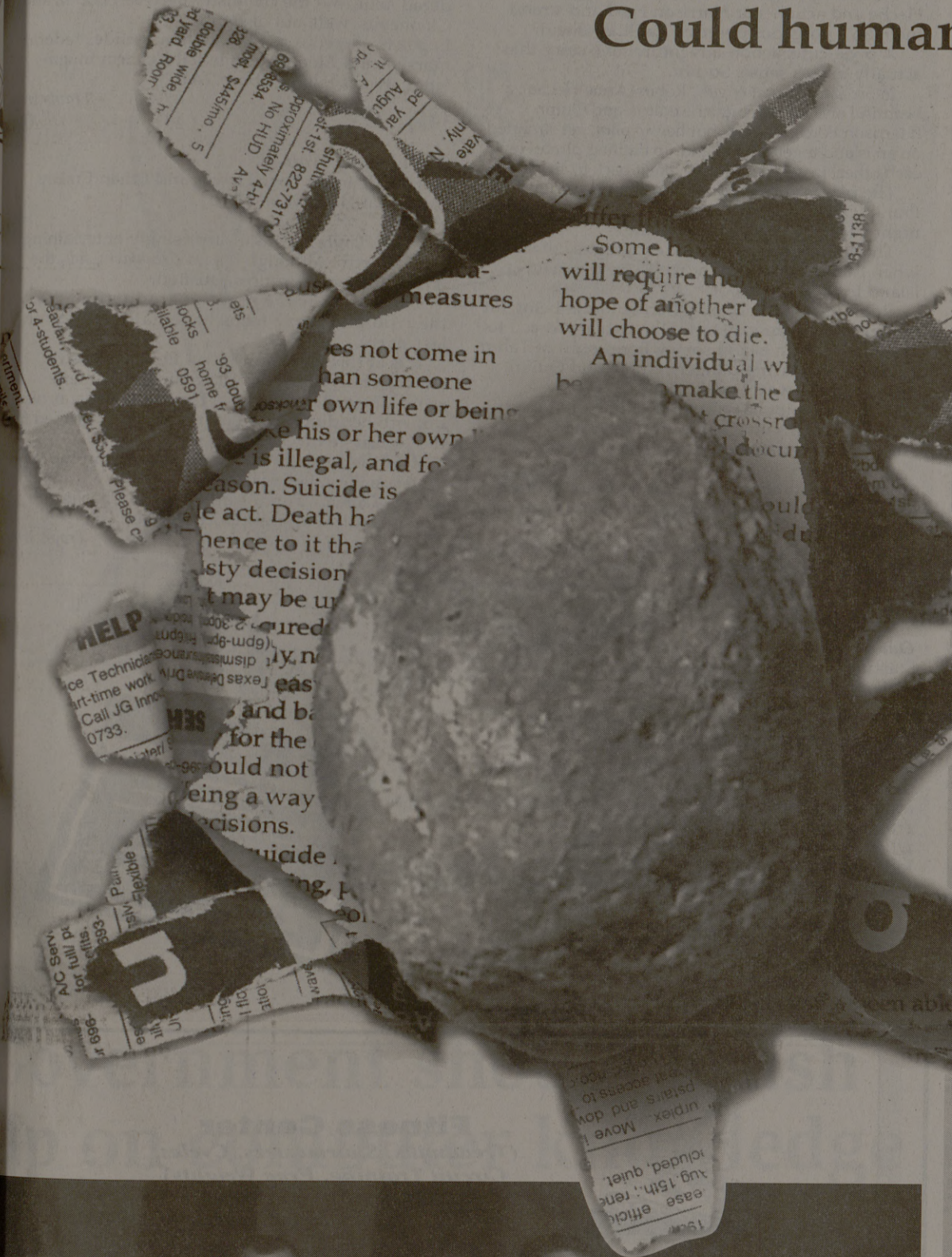


THE END IS NEAR

Could humanity survive the ultimate disaster?

