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Opening extract from

The Giant Rumble Wrestling Trolls: Match Three

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Chapter One

From their dressing room at the back of the packed arena, Jack could hear the audience shouting.

'Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!' chanted some of the crowd, while others yelled out, 'Big Rock,' and still others, 'We love the Masked Avenger!'

'They are cheering louder for you two,' Jack declared to his friends.

Tonight, Big Rock and the Masked Avenger were taking on two of the villainous Lord Veto's Wrestling Orcs: Smash and Squirm.

'Stand still!' instructed Meenu, as she made a last adjustment to the Masked Avenger's full head-mask.

'Sorry,' replied Princess Ava. 'I'm just ready to

take on those orcs.'

The Masked Avenger was actually the young Princess Ava from the Kingdom of Weevil. The challenge was that her mask could only be removed and her identity revealed, if she was beaten in the ring. So far, she was unbeaten.

'There,' said Meenu, at last. 'That shouldn't come off, no matter what the orcs do to it.'

'Unless they win,' commented Robin the old horse, drily.

'They won't,' promised Big Rock.

'But these are orcs,' said Jack, worried. 'They cheat.'

'They won't beat me and Masked Avenger,' said Big Rock confidently. 'We good tag team.'

'No, you two are a *great* tag team,' corrected Milo.

Thirteen-year-old Milo was the manager of Waldo's Wrestling Trolls, or WWT for short. Not long ago, ten-year-old Jack had earned his place as the assistant trainer, and Robin, the horse who pulled their caravan, seemed like he'd been around forever. Along with Meenu,

the girl from Weevil who designed Princess Ava's outfits – both the princess dresses she had to wear and the wrestling costumes she chose to wear – Jack, Milo and Robin were the support for the tag team duo: Big Rock and the Masked Avenger.

Milo cocked his head to one side as the noise from the arena grew suddenly louder – whistles and stamping of thousands of feet.

'Sounds like the orcs have just come in,' he said. 'Time for us to go. You two ready?'

'Never better!' said Princess Ava, and she and Big Rock slapped palms. Jack noticed that Big Rock didn't slap too hard. A knock from the giant Big Rock could put a hole in a wall.

'Okay,' said Milo. 'Let's go!'

Milo opened the door, and Big Rock and the Masked Avenger stepped out into the aisle. As they started towards the ring a huge roar of applause went up, mixed with some loud booing from the orcs' supporters.

The lights bounced off Big Rock's granite body and his wrestling costume: a multicoloured

spangly outfit with a picture of a mountain-top on the front.

The Masked Avenger looked tiny beside him in her red leotard beneath her purple cloak.

The two orcs were already in the ring, dressed identically in black-and-white costumes with a red lightning flash on the front.

'You know, I've never seen Ava – er, the Masked Avenger wrestle before,' Meenu whispered to Jack.

'You're in for a treat,' Jack whispered back. It hadn't been that long ago that Jack had been forbidden to watch wrestling matches, and he never tired of the excitement.

They reached the ring and Big Rock and the Masked Avenger pulled themselves up and through the ropes. The two orcs snarled and sneered, and Smash glowered at the pair with his blood-red eyes as he snapped the sharp claws of his talons together, making sparks fly off them.

Milo, Jack, Meenu and Robin took their places beneath Big Rock and the Avenger's corner as

the referee strode to the centre of the ring.

'My lord, ladies and gentlemen!' he boomed. 'Welcome to the main bout of the evening, a tag contest between Big Rock and the Masked Avenger, and that incredible Wrestling Orc duo, Smash and Squirm!

'The rules,' he continued. 'Only one member of each team in the ring at a time, the other outside, holding the tag rope. The one outside can only enter the ring and take over when their partner has tagged them by touching them with their hand. Clear?'

Everyone grunted, and the Masked Avenger cracked her knuckles.

'Let the contest begin!' the referee shouted.

Big Rock took his position on the apron of the ring outside the ropes, while in the other corner, Squirm gripped his tag rope and watched his orc partner, Smash, circle the tiny figure of the Masked Avenger.

Smash made his first move, leaping at the Masked Avenger and kicking both legs at her in a drop kick.

The Masked Avenger dodged to one side. Smash was obviously expecting this, because as he landed he lashed out at her ankles with his sharp claws. But the Masked Avenger had second-guessed him, and she leapt into the air and then came down, landing with both feet on his arm.

Before the orc realised what was happening, the Masked Avenger had grabbed Smash's other arm and turned the orc onto his face.

WHAM!

The Masked Avenger dropped on the orc's back, driving Smash's sharp beak through the canvas of the ring. Trapped, the orc struggled to push himself up, but as he did so the Masked Avenger flipped him over onto his back, and then brought both her legs down on his chest and arms, forcing his shoulders to the canvas.

'One!' shouted the crowd excitedly.

'Two,' said the referee. 'Three!'

The crowd went wild as the Masked Avenger rolled off the fallen orc and bounced to the ropes, where Big Rock was waiting.

