

The Beast of Bald Peak  
By Robert Moore

[this sample represents a work in progress]

Jake tore down the jagged mountainside with the howl of the beast at his back. Tree branches lashed out at him like witch fingers trying to grab and hold him as their sacrifice to the creature. Jake lowered his head and charged like a bullet train through an especially thick tangle of branches. He burst through on the other side with only a few scratches to his face, but he didn't notice the upturned root in front of him and took a dive to the dirt. His face slammed into the cold earth. Pushing off from his knee he got back up and immediately staggered back into a tree. His eyes distorted the world before him, like a camera trying to focus, he felt sick and could feel blood dripping off his lips. For a moment he forgot where he was and why his heart was beating so furiously. Then a cry pierced the night. The sound was like a human scream, but hoarse and guttural and the trees seemed to quake as it resounded through the wood.

The sound had become all too familiar this night. Jake had heard the legend of the Beast a week ago at his high school. He was new to the area and school was always a struggle for the new kid. It was Monday and he was running late, literally running. He missed the bus and had to sprint through the biting fall air to make it to before they closed the doors. He already had two tardy marks and didn't need another. His calves burned as he heaved past the final block to school, but upon his

arrival he was not met with locked doors and a glowering school secretary. As he came in view of the school he saw a mass of students standing around the door and the principal addressing the crowd. Apparently, the building that housed the school's generators had been damaged and school was canceled for the day. Jake took a moment to absorb the joyous news of a school cancelation before wondering what had happened to the powerhouse. The thought would be answered for him on the ride home.

Trapped in the chaos of the school bus, Jake overheard a conversation in front of him about the damage to the generator.

"It was the Beast of Bald Peak," One boy said. "My uncle's a local electrician and he's seen this happen before. He told me that the beast's attracted to power sources because of the humming sound. It thinks it's a heartbeat or something." Jake was intrigued he had never heard of the beast. So he leaned in closer. The boy continued to describe the beast as a massive creature with fangs and horns and claws that could tear flesh from bone. The other boys seemed skeptical, but then the first boy held out his proof. On his phone was a picture that he claimed his uncle had sent to him last month. The circumstances had been similar; a generator house to an apartment building had been damaged. The official story was a tree had fallen on it, but the picture seemed to show otherwise. The picture was of a metal door that had been torn from its hinges and bore several closely spaced long gashes. Claw marks. The boy went on to say that a local newspaper was offering five thousand dollars for a picture of the beast.

Now this intrigued Jake. Five G's was a lot of money and money was something that his family could use right now. He lived with his single dad, who was between jobs at the time and his older sister who also worked so that they could afford their apartment fees. So that night he had set out into the woods with a plan. He brought with him his phone and an old radio from their apartment. He had recorded the humming sound of a generator off the Internet and then burned a CD of the sound. He had hiked high up into the woods, finally coming to his destination: Bald Peak. The mountain loomed above him like a giant figure wrapped in a pine-covered cloak that flowed down around it. The hike up was long and arduous, but the reward would be worth it. He set up the radio in a clearing, slid in the CD, hit repeat and found a nearby tree to hide in. Then he waited for the moment when he would whip out his phone and catch footage of the creature that had been dismantling the generator houses. Despite the elaborate setup, he didn't imagine that he would see a beast. It was probably a pack of wolves or black bear, both of which he would be safe from in the tree if he stayed quiet. He didn't believe there was such a thing as the Beast. He was wrong. With that final thought reality solidified around him and he was once again being chased down a mountain by a terrible monster.

Adrenaline shot through his body then, giving his legs a means to achieve what his brain had been screaming for them to do: run. His arms pumped behind him, shooting him off a tree and back down the death trap that the state called a hiking trail. Every turn looked familiar, but also strange. The Adirondack Park, that was a fun family destination in the daytime had become a giant, terrifying labyrinth. A

nightmare where the only way out was hidden by shadows and guarded by the beast that now hunted him. Jake looked for an escape any way to get away from the Beast; he would take any way out. Any way.

