

THE DAILY PLANET

Strike Shock

Life on Earth to be destroyed by an asteroid in 25 years

In the last few days, scientists have identified that a large asteroid is on a collision course with planet Earth. The asteroid will strike Earth in 25 years' time. The results of this impact will be catastrophic, most life on our planet will be wiped out, and our planet may become a hostile alien environment. Scientists are working round the clock to come up with a solution to the problem. Yesterday the United Nations announced plans to set up a team of scientists to look into the possibility of colonising another body (a planet or a moon) within our own Solar system. Dr Philip Bland, Royal Society Research fellow at Imperial College London, an expert in the field of comets and meteors, said 'The chances of such an impact happening are extremely remote, ie about one every couple of billion years.'



Artist's impression of an asteroid hitting the Earth
He went on to say that the Earth has a history of impacts due to asteroids, and that the Earth's crust is littered with craters from previous strikes. The problem this time is that the asteroid is significantly bigger. Dr Bland is in charge of setting up a UK task force of top scientists to look into possible destinations within our own Solar System that humans could move to. Dr Bland went on to say 'Time is of the essence here, we will have to work quickly to find a brave new world for humans to move to.'

Task overview

- In the 25 years between now and the asteroid impact, the European Space Agency has time and resources to send one probed satellite mission to a planet or the moon. The purpose of this mission will be to gain essential information for the future colonisers of the chosen destination.
- You are one of a team of scientific report writers, who will keep Dr Philip Bland well informed. This will help him in making decisions that may prove critical to the survival of life, as we know it. **Challenges 1, 2 and 3** will provide the essential information about where to colonise.
- **Challenge 1.** You receive a letter from Philip. He needs some help in writing his report. Working with information from UK scientists, Catherine Heymans and Emily McDonald of the Oxford University Astronomy Department, you will identify the essential factors needed for life on other planets or moons.
- **Challenge 2.** You will work through Solar system data to establish the best destination choice.
- **Challenge 3.** You will use information provided by David Ryan Smith, of the National Space Centre based at Leicester University, to decide how best to use your satellite to gain the information needed.