

The Ponies

>Joe looked out over the horizon, his brow heavy

>His worn boots, patched in part with the rotted rubber of old tires, crushed the aged concrete underfoot as he pulled his cart along

>"Come on, just a bit further"

>He took in a deep breath, his lungs burning

You're the one sitting!

>He almost hated his sister, only being saved by the fact he had to live with her

>"Son, what day is it?"

Are you getting that old already? Maybe we shouldn't stay out in the sun so long!

>"It's useful to remember, there'll always be people needing to know the date"

June 29, 1976

>"Good, right on the mark"

>Dad always made him remember useless things

>Who was president in 1901?

>How did Hitler rise to power?

>How did the US win the Battle of Midway?

>You don't quite know why he stressed such useless things

>He lived through some of it, you're sure, but they had no bearing on you

>"Alright, let's stop here. It's getting late, anyways"

>It wasn't too dark, you had 2 hours or so

>He might've just been giving you a break

>"Son, go look around, see if there's any water around here"

Are we low or something?

>"No, but securities' never hurt no one"

>He's giving you a break

>You check your compass, making a mental note of the road's direction

>You were good at geography, but only because you paid attention

>"You got a canteen full?"

Yeah, Dad. I filled it up like half an hour ago

>"See what telling time gets you?"

>You smile, not wanting to give him the pride of getting any bigger reaction out of you

>You look up to the sky, catching a far off bird flying south

I'm thinking that way, at least the bird does

>"Well, get to it"

>He leans in to you

>"Before she starts talking about that boy back in Albuquerque"

>You shiver in disgust, adding some sound effects

>"Shut up! That was months ago, and at least he loved me!"

>"And I'm not letting my daughter settle down with some poor half-breed Jap, to never see her again, no matter how harmless he may seem"

>"He's nothing like the ones you fought!"

>You jog off before you can hear anymore of their argument

>The desiccated sand cracks under your feet like pottery

>It essentially is, if you remember Mom's lessons right

>She's better off not here

>The horizon moves farther off, and you lose sight of the makeshift tent that made up your home

>You think Dad just liked running from place to place
>That's how Grandma and Grandpa raised him out West, apparently
>Something catches your eye, and you walk towards it
>Best not to run if there's nothing to harm you, wastes water
>It's a machine part, looking too intricate to realistically guess at it's purpose
>Ferrous, some shine coming through the rust
>You pocket it
>It could sell for something, somewhere
>You almost lose sight of the bird, but you catch up
>Another piece of metal, a long sheet, protrudes from the ground
>You're disheartened to find it's just aluminum
>Some could make arrowheads or such from it, but you could never use a bow
>You left it, spotting another shard of scrap
>And another
>Then yet more
>After a while of dashing left and right to pick up any worth taking, you make out a large mass off in the distance, almost blinding you as it reflects the last rays of sunlight
>A cloud passes over, and you can immediately recognize what it is
>Dad's plane, from his war
Four Wright R-3350 Duplex-Cyclone radials, 2200 horsepower
>He made you memorize a lot of details over them, for his sake, you think
>He flown them against some empire called Japan, before the war you remember
>You know he'd love to have a piece of it, if not the whole thing
>You'd have to get something recognizable, something that he'd remember
>It's ripped apart, the tail section and cockpit exposing the innards to the elements
>Running up, you brush some dirty glass off it's frame with your boot
>The front's called the cockpit, you knew this
>Why it didn't involve roosters or pits, you couldn't figure out
>You crawl in, landing on the remains of what must've been the pilot's seat
>Sorting through the bits of indescribable, rusted machinery, you find something you recognize
>A pilot's mask
>You dust it off, looking closer
>It's got a tube of some sort
>They stored air in the plane for when they flew too high, if you remember right
>You don't recognize the printing on it
>It looks like Greek, but it can't be read as such
>You know enough, Dad made sure of that, so it's not you
>It's probably some sort of designation which hasn't meant anything for awhile
>Setting it down, you look further into the plane
>Whatever made it crash must've been strong
>Everything is thrown about
>Your foot kicks something light, which bounces around for a moment
>It looks like aged plastic
>Plastics have some uses, if you find someone who can melt and cast without ruining them
>You scratch it
>Looking down to what should be the navigator's position, you see more of the same material
>It's bone, going by the crushed jaw hanging on a protruding instrument
>You set the piece back down
>You can never let old bones get to you

>They've gone off to a better place, their old hate can't do anything to you
>You surmise he must've been the navigator, and died during the crash
>Forcing yourself to ignore it, you can spot some things farther into the fuselage
>It's where the bomb bays should be, but they don't look like any bombs you've ever seen
>They look more like big tanks than bombs, having no fins
>Maybe they were transporting something?
>The gasoline would be long expired, but a Benghazi Burner would always come in handy
>Taking your a pair of pliers from your belt, you try to open one
>No point in trying to save it all, you'd be the one pulling them
>The nut won't budge

Rusted, should've thought

>You bang your pliers against it, a sickening echo carrying the ringing throughout the plane and back again
>The noise irritates you, and you want to yell at it
>You strike again, and again, and again
>Your ears feel fuzzy from the noise, but yet you don't stop
>You don't like this container, it tries to hide things from you that it has no reason to
>It gives way, enough for you to turn it with your pliers

Stupid fucker! I win!

