

**STOLEN SOULS**

**By**

**Rich La Bonté**

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**Visit fLAtDiSk.NeT at <http://flatdisk.net>**

**Email: [rich@richlabonte.com](mailto:rich@richlabonte.com)**

## CHAPTER ONE

Long ago, the La Brea Tar Pits were a very dangerous place to native Californians. Before the pits were "discovered", and before the chain-link fences and impressive bone museum and murals, there was an open plain with a small lake. The plain topped a vast underlying deposit of black sticky stuff, and when rain flooded the surrounding land, various unfortunates would wade into the lake unknowingly, to drink or bathe, and get stuck. Vicious, but equally unwary predators often followed them, and they all sank together into the depths of the noxious pits.

This occurred before humans sprang up here in any numbers, but, after most of the saber-toothed tigers, sloth, mammoths, and California lions had passed into history, a few of my distant ancestors may have been sucked in too. Those atypically unwise red men would have been hunting the buffalo that drank from that lake.

In 1911, to the surprise of some residents of tiny Los Angeles, the body of a Native American was indeed pulled from the tar by the local constabulary. The man was not a hunter of buffalo. His tribal origins were never ascertained, but it was believed that he came from the Midwest, as he was a "movie" who worked for a motion picture company recently arrived from Chicago.

L.A. residents referred to all employees of that somewhat suspect business as "movies" in the early years. Considered vagrants, loafers, and persons of low morals, the "movies" were placed on the social ladder somewhere between prostitutes and the annoying salesmen who came knocking on one's front door quite uninvited at all hours of the day. Local boarding houses often displayed signs that declared that "No Movies or Salesmen!" would find lodging within.

Jonah Longwing, the red man found in the tar, was hardly a wretched actor wandering the dusty streets before his demise. The National Pictures Company of Chicago considered him a major asset, as he was a cameraman of some repute. He had once worked in New York at Biograph with David Wark Griffith, before the Trust War forced independents further west.

His death was violent, as a local police sergeant noted: "The Indian was face down and had been bludgeoned and then rolled" into the morass, sometime in the twilight hours of early morning. The cause of death was suffocation. The Los Angeles Police had the same opinion of "movies" as other locals, however, and no formal investigation was ever made of the death of Jonah Longwing.

That was the end of the story told to me by my friend Doc Collins, the L.A. County Coroner, over a generous lunch at Musso and Frank's on Hollywood Boulevard one rainy Thursday. I say generous because Doc paid for it.

"Nice story, Doc, but what's the punch line?" I asked, accepting the attentive waiter's invitation to another slice of the lamb roast that is Musso and Frank's specialty. The service there is almost as good as the food.

"There may not be one, but history repeated itself this morning at five thirty a.m." Doc said, sounding unusually serious for Doc. I noticed he hadn't touched his baked potato. For a man with Doc's palette, this is a sign of intense distraction.

"Uh, ok," I said, cutting a forkful of lamb. "I give up."

"A man was found face down at the La Brea Pits. He had been hit in the head with a heavy object - I haven't had time to figure out what - and then dumped over the iron fence around the pond. There was an incline where he was dumped, which caused the body to roll into the tar at the edge. Poor son of a bitch was asphyxiated."

"He was also a Native American?" I guessed, forgetting my fork.

"Pure-blood. You figure it!"

"How come you know all about the first guy? Longwing?"

"I'm a film historian on the side, remember? You may not know that I also collect, and I hang out with other collectors. Just so happens I've seen some of the films Longwing worked on at Biograph: he was pretty good. Not Griffith's number one man - Billy Bitzer had that honor - but Longwing helped invent the art just the same. Most silent film

fanatics know about him, but the only thing written about him in his own time was a short notice of how he died."

"You said you'd seen some of his stuff. Not in your personal collection?"

"No, son. Too rare. A much richer collector bought every frame of Longwing's work years ago."

"So, this new red man in the pit: was he a 'movie'?"

"He was a stunt rider on a few. That's why I thought of you, Frank. You saw him in that remake of 'Black Canyon'. I remembered talking to you about the scene. He rode the horse in the storm sequence..."

"Sure, I remember. I thought the guy shoulda' gotten top billing for that stunt, but he wasn't even credited."

"Charlie Fox. Pretty dangerous, right? It wasn't blue-screened then? I don't ride myself."

