The Solarpunk Society

A Single Blade of Hope

Gingerbeard

Solarpunk Press

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Based on a true timeline.

Dedicated to my dad – the kindest revolutionary and a continual source of infinite inspiration in life and after it – and to my mum – my number-one supporter and the living embodiment of Solarpunk: a woman who transformed the deepest darkness into light, laughter and forever dancing in the rain; lastly, to Lance Goodey, who died in January 2025. Lance was an incredible human and clown, and I will always remember him bringing just the right amount of beautiful, insurgent absurdity to a crazy world with CIRCA at the G8 protests.

All three of them chose – and choose – to colour the world outside the lines society laid down around them, and I would never have lived the timeline I have if it weren't for their inspiration.

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A Wee Word Before We Begin

> 'Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.'
> — Karl Marx

Listen, this book might not be what you are expecting. Thou art to be a sore-butted reader if thou wert to assume me to be wan ae thae serious literary writer folk wi big words an aw that. Reading this book might feel like being punch-drunk in the midst of an oily Glasgow-pub wrestling match with a psychedelic sailor as your opponent who, mid-fight, gives you tips on your tax return and offers you a lift home on his flying saucer. It's certainly not an academic deep-dive, backed up by bazillions of data points and political theories with fancy Latin names. That's because I'm not an academic. I'm just a working-class Glaswegian who happens to have gotten caught up in a bit of quantum timeline weirdness.

Ma name is GINGERBEARD. I'm fae a wee place in the world called Glasgow, Scotland. Up until 2014, our worlds shared the same timeline.

I didn't plan on being here with you but equally, I didn't end up here by accident. The witch didn't send me to just *any* timeline. She sent me to the one that haunted me most – the one I kept imagining, over and over, wondering what it would have meant: the timeline where, in 2014, Scotland didn't vote 55% in favour of its own independence from ye ole Britannia but 55% against it!

From your perspective, nothing drastically changed in 2014 when our timelines split – or in 2025 when I arrived on yours. It seems like a smooth continuum. It felt the same for me until I woke up one morning on this timeline that's so similar in many ways, yet so fucking alien at the same time. The witch never explained any of the 'how' – how our timelines split or how I arrived on yours over a decade later. Trying to understand what happened to me still gives me a headache. It's like... cosmic lasagna all the way down.

See, I'm a time*line* traveller, not a time traveller from the future. Technically, there isn't any future anyway. Or a past, for that matter. At least not like we imagine there to be – all linear, static and stuck; crisp and set in its ways like some deterministic jizz stain on the cosmic duvet we call the universe.

I think I was on the toilet at the time, on my phone, poo-scrolling as the modern affliction would have it. That was the first time I read about the Cosmic Time Lasagna. I think many great universal epiphanies actually happen on the shitter, you know? Though most of us wouldn't dare admit it.

The Cosmic Time Lasagna, or CTL, is an intricate universal dish of vibrant galactic colours, age-old flavours and layered surprises. Between its infinite tasty layers lies every version of me, you and everything else that ever was and ever could be,

simultaneously. I know it's a mouthful at first to get your head around, and a tasty one at that. The CTL is a fun concept to play with intellectually, of course, but I didn't ever expect I'd personally experience it.

We don't, in fact, move forward and back through the fourth dimension of time but side to side, up and down, and round about in and out of different timelines in a process driven by chaos magick, intentional mindfuckery and the occasional cosmic giggle.[1] From our vantage point, it all feels linear. Our brains place each event in a straight line after another, then they retroactively imagine a suitable explanation of the previous with the latter – utterly oblivious to the if/then, either/or quantum superposition, non-deterministic cluckfuckeries and rollercoaster timesplits we have been through to arrive at this very spot.

As far as I know, it could be infinite lasagna in all directions. I don't think anyone has ever reached a slightly burnt crispy edge, even though those are obviously the best bits. That's not to say such a delicious spacetime crusty edge does not exist – we just don't know.

I've said it too much, haven't I?

Or not enough.

LASAAAAAGNA!

I don't really know what causes these wee splits to happen – why some moments and not others. You don't suddenly un-

1. The 'cosmic giggle' is a term popularised by psychedelic philosophers like Timothy Leary and Robert Anton Wilson to describe a mischievous, trickster-like force embedded in the fabric of the universe. It refers to the uncanny way reality seems to laugh back at our most rigid expectations, ideologies or grand plans, especially when taken too seriously.

derstand electrical engineering just because your big brother locks you in the washing machine and puts you on for a hot spin.

I've had many sleepless nights since, trying my best to work out exactly what in the name of God[2] is going on. As it unfolds, I think the 'why' is much more profound than the 'how'. For the sake of argument, though, let's get the 'how' question out the way first. I've narrowed it down to three possible working theories:

Theory One: Some quantum physicists might argue that the sheer density of collective observation during such a highly polarised democratic event caused a macro-level quantum decoherence. Basically, so many millions of people were intensely focusing on two mutually exclusive outcomes (yes or no) that the probability superposition couldn't hold the tension and the universe simply cracked under the pressure, splitting off into the Many Worlds Theory. It sounds rational, but it lacks a certain pizzazz.

Theory Two: We know the British establishment was absolutely bricking it about losing their grip on Scotland. So, it's entirely plausible that MI5 cracked out some highly experimental, Cold War-era mindcontrol fuckery to nudge the undecided voters over the line. In doing so, they accidentally tickled the creamy underbelly of the Cosmic Time Lasagna. They pushed the simulation's code too far, the system glitched and our realities fractured.

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2. I don't like to only refer to the singular imaginary being you have sculpted in your head when hearing the word 'God' so throughout, I'll try to refer to as many as I can to keep it interesting.

Theory Three: The Cosmic Queef Hypothesis. This by no means meets Occam's Razor, but it is my absolute favourite. It came to me while trippin' in a forest. In the random, discombobulating convulsions of spacetime jelly, there are three quantum colleagues coexisting – Chaos, Pleasure and Reason. Often they dance, and occasionally they have the odd threesome after an erogenous joint. During one such cosmic ménage à trois, one of the three accidentally let out a wavefunction-collapsing queef. This quaint, dainty vibration – more of a celestial side-squelch, really – wafted its way out of the quantum realm and landed, by chance, on Scotland right as the ballot boxes opened. The tom-shittery of such a cosmic queef randomised a rupturing ripple, through which at least two timelines plopped from one. I didn't say theory three was the most *likely* explanation; just my favourite.

Despite this book's unusual assembly of ideas, memories and thoughts that sometimes stubbornly defy standard categorisation of what a book 'should' be, I think you'll keep reading past any challenges – or I hope you will – because you are intrigued to find out about Solarpunk. Or because you are sick to death of the late-stage Cyberpunk capitalist apocalypse cult we find ourselves in (don't worry; we will break down that word soup later). Or maybe because I have a mad-as-fuck story to tell you – a story that despite coming from another timeline may feel very applicable to your own.

To help with any early turbulence, approach this book playfully, like you would a Glaswegian sci-fi novel. It is, after all, a story that – thanks to a witch, a dream and some mind-bending physics – means I'm somehow here on your timeline, rather

than sipping organic raspberry and nettle mocktails back on my own where I was very comfortable, thank you very much!

Beyond the quantum quackery you are about to dive into, this book is really a story of how we can move the trajectory of this specific timeline away from the cliff edge it fetishises. As intergalactic Marx would have said himself, the point isn't to interpret these many worlds but to radically choose between them.

None of this, of course, is a sci-fi novel from my perspective. For me, the creation of The Solarpunk Society is a matter of fact, a document of history, a story to be told retrospectively. For you, The Solarpunk Society is just a book about an alternative Scotland, written by a weird Scotsman who you can barely unnerstaun' even wan he's attemptin' tae write in English. So if you aren't Scottish or living in Scotland, what the fuck has any of this got to do with you? Well, potentially...

EVERYTHING.

It's true the story is largely based in Scotland but the impacts, the ramifications, the successes and failures – all of these experiments recognise no borders. Everything I am going to talk with you about could as easily occur anywhere in the world from Timbuktu to the highlands of Peru. The late-stage Cyberpunk capitalist cult we're currently living under equally does not recognise borders or nations, therefore nor can any credible alternative. Yet, every new model has to be born somewhere. It seems suitably synchronistic that the birthplace of Adam Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment that gave the world the initial concepts of capitalism should also give birth to the system that replaces it. There is nothing particularly extraordinary about Scotland or the people that live there.

Even if you are not Scottish and know nothing about our wee, pishin' wet island, I implore you to just enjoy the story, take the lessons where you find them and apply them where relevant to your own corner of the world.

Don't tell any other aspiring literary writers out there but by Huitzilopochtli,[3] I barely ever finish reading books myself. I love them though – so much, in fact, that I have about twenty-four of them open and half read in my e-reader.

And while we're talking about books: you won't get this one on Amazon. I know, I know. It's a bold move for a self-published daftie with zero record or following, but hear me out. Amazon has spent the last two decades trying to monopolise the entire printed word. And by Ahriman,[4] they've done a terrifyingly good job of it. At the time of writing, those bastards control over fifty percent of all physical book sales, more than eighty percent of the e-book market and upwards of seventy-five percent of audiobooks. They have the entire literary world in a absolute chokehold. It would be a total joke to come here and tell you all about how we broke free from the enshittifiers on my timeline, while directly adding profits to those showers of shite on this timeline in the process. That's why this book will NEVER be sold on Amazon, no matter how much that hurts. Some things simply matter more than sales. If you see this book on Amazon, please don't buy it. It is either some low-effort AI rip-off or an outright scam. Please

3. Huitzilopochtli was the Aztec god of the sun and war, central to *Mexica* identity and the practice of sacrifice.

4. Ahriman is the embodiment of evil, chaos, darkness and destruction in ancient Persian mythology.

do yourself and the planet a massive favour and delete your Amazon account as soon as you possibly can.

I was faced with a similar dilemma when considering how to market this book so it could find its way to your very eyes. Once again, I drew the hard but necessary red line to never pay a single penny to Meta, Google, or any of the tech mafia for that matter. Instead, I built Solarpunk Press and designed an autonomous marketing app that handles all my organic marketing for me. It helps me manage my emails, generates content from my raw clips, and schedules and shares it across the internet to connect me with people like you. The app, along with many other Solarfleet apps I'm currently experimenting with, are completely open-source and available for free (with a donation very welcome) online if you search for 'The Solarpunk Society'.

What else is there to mention? Right: it would be hypocritical of me to expect you to read this book in any particular way. It's quite dense and you might need some time to wrap your head around the ideas presented in it. There is a glossary at the end if you ever want to return to a specific concept, as well as a wee dictionary of the Scottish terms I use that you might have struggled to work out from the context. I am sure many so-called professionals may diagnose my brain with some kind of disorder if they got their grubby hands on it – on this timeline anyway. Everyone who struggles to swallow the cult pills or drink the Kool-Aid[5] must be disordered in some

5. 'Drinking the Kool-Aid' most commonly refers to the mass killing of the Jim Jones cult in Jonestown, Guyana. In 1978, over 900 people died by drinking the Kool-Aid (though evidence shows that many victims, especially children, were forced to ingest the poison). I use 'drinking the Kool-Aid' as an idiom for blind obedience to the Big C Cult or the authorities.

way or another. I have such gratitude for my 'disordered' brain though, because from the chaos feed I receive daily came the energy and motivation to write this book. Apologies go out to all my siblings with neurotypical disorder (or NTD, as I like to call it) for any adjustments needed.

Thanks to experiments like the quantum delayed-choice eraser or the double-slit experiment, scientists have known for a while that our present intentional measurements and experiences not only affect what we call the 'future' but can actually reshape the 'past', too.[6] The act of measuring, observing and intentionally interacting with the universe in which we find ourselves seems to actively transform how it behaves – and not just what happens after our observation, but before it, too. Headfuck, I know! All we need to take for now is that the universe is way weirder than we think. Our thoughts, intentions, measurements and actions have vastly more impact on our reality and experience of it than we could ever anticipate. Therefore, by reading this book, filling your mind and heart with positive possibilities and alternative realities – free from the current capitalist cult we find ourselves in – you are more likely to align with timelines that break free from that cult sooner or later.

I don't want you to mistake this book for some fantasy novel you can use to temporarily escape the worst effects of this economic cult – a cult that's digging its shit-covered claws deep into our collective flesh. Of course, some books are simply meant to be read, enjoyed and set aside. This book, however, is

6. If you love some Matrix-style mind-bending, I implore you to research both experiments if you haven't before.

meant to be a canister of Grade-A fucking rocket fuel to stick in your burnt-out activist tank. If you choose to continue to read past this introduction, may you know that you will cease to be a passive reader in the unfolding of the concepts, ideas and realities it discusses. You will – you must, in fact – become an active part of a collective unfolding. When we actively ignore new possibilities for too long, our reality (our Overton window) shrinks and imprisons us within it. But when we look beyond what we are against and instead start discussing, debating and fighting for what we are for, we might start to see what liberation looks like – liberation from the capitalist realist mythology that this is the only possible timeline, and in its place, make space for a burgeoning multiverse of pathways. After reading this book, you might find it impossible to climb back into the box of 'normality'. I don't know what exactly it might inspire in you, but for Christ's[7] sake, there has never been a better time for us to go ahead and start building the world we want to live in.

7. I guess not technically a god himself (more a son of one) but an all-round sound guy, it seems. Today, he would be labelled an immigrant Hamas terrorist, socialist, commie, homosexual libtard and brown Jew. What's not to love!

PART ONE: POLITICS AND JUSTICE

1
WHY SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE WASN'T ENOUGH

I was on Princes Street in Edinburgh one time, chatting to this older guy – manky hoodie but sharp as a blade – and I asked him, 'But what if we just end up voting in another bunch of numpties; same pish, different flag?'

He didn't even blink. 'Aye,' he said, pointing towards the Scottish Parliament, 'but they'll be oor numpties. Just up tha road in that ugly shitehole of a buildin'. And if they get too high and mighty, we kin jist walk in any time and remind them whose payin' thur bills.'

That line stuck with me. Right up until it happened.

It was 3 February 2018 and the third day of the, well... what was it? It wasn't a riot or a siege. More like a rave – and I don't mean one of these modern-day, corporate mass milking festivals masquerading as a rave. No, like an actual old skool car-battery-and-bashed-up-speaker rave.

As me and my mate DRIFT, a crusty vegan with dreadlocks, approached the steps outside the Parliament, we heard what sounded like a Techno-Ceilidh. Without a single word uttered between us, we legged it into the hundreds-strong audience.

Before we knew it, a mosh pit was in full swing. What had started as a makeshift dance floor on day three was an entire village by day ten, spreading all the way to Arthur's Seat and back. Even though there was a mainstream media blackout about our inconveniently growing rave, word got out and folk were bringing more speakers, tents, drums, guitars, free food stalls, zines and herbal teas. The air began to fill with the scent of woodsmoke, vegan hot dogs and moroccan hash. Some had started to make huge political sculptures out of foraged wood and junk metal in the Parliament car park and it wasn't just a bunch of unemployed millennials like me kicking up a fuck: I remember the day when the mad maws arrived with their old pots and pans. Maws carry their own gravitas, so much so that Parliament and the world could no longer pretend to ignore them.

Aye, it was a cacophony at first, everyone just laying into their metallic appliances as loud as possible. I swear though, after a few hours, they started to sync in with each other's rhythm. By the end of the day, a newly formed maw's samba band was leading a hyper crowd in circles around the Parliament. Even the mics in the debating chamber started picking us up during parliamentary questions, the windows inexplicably shaking with the bass.

A few days later, the green mob – folk you'd usually find living in rural coliving spaces, communes and collectives, and who were used to settling into random temporary autonomous spaces – arrived with their solar panels, compost loos, play tents, a creche, a clothing swap, a cornershop barber and even a bard in a bathrobe doing dream readings. No one could have planned or organised any of this if they tried. It all just unfolded,

emergently and beautifully. People started smiling – like, actually smiling – folk who had their hope stolen many times over before. This was becoming something joyous: not just protest anymore but playful resistance. Hundreds had turned to thousands, then tens of thousands, then hunners' a thousands.

The polis tried kettling us in,[1] shutting down bus and train stations to halt the flow, but the greatest weapon against their truncheons and tear gas, it turned out, was our humour and mockery. We played clown music when they marched in formations and tickled them with feather dusters. Bright, glittery body dust along with good old spray paint works really well at jazzing up riot cops' shields and helmets on the move. It's not our fault our attempts at some decorating rendered their riot helmets useless.

Eventually, the polis – having run out of riot gear that hadn't been glitterified – despaired at their pointless task. I mind seeing a cop take off his body armour for the first time so someone could give him a proper neck and shoulder massage during his third sleepless night shift standing. Before long, the entire polis line stopped being a human barricade and became a queue for the masseuse tent.

The politicians started peeking out from behind the Parliament blinds, then from the doorsteps. A few even slipped out of the debating chamber and into the pop-up daytime workshops on emotional resilience and mushroom-growing. I remember seeing the Finance Minister sitting on a plastic milk crate in the

1. Kettling is a tactic where police surround a group and – without detaining or arresting anyone for a crime – restrict their freedom of movement, their ability to go to the toilet, get food or even sit down. They don't care if you are an activist or a pregnant woman caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

mud, listening to a single mum from Govan explain how she had used a community fridge to keep her kids fed all winter. He was nodding silently, getting smaller and smaller as both his crate and guilt sunk into the mud.

The chats outside were far more engaging than the debates inside Parliament and when the nightfall raves kicked off fully, many politicians secretly got stuck into the ecstatic dance and psychedelic sound baths along with the adult cuddle puddles pulsing under the stars up the Edinburgh mound at 5 am. It was a moment of enlightenment and unity that broke the boundary completely between protester and politician. The English-controlled legacy media camera crews[2] tried to spin it as a fringe of radicals and terrorist sympathisers, but when footage leaked of a senior government minister receiving an abdominal massage in the radical care tent while deep-belly crying to a trance remix of Runrig, their hypocritical us-versus-them narratives collapsed into absurdity.

We didn't see those inside the Parliament as our enemy. Instead, we surrounded the building with so much life and love that its walls simply melted open, those inside curious to come out rather than us demanding to come in. The music, the smell of vegan hot dogs and the sound of children laughing melted the masks of the politicians arguing. Turns out, it wasn't just the kids outside playing make-believe; it was the adults inside, too.

2. Although we were independent on paper at this point, the mainstream media in Scotland remained almost wholly in the hands and at the whim of billionaires aligned with corporate England.

For me, the most intriguing indication of the rapid transition in energy was in the music itself. The first tunes playing in the early days of the month-long rave were dark and heavy, a cathartic reflection of the overly industrialised, collapsing, commodified world. In many ways, the music was a resistance by mirroring the violence. Yet as the rave grew – in both numbers and energy – the music changed with it. Its energetic drive and power remained, but there was more melody, emotion and soul – something that had been sorely neglected for a long time. Eventually, after a few weeks, the anger and protest had almost completely transformed into funk and freshness. A solemn funeral for the inevitable apocalypse had become a national – now global – celebration, a carnival of resistance and new experimental sounds to match.

The SNP leadership stepped down, exhausted, and most other parties in the Parliament disbanded or were outright routed to England. For many of them, this wasn't so much a political decision as more so they could finally crawl home and curl up in bed with nothing but a bottle of Yahoo strawberry milk for comfort, listening to Underworld's *Born Slippy* on repeat while the existential dread of their comedown slowly subsided. The final message from the Scottish government, published on their website in Comic Sans for some reason, simply read:

We are all just humans. And frankly, we need a nap.

The last politician was found lying on the press room floor, swaddled in a tangle of lanyards and press cards, whimpering something about 'just wanting his mammy's mac and cheese'.

So that was it. The old, rotten tree of party politics with all its poison flags and manifestos had come crashing down on a huge comedown and we were stood naked and confused as the unfamiliar sunlight burst out the void and hit our eyes in bedazzlement.

But let's rewind. What brought Scotland on my timeline to that point? Four years earlier on my timeline, in 2014, we had a referendum that resulted in our independence and a new wave of diversification in Parliament. But rather than the promised 'rainbow' parliament we somehow ended up with *Fifty Shades of Shite.* It turned out that it doesn't matter what politicians you elect, what flag they fly, colour or cause they claim to support. They will always end up serving but one master – power.

Essentially, the ruling party of our new independent Scotland, the Scottish National Party or SNP, had seemingly been corrupted and compromised from their initial promises after Independence. Despite their victory as the umbrella party, it didn't take long before plans and promises fell apart and the ruling SNP were cosying up with the old Westminster-aligned parties to push through another round of forced austerity and NATO military spending. The SNP had naively accumulated IMF debts after the economy went on a steep downhill course. Following the initial wave of post-independence optimism, life in Scotland became increasingly rough and tough. What use is a new flag or national anthem when the price of bread keeps going up and you can't pay the heating or afford the bus ticket to work? Many of the same shadowy forces that benefited from our economic failures were the first in line to offer us 'recovery' loans. The SNP tried to kick the economic can down the road, buying borrowed time to find their feet – but never did.

You could, of course, argue that they had some logic in their failed plans to not rock the boat too much post-independence – keeping the English Pound, swearing allegiance to English royalty and joining NATO. They thought that appeasing the corporatists, bureaucrats and centrists in the West, playing along with their boyish fantasies, would buy us enough credulity that most of them would leave us alone – if not outright support our freshly independent country. Yet, despite trying everything to look, act and smell like one of the sheep, an independent Scotland was always going to be viewed as a dangerous wolf – a precedent that had to be stamped out before it got oxygen.[3] Scotland seeking to compromise out the gate wasn't seen as an act of civility by other Western powers. It was seen as weakness. If only British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain who tried to 'civilise' Hitler could have screamed out from his grave all the way up to Scotland, 'APPEASEMENT NEVER WORKS, YOU SILLY BASTARDS!'

Independent Scotland soon started looking and smelling suspiciously like the old guard we had supposedly just freed ourselves from – only now wrapped up in a different flavour of deep-fried nationalist mythologies. Much of the political theatre of independence was irrelevant because the engine that runs any society – our economy – didn't declare independence when our Parliament did. The true levers of power (the currency, banks and essential industries) remained outside our grasp and in the hands of international institutions and

3. Remember, Scottish landowners killed off all the wolves a long time ago – along with those troublesome indigenous human populations – to make way for more domesticated sheep.

foreign governments. Through the deal brokered with England and later the IMF, even if the SNP had maintained the best of intentions and purest of hearts, they couldn't ever have achieved their promises. Not without real economic leverage – leverage they never had from the get-go.

So what were we, the people, going to do about it? Fighting violence with violence almost always leads to an escalation from all sides. The state or corporations will justify increased surveillance, civil restrictions and state oppression in response to 'violent protesters and terrorists threatening public safety'; meanwhile, more peaceful campaigners may turn violent after seeing too many grannies kicked in the face, or students stunned by police officers, or young women given lengthy jail sentences for the simple act of giving a fuck.

All of the usual avenues for citizen protests were exhausted. Nothing had changed – partially because the Parliament didn't want to, but also because they didn't actually have the power to change the things we demanded. Many failed demos, protests and actions later, protesters did the only thing that made sense in such infinitely looping hopelessness: people brought out their dusty old speakers, mics and decks and took back the streets of power. On day one, it was a wee random demo with no more than forty folk – a single solar PA system outside the Parliament front door, a table with soup and a couple of camping stoves. None of us partying outside were particularly aligned to any party inside. No unions showed up in support either, no left-wing parties, alliances or organisations. By that point, the disunited Scottish left had been fruitlessly trying to pull themselves together for decades. You would think independence would have put the wind in their sails but, de-

spite constant calls for unity, every joint meeting between the factions collapsed into bickering and accusations. Same shit, different day. The voices of women, ethnic minorities and disabled people were mostly sidelined when all the shouty-shouty contests kicked off. Every post-indy attempt at unity came to a grinding halt and ironic collapse into even more splinter groups.

Most of the elected politicians inside the Parliament pretended we didn't exist outside, even when we caught their eyes from their office windows and waved them down. They handled us much like the IMF debt: if you don't look, it will magically go away. Well, the debt didn't go away and neither did we.

It wasn't our outside resistance, though, that eventually pushed the politicians over the edge and collapsed our political system. Some of them were as disillusioned with the political puppet show as we were and genuinely happy for an excuse to fuck it all up the wall and start again. The problem was: we hadn't anticipated any of this. We didn't expect the Parliament to disband so quickly and there was certainly no agreed-upon plan past this point. No ten-point post-mortem strategies or transitional councils ready to step in. We didn't even have a name for this new emerging Scotland. The protesters hadn't intended on taking over power. We simply wanted to dissolve it and spread it roon. We knew this was the end of our so-called 'liberal democracy', with a tense hope that something better could emerge. But what?

2
Independence from what, actually?

> 'Ooh, you know what Bill's doing now? He's going for the righteous indignation dollar.'
> 'Godammit, I'm not doing that, you scum-bags! Quit putting a goddamn dollar sign on every fucking thing on this planet.'
> 'Ooh, the anger dollar. Huge. Huge in times of recession...'
> 'God, I'm just caught in a fucking web.'
> 'Ooh, the trapped dollar...'
>
> — Bill Hicks: Revelations (1993)

The Cult

There I was, full of anti-globalist fervour, stood in a muddy field in Gleneagles – an 18-year-old revolutionary wannabe – armed with my Palestinian Keffiyeh and a Greggs pasty, ready to bring down the elite with nothing but a mouthful of spite and starch. It was the G8 summit being hosted in a

huge golf hotel in Scotland back in 2005, when me and you still shared the same timeline. George Bush and his rent bitch Blair were just beyond a polis fence; so close I could almost smell their sweaty sanctimony. My thirst for revolution, however, kept getting interrupted by increasingly radical comrades – all with slightly different red and black flags, each claiming to be the true voice of the revolution. They were all flogging their own paper, their own leaflet, their own dogma. It was essential I bought their version of the revolution, for only £3.50 mind! I was just waiting for one wee bunnet-topped toerag to sprout up shouting, 'Splitters! We're from the TRUE Judean People's Front!'[1]

There we were, infighting about fonts and slogans, while smoking rollies and drinking beers – more than half of which had already been taxed and handed back to the people behind the fence we were supposedly fighting. The polis weren't letting anyone who looked or smelt like a hippy or punk into Gleneagles that day. Cars were being turned over, stripped and sent away. Yet all these radical newspaper vendors got through with car boots full of 'revolutionary' papers somehow? Surely it's not possible that some of those in charge of deciding what left-wingers read about – those who collect huge databases of 'member' personal details – could have preexisting relationships with the police or state? *Stop being paranoid*,[2]

1. This is just my personal first-hand account of being there and seeing it happen. Monty Python's *Life of Brian* satirised the disunity of the splintered left far better than I ever could.

2. Upon later life reflection, just because you are paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you.

I told myself at the time. The only reason we got past the barricade was on account of the fact we had borrowed my mum's partner's company BMW without his knowledge. When we got pulled over and questioned by the cops, the driver put on their poshest accent and, before the polis got a word in edgeways, said, 'What are all these bloody anarchists doing around my home!? In all my life here in the village, there has never been this much chaos. I hope you are doing a good job of keeping those bastards out, officer.'

The officer took a quick look at the BMW car, then again at the driver and eventually waved us through. He never bothered to look in the back seat where we dafties were wrapped up in black and red scarves, sitting on our signs, holding perfectly still, assuming we were invisible to them so long as we didn't move or breathe.

The cops and the henchmen they answer to clearly needed an excuse to block all the roads to the protest outside the G8 Summit that day. We had gotten up for brekkie and stuck on the news that morning, where we saw every channel alight with reports of a group of 'anarchists' – still, grainy pictures of men ominously dressed in black, with caps and scarves that looked too fresh and expensive. They, no doubt, had a banner that read: 'DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING!'

They were reported to have gone on a window-smashing rampage through the local Gleneagles village just next to the golf course the lizard folk were due to gather at later that day. You know how much anarchists hate windows, right? It's their kryptonite! A dedicated bunch of them had apparently targeted local shops and resident parking at 6 am to really bring down the capitalist system by striking at its imperial core:

village bakers and family cars. I'm sure some of the anarchists were bloody immigrants, too. Leftie pricks!

Maybe the journalists on the telly hadn't had their coffee yet, since not a single one questioned the narrative dictated to them by the cops that morning. I thought it was common knowledge that real-life anarchists aren't physically capable of waking up at 6 am. It's against their very biology. On top of that, these impossible anarchists were in a village full of legit targets – banks, thousands of polis, the full deck of shapeshifting reptilian overlords and their entourage landing, probably in spaceships across an entire golf course – yet they decided to attack local village shops, run by working-class people along with cars owned by some grannies. Aye, nae bother pal.

Looking back, I wonder how many others eating their brekkie and watching the news that morning questioned any of it. That's how propaganda works. It wears your critical thinking down slowly, until all you can think about is a violent man in black, smashing up your shiny new postbox out front for no darn tootin' reason. Now filled with sanctimonious rage at something your brain literally just made up, you are far too clouded to see the actual events in front of your eyes. Gotta smoke out the bees to steal their honey.

So, the legally dubious police blockade now had its reason to be in place and no one dared question the logic. A tiny percentage of the protesters did get through still and a mini march was eventually allowed to proceed along a police-agreed circular route – a route that led us down a road flanked by militarised riot cops. When we reached the end of the route, the moment had come for the all too predictable rammy with the polis. I watched from the sidelines. It was like cheering on a game

of school rugby where the final year high school A-team was given full body armour and an array of military-grade weapons, while their opponents were kindergarten kids who kept getting red-carded, violently abducted and arrested for something as simple as wearing cloth over their mouths. Eventually, after the polis made enough bloody noses, most of the protesters gave up and turned back along the designated robocop road to where the buses were expected to shift everyone outta there asap.

Fast forward a few hours and we ended up back in Glasgow, drinking pints in a Wetherspoon pub owned by a millionaire Tory and eating meat burgers made from enslaved animals. Another group of protesters clocked us and asked to join. We were easy to spot – practically all wearing variations of some Che Guevara T-shirt with a 'made in Bangladesh' label on the back, maybe even stitched on by the same child labourer.

As I downed my third pint, it began to dawn on me: It's all fucked. There is nowhere to escape it, even at a protest! Capitalism isn't just an economy. It's a fucking cult – a cult so omnipresent that it doesn't need a god or even a belief system for you to be stuck in it – from the first branded milk bottle filled with formula to the last exorbitantly expensive plastic urn. It doesn't care what you protest about, who you pray to or who you shag – as long as you get up every day and throw your body onto the gears of the wage-slave-to-consumer loophole. Line go up. Keep shopping. Line go up. Keep scrolling. Line go up. LINE GO UP!

Such a single-minded system can tolerate – even encourage – you to think you're radical because you read Marx, so long as it was on a Kindle made in a factory where people regularly

jump from the rooftop.[3] It let's you scream about African liberation while self-soothing and sucking on the chocolatey teat of the baby-murdering Nestlé corporation.[4] You can post memes about burning it all down, using a platform that sells your rage to ad agencies that know more about you than your overpriced therapist, then sell you back the solutions to the problems they helped create. It teaches you to mock the people below you, fear the people beside you and worship the people shitting on you from above. When the dissonant rage builds up too high, the system hands you a wee tranquilliser:

'Rich? Fancy a line of Escobar Puro?'

'Poor? Don't worry, fill yer veins with smack.'

'Man? How about a wee shot of alcoholic anger on the side?'

'Woman? Rub some of this carcinogenic sludge on your face. Treat yourself!'

'LGBTQI+? Go on! Do your wee parade again! It's so cute and we love all that advertising space on your banners and buses.'

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3. In 2010, at least 18 workers attempted suicide by jumping from high-rise dormitory buildings at the Foxconn electronics manufacturing plants in China, resulting in 14 deaths. The suicides are attributed to brutal overwork and military-style management while producing devices for companies like Apple and Amazon. Following the incidents, factory owners installed safety netting around the buildings to catch falling bodies and forced employees to sign 'no-suicide pledges'.

