

## About the Tales:

From Bill Russo, the author of *The Creature From the Bridgewater Triangle*, comes new tales from the 200 square mile area that is sometimes called 'America's Bermuda Triangle'. This time the stories are fiction - and yet these yarns come from a place where 'real' and 'unreal' collide and exist in an uneasy truce in the same space.

Four young friends gather at a summer camp near the eerie Hockomock Swamp. They spin a few campfire yarns. The oldest of the group tells a story that could be called *The Cold, Clammy Touch of Death*.

His narrative is derided by his companions so he offers them a far darker scenario when he relates the bizarre life of Jimmy Catfish of the devilish body of disparate waters called Codfresh Lake.

As the last hushed words of the story fade away, more firewood is piled on the campfire and an unforeseen event ratchets the mood of the friends from jocular to tense as they contemplate a new horror - a reanimated warrior from a hundred years ago who wears a string of scalps around his neck and head - some of which are fresh with blood from the newly dead.

Swamp Tales

Horrors from the Hockomock Swamp  
and the Cape Cod Marshes

by **Bill Russo**

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Also by Bill Russo

The Ghosts of Cape Cod

In paperback, E-book And as an audiobook narrated by NPR's Scott R. Pollak

The Creature From the Bridgewater Triangle

Available in both  
Paperback and e-book formats.

It's a book of New England stories, including the account of the author's encounter with a Puckwudgie, as featured on national television and in the award winning documentary, "The Bridgewater Triangle".

Jimmy Catfish – the Beginning and the End

The prequel and backstory to a story first told  
In chapter three of this book.

Crossing the Musical Color Line

Stories of singers and players that the Bill Russo knew or interviewed; some famous, some only known as 'musician's musicians – but all iconic and influential.

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## **Forward:**

The greatest boxing match ever, was not contested in a slick Las Vegas fight room with glitzy ringsiders paying \$2500 a seat; but in a back alley, most likely in a rust belt city, by two unknown combatants - probably with no onlookers.

The most skilled baseball player? He was surely a farm boy in Texas who never traveled more than a hundred miles from his home, but could 'chunk' a fist sized rock 61 feet through the air and knock a fly off a frog's tongue.

So too with stories of the paranormal - Ghost stories, Vampire Tales, and Werewolf Wanderings. The best of these don't come from Hollywood or from television.

The grimmest of yarns come from close to the ground. From trailside cooking fires and bunkroll musings; the scariest narratives are born.

Are they real? Right up front I will tell you they are not! They are merely campfire tales. Keep telling yourself that as you read the yarns from a place where reality, imagination, and the impossible exist at one time in the same place.

I will only repeat again, that the truest yarns are the ones that emanate from the source. When the tales being told, are being iterated in one of the most haunted places in the world, the stories get even icier.

Such is the case with the offerings in this short book. It takes place mostly in the area of the Hockomock Swamp, which is a spooky place that lies within the even scarier, Bridgewater Triangle.

The Bridgewater Triangle is a focus point of some 200 square

miles in Southeastern Massachusetts about half way between Boston and Providence, where thousands of unexplained happenings have mystified residents and researchers for hundreds of years.

The areas of strange activity are centered around the towns of Raynham and Bridgewater, but many weird tales also come from the whole area, stretching down even to the island/peninsula of Cape Cod.

In one of the most credible UFO sightings ever, two respected TV journalists reported seeing a large spacecraft over the Raynham Dog Track.

Bigfoot, Middlefoot and even Littlefoot sightings are as common as Little League baseball fields, in the towns of The Bridgewater Triangle.

Cannibalistic monster dogs with glowing red eyes and sharp, long fangs have been spotted dining on local farmers' stock. A 40 ton rock, unearthed at low tide in a salty river turned out to be the prehistoric equivalent of a graffiti wall. Thousands of ancient scrawlings on it, of undetermined meanings have boggled the brains of men and women of science for over a hundred years.

One man was walking his dog on a midnight trek when he met a squat, hairy swamp creature (probably a Puckwudgie) who spoke to him; begging him to 'come here'. The gentleman refused the chance of chatting with the pleading bushy being, and in so doing, most likely saved his life - according to those who claim to know the power of such demons.

Ancient extinct dinosaurs with the ability of flight; (pterodactyls) reportedly still fly in the spirited air of the vast, uncharted Hockomock Swamp. The most reputable witness to such a featherless flyer, was a Norton, Massachusetts Police Sergeant, who besieged with so many questions, eventually declined any further comment on the matter.

Serpents, or snakes, nearly as big around as telephone poles, are seen with some regularity. Ghostly lights sometimes illuminate whole sections of trees in the thick forests that surround tiny kettle ponds.

Spectral illuminations, on occasion, shine far above 'The High Tees' - a swath of land running from Boston to Providence, hosting the high tension wires of the Electric companies. There are those who say that this verdant strip is a superhighway for all manner of odd creatures traveling back and forth from Lizzie Borden's home in Fall River, to Boston and Providence.

The stories in this work, come from four Counselors of a Summer Camp deep inside the Hockomock where the trees and the rocks are the same as they were hundreds of years ago. On a three day training mission before the official start of the season, they were seated around a smoky fire; doing what people have done ever since fire was first captured and corralled by a group of round stones: sharing campfire tales.

(Author's Note: These tales make no claims of authenticity, though many are based on local myths and legends.)





Part of the Hockomock Swamp

In their words, here are the Tales From The Swamp:

## **Chapter One: The Campfire**

The first narrator is a teenager named Bill Ricci.....

“The best stories are told, not on Halloween night, but during warm evenings in early July, under the stars around a smoldering camp-fire. Six months before the new century began, I was seated with three companions at just such a fire.

We had cooked and eaten our 'Campers Stew' and were hunkered down, cross legged around the coals swapping tales. The sun had set. To the West, billowy clouds were dyed a delicate crimson by the remains of the twilight. A gentle wind swirled the smoke from the cooking fire in lazy circles around us, keeping us happily free of flying pests such as mosquitoes, gnats and midges.

Mist from a tiny kettle pond, less than 30 yards distant, was transported on occasion by the breeze to caress our faces with a spritz of cool, spring fed water.

It was one week before the beginning of the 1999 season of Summer Camp. At 15, I was the youngest of the Counselors and by far the least experienced. I did have the advantage of having spent parts of the last four summers as a paying customer of Camp Wild River. This year, having been selected as a Counselor in Training; I would spend the entire season at camp and be paid for it too.

I knew the 200 acres of woodland that was home to the camp as

well as most of the Senior Counselors and I could hold my own in any sport. My Dad was short, but I had picked up some height genes from my Mom's side and was already close to six feet tall. My weight hadn't caught up to my height, being only 165; but I was wiry and fast and had won most of my matches as a member of the High School's Freshman Wrestling team.

As part of our job training, we were camping out in the open for three nights. There were three groups of four counselors each. My quartet was Delta - group four. My three mates were Bobby Butterfield, who was 18 and a senior in high school; Freddy Simpson who was a 21 year old college student; and Mr. Markens, a 28 year old history teacher.

After we finished our delicious stew, the talk turned to the spooky area that we lived in - a part of Massachusetts called 'The Bridgewater Triangle'."

## **The Campfire Stories**

"There's no more haunted place in the United States," said Freddy. "When my Dad was a Counselor here 25 years ago, he saw the Red Eyed Dogs. Walking with two friends near the old iron works just before dawn, over by the dam, they heard an unearthly wailing. They watched four huge canines with flashing fangs attack a large stag that was crying from pain and fear. Dad said the monsters were as tall as ponies and they were ravenously eating the unfortunate stag alive. Their eyes glowed redder than the coals of a hard-wood campfire. The eerie light transformed their bloody mouths into gaping Jack-o-Lantern smiles.

So intense were the creatures, at their ravaging, that they took no notice of my Father and his friends. Dad never again saw the horrific dogs. Mainly due to the fact he and his pals decided to never again walk the swamp in the dead of night!"

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The wind picked up and pushed smoke from the smoldering fire into the eyes and up the noses of the campers. Bill Ricci coughed, wiped his eyes with a red bandana and asked the history expert a question.

"What do you think, Mr. Markens? Is the Hockomock Swamp haunted?"

He thought for a moment, lifted his glasses from his nose and slid them back to the top of his head, cleared his throat, and finally spoke.....

"Well, as a teacher and a student of this region, I can tell you that for hundreds of years, this area of Massachusetts has been the

site of thousands of reports of shaggy half-men, half-ape creatures. There have been dozens of accounts of flying birds that seem to be prehistoric pterodactyls. They are extinct flying dinosaurs. Thunder Birds have been spotted. Abnormally large Snakes have been sighted. Snakes, or serpents I should say, as big around as telephone poles! For myself, I have never seen anything in these woods that I cannot explain."

Bobby Butterfield had been anxious to speak, and jumped in when Markens cleared his throat, a nervous habit the teacher had - akin to some people's frequent injection of 'you know' into almost every sentence they utter.

"I've been a camper and a counselor here for quite a few years you know. I have never seen anything like what you guys are describing, you know. But I will tell you what I did see. And mind you. I have seen it three times you know! It is just before or just after sunset. It happens near Rusty Pond, you know where they used to dump old cars and trucks, and the water has turned a reddish brown."

