

MELONHEADS, VICTIMS OF HORRIBLE EXPERIMENTS, STALK THE WOODS OF OHIO! DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!

There is perhaps no town on Earth as spooky as Kirtland.

This East Side suburb has a sordid history of weirdness. It's where cult leader Jeffrey Lundgren murdered the Avery family and buried their bodies under the floor of a decaying barn.

Today, Kirtland is still rural and underpopulated, a community of cabins on rolling hills amid vast stretches of forest. There is a place on King Memorial Road called Gravity Hill, where the laws of physics are seemingly reversed - cars roll uphill, here. There's a crybaby bridge, too. Local legend claims a teenager became pregnant in the early 1900s under suspicious circumstances. When her father demanded she give it up for adoption, the teen took her baby and leaped into the river. If you stand on the bridge at midnight and chant "crybaby" three times, you can hear the faint cries of a child drifting through the trees.

But nothing is quite as scary as the tale of the Melonheads.

Around the turn of the last century, a man known only as Dr. Crow built an orphanage at the end of Wisner Road, atop a hill overlooking the crybaby bridge. He was an evil and twisted doctor, and at night, when the nurses were away, he conducted odd medical experiments on the children. The procedures caused the kids to develop abnormally large heads with no hair, on top of small, deformed bodies. He called them his "melonheads." But one day, the melonheads revolted. They killed the doctor, burned down the orphanage and escaped into the woods, where they still live today.

Ever since the orphanage burned down, residents of Kirtland have reported strange sightings of short, naked creatures with large heads roaming the woods.

Fire Chief Anthony Hutton has heard the story, but has never seen a melonhead himself - though not for lack of trying. "When I was in school, we used to take the girls out there to scare 'em," he says with a sly smile.

Other residents suspect there may be a logical explanation to the myth. "How it all came about was, there was this doctor who lived here that had some mongoloid children," says Nancy Gorman, who owns horse stables on Wisner Road. "People were just scared of 'em because they didn't know better."

Maybe. But that doesn't explain the number of residents that post new sightings on the Internet. One fellow, on creepycleveland.net, says he watched helplessly as a melonhead came out of the woods, attacked, then ate his pet dog. So, if you visit Wisner Road this Halloween, keep Sparky at home.

- James Renner