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High Plains Library District
CommUNITY

MARCH 2026

**BIG
Announcement**

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ReadCon Guest Leigha Huggins

Leigha Huggins is our second [ReadCon](#) guest interview, and, folks, this is a fun one.

Between talk of creativity, typewriters, and having multiple pallets of books delivered to her house, Leigha has some great inspiration to share for others, whether they be readers, aspiring writers, or writers in the thick of their 27th novel.

We'll start with Leigha's bio, then move into a Q&A:

*Leigha Huggins is an author, creative collaborator, and lifelong daydreamer whose work explores imagination, connection, and intentional living. She has authored nine books—including children's picture books, guided journals, and a craft book—and co-created Lolly Rose Dolls, an intentional doll line designed to inspire creativity and meaningful connection. Leigha's creative philosophy is rooted in curiosity and inspired action. She believes that showing up—especially before feeling fully ready—can open unexpected doors and invite possibility. Much like her collaborative project *Imagine a World: Full of Wonder* features artwork from 26 illustrators around the world, celebrating diverse perspectives and the power of shared storytelling.*

Leigha considers herself an "accidental author," guided first by a single sentimental book that opened an unexpected door. She jokes that she was pushed into purpose but holds deep gratitude for the yeses that have helped



shape her path. Having walked the journey herself, Leigha believes our greatest responsibility is to turn back and light the way—helping ignite the journeys of others as they step toward the path ahead of creativity and self-expression.

HPLD: We'll get to your writing shortly, but I was looking at your website, and in addition to writing, you have a lot of other creative projects going, and it sounds like you will sometimes switch between projects when you're feeling creatively blocked. Tell me a little bit about how that works. How does switching projects help keep you motivated?

Leigha Huggins: Switching between projects has become one of my greatest creative tools. When I feel blocked, I've learned it's rarely because I've run out of ideas — it's usually because something needs to move. Creativity, for me, is energetic. If I try to force it to stay in one lane, it can feel stagnant.

When I shift my attention to a different project — maybe an event, a project collaboration, or a community idea — I'm not abandoning the original work. I'm giving it space to breathe. Often, clarity arrives when each project feeds the others.

That movement keeps me motivated because it keeps me curious. It turns creativity into a conversation rather than a task. I've learned to trust that nothing is wasted — everything I explore eventually finds its way back into the work, often in ways I couldn't have planned.

HPLD: I read online that you used to go to an inventors' roundtable? Tell me a little bit about that.

LH: The Inventors' Roundtable was one of the earliest places where I immersed myself in the mindset of possibility. I loved being in a room full of people brave enough to say their ideas out loud — some deeply technical, others wildly imaginative. I was mostly a fly on the wall, listening, absorbing, stretching my thinking.

What fascinated me wasn't just the ideas themselves, but the process: patents, prototypes, attorneys, logistics — all the practical realities that can either ground a dream or overwhelm it. Being exposed to those conversations gave me a real education in what it takes to move something from imagination into form.

While inventing didn't become my formal path, the experience planted important seeds. It taught me creative courage. It taught me how to sit in rooms with people who were further down the road. And most importantly, it helped me learn when and how to speak up — a theme that continued through my time in Toastmasters and later professional experiences. Looking back, it was an early lesson in saying yes to growth before feeling ready.

HPLD: How is the writing side of your life different from some of the other creative endeavors you have taken on, and what elements does writing share with the other aspects of your life?

LH: For me, writing isn't separate from my other creative endeavors — it grows from the same root. Everything I do is about expression, expansion, and intention. I hold a deep belief that when something is created with love, intention, and connection, it always matters — even if we don't see the impact right away. It ripples across time

and space in ways we may never fully know.

Writing lives alongside my other creative expressions because I'm naturally curious. I love to explore new art forms, techniques, and ways of connecting. I'm inspired by learning, and I try to inspire through the full spectrum of my lived experience — my pain, my purpose, my wins, and my failures. Creativity, for me, is an ongoing dance that blends into all

aspects of life (okay maybe not cooking ... ha!).

Writing is where my experiences simmer. Where ideas are refined. Where meaning becomes visible. Other projects may begin as pure expression or community connection, but writing is where those experiences are often distilled into something that can be shared more widely...Fun fact, I often type with my eyes closed so I don't judge my imperfections or mistakes, so I can continue to keep in the flow of expression.

HPLD: I think for a lot of writers, it's the very beginning stage that's the most difficult to get through. Tell me a little bit about how you first started writing more seriously, and if there were major challenges in there, what helped you overcome them?

