

Chapter 2

The Trackers



The stillness of the night shattered with a thunderous crack, reminiscent of a colossal tree being torn apart by an unimaginable powerful force. The sound jolted Kaleb from his deep REM sleep, pulling him abruptly into consciousness from his dark vortex dreams. He sensed that something had disturbed his sleep, yet his mind lingered in a fog, struggling to understand the source of the disturbance. It was that disorienting sensation of being awakened by an unknown presence, leaving him bewildered and alert, yet unable to comprehend what had truly transpired.

Kaleb glanced over at John, who was still deep in the depths of his dreams, and chose not to disturb him. After all, there was no need to disturb his sleep, plus once awake he would probable start babbling on about his dreams. As Kaleb climbed out of his sleeping bag, he realized that his air mattress had deflated overnight. It must have developed a slow leak while he slept. He recalled that the pump was outside on the front deck of the oTENTik. He pulled his air mattress from under his sleeping bag and dragged it to the front door where he paused as he tried to remember why he was abruptly awakened? He reached for the door, slowly opening it up trying not to make too much noise as not to awaken John. He stepped outside; dragging his now limp air mattress along with him. He hesitated just outside the door and looked around for the air pump.



Just then a strange sensation washed over him, as if he were perceiving the forest in an entirely new light. The woods surrounding his oTENTik seemed to pulse with life, not merely shifting, but teeming with vibrant movement. The darkness of the night enveloped him, making it difficult to see beyond a few meters, yet he could just discern shapes stirring in the underbrush directly in front of him. It appeared as though small creatures, no larger than mice, were scurrying about, seemingly engaged in conversations of their own. Despite his efforts to focus in the dim moonlight, the details remained elusive, and he could only faintly make out the flickering movements among the foliage.

“What the broccoli?”, Kaleb whispered as his mind tried to comprehend what was happening to him. Was he going insane, it did not feel like it, everything felt normal! But what was he seeing? He bent over slightly and tilted his head to the right seeing if he could hear the movement he was seeing. Suddenly, he heard slight whispers in the wind. It sounded like conversations; voices light whispers, hundreds of them, all talking in a language he could not make out!

Kaleb blurted out, “Who are you?” In that instant, the forest fell eerily silent. It was unsettling—no chirping crickets, no singing Robins, and even the gentle rustle of the wind through the treetops ceased. An overwhelming stillness enveloped the surroundings, creating a sense of anticipation that hung in the air, which now felt as if a thick, Fundy fog had just rolled in.

Moments later, Kaleb heard a low whisper of a voice as if the sound arrived on a light breeze. “Can he see us?” it asked! Another deeper sounding voice chimed in. “No he must be talking to himself. You know these humans, always talking to themselves as if no one is listening! Blab, blab, always talking, talking and talking.” Kaleb cleared his throat and said in a soft voice as if not to scare them off, whatever they are. “I can hear you. Who and what are you?” Another whisperer abruptly said, “What the

mushroom!...The big human can hear us!” The deeper voice interrupted, “I take offence to that mushroom comment! I will have you know my mother is a redcap mushroom and she comes from a long line of proud forest mushrooms!” The first whisperer responded “Sorry I got a little carried away there...How is your mother by the way?” “Very good, thank you for asking.” replied the deeper whispering voice.

Kaleb took one step off the deck and suddenly the forest around him erupted as if something was running away deeper into the darkness. He blurted out, “Wait! Tell me who or what you are!” Suddenly, there was a creaking, snapping sound of branches breaking off to his right several meters away and several meters above him. He now had an overwhelming feeling that someone or something was watching him and it was much larger then the little creatures he had heard earlier, much bigger! He squinted again, trying to make out if there was anything in the bushes, but could not see anything but endless darkness. “Snap!” went a branch well above the shrubberies now in front of him. Kaleb looked up slowly, trying to focus now that he could see the moonlight through the top of the trees. Then he saw them! A set of large dark blue eyes deep in the forest intently staring back at him.




Kaleb instinctively took a step backward and whispered. “What are you?” In that moment, a cold gust of wind blew through the forest making the trees sway back and forth, causing Kaleb to look away from the blue eyes just for a second. But when he turned back around, the eyes were gone. There was just an extremely large maple tree where the eyes were. Kaleb mumbled to himself, “This is the last time I come outside at night without a flashlight! Was that maple tree there before? I am starting to see things in the darkness. Of course the maple tree was there before, it’s probably 300 years old.” He turned and focused his attention on the mattress and started to pump up it up, thinking to himself, “Was I really seeing things that were not real? But they felt so real!” He looking back over his shoulder at the massive maple tree.

Once he finished pumping up his air mattress it was off to bed. since he knew he would need lots of rest for the long trip tomorrow morning. He just hoped John's tracking skills were up to the task.

