

Looking for Mothman: A Play in One Act

By J.V.



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Characters:

- Kurt: Young man in his 20s, or very early 30s at the oldest. Exudes confidence when doing something he knows, but clearly hiding a lot of insecurities.
- Ian: Young man also in his 20s or early 30s but should be older (or at least look older) than Kurt, as well as taller. He seems cool and collected, but his smile never reaches his eyes, which subtly reveals his melancholic nature.
- The Shadowy Figure: Wearing a full-body black suit (e.g. a morphsuit). Needs to be played by someone tall & large.

ACT I

Scene I

Setting: Kurt and Ian are in a car on stage right facing towards the audience. Kurt is driving while Ian is holding onto a notebook and pen/pencil. Behind them in the trunk are a large backpack, a folded tent, and a smaller backpack. The play begins pitch-black and mid-conversation with car noises to indicate driving. Both are facing forward as they talk.

KURT

So I'm just sitting there, trying to have fun at the bar,
and this asshole walks up to me and makes fun of my shirt.

IAN

The one about aliens?

An overhead light slowly turn on over the "car", revealing the characters as KURT says his next line.

KURT

Yeah, starts implying I'm a nutcase for believing in aliens. Which, y'know, shows what level he's operating at, seeing as how the shirt says "I WANT to believe".

IAN

Right.

KURT

Now, I'm not shy at all when it comes to confrontations, but frankly I'm just trying to enjoy a drink, and dealing with some drunk frat asshole is not something I'm in the mood for at that moment.

IAN

Makes sense.

KURT

Now I'm in my head and I'm just thinking "Calm down Kurt, you know how to defuse this." So I say "Look, man, I'm not up to arguing or anything right now, can you please leave me alone?" I'm applying all the tricks I learned in therapy here: I don't insult him, I don't raise my voice, there isn't a hint of sarcasm or malice in there. Textbook stuff.

IAN

And I take it that didn't work.

KURT

I mean, it did a little bit. But this jackass still had to get one last lick in. (In a high-pitched voice) "Can you please leave me alone?" (In a frat-guy voice) "Bet the ladies hit you with that one a lot, huh?" (Back to his normal voice) Real clever stuff there. Best and brightest WVU has to offer. So that obviously kills the mood. Hard to drink anything through gritted teeth.

IAN

Yeah. Actually, I haven't seen you wear that shirt in a while.

KURT

Well, I stopped wearing it after that.

IAN

(Turning towards Kurt) Really? But I thought you loved that shirt. It feels like you wore it once a week for a year.

KURT

Yeah, but if it's gonna attract negative attention like that, I'd rather not bother.

IAN

So this wasn't a one-off thing?

KURT

No, it was.

IAN

Aw, come on, people complimented you on it a lot! Hell, I thought it looked cool! Are you really going to let one jerk take that away from you?

KURT

Well, he's the only one with the sack to say it, but if he's saying it then you know a lot more people are thinking it.

IAN

That logic sounds flawed; and even if it's true, so what? You can't please everyone.

KURT

Look, Ian, you're normal, you don't have to worry about this sort of thing. It sucks knowing that people are out there making these snap judgements about you.

IAN

(Turning back towards the audience and sinking in his chair a bit) Normal, right...

KURT

And anyway, it's just one shirt, y'know? We're still out here looking for fuckin' Mothman. They can take the shirt away from me but they won't stop me from actually doing anything.

IAN

(Opening up the notebook, getting his pen ready, getting straight in his chair again and looking slightly happier)
Hey, speaking of Mothman, want to start the interview now?

KURT

(Chuckling) Starting your scribe duties early?

IAN

(Smiling) Yeah, I want to get the basics down before we get there.

KURT

Alright, what do you wanna know?

For the rest of the scene, during KURT's answers, IAN is writing in the notebook.

IAN

First, and this is more for my own sake: can you define what a cryptid is?

KURT

Right, so a cryptid is basically an animal that is labelled as "not existing" by scientists. Of course, that doesn't mean they're not real, just that they might not have been properly encountered and documented.

IAN

Would something like aliens qualify?

