

The Ghost Gar

A White River Fish Tale

By James Argo

Now, I ain't one to embellish, but is ever there was a yarn work stretchin', it's the one 'bout my nighttime skirmish with the Ghost Gar of the White River. It was a chilly October eve back in 2019, the find where the moon hangs low like a lantern over Calico Rock, castin' silver spells on the water. Our town's a quaint little spot, you know, perched on them bluffs where the river bends lazy-like, with its old railroad tracks whisperin' secrets to the wind and the Trout Dock sittin' there all innocent, rentin' out jon boats to city folk chasin' rainbow trout. But us locals know better. There's tales older than the hills 'bout underwater caves riddlin' the riverbed- deep, twisty lairs where the Osage spirits linger, cursin' any fool who dips a line without payin' homage. Some say it's the ghosts of them ancient mound-builders, stirrin' up mutants from the depths where mother nature has turned a blind eye. And me? Well, I was just such a fool that night, sneakin' out for an illicit haul under the cover of darkness, 'cause the game warden don't patrol after sundown, and well, a man's gotta eat.

I shoved off from the Trout Dock 'round midnight, my old flat-bottom skiff glidin' silent as a shadow. No lights, no fuss-just me, a jug of peppersauce for comfort, and a stout rod rigged with a chunk of shad for bait. The river was glass-smooth, reflectin' erie silhouettes of the cottonwoods along the bank, and the only sound was the occasional hoot of an owl, like

it was laughin' at my folly. I aimed for City Rock, a bend in the river where the bluffs drop sheer into the water. Folks 'round Calico Rock whisper 'bout it—how the caves down there connect to some bottomless abyss, ocssasionally floodin' the river with queer chemicals from forgotten mines, birthin' abominations that'd make a catfish look like a minnow. Indian curse, some call it; the spirits of the Quapaw, riled up by white men's greed, twistin' nature into nightmares. I laughed it off, of course. Tall tales, I thought. But as I cast my line into the black depths, somethin' stirred—a ripple that weren't from no breeze.

At first, it was a tug, gentle-like, as if the river was testin' my mettle. Then came the yank—Lord almighty, it near pulled me overboard! My reel screamed like a banshee, line smokin' as it spooled out faster than the Ozark Queen chasin' the current. I braced my boots against the gunwale, hollerin' curses that'd blister paint, but whatever was down there weren't no ordinary brown or rainbow. No sir, this was somethin' primordial, a shadow risin' from them cursed caves. The moon caught a glimpse as it breached—scales like rusty bones, a snout long as my arm, lined with teeth jagged as broken glass. An alligator gar, sure enough, but twisted by whatever hellish brew bubbles in them underwater lairs. This brute was nigh on twelve feet, eyes glowin' in the moonlight, like embers from the underworld, its



body bloated and scarred, fins tipped with barbs that could gut a man clean.

It thrashed, sendin' waves crashin' against the bluffs, and I swear on my grandpaw's Bible, I heard voices in the spray—whispers in a tongue older than English, cursin' my trespass. The gar dove deep, draggin' my skiff toward the mouth of one of them caves, where the water swirls black and bottomless. I fought like the devil, arms burnin', my cold sweat mixin' with river mist, but that beast was playin' me, like I was the bait. Visions flashed in my mind—ghostly figures dancin' on the banks, Osage warriors with eyes like the gar's, warnin' of the price for stealin' from the river's bounty. Was it the curse? The spirits? Or just the liquor talkin'? I ain't sure, but as it surfaced again, closer now, its maw gapin' wide enough to

swallow a canoe, I cut the line with my belt knife and rowed for dear life back to the Trout Dock, heart poundin' like a war drum.

I made it ashore as the first light cracked the horizon, shakin' like a leaf in a gale. Folks at the dock laughed when I told 'em—called it a fish tale. But I seen the scratches on my boat, deep as claw marks, and sometimes at night, I hear that whisperin' echo from City Rock. That gar's still out there, lurkin' in them caves, waitin' for the next bold soul. So come on down to Calico Rock, you tourists with your fancy rods and dreams of glory. Get a tag, rent a boat at the Trout Dock, cast into the moonlit waters, and hunt the beast if you've got the grit. Who knows? You might just hook the legend—and live to tell the tale. Or maybe... you won't.