Ghost Train

by
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EXT. RAILROAD TRESTLE - NIGHT

On horseback, three men SPLASH up a creek beneath a wooden train trestle. Bandannas cover their faces.

OLD PETE, 50s, balding, grizzled, faded clothes, rolls off his horse into the creek.

JOEY
Pete!

JOEY SLADE, 17, eyes wide with fear, jumps off his horse. WRIGHT, early 20s, icily handsome, cocky, reins up.

WRIGHT
Shit.

Joey rolls Old Pete out of the water. Blood soaks his shirt.

JOEY
Oh, Lord, Wright, he’s hurt bad. Gimme a hand.

WRIGHT
Joey, that posse--

JOEY
We ain’t leavin’ him!

Joey’s panicky, almost frantic. Wright dismounts and gathers the horses.

Old Pete GROANS and SPITS blood. His words are labored.

OLD PETE
Just a simple stage robbery. Never shoulda been no shootin’.

WRIGHT
Thought he was goin’ for a gun.

OLD PETE
Naw. You wanted to see what it’s like to kill.

WRIGHT
Weren’t my first time killin’, old man.

Wright reloads his ivory-handled Schofield revolver.
OLD PETE
Never should’ve hooked up with you, Wright. Only done it ‘cause I owed Joey’s pa.

JOEY
I know he’d appreciate you helpin’ me get my start. Gonna do Pa proud, you’ll see.

OLD PETE
Bein’ an outlaw ain’t like yer dime novels, Joey, nor them stories I told ‘bout Big Bill an’ me.

He COUGHS up more blood.

JOEY
Now you rest easy, Pete. Git yer strength back.

OLD PETE
No use. Can’t ride no more. I’m done fer.

JOEY
No! Yer only hurt some. Spotted a depot up the tracks – town can’t be far off. We’ll git a doctor out here.

OLD PETE
Where’d you think that posse come from? Town’s busy as a beehive with lawmen now.

Old Pete grabs Joey’s collar and points to Wright.

OLD PETE
You listen to me, Joey. Split offa him, soon’s you can. He’s snakebit. Poison with meanness. Git you both hanged.

Old Pete falls back, exhausted. Joey’s confused and frightened.

JOEY
Wright? But he’s my pard. Like you and Pa in the old days.

Old Pete struggles for breath, his voice weak.
OLD PETE
Got a powerful thirst.

Wright hands Joey a canteen. Joey helps Old Pete drink.
Bloody water dribbles out of his mouth.

OLD PETE
Thanky, Bill. Much obliged.

JOEY
Pete, I got a Bible in my pack. You want I should read ya somethin’ from it?

OLD PETE
That’d ... nice. Real ...

Joey jumps up. Digs through his saddlebag.

A train ROARS across the trestle overhead. Soot and hot cinders rain down. Joey turns, Bible in hand.

Old Pete’s dead.

Joey kneels and closes his eyes.

JOEY
Now I ain’t got nobody left in the world.

WRIGHT
Hell, you got me, Joey.

Both turn as they hear SHOUTS.

WRIGHT
Posse’s close now.

The train WHISTLES at the depot down the tracks.

JOEY
I got an idea.

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

A TRACKER kneels on the creek bank. Wipes something wet off a rock with his gloved hand. SNIFFS it.

TRACKER
Blood trail, Sheriff.

A SHERIFF, portly, tin star, on horseback with a POSSE of a half-dozen men.
SHERIFF
Ike said he winged one--

Three dark shapes BURST from under the trestle downstream. Hooves GALLOP in the night.

SHERIFF
They’re makin’ a break for it!
After ‘em, boys!

The posse gives chase.

EXT. TRACKS - NIGHT
Joey and Wright hurry toward the depot, keeping low.
Lightning flashes ahead. Thunder RUMBLES.

EXT. DEPOT - NIGHT
Joey and Wright pass the train’s final car, a darkened observation car.

Black passenger cars stretch down the platform. Doors at each end open to railed porches with stairs to either side.

WRIGHT
Sure is a beauty, ain’t she?

Ahead, the last passengers board, indistinct figures in a cloud of steam PUFFING from the locomotive.

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)
All aboard!

The WHISTLE blows. Brakes loose with a CLANK. The train rolls forward.

JOEY
C’mon!

Joey and Wright dash for the nearest passenger car. Ahead, baggage car doors SLAM shut.

Wright bounds onto the passenger car steps. The train picks up speed. Joey falls behind.

WRIGHT
Here, Joey!

Wright stretches out a hand. Putting on a final burst of speed, Joey grabs it and Wright yanks him aboard.
The train CHUGS into the oncoming storm.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

Joey and Wright shut the door behind them.

