

# Life in the Air Age

*By Cliff Dale*

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Life in the air age was rather short, sadly, your life expectancy was much the same, many acknowledged it was grim enough to make a robot cry, and it must be said, I have no reason to refute that.

It doesn't matter where you are on this once majestic planet, the sun's glare is relentless, the snows have now melted, the once resplendent polar glaciers have all slipped into a quickly ebbing sea, the rivers are run dry, and the once-mighty oceans are left as no more than soulless deserts, devoid of anything but long-forgotten shipwrecks and the crumbling bones of ancient mariners. For its past transgressions, humanity is forced upward, up and away from the expanding deserts and the rising temperatures, abandoning the islands of the dead below, now looking toward the heavens, aiming for a salvation that the blazing apostles promised would await them, and still falling short. There were the die-hards who continued their twilight capers, lost in the neon worlds they fashioned, still diving headlong into visions of endless hopes that continued to vanish with every turn of the globe, and yes, they died hard. There was no longer any worthwhile expectation, all the remote probabilities had been explored and subsequently abandoned, the chances to rescue this planet should have been taken when it was offered, but no, blinded by profit and handcuffed to their portfolio, they just kept on with the pedal to the metal, trucking down the same old highways, smoke pouring from the stacks in the rush to get nowhere fast, making the throwaways as cheaply as possible, cutting corners and running the red lights. Right now, the only highways are in the sky, and these were uncluttered, there are no clouds, no rain, no humidity, no smog and precious little humanity, and for what is frequently referred to as the air age, there is nothing to flutter in no breeze.

Damn, it was still, so hot, anything on the ground was likely to melt, the drastic plastic was the only liquid that bubbled, and not just from the heat, there was a proper chemical soup down there, and although it was true, you could go down to the surface, it was far too dangerous to stay. It isn't much better up here either, perched between the mountain worlds, the pilotless air-ships frequently crashed into the dry of the bays below, further polluting that which was already poisoned to silence. This sterilising heat had many side effects on the Don Quixote's of the time, no windmills to fight, no dreams to chase, no chivalry left to revive, and little personality to disorder, and it often left the maids in the heavens so alone, the modern duet of love was frequently nothing more than a solo, there was a life unfulfilled for the many, all life in the air age was difficult, the bloodlines were shortened too. No one had the power anymore, that grid was gone, life was ungoverned, it was strictly each to his own, there was no 'one for all' as all were only the one, no dog eat dog, they had done that already, feasting on the needs of the many. There was no longer a concern for the few, hadn't been for years, nor was there any fear of the many, the collective was the individual, cautious and scared, dipping a toe in the poisoned waters and retreating to a safe distance, waiting for a sign.

Life was said to be lonely in the air age; some would argue that it was no life at all.

Still, the overpopulation of the planet was no longer a worry, quite the opposite, the species was declining, dwindling, fading into something of a non-existence, deforestation was quickly followed by de-population, it was all drifting toward an inevitable end, the non-survival of the species. Fit or not, the end was nigh, the meek were destined to perish with the rest of us, no one was immune, and no mass vaccination would fix this disease, things were reaching terminal velocity. No person was willing to rise above it, in fact, everyone now desired to be beneath it all, climbing the social ladder meant you lived closer to the once elusive penthouse and this was no longer the place to be, your head may be way above the toxic vapours below, but the sun was far too hot with your head nearer the heavens. The population explosion had come and gone, all that was left was the fallout, the embers of something once so powerful and proud, its energy almost spent, nearly exhausted. No one cared, it didn't pay to think anymore, that put you on the menu, it had been proven that things were way beyond caring, anyone who did care was going to be food for thought, no one was fat anymore, fat was slow, only the quick got fed.

All the cities that once sprawled across the lands were deeply buried in the dust that was time, and all were lost in the noxious smog, now, everything was floating, and not on the water, it was called the air age for a reason. It was once said that time and tide wait for no man, now it is Man that waits for the tide of time to end, we all know it will not be long.

It never used to be like this, I tell you, I was young once, on a clear mind day, I can still remember tiptoeing in the cool of a river, the mud squeezing between my toes, at the fringes of the sands of time we would dive headlong into the crashing waves, splash about and float on waters so vast you could not comprehend the size, but not now, that past is so forgotten, it is nothing more than a flash of whimsical fancy in this scattered mind, it is but a fantastical dream, a hallucination in a twilight landscape.

