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## RAINWALKERS

*"While Will and Zach slept on the floor of the old man's trailer, clouds shuddered in the darkness on the Santa Lucias at the western edge of the Valley. It was from that purple and brooding wall that rain came each night. Up on the steep ridgeline, a forest of firs basked in moonlight above a gossamer of gloom, and silence prevailed, no bird song, no hum of insects, nor hooves sneaking across soft leaves. All gone.*

*Marine fog rolled down the east-facing slopes and mixed in the air with microscopic debris and man-made bacteria. Each night, the Valley basin filled with clouds that rung out like an old sponge. Artificial bacteria designed by forgotten scientists in their experiments gone wrong nucleated ice around every particle of Valley dust that fell from the sky in each rain. During their descent, the bacteria filled each raindrop with a foul-smelling airborne chemical deadly to humans, but neutralized in the soil within seconds.*

*Before sun up, water flowed off the thin flinty soils and scented shrubs of the hillsides to the riches of black mud and shapeless clumps of plowed earth on the Valley floor. The drinking water that squeezed through the deep soils into the Salinas River was once again pure. The rain affected neither the plants nor the soil fungi, so the diverse Valley crops prospered despite, and because of, each night's toxic bathing. If such were not the case, Valley residents would have starved within weeks of the first deadly rains that ended the hundred years of drought. Instead, each morning the Valley soil took on deadly water at all sides and purified it as it ran toward the enduring river at its center.*

*Along the entire Valley border, out past the rolling low hills of the eastern Gabilans, a high wall ran through the dust, sagebrush, and dry grass. It was a wall without end, circling the Valley, neither beginning nor ending at any location, and broken only at the guarded border crossings. Lonely young men in poorly built lookout towers were perched along the wall, watching the sun rise and feeling the dry rattling desert breath howl in from the east. Beyond their sight, far past the golden horizon, stretched a dryness so complete that life could no longer be sustained in any of it. Dead stands of brittle creosote and the broken stems of burrobush stretched across vast expanses on the surface of what was once the western North American continent."*

*Excerpt taken from Rainwalkers by Matt Ritter, out now via [pacificstreetpublishing.com](http://pacificstreetpublishing.com).*

