

Taste the ash, see the pink sun: our dead future is here

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I can't breathe. They say something like 100 bush and grass fires are raging across the state. The city I live in feels like a scene from *Blade Runner 2049* come to life in 2019. There is no other way to see it: our dead future is here.

The mornings are smoky and grey. The afternoons distinctly eerie with the sun a shrunken disc that is by turns eggishly sick, bright pink, or burning orange in the seemingly permanent haze.

My eyes water. My breathing is shallow. My throat trickles with foreign matter.

On my back verandah, the washing machine and wooden shelves are covered in a gritty film of ash. I see what I am breathing in. Like tea leaves left in a cup predicting bad things.

Last week, I struggled so badly for air I had to leave work early and drive back home 10 minutes away. Yes, I am mildly asthmatic. Yes, I am vulnerable to air pollution. But this was different to anything I've experienced before.

I felt frightened for what was happening as I gripped the wheel. The struggle to get oxygen into my body. The growing tightness. I recognised my system was constricting and closing down.

It came to me that I was being buried alive. And that I am not the only one. All of us slowly smothered.

When I got inside I lay on my bed in the cool dark. All the doors and windows shut. I began to feel better. But it took me most of the afternoon to recover. And something else occupied me. A kind of anxiety and dread. A profound feeling of futility and depression.

Through my window, I watched the outlines of a tree like some undersea creature swimming in the silver wind. Its clumps of leaves and branches move this way and that, communicating a message to me that speaks of something gone deeply wrong with the world.

This week, temperatures are soaring again. Friends say the fires will burn for weeks, maybe months. It's likely there will be no rain till the end January.

On social media, everybody keeps taking pictures of the sky and the sun. Someone writes a note: "How long before the birds start dropping from the sky?"