

YETI

Dave Smith, unwrapped his tall body from the warm sleeping bag, putting his feet on the floor of his tent. Harsh wind whipped around his temporary home as the canvas walls jerked against the force of the air. He felt as though the whole thing might take off like a kite, but it remained securely tied to the frozen ground. Ridiculously early at 3:30 in the morning, he stretched, climbed out of bed and stoked the fire.

Coffee bubbled from the pot he kept on the stove and he poured himself a heaping mug while shoving his feet into thick, heavy boots. By 3:45, he stood outside as air pierced what little skin he left exposed. After securing the front flap on the tent, retaining precious heat, he walked to the teleportation spot, securely hidden and most importantly, out of the wind.

As a zoologist employed with the Wizard Council of America, the governing body for witches and wizards, Dave found himself in the enviable position of working with the existing Yeti colony in the Rocky Mountains. Many others in his field had applied for the newest openings on the team, but only three had been hired to study evidence of a new Yeti sleuth, thought to be living in a lower altitude.

Gracefully, Dave landed in the pre-approved teleportation spot situated in the middle of dense trees and wild undergrowth. Though well hidden, it offered him an unobstructed view of the forest and he crouched behind the bushes as he surveyed his location. All around him, animals scurried through the trees and across the thick underbrush; hooves clicked against stone and wood as deer searched for food, and the coyotes wailing filled the darkness, all the while he hoped for the heavy footsteps belonging to the large creatures.

He filled his lungs with crisp air, hoping to get a whiff of the Yetis' strong odor, but the air smelled sweet and clean. With nothing indicating the creatures were near, he headed west to begin his search.

Thousands of acres of forest lined the mountain and yet, the sleuth of Yetis remained in a small area deep in the forest, a cumbersome walk from the teleportation spot. His brain whirled in thought as he searched for the consistent manners the creatures exhibited; braking of trees, removal of leaves, and if fortunate, footprints hardening in the muddy earth. With his flashlight low as to not draw attention, Dave entered the creature's habitat.

It's too quiet he thought, as he penetrated an area seldom hiked by humans. When his boot cracked a dried twig in half he became fully aware of the definitive silence that engulfed him. He had expected the hum of nocturnal wildlife, but if any creatures were present, the smaller animals had been driven away. Unnerved by the stillness, he aimed his light in the trees and across the forest floor searching for signs of life, anything to not feel so alone. It was then he discovered the tree; its large trunk pushed down to the ground, dried and dead splinters of wood dangerously sticking in the air. Leaves were scattered on the ground, several with tooth

impressions marking them. Where the creature had yanked on the tree, the bark had been ripped from the trunk, several chunks lying on the pile of foliage at his feet. The new sleuth was near.

Deliberate, heavy footsteps followed alongside him and he slowed his pace. Hairs on the back of his neck stood straight up. *Thump...thump...thump*; his pulse quickened and blood rushed in his ears as the forest came alive around him.

Fumbling with his flashlight, he trained the beam in the direction of the footsteps. The trees stood bare and devoid of wildlife. *Crunch...crunch...crunch*, he spun around quickly, sighting movement. Adrenaline surged through his body as he made his way toward the unknown being.

Forgetting caution, he picked up speed through the tightly packed forest, catching low branches against his synthetic jacket, snapping twigs beneath his feet. His large boot caught on a tree root; falling forward, he whipped out his palm and used a simple spell to keep from tumbling to the ground. As he hung spread eagle in the air, he laughed loudly before righting himself.

Thud...thud...thud. The slow and controlled footsteps came closer; Dave waited patiently. Though unafraid of what might join him, he still held a palm out on the off chance the creature was something other than a gentle Yeti. The thumping abruptly stopped.

With his empty hand, he focused the light in the trees, finding a tuft of fur partially hidden behind a tree trunk. The creature tilted its head as it watched Dave, who in turn, observed it.

“Click, click...click.”