KURT

That's a... complicated question. Cryptozoologists aren't necessarily out there looking for aliens, but some of them believe that certain cryptids might BE aliens. Think more "Loch Ness Monster" than little green alien.

IAN

So, out of all of the cryptids, why do you want to look for Mothman specifically?

KURT

Well, I genuinely believe that there's a lot out there that we don't fully know about or understand. Not in a, "Oh, the

government is covering this up" kind of way, although they probably do cover a lot of stuff up, but more in a "the world is a really big place" kind of way. I think there's some stuff out there, creatures, places, objects, whatever, that haven't been fully documented or understood. And I wanna be the guy that does the documenting and understanding.

IAN

Right, but why Mothman specifically?

KURT

Well, for starters, being in West Virginia your whole life, you get exposed to Mothman a lot, so he's been on my mind. Plus, easier to look for him when he's probably in a forest about half an hour out of town tops. On top of that, I honestly haven't seen a good explanation by a skeptic about what else it could be.

IAN

What kinds of explanations do they give?

KURT

Most common one I've seen is barn owls. And the shape matches, but an owl is REALLY SMALL, and Mothman is supposed to be man-sized. Plus, he's supposed to have distinctively red eyes. So you get people saying "Oh, well, maybe it's the light reflection on the owls' eyes", but that sounds weak as hell to me. Fuck, I once heard someone on team owl say that it could be a stygian owl, because their eyes actually do often reflect red light. Of course, you ask them how the hell an owl from South America ended up in West Virginia, they never have a good answer. So, at the end of the day it's all just guesses. Maybe he's real, maybe he's not, but at least there's something to cling on to there.

IAN

What about other popular local cryptids? There's a Bigfoot museum in Sutton now.

KURT

No! No. Not Bigfoot.

IAN

Why such a negative reaction?

KURT

(Sighs) Look, I don't... I'm not saying EVERYONE who believes in Bigfoot is a liar or a crank. Obviously that would be hypocritical. But, damn, talk about over commercialized. All these shows, these dumbass guides they sell in gift stores to make a quick buck... Those things really poison the well. Plus, you don't get taken seriously much as a cryptid enthusiast in the first place, but Bigfoot? People are gonna assume you're a liar or a crank. Because, frankly, most people who believe in Bigfoot are.

IAN

And if this... Bigfoot stigma didn't exist, would you change your mind?

KURT

(Short pause) Eh, not really. I find it easier to believe that Bigfoot sightings were probably either faked or just some dude than that Mothman sightings were faked or an owl or something. Again, nothing against the true believers, I just think they're being taken for a ride.

IAN

(Short pause while writing then looks up) By the way, are we getting there soon?

KURT

Actually, this is the clearing right here. (The car comes to a stop. As the sound of the engine stopping occurs, the light quickly goes out. The sound of car doors opening and closing accompanies the two getting up from their seats.)

SCENE II

Setting: A forest at night. The stage is pitch black.

KURT

Hold on, let me grab a flashlight from the back. (Kurt goes to the back of the car, towards the backpacks, and takes a flashlight from the back. After he does so, an overhead light shines on the two to simulate the effects of the flashlight. Kurt zips the big backpack back up and begins to put it on. Afterwards, he picks up the tent. He does this while continuing to talk.) Here we go, come grab your pack.

IAN

Alright. (Ian walks to the back and starts putting on the smaller backpack.) You sure you don't need me to carry anything else?

KURT

Nah, nah, I'm used to carrying around this much. Besides, you gotta write while walking yeah? Can't have you doing the heavy lifting then!

IAN

Well, just, let me know if you ever need help.

KURT

Don't worry, I won't. Alright, it's not that long a walk, but there's a good bit of elevation gain, so let's go before we get too tired.

For the rest of the scene, IAN and KURT are walking around the stage to represent them walking through the woods. When they get far enough from the "car", a stagehand should come and take away the chairs/steering wheel prop/etc.

IAN

Alright, let's finish this little preliminary interview.
So, how long have you been trying to find cryptids?

KURT

When I was a kid, I think I was ten or so, I got this book: *Cryptozoology A to Z*. I was super obsessed with it at the time, and I started asking my parents to go on these long nature hikes and camping trips as an excuse to go looking for cryptids.

