# Live and Let Die

*“Tut, tut, child!” said the Duchess. “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”*

*– Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

A few days ago, our more-or-less president paid a visit to an Arizona factory where they manufacture Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), in this case the N95 masks that are essential for health care workers and are pretty damn great for the rest of us who are trying not to die of the COVID monster. As the Great Pumpkin toured the site – without wearing a mask himself, at one point spraying his putrid drool directly onto a bin of newly-made product – a curious song blared over the loudspeakers.

Indeed, it was the James Bond theme written and made famous by Sir Paul McCartneyHe was in a band called The Beatles for a minute back in the dark ages. You can look it up. and redone by the fleetingly popular 80s hair band Guns’n’Roses; it was their antically screeching version accompanying the president. Late night comics had a blast, as did the twitterati, hailing the anonymous jokester who slipped this past the gatekeepers. Others japed that the hopelessly incompetent boobs on the WH staff were to blame; they just did not realize what the song actually says, yet another in a long-running GOP quirk of using songs that mean the opposite of what they think it means. *Born in the USA*, anyone?

All bullshit, sez me. I assert that the song was chosen with

great deliberation and malice aforethought. This is the message the White House wants you to hear and internalize. “Live and Let Die” is as succinct and honest a policy statement as the Trump gang has presented in the three dark years they have been looting our national patrimony. It is the exquisitely logical culmination of disaster capitalism. These mafioso are damned if they are going to let this good crisis go to waste. And in a rare moment, they decided to not even pretend any more that there was so much as a passing interest in ameliorating the human consequences of the pandemic.

We fool ourselves when we fall into the trap of assuming the *capos* and *subcapos* in the White House are bungling doofuses. I believe they are, in fact, quite capable at the mission they have undertaken. They are there to hasten the dismantling of the commons. They are there to reaffirm White Supremacy as the dominant paradigm of the American social contract. They are there to convert public assets into private holdings. They are there to ensure their friends are allowed to conduct business unfettered by inconveniences like environmental and labor protections, barriers to monopoly, and pesky annoyances like restrictions on abuse of power and foreign financial entanglements.

And certainly our betters do not deserve to be hampered by concerns over whether a few hundred or a few hundred thousand Americans get sick and die from a novel pandemic. Especially when such concerns might keep the hoi palloi from going about their designated roles as widget producers and consumers. The engines of democracy, what what.

America was built on the backs of expendables. From the beginning there has always been a surplus population that the sober-minded Captains of Industry and Capital have been hair-trigger ready to sacrifice to their own enrichment. Use them as one would any natural resource: Extract the value and cast the remains aside.

This is the mission of the Trump kakistocracy. It's a time honored strategy beloved by organized crime and hedge fund titans (though I repeat myself): Take over an institution and through concentrated malfeasance drive it into perilous instability. Then the looters are free to pilfer and sell off the pieces for personal enrichment. Fans of the Sopranos recognize this as the Bust Out.

The Trump family – so accurately described by writer Sarah Kendzior as "a *transnational crime* syndicate masquerading as a government" – has been systematic in its efforts to undermine governance. This has been apparent from the jump, and while Trump is indeed half-an-imbecile at best, efforts to dismiss this rampage as the product of stupidity leaves us helpless in the face of a harsh reality: The destruction of American governance and the evisceration of the rule of law are at the heart of the Trump project.

But wait. There's more!

Because the evangelical core of the MAGA movement is so inextricably wedded to theological White supremacy, there exists a huge swath of our fellow citizens who are actively

and enthusiastically rooting for an apocalypse of any kind, just so long as it does the salutary work of ridding the world of apostates, degenerates, liberals, mud people, and pretty much anyone who does not buy into their christo-fascist revelations.

This sets us up nicely for a maker-taker / saved-damned parsing of the citizenry. The makers are happy to see the decimation and further impoverishment of the takers, the better to more thoroughly control the resources that are – obviously! – the makers' natural due. The saved are happy to see the damned scourged by hellfire, or virus, or whatever sword of god is close to hand. And anyone who falls to the sword – even those who thought they were in the maker/saved camp – has only gotten the comeuppance they so richly deserve. So how dare you tell me to take precautions on behalf of my or my neighbor's health? Survival of the fittest!

