

Lewis was a man far from home, at least he assumed so. Nothing was familiar to him around these parts. There wasn't much that was familiar anymore. Lewis woke up in the office of the town doctor with stitches in his scalp and no memory. He was told he fell off a horse. Hit a rock. That he was lucky to be alive. He didn't care how lucky he was. He wanted to know who he was.

His only clues were what he already had on him. The spurs on his boots reinforced the doctor's story. He was a rider indeed. He had a wide-brimmed black hat paired with a green and beige checkered scarf. The vest he wore was ripped, maybe the horse accident, but with old, unmended tears here too. The soles of his boots were worn down. He didn't have any rings on. He had black riding gloves on. These all seemed to make sense to Lewis. However, two items cut against the grain of Lewis' brain.

In his satchel lay a heavily creased, folded wanted poster for a Mr. Swearingen. Mr. Swearingen had dark features, a rough beard, and a mean disposition. Drawn with exaggerated frowning eyebrows and a scowl set in his stony face. Lewis rubbed the stubble on his chin. He wondered if he could grow a beard like that.

The second of these items was the massive revolver at his waist. Lewis almost feared taking the thing out of the leather holster that encircled it. He did anyway, his hand almost moving on instinct. Like an automaton he flicked the chamber open and checked the cylinder. One bullet shone from its casing. Lewis shut the chamber and breathed out a long sigh.

He stood on the porch of the doctor's office, the wind pushing the sand and dust through the worn, cobbled streets. The whole town seemed to sigh with each gust of wind. Some buildings here lay torn open, insides exposed to the air above. A horse and carriage clopped through the street; the driver's face sagged. What a sad place to find himself in.

Lewis stored his polished pistol and walked out into the street. He knew he only had one choice. Find Mr. Swearingen. Kill him maybe. Find answers probably. For some reason Lewis felt that killing Swearingen would restore himself. After all, he was toting around a gun with one bullet

Lewis felt his legs taking him to the saloon. He realized this would probably be a good place to start half way there. Outside the saloon he saw several horses tied to stands. He heard an old piano playing a dinky tune inside. His eyes shifted back to the horses, drinking out of long wooden troughs. Instead of going inside he almost ran to the trough, staring at the water. Only a dark silhouette loomed in the murky, brown water. Even this ghostly form vanished as the water was displaced by a thirsty chestnut mare. Lewis straightened himself out, startled by his own behavior. He climbed the four steps to the saloon and pushed the door open.

He was met by hearty laughter, music, and conversation. A guitarist took the stage alongside the pianist and joined in his tune. Lewis walked up to the bar and squeezed between two men. The bartender looked at Lewis expectantly as he polished a shot glass. Before Lewis decided what to say, he felt an arm wrap around his shoulders.

"I'll have two whiskeys, sir, one for my friend here," the man next to him said. The bartender nodded and poured out two small glasses. The brown gloved hand of the man slid fifty

cents across the tabletop and he grabbed both glasses, walking to a table near the end of the saloon. His boots made the same noise Lewis' made as he walked. Lewis followed. The man sat delicately in his chair. As Lewis slid into the chair across from the strange man, he took him in. The man had hair the color and consistency of straw, thrown haphazardly to one side. He had a waxed, thick mustache that curled up ever so slightly. He had red and brown suspenders over a white collared shirt.

"I know why you're in town, Lewis. We all do. Listen cowboy, you don't have to go through with this."

"I have to. Nothing will make sense otherwise."

"Lewis." The man's face contorted into pity. "Sometimes the world doesn't make sense, and we just have to move on from that."

"You wouldn't understand," Lewis said, standing up from the table.

"Sit down Lewis, please. You haven't even had your whiskey yet."

Lewis begrudgingly sat down. Lewis' words droned out in an even tone that sounded foreign even to him. It almost seemed like he had his lines written out for him, and he was just reciting them. The mustachioed man held the shot close to him, his eyes never wavering from Lewis'.

"Lewis," the man continued, "you can stay here as long as you want. You have friends here, friends!"

"You don't understand, stranger. I don't have any friends. Not anymore."

"Wha- stranger?"

Lewis was already on his feet again, whiskey be damned.

"So the rumors are true, are they?" the man said. "Your memories are gone?"

Lewis turned back to him. "Word gets around that quick, huh?"

"Yes."

"So who was I to you?"

"An acquaintance only. We did business together."

"We did business together, hm? Then you know the business I have to do."

"You don't have to do anything. That's what I'm trying to convince you of."

"You don't understand my situation, sir. I need to go now." Lewis turned and quickly strode towards the entrance of the bar. He heard the man's cries behind him, but they soon melded with the piano, and vanished from his consciousness.

He shouldered his way out of the door and back onto the dry street. He found himself out of breath. Was he that out of shape? He stood still. His chest continued to heave. He felt he couldn't stay in one place long. Again, he started moving with barely a thought, trudging through the streets of this decrepit town. He walked. His boots left the road. They sank into the sand. They crushed a small, dried up bush. The sun beat down overhead, it was just past noon and the light burned into his eyes. Lewis wanted to go back and talk to that man. Why couldn't he just ask the simplest of questions? The thinking hurt Lewis' head. He pulled his hat down and attempted to scan the horizon. Through a squint he could make out a brown shape, barely

wavering in the sand. He staggered through the heat and haze. He could finally make out the shape. A tent. Lewis pushed open the flap of the tent and ducked inside.