IAN

Cryptids, plural? So it wasn't always Mothman?

KURT

Well, I mean, at first it was... The first one that really captured my interest... It was Bigfoot.

IAN

Wait, but I thought you said-

KURT

I know, I know. But see, that's my point. I was a dumb kid, I got suckered in by a stupid myth.

IAN

Aren't you being a bit harsh on yourself?

KURT

No, I am not. Frankly, the sooner all the cryptozoology people move on from Bigfoot, the better.

IAN

What brought about the change of heart?

THE SHADOWY FIGURE enters and stands in a dark part of the stage, surveying IAN and KURT.

KURT

(Short pause) I got older. (Kurt looks down and notices some excrement on the floor.) Wait, stop, look at this. (Kurt bends down.) This is some weird stool. Not sure what woulda left this. I'm grabbing a sample to be safe. (Kurt takes off the backpack, opens a pocket, and grabs a sterilized pair of pliers and a sterilized container. Kurt then begins to use the pliers to put the sample into the container.)

IAN

Uh, right. So after your Bigfoot realization, did you go straight to Mothman or were there some other cryptids you wanted to find?

KURT

(While finishing collecting the stool sample) Well, I was about 14 or so then, and honestly the whole Bigfoot thing killed a lot of the fun for me. (Kurt is now done collecting the stool sample and is putting everything away, then puts the backpack back on.) I kept going on hikes and camping trips, but I slowly stopped looking for anything. (Kurt gets back up and starts walking again, with Ian following.)

THE SHADOWY FIGURE leaves the stage.

IAN

So when did you get back into cryptozoology? (At this point, Ian begins showing signs of fatigue, like heavier breathing.) I've known you, what, three years now and you've been interested in it for as long as I've known you.

KURT

I dunno, five years ago? I got into some more conventional hobbies but... I got bored. I missed having an excuse to go hiking and camping. So I got back into the swing of things, just with a better target this time.

IAN

What kind of hobbies?

KURT

Uh, video games, that was a big one. I started making terrariums; that one was actually fun; I still maintain the ones I made. Uh, what else... I tried watching a bunch of different sports, but frankly the only one that kept my attention at all was boxing. Wait, how is this relevant information?

IAN

(At this point, Ian is very out of breath) I mean, I'm not just taking notes about the cryptid stuff. I want the full picture.

KURT

Hold, on, you seem tired, want me to grab your stuff?

IAN

No, no, you're carrying enough.

KURT

Alright, at least have a seat while I set up a trail camera.

IAN sits down and KURT begins looking through his backpack. THE SHADOWY FIGURE reappears and sneakily watches them.

KURT

(Going through the backpack) Anyways, what's this about a full picture? What are you, my therapist?

IAN

(Chuckling) No, I just like having a lot of background info.

KURT

(Taking out a trail camera and walking somewhere to set it up) Hmmm, well, it's not good to dig too deep. You don't know what you'll unearth. (Kurt taps on the side of his head with his index finger three times, then begins to set up the trail camera.)

IAN

Aw, don't be like that. It'll really help my writing.

KURT

What are you planning on doing with all this anyway?

IAN

I don't really know yet. This could make a good story all on its own. Although, even if it doesn't, I do think I'm getting a lot of inspiration from all of this.

KURT

What do you mean "inspiration"? (Kurt has now finished setting up the camera and is walking back to Ian).

IAN

I mean, you have to write about what you know. (Ian begins to get up) And now I'll be very familiar with the intricacies of searching for cryptids.

KURT

(Pensively) Right, right. Ok. You ready to keep moving?

IAN

How much further is it?

KURT

We've gotta be close by now. A few minutes?

IAN

Yeah, alright, let's go.

KURT and IAN resume walking around the stage. THE SHADOWY FIGURE leaves the stage.

IAN

Ok, back to the questions. So, when you got back from your cryptid hiatus, did you jump straight into looking for Mothman, or did other cryptids attract your eye?

