

THE MUMMIFICATIONS AT CACTUS CREEK

An original Screenplay
for an Après-Garde film

BY JUDGE SMITH

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FADE IN:

Scene 1 - THE SHACK INTERIOR

(BLACK & WHITE FILM)

The Shack is a log cabin or similar rough wooden structure. The interior is Spartan, with bare timber floors, though some small attempts at home-making can be seen. A daguerreotype of a moustachioed gunman hangs on the wall, along with an embroidered sampler which reads 'Home Sweet Home', and a reproduction of a 19th Century painting of the Pyramids. The general effect is of a scene from a cheap 'B Movie' Western.

The room is furnished with a rough wooden table around which are three chairs currently occupied by the Cactus Creek Gang. The Shack is their hideout.

The Gang's appearance continues the 'B Movie' cowboy theme: plaid shirts, bandannas, waistcoats, boots and six-guns are all present and correct.

ALPHONSE is the gang-leader, big and bearded. He wears a bandoleer of cartridges over one shoulder. LEFTY is also tall, though lean and cadaverous with lank hair and a long, drooping moustache, TUSCON PETE is grizzled and much shorter than the other two, he wears leather chaps and his Stetson hangs by a thong at the back of his head.

The three characters think of themselves as mean, outlaw hombres, and the actors deliver their lines in the ponderous, over-emphasised style of the early Talkies.

ALPHONSE

So it's agreed. We're gonna hold-up the Stage.

LEFTY

Yeah! We're gonna steal the gold.

TUSCON PETE

Because we're bad hombres.

ALPHONSE

Yeah, we're bad hombres, and We're the Cactus Creek Gang.

ALL

Yeah, the Cactus Creek Gang!

TUSCON PETE

How we gonna do it, Alphonse?

ALPHONSE

I've told you before, Tuscon Pete,
I am Black Alphonso!

TUSCON PETE

Sorry Black Alphonso, I keep forgettin'.
(pause) So how we gonna do it?

LEFTY

Yeah, what's the plan. We gotta have
a plan.

ALPHONSE

I bin workin' on that. You just see
what I've been a' makin'.

Alphonse reaches into his pocket and pulls out a black leather mask which he lays proudly on the table. We see this in close-up. The mask is small, covering only the eyes of the wearer in the manner of a cartoon burglar.

TUSCON PETE

What is that, Black Alphonso?

ALPHONSE

That...is a Mask.

LEFTY

A mask?

TUSCON PETE

How does it work?

ALPHONSE

If I put on this mask,
no one will recognise me.

LEFTY

(getting the idea) So they won't
know who's stealing their gold!

TUSCON PETE

Put it on, Black Alphonso,
let's see it workin'.

Alphonse puts on the mask with a triumphant smile and faces the others.

TUSCON PETE

(Gasps) Who are you?

LEFTY

I have no idea who that man is.

TUSCON PETE

Wait. We are the Cactus Creek
Gang, aren't we?

LEFTY

That's right.

TUSCON PETE

Black Alphonso, Lefty and Tuscon
Pete.

LEFTY

That's right.

TUSCON PETE

Well, you're Lefty, and I'm Tuscon
Pete, so that means...

LEFTY

He must be Black Alphonso.

TUSCON PETE

Black Alphonso, we may have a
problem.

Alphonse angrily tears off the mask.

ALPHONSE

Tarnation!

LEFTY

Let me try, Black Alphonso.
Maybe it'll work different on me.

Alphonse hands it over despairingly. Lefty ties on the mask.

TUSCON PETE

Who are you, and what have you
done with Lefty?

ALPHONSE

I told you! You put it on
and no one knows who you are!

LEFTY

I'm incog..er..incog-nitti-o!

TUSCON PETE

I'm sorry, Alphonse..I mean Black Alphonso, I truly am, but that's Lefty's chair, and I think that's Lefty sittin' in it.

Lefty sadly takes off the mask.

ALPHONSE

Tarnation!

LEFTY (in despair)

What we gonna do?

ALPHONSE

Wait! I figured it out. We know who we are. We know we're the Cactus Creek Gang, but those galoots on the Stage, they won't know we're the Cactus Creek Gang. And so if I'm wearing the mask I will be truly..

LEFTY

Incog-nitti-o!

TUSCON PETE

He figured it out!

LEFTY

That's why he's the leader of the Gang.