The tent was small, cozy. A table sat in the middle, too squat for any chairs. Underneath was a colorful rug. On the other side of the table a woman sat, idly shuffling a deck of cards. She had dark hair, falling past her shoulders. Her near-black eyes were fixed on him.

“So, Lewis, you came after all.”

“Why does everybody know my name?” Lewis almost startled himself. He had spoken what was on his mind. It came so easily for one moment.

“Take a seat, maybe I can shed some light on a few things.”

Lewis sat. It was comfortable here. The rest of the world seemed to vanish.

“I don’t understand. How is telling my fortune going to help?” Back on script.

“You don’t know yourself. I can simplify things for you, make what’s going on easier to digest.”

Lewis’ hands were clammy and cold. He gripped the edge of the table. “Fine. How does this work?”

“Easy. I draw three cards, one symbolizes your past, the next your present, and the third your future.”

Lewis just stared at the deck of cards being shuffled. One card slipped through the woman’s long fingers and landed on the rug.

“Your first card. The Tower, face up.”

“What does that mean?”

“A great change happened that upended your life. You lived in chaos.”

Lewis’ brow furrowed. The woman continued shuffling. Another card fell out, falling face down on the table. The woman flipped the card over. The card depicted a regal woman sitting on a palanquin.

“The inverted Chariot. You lack direction. Someone or something else is pulling you along—”

As she spoke the last card fell out of the deck. The woman was barely able to finish her sentence when the card landed, face up in front of Lewis. The card depicted a man, upside down. One leg tied to a post above him, his arms tied behind his back. The man’s face appeared gaunt. Lewis’ throat closed. In black words at the bottom of the card were the words: “The Hanged Man”. Lewis stood.

“Wait, Lewis—”

He was back on the sand. Towards town now. Where the hell was he going? As the sun dipped into evening, Lewis scanned the window of each storefront. A glimpse was all he needed. Just a glimpse to relieve himself of his worst fears. The glare of the sun, the shadows, whatever it was at any window, he just could not see his reflection. Lewis felt the tears well behind his eyes. Why was he here? Why did everyone know his name? Why did he know his name?

“Lewis!” A man’s voice roared through the streets. Lewis swung around to see a man walking down the steps of a house porch towards him. The man stopped in the street, his coat

scraping the road as it flapped softly in the wind. With the sun and the stranger's hat, Lewis could only make out the man's mouth, contorted into an expression Lewis could only describe as rage. Rage. Rage emanated from this man's very being. Lewis had never seen a man so angry before. At least he assumed so.

"Why are you here? Why now!?"

"I need to end this. It's all gone on far too long."

"I agree," the man said, "this town and I have been making excuses for you for far too long."

Lewis saw the man's hand move to his side. He saw a glint of metal. Lewis' own hand fell to his side. In a fraction of a heartbeat, two explosions resounded in the streets of Wakewood. Wakewood. That was the name of this town. Lewis felt the heat of metal against his cheek. He saw a blast of red. He saw the gun fall from the hands of the man across the street. Lewis' hand shook. The gun was still pointed forward. He dropped the gun.

Lewis stared at the place behind where the man had stood. It was a house. The front door was still open, squeaking, barely connected to its hinges. Lewis staggered past the man on the street, lying in a pool of crimson. He stepped up onto the porch and through the door. Lewis wasn't quite sure how the floor of this house was supporting his weight, but he pressed on.

The house was a destroyed mess. Glass from the front windows crunched under his feet as he walked through the first floor. It seemed that this place had been ransacked in the years after its abandonment. He came to a stop below a staircase. The stairs appeared to be rotting and dry. He pushed up and forwards anyway. The wood creaked dangerously. He kept moving. Before him, there was a hallway uniting three rooms. Lewis pushed open the first door. It appeared to be the master bedroom, a double bed dominating the still relatively small room. A dresser stood in the corner, all the drawers pulled out, moth eaten clothes strewn across the floor. In front of the nightstand on the floor was a picture frame, on its face. Lewis knelt to flip it over.

Four people stood in the picture behind the broken glass. A man, a woman, and two men. One was the man lying on the street outside. The other was the man from Lewis' wanted poster. The Swearingen family looked back at Lewis. It couldn't be. Could it? Lewis fumbled through his bag for the paper. He took hold of the page and lifted it to the picture to compare. A third comparison became apparent to Lewis.

He couldn't breathe. In the shattered glass of the portrait he caught a glimpse of Mr. Swearingen. Lewis could deny it no longer. He had to stop. Lewis still couldn't breathe, as if a noose had fallen around his neck. He gagged, falling on all fours.

"I—I'm sorry." He choked out. He knew what he had to do.

He wished he still had that bullet.

Mr. Lewis Swearingen.

Wanted Dead or Alive for Patricide and Matricide.

Reward: \$60