

EPITAPH

Written by

René S. Garcia, Jr.

FADE IN:

EXT. ARIZONA PLAINS - TRAIN TRACKS - 1879 - MORNING

Train tracks stretch into the desert horizon. In the opposite direction, there is a giant, smoldering divot where the tracks have been blown up. Beyond the twisted iron is a stopped train. Two horses are hitched to the locomotive.

INT. LOCOMOTIVE - CONTINUOUS

The engineers are bound and gagged and struggle to get free.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car is full with roughly 20 people from different economic backgrounds who are busy speculating about the delay. JIMMY (20) has his head out a window. SARAH (20), his wife, prods him.

SARAH

Well? What do you see, Jimmy?

JIMMY

Hard to say. Hold my belt.

Sarah does so, revealing Jimmy's holstered PISTOL. Jimmy leans farther out the window.

SARAH

Anything?

JIMMY

Looks like something's wrong with the tracks. I see smoke.

SARAH

This is silly. Get back in here before you fall and crack your head. We've been here for twenty minutes. If you're not going to go see what's wrong, then I will.

She lets go of Jimmy's belt too soon and he almost falls out the window. He struggles to pull himself back in as Sarah heads up the aisle to exit the car.

JIMMY

Sarah, wait!

Too late. She's about to reach the front door of the car, but it suddenly flies open, revealing two MASKED MEN with guns. They step inside, sending Sarah running back to Jimmy's side.

MASKED MAN #1 is dressed in a dusty, black gentleman's outfit and gambler hat and sports two nickle-plated pistols with ivory grips at his hips.

A red bandana hides his face below the eyes. A black vertical stripe on the side of the bandana ends in a point. It looks like a long canine tooth.

MASKED MAN #2 stands behind him dressed in a dusty poncho and a cattleman hat. His face is also obscured by a red bandana with a similar design. He aims a rifle at the passengers.

MASKED MAN #1

Ladies and gentlemen!

He raises his hands to calm the passengers who shrink into their seats. He speaks with a bemused air about himself.

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

I apologize for the delay, but on behalf of the Unofficial Coalition of Chinese Railroad Workers, I regret to inform you that there's a problem with the tracks. But don't you fret; once the station ahead realizes you're late, workers will be dispatched post haste to have you on your merry way.

OLD PASSENGER

Coalition of Chinese what? Never heard of you.

MASKED MAN #1

Well, we're a very small group.

A third masked man rides up on a cart drawn by two horses. He pulls up alongside the passenger car and draws a rifle aimed at the windows. Some passengers yelp when they see him.

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

Your donations today will go a long way to growing our membership.

Masked Man #2 shoulders his rifle and moves down the aisle with a large sack.

UGLY PASSENGER

Donations? You mean rob us blind!

MASKED MAN #1

Call it what you want, but there's
no reason to be ugly. So if you
will kindly deposit your jewelry,
money, and any other valuables,
then we'll be on our way.

(beat)

And you'll be alive.

The passengers reluctantly deposit their valuables in the sack while Masked Man #1 twirls a pistol insouciantly. When Masked Man #2 sees expensive luggage, he tosses it out the window at MASKED MAN #3 who places it on the cart.

When Masked Man #2 gets to Sarah she tries to cover her WEDDING RING, but the man sees it and grabs her wrist. Jimmy intervenes, and a scuffle ensues. Masked Man #2 pulls out a knife, and Sarah screams.

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

What's going on over there?!

Masked Man #2 makes a strange sound like a deaf person and raises Sarah's hand to show the ring.

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

Ma'am, you either take it off or he
cuts it off. Either way, we're
getting that ring.

Angrily, Sarah twists off the ring and throws it at Masked Man #1. He snatches it out of the air then bites down on it with his molars. He makes an impressed face at Jimmy before tucking the ring into a breast pocket.

With nothing left, Masked Man #2 rejoins Masked Man #1 at the front of the car, sweeping the crowd with his rifle.

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

We appreciate your generosity!
Please, have a safe journey.

He motions, and his partner exits. He turns to leave--

JIMMY

You bastard. YOU BASTARD!

(stands)

I know who you are!

MASKED MAN #1

Oh?

(turns to face Jimmy)

Who am I?

