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Screenwriting Sample Scene: “Fortune & Glory”

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In 2024 I wrote a spec script for the pilot episode of a television series about the *Indiana Jones* character Short Round, in which he steals and repatriates Chinese cultural artifacts in the 1950s. Enjoy this sample action sequence from that script.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - CHINATOWN - OPEN-AIR PARLOR - MIDDAY

Short Round hovers over an ANNOYED MIDDLE-AGED MAN dressed in business attire, who is trying in vain to focus on his game of mahjong.

SHORTY

...so whaddya say? Win-win, right?

MAHJONG PLAYER

(to the businessman,
in Mandarin)

What's the holdup?

BUSINESSMAN

(to Shorty, in
English)

The last time you told me something
was win-win, I lost two hundred
dollars and you ended up in jail.

Shorty slyly grabs a dumpling off a passing waiter's tray,
tosses it in his mouth.

SHORTY

But look at us now, eh? That suit
must have cost a mint. You look like
a winner to me.

MAHJONG PLAYER

(in Mandarin, to
Shorty)

What the hell, man? We're playing
here.

SHORTY

(ignoring him)

Look, Jin -- give me one last chance,
huh? I could really use the help.

BUSINESSMAN

Sorry, Shorty.

The businessman slaps down his tiles to reveal his hand, and
his opponents GROAN. He rakes in their money.

BUSINESSMAN (cont'd)

You're right -- I am a winner. 'Cause
I only bet on sure things.

Dejected, Shorty turns to leave, and WHAM -- he runs right

into a GANG GOU THUG so tall and muscular it's like walking into a brick wall. The goon is flanked by three more just like him -- and WEI WEI, sporting a black eye and heavy bruises.

SHORTY

Wei Wei. Boys.

WEI WEI

Hey, Shorty. Didn't expect to see me again, huh?

SHORTY

Well, a guy can hope.

WEI WEI

Nothin' personal. It's just -- Boss wants to know how come you get to keep the loot all for yourself, and we get nothin'?

SHORTY

Maybe 'cause I did all the work?

GANG GOU THUG

(in Mandarin)

Where is it?

SHORTY

(reassuring)

Hold onto your potatoes, Bruno. I got it. Not on me, of course. Whaddya think I am, stupid?

WEI WEI

Your place?

SHORTY

So you DO think I'm stupid. Y'know, Wei Wei, this is a hell of a way to treat an old pal.

Shorty has begin to BACK AWAY SLOWLY, leading the thugs out of the parlor and onto the busy SIDEWALK.

WEI WEI

(to the thugs)

It's at his apartment.

The main thug GRABS SHORTY BY THE THROAT and starts lifting him off the ground.

GANG GOU THUG
(in Mandarin)
Where?

Shorty CHOKES OUT an incoherent reply, fingers scrabbling at the goon's concrete-hard fist, legs kicking. Wei Wei looks pleased.

WEI WEI
Can't say you didn't have this
comin', *Short Round*.

Shorty's eyes FLASH with anger. His body tenses, and he THROWS BOTH FEET INTO THE THUG'S CHEST, forcing him to let go of Shorty's neck and sending him sailing backward into a mahjong table with a CRASH.

The other thugs brandish SWITCHBLADES and LUNGE at Shorty. He enters a Wing Chun stance and deflects their simultaneous attacks, grabbing a small TABLECLOTH off a nearby patio table and twisting it into a defensive weapon.

WEI WEI
(cont'd)
Get him!

Shorty WHIPS Wei Wei right in the SACK. Wei Wei shouts and doubles over in pain.

As the goons attack again, Shorty spots a PASSING TRUCK -- WAITS FOR HIS MOMENT -- and LEAPS across the street just as the truck ZOOMS PAST. The second his feet hit the ground, Shorty's OFF, with the goons in HOT PURSUIT.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - CHINATOWN - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Shorty is at a FULL SPRINT, waving at the crush of pedestrians to get out of his way.

SHORTY
Move! Move! C'mon, make a hole!

