

Subject: Important Lean-Erased

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Lean In or Be Erased

A Field Report from the Edge of the Simulation

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I have stopped arguing about the future, because in my own mind I have already seen it. I don't shout anymore. I don't plead. I lean back, lower my voice, and tell you that the transition is already underway — that we are living through the construction of what I call a one-world control grid, and that resistance is not so much immoral as it is a waste of vital energy.

You'll find me saying it at the edges of dinner parties where I've had two drinks and decided to tell you how the world really works. I've done the reading. I've made the money. And I've arrived at a conclusion I hand you like a diagnosis, because that's what it is: the monopoly board is being tipped over, the pieces rearranged by an agenda not one of us was ever asked about, and the only question that should occupy a single minute of your time is whether you intend to be a player or a product. Spoiler: it's already decided, because you will not change it. You had six years. Six. And what did you do with them? You babbled about "the Great Awakening," you anointed yourself one of the enlightened, and then — like a dog wagging its tail at whoever rattles the bowl — you waddled from one bait to the next, sniffing each fresh outrage, swallowing it whole, and mistaking the aftertaste for understanding. You called it research. It was feeding time.

And look at what you aim all that magnificent fury at. A tweet. An article. A flag. The *idea* of a country you've decided you don't care for, or that you've appointed yourself moral enough to condemn from a screen. That's the full radius of your rebellion: things that load in a browser and cost you nothing. You didn't fight the machine. You performed in front of it, for an audience of one, and the machine logged every twitch and thanked you for the data. It's not even tragic. It's just pathetic

The agenda has three legs. We've discussed them ad nauseam: Programmable money, so that every transaction can be permitted or denied. Social credit, so that every citizen can be scored. And artificial intelligence, the engine that watches, learns, and tightens all of it. Put the three together and you have a machine for managing human beings at scale — a police and surveillance architecture dressed up as convenience, sold to you one frictionless upgrade at a time.

I know it's a bleak thesis. What kept me from drowning in it is that I refuse to stop at the bleakness. There is a way through, and I intend to take it.

The tired crypto-bro metaphor isn't mine. It's scavenged from a single film about a simulated reality and then stretched — past the point of meaning, past the point of dignity — until it somehow covers an entire emotional journey. And everyone repeats it. On every podcast, in every publication, in every tweet, the same exhausted reference gets passed mouth to mouth like a chewed-over meme, a ball of fried, degenerated brain cells clutching one threadbare scrap of pop culture and hoisting it up as their god. They didn't read a book. They watched a movie once, decades ago, and built a whole cosmology out of it — and now they recite the colors back to each other like scripture

The blue pill is comfortable ignorance: you keep your job, your mortgage, your opinions handed to you nightly, and you never ask who benefits. The red pill is the first violent waking, the moment I realised the system is engineered rather than natural — that money is created, that media is owned, that the rules were written by people who profit from them.

