

Episode 48: Brambleberry Scrambler

Written by Jarod K. Anderson

[www.cryptonaturalist.com](http://www.cryptonaturalist.com)

Step inside my cabin and hang your coat by the door.

You smell of snowfall and hemlock boughs.

I just fed the stove and the fire is whispering like radio static.

Soon, that white lace on your boots will be pooling on the floorboards, making them shine like polished stone.

Rest here as long as you like.

It's no trouble that our meeting place is imaginary.

Many worthwhile things are.

Welcome to The CryptoNaturalist.

[Theme Music]

My friends, I'm gonna level with you. I absolutely thought the Brambleberry Scrambler was imaginary.

I still think it is right on the edge of being imaginary. If I wasn't looking at a pink, heart-shaped snout-print on my shirt as I speak, I would continue to suspect that its primary habitat is in the mind.

The first and only mention of the Scrambler in CryptoNaturalist lore comes from the whimsical work of Susan Huckleberry.

If you've never heard of Susan, well, let me say that her books are a delightful read and not a great starting place for someone new to studying hidden nature.

You see Susan, more than most, found little worth in making distinctions between the subjective denizens of her own fancy and the objective inhabitants of the wider world.

So, creatures both real and real-to-Susan stand side by side in her work and if you're expecting her to note which is which, you will be disappointed.

Moreover her writing style was unorthodox, even among CryptoNaturalists.

By way of example, let me read you a few of her words on the Brambleberry Scrambler.

This is from page 53 of Susan's book *Love Letters to Precious Monsters*.

Quote:

*The Brambleberry Scrambler  
Both Rambles and Scrambles  
It Dimples the Earth  
With its Natural Sandals  
It Scouts all About and  
With its Stout Snout it Handles  
Snails and Blackberries  
And Salubrious Scandals.*

End quote.

It goes on like that for a few pages, but you get the idea. The image she paired with these words is a cartoonish, pink creature that looks like a very plump piglet with a fluffy, cotton candy mane running down its back and the black spots of a Holstein-Friesian cow.

So, when I got a call from a sanitation worker pal of mine up in Northern Michigan about an elusive pink critter she'd spotted in a tanglewood patch next to a middle school up near Grayling, the Brambleberry Scrambler was not, immediately, on my mind.

It's funny.

I keep talking about objective reality and the imagination as if they are wholly separate concepts that never overlap. You'd think I would know that such dichotomies are rarely so simple.

Speaking of places where the real and imagined meet, how about a little poetry?  
It's time for today's hidden lore segment.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Katelyn Allred.

Calling

Do not fear  
when wind lifts in you like ravens' wings,  
and you crave to explore the twisting tangle of trees.

Feel the primal pulse leading you deeper  
into the woods, for part of you remembers  
nights dizzy-drunk on starlight,  
recalls the rhythms of your earthy cradle.  
Something in you still longs  
for the bits of yourself you left behind; it still  
sings out in search  
of what will never return.

No, indeed. We should not fear that primal pulse calling us into the wilderness. I often think of that call as good old fashioned homesickness. A lovely poem that makes me think about the nostalgia our bodies feel for a wild way of life that our minds might not consciously remember. The body remembers.

Katelyn is a writer and student currently working towards a Bachelor's Degree in English. Her work has been featured in The Merrimack Review, and you can find her on Instagram @katelynallredwrites.

A few hours ago, Cassandra dropped me off at a WWII era middle school built of bricks the color of pumpkin pie. A dented bike rack stood out front like a lopsided smile.

It was the kind of January day that transforms the concept of the color gray into a full body sensation. Cold, but not freezing. Mist, but not rain. Disquiet air, but not a real breeze.

The woods by the school was littered with candy wrappers and cigarette butts. A half-closed folding knife stuck in a rotting log glinted in the ashy light like a rusting question mark. A wet cardboard mildew smell kept watch over the flotsam and jetsam of small rebellion.

There were certainly no brambleberries there on the cusp of January, but there were brambles a-plenty.

I tucked in my arms, bent down, and took one of the middle schooler paths to the sort of secret, inner citadel of interwoven brush universally admired by children.

