

# **Spaceship Earth in a Violent Universe**

## **Apocalyptic Scenarios in Science Television Documentaries**

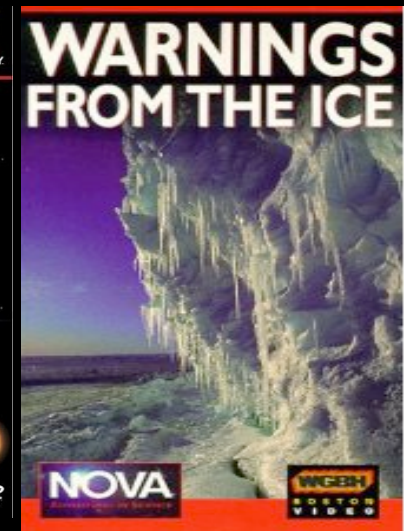
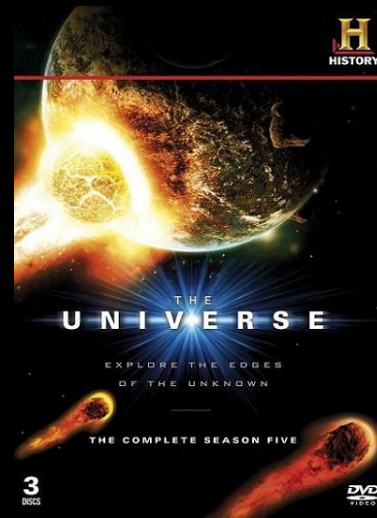
Genevieve Gillespie

Temple University



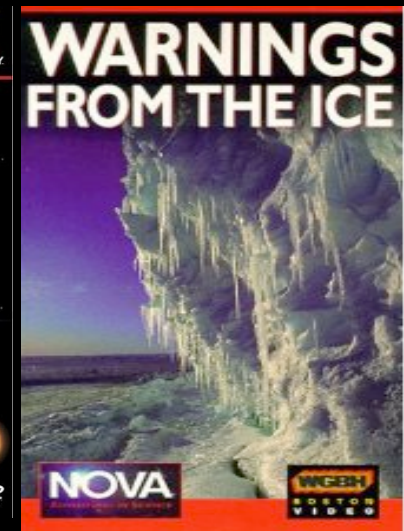
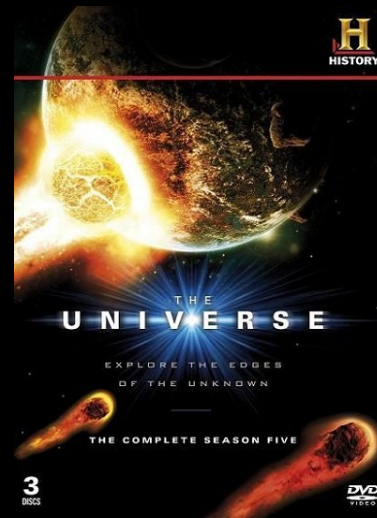
# Science TV and the Apocalypse

- History Channel
  - *The Universe*
  - *Comets: Prophets of Doom*
- PBS *Nova*
  - *Warnings from the Ice*
  - *Terror in Space*



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- Weather Channel
  - *Weathering Disaster*
  - *It Could Happen Tomorrow*
- Science Channel
  - *Raging Planet*
  - *Exodus Earth*



# Science TV Apocalypses

DOCUMENTARY SERIES	APOCALYPSES ON SPACESHIP EARTH	EXAMPLE EPISODES
<i>The Universe</i> , The History Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red dwarf</li> <li>• Supernova</li> <li>• Black hole</li> <li>• Galaxy collision</li> <li>• Gamma rays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Asteroid Attack”</li> <li>• “Cosmic Apocalypse”</li> <li>• “10 Ways to Destroy Earth”</li> <li>• “Stopping Armageddon”</li> <li>• “Deadly Comets and Meteors”</li> </ul>

# *The Universe: The History Channel*

- **Death by stars**
  - Season 2: “Supernova”
  - Season 1: “The End of the Earth: Deep Space Threats to Our Planet”
- **Death by collision**
  - Season 2: “Cosmic Collisions”
  - Season 4: “Ten Ways to Destroy Earth”
- **Death by universal annihilation**
  - Big Rip, Big Crunch, Big Chill theories
  - Season 2: “Cosmic Apocalypse”
  - “The End of the Earth”





# Typical Apocalyptic Quotes

- “Everything that we know, time, space, and matter are doomed.”
- “Armageddon inferno” or an “icy executioner.”
- “Here comes the cosmic apocalypse!”
  - Narrator, “Cosmic Apocalypse”



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- Narrator, “Cosmic Apocalypse”

- “Any life that depends on sunlight will rapidly go extinct.”

