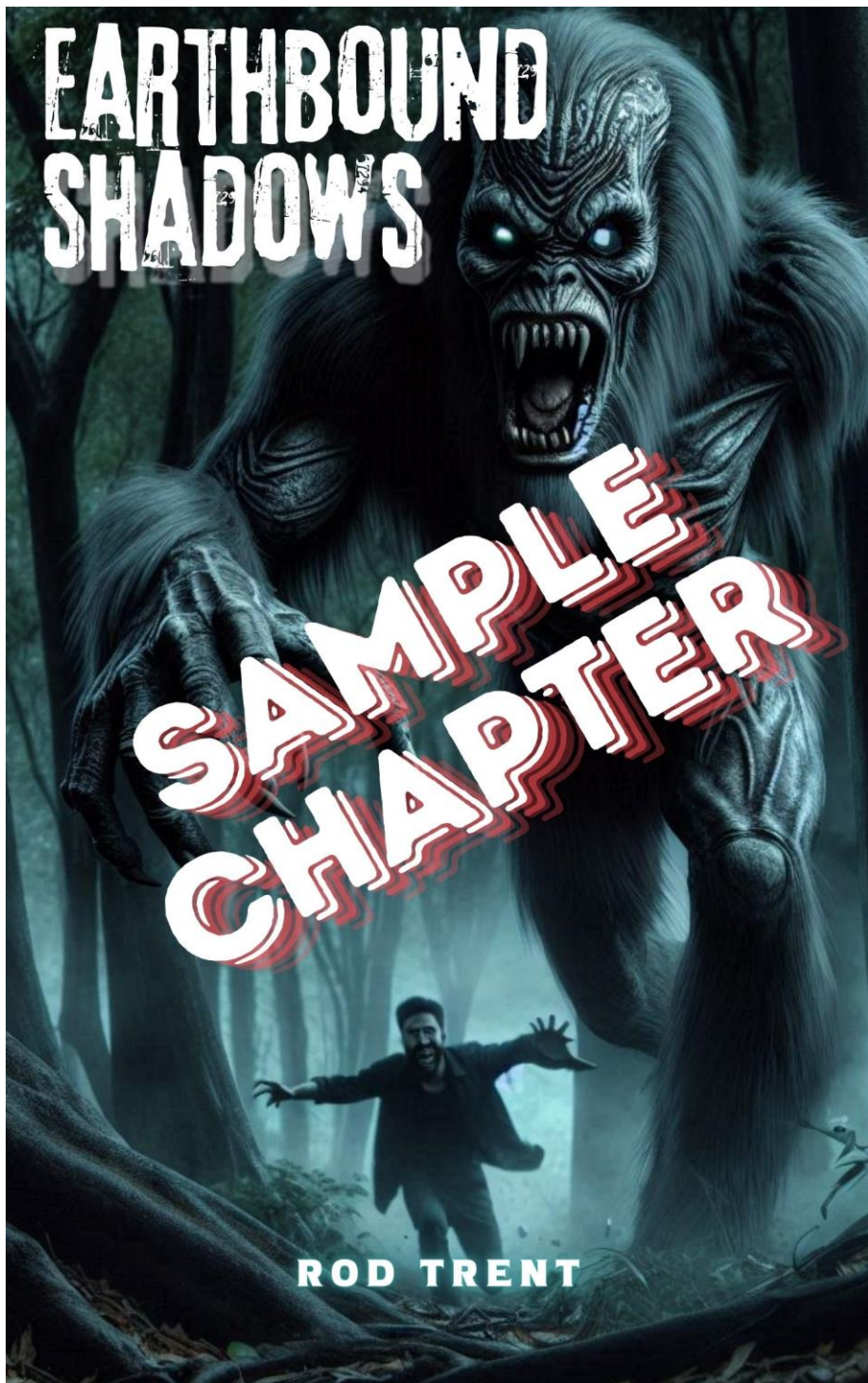


# EARTHBOUND SHADOWS

## SAMPLE CHAPTER

ROD TRENT



Welcome, dear reader.

This story is an interesting one and something that has burdened me for decades. I grew up enthralled by myths and legends thanks to Leonard Nimoy narrating the original "In Search Of" television series and books like "Project Blue Book." My curiosity for these things has always driven my quiet thoughts.

But what are these elusive things? This story exposes what may be their true nature.

