

HELL BENT

by

John Staats

(520) 301-5089
jestaats@hotmail.com

Copyright (c)2017

FADE IN

EXT. SONORAN DESERT - NIGHT

A full moon casts a bright light across saguaro cactus and mesquite trees. The sky is carpeted with brilliant stars.

The moon's light is enough to define the steep rocky ridges that surround a long valley.

Through the valley snakes a dry wash with steep banks.

EXT. DRY WASH - CONTINUOUS

A thunder of galloping horses breaks the desert silence.

Three men on horseback ride recklessly, hell-bent for leather, up the dry wash.

Their attire and menacing appearance hints that they've been up to no good. They're bandits.

Moments later, a posse of eight riders pass. They're badged and determined.

Some carry torches while others have guns drawn.

BANDITS

The bandits ride hard and fast. They're dirty and dusty, and their horses froth with sweat.

In front, with leather pouches tied to his saddle, is the leader, JAKE (30). With long blonde hair and fair complexion, he looks confident and rides with eyes forward.

The other gang members are TICO (35), in a wool poncho and sombrero, and YUMA (30), an Apache in a faded blue Cavalry vest and red headband.

Both Tico and Yuma look frequently over their shoulders. Yuma's look is watchful. Tico is downright scared.

TICO

What the Hell, Jake! We got to get out of this arroyo. A blind man could track us in this sand!

JAKE

Quit your bitchin', Tico. You gotta trust me on this.

YUMA

I hope you right, Jake. They are close.

JAKE
Yuma, how many do you think are
still on our tail?

YUMA
They must have split up a ways
back. Only six, maybe eight, now.

JAKE
Good, we're almost there.

The bandits round a bend and the terrain changes drastically
to a red rock stream bed and vertical rock walls.

TICO
Gracias a Dios! Maybe now we can
lose them.

JAKE
It should be just ahead.

They approach a confluence of three slot canyons. Jake turns
into the narrowest and they ride single file.

As they ride, the walls gradually lower until they
eventually exit into a meadow below a mountain pass.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - CONTINUOUS

On both sides of the meadow, steep walls rise to the ridge.
The only way out is dead ahead to the pass.

JAKE
That's it, boys. Across that flat,
up through the pass, and we drop
into Mexico.

As the bandits trot forward, the meadow glows in the bright
moon light.

Yuma tenses and reins to a quick stop.

YUMA
No. No good.

Jake and Tico stop and turn to Yuma.

JAKE
What's no good?

TICO
Que pasa, amigo?

Yuma's scared. He stares past his partners in fear.

YUMA

Turn around. Find another way.

JAKE

What gives, Chief? There ain't no other way.

YUMA

Spirits, Jake. There.

Yuma points beyond and the others turn to see what has spooked their partner.

Ahead is a wooden platform on posts. Laid on top are skeletal remains in a headdress. A spear and shield hang on one of the posts.

TICO

No, no, no! I can't go through there!

JAKE

Yuma! Tico! Get your shit together! It's just a bunch of dead injuns.

YUMA

Sacred ground. I will not enter.

TICO

Shit, Jake! There's no way in hell I'm going through that!

JAKE

You two are pathetic. There's no other way. It's either ride through to the pass or fight it out with the law.

YUMA

I'll make my stand. At least I'll have a fighting chance. If you were smart, you would too.

Yuma pulls out his rifle and turns to leave.

JAKE

Yuma, hold up.

Jake takes two leather pouches off his saddle and tosses them to Yuma.

JAKE

Your cut. Find your way out of this and we'll see you in Mexico. You know where we'll be.

YUMA
Go quickly, yet quietly. Don't stop
until dawn.

Yuma trots towards the slot canyon. No goodbyes.

JAKE
What about you, Tico? Time's a
wastin'.

Tico looks to the canyon. The flicker of the posse's torch
light reflects off the walls. They still follow.

He squirms in his saddle and does the sign of the cross.

TICO
Aaaaah! Okay, okay. Let's do this.

JAKE
Good man. Hee-yah!

EXT. BURIAL GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Jake and Tico trot through the sacred grounds. More and more
platforms appear.

The remains perched atop are in varying degrees of decay.
From rotten corpses to bare bones.

JAKE
Hey, Tico. They got a name for this
fear of cemeteries, you know.

TICO
Oh, yeah? What's that?

JAKE
Chicken shit. Heh, heh.

Tico glances at a skeleton on a platform as they pass. The
skull looks to the sky with mouth agape in a silent scream.

As he stares, the skull slowly closes its mouth and turns to
face Tico.

TICO
Jake. Jake! Did you see that?

JAKE
See what?

TICO
That skull. It moved. I swear it
looked right at me.

Jake's had enough. He turns his horse and sidles up next to the platform. He kicks the post hard.

TICO
What are you doing?!

The skeleton falls apart and the skull rolls off to shatter on the ground.

JAKE
They're just bones. Come on.

A gust of wind kicks up that causes a low moan as it passes over the Indian remains. Tico is scared stiff.

TICO
What was that?!

JAKE
The wind, Tico. Just the wind.

BANG!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Tico almost jumps off his saddle from the distant gunshots.

A furious gunfight echoes up the valley from the direction of the slot canyon. It's fierce but short.

JAKE
(sigh)
Yuma's choice.

Tico does the sign of the cross.

TICO
He might be okay. Maybe he surprised them, no?

JAKE
Maybe. Let's go.

They ride through a maze of platforms. Tico rides with one eye closed and shoulders hunched, as if ready to be scared.

Every time Tico's eyes veer from the path, he locks eyes with another dead Indian.