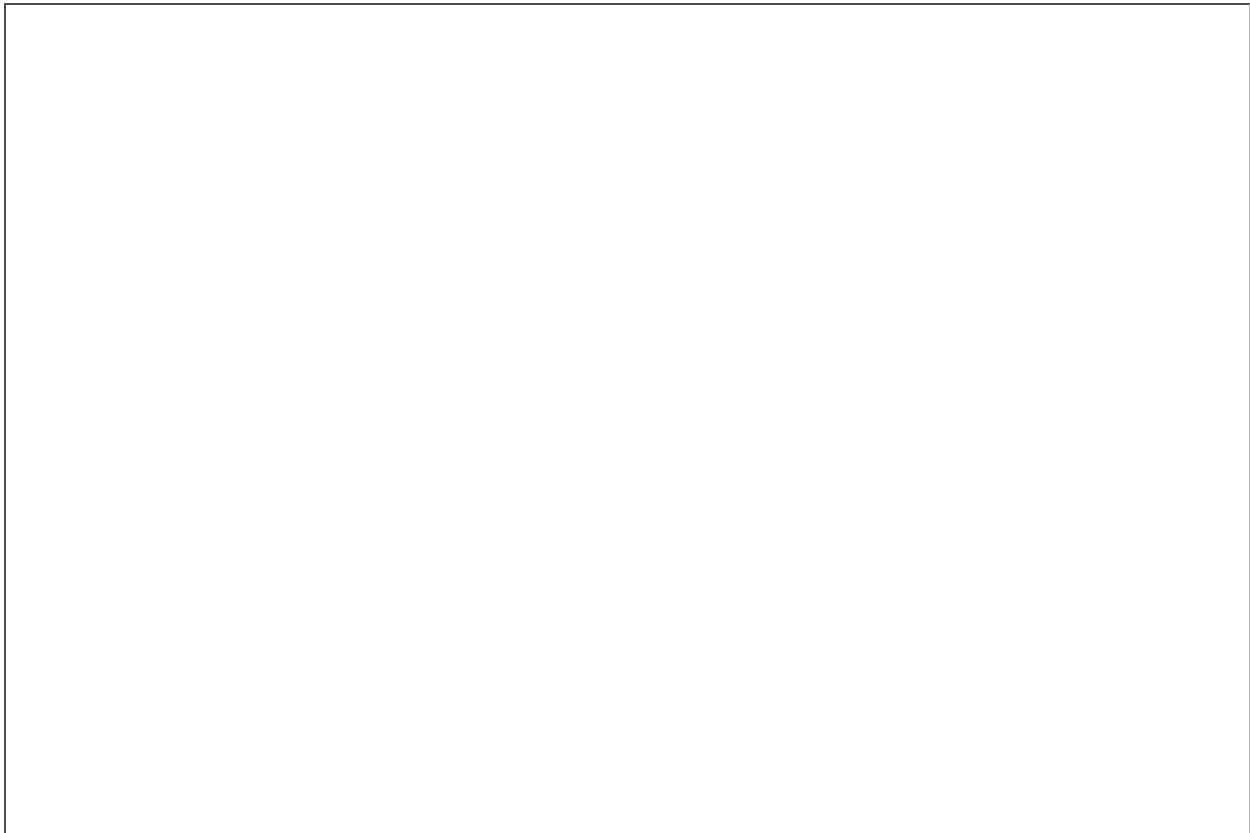
Then comes the part the recruitment videos leave out. After the red pill, you don't arrive in paradise. Working in my former job, I crashed into a wall of bureaucracy and lies and things I couldn't change, and I turned black-pilled. I got dark. I lost my motivation. I stopped getting up early. I drifted, vaguely competent and quietly defeated, because seeing the machine clearly is its own kind of poison. Plenty of people get stuck here forever, doom-scrolling their own disillusionment, mistaking cynicism for insight. I was one of them for the better part of a year.

The white pill is the brief, naive surge of hope in between — the belief that you can fix it, that you'll be the one to do some good. It rarely survives contact with reality. Mine didn't.

Here the pills run out. The blue, the red, the black, the white were all things done to me — doses to swallow and wait out, each one changing what I could see. What finally pulled me clear wasn't another pill. It was picking something up. I think of it now as the forge, and it's the thing I've built my whole way of living around.

The forge isn't a theory about the world; it's a way of working inside it. It says: I have taken every pill there is. I know how the system works. I know I cannot put the fire out. So rather than flee the heat or let it consume me, I am going to stand at it and use it — take the fire in my hands and hammer out my own tools, my own work, my own world, on my own anvil. It is reality accepted without flinching, and then beaten into a shape that is mine.

That is the emotional core of everything I'm about to tell you, and I want to name it plainly, because everything else — the geopolitics, the token economics, the rage at the news — is downstream of it. I worked for the machine, I despaired, and then I chose construction over collapse. I won't pretend the danger and the appeal aren't the same thing: this is a philosophy that tells the disillusioned they were right to give up on the world, and noble to give up on it gracefully. I've made my peace with that.