4. The 1974 report *Nestlé Kills Babies* by the Bern Third World Action Group exposed predatory marketing in developing nations and, as a result, sparked a global boycott. Tactics included using saleswomen dressed as 'milk nurses' and distributing free samples that led to the cessation of natural lactation, forcing a reliance on expensive formula often mixed with contaminated water. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) estimated that, by 1981, these practices contributed to approximately 212,000(!) infant deaths annually.

Those fuckin' immigrants causing it all though, right? Those homeless beggars, housing-benefit scroungers, inferior in culture and intellect yet simultaneously the reason you have no job... The worst, of course, are those predator trans folk masterminding all the evil conspiracies in the world from inside the women's public toilets!

The cult and its frustratingly repetitive narratives work because they don't feel like coercion but like a free choice; like we are freely choosing to believe the emperor has clothes while forced to ignore his smelly nutsack dangling far too close to our faces.

Then there are the moments – in the midst of the collective delusion – some schmuck bursts out laughing while the rest of us are crying inside. In Gleneagles that day, those laughing schmucks were the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, or CIRCA for short, dressed in faux camouflage and colander helmets, armed with balloon bazookas and the odd feather duster and pink boa.

Exhausted after hours of watching the failed attempts to break through police lines, I ended up sulkingly dragging my heels back along the route to where I had come from. Along the roadside on my right was an unbroken chain of blacked-out robocops, shoulder-to-shoulder, making sure we kept moving along. But then, through the side of my eye, the oppressive line of state-sponsored terror was broken by an officer whose rank remained a mystery. They were dishing out loud orders to passing protesters, 'Come on, hurry along, polish those boots, tally ho pip pip what what *honk honk*!'

As I curiously approached, I clocked an unmistakably painted white face. It was a CIRCA soldier squeezing his red nose as

he doffed his colander helmet towards me. After the tension of the day and distinct lack of public services, I just burst, laughing so hard I almost pissed myself. Just then, a marching brass band had decided they, too, had enough of robocop avenue and took a random B-line to their immediate left, off-road and into a huge field of open wheat, their full-sized tuba poking out on top. Maybe the polis didn't have enough robos on duty to line both sides of the road. Maybe in their Aristotelian either/or thinking, they never considered the fact someone – never mind a fucking brass band – would ever veer off the downtrodden track and just walk full-pelt into a field of wheat, trailblazing blindly yet freely in the general direction of the golf course.

The jig was up. Or was it about to start? Like the kids of the Pied Piper, hundreds of us all enthusiastically ran to follow the jolly marching music into the grassy oblivion. We got pretty bloody far too, mind you. Enough to spook the shit out of not just the Scottish cops, but the US Army as well – until US Army Chinook helicopters descended and literally blocked out the sun. They were filled with attack dogs, machine guns and even a horse half-dangling out of one, probably trippin' even more than we were at the entire spectacle. Not too surprisingly, the most advanced and expensive army in the world had caught up with our newly forming brass movement and was chasing a literal bunch of fucking clowns down a field of wheat. By baton and at machine gunpoint, we were eventually re-routed and forced back to the buses. Yet thanks to some clowns dressed as soldiers (or maybe the real hero soldiers, dressed as clowns) and a brave-as-fuck brass band, for the first time, the full cult veil was lifted and I could suddenly see the edges of the beast

I'd been smothered by my whole life. Not just that. Once some fresh air reached my nose, it was impossible to get it back out – the smell of possibilities that lay beyond the cult. How come it took me so long to smell it?

The Left/Right Dualism

We live in entirely different reality tunnels – me, you and the guy you were arguing with on facebook at 3 am last night. This is, in part, manufactured and magnified by various algorithms that have increasing power to control our minds, views and spending habits. It means real discussion and debate is almost impossible because we are no longer even discussing the same thing. We no longer represent two perspectives on the same world – we are aliens speaking different languages from different universes. This is exactly where the cult wants us to be: alone in our own paranoid collapsing tunnels. We've been convinced it's left versus right so we take aim at our peers who exist on our sides, rather than those controlling the narrative from far above.

Some of the working class have been convinced to vote for right-wing fascist billionaires, who hack big chunks off the state and economy to hand to megacorps. Meanwhile the left, on the whole, have given up on world-building and class struggle altogether, trading bread-and-butter economic fights for media wordplay squabbles or so-called community projects that need 32 meetings, 400 middle-class attendees and 5.212 amendments just to build a bike shed.

Class struggle is the supposed heartland of the left, yet what established movement in the West is honestly answering to the

needs of the people trapped in wage slavery or the growing precariat,[5] desperate to know why things keep getting worse and how they are supposed to survive?

If you watch TV or read the papers, you are made to care more about who is taking a shit in which toilet cubicle than the fact there are no fucking public toilets left in the first place. They have all been shut down – as have more than half of the city centres, town squares, local shops, cafés and pubs. Public space has been replaced with cold steel and tinted-glass American hedge fund franchises. If you are looking for the immigrants coming here, taking the jobs, not paying any taxes, killing your culture and destroying your way of life, it's not refugees fleeing the wars we started in Syria or Afghanistan. It's McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks and KFC washing over your entire country like a fucking plague of grey goo. Keeping us distracted and obsessed with immigrants and trans people benefits the elites twice over. It sends out the signal to immigrants and trans people – just like Black, gay or Jewish people before them – that their very existence in public life is under constant threat, while simultaneously alienating white working-class citizens from left-wing thought leaders and activists who are forced to spend all their time in a specifically small battle defending immigrant and trans rights as that's the only time they are ever invited onto mainstream platforms for comment. To the naive viewer, it's as if they are the ones obsessed with immigrants and trans people, rather than the bigots who

5. The precariat, or precarious proletariat, is a relatively new term for people working and living precariously – often thanks to zero-hours contracts and American app companies that fully exploit labour but dodge all worker protections.

own the platforms and set the agendas. It's a particularly cruel but effective tactic that has worked in perpetuity. Sometimes, who is asking the questions is much more important than who is answering them: Take the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, for example, marked by a prominent 'red herring' known as the *mamadeira de piroca* (penis-shaped baby bottle) hoax. The fascist Bolsonaro utilised a disinformation campaign to falsely claim that the opposition Workers' Party (PT) was distributing phallic-nippled bottles to public daycares as part of a 'gay kit' to sexualise children. By shifting the national discourse toward an urgent, manufactured moral panic, the campaign effectively sidelined substantive debate on economic and social policy, and even convinced many poor people to vote for the guy who would go on to oppress and kill them.

We've been sold this whole 'left versus right' political pantomime for centuries. But here's the only axis that matters: up versus doon. Deliberate lies and fear-mongering would get you fired from most jobs, but in politics it wins votes. The moment any prick in a tie runs for office, they can literally say whatever rhetoric to any crowd, align with whatever cause they think wins and there's no responsibility to follow through or deliver. That's because, once in public office, they join the up-class and are now net beneficiaries of at least parts of the system they were empowered by the voters to oppose. There's a new stop for the gravy train now: 'Yeah, a change needs to come eventually, but can't it just wait a wee bit till next term maybe? An oil exec just gave me VIP tickets to a Rihanna concert.'[6]

6. Compared to their US or European counterparts, UK politicians famously sell their arses on the cheap – for as little as a shitty concert ticket.

Time and time again, we are left standing by, watching their motivations switch sides to align with the ultra-powerful.

Of course, if class privileges and straight-up lobbyist bribes don't work, try blackmail – Epstein- or Diddy-style honey-traps, wee 'misunderstandings' at private parties, a misplaced video file labelled 'homework folder'. If you've got skeletons in the closet, they've got leverage. And if you've not got any yet, don't worry – they'll make some up for you in no time. You and your team might even try to play the same game on them. It's a policy of mutual self-destruction. Everyone compromised to keep everyone on script at all times, especially during a public crisis. The up-class can mostly behave how they want but they never cross certain class red lines, obliged to stick to their specific scripts given to them through their secret boys' clubs.

People across the political spectrum are starting to realise this theatrical spectacle. When you ask people without power and seeking it, you can find a variety of opinions on the Israeli occupation, drug policy or free health care. Yet, as soon as anyone from any background gets into power, they suddenly become deeply pro-Israel, anti-all-drugs and pro-privatisation. As soon as they are out of powerful positions, they start to 'spill the beans' or let rip about their 'true' opinion or experiences, usually in the form of a book for sale for only $39.99! What the fuck use is that? Why didn't you say anything, do anything, when you actually had power?

The supposed rebels who do make it to the up-class yet still criticise the system publicly – the loudmouth comedians, the firebrand critics, the media commentators – they are allowed to entertain the masses as court jesters. They are the controlled

pressure valves needed to release the pent-up societal pressure, allowing us to feel like we are activists because we watch the Daily Show or laugh at an anti-Trump joke. It's controlled opposition disguised as democracy. It keeps the circus going and us plebs clapping or booing on command. The truly unbuyable ones on this timeline who, at least sometimes, fought for the people and stood up for democracy – Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Mahatma Gandhi, Patrice Lumumba, Salvador Allende, Benazir Bhutto, Che Guevara, Thomas Sankara, JFK – usually end up with a bullet in the head.

The up-owned media managed to convince a group of Scottish, Independence-supporting lesbians – of all people – to fight for the suppression of trans rights in an English court. It convinced a fuck-load of South American descendants to vote for Trump. How many millions of exploited workers around the world come home and abuse their partners? How many suffering parents go on to abuse their kids? How many abused kids become bullies or worse, future police and soldiers with a vendetta? A pertinent example of what we are talking about might be Irish (famously pro-Palestinian as a nation today) immigrants to the US. Back in those days, the Irish were treated like dogs. 'No Blacks, no Irish, no dogs' – so went the famous sign on many boarding houses. They were only mildly better off than their African enslaved siblings. Yet the tantalising allure of becoming even a little bit more 'up' was enough to turn many Irish immigrants into active KKK members and some of the most racist police officers in the US during the Jim Crow period. A wee leg up by standing in the faces of their fellow oppressed.

From a left/right perspective, none of these anomalies are explainable. How come left-wing progressive movements and individuals go on to commit the same and worse acts of violence than were carried out against them? Why doesn't their lived empathy stop them? Surely, part of the answer must be the compartmentalisation we commit to when we invent these false and distractionary categories: left/right, man/woman, Black/white, terrorist/freedom fighter. The only solution to this cognitive dissonance and blatant moral hypocrisy is to start seeing all our struggles as representations of the inequality of up versus doon, not left versus right. This new way of thinking requires us to be less egotistical and more nuanced. From the new perspective of up/doon, we have to ask ourselves: Which camp am I?

That means we have to understand that we relate differently to our children than we do to our partners; we are someone different to our colleagues than we are to our bosses. I am both up and doon simultaneously. With this realisation, suddenly all the contradictions are gone. We begin to see that every action and every relationship is unique and our responsibility changes with them. Martin Luther King was a great hero in the struggle for civil rights, yet he no doubt harmed many Black women along the way with his alleged serial infidelity.

This starts to get us somewhere closer to understanding why our heroes often act like complete wankers in private, or why the movements we place our hopes and dreams into disappoint us once they reach a certain position of influence. Should we give up all hope and become full-time cynics? Not if we recognise the problem isn't who is in power but the structures of power themselves.

Not all struggles are equal. Certain people and groups clearly have it much worse than others. But the Oppression Olympics[7] capitalism enters us into at birth – with its false categorisations, labels and binary boxes – is only ever a race to the bottom that leaves us all divided and alone, even the ones with so-called privilege. Breaking free from the left/right nonsense helps us see that, more often than not, your struggle *is* my struggle, and vice versa – even when we have different boxes stuck on our heads, experiences of struggle, languages, social media (propaganda), taboos and even different explanations for our suffering and oppression. When we look beyond these manufactured differences, great things can happen – great things that keep the up-class awake at night and trembling. For when we start to remove their divisions, it soon becomes mighty obvious just how many more of us there are than them – like when LGBT protesters bravely came out to support the Welsh miners in 1984,[8] despite rampant homophobia in the miner villages; or when the Black Panthers created connections in solidarity with other oppressed non-Black groups, most notably the 'Rainbow Coalition' in Chicago between Puerto Ricans and white working-class activists.[9]

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7. The term refers to reducing the struggle for social justice to a competitive hierarchy of victimhood. Individuals or groups 'compete' for cultural capital, resources or brand recognition based on their level of marginalisation, often while the underlying structures remain unchallenged.

8. Watch *Pride* (2014), an incredible movie about this beautiful moment in history. At first, the majority of miners were deeply homophobic (due to their cult indoctrination) but eventually they recognised the shared struggle.

9. There's a good documentary called *The First Rainbow Coalition* about it on PBS.

These coalitions have happened but they must now become the norm – rather than the exception – if we are to build a critical mass. We can no longer fear and fight our peers on our left or the right. We need to grasp hands and rise up together!

3
Our First Great Clan Gathering

The Big Blether Get-Tae-Gither revealed on all levels, metrics and data points that we were collectively done with the left/right pantomime. The divisive political distraction show was ready for the bin and we were ready to build something new. After the raves were over and the real work of our Interdependence began, we discovered that debating chambers make for shite dancefloors. There's just no flow. No vibes, maaaan.

Debating chambers in parliaments are living embodiments of that left/right divide the cult wants us to believe is some fundamental part of politics. If you're over on the right wing of the chamber and you're feeling the vibe of the folk kicking off on the left, good luck making your way over to join them without any obstacles. It's all pews and partitions, tribal sections for different teams, incomplete circles and segmented spaces.

Imagine heading out for a night, alone or with your crew of mates. The best nights are when you cross-pollinate with new weirdos and different tribes. Dancefloors designed well can help with that. They dissolve protective egos and a magical non-verbal unity can emerge under the right circumstances. Debating chambers, on the other hand, are about as stiff and

rigid as an Eton boy's cum sock. I know, it's an odd place to start when talking about the founding principles of a post-capitalist ecological society. But it's no more ridiculous an obsession than a saggy old man, sprayed the colour of a rusting traffic cone, getting all 'woke' and reassigning the Gulf of Mexico.[1]

We didn't know how to run our own country properly in those early days post-2018 over on my timeline after the month-long rave brought down the government. Contrary to dystopian blockbuster scripts, we didn't decompose into the political vacuum, wake up as zombies and start eating each other's children. With no clear emerging leadership, we mostly just gathered. We blethered. We turned to one another – not just outside the Parliament but back in our villages, towns and cities for what became known as the Big Blether Get-Tae-Gither.

No one person organised it. The national Big Blether sprouted everywhere, seemingly all at once: town halls, abandoned churches, school gyms, forest clearings, roof gardens, skate parks and Zoom calls from community centres. There were people who emerged as natural connectors, joining up the results of all these meetings into something useful on a national level. Some others obviously turned up just to cathartically shout, some to cry, some to hand out food to hungry mouths. But what mattered was that we aww showed up – as neighbours and equals, not just anonymous avatars behind screens.

I remember my first Big Blether in a drafty church hall in Springburn. The air smelt thickly of homemade lentil soup like

1. Is the renamed Gulf of America a trans gulf now? How about the trans US Department of Defence that now identifies as the Department of War?

yer grannie used to make, along with that awful smell of wet duffle coats. A 17-year-old lass stood up, her voice trembling as she plucked the courage to propose forming a group she called 'The Clan of the Quiet Ones' – a kinship for the introverts who usually get shouted over by loud-mouths. There was a resoundingly quiet excitement around the room for such a random but resonant suggestion.

It's true there were a few trolls who turned up out of some anticipated schadenfreude but actually, many of those early cynics ended up being the most important contributors to many niche discussions. One such taxi driver (let's admit it, we assumed he was a bit racist and bigoted at first, which itself was a bit of a bigoted assumption about taxi drivers) ended up being an epic resource, helping a group of local muslim women map out the entire city and its areas of highest deprivation most in need of child support.

The discussions and solutions that surfaced were rarely revolutionary or sexy on paper. People were willing to accept short-term pain for longer-term success, it turned out. What united us in optimism – despite the chaos all around – was a future vision that wasn't on fire. It was goals like community safety, access to food, water and meaningful paid work, personal dignity, time to experiment, create and grow. We wanted to be warm in winter, make music and enjoy art. Simple things. Sacred things. The stuff no government manifesto ever seems to mention anymore and, if they do, they are conveniently forgotten or 'unaffordable' upon taking office. Somehow, there is always money for random wars and politician duck house expenses though.

When the lid was lifted, it started to dawn on most of us that if we stopped clutching our wee daft flags and sectarian team scarves for a minute, we had a lot more in common than we were ever meant to realise. We're Scottish – not Irish, British, Israeli or Palestinian. Their struggles may inform us but they do not define us. The old divide-and-conquer sectarian lines, all that Protestant-versus-Catholic pish, started to fade as soon as most of the institutions propping up the hatred fucked off to England after our month-long rave.

It wasn't all polite, though. In the early days of the Parliament raves, a gang of Orange Order[2] British-flag wavers turned up to terrorise and start fights. The police had conveniently stepped down from their posts that day, too. The group of armed cowards gathered under a tunnel (like actual trolls) and began planning how to cause the most amount of fear and damage possible. In the end, they chose to sneak in from the side and charge at our children's creche area, thinking that would be the weakest spot and send us all running. The knuckle in their collective head had failed to comprehend the hidden well of determination of a group of mothers and fathers whose children were suddenly under threat. As the Orange Order thugs charged, revealing their intent to harm, several mums, well-practised in this game by now, lifted the parachute that had been on the ground for the kids' games and, in one swift

2. The Orange Order is a shadowy organisation established in Scotland by the English, designed to drive a sectarian wedge into Scottish culture. They have a history of violence and hatred, marching every year in celebration of an ancient battle they have co-opted to mean the killing of Catholics. Obviously, they should have been banned decades ago, but the British state needs their proxies to keep the people in their colonies divided and therefore conquered.

motion, collapsed it over the entire gang – British flags and all. The rest of the dads and mums then stood on the parachute edges, while the kids looked confused (but not traumatised) by this weird-ass group of adults coming to play. Underneath, there were so many sectarian slurs being thrown around that the noise made by the bigot butcher band attracted the rest of the unsuspecting ravers. More and more rushed over to help, encircling the surprisingly thick parachute. Those and some old slacklines lying about were perfect for wrapping around the now-trapped and blinded invaders if need be.

When they finally calmed down, we slowly lifted the parachute from their heads. On noticing they were surrounded in row after row of smiling but laser-focused adults, all staring at them, there was a long, awkward silence. My mate DRIFT finally broke it when he offered a sweaty, terrified and dehydrated-looking bald man a bottle of water and a sip of his tea flask. The guy cautiously accepted the gift and the high five that followed it. Some Scottish grannies made their way to the front of the tense circle, too, and had a wee word in the ear of many of the intruders. No one likes a telling-off from granny and, as we Scots know, ye cannae talk back and ye cannae throw them aff a bus. Eventually, as tensions calmed, most accepted the escort back to the train station. Those who stayed behind did so not to cause more trouble but for medical assistance, a bowl of soup or even a wee dance. Hard to stay angry for long with good music!

The power of such a deep and rapid culture shift isn't fantasy, nor is it unprecedented. The early 1990s rave scene across Scotland and England practically wiped out football hooliganism. It brought about an almost overnight shift in culture, music

and drug of choice that saw previously drunk lads who'd glass each other suddenly hugging in random fields the following weekend, high on pills and pure vibrations. Who knew that the solution to ending centuries of sectarianism was as straightforward as following our newly emerging Scottish golden rule:

DON'T BE A CUNT.

Fast forward to the Big Blether again and – despite the decrease in sectarian violence – there was still no great central unifying ideology that came out of the findings, no single 'ism' that defined everyone or our shared vision. It seemed, in many ways, what we were building was post-ideological (but certainly not apolitical). Maybe because our evolving movement was not stained with the blood of a million deaths in the name of some revolution, our hearts hadn't been hardened, nor had collective PTSD forced us into illogical binaries of heroes and traitors. After the Big Blether, we realised that trying to lump everyone into one homogenised whole – trying to be everything to everyone – just gave us a grey-brown clump of crusted playdough that was nothing to no one. Despite what economists had told us for decades, there is no such thing as Homo economicus (the average rational actor, as they call it). Trying to sum up the totality of the human experience into one boring average cunt is just daft folly. Our diversity, it transpired, is the source of our collective strength, not something to be tolerated or battled against; and if we were to find a way forward, especially in such a timely crisis, we needed to rebuild around our diversity, not opposed to it. That is how

the new Scottish clan structure emerged – organically across the country, not tied to geography or the family you were born into, but as open clans of choice. These new clans weren't rose-tinted hark-backs to outdated forms of family alliances, marrying off daughters in return for sheep. There were no Clan McFucknoses murdering the MacSneeziepits in their sleep in Glencoe. These new clans were new kinds of kinships forming in a vacuum with just enough creativity and chaos to make them an interesting fit for the modern world, but infused with enough culture and tradition to rally most people behind them.

Sometimes, they were indeed formed around geographical locations as well as physical communities, sometimes around temporary projects, sometimes just shared vibes and interests. You could be in as many clans as you wanted – or none at all (though most people chose membership of at least one). Apathy rather than participation became the anathema in a period of such radical possibility and people power. Some clans focused on solving practical challenges like community energy, land stewardship or public transport. Others were playful, like the aforementioned Clan of Quiet Ones for the introverts and spectrum folk, the Techno Druids for the weird ravers or the Order of the Massive Cuppa for those who loved a cosy couch. I initially joined the latter two but got kicked out the Massive Cuppa because I was too wired on coffee. Lest you think this is just another recipe for the bigger clans to bully the small ones for power, we built in a few catches. For example, membership wasn't just a headcount numbers game. Only members with active participation points awarded to them by other members were included in a clan's eligible membership for elections. More on all that later.

The early clan formations with very little to support them were forced to pool resources and share tools, building ties of mutual growth and aid while creating the conditions for new clans and communities to form and join the web. The point wasn't to build from scratch but to reuse and repurpose the state-owned stuff we'd inherited from the collapse. Even more important than the practical organising of the early clans was that they gave folk a way to belong again – not just as represented citizens but as empowered co-creators with a clear mission. This was the clan network's superpower. Aye, there was a bit of friendly rivalry between some, but on the whole, it brought everyone from all the mad backgrounds together through a shared commons. If the goths were birch trees and the golfers were pines, then the clan network was the mycelia connecting them under the surface, pooling resources as well as sharing much needed common understanding. Free from the cult, empire and sham parliamentary democracies, it felt like a natural progression for us to begin to build our alternative system on something both ancient and radically new at the same time.

The stage was set for the very first Great Clan Gathering in hundreds of years in Scotland. Every clan would have the right to send representatives relative to their size as well as bring ideas to the table – a literal table placed in the middle, built from driftwood and wind-felled oak. As I speak, this table has been hauled from town to town for many of the Big Blethers and has become the focal point for the weirdest, most wonderful collective reimaginings Scotland has ever seen. Some early ideas failed spectacularly. Others exploded in glory. But all of it moved us away from capitalist fatalism and toward something

fresh and really fucking exciting – something rooted, playful, grounded and suitably strange. It felt alive.

That's what this book truly is, too: not a dead manifesto, not a list of 23 magic answers we came up with to solve every world crisis you might possibly be facing in your community or country, but a glimpse of what happens when you stop waiting for someone else to save the world and just get stuck in!

The Great Clan Gathering was announced just in the nick of time because, despite the Big Blether excitement, the financial pressure was on. Since the old government and the entire parliamentary system had collapsed in on itself, most government employees were left without a system in place to pay them anymore, yet they had continued to go to work – well, people who worked in essential community jobs, like refuse workers, social carers, doctors, teachers and the like. Anyone in a meaningless admin job jumped at the chance to leave and enjoy a much needed rest during the unfolding chaos. Many also banded together to volunteer and help keep essential public services functional while we, as a nation, worked out what the fuck we were going to do next. This banding together to keep things going might, in fact, have helped the early clan structure to emerge, giving it much needed kindling.

Many are under the illusion that, if the government shuts down, the whole of society would fall apart instantly. But as the US government has shown time and time again in recent years government shutdowns are bad, but not as disastrous as you would imagine. It's more of a slow burn. Companies continue to function, shops stay open, parcels get delivered and farmers keep growing food. In our case, volunteers banded together to shore up struggling public services for a few months.

Luckily still, we managed to hold our first Great Clan Gathering only six months after the fall of Parliament. That's when our second attempt at real independence – our Interdependence – began. Not a moment too soon so families could get paid again. There was nationwide support for the Gathering and high expectations for something radically new to come out of it, especially from those who were working their arses off for free in the belief their temporary pain and sacrifice would lead to something better for us all.

4
The Early Hangover and How We Overcame It

All of it. Shaken. To. The. Core. It smelt different. Not just the air, mind. I mean the deep shit. The core of your life. Your relationships. Your cravings. What you wake up for in the morning. What you eat. When you eat it. Your ideas about success, about sex, about safety, about play.

Emerging free from the Big Capitalist Cult was like stepping out of a sealed underground bunker into sunlight for the first time in decades – or, for many, their entire life. At first, it's stunning, radiant. You laugh. You cry. You can see the colours in everything so vividly. It's all breath, joy and wondrous awe. But then you realise that without the protective shell of the prison bunker, you're exposed. Skin begins to fry as the new reality sets in. That fiery light, it fucking burns!

You do what anyone would: you start looking for shade, any kind. Even a flimsy bit of ideology, a comforting little identity badge, a nostalgia-flavoured cardboard umbrella. Anything to shield yourself from the rawness of reality. Freedom – real radical freedom – isn't what it's cracked up to be. It isn't cosy or comfortable. It's vulnerable as fuck and genuinely terrifying.

Us peely wally Scots don't fare well under direct sunlight so, of course, we sought out some temporary cover at first – even just to find our bearings and get things moving again. The plan was simple enough: to get people the money and resources they needed to stabilise and go from there.

For our first Great Clan Gathering, we decided to use the old Parliament building. It didn't take long, though, before all the excitement and unity we felt at the protests, the raves and the Big Blethers was drained and gone completely. Those early proto-gatherings had organically formed in circles in wide flat spaces where people could stand, sway and move around, interact and take up space. Now stuck in the stuffy, dilapidated Debating Chamber, people suddenly started arguing, deliberately offending while taking constant offence too – just like the good ole' days.

After a day or two, the polite civility wore off and the first round of clan reps started to cluster into informal gang cohorts – feedback echoes of the old cult BS (bullshit/belief systems). Addicts in recovery call it 'relapse'. Anyone who has experienced one will tell you they can just as easily be triggered by the expectation of a perceived positive experience as they can by a negative one.

In the early 'hangover period' as many now remember it – the period right after the raves – we even saw drugs make a comeback we hadn't seen in ages. Lots of people I met during the raves had stopped using heroin, coke, fags even – the kind of last-resort, shitty drugs people feel the need to self-medicate with in a sick society. With hindsight, it's not that surprising, once back in the old Parliament, everyone started drinking, smoking and snorting again.

Many guests reported the toilets were full of little, transparent, discarded baggies. During discussions in the Chamber, twitchy people in love with the sound of their own voice began taking up most of the precious airtime, much to the annoyance of the rep for the Clan of Quiet Ones. People who had been amicable to one another on the street outside became mortal enemies inside. It's as if the Chamber, by its very design, created a particular soundtrack – a Guantanamo Bay-style, amplified dissonance creating a cacophony of drunken 'heeeuuughs' and coked up 'naaaaww mates'. It was a fucking embarrassment to be honest with you – as horrendous as the House of Commons in Westminster, only now wae mad coke-fuelled Scottish twangs. This was a non-starter from the get-go. All the effort to get this far just to end up just like them, only more crude? Was this really as good as it would get?

At the peak of this ego marathon and sweaty rant fest, people in the gallery and on the live stream were literally placing bets on which clan rep would get stabbed first – half laughing and half crying as they watched. Right then, in the middle of a particularly debauched clan debate, a weird-looking, scrawny old guy with a crusty, off-white beard and a New York Jewish accent stood up in the viewing gallery and screamed. His thunderous guttural belch caught the entire Chamber by surprise and cast a rupture of confused silence on everyone. He proceeded to fill it with a phrase many still debate the meaning of to this day, later identified as a quote from *Cosmic Trigger*.[1] In his whimsical, wavering, wizard-like voice he proclaimed,

1. Fantastic book with mystical laughs and wisdom from the great Robert Anton Wilson.

'All of these ill-gotten statements are equally true, false and meaningless – including this one!'

The continuing confuddled silence was reverberating and amplifying a soundless sound – a deeply uncomfortable type of soundless sound – usually only found at the heart of anechoic chambers or deep underground caves. Then it happened.

It was a slow, rumbling kind of bass tone fart, much of which was seemingly outside the human hearing range. You could almost feel the compressed gas particles ping-ponging back and forth between the droopy arse cheeks of that hairy old dude. The festering stench clean knocked out half the viewing gallery closest to him, and left the other half unable to regulate their breathing between laughter gasps and uncontrollable boak-wretches. Many in the Chamber below later complained of severe cases of pink eye, with one nearby woman claiming to have entered a near death experience, reliving a hundred lives in the time it took for the fart to finally clear the air. Before long, the entire building was turned inside out with explosive vomit and laughter. Thanks to the live cameras, the strangest parliamentary incident ever filmed spread far beyond our Scottish borders.

Then that was that. The old man's words were the last thing to be said on the public record in that building. Some tourists continue to visit today for the Wizard Fart Tour, being told that if you inhale deeply enough, you can still smell it in the back of your throat. Something wasn't working in that old man's stomach but something definitely wasn't working in that Chamber either. In reflection, the old man did us all a great stinking service that day. We were trying to break free from our jail cells but kept using their prison system: not just the Debating

Chamber but the psychological maps they had imprinted on us. The toxicity left behind by the Big C Cult, a lasting rot inside our guts, stunk. If we were going to do anything differently, we had to detox first.

From Grand Palaces to Lichen-Covered Huts

> 'It is one way to learn that each man's labour is as important as another's. In fact, while you are doing it, cleaning the latrine seems far more important than the law.'
>
> — From the film 'Gandhi' (1982)

Despite the first botched attempts, the Great Clan Gathering had to try again. What other option did we have? It quickly moved locations to a more open, collaborative space – not in a city but out in nature. This was a pragmatic last-minute decision given the need for a spacious alternative and the lack of such alternatives in the city centre of Edinburgh. Little did the people on the deciding committee know they had stumbled upon a possible solution to the deep-rooted problems that the Gathering was facing back in the old, ghost-ridden building of hierarchical power. Gone were the stiff pews and adversarial rows; in came dynamic Earth spaces in nature in Scottish summer – wide-open meadows with marquees and circle tents strung together in fields and forests like a psychedelic yurt nebula – and old retrofitted community halls in winter. The

Great Clan Gathering had finally discovered (or rediscovered) its real home.

What became apparent after the first few gatherings held in nature was: circles are non-negotiable. The new meeting spaces built by teams of volunteers – many of whom had helped build temporary festival sites before – were similarly designed with emergent flow and participation in mind. For the Great Clan's main Gatherings, everyone faced inward with nobody elevated above the rest (other than for accessibility reasons). There were no sides to be on, no aisles to cross. You couldn't hide in a circle. You had to be with folk, not over them. It didn't need some forced equality standards. Having such a random and diverse group of people with such radically different skill sets and experiences, the incentive was to find equity over forced equality. That meant it was more important to make sure everyone had an opportunity to communicate their ideas, even if that meant some people required extra time or assistance. It wasn't a trained political class with years of education in the same schools, learning the same codified languages, both verbal and body. With no established communication hierarchies or taboos, our clan reps felt more relaxed and able to speak freely. Rules and norms were less important than flow and balance.

