

*Firestick* is inspired by sections of The Future Eaters, a populist treatise by respected Australian scientist, Tim Flannery. Among other things, this work espouses controversial theories regarding humankind's effect on the ecology of Australasia. Flannery believes giant marsupials, whose existence is known through fossil records, were hunted to extinction by the first wave of Aborigines some 60 000 years ago. These animals were benign herbivores, who having never faced any sort of predator, let alone people, were too easy and plentiful a prey. While notable in itself, it is the significant and traumatic ramifications of their passing which Flannery makes the focus of his discussion. The most immediate consequence was to leave the Aborigines without a ready food-supply. Perhaps more pertinently, however, the enormous mass of vegetation ordinarily consumed by these creatures was now left to grow unchecked. This resulted in the fuel for outbreaks of fire dramatically increasing, further exacerbating their already rising incidence with the arrival of people. Instead of ignitions from campsites, lightning and such tending to fizzle and die, raging bushfires of either natural or manmade origin became commonplace, causing untold damage to the environment.

Over an extended period of time, however, the Aborigines developed a technique which both redressed the ecological balance and established them in a symbiotic relationship with the land. Their approach, known as "firestick farming", involved the deliberate lighting of small fires to burn patches of undergrowth in a mosaic-like pattern. This was to limit the fuel and pathways for major bushfires and thus decrease their number and ferocity. A further result was the emergence of open-plain ecosystems, giving rise to a population boom in medium-sized marsupials (such as kangaroos), which in turn solved the Aborigines' food-supply problems.

Tragically, this symbiosis was entirely destroyed with the arrival of Europeans, and in consequence, devastating fires have returned to the Australian bush. *Firestick* is concerned with how the instigation of a modern version of "firestick farming" could not only minimize horrendous damage to wilderness, properties and homes, but also change how contemporary Australians relate to their own environment. Rather than trace a particular narrative, this work seeks to outline a change of perception: from anger and despair at the rampaging nature of bushfire, to the realization- through "firestick farming"- that fire is an integral part of life in Australia. The cycle of destruction and regeneration intimated physically and psychologically by this trajectory is also addressed. This is of particular resonance with the inceptive context of the work, as the New Millennium can be perceived both as an end and a fresh beginning.

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