

## Protecting the Swamp

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A large portion of Ireland is wetland. The bogs, swamps, and marshes are home to many towns but none are quite the same as Violi's swamp. The town of Violi is located in the Northern tip of Ireland and is populated by less than 100 people. While it's not very crowded, Violi is known to be the headquarters of a creature named Acheron. Acheron is a large *thing*. It's hard to describe what he is because nobody who has encountered him, has lived to report back what they saw. Sometimes he's called a monster, or a bogman, or a spawn of the devil, but nobody *really* knows what he is.

What the people of Violi and really all of Ireland do know, is that Acheron is angry, and he has been for over 100 years. If he sees you inside his swamps past sunset, you are now in his territory and are a subject to him. People will run home from work just to avoid being out at night. The roads are empty at 5 pm everyday and the townspeople stay in for the night.

The last victim of Acheron was Finn Joseph, a young man out on a fishing trip. His boat got stuck in the weeds of the swamp. He was too far out for the townspeople to hear his scream for help. The next morning some other fisherman found his boat tipped upside down with no trace of him left. The town was horrified. This monster has run their town for decades and they are tired of losing their young to the territorial creature in the bogs.

A council meeting was called on October 12, 1963 for Violi and all of the neighboring towns that share the swamps in which Acheron roams. Councilman Ronan Neil called the meeting and walked into the townhouse at noon with intent for this to be

the beginning of the end of Acheron. The sun shines through the windows of the log building and the swamp nearby leaves the air thick and full of mosquitoes.

“Let’s not beat around the bush, we need to kill this monster,” Councilman Neil opens. “My daughter walks past those swamps everyday and I will not wait until she is murdered to kill Acheron, even if it's the last thing I do!”

The small townhouse that is packed shoulder to shoulder, erupts in applause.

“Yes sir,” is echoed throughout the room, with many people volunteering to help.

“Alright, but if we do this we need to be prepared for the consequences. This creature is a skilled assassin and is not afraid of death,” Victor, an older member of the town, calls out over the crowd.

“Correct, Victor. This is a dangerous job and only those prepared to lose their lives will be a part of this mission. I have a barn full of pitchforks and swords we can use for weapons.”

“I’ll sew some armor,” Abigail, the leader of the women’s sewing group offers.

“And I’ve got extra guns in my shed,” Patrick, Victor's son, suggests. The town continues to plan the execution of Acheron for four and half more hours until it is time for curfew and before the sun sets. The seed of hope was planted in Violi that day and the longing for freedom from Acheron was on the whole town’s mind.

Over the next three weeks, preparations took place. Members of the town pulled together as many weapons as they could and began training for the battle. From the outside it may look like they were preparing for war; captains were assigned and groups formed based on specialty. Everyone participated. It may have seemed optional based on the councilman’s speech, but it really wasn’t. If you were a member of Violi, it was

your duty to protect it. Most of the women created suits of armor for the soldiers, while a few others decided to be part of the battalion. School was canceled and only the most necessary jobs, like farmers, continued their work during this period. The town of Violi lost almost 50 people to Acheron throughout his reign of the land; this battle was personal.

November 2nd was the set day to finalize the plans for the mission. A wintry breeze stung the air, as people walked into Violi's small town square. Men, women, and children alike marched into town bundled in layers of garments protecting them from the harsh weather. Councilman Neil stood at the front of the townhouse looking over the people gathered. The word of Violi's plan got out and many people from other towns joined in. People whose relatives were murdered, or those who moved away from Violi to get away from Acheron, gathered with the town's members as part of the battalion. No longer were they filling just the townhouse, but the whole main street was filled with angry Irishmen looking for the blood of Acheron. The loud cheers and chants of the crowd carried on for almost 10 minutes before the Councilman got all of their attention.

"Violi, are you ready?" Councilman Neil shouts out to the crowd.

Another loud applause takes off. Weapons are thrust into the air and many faces in the crowd turn red as they scream for the cause. Once again, it takes many minutes to control the crowd again.

The Councilman continues, "This fight is for revenge. It is for Nora Gretta, Aiden Flynn, Connor O'Neil, Finn Joseph and every person who was caught by this murderous monster." Heads nod in agreement and tears form in many of the eyes staring back at

their leader. Councilman Neil goes on, "This town has been under the thumb of Acheron for over 100 years and we cannot allow this to continue. We *will* go to the bog tonight, and we *will* kill Acheron."

