

Montana

Crowds of people gathered on the streets on that fatal Tuesday. No one knew where it had come from; no one knew why, but everyone had heard the rumor, and everyone was curious for more information. A panic swept the state as they gossiped nervously. Many people were rifling frantically through Bibles, while others looked at the sky, wondering if a storm was to come. Still others hurriedly ushered their families out of state, hoping to avoid that terrible tragedy to come. No one was working, no one was having fun, no one was sleeping; everyone whispered among themselves, wondering quietly but not daring to speak aloud.

It all started the day before, early that morning as the sun went up. John Smith woke up and, very normally, showered, brushed his teeth, shaved and dressed. He just as normally ate breakfast, grabbed a couple of pieces of toast to eat and poured himself a glass of orange juice, and walked out the door towards his newspaper-editing office. He reached his office and found, just as usual, the three newspapers other editors had published in the same city.

John spread the newspapers on his desk (still very normally) and smoothed them out to read, but the headline of the first newspaper caused him to choke on his own saliva. He adjusted his glasses and smoothed the paper out to be sure he was reading it correctly. John was not mistaken, however, and he shook his head after reading the article, disturbed, as he hurried out of his office to his secretary.

Meanwhile, the entire city was beginning to wake up, and those lucky people who had subscribed to *Montana Today* glanced at their newspapers as they hurried off to work, gasping and whispering anxiously to their colleagues.

The whole idea was egregious, certainly; but was it? How could it be believable?—but how could it possibly be proven wrong? Uncertainty seeped through the city as the article was read and reread.

John Smith rushed through his office, feverishly rustling through the Bible and giving employees orders that he changed every couple of minutes. Despite his complete normality, he knew that if he did not print this story soon, *The Montana News* might lose its title as most-popular-newspaper-in-the-state to *Montana Today*. Finally, the newspaper was finished, and John Smith knew a restless sleep as his papers were printed, delivered, and read all over the state of Montana.

It was because of this newspaper that more than half of Montana awoke the next morning to find a startling title glaring at them:

MONTANA WILL BE WIPED AWAY WEDNESDAY SAYS THE BIBLE

Reading this was generally accompanied by rapid blinking and squinting, before readers continued on to the rest of the article.

Although the frequent sermons of Pastor Christopher Johnson (First Baptist Church) are not generally noted by the public, the small city of Absarokee, Montana was not able to ignore his preaching this past Sunday, as he warned of a devastating blow that would come to Montana this Wednesday, supposedly mentioned in the Bible. "Start praying, and don't stop!" Pastor Johnson says. "Unless you are prepared to leave the state, pray that we may earn God's favor and avoid this misfortune. Montana is to be wiped out this Wednesday!" he continued on, pointing to chapter nineteen of the Bible's Genesis (verse 13 specifically), and claiming absurdly that Sodom once rested in the place that Montana is now. He explained that the actual destruction described in verses 24 and 25 did not actually occur, but was a metaphor. Johnson even managed to expound on how he is sure that this Wednesday is the correct time.

We may think it seems rather odd, or even outlandish to believe such a fairy tale from this interesting man. However, there is no denying that some measures must be taken to looking into this possible catastrophe if we really do hope to be saved.

Little did John Smith know, as he published this, that he would cause millions of people to leave their homes and their jobs as they discussed the potential disaster.

The time ticked and people began to make decisions. Some went back to their work, hoping for the best. Several people entered the Church and began repenting with fervor, and asking priests and pastors for more information, but the holy men were just as unsure. Young people chose to have fun while they could, and they enjoyed having freedom to do what they pleased. No one, however, seemed certain of what to do.

Only one person re-acted forcefully to this panic: John Smith. Immediately, his reporters flocked across the state, requesting interviews with everyone from Christopher Johnson to the

finicky old lady taking her cats on a walk. “Why did you say this? Where did your inspiration come from?” They asked the smiling Christopher Johnson. “From the Bible, where else?” He responded in a stating-the-obvious voice. “And of course, when I receive inspiration like this, I must share it with the world! I’m just so glad the news got out.” Meanwhile, a chorus of responses from miscellaneous pedestrians explained the reason for the surprise. “I know that John Smith only writes the truth. What he writes, I believe,” one middle-aged lady declared. A college student added, “Only my weird friends read *Montana Today*, but when I saw that story in *The Montana News*, I knew it was *real*.” A police officer added, “We are currently examining the mental health of Christopher Johnson. His remarks may cause a great scandal, or foretell a great disaster.”

Despite the wittiness of Smith’s thinking, his bright idea benefited only the few people who turned on the television in the hope of more information. Most people united in the streets, watching the day go by hour after hour, minute after minute, second after second. Finally, there were only ten seconds until the climax of the new day. “Ten!” People were counting. “Nine,” Excitement was growing. “Eight,” Hearts were speeding. “Seven,” Dread was mounting. “Six,” Faces were turning. “Five,” Hands were clasping. “Four,” Teeth were clenching.” “Three,” Eyes were squeezing. “Two,” Voices were squeaking. “One!” Silence ensued, and everyone glanced around in the moment that passed, waiting, wondering. Then the state broke into a terrific noise, not of disaster, but of voices. “We’re safe!” Some shouted gleefully, “No more worries!” But most people sighed, and questioned, “Are we?” “Is it really okay?” “Will everything be okay tomorrow?” “Will we die at noon?” “What’s going to happen?”

Beds found no inhabitants that night; everyone remained in the streets. Some people celebrated, but most waited in terrible anxiety for the catastrophe. The morning ticked by slowly. Everyone was exhausted, but no one went to bed; the apprehension was too great. Some people tried to buy breakfast, but there was no one to pay. Lunches consisted of canned green beans and ice cream from nearby grocery stores, and by dinner few people even bothered with worrying about money. The sky received many worried stares; eyes filled with both tears and excitement, and clocks received an overwhelming amount of attention. Once again, everyone hoped to count down the time until midnight.

The lack of sleep from the previous night, however, outlawed this. Slowly, people wandered back to their houses, hoping for a moment to rest, or a bite to eat. They wandered to

their beds, wanting only a blanket, but sleep urged them to come, pulled them. As midnight approached again, no one remained awake to count down the seconds. No one remained awake to wonder about the next day. No one was awake to hear the thunderous boom that echoed through the state at midnight.

At five-o'clock the next morning, John Smith woke up and, very normally, showered, brushed his teeth, shaved, and dressed. He just as normally ate breakfast, grabbed a couple of pieces of toast to eat, poured himself a glass of orange juice, and walked out the door towards his newspaper-editing office. An abnormally harsh torrent of rain met him when he opened the door. For the first time ever, he halted abruptly, wondering if he had predicted this storm in his paper the day before. For the first time ever, he could not remember, and so he shrugged it off and continued on his way. As he passed by the normal grocery store, he was startled to find it unlocked and messy. He looked around cautiously, but eventually passed it by with a second shrug. He walked into his office, but for the first time he did not find a single newspaper on his desk. For the first time he was forced to search the internet for popular headlines, but his findings were not read particularly intensely, and his saliva was not choked on. For the first time, he read the internet articles, and chance caused him to skim vaguely over a Christian story about the destruction of Sodom, although the date of the destruction was not listed. He knew a moment of realization, and remembrance, but the exact memory was lost in a world of newspaper thoughts, and he ignored it with a third shrug. The newspaper he published that day was filled with every normal story most papers contained; the president was considering a new amendment, the movie star was engaged, and the department store was having a sale. No one quit their jobs, no one left the state, and no one panicked. Everyone walked with umbrellas to work, complained about the thunder storm, and questioned why their work was neglected. The day was almost ordinary in Montana.