ALPHONSE (basking modestly in their praise) This calls for a celebration.(shouts) Juanita!

JUANITA enters. She is a dramatic brunet in Mexican dress. She has a very sinister smile and wears a small, black leather mask.

JUANITA

Yes, Señores.

ALPHONSE

Bring us some food.

JUANITA

Yes, Señores.

Juanita exits.

TUSCON PETE

I've bin thinkin'. When we rob the stage, Black Alphonso, they won't know who you are, because you'll be wearin' the mask. Am I right?

LEFTY

You're right, Tuscon Pete.

TUSCON PETE

But Lefty an me, we won't be wearin' the mask. So they're gonna know who we are!

ALPHONSE

You're right, I guess.

LEFTY (in despair)

What we gonna do?

ALPHONSE

I'll figure it out... I'll figure it out because I'm the Leader of this Gang.

LEFTY & TUSCON PETE

Yeah!

Juanita enters, bringing three bowls of stew which she sets down on the table.

LEFTY

Thank you Miss Juanita.

Alphonse and Tuscon Pete stare at him in disgust. All three start to eat. Juanita exits.

TUSCON PETE

Let's have some whiskey.

ALPHONSE

No whiskey! We gotta stay sharp. 'Cause tomorrow we're robbin' the Stage. (Pause, then, uncertainly at first, then gaining confidence) Okay... I think I've got this. I'll be wearing the mask, and I'll say 'Reach for the sky!'. Then I give the mask to Lefty, and he puts it on and says..

LEFTY

This is a robbery!

ALPHONSE

Then he gives it to Tuscon Pete,
and he puts it on and says...

TUSCON PETE

Give us the gold!

LEFTY

That's great, Black Alphonso, great.
(long pause) But, y'know, I can't
help but feelin' we're missin'
somethin'.

TUSCON PETE

Yeah, Black Alphonso, I think
we may still have a problem.

ALPHONSE

Tarnation!

LEFTY (in despair)

What we gonna do?

Scene 2. THE ROOM OF THE GAME

(COLOUR FILM)

The Room of the Game is a white and featureless rectangle, without windows and lit by artificial light. The room contains two blocks or upright slabs, also white, each positioned centrally on the long axis of the room and a few feet from either end. One slab is a couple of feet high, the other is perhaps five feet tall. The taller of the two slabs bears a large image of the familiar gold mask of Tutankhamun, but wearing a black eye-mask. A little way in front of this slab, a galvanised bucket stands on the floor.

A young man is seated on the floor, leaning back against the smaller slab. He wears a T-shirt tucked into chino slacks, and tennis shoes. His appearance and posture is reminiscent of Steve McQueen in 'The Great Escape', so we will call him STEVE.

To one side of him is another bucket, full of tennis balls. Steve takes a ball and throws it down the room so that it bounces off the floor and hits the masked image of Tutankhamen. He is trying to make the ball bounce back into the bucket in front of the large slab. This is the Game. Steve

is relaxed and casual as he repeats this action several times, until he is successful, and a ball falls into the bucket.

At this moment we hear the loud, electronic click-and-bell of a pinball machine and the image of a full-size mummy-case suddenly appears standing upright in one corner of the room.

Steve continues the Game, and each time he is successful in bouncing a ball off the slab and into the bucket, the pinball machine rings and another image of the mummy-case is superimposed on the scene. Gradually the room begins to fill with mummy-cases.

Scene 3 THE SHACK - INTERIOR

(BLACK & WHITE FILM)

Lefty and Tuscon Pete are seated disconsolately at the table. Alphonse enters.

ALPHONSE

You know that problem?...
The problem with the mask?

Lefty and Tuscon Pete nod sorrowfully.

ALPHONSE

Well I fixed that problem. I
figured it out and I fixed it.
Look at this!

Alphonse pulls a handful of black material out of his pocket and bangs it triumphantly on the table.

LEFTY

What's that, Black Alphonso?

ALPHONSE

This is a new mask.

TUSCON PETE

A new mask?

LEFTY

How does this one work?

ALPHONSE

I'll show you. Tuscon Pete,
you stand next to me, and Lefty,
you stand next to Tuscon Pete.

