

Poncho 2020



\$0.99 US  
DIGITAL

# MetaZoo



**MAGIC IS REAL...**  
**REAL MAGIC IS EVERYWHERE!**



**THE ONLY TCG WHERE  
YOUR SURROUNDINGS MATTER!**

*MetaZoo: Cryptid Nation* is a Cryptid themed TCG for 2-6 players. Players assume the roles of Casters; their decks representing spell books from which they cast powerful spells, summon ancient artifacts, and form Contracts with beloved Cryptids to aid them in the Arena. Be wary of your surroundings though, the environment around the Arena has the potential to strengthen your Beasties, or even weaken your Spells! With the Veil between our world and all things magical mysteriously torn, it's up to you to become a powerful enough Caster to fight the menacing Indrid Cold and his powerful Cryptids....or join their ranks! Will you form a Contract with the benevolent Bigfoot and Fearsome Critters to protect our forests, or embrace the flying catastrophe that is The Mothman? The choice is yours in *MetaZoo: Cryptid Nation!*



## A Man from the Shadows

It was 3:01 am, November 15, 1966. On a road like many others in the region, the cold air of a later fall was pervasive and the leaves were just beginning to turn color in earnest. Although at this hour, the witching hour, the only colors that littered the ground were grays and blacks, and the soft glow of a small town not too far off in the distance touched them not.

At this hour, the witching hour, shadows flooded every square inch of this road, and from these shadows, the shape of a man began to emerge. To any average bystander, this man enveloped in the shadows would be just out of sight, but the \*click-clack\* of his dress shoes on the asphalt could still be clearly heard through the crisp air.

To the keen observer, the trees and bushes on either side of the road were filled with creatures sitting, watching, and waiting. These observing eyes, only briefly noticeable to a normal person from the corner of their own, held both intelligence and fear. For they knew this man, and what his arrival meant.

The man from the shadows walked several paces and then stopped, and the trees on either side of the road and the air itself seemed to stop with him.

Invisible to most, but most likely felt down the spine of every living creature within a 10-mile radius, an unnaturally large smile peeled across the man's face. His eyes began to glow that in no way illuminated the shadows before him — in fact the shadows themselves seemed to grow darker. They appeared instead as two ghost-lights suspended just 6 or 7 feet above the road, looking to guide unwary drivers to their doom.

Slowly, but with confidence, as though he had all the time in the world, the man raised an arm to the fall sky and peered at the stars from between outstretched fingers.

With a voice like the leaves that tumbled and scraped across the pavement at his feet, the man spoke through sharpened teeth.

“The same stars. Not too long, then. Roughly... 1000 years?”

The space immediately around the man's arm then appeared to flex or bend for a brief moment, and the air just above his outstretched hand rippled as though there was a fine film resting on top of it, oily and slick to the touch and distorting the brilliance of the stars he was looking at. Then, with a chuckle that could wither spring's flowers:



“I think it’s almost time. The Veil is thinner here, wouldn’t you agree, old friend?” the man said.

The man’s ghost-light eyes shifted from the stars above to look at two red glowing orbs, the size of a car’s headlights, resting atop a large tree on the side of the road. These red eyes held a certain wicked intelligence, but no sign of the fear present in the other observers closer to the ground. Spilling from these eyes was a heavy shadow extending to the road and outward into the sky like two colossal wings.



Indrid Cold's unnaturally large smile peeled back even farther.

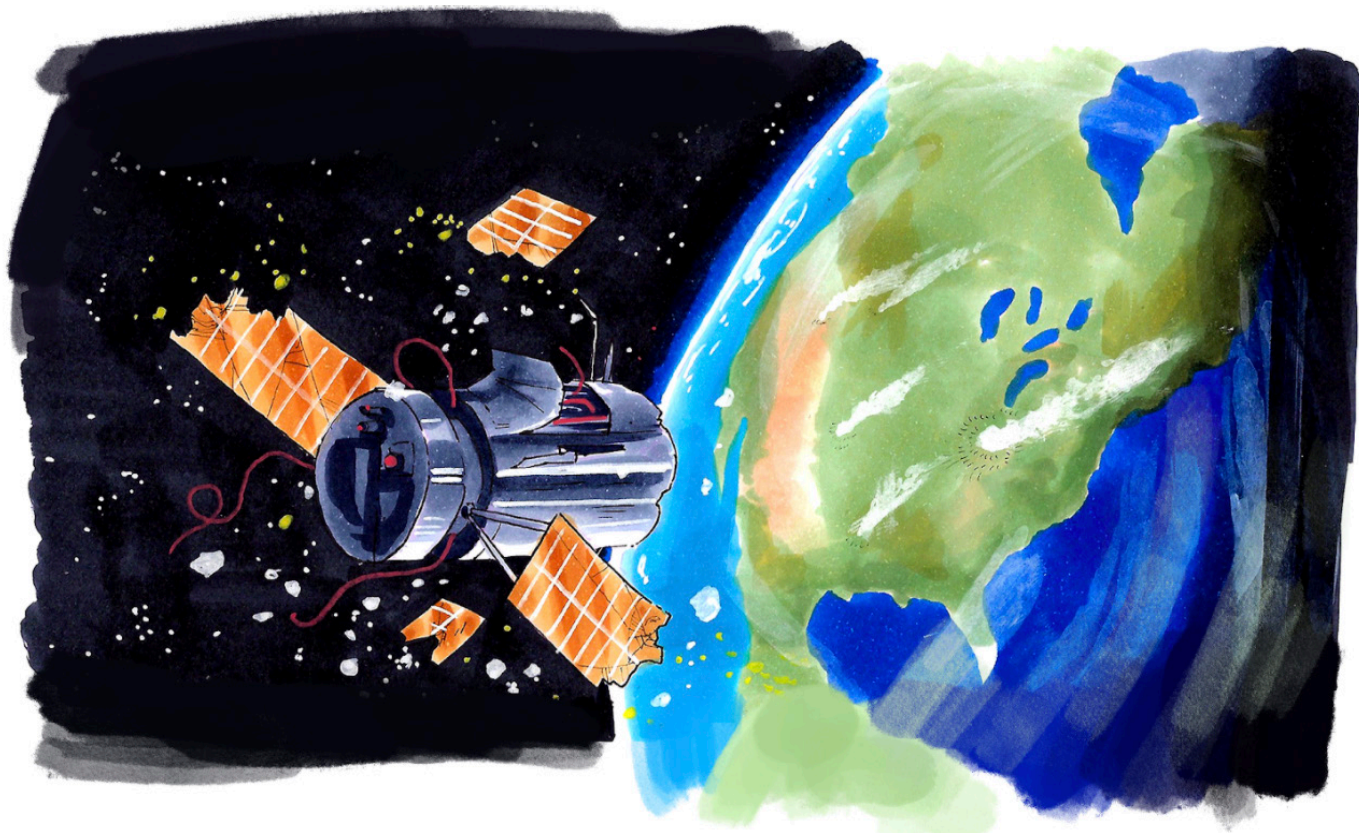
"Tell me what you see, old friend. Tell me the future. Tell me what you see and I will do my great work."

The man from the shadows continued down the road, skipping occasionally. As he passed a battered road sign that said "Welcome to Point Pleasant", the man from the shadows began to whistle a merry tune.

## M

If you've ever watched a baseball game from a distance, maybe you could only afford one of the nose-bleeders, the speed of sound is very much on display. The sight of the batter cracking the pitched ball always reaches you slightly before the matching crackling sound. The symbolism here is pretty on the nose, but no less worth pointing out — the farther away you are from something, the harder it is to make out the details... to see how everything is connected.

And that was the case on one Saturday morning at 10:04 am, during a midmorning heat one can only experience on the East Coast in August. To the many satellites that would take photos of the aftermath and to the many more analysts that would try to make sense of the scale of the catastrophe, all that was seen was the appearance of the Cryptid, codenamed Mothman, above a Little League baseball game in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, followed by an explosion large enough to shatter windows over 100 miles away. This is by no means a unique event for that morning, a morning plagued by similarly unexplained and supernatural events; events that only those that survived them, and survived them up close, could speak to the true story.



