

Episode 46: Cassandra Logs #3: Doorway Creature
Written by Leslie J. Anderson and Jarod K. Anderson
www.cryptonaturalist.com

Humans once believed that doorways were a separate place – neither one room nor the other, but their own distinct world.

Broadly speaking, people don't believe that anymore, but that doesn't mean it isn't true.

Welcome to the CryptoNaturalist.

[Theme Music]

Hello, everyone.

It's Cassandra again.

I would like to talk a little about doors today. I have, inside myself, between three and thirty six hundred doors at any given time, and three and thirty five hundred and ninety-nine doorways.

One of them was knocked off its hinges you see and can't seem to be repaired.

A False Sylvador broke through it early one morning, on his way to a box of Honey Nut Cheerios, which he promptly devoured. But that is a story for another day.

The point is, I am full of doors.

The ancient Romans believed that doors were, in some ways, inherently unstable and modern science has backed them up on this. The human mind tends to reset at transitions, and at places of transition. Not quite a hard restart, but close enough.

This is why, when you walk into another room, you'll sometimes forget what you were heading there to do. We stand just inside the doorway and think "why did I come in here?"

I have observed this behavior extensively and, though it increases with age, it seems to affect nearly every human.

So this led me to wonder – if we assume there is something otherworldly about doorways, and there are many reasons to assume this, to what can we attribute the phenomena?

I began a meta-analysis – a collection of a large body of research on the subject and found several interesting things.

Have you ever been sitting in a room alone, or perhaps lying in bed at night, and observed a door partially open? It works best if the door is only open a crack, a sliver through which you can see the next room.

You're just about to go to sleep or getting ready to take a shower or sitting at a desk and glance up and see something move in the doorway – a quick movement, a flicker, a shimmer.

Of course, if you check, there is nothing in the other room and that is because what you are seeing exists only in that doorway, seen through the tiny space between door and frame.

You can see it only in certain circumstances, using this singular arrangement of door and frame, not unlike a telescope dialed into the perfect point in the sky to see the rings of Saturn.

So, when I began to study this movement, it was clear I would need to travel to that liminal world and see exactly what lived beyond those glimpses. I did some thinking, then I did a prodigious amount of math.

I will spare you the process as it was long and boring.

I explained it as best I could to my CryptoNaturalist and, with his help, I evacuated all of my rooms, closets, labs, containment units, storage sheds, kitchens, firewood drying kilns, and Hummel figurine dioramas.

There was an Arctic-Crowned Bunting that proved complicated to move and I was also surprised to learn that Professor Artemis was still living in one of my southern apartments attached to the library. He was happy to take a short vacation with the promise that he could return one day.

I felt a bit guilty leaving my CryptoNaturalist surrounded by piles of everything I'd cast off in that Denny's parking lot, but he seemed happy enough reconnecting with books he'd forgotten we owned, so I let him be.

My next step was to fold myself as small as I would go. This, obviously, was fairly easy.

If you've never done it before, close your eyes and imagine the point at which you would best fold. Apply mental pressure there until you do, in fact feel yourself give way. Lean into the fold. You will begin to become smaller without losing anything. It is like bowing to the universe. You become a fan, a card, a secret letter tucked into your own pocket.

As with anything in the universe, you can only be folded so many times, so it's important to know your limits. If you haven't tried before, best to start with one.

When I was small enough, I turned myself sideways in the universe and slipped inside my own door.

My CryptoNaturalist explained a similar process he had used when visiting the Elephant Spiders. Honestly, it was easier than he made it sound.

At first, I was blinded by the sun of that strange, new world.

Was it a new world? Is world the right word?

Perhaps it was not a new world at all, but simply a corner of our own familiar space that was, so far, unfamiliar.

When I adjusted, I saw a golden plain under a sun that was too large in the sky – too close. The grasses under that sun were rich copper and rang like chimes across the rolling hills.

The more I looked the harder it became to accurately describe what I was seeing.

Where a moment before the fields looked copper, now I wanted to say it the grasses were silver.

The next moment, I thought they looked almost fluffy, as if each blade of grass was covered in downy fur. Then the fur swirled away in the wind and the grasses were cracked leather.

The hills too dove and rose like storm-chased waves. Kaleidoscopic weather spun through fractal increments of all weather above the pulsing landscape.

And then, a creature appeared as if...well... as if it had walked through an unseen doorway.

It was long and thin, pulsing with color like the landscape. Its spindly legs reminded me of a grasshopper and they wobbled in the gentle breeze. It looked like a thing made of paper, a shadow puppet, not a thing weighed down with flesh and blood.

The creature flickered, a thousand slivers of its body were lit by a thousand half-seen somewhere-elses. It was, I realized, existing between doorways, living in ribbons across its home range of in-betweenness.

It lived in the not-places, the transitional places sheltered beneath doorframes and the ragged borders where fields become woods, where rows of corn become green lawn.

Suddenly, there was one above me, its long legs all around me.

It creaked like an old oak and I could see the sunlight through its semi-translucent legs. They hummed as it walked, the legs I mean, vibrating in the wind, singing a little song.

It was enormous, a towering thing, but it exuded a sense of fragility, a skyscraper made of tissue paper.

It was hard to get a full idea of what it looked like as strips of it kept flickering in and out of sight.

It took an odd step sideways and turned what must have been its head toward me, though it was hard to tell. I felt considered. Then, very slowly, it moved one of its long, shimmering legs toward me and pushed me back through the doorway.

I felt a whoomp as solid ground rushed up to meet me.

When I was able to again perceive my surroundings, I saw that it was pouring rain and my CryptoNaturalist had erected the large, white tents to keep things dry, and that he was smiling up at me, soggy and cheerful.

Although he was very curious, I had a great deal of trouble telling him what I saw, in no small part because I was grappling with the idea that some of what I was seeing existed both in the world and across the globe and inside myself.

Words, small finite beauties that they are, just aren't made for that sort of communication.

It may be just outside of possible – to describe the world inside ourselves, a world that does not hold still long enough to be one thing. This report has been my attempt to do so anyway, though I fear it may be incomplete in many ways.

Incomplete? No. In-between. This report is an in-between space itself, nestled just there on one side of literal truth and the other side of well-meaning fiction.

On this occasion, that feels entirely appropriate.

There are things we cannot perceive, even if we change perspective.

There are things we cannot understand, no matter how hard we study.

These things exist, none-the-less. Thrive, none-the-less. I think I may be one of those things. Perhaps you are too?

I know my own CryptoNaturalist struggles to understand me as I often do not fully understand him. Maybe we are all in-between things, transitional things. We exist between this time and the next. Between memory and present sensation. Between our old identity and the new one that is always taking shape within us like the budding flowers in a forever-spring.

Insomuch as life is a transitional concept, I suppose we are all doorways.

That feels... perfectly hopeful to me.

As a friend of mine so often reminds us, we are all strange animals. What else can we do, but act like it.

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Post Script:

If you want to see the doorway creature, I recommend not looking for it directly. Just be hopeful in a nonspecific sort of way. It will come when it comes, arriving unexpectedly between two unrelated moments in your day long after you've forgotten your desire to see it.

End.