

The See of Galilee

Time: mid-afternoon, mid-December, 2013.

Place: Bimblebox Nature Refuge, Galilee Basin, Queensland.

48 degrees in the shade. Bared to merciless sun, mercury strains the glass at 61. The heat is a wake-up wave, intense and portentous. Far from relief, wind gusts are inversed iron lungs. You fight for air in searing gasps, your eyes sting, blood thins and head spins. What's left of sanity warns explicitly – entering no-go zone, to proceed is unsafe. But body resists commands. You cannot trust rationale. Nor quell anxiety or overcome delirium. There is no avoiding or escape. Murmuring directives, you flail yourself forth, a good shepherd has no choice. Hundreds depend on you for their survival and wellbeing. And you know they know. So on and out you go.

On dusty stable floor you replenish drinking water for fledgling honeyeaters and dethroned king of fishers. And see primeval fear in empathic eye of fellow living creatures. Note with detachment, little improvement on faraway yesterday. They look just like you feel. At wits' desperate end. And note remotely, ants are absent from charity bowls, their glazed highways now ghost tracks through parched grass. A stock trough is ringed by birds of many feathers, silent manikins bobbing and bowing together. Tawny grey diversity, black and white enmities overruled by adversity. Note with curiosity none is perturbed by your proximity. Blue- and red-winged flash a shivered chill of summer fever. Crow's macabre caw the creak of heaven's door. Two legless emus mirage to camel gnomes, humped in solemn prayer. Bees smother one another at the altar of plastic float, their sacrificial kin skin the sacred communal water.

A twenty-minute mercy ride to restart station's heart, nothing moves save for insane you, the quivering trees and falling triaged leaves. Kangaroos huddle, dazed upright rigid in the shade, radiator arms soaking wet from spider paws to scrawny breast, scrub ticks are rosary beads, a living necklace of imminent death. At intervals two lay prostrate beside the road, plump and young, first to succumb to ambient heat that boils the blood of mortal beast, boils the oil of man's infernal machine and brings a troubled soul unto his knees. Anxiously stirred to motion, reliable Lister beats purposeful in the trees, drawing life's essence from deep beneath, drawing life's lessons from deep within, and under spell of sun's fervid stroke man finally sees the dire predicament he is in.

Modern world energy needs sourced from ancient fuels sets us smugly flying high, sets us up to fall. Human ingenuity relieves servitude and drudgery, and paradoxically lulls us into complacency and peril. Provides unhindered rate of progress far faster than limited state of redress, until the weight and speed and momentum of nine billion all at once propelled like this old engine can only stop with vessels emptied or when everything ends with a clunk. Galilee's Goliath lies entombed within this earth but there are philistines alive today who from airconditioned comfort prepare to awaken the prehistoric monster from eternal silent slumber. They feel not this ominous portent nor heed the honourable science that has served us all so well so far but today serves us notice. Secluded by wealth and blinded by greed, they contort thoughts and words and figures to persuade us all that more of same is needed. Unless latter-day Davids poised with dialectic slings and intellectual arrows can put paid to these foolish ways – and fast – our ordained days are numbered.