

THIRD PRIZE

Class A Sighting

by Mark Matzke

“There has been a lot of activity at this site. I mean, a lot.” Little clouds of steam shot out of my father’s mouth as he declared this. I watched him survey the campsite with the importance of a forensic investigator. He was dressed for a safari. Keeping a straight face was not easy.

We had driven through the night to get to this campsite, listening to one of those AM radio call-in shows in which people talk about UFOs and the government beaming thoughts into their heads and, of course, their encounters with Bigfoot. I had glanced over to see his eyes wide open, like a kid at a campfire, his face reflecting the glow of the dashboard. It was like he was listening to a sermon. It had been like this since Mom left. Squatching had become devotional in nature.

The vapor he had produced now surrounded his head, nimbus-like. He was looking at me expectantly. I knew what I was supposed to do.

“Oh, yeah, really? A lot of activity, huh?”

“Heavens, yes. The Sasquatch Doctor said there have been five Class A sightings here within the past three months.”

My father says the Sasquatch Doctor saved him. What he means is that he started listening to the Sasquatch Doctor’s podcast at his absolute lowest point. The eyewitness stories and the earnestness of the show’s host spoke to something in him, lifted his spirits, and inspired him to the point that we were now tromping around southeastern Ohio looking for ape-men.

I hopped down from the pickup cab and pretended to look for tracks in the earth.

“Five Class A sightings, for real?”

“For real, son. The most recent happened no more than two weeks ago. A husband and wife were out here for their anniversary. They didn’t notice anything the first night, but the second night something started throwing rocks at their tent. Now mind you, the couple didn’t believe in Bigfoot at all, so they thought this was kids messing with them or something. So the husband says to his wife, “I’m gonna teach these fools a lesson,” and gets out of the tent ready to raise holy hell, and when he does, he comes face to face with an eight-and-half-foot-tall, hair-covered creature swaying back and forth. It’s got these blazing orange eyes and the guy notices it’s got a softball-sized rock in its hand. Well, this guy kind of loses his mind because he can’t think of what to do, so he bellows, I mean, he roars at this Sasquatch like he’s trying to scare it away. The thing kind of looks shocked, he said, and then it rears back and roars at him, and he said it was like when one of those idiotic cars goes by your house and you can feel the impact of the sound. Well, that bass just hit him right in the chest. By now his wife in the tent is screaming bloody murder. I don’t know if she ever got a look at the thing. But anyway, after the creature let out that roar, it turned on its heel and in two big bounds, it was gone. And about ten seconds later that softball-sized rock comes sailing out of the sky and lands right at the guy’s feet. They threw all their gear in the truck and left that night.”

“And that happened right here, you say?”

“Right here where we stand.” He said this in a dramatic stage whisper.

“Well, we’d better keep our eyes peeled then,” I said, hating myself for playing along. I watched my father watching the woods. This was a man who had turned a storefront sporting goods store into a minor empire throughout the Midwest; an athlete who could roll out of bed and win the club golf tournament without having played in a month; a leader who had organized parades and civic gatherings for Scouts and veterans. By all accounts a competent man, if not an available husband. Actually, he had a cold, cruel streak, but we couldn’t talk about it, because no one would have believed us. And now . . . now he was a monster hunter. Now he listened to the Sasquatch Doctor, religiously.

He was pulling a bag out of the back of the cab—full of Bigfoot research tools, no doubt. I left him to his crucial tasks and started toward the nearby tree line. “Got to shake hands with the President,” I said, not expecting a reply, nor getting one.

I made my way down a short, rocky decline to a shady spot among the trees. Glancing back over my shoulder, I could still see the very top of the truck. As I reached down and fumbled for my zipper, I noticed the forest had gone silent. It was like someone had pressed the mute button on nature.

Then, the scent of ammonia hit my nose, and I flinched a bit. Blinking my eyes, I shook my head, looking up just in time to see an enormous, cinnamon-colored shoulder bend out from behind a large oak tree, no more than twenty feet away from me, followed by the thick neck and head of something that I can only describe as neither human nor gorilla. It didn’t seem surprised to see me at all. The figure reversed its motion with otherworldly speed and was gone. Before my brain could even formulate a thought, the world’s sound was turned back on. I just stood there with my hands at my fly.

I was rooted to the spot. For how long, I can’t say. But finally the jackhammer in my chest began to subside and my legs seemed to work, so I sprang back up toward the truck.

“Hey, there you are,” my father said, narrowing an eye. “What happened to you?”

I smiled, more than I meant to.

“Nothing, Dad.”

Third Prize Mark Matzke, "Class A Sighting"

Mark Matzke has co-written two documentary films, “Invasion on Chestnut Ridge” and “The Bray Road Beast” for the Ohio-based production company Small Town Monsters. He served as narrator for “Invasion ...” and “On the Trail of Champ.” He has also written articles for *Nostalgia Digest*, *G-FAN*, *Cryptid Culture* and *Mad Scientist* magazine and essays for Stephen Bissette’s upcoming book *Cryptid Cinema: Volume Two*. He lives in Northeast Ohio with his wife and son.