Detective Arnie Hooks looked up at the big clock on the precinct wall once again. And for the umpteenth time he noticed the relentless motion of the minute hand as it swept through. "Tick, tick, tick," he muttered to himself, even though the clock was perfectly silent. Still, the sense of the present slipping inexorably into the past was overwhelming. It was 11:31 pm. It had been 11:30 just a few ticks ago, and in a few more it would be 11:32. There was no escape. No getting away from the sense that everything—his patience, his life, the whole wide world—was winding down.

Noticing this obsession with the clock, Del Chambers spoke up, more to break the monotony than anything else.

"You're only going to slow it down if you keep that up," she said.

"What?" Hooks jumped.

"It's the relativity of time problem," she said.

"I thought that meant that astronauts came back younger than their twins or something," David Gere interjected.

Gere had been slowly pacing near the window, trying not to also obsess about the time and failing for the most part, just like everyone else in the room.

"I mean psychologically," Del answered. "If you concentrate on the passing of time, it seems to pass slower."

"Slow or fast, it's still passing, " Hooks said abruptly, "and we're no closer to solving this damn thing."

"And if this lunatic is to believed," Gere said, "we've only got 29 minutes left to figure out what's going on and then..."

"Bang, " Hooks said. "Happy New Year, Murder One."
The problem they were all having with the clock was that it wasn't just any old 11:31. It was New Year's Eve, and not just your average end of the year either. It was exactly 29 minutes before the end of the century. 1740 seconds to the new millennium. Outside, the rest of the town was waiting for the ball to drop to start the biggest celebration in the city's history. But inside the 21st precinct, squeezed into Detective Hooks' stuffy little office, he and the other four members of the team were not celebrating anything. They were trying to catch a lunatic killer before he could claim the first victim of the new year. And as the clock had a nasty habit of proving with each sweep of the second hand...time was running out.

Arnie Hooks was the head of the Special Homicide squad, a five-person unit assigned to the worst of the city's unsolved and serial murder cases. The team had been carefully chosen, each member bringing a different area of expertise to the work. Hooks himself had been a homicide detective for 20 years and knew—by intuition as well as experience—how to dig up clues everyone else overlooked. David Gere was a negotiator and hostage crisis management expert. Del Chambers was the team psychologist. Eddie Paige was a ballistics and weapons expert, and Renata Cayce was a profiler on loan from the FBI.

The Homicide Team—or The Murder Club as they were known in the papers—had been successful in solving a number of brutal cases and bringing the killers to the courts. They had even narrowly prevented a few others from taking place, by keeping an eye on some dangerous candidates.

But the current one—the one they had taken to calling the Year 2000 Killer—had them stumped. That was unusual for the team and added a touch of frustration to their growing sense of urgency.

Returning from the washroom, Eddie Paige came back into the office just in time to catch everyone staring at the clock at the same time. A drop of water that might have been mistaken for a bead of sweat, dripped down his cheek as he strained to see what everyone else saw...11:32.

“Great,” he said caustically, knowing that in a few more minutes the madman would have one more present for them...the fifth and final clue in his crazed scavenger hunt. At which point, the team would be off on another insane attempt to make sense of it before the killer fulfilled his promise.

“I guess I'm not getting home for the party,” Gere said with resignation. “Not unless you can tell me what all this crap means,” Hooks said, pointing to the strange items on his desk.

“We've been staring at that stuff for twelve hours, chief,” Del said. “Maybe it means nothing.”

“It's up to you guys,” Hooks said. “Should we wait it out...or figure it's a practical joke? I hate to think we could have saved someone's life. That is, after all, what they pay us to do.”

That said, Paige joined the others in waiting, pacing, watching, and ruminating.

The whole mad game had started twelve hours before, at about
murder in the year 2000

eleven o'clock that morning, with a bizarre fax. No one had taken it seriously at first. After all it was New Year's Eve and they were all planning to leave early. But it was Del Chambers, the psychologist, who saw something in the tone of the writing — a certain intensity — that told her it was not just a prank. After studying all five pages of the fax, she convinced herself that the message should be taken seriously, and she took it into Hooks' office.

The fax was a maniac's manifesto, obsessive and urgent. It talked ramblingly about the triumph of evil, the conspiracy of government agencies, Hollywood mind control, murder as a form of benediction. The usual rants of a certifiable sociopath. But in there among the rantings and rages, was a simple and clear threat. The author of the fax, it said, was going to commit the very first murder of the new millennium, just 13 hours away. And there was nothing the police could do to stop it.

Amazingly, the identity of the madman was no mystery at all. Renata Cayce, the profiler, figured that out right away. With a computer-like inventory in her head of every madman she had ever interviewed, she promptly brought a file up on her laptop and pointed to it.

