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Need Proof? Call 1-900-Y2K-SHAM

A year ago I shook up the technology world with a crushing rebuttal to the paranoia of year 2000 (Y2K) alarmists, assuring our readers that "MacGyver alone could fix the Y2K problem using nothing but PVC pipe, a transistor radio, and Gouda cheese" (<http://www.stsc.hill.af.mil/CrossTalk/1998/jan/backtalk.html>). Unfortunately, a startling percentage of readers thought I was joking, or at least tried to dismiss my forecast by

- claiming to have proof that MacGyver is a fictional character. (So what is he—a trained otter in a guy suit?)
- claiming that the problem isn't a lack of solutions but a lack of time. (I'll partially concede this point. Cheese factories can only work so fast.)

It's getting harder to be a voice of sanity while virtually all of government and industry—blinded by facts and data—jumps on the "this-could-get-ugly-if-we-don't-act-fast" bandwagon. They're forecasting irritating to catastrophic effects depending on what gets done this year, and the sad thing is they're basing all this alarm on a laughably faulty assumption. All along, they've presumed that just because their critical systems go kablooy when they *test* for Y2K problems, it means these systems *will* go kablooy in January 2000.

Ha! These people are obviously putting more trust in their experience and in the "experts" than in the opinion polls, which clearly show that most people think the Y2K thing is overblown. And the Y2K alarmists aren't the only ones with respectability and expertise on their side, either. After some searching, I have finally found someone with the respectability, experience, and credentials to reliably verify that we'll be buying fresh bananas by credit card come next January:

Consultant: Thank you for calling 1-900-ASTROTEK, the psychic technology hot line. We employ only MCSE-certified astrologers, just \$3.95 a minute. Birth date?

Me: May eighth. Tell me: what will January 2000 bring?

C: Let's see (*sound of shuffling*) ... the cards say ... beware of mysterious floppies, for they may foul the purity of your system with macro viruses. Backup often and—

M: —No, I mean, will the Y2K bug bring chaos and upheaval or just overcooked microwave popcorn?

C: For that I must gaze at the crystal ball ... I type January 15, 2000 into the mysterious oracle's keypad and I see ... I see ... (*sound of whacking*) ... blackness ... nothingness. My system just froze up.

M: I have no time for that. Just tell me whether I'll be cooking toothpaste over a can of Sterno next January or whether I'll be dining on imported Argentine beef while making satellite phone calls from a 747.

C: (*shuffling*) The cards say that the answer ... lies within each person's heart.

M: Give me an answer I can work with. Ed Yardeni's heart says there will be a severe worldwide recession and a huge dip in the stock market. Ed Yourdon's heart told him to move into a solar-powered house in New Mexico—

C: —Who are these people?

M: A world-renowned economist and a world-renowned systems consultant.

C: And I couldn't help but notice the similarities in their names. Are you certain they're not the same person?

M: Nobody knows for sure. But they're huge in their fields. Why should I believe my heart ahead of theirs?

C: Does your heart say there will be a Y2K disaster?

M: Well, having seen "Armageddon" and "Deep Impact," there's a good chance Manhattan and Paris will be destroyed. But I know that somewhere out there a group of scrappy misfits will save the planet with seconds to spare, followed by celebratory vignettes of cheering people who represent the Earth's major cultures and ethnic groups.

C: Then, there you have it. That is your truth, and you may live accordingly.

M: So I don't personally need to do anything, just in case someone else's truth happens? What do the stars say?

C: Let's see ... you're a Taurus ... January 2000 ... emphasis on romance and hardware upgrades ... 10X DVD drives will be big ... beware of Capricorn network administrators ... nope, nothing about distribution problems, power outages, or hardships. Yes, you'll be ordering Alaskan salmon over the Internet next January.

M: Great! Well, I'm off to sell my food storage to some emergency preparedness nuts and buy some snowmobiles!

What a relief that interview was! But if you're still not sure if you should personally do anything, here's an analogy to put things in perspective: Imagine some weather experts say a hurricane may or may not hit your city on a certain day, and it may or may not have a devastating impact. What's the intelligent thing to do? That's right: you sit on your hiney until general panic sets in, and then you sell bottled water and toilet paper to desperate people at obscene prices. At least that's what I'm going to do. Snowmobiles aren't cheap, you know. —Lorin May

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