

We Get It, the Apocalypse Sucked

Zach MacDonald

We understand it wasn't easy, to say the least, when that giant asteroid came out of nowhere. I mean, we've got an idea of how it was. I'd say you've gone over it with us more than a few times, about that damned space rock that interrupted everyone's plans for the future. We know it was scary when that sparkling cosmic monolith of pure iron pyrite smacked into the Atlantic and vaporized half the ocean, boiling alive in brine every aquatic beastie from Greenland to South Africa.

And the steam clouds. We know about how the atmosphere filled with steam and everything became like what you call a sauna. Yes, and that you eventually lost all your family. All your friends, too. Everyone you'd ever loved and cared about. But no, that wasn't the end, of course, because then the earthquakes started, and the volcanic eruptions. The Yellowstone caldera exploded. A chunk of North America, gone. Then there were the earthquakes, the magma-spewing eruptions, and those pyroclastic clouds belching up left and right from the torn-open belly of the earth, all from the great shifting of tectonic plates after the impact—straight into the seabed—of the last chunk of fool's gold asteroid that wasn't vaporized during its power dive through miles of ocean. How big did they estimate the chunk was that splintered the plates and displaced the earth's crust? I've studied it in the records before. A dozen miles or something like that, or so scientists estimated, though those scientists mostly died in the ionized air, baking themselves in plasma waves in order to get their readings, right?

Fucking scientists, I know. They couldn't even detect that rock—at least not till it emerged from that doppelganger orbit it'd been in behind the sun. Of all celestial objects, the damn *sun*: the star that helped our chemosynthetic ancestors finally get off the lousy ocean floor. That ball of plasma is how we got here, billions of years later, and now that same sun, well you can't even see it, yeah? Even if we crawled up all those levels, pulled ourselves up the chains still hanging in the old elevator shafts, past the conception chambers and the pain rooms, through the blast doors that were rusted shut twenty years ago, and then the airlock that was welded closed when the microblock filter-chain system to the surface was finished. And past the airlock, if we could find our way through the honeycomb maze with the bioluminescent psilocybin mushrooms growing on the walls—past that glowing aquamarine maze to the hangar, empty save for some forever-grounded aircraft remains, to the glass porthole, made from not real glass like the antique drinking glasses are, but acrylic—and even if we could get those darkened portholes open, pushing against all the dust and sediment piled up no-one-knows-how-deep on top, even if we got out there, we wouldn't see the sun, that glowing orb that they say you couldn't even look at in the past because it would burn the retinas out of your eyes—and how stupid to think we evolved on this planet thanks to energy from a sun we couldn't even look at.

We get it, the apocalypse sucked. We know it was hard on you, harder on your parents, and in a way easier on your grandparents because they died fairly soon thereafter, some before the tunnels were even carved out, or found, or won access to by lottery.

We don't mean to sound exasperated, grandpa, but we know all this. We do. We get that it was a shit deal for everyone down here when the conception chambers were cut out of the rock. It's in the records how the elites perished for what they did, in the pain rooms your parents and their peers dug after the uprising. You've been quite explicit—which must be difficult considering what happened to your sister—about what went on in the conception

chambers, about how the young women and girls were taken, fertile or not, because it wasn't really about procreation, though they insisted it was in the announcements that trickled down the comm-wires to the tunnel bowels where you and the others slaved away at the UV food grow-ops and maintenance of the aquifer-powered turbines. We know it was a lie; it stands to reason that it was. It was a lie by the elites about ensuring the survival of the species and all that, about how they'd chosen their very best in physical and mental attributes to mate with those girls and produce a handsome future ratio of elites to the underclass denizens fated to live on in the bowels from which their mothers were drawn, crying and screaming—and when those girls came back they never had children with them, but they were hollow-eyed, numb, talking to condensation patterns on the walls, and they'd been torn up and shredded in those places our clothes are supposed to hide for the sake of our modesty, so that they couldn't go to the toilet without trouble and pain for many years. And a lot of those girls never came back, even though your sister did, and just so you know that I know, I remember everything you told me, about how she couldn't figure out how to kill herself, and your mom and dad hid the knives from her, so she shoved the handle end of a spoon through one of her eyes, into her brain, and wrenched it back and forth until it mushed up enough of her prefrontal cortex to kill the person part of her, the human being who was your sister, and you were the one that found her, on the kitchen floor with a spoon sticking out of her eye.

