

THE DEAD PLAINS

Written by

Paul Corricelli

FLESH ROTS:

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - LATE AFTERNOON

Six Indians lie dead on the ground, a gruesome scene.

Two men walk among the corpses. JED PARKER, 30's, dirty, unshaven, deadly as a rattler hiding in the brush, and BOGDEN DIMIDOV, 28, Russian, glaringly out of place in the American West.

Jed and Bogden collect the dead Indian's animal skin bundles.

JED PARKER

Sun's goin' down, let's pack up and get the fuck outta here.

Bogden grunts his reply and heads to his horse.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - DUSK

Three men on horseback ride in the fading light.

Sheriff CLYDE SOLOMON, 50, tough as nails, a man who's very presence garners respect, Deputy COTTON PIKE, mid 30's, half Indian, black hair in a neat braid, and SCOUT, their guide, 60, a rugged old cowboy.

DEPUTY PIKE

We're a good mile in, Sheriff. You sure about this?

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Not sure about anything yet, son.

DEPUTY PIKE

Don't know as I'd try and hide on Shoshone land.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

That's because you ain't a dumb son-of-a-bitch.

They reach the top of a rise and the entire valley opens up before them.

In the distance a small campfire smolders, sending black smoke into the fading light. They share a concerned look.

SCOUT

Natives wouldn't leave a fire smoldering, that's fer sure.

DEPUTY PIKE

We don't have jurisdiction here,  
Sheriff. What's the call?

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Don't see as we have a choice.

The Sheriff urges his horse forward.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

The Sheriff and his party make their way across the valley floor. They ride up to an empty camp and climb down off their horses.

EXT. EMPTY CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Pools of dried blood mark the clay floor, but the bodies are gone.

Deputy Pike pulls a piece of bloodied animal skin from out of the sand. He holds it up for the Sheriff to see.

Scout inspects the ground around the camp.

SCOUT

A good size party got here ahead of  
us. Must have took the bodies.  
Shoshone I'd expect... horses ain't  
shoed.

Sheriff Solomon inspects the fire. He uses the barrel of his shotgun to push something out of the embers--

A large knife with an ornately carved handle and leather sheath. The Sheriff's face is grim as he hands the knife to Deputy Pike.

The Deputy, stone faced, determined, shoves the knife into his belt next to his own--with almost identical markings.

Scout examines a set of tracks leading away from the camp.

SCOUT (CONT'D)

Got more tracks here, Sheriff.  
comin' and goin.'

Sheriff Solomon scans the empty valley and the jagged cliffs in the distant.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

I've seen enough, let's go.

Without waiting for a reply, the Sheriff climbs into his saddle and follows the trail out of camp.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - NIGHT

A massive fire burns high atop a rugged plateau of red rock and cactus.

Six dead Indians are lined up on the ground. Each body is painted in vivid colors, their gruesome injuries cleaned and bandaged.

Six tribe leaders sit in a trance, chanting over the bodies of their fallen. A small wooden bowl filled with blood rests in front of each of them.

GRAY WOLF, the chief, grizzled, long salt and pepper hair, with lines creasing his face like a map of this rugged territory, watches an ancient HOLY MAN, mix a thick green liquid.

Gray Wolf approaches each tribe leader with an ornately painted bowl, and they pour the contents of their bowls into his.

The Holy Man takes the bowl from Chief Gray Wolf and pours some of the blood into his green mixture. The colors swirl together as he raises it to his lips and drinks deep--

He throws his head back, staring up at the night sky and brilliant canopy of stars. He rips a leather pouch from around his neck, and throws it onto the flames.

The fire erupts in a blinding flash, and hundreds of ghostly bodies are released into the night to a chorus of terrifying, inhuman screams.

EXT. CAMP SITE - NIGHT

The screams echo across the desert plains, slowly fading away.

Jed and Bogden pass a bottle of whiskey between themselves as they cook their dinner. They scan the darkness, nervous, and unsettled, speaking in hushed tones.

BOGDEN  
Don't like it.

JED PARKER  
Yeah, no shit, Bog's...

Jed stops, Listening to the night.

From out of the darkness--

SHERIFF SOLOMON (O.S.)

Boys...

Jed and Bogden practically jump out of their skin as Sheriff Solomon and Deputy Pike appear from out of the shadows, guns drawn. Scout lingers behind.

JED PARKER

Son of a bitch!

Jed makes a move for his gun, but Deputy Pike's shotgun swings in his direction.

DEPUTY PIKE

Wouldn't do that.

Jed freezes. Recognizing the horsemen, he eases back.

JED PARKER

Sheriff Solomon.