- Neil deGrasse Tyson



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<i>Nova</i> , PBS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supernovas</li> <li>• Dimming of Sun</li> <li>• Black holes</li> <li>• Giant wave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Doomsday Asteroid”</li> <li>• “Terror in Space”</li> <li>• “Death Star”</li> <li>• “Storm that Drown a City”</li> </ul>
<i>It Could Happen Tomorrow</i> , The Weather Channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flash floods</li> <li>• Tornados</li> <li>• Hurricanes</li> <li>• Earthquakes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Hawaii Tsunami”</li> <li>• “Tampa Hurricane”</li> <li>• “Texas Wildfire”</li> </ul>

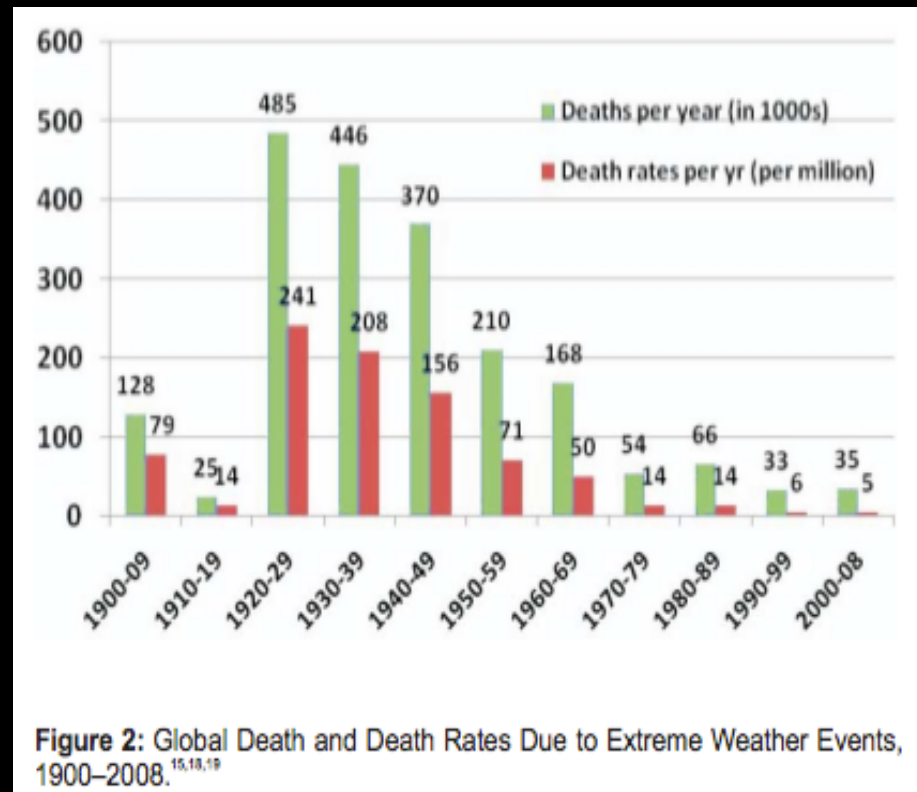


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- 41% of Americans would rather save for a catastrophe than invest in a 401k.
- America ranks 23rd in science education.
  - among industrial nations
  - Source: OECD, 2009.