"Yes we all know where it is Bobby. What did you see?" asked Mr. Markens.

"Glowing trees. Entire trees lit up from the base right to the highest branch. Not lit up like by a light bulb, but lit only with a faint, cold glow. They were not even as bright as a fire fly. They looked like giant versions of those glow sticks that people carry; but not the bright ones, you know. They looked like dim glow sticks that are just short of going out. There would be as many as 40 trees, on either side of the path, shimmering in the darkness with that faint, spectral light."

"I've heard of that phenomenon," remarked the history teacher. "There can be several natural explanations for it."

"Well Mr. Markens, that doesn't make it any less scary, you know," Bobby affirmed coldly.

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It fell to Bill Ricci next, to take up the tales.

"It's my first year as a Junior Counselor but I have been a camper at Wild River for four years. Also, my parents' house is only a few miles away. Our land backs right up to the 'High Tees' - that long swath of land that has the high tension wires that run from Boston to Providence."

"Hey Bill, everybody knows about the 'High Tees'," Bobby Butterfield interjected. "It's a sixty mile green strip that is supposedly used as an expressway by ghosts and creatures that wander from Massachusetts to Rhode Island."

"You are correct Bob. I've never seen anything weird, either in the 'High Tees' or in the area around the Camp. But I know there are plenty of bizarre creatures in the swamp. My uncle and my Father have seen things, but they refuse to go into details. They will only tell me that they have seen and spoken to some people they called 'wild men'."



Entrance to the High Tees in Raynham, Mass.

"Really Bill," an excited Mr. Markens interrupted. "I've never heard this before. Please go on."

"Well, I really don't know much. They simply refuse to tell me any more than I already have told you. My Uncle, walking in the High Tees, has seen a wild man at least twice. He talked to it. The more I asked him about it the less he wanted to discuss it. Finally he said that it was just an old drunk passing through that he spoke with and he made it a closed subject. The same thing happened when I talked to my Father. Clearly, they have seen something - Something that scared them into silence."

"I know your father and his brother a little bit," said the school teacher, "and I don't think there's too much on earth that could scare either one of them. Their spirit and bravery is well known around Southeastern Massachusetts. There's another reason why they will not talk about their experience."

"What could the reason be?" Bill asked.

Mr. Markens thought for a moment, cleared his throat, and moved his glasses back down to his nose before he spoke.

"They are both conservationists. Your Dad and Uncle have been against every building project that's ever been proposed for the Wild River area. Perhaps they fear that if it were known for certain that there are half-wild men living in the swamp; it would bring unwanted publicity that could lead to the capture and destruction of the primitive creatures."

"You could be right about that," I admitted, "The both of them are always rescuing turtles or injured animals and nursing them back



to health before releasing them back into the wild. My Dad always says that the Wild River area should never be developed."

"He's right about that, of course", agreed Mr. Markens, "because the 60,000 acres of swampland around us, act as a Rhode Island-sized sponge. The swamp swabs up excess rain and moisture from storms and stores it, so that we never experience flooding or flood damage in our towns. If there's too much development, the sponge won't be big enough to stop the torrents of water during hurricanes and such. Massachusetts could literally sink into the Atlantic Ocean!"

The moon was more than half full and cast a decent amount of light on our camping spot. Mr. Markens threw some more wood on the fire while Freddy Simpson placed an old aluminum coffee pot on a patch of hot coals.

## **Chapter Two: The Iron Works**

"If we are going to be sharing some more ghost stories, I'd like a cup of hot coffee," Freddy said after setting the pot down. "Mr. Markens, you're the history guy. How about telling us a story about this place from back in the day?"

"Well Freddy, I am pretty much of a skeptic about this area that is called 'The Bridgewater Triangle', but there is one scary story that took place not 200 yards from where we are, over a hundred years ago.

As you guys know, there was an iron works right here where we are, in Southeastern, Massachusetts. It was the one of the first in the nation. The melting furnace was first lit around 1700 and ran non-stop for over 200 years.



Leonard Ironworks memorial site in Raynham

Back around 1850, the man who had managed the iron works for more than 20 years died suddenly in his house, which stood very near to the spot of our campfire.

His name was John Alderson and he was a very successful businessman, which is to say that he greatly underpaid his workers and skimmed on everything in a never ending quest for higher profits.

Now gentlemen, let the record show that there was nothing extraordinary about his death. It was the natural death of a man who had been given the biblical three score and ten years. A person who had chosen to continue working right up to his last breath. In fact, his foreman was working with him when he died.

They were looking at plans for the construction of a steeple for a new Methodist Church in the town of Plymouth.

With the victim laid out on his own bed, the Doctor and the foreman were speaking about the funeral arrangements and other details surrounding the death.

"Well Doctor. We were figuring out what it was going to cost us to fabricate this new Plymouth job, when all of a sudden Mr. Alderson's head just jerked upwards. His eyes bulged and he tried to breathe, but wasn't able to. Then he collapsed. I saddled up a horse and came and got you."

"You did the right thing Mr. Phipps. It certainly looks like age just caught up with old Alderson. He could have had a bad heart. I wouldn't know because he never came in to the office for medical advice. I don't believe he thought much of medicine. He certainly was slow in paying the bills every time I had to patch up any of your men who got hurt on the job."

"It was nothing personal Doc. He just hated spending money. The old guy was just plain cheap. He squeezed us on everything. We had to make our tools last twice as long as they should. We had to save every piece of scrap metal from every job and put it in a big 'boneyard' out behind the works. Then, when we'd get a job, Alderson would make me go out and search the scrap to see how much of it would be of use in the new job."

"Well I guess that makes sense Phipps. Why buy new stock if you have old stock you can use?"

"It makes sense only on the surface Doc. I would sometimes have to spend a whole day out in the boneyard piecing together junk scraps that we call 'drops', to make a beam! Most of the buildings in the Commonwealth have main beams that were cobbled together with old junk scraps. There's no telling when a serious accident could happen. The State House in Boston could fall down tomorrow because of the shoddy materials we used when we built it."

"Well it does sound pretty bad when you phrase it that way Phipps. At any rate, I will be back in the morning to take care of the body and finish making my report. By the way, someone has to stay with the body."

"If you mean me Doc, sitting up with the dead is usually left up to a family member or a loved one."

"Mr. Phipps you are correct. As far as I know, old Alderson had no family and nobody he loved; and certainly nobody who loved him. But it is tradition. Somebody has to sit up with the dead. You do it tonight and I will have some folks from the Iron Works come in to take over for you early in the morning."

The doctor prepared to leave. Slowly he took off his rubber gloves. Phipps watched in fascination as he removed the cold and clammy things that felt like the touch of death.

"Why do my gloves interest you so?"

"We use gloves in our work too, Doctor. In fact, you treated a man recently who was badly burned because he didn't have any gloves."

"Yes, young Walter Smith foolishly was working his cutting torch without his gloves. I told him to always put his gloves on before doing any work with heating elements."

"He didn't have any gloves, Doc. He wore out his pair. When he tried to get new ones from the stockroom, he was told that under Alderson's orders, he could not have a new pair for six more weeks. I told you Alderson shorted us on everything. I can't say that I am sad he's gone. If they give me his job, things will change around here. We might not make as much money, but the men will be safer and happier."

"I am sorry to hear about this, Phipps. I hope you do get to take over his job. Well, I am off now. Will you be okay until about 8:00 A.M.? I will have people in by then to relieve you."

"Yes. Sure. I'll sit up with the dead guy and I'll write up a new estimate for this steeple job in Plymouth. I will make sure that at least this job, will be done right."

The doctor departed and Charles Phipps sat down in one of the two chairs in the small home of the late John Alderson.

"He wasn't just stingy with us at work, he was even cheap with himself," Phipps said aloud. "Look at this dump. He was the head of a business that has hundreds of workers. The company does work all over the Commonwealth and yet the guy lived in a one room house with just two wooden chairs; a small table; a little bit of a couch, and a tiny twin bed. He had a desk, a dresser and a closet full of identical cheap black suits. That's it. That's all that he had.

He glanced casually at the formless, sheeted hulk on the bed opposite him, and began to study the steeple plans by the light of the dim lamp which stood on the rough table.

Still talking aloud, though he was alone in the minuscule dwelling, he said, "Well Alderson, tonight you are in the best mood ever. There's no groaning, no complaining, and you have not once told me that I am wasting the company's money. I have to say that death certainly does become you, you old goat!"

Outside, a black darkness raced in, obliterating the path, the tree line, and even the sky from Phipps' vantage point at a dirty windowsill. In the dim light of the lamp, he found that it was a strain on his eyes to try to do any more work, so he folded up the plans and set his arms down on the bare table to act as a pillow for his head. Before he closed his weary eyes he looked across the room at Alderson. He had worked with the man for more than 20 years and not once did Alderson have a visitor or a friend. He took no holidays and spent every day, including Sundays, working in his office on the second floor of the main building of the iron works.

Out of doors, the wind had picked up and was shearing branches from the sheltering pines and tossing them at the little hovel. With a thud, a freshly severed limb struck the door of the house.

Charles Phipps jerked his head and he realized the noise was just a windswept branch.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed something. By the door, on a frail looking three legged table, was the doctor's bag.

