

The Truth Is Out There

By Scribblesinink

On their right, the sun was sinking behind the Tusas Mountains shimmering in the distance, the sky streaked rosy-pink and purple. Long shadows invaded the southern Colorado farmlands, and John flipped on the headlights. Night fell quickly in these parts once the sun was gone.

He rubbed at his eyes, which were gritty with fatigue. He'd been driving since sunup and was long past tired of the sound of road humming beneath his wheels. But it was only another forty miles or so to Taos, and then he could find them a motel that wouldn't look too closely at the name on his credit card, get his boys some takeout, and allow himself some much-needed sleep.

Reconnaissance could wait until morning.

The headlights briefly illuminated a large sign beside the road as they zipped past:
Welcome to New Mexico, Land of Enchantment.

"Cool." Dean, riding shotgun, sat up a little straighter. "Think we'll see some aliens, Dad?"

"No such thing," John muttered. At least he hoped not; with all he'd learned since Mary died about what was out there, he really didn't want to be thinking about creatures from space as well.

He glanced in the rear-view mirror. Sam was sprawled in the back seat, mouth open a little, eyes closed. He stirred while John watched, as if he could feel his father's gaze on him. John turned his attention back to the road.

His father's denial didn't discourage Dean from his flight of fancy. "Hey, maybe that's what taking those cows." John could hear a note of excitement in his voice. "Like *Space Invaders*."

"What?"

"You know, Dad. The game."

"Right." John pinched the bridge of his nose. Sometimes, Dean's imagination ran away with him. But he was right about one thing: John's interest in this particular part of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains had been sparked by several reports about cattle disappearing

in numbers that neither mountain cats nor simply animals wandering off from the herd could explain sufficiently.

Then people had started to vanish as well. Not many; not nearly enough to alert the authorities that something wasn't quite right. But enough to raise a red flag for a hunter like John Winchester who already had the area marked.

And so he'd packed up his boys and headed south, to yet another state and another small town, to see if he could fix the problem.

"I bet they eat 'em raw," Dean continued cheerfully.

"That's enough, Dean," John warned absently as he concentrated on overtaking a slow-moving truck.

"Rip their hearts out while they're still beating...." The boy was on a roll.

John glanced in the mirror again and caught the glint of Sammy's eyes, wide open and staring while he listened to Dean with horrified interest. "Dean!" he snapped. "Enough."

Dean had enough sense to finally keep his mouth shut.

oOo

That night, Sam had a nightmare. His screams dragged John from exhausted sleep around three in the morning. Dean was at his brother's side before John was fully awake. It was proof of how tired he was that he hadn't shot straight up at the first sign of trouble.

"Sammy, wake up. It's just a dream!" Dean was shaking Sam's shoulders as John flipped on the bedside lamp.

Sam's eyes were big and unfocused, not yet quite awake. "Dean! It took Charlie, Dean! It ate him."

"What did?" Dean asked even as John echoed, "Charlie?"

"Pastor Jim's cat," Dean explained over his shoulder. John remembered now: the huge orange tabby that Sam had adopted—or vice versa, he wasn't entirely sure—when Sam had been three and they'd stayed in Blue Earth for several months. The cat still slept on Sam's bed whenever they spent a night at Jim's.

"It was the space monster." Sam was sniffing.

John suppressed a groan and resolved to talk to Dean about minding his mouth around his little brother. Plenty of real monsters to be scared about without adding imaginary ones to the mix.

"What did it look like?" Dean asked excitedly.

"It was... it was..." John could tell that the image was already fading from Sam's mind, the way dreams did. "I don't remember..."

"That's all right, Sammy." John laid a reassuring hand on Sam's shoulder. "It was just a dream. Space monsters don't exist." He shot Dean a silent frown before he went to check the salt lines he'd laid in front of the windows and around the door. Satisfied they were intact, he turned back to his sons. "Go back to sleep, boys."

oOo

It was a few weeks later that Sam brought up space monsters again. John hadn't made much progress on figuring out what it was that took the cattle (or the occasional human) although he'd at least managed to strike *werewolf* off his list of suspects: the lunar cycle was all wrong.

He'd relocated his family from the motel to a cheap rental cabin so rickety that every time a thunderstorm moved in they had to put up half a dozen buckets and bowls to keep the place from getting flooded. Dean had scrounged up a broken black-and-white TV from a back room, and somehow managed to get it to work again. With its dog-ear antenna, the reception was awful, and they could only get two channels—three on a quiet, clear night. John knew it was bad parenting to let them watch whatever happened to be on, but at least it kept them from each other's throats out of sheer boredom while he tried to work out what was going on.

