

Apocalypse not: Y2K afterthoughts

From the Editors in the [January 19, 2000](#) issue

Anyone who has ever studied for a major exam or planned a special vacation knows how the task of preparing for a big event can give vitality and meaning to one's days—and create a sense of emptiness afterward. No wonder, then, that journalists sounded a little disappointed as they reported that computers were functioning fine on January 1, 2000.

And we should not be surprised if Y2K doomsayers try to hold on to the belief that for some time has organized their lives.

After the apocalypse that wasn't, *Washington Post* reporter Hanna Rosin checked out the Web sites of some of the Y2K gurus who had been urging people to stockpile food and fuel and move to the country in order to escape the expected bands of marauding hordes. While she found some bitterness among those who had taken the advice, and some hesitant apologies from survivalist gurus such as Gary North and Ed Yourdon, Rosin also found that many people were remaining loyal to their leaders. Instead of abandoning fears about the Y2K disaster, they were recalculating the timetable. Many insisted that disaster still lurks in the computer chips, and that the system will slowly unravel in the months ahead.

Was the Y2K problem vastly overrated, or was it solved by the millions of dollars spent on computer upgrades? Or was it some of both? That debate may rage for years. At this point, we're impressed by the successful mobilization of resources to meet the problem. If such an effort can be made for Y2K, perhaps it can be made to address other threats, like global warming.

The fact that some Americans were hunkered down, awaiting signs of massive civilizational breakdown (with many others crossing their fingers), lent high drama to January 1. Perhaps not since the Millerites took to hilltops and rooftops on October 22, 1844, to await the second advent of Christ has so much speculation been tied to a particular day. (Like the Y2K gurus, the Millerites also turned to recalculating their theories.)

For the rest of us, 2000 looks like another year to be lived, by God's grace, in ordinary time. In ordinary time, writes W. H. Auden in *For the Time Being*, the task of faith is to "practice the scales of rejoicing without even a hostile audience." We do not look for an earthly disaster to divert us or a heavenly apocalypse to overwhelm us. It could happen, of course. But as Auden says: "In the meantime there are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair, irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem from insignificance." We're glad the machines were repaired, and we look forward to another year of redeemable time.