"It was real, and Kamikaze stuff in that mudslide! Both of them were lucky to come out of it without breaking their necks! The rider and the horse, I mean. That guy is an expert handler."

"Was, Frank. Charlie Fox is my guest over at County now." Doc stared at the potato for a moment. "The boys are baffled, Frank. How about a hand on the side? Personal favor?"

"A pet case? That's not like you, Doc."

"It's always bothered me - the Longwing thing. Now we've finally got a clue."

"How do you figure that, Doc? Longwing might as well have been done in by a saber-tooth tiger. It's almost that long ago."

"Pay attention, Frank!" Doc signaled our waiter. I knew it was for a fresh spud. "We've got a copy-cat murderer on our hands. You find out who and why about Charlie Fox, and five'll get you ten you'll break the oldest unsolved murder in Hollywood!"

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I settled into the Dodge, reminded myself for the thousandth time that it needed an oil change, and drove to the La Brea Tar Pits. The fact that my case - or cases - involved no retainer or future income was not an issue. I had recently solved a kidnapping and shamelessly accepted a large bonus from a grateful family who could certainly afford it. I also owed Doc for favors past, and an investigation into the deaths of Charlie Fox and Jonah Longwing was inarguably appropriate for a P.I. with my ancestors: my bloodline is part Menominee, on my Dad's side.

The Dodge and I knew that my procrastinated oil change was inexcusable, but I didn't have time. Doc and I were due to meet again that afternoon at the home of one G.W. Stackhouse, film collector. Doc had arranged a private screening of the collected work of Jonah Longwing.

The tar pits are part of the grounds of the L.A. County Museum, and the police had barricades in place. I parked in the lot, wandered by three or four uniforms without incident, and hiked up the concrete stairs to the observation deck in front of the permanent fossil exhibit building. There were more uniforms behind the iron fence below, guarding the marked edge of the little bubbling pond that hides all that tar. A Channel Five News crew was just finishing up. I spotted the Ten O'clock blonde I always watch, and headed down another long set of steps to try my luck.

"Yellowflower!" Quinles growled, appearing from nowhere and neatly blocking my fantasy about the Ten O'clock blonde. "I might have known you'd show up!"

"Quin," I said to irritate him. We stopped at the foot of the stairs, and I looked past his gray raincoat at the escaping reporter.

"Museum grounds are off-limits today, Frank. How'd you find out about this? I just spent twenty minutes convincing the TV people to put a hold on the story."

"I've got a friend in a high place," I told him truthfully. The County Coroner far outranks a homicide detective in L.A.'s hierarchy, but I named no names. Quinoles jammed his hands into his raincoat to restrain them from assault. He growled some more:

"Ok, never mind. What do you know about Charlie Fox?"

"That's my line, Quin. He's a dead movie wrangler, found fishing for dinosaurs. I saw him in a western once."

"You like to get on my nerves, don't you Frank? He was an Indian. You must know something about him!"

"Oh, I get it! We redskins all know each other? Or do you figure me as a likely suspect, Quin?"

"I figure you for a shamus who always turns up when things are already complicated enough."

"What could possibly be 'complicated' about this one, Quinoles? A guy gets slugged with a blunt instrument and dumped in a tar pit.."

"Dumped? Yeah, over an eight-foot fence. And by who? It rained like hell all night. No drag marks on the bank. No footprints on either side! Nothin' but a little depression at the top of that rise. All the boys can tell me is that the guy was unconscious when his body hit the weeds and then rolled face-first into the tar at the edge of the pond."

"Didn't die from the blow then?"

"Nope. You tell me, Frank. Charlie Fox wasn't a big guy - one-fifty, one-sixty tops - but how do you toss a guy that size over an eight-foot fence and not leave footprints?"

Quinoles stared at me, fists clenched in his pockets. The lieutenant hates a mystery. He was waiting for a solution.

"Some of us Indians can fly, Quin," I remarked dryly. I patted his arm in sympathy and went back to the Dodge.

\*

There was time before I was supposed to meet with Doc Collins and the film buff, but I postponed the oil change again in favor of a visit to Universal to see a Teamster. Dan Webb is a driver who mostly does television car chases for a living, but his father had been a horseman in many of the great westerns of the fifties. The gate guard paged Dan, and I got in with a day-pass.

