

The Guide

by Coenraad Brand

Stalls were to be seen everywhere between amongst the many shops. They sell everything you can possibly think off. Memorabilia which borders literally on the insane, inculcating dark laws of condemnation, though safe, even funny to take with. Of another kind altogether and grouped neatly together next to this group of memorabilia, are more memorabilia, but of hope. Some memorabilia borders, but goes to yet another grouping, namely that of grossly exaggerated impressionist images of wealth for the new country being envisioned. Hats, ventilated jackets, and overcoats of various kinds, some are even combined water feeds and containers held in suspension with the outfit. There are also more appropriate bottle-and-backpack contraptions.

This is Mexico where according to some consensuses allegedly having been taken, it is believed eighty percent of the population is indeed homosexual. People walk the stalls and shops with strange faces. Their harsh determination are bordering on their insecurity. A peculiar nervous void hangs in the air in the shops and stalls closed off from the harsh elements of the baking sun.

People walk around, not knowing whether to ignore or greet one another, or to pierce each other right into the depth of each other's heart and soul, which they are inclined to do. They wish to know more, to learn the little more they can, with the only much hated element present here, namely that of their mere clumsy words, accompanied and cut short with ever best well wishes from loved ones greeting those soon to be traveling.

Some evades such deeply searching and deeply penetrating reptile like gazes, they trod along to look rather at the memorabilia shouting at them, finding from it something and disappearing through the crowd and down the road they came from with it hidden in a bag, or till they find something to hold on to with hope, and buy it straight away mostly at a huge profit to the seller. The eager and attentive sales lady selling it are putting it in a nice paper bag with excessive care before giving back the change with a gentle, but rather awkwardly exaggerated smile.

Here and there tension gets relieved by a sudden burst of cleverly conceived humor from experienced shop tenants, or loved ones greeting, which is somewhat nice to listen to, as it soothes, and it inspires.

Later...

The heat is simply excruciating. Deep into the desert spanning wide open in the distance a silhouette of a man is visible.

Towards six the afternoon everybody was ready and moved in awkwardly uncomfortable and self-assembled groups towards him. They stood talking softly and inspecting their purchases of gear in these small but seemingly inseparable groups, lifting their heavy loads of water onto their backs to see if the comfort is satisfactory. Due to the weight of

these backpacks they soon put it down again, only to lift it on their backs to check it again later on. The talking, softly and ever so considerate, comes over them, passes through them, and seems to vanish from time to time, and return again with extra care, like the cool spots in the still hot heat waves flowing over plane they were gathered on.

All this time he stood facing away from them, looking intently toward the desert, looking sternly over its horizon, not at them. The two times he moved the talking vanished. He turns around finally, a slender giant in stature. Sternly he watches over them, condemning each with his gaze.

'I am the guide.' Confirming what they had known all the time. He turns around again and faces the vast desert in front of him.

With his back facing them he utters the following: 'If you do not wish to accomplish this, go do the canal.' He knew he screamed this hysterically. He did not mean to. He wished to say please. He wished to beg them. He had wanted to stand on his knees. He wished to sing in cries endlessly in their ears and send them home.

He immediately started walked ever so lightly into the desert at a pace no one can follow, increasing the distance separating him and them ever so quickly.

Here, on his own, he wished he had spoken louder.

The illegal immigration from Mexico into America was a tremendous problem to these illegal immigrants, for on the one side there was the desert that could only be walked, and on the other side there was the canal which one could not swim through at all. It was purposefully made not to allow that at all.

Some remained standing, covered in faces of disgust and disapproval, but relieved their selves thereof instantly as they saw other faces similarly contorted, or as their groups started leaving. They moved their shoulders about and heaved their clumsy and heavy packs onto their backs and stepped deep hollows into the desert sand as they tried to keep up.

It was only when he was well beyond hearing distance when the rumors about him started. There was much gossip about this man. They were all disappointed at him for walking off as fast as he did. None could keep up with the stiff pace of his slender body.

By noon more than a third returned home. The remainder was quiet, almost as he. They walked in a dreamy state. They worried about too much sweating. One man stopped to take some water, concluding in silence that too much adrenaline was at fault. The others soon followed this example.

In the distance he stopped. He did not look back, but fiddled in his backpack and took out an object he tied to his head. He switched on the light of this device only once they started walking again, when dusk started setting in, maintaining his lead as they had gotten used to by now.