John was a seasoned expert in tracking both wildlife and humans, boasting years of hands-on experience. His passion for tracking began in childhood, where he spent countless hours hunting with his father, learning to identify the footprints and signs left behind by various animals. After completing his education, John further honed his skills by successfully finishing several man-tracking courses, which he then applied to ground search and rescue operations.

He often remarked on the constants of the universe, drawing parallels to Newton's third law: "Every action has a reaction." John understood that every movement leaves a trace, whether it be a footprint, an overturned leaf, or a broken twig. He believed that if someone or something had been present, they would have left a mark. A mark that could be tracked and followed. This profound understanding of nature and human movement made him an invaluable asset and partner for this expedition.



Wake up... Wake up... Wake up! Went Kaleb's custom ring tone, with a thundering sound shattering the stillness of the oTENTik. His alarm was set for 5.30 am with the intent of striking off early on this 'grand adventure', as he called it. However, John had other ideas. To him, anything between 1 am and 8 am was for the birds and not for him. When the alarm went off, John rolled over, wrapping himself in his sleeping bag and mumbling, "You have got to be kidding..Wake me in a couple of hours! I

have spoken,” chuckling at the reference to his favorite Sci-Fi show, the Mandalorian.

Kaleb climbed out of his sleeping bag, rubbing his eyes, followed by a deep yawn, still tired from the night’s sleep, or lack thereof. He wondered if he did hear and see those creatures, or was it all his imagination? Either way, the day was calling, and he needed to get things rolling. He looked over at John, now sleeping, and with sleep in his eyes and a sarcastic voice Kaleb said, “Don’t worry, I got this!” After all, he was the assigned cook on this trip, according to John.

Kaleb stood up and shook off the long night’s sleep. He looked around the oTENTik for a moment. He estimated it would take about an hour to pack up and start cooking breakfast. With the smell of fresh brewed coffee and bacon bubbling in the cast iron skillet, Kaleb knew it would only be a couple of minutes before John was up and about. He could never resist the enticing aroma of a fresh campsite breakfast.

In the middle of cooking breakfast, there was a distinct rumbling sound coming from inside the oTENTik. It was John packing his gear, and preparing for the day’s adventure. Just then, the door of the oTENTik burst open and John stood in the doorway with his right hand on his hip and his coffee cup in his left hand, like some kind of conquering hero. “Do I smell fresh coffee!” exclaimed John as he enjoyed his morning stretch. The sun was now coming up above the treeline with its beams of light warming the forest floor around the oTENTik.

“Top of the morning to you!” exclaimed John, feeling good that he had the extra hour of sleep. “Is the coffee ready?” he asked, holding out his empty coffee cup as if to say, “Please fill me.”

“Just about ready, John! Did you sleep well?” Kaleb said with a grin. He went on to ask, “Nothing disturbed your sleep last night?” Fishing to

see if John had heard or seen anything unusual last night.

“Nope! I slept like a baby...It was, however, a little warm in there last night.” John commented with a little annoyance in his voice.

“Well, breakfast is just about ready. The freshly brewed coffee is over there.” pointing to a large 8-cup thermos on the picnic table. “Once we finish breakfast, we can confirm the plan for the day and head out,” Kaleb stated with a slight whisper of leadership.

During breakfast Kaleb considered telling John what happened to him last night, but decided not to. After all, he probably would have just laugh at him and told him he was seeing things. John considered everything with a scientific view in mind. To him there was always a known scientific answer that could explain everything.

“You know I did, however, have a really strange dream last night,” explained John! “You were in it, and some strange-looking mushroom people, or things...It was weird... As if I was watching it from the forest, looking back at the oTENTik, almost as if it was not me but something else or I was someone else. It was like an out-of-body experience.” chuckled John. “It must be all this fresh air, trees, and wildlife,” he snickered “Like that was ever going to happen.” John snickered again as he devoured his camp breakfast.

Once breakfast was finished and packed up, the team spent about 20 minutes enjoying their morning coffee and planning the day’s activities. “The plan is simple,” stated Kaleb. “We will make our way from Point Wolfe campground,” pointing to it on his map, “and follow the Marven Lake trail for 8.5 km. Then, we will spend some time at Chambers Lake. That’s where the last sighting of the Green Man was a couple of days ago. Then, we will make our way back down Fosters Brook trail and back to the campground for the night. I estimate it should take about 8 hours to make all this happen, provided we don’t get lost or something else happens to

us.” Kaleb said with one of his adventurous voice.

John smiled and said theatrically, “It sounds like a fantastic way to spend the first day searching for the elusive Green Maaaaaaann!” and waved his hands in the air.

“Have fun with it John, but when we find him you will be singing another tune!” Kaleb stated with confidence.



Chambers Lake