That was when he saw it. He had broken through to a small clearing; on all sides the forest loomed like a beast itself, ready to swallow him again. On all sides, but his right. There, was a sheer rock face that dropped off into oblivion. The sudden drop of death was not what Jake saw, however. What he saw was the other rock face position across and just a bit bellow the rim of rock. If he could make it to that outcropping the beast wouldn't be able to follow. On the other side he saw salvation. The ledge was farther across than any jump he had ever done in his life, but right now he felt like he could do anything to escape the beast, even jump off the jagged plank of granite that lay before him. Jake backed up and prepared to walk the plank.

He stopped at the edge of the forest for a moment to prepare, but then he felt a sudden gust of wind behind him. The wind wasn't the air of the cool mountain. Instead, it was fetid and rotten like death. The breath of the beast, it had found him. He burst forward and felt a massive hand rake the back of his shirt. The torn threads streamed behind him like flames. The ledge was quickly approaching. For a split second Jake second-guessed himself, but then he glanced back. The beast had emerged into the moonlight. It stood at least ten feet tall, with scraggly haired arms and legs that were thicker than some of the trees. It had a set of fangs that curved up out of its lips and horns that grew in a jagged pattern out from the sides of its

head and looked like the twisted branches of an oak. The worst part of the beast, however, was its eyes. They glowed in the dark like a dog's, but only the outer edges, in the center they were black and soulless. Jake took in all this in an instant. When he looked back to his feet the cliff side was there to greet him. He wanted to shut his eyes, but he didn't dare. The cliff ended, and he jumped.

Jake wondered how he had come to find himself in this haunting wood, at night, with a beast shrieking down the mountain behind him.

It had started on a day almost as daunting as this. He had just rushed into his high school, this was the third time he was running behind, not good when you're already the new kid. He burst through the door to class with much more exuberance than was necessary. Everyone in the class lurched in their seats from the sudden disturbance, well, everyone except Miss Eckert. You see to be surprised one must experience fear and fear is an emotion and Jake was fairly certain that Miss Eckert didn't have those. She stared at Jake and reached her long red, clawish fingernails toward his seat. She didn't say a word and she didn't need to, this was his third time late, he was out of strikes. After slouching into his seat Miss Eckert picked up her lesson again.

“Class we will pick up on page 567 of your textbooks, now watch this presentation closely.”

Miss Eckert’s voice sounded like a mix between depressed country singer and a crow, grating and shrill. She went on with an extremely detailed PowerPoint presentation on the settlement of Jamestown and all the diseases that the settlers gave to the natives. The only disease Jake was concerned with though was this class and his detainment in it. After 40 minutes (or years) of Miss Eckert’s droning, the bell rang and Jake was set free. The hall offered him no relief though, as he walked past some of the more burley looking boys in the class he could hear them mocking him.

“Bro, guess his mommy didn’t get him ready this morning.”

“You seen his clothes, dude looks like he’s on a steady diet of Salvation Army.”

“His family doesn’t have any money man. I heard that his Dad blew it all looking for Bigfoot.”

At this point the biggest member of the brute club, Ed let out a loud gurgling laugh.

“What a crack-head bro.”

That was it. Jake spun around and seethed.

“Are you talking about my dad?”

Ed lurched toward Jake and spat back.

“What if I was dirt boy? You and your daddy gonna send Bigfoot after me?”

Jake’s fingers twisted into fists. He felt hot, like someone was boiling water in

his stomach and it was quickly flooding his body. He knew he was about to do something stupid, but he couldn't stop it from happening. Maybe he could get the satisfaction of an unexpected shot to Ed's jaw before his cronies joined in and destroyed him. The boil had reached his head and he felt his arm winding back like a coil ready to shoot out. This was it. Or not.

"Stop!"

The voice was like a referee's whistle calling of the fight. Jake knew the voice well and he dreaded what it would say next.

"What's going on here?"

A tall, slim, sharply dressed woman strode toward the would be brawl. She had dark neatly trimmed shoulder length hair and meticulously applied make-up. Her high-heels clicked in perfect rhythm as she approached the boys and came to a stop. Her piercing blue eyes gazed out from behind the thick black frame of her glasses and froze the boys in place. The ice slowly melted and the boys took on a more casual stance. Jake took a step away from Ed, out of the kill zone. The woman kept her icy stare on the boys as she spoke.

"Where you boys going to fight in school?"

