

Episode 37: Obsidian Bat
Written by Jarod K. Anderson
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We get three sets of teeth. Baby teeth. Adult teeth. And the last set that comes in after you die and just before you become a sentient mist that gnaws the shadows of those who wronged you in life.

Welcome to the CryptoNaturalist.

A fine howdy to you today, listener.

Ya know, your brain has weather. Happiness. Sadness. Foggy autumn mornings when the dew soaks your pant cuffs. Sunny days with a sweet breeze that makes you wonder how you could have ever been dissatisfied with anything. We don't control the weather out in the wide world and there are plenty of times when we don't seem to control the weather in our own minds.

Well, in the wild and inside your own skull, if you don't control the weather, you can at least dress for it. A slicker for the downpour and a warm coffee with a dogeared old friend of a book for days when the sadness blows in over the mountains.

The last thing you wanna do is beat yourself up for what your feeling. Anxiety. Depression. Dread. These aren't the interior weather that any of us would choose, and that's kinda the point of my weather metaphor. You didn't choose such things and deserve no criticism for feeling them. So, be kind to yourself and dress for the weather as you find it.

A friend of mine is experiencing some inclement skull-weather lately, so I asked them what sort of CryptoNature they would like to hear about this week. They responded, "anything about bats."

Well now, that's almost too easy, but I'm happy to oblige. You see, even the most common bat in the world is an absolute wonder. Heck, they are the only free flying mammals and if that isn't strange enough, my mind downright swims when

I think about the reality of their echolocation. Many a time I've been out walking in the dusk and watched a swooping bat swerve to avoid me, clicking out their echolocation song all the while. I love the idea that, for a moment, my face was a 3D map in a bat's brain.

Some bats drink blood. Some eat fruit. Some are important pollinators. And have you ever seen one swim? If somebody out there wants to start a podcast just about bats, they would have plenty of material and I would certainly listen.

Now, as I said, all bats are amazing, but if you want the species most firmly categorized as CryptoNature, then we need to head to Piton de la Fournaise on La Réunion island in the Indian Ocean. Piton de la Fournaise is "Peak of the Furnace" in English. It's one of the most active Volcanos in the world and one of a very few places on Earth you can get a glimpse of the Obsidian Bat, a terrestrial roosting cosmic bat known for its seclusive disposition and its wonderful propensity for eating colossal low orbit mosquitoes. Trust me, we need something to eat low orbit mosquitoes.

Now, I decided to look for the Obsidian Bat while in Australia last week, but I made it to Piton de la Fournaise in about six hours thanks to a shortcut that's both convenient and a bit disrespectful to physical reality. But, hey, we gotta keep reality on its toes, eh?

Speaking of keeping reality on its toes, how about a little poetry? It's time for today's hidden lore segment.

Hidden Lore:

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Patricia Killelea (KILL-A-LAY).

POEM TO BE READ SHORTLY BEFORE MY REINCARNATION

Next life, I want to be the animal who comes across her reflection in the waters & doesn't stop to wonder whether or not it is beautiful

Or next life I'll perch in the ash, try on black feathers & catch the falling leaves so I can glue them all back to the branches

Maybe next life I'll become the white ghost deer crossing ice sheets all winter to reach the promise of spring on the other side

Or next life, I'll find a way to use my whole body to speak in vibrations, like a spider or a cicada & I'll make candlelights flicker just to let you know I'm still around

Next life, I'll definitely have hooves made of agate & I'll train my eyes to travel by birchlight, or I'll swim from the stars all the way back to the river where I was born
It shouldn't be too hard to find me again

Because in the next life, I'll become the first moth to finally reach the moon, the first flake of snow to melt on your tongue

Will you meet me there too

will you glow there beside me, will you become the waters I gaze into, or the ash

Will I find you again in the falling leaves, or in the flicker, next life.

This poem speaks to me of the wonderful cyclical quality of nature and the unity of all things. I sometimes think life is like a river and we, the trees, the insects, and all living things are just the banks through which it flows. Beautiful.