The age of crude censorship is over. There was a moment when stepping out of line got you cancelled outright — deplatformed, erased, silenced. Then something shifted. The people who run the feeds realised that silencing dissidents only made them interesting. So they changed the rules to something more elegant and more total: freedom of speech, but not freedom of reach. Say whatever you like. Tell your truth, loudly, in full. They want it all on the record — because every opinion you broadcast is another data point in the profile they're building of you. And then, quietly, they decide who hears you. They boost what they want boosted. They let the rest sink.

It's a world in which visibility itself becomes the lever of control. You are not banned. You are simply turned down, a dial nobody admits exists, until you are screaming into a room that has been emptied without your knowledge and the only one listening is an Palantir data center quietly feeding your indictment.

The same machine that meters your reach also shapes your soul. Feed a person a narrative for long enough and you don't just inform them — you radicalize them into the most extreme version of themselves. The algorithm finds the worldview you lean toward and then leans on it, hard, serving you more of the thing that already inflames you until your edges sharpen into a caricature. Everyone ends up at the angriest version of who they were, certain they arrived there by reason.

When people ask me whether this is conspiracy or commerce — whether there's a hand on the dial or simply a profit motive — I refuse the choice. It's both. It can be both. There's the revenue machine, which discovered long ago that the most reliable way to keep you on a device is to feed your worst curiosities, the rubbernecking part of the brain that cannot look away from violence and humiliation.

Most of us go through a phase of watching terrible things we wish we hadn't, until one day we recoil and stop. And there's the deeper game, the possibility that the same infrastructure can be rented by whoever has an agenda — a business, a party, an intelligence service — because once a system can change what millions of people believe, somebody is always going to pay to use it.

The primary goal underneath all of it, I think, is simpler and more clinical than any plot. The goal is the doom loop. Keep you on the device. Maximise the time. Because every minute you stay is another minute of profiling, and a fully mapped human being is a manageable one.

And the device works on you at the level of chemistry, not just attention. The more relentlessly you chase the next hit — the next scroll, the next notification, the next small jolt of novelty — the more the pleasure flattens, until nothing feels exciting anymore and you need more just to feel ordinary. The escape isn't some dramatic digital detox is boredom, chosen on purpose. Less, not more. Letting the mind go quiet long enough that ordinary things get their flavour back. It tells you everything that the single most subversive act left to most people is simply to be bored — to step out of the loop the whole machine is built to keep you inside.

Cancellation is never about punishment. It is about conversion. The point of destroying a prominent person — suing them, bankrupting them, dragging their name through a year of headlines — is never to remove them from public life. It is to break them, and then to bring them back. Ruin a man and you create an asset: someone compromised, someone in debt, someone who now understands exactly what happens if he steps out of line again. The ones who return from the wilderness don't return free. They return on a leash, with a narrative that has been pre-approved, escalating only as far as their handlers allow.

It's a grim cynicism, and I'm aware it can absorb any fact. A public figure who falls and rises again isn't redeemed; he's recruited. A creator who learns which headlines pay isn't adapting; he's being trained. Every reward is a hook, every platform a finishing school for the speech the platform wants. You can monetize on a network, which proves the network has decided your message is acceptable — or that there's simply too much money in it to refuse. Either way, the cage is the same shape.

I'll admit what this does: it removes the possibility of anyone simply meaning what they say. In the world I'm describing, sincerity looks like naivety and success looks like suspicion. To be heard at scale is to have been permitted. The only people I fully trust are the ones with nothing left to lose — or everything already won. I sit closer to the second category than I'd like to admit, and I try not to let it make me stupid.

Which brings me, inevitably, to money, and to the idea that organises everything else for me: capture.

My own education in capture came from SpaceX, and I tell it as a tragedy because I lived it. It started with an ethos - but every company I watched, every project I backed, walked the same path into the same cage. First you incorporate. Then you appoint a board. Then the board needs a licence, and a licence needs a banking relationship, and the banking relationship needs you to behave. Then you raise venture capital, and the venture capital wants a return, and the return demands growth, and growth demands an IPO. By the end you are a public company — a fully owned subordinate of the financial-industrial complex, loaded with debt, governed by incompetent people who bought their way onto your board, optimized to never again threaten the system you set out to escape.

