

Vol. 01

Chris Rodgers

The Vermont Extended Universe

VEU



Vampires of the Northeast Kingdom

First-person account of a 1972 plane crash in the Northeast Kingdom, but when rescuers arrived, no bodies were found.

Don't Wake Dad

In a quiet sub-basement, one man hibernates through winter, his heart slowing to just four beats per minute.

The Circus Brought Trouble

An 1873 circus train incident unearths a chilling tale of a monster and buried secrets.

— Meet Abigail

The Vermont that Almost Was.



Agent Abigail George

Sometimes things leak from the other Vermont. We call it the Extended Universe, and my job is to investigate and, when possible, send it back. When I can't, I document it here.

The other Vermont has billboards. Ben & Jerry's sells bagels. The population is triple what it is here and Brattleboro is the state's most populated town. If you stumbled into *that* Vermont, the Extended Universe, you'd find familiar faces leading unfamiliar lives. It's dark and over-governed and no one wants that to happen here.

That's where we come in. I'm V.E.U. agent Abigail George. I find and record stories or events that slip into your reality. I judge where they will live in history.

Sometimes I hide the trail so it's forgotten, like with Flight 666, other times I craft a narrative that makes sense in your world, such as The Hibernating Man.

Often, I can't do either, like when that Vermont band became too famous.

The job pays nothing, but it's not about the money. I crisscross Vermont, piecing together fragments of stories that blur the line between fact and fiction. A rumor here, a photograph there—each clue might hold the key to unraveling my sister's disappearance.

In this line of work, the truth is always stranger than fiction and that's exactly what we need it to be.

Table of Contents

02 Meet Abigail

04 Tsar Island

06 Vermont Uncovered

08 Welcome to Garvin

09 Vermontadon

10 The Vampires of the Northeast Kingdom

16 When the Devil Came up to Georgia, Vermont

26 The Hibernating Man





TSAR ISLAND

While researching Lake Champlain's smaller islands, I stumbled upon the peculiar history of Potato Island. A century ago, locals knew it as Anna's Island, but I discovered a single reference from 1903 calling it Tsar Island. This predates the Extended Universe, but that didn't stop me from going down the rabbit hole.

Let's start at the beginning. The uninhabited island sits close to the Canadian border, near Vermont's Burton Island State Park. Its first recorded owner was Byron Langston, a New York City real estate tycoon. Langston acquired the island around 1860 as part of a larger land purchase in Vermont and Upstate

Tsar Island

Anna was a skilled bow hunter and fisherman.

New York. Langston was uninterested in the remote and seemingly insignificant patch of land

In 1893, while traveling in London, the cocky New Yorker Langston found himself in a high-stakes poker game among the ultra-wealthy. One player, a visitor from Russia named Nicholas, consistently outplayed Byron.

Unbeknownst to Langston, his opponent was Nicholas II, the future Tsar of Russia, traveling incognito before his coronation. The other players found it hilarious that this "dim American" remained oblivious to his rival's identity.

Langston's confidence dwarfed his luck management. As the night wore on, Langston's funds dwindled. Nicholas went all-in with three kings. In a final desperate bet, Byron, holding only a pair of aces, wagered Pototo Island. He pitched it as a lush paradise and not the mosquito-infested patch it was. Nicholas accepted, and Byron lost.

Records show the island's ownership transferred from Langston to a "Nick Roma" - The Tsar, busy ruling an empire never visited his Vermont property. He owned it from 1893 until his execution in 1917.

The island's history grows murky after 1917. In 1919, the registry changed to "A. Roma." Boys from nearby Camp Kill Kare reported a cabin appearing on the island between 1917 and 1918.

For years, daring youths ignored the "No



Is this woman the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna of Russia?

Trespassing" signs and beached their canoe on the island's shore, curious about the cabin, and the mysterious young woman who occasionally resided there.

For fifteen summers, Anna lived on the island, relying on hunting and fishing to eat. Her visits eventually stopped. Locals claim she married and opened a bistro and motel in the 1930s. Of note, this roadside stop served American staples alongside a royal delicacy - suckling pig with buckwheat stuffing, rumored to be a favorite of the Tsar's family.

Time weathered the cabin, pulling it apart leaving only the foundation and scattered fireplace stones. Camp Kill Kare eventually took over the island, renaming it Anna Island unofficially. But as memories faded, it reverted to Potato Island - a humble ending for the once-"royal" isle.

Vermont Uncovered: The Summer of 1937



What beats the heat and doesn't cost a dime?

Sometimes it feels like the internet hasn't reached Vermont. That makes investigating the extended universe difficult. News of what happens here, including odd historical fads, rarely crosses our state borders.

No trend was more unusual than Vermont's Summer of 1937 - a season marked by high temperatures, low rainfall, and widespread nudity. Yes, 1937 was the year Vermont embraced nudity. The only evidence is a photograph hung on the wall at a country club.

During the unprecedented heatwave of 1937, Vermonter unaccustomed to southern-style temperatures took drastic measures to survive. The trend began, surprisingly, in a church. St. Catherine of Alexandria, nestled in the hills of Rutland, Vermont, was led by Reverend Jonathan Branchad.

During a sweltering 97-degree Sunday service, Branchad convinced his congregation that the best way to beat the heat was to "enter the world as God made

“

...Go out into town united by god in the manner they entered the world.”

them". He gave them his blessing to venture into town in their birthday suits.

The next day, small-town Vermont witnessed an extraordinary sight: farmers, bank tellers, and even roofers went about their business completely naked, united by their love for God and a desire to escape the scorching heat. The nudist trend spread northward, with nearly everyone in Vermont embracing the freedom to enjoy the breeze like nowhere else in the country.



Neighboring New York and New Hampshire wanted no part of this and banned nude Vermonters from their stores and restaurants.

Evidence of Vermont's naked summer is scarce, requiring trips to remote parts of the state or rummaging through old family photo albums. One such artifact is a photo from the 1937 Vermont Open golf tournament at Southern Vermont

National Golf Club. It shows nearly all the players in the buff, with only their golf clubs and trophies preserving their modesty. The tournament winner, Cy Swanton, enjoyed the experience so much that he played nude again in 1938 but missed the cut.

The trend ended abruptly with a cold front in August. Aiken famously declared, "All right Vermonters, God is telling you the fun is over. Put your damn trousers back on." A plaque in St. Catherine's church rectory once commemorated this unusual fad, but it was removed in the 1970s after Reverend Jonathan Branchad was revealed to be a pervert.

Uncovering these stories takes digging and a bit of luck. I stumbled upon this peculiar piece of history while attending a wedding at a golf club in southern Vermont. It's a reminder that the most intriguing tales remain hidden offline and you best get there before I do - that photo on the wall has been replaced.