And this was the case on this particular Saturday morning at 10:04 am when the Veil that was put into place over 1000 years ago finally shattered.

# M

The middle school's bleachers were littered with them. While Wanted signs were a somewhat antiquated method of informing the general public about a threat, Point Pleasant was still a small enough town to warrant the extra measure. The figure on the signs was more shadow than man, but no one had ever gotten a good look at his face - all that was known was that he had appeared in town at hours and places he should not have. And people were afraid.

No one paid these posters any heed though, at least not right at that moment. Baxter Middle-High's Mothmen were currently in the middle of delivering physical punishment to the out-of-county Dragons from Cumberland Middle School, and tensions were high.

To many laymen, it appeared as though the Mothmen had risen in the national ranks for Middle School baseball almost by magic. However, to those watching more closely, their recent fame could be explained entirely by the last-minute recruitment of two 8-year-olds, Sam Sinclair and Adam Akram. In comparison to many of the other players, many 4 to 6 years older than them, Sam and Adam were special in a way that was difficult to put your finger on.

Sam knew, however, just how and in which ways he and Adam were special. The two 8-year-olds had what Sam described to himself as "intuitions," because describing their abilities as powers sounded almost too cliché, even to his pre-teen sensibilities.

These intuitions took separate but equally useful forms, and each aided their ability to dominate baseball in different ways. Sam's intuition gave him the ability to almost "see" the different directions the ball might take before it even took flight - the clearest direction was more often than not the direction it took. Adam's took the form of "feeling" how the opposing players were going to act. While possibly more potent, Adam's intuition was certainly more abstract and therefore difficult to use... but he had fine-tuned it to such a degree that he often did better on the field than Sam.

These abilities and the mystery of their origin were often discussed between the two childhood friends, and they kept it as a closely guarded secret in the way only the innocent can.

For Sam and Adam to not only recognize their intuitions, but to also actively train and use them, was... apparently unprecedented.

And use it, they did. Sam had just secured a lead in the previous inning with a home run that was, at this point, par for the course every time he stepped up to bat.



It was so expected that one of the outfielders from the opposing team actually pulled out his phone to check his messages when Sam teed up. Now, in the final inning of the game with one out, the opposing team had their fastest runner, a boy named Chris, on second base and Adam's intuition was screaming that he would try to steal third a split second before the pitch was made. Adam and Sam locked eyes as the ball flew and Chris rocketed from second - Sam's gaze flitted to an area in the outfield where he knew the ball would go - Adam pivoted on his left foot and headed directly to that spot before bat even met the ball. A mere 7 seconds later, and the game was won.



The bleachers decorated with Indrid Cold's silhouette bent as parents launched themselves into the field to celebrate the Mothmen winning the Tri-County Championship for the first time in living memory.

Sam and Adam smiled at each other through a sea of parents' arms and gloves and bats being discarded on the field by the defeated Dragons. It's hard to fathom what amazing stories these two would have embarked on had they the opportunity to live life the way it should have been lived. It's hard to fathom what the world would have been had the Veil not shattered, but shatter it did.

Through the smiles of victory and through the pouted faces of defeat, one sound emerged that tore through everything else. The sound seemed to come from afar and nearby all at once, and in many ways the sound came from within. The sound was not unlike the sound of metal tearing, and even though it only sounded for 3 seconds, it felt like hours to Sam.

The sound finally stopped and was followed by what would be described by many as an almost unnatural silence. Then, after nearly 10 seconds of shock, the screaming began.

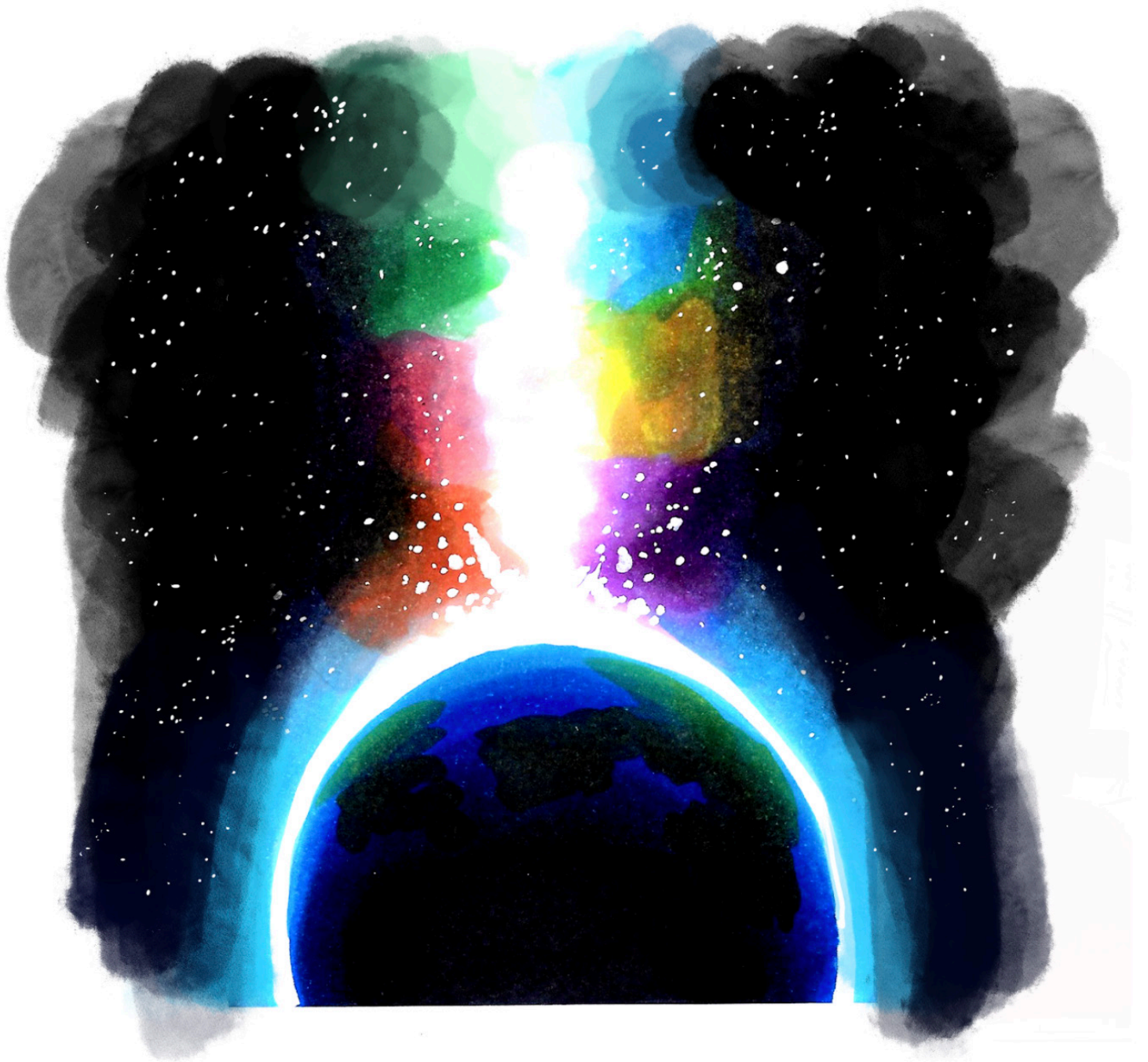


Ms. Burgens, the local librarian who always brought chili-dogs to every little league match despite her own son dying by a drunken driver nearly 3 years ago, had at some point in the last minute caught on fire.

Drake Furgenson, the pitcher for the Dragons, stood dumbstruck over what appeared to be the misshapen bodies of his parents, who moments before were consoling him on the loss of the game.

Chris Gold, who a mere 2 minutes ago tried to steal second base, yowled in agony as his eyes turned into what could only be described as 4th of July sparklers.

And so it was for every 10th person on the field - an affliction of sorts was changing their bodies, and it was somehow connected to the sound they had all heard. The sound they had all *felt*.



Through all of this, Sam and Adam had maintained a locked gaze. And then, someone turned off the sun. No, that wasn't quite right, although the effect was much the same. More than anything else, more than all the chaos that had preceded that moment, the shadow cast upon the field and the thing casting it was enough for Sam and Adam to look up.



