



Deathwatch by Robb White

Subjects: Deserts; Adventure and adventurers

Award: Edgar Allan Poe Winner

Book Lists: Gifted, Middle School, North America, Reluctant Readers

Props: Bighorn sheep head



(Show Bighorn sheep head) This is what Madec wanted, the head of a big horned sheep to hang on the wall of his study . . . and Madec always got what he wanted. He'd waited years for his once-in-a-lifetime license to hunt a male big horned sheep—not the female or the young sheep. *(Put down sheep head)* He'd been out in the desert for 3 days with the best guide money could buy, a college kid named Ben. They hadn't seen any male bighorns but just then they'd had a quick glimpse of five bighorn sheep. They disappeared over a ridge like something had startled them. Madec lay motionless, his heavy rifle resting on a flat stone, *(Hold arms like you're holding a rifle)* waiting for the bighorn sheep to show himself again. "There he is," Madec whispered. "I didn't see any horns," said Ben. "There have to be horns." "I saw horns," said Madec. "I didn't," repeated Ben.

The sound of Madec's shot *(Put arms down)* shattered the landscape. It echoed off the mountains and hung in the air. Then dead silence again. Madec went to claim his kill, but came back quickly saying he had missed. He motioned to Ben to come on and go to another site. But Ben knew something was wrong. Madec was a crack shot. Ben rushed up the cliff to where Madec had been. Madec had killed something all right. He had killed an old man, a prospector. Ben turned to find Madec right behind him, ready with a deal. Madec would pay all Ben's college expenses and make sure he got a job when he graduated. All Ben had to do was just walk away and forget the whole thing. Nobody cared about this old man. Nobody

would know. Ben needed the money for college. That's the only reason he'd taken this job because he hadn't liked Madec right off. But a man had been killed and they needed to take him to the sheriff. Ben put down his rifle in order to drag the body down to the jeep. That turned out to be a very big mistake.

Madec grabbed Ben's rifle. He wasn't about to risk any trouble from a two-bit sheriff in a tiny town on the edge of nowhere. And Madec wasn't the kind of man who took no from anyone, much less a college kid. Ben had put himself in Madec's way and he'd have to be eliminated. He didn't plan to murder Ben. He didn't need to. He'd let the desert do the job for him.

Madec forced Ben to strip to his undershorts and walk into the desert with no food, no water, no shoes, no protection from the sun. Between Ben and the small town were 35 miles of open desert. His body could possibly last 24 hours without water, but his feet, his skin couldn't last that long in the sun. Madec sat in the jeep and kept Ben in sight. All he had to do was to wait for Ben to die. Then he'd put Ben's clothes back on him and leave. No one would ever know what happened.

Ben had lived all his life next to this desert and prided himself on knowing it well, but could he survive this? Could anyone? *(Hold up book)* *Deathwatch* by Robb White.