

ARMAGEDDON (1998)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 2 hr 31 min.

Our content rating (1-10): Violence -5; Language 3; Sex/Nudity

4

The publicity lavished on this blockbuster must have cost more than the average film (the Count Down Digital Clock sent to me by the studio now reads "0 Days, 0 Hours, 00 Min., 00 Sec."), maybe even as much as the spectacular special effects. The result is an exciting, bumpy ride that scarcely gives you time to catch your breath before the next life-threatening crisis erupts. If you are looking for something that makes you forget your own troubles, this Dirty Dozen in Space Suits might do—but if you have sensitive ears, you'd better bring some earplugs, or plenty of aspirin. Nor is the 1967 Lee Marvin adventure film the only one referenced: there is the scene in which the traditional motor-mouthed Wise Guy straddles a nuclear weapon like the cowboy character in *Dr. Strangelove*; and there's also references to *Star Wars* and *The Right Stuff*.

Bruce Willis plays the Lee Marvin-type character Harry S. Stamper, a hard-driving, tough talking head of an oil drilling firm. He can be so mean and volatile that when he finds his protégé A.J. Frost (Ben Affleck) in bed with daughter Grace, he takes after the would-be son-in-law with a shot gun—on an oil rig platform far out at sea. Yeah, sure. Ole Harry has the roughest, toughest, meanest, orneriest crew in the whole world, and only they can handle the job of digging an 800 foot hole in the Texas-sized astronaut hurtling toward Earth at 22,000 miles an hour. The poor government trainers and psychologists having to deal with this crew more than earn their money as they try to get them ready for the rigors of space in less than two weeks.

A.J. is placed in a second space shuttle and crew, NASA always

doubling up any system. As we see, getting to the asteroid proves as dangerous as landing and drilling, so NASA's redundancy is a good thing. The story of Harry's relationship with A.J., Grace, and the crew is touching at times, but we can tell pretty well how it all will turn out. But the crisis a minute, frantic pace of the film gives you little time to think. And the sound volume is so loud that your ears feel like they are being assaulted! You just hold on to your seat and go with the bumpy ride.

A few thoughts, now that the ride is over: The title is a bit bothersome, reflecting Hollywood's usual misreading of the Bible, especially of the Book of Revelation. In John's scheme of things Armageddon (from the Hebrew "Megiddo" where several historic battles were fought) is the place of the final battle between the forces of good and evil at the end times, in no way applicable to a natural threat to humanity. Like most science fiction films, this one puts great store in technology and human ingenuity (and courage)—and yet, whether it is a pandering to popular piety or is a heart-felt notion, the writers temper this by having one character utter a brief prayer to God on several occasions. And he is the least likely person anyone would suspect to find a touch of piety, Harry S. Stamper. But in the end such films involve humans trying to *prevent* Armageddon, not bring it on as the promise of God's goodness and power over evil. Never forget the the Apocalypse of John ends with the plea, "Come, Lord Jesus."