JIMMY

You're that Chinaman train robber goes by The Long Fang. You and your partners are killers wanted across three territories for murdering lawmen, women, and children.

He drops his hand by his side near his pistol.

Masked Man #1 tips his hat back until it slides off his head and dangles from his neck down his back by some cording. His hair is longish and greying at the temples. He slides his bandana down to reveal a manicured goatee and moustache.

MASKED MAN #1/LONG

My name is Fang Long. The Long Fang if you prefer. I've killed a lot of people. And I'll kill you too if you do something stupid.

Jimmy tries to build enough nerve to draw his gun. Some of the male passengers look pleading eyes with him, but Jimmy lets the moment pass in frustration. Satisfied that nothing is going to happen, Long turns to leave--

JIMMY

There's also a bounty on your head.
\$2,000. Dead or alive.

The fear drains in some of the male passengers' faces. One man notices a PISTOL already in another man's lap. That man notices the first and nods. Near the back of the car, a pistol is heard cocking. Jimmy grimaces in determination.

LONG

(in Cantonese)

You stupid sons of whores.

Three men with pistols stand and open fire as Jimmy begins drawing his gun. But, with incredible speed, dexterity, and accuracy, Long draws his own pistol and shoots from the hip, fanning the hammer and killing the three men instantly.

Long trains his pistol on Jimmy who is stunned, covered in blood spatter, and hasn't cleared his holster. In awe, Jimmy re-holsters his weapon. Long turns to leave amid the wails of wives and daughters who just lost the men in their lives.

One unarmed FEMALE PASSENGER near the back of the car starts running at Long, screaming--

FEMALE PASSENGER

I'LL KILL YOU! I'LL KILL YOU!

Long turns to handle her but is surprised when a gun shot to the head makes short work of her. He turns to see Masked Man #3 standing on the cart outside with his rifle trained on the woman's dead body through the broken window. He winks.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR - CONTINUOUS

Long exits, unhappy. Masked Man #3 meets him on the ground a few feet away from the passenger car.

MASKED MAN #3
(pulling off mask)
Told you I'd come in handy.

Long approaches with determination. When he's close enough, he punches Masked Man #3 who staggers back.

LONG
What did I tell you? No women!

MASKED MAN #3
I just saved your life!

LONG
Like hell you did. She was unarmed!
Where were you five seconds before
when I was fighting for my life
against three men with guns?
(beat)
Sam Duke. Deadliest Rifle West of
Tennessee my ass!

MASKED MAN #3/SAM
Go to blazes. I was fiddlin' with
the luggage. Besides, those
corncrackers couldn't hit a bull's
rump with a handful of banjos.

LONG
(beat)
Sam, if that's English, then I
regret learning it.

Both men look sternly at each other before chuckling. Sam rubs his jaw.

SAM
I like you, so I'm gonna let this
one go. Now tell your little
brother to ease up on the iron.

Long turns to see Masked Man #2 on his horse a few yards away but with his rifle trained on Sam.

LONG
 (in Cantonese)
 Bao, everything is fine. Bring the
 horses.

Masked Man #2/Bao reluctantly shoulders his rifle and rides
 up with Long's horse in tow.

SAM
 We better git. The natives are
 getting restless.

Long looks up at the passenger car windows and sees curios
 faces peeking out. He draws his pistol on them, and they
 scurry away. All three men mount their horses and ride away
 from the train as passengers peek out timidly.

Bao points at some blood on Long's coat.

LONG
 (in Cantonese)
 Bao, I'm fine little brother. Just
 some white man's blood.
 (beat)
 Did you know my bounty is at \$2000
 now?

Bao grunts and motions to himself.

LONG (CONT'D)
 They didn't say anything about you.
 Sorry.

Bao rides ahead indignantly. Long chuckles and falls back to
 Sam on the cart.

LONG (CONT'D)
 Alright, Sam. Stash this at the
 hideout and meet us at Sally's.

SAM
 I got it. I got it.
 (beat)
 This ain't much to split three
 ways. Heck, this ain't even enough
 for one of us.

LONG
 (beat)
 Don't get any ideas. This haul
 isn't half as good as what's
 waiting for us in town. And you
 don't want me on your tail.

