

Episode 57: Breakfast  
Written by Jarod K. Anderson

[SFX – Alarm Clock, followed by click of alarm being silenced]

\*Yawn\*

Hmm. I see the “on air” light is on.  
I didn’t know I had an “on air” light in this room. Or a microphone. But, here we are.

Um. I guess when I asked Cassandra to remind me to record a podcast “first thing this morning,” I could have been more specific.

So... welcome to The CryptoNaturalist.

[MUSIC – MAIN THEME]

[SFX – Coffee Brewing]

Good morning, listeners.

I’m here in the kitchen making breakfast. Got the coffee on.

Preparing to make my toast.

Bread is important to me and I make it at least once a week.

Nothing fancy. I follow a pretty simple recipe. I start with about two cups of water in a big bowl. Add a pinch of salt. Maybe a half-tablespoon of yeast. I mix in flour until the texture looks right. Mostly bread flour. Often a bit of rye too. I get it to about the consistency of cake batter, then leave it to sit under a wet towel until... well... until I remember it’s there, usually 6 or 8hrs later.

By that time, it’s a bubbly, yeasty concoction that smells like it’s time for the next step.

Then I add more bread flour, until it's just too thick to mix with a wooden spoon, but still too wet and sticky to knead.

I cover it again and let it rise for forty minutes give or take. I come back, wet my fingers, then pinch, pull, fold. Pinch, pull, fold. Pinch, pull fold. Maybe four folds. Cover the bowl again and repeat the process. I repeat that rise/fold a few times over the course of a couple hours, depending on what sort of hurry I'm in, then down it goes into a Dutch oven lined with parchment paper.

The dough should be full of air at this point, jiggling like Jello.

Sometimes I preheat the Dutch oven. Sometimes just the lid. Sometimes not at all.

To me, baking bread is a bit like gardening or podcasting, a bit of variation is part of the pleasure. Life expressing itself through diversity of character and action.

The lid goes on and the Dutch oven goes in at 500 degrees Fahrenheit for about 35 minutes. Then, the lid comes off and I bake it until it's the right color, usually about ten minutes more and out it comes onto the cooling rack.

It comes out round with a brown, blistered crust and a hollow feel.

Now's the time to really enjoy that smell and put an ear to the loaf to hear a crackle like a muffled campfire.

After it cools... it lives in a bag in the fridge until I reach for it. Like, now for example.

[SFX fridge door opens/closes, plastic bag rustling sounds]

Let me get some coffee here and then on to the important decision of how thick to slice my toast.

[SFX clink of mugs, coffee pouring, sipping]

Alright, that helps.

How I do love coffee. These days, I've started taking it black. I like tasting the beans. I like to imagine I can also taste the roasting fire. The sky. The sun that grew and dried the crop. The soil. The hands that labored. The knowledge. All of it culminating in a very magic potion.

Onto my toast.

My cutting board is next to a broad, shallow box full of steel wool.

[SFX knife sawing through bread]

As I slice the bread, I do my best to make a mess of crumbs. I do this because it's fun and as an enticement to the breakfast bugs hiding in that nearby box.

Ah, here they come.

Breakfast bugs are a terrestrial isopod that look like living armor made from joined, chrome plates. Cousin to pill bugs or sow bugs. These have a mirror shine that catches the light and throws little patches of silver up on the walls. Unlike other isopods, the breakfast bugs will roll into a ball for travel, not just defense.

It's funny, when they take on their ball-form, all those joints just seem to disappear and it's like looking at a perfectly smooth, metallic marble.

[SFX marbles rolling across counter/skittering]

Huh, listen to 'em go.

I have a mutually beneficial relationship with this little group of breakfast bugs. They dine on the crumbs I leave behind each morning and, remarkably, they also eat the crusts off of any slices I set on the counter. I deeply appreciate both services.

Some of you are probably thinking, "okay, but what is their actual name? They can't really be known as 'breakfast bugs.'"

Fair point.

The problem is that this little colony is the only known representatives of the species, so my nickname is the default at the moment.

Cassandra, just like you and me, is an ecosystem unto herself.

I keep thinking I should give the breakfast bugs a more dignified moniker. Then again, I have a very high opinion of breakfast, so the name reads as a compliment in the context of my worldview.

[SFX – Clatter of something hitting the countertop]

Huh. An old walkie-talkie just fell out of my spice rack.

I suppose that's today's hidden lore segment. Let's take a listen.

