Comic Anthology: “Life Finds a Way”

Concept: Post-Post-Apocalyptic Slice of Life.

Theme: Hope in Progress

Sub Themes: adaptability, perseverance paid off, a-new-normal, living for the next generation, a new prosperity being discovered, a positive turning point.

**This is a style guide for creators of the Life Finds a Way anthology, a reminder of what the editors are looking for as well as an extended exploration of both theme and sub-genre.**
Part of the fascination in post-apocalypse is the process of survival itself: that life can be cheap, that sacrifices are demanded, and that hard decisions must be made. From this we get drama that creates tension and makes for gripping stories. The emphasis on many of these stories are the survival(or failure to survive) of the individual or a small group of individuals, what about the stories of people rather than persons? Humanity is social by nature, we build communities, we want to move forward and progress, why do we need to leave the story at the individual level?

Theme
Life Finds a Way is a comic anthology of the post-apocalyptic genre. Unlike most explorations of the post-apocalyptic genre our focus is *not* on gritty realism and the tragic misanthropy of society devolving under stress. We want to tell stories of what happens after the dust settles, the wounds have healed into scars, and people have to pick up the pieces because the alternative wasn’t acceptable to anyone left. Rather than sticking to a specific idea of how the world ends the point of Life Finds a Way is to focus on what happens significantly after the Apocalypse. The idea of not merely post-apocalypse but post-dystopian, that society has gotten out of the worst of its growing pains. This is why the theme of Life Finds a Way is “Hope in Progress”.

Communities will gather, societies can be rebuilt, and the human nature to find a way to survive and thrive by meeting the challenges offered. These stories are about what life is like when humans feel like they can put down roots again, not living season to season or year to year but thinking of what they are creating for the next generation. These are stories about adaptation, about making progress in your situation, about hope justified by outcome.

If hope is a flame that must be tended it has not died out, it may have calmed to embers, but the people in your story have fed it, protected it, and it is growing stronger and brighter. It’s not to say that everything is easy, but that progress can be felt if only in the smallest way, and people have the feeling that some worthwhile end is only a matter of time and dedication. These stories have a core of optimism built into their framework, because for you characters, tomorrow is full of promise.

Narrative Guidelines
For the purposes of this anthology we are using the word “apocalypse” with the following definition: “an apocalypse is a calamitous disaster that has affected most of humanity in such a way that life before the apocalypse is dramatically different from life afterwards.” We would prefer that the setting of your story have a time-frame of at least a generation since the apocalypse, but the editors choose to leave the details to the creators so long as they are following our theme.

In your story we want the answer to two questions:
A) What apocalypse happened to the world?
B) What has humanity done under the circumstance to find a way to thrive?
This is a challenge to our creators because we are not (overly) limiting the form or means that the world might end. A supernatural cause is as worthy as a scientific cause, we have a list of ideas the anthology editors came up below, but we encourage creators to come up with their own unique circumstances.

Stories for Life Finds a Way are best done either *in medias res* or slice-of-life, we want an emphasis on humanity and how it has changed. Because the stories are short, world building has to take a back seat to the narrative of the story. We encourage you to show rather than tell the reader how the world has changed, have the “normal day” for the characters speak for itself, exposition should be avoided whenever possible.  The story should show what life is like for the characters and clearly show how different things are from the life that the readers find familiar.
-How has technology changed, have new technologies been developed?
-Has physics changed, have any fundamental laws of the universe been adjusted?
-How has culture changed given such developments, what if any cultural aspects would the readers recognize from their everyday lives that has continued to your story?
These questions should be answered through your story and be a direct result of the apocalypse you have chosen.

One last thing.
These stories are intended to be comforting for the audience, a reminder that the themes presented are both contemporary and identifiable. Though elements of struggle, sacrifice, and hard choices may still be used we want the story to stick with the theme of hope and demonstrate that even if life is difficult progress can be felt and there is reason to hope for tomorrow.

