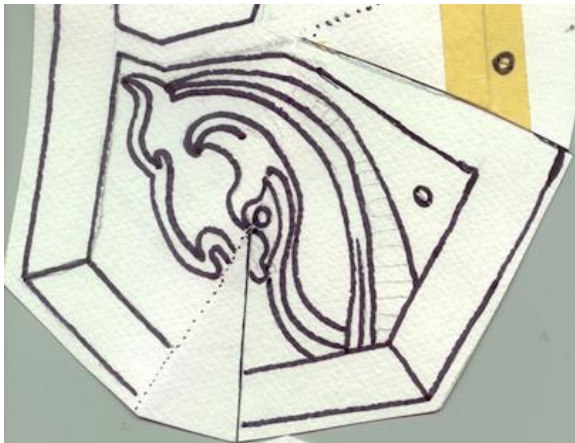
The belt buckles are just regular antique brass, but the clip that holds the two rings together had to be constructed. This is made from a section of brass colored door threshold metal that has had an inlay of embossing copper folded into it.



The whole thing is held in place with a rather cunning brass screw that I found in the scrap bin in the garage. The most difficult pieces to locate were the big rings for the scabbard to hang from. It turned out they are a part of horse tack (what else!) called collar rings.



The majority of the leatherworking on the project consisted of cutting, embossing, and edge dyeing the many, many pieces of leather trim on both sets of armor. We purchased latigo leather hides for this, trying to get them as thin and flexible as possible.



Many of the patterns appear at first glance to be the same, but they are actually different variations, and sizes (the Rohirric horse head, for example). It was rare to discover that a particular pattern could be reused in the same size for more than one location. Luckily all the straps are similar and could be made in long sections.

Scabbard

Since there is no replica sword for the Gamling character, I use a sword made for Eowyn with that costume. It didn't come with a scabbard.

To make a scabbard the sword is placed on a large sheet of stiff paper and traced. The tracing is taped to the blade and any extra additions to the scabbard are added to make it fit the shape of the hilt.



The scabbard is sized up by adding at least 1/4 inch to all the edges that will cover the blade, but not to any of the other parts of the scabbard blank. The final blank is cut from ABS plastic.



Tape the two sections with fiber reinforced tape around the sword and check the fit. It will be tight! You may want to leave the very top un-taped at this stage

so you can get the sword back out.

Pull out the sword, add some more tape so that all the edges are covered by at least one layer and push a good sized dowel into the scabbard in place of the sword. You can hand bend the plastic by pushing against the dowel. This will make the scabbard loose enough to pull and replace the sword. Keep at it until it works properly.



Cut out two pieces of covering material. I used vinyl. One piece should be large enough to wrap around the edges of the scabbard and overhang the far side. The other should be slightly smaller than the size of the original paper pattern.

Fold up the edges of the first section around the scabbard smoothly and glue them into place with contact cement, smoothing them over the edges and up onto the top side. Let dry thoroughly and check for attachment.



The other section of the cover is centered on the scabbard and glued down covering the raw edges of the first section, but it does not extend out to the edge of the scabbard. That would make it subject to

snagging and being pulled off. Leave it about 1/4 inch from the edge all around. I wear this part of the scabbard against my body, and the other side toward the viewer.



The final addition to the scabbard is the chape (metal tip) and other hardware. The Chape (above) was made of heavy embossed brass, folded into the shape of the tip of the scabbard and attached with contact cement.

For the other hardware, I traced the original hardware designs on paper adjusting them to fit the scabbard by wrapping around the underside and extending far enough beyond the scabbard to allow for the insertion of metal rings for attaching the scabbard to my belt. The design was built up in layers of ABS. I bent the bottommost layer by hand to fit around the scabbard and punched the holes for the chain. I then flattened it out again, built up the layers of additional design, and sprayed it all with metallic paint. When it was dry I completed the assembly.

Helm

Gamling's helm is standard royal guard issue, and is built over a base made from a used batting helmet which had the entire



Helm parts: modified and painted batting helmet, cheek plates, and various embossed metal parts.

brim removed. The protective chain mail for the neck was woven of aluminum rings given to me by a friend who had some left over from a previous project. It attaches to the edge of the helmet through holes bored in the back edge.

The cheekplates and eyeguard are ABS with an overlay of embossing metal in the appropriate colors and design. The other metal inlay trims are also embossing metal attached to the painted batting helmet in the appropriate patterns.



Test fitting parts to the modified and painted helmet. Bag of chain mail links to right of helm.

The crest, above at right, was created by making a sandwich from laminated balsa with ABS layers on the outside. It was then covered in embossed brass, and painted in the recessed areas.



A black horsetail plume for the crest was purchased on e-bay. They sell them for horse shows, to braid into the horse's regular tail and make it look fuller. Since the batting helmet is not as oval in height as the helm in the film, the crest was adjusted slightly to create a greater impression of height on the finished helm. The crest is attached using a bolt that goes through the top of the helmet from the inside and screws into a molly in the bottom of the crest.

The finished helm with the crest in place, together with all the other elements is shown below at left.

Starting on any project of this magnitude has to be a labor of love. If you don't want it badly enough, you'll end up hating it before you're done. In this case, it definitely was something I wanted to do.

I had assistance from instructors at Tandy Leather, from others who had made Rohan armor before me, from armor web sites. I also had encouragement from several people who worked on the film. Their enthusiasm went a long way toward keeping me invested in the project when things began to look grim. As a result I've worn the armor at least a half a dozen times, and continue to enjoy portraying Gamling, the King's Man.

***Kathe Gust** enjoys creating clothing for many historical periods, and for various sci-fi and fantasy genre. Visit her [web site](#) to read articles and see photos for some of her costuming projects.*