

Field Notes

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Adapted by Fishtank Staff

The Earth Heats Up

12. 6. 2025

- 1 We leaned into the enormous red crater, where the ground concaved like the inside of a coracle. When I looked closer, I saw the dust from the bowl travel in particles, like clusters of stars. The deep, craggy floor of the thing rippled and contracted like a diaphragm or a sea anemone, pulsing emphatically, disturbed by the flock of tourists who were cramming in around the precipice with their camera phones and selfie sticks. Their drones hovered above us, taking bird's-eye snaps which later, when we looked again, would show nothing but a glaring white light.
- 2 My job is to drive people to the mountains and then guide them on foot to see the thing. We camp at the site for one night, before walking back to the car and returning to the city. This group was small, twelve people or so. As we all stood around the thing, I told them a story—the same story I tell everyone.
- 3 "Archaeologists claim that this area was the resting place of Noah's Ark," I said. "A refuge for all the Earth's creatures; history's apobaterion, a place of landing, of rest." The real believers are religious prophets and tourist pamphlets, not archaeologists—but I don't tell them that.
- 4 My real job is to tell this story well, to distract people from the fear and turn their guilt into something that's easier to swallow. As it turns out, history makes a pretty decent inebriant. If you tell it right, the past becomes a spiritual mooring, a refuge from solastalgia—from the blinding grief of witnessing environmental cataclysm.
- 5 When the thing appeared in the ground three years ago, people started coming here from all over to see it. Whether you read the Quran or the Bible, both will claim ownership of the truth. Early on, biologists came to take swabs and stick it with needles, prod it with their long rods, but the only thing they could conclusively say was that it was probably alive. I don't know why it drew such fanatical curiosity, but I guess anything, no matter how disturbing, is better than watching the world die through a screen in your living room.
- 6 I told the tour group that last week, the world's last kiwi died of old age.
- 7 "It was a 45-year-old male with tatty, hairy feathers," I said, "and a long, pink beak."

- 8 I was going off script, but I remembered it so clearly, seeing New Zealand's prime minister cry over its frozen body on television.
- 9 I could see that I had their attention, so I went on. "Large-scale phosphate mining and eutrophication have starved many plant species of oxygen and suffocated many important aquatic habitats with algae."
- 10 I thought back to the last time I was in Istanbul. Apart from some rodent species and a few types of flying bugs, only the cats are left in abundance. They prowl around the cities and nurse their kittens in rubbish bins.
- 11 The group seemed lost for words, and I knew how they felt. We're all a bit scared of the future, now that it's not really guaranteed to us anymore.
- 12 While we set up camp, they ignored me and spoke only to each other. At first their conversation was focused on the heat, which sweat-stuck your clothes and made you curse at this planetary gas trap we've created.
- 13 For as long as I've been alive, Turkey's been heating up. I come from a small town in northern Turkey. That's where my family is: my elderly father and Amraz, who isn't blood family, but might as well be.
- 14 When I visit, we fight the heat like it's a war, spending most of the day indoors with the electric fans on high. Everyone overuses them, so we have power cuts every hour. In summer, the nights never drop below 40°C, so we usually sleep on the stone terrace roof in a rattan cot made to fit us all in, like sweaty sardines. On the warmest nights, I don't try to sleep. I just lie there thinking about the heat, and how my father seems older with every visit.
- 15 The group's conversation died for a while and then eventually turned to what they always end up talking about. I eavesdropped, though I pretended to be fiddling with the tent poles.
- 16 "I think it's beautiful," one of the girls said.
- 17 "Yeah, really beautiful," replied the other girl, "but also creepy, like a giant womb."
- 18 "Right." The boys laughed at her, and it does sound ridiculous when she says it. But the thing radiates heat, and it is lined with a thin membrane, like an amniotic sac.
- 19 I feel bad because we never leave it alone. It must get tired of seeing our faces, moonlike and inspective. How many times can you hear the same digs over again? People mostly stare and say, "I'm sure I've seen one like it," or, "My mum read that you'll die if you get too close." This last one is always said with glee. What really gets me is when they cry softly and nostalgically and say to their friends, "It's so much bigger in real life, don't you think?" And then they go back to their tents and text their friends back home. But they don't really come to see the thing.