"I wonder if the Doc left any medicine in that case?"

Phipps rose from his chair, rubbed his eyes, and then was delighted to find a nearly full bottle of brandy among the bandages, scissors, scalpels and such. He drank liberally and straight from the bottle. The Doctor certainly wouldn't mind him having the brandy, he assured himself. He was, after all, doing him a great favor by sitting up with the dead.

There was a detective magazine in the Doctor's bag, so Charles Phipps turned up the lamp and began reading. After a time, he looked up from the literature and his eyes fell upon the bed with its silent occupant. He was startled, involuntarily; as if he had for a moment, forgotten the presence of the corpse, and was unpleasantly reminded of it.

Later, he realized that every time he looked up from the magazine, he would peer over at the dead man, and each time, he had a momentary fright; as though he were seeing him 'laid out' for the first time.

The fright was light and instinctive, but he felt angry at himself.

The wind died down to a whisper before evaporating into nothing. There were no hooting owls, no croaking frogs, no buzzing crickets. He realized that utter and deadening silence had cloaked both the house and the night.

Phipps shook himself as if to rid his mind of wild speculations, and went back to his reading. A sudden rogue gust of wind whipped through the window, in which the light in the lamp flickered and went out suddenly. Phipps, cursing softly, groped in

the darkness for matches, burning his fingers on the lamp chimney. He struck a match, relit the lamp, and glancing over at the bed, got a horrible shock.

Alderson's face stared blindly at him, the dead eyes wide and blank, framed in the gnarled gray features. Even as Phipps instinctively shuddered, his reason explained the apparent phenomenon: the sheet that covered the corpse had been carelessly thrown across the face by the Doctor and the sudden puff of wind had simply tossed it aside.

Yet there was something grisly about the thing, something fearsomely suggestive; as if, in the masking darkness, a dead hand had cast aside the sheet, just as if the corpse were about to rise....

Phipps, an imaginative man, shrugged his shoulders at these ghastly thoughts and crossed the room to replace the sheet. The dead eyes seemed to stare malevolently, with an evilness that transcended the dead man in life.

The workings of a vivid imagination, Phipps knew, and he recovered the gray face, shrinking as his hand chanced to touch the cold flesh--slick and clammy, the touch of death. He shuddered with the natural revulsion that the living have for the dead, and went back to his chair and magazine.

"Settle down Charlie," he instructed himself, yawning as the night began to turn towards morning. "I think I'll just lie down on that skimpy little couch over there and get some rest."

"Now I might fall asleep, but I will leave the light burning. It's not because I'm afraid; it's just that it is the custom to leave the lights burning for the dead," he bravely told himself.

He did not want to admit, even to himself, that he realized that he had a deep dislike of the thought of lying in the darkness with the corpse of Alderson.

He dozed, awoke with a start and looked at the sheeted form on the bed. Silence reigned over the house, and outside it was very dark.

The hour was approaching midnight, the worst time of all for a man with a fragile mind. He stared again at the bed where the body lay and found himself more disturbed than ever by the sight of his sheeted former boss.

A bizarre idea formed in his mind, and grew, that beneath the sheet, the mere lifeless body had become a strange, monstrous thing, a hideous, conscious being, that watched him with eyes which burned through the fabric of the cloth. This thought of course; he explained to himself by the legends of vampires, undead ghosts and such. The fears; attributes with which the living have cloaked the dead for countless ages, since primitive man first recognized in death something horrid and apart from life. Man feared death, thought Phipps, and some of this fear of death took hold on the dead so that they, too, were feared. And the sight of the dead

Engendered grisly thoughts, gave rise to dim fears of hereditary memory, lurking back in the dark corners of the brain.

At any rate, that silent, hidden thing was getting on his nerves. He thought of uncovering the face, on the principle that familiarity breeds contempt. The sight of the features, calm and still in death, would banish, he thought, all such wild conjectures as were haunting him in spite of himself. But the thought of those dead eyes staring in the lamplight was intolerable; so at last he blew out the light and lay down. This fear had been stealing upon him so insidiously and gradually that he had not been aware of its growth.

With the extinguishing of the light, however, and the blotting out of the sight of the corpse, things assumed their true character and proportions, and he fell asleep almost instantly, on his lips a faint smile for his previous folly.



He awakened suddenly. How long he had been asleep he did not know. He sat up, his pulse pounding frantically, the cold sweat beading his forehead. He knew instantly where he was, remembered the other occupant of the room. But what had awakened him? A dream - yes, now he remembered - a hideous dream in which the dead man had risen from the bed and stalked stiffly across the room with eyes of fire and a horrid leer frozen on his gray lips. Phipps had seemed to lie motionless, helpless; then as the corpse reached out with a gnarled and horrible hand, he had awakened.

He strained to see something, anything. But the room was all blackness and outside was so dark that no gleam of light came through the window. He reached a shaking hand toward the lamp then recoiled as if from a hidden snake. Sitting here in the dark with a fiendish corpse was bad enough, but he dared not light the lamp, for fear that his reason would be snuffed out like a candle at what he might see.

Horror, stark and unreasoning, had full possession of his soul; he no longer questioned the instinctive fears that rose in him. All those legends he had heard came back to him and brought a belief in them.

Death was a hideous thing, a brain-shattering horror, imbuing lifeless men with a horrid malevolence. Alderson in his life had been simply a cheap and selfish man; now, in death, he was a terror, a monster, a fiend lurking in the shadows of fear, ready to leap on mankind with talons dipped deep in violent insanity.

Phipps sat there, his blood freezing, and fought out his silent battle. Faint glimmerings of reason had begun to touch his fright when a soft, stealthy sound again froze him. He did not recognize it as the whisper of the night wind across the windowsill. His frenzied fancy knew it only as the tread of death and horror. He sprang from the couch then stood undecided. Escape was in his

mind but he was too dazed to even try to formulate a plan of escape. Even his sense of direction was gone. Fear had so stifled his brain, that he was not able to think consciously. The blackness spread in long waves about him and its darkness and void entered into his brain. His motions, such as they were, were instinctive. He seemed shackled with mighty chains and his limbs responded sluggishly. He was in a state of pure panic.

A terrible horror grew up in him and reared its grisly shape, that the dead man was behind him, was sneaking up on him from the rear. He no longer thought of lighting the lamp; he no longer thought of anything. Fear filled his whole being; there was room for nothing else.

He backed slowly away in the darkness, hands behind him, instinctively feeling the way. With a terrific effort he partly shook the clinging mists of horror from him, and, the cold sweat, clammy upon his body, fought to orient himself. He found the bottle and drained the last of the brandy, then hurled the empty container at the wall. It crashed and broke into many pieces.

He could see nothing. But the bed was across the room, in front of him. He was backing away from it. That was where the dead man was lying, according to all rules of nature; if the thing were, as he felt, behind him, then the old tales were true: death did implant in lifeless bodies an unearthly animation. Dead men do walk! Dead men do roam the shadows to work their ghastly and evil will upon the living.

These conclusions he did not reach by any reasoning process; they leaped full-grown into his terror-dazed brain. He worked his way slowly backward, groping, clinging to the thought that the dead man must be in front of him.

Then his hands, which he had been holding behind him, encountered something--something slick, cold and clammy - like the touch of death. A scream shook the echoes, followed by the crash of a falling body.

The next morning the doctor and some of the workers came to the house of death. They found two corpses. John Alderson's sheeted body lay motionless upon the bed, and across the room lay the body of Charles Phipps, next to the rickety three legged table where the Doctor had left his bag and his gloves.

His rubber gloves - slick and clammy to the touch. Like the touch of a hand groping in the dark. A hand of one fleeing from his own fear. Rubber gloves, slick and clammy and cold. Like the touch of death!

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The history teacher, Mr. Markens, stood up as he neared the finish of the story and tried to make it as eerie as possible, but to his chagrin, the boys were not pleased.

"Look Mr. Markens," Freddy Simpson said, "you are camping out in a swamp where Bigfoot is almost as common as complaints about Cape Cod traffic jams and you give us a lame story like that....."

"We appreciate that it's probably a good historical story, but it's not paranormal, it's just lame," Bobby Butterfield added. "Don't you know any good stories?"

"Well guys, like I said, I don't believe in The Bridgewater Triangle. I think that all the stories have explanations. Just like in the story I told you, if you look deep enough you will always find a pair of rubber gloves."

"You don't get it Mr. Markens," Bill Ricci commented. "You don't have to believe it, for it to be a good story. Some of the greatest stories ever written are not credible, but they are interesting. I think you have got better stories in you than that Rubber Gloves story."

"Well Bill," he replied, "Thanks, I guess, for that lukewarm vote of confidence. I do have a really weird paranormal type story. But it didn't happen here. It happened in Cape Cod. Do you guys want to hear it?"

Nobody answered for a minute. Simpson got himself another cup of coffee. Butterfield fetched a few logs and threw a couple on the fire. Markens looked like a little kid that was trying unsuccessfully to get picked for a sandlot baseball game."

Bill Ricci took pity on him..... "Sure, Mr. Markens. We will listen. But jazz it up. Will yah?"