It was a monster, and it had black wings. And piercing from this cold blackness, two colder red eyes the same size of the sun they covered, and just as bright. They searched the field and found Sam's eyes. And then... a white light.

## M

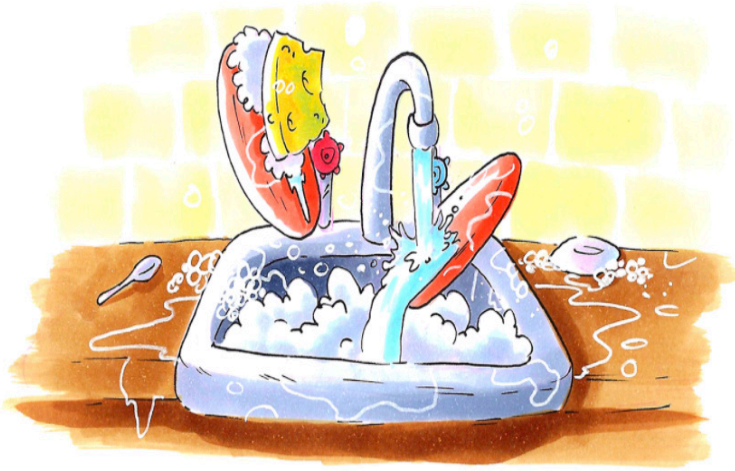
Sam was 12 years old and late for school. He jumped down the living room stairs two steps at a time, all in training to finally work up the courage to do three at a time. Maybe next week. A rabbit's foot keychain attached to Sam's backpack bounced alongside him. Adam was already at school, and made a point of waking up at 5am in order to fit in some training of his own before first bell.

Sam bolted through the kitchen, grabbing a misshapen pastry that M no doubt intended to be shaped like a Cryptid, but might as well have been a duck.

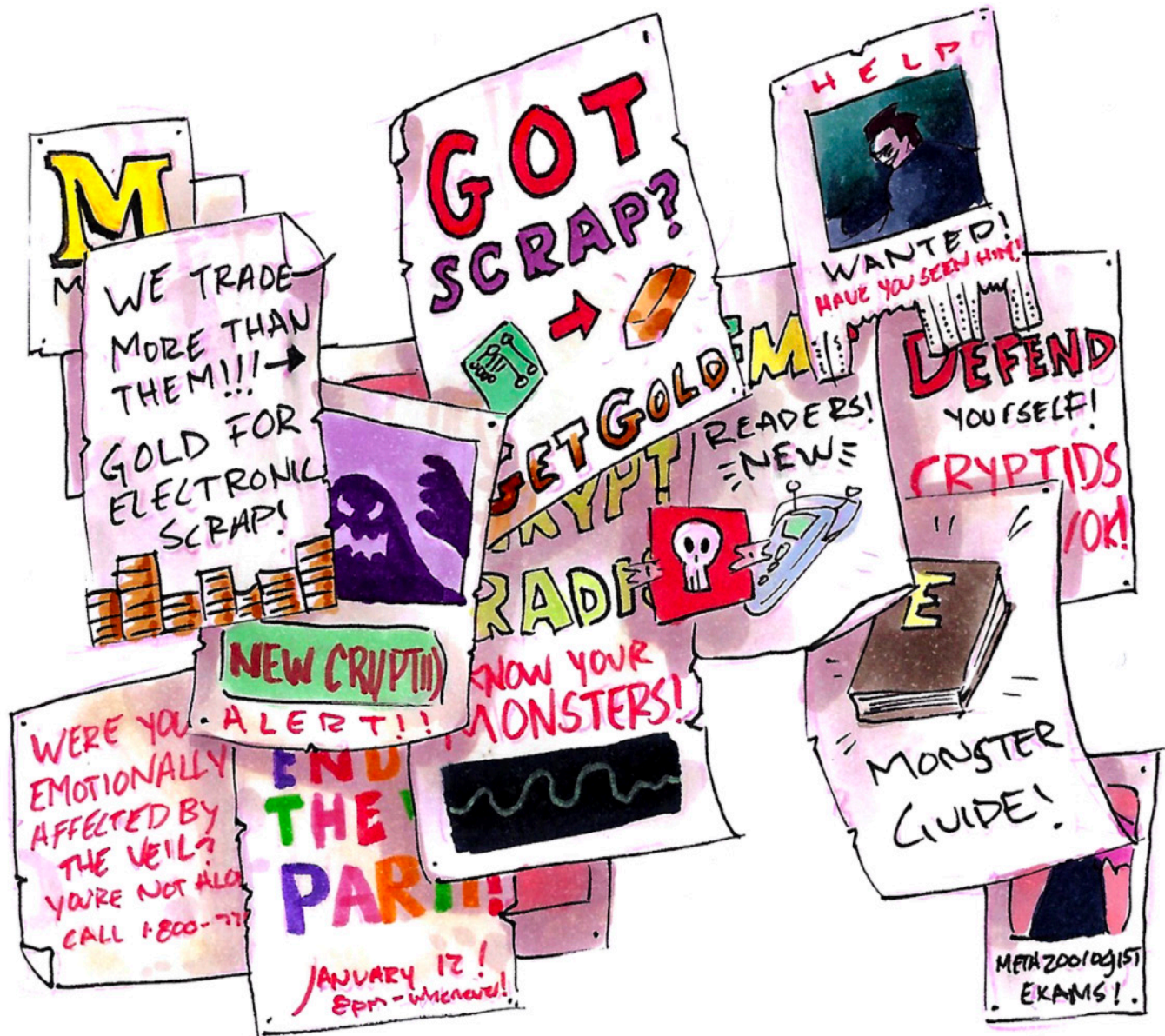
M was the man who adopted both Sam and Adam after the events of the summer of 2021, and he was magic. Only hours after the Veil shattered and the world descended into chaos, M appeared in the town from the North East, walking along U.S. Route 35 and seemingly without a care in the world. M stood nearly 6'5 and was nothing but knots of wiry muscle, like an old tree branch that had weathered too many storms but was all the stronger for it. He was old, but the type of old that is hard to pinpoint, as his grey hair and age spots were fiercely contrasted by sharp blue eyes and unnaturally smooth skin. All the more reason why he looked ridiculous in an apron.

“M, with all of that magic you still can’t bake a Cryptid croissant without burning it!?”

“That’s a really odd way of saying ‘thank you,’ Sam... now get to school!” M shouted as dishes danced across the kitchen cleaning themselves (or attempting to). Sam wasn’t a particularly huge fan of M using magic, but he wouldn’t say no to a hot (if slightly singed) breakfast.



Every day on his way to school, Sam passed the same fence that bordered Mrs. Chapel’s garden, and every day Sam tried to spot the differences that decorated it. Every day the fence had different posters and ads and graffiti on it that were a reflection of the new world they all lived in.



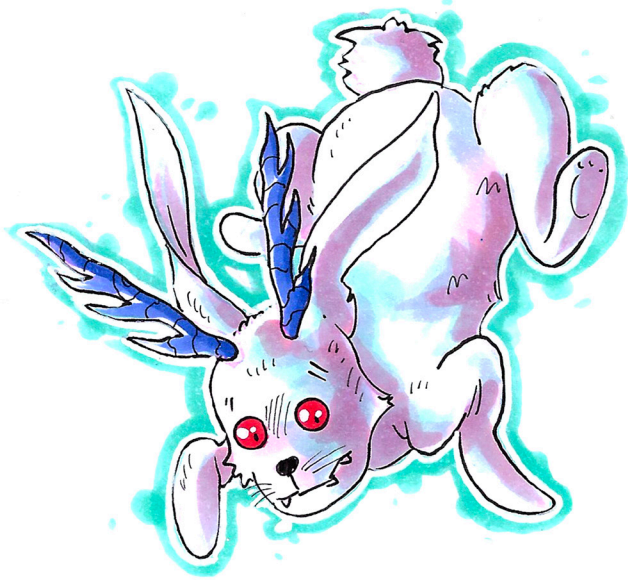
Sam was a collector, and specifically a collector of all things Cryptid, so if anything was easily removable and portable in his backpack, he made a mental note to do his public duty to reduce littering on his way back home.

