

1

00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:16,877

This series presents information based in part on theory and conjecture.

2

00:00:16,877 --> 00:00:21,398

The producer's purpose is to suggest some possible explanations but not necessarily

3

00:00:21,398 --> 00:00:27,039

the only ones to the mysteries we will examine.

4

00:00:27,039 --> 00:00:34,600

This monstrous crater nearly three miles around is over 60 stories deep.

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00:00:34,600 --> 00:00:41,041

It may mark a moment in time when life on our planet was forever changed.

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00:00:41,041 --> 00:00:45,682

Speculation suggests that a monstrous asteroid careened from its orbit and struck the earth

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00:00:45,682 --> 00:00:48,842

with apocalyptic fury.

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00:00:48,842 --> 00:00:55,403

75% of all life may have been destroyed in sudden cataclysm.

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00:00:55,403 --> 00:00:59,324

The use of asteroids churned through the abyss of space.

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00:00:59,324 --> 00:01:16,606

Could one suddenly tumble towards our planet bringing about the end of the world?

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00:01:16,606 --> 00:01:24,847

The Arizona desert, it probably has not changed much in appearance for 25,000 years.

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00:01:24,847 --> 00:01:30,568

A long ago, a huge asteroid weighing millions of tons suddenly, unexplainably fell from

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00:01:30,568 --> 00:01:44,210

its orbit and tumbled headlong towards the earth.

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00:01:44,210 --> 00:01:49,691

It probably exploded with a force far greater than any recorded nuclear explosion, leaving

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00:01:49,691 --> 00:01:55,932

this crater.

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00:01:55,932 --> 00:02:01,212

Founder of the American Meteorite Laboratory, Dr. H. H. Nanninger.

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00:02:01,212 --> 00:02:05,853

The greatest geological force that has ever operated in the crust of the earth has been

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00:02:05,853 --> 00:02:08,013

the force of impact.

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00:02:08,013 --> 00:02:12,254

We have a little example of that impact here before us today.

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00:02:12,254 --> 00:02:18,495

I say a little one because this one is about four-fifths of a mile across and 600 feet

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00:02:18,495 --> 00:02:25,136

deep, but that is a baby by the side of others that have been found on the earth that are

22

00:02:25,136 --> 00:02:31,177

old, that have been wiped out almost entirely by erosion.

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00:02:31,177 --> 00:02:36,937

Originally, twice as high and deep, enormous craters have been uniquely preserved by the

24

00:02:36,937 --> 00:02:41,018

climate of Australia.

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00:02:41,018 --> 00:02:44,099

Craters were blasted out of solid granite.

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00:02:44,099 --> 00:02:50,419

One huge Canadian crater is even visible from space.

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00:02:50,419 --> 00:02:55,140

Thousands of meteors have hit the United States itself, for the most part, the invisible

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00:02:55,140 --> 00:03:00,181

remains have long since been covered by the elements.

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00:03:00,181 --> 00:03:03,901

The face of the moon is a clear example of impact.

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00:03:03,901 --> 00:03:07,422

Seen from earth, its craters appear as tiny pock marks.

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00:03:08,182 --> 00:03:11,862

They are actually up to hundreds of miles in diameter.

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00:03:11,862 --> 00:03:16,463

It's hard to believe that our earth's appearance was at one time very similar to the moon's

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00:03:16,463 --> 00:03:19,624

today.

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00:03:19,624 --> 00:03:25,944

What result did this awesome force have during our planet's ancient past?

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00:03:25,944 --> 00:03:32,225

We don't find the North Pole in the past at the same location it is now by any means.

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00:03:32,225 --> 00:03:37,706

It has been shifted as much as 30 or 40 degrees from time to time.

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00:03:37,706 --> 00:03:45,427

And the only sensible explanation for that that I can think of is impact.

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00:03:45,427 --> 00:03:50,148

Recent studies have established that our earth's poles, as shown here, have undergone complete

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00:03:50,148 --> 00:03:53,548

reversal in the past.

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00:03:53,548 --> 00:03:58,029

Evidence of this sudden catastrophic shift lies hidden in the enigmatic vastness of the

41

00:03:58,029 --> 00:04:00,029

North Pole.

42

00:04:00,029 --> 00:04:04,790

Pole reefs have been discovered here, as well as trees with their fruit and leaves frozen

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00:04:04,790 --> 00:04:06,790

intact.

