

The Legend of Frogboy

By Andrew McKee

The Legend

Yellowwood, Indiana, was haunted.

The town wasn't afflicted by vengeful spirits, nor an eternal curse. Residents of Yellowwood didn't feel the need to create protection circles or hire priests.

They just stayed away from the woods.

The haunting thing was the subject of playground rhymes, conspiracy chat boards, and even a local museum that never opened. Nobody had ever really *seen* the thing, at least not without paying for the viewing with their life. Even so, there were legends.

Tales of wet, slimy skin that blended in with the earthy green of Yellowwood's Crooked Pine Forest's foliage tickled the back of children's brains. Beady and animalistic eyes the size of baseballs was said to sit upon its oversized head and teetered above a colossal mouth that concealed a fleshy projectile. The only evidence of its existence was the fleeting trails it left. Its spindly footprints had elongated fingers and large, bulbous growths as fingertips.

They called him Frogboy.

The existence of Frogboy was attributed to the disappearance of three eight-year-olds in 2008: Gabriel Johnson, Dean Wood, and Josh Porter. Each was reported missing by their parents in the middle of the day, and no trace of any victim was ever recovered. The residents of Yellowwood felt their town rotting

from the inside out. They needed something to place the decentralized panic that swept through the town. They needed a villain.

The real kicker was when Brian Greene, brother of the sheriff and clerk of the local video store Movie Planet, was found dead in the woods surrounded by the mutated and monstrous footprints that would come to be iconic in Yellowwood.

A local mommy blogger who moonlighted as a digital tabloid journalist on her website YellowwoodsYikes.com was the first to use the name “Frogboy.” The name was first mentioned in a salacious, fear-mongering piece about the hypothetical threat of a supernatural or extraterrestrial force threatening the town.

“How can we be expected to let our children walk these haunted grounds with the knowledge that there might be something out there?” she asked in the piece, titled “A Shadow over Yellowwood.” “To each their own, but I’m not about to allow my family to become the next victim of this Frogboy.”

Just like that, one word, capitalized. It wasn’t just a moniker or some insult. It was a name, and it took Yellowwood by storm.

Within days of Greene’s grisly murder, Frogboy t-shirts could be purchased at any convenience store or gas station within five miles of Yellowwood. Before his body had even been lowered into his grave, true crime journalists poured into the single ramshackle motel that sat on the topography of the town like an old mole.

Even children were fascinated with the creature, more as something to be wondered about rather than afraid of.

Artie Fleck was one of these children. Due to an early admiration of crime-solving dogs and noir cinema, Artie always had a love for mysteries. As a child, he fancied a career as a private investigator. After a meeting with one of his dad's friends who was a detective for the Yellowwood Police Department, he realized the hard truth that PIs don't exist in the same capacity in real life as they do in movies. Therefore, his detective work would simply have to be a hobby.

When eight-year-old Artie snuck down the hallway of his one-story home to grab an extra cookie before going to bed, he encountered the mystery of a lifetime. It had missing children, a dead body, and a mythical creature roaming the woods, all in his own hometown.

He met with his partner in crime the next day during recess.

"With my detective skills and your people skills, I'm confident we'll solve the case in no time," Artie said to his friend June. The pair sat beneath their school's sprawling wooden playground that resembled a roofless castle with too many bridges.

"I don't know, Artie." June shrugged. "My mom is still mad at me for the last mystery we tried to solve."

June was Artie's best friend, because they both read the same Midwest themed young adult horror novel series and bonded about it on the first day of school. Her short black hair was a direct contrast to the curly mound of blonde

atop Artie's head, and she stood a couple inches taller than him despite being a year younger.

"It'll be different this time," Artie said.

"Different how?" June whined. She poked sharp pieces of mulch through the thin fabric of her dress.

Artie beamed. "I'll be smarter."

June rolled her eyes and groaned.

"We need more people, Artie," June said.

Artie obliged, and so the pair spent the rest of the day recruiting the greatest minds of Yellowwood Elementary School's third grade class. By the end of the day, their team had doubled.

