

Commentary on “An Occurrence in the Striped Patch”

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An associate¹ of mine — let’s call him JW Meek — dials me up from time to time and tells me his dreams. One of these dreams was “An Occurrence in the Striped Patch.” Ten years ago, when I was still a wage-earning employee of the Louisiana State Park Service (as well as a side-gig chauffeur for an erratic Oil & Gas baron — my Uncle Theophilus), a man by the name of Charles Marcellus² invited me and JW Meek to venture north to the town of Fouke, Arkansas, in pursuit of that Boggy Creek Creature made so infamous on film by auteur Charles B. Pierce³. Of course, my Papaw Wainwright advised against the trip, and, only a mere three years before his tragic passing from a fall in the kitchen, explicated the stupidity of this cryptozoological search: *There ain’t no goddamned Boggy Creek Creature*, Papaw said to me. *Y’all’re some fools!*

But brash Youth, as a poet once proclaimed⁴, shall not be deterred by the strictures of the Old, and so the three of us — Charles, JW, and myself — set out immediately on a two-and-a-half-hour journey to the Fouke Monster Mart, where, upon arrival, we bought a snack — some watermelon, as you may recall — and wandered about the premises for 30 to 45 minutes before at last recognizing the futility of our quest and reluctantly turning back. The whole adventure — I am secure enough now to admit — was a complete failure, as we were

¹ I employ — quite deliberately — the word “associate” instead of “friend,” for as a man at the corner of Broadway and 72nd Street once said to me (and since I didn’t question him then, I won’t start now): *Son, there ain’t no Friends in this life, only Associates: God in His Heavens; that Dollar in your Pocket; and Dragon Ball Z.*

² Charles Marcellus — let the reader understand — is a figment, not of my imagination, but of someone’s above. Therefore, any similarity to a fictitious character, whether in the “Occurrence” or elsewhere is entirely coincidental.

³ If you or an associate hankers after Piercian extravaganza, *The Legend of Boggy Creek; Return to Boggy Creek*; and *Boggy Creek II: And the Legend Continues* are available on YouTube. I have commenced a persuasive letter-writing campaign to Criterion Collection for consideration of the films for future release and will report back.

⁴ Richelieu, Toalla. “The Hem of Her Garment.” *An Anthology of Veristic Poems*, edited by Devin B. Jacobsen, SourMash Press, 2003, pp. 143-145.

unable to ascertain the location of the Boggy Creek Creature and could not prove its existence to my skeptical Papaw. Nevertheless, that trip from ten years in my past has left on me an indelible mark⁵ and has served as a catalyst for my artistic self-discovery. No longer would I shirk my duties as a literary craftsman, or waste time with familiar excuses — the writer’s block, the let-me-first-just-check-my-email, etc. — for if I could spend hours on an aimless hunt for the Boggy Creek Creature, then I could certainly compel myself to my desk⁶, pour glasses of Godet (or George Dickel, Lagavulin, Woodford Reserve, you get the idea); and force myself through the frustration, confusion, and — yes — the defeats that are but the prerequisites of artistic life.

But let me return now to my associate JW Meek and to the talk of his dreams, for I can still remember that odd cellphone call I received at 5:00 on the morning of his birthday in 2018.

It’s a mantra, JW said. It was in my mind all night. Occurrence in Striped⁷ Patch. Striped.

Striped? I repeated. *What’s it even mean? What kind of dream is this? Can you explain it?*

But JW could not sufficiently explain it — and that’s not so strange — for like the Boggy Creek Creature, my associate’s dreams remain a bit of a mystery, not only to him, but to me, too.

I’ll write it for you, I said. I’ll try my best. I’ll capture it, keep it forever. Make sense of it.

Well, you see what good that did me. I don’t understand “An Occurrence in the Striped Patch⁸,” but who does? It’s an elusive Boggy Creek Creature of the soul. I just hope you enjoy it.

⁵ A delible one, too: I tripped and skinned my knee that day at T-Rick’s truck-stop in El Dorado, but it’s healed up.

⁶ Intentional allusion to Nathaniel Jessup’s *Strangers in the East*, Marlon Brando’s favorite film noir, and mine, too.

⁷ Pronounced /straiped/ in Arkansan patois, but see Finn, Tobias; *Southern Speechways*, for heated scholarly debate.

⁸ Or this commentary, either, if I’m being truthful.