LH: The beginning was less about skill and more about permission. I had to give myself permission to start before I felt ready, before things were polished, before I knew where



it would lead. One of the biggest challenges was releasing the idea that I needed to know the whole path before taking the first step.

What helped me was reframing writing as exploration instead of performance. I allowed myself to iterate, to experiment, to learn as I went. Working with editors reinforced that mindset — feedback became a collaboration, not a judgment. Over time, I learned that momentum lives in the next small step forward, and that clarity follows action more often than the other way around.

HPLD: I'm seeing on your socials a lot of different events with kids that dovetail with your books. A painting event, a dance event. Tell me about how you come up with these different events and what some of those experiences are like.

LH: For me, these events started as a natural extension of my books — a way to move ideas off the page and into real life. I didn't begin with a polished strategy or a long-term plan. I began by putting ideas into motion and seeing what happened. Painting events, dance experiences, creative gatherings — they were all experiments in connection, curiosity, and presence. I'm now moving into shared events — partnering with an upcoming mommy and me event at Peake Wellness in Greeley, Eleve Dance, and other creators — which allows these ideas to live in community rather than on my shoulders alone. It becomes a shared offering instead of a solo effort. Now I'm playing with co-creation instead of production — contributing my voice, books, and creative energy into spaces that already exist, rather

than always building something from scratch. It feels more sustainable, more aligned, and more expansive. The heart of it stays the same — connection, imagination, presence — but the structure is evolving. I'm learning that growth doesn't always mean doing more; sometimes it means doing things together.

HPLD: *Imagine a World: Full of Wonder* is a children's picture book, and there are 26 different artists who illustrated the different pages. What were the challenges and rewards of working with so many different artists on the same project?

LH: Working with 26 illustrators was both ambitious and deeply rewarding. One of the biggest challenges was coordination — every artist had a different style, schedule, and creative rhythm. This project invited trust. I had to learn how to hold a vision loosely, allowing each illustrator the freedom to bring their full self to the page while trusting that it would all come together as a cohesive whole.

The idea for the book first came to me in a quiet, early-morning, half-dream state — the kind where imagination feels especially vivid. I loved it so much that I started talking about it, and those conversations slowly turned into action. What began as a plan to collaborate with just a few artists grew organically into something much larger and more meaningful.

That process turned the book into a kind of visual conversation — a gathering of people connected by heart, talent, and a shared desire to imagine a more beautiful

APRIL 2026

READCON

**April 24th
5:30-8:30pm**

**LINC Library Innovation Center
501 8th Ave, Greeley**

**Get tickets at
www.mylibrary.us/readcon**

Leigha Huggins **Lisa Zimmerman** **Kristin Koval**

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world. The correspondence itself became one of the most rewarding parts. Being able to connect with artists around the globe, support their creative voices, felt incredibly meaningful, especially after 2020.

Each illustration stands on its own, yet together they form something larger — a world built by many hands and many perspectives. That sense of togetherness is what I'm most proud of. We carried this same collaborative spirit into our newest project, [The Animal World](#), which includes 20 illustrators, four of whom are local to Colorado.

It's a lot of work, but it's work I'm deeply grateful for and proud of. I truly love bringing people together, lifting others up, and creating spaces where creativity, passion, purpose, and intention meet to build something beautiful.

HPLD: Can you tell us about the process of assembling *Imagine a World: Full of Wonder*? Did you have ideas already set and ask illustrators to do specific pages, did you give them the text and tell them to come up with whatever they liked? How did that all work?

LH: The project began as a proposal rooted in connection during a time of profound disconnection. I asked [Heather Lean, my co-author](#), if she wanted to collaborate on creating something that could bring people together creatively. We both had existing relationships with illustrators, and it felt important to bring those relationships forward — because when you grow together, everyone wins, and multiplied wins is how I love to begin.

Rather than assigning specific pages or giving rigid direction, Heather and I approached the project in a very open, collaborative way. We created a list of intentional words — ideas like *love, wonder, togetherness, simplicity and treasures* — and invited each illustrator to choose the word that resonated most with them and interpret it freely. From there, we essentially wrote the book backward: once the artwork was complete, we crafted the text to honor and reflect what the artists had created.

Receiving each illustration was a joy. Matching words to images felt like discovery. In hindsight, I'm especially

proud that the book was made by real people with real talent and real experiences woven into something that is meant to leave a seed of wonder.

