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Paper 'n Ink...

something wicked this way comes...

By Lynn Brisendine

It is one of the stock plots in so many sci-fi movies. The Earth is hit by a monstrous rock from space.

Two recent flicks come to mind which have a planet-killing asteroid crashing through our atmosphere, hitting the Earth with a cataclysmic force.

In many of these movies, scientists come to the rescue by sending a barrage of nuclear missiles or men riding in rocketships and souped up shuttles to intercept an incoming object. They plant bombs to blow it apart before it hits and annihilates everything, from the largest animal to microbes on this planet.

The possibility of such an event taking place is not just science fiction. Historic events point to this scenario actually occurring in the ancient past.

We all know about the asteroid which struck what we now call the Yucatan Peninsula, in present day Mexico, which many scientists think doomed the mighty dinosaurs.

The idea of such a disastrous collision is that the original shockwave, coupled with the tremendous heat generated, was bad enough. But the damage of such an event went far beyond the initial explosion. The crater which resulted saw massive amounts of dust, coupled with the smoke from fires burning down entire forests, and blocked sunshine for years, causing havoc to both animal and plant life.

Last week three events took place which give credibility to such catastrophes actually taking place. Astronomers watched with the rest of us as a massive rock structure, some estimate it to be half a football field wide, weighing several tons, missed us by 17,000 miles. That seems like a pretty big miss, except for the fact that when calculating any spacial difference, the object was truly a near miss, and thank goodness this big rock sailed right on by.

The folks who keep an eye on spacial events had this thing calculated to its nearest point of us for months after sighting the incoming hunk of space rock. The announcers covering the story had a special countdown where they knew the exact second when it attained its nearest point and immediately afterward began to report its moving away. This thing was moving four or five times faster than a bullet fired from a rifle.

While many of us were observing this massive object coming and going without damage to anyone or anything, another space rock made news over Siberia.

This thing sneaked up on everyone. It blazed its way through the atmosphere, leaving a huge smoking trail following a glowing meteor.

Several estimates of size and speed of this object have appeared. The last of these specu-

lations saw this mass being 55 feet in diameter and weighing several tons.

Another less significant event took place over California last week as a smaller space chunk burned up in a spectacular fireworks show far above the landscape.

So, we saw three different events within a few days of one another take place. One object we had sighted and calculated its flight path, two others came as a surprise.

Some reports coming out of the Siberian incident talked of the Russian citizens' fear and thoughts that they were being attacked by a secret American weapon. And that scenario, too, is spooky in so many ways.

Our atmosphere is a pretty significant boundary, one that protects us from a huge amount of junk flying in from deep space. The amount of material striking our atmosphere and burning into ash daily is considerable.

The Siberian meteor blew up some ten miles above the Earth. The resulting explosion, estimated to be two or three times the earliest atomic bombs, caused a great deal of havoc on the ground below. The blast broke windows in a Siberian city and saw hundreds injured from flying glass or accidents resulting from the chaos of such an event.

Astronomers are quick to tell us that nothing so large or threatening is coming at us that they can observe with the equipment available to them at this writing.

Some are excited about a future space telescope that will allow us a better look at space events in the future.

Some movie plots revolve around using nuclear bombs to blow the space monsters to pieces, thus saving us from a direct hit. Many researchers and astronomers tell us this is a flawed concept. Blowing one of them to pieces would see the mass continue to move our way and thus cause the same damage as the object before the explosions. Of course, men or weapons making a journey to intercept these speeding objects would be a difficult ordeal.

Many of these people are thinking that we should, if ever we can foresee such a massive object come our way, use specially designed space engines, flown to the object and affixed in such a way as to use their propulsion to move the object ever so slightly, forcing the trajectory to alter and miss us.

Whatever, the possibility of these huge rocks coming into contact with us is not just a possibility but, odds are, a probability. The good news in all of that is the odds extend over millions of years.

That is a comforting thought only disrupted by remembering what became of the Thunder Lizards of eons and long odds past.

State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association

Texas joins other states in legal challenge...

AUSTIN — Attorney General Greg Abbott on Feb. 13 announced Texas had joined 10 other states in a legal challenge to a federal law, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010.