A uniformed CONDUCTOR, elderly, thin, white hair and mustache, approaches. He touches his cap.

    CONDUCTOR
    ‘Evening, young fellers.

    JOEY
    Mister, we’ll take two tickets.

    CONDUCTOR
    You cowboys know where this train’s bound?

    WRIGHT
    Anywhere’s better’n here.

    CONDUCTOR
    That’ll be two coins each, then.

Joey turns to Wright. Lightning CRACKLES. Quick FLASH of a skeletal claw in a ragged cloak in place of the Conductor’s outstretched hand.

Joey turns back. The friendly Conductor again. Joey pays for the tickets.

    JOEY
    Mister, these tickets ain’t been punched.

    CONDUCTOR
    All in good time, young feller. All in good time. Welcome aboard.

EXT. TRACKS - NIGHT

The black train CLICKETY-CLACKS down the tracks. A thick plume of steam pours from the sleek locomotive, No. 927.

Next comes the open coal car, followed by windowless baggage and mail cars. A series of passenger cars, with the observation car bringing up the rear.

The WHISTLE blows in the stormy night.
INT. PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

The train RATTLES and BUMPS down the tracks. Joey and Wright stroll down a center aisle lined by padded bench seats. Gas lamps HISS.

A cowboy SNORES next to a window, his hat pulled over his eyes.

A woman in a dancing dress smiles at Joey. He tips his hat.

Joey and Wright take an open bench away from the others. They speak in low voices.

WRIGHT
Won’t take that posse long to figure out where we went.

JOEY
Even if they wire ahead to the next stop, won’t do ‘em no good. Once we put some miles ‘tween us and them, I aim for us to jump off.

Wright laughs.

WRIGHT
‘Twixt yer brains and my gun hand, Joey, we’re gonna be rich.

Joey stares out the window at the gathering storm. Wright pulls out a wad of cash and a gold pocket watch.

WRIGHT
Wanna split the take from them stage passengers now?

JOEY
I’ll take the watch as my share. Fair enough?

Wright nods. Joey takes the watch.

WRIGHT
Don’t pay no nevermind to them things Pete said ‘bout the outlaw life. He weren’t in his right mind from the pain, that’s all.

JOEY
Wish we could’ve buried him proper.
WRIGHT
Say, let’s see if this train’s got a saloon car. Got to celebrate our first job, after all.

Joey nods.

EXT. DEPOT - NIGHT

The Sheriff glowers on the platform. Behind him, the posse searches blackened timbers of a long-abandoned depot.

A breeze rustles weeds growing through the rusty railroad tracks.

Boards CREAK as the Tracker joins the lawman.

TRACKER
Trail ends here, Sheriff, but they ain’t hidin’ nowheres.

SHERIFF
Where’n hell them boys git to?

Lightning flashes in the distance.

INT. SALOON CAR - NIGHT

Joey and Wright take in the car. The BARTENDER wiping down his bar matches the Conductor except in attire.

JOEY
Huh. Must be twins.

Three men play cards. Poker chips and a half-empty whiskey bottle on the table.

HARDIN
Ya lowdown dirty cheat!

JOHN WESLEY HARDIN, 40s, unruly brown hair, mild blue eyes over a flamboyant mustache, throws down his cards and draws an enormous Colt .44 revolver from a shoulder holster.

Hardin FIRES at the third player, burly despite having no right arm. Blood SPATTERS on Joey’s shirt. He flinches.

The one-armed man topples over in his chair with a THUD. Dead.
The third player, EMMANUEL CLEMENTS, 30s, short hair and a neat mustache, wears a suit with a pocket watch. He seems unfazed by the violence.

EMMANUEL
He weren’t cheatin’ none, John. Hell, he aint’ got but the one sleeve. Where d’you reckon he was hidin’ the cards?

HARDIN
Goddamn it, Emmanuel, if I say a feller’s a cheat, then he’s a cheat.

Emmanuel coolly examines the dead man’s hand of cards. Tosses them back on the table with a SNORT.

EMMANUEL
If he’s a cheat, then he’s the worst damn cheat I ever laid eyes on. He weren’t holdin’ nothin’.

HARDIN
Well, shit.

He SPITS on the floor.

HARDIN
Two-hand poker’s no damn fun. You two! Greenhorns! Have a sit and play a few hands.

He casually waves the .44 at Joey and Wright.

EMMANUEL
Jesus, John, put that thing down afore you plug somebody else.

HARDIN
I’m John Wesley Hardin, and I’ll plug anyone I damn well please. Keep rilin’ me and I may plug you next.

EMMANUEL
You’d plug yer own cousin?

HARDIN
I’d plug the little baby Jesus hisself if he riled me enough. ‘Sides, half the damn West’s some kind of kin or ‘nother t’me.

