

**M**ore than three years ago, when Keith and I were successful but hungry magazine publishers looking for new worlds to conquer, we brainstormed a whole list of promising computer books to publish in our first year in the book business. One of the concepts was a handbook for dealing with the problems of the 1999-2000 calendar flipover.

“Do you think there’s a whole *book* in that?” Keith asked.

“I dunno. Maybe we could toss in a couple chapters on calendrics or something. And put a bunch of free stuff on the CD-ROM.”

“Bzzzzt.”

Fast forward to 1996. *Fin de Siecle* Fever is gripping the world. UFOs are as thick as Minnesota midges, buzzing hick-town bars and cutting the ears off cows. “Earth changes” (how’s *that* for euphemism?) promise to give Arizona a coastline and California what it deserves. Conspiracies are oozing from every manhole. People are actually going back to church. And to prove that the End Is Near, in my inbox lies the crowning glory: *The Year 2000 Conference and Expo*. Get yer ticket for only \$1095. Main headline on the flyer:

**Jigger your systems to use hex instead of decimal. That’ll buy you a few more years, and with any luck, you can retire before the year 19FF.**

“Leading analysts estimate Year 2000 costs will exceed \$400 *billion*. Do you have your budgets and plans in place?”

Man, my cow just lost his ears to the Martians, and you want me to...wait a minute. \$400 billion? \$400 *billion*? Are we fixing bugs here? Or buying aircraft carriers? Hey, c’mon. I can save you \$400 billion dollars—or at least a thousand. Here are some suggestions. Choose one. They’ll all work. And you can walk into the twenty-first century with a clear conscience.

## Panic in the Year Zero

**Jeff Duntemann**

- *The Top-Down Approach*: Assign a team to each of your systems. Tell them that any system that crashes on New Year’s Day 2000 gets outsourced and takes its team with it. (Yes, I understand that this is Too True To Be Funny....)
- *The Last Mainframe In Paris Approach*: Go down to the local electronic scrapyards and gold recovery plant and buy a spare mainframe just like the one way in the back room that you’re worried about. They’ll sell it to you by the pound, though that may not be much of a win. Replicate your oldest system on it,

can retire before the year 19FF.

- *The Humphrey The Camel Approach*: If the problem is with dates, go through the source and change all the dates to figs.
- *The Deja Vu All Over Again Approach*: Instead of rolling over to 2000, roll over to 1900. If anybody objects, tell them you’re going to do the twentieth century over again, without the wars and Barry Manilow.

Ah, wait a second—according to historians (who have been counting years longer than COBOL programmers have been swatting bugs) the twenty-first century doesn’t really begin until January 1, 2001!

Sorry, wrong. A simple misunderstanding. Traditionally, the first year of the Current Era was Year 1. Of course, all number systems begin with 0. But back when the Romans were in charge, they hadn’t yet invented the 0. So they punted. The year 1 BC was followed by the year 1 AD. The year 0 never happened, and for 20 centuries, we’ve been starting every century a year too late.

My suggestion? Stick the year 0 in after 1999, and shut down every damned computer in the world for a whole year with the Mother of All Divide By Zero errors. Maybe then I’ll have a little time to brush up on my Palmer Method and learn to sight-read on the piano—or even take voice lessons.

Panic you want? *Panic* we’ll give you! ▼

then lie to the system clock and tell the old box it’s December 31, 1999. Tell the gang to bring their sleeping bags, order out pizza, and have a jammy party to see what blows up, and take notes. Do the same thing a week later for your next oldest system. Repeat until done.

- *The Salem’s Lot Approach*: Jigger your systems to use hex instead of decimal. That’ll buy you a few more years, and with any luck, you

