

that if you look closely, the apocalypse is not only often entirely our own fault, but is frequently even depicted as *a good thing*. For everything and everyone except humankind, of course.

Nearly all apocalypse stories serve as a warning: the catastrophe is justly deserved because humanity has been behaving badly towards both itself and the planet. The idea that we've all brought it about on ourselves is most visible, of course, in stories set in the aftermath of a nuclear war, from *Dr Strangelove* to Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Gudrun Pausewang's 1983 novel *The Last Children* depicts the irreconcilable breach that comes about when the children who survive such a war blame their parents for creating a world in which this could happen in the first place.

Nuclear threats are not as omnipresent in post-Cold War fiction, but that doesn't mean that we've run out of ways to bring about our own demise. The rapidly growing genre of 'cli-fi', or climate change fiction, presents worlds with lethal pollution (*WALL-E*), food shortages (Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*), extreme weather (*The Day After Tomorrow*), or water shortages (Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*). Climate change is caused by humans, we should have seen it coming, so everything that happens thanks to our polluting efforts is entirely our fault: cli-fi is meant to warn us before it's too late. Although the genre has grown rapidly in the 21st Century, now that the consequences of global warming are being felt, cli-fi works have been around for much longer: J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, from 1962, presents a world in which the ice caps have melted and London has been claimed by the sea.

But some apocalypse fiction takes this warning a step further. For all other living things, these works warn, it would be extremely beneficial if humanity were to be eradicated.

Take Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, for instance. In the first instalment, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the scientist Crake decides he's had enough of the rampantly consumerist, overpopulated, polluting world he lives in, so he releases a hyper-contagious lethal virus. Meanwhile, he engineers a new species of humanoids, 'Crakers', in which all of the flaws of *Homo sapiens* have been carefully removed. The apocalypse needs to take place in order to create a better world, with Crakers replacing us: a plague wipes away humankind – but humanity itself was the real plague.

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Crake's apocalypse is carefully planned, unlike most fictional apocalypses. Yet an

accidental outbreak can be beneficial for our planet too. In Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, the pandemic that turns humans into vampires is caused by carelessly experimenting scientists – and it turns out that these vampires see themselves as a new, better society, replacing humans, which they see as terrifying adversaries. While we fear vampires that hunt in the night, they fear the humans who slaughter them in the daytime.

Finally, there are the stories in which humans get wiped out by other intelligent beings. Aliens, or artificial intelligence. In these stories, an entity that is more intelligent than humans takes one look at the sorry lot of us, and decides that both the Earth itself and the galaxy as a whole are better off without us. This is the justification Agent Smith gives in *The Matrix* for keeping humans in pods as food for the machines:

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I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed and the only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You're a plague and we are the cure.

Science fiction is based on extrapolation: it takes the society we currently live in, and explores the possible futures such a society may end up in. The fact that lots of contemporary science fiction presents an apocalypse as a good thing for the world around us should give us pause.

HuffPost UK Tech has launched HuffPost-Apocalypse, a project that aims to investigate what an apocalypse would mean for humanity, how we can best delay the end of the world, what the world will look like after we're gone and what the best viable options for survival will be for anyone left. Join in the conversation with #HuffPostApocalypse on Twitter. To read more from the series, visit [our dedicated page](#).

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