

A town called nowhere

Chapter one

Welcome to nowhere

“Take my advice and live for a long, long time. Because the maddest thing a man can do is to let himself die” –Don Quixote

The dust bowl dances across the desert dunes to the tune of the harsh winds. In this near barren abyss, this vast unforgiving wasteland, a single set on train tracks stretches from horizon to pale blue sky. A sand storm snarls down the tracks like a dust devil, claiming scorpions, snakes, the occasional corpse and cacti. Tumbleweed swirls unnaturally, recklessly across the landscape. The sky slowly darkens.

An unforgiving desert mist bellows towards a shanty town, a light flickers in the belly of the devil.

A flash with shades of lighting. Windows in the town rattle to the dust devils stomping march. A manifestation of nature which answers to no man, only gods. Doors rattle and the murmurings of people whisper through the sand and dust. There is a crackle and the bursts of light become more frequent almost in sequence, they come with a rhythm. The tempo slowly increasing, followed by sounds of crashing, the devil roars. In an instant, an all encompassing light and clap of thunder disperses the devil, the almighty intervention evaporating him instantaneously. In its centre lies the figure of a man, covered in sand and dust, slightly charred.

A vulture flies overhead circling the charred man he slowly turns and makes his descent weaving, like a thread through the eye of the needle. It lands within an arms reach of the charred man and squawks, hoping to not elicit a reaction so it can begin its meal. It shuffles closer softly its talons sinking into the dirt it hops over to the man's thigh, ready to begin stripping at the baked flesh. It pecks and a trickle of carmine weeps from the charred man's leg. A loud heavy cough comes from the not quite deceased, spluttering and wheezing the charred man twitched and jolted. The vulture releases a high pitch squawk as it stumbles backwards flapping in protest. Few words are said between the coughs and spasms, the vulture takes its leave and a mighty cheer erupts from the buildings all around him. People begin streaming out of the saloon and stores and townhouses on each side of the charred man remaining a cautious distance from the unknown arrival, they form a circle around him, shock and awe spreads its way amongst the people the cheer turning into whispers. “What do we do?” someone murmurs “He alive or just twitchy?” another bystander whispers.

With all the commotion going on a crusty old man waddles out of the crowd a shrunken man with a wiry frame, frail but had the look a man who used to be strong. He moves like a cricket with a broken leg with his large meandering strides. He dips on his left step like a broken winch. He leans over the charred man and gets a good look at his face. The charred man is youthful no older than 30 with blonde hair and dark blue eyes and stubble he's wearing a charred black suit and toasted leather shoes. “Why hello there stranger... Welcome to nowhere” The charred man looks up at the old man, His sun-beaten face a face reminiscent of a stereotypical gold miner, large white bushy beard, a golden tooth and slicked-back hair. “Hey there old timer, mind giving me a hand up?” smirked the charred man. The old man burst out laughing and “you've still got some life in you I see then, good to see, good to see” The old man reached out his twig arm and extended his nimble fingers, the charred man clasped the old mans and managed to pull himself up. Finding his feet he realised the searing pain in his leg, looking down he saw he wasn't in the best of shape. Blood still weeping from the fresh wound he grabbed at his leg. “We'll get that taken care of first then we'll take you to Red, get you some clothes and find you a place to rest up.”

The old man smiled he had a worn but happy look on his face, the charred man could tell this wasn't the first time this had happened. “Thanks, I'm going to need a name so I know who to thank for all this kindness and I'm also going to need to know where exactly it is that I am.” “The names Augustine firstly and you don't need to thank me, just doing my civic duty. Secondly, well, like I said, you're in nowhere... this here town right here.” “The name of this town is nowhere?” “Well look around young fella you have any idea where this is? Because we sure as shit don't! haha!” The charred man looked around aside from the abundance of town people that had emerged from the buildings all that could be seen was the train tracks, the surrounding shantytown and the endless desert. “Well, shit”.

“Alright everybody step aside, step aside!” Crowed Augustine “Gotta take the new fella to Doc then to Red!” There was a pause from all the murmurings” After he's settled you can ask your questions” There was a collective sigh from the townspeople and then the murmurings grew in volume. Augustine gave the charred man a shoulder to lean on and they made their way to the town physician. “Quite the crowd you've got here old timer” grinned the charred man as he gave a heavy cough, “You'll be coughing for a while there fella...everybody does” “Everybody?” “Yeah you're the first in a long while I reckon...well over there is the town saloon, next to that is the sheriff's office, you've got your townhouses over there“.

