

Further Hazards of Commuting

Little is known with certainty about the lives of trolls. They live under bridges or along desolate mountain ways. The touch of sunlight turns them to stone. They eat human flesh. They are hoarders of treasure, like their distant cousins the Dwarves. They adore beautiful blonde young princesses and sometimes abduct same, to keep them company and brush out their snaggly troll-hair. Beyond, all is mystery; even august authorities like Tolkien and the brothers Grimm have little to add. Science, considering trolls mythical, has no interest in studying them. Symmetrically, trolls have no interest in science; or in scientists, except as a potential meal.

Once upon a time, then, a troll named Clogg came from somewhere, by some means (one theory holds that they burrow through the earth, like moles); and made himself a lair beneath a bridge. Human habitation lay near enough to ensure plentiful food, but not so near as to be risky. Excavating the lair was hard work and made him hungry; so when night fell he came aboveground, and hid in the woods to await any hapless travelers.

The hapless travelers who soon appeared, some 31 in number, occupied the first two coaches of a late-evening commuter train - for most implausibly, Clogg had found his way to New Jersey, and made his lair beneath a railway bridge, spanning the Passaic River a few miles above Newark. He had never seen a train before, but managed to improvise a response. As it rushed past, he hurled himself forward in a football-esque tackle, and succeeded in derailing the last coach and locomotive. They slewed sideways, tearing up east and westbound lines in a snarl of rails, ties, and ballast.

No one was hurt. The train was in "push-pull" mode: railspeak for running backwards, engine at the rear controlled by the engineer from a cab in the lead coach. While the crew went out to inspect the mess, the passengers sat fretting in the lurid glare of the emergency lights. Among them was a yuppie, complete with cell phone, on which he had been plagueing his overworked, underpaid secretary while plotting a hostile takeover. Furious at the interruption, and disdaining the crew's safety warning to stay aboard, he went to the vestibule, opened a door, looked out - and was promptly gobbled; red suspenders, cell phone and all.

For a moment Clogg stared dully at his stomach, from which a faint tinny voice could be heard: *"....cannot be completed as dialed. Please check the number and try again; or ask your*

Operator for assistance. We're sorry...." Then, satiated (the yuppie had been rather fat), he shambled back to his lair.