

**A proposal for...**

**GHOSTWALKERS**

**A Deadlands Novel**

**By**

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**GREY TORRANCE** was once a decorated and respected captain in the Union Army. But after refusing a direct order to execute a pair of starving teenage Confederate soldiers arrested for stealing food, Torrance is dishonorably discharged. Since then he's become a gun-for-hire and bounty hunter working throughout the West.

He and his partner, the intellectual and educated Comanche, **THOMAS LOOKS AWAY**, are hired to help protect a small town against a fierce land grab by the gangs working for the mysterious millionaire **ALEKSANDER DERAY**.

Our story opens with Grey and Looks Away riding to the aid of a strangely-dressed young woman (**OONA**) who is being attacked by weird men in heavy clothes that cover their entire bodies. These attackers are strangely built, almost like apes, but they are clearly intelligent. The brutes are also ferocious and powerful, but Grey and Looks Away kill four of them and drive the rest away. When Grey removes the hood of one of the creatures the face that is revealed is monstrous. The creatures are covered in shaggy gray fur, large eyes, and the fangs of a carnivore. Looks Away thinks that these are *Mu pitz*, the wild cannibal men of Comanche

legend. (NOTE: The ***Mu pitz*** is one of many ‘wildmen’ found in Native American beliefs. Others Ojibwa *Manito*, Cherokee *Nun’ Yunu’ Wi*, Choctaw *Shampe* and, of course, *Sasquatch*.)

Oona, who has a mild head injury, *claims* to have no memory of who she is or what those creatures are. Grey isn’t sure he believes her, but he takes her to the hacienda of **BIG BILL BROWDER** A Texas cattle rancher and head of the Ranchers Commission, which includes a few dozen small farms that are under attack by Deray’s gunmen. And by *other* things. Browder tells Grey that several of his men and a lot of his cattle have been killed in savage ways –slashed to death and partially consumed.

Oona asks Browder to describe the wounds, and he gives them directions to a spot where the most recent killings have occurred. The carcasses of a few of the cattle are still there. Looks Away and Grey don’t recognize what kind of animal killed them, but Oona clearly does and she looks absolutely terrified.

Oona says that her memories are ‘starting to come back’ but are still mostly vague. She asks Grey and Looks Away for help in recovering her wagon, which broke down and was abandoned in the desert. They agree –mostly because they want the opportunity of grilling her to find out that she knows—but when they arrive at wagon nothing is quite what it seems. The ‘wagon’ is a mechanical device that looks like a great clockwork sled. And there are a bunch of the weird apelike creatures working to dismantle the machinery.

Big fight. The creatures attack and there is a terrible running fight. Grey and Looks Away manage to hold their own, but eventually they are overwhelmed by numbers. Then Oona produces a strange weapon from a compartment of the sled and with it manages to drive off the creatures. This weapon –a *Theotimus discharger*-- does not fire bullets but instead emits a ray that causes anything it touches to undergo incredibly rapid aging. The ray isn't big enough to kill a person, but Oona uses it to wither arms and legs, or in the case of direct shots to the body, cause internal organs to age into infirmity, causing heart attacks and kidney failure.

When they return to the Browder ranch they find a bunch of men returning from a fruitless search of the desert. During the night there had been a series of raids and several people, including whole families, had been taken. A number of ranchers were killed in the raids. However no trace of the raiders have been found. The ranchers believe that the raids are being carried out by Comanche war parties who are using the range war as an opportunity to make a move to reclaim their lands. Looks Away does not believe this, but none of the farmers want to listen to what a Comanche has to say.

Grey organizes his own posse; choosing men he feels are steady and level-headed. They ride out into the desert where they pick up tracks consistent with those left by the strange creatures who had attacked Oona.

They track the creatures into a series of caves. They encounter a number of strange creatures guarding the cave, including two men that Grey Torrance knows for sure are dead. He killed them in a battle with Deray's thugs. These zombies attack. The *Theotimus discharger* only

works on living tissue and is therefore useless against the zombies. The search party are forced to battle them with well-placed bullets and brute force.

