

ARIZONA NIGHTS TRANSPORTER 2

(written on the toilet, 2/14/21)

'I was driving down route 45', he was driving down route 45. It was a yellow, mellow day that silently beat down on the long, cracked roads accessed like tunnels only by the truckers. They delivered every precious amenity from industrial supplies to dried foodstuffs to oil, like the well-guarded horse and carriages that once carried spice and sleeping royalty in medieval times.

Sloping hills with dry bushes sprouting from every ridge lined the Arizona horizon, between them and the road there is a stretch of desert plain as far as the eye can see, the trail pocked every so often with a road sign. 'I was tuning into the radio for some classics, maybe some easy listening on the road...', country music is the most popular radio format, and that's what he was listening to. It made perfect sense for the aliens to use country radio to transmit their message.

'One moment I was hearin' the twangin' of Willie Nelson's *Trigger*, the next... It was as if somethin' was suddenly inbetween the lines, inbetween the soundwaves that I hadn't heard before. Clear as day I heard the message, askin' me to pick up these... Intergalactic items and transport them across the desert, to what seemed like a random location to be honest with ya'... I never thought through a moment like this before, but at the time it seemed like... The right thing to do, if an alien is askin' you a favour like that it must be pretty unprecedented.'

The wheels of his 18-wheeler turned sharply into the rocky edges of the roadside as he turned the truck right around. It was a bulky framed mechanical beast which huffed and puffed at every pull, tug, shift or turn, painted red and pasted with irrelevant logos. His first stop: The mid-45 Goode's Arizona Gas Station... The linear journey continued, in the opposite direction. A few miles back the Gas Station branched off the side of the main strip, and on that patch of concrete there was a slightly-rectangular box growth, fitted with a sign and several fuel pumps. The whole station grew from the concrete like a tumorous growth, with pumps strung together with underground cables of 'red blood cells'.

His eyes had investigated every edge and fold of the drifting clouds, the dust-freckled air and the far-off haze of the horizon over and over again, one million times each as he drove back down the same road, flushed with the determination of intergalactic duty. It was similar to a caffeine rush. It took 45 minutes before the road sprouted out. Having arrived, he put the 18-wheeler in park, shut 'er down and hopped out the side... The car park and fuel pump plateau was completely barren, but the transmission said the items would be *outside* the station, so instead of walking in he walked around the side... *Behind the gas station* was a place more secretive than the gas station itself, more perpendicular planes of concrete which host a dumpster facing a knee-height wall, over which Arizona extends.

In front of that dumpster were two objects, as promised... On the left, there was a silvery *thing* which reflected light like CGI chrome, constantly morphing and shifting in shape while hovering gently above the ground. On the right there was something much different. It was suctioned to

the floor in a static pool of albumen-like substance, suspending a muddy-black globule that constituted the mass of the thing, it bulged out at all sides... From within that murkiness there protruded a floppy, spindly tentacle - much like a squid's - which had a brownish colour to it ... All signs point to it being alive, but it doesn't do anything but remain in place and ever so slightly convulse with blobular micro-movements.

He first tried to move the gelatinous blob with a doubled-up wad of cardboard that had been abandoned bin-side, but he couldn't penetrate the gap between goo and concrete... He moved the silvery object first, surprised that it even fell into his palm when it looked so incorporeal. He noticed that as he moved the silvery object, the blob followed suit, inching across the concrete, not even picking up any gravelly pieces with its airtight suction to the ground. He let the silvery object float above his passenger-side seat, while the blob stopped itself on the closer end of his truck's cargo bed, sitting still with the odd, ominous move of its tentacle.

As he exhaled in the driver's seat, the trucker's mind had transitioned to a different state. There were now apparent gaps between the edge of his mind and its centre, temporary empty space within his skull, all his thoughts were now crammed into the small bunker of consciousness at the core of his head. It was a liminal state, a mechanism of mental self-preservation in order to get the job done. Buttoned down brainlessness, a response to the shock of reality, a fulfilling of the truckers credo: transport.

