

Y2K - A Love Story

or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the

Bug

STORY BY CLIFF HICKS

Every hour, on the hour, for 24 hours, as the world turns, the sun sets and rises on various parts of this insignificant blue-green planet we call Earth, and, time zone after time zone, we are all moved into the year 2000.

Slowly, but surely, everything begins to fall apart.

As time combs across the planet, each Universal Time Coordinated (UTC) zone changes, be it slight or great, when the calendar rolls over.

While Auckland, New Zealand, will be the first to bask in the big 2K, the first city to feel its real impact will be Andyr, inside the eastern-most point of what was once the Soviet Union.

The first disaster hits there. Many more follow...

Andyr, Russia (+14 hours UTC)

"Three ... 2 ... 1 ... Happy New Year!" the engineers at the plant shout. Not more than a few seconds later, lights start to flash and alarms begin to sound.

Power coming from the nuclear plant stops as men run back and forth down hallways, looking for radiation suits or shelters.

One man is crouched in the middle of the hallway, head between his knees, praying in four different languages.

Soldiers not far away are sipping their champagne, confident the missile they-guard will not launch (it doesn't) and that they will live to see 2001 (they won't).

As the nuclear power plant melts down, the light is visible from space, and thousands of people glow in the new year.

News of the disaster spreads, people across the world begin hyperventilating and, like cockroaches scurrying from the kitchen light, scatter in fear, trying to make last-minute preparations.

Kamchatka, Russia (+13 hours UTC)

"Three ... 2 ... 1 ... Happy New Year!" the patients exclaim seconds before the life-giving machines give out.

Bodies wheeze and cough, the slow drip of life comes to a fatal halt, and one paramedic, stunned by the death toll, utters beneath his breath, "Our morgue can't hold them all."

Hundreds are dead as medical devices of all sorts fail and collapse, crippled by the Y2K bug.

Sydney, Australia (+10 hours UTC)

Those gathered at the Sydney Opera House shout and cheer as the year turns mere seconds before the lights die and the area falls black. While much of the world has power, outages are common from place to place.

In Australia, the power outage is a mere inconvenience. But in many places, the cold winter chills people to the bone as their heat goes out and thousands freeze to death.

Some of these bodies will never be found.

