

# AGENDA

By Morrow Taplin

“There is a... (huff) creature that lives here. I... (huff) am going to fight it. I... (huff) am going to kill it. I... (huff) am going to drive it (huff) out of this place.”

The night is silent, the only light the flickering of Mary’s torch beam, the only sound her angry mumblings.

“Everyone... (huff) why does nobody *care*? Some... (huff) crazy beast right near our town (huff) - it could (huff) make havoc at any (huff) moment! Why does (huff) no-one listen to me? (huff) Why are they so *stupid*?”

She is almost there: the stone cairn in the undergrowth. The place she has come, too scared to do anything, since she was a kid. She has always known that it would be *her* who brings this to an end, her who saves the village.

“(huff) I will -”

The body is hung on a tree by the time the sun comes up. It is a cold morning, where your breath condenses in the air and twirls like the mist in the mountains, and where the spider’s webs hang heavy with dew. The first person to come along the trail is a German backpacker, heading off early with a swag rolled up tightly and strung to his back. He is horrified to see it there - why? how? what? He calls the police.

Later that day, Mary is interviewed on TV. She talks about the menace that we have been ignoring for so long, how something needs to be done so no more people lose their lives. She talks passionately, convincingly. There is rage and anger in her voice as she talks. She is persuasive. The interviewer nods a lot and asks questions in a formal voice. He struggles to keep the standard “Neutral Presenter Face” and, if you look closely, is absolutely terrified.

That night, another person is found dead on a street. His eyes are dull and pressed into their sockets. People wonder where the TV presenter is and complain loudly about his substitute.

People want to kill the creature, they want to leave the town, they have put planks of wood across their doors. The sales of trail mix and baked beans have skyrocketed. People are fearful, paranoid - will I be the next victim?

The paranoid ones seem to be the ones who die first. Their corpses are found many weeks later, inside boarded up houses, surrounded by cans of food.

Some people begin to wonder... why now? Why *now* that everything is changing?

Has it just been sleeping for long enough, and now that rest has ended?

Did some event trigger it?

Climate?

Something else entirely?

The library is cool and air-conditioned, despite the crisis, when Margo, a PhD undergrad from a nearby university, looks in the historical archives for something, *anything* that might help. She looks through yellowed black-and white photo albums, newspaper articles, pages of magazines, and there - there it is - after six hours, a tiny paperback book. Some pages are handwritten in pencil or ink, others are typed on typewriters. The cover is white with an ornate elliptical frame on the cover - displaying a line-worked image of people around a campfire. There is a cursive title below it - "Oral Histories" and then in more legible typeface "A most divertiNG reCord of This area's FaSCinating hisTory".

She opens the book, turns to the contents page and there it is - the solution. The way that this can be done. The way to save the world. Maybe.

**We interviewed Mr. Robert Colby, a 14th generation resident, about this issue.**

"There is a story in my family about this. See, when people first came to this place, the creature was there. Whether it moved in with them or was it already there? We don't know. Anyway, when people found out about it, they obviously tried to kill it [laugh]. The preacher was there trying to exorcise it and a few people died, mostly the preacher [laugh]."

"Everyone started to notice that the ones who hated it would die first, or the ones who were most scared would die. Crazy it was. And then people thought, well why not just ignore it? And it worked! My dad reckoned that that's why nobody cares, is because that's the only way to avoid it!"

She flicks past that, and finds something somewhat more useful:

***Reproduced here is a page from the Handbooke of Creetures.***

There is a Local Legende about the Beest. It is a Curious and Distressing Thinge as it Feasts Upon the Hate and Fear which People have Unto It. This Hate and Fear so Consumes them that When it is Eaten the Victimm is Left as an Emty Husk. Often, so Say the Legende, it will Go into and Control the Furst person, As it can Then Use Them to its Advantage. If It is Unable to Get this Energie it Lays Dormant and Can only Be Powerfull if an Individual of particular Hatred is near. Otherwise it cannot Stray from Dormancy.

*Does that mean, she thinks, that there is a Husk somewhere here? And who?*

The thought is terrifying,

But it explains *everything*.

*Almost everything.*

The preppers dead in their houses – terrified and therefore vulnerable.

The TV presenter – the look in his eyes said it all when he interviewed Mary.

But who is the Husk?

How did the first person die?

And how can she make everyone be calm and sane in the face of something so scary?

Mary is the public face of the anti-monster army now. She is telling people how they can drive the creature away, if only they have the *willpower* and the *strength* to do it.

Margo realizes that if she is to save the town, this is who she needs to talk to.

It is late evening. Margo walks towards the dilapidated community hall, the gardens of which are looking a shadow of their former selves since the gardener fled a week ago.

She thinks about what she must do. She rehearses her explanation.

She realizes something.

*Mary is the Husk.*

*The only reason she is speaking against the creature is so that it can gain power.*

She turns back and grabs a knife.

She continues.

Rationality, she thinks, is what is needed. A knowledge of what can be done, what will help, what won't help.

"And what I am about to attempt is *definitely* rational."

She walks forward, confident and suppressing fear. She does not know what will come ahead, how this will end. Maybe the creature will succeed and take over the world, or maybe she will save the world from it. She does not know.

She does not know how this will end.

She