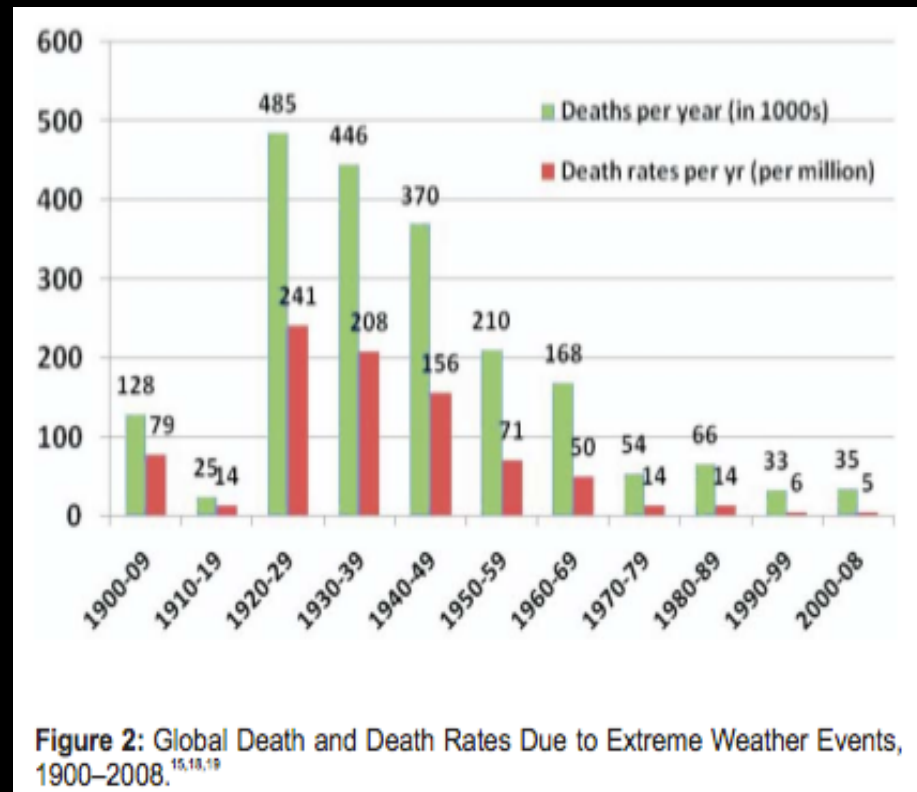
# Regarding Natural Disasters

- Cyclone activity is at an all time low.
- Earthquake rates are recorded as normal.
- Deaths due to:
  - Natural disasters is 0.06%
    - Not among the top 30 killers.



# Regarding Natural Disasters

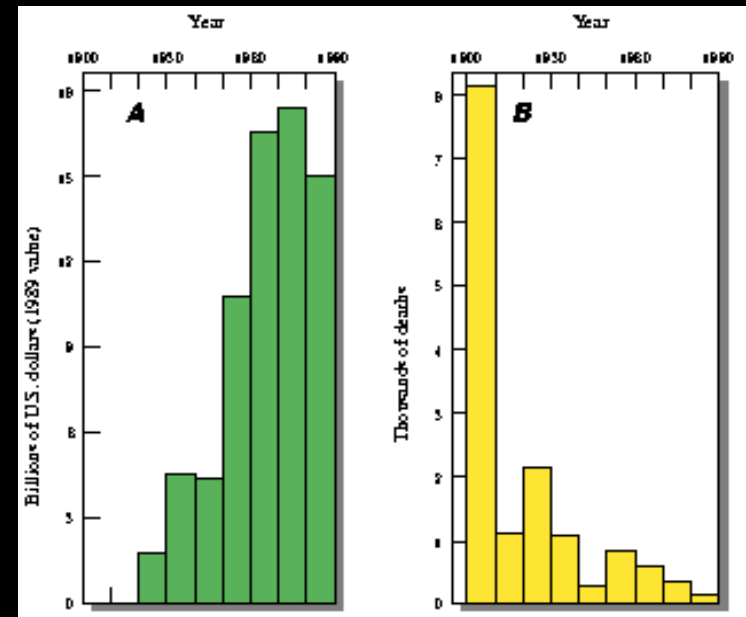
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- Earthquake rates are recorded as normal.
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  - Cardiovascular disease is 29% of global deaths.
    - **#1 killer on Earth.**



# Property Losses and Deaths Due to Natural Disasters: 1900-1990

- Property loss

Increased exponentially during 20th century.



Barton, Chris. "USGS Fact Sheet: Natural Disasters: Forecasting Economic and Life Losses." *Welcome to the USGS - U.S. Geological Survey*. 1997.



