

TechNews

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McCormick Tribune Campus Center
Room 221
3201 South State Street
Chicago, Illinois 60616

E-mail: editor@technewsiit.com
Website: http://www.technewsiit.com

TechNews STAFF

Editor-in-Chief	Ryan Kamphuis
Assistant Editor	Hannah Larson
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ILLINOIS INSTITUTE
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Apocalypse feasible, not imminent

By Shreeyeh Rajan

OPINION EDITOR

Is the world going end on December 21st 2012? Should I stop making plans for my birthday? You're probably thinking why write an article about this when Google gets you around 1,980,000,000 results. I wanted to know whether or not this was scientifically true, so I attended Dr. Phil Plait's lecture "Death from the Skies!" Would we all die because of an asteroid hitting planet Earth? Dr. Plait explained how even though there have been incidents where asteroids have damaged the planet before, NASA scientists have come up with an innovative plan to stop asteroids from colliding with the Earth. Before, every scientist, physicist, and astronomer thought of different ways to break the asteroid into pieces before it touched the planet. But realizing that it's far too dangerous and risky, NASA scientists have come up with a better plan called the "Gravity Tug." In simple words, the plan is to move the direction of the asteroid's path with the help of a rocket, thus missing the keyhole. What's a keyhole? Wikipedia states that, "A gravitational keyhole is a tiny region of space where a planet's gravity would alter the orbit of a passing asteroid such that the asteroid would collide with that planet on a given future orbital pass." For example, the asteroid named 99942 Apophis has

a small probability of striking Earth in 2029. But if it passes through the gravitational keyhole, we may be able to escape it in the short-term. But studies show that it may strike Earth in 2036.

What about comets? Where do we get more information about this? Well, according to Dr. Plait, never search for information about astronomy in Hollywood!

In a very amusing way, he spoke about the scientific inaccuracies featured in a 1998 science fiction movie named *Armageddon*. For instance, in the film, the NASA director claims that the asteroid, which was the size of Texas, was "knocked out of the asteroid belt by a comet." First of all, the biggest asteroid named Ceres ever found was 900

film, especially the film 2012.

To sum up what Dr. Plait said, even though there have been numerous scary astronomic events occurring through the centuries, NASA have come up with better space programs to combat any external object impacting our planet Earth.

Now for the popular asked question, will the world end in 2012? Why do the Mayans say that the world is going to end on December 21st 2012? According to NASA, the Mayans calendar doesn't continue after December 21st like how our calendar doesn't continue after December 31st. But just how our calendar starts a new year after December 31st, the Mayans calendar does after December 21st.

So, if the world really isn't going to end in 2012, then who came up with this threat? Recollecting the answer that NASA answered for the question "What is the origin of the prediction that the world will end in 2012?" NASA replied, "The story started with claims that Nibiru, a supposed planet discovered by the Sumerians, is headed toward Earth. This catastrophe was initially predicted for May 2003, but when nothing happened the doomsday date was moved forward to December 2012. Then these two fables were linked to the end of one of the cycles in the ancient Mayan calendar at the winter solstice in 2012 -- hence the predicted doomsday date of December 21, 2012."

I guess there isn't much to worry about now. We can all carry on with our family, jobs, education, relationships and so on. No necessity to start writing up a bucket list for the year 2012. So, to summarize this whole article, I'd like to point out a sentence that Dr. Plait wrote in his book *Death from the Skies!*, "Most of the Universe is lethal, but our little section of it is pretty cozy."

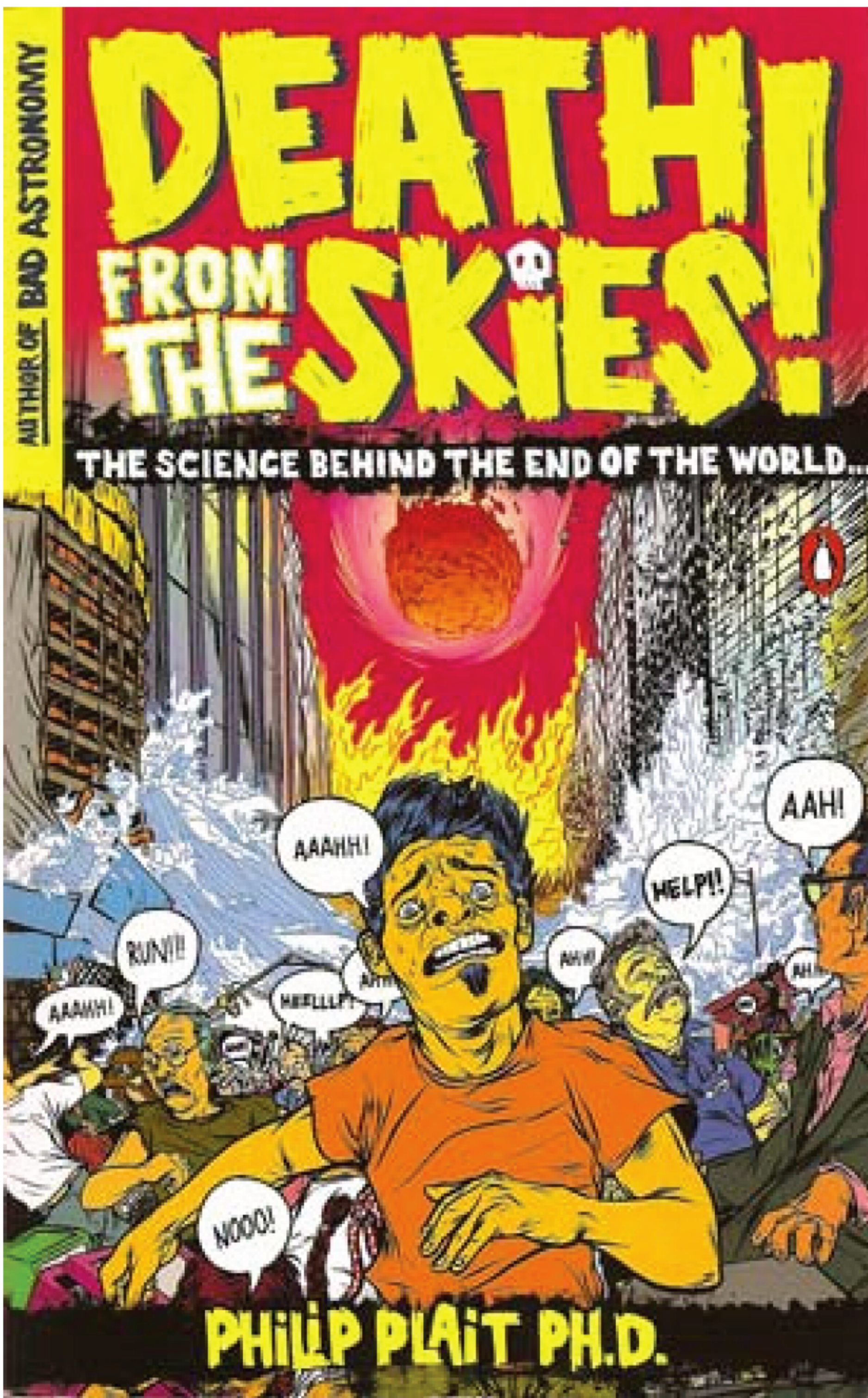


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