I walked from the commissary, along the streets of neutral white sound stages, and through a few standing sets to Main Street. There were five cars piled in the center of the town square, and one of them was on fire.

"Stand over here, please," a young production assistant told me, and I followed her to one side of a three-quarter bank building. Seconds later an eight-wheel truck roared by and stopped just short of the burning car, which exploded quietly at the simulated impact. The boom would be added later.

"Fine, fine. That's a take," a voice called out from above. I looked up at a cherry picker cage with a camera and several men on board. The effects crew ran into the shot and sprayed the flames with extinguishers. The eight-wheeler backed up and stopped next to us.

"Hey, Frank!" Dan Webb shouted from the cab. "Who's the skirt?"

Smiling weakly at the girl, who was less than impressed, I climbed up on the running board. Dan motioned me into the shotgun seat. "Exciting work, Dan."

"Give me a break, man. Faking that little crash scene made me better bucks than hauling ten loads of dogshit to San Bernardino! It's boring, and it's pussy, but it's hamburger on the old barbecue. What are you doin' on the back lot, gumshoe?"

"Ever heard of a wrangler named Charlie Fox?"

"Sure. Good with falls. The western stunt boys would call him a top hand. Why?"

"He turned up dead this morning. Looks like a homicide."

"No shit? Hmm. Not that surprising, really?"

"How's that, Dan?"

"Old Charlie was never a team player, Frank. He didn't have many friends. A few enemies, in fact. He was a scrapper, and he usually won. Respected, but not well-liked, you could say."

"Any particular reason for the hostility?"

"He drank a lot. Like most...uh, I was gonna say cowboys, Frank. Wipe that tomahawk look off your face, ok?"

"Sorry, Dan."

"It's all right. Anyway, Charlie Fox had a way with the women, and he preferred the married ones. One of their husbands was usually lookin' for him." He pointed at the crew clearing the wrecked cars.

"See that big guy over there? The Irish with all that muscle? Name's Murphy, and Charlie Fox fucked his wife right here on the back lot - in the Bates Motel set, for God's sake! We all thought Charlie was dead meat when Murphy found out. Murphy carries a .45 in his briefcase. When it came down to it, though, Charlie beat the hell out of Murphy and the big guy wound up in County General for two weeks. Charlie never touched the wife again, but she ran off with some other cat a month later." Dan stopped talking to light a Camel. "I think Murphy was glad to see her go, but lots of the other guys will be dancin' on Charlie's grave." He offered me the pack.

"No, thanks," I said. "He was a backdoor man. Anything else?"

"Well, yeah, now that you mention it. Kinda' strange, too. Charlie Fox had this king thing."

"What's a 'king thing'?"

"Claimed he was king of all he surveyed, you know? Whenever he got really loaded he'd start going on about how his people owned Universal and Warners. His ancestors, he said."

"A lot of Native Americans feel that way, Dan."

"He wasn't talkin' about the land, Frank. He meant the studios. Never made any sense to me, but Charlie used to rant and rave about being the rightful heir to the whole movie business!"

"Fox have a wife of his own, Dan?"

"I don't think so. Had a girlfriend. Pretty steady, when he wasn't playin' around. She lives out in Sunland."

"Name?"

"Jane. 'Plain Jane', Charlie used to call her. There's another mystery for you: that little woman ain't plain at all! Real pretty lady. Works in an auto parts store. Got me some wheels for my Land Rover once. Big Al's Parts and Tires, on San Raphael Boulevard."

"Thanks, Dan," I said, opening the door.

"For what, Frank? I don't know shit about Charlie Fox. Nobody did."

"Maybe," I said, swinging back down to the dirt. "Maybe not."

\*

The North Hollywood address Doc had given me for G.W. Stackhouse was a flat, modern mansion, surrounded by dozens of similar modern mansions occupied mostly by studio people and aerospace engineers. Stackhouse was a retired film editor who had only trimmed the stars at Monogram and Republic, but even b-picture technicians made good money in his day. His lawn was perfect, the two-car garage held a shiny new Mercedes, and Doc Collins, who was eating a Granny Smith apple, occupied his front steps.

"Diet," Doc explained. "Got a bag of them in the LTD, if you want one."

"Later, maybe. This Stackhouse guy at home? There's only one car beside yours, and I'll bet it's his wife's."