Patricia Killelea (KILL-A-LAY) is the author of the poetry collections *Counterglow* (Urban Farmhouse Press, 2019) and *Other Suns* (Swan Scythe press, 2011). She is currently Poetry Editor at *Passages North* and an Assistant Professor of English at Northern Michigan University. Her work appears in *cream city review*, *Seneca Review*, *Trampoline Poetry*, *Atticus Review*, *Quarterly West*, *The Common*, *Waxwing*, *Spiritus*, and *As/Us*. She also produces videopoems, which have been featured at *Moving Poems*, *Poetry Film Live*, screened and shortlisted for the O'Beal International Poetry Film Competition, and longlisted for the Rabbit Heart Poetry Film Prize.

Volcanoes are wonderful places. Well, not great to places to live or picnic or host a company softball game, but still great all the same.

It was humid dusk with the sunset's crimson and the volcanic vents' crimson mingling in monochromatic splendor as Casandra crept over the lip of Piton de la Fournaise's caldera. We drove down among the many craters and spatter cones seeing the occasional flash of iridium-rich lava here and there about the place.

Now, you might be asking, should you drive into the caldera of an active volcano?
No.

Can I explain to you how Cassandra is able to do it?

Well, based on the omni-directional scowl I feel descending upon me as I speak these words, I suppose the answer is “no.”

Suffice it to say that my friend and vehicle offers me some unparalleled views of this incredible planet and I’m fortunate to know her.

Now, normally in these situations, I prefer to leave Cassandra and find a place of concealment from which to watch for the cryptid in question. But, this time I opted to stay inside and remain uncooked. In any case, as far as I know, the obsidian bat doesn’t have any predators, so I didn’t imagine it would feel threatened by one out-of-place RV in the caldera.

You may have noticed that I say THE obsidian bat rather than AN obsidian bat. That’s because, as far as we know, there’s only one. A notch-eared old giant with a hundred meter wingspan. As the name would imply, the obsidian bat appears to be made from obsidian, though I doubt that’s literally true.

Still, its skin looks like polished black stone and through that volcanic glass there appears to be veins of liquid fire branching out from a pumping heart like a setting sun burning through a stormy cloudbank.

Beyond that, I’ll just say that the creature looks like a work of origami in stone. Sharp, precise angles in lieu of skin and fur.

Well, we were waiting several days to spot the obsidian bat and I was feeling a little uncharacteristically impatient when one of the nearby craters splintered upward in a shower of stone and spewing lava.

The bat climbed up out of the earth and, wouldn’t you just know it, it did in fact resent a lone RV encroaching on its home territory.

In the time following that particular moment, I have apologized to Cassandra many times for that miscalculation and I do so again now. Sorry Cassandra. I’m a lifelong learner and this one was a new lesson for me.

The obsidian bat wasted no time hissing like a high voltage spike blowing a transformer and snatching us up in its angular maw.

I say us... and us it was... but, of course, it was Cassandra's side panels that got dented and her paint that got scratched. Apologies again, friend.

Wild animals are, well, wild and it's a fool who thinks he can always predict their behavior. Still... my fault.

I was given a fair amount of time to think about that as we were rocketed upward into the atmosphere in those dark glass jaws that glowed with the rosy light of newly forged metal.

The sudden g-force of the trip absolutely devastated the horchata I was enjoying and, frankly, I'm still coming to terms with the idea that I'll never get that beverage back.

We were high enough to see the curvature of the earth and Cassandra and I were discussing her possible aptitude for being a spacefaring vehicle when thankfully we were saved by the presence of the obsidian bat's preferred prey, a low orbit mosquito.

There it was. Shining in the dark emptiness above us. Cycling through colors like a perturbed cuttlefish.

As you may know, low orbit mosquitoes appear as a dozen or so images or instances of the same animal transposed one upon the others. Picture an iridescent mosquito the size of a moving van. Now picture twelve more ghost images of the same creature on top of the first, each facing a different direction and menacing you in a different way.

Forgive me. I'm sure I don't need to describe low orbit mosquitoes to you folks. I imagine they're ubiquitous enough to feature in most grade school discussions of common critters.

Anyhoo, the magnificent bat released us to pursue the probability-bending insect and we began tumbling back toward terra firma. A process I'm told is hot and uncomfortable, particularly on the tires. Again. Cassandra. I'm sorry.

Well, eventually our parachute deployed we had a leisurely descent into the Indian ocean, wherein I am now recording this broadcast.

There you have it. An obsidian bat. A low orbit mosquito. A very patient and forgiving RV. The world is full of wonders.

Now then. It's seems to be our good fortune to have a new field report to help close out this episode. Let's take a listen.

