

Episode 18: The Green Stranger
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500,000 years ago, an elk was struck by lightning and lived. The ache of it stayed in her bones the rest of her life. There was no human there to see it or record it in words, yet it's just as much a part of earth's essential history as any song lingering in a billion human minds.

Welcome, to The CryptoNaturalist.

And a fine evening to you, listener. I'm sitting here in a dark, swampy patch of Mississippi woods on an old, mossy log next to cheerful little fire. The campfire smoke smells like heaven, so I forgive it for stinging my eyes whenever the breeze shifts my way.

And just how much do I love that night breeze? The way it ebbs and flows in the pitchy blackness beneath the trees, bringing me the smells of earth and plants and all the creatures that the breeze knows without naming, understands without judging, analyzing or categorizing the way us young humans do.

But, now, listen to me. I'm here to do science and I'm sliding into poetry. I gotta admit, sometimes the two overlap in my mind to such a degree that I have trouble telling the two apart.

Of course, the truth is there are countless reasons why a body might want to be sitting in these lovely woods on such a lovely night with just a few tattered clouds sailing past the full moon in a bright, starry sky.

That said, this particular body is here for one reason, to witness a beautiful, CryptoNatural phenomenon folks around here call "The Green Stranger."

Very little is known about this topic, though, as usual, I suspect Cassandra knows more than she's telling me considering that she scouted out this particular location.

Around these parts, The Green Stranger is known as, well, both a fireside story and a fireside phenomenon.

You see, the folktales center on campers sitting around a dwindling campfire in the small hours of the night, their chins falling to their chests, fighting a losing battle against sleep, driven to stay awake and prolong the magic and fellowship of camping, when suddenly a drowsy camper notices that there's an extra body sitting in the circle of flickering, orange light.

An ill-defined silhouette like a person-shaped patch of the underbrush glowing a faint, mossy green.

Now, the old fella at the Waffle House who spun me that yarn gave me the impression that it was supposed to be a spooky story. I guess it's supposed to work on the fear of the unknown, which, listeners, is not exactly one of my chief fears.

Ah... and what have we here...

The firelight has faded down to nothing, even though I see no earthly reason for it to do so.

Alright.

And... now... the light is returning to normal...

And I am no longer alone.

Wonderful. Absolutely wonderful.

A visitor has joined me on the far side of the fire. Seems to be sitting on an old stump, hands folded in their lap. There's no green glow to speak of. Can't quite make out any features really, just a fuzzy outline of a person.

But, listen to me forgetting my manners.

Howdy, friend. Welcome to my camp. Please make yourself comfortable.

Heck, you've got impeccable timing. You arrived just before a Hidden Lore segment! Let's enjoy some short fiction together. Today's hidden lore is from Madison Trupp.

Hidden Lore:

Visitation #1

I am alone in a swamp at night. I lie in the reeds as silt curls around my heels and mud pillows beneath my head. The heat of summer has found refuge in the substrate strafing my skin while the water laps it from my fingers and toes. Humid darkness settles heavy on my chest.

In the long black sky, the moon sits at an arbitrary angle. I watch it through the slow waving fronds of grass above me. I can see its distant flaws, the imperfections of cold craters overlain by streaks of ancient eruptions. The moon is dormant and millions of miles away; there is nothing enchanting about this piece of orbiting debris, yet I crave its attention all the same. In this moment, it looks down on me, but I am fleeting and soon it will pass on to someone else.

When it does pass, I feel the tracks in the mire that I have left behind. Leaves clot my hair. My fingers arch and squelch; the swamp's parasites have already begun to writhe into my pores. My rips of purple skin and black blood.

Nothing croaks or chirps in the dead of this night. It tells me to sleep.

So, I sleep. And I dream. And I rise from the swamp, looking down on myself, cold and dormant and millions of miles away.

(end)

Ah, I think my visitor just gave the slightest of nods. I suspect we both enjoyed this one. Somehow lonesome, yet hopeful. Dark, but full of mysterious possibility. Just lovely.

Ya know, Madison Trupp is a Canadian writer and artist with a love for haunted fantasy, escapism, and standing under streetlights on rainy nights. She writes novels for children and blog posts about writing. You can find more of her work at www.madisontrupp.com.

The Green Stranger sits motionless, but there's the slightest angle to their head that suggests that they are staring into the fire. They seem... contemplative. Which, I'd say is a pretty universal reaction to sitting next to a campfire in the dead of night. Your immediate world shrinks to a little sphere of ancient, primal illumination and somehow this distillation of your visible world prompts the imagination to expand to a truly cosmic scale, discovering new worlds of "what if" and "why not."