The three line-up shoulder to shoulder. The new mask is a ring, or noose, of black, elastic fabric about two inches wide and three-and-a-half feet long. It has three sets of eye-holes let into the band. Alphonse arranges this so it goes round his and Lefty's heads. They are now both wearing the same giant mask, intended to be worn by all three outlaws. Unfortunately, Tuscon Pete, who is standing between them, is too short, and the mask passes just above his head. In close-up, He grabs a section of the fabric and pulls it down so that the central set of eyeholes is in the right position, but when he releases his grip, it springs back, exposing his face.

LEFTY

That's Jim Dandy, Black Alphonso!
This is one powerful-good mask
you made. Now we all gonna be
incog-nitti-o!

TUSCON PETE

No we ain't! You're too tall.
This mask don't hide nothin' on me.

LEFTY

That's 'cos you're too short.

TUSCON PETE

No, you're too tall!

LEFTY

No, you're too short!

Tuscon Pete leaves the 'line-up' and faces-up to Lefty.

TUSCON PETE

That's fightin' talk!

Tuscon Pete goes into a gunfighter's crouch, his hand hovering around the holster of his pistol.

ALPHONSE

You stop that, Tuscon Pete,
an you quit rilin' him, Lefty.

Alphonse removes the mask from himself and Lefty.

LEFTY (despairingly)

What we gonna do?

ALPHONSE

I'll figure this out... I always
figure it out... Because I am the

leader of this gang!

Scene 4. THE ROOM OF THE GAME

(COLOUR FILM)

The room is now almost full of mummy-cases, with only just enough room for Steve to throw his tennis balls. One more ball bounces from Tutankhamen's face into the bucket and a final mummy-case appears. Steve throws again and after a couple of attempts, he bounces another ball into the bucket.

At this instant there is a brilliant flash of light and the loud sound of bells and hooters. It is the sound of the jackpot being won on an old-fashioned fruit machine. The flash of light passes to reveal that all the mummy-cases have disappeared. The image of Tutankhamen has been replaced by a full-face photograph of Steve, who is wearing a black eye-mask. As for Steve himself he is now swathed from head to foot in tight white linen bandages. Nothing of Steve can be seen, his face is entirely covered except for a narrow eye-slit. He has become a MUMMY.

However this process does not seem to have disturbed him. He is still seated on the floor, leaning back against his slab. All the loose tennis balls have been returned to his bucket, and he begins the game once more. After a few tries he bounces a ball off his picture and into the bucket and an image of Steve, standing upright, in his T-shirt and chinos (and without a mask) suddenly appears in one corner of the room.

The game progresses, and the room begins to fill with images of Steve.

Scene 5 THE SHACK - INTERIOR

(BLACK & WHITE FILM)

Lefty And Tuscon Pete are standing, Waiting for instructions. Alphonse is pacing excitedly.

ALPHONSE
(Shouts) Juanita!

Juanita enters.

JUANITA
Yes, Señores.

ALPHONSE
Juanita, bring me those bibles.

JUANITA

Yes, Señore.

Juanita exits.

LEFTY

What do we want bibles for, Alphonse,
I mean Black Alphonso? We're outlaws.

TUSCON PETE

Yeah, we're bad hombres.

ALPHONSE

You'll see!

Juanita reappears carrying a large stack of similar bibles,
and puts them on the table, smiling in her sinister way. She
exits.

LEFTY

Thank you Miss Juanita...

The other two look at each other and shake their heads.

TUSCON PETE

Where you get all them Bibles?

ALPHONSE (Proudly)

I stole 'em...From hotel rooms.

LEFTY (Suspiciously)

What you gonna do with 'em?

ALPHONSE

I will show you, Lefty.

In close up, Alphonse puts two piles of three bibles each next
to each other on the floor.

ALPHONSE

Tuscon Pete, you come here and
stand on these here bibles.

Before the close-up ends, we see Tuscon Pete's boots mounting
the stacks of bibles.

ALPHONSE

Now, Lefty. We need some rope.

LEFTY

(calls politely) Miss Juanita?

JAUNITA

Yes, Señore.

LEFTY

Do we have any rope, please?

Alphonse and Tuscon Pete mouth Lefty's words with sissified expressions.

Scene 6. THE ROOM OF THE GAME

(COLOUR FILM)

The room is now almost full of images of Steve, with only just enough room for MUMMY STEVE to throw his tennis balls. After a few attempts, another ball bounces from Steve's face into the bucket and one more image of Steve appears. Mummy Steve continues to play, and in a few moments a further ball drops into the bucket.