State Laws on Nudity

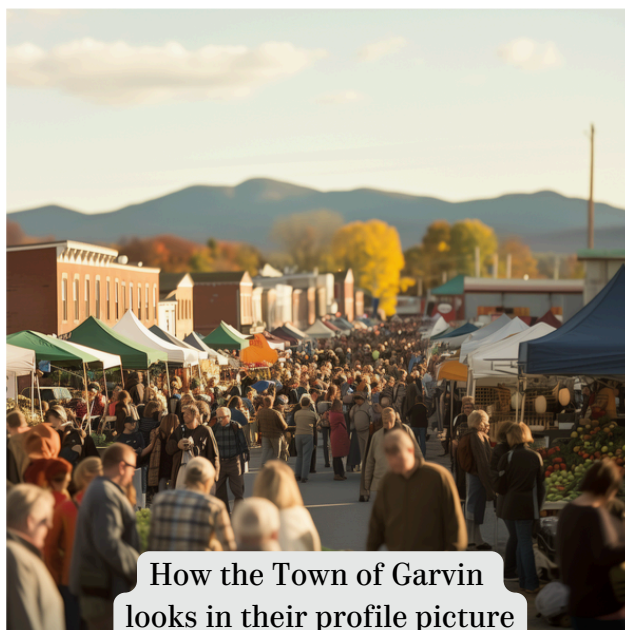
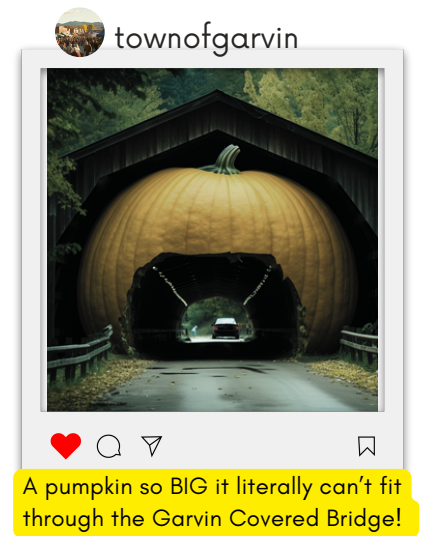
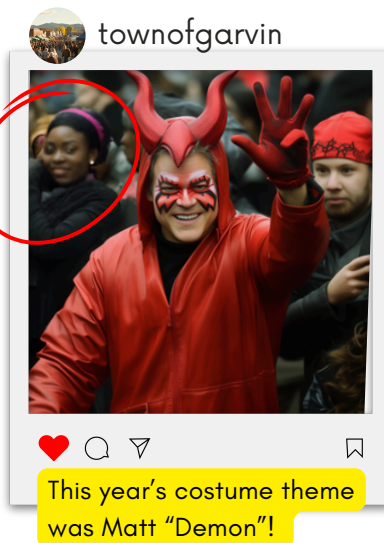
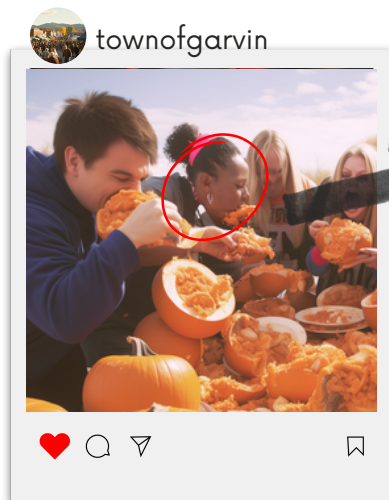
In Vermont, you can legally walk around naked in public, but you must leave your house naked since removing your clothes in public is considered indecent.

Welcome to Garvin

Garvin, Vermont is a mystery. It's not on any map in either universe. The only proof it exists is four Instagram posts that appeared in my feed and then disappeared.

The town's official account paints a vivid picture of a spirited place. What catches my eye? The lady stuffing her face with pumpkin meat at the fair and to the left of Matt "Demon"?

I'm almost certain that's my Betty - my sister.



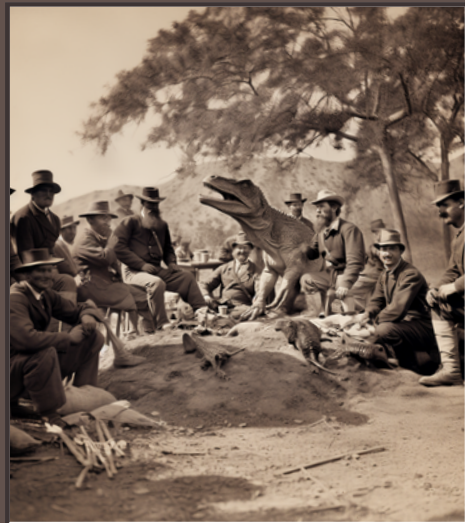
Vermontadon

The Dinosaurs of the Civil War

The boys from Vermont missed the green mountains and maple trees something fierce. The hot Southern sun beating down was a misery they weren't accustomed to. But they had a secret weapon to keep their spirits up and give the Rebs a fright - pet dinosaurs!

They'd smuggled the little fellas along, claiming they were exotic chickens to any who asked. At night around the campfire, they'd take them out on a leash and scratch their bellies.

The sight of those big teeth and tails swishing kept the Confederates away. The dinosaurs reminded those Vermont farm boys of home. And they reminded the Rebs that the men in blue weren't to be trifled with!



courtesy of dinosaur heritage foundation

THE VAMPIRES OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM

Abigail sat in the dim, cluttered office. The cabin near Lake Elmore had seen better days. The air was stale, and the thick layer of dust accumulated due to years of neglect. Abigail reached into the bottom drawer of the desk, her fingers landed on a file labeled: Flight 666.



..the plane was in pieces. You'd think there'd be... something. But there wasn't a single body. It was like everyone vanished.



“WE THOUGHT THE PLANE WAS EMPTY BUT THERE WERE FOOTPRINTS HEADING OUT INTO THE WOODS IN EVERY DIRECTION. HUNDREDS OF THEM.”

The file was thin. There was a flight manifest with the names of all the passengers. A photo of the crew. Attached to the file was an old cassette tape, worn but intact; labeled - "Sally" / Flight 666 Interview -1982.

She slid the tape into the tape player. The faint sound of static filled the room before the voices emerged.

"This is a recorded transcription of an interview between me, V.E.U. Agent Adam Richfield, and a first responder who preferred not to use her real name. We'll call her 'Sally'."

Adam: Thanks for agreeing to talk. I know it can't be easy recalling that night.

Sally: [chair squeaking in the recording, followed by a deep sigh] It's easy to recall, hard to forget. Who are you with again?

