

# Seeking a Friend for the End of the World (2012)

Rated R. Our ratings: V -3; L -5; S/N -5. Running time: 1 hour 41 min.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. 1 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

*You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. 2For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, 4treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God... 2 Timothy 3:1-4*

If you knew that the world would end in three weeks, would morality matter to you any more?

Or would you be like the man in

2012 Focus Features

Lorene Scafaria's film (she wrote and directed it) who tells Steve Carrell's Dodge that now that he doesn't have to worry about disease or other consequences, he has been sleeping with lots of women? I've seen a number of comments decrying the star's "boring" character that "ruined" the

film, but I found this apocalyptic tale even more intriguing than Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*. I think that the studio's marketing the film as a comedy was a bad decision in that people who think that they'll see the Carrell of *Evan Almighty* are bound to be disappointed when they see instead a film exploring human relationships and morality as important regardless of any consequences.

The film begins with Dodge sitting in a car with his wife as they listen to a newscaster deliver the grim news that the space ship sent to divert the 70-mile diameter Matilda from crashing into Earth crashed into some space debris—where is Bruce Willis when you need him, he would have avoided this! Without a word Dodge's wife gets out of the car and walks into the darkness. He goes into his office, but finds it in disarray, and that night at a party turns down an invitation to group sex, as well as refusing to join in the heroin binge.

At his apartment complex he meets a tearful neighbor Penny (Keira Knightley) who has broken up with her boyfriend. He has already taken under his wing a little dog, so why not this Brit, pining away because she has missed the last commercial flight to England where her parents live? Learning from her that she had not turned over to him a letter mistakenly dropped in her mailbox, he decides to go visit the writer, Olivia, a sweetheart from his younger days. He promises that if Penny will accompany him, he will somehow acquire a plane to fly her to England. And so they set out on a perilous journey, but one that first leads to his father Frank (Martin Sheen) and a long delayed reconciliation.

I wondered for some time if there would ever be a character whose faith led him or her to view the end of a world from a different perspective than the hedonistic friends of Dodge. Although this person never appears, Dodge and Penny do encounter a group gathered on a beach where a man is engaged in baptizing a group of people. Unlike *Oh brother, Where Art Thou?*, there is no singing, nor does anyone say anything. Penny and Dodge just stand there and watch, and yet this faith incident seems to be a pivotal point in the film. Later, when the couple arrives at Olivia's, Dodge does something unexpected, and upon reflection, the viewer realizes involves a real sacrifice. This is a film in which a person's acts convey as much, if not more, than his or her words.

Despite its grim plot, the film is often funny in a quiet way. Part of the humor lies in observing different people's reactions to the news. Some riot or engage in wild sex, but others continue on with their routines. Dodge's Hispanic maid is one of the latter. Dodge sees no point in keeping the apartment spotless, but the maid returns in spite of his suggestion it is not necessary. When he tries to suggest that she has better things to do, she becomes upset because she thinks he is firing her. He assures her that is not the case, and so she leaves, indicating she will see him again. Then later, as the TV newscasts, whose staff obviously had decided to stay with their work, go off the air, an announcer reminds everyone watching to set their clocks ahead for Daylight Savings Time.

There have been many, many films dealing with Earth threatened with destruction by some force of nature—asteroids, meteors, and such, going back to *When Worlds Collide*. Most use spectacular special effects, and almost all are based on an optimistic belief that science and heroic action can save us. This is not one of those films. For those interested in relationships and thought-provoking moments Lorene Scafaria's film will be a welcome relief from ordinary film fare.

## For Reflection/Discussion

1. What are the various ways that people react to the news that the end of the world will come in three weeks? If you received such news, what would you do?
2. Compare Dodge and Penny: how are they an unlikely pair?
3. What do you think of the survivalist's preparations? Any irony in this, given the immensity of the threat?
4. What would you say is the intention of the owners of Friendsy's for their customeres? Compare it to the New Testament concept of koinonia. Despite its superficiality, how are bars sometimes closer to this than churches? (Remember the theme song of the TV series "Cheers" ?)
5. Were you wondering if there would be any display of faith or religion in the film? How does the baptismal scene seem to be a turning point in the film?
6. Why is it important for Dodge to seek reconciliation with his father before the end?
7. What sacrifice does Dodge make when they arrive at Olivia's house?
8. How did you feel at the end of the film? Compare this view of the end of the world with that depicted in 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18 or to the above passage.