With this his hands slid deeper around the back of his leather wheel, and the 18-wheeled pig started to grumble again. Set back on the road, in the original direction, the trucker daren't turn the radio off. He kept it dialed in exactly where he heard the message - a few static-y notches right of 'Country Classics, 103.2 with Neil Nelson'. His eyes flicked back and forth, from the rumbling road, to the gently bobbing silver orb now glowing a faint but bright shade- as if projecting its own reflection outwards as an aura. His eyes watched as yellow roadlines got fainter and richer, thicker and thinner in paint. His eyes also watched the point of nothing, with too much going on around him and nothing to see but the same .gif like stretch of asphalt, it was easy to look and think of nothing at all.

At this point night had begun. The moon made swift moves up the Arizona sky, which was turning from a bruised baby blue to a lavender which darkened towards black over time. Arizona's night sky was a rich black, depth, almost glowing black. It radiated off every surface, only cut by the shimmering of the moon's reflection. As he flicked his headlights on, as is his instinct, the Arizona colour scheme immediately changed to LED silver and pure black. He was itching for his destination, a metaphorical itch which was starting to prickle at his non-metaphorical skin...

A few miles after catching up with himself, the trucker's iris' flared. He recognised this place in the road and with full understanding of his directions he turned right, bending off the road in a cloud of dust, and rocking down a short slope into the wading plains... The view ahead of him was completely smothering until he noticed a glow, like a pole-less lamp-post in the near distance. His truck rumbled precariously towards it, his neck craned in sequence between the

blob, the orb and the view, and his mouth gasped. It was like his body was expelling excess bewilderment with verbal exhaust fumes. He fidgeted with the radio's volume knob and 'ah- ah- ah-', 'wh- wh- wh-', 'oh my god' crackled from his malfunctioning voice box.

At this point, there is a split in time, and two stories will continue from this point.

His truck stopped with a brash sound. The trucker's eyes glazed over as he looked at the outer rim of a floating vehicle. From a beam, which looked exactly as he expected, an alien appeared. He was a shell of himself as he watched the alien release a box from the underside of its vessel, and brought it to the mid-way point between the truck and the ship. Its appearance was surprisingly unsurprising, they were tall, gangly, shrek-green - perhaps a little lighter... It brought on connotations, questions on the history of human-alien interaction, but this didn't deserve a single morsel of his thought right now. He was enraptured. The alien placed the box on the ground, it was hollow with metallic spines in the middle separating it in half. The alien was the clear lead of this one-sided exchange, taking the silver object from the seat and leading the blob from the truck, with the assistance of the idle, stunned human. The silver orb was placed in one half of the box, and the blob soon crawled into the other. The first distinct movement from the human was a delicate squint as he tried to figure out what this box was... The alien then placed it back into the ship's belly, it clicked into place and as it did a small, red symbol in the shape of a coffee cup lit up within the ship's dome. The alien smiled, and left. It had a cowboy hat on. Acclimation?

His truck stopped with a brash sound. The trucker's face scrunched up as he tried to make out what was in front of him... He saw a rectangular structure on the floor, and two aliens stood on each side. Hopping from the side of his truck, with a gaping mouth, the trucker moved the goods towards the point of exchange... 'H-Here...' he muttered. He had been grasping the silvery orb gently, letting it shape about within his palm, and the blob had crawled behind him. As soon as his fingers released, the two objects entered the flap-door of the container. It was large, and deep, like the objects had entered into a big dustbin or an arc. The distorted, off-road radio signal was vibrating the air with Dolly Parton. Night hawks could be heard above.

The lingering moment was as calm as could be, it was nothing, it was thinner than oxygen... In his racing mind he thought this exchange would feel like... The moments before the Nazis had their faces melted from their skulls in Indiana Jones, or like the moments before ascending into a heavenly ray of light, or the moment before you disintegrate into a flaming pillar in biblical times of Wrath. It was not those things, it was much more confusing and he did not know what to make of it... It was like a piece of string dangling between two unseen points, in a contained atmospheric void. It was something, as something as the unreachable, distant stars in the sky. Neither he nor I knew what it was.

THE END