

Episode 53: The Uneasiness
Written by Jarod K. Anderson

Imagine a fat groundhog comfortably grubbing his way through the soil, making and mapping his world simultaneously. Now, within your imagining, take a moment to allow for the idea that groundhog is experiencing the *real* Earth, the truest, *defining* Earth... down there, a dark, winding planet of loamy scent and sensation, bristling with root-tips. Take a moment and bestow upon every groundhog you can conceptualize the dignity of knowing our planet in a worthy way that we do not.

Welcome to The CryptoNaturalist.

[MUSIC – MAIN THEME]

Hello, Friends. [SFX – Fade-in faint, crackling fire as audio signifier of this indoor space]

There are things in the universe that we must intuit from an absence.

A pinprick shadow passing in front of a distant star, a tiny lack of light, announces a hitherto unknown planet.

The absence of steady growth observed in the ring of a cut tree's cross section tells of a rough year, perhaps illness or inclement weather.

Absence of the expected. A break in a pattern. A missing piece in the puzzle that educates through silence rather than speech.

This, too, is the case with *The Uneasiness*.

A creature you likely know well, rather or not you have thought to give it a name.

A creature we feel. We suspect. A sourceless shadow that both demands and rejects investigation.

I am recording this at... nearly 1AM on a January night. I'm in a well-loved armchair. On the little table next to me is a steaming mug of tea and my portable

recorder. Likely, you can hear my little fireplace crackling. It's a little too warm in here, but I enjoy the fire's company.

There's a tall lamp with a pale green shade blazing next to the bookshelf.

Yet, when I look up from my tea, my eyes are not drawn to the spines of books or the cheerful hearth. No, my gaze is drawn to the large window on the wall opposite me.

The lamp and the night have conspired to make that window a mirror, an inky rectangle reflecting my looking-glass self in his looking-glass chair.

It shows nothing of the wooded hills beyond.

And... somehow... it's not quite nothing.

I can't see anything through that window, but seeing is hardly our only sense.

I can certainly *feel* something from the dark landscape beyond the glass and the conspicuous absence of an image to accompany that feeling makes ambiguity come alive with intent, with bone and sinew.

The Uneasiness.

A window like this one coaxes a troubling realization. I can't see out. But anything on the other side can see me just fine. From out among those dark trees, I'm as bright and clear as a drive-in movie.

When I lock eyes with my reflection, it's not hard to imagine that I could well be meeting the eyes of something else, something watching, something that stands tall and still on the hillside, framed in a column of yellow light without being illuminated by it.

What does your mind's eye show you when I suggest such a thing?

A slender thing with a jagged simile like a lamp pole sporting broken glass and a shattered bulb?

Perhaps that image is too still.

Maybe your Uneasiness paces long, thin figure 8's like a thing distrustful of rest, a thing too full of hunger to consider anything beyond pursuit.

One thing that has become clear to me is that, when a dark window taps you on the shoulder with its troubling opacity, whatever creature strolls into your awareness is all about your brain trying to assign shape to a creature defined by watchful shapelessness.

We sense the gaze of an absence and something in us needs to give it form.

You might say The Uneasiness relies on us for form, just as some parasites rely on a host animal for sustenance.

It's our brains' way of attempting an act of involuntary translation to create a more cohesive reality, much as the minds of those of us with two eyes work to present us with one picture of our surroundings instead of two.

What CryptoNaturalists understand is that there is very much something out there and we all know it in a way that isn't quite related to our five primary senses.

Speaking of things a bit beyond mundane perception, how about a little poetry?

It's time for today's hidden lore segment.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Tim Murphy.

Wildness Unafraid

What if trees could talk?

No. Of course they do.

What if we could hear

them speak
just beneath our feet?

What if birds of all feathers
who lift the sky with song,
frame it with flight
told us
what names to call them?

What if we simply bathed
in wonder at the coyote's
wild music of the night,
not needing to demonize
to feel alive?

What if we listened deeply,
heeding the ancient wisdom
of many worlds unknown
contained in this one
we don't own?