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00:04:06,790 --> 00:04:14,951

In 1900, explorers unearthed this mammoth with an unshoed mouthful of buttercups, its

45

00:04:14,951 --> 00:04:17,952

stomach full of summer grasses.

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00:04:17,952 --> 00:04:22,953

The icy Siberian tundra conceals the fact that giant woolly mammoths once roamed a

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00:04:22,953 --> 00:04:27,593

lush land until a disaster froze them in an instant.

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00:04:27,593 --> 00:04:33,554

What a meteor bombardment have brought about at end to their world.

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00:04:33,554 --> 00:04:39,395

Pitted by its blistering entry into the atmosphere, a meteorite similar to this one contained enough

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00:04:39,395 --> 00:04:44,116

iron to produce nearly 50,000 cards.

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00:04:44,116 --> 00:04:48,276

It blasted this crater from the Arizona bedrock.

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00:04:48,276 --> 00:04:55,037

Diamonds were created instantaneously.

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00:04:55,037 --> 00:05:00,598

This computerized graphic illustrates the three million tons of crushed earth and meteor

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00:05:00,598 --> 00:05:06,919

that in less than a second were strewn for miles over the surrounding countryside.

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00:05:06,919 --> 00:05:11,920

One block, the size of a large house, was thrown into the crater lip.

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00:05:11,920 --> 00:05:17,440

It is a mere speck in comparison to the immensity of the crater itself.

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00:05:17,440 --> 00:05:24,081

A larger asteroid could have resulted in a crater the size of the state of Missouri.

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00:05:24,081 --> 00:05:31,642

A meteorite by the time it comes into view will already be within almost less than a

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00:05:31,642 --> 00:05:35,043

hundred miles of its target.

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00:05:35,043 --> 00:05:42,604

And a hundred miles for the travel of an asteroid or a meteorite would be covered in just a

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00:05:42,604 --> 00:05:43,924

few seconds.

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00:05:43,924 --> 00:05:46,805

So there is no such thing as getting ready for this thing.

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00:05:46,805 --> 00:05:51,085

We'll never know in advance that one is coming.

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00:05:51,085 --> 00:05:55,286

Asteroids orbit between Jupiter and Mars.

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00:05:55,286 --> 00:06:01,087

However, there are Mavericks whose orbits actually cross that of our planet.

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00:06:01,087 --> 00:06:08,328

Kalamor Observatory in California has accelerated their research to track these potential threats.

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00:06:08,328 --> 00:06:14,529

Eleanor Helene, senior scientist at California Institute of Technology, is the world's foremost

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00:06:14,529 --> 00:06:16,609

asteroid tracker.

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00:06:16,609 --> 00:06:22,410

She has discovered several hundred, including this one, the raw shalom.

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00:06:22,410 --> 00:06:24,530

We could be caught unawares.

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00:06:24,530 --> 00:06:27,330

It is our plan to be as prepared as we can.

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00:06:27,330 --> 00:06:34,411

And I think the increase in general observation for survey and search will give us much more

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00:06:34,411 --> 00:06:39,892

lead time to at least be aware that something is coming in close.

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00:06:39,892 --> 00:06:43,733

Skylab fell from its orbit smashing into Australia.

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00:06:43,733 --> 00:06:46,593

Our sophisticated technology was helpless.

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00:06:46,593 --> 00:06:50,114

We could do nothing but wait and see where it would hit.

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00:06:50,114 --> 00:06:55,995

Well, it's certainly been our experience, unfortunately, that if an object is found

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00:06:55,995 --> 00:07:00,955

on a collisional course with the Earth, and we've had a few exercises that fortunately

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00:07:00,955 --> 00:07:08,236

have not approved to be true, that we really have no means of deflecting an object that

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00:07:08,236 --> 00:07:13,277

is coming directly toward the Earth, at least at this time, as far as I'm aware.

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00:07:13,277 --> 00:07:18,438

Because of this potential threat from space, NASA is studying the force of impact in order

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00:07:18,438 --> 00:07:22,318

to know what to expect.

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00:07:22,318 --> 00:07:28,519

The light gas gun, the only one of its kind on Earth, was built to study such an event.