Just at the entrance of school, Sam spotted Adam at the center of a group of other students, some as old as 18. Adam stood straight with his left arm perpendicular to his body, and his Spellbook in his right hand. At his feet, a terrified Jackalope was magically bound to the ground in an intricate sigil glowing with a soft blue hue.

“...and so you see, you actually don’t need the Cryptid’s cooperation to form a Contract with it. All you need to do is incapacitate it,” Adam explained to his group of fans to many ‘ahh’s and ‘ooh’s.

“Of course, the sigil is just a placeholder. I hear that the most powerful Casters can form Contracts with willpower alone...” Adam says as he extended a hand with flourish, snapped his fingers, and produced a brief shower of multi-colored sparks - to many more ‘ahh’s and ‘ooh’s much louder than before. Adam then made the Jackalope hop onto its hind legs and dance, much to the merriment of those surrounding him. Searing pain and terror were apparent in the Jackalope’s eyes.

Sam didn’t need to say anything, and through their strange connection made all the stronger since the Veil shattered, Adam knew it was time to end the demonstration. With a snap of his Spellbook, the sigil disappeared and the Jackalope hopped off into the forest (not before goring one of the senior’s prized Dodge Challenger’s wheels).



The crowd dispersed, making eye contact with Sam and shooting daggers at him knowing that he was somehow the cause to the abrupt end of the morning’s fun - like he always was.

As the sea of students made their way to the entrance of the school before first bell, Adam caught up to Sam with a huff.

With a little too much excitement, Adam said, “Sam, I get it, you don’t like the magic and you especially don’t like it when I use it on a Beastie - but I’m really good at it and you could be too if you just trained a little!”

A brief pause for effect, and then Sam responded, “It’s bad Adam, it killed our parents and everyone we knew but it didn’t kill us... and you just use it like it’s nothing, like there’s nothing wrong with it.”

“Sam, the magic is just magic - it’s no big deal - I’m creating pretty sparks and some of the spells are actually really cool and in fact I think I found out how to some stuff I don’t think even M knows how to do. Besides, most people agree that the Beasties are to blame for the-”

“Adam, just stop please, we’re going to be late,” Sam interrupted. Adam stopped in the hallway they had entered moments before to look at Sam’s back as he walked away, and the sea of students parted before him.

# M

Sam was 16 years old, and he had a bloody lip outside by the fence of Mrs. Chapel's garden. Above him a poster of Hero battling the latest artist's rendition of the mythical Piasa Bird exploded in full color. Hero was Unity City's newly established and sanctioned hero... but Sam thought his look and powers were more like a cheap knock-off of Superman - maybe that's what the propaganda goons in UC were going for, though.



A blow to the back of Sam's head made his own vision explode in full color. Sam was unsure whether the blow came from one of the 3 seniors that surrounded him, Spellbooks open and at the ready, or the rather mean looking River Dino they had Contracted - not that it mattered.

Every day for the past several months these same 3 would catch Sam on his way to school and give him what they believed to be a "well deserved" beating, and every day Sam took it without complaint. He knew all he had to do was wake up earlier, perhaps even as early as Adam, and the beatings would stop as a matter of inconvenience to his bullies. But in Sam's mind, that would be tantamount to admitting defeat.

"Come on, cast a spell you freak," said Andy with a sneer not made any better by his hair-lip.

"You know, Andy, fixing that axe wound on your face would only need a slightly advanced cosmetic spell, or can't you cast those? Not enough juice in the tank?" Sam bubbled through his own split face. Sam always gave it back in his own way, and the spells he cast were often white-hot cruelty. Sam knew Andy lacked the magic necessary to fix his hair-lip, and by proxy Sam knew everyone in Andy's family lacked the skills necessary as well.

Andy's eyes widened and his pupils sharpened to a point. The River Dino's face twitched in unison and with a great leap it pounced onto Sam's chest, digging its claw into white flesh as it did so. It was only the size and weight of a medium-sized dog, but the momentum it carried threw Sam onto the asphalt with a wet smack.

As pain exploded into Sam's body from a thousand different places, all he could do was focus on a singular point on the River Dino's forehead. It was Andy's Sigil, burned deep red into the flesh and making the one responsible for his pain impossible to deny. This was one of the downfalls of Contracting a Beastie for those of us with criminal inclinations - it always left the mark of the Caster somewhere. Sam wouldn't be surprised if somewhere in Unity City, perhaps in a darkened basement where only mushrooms and secrets grow, a database of Casters' sigils were kept on file as a fingerprinting system. Indeed, many dark Casters had taken up the habit of carving nonsense sigils into whatever Beasties they Contracted to remove any culpability, and not a few people had been framed for crimes they didn't commit as a result.

"Easy Andy, you're going to kill him," the leader of this merry band, Stefan, said with an all-too-easy chuckle. Stefan was a hulking Bulgarian who had hit puberty perhaps a little too soon, and he had also once been Sam's friend... before the shattering of the Veil, that is. Sam remembered Stefan once telling him that Bulgaria was really well known for Curling. It struck Sam as odd at the time that an entire country would be known for a single weight-lifting exercise, but there are certainly stranger things in the world, especially now!

Stefan knelt by Sam's struggling body and put a hand on the River Dino's snout, muffling its snarls.

"You know, you sure do talk a lot of shit for someone who doesn't use magic, Sam. Every morning we come here to educate you, but every morning you just get stupider and stupider," Stefan said with a type of condescension that almost came off as sympathetic.

"We just want you to cast one little spell, we know you can do it. You have such a hardon for these Beasties that killed our friends and family, but something against using magic? Help me understand." Stefan propped his Spellbook on his knee and flipped to a Bookmarked page. A moment of concentration, and then... a tiny fire wisp the size of a lit candle's flame appeared at the tip of Sam's nose.

Sam muffled his own cries. After all, Mrs. Chapel was his next door neighbor, and Sam made every effort to hide his daily torment from his family. His first stop after the morning beatings was always a Magical Emergency Clinic (MEC) just outside of his school that specializes in superficial cuts, bruises, and burns (often magical in nature).

And why were these kids so cruel, cruel in a way we all experience in our youth but soon forget, cruel in a way that only children can be? Sam could use magic, yes, but he chose not to. This was seen as not only odd behavior, but it verged on the sacrilegious in the "New World Order". It wasn't helped by the fact that everyone in town knew that Sam and Adam were the only survivors of that fated baseball game 8 years ago, where so many of their own friends and family had perished. Sure, millions of people died that day, all over the world, but the fact that they were the sole survivors of that particular *local* incident rubbed the *local* people the wrong way. And Sam was still paying for it, and paying for it gladly. And while most of the world had learned to adapt to the reality of Cryptid Nation (as the US had become known to be called), the residents of Point Pleasant never truly understood why Adam loved cryptids the way he did.

The cruelty wasn't limited to the town's children - the adults actively but more subtly and perhaps unknowingly participated as well. The C on an exam instead of the earned B+; stale bread instead of the fresh batch when he went to Piggly Wiggly on 3rd Street; bus doors that closed just a little too soon as Sam ran to catch them. Cruelty by a thousand cuts, but such a consistent slow burn of cruelty was enough to leave any child feeling unloved.

Of course, no such cruelty met Adam, the star child of Point Pleasant. His survival 8 years ago was overlooked by his adoring fans: child, teen, and adult alike. After all, who could hate the wunderkind that crushed every standardized test thrown at him, was the captain of at least 3 different sports, and could cast magic that left even the most adept adult Caster in awe. Or perhaps they were simply afraid of him, because if you could only choose one word to describe Adam, most people would choose “powerful”.

Just as the River Dino began digging its claws a little too deeply into Sam’s chest, just as Sam’s ability to control his screams disappeared, the River Dino began to float in the air as though it were in an underwater waltz. In a panic it briefly tried to find purchase in Sam’s flesh, and Sam let out the first scream of the morning.

A shadow was cast on Sam and all three bullies took a step back before they could catch themselves.

Adam was not a large teen by any means, in fact in comparison to the hormone riddled bullies that stood before him you might even describe him as frail... but there was a gravity to the way Adam held himself that was undeniably striking. Jet black hair, glasses a little too reminiscent of Harry Potter to be entirely an accident, and a casual suit and red tie that had once earned him the attention of bullies himself before they learned better - all added to the effect.