TICO
(softly)
They're only bones. They're only bones. They're only---

Tico cocks his head and listens with intent. The clip-clop of their horses trot is off tempo.

TICO
Jake, hold up.

JAKE
What now?

When the horses come to a stop, there is an extra couple of clip-clops before silence.

Tico whips his head about and looks for another horse.

TICO
What the---? Yuma? Is that you?

JAKE
Get a hold of yourself, man! It's only an echo.

Jake kicks his mount and trots ahead.

Tico reluctantly follows and resumes his mantra.

As they ride, the platforms get fewer and fewer. They made it through the sacred grounds.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - CONTINUOUS

They finally reach the mountain pass and look down upon the lights of a small town. Jake is all smiles.

JAKE
See, Tico? There it is. La Paz, Mexico.

TICO
Never has a shitty little border town looked so attractive.

JAKE
Nothin' to it, right?

He slaps a relieved Tico on the back.

TICO
Sorry for being such a pain in the ass.

Jake's smile suddenly turns to an expression of disbelief. He slumps forward with an arrow in his back.

TICO
Jake!

Tico nudges his horse closer to steady Jake. When he grabs him, the arrow vanishes and leaves a bleeding wound.

TICO

Dios, no!

JAKE

Tico, what's happening?

Tico looks back towards the sacred grounds.

A line of spectral images are lined up. Skeletons and rotten corpses are mounted on ghostly horses.

One of the spectres nocks another arrow.

TICO

Just hold on and ride like the
Hell!

Tico slaps the hind end of Jake's horse and it takes off on a gallop.

Tico spurs hard to follow as an arrow stabs a saguaro cactus nearby and disappears.

A haunting war cry echoes down the canyon and a thunder of hoofs begin chase.

Jake struggles to stay in the saddle. Another arrow hits him in the shoulder and vanishes.

As they round a bend, they encounter a sharp drop off. They rein hard and come to a stop.

JAKE

Tico, you'll have to dismount and
walk your horse down the talus.

TICO

What about you?

JAKE

I can't. I'll hold them off as best
I can.

TICO

No, you make it. Come on!

JAKE

I'm done for, amigo. Take these and
go.

Jake gives him all the pouches.

JAKE

You can give me back my share when
I see you again.

TICO

Vaya con Dios, my friend.

Tico dismounts and starts to scramble down the hillside
in a cloud of dust.

Jake turns his horse towards the oncoming horde of dead,
draws both pistols, and puts the reins in his teeth.

JAKE

Time to send you back to whence you
came! Hee-yah!

Jake rides headlong into the stampede with guns ablaze.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Bones shatter and rotten flesh splatters. Unaffected, the
dead ride forward.

Arrows pierce Jake in arms, legs and torso. They disappear
moments after impact.

He's riddled with holes. Some flow dark red, others spurt
arterial streams of bright crimson. He finally falls.

A towering skeleton leaps off his horse and stands over
Jake. He reaches down and grabs his long blonde hair.

JAKE

Come on.... Is that all you got?

With a swing of his tomahawk and a quick tug, he holds the
blonde scalp high and lets out a howl of victory.

EXT. TALUS SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

Tico slides down the slope on his heels. He catches his foot
and starts to tumble.

He realizes now that it's not rock talus, but a hillside of
skulls and bones.

He's near the bottom of the slope when the victory cry
reaches him.

The pitch and volume is soul-splitting. Even with hands over
his ears, it causes blood to flow from his ears.

TICO

Oh, Jake, you poor bastard.

He catches and mounts his horse at the bottom of the hill and begins his gallop towards La Paz.

The spirits give chase and ride effortlessly down the hill.

EXT. ROAD TO LA PAZ - CONTINUOUS

Tico's horse is just as spooked as him. It puts all effort into each stride.

It's almost dawn. The ridge behind him on the eastern horizon gets brighter every second.

Not too far ahead, the sun west of town slowly creeps towards Tico.

TICO
Sunlight. Got to get to the
sunlight.

The Indian horde gets closer and closer. The arrows start to get uncomfortably close to Tico.

From not too far behind, a spear is thrown that lands right in front of his horse.

His horse veers and Tico is thrown through the air. He hits hard and tumbles to a stop. He faces right at his pursuers.

Dozens of dead close in with spears ready and arrows drawn.

The sun rises over the eastern horizon and POOF! The horde disintegrates into thin air.

Tico sits in daylight. He raises his arms, arches his back, and let's out his own victory howl.

EXT. MAIN STREET, LA PAZ - DAWN

Tico rides into town. He dismounts and leaves his horse at the water trough.

He grabs his saddlebag and the pouches. He looks up at the sign on the building front: LA PAZ HOTEL - DESCANSE EN PAZ.

TICO
Rest in peace. Heh. That's bad
marketing.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The room is sparse with a single bed, rickety dresser, and a wash basin. Stained curtains blow by the open window.

The lock rattles and the door swings open. Tico walks in and throws the saddlebag and pouches on the bed.

YUMA

Hola, Tico.

Tico swings about and draws his pistol towards a chair in the dark corner.

TICO

Wh-who is that?

YUMA

It's only me, amigo.

Yuma leans forward from the dark shadows just enough to calm Tico's nerves.

TICO

Yuma! You made it!

Tico starts towards Yuma and stops.

TICO

Wait... How in the hell did you get here before me?

Yuma stands and steps closer. He avoids the sun that beams through the window.

YUMA

I told you not to go through the burial grounds.

Yuma is covered with bullet holes and the back of his head is missing.

Yuma throws his Bowie knife and sticks Tico in the chest. The knife quickly disappears.

YUMA

Descanse en paz, amigo.

Tico falls to the floor and Yuma vanishes.

FADE TO BLACK