



**HELD  
BY A  
STRANGER**

**WRITTEN BY  
DAN BARKER**

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Written By: Dan Barker

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## INTRODUCTION

*Every town in the west had heard about 'No-Miss' John. This guy had never, ever missed a shot, never lost a shoot-out. He was the greatest bounty hunter in the world, some would say. He even helped stop the Diamond Brothers from robbing the family crests of Franklin Pierce way back when.*

*Though, that was all so long ago now. John had retired and decided to settle down, enjoy his life, he wasn't getting any younger. In fact, he hadn't fired a gun in four years.*

*This is where we meet him.*

‘No-Miss’ John was his name. An elderly gentleman about fifty-four years old but still a tough man.

The train pulled up to the empty, dusty, wooden train station – or platform more like. There was no ticket guy or anything like that, just an old, timber decking. John stepped off the train and on to the dry, decaying wood, that had white paint peeling from it like the shed skin of a Texas Rattlesnake. He had just moved from a little unknown town called Sleeping Hills – it sat on, you guessed it, two hills. John had been born and raised there but it was time for a change. He walked off the platform and stood looking up at the aged sign that was held up proudly in the sky by two wooden logs, blowing in the coarse, desert wind. It read, just simply, “Southwind Town”.

That’s where John moved to, Southwind Town. He had heard so much about it through word of mouth and knew it was the place to be. John continued walking ahead, under the sign and forward, towards the center of the small town. He could hear a local bar, it was a bit rowdy for twelve o’clock in the afternoon, but it sounded like a good time and plus, he needed to get to know the people of this town, right?

John came bursting the saloon doors and the music suddenly stopped, the scrawny piano player in the flat-cap stopped playing the up-tempo honky-tonk Boogie Woogie music and everyone in the bar just sat in silence staring at John. He continued walking towards the bar, all this was strange but he still wanted a drink, he had just got off from a four-hour train ride.

“Jack on the rocks.” John ordered, but the round and butch barmaid just stood staring at him, mean-eyed. John should have been worried because you could’ve cut the tension in the musky air with a knife, but he wasn’t, he was calm and confident that he could handle any trouble that might occur, he was the legendary ‘No-Miss’ John, after all.

Suddenly a huge, fat, dark-haired man came up behind John. Casting a shadow that was dark enough to impair John’s vision.

“Y’know, this town may seem welcoming, but we don’t take too kindly to strangers ‘round here. What’s your business here partner?” said the fat man in an aggressive and threatening tone.

“I’m rentin’ a room from Ms Rose over by the Blacksmiths, will that be a problem, partner?” Challenged John sarcastically.

“You askin’ for a problem?”

“Not unless you want one, sir.”

“If you’re challenging me, ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson, you best mighty brave, son.”

“Brave, I am.” Declared John, confident he could win the shoot-out.

The two men walked out of the bar and on to the old, dirt road, surrounded by wooden buildings that had paint peeling and curling from them due to the intense western heat in the middle of the day. Everybody in bar stood in the moderate safety of the indoors to watch the shoot-out, noses pressed against the bubbled and uneven glass of the windows.

The two men stood back to back. The shadow of ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson’s enormous body loomed over John like a dark thundercloud on a sunny day. The men took ten steps forward at exactly the same pace. Each step on the dry, hot dirt was heard throughout the entire town. They hadn’t had a stranger in town for a while and apparently, for good reason. After ten steps were up the men turned around to face each other and just stood there, staring into each other’s eyes like a lion and a gazelle. The real question was, *who was the lion and who was the gazelle?* Still, with ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson’s shadow just looming over John, they stood frozen for around thirty seconds as the breeze and dust flew through the air making a whistling sound, the only sound in fact, in an otherwise still afternoon.

“Draw!” The stocky barmaid yelled after which the two men quickly drew their guns. ‘Bone-Crunching’ Thompson was much, much bigger than ‘No-Miss’ John, but he was also much faster. He shot John, straight through the stomach.

John laid there, the blood seeping from his wound, staining and drenching the dull, dry dirt. He missed, for the first time in his life and it cost him.

That was the end of ‘No-Miss’ John.

‘One-Miss’ John laid on the dry, dirt ground of Southwind Town, lifeless as his body slowly shut down, held by a stranger.

**THE END**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dan Barker was born in Nottingham, England in 1999. Dan has always been imaginative and creative but it wasn't until he discovered writing that he was able to actually create the worlds and characters he wanted. Dan started as a screenwriter and still remains, though writing stories and books are his main focus right now. Dan writes many short stories and books a year with the help of his editor and partner, Somalia Carty. Dan will share many more stories and characters with you through the months and years ahead, but for now, you've just had your first glimpse of what's to come.

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