Adam: I'm with the VEU.

Sally: [pauses] Never heard of it? VEU? State agency?

Adam: Yeah. A different part of the state. It's been ten years, and I don't feel like what happened to Flight 666 was recorded fully. I want... I need to get it down. You seem to be the only one willing to tell it.

Sally: Henry too but yeah, I'm the only one you can find.

Adam: How did it go down?

Sally: Ah, gravity.

Adam: [laughs] Not the plane. I mean everything that happened after. How was it that you and Henry were the first on the scene?

No Bodies. No Answers.

Sally: We were in the ambulance after dropping off a patient at the hospital. It was three in the morning. Nobody on the roads. It's the Northeast Kingdom after all. Then we heard this roar, and like a hundred feet over our heads, this massive jet went whoosh right past us. Like a shadow.

Adam: No flames?

Sally: Not while it was in the air. On the ground lots of flames.

Adam: Close to the road?

Sally: It was way back in the woods. We grabbed a bag, stuffed as much as we could—bandages, supplies—and ran. I figured nobody could survive that. It hit so hard... no chance.

Adam: Were the first on the scene?

Sally: Yeah, but not right away. There was snow and I was not dressed for hiking in it. I took quick breaks to fix my shoes. That's when I heard people. People yelling.

Adam: But not first responders.

Sally: No. They were not local. I looked out into the darkness and could see people moving in the distance. Henry was up ahead shouting at me. Shouting at them. I lost track of Henry and was losing steam. It's not like I was a runner, and back then I smoked two packs a day. I was in sad shape and needed to sit down the second the adrenaline ran out. I was hyperventilating.

Adam: Could you see the plane?

Sally: I could see some flames. But I was sitting on a log trying to regain my breath. Someone was coming up on me. I thought it was Henry



and shined my flashlight. But it wasn't Henry. It was like a twelve-year-old boy. He ran right past me. He was wearing a pilot's hat.

Adam: Local kid?

Sally: He looked like a peasant. No shoes, soot all over his face, his pants and shirt ripped up. Didn't stop or even look in my direction.

Adam: You think he was on that plane?

Sally: I didn't at the time. I figured it was some kid who lived nearby who thought it'd be cool to steal something from the crash. Show his friends. He probably grabbed the hat and went home.

Adam: How much time had passed at this point? Since you first saw the plane overhead.

Sally: Fifteen to twenty minutes.

Adam: What did you feel when you got closer?

Sally: [voice quieting] Fear, mostly. I'm mentally prepared for a car crash. That's the worst I've seen. I was expecting a gruesome scene. Bodies, debris. But there was nothing like that. The plane was in pieces, parts of it still on fire, but... no bodies. It was like they vanished.

Adam: Nothing at all?

Sally: Footprints. Hundreds of them. In the snow, leading away from the wreck; going this way and that. They were just...everywhere. It was like a stampede had come through. You couldn't tell where they started or ended. The whole thing didn't make any sense. The tracks were clear, but the people... gone.

Adam: Did you follow the tracks?

Sally: A little, but it became impossible. The tracks overlapped too much. Eventually, the snow started erasing them. Whoever made them was still out there watching me.

Adam: The people on the plane?

Sally: Yeah. I stood there in the forest. Plane still smoldering. And you could hear talking. Not in English. They were watching me. I yelled out 'Hello' and from the darkness, this deep voice answered, 'Hello there.' I freaked and found Henry.

Adam: How long until support came?

Sally: Not long. Maybe twenty minutes. It was about when the helicopters came. Police too. But they were on foot. The FAA and FBI came in helicopters. Which agency are you with again?

Adam: The V.E.U.

Sally: Right. They told us they were taking over. Never asked any questions. Just sent us home. I was happy to leave.

Adam: Did you tell anyone about the voices you heard?

Sally: I may have mentioned it. No one cared.

Adam: You think the government knows what happened?

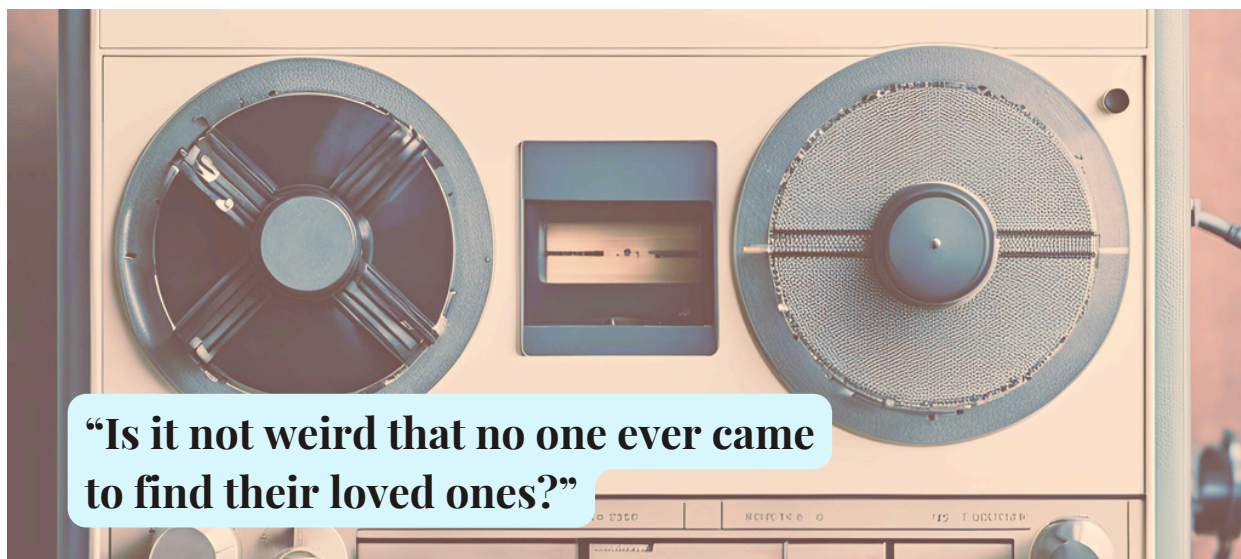
Sally: Is it not weird that no one ever came to find their loved ones? No one cared about the plane and the people on it. There were more than a hundred passengers. Like it never happened.

Adam: Your ambulance was stolen? Is that right?

Sally: Yeah, that's correct. And not just our ambulance. All the vehicles parked on the road that night were stolen. Police cars. A tow truck even.

Adam: Wait, they all went missing?

Sally: Who'd steal an ambulance, let alone a police car? The next morning, they found them—in Enosburg.



There's Vampires among us and it's being kept secret.

Adam: I gotta ask. Who took 'em?

