

Ghost Train

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FADE IN:

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
shoul'da 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)

HARDIN (CONT'D)

Plenty more cousins where you come from, Emmanuel.

He notices Wright and Joey.

HARDIN

Quit yer dawdlin' 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 five
more.

HARDIN

Sure you played this game before,
greenhorn?

He SPITS on the floor.

WRIGHT

I done told you once, I ain't no
damn greenhorn.

JOEY

(hastily)
I'll call.

EMMANUEL
And the dealer calls. John?

HARDIN
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.

EMMANUEL
How many cards, gentlemen?

HARDIN
Four.

EMMANUEL
Jesus, John.

HARDIN
Gimme the damn cards.

WRIGHT
Two.

JOEY
Three.

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

JOEY
He was my Pa.

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

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

JOEY
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 townfolk 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.

DEACON JIM

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.

DEACON JIM

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.

DEACON JIM

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.

DEACON JIM

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

He unbuttons his frock coat to reveal a steel plate.

DEACON JIM

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

Unharmd 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?

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