

★ **It's the End of the World: But What Are We Really Afraid of?**

Adam Roberts

Elliott & Thompson (Nov 1, 2021)

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Adam Roberts's entertaining cultural survey *It's the End of the World* takes an omnivorous approach to the apocalypse, devoting space to possible mass extinctions wrought by deities, zombies, viruses, and climate change.

The book draws from world religions, science, and the arts, analyzing the stories that people have always told themselves about the end of the world. Classic science fiction and horror stories by Mary Shelley and H. G. Wells are made to mingle with world mythology, 1990s action movies, and 1950s pulp novels. Holy books and comic books are given equal weight, and the mix is delightful.

Wry humor directs the book. It includes asides tucked into footnotes, as well as strange and creative comparisons in the text proper. Roberts likens the storytelling techniques in Revelation with the increasing tension of a striptease, wherein the recipients of plagues and seduction see their anticipation grow exponentially. In a chapter on zombies, the book discusses the creatures' relative lack of sex appeal compared to vampires; while considering the heat death of the sun, the horsemen of the apocalypse return—their assigned colors, it's pointed out, are parallel to the life stages of stars.

To draw conclusions about how people throughout history have thought about the end, Roberts incorporates research and analysis into his work. Indeed, his topical chapters build upon each other to tell a cohesive story about human fears and beliefs. And it's a real feat that the book treats the biggest threats to humanity in a manner that's both educational and fun to read about. *It's the End of the World* is expert and engaging in its approach to the dead serious topic of the apocalypse.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September / October 2021)

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