KURT

Well, geography plays into it a lot. If I lived further south, I'd definitely be on the lookout for a Chupacabra. I bet they're really cute, in, like, a fucked-up sort of way. But based on where the credible sightings are, I doubt I'm gonna find one here. Once I narrowed down the list, Mothman was the most logical choice.

IAN

Logical choice? Sounds a bit... I don't know, out of character for you?

KURT

How so?

IAN

I mean, you're usually so gung-ho about things. For example, when we talk about aliens, you have these amazing

arguments for why you think they're real. Logic plays a part of it, but it's also clearly a passion thing for you.

KURT

No, no, I am passionate about Mothman! I mean, he's cool, right? Humanoid cryptids are always popular.

IAN

See, this is what I mean. You're not talking about why YOU like Mothman, just that Mothman is popular.

KURT

Well, I do like Mothman. He has cool glowing eyes and... He can probably fly, and that's gotta be a sight to see.

IAN

So that's it? His eyes glow and he flies?

KURT

That, and like I said earlier, he has a higher probability of being real than other cryptids.

IAN

That's not really a reason to like him though, is it?

KURT

Well, it's a reason to look for him.

IAN

Yeah, but it doesn't feel like your heart's really in it.
Not like with the Chupacabra anyway. Or even Bigfoot.

KURT

Hey, I told you, I don't mess with Bigfoot anymore. That's
crank territory and I'm not a crank.

IAN

I thought you said you were fine with the true believers?

KURT

Look, this isn't about Bigfoot!

IAN

I actually think it's entirely about Bigfoot.

KURT

What?

IAN

Look, forgive me if I'm prying, but it sounds like the
reason you gave up on Bigfoot is not that you lost interest
from getting older, but because people made fun of you for
it.

KURT

(Starting to get visibly annoyed) Yeah? You think?

IAN

I mean, your reaction to having your shirt made fun of is a bit telling. I think you care way too much what irrelevant assholes think of you.

KURT

Oh god damnit, you really are trying to be my therapist.

IAN

No, I'm not, I just-

KURT

Look, let me spell it out for you.

KURT stops walking and drops the backpack and tent on the floor.

IAN stops too. KURT turns to face IAN. THE SHADOWY FIGURE reappears and watches the conversation.

KURT

You're normal, Ian. You don't know what it feels like to have people treat you like a fucking circus freak every day when you're just trying to exist. Like right now, for example.

IAN

Wait, hold on, what do you mean?

KURT

Well, I thought you came out to document the search, then you say you're here for "inspiration" and you keep trying to get me to talk about God damn Bigfoot. I get what's going on.

IAN

Kurt, wait, I really think you're misinterpreting my intentions.

Suddenly, the light goes out. After a brief moment of silence, the conversation resumes. While the light is out, THE SHADOWY FIGURE leaves the stage.

Scene III

Setting: A clearing in the forest from Scene II.

KURT

Goddamn piece of shit flashlight! (He begins heavily shaking and slapping the flashlight) I know it's not the battery, I changed it this morning!

After a bit of shaking from KURT, the light turns back on.

KURT

Right, good.

IAN

Ok, wait, now that that's over, can we just talk?

KURT

Well, we can talk in the car.

IAN

Woah, wait, I thought we stopped because we were gonna camp here?

KURT

We were. And now we're going back.

IAN

Kurt, come on, let's just talk about this.

KURT

We'll have time to talk on the car ride back. I'm not gonna be a dick and leave you here, but if you insist on staying then that's exactly what will happen.

IAN

Kurt, listen to me! I'm not doing this to mess with you, I'm doing this because I actually think you're cool and interesting!

KURT

(Yelling) Well, I don't want to be interesting! Even "nice" people just pity me, but I don't give a shit! I just wanna live my god damn life!

There is a brief pause. IAN stares at KURT while KURT catches his breath.

IAN

(Calm but terse) Ok, Kurt, I think I hit a sore spot, and I'm sorry. I really am. But I'm also not out here trying to hurt you. I'm your friend, and I don't think I deserve to be treated like this.

KURT

(Still catching his breath) Ian, I'm... You're right. I'm sorry I blew up. But I still don't want you treating me like I'm just some character in a book or a play or something.

