

Episode 25: It's Behind You  
Written by Jarod K. Anderson  
[www.cryptonaturalist.com](http://www.cryptonaturalist.com)

Umm. Listener, there's, uh, something behind you. No, no, don't look. It's not the kind of thing you look at, it's just... well... conspicuous. Yeah, I really shouldn't have brought it up.

Welcome, to The CryptoNaturalist.

Howdy there!

Today we're discussing the strange history of micro-hippos and their role in the sinking of the original version of Florida.

Hmm. You seem a bit distracted, though.

I get the sense that you're still a bit preoccupied with that thing behind you. Well, let's address it then. I've never had much use for that old saying "ignorance is bliss." Ignorance is just ignorance. I think that's more akin to numbness. Understanding is closer to bliss.

Well, go ahead and look over your shoulder for that thing, if you haven't already. I'm guessing you won't see it even if you look. I can see it even across the time and distance that separate us in this moment, but that's just practice and experience. I'm not doing anything that you couldn't learn to do yourself with enough study and near-death experiences.

Speaking of experience, I don't mean to trouble you here, but I... don't actually know what that thing behind you is.

Now, don't take that the wrong way. This isn't a time to panic. I'm reasonably confident that you're reasonably safe. If you're listening to this, I expect that you're well aware that I've had experience with inexplicable and singular creatures before, so we'll just go ahead and work through the process of discovery together.

There's a lesson to be learned here. See, part of being a human being who is open to growth is admitting freely when you don't know something. There's no shame in it. Nope. It's an exciting moment, a catalyst for curiosity and a prelude to new knowledge.

Whoa. Never seen that behavior before. Uh, maybe itch the top of your head. Just to be safe.

Let's see. Generalization can often be misleading when it comes to identifying animals. Many of the old sayings are not universally true.

For example, the idea that all venomous snakes have triangular heads is simply false. Or the old's children's rhyme "eyes of nine, you're gonna be fine / eyes of seven, you're headed for

heaven.” It’s true in a lot of cases, but not all. So, the fact that the creature watching you now has seven eyes is not necessarily a sign of danger.

Heck, that creature lurking behind you is probably just enjoying your body heat or feeding on your brain waves. Completely harmless.

You know, I once tracked a sentient pile of knives down a Chicago alleyway. Now, that was a touchy situation. Terrifying looking creature, like looking through a kaleidoscope of living cutlery, though when it moved it made a lovely sound something like windchimes when a storm is blowing in. That, friend, was a dangerous creature, but despite all the stitches, I wouldn’t have traded that experience for anything. Compared to that, the creature behind you is harmless as dandelion fluff. I’m sure of it. That thing is just a little mysterious is all. A little mystery is nourishing to the spirit.

Speaking of nourishment, how about a little poetry? It’s time for today’s hidden lore segment.

Today’s hidden lore is a poem by Taylor A. Greene.

### **Hidden Lore**

#### *The Cookeville Crossroad*

Honeysuckle vines tangled into my tendons  
release a saccharine smell of summer --  
southern decadence in a scent.  
My unmoving eyes stare at cotton clouds  
lazily begging to be picked  
yet my fingers refuse to move.

Carnivorous butterflies find me first,  
as do coyotes, curious of the still man,  
they move cautiously,  
choosing to leave for another day.

I am found after the buzzards --  
covered in a coffin of kudzu and Ionicerae.

I’ve always enjoyed work that plays with the border between bodies and nature. We are each, after all, simply unique arrangements of the basic materials of the wild.

Taylor A. Greene is a graduate student of archaeology at Ole Miss and a Kentucky native. His poetry is inspired by love, loss, and the beauty of Southern nature. His work has been featured in *Rootstalk: A Prairie Journal*.

In lieu of a personal website, Taylor requests listeners "pay it forward" with love and joy. (I think we can do that.)

Love and joy. I think I can sense a bit of love in joy in the critter who has decided to be your shadow. I mean, sure, it has a veritable forest of teeth and a mosaic of inky eyes focused on the back of your skull, but we're not in a position to make firm conclusions about such observations.

After all, water deer have fangs, but that doesn't mean they're predators. Like as not, that thing's here to nibble on your fears, anxieties, and insecurities – a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Hmm. The way all of its tendrils are unspooling suggests to me that it's probably about done with whatever it's doing.

What on Earth is that fascinating animal. I keep trying to sketch my impressions of it in my notebook, but anytime I get close to an accurate representation the lines go sliding off the page. Sigh. The happens sometimes.

You know, we might be witnessing this creature's entire lifecycle. I once followed a galloping herd of dew horses along the northern border of Botswana. Dew horses are primarily water vapor and an entire generation lasts a single morning. When the sun rises high enough, they all return to the sky as curling, phantom wisps that break the light into lovely rainbow ribbons winding up toward the clouds.