The gathering space itself is a pretty sensory experience: thoughtfully tuned acoustics, natural lighting and fragrant herbs growing along the perimeters. If things get too heated, wafts of lavender and Brian-Eno-inspired ambient music calm people back down.

Political parties were in the bin. There were no official factions or gangs anymore, just clan reps from fluid groups,

organised by affinity or geography. Citizens could be in more than one clan, remember? One for your street, one for your passion, one for your identity or purpose. This also meant the total amount of clan reps fluctuated. If citizens felt strongly about a certain issue, they would form more clans of special interest, increasing the overall number of reps. If things were chill or issues less burning, there was less need for new clans and, hence, fewer reps.

Meals were a key part of the process at the first Gatherings out in nature. Every Gathering has communal cook-ups, shared kitchens, and long, slow breakfasts with loads of down-time for walks and emergent outdoor activities. It's hard to stay in pure rage at someone when you've just burnt your tongue together on a hot tattie scone, or enjoyed a crisp autumn sunset along a gorgeous Scottish riverside. Every Gathering is communal in the sense that all clan reps, as well as the auxiliary workers, admin, security and teams of volunteers, were expected to contribute somehow to the basic running of the event, usually with the occasional cooking or cleaning shift. Our fragile egos, desperate to establish ourselves higher on the pecking order, can get caught up in the importance of uniforms, badges and hierarchies – both explicit and implicit – but at the end of a busy day, we are all just long tubes with mouths at one end and arseholes at the other. Community food sharing is a great way to remember this. It all could have been outsourced to an external caterer, like it used to be under the old system, but we found that a lot of the real politics, collaboration and consensus decision-making happened in the canteen or during a post-lunch cleanup sesh. Consensus is a much more fruitful goal than winning – and not in a low-

est-common-denominator kind of way, boring and stifled, but more like a pragmatic approach to getting the most amount done in a way that benefits most people.

The land where the clans debate must be land that is looked after, too – land that feeds us, grounds us and holds us in circle; where participants can be present in respect and gratitude, hopefully with the intention of transforming that gift of life energy into something much bigger than themselves.

All of this may seem like a relatively trivial matter in the grand scheme of things but imagine a world where for Trump to be any kind of a leader, he knew he would have to clean up the toilets of his 'enemies'. Do you think he would have taken the job? Would any of the narcissists disguised as politicians get the gloves on and do the dishes every week? Jesus, a brown Palestinian Jew born homeless, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, made a point to wash the feet of his disciples in public view. I always wondered how all the Evangelicals with their private jets and 'King Trump' badges explain Jesus' feet washing. A strange fetish?

Not long ago, we were all raving, shouting and sharing outside the Parliament as equals. Most people were chipping in when something had to be done without being asked. Back then, it was kind of by necessity. Now, we had a chance to make it by design. Even arch-debating nemeses knew that a time would come when it was their turn to clean up after everyone's shite, quite literally. So, how do we keep narcissistic arseholes from even making it to the Great Clan Gatherings in the first place? These are often the gaps where our activist circles collapse, because we don't pay attention to the basic admin and bureaucracy of the political and social structures

we build. Many of the greatest and worst dictators of all time were also the greatest and worst bureaucrats.

To stop power-hungry nutters from gaming the system, the clans utilise a peer-to-peer merit point system managed through an app. Every member has a monthly renewing set of points they can gift anonymously to other clan members. More often than not, it's the quiet doers who get the most points; those who keep the community spinning without seeking a reward – the volunteer janitors, cleaners, sound techs and cooks, as well as the speakers and workshop hosts. Because these merits are awarded emergently by the entire clan rather than top-down bureaucrats, the system naturally rewards genuine contributors with symbolic community recognition. There are no cash rewards and, most importantly, having a lot of points does not guarantee a position as a representative of that clan; instead, it acts only as a vetting threshold for random selection. A member must have a specific merit score to qualify as a candidate for the sortition lottery. The threshold is relatively low, but it makes it mathematically and creatively exhausting for wannabe wankers to try and game multiple clans at once for a higher chance of selection.

The point system has nothing to do with your private life or actions. It's not like some Chinese social credit score where the all-seeing state can strip your privileges if you jaywalk too often. The points are strictly autonomous and specific to each clan. It's like receiving a love heart on your social media, only this form of bonding actually encourages real-life interactions and community building. It helps foster a sense of trust within the clan and recognition, even though they don't actually provide anyone with any material gain. As a whole generation

of TikTok addicts will tell you, though, recognition is often more than enough for us humans to feel rewarded and part of the tribe. This positive-reinforcement structure filters out narcissistic liars and the disinterested before they even get a sniff of power, ensuring that those who sought community rather than authority – those with genuine vested interest – represent the clan.

Why We Got Rid of Voting

Funky clan circles out the way, I guess I'd best explain how our clan representatives (the ones who got to be at the Great Clan Gatherings) are appointed into power in the first place. It feels normal for me now, but from your perspective it's kind of a biggy: We got rid of voting.

At least for politicians anyway. Before you slap this book shut and mutter, 'Aye, here it is. I knew it was gonna turn into a fascist dystopia eventually.' – hawd yer weesht and hear me out. This is not some Kim Jong Un in a kilt and a Jimmy hat. We didn't get rid of *all* voting – just that specific kind of very corruptible voting – and I'd argue it made our society even more democratic. Aye, I know. How the fuck does that work? Gimme the rest of the chapter and maybe the one after that to lay it out for you and see if you agree with me by the end.

In our system, every clan rep represents a biosphere. That's how we divide up the land politically: by ecozone, not abstract political boundaries. A local biosphere would be categorised as having similar conditions across it. Therefore, representatives for that area could more accurately cover its needs. Good luck trying to gerrymander biospheres. Not that anyone wants to

gerrymander anymore on my Scottish timeline anyway, but drawing squiggly lines on a map will definitely not suit your election agenda.

Reps themselves come from both the geographical clans (those defined by local biospheres) and the affinity clans formed around special interests and skills. This (i.e. your) timeline's Scotland already has a similar two-tier system for the regional and list MSPs. Except, rather than focusing representation around your geographical area and the political party you vote for, our system means that citizens are represented both by their local clan rep focusing on issues in their area and also by multiple reps who share a similar identity or special interest. For instance, a disabled goth from Glenrothes of Indian heritage might feel represented by four or more separate reps at the Clan Gatherings. Those representing each clan (for Glenrothes, goths, disability action and Indian Scots, for example) would be switched up regularly; about a two-year term on average, sometimes shorter if needed. This helped further lower corruption, a point we will come back to later.

The big twist in the nutsack of the wannabe oligarchs is that all our reps are picked by lot, as in – lottery. If you are an active member of a clan, then you could be appointed its next rep. No election needed because it's random. No political campaigns. No media manipulation. No sugar-coated political manifestos filled with pish and waffle. Just the chaos of chance.

As mad and radical as this might sound, it's an ancient concept. It's a core part of the democratic system we pinched from the ancient Greeks. If you haven't heard of sortition before, it's no surprise; and if you thought you were living in a democracy, well, you aren't. These are the vital elements of democracy

the Big C Cult conveniently forgets to include or teach much about in school – appointing people into positions of power by random draw. Obviously, it can be a controlled pool of suitable candidates for specific roles that require a certain training, like judges and police chiefs. For us, it was enough qualification that you were an active member of a clan to be eligible to represent it. Sounds mental? Ayyyyye, it is! But ask yourself: what's the alternative?

We laugh when we hear of elections in Russia or North Korea where there is only one candidate and party on the ballot. Is it really that much better to have a similarly orchestrated choice between two or maybe three compromised bawbags rather than one? They all come from the same schools, class, gender, ideology; with the same bribes and blackmails keeping them in line. Most who make it to the top have been made to fuck a dead goat in their secret society boys' clubs but now, out in the wild open, they wear different coloured ties and represent different parties that 100% definitely are not aligned in any way. That's not a democratic choice. From Red Russia to Blue States in America – it's the skillfully crafted illusion of choice.

All of these political systems built on charisma and ties to power inevitably attract the richest, most power-hungry and manipulative sociopaths with no morals because they are the best liars. When they get in on whatever bullshit they came up with to get there, they rewrite the game to stay longer or shuffle power around with their fuckboy buddies. (Epstein files are showing it gets way darker than a dead goat, but let's not go down that rabbit hole today.)

When your political representatives are picked by lot, the whole power dynamic – the entire meta of the game – flips. Instead of snake-oil salesmen charming their way to power with lies, you get citizens regularly chosen totally at random. Could be you. Could be yer da. Could be Big Moira fae up the chip shop. It's kinda like jury duty if you will, but for the government.

Even when we agreed to give it a go over in my timeline's Scotland, some folk were afraid it was gonna be carnage, especially given the coverage the international billionaire press gave it: that we'd get total nutters, chancers, and clueless eejits, incompetent people running the country. Aye, they were right – sometimes we did. We had to evolve some safeguards for sure, but surprisingly to most spectators, the vast majority of people – when handed genuine responsibility, power and trust – actually steps up and serves their community well. Just like you would, no?

Sorting Out Sortition And Cancelling Corruption

> 'Democracy arises after the poor are victorious over their adversaries... and then they share out equally with the rest of the population political offices and burdens; and in this regime public offices are usually allocated by lot.'
>
> — Plato: The Republic (Book VIII, 557a)

Stamping out election corruption was easy when it was randomised. It's easier to make and maintain a transparent, open-source lottery system than to ensure fair and balanced elections, vet every candidate and make sure they remain uncompromised or corrupted over a lifelong career of (broken) promises. Trust me.

Actually, don't: trust the random chaos generator. Even Plato, who famously hated democracy and preferred philosopher fascism with a touch of eugenics, understood that appointment by lot is the central feature of any political system that claims to be democratic. Appointment by the voting in of a wealthy, connected political class is just oligarchy in disguise.

Aye, we got a few... eccentrics when sortition rolled out across the clans. One time, the randomiser picked three Charlies in a row, all from Lesmahagow. How the fuck did that happen?! That's chaos for you. The fact weird shit like that happens is actually evidence it truly is random. No one trying to hide their plans in the chaos would choose three Charlies in a row. Wait... unless that's what they want you to believe?

We made the generator open-source for anyone around the world to check the code and log for external interference any time. Whatever oligarch prevention system you put into your democracy rules will eventually be eroded, overcome or even used against itself by the power-hungry dictator bitches. The only politically safe and sustainable democratic system, then, is one with just enough transparent randomness throughout where you can't predict what happens next. Chaos keeps power structures from growing too many roots.

In the UK and US on this timeline, for example, we place the most important decisions of justice – those that affect a

person's life – in the hands of a jury of their peers. If you get randomly selected for jury duty, court administrators assess your suitability; if you are unavailable or evidently batshit crazy, you get deselected. This assessment is not political but practical and psychological in nature, deeming whether you are capable of consenting to the role and understanding the responsibilities it comes with, including handling some level of triggers and potential stress. Ask yourself the question: if you were being tried for a crime you did not commit, would you rather be judged by a jury of your citizen peers or a team of 'experts' who all share the same education, class, ethnicity and age? You might trust the 'experts' more than your fellow citizens (let's talk about our perception of our fellow citizens later in the book) if you come from the same privileged class as those same 'experts'. If you are like me, though, and you cringe at the thought of old white male 'experts' dispensing justice upon you, blind to their biases and privilege, then why do you not cringe at the so-called experts in every other public position?

Our vetting system for appointing rep positions was even more rigorous than the one used for jury duty. Admittedly, though, even with our new rigorous filtering, some early appointments didn't quite work out as expected and Maggie got through. Wee Mad Maggie! Appointed as a clan rep for her local biosphere, she was a lovely person according to her neighbours and a regular attendee and helper at local events ran by her clan. Yet something made Maggie go mad as a hatter once she was appointed. She started putting on grey wigs and talking in a posh English accent despite growing up in a rough part of Paisley. I kid you not – she started going around the

Great Clan Gathering announcing to the interrupted and rather startled-looking groups that she was the reincarnation of the last 'great Maggie' to run the country. Rumours were abound. Was she actually the dreaded reawakening of Thatcher herself, heated up from the grave like a privatised zombie told to get back to work? Her behaviour during official meetings was even more erratic than in the lobbies, culminating in one of the best and worst episodes in the history of Scottish politics. Or any politics, for that matter!

Everyone was calmly listening to another rep when Maggie rudely blurted out to the Clan Circle that she was 'NOT FOR TURNING'. The initial speaker was completely thrown off her point. It was a bit boring, to be honest, and most would admit in private they were excited, initially, about the random interjection. Their secret amusement, though, soon turned to extreme displays of horror as it became apparent what they (and we watching online) were about to bear witness to; something that will be etched onto the back of my retinas till the day I die.

There Maggie was, live on air with the cameras fully twisted around and fixated solely on her, as she climbed awkwardly up onto her desk. With many eyes in equal parts anticipation and horror, she proceeded to reveal her full moon – and I don't mean a sneak preview. Many jaws dropped to full extent as she painstakingly and far too slowly bent over and, almost as if in one fluid motion, dropped a wee tolly oot her bum onto her own desk.

I don't know if she had saved the poo for the occasion or whether she just has olympically efficient bowel movements. Either way, it all happened so fast no one could intervene and yet, at the same time, it was as if the whole Gathering had fallen

into agonising slow motion. By the time I got back from my toilet at home, wiping the last bit of sick off my face, Maggie had sorted herself out too, and without a breath was now demanding at the top of her voice that someone else better come clean up this pile of shit on her desk. Back down on the floor and face-to-face with the steaming phenomenon, she seemed horrified, indignant with rage as if unaware it was quite literally her own shit.

The turd was probably still warm by the time the stream and clips of it went viral, globally. It was all so reminiscent of the wizard dude with his huge fart in the old Parliament – only this time, Maggie had desecrated the inner circle of the Great Clan Gathering. Disgustingly hilarious as it was, I do admit I, and many other Scots, were afraid this was an omen that things were slipping back to the way they were. Why did she do it? When asked what the dirty protest was meant to symbolise, she simply told a scurrying crowd of international media cameras outside later, 'I just wanted to know what it felt like to be a Tory, shitting in my own backyard while making a huge arse of myself and blaming others for my own steaming pile of shite.' Some believe this was the greatest work of political art ever made. Others believe she's just mental. Is it possible that both are true? Either way, it wasn't a bad omen for us. More of a nostalgic reminder of how our shite politics used to work.

Quite ironically, after the Jobbygeddon affair, some of the old lobbyists for private water companies – a.k.a. BIG TOILET[2] – who had all lost their contracts post-Interdependence

2. Everyone is aware of Big Pharma and Big Oil but less people are aware of the even darker and smellier Big Toilet lobby.

in Scotland, saw an opportunity to try to get back in. They invited Wee Mad Maggie for a posh lunch in a silver service joint, much to their dismay. They couldn't get past her thick Scottish accent, now the ghost of Thatcher had seemingly left her.

'You scratch our back, we scratch yo–' they subtly tried suggesting, but Maggie had had enough shite and barked, 'FUCK OFF JOBBY LOBBY!'

Rather embarrassed, the English-accented suits paid for her lunch and scurried off with their briefcases still closed back to their London offices, while Maggie had dissected her lunch, leaving the squiggy amorphous blobs that posh people eat behind and requesting a burnt buttered roll to put the edible stuff on.

Corporate lobbying (or bribery, if you prefer a less fancy name) just hasn't been all that successful in Scotland since we introduced sortition or appointment by lot – not only because we finally made it illegal but because any underhanded attempt at corrupting clan reps can't really get you all that far. Clan reps simply weren't so predictable and persuadable as the usual political classes they dealt with.

There are a few nice safety features built in too, like each clan's ability to have a vote of no confidence in their randomly selected rep if it is agreed they are not able or willing to represent them anymore. Surprisingly, Maggie didn't get voted off her role after Jobbygeddon, maybe because the people of Paisley felt that level of madness suitably represented them. However, if Maggie were paid off by some London fannies to be the face of water privatisation again, someone would likely have smelt a rat and reined it in, at a local level.

None of these reps came from 'political' families (more American doublespeak for corrupt-as-fuck). By the time the bill was passed through the Clan Gathering, the lobbyists would essentially have had to bribe every single clan rep to have any influence (like AIPAC has successfully done in the US). With our short terms of office, though, they would eventually have to bribe every single member in every clan across the entire country multiple times over. Remember, almost every single citizen in Solartime Scotland is in at least one clan; so, to push through a bill good for private interest and obviously bad for the public, they would have to pay off the majority of the entire nation. An impractical, although not totally impossible, task in a country of a few million. But that's not the end of the line for lobbyists and their corrupt desires to circumnavigate democracy. As we will dive into in more detail later, a proposed bill doesn't go into law just because it got passed by the reps at the Gathering. It has to then go on to win a direct democratic referendum, open for vote from every single citizen over the age of 14.

The randomness of sortition might seem mad and unsafe, but if Maggie's dirty protest was our worst-case scenario, then, even then, we were protected – not because someone unsuitable never randomly got into a position of power, but because the same chaos that offered them a seat at the table in the first place also made sure they wouldn't get too carried away. When we recognise a perfect system is impossible, it boils down to the overall maths. If sortition means the majority of rep positions are filled by good-hearted, honest citizens, but it means accepting a handful might be nutters or have bad intentions, the chaos keeps that bad apple from spoiling the

whole harvest. In a sea of political alternatives that seem to only produce bad apples, sortition puts the overall maths of anti-corruption success in our favour. We are protected by the chaos while, at the same time, we get some good stories from it now and then.

Almost Incorruptible, Gloriously Unpredictable

Aye, sortition is a mad system; unprofessional sometimes, and messy. Folk talk a lot of unfiltered shite and others wear weird jumpers and hats rather than suits and ties. But that makes it honest. The collective wisdom of a diverse group of real, flawed, passionate humans tends to move in the direction of the common good, especially when you remove external corruptive forces.

It's like placing your trust in the collective human vision; the wisdom of the crowd. Each individual component might vary opinion to opinion, experience to experience, maybe even year to year – but overall, the averaging wisdom usually takes steps in directions that benefit most of us most accurately most of the time. Humans are famously shit at games like 'guess the jellybeans in the jar', hence why they make carnival organisers money. Researchers found something interesting, though, when they collected the average guess. It turns out to be remarkably accurate, no matter how wide-ranging the individual guesses are. This same finding comes up again and again, not just for jellybeans but for just about anything we make decisions about. Why wouldn't it work for politics then?

There are historical examples that seem to disprove what I just said. Democracy doesn't always produce desirable outcomes. If society's incentives are still fucked – if racism, classism, transphobia or scapegoating are culturally reinforced and children are indoctrinated in it from birth – then aye, for sure, some of that will show up in the randomly allotted reps, as well as in the bills proposed. Take the Swiss referendum to ban burkas in 2021, a citizen-proposed vote that won and legally enforced bigotry against Muslim women, some of the least powerful and most vulnerable people in the country. Democracies have the power to do bad shit. The Greeks themselves kept voting for endless wars that constantly killed their own young men and ruptured society over and over. Greek democratic states had a tiny pool of voters compared to the whole population, though. Only rich Greek males could vote or get nominated. I wonder how different results would have been if it included the wishes of all people – women, foreigners and slaves. Perhaps then, Aristophanes might not have had to write *Lysistrata.*[3]

Reintroducing sortition and democracy alone wasn't enough to fix our shit, though. Even when we handed more power to more people and believed in our collective wisdom, bad things still happened. There were some collective traumas we had barely begun to process. Still, without any perfect solutions, we decided to keep trusting the overall maths.

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3. Famous greek comedy about an Athenian woman who leads a female sex strike to end the Peloponnesian War. During the whole play, husbands are stuck walking around with massive boners.

When we compare the voting history of Swiss citizens to, let's say, US politicians, it's clear which system produces the more immoral and unjust decisions. As bad as the Swiss vote against the burka was, the official death toll as a result still stands at zero; meanwhile the deaths caused by US-led sanctions alone since 1970 (never mind their endless list of bloody invasions, coups, funded juntas and death squads) is calculated at around 38 million.[4] For context, that is double the amount of people killed during the Holocaust. The worst crimes of any more direct democracy pale into insignificance in the face of all-out oligarchy (like the US).

Kant said, 'Act only on that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.' In other words, before you act, ask yourself: What if everybody did this? What if I could wake up randomly in any position in society tomorrow; be any man, woman, non-binary or trans person of any age, race and economic background? Would the society I am proposing make me better off still? Or is it only if I happen to land on a specific set of attributes by sheer chance? If it's the latter, your proposed society sucks!

Selecting reps by lot strikes a balance between representative democracy (where officials take decisions on our behalves) and direct democracy (when we directly decide everything ourselves). It is not a flat system with no one taking responsibility for anything, nor is it a traditional hierarchy where the powerful use every means possible to dig themselves in. We've

4. Rodríguez, F., Rendón, S., & Weisbrot, M. (2025). Effects of international sanctions on age-specific mortality: A cross-national panel data analysis. *The Lancet Global Health*, *13*(8), e1358–e1366. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(25)00189-5

still got roles, layers and power. It's just that we've made it random who's in a position of up or doon at any given time. The deck gets shuffled regularly enough, mitigating any particularly bad hands and sharing our benefits. More importantly, it stops the political entrenchment of those positioned up. Gone are political dynasties and career-long pricks. There's less incentive to rig the system for personal gain when you know your arch-nemesis neighbour might be next year's rep and she'll just use whatever selfish tactics you used against her now in revenge. 'An eye for an eye and soon the whole world will be blind' sounds familiar over here on this timeline, doesn't it? Politicians attempt this lunacy because they want to entrench their power for a generation to come. Meanwhile we know we are back in the normal world after one or two years, no matter what alliances we have made.

While in office, there are still privileges that come with being up for a while – free lunches, some expenses covered, connections and maybe a chance to promote your own personality, projects or agendas while in power. That power and privilege is shared dynamically across society, though. When you zoom out over the spacetime continuum, the randomness actually looks like balance.

5
Jury Duty, Only Better!

Jury duty is like marmite – some revel in the idea of a paid break from work to join in on what they imagine to be their own episode of CSI; others would throw their own maw under a bus if it got them out of it. If you think jury duty is controversial, political duty was even more contentious.

But even the haters, who initially squirmed at the idea, eventually became animated and engaged during specific debates that personally affected them – so much so that, during their term, they often became the much-needed specialists. They might not have offered much to the majority of discussions, but this created a good debating dynamic at the Gatherings. Not everyone wants to fully engage in every debate every day, but there was rarely any lull in energy overall either. The Gatherings were never designed to be places where a bunch of perfectly informed 'experts' spouted hot gas for hours, but spaces that allowed for dynamic flow. It wasn't as if the reps turned up with three-hour lectures and, if they did, they were told to go and take a walk in the park till the cocaine wore off. Reps weren't expected to do all the technical work needed to run the public services themselves, either. We inherited whole departments of specialists who did that already.

Those job posts continued allowing the reps to be the voice of the public while actual trained specialists carried out most of the public works on the ground according to the laws, strategies and budgets passed. It's not that much different than here on your timeline. Your local councillor doesn't collect your bins or fill in the potholes. There are teams of specialists for everything. The job of your representative is to guide the strategic aims of the work the public bodies do. Our Great Clan Gatherings were more of a national vibe check. Put the specialists in charge of politics and you end up with an Elon Musk-style technocracy. Put the politicians in charge of the technicals (sewage engineer, bin truck driver, ...) and you end up with a country swimming in shit and chaos. As with everything, it only ever works in balance.

Of course, you don't want to run a random lottery for every single position in your community either. You don't want to randomly appoint your gran as the new postman or uncle Fester as the village doctor. You may, however, want to appoint the representatives of the post office randomly from the pool of all postal workers, or an NHS board from a random selection of citizen patients. These randomly selected representative bodies are a collective, ever-changing mirror of the actual public, with all our fears, passions, blind spots and brilliance baked in. That is a feature, not a flaw!

Remember, anyone can be a member of multiple local clans – attending meetings, helping out and making decisions on a local level – but the Great Clan Gatherings, where the larger strategic decisions are guided, are held in temporary spaces. We didn't want to create centralised and static homes of power in any one city or region, so the Great Clan Gatherings move

annually all across the country. Once the Great Clan Gathering had been held, the space renovated for its purpose was passed on to a local clan to use for the community good. This snail-trail of regeneration left behind a continual legacy for the Common Weal.[1]

Each clan was incentivised to grow, as the larger they were, the greater share of the representative pie they got. There was a membership threshold they had to reach before they would be allotted a clan rep. The larger they got relative to the rest, the more reps they could have. Many micro clans came in and out of existence all the time, so later we added a minimum one-year stipulation before they could apply to have a rep.

At the same time, we established a counteracting incentive to keep each clan focused on streamlining quality rather than chasing quantity. The larger and more watered down a clan became, the less statistically likely it would become that any one person (potentially seeking power) would end up appointed. This incentive for quality meant that clans, especially those based around special interests and skills had proper sign-up requirements and continual shared responsibility for each member to contribute in some way to maintain membership. If someone wanted to get elected by lot just for the sake of power, they might think they could sign up to as many clans as possible to increase their statistical chances. However, they would have to pass ten different entry requirements and take home ten sets of unpaid workloads – all for ten random lottery

1. The Common Weal is a concept in Scots language and culture that goes back to the 16th century. It got reinvigorated during the Independence Referendum in 2014 and fully established in modern Scots Lore.

tickets that would still allow their fellow members to boot them out if they were in it for the wrong reasons.

Decisions could be, but rarely were, made by vote, even at local clan meetings – unless it was for something as official as a vote of no confidence in their rep. The binary yes/no of voting wasn't that useful anymore for the now mostly nuanced debates and discussions. Decisions were made through patient, messy, circular consensus. What mattered most wasn't who won, but how we converged. Could you hold space for ideas that weren't yours? Maybe even opposed? Could you shift, adapt and move in a way that still took up presence, but somehow made the whole better than any individual view or stance?

That was the magic – slowly getting over our collective egos. And aye, sometimes it was frustrating as hell – especially because a bill couldn't pass through the Gathering unless it reached consensus. That means full agreement, not majority rule. In a room full of enemies, nothing would ever pass and you'd be forced to sit in a chamber shouting about the same increasingly boring issue forever. If consensus is the necessary finishing post, it makes more sense to find friends than enemies – if for nothing else than to get home early enough for dinner. Bills presented with respect and open discussion, aimed at finding common ground, passed easily while shouty arseholes never got much done or passed. Slowly, year by year, the decisions that did emerge from these circles were strangely... better, for everyone. Making the political environment circular and synergetic, it seemed, made the thinking follow.

Walking The Talk

Nothing good ever arrives in a brown envelope. Usually some council tax grief or a parking fine you forgot about – bureaucratic magic spells with the power to crush your remaining will to live on the spot, if nothing else, out of sheer boredom. When I received one such brown envelope with the seal of my local clan on it, way back in January of 2020, my stomach dropped straight out my arse and through the floor in horror. I'd been randomly selected for political duty. Me, GINGERBEARD. The universe (or what I later discovered to be the Cosmic Time Lasagna) must've been pished that day. I had been involved with the early Interdependence raves for a laugh, sure, but even now, a couple years later, I was still full of residual cynicism about our potential to break free from the 'same shit, different day' paradigm. The Big C Cult clearly still had its talons latched somewhere deep inside my subconscious.

I'd been inside Westminster and the old Scottish Parliament years before, as a tourist mind. I'd done a round of jury duty too, in some manky old court building. All those places had the same stench of sticky upholstery, blue plastic lanyard and entitlement wrapped in dusty wigs. The conditioned air itself felt like it was ominously judging me, even as I hid in a cubicle desperately trying to evacuate some stress. Those kinds of buildings are ghostly mausoleums of power.

When I told my mates I had been appointed to be clan rep, they immediately made me swear I wouldn't turn into 'one of them' – the old white balding politician types – as if accepting the role would suddenly drain all life from my face and scalp. I laughed it off but secretly dreaded it might turn me bald and

wrinkly too fast. What if politics was infectious? What if the appointment changed the chemistry of my brain and I became my own worst cunt?

The first year is like a warm-up before the real deal. You can attend part-time and get a chance to scout the landscape before it's your own proper turn. It's also a chance for your clan and your facilitators to vet your ability to represent in such an environment. It takes the pressure off, if only slightly – like, down to regular heart palpitations rather than a full-on head explosion. On the first day I was invited in, I think I did three nervous shits before I left the house. I wore my favourite socially-aware T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase 'INTERSECTIONAL AS FUCK' and packed my notebook full of pompous half-thoughts (in case I needed fodder to sound smart) alongside a healthy dose of social anxiety. The moment I arrived... everything I had anticipated dissolved away.

This wasn't a corporate networking event. It didn't smell of stale instant coffee and sour sweat. It was more like walking into your gran's garden on a hot summer's day – just a grassy field full of people who looked like the folk you'd bump into on any street. A young dad was pushing a pram while arguing about legalising drugs with a priest. Some somali aunties were debating food budgets and sharing one-pot recipes with two recovering heroin users from the local support hub, while a Shetland sheep farmer was singing[2] about ferry subsidy maths to a red-haired queer student from Govanhill who I think was explaining their student strikes right back. The farmer clearly couldn't understand a word of the rapid fire rants, but seemed

2. People from Shetland sound like they are singing when they talk.

thoroughly entertained nonetheless. There was even a gang of schemey-looking teenagers in trackies surrounded by a gaggle of grannies, spitballing about how to design safer night buses by playing tunes and installing light shows onto bus stops.

I didn't need to identify myself to security because there weren't any (at least identifiable ones). I didn't have to find my handler for a tour either because, upon entering, everyone was so keen to offer to help out and make me tea that I got an emergent tour whether I liked it or not. The whole experience was bizarre and, I must admit, overwhelming. My old Big C Cult mindset made me suspicious when people were so warm and open without knowing me first. I was waiting for one of them to try lead me into a burning Wicker Man or start making out with a wall. I kept checking that my phone and money were still in my bumbag and nervously bit my fingernails – until the music kicked off.

Aye, I know, right? There was live music, at a place of serious civic work! The band stumbled on stage like a travelling circus made from spare parts of a Celtic retrofuture. Fiddles were getting plugged into synths and weird homemade pedals. The drums looked half-made of found materials from the field outside the Gathering Tent, half 3D-printed with some off-planet exotics. The long braided hair of the bass player was somehow connected to his instrument like a Tartan Avatar. Then, out in front and centre, on keys and mic, walked FIZZY GINGER. I'd seen her before at the rave. Her wild ginger hair made her look like a lioness after a lightning strike and her energy on stage was to match, rearranging the air around her.

First day at the new job and within seconds of the first Ceilidh tune, I was getting flung about by complete strangers

like a newborn at a broody baby shower. There wasn't any of that polite, middle-class clapping-and-swaying shite. Everyone was goin' fur it, sweatin', flingin', flirting to this Techno-Ceilidh madness.

I was done in. When I looked around, I felt we all needed a break. FIZZY GINGER held us there in the calm for a wee bit with a song she called *Home*. Those chords, man. They drew the disparate Gathering together into a huddle. FIZZY's voice sounded playful at first, almost cheeky, then half way through the song, it cracked. Not the 'oops I fucked up' kind, but the kind that tells you the song is touching something soft; inviting us to a deeper emotional space that's usually behind walls. The song was about a place of pain for many of us: Where is home?

The whole tent had went silent on instinct, like everyone knew something sacred was happening. I looked down to hide my tears and snot-smears. The moment her voice wavered, something cracked in the room, too. The ecstatic joy of the Ceilidh had transformed into a more vulnerable vibe. But instead of scattering, everyone leaned in closer, seemingly exhaling with her in unison.

After the gig, I wanted to find FIZZY GINGER and thank her – but I had no idea where to look.

'Ahh, a fellow ginger cunt!'

The shout made me spin round, still wiping my eyes like a salty shitebag. There she was, hair sparking like it was connected to a Tesla coil.

She took one look at my face and burst out laughing. 'Was it my *Home* song or did somebody elbow ye in the baws during the Ceilidh?'

