

EPITAPH

Written by

René S. Garcia, Jr

FADE IN:

EXT. ARIZONA PLAINS - TRAIN TRACKS - 1879 - MORNING

Train tracks stretch into the desert. Following the tracks in the opposite direction leads to a giant, smoldering divot where the tracks have been blown up. Behind the twisted iron is a stopped train. Two horses are hitched to the engine.

INT. LOCOMOTIVE - CONTINUOUS

Two MASKED MEN have finished binding and gagging the engineers and move on to the passenger car.

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

What do you see, Jimmy?

JIMMY

Can't tell. Hold my belt.

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

SARAH

Well?

JIMMY

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

SARAH

This is silly. I'm going to look for myself.

She lets go of Jimmy's belt and starts walking up the aisle. Jimmy almost falls out and struggles to pull himself back in.

JIMMY

Sarah, wait!

Too late. She's about to reach the front door of the car, but it suddenly flies open, revealing the two masked men. 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.

MASKED MAN #2 stands behind him dressed in a dusty poncho and a cattleman hat. His face is also covered by a red bandana. 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. When he speaks, he has a strange accent.

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)
That's why we need your donations today.

Masked Man #2 shoulders his rifle 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.
(MORE)

MASKED MAN #1 (CONT'D)

(beat)
And you'll be alive.

The passengers reluctantly deposit their valuables in the sack. When Masked Man #2 sees expensive-looking 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 we cut 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

OK.
(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

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 lock pleading eyes with him, but Jimmy let's 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. Jimmy re-holsters his weapon. Long turns to leave when a FEMALE PASSENGER silently draws a blade to stab him from behind.

A gun shot followed by glass breaking results in the woman's head exploding as Long stumbles backward. He turns to see Masked Man #3 standing on the cart 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

(pulling off mask)

Saved your life again.

LONG

Like hell you did. Where were you five seconds before that when I was fighting for my life against three mean cowboys?

(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.

Both men look sternly at each other before chuckling.

LONG

Sam, if that's English, then I regret learning it.

Masked Man #2 rides up with Long's horse in tow. His mask is off and he looks concerned. Long reassures him with a tired wave and mounts his horse. All three men ride away from the train as passengers peek out timidly.

Masked Man #2 points at some blood on Long's coat.

LONG (CONT'D)

(in Cantonese)

Bao, I'm fine little brother. Just some white man's blood.

(beat)

Did you know my bounty is at \$2000 now?

Masked Man #2/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.

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.

Sam whips the horses and speeds away as Long and Bao watch him go. Then 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 fortified around its perimeter by large logs planted into the ground and shaved into spikes at their tops. There are only a few entrances.

Long points in a direction just off to the 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 illustrate 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.

(MORE)

EVERETT (CONT'D)

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.