ForeWord Reviews
**Clarion Review**

GENERAL

**Brutus: The Swamp Man**
Larry McCollum
Xlibris
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Two Stars (out of Five)

Remote areas, such as swamps, often serve as habitats for mythic, legendary creatures. Such is the setting for Larry McCollum's fictional tale of *Brutus*, the Swamp Man.

Brutus is the child of English colonists who paid pirates to take them to a new place to live. They ended up in the swamps of Louisiana near the Atchafalaya River. Brutus was orphaned at the age of ten when scarlet fever killed everyone else in the colony. Living alone, he forgot about civilization and language and grew into a large, hairy adult with the intelligence of a five-year-old.

After the Civil War, a group of Baton Rouge teenagers decide to get at the truth of the swamp man legend. Without their parents' knowledge, they paddle canoes into the swamp for several weeks. Their search leads to near disaster on several occasions as they encounter quicksand, a panther, and alligators, but eventually Tom and Sarah locate the wounded, naked Brutus, in his cave. Sarah provides tender care and earns the swamp man's trust so they can take him back to Baton Rouge and show him how to live in a civilized town. "What a dream that would be realizing that a grown man could still learn how to read and write and speak his native language," Sarah thinks.

The teens shackle Brutus in a barn for his own good and go home to their parents. Brutus, not surprisingly, escapes, then lives for five years with Tully, an alligator trapper, who teaches him basic skills and speech. When Tully dies, Brutus again forgets all he's learned, even after he meets Marie, who has escaped from prison where she was falsely incarcerated by an evil sheriff. Marie and Brutus become friends as Brutus searches for his home cave.

At times, the author seems to reference Mark Twain, Tarzan ("Me Brutus"), Oz books, and Frankenstein. But unlike these classics, McCollum's story lacks fleshed out characters and focus. It is episodic and without a dramatic conclusion.

The ages of the characters, including Brutus, are unclear, as is the book's timeframe. Dialogue is often stilted. For example, McCollum writes, "Tom and Timothy finally got close

enough to see one another. Timothy said, ‘Tom, there you are! I see you in the brush.’ Timothy and the others walked toward Tom and Sarah. Timothy said, ‘Hey Tom! Glad to see you and Sarah are okay!’ Tom said, ‘Thanks! I’m glad that you and the gang could make it.’”

Dialogue and text are repetitive and closer editing might have caught incorrect word use, such as “sequels” instead of “seagulls.” There are anachronisms involving slang, as when the teens are “grounded” by their parents. Geology of the swamp area is fanciful because there are no caves or coalmines in the Atchafalaya region.

McCollum has a worthy message, however, which is restated in his epilogue: unfortunate people, even the unlovable, need love. Brutus was perhaps better off before he was lured to civilization, but he did find human caring through characters like Sarah, Tully, and Marie.

*Linda Salisbury*