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00:07:28,519 --> 00:07:36,320

A pellet simulating a meteorite is carefully placed into the gun.

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00:07:36,320 --> 00:07:39,081

A piston is locked into place.

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00:07:39,081 --> 00:07:45,122

It will pump millions of pounds of high pressure hydrogen gas into the gun.

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00:07:45,122 --> 00:07:49,242

A final check is carefully conducted.

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00:07:49,242 --> 00:07:55,363

Because of the tremendous pressures generated, any mistake could prove fatal to the crew.

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00:07:55,363 --> 00:07:58,763

The gun is raised to the vertical position.

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00:07:58,763 --> 00:08:06,685

Upon firing, the pellet will hurtle down the tube at a speed nearing six miles per second.

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00:08:06,685 --> 00:08:20,407

A target representing the Earth is prepared, and the room is evacuated.

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00:08:20,407 --> 00:08:32,408

The gun is fired.

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00:08:32,408 --> 00:08:41,090

The target exhibits a striking resemblance to meteor crater.

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00:08:41,090 --> 00:08:49,211

Planetologist Donald Galt has experimented for years with the light gas gun.

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00:08:49,211 --> 00:08:56,532

Now we know that on Earth, we have craters up to 100 miles in diameter, with three out

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00:08:56,532 --> 00:09:00,732

of every four objects that strike the Earth landing in the ocean basins.

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00:09:00,932 --> 00:09:06,973

We wonder what would happen if a big object struck in the ocean, say the Pacific Ocean,

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00:09:06,973 --> 00:09:12,774

and produced a transient crater, the water would collapse, a transient crater 100 miles

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00:09:12,774 --> 00:09:14,894

in diameter.

100

00:09:14,894 --> 00:09:20,335

The ocean is only an average of two or three miles deep, so we'd just wipe the water right

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00:09:20,335 --> 00:09:24,816

off the floor of the ocean for 100 miles, and it would collapse.

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00:09:24,816 --> 00:09:30,537

The tidal waves that result from such an event, they just stagger the imagination.

103

00:09:31,497 --> 00:09:35,497

We just don't know what would happen, really, except it would be devastation on a terrible scale.

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00:09:48,499 --> 00:09:54,180

If such an object landed on land, for example, suppose it's centered right in the middle

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00:09:54,180 --> 00:10:00,661

of Chicago, it would totally obliterate the city in the surrounding suburbs around Lake

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00:10:00,661 --> 00:10:04,301

Michigan to the north and south of Chicago.

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00:10:04,301 --> 00:10:09,182

And that's a little spooky, because we don't know when some big object like this is coming

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00:10:09,182 --> 00:10:11,182

in and could strike the Earth.

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00:10:11,182 --> 00:10:27,265

A startling theory has recently come to light, suggesting that a meteor impact could cause

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00:10:27,265 --> 00:10:30,585

the end of the world.

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00:10:30,585 --> 00:10:35,586

Scientists have long been perplexed by the abrupt disappearance of the dinosaurs 65 million

112

00:10:35,586 --> 00:10:37,546

years ago.

113

00:10:37,546 --> 00:10:44,067

Trying for clues to explain this mystery, researchers delved deeply into the ocean bottom.

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00:10:44,067 --> 00:10:48,388

Drilling was conducted worldwide to collect samples of the prehistoric Earth.

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00:10:53,388 --> 00:10:58,709

A layer of thin clay is the soil upon which the dinosaurs lived.

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00:10:58,709 --> 00:11:03,550

Closer examination with microphotography produced startling results.

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00:11:03,550 --> 00:11:12,471

Examples of living organisms vanished in the layer above, seemingly proof of sudden extinction.

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00:11:12,471 --> 00:11:18,872

Further investigation was conducted at laboratories in Berkeley, California.

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00:11:18,872 --> 00:11:25,713

Scientists Frank Asaro subjected the samples to complex computer analysis.

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00:11:25,713 --> 00:11:30,994

The amount of riridium was found to be nearly 200 times that of the other elements in the

121

00:11:30,994 --> 00:11:32,314

Earth sample.

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00:11:32,314 --> 00:11:34,474

Scientists were amazed.

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00:11:34,474 --> 00:11:41,755

Irridium, a rare metal, is never found in this great amount on Earth.