Or there's the firecracker snail whose adult life consists of about four minutes of whistling like a teakettle before exploding with sharp pop, sending its eggs rocketing in all directions.

Hmm. I'm not sure if I'm succeeding in comforting you, here.

Let's see. I'm recording this in another time and place, but I think I may be able to entice the creature to come my way.

I'm guessing what we have here is a touch arachnid, a tad marsupial, a whisper of cephalopod and a generous pinch of sunspot activity.

I have a call that should do the trick. If this works, I'll lure this beautiful specimen through your listening device and into my time and place. I'm overexplaining, aren't I. This is all pretty textbook, I'm sure I don't need to bore you with details.

Ok, here goes:

[Strange Animal Call]

One more time.

[Strange Animal Call Repeated]

Oh, here it comes. You might feel a slight pressure on your thoughts... and...

There you are! Welcome to Cassandra! I'm Jarod and if you don't mind, I'd like to...

[Splattering Sound]

Huh.

Unfortunate news, listener. Unfortunate for my studio, anyway. The creature has sprayed me with ink and vanished. A pretty standard defense reflex, though I don't know what exactly I did to startle it so. Oh my. This is going to take forever to clean.

[Transmission Alarm]

Oh, good. Why don't we listen to this transmission while I try to clean off my recording equipment.

## **Field Report**

(Jordan Cobb) Angela Hall

Angela Hall transmitting on CryptoNaturalist frequency 11-58-1.

One hundred years in a timeless meadow hemmed in on all sides by sycamore trees.

Well, it gives you time to think.

Many of you listening to this will recall seeing me last month at the CryptoNaturalist Society's charity softball jamboree, but trust me, I've lived a hundred subjective years in the span between now and then.

Let's see.

I'm a little dazed. I think I can be forgiven for that. So, I'm working out what it is that I should report from my century in the meadow.

First, there's this: I consented to the hundred years. This was not misfortune. The meadow is neither a trap nor a curse. Not a hazard. It's an offer, an offer of a column of golden sunlight amidst the trees and a leaf-framed pool of stars on long, still nights.

36,500 days and nights of quiet observation.

You know, the seasons never changed there. It was always the slow, heavy end of summer with the citrus hint of a crisp fall as soon as the sun set.

But, life progressed. Oh yes. Life rarely stands still.

I sat on a smooth stone the color of the Atlantic for much of the time. I sat and I watched.

I watched dark shrews like living shreds of shadow weaving in and out of the grassy ground. I watched field sparrows nest and cicadas emerge at steady intervals like the slow beat of the Earth's heart.

At first, I knew individual organisms. I named them. Later, I gave the characteristics of individuals to entire generations, not as an act of dismissal, but so I could remember each of them as old friends.

The truth is, I'm a chronicler by nature, and the last hundred years taught me something about the value of simple, joyous observation with no goal in mind beyond gratitude. There was a time I would have called this pointless. Now, I call it a gift to oneself.

Uncomplicated appreciation. It was a difficult lesson for me, so I suspect it's a worthwhile lesson. That's usually how it works.

The timeless meadow is located in the same general mood as the half-remembered forest, but not precisely in close proximity. Just walk until you think you've gone too far, smile at your own doubt, and press on a bit further.

You'll find it, if you're sure that's what you want.

Actually, I'm planning to head back there soon. Hmm. I think I'll go now.

Angela Hall signing off for another quiet century.

[End Report]

How about that? Angela is an inspiration. I eagerly await the insights she discovers from another century or two in that meadow.

It's strange, isn't it? 100 years is both a very long time and no time at all. And isn't that the case with all units of time. Both seemingly forever and over in an instant. The human brain is a confounding window through which to view the world.

I need to stop off and get some metaphysical cleaning supplies. In the mean time, try not to collect anymore inexplicable creatures in your wake. At least not until I'm around to enjoy the experience with you.

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

**END**

**Show Notes: Episode 25: What on Earth (00:18:06)**

I don't want to alarm you, but today's creature is a lot closer to you than it is to me.

Angela Hall played by Jordan Cobb. Learn more about Jordan's work at [www.jordanvcobb.com](http://www.jordanvcobb.com) or on Twitter @inkphemeral.

Hidden Lore poetry by Taylor A. Greene. Taylor A. Greene is a graduate student of archaeology at Ole Miss and a Kentucky native. His poetry is inspired by love, loss, and the beauty of Southern nature. His work has been featured in Rootstalk: A Prairie Journal. In lieu of a personal website, Taylor requests listeners "pay it forward" with love and joy.

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