(MORE)
Plenty more cousins where you come from, Emmanuel.

He notices Wright and Joey.

**HARDIN**
Quit yer dawdling’ an’ take a seat, damn it. You can buy this feller’s chips. He won’t be needin’ ‘em for awhile.

**JOEY**
Not til Judgment Day.

Hardin puts the .44 on the table with a THUMP. He pours a shot of whiskey.

Wright and Joey join the game, Wright taking the dead man’s chair.

**WRIGHT**
I ain’t no damn greenhorn, mister.
You really John Wesley Hardin?

Wright buys chips for both with the cash from the stage robbery.

Emmanuel gathers the cards and shuffles.

**EMMANUEL**
Now how come nobody never asks if I’m really Emmanuel Clements?

**HARDIN**
‘Cause you ain’t the killingest son of a bitch in the West, Emmanuel, that’s how come.

**WRIGHT**
I heard you kilt 44 men, Hardin.

Hardin downs a shot of whiskey.

**HARDIN**
Forty-five.

Wright glances at the body.

**WRIGHT**
Oh. Right.

**HARDIN**
More or less. Anyhow, they all deserved it.
EMMANUEL
What about that feller you shot for
snorin’ too loud up in Abilene?

HARDIN
Yer point bein’?

Emmanuel shrugs. Behind them, the Bartender drags away the
body and mops blood off the floor.

WRIGHT
Pleased to meet ya, Hardin. Name’s
Wright, and this here’s Joey Slade.

Hardin SPITS on the floor.

HARDIN
Less jawin’, more playin’.

EMMANUEL
The game’s five-card draw, gents.
Nothin’ wild.

HARDIN
Shit, where’s the fun in that?

EMMANUEL
Your turn to deal, you call the
game, John. Dollar ante.

Players ante up. Emmanuel deals. Hardin doesn’t even glance
at his hand.

HARDIN
Five bucks.

WRIGHT
I’ll see ya and raise you fivemore.

HARDIN
Sure you played this game before,
greenhorn?

He SPITS on the floor.

WRIGHT
I done told you once, I ain’t no
darn greenhorn.

JOEY
(hastily)
I’ll call.
And the dealer calls. John?

Hell, call.

The Bartender discreetly sets a brass spittoon next to Hardin’s chair.

Hardin stares him in the eye. Leans over. And SPITS carefully on the floor next to it. The Bartender throws up his hands in defeat and retreats to his bar.

How many cards, gentlemen?

Four.

Jesus, John.

Gimme the damn cards.

Two.

Three.

And the dealer takes two. Say, you any relation to Big Bill Slade?

He was my Pa.

Thought I saw a family resemblance. You remember Big Bill, John?

Yeah. Lousy pistol shot, but he weren’t bad with a rifle. Once seen him pick off a cowpoke at half a mile.

This feller shootin’ at you?
HARDIN
Naw. Ridin’ a fenceline. I bet Big Bill a bottle of whiskey he couldn’t plug him from that distance and, dern it, he did.

EMMANUEL
You was madder than a wet hen, John.

HARDIN
T’was a foolish bet. My last bottle at the time.

Wright’s prickly at being ignored.

WRIGHT
Me and Joey, here, we’re partners. Knocked over a stage earlier today.

Hardin SPITS.

HARDIN
We playin’ cards here or not?

EMMANUEL
Your bet, John.

HARDIN
Five bucks, then.

WRIGHT
Make it ten.

Joey’s distracted.

HARDIN
Dern pack of slowpokes we got here. What’s yer bet, Baby Slade?

JOEY
Fold.

EMMANUEL
Sorry, compadres, this game’s too rich for my blood.

He tosses his cards on the table. Hardin studies Wright. Taking his measure.

HARDIN
Yer bluffin’.
WRIGHT
You gonna pay to find out?

Hardin’s eyes narrow.

EMMANUEL
Just a friendly game of cards, John. Nothin’ to get riled over.

HARDIN
Who’s gettin’ riled? Knocked over a stage, huh?

WRIGHT
Kilt at least one man already today. I’m aimin’ to beat yer record, Hardin.

HARDIN
You got a lot to learn afore you do that, greenhorn.

Wright bristles like a gamecock.

WRIGHT
I ain’t tellin’ you again. I ain’t no greenhorn.

EMMANUEL
Hell, John, can’t we go one damn hand of cards without you shootin’ some poor bastard?

HARDIN
I ain’t shot nobody yet.
(pause)
‘Cept for that other feller, and shootin’ no one-armed man don’t even hardly count fer nothin’.

Hardin pushes his chips to the table’s center.

HARDIN
Let’s get this here pissin’ contest over with. All in.

