

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer has been a widely cherished Christmas character for generations, but have you heard of Mothman the Red-Eyed Cryptid? Quite the opposite of the adorable doe-eyed reindeer, Mothman is a human-sized, black mothlike creature with bird wings and glowing red eyes. He suffers from a reputation of causing accidents, and the unlucky few who catch a glimpse of his shadowy figure are certain that disaster lurks just around the corner. However, on Christmas Eve, when Rudolph opts for an impromptu poolside vacation, what is Santa to do but ask “Mothman, with your eyes so bright, won’t you guide my sleigh tonight?” Paying homage to “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,” Shaffer cleverly borrows the reindeer’s renowned jingle to infuse some West Virginia folklore into the Christmas season. Ironically, the climax of the story flounders as “there was no big disaster, not a single thing went wrong,” and the story’s conclusion is neat and swift, as Mothman’s unanticipated success leaves no story left to tell. Illustrations are stylized with bold black coloring and black outlines. Back matter contains a guide for parents, teachers, and librarians providing the answers to questions young readers are likely to ask about this lesser-known cryptid.

VERDICT: A quirk holiday story with appeal for early elementary-aged readers curious about legendary creatures.