

A FIELD GUIDE TO THE NORTHBORN

*Being a partial record of the species the world calls Sasquatch,
compiled from fifty years of field journals kept near Elwha, Washington*

An exclusive companion to

Sophia Sprite and the Sasquatch Secret

by Brian Young

For preorder readers only. Thank you for believing early.
The people in this book would approve of that.

A Note Before You Begin

Every town has one person nobody listens to. In Elwha, Washington, it's the man with the plaster casts in his garage and the trail cameras that never catch anything, the one the whole town calls the crazy Bigfoot guy. This guide is assembled from journals like his. Decades of them. Notebooks warped by rain, pages held together with fir sap and stubbornness.

Here is the uncomfortable thing about people nobody listens to: some of them are right.

What follows is a partial record of the Northborn, the species your maps and museums insist does not exist. It is incomplete on purpose. Some knowledge is dangerous to write down, and some of it belongs to Sophia's story, which begins on November 23. Consider this your trailhead.

One warning, reader. Once you know the signs, you will start seeing them. That is not a figure of speech. That is how it starts.

Entry I. What the World Gets Wrong

Start with the word. "Bigfoot" is a nickname invented by a newspaper. "Sasquatch" is closer, borrowed from peoples who lived beside them long enough to know better than to bother them. They call themselves the Northborn, and they are older than we are. Sixty thousand years ago, while we were still arguing over stone tools, they looked at what humanity was becoming and made a decision: they left. Not the planet. Just the surface of it.

The world pictures a lumbering ape that blunders in front of cameras. The truth is worse for our pride. The Northborn are not hiding in the forest. They are beneath it. What we call sightings, they call mistakes, and they make perhaps three a century. An eight-foot being does not stay undiscovered for sixty thousand years by being stupid. They stay undiscovered by being patient, organized, and better at hiding than we are at looking.

They build. They remember. They keep records older than our alphabets. Two fragments from the journals, offered without explanation. First: an older name surfaces in the earliest entries, half-heard and twice underlined. *Vorath*. Second: what your textbook says about the Neanderthals is missing a chapter, and the Northborn were there for it.

Entry II. Field Signs, or How to Know You Are a Guest

You will not find a Northborn. That has to be understood first. What you can find, if you spend fifty years at it, are the edges of their tidiness. The journals record the following, each observed at least twice:

The quiet. Birdsong stops in a circle, not a line. If the woods go silent around you rather than ahead of you, you are inside the circle.

The circling trail. You walked a straight line. You are certain you walked a straight line. You arrived back at your car. The journals' author charted this happening in the same square mile eleven times, with a compass, and the compass agreed with him and was also wrong. Nothing in these woods is lost. Some of it is being politely refused.

Instruments that lie. Trail cameras that never catch anything, on trails something is clearly using. Film that develops into fog. Batteries that die in a circle, too.

The memory that will not hold. The surest sign, and the cruelest. You saw something. By morning you can only half describe it, and the half keeps shrinking. The journals' author has one entry from the 1970s that he rewrote for fifty years, trying to remember what he was certain of the night he wrote it.

A smooth river stone, left where no river put it. One margin note, no explanation: "Stones mean permanence. Something that endures." Remember that one. It will find you again.

Entry III. Artifacts of the Bridge

At rare moments in history, individual humans have been trusted. The journals call these people bridges. A bridge is given tools, because a human moving between two worlds needs help surviving both. Three such artifacts are described in scattered entries, and all three surface in Sophia's story:

A cloak woven of hair that belongs to no animal in any catalog, and bends light around its wearer. Not invisibility, the journals insist. Politeness, engineered. The world simply agrees to look elsewhere.

Boots that look like ordinary hiking boots. That is the first lie they tell. They are soled for terrain no map admits to, stone that has never seen the sun, and wearers describe the ground meeting them halfway.

A whistle that is deafening to the one who blows it and silent to everyone else in the house. It is not silent everywhere. What answers it is not recorded in this guide.

A bridge's work is quiet, essential, and dangerous. The most recent one kept her second life so well hidden that her own daughter found out from a trunk in an attic.

Entry IV. On the Others

The Northborn are the oldest of the hidden, but not the loneliest. The journals mention, with visible reluctance, at least one leprechaun on this side of the Atlantic, four centuries old, tempered like a horseshoe, and carrying grief the way other people carry a wallet. Later entries list others in a shakier hand: the small folk, the fair ones, things with older names, all of them living quietly under Northborn protection. And one entry notes something stranger still: some humans carry more of the old blood in their veins than the rest of us. A rare few carry enough that the hidden world counts them as nearly kin. They tend to sense what others walk past. If that sentence made the back of your neck prickle, the journals would like a word with you.

And there are worse things than any of these. The journals go quiet on this subject, except for one line, underlined twice: "The old ones remember why they hid. Some of them never stopped being angry about it."

Entry V. Rules for an Encounter

Compiled from the journals' final notebook, presented without commentary.

1. Do not run. Running announces that you believe you are prey, and belief is contagious.
2. Do not photograph. Sixty thousand years of privacy is not yours to end for likes.
3. Speak normally. They understand more than you think. They always have.
4. If the trail keeps returning you to where you started, take the hint. You are not lost. You are being declined, courteously.
5. Protect the secret. Not because they will punish you. Because trust between species is the rarest thing either world makes, and every person who keeps it makes the next bridge possible.
6. Choose hope anyway. The journals' author spent a lifetime being laughed at and never once stopped looking. The last rule is written larger than the rest: "Being right was never the point. Looking was."

The Story Begins November 23

Fourteen-year-old Sophia Sprite lost her parents. Then she found her mother's secret: a hidden species beneath the earth, a double life as their protector, and a murder staged as an accident. To finish what her mother started, Sophia descends into an ancient world with unlikely allies at her side.

Sophia Sprite and the Sasquatch Secret

Book One • Ebook and audiobook, November 23

Audiobook narrated by nine-time Audie Award winner and

Audible Narrator Hall of Fame inductee **Bahni Turpin**
(The Hate U Give, The Help, Children of Blood and Bone)

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drawn the last week of November.*

Thank you for looking.

— Brian Young