Sally: Well, it wasn't the friggin' moose. It was the damn survivors.

Adam: You think the people on a crashed plane walked away and stole your ambulance?

Sally: Or maybe it was the boy in the pilot's hat.

Adam: Okay, let's cut to it. Who were the people on that plane, Sally? No wrong answers.

Sally: To survive that crash, you'd have to be someone who can't die. Who do we know like that?

Adam: You tell me.

Sally: Eastern Europeans! They've... what's the word... interspersed into society, you know. And now they're here, living amongst us.

Adam: You gotta be clearer than Eastern European.

Sally: Vampires, man. That's all I'm gonna say about it okay?

Adam: Have you ever gone back to the site?

Sally: Yeah, a few years later. There was nothing there. It was cleaned up. There was no plane. No debris. Nothing. Like it never happened.

Adam: Like it never happened. Not the first time you've said that.

Sally: Ever wonder why everything closes so early here? Can't get a decent meal or a drink after eight. There are Vampires among us and it's being kept secret.



Adam: Seems hard to believe.

Sally: Is it? After everything I've told you?

Adam: You were probably in the wrong spot.

Sally: Forty-four degrees, thirty-two minutes north. Seventy-two degrees, thirty-five minutes west. Near the old logging road. I was not at the wrong spot. You can go, but the plane is long gone.

Adam: Maybe I'll take a look anyway.

Sally: Don't go alone.

[End of recording]



Abigail searches for clues using a metal detector and saw something she'd never seen before

The interview ended. I clicked the recorder off, letting the silence settle knowing immediately I had to see the crash site. I grabbed my jacket, and left the cabin, locking the door behind me.

I passed no cars and saw no one on the drive to the crash site. That's just how it sometimes is in the Northeast Kingdom. I removed a metal detector from my trunk and headed into the dense, overgrown forest. As I approached the site the air grew heavy; a familiar clue of the extended universe.

Arriving at the clearing I wasn't surprised there was no wreckage, or visible clues - only silence. Sweeping the area with a metal detector revealed a small, corroded piece of metal with a faint airline logo—possibly part of the fuselage.

As I examined my find, I sensed I was not alone and my heart raced. I heard a twig snap and spun around expecting

to see that boy in a tattered pilot's hat, but what I saw standing on the edge of the woods was equally rare - a moose. A first sighting for me.

The beautiful creature stared me down with its large, dark eyes for a moment before turning and casually walking into the shadows.

Returning to my car, I was satisfied that no more could be done to erase the story of Flight 666. This story did not belong to this Vermont. The survivors, the vampires, were out there, integrated into society and they'll never be found.

I pulled out the flight manifest from the file and set the paper ablaze. I tossed the ashes to the wind, started my car, and drove away with no reason to go back. The story of Flight 666 would remain a secret, hidden in the Vermont that exists just beyond the veil of reality.



THIS STORY, ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE CITIZEN QUARTERLY, IS CRUCIAL TO THE NARRATIVE OF THE VEV AND IS REPRINTED HERE WITHOUT PERMISSION.

Did you know in Alabama ice cream in your pocket is a crime?

And in West Virginia, underwater whistling could land you a hefty fine?

Fact. Strange but true.

These quirky laws fascinate me. I was charged with writing a fun story about how the US is more eccentric than we think. I may have gone too far.

State by state, I researched America's legal oddities. Some were amusing. Others are baffling. For instance, the origin of the ice cream law was horse theft prevention. Allegedly, the law was written to stop thieves from luring equines with melting dairy treats.

I discovered surprises in every state, and when you learned the backstory most made some sense in a twisted way - until I came to Vermont.

While the Green Mountain State protects its maple syrup, it also has a law shielding elephants from harm.

A law so random must have an easily accessible reason, right? Wrong. While I know the reason, I'm not sure I believe it.

When the Devil Came up to Georgia, Vermont

Part 1

By Elin Falk



While combing through Vermont's statutes, I stumbled upon a peculiar line: 'It shall be unlawful for any person to discharge a firearm at an elephant within the state boundaries of Vermont.' I blinked and reread it. Elephants? In Vermont? Had there ever been an elephant in Vermont? Like Spiderman's spider sense, my journalist's feelings tingled. This would anchor the story and whole project I had to know more.

The elephant bylaw appeared just once in the 1873 Franklin County register. Never copied. Never repeated. It was not until a high schooler with a summer job scanning the county's documents noticed the line before posting it online. Even then it was

Without the efforts of the studious student, this legislation would never have seen the light of day and I silently thanked her.

Had I known how deep and dark this rabbit hole would go, I might have cursed her name.

I've heard of the bylaw, yes,' said a distracted voice on the phone, wary of speaking with a reporter. "I saw the posting and yes, I think I can explain it."

Professor Emerson, head of the history department, spoke with the weariness of someone long bored by his own subject.

If eye rolling is a sound, it would have been the sigh that Emerson gave before explaining, "Vermont's history is the equivalent of watching paint dry 1873 was no exception."

Why were there elephants in Vermont?" I prodded. "And who shot them?"

There was a pause. "Well, truthfully I have no idea who shot them," he said slowly. "I can

make a guess. A flood washed away tracks and a northbound train was delayed a few days. And maybe... " He trailed off. I leaned in.

"Maybe what?" I prompted.

"Maybe some animals escaped," he finished.

"From a train?" I asked. "Why

"It shall be unlawful for any person to discharge a firearm at an elephant within the state boundaries of Vermont."

would there be elephants on a train?"

"Back then, everything moved by rail- even the circus," Emerson said hurriedly. "I understand that some animals, including

Every Law Has an Origin Story

elephants, got loose. Hold on." I heard muffled voices on the other end.

"And they shot them?" I spouted but the professor was having a conversation with someone else. I pieced it together without him. The circus got held up by flooding, elephants escaped and they were promptly shot. Mystery solved.

"I'd hate to speculate without some proof," Emerson returned. "I teach Greek history. Vermont is an infant, boring, and of no use to me. He paused again before adding, "I know about the elephants because of the photo on the wall at Eugene's Bar in St. Albans." Another pause. "Bye now."

He hung up, I was frozen in thought. A photo of a bar in St. Albans a town not far from the Canadian border.

Was it worth traveling to Vermont just to glimpse an old photo of elephants in a bar? Absolutely. My editor would disagree, but then again he was the one who told me to follow my gut.

The next day, I was disembarking a train in St. Albans breathing Vermont's fresh air; full of pine and possibility.

At first glance, this Norman Rockwell town seemed almost too picture-perfect—like it was hiding something beneath the surface.