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00:11:41,755 --> 00:11:49,516

The unusually high abundance of irridium that was detected in the clay layer suggested

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00:11:49,516 --> 00:11:56,797

that the irridium came from an extraordinary extraterrestrial event.

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00:11:56,797 --> 00:12:04,839

An asteroid is the only possible explanation for the incredibly high percentage of irridium.

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00:12:04,839 --> 00:12:11,480

Could a meteor crater-like event have actually brought about an end of the world?

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00:12:11,480 --> 00:12:19,401

The asteroid impact theory envisions that an asteroid struck the Earth about 65 million

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00:12:19,401 --> 00:12:20,801

years ago.

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00:12:20,801 --> 00:12:28,402

This caused a tremendous explosion, possibly larger than 100 million megatons, and this

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00:12:28,402 --> 00:12:36,203

erupted not only the asteroid mass, but perhaps 60 times its mass of terrestrial material,

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00:12:36,203 --> 00:12:43,404

and a good part of this went into the upper atmosphere, possibly 17 trillion tons, and

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00:12:43,404 --> 00:12:48,285

this spread around the Earth, turning day into night.

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00:12:48,285 --> 00:13:02,047

At this time, some 75% of all living species became extinguished.

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00:13:02,047 --> 00:13:04,727

Yet asteroids are not the only threats.

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00:13:04,727 --> 00:13:10,968

Comets, frozen bodies of ice and gas, twice in the last 80 years have exploded into the

137

00:13:10,968 --> 00:13:14,209

Russian countryside.

138

00:13:14,209 --> 00:13:18,969

Several footage shows the aftermath of the 1908 Tunguska explosion.

139

00:13:18,969 --> 00:13:26,530

Dr. Eugene Shoemaker, world-renowned authority on cratering and recent electee to the National

140

00:13:26,530 --> 00:13:29,051

Academy of Science.

141

00:13:29,051 --> 00:13:35,892

If an event like Tunguska were to happen today over a populated part of the Earth, that event

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00:13:35,892 --> 00:13:41,492

would almost surely be perceived by the people and by the nation in which it happened as

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00:13:41,492 --> 00:13:46,533

a nuclear attack.

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00:13:46,533 --> 00:13:51,294

This event would look to people almost exactly like a nuclear explosion.

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00:13:51,294 --> 00:13:56,175

The hazard is not from the direct effects of the impact or encounter with those small

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00:13:56,175 --> 00:14:02,776

asteroids, but rather how they are perceived by man and how man will react to it.

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00:14:02,776 --> 00:14:09,656

If that event happens over a nation that possesses nuclear weapons, will they respond?

148

00:14:09,656 --> 00:14:12,817

It's the hazard and that's the unknowable.

149

00:14:12,817 --> 00:14:16,497

Doomsday, apocalypse, Armageddon.

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00:14:16,497 --> 00:14:21,538

Deep within the soul of humanity lies a primal fear, the fear of the total destruction of

151

00:14:21,538 --> 00:14:25,419

the Earth as we know it, the end of the world.

152

00:14:25,419 --> 00:14:29,619

Throughout time, we have always been at the mercy of nature's potentially catastrophic

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00:14:29,619 --> 00:14:30,619

forces.

154

00:14:30,619 --> 00:14:36,740

Today, however, we hold the power to bring about Earth-shattering holocausts ourselves.

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00:14:36,740 --> 00:14:40,581

Can there possibly be a solution to these global problems?

156

00:14:40,581 --> 00:14:46,422

The infinite frontier, space, stretching endlessly upon itself.

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00:14:46,422 --> 00:14:52,983

Could its mysterious vastness be part of the answer?

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00:14:52,983 --> 00:14:58,223

Investigative research into the possibilities is being conducted at Princeton University.

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00:14:59,224 --> 00:15:07,225

Dr. Gerard O'Neill, high-energy physicist and NASA consultant on space-related matters.

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00:15:07,225 --> 00:15:11,665

We're very, very fortunate because after all of the centuries of the development of human

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00:15:11,665 --> 00:15:16,586

civilization, we're just in this critical period where the breakout of humanity into

162

00:15:16,586 --> 00:15:20,227

space can occur within the next one or two decades for us.