The bullies’ surprise wasn’t unwarranted either - it was a known fact that since the Veil shattered, Adam has always arrived several hours early to school. It was his thing. What he was doing all the way back home only 30 minutes before first bell had Sam even more confused than Stefan and his merry crew.

“Oh crap -” squeaked Andy in a pitch that Sam had never heard before.

Stefan, the most experienced and sure of the crew, slid back to put some distance between him and the figure that had seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

“Don’t be panzees, get him before he has a chance to pull out his Spellbook!” roared Stefan while rapidly flipping the pages of his own so hard they almost tore.

Sam was so distracted by the River Dino drowning midair above him (now floating a solid 25 feet in the air like the world’s most grotesque balloon animal) that he almost forgot to cover his face and vitals in preparation for the chaos that was about to ensue.

**Autonomous Control of so-called “Veil Link” in so-called “Casters” and its Implications to Understanding Motor Neurons and Aura Axons**

**M., Simon B.<sup>1</sup>, Simon M.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Quimblys University, School of Mothman Studies; <sup>2</sup>Castor University, School of Aura Neurology

**Abstract**

As more academic papers seeking to unveil the mysteries of the Shattering are published, one problem remains unsolved: How exactly is this so called “Magic” controlled by Casters using what has become known as a “Veil Link”. In this paper we submit a mathematical proof showing that control of Magic is facilitated through an autonomous biological process similar to the process of motor neurons interacting with axons to turn the biochemistry of an individual’s thoughts into physical movement. We define these facilitators of the “Veil Link” as Aura Axons.



All three bullies, Spellbooks opened and Bookmarked, took position in front of Adam who hadn't moved since he first appeared. In fact, his hands were still in his pockets!

A brief flash and then a ball of fire the size of a baseball appeared in front of Stefan and hurtled towards Adam. A silver snake with wings appeared from the 3rd bully's Spellbook and darted in the same direction. In a single movement, Andy broke his Contract with the waltzing River Dino, causing it seemingly flicker out of existence, and produced a thin whip of pure blue lightning that he sent crackling towards Sam's prostate form.

Still no movement from Adam, but Sam felt a pressure almost extend from where Adam was standing, as though the very air itself were bending. While Adam did not move, Sam felt as though Adam's will was a tangible force flowing around him like a current.

The fireball, a mere 3 feet from making impact, expanded in size until it became so thin that it disappeared with a poof. The winged silver snake screeched before tying itself into a knot and exploding in a flash. For the lightning whip, which almost certainly would have blown a golf ball-sized hole into Sam's back, it stopped mid-flight and hung suspended in the air as though someone had taken a photo of a lightning bolt right before striking a tree.

“You actually have some skill, Andy, try and use it on someone other than my brother,” Adam said almost nonchalantly. *Or focus it on cosmetics*, Sam thought bravely from his curled up ball.

With the magic from their spells dissipating into the air like steam, the bullies stood stunned as though they themselves had been struck by blue lightning. They had known that Adam was skilled, but to cast such powerful defensive spells without a Spellbook, let alone moving a muscle? It was enough to make anyone run, and run they did.

Sam attempted to slowly raise himself off the ground, grunting with the effort. Through clenched teeth said, “What exactly are you doing here Adam, not that I’m-” before seemingly out of nowhere, Rose appeared by his side.

“Sam, these cuts are horrible, please don’t move.” Rose immediately began to apply medicinal magic. A soft green hue spilled forth from her fingertips like murky water and gently caressed Sam’s wounds.

Sam’s cheeks turned to roses. Adam was a surprise, sure. Being saved by Adam, and especially by magic, was embarrassing. All of that combined with the fact that it had happened in front of Rose, his Rose? It was enough to turn the roses that had formed on Sam’s cheeks into rose bushes.

“O-okay, so what exactly is happening? You two are always at school by now.” Sam sputtered.

“Sam, how long has this been happening, certainly not -”, Rose began.

“Doesn’t matter, he can take care of himself. Sam, we need to talk.” Adam was practical, beyond practical, and he was certainly not stupid. He knew the embarrassment Sam must be feeling at that exact moment, and he knew the best thing to do was move on. Besides, he clearly had something important to say.

At that very moment, M exited the house carrying two very heavy and well-loved suitcases to the curb.



“Oh! You’re already here. What the - Sam get off the ground you’re ruining your good school clothes. Spells can only rebind fabric so many times.” Clearly M knew something had happened, but maybe he figured that the drama that had unfolded moments before was something that should remain in the realm of the teenagers that stood before him.

Making a vexed sound at the interruption - Adam always did see M as a bit goofy despite M’s immense magical powers - Adam continued, “Look, Sam... when Rose and I got to school this morning, our daily casting exercises were interrupted by a recruiter from Quimblys.”

Sam’s eyes widened, and to be completely honest, Adam’s did as well as he was repeating what still struck him as extraordinary. Quimblys was the state-sanctioned college for magic located in Unity City. It was basically the real world version of Hogwarts and was based out of the husk of Georgetown University’s campus which had burned down in the attacks immediately following the shattering of the Veil. Not surprisingly, some high potential Casters were located in and around what was once DC, so when the Veil shattered, the level of destruction was tremendous. But then again, so was the reconstruction effort that followed.

“I don’t understand, don’t you have to be 18 to go to college?” Sam asked.

“Not necessarily, in fact I know of quite a few Casters younger than the three of you who are already attending Quimblys...” interjected M with a sly smile.

“So what?” Sam continued, “The recruiter shows up and you leave the same day? What the hell is that?”

Adam averted his eyes from Sam’s in a way that was uncharacteristically sheepish. Sam immediately came to the correct conclusion.

“You’ve known about this for a while - the three of you have. Without telling me? You guys were just going to leave me?” Sam said with not a little despair in his voice. How Adam had hidden this from Sam given their connection would be a mystery that haunted Sam for months.

“Sam, it’s Quimblys, it’s like the Hogw-” Rose began.

“I know what it is, Jesus, I guess that makes me the Dursley of the family.” Sam’s cheeks bloomed roses once again as he realized just how vulnerable his anger at the situation made him, and what it exposed about his (very different) love for both Rose and Adam. In this instance he should have cared less about the self-image he was cultivating for Rose, a girl he wouldn’t see for many years, but teenage hormones are a strange thing.

A long pause, and then without missing a beat and just as cheery as ever, M softly spoke in a way that carried through the air farther than it should have. “Let’s go then, or we will be late. Time to say your goodbyes.” Adam, who had turned with a jolt at the sound of the whisper, turned back in a hurry to explain what had happened to Sam in more detail, timing and being late be damned.

But Sam was already turning the corner down the block, running faster than he ever had before.

# M

Sam was 18, and he was weeks away from graduating high school. He sat in his room at roughly 12am, preparing his tools to leave through his bedroom window.

It had been 2 years since Rose and Adam had left him, left his family, and not all of his fears of loneliness had come true.

Adam never wrote a single letter to Sam (and vice versa), but Sam had spied Adam's handwriting on more than one piece of paper that M had been reading throughout the years. Of course at second glance the handwriting would always change, accompanied by that sly smile M was always fond of showing.



Rose was a different matter entirely. While Sam wouldn't call them love letters, their correspondence could have filled an entire desk drawer, and it did. In the years since she left, Sam had gotten to know Rose better than he had when they were sitting next to each other for hours each day. This level of connection made the disappearance of Adam from Sam's world easier to manage. The bits and pieces of information about Adam he had been able to glean from Rose's letters pointed to the fact that both were considered prodigies even among Quimbly's prodigies. Anything more was shrouded in mystery.

And in the ways only the young can, when summers stretch for an eternity and a year is all that is needed to become a new person, Sam moved on from the fact that his two best friends had left him in his small town to go on an adventure. The chasm between 16 years of age and 18 is something that is hard to fathom.