They noticed him noticing a couple of vultures with filled bellies flying off. He changed direction slightly averting the scene.

Soon after this they followed him closely past the wreck of a car. A four wheel drive vehicle with its cabin ripped to shreds, and bodies, pieces of partially devoured and dried out human flesh and limbs lying strewn to great distances from the explosion. Such burnt out pictures repeated itself over and over again on their trip, some involving motorcycles. This desert is only to be walked, and even then at a risk too.

They walked till way after daybreak. He grew terribly impatient with the pace they were able to maintain.

They halted and put up their sunshades, ate, and slept all day in the excruciating heat hiding underneath makeshift shelters and sweating profusely.

‘We must continue.’ He said in a stern voice to the nearest man of around thirty, after prodding him on the shoulder lightly to wake him up. He had lain sleeping with the rest of his group closest to where the guide had put up his camp, sleeping alone in the distance under his makeshift canopy.

One by one, very slowly, they started getting into complaining and confused motion. He sat eating very quickly far away and assumed his usual position, standing ready for the walk. After a long debate about a young overweight man who slowed them down the previous day, he walked back in the opposite direction, while tentatively holding the compass he got given and explained how to use, stepping with an awkward motion of his legs due to the chafing of the previous day.

Later that evening they found the leftovers of previous travelers scattered all over the desert floor. Empty cans, bottles, and some memorabilia.

This was where they were supposed to rest their first night. The fat young man slowed them down too much.

During their rest on day three they met their first contact from the Promised Land. A military helicopter flew by, inspecting them closely through their goggles for protecting them from the blinding desert surface. The helicopter circled looking closely, but left again. Unhurt they continued.

Night three introduced them to the stench of a decaying human body. In time they learned they were lying one by one, half eaten by vultures, drying out in the sun. The backpacks sometimes some distance away, raided of its contents and some still ready to be raided, but as yet nobody ventured.

The valleys, big hollows between sand dunes capturing all the heat of the desert, were avoided for daytime rest.

In many places blown sand half covers the bodies and remains of earlier travelers.

The landscape was covered with apparatus not found not to be absolutely necessary by earlier travelers, yet in some places the most crucial apparatus was found deserted in the sand.

Some wished to ask the guide what they could leave behind due to the weight they were to carry, but rather quibbled with one another on what they found the previous travelers

had left behind. In the clearings after the tiring stretches, they emptied their packs of any unwanted heavy goods. They threw them into the heavy sand, to decay in the scorching sun along with other unwanted goods left there before.

Night six they were halfway. They stopped earlier than usual, but still way into the heat of the day. He sat at the usual distance, revealing slightly past his back the cleaning of his gun from all the dust it had gathered on the walk. He looked through the barrel a few times, holding it uncomfortably, up high and aimed at the sky. He knew it would at least carry an effect on the travelers. He is lucky this time, with this particular group.

Night twelve arrived and they were merely one day away. An eager young man, who, though repeatedly shunned away by the guide, tenaciously attempted to find tutorship from him, was given the compass readings to take for the next night.

That evening the guide went his own way before any awoke. He hated that name, but it is the name they gave him, it is the only name he is known by. He climbed a new direction through the dunes. At a certain spot he looked around. He saw how the sand had changed shape. He kneels down onto his tired legs with a sigh, and immediately dug a hole for the illegally purchased weapon. He cannot take this weapon with him as he passes border patrol back into Mexico on the highway. As he dug, a barrel pierced through the shifting sand. He looked at it. He pulled it from the sand. He held it, and then shoved it down into the sand, into the bottom of the hole he had made, and closed the hole clumsily with one hand.

He looked round at the sand of the dunes, the places he remembers where he had hidden guns like these before. Tears were wallowing in his sensitive eyes. With time, and difficulty in his mind, he counted them one by one.

He remembers that first time he conquered the desert, an invention of his, and started digging a hole for the weapon he silently had cogged while thinking, and still held it in the other hand as he dug.

One more time.

Just once more he thought.

He was not having the will to part with his invention quite yet, though he recalls and admitted having started worrying.

He does not talk to anyone.

It all became just a game.

He knew he had a problem.

The last stretch the people he led had walked alone.

He did not want to talk to that annoying and curious boy.