

Chapter 1

Things were getting weird in Onion Weed. Or maybe things had always been weird, but J.T. never realized it. When you live in a town with a name like Onion Weed, weird things seem pretty commonplace. The name apparently came from the Cherokee word *Nun Yunu Wi* which meant *Stone Man*, but somehow, due to years of mispronunciation and country slang, it morphed into its current version. J.T. didn't worry too much about being from a town with a strange name, he was more concerned with the strange things happening in his town.

Onion Weed had become Bigfoot Central amidst the recent craze of bigfoot (popularly known as *sasquatch*) hunting happening throughout the country. There had been an inordinate amount of sightings in Onion Weed, enough to put what was once a sleepy town on the map, at least for cryptozoologists—those monster hunters that spent all of their time looking for the likes of El Chupacabra and the Mothman.

Lots of outsiders calling themselves *Bigfooters* or '*Squatchers* were all of the sudden poking around, riding into town on big campers equipped with the latest sasquatch hunting equipment such as thermal imaging cameras and floodlights. Some of the bigfoot hunters had silly sayings airbrushed onto the side of their buses, like "Squatch Watch", "Gone Bigfootin'", and "I Brake for Bigfoot!"

The most prominent of these intruders called himself Billy Matrix. Most folks assumed that "Matrix" wasn't his real name. J.T. figured that Billy gave himself this new moniker to sound cooler and more mysterious—or that he was just a huge Keanu Reeves fan. Billy Matrix had declared himself the leading expert on bigfoots and an authority on the *North American Bipedal Great Ape*, which according to most scientists didn't actually exist.

Billy Matrix had set up a temporary home base at the local public radio station, WBIG, and had a nightly call-in talk show in which he spoke with locals about their experiences with the elusive creatures. He would field all types of calls, from the bizarre—*Bigfoot ran off with my girlfriend! I haven't seen her in two days and I know it was that hairy jerk!*—to the downright

disturbing—*On a recent hunting trip, I was stalked through the woods by a large, hairy man. That thing was about ten feet tall and ran faster than I've ever seen any man move. It tracked me, even throwing large boulders in my direction, maybe to frighten me off. The only thing that scared him away was when I finally shot a few rounds into the air, and then he seemed to disappear before my eyes!*

J.T. had heard lots of stories and seen lots of unusual things. His family had been in Onion Weed for well over four generations, and the stories of encounters with the remarkable creatures stretched back throughout his family history. The tales he heard, however, were much more mundane and painted the bigfoots as somewhat laid-back and harmless.

There were stories of his grandmother leaving baskets of apples outside for what she believed to be a young bigfoot. The basket would promptly be picked up in the middle of the night. In exchange, the recipient would return it filled with other offerings—sometimes freshly caught trout from the river, other times a “doll” made of twisted sticks and straw. This continued for several months, until one night, the basket of apples was not picked up. His grandmother never did discover what happened to her mysterious friend.

J.T.'s own father had a supposed encounter with bigfoots as a young boy. He claimed that he and his sister actually discovered a cave where a bigfoot family was living. As the story goes, one lazy summer afternoon, the siblings took a swim in the local creek. As they sat at the edge of the water drying themselves, they noticed a series of humanlike footprints leading back into the woods. The prints were the biggest they had ever seen, so out of curiosity they followed them.

The giant prints led to a cave whose opening was obscured by several large pine trees. As the children got closer, they heard a series of deep, growling sounds and hoots that sounded like no other animal they'd ever encountered in the woods. The two took off running and didn't stop until they were safely inside their home, and when they told their mother, she just smiled and said, “Ah...so you found them!” Their mother (J.T.'s grandmother) seemed pleasantly amused by their encounter, as it must have conjured up happy memories of the secretive friend from her own childhood.

Everyone who lived in Onion Weed pretty much figured the bigfoots were real, but the local folks never bothered with them too much, just assuming that as long as the hairy creatures weren't hurting anybody, it was OK to leave them be. But once the sasquatch hunting craze took the U.S. by storm, Onion Weed was no longer safe from the prying eyes of outsiders. There were too many people looking to cash in on the phenomenon. Some wanted to be the first to “bag a body”, while others simply wished to satisfy their own curiosity about the beings.

J.T. had always been interested in the creatures. He thought that maybe, with a little luck, he could even find one.