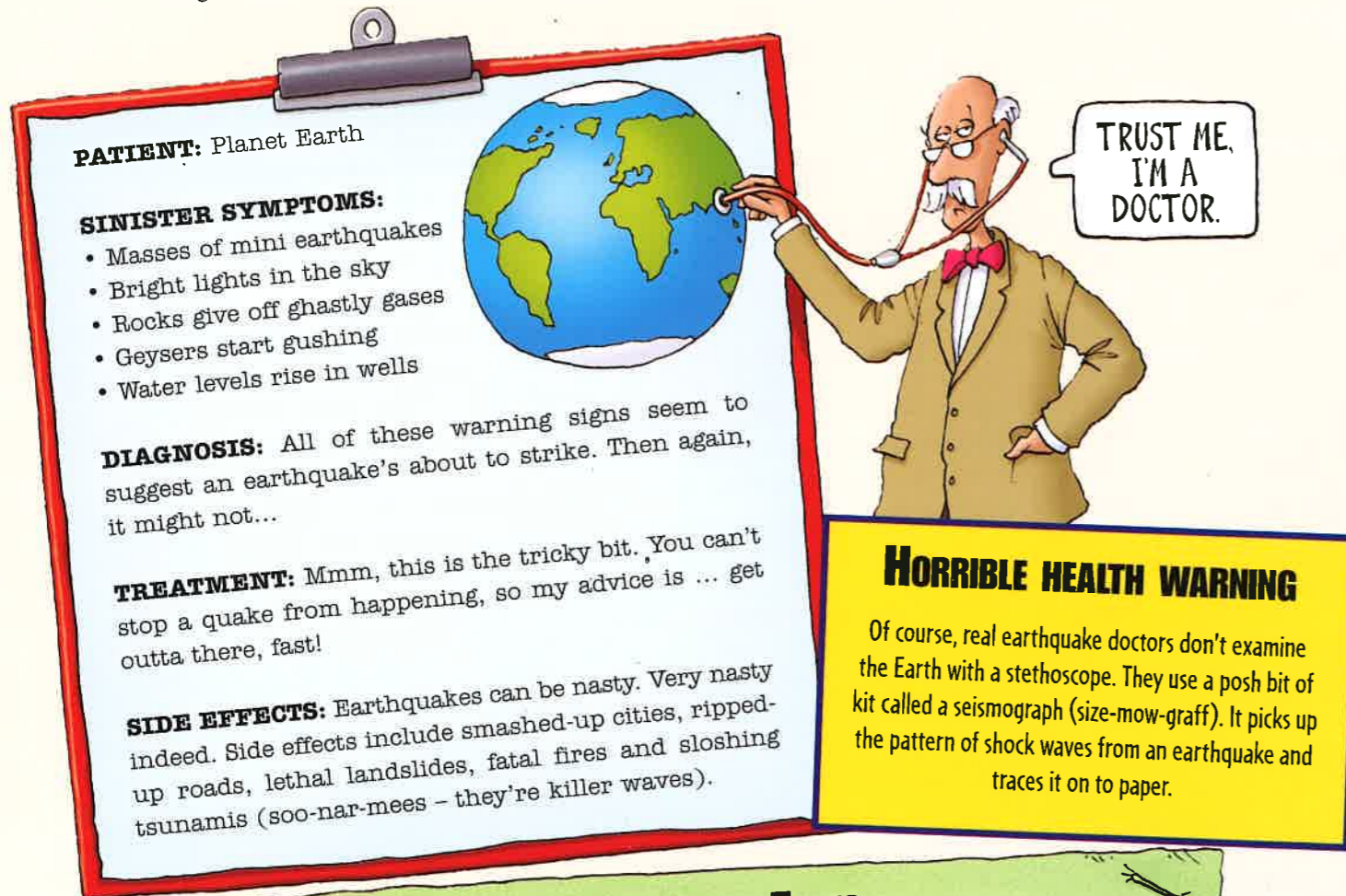


Earth-shattering earthquakes are horribly hard to predict, so seismologists are under serious stress. If they could tell when a quake was coming, they could warn people and save thousands of lives. But how on Earth can they work out when and where an earthquake will strike next? It's a bit like being a doctor with one GIGANTIC patient. Over to you, Uncle Cliff...



PATIENT: Planet Earth

SINISTER SYMPTOMS:

- Masses of mini earthquakes
- Bright lights in the sky
- Rocks give off ghastly gases
- Geysers start gushing
- Water levels rise in wells

DIAGNOSIS: All of these warning signs seem to suggest an earthquake's about to strike. Then again, it might not...

TREATMENT: Mmm, this is the tricky bit. You can't stop a quake from happening, so my advice is ... get outta there, fast!

SIDE EFFECTS: Earthquakes can be nasty. Very nasty indeed. Side effects include smashed-up cities, ripped-up roads, lethal landslides, fatal fires and sloshing tsunamis (soo-nar-meas - they're killer waves).

HORRIBLE HEALTH WARNING

Of course, real earthquake doctors don't examine the Earth with a stethoscope. They use a posh bit of kit called a seismograph (size-mow-graff). It picks up the pattern of shock waves from an earthquake and traces it on to paper.

WICKED WORLD FACTS

The first practical seismograph was invented in the 1880s by the British scientist John Milne. Daring John's research included being tormented by tremors in Japan.

If you're indoors and an earthquake strikes, crouch under a table. Cover your face and eyes with your arms. Then hold on tight until the shaking stops (and you stop quaking in your boots).

If your pet dog suddenly stops chewing your dad's slippers and scarpers, you could be in for a nasty shock. Some people think animals act strangely before an earthquake. Your missing mutt might be trying to tell you a quake's about to strike.

In the 1985 Mexico City quake, two babies were pulled alive from the ruins of a hospital - ten days after it collapsed!

The good news is, seismologists can give very general warnings about where a quake might strike. The bad news is, they only know a quake's on the way when it's actually happening. To make matters worse, some quakes strike without any warning at all. Like the one that hit Tangshan, China, in 1976. Here's how the Daily Globe might have reported from the scene of the disaster.

DAILY GLOBE

TANGSHAN, CHINA, 29 July 1976



The surviving residents of this shattered city are still reeling from the shock after yesterday's devastating earthquake.

Measuring a massive 8.3 on the Richter Scale, shell-shocked experts are already claiming the quake was the deadliest of modern times.

At 3.43 am, local time, a huge tremor struck without warning. In seconds, it reduced this thriving industrial city to a pile of rubble. Numbers are still coming in, but

it is estimated that more than 300,000 people have died. Thousands more lie injured or buried beneath the collapsed buildings. Rescue teams have already begun a frantic search for survivors. Thousands of people have been left homeless. With winter coming, their future looks very bleak indeed.