As the author of this story, I began my career writing fiction, a passion that has never dimmed even as I ventured into the world of technology content to pay the bills and drive my career forward. The act of creation is not just a job; it is a therapeutic escape, a return to the roots of my creativity, and I am thrilled to be sharing this passion with you. In a very real way, this book is just for me. Selfish, huh? But for those that know me, I share everything, so, I hope you both excuse and enjoy my attempted intrusion into your world.

- Rod



# Chapter 1

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## Enigmatic

Leaves crunched underfoot as Owen and Lily pushed through the dense underbrush, their breaths visible in the cool air. The forest loomed large around them, an ancient behemoth guarding its secrets.

"Did you hear that?" Lily stopped abruptly, head tilted.

"An animal, probably," Owen replied, his voice low, eyes darting to the thickets on either side.

"More than that," she insisted, her voice a whisper of excitement. "The forest talks, if you listen."

Owen didn't respond, but he couldn't deny the prickling sensation climbing up his spine. Lily marched ahead, undeterred by the creeping fog that started to blanket the ground. Every so often, she would pause, touching a moss-covered tree trunk or peering at a cluster of mushrooms sprouting from the damp earth.

"Remember the story of the Shadow Walker?" Her words sliced through the stillness as she glanced back at him, blue eyes alight. "They say it roams these woods."

"Legends," Owen said, though his skeptical tone faltered against the weight of the forest's oppressive silence.

"Isn't that why we're here?" She laughed, stepping over a fallen log with ease. "To chase legends?"

"Carefully," he reminded her, following in her nimble footsteps while scanning the path for hidden pitfalls.

"Always," she shot back, though her attention was already captured by something else. Her hands moved animatedly as she recounted their past findings, each tale punctuated with a hint of the unknown.

"Look at this." She crouched suddenly, fingers brushing aside leaves to reveal an intricately patterned stone half-buried in the ground.

"Could be something," Owen admitted, kneeling beside her.

"Or another dead end," Lily conceded, but there was no mistaking the thrill in her voice as she gently unearthed the stone.

Owen reached out, tracing the lines etched into the rock, feeling the hum of history beneath his fingertips. He met Lily's gaze, wordless understanding passing between them.

"Let's keep moving," he said finally, pocketing the stone.

"Deeper into the shadows," she agreed, her voice a mix of reverence and daring as they resumed their trek into the heart of the Great Northwest forests.

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Lily halted, her hand shooting up. "Owen, look."

He squinted in the direction she pointed, where sunlight struggled through the dense canopy. A shimmer caught his eye, subtle but deliberate, like a secret whispering to be found.

"Over there," she said, already moving, her boots crunching over twigs and moss. He followed, each step deliberate, aware of the forest's watchful eyes.

"Careful, Lily," he called out, but she was a wisp of red hair and determination, weaving through the trees.

"Here." Her voice echoed strangely, muffled by foliage. Owen pushed through the last barrier of underbrush and found himself at the mouth of a cave, its entrance like a darkened maw.

"Thoughts?" Lily asked, flashlight in hand, her breath visible in the chill air escaping the earth's depths.

"Let's be quick," Owen replied, flicking on his own light. Their beams cut through the darkness, twin swords against the encroaching shadows.

"Agreed," she said, stepping inside.

The cave's air was damp, heavy with the scent of mineral and decay. Stalactites loomed overhead, ancient guardians in silent vigil. Their lights danced across rough walls, throwing distorted shapes that seemed to move just beyond perception.

"Stay close," Owen whispered, senses heightened. Every sound amplified – a drip of water, the scrape of their shoes against stone – fueling an undercurrent of primal unease.

"Always do," Lily shot back, her tone lighter than the pressing darkness around them. But even she moved with more care, wary of the unknown that lay ahead.

"Watch your step," Owen said as they delved deeper into the cavern's belly, the promise of discovery urging them forward into the heart of darkness.

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The beam of Owen's flashlight trembled as it landed on an assortment of relics, their edges catching the light with a strange luster. A low hum seemed to vibrate from the very walls of the cave, setting his teeth on edge.

"Owen, look!" Lily's voice broke through the silence, tinged with an excitement that bordered on reverence.

He edged closer, squinting at the items before them. Statuettes with humanoid forms, bowls etched with spirals, amulets that pulsed faintly – as if they held captured starlight within their stone hearts. They were not merely old; they felt ancient, connected to a time when the earth was young and wild.