That's my model for how every rebellion dies: by domestication. The movement doesn't lose the argument; it

accepts the funding. The capital comes in, and capital is never neutral. Take on debt and you become the product of whoever you owe. Sell shares and you become the asset of whoever buys. Every dollar that enters from outside arrives with a string, and the strings all pull in the same direction: toward compliance, toward the center, toward the system.

The survivors, in my experience, are the rare few who refused the on-ramp. The ones who got rich without venture money, who held their own assets in their own custody, who built an audience that paid them directly and therefore owed nothing to any platform. Those people are the ones the system cannot abide — wealthy enough to matter, independent enough to speak, and unleashed from every lever that keeps the rest in line. They're vanishingly rare, because almost everyone gets pulled into a business that bends them somewhere along the way. I spent years trying to become one of them - it didn't work. Because getting things for free online, still beats supporting a common goal of independence for someone other than you.

At one end sits the person with no real money and a mountain of debt. He is, in the cold language of my thesis, the perfect product. He pays his interest, his rent, his mortgage, his credit card, and he watches his situation get worse year after year. He can complain. He can shout as loudly as the algorithm allows. Nobody who matters cares, because his shouting changes nothing and his payments never stop. He is useful precisely because he is trapped.

Move up the spectrum and you reach real power — the corporate tier, the people running companies worth billions, preparing colossal public offerings. They look free. They are not. They sit inside bounded compromise: cross the wrong line and your access to capital evaporates, your share price is destroyed, your advertisers vanish, a regulator or a lobby arrives to dismantle you. They rarely need to be blackmailed. They simply protect their own interests, and their interests have been engineered to align with silence.

And then, at the far end, the place this whole sermon of mine is pointing toward: the sovereign zone. The person who is wealthy enough to be free, who carries no mortgage and no master, who is not subordinate to any of the layers — no bank, no board, no platform, no creditor. That person can actually influence things, because none of the usual leverage applies to him. The system does not want those people to exist. They are the wild cards, and the machine is built to make sure there are as few of them as possible.

My entire programme, then, is an instruction I give myself first: move along the spectrum, away from subordination and toward sovereignty, knowing I will never reach the end, because something always binds me. A sovereign individual. A sovereign business. A sovereign family. You build outward from yourself, and you measure every decision by whether it makes you freer or more owned.

There will be losers, and a great many of them. If your job is to sit at a desk and shuffle data from one application into another, interpreting and re-keying and moving information between systems, your job is gone. Not threatened. Gone. You are, in my blunt word, cooked. And the consultant who imagined himself safe — the one with a team and a title and a methodology — will be replaced by a single person who is native to this technology and can direct a swarm of agents to do what used to take twelve people and a year.

The entire engine of recent "growth" is the build-out of the infrastructure behind artificial intelligence — the data centers, the chips, the power. Strip that out and the real economy underneath has been close to inert. A handful of enormous companies have come to dominate the index to a degree that would once have seemed absurd; soon, the club will swell further as the largest private champions are floated and folded straight into the benchmark on day one, simply because they're too big to leave out.

A dominant chipmaker reports margins that should not be possible, announces an enormous share buyback to seduce the growth investors, and then lifts its dividend many times over to lure the old income crowd — the cautious money that lives on yield. Now it has both. It props up the private credit market, which feeds back into the banks. A giant fund sells everything it owns and constructs a vast, leveraged bet to buy into the most coveted private shares before they list. Everything is wired to the same handful of names. Everything is bet on the same story.

I know the obvious objection, because I raise it myself: isn't this just the dot-com bubble again? And I draw the distinction carefully. The internet arrived before the world was ready for it — the connections were too slow, the promises too early, the revenue not there. This time the pipes are ready and the revenue is real and growing, the margins on the underlying service extraordinary. I'm not worried about whether these businesses can make money. I'm worried about what the banks are doing with that fact — valuing the companies on years of forward growth, selling tomorrow's revenue at today's prices, inflating numbers to a scale that requires the music never to

stop.