"It's our old friend Henry Wayne Cragg," she said bluntly, leaving no room for debate.

"How can you be so sure?" Hooks asked.

"This lunacy is definitely his kind of lunacy," she said. "Who else would think that TV newswomen are agents of the CIA? Or that you have to murder folks to free them from mind control? And look at the misspellings like 'milennium.' That was in the note Cragg wrote us last year."

"Hey, I misspell millennium too," Paige said. "Does that make me a suspect?"

"We'll put you on the list," Gere joked.

"I agree with Renata," Del said. "Listen to this phrase...'those who are guilty of mocking me shall have no mercy from my wrath'. That kind of mock biblical pronouncement? That's classic Henry Wayne Cragg. He wants us to know he wrote this fax. He wants us to know it's him."

"Then why didn't he just sign it?" Paige asked.

"One of his little games," Cayce said. "He's a nutcase who thinks he's a genius. He loves to play games; prove how clever he is."

"Excuse me," Gere interrupted. "But I wasn't on the team when this guy was around. Just who is Henry Wayne Cragg?"

"It was a case we had last year," Hooks explained. "Naturally, it was in all the papers, although we begged them not to go public with it. Reporters love this cat and mouse crap. I wish they'd all just go and write their screenplays and leave us alone."

"They called it the Holiday Killer Case," Paige continued. "There were a series of murders that all took place on national holidays."

"I remember that," Gere said.

"Cragg actually wrote us a letter about it. It was totally off the wall, but Renata wanted him to come in for questioning."

"Did he have information about the murders?" Gere asked.

"He had nothing but his own paranoid fantasies," Cayce said. "Like most psychos, he thinks he's smarter than everyone else. So he never says anything straight out, it's all a web of fantasies, lies, half-truths."
“Anyway,” Hooks said, picking up the thread, “once we got him in here, we became convinced that he was actually behind the holiday murders or at least knew something about them.”

“He was our chief suspect for weeks,” Paige recalled with a certain amount of annoyance, “but we were never able to get enough evidence on him. He fashions himself a kind of deranged prankster, our Henry. Like a character out of a Batman comic…the Puzzler, let’s call him.”

“Oh yeah,” Cayce agreed. “Henry would love that one!”

“So you never actually nailed him for the murders?”

“Never did,” Hooks said. “But all the crimes stopped the moment we let him go.”

“Sure. Once he knew we weren’t going to arrest him, the game was over. You see, he’s obsessed with proving his superiority over authority figures. Military father, blah, blah. Except that he’ll kill people to prove the point.”

“That’s why he wants us to know that he sent the fax,” Cayce said. “To taunt us. But what bothers me is what is still missing…the game. The puzzle he would have to contrive to show that he’s smarter than we are, that he can manipulate us. It would be his only way of keeping our interest.”

Sure enough, Cayce had barely finished her sentence when the phone rang and the fax machine hummed into action. The second fax presented just what she predicted. It was a challenge from Cragg to try to stop him before he committed his crime. Feeling sorry for their pathetic talents, he promised to deliver one clue every three hours to the precinct. The clues would point to the victim of the murder. The last one—delivered five minutes before the new year—would be followed precisely 300 seconds later by the first murder of the new millennium.

“So I won’t be popping open a bottle of champagne tonight with my family,” Chambers announced.

“Depends on how long it takes us to figure out Cragg’s game,” Hooks said, but he knew he was being optimistic.

As promised, the first clue arrived by messenger at noon. Hooks tried to question the delivery boy, but it quickly proved futile. He worked at the Fish Market and had been hired over the phone. He was told to select a certain kind of fish, wrap it up and deliver it to the precinct. Fifty dollars had already been left in an envelope on top of the phone booth at the corner. In other words, no leads, no connections, and no way to track back to Cragg.

Hooks opened the package on his desk. Inside the brown paper outer wrapper was a layer of newspaper. The others crowded around Hooks as he delicately opened the newspaper like a New Year’s present to reveal the first clue in Cragg’s murderous game.

A dead fish.

“Okay,” Hooks said, eyeing it exactly the way one would eye a dead fish. “What does it mean?”

“It means someone is going to be murdered,” Gere said.

“Very funny,” Hooks said.

“No, I mean it. It’s the sign the Costra Nostra uses when they’re going to whack someone. You know, he’ll sleep with the fishes tonight? Maybe he’s going to drown someone.”
murder in the year 2000

"Or beat them with a halibut."

"Looks like a red snapper to me," Paige said, "maybe the victim is someone named Snapper. I'll check the phone book."

"There's a restaurant on Broadway called The Red Snapper," Cayce suggested. "I'm sure they're having a celebration tonight."