The first recruit was Paul Kilpatrick, the leader of the chess team and top of the class in times tables. He was a friendly kid, but a bit emotionally distant. His face very rarely wavered from a stony gaze with a half-smile, and he stood nearly a head lower than his peers.

Benny McIntyre was the second recruit, and an outlier. Benny was the largest student in Yellowwood Elementary, including the fourth and fifth graders. Despite his age, he stood an astonishing five foot two and weighed heavier than June and Artie put together. However, his intimidating size reflected nothing of his personality. Benny was extremely kind, as if his muscle fibers had grown with every compliment he said. Artie thought the boy's face was extremely pretty as well, a feeling he would not fully reckon with until some years later.

The four children called themselves “The Friends of Frogboy.” Their mission was simple: find any hard evidence to prove the existence of Frogboy. Paul handled anything that required computers, June could talk her way out of anything, Benny’s fists were fantastic tools for intimidation, and Artie held it all together. They went on like this for a few years, and they grew closer all the while.

Then, things changed, like they always do.

The Graduation

Artie spent the evening after his high school graduation in the fetal position on his bedroom floor. A gentle stream of tears ran consistently from his eyes with no signs of slowing. He attempted to control his breathing, but his chest heaved violently as he wept.

He thought he might be dying.

He was having a panic attack. He had never consciously experienced one, but he'd had episodes in the past that had been described as such by doctors after the fact.

The psychic demon that afflicted Artie was a familiar evil that snuck up on everyone sooner or later. It was the simple passage of time. Artie simply couldn't stomach the fact that he was not a child anymore. The vision of growing old and finding a job and starting a family was not one Artie had ever actually prepared for. Finally, standing on the precipice of the beginning of the rest of his life, Artie couldn't take it.

Beyond his door, which felt like it could have been miles away, his parents tapped lightly.

"Everything okay, Arthur?" his dad asked. "You don't need to open the door. Your mother and I just want to know if everything is okay."

"Yes," was all Artie could manage.

Suddenly, the floor gave out from beneath Artie, and he was falling. An infinite hole pierced through the earth below him and eagerly drew him in. As he sunk, his mind turned so fast it caught fire. The grades, the clubs, the

friends, his mind screamed that it was all meaningless. If his heart pounded any harder, it might have splintered his ribs and popped out like a pulsing Kool-Aid Man.

Warm saliva filled his mouth, and his stomach made its uncomfortable presence impossible not to notice. Every part of his body was sent into overdrive. Even his senses were dulled from the deluge of tears that left dry salt crystals on his face.

Artie wasn't sure why, but as he sat in the ever long crevice of his own fear, he felt a group of eyes settle upon him.

He looked up, and at the opening of his imaginary hole stood four young figures, the Friends of Frogboy.

Artie rolled his body over just enough to remove pressure from his right pocket, from which he retrieved his out-of-date smartphone and tapped into his frequent contacts.

"Hello?" June said.

Artie fumbled with his cell phone and settled to slide it between his head and the floor. Loud music pulsed in the back of the call, along with a roar of conversation.

He wasn't surprised. June was the only one in the original four who had managed to live out the high school experience decades of young adult television programming had promised them. She frequented parties, experimented with drugs, and even had a fake ID for a few weeks before it got confiscated by a bouncer at Club Tune.

“I’m sorry for calling so late.” Artie’s voice trembled.

“No problem, Artie,” June said. “Are you okay?”

“Can you meet me somewhere?” he asked.

June whispered something to her friend. Artie figured she was probably hanging out with Kat, which he tried to convince himself he didn’t have a problem with. Kat was June’s best friend after Artie, but he was more concerned about her power and influence over June. She had never touched a cigarette or a drop of alcohol before meeting Kat, and Artie was worried about her ability to say no to her friends.

After a beat she said, “Give me like an hour, okay? Meet me at Night Owl.”

An hour was longer than Artie wanted to wait, but June was worth it.

“Don’t be late,” he said.

“I won’t,” she replied. “Be safe, Artie.”

“I will.” Artie disconnected the call.

Artie managed to stand about halfway and hobbled to the bathroom. His body was devoid of energy due to his existential tantrum. He managed to pull himself straight with the bathroom sink and take a good look into the mirror.

He looked like shit.