Field Report:

Trillium Spencer reporting on CryptoNaturalist Frequency 11-58-1.

Hold in your hand a pinecone.

See it as a city block gently peeled from the Earth and rolled into a conical shape.

See the tiny buildings jutting out in all directions, delicate wooden architecture pressed lightly into your palm.

Smell it. Resin. Pine. Wood. Something earthy. Something meant for the sky.

To call a pinecone a city is a metaphor, except when it isn't. Sometimes, that's the literal truth of what it is.

A brief story.

Some of you will know that I spent the last sixteen months in the spiral caves beneath Lake Hope.

I went there to see the luminescent subspecies of Hellbender Salamander rumored to call those caves home. The result of that search is a story for another time, but the point is I brought a comfort pinecone along with me to remind me

of the woosh of pine boughs catching the summer wind. Such reminders are important deep within the ground.

Well, I was scrutinizing this pinecone in the absolute dark of the cave when something glimmered. A tiny square of light, small as a sugar granule.

I pulled my magnifying glass and found that one of those building-like fingers of wood was more than building-like. It was absolutely a building, dotted with tiny square windows and one of those windows had a light on.

As you can imagine, I couldn't see much. A square of light. Perhaps a row of beige cubicles within. The distinctive waxy green of a lopsided office plant. It's difficult to be certain.

As I studied that window, a tiny figure came into view. I believe, based on her swaying movement, that she was running a vacuum cleaner while nodding to the rhythm of music I couldn't hear.

She pivoted, gazed out the window and, small though she was I felt that instinctive jolt of eye contact as she noticed me looming in the colossal dark beyond her window. I believe she shrugged.

She reached for something out of my view and then the window went dark. A shutter perhaps? I can't say.

Sixteen months in those caves and I never saw that light again. Yet, you my peers, my fellow CryptoNaturalists, will know what I mean when I tell you that I do not doubt what I saw. Not for a moment.

Trillium Spencer signing off.

Huh. You know, I'll have to contact Trillium. I was actually inside one of those pinecone buildings once.

Hmm? What's that Cassandra?

Oh, no, I didn't shrink. Nothing so farfetched as that. It was simply a giant pinecone orbiting a moon in another dimension.

Ha, shrinking. You do let your imagination run away with you sometimes, friend.

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

Show Notes: Episode 37 Obsidian Bat (00:21:25)

Credits

Thank's to you kind folks who have sent mail to me during this time of social distancing. I've received a surprising volume of mail, considering I've never mentioned my PO Box Address on the podcast. I'll mention it in just a moment. Thank you to Vijay, Valkyrie, Elle, Theo, and Dave for the letters and postcards. Thanks to Rissa for the beautiful calligraphy and for making me feel like an druid in a fantasy novel by letting me open a wax-sealed letter. Thanks to my friend Bog Witch for the wonderful photography and little pieces of nature from the Pacific Northwest. Thanks to Boots for the wonderful cross stitch. I do my best to answer all mail, though I am very busy being terribly distracted.

If you would like to send something, mail to:

The CryptoNaturalist

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Special thanks to Isabel Renner for lending her voice talents as Trillium Spencer. Isabel Renner graduated with a BFA in Acting from Mason Gross School of the Arts right before the arrival of the pandemic. A NYC dweller, you can find her on Instagram @isabelrenner and at isabelrenner.com

Patricia Killelea (KILL-A-LAY) is the author of the poetry collections *Counterglow* (Urban Farmhouse Press, 2019) and *Other Suns* (Swan Scythe press, 2011). She is currently Poetry Editor at *Passages North* and an Assistant Professor of English at Northern Michigan University. Her work appears in cream city review, Seneca Review, Trampoline Poetry, Atticus Review, Quarterly West, The Common,

Waxwing, Spiritus, and As/Us. She also produces videopoems, which have been featured at Moving Poems, Poetry Film Live, screened and shortlisted for the O'Beal International Poetry Film Competition, and longlisted for the Rabbit Heart Poetry Film Prize.

Exclusive stickers, pins, shirts, and access to bonus content and strange expertise on strange topics awaits you at our patreon page. 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. 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.

Post Script:

Some people find bats frightening, but I don't understand why. They're just nocturnal creatures who can sense the world in a way we can't imagine and they're the only true flying creature with teeth, perfect little fangs and... Oh, wait, I get it now.