

01-01-00, 7:04 a.m. (EST)

Cobalt smoke infuses late night blackness with early morning glow. Intricate patterns of electricity draw out, in measured increments, the first dawn of a new millennium. Separation and identity come on with an icy shiver that runs the length of my body. My right hand relaxes with a tingling ache as stiff fingers release an unconscious grip on the stale remains of a four dollar bottle of champagne. The bottle rolls into a dark distant corner. The sound of glass gliding unevenly across tar and roofing paper turns my head and draws my eyes into the dissipating darkness. The bottle comes to rest against the roof ledge but my eyes continue outward across the endless Brooklyn rooftops that stretch in all directions.

Damp with dew and shivering, there is no telling how long I've been up here alone in the dark. I turn my gaze skyward again and attempt to scry up memories of an impossible future. Instead I am greeted with disparate glimpses of the very recent past.

*"The End is Nigh"*. The old preacher's placard is lettered in a stern yet uneven hand. He stands ahead of me, the manifestation of an endlessly looped cliché, with eyes wide and unblinking and the fanatical grin of the true believer radiating from behind the untamed beard of the timeless sage. With an unnervingly gentle firmness, he places a pink sheet of paper streaked gray from poor photocopying in my unreceptive hand. It contains the painstakingly hand copied words of chapter eighteen of Revelations with a few peculiar doodles in the margins to enhance its provenance as a true illuminated manuscript.

*"Alas, alas, the great city, Babylon, the mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come"*. The would be prophet's arms ecstatically raise over head indicating the tens of thousands of revelers behind him as his very own flock. He blesses them with his beatific smile and special knowledge of the quickly approaching next eon. Its only noon and the crowds in Times Square have already surged for half a dozen blocks uptown. The air is full of nervous anticipation more than celebration. Overhead on the famous news ticker reports of thousands of body bags being laid out in Madison Square Garden scroll by unnoticed as the

shear mass of raw humanity reaches numbers increasingly difficult to comprehend. It's all quickly too much for my agoraphobic tendencies. Long ahead of nightfall, I retreat by subway to the perceived safety of the outer boroughs.

"10, 9, 8 ..." Dick Clark's soulless voice leads a distant chorus channeling through my television. We have retired now to the familiarity of our own apartment, an odd mix of close friends and near strangers acquired along the way. Everyone is packed into our small front room drinking heavily, passing each other nervous glances and counting along with the crowds on the television. I look around the room and take note of the people missing, loved ones who have fled to the suburbs for the holidays and others braving the bars and clubs no doubt being inundated with prince songs and apocryphal pick up lines.

"3, 2, 1..." As everyone stares blankly at the illuminated crystal orb, anticipation and fear cut out a small moment's pause in time's steady progress. Arresting stillness grasps this moment. The fears and fantasies of a city's populace resonate outward and become a seemingly tangible ripple in time. But the world doesn't end in this moment. Planes do not fall to earth. Horsemen do not appear in the sky. There are no horn blowing cherubs or white buffalo galloping down Broadway. There are only a few million people not breathing for one full second. Then a collective exhale as a deferred cheer rings out across the east coast and glasses crash together in our small front room in Brooklyn. It's an edgy cheer cut through with desperation and a peculiar flavor of disappointment, but it is a cheer none the less and the world limps forward more or less as it was.

Embraces, toasts and laughter circulate the room but it's not long before the sound of noise makers and revelry are eclipsed by the frantic tap of a razor blade and the vacuous rush of the straw. Soon I'm drawing concerned looks from hangers on and steely knowing glances and nearly imperceptible nods from friends on the same wavelength. If the world did not have the decency to end at the appointed hour or at the very least erupt in cataclysmic chaos than it's our solipsistic duty to force the issue. We will wear away at the flimsy veneer of this reality, fraying it at the edges by laying a variety of pills and powders on top of dangerous psychedelics. We will pull all the demons from the cabinets and let them loose in a world of our own making.