The Sheriff climbs off his horse and gives Jed a curt nod.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Jed... who's your friend?

JED PARKER

This here's Bogden, he's Russian...  
married to my sister.

(pause)

Pretty far from home, Sheriff. You  
expanding your territory?

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Been tracking you boys. Come to  
bring you and those two horses you  
stole back to town.

JED PARKER

Afraid I wouldn't know anything  
about stolen horses, Sheriff.

Sheriff Solomon inspects several bundles of animal skins stacked together.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Seems you boys may have a bigger  
problem on your hands.

Sheriff Solomon picks up a bundle that has blood splattered across it.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
You speak english, Bogden?

JED PARKER  
Course he does, but--

DEPUTY PIKE  
Sheriff didn't ask you, now did he?

JED PARKER  
I see you brought yer pet Injun.

Deputy Pike glares at Jed. The Sheriff continues.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
What were you boys doing on  
Shoshone land, Bogden?

BOGDEN  
We make camp. Hunt...

JED PARKER  
(nervous laughter)  
Don't pay him no mind, Sheriff, he  
ain't even from this country and  
don't know where the fuck he's at  
half the time. We ain't been on  
Shoshone land, we've been right  
here...

Pointing to the bundles of animal skins.

JED PARKER (CONT'D)  
Collectin' from our traps.

The Sheriff and Deputy share a look. Deputy Pike climbs down from his horse.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
I ain't never known you to do an  
honest days work in yer entire  
life, Jed.

JED PARKER  
A man can change, cant he? Side's,  
that's what I got Bogden for. He  
specializes in...

Sheriff Solomon pulls the bloodied animal skin out of his saddle bag and tosses it at Jed's feet.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

How many men did you kill to get those skins?

JED PARKER

I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Sheriff, and I resent the accusations--

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Get up.

JED PARKER

Now look here--

Deputy Pike's shotgun swings in Jed's direction once again.

DEPUTY PIKE

You ain't gonna be asked again.

EXT. UTAH PLATEAU - NIGHT

Gray Wolf and the Holy Man watch as the last of the ghostly figure disappears into the night. The six dead Indians on the ground suddenly convulse, their eyes snap open.

EXT. INDIAN BURIAL SITE - NIGHT

Dead bodies claw through the earth and rise up to join their dead tribesmen.

They unleash another chorus of terrifying screams--

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Jed and Bogden's hands and feet are tied. They sit stewing as the Sheriff's party make themselves at home, eating their beans and corn bread. They're all on edge.

A chorus of screams echo off the canyon walls.

DEPUTY PIKE

We've had peace with the tribes for nearly three years, and this cock-sucker just--

JED PARKER

They came into our camp! We was within our rights!

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
You were on their land!

DEPUTY PIKE  
And, you've just incriminated  
yourself.

Jed looks Deputy Pike in the eyes as he speaks. The message  
is clear--

JED PARKER  
I warned them filthy savages to  
move on...

Deputy Pike is on his feet, knife in hand.

DEPUTY PIKE  
You son of a bitch!

Sheriff Solomon scrambles to his feet, and stops his Deputy.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
Let it go, Cotton! He'll get his,  
one way or the other.

Deputy Pike reluctantly slips the knife back in its leather  
sheath and sits down, never taking his eyes of Jed.

SCOUT  
You ask me, I say we leave em' here  
for Chief Gray Wolf to find.

Scout points to Jed with a bean encrusted spoon.

SCOUT (CONT'D)  
He'd take care of both a' you  
murderin' shit-tops.

He licks the spoon clean with gusto.

JED PARKER  
(smug)  
You ain't gonna do that are you,  
Sheriff? Yer too goddamn righteous  
with the law.

Another faint scream echoes in the night.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
Unfortunately for you boys, the  
law's pretty clear on murder.

DEPUTY PIKE

We'll see you two hang, I can  
promise you that.

JED PARKER

It's nothin but a few dead savages.  
Ain't nobody gonna care...

Jed looks to Deputy Pike.

JED PARKER (CONT'D)

Unless they was yer kin?

The Deputy Pike glares, his hand moving to his knife hilt.  
The Sheriff puts a hand out and lowers his voice--

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Keep yer cool, Cotton, he's tryin'  
to get a rise. Just let it be.

The Sheriff steps in front of Jed.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

And you... you shut your mouth or  
I'll shut it for you.

JED PARKER

Sorry, Sheriff... didn't mean to  
insult yer half-breed.

Sheriff Solomon punches Jed in the face, effectively shutting  
him up.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Man don't know when to close his  
goddamned mouth.

(to Bogden)

You got anything to say?

Bogden shakes his head - no.