"Okay Bill, here goes. Oh Freddy, is there any more coffee? I'm going to need one. You won't need any. This story will keep you guys awake."

The history teacher, as per his habit, cleared his throat, slid his glasses back into his black hair and finally began. He told the campers of an unfortunate creature named Jimmy Catfish and a Cape Cod lake that none of them had ever heard of, even though their families were frequent Cape Cod visitors.

To this day, the campers are not sure if the lake actually exists and if the story is true, but Markens said that it does exist and he claimed that the story is true. Here is the tale exactly as it was told to the campfire crew.....



Erie Codfresh Lake in Cape Cod – photo by Bill Russo

### **Chapter Three: Codfresh Lake and Jimmy Catfish**

It is hardly possible to describe Codfresh Lake to you; so that you guys sitting by the fire, breathing in the moist summery air, will get the picture of it in your head as I have it in mine.

For Codfresh Lake is like no other body of water that I have ever seen. Some say it was created by the great hurricane of 1937.

Others avow that it never was created at all, but is simply some sort of a cosmic joke. It is only called a lake because there is no word in English for what it really is.

In the middle of Cape Cod sometime in the early 1900s; from Nantucket Sound Northwards, a salt river snaked its tidal way from Dennis Port towards Brewster, then veered sharply West in the direction of Provincetown - but it never got there.

A rogue stream from Harwich, began a trip East at Long Pond and took on girth when it married a rivulet from Hinckley's Pond. The conjoined rivers had a baby when they ran through Seymour Pond, about three miles from Route six. The newly expanded raging fresh-water river set a course for Dennis Port - but it never got there.

The Salt River rushed on to meet the Fresh River combination. The mingle of these entities did not bring forth a marriage of the headwaters; only an uneasy truce that created an odd body of water six miles long and a half mile wide. Divided into three sections; it consisted of a tiny sea of salt water two miles long on the East end; a small fresh-water lake of two miles in length on the West end; and in the middle, was a two mile area of unearthly water that the locals called 'The Brack'.

The three sections of the Codfresh were as different in color as in composition. The salty part was a bright, inviting blue, while at the opposite end of the lake the freshwater section had a brownish/black hue. In the middle; the brack took on the gray pall of a World War Two battleship.

Airplanes generally avoided Codfresh Lake. Some pilots reported feeling queasy as they flew over the motley waters. Other fliers said their engines sputtered as they crossed the Brack.

Codfish were known to swim in the East and Trout basked near the Western shore; but in the middle it was said that strange fish existed; fish that were neither salt nor fresh; but simply

'Brackfish'.

The six miles of land that was filled by the uneasy entrenchment of the salt and fresh rivers, had contained high points and low. It was both forested, and bare, as well as rocky and sandy.

As it was being formed during the wrestling match of the rivers, the Codfresh waters took down trees, hills and hollows. The result was the largest lake on the island of Cape Cod, lying mostly in Harwich but partly in Dennis. Oddly enough, the shape of the lake mirrored the shape of Cape Cod! It looked like a flexed human arm.

During the run of the railroad, Codfresh Lake was accessible. The train tracks ran right by it. After train service was stopped in the 1940s, the body of water could only be reached on foot. The nearest paved road was more than three miles distant. That is the reason you guys never heard of it. Few tourists or even Summer residents have ever seen or heard of the lake.

There was neither electricity nor municipal services in the area and very few homes. Codfresh Lake is, and has always been, a lake of mystery.

In places it is bottomless. Other places the skeletons of the Pine trees that went down when the earth sank, still stand upright so that if the sun shines from the right quarter, and the water is less muddy than usual, a man, peering face downward into its depths, sees, or thinks he sees, down below him the bare top-limbs stretching up like the fingers of drowned men, all coated with the mud and green slime of many years.

In still other places the lake is shallow for long stretches, no deeper than chest high, but dangerous because of the weed growths and the sunken drifts which entangle a swimmer's legs.

The banks of Codfresh are mainly mud. Its West waters are also muddy, being a rich coffee color in the spring and a coppery

yellow in the summer. The trees along its shore are mud colored too; right up to their lower limbs after the spring floods, when the dried sediment covers their trunks with a thick, scruffy-looking coat.

There are stretches of unbroken forest around it, and runs where the rangy pines rise like tombstones above the dead trunks that rot in the soft ooze.

There are long, dismal flats where in the Spring the Leopard Frog spawn cling like patches of white mucus among the weed-stalks, and at night the turtles crawl out to lay batches of perfectly round, white eggs with tough, rubbery shells in the sand.

Codfresh lies there, flat in the bottoms, freezing over in the winter, steaming torridly in the summer, swollen in the spring when the woods have turned a vivid green and the flies and gnats by the millions fill the flooded hollows with their pestilential buzzing, and in the fall, ringed about gloriously with all the colors which the first frost brings - gold of Maple, yellow-russet of Oak, and Red of the Burning Bush.

The countryside around Codfresh Lake is the best game and fish country, natural or artificial, that is left in Massachusetts, Connecticut or Rhode Island today.

In their appointed seasons the duck and the geese flock in by the thousands. Snow white Swans glide on the fresh water to the West, while Seagulls patrol the East. Strange birds swim in "The Brack".

Wild Turkeys range the ridges. By night the bullfrogs, inconceivably big and tremendously vocal, bellow under the banks.

It is a wonderful place for fish - Fluke and Blues abound in the East and there are Trout and Bass in the West. Odd, crusty creatures swim in The Brack.



On every stranded log the huge snapping turtles lie on sunny days in groups of four and six, baking their shells black in the sun, with their little snaky heads raised watchfully, ready to slip noiselessly off at the first sound of oars grating in the row-locks.

But the biggest creatures in Codfresh Lake are the catfish in the Brack! Found only in the lake's gray waters, they are a kind of Catfish seen nowhere else. Their ferocity is unmatched by any fish or mammal save the Homo Sapiens.

They are monstrous creatures, these catfish. They are scaleless, slick things, with dead eyes and poisonous fins, like javelins, and huge whiskers dangling from the sides of their cavernous heads.

Three and four feet long they grow to be, and weigh 50 pounds or more, and they have mouths wide enough to take in a man's foot or a man's fist, and strong enough to break any hook save the strongest, and greedy enough to eat anything, living or dead or putrid, that the horny jaws can master.

They are vile things, and the few locals who fish the Brack, tell wicked tales of them down there. They call them man-eaters, and compare them, in certain of their habits, to sharks.

Jimmy Catfish was one of the few people who lived on the shores of Codfresh Lake. He had been born there to a fisherman and a Native-American woman. Both were long dead.

Jim was deformed and the story that ran around Cape Cod was that his Mother had been frightened by one of the monster Catfish just before giving birth, so that's why the baby was born deformed. There was little support for one born 'different' back in the 1960's, the time of this story.

Jimmy Catfish was considered a human monstrosity, the veritable embodiment of nightmare!

He had the body of a man--a short, stocky sinewy body--but his face was as near to being the face of a great fish as any face could be and still have some trace of humanity.

His skull sloped back so sharply that he could hardly be said to have a forehead at all; his chin slanted off right into nothing. His eyes were small and round with shallow, glazed, pale-yellow pupils, and they were set wide apart in his head, and they were unblinking and staring - like fish eyes. His nose was little more than two slits on an oily face. His mouth was the worst of all. It was the awful maw of a catfish, lipless and almost inconceivably wide, stretching from side to side.

Most cruel of all, when Jimmy became a man, his likeness to a fish increased, for the hair upon his face grew out into two tightly kinked slender pendants that drooped down either side of the mouth like the beards of a fish!

He was often called simply "Catfish", and he answered to it. He knew the waters and the woods of the area better than any other man there; but he mainly kept to himself, tending his vegetable garden, netting the lake, and trapping a little. His neighbors left him to himself.

Indeed, for the most part they had a superstitious fear of him. So he lived alone, with no friends or visitors.

His cabin stood just at the merge of the Brack and the fresh-water. It was a shack of logs, the only human habitation for a few miles in any direction.

Behind it the thick timber marched right up to the edge of his small garden, enclosing it in thick shade except when the sun stood just overhead.

He cooked his food in a primitive fashion, outdoors, over a hole in the soggy earth or upon the rusted red ruin of an old

cookstove, and he drank the brown water of the fresh lake out of a dipper made of a gourd, faring and fending for himself, a master hand at skiff and net, competent with duck gun and fish-spear, yet a creature of affliction and loneliness, part savage, almost amphibious, set apart from his fellows, silent and suspicious.

In front of his cabin jugged out the trunk of a long fallen Maple, lying half in and half out of the water, its top side made sand colored by the sun and worn smooth by the friction of Jimmy's bare webbed feet until it showed countless patterns of tiny scrolled lines, its underside black and rotted, and lapped at unceasingly by little waves like tiny licking tongues.

Its farther end reached deep water. And it was a part of Jimmy Catfish, for no matter how far his fishing and trapping might take him in the daytime, sunset would find him back there, his boat drawn up on the bank, and he on the other end of this log.

From a distance men had seen him there many times, sometimes squatted as motionless as the big turtles that would crawl upon its dipping tip in his absence, sometimes erect and motionless, his misshapen form outlined against the yellow sun, the brown water, and the muddy banks.