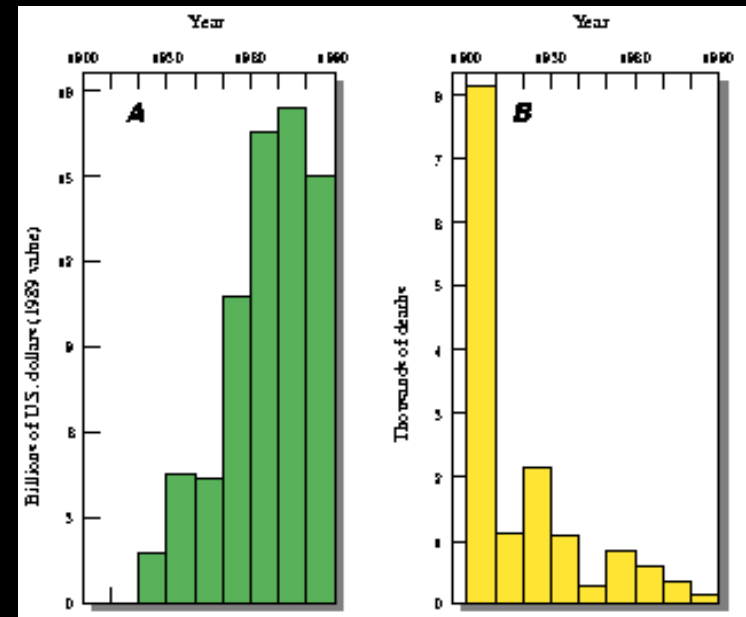
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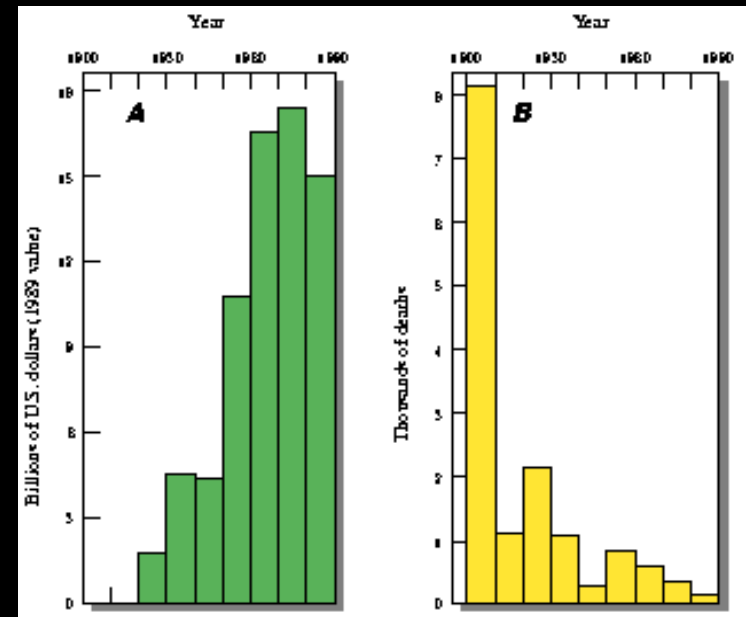
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- Why?

More urban development, more intersection with natural disasters.

Better seismic technology.

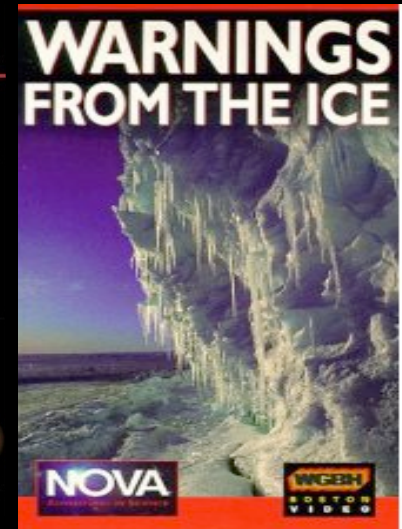
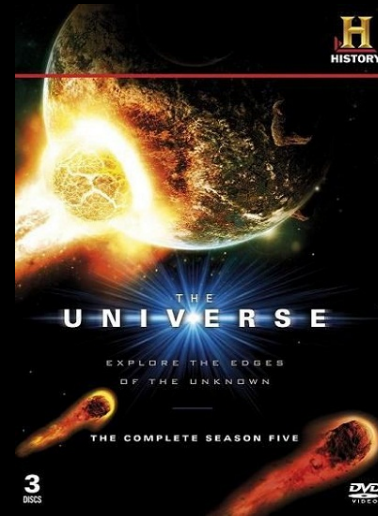
More global communication.