'The song,' I managed. 'Though... could've been both.'

‘Good, glad you joined me,’ she grinned. ‘If folk arenae cryin’ a wee bit at *Home*, I’ve fucked it.’

I told her my name and before I could properly get the words out to thank her, she hooked her finger in and around my ‘INTERSECTIONAL AS FUCK’ sleeve. ‘Right, come wae me. I need a seat. I know some beanbags.’

She dragged me into a wee den behind the stage with beanbags, blankets and some colourful fabric that looked like it once belonged to a parachute. We fell into it like two bairns hiding under a table at a wedding party. Up close she wasn’t the stage-fire version. She was warm and grounded, the kind of presence that makes your ribs unclench.

‘So,’ she said, nudging my knee next to hers, ‘first Gathering?’

‘Aye.’

‘And? Met your expectations so far?’

‘Expectations!? I thought it was gonnae feel like being in detention, getting told off by some cunt called Malcolm for not wearing a fucking tie. Mind, like old world vibes?’

‘Aye, those bastard Malcolms,’ she muttered. ‘Used to be whole clans o’ them.’

‘But this,’ I gestured at the tent, speechless for descriptive words. ‘This feels... different. Like home.’

A fresh inexplicable tear formed under my right eye.

Her face softened and a smile rippled as another formed under her eye, too.

We sat in that moment for a bit, until she said, ‘You have a look about ye GINGERBEARD. Like an adventurer still a bit lost, seeking their home.’

I met her eyes.

She didn’t look away.

'My mum,' she said, 'she was a brilliant woman. But the drink, man. It's a thief. I never knew which version of her'd be there when I woke up or came back fae school. I didn't know if any version of her would be there. Then one day, she wasn't. Ma da' was oot workin' three jobs to fund a family and ma maw's habits. I learnt I had to earn love. If only I performed well, we'd finally have a happy home.'

I nodded.

'I miss her still. She went too fucking early,' FIZZY GINGER said, and after a wee pause added, 'At least she isn't suffering any more. You know, sometimes, I feel annoyed at her for taking away my sense of home. Even though now, I'm an adult and I'm fine and I know it wasn't her fault. I guess I have been trying ever since to feel at home in myself.'

'Aye, I know what you mean. My whole world felt like it collapsed when my dad died. I ran half way round the world to the Amazon jungle, trying to feel at home somewhere, anywhere! But I never did. Until I stopped and was forced to look inwards. I sound embarrassingly cliché right now but it's true.'

'I hear you,' she smiled. Then she nudged me again, 'So what's your story? Besides greetin' in the mosh pit. What are you hoping to contribute to here?'

'I came cause ae the brown envelope of doom. Now I'm here but, I think I can actually see some possibility. I feel like maybe it's good I am here. Like, really good!?'

She thumped my shoulder. 'Exactly. Folk like us here got fucked over by the old world, but we are still daft enough tae gie a fuck. I, for one, am glad the chaos goddesses chose your ginger power, right!?'

I snort-laughed like a donkey.

'How come you got a gig here then? Seems a weird place for a Techno-Ceilidh?'

'It's not weird, it's the perfect place for one! Your tears say you experienced it too? I don't think music was ever meant to just be entertainment. Music is a language of emotions, connection, release. Don't you want your representatives making some of the most important decisions to be emotionally connected? To be able to release?'

'Fuck! When you put it like that...'

We giggled some more and shared a tea before my facilitator finally found me and whipped me away for training.

Sitting there in that daft beanbag fortress we had built with her music still echoing somewhere in my chest, I felt something I'd never felt in any of the old marble halls of power: I felt welcome in this new home; in this new Scotland.

Can Consensus-Based Models Actually Work?

If I just read that last bit without it all happening to me, I'd be closing the book right about now with a cynical scoff, writing the whole thing off as nothing more than a naive door-stopper. I just wouldn't be able to imagine a room – let alone a chamber – full of randomly selected people (and Scottish people at that) all just gettin' along like a bunch of mad fairies wae magic dust and rainbows coming oot their arses. I'm from the West Coast of Scotland and we are indoctrinated with an unhealthy amount of humility and scepticism in us. I've never been to a family gathering of more than five people where there hasn't

been at least one inappropriate comment and an attempted chibbin'. It's made all the harder to believe when I go on about an alternative timeline caused by a cosmic queef in the time lasagna that happened after some independence referendum.

At this point, you essentially have three choices:

1. Either, believe me when I say this all actually happened on my alternative timeline.
2. Suspend your disbelief for now and just enjoy the story, taking what you like about it and leaving the rest.
3. Be completely sceptical this is anything more than some kind of Glaswegian sci-fi book.

Before we move onto the next wee rant, whether you believe I am telling the truth or not at this point, I want to remind you that my timeline isn't the only place you can find folk experimenting with ideas like consensus-based decision-making models. I try to not spend too long explaining historical examples of projects or ideas from this timeline because then I'd have no time to tell you about mine. To ground some of these ideas in both our timelines, though, let's have a look at a few examples. Any reference I mention in passing from this timeline is 100% real (for you) and if you get a chance, go research them in more detail.

Back in 2008, one of our closest Scottish neighbours had their own potentially timeline-splitting moment; a mini revolution most people have never heard about: The Icelandic example is a poignant one as it perfectly illustrates the success of consensus-based decision-making and some key hurdles in the way, too Their Pots and Pans Revolution was a magnificent moment of citizen empowerment and a key step change compared to what most other Western countries did. In the

wake of their financial collapse in 2008, the citizens of Iceland refused to pay the proposed bail-out for the banks and instead rallied outside their parliament with pots and pans for days. They eventually brought the entire government down, while the people convened a Constitutional Council of randomly selected citizens who were tasked with writing an entirely new constitution for Iceland. This wasn't about putting pressure on a corrupt bunch of politicians to suddenly change their ways, but about bypassing the rot completely and rewriting the rules of the power game in a country even smaller than Scotland. After four months of painstaking deliberation countrywide, the Citizen's Council achieved a unanimous 25-0 approval of their final bill. Twenty-five ordinary people – a true cross-section of society – reached full consensus on the most important questions a country can ask itself about its very constitution, all in the midst of a political, economic and social crisis. What an immense victory and case study we should all intimately know about; yet, most of us have never heard of it.

As history reveals, the old bulls in charge don't like such smooth examples of people power. In the case of Iceland, it wasn't a happily-ever-after ending, either. The political elites – including members of the very party that had supposedly supported the project initially – deliberately delayed the process for years and eventually, when they felt strong enough again, began outright rallying against the reforms. Fucking cowardly bastards. The Supreme Court's annulment of the initial election for the constitutional assembly cast a shadow of doubt on its legitimacy which, of course, the up-class seized on. Political opposition and legislative inaction slowly strangled the revolution's momentum. Their new constitution was deemed 'overly

vague' by lawyers (the absurdity of lawyers calling anything vague!) and ultimately, an unholy alliance of old-guard politicians, judges and lawyers brought the whole thing crumbling down. In many ways, the status quo was reestablished.

The lesson is clear: it's not enough to build a better model. You have to build a stronger resistance that can withstand the institutional pushback from those who stand to lose their power privilege – the old bulls who greet us with a smile, then stab us as soon as our backs are turned. Our biggest advantage in my timeline's Scotland was that our political collapse in 2018, after our month-long rave, was more complete than the uprising in Iceland 2008. We didn't have to contend later with so many poshos in wigs cosplaying as judges or slimebags in suits. Still, Iceland was a huge inspiration for us. Many Icelanders came over to Scotland in droves to offer support and advice during the raves and helped set all this consensus stuff up afterwards. Trust me, we needed a lot of training. We had so much in common with our northerly neighbours and, in many ways, our Interdependence brought us a lot closer to them than the rotting British or American empire. The point I am making for now, though, is that the idea of consensus-based governance isn't a total fiction you think I just made up for this book.

For centuries, countries like Switzerland and Belgium have functioned as 'consociational states', a specific political model where they manage deep societal divisions through an institutionalised commitment to power-sharing. The Swiss have four official languages and many varied cultures; the Belgians have three. So, there are lots of minority communities who all need to be equally protected under the law and represented in government. They use broad coalition governments and

proportional representation to ensure that no single group or political party can dominate. The Swiss Federal Council, a seven-member executive body, serves as a prominent example of consensus-based decision-making where all members, regardless of their partisan politics, must support and defend the council's decisions collectively. It's a careful, pragmatic system designed to maintain stability by giving everyone a seat at the table, incentivising collective benefit and agreement rather than divisive politics. It's a slow and often messy process but it usually works better in terms of decisions and results, proving that societies can, in fact, choose broad agreement over the absolute rule of an aggressive majority.

On a smaller scale, we can find other successful experiments in deliberative and participatory democracy. Citizens' assemblies, for instance, have been used in countries around the world to tackle complex, controversial issues by bringing together a representative cross-section of the population to learn, deliberate and make recommendations. The Climate Assembly UK was commissioned by Parliament to create a roadmap for achieving the country's net zero target by 2050, showing that ordinary people can arrive at incredibly informed and rational judgments, cutting through the partisanship that plagues daily politics.

The path we took over on my timeline's Scotland was indeed a radical one; a new emergent clan system of governance, built from the ashes up with multiple points of representation, informed participation from almost everyone and political appointments made by random chaos or lot – a dynamic living body of politics where people can gather, share responsibilities and build consensus towards radical progress for the collective.

I asked you to give me till the end of this chapter to convince you our emerging system over on my timeline's Scotland is more democratic than the one we are still lumped with here. So, if you had a chance to flip a switch – get rid of politicians and elections and instead bring in direct referendums, sortition and consensus-based decision-making issue by issue – would you?

6
Building an Informed Democracy

All political systems have hidden imbalances. These imbalances are what cunning manipulators try to exploit for personal gain. So, there have been attempts at balancing power – even in yee old (royalist) Englandshire. The House of Lords, down in Westminster, is supposed to act as some sort of checks and balances on the House of Commons. The only thing common about that lot of Commons MPs swimming in taxpayer-funded champagne-hooker-and-cocaine-parties (even during Covid) is the offshore accountant details and STIs they are probably trading like Pokémon cards. But the House of Lords isn't much better itself. Its members are appointed based on those who 'inherited' stolen lands, mixed with some arselickers of previous Prime Ministers, probable pedo protectors from the Church of England and some suspected blood drinkers from the City of London banker class. What the fuck are they checking and balancing exactly? Their 'allowances' chequebook? It's like being forced to play Monopoly against the biggest cheats and liars in the country. They get to play banker every time. Oh, and they start the game owning every

square on the board. Don't worry, there is a referee overseeing the whole game – except you find out he's your opponent's rich, drunk and definitely racist uncle. Brilliant!

After our disappointing independence in 2014 and subsequent Interdependence in 2018, we clearly didn't want another House of Entitled Racists to carry out the checks and balances. The self-appointed experts and wannabe-technocrat cuntlords can take a run and jump too, if they want us to believe they will be any better. How can a bunch of experts check the power of a government if they are appointed by and benefit from the same status-quo corporate establishment? This setup is what Aristotle called oligarchy (not democracy!), and that's even before mentioning all the royal aristocratic and official religious influences who own half the bloody land. How did anyone get gaslit into believing Westminster is in any semblance of 'democracy'? You would have to lock children in a room day after day, force-feeding them this utter nonsense under duress for years, just to make them believe – wait... is that what school is!? Those cult talons up to their old tricks again.

The contradiction of power is that the longer people are in privileged positions, the further they get from the everyday common experience of the very people they cast their power over. Even if they are sound as a pound to begin with, before long, they will inevitably start acting like an entitled prick if their power goes unchecked. We have all seen it happen – not just in Westminster, but around the world. For that reason, we gotta keep shifting the people in power up. It's nothing personal. It's just our entitled-prick insurance. We certainly started that process over on my timeline with our new ap-

pointment-by-lot system. However, the Gathering – and the bills it produced – still needed a second opinion: some checks and balances, just in case the Gathering of randoms made rash decisions the rest of us at home didn't agree with. But rather than a House of Edgelords, our second house of power was made up of the people themselves, directly.

The idea of any form of direct democracy used to sound weird, laughable or daft. Everything is weird, laughable and daft until it happens, though. Nowadays, direct democracy, even on a large scale, doesn't seem like such a fantasy. If we have the tech and wherewithal to vote for a singer on X Factor every week, we can sure as fuck vote for the things that actually affect us. How it works, in practice, is that whenever a motion is passed by the Great Clan Gathering, it then has to go to a public approval vote. The motion is published widely, in multiple languages and in clear, jargon-free prose. Different open-source machine intelligences with selectable characters can then have a conversation with you. Plus, content creators make a living producing videos, blogs and all sorts explaining it from their particular standpoint. That way, the cultural sphere supports our democracy by making its outputs accessible and fun to engage with for people from all generations and backgrounds. Proponents of a bill can host public debates in community spaces, in person and online. Sometimes we don't really know our own opinions until we are forced to engage in a bit of tugging and pulling, teasing out the tensions and finding any blind spots, logical absurdities and skeletons hiding in the details. This is our Informed Direct Democracy in action.

There are examples of direct democracy here in Cybertime, too – but for boring and weird things, like local planning pro-

cedures where the affected community gets a period of time to place comments and motions in favour or objection. The developer must hold public displays and opportunities for the community to ask questions and raise issues. This is great! But do we think that the only thing the community can understand and contribute to is park benches?

On my timeline, it's not like everyone is forced to vote every time on every bill. Many can't or don't want to. We got other shit to get on with too, right? Most people, however, do pick and choose which motions are of interest to them and get involved in those public debates and campaigns before voting.

If a motion is rejected by referendum, it goes back to the Great Clan Gathering, where it is either scrubbed or re-entered with the considerations from the public. Once the Gathering has reached consensus on the motion, it eventually goes back to the public for another referendum vote, repeating those steps until a final decision is reached. It seems intensely tedious and slow, but we are talking about laws and regulations that affect millions of people in deeply profound and sometimes existential ways, so it should be fucking long and tedious. A similar process happens in Westminster between their two houses, or in the US with the House and the Senate, like a game of legislative tension tennis that keeps things moving forward. In our case, however, literally everyone has the possibility of oversight – not just a bunch of racist, pedophilic aristocrats.

Is it possible that a bad bill somehow passes through consensus, then a public vote due to low turnout? Yes, absolutely – but then, we only have ourselves to blame. With great freedom come great responsibilities after all. It requires a much higher level of citizen engagement, trust and shared responsibility

than what we were used to under the Big C Cult. It was fragile at first, but eventually, most people took on the responsibility with pleasure, enjoying the debates and drama just like a night in, watching and voting for Big Brother or Strictly.

The Rise of the Pirates

I've maybe bamboozled you thus far with loads of different jargon: the Cosmic Time Lasagna, the successful Scottish independence referendum in 2014 and the subsequent 2018 Interdependence. Or the late-stage Big C Cult here on your timeline – C as in 'cyberpunk', 'capitalist' or 'bunch of cunts'.

Up until this part of the story, I haven't really used the term Solarpunk to describe what was unfolding. That's the beautiful thing about Solarpunk. It's not a top-down ideology – like fascism or the Big C Cult – that needs to be stamped into people's heads from wanks in uniforms. Solarpunk is the invisible mycelia under the ground, the grass between your toes, the very soil that holds you, even when you don't notice it's there – powered, as if by magic, from a huge, seemingly eternal nuclear explosion in the sky. We will come back to the term Solarpunk itself soon, but for the sake of clarity, from now on, let's call my timeline Solartime and yours Cybertime.

Right, with that out of the way, can we finally talk about PIRATES?! The emergent power structures of our new clan system were in some way inspired by the old pirate code. You may imagine pirates as lawless bastards of the high seas. Or you may know that, despite the propaganda, many pirate ships were actually way more inclusive and democratic than any comparable Western society of their time. Ship captains

could be deposed by a vote of no confidence and a new one elected through crew votes and points. Some captains (though admittedly not loads) were women, famously Anne Bonny in the Caribbean or Ching Shih in the South China Sea. Most pirates probably did have STIs and honkin' breath, mind you. The great thing about history, though, is you don't need to throw the baby out with the filthy scurvy bathwater. Pick out the shitty bits and improve on the good ones.

That's why many young folk independently started calling themselves Solarpirates a few years into our Interdependence – not for the STIs and scurvy, but inspired by the pirate's code. To them, the pirate's code represents the spirit and the idea of anarchic adventurers, open to exploring new frontiers of ideas, still grounded in radical autonomy, egalitarianism and democracy. The name Solarpirates was a bit arsey-sounding to me at first but that's clearly just a sign I'm becoming an old fart – you know, the new slang offending me. At least the weans are creating subcultures again, actually driven by curious discovery and political activism rather than just drug-enabled sexual release.

Solarpirates claim the other generations' chronic sense of existential dread comes from the separation of science and nature, cities and countryside, animals and humans; and from capitalism's constant need for more productivity and the resulting frustrated biological functions. But Solarpirates aren't your classic youth rebels. Despite all the convoluted stuff I was telling you before – the technicalities of the local clans and the national Gatherings – the government these days over in Solartime has very little to do with most things average humans get up to day to day. That's because most important

decision-making now lies embedded within the communities themselves. Young people stopped needing to be angry rebels, or else apathetic loners lost in computer games and porn. Just like pirates of old, Solarpirates see opportunities and pounce on them together – always bound by the pirate code, of course. If you are an old cynical fart like me, you might find this new, emerging profile of young people hard to swallow. 'Ah, they are all just lazy bastards, uninterested in anything! Most cannae lead a dug to the park, let alone a revolution!'

If you don't believe it's possible over on my timeline, how do you explain the same thing unfolding here in Cybertime? Look at the wave of Gen Z protesters and new societies being created in the rubble. In Nepal, for example, the youth leading the protests that brought down the government in 2025 were out the next day cleaning the cities up, hunting down looters online and socially pressuring them to return their stolen goods. They were calmly consulting with the old political and military class for what was to come next, but no doubt it was going to be some youth figurehead, not an old up-classer. The youth there are less interested in becoming the big wigs or military uniforms themselves and much more keen on building an equitable society, free from corruption and fair for everyone.

Pirates appear in vacuums, not waiting for permission or instruction. Pirates see an opportunity where most others see chaos. They simply get on with things they want to do. The fall of the capitalist dome in Solartime Scotland opened up many previously 'private' properties and enclosed 'investment' lands that had sat literally empty or abandoned for decades. It reminded me of East Berlin in 1989 – except unlike the fall of communism, which saw millions of used homes, factories and

businesses abandoned overnight to be filled with clubs, punks and squatters, the fall of capitalism meant that millions of deliberately underused or disused spaces that had been left to rot for the sake of false scarcity could finally be reoccupied. Either way, the collapse of a dysfunctional system opened up vast new possibilities and territories for those piratey enough to take them: artists, activists, immigrants and communities that had been starved for decades. Thousands flocked to Scotland's cities from all round the world to join the new Solarpirates as they, in turn, flooded into the new frontiers. This eventually contributed to a sprawling public commons under the new 'use-it-or-lose-it' plan, the mechanism used to reclaim all idle assets and land for public benefit legally. The outburst was eventually supported by the newly emerging Solarpunk society – a movement that was itself evolving through the Great Clan Gathering. In many ways, this political body was inspired and shaped by the surge in creativity and energy from the youthful Solarpirates, who took the initiative in building these new common spaces.

If you take the free Alternative Tour from Alexanderplatz next time you are in Berlin, you might hear of the famous story of an immigrant family who built a treehouse in the middle of what used to be no man's land. It was an abandoned space and for many a no-go area, even after the Wall came down. For some Berlin Pirates though, it was a new opportunity since no one was claiming the land as theirs. Eventually, when the newly unified government tried to remove the family, claiming it was an illegal settlement (ironic given Germany's continual support of many actual illegal settlements), the family simply refused, cementing all their furniture to the ground so even

the bailiffs couldn't remove them. Now a national curiosity, the government escalated and threatened total demolition if they didn't move out. The day before the JCB arrived to knock them down, the Muslim family was saved by the local Catholic Church who had been rummaging for days through their vaults. In their final hour of need, they pulled out medieval documents that proved the church actually had title deeds to the lands in question, not the newly forming state claiming everything for itself. What a punk-ass Solarpirate story if ever you heard one, right? All across Berlin, squats, emergent housing projects, clubs and artist spaces popped up after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Eventually, the new capitalists who had seemingly won the Cold War along with their need for enclosure and false scarcity, violently forced most of them out over the following decades – however, not without huge city-wide riots.

In our Solartime, we were lucky. Rather than setting the powers of the newly forming state to dominate, repress and fight, those state powers were used to support the Pirates, offering legal, safe and legit structures of community ownership and funding – so no future dicks could take them away. Of course, there was tension between the forming power structures – trying to build bureaucracies and ways of doing things 'properly' – and the rampant enthusiasm of the Pirates to get it done all at once; at best, yesterday. Ultimately, the Gathering's decision to collaborate followed 'if you can't beat them, join them' logic: partly as a moral choice to align with the youth, and partly because the newly forming political structures had more pressing concerns than the fate of some old empty properties.

7
Realigning Journalism with Truth-Seeking

I cried the first days I spent here in Cybertime. The Big C Cult was awful to live under 14 years ago when we shared a timeline, but seeing things now through my Solartime eyes – young people, especially – I never imagined it could get so bad. You walk down any street and humans pass by each other as if they both are the only individual left on Earth. There is no smile, no gentle nod. I'm just gonna say it: We all be lookin' like NPCs over here! It's not like humans from Solartime Scotland are any different or superior. If any amount of us swapped places with each other, before long, we'd all start acting like our counterparts. On this occasion, I happen to know what I'm talking about. Since being here, I've picked up a whole bunch of addictions and bad habits I had forgotten decades ago.

'Free will in a bubble' has always been a ludicrous concept. Free will can only exist in interaction with its environment – the yin and the yang. Hegel said human ideas and consciousness shape our environment. Marx said the environment shapes our ideas and consciousness. Yet surely, the truth is hovering between our interactions, and that is where the il-

lusive free will must live? In Solartime Scotland, this was less of a philosophical question and more of a practical dilemma. Do we smash it all down and start fresh from some abstract ideas? Or do we start from where we spawn in the game and use what we got? What if that toxic environment controls our ideas and we once again fall into bad authoritarian habits? I mean, no one (other than me, maybe) spent much time debating the intricacies of historical materialism or the human zeitgeist. Our focus was much more direct, asking: Could we reorganise rather than rebuild?

Some institutions, for sure, were so rotten they had to go completely – things like lobbyists and corporate shareholders. But most things, we slowly found, could find a new purpose, so long as we fundamentally changed the overall (dis)incentive cycle that drove those structures and systems to exploit and abuse previously. Systems are a-moral in the sense that they are just tools. A hammer can be used to build or destroy. So, too, can taxes. We didn't need to invent shiny new technologies and wait for some kind of digital messiah. No tech was coming to save us all. It didn't need to. We just needed to reprogramme the old bastard machines that, for so long, had cared more about people than profit.

The Rotten Fruit of Propaganda

Take the state of journalism, for example. It has always been a dumpster fire, even before me and you parted timelines. I remember one time: I was stood on Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow, right before the independence referendum of 2014. The entirety of Buchanan Street was full, top-to-bottom, with

independence supporters – tens of thousands singing *Caledonia* at the top of their lungs. The BBC had been there all day, filming what unfolded. Yet, five hours in, despite the city-wide explosion of Scottish flags, there was nothing like that on the news. Then, I stumbled upon an interesting sight. Around the corner, just out of sight and earshot of the tens of thousands, a handful of old dudes in suits – Labour Party card carriers with 'Vote No' banners – gathered at a seemingly pre-approved time. They looked dull and lifeless, like tired security guards rounded up from a local Farmfoods, asked to hold a banner for ten minutes in return for a Tesco bag of frozen sausages. The six o'clock news that night didn't mention the tens of thousands squeezed into the streets round the corner but was broadcast live with the twenty sausage-loving security guards and their 'BETTER TOGETHER' placards behind the presenter.

Media propaganda from the BBC and the entire legacy media was horrendous during the independence referendum in 2014, but by Venus,[1] eleven years later here in Cybertime, and the billionaires haven't just bought up all the squares on the journalism Monopoly board – they have started chewing up the board itself, and actual journalism has almost entirely vanished.

The Whistleblower Bounty

Thanks to the hammering we took from the BBC and their ilk, as soon as our first Gathering came about in Solartime, jour-

1. Venus is the Roman goddess of love, beauty, sex, fertility and victory. Competing for her attention, the male gods almost caused a divine civil war.

nalistic reform was near the very top of the agenda. Journalists aren't really the problem, though. Most of them got into the field believing they could make the world a better place by shining a light of truth on power. Journalists themselves are the solution – assuming you get rid of their billionaire employers and align the money incentives right. Here in Cybertime, independent journalism that is critical of big corporations or Western governments is not only disincentivised, it's often a 'crime'. They tried to kill, starve and eradicate Julian Assange multiple times.

In Solartime, one meme idea rose up from a journalism clan and went viral: whistleblower bounties. The idea was simple. It doesn't matter whether you are a journalist, civil servant, cop or employee of a company – a crowdfunded mechanism would award whistleblowers who revealed malpractice, corruption or deceit by anyone in any position of power. It was a pretty hefty award, too, depending on the seriousness and the position of the people involved. It covered any legal costs and insurance, in case you got fired or sued. It meant any arsehole boss under investigation who fired a supposed whistleblower would actually be doing them a favour; their salary would be covered for up to a few years without them having to work another day.

People who contributed towards the crowdfunder recognised that there was a great return on investment for this programme overall. The whistleblower's fund saved society as a whole billions in thwarted corruption and environmental damage. All the Epstein-like baddies – corrupt cops, reps and bankers – now knew that everyone was encouraged to uncover their malpractice, not just a handful of underfunded regulators. Over time, this incentivised a culture of speaking up for the

oppressed, exploited or endangered rather than the billionaire shiterags.

It's like when they reintroduced wolves to Yellowstone Park in 1995. Turns out, it doesn't take many wolves to change the behaviour of thousands of deer that had, for years, been eating all the tree saplings. Just knowing that the wolves are out there was enough to make the deer hide further in the forests (rather than out in the open), allowing the grass, bushes and trees to regrow and eventually, with their deepening root system, change the direction of entire river systems. In Solartime, we didn't need to have expensive mass trials of corrupt powerful people for the new system to be effective. The growing number of successful whistleblowing cases – our reintroduced wolves – were enough to change the behaviour of an entire system, eventually allowing justice to flow more naturally.

8
THE NATIONAL JUSTICE SERVICE

Justice usually comes with a price tag – anything you want for the right price. Inversely, if you are an exploited worker with no protections and don't have two farts to rub together, if they come for you, you wake up in an El Salvadorian for-profit slave prison. Capitalism gives you the ability to choose from a thousand different options – in theory. Hunners' a lawyers who specialise in just the kind of justice you need. But, for the vast majority of us, every single one is locked away behind an insurmountable paywall. If your justice system is financialised, then by definition, the super-rich literally live above the laws placed on the rest of us.

The corporations they launder their money through are seen as 'human' in the eyes of the law. When those corporations commit theft and murder, wiping out entire village water tables or hiring actual death militias (as in the banana republic), and someone has the money to challenge them in court, they usually have to win not once but through three different levels of the judiciary. After all that, the best outcome they can hope for is the corporation paying a fine equivalent to a few percent of its annual revenue, or a bag of sweets and a picture with Brad Pitt for the kids dying of cancer caused by their

illegal heavy metal poisoning of a lake. Such goodwill gestures to the make-a-fucking-wish-bitch society will usually satisfy most judges. It would be hysterically absurd if there weren't so many poisoned kids with preventable diseases and dead fish everywhere.

The largest fines any corporations have ever paid were roughly one year's profits – profits they made from those very crimes. BP is one of those companies, having polluted an entire fucking ocean with an underwater oil leak; or Volkswagen after they systematically lied about their car emissions on tests, both disasters adding billions of tonnes of CO_2 to the environment illegally and causing the deaths of wildlife as well as shortening human life spans. No jail time, no shut downs, no new regulations. Both BP and Volkswagen were allowed to continue business as usual. In fact, BP managed to talk their fine down from $65 billion to only $18 billion. Since the Earth-shattering oil spill in 2010, BP have made $106 billion in profits – five times more than they paid in fines – while Volkswagen made an even more impressive $108 billion in profits since 2016. If this doesn't make your blood boil, don't worry, these fucks will soon have the oceans boiling instead.

Our Solartime NJS covers all citizens' legal costs. If you have a strong enough case to take a corporation to court, as deemed by the procurator fiscal, you will get your hearing and the taxpayer covers your arse – just like in the NHS, the National Health Service here in British Cybertime. No taxpayer really minds chippin' in if everyone is winning. Workers have their rights enshrined and actually protected by a legal system with teeth; meanwhile, businesses can grow and compete on a free,

fair and regulated market. Although I keep calling it capitalist, Cybertime, in reality, devolved into full corporatism long ago.

Corporatism, in Solartime, finally heard its death knell in Scotland when we armed our new NJS. Massive corps could no longer buy their justice. And you know what? It wasn't just the workers of those companies who supported our new NJS but the vast majority of business owners too, since they were the ones otherwise being chewed up by monopolistic, feudal landlord-cheats like Amazon, Tesla or SpaceX. We figured out that paying for the legal proceedings as part of the tax bill actually saved us a shit ton of money overall, as it stopped so much more corporate theft – the largest and most expensive crime on Earth.

Even the hardest opponents of the NJS usually support the taxpayer funding of criminal cases, because they don't want to get stabbed walking down the street, then have to rush off to a lawyer rather than the hospital. Yet, as the case above and millions of others show, corporate crimes are often far wider reaching and, at the same time, vastly underreported or treated as civil cases rather than criminal, while success rates against them are abysmal. These are the kinds of companies that, if you even got close to beating them in court and forcing them to pay out, would make sure you and your nuisance voice disappeared. If you think this is extremely unlikely to happen, go talk to Indigenous activists living in the Amazon – or anywhere around the world, for that fucking matter – and ask them how many of their colleagues, friends and families have disappeared or ended up dead.

In Solartime, we made CEOs legally responsible for their companies – that means their debts and their crimes. If a

criminal gang beat you up or robbed your house, would you feel justice had been served if the CPS took the legal entity of the gang name to court, rather than the individual humans? Fuck no! So why do we allow such wordplay-bullshit for corporations who, after all, are just gangs in uglier suits?

The simple act of nationalising all legal costs for all citizens didn't take much time to think up, agree on, implement or even fund, as we were already funding the vast majority of cases – which are criminal anyway. There were obviously teething issues, court delays and tough prioritisation choices to work through; hence why it had to work hand-in-hand with other forms of restorative justice to be truly successful. More on that later in this chapter.

While our NJS helped slowly dismantle the cost barrier to justice, ensuring that no citizen was priced out of challenging systematic malfeasance, its implementation did not escape some fierce critique from both the financial and corporate sectors and, to be fair, they had some good points initially. The first major challenge was the economic drain caused by the potential flood of new, frivolous cases. Critics feared that removing the financial risk involved with suing a company would lead to an unmanageable flood of speculative, low-merit claims that were highly specific and niche, rather than systematic. The NJS addressed this by establishing the Triage and Vetting Tribunal (TVT), which replaced the old dysfunctional legal aid system. This independent body acts as a rigorous gatekeeper, helping citizens assess their grievances online and in person and, where necessary, channelling low-severity issues toward restorative justice and ensuring that the NJS's limited resources are reserved only for cases that meet a severity threshold (cases

of systemic and mass harm). Restorative justice programmes actually covered the vast majority of citizen and consumer needs for justice. The NJS system itself is designed to be largely self-sustaining, with most additional costs recovered from the much harsher financial penalties levied on guilty corporations. Victims would get a percentage of the payout, as would the National Justice Service.