If the locals shunned Catfish by day; they feared him by night and avoided him as a plague, dreading even the chance of a casual meeting; for there were ugly stories about Jimmy.

They said that a cry which had been heard just before dusk and just after, skittering across the darkened waters, was his calling cry to the big catfish, and at his bidding they came trooping in, and that in their company he swam in the Brack on moonlight nights - diving with them, even feeding with them on whatever manner of unclean things they fed.

The cry had been heard many times, that much was certain, and it was certain also that the big fish were noticeably thick at

the mouth of Catfish's slough (the wet muddy area near the fallen Maple log).

Here Jimmy Catfish had lived, and here he was going to die. The Jamison brothers were going to kill him, and this day in late summer was to be the time of the killing.

The two Jamisons, Jake and Joel, were coming in their dugout to do it!

This murder had been a long time in the making. The Jamisons had to brew their hate over a slow fire for months before it reached the pitch of action.

They were poor, jobless locals. Poor in everything; repute, and worldly goods and standing - a pair of fever-ridden squatters who lived on whiskey and tobacco when they could get it and on fish and cornbread when they couldn't.

The feud itself was of months' standing. Meeting Catfish one day, in the spring on the spindly scaffolding of the skiff landing at Walnut Log, and being themselves far overtaken in liquor and with a bogus alcoholic substitute for courage, the brothers had accused him, wantonly and without proof, of running their trout-line and stripping it of the hooked catch--an unforgivable sin among Cape Cod fishermen.

Seeing that he bore this accusation in silence, only eyeing them steadfastly, they had been emboldened then to slap his face, whereupon he turned and gave them both the beating of their lives - bloodying their noses and bruising their lips with hard blows against their front teeth, and finally leaving them, mauled and prone, in the dirt.

The whole thing had been planned out amply. They were going to kill him on his log at sundown. There would be no witnesses to see it, no retribution to follow after it. The very ease of the undertaking made them forget even their inborn fear of

Catfish's house.

For more than an hour they had been coming from their shack across a deeply indented arm of the lake.

Their dugout, fashioned by fire and axe and knife, moved through the water as noiselessly as a swimming mallard, leaving behind it a long, wavy trail on the stilled waters.

Jake, the better oarsman, sat flat in the stern of the round-bottomed craft, paddling with quick, splashless strokes, Joel, the better shot, was squatted forward. There was a heavy, rusted duck gun between his knees.

Though their spying upon the victim had made them certain he would not be about the shore for hours, a doubled sense of caution led them to hug closely to the weedy banks. They slid along the shore like shadows, moving so swiftly and in such silence that the watchful mud turtles barely turned their snaky heads as they passed.

So, a full hour before the time, they came slipping around the mouth of the slough and made for a natural ambush point which Catfish had left within a stone's throw of his cabin.

Where the slough's flow joined deeper water a partly uprooted tree was stretched, prone from shore, at the top still thick and green with leaves that drew nourishment from the earth in which the half uncovered roots yet held, and twined about with an exuberance of trumpet vines. All about was a huddle of drift--last year's cornstalks, shredded strips of bark, chunks of rotted weed, all the silt and refuse of a quiet eddy.

Straight into this green clump glided the dugout and swung, broadside on, against the protecting trunk of the tree, hidden from the inner side by the intervening curtains of rank growth, just as the Jamisons had intended it should be hidden when days before in their scouting they marked this masked place of waiting and

included it, then and there, in the scope of their plans.

There had been no hitch or mishap. No one had been abroad in the late afternoon to mark their movements--and in a little while Catfish ought to be due. Jake's woodman's eye followed the downward swing of the sun speculatively.

The shadows, thrown shoreward, lengthened and slithered on the small ripples. The small noises of the day died out; the small noises of the coming night began to multiply.

The green-bodied flies went away and big mosquitoes with speckled gray legs, came to take the places of the flies.

The sleepy lake sucked at the mud banks with small mouthing sounds, as though it found the taste of the raw mud agreeable.

Bats began to flit back and forth, above the tops of the trees. A pudgy muskrat, swimming with head up, was moved to sidle off briskly as he met a water snake, so fat and swollen that it looked almost like a legless lizard as it moved along the surface of the water in a series of slow torpid S's. Directly above the head of either of the waiting assassins a compact little swarm of 'biting' midges hung, holding to a sort of kite-shaped formation.

A little more time passed and Catfish came out of the woods at the back, walking swiftly, with a sack over his shoulder.

For a few seconds he stood in the clearing then the black inside of the cabin swallowed him up.

By now the sun was almost down. Only the red nub of it showed above the timber line across the lake, and the shadows lay inland a long way. Out beyond, the big cats were stirring, and the great smacking sounds as their twisting bodies leaped clear and fell back in the water, came shoreward in a chorus.

But the two brothers, in their green cover, gave heed to

nothing except the one thing upon which their hearts were set and their nerves tensed. Joel gently shoved his gun barrels across the log, cuddling the stock to his shoulder and slipping two fingers caressingly back and forth upon the triggers. Jake held the narrow dugout steady by a gripping a fist full of the trumpet vines.

A little wait and then the finish came!

Jimmy Catfish emerged from the cabin door and came down the narrow footpath to the water and out upon the water on his log.

He was barefooted and bareheaded, his cotton shirt open down the front to show his neck and chest, his dungarees held about his waist by a twisted tow rope.

His broad feet, with their webbed prehensile toes outspread, gripped the polished curve of the log as he moved along its swaying, dipping surface until he came to its outer end, and stood there erect, his chest filling, his chinless face lifted up, and something of the master and of dominion in his poise.

And then--his eye caught what another's eyes might have missed - the round, twin ends of the gun barrels, the fixed gleam of Joel's eyes, aimed at him through the green! In that swift passage of time, too swift almost to be measured by seconds, realization flashed all through him, and he threw his head still higher and opened wide his shapeless trap of a mouth, and out across the lake he sent skittering and rolling his cry.

And in his cry, was the laugh of a loon and the croaking bellow of a frog, and the bay of a hound, all the compounded night noises of the lake. And in it, too, was a farewell, and a defiance, and an appeal!

The heavy roar of the duck gun overpowered all the other sounds on the lake!

At twenty yards the double charge tore the throat out of Catfish. He came down, face forward, upon the log and clung there, his trunk twisting in spasms, his legs twitching and kicking like the legs of a speared frog; his shoulders hunching and lifting spasmodically as the life ran out of him all in one swift coursing flow.

His head canted up between the heaving shoulders, his eyes looked full on the staring face of his murderer, and then the blood came out of his mouth, and Catfish, in death still as much fish as man, slid, flopping, head first, off the end of the log, and sank, face downward slowly, his limbs all extended out.

One after another a string of big bubbles came up to burst in the middle of a widening reddish stain on the gray water.

The brothers watched this, held by the horror of the thing they had done, and the cranky dugout, having been tipped far over by the recoil of the gun, took water steadily across its gunwale; and now there was a sudden stroke from below upon its careening bottom and it went over and they were in the lake.

But shore was only twenty feet away, the trunk of the uprooted tree only five. Joel, still holding fast to his shot gun, made for the log, gaining it with one stroke. He threw his free arm over it and clung there, treading water, as he shook his eyes free.

Something gripped him--some great, sinewy, unseen thing gripped him fast by the thigh, crushing down on his flesh!

He uttered no cry, but his eyes popped out, and his mouth set in a square shape of agony, and his fingers gripped into the bark of the tree like grapples. He was pulled down and down, by steady jerks, not rapidly but steadily, so steadily, and as he went his fingernails tore four little white strips in the tree-bark. His mouth went under, next his popping eyes, then his erect hair, and finally his clawing, clutching hand, and that was the end of him.



Jake's fate was harder still, for he lived longer--long enough to see Joel's finish. He saw it through the water that ran down his face, and with a great surge of his whole body, he literally flung himself across the log and jerked his legs up high into the air to save them. He flung himself too far, though, for his face and chest hit the water on the far side.

And out of this water rose the head of a great fish, with the lake slime of years on its flat, black head, its whiskers bristling, its fixed eyes alight. Its boney jaws closed and clamped in the front of Jake's flannel shirt. His hand struck out wildly and was speared on a poisoned fin, and, unlike Joel, he went from sight with a great yell, and a whirling and churning of the water that made the cornstalks circle on the edges of a small whirlpool.

But the whirlpool soon thinned away, into widening rings of ripples, and the corn stalks quit circling and became still again, and only the multiplying night noises sounded about the mouth of the slough.

The bodies of all three came ashore on the same day near the same place. Except for the gaping gunshot wound where the neck met the chest, Jimmy Catfish's body was unmarked.

But the bodies of the two Jamisons were so marred and mauled that the locals buried them together on the bank without ever knowing which might be Jake's and which might be Joel's.

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"That's the sad tale of Jimmy Catfish and Cape Cod's strangest lake."

"Okay Mr. Markens, you did pretty good. That was a lot better than your other story," said Freddy Simpson.

"I have a question for you Mr. Markens," Bill Ricci said.

"Go ahead Bill. What is it?"

"Well, it seems like the catfish of Codfresh Lake will eat anything that comes their way. Why didn't they eat those three bodies?"