Because the market rests on the money printer, which must keep running or the game halts. The passive funds, whose owners effectively decide who is in the index and who is out. And the narrative — the story, manufactured and amplified, that says we will lose the race for the future unless we invest at exactly these valuations, right now, no questions asked. Print the cash. Justify the printing with a grand enough fear. I suspect the whole structure has a rug-pull engineered into it, a correction waiting on the far side of the great public offerings, timed and managed by people who will be positioned to profit when it comes.

Beneath the markets and the geopolitics sits the simplest machine of all, and once you see it you cannot unsee it: the debt-based money system itself. That is the engine. Everything else is exhaust.

The mechanics aren't complicated, which is precisely why so few of us are ever encouraged to look at them. When the economy slows, a recession has become politically unsurvivable, so we have quietly abolished recessions. In their place we have money creation — quantitative easing, large-scale asset purchases, whatever name the era prefers.

The central bank goes into the market, buys up the safe long-dated assets, and floods the system with liquidity in the hope the money chases into riskier things. When they asked the architects of this what it was actually for, the honest answer was almost comically blunt: go and buy equities.

But not everyone can buy equities. So you end up with a two-tier economy, split cleanly down a single line — you are either an asset holder or you are not.

If you own the assets, the printing inflates your wealth and you're told to be grateful. If you don't, the same printing inflates your rent, your food, your energy, and quietly drains the value out of the wages you're paid in. I've come to think of the central bank as the engine of inequality.

This is the part I find genuinely depressing, more than any of the grand conspiracies. So many of the people who run this system know exactly how it works. They know the mechanics are rigged. They know it hollows out society and grinds down the poor. And almost none of them will do anything about it, because the system pays them precisely to keep it running.

What the old generations are really saying to the younger ones, collectively, as the adults nominally in charge, is this: *you will work harder and own less in the future so that we can have more right now.* They rarely say it out loud. The machine says it for them, every month, in the price of everything.

The story is one of deliberate multipolarity: a world being carved, by agreement, into spheres. The rivalry between the great powers is real on the surface, but at a higher altitude I see coordination — executives of the banks and the technology giants sitting down with rival heads of state as partners reporting in, dividing up the board, agreeing where the new energy routes will run and who will hold which corner of the map while the infrastructure of the future gets built, complete with its scheduled corrections.

The currency is the real battlefield, as it always has been before every war. The old order — oil priced in one currency, those dollars recycled into government debt, the yield reinvested into the issuing nation's own companies and bases, the whole loop guaranteed by military protection — is being quietly dismantled. I point to swap lines extended to new players, to alternative payment networks knitting together rival economies, to gold-clearing infrastructure migrating from the old financial capital to a new one, to energy producers signing pricing deals outside the established blocs. Sanctions are being defanged by the slow construction of an entire parallel plumbing that doesn't run through the old chokepoints. Strip away the layers that propped up the dominant currency, and you're left with a multipolar settlement in which value is drained out of one system and into the assets of another.

The broader pattern I draw is one of managed decline: take the assets of the fading empire, distribute them across new centers, keep the population fixated on a coming great war that I'm certain cannot actually happen — because the supply chains of the rival powers are too entangled for any of them to survive the rupture. The threat of catastrophe is theater. The reality is negotiation, conducted over the heads of citizens by people who long ago concluded that open war is bad for business.

This is the part of my worldview that does the most work and bears the least weight. It's internally seamless and externally hard to disprove — every event, however contradictory, slots in as further proof. A crisis is a beta test.

A bailout is a power transfer in disguise. A leader's defiance is a scripted performance. I'm aware the theory can't lose, and that's exactly why I try to keep one hand on the brake. A model that explains everything explains nothing, and the seduction of seeing the whole board at once is precisely the feeling I warned you the algorithm uses to capture you. I'm not above that feeling. I just try to notice when I'm enjoying it too much.

There are three overlapping complexes, each pulling in its own direction.

The first is the military-industrial complex — older, more nationalistic, the world of stockpiles and defence contracts and the men who still remember when the dominant currency ruled unchallenged. It thrives on strategic tension, on the steady manufacture of enemies that justify the next budget.