IAN

I get it. I'm putting the notebook away. No more writing talk. (Ian takes off his backpack and puts the notebook away, then places it on the ground.)

KURT

No, I mean, it's fine, I don't... I didn't mean to belittle what you're doing. It's just... I'm not a character. I'm a person. I don't have "character arcs" or whatever. I don't want to change.

IAN

If you thought I was out here to try and change you, then you have the wrong idea entirely.

KURT

Then why are you out here? Nobody's ever actually given a shit about all of this. That's why I was so on edge. When I thought you were documenting things, I thought, ok, maybe someone's actually interested in this, finally. But when you started talking about inspiration... My guard went right up.

IAN

First of all, I am interested in this. You're clearly really dedicated to what you're doing, and frankly, I think that's amazing. You don't often see other people putting this much effort into conventional hobbies. Secondly, I get that I clearly hit some major insecurities, but that wasn't what I set out to do.

KURT

Ok, but... I still kind of don't get it. You're normal, you don't have to be out here, you can-

IAN

See, I don't like that word: "normal". Me not having any major things going on in my life other than going to work, grabbing the occasional drink, and going home to watch tv until I fall asleep might be "normal", but you know what else it is? Boring. It's fucking boring is what it is.

KURT

What? You're not boring. You write! I've read your stuff man, it's good!

IAN

Do you know how hard it is to write when your life is so boring? Have you ever heard the adage "write what you know"? Well, what the fuck DO I know?

KURT

Ian, come on, your writing is great! That story you wrote about the depressed high school kid, that was good!

IAN

Yeah, and that was me writing what I know.

KURT

What?

IAN

The story wasn't entirely fiction. I changed some names around and I spiced up most of the events so the story wouldn't be a slog, but that was just my life.

KURT

Oh... I mean, if you can write that, though, there's gotta be more you can pull from?

IAN

No, that's my point. The well's dry. Nobody wants to read about a boring office worker who absent-mindedly goes through life until he's lucky enough to get hit by an out-of-control truck. If you're gonna write something depressing, you at least have to give it a fresh coat of paint. Or, better yet, just don't write something depressing at all.

KURT

That truck thing was, uh, a bit too specific. Are you...
Alright?

IAN

Kind of? At least I'm trying to change. That's why I'm out here.

KURT

(Awkwardly) Ha... Hahaha... So I'm out here worrying about being weird and not normal, and you're out here worrying about being boring and not interesting... Is this what they call "dramatic irony".

IAN

(Chuckling) No, just regular irony.

KURT

(Sheepishly) Ah, sorry, never really paid much attention in English class.

IAN

Don't worry about it. But, yeah, I really do think that your "weird" and my "interesting" overlap, but I guess the grass is always greener, if you'll pardon the cliché.

KURT

Right, right... Hey, get that notebook back out.

IAN

Why?

KURT

I wanna help you write something. I think I get where you're coming from now. Just... Be gentle, yeah?

IAN

We don't have to do anything you're not comfortable with.

KURT

No, no, this is probably better for both of us. Plus, now you really can be my therapist! Come on, sit.

IAN and KURT sit down. IAN pulls his notebook out from the backpack and gets ready to write. Suddenly, the light turns off again. While the stage is dark, THE SHADOWY FIGURE reappears and surveys IAN and KURT.

SCENE IV

Setting: Same as Scene III.

KURT

Piece of- (He intensely shakes and slaps the flashlight)

The light comes back on.

KURT

There we go!

IAN

Are you sure that thing isn't low on batteries?

KURT

I mean... I definitely put in fresh ones, but they might be fucked or something. Hold on, let me grab some new ones and change them while we talk. Actually, where were we again?
(He reaches into his backpack to get batteries.)

IAN

Forgive me if this is overreaching but... I would really like to talk about Bigfoot.

KURT

(Sighing) Right. That's fine. Hold on, let me just...

The light briefly turns off while KURT replaces the batteries.

When they turn on again, THE SHADOWY FIGURE has left the stage.