"Can you believe this?" Lily's hand hovered over a curious pendant, her fingers twitching. "It's... it's like nothing I've ever seen."

"Careful," he managed, though she barely heard him.

Her touch traced the sinuous lines of a carving, following the curves and angles with a mix of awe and hunger. Each artifact whispered promises to her fingertips; knowledge, power, secrets waiting to be unlocked. The symbols spoke in a language forgotten by time, yet they beckoned to Lily with undeniable intent.

She leaned closer, breath hitching as she drank in the sight. "I need to know more."

"Slow down." Owen's voice was a whisper lost in the vastness of the chamber. He knew caution was a thin thread here, but Lily was already caught in the artifacts' silent siren song. Her world narrowed to the glow and the enigma.

"Listen to them, Owen." Her words floated back to him, coated in wonder. "They're alive."

"Alive?" His pulse quickened. Alive meant danger, but the thrum in the air, the unearthly shimmer of the objects — it was hard to deny her claim.

"More than we ever imagined," she replied, turning to face him. Her eyes sparkled with reflected luminescence, a mirror of the cave's hidden heart.

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Owen hesitated. Shadows played across the cave's walls, transforming benign relics into menacing figures. His gaze lingered on Lily, her silhouette haloed by the dim light of their flashlights.

"Be careful," he said, his voice barely above a murmur yet slicing through the silence like a blade. "We don't know what these are capable of."

Lily didn't even glance up, her fingers hovering millimeters from an amulet. Its metal gleamed as if lit from within, casting a pale glow on her face. "It's history, Owen. It's discovery."

"History has its dangers." He stepped closer, his eyes narrowing at the sight of the amulet. It seemed to pulse with an energy that defied logic.



"Everything does." She shrugged off his concern and picked up the amulet, her touch confident, dismissive of his warning.

The metal felt cool, almost icy against her skin, a stark contrast to the warmth radiating from within. Her thumb caressed the surface, feeling the etchings that might unlock epochs of forgotten lore.

"C'mon, Lily!" Owen clenched his fists. Frustration surged through him, battling the fear gnawing at his insides. "Think!"

"Thinking is done out there." She gestured toward the cave's mouth with her free hand. "In here, we feel. We connect."

"Connect with caution," he shot back, his protective instincts flaring. But she was already lost to the amulet's call.

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A jolt shot through her. Lily's breath hitched, and the amulet fell from her trembling fingers, tumbling down to the cave floor with a sound that echoed off the ancient walls.

"Owen!" Her voice cracked, barely audible over the ringing in her own ears.

He was at her side in an instant, his hand steady on her shoulder. "Lily? What happened?"

"Energy," she managed to gasp out, her bright blue eyes wide with shock. "It – it went through me."

"Easy," he soothed, though his own pulse hammered against his throat. He scanned her face for signs of harm, green eyes narrowed in focus. "You're okay now, I've got you."

"Did you feel that?" Her chest rose and fell rapidly, cheeks flushed from the adrenaline.

"No, nothing." He helped her to her feet, his touch firm yet gentle. "It must've been the amulet."

"Must've been." She nodded, steadying herself against him. Her gaze flickered back to the artifact lying innocently among the dust. "We should –"

"Let's just take a minute here." Owen cut her off, his words sharp but not unkind. "No more touching anything. Not yet."

"Right." She swallowed hard, her adventurous spirit momentarily quelled by the reality of their situation.

Together, they stood in the silence of the cave, each heartbeat syncing with the other's, a silent pact forming between them in the dim, cavernous space.

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Owen's gaze locked with Lily's for a mere second, the unspoken agreement crackling between them like static. Explore further. The shimmer of excitement returned to her eyes, a wild glint that spoke volumes.

"Let's document everything," she whispered, her voice a mix of awe and defiance.

"Carefully," he replied, his voice low, infused with the gravity of their discovery.

They moved in tandem, each step measured, precise. Owen pulled a soft cloth from his backpack, spreading it on the ground. Together, they picked up the scattered artifacts with

reverent hands, each piece wrapped delicately, as if swaddling newborn secrets in linen.

"Imagine the history here," Lily murmured, her fingers lingering over a carved stone figure before tucking it away.

"Imagine the danger," Owen countered softly, though his eyes betrayed his own fascination. Artifacts bundled, they stood, their load secured against Owen's chest.