"No of course not ma'am, we was just talkin' bout local legends n' stuff n' Jake was showin' me how a bigfoot would attack its pray weren't you." Ed's tone was sickly sweet and he sent a disgusting smirk in Jake's direction. The other boys snickered at Ed's twisted joke. It took all the will power inside Jake not to give Ed a few twisted teeth to match his sense of humor. The woman put her hand on her



hips and then said dryly,

“Well, I don’t believe this school offers live demonstrations on cryptozoology, so why don’t you get to your next class.”

“Of course ma’am,” The Ed shoved off from the wall he was leaning against and shuffled past Jake. Ed kept enough distance so that the woman wouldn’t give him another lecture, but he came close enough for Jake to smell his beef jerky laced breath and hear him mutter, “Bigfoot boy needs his big sister to save him huh.”

Jake whirled around toward Ed, but a hand caught his shoulder. He turned around slowly, keeping his head low to face his older sister Kate. Kate was a teacher here at the school she had gone through high school and college with straight A’s and had found a good staring job here at the school. Everything seemed to have been going well in both their lives until their Dad had spent a fortune on a gamble that he could produce evidence that the Sasquatch existed. That was about half a year ago, the bet had run dry and Dad was left with nothing. Kate was their savior, she had allowed Jake and dad to move into her apartment with her until their dad was able to find steady work. It was extremely generous of her, but it made for the worst family time ever. It’s hard for a new high school student to hold his head high when everyone knew that his sister was financially carrying his father who was currently selling gas and homemade beef jerky at a convenience store.

Without even looking, Jake could feel Kate’s eyes boring into his skull. Finally she spoke.

“Have you lost your mind? Did I just seriously catch you about to start a fight

in the middle of a hallway with those boys?

Her tone was even, but Jake could sense a barely controlled fury beneath the words.

“They started it.” He laid out his poorly constructed cliché of an argument. Kate’s eyes flashed like a fire that someone had just dumped gasoline over.

“Oh, well that makes it all better then. That looks perfect on the paper work. I’ll just say, please excuse my brother for punching a fellow student in the hall and starting a fight in the middle of a school hallway. The other boy said something to him that made him mad so it’s really his fault. You know I think they might even give me a raise for this.”

When Kate was angry she would be derisive, when she was furious every word became a caustic dagger of sarcasm that melted flesh and bone down to the soul. They used to be friends, as good of friends as brother and sister can be, but still friends. She had even let him stay at her apartment a few years earlier, after she had just moved in when he was doing a school project on native wildlife. He would never have guessed then that he would be staying there out of necessity one day. Suddenly, Jake snapped back into reality where his very angry sister was waiting for a more intelligent response than he had offered up so far. He just kept quiet and stared at his muddy shoes. Nothing he could say would be enough for her. He didn’t look at her, but he heard her sigh and her tone softened just a little when she spoke again.

“Jake, I’m on thin ice in this community as it is right now. It’s a small town and

news travels fast. I've already got enough to deal with on my job, making sure we have enough to live on every month, and applying to have dad evaluated, I really don't need your behavior to worry about too."

"Dad's not crazy." Jake said it out of reflex and repetition. He had to repeat this phrase multiple times over the past month to defend his dad's perceived mental health against those who would question it. He hadn't thought he would have to do the same against his sister.

"I didn't say he was crazy Jake, but he spent a fortune trying to find an ape man in the woods. Something is wrong with him and we need to find out what. At the least we can get some financial support from this."

"We're doing fine."

"No we're not Jake. I'm working as hard as I can and its still not enough. I've used up most of my savings and if we don't get some help soon we'll be renting a trailer by next month and eating a steady diet of canned beans."

"If mom was here she could have helped."

"Jake please don't go into that again." Kate pressed her fingers against her forehead, "Yes, mom could have helped. She had a PhD, she taught at college for years, I know all that. It's why I even wanted to become a teacher but she's gone now. She's been gone for three years and it was after her death that dad quit his job at the carpenters shop and started this creature quest. I think that her death is exactly what is causing all this..."

"You hate dad don't you," Jake could feel tears welling up, but he forced his

eyes to swallow them, he wouldn't do this in front of Kate. They both stood there for a while.