One of the goons is CATCHING UP. Shorty tosses the tablecloth backwards, and it ENVELOPS the thug, who SNARLS

in frustration. Blinded, he RUNS STRAIGHT INTO A LAMP POST
-- CLANGG!! -- knocking himself out cold. Shorty CACKLES.

But the other three are still on his tail, and now he's
unarmed. Still sprinting, Shorty looks ahead -- CRASH!! --
just in time to PLOW STRAIGHT INTO A FRUIT STAND, tumbling
onto the ground and sending produce everywhere.

The thugs close the gap and one of them aims a KICK at
Shorty, who's still prone. Shorty GRABS HIS ANKLE and uses
the thug's momentum against him, sending him FLYING. Shorty
grabs a couple loose FRUITS and FLINGS one at another goon,
smacking him right in the cheek. SWISH -- Shorty throws a
second one, this time KNOCKING THE KNIFE OUT OF A GOON'S
HAND.

Enjoying himself now -- maybe a bit too much -- Shorty leaps
to his feet and takes a pitcher's stance.

SHORTY (cont'd)

And Round's at the mound. Here's the
wind-up--!

Shorty throws a FASTBALL PITCH, his fruit-ball EXPLODING as
it strikes a thug in the forehead hard enough to KNOCK HIM
TO THE GROUND.

SHORTY (cont'd)

Steeee-riike three! The crowd goes
wild!

There's a SMATTERING OF CONFUSED APPLAUSE from the
pedestrians watching the spectacle. Shorty addresses his
"adoring fans".

SHORTY (cont'd)

No autographs please, folks! I'm just
here to play the game--

WHAM!! Shorty is SPEAR-TACKLED to the ground by one of the
goons. The onlookers SHRIEK. Straddling Shorty, the goon
gets in a few good PUNCHES, busting Shorty's lip and drawing
BLOOD.

GANG GOU THUG

(in Mandarin)

Tell me where you hid it, kid, and I
promise I'll make this quick.

The goon draws his fist back for another punch, but Shorty CATCHES IT. In three smooth moves, Shorty STRIKES THE GOON'S INNER ARM, SLAPS HIM IN THE THROAT with some POINTED FINGERS, and FLIPS the goon off him.

Shorty scrambles to his feet and DODGES as another goon SWIPES A SWITCHBLADE at his neck. Shorty sets his jaw, wipes his bloody chin with the back of his hand, GRINS, and unleashes a FLURRY OF WING CHUN BLOWS that disarms the goon and KNOCKS HIM UNCONSCIOUS.

DING DING!! Shorty turns to see an approaching CABLE CAR full of commuters and -- seeing his exit -- HOPS LIGHTLY ABOARD as it passes. But the last remaining Gang Gou thug GRABS THE STANCHION at the rear of the car and PULLS HIMSELF ABOARD as well!

5.

INT. SAN FRANCISCO - DOWNTOWN - CABLE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Cornered, Shorty looks for a chance to leap off into the street, but CARS and BICYCLES are WHIZZING BY, and the thug is pushing through startled commuters towards him.

Seeing the FLASH of the thug's SWITCHBLADE, Shorty GRABS THE BELL CABLE ABOVE HIS HEAD -- DING DING! -- and lifts his feet into the air, KICKING the knife out of the thug's hand and sending it out the window.

Acting on instinct, Shorty sticks his arm out another window, grabs the outside edge of the cable car's roof, and HOISTS HIMSELF THROUGH THE WINDOW and ONTO THE ROOF.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - DOWNTOWN - CABLE CAR ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Shorty holds his Giants cap firm on his head with one hand and extends the other, trying to get his sea legs. The goon STRUGGLES OUT of the window and emerges on the opposite side of the roof.

SHORTY
(exasperated)
Really, pal?

Wild-eyed with adrenaline, the goon puts up his dukes and SQUARES UP with Shorty.

SHORTY (cont'd)
(a little impressed)
Shit. OK then.

They FLY INTO AN INTENSE MARTIAL ARTS DUEL, trading blow for blow as the cable car TILTS UPWARD, hitting a sloped street. Shorty rarely spars with someone of this skill level -- the thug is fast, powerful, and fueled by rage. It's all he can do to stay on his feet.