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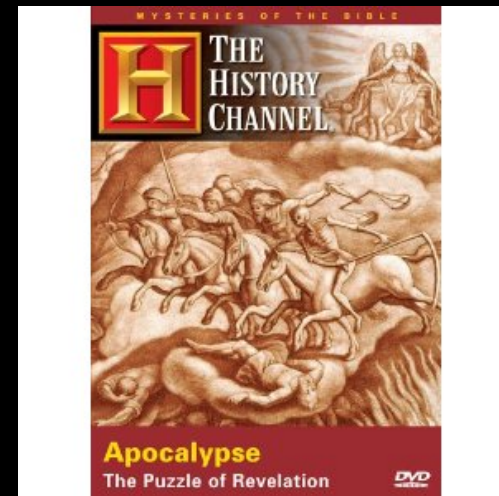
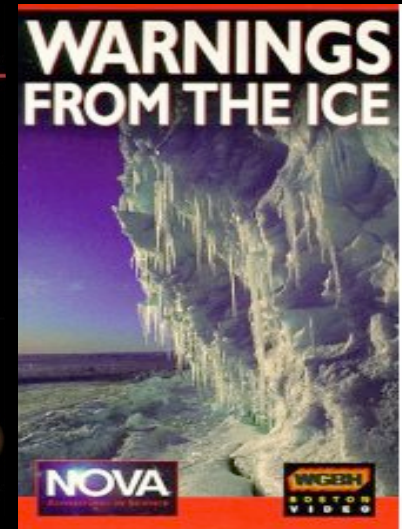
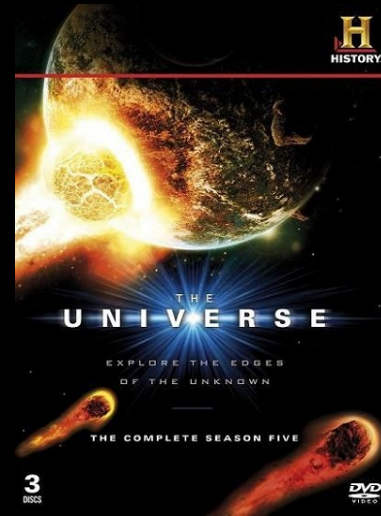
# Why So Many Apocalypses?

- Science:
  - Apocalypse due to probabilities.
  - Laws of universe.
  - No salvation.



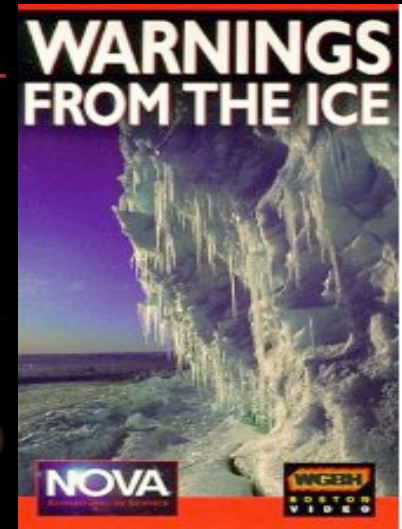
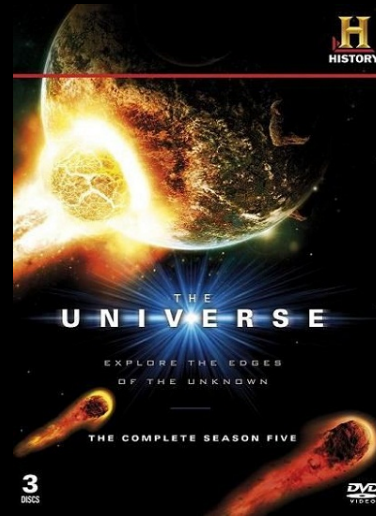
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  - Laws of universe.
  - No salvation.
- Theology:
  - Apocalypse due to prophecy.
  - Law of creator of universe.
  - Salvation: Eternity after apocalypse.