One thing that had not changed though was Sam's love of all things Cryptid. He had at some point in the past 2 years upgraded from petty theft of the local poster industry to full on Cryptid hunting. Now, Sam's definition of Cryptid hunting was perhaps more innocent than you might think. Unlike many of the Casters looking to expand the powers of their Spellbook, or the Cryptid product specialists looking to research a new facial cream, Sam merely liked to take photos for his personal collection.

Of course, he had the many posters of superstars like Bigfoot, Mothman, and the Jersey Devil that papered his bedroom's walls. However, Sam had made every effort to take photos of more obscure Cryptids like the various breeds of Devil Dogs that recently moved to the outskirts of the town. These were his true pride and joy, despite no one being interested in branding a new line of toys or toothpaste based on them.

Gadgets and gizmos in various states of disrepair littered the room like a museum to the 1980s and a tribute to the fact that Sam relied on technology more than magic. It was hard to get anything more advanced than analog up and running these days, but Sam found himself to be quite the technological wiz. Sam picked up a vintage Zenit-E from the Soviet era that he had recently refurbished (and for whatever reason, captured paranormal activity perfectly) and zipped up his Jansports backpack.



Sam had recently found himself sneaking out from his bedroom window and scaling the gutter in order to investigate a puzzling development. The cloak-and-daggers was a necessity born from the fact that Sam wasn't allowed out past dusk... unless of course he trained how to Cast with M, something Sam still stubbornly refused to do.

The puzzling development was that the level of Spirit activity on the outskirts of Point Pleasant had multiplied 10-fold in the past 2 weeks. Now, M and the other local Casters had put up barriers around Point Pleasant that prevented Spirits and the more powerful Cryptids from entering city limits - and these barriers were powerful. Many towns were not so lucky, and for cities that were built on the buried corpses of sometimes millions of people, the shattering of the Veil released armies of Spirits onto the world that were impossible to exorcise. As a result, many larger cities were abandoned and even smaller towns required power Casters to create magical countermeasures. The rest of the US population resorted to a nomadic lifestyle, moving from place to place until too many friends and loved ones died, making the presence of Spirits once again unbearable.

Point Pleasant was no exception, and following the shattering of the Veil and the resulting explosion there were certainly enough Spirits wandering around to make life less than comfortable. However, with the help of M (who handled the "awakening" of his powers almost suspiciously well), the small town of Point Pleasant had successfully installed a magical barrier only 3 days after the Veil shattered.

In the months that followed, many of the surviving residents would visit the barrier that bordered the town in an attempt to see if they could spot a loved one in the crowd of Spirits. This practice led to one too many suicides and attempts to improperly cross the barrier. Only 6 months after the Veil shattered the council of Casters created by M cast a series of spells that removed the Spirits' faces and obscured their voices. The Spirits passed once again into the background of daily life, ever present but more like features of the town's outer landscape than something people had to actively worry about.

But something had changed.

More and more Spirits had appeared at the barrier in the past several weeks, but this wasn't what was most troubling. What was most troubling was the fact that some of these Spirits had crossed the barrier and would be found wandering the forests of Point Pleasant.

When Sam probed M for the potential causes of this, especially since M himself had put the barrier in place, M responded with a textbook explanation, "Sam, all barriers are Veils themselves and there are many types of Veils. These Veils are usually meant to obscure something, or keep something out, or outright remove it from what we define as existence. In fact, the ability for a Caster to form a Contract with a Cryptid and summon and dismiss it at will is done by enveloping it in a compact Veil that's stored in their Spellbook..." but Sam, who had heard this a million times in various classes, news reports, books, and other forms of exposition was trying to make another point.

<b>Sam's Notes on Point Pleasant</b>	<b>5/10/2031</b>
<b>M was smarter than people gave him credit for - the act of erasing both voice and face had unexpected event that I believe scientists will be studying for years to come.</b>	
<b>Spirit's presence in our world is the result of recognition from living humans, especially those that knew them in their mortal lives. By removing the very features that gave them their identity, many of the Spirits would weaken and pass from this realm and into the next - essentially exorcising themselves over time.</b>	

“Why only some Spirits?” Sam asked. M only looked at Sam, knowing there was another part of the question...

“... and why do they have faces no one has ever seen?” finished Sam. The Spirits that passed M’s barrier had faces when they shouldn’t, and those impossible faces showed up in no digital database that had survived the Veil shattering. And each night the faces were always different, and the Spirits had always vanished before morning’s first light.

M thought for a moment, and stared at something in the distance Sam could never quite see. “Sam, all Veils are imperfect and let’s just leave it at that.”

So, M didn’t know. And that excited Sam as much as it scared him.

For the past several nights, Sam had been leaving through his bedroom window and photographing the faces of those Spirits who had crossed the barrier. Sam peered outside his window and into the forest not a half mile away from his home. A dozen or more soft glowing lights moved through the trees like phantom fireflies. Tonight was going to be a good night, Sam thought to himself. The Spirits never bothered Sam, and they hardly seemed bothered by his presence either. Another strange difference between these Spirits and the ones Sam had become accustomed to.

Sam found the relic from his past hanging in its place of honor on his wall - a tattered wooden baseball bat that had somehow survived the explosion all those years ago. The signed signatures from the entire 2021 Mothmen team decorated it like a list of the dead. Sam pulled it from the wall, like blade from stone, and found some reassurance in its grip. It wouldn’t be very effective against these odd Spirits, but it somehow always made Sam feel safer, and so it always joined him on his nightly excursions.




# CRYPTID NATION

At the center of this forest was Point Pleasant's very own CryptidFM Tower, built at some point after the Veil shattered. For whatever reason, radio was one of the few remaining technological methods of long-distance communication that was still effective, but even it was not completely immune to the influx of Spiritual energy haunting the surrounding forest.


Sam readied his things as he listened to the soft crackle of the CryptidCast radio show, the volume lowered so M didn't suspect that Sam was still awake.




 "Hooo boy, is anyone reading this?" the announcer said in an exaggerated tone, tapping the mic with what must have been his finger.

 "1, 2, and 3. Testing, haha! How's it going tonight ladies, gentlemen, and Cryptids. This is Cyril, your lovely and dedicated host coming to you live from the center of paranormal activity, POINT PLEASANT, WEST VIRGINIA!"


A spooky theme song, undoubtedly created by Cyril's son, a budding musician of 15 that Sam had seen lurking the hallways of their school trying to sell CryptidCast merch, began to fill Sam's room.

 "The greatest apologies for the static, it seems the station has its own fresh batch of groupies outside, mucking with the reception..."

Sam opened the window, breathed the night air in deeply, and quietly began his descent. He also brought his hand radio with him, as listening to CryptidCast as he himself went to haunt its surrounding forest was part of the recent ritual.

 “Well, for those that CAN hear me, we got a lot to cover tonight. First up, we got another MOTHMAN sighting! That’s right folks, our very own Point Pleasant Mascot and the cause of two of the most horrific events in this city’s history. That bastard has be sighted 7 different times in as many days all over West Virginia - ”

Sam moved quickly and with purpose, and after doing this for nearly 2 weeks, the half mile between his house and the edge of the forest passed in a blink of an eye. Tonight would be different. Once he was past the streetlights that flickered every so often from the same Spiritual energy that made his radio crackle, Sam relaxed. He turned up the volume on his radio as it battled the fact that Sam was getting closer to both the source of the signal and its interference.

