

# Futures

## Welcome to your post-apocalyptic bunker rental!

A home away from home. By Wendy Nickel



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

**T**hank you for your interest in Guest Bunker Alpha. Nestled in a quiet, isolated region of the Rocky Mountains, this cosy, 600-square-foot underground bunker with premium army cots for up to four guests offers all you need for a relaxing getaway from the stress and chaos of post-apocalyptic life.

Your reservation has been confirmed for Days 184 to 191 Post-Event and your non-refundable pre-payment has been received.

**CHECK-IN:** Encoded instructions to access this location will be transmitted via radio at precisely 01:00 UTC on the day prior to your arrival – unless I forget, in which case, Mary will probably remind me within an hour or so. For your protection, instructions will not be repeated, so we recommend you keep the AM radio frequency and decoding cipher provided

on the back of this page in a waterproof, fire-proof and brimstone-proof container. No refunds for guests missing the transmission (including in the case of a robot or alien apocalypse, where the enemy's advanced technology has blocked the use of radio waves – sorry)!

Check-in time is between 10:00 and 10:10 UTC. For your protection, Guest Bunker Alpha is accessible only via a ten-mile out-and-back route with an elevation gain of approximately 1,000 feet, which has been described as “tough”, “strenuous” and “what the hell did you get me into, Mark?” Vehicles may be parked at the trail head at your own risk; hosts are not responsible for any vandalized, stolen, looted, kaiju-stomped, or otherwise damaged or destroyed vehicles.

For your protection, the route to Bunker Alpha is not maintained and may require bush-whacking through thick undergrowth. Please

plan for extreme weather, pack light, and keep an eye out for poison oak, rattlesnakes, grizzlies and/or zombies. No refunds for guests failing to reach the bunker. And remember, leave no trace!

**RULES:** Mary and I have put a lot into making this rental a secure and comfortable bunker-away-from-bunker for post-apocalyptic survivors, so we ask that you treat it with the same respect as you would your own stronghold.

No smoking. No firearms (knives, machetes or chainsaws OK). As Mary likes to say, “Keep those nasty butts outside!”

In the event of a nuclear holocaust or super-volcano eruption, please decontaminate prior to entering by pressing the green button past the first set of doors. In the event of a Big Freeze, please leave snowshoes outside. If you suspect any of your party of being bitten by a

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zombie, werewolf, vampire or other mutant creature, please leave them outside as well.

Each guest will be provided two Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) per day, made of a variety of nutrient-dense dishes with an average of 1,200 calories per meal. Please let us know if you would prefer a vegetarian option, and we'll pick out the bacon chunks prior to your arrival. Meals also include a moist towelette and a souvenir military spoon.

Those interested in enjoying the 'hot tub' listed in our amenities section can do so by filling the wash basin with water heated on the stove. Those interested in using the 'bath' may do the same.

For your protection, do not build campfires or use flashlights outside after dark, as the light may attract vagrants, scavengers, aliens and/or zombies, and compromise the bunker's security.

Although we encourage you to make full use of our 360-degree periscope to enjoy the majestic scenery around Guest Bunker Alpha, we must advise that exploring beyond the

marked-out 'safe zone' is done at your own risk. For your protection, the perimeter has been secured by trip wires, landmines and other protective means. Subsequently, we also must prohibit any parties, visitors or unregistered guests, as anyone coming or going from the bunker outside the noted check-in or check-out times will be considered a security threat and dealt with accordingly. No refunds for guests who die before the end of their stay!

In the event of an apocalypse involving giant subterranean worms, we make no guarantees regarding the inedibility of our bunker.

**CHECK-OUT INSTRUCTIONS:** Prior to check-out, we ask that you incinerate any waste you've produced, turn off the generator, and give the cots and blankets a good shake-out for the next guests. In the case of a plague, please hit the blue 'UV decontamination' button at the door as you leave.

For your protection, check-out time is strictly enforced. Guests failing to vacate the 20-mile radius by precisely 04:00 UTC may

be incited to do so by our 120-lb Doberman Pinschers, our arsenal of military-grade weapons and/or mustard gas.

We reserve the right to any clothing, food, weapons or other items of value remaining on our property at check-out time. Or before that, if we're running low. Mary says I shouldn't include that in the paperwork, but I say that no one reads these things anyway. Guess we'll see who's right, won't we?

If you have any other questions during your stay, you're welcome to contact Mary and me via Morse code tapped out on the metal pipe on the north side of the bunker, but chances are, any trouble you run into, we'll already know, as we'll be keeping an eye on things from our own secure location nearby.

We look forward to your stay!

**Wendy Nikel** is a speculative-fiction author with a degree in elementary education, a fondness for road trips and a terrible habit of forgetting where she's left her cup of tea. For more info, visit [wendynikel.com](http://wendynikel.com).

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Wendy Nikel reveals the inspiration behind *Welcome to your post-apocalyptic bunker rental!***

A story prompt from my online writing group offered up a challenge: write a story in a format or structure that you've never tried before. I've been at this writing thing for a while now, so finding a story style that I hadn't at least *attempted* before was going to be tricky. It's one of the things that I love about flash fiction; it's uniquely suited to experimentation, unusual formats and finding stories hidden in everyday things.

A few months prior, though, our family had stayed at a vacation rental — a rustic little lakeside cabin in rural Wisconsin. During our visit, we had the 'excitement' of experiencing a tornado watch. Husband and I had both been raised in the Midwest, so this was nothing new to us, but it did require a phone call to the property owners to gain access to the dark and spider-infested crawl space underneath the cabin, just in case that tornado watch turned into a tornado warning.

This experience became the spark for this flash story, which is written in the format of a vacation rental agreement. Initially, it'd started out with a normal rental property, outlining the 'what-ifs' of various natural disasters, but as stories often do, it soon morphed into something a little more... *unique*.