What if we let other beings
live alongside us
outside the long, lonely shadows
cast by our fear
of our own wildness?

Our imaginations are gardens full of "what if's" are they not? Some of those questions are volunteers, growing all on their own. Some such questions require our intentional cultivation. With luck and effort, I like to hope we can harvest some of the questions posed in this poem and carry them with us into a kinder future.

Tim Murphy (he/him) is a disabled, bisexual poet who lives in Portland, Oregon. His writing explores disability and our complex, tenuous relationship to the more-than-human world. Tim's poetry appears in *Wordgathering, Remington*

Review, Writers Resist, The Long COVID Reader, and more. "Wildness Unafraid" originally appeared in Writers Resist. You can find him on Instagram and Twitter (@brokenwingpoet).

There is a way to see The Uneasiness.

Well, there is way to see your version anyway, although you'll have to be a little flexible with that verb "to see."

Some seeing requires imagination.

And, before you scoff or dismiss that notion as somehow antithetical to real scientific inquiry, let me point out that many important kinds of seeing require imagination.

Empathy, for example. The imaginative leap that leads you to the truth that people beyond yourself, perhaps people who are quite different, matter and are worthy.

Imagination may reveal many real things. Not all important facets of reality will stand still to be measured and weighed.

Also, when I say you can see "your uneasiness," that is not meant to diminish the project. I believe that there is no objective version of the creature. The Uneasiness dwells in that same fluid corner of reality where we house our meaning. It's a subjective organism. It exists in collaboration between reality and interpretation, that's the habitat which sustains and shapes it.

Indeed, many things in our lives don't exist until we choose to perceive them.

Meaning. Worth. Purpose. Semi-corporeal creatures looming outside of dark windows like herons studying bluegill in a still pond.

Yup. These things partly exist because of us.

So, since we're already talking about imagination as a place, go ahead and think about joining me here in this room.

It doesn't matter if the timelines don't sync up perfectly because this was recorded in your past. Imagination doesn't much care for such distinctions.

Come on in and sit next to me.

Here, I'll give you a hand.

The room smells like woodsmoke, mint, and old books.

I can feel the hum of an RV engine through the floor, despite the general impression that this room belongs to a small country home.

The room is warm, but that big, dark window radiates a kind of cold that proclaims "winter" in a firm, steady tone.

You can feel the cold from that window meeting the warmth of the fire, the push-pull of two elemental forces wrestling in this tiny, domestic space.

It's dry and staticky in here, but the books and the tea create a of atmosphere all their own.

Look at that, suddenly there are two chairs in here and you're in one of them.

We nod at one another and then turn to the business at hand, that black window and what watches out in the cold beyond.

Together, we stretch our imaginations further and do something The Uneasiness does not expect.

We expand ourselves to be in two places at once. A thing we cannot do physically, but physicality is just not the boss of us. Not right now.

We stay anchored in our warm chairs in our bright little room, but we also flow outward. [SFX – Eerie undertone – Gradually the sound of wind in trees mixes with the interior fire sound (no insects this time – too cold for crickets). Wind. The creak of swaying trees.] We blur. We run across the page like spreading

watercolors, moving toward that window and through it, out to the night beyond, to the dark hill and the bare trees that seem like an inverse root system sunk into a starry sky.

Now, we are in our chairs and on the dark hill, seeing a bright picture of ourselves framed in the window.

Yet, look around, are we alone on this hill?

Steady. Hold the images. Don't worry about searching. Just holding.

Yes, you have an image of where you are in physical space, listening to my voice.

You also have an image of yourself seated next to me in the bright room.

Now, hold that third image, your stretched self's image of a shaggy hill and one, sunny square of yellow light standing in stark contrast to the dark landscape all around us.

[SFX – Great horned owl hooting in the distance. Wind/fireplace continue in the background.]

Start to feel it. Let your imagination open your other senses.

It's windy tonight. Somewhere, a great horned owl is speaking to the coming storm. Did you hear it?