Wright pushes his chips in. He lays down his cards. Not a great hand, but Wright tries to cover it with bravado.

WRIGHT
Two kings, ace kicker. Beat that.

HARDIN
Two pair.
Hardin lays down aces and eights with a nine of diamonds.

Emmanuel WHISTLES.

JOEY
Those are the cards Wild Bill held when he got kilt up in Deadwood.

EMMANUEL
Dead man’s hand, all right.

A mean CHUCKLE from Wright.

WRIGHT
Well, ain’t that appropriate.

HARDIN
How’s that?

WRIGHT
On account of I heard you went and got yourself kilt. Yer pretty spry for a corpse, Hardin.

JOEY
Probably someone talkin’ himself up.

HARDIN
Nope, more’s the pity. Damn dirty bushwhacker shot me in the back down in El Paso while I was playin’ dice.

WRIGHT
Don’t you josh me. Yer sittin’ right here, plain as day.

HARDIN
Not a’tall. I’s dead. D-E-D, dead ... greenhorn.

WRIGHT
I warned you, Hardin.

Before he can draw, a FLASH of lightning reveals Hardin and Emmanuel as skeletal, phantasmal ghosts.

The ghostly Hardin has bullet wounds in head, chest, and arm, while the phantasmal Clements has a single bullet wound in the back of the head.

Joey jumps back from the table, his chair CLATTERING to the floor. Wright’s mouth hangs open.
Hardin LAUGHS with an eerie resonance.

JOEY
What in Sam Hill’s goin’ on here?

HARDIN
Don’t you even know what railroad yer on? Boys, you done caught yourselves a ride on the train to Hell.

He LAUGHS again.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Wright dives off his chair.

Behind Hardin, the one-armed man, no sign of his fatal wound, a smoking pistol in his left hand.

Hardin sees blood pouring from three exit wounds in his chest.

HARDIN
Dern. Bushwhacked agin.

He slumps over the table. Emmanuel shakes his head and gathers up cards.

EMMANUEL
Can’t never finish a hand on this damn train, nohow. Blackjack?

The one-armed gunman nods and reclaims his chair.

Wright and Joey run from the saloon car.

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

The ghost train hurtles down the tracks, wheels SCREAMING through the stormy night.

INT. LOCOMOTIVE - NIGHT

The ENGINEER - identical to the Conductor and Bartender, except in attire - opens up the throttle.

The train speeds up. The whistle BLOWS mournfully.

INT. PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

Joey and Wright hurry through the empty car.
WRIGHT
Reckon Hardin’s tellin’ the truth?

JOEY
Don’t know as you can trust nothin’
no ghost says, but I don’t aim to
take no chances.

WRIGHT
Gonna jump, then.

JOEY
Gotta wait ‘til the train slows up,
else we’ll git our necks broke.

INT. CHAPEL CAR – NIGHT

Rows of wooden pews before an altar with a brass lectern. A
compact pipe organ to one side, and domed ceiling with brass
chandeliers swaying overhead.

Above rain-streaked windows are panels of stained glass.

JOEY
Some kind of chapel car. A church
on rails.

WRIGHT
Damn, Joey! The money!

JOEY
What?

WRIGHT
Those two bastards back there got
our whole stake!

DEACON JIM (O.S.)
“For the wages of sin is death; but
the gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In a shadowed pew, DEACON JIM MILLER, late 40s, receding
hair, mustache, black frock coat.

WRIGHT
(whispers)
Reckon he’s a ghost?

JOEY
(whispers)
In a church?
They approach Deacon Jim’s pew.

JOEY
You a preacher, mister?

DEACON JIM
I do love the Word of the Lord, but I ain’t ordained. Name of Jim Miller. Some folks call me Deacon Jim on account of my church work.

He eyes blood spattered on Joey’s shirt.

DEACON JIM
I see you’ve met John Wesley.

JOEY
Ain’t mine. Hardin shot this one-armed feller playin’ cards.

DEACON JIM
Bullets do tend to fly where my cousin-in-law’s concerned. A one-armed man, you say?

Joey nods.

DEACON JIM
That’d be Black Jack Ketchum. Took down trains with the Hole in the Wall Gang out New Mexico way.

WRIGHT
Never heard of no one-armed outlaw.

DEACON JIM
He weren’t a one-armed outlaw for very long. Conductor blew his arm off with a shotgun on account of Black Jack ridin’ up too slow on a train he was robbin’, and the law got him.

JOEY
Pardon me for sayin’ so, but you sure do know a lot about outlaws for a church-going man.

DEACON JIM
Said I loved the Word, brother. Never said I was much good at livin’ it. Anyhow, they hanged Black Jack. ‘Cept they botched the job.
WRIGHT
Now how in tarnation do you botch a hangin’?