Gesturing to the opposite side of town “But hey first things first! Let's get you fixed up! Docs real good fixed my bum leg!” Augustine pointed at the leg which dipped with every step, The charred man forced a laugh “haha...Fantastic”. As they approached the steps of the physicians a middle-aged man walked out “So this is our new arrival Augustine?” “Yesserie Doc Buzzard got 'em he's bleedin like a stuck pig!” The Middle-aged man ran down to assist Augustine, He had a thick caterpillar moustache and wore tattered green jumper and shirt with rolled-up sleeves his hair was thick black and combed “I'm Mel short for Melvin before you ask, you can call me Doc” His Voice was dry and didn't give much else, stern and surly. He and Doc Helped the charred man into the physicians' office and sat him down.

The charred man was sat in a wooden chair with a pillow on it while Mel cleared the bed of boxes and instruments.

“Augustine you can wait outside if you like we could be here a while. As for you son, remember anything?” He said to the charred man as he went through his instruments. The charred man looked at him inspecting the equipment, if he didn't know any better he'd say Mel didn't actually know what he was looking for. “It's all just a mess at the moment Doc” Mel began to grumble then “Aha! Got it!” He had a stethoscope in his hands and a victorious look on his face. The charred man was

relieved up to the point in which Mel placed in his earpieces but placed the diaphragm on his thigh. "Doc... what are you doing?" Mel licks his lips and frowns, looking up with a grave look on his face "This isn't good son, I think we're going to have to amputate." "No, no you won't it's a bite just clean it sterilise it and bandage me up" Wait here a moment..." Mel leaves the room for a moment the charred man was at unease, where the hell was he and who are these people? And How did Mel become a doctor? It's at that moment that the charred man realised that one of the boxes moved from the bed was filled with bloody rags. Mel enters the room and like the hang man dropping from the gallows the atmosphere changed from unease to panic. Mel was holding a bone saw, "This is going to hurt son."

Augustine was outside sitting on a bench whistling to the tune of old frontier music. He heard murmurs that turned to shouts and shouts that turned to screams, sounds of falling metal instruments like a clashing of symbols and crashing bodies. "GET THE HELL OFF OF ME YOU CRAZY BASTARD!" Mel flew out of the door onto his ass. "SETLE DOWN OR ILL HAVE TO.." a second fist found its place in Mels face sending him tumbling down the stairs. The charred man stands with his back arched breathing heavily. "I suggest you put some ice on that. We're done here.. I'll take care of this myself." he says clutching his leg and remembering the pain. he limps back into the physicians. Augustine standing in utter shock and confusion stands dumfounded and stares speechless at Mel. "SON OF A BITCH!" Screams Mel "YOU JUST WAIT TILL I GET THE SHERIF!" clambering back to his feet he storms off towards town. Augustine turns his stare towards the door and creeps into the physicians. The charred man is sitting on the bed with a bottle of ointment and some fresh bandages. "Ah old timer I'm going to need your help here the bite is deeper then I thought. I'm not going to be able to pour on the iodine and hold it without spilling it everywhere. I need you to do it." He places the bottle of iodine and a tall glass of water on the bedside table. Augustine swallows a mouth full of spit "Ok...I'll do my best"

Augustine looks up at the charred man giving a look or reassurance a look that said "I've got this boy". Clutching the iodine in his boney trembling fingers, he manages to unscrew the bottle slowly almost purposefully building the suspense. With an intense focus his face resembling that of a madman in a shamans trance. Augustine looked to be having some kind of outer body experience. The charred man could see that for Augustine this was no small feat. The click of the lid sounds victorious and a smile storms Augustine's grizzled face.