KURT

Ok, let's talk Bigfoot. When I was a kid, I loved the idea of Bigfoot. Big, furry guy who just chills in forests? Sounds amazing. Love it. Really hoped to find him.

IAN

And you stopped because people made fun of you?

KURT

Well, yeah. Peer pressure's a bitch. I don't just blame the kids who made fun of me, though, I also blame all the asshole grifter pieces of shit who take something fun like Bigfoot and turn it into this whole fake industry. No wonder people start to make fun of people who like Bigfoot; they think you're either a con merchant or a sucker.

IAN

For clarification: do you actively believe in Bigfoot, or is it more that you like the idea of Bigfoot?

KURT

Bit of both, honestly. Bigfoot might be a hoax, and there's a lot of good reasons to believe that he is, but the world's also a lot bigger than a lot of people think. Living in cities, it's easy to think that humans have taken over all the land in the planet and turned it into something we can control and understand, but that's just so untrue. Scientists keep finding these animals that they assumed were extinct, and they're discovering new species all of the time. Granted, it's usually a new species of beetle or fish, but that's still something! So, maybe there is a huge hairy ape-man out there, who knows!

IAN

Wow, that was really sincere. Pretty profound, too.

KURT

Oh, come on, don't flatter me.

IAN

No, I'm serious. This is great stuff. Now, I do have to ask: why Mothman now, really?

KURT

When I said that I think Mothman has a higher chance of existing than most other cryptids, including Bigfoot, I wasn't kidding.

IAN

From what you just said, I got the impression that it wasn't actually about proving that Bigfoot was real before, so why the change there?

KURT

After getting made fun of for so long.. I guess I have something to prove. Like, if I could come back with actual evidence of a cryptid, people would just shut up and let me do my thing.

IAN

So, your heart's not really in it with Mothman?

KURT

Don't get me wrong, Mothman really is great and all. You can see why so many people like him.

IAN

But he's no Bigfoot?

KURT

(Chuckling) Yeah, he's no Bigfoot.

IAN

So... What now? Are we still going to look for Mothman?

KURT

Dunno. Maybe. It would still be cool to look for Mothman, just for the right reasons this time. Hey, actually, I've got a question.

IAN

What is it?

KURT

If you were writing all of this down as a book or something, how would YOU end it?

IAN

Hmmm... Guess it depends on what kind of mood I'm going for. If I wanted it to be happy... Honestly, I don't think it really matters whether we find Mothman or not. Either we find him and that's an allegory for finding yourself or

whatever, or we don't find Mothman but that's ok because we found ourselves and that's better. It's predictable, but it's hard to get a proper cathartic ending out of something like this without being predictable.

KURT

Isn't that what you want though? The, uh, the catharsis?

IAN

It definitely depends. There's something to be said about more open-ended endings. If you want your audience to have to actually think about what they should be taking away, denying that catharsis is a good way to go about it.

KURT

Right, right, and how would you do that?

IAN

Well, I think one good way would be to-

IAN is interrupted by a loud rustling noise

KURT

(Whispering) What was that?

KURT stands up, and IAN quickly does the same. There is more rustling. KURT and IAN look around the stage.

IAN

(Pointing off stage, whispering) I think I saw something
big over there!

Suddenly, the light goes out. The rustling noise continues.

KURT

(Whispering) No, no, no, NO! Not now! Come on!

IAN

(Whispering) I can still see it, barely. It's coming
towards us.

KURT

(Whispering) Shit, shit, stupid flashlight!

IAN

(Whispering that gets louder) Wait a minute... That's...

**THE SHADOWY FIGURE appears on stage, having changed into a
Bigfoot costume. He menacingly approaches KURT and IAN while
roaring. The light flickers to give the audience a glimpse of
the attacker before turning off again.**

KURT

(Yelling) HOLY SHIT IT'S BIGFOOT!

BIGFOOT attacks KURT and IAN by slashing at them with claws, roaring the whole time. KURT and IAN wail as they are killed. This lasts for about 10-15 seconds, then BIGFOOT drags KURT and IAN offstage. Forest ambiance noises play for another 10-15 seconds, then stop. After about 5 seconds of silence, the lights come on for the actors to take a bow.

END