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The March of the Trolls

THE MARCH OF THE TROLLS

by

Dag Rossman

They see him here, they hear him there;

Those trolls, they think he's everywhere.

His eyes that glow, the laugh of him;

The trolls, in dread, flee Faragrim.

An old Oppland ditty

The great in-gathering and subsequent out-wandering of the trolls from throughout Oppland, following their rout by Faragrim in Ottidal, became a matter of legend and song. After ascending into the high country and traversing the snow fields they encountered, the emigrants descended through steep mountain passes to the broad valleys below. There—save for the tumbling streams they were forced to ford—the walking was easier, particularly for the very young, the very old, and those recent combatants who were not fully recovered from their wounds.

The disorganized line of trolls trended ever northward and eastward in the direction of Jötunheim, the domain of their distant kinfolk, the Hill Giants and Frost Giants. Because of their petrifying fear of sunlight, the trolls could only travel at night or on densely foggy days, so their passage went largely unnoticed despite their large numbers. The trolls were aware, however, that they did not travel entirely alone. From

time to time, a peal of maniacal laughter would ring out to remind them that Faragrim was still dogging their footsteps. On moonlit nights his cloaked figure—eyes aglow deep within the hood—might appear at a distance, sometimes keeping pace with the column, at other times simply standing by watchfully. Thus, without provoking a direct confrontation, these continuing reminders of the draug's presence maintained the trolls' fear of him and hastened them along their way . . . without any detours to raid human farmsteads.

Deprived of this source of food, the trolls began to suffer serious hunger pangs. Not wishing to be needlessly cruel—or drive the trolls to desperation—Faragrim tracked down a herd of reindeer one night and steered it across the path of the marching trolls. Most of the deer escaped, but the trolls were able to bring down enough of them to greatly augment their dwindling rations for days to come. Some of the trolls

loudly boasted about their “accidental” good fortune and their own hunting skills, but old Rangbein had his suspicions that their good luck had a different source, though he kept this thought to himself.

Thus the march of the trolls proceeded: night after night, another mountain followed by another valley until, at long last, the weary, footsore travelers came to the foothills of the highest, most extensive block of mountains in the Nine Worlds. The blue-gray water rushing down the hillside—and the chilly, bracing air it carried with it—proclaimed that the stream could only have originated from one of the great rivers of ice capping Jötunheim. Further confirmation came when those long, keen trollish noses detected the faint but distinctive odor of giants borne by that same glacial breeze. Clearly the trolls had reached their long-sought goal and, re-energized by this realization, they picked up the pace in their haste to find and claim any caves or deeper caverns that could serve as their new dwelling places.

One troll stepped aside from the line of march and waited for it to pass him by. As the excited gabble of his fellows began to recede in the distance, old Rangbein called out into fading darkness of the pre-dawn hours: “Can you hear me, Faragrim? You’ve been our constant companion throughout our trek, so I can’t imagine that you’d leave before you saw us safely out of Midgard.”

A cloaked figure detached itself from the side of a large boulder along the trail where it had stood concealed. “Here I am, Rangbein.”

“Trollbane I named you back in Ottidal . . . and with good reason. Yet without that herd of reindeer I’m sure you guided onto our path—and the other caches of food that just ‘happened to show up’ along the way—it is almost certain that many of my people would not have survived the march to

Jötunheim. Harsh and dangerous you may well be, but I think perhaps you are not such a bad fellow at heart after all.”

“My only goal has always been to protect humans from trolls; it has never been my intention to harm any troll that behaved himself. Nothing would have been served by starving your people to death—that would only have forced them to raid human farms for food. As a matter of fact, when I explained this to several of the farmers who live in the valleys through which you passed, they were only too happy to contribute the smoked meats and other foodstuffs that I left where you could find them.”

“Well, I thank you . . . and the farmers, too. I won’t forget what you have done, Faragrim, and should another hothead like Kraki ever try to stir the trolls into sending raiding parties back into Midgard, I’ll see to it that my people don’t forget you either—neither the ease with which you overcame the trolls in Ottidal, nor the kindness you showed us on the Long March. Hopefully, that mixture of fear and gratitude will serve to keep us peaceable.”

“I’m sure it will, Rangbein, if the others have the good sense to select you as their leader and heed your wisdom. Now, you’d best be on your way if you are going to catch up with the others. May the sun never shine upon your face.”