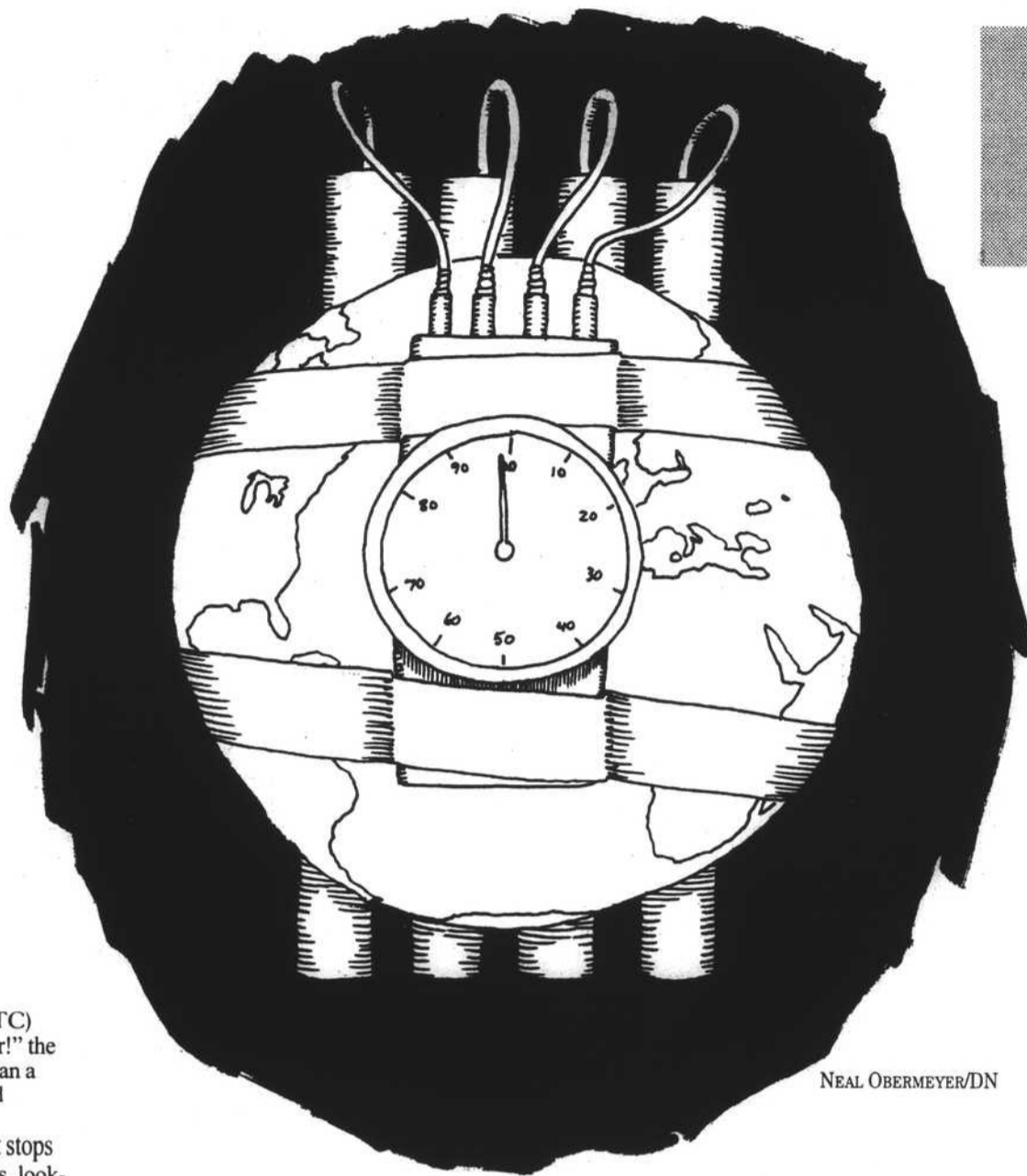
Tokyo (+9 hours UTC)

No one cheers in Japan - there isn't time to. Ultra-reliance on technology has brought the country to a virtual stand-still. Power flickers on and off.

Japan lives and breathes electricity.

It all begins with one generator that doesn't go down but overloads and surges the system. In a domino effect, one problem cripples every system. They will be immobilized for weeks.

Until the life-blood flows once more, the islands are as graveyards.



NEAL OBERMEYER/DN

Singapore (+8 hours UTC)

"Three ... 2 ... 1 ... Happy New Year," a lone hacker whispers from his tiny apartment. With the click of a mouse, he's just launched a virus into the Web that will be felt internationally.

In the next few months, pieces of the Pentagon will turn on when they're meant to be off, off when they're meant to be on.

And a solitary light will begin to flash on Valentine's Day that will make people with a lot of stars on their shoulders very, very nervous.

The hacker is using the Y2K bug as a cover for his infiltration, and thousands of counter-hackers are looking the wrong way. Across the globe, there are many hackers doing the same thing as this one.

It is perhaps the largest cyber-attack in history, made all the more unbelievable by the fact that few of the hackers are aware of their colleagues' efforts.

It just seemed like too choice an opportunity for people to pass up.

Calcutta (+5 1/2 hours UTC)

Not far from the center of the city, a passenger plane crashes into an apartment building, killing nearly a thousand people. Steel tears through the mortar, and flesh is ripped by splintered pieces of wing. The explosion is visible for miles, and thousands more are wounded by shrapnel and rubble.

This is not the only plane crash this night, merely the most visible. The eyes of CNN broadcast it to the world.

Tehran, Iran (+3 1/2 hours UTC)

At the stroke of midnight, nothing happens in the city of Tehran. Everything continues as normal, and everyone breathes a sigh of relief.