I should have checked before planning my trip. Eugene's Bar was closed and would be for the three days I'd be here. How can a bar only open four days a week? I pointed to the closed sign as an elderly woman passed by. "Money laundering, right?" She silently handed me a dollar, as if that answered everything.

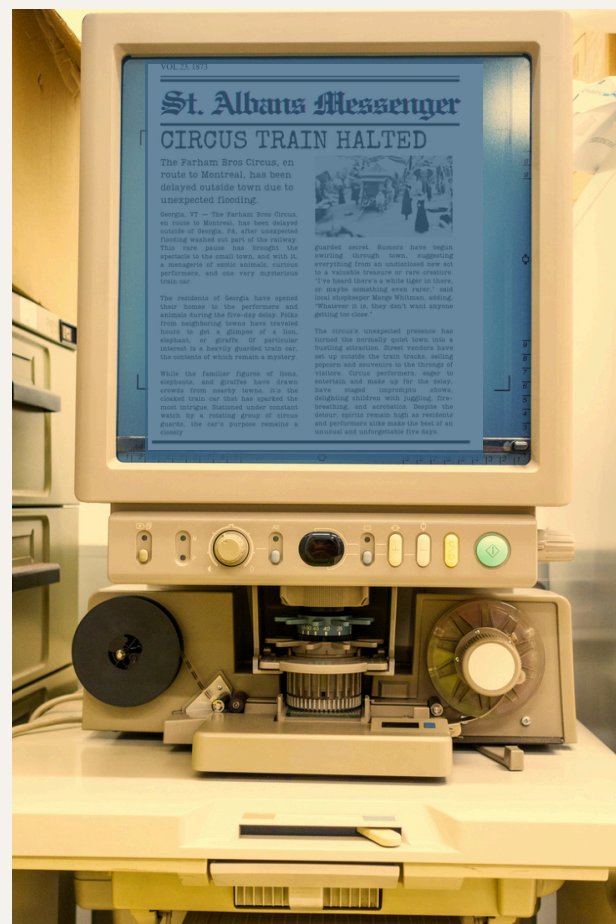
I made my way to the Georgia Historical Society, the nearby town where the elephant law was

written. But hit another dead end. "Permanently Closed." Georgia was not focused on the past.

How does anyone make money around here? I gave the buck back to the woman.

I turned to the citizens of St. Albans. You should have seen the sideways glances in response to questions about the elephant bylaw from anyone who walked by. I'd ask simply if they ever heard it. No one had.

Peering through the bar's window, I could just make out dark wood paneling, brass fixtures, and walls lined with old photos and vintage cigarette ads—but none offered the answers I was searching for.



The library saved me. At least here, some history remained intact, and, even better, the doors were open. But there were no old newspapers to flip through. Instead, I was led to a machine—microfiche.

Microfiche is like scrolling through Instagram for those born in this century, but each image is a full newspaper page. You load it into a machine, and

instead of swiping, you turn a dial to move from page to page. Every story in the history of The Saint Albans Messenger was saved. I fed the reel into the machine and the past flickered to life.

Each page was an opportunity to get distracted - hours passed quickly. My eyes strained against the dim light of the monitor and the words blurred together. Before they gave up completely, I found what I needed. The headline sharpened my focus.

St. Albans Messenger

CIRCUS TRAIN HALTED

The Farham Bros Circus, en route to Montreal, has been delayed outside town due to unexpected flooding.

Georgia, VT — The Farham Bros Circus, en route to Montreal, has been delayed outside of Georgia, PA, after unexpected flooding washed out part of the railway. This rare pause has brought the spectacle to the small town, and with it, a menagerie of exotic animals, curious performers, and one very mysterious train car.

The residents of Georgia have opened their homes to the performers and animals during the five-day delay. Folks from neighboring towns have traveled hours to get a glimpse of a lion, elephant, or giraffe. Of particular interest is a heavily guarded train car, the contents of which remain a mystery.

While the familiar figures of lions, elephants, and giraffes have drawn crowds from nearby towns, it's the cloaked train car that has sparked the most intrigue. Stationed under constant watch by a rotating group of circus guards, the car's purpose remains a



guarded secret. Rumors have begun swirling through town, suggesting everything from an undisclosed new act to a valuable treasure or rare creature. "I've heard there's a white tiger in there, or maybe something even rarer," said local shopkeeper Marge Whitman, adding, "Whatever it is, they don't want anyone getting too close."

The circus's unexpected presence has turned the normally quiet town into a bustling attraction. Street vendors have set up outside the train tracks, selling popcorn and souvenirs to the throngs of visitors. Circus performers, eager to entertain and make up for the delay, have staged impromptu shows, delighting children with juggling, fire-breathing, and acrobatics. Despite the detour, spirits remain high as residents and performers alike make the best of an



What could have been hidden in that armored car? Something dangerous, or just a circus gimmick? The more I thought about it, the more the possibilities gnawed at me.

My mind raced with possibilities. Maybe the local men, bored with hunting deer and rabbits, saw an opportunity for a more exotic game.

I scanned the rest of the newspaper and found only normal 1873 stories - advertisements for patent medicines and farm equipment. But then, tucked away in the obituaries, something caught my eye. But before I could investigate further, a hand on my shoulder startled me.

"We're closing, dear," a kind voice said. I looked up at an older woman, her gray hair neatly pinned back, smiling down at me. Her nametag read "Helen."

"Oh, I'm sorry," I stammered, gathering my notes. "I lost track of time."

Helen glanced at my work. "Researching the old circus incident, are you?" she asked.

I nodded, surprised. "You know about it?"

She chuckled. "Lots of us know about it. Or I guess,

everyone knows there's something to know, if you catch my drift." She smirked "You know, I can show you a photo from that day."

"That would be incredible," I said, trying to keep the excitement out of my voice. "I heard there was a photo over at Eugene's, but they're closed."

"Follow me," Helen said, ushering me out as she locked up the library. "Get in the car."

Helen was a quintessential New Englander: reserved but kind, with a calm demeanor that somehow made it feel safe to climb into a stranger's car.

Anyway, she was a librarian the unsung heroes of research and community. While journalism dies, librarians remain.

Before I knew it, we were back at Eugene's. We stepped out of the car, and I paused.

"Wait," I said, turning to her. "You know Eugene?"

"Eugene's dead. This is my place." Helen chuckled. "Eugene was my grandfather." She pulled a key from her pocket and unlocked the door. The bar was dark and still. The air carried the heavy scent of aged wood and stale beer. With a flick of the light, she led me to the far wall.

A Photo Worth a Thousand Questions



And there it was. The photo Professor Emerson had mentioned. Black and white, yellowed with age. But clear enough to see the details. The photo was taken from a hill. Several train cars were in view, as were the workers, the onlookers, and some animals. An out-of-focus group of elephants loomed in the background.