By MARIUM MOHIUDDIN
Staff Writer

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed."
— the Holy Bible, Peter 3:10



Rough-and-tumble oil driller-astronauts Chapple (Will Patton), Stamper (Bruce Willis), Kurleenbear (Michael Duncan), Frost (Ben Affleck) and Choi (Owen Wilson) set out on a journey into space to save the world from an asteroid the size of Texas.

Hollywood stars battle falling star in doomsday showdown *Armageddon*

Armageddon
Starring Bruce Willis, Liv Tyler and Ben Affleck
Directed by Michael Bay
Rated PG-13
Playing at Hollywood 16

The countdown is over ... the asteroid approaches Earth ... *Armageddon* is upon us. In the second-billed blockbuster film dealing with the destruction of Earth by a huge asteroid, or global killer as they say in the film, *Armageddon* cannot help but be compared to *Deep Impact*.
The film stars Bruce Willis, Liv Tyler (the daughter of Steven Tyler, whose music can be heard creeping into many of the film's more emotional or dangerous action scenes) and Ben Affleck. These three represent the main people in a cast of name-brand Hollywood actors and actresses, and they stand out because of the relationship they share with one another.
Willis' character is Harry Stamper, a world-recognized deep core oil driller and a man who would kill anyone attempting to get close to or harm his daughter Grace (Tyler).
As an asteroid the size of Texas is discovered to be making its way to Earth, Stamper and his crew of roughneck drillers are asked to take a mission into space, plant a nuclear weapon inside its core and save Earth from total obliteration. That's the plot; nothing too different from that of *Deep Impact*, except better special effects, many more action sequences and a faster-pasted storyline.
Affleck portrays A.J. Frost, one of Stamper's roughnecks who falls for Grace. Although it is obvious to see that Stamper disapproves of Frost (he chases after him

on a drill site firing a shotgun), the film takes audiences through the evolution of his relationship with the man who intends to marry his daughter.
Others among the cast of a million stars include Billy Bob Thornton as NASA Executive Director Dan Truman and Steve Buscemi as Rockhound, another one of Stamper's roughnecks.
Although the film plays out like a two-minute tango, it spans more than two-and-a-half hours — when a meteor shower is the opening scene of the film, it cannot help be a rollercoaster ride of action and high emotion.
Willis, Tyler and Affleck give memorable performances; there's just something about seeing these three actors cry in the film that makes a moviegoer gush with tears.
The plot, however, suffers from *Deep Impact*'s earlier release. Overall, *Armageddon* is worth the price of a matinee or regular-timed ticket. It provides laughter, tears, anxiety and a host of other emotions that make the movie-going experience a real treat.
And although the film showcases the thought-provoking question of what would happen if a huge asteroid fell to Earth (as it did some 65 million years ago with the dinosaurs), this does not appear to be the message on most people's minds.
The most asked question about *Armageddon* seems to be, "Does Ben Affleck die?" For that answer, fans will have to watch the film from beginning to end.
(B+)

— James Francis

Before man, there were the dinosaurs. Over 4 million years ago they ruled the earth. The age of the dinosaurs ended when an asteroid hit the earth and caused the climate to change and life as they knew it to end.
Now 4 million years later man rules the earth, but will there soon be the dawn of a new era?

Dr. Ronald Schorn, a professional astronomer and a visiting assistant professor of physics, said humans have been on earth for 4.6 million years and several asteroids to hit the earth.
"It happened near Flagstaff, Ariz., and it destroyed everything in sight," he said. "It happened in Canada as well. In 1909, it happened in Siberia. A comet hit and it caused an explosion that was five to 10 miles high. It destroyed everything within one-hundred miles."

"The same thing that happened in Siberia could happen here in College Station," Schorn said. "Who is to say that it could not hit here? There is no special saucer protecting us. If that same comet hit here then it would destroy Houston, Austin and everything around here."