DEACON JIM
Fools used too long a rope, and you may’ve noticed Black Jack ain’t no small man. Popped his head clean off, like a cork from a bottle.

JOEY
Popped his head off?

Joey’s a little green.

DEACON JIM
Black Jack never did have no luck. If yer gonna get hanged, best pray you draw a hangman knows what he’s doin’. Now, the fellers that done me were amateurs, but they did a right smart job of it regardless.

JOEY
You sayin’ yer ... dead?

DEACON JIM
Seems the good townsfolk of Ada, Oklahoma, didn’t take too kindly to the odds on my acquittal fer killin’ their former sheriff.

Joey steps back.

JOEY
It’s a ghost train, full up with haunts.

Wright SNORTS.

WRIGHT
Folks on this train sure don’t act like no ghosts I ever heard tell of.

DEACON JIM
That’s ‘cause most of ‘em don’t realize they’re among the departed.

WRIGHT
Bosh. Hardin told us how he got bushwhacked in El Paso.
DEACON JIM
Oh, some of ‘em know they was kilt, right enough. They simply don’t believe it. Not deep down. So they carry on much like they did in life, drinkin’, gamblin’, shootin’ each other.

JOEY
Hardin says we’re on the train to Hell. That true?

DEACON JIM
For John Wesley and most of the rest of us, I reckon so.

WRIGHT
Don’t believe in no Hell.

Deacon Jim squints at Wright.

DEACON JIM
Well, brother, Hell evidently believes in you.

JOEY
What’s all this got to do with Wright and me? We ain’t dead. All we done was get on the wrong train.

DEACON JIM
That all? “The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.” Psalms, 11:5.

JOEY
You sayin’ God’s tryin’ us?

DEACON JIM
Or blessing you with a warning.

WRIGHT
Damn you, damn your warning, and damn God.

In the blink of an eye, Deacon Jim has Wright pinned against a window.

Faster than a rattlesnake, and twice as deadly.
I’ve taken 14 lives, boy, eight for no better reason than somebody paid me to do it. But I don’t abide blasphemy.

Wright’s hand moves a fraction. Deacon Jim snatches Wright’s pistol from his holster and tosses it away.

It SLIDES across the floor.

The killer twists Wright’s head, forcing him to gaze out the window.

Warped trees of an eerie black wood whip past. Stars are gone. Sky’s tinged with red.

That look like Texas to you, Brother Wright? Quit yer prideful ways, and get busy repentin’ the wickedness you done.

An odd quality comes into Deacon Jim’s voice as a lightning FLASH reveals his gruesome, ghostly self, his neck broken and abraded by the noose.

While your livin’ prayers still have weight.

Deacon Jim releases Wright and steps back.

Wright sucker-punches him in the kidneys. A vicious blow. But it’s Wright who drops to his knees, cradling his hand.

Deacon Jim sighs.

You ain’t got the sense God granted a polecat.

He unbuttons his frock coat to reveal a steel plate.

This plate saved me many a time in life. On this train, bein’ as we’re dead, gettin’ shot’s more of an inconvenience than anything else, but I still don’t cotton to it none.

Wright shakily tries to draw a knife from his boot.
Deacon Jim shakes his head and kicks Wright in the head, like a cruel man kicks a misbehaving dog.

Wright curls on the floor. WHIMPERING. Bleeding. Deacon Jim looms over him.

    JOEY
    Please, mister, don’t kill him.

No reaction.

    JOEY
    Yer in a house of God!

Deacon Jim SIGHS. His shoulders sag.

    DEACON JIM
    Seems killin’ ain’t no easy habit to break. You remember that, brother.

    JOEY
    We’ll leave you in peace, an’ you do the same.

    DEACON JIM
    Fair enough. And - God bless.

Joey helps Wright to his feet. They run forward. Joey scoops up Wright’s ivory-handled Schofield as they pass.

Deacon Jim returns to his pew and takes up his Bible.

EXT. INTERCAR - NIGHT

Joey and Wright stop on the chapel car’s covered front porch. Tracks CLICKETY-CLACK below.

Wright snatches his pistol from Joey like a baby eager for a bottle. He glares back into the chapel car, gingerly touching his bloody lip.

    WRIGHT
    Bastard caught me by surprise, that’s all.

    JOEY
    We ain’t got time for no shootouts with no ghosts, Wright! Mebbe we can hide in the mail car ‘til we can jump off.
WRIGHT
Don’t suit me, runnin’.

JOEY
They’re ghosts, Wright. We can kill ‘em a hunnert times and it don’t matter none. They only got to kill us once.

He crosses to the next car. After a moment, Wright follows.