The second major critique from corporations and their channels was that overregulation and the fear of being constantly sued would dry up all R&D, and most companies would pack up and move abroad. We heard the same excuses when it came to the debates around proper taxation of stagnant wealth and, in both cases, it proved to be an inaccurate prediction. The NJS has always aimed to deter capital that relies heavily on exploiting the public or the environment – either through extraction (e.g. fracking), dangerous experimentation (e.g. predatory pharma) or deception and fraud (e.g. insurance scams). So yes, some companies did leave, but I mean – good! Right? A country with less evil companies isn't a bad thing. If nurses or binmen go on strike, society shuts down; if insurance lawyers and bankers stop working, would you even notice?

Financial incentive programmes were rolled out specifically to support R&D into science and economic activity that helped counterbalance any perceived pressure from the new NJS – funding that helped progress humanity, rewarding not just innovative but also ethical and responsible R&D. This all ensures that companies that prioritise public benefit as well as innovation find a supportive regulatory and financial environment.

To prevent the NJS from becoming bureaucratic and slow, defunded or a future political weapon, it is legally independent

of the clan system of governance and structurally decentralised through regional litigation hubs that foster specialised local expertise. An independent board of directors provides oversight and the TVT maintains the objective severity threshold as the primary driver for all actions.

Overall, the NJS has turned out to be a great investment. It has even had diminishing costs and increasing returns over time because the fundamental system of incentives flipped. A system that allows people and corporations to buy their way out of justice incentivises larger and more dangerous escalations from those with wealth, should they get caught. With the power taken away from these cancerous, 'profit-maximising' corps and billionaires, taxpayers save billions annually on corruption and cleaning up their messes. The incentives are for a fair market and society: open, transparent and with everyone playing by the same rules.

Although anyone could blow the whistle on corporate malpractice, competitors were the most likely to do so. When bullies can buy justice, systems always creep towards crony monopolies and oligarchy. That's why our universally enforced regulations in Solartime spelled the death of the cartels that now rule every sector here in Cybertime. Our regulations actually led to more competition and better companies, products and services – and as a result, our Solarpunk society is much better at creating free markets than capitalism ever was.

Cops, Judges and Jails

The concept of cops, judges and jails is one of those things no one would invent if they didn't exist already. In Western

countries, we employ a bunch of (mainly) white, (mainly) men who were either bullied at school or were the bullies themselves. We then arm and train them to be a street gang in militaristic uniforms and body armour that monitors and roams their beat 24/7 in cars with shiny blue lights. This gang has almost unrestricted freedom and access to act with impunity – stopping and searching, assaulting, arresting and jailing for any number of wide-ranging, deliberately ambiguous crimes like 'causing a public disturbance' when you raise your voice about an issue, or 'resisting arrest' when they start the fight.

As I write this, in the UK, they are arresting 80-year-old grannies and threatening them with 14 years in prison, accusing them of being terrorists for holding a banner or wearing a T-shirt. FOR WEARING A FUCKING T-SHIRT! Yet our supposed representatives, paid by foreign government lobbyists, sell bombs funded with our taxes to the cunts committing actual genocide. None of them are arrested or jailed, no matter how many children are used as target practice in their name.



I can still feel the pain of being deliberately thrown down a set of stairs by a squad of riot cops in London. It was 2009, way before our timelines split. We were absolutely knackered after protesting and dancing all day previously at the anti-G20 protests outside the Bank of England, where the polis had kettled us in the baking sun with no access to water or toilets for hours and hours on end. I remember watching the riot cops on the front line challenging, threatening, begging for someone

to start it – banging on their shields, screaming, 'Fucking come on then!'

Desperate, drunk and frustrated, some people in one corner finally took the bait and pushed forward. The riot cops took a couple of blows from flying projectiles, then almost instantly retreated about thirty metres. For miles around the protest that day, every single shopfront in London had its shutters down, expecting things to get messy. The new frontier the cops had opened up with their 'retreat' happened to unveil a shiny, glass-fronted branch of an RBS – one of the banks recently bailed out by the government with taxpayers' money. The commotion brought a lot of attention from the rest of the hemmed-in protesters as more began pushing and piling in, thinking they were finally escaping the scorching square. The ruiz had worked perfectly. We weren't going anywhere. But now, as the newly stirred-up pressure cooker was forcibly compressed even tighter – even hotter and angrier, with nothing to do but stare at this big, shiny glass symbol of greed and theft – what do you think the expectation was all along?

Before the first rock hit the glass, there were already thirty professional photographers lined up for the perfect front-page shot everyone knew was coming. Who could say if the first dafties who threw the bricks were protesters or undercover polis? It didn't matter by that point. The next day, every front page had its perfect frame – a gang of angry protesters dressed in black, openly smashing private property like 'violent hooligans' and destroying an innocent little bank branch your granny probably uses. The manufactured outrage provided instant justification for sweeping raids and violent crackdowns

the following day on anyone deemed to have partaken in any 'crimes' the day before.

I was hungover as fuck with a splitting headache, half-sleeping on the floor of a manky squat in London. I couldn't get the image out of my head of a huge rat we saw in the kitchen cupboard the night before, with a nonchalant attitude like some London taxi driver. It turned its head, looked right at me and telepathically spoke, 'Awrite guvna! Where you off to then?' No wonder I had to get proper pissed to sleep that night.

The next morning – when most others were getting up and off to the next day's protest, this time outside the G20 venue itself – I was a dehydrated shell of my former self. Rather than join them, I stole a bed spot and fell back asleep till I woke up in the early afternoon, trying to work out where the fuck I was exactly. I stumbled to a corridor window that looked out onto a public alley. I could see a cop hanging around outside so I started deliberating with DRIFT I heard downstairs.

'Hold up, let's get some breakfast and chill before leaving today. There's a cop outside poaching for an arrest, I bet.'

DRIFT shouted back up, 'Fair enough. We got bananas I thi–' when I rudely interrupted, 'Aw fuck me. Fuck me. FUCK ME!'

Suddenly, it wasn't just one cop; there was a fucking army of riot cops – and the nasty ones at that. I ran downstairs to scream of the impending invasion but I was already too late. The cunts kicked the door down just as I was at the wee landing junction between flights of stairs, looking down straight at them. If I continued to run down now, they would say I'm attacking and probably batter me. If I ran back up, they would chase me and say I was running away and, well, batter me too. The game was up. I stood back, relaxed, my already aching

head against the wall, and put my hands up with a fake smile just as a riot cop stormed his way straight towards me.

The first man in black shook me and ran past – on the hunt for juicier pickings, maybe. I then came face-to-face with the second balaclava man. You can't see much of them behind all of their weird kink gear, but when I looked into his eyes, I realised that he was suffering. Maybe he'd failed his army training or got rejected from becoming a fireman. This guy wasn't just a cop with a tiny jockstrap – this was a riot cop with something to prove today.

With hindsight, saying, 'What's happenin' bro?' might not have been the most appropriate opener from me. I was delirious from lack of sleep and, every time I closed my eyes, I kept seeing that taxi driver rat. When I reopened my eyes, there was no more time to re-attempt first contact with the balaclava alien-man-boy. His decision was made up. Whatever the cause was for putting his boot in and throwing me down a flight of stairs, it all happened fast and pulled me out of Matrix bullet-dodging speed. I tumbled uncontrollably down the rotten stairs of the squat.

As I came round, I realised I was at the bottom, somehow still standing upright. Only problem now was that I appeared to be surrounded by a large hunting pack of six-foot-tall, coked-up gorilla cops who looked like they just found the four-foot-something prey they had been looking for. Up until that point, I had been lucky enough in life to have never taken a kicking – let alone one from all sides at once. I can only describe it as a really angry car wash – one of those with the big fluffy rollers, except this one was made of white fists protected by armoured gloves. I took my chances with the taxi rat instead

and closed my eyes. With my hands still up, all I could do was shout, 'I'm not resisting arrest!' over and over to anyone who could at least witness my voice; meanwhile, the eviler twins to Tweedledum and Tweedledee kicking shite out of me were busy tasering some poor cunt sleeping upstairs!

In another room, they split DRIFT's eyebrow open, so he now looked like an actual pirate with a bloody head bandage. The same cops later forced a finger up his arse at the station because he legally and politely refused to comply with their demands for his ID. Meanwhile, in another cell, they made it very clear to me that I was being spared such abuse because I had consented to them taking my ID – all while standing on my back with my hands cuffed behind me on the ground. Makes you wonder why only one of us required an internal drug search? Is it possible the polis weaponise their powers to violate human bodies?

This was all after they arrested us both for 'violent disorder' – a crime defined as being committed by a minimum of three people that implies deliberately carrying out an act of extreme violence. It was definitely one of the more spicy accusations made against me in my life. I never got a cop finger up my arse but they did, however, take all my clothes as 'evidence' (even though there was no forensic evidence to gather) and left me wearing nothing but a boiler suit in a cell. Did I do something when I was blackout drunk last night? Did I somehow manage to come up with a dastardly scheme with two other blackouts? My drunk self struggles to pee standing up, never mind create an organised criminal conspiracy to commit violent disorder! This was turning out to be some fucking hangover.

They finally dropped the charges a few months later, after I laughed uncontrollably through the polis interview. They were finally obliged to present their evidence and case against me after hours spent locked in the cells. The day before, the surveillance officer positioned on the roof of the Bank of England with his spy goggles in hand reported that I approached looking like I was going to rip concrete barriers out of the ground and, along with two other random people I never met, would throw them over the heads of a crowd maybe eight to twelve people deep, hitting the Bank of England so powerfully it might cause the global stock market to instantly collapse.

OK, I added that last bit in, but the rest is literally what the report said. Something along those lines, anyway. Was I some kind of superman hulk in the eyes of the law? Hats off to the daft prick spying on me that day, mind you. He gave me a belter nickname in their report – a name I still go by to this day over in Solartime: 'Suspect number one who, from now on, I shall refer to as GINGERBEARD...'

All of this is my way of saying: I know from experience that All Cops can be Absolute Bastards. But it's not that they abuse their power when unchecked; it's that the cops tasked with falsely accusing, arresting and kicking the fuck out of people are – more often than we like to realise – 'just' doing their job as the state has employed them to. The state is the rot, not just a handful of bad apple cops.

Remember when it was revealed that undercover polis, funded by the taxpayer, were tasked by their seniors with befriending and spying on activists in the 1980s across England (and probably Scotland, but those papers haven't been released). They deliberately targeted women protesters in the

Animal Lib movement, flirting, dating and eventually marrying them. These sinister wanks actually raised kids with these valiant women, all while spying on them for years, following exact orders until the mission was complete and then simply disappeared, leaving behind abandoned wives and children. This wasn't a bad cop abusing his power; this was the job.

In the US right now, ICE has been upgraded to one of the best-funded agencies in the country, using the School of the Americas'[1] tactics of 'disappearing' residents, like 82-year-old Luis Leon, whose only crime was losing his green card and picking up a new one. ICE violently abducted him in front of his wife, then told her later he was dead – until the family randomly found him in hospital in a foreign country he had no ties to. This is where all police states lead: Banana Republic shit.

In case the doom and gloom is getting to you, my personal story has a somewhat happy ending. Most people don't consider the fact you can sue cops and sometimes even win. When I got arrested, I had the sheer chaotic luck to be assigned an incredible human rights lawyer who turned up at my police interview. Despite the long list of police victims that day in the squat, me and DRIFT were the only two who decided to sue the Metropolitan Police for their false arrest, imprisonment and initial assault. Everyone else, I assume, thought it was a waste of time – especially given there were no witnesses. Seven years later, thanks to our superhero lawyer at Bhatt Murphy,

1. The School of the Americas is a US-run military base that trains (and funds) Latin American forces to do their dirty work. It's infamous for churning out dictators, torture manuals and right-wing death squads across the continent.

we handled every aggressive delaying, threatening and illegal tactic the Met threw at us and, despite all odds, fucking won!

Or at least, they settled on our terms the day before we were due for court. Obviously, I wanted to carry on to court but I was advised to take the settlement as a rare moment of success. The cops paid all our legal costs – well into the hundreds of thousands – and had to give us a decent settlement of tens of thousands each on top. Did you know there is an actual price list for police crimes, like a per-hour rate for false imprisonment? Most importantly to me, I got to sit face-to-face with the deputy chief of the Met Police and tell her my story.

'You know, GINGERBEARD,' she said once I finished, 'I think if me and you had sat down at the start of this whole thing, we could have sorted it out over a cuppa.'

'So, why the fuck then did you waste hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' money and my life over seven years!?'

She awkwardly glanced between her army of lawyers, but no one dared look back to assist her. This was my own wee moment of restorative justice.

Nothing is ever black and white completely though, not even the polis being a shower of shite. In times of emergency, many of us might still call them to help us and sometimes, they actually do. I remember when my dad, with his Alzheimer's, went missing all night long once in freezing winter with no clothes, food or water. Within a few hours, the cops were round putting a full-scale search operation into place, complete with helicopters and all. Though they didn't find him (he eventually walked into a local police station right as rain after ten hours adventuring the midnight hills), the resources, effort and care they put into the search for a vulnerable missing person still

deeply moves me to this day. I am full of gratitude to live in a country where such services, technologies and good humans are funded by the taxpayer to help our most vulnerable. That is the true sign of our actual civilisation – when humans rally and pull resources together, not to inflict harm on socially conscious protesters but to care for vulnerable people. Underneath every ugly-ass police helmet, there is still a being with a million years of humanity running through their veins.

It would be all too easy for me, post-2009 after getting my head kicked in, to go around spray-painting 'ACAB' (All Cops Are Bastards) on every cop car I could. For progress to be made, we have to move towards an understanding of nuance – one that looks at structures of power and their corrupting nature.

We have it all topsy-turvy, maybe? Rather than searching for the individual rotten apples in a supposedly good system, we should be searching for the good apples working despite a rotten structure, then build a new service around their intact humanity and good intentions. ACAB proponents argue that systemic police corruption forces all cops to be bastards or else they face punishment from the hierarchy they are employed within. However, assuming that there is no such thing as a kind cop is not just factually wrong, it also increases the amount of hatred towards other humans (rather than the institutions controlling them) and feeds into a self-fulfilling prophecy racing us all to hell. The question for us in Solartime is not whether all cops are bastards. It's a much more powerful one than that: How do we build a safe society for all – a community guarded by the heroes who searched for my dad, without them also being the hired thugs who kicked and falsely imprisoned me?

What Was So Radical About the NJS?

Under the Big C Cult, justice systems rarely consider rehabilitation. Marginalised and poor communities know the police aren't there to protect them, corrupt courts aren't built to uphold their justice and the private slave prisons certainly aren't for reform. When our timelines split and Solartime emerged, we suddenly had an opportunity to do something about it.

It started small – before the month-long rave even. Our early protests were met with increasingly violent Scottish polis crackdowns. Community organisers were labelled anti-Scottish or extremists. Squads of riot cops stormed housing co-ops, community spaces and even forest schools under the guise of 'public order'. When the first Community Justice Councils were formed – attempting to build a restorative alternative to police and court repression – the press headlines screamed 'Anarchy!', 'Chaos!', 'Vigilante Criminals Running the Country!'.

Maybe they were right and that was the point. We were done trying to reform the old system with its polis henchmen, funny-wigged judges and private prisons by wrapping a new Scottish flag around them. We were here to end it all, entirely. The police and legal system were too tied to the old ways, having deep connections to so-called secret societies like the Masons and the Orange Order, all still swearing allegiance to the foreign English crown. You can't reform an old-boys' club. We had to build something different in its place, but the newly independent Scottish elites weren't very keen on such radical reform – reform that would leave them without sufficient foot soldiers as a buffer against, you know, us the citizens. Up until that point, all governments needed amoral gangs of paid

mercenaries (the police and army) that would essentially allow them to enforce tax collection.

Even the SNP tried to sign a power pact with the devil. I don't blame them too much, though. I think the SNP did the best they could, naively playing a rigged game with a terrible opening hand. But the post-indy SNP era was a massive disappointment for most of us supporters. We got screwed both by powerful and smarter outside powers, and also by our own politicians. Some saw independence not as a vessel for true structural change, but a mere changing of the guard – something that would allow them to be bigger fish in a smaller pond. For others, it was the naive belief the Western order could be reformed into a force for good (something you still hear from British and European leaders here pandering to Trump). For others still, it was a lack of vision or understanding of the possibilities independence brought, yet people demanded we at least try.

For over a decade – since before the 2014 referendum – the SNP had been the Scottish Government and Scotland's new status quo, moving rapidly from an obscure, fringe, single-issue underdog to a new political up-class. Despite some early optimism with free buses for the elderly and prescriptions, overall – as they settled into their new up-class consciousness – progress slowed to a grinding halt and once again, no matter who we voted for, hee-haw changed. Westminster was the big bogeyman used to excuse many of the chains Scotland willingly kept around itself. But why did even the pro-indy politicians hold us back from our own power?

To understand the power dynamics at play, consider this scenario: the CEOs of the world's most powerful 'poverty

charities' – individuals earning six or seven figures – are invited to a secret meeting where a piece of alien technology is unveiled. It's a massive button. They are informed they can decide, right then and there, to end all world poverty by pressing it. Doing so would achieve every one of their charitable missions instantly. However, in one fell swoop, it would also end the need for their jobs and their influence; the salaries, the speaking engagements and the party invites would vanish. They would have to retrain, find new work, perhaps even a new identity. No one would ever need the names Oxfam or Red Cross again. Would they push that button?

What if, next to that big red button, sat a smaller one? This one cannot tackle the underlying structures that churn out generational poverty, but pushing it results in a massive roll-out of wells in Sub-Saharan Africa and food banks in Glasgow over the next century – growing at a steady pace alongside the growth of global poverty itself. And every one of those new projects would have their charity's name on it. This is the allure of power. It's what leads good people to do bad things.

The Red Cross needs poverty to exist for it to exist. Well-funded food banks like the Trussell Trust need people to be starving. There is very little incentive for their board of deep-pocketed directors to critique government policies that create starvation in a supposed first-world country like the UK. Similarly, the SNP benefited when Westminster oppressed us Scots, giving them power and privilege with the least amount of responsibility. The SNP were the head of a toothless, devolved state and had a lot to lose from actual independence, knowing their umbrella would probably disband as soon as their single issue was achieved. Our gradual change in incentives – once

they had passed from the doon to the up – made them unsuitable leaders for the scale of change that the people demanded.

If you aren't familiar with Scottish politics, this might all seem a niche problem. I promise you it's not. This exact same dynamic has played out across the world since the dawn of nation states. Whether it's the betrayal of Podemos in Spain, the Greens voting to increase military spending in Germany (of all fucking countries) as soon as they were sharing power, or the Liberal Democrats allowing student fees to triple rather than cancelling them as promised. The SNP is yet another example proving that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absofuckinglutely every time.

A few years after the 2018 collapse of the SNP and the Scottish Parliament, the emerging clan system finally established the National Justice Service (NJS). We already looked at how the NJS confronted corporate abuse by funding all legal expenses. Now, let's spotlight three of my personal favourite radical shifts in how we tackle crime in Solartime.

The First Year of Justice Without Cops

It was late. The streets of Glasgow were quiet; the kind of quiet that only happens when a city is finally, finally at peace with itself – nobody blindly drunk, blocking out reality with smashed glasses and high heels in the rain. No sirens either. No flashing blue lights burning up the night. Just the faint sound of a street musician's fiddle, the rustle of leaves and the hum of an all-night café where Solarpirates were laughing over a game of holographic chess playing against a live opponent in Cuba.

I remember shitting myself when I first heard him: someone running down Buchanan Street, out of breath and manifestly afraid. Maybe they'd stolen somethin' or were running from a fight. Fuck knows. The old reflexes kicked in. For a split second, I wasn't as scared of him as I was of the anticipated clatter of army boots following, the polis' 'Haw, stop!' and the inevitable escalation that would turn whatever petty drama this was into a tragedy. But that wasn't how things unfolded anymore in Solartime Scotland.

Two Community Guardians, dressed in glowing neon and trailing welfare pouches, treaded calmly down the street, hands raised, voices steady. No batons. No guns. No cuffs. They weren't there to 'detain' or 'subdue.' They were there for a blether which they got, eventually, when the guy ran out of steam. By the time I caught up briskly walking (so I didn't look too involved but equally didn't miss the drama), he was sitting on the pavement, drinking a cup of tea from a thermos one of the Guardians had pulled from their pouch. You try not to directly look when passing, but through my cheeky side-eye, I caught the dude's expression. It was a mixture of exhaustion, relief and something else. Rather than what he had anticipated, the realisation was dawning he wasn't about to become another headline in The Digger.[2]

I sat a wee while away, not interfering but being present in case anyone, including him, requested help or assistance. That, and I'm a nosy wee bastard. Eventually, the guy got up and

2. The Digger is an awful wee magazine sold in working-class areas of Cybertime Glasgow, listing all the crimes, stabbings and shootings there have been recently – just in case you needed some extra misery in your life.

gave them both a cuddle, they swapped socials and he calmly walked off laughing. I never got a chance to chat to him, but I did recognise one of the Community Guardians. I've seen her every time I was in that part of town – never marching up and down it, parading or anything – but there like a glowing beacon when something needed a wee bit of care. I went up when things had chilled, to say hi and thank you for being so sound. Her name was LOFI.

She was apparently German, living in Scotland, but her accent didn't give her away at all. Maybe her glowing complexion did, though – not yet intoxicated by decades of eating too much deep-fried food under grey skies. LOFI was one of the pioneer volunteers for the new Community Guardians in the early days, after the month-long rave, when there had been a nationwide callout. The Community Guardians, or CGs, were not police or security – just badass members of the community who were trained to 'de-escalate, mediate and protect' as their new motto was. Almost every CG had their own special skills and secret weapons of de-escalation. LOFI's was homemade, gluten-free, nut-free, vegan brownies. Almost anyone could eat it that way and enjoy the gooey chocolatey goodness lighting up their heart and soul. Medical, mental health or criminal – most situations could be improved with brownie.

I found LOFI amusing and somewhat intriguing. She was in a position of power but I didn't get any sense of domination through authority from her. In fact, I really wanted to invite her for a hot chocolate after her shift. Of course, I never did because I'm a huge shitebag. Instead, I kept it suitably professional, asking her how she felt first time she was called in to help with a situation.

'I was petrified,' LOFI recalled. 'The first night we were out, a guy pulled a knife outside a pub in a taxi queue in Govan. In the old system, the cops would have rocked up, screamed at him with guns maybe, slammed him into the pavement and he'd have gone straight to Barlinnie Prison. Instead, we were three mediators who decided to talk to him. From a safe distance, of course.'

'It was a bit scary at first,' Charlie, the other Community Guardian, chimed in. 'The guy shouted at LOFI, telling her to get the fuck away from him or he'd fuck her pretty face up. So I stepped in and asked him what his name was and what music he liked. I was playing some random tunes from my small glowing speaker at the time.'

'Then Angus – that was his name – told Charlie to turn the pish music off he was listening to and stick some Johnny Cash on instead,' LOFI laughed.

'Aye,' Charlie continued, 'so I did. Didn't take long for him to chill out a wee bit. Eventually, he even accepted a cuppa and some chips in exchange for the knife. That was before LOFI started carrying her emergency brownies on shift.'

'That's right.' LOFI beamed. 'You wouldn't believe how much can be resolved with a brownie.'

Then she continued, 'We sat on a bench after and his story began spilling out. He had taken the bus from Dundee to Glasgow to get out of town. His partner had left him that morning with nothing more than a note after he'd lost his job. He had spent all day getting horribly drunk and by the time we met him, he was done in. He said he hated himself and some part of him probably wanted to get his head kicked in and spend the night in a cell where he believed he belonged. That's my

interpretation, anyway. Eventually, we got him home safe on the last bus to Dundee.'

'Last I heard he was training to be a Guardian himself, over in Dundee,' Charlie concluded with a smile.

That was what people didn't understand at first. How could you not treat fire with fire; violence with the threat of even more violence?

'So... what was the crack with that guy – the one you caught up with a minute ago – if you don't mind me asking?' I turned to LOFI, equally confused and inspired.

'Let's just say he has a strong flight response. People used to see him very differently, before all the changes in Scotland. When you have a scar on your face like that and a shop security guard approaches you, I think the instinct is to run. The security was just trying to hand him back a glove that fell out his pocket.'

It was becoming so clear in my mind: once we stopped acting like crime happens in a vacuum – once we started dealing with why people did these things in the first place, and stopped assuming anyone who even dares to look like a criminal deserves what's coming to them – the crime stats collapsed. Within six months, violent crime dropped by nearly 45%. Within the first few years, we had closed half the prisons and drawn up a transitional plan for the rest.

Does this mean we let violent people off the hook in Solartime? Domestic abusers and child molesters roaming freely, only now with a brownie and a cuppa to egg them on? Naw, obviously not! We had a specialised violence reduction branch of the Community Guardians – not volunteers, but specialists dealing with professional and violent crime. They had po-

lice-style training in identifying, targeting and shutting down crime rings, yet their main skill was de-escalation, rather than just locking up the latest gang leader and causing a violent power struggle to fill the vacuum.

For the first time in Scottish history, victims of domestic and child abuse were fully supported – with immediate access to legal resources, emergency care and safe shelters. People suspected of committing extreme violence were taken into custody until a safety assessment could be conducted – one informed by the victims themselves, as well as their family, friends or other support networks. Unlike before, custody no longer meant a prison cell. People suspected of serious offences might have their freedom temporarily removed, but not their dignity or safety. They were not subjected to neglect or violence at the hands of militarised officers or other inmates. Barriers could be lowered more quickly when everyone involved felt safe, warm, fed and heard. This process handled the vast majority of all conflicts and disturbances – previously considered crimes – in a completely non-violent way. I can hear the voices of some people screaming at me right now, 'That's being SOFT on crime!'

We sometimes have this tendency for real sadism. We find ourselves thinking that justice must include some severe form of punishment. Something suitably painful and humiliating that causes immense mental, if not physical, suffering for a long time. This is how you stop someone from misbehaving – fear, suffocation and absolute dominance.

But that's just not true.

I could list an almost endless stream of research that demonstrates how focusing on punishment rather than rehabilitation

only leads to worse outcomes for all involved, causing spiralling taxpayer costs as more and more people are added to the revolving door recruitment line for criminal gangs. You don't even need the research to know instinctively that punishment doesn't lead to a sense of peace or justice. Punishment simply leads to more suffering for a person who must have been suffering already to commit their crimes in the first place. Their suffering doesn't morally justify their actions, but it's blatantly clear that if we accept any correlation whatsoever between trauma and crime, then inflicting more trauma is only going to encourage further offences – not fewer.

Try this thought experiment if you still doubt me: It's a statistical possibility your new neighbours might have been to jail or through a detention facility, or maybe the guy walking his dog past your garden every day, or the delivery guy for your next pizza. If it happens that you and your loved ones are unknowingly in the vicinity of former prisoners regularly, do you want those ex-criminals to have severe, unmet trauma from punishment? All the physical, sexual and mental violence they received constantly over many years from officers and other inmates in a prison? Or would you prefer them to have received the very best rehabilitation opportunities to heal the trauma that influenced their actions, face their wrongdoings and victims while making reparations for their crimes?

Do you prefer them to be violent drug addicts and alcoholics with gang affiliations and an inability to find any decent legal work ever – or would you prefer they had a chance to practise (maybe for the first time in their lives) what it feels like to have a healthy routine, responsibility and grounding, education, happiness and connection? Which one is safer for your children to

naively play next to? Or should we just lock up our kids in tiny kindergarten prisons to keep them, you know, safe?

> 'You can get a man to talk, but you cannot get him to tell the truth.'
>
> — Hanns Scharff

Hanns Scharff was a master interrogator for the Nazis during WWII, infamous for pulling countless secrets from Allied prisoners of war. You would expect the best Nazi interrogator to be a big fan of the worst kinds of torture imaginable. Yet the 'Scharff Technique' – studied by secret services around the world – worked so well because he befriended the prisoners, inquired about their human needs and actually met them. He took them on nature walks rather than picking them apart in interrogation rooms. People told him war secrets not because they wanted to betray their country to the Nazis of all cunts, but because humans respond to kindness with honesty and transparency. Hanns Scharff weaponised this for the purposes of war. We Solarpunks used it for the purposes of peace.

After hundreds of years of the Big C Cult fucking us all up, we cannot expect everyone to suddenly act truthfully and responsibly, though, even when handed the tools to do so. We still have the mental health fallout to contend with – narcissists, sociopaths and psychopaths trying to gamify the new meta in what they see as a society game. Some people still require temporary removal from the community and full-time support in what we call Restorative Centres over in Solartime.

We could not do away with all institutions overnight. It will take generations to free us from the deep harm the cult and its processes of institutionalisation have created, but at least most of the supply has been cut off. In this Cybertime, the endless loop is still being fed, using people as fodder in for-profit systems and cementing the dynamics of power and control.

The End of Prisons

> 'Before our white brothers came to civilise us we had no jails. Therefore we had no criminals. You can't have criminals without a jail. We had no locks or keys, and so we had no thieves. .. I don't know how we managed to get along without these basic things which are absolutely necessary to make a civilised society.'
>
> — John (Fire) Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions

Let's get this straight. Most of us folk haven't got a scooby what it's actually like inside a Scottish prison. We've probably swallowed a lot of the shite spun by the telly and the papers, thinking prisons are jam-packed with pure monsters – all of them serial murderers, rapists, psychopaths; unredeemable folk who deserve to rot in a shrinking cage for all eternity.

Yes, of course these people exist in jails but the ugly, inconvenient truth is that for donkeys' years, prisons have been, for the most part, filled with people whose only actual crime was being skint, isolated, undereducated or having a mental

health breakdown. In Victorian times and before, they used to literally lock you up for the crime of being poor. Now they do it more subtly, by criminalising the inevitable behaviour of those forced to suffer the reality of poverty.

Around 85% of the poor sods locked up in pre-Interdependence Scotland were inside for what we now rightly call survival crimes, like petty theft or drug possession. We stopped sending folk to prison for boosting oot a store wae a few quid's worth of grub and some tampons, or for taking drugs to self-medicate and function. We also stopped criminalising sex work. Interestingly, the effort to criminalise it in the first place often came from the very people who frequented sex worker services the most.

In a society that cares for its citizens' wellbeing, these former crimes never needed to exist. Hence, we replaced the concept with something much more fitting for both the victims and perpetrators: We built Restorative Justice Circles – a system we lovingly adapted from native and indigenous practices all over the world because, let's be honest, indigenous peoples figured this shite out millennia ago – before we came to 'civilise' them. If you need something, you don't have to commit a crime to get it if your neighbours give you it willingly. If you still harm someone despite this, you don't get hidden away in some isolation cave where both society and the perpetrator can forget about what was done – an isolation cave where the only interactions are with people who have done even more heinous acts of violence. Naw, mate.

Perpetrators have to face the people they fear most – the ones they harmed. They have to listen (proper listen!) to the pain they caused and then roll up their sleeves and try to

make things right with reparations. Meanwhile, society as a whole has to look at the harm. Rather than blame one person while sweeping it under the rug, we have to ask: How did we collectively allow this to happen? We must take on our share of the responsibility to mend and heal, as well as look at how to make sure it doesn't happen again. All of that is lost in a blame culture that simply locks up our shadows and throws away the key. After thousands of years of trying and failing to do so, isn't it time for a new approach?

If you nicked a loaf of bread because your belly was empty, we no longer slap a tag on your ankle and forget about it; we take aim at the poverty that was gnawing at your guts in the first place, while you apologise and face anyone you may have hurt by your actions.[3] In Solartime, it's healing over hurting. If you lashed out because you felt broken inside, we don't kick you while you are down; we help you identify and start healing the wounds. That healing requires making amends to the victims we are all guilty of creating sometimes. Contrary to how this might sound, the healing process itself isn't all sunshine and roses. It's a painful-as-fuck journey that requires self-reflection and stepping out of those hidden shadows that can consume us. This is a process much more difficult than simply ignoring the results of your actions, enabled by people who have committed much worse than you.

