

The Cargo

The highway stretched from horizon to horizon, seemingly splitting the world in half. To mortal eyes the dry shrubs and the sporadically placed cacti would hold no significance, but to Damien they were all the signs he needed. They had reached the end of the line.

The rusty old pickup truck had been his sole companion for many years. He cherished every stain of rust that covered her once white plate. He felt a hint of sadness knowing this was the last time he would have the honor of driving her.

"Here, we do it here" Damien must have been silent for quite some time since the tiny man beside him had flinched when he spoke. "Are you sure?" Various strings decorated with bones, pearls and feathers hanging from the man's clothing rattled as he turned towards Damien. "I can still sense it, the looming presence of spirits, are you sure about this?" Damien shrugged. "All I know is that we are far from the closest city and if we travel any further the sunrise will soon be upon us." The man raised his unnaturally short arms towards the sky, or rather, the roof of the car. "If you fear the sunlight, I can guard the cargo while you sleep, we can still find a better place" Damien sighed. "This will do." The man, who was - by all definitions of the word - a pygmy, gave a short nod and once again turned straight ahead.

As Damien closed the door behind him he took a deep breath of the cool desert air while looking towards the sky. He let his gaze follow imagined lines between the stars while quietly chanting in his mother tongue. This had been his ritual since before his embrace, the remnants of a long dead religion, one that he had no interest in preserving but nevertheless practiced out of habit. As he silently whispered his incantations and good luck spells, he heard the pygmy shutting the car door behind him.

Damien, rushed to finish his silly ritual, closed his eyes and tried to recall the faces of those he had slain. Of course, he could not remember them all, not even most of them, but he would always be haunted by the faces of his childer as they died by his hands. "*This time it will be different*" he ensured himself.

"Damien, could you give me a hand?" The pygmy was standing at the back of the truck, trying to reach into the cargo area. Damien shook his head violently, as if to force the images out of his head. He walked around the truck and grabbed the peculiar staff that was carefully attached to the side. The staff was a slightly bent wooden pole

bearing decorations similar to those hanging from his companion's thin robes. At the crown of the staff there was a large skull attached. The skull was from an animal or monster unknown to Damien, but he did recognize that it was from no ordinary creature. He handed the staff to the pygmy who received it gently. The staff was almost double his height, but that did not seem to bother him at all.

Damien pointed towards the oblong metal box that was placed in the back of the cargo area. "Is it not possible to move it out of the truck first?" The pygmy shook his head. "It cannot touch the ground; that would be devastating" Damien took a step back. "Well, having seen this thing up close I cannot agree with you more. It's just a shame that my truck has to act as the pedestal." The pygmy looked up, straight into Damien's eyes. "It has already begun, I can sense it. We cannot turn back now." Damien did not possess the spiritual powers that his tiny companion did, but even he could feel the powerful presence emanating from the box. "Just do it." The pygmy shaman tapped his staff into the ground three times and closed his eyes.

The winds suddenly stopped. Damien felt the tension fill his entire being. A shiver rushed through his body, so strong that he fell to his knees. "*The calm before the storm*" Damien thought. Suddenly the metal box blew open and a radiant beam of light blasted up into the sky. Damien was blinded by the brightness, but he could hear the shaman's shout: "Damien, NOW!"

Instinctively Damien bit off a chunk of flesh from his left bicep. Blood began streaming out of the wound, and a warm pulsating feeling spread throughout his body. Damien forced himself back to his feet using sheer willpower. He pressed the wound onto the mouth of the shaman, turning his back to the light. Damien felt a tingle when the vitae left his arteries and entered the tiny man's mouth. The power in the air combined with the quick draining of his blood was too much for Damien to handle, he fell unconscious.

As Damien awoke he could immediately smell something burning. He opened his eyes and was met with a pillar of smoke, a great smudge on the otherwise serene starry backdrop. He was lying on the coarse desert ground. To the right of him he could see his beloved truck engulfed in flames. "There is no way of going back now is there?" The question came from behind him. Damien hoisted himself up into a sitting position. "No. Their hunt has most surely begun" He could hear the shaman sigh "All this for some runaway girl?" Damien could feel himself grinning "Everything for her."