We know they took the boys sometimes, after the spiriting away of girls had become routine, and that's where your old friends whose faces you have trouble remembering went, and that they tried to take you, sending down one of their big well-fed men to do it, and that was when the elevators still worked, and he took you to the elevators, but they didn't have doors on them, and even though that man was big you could tell his balance would be bad because he was beefy and top-heavy with muscle, and as the elevator started to go up, right at that moment you tripped him, knocked his legs out from under him and pushed him down, so he fell right onto the edge of the elevator floor, part in the box and part hanging out over the metal-plated hallway the box was elevating out of, and he tried to scramble back, but he wasn't fast enough and his head got lobbed off when the shaft cut into him, and then you mashed the button to go back down and went and told everyone what had happened, and it put confidence in everyone's hearts to know that the elites weren't superhuman at all, at least not physically, and that meant they probably didn't have divine or even exceptional mental attributes, and that meant—since it was the bowel-dwellers who safeguarded the energy and food production—that the elites were, to quote you from previous tellings, absolutely motherfucking useless.

With respect, you don't need to waste your precious energy on this narrative again, because we all recall the history by now of how the elites tried everything—attempts at poison gas, crude firebombs that didn't have an effect because the walls and floors down here are non-flammable earth and metal, and finally storming the place themselves with that little bit of weaponry they'd had stockpiled for years but forgotten how to use. And plenty of them were slaughtered down here in these very halls, these stairwells, the rooms and alcoves hacked out of the bedrock, and we can still see the maroon-black stains if we shine light on certain areas of the wall or the bottom edges of the cast-iron steps between the fungi farms and the recreations lobby. It's already been well documented, of course, that those elites who weren't killed were taken prisoner, and the prisoners were taken back to the upper levels, and their remaining canned foods, preserved as luxuries, were eaten and shared by the victors in a great feast, and then the tools of the former elites were used to dig out the pain rooms, each pain room next to one of their conception chambers, which reeked of fear and blood and urine, so that there was one pain room for every former conception chamber, and sometimes as they dug them out they came across the mummified bodies of the girls and boys who'd

died at those elitist hands, and sometimes the remains of tiny babies were sealed in the earth there as well, because they preferred killing those accidents rather than let those accidents go on to consume resources. And then those broken POWs were taken into the pain rooms, and tied up, or shackled, or bolted to the walls and floors, and what happened to them after that, as it states precisely in the histories we had to commit to memory, were examples of justice through evil and evil through justice, and those reckonings will not be recorded in respect of the noble aims to which we now aspire.

We appreciate those noble aims you all came up with, grandpa, we do—because look! Things seem a lot better than they did back in those times, don't they? You've said so often yourself. Oh, please don't go on again about how you don't have much time left and you need to be sure we understand. We do, we understand it all. We're making things better. I mean, look at this—I know you're not a fan of scientists because of the whole thing with them not detecting the asteroid and having no effective deterrence options for it—but down in one of the labs on C6-A they've figured out how to synthesize vitamin D from some compound in algae. They think we're going to be able to have supplements available pretty soon. We'll be healthy as ever!

Grandpa, please don't be upset. We won't forget what people had to go through before. The apocalypse sucked, and we're so lucky to have come into this world when we did. We love you and we understand. It's up to us, all of us who get to be here, to remember just how bad it was in the old days. We've got our own challenges now, of course, and new ones will come, but we're going to live and we're going to make you proud. We know our history. We won't ever let you down.

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Originally from Nova Scotia, Canada, Zach MacDonald has lived abroad extensively, working in Japan and South Korea before moving to his current home in Bangkok, Thailand. His work has previously been published in the *Asia Literary Review*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, and *Prometheus Dreaming*. His novel, *Itsuki*, is forthcoming from *Atmosphere Press*.