Mr. Markens scratched a spot behind his ear for a few seconds as he was thinking. He slid his glasses on his nose and said.....

"I'm pretty sure that they did not eat Jimmy Catfish because it looks like he was, if not part catfish, at least their leader. I think he was a kind of a God to them, so they naturally would not consume him. As to the the Jamison brothers, I think it's probably fair to say that even cannibalistic catfish don't eat 'skunks'!"

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"Now I got a story, guys," Freddy said. "And this comes from Joe Santini, the farmer who owns the land next to Wild River Camp. He's a conservationist guy and he owns about 500 pristine acres."

"I know him," Bill said, "His gardens are like magic. He grows pumpkins the size of Mini Coopers."

"And tomatoes as big as basketballs," added Bobby Butterfield.

"I have seen them you know. One summer, I did some work for him and he gave me a few of those tomatoes and some corn, you know. My Mother said she had never had vegetables half as good as those."

"Like a lot of young guys in this town, I also have worked on his farm" Freddy continued, "and on one hot August afternoon when it was too hot to be in the fields, we sat with cold drinks by the side of a pond, and talked about the Hockomock Swamp."

"I told you things about the swamp that day that fewer than a

hundred people in the whole world know...."

## **Chapter Four: Rip and Joe**

The group fell silent as the new voice intruded into the circle. A tall, gaunt figure pushed his way through the dense brush and walked towards the fire.

He was an older man with a shock of white hair that fell to his shoulders. Holding a thick walking stick in one hand, he hugged a 40 ounce Colt 45 Malt liquor with the other.

He was trailed by a large dog with rounded ears that stood straight up and a rough shaggy coat. His eyes glowed reddish orange. The dog, or perhaps it was a wolf, padded along on huge paws as big as men's winter boots.

The man was Joe Santini himself. The wolf-dog was his canine friend Rip. Santini is a legend among those who know the Hockomock Swamp. An expert farmer, hunter, trapper and fisherman as well as a successful inventor, his skills had brought him considerable wealth and the means to transform his acreage into a wildlife preserve and sanctuary.

As a taxidermist, his expertise was unmatched and he was able to demand, and get, exorbitant fees for his work. He was just as likely, however, to charge no fee at all - if he mounted a fish or a bird for a friend or for one of the many young men in the area who worked part time for him.

"I hope you guys don't mind, but Rip and I have been listening to you for some time. Freddy, when you started to tell about some of the things that I told you, I thought perhaps everyone would like to hear these things directly from me," Santini said with a confident smile.

Joe sat down at the fire and Rip squeezed in beside him. Bill Ricci heaved a half-dozen good sized logs into the pit and in a moment, a roaring blaze illuminated the faces of the man and the dog. Rip's eyes had that scary 'lightbulb look', common to dogs and creatures of the night. But the wolf-dog's eyes glowed blood red, instead of the customary yellow. All four of the campers noticed, but nobody mentioned it.

"I'll share you a story about the Hockomock Swamp," Joe said, as he took a long pull from his 40 ounce Colt 45 Malt Liquor. He took something from a shirt pocket and flipped it to his canine buddy who snatched it from the air in a flash. When Rip's huge, powerful jaws clamped down on whatever bit of food Joe threw; the noise cracked the silence of the night like the slamming of a car door.

The four young men who had been joined by Santini and Rip, huddled closer to the fire. Nobody said anything, but they all felt that the temperature had fallen about ten degrees in the short space of a minute since Santini had unexpectedly dropped in.

"I've seen things in this swamp. I have seen things that nobody else has seen," Joe said. "Mr. Markens, you told a story about a guy getting scared to death near the old iron works and you thought that it was just rubber gloves that frightened him to death. Maybe it was; but I can tell you true, that there are haunts here. Lots of them and they're real enough to scare even old fearless Rip.

"I will have to admit that I have never seen any Bigfoot creatures or even pint sized Littlefoot creatures like that man in the Bridgewater Triangle movie saw. But I've been in their lairs and I've seen the clumps of hair left behind by them."

"What do you mean clumps of hair?" asked Bill Ricci.

"Just that Billy. Over on the other side of my fishing lake, I saw areas where a few rough lean-tos were built from fallen logs and

branches. When I checked inside there were piles of hair everywhere. I picked up one huge clump that was as big enough to fill a trash can. I stretched out some of the hairs to see how long they were. Many of them were over five feet! I think that they probably shedded it in the summer to keep cool. It almost looked like they had saved it to use for pillows.

“Behind the lean-tos was a foot high mound of fish bones. I had noticed that fish were getting very scarce in the pond and I figured that a group of otters must have moved in. You know one lone otter will eat between five and ten pounds of fish a day. A group of ‘em can clean out a fish pond in a single season. So I circled the pond looking to get those damn otters. I had my rifle and my revolver with me. But there were no otters. The creatures that left those piles of hair? I will give you twenty to one odds that they were Bigfoot people.

“I wouldn’t mind meeting up with Bigfoot. There are lots of creatures in these woods far scarier than Bigfoot and the story I am going to tell you now is about two of them.

“As you four guys know, I own hundreds of acres of woodland and swampland here at the edge of the Hockomock Swamp. I bought my first section over 40 years ago and I have been buying up land ever since, whenever I get the opportunity to do so.

I have kept the property in its natural shape except for the house, my garden and a few outbuildings. I almost never leave my land. I’m mostly self sufficient what with my garden, my hunting, a flock of chickens and such. What I can’t grow or hunt, I have delivered if I need it.

At the north corner of my property is the remains of that old ironworks that Mr. Markens told you about. On the southern edge running to the west side is the state highway. Have any of you ever seen the western boundary.”

“I’ve seen it,” said Bill Ricci. There was a forest fire or

something there. It's mostly grown back now but you can still see a lot of the hulks of the burned trees."

"There was a fire there Bill and that's part of the story. At one time on that western edge there was a two story cottage. I lived in the home after I bought the property from a sick old Indian. He was named Marcus 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves of the Wampanoag tribe.

Back then, there were only a few full time residents in the area. People used to come here for the summer. There were no homes close to my land. A few miles away, at 'The Nip', there were hundreds of seasonal properties.

I was not quite the recluse back then that I am now. I used to party with and swim with a group of summer friends. We would have picnics, pitch horse shoes, and ply the waters with rowboats, canoes and sailboats.

On Labor Day every year we'd stack old wooden barrels 20 or 30 high and have a giant farewell bonfire and cookout. The nights would be getting cool and the heat from those bonfires was intense. People would come from as far away as Brockton, Fall River and Providence to see the blaze.

By the next afternoon, everyone was gone and I would be all alone in my large cottage at the edge of my pond. Over the years I grew to love my solitude even more than the party time with friends; so gradually I stopped going to the summer gatherings and I remained at home by myself.

The dwelling that I lived in, was on the property when I bought it. At one time, it may have belonged to one of the owners of the ironworks. A cottage in name only, it was a lovely, well built structure of several thousand square feet.

The upper floor had six good sized rooms. Originally they were all used as bedrooms. Because I lived by myself, I converted two

of the rooms. One I made into an office and the other to a library for my book collection.

The downstairs was one huge uninterrupted great room. It was a combination area which served as living room, dining room, and kitchen. Since the home was far from the street where the telephone and electric wires ran, there was no electricity and no phone.

That suited me fine. I had candles glowing in the Great Room and a roaring fire was always blazing in the king sized hearth. The fireplace was fashioned not from puny brick, but bulky granite blocks. Much of the exterior of the house was stone, giving the cottage the appearance of a medieval castle.

A winding staircase of ornamental metal, led from the Great Room to the second floor. From the kitchen area there was a second stairwell, this one of wood that also went to the second floor bedrooms and then continued up to a commodious attic that had eight smaller rooms, each with a tiny triangular window.

Those quarters may have been used by the servants or perhaps as guest rooms. Antique chamber pots were under each bed – more than one of which contained the desiccated remains of what the product was intended to contain.

My sleeping room was on the right hand side of the house, facing the pond. The room afforded me the first rays of the morning sun so that it was warm on a chilly morning and shaded on a hot afternoon or early evening.

Though it was far too big for me, I did love the house.

In the autumn mornings before the onset of the cold weather, I would load my fishing gear into an old flat bottomed dory and push off from my little dock and row to a weather whitened log that had fallen long ago in a Northeast Gale. After it toppled, the old Maple Tree found a new life as a foot bridge, spanning some

20 yards in a gentle incline from the shore into the clear water of the pond.

The naked arms of that sun-bleached log dipped underwater and made comfortable little homes for the plump trout that swam there in great quantities. In less than an hour I was almost always able to fill my creel. On the rare occasions the trout did not respond to whatever I was offering on my hooks, the pickerel were only too eager to volunteer for breakfast duty. I accepted them willingly enough, though they required a bit more preparation than the trout.

Shortly after I moved in, I noticed the doors of a bulkhead in the backyard, almost entirely obscured by vines and other scrub growth. A few minutes hacking with my scythe soon exposed the handles.

Perspiring from my bit of exercise I was pleasantly surprised by a blast of frosty air when I freed the heavy wooden doors. They led to an underground larder that was nearly as cold as a refrigerator, even in the summertime.