'How can it work?! The streets will run red with violent offenders!', some in the media whinged at the thought of healing

3. This was only ever humans and animal victims considered, but never corporations. No one ever has to apologise or make reparations to a corporation, because corporations are not sentient – no matter what corporate law tries to tell you in Cybertime.

rather than perpetuating. But within three years, Scotland, the wee country that used to be infamous for its street and domestic violence, went from a serious drug and crime epidemic to having the lowest conviction and incarceration rate on the entire planet. When people have food and shelter, and when they feel safe, heard and not like they're stuck in a rigged game, they usually don't commit crimes. And those who still did? The dangerous ones unable to take the new opportunities in front of them just yet? Well, they were finally offered something no court, in all its supposed glory, had ever truly given them: a genuine chance to change and leave behind their violent survival strategies.

Despite it sounding like all I talk about is the perpetrator, this is actually a victim-focused process. Of course, we also needed to vastly improve funding and coverage for victim support, like women's shelters with improved victim rights legislation. This goes almost without saying. Yet it's not enough to focus on the suffering caused to the victims alone. Because a system that only focuses on picking up the pieces in the aftermath of crime – having only concern for the needs of the victims and not the perpetrators – is blind to the causes of crime and therefore is inherently doomed to keep on creating new victims ad infinitum.

The for-profit-prison revolving door is fuelled at every turn by a society obsessed with punishment. Prisoners can form a new legal slave labour force and police can easily target societal groups whose status quo is most threatened. Obviously, many nefarious countries from the US to China have made sure that mostly Black, brown and poor people are criminally targeted and enslaved in prisons – and when they leave, the legal system

makes it extremely likely for them to come back very soon. Guard and inmate violence will have left you covered in scars and tattoos and, worst of all, your criminal record is now an insurmountable barrier if you take on the uphill struggle to turn your life around. You will be forever worse off in employment and any opportunity you may go for. The one remaining door – still wide open to you when you leave prison – is organised crime; gangs that, as the Epstein files and decades of CIA and intelligence documents prove, are often in cahoots with the very government running the prisons.

Many parts of the 'revolving door', the cycle of prison trauma, fell apart when the NJS began working on a justice system not based on police and prisons but peace and restoration. Some people still needed to be removed from their communities temporarily into controlled rehabilitation centres, but Restorative Justice Circles were more than sufficient for the vast majority of crimes. On the completion of a Circle, victims had a much stronger sense of justice and safety being met, meanwhile no one was left with a criminal record following them around for the next twenty years. There is no set time for how long a restorative justice programme might take for all parties to feel like justice has been served and the case is concluded satisfactorily. It might take months. Sometimes even years. The victims and their families help decide how someone can rebuild trust in the people and community they violated, and whether that requires some time under institutional control removed from the community or whether it can be served living in the community under supervision. Once the process is completed and the conviction is spent, no further punishment for that crime can follow a person around, denying them access

to work, education or things we all take for granted. In fact, a restorative plan must increase the options and abilities for both victims and perpetrators to come out of the process living a healthier, safer and more stable life, contributing to society. Only in extreme cases of severe violence would someone have a criminal record revealed to councils or employers to protect the safety of vulnerable groups like children and the sick.

So, with all this in place and evolving over in Solartime – and with all the evidence even here in Cybertime from Scandinavian countries with similar restorative programmes delivering the lowest recidivism rates in the world – I ask you again: If you had to live next to a criminal, sharing a street, a school, a bus or a workplace, would you rather they had gone through the classic US or UK Cybertime prison system, or our emerging Solartime one?

Bodily Autonomy and the Right to Be Free

Some of the most radical changes were often also the simplest; the ones that screamed: Why the fuck did we not do this sooner? Drugs, for example, were decriminalised. Full stop. The so-called 'war on drugs' had never been about keeping anyone safe. It was a pure power trip, plain and simple; a tool of control to criminalise marginalised communities and oppress them at will. Our NJS treated addiction for what it truly was: a health issue, a cry for help but not a reason to lock someone up. Within two years of that seismic policy shift, overdose deaths plummeted by a staggering 75% – much the same results as Portugal after they decriminalised and focused on their addiction health epidemic.

Another astounding moment was when sex work was legalised and unionised simultaneously. Can you even imagine? Six months after we finally shook off the old chains, the very first Brothel Workers' Co-op opened its doors in Leith. Suddenly, crime against sex workers dropped to practically zero. Why? Because they weren't operating in the shadows anymore, attacked by pimps, customers and the police. They were finally protected by the law, by unions and by a society that actually gave a damn about their safety and dignity. For all the debate around whether sex workers are inherently exploited to sell their bodies or whether it is a free choice, the one way to settle it is to make it legal, worker-owned, unionised and safe. That way, you can separate conscious sex work from sex slavery and human trafficking done by international crime rings. In Cybertime, there still is little separation and therefore no effective strategy to end human trafficking.

And then, there is assisted dying – legalised, of course, with standard safeguards and oversight. No more prolonged suffering in silence, no more forcing folk to endure a life they no longer want, no more politicians telling you when and how your life should end.

Bodily autonomy was the beating heart of it all. It was what brought these ideas under one single motion: No government has the right to dictate what you put in your body, who you sleep with, how you choose to live your life or when you choose to leave it. These are your choices, and yours alone. It seems crazy looking back that we even had to make such a statement law. It's common sense, or so it feels to me, yet here in Cybertime, the war on – and for – our bodies and minds continues at full throttle.

If I'd stood here with you, before our timelines split, and told you all this was possible – for violent crime to plummet without needing to fill prisons to bursting, that real safety could exist without the constant threat of a police state, that harm could be healed instead of just endlessly avenged – would you have actually believed me?

Maybe not. Maybe even now, as you read this – a testimony from someone from a different timeline who has actually seen it unfold (or at least the early signs) – a wee part of you is scoffing, thinking it's all a load of romantic nonsense; that humans are violent beasts at their most basic and, hence, need controlling by some state or corporation. But here's the pure, unadulterated truth about the unforeseen revolutions that are to come for us all: they always sound impossible, a far-fetched fantasy, until one day... they aren't. And then, you wonder why it took us so bloody long to get there.

9
Non-violence does not equal passivism

We are living in the Anthropocene – the era of the Sixth Mass Extinction – precisely where evolutionary forces kick into overdrive. Driven not by comfort but by the sheer necessity to survive, old dinosaur ways rapidly die off while specialised niches rise to fill the new paradigm space with systems better adapted and more resilient. The actual revolutions that define the transitional space between old and new can be messy and violent though, as the old system clings on for dear life, like an old bull roaring one last time before running out of air.

Solartime Scotland, however, is a testament to the fact that violence is not a necessary prerequisite for change to occur, despite its ever-lingering threat. Quite the opposite: Solarpunk is the epitome of non-violence. It is a system founded on trust, mutual benefit and radical diversity.

Here in Cybertime, for those of us living under a sudden surge of intolerance, bigotry and force, it's easy to mistake it for a resurgence in the power and dominance of the old cult's ways. Any thin, tokenistic veneers of civic rights and egalitarianism are rapidly stripped away as the cult retreats into the only force it knows: violence. This is not a sign of

systemic strength or vitality – it is the exact opposite. Someone lashing out in ever-increasing aggression must feel weak and under existential threat on some level, hence their need to puff their chest. As the evolution of life has shown us, these violent outbursts often precede and mark the beginning of a profound change in direction. It's a wholesale dying-off of the old guard, creating open space for better-adapted systems to expand into.

Yet, we can't simply hide under rocks and hope the old bull puts itself out of its misery. We need to actively have conversations, build rallies and organise international actions led by unifying beliefs in a better world – the world the fearful old bull senses is coming. We need to start talking about that better world more publicly and with each other because without a better world worth fighting for, why would anyone risk their skin in the game?

The up-class (the so-called extreme right) has its nihilistic story mapped out, bankrolled by billionaires who know they need fascist foot soldiers on the ground to back up a well-funded narrative. This narrative offers desperate, ignorant people the scapegoats they need to be distracted with blind hate, allowing the billionaires to continue their theft. As the 'moderate' bureaucratic capitalists collapse inwards under the weight of their own unpopularity, the rich know people will move towards radical politics and, if the public doesn't choose fear and fascism, they will be coming for the billionaires instead.

Meanwhile, the down-class (the so-called left) is constantly being cancelled, deplatformed and defunded. Now, here in Cybertime in 2025, we are witnessing the mass criminalisation of all dissent. Harmless protesters – 80-year-old grannies in England who dare to speak out against the genocide in

Palestine – are being thrown in jail as terrorists. Immigrants are being disappeared to secret foreign prisons. Trans people are being systematically denied access to public life (toilets, schools, healthcare) through manufactured bad-faith debates. History shows us fascism doesn't plateau its violence or slows down in response to public unpopularity. Unless completely smashed and eradicated, we know what the next phase of the plan is – and at that point, it becomes a vastly more bloody and painful task to root out the disease. We have to start building our new world now, out of the already crumbling remains of this fascist Cyberpunk Big C Cult before it all gets turned into radioactive rubble.

The reason fascist rhetoric is so alluring initially, even to working-class people who have the most to lose, is that its fears and scapegoats speak directly to our most primal circuits of consciousness. Fascism targets the first, or motherly, circuit of consciousness – that is, the mammalian desire for the state or a strong leader to provide safety and sustenance. Once the fascists convince us we are existentially unsafe which, after decades of the late-stage Big C Cult, many can agree with – their strength lies in the simplicity of their target, reducing the threat down to blaming our neighbours who look the most different from us. This doesn't work on any intellectual or spiritual level, but it hits home on our second, territorial (or anal) circuit of consciousness:

> 'My tribe good; other tribe bad! I am top dog; they are bottom.'

Which explains why those with a heavy imprint of this patriarchal circuit seem so cognitively dissonant – especially when challenged on the perceived criminality of, say, immigrants versus the very real, convicted criminality of their leaders. Their gaze of hatred is always downward, towards those they perceive to be below them. They feel it is their moral duty to bite down on those beneath them to establish their status in the pack, while happily handing over privileges and get-out-of-jail-free cards to those they deem above them – the super top dogs (ahem, TRUMP).

My Solartime proves nothing is inevitable, but the lesson in times of great instability and fear is that we cannot ignore people's primal concerns. We can't ignore their desire for a motherly embrace bringing them safety. The political left who assume the position of representing us doon-folk are frequently dog shit at this task, snarling from the sidelines in the hope it will change the world. They are often too obsessed with shaming people who don't use the right language, over-intellectualising or promoting middle-class elites who lack experience of real struggle. They would rather debate the intricacies of late-stage capitalism than rally and unify the people they claim to represent.

However, there is new hope in those who are finally catching on to this act – the New York Mamdanis and British Green Party Polanskis of the emerging world, who talk about the fear we are all feeling while bringing the conversation back to the fundamental economic issues. It is yet to be seen if they, too, are turncoats as soon as they transfer from the doon-class to the up, but, at least for now, they are attempting to address

what affects us all – our first-circuit sense of safety and our second-circuit sense of control and empowerment.

What Have the Romans Ever Done for Us?

> 'All right, but apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the-fresh water system and public health, what have the Romans ever done for us?'
> — From the film 'Monty Python's Life of Brian' (1979)

This has all happened before. It has the same stench other rotting empires once had. Let's geek out on the Romans for a moment. Their empire, in its later stages, became a casualty of its own colossal scale and ingrained imperial narcissism. It had expanded far beyond sustainable limits, creating a bloated bureaucracy and a costly military that ceaselessly drained resources to hold vast territories – rather than investing in internal infrastructure, food and vital innovation. For generations, military expansion was the ultimate display of power for the increasingly egomaniacal emperors. The problem with having an empire stretching halfway around the world – as anyone who served in Iraq will tell you – isn't conquering it but maintaining the peace after.

This pervasive ego born from an empire too arrogant to critically self-assess and evolve ultimately rendered it too rigid and inefficient to withstand complex challenges. The ruling elite,

proud and set in their opulent ways, remained detached from pressing systemic issues like economic inequality, rampant corruption and declining civic engagement. Foreign invaders found it easy to take advantage of this internal decay. They, however, were not the primary drivers of its collapse. It was the already rotting system which, at its core, stemmed from the ruling elites' detachment from the needs of the citizens and the calculated protection of their own wealth.

The rich were exempt from serious taxation so, to fund the massive, overstretched military, emperors had to systematically debase their currency year after year. The silver content of the denarius was reduced to near-worthless levels, essentially stealing from everyone's savings to pay for the empire's debt. This recklessness triggered runaway hyperinflation, hollowing out the cities, destroying entire trade routes and bankrupting the middle-class merchants and artisans who were once the economic backbone of the empire. If you happen to live in the US in Cybertime 2025, does any of this sound familiar?

Simultaneously, the wealthy senatorial class expertly used their influence to further evade taxes, leaving the crippling burden of maintaining a state entirely on the poor, while sending their children into meaningless wars for the whims of their supposed leaders. Civic administrators were forced to flee their essential posts, causing the state to lose both its functionality and its pool of loyal leadership, leaving it utterly dependent on unreliable, federated barbarian mercenaries (foederati).

This combination of economic instability, civic decay and military dependency – all stemming from an arrogant elite prioritising short-term financial self-interest over citizens'

well-being – made the empire too fragile to withstand the inevitable external pressures.

Some territories previously conquered by the Romans were simply so hollowed out and shattered that, when the Romans withdrew, society collapsed. The power vacuum led to a catastrophic loss of knowledge and scale, with the technological regression most acutely felt in the crumbling of vast public infrastructure. Highly engineered aqueducts and sewage systems failed, leading to a sharp decline in public health and massive population shrinkage. The sophisticated network of Roman roads dissolved, halting long-distance trade and forcing communities into isolated, backward subsistence farming. The world lost its advanced blueprints – from how to build durable roads to how to maintain clean cities. The devastating setback took centuries to recover as the void was filled by warlords and religious superstition.

So once again, if we are witnessing the collapse of public infrastructure, health, science and global trade – amplified by rising local protectionism, nationalism and tariffs – we are witnessing the effects of a collapsing empire. Human progress, just like evolution, doesn't follow a smooth upward curve; it is fraught with pits and spikes.

The American Imperial Blockage

American Imperialism, much like the late-stage Roman Empire, has been the most persistent blockage of human progress since WWII. Especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, US foreign policy has been that big tuft of rancid hair, oil, fat, screws and coins blocking the universal shit pipe, forcing

global progress to back up and fester in stagnant, commodified water.

This was acutely evident when the US prioritised the short-term profit of its pharmaceutical giants over the lives of millions by championing the TRIPS Agreement. This move suppressed the production of affordable, generic antiretrovirals during the AIDS crisis, effectively stalling global progress in infectious disease management for years and leaving millions of 'untouchables' to die horrifically in pain. Gay men's and poor Africans' welfare, it seems, didn't matter much to the US government. Concurrently, US-led institutions like the IMF and World Bank conditioned debt relief on harsh Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), forcing developing nations to cut social spending and privatise essential services, reversing decades of progress and locking vulnerable economies into perpetual debt cycles. Instead of launching a unified global effort to alleviate human misery, the US weaponised its unchecked dominance to further entrench a self-serving economic order.

This imperial arrogance extended to stalling technological shifts that threatened established profit models. The US automotive industry actively resisted and recalled pioneering electric models like the EV1 throughout the 1990s, successfully lobbying to protect the fossil-fuel economy and delaying critical climate change mitigation progress by over two decades. Those twenty years could make the difference between our entire species living or dying.

Geopolitically, the US has consistently preferred economic control and hegemony, backing and arming dictators, death squads and fascist strongmen so long as they swear allegiance

to Washington first – and allow in a military base or two. Many well-researched works have been written about how truly awful the US empire has been for the planet and its people.[1] My point isn't to revise this familiar history but to point out that, throughout this unfolding catastrophe that feels so disempowering, there are always moments of incredible opportunity too – depending on how we act.

When USAID got completely gutted by the billionaires of the US oligarchy under Trump 2.0, it was such a moment. It was potentially perfect for a timeline split to occur. USAID was never meant to be a humanitarian charity. For decades, it was used as a political tool in the spreading of American hegemony, creating crippling economic codependency on the United States, its corporations and shell fronts like the IMF and World Bank. It obliterated the internal food markets of agrarian countries by flooding them with cheap American corn and US surplus, destroying local farmers' incomes. It was all done under the banner of 'aid'. With markets suitably interfered with, it was much easier for the IMF and World Bank to now force countries into huge unpayable loans, giving them leverage for the ultimate outcome – imposing the production of cash crops or raw material extraction, none of which was for the locals to use. Even in the midst of disasters and famines, local farmers and workers would be forced to produce food products and raw materials for US-led companies, shipped overseas right away while they starved to death. This deliberate codepen-

1. For some political history, I recommend reading any of Noam Chomsky's political writing or John Pilger's journalistic work which spans essays, books and documentaries.

dency gave the IMF and World Bank leverage (so-called soft power) over the lives of entire countries if they dared rebel against doctrinal policy. The underlying threat was simple: Comply and we will feed you a subsistence amount from our rotting surpluses; rise up and we will starve you to death.

When USAID collapsed, turned off with brute force at the hands of a pair of daddy-boy fuckwits,[2] the sudden shutdown could have been an incredible opportunity for oppressed economies and emerging markets to empower local producers with the capital they had been robbed of and for global NGOs, now free from American control, to finally tackle the root causes of poverty and hunger. But that hasn't happened. Why? Why was no one prepared to take advantage of this chaos, other than the arseholes causing it? BECAUSE NO ONE HAS ANY WORLD-BUILDING VISIONS ANYMORE! We only envisage a myriad of dystopias, fetishising the 'inevitable' apocalypse we often seem to accidentally cheerlead into existence. This lack of alternative world-building, unfortunately, means there are probably millions more poor, dependent people suffering and dying today in the aftermath of the USAID shutdown. It's like a narcissistic partner suddenly dumping their victim at the side of a desert road after years of manipulation and coercive control. Yes, the victim is now finally free of their abuser, but they are also without financial means, stranded in a place that lacks basic life-supporting infrastructure. Worst of all, the resource-depleted vacuum left behind will eventually

2. The exact motives behind the USAID shutdown remain unknown. It could have been an ignoramus' way of cutting state spending with a blunt scythe, part of a wider agenda to fracture global hegemony or direct retaliation for USAID's investigations into Elon's businesses.

be filled by whoever has the most abundantly ready plan – which, by the looks of it right now, means China stepping in. It is the geopolitical equivalent of replacing a lying, narcissistic partner with a cold, controlling authoritarian one, when all the victim ever wanted was to be left to their own devices, with restored access to the resources stolen from them.

There has never been a more pertinent and important fucking time for us to build an alternative vision free from autocrats, authoritarianism and blood-sucking corporations. We shouldn't settle for the claustrophobic 'realism' that our only hope is to be passed between evil superpowers like a poor seal between two killer whales.[3] When we formed the Solarpunk society on my timeline, we were lucky to evolve into one of those progressive evolutionary spikes, rather than a dark age like the one that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. Our new, emerging society is not a techno-utopia saved by some magical, futuristic technology you don't yet have here in Cybertime. On the whole, we just radically reshaped existing systems into a vastly improved model that can adapt at the pace necessary to keep up with an increasingly evolving world. We did this using whatever we had lying around. Our goal is intersectional synchronisation and long-term sustainability, not short-term conquest, domination and exploitation. Essentially, all our systems and processes are underpinned by a new universal directive – a directive we place at the top of all

3. This is a real-life scene from David Attenborough's *The Trials of Life* series that describes an orca behaviour known as 'porpoising'. Interestingly, it has recently been observed that humpback whales help seals and other prey escape the seemingly malicious orcas and their torture play. Orcas often kill the babies of other whales, so this might be their retribution or justice.

official documents. Citizens have even put up big neon signs on top of the highest peaks in many Scottish cities, beaming through the grey clouds at night:

DON'T BE A CUNT.

10
Summary: The Great Unlearning

> We are the music makers,
> And we are the dreamers of dreams,
> Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
> And sitting by desolate streams;
> World-losers and world-forsakers,
> On whom the pale moon gleams:
> Yet we are the movers and shakers
> Of the world for ever, it seems.
>
> — O'Shaughnessy: 'Ode'

This chapter brings the first act of our little cosmic lasagna drama to an end. It all started back in 2014, at the great fork in the timeline road. In your timeline, Scotland blinked first and settled for a handful of peanuts and false promises. In mine, we jumped.

But as we quickly learned, independence under the old system was just 'Cybertime Lite'. For four years, we watched the SNP try to run a new country with an old-world manual – caving to the IMF and ending up acting like Tartan Tories,

while Westminster and its corporate financiers tried to sabotage our every effort.

Then came February 2018, the month the music changed everything. The month-long rave in front of Parliament was a cathartic party with a purpose. The bass shook the very foundations of an already crumbling system and sent it over the edge. When the government finally posted that they needed a nap and wandered off into the sunset, the vacuum didn't fill with violence but with light. Despite what all the zombie movies taught us, in our time of crisis, most of us actually pulled closer together instead of drifting further apart. We stopped waiting for some self-appointed leader and started listening to our neighbours. This was the birth of the new clans – not the old blood-and-soil nonsense, but emergent kinships based on where we lived and what we loved, from the Biosphere Guardians to the Order of the Massive Cuppa. We realised that if we wanted to avoid the Big C Cult's traps, we had to stop voting between narcissists and liars, and instead start trusting each other through the maths of sortition. Picking our representatives by lot finally killed the political snake and no other could replace it. To keep it all honest and transparent, we ditched the old justice model for the new National Justice Service (NJS). Rather than funneling the poor into private prisons, we sent Community Guardians to mediate peace on the streets. We learned that you don't need a baton to fix a broken window. You need a system that values restorative justice and sees every problem or challenge as holistically connected to the whole.

We've spent Part One dismantling all the previously invisible fences in our society and our minds – the idea that we need

bosses, landlords or experts to tell us how to breathe and when to fart. We found our feet, rebuilt our clans and started to talk to each other without constantly screaming.

All the while, I've been talking to you like normal, casually dropping in that I'm from another timeline in the Cosmic Time Lasagna. I know it's quite a lot to swallow, especially so nonchalantly. Thing is, for me, GINGERBEARD, to be here in Cybertime, the version of me that was here before had to go elsewhere. I know no one asked his consent for this cause – which is a huge red flag – but in my defence, no one asked mine either. Something tells me, though, the jammy wee bastard is doin' awrite over there in Solartime.

Here I am now, as a voice in your head while you read this book, on a shitty timeline obsessed with the best ways to kill us all. Well, fuck that! Cards on the table, I have an ulterior motive. I am not an objective narrator, simply handing you some collated information for you to do as you will. I'm actively and directly trying to convince you to get off your arse and help me turn this Cybertime more Solarpunk.

As we round up the chaos of Part One, the following part is my attempt to show you – with all the powers I can muster – that, no matter how fucked things seem or how powerless you feel, reality can still change. But we have to target the right structure. As anyone who fought Apartheid in South Africa might tell you, political freedom isn't worth the paper it's printed on without economic freedom to match.[1] That

1. To see how white Western corporations kept their power over the people, read Naomi Klein's chapter on the South African political swindle in *The Shock Doctrine*.

is because economics is just a fancy term for our collective human activity. To prove that we can change course, we need to move away from what we should do and toward *how* we can do it. Let's get down and dirty into the economics of how in the next part of this book.

YOUR TURN NOW!

Before we dive headlong into economics and the big heavy shit, I want to remind you of the commitment you made when you continued past the introduction of this book: this isn't just a story for passive eyeballs and lazy brains. You're part of this now, whatever your opinions. We are co-creating a conscious new timeline together, so time to gather your own thoughts.

Consider this our own wee Solarpunk rewiring session. Grab your laptop, a notebook, the back of an envelope or just shout it out loud in yer kitchen. Whatever works for you. Take your pick from the prompts below or be brave and try them all:

1. Spot the Cult in Your Life

Write down three ways the Big C Cult still shows up in your daily grind.

For example: doom-scrolling TikTok, rent-eating half your wage, buying crap not remembering why you bought it in the first place, hiding your addictions from loved ones.

How do these shape your mood, your personality, your relationships, your sense of freedom and autonomy?

2. Map (or Imagine) Your Clan

If you've got pals, neighbours or wee communities you vibe with, sketch them out in a mind map as your current clans. If you don't (and plenty folk feel clan-less right now), imagine the ones you wish existed or you could create or join. What's their purpose? What do you do together in your clans? What makes them feel like a home?

3. Remember Your 'Parliament Rave' Moment

Think back to a time when collective joy (a rave, retreat, festival or quiet book club) cracked you wide open. What did it teach you about yourself, humans and possibility?

If you've never had one, what kind of human gathering do you imagine would make you feel that way and why? Can you go and find one that exists already? Is it something you can plan to attend?

4. The Time Lasagna Exercise

Imagine you live across a multitude of lasagna timelines. Write down three other versions of you: One who went full Darth Vader, consumed by the Cult mindset, trying to gamify, mask, fit in and climb the ladder. One struggling to survive in the Big C Cult but resisting. One living in a Solarpunk society of your imagining.

What can you learn from all three versions? What is their message to you if they could speak to you through the mirror? How do each of them suffer and benefit from their environment?

5. Design Your Rebel Ritual

All human communities, cultures and movements have rituals. What's one wee ritual act you could start doing to remind yourself of our collective interdependence?

For example: lighting a candle for ten minutes and giving gratitude before bed, planting a seed or tree or donating to a rewilding project, sharing lunch weekly with a friend or local homeless person – anything counts.

How does this ritual feel? Does it help you ground? Does it feel silly? Why do humans need healthy rituals?

6. Draw Your Own Clan Hut

Sketch the kind of space you'd love to congregate in for a Great Clan Gathering of your own. Don't think parliament, congress or stinky state buildings. Think accessible, welcoming, inclusive.

What smells are in the air? What music is playing? How do people move inside it? How do they communicate? What do they eat? Where do they nap? What kind of decisions do policy makers shape here?

Next time you get a chance, take your sketch to an official place of power and compare them. Use your design as a counterweight to analyse your experience walking through the building and the emotions that arise.

Do you feel welcome, warm, big or small? What kind of decisions would you make there compared to your own design?

7. The Capitalist Bingo Card

Make bingo cards of absurd capitalist nonsense you might notice in an average week – *plastic-wrapped fruit from far-off lands that could grow locally, paywalls for basic needs like toilets or water, adverts using your grief or love for your child to sell you yoghurt.*

Over the next week, take them with you on your phone or on paper and tick them off as you find them.

Does this active seeing – this removing of your cult glasses – make you laugh, rage or reframe?

Does it make you feel empowered, disempowered or both simultaneously?

8. Radical Gratitude Inventory

Write down ten things in your life right now that are Solarpunk for you.

For example: compost bins, a neighbour's friendly wave, graffiti that made you giggle, free food from a friend or local project, a local tool library. Notice the Solar light sneaking in the cracks around you already. How could you contribute to opening up these cracks further?

If you struggle to find any examples off the top of your head, use this as an opportunity to dig deeper and research your local area for examples you didn't know about previously. You might be surprised at what you discover.

9. Micro-Rebellion Challenge

Pick one small rebellion this week.

For example: cycling instead of driving, a clothes swap or second-hand purchase, volunteering for an evening, cooking for pals instead of Deliveroo, going vegan for the week and counting the animals' lives you saved from needless suffering and slaughter.

See how you feel the next week. Ask yourself: What did you have to sacrifice for the experience? Was it worth it for the benefits? Could you make this a long-term habit? What's stopping you?

10. Write Your Clan Proclamation

Pretend you and your chosen clan have your local parliament for five minutes, with full attention from your entire community or nation. What truth do you speak to the world?

Write it down – funny, furious, heartfelt, chaotic. Reach deep from the personal to the political.

Read it back. Does it make you cry? Laugh out loud? Feel like burning something?

Bonus: Actually declare it out loud to someone (or your seemingly disinterested cat).

That's it – ten ways to start being an active cosmic co-conspirator. Stick your notes in a drawer and read them when you finish the book, burn them in a ritual witch's fire or share them with your community and me! The point is: don't just read this

book. Activate it. Talk about it. Reflect on and dance with the ideas. Only then can we rewrite our own timeline away from the multitude of apocalypses and towards something sustainable, loving and genuinely exciting.

PART TWO: ECONOMY MEETS ENVIRONMENT

11
The 100-Year Solarpunk Plan

The ghostly ideologies of the past – whether so-called left or right – rightfully failed because they shared one catastrophic, unspoken assumption: that the Earth will infinitely supply us as we grow, exploit and abuse her motherlike kindness. The fundamental driving question of our Solartime is not, 'How can we maximise profit?' nor, 'How can the proletariat take over the means of production?' but:

> How can all humanity progress alongside the rest of the planet, not against it?

The clan system that emerged after our 2018 Interdependence was impressively efficient at most things: managing day-to-day life and reorganising food systems, power, housing and council services. It put the specialist departments in the hands of specialist workers who had the knowledge from the old system and now also the power to manage their expertise – instead of answering to pig-headed politicians. The political roadblocks were gone and things were running smoother than ever. However, after the initial high wore off, the Great Clan

Gathering (GCG) quickly realised we lacked a long-term plan – one that helped ensure we not only diverge from the past cult out of spite, but magnetised towards a future that could actually hold both us and the planet in the picture. We needed a unified, long-term philosophical blueprint rooted in sustainability, equity, diversity and inclusion. Fuck 5-year plans. We needed a 100-year vision!

Obviously, such a project is unthinkable under the Cyberpunk Big C Cult. Any attempt to project the cult ideologies or foundational myths a hundred years into the future could only ever create a graph that runs in one direction: off a fucking cliff. That's why politicians like Trump rise to the surface – to keep us hyper-fixated on his daily brain diarrhea and without a second spare to focus on what icebergs actually lay ahead. Whatever you do, don't look up!

Having identified the lack of a united future vision, the GCG immediately commissioned the Future Vision Council (don't worry too much about remembering the name; it was only a placeholder). It wasn't some stuffy government committee filled with hacks to confirm the GCG biases under the guise of democracy; this was a philosophical open-source hackathon with organised meetings across the country and online, inviting every citizen to join. All the usual experts where present: ecologists, international philosophers, radical economists studying alternative models – and a half-drunk dude who had his idea written on the back of a beer mat he'd saved in his inner jacket pocket since 1992. You know what? It was a half-decent idea too! Who are we to judge who is an expert, after all?

The process worked similarly to how the Icelanders re-wrote their constitution in 2010 after the banking collapse

a few years earlier: brainstorming input, testing ideas and hammering out the principles of a shared future vision, all decided upon through consensus. The ideas and suggestions gathered from that process would be presented to the Great Clan Gathering, which could then decide and pass successful motions onto general referendums, adding each passed motion to our collective 100-year vision for a future Scotland. Sounds like a gargantuan project from beginning to end – but what better way to spend our time than trying to build a sustainable future that allows our children to actually inherit a living, green, gorgeous country?

Great in theory. The practice is never that straight-forward though. The clashes began right from the outset around something seemingly trivial. What do we call our new movement?

The Naming Debate

The air in the clan hall was thick. The FVC meeting was part of our national philosophical hackathon and had been going for seven gruesome hours, the whiteboard looking like a graveyard of failed political jargon with lines scoring them out one by one.

A clean-shaven man in a sharp suit – self-appointed as a rabble-rouser amidst the general exhaustion – clearly still had one foot in the nostalgic old world. He cleared his throat.

'Ahem, we must be precise so the world knows who we are. I submit we call ourselves the New Socialist Republic of Scotland.'

There was some general applause as well as jeers for the notion. Socialism has a long history of support in Scotland.

Then a weary woman, a former teacher who maintained her iron-fisted authority, slammed the table with her hand.