SAM

Christ Almighty Long. You're the one who's as crooked as a dog's hind leg. You just make sure the loot on our next job is worth my time. I ain't no purse snatcher.

Sam looks back at the luggage in the cart and spits. Then whips the horses and speeds away as Long and Bao watch him go. They head off in a different direction.

INSERT MONTAGE

EXT. ARIZONA PLAINS - LATER

Long and Bao give wide berth to an active military fort with a large contingent of soldiers performing military drills.

Later, Long and Bao move quietly as they pass by a group of Indian bandits attacking a wagon with a settler family on it. As a woman screams helplessly, Long and Bao leave quickly.

Crossing a well-traveled road, Long and Bao briefly cross paths with a snake oil salesman transporting his goods on a horse-drawn cart. The side of his cart reads "Petrov's Potent Potables".

Outside of a silver mine, Long and Bao slowly ride through the operations out front. They take note of the many Chinese workers hauling and processing the ore before moving on. The name on a hanging sign reads "Profitt Silver Mine".

Finally, they see the town of Epitaph in the distance. It's large for a desert town and the buildings are packed tightly together. In the center is an old fortified outpost. There are also train tracks that pass through one side of town.

Long points in a direction off to the other side of town.

END MONTAGE

EXT. DESERT OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

Long and Bao arrive in a secluded clearing with raised ground all around. They tie their horses to a crude hitching post and make their way into a natural passage that has formed in a large, deep crack in the desert surface hidden by flora.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

A sign nailed to the wall of the train platform reads: "Welcome to Epitaph". The STATION MANAGER steps out, looks down the tracks, then pulls out a pocket watch and shakes his head. He whistles to a group of workers standing around.

The men grumble as they draw a handcar out onto the tracks and load it with new rail, spikes, and sledgehammers. The section crew then begins pumping the handcar down the tracks. The Station Manager goes back in the office.

Standing alone on the platform is U.S. Marshal EVERETT JAMES (45). His black duster is dusty, and weary eyes peek out from beneath the brim of his ridge top hat. His aggressively grizzled facial hair illustrates his time away from town.

The town sheriff STAN HOLDEN (35) approaches.

STAN

Unless my eyes deceive, I don't see a train. So, you were right. The Long Fang bites again.

(beat)

Are you sure he's coming this way?

(Everett doesn't reply)

I mean, those boys we got posted all over town haven't seen hide nor hair of him.

(Everett remains silent)

C'mon Marshal, you've been riding those boys pretty hard for days. Let's call 'em in.

EVERETT

He'll be here. I know it.

STAN

Blazes Everett. We all know what this means to you. How long you been chasing Fang? What's one more day? Let these men see their families tonight.

Everett sighs heavily. He softens.

EVERETT

Alright Sheriff. Tell them boys to meet at Porter's to resupply. Then tell them to get some chow. We'll ride out tomorrow morning.

STAN
 Will do, Marshal!
 (he begins to leave)

EVERETT
 Stan.

STAN
 Yeah?

EVERETT
 10 years.

STAN
 What's that?

EVERETT
 You asked me how long I've been
 chasing Fang. 10 years.

STAN
 Dang, Marshal. Ain't there some
 kind of statute of limitations?

EVERETT
 Not for what he did. Not in this
 life. Not ever.

A stiff breeze blows past as Stan leaves to round up the posse. Everett pulls out his pocket watch and opens the clasp to check the time. There's a whisper of a smile on his face. Then it vanishes. Everett puts his watch away and leaves.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Long and Bao make their way through the natural separation in the earth. As they continue, the passageway becomes braced by wood boards and support beams. They arrive at a lantern illuminating the underside of heavy cellar doors.

Long tries the iron handles, but the sturdy doors won't budge. He bangs hard on them. After a moment, scraping is heard on the other side. Then the doors open revealing ZEKE BONNER (50) a portly man with a bushy beard and bowler hat.

ZEKE
 Well, if ain't the Tooth Fairies!

LONG
 Oh, is that a joke about our names?

Long and Bao climb out of the passageway.

INT. SALLY'S SALOON - BACK CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

ZEKE

Fang Brothers. Tooth Fairies. I've been saving that all day!