>Dad would smack you if he heard you curse like that, but you don't care
>No one's out here to annoy you
>You toss the nut and the cap it was holding aside, perplexed at the odd top
>Maybe it was aviation fuel?

That might burn more

>You get a grip on it, pushing and pulling to stand it upright

Come on!

>You grit through your teeth
>It excites you all the more
>Heavier it is, the more you have
>Suddenly, your grip slips from it's sandy surfaces, and you both fall
>Something spills out of it, covering you
>You flail and spit, trying to stop the thick fluid from dousing you, to no avail
>Finally, it runs out, and you catch your breath
>It smells awful, like rotting fruit
>You don't know any sort of fuel that smells like that, so it must be something else
>Regardless, you don't want to take your chances with flammable materials
>You strip your wet outer layers off, handing them on the cockpit's broken windows as you sit down
>You give a harsh cough, your body trying to remove the offending miasma
>Night is fast approaching, but you can't will yourself off the old pilot's seat
>Every limb refuses to move more than a few inches
>You don't particularly feel bad, but you know you have to move
>There was something in that container doing this, and it's permeating the air
>You can't freak out, despite how much you want to

C-come on, move

>A few tears fall as you slowly slide off the seat
>You don't know what could do this, but you don't want to find out, anymore
>You fall, your arms too slow to stop your head banging against an instrument panel
>The pain hardly registers
>You're dying

>You don't want to leave, even if it is garbage
>Even if I can't drink most of the water I find, or eat most of the animals!
>Even if I'm paranoid that some old basement I have to sleep in is irradiated!
>Even if I have to pull that stupid cart, at least I'm helping!
>A few weak coughs leave you, as does consciousness

>Everything hurts
>You try to call out, but your throat screams at you
>You need water, you need water or you won't get out of here
>Where is here?
>You can't make out much, your vision fuzzy and confusing
>You locate your rucksack, and force yourself over towards it
>Every muscle and bone aches, as if it just been beaten by a rod
>You throw your arm out to the bag, knocking it open and revealing your water bladder
>Your hand refuses to grasp the nozzle, but you crack it open with your teeth, gingerly sucking down some of it's contents
>Your breath is heavy, and your body refuses to move even a single inch more
>You should sleep again
>And you do

>You awake, your legs cracking as you stand up
>You let out a pained whinny
>Your throat hurts
>Thankfully, someone set out your bladder
>You stick your muzzle around it, drinking the rest of it's contents
>Where are you?
>You remember following a bird south
>Water or something?
>You're in some metal structure
>Plane
>Right, it was the same kind of plane dad flew, a Superfortress
>You spot the mask from earlier laying around, and grab it in your mouth
>Dad would like it, you think
>Your clothes are set out, but you don't rightly know why you had them
>Ponies don't need clothes
>Digging around with your hoof, you find your compass
>Right, North is left
>You left to go South
>So, all you're left to do right now is go North
>Dropping it, you trot out the cockpit, past the unfortunate navigator
>How long have you been gone?
>Dad'll probably be happy to see you
>There's a lot of sand flying about, there must've been a windstorm recently
>You can't find your old hoof prints, but the occasional bit of familiar debris sets you on the right course
>After a bit, you start to see splotches of concrete on the ground, and the smooth sands return to baked plates, smashing underhoof
>"Halt! State your business!"
>You'd recognize that voice anywhere
>Dad knows ponies can't talk, right?

>He's pointing his old Mauser at you, but you're not scared
>"Dad, I don't think that's a person..."
>Your sister nudges him, and he relents
>They both look really sad for some reason
>Are they mad at you for being gone so long?
>You approach, but they seem apprehensive
>"That's the oddest damn horse I've ever seen"
>You tremble a little at his cursing
>He only did that when he's mad
>"I think she's lost, can we keep her?"
>You nicker at her
>You're a grown stallion, not a mare!
>"That's a colt, and I guess we'll have to see. I can't feed four mouths"
>He says the last statement with some pain, before approaching you and taking the mask from your mouth
>"What's he got in his muzzle?"
>"I don't rightly believe it, but a Russian pilot's mask"
>Four mouths?
>There's only the three of you
>Your sister comes up to you, running a hand through your mane
>You snort at her, making her jump
>It makes you glad to see her not so glum
>"He's laughing at me! Teach him to be nice, you raised horses before!"
>Dad smirks at you, winking
>You return it
>"You're a smart little thing, aren't you boy?"
>You taught me, didn't you?
>"Dad, how much longer can we wait for him? It's almost been a week"
>"He's either found someplace he didn't want to share, or, well"
>He sighs, making a discomfoting noise, before turning back to you
>"How's Joe sound for a name, buddy?"
>You nod, tossing your head
>He really is losing it in this heat
>"Come on, let's go"
>You make your way to the front of the cart, and he lashes it to your back
>They sit in silence, and you start pulling again
>"Just a bit further, Joe"