'Socialism? I worked for years under the last failed government that called itself socialist. All I got was long waiting lists, endless bureaucracy, strikes and promises that never materialised because the state was too inefficient to do anything. Socialism stinks of old Union white men, too homophobic and patriarchal to do anything truly radical.'

An old Union man shouted, looking somewhat offended, 'Fine then! How about the Communist Collective of North Britain? It's transparent, traditional and working-class. Long live the British worker revolution!'

He sounded like he was still living under Rule Britannia of the 1970s. There was an audible gasp from many corners of the hall at once.

'Transparently terrrrrifying to me,' came a sharp voice from the corner. A staunch working-class woman with an Eastern European accent spoke up, her eyes tight as she said,

'I grew up when it was still called the CCCP.[1] You want to talk about transparency? I will give a lecture right now on the actual living conditions under communism, and I prrromise you will run out of this room screaming to your union to protect you from the scourge of communism. Kurczę! Next suggestion, please.'

No one dared argue back.

'Anarchist Association of Scotland!' arose a young activist, face covered, dressed all in black and scrambling up onto a chair with their fist in the air.

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1. USSR or Soviet Union

A chorus of older, mildly tipsy Glaswegians erupted in immediate protest. One of them hollered at him, 'Sit the fuck doon, son. You look like ye've squared up tae a Goth Panda and got yer arse felt. We dinnae want any fuckin mare anarchy in Scotland. We have enough chaos and sectarian nonsense!'

'I've heard enough old white men to fall asleep, this is so boring! If we aren't building an alternative that is deeply feminist, we aren't doing it right. How about we call ourselves the Intersectional Feminist Front?' came a commanding voice from a Black Scottish woman with a Fifer accent, dressed in bold purple.

Before she got the words out her mouth, of course, an angry white boy in a cheese and jizz-stained hoody interrupted her, shouting, 'Not all men! Are you deliberately trying to make half the country feel excluded right from the get-go?'

The war of jargon and deliberate misunderstandings continued, eventually reaching such heights it mostly went over the heads of the rest of the room who fell into baffled, awkward silence.

After an all-too-painful pause, a quiet anonymous voice came from the back, finally relieving the tension, 'Maybe we should begin by describing the old system we have escaped from. What was it, exactly?'

Without hesitation, a comic-book nerd, still huddled over their tablet, answered without raising their eyes. 'That was Cyberpunk. That's the definition of it, the thing we lived under before: an endless machine, corporate rule, shiny technology on the surface with surveillance, control and absolute misery underneath.'

The room processed the term.

‘Punk?’ the old Union man repeated slowly, a flicker of recognition in his eye. ‘A’ve no heard a Cyberpunk before, but I like how you put it, son. But here. Are we no still punk the noo? I mean look aroon the room and the things we are aww debatin’. This feels pretty punk to me?’

There was a general nod of agreement around the room for the first time in nearing eight hours. Leaping on the first signs of progress, Fiona with the marker pen near the whiteboard jumped in. ‘So we keep the Punk bit?’ She secretly hoped this would be the first word we wrote up that didn’t immediately need a line through it.

‘Aye!’ came the crowd reply.

‘But what do we put in front of it? Something anti-cyber, something sustainable, something... brighter?’

There was a beat of silence. Then a voice shouted out, ‘Hope!’

‘Light,’ came another response.

Then an altered echo, ‘Love.’

As if by cosmic synchronicity, at least seven people across the room, including the quiet woman from Eastern Europe and the comic book nerd, all replied at the same time, ‘Solarpunk!’

Fiona, the appointed group scribe, wrote the now immortal words on the whiteboard:

THE SOLARPUNK SOCIETY

The First Summit

The name suggestion now had to reach consensus – not just from the Glasgow branch, but the nationwide convention. A

week later, adjacent to the Great Clan Gathering convening in the grassy lowlands just outside Stirling, we held the first national summit, pulling together all initial suggestions from the local hackathons. The conference opened with the national vote on what name to choose from each branch's suggestions. To our surprise, 'Solarpunk Society' won with flying colours. It was the only suggestion that broke clean away from the jargon of the past and presented a fresh term to sum up our collective vision without any prior baggage. Given the resounding cheers when it was announced the winner, other attendees must have agreed with me. Let's face it: you really had to be a cynical, pessimistic cunt to find anything to argue against it.

Despite the rapturous applause, there was an overwhelming urgency to hurry up and get to the much more pressing matters of the day. In these early days, as the honeymoon sheen wore off, the central problem staring back at us was, as always, the state of the economy. Get this bit wrong and the rest is damned along with it. There had been multiple signup sheets for anyone to present an idea or area of expertise they felt could help.

A young woman and former ecological researcher named Elara stood before a huge screen displaying global economic and ecological metrics.

'We all agree that capitalism failed because it assumed the Earth's resources were infinite,' Elara offered the crowd. 'And because of that naive belief in infinite growth, the system was designed to exponentially reward exploitation and destruction. Exactly like a cancer cell.'

After a pause, she turned and pointed to a data set. 'Take the Amazon. Not the trillion-dollar digital marketplace you buy

your junk from. No, the actual Amazon rainforest. Let's say a corporation, legally or illegally, goes in, logs a patch of jungle and reports a profit of, say, fifty million pounds. In the old capitalist economics, that's a win. As a result, GDP goes up and averages that profit out across every citizen. But in physical, planetary reality, they've destroyed an irreplaceable carbon sink and accelerated climate collapse while a tiny minority hoards all the profits,' she said, air-quoting the final words with her fingers. 'The actual monetary loss isn't fifty million; it's damage beyond what any amount of money could ever replace.'

The comic book geek, who had been at the same Glasgow branch meeting as me, jumped in without filter or pause. 'The rarer a species of fish becomes, the more valuable a dead fish from that species is. It's the extinction premium! It gets worse the deeper we go into the anthropocene. Cyberpunk capitalism incentivises the least moral and short-sighted among us to exploit nature into extinction, because the impending demise or extinction of a species or resource actually adds massive value to its exploitation. Rather than slowing down destruction, the old model speeds it up!'

Elara replied to the interjection, 'If that economic model is judged only by the reported profits from those cruel companies without reviewing the immense and irreparable damage to the planet, it is a fictional world. Much worse than the book-keeping fantasies of the USSR.'

The core problem was now laid bare: economic values and environmental values were being treated as separate, often mortal enemies, under the old cult logic.

Fiona, the scribe, walked up to the centre to join Elara. 'Think of our history,' Fiona urged. 'Like a baby in the womb, humanity's only concern until now has been growth at all costs, even if that growth harms or threatens our mother host. We were obsessed with growth – a kind of infantial megalomania. It takes a while for an infant species to realise the world doesn't revolve around us. Maybe here, today, is the first sign we are beginning to grow up.'

Elara bounced off Fiona's comment. 'Remember how Galileo was condemned and killed for heresy for proving the Earth wasn't the centre of the universe? Our Solarpunk Society today is committing a similar heresy. We are pointing out that our economics can't possibly revolve around just us either.'

'I propose,' Fiona began, rallying, 'that from this day forward, for the Solarpunk Society and for the future of Scotland, we no longer create a separation between economics and the environment. We merge the two.' Fiona then put the proposed term in massive letters on the screen:

ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

Later in the day, a breakaway group was formed to agree on a living definition of the term. The Solarpunk Society's structure is democratic and open to all citizens, yet it realised not everyone could or wanted to be a part of every single decision and discussion. So, breakaway groups were essential to let smaller groups specialise, boil things down, iron out the details and bring them back to the wider collective for general agreement. There was a hierarchical structure for sure, yet the

big difference is that information, power and influence flowed from the bottom to the top rather than what we are used to from classic top-down patriarchies.

The definition of environmental economics that emerged from the tasked breakaway action group was:

> The non-optional fusion of planetary health (the environment) and human activity (economics)

You can't measure one E without the other, like a pair of entangled particles. Environmental economics represents a staggering departure from the previous model which, when studied in detail, turns out to have been an elaborate piece of performance art – or possibly a joke that no one got for far too long.

The alternative to the Big C Cult wasn't a Stalinist planned economy. It was something much more inclusive, emergent and sexier. Sustainability is sexy after all. Who wants to get jiggy with it when you think the world is about to end!? With our guiding philosophy named and its core economic principles defined, the Solarpunk Society now had its foundation to build upon. The real work – implementing the 100-year vision – had finally taken its first steps on a hundred-mile trek. The question facing us now, as we moved from the abstract to the more practical, was whether we were replacing one set of fairytale economic principles with another just as absurd.

12
Natural Growth and Radical Abundance

Our governments and corporations made us believe that GDP increase, or 'economic growth', was the bee's knees. The thin veil of credibility that story had has fallen off. Lately, there has been a lot of talk about following the 'de-growth' movement and focusing on a Global Happiness Index instead of GDP. I love most of what these ideas stand for, but here's why our Solarpunk society hasn't aligned itself with them.

A Global Happiness Index (GHI) sounds like a banger, right? The idea of measuring a society's progress on the collective happiness of its citizens rather than their productive output is a beautiful one, famously pioneered by Bhutan. In 1972, the teenage King of Bhutan found himself cornered at an airport (there were no airports in Bhutan at the time) by Indian journalists essentially asking, 'So, your country is tiny, isolated and landlocked – what exactly is your Gross National Product?'

It was one of those attempted 'gotcha' moments designed to highlight Bhutan's lack of industrial muscle, but the young king looked them in the eye and deadpan responded: 'Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product' – or something to that effect.

This off-the-top-of-the-head, quick-witted mic drop is the origin of the Index, not the result of decades of research by some academic committee. What started as a clever bit of footwork to dodge an awkward economic question ended up accidentally founding a global movement. Whatever its origins, it has inspired millions as a galvanising idea that focuses the attention on our humanity rather than productivity. But Bhutan is no utopia.

Bhutanese are still treated as subjects of a ruler rather than free citizens. Is it possible to be truly happy living under an extreme hierarchy? Happiness is notoriously slippery to measure anyway. Countries like Norway are often ranked as some of the 'happiest' in the world, yet they simultaneously grapple with some of the highest rates of loneliness and suicide – details often lost in overly abstracted data points. So what are we actually measuring when we say 'overall happiness'? Material needs met? Hedonistic attainment? Spiritual enlightenment? Everyone has a different answer, so it seems.

Is it even all that bad to not be happy all the time? As a singular metric, happiness alone can be manipulated to excuse terrible things. It's possible to imagine a population very happy, drugged on some chemical and trapped inside a VR-induced simulation while they are harvested for their energy like is the case in *The Matrix*. Or maybe the planetary water levels rise all around them while they are blissed out, only realising the cost of their happiness once it's too late and they are suddenly drowning. There are many more dangerous ethical rabbit holes: the all-out political attack on the trans community or the ethnic cleansing of an 'undesirable' community could all be framed by bad actors as a way to increase overall hap-

piness – just as politicians currently manipulate markets in every way they can in pursuit of gaming the graphs. A GHI could become a powerful tool for population control and social conditioning: toxic positivity on a nationwide level. Ultimately, as a stand-alone yardstick, GHI is just not good enough.

Degrowth is another term doing the rounds here in Cybertime these days. But from a marketing perspective, 'degrowth' is just a straight-up dogshit name. No one is getting wet about the lips thinking about DEGROWTH. The problem with it is less to do with the agenda it puts forward and more to do with the fact that it is a name based on a negation. It sounds like a lacking – like there will be less for me and you – when, in reality, it is arguing the exact opposite. No one can make a mass movement around degrowth because of our conditioning.

What does it actually mean though, if you push past its branding? Degrowth illuminates the collective hypnosis of capitalism – the foundational myth that GDP is always a net benefit to every citizen – when in fact, we know by now it's often the opposite. Capitalist growth in 2025 usually means someone has managed to enclose and sell a once free or cheaper product or service, manufacturing a false scarcity around it for a higher profit. When a health insurance company is inclined to be less deceitful to its customers (for example, because one of their CEOs got shot to death), it can and will literally be sued by its own shareholders for failing its LEGAL responsibility to maximise profits, even if those profits are made at the expense of severely sick and dying people. In the case of US health insurers, profit growth for anonymous shareholders is vastly more important than the lives of literally millions of US citizens they are supposedly in the business of

keeping healthy. This is not health insurance, it is a private sickness tax. These horrible examples exist more than ever today when we look around, but surely GDP growth wasn't always a bad thing for the common person?

Defining Natural Growth

For decades after WWII, GDP growth was actually pretty closely tied to rising average incomes and shared prosperity across Western societies. But around the 1980s, these trends diverged sharply. While GDP has continued to grow, the benefits have been concentrated almost exclusively at the very top of the pyramid. So, the problem is not necessarily inherent in GDP growth itself. The issue, as always, is inequality. Whose interests are taken into consideration when chasing profits and who benefits from those profits? GDP measurements conveniently do not ask these questions.

The post-war social contract used to include a small but noticeable slice of the profits pie going to support emerging middle classes. Yet even they have increasingly been cut out of the equation. Workers were never considered when dividing the shares – and the planet we pillaged in the first place, even less so.

Rather than abandoning GDP growth altogether, in Solartime, we called for a realignment – a realignment between human, technological and planetary needs. We argued that growth should benefit not only human society but the rest of nature, too. Incentivising fishermen to collect and sell waste plastic at sea with funding to kickstart it all, for example, created whole new, innovative industries around it – like au-

tonomous aquatic mushroom farming. These industries all led to a growth in GDP, and everyone, including nature, was better off because of it. In the same way the late-stage disaster capitalist cult has managed to monetise human misery, we set out to monetise happiness, harmony and the restoration of the commons. One way we did that was by investing in decentralised, community-owned renewable energy grids. They made our society less beholden to mega evil corps as well as dictators of foreign petrostates like Russia, the US or the Saudis and increased GDP through an expansion of citizen power and wealth. This investment in citizens' time, safety and creativity led to a much greater ROI than whatever crumbs we got in taxes from the old energy dinosaurs,[1] which did see a vast reduction in profits. Overall, this meant GDP went up because everyone was wealthier – not just a few CEOs.

As we built new hemp and weed farms and invested in psychedelic research, we saw a massive boom in both scientific and industrial investments, as well as many new conscious travellers visiting Scotland – for the wild mountains and even wilder guided mushroom trips. This drastically increased our GDP while having a net benefit to the people involved as well as the environment, as eco-tourist companies were incentivised to keep the place tidy and something to be proud of. So far, over in Solartime, we have managed to meet our environmental targets while continuing to grow the economy – simply by seeing these goals as the same challenge, rather

1. Sometimes, in countries so deeply bought and sold like the UK or Australia, governments would even give more in subsidies to oil, gas and mining companies than they receive back in taxes – despite those companies reporting bumper billions in profits for shareholders. Madness!

than opposing ones. Growth is not our enemy nor is population increase or decrease, so long as we take into account the wider ecosystem we are growing into.

We are not technophobic back-to-the land peasants. Our innovation-driven GDP, every year for the past five years, has outstripped many previous highs. Previously underfunded and abandoned towns are flourishing as they are reclaimed and, at the same time, Scotland has seen the largest programme of rewilding in Europe. We are by far the most carbon negative country, and our waters are safe havens for long depleted fish to finally begin to heal and replenish. In environmental economics, this is called natural growth, as opposed to infinite growth under capitalism.

The Problem With Infinite Growth

Sounds too good to be true again, doesn't it? All this natural growth stuff. We are so trained to think that the way it happened before is the only way it can possibly happen again. The human creative mind is a prisoner of its own imprints from the past, so it seems.

As Jason Hickel points out in his epic book *Less is More*, if capitalism is defined by the manufacturing of false scarcity, waste and fear, then the opposite system is less about degrowth and more about building an economic model of RADICAL ABUNDANCE. Now, that is much better branding. That is a movement I could get behind and fight for!

I already listed some of our good early wins over in Solartime, finding technological and economic niches that could exist in the Venn diagram between human and environmental

needs. But I would be dishonest if I claimed that was a sufficient response to one of the greatest dragons in economic theory: the belief in infinite growth. Although no classical Cybertime economist is dumb enough to say it out loud, this is the real foundation of the Big C Cult.

The Solarpunk alternative to infinite growth I've presented so far is incomplete if all it's saying is, 'Don't worry, we can just have infinite GREEN growth instead!'. Even if an alternative energy source to oil was 90% greener, let's say, it would still eventually eat up the planet, if only a bit slower. Economic productivity – even if it's greener in comparison – left unchecked, will eventually consume the entire planetary resources. On a very finite planet, the problem obviously isn't the word 'growth'; it's the word 'infinite'.

The current Cybertime solution is simply expanding wasteful consumerism onto asteroids and into the cosmos. First off, the people striving for that are far too dumb and egotistical to successfully pull off even the first stages of complexity needed for such a venture (see Elon's expensive SpaceX fireworks). Secondly, is that really our future as humanity? Mindlessly expanding across the solar system, violently consuming everything we touch like the Vogon, Daleks or some amorphous floating space cancer?

I want us to explore space but maybe there are higher intelligences out there that will only tolerate us when we are ready to explore with kinder intentions?

Billionaire space-dystopia fantasies aside, if we don't fundamentally factor in various growth and death cycles in our economic models as a feature rather than a bug back here on

Earth, we're just postulating distracting nonsense on a boat about to go over the edge of a waterfall.

The Circular Solution

We had to start by not only designing our new spaces as circles but imagining our entire economy in cycles. The economy had to refocus from a linear build-to-break consumerism to a circular mend-modulate-and-repair communitarianism.

That didn't mean people stopped buying things. It just meant things were used and reused around the economy much more than before. This opened up space for technological development that doesn't primarily focus on massive ROIs for vulture investors from selling brand-new items we don't need that break within a week. Instead, in Solartime, we build long-life tech that can be repaired or upgraded modularly. There has been an exponential increase in R&D into recycled organic materials and new tech that can efficiently and autonomously harvest useful metals and materials from products at the end of their life cycles. It's peak alchemy: turning throwaways full of precious metals into gold bars.

Every revolution in history has led to the rise of a new class of self-appointed pricks. History shows us that if we leave societal decision-making to corrupt governments, corporations, kings or queens, all our sacrifices will only ever buy us moments of temporary reprieve between one fascist we depose and the next bureaucratic wolf in sheep's clothing that replaces them. At the same time, a political or social movement led by people who are fundamentally skint is a toothless tiger. In Solartime, we had to redirect the flow of wealth, investing and

subsidising our way out of crisis. But unlike during COVID or the recent energy shocks – where chunks of tax-paid government funds were blindly handed over to pharmaceuticals, banks and oil companies – we invested it directly in the people themselves.

How We Flipped the Script on Wealth and Poverty

It's hard to see how deep you are buried within a cult when no light penetrates from the outside. Eventually, the walls vanish altogether until it feels as though this is all there is, your entire universe shrinking down to a pinpoint. Or, if you do catch a glimpse of something beyond, all you hear about are even more violent and punitive alternatives than the reality you're in – as if the only option is to escape Fritzl's basement for Manson's bunker. Fuck that for a choice!

On the one hand, I might not be best placed trying to show you there really is light beyond the walls, given I have no background in maths or economics. But through some quantum fate, I'm the daft cunt that's stuck here with you in Cybertime. On the other hand, it is probably a good thing I'm not an economist. When was the last time you kept your eyes open listening to a classical economist for more than five seconds before you thought to yourself, *I hope he doesn't make love to his partner with that voice.*

As you can imagine, I had some initial resistance to writing this part. I'm like the dude who returns to Plato's Cave trying to explain to the inhabitants staring at shadows cast by puppets

on the wall that this is all just a cave, and there is a whole three-dimensional world out there. The problem is, we don't really have the shared language for what exists outside the cave in the light. So, forgive me while I try to explain, to the best of my abilities, what a world outside the cult walls looks like.

I was a bit reluctant to write this part and open the Pandora's box of Solartime economics, for fear of stepping into a hyper-intellectualised, jargonistic world that could either make you think I'm an idiot or, equally as bad, a boring cunt – or worse still: both! But if I were to brush over or ignore the economics of a Solarpunk world, I'd be missing out on its most vital organs: the beating heart that drives our gorgeous new planetary model – a model we have all the tools to build here in Cybertime too, should we wish to.

Inflate This, Bitch!

Let's break down some classic ponzi banking basics, so we can agree what we are up against here before exploring what the alternatives might be. In Cybertime, the rich have a stealth weapon against the poor: inflation. Everyone has heard of it, but few of us have a scooby what it actually means. At its core, inflation is a flat tax on everyone. Each year, central banks and governments devalue currency, effectively taking 1-5% of every person's unspent income without consent. Your bank account balance might have stayed the same, but its purchasing power diminished. The only way to escape this is to have enough wealth to move your money into 'investments' that will outpace this quiet erosion of savings. For the poor who have little to save and nothing to invest, inflation acts as a poverty tax. It

penalises people for being poor. This deliberate devaluing of citizen savings to pay for foreign wars is starting to sound awfully like those bastard Romans again.

We also have to confront the myth of what we think a bank is. Most of us believe banks are a simple storage service: a safe place to keep our money. They aren't simple and they don't store your money for you. They take your deposits and invest them as their capital into all sorts of dodgy shit – from weapons manufacturing to surveillance tech and AI. If they make profit with your money, they keep all of it. If they lose your money, they just hope you don't notice. If you were to ask for all of your money back at once and the bank had spent it on these gambles, they would take it from your neighbour's account to pay you. But what happens when you and your neighbour want it out at the same time? What if everyone asked for their money back at the same time? That is called a bank run. As proof that the bank doesn't store your money but spends it however it wishes, every historical run has collapsed the bank, leaving customers out to dry or, if they're lucky, partially bailed out by taxpayers. In other words, workers of the world loan their meager wages each month to a shady bank that gambles with it, investing in awful shit and, when it loses, the same taxpayer has to bail them out. The entire system is a house of cards, a violent Ponzi scheme built on manipulating the trust of its users. If we all lose faith in the banks tomorrow and demand our money back, the entire system would collapse. It might feel satisfying to imagine such a collapse but in reality, it would immediately trigger a mass land and asset grab by those same thieving banks – which is exactly what happened in 2007 and 2008. Banks facing collapse foreclosed on almost

all their middle-class mortgages,[2] deliberately forcing millions of mortgage defaults and forced sell-offs. This was particularly prevalent among Black communities in the US – a country that has forever been deeply afraid of the idea of Black people owning property or the means of production like their white counterparts.

Now, most rental properties in the UK, for example, are owned by US investment banks as a result of these land grabs. What an entirely broken system, where the banks win if they profit and still win when they lose. It's a multi-level scam, held together by creating an ever larger scam on top of it. None of this even touches upon the ultimate scam of how banks actually create new money in the first place. We can come back to that later.[3]

In Solartime, we chose to build something different. As is the Solarpunk way, we started out using the economic tools that were around, only repurposed with a different motivation and incentive structure (which we will go over throughout the next chapters). Once we brought this new framework into our society, something truly remarkable began to happen: Money simply stopped mattering as much as it used to. It was no longer a key identifier of success or the primary driver of human life. We kept a concept of money to help us trade and live, but paying off debts was no longer the sole reason to get out of bed.

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2. You don't buy a house with a mortgage – in reality, it belongs to the bank until you pay it off, which nowadays might never happen. You are still a renter, except off of the bank rather than a landlord. Mortgage, by the way, comes from the French word for 'death' and 'pledge'. Make of that what you will...

3. David Graeber gives a deep dive into the history of banking and debt in his book *Debt - The First 5.000 Years.*

The change was so gradual and seamless that almost none of us noticed our relationship with money change. But once our human souls were lifted from the constant state of paranoia and scarcity, allowed to return to a place of love and trust, money – the very thing so many used to pray for or try to 'manifest' – became an afterthought; a simple means rather than the ends in itself. Instead of scarcity, in Solartime, we mostly focused on the new connections that were coming into our lives. People began helping, gifting and serving one another – for free mostly and not because the state mandated it, but because they realised it felt good and was in their economic self-interest being both giver and receiver.

What better starting point than the currency itself for me to kick off explaining how we built our Solartime environmental economics of abundance.

13
THE LOL, OUR ECO-SOVEREIGN CURRENCY

Our new currency didn't get off to a flying start. Currencies are valued based on trust, as well as speculation around their use and stories. All currency valuations are wide open to market manipulation, pump-and-dumps or rug pulls from both inside and out. Most global currencies used to be backed by a country's gold reserves. It pegged the currency to real-world lumps of metal – even if loosely – like a ship's anchor keeping the boat from drifting too far. But US President Nixon decided to rip up the Gold Standard one day in August 1971, changing the global reserve currency to a fiat currency – one backed by nothing but trust in their central bank.

In doing so, he attempted to wipe out billions in US government debt. Essentially, it was a default without calling it one. On that day in 1971, the world changed forever – although the dollar didn't collapse overnight. Nixon ensured the dollar remained the world reserve currency through a deal with Saudi Arabia: they would sell their oil exclusively in dollars in return for US military protection. But for those who could see it, a signal had been released. We had entered the final, grubby

phase of crony capitalism – a phase marked by speculation, the erosion of public services and human rights, and a massive surge in financial products over real-world value, all while the oligarchs hoarded more and more wealth.

This was the beginning of a new phase built on pure, unadulterated, spiralling debt. The US, UK and many other countries stopped being net producers and instead fired all their workers, shut down the factories and mines and became net consumers. National government debt blew up with no ways to ever recover it. This led to a rapid acceleration in the boom-and-bust cycles of capitalism, with an increasing amount of outright pyramid schemes and scams forming all over the place. All those bubbles must burst eventually, and that's why this latest phase of cyber corporatism passes the responsibility to clean up over to the state – or, more accurately, to us, the taxpayer. Privatised capitalist profit with nationalised social debt. Nice one, guys!

In Solartime, we obviously didn't create just another fiat currency backed by a privatised central bank owned by a bunch of rich, anonymous foreigners. Nor did we build a centrally managed economy with mini-Stalins dictating every twist of every lever, or try to nestle our new economy in with the other corporate-owned bullies from the West. That niche is well and truly saturated, and to be honest, it stinks in their locker room. We went our own way, taking the best from past failed economies and mixing in some modern innovations, a healthy dose of common sense and some laughter too.

Our currency, the LOL – voted by citizens as the best name because 'money is a fucking joke' – is fully digital with a transparent, open-source ledger. We didn't use the old tech

you might know as blockchain. While that was a brilliant first draft, it was a massive energy hog. The answer we settled on came from a different kind of distributed ledger technology called Directed Acyclic Graph, or DAG. Now, that name sounds technical as hell, but the concept is beautifully simple and utterly Solarpunk. Think of it like this: A traditional blockchain is a single, linear chain of blocks. It's like a train on a single track. A DAG, on the other hand, is a living, interconnected network. Instead of a linear chain, each new transaction confirms multiple previous transactions in a web-like structure. It's decentralised, fast and uses a tiny fraction of the power of a traditional blockchain. The more people use the network, the faster and more secure it becomes. It's like a vibrant ecosystem where every new bee that joins the swarm helps to pollinate more flowers, strengthening the entire garden. In this metaphor, I'm an ant trying to explain quantum mechanics to you (I wouldn't be all that surprised if some ants knew more about quantum physics than we do).

Another key difference I can tell you about easily enough is the fact the currency is totally digital, with no printed money at all. The clan system transition required us to move over many years: most places still accepted the old English Pound while rolling out a nationwide campaign to ensure every citizen had an account with the Citizen's Investment Bank (more on that in Chapter 17), alongside a card and app to send and receive money. Rightfully, there is suspicion around digital currencies here in Cybertime, given how easily they can be used to track and spy on citizens. As if that isn't enough, 1-4% of the monetary value is lost per transaction from buyer to seller, instead landing directly in an intermediary bank that did almost

nothing of value to earn it. In Solartime, a single LOL coin circulates without banks eroding it down to nothing. We have non-profit versions of Mastercard and Visa that don't charge any transaction fees and our monetary and tax systems are truly transparent, as you will see on the next pages.

Backed by the Biosphere, Not Gold

The true innovation of our new currency lay in that it was backed not by gold, but by the ecosystem itself. Welcome to the potentially most technical bit of the entire book. We spent so long talking about the myth of GDP that we can't even imagine a world *not* built around it. Indulge me while I geek out for a moment on metric measurement alternatives to Gross Domestic Product.

The LOL, our new Scottish currency, is a form of eco-sovereign currency pegged to the Human and Planetary Health Index (HPHI) – an index which is a series of independent metrics used to cross-assess the regular health of Scotland's wilderness alongside our human health and wellbeing data. It's our gold reserve, the economic anchor that quite literally grounds us. Most hidden costs of capitalism are deliberately externalised from GDP measurements and classic financial data (they have to be for the illusion to work). When you balance your economic trade with the ground upon which it is traded, it naturally internalises all those externalities classical economists so love to hide. We no longer separated humans from nature in our calculations because they were never in opposition in the first place. What is good for the Earth is good for humanity in the long term. It therefore stands that what is

good for humanity is to be good to the Earth. That makes the most profitable system one that grows with the planet in the long term – not in spite of it.

Economists love to boil all eight billion humans down to one average boring dude they call Homo economicus. I prefer Bob. Bob makes every single decision in his life 100% rationally, using pure reason, almost obsessively searching for how to maximise his personal self-interest. Might just be me, but Bob sounds like a bit of a cunt. Solarpunk economists don't work on random numbers floating around in vacuums with hypothetical Bobs. Their offices are at street level with busy doors. To come up with increasingly in-depth and multi-referenced metrics, they talk with ecologists, social care workers, sex workers, taxi drivers, local pub owners, priests and monks, as well as scientists from every field. Three of my personal favourite metrics aren't even Solarpunk inventions. They exist here in Cybertime.

The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI): the GPI is our GDP version 2.0, adjusting traditional economic data by distinguishing between beneficial growth and 'defensive' costs. It counts personal consumption just like GDP, then adds costs for unpaid societal contributions (like parenting and volunteering) before subtracting for social and environmental harm (such as pollution, crime and resource depletion). It reveals whether a nation's financial gain is coming at the expense of its long-term social capital. Essentially, it's a tool to spot economic bubbles.

The Happy Planet Index (HPI): the HPI is a measure of ecological efficiency that calculates how effectively a nation converts natural resources into long, happy lives. By dividing a population's well-being and life expectancy by its ecological

footprint, it challenges the idea that high consumption equals a high standard of living. The HPI highlights societies that achieve peak human outcomes while remaining within the planet's regenerative boundaries.

Gross National Happiness (GNH): pioneered as a governance framework by Bhutan, GNH posits that the purpose of the state is to foster collective harmony rather than mere market activity. It evaluates progress across nine holistic domains, including psychological well-being, cultural resilience and work-life balance to ensure that policy decisions support the spiritual and community health of the population as much as their material needs.

Obviously, gathering this depth of data and professionally analysing it without bias was a massive challenge. We relied on human and machine minds to calculate and analyse the data. While these metrics were occasionally imperfect and inaccurate on their own, when cross-referenced and synthesised into our HPHI, they gave us the most informed assessment of what was happening. We no longer wanted to mask inequality but search and root out the runaway contributors. The HPHI helped us find out where we should focus our efforts first.

The Mechanism of Natural Growth and Contraction

If the overall HPHI said things were improving, our currency pool could grow, meaning we could create some more money and share it round without causing deflation or inflation. When the metrics signal a healthy environmental economy, any in-

vestment of fresh money supply is likely to increase productivity and benefit citizens overall. This process is managed by the Algorithmic Stability Mechanism (ASM) – and don't worry, that's the very last acronym I'm going to drop here.