LONG

You're one to talk. Zeke. Your name sounds like a disease.

Zeke slams the cellar doors shut and slides a lock in place.

ZEKE

It's a joke. What crawled up your britches and died?

LONG

(softer)

Sorry. It's been a hell of a day. It's good to see you again.

ZEKE

Yes sir, it's been a while.

He shakes Long's hand vigorously and slaps Bao on the back heartily. He begins walking them to the front room where the din of saloon activity can be heard.

ZEKE (CONT'D)

It's a good thing you still remembered to use the back door. Posse's in town, but I hear they're moving on in the morning.

LONG

You still got those spare rooms?

ZEKE

Fresh sheets. Just for you.

LONG

Hot damn. Looking forward to sleeping in a bed for a change.

ZEKE

Want me to send some girls from the 9 Lives up?

LONG

Maybe later. Right now, we could use a drink.

INT. SALLY'S SALOON - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The large room is bustling with activity. Unsavory-looking people sit at most tables. Some play cards. Others compare scars and tattoos. While the more dangerous types either arm wrestle or keep to themselves. An aging Indian man sweeps.

A man plays lively tunes on the upright piano by the stairs that lead up. Long and Bao saunter up to the bar. SALLY STRETCH (55), a woman whose obvious beauty has long since faded, mans the bar. She wears an old cabaret dress.

SALLY

Well, lookee here! Who's got a kiss
for Sally Stretch?

When she speaks, her voice is hoarse. She offers her cheek to Long and absentmindedly scratches at the scar around her neck that could only result from rope burns. Long leans over the bar and kisses her cheek.

Sally offers her other cheek to Bao, but when he leans to kiss it, Sally quickly turns and kisses Bao on the lips. She grabs both sides of his head so he can't escape even though he struggles, wide-eyed. Sally finally releases him.

SALLY (CONT'D)

I know you missed that!

Long laughs as Bao wipes the slobber off his face.

LONG

Careful, Sally. You'll make Zeke
jealous.

ZEKE

(lighting cigar, scoffs)
Better him than me. It's like
kissing a prune.

SALLY

Oh, hon, better than kissing that
briar patch of a face.

(to Long)

Now, what'll it be, sugar?

LONG

Gin.

Bao knocks on the bar top twice, then signals with two fingers to pour one for him as well. Sally does so then moves down the bar to two sullen-looking men. By their attire, they're prospectors.

PROSPECTOR #1
We just have to keep digging.

PROSPECTOR #2
I'm telling you; we're digging in
the wrong spot.

SALLY
You boys want another one?
(they nod)
How about you show me your coin
before I pour?

The men's shoulders slump and they slink out. Meanwhile--

LONG
Well, Zeke, I got your message.
What's the job this time?

ZEKE
(puffing hard on cigar)
Long, we've hit the mother lode.
And I mean it.

INSERT MONTAGE

INT. PROFITT SILVER MINE - DAY

Chinese workers swing pickaxes against the mine wall.

ZEKE (V.O.)
Them Chinamen been slaving away
night and day in the silver mine.
And there's been enough silver to
draw prospectors from miles around.
But not like this.

One weary worker looks like he's going pass out, but gives
one more swing. As the rock falls away from the wall, the
worker's face illuminates from the silver revealed. The vein
is so rich, other workers stop and marvel at the silver wall.

WORKER #1
Boss! BOSS!

EXT. PROFITT SILVER MINE - LATER

Cart after cart of silver ore is pushed out of the mine.
Workers then load the ore onto a horse-drawn cart under the
supervision of foremen.

ZEKE (V.O.)

The silver flowed like a river.
Just cart after cart. All coming
out of Old Man Profitt's mine.

OLD MAN PROFITT (65), a bespectacled man with a slight frame and with only a few fine strands of hair left on his scalp, watches from a platform and grins ghoulishly.

EXT. WELLS GREENE BANK - LATER

A large sign with the bank's name hangs over the entrance. A solitary guard stands outside by the door with a shotgun. The cart full of silver ore pulls up, and armed men spill off the back as another cart full of Chinese workers arrives.

ZEKE (V.O.)

The closest smelter is in Bisbee,
and the old man has already sent
for a guarded transport. It'll take
them a couple of days for them to
get here.