Artie’s once bouncy curly hair was matted down and damp with tears. His face was pink and tender, like a fresh piece of lunchmeat. His eyes were slightly swollen and a deep red color.

He sulked back into his bedroom and opened his closet to look for anything to wear other than the disheveled dress shirt and pants he wore beneath his graduation gown.

The closet triggered another spiral. Before Artie was an entire timeline of his life. He hadn't grown much since freshman year of high school, so he had four years' worth of clothes surrounded by nearly two decades' worth of sentimental items crammed into clear boxes.

Artie's eyes were immediately drawn to one box, and his heart skipped a beat. Memories he hadn't touched in years flashed through his mind in an instant. He opened the box and dumped it onto his bedroom floor. He knew exactly how he was going to spend his next hour.

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Ask any of Artie's friends where to get the best coffee in Yellowwood, they'd tell you Night Owl. Most others in town would say Golden Goat, but most of their espresso drinks had a rubbery aftertaste. The Night Owl got its name from its firm twenty-four seven open hours (including most holidays), and the gargantuan neon owl sign that towered over the modest brick building.

Artie arrived at 10:17 p.m., nearly an hour after his phone call with June. He opened the glass paneled door, which was decorated with sunflowers and a grim looking owl logo. June was already waiting for him in their usual corner booth.

Her hair was still short, but years of practice had taught her how to cut it to frame her face perfectly. She wore a cropped black tank top and black cargo pants covered in chains and holes.

“Artie!” she said. She motioned him over excitedly.

Artie sat across from her at a table in the corner of the shop, just below some hanging potted flowers. He had cleaned up a bit and was now wearing his usual flannel shirt and jeans.

“Okay, dude,” June said. She placed both hands on the table. “Seriously, what’s going on?”

Artie hesitated and smiled. Of course, he would have liked to spill out every single untold secret he held in his heart, but he could tell from the slight lisp in June’s voice and the uneasy tilt of her neck that she was likely still a little drunk. He thought about telling her about the panic attack, or about the Kool Aid Man heart, but he decided to talk about the box instead.

He placed a green file folder on the table. Written in red permanent marker across the front read:

Friends of Frogboy

Frogboy Investigation, 2008

“I have a proposal,” Artie said.

June laughed.

“What is this?” She picked up the folder and flipped through it. Her eyes widened and her grin stretched as she read the pages.

“Let’s do it again,” Artie said. “Let’s reopen the case.”

“You’re joking,” June said. “What is this about, really?”

Artie’s face flushed.

“Please don’t tell me you called me all the way out here for this,” she said.

“I miss us,” he said, without much thought. “Like, the ‘Friends of Frogboy.’ I know there might be no chance we find any more evidence than we did ten years ago, but that’s all right with me.”

June smiled. Although June and Artie shared some classes their senior year, they rarely hung out outside of class. Not to mention Paul and Benny.

Paul Kilpatrick became a hermit. Once everyone got into high school, he became far too focused on grades to have a social life and retreated into his room every evening to study and do homework. Paul always said it wasn’t a life he enjoyed, but it was a duty he felt he should uphold out of respect and love for his parents. June and Artie had hardly seen him around Yellowwood High School, excluding the rare occasion they shared a class with him. When they did, he was just as they remembered. Same stony gaze. Same slight smile.

Benny and Artie got in a big fight in 2012. June and Paul never actually learned what the fight was about, but neither took sides. June continued to hang out with both boys, and Paul continued to hang out with neither. Soon after, Benny worked at Yellowwood’s only 7-Eleven, where he remained throughout all of high school. June often stopped by in the evenings to get her fix of cigarettes and socialization.

“Okay, okay,” June said. “I’m interested, but only under one condition.”

“Anything,” Artie said.

“We get the whole group back together,” she said.

Artie’s spine went cold. He had no issue with Paul, and actually intended to invite him on the Frogboy investigation as well, but Artie didn’t plan on speaking to Benny again in his entire life.

“Why?” Artie said.

“You know why.” June scoffed. “Is it really worth it? You guys were best friends.”

“You don’t even know what happened,” he said.

“I don’t need to.” June placed the folder back onto the table. “That’s my condition.”