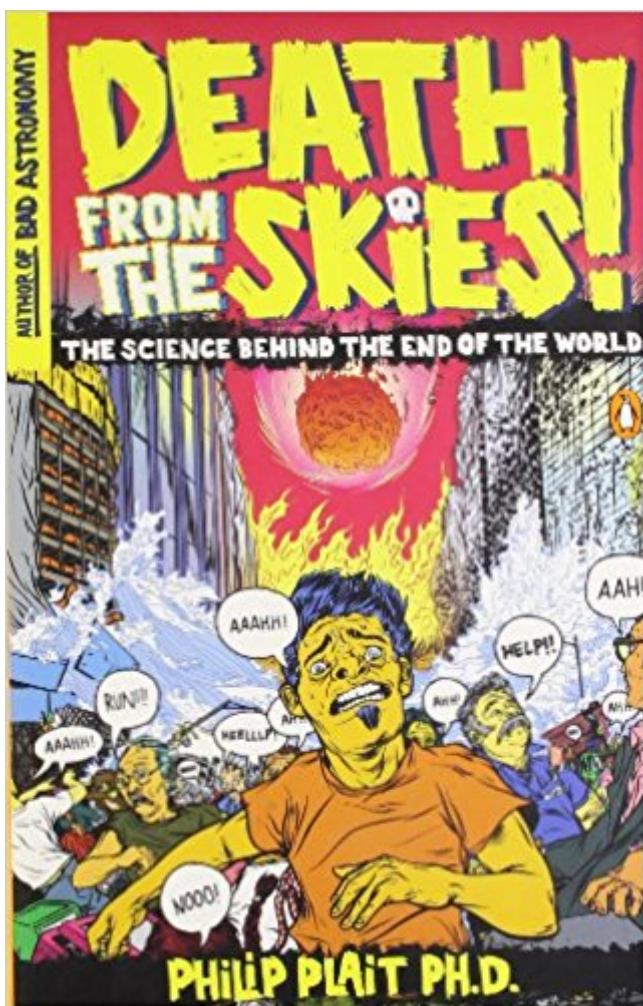


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Death From The Skies!: The Science Behind The End Of The World



Synopsis

With wit, humor, and an infectious love of astronomy that could win over even the science-phobic, this fun and fascinating book reminds us that outer space is anything but remote. The scientist behind the popular website badastronomy.com, Philip Plait presents some of the most fearsome end-of-the-world calamities (for instance, incoming asteroids and planet-swallowing black holes), demystifies the scientific principles at work behind them, and gives us the odds that any of them will step out of the realm of sci-fi to disrupt our quiet corner of the cosmos. The result is a book that is both terrifying and entertaining?a tour of the violent universe we live in, written with an enthusiasm that every stargazer will appreciate.

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Customer Reviews

Plait, an astronomer and author of the popular Web site badastronomy.com, presents in loving detail the many, many ways the human race could die, from temperature extremes and poisonous atmosphere to asteroid impacts and supernovae explosions. Such a state of destruction existed some 65 million years ago, when a giant meteoroid struck Earth, sending up so much flaming debris that the whole planet caught fire and the dinosaurs were wiped out. Solar flare activity could bring on another Ice Age. Worse yet would be a gamma ray burster, a collapsed star whose radiation would be comparable to detonating a one-megaton nuclear bomb over every square mile of the planet. Plait discusses insatiable black holes, the death of the Sun and cannibal galaxiesâ "including our own. Balancing his doomsday scenarios with enthusiastic and clear explanations of the science

behind each, Plait offers a surprisingly educational and enjoyable astronomical horror show, including a table listing the extremely low odds of each event occurring. He gives readers a good scare, and then puts it in context. Illus. (Oct. 20) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Fans of disaster-from-space movies such as *Deep Impact* or *Armageddon*, or of science-fiction novels like Lucifer's Hammer, will definitely want to check out this lively yet also rather scary book by a noted astronomer and creator of the clever Web site badastronomy.com. The book is basically a catalogue of astronomical catastrophes that could wipe out life on earth: asteroids, comets, supernovae, black holes, aliens, even our friendly sun. According to Plait, it is virtually inevitable that something will happen, perhaps not in the not-so-distant future, to kill us all. "don't forget, it's already happened once, 65 million years ago (remember the dinosaurs?), and there have been several recent near misses. The thing to do is stop worrying about inevitabilities and start planning for them: find ways, for example, to turn asteroids off course before they hit us. The book is extremely informative: Plait explains not only what can destroy the planet but also how it would happen. It's a crash course in astronomy as well as a cautionary tale about the (possibly brief) future of our world. --David Pitt --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

