



Hole

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Published: 2006

Tag(s): "science fiction" fantasy horror psychological drama apocalyptic

When Sully Michaels woke up, the clock on the wall was radiating its message in a shade of brilliant neon green: 8:25 AM. Sully rubbed his eyes and sat up.

"Never get up on time," he muttered to himself. It didn't matter. It was true, but didn't matter. He had no windows to brighten his room and wake him up early. He also had nothing to wake up early for.

Is there a sun left to fill the room, even if there were windows?

It was like this every day.

The room was really two rooms; three, if one counted the latrine. There was the bedroom and a sort of kitchen-living room hybrid. He spent a lot of time in there sitting on the couch-cot. He read a lot and he slept a lot. He hated both. Sully had read every book, magazine, and can label he had; he had slept so much that by now he must've dreamt every dream his mind could produce. And the two familiar rooms (three if you counted the latrine) bored him and he hated them all; and he hated the repetition of every day, the redundancy of even waking up at all.

He had prepared for a good many years, so said Maslow's lower hierarchy. Sully sometimes regretted it now, though. Was it really worth it at this point? He thought he had anticipated it all. People had called him mad, crazy, insane; but he had built this place, this underground shelter anyway. He had always known he'd be right; and even as the bombs hit dirt and made every living thing and every dead thing disappear, he was sitting on his couch-cot reading a book. Things were good, then. Things were Hell now.

And he had planned it all (so he thought): food, shelter, water; probably the last of these in the world that were untouched by radiation. But he never planned for the boredom, the repetition, the sheer loneliness.

If only I had brought someone with me, if only anyone had wanted to come.

He got up and went to the couch-cot and sat down breathing a heavy sigh. He looked at the kitchen part of the room; the cases and cupboards and pantries full of food and water.

Why can't you just run out already?

You could end it all.

No. I put myself here, in this hole.

The radiation kept him from wanting to be on the surface, the loneliness kept him from wanting to be in this room.

He looked back at the clock on the wall.

8:29 AM.

Christ.

It, too, was beginning to betray him. He had no friends in this place.

You could've stayed up on the surface and died with your friends and family instead of dying alone down here.

What's the difference?

One is painless.

What had it been like? One second everything's normal; people have jobs, money is in circulation, kids go to school, everyone buys food and eats breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There is war and crime, but there is also peace and quiet. The next moment there's *nothing*, not even the base creatures placed here by whatever creator one prefers to give credit to.

And what was it like now? Was there ruin and rubble; the frames and skeletons of buildings and playgrounds; a ghost of what once was; or was even *that* reduced to ash left to blow away in the wind, return to the Earth from which it was created, which it was beginning to destroy?

Did it matter?

Sully got up and opened every single can of food he had, and set them all down on the counter. He shut off the heater and then went to the latrine and opened the tank that held his fresh water supply. He urinated into it and then went to a cabinet and took a revolver from it. Then he left the latrine and entered what couldn't be considered a fourth room, but was a small area that he hadn't set foot into in a very, very long time: The elevator that led back to the surface.

I put myself in this hole, I can dig myself back out.

He pressed one of two buttons. Some gears began to rotate and pull some chains and cables, and the elevator went up.

Aren't you a little late to die with your friends?

That's not what this is about.

Sure it isn't.

The elevator reached the top and Sully Michaels stepped out into another cold, metal room. This one housed the generator and the air pump, which Sully shot several times each with his revolver. The slow, steady whirring of the two machines died along with any possibility of ever returning to the hole.

Sully looked up at the valve door in the incredibly low ceiling, reached up, struggled to open it. The valve was difficult to turn because of the rust that had built up over so many months of non-use, but after the first few tantalizing rotations it became easier, and finally there was a click and the door fell down, nearly taking Sully out.

He looked up and saw metal. He hadn't expected that this part of his construction, this small metal shed would withstand the blast. Still, he climbed up through the opening and stood in a tiny metal chamber, and now all that stood between him and the outside world was a door. What was beyond it, outside? Had someone survived, cleaned up the radiation, rebuilt the world? If *he* had seen the attack coming, surely someone else had?

Sully Michaels opened the door and stepped outside. The sun was shining and there was the most beautiful breeze he had ever felt gently whisking about. The rest of the world was a gruesome contusion of its former self. The buildings were now piles of broken rubble, of garbage. But worst of all was the silence.

Nothing had survived.

He looked around, anticipated his next move, half-heartedly hoped to see movement, some sort of sign of life. But there was none. No birds in the sky, no bugs in the air, no people on the streets or in the field where he stood next to the metal shack. Sully thought about the radiation that he was now inhaling. He put the revolver to his head and pulled the trigger.

Click.

Empty like the world.

Aren't you a little late not to die alone?



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