



## Dystopia

Sat on a rocky outcrop, high above the desolate land, a father and son huddled together under an umbrella. Despite the overwhelming heat, they both wore heavy metal masks that connected to the large tanks of oxygen strapped to their backs. When they spoke to each other, it had a tinny quality, echoed by the helmets. A newspaper drifted past on the gentle breeze. The young boy reached out and snatched at it. It was dated the day before, 24th December 2050.

“What happened here, dad?” the boy asked his father, unable to take his eyes away from the ravaged landscape.

“This was all rainforest when I was a boy,” his father began, “but humans came and took what we wanted. The problem was, we wanted everything. It started with oil and plastics. Before long, the oceans were so toxic that nothing could survive and so we started farming even more intensively on land. That meant more trees needed to come down. Everything needed palm oil back then. If it wasn’t the black gold in the ground, it was palm oil. One oil or the other helped to destroy pretty much everything. Once we started putting money into chopping down the forests and stopped recycling, there was only one way it could go.”

The child looked down from their perch. From so high up, it was easy to see the scars criss-crossing the landscape. They hadn’t been formed by earthquakes or drought - though he knew there’d been enough of those since he’d been born - instead, they were the marks left behind by diggers and cranes and trucks moving in and out of the area. On their way out, he’d heard, they’d often been overloaded with timber. “Why didn’t you stop them?” he asked the obvious question. He’d tried hard to contain his emotions but his voice quivered and his eyes dampened.

“We did, for a while. Governments came and went, and we blamed each other, but nothing changed. Nobody wanted to take responsibility, and so we didn’t take it seriously until it was far too late.”

“What lived here, back when it was green?”

“Here in India, there were giant creatures called elephants, as tall as the trees themselves. They had long trunks that sprouted from their face like an arm. Around them, striped tigers hunted monkeys and bison. Giant squirrels leapt from tree to tree, and hunting dogs chased each other through the long grass.”

Tears streamed down the old man’s cheeks as he spoke, unseen behind the mask. His son stared wistfully at the barren dust-bowl far below. He imagined the ghosts of these creatures wandering aimlessly through

a world they wouldn't recognise. It had been a slow change, his father had told him before. It had taken years to reach this point, but not nearly as many as their governments had predicted. Once the big things had started to disappear, people had lost hope. Apparently, while islands had disappeared beneath the seas as the polar regions (once vast areas covered in ice, he'd been told) had started to melt, people carried on churning out their poisons and stealing resources from deeper and deeper within the earth. Soon, they'd ripped out the heart of the planet. He knew that the rest of his family - his mother, grandparents and sisters - had all been lost in a great tsunami a few years before. Back then, there'd been enough oxygen in the air to breath.

"What can we do? Is there any coming back?"

"Learn. Learn and listen. Learn from our mistakes and those before us and listen to the experts. Never assume something is too big to change. And don't be afraid to take action and be the voice in the silence. Earth will repair itself, it's done it before. Whether we have a part to play in the new future is out of our hands." For a while, they stood and stared into the distance; ghostly memories of a disappearing past.



## VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find a definition for **desolate** that fits in this context.
2. Which word tells you that the world has been torn apart and broken?
3. Find the word that tells you the boy was sad and nervous when he spoke.
4. Find the sentence that starts "Tears streamed..." and rewrite it replacing the word **streamed**.

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

On which date is the story taking place?

**P**

Why do you think they have large tanks of oxygen strapped to their backs?

**I**

What was the **black gold** in the ground? Why was it called this?

**E**

Explain how the *scars criss-crossing the landscape* had been formed.

**R**

Where on Earth are they?

Answers:

1. Uninhabited emptiness
2. Ravaged
3. Quivered
4. Any correctly punctuated sentence that uses a synonym of streamed

R: December 25th (Christmas Day) 2050

P: Any prediction involving the atmosphere not being breathable or too polluted

I: Oil - it was black and very valuable as it ran out

E: Diggers, cranes and trucks driving across the landscape loaded with trees

R: India