The larder was soon stocked with fruits and vegetables from my garden. The cooling properties were so good that I could even safely store my fish for a few days, without the bother of salting or drying them.

What with taking care of the property, my gardens, and my journals – which I kept every day – my life in the swamp was busy and fulfilling.

And yet, as time went by, I found that I was not sleeping as well as before. I would awaken in the middle of the night and listen. I was not sure what I was listening for, but I felt certain that I needed to be listening for something.”

Joe Santini paused and took a deep breath. He put his hand on his forehead as if he were checking to see if he had a fever. He



patted Rip and gave the great wolf-dog another scrap of something from his pocket and then he continued.....

“Now you gentlemen sitting around the campfire - Mr. Markens, Bill, Freddie, and Bobby; please understand that I love being alone. I am not afraid of solitude. I have half a dozen rifles and pistols and I know how to use them. In order for this story to make any sense, you have to believe me when I say that I love being by myself. I am not afraid of being alone!

But I wasn't sleeping well. As I told you, almost every night I would wake up after dreaming that I needed to wake up to listen for something. My dream never revealed what I was supposed to be listening for.

As each new sunset came and darkness swallowed my house, there was never enough light inside. I stacked up wood six feet high in my hearth. Bundling banks of candles together, I had three dozen burning at a time. It was still too dark.

My spacious and breezy bedroom seemed to become tiny. The air which once flowed freely from my two large windows had slowed down and stopped. The wind offered not even a whisper of a breeze. The smoke from the candles went straight up to the ceiling as there was not even a tiny draft to make the fumes wiggle away from the wicks.

My own breath also threatened to cease. My throat seemed to be paralyzed. I could not swallow. I was unable to force my lungs to compress. Even my tongue had been stilled by some unseen and evil power.

Every morning at two or three a.m. when I awoke, I was forced to scramble down the spiral metal stairs to the Great Room. There, I could breathe again. My tongue was loosed and began to wag once more. I was able to swallow the mouthful of phlegm that I had been choking on. My heart stopped racing and my respiration slowed to normal.

The next day, before sunset I dragged my bed down the ornamental stairs and set it up near the dining table. Feeling hungry for the first time in a week, I went to the larder and selected a pepper, an onion, one tomato, a head of lettuce, some cheese and some fish. I cooked and ate a double portion of food.

Exhausted, I laid down on the bed and fell asleep just as the grandfather clock standing guard by the dining table, chimed eight times. Twelve hours later, as the clock again chimed eight times, I awoke.

I opened my mouth and peered into a mirror to see if my tongue was moving. It was. I was breathing normally. My universe had righted itself and everything was fine.

Retiring at the stroke of nine the next evening, I found myself awake when the grandfather clock clanged eleven bells. I made a sandwich and had a glass of milk. I tried to read in the light of fourteen candles. I was cold. Though the day had been warm, I was shivering.

The night was still. The birds had ceased chattering. The drone of the crickets, cicadas, bullfrogs, and the cries of the wolves and coyotes stopped. It got even colder. There was not a single sound except for some slight rhythmic vibrations floating through the open window. They seemed to be coming from the nearby boat dock.

I heard the sound of oars being pulled from their locks and placed across the seats of a small boat. I heard the soft thud of a tiny vessel bumping up against the automobile tires that I affixed to the sides of the dock.

Shivering, I rose from my bed and stole over to the cupboard where I had a rifle and two boxes of ammunition. I was frozen both by temperature and fear. To help stop the shaking I went to a closet and took out a heavy black robe and put it on. The long

black garment had an oversized hood which I pulled up until it fully covered my head, leaving only a peering space in front of my watery eyes.

There was a full moon that cursed night and an eerie, frosty light streamed into the house through the windows on all four sides of the Great Room. Outside it was as bright as the morning twilight though the clock lacked only a few more minutes before it would strike twelve loud gongs.

From my stand near the open window I saw two, no three, figures emerge from the boat which turned out not to be a dory as I first thought, but a large dugout canoe fashioned from giant birch trees such as were plentiful in this land 400 years ago.

The unholy trio that departed the dugout ranged in size from massive to diminutive and they traversed the walk-way from the dock to my front door in order of their size.

As they drew within 20 feet of the cottage entrance, I got my first clear look at the leader. He was over seven feet tall but had the stance of a nine footer counting his full war bonnet. Made from eagle feathers, the giant man's headdress displayed a grisly string of scalps – coup taken in battles to the death. Worse yet, one of the scalps was fresh and bloody.

Obviously a once important chief, the fighting man had his face painted in war colors – one side was blood red and the other half of his visage; from the middle of his nose to his ear was painted midnight black. A large scalping knife was clutched in his right hand while his left held what looked to be an amulet made from a tooth – perhaps from a bear.

The second in line was half the size of the leader. Old, shrunken and bent over; he jabbed a walking stick in front of him, poking the ground as he plodded along in the manner of a blind person. He wore no chief's ornaments, being dressed only in ragged dungarees and a much patched denim shirt.

As they neared the knob of my front door I realized that the third shape, the smallest of all, was actually being dragged at the end of a rope by the old shrunken man – although how he had the strength to drag a person I cannot explain.

I realized too, that the third figure was actually not as small as he had seemed. The lack of size was due to the fact that they had folded the body like a pretzel. I said body because I could tell that the unfortunate creature being dragged was dead.

The unholy parade entered into the Great Room, though my door has been locked and barred. Slowly and silently they traipsed to the middle of the room and stopped. They were not fifteen feet away from me. Surely they could see me, I thought.

Fear, by now, had overtaken me. I was frozen by it, unable to move even a finger or a toe. That cowardice probably saved my life - that and the black robe. Due to the voluminous and shapeless draping, I was invisible to the ghostly figures. I appeared to be nothing more than a mound of dirty laundry; a pile of old linens and blankets.

My eyes alone were not welded shut. I found that I could shift my gaze and see the details of my intruders. The first I have already described. He could have been any of the powerful historical legendary native leaders from Massasoit to Geronimo.

The second face, in the light of the full moon, seemed familiar. Full moon. Full moon? Full Moon?

I kept tossing the words around in my mind and then I remembered. Marcus 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves - the man from whom I had obtained the property. He had a face as round as a full moon, and that was how he had acquired his name.

It was him, but for the blindness.

Except that he could no longer see, I was certain that it was 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves returning to kill me.

Why would he want to murder me, you might ask?

I cheated him! He was old and infirm. I remembered too, that his eyesight was failing when I approached him about taking over his land.

I convinced him that his property was worthless and gave him just enough money to leave the Town of Raynham and go live with his tribe on a reservation on Cape Cod.

Immobilized by my shock and fear, I could not look upon the third person - the lifeless lump being hauled by 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves.

"My great, great, grandson, let us go now to the bedroom on the second floor and finish the work we have come for."

It was the massive warrior who spoke. The words flowed from that painted young face. He was speaking to the wizened old man who I cheated and the youth called the ancient one, grandson!

If there had been any doubt at all about the spectral qualities of these intruders; there was no uncertainty after that.

From beneath the folds of my black robe I peered over at the front door which they had left open. I yearned to make a run for it, but still could not move; so I resigned myself to whatever was in store for me. I could not fight. I would be fowl to their hawk.

After the giant spoke, the ghastly parade began inching towards the metal stairs. Creeping along in a halting pace they started to ascend the iron treads, dragging the body along behind.

After what seemed like a full hour they reached the top. The Grandfather Clock by the dining table struck. One chime. A

second. Then no more. It was two hours past midnight.

The wraiths made straight for my bedroom which I had so fortunately abandoned. Angry shouts emanated from upstairs when the specters realized that the sleeping prey they anticipated was not in the room.

Mournfully, the apparitions marched back down the stairs with a rhythmic thumping trailing behind them as the body banged its way from stair to stair.

“It is not right to steal an old man’s land,” moaned the spirit who looked like ‘Full Moon’ Shortsleeves.

The phantoms stopped and I finally did venture to look upon the lifeless, misshapen form that was being dragged. Its throat had been slit. It had been scalped and then crushed double by the great strength of the giant Chief, before being trussed up like meat for an oven.

I glanced at the face of the wretch and my heart stopped for a full second when I saw that the bloody corpse was me!

I remember nothing else of the ordeal. I awoke to rays of sunshine slowly warming the cold stones of the floor of the Great Room where I lay shivering, and grasping my long black robe.

After four or five cups of coffee sweetened with sugar and strengthened with a few ounces of Jack Daniels; I was fairly convinced that the whole matter was nothing but a bad dream.

There was no evidence that I had been attacked. No blood was spattered on the floor or the stairs. The huge chief had not left a knife behind, or even a feather.

I went ahead with a business deal that I had in the works for some time. I was selling off part of the property that I had obtained from the old Indian - a dozen acres across the highway, not

connected to the hundreds of acres of woods and swamp that I am preserving.

A builder offered me a million dollars cash for the 12 acres. They were to be used for the development of several mansions for the rich sports figures who had begun to settle in Southeastern Massachusetts following the Boston Patriots decision to leave the city in favor of the town of Foxboro. Their new football stadium was just a few minutes' drive from my purloined land.

