

Part Seventeen

In the dusk, Glanton and twenty-one men, along with a dog and their cart containing an idiot in a cage and a whiskey keg, set out from a town into the desert. The keg had been modified to hold whiskey disguised within water, and as they left, the idiot called hoarsely after the sun. Glanton, riding in a new saddle, led the group, while David Brown at the rear harbored dark thoughts about leaving his brother behind. The men interacted with savages to exchange the whiskey for gold and silver, which Glanton dismissed, opting to keep his focus forward.

They rode west through desolate landscapes, encountering the remains of a crockery furnace and the haunting beauty of saguaro forests under a darkened sky. As they progressed further into the barren lands devoid of water, Glanton reflected on the many lives lost, the Delawares all slain, shaping his perspective on their future. Sitting around a fire that night, Glanton contemplated fate and his role within the vast universe, asserting agency over his existence, regardless of what lay ahead.

As they continued their journey, they met a ragged legion led by Colonel Garcia, who aimed to hunt down Apaches. The encounter left Glanton and his men astonished at the state of the Mexicans, some wearing rags, and their makeshift weapons. Glanton felt disconnected from these riders, reinforcing the idea that their land and struggles were inconsequential to his cause. After parting ways with the Mexicans, they camped once more, discussing the nature of war and existence.

The judge expounded philosophical views about war, asserting that it was an eternal presence in humanity, predated by nothing. In his discourse, he saw war as the ultimate game, leading to significant validation of man's worth, intertwined with morality and existence itself. Brown expressed skepticism about the judge's philosophy, leading to exchanges about the relationships between warfare, morality, and human nature.

As they traversed a dry landscape, they experienced hunger, discomfort, and a sense of futility. The judge believed that men are inherently players in this grand game called life, witnessing conflicts that define their existence. The next day, they crossed a lava bed and found an ancient femur, marking the intersection of their reality with the specter of the past. The judge, paying homage to time and existence, brought forth gray phosphorescent truths rooted in exploration, while they resolved to continue their relentless journey across the desolate terrain.