INT. MAIL CAR - NIGHT

Canvas mailbags hang from wire racks lining both sides of a narrow aisle. Wooden cabinets with wire-mesh doors hang over the racks.

The canvas bags overflow with letters.

As Joey and Wright enter, wind from the open door blows envelopes into the air. Others spill onto the floor.

Joey snatches a wind-blown letter.

The word “God” in black ink, crossed out with red ink, and “The Devil” written alongside it in red.

Joey checks other letters. Each has been similarly re-addressed – “Heavenly Lord” to “Prince of Lies,” “Our Father” to “The Tempter,” “Dios” to “El Diablo,” and so forth.

JOEY
Wright, look at this. Who sends letters to Hell?

MAIL CLERK (O.S.)
Not many folk. Not on purpose, anyhow.

The MAIL CLERK, older, portly, white-bearded, occupies a swivel chair at the far end, in a larger room past rows of mailbags.

He works at a counter below a rack of mail slots, patiently re-addressing envelopes with a pen and bottle of red ink.

Joey and Wright approach.

MAIL CLERK
Every prayer to God asking for misfortune or pain on another is bein’ sent to the wrong address.

(MORE)
MAIL CLERK (CONT'D)
Each of these dead letters needs to be forwarded to where they belong. To Hell.

WRIGHT
You don’t look like them other fellers what run this train.

MAIL CLERK
Strictly speaking, I’m not a employee of this here railroad. You might say I work directly for the owner.

Wright draws, fast as lightning, holding his shooting iron right at the Mail Clerk’s head. He cocks it with a CLICK.

WRIGHT
You. You know what’s going on.

The Mail Clerk nods.

WRIGHT
Spill it, or I’ll fill you fulla lead.

MAIL CLERK
No need for threats, Mr. Wright.

WRIGHT
How do you know my name?

MAIL CLERK
As I say, I work for the owner. Think he don’t know who’s riding his own railroad? Boys, you’re on the Purgatory Line. We run a loop from Heaven to Hell, picking up souls of the dead along the way and delivering ’em to their proper destinations.

JOEY
Where are we headed now?

MAIL CLERK
At the moment, we’re on the track to Hell. The wooden ties on that trackbed are all good intentions gone awry, and every spike holdin’ down the rails is a mortal sin.

JOEY
Can’t nobody change their ticket?
The Mail Clerk shakes his head, sadly.

MAIL CLERK
Only in life, Mr. Slade.

WRIGHT
Stop this damn train right now! I ain’t lettin’ you take me to Hell!

He waves his pistol in the Mail Clerk’s face.

MAIL CLERK
Thought you didn’t believe in Hell, Mr. Wright.

WRIGHT
Well, this train sure as shit ain’t goin’ to Topeka!

Joey pulls out his ticket.

JOEY
But we ain’t dead, mister. Look, our tickets ain’t punched yet.

Wright yanks out his ticket and shoves it at the Mail Clerk.

WRIGHT
You punch these tickets for Heaven. You do it now!

MAIL CLERK
You still don’t get it, Mr. Wright. I don’t punch your ticket. You do.

WRIGHT
I ain’t doin’ no such thing!

MAIL CLERK
You’re wrong. I’m sorry.

WRIGHT
You’re gonna be sorry, old man! I ain’t wrong! I’m Wright!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Wright unloads his revolver point-blank into the Mail Clerk’s chest.

Chips of wood fly from the counter. Ink bottle shatters. Paper envelopes explode.

Red ink spatters across white envelopes.

ON WRIGHT AND JOEY
Their eyes widen. Wright blinks and fumbles at his gun belt to reload.

WRIGHT
No! I saw them others bleed and fall down!

Joey continues to stare.

ON MAIL CLERK
Unharmed amidst the wreckage.

JOEY
You ain’t no dead outlaw, are you, mister?

The Mail Clerk shakes his head.

WRIGHT
He’s a devil!

The Mail Clerk shakes his head again.

A CRACK of lightning reveals, not a skeletal ghost, but a pair of wings.

Wright, busy reloading, doesn’t see it.

Joey reaches into his pocket. Takes out the gold watch from his share of the loot. And hands it to the Mail Clerk.

JOEY
This don’t belong to me. You see the feller who owns it gets it back?

The Mail Clerk smiles and nods as he takes the watch.

Wright SNAPS the cylinder shut and raises the gun.

WRIGHT
I bet a faceful of lead will snuff even a devil’s candle—Where’d he go, Joey?

Empty swivel chair. Wright FIRES wildly. Ricochets ZING through the air. Joey ducks.

JOEY
Wright, you gone plumb loco?
WRIGHT
You can’t hide from me, you old buzzard!