DEPUTY PIKE

I'd be happy to cut his tongue out.

SCOUT

That might offer some temporary  
relief, but what's the plan here,  
Sheriff? The natives sound  
restless.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

We'll take turns on watch. At dawn  
I'll ride out and talk to Chief  
Gray Wolf, while you and Scout head  
back to town with these two.

DEPUTY PIKE

And if there's no appeasement?

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Treaty's clear on the matter.  
Tribal laws don't apply here. I'll  
expect him to honor that, with the  
promise of justice served.

SCOUT

These boys are lucky was you that  
caught 'em, Sheriff. Hell, they're  
lucky they ain't bein' skinned  
alive right now... can't say they  
deserves any better, though.

DEPUTY PIKE

Maybe I should go with you,  
Sheriff, seein' as I speak the  
language.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

I'll be alright, son. I need you to  
get these two as far away from here  
as possible. Don't need retaliation  
complicating the matter.

Deputy Pike nods in agreement.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Maybe you could look in on Abigail  
for me as well... let her know I'll  
be a few days behind.

DEPUTY PIKE

Of course, Sheriff.

The men sit in silence for a moment.

SCOUT

I'll take the first watch if it's  
all the same to you, Sheriff. At my  
age sleep don't always present  
itself when desired.

The sheriff nods as he pours himself some coffee.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Scout sits with his back against a dead tree stump scanning the darkness while the others sleep. The horses are nervous, snorting, hooves shuffling on hard packed earth.

Jed lies on the ground, wide awake, listening. Something's not right--

Jed kicks Bogden's bound feet to wake him. He stirs, and they speak in whispers.

BOGDEN

I was dreaming about Janny... I want to go home, Jed.

JED PARKER

Then get to work on those ropes because somethin' ain't sitting right...

A horses fearful whinny jolts Scout into action. He grabs his gun and is on his feet, quietly moving through the dark.

JEd and Bogden begin working on their ropes.

EXT CAMPSITE - HORSES - NIGHT

Scout grabs the reins of the first horse as it tries to break free. They're all spooked. He scans the darkness, when--

Something slams into him, knocking him to the ground. He scrambles to his feet to find--

A horrifying INDIAN ZOMBIE standing over him. Before he can recover, the creature is on him. Its teeth rip a chunk of flesh from his neck, splashing blood across both of them.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Scout's screams wake the rest of the party as more Indian Zombies move through the darkness.

Jed and Bogden are both free from their bonds. Jed stands, but two Indian Zombies are on him, knocking him back to the ground. One of the creatures tears a mouth-full of flesh from his cheek.

Sheriff Solomon pulls his six shooter and blasts the first Indian Zombie in the side of the head, the second one in the chest. As they topple, a third creature grabs the Sheriff from behind--

Before it can sink its teeth into his flesh, Deputy Pike pulls it off him and throws it to the ground, shooting it twice in the torso.

Bogden bolts into the darkness, an Indian Zombie on his tail.

Jed screams as the Indian Zombie with the chest wound is on him again. Its teeth rip a hole in his shoulder, blood and gore spilling over it's painted flesh.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

What the hell are these things?

He shoots the Zombie in the head and it crumples to the ground. Sheriff Solomon inspects one of the fallen Zombies, its brains splayed out across the red dirt floor.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

The markings are Shoshone, but--

A scream from man and beast breaks the silence. A terrified horse bolts out of the darkness with Scout slumped over the saddle, blood oozing from a neck wound, an Indian Zombie chasing on foot.

DEPUTY PIKE

Scout!

An Indian Zombie appears behind Deputy Pike. Its teeth sink into the back of his neck, ripping away a strip of flesh--

The Deputy throws it to the ground and, planting a foot in its chest, fires two shots. The first one misses, the second one tears through its neck, but it keeps struggling.

DEPUTY PIKE (CONT'D)

These things wont die!

Sheriff Solomon shoots the creature in the head and it stops moving.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

You okay, son?

The Deputy's hand goes to the wound.

DEPUTY PIKE

I think so, hurts like the devil,  
but I recon It'll heal.

A moan causes them to turn--

An Indian Zombie is bent over Jed, ripping the flesh from his neck, its mouth covered in gore.

DEPUTY PIKE (CONT'D)

Holy mother...

Deputy Pike shoots it in the chest. It flinches, but goes right back to work on Jed. His second shot is to the head and it collapses, dead.

Deputy Pike scans the darkness.

DEPUTY PIKE (CONT'D)

I'm gonna check on the horses.

Sheriff Solomon pulls the Zombie off of Jed's body. The man is barely alive, shaking, bleeding out.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Goddamn you, Jed. What have you started?