The armored train car caught my eye. It looked like a shadow clad in iron. Grim-faced Pinkerton security guards stood at attention. One door. No windows. Whatever was inside, they were extremely concerned about it getting out.

Helen removed the photo from the wall and placed it carefully on the bar. "Drink?" she offered.

"Just diet soda, if you have it," I replied, my eyes still glued to the photo.

As Helen busied herself behind the bar, I leaned in closer, examining every detail of the image. "It's kinda freaky, that car no?" I murmured, more to myself than to Helen.

"Yeah, I guess it is," she confirmed, sliding a glass of soda towards me.

I looked up at her, my curiosity on fire. "What was in it?"

Helen's lips curved into a smile. "Wouldn't you like to know?."

"I mean, yeah," I said, perhaps too eager. "That is why I'm here. Well and those elephants. Sometimes the focus of the story changes. "

Helen's expression didn't change. "Well, good luck," she said. "Only a handful ever knew what happened, and my guess is the circus company paid them off. Farham Brothers didn't want their secrets getting out."

"What secrets?"

Helen shrugs. "Oh, something happened and it left the state forever changed. What that was we don't know."

I nodded, turning back to the photo. Then, something strange caught my eye. Between the cameraman and the armored train car stood a woman in a flowing black dress, her blurred figure an eerie anomaly in the scene. Her face was blurred, by movement and the limitations of 1873 photography, but even in the grainy image, something was unsettling about her presence.

That woman in black—there's something off about her," I said, gesturing to the blurred figure in the photo. "Helen leaned in, squinting at the photo. "I suppose," she adds, her voice soft. "I'd say she's dressed for a funeral."

We joined in silence for a moment, both lost in thought. I thought about a funeral and like a bolt of lightning, it hit me. The obituaries I saw in the old newspaper. Two men, both in their thirties, both dead of apparent heart attacks. Both died on Main Street.

"Oh my God," I breathed. "It's in the paper. That weekly paper. Would you be able to get me back in the library tonight?"

Helen arched an eyebrow, her expression skeptical, but she nodded. "I suppose I could," she said slowly. "But why? What did you see?"



I was already halfway to the door. "I'll explain on the way,"

On the ride, I filled her in on my hunch about the obituaries. I couldn't remember many details other than two young men dead of heart attack at the same location. The possibility that maybe these deaths weren't as natural as reported.

Helen snuck me in through a side door. I made a beeline for the archives. It was much easier to find what I was looking for this time. There it was, two obituaries, side by side.

Josiah Hadley, aged 34, died in his home on Main Street of a heart attack. No picture, no details. Just a bare-bones announcement of a life ended too soon. And next to it, Jeremiah Flint, a New Jersey native, also died of a heart attack on Main Street. Again, no details and no explanation of what a man from New Jersey was doing in small-town Vermont. He wasn't leaf-peeping that was for sure.

I snapped a picture of the obituary with my phone, my mind racing. I thanked Helen profusely, knowing I was pushing the bounds of small-town hospitality. She simply nodded. "Be careful," she said as I left. "Some secrets are buried for a reason."

... two young men dead of heart attack at the same location. The possibility that maybe these deaths weren't as natural as reported.

Her words echoed in my head on the walk back to my hotel. While it felt like I was moving further away from the elephant and the bylaw question, I was on the trail of a bigger story - the one that was going to land me a Netflix documentary.

Back in my room, I dove into research, my laptop casting a blue glow in the dark room. The hours flew by, my eyes burning from staring at the screen. Finally, I unearthed a podcast about Jeremiah Flint—a forgotten figure in Philadelphia folklore. It had less than fifty plays even though it was a decade old. The title of the episode? *Jeremiah Flint - The Man Who Captured the Devil*.

I gave my eyes a break, clicked play, and lay in bed. An enthusiastic young man's voice filled the room along with some terrible audio quality. No wonder it had only 50 plays, he never even introduced himself. The podcaster spoke of Flint's legendary hunting exploits. And then, almost as an afterthought, he mentioned a piece of folklore too outrageous to be true.

According to the podcast, Jeremiah Flint had captured perhaps the most famous monster in

The Devil in the Pines: Jeremiah Flint's Dangerous Hunt



America, after Bigfoot - the Jersey Devil. The young man was light on details saying he wanted to reserve it for a book as only he knew the truth.

I immediately put the Jersey Devil into that iron-clad train car, with the fearful Pinkerton guards, and connected it to the two heart attacks.

The next morning I tracked down the podcaster's contact information. His name was Alex Richards and we set up a video call later in the morning. Alex looked young, happy, and excited that someone had heard his podcast.

"Jeremiah Flint is probably the most interesting person that no one ever heard about," Alex said, his voice deeper than in the podcast. I realized he must have been much younger when he recorded the podcast. Perhaps only 15 or so at the time. The enthusiasm hadn't dimmed with age. "I always thought about writing a book about him," Alex continued, "but never have."

"I can help you there," I offered meekly. "People will want to know more about Flint after I publish this story. Your podcast even. But I need you to tell me how he captured the Jersey Devil."

Alex hesitated. "I mean, you listened to the podcast," he said quietly.

I shook my head. "I can't report on your reporting. I need more details than you gave." I explained. "I need you to tell me everything you know. Plus, I need to know *how* you know."

Alex nodded. "Okay," he said. "I'll tell you the story first. And then tell you how I know. It'll make more sense in that order."

I settled back in my chair after confirming everything was being recorded.

"The Farham Brothers," Alex began, "were the biggest circus at the time. This is kind of pre-Barnum and Bailey. The brothers were still leaning on strange and gross things to attack crowds. I don't know if rides even existed. They were British and loved showing off how weird America was, you know?"

"Revenge for the Revolutionary War?" I joked.

Alex chuckled. "Something like that. They wanted to show us as half-wits. Their words. So these guys were into finding and capturing local legends. If they couldn't find them, they'd make them up. They hired Jeremiah to track down what we now call cryptids. If he couldn't track them, no one could."

"And he found the Jersey Devil?" I prompted.

"Do you know the origin of the devil of New Jersey?" Alex asked.

I shook my head. "No, I don't."

Alex leaned back. "Well, in some shack in the Pine Barrens, Mrs. Leeds cursed her thirteenth child as she birthed it. It came out like a winged beast and lived in the woods. It ate livestock and maybe an occasional child, though that's been disputed. But it hid. Not wanting to be seen. Mrs. Leeds, unable to forgive herself, took care of him so he wouldn't be hunted."

"A mother's instinct," I offer.

