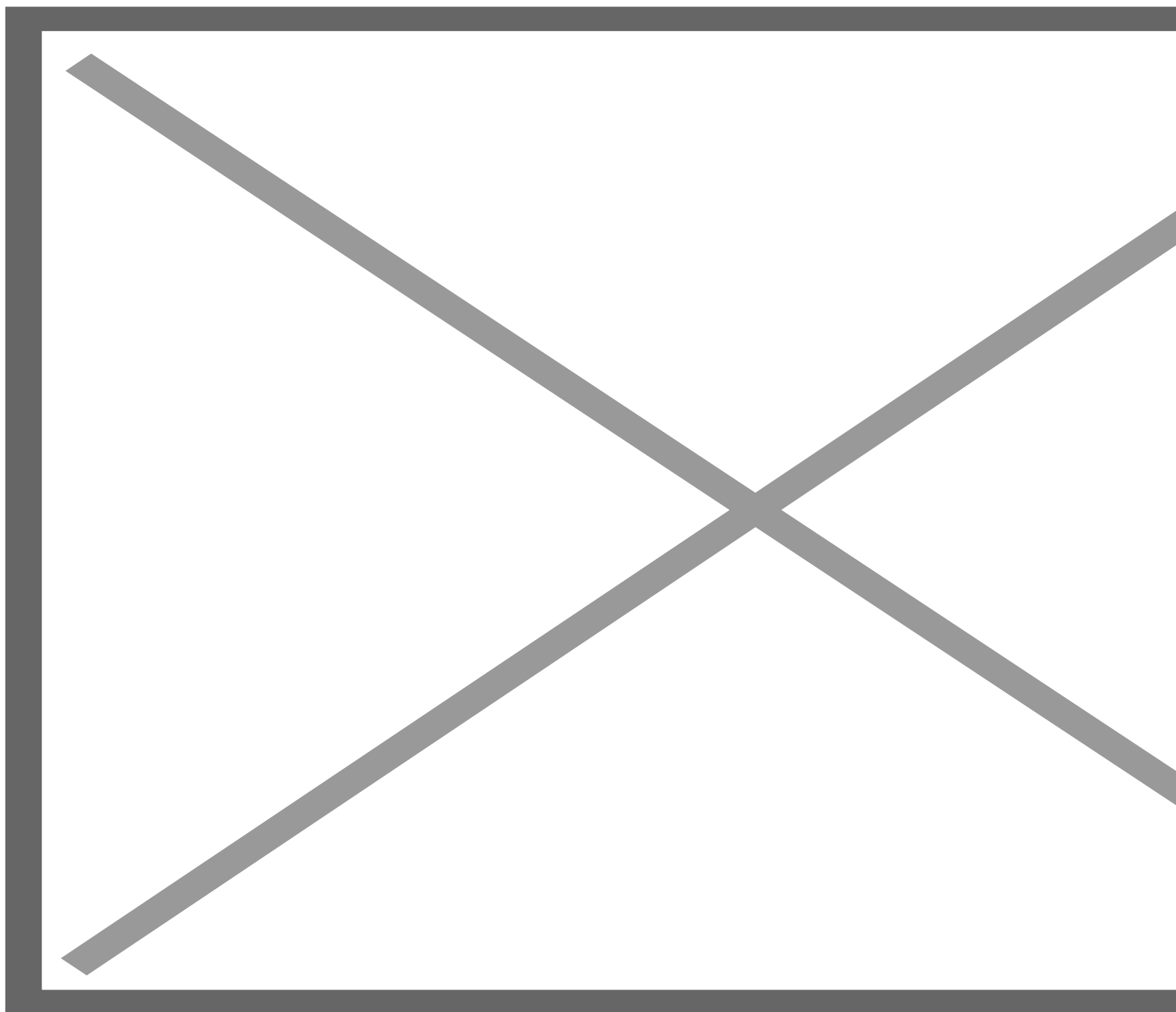


# Underground apocalypse

**In three current series—*Paradise*, *Silo*, and *Fallout*—bunkers owned by billionaires dictate the options for post-apocalyptic existence.**

by [Kathryn Reklis](#) in the [July 2026](#) issue  
Published on May 27, 2026



Left to right: Sterling K. Brown in *Paradise*, Rebecca Ferguson in *Silo*, and Ella Purnell in *Fallout* (Courtesy of Disney / Brian Roedel; courtesy of AppleTV+; courtesy of Prime Video)

Apocalypse bunkers are back in style like it's the late 1960s. If he can't get to Mars in time, Elon Musk has hedged his bets with designs for a "cyberbunker" prototype and has referred to his personal plans for an "apocalypse resort." Other tech bros like Mark Zuckerberg have reportedly spent hundreds of millions of dollars building underground homes with their own water and food supplies.