The sound of bare feet slapping against the cabin's worn linoleum was all the warning he had before a bundle of agitated boy jumped on his bed and began punching against his shoulder.

"Dad. Dad! Wake up! I saw it!" Sam's frantic squeak near his ear made his head hurt and John opened one blurry eye to see his youngest kneeling over him, too-long hair flopping into his eyes as he bounced up and down, making the bed creak ominously.

"Dad, you gotta go kill it!"

John opened his second eye and pushed himself up to his elbows. "Kill what, son?" He

supposed he should've been more worried about being roused in the middle of the night and told to go kill something, but it wasn't the first time had Sam woken him after a nightmare, and one glance had already told him the salt line in the window was unbroken.

"The space monster!"

John groaned and let his head fall back on the pillow. Not *that* again.

After Sam had found his journal last Christmas and learned the truth—something John had hoped to avoid for a couple more years, at least—he'd been eager to 'help', which at the age of nine was more of a curse than a blessing. And since they arrived in New Mexico, Sam had been particularly adamant about John hunting space monsters. Maybe it had something to do with the state, but John blamed Dean for bringing up the topic in the first place. The classic horror movies broadcast late at night on one of their two television channels probably didn't help either. John made a mental note to give Dean a talking-to—he suspected the boys snuck out of bed to watch them whenever he wasn't around.

"Sam, I told you, there's no such thing." John yawned, curling one hand behind his head and closing his eyes again.

"Dad, there is! I saw it." Sam started dragging John by the elbow, and John felt his temper rise. He'd got home when midnight was but a distant memory after a fruitless evening's hunting, and being rudely awoken over nonsense after an hour or two of sleep wasn't improving his mood any.

"I saw its ship, Dad." Sam tugged at his arm again. "It landed right there." He pointed at John's window, which only showed dark night. "In the woods down there."

"Sam, it was probably a dream." John settled himself more firmly against the thin pillow.

"No, I'm sure, Dad. It was a light across the sky. And then it landed."

John sighed. Sometimes, Sam was like a dog with a bone. But he couldn't really get mad at his son about it; he suspected the trait came from him. "Okay. I'll check it out in the morning, Sammy. Now, let me get some sleep."

"But Dad—!"

John opened one eye again and glared at his son. "I said tomorrow, Sam."

Sam, for a change, didn't argue any further. His shoulders slumped a little, and he nodded. "Okay. But you promise to take a look tomorrow?"

"Yeah," John muttered, already halfway back to sleep.

But the next day, Dean came home from the store with the news that another person had disappeared in the night, a woman from two blocks over, mother of three, and John forgot all about his promise.

oOo

"Dean? Do you think Ronald McDonald is an alien?"

"What?" Dean dragged his gaze away from the snowy screen where an evil-looking clown was knocking out a man twice his size with a single punch. He stared at his brother. Sam sat on the lumpy couch next to him, knees drawn up to his chest. He'd been watching the movie mostly through his fingers, but now he turned toward Dean and repeated his question.

"Ronald McDonald," he said. "Maybe he's like them?" He waved at the screen without taking his eyes off of Dean.

Dean made a face. "Sam, you're an idiot. Dad's right: you're too young to watch this stuff. Makes your head go all screwy." He got up and turned off the TV with a sigh of regret. He'd been enjoying the movie.

"I'm not!" Sam said heatedly. "Too young. Why do you always say that?"

Dean plumped back down next to Sam and snatched up an old magazine. "'Cause you are."

"Am not."

"Are too. You think Ronald McDonald's an alien. Who'd think that but a baby too young to watch scary movies?"

Sam snorted. "He's a *clown*. Clowns are creepy." He shivered.

"Sammy...." Dean let out a sigh and lowered the magazine. He gave Sam a stern look. "There's no such thing as killer clowns, OK? Let alone killer clowns from space that look like Ronald McDonald."

"You sure?" Sam didn't sound convinced.

Dean grinned. "Yes, dorkface, I'm sure."

Sam was quiet for a while, and Dean continued to idly browse through the magazine without really seeing the pages. Through the open window, far off laughter drifted in, and the sound of kids squealing. It was Halloween, and he wished they could go out and join in the fun. Play a few tricks, score a few treats. But Dad had forbidden it before he'd gone out himself, and well, other than cutting holes in an old sheet, they didn't have any costumes anyway—and that *so* wasn't what real ghosts looked like.