The preamble to the 848-page law states its purpose: "To promote the financial stability of the United States by improving accountability and transparency in the financial system, to end 'too big to fail,' to protect the American taxpayer by ending bailouts, to protect consumers from abusive financial services practices, and for other purposes."

Abbott, however, said the law "is bad for banks, harmful to businesses and worse for consumers who want to borrow money. It gives too much power to the federal government — and puts taxpayer dollars at risk. Under this law, unelected federal bureaucrats can unilaterally liquidate financial institutions in which the state invests taxpayer dollars. The State of Texas could be denied basic due process rights and taxpayers' dollars could recklessly be put at risk," Abbott said.

Over the last few months, The Associated Press and other national media entities have noted that Abbott, on behalf of the state, has sued the Obama administration more than two dozen times since January 2009. Complaints in the many federal lawsuits to which Texas has

been party vary widely, including such topics as health care reform, offshore drilling, voter identification, redistricting, air-quality regulations and school prayer.

Survey spells out needs

Members of the 83rd Texas Legislature, in crafting a state budget for fiscal years 2014-2015, will know what's on the minds of people with disabilities.

On Feb. 13, the governor's office posted funding priorities as expressed in a survey of 1,131 citizens who responded to a survey conducted in the third quarter of 2012 by the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities.

Respondents ranked issues and gave open-ended input on any issue important to them. Some of the highest-ranking issues expressed in the survey include:

- Access to efficient and quality healthcare (expressed by 90.1 percent of respondents);
- Access to affordable healthcare (89.9 percent);
- Ensure that emergency notification and warnings are provided in multiple formats, including formats that are accessible to people who are blind, deaf, hard-of-hearing, or use American Sign Language (85.7 percent);

— Increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities (85.6 percent);

- Accessible evacuation transportation (84.9 percent);
- Adequate, efficient Special Education programs, ser-

vices and procedures (84.7 percent).

Also:

- Emergency planning processes that include people with disabilities (84.2 percent);
- Ensure appropriate (educational) accommodations are available during testing (83.2 percent);

— Education of employers about disability rights law related to employment (82.3 percent);

- Accessible post-disaster housing (82.2 percent);
- Integrate people with disabilities in the planning process for emergencies at the State and local level (82.0 percent);

— More resources and support for family caregivers, including respite services (80.0 percent); and

- Strengthening existing anti-bullying laws in schools related to students with disabilities (79.1 percent).

DNA database is credited

Steven McCraw, director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, on Feb. 14 recognized the CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) database for achievements.

The CODIS section of the DPS Crime Laboratory Service received a unit citation for recent accomplishments. Notably, in November, CODIS registered the 10,000th cold hit, ranking fourth among the states in the number of hits, the DPS reported, and explained that "cold hits" are unexpected matches between DNA of known criminal offenders with biological evidence from crime scenes.

Since 1998, the DPS CODIS Lab has helped solve more than 640 homicides, 3,300 sexual assaults, 4,200 burglaries, 550 robberies and hundreds of other crimes in Texas and other states, McCraw said.

The Seminole Sentinel welcomes and will publish engagement and wedding stories under a long time policy.

The Sentinel will accept and publish for free weddings which are newsworthy. We will provide our readers this service with the understanding that we reserve the right to edit the content for space. We will not accept (for free) a wedding story which details an event more than one month old. Should you wish to have a story published concerning an event more than a month old, we have an affordable and workable wedding package available.



Wright Words...

By Dustin Wright
Sentinel Managing Editor

Monday morning, as I was scraping for ideas for news copy, I looked out the window of the Sentinel offices.

My eyes caught the attention of the majestic sight of "Ol' Glory" waving in the wind. Further beyond the view of the US flag, I saw leafless elm tree limbs swaying.

All were placed before a backdrop of a "beautiful" brown sky backdrop.

Yeah, it's late winter/early spring in West Texas.

Weather has always been fascinating to me, for as long back as I can remember.