Once past the undead guardians, Grey and his companions discover a vast cave that has been excavated beneath the desert. The cave has pens in which hundreds of zombies are kept; and massive iron cages containing fierce creatures ranging from Siberian tigers to what appears to be dinosaurs. They find ancient books written in strange languages, as well as some scrolls written in a weird code-like language that Oona appears to understand. She takes these and stuffs them into her pouch.

They explore the caves and find a chamber in which a strange ceremony is taking place.

Aleksander Deray, dressed in bizarre robes, has one of Browder's friends on a stone altar.

Before Grey can act, Deray plunges a knife into the man's chest and cuts him open. Then he removes the man's heart and speaks an incantation. Immediately the corpse begins speaking.

Deray demands that the spirit of the dead man answer his questions, and as Grey and the others listen in horror, the corpse talks about things he couldn't know about...the future, changes in technology, the rise of a new kind of American culture. Oona, in horror, says that Deray is clearly a necromancer –a sorcerer who can force the dead to reveal hidden knowledge.

Looks Away spots a holding pen in which a dozen farmers are being held –men, women and children. He frees the captives and begins leading them out of the cave. But then the sacrificial corpse spots him and screams a warning to Deray. The necromancer magically opens several of the cages, releasing all kinds of horrors to pursue them.

It's a running fight that results in several of the free farmers being mauled to death. As they flee, they pass through a chamber filled with religious artifacts from hundreds of cultures around the world –some of which they recognize and many of which are unknown to them. Oona recognizes one that is an icon of worship that she, in shocked outburst, says belongs eight hundred thousand years in the future.

Grey, Looks Away, Oona and the survivors are chased by a pack of velociraptors and only narrowly escape back into the desert. They mount up and ride off as fast as they can.

Back at Browder's farm, Grey demands that Oona come clean with them, and she does so with great reluctance. She confesses that she is not from 'this age of the world'. In fact she is the daughter of Weena of the Eloi and a man known as *The Time Traveller* (from H.G. Wells' THE TIME MACHINE). Oona says that she was born in the year 802,702. The creatures who attacked her when she first met Grey are MORLOCKS, a savage race of cannibals who evolved from humanity. The Morlocks live in vast underground caverns, tending to ancient machines. Before the arrival of the Time Traveller, the Morlocks kept the Eloi fed and fatted in the same way Browder raises cattle.

Oona says that her father trained the Eloi to fight back against the Morlocks and defeated them in a series of bloody battles that devastated much of the world. During the war, her father's Time Machine was stolen, and Oona led a mission to recover it. She found it inside a Morlock temple where it had been mostly disassembled for study. Oona hastily rebuilt the machine and used it to

escape in the very nick of time, however a Morlock leapt aboard and as the Time Machine vanished into the time-stream, Oona and the Morlock fought to the death. She ultimately prevailed, but was injured in the process. Dazed and half out of her mind, Oona tried to control the Machine, but it hurtled steadily into the past. She realized –too late—that either she had re-assembled the machine incorrectly or it had been damaged during the fight. Or both. She eventually managed to stop the Time Machine by yanking out the control crystal, but that caused it to crash-land in 1882. She isn't sure if the machine can be repaired and may be stuck here forever.

This story is hard for Grey and Looks Away to swallow –but in light of everything else they've experienced over the last days, they give her the benefit of the doubt.

Together they examine the scrolls Oona recovered from the cave. She tells them that these are written in the language of the Morlocks, and they appear to be detailed information about the past. Specifically they detail the rise of America as a 'super power' and about the invention of machines that roll and fly using engines fueled by oil. Oona fills in the blanks about the industrial revolution and the rise of what she calls the 'Carbon Age'.

Based on what she knows of history, the information in the Morlock scrolls, and what the corpse told Deray, they piece together a theory of what the necromancer has in mind. Deray has learned that that oil will soon become the most precious commodity on earth; and so Deray sets about acquiring all of the oil-rich lands in America. Starting with Texas. Deray, who may also have stolen the secret of immortality from the spirits of the dead, is launching a campaign of

extermination to slaughter everyone living on lands that will be the core of the next century's oil industry. If he succeeds, he will become the richest and most powerful man in history. He will, in fact, rewrite all of history, which means that Oona's own culture will cease to exist.