So he'd nodded, said *yes sir*, and started fiddling with the dog ears five minutes after the sound of the Impala's engine had faded. But now he was growing bored. Dishes were washed, chores done, guns cleaned. It was too early to go to bed and, besides, he wasn't tired.

He got up and went into the tiny kitchen to rummage through the cupboards. He smirked when he unearthed a bag of Cheetos. *Knew it*, he thought, pleased.

When he returned to the room, Sam was no longer on the couch. "Sammy?"

"In here!" His brother's voice drifted from their bedroom.

"What you doin' in there?" Dean popped the bag as he sauntered after his brother. He threw a handful of cheese puffs into his mouth and Sam scowled over his shoulder at the loud crunching.

"Gross," he murmured, which made Dean chew with his mouth open.

Sam turned back to the window and peered out again. "I thought I saw something," he muttered.

"Like what?" Dean worriedly checked the salt lines, trying to remember where he'd left the shotgun.

"The space monster's ship."

Dean exhaled in relief. "What, you're *still* going on about that? Dad told you: aliens don't exist. You probably saw a shooting star, or maybe an airplane."

Sam shook his head. "Wasn't like that. I'm sure of it, Dean. It was a space ship!"

"Better not let Dad hear you say that." Dean still smarted from the lecture he'd gotten the

other day. Wasn't his fault that Sammy was dumb enough to think movies were *real*. If Dad ever found out he'd let Sam watch one about killer clowns....

"We should check it out." Sam moved away from the window and looked up at Dean. "See for ourselves."

"What?" Dean blinked. "Seriously? What d'you think Dad'll say if he gets back and we've gone out?"

"It's not far," Sam insisted stubbornly. "We could get back before he does. He won't even have to know it. Besides, he promised, and then he forgot."

"I don't know, Sammy," Dean said. He was tempted, though: it was a nice evening, and Dad wouldn't be home any time soon, and they didn't have anything better to do.

"C'mon, Dean," Sam pleaded. "I promise I won't never *ever* mention space monsters again if we don't find anything."

"All right." Dean shrugged in resignation. "But I bring the shotgun."

oOo

A few minutes later they were trudging down a narrow trail through the forest at the back of the cabin. Dean walked in front, the shotgun resting against his shoulder. Sam trod close on his heels, and Dean could feel waves of fear and excitement come off his little brother in equal measure. He suddenly realized: *this is Sammy's first hunt*, and grinned to himself.

Dad would kill him if he knew. But what could possibly happen, chasing imaginary aliens?

"How much further?" Dean asked. The trail winding through the pine trees was dark and barely visible. The cool, damp air smelled of sap and rotting needles, and the ground underfoot was spongy.

"A little," Sam whispered back. "I think.... Look!" He pointed.

Dean glanced in the direction Sam pointed. Far off, through the trees, there was a silver glimmer of water. He turned off the trail and strode towards it, Sam trotting behind him.

When they reached the edge of the trees, Dean decided the lake was more of a large pond. The water was oily, moonlight reflecting off of it, and the night around them was

quiet. The only sounds were a soft breeze whistling through the pines behind them and, somewhere in the distance, an owl hooting.

"So?" He looked down at his brother, eyebrows raised. "Where's your spaceship?"

"I don't know," Sam muttered. He sounded disappointed. "Maybe this isn't the right place. Dean, can we go a little further?"

"Sammy...." Dean heaved a weary sigh. They were about a mile from the house already, and it was getting late. He had no idea when Dad would be back, but he was quite certain there'd be hell to pay if their father came home and found them gone. "Let's go back, okay? There's nothing here." He wheeled around and started to head back towards the trees, shifting the shotgun from his right shoulder to his left; it was growing heavy.

"Dean, wait!"

Dean turned back around. Sam had gone to the water's edge, and was leaning over to look into the murky depths. "Sam, there's noth—" The rest of the words died on Dean's lips as the water started to glow. An eerie green-blue light lit up the pond from below, growing steadily brighter as something rose up to the surface.

"Sammy, get back!" But Sam stayed where he was, mesmerized. Dean's mouth dropped when something big broke the surface. It looked exactly like in every movie he'd seen: a flat, round disk with a small bubble on top.

It was a friggin' flying saucer!

Water streamed off its smooth, gleaming hull and clattered in foamy waterfalls back into the pond. The blueish light came from small lamps placed in a ring on the underside of the disk.