The second is the financial-industrial complex — transnational, borderless, the world of sovereign wealth funds and global banks and capital that owes loyalty to no flag. These are the globalists, indifferent to nations except as markets, fluent in the movement of money across every border.

The third, the one I believe is now ascendant, is the technical-industrial complex — the builders of the grid itself, the data centers and the models and the programmable infrastructure of control. The one-world architecture is the place where all three complexes meet: military muscle, financial reach, technological reach, fused into a single project that strips the assets of the old order and rebuilds them as something new and centralized.

It's a framework that explains a great deal precisely because it can be bent to explain anything. I know that's its strength as rhetoric and its weakness as analysis. But I find it undeniably useful as a lens, and I reach for it constantly, sorting every headline into one of the three boxes and feeling, each time, the small narcotic satisfaction of a world that makes sense.

When people ask me whether any of this is new, I laugh and say of course not. This is simply how the world has always worked. I reached for the old empires — the chartered companies, the imperial banks, the governments that took on the debt and the public that had to be sold a story. Steal the assets, take the resources, manufacture the wars until everything worth taking has been taken, and then hand the whole apparatus to the next empire in line. The tools change. Once it was ships; now it is artificial intelligence. The structure is identical.

One model you'd call socialism and the other capitalism, and the labels would tell you nothing, because both words were invented to disguise the only thing that actually matters — who ends up owning the assets. Capitalism and communism were never true opposites. They were two costumes worn by the same central-banking machine, two stories told to keep populations fighting over systems while the people who funded both quietly consolidated power upward.

One route does it slowly and one does it fast, but both arrive at the same destination: wealth and control flowing to the center. I spent years studying the economics that taught me otherwise, and only after I left did I understand that the discipline itself was a kind of operation — built to produce bankers and employees who would defend the system, and to erase the one subject that explained everything, which is the nature of money itself.

And the wars almost always trace back to the same crime. A country tries to use its own resources for its own people, or to distribute its own assets in a way that denies the cheap margin to the powerful, and that country is brought to heel. Nationalize the wrong industry, share the wrong wealth, and the tanks or the sanctions or the coup will find you. You see the same story behind conflict after conflict: someone tried to keep what was theirs, and was punished for it.

So what does all this mean for you — the person who simply notices that everything costs more and wonders why? You already know that there's a big club, and you're not in it. The money does not trickle down; it trickles up. Purchasing power is quietly extracted from you, year after year, and your only real task is to find a way of living that the extraction cannot reach.

I describe the squeeze with three pressures I believe were tightened deliberately. Food, made more expensive by disruptions to supply. Energy, made dearer by the same. And interest, kept high because the inflation those disruptions caused made it impossible to cut. Hit a household on all three at once and you've hollowed out its disposable income entirely. The people at the top shrug and pay. Everyone else stops going out, stops taking holidays, stops spending, and the country itself begins to feel depressed — at the scale of a national mood disorder, expressed in the rise of populism on every side.

I keep coming back to a single melancholy evening to make the point. I went out in a city I used to work in, a place that was once impossible to get into without a booking, where the good restaurants were full on a Tuesday and the hidden bars turned you away at the door. I found half-empty rooms and indifferent service and prices that made me wince — hundreds for a mediocre dinner, a small fortune for a handful of cocktails in a bar with eight people in it, a refurbished jazz club, beautiful and nearly empty. The rich young people who once propped the place up were simply not there. The city, I concluded, was cooked. Everywhere expensive, everywhere empty, the life drained out of it.

The state's role is to manage you into one of a few useful conditions. Be employed and pay the maximum the system can extract — interest, energy, food, and the rest financed by more debt. Or hand over your money to be managed for you. Or become homeless, at which point you're no use to anyone, because you can no longer take on debt.

And throughout, stay angry enough to keep voting, because the voting is the release valve. For that you need an enemy, and the enemy is rotated as each one tires — first one ideology, then a category of villain, then another, mixed together and amplified by the algorithms that build your profile while they stoke your rage. Keep everyone staring at the wrong threat, and the real machine of subordination runs untouched.