Pop culture has a lot to say about underground apocalyptic fantasies. Spoiler alert: They're not all they're cracked up to be. Three of the most popular television shows streaming right now take place in or around bunkers built to safeguard a tiny sliver of the world's population from civilizational collapse.

*Paradise* (created by Dan Fogelman, streaming on Hulu) imagines an idyllic suburban town replete with a cozy main street and central green space. Everyone lives in comfortable middle-class homes decorated in Pottery Barn neutrals. The ducks might be mechanical, and the cheese fries are actually smothered in a vegan cheese substitute, but these are small prices to pay to live among the presumed last 25,000 people on earth, hundreds of feet under the Colorado mountains.

It takes less than one episode to realize there is trouble in this paradise: The president has been murdered, and his top security agent, Xavier Collins (Sterling K. Brown), is determined to figure out who killed him and why. His investigation starts to reveal all manner of secrets and shenanigans, and soon the very purpose of the bunker is called into question. Although the show is predicated on farfetched technology that only gets more outlandish by the end of the second season—with hints of quantum physics, artificial intelligence, and wrinkles in the space-time continuum—*Paradise* is not a particularly philosophical show. It is a political thriller, with a lot of family drama, that just happens to be set underground.

The same might be said of *Silo* (created by Graham Yost, streaming on Apple TV). The action of the show takes place as the residents of the silo—a massive, vertical bunker that extends more than a mile underground—prepare to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the end of the rebellion, a shadowy act when a group of silo dwellers attempted to escape. At the close of the rebellion, all records of the past were destroyed and all knowledge about the silo itself faded from human memory. The current residents have no idea why they live underground or who first created the massive structure that keeps them safe. Their only knowledge of the outside world is one surveillance camera they can watch anytime a resident is sent outside as punishment and inevitably dies in the poisoned air. The drama is basically a class conflict between those who trust the powers that be (the ruling classes, who live on the higher levels) and those who thirst after a truth they are convinced is being hidden from them (largely the mechanical classes, who live at the literal and metaphorical bottom).

*Fallout* (created by Geneva Robertson-Dworet and Graham Wagner, streaming on Amazon) also starts in a bunker, or what the show calls a vault: a planned underground community created during an alternate version of the 1960s, before something like the Cuban Missile Crisis ended badly. Several hundred years later, the residents of Vaults 31, 32, and 33 live in relative peace and happiness, raised to believe that they are keeping the last seeds of decency and democracy alive, waiting to repopulate the earth. When a group of raiders destroys their peace and kidnaps their overseer, Hank (Kyle MacLachlan), his daughter Lucy (Ella Purnell) travels to the surface to rescue him. Before long she teams up with a radioactive ghoul who has survived all the way since the before times (Walton Goggins). Like the video game on which the show is based, Lucy and the ghoul stumble through various neighborhoods, like video game levels, encountering a wide range of strange, violent, hopeful, and bleak possibilities that populate the postapocalyptic landscape, with occasional flashbacks to the ghoul's previous life as Hollywood cowboy Cooper Howard.

Your preference for one of these shows over another might depend on your preference for glossy prime-time drama (*Paradise*), bleak class struggle (*Silo*), or technicolor video game violence (*Fallout*). Or it might come down to your hope that the billionaire class has our best interests at heart. For all their different premises and

styles, perhaps the most realistic thing they share is the fact that the bunkers in each case are built by billionaires.

In *Paradise*, tech billionaire Samantha Redmond (Julianne Nicholson) is both the visionary who built the bunker and the shadowy leader behind the face of presidential power. Whether or not we trust her intentions will guide how we interpret everything else that happens. So too for the original founders of the silo, whose intentions are so obfuscated by historical amnesia that the current residents are left trusting interpretations of events they no longer understand, left by people who are long dead. In both cases, whether the billionaire founders can be trusted is at least an open question. Not so in *Fallout*, where the billionaires are egotistical profiteers who are convinced that they should be allowed to experiment with the very future of the human species. For all its outlandish cartoon violence and video game landscapes, this feels like the most realistic option of the three.

All these shows are asking questions about who has the power to make decisions for other people, under what conditions people will give up certain kinds of freedom, and whether ordinary people can be trusted with the truth about the dangers they face and the future that might be possible. As the options for our pre-apocalyptic civilization are increasingly closed in by the whims and wishes of billionaires, it is not much of a stretch to imagine they will dictate our options for apocalypse as well. But the moral of these stories is always the same: Escape the bunker if you can.