HPLD: I see you've been using a typewriter, an IBM Selectric II. Are you using that for writing books, and if so, what's that been like? Are you becoming a fan of typewriters?

LH: I absolutely love my IBM Selectric II. I recently named her Rose, and honestly, she's become such a meaningful part of my creative life.

She was a surprise gift from a neighbor — one of those thoughtful, unexpected gestures that stays with you, and takes on a new story of its own. And yes, I fell in love with her immediately.

Rose now lives in my bedroom on my vanity, and over time we've developed a kind of quiet partnership — a flow built on trust and a nostalgic hum that's easy to get lost in. There's something grounding about her. No bright lights. No distractions. Just the rhythm of keys and the permission to make mistakes. She listens patiently, keeps it real, and gives me space to elaborate, explore, and simply be with my thoughts.

She's brought me so much joy that I've started bringing her out into the world. I've taken Rose to three different events for kids, giving them the chance to type on her and

experience writing in a completely different way. Watching their faces light up — hearing the sounds, feeling the weight of the keys — it turns writing into something tangible and playful. It feels like bringing a little bit of past magic forward.

One of my next daydreams is to have the incredibly talented Averie Parish paint Rose. Averie recently created a beautiful original watercolor for the Glenn Jones Library here in Johnstown and has Parish family roots tied to the founders of our town — something we only discovered when the historical society attended a tea party celebrating her contribution. She also illustrated a page in my newest book, *The Animal World — The Party of Peacocks* — which earned her a Scholastic Golden Key Award. She is so talented, and I would be absolutely honored to have



her add her touch of beauty on my beast of a keyboard someday.

Rose is already helping me bring new stories to life, including a project I'm currently working on with my dear friend and longtime co-author, Heather Lean. We've co-authored four books together, and this next one feels especially close to our hearts — it explores the idea that healing your self-worth is your greatest wealth.

So, in many ways, Rose has become a safe place. She holds space for honesty, curiosity, and imperfection. Together, I know we're going to create some truly beautiful things.

HPLD: I saw on your Instagram what looked like a HUGE pallet of your book, *The Animal World*, set for delivery. For people who don't know, I mean it when I say "HUGE," we're talking a stack of books that could be hollowed out and lived inside of. Does this mean you're getting that giant stack delivered to your house? How do you manage that? What's that like? Exciting? Overwhelming?

LH: When you say *huge*, you truly mean huge. A single pallet is usually around 1000 give or take some — and my very first print run for *Love Lottery* was *three pallets*.

I had absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into. It was exciting, surreal, overwhelming... and honestly, a little terrifying. The amount of work, storage, and sheer space it took up wasn't something I fully understood at the time. But once those pallets arrived, there was no turning back — I had committed, and I was riding the momentum.

That experience quickly taught me that printing books is only half the story. Managing inventory is its own full-time job. I've learned a lot — sometimes the hard way — about storage, cash flow, and pacing yourself as a creator. It hasn't always been the smoothest or smartest business decision, but holding my books in my hands for the first time was truly magical. I felt incredibly proud of myself, and I have now successfully moved through all my 3,000 copies, and at this time, I have no idea if I'll do another gold foil print run. That may be a forever special thing I did for my kickstarters that helped me get started on this path of publishing.

Today, I approach things much more intentionally. I lean toward print-on-demand, where books are printed as they're ordered, so I can focus on the creative work without being buried in boxes. Looking back, if I could do it again, I'd start smaller and slower. Big leaps before you're ready can be exciting, but they can also be exhausting.

So yes — that pallet moment was the start of a bit of an avalanche. But it also became part of my story. And if nothing else, it gave me one very clear takeaway: order what you need, let demand lead the way, and remember that the journey itself is where the real story lives.

HPLD: Tell me a little bit about what you've got planned for [ReadCon 2026](#)!

LH: I'm preparing something for ReadCon that speaks to the curious—work grounded in grace, connection, and possibility. Not because I've arrived, or because I hold all the answers, but because I was invited. And I chose to accept that invitation with intention and courage.

What I'm bringing isn't about arrival; it's about presence. It's about showing up with honesty, and taking courageous action not for recognition, but in the hope that something shared might encourage someone else to write their own words, tell their own story, or recognize a seed of possibility they didn't yet know they were carrying. I believe deeply that when we show up with sincerity and a genuine desire to connect, something meaningful happens. Stories open doors. Conversations invite courage. Even small moments, shared honestly, can remind us that imagination is still alive—and waiting for our participation.