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00:15:20,227 --> 00:15:24,907

Perhaps the most critical breakout that there could be thought of over hundreds of years

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00:15:24,907 --> 00:15:30,588

of time, because once that happens, the human race will be unkillable, no single natural

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00:15:30,588 --> 00:15:32,988

disaster can wipe it out.

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00:15:32,988 --> 00:15:37,709

And once that happens, all the other transitions, going out throughout the solar system, eventually

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00:15:37,709 --> 00:15:43,270

even to other stars, are far, far easier than this one critical breakout that we're about

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00:15:43,270 --> 00:15:45,110

to make at this time.

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00:15:45,110 --> 00:15:50,511

NASA's space shuttle is at the forefront of present space technology.

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00:15:50,511 --> 00:15:54,551

It is our first step toward the use of space as a refuge.

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00:15:54,551 --> 00:16:01,392

Spacecraft and others like it will one day be our galactic covered wagons to the stars.

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00:16:01,392 --> 00:16:05,313

The whole point about the high frontier of space is that it's a virtually unlimited

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00:16:05,313 --> 00:16:07,673

resource of energy and materials.

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00:16:07,673 --> 00:16:11,394

We're suffering increasing poverty here on the surface of the Earth, and it makes sense

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00:16:11,394 --> 00:16:17,595

to go out and begin using that wealth of solar energy and of materials.

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00:16:17,595 --> 00:16:23,596

In solar panels, many square miles in area, could one day beam limitless energy through

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00:16:23,596 --> 00:16:25,076

space.

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00:16:25,076 --> 00:16:31,597

Solar energy is eight times as efficient there and reliable 24 hours a day.

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00:16:31,597 --> 00:16:37,198

Ironically, the asteroids we fear will one day be mined for their valuable resources of

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00:16:37,198 --> 00:16:40,238

iron and nickel.

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00:16:40,238 --> 00:16:46,159

To accomplish this, Dr. O'Neill and his colleagues have invented the mass driver, an intricately

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00:16:46,159 --> 00:16:52,600

designed motor that converts electrical energy into motion at speeds exceeding 15 miles

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00:16:52,600 --> 00:16:54,520

per second.

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00:16:54,520 --> 00:17:00,841

It will accelerate mined resources to processing stations in space.

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00:17:00,841 --> 00:17:05,202

In evolutionary terms, it's a very natural thing for us to move out into the new environment

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00:17:05,202 --> 00:17:09,042

of space and begin using the resources that are there.

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00:17:09,042 --> 00:17:13,803

Humanity has always moved into new areas where natural resources could be found.

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00:17:13,803 --> 00:17:17,603

In the long run, people are going to be moving out into space in considerable numbers.

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00:17:17,603 --> 00:17:24,684

It turns out that the material resources that exist even relatively nearby are enough to

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00:17:24,684 --> 00:17:31,325

build about 3,000 times the land area of the Earth in the form of space colonies.

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00:17:31,325 --> 00:17:35,646

Going to a space colony would be, in the beginning, a little like taking a trip across the ocean

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00:17:35,646 --> 00:17:36,646

by ship.

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00:17:36,646 --> 00:17:41,287

It would take about five to seven days of travel time in a very comfortable ship with its own

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00:17:41,287 --> 00:17:44,327

artificial gravity.

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00:17:44,327 --> 00:17:49,968

At tremendous speeds, the transfer of craft would jet far beyond terrestrial boundaries,

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00:17:49,968 --> 00:17:54,449

penetrating into the profound silence of space.

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00:17:54,449 --> 00:17:59,569

Through a zero-gravity corridor, one would begin moving down into the colony.

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00:17:59,569 --> 00:18:05,970

A large valley would open out, possibly filled with lakes, trees, grass, and flowers.

199

00:18:06,090 --> 00:18:12,851

Unburdened by heavy industry, a colony could be a very silven, park-like environment.

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00:18:12,851 --> 00:18:19,652

Each colony, supporting perhaps 50 to 100,000 people, could be unique.

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00:18:19,652 --> 00:18:24,613

Work would be done in nearby modules, each a complete ecosystem, self-supporting and

202

00:18:24,613 --> 00:18:26,133

independent.

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00:18:26,133 --> 00:18:33,414

Air, water, and other resources would be completely recycled.

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00:18:33,414 --> 00:18:38,935

And access to the sun would give the ability to control the seasons at will.

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00:18:38,935 --> 00:18:48,576

Giant hothouses would allow crops to be grown year-round.