"Ready?" he asked, one hand on the cave's damp wall for balance.

"Always," she shot back with a grin, though her lips trembled slightly.

Steps cautious, they navigated the uneven ground toward the cave mouth, the beam of their flashlights cutting through the pressing darkness. The air turned cooler as they neared the exit, the promise of daylight seeping into the shadows.

"Questions first, answers... hopefully to come," Owen said, a half-joke to mask the thud of his heart.

"Right behind you," Lily replied, her tone all adventure but her hand gripping his arm with uncharacteristic tightness.

With the threshold crossed, they paused, allowing their eyes to adjust to the fading light outside.

"Home now," Owen declared, more to reassure himself than her.

"Then research," she added, her curiosity an unquenchable flame.

"Then research," he agreed, stepping into the waning day, their minds racing faster than their feet could carry them.

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Leaves crunched underfoot as they stepped out, the forest swallowing them whole once more. Mist curled around trunks like wraiths, the sun's last rays clawing through a thick canopy overhead. Owen felt it – the weight of ancient secrets pressing on his chest, a burden shared and heavy.

"Owen," Lily whispered, her breath visible in the cool air, "we can't let these... just be forgotten."

He nodded, eyes scanning the encroaching shadows. "We won't."

The silence between them was electric, charged with unspoken oaths. Eerie whispers seemed to dance on the breeze, but Owen's resolve was ironclad. He would keep Lily safe; that much was etched into his very soul.

"Promise me," she said, her gaze piercing into his, "no matter what we find..."

"Nothing gets past us," he finished for her, his tone sharp as flint. "Together, right?"

"Right." Her smile flashed, brave and bright against the gathering dusk.

Packed earth gave way to softer ground as they moved, the artifacts secure against Owen's chest. Each step felt like a defiance, a challenge to the unknown. The forest watched, silent and ancient, its secrets now theirs to unearth.

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Branches snapped under their boots, urgency propelling them forward. Owen's grip on the cloth-wrapped bundle tightened with each stride, the artifacts inside a tangible promise of adventure. Verdant ferns brushed against their legs as they navigated through the underbrush, a path known only to those who called these woods home.

"Keep up," Owen called back, his voice barely louder than the rustle of leaves.

"Right behind you," Lily panted, determination etched in her features.

The forest blurred into streaks of green and brown as they moved, every sense alert. A chill breeze whispered secrets only the ancient trees could understand, but the siblings had their own truth to chase.

"Almost there," he said, more to himself than to Lily.

Her response was a grunt, the exertion evident. But she matched him step for step, her resolve as unyielding as the towering pines around them.

They emerged onto a clearing, their home in sight – a beacon of safety and normalcy amidst the untamed wild. Owen's heart pounded, not from the run, but from what lay ahead. The unknown beckoned, a siren calling out to the depths of his soul.

"Home stretch!" Lily exclaimed, her second wind catching.