If someone leaves feeling even a little braver, more curious, or more willing to create, then I'll know I brought exactly what I was meant to.

I said yes to this moment because I wanted to stretch myself—to stand in a space that feels both exciting and uncomfortable. Life moves through each of us differently, across ages, stages, and seasons. We can't always reach everyone. But if I can stand on a stage for fifteen minutes and help even one

person feel inspired enough to take action, that is where growth lives. That is where progress begins.

Somewhere along the way, many of us stop measuring possibility by how far we can climb and start measuring it by what we can check off instead. But if you find yourself in the ReadCon conference room, I know something about you: you have a story. You have an idea. You have something quietly taking root. And I believe this—the more time we spend nurturing what activates our truth, our purpose, and our passion, the more grounded and prouder we become. Even when we feel unprepared. Especially then.

So, I hope to offer a moment of encouragement—to remind people to water those roots, and to trust where they might lead.

"I had absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into. It was exciting, surreal, overwhelming... and honestly, a little terrifying."

-Leigha Huggins

A BIG Announcement *and a Little Help*



Over the last year or so, you may have noticed some text that reads “Try Vega Catalog” hovering in our online catalog.

And we’ve now come to the point where the Vega catalog is going to be shifting into the spotlight, becoming the primary catalog for all of HPLD.

Starting April 13th, all links online, all searches, all roads will lead to [Vega](#), and by June, the old catalog, Encore, will be gone.

This is, of course, a good news/bad news thing.

The good news is that Vega should be a better, more functional way to get all your HPLD stuff quickly and

easily. Searching should be a little easier, misspellings should be less of a problem, and you should be able to see lots of different formats contained together (no more seeing 5 different listings for the same book!).

The bad news is that it will be a switch, and switching can be tough.

I'm not immune to the horrors of a switch. When I check my email and SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE at Microsoft has decided to move a bunch of buttons around, I am not a happy camper, though I am A camper because I choose to camp outside the Microsoft offices in the hopes of catching someone and yelling at them. Just a little.

Yes, I've been using Vega, and, yes, it takes some getting used to. But it's time.

Let's talk for a second about switching costs.

Switching costs are a term we sometimes use to describe what it "costs" to switch from one thing to another. For example, if you wanted to abandon your Kindle to get a Kobo eReader instead, there would be costs. The financial costs of rebuilding your digital library, the time costs of learning a new piece of technology, and maybe even some psychological cost because, hey, we all become a little attached to our devices, and maybe you've read some great books on your Kindle.

Sometimes we'll delay an important switch because the switching costs feel too high, and when we hesitate to make the switch, we can end up in a bad relationship with tech.

I think a lot of people have experienced this with an email service at one time or another. You might WANT to switch, but then you start adding up all the accounts you have registered with that address, all the contacts you'd have to repopulate, all the people you'd have to give your new address to, and by the time you total it all up, it can seem like WAY too much to make the switch, so you just stay with your current email service.

And then that service gets slower. You're missing emails. They provide you less storage space. They move stuff around for NO REASON.

Finally, you break down, make the switch, and most times, you think, "Geez, why didn't I do this AGES ago?"

The main thing I want to say about HPLD's switch to the new Vega catalog is that there are switching costs, and for you, library users, there will be some costs as far as learning to use a new thing and figuring out where this and that button has gone.

But the cost of staying, of not switching, is very, very high. Encore, the software we use now, will decay, and it'll be less useful, less quick, and less secure over time.

So as much as the switching cost will sting a bit, it's better

than the swarm of problems that'll come with staying where we are for too long.

To help you with the switch, we put together a little FAQ below. But, please, [write in and ask questions you might have about Vega](#), and we'll do our best to find some answers!

1. What's the major change I'll see after April 13th?

HPLD will be using a new, updated catalog. Things will look a little different, the locations of some buttons and functions will change. However, most of the functionality will be very similar.

2. What will happen to the items I have checked out?

Those will be pushed into the new catalog, no changes in due dates or anything like that, they will still be on your card.

3. What about my requests in Prospector or Interlibrary Loan?

No change, those will carry over to Vega as well.

4. Checkout limits, holds, card types, is all that staying the same?

Yes, all that stuff stays the same. The policies and borrower privileges you have today will be the same after we make the switch.

5. Will my same library card and number still work? Yes, that info will transfer over, you won't need a new card or number.

