

FADE IN:

EXT. GRAND RAPIDS FAIRGROUNDS - RAILROAD TRACK - DAY

A ROARING steam locomotive pulling a coal tender, two boxcars and a caboose hurtles down a railroad track.

Its whistle SCREAMS non-stop.

A thick trail of steam and smoke follows.

Painted on the front boxcar in huge letters: "PROHIBITION."

SUPER: "GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, NOVEMBER 1929"

INT. "PROHIBITION" - MOVING

Inside the swaying, noisy cab -- THERE'S NO ONE TO BE FOUND.

Its throttle and whistle have been tied down with rope.

The firebox door swings on its hinges, coal blazing inside.

Above it, a hand-scrawled sign reads "GONE TO KINGDOM COME."

RAILROAD TRACK - OTHER DIRECTION

Two miles away, a nearly identical train RUMBLES directly toward the Prohibition -- ON THE SAME TRACK.

But painted on its front boxcar: "JOHN BARLEYCORN."

INT. "JOHN BARLEYCORN" - MOVING

Likewise, NOT A SOUL is in this cab.

Its throttle and whistle are tied down with filthy red kerchiefs.

Next to the water and pressure gauges, a skull and crossbones have been sloppily painted in whitewash.

GRANDSTAND

As the doomed trains race into view, 30,000 spectators -- young and old, rich and poor -- jump to their feet and go STARK RAVING NUTS, whooping and cheering for the inevitable massacre.

CINDER TRACK

Pacing in front of the rollicking grandstand is "HEAD-ON" BOBBY RAFFERTY (50s), a rakish, gregarious showman in his prime.

A bundle of nervous energy, he listens for something in both directions.

Then, in his Irish brogue over the noise:

BOBBY

Sweet Jesus! Where are the feckin' torpedoes?

The approaching iron horses HOWL ominously.

Bobby hurries over to EDGAR ALLAN "SARGE" KIPSINGER (50s), his oldest friend and trusted right-hand man.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Sarge! Where're those bastard torpedoes?

SARGE

Any second, Bobby!
(chuckles)
Patience, my friend, *patience!*

"PROHIBITION"

Its front wheels start pounding small explosives strapped to the rails -- their sharp, loud BANGS spaced at decreasing intervals so they'll speed up.

"JOHN BARLEYCORN"

Same.

CINDER TRACK

Bobby glances left and right.

He nudges Sarge, grinning.

BOBBY

What'd I tell ya? The more racket the better!

SARGE

Great idea!

Bobby claps like a coach on the sidelines:

BOBBY
All right now, fellas! Let's hit
the bullseye...

He grabs the binoculars hanging around his neck, puts them up and squints at something in the distance:

A JOLLY ROGER FLAG planted by the track at the IMPACT POINT.

Bobby laughs gleefully, drops the binos and rubs his hands together.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Ohhh, I never get tired of this.

Sarge grins.

BOBBY (CONT'D)
Twenty-five years today, Sarge. Who
woulda guessed? Time sure flies
when you're slammin' the shite
outta trains, eh?

They laugh.

IMPACT POINT - LOOKING EAST

"Prohibition" THUNDERS in at 300 yards away.

LOOKING WEST

Likewise "John Barleycorn."

GRANDSTANDS

The crowd falls silent now as:
-- a young woman grabs her boyfriend's arm;
-- a wealthy-looking man grits his teeth;
-- and an older farming couple brace for the inevitable.

CINDER TRACK

Sarge observes carefully, his head snapping back and forth.

Bobby gleefully punches the air.

BOBBY
COME ON, YOU MANIACS!

IMPACT POINT

The steel behemoths lunge at each other, and then --

-- *IMPACT!* --

In a mere moment:

- The locomotives accordion in an UNGODLY METALLIC THUD.
- The rigged boxcars EXPLODE in a fireball and derail.
- Metal and wood debris ERUPTS in all directions.
- And a cloud of oily black smoke instantly chokes the air.

GRANDSTAND

Spectators gasp, cringe and point.

IMPACT POINT

Chunks and fragments rain down on the 20-foot mountain of wreckage --

-- which continues to shift and CREAK.

GRANDSTAND

The crowd's shocked applause crescendos to a ROAR of approval.

IMPACT POINT

Steam BLASTS from a ruptured boiler somewhere.

And a dying locomotive emits its LAST, GASPING BREATH.

GRANDSTAND

Souvenir hunters and curiosity hounds shove to the bottom.

A line of cops tries to stop them, but many break through and scramble toward the wreckage.

IMPACT POINT

Firefighters jump out of arriving trucks, SIRENS blaring, and hurry to hose down the smoldering remains.

CINDER TRACK

Back in front of the stands, flashbulbs POP, reporters swarm, VIPs close in --

-- and Bobby, ever the showman, is all grins and charm.

BOBBY

Of course I think it's my best crash ever, Henry! I think every crash is my best ever!

Enthusiastic laughter. The reporters get this down.

REPORTER 1

How many crashes is this, Bobby?

BOBBY

One hundred and thirty, can ya believe it?

Somebody whistles.

REPORTER 2

How'd you ever manage to make smashing up trains so popular?

BOBBY

Boys, when I was in the circus I learned that the public wants three things: Spectacle, daredevilry -- and things that go *BOOM!*

More laughter and scribbling.

Bobby beams.

REPORTER 3

Speaking of crashes, are you worried this stock market trouble could cut into business?

BOBBY

Nahh, folks'll always want a bit o' fun. Did ya hear those cheers?

REPORTER 1

So what's the future hold, Bobby? You ever gonna retire?

BOBBY

(scoffs)

You kiddin'? You know my motto: "Don't look back, look forward --"

Some of them join in, nodding:

BOBBY & OTHERS:
 "-- because the other train's
 comin' straight for ya!"