Two quick clicks, a short pause and a third click escaped the Yeti’s mouth. Unable to interpret the meaning of the sounds, Dave simply stood in awe.

“What are you saying?” Startled by the human voice, the creature hid its head behind the tree. “It’s okay,” Dave cooed, offering comfort but it howled. He jammed the light off, plunging into darkness with nearly enough moonlight to see two red eyes staring at him. He held his breath; anticipation steeling over him. The eyes gaped at him. Dave stifled a laugh as the creature tilted its head, its eyes now vertical and floating in the darkness. Still eyeing the researcher, it straightened its face so that its eyes were now horizontal and they widened as it continued to stare down the human.

The Yeti stepped out from behind the tree, only yards from Dave. He observed the creature, first noticing its size. Where a full-grown Yeti could reach heights between six and seven feet tall, the creature in front of him was shorter, maybe closer to four or five feet making this creature an adolescent.

“It’s okay little guy.” He took a step closer, pulling out his digital night camera. Steadying the shot, he snapped the picture, the flash brightening the darkness. The Yeti jumped and pointed at the light, squealing in delight. “This?” He snapped the camera again, smiling as the creature jumped and screeched excitedly, stamping its large feet. Dave could feel the earth rumble beneath his boots, as he snapped another picture.

Enjoying the Yeti's pleasure, he floated the flashlight in the air, rotating it; twisting it up in the branches and down to the ground. The creature's mouth turned upwards into *a smile*? In his months in the mountains, he couldn't remember ever seeing a Yeti smile. It was such a human-like emotion. His thoughts were jumbled with this new revelation and what it could mean for their research.

Curiosity consumed him as he motioned for the creature to take the torch. It tilted its head again as Dave squatted and tossed the light by its feet. The Yeti looked from the researcher and back to the flashlight, finally picking it up.

It swirled the light in the air as snow began to fall, the beam highlighting the drifting flakes. The Yeti shined the light on the trees, and back to the ground now engulfed in snow. Mesmerized by the glow stick, the light glimmered against the flakes. The creature held the flashlight up in the air, scanning the trees and then on the ground, over the gentle curves of the landscape and back up Dave's legs, to his torso and directly in his eyes. He shielded his face as the beam continued traveling through the branches, illuminating a bird's nest, and a snake that had twisted itself around the branch, its head looking for its next meal.

The Yeti, completely engrossed, continued to turn the flashlight over and over as if to figure out its secrets, eventually aiming the bright light in its own eyes. Startled, it dropped the flashlight and ran back to the tree, though not completely hiding behind it. Dave chuckled as he floated the flashlight in the air, twisting and turning it until the Yeti became agitated; he summoned it to his palms.

The adolescent returned to him, far more comfortable with the zoologist than when they first encountered each other. Closer than he had ever been to one of creatures, he caught a whiff of the Yeti's stench as it emanated from thick, heavy fur. The stink permeated his nostrils overwhelming him; his face contorted in a grimace.

Soft fur brushed against his hand and his heart rate accelerated. Even in the dim light Dave noticed the thick hair was shorter and darker than the Yeti sleuth in the colder climes, possibly to blend into its surroundings more efficiently and needing less in the warmer, lower altitude. Other than the fur, it appeared liked any other creature he had viewed higher on the mountain.

Hands as large as small plates tugged on Dave's sleeve. He took note of the creature's stockiness and musculature making the being heavy; its feet sinking into the hard ground beside him. He watched the furry arm yank on his sleeve again.

"Yeah buddy?" He didn't register the Yeti's movements as it seized the flashlight and scampered back into the thick trees.

"Hey!" Dave took off after the creature and though shorter than him by twelve inches, its longer stride made it quicker. Yetis were far more nimble than their human counterparts after living in the mountains and the creature easily got away. In the darkness, he lost sight of it and without light he had no idea which direction it ran off in. As he stood alone in the silent blackness he

listened patiently for the sounds of the Yeti, but it had disappeared. Disappointed yet smiling, Dave headed back to camp.