FLASH FICTION

Take a Look

by David Weber

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We had been walking inland for several months and slowly but steadily our resources had become scarce. We could hold up several days without food — but water, oh, we needed water.

After everything had gone to shit, you had to avoid cities — they quickly turned into battlefields. We left L.A. and followed Route 66, one of the last functional roads in the country. Every means of transportation apart from one's feet was already gone at this point. After the last drops of fossil fuels had been used up, we still had electricity as our main means of energy and transport for a couple of years, but this also came to an end. The biggest problem was the rising temperature. After the polar caps had melted away, the first islands were swallowed by the rising sea levels. The deserts expanded and when natural disaster became more of a regularity than an exception, huge numbers of climate change refugees tried to flee to safer countries. First, we tried to keep them out but when it became a question of life and death, they overran our borders and walls.

This was also the reason why there was way too much going on on the road and why Ray and I soon left Route 66 and turned north to reach a safer environment. Each day walking towards Las Vegas, the cart with our supplies got lighter and lighter until there was nothing left. When we passed the city on our right it was a sight of horror.

"Oh my God — this is pure madness," Ray said. The only sound we heard was the screams of people fighting and dying. I nodded and we continued north, silently but chased by the screams and the light of many fires shining beyond the horizon.

We were deep into the Mojave Desert when we saw a little town. It looked abandoned and was half covered in sand. We approached it from a high dune and peered with our binoculars into the valley basin. The colors of the buildings were bleached by the burning sun and covered in sand. It was an Egyptian Atlantis looking like a desolate relic from ancient times. While continuing to scout the valley, something, possibly the roof of a water silo, glittered back at my binoculars.

"We have to take a look!" I said to my brother. "There might be water."

"Oh no, let's not do this — it's way too dangerous," Ray answered with an agonized look.

"It's alright, there is no one — we would have seen something by now. We can barely make it down there, let alone keep going north. We've got nothing left — we have to take a look!"

Ray turned away with a shiver.

"Come on, we'll be quiet and slow, and we'll always stick together — and if worst comes to worst, I still got some bullets left." Actually, it was only one.

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We made our way down the big dune with the setting sun on our back. Our boots sank into the deep sand. When I crossed the town border with Ray close behind me, I wiped off some sand from a road sign. It read “Welcome to Armadillo” in peeled-off yellow letters on a washed-out blue. My throat was sore and ached from the dryness of several days. I made my way straight to the silo, which was near the main square of little Armadillo.

Just as I wanted to climb the ladder to the top of the large construction, Ray took hold of my duster coat and whispered with a shaking voice, “I don’t like this at all.” I paused for a moment. In the meantime the setting sun had reached the top of the surrounding dunes and was slowly disappearing behind them. Dusk was setting into town surprisingly fast and the shadows started creeping out of their lairs. Suddenly, slender figures appeared between the dilapidated houses. I rubbed my eyes but indeed there were people standing in every gap between the small-town buildings. I got down from the ladder and whispered into Rays’ ears, “Let’s get out of here, quickly.” He had a look of pure terror but followed me down the town’s main street. We had no chance; the countless skinny and feeble-looking figures closed in on us. We couldn’t detect one gap to slip through. Armadillo’s exit was blocked by a row of these apparitions. While they encircled us closer and closer, a rumor about the Mojave Desert echoed in my mind: “They started eating people down there.”

The fire’s shine had faded. One single shot shook the pitch-black darkness — and then it was silent again.

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