

J. SAKARI SALONEN

Five Apocalypses

History of Planet Earth and the Future of Humankind



This gripping work of popular science won the Kalevi Jännti prize for non-fiction in 2022:

”A multi-layered and thought-provoking reading experience. The arguments on the possible futures of humankind carry weight, and Salonen presents them through a beautiful narrative that almost reads like fiction.”

– Kalevi Jännti prize jury

Asteroids speeding towards Earth, volcanoes erupting and floods submerging entire cities are images familiar to us all from disaster movies. In this age of climate change and biodiversity loss, concerns over our survival as a species are not, however, limited to the realm of fiction. What can millions of years of planetary history teach us about the disasters that might threaten life on our planet?

In *Five Apocalypses*, paleoclimatologist J. Sakari Salonen takes the reader on a journey into deep time, shedding light on the five mass extinctions that wiped out almost all life on Earth, and on the factors that likely caused them. As we learn, the organisms inhabiting Earth today, including humans, are susceptible to many kinds of geological and cosmic forces. Could asteroids, comets or gamma-ray bursts bring large-scale destruction in the future? Will dormant supervolcanoes awaken from their millenia-long sleep? Or is a new ice age waiting around the corner?

One significant threat to life is human activity, as has been made clear by the damage we have done to the environment and the destructive potential of nuclear weapons. On the other hand, our big impact on the planet reminds us that the keys to a better future are still in our hands.

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