Sheriff Solomon wraps a bandana around the mans neck wounds, trying to staunch the flow of blood.

Deputy Pike rides up.

DEPUTY PIKE

I'm going after Scout.

The sheriff tends to Jed's shoulder wound.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Leave him be, he'll double back around and find us on the trail. We need to get back to town. God knows how many more of those things are out there...

With the sound of hooves, sheriff Solomon turns to find Deputy Pike gone.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Damn it.

EXT. UTAH PLATEAU - NIGHT

Chief Gray Wolf and his holy men are gathered around the fire. Bellow them, dozens of Indian Zombies are converging on the spot.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - MORNING

Two horses move slowly across a seemingly endless expanse of rugged plains.

Sheriff Solomon pulls a second horse behind his as he rides. The body of Jed Parked is draped across the saddle, hands and feet tied, his skin now a purplish gray.

Sheriff Solomon stops at the crest of a small rise. Far off in the distance the outline of a town shimmers like a mirage in the morning heat.

He leads the horses down the slope, and stops short--

Bogden Dimidov is hovering by an outcropping of rock, his back to the Sheriff, slowly swaying back and forth.

Sheriff Solomon pulls out his gun.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Keep your hands where I can see 'em  
and turn around, son.

No response.

He slides off his horse and approaches, when--

Bogden turns. Half his face is missing, a mass of gore, his skin gray and lifeless. He lunges, pushing Sheriff Solomon back into the horse carry Jed--

Jed's eyes snap open and he sinks his teeth into the Sheriff's forearm.

The Sheriff screams in agony, as Bogden charges again. Sheriff Solomon violently rips his arm free, leaving a jagged tear in the skin, splashed in blood--

He slams the gun under Bogden's chin and pulls the trigger, blowing the back of his head off. As Bogden hits the ground, the Sheriff pulls Jed off the horse and slams him into the dirt.

He inspects the jagged tear in his arm. Looking from Bogden to Jed--thrashing around on the ground--

The connection is made, he knows what the future holds for him.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Goddamn you, Jed.

Jed stops thrashing. He jerks his head to the side and his dead Zombie eyes stare out over the open plain. Sheriff Solomon follows his gaze--

From this distance it's just a tiny speck, but there's no mistaking it, someone, or something, is headed for the town.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
Son of a bitch.

He looks down at Jed.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
You can rot down there in the  
fucking dirt.

The Sheriff puts a bullet in Jed's head.

He jumps on his horse and rides off, pulling the other animal behind him.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - DAY

Scout--now a zombie, on horseback, rides towards the town. He passes a sign - "WELCOME TO SALT FLATS."

EXT. TOWN OF SALT FLATS - DAY

At the outer edge of town, Scout rides up to find--

The bodies of three men lying in the dirt, outside a ramshackled barn.

It's a gruesome scene, a massacre, blood everywhere. One man is in the process of "turning." Gnashing its teeth, staring into the sun with dead eyes.

Scout moves on.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - DAY

Sheriff Solomon is wilting under the blazing sun. He wipes sweat from his eyes with a bandana, more feverish than suffering the elements. He stops--

A MAN is bent over the painted body of an Indian Zombie sprawled out in the dirt. Nearby, a horse lies on its side, bleeding out, ragged bite marks on its neck.

Sheriff Solomon climbs down off his horse, a crude bandage now wrapped around his forearm, still seeping blood. He takes a few steps closer.

The horse's leg twitches, kicking up dust. The MAN bent over the body turns--

Deputy Cotton Pike, now a zombie, grotesque, ashen, his mouth full of blood and human meat.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Jesus.

Zombie Pike stands. He holds the severed head of the Indian zombie in his hand. He stares back at his old friend, but does not attack. Still a glimmer of his former self behind the eyes.

Sheriff Solomon raises his gun.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Goddamn it... I'm sorry, Cotton.

He hesitates. His hand is shaking. Zombie Pike sniffs the air, causing the sheriff to check the bandage on his bite.

Deputy Pike holds up the severed head and looks off into the plains. He let's out a terrible scream.

Sheriff Solomon follows his eyes, and far of in the distance he sees it--

EXT. PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

A hundred Indian Zombies trudging across the plains, heading toward Salt Flats.

Sheriff Solomon turns back to Zombie Pike, keeping his gun trained on him.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

(whispers)

Abigail...

EXT. SALT FLATS - DAY

The main street is littered with corpses. Washed in blood. A few are reanimating.

There is a group of about fifty Cowboy Zombies standing at the edge of town, their numbers slowly growing.