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00:18:48,576 --> 00:18:53,377

At first heavily dependent on the Earth, the colonies eventually would become miniature

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00:18:53,377 --> 00:18:57,538

worlds of their own.

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00:18:57,538 --> 00:19:01,658

Technological advancements would release us from many laborious tasks, which are presently

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00:19:01,658 --> 00:19:03,498

a necessity.

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00:19:03,498 --> 00:19:09,019

This would allow more time for personal creativity and experimentation.

211

00:19:09,019 --> 00:19:15,740

Dr. O'Neill believes that by the middle of the next century, millions of us will be moving

212

00:19:15,740 --> 00:19:23,101

out into space.

213

00:19:23,101 --> 00:19:29,142

The National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. chronicles the quest to expand our earthly

214

00:19:29,142 --> 00:19:34,903

limits, pushing beyond our boundaries ever in quest of new challenges.

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00:19:34,903 --> 00:19:41,784

What was impossible 40 years ago is commonly accepted today.

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00:19:41,784 --> 00:19:53,066

Technology has clearly begun to satisfy our desire to conquer space itself.

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00:19:53,066 --> 00:19:58,386

The International Committee for the Future's President, Barbara Marx Hubbard, has testified

218

00:19:58,386 --> 00:20:00,907

before the Congressional Subcommittee on Space.

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00:20:00,907 --> 00:20:06,227

One of the fascinating things about outer space is you've got to cooperate to live.

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00:20:06,227 --> 00:20:09,948

I think we'll learn new models of how people can work together.

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00:20:09,948 --> 00:20:26,190

Because there, if you fight, you die immediately.

222

00:20:26,190 --> 00:20:30,151

Maybe it's a new place for the human race to learn how to live together.

223

00:20:30,151 --> 00:20:34,151

And the people on Earth will learn lessons from what the people in space are doing on

224

00:20:34,151 --> 00:20:35,672

the new frontier.

225

00:20:35,672 --> 00:20:38,472

Right now on planet Earth, we're in a zero-sum game.

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00:20:38,472 --> 00:20:41,232

One nation can't gain without taking resources away from another.

227

00:20:41,232 --> 00:20:44,593

And that's why we see hostility increasing all around us.

228

00:20:44,593 --> 00:20:49,074

I think that if we can move out into an environment where there's virtually unlimited energy and

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00:20:49,074 --> 00:20:54,434

material resources for everyone, we ought to find it possible to live with less hostility

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00:20:54,554 --> 00:20:56,315

than there is at the present time.

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00:20:56,315 --> 00:21:06,676

That's certainly my hope.

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00:21:06,676 --> 00:21:11,037

It's the step probably of the greatest freedom and emancipation that the human race has ever

233

00:21:11,037 --> 00:21:12,037

known.

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00:21:12,037 --> 00:21:13,997

It has been a long history of freedom.

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00:21:13,997 --> 00:21:18,718

If you think of it starting in the early caves and then exploring the seas and then going

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00:21:18,718 --> 00:21:23,278

over the mountains and then getting in the aeroplanes and seeing if we could fly.

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00:21:23,318 --> 00:21:25,639

At every step, people said, we can't do it.

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00:21:25,639 --> 00:21:26,639

There were the impossibleists.

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00:21:26,639 --> 00:21:34,680

And then there were the possibleists that expanded human freedom.

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00:21:34,680 --> 00:21:38,961

There is always the lure of the possible future.

241

00:21:38,961 --> 00:21:42,441

What humanity envisions can often be achieved.

242

00:21:53,283 --> 00:22:04,404

Coming up next in search of continues with a probe into the historical facts about Noah's

243

00:22:04,404 --> 00:22:05,404

flood.

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00:22:05,404 --> 00:22:10,485

Then 20th century with Mike Wallace journeys into the eye of the storm for a report on

245

00:22:10,485 --> 00:22:13,206

the destructive power of hurricanes.

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00:22:13,206 --> 00:22:17,686

And later tonight, find out how one week in time holds an amazing wealth of history as

247

00:22:17,686 --> 00:22:23,007

this week in history looks at the launching of Sputnik 1 and other extraordinary events.

248

00:22:23,007 --> 00:22:26,487

9 here on the History Channel where the past comes alive.