

It's Getting There



*Shadows are falling and I've been here all day
It's too hot to sleep, time is running away
Feel like my soul has turned into steel
I've still got the scars that the sun didn't heal
There's not even room enough to be anywhere
It's not dark yet, but it's getting there
– Bob*

I'd love to take a cavalier tone here, deliver a wry slice of the buffoonery that is He, TrumpTM Charlie Pierce. The man is comedy gold, a walking punch line, from his barely concealed groping of Ivanka, to his hair and skin color, to his inability to let go a grudge, to his Mussolini-esque lip pursing. Someone wearing my eyeglasses emphasized this last tic during last Mardi Gras. It was yooge. Way ahead of the curve.



The Writer as Trump, Friend of da Jieuxs – Photo by Ryan Hodgson-Rigsbee

But mocking Trump is just not enough. Things are just a tad too dire. Face it: one of two people has a non-zero chance of becoming the nation's 45th president. Neither is named Jill or Gary. Get over it. Given the peculiarities of American electoral politics, one of them is named Trump.

I feel like I'm watching some unholy mashup of *Seven Days in May*, *Manchurian Candidate*, and *The Man in the High Castle*. It can't happen here? This time, I wonder.

His acceptance speech in Cleveland was ... was ... well, what the hell was that, anyway? He began by saying this:

Friends, delegates and fellow Americans: I humbly and gratefully accept your nomination for the presidency of the United States.



Humble

It was touted ahead of time as hewing to the model of Nixon's 1968 acceptance. (My favorite Nixon scholar, Rick Perlstein, explains here how badly Trump missed the mark.) Trump knows that his only hope for winning is to amplify and exaggerate our fears, to scare enough people into welcoming authoritarian rule to save us from threats at home and abroad, threats to our "way of life" and "our values". Like Nixon in '68, the litany of horror Trump describes is impressively dire. But unlike Nixon's list, it is largely fictional. A few examples: crime is down, cop killings are down, employment is up, ACA is working well, and so on. Our scorched Thunderdome? He pretty much just made it up.



Fact checkers at work on Trump's ravings

Even more telling, Nixon understood and acknowledged that these were problems that we would have to solve "together". Trump had a slightly different perspective:

I ALONE CAN FIX IT.

This theme came around several times, and it is perhaps the most telling component of the whole crazed diatribe. Trump sees himself as a messianic figure, an authoritarian genius who will cure everything that ails us simply by being his awesome self.

On January 20th of 2017, the day after I take the oath of office, Americans will finally wake up in a country where the laws of the United States are enforced.

Because right now, and as far as memory can serve, America is a charred hellscape where chaos reigns supreme. And only one man can save us.



More humility, with a hearty dash of spittle-flecked anger

He yelled. He balled his fists. His face contorted and reddened. He started loud and got louder, more angry.

And then he lowered his tone and said this:

I AM YOUR VOICE.

I truly lost my bearings at this point. Is he a con artist, delivering his practiced patter to sting an easy mark? Is it all an act, or does this guy truly believe our world is in the depths of hell and he is the only man who can save us.

It doesn't really matter. We now have a know-nothing narcissist within hailing distance of the Oval Office. He is clearly unqualified, and unhinged. Whether he's running a long con or is "just" a demented egomaniac (not that these are mutually exclusive), this is dangerous territory

It's unlikely, but this tiny fingered schmuck could win. He starts with a reliable ~40% of the vote, people who love them some authoritarianism, along with folks whose tribal affiliation to Republicanism means they just have to vote for him. On the other side, Clinton has a reliable ~40% base who love them some Democratic tribalism. And as always, that leaves the mushy middle of 20 million or so people who are unsure, undecided. These are, for the most part, what the political profession calls low information voters.<fn>Actually, that label applies to a huge portion of the dedicated party folks, too. On both sides.</fn> People who will make up their minds based on their feelings. Who would you rather have a beer with?

A few hours ago, a candidate for state representative knocked on my door.<fn>Really! This is not some Thomas Friedman cab driver gimmick.</fn> Nice guy, friendly. Republican, and in a town this size, basically a neighbor. We got to talking Trump. He's not a happy guy on this, says there's no way he can vote for a "looney", and is pretty sad about the state of his party.<fn>He also had unkind things to say about Little Marco Rubio. I liked him even more then.</fn> I asked him if he would vote for Hillary. He kind of shook his head and said, no, he didn't think he could do it.

I asked him if, knowing that Trump is a dangerous nut, and that one of two people was going to be President, and that Florida is a tight state electorally, he didn't think it was his responsibility to do what he could to keep the nut out of office. He was remarkably open to the idea when phrased that way.

I had the same conversation with my fab daughter this morning, a disappointed Bernster who "just isn't feeling Hillary". I get it. It's her first election, and she wants it to be a righteous experience. And I get that many Bernie supporters are disappointed and feeling left out. Been there.

Much has been said about prominent GOPers refusing to attend the convention. Several big name Republicans have announced that they will absolutely not vote for Trump, but like my new pal and state house candidate, they can't bring themselves to vote for Clinton. And much is made of their integrity, their principled opposition.

I say bullshit. How bad does it have to get to renounce your party's presidential nominee? Pretty fucking terrible, that's how. Yet that's not terrible enough to actually do something to keep him out of the office you already admit that he is unqualified for? What more do you need?

Republicans have a shitty choice, but it has a silver lining. I'm looking for prominent Republicans – come on JEB! – to take a stand and say, "This guy is dangerous, he does not represent the values of our party or our country, and I am voting for his opponent. In four years, I will campaign hard to re-take the White House from Hillary Clinton, but for now, she is the only viable choice."

This is the way to rebuild a sober and rational party. I know too many Republicans who acknowledge that the party has become extremist. They want it to change. Here's their chance to chase to tea partiers, the white supremacists, the

obstructionists, the bomb throwers.

For Hillary-averse voters who consider themselves liberal, or progressive, or leftist syndicalist whatever, it's time to suck it up and support Clinton. Proclaim loudly that Trump is just too dangerous, but dammit Clinton, we're gonna bulldog you and hold your feet to the fire. Find another Bernie to primary her in 2020 if she let's you down too badly.

I get that there are people who really, really, *really* do not like Hillary Clinton. Personally, I'm fine with her; it feels like a continuation of Obama, and I can't get too outraged over that. I'm fairly certain she will disappoint and outrage me at some point, just like every other president in my lifetime.<fn>Some way more than others, natch.</fn>

But I'm comfortable with that because I know it is inevitable. For some folks, the idea of voting the lesser of two evils is too much to bear, and a principled purity vote is more emotionally satisfying. Or maybe you're thinking of staying home, like your crestfallen GOP counterparts who didn't get they nominee they wanted. Above it all.

Whether you're a disappointed progressive or an disappointed conservative, let me say with utmost respect:

Fuck your feelings. Use your head.

Trump is a clear danger. We cannot afford to indulge in preening and moral purity this year. The stakes are too high. Vote, goddamit. And don't waste it.

(Full Disclosure: I voted Bernie in the primary, fwiw. And I like Tim Kaine just fine.)