"Astute deduction!" A voice boomed behind us. The screen door opened, and G.W. Stackhouse appeared. "Mine is in the shop. A Ford wagon."

The film collector was a rotund man in his mid-sixties. He wore golfing clothes, gold rings, a gold Rolex, and had the tan that the Southern California upper class maintains on weekends in Palm Springs.

"I would have pegged you for a Caddy," I admitted. Stackhouse uttered a hearty chuckle.

"Never liked them," he claimed. "Never will." I noticed he was wearing a hairpiece. There followed a ten-minute discourse on the merits of Fords through the years. Doc finally got a word in:

"We're here to see the Longwing stuff, G.W. Remember?"

"Naturally I remember!" G.W. chortled, rolling his eyes. Camaraderie, to G.W. Stackhouse, meant a mocking laugh at everything the other guy said - as though nothing could ever be more important than what G.W. Stackhouse could have been saying while the other guy was talking. "Bring your detective into the Black Maria, and I'll pull the tape."

The "Black Maria" was a large room in the Stackhouse mansion, which was an exact replica of the New Jersey studio in which Thomas Edison both filmed and projected his one-reelers. Doc explained that Stackhouse was an Edison "freak", and that he had tried to buy the real studio, but the people at the Edison Museum weren't selling.

The small room was entirely black, and there were three rows of theater seats, six to a row, and a square screen up front. A series of ropes and pulleys ran to trap doors in the ceiling and walls, and huge metal gears protruded from the floor behind the seats.

"Those were used by Edison to light his films", Doc explained. "The original Black Maria was a little house that Edison had rigged to turn in a circle so he could catch the sun all

day through the trap doors. This isn't a working replica, of course, and G.W. has thirty-fives up in the projection booth." Doc smiled at my blank expression. "Thirty-five millimeter projectors, son."

"He said tape," I pointed out. "He went to pull the tape."

"A modern necessity," G.W. Stackhouse confirmed as he returned. He pulled a rope on the right wall and one of the trap doors opened to reveal a professional two-inch video recorder. He removed a metal reel from the box he was carrying. "Film stocks from the turn of the century are far too fragile to project - even on one of Edison's original, hand-cranked projectors - and making internegatives is risky. I reprocess every film to videotape as soon as I acquire it. Special optical bench I designed myself. There's a video projector up in the booth. Some loss of quality, but not enough to bother a lay audience."

"If you have them on tape," I asked, "then why are the Longwing reels so rare?"

"He can't release copies because of the copyright thing," Doc answered. He wanted to prove that he was not included in the "lay audience" remark. "The originals would be devalued if everybody had a copy."

"Wouldn't the copyrights protect them?"

"If I could get a copyright," Stackhouse said. "I own the original footage legally, but the duplication rights passed into public domain forty years ago." He dimmed the lights and rolled the tape.

I had seen restored Griffith and Chaplin on PBS, but G.W.'s process left in the flicker for authenticity. It was a headache to watch, but Jonah Longwing's work was as amazing as promised. G.W. provided occasional narration.

"You're seeing exactly what audiences saw between 1908 and 1909. This bit here is from a film Griffith directed for Biograph."

We watched the rest in appropriate silence: ghosts from the one-reel past strobing short shadow plays in literate mime. Longwing's cinematography rivaled modern masters. I wanted to applaud when the reel ended. I asked a question instead:

"What about the rest?"

G.W. Stackhouse turned suddenly from the controls of his tape machine. He looked like a man who had been kicked. He stared at me.

"The stuff after 1909," I prompted. "Longwing died in 1911."

"Jonah Longwing left New York in 1909," Stackhouse said. "He was not happy when Biograph joined the Motion Pictures Patents Trust." He paused. We listened to the hum of the reel rewinding. "There were no other reels," he said, but he was not a man who lied well.

I had hit on something.

Doc wanted to stay longer, but the atmosphere had changed. Stackhouse's cordiality became affected. He was out of hospitality:

"You're an Indian, aren't you?" he asked as I thanked him politely in his driveway. It bordered on an accusation. The freshly kicked look had returned. He stared at Doc Collins as though awaiting an explanation.

"Some of us are, some ain't," Doc pointed out innocently. He grimaced at me in apology. "Frank's very interested in the uncredited contributions of Native American's to what we perversely call 'American Culture'."