Talk becomes louder, less focused and more impassioned. Sensible guests begin to find their way home. Those who stay quickly become locked in to the spiral of self immolation

that a few of us have set in motion. Now draped solely in deep tangible red light and icy swathes of shadow the apartment is alive with the the chaotic dance of malevolent spirits and the oppressive threat of immanent violence. Time is unhinged and now loops its way unevenly in ever tightening cycles of conversation and consumption . The acetate of this condensed and insular reality melts at the corners as the room fills with the sickening smell of burning chemicals and extinguished candles.

*"Infinite before my death, I will fly without wings".* We quit the claustrophobic apartment for the open sky of the rooftop. Its dense black and wickedly windy but by this time no force of nature can touch me. I hurl bottles down on to the vacant street whose quiet normalcy scoffs at my efforts. I scream obscenities at the night sky through a hot film of tears and snot but the fury and desperation in me only metastasizes. Standing on one unsteady foot I contemplate stepping over the edge into the darkness but pathetically balk at not having written a proper suicide note. I spin around to explain this to my companions only to discover I'm alone. A wraith of darkness, tangible in its absence, envelopes me and my knees buckle as I collapse onto the frozen roof tar clutching a bottle of long stale liquid to my chest for warmth.

That is the last memory I am able to conjure. Back again at dawn's breaking, I am still alone above the slowly awakening Brooklyn streets. The sun has risen now and the blue has faded into the filthy yellow gray of January mornings. I clamor uneasily to my feet and look out across the neighborhood. I feel nothing but the cold air on my damp skin. I stand purged of all yearning, frustration and fear. I've never been exactly sure what we wanted to happen. Whether it was a true death wish, a super imposed homicidal urge, that wanted to see society purged and ourselves along with it. Most likely it was a distorted yearning for hope, a compounded desire to escape the tyranny of the everyday, a misplaced desire to cast off the seemingly endless drudgery and inescapable feelings of powerlessness in one catastrophic event. Y2k the myth was perhaps a dying wish from a once great society, a compacted and ignited intent for escape from this living death through one gloriously monstrous sacrifice.

I strain to see Manhattan through painfully bloodshot eyes. The city is still and dark, its inhabitants tucked into post millennial slumber. I will stand two years from this day and will have twice seen smoke rise in the distance, once from the towers in the west and the other from flight 800 in the east. The one moment in September will open the latch to all manner of

unwelcome knowledge. I will come to know how hot jet fuel burns, come to experience the sickening odor of smoldering flesh and steel. I'll learn where the Sunni Triangle is and how levies and bureaucracies fail. In the years that follow I will be bombarded by new vocabulary like *Enemy Combatant*, *PATRIOT ACT*, *IUD* and *Black Site*. There will be armed soldiers in the streets, train stations and airports of this city. My government will admit to spying on its citizens and *Terror* will have thoroughly superseded the feeble and pathetic *Y2K* as the violently resonant meme of choice in America. By mid decade our nation will be well and truly lost in two hopeless wars in the middle east. Our armed forces will commit atrocities not seen since World War II and an American city will drown and starve while the rest of the nation watches on CNN.

As I stand on this rooftop in the first morning hours of the year 2000 I have not yet seen the tyranny of my own people illustrated succinctly by two stunning images, one a burlap hooded and electrode strapped torture victim and the other cigarette dangling grin and sadistic thumbs up of his oppressor. At this moment all I can see is the drudgery and necrotic ignorance of an industrial machine past its prime. I am saddened by the soulless slumbering shuffle of my average countrymen. I still have the strong yet naive belief that a violent shaking is all that is needed to wake the common man, that the light of truth will lead all of us from our narcotic slumber and into the warm embrace of freedom. I have yet to see catastrophe bring out the worst humankind. I have not yet learned that novelty can be as oppressive as it can be liberating. It will not be too long before I secretly, in my quite desperate hours, wish for a small sliver of that ignorance and slumber that I so revile to salve the scars and burns of *the reality on the ground*.