In a few hours, however, all the cell phones and pagers will suddenly go off. A loud ringing will hound the streets, and when the phones are answered, no voice is on the other end of the line.

MOSCOW (+3 hours UTC)

In Moscow, the problem isn't that the phones are ringing - it's that they aren't ringing.

"The system is busy," an automated voice tells some people, while most are merely left with a dead line.

It's a relatively simple problem - if even just half of everyone who owns a telephone line were to pick up their phones at once, it would crash the system.

In Moscow, like many other cities, it does.

People panic by the thousands, and suicides run rampant. Fear the world has collapsed moves hundreds to take their own lives or riot, trying to scavenge supplies because they suspect their loved ones have died - and they could be next.

It's incredible how much people take technology for granted and how skittish they are when one element fails them, even for only a few hours.

Fear is the leading cause of death worldwide, on this day.

London (+1 hour UTC)

There is a sudden rush of violence against the large Pakistani population living in London by white supremacists groups.

The majority of people are opposed to the violence, but many of them are too timid to fight back. Gunshots fill the night along with the roar of fire and flames that tickle the skyline. As the night passes, the death toll rises, and the police are stretched thinner.

And thinner.

And thinner.

Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean (UTC time)

A plane, this time a 747 flying a trans-Atlantic route, collides into another plane coming the other way.

It's a few hours past the turn of the year, and with each ticking second, the trajectory of the planes had veered just slightly, putting them on a collision course. Thick clouds prevent the pilots from seeing each other until it's too late.

Over the cool blue waters, in two areas of total emptiness, a pair of metallic behemoths smash into one another, as one wing slices another wing off.

Both planes plummet toward the ocean, and even though both planes are carrying a minimal number of passengers, nearly 200 people

die almost instantly.

Washington, D.C. (-4 hours UTC)

For the most part, the government is prepared for the rollover, but one department simply couldn't do enough fast enough.

Inside the Department of Defense, a few hundred systems slowly begin to glitch and fizzle. While no missiles are launched and no commands are issued incorrectly, the situation is still not ideal.

For a few hours, our watchmen ... watch nothing.

New York City (-4 hours UTC)

Computers aren't a problem for New York City - it has its technological problems under control.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said for its biological problems.

In Times Square, a simple fistfight between two people escalates until the riot threatens to overwhelm the city. Police are on the scene from the start but to no avail. Times Square overflows with people, many, many more than previous years have drawn.

With all the police attention drawn to Times Square, looters and rioters strike all over the city. Property damage rises; fires are set all over.

It seems fire is all the rage this New Year.

Chicago (-5 hours UTC)

A man walking home from a party is killed by a random bullet. The slug isn't fired at the man, and the man never sees the person holding the gun.

The bullet descends from the sky and sinks through the man's skull, down through his brain and exits out the bottom of his jaw.

When the year turned, many people fired their guns into the air in celebration. But, as the old saying goes, what goes up ...

More than a hundred people are killed in this manner around the world.

Denver (-6 hours UTC)

Rushes for food cause rioting at a local grocery store. A woman whose fear has overwhelmed her guns down a clerk working a midnight shift for the last can of Spaghetti-O's.

Los Angeles (-7 hours UTC)

One machine in a chemical plant goes out, and the process is disrupted. Chemicals begin to overflow in tanks as they are unable to be processed along the line. Before someone can shut the whole system down, the streets outside are covered in green goo, and the problems are only just beginning as some of the deadly fluids seep into the sewer system. ♣

Honolulu (-9 hours UTC)

A man sits on the beach in a wooden chair, his leather jacket hanging over the back. He sips a piña colada and listens to everything collapse over short-wave radio.

He can't wait until the new millennium starts in 2001.

The journalism guerrilla still encourages you to die in the fight against all corruption. Any communiqués for the rebel should be sent to journalisticwarfare@hotmail.com. Pleas for mercy will be duly ignored.

**AT
LARGE**