6. When will I be unable to access the catalog?

The plan is to make the switch starting Sunday evening, 6 pm, April 12th, and the catalog may be down as late as 11 pm on Monday, April 13th. If you have library-related things you need to get done around then, it's best to get them done early Sunday or to plan on waiting until Tuesday.

7. What if I use [the HPLD2Go app](#)?

If you've updated your app since February 4th, 2026, you are all good. If you haven't updated it since then, update it at your earliest convenience. It will connect to Vega after updating. However, the app will look and feel the same, and the way you use it will be unchanged. The app will also be unavailable for library catalog stuff from the evening of Sunday April 11th to late night Monday, April 13th.

8. Will other services, like room reservations, Specialty Checkouts, printing, Libby, Hoopla, stuff like that, will all of that be working on Monday April 12th? Yes, everything outside of the catalog will be up and running that day.

Yes, everything outside of the catalog will be up and running that day.

9. Can I check out books in the library on Monday, April 12th?

Yep! We've got that all worked out.

10. I turned on the feature that tracks my borrowing

history in the old catalog. Will that transfer over to Vega?

Yes. Your history will transfer over, and Vega will continue to track the items you've checked out if you opted into that service. If you haven't, Vega won't start tracking your borrowing history unless you want it to.

11. What about lists I've made in the old catalog?

Those will not transfer, so you'll need to save your lists and make new ones in Vega. We'll have some more guidance on that coming very soon.

12. Why are you changing now?

The old catalog, Encore, debuted in the early-to-mid 2000s, meaning it's about 20 years old now (which, OUCH, how is 2000 over 20 years ago!?). Vega is the newer product from the same company, Innovative Interfaces, Inc., and the company is sunsetting Encore, which had its last serious update in about 2018. To put it in perspective, if we were using the version of Windows that came out at the same time as Encore, we'd be using Windows Vista today. It's the right time. Vega has been in use by libraries outside of HPLD for about 5 years now, so we're very confident that it's a good option, bugs have been worked out, and we can reach out for help from other libraries if we need it. We also don't want to wait so long that we are forced to change over to Vega at some point that might be very inconvenient or difficult to manage.

13. Is this just a graphics upgrade, a snazzier-looking catalog?

No, this is actually a more functional catalog that should

make it easier to do some of the things we've been wanting to do. For example, Vega is able to catalog Hoopla materials and show your Hoopla checkouts alongside the physical items you check out at the library, making it a little easier to keep track of everything on your plate. You'll also notice there are new items displayed on Vega's home page, which makes browsing a little more fun. Oh, and Vega is a LOT better on a mobile device than Encore, so it'll be a lot easier to take care of library business when you're on your phone.

14. Can I start using Vega now?

Yes, please do! If you go to our regular catalog, you'll see the text "Try Vega Catalog" at the top. You can put items on hold, search the catalog, and do the kinds of things you do now while also getting acquainted with Vega.

15. If I hate Vega, can I keep using Encore?

Vega will be the default in-use on our website and so on starting April 13th, and Encore will be completely gone starting in June. So you could continue to use the old catalog for a short period. However, my librarian-y advice is to start using Vega now so that when the time comes, you're ready.

16. What if I have questions about how to use Vega? You can [contact us](#), you can always walk into a branch and get help, and if you think you might need a longer session where you can sit down with a staff member, you might try a [Book-a-Librarian appointment](#).

Also, you can [ask us questions at this link](#), and we'll try and get to them in next month's newsletter!

READ All Year Long

Challenge yourself to read 20 books in 12 months with the Adults Read On program and earn prizes along the way! Adults (16+) can participate by picking up a paper log at any branch, by downloading the Beanstack Tracker App and following the instructions, or by visiting highplains.beanstack.org/reader365. Redeem prizes at your local HPLD location, after you've read 5, 10, and 20 books! For more details, check out www.MyLibrary.us/aro.

Book No.	Title
1	
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7	
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HPLD Friends & Foundation logo and highplains Library District logo.

Cult Movie Vault:

Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You

You know how someone will say, “There are two types of people,” and then they tell you about two opposite kinds of people? “There are people who spend, and there are people who save.” Or, “There are librarians who write newsletters, and there are people who live happy, fulfilled lives and don’t watch terrible movies and inflict them on others.”