INT. WELLS GREENE BANK - CONTINUOUS

Behind the teller stations and the Manager's desk, a giant vault dominates the rear of the room. The front door opens and Old Man Profitt approaches a CLERK and drops a giant silver ore at his station.

ZEKE (V.O.)

In the meantime, all of that ore is
being stored under lock and key at
the bank. And I've got a plan to
take it.

END MONTAGE

INT. SALLY'S SALOON - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LONG

So, we're bank robbers now?

ZEKE

Sure. Why not?

LONG

Why not just ambush the transport
on its way to Bisbee?

ZEKE

Long, the men Old Man Profitt hired to guard his fortune are just some boys from around town looking for honest work. The men coming from Bisbee are professionals. Used to be in the army under Sherman.

(beat)

We're not gonna get the jump on them. And if things go south, we'll have real trouble. Get me?

LONG

Alright, Zeke. I believe you. We'll need time to think about it.

ZEKE

Sure. Sure. Just don't think too long. Tomorrow night's probably our only chance.

He leaves as Long and Bao huddle and discuss the idea.

EXT. PORTER'S GENERAL GOODS - CONTINUOUS

The general goods store is busy with all walks of life coming in and out with the necessities for their day. Everett approaches and stands outside with his back to the wall and his eyes on the street. Several of his posse file by.

They nod, tip their hat, or otherwise thank him with some small gesture, as if knowing better than to speak to him. Stan walks up after the last member enters the store.

STAN

The boys sure are grateful. I'm sure they all miss their families.

EVERETT

Don't we all.

Stan and Everett stand in silence for a moment.

EVERETT (CONT'D)

Where's the best place to get a drink around here?

STAN

Hey now! I never pegged you as the drinking kind. I always thought you were dryer than a snake's behind.

Everett gives him an expectant look.

STAN (CONT'D)

OK, since you want the best there are only two places worth recommending. The 9 Lives or Sally's. 9 Lives is cat house but the girls also put on a decent show if that's the kind of entertainment you're looking for. Sally's is even more unsavory if you can believe that. Mostly the dregs of society and that includes Sally. Rumor is that they strung her up in Texas but that tough bitch wouldn't die. So, you won't like the clientele, but Sally pours 'em stiff.

Everett's attention is focused on an approaching horse-drawn cart. Riding on it are MAGGIE MILLER (30), her son BILLY (7), and her hired Negro help RAY (35). Stan realizes, gives Everett a knowing smile, and leaves into the store.

When the cart stops, Everett doesn't approach, but his eyes smile. Ray hops off and begins gathering sacks and containers from the cart. Maggie is the first to see Everett.

MAGGIE

Fancy seeing you here again,
Marshall.

EVERETT

Ms. Miller.

MAGGIE

Please, Everett. Call me Maggie.
Are you chasing another dangerous
outlaw?

EVERETT

Yes ma'am, I am.

MAGGIE

There must be so many for you to be
coming around as often as you do.

(beat)

Are you sure there's not another
reason?

Everett blushes, unsure of what to say. Then--

BILLY

Howdy Marshall!

EVERETT

Howdy Billy. You looking after your ma?

BILLY

You bet! When I grow up I'm gonna be famous marshal, too. So no one can ever hurt mama again!

He pulls a piece of wood shaped like a crude pistol from his belt and pretends to shoot from the hip.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Bang, bang, bang! You bad man! Don't shoot my daddy!

Everett smiles as if for the first time in a long time.

MAGGIE

That's enough Billy. Go help Ray fetch what we came for.

Ray, a formidable black man dressed in field hand attire, nods at Everett as he approaches, containers in hand.

EVERETT

Ray. Good to see you.

RAY

Yessuh. You too, suh.
(to Billy)
C'mon now. Git.

BILLY

Aw. Bye marshal!

He gives a friendly wave before entering the store with Ray. Maggie moves closer to Everett.

MAGGIE

You'll have to excuse him. You've made quite an impression on him.
(beat)
He's not the only one.
(locks eyes with Everett)
I wish you would stay longer.

EVERETT

Maggie...I...

MAGGIE

It's alright. Just think about it.

She lays her hand on his chest over his heart then goes inside the store.