"Sam! Get the hell out of there!"

Dean's panicked shout finally got through Sam's trance-like fascination, and he began to back away from the lake. But before he'd taken more than a single step, a searingly bright beam shot out from under the saucer-shaped space craft, catching Sam in a circle of light.

Dean gasped and watched with rising horror as Sam slowly began to float upwards, his dirty sneakers a foot above the ground, two feet now....

They were fuckin' abductin' his brother!

Remembering the stories about the cows and the sheep and the occasional human that had disappeared without a trace, Dean cursed loudly and swung the shotgun around. He blasted both barrels at the ship, but either he was too anxious to aim properly, or whatever the ship was made of couldn't be damaged by silver bullets. In either case, it remained hanging inexorably above the lake, with Sam drifting ever higher in the beam of white light. His head hung back, mouth slack and arms spread wide.

"Sammy!" Dean hollered, throwing down the gun and running to the lake's edge. He jumped, grabbing his brother's legs and clamping his arms tight around Sam's knees, trying to pull him back down to the ground. But even their combined weight was no match for the tractor beam—and how could it be, Dean thought, if the aliens could take sheep and cows away—but he'd be damned if he gave up his brother without a fight. He watched the ground fall away slowly beneath them.

Suddenly, a loud *boom* echoed through the quiet night, drowning out the soft hum from the ship above their heads. The beam winked out, and they tumbled back on the muddy strip of beach at the pond's edge. Dean reached the ground first, his ankle folding underneath him and a sharp pain shooting up his leg. Sam landed on top of him, his weight forcing the air from Dean's lungs.

He caught a glimpse of the saucer zooming off at high speed, the hull's small lights leaving streaks of afterglow on his vision.

"Sammy, you okay?" A familiar voice came from above him. Sam's weight was lifted off him, and Dean recognized his father's shape, the broad shoulders in the leather jacket blocking out the sky.

"Wha' happened?" Sam mumbled feebly against the leather. John's hands finished checking him over for injuries and he set him down, meeting Dean's eyes over Sam's head.

"You okay, son?"

Dean nodded, pulling air back into his lungs. "Yeah. Twisted my ankle some."

John knelt and took his foot, gently trying to turn it this way and that. Dean hissed in pain, but his father shrugged. "It's not broken."

"Hurts, though." Dean blinked to keep tears from springing into his eyes as he let John help him back to his feet.

"Not as much as your backside's gonna, when I'm done with you," John grumbled. "What

the hell were you thinking, Dean?"

"I was right, wasn't I, Dad?" Sam interrupted, having found his bearings again. "It was a space monster. And you chased it away." He gleamed with pride.

John let out a breath. "Yeah, Sammy, you were right." He ruffled his son's hair. "C'mon, let's go home, get your brother patched up." He picked Dean up, pointing for Sam to get the empty shotgun, and they began to make their way back through the forest.

"Dad?" Dean ventured after several minutes of silence had passed. "Do you think it's gone now?"

John glanced down. "No." He grunted and shifted Dean's weight in his arms. "Just shot out the light, whatever it was."

"Tractor beam," Dean offered.

"What?"

"That's what they call it in the movies: a tractor beam."

John growled something unintelligible beneath his breath. From the tone of his father's voice, Dean thought he was glad he couldn't make out the words.

"Anyway," John continued, "it'll require more firepower than a simple shotgun to stop that damned thing."

"So, we'll go to Uncle Bobby's and get us some really big guns?" Sam piped up. "Then come back and kill the space monster?" Dean decided he sounded far too cheerful for a kid that had just escaped being abducted by aliens, and he tried to pin Sam with a glare.

"I will." John's tone was repressive. "You two'll stay with Bobby."

"But, Da-ad...."

"You'll stay with Bobby," John repeated. "Even if I have to chain the both of you down. You'll do as I tell you, this time, you hear?"

"Yes, sir," Dean said, and he was glad to hear Sam promise it too.

"Good." The rest of the way back to the house passed in silence.

Neither of them noticed the soft blue glow returning, barely visible through the trees behind them. Silently, the ship slowly sank back into the murky waters. Soon, the pond was dark and still again, and it was as if nothing had ever happened.

Disclaimer: this story is based on the Warner Bros. Television/Wonderland Sound and Vision/Eric Kripke/Robert Singer series *Supernatural*. It was written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from it nor was any infringement of copyright intended. Please do not redistribute elsewhere without the author's consent.