This was a particularly good one. I tip my hat to the kids who made it.

The path was practically a tunnel. The dense briars and honeysuckle made an impenetrable wall. And, no doubt, many adults who are no longer on speaking terms with their childhoods would miss the path entirely.

After a surprisingly long trot, I came to a low, domed place awash with old pizza boxes and crumpled soda cans.

There was an army green footlocker covered in creatively lude art. It must have been a heroic task to carry it into that place. It was padlocked shut, which didn't matter much because something had chewed one of the ends of the wooden box clean off.

Through that ragged, splintery opening, a rainbow of candy packages spilled onto to the packed dirt.

Many of the packages were tattered and empty, but some still bulged with their sugary contents.

"Ah," I said to the trash-strewn 12-year-old's paradise. "We have a food source."

I tucked myself into a seated position, half-concealed beneath a cascade of bare branches, and prepared to wait.

Dusk was fast approaching and since my friend had sighted the pink creature at dawn, I thought it likely I was dealing with a crepuscular cryptid.

There's a tongue twister for you.

Well, it was a lucky guess, but I was right.

Friends, I've seen some odd things.

I mean, The Orbital Kingfisher is nothing to yawn at, but the Brambleberry Scrambler well and truly made me wonder if reality had blown a fuse.

It's not *that* it was strange. It's *how* it was strange.

It looked like a bit of animation had escaped from a television and into the real world. Its bright, luminescent body was shocking in the waning, gray light. Its oversized, expressive eyes locked onto the candy and then it blurred forward to crash into the box with snuffle and a snort. The fine fur of its pink mane floated above its shoulders like smoke.

I just sat there with my jaw hanging open, sending a mental apology to the late, great Susan Huckleberry for my doubts.

As dusk deepened, the basketball sized pig squeaked and chomped happily, munching on colorful candy, its tiny, tufted tail wagging back and forth like a metronome.

I suspect the candy lured the creature out of winter dormancy, mimicking the sweetness of its typical diet of brambleberries. I have to wonder if berries will still satisfy it after tasting that level of concentrated sugar. It would be an... interesting turn of events if Brambleberry Scramblers started pursuing candy in the wider world.

Eventually, the Scrambler extracted itself from the candy looking a bit plumper and very satisfied.

At that point, it noticed me sitting ten feet off.

It raised a single eyebrow in a disturbingly human expression, then it pranced directly toward me.

“Hello there,” I said. “How are you this fine evening?”

I didn’t expect it to speak, but words are a handy way to project your intentions when you’re feeling a tad flustered.

It didn’t speak.

Which, at the time, was a bit of a relief.

Instead, it cocked its head, then stepped forward and poked me square in the stomach with its heart-shaped snout, leaving a pink print on my white shirt.

There was a little “boop” sound when it prodded me.

With that, it hopped in the air, its short legs running in place. Then it landed, spun in a circle a few times, and vanished with a puff of rosy smoke that... I kid you not... smelled like bubblegum.

Sigh.

You know, I just experienced this, and already I feel like I’m making this up as I go. Could that be a survival mechanism? Could sheer unlikeliness act as a kind of narrative camouflage for the Brambleberry Scrambler?

Feels possible.

I’m going to head back out at dawn and see if I can gather more data. Wish me luck.

In the meantime, it looks like we have a new field report. Coordinates too. Huh. Let’s take a listen.

[Click]

This is Professor Taylor Hoyt Broadcasting on CryptoNaturalist Frequency 11-58-1.

My colleagues, is there traffic between cryptid and CryptoNaturalist?

In our peculiar field, is the divide between subject and student a stark, stone wall? Or is it something softer? More... permeable.

I have a growing certainty that I, myself, am a cryptid. Perhaps this is a new development or perhaps it has always been so.

I reach out to you, my community, for insight beyond my own perception.

Allow me to elaborate.

As far back as I can recall, I have been studying this lagoon, an unblinking aquamarine eye gazing out from sun-warmed sands.

If I start at dawn, I can walk around the lagoon three times a day, pausing twice to eat a meal of shallow-hoppers and shore grass. Three circuits of the water following the endless, jumbled braid of claw-toed prints in the sand.

