

EIFF review Troll Hunter

by Ryan McNeely

What can I say about Troll Hunter? Well, before the flick started, I tweeted this:- “Going to see Troll Hunter. With a name like that, how can it not be awesome?”

You know what? I was right. It really is an absolute blast.

The movie presents itself as another “found-footage” documentary a la The Blair Witch Project or Cloverfield, starting off with a three-man (or, more accurately, a two-man, one-woman) student film crew out in northern Norway to shoot a piece about illegal bear hunting. They keep hearing tales from the licensed hunters about one man in particular. A man who speaks to nobody; is often seen around areas where dead bears are later found; a man known only as Hans. Our crew decide to follow Hans and try to get an interview.

The first act is made up of these kids – Thomas, the presenter; Johanna, the sound recordist; and Kalle, the cameraman – trailing Hans from campground to campground. First he ignores them, then he brushes them off. Unfortunately for Hans, the crew can’t take a hint, and his oddly tricked out camper and Land Rover (all massive floodlights and odd claw marks, with strange hairy things hanging inside) just make them more determined to get his story. After a few days of this cat and mouse malarkey the crew decide to tail Hans on a midnight trip deep into the woods. A few miles along the track, their car gets stuck and they have to continue on foot. Suddenly through the trees they see a bright flashing light and hear an almighty roar, followed by Hans running straight into them screaming one word: TROLL! You see, Hans is not an unlicensed bear hunter. He is a state-sponsored Troll Hunter. And now that the film crew’s car has been destroyed, he’s also their ride back to safety.

It is at this point where the writer/director Andre Ovredal really makes the documentary part stick. Every single aspect of the troll mythology is explained*, and in such a matter-of-fact way there are moments where it is easy to forget about the mock- half of the mock-doc equation. And then there are the trolls themselves. Oh, lordy. The best compliment you can give a special effect is to say that you didn't even notice it as an effect. These trolls are completely integrated into their environments. They have mass. Unlike the clearly painted in monsters often seen in the CGI-age (such as in any number of syfy movies-of-the-week) these creatures are wholly believable. This is undoubtedly helped by the fact that they are nocturnal, so there aren't any pesky bright daylight scenes to worry about. Saying that though, the climactic duel between Hans and the 200-foot-tall Jotnar troll is shot in a gorgeous pre-dawn twilight. You see the beast at every distance from miles away on the horizon right up to driving between its legs mid-run, but you never doubt the fact that it is there.

Out of the four species of troll featured in the flick my favourite is the bridge-dwelling Ringlefinch, probably because it is the one we get the best look at (after the Jotnar, that is), in a scene where Hans, dressed head-to-toe in his homemade armour, is trying to get a blood sample from the critter for medical tests. This decision may have also been influenced by a certain youtube clip made by an animator explaining why this particular Ringlefinch has only got one arm..

Some of the characters – okay, everyone except Hans – feel a bit short-changed in the characterisation department. The film crew themselves are barely sketched out. There is no background, no explanation of their relationships. The documentary format makes this less of a problem than it would have been otherwise, but we really need the first act build-up to get to know these kids, so that we feel for their peril

when things start going batshit.

Troll Hunter gets a cinema release in the UK on 9 September. You should really go see it.

(*Except for the bit about Christians. Trolls hate Christians. They can actually smell if someone is a Christian and will hunt and eat them. The weirdest part about this is that some of the individual trolls themselves are older than Christianity. I'll admit to not reading The Bible recently, but I don't know of any anti-troll sentiment in there)