

# Unanswered questions

## NASA ponders fate of lost Mars Polar Lander

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — With hope fading fast for the Mars Polar Lander, NASA investigators may have to face the possibility of never really knowing what went wrong with the spacecraft 157 million miles from Earth.

The space agency has only scant information on the final moments of the \$165 million spacecraft's attempt to land on Mars and no hope of recovering any wreckage.

"It may be that everything went right, and it simply landed in a terrible spot," physics professor Robert Park, a University of Maryland expert on the space program, said. "Who knows if it landed on a big boulder and fell over? We just don't know, and we never will is my guess."

For NASA, the loss would mean that back-to-back Mars expeditions have ended in failure.

Mission controllers plan another attempt today to detect a signal from the spacecraft, which has not been heard from since it began its descent Friday. Two microprobes that were to have landed separately also were lost.

No signal during the next window would eliminate one explanation for the spacecraft's silence — that it was in a slumbering "safe mode" caused by some problem after landing, Laurie Leshin, a member of the lander's science team, said.

"We think this is one of our last really good chances," she said yesterday.

Other possible explanations: the spacecraft burned up in the planet's atmosphere, crash-landed on the "Red Planet" or experienced some kind of problem with its antenna or its computer.

It could be two weeks before the mission is declared a failure, Richard Cook, the spacecraft's operations manager at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, said.

If the mission did fail, one critical piece of information could be acquired by the powerful cameras of NASA's orbiting Mars Global Surveyor, a satellite that is mapping the surface of Mars. Cook said NASA will look for evidence of the lander's parachute on Mars.

**"It may be that everything went right, and it simply landed in a terrible spot."**

— Robert Park  
University of Maryland  
space program expert

# 4 wounded in school shooting

FORT GIBSON, Okla. (AP) — A seventh-grader walked up to a crowd of youngsters waiting for the morning bell yesterday and allegedly opened fire with a gun, wounding four schoolmates before a teacher pinned him against a wall.

None of the injuries appeared to be life-threatening. A fifth youngster suffered bumps and bruises.

"He doesn't even know who it was he shot," sheriff's deputy Terry Cragg said. "There was not a name thing, I asked him why. He said, 'I don't know.'"

The 13-year-old dropped the emptied, 9mm semiautomatic handgun as he was approached by science teacher Ronnie Holuby, who also serves as the safety officer at Fort Gibson Middle School, Superintendent Steve Wilmoth

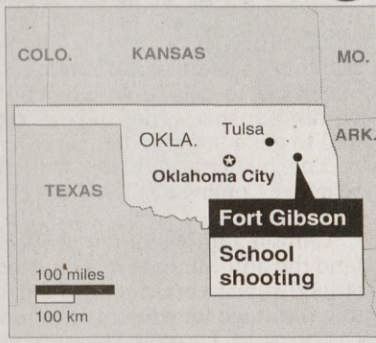
said. Holuby grabbed the boy's arms and pinned him against a brick wall.

The small, slender boy was taken to court for a closed, 15-minute arraignment, walking solemnly between two deputies and keeping his head down.

His name was not released. No details were released on the arraignment or on what charges the boy faces.

Gov. Frank Keating issued a statement saying the shooting "must serve as a call to arms" to address "the root causes of what is happening to our families and young people." He later issued a revised statement, deleting a "call to arms" and substituting the phrase "wake-up call."

President Clinton told re-



AP

porters in Washington that investigators from the FBI and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were on the scene.

"Our prayers are with each of the children and their families," Clinton said.

## What was the Star?

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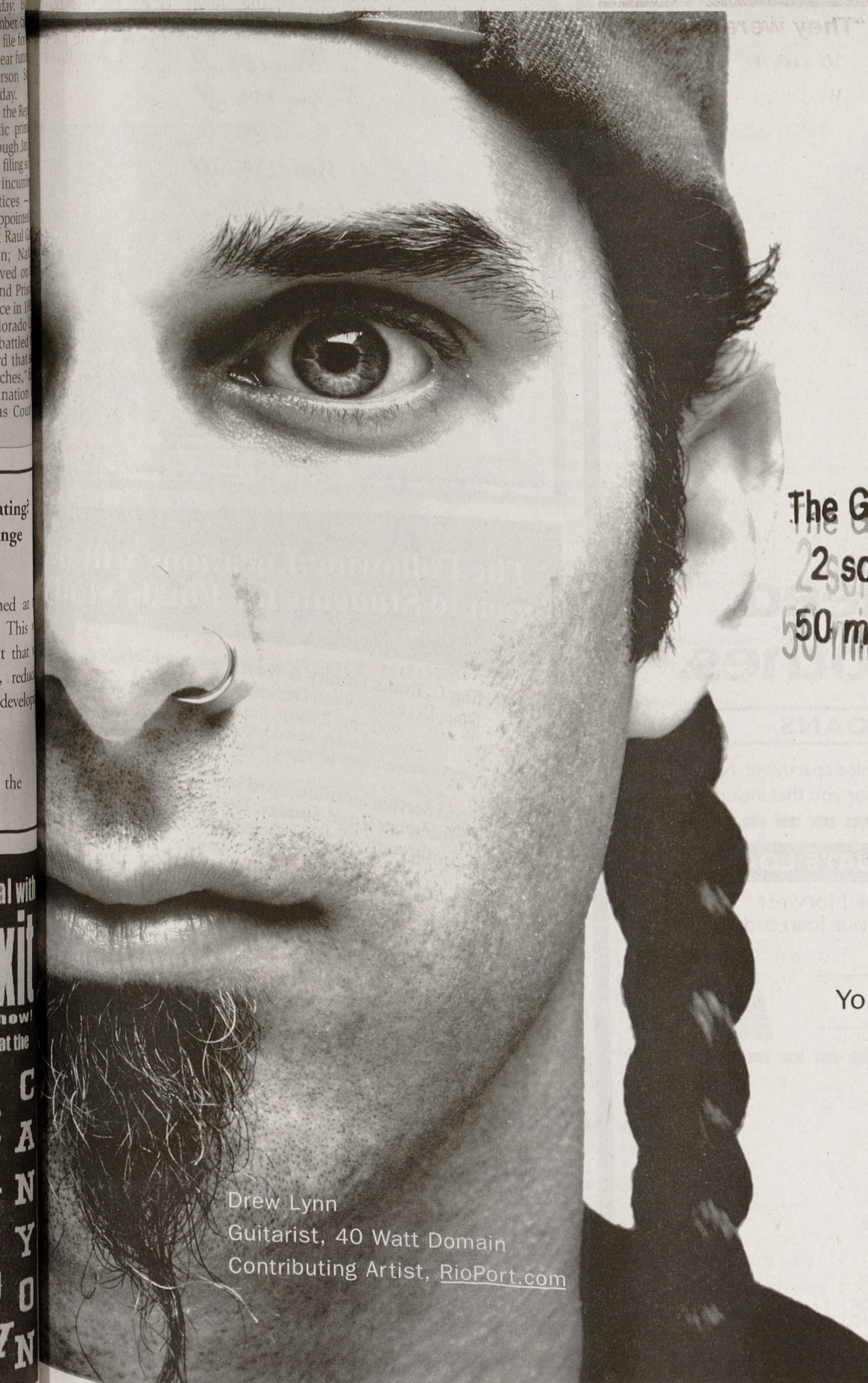
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