As a child, I loved thunderstorms. I would love to sit on the front porch and watch the lightning strikes dance from thunderheads off in the distance. When the severe weather approached, I would find a spot by the front door or my bedroom window, and enjoy the rare sight of rain, sometimes mixed with some hail for good measure.

Weather still fascinates me to this day. Thunderstorms and high snow chances still get me as excited as I was when I was a child. However, I am still not fond of dirt-filled skies or stiff 30 mph winds out of the North which drop temperatures below my preferred comfort range of 60 degrees during the wintertime.

With the calendar rapidly approaching the spring months, paired with Monday's high winds in the area, I couldn't help but flash back to one of the oddest weather events I have yet to experience in my short life on this Earth.

The date: April 5, 1996. I, along with my parents and two older brothers, were traveling home to Seminole from Stephenville after attending the funeral services of one of my uncles.

As we departed Seminole days before, I had packed the necessary clothes for the trip, one set of dress clothes for the funeral, and enough athletic shorts and T-shirts to pass me through our stay.

It's April in Central Texas. It's not like we're going to run into a "Blue

Norther" or anything, right?

Wrong! The day of the funeral, it rained in Stephenville. And not just a 30-minute passing thunderstorm kind of rain. It rained all day long. And all night. And the morning of our departure.

For the North Texas region that year, the rain was welcomed as the area was in severe drought conditions.

As we said our "goodbyes" and left the green, northern edge of the Texas Hill Country, we made our way back west to Seminole.

Being April, the temperatures were in the low 70s from what I could remember as we left Stephenville, with the rain still pouring down.

And it poured. And poured. And poured, as we continued to make our way west through the I-20 towns of Eastland, Cisco, Baird towards the midway point of Abilene.

Sitting in the back of my middle brother's Suburban, the closer we came to Abilene, the more we started seeing eastbound cars with white, flaky stuff caked on top of the hoods and passenger cabs.

Snow!?

Nah, it couldn't be snow! This is April. In the Rolling Plains region of Texas! It can't be snow!

It was snow! And, within the roughly 15 mile span of the eastern portion of Abilene to its west side — via I-20 — we saw quite the transition from rain-to-sleet-to-snow.

A transition which saw our typical 5-hour trip home turn into an all-day affair.

You see, the April 5, 1996 snowstorm seen in the Abilene region that day turned out to be "one of the heaviest April snowstorms on record" according to records by the National Weather Service.

And I, along with my parents and brothers, had an unwelcomed view of it.

On that day, a record 18 inches of snow fell between Abilene and Sweetwater.

It's fairly safe to say that we saw half of that total fall in the four hours we spent on I-20, stuck, on the 40 mile stretch between Abilene and

Sweetwater.

It was a miserable four hours, having to sit cooped up inside a vehicle, with shorts and a T-shirt on.

In fact, for a solid hour, we weren't able to move forward one inch on I-20, due to jackknifed 18-wheelers scattered along the highways.

But the trip wasn't without some funny moments, as we crawled by several motorists who opted to build snowmen on the sides of the road to pass the time.

Or the group of 10 or so women who "circled the wagons" with blankets on the side of the road, since we were all miles away from the nearest restroom facilities.

However, the funniest memory of the trip was seeing the joy of an Australian couple who spent their down time along I-20 playing in the snow, as they had never experienced such a weather event in their lives.

After the four hour ordeal, we finally made it to Sweetwater, where the only place we could find an available place to sit down and eat was a small fried-chicken place a few blocks off the interstate. Although it wasn't the best tasting meal from what I remember, it was welcomed before we attempted to venture on home to Seminole.

A venture I was prepping myself for "as another long stretch of down time."

However, Mother Nature surprised us again as once we reached the community of Roscoe—seven miles west of Sweetwater—we found dry highways and partly cloudy skies.

It was as if the Good Lord had drawn a dividing line between the two.

A few years removed from that weather event, I've learned my lessons, especially since I tend to do a bit of traveling within the region covering sporting/news events this time of year.

I dress a little more for the weather and always drop a heavier jacket and a bottle of water or two into the backseat for extra measure.

After all, as the old Texas saying goes, "If you don't like the weather, wait around for five minutes. It'll change."