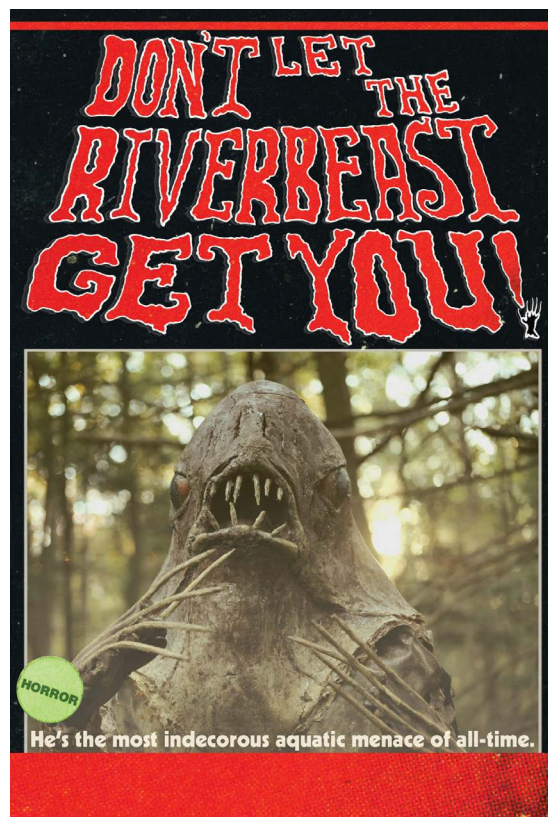
I always thought it would be funny to launch into “There are two types of people,” and then to just leave it there, dangling.

Wouldn’t that be the best? You’re at a party, you chat with a stranger for a moment, then you say, “You know, there are two types of people,” and then sip a drink and walk away.

So here we go: There are two types of movies that are so bad they’re good.

Will we come back to finish the sentence, tell you the two types of good-bad movies?

To find out, you’ll just have to read this edition of HPLD’s Cult Movie Vault, learn a little bit about Matt Farley and the motion picture *Don’t Let The Riverbeast Get You*.



...
[Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You](#) opens with a *Masterpiece Theater* type of thing, a man seated in an armchair. This man, who, take it from someone who is similarly afflicted, could've used a quick round of nose hair trimming before a close-up, tells us, the viewers, that the movie we're about to see has "scenes of shocking riverbeast action." And so, on advice of legal counsel, the filmmakers have added a warning system to the movie: Whenever the riverbeast is about to appear, the screen will flash red twice.

This sort of gimmick is mostly absent from movies ever since [William Castle](#) died, and we're worse for it. Sure, you can see a movie in 4D today, but that'll never compare to a skeleton flying through the theater on a wire, thank you very much.

Our main character, Neil, is coming back to his hometown, and, almost right away, we learn three things about Neil:

1. He was a tutor, and he was the best tutor in the game. Tutoring is a big deal in this town, there's a whole hierarchy of tutors that everyone seems to know, and

there might even be a secret cabal of overlords in charge of tutoring. I kind of picture it like a bunch of weird, robed monks who decree who should be tutored in what and when, and they probably make these decisions by unraveling a knitted sweater and laying out all the yarn on the floor in order to interpret “what the cardigan is trying to tell us.”

2. Neil was engaged to be married to the beautiful Emmaline, who is now engaged to a different man, a total jerk named Danny, who we KNOW is a total jerk because he just helps himself to potato salad at a wedding before anyone has been invited to eat. This is not how weddings work, Danny. Attending a wedding is like getting on one of those haunted rides at a carnival: You get in the little car, you’re strapped in, and you go where the car takes you, and you pretend like you’re having a good time even though it seems a little underwhelming and an awful lot like the haunted ride you went on at a different carnival last year.

3. Neil was run out of town, disgraced, because he claimed to have seen a “riverbeast” living just outside of town near, well, the river. This riverbeast is a cryptid, sort of like Bigfoot merged with the Creature from the Black Lagoon...maybe a little Power Rangers costume department mixed in there, too.

But Neil is back, and he’s going to reclaim his life by

A. Returning to tutoring

B. Winning back his ex fiancé, Emmaline

C. Proving, once and for all, that the riverbeast is real.



Neil starts by getting a job tutoring Allie Stone, daughter of Frank Stone, a granite slab of a man who is known as an excellent athlete, though the sport(s) he played are kept vague. In one scene, he’s playing basketball. In another, hockey. And in a third, horseshoes, which I wasn’t aware was a professional sport, but of course [there’s a professional league, and, of course, its big tournament is in Wausau, Wisconsin.](#)

Allie isn’t doing so hot in school, but now that she’s got the best tutor to ever, uh, toot, she’s going to prove to the world that she IS smart.