"If you'll excuse me, gentlemen," Stackhouse said in a shaky voice. He turned and marched into his house, closing the front door behind him.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Doc exclaimed. "Hey!" he shouted at the door. "I thought we were gonna screen 'Test Pilot'!" He looked back at me and shrugged. "Come on, Frank. Old G.W.'s somehow got a bug up his ass!"

"Or an arrowhead," I remarked.

We hung around shooting the breeze for a while, and then Doc loaded his bulk into his gray LTD and offered me a Granny Smith from the brown bag in his front seat. It was a peace offering, so I accepted.

\*

After being cheated of an afternoon with Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, and Myrna Loy, Doc decided to go back to his office and catch up on paper work. I drove to Sunland on the freeway, and managed to find Al's Parts on San Raphael Boulevard. Inside the store, I didn't have to be a P.I. to pick Jane out instantly. The other girls were Heather Locklear clones, and Jane was pure Blackfoot.

"Hello," I said. Calm brown eyes took me in. I felt the pull of bloodlines.

"May I help you?" she asked, but hawks flew, and tall, green grasses waved between her words. Dan was right: she was far from plain. "Hello?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "My name is Frank Yellowflower. I have some bad news for you, Jane."

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"I always knew he'd die young," she said. I took the cup of coffee she offered and settled back on the comfortable couch. Her apartment was warm and friendly, earth and sky and green with plants, and she showed no emotion at word of her lover's death.

"Did he say he would?"

"Oh, no. I think he meant to live forever. He was a kind of fool. Our relationship was mostly physical. Charlie was in great shape. He was an acrobat, really." I nodded.

"I saw the mudslide stunt in 'Black Canyon'. He had to be."

"Charlie choreographed that stunt himself, you know. They didn't give him a credit. It really set him off. He was a maniac when we got back from the premiere. Charlie had a thing about getting credit."

"He was good. I don't blame him. Did he ever mention an ancestor named Longwing?" I was guessing.

"His great-grandfather? Yes, of course," she frowned. "His favorite subject." Her tone said it was his obsession. I wanted to apologize for pressing her, but I didn't.

"Please tell me everything he said, Jane. Tell me everything you can remember about Charlie Fox's great-grandfather."

## CHAPTER TWO

Jonah Longwing was as modern as the art form he practiced, but his tribe was not. When he returned from New York for the first time, to visit his mother and sisters in the village in which he was raised, Longwing was amused to discover that the people of his tribe had renamed him. Like some other Native Americans who mistrusted the miraculous and encroaching technology of the Caucasians, Jonah's people believed that a camera captured not only an image, but also the very soul of a person who was photographed. Jonah Longwing had become The Stealer of Many Souls.

On a subsequent visit, Longwing made love to a friend of his sister. Later when she wrote to tell him she was with child, he implored her to join him in New York. She refused, saying she could not leave her family. Longwing returned and married her, but she remained stubbornly loyal to her way of life, and he finally left her in the village with their infant son.

The son of The Stealer of Many Souls was Charlie Fox's grandfather, and his family endured undeserved hardships from the name that Jonah had brushed off as harmless superstition. Longwing's wife had been suspected of consorting with demons, and Charlie's grandfather was surely devil-spawned. The other villagers segregated her and the boy. In the tribal tradition, they were both feared and revered by their kin and neighbors.

By the time Charlie's generation arrived, relatives of Jonah Longwing were soul eaters in tales told by tribal elders. Even when Charlie's father personally negotiated the return of tribal lands during the time of the Reclamation Act, the myth of Jonah Longwing continued, and the reacquisition was credited to darker powers.

When he was old enough, Charlie Fox left his people with the wave of youth tired of the old ways: a generation that wanted to grab what they could of the outside world.

Charlie knew that his great-grandfather had worked in silent films. He searched for his own path by tracing Longwing's life, or what he knew of it. There were no remaining physical traces of Biograph in New York, but Charlie did see a one-reeler shot by

Longwing at a Griffith retrospective. His interest in his ancestor was also fired by a gift from his father: two yellowed sketches that Longwing had once left with his wife for safekeeping. The sketches were drawings of a camera that Longwing had designed.