 “ - and later tonight we’ll be joined by Quimbly’s Professor of Mothman Studies and Affairs, Professor Billange. He will be “phoning in” - and I’m doing air quotes, believe me - using a spell so hopefully we won’t have too much interference on his end. Before that though, a quick word from our sponsor, Hodag O’s - a nutritious, all natural breakfast cereal with real Forest Greens! And what better way to wash down Hodag O’s than with our second sponsor, Minne-Soda? The coldest bev-”

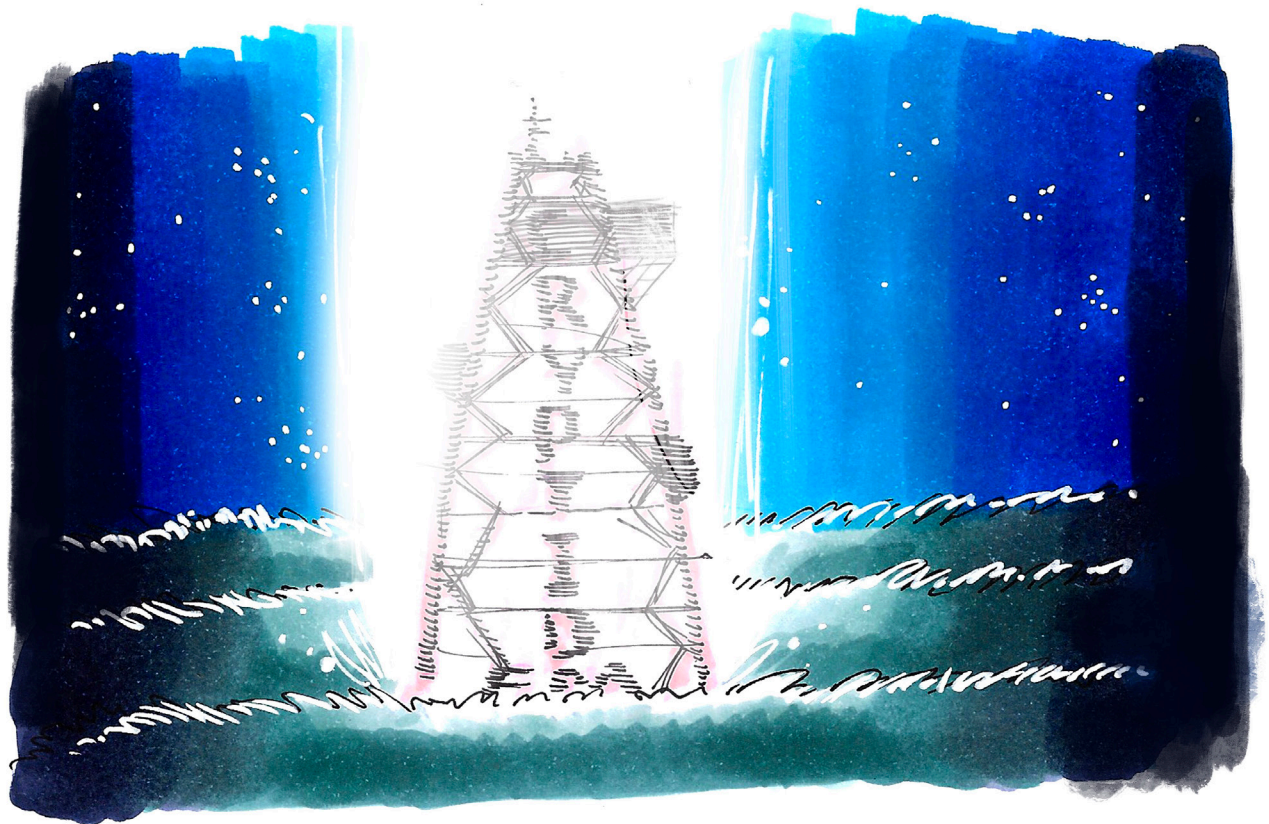


## CRYPTID NATION

Still only halfway to the edge of the forest, Sam stopped and almost tripped over his own feet. The number of Spirits flitting between the trees had multiplied. Now it seemed as though there were hundreds, as if all the Spirits that had slipped through the barrier in the previous weeks (and then disappeared by morning) had converged at that same spot with a single purpose. And they were moving faster than he had ever seen them move, and seemingly in unison. Sam scrambled to get his camera out.

And then the night turned into day.





Where there was once the radio tower there now stood a pillar of light extending from the center of the forest and into the sky. Sam, shielding his eyes, had only a few moments to realize that the Spirits were flying into the pillar as though they were the source of its energy... before he saw it. At the dead center of the pillar, perched above the melting and now molten tip of CryptidFM Tower, was Mothman.



Despite the light that surrounded it, Mothman somehow made the night darker, and from its perch it set its red gaze upon Sam.

Sam fell, and fell for what seemed like eons.

He fell in the same way he did in his worst dreams, where he could never outrun the faceless evil that chased him. And in this living nightmare, Sam saw the explosion from 10 years ago and the people who burned all around him. He saw Adam and Rose leaving on their adventure, hand in hand. He saw himself leaving the home that M had built for them, and M there alone in a dark doorway. Sam fell, and fell, and fell...

But then he was caught.

Waking from the dream, Sam's eyes took a moment to focus (it was only later that Sam realized they had been covered in his own blood that was seeping out of his tear ducts) but when they did, he saw that it was M that had caught him. Still in his PJ pants littered with small Cactus Cats drinking martinis (and inexplicably still wearing his iconic dress shirt and tie!), M had at some point covered the distance between their house and halfway to the edge of the forest.

"Sam, you're really not supposed to be out past dusk, we discussed this."

"Yea, really sorry about that M..." Sam's throat felt as though he had been screaming for hours, and for all he knew he had been.

"That's quite alright. Are you okay? Are you hurt?" True worry, the kind of worry that is painful to a parent. Sam felt a wave of guilt pass over him.

"M, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to put anyone in danger. I just wanted to take..."

"That's enough. it doesn't matter Sam - just focus on me." M said with a strained voice.

And then Sam remembered. With a face almost comically contorted by fear, Sam turned his head just enough to see that the pillar of light - and Mothman - was still there.

“Don’t look at it, Sam. Look only at me. Clever... they used Contracts with Spirits to change their energy signature enough to slip them past my barrier. The crafty devils even enveloped them in Veils so I couldn’t see just how many of them had actually slipped in. Then they used the Spirits and the radio tower to create a focal point that would allow them to punch through.”

“... what are you talking about, M. Let’s get out of here.” Sam was tired. Very tired. He just wanted to wake up from this nightmare.

“Nevermind all that, Sam. Just keep your eyes on me.” And just as M said this, Sam felt something wet drip onto his face. It was M’s own blood, mixing with Sam’s.

Sam realized with horror that through their entire conversation, M had not broken eye-contact with Mothman, not for a single second. *Impossible*, Sam thought. *That thing looked at me once and I almost died.*

M, still maintaining eye contact, gently placed Sam on the ground as though he weighed nothing at all.

Sam scrambled and moved through what felt like molasses behind M’s towering figure (had he always been this tall?).

M, in a voice that was starting to sound as weary as Sam’s, but strong as ever, said “You poor creature. I know whose Sigil that is...”

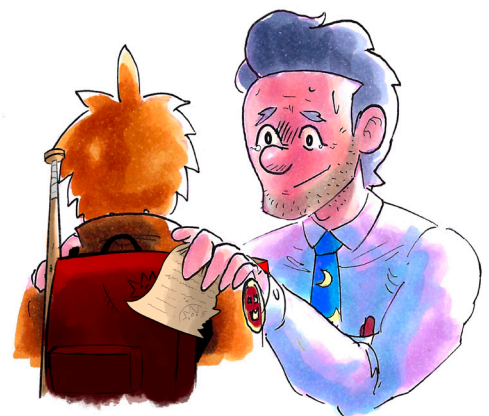
M moved his right hand out to his side almost as though he were asking for change, and a bloodred Spellbook appeared, pages fluttering. Sam had only ever seen it once before, when he observed from a crowd M putting Point Pleasant’s barrier in place. Most of the magic M did on a daily basis, regardless of its complexity, didn’t require his Spellbook. It was thicker than any Spellbook Sam had seen, and filled to the brim with all things arcane and magical and powerful. Or so Sam thought.

Mothman screamed in a voice that came through the forest like a dark wind, sounding tortured and anguished, both human and not as Sam’s own screams mixed in with it. Sam’s blood became like ice, and he felt as though everything happy in his life had never before happened.

M’s soft voice carried on the wind as well, and cut through the Beastie’s shriek. “Sam...” he said, tearing a page out of his Spellbook, “Sam, I’m going to open a Door behind you and I want you to take it.” And just as M finished saying this, Sam heard what sounded like an old wooden door creak open behind him, but he was far too afraid and far too worried about M to look.

And then M did something that Sam would never forget for the rest of his incredible life - M broke eye contact with Mothman, who immediately leapt from his perch (almost as though it was M that was keeping him there!), and turned to face Sam with a smile.