From the bottle neck the fumes from the iodine rose from the bottle slowly an intimate plume of bright white found its way up Augustine's hairy nostrils and that was it. Augustine met the floor with a thud like a corpse carrying a sack of potatoes. "Ah God" sighed the charred man. The Iodine poured out like a ghost through the floorboards, The charred man watched in indignation as his chance of sterilizing his wound was now dampening the floor and stinking out the room. He knew there must be more but the waste wasn't lost on him. The charred man couldn't tell if Augustine was dead or just out cold due to the fumes. He managed to throw himself onto his feet and drop to his knees, Augustine still had a murmur of a pulse, at least he hadn't killed anyone, not yet he thought. Although looking back on his short time in nowhere he had made a far from a good start.

Once he had clambered back to his feet with the assistance of the bed he made his way towards the door. He realised that if things were going to get better he'd need help from someone who isn't an unconscious decrepit old prospector. He pushed his way through the door to be met by a six shooter pressed against his nose. Now he didn't know much about guns but the charred man did know that he was on the wrong side of the gun and from where he was standing the man on the right side of the gun didn't look the calm collected type, more brash and hot tempered. "Now now Mel looks like we've found your two bit thug, not so brave with a shooter up in your grill are ya?" He grinned as he cocked the gun "About as brave as any man with a gun in his face sir...not very, Now I take it you're the sheriff and you're the man who can help clear up this mess we seem to have got our selves in" "Only person in a mess here seems to be you crispy. My boy Mel here says your roughed him up good, made him look a fool in front of poor Augustine here who is either dead or piss ass drunk again." "He killed him sheriff! Couldn't get to me so he killed Augustine! Put the bastard down for a dirt nap!" squealed Mel "Shut your trap you lying piece of shit! The old mans out cold but he ain't dead! Inhaled some of the iodine knocked him out for a spell" The sheriff crouched down his gun still on the charred man checking Augustine's pulse. "Well He ain't dead not lying about that, but you did give Mel a beat down and he's our town doctor. Mighty important to me and in my town you can't be doing shit like this Crispy. Gets a man killed shit like this." "He tried to cut off my fucking leg! What would you have done?! It's just a bite a simple god damn BITE! I just need to clean it!" "Now is this true Mel? Because I can't rightly blame the man for not wanting to lose his leg.." "I'm the doctor god damn it!" Cursed Mel. "I know you're the god damn doctor Mel! But you can't just go around chopping of Peoples legs!" "For gods sake sheriff! Crispy bastards in town five god damn minutes and your already takin his side over me!? He beat the shit outta me and I tried to save his ass! What the hell does he know!? I'm the doctor not him!" "Now Mel I'm not taking sides here! You come to me screaming and whaling about the devil son of a bitch trying to kill you and I find out you wanna take the bastards leg!

Crispy stood in awe of their exchange it was almost as if it wasn't about him anymore. A stubborn man trying to reason with an idiot, an unstoppable force meeting an immovable object. Whilst the two exchanged barbs crispy looked over Augustine. He was pale and breathing heavily now. He realised with Augustine being as old as he is, the fall could do just as damage as the fumes did and pangs of guilt began to plague him. "Excuse me sheriff sir" He chose his words carefully not forgetting moments ago he was staring down the barrel of a gun. "I'll go quietly but first I think its best help Augustine. He tried to help me after my...disagreement with Mel" "Disagreement!?" Barked Mel "Shut up Mel! Much shit as Crispy seems to have caused he's right. What can you do for him doc?" Mel bumbled and mumbled as he walked over to Augustine kneeling down next to his chest. "I need my instruments...my stethoscope my magnifying glass, don't think I'll need my saw but just in case..."

"Again with the saw!?" Exclaimed crispy "Where did you find this guy sheriff!? Augustine's problem is clearly with his breathing. This stupid bastard's obsessed with god damn dismemberment! How many amputees are there in this town?" The Sheriff paused a moment. "Three. No wait... five I figure... is that a lot?" "Considering Augustine needs probably fresh air firstly then perhaps some medicine yeah I'd say chopping off limbs is a bit much!" "And what if the old bastard dies Crispy? Then what?" Hissed Mel. The sheriff looking to Crispy for an answer. "Then it's on me and I killed the poor bastard." "God fuckin damn it!" Cursed the sheriff "You sure know how to make an entrance don't ya Crispy!?" "Shoot him!" Mel squealed

“The fucker killed Augustine!” “MEL! Shut the fuck up! You are pissing me off something fierce! And now crispy mentioned it you’ve got some kinda crazy blood lust! I hear one more god damn word outta your fat flabby mouth I’m throwin you in a cell!” Mel looked offended but obedient. He knew his place with the sheriff. “Now crispy I’m gonna go talk to the mayor, and I’m taking Mel with me. You sound like you know what you’re talking about so I’m leaving this with you. But pray to god that the old man doesn’t die. If he goes you’re gonna wish Mel took your leg.”