Now, it is just dry, dry throat, dry mind, dry joints, mine are the memories of a thoroughly drained soul still surfing on the waves of a fading nostalgia, no longer sure of the truth of it all. Sometimes, I am forced to drift ever deeper in order to remember the vibrant holiday destinations of old, recalling trips to foreign lands taken on a whim, or meticulously planned through the glossy holiday club magazines, but life in the air age is nothing like those brochures from my youth depicted, for today is colourless and lost, those faded leaflets of the past point to nought but a frightening discovery of desolation and desperation in this cloudless sky. I try to revive the memory in that fruit bowl of a past life, one that was filled with such colour, delicate skins so full of variety, seeding the wisdom and fulfilment, revelling in the accomplishments of modern living, tasting the aroma of the harvest, all deeply infused in the spice that was the modern life. That was the time before this air age, a time lost, and this reminiscence, a step too far, too painful to dredge forward, its palette so faint it seems a distant dream, one that has dropped us headlong into this nightmare. On opening my mind's eye to this most modern of vistas, all I see is this perishing and weather-beaten skin that smothers me, now chafed and torn, dried, as if to preserve, harshly ravaged by the solar winds that grate relentlessly upon it. Oh, how it hurts to dwell in this past, so much so that I am forced to close the blinds to this window of my soul, for I have no desire for this vision of the harsh truth, this disjointed reality, I much prefer the blinkered disbelief and the delicately woven lies of old, that suits my purpose, it pacifies my soul.

Sadly, I see no purpose, no point in this life; for me, the light of my life is fading, growing dim, I'm losing hold, my grip on the fabric of this modern reality is wearing it thin, the holes are getting bigger, the tears more frequent, there is no blanket of safety. When it all fails, I want to sleep through that passing moment, and though that sleep may still burn, I can only see this futurama as stony cold, for it is soulless, empty of joy yet so full of people, though, they are lost and so alone, fitting the narrative of the age. Right now, at this time and place, I feel so old, I know not where I am, nor where I am supposed to fit, do I care that I missed that brief flash in the depths of despair, skipped a fleeting glimpse of deliverance that passed by, or that I wasted a moment of exceptional brilliance in this sun-kissed world? No, I care not, it is too late for all of that.

I consider that what I am in need of most is a friend, a rare commodity indeed in this air age, for I have come to realise that they have all passed, some lost in the clouds of mind-fog, some, nothing but ashes in the funeral pyre of the past, and there are others, those more recently departed, they have been absorbed in the dust of this grim present, powdered to oblivion, adding to the choking dust of the building dunes. The occasional memories of a misspent youth remind me of a world so nothing like yours, given a choice, I would choose to live in that time of not so long ago, but this sunburst finish has me struggling to think, even to breathe, this panic in my world is screaming some futurist manifesto that makes no sense, gives me, us, no choice, though the choices we had, and the paths we took, leave a lot to be desired, this manifestation of the future is no more than an abomination. I tell you, this kiss of the modern light has fried my good-natured soul, it has me crying to the sky and looking for a release, but it only conspires to release the only pure water for miles, and even these tears are wasted, I don't like this life in the air age, it only does me harm.

There are moments when I am so lost between these air age worlds, deeply off-grid and living in my mind's café, so steeped in a paradise lost that I can see no road map for a future, there is none, the satellites may still be there, but the channels are scrambled, the contours of this landscape changed beyond all reason, nothing adds up anymore. All the signs say we have passed the crossroads and there is nowhere left to turn, the freeway is now a toll road that has no roundabouts on which we can return. Then, I am further dismayed to discover the menu placed on this café table to be so bland that it is thoroughly distasteful,

and why am I not surprised to find the fee to be paid is too high? But then, we discover what we suspected, that there is nowhere else to feed, even though the trough may not be crowded, we find the cream within is still deeply soured, we are starved of so much already, what else can we do but feast on the bitter remnants of truth?