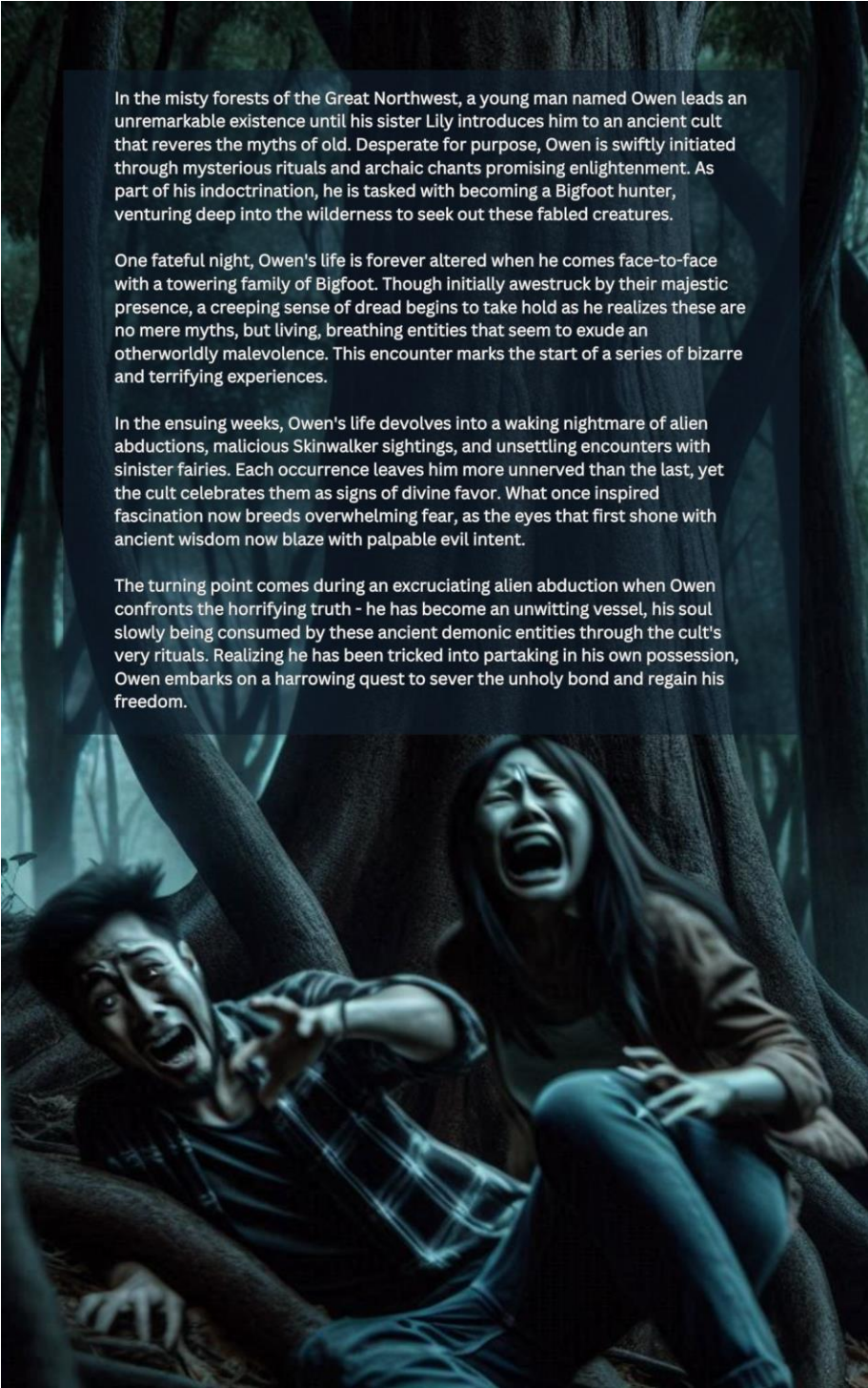
"Let's go." Owen's words were clipped, sharp.

They crossed the clearing in a final sprint, the house growing larger with each passing moment. As they reached the porch, hands on knees, breaths heaving, Owen looked over at Lily. Her eyes sparkled, mirroring his own exhilaration.

"Tomorrow?" she asked between gulps of air.

"First light," he confirmed, his mind already racing through possibilities.

They stepped inside, the door closing with a sense of finality. Outside, the forest loomed, holding its breath, waiting for what would come next.



In the misty forests of the Great Northwest, a young man named Owen leads an unremarkable existence until his sister Lily introduces him to an ancient cult that reveres the myths of old. Desperate for purpose, Owen is swiftly initiated through mysterious rituals and archaic chants promising enlightenment. As part of his indoctrination, he is tasked with becoming a Bigfoot hunter, venturing deep into the wilderness to seek out these fabled creatures.

One fateful night, Owen's life is forever altered when he comes face-to-face with a towering family of Bigfoot. Though initially awestruck by their majestic presence, a creeping sense of dread begins to take hold as he realizes these are no mere myths, but living, breathing entities that seem to exude an otherworldly malevolence. This encounter marks the start of a series of bizarre and terrifying experiences.

In the ensuing weeks, Owen's life devolves into a waking nightmare of alien abductions, malicious Skinwalker sightings, and unsettling encounters with sinister fairies. Each occurrence leaves him more unnerved than the last, yet the cult celebrates them as signs of divine favor. What once inspired fascination now breeds overwhelming fear, as the eyes that first shone with ancient wisdom now blaze with palpable evil intent.

The turning point comes during an excruciating alien abduction when Owen confronts the horrifying truth - he has become an unwitting vessel, his soul slowly being consumed by these ancient demonic entities through the cult's very rituals. Realizing he has been tricked into partaking in his own possession, Owen embarks on a harrowing quest to sever the unholy bond and regain his freedom.