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Opening extract from

# Big Rock and the Masked Avenger Wrestling Trolls: Match One

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# Chapter 1

The Master of Ceremonies stood in the centre of the wrestling ring, the spangles on his shiny multicoloured suit reflecting the glare from the lighting rigs high up in the ceiling of the enormous tent.

'My lords, ladies and gentlemen!' his voice boomed out. 'Welcome to the second fantastic day of this very special All-Comers Slamdown, being held in the grounds of the magnificent Veto Castle. Once again I give you: Orcs versus Trolls!'

At this a huge roar of appreciation came from the audience. Even though it was the first bout of the day and early in the morning, the tent was packed. People stood on their seats

and shouted, some waved homemade signs and pictures declaring their admiration for their favourite wrestlers, while others chanted and sang.

'Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!' came the chant from one side of the audience, while another equally large group sang loudly, and in chorus: 'Trolls! Trolls! Trolls!'

The MC beamed happily as the shouting from all around the tent grew to a crescendo, before he waved a hand to calm the crowd down and announced:

'Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce you to the very special patron for this wrestling tournament, someone whose family has long been involved in the noble art of wrestling. My lords, ladies and gentlemen, please show your appreciation for our very special guest, from the Royal Court of the Kingdom of Weevil: Her Royal Highness Princess Ava!'

Once more the crowd erupted into loud cheers and placard waving, and this time the chants were of, 'Ava! Ava! Ava!'

Outside the tent, in the grey morning as the rain battered down, ten-year-old Jack balanced on a wobbly box as he peered through a gap in the tent. In the royal box he could see a small girl standing up and waving at the crowd. She wore an ornately embroidered dress of purple and blue, and had a small gold crown on top of her wavy red hair.

That's so unfair, Jack thought miserably. I bet she doesn't know a quarter as much as I do about wrestling, but there she is in the best seat in the house. Why can't I get a good seat in the dry,



instead of being out here, soaking wet and balancing on this box?

It had been raining heavily for the last hour and Jack was soaked right through to the skin. He looked through the hole in the tent and saw the crowd settle back down in their seats and fall silent in an expectant hush as the MC strode around the ring, smiling broadly.

'The first bout on this final day is between that fantastic Wrestling Troll, Mudd . . .'

Before the MC could finish the sentence, at the word 'Mudd' half of the huge crowd erupted into cheers and yells and chants of, 'Mudd! Mudd!' and placards with a picture of a ball of mud on them were waved. Meanwhile, from the other half of the audience came loud jeers and boos.

From his vantage point, Jack saw the figure of Mudd enter the tent from a door at the back. The troll was huge and wearing a sparkly blue and yellow costume. He was also well-named – over his rock-like body he seemed to have a coating of wet mud, which would make it

difficult for his opponent to get a decent hold.

The tall, powerful figure of Mudd stomped down the aisle towards the ring, waving at the crowd who stood and cheered – or stood and booed if they were orc supporters.

Mudd reached the ring and hauled himself up between the ropes, then stamped around waving at the crowd before stopping at his corner, flexing his arm muscles and bending his knees in a warm-up.

The MC continued: '. . . and one of the rising stars from Lord Veto's stable of sporting heroes, Wrestling Orc . . . Slasher!'

At this, the section of the crowd that had been booing Mudd suddenly began roaring their approval of Slasher the Wrestling Orc, and now the placards that were being waved had a picture of a sharp claw and the word 'Slasher' on them, along with chants of, 'Slasher! Slasher!' and 'Orcs! Orcs! Orcs!'

Where the troll had marched in a flat-footed, heavy way down the aisle, Slasher the Orc ran out from the door at the far end, did a dazzling

somersault and then leapt to his feet, baring his large teeth in a wicked grin and holding his claws so that the light reflected from his shiny talons. He wore shorts, which meant that his scaly skin was on show for all to see.

As Slasher danced down the aisle towards the ring, Jack turned his attention back to Mudd the Troll, standing patiently as he waited for his opponent to get into the ring. It was the Wrestling Trolls Jack had really come to see. The problem was that now the wrestlers had appeared, some people at the back of the crowd were standing up and blocking Jack's view through the hole in the tent.

He saw another hole a bit to the left, and shifted to try and reach it, while holding onto the fabric of the tent; but just as he moved, an angry growl from behind startled him, and he fell off the box onto the wet ground.

Jack struggled to his feet and turned to find himself looking into the angry face of the owner of Veto Castle, Lord Veto himself! Next to Lord Veto stood the tall, powerful figure of Warg,

one of his Wrestling Orcs.

'So!' snarled Lord Veto. 'My kitchen boy! What are you doing here?'

'I . . . er . . . I . . .' stammered Jack. He gulped nervously, then said apologetically: 'I'm sorry, my Lord.'

'You will be sorry!' snapped Lord Veto. 'You're sacked! And if you dare to come anywhere near my castle again, you'll suffer!'



Jack stared up at Lord Veto, shocked.

'But . . . but I only wanted to see the wrestling, my Lord!' he said.

'And I forbade you to! You disobeyed me! Warg, find a big muddy puddle and throw him into it!'