As the cable car LURCHES again, cresting the top of a hill, Shorty sees an opening and delivers an acrobatic SPIN-KICK to his opponent's head, knocking the thug prone on the roof. He SMILES -- but the thug's leg WHIPS OUT and TAKES OUT SHORTY AT THE ANKLES, driving him down with a CRASH as well!

The thug is suddenly on top of Shorty, MITTS CLAMPED AROUND HIS THROAT. Shorty struggles, and the thug SLAMS his head against the metal roof. He's helpless -- face turning blue as the thug SQUEEZES.

There is a loud BANG!! as the thug's EYES GO WIDE and his grip suddenly SLACKENS.

He SLUMPS FORWARD onto Shorty, and the pair TUMBLE OFF THE ROOF and onto the street, landing HARD.

Shorty strains to push the thug off, realizing his opponent's been SHOT DEAD. He COLLAPSES, exhausted.

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - UNION SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Two sleek black PACKARDS SCREECH to a halt, blocking Shorty's path. The suicide doors open and a chopper squad of IMMACULATELY-DRESSED GANGSTERS in dark double-breasted suits and fedoras step out, their TATTOOED HANDS gripping AUTOMATIC WEAPONS.

As they roughly pull Shorty to his feet, a SLIGHT, MIDDLE AGED MAN exits one of the cars and walks over to face him. This is TENG TU HOK (early 50s, soft-spoken, with a kind & avuncular face) -- the one man everybody in San Francisco knows, and nobody wants to meet.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - UNION SQUARE - CAFE - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: A pair of BRIGHT GREEN EYES framed by AUBURN HAIR, peering over the edge of a NEWSPAPER. She's watching all this unfold from a cafe table nearby.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - UNION SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Shorty STRUGGLES against the iron grip of the gangsters. Tengtu raises a hand, as if to calm him.

TENGTU

Shh, easy. Easy now. It's all right.

Tengtu turns over an open palm. One of the gangsters fishes Shorty's WALLET out of his jacket and places it in his boss's hand. Tengtu flips through and finds Shorty's ID.

TENGTU (cont'd)

"Wan Li". Interesting. I've never heard of you. They don't usually issue driver's licenses to immigrants.

SHORTY

Look, geezer. Nobody calls me that. And who says I'm an immigrant? I'm a red-blooded American, same as-

TENGTU

As me?

Tengtu LAUGHS, a strangely endearing high-pitched giggle. His gangsters chuckle. Shorty cracks a weak smile.

TENGTU (cont'd)

Yep, you and me, American as apple pie. I guess I don't need to introduce myself.

SHORTY

You're Tengtu Hok.

TENGTU

Smart, too. How about that. Y'know,
you got some moxie, kid. I could use
someone like you.

SHORTY

Yeah, and I could use a sandwich. You
buyin'?

One of the gangsters SOCKS SHORTY IN THE GUT, doubling him
over. Tengtu tuts disapprovingly.

TENGTU

We'll smack that out of you, don't
worry. You'll go far. But first,
you're gonna give me what I want.

SHORTY

I don't got nothin' you want, you
crummy fat-headed--

This earns Shorty another PUNCH -- this time, it takes him
to his knees. Drool runs from his slackened mouth.

Tengtu leans down to speak into Shorty's ear.

TENGTU

I'll skin you, understand? You're
into something way above your pay
grade. It's not just you who will
suffer. Now you tell me where it is,
or--

TRIAD GANGSTER

(in Mandarin)

Boss.

One of the gangsters pulls out a CARD from Shorty's wallet
-- it's the one from MR. CHEN, his landlord, with the
building's ADDRESS on the back.

TENGTU

Ahh. Whaddya say, boys? Time for a
house call?

SHORTY

Wait. No!

The gangsters give Shorty a final PARTING SHOT, this time

across the jaw. He CRUMPLES on the pavement. They toss his wallet onto him as they leave.

Shorty's vision swims, and he BLACKS OUT.

CUT TO BLACK.