Although Charlie had no interest in the technical side of Longwing's work, he decided to try his own luck in the ruins of the Hollywood dream. He moved to Los Angeles and put his own talents to use as a wrangler and stunt rider.

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"Jonah Longwing was a divinity to Charlie," Jane told me. "I think he half-believed the tribal myth. When he spoke of Jonah, he even used the old tribal name: The Stealer of Many Souls." She sighed and focused her brown eyes into mine. "He said that Jonah was murdered by Thomas Edison. I never understood what he meant by that, or why he always claimed that everything in Hollywood rightfully belonged to the children of The Stealer of Many Souls."

"Any idea what happened to the drawings that Charlie's father gave him?"

"I have them," Jane said. "I had copies made. Charlie asked a cameraman about them on the set one day. The guy told Charlie that the drawings ought to be in a museum. Charlie drank a lot, so I thought I'd better keep them for him. The cameraman said the originals were 'priceless'."

\*

It was dark by the time I left Jane in Sunland, and storm clouds had reappeared majestically from the south, making it even darker. I had called Doc Collins from Jane's place, and we invented fresh theories for each of the Tar Pit deaths. I needed to check out the L.A.P.D. photos of Charlie Fox's corpse to confirm one, and I wanted Doc to see the copies of the drawings that Jane had given me before we paid another visit to the Stackhouse Black Maria.

The rain began to pelt against the Dodge just as the jock on KEARTH put on "Born To Be Wild". I kept my speed down. Driving with the residents of Los Angeles in the rain is

a near-death experience as it is, and it was just slippery enough in the center lane of the Hollywood Freeway to make the correct response to that song a suicide.

I noticed a car close on my tail, but I figured it was somebody who didn't have wipers. L.A. drivers use logic like that: I can't see in this damn rain, so I'd better stay close to the car in front of me.

"Back off, you maroon!" I cursed quietly in my best Bugs Bunny. A bus going seventy streaked past and doused my windshield with twenty gallons of acid rainwater. I swerved a little at the impact. When I checked my rearview, the tailgater was gone.

The rain had let up by the time I reached Doc's house in Van Nuys. The sky brightened with city lights, but the clouds were still massive and rolling in a thousand shades of gray. Doc turned on the porch light when he heard the Dodge pull into his driveway. I got out and greeted him as he opened the front door. One of his ten kids, a two-year old girl with a name even Doc forgets, peered from behind his pant legs.

"Ok, son. Let's see this Jonah Longwing artwork and be quick about it! One of the kids just threw up on the TV and my wife Edna is cheating with a sailor in Reseda."

I've met Doc's wife, and her name isn't Edna, so I started to laugh. A shot rang out and shattered the porch light.

"What the fuck?" Doc yelled, and the child began to cry behind him. I slammed the door in his face and rolled off the porch into the cover of some very nasty shrubbery. A sharp thorn scratched my cheek. I could hear the sound of a TV next door promoting a cold medicine. I waited for a second shot, but nothing happened. There was thunder in the mountains.

Then a car on Doc's street came to life and roared into the night with its lights off. I stood up to tag the plates, but a fresh sheet of rain splashed in my eyes. I heard footsteps and spun into Doc and an orange umbrella.

"Hey! Take it easy! It's just me, Mary Poppins From Hell!"

"Very funny. I'm outta' here, Doc."

"You're bleeding, son, and you'll never find that son of a bitch in this urban maze. Car chases aren't your style, Frank. Let's get inside before the kids take over."

\*

G.W. Stackhouse refused to cooperate the next morning, even after Doc called him personally. He denied the possibility of Longwing's drawings being legitimate without having seen them. I began to suspect G.W.'s conservative nature went a little deeper than the ideals of an avid film collector.

I recounted the stories Jane had told me about The Stealer of Many Souls, and an examination of the police photos and Doc's quick post-mortem on the body of Charlie Fox confirmed one of my answers. The bullet in the wall of Doc's front porch was a .45, but it was Doc who told me to put off quizzing the cuckolded Teamster that Dan had pointed out on the Universal back lot.

"Lots of guys brought service revolvers back from World War Two," Doc said. He was ready to agree with my second conclusion.

We had to get a warrant to try and prove it. By that time, however, the self-righteous G.W. Stackhouse had murdered the ghost of Jonah Longwing. A smell of burnt Celluloid still hung in the Black Maria.

