

ONCE UPON a TIME in TEXAS
(Feature horror screenplay – 88 pages)

*Austin After Dark Film Festival 2020 Official Selection
Chicago Film Festival 2021 Semi-Finalist*

"Horror can be imagined or real... either is best left alone."

"Folklore, myths, legends, fairy tales, begin as stories told and re-told by storytellers altering the narrative, adjust history or enhance events in order to bring amazement to their tome. The tale of Eddie, a slow-minded young Texas boy, abused by family and friends, is no different. The story turns into a series of possibilities driven by local lore of abandoned trains and forgotten lives, re-visited Once Upon a Time..."

Southwestern Texas 1864.

A steam train slowly climbs a hill within the Guadalupe mountains of southwest, Texas a week after Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Aboard is MARY and nephew, eight-year old, WILLIAM. Across the aisle is CHADWICK, a cattle rancher from Odessa on his way to Fort Sands outside the town of Weber to sell cattle to the army.

They strike up a conversation as the CONDUCTOR lights kerosene lanterns to illuminate the interior for when the train enters a nearing tunnel. Inside the tunnel the train is suddenly jolted, stopping abruptly. Confusion sets in. The conductor leaves to investigate. As the passengers consider the possible reasons for stopping the conductor returns scared, shaking explaining the locomotive's front wheels fell into a hole opened under the tracks and terrible, horrible creatures are coming from the hole. They attacked and killed the Engineer and Fireman.

Panic ensues among the passengers. The Conductor locates a tunnel air shaft on the tunnel ceiling near the car's roof but it is too far to reach. They decided the only one they can get to the shaft is the child, William. The car becomes the target of the creatures but the lantern light holds them back. Realizing the kerosene will not last William is helped into the air shaft with instructions to quickly go to Fort Sands for help. William makes it to the Fort.

The commander brings troops to the tunnel and orders some soldiers inside to investigate. Shortly, the commander hears gunshots, screams and an eerie clicking sound. Then, numerous red eyes approach the tunnel entrance, stopping just short of daylight. The commander, believing Williams tale of monsters in the tunnel, elects to dynamite both portals of the tunnel sealing the train, passengers and creatures inside.

One hundred years later 1967

Fifteen year old, EDDIE, a slow minded boy who tries to appease others to prove his worthiness, and big brother, RICHIE, an unemployed teen searching for his notch in life, live under the roof of POP, an alcoholic, abusive father in the Weber, Texas, a small, economically strained community.

Richie gets together with a friend, BARRY, just discharged from the army after serving as a "tunnel rat" in Vietnam. They spend the afternoon with Barry's cousin, TOBY, another unemployed teen known for his pranks and stories. The boys agree to go on a hunting trip to catch up and have some fun.

At dinner, Pop is his usual angry, drunk self, taunting Eddie for his slow mindedness and Richie's unemployment. Eddie knows of the hunting trip planned for the morning and mentions it. Pop's taunting increases and he demands Richie take Eddie along but not to let him have a rifle. Richie angrily leaves the table. Eddie goes to the kitchen to do the dishes. As Pop sits at the table, Eddie approaches from behind wearing a strange grin, an evil gleam in his eyes, a knife in hand.

The boys are on their hunting weekend and begin to tease Eddie. They make him go into a pond wearing only his underwear to stay under water for a minute. Eddie struggles and pleads to come out. Finally they let him out but he is covered with leeches. Eddie panics and runs back to their camp where he is forced to remove the leeches himself as the others drink and laugh at him. Around the campfire Toby tells a story of a train sealed in a tunnel under where they camp because creatures in the tunnel ate the passengers. That night, in a tent they all share, Eddie has a dream about creatures coming through the ground at him. He cannot go back to sleep so joins Toby outside by the fire. Toby tells Eddie he is going hunting early to beat the others and make the first kill. Eddie joins him.

Richie and Barry awake to Eddie running back excitedly exclaiming Toby found the air shaft from his train in the tunnel story. Barry and Richie are amused believing Toby is continuing his story to keep Eddie frightened. After they hear a faint gunshot in the distance they decide to follow Eddie to the shaft. Barry enters the shaft recalling his tunnel rat days in Vietnam. Eddie reluctantly follows. Richie enters angrily feeling they are wasting time not hunting in order to play along with Toby's prank.

In the tunnel they search with flashlights for Toby. They find the bones of the soldiers and strange skeletons of... something. Accidentally, they find Toby being devoured by a creature. Barry kills it with his machete. Other creatures begin to appear producing a clicking sound. The boys escape to the passenger car where they find skeletons of the passengers. The creatures are kept away by their flashlights but begin to rock the car violently. Barry hands Eddie his machete for protection as they climb onto the car's roof. They find the air shaft but realize it is too far for them to get to. Eddie is attacked by a creature and kills it with the machete. Richie and Barry begin to shoot creatures. Richie sadly agrees Eddie is the only one they can get out to the air shaft. Barry stretches across the gap between the car and air shaft for Eddie to shimmy across.

Outside, Eddie hears the last of the gunfire, numerous clicking, and screams from his brother and Barry. Eddie goes through a series of psychological traumas and emotional changes, shaking, crying, calming, laughing, torn between happiness to be safe, the loss of his friends, the horror in the tunnel, and years of abuse. He morphs into a crazed man.

Forty years later 2007

Inside the community room of the state insane hospital, AUDREY, a middle-aged Orderly nearing retirement, tells her story to ZOEY, her young replacement, of the man sitting motionless by the window, staring at the distant hills. Audrey tells how they found the inmate called Crazy Eddie roaming the hills holding a bloodied machete and finding a nearby campground with a blood soaked tent, but no bodies. The authorities believe Eddie murdered them after he finally snapped from the torment and abuse. They found his Father murdered at the dinning room table. The boys were never found.

Zoey wonders if it actually happened, a train, a tunnel... creatures? Is Eddie waiting all these years for the train? Audrey figures most stories get changed over the years when told and the tale of Crazy Eddie may have been a tad twisted, altered over the years. Eddie hears Audrey and Zoey leave. He clicks his teeth, an evil grin covers his face.

The End