"Yeah, exactly. Flint found Mrs. Leeds and spied on her for weeks," Alex continued. "One night, she stood outside her shack and played a music box. The large winged beast came and lay before her while she stroked his head. It had hooves for legs, a large hairless body, and the color and look of severe sunburn. Its face was oversized and lumpy with glowing red eyes."

"That sounds lovely," I muttered.

Alex nodded. "But only she could soothe him. It wasn't because of her motherly love. It was the music. That's what soothed him. Once the music stopped, the devil went back to its beastly ways. She'd play the music and go back inside while the devil flew off into the night, making an inhuman shriek as Jeremiah described it."



I felt a chill run down my spine. The woman in black from the photo flashed in my mind.

"Flint bought out a hundred music boxes but none drew the creature. He had to have the one that Mrs. Leeds played. So he watched the home and waited for the Leeds and the children to all be away," Alex went on. "When, finally they all were far enough from the home he snuck in and stole the music box."

"That thief," I add.

"Might as well call him a kidnapper too, because the next night, he and other men he hired went into the pine barrens. It was dark and scary. But they were ready. Flint played the music box. The song echoed into the woods. It was not long before he could hear the winged beast circling the sky above them. The men started freaking out. It landed some ways from Jeremiah. While he was out in the open the other men hid behind trees. The area was lit only by a single torch."

I was on the edge of my seat.

"Flint, never more fearful, saw the devil and the devil saw him," Alex said, his voice dropping to a near-whisper. "It did not seem confused as to why it was he, Jeremiah Flint, and not his mother playing the box. Or why they were not near the home. The music was working."

The devil moved slowly towards him. Suddenly, the ground gave out underneath him. Ropes snaked around his hooves and pulled him into a hole in the ground. There, a steel box sat waiting. Steel cables, hidden beneath the forest floor, had sprung to life, ensnaring the beast. The music box's song had rendered the Devil docile, allowing Flint to secure it without a scratch to him or his prey. The men secured the cables so he couldn't fly away, and Flint covered the box and sealed it."

"Holy mackerel," I blurted, realizing I'd been holding my breath.

Alex nodded, grinning. "Right? Flint was a legend."

A Haunting Melody

"So was the Jersey Devil ever shown publicly?" I asked.

Alex shook his head. "No. It was supposed to be. The brothers paid Flint a fortune and gave him more to be the Devil's minder on the road, but they knew they had to get the beast out of the country. The plan was to head to Montreal, then to Europe. Build up the excitement and figure out the best way to show the devil here. They needed a plan and some space."

"So that's what was in the armored train car?" I said, the pieces finally starting to fit together.

"It's likely," Alex offered. "But what happened in Vermont, I can't tell you 'cause I don't know."

I frowned, remembering the obituaries. "In the paper, it said that Flint died of a heart attack."

Alex laughed. "I mean, his heart was attacked. When his body came back to New Jersey, it was half clawed out of his body."

"Alex, you need to write this book." This was more than I had bargained for. I'm not sure this is even a story I can run. But I had to know more. "So, then how do you know all this?" I asked.

Alex held up a finger, prompting me to wait. He went off-camera, and I could hear things moving around in his apartment. When he returned, he held up a small, ornate box.

off-camera, and I could hear things moving around in his apartment. When he returned, he held up a small, ornate box.

"Flint's wife, Abigail, was my great-grandmother times three," Alex explained, his voice filled with pride. "This has been passed down along with the Flint's story. Abigail wrote it all down and kept this music box. When I was younger, I'd play it for hours."

"Hoping to summon the devil?" I asked, only half-joking.

"Yeah, that's what boredom will do to ya," Alex laughed.

He opened the box, and a haunting melody filled the air. Eerie and simple, yet beautiful. I found myself leaning closer to the screen.

"I don't recognize the song," I said.

"Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming," Alex replied. "It's an old tune. Older than the Devil. And that story is exactly how Jeremiah told it to his wife the night before he left for Montreal. She'd never see him alive again."

I thanked Alex profusely, promising to stay in touch. The elephant bylaw remained a mystery, but I was now chasing something far bigger—a legend. I glanced at my notes, and with a sense of foreboding, jotted down one haunting phrase: 'Older than the Devil.'

PART 2 WILL NOT BE PRINTED IN THE CITIZEN'S QUARTERLY BUT WILL INSTEAD APPEAR IN OUR SPRING ISSUE, AS IT HOLDS SIGNIFICANT IMPORTANCE TO THE VEV.



THE HIBERNATING MAN



“James is the only human who truly hibernates,”

The drive to the Hibernating Man was pure misery. Salt caked my windshield driving the iced Newport Roads, but this couldn’t wait until Spring. I received a tip from his wife, Sarah Matthews, she read my profile of a woodworker in Shelburne who made frisbees. It’s helpful for me to write stories for local papers, both for practice and for credibility.

Sarah thought I’d be interested in, as she put it, her husband’s “unique winter arrangement.” The address was 82 Humpback Drive—the development named all the roads after endangered species.

“Come any time,” she said. “He’ll be asleep anyway.”

So there I was, slipping up her steep, ice-covered driveway, wishing for a dog sled instead of my Subaru. The house itself was a nondescript McMansion, the kind that’s less common here than in the other Vermont. In the yard, a plastic Santa lay facedown in the snow, half-buried, as if he’d given up on the season entirely.

Sarah Matthews greeted me at the door, tired but kind. The dark circles under her eyes contrasted with the toothy smile.

"Abigail?" She asked. "From the VEU?"

"I am. Abigail George."

Sarah ushered me inside quickly enveloping me in the home's warmth. The scent of cinnamon-infused apple cider disarmed me immediately.

"I'm not exactly sure what the VEU is. You write for other newspapers around Vermont?"

"The Vermont Editorial Unit," I fib.

A boy of about eight rolled in on a scooter. "Mom, is she here to write about Dad?"

"She is," Sarah headed to the kitchen and I followed. "Coffee?"

"Sure," I answered despite recently finishing a large gas station brew on the ride.

"Do you know my husband James' story at all?" She asked pouring into a mug covered with faded images of her kids. How do you take your coffee?"

"Light and sweet," I tell her, surveying the kitchen. The fridge is covered in more photos of the family, two kids in addition to Sarah and James. In some pictures, James is skinny with a long beard and in others, he's morbidly obese. "Only what you said on the phone. You said your husband hibernates."



"Okay so yah, James is the only human who truly hibernates, that we know about at least," She says placing the coffee mug on the table in front of me.

"We're not talking about an induced coma right?"

"Oh, nothing like that. He was in grade school when it started," she explained, stirring cream into her cup. "He'd fall asleep in every class even if he had a full night's rest and his parents tried everything; different diets, light therapy, and vitamins but nothing worked. He needed more sleep than a koala bear."

"Do they need a lot of sleep?"