"Damnit, man!" Doc exploded. "Why did you do it? It was history!"

"Don't you think I know that, you fool?" Stackhouse snapped back. The old man was bitter in his victory. "Don't you think I've lived with the guilt of it ever since I acquired that damned reel?" He raised his head and stared into the blank white screen on the wall.

"Do you really think I wanted to shoot at you?" he asked quietly. Doc wasn't satisfied.

"Look at these!" he cried, thrusting the copies of Jonah Longwing's schematics at his former friend. "Do you see the date by that signature? 1907! Do you understand what that means?"

"I know what it would have meant if I hadn't burned every frame of that reel! It would have meant chaos! It could have destroyed fortunes and lives - and tarnished the memory of a great American!"

G.W. Stackhouse glared at Doc, and then at me. "And all for some goddamned Indian!"

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The reel of color film shot by Jonah Longwing in 1911 was lost forever. With it went proof that Longwing's invention, the first three-strip color motion picture camera, predated Herbert Kalmus' 1933 three-strip Technicolor process by twenty-five years. The reel had been proof that a working model of the camera and the developing process had existed when Longwing met his death in the La Brea Tar Pits. It suggested a strong motive for premeditated murder by agents of the Motion Picture Patents Company, infamous in its time for the violent suppression of independent competition.

What the collector G.W. Stackhouse had feared most of all was inference of a further link between that violence and the founder of the Patents Trust: Thomas Alva Edison. G.W.'s mania to protect the Edison myth had put a gun in his hand when he followed me to and from Sunland after our first encounter. Perhaps he had only thought to frighten me away from the case, as he later claimed, but I still remember the little Collins girl peeking out from behind her dad when the shot was fired.

Doc rented a copy of "Black Canyon" a few weeks later, and we had a few beers and watched it on the color TV Doc keeps at the L.A. County Coroner's office. The mudslide sequence, with Charlie Fox riding and sliding on a magnificently trained quarter horse, was just as exciting on a small screen.

"It was all instinct with Charlie Fox," I said. "Intuition, I guess. I wonder what he would have done if he'd known about Jonah's reel?"

"You're right about instinct," Doc agreed. "I don't expect he really knew what he had in those schematics. The whole idea of using multiple lenses and individual strips of film for each of the primary colors seems as unsophisticated as a hand-cranked camera today.

It was the date on his great-grandfather's drawings that made them so important. An American named Urban invented a two-strip color film in 1908. 'Kinemacolor', he called it. The Patents Trust forced him out of the U.S. market, and he and his film moved to England."

"So Jonah Longwing was a year earlier, and with a technology that was a quarter-century ahead of his time. He really was first! How do you suppose the Trust found out about his camera?"

"We won't ever know that, Frank - assuming that it really was the Trust who had him hit. But Longwing did work for Biograph in New York, and Biograph was one of the production companies that Edison bullied into joining the Trust in 1908. Maybe Jonah told somebody at Biograph about the camera, and word got to Edison.

"Old Tom simply wanted a piece of all the motion pictures made in the United States, not to mention any related technology that motion pictures might spawn. He was bitter about his failure to secure international copyrights on his own camera - which was really partially invented by his assistant, you know. He couldn't control the European market."

"I think Charlie hoped that Longwing himself would tell him what to do," I said. "He still had that much of the old way in his blood. I think that's why he went to the La Brea Tar Pits that morning, where Jonah had died, and jumped up on that iron fence railing in the rain."

"Walkin' it, like a tightrope. Lookin' for Jonah's ghost, you mean?"

"He was that crazy. Jane said he thought of Longwing as a divinity: The Stealer of Many Souls. I can visualize him there, drunk and teetering on that iron railing in the mist, calling out for his ancestor to give him a sign."

"Then he slipped," Doc said, "and smacked his head on the railing as he fell. Say, Frank, did you ever see that film 'The Rose Tattoo' with Burt Lancaster? The one where he's up on the rooftop at the end?"

"The one with Anna Magnani? Sure, but that ending was almost comic, Doc. Charlie's tightrope act was more a tragedy. More ironic. He died just like Jonah, unconscious in the tar."

"You're right, son. Cold fate. Silent pathos in the rain." Doc sighed. "Like Griffith might have done it - and they don't make them like that anymore, Frank."

**The End**