The fight is on now to save three worlds: Texas of 1882, the rise of 20<sup>th</sup> century cultures, and the world the Time Traveler helped save in the 802 millennium. If they lose, then the world will become an industrial slave state, with Deray as global emperor and the Morlocks as his chosen elite. The humans will become cattle, but instead of the few hundred thousand who exist in Oona's time, now there will be billions of humans to feed a growing and thriving new population of Morlocks. Deray and his allies are about to devour the entire world.

Oona, Grey and Looks Away return to the desert to try and find the Morlocks' lair. They find it after a long search and there is a fierce battle with some Morlock guards. Inside the cave is a huge Time Machine. Oona wants to use it to go into the future to fetch her father and some of the Eloi warriors, but the Morlock's machine appears to be too badly damaged. It takes Oona, Grey and Looks away on a wild ride back and forth through time and then crashes back where it started. Oona tries to re-start it, but the machine appears to be dead.

As Grey and Looks Away try to put together an army out of the skeptical cattle ranchers; Oona uses what's left of the Time Machine to make weapons. Her knowledge of future science is hampered by the lack of advanced resources –there are no computers, no silicon chips, no nuclear engines. She has to improvise, and what she comes up with are weapons that use 19<sup>th</sup> century resources –clockwork, steam, etc—but built according to the most advanced science.

A sneak attack on the farm that night catches them all off guard, and even though it's beaten back, it makes Grey wonder how Deray knew where they were. Was it information culled from the dead, or was there a spy within the group of defenders?

Grey and Looks Away have an argument about what to do next. Grey wants to fortify the Browder farm and use it as a base to raid Deray's caves. Looks Away wants to go warn his fellow Comanches –and maybe get them the hell out of Texas. Their argument gets heated as each of them makes a case in support of their *own* people. In the end, Looks Away reluctantly agrees to help fortify the farm. One device she creates is called the Mirage, a kind of cloaking device.

However in the middle of the night, Looks Away slips out of the house and vanished, apparently leaving the whites to fend for themselves. To make it worse, Looks Away takes the cloaking device with him. Grey seems crushed by this betrayal. Some of the farmers are happy to see the back of the Indian, but Grey growls at them, saying that Looks Away is a great fighter and worth any dozen of them.

Meanwhile, Deray is not sitting back and waiting to be attacked. The dead warn him that an attack is coming. Deray raises an army of the dead and uses his Morlock allies as generals. The army marches on the Browder farm with the intention of wiping them all out.

The battle is terrible and becomes apparent to Grey that the farm is going to become another Alamo. With Grey's knowledge of battle tactics and Oona's weapons, they repel attack after attack, but Deray has the numbers. The defenders are dying one by one.

When Deray makes a final surge, one of the ranchers opens the gate. He is the traitor, and as Grey threatens to shoot him down, the man says that he did it to save his wife and son, who are still captives of Deray. But Deray breaches the wall at that moment and mocks the man, saying that he has already slaughtered 'the cow and the veal'. The man goes crazy with grief and horror and tries to attack Deray, but the sorcerer destroys him.

With the gates open, the real slaughter begins. Deray fights a terrible battle with Oona and Grey, and when things are looking really bad, Grey tells Oona: "Now!" She fires a flare-gun into the sky.

There is an ear-splitting war cry and they all turn to see the blank desert suddenly shimmer and then fill with thousands of Comanches on horseback. Looks Away, holding the Mirage cloaking device, leads the charge and his people slam into the ranks of the living dead. This is all part of a plan Looks Away and Grey cooked up to fool Deray and whoever the traitor was.

Fighting side-by-side, the Comanches and the cattle ranchers destroy the undead, and Deray is finally defeated in a fierce battle with Grey, who uses some of Oona's devices to nullify the necromancer's dark magic. Oona defeats the Morlocks, and Looks Away slaughters the last of the zombies.

As the smoke of battle clears, the survivors stand in the ruins of the farm. Many have died, but the future has been saved.

In the epilogue, Grey, Oona and Looks Away track the Morlocks back to their lair, and they find marks where their damaged Time Machine once stood. But it's gone, taking the last of the Morlocks with it. Have they fled back to the future, or will they journey into the past to try and disrupt the timeline that lead to their defeat?

They stand in the empty cave, surrounded by terrible possibilities.