‘Good fall,’ smiled Big Rock, as he and Princess Ava touched hands, tagging Big Rock to take her place in the ring.

At the ringside, Jack gave Meenu a high five.

‘First fall to our team,’ grinned Milo. ‘One more fall or a knockout, and it’s victory to us!’

But Jack had spotted a dreaded figure across the arena. He gestured to the back of the hall where Lord Veto, the owner of the Wrestling Orcs, was in deep conversation with Warg, his Chief Orc.

‘Those two are up to something,’ muttered Jack. ‘I’m going to find out what.’

As Jack pushed his way through the crowd, in the ring, Big Rock faced up to Squirm. The two threw themselves at one another, and the whole arena seemed to shake as they crunched together, with bits of quartz flying off Big Rock’s body as Squirm raked the troll with his talons.

‘Those idiots are losing,’ Jack heard Lord Veto hiss to Warg as he got nearer.

‘It’s only one fall so far, my Lord,’ responded Warg.

'I don't care! I can't take the chance on our team losing in front of all these people.' Then Lord Veto leaned closer to Warg and began to whisper in his ear. The orc listened, then nodded and slid away, out of the hall.

Jack hurried back to the others.

'Lord Veto's definitely up to something,' he said.

'What?' asked Milo.

'I don't know,' admitted Jack. 'But one thing's for sure, if Lord Veto's involved it will be sneaky and rotten.'

'Shush,' said Robin. 'I'm trying to watch the match.'

In the ring, Big Rock had Squirm in a bear hug, but the orc managed to wriggle out, squeezing himself upwards.

Then the orc hauled himself up onto the giant troll's shoulders. An elbow from Squirm caught Big Rock in the eye, then he grabbed Big Rock round the head, with both clawed hands locking together.

The orc threw himself backwards, intending

to make the big troll fall. Instead, Big Rock stood his ground; then he reached up, snatched Squirm off his head and threw him at the corner post.

WHUMP!!!

Squirm hit the corner post and bounced back into the ring, and as he did Big Rock fell on him, pinning both his shoulders to the canvas.

'A pinfall!' yelled Milo delightedly. 'One . . .'

Before he and the referee could take up the count, there was a sudden massive surge from the crowd, and the next moment what looked like a small army of Wrestling Orcs, all dressed in identical costumes to Smash and Squirm, had invaded the ring.

As the crowd roared – some in loud disapproval, some in support of the orcs – the referee tried in vain to intervene, but it was no use. The orcs had taken over. About five orcs had rushed to Squirm's aid, leaping on Big Rock and punching and kicking at him.

Furious at this, the Masked Avenger let go of her tag rope and leapt into the ring to go to

Big Rock's rescue, but it was obvious to everyone that she and the troll were hopelessly outnumbered. The orcs were already piling onto the Masked Avenger, dragging her down to the canvas.

'She's going to get stomped!' gasped the horrified Meenu. 'They're both going to get crushed!'

Jack felt a sense of deep anger and injustice rise in him as he watched what was happening in the ring, and his eyes began to fill up with tears. No, not with tears, with a sort of . . . mist. Like thick, opaque crystals forming. And, at the same time, he felt a shuddering sensation course through him.

'GRAAAARRR!'

The roar was so loud it sent shock waves around the whole arena. It made the orcs in the ring stop their pounding of Big Rock and the Masked Avenger and look to see where the massive sound came from.

It came from a troll. And not just any troll, but a massive and very angry troll, who leapt



into the ring and began to pick up orcs with his huge hands and throw them out of the ring as if they were dolls. Soon the area outside the ring was littered with Wrestling Orcs, moaning and groaning.

The referee had managed to get back into the ring. As Big Rock and the Masked Avenger lurched to their feet, the referee announced: 'Ladies and gentlemen! Because of the invasion of the ring, I regret to tell you that this bout has been rendered null and void. It's cancelled!'

At this there was a huge shouting of disapproval, with boos ringing around the arena.

Big Rock and Princess Ava clambered out of the ring and joined the gang. Both looked glum.

'We were winning,' grunted Big Rock.

'Jack was right!' fumed Milo. 'Lord Veto did this!' Milo stomped off towards the referee.

'And nearly got us flattened by those orcs,' sighed Princess Ava/the Masked Avenger.

'You were lucky that big troll appeared,' said Meenu. 'Where did he go? And where did he

come from? I never saw him before that.'

'Actually, that was Jack,' said Princess Ava.

Meenu, puzzled, looked at the small, thin – almost fragile – figure of Jack.

'You mean it was a friend of his?'

'No, it was Jack,' repeated Ava.

Meenu looked at Jack, and then laughed. 'Yeah, right!' she chuckled.

'It true,' said Big Rock. 'Jack half-troll.'

'When he gets angry, his inner troll comes out and he turns into Thud,' explained Ava.

'Thud?'

'It's who he becomes when his troll side comes out.'

'I thought of that name,' said Robin proudly.



Meenu looked at Jack, stunned. The small boy gave an embarrassed smile.

