



'The Lord of the Rings' Almost Had a Very Different Samwise Gamgee



By Rachel Sandell

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Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...

SUMMARY

- James Corden auditioned for the role of Samwise Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*, but ultimately wasn't chosen.
- Sam is more musical in J.R.R. Tolkien's books and Corden could have brought that aspect to the screen.
- Sean Astin's portrayal of Samwise Gamgee perfectly captured the character's earnest and wholesome sincerity.

Just one casting change has the potential to shift an entire story's presentation. *The Lord of the Rings* includes a plethora of heroic figures, **from returning kings** to hole-in-the-hill hobbits, proving that heroes come from all walks of life and in all sizes, great and small. The story's most inspiring hero is indeed small, but his effect on the people around him is huge. From the moment of the Mount Doom speech (and plenty of times before that), *Lord of the Rings* fans have concurred that **the true hero of the story isn't Frodo (Elijah Wood)** – it's his loyal gardener turned bodyguard, Sam (**Sean Astin**). The character's likability is off the charts, and while the writing of Samwise Gamgee's character is not to be overlooked, a lot of that wholesome charm is thanks to his portrayal by Astin. Sam would have been a very different character if he was played by any other actor. For example: **James Corden**.



James Corden Auditioned for Samwise Gamgee in 'The Lord of the Rings'



In an episode of the *Happy Sad Confused* podcast, Corden told interviewer Joshua Horowitz about his **experience** responding to *The Lord of the Rings* casting call in London. According to Corden, "everyone in London" was excited to have their shot at being part of the epic project. Corden auditioned for the role of Samwise Gamgee with high hopes and great enthusiasm, complete with an accent and the gardener's trademark attachment to "Mr. Frodo." He and his friends, who also auditioned for the films, even got two callbacks. In the end, he wasn't chosen for the part, but the disappointment didn't dampen his enjoyment of



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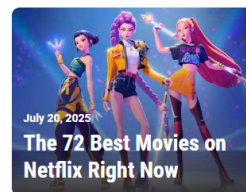
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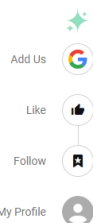
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Corden's experience with *The Lord of the Rings* casting call was one of his early career auditions, and being passed over for the part didn't stop him from continuing his work in TV and film. Corden has gone on to become a successful actor, producer, and TV host, best known for his talk show, *The Late Late Late Show* (the torch was passed to him by fellow comedian **Craig Ferguson**), and appearing in films like *Ocean's 8*, *Into the Woods*, and *Cats* — but **we try to forget about Cats**.

James Corden's Portrayal Would Have Been Much Different Than Sean Astin's



Samwise Gamgee was a deceptively important role to fill, as he would be the silent hero throughout most of the trilogy before single-handedly saving the day by fighting off the spider Shelob and carrying Frodo up Mount Doom in *The Return of the King*. The actor who played him had to fit the role perfectly, with just the right amount of simple charm, wholesome loyalty, and hidden adventurous spirit. Had Corden been cast in the role he auditioned for all those years ago, *The Lord of the Rings* would have featured a very different Sam. While a few scenes feature Astin's Samwise singing or referring to songs and folktales, the **books by J.R.R. Tolkien include many more instances** of Sam happily performing songs and quoting verses. Corden's take on the character might have been more musical, and the comedic aspect of his portrayal would have had a completely different style.

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Sean Astin Cemented His Legacy As Samwise Gamgee



Corden never got his chance to play the understated but incredibly important role of Sam, but the version of the character we do have is iconic and will continue to inspire for a long time to come. Sam's earnest and wholesome sincerity clearly shines through in Astin's portrayal, proving that he was indeed the perfect actor for the role. Unfortunately for Corden, we will probably never know how he would have portrayed Sam, but thankfully, Astin gave an emotional and heartfelt rendition worthy of the character. Astin's performance **elevated the character from loyal unsung hero to the ultimate friend**. Granted, all the actors playing lead roles gave it their all (who can forget **Viggo Mortensen's** portrayal of Aragorn, **Ian McKellen** facing off against **Christopher Lee's** Saruman, or **Andy Serkis** putting all his energy into playing Smeagol/Gollum), but Sam is just the type of character that can easily be mishandled.

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As a side character for most of the series, **it's relatively easy to overlook Sam**. One of the main themes of *The Lord of the Rings* is the strength of the little guy. And, with all our focus on Frodo as the little guy, it's easy to miss the even more common gardener in the little guy's shadow (a littler guy, if you will). He, along with Merry (**Dominic Monaghan**) and Pippin (**Billy Boyd**), could have been treated as mere comedic relief until his big moments, but the heroism was always there beneath the surface (the Prancing Pony scene, in which the hobbits meet Aragorn for the first time, comes to mind).

In a 2021 interview with Collider, **Astin recounts his experience** approaching the role, describing his lack of knowledge of the source material and how, when his agent informed him of the role, he went in search of the books with the intention of learning more about Sam in particular. In his own words: "Everything I've experienced from *Lord of the Rings* has been from Sam's point of view." Despite knowing very little about the story, Astin approached the experience immersed in Sam's character from the beginning, and the result is still widely beloved.

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None of this is to say that Corden couldn't have pulled this off, but at the time of this audition, Astin had already shown his acting capabilities in *The Goonies* and starred in the 1993 film *Rudy* as the hard-working titular character, which served as a fitting precursor to his version of the dedicated hobbit companion. When comparing how these two very different actors would have approached the role, it's apples to oranges, with a clear distinction between acting styles. **Despite there being many bigger and physically tougher characters in the fantasy epic**, there's no character with a stronger heart than Sam. It's fun to imagine what could have been, but Astin portrayed the heart of Samwise Gamgee in a dedicated and genuine way, giving us the dependable loyal hobbit gardener we know and love today.

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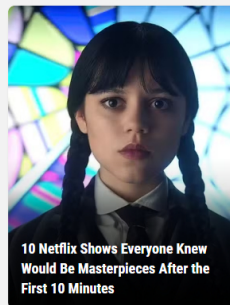
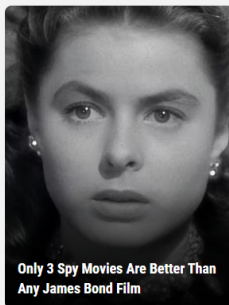
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