

Apocalypse Tomorrow

"It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine." When piano-bar musician Tony Delgatto (George Segal) croons those lyrics to a sloshed crowd in the new film *2012*, he has no idea he's performing the intro to a seismic disaster that's about to take center stage on planet Earth.

It isn't long, however, before everyone, everywhere in this apocalyptic movie, which opens Friday, realizes Mother Earth has started to reel like a drunken sailor and that something is terribly wrong with her. What unfolds is a special-effects bonanza about the collapse of the world and the story of those who survive it.

Set from 2009 to 2012, the film opens with a discovery that the Earth's core temperature is rising rapidly. Causing this is an astro-physical phenomenon brought on by a freakish planetary alignment that occurs once every 640,000 years, according to ancient Mayan astronomers. They calculated the next alignment would start in 2010 and end on the winter solstice of 2012, or Dec. 21.

Right on cue, the planets line up, causing the sun to microwave the Earth's molten core and "melt" the world's landmasses. The result is a gargantuan displacement of Earth's crust—fault lines rip open, bodies of land implode, underwater earthquakes spike the seismographs and roll the planet from pole to pole with 4,900-foot tsunamis. Geological carnage is wreaked on a world that, thanks to joint governmental conspiracies, is clueless that an apocalypse is brewing.

At the center of the action are Jackson Curtis (John Cusack) and Kate Curtis (Amanda Peet), a divorced couple with two preteen kids. The four are reunited by circumstances just as the catastrophe strikes Los Angeles, where they live. Jackson Curtis, who works part time for a livery and was famous once

for his best-selling science-fiction novel, has amazingly gotten wind of what's happening in the disturbed belly of the Earth. He's made it his mission to save his family, no matter what.

He piles everyone into his company's limousine to head for a local airport, where he's chartered a flight out of the city. Just as he does, Los Angeles begins to writhe and belch its molten guts out. Streets curl, jerk and snap like a bullwhip while Jackson drives pedal to the metal, dodging collapsing freeways, exploding gas lines, falling parking garages, disintegrating high-rises and pesky ground fissures.

Director Roland Emmerich does a decent job of pairing the film's unrelenting action with some lighthearted comic relief, just as he did with *Independence Day*. For one, he gives us Woody Harrelson as Charlie Frost, a pickle-poppin' hippie who lives in Yellowstone National Park in an ancient RV, from which he does pirate-radio broadcasts to expose government cover-ups about 2012.

The onscreen action is practically nonstop over the course of 2012's gargantuan 158 minutes, but you might lose count of the number of times you'll think, *The chances of that person surviving that disaster is, oh, about a gazillion to one*. And be prepared to roll your eyes at the lack of fear some of the characters exude in the face of utter devastation or certain doom. How many of us could really make wise cracks while we're standing under a sky that's raining fire?

The film also erroneously states that Christians refer to the end of the world as the rapture. And it pits the conclusions of Mayan seers against the Bible's teaching that humanity does not know the precise time (certainly not to the year) when the world will end.

You can be certain that 2012 is a cinematic thrill ride. But also know that the price of admission to this adventure is a

hefty helping of absurdity you'll have to buy into to believe anyone, anywhere could escape the snapping jaws of our tranquil planet turned killer beast. But, after all, it's only a movie; so buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Content Watch: *2012* is rated PG-13. This movie is about disaster. There may be scary sequences that involve disasters killing countless people. Scenes may be too intense for young children. There is one momentary view of gore and no sex or nudity.