But, there I go again, narrating and forgetting my hospitality.

Can I offer you anything, friend?

Let's see here... how about some trail mix? No?
What else do I have in my pack?

Macadamia nuts?

Meal worms?

UV Light?

Spring Water?

Ancient Riddles?

Pop Tarts?

My Great British Bake-Off fan fiction?

Can I offer you anything at all?

Quiet type, eh?

Well, tell you what. I have a thermos full of hot coco here and I just happen to have two mugs. I'll pour you one and you can drink it if you like. No pressure.

[Footsteps]

Here you are, I'll just set that next to you.

[Unearthly howl]

Oh, think nothing of it. My coco is your coco, friend.

Let me just return to my seat here. Now, I hope you don't mind if I give a quick description of you to our listeners here.

The green stranger seems to be a handsome collection of fungi, lichens, mosses and other plant material, with what appears to be two glossy black beetles for eyes and surprisingly human teeth.

In short, they're some of my favorite organisms collected together in a human shape. Honestly, I'm a little flattered that such ancient and diverse creatures would choose to take the shape of a person, let alone visit my little camp site.

What a treat.

Oh, my. The fire light is dimming again. Do you have to go so soon? There's a guest room here in my Winnebago. No need to rush off.

Ah. Well.

The Green Stranger has departed with the return of the light. It's a shame.

Ah, but look.

They drank their coco!

And they left us little something on the stump.

Looks like... three acorns and a human jawbone.

Well, that's mighty sweet of them.

Afterall, what's an acorn but the promise of a future oak tree. And a jawbone? Well, could there be a better symbol of conversation and breaking bread together.

What thoughtful gifts.

Oop. My fillings are buzzing again. That means I must have a transmission. Let's head on inside the RV and see what's come thorough.

[Door opening/closing – outdoor sounds subside]

Hmm. Well, that's unusual. I don't see any messages, but Cassandra is prompting to press play. I guess let's take a listen.

Transmission:

Ahem. Hello. I'm here transmitting on and, well... living on CryptoNaturalist frequency 11-58-1.

Right now I suppose you're wondering if the radio itself has become sentient or if my intelligence resides in something less concrete. Well, to that reasonable question, I can only say, "shut up."

What?

Don't act like you can explain the nature of your own consciousness any better than I can. Sure, you can point to a body made of meat and say something vague about the squishy electro-chemical functions of your brain, but let's not pretend that such an explanation is any more complete than mine.

Can you even conceptualize how your thoughts are created, smarty pants?

No. You can't.

I live in or through these transmissions and you reside in a wrinkly lump of flesh the size of a Guinea pig locked inside your skull.

We're both weird. It's not a contest.

Anyway, I can sort of... see everyone who can currently hear my voice and I've reached the point at which it feels a little creepy not to say, "hello."

So, "hello."

Disembodied voices are nothing if not polite.

See? I just made that up. I'm inventing an identity for myself as I speak. It's really an enormous amount of pressure that I simply refuse to confront.

Ah, denial of responsibility. Yet another aspect of my personality unfolds.

If you need me, just talk to the radio. You can call me The Transmission. Is that a confusing name for me to choose? Well, such is life.

Bye for now.

(End.)

Ah, well. Congratulations on your new found sense of self, The Transmission. I, for one, am happy that you're on or through my radio. Welcome.

Friends, I think I'm going to head out and sleep by the fire tonight. Maybe I'll get lucky and have another visit from The Green Stranger.

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

Credits

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Show Notes: Episode 18: The Green Stranger (00:15:35)

A strange visitor joins the CryptoNaturalist around the campfire for a pleasant, if one-sided, conversation.

Special thanks to Tim Sniffin for being the voice of The Transmission. Hear more of Tim on the Hello From The Magic Tavern podcast as the Mysterious Man, and find more of Tim's work at timsniffen.com

Oh, and subscribe to our new YouTube channel for upcoming bonus videos. We're currently working on a CryptoNaturalist makeup tutorial video, which is just as strange as it sounds.

Hidden lore fiction by Madison Trupp. Madison is a Canadian writer and artist with a love for haunted fantasy, escapism, and standing under streetlights on rainy nights. She writes novels for children and blog posts about writing. You can find more of her work at www.madisontrupp.com.

(End)