

# SALT FLATS

a short story by Erini CS

It was almost ghostly that night—walking through the cool, crisp air towards the old air base.

We looked like an out of place tour group, ten of us walking through the neighborhood at nearly 2 a.m., the rocks in the yards cracking and clacking beneath our feet. We tried to keep to what sidewalks were there and the streets, but the neighborhood dogs still barked out our arrival as we tried to quietly pass. At the edge of the neighborhood, a community center's lights washed out into the streets. The citizens who kept the town running, and its beaconing strip of casinos and their tireless lights, were still enjoying a late night dance. The echoing tubas, guitars, and mariachi horns cut through the air.

Once on the base, the ground began to crunch, reminding us that the endless stretch of salt flats were just beyond the barbed wire. Making our way past empty building, the streetlights spread out further and further. The casino lights were just far enough away now. We go by building after building, each with faded, peeling white paint that glowed eerily in the moonlight. Only a few of us pause at a building with one solitary bare light bulb shining through the broken slats.

It was hard to recognize it, standing right in front of us—the infamous hanger of the Enola Gay. The plane that changed history, changed the war, once lived mere feet away from us. The large panel sign stationed in what could be called a yard informed us of the recent renovations. The newly installed, and very secure, gates were enough of a sign to let us know. We stood, taking in the hanger, which in the cool night looked only like a hanger. Its renovations being the only thing now to make it stand out on the base.

We passed the bunkers, all but two looking untouched since the end of the war. In front of one building was an old radio tower that still worked—though now it only crackled fast food drive through orders. We continued on, pass every remnant of life that once was there, on into the weeds and bushes. Just beyond the wire fence, an abandoned plane barely visible in the last bits of the streetlights watched over us.

All through the base, more of the panel signs appeared in front of various buildings in various stages of disrepair. Preserving the history by rebuilding. As if they were getting ready for another war, another Enola Gay, another bomb. A white SUV passed as we continued walking towards the darkness beyond the base. There was nothing blocking our sight, showing us the SUV turning to pass us again. We stayed silent and close, our strange group of vagrants.

We stopped about a mile out. It had begun to mist, bringing a soft sweetness from the bushes that seemed to sigh with relief. Barbed wire flanked the road, tangled with tumbleweeds. Behind us the lights of the town, the speckled street lights of the air base, outshone by the flashing casinos on the hill. A few roads back, a single pair of headlights was looming slowly along.

We continued on, into the darkness.