After I closed the sale and banked the cash, I finally felt good enough to move my bed back to my old room on the second floor. Naturally, the very first night back in the room; I had the dream again. And every night from then on, I was haunted by the unholy three. In later variations of the dream, I was still alive even though my throat was slit. Still alive was I - though I had been scalped, had been bent in half, and was being dragged up the metal stairs.

One night as I lay cowering before the apparitions, the bloody trussed up me, spoke to the other me who still had his scalp.

“Joe. We cheated the old man,” he gurgled with bloody bubbles floating from his lips. “We will never be free of the ghosts until you make it right.”

As always, in the morning my liquor-fortified coffee made the dreams, just that – dreams. Bad dreams! That’s all they are, I said.

As I dressed for an appointment with my banker one morning, I reached for my shoe and found that there was something in it.

It was a scalping knife exactly like the one the big Chief wielded. It had apparently been dropped by the towering warrior during the night’s ‘dream’.

I kept my appointment with my banker and told him to find old

Marcus 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves and give him the million dollars.

“Tell him a distant relative died and left him the money. Tell him he won the lottery. I don't care what you say to him. Just give the money to 'Full Moon' Shortsleeves!”

The banker reported back to me within a week saying that he had found the old fellow in the reservation and had awarded him the proceeds of the estate of an overseas uncle he didn't even know he had. The estate amounted to one million dollars in cash.

A month later I had an eye exam with a specialist in Mashpee, in the middle of Cape Cod. As I was waiting to see the doctor, a well dressed old man, with a much younger man – probably his grandson – was leaving the office.

The old man was smiling and chatting about how lucky he was to have had a windfall that gave him the means to have his expensive eye operation. His cataracts were gone and his blindness had left with them. The old gentleman looked familiar. He had a face as round as a full moon.

When the old man and the very tall young man passed by my seat in the waiting room, they paused briefly.

The moon faced man looked at me and said woodenly, “It's not nice to steal an old man's land.” He left the office without another word.

When I went home I took five gallons of gasoline and three bales of hay and spread both through the cottage. I touched a match to a gas soaked clump of hay by the front door and left; not even bothering to look at the expanding inferno.

When I returned the next day, the house had burned to the ground, scattering the stone work over half an acre. The blaze had worked its way to the pond where it burned itself out.



As the last embers of that devastation stopped smoking and cooled, so went the horrors of my nightmares – if dreams they were!

Since that day, I have tried to live an honest life in business and I am happy to say that I have not had a single visit from the moon faced old man and his giant grandfather. I also have not seen visions of myself with a slit throat and a missing scalp.”

Joe Santini ran his hand through his long white hair, as if checking to see that it was still there. He plucked something from his pocket and tossed it to Rip whose eyes shone blood red. The wolf-dog opened his ratchet jaws and quickly clamped down on the morsel with a sound like an axe thudding into a chopping block

“That’s a pretty scary story Joe,” said Bobby Butterworth. The others nodded in agreement. “Do you think that it was a dream or did they really come after you?”

Joe didn’t answer. Instead he withdrew something from his shirt and as quick as a flash of lightning he threw the object at a log in front of the fire. A long, sharp knife speared its way into the wood and buried itself halfway up to the hilt.

“It’s a scalping knife!” exclaimed Bill Ricci.

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For a long moment no one spoke. The four camp councilors just stared at the hilt of the blade. At length Rip rose silently from his spot next to Joe Santini and padded his way around the campfire toward the weapon. The great wolf-dog focused his glowing eyes on the shiny shape buried in the seasoned log. Quickly, he opened his toothy mouth and clamped down on the handle. Shrugging his bulky skull, the beast ripped the blade from the

wood.

With a throaty grunt, Rip walked behind Mr. Markens. The handle of the weapon was held tightly in his jaws with the blade pointing out straight like the sharpened horn of a charging bull.

The night seemed to get darker and frostier as the hundred pound hulk casually eased his way along the outer edge of the circle. Mr. Markens shuddered as Rip walked by. The other three young men shifted uncomfortably in the same manner when the wolf-dog went by them before settling in next to Santini.

Joe reached into his shirt pocket and drew out another treat which he tossed to Rip. When the faithful dog opened his mouth to catch it, the knife dropped to the ground and Santini put it away.

“You fellas are pretty quiet all of a sudden,” Joe smiled. “Do you want to turn in or would you like to hear another story?”

“I’m up for another one,” Bobby said. “I’m not scared by this you know.”

“I am very interested in hearing another yarn,” agreed Mr. Markens. The young history teacher was beginning to feel that he could learn more in a few hours from the white haired old man sitting at the campfire, than he had picked up in his four years at Boston University.

“What about you, young Bill Ricci?” asked Santini. “Would you care to hear another adventure?”

“Yes sir Joe,” replied Bill picking up the fire blackened coffee pot

from the coals and offering a fresh cup to everyone. An experienced trail cook, though only 15 years old, he poured carefully so that the grounds would stay in the bottom of the pot.

One after another he filled the mugs of the men huddled around the smoky campfire.

“Only half way up for me,” chuckled Joe Santini as he reached into a vest pocket and plucked out a silver flask; using part of the contents to give a little extra strength to his coffee. “Mr. Markens? Care for some?”

“No thanks Joe. The coffee itself is plenty strong enough for me.”

“How bout you Freddy? You turned 21 this year.”

“No Joe, Mr. Markens is right. This horrible coffee that Bill Ricci brews up is more than strong enough for me.”

“Hey, I’m over here you know Joe, did you forget about me,” said Bobby Butterworth, rising from a crouch and extending his cup towards Santini.

“You’re 18 Bobby. You got a while to wait before you can add anything to your coffee,” Joe replied.

With the fire replenished by the addition of several more stout logs, the group of five plus the wolf-dog settled in for another tale.

## **Chapter 5: Taunton State Hospital for the Criminally Insane**

Stifling a yawn, Joe Santini spoke.....

“We are sitting not ten miles away from one of the scariest and cruelest places in the entire U.S. It’s called the Taunton State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. In its 150 year history there were thousands of weird and unexplained happenings. Though I am going to tell you about one of the strangest things that ever happened there, I wish to rest my voice a bit. Does anyone else know anything about this cursed medical facility?”

“At the risk of boring you guys, I can give you some facts about the complex,” said the history teacher, Mr. Merkens. “There were some 40 buildings spread over 150 acres. It was a miniature city, complete with a theater, a ballroom, a dairy farm, and a complete torture chamber in the cellar of the main building.



Taunton State Hospital

“In 1854 when it was built, mental hospitals treated the patients much more harshly than they would be today. Many of the unfortunates were permanently chained to the walls of the basement. Ice picks were used to give lobotomies to the more troublesome inmates. Electric shocks were employed to erase memories; but all too often the shocks erased the whole brain, leaving nothing but human vegetables.

“As to the paranormal, the hospital has more than its share of ghosts, werewolves, shadow-men, wall-walkers, visitations by the devil, and satanic human sacrifices. The bizarre happenings were not confined just to the hospital, but also to the surrounding woods,” said Markens.

“My Mom worked at in the clerical department at Taunton State in the 1980’s” interjected Bill Ricci, the 15 year old Junior Counselor, “and she told me a few things that she noticed.”

“What did she tell you Bill?” asked Mr. Markens.

“She never saw any ghosts or the guy who supposedly walks on the walls and ceilings. She said the worst thing that she experienced was the howling of the patients during full moons.

“She left work shortly after eight p.m. every night and as she was getting in her car she would hear occasional howls and moans from the patients. On the nights of a full moon the volume of noise would increase by a thousand per cent. The screaming and the whining of the tortured residents became overwhelming.

“She said that her workspace was free of weird happenings, but that some of her co-workers experienced ‘cold spots’. A small area of their office would suddenly get very cold. They said that it was usually a small area covering about three or four feet of floor space. The temperature would drop ten degrees or more in the cold spot without warning and with no reasonable explanation. One of her friends believed that the cold spots were caused by ghosts and that their spirits are contained in the frosty bubble of cold air.

“That’s all I know about Taunton State Hospital,” Bill concluded. “Hey Joe! We’re ready for that story about the strangest thing that ever happened in Taunton State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

Joe did not answer. The three friends called his name. Softly at first - “Joe. Joe. Joe.” Then Louder. “JOE. JOE. JOE. JOE!”

Joe Santini still did not answer. His eyes closed, he sat there before the fire, as still as a boulder.

“I think he’s asleep,” said Bobby.

“I think he’s drunk,” added Freddy.

“I think he’s dead,” Bill offered.

“I’m going to shake him and wake him up”, said Mr. Markens.

“Do it.” Freddy responded. “Because I really want to hear the story.”

Mr. Markens reached over to touch Joe but before he could get within a foot of him, Rip sprang to his feet and growled a deep and loud warning to stay away.

Mr. Markens, Freddy, Bobby, and Bill warily backed off and went to their tents.

“Let’s try to get some sleep now,” said Mr. Markens, “and we’ll check on Joe Santini in the morning.”

The end

'Swamp Tales' is written by Bill Russo and in part draws upon themes imagined in the late 1800s and early 1900s by people like Fergus Truslow, Robert Howard and Irvin S. Cobb

Other books by Bill Russo include  
The Creature From the Bridgewater Triangle  
The Ghosts of Cape Cod  
Crossing the Musical Color Line

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