



CLIMATE CHANGE ON FOR YOUNG & OLD

Published in *Climate Change On for Young & Old* in 2009 by Future Leaders (www.futureleaders.com.au)

Glass Cage

Sarah Parkinson

The expanse of glass above your head encloses your thoughts. A cage. A cage of your own creation. Beyond the transparent barrier is a former world, where once thriving vitality has melted into an expanse of ocean, awash with the mistakes of the past. Rusted tins, car parts and knickknacks litter the footpaths, now enveloped with the tides as they stream in and out, lapping at the glass.

You set about your repairs. Glass maintenance. Patching cracks that splinter through the cage, spreading like an old, poorly designed road network, from a now non-existent Third World. Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, nations of the past — a furnace of pollution now fragmented with remnants of the Antarctic, which drift calmly over Ecuador. Poor and unstable countries have become the modern-day Atlantis, engulfed by the coast, one by one. Swallowing their people. Swallowing their culture.

The cool breeze tickles your forehead as you wipe your brow. An artificial sensation, a pleasant change from the scorching heat of the exterior world. The sun's deadly rays pierce through the vast expanse of glass panels. You breathe in; crisp air — although again artificial. The air has been processed to remove excess carbon dioxide, which seeps into the cage from the outer, oozing through the cracks like a deadly toxin dispersing itself through the bloodstream. Schoolchildren wander past. They press their faces to the glass, watching the waves of the outside world crash on the other side; curious. The children head home from their day within the classroom, within the building, within the gates, within the cage. This is how you all live now. Cages

scatter the globe. Every country that is wealthy enough has constructed monstrosities, interlinked through tunnels. Air-travel, a concept of the distant past, banned for environmental purposes. All a matter of too little, too late. An exotic holiday now implies a stay at a hotel with great views; through the glass. Island vacations are no longer an option. Self-sufficiency within the cage is vital. Genetically modified foods feed the nation, crops of corn thrive in factories and wheat sprouts up through artificial soil spread liberally throughout the compound. Those who did not make into the cage, the others, they were left to fend for themselves, like abandoned kittens in a dumpster, swamped by the ocean, or singed by the heat.

A single crack splinters the glass separating two panels, with the same doom as a tectonic plate. Panic strikes your sector. All the workers on panels 760-825 stampede towards you, as yells reverberate in the distance. Hands scatter to retrieve tools and vigorously work to patch the crack. A yellowy gas leaks through, and a stench fills the room. You breathe in, but now the crisp air is replaced with a harsh burn in your lungs as the steaming gas is sucked down your wind-pipe. The detoxifying air cleansers go into overdrive to filter out the gases and dehumidify the once pristine cage air. The toxins from the outside world — excreted from the seemingly ancient process of burning fossil fuels, leak into the glass dome. The world knew decades ago that this could happen, that the temperature could rise so high that the polar ice caps could melt. That fossil fuels could pollute the air with carbon dioxide. That the hole in the ozone layer could be stretched like an elastic band in a childish slingshot. Yet they did nothing. You did nothing.

The gap widens. More toxins disperse themselves through your once artificially perfect world, modified and engineered. Environmental inspectors swarm around, emergency guideline procedures gripped firmly in their clutch. They seal off the section and a masked team hurry towards them with large rolls of what appears to be nothing more than old-fashioned duct tape. This stuff is rare; duct tape. Most of these items were banned with the plastic laws eight years ago. If it's nonrecyclable, it's banned. They roll the tape over the panel, memories of the old world consume your thoughts. The beach, swimming, sunshine, cars, plastic, regretful reminiscence. Ropes extend upwards and firmly pull the glass out of the section, a

new one is briskly rushed in and fixed in its new position. The cracked glass is whisked off for maintenance by the senior repairs team, and suction pumps are brought through to remove any remaining toxins. You're in the clear.

Relief. You look through your fresh panel. Your eyes creep skywards to see a blanket of fog smothering the earth. Greenhouse gases were once an invisible villain who loitered high above with a sinister grin. This is no longer. The villain has now extended its deadly arm closer to the surface, enveloping the cloud cover and the tips of old, dilapidated skyscrapers. You can taste the salty remnants of sweat on your upper lip as you plonk yourself on the nearest weight-bearing surface. Your heart rate slows back to a regulated pace, and realisation dawns. The glass has been replaced and not repaired. How ironic, this is how the cage came about to begin with. The problem was never fixed.

You. This will be you. The world is melting. What an inconvenient truth.



Sarah Parkinson wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 12 at Walford Anglican School For Girls in South Australia.