

Fearsome Four

The Zombies of the Moonlit Marshes

Joseph Jethro



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Chapter One

The thick fog hung in the air, blanketing everything in a shroud of grey. Even if you stretched out your hand, it would vanish into the swirling grey. Overhead, the full moon loomed, its pale light struggling to pierce the misty haze, casting long, ghostly shadows. The wind roared furiously through the trees, shaking their branches and sending leaves swirling into the air.

Abner glanced over his shoulder, his eyes darting nervously through the fog. 'Come on, guys, hurry up!' he whispered, his voice barely rising above the ghostly whispers of the wind. He stood at the edge of the cracked road, where the fog was so thick it felt like it was closing in around him.

A car moved cautiously along the road, its headlights cutting through the murk like sharp knives. The beams made the fog twist and swirl, casting shadows that seemed to move on their own like ghosts creeping through the night. Abner quickly pulled his hoodie up, tugging it low over his face. He stayed motionless, holding his breath as the car drove past, its engine growling like a beast. Then, just as suddenly as it appeared, it vanished into the mist.

Soon, Ray and Sani caught up to Abner, their breath turning to mist in the chilly air.

'How do you know we're going the right way?' Sani asked, rubbing his frozen fingertips together and breathing on them to keep warm.

'Cause I've got a map, silly,' Abner said with a grin, pulling out a rolled-up map from his backpack. 'Here, shine the flashlight on it, will ya?' He gestured at Sani, holding the map open.

Sani switched on the flashlight, the beam bouncing across the foggy air before settling on the map.

'Whoa, that's so cool! Can I have it?' Ray asked, his eyes lighting up as he admired the intricate details sketched across the paper.

'Not a chance,' Abner replied, shaking his head at Ray, who had a habit of trying to snag his stuff.

Abner traced his finger to a section of the map. 'Okay, first, we've got to cross this road,' he said, glancing at the cracked pavement. 'Then we head through...this swamp,' he added, his tone dropping as he let out a long sigh, his breath turning into mist in the frosty air.

'A swamp? Yikes!' Ray exclaimed, raising an eyebrow. 'I hope there aren't any crocs...or swamp monsters,' he added, folding his arms and glaring at Abner.

'Take a chill pill,' Sani said with a shrug. 'There's no such thing as monsters.'

'Then why is Abner dragging us on this so-called hunt for zombies?' Ray asked, his voice dripping with disappointment.

'Because *he* believes they're real,' Sani replied, gesturing at Abner. 'And apparently, we're all just following him to find this 'marsh zombie' thing...'

Straightening up, Abner cut him off. '*The Zombies of the Moonlit Marshes*. That's what it's called,' he said with a proud smirk.

'Right, the Moonlit Marshes. Blah, blah, blah,' Sani retorted, rolling his eyes dramatically. 'We're gonna go there, take one look around, and prove to him there's no such thing as zombies,' he added, puffing out his cheeks in exaggerated annoyance.

‘Ohhh,’ Ray murmured, stretching the sound while nodding deliberately, his face a mix of scepticism and intrigue. ‘Zombies aren’t real? Yeah, I’m not convinced.’

‘Where’s Umari?’ Abner asked, his eyes darting around the misty darkness.

‘S-sorry!’ a voice suddenly stammered, breaking the silence.

A moment later, a figure came crashing out of the bushes, landing flat on the ground with a loud *thud*.

Abner rolled his eyes and let out an impatient sigh. ‘Come on, Umari, we don’t have all night,’ he said, grabbing him by the arm and hauling him to his feet.

They crossed the cracked road, the fog growing thicker with each step as if the world was slowly swallowing them whole. Abner led the way, his eyes scanning the path ahead, while Sani held the flashlight, the beam cutting through the mist but barely reaching beyond a few feet.

When they reached the edge of the swamp, the air turned colder. It was thick with a damp, musty scent that clung to their senses, like old leaves and wet earth. ‘Okay, we’ve gotta roll up our pants,’ Abner said, glancing at Ray and Sani. ‘It’s gonna get muddy, and we don’t want to ruin them.’

Ray groaned. ‘Great, swamp water and mud. Perfect.’

Sani sighed deeply but started tugging up his pants. ‘Don’t complain. We’ll prove there are no zombies; then we can head back home.’

Umari hesitated, looking at the murky water. ‘This feels...wrong,’ he muttered, his voice almost lost in the howl of the wind.

Abner shot him a look, his eyebrow lifting in amusement. ‘Scared, Umari? Come on, it’s just a swamp.’

‘I’m not scared,’ Umari grumbled, though his voice didn’t sound all that convincing. He rolled his pants up and stepped gingerly into the swamp, feeling the cold, sluggish water creep around his ankles.

The muck stubbornly clung to their feet while the air hummed with the chorus of croaking frogs and the persistent buzz of insects. Strange shapes loomed in the distance, half-hidden in the fog, but when they looked closely, they saw only twisted trees and tangled vines.

‘I swear, this place is like a horror movie,’ Ray muttered, his voice shaky. ‘I’m pretty sure I saw something move over there...’

‘Stop being a baby,’ Sani snapped, though his voice wavered slightly. ‘It’s just the wind or something.’ But even he couldn’t hide the nervousness in his eyes.

Finally, they crossed the swamp and stepped into a deserted farmyard. The wind rustled the trees, making them jump, all of them half-expecting something to leap from the shadows. The farm was eerily quiet, with broken fences and old crates scattered around.

After what felt like forever, they reached the edge of the yard. The old, creaky wooden fence around the property looked like it had been standing there for years, barely held together by rusted nails. The barn in the distance was falling apart, its doors hanging crooked on their hinges.

‘Let’s get over this fence fast,’ Abner whispered, glancing over at the creepy barn.

They moved quickly, stepping over broken planks and old tools on the ground. They jumped over the creaky fence, their eyes scanning the dark shadows and their hearts pounding with every step.

Finally, they reached the marsh. The ground was soft and spongy, covered in tangled roots and tall, swaying reeds. A damp, unpleasant smell hung in the air, and the thick mist made it impossible to see far ahead.

Abner looked at the map again. 'This is it,' he whispered, stepping forward. 'The Moonlit Marshes.'