"Believe it or not," Paige said, flipping through the directory, "there's someone in town named Redd Snapper!"

"Maybe we should alert him," Gere said.

"Or the restaurant," Cayce added.

"Not yet," Hooks said. "Let's not start to alarm anyone until we see where all this leads."

By 3:00 the second clue had not yet arrived and they were starting to get nervous. The pacing and the clock staring began. Inadvertently and inexorably, they were being pulled into the Year 2000 Killer's mind game.

At precisely 3:01, another delivery boy arrived. He took a small unwrapped object out of his pocket. It was an old wind-up clock that he held out in his hand when Hooks opened the door.

"The man on the phone told me to give you this clock and that you'd pay me fifty bucks," the boy said.

"Fifty dollars?" Hooks protested. "It's not enough we have to play this idiotic game, now we have to pay for the privilege?"

"I don't know anything about that, mister," he said, still holding out his hand.

murder in the year 2000

Hooks grudgingly collected the money from the team members and handed it to the boy.

"Were did you get the call?" he asked the boy.

"At the store where I work," the kid answered.

"Where's that?"

"The Pawn Shop on Hudson."

"What did the man on the phone say?"

"To bring this clock to you...and make sure it was set to five of twelve."

"That's all? He said this particular clock?"

"Any alarm clock with a bell on the top."

"Okay, Hooks said unhappily, closing the door and handing the clock to Eddie. Paige. "Care for a clock, Eddie?"

"Maybe something happens at five of twelve," Paige said as he put it down on the desk. "Like the murder."

"No, he already told us it would happen in the new year."

"Maybe the numbers 5 and 12 mean something," Cayce offered. "an address maybe."

"512 Fish Street," Paige said.

"Is that real?" Hooks asked no one in particular.

But Paige was already checking it out on a map.

"Yes, that could be."

"The kid said something about the bell on the clock," Del said, already leafing through the phone book. "Well...there are ten Bells in the book. Alert them all?"
Gere, who was dutifully making a list of all the possibilities, added that too. And a few others that occurred to the group as they made their random guesses: that the murder might take place near a clock on Fish Street, that someone might be drowned at five of twelve, that fish would be killed by beating them with old clocks. After a while, a certain degree of idiocy was setting in.

“This is getting...” Hooks struggled for the right word.

“Stupid,” Del offered.

“Why don’t we just go out and pick this Henry what’s-his-name up?” Gere asked.

“Because he won’t be anywhere where we can find him,” Cayce said.

“He’s too methodical for that.”

“I thought you said he was nuts.”

“He is nuts but he’s not sloppy nuts.”

At 6:15, all efforts to ignore the seriousness of the situation disappeared as the third clue was delivered. It came by Fedex with a phony return address. This time Paige, feeling the package and guessing what was inside, opened it up to find a .38 caliber handgun.

“No bullets,” he said inspecting the pistol. “But it should hold six. Maybe the number 6 is significant. Phone number?”

“Or maybe it means he’s going to shoot somebody.”

“At the fish market...”

“At five of twelve.”

That sounded plausible enough to get Hooks to pick up the phone.

“Let’s get someone down there,” he said as he prepared to ruin New Year’s Eve for two patrol officers.

“Not so fast chief,” Del said. “It could also mean he’s going to drown someone named Gunn near a big clock.”

“She’s right, there are four people named Gunn in the book,” Paige said, looking up.

“We can’t start sending cops after every scenario that occurs to us or we’ll have no one left if we’re wrong.”

Hooks put the phone back down.

“Look,” Gere said, “all these clues have to point to someone somewhere. We know when he’s going to do it and it probably doesn’t matter how. We need a name and a place, that’s all.”

“What have we got so far?”

Gere consulted his list, but the possibilities were more numerous than their manpower. The most popular victims potential victims were someone named Lazlo Bell who happened to live at 512 Fish Street, a man named Gunn who worked at the Fish Market, and Redd Snapper, whoever he was, lured to the big clock on Broadway that was near a shooting range.

They debated the merits of each choice to the point of exhaustion. Then, after a long pause, Paige suddenly perked up.

“Time is a river!” he said, snapping his fingers.

“Congratulations.”

“And what do fish swim in?” he added.

“A fishbowl,” Del suggested.
“Great, we’ve been reduced to playing Jeopardy.”
“No, go on David. What are you getting at?” Hooks said.
“That both things point to the word river.”
“And?”
“That’s as far as I got,” Gere admitted.
“Like I said, congratulations.”
“But maybe all the clues point to one thing and that thing will tell us who we’re looking for.”
“In which case, we have to wait for the final clue. We would need all five to see the connection, or we would solve it too soon for Henry’s sick sense of fairness.”