28 palm trees. 4 noteworthy stones. One hunk of driftwood like a hooked and beckoning finger.

If my memory is to be believed, these odd tracks, the focus of my study, have coaxed me forward and given structure to my days for the entirety of my life.

I'm embarrassed to admit that I only recently realized what I do not doubt you guessed immediately.

The tracks in the sand are all mine.

The clawed toes, the webbed feet. Mine as well.

As you can imagine, this realization led to many others.

So many questions. A pressing, omnidirectional weight of ignorance.

How is it that I recall no place beyond this lagoon and yet I call myself “professor”?

I somehow doubt that any reputable institution of higher learning bestows that title on the be-fanged and roving inhabitants of isolated lagoons, sight unseen.

No, that title, like the name that goes with it, is inscribed here on this battered valise I carry.

So, what am I to conclude?

Was I this man? Did I become what I studied? Or am I a creature that found a CryptoNaturalist’s possessions and somehow contracted the profession as one might influenza?

[Sigh]

I have come to believe something a bit humbling.

These questions are too big for me. I require assistance.

Whether I was Professor Taylor Hoyt before or have become him more recently I do not know.

What I do know, what I feel as a matter of faith, is that I am a member of a thoughtful, curious, caring community and to that community, to *my* community, I say this:

Please come and fetch me.

It’s time I get a new perspective as well as a change of scenery.

There is a switch on my transmitter that broadcasts my coordinates. I am activating it now.



Having exhausted my data and my faculties, I am trusting to your goodwill and the myriad wisdom of a wider world.

I admit... I tremble at the simple thought of venturing beyond my home. And yet...

It may be the instincts of the creature I am or the values of the man I was or a felicitous mix of the two, but I'm holding fast to one point of certainty.

A certainty that change and growth are fearful things and, by the sun and moon, marching toward them is the most meritorious act a thinking being can choose.

Professor Taylor Hoyt, signing off.

[Click]

Well how about that.

Let's see here. Looking at these coordinates... it will take some specialized travel to reach the professor. Valentina, if you're listening, let's coordinate on this one. I'm gonna end this broadcast and open up some other lines of communication with folks.

Rest assured listeners, we will show Professor Taylor Hoyt that his faith in our community was well-placed.

Until next time, we're all strange animals. So, act like it.

**Show Notes: Episode 48: Brambleberry Scrambler Feast (00:22:02)**

### **Credits**

**The Brambleberry Scrambler is just on the edge of being real, which is a perfectly lovely place to call home.**

Special thanks to Matthew Zahnzinger for playing Professor Taylor Hoyt. Matthew is a stage actor in the Greater Boston area, a devotee of Peter Cushing, a board

gamer and a collector of walking sticks. He's a regular cast member on The Penumbra Podcast and he was a guest performer on the debut season of Second Star to the Left. Reach out to him for voice acting opportunities via his Twitter handle, @MatthewofBoston.

Check out Field Guide to the Haunted Forest by Jarod K. Anderson wherever books are sold.

Reminder: Transcripts of this and every episode are available at [cryptonaturalist.com](http://cryptonaturalist.com).

Mailing Address:

**The CryptoNaturalist**  
**PO Box 837**  
**Delaware, OH 43015**

Exclusive stickers, pins, shirts, and access to bonus content and strange expertise on strange topics awaits you at our patreon page. [Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist](https://Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist). You'll find information about submitting your poetry or prose for our hidden lore segments in the about section of our website at [CryptoNaturalist.com](http://CryptoNaturalist.com).

The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod K. Anderson.

Thanks to Adam Hurt for the use of his song Garfield's Blackberry Blossom from his album Insight. For more information on Adam's music, performances, and teaching, visit [adamhurt.com](http://adamhurt.com).

### **Post Script:**

After coordinating with my colleagues, we decided that Cassandra and I will go meet Professor Hoyt. Meanwhile, the heart-shaped snout print on my shirt has begun quietly oinking. After many decades in this line of work, it's nice to find that I can still be surprised.