Wright LAUGHS like a madman as he SHOOTS.

The sound of WINGS. A RUSH of wind. Letters blow around the mail car. Pour out of bags and mail slots. A blizzard of white envelopes obscures everything.

Joey and Wright stumble through the storm of dead letters to the rear door.

EXT. INTERCAR - NIGHT

The wind MOANS as the train CLICKETY-CLACKS down the infernal track.

Wright FIRES back into the mail car. His revolver CLICKS empty. A few letters drift out. Wright’s hands shake as he reloads.

WRIGHT
That ain’t natural! Even the dead here fall down when you shoot ‘em! That ... That ... That ain’t fair!

JOEY
Fair?

Wright’s gun hangs limply at his side. He stares into the mail car.

WRIGHT
Ain’t fair.

JOEY
Mebbe there’s things can’t be solved with no gun, Wright.

Wright’s eyes are bleak as he turns to Joey.

WRIGHT
Why not?

INT. PASSENGER CAR - NIGHT

As Joey and Wright enter from one end, John Wesley Hardin enters from the other.

They stop and stare at one another. Hardin grins.
HARDIN
Boo.

He draws his Colt .44 and BLASTS away at Joey and Wright, who dive behind bench seats for cover.

HARDIN
Been lookin’ for you two!

Wright FIRES back at Hardin as they shout over the gunfire.

JOEY
We ain’t done no harm to you, Hardin!

HARDIN
Mebbe I just hate greenhorns!

Joey takes careful aim with his Colt Peacemaker and SHOOTS - not at Hardin, but at a gas lamp next to his head.

The lamp BURSTS into flames, lighting Hardin on fire.

Joey grabs Wright and drags him back out as Hardin careens around the car, cursing, trying to douse the flames.

EXT. INTERCAR - NIGHT

Joey pushes Wright to a railing.

JOEY
Climb up! We’ll git past him on the roofs!

They climb.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Joey helps Wright up.

Tortured trees spread along the track. Distant gouts of flame geyser skyward. The sky burns.

WRIGHT
Done landed in Hell. How we gonna git off now?

JOEY
Jump off the last car onto the tracks. Railway’s like a road, ain’t it?
Wright nods.

JOEY
Roads go both ways. C’mon.

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

Joey and Wright race from roof to roof, leaping over gaps between cars, heading back.

Below, Hardin pursues, relentless.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Joey glances back at the locomotive as it CHUGS under a set of gigantic arching ribs from some impossible antediluvian beast

JOEY
Wright, duck!

The two throw themselves down in the nick of time to avoid being swept off by arching bones.

The fall knocks the Colt Peacemaker out of Joey’s holster. It SLIDES off the roof into oblivion.

A hand grips the roof’s corner ahead of Joey and Wright, who don’t see it.

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

The train emerges from the devilish tunnel.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR ROOF - NIGHT

Joey helps Wright up as both struggle to stay upright against HOWLING winds.

The train RATTLES over a bridge of bones. Flames GEYSER from pools of fire ringed by black, barren rock. Faraway bat-like shapes FLAP against fuming skies.

And John Wesley Hardin waits at the roof’s other end.

HARDIN
Ain’t goin’ noplace, greenhorns. I ain’t kilt you yet.
JOEY
All we want is to git off this damn train.

HARDIN
Why? This here’s a fine train by my way of thinkin’. Only downside is, killin’ other ghosts just don’t satisfy. But you, greenhorns ... yer still among the livin’. Reckon I got time t’add a couple more souls to my score afore I go to my infernal reward.

MOANS and CRIES of the damned ride the winds.

JOEY
Ain’t no rewards in Hell, Hardin. The Devil don’t keep no tallies.

HARDIN
The hell he don’t! I say the Devil loves killin’. With my record, I ‘spect Old Scratch’s fixin’ to make me his right-hand man.

JOEY
You ain’t rackin’ up no score. Yer pilin’ on debt.

HARDIN
Enough talk outta you, Baby Slade. Gonna trade some words with yer partner there afore I git to you.

Hardin pats his holstered Colt .44. Wright steps up.

WRIGHT
See, Joey, you was wrong. Ain’t no problem can’t be solved by the application of a little hot lead.

He takes a gunfighter’s stance.

WRIGHT
Yer forgettin’ I seen you draw, Hardin. I’m faster than you.

Hardin’s ready, too.

HARDIN
You gonna pay to find out, greenhorn?
Joey dives to the roof. Hardin and Wright draw and FIRE simultaneously.

A bullet hole craters a cyclopean third eye in Wright’s forehead. He drops his pistol with a THUMP and topples over the side into the black woods.

GROANS and SCREAMS and RENDING noises.