They were so caught up in the discussion that the knock on the door just before 9:00 came as a sudden shock. Cayce was closest to the door at that point and opened it. But instead of finding another delivery boy, he was confronted by a tall, somber looking woman.

“Can I help you?”
“Yes, I was told I could find Detective Hooks here.”
“I’m Hooks. Who sent you?”
“Hands Up!”
Gere went for his weapon but stopped when Hooks started to laugh.
“You’re from Hands Up!, the bookstore down the block. The one that sells mysteries.”
“That’s right. You did just ordered this book from me, didn’t you?”
“Did I?”
“And I told you I would bring it over personally. Well here it is.”

She handed a gift wrapped paperback to Hooks who took it without looking at it.
“And did I ask you for this specific book?”
“Of course,” she said as though it was a trick question.
“By name?”
“Dispose of Body by Alan Robbins. Very entertaining. Isn’t that the one you wanted?”
“I guess so,” Hooks said, shaking his head. Then, reaching into his pocket, he added “how much?”
“But you already gave me your credit card over the phone.”
“I did?” he said, thinking he had a lead.
“Forget it chief,” Chambers said, second-guessing him. “It won’t be his credit card. Too simple.”

Once the bookstore lady left the team resumed their roundabout of ideas which were, if nothing else, helping to pass the slowly passing time.

“Anyone,” Hooks asked, eventually throwing the novel down on his desk in disgust.

“John Book, there are three of them. But one of them lives on 215th Street.”
“What’s that got to do with anything?”
“215 are the numbers on the clock—512—backwards,” Gere said with great pride.
“There’s also a Book Street. It’s over by the docks.”
“Maybe he’s going to murder someone at the Fish Market by forcing them to read dime novels.”
"No, wait a second," Gere said. "I read this book. This Robbins is a really good mystery writer. It's about this guy named Aldo Weeks who's afraid to leave his house. He finally gets up the courage to go out and immediately gets involved in a murder."

"Sounds like my life," Del suggested.

"The whole thing has something to with a treasure inside a puzzle box that no one can open."

"Puzzle box. That's right up Henry's alley."

"Aldo?" Hooks said. "Did you say the characters name is Aldo? That's Mayor Clark's first name."

That revelation silenced everyone.

"Where is the Mayor?"

"He should be on his way to the celebration at the...uh oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"At the Dorsal," Cayce said, picking up the connection, "the hotel in midtown."

"A dorsal is a fish fin," she explained to Del who was no friend of the sea.

"We could warn the Mayor's security team."

"Okay," Hooks said reluctantly, "but we're not sure that's what this all means."

"Arnie's right," Gere said. "Maybe we should wait until we have the last clue, that may change things."

"Are you crazy?" Cayce said. "That won't be until near midnight. It will give us five minutes. It could be too late by then."

"True," Chambers added. "But we could be playing right into Cragg's hands. These clues were selected very carefully. He might have wanted us to reach this conclusion and in a panic rush to take action and miss his real target."

"That could happen anyway," Hooks said. "We can't keep second-guessing ourselves. I'm calling the Mayor and warning him."

But as he lifted the phone to make the call, the Sergeant on duty knocked on the door. Amazingly, three hours had passed and another package had arrived. This time it was a cardboard box, taped closed and tied with cord. The gift was right on time and promised.

It was five minutes to midnight.

Cayce took the box from the policeman and went to set it on the desk, but Hooks suddenly jumped up, his face pale with an agonizing insight.

"I've got it! he cried, watching the seconds tick down to disaster, "but hurry...we don't have much time!"

**solution:** Now, assemble the puzzle and see if you can identify the victim, and uncover the site of the first crime of the new millennium.

(to read solution hold up to a mirror)

Mountain Smith Hoos Creek Falls Mirror the box that ping your phone.
and cross it out the window into the picture meant you must read to -get start.
"Look the mirror and examine the license plate."
"Pel."
"Get into the hall and soon my office of the room and as far away super, super good and dig."
murder in the year 2000

from the window as possible.

Am I missing something?" Del Campions said as she tipped over

Ceres and fell to the floor.

"I'll be here after Hoopes said. "We're supposed to be the victims.

That box must have a bomb.

How do you figure that?" Ceres asked.

If we're the ones they've never considered.

Each of the captive points to one of us,
Hoopes said. "You catch the

with Hoopes and their kind of clock for a Ceres.

the plot thickens. Campions and every other face a puzzle.

Right. And so is a kind of cherry, Canches shrug.

erasing the face of our number on the frame.

Before

"Happy New Year everyone." Hoopes said, as they snuggled in the

Hmmm.

But their voices were growing out of the muffled sound of an explo-

soon. His palm into the window until during something into the Tic-

worth...the first moments prior of the millennium ends.