“Sam, you have a good heart and you’re going to do amazing things. People in this world need you, so help them. Please. Your journey will matter, more than you know... and take this old book from me, I only need one last Spell from it!” M said with a laugh, holding the Page of the Spellbook he had torn out moments before, waving it side to side.



And then, almost playfully, M gave him a little push and Sam was once again falling.

Before the door closed and before the darkness that Sam was floating in completely enveloped him, Sam saw the last moment's of M's life. He saw M turn, still smiling, to face Mothman who was now only a few feet from colliding with the old man. He saw M lift his hand and the Spellbook's torn page engulf itself in an eldritch green fire. He heard M say in a friendly but final tone "I release you from your Contract, old friend." Sam's eyes widened with surprise and then immediately shut in pain as the light from an explosion that would go on to wipe Point Pleasant off the face of the Earth for a second time poured through the door.

And then the door closed.



Well wow, here we are. The inaugural chapter of the official MetaZoo story. When we first decided that we needed to tell the MetaZoo story, our initial pitch was doing a comic series. We decided after much deliberation that it was an insufficient medium for telling the story - we needed to put words to paper to really explain the full depth and emotion the characters were feeling and the gravity of the events transpiring. This isn't to say comics or manga can't achieve this same goal, but I just felt like illustrated chapters were the better way to tell *MetaZoo's* story.

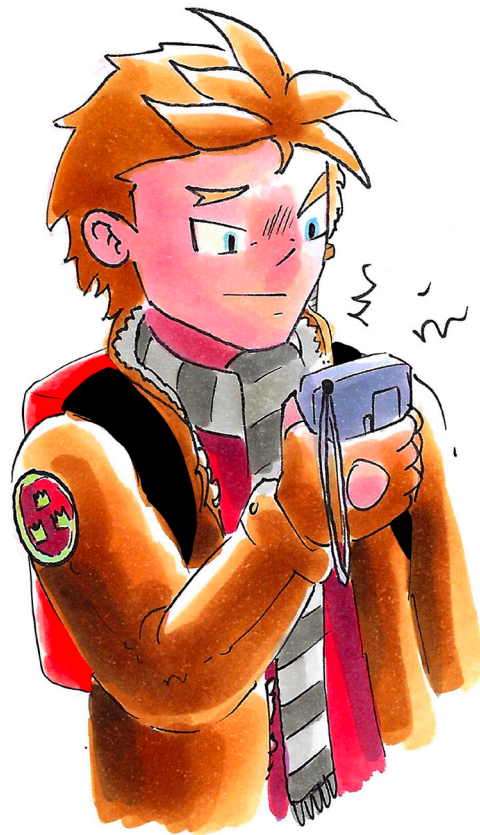
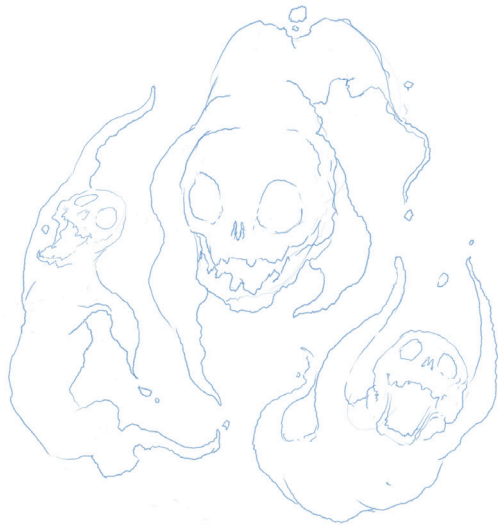
Here's the rub: I'm not a writer. I know what the story is (because I spent a very long time coming up with it!), but manifesting this story into words, and words that are compelling... is something I just have no experience with. But you know what? Who gives a damn. I'm going to learn how to write and hopefully you all will join me on this journey. I will get better at it with practice, I promise. In the immortal words of Dr. Strange, "Study and practice, lots of it."

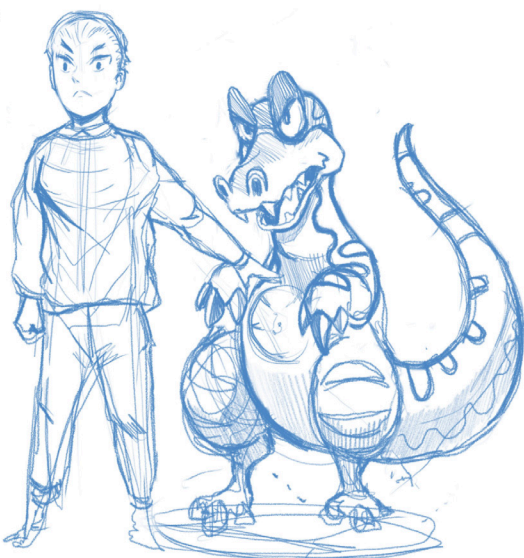
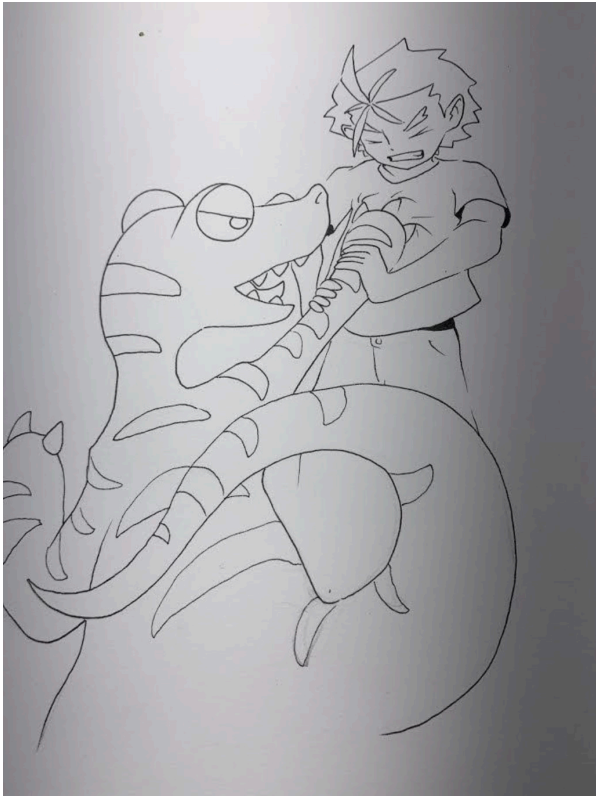
With that out of the way, what else is there to say? This isn't just the inaugural chapter, it's really the "Month of Firsts". MetaZoo: Cryptid Nation Base Set just released its Kickstarter Print Run. People are already calling from the highest peaks for restocks of items that are already sold out. It's been such an incredible journey that started in earnest last May 2020, and many of you have been there with me every step of the way. Many more of you joined at various points in time leading up to release. Most of you have joined only recently. All of you have been instrumental in making this a success, such that it is.

And where do we go from here? We have so much we want to do - our ambitions with MetaZoo are limitless - but we need not rush! The history of MetaZoo will be a long one, and one that we should cherish. It's been a challenging but rewarding journey to get to this point. These will be the moments and memories that we remember years down the line that will be the most special to us - and you're part of that - so thank you!

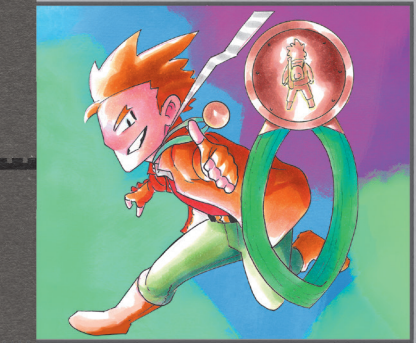
Sincerely and happily yours,







ARTIFACT MEDAL  
**CHAPTER 1, DIGITAL MEDAL** 0  
1 PER SPELLBOOK



The original owner of this Page read  
**Chapter 1, Digital Print of the MetaZoo  
Illustrated Story!**

*You didn't have to crack it, but you did! Future collectors  
will weep, but it was a pretty good read, right?!*

© 2021 MetaZoo Games LLC.™ Illus. Poncho



**MetaZoo™**

© 2021 MetaZoo Games LLC