**El Silbon- Venezuela & Colombian Folk Tale**

The following folktale, which originated in the 19th century, is often told in the rural parts of Venezuela’s vast Midwest plains. The scary and disturbing ghost described in this story is considered to be a harbinger of death.

The story always starts with a son killing his father. One version states that this son returning home one day found his father abusing his beautiful young wife. This so angered him he killed his father.

Another more disconcerting version states this son was a “spoiled brat” whose every wish was catered to by his parents. One afternoon he demands his father hunt for a deer--his favorite meat. But when the father does not find a deer and returns empty-handed, his son kills him and cuts out his heart and liver. He then has his mother cook them for dinner.

The mother finding this meat is tough starts to suspect something is amiss. She discovers these organs are her own husband’s innards and curses her son for eternity. At this point, most versions of this story become similar.

The mother fetches a male relative--in most versions the grandfather-- and he ties the son to a tree--he then whips him--he finishes by rubbing lemon or hot peppers into the son’s wounds.

The grandfather then unleashes a vicious dog and orders it to go after his grandson. This dog pursues the son relentlessly. His mother’s curse transforms the son into a ghost. He is condemned to wander the plains carrying a sack of bones on his back. Some versions state these are the bones of his father, others state these are the bones of his victims. His ghost is described as being disproportionally skinny and extremely tall. He towers over treetops with his bag of bones slung over his back.

The vicious dog chases him, continually nipping at his heels. He wears a tattered white suit and a wide-brimmed hat. It is said that few people who have seen him have lived to tell about it.

His ghost is known as The Whistler because of a tune he is heard whistling-- the basic seven notes, do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti. He sounds these notes slowly and draws each one out.

People are warned his whistle is deceptive. It is said that when people hear his tune-up close, they are actually safe for this means he is far away, but if they listen to him from afar, they best beware for he is actually close by. Despite this warning, most people do not become concerned about his whistling when it seems far away, so they ignore it--this is a mistake for when they finally notice it is already too late.

It is often mentioned his ghost hunts down cruel men who cheat on their wives. His ghost also attacks drunks when they are fast asleep. A gruesome detail shared states his spirit uncovers their belly buttons and then sucks until the alcohol comes out of them. In Central and South American ghost stories, this is a universal theme-- ghosts often punish drunks.

A frightening element in this story is The Whistler enters people’s homes at night. He lays his sack of bones on the floor and starts counting them. If no one hears the clatter of the bones or notices his presence, this means one member of the household will die.

It is always mentioned that there are ways people can protect themselves from his ghost. One way is just to remind him of his terrible crime and why he is cursed. Another way is to keep the items The Whistler is most afraid of handy--they include a whip, hot peppers, or a dog.