The old troll turned on his heel and shuffled on after the tail of the column, which had already disappeared up the trail. Faragrim stood in silence and watched him go out of sight. His musings were soon interrupted by the silvery tinkling voice of a beautiful blonde woman who had walked up beside the draug, quietly clapping her hands in pleasure.

“Oh, that was well done, Faragrim. Not only have you freed Oppland from the threat of trolls, but you did it with relatively little bloodshed . . . and thus gave the trolls little reason to feel honor-bound to seek revenge.

You have far exceeded the expectations I had for you when I knit your body and spirit back together and freed you from your grave.”

“It has been an honor to serve you, Lady Freyja, and to carry out the responsibility with which you charged me. I only hope that you will give me some other task I can undertake for you.”

“All in good time, my hero, all in good time. But for the moment, I just want to be the bearer of good news and surprises. First of all, your moose friend has returned to my lake where—in the course of time—he will be joined by his family after they have lived out their mortal lives. After all they did to help you rescue the children from the trolls, they deserve no less.”

“How wonderful, my Lady! Thank you for your thoughtfulness.”

Pleased, the smiling goddess continued: “I intend to grant the same privilege to your friend Gudmund should he not fall in battle and thus qualify for a place in Valhalla. By the way, Faragrim, where is he? I fully expected him to accompany you on the trolls’ trek to Jötunheim.”

“He wanted to come, my Lady, but I pointed out that he would be needed in Kverndal to look after his brother’s family until such time as Arne had fully recovered from the wounds inflicted by the trolls. After that, Gudmund was clearly pulled in two directions by his divided loyalties. So I made his choice easier by reminding him that he could not see in the dark without a light, and I needed to be able to move about quickly in order to keep the trolls guessing my whereabouts . . . which would be impossible if he were following me about with a torch.”

Freyja giggled at the thought.

“I do miss him, though,” said Faragrim ruefully. “He was a good companion.”

“Oft it is said that good friends’ paths cross when least expected. Such is the way

of wyrd.” Freyja paused to let Faragrim ponder the saying. “Now for my surprise. What would you say if I told you that you had a living kinsman in the mortal world?”

“How could that be?” the draug asked in astonishment. “Mother never mentioned having any other son or a male relative save for the grandfather I slew to avenge my father’s murder.”

“That’s because she never knew about your elder half-brother until after you had fled your home. Dag is Völund’s child by his first wife, a swan maiden named Hervor. Dag has wandered throughout the Nine Worlds—save, of course, for Helheim, where no mortal being may venture—adding to his store of lore and honing his skills.”

“That sounds as if he were a wizard,” mused Faragrim.

“Oh, Dag has the power to create illusions alright, but not through the use of runes or incantations. No, he uses something much simpler but perhaps even more powerful in some ways . . . for it can cast a spell on everyone within the sound of his voice. Dag is a skald, a storyteller, and a very fine one. His listeners can see in their imaginations the scenes he paints with his words, and when he begins to unveil the plot he literally becomes each and every one of the characters he portrays so that each of them seems to be a distinctly different person.”

“That *does* sound like magic, my Lady. I can hardly wait to meet this brother of mine and become acquainted with him. Where might I be able to find him?”

“Storytellers wander where they will, Faragrim, much like those who keep an eye on trolls. But the last I heard from our mutual friend Heimdal, Dag was residing in Alfheim. Turn your face and feet toward the West, my hero, and sooner or later you’ll arrive in the land of the Light Elves. Now, go with Freyja’s blessing.”

When the draug knelt to receive her favor, the goddess pushed back his hood and kissed

Faragrim's icy-cold brow with her warm lips
before calling up her cat-drawn cart and
riding off toward Asgard.

Faragrim watched Freyja until she rode

out of sight, then he headed back into
Midgard, striding westward—walking on the
heels of his own long shadow, cast by the
rising sun.

Darkedge

by

Lee Clark Zumpe

I remember being a blade once,
A promise of victory;
A harvester of death;
The object of a curse
Upon a warrior's breath.

I cut the air at his command,
I shimmered in the sun.
I slept in leathern bed;
And on days of battle
I was bathed in red.

A name I know he gave to me:
I, a brother he trusted,
I, his only real friend;
Darkedge is what he called me
Till he met his tragic end.

With grace I saw years pass by,
My thirst was yet unquenched,
And still my bite was keen;
But the warrior used me little
For he was not what he had been.

When finally he roused me from my sleep,
Face withered, eyes distant,
His ambitions had been laid to rest.
I wept for the warrior's youth
As I plunged into his breast.