Nothing else matters, that is all there is, we should be used to this by now, it is a diet gorged on for years, too late for repentance now, that revelation has come and overtaken the present, bringing a future that should have never been, it was only supposed to be a possibility, never the eventuality. That was a poor mistake too late to correct, the past is gone and now our future is missing, evaporated with the waters, there is only this present, an offering no longer sugar-coated and gift-wrapped, it is one box that should never have been opened, too late to send it back, on this one there is no refund, one size fits all, and as you flip the gift card, it reads,

Welcome to life in the air age, inhale deeply, exhale, scream.

You know, sometimes I remember trees, on occasion, even recall the smell of flowers and hear the buzz of the pollinators, there was life so abundant in the lands of verdant green, it seemed so strong in the tidal waters filled with many shades of blue, but these are so gone, cut down in the name of profit and drained to extinction. There are things once dearly loved, cared for, occasionally respected and sometimes revered, but always so taken for granted, and now, so sincerely missed, just like past opportunities. What had we done, too little as it turned out, where did it go so wrong, that's easy, everywhere, when did we not see the harm, ah, well, when we were told not to, why did it all fall on so many deaf ears, of billions? No one cares to remember, for they may not want to shoulder the blame of this genocide, maybe, all were too busy looking the other way, busy waiting for someone else to step up and take the stand, have you considered that, did you ignore the dying words of mother nature?

There are no more winds on the waves, no breeze through the trees, the breath of life is but a wheeze, there is nothing left to save, we have no natural treasures left, all that remains is this sterile life in the air age, staring at the sign that says, welcome to the end, no refunds without a receipt.

I am forced to admit that this is no life at all, an existence perhaps, but barely.

There are few such as I that remember the days of old, of those, most are not so sound of body anymore, but it is true to say that all are sad of mind, forever battling the internal fears of fatality and facing the reality of fading memories, slowly getting lost, constantly being dragged unwillingly forward, waiting to be swallowed by the creeping dunes to become engulfed in the sands of time.

This poor excuse of an existence is a sham, I am not a willing party to this desecration of an already jaded vision of the future, I never was, I never subscribed to this, tell me my friend, where do I disconnect, can someone please pull my plug, I can't see it, I don't feel it, please, I no longer enjoy this ride, someone, stop this world, I want to get off. When were we overruled by the minority, those that acted in our interests and filled the bank balance of theirs, I ask you, if they could see the image of our future was already pixelated, was it really necessary to feel the need to blur it further?

Now it comes back to me, what we were told, be resourceful they said for we have no resources, be mindful they said and proceeded to spoon-feed us their mind-numbing values, be sensitive they said and promptly desensitised the masses to the coming of the storm, be vigilant they said and they would surround us with their cameras, be respectful they said, huh, and they did nothing but ignore us, however, they were sure to blame us for our lack of empathy for their judgements. At the end of the day, we knew what they were doing but did nothing, we told them we knew what they had done but failed to change it, we knew big brother was always watching, forever listening, and still, we changed channels whilst they picked off those who stepped out of line, as they snubbed the voices of reason and then set about snuffing the opinions that dared to question, stamped out those that had the courage to organise, stifling the voice of free speech. Those we blindly entrusted with our voice turned this world on its head with their spin, twisted it until the people were so dizzy they didn't know where to look or know who to believe, the masses were encouraged to thoughtlessly follow the party line, dividing the conquered, and like lemmings they followed, one after another, stepping into the brink and beyond, following the lead of those that would subsequently blame them for not trying, all whilst they tied the gold-braided noose.

I am sorry, I have nothing left to give, you should leave me here in the soulless air age if you like, I have no life to live and I'm sitting on Terminal Street anyway, I have seen this is one way, and a dead-end,

there is no way out and no way back, no one cares for anything anymore, the air age is sucking the life from us all as we choose to do nothing, we must now accept our fate, for now, we know, with certainty, that there is nothing left to be done, it has been done to death already, as my friend, have we.

For now, I allow my thoughts to drift to better days, yes, I'd dearly love to go back to those old times, but the past is gone, life in the air age is the last gasp for this fish out of water, and there is no pond left in which to respawn. Was it a wise man that said a lack of foresight is no excuse for inaction, and ignorance of circumstance is no defence? Maybe it was the fool, or the jester, it matters not, this is the end of this epoch, this is the time of the ending of Man, once more, done by its own hand.

My friend, if you would but listen now, I am forced to ask you this simple question,

is it such a shame? It should be.

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