Neil also begins a campaign to win back his former fiancé, Emmaline, which dovetails with his goal of proving that the riverbeast is real. Neil figures that if he can prove the riverbeast is real, he’ll be vindicated, and then love will blossom once again.

So, Neil walks into a phone booth, picks up the phone,

and says, “Operator? Can you please connect me with Ito Hootkins? Yeah, that’s right, Ito Hootkins, the big game hunter.”

Riverbeast is FULL of this kind of weirdly expository dialog, a hallmark of a bad movie, including bad Hallmark movies.

My favorite recurring piece of expository dialog in *Riverbeast* is in reference to Emmaline’s new fiancé’s son, Bradley, who is always, ALWAYS introduced as “Bradley, Danny’s son from another marriage.”

We are told, no less than 5 times, by no fewer than 3 characters, that Bradley is “Danny’s son from another marriage.”

I’m sure, in the universe of the film, that if Bradley has a nametag taped to his desk at school, it must say, “Bradley, Danny’s son from another marriage.”

Another expository oddity, there’s a reporter, Sparky Watts, who seems obsessed with writing stories about Neil. Apparently, it’s a big headline when a disgraced tutor returns to town and reignites his hunt for riverbeast truth.

I mean, can you imagine? If you opened up your local newspaper and the top story was that a really good tutor was back in town, and he was continuing his search for a mythical beast?

I can only assume Sparky Watts came from the same journalism school as the newspaper writer from *Tango & Cash*, who

wrote frequent headlines about the duo, including, “Tango Breaks Drug Pipeline, One Million In Cocaine Seized,” and “Tango and Cash arrested for Murder,” and “Cops Tango and Cash to Stand Trial For Drug Deal Murder,” and “GUILTY! Tango And Cash Get Eighteen Months,” and “Heroes Again...Tango & Cash Back on the Force.”

Sorry, I think I may have accidentally spoiled the plot to *Tango & Cash* for you. But don’t worry, it’s not a movie that’s about its plot, its about the chemistry between Kurt Russell, a buttoned-down Sylvester Stallone, and a battle van.

Let’s make this quick: Ito Hootkins, Sparky Watts, plus a couple others, are all killed by the riverbeast. Neil is accused of the crimes and put in jail, but he’s released once NEW people are killed during the time he’s locked up, proving he’s not the killer.

Justice is served!

There's a confrontation between our remaining characters and the riverbeast, and let me tell you, I was MEGA excited when my brain, slow as it is, put together that we've been talking about this muscle man athlete this whole time, and the reason we've talked about him so much is because he is going to wrestle the riverbeast into submission.

Checkov's gun? Nay, Frank Stone's GUNS. As in huge biceps. Hidden in plain sight throughout the movie until, bam, it's time to break 'em out.

Now, I have to give you a spoiler warning because I want to tell you about my absolute favorite thing in the movie. It's one of the funnier gags I've ever seen, so if you think *Riverbeast* sounds like your kind of movie, stop reading now! But do promise to come back to this later. And click a bunch of links and maybe get your friends to [sign up for this newsletter](#). In fact, do that first, then [go watch Riverbeast](#), THEN come back and finish this article. And use your local library at all steps in between.



Wow, for someone who spent 2 hours watching *Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You*, then another hour or so writing a review of it, I have some pretty strong beliefs about how you should spend your time.

Okay, here we go:

Frank Stone is killed while struggling with the riverbeast, however the group ultimately triumphs, and we cut to a short time later for the unveiling of a statue carved in Frank's memory.

I'm sitting at home, watching this movie, 3-4 popcorn buckets in, and as the characters talk about unveiling this Frank Stone statue, I'm seeing what appears to be a full-size statue underneath a sheet.



And I'm wondering how they're going to make a full-size statue of a guy in this movie. I mean, it's a low budget feature, they don't have life-size statue money.

And then they unveil the statue. Which is clearly Frank Stone actor Kevin McGee with a load of silver paint covering his clothes and skin. Genius. 10/10.

~

To really understand *Riverbeast*, we have to talk about its driving force, Matt Farley, who wrote and produced the movie, and he plays Neil to boot.

Matt Farley has had an absolutely fascinating career.

Farley, early on, was a prolific songwriter. During one year of college, he wrote a full-length album every day, a feat he repeated a little later in 2006.