At this moment there is a second brilliant flash of light and the 'jackpot' sound of bells and hooters. The flash of light passes to reveal that all the images of Steve have disappeared, and the situation has returned to what it was when we first observed the Room of the Game, with the image of Tutankhamen on the far slab, and normal, 'human' Steve imperturbably continuing the Game.

As the Game progresses, the Room begins to fill, once more, with mummy-cases.

Scene 7 THE SHACK - INTERIOR

(BLACK & WHITE FILM)

Close-up of Tuscon Pete's boots on the stacks of bibles, but now they are now firmly secured to the piles of books with multiple windings of knotted cord.

We now see the whole gang. Tuscon Pete stands in the middle and, standing on his bibles, his face is now on a level with Alphonse and Lefty. They are also now, finally, all wearing the giant, triple mask, and are very pleased about it.

TUSCON PETE

I'm tall!

ALPHONSE

You sure are!

LEFTY

And we're all...

ALL
Incog-nitti-o!

ALPHONSE
Let's practice.

Alphonse pulls his gun.

ALPHONSE
Reach for the sky!

Lefty pulls his gun.

LEFTY
This is a robbery!

Tuscon Pete pulls his gun.

TUSCON PETE
Give us the gold!

Scene 8. THE ROOM OF THE GAME

(COLOUR FILM)

Once more, the Room is now almost full of mummy-cases, with only just enough room for Steve to throw his tennis balls. One more ball bounces from Tutankhamen's face into the bucket and another mummy-case appears.

Scene 9. THE SHACK - INTERIOR

(BLACK & WHITE FILM)

The Gang have now divested themselves of the Mask, but Tuscon Pete still wears his biblical stilts. They are concerned about something.

ALPHONSE (Pointing)
What's that?

LEFTY
What?

ALPHONSE
That!

TUSCON PETE
It's just a door, Black Alphonso.

ALPHONSE
But I ain't never seen that door before.

LEFTY
I ain't neither.

TUSCON PETE
Let's take a look...

They move towards a door in one wall of the shack. It is outlined in light, indicating the presence of some sort of illuminated space behind. Tuscon Pete clumps clumsily towards it, followed by the others. They are interrupted by Juanita who rushes in.

JUANITA
No, Señores! Stop! Don't go
down there!

ALPHONSE
This is our shack. I don't want
no strange doors what we don't
know what's behind.

JUANITA
Please, Señores! That door is
not for you!

LEFTY
Step aside, if you please,
Miss Juanita. We're goin' in...

They throw open the door, crowding around the doorway. They are confronted by a bright, featureless light. They push their way inside.

Scene 10. THE ROOM OF THE GAME (COLOUR FILM)

In medium close-up we see a tennis ball bounce into the bucket. Once more there is a brilliant flash of light and the 'jackpot' sound of bells and hooters.

Then, against a black background we see the Gang, closely grouped together and advancing on us menacingly, with pistols drawn. They are swathed, head-to-toe in white bandages. They are all mummies.

ALPHONSE, LEFTY and TUSCON PETE
Reach for the sky!

THE END

TECHNICAL NOTES:

- As Screenwriter and putative Director of this film, I should point out, firstly, that in my visualisation there is a complete absence of camera movement throughout; all shots being static, without tracking, panning or zoom.
- The 'process shots' or special effects elements, specifically the multiplying images of mummy cases and figures of 'Steve', are not intended to be realistic. There should be no attempt to make them appear as three-dimensional objects, and they can be obviously flat, two-dimensional images, although facing us at varying angles. They can be superimposed on the scene in the simplest possible digital technique.
- The mummified figures, however must be fully believable. Baggy, zip-up mummy suits are not acceptable. Further, these are not ancient mummies. They are not dirty or decayed, with no bloodstains or unravelling bandages. But neither are they authentic Egyptian mummies, because their legs are not bound together. The mummies of Cactus Creek are in the tradition of mummies from the movies, although, unusually, they appear 'freshly wrapped' in clean, white bandages.
- Costumes and make-up throughout must be of high quality, with the Cactus Creek Gang looking like authentic Wild West outlaws. Their surreal idiocy will not work for us unless they look completely believable. Surrealism cannot exist without realism.

JUDGE SMITH - 2017