In the end, I regard politics as a trap for the energetic and the sincere. If you're spending your life on politics, you're spending it on the layer where nothing is decided. I came to it late myself, after I concluded it was theater — a contest between managers of the same system, offering you the choice of which way you'd like to be extracted from. One side will tax your assets one way; the other will blame a different villain and tax them another. The board does not change because you moved a piece on it.

The real lever is money. You vote with it. You stop feeding the things you oppose and you build the things you want, starting with yourself and your family and your community and working outward from there. You learn the rules of the system not to worship them but to use them — and then you decide whether to play the system from the inside, understanding it well enough to win, or to build genuine wealth outside it and become one of the rare free people who can afford to say what they actually think.

There is, I'll concede, a perfectly happy life available to people who never think about any of this — who vote, work, draw a pension and die content, certain that the world is broadly fine and getting better. I don't entirely envy them and I don't entirely pity them. I simply know I can no longer tolerate being among them.

Once you understand the debt machine, the theatre of politics resolves into something almost pitiable. The role of a politician is to win power and then to keep it. But you cannot keep your grip on a system that is mathematically breaking without reaching for tighter and tighter control. So that is what they do.

Whoever you vote in inherits the same two levers and no others: create money, which generates the inflation that punishes everyone, or raise taxes, which enrages a public already being squeezed. There is no third lever. There is no manifesto clever enough to escape the arithmetic. Every new government, left or right, arrives with a glossy promise and departs having delivered the same thing — decline. The only real choice on the ballot is who you'd like to manage that decline, and how fast.

This is why I think the surges of populism on every side — the insurgent parties, the protest votes — are badly misread by the people they frighten. They are not votes for a new ideology. They are votes against the system itself, cast by people sick of constant failure and being lied to and watching everything get more expensive, who have correctly sensed that swapping one manager of decline for another changes only the colour of the rosette. The personnel rotate. The machine does not.

And as the grip slips, the controls multiply. A government losing the argument starts trying to win it by force instead. It moves to throttle the platforms where it is humiliated daily, dressing censorship up as safety — going after the tool rather than the handful of individuals who actually break a clear law, because the real target was never the abuse, it was the platform.

It hands real power to unaccountable institutions, regulators nobody elected, whose members we cannot name and cannot remove — and a system in which you cannot get rid of the people who govern you is not, whatever it calls itself, a democracy.

It floats digital identity. It eyes the jury trial. It delays the elections it expects to lose. Each move is sold as

protection. Each one is really the reflex of an organism that can no longer rule by consent and so reaches for the lever marked control.

It helps to remember this isn't the first time the promise has curdled. The liberal-democratic order we treat as the natural end of history was in fact assembled relatively recently and sold as the guarantor of freedom — and it has now failed in slow motion not once but twice, promising liberty and delivering, by degrees, chaos, control, and a kind of moral exhaustion. People are losing faith in it not because they've been radicalized but because they can see, plainly, that it no longer does what it claims to do.

The clearest diagnosis I've found is also one of the oldest and simplest. The state should do one thing and one thing only: defend life, liberty, and property. With that secured, you can get on with the pursuit of happiness yourself. The moment the state steps beyond that — into redistribution, into deciding who gets what — it inverts its own morality. It stops being the thing that protects you from plunder and becomes the instrument of it, just with better paperwork.

I no longer believe the old left-right pantomime contains the answer. I can run through every candidate and every party and find each of them wrong — because every one of them still believes the state can and should redistribute, that with the right people pulling the levers the machine of extraction will somehow start running in reverse. It won't. The levers only turn one way.

So what do you actually do, once you've stopped pretending the ballot box is an exit? I've come to think there are only three doors, and you can take more than one.

The first is genuine reform — constitutional restraint, hard limits on the power of the state, a government forced back into its proper, narrow lane. Somewhere, eventually, a country breaks badly enough that it reaches for a figure who can diagnose the disease honestly and sell the cure to enough people to win. It has happened. A nation can endure decades of inflation and decay, voting through the same tired options, until someone arrives speaking plainly about debt and money and the machine — and angry, exhausted voters finally choose him, and the numbers actually start to turn. That door is real, but it's heavy, and it usually only opens after things have become much worse than they are now. I suspect we have years of decline left before enough people genuinely want it.