We live in a reality where the federal government has made the utilitarian calculation that letting this pandemic "run its course" is more cost efficient than trying to fight it, that

re-opening the economy is worth whatever death and suffering among the commoners might result. That this is both morally and economically insane is beside the point, because none of us matters in their accounting. They want you to know they feel that way. They want you to feel that way about yourself. Because once we believe it, we are done.

> *Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.*
>
> *John Adams, 1814*

Are we done for? Maybe not, but as long as this syndicate runs the show, we are well advised to not expect any substantial aid – or even reasonable guidance – from our governmental institutions. We are being urged to get our economy rolling again – much as we were told to just go shopping after 9/11 – not because medical science suggests it is time but because the people who can force the issue are tired of not raking the profits to which they are accustomed. Even worse! The proles are getting money for nothing, just for sitting around and watching teevee.

Who the fuck do they think they are? Rentiers? Stockholders? Money lenders?

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  No. Not you.

I am depressed beyond measure as people rush to fill reopened

public spaces, as people squander the gains made against viral spread over the past two months.Or has it been four? Or six? I lost track of the month this morning as I woke from yet another anxiety dream. I was sure it had to still be April. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems likely that this hasty 'return to normal' – whatever the hell *normal* might even mean any more – is going to trigger another wave of infection. I hope I'm wrong, but any cursory study of the great pandemics of history suggest it is inevitable. I will take no satisfaction in being proved right.

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  They keep coming back. They don't know why.

People like me are accused of wanting the shutdown to go on forever, and judging by social media comments, anyone foolish enough to want to protect their own health – by wearing a mask, practicing distancing & isolation, etc. – is some wretched combination of homosexual, commie, and victim of marital betrayal. We are One World, Soros/Gates controlled puppets, a flock of sheeple being led astray by "crisis actor" doctors and nurses conspiring to use the pandemic to make

their Cheeto Jesus look bad.

A bunch of haters trying to make Trump look bad.

As I have done forever, I have been consuming a bunch of apocalypse narratives lately, and I really need to stop. Some of them, like the latest William Gibson novel *Agency* and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, are terrific page-turners that left me feeling hopeless. *Ducks, Newburyport* is a thousand page stream of anxiousness story about a woman who is certain global catastrophe is just around the corner. Thanks anyway, and it is indeed written superbly, but I'm more than capable of generating my own running commentary on the end times.

HBO's *Westworld* started off spiffy enough, but devolved into dreary slaughter and a bleak pile of body parts.The nod at redemption for Dolores was a nice touch, but not enough to counterbalance the grim nihilism. And however cool the exploding skyscrapers at the end of *Fight Club* might have seemed in 1999, *Westworld's* invocation of this image is at once lazy and pretty god damned tone deaf post-9/11.

It felt like I was chewing nails. I needed something light, a little pick me up as ’twere. So I pulled down *The Plague* by Albert Camus.Yeah, I am a weirdo.

Amazingly enough, it was just the ticket back into hopefulness. First off, the writing is remarkably sharp. The tone steers clear of the dark spectacle that is common currency in dystopia tales. In its place is a heartfelt humaneness, a depth of feeling that refuses to hide its suffering behind narrative fireworks.

On the last page, the narrator explains that he wrote his account because he wished to…

> *…bear witness in favor of those plaque-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.*
>
> *— The Plague, Albert Camus*

We find a similar tone in Rebecca Solnit’s *A Paradise Built in Hell.* This examination of community responses to five epic social calamities — from the great San Francisco fire to Katrina — paints a picture of how we might find our best selves in the face of crisis, how we might rise above our habitual indifferences to achieve something greater than the sum of our parts. We need look no farther than the front line medical workers for an example of what that might look like.

One post-dystopic book I’d like to read again soonWill he never learn???? is Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*. It paints a grueling struggle, but it is suffused with hope for a better future. No matter how dark, our heroes refuse to give up.

> *“That’s all anybody can do right now. Live. Hold out.*

> *Survive. I don’t know whether good times are coming back again. But I know that won’t matter if we don’t survive these times.”*
>
> *Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower*

That pretty well sums up where I am right now. I despair for the choices and challenges facing my kids and their generation, and I grieve for the thousands who have and will die from the indifference the Trump syndicate has shown towards medical science and human decency.

My optimism is pretty much spent. But I remain too stubborn to surrender hope, no matter how unreasonable that may seem.

Top of the page, yo. Blog motto. It matters a difference.

*Also, too: I’m going to bring back the My Favorite World series next week. Because there is still so much astonishingly wonderful stuff to celebrate.*