# Why So Many Apocalypses?

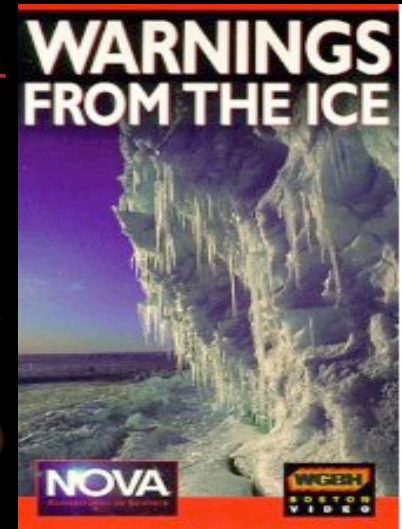
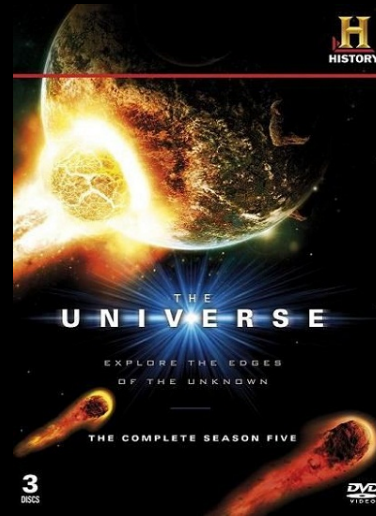
- Humans delight in imagining the end of the world?
- We want to see an end to the universe to mirror (or amend) our deaths?





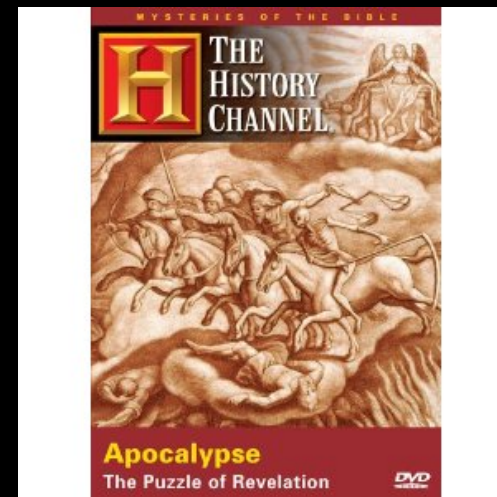
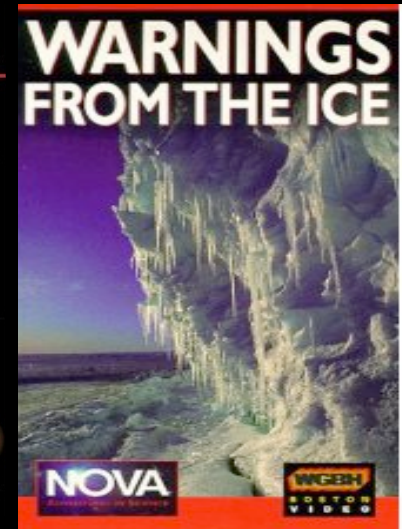
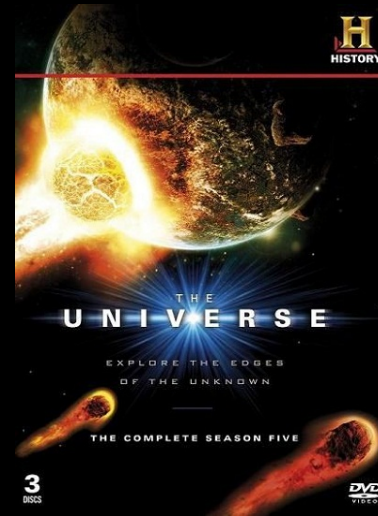
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  - ... a vast universe beyond most people's comprehension.
  - ... the future.



# Why So Many Apocalypses?

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- Proliferating apocalypses reflect our fears toward ...
  - ... a vast universe beyond most people's comprehension.
  - So we imagine a “future” in which we have a secure destiny?



# Is there a hidden message?

- All of these scenarios are possible, but:
- Does the impending apocalypse mean dystopian destruction or utopian redemption, and how are local and global communities envisioning themselves within these end-of-the-world narratives?
- Do these theories reflect the dissolution of humanity on a planet in an impersonal and potentially dangerous universe?
- What do these scenarios say about our ability to imagine a future for community and civilization?

