

Episode 29: Cemetery  
Written by Jarod K. Anderson  
[www.cryptonaturalist.com](http://www.cryptonaturalist.com)

I suffered from imposter syndrome when I was younger. I impersonated an obstreperous flock of European starlings until I finally stumbled onto a cure.

Welcome to the CryptoNaturalist.

[Theme Music]

The cemetery had no gate. It had a fence sure enough, but no gate. Moreover, I suspect it never had a gate, which raises some real logistical questions about how burials took place. How gravestones were hauled in and the like.

Even from outside the storm-gray eight foot chain-link, I could see tiny archipelagos of well-tended flowers on well-tended plots... just... no gate.

I was standing in the ragged end of October, feeling as autumnal as a jack-o-lantern floating down a river of apple cider. The sun had just dipped below the horizon. Black trees silhouetted in an orange sky. The air was chill and smelled like rain and that citrus tang of leaf-decay. I was on the outskirts of Delaware, Ohio, a small town with two states in its name. Birthplace of Rutherford B. Hayes and home to a cemetery that never had a gate.

I had walked over the hill from Cassandra, but she honked a short message to me in Morse code. I honked back my thanks.

“Look near the old onramp,” Cassandra suggested.

I peered around and saw the place she meant about a mile distant. A crumbling old highway onramp that led from nowhere to nowhere. The nearby highway had outgrown this particular traffic structure and now it stood as a monument to ingenuity or hubris or poor civic planning. It was open to interpretation.

I walked into the wind, my face pleasantly numb, and I reached to old onramp just as dusk was blooming into purple-blue night.

There was a husk of an old building between the onramp and the cemetery fence, its parking lot broken and wild with clover, thistle, and milkweed. It looked like a giant box made of sun-bleached bone, well, except for the faded “Denny’s” sign. I love roadside diners and I had the impulse to take that old building as an ill-omen, but I chuckled at that ol’ superstitious reflex. Omens are make-believe like pigeons, not real like ghosts.

I moved to the fence. It strobed a pale sulphur yellow with the passing headlights on the nearby highway.

I immediately saw what Cassandra had detected. It was a perfect, six foot cut in the chain link. The metal seemed more pliant there, the two edges of fencing swaying and chiming off of one another like crystal champagne flutes.

The whooshing heartbeat of the wind. The growl of the distant traffic. The soft, toneless music of the fence. The place seemed to be having a conversation with itself, a conversation I was a bit nervous to interrupt.

But, ya know, there’s a quote by Hellen Keller that I just love and it goes like this:

“Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold.”

So, I tipped my hat to the evening and stepped through the fence into the gateless cemetery.

You know, speaking of old places and old voices, how about an old classic poem courtesy of the public domain. It’s time for today’s Hidden Lore segment. Today’s poem by Lewis Carroll visits us from its publication date in 1871.

Jabberwocky

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand;  
Long time the manxome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”  
He chortled in his joy.

’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

There we are. A solid piece of historical nonfiction from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to keep us grounded on our journey toward discovery.

Friends, what is it about cemeteries that invite spooky stories and general dread. Is it the idea of death? Death isn’t rooted in cemeteries and wouldn’t respect our

borders and fences even if it was. Cemeteries aren't about death. Cemeteries are about love.

Think about it.

What are all those gravestones doing out there, dotting the green hills like granite mushrooms? I'd argue that they don't represent death anymore than an old poem represents death. No, they represent memory. They represent the tenderness we feel for loved ones, our efforts to build calm bays in the stream of time. Cemeteries aren't spooky. They're adorable. They're great tracks of land set aside for stone love letters. I won't say they aren't sad places from time to time, but that sadness is a byproduct of love they way oxygen is a byproduct of photosynthesis. Cemeteries don't exist because of death. They exist because of life.

All that said, I was out in that cemetery looking for a creature reputed to be a giant, semi-tangible hound composed of borrowed bones and dark water like liquid obsidian. Okay, maybe a touch unsettling to some, but my larger point about cemeteries stands all the same.

Now, there are lots of old legends surrounding ghostly black dogs, claiming that they're portents of death or agents of evil. I once heard a yarn spun about a shadowy chihuahua that stole all the heirloom tomatoes from a county in Arkansas. Whether any of these old tales have a connection to the animal I came to observe this evening, I couldn't say. What I can say is that I, personally, have never met a bad dog.

Chain link fencing is hardly an opaque material, but somehow it was darker inside the cemetery than out by the old Denny's. The stars seemed brighter, as if the light pollution from civilization was nullified there. I looked up into a clear sky and saw Orion rising above the eastern horizon. I smiled at the old hunter and walked deeper into the cemetery.

Much of the place was situated around a low hill crowned with a stand of ancient oaks that had already shed most of their leaves. I made for that hill, my senses alive with the familiar joy of fieldwork. Nature is always sending marvels walking halfway to meet us. Our job is to do our half of the walking.

Sometimes, cryptonature practically marches up to me and shakes my hand. Other times I'm met with a distant glimpse of something rare and wonderful. Both scenarios have their charms.

This evening was a distant glimpse situation. I saw the hound only for a minute, a darker shape against the dark sky. It padded along the crest of the hill, bowing its head down to each and every gravestone as it went. I couldn't quite see what it was doing, only that it came snout-to-stone close to each and every monument.

By the time I reached to top of the hill, there was no sign of the beautiful creature. From that hilltop, I looked out at the surrounding cemetery. Dark upon dark. A crowd of pale monuments keeping one another company.

I knelt next to one of the stones the hound visited. The surface of the stone was dappled with moss and lichens, except for one perfectly clean patch where the word "memory" was etched. I ran my fingertips over the word. It was damp. I believe it had been licked clean.

I never saw that hound again and, somehow, that felt appropriate.

I took my time returning to Cassandra, drinking in the cool autumn and sending my imagination tumbling in all directions with the drifting leaves.

Now, I'm back here in my warm studio with the lights dimmed. Chatting with you and feeling thankful for my own garden of memories. The acoustic bats that crowd my ceiling and walls all seem to smile at me. A thicket of friendly fangs surrounding me on all sides, glowing a dull white in the light from my recording equipment.

Something about the autumn always makes me sentimental.

Well.

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

**Show Notes: Episode 29: Cemetery (00:15:05)**

There's a cemetery that has never had a proper gate, but we'll explore it all the same.

The CryptoNaturalist has been nominated for the 2019 Audio Verse awards in the categories of: Spoken Word – Program; Spoken Word – Writing; and Spoken Word – Performance. Visit <https://audioverseawards.net/> before October, 31<sup>st</sup> to vote.

## **Credits**

You can support the production of this show and find bonus content and exclusive episodes by becoming a patron at [Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist](https://Patreon.com/CryptoNaturalist) OR by visiting the Merch and Support sections on [Cryptonaturalist.com](https://Cryptonaturalist.com) for t-shirts, stickers, and more. \$5 a month patrons now have access to CryptoNaturalist correspondence courses, providing detailed lessons on what it takes to become a CryptoNaturalist. You'll find information about submitting your poetry or prose for our hidden lore segments in the about section of our website. To connect with other CryptoNaturalist fans and see all the strange nature the internet has to offer, search out The CryptoNaturalist Fan Group on Facebook. The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod Anderson. Our theme song is Banish Misfortune, played by Andrew Collins. Stay Curious. Stay Wild. Stay Weird.