Laughs, applause, and even a few cheers for his regular benediction.

BOBBY
 (with a wave)
 Thank you, gentlemen!

With that, he strides away happily toward the crash site.

But then --

Moments later, Sarge hurries to catch up with him.

He shouts something, Bobby turns, and they huddle.

Obviously pained, Sarge puts a hand on Bobby's shoulder as he speaks.

The concern on Bobby's face instantly turns to shock and disbelief.

They converse briefly.

Then something is decided, and they hurry off in a different direction.

As they go --

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (PRE-LAP V.O.)
 (typical rapid-fire
 delivery of the era)
 Thirty-year-old train engineer
 Luther Weston is said to have
 fallen from his locomotive at the
 beginning of their run at the Grand
 Rapids Fairgrounds.

BEGIN MOVIE NEWSREEL

Footage of a train moving slowly down a track.

An engineer and fireman, in turn, climb down the ladder and hop off.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

The starting method for Rafferty's crew -- as seen here -- is to get their trains running, tie down the throttle, then jump off before they accelerate -- often up to speeds of 80 miles an hour.

A previous event shows two trains racing toward each other and crashing.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

In well over 100 wrecks around the country, this is the first-ever fatality for one of "Head-On" Bobby Rafferty's men.

Bobby waves to crowds in grandstands. Shakes hands with dignitaries. Inspects one of his pileups.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

A former circus daredevil, Rafferty has long been one of the nation's favorite traveling showmen, demolishing his iron horses in cities, hamlets and fairgrounds from one end of the nation to the other for 25 years.

Bobby speaks with the King of England. Followed by another collision before a large audience.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Last year Rafferty and company even sailed to England, where King George the Fifth himself witnessed a royal wreckage.

Bobby waves to the camera.

NEWSREEL ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

It is not known at this time if Head-On Bobby will continue with his current tour in light of this tragedy.

END NEWSREEL**EXT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY**

On a dark city block, there's a repurposed church with a banner that reads "FREE SOUP & COFFEE."

Out front, sad-looking men mill around and shuffle in.

SUPER: "10 YEARS LATER, HARRISBURG, PA, NEAR THE END OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION"

INT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY

A different Bobby now -- older, unshaven, poorly dressed and a bit unsteady on his feet -- walks between rows of tables.

On his sparse tray, just soup, bread and coffee.

He shambles to a less populated section and sits.

He looks around. Stealthily pulls a flask from his jacket. And with a shaky hand, adds whiskey to his coffee.

He puts the flask away. Sips the coffee.

Breaks the bread into his soup. Wipes his spoon with a paper napkin.

Then -- head down like the others -- he eats in silence.

EXT. KEYSTONE RAILROAD OFFICE - DAY

An office building in downtown Harrisburg with a sign out front reading "KEYSTONE RAILROAD / CENTRAL PENN. REGION."

INT. DEZ'S OFFICE - DAY

"DEZ" DESMOND (40s), an eager KRR vice president, stands by three large easels waving a wooden pointer at a map of the Northeast U.S.

DEZ

Hell, anyone can see why they still call P.A. the Keystone State! Look where it is, Les! It connects the whole northeast with the rest of the country. Take it out -- pfffft! Everything collapses.

TERRY GILSON (30s), the good-natured yardmaster of the nearby Pennsvieview Rail Yard, nods meaningfully at the man seated next to him.

TERRY

(under his breath)
So true, Les.

LESTER NEWHOUSE (30s), a level-headed bank manager and Pennsview borough council president -- who also happens to be Bobby Rafferty's son-in-law -- motions for Terry to settle down.

Dez moves to a KRR system map of PA and draws a circle around HARRISBURG, tapping it hard a couple of times.

DEZ

And, of course, the Harrisburg area is *right smack* at the crossroads of everything.

TERRY

(nudges him)
That's us, Les.

LESTER

I know that, Terry.

DEZ

So when this Depression starts to turn around -- and it will soon --

With a bit of flair, he circles the PENNSVIEW RAIL YARD just across the Susquehanna River from Harrisburg.

DEZ (CONT'D)

-- the Pennsview Rail Yard -- *your town's* rail yard -- could be absolutely crucial to the nation's recovery.

He turns back to his guests, excited.

DEZ (CONT'D)

Just imagine all of that coal and steel and goods and merchandise traveling right through your backyard, Les! Terry's your yardmaster over there -- he knows what a boost this would be.

Terry jumps up and goes to another easel with a detailed chart marked RAIL YARD EXPANSION.

TERRY

Absolutely! Just look at this, Les.

He points things out --

TERRY (CONT'D)

Two classification yards, east and westbound, each with its own hump.
(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

A steel car shop. Fifty-stall roundhouse. A hundred and sixty miles of track on 500-plus acres -- with plenty of room to grow!

He turns to Lester.

TERRY (CONT'D)

We're talking *hundreds* more trains coming in and out of Pennsvew, day and night, going all over America. *Fourteen thousand boxcars a day*, can you imagine? Buddy -- it's the miracle we've been praying for!

They wait for Lester's reaction.

But Lester just looks at them.

And shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

LESTER

Well, yeah... Yes. It's all very exciting, fellas -- no doubt about it... If you can make it happen.

Dez and Terry look at each other.

LESTER (CONT'D)

But I'm only president of the Pennsvew Borough Council --

He gets up to leave.

LESTER (CONT'D)

-- and I still have a bank to manage across the river, so I'm not sure what you thought I could do to help the Keystone Rai--

DEZ

(loudly)

You see the *Derryford* Rail Yard over here?

Back at the KRR system map, Dez scrapes a line along the several miles between PENNSVIEW and the DERRYFORD RAIL YARD just east of Harrisburg.

Curious now, Lester sits.

LESTER

Derryford?