The day was long, the sun as unforgiving as the desert sands and crispy was against it all. Crispy looked at his leg if he was going to help Augustine he was going to have to help himself first. He looked through the medical supplies in storage. Surprisingly for a place named Nowhere they were surprisingly well stocked. There were no less than 20 bottles of iodine, and crispy breathed a small sigh of relief. This town wasn’t hopeless it seemed, he managed to rustle up some whisky from one of the cabinets, if he was going to do this himself he knew it would sting like hell and as that most certainly the case alcohol was mandatory.

He took his time and surgically unscrewed a bottle of iodine successfully not a drop was spilt. He would have to celebrate little victories another time he realised and with that took an almighty gulp of whisky. It felt as if he had poured hot coals down his throat and his eyes began to steam but that was his cue to apply the iodine. The clear liquid felt like something personally selected from the devils medicine cabinet, He couldn’t muster a scream just a gasp long and deep and the moment seemed to last an eternity until it passed and crispy never seemed more grateful for anything before in his new life. He took a moment to readjust and recuperate. This was literally the beginning and he couldn’t stop here. He used some old bandages discoloured by age and wrapped his leg. He knew he would need to rest but that was sadly quite some time away. He had a job to do and come hell or Mel he was going to do his damndest to get it done.

He knew if Augustine was going to make it he needed plenty of air, water and medicine if a fever took. He lifted Augustine to the bed and took off the cover. After Augustine was comfortably or perhaps just more conveniently positioned Crispy threw open all the windows. It was heading towards midday far as he could tell and the battle against heat stroke was just one of many things he had to prepare for. The breeze bellowed through strong enough and loud enough to make its presence known. With that lighting struck and Crispy pulled the covers from the bed sheets and created a makeshift windbreaker, shading Augustine and stopping the wind from stirring within the room. A smirk began to crawl past Crispys face he knew he had every right to be scared of the coming events. But he was solving his problems. It was almost liberating, a given feeling of rejuvenation, this would not be his end and it would not be Augustine’s. He didn’t say it out loud but he told himself and he meant it.

The following hours would prove to be crucial, with the sun at it’s peak it was Crispys sole task to make sure Augustine didn’t overheat he battled this but using makeshift fans, wet cloths he would sit over Augustine like a mother sits over her sick child, He would not entertain the idea that this old mans blood would be on his hands. Doing so would allow the thought of failure to invade his mind and it’s a mindset he could scarcely afford. He must live, the one person who’s shown any kind of civility in this clearly cruel chaotic town. Augustine began to stir in his sleep he would just murmur sounds came out with non sensical gibberish “It’s not ready” he spattered “Where’s my Mable?” “It’s not safe” “Purple pants”. Crispy whispered laughing “Purple pants? What?” “I am the financeeeeeer” snarled Augustine “Financer?” Crispy thought “The hell kinda dream you having old timer?” Crispy looked up at the clock it was Seven forty five in the evening, without even noticing the sun had set and night began, Crispy needed some air it was a long day and was more than likely going to be a long night. He stepped out to find the sheriff waiting on the doorstep. Why howdy crispy stepping out? “I just needed some air Sheriff that’s all” “Well why don’t I just see how you did with your task before you up and saunter on out of here huh?” He stepped through the door and saw Augustine asleep on the bed the covers half on him to stop wind chill but not fully on to help start a fever, Augustine was in a deep sleep. “Well he ain’t dead so there’s that thank god. Truth be told Crispy I’m relieved Augustine means a lot to me and this here town so I hate to say it but you done good tonight, Real good” “Thank you sheriff” “No thank you crispy. Look it’s been a long day and it’s probably going to be a long night. Why don’t you step on out for a spell he’s just sleepin by the looks of things and I think you earned some fresh air” “Looks beautiful out there tonight” “Indeed it does Crispy that’s because it is.”