After reading and enjoying Plait's previous book "Bad Astronomy" I was naturally encouraged to give his next book a try. "Death from the Skies!" had an intriguing and irresistible premise and I was quickly hooked. The book details the many ways that civilization, humanity, all life, and indeed the very planet itself could be destroyed by astronomical events from asteroid or comet impacts to the end of the universe itself. Each chapter is introduced by a short fictional vignette which brings catastrophe down to a personal level. As interesting as the premise was the real value of the book turned out to be the education provided. My personal astronomical knowledge had become quite dated over the past few decades. Plait's book was a great way to be brought up to date and left me seeking out more detailed works. Plait's style of writing probably won't be to every taste but I found it engaging and inviting. The clever footnotes dealt out humor, irony, sarcasm, and much else in rapid succession. The Kindle edition was well formatted and everything worked well. A curious feature was that the captions to the illustrations were rendered as text instead of being part of the graphic which made them searchable. The major flaw was the entirely useless "index" with page numbers completely omitted even though this edition tracked the print page numbers. Indices are somewhat

redundant with searchable text but if included they should be useable. The appendix of nearby supernova candidates (in graphic format) is also too small for easy reading. The epilogue has a table in it which can best be read by reducing font size. Highly recommended. I look forward to Plait's future books.

One of the best books I have found on how the world - or at least the human race - might come to an end due to extraterrestrial causes. Plait doesn't give much space to the most likely hazards, asteroid or comet impacts, which have been thoroughly covered by other writers, and which he believes we can protect ourselves against with foreseeable technology. He gives more space to some things which theoretically could happen, but almost certainly won't, such as supernovas. (They aren't a significant danger, because only certain types of stars can become supernovas, and none of those are close enough to do us any harm.) He describes solar flares, which could wreck our electronics and cause untold misery, but wouldn't kill us off. About half of the book deals with how the world most certainly will end - billions of years from now. I found that very interesting, but for some reason it didn't keep me awake at night. He gives lengthy explanations of the science behind the possible events he describes, which I found fascinating but might bore some people who just want an overview.

This is an entertaining book from start to finish. The writing style is both entertaining and fun. What may not be apparent from the title is how much you can learn from reading this book. The author explains the physics of the universe, stars and planets very clearly and in a plain language. I learned a lot from reading this book. The universe is indeed a hostile place. It is amazing how well the Earth is designed for life including the placement within the galaxy, position within the solar system, the type of sun, elemental composition, protective magnetic field and many other features. We truly live on a privileged planet.

I like Phillip Plait, and usually find his talks quite informative and entertaining, but this book was a bit of a slog. Despite its interesting topics, the material within it is quite technical and specific, but sadly not original. This is not the fault Phillip Plait at all, it's just an observation from someone whose followed read and researched a fair amount on the subject presented within the book. If you're looking for a comprehensive, yet easy to follow, explanation as to how supernovae, black holes, meteoroids, and such can destroy the earth, this is a great book to buy. If you're looking for the cliff-note versions of these same topics, watch Phillip Plait's PBS Crash Course videos on YouTube.

He covers most of these topics and more, plus his videos have pretty graphics. I gave it 4 stars not because I found the book lacking, but because it was a bit of a chore to read.

Exciting, even though it is all true, it reads like a novel which makes it all the more exciting!! It is about all the things that can happen from the skies that could do earth in. The section on comets and asteroids alone made the book worth it. Dr. Plait does not write it as a scare tactic, and tells you the odds, often quite low, of this actually happening. For example, there are virtually invisible rogue black hole drifting around the universe. If one of them drifted into our solar system, we would be sucked into it, good-bye earth. The style is to address each of these potential disasters, in a new chapter, as if you were going about your life as this disaster started. What would you first notice? What would happen next? Would you have any warning? All of this is embedded in the history of science and scientific education. Really an exciting and VERY informative read.

Few science books I have ever read have been this entertaining, this informative and this thought provoking. I very much enjoyed the discussions of various disasters and stellar events, to the point where I find myself re-reading them over and over. The highlight for me is the creation of a supernova. Mr. Plait's description is so evocative that I can visualize the core collapsing below my feet. I also found the other chapters informative and fun including the discussion of hypernovas and supermassive black holes. His final chapter on the death of the universe is surprisingly moving and deeply philosophical.

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