After the last statement was spoken, there was no chance of controlling the crowds again. The passion roared through the town as they charged out the door in a chorus of shouts. Piles of guns, swords, pitchforks and makeshift weapons were divided and handed out to every member of the crowd. Nobody was staying in tonight. Children wobbled down the pebble road with axes and swords swaying them from side to side due to the weight.

There was only a slight plan of attack. The strongest and most fit were in the front, while children and the weakest were in the back. They were going to lure the creature out from the swamp by banging their pots and pans. Those with guns were ordered to shoot anything that moves and try to wound the monster before he gets close in range. Then once Acheron was close enough, the rest of the crowd would smother him with their weapons and outnumber him immensely. Once he was injured enough, they would rope him up and drag him out to the boats. They then would sail out to the deep sea, maybe to the coast of England, and drop the tied up monster in the ocean where he would struggle in the ropes until he eventually dies.

While this plan was relatively solid, it was completely ignored almost immediately when the crowd took off in sprints towards the swamps. Who cares about luring him out of the swamp? They were going to take Acheron down in his own turf. Guns were shot off in every direction and loud screams and wails filled the normally quiet swamp. Fishermen climbed into boats and people waded into the swamp to search for the

monster. The sun was beginning to set and Acheron would be arriving in Violi any minute now.

The unruly battalion tore apart the swamp for another 20 minutes before they saw any sign of Acheron. The sun had just dropped under the horizon line and the wind whipped through the evening night with a violent intent, when they started to see the whole swamp shake. Trees rattle and sway at a fast pace and every animal in sight hides immediately in the closest thing they find. The thick, muddy water of the swamp begins to ripple and large waves start splashing onto the shore. Those who are in boats skillfully counteract the waves and focus on the movement of the water. Even those who know this swamp like the back of their hand, don't seem to notice the large shadows that appear under the water. Only the children see Acheron's first sign of appearance, as they start crying and begging to go home.

"No!" Councilman Neil orders. "We are warriors who *will* fight until we die" The townspeople shout in agreement and rage. The kids were handed more weapons and were told to fight the monster if they saw him. They weren't warriors, only children.

The Earth under them starts to crumble and large cracks form in the dry land. Loud rumbles sound and the crowd tenses and gets into fighting positions. At least ten giant tentacles shoot up through the swamp and slam down onto the water and shoreline. Many people are knocked off their feet and whipped by the heavy limbs of Acheron. The screams begin, and they only get louder. The guns shoot consistently, but they are of no use. There is no slowing down of the tentacles as the body of Acheron emerges from the water. His head, or rather *heads* reveals pits of darkness for eyes, and sharp teeth and large openings for mouths. His necks snap back and forth

analyzing the crowds. His growls are low and loud and chills fill some of the townspeople. Most of them however, came here for a reason, and weren't going to leave until they fulfill it.

People charge him from left and right. Weapons are thrown at Acheron from every direction and warcries fill the swamp as over 100 people attack the creature at once. It's a bloodbath. Not for Acheron, but for the people of Violi. He effortlessly knocks people out cold with the whip of his tentacles, and twists his long limbs around others draining all of the air out of their bodies until they fall limp in his grasp. After they're dead, he simply drops them into the swamp and moves onto the next person. He's brutal and shows no sign of pain or remorse as one by one, death by death, he lowers the town's population. It only takes a few minutes before  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the town's bodies lay in the muddy swamp, slowly sinking into the thick water.

Those who are left were those who were in the back. The weak and the children. Tears and fear cover their faces as they stumble back away from Acheron's swamp. Children are scooped up and the remainder of Violi retreat as fast as they can back to the town. However, they were weak, and slow. They had no chance. Acheron finishes his job, destroying the entire town. Not a single soul makes it back into town.

Silence occurs. Acheron's peace is restored in the swamp as a beautiful stillness arises. The only movement of the swamp is from him and he hears no noise from what used to be the town of Violi. The dark night and cold air comforts him as he returns back to home, a cove off of the swamp located under the town. More specifically, under the train station. He no longer hears the loud horn of the train or the rattling of the tracks that disrupt his way of life. No longer does his neighboring creatures have to hide under

sturdy surfaces to dodge land crumbling down from the roof of the cove. No longer does he have to pull up creatures from rocks that planted them into the sediment. No longer does he have to protect the creatures of the swamp from the humans.