Hardin advances on Joey, still prone. He COCKS his Colt .44.

HARDIN
Aw, you lost yer shootin’ iron.
Ain’t that a shame.

Joey kicks out with both boots into Hardin’s knees with a sickening CRUNCH. Hardin GASPS, falling to his knees as he drops his pistol. It BOUNCES over the edge.

Joey leaps up and runs past the GROANING Hardin.

A CLICK of a pistol being cocked as he reaches the end.

HARDIN
You ain’t shed of me that easy,
Baby Slade.

Hardin holds Wright’s ivory-handled Schofield on Joey.

HARDIN
Look on the bright side. ‘Least you can tell folks you was the final victim of the killingest son of a bitch in the West.

Wright reappears next to Joey.

JOEY
Wright?

Lightning CRACKLES overhead, revealing Wright as a skeletal phantasm with a gaping bullet wound to the forehead.

JOEY
No!

HARDIN
See what I mean? Damn ghosts pop back up faster’n weeds.

WRIGHT
Seems I ain’t the only feller you kilt what ended up in Hell, Hardin.
For the first time, Hardin falters.

HARDIN
No.

WRIGHT
Some of the boys agreed to form a welcomin’ committee.

A dozen or more GHOSTS appear. All bear gruesome gunshot wounds.

HARDIN
NO!

Ghosts of his victims swarm Hardin, carrying him off the passenger car roof. They plummet to a fiery river far below.

Wright turns to Joey.

WRIGHT
You git off this train, Joey. You don’t belong here.

JOEY
Wright, I’m awful sorry.

WRIGHT
My own damn fault.

He holds out a hand. They shake.

JOEY
I’ll be prayin’ for you, Wright.

WRIGHT
So long, pard.

INT. OBSERVATION CAR - NIGHT

Joey enters. Gas lights are off. He rushes through to the back door. RATTLES the doorknob. Locked.

A shape in shadow behind him. BIG BILL SLADE steps into a shaft of light. Joey’s thunderstruck.

BIG BILL
Joey? Oh, no! They kilt my boy!

Joey hugs his father. Through the back windows, hellish train tracks unspool through under a crimson sky.
JOEY
No, Pa, I ain’t dead. Robbed a stage and got on this train tryin’ to outrun a posse.

BIG BILL
Oh, thank the Lord. Thank the Lord.

He collapses onto a seat. Regards Joey.

BIG BILL
You robbed a stage? Son, why?

JOEY
I was tryin’ to do you proud, Pa.

Big Bill’s face hardens.

BIG BILL
Boy, ain’t you learnt nothin’ from my life?

JOEY
You was a famous outlaw, Pa. I only wanted to be like you.

Big Bill rises. Grabs Joey by his shoulders. Turns him to face the long, black train.

BIG BILL
Listen to me, son. You think you bein’ on this ghost train with me and all these other dead bad men is gonna make me proud of you?

His father puts one hand on Joey’s shoulder.

BIG BILL
Joseph, I’m being taken as kindlin’ for the fire for the damnfool sins I committed while I was breathin’. Believe me, bein’ an outlaw’s no kinda life for you.

JOEY
I don’t want it no more, Pa. But I already been party to a killing.

BIG BILL
It weren’t you that pulled the trigger?
JOEY

That don’t matter none, Pa. I still
got to account for my part in it.
Got to make up for it, somehow.

The back door CLICKS. And swings open.

Joey’s face lights up.

JOEY

C’mon, Pa! We can git off this
damned train!

BIG BILL

(slowly)

It didn’t open for me, Joseph.

JOEY

But, Pa-

Big Bill pulls out his ticket. Punched. For Hell.

BIG BILL

I done lived my life, son. Right or
wrong. Now I gotta account for it,
best I can. You ain’t had a life
yet. You still got a chance to live
it right. Go on, boy.

JOEY

I ain’t leavin’ you on no hell
train, Pa!

BIG BILL

I said git, now!

He shoves Joey out, hard. Joey hits the rail, flips, and
falls off the ghost train. Hits the blackened cinders.

Joey gets to his feet. The train CHUGS away. Big Bill, framed
in the door, waves a final farewell.

BIG BILL

You take care of yourself, son.

The horrific landscape recedes; HOWLING winds fade; the sky
goes from angry red to deep purple.

JOEY

Pa!

The train passes from view. Joey’s on a mundane set of rails
as stars fade before sun-up. Crickets CHIRP. A rooster CROWS.
Lights of a town in the distance.
Joey pulls out his ticket. Still unpunched. It BURSTS into flames, burning to ashes.

He gazes down the now-empty tracks.

JOEY
I’ll do ya proud, Pa.

As the sun rises, he heads toward town.

FADE TO BLACK