



## Troll Hunter

(Norway, 2010)

Written and Directed by André Øvredal

Director of Photography: Hallvard Bræin

Running time: 103 minutes

[www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk](http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk)

**Cast: Hans – Otto Jespersen; Thomas – Glenn Erland Tosterud; Johanna – Johanna Mørck; Kalle – Tomas Alf Larsen; Malica – Urmila Berg-Domaas; Finn Haugen – Hans Morten Hansen; Polish bear hunter – Robert Stoltenberg; plant manager – Knut Nærum; campsite owner – Eirik Bech.**

In the last ten years, 'found footage' horror movie — presenting scratchy-looking scenes which document actual events, shot by characters who almost certainly didn't survive them — has become its own sub-genre. The Blair Witch Project, the breakthrough film in this category, adopted shaky-cam and improvised chatter from budgetary necessity, since its makers' resources didn't stretch to having the witch show up onscreen. Since then, the form has evolved, and it's no longer a matter of making do with suggestion because there isn't enough money for a monster. In the era of Cloverfield, even productions which can afford state-of-the-art effects go to some trouble to mimic the rough-and-ready feel of penurious efforts such as Man Bites Dog or Paranormal Activity. After a reel or two of ciné-vérité jitter and whiskey Norwegian mumbling, it's something of a shock when this picture from a not-yet-fashionable territory delivers big-scale action and effects far more sophisticated, imaginative and impressive than those of, say, Clash Of The Titans. This is not a picture to skimp on the giant monster action.

Like Rare Exports, which put a black comic-horrific Finnish spin on the legend of Santa Claus, Troll Hunter reclaims a local mythology which has been watered down in international pop culture. The whole picture seems based on an offhand remark by the Prime Minister of Norway at a press conference, when he lets slip that the ugly pylons which carry power-lines through picturesque remote areas are a necessity because "Norway has trolls". The cables are really electric fences designed to keep the man-slaying giants out of inhabited areas. Otto Jespersen makes an indelible character out of the veteran troll-hunter who gives the callow filmmakers an insight into his profession. The movie trots out its troll lore with a straight face, and builds big scenes around such gimmicks as the monster traditionally lurking under a bridge and an ogre's ability to sniff out the true Christians which are its favoured snacks. When the secret true believer in the group meets an unfortunate end, the filmmakers are forced to hire a Muslim replacement — though an opening caption indicates that this crew are as likely to join the missing lists as the Blair Witch trio.

The format lets Jespersen create a character, but shoves almost all the other players offscreen for the most part (a given in these films, where someone has to hold the camera). The structure is much the same as any Ray Harryhausen picture: every ten minutes a new monster shows up, roaring and blustering, forcing the heroes to devise a means of

defeating it, while the incidental body count rises. The creatures here have more character than most monsters, since trolls are a sub-humanoid race with individual traits rather than simple dinosaur or blob-type monsters. There is even an attempt to evoke sympathy for a perhaps-endangered species and suggest that the ruthless Norwegian state, which goes out of its way to provide cover stories to conceal monster activity, is partially responsible for the unending troll wars.

You might need to take a Norwegian guide along to explain various local references and identify the specific trolls, but *Troll Hunter's* proud cultural identity — tremble, a US remake is in the works — is its strongest suit. It's wry, spectacular fun.

Kim Newman, *Empire*

The grisly case of Norway's extreme-rightwing mass murderer Anders Breivik may have conferred the status of satire or prophecy on this bizarre black-comedy horror. It is a mocu-realist nightmare in the handheld style of *Blair Witch* or *Cloverfield*: what we see is supposedly found-footage, shot by a group of film students who were making a documentary about what was officially deemed to be a human-killing bear....The scenes involving the trolls themselves are spectacular, but somehow not scary exactly: they look too absurd for that. Real fear is to be found when the trolls are just invisible forces deep within the beautiful landscape.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2011

The troll lore Hans [the troll hunter] expounds is convincing, as are the monsters when we meet them, while the misty landscape of mountains and fjords has the same feeling as the one around Loch Ness that makes the Scottish monster plausible. Indeed we end up full of sympathy for these innocent creatures, persecuted by insensitive bureaucrats. A much better plot than that of *Cowboys & Aliens* would be a horror flick in which the Heroes of Telemark recruit the trolls for their attacks on the Nazis' second world war heavy water plant. It could be made in Sweden at Trollhättan, Scandinavia's largest film studio (popularly known as Trollywood), where Lars von Trier regularly works.

Philip French, *The Observer*, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2011

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