- 20 They come because it's a bloody rite of passage, an ecopolitical pilgrimage for the well-educated traveller, the climate-conscious, passport-stamp collector. This trip isn't for the tourist who looks passively at Notre-Dame Cathedral (when it was still standing) and chooses the five-star hotel over a tent. It's for those who want to say, *I'm not like them. I travelled all this way to feel something.*
- 21 On the nights that we're camping, I usually sleep metres away from the thing in a bivvy bag. In the beginning, I was too scared to do anything but watch it shyly from afar. But that night, after everyone was asleep in their tents, I sat right up by the edge of it. I placed my hand inside the pit, on the thing's rubbery walls, and lay my head down. I could hear its heart thump together with mine, making a racket in my chest. When I fell asleep, I dreamed that I was a young lamb taken from my flock by a shepherd and led to a large tabernacle. The shepherd took me to a small enclosure, made from copper and inlaid with a metal grate. As I gazed down at the swamp of hot ash underneath the grate, flames began to lick at my hooves. I woke up the next morning with my face indented by the earth.

Things Heat Up Inside Us

7. 6. 2026

- 22 As I readied myself for a second season of guiding, my village prepared for protests in Istanbul. On the streets there were daily rallies for Kurdish independence, and celebrations of our culture everywhere: markets spilling out onto the road, explosions of folk music which travelled upwards into the mountains, and line dancing under a waxing moon, the men and women joined by their palms, moving to the song of the long-necked tanbur. We enjoyed all of them, thrilled by the freedom of it and aware that it may not last.
- 23 One night I walked through the bazaar with Amraz. We stopped to watch the dancing on the street, and as the strumming of the tanbur changed time, he took my hand. My heart began to beat rapidly, matching the thumping steps of the dancers as they moved their feet in time to the acoustic crescendo. We walked away from the music to an alley that was quiet and softly lit, behind an old shoemaker's shop.
- 24 "Come with us to Istanbul," Amraz said when we were finally alone. The shadows made his long nose and large eyes look exaggerated on his face.
- 25 "You know I want to be there, but I need the money." I was tired of his judgement. People don't trust you when you work for the government we're supposed to be at war with. "We need the money."

- 26 He nodded slowly and I knew that he was thinking of my father. Last year, my father had a heart attack. Amraz was with him when it happened—they were catching fish in the Munzer River. He's recovered well, but I'm constantly afraid that his heart won't stand the stress of these times. With the money I save this summer, I want to fly him to the city for better care.
- 27 "I'm always thinking about your father," he said at last. "I'll be thinking of him when I'm fighting." He paused. "And I'll be thinking of you, too."
- 28 For a moment we both said nothing, and then he leaned in slightly, as if he was about to kiss me. But I blinked and then he wasn't looking at me anymore, but out towards the dry ravine and the dying fields of wheat in the distance.
- 29 "With all that thinking, you'll get yourself killed," I said.
- 30 He looked at me closely. "You know, we may never see each other again after this summer."
- 31 "Don't be so dramatic."
- 32 He knew I was trying to hide my fear, but he smiled anyway. "I'll walk you home."
- 33 As I write this by the stub of a candle (my father, asleep, in the room next to mine), I hold onto this memory, sharp as I write, but fading quickly: the bouncing tanbur, the rumble and thump of dancing feet, the close confidence of a dear friend.
- 34 As the summer progressed, the heat took all of us prisoner. We stayed indoors in the middle of the day, slept for longer, and dared to hope for a small reprieve.
- 35 In my living room, we watched television coverage of President Erdogan. He was kneeling at the mouth of the thing, reciting a prayer and asking for a flood of rain to quench the heat. He was bent low, the long dark fabric of his bisht cloaking his scarecrow frame. His hands were pressed into the ground as he knelt and spoke in Arabic. They were not words for God, but words for Earth; private utterances or pleas for forgiveness maybe, unheard by the tripod-mounted cameras or by the journalists gathered around him. As he stood, the mountains looming over him, he suddenly seemed weak and hungry, like the rest of us.