Meenu smiled. 'That was so *cool*!'

The sound of angry shouting from the other side of the ring interrupted them.

'That's Milo!' said Big Rock.

They hurried round the ring and found Milo and Lord Veto nose to nose in anger, although Milo had to stand on tiptoe to achieve it.

'You are a cheat!' yelled Milo. 'You knew you were being beaten so you fixed that invasion!'

'Me, a cheat?' shouted back Lord Veto. 'What about that freak troll of yours? He damaged five of my precious orcs! I've a good mind to sue you for damages!'

Lord Veto looked around, puzzled. 'Where did he go, anyway?'

'Never mind him,' raged Milo. 'You and your cheating orcs have no place in wrestling!'

'That's right.' Robin nodded. 'You make a clean game dirty.'

'Shut up!' snarled Lord Veto at the old horse.

‘Utter one more word and we’ll be eating horsemeat for dinner.’

‘Don’t you dare threaten Robin!’ snapped Jack, his face glowing red with fury.

Princess Ava, Meenu and Big Rock exchanged worried looks. Was Jack so angry he was about to turn into Thud? But the moment passed. Instead, Milo glared at Lord Veto and declared loudly, ‘Wrestling isn’t big enough for both of us!’



At this, an evil light came into Lord Veto's eyes and a nasty smile appeared on his lips.

'No,' he said. 'I agree. So let's settle this once and for all.'

Jack, worried and suspicious about Lord Veto's manner, tried to intervene. 'Milo . . .' he began.

But Milo ignored him. 'Come on, then!' he demanded. 'What's your challenge?'

'A Giant Rumble,' said Lord Veto. 'Ten of my Wrestling Orcs against ten of your Wrestling Trolls, in the ring together. Last one standing is the winner. The loser will withdraw his team from the Wrestling Federation, which means they cannot enter any tournaments ever again.'

'Done!' nodded Milo.

Jack gasped.

Lord Veto smiled. 'Yes,' he said with a silky smile. 'I think you have been.' He turned to his Chief Orc. 'Come, Warg. We have a Giant Rumble to prepare for.'

With that, Lord Veto and Warg walked off.

'Ha!' said Milo defiantly. 'That told him!'

‘Yes, it told him you’re an idiot,’ snorted Robin.

‘What do you mean?’ demanded Milo indignantly.

‘You took a challenge to put ten Wrestling Trolls into a ring against ten of his orcs,’ said Robin. ‘How many Wrestling Trolls have you got?’

‘Er . . .’ began Milo.

‘Me,’ said Big Rock proudly.

‘That’s one,’ said Robin. ‘Where are you going to get the other nine?’

Meenu pointed at Jack.

‘He turns into one,’ she said. ‘That’s two.’

‘But not all the time,’ sighed Jack sadly. ‘I can’t control when it happens. It may not.’

‘Let’s be positive,’ said Princess Ava. ‘I’ll annoy you in some way to make you change. So that’s two.’

‘There’s Grit!’ said Milo. ‘She’s a great wrestler! And she’s a troll!’

‘Yes, but she went off on her travels and no one knows where she is,’ said Robin.

‘We’ll find her,’ said Milo confidently. ‘We’ll send out carrier pigeons with messages.’

Robin gave a doubtful snort. ‘It’s all a bit iffy, if you ask me,’ he said.

‘We have to make it work,’ said Big Rock firmly.

‘Big Rock’s right,’ nodded Jack. ‘Okay, finding seven more Wrestling Trolls is going to be hard –’

‘More like impossible,’ snorted Robin.

‘But,’ continued Jack firmly, ignoring the old horse’s interruption, ‘that’s what we’ll do.’

‘Jack right,’ nodded Big Rock. ‘We do this together.’

‘I can be an Honorary Troll!’ blurted out Princess Ava.

‘An Honorary Troll?’ repeated Big Rock, puzzled.

‘Yes, it means I can be . . . a Wrestling Troll for the occasion,’ said Princess Ava.

‘Big Rock, Grit, the Masked Avenger and me – if I can turn into Thud,’ said Jack, counting on his fingers. ‘That’s four.’

‘Hmm. It *could* work,’ said Robin. ‘But we still need another six.’

‘Then we’ll find six more Wrestling Trolls and put together a team,’ declared Milo.

‘And where,’ enquired Robin, ‘are we going to find them?’

‘We’ll use my Uncle Waldo’s map,’ said Milo. ‘The one he marked up with all the places he took Waldo’s Wrestling Trolls to. We’re bound to find some good wrestlers there.’ He gave a confident grin. ‘Let’s go get the map! We’re going on a journey!’

As Milo, Big Rock and Jack headed for the dressing room, Meenu looked at Ava excitedly. ‘This is great!’ she whispered. ‘It’ll be just like my family’s holiday road trips – all working together.’

‘Yes, it will.’ Ava smiled.

The two girls headed after the others, with Robin following.

‘A family,’ said Robin quietly to himself. ‘I like that.’