

From Deep Within

The scientists and experts were wrong. Humanity's demise will not come as a result of man-induced climate change. Nor will it come in the form of an extinction-level asteroid on a collision course with Earth. Not even man's proclivity for war, power, and greed will precipitate The End. All this time spent pointing fingers, pointing *up*; when the real threat has been brewing deep within Earth's bowels all along.

It started with a tremor near the Long Valley Caldera in California. Followed by an intense quake in New Mexico that created a mammoth sinkhole the size of Manhattan. For the past week, Old Faithful has been continuously spewing unprecedented volumes of boiling, sulphuric acid hundreds of metres into the air, killing all wildlife within a 10-kilometre radius of its geothermal vent.

It's been forty-eight hours since the 90-kilometre wide subterranean chamber of molten rock and gases that sits beneath Yellowstone National Park erupted, sending thousands of cubic kilometres of hot, volcanic ash into the atmosphere. Denver, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City have been completely entombed under lava and man-made debris. Millions of souls annihilated in an instant. An ever-expanding plume of ash has lashed down on North America, burying major cities under a thick blanket of volcanic waste or toxic, acid rain.

We are the fortunate ones, for we have had time to prepare for the impending doom. I've boarded up all our windows, closed off the fireplace vents, stood patiently in Costco's seemingly endless queue to stock up on rations we will need to weather the storm. The umbrella cloud looms over the Atlantic. It will reach our shores by morning.

I try not to think about the last time a super volcano erupted some 75,000 years ago. A quick google-search revealed that the Indonesian mega-eruption triggered a global volcanic winter that lasted ten years and all but wiped out human populations. I can't agonise over the what ifs. I have my family to think about.

'Daddy, why are you making the house so dark?' my little girl asks. She stands beside me as I kneel on the floor, stuffing damp rags under the patio door.

'There's a big storm coming, sweetie,' I say. 'I'm making our house safe.'

'Is the sky going to light up and make a loud noise?'

'It's a different kind of storm, Mia.'

'What kind of storm?'

I sit on the floor and pull Mia onto my lap. 'Do you know what dust looks like?' I ask.

'Mummy sees dust everywhere. But she says no one else can see it. Especially you, daddy.'

I resist the urge to chuckle. 'Well, you'll soon be able to see dust, too, Mia.'

'Cool,' she says, then looks up at me with her expressive, brown eyes. 'If it's sunny the day after this day, can we go to the park and play on the swings?'

I don't have the heart to tell her that today was the last of our sunny days.

'I would love that.'