What Happens If the Rain Never Comes?

20. 8. 2026

- 36 Towards the end of the summer, masses of people travelled to see the thing, fuelled by a cocktail of fear and hope. When people prayed, they asked the Earth to forgive them for their ignorance. Buses were full of tourists, many of whom refused to leave before the rain came. People were hysterical; nobody slept. I think the heat was so bad that people would take rain at any cost, even if it washed us all away.

37 When I returned to the city for a day, I found a letter from Amraz in a grey envelope on my bed.

38 *Dear Olan,*

People are hungry, even in Istanbul. I knew that food was scarce, but even the wealthy districts of the city are struggling with basic supplies. Bread, cheese, eggs, even water is rationed. With the end of the world in sight, there seems to be very little humanity left anywhere. People speak of God constantly, but what is God to us now? Where, in this mess, do we find him? Yesterday, we gathered in the streets of Beşiktaş. People turned on us, they told us to surrender ourselves. When we didn't, they ran at us like rats with kitchen knives, and chased us to the edge of the Bosphorus. Some of us drowned in the toxic waters.

39 *At night I am consumed by thoughts of a new world with endless possibilities. When I dream, I can feel a cool breeze prickle my skin and see the pink sky reflected in the waters of endless marshland. In the dream I saw you standing not far from me, so I called out to you. You were crouched in the grass with your back to me and when you turned around, I saw that you were standing in a field of wild crocus flowers, just like the ones from home. Do you remember that we used to find dozens of them, even in the winter? I used to think of them as a reminder that we could withstand anything together.*

With love,

Amraz

40 I folded the letter neatly, carving indents into his words. In my head, God was a muddied and elusive idea, an uncanny father figure. In place of God, many of us had turned to nature for guidance. But she was not the forgiving, maternal deity that we had imagined; she didn't have the power to grant us clemency for our faults, nor could she cast a flood of rain from the heavens.

41 I took a group of young students to see the thing last month. They did not beg and pray like everyone else. They listened closely to the low, sorrowful sounds coming from underneath us and felt the ground rise and fall like the chest of a sleeping dog. I think they'd accepted something that I'd always known: that the thing wasn't here to fulfil a prophetic purpose, or to offer us a place of refuge when the apocalypse came. Like us, it was a refugee on this dying planet, trying to find a semblance of home in a wasted land.

42 I wrote to Amraz, asking him to visit my father. I imagined them eating together in our tiny kitchen, the chaos of the world outside a far-off abstraction. Amraz would sit on the rooftop with my father every evening to watch the sun go down, the two of them perfect silhouettes against the dying light.

- 43 I stayed behind and told stories to the pilgrims. Every night we sat around in the dry, rocky encampment. Tents were set up everywhere; people were sedentary, hungry. At night things were silent, and the silence felt raw, like an exposed wound.
- 44 Then one night, as the moon cut through the haze, a mother, sick from fever, tried to offer her newborn child to me.
- 45 Her womb was still swollen from the birth. I held my hand to her forehead, and it was scalding. She held him out to me, and cried, "Take him!" so I held him unnaturally in my arms. He lay there squirming and clasped his tiny hand around my finger. Not a cry nor a murmur came from his mouth; he was pure like a fresh, gold yolk. His mother's infection got worse overnight and she didn't live to see the following morning, so I wrapped the baby in some spare muslin and kept him in a makeshift cot, an empty cardboard box and a scrap of blanket.
- 46 I watched him sleep soundly for hours. *He'll need milk soon*, I thought. When he wakes up, he'll be hungry. Outside, someone tapped a beat on the tops of empty spaghetti cans, but he barely stirred. I couldn't let myself sleep—I was terrified of his tiny body, his chubby legs, the soft down on his head. I was so unnerved by how still and calm he seemed, and a few times I came close to shaking him awake. I thought to myself, *He's ignorant of it now, but in time he will feel the loss of his mother keenly.*