Schorn said it does not matter if it is a comet or an asteroid, if it is traveling at the same velocity it will cause the same damage.

"An asteroid is a rocky body and a comet is an icy body," he said. "The bigger they are, the more damage they will cause. If it were to hit earth, it would not affect the orbit of the earth but it would destroy all life. Just the impact alone would shake you like jelly."

Schorn said the meteor that hit Flagstaff was small in size but caused a lot of damage. An average sized asteroid or comet would cause a lot more damage.

"Nothing would be around," he said. "There would be a tidal wave a mile high and the earth's crust would look like glowing embers. There would be fires in the forests and vegetation, shock waves in the ocean, no sunlight, no photosynthesis."

Dr. Andrew Hajash, professor of geology and geophysics and the assistant department head, said looking at past collisions can be an indicator of what could happen.

"It would create a lot of pressure," he said. "It would cause rocks to melt, high temperatures and high pressures. The energy of the impact would be dissipated into heat, sound, movement of mountains and water and giant explosions."

Hajash said the statistics show the chance of an asteroid hitting is greater in the water and than on land.

"A meteor

would most likely hit in the ocean because the earth is made of 70 percent water and 30 percent is earth," he said. "If it were to hit the Atlantic Ocean it would set off large tsunamis. These waves would be so high that they would cover the Appalachian Mountains."

Dr. David Owens, a marine biologist and a professor of biology, said the impact would be reduced if it were an oceanic impact as compared to a terrestrial impact.

"On land it would cause a lot of debris in the air, volcanic eruptions and there would be a greater degree of global warming but in the ocean the damage would not be as severe," he said.

Owens said the disaster would lead the whole ecological system to be damaged or destroyed.
"The damage would also depend on the type and size of the meteor," he said. "There would be several volcanic explosions, so this would lead to gas and ash in the air from the core of the earth. It would be a toxic environment. There would be less oxygen because there would not be any plants doing photosynthesis."

"Currently endangered species would probably become extinct," Owens said. "A lot of species would go away. Animals like whales, fishes and sea turtles would die because of the pressure, it would cause their lungs to collapse. There would be a lot of havoc and would take months and months to repair any damage."

Owens said many scientists believe an asteroid or a comet hitting the earth is what led to the extinction of dinosaurs.

"There was a great loss of plant production," he said. "Herbivores died because of the loss, and the carnivores died because there were not many herbivores left to eat. So it caused a lot of death and it was enough to do damage. This then allowed mammals to come and settle in the remaining habitat, and eat the remaining plants. It allowed them to take over."

Owens said after many years the dust would settle and slowly things would be healed.

"Everything evolves and new species would come back," he said. "First the plants would begin to grow and this would be followed by animals, but this would take hundreds and thousands of years."

"A lot of people will be in the wrong place at the wrong time," Owens said. "If you live in Colorado you might be fine, but off the coast of Texas you will not. But man is very clever and he will find ways to keep himself alive. Of course you would not get evolution immediately but there will be some that will survive, and in the long run humans will do just fine."

Schorn said the premise of *Armageddon* is correct. The threat of this happening is very real and there are preventative measures that can be taken.

"We certainly can do something about it," he said. "You can either pray or get off of your knees and do something. In one of the movies they blow up the comet. This will cause the same amount of damage because instead of having one huge comet you will have several ones. You can build a rocket engine to move the comet or asteroid off its orbit. This is a very real solution."

Dinosaurs did not have the intelligence to save the planet. Fortunately mankind has the capabilities and the power to reach within itself to find a solution.

"When the heaven is cleft asunder, when the stars have fallen and scattered, when the seas are burst forth and when the graves are turned upside down what will make you know what the day of recompense is; the day when no person shall have power to do anything for another and the decision that day will be with God."

— the Holy Qur'an, Cleft Asunder 1-4, 18-19

