

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Better to beware

Citizens need warning of Y2K problem spots

The year of naught, 2000, is coming, and the government isn't going to be ready.

This isn't a real surprise, of course, but it's going to happen anyway, and so far, the government isn't doing much to help people prepare.

Last month, it was announced that 11 of the 24 major federal agencies missed the government's March 31 deadline for making their "mission-critical" systems Y2K compliant. Last Friday, it was announced that only 44 percent of the nation's electrical power systems participating in the government's self-check program were ready for Y2K.

This isn't a call for panic, but a call for the government to step forward, tell us where the problems are going to be and what we can do about it.

As the clock ticks closer to the fateful first day of January, the government is working to try to get all the systems ready for it.

And we, the public, don't know which ones or where.

While the announcement was made that only 44 percent of the nation's electrical power was ready, it's not specified which 44 percent.

The American people as a whole are expecting a few problems. That's been well-documented in countless polls.

But they need to know what to be ready for.

Families need to know if they should prepare for a week or two without power. They need to have time to save canned food and figure out alternatives to the normal way of life.

Everyone deserves that warning. If things are going to hit, we'd like to know a little in advance, please.

Our government is compiling a list of what's most likely to go wrong on that cold January morning, and we, the American people, should get that list.

If a disaster's coming, or even just a few minor glitches, we deserve to know.

There may be people who panic, but that's the way it goes, and the rest of us can keep those panicky people from going too far. Most of the folks who would be terrified already are.

The rest of us will treat a power outage exactly as the situation merits: We'll cope and adapt.

“Everyone deserves that warning. If things are going to hit, we'd like to know a little in advance, please.”

Hitch's VIEW



Mind benders

A reading list for deep thought



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You ever wondered how to define reality?

You ever wondered where all these crazy ideas I have come from?

Last week, when I talked about the Illuminati, grand conspiracies and a higher plane of existence, lots of people asking me what the hell I was talking about, so I sat down and compiled a "must-read" list if you want to try to follow some of the more interesting theories I've been known to champion.

So, consider this Cliff's Recommended Reading List. A lot of this stuff will peel your skull open and get you deep into the heavy metaphors that make up life and start to tear open what you thought reality was. Be forewarned, however, none of this stuff is easy reading, so be prepared to strain your brain a little.

"The Illuminatus Trilogy" – Robert Anton Wilson & Robert Shea, "Schrödinger's Cat Trilogy" – Robert Anton Wilson

It's impossible to describe these two monstrous volumes. I read the Illuminatus Trilogy when I was in 7th grade and it really started to bend my brain open. It's full of violence, sex, dimension hopping, reality theory, number theory, surrealism, humor, metaphors, conspiracies and chaos.

The plot starts with a newspaper editor who stumbles on to a lot more than he's ready to handle. From there, it gets too complex to explain.

It was my sophomore year in high school before I was able to track down the quasi-sequel trilogy, written by one of the two authors, and, in many regards, it superseded my expectations.

Once you read "Schrödinger's Cat," there's no turning back.

This is the graduate level, here, however, and this is not where you want to begin. You might want to save

these books for last. They're some of the most challenging readings you'll ever do.

"The Hitchhiker's Guide To the Galaxy" (series) – Douglas Adams

This is where you should start. Adams is much lighter reading than Wilson/Shea, and often a lot funnier.

The incredibly inaccurately named Hitchhiker's Trilogy comprises five books, all of which are worth reading in some respect or another (although the fifth one is a little weak).

The story follows Arthur Dent, one of the few survivors of Earth, which is destroyed to make an intergalactic bypass, and his good friend, Ford Prefect, as they hitchhike across the universe.

Trust me, you'll love it.

"The Invisibles" – Grant Morrison

Invisibles stands in a different category here because it's ongoing. It's a comic book, and you can get it on a monthly basis. There are three trade paperbacks available already.

Before you get on your "comics are for kids" high horse, let me educate you about a few things: Comics are not just for kids, and invisibles definitely isn't a kids comic.

The whole world is at war, it's just that no one knows that yet, except for a small group known as the Invisibles.

The characters? *King Mob* – a writer turned philosopher/anarchist/sharpsooter. *Ragged Robin* – a psychic returned from 2012. *Boy* – an ex-Harlem cop and martial arts specialist, who lost her brother to a conspiracy. *Lord Fanny* – a Brazilian transvestite shaman. *Jack Frost* – an ex-Brit punk who is the future Buddha.

The whole story moves at bullet's pace, blending the speed of Hong Kong action films with the heavy theory of Wilson's works.

Morrison's a genius. Do yourself the favor. Become invisible.

"Mystery Play" – Grant Morrison

"Mystery Play" is a graphic novel written by Morrison and painted by Jon J. Muth. It deals with a murder in a small English town, during a mystery play. Mystery plays are re-enactments of Bible stories.

During a play, someone kills God, or the actor playing God, or both.

"Mystery Play" isn't meant to be obvious – it's meant to make you think. Morrison will rarely lead you

astray, so get your hands on anything of his you can.

"To Reign In Hell" – Steven Brust

Finding this may not be easy, but it is a monumental book and one of Steve's best (although he hasn't written a bad book yet. The Vlad Taltos series is just fun reading).

It's another perspective on the angels' fall from Heaven, and is required reading for anyone who thinks about religion.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" – Tom Stoppard

Stoppard's one of the sharpest playwrights working today, and I have a lot of admiration for the man. It was his writing that eventually inspired me to try my own hand at the medium again.

"R&G" is Hamlet seen from the eyes of the two, uh, less-than-bright fellows. If you haven't read "Hamlet," do that first. (Or wear the "I'm uncultured" sign for the rest of your life.)

"Arcadia" is almost beyond description. At its heart, it's a love story, but it's also a mystery, a mathematics theory lesson and an existential diatribe.

Stoppard's worth reading.

"Groucho & Me"/"The Groucho Letters" – Groucho Marx

(also "Duck Soup," "A Night at the Opera" and other Marx Bros. films) Since this is a literary review, I should stick to just books, but I am going to digress a little.

"Groucho & Me" is the autobiography of one of the greatest comics of all time, the infamous Groucho Marx. It helps to understanding the genius that was Groucho Marx.

"The Groucho Letters" is a collection of letters to and from Groucho, and they shine light on his comic wit.

My Marxist fascinations are well documented (I have three Marx Brothers T-shirts, including one that reads "Sure I'm a Marxist!" with Groucho, his brothers Chico and Harpo, as well as the unrelated Karl Marx) and I push it to everyone.

To get the whole Marxist experience, however, you need to see "Duck Soup," perhaps one of the finest works of sheer lunacy ever. All the other Marx Bros. films are incredible, too.

There's so much more I'd like to tell you about – music, film and more – but this is a start. Now go read.

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