[SFX – A click and slight static from the walkie-talkie]

## **The Sky**

It has to do with the sky. It has to do with the way the sky does not reveal itself to me anymore. It has to do with the way the sky used to swing open like a door when the sun took the night off. It has to do with the things I saw up there, the things I can't describe, refuse to. It has to do with how it only happened there. In that town. When we thought the world was dying. When we knew this place was dying. I watched the people I should have known the best but did not know at all light fires from the rooftops, melt into the eaves of the skeletal remains of corner stores and flower shops. I watched the train tracks twist and writhe and slink off into the river like a water snake, swallow the deer whole on the way out. I watched the thing that was and was not god pull itself from beneath the cemetery walls and metastasize until it burst. I felt the blood drip down my arms from places I did not realize I could bleed from. It has to do with how I woke up the next morning. It has to do with how I left that town the next day. It has to do with how I say I am from somewhere else.

[SFX – Click and end to static]

Well, I suppose when home stops feeling like home, for whatever reason, there's nothing to stop us from adopting a new place of origin. A huge part of identity rests on the story we get to tell, rests on the story we get to create as a way of understanding ourselves.

[SFX – marbles rolling on countertop / skittering]

My crustacean friends have finished with my bread crusts.

Thanks gang. I am truly thankful to have you as roommates.

That means it's toasting time.

Sometimes I start scrambled eggs about now, but this feels like a toast and coffee morning. When I was younger, I'm not sure I would have considered toast to be a proper breakfast, but that's just because I didn't know what toast could be with a little extra time and attention.

I've got homemade bread. I've got butter I picked up from a farmer's market we found in rural Maine yesterday. I've got honey from a friend's hive and orange marmalade gifted to me by a herpetologist who is a leading expert on both marbled newts and, evidently, making preserves.

But, before we talk toppings, we gotta talk toasting.

Your heat source is part of the flavor. Yeah, a countertop toaster will certainly get the job done. Then again, if you've never tried toasting bread fireside on a long fork or griddle set over some embers, I recommend giving it a shot. You'll taste the difference.

As for me, I've been indulging in a little toasting experiment lately.

We picked up a pair of urban salamanders back near Cleveland a few weeks ago. Not intentionally, mind you. They stowed away beneath Cassandra, seemingly hibernating in a little nook near the rear axle. They dull their heat in dormancy.

Which is why they haven't melted straight through the steel surrounding them. If you're not familiar with urban salamanders, you can revisit episode 7 for a refresher. In short, they are very hot, even while snoozing. Cassandra and I installed a little insulated viewing hatch above the pair and... well... I installed a grill on top of that.

Look, there's no reason science and whimsy can't go hand-in-hand.

I'm always very careful not to bother them, but... come on... how often do you get an opportunity to have amphibian-toasted bread?

The taste is certainly unique. A little like wetlands. A little like that smell of pavement after a hard rain.

My stomach's growling just thinking about it.

Well, I gotta head down to the RV basement to access the salamander hatch, so I'll sign off for now.

Thanks for joining me this morning.

Don't forget to build little pockets of pleasantness into your day. Happiness can be a bit like an ivy. It wants to grow and stretch up toward the sun, but you gotta give it something to climb, something to cling to. You gotta garden your own contentment with foresight and intention.

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

### **Show Notes: Episode 57: Breakfast (00:19:45)**

**An early morning record focusing on starting the day The CryptoNaturalist way.**

Thanks to Joseph Giglio for today's hidden lore, "The Sky." Joseph is currently an MFA student at George Mason University and originally from Buffalo, NY. He has been previously published in Corvus Review and Dead Fern Press amongst others. He is often somewhere he shouldn't be looking for birds or ghosts, but never bird ghosts. You can find him @JoeWritesWeird on Twitter.

Thanks to Ella Watts for voicing today's hidden lore segment. Ella is a queer, disabled director, writer and producer of audio fiction in all of its many forms. She's currently Head of Production at Six to Start, the company behind audio drama and fitness app ZRX. She's also releasing an audio drama series she wrote and directed called Camlann. It's a post-apocalyptic urban fantasy inspired by folklore and Arthurian legends. Ella is an advocate for audio fiction in all of its forms, and longtime fan of The Cryptonaturalist.

To find bonus content and a variety of strange rewards, support our show by visiting [Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist](https://Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist). You can also help by rating, reviewing, and telling a friend.

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](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://adamhurt.com).

Reminder: Transcripts of this and every episode are available at [cryptonaturalist.com](https://cryptonaturalist.com).

Stay Curious. Stay Wild. Stay Weird.

### **Post Script:**

Sometimes, it can seem like you're doing yourself a favor by not putting time and effort into your own care. I don't think that's quite right. Not all labor is work.