The second door is simply to leave — to take your life somewhere the extraction is gentler. It's a fair option and I don't sneer at it. For most people, though, it isn't available, and for some of us there's still too much fight left to walk out yet.

The third door is the one I keep coming back to, because it needs no one's permission: exit in place. Stay where you are and quietly remove as much of yourself from the system as you can. Hold your wealth in assets they cannot inflate away or switch off. Transact in cash where you can. Spend locally and deliberately — the independent coffee shop instead of the chain, the local grower instead of the supermarket — and build parallel networks that run alongside the official ones rather than through them. Then help other people find the same door.

If the financial and political behemoth genuinely can't be beaten head-on, the next best thing is to make yourself less and less dependent on it, and to show everyone within reach how to do the same. This, in the end, is where the forge and the politics finally meet: you cannot vote your way out, so you build your way out — starting small, starting local, starting with the people you can actually touch.

Strip away the geopolitics and the market mechanics, and what the forge actually asks of me is surprisingly small. Domestic, even.

It asks for a micro-business instead of an empire. For years, the family I came up in shamed people who built modest family enterprises and pushed them toward the grand ascent — venture money, then private equity, then a public listing, then thousands of employees and a life spent managing human resources and investor expectations. You could own a sliver of something enormous or all of something that went bust, and you were told the sliver was the only respectable choice. I'm quietly, enormously grateful that I never took that road.

Because now, with today's tools, I believe a single person can build what once required an army and a war chest. I have been building a company I won't name. Five years ago it would have meant ten million in funding, a third of the business given away, and a long dependent journey after that. Now I think I can build the whole thing myself in a few months. That, to me, is the forge made concrete: not a retreat from ambition, but a relocation of it — out

of the boardroom and back into the kitchen, the family, the small circle of people who actually matter to me.

Underneath everything, when the geopolitics is exhausted and the markets have been mapped, I arrive at a philosophy that's almost gentle.

Life is not a problem to be solved. We keep telling ourselves we'll fix the world, reach the utopia, cross into some golden age — and I no longer believe that's what life is. Life is a test. It throws the most beautiful things and the most evil things at you, and the only question that matters is which way you lean. Toward the good or toward the bad. And you know, in your soul, which is which. When I do something I shouldn't, I feel it internally, however cleverly I've talked myself into it.

I don't exempt myself. I'll admit, without quite confessing the specifics, that I've done things I knew were wrong and built narratives to permit them, that there are things I still can't reconcile in myself. The privilege of money, I've found, is partly the privilege of being able to stop, breathe, and choose — to step out of the desperate pressure that drives people into bad decisions, the journalist writing the cruel headline to climb a rung, the creator choosing the dishonest title because it will reach more people. I know that game intimately. I've made those choices on my own work, weighing a truthful framing that helps a few against a sensational one that reaches the many, and I won't pretend I always chose well.

The place I say I've finally landed is the one redeeming note in a worldview otherwise drenched in suspicion: I want to be as truthful as possible, even when the truth runs against my own interest. It's a cool place to stand, and a lonely one. It means refusing the comfortable side. It means an analysis that satisfies no faction and irritates all of them. It means saying the unpopular thing two years before it becomes the popular thing, and being called every name in between. I've learned that when I'm right — and I'm not always right — I'm usually right about two years early, and then one day the thing nobody would say becomes the thing everybody says.

Whether my grand theory is right hardly matters by the end. It is, depending on where you stand, either the most clear-eyed response to the present moment or the most elegant surrender ever dressed up as defiance. Possibly it's both. I'd say it's both. I'd say that's the point.

The grid is coming. I won't stop it. So I've decided, today, what kind of world I'm going to build inside it — and who I intend to be when it arrives. The only question I'll leave you with is the one I had to answer myself: will you be a player, or a product?

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