The trees around us are in constant motion and that little window is a beacon of oddity, making the wilderness more wild through its right angles and false daylight.

The cold is biting, but we can control how much of it we let through because we are not here as bodies. We're here as ideas.

Try to just be here on this hill for a moment. Dial up the volume on the hill. Dial down the volume on the room. [SFX – Room sounds fade. Outdoor sounds intensify.] The lamp. The chair. The listener somewhere down the timeline.

Wherever and whenever else you are, you are standing with me on a dark hill looking at two people in a brightly lit room while all around us the world sways and breathes and the dark is its own liquid nation that flows like a flood without borders or rulers.

Now.

Look to your left.

What else is on this hillside? [SFX – Eerie sound grows louder in the mix?]

What else studies the window and the people within?

What stands there?

Not a tree. Not a shadow. Not another person.

Something else.

Something that needs us to be in there so that it may be out here.

Can you see it?

Alright.

That's enough.

Come back.

Come back.

[SFX – Eerie sound fades and outdoor sounds diminish until we're, once again, listening to the crackle of the fire and nothing beyond.]

Back to the room. Back to mint tea and the smell of books. Back to dry air and the hum of an engine beneath your feet.

Back further still. Back to your body. Back to hearing my words as just words, no longer a cobblestone path of sounds leading elsewhere.

Now, already you may be thinking to yourself that what you saw was wholly in your mind. It wasn't. But, if that's the meaning you need to make in order to gain a little comforting distance, well, your imagination can be a protective power as well as a far-seeing one.

Nothing at all wrong with that.

As for me, my version of The Uneasiness moves if I try to look at it directly. It's always at the edge. Tall. Leggy. I think it's dressed in something like an imitation of a uniform, rows of brass buttons or yellow eyes. That broken lamp post glass smile above. It doesn't move. It just waits. Unhurried. Operating on its own schedule.

The Uneasiness haunts. That's what it does.

How it haunts is mostly up to us. In that sense, we are both the creature on the hill and the worried eyes reflected in the blank glass.

Yet, if you find the idea of The Uneasiness troubling, do recall that nature is full of contrasts. Spectrums stretching between extremes, rejecting simplistic binaries.

The Uneasiness is not evidence of any malevolent streak in the world. No, it's just the natural antithesis to other phenomena we know and cherish.

That feeling of boundless hope blooming in a golden sunrise.

That quiet sensation of calm wholeness watching twilight settle over the sea.

Nature is balance and The Uneasiness is part of that balance.

All things resolve into balance in the fullness of time.

And, while our notions of control may sometimes lead us astray, our sense of gratitude for a diverse world, a world of myriad creatures, sensations, and perspectives, is always a firm path on which to walk.

In any case, I think it's time for me to move to a room without a window. At least for a bit.

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

Show Notes: Episode 53: The Uneasiness (00:18:10)

The Uneasiness waits and watches somewhere beyond dark windows.

Thanks to Tim Murphy for his hidden lore poem "Wildness Unafraid." Tim Murphy (he/him) is a disabled, bisexual poet who lives in Portland, Oregon. His writing explores disability and our complex, tenuous relationship to the more-than-human world. Tim's poetry appears in *Wordgathering*, *Remington Review*, *Writers Resist*, *The Long COVID Reader*, and more. "Wildness Unafraid" originally appeared in *Writers Resist*. You can find him on Instagram and Twitter (@brokenwingpoet).

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The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod K. Anderson.

For books and poetry collections by Jarod K. Anderson and Leslie J. Anderson, visit CryptoNaturalist.com/books.

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.

This show is produced and edited by Tracy Barnett. You can find them online, anywhere at [TheOtherTracy](https://TheOtherTracy.com) or TheOtherTracy.com.

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.

Reminder: Transcripts of this and every episode are available at cryptonaturalist.com.

Stay Curious. Stay Wild. Stay Weird.

Post Script:

If the idea of The Uneasiness troubles you this evening, perhaps I can help you shake that feeling. Ask yourself, really, how formidable is a creature that may be defeated by curtains?