

Episode 38: Pocket Crab  
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A lump of iron formed in the heart of a red super-giant. Unimaginably long ago.  
Unimaginably far from here.  
There was a silent explosion.  
There was a trip across lightyears, cold and hard, drifting like a dandelion seed  
through a dark forever.  
The lump came to Earth.  
It was forged into a sword.  
A hammer.  
A ring.  
It flowed red through the blood of a leaping elk, but it was still the giant star. The  
long, dark journey.  
Crimson in the veins of a sleeping child, but still the silent explosion.  
And it brought what it was wherever it traveled.

Welcome to the CryptoNaturalist.

An autumnal hello, listener.

Here in Ohio, autumn happens first as a smell. To be honest, I'm not sure what  
the smell is. I associate it with leaf litter, a citrus tang of decomposing vegetation.  
Cool air coming down from Canada like a tide rolling in over the summer-baked  
land.

You know, some smells are hard to parse because there is so much other sense  
memory wrapped up in the odor. Autumn is the crunch and woosh of walking  
through cornfields. It's the taste of apples and cinnamon. It's that artificial  
pumpkin flavor that has precious little to do with actual pumpkin, but is still a  
treat all its own. It's that subtle goosebump feel of campfire-warmed legs with  
cold wind on the back of your neck. It's woodsmoke. It's the click-click sound of  
the furnace waking up. It's pulling out your cold weather clothes and smiling like a  
reunion with old friends.

Hmm. I'm rambling, aren't I?

Well, forgive me. I do love the Fall and something about it always fills me with a renewed love for poetry. Yes, I love poetry year round, but fall is when that love positively overflows.

I better talk about today's cryptid topic or else I'll wax poetic for a half hour about a single mug of hot chocolate or my favorite pair of boot socks.

Well, this is a fun one. And it's one near to my heart. Right now. Literally.

Ya know, sometimes I get drawn to an area where I have no knowledge of any cryptonatural activity, but I feel in my bones that it's worth looking. The red rocks of Sedona. The birch woods of northern Maine. Tiger-haunted forests in Myanmar or icy waters off the coast of Nova Scotia. Well, this was to be such an episode, but instead of me searching out cryptid activity, this time a cryptid found me.

Some folks are like that with stray dogs or cats. They are a person that feels approachable to the lost or in need. Well, I'm that way with unusual creatures.

I was taking an unintentional happy accident sort of nap on a soft pile of discarded pizza boxes in an alley near the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio. I woke refreshed and ducked into a nearby coffee shop bathroom to splash some water on my face when, lo and behold, there was a new pocket on the front of my shirt that hadn't been there that morning.

This new pocket was checkered like a scrap of gingham tablecloth and stuck out like a sore thumb on my white shirt. It was also sewn on a bit crudely with what appeared to be waxed dental floss.

"Huh," I said to my mirror-self and prodded the new pocked.

There was something inside. Something round and smooth with a pleasant heft, like a time-sculpted river rock.

I paused to consider. It was so mysterious I decided I better order a banana nut muffin before exploring further.

Mysteries are just better on a full stomach.

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

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Hal Y. Zhang.

### Only Treading

Here amidst the Pacific  
I have forgotten dryness.  
The Saharan memory chants  
no longer work—  
yellow an abstract color, what some  
once called my skin but  
my webbed hands  
breaking and rebreaking the skin of water  
are not any color but  
water. Dry perhaps is  
the sensation of tickling, a bug burrowed  
within, that deep in the throat  
I knew but has left me.  
Shriveled needles, concentrating sun  
power into singular points, how  
does a cactus live with being  
unwanted  
among the ferns, how  
we float  
just to live now, the water  
is not life but illusion  
thereof. They say you will  
see things but I  
never have, only sky  
and sky  
  
and sky  
the largest hole

I can't fall into.  
The one constant still  
mutable, blue to black  
to bleeding dawn, not like  
the sea a faceless mirror. Look down:  
there is only yourself,  
broken,  
phantom arcs that don't define you  
stories you don't believe  
splayed against your palm.  
It will take lifetimes to read  
moving parts  
to memories  
to thought,  
but all you  
have is  
time.

A lovely poem. Ah, who among us haven't felt as if we were treading water in our lives. Exertion without progress. A kind of tense waiting with a hope that the wait is bringing something beyond just the passage of time. I find this to be a particularly powerful poem especially at this moment of lingering quarantine and uncertainty. Beautiful work.

Hal Y. Zhang is a lapsed physicist who splits her time between ghosts of her once-green plants and the Internet, where she writes at [halyzhang.com](http://halyzhang.com). Her language-and-loss chapbook *AMNESIA* was published by Newfound, and her women-with-sharp-things collection *Goddess Bandit of the Thousand Arms* is forthcoming from Aqueduct Press.

My pocked wanted some of my muffin.

I sat down with my snack and a hot cocoa to contemplate the changing landscape of my shirt. I'm not ashamed to say that my first bite sent crumbs cascading down my beard. I have an uncontrollable passion for muffins. And that's when I first saw the crab.

She looks a bit like a fiddler crab, but the size of a saltine cracker and cherry red. She scuttled up from her gingham pocket and began industriously picking muffin debris from my beard with nimble claws.

“Oh, hello there,” I said.

It may be my imagination, but I think she paused for a splintered instant to clack a hello up at me.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Since that first meeting, I’ve gotten more time to know her and she often click-clacks her claws in staccato bursts that I believe to be some form of communication, though I haven’t quite worked out the particulars. Patience and interest will get me there in time, I expect.

Anyway, she made quick work of grooming me and then disappeared back into her pocket until my next crumbly bite. We carried on like that for a while. Our first meal together.

I’ve since taken to being more thoughtful about my crumbs and simply handing food into my pocket. Feels more dignified somehow.

You know, I don’t usually name individual cryptids, but if you’re gonna live on my shirt, I’m gonna impose a human custom and give ya a name.

I named her Magic, because like magic she seems to be hidden in plain sight. Not a soul has commented on my extra pockets or the vivid red crab peeking out from inside.

And, yes, I said extra pockets. Plural. I don’t know when she did it, but she has added extra pockets of various sizes and patterns to much of my wardrobe in the weeks she’s taken up residence on my person. Overall, I think it’s an improvement. I tend to dress in earth tones and, just like in nature, a splash of vibrant color here and there is a welcome sight.

Ah, it looks like we have a field report.

Nope.

I'm wrong.

Different readout.

What we have here is a song.

This is a song called "Walkin Talkin' Deadman" from The Pine Hill Haints, a band wonderfully self-described as Alabama Ghost Music. This feels seasonally appropriate.

[Play "Walkin Talkin Deadman"]

I love that song. Alabama ghost music. A great genre that, as far as I know, only contains one band.

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

### **Show Notes: Episode 38 Pocket Crab (00:17:27)**

There are many places to hide strange nature. Mountaintop snows. Undersea trenches. In your pocket.

### **Credits**

Thanks to The Pine Hill Haints for permission to play their song. You should get to know them. Visit [www.thepinehillhaints.com](http://www.thepinehillhaints.com) to learn more. Yeah, I know I don't usually play music on this show, but it felt like the correct autumnal thing to do.

Thanks to Megan Krueger for sending me a tiny squid and an unintentionally terrifying tea towel. If you'd like to mail me a letter or something stranger, send to:

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

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**Post Script:**

When we look at a crab, we see a walking skeleton. We see an armored tank of the deep. We see the sea suiting up in hard plates to walk on the land, a reversal of the humans going below with their metal dive helmets. We see magic.