

## “THE TROLL HUNTER” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold  
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It's a sign of just how deeply the *vérité* approach has permeated the genre scene, and the variety of the ways it has done so, that THE TROLL HUNTER can legitimately be described as a cross between THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT and CLOVERFIELD. And it's a sign of the gambit's resilience that even as it suggests its forebears, TROLL HUNTER establishes its own identity and succeeds on its own terms.

Like BLAIR WITCH, the Norwegian TROLL HUNTER (currently playing the Sundance Film Festival ahead of its VOD and theatrical release this winter/spring from Magnolia Pictures' Magnet Releasing division) is set up as the recovered footage from a small group of college kids who disappeared after setting out to shoot a documentary. Through the lens of the camera wielded by Kalle (Tomas Alf Larsen), we watch as Thomas (Glenn Erland Tosterud), the leader of the project, and sound recordist Johanna (Johanna Mørck) set out to cover incidents of bear poaching in a mountainous area. The key object of their investigation soon becomes Hans (Otto Jespersen), a gruff and surly type who quickly makes it clear he doesn't like being videotaped. Yet the trio press on, soon following him on a middle-of-the-night drive into a forbidding forest—where his true activities become clear.



Hans, it turns out, is the title character, his life devoted to dispatching wayward trolls that stray from their designated homes and wander too close to civilization. Here's where writer/director André Øverdal eases us from the spookiness of being stranded in unfamiliar woods to the thrills of a ground-level giant-monster movie, as a towering, multiheaded man-beast stalks into the green-night-vision frame to scare the hell out of the amateur documentarians. Not Hans, though—he proves to be fully prepared for the situation, and demonstrates how modern technology can be applied to take out this ancient beastie.

At this point, Thomas and co. are clearly onto a much bigger story than they expected to find, and Hans decides to let them hang with him and keep taping, in part because (in a twist reminiscent of yet another recent mock-doc, BIG MAN JAPAN) he's become disenchanted with

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his job and wants to show the world what he’s had to put up with. There’s a fun disconnect between the enormity of what Hans been tasked with confronting and the workaday attitude with which he confronts it, and as he explains the particulars, Øvredal introduces and develops very well-thought-through modern mythology for the trolls. I’m not up on my Norwegian folklore, so I have no idea what the filmmaker borrowed and what he came up with himself, but it all comes off sounding authentic: We learn about the different species of trolls (Ringlefinches, Tosserlads, Rinetossers and Jotnars), how to deal with them (“Concrete and charcoal is an unbeatable combination”), etc. There’s a plausible-sounding scientific basis behind everything, even as it retains a definite old-world veneer; there’s even a direct homage to the tale of the Three Billy Goats Gruff when Hans uses just such an animal to lure one troll to a bridge where he plans to dispatch it.

Also thoroughly believable from start to finish are the visual FX supervised by Øystein Larsen, which bring the assorted creatures to life with nary a digital seam showing. It’s damn impressive work, not only considering the presumably low budget but given the extra added verisimilitude that this particular storytelling format demands. Øvredal also belies the movie’s limited means by keeping the settings varied, taking us along with the youthful protagonists from the forests to rocky caves to an impressively shot final act on wintry plains. It’s here where the truth behind the trolls finally comes to light and the assorted story strands are tied together, capped off with a bit of borrowed (and, one assumes, authentic and undoctored) news footage that serves as a perfect, cheeky conclusion.

If the fantastical elements of THE TROLL HUNTER prevent it from achieving the deep-seated scares of some of its found-footage ilk, it nonetheless provides a compelling viewing experience with a rich and distinctive flavor. The ingredients may occasionally be familiar, but it always has another surprise up its sleeve, and its basis in dark fairy tales makes it all the more impressive that the film achieves the basic goal of any found-footage feature: You never stop believing what you’re seeing.



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