"Twenty hours. Doctors thought it was some rare form of narcolepsy at first," she continued.



... it feels like I'm single parenting while he dreams of another life."

"Or depression. He did a sleep study when he was in middle school and the specialist compared his sleep needs to a bear, practically no metabolism - his heartbeat dropped to four beats a minute.

"Like a chipmunk," I comment jotting down her words on paper.

Tommy walked back into the room. "My dad doesn't like winter."

I laughed. "I'm not a big fan either. Hibernating sounds like a good plan."

"This world is sometimes a little too much for him," Sarah adds. "He's a good person and a great dad. James was never a fan of the long winters here. His family decided to let him sleep through winter. Usually three months and it's not like a coma," seeing my expression when she told me how long, she quickly added. "His brain doesn't shut down. He has vivid dreams and remembers nearly all of them. When his mom passed away we had to wake him up so he could attend the funeral. It took three days for him to get his heartbeat and metabolism back to normal. The cold makes him grumpy."

"So you just single parent?"

"Some days, I pretend he's on an oil rig far from home. Other days, it feels like I'm single parenting while he dreams of another life."

Emma, the youngest kid at six walked in proudly. "Want to see Daddy's cave?"

I nodded and the girl took my hand, Sarah stood up while Emma pulled me out of my seat. I left my coffee and notebook on the table.

The basement looked like a normal finished basement. A fun place for kids to hang out, with toys everywhere, and TV always playing cartoons. I look around and see no signs of a Hibernating Man.



Sarah motioned me to follow with the kids at my side. We entered a laundry room dominated by a spiral staircase parked in the middle of the space.

The kids and Sarah deftly moved down the stairs while I struggled with the narrow steps. My senses were on alert. It was dark, the temperature dropped

noticeably and the classical music pumped Bach. Bach made me uneasy.

Downstairs there was a smaller version of the basement, dark and windowless. At the bottom of the stairs was a small sitting room, with a compact sofa and a well-worn easy chair.

The couch and chairs faced a large observational window looking into James' winter room. The kids run to the window and look in, like a fish at the aquarium, their artwork taped to the glass.

"They never miss a goodnight," Sarah explained walking me to the windows. "I'd like to think he hears it even through the soundproof windows. Tommy can read any story so sometimes he reads to his dad."

Through the window, I saw him— a still hefty James Matthews, curled up in a queen-sized hospital bed. The space looked more like a research facility than a bedroom. He was connected to wires that led to an EKG on our side of the window.

"He looks content I say,"

"Four beats per minute will do that to you," Sarah said.

"Why did you seek me out?" I ask focused on James, still not a hundred percent sure this isn't some scam. "What does publicity do? Just go Facebook, no?"

"I need help," Sarah says her arms crossed. Even though James is asleep she moves away



from the window as if he can read her lips sleeping. "I have what, another twelve years of this before the kids are on their own? If he is still hibernating, I'll be going to Arizona for the winter."

"So you want the story profile to be your story as much as his? How it's hard to be married to the Hibernating Man."

"Ew, Sounds like I'm a victim. Let's go back up," She motions and we head back up the stairs "I love James but he has no idea what it's like here in the winter, just because he hates to ski."

Upstairs, we finish our coffee, Sarah fills in the blanks while I take photos of the family and the locations for the story.

Finished Sarah walks me to the door. I think of a question I almost forgot.

"Does he dream?"

Sarah's face lights up and she exclaims "Oh, the dreams. When he wakes up in spring, he writes them down immediately. They are... extraordinary. He writes everything he remembers over the next few months. It's like he lives a whole different life."

"What does he do with the writings? Maybe he could publish them. Help you out."

"They don't make a ton of sense," she says. "Interested in seeing them?"

Before I could respond, she led me past the kitchen to a small office. On the shelves, there are two dozen journals. The first few are just in notebooks while the more recent ones are leather-bound. "This is from last winter," handing it to me like a sacred text. "I read them for comfort sometimes. That world is a warm blanket on a cold day."

Reading or talking about someone's dreams can't be less interesting to me but I could pretend. I took a look noting the frantic handwriting. I can imagine he was afraid he'd forget the memories before they were captured.

And there, on the third page, a word that made my breath catch: Garvin.

The town that doesn't exist.

"Sarah," I said carefully pointing to the word. It appears often I notice. "Has James ever mentioned where he heard about Garvin?"



"No, but he mentions it often. It's not a real place. It's the town he lives in when dreaming."

"I'd like to talk to him about it," I closed the journal, my mind racing. "In a couple of months, of course. Could I borrow this?"

Sarah paused. "I'm not comfortable, it's his only copy."

"Well, can you make one for me?"

"Wait, Is Garvin something I should know about?"

She took the journal from my hand.

"It's not a physical place, but it's also not an invention of his mind," I say cryptically. "It's come up before."

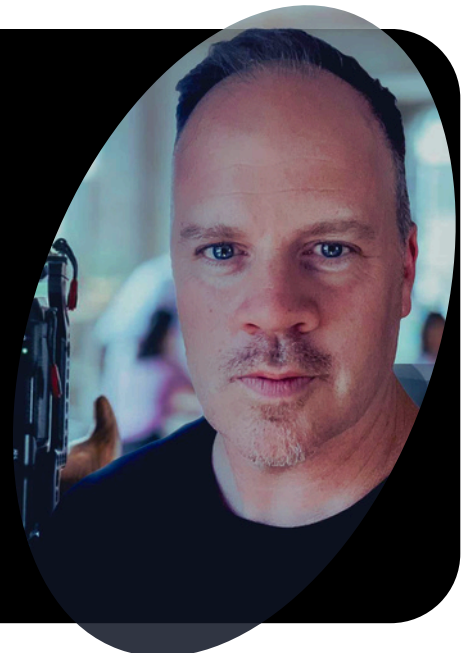
Fortunately, Sarah took my explanation at face value assuring me she'd make a copy as we moved to the door.

Walking to my car, the cold air biting my face, my confusion was so intense I felt nauseous. Why was the Hibernating Man dreaming of a place that's not supposed to exist?

AUTHOR BIO

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Chris lives in Vermont with his wife, twin boys, and their corgi, Meeko. He has owned a film production company, sold slot machines, and worked for Tony Robbins. He writes in his magical tiny house and writes in his thoughts at chrisrodgers.blog.





VEU

Vol 2

In the Spring of 2025, journey deeper into Vermont's hidden corners as Abigail delves further into the mystery of her missing sister. Uncover chilling encounters, unravel the secrets of Garvin—a town for dreamers and the disappeared—and witness the haunting truths of Vermont's extended universe. The line between reality and the unknown has never been thinner. Don't miss the next chapter.

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