But even with all that material, making it as a musician isn't easy. Farley left CDs everywhere and did everything he could to publicize his music, including taking gigs driving people to the airport so he could play his music during the drive, exposing the passengers to it. Farley eventually discovered he could upload music to CD Baby, a mid-2000s service that would distribute music digitally or on CD, pressing copies on-demand.

In doing this, Farley discovered that his songs with silly titles were a lot more popular than his other songs, and he figured people were typing funny keywords into music sites and checking out what came up.

So, he started writing and recording songs that he thought might make for popular searches, and he combined this practice with his tremendous output, cranking out up to 100 songs per day at his peak. He's written songs about a variety of things, some of his most popular being bathroom-related, which he credits a lot of success to because kids will often ask Alexa or similar devices for songs about poop or toilets or farts, and when they do, they often get a Matt Farley jam.

Farley has used memes for inspiration, for example, his song "[Used to Be a Pizza Hut](#)," which is all about how buildings that used to be Pizza Huts still mostly look like Pizza Huts.

Farley also made albums for all 50 states, identifying cities in each state and making a song for each.

Yes, this means he's done an album for Colorado which

features songs such as "Fort Collins Forever," "Westminster Awesome Song!," "Northglenn Is The Subject of This Excellent Song," "Erie is a Colorado Town," "Winter Park Needs a Song This Great," and, naturally, [Great Song for Greeley](#), which includes shoutouts to City Hall, Guggenheim Hall, UNC, and an urging on to support the local economy.

In 2008, Farley made \$3,000 from downloads and streams of his music.

In 2012, \$24,000.

In 2018, \$65,000.

And by 2020, Farley was making \$200,000 annually from streams and downloads of his songs. And whenever he saves up enough money, he makes a movie.

Now, this might sound amazing, like the best passive income stream ever, like Farley beat the system.

But I'm not so sure that Farley beat the system so much as he worked really, super hard.

To give you some context, The Beatles recorded something like 200 songs.

Prince, who was notoriously prolific, recorded and released somewhere between 500 and 1,000 songs, and there may be thousands more in the vault at Paisley Park.

Matt Farley has released more than 26,000 songs.

Now, I don't know that I'm ready to toss out my copies of *Revolver*, *Purple Rain*, and, of course, the Batman soundtrack, featuring "Batdance," I won't claim to love Farley's music on the level of those artists, but the guy WORKS.

~

Here's what I like about *Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You*: It feels a LOT like a movie you'd make in your backyard with your dad's video camera, the camera your dad INSISTED wasn't a toy, but, like, yes it was.

It's got that same feel, but unlike the Batman movie I made with some childhood friends, *Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You* does have a coherent plot, it does have characters you mostly understand, and it does look and sound like a real movie.

The actors in *Riverbeast* reappear in most of Farley's movies, and it adds to that feeling, those weekend afternoons, fooling around with a video camera.

When we were kids, we didn't have stars, we didn't have auditions. We came up with a story, and we filmed our friends.

There's just something about that vibe, and it's captured perfectly in *Riverbeast*. It's incredibly wholesome and also a little wild at the same time, like *The Adventures of Pete and Pete*. Yes? No? *Adventures of Pete and Pete*? Anyone?

Even though *Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You* is made by adults, it can take you back to the feeling of being a kid again, the good parts of being a kid, the parts where you just did stuff because it was fun.

~

You've waited long enough, so let's talk about the two kinds of good/bad movies.

One type is movies that are bad but do not KNOW they are bad. These are your Neil Breen films, your *The Rooms*, possibly the first [Birdemic](#).

The other type is movies that are bad, and they KNOW they are bad. Your [Sharknado](#)s, anything made by

Asylum, and your [Troma movies](#) might fit in here, too.

Don't Let The Riverbeast Get You is a film that doesn't live at either pole. Or, maybe it lives at both. Or between.

I think Matt Farley knows that repeatedly reminding the viewer that Bradley is Danny's son from another marriage is a funny thing to do (and if I ever meet

someone named Bradley from here forward, I know that, in my head, I'll be saying, "Ah, Bradley, Danny's son from another marriage.").

I have to believe that the giant, silver statue made with makeup and the direction "stand very still," is something that Matt Farley knows is comical.

On the other hand, I'm not sure whether he's doing these things completely on purpose, or whether there are happy accidents in here, or...what?

Is Matt Farley a genius? An accidental genius? Or...what? I can't really say. But what I can say is that if Matt Farley gets to spend a good chunk of his time making fun movies with his buddies, even if he's not a cinematic genius, he's definitely got life figured out.



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