Things We Do Not Want For This Anthology
Because we are giving less restrictions on the setting of our stories we have compiled a list of things that we both do not want and will not accept in our anthology, included with each undesirable element is our explanation.

**Clichés:**
A cliché is a cliché because it’s expected and it’s boring. You don’t have pages and pages to outline, subvert, and dissect a cliché, so please avoid them.

**Anything Pointlessly Grimdark:**
Grimdark: Adj.: “a subgenre or a way to describe the tone, style or setting of speculative fiction that is especially dystopian, amoral or violent.”
Yes, the world ended, but that was some time ago and as bad as it was the setting has moved past that. While we are willing to examine ideas more inherent to the darker parts of the fantasy and science fiction genres, humanity has to have found a way to cope. Bad things can still be around and terrifying monsters can still be out there, but the point of your story should be that humanity is finding ways to effectively deal with this. The theme of the anthology is hope after all. Exploring being the “one growing light in a sea of darkness”, is a valid way to do this.

**Romero/Walking Dead Zombies:**
We get it, Zombie Apocalypse stuff is popular and often people like it. However, mindless flesh-eating zombies are a cliché now, and as previously said we are avoiding clichés.  Sentient and aware rotting undead however are more than acceptable, but keep things realistic given the subject matter, this circumstance would require radical changes to culture and we want to see those changes. How have people adapted, could they find a way to make the dead useful? What does it mean if people don’t die in any meaningful way?

**Keep it Tasteful:**
Yes, the world won’t suddenly set fire to itself if various genitalia show up on a page or if you have a particularly visceral combat scene. But does it serve a greater purpose to the story or is it just shocking? If the answer is the latter we aren’t interested. Furthermore, despite the fact that “apocalypse” comes from a religious idea and many religions have beliefs in “The End of the World” or “Judgement Day” if you are using religious ideas in your story please be respectful to the beliefs of the people who hold them.

**No Xenophobic Allegories:**
It could be said “it is a cliché” and left at that. However, it has to made clear that this is not something we want in our stories. It has been done, it is hard to do well in a manner that isn’t hurtful, and it’s easier to say “no” than try to make them work for the anthology.

**Fan-Fics, Fan Arts, Pastiches or Obvious Rip-Offs:**
We want your own original IP.

Okay, now that we’ve gotten all the negativity out of the way, the editors have come up with some ideas for our creators to springboard into some creative ideas.

Apocalypse Examples:
-Nuclear/Biological/Chemical Fallout (Massive population die off with a hazardous environment left behind, what is left and how have people found ways of surviving?)
-Grey Ooze (Global Nanobot rampage, everything solid that touches the ooze is broken down into base components. Have we taken to the skies? Have we taken to the seas? Have we found a way to keep the nanobots under limited control?)
-Magical Awakening (Magic is real, but there are rules that people can work with. How has society changed, how long did it take for people to learn the rules?)
-The Gods Come Back (Pantheons are pissed! This might mean that their associated critters came back with them, can we travel the globe with Krakens, harpies, and various monsters?)
-The Ruinstorm (Weather on earth got so violent it reshaped the planet, how are we surviving?)
-Doomsday(Demons invade the earth, how did we cope, how do we fight back, how are we managing the world as it has become?)
-Mass Mutations (90% of humanity became unrecognizable within a generation, how have people coped?)
-Loss of water/Rising Waters (We’ve become Dune or Water World. How has society changed, can we reverse the climate change?)
-”Attack of the Mushrooms” (B-Movie end of the world: are people living in giant hollowed out mushrooms? Did Dinosaurs come back from the center of the earth? Did large boxy robots with death beams war against us?)
-Aliens “Attacked” (Alien Invasion? Alien Colonization? Alien Migration? Alien Exodus? Where are we now, how has co-existence changed us?)

These are examples, creators are not limited to these options, only our guidelines. Our editors are excited at the idea of seeing your original ideas and your stories, so please don’t disappoint them.