EXT. UTAH PLAINS - DAY

Sheriff Solomon rides at full speed. He's feverish, purple veins are now spreading out from under the bandage on his arm, the skin around it gray, dead.

He struggles to stay upright in his saddle.

Behind him, Zombie Pike rides at full speed. At this point it's impossible to tell if he's following or chasing the sheriff.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

The Indian Zombie horde kicks up a cloud of dust as they race towards the town--

They're led by Gray Wolf.

EXT. SALT FLATS - DAY

Sheriff Solomon rides straight to the crowd of Cowboy Zombies at the edge of town and pulls up. Several zombies gnash their teeth, but none attack.

Zombie Pike rides up behind him.

Sheriff Solomon stares at his old friend. Like the others, Pike does not attack and stares at the Sheriff as if there is recognition, some thread of consciousness.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Wait here...

The Sheriff spurs his horse into town, past dead bodies, blood splashed dirt, and monsters reanimating in the street.

He pulls up in front of a Hotel and dismounts, the ground littered with dead zombies shot through the brain. He races up an outer staircase to a closed door. It's locked--

The Sheriff throws himself into the door and crashes into the room--

INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A shotgun is pointed at his head. The Sheriff freezes.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON

Daddy?

ABIGAIL SOLOMON, 28, terrified, lowers the shotgun halfway, ready to react. Tears well up in her eyes.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Daddy... no...

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Abigail, thank God... you've got to come with me. We're running out of time.

A Cowboy Zombie stumbles into the room behind the Sheriff, gnashing it's teeth at Abigail. It tries to push past him, but he grabs it by the collar, pushing it back out the door.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

No!

Abigail lowers the shotgun.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON

How did you do that?

The Sheriff's voice is wet and gravelly.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

I don't know... Abigail, I need you to grab some supplies... and leave... here... no time...

ABIGAIL SOLOMON

My horse is loaded to go, but those things got into the barn and I had to make a run for it.

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Come with me... I'll keep you safe.

Abigail tentatively follows her father out of the room.

EXT. HOTLE - CONTINUOUS

Abigail stays close to her father as they descend the stairs. Cowboy Zombies move close, full of hunger--

Sheriff Solomon motions them away--

SHERIFF SOLOMON

Stay away from her...

A Single Cowboy Zombie breaks through the small crowd and charges--

The Sheriff puts a bullet through his brain and the zombie drops. The crowd is restless, they press closer.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Stay away... from her!

Her horse is terrified but unhurt. It calms a little with her touch. Abigail checks the saddle straps.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON  
I packed enough for both of us, I  
knew you'd make it back.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
I can't go... look at me.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON  
No, Daddy, we'll get you help.  
We'll find a doctor...

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
It's too late... for me. I've got  
to see this through...

He looks to the plains and the hordes of Zombies getting closer.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
... to the end...

ABIGAIL SOLOMON  
Daddy, I can't leave you hear. I  
won't.

Sheriff Solomon takes her hand.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
You have to live... start over...  
for me, please... live.

Both their eyes fill with tears. Abigail hugs her father.

ABIGAIL SOLOMON  
I love you, Daddy.

SHERIFF SOLOMON  
I love you, Abigail... now... go.  
Get as far away from here as you  
can... tell them....

Abigail gets up on her horse.

SHERIFF SOLOMON (CONT'D)  
Warn... them.

With tears streaming down her cheeks, Abigail's horse bolts out of the stable and down the street, away from the storm of death that's approaching.

EXT. SALT FLATS - DAY

Sheriff Solomon rides back to the entrance of town and surveys the growing crowd. He slides off his horse and nearly collapses, the fever taking over. Zombie Pike follows.

Zombie Scout steps out of the crowd and approaches the Sheriff. He looks to the plains--the Indian Zombies are close.

The crowd of cowboy zombies are restless, agitated. Zombie Scout turns back to the sheriff and utters a single word, wet and gravely from decaying vocal cords--

ZOMBIE SCOUT

Leeeeeeeead.

Sheriff Solomon stumbles back to his horse. He reaches for his shotgun, but hesitates. He sways and falls into a sitting position, head bowed.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Chief Gray Wolf and his hoard of Indian Zombies are close. Their terrible screams shatter the still air.

EXT. SALT FLATS - DAY

Sheriff Solomon stands in front of the Cowboy Zombies, his back towards us, shotgun in hand. He turns--

He is now a Zombie. He let's out a horrifying scream--

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Indian and Cowboy Zombies race towards each other, screaming, gnashing their teeth, consumed with blood lust.

Sheriff Solomon and deputy Pike at the head of the Cowboy Zombie ranks run full boar.

The Indian Zombie and Cowboy Zombie ranks collide--

THE END.