The huge orc standing beside Lord Veto growled. Then it reached out one of its massive claws and grabbed Jack, and carried him off into the rainy night. Jack struggled, trying to break free, and for a second a kind of mist filled Jack's mind and he seemed to see everything through crystals. A shuddering sensation pumped through his arms and legs, and the orc nearly dropped him. Then the strange feelings vanished and the orc tightened its grip on Jack and carried him across the muddy field, while the rain poured down. Finally the orc stopped and, with a satisfied laugh, dropped Jack into a large muddy puddle. Then it returned to Lord Veto and the two walked towards the entrance of the large tent.

# Chapter 2

Jack got up out of the puddle, and then fell over as his feet slipped on the mud. He lay there, half in and half out of the big puddle, and felt the rain fall on him. He thought he might be crying, but his face was so wet from the rain that he couldn't be sure if there were also tears.

'Hello! What's up?'

Jack looked up at the sound of the deep friendly voice. A troll was standing there, looking down at him sympathetically. The troll was wearing its wrestling costume: a multicoloured leotard with a picture of a mountaintop on the front. Up close like this, Jack noticed that the mixture of colours was a

mostly to do with the fact that the costume had been patched with lots of different coloured cloth: blue, red, yellow, green, purple.

'An orc dumped me in this puddle,' said Jack. And now he *was* crying. 'A Wrestling Orc.'

'Orcs no good,' said the troll, and he made a fart noise just to make its feelings about orcs clear. 'I take you somewhere dry. Make you feel better.'

'Thanks,' said Jack, 'but there's no need.'



The troll made the fart noise again and lifted Jack up as if he weighed no more than a feather. Then it carried him through the squelching mud to a large wooden caravan. The troll pushed open the door.

'Milo!' it called. 'We got visitor!'

A boy of about thirteen looked up from his wrestling magazine as the troll pushed the soaking wet Jack into the caravan.

'Found him in puddle,' explained the troll. 'He wet.'

'So I see,' said the boy. He put down the magazine and stood up, smiling in greeting. 'Let me guess! You want some signed photographs of Big Rock?' Milo went to a drawer and opened it, taking out some large glossy photos as he carried on talking: 'Or maybe you want a piece of his costume? That is our most popular item! That's why his costume's got so many patches on it – because of all the people who want a bit, just so they can say that they own a genuine piece of Big Rock the Wrestling Troll!'

'He not buying,' said the troll. 'He sad. And wet.'

'Not buying?' said Milo, shocked. 'Everyone buys!'

'Not me,' said Jack sadly. 'I haven't got any money.'

This admission made Milo stop.

'None?' he queried, puzzled, as if the thought of people without any money at all was an alien concept for him.

'None,' sighed Jack.

Milo looked at Jack, and now properly took in his soaking wet, mud-stained clothes.

'What's your name?' asked Milo.

'Jack,' said Jack.

'I'm Milo, and that's Big Rock,' said Milo. 'He's the Champion Wrestling Troll.'

'Not yet,' said Big Rock in his deep troll voice.

'The next Champion Wrestling Troll,' said Milo. 'I'm his manager and trainer. So, how did you end up in a puddle?'

'Lord Veto told one of his orcs to dump me in it.'

Milo looked interested.

'Lord Veto? The bloke who owns all those sports stars? Wrestling Orcs? Footballing Elves? Gymnast Goblins?'

'Yes,' said Jack. 'I work – worked – in the kitchens at Veto Castle. I've worked there since I was five. Until tonight. He sacked me.'

And Jack told them his story. Orphaned at five years old. His parents had worked for Lord Veto, so Jack was kept on to work in the kitchens at Veto Castle, doing all the dirty jobs that no one else wanted to do, like cleaning the grease from under the oven. But Jack's biggest love was wrestling, and when he'd heard that a tournament featuring Wrestling Trolls was to be held in the grounds of Veto Castle, he'd asked Lord Veto if he could have a day off to go and watch it.

The answer had been a firm refusal.

'He said no, I had to stay in the kitchens in case he felt like a snack when he came home. So all day long yesterday I stayed in the kitchen, but he never came. So today I thought I'd be

able to go without him noticing. So I did.'

'Then you saw the first match!' smiled Milo. 'Slasher versus Mudd! Fantastic!'

'I never saw it,' Jack told them miserably. 'I never got in. I had a penny saved up from my wages, but I lost it through a hole in my pocket. So I found a gap in the tent I could look through, but I couldn't see properly. I was just getting a decent view when Lord Veto found me. And that was that. He sacked me and had me dumped in the puddle.'

Milo shook his head. 'I think that's one of the saddest stories I've ever heard,' he said. He turned to Big Rock. 'What do you think?'

'Sad,' agreed the troll, nodding his great rock-like head.

'No, I mean: what do you think we should do with him?' said Milo.

Big Rock fell silent. A minute passed. Then another.

'He's thinking,' Milo explained to Jack. 'Trolls aren't used to doing too much of that.' He turned back to Big Rock. 'Well?'

The huge troll finally nodded. 'Help Jack,' he said.

'Yes. That's what I thought,' nodded Milo. He turned to Jack. 'I've got some old clothes you can put on. They may be a bit big for you, but at least you'll be dry while we hang out those wet ones of yours. Then you can give me and Big Rock a hand, practising for his bout this afternoon. If it stops raining, that is.'

Big Rock lifted his head and listened.

'It stop,' he said.

'What?' asked Milo.

He went to the window and looked out, and then he smiled.

'You're right, Big Rock. It has stopped raining,' he said. He grinned at Jack. 'Maybe you're bringing us luck!'