

## Solomon Bull: When the Friction has its Machine

**Clayton Lindemuth**

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*Solomon Bull is a thrilling tale of perseverance against elements that range from the political to the natural and internal.*

Clayton Lindemuth's *Solomon Bull* is a smart and darkly funny political thriller that takes institutional depravity to task, all at the hands of its determined Blackfoot lead.

Solomon—sharp-tongued, young, and fit, with a penchant for wry vulgarities and just a hint of a philosopher's soul—is training for the Desert Dog, a privately sponsored race rumored to exist for the recruitment of mercenaries. He dreams that, if he wins, he will be regarded as “a Blackfoot version of Nietzsche's Overman.”

Of course, life itself looms beyond the contest. His girlfriend, Katrina, is double-timing him with his roommate and college friend, Keith. A confrontation with them prompts Solomon to initiate a dare: to prove himself capable, he will single-handedly derail Senator Cyman's reelection campaign, setting up the unlikely liberal opponent, Hock, for the seat in Cyman's place.

But in time with his acts of subterfuge, he's forced into a government scheme against Cal Barrett, the paranoid figure who runs Desert Dog. Shady, devious, and semi-intertwined figures soon abound. No matter the challenges that he faces, though, Solomon remains centered and committed to his dream to make an impact in the desert race. Whether he's battling government entities, vicious operatives, old demons, or the conditions along the Desert Dog route, Solomon's determination reigns.

The text is electric with evocative descriptions—the pull of a sticky floor on shoes; the sizzling heat of a desert path. Some dialogue is heavy-handed, but most is engaging. Characterizations—particularly those that come from other characters—are self-consciously politically incorrect; even Solomon engages in light Native American stereotyping, as he does deliver a few victim-blaming speeches, and use “gay” in a derogatory way. His deliveries will alienate some audiences, but will delight the like-minded set. A pinch of cultural references, a smattering of literary nods, and just a dash of nose-thumbing at Godwin's Law help to round out brash, often good-humored, and libertarian-flavored passages.

Solomon is no word-mincing lead; his worldview pervades the text. “Read *Atlas Shrugged*. It will change your life,” he advises. Through him, sexual interludes are bluntly conveyed: “Every chick I poke earns full consideration,” he declares, “I'm adamant about that.” While lines do sometimes contain such bundles of seeming contradictions, unwinding them is endless fun.

Beneath this edgy writing lies a barbed and complex plot, involving shadow governments, abusive behaviors, and frightening global conspiracies, that snags attention and propels the story forward. Heroes and villains aren't always easy to discern—a treasury agent proves to be not as she initially presents; Barrett is, at various points, considered both insane and an invaluable ally—but the work remains involving throughout, through to an end that is as much

satisfying as it is a new beginning.

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MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May 5, 2017)

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