Rather than filtering the money through commercial banks and losing most of it, new digitally created currency would be distributed in the form of an increased contribution towards the Citizen's Dividend (something we will come back to soon). If the environmental economy had issues for any reason – a crash in biodiversity or water quality – the currency would contract and we would all have to share the pain till we found a way to recover. Planetary pain became *our pain*, and pain can be a great motivator sometimes. For example, some economic productivity measured in GDP would occasionally shrink as the price of housing fell – line go down is usually reported as a disaster but in our experience, the standard of living, sense of community and general happiness all went up at the same time. This happened when more free neighbourhood childcare collectives sprouted up. It meant something that cost parents a fortune was now basically free and only required irregular volunteering, which actually helped develop another need very much lacking: our need for trust and connection. We needed each other again and that felt good. More people required less money to survive as more expensive things became provided as part of the commons. Even falling GDP, when included in our much wider HPHI, can actually balance out as a net positive overall.

This, then, was our LOL moment – the absolute financial and philosophical boot-to-the-baws of the engine powering the old Big C Cult. We swapped out GDP worship with nuanced

maps that approximated a much more relevant truth and set of priorities for most beings. We made a healthy planet our anchor. This was the pure LOL genius: by tying every single LOL in every pocket directly to the health of the whole damn ecosystem, us included, we guaranteed that the most profitable thing anyone could do was look after the collective. Harmony wasn't just some soft fairy tale. It was honest-to-fuck good business.

Captain Braveheart and the Rig of Doom

What I have avoided telling you so far is that all these metrics and measurements are great, yet still, in our early years, the economy and the state of the environment took a kicking. I never planned to be so involved in finding an answer as to why, but sometimes life sends you on the kind of side quests that end up being more epic than the main mission.

LOFI and I became friends after I plucked up the courage to speak to her that first time, back when she was working her shift as a Community Guardian. I never asked her out on a date or anything; I've always been a pro at putting myself squarely in the friend zone. We exchanged socials, shared a few funny memes and soon realised that neither of us liked small talk. When we'd meet for coffee, we went straight to the deep shit. LOFI had emigrated to Scotland in 2014, curious about what our independence could mean for the world – especially coming from a country like Germany, which is still redefining its place internationally. She too had been sorely disappointed by how the promises and dreams didn't match up to the actual outcome. She wasn't there at the month-long rave outside the

Parliament since she wasn't much of a raver back then; more of a one-on-one person who liked quiet quality time over big groups. I, on the other hand, am a firework waiting to explode most of the time, desperate for constant stimulation, action and adventure. We were never the same – nor did we ever try to be – but we went together like a morning roll and vegan square sausage.

When the clan system started to emerge post-Interdependence-rave, LOFI was there supporting and lending a hand – organising, baking, arranging spaces and making sure the finer details were attended to before people arrived. Without people like LOFI, quietly weaving the structures and holding them together, we couldn't have gotten anything off the ground. When a call-out for Community Guardian volunteers went round the clans, LOFI hesitated at first. She, like so many women, had experienced male violence and confronting them in the streets didn't sound like something she'd be keen on. Yet something inside nudged her to put her name on the list regardless. LOFI has got a way of creating a quiet pocket around her, where folk end up unpacking their heaviest secrets without even realising they've started. She must have been some kind of witch in a previous life. In this one, at the least, she's an empath through and through. But as with most empaths, she struggles to see herself with the same compassion she directs towards others. Especially here in Cybertime, we tend to be convinced early on that we are the broken ones – not the system we constantly attempt and fail to adjust to; that our greatest superpowers are our greatest weaknesses.

When I invited LOFI to one of the early Solarpunk Society meetups – officially to see what was going down, but secretly

to impress her with the volunteer work I had been doing – I accidentally dragged her into a world of international espionage and counter-terrorism that, quite literally, left us gasping for air on a nearly sinking ship as we were trying to find out what was tanking our new currency so bad.

I wish I had never considered the question. It was one that took me and LOFI on a journey all the way to the tiny islands of Shetland, in the most northerly parts of Scotland, where in the dark of freezin-yer-baws-aff night, we had to clamber onto a tiny motorless boat.

'Dude,' she recoiled, 'this is a weird-ass cruise. Where the heck are you taking me GIN—?'

Before LOFI could finish her protest, she was interrupted by her own involuntary, full-body boak as the captain ignored her attempted sentence and crammed her under an oil-stained camouflage tarp that stank of fish guts and old fishermen's feet.

'I might have been exaggerating slightly when I called it a cruise, but hey, it's an adventure!'

All colour had left LOFI's face, so I quickly added, 'You're up for this still?'

The captain pulled his chin right back into his neck, his bloodshot eyes telepathically telling me to get a fuckin' move on.

LOFI straightened – as much as that's possible under a tarp – and said firmly, with a flash of cheeky temper, 'Yer a wee jobby. But we're here now, so let's just get it over with.'

I was delighted by how naturally the phrase rolled off her tongue!

'Aye, thanks. I really appreciate it. Sorry if I ma–' but the captain's scold interrupted me from the back.

'Right. Shut it ya pair a loved-up pricks. We have a mission, mind?'

I blushed and scrambled into a small storage box up front with a tiny spyhole, looking out the side of the boat into the blackened North Sea.

Braveheart was a fisherman and the red-nosed captain of the rickety lump of wood and nails he told us was his boat. With a quick yoink and a push off the harbour wall, the sea started to rock and roll beneath us, playing right into our guts, desperate to make us spew and feed the fish all around us. It was going to be a long, freezin' trip. So long, in fact, that even the sun got bored and went to bed.

It wasn't until hours later that an immense amount of light burst through the spyhole into my box and I jolted awake. After some blinding first seconds, I could eventually make out the burning lights in the distance: a roaring plume of deep black smoke with huge flames underneath in the middle of the open ocean, rising high into the sky. I went into a full-on coughing fit, hacking and choking as the thick air stripped the breath right out my lungs.

When I had finally managed to pull myself together, I quietly sneaked out of my hiding box and crawled over to the stinky fish cover. I approached the olfactorily traumatised LOFI like I would an injured wild animal and sure enough, the second I touched her, she pounced up.

'Arewethereyet?' she muttered monotonously. It was as if she'd been saying that sentence in her head for hours on repeat.

We both temporarily forgot where we supposedly were, what we were supposed to be doing and all our supposed

fucking training as we just instinctively embraced for a deeply needed cuddle.

The oil rig looked like it was falling apart in the approaching distance. Up-close, you could see it was covered in clams and bird shit. Inside, as we discovered, was a fully functioning military operation run by the English Secret Service, MI6.

The Great Clan Gathering had deliberately turned off the last oil rig back in 2020 – or so we thought. We had decommissioned them but left them dormant, able to be reignited only as an absolute emergency measure. In environmental economics, extracting a finite resource like oil from the middle of the North Sea to pump it back and separate it all at significant cost – just to burn it for energy – makes no sense whatsoever. Not only because of the devastating impact on the environment and the future economy, but because solar, wind and wave tech massively outcompete the old polluters in almost every way nowadays.

After our independence, someone had clearly messed up. We were all so busy with everything else that no one had really kept proper tabs on all the decommissioned oil rigs. Maybe it was negligence, maybe someone got paid off. Now, as me and LOFI floated towards this particular rig, it dawned on us that the corporations the English government works for were running a secret command post just inside our upper sea border, right under our noses.

Braveheart rowed up stealthily under the cover of darkness – no engines – while we were holding our breath and squeezing our sphincters. Dangling on the edge of this so-called boat, oxygen masks on, against all our instincts, me and LOFI fell backwards into the freezing water, just as we had in our

two-day training course at the Gorbals swimming pool. We attempted to swim like seals so as not to create many waves above, but I had failed the seal-swimming part of the course five times before I passed. Now panicking like fuck, I floundered about like a big gurning fish, the nerves mixed with the movement making me need to fart so bad. The bubbles as they popped were sure to give us away, but luckily, Braveheart took the heat away from my flatulent folly.

The mad fisherman captain had 'voluntarily' signed up to take us after losing a drunken bet in the pub the night before. He bet there was less bacteria on the bar's kitchen counter than there was inside the gents' toilet. Now, Braveheart had to either eat his dinner from the toilet lid or take us out on his boat the next day. He still seemed drunk when he picked us up, but at least he had kept his side of the bargain. After he dropped us off in position and just as we were swimming towards the first deep concrete pillars that went all the way to the seabed, he rowed away into a bright spotlight on the opposite side. We found the base of a stepladder and used it to gently come to the surface, when we saw his outline in the distance. Willing as much strength as possible, he rammed his fragile wee boat into a pillar under the spotlight. After a minute... nothing happened. Collecting his breath and taking a wee swally from his hip flask, he resorted to shouting as if he had drunkenly hit his head during the collision. When that still didn't get the attention he was looking for, he moved to plan B – jumping on his half-cooked, half-drowned radio and shouting for SOS.

'Ach aye, this is alpha bravo charlie mango fuckin tango. Listen here whoever is in that bloody abomination in the middle

of the sea. A've just woke up and your bloody rig had gotten in the ways of ma wee boat. Ye've goan an fucked the rudder while I wis just havin a wee nap. Gonnae sumwan get oot here and gies a haun or wit?! OVER.'

We could feel the commotion up above. Someone had heard him this time. Soldiers were scrambled from their beds and sent running toward Braveheart's side of the rig. I swear, I could feel the commander's arse cheeks heat up as alarms went off all over the greasy joint. This was meant to be a top-secret military location that drunken Scottish fishermen weren't supposed to just bump into without them noticing.

They had taken Braveheart's bait, and it had left us a chance to complete our task. We hadn't factored in them opening fire on Braveheart, though. We thought they'd at least want to try and capture him for questioning. The guilt and utter fucking helplessness I felt was the most horrific gut-wrenching feeling of my life. I had roped this poor guy into helping us over a stupid drunken bet, and now he was a sitting duck in a rowing boat stranded in the middle of the freezing North Sea, being shot at by some kind of English special forces.

Scottish fishermen are tough cookies, though.

'Aah ye's think yer a bunch a hard cunts do yee's?' I could hear him cackle through the sound of ricocheting bullets penetrating the water. 'Why don't yee's come doon here and I'll gie yee's a fair square go, ya shower a shite? Yer nutin' but a pair a big granny's knickers. Yee's dinnae huv two baws between the lot a yees!'

Old fishermen were always mental cunts. They were our new guardians of the sea and Braveheart wasn't going anywhere without a fight. While my flight response was emptying my

bladder, his fight response was pumped up to eleven, boxing the cold, steamy air in front of his mouth. During a hail of bullets, he slowly pulled his waterproof (but not bulletproof) dreichs doon to his ankles. There we were, frozen half to death, stuck to a lawless and very angrily vibrating concrete pillar a hundred miles away from the middle of fucking nowhere, watching as a man bared his cold blue arse cheeks. He even gave the gobsmacked soldiers illuminating the scene with their spotlights a wee sneak preview of the back of his hairy baws. They were so freakishly big, even we could see them dangling proud. Everything started to feel unreal, like this was all just a simulation. Was Keanu Reeves playing William Wallace in the Scottish Matrix sequel *Bravebaws* with some protective shield shining oot his arsehole?

All this madness was definitely off-script, deeply unprofessional, dangerous – and utterly perfect. It drew all attention to the other side of the rig. All I had to do was climb up the ladder on the pillar and pull out the SWB.[1] Apparently, it would do the rest itself. Some mad cunt from Glasgow had invented the hacking device while full of speed one night at a hackathon event. He managed to hack into all the cooncil computers and wreaked havoc, reprogramming traffic lights for a laugh and making automatic doors shut on distracted screen addicts. Rather than jailing him, the Solarpunk Society gave the mad junkie genius a job designing cool shit as a result of their restorative justice programme.

His device could hack any computer from a fair distance, but I still had to get it as close as possible. LOFI's nudge reminded

1. Sneaky Wee Bastard

me it was my time to act, but I shat it. I clung to the bottom of the ladder, floating still in the putrid water, surrounded by festering, stinking waste. LOFI nudged me again and gave me *the look*. For once though, not even a woman's death stare seemed to kick me into action.

When she found out what that initial meeting was all about – the one I had invited her to for a totally non-date date – she begged me not to sign up for anything silly. The scientists did their best to explain and inspire us invited guests into action, except scientists and researchers aren't often the best at hyping things up. Dry data points sent one half of the room to sleep, and the implicit danger of the proposed mission – with no fame, money or reward at the end of it – made the other half need the toilet when the time came to volunteer. We had arrived late and were sitting right at the front, in the only two seats left – the spot in the room where the silence felt the most tense and sticky. LOFI later told me it had only lasted a few minutes, but by Shiva,[2] it felt like I had fallen head-first into a timeless black hole. I couldn't help myself and, daring not to look in LOFI's direction, my mouth involuntarily blurted out, 'FUCK IT!' while my hand rapidly scribbled my name down on the sign-up sheet, all before LOFI could rugby-tackle me away from it.

She didn't talk to me for the rest of the night. Or the next day. I tried to convince her it would all be OK and I'd be back before sunrise with fresh coffee on. She knew I was full of shit, and my bad cruise jokes and damage-limitation efforts only made

2. Shiva is the Hindu deity of destruction and transformation, responsible for dissolving the universe to allow for its eventual rebirth.

things worse. She was partly pissed because I had betrayed my agreement not to volunteer, but mostly because she knew that there was no way she was going to let me do it on my own – despite her hating the cold, boats and being out after bedtime.

Yet here we were, clinging to a fucking lump of concrete in a frozen wasteland in the pitch black North Sea, the sound of gunfire omnipresent.

Sometimes, moments like that turn a worrier into a warrior. I felt LOFI's grasp between my legs while she maintained perfectly silent eye contact.

Wow, really? Here? Now? My dirty mind twisted and turned before I even managed to recognise what was really happening. She had ripped the SWB out of the secret pouch on my inner thigh while Braveheart, his baws still half-dangling out, roared, 'FREEEEEEEDOOOOOOOM!'

LOFI took that as the starting pistol to bolt halfway up the wrought-iron ladder, ascending towards the hail of bullets despite the many missing steps.

I was in shock.

I was in love.

Like a ninja mouse perfectly at ease in the shadows, she lay against the ladder, undetectable under the feet of the stressed-out passing guard. I pissed myself – literally this time. I could feel the liquid fear rolling down my legs inside my specialised dry suit. Not my finest moment, but at least I finally knew I had to profess my love to LOFI if we survived this surreal Tom Cruise situation.

Our Braveheart captain had somehow managed to get his troosers back on and row himself into the safety of the surrounding darkness. Most of the snipers had given up trying to

kill him and instead began pinching themselves to see if they were dreaming. I think Braveheart's saving grace was the fact he was blootered – totally wasted, pished at the wheel – with the boat going more left and right than forward most of the time. I don't know if I believed Braveheart the first time he told me he knew he was not going to die. He had seen his death in a vision, out at sea, stuck in a massive storm. There was no storm tonight. Who knows if he was gifted or just psycho. Either way, he had a huge set of baws.

Right at that moment, the SWB in LOFI's hand turned green. That was a good sign, apparently. She calmly slipped the SWB up her sleeve as if she had been doing this spy shit for decades, then casually and quietly climbed down the ladder and into my shivering arms below. We had done it! Well, the other two had done most, but I got to witness it all!

'I think I really fancy you, LOFI. Actually... I love you,' I whispered abruptly to her.

It wasn't a pretty first kiss – at the bottom of a rusty ladder, where the freezing air met the putrid smell of oil and rotting rubbish, us smooshing our faces together, awkwardly clanging while trying to avoid the oxygen masks that covered most of our faces. We laughed, and once the lovers' haze wore off, we masked back up and sank under the waves, swimming together towards the tracker on Braveheart's bullet-ridden boat – or what was left of it. As we surfaced nearby, LOFI looked puzzled.

'Em, GINGERBEARD. We're going to sink if we travel back in that sieve.'

'Don't worry about the practicalities so much,' I managed to say before a long hairy arm pulled me up onto the boat.

I had never been so deliriously happy to see this man and his smelly boat. The bullet holes helped air it out somewhat and I could finally empty the piss-filled right leg of my suit into the sea. By the grace of the goddess of the sea, we somehow managed to still float.

When we finally set off, huddling under the camouflage tarp, LOFI let her weight sink onto my shoulder, gently tucking her chin into my neck.

'GINGERBEARD?' she whispered. 'I love you too.'

As LOFI turned, her face came nose-to-nose with mine. Our eyes locked and she clasped my cheeks with both hands. We smiled in silence. After a suspended pause, she pulled back involuntarily and laughed. 'You stink of fish.'

She was right.

Despite the many intense smells, we wet-cuddled as we weaved left and right, two slippery sea slugs listening to the cackles of a justifiably cocky captain. Slowly and safely, Braveheart got us back to the still Shetland shores. By the sheer luck of the salty salutations of the sea, the special forces from the oil rig never gave chase in their much faster boats. Maybe because they thought it was a trap, maybe they thought Braveheart was a ghost, or maybe they just didn't want to see his big hairy baws ever again. Thanks to Braveheart and his big blue bum, along with LOFI and her secret spy skills, we had successfully hacked the Rig of Doom.

14
From Treachery to Triumph

Once me and LOFI had had a good rest and about three showers to get rid of the stink, we headed to the Solarpunk Society office. It was there that the reality set in of what we had found. The data revealed that almost from day one of our independence, England and its corporate puppet masters had been secretly sabotaging our every Solarpunk effort. MOSS, one of the volunteer researchers, sat us down. They were wrestling with excitement and nervousness, desperate and terrified to summarise the data they had scraped from the hacked computer on the Rig of Doom.

'Operation SludgeFest. Capital S, capital F; officially disgusting,' MOSS blurted out, frantically tapping their datapad. 'The plan was sickeningly simple and they've been running it since 2017. They've been smuggling in tonnes of industrial runoff, right under our noses. I'm talking about barrels of concentrated, high-hazard industrial waste – lorry after lorry, tanker after tanker crossing our land and sea border. I think their hedge funds were massively short-selling the LOL coin, betting that their toxic assault would force a currency contraction and make those in the know massive profits through our demise. The exact same tactic they have been using for

decades. Remember the whole Gamestop drama? When they tried the same on a failing company but retail investors trolled the hedge funds en masse by last-minute buying up GameStop stocks, pushing the price back up?'

'Wait, forget Gamestop for a minute. Whit the fuck are you sayin' about our situation? There's a huge clandestine mass poisoning of the entirety of Scotland, all in an attempt to contract our new currency because we pegged it to the environment?!'

MOSS nodded and my eyes widened.

'They secretly poison our ecosystems so that people and animals get sick, the metrics go down, the currency contracts – and we all lose money because of it? Wait–' I interrupted myself, 'what about the citizens of England? They rely on our resources too! Water for example. Whoever is behind this obviously has no allegiance to them whatsoever since they're making huge amounts of money betting on their environmental terrorism succeeding?'

MOSS nodded again. 'Essentially yes. That's what's been happening since 2017 it seems.'

'Fuck me, that's a lot to take in.'

My head was spinning.

LOFI used the pause to jump in.

'Right, that's totally fucked up. What do we do now? We can't suddenly start checking every single lorry and boat coming from England.'

'If it only were a few boats and lorries,' MOSS said. 'They've been aerial spraying! Using their military spy planes and drones that our radar can't detect to dump forever-chemicals miles up in the atmosphere. The data trail is conclusive: they knew these

PFOA and PFOS derivatives cause multi-mammalian cancers. That's deliberate ecocide. I'm sure it must be a war crime of some kind? And they've been tampering with our weather, too! Injecting heavy metals to induce floods in the Central Belt, while likely triggering those droughts last year in the Highlands. We even found evidence they might have leveraged HAARP technology to deliberately excite our ionosphere for even more extreme localised weather events.'

'My Belenus,[1] this is proper James Bond shit we are up against,' I whispered. 'It's like they were trying to poison us from every possible angle at once. Stamp out our environmental economics alternative experiments before it could even begin. Shit, are we the new Cuba?'

MOSS nodded sharply. 'It's a blockade made of toxins. Have I mentioned they've flooded the Gulf Stream with human waste, too? All of that shit directly swims up to pollute our new protected waters. It's an absolute disaster!'

LOFI had clapped a hand over her mouth and stared at MOSS in silence.

They leaned in, their voice now dropping to a theatrical, anxious whisper, and continued. 'I saved the worst bit for last. Someone, an internal operative, has been using micro-explosives to systematically breach decommissioned underwater nuclear waste facilities, causing a slow-burn, steady-state leakage of low-level nuclear waste directly into the Clyde estuary. They've been doing this for the past two years. The leakage rate is terrifying, but it was designed to be just below the

1. Belenus is an ancient Celtic sun god associated with light, healing and the seasonal festival of Beltane.

threshold of immediate regulatory alarm. This is worse than a devalued currency.'

I was about to faint and LOFI looked like she'd be right behind me. Since there was no more comment from our sides, MOSS concluded their bombshell report.

'We have to depopulate the entire upper Clyde valley. Now.'

'Seems like the English didn't just leave the jannies behind at Faslane Base,' was the only retort I could muster.

We had trusted the smile, the British politeness of our counterparts down south. We knew they weren't happy with what we were doing but never truly considered the intricate levels they would go to to destroy us – even hurting their own citizens! I guess they were just as expendable in whatever game they were playing, and we weren't the first to fall for the smile. Millions of their victims have seen it before: *the British Empire where the sun never sets*, which – as many might astutely point out – means even the sun doesn't trust the British in the dark. England has a long history of viewing Scotland as their dumping ground: from the Highland Clearances starving out our clans and subsistence farmers to make way for their sheep, to historic amounts of unreported nuclear dumping at Faslane and across Scotland. The treachery goes way back and continues to this day. Like a sullen narcissistic ex, it's as if they are now telling us, 'If we can't have you, no one can!'

We weren't going mad at least. The currency was tanking, aye, but we finally knew why – and it wasn't the fault of our Solartime efforts. If anything, they were mitigating the horrendous acts of environmental terrorism.

What the fuck were we going to do about the emergency on our hands? Go to war? No one had any desire for violence. It

was blatantly obvious what shitholes that would lead to. Maybe though, if we looked closely enough, hidden in the chaos, there were some new possibilities – new frontiers of opportunity.

'Most urgent priority is the evacuation and clean up,' MOSS said. 'The second is defence to save the environment and the economy. The ESC design has a huge vulnerability: if the HPHI metrics crash, the whole money supply has to contract. We need a firewall if this happens again.'

LOFI had overcome the first shock and snapped her fingers. 'A sovereign wealth fund, like the Norwegians? A rainy-day fund?'[2]

'Exactly,' MOSS affirmed. 'A precautionary reserve. We need to invest some taxes from our new economies and convert them into a strategic reserve of highly liquid, external assets – like foreign currencies and valuable metals, for example. This reserve might buy us enough time to endure and even clean up the unexpected mess without complete financial paralysis.'

I nodded slowly. 'And the HPHI itself? If the value of our entire economy is pegged to some data points, what stops a politician or a corporate prick from bribing a bureaucrat or two to fudge the numbers like some Soviet crop yield report?'

'That's why we can't rely on a single monolithic metric. Our HPHI must be a transparent, high-dimensional basket of indices. Hundreds of independently curated and audited stats with multiple overlapping inputs. If anything, uncovering this

2. Norway's $2-trillion-plus sovereign wealth fund holds roughly 1.5% of all global listed equities to secure the nation's post-oil future. By investing surplus petroleum revenues strictly in foreign assets rather than at home, it shields the domestic economy from inflation while ensuring national wealth isn't wiped out if oil prices crash.

treachery tells us we should expand our metrics beyond our own borders and include the whole planet. Corruption is a lot less likely with multiple cross-referenced vantage points.'

When the English launched their dirty war, their goal was clear: to deliberately poison the metrics of our Human and Planetary Health Index (HPHI), triggering the Algorithmic Stability Mechanism (ASM) to contract the LOL and send our entire economy into a death spiral. We had tried to internalise all the 'externalities' and realign our economy with the environment and humanity. Now the old bulls of the Big C Cult wanted to weaponise our greatest strength against us. They bet big money that a small nation – seemingly so chaotic from the outside, struggling to find its feet – couldn't withstand such targeted, widespread damage.

They were wrong. The catastrophe didn't destroy us, it was our catalyst. Once the cat was out the bag, it triggered a state of furious hyper-innovation to find solutions. The idiots at the wheel of the Big C Cult saw, once again, their tactics didn't work – in fact, they had the opposite effect. From embargoed Cuba to Iran, the more they squeezed and tried to choke the people, the more the people unified and galvanised resistance, and the more innovative the solutions became.

Fleet Melty McMeltface and Friends

Built on the newly reinvigorated high-tech Clyde shipyards, our fleet of autonomous boats does exactly what it says on the tin. Led by the flagship enterprise Melty McMeltface and built specifically to counteract the surge of illegal ocean dumping, Melty and the gang have turned a problem into a solution. Not

with guns and million-dollar torpedoes, but by going around autonomously collecting oceanic and fresh-water plastic and waste – shite left by fishermen and now the English government. The ships melt it down and reform it into different varieties of pellets that are fed to various genetically trained mycelium. Most of the resulting mushrooms aren't the tastiest for eating, but they have tons of medicinal properties and can be used as a cheap leather replacement. The boats, with their self-generating mycelium farms and automated waste collection, have robotic arms that pick and package the harvested mushrooms, too. When they come back to dock, they drop off crates of mushrooms ready for distribution, grab some empty crates from the last boat and head back out. Their combo of wind, wave and solar power means they only need to come back to shore when they have a full batch of mushrooms ready to share at any of the collection points that have popped up all around our rugged wee coastline. Short of annual maintenance and any upgrades, the fleet of boats hardly ever interacts with humans. In fact, they speak a lot more with animals than humans using their MLG (our term for AI) brains. That's because the boats also serve as autonomous researchers, recording the sights and sounds of the sea to help track wildlife numbers, with some even trying to learn the languages and dialects of local dolphins, whales and other curious beings that call the sea and lochs their home. One boat even claimed to have conversed with Nessy up in Loch Ness!

The whole project is run by former fishing communities that had almost died off completely. They do occasionally go out with the boats when they want to – trails of dolphins often follow the boats, as curious about us as we are of them. But

no one needs to be taken from their families for weeks on end anymore. This is not a project run by one single evil corp with vulture capitalists funding it, looking to expand their profits annually. This is a community-owned project from inception to completion. Fishermen don't need to identify or squabble over who owns the boxes of mushrooms returned to land because they are everywhere. This new abundant harvest, appearing on our shores, has led to the creation of countless new businesses and industries – vegan leather, artists, shoemakers, fertile composts for farming; you name it. Our new nationalised pharmaceutical industry loves them too. The mushrooms have an incredible ability to suck not only microplastics but also heavy metals out of cells and organs. After a medicinal mushroom purge, your turd is so heavy it might crack the toilet bowl. A worthy side effect, I'd say, for the health benefits after decades of getting slowly poisoned.

Rewilding the Clyde

As for the nuclear waste, that was a bit more tricky – given how close it was deliberately dumped next to our most populated city. It certainly cleared up the debate about what area we should rewild first. Luckily, the radiation had been discovered early enough and stopped at the source. After the evacuation, the River Clyde was filled with floating mushroom farms and bioluminescent algae that glowed at night. They did the job, containing and clearing the worst of the radiation poisoning and stopping its spread.

Animals came back in droves to the newly cleared land near the water. They adapt way better to radiation than we ever

thought possible. Loads of scientists are building on a body of work started in places like Chernobyl, revealing epigenetic secrets of life on Earth and our innate ability to survive and even thrive under high radiation. Voles, fish and plants all massively increased levels of antioxidant production as an epigenetic defence in high-radiation zones. Now, in Scotland, we got to witness nature's response live. These were not dead zones locked down for a hundred years; they were rapidly becoming wildlife hubs with thriving non-human communities and rebounding biosystems, all despite the contamination. What does this tell us about the impact of our civilisations on the rest of life on Earth? We are literally worse than nuclear fucking radiation!

I remember the first time I saw a beaver share a passing nod with an otter floating by, soaking up the glistening sun bouncing off the Clyde. They had floated downstream from their new protected haven up the road. Gone were dirty nappies, shopping trolleys and junkie needles. When I left Solartime, we were still working out how to handle the toxins sprayed into our atmosphere, most of which had blown out to sea, but the English had rallied everyone behind a rewilding project that would have otherwise taken decades to achieve. Rather than trying to heal a deep infection, this ecological terrorism forced us to cut out what we couldn't fix and let it regrow healthily according to its own nature.

Yes, it did bring about unavoidable large-scale housing disruption with huge relocations – but, rather than destroying functional communities, this forced relocation actually helped build many new ones, especially in former dysfunctional areas. With our booming new community-built and common-owned

housing market, no one was left without a home. Not even temporarily.

Our rewilding efforts wouldn't have had the impact they did without the many international volunteers, innovators and scientists. Thousands from across the globe answered our call and came to address the ecological emergency – many hundreds from England too; and an overwhelmingly large number from formerly oppressed colonies, like sub-Saharan African countries, flood-prone Bangladesh and many previously war-torn countries in Asia, still suffering from the side effects of American and European chemical and nuclear weapons, wars and experiments. These were people who knew struggle, resistance and people power. They had gone through their own dark nights of the soul and come out the other end, all with a smile on their faces – contrary to the English orchestrators whose faces dropped with each attack that was turned into something beautiful.

Scotland used to be – and technically still is – a temperate rainforest. Yet instead of lush mossy forests everywhere, we inherited a nation that was mostly barren, windswept and dying after centuries of exploitation, cutting, poisoning, over-farming and over-fishing. Rather than finish us off though, the English eco-sabotage inspired an emergent, community-led immunity response; one that had been dormant for centuries. We are not completely over the hill yet, but we are on a healing course. Whatever shit they flung, we just kept using it to power our innovations until eventually, they stopped feeding us new ideas. Every international volunteer, many of whom stayed for months and years even, took their experiences and experimental results back home to their countries. Just like

the mycelia on our Melty McMeltface, the Solarpunk wisdom spread like seeds in a summer's breeze around the globe.

If there was a pivotal learning in this episode for me, it was that even though our Interdependence movement began in Scotland, it couldn't be nationalist. It had to be internationalist in the fullest sense – meaning our new currency and its reserve couldn't focus only on Scotland either. We started feeding it with data from around the globe which meant every Scot and Scottish business was incentivised to build, heal and grow in line with the entire planet's needs and happiness. We became a wee outward-looking nation of innovators, inventors and empowered doers, focusing less and less on identifying as Solarpunk Scotland and instead as a Solarpunk planet. A Solarpunk star system. A Solarpunk MULTIVERSE!

15
The Chains We Didn't See

I remember the first small-scale public debate me and LOFI organised as volunteers for the Solarpunk Society. You might recall that the role of the society was to stir up a national discussion and vision for the next hundred years at least: What kind of radical thinking could lift us all up? What kind of profound ideas could target the root of our problems? While the Great Clans got to work tackling the immediate and emergency needs of our wee island country, the Solarpunk Society zoomed out and focused on the bigger picture.

We nervously chose to hold that first debate at *Encoded with Love*, the new, fully automated robo-coffee shop in Edinburgh. It was the first café of its kind in Scotland. The interior design caught me by surprise when we first rocked up to scout it out as a venue. I expected a bland steel square with clunky, cold robots fucking up an already burnt coffee. I couldn't have been more wrong. I don't know if they were inspired by the new organic feeling of the temporary autonomous spaces being designed for the Great Clan Gatherings or whether great ideas simply emerge simultaneously all over the place, but the whole café building was round – round windows, round tables, round walls dripping in deep green forest plants draped

over every sexy curve. There were barely any straight lines anywhere. Even the bathroom mirrors were cut into the shape of a small pond, surrounded by foliage, with your face reflecting back at you as if from the still water. The ground wasn't concrete or even wood. It was live-cultured earth with grass full of worms. You sometimes found one wriggling between your bare toes, which was equal parts cute and fucking disgusting. Best thing yet, the coffee was epic! No syrups or minty mocha mega skinny lattes to cover up the pish-water coffee made with ground-up cockroaches;[1] just smooth single-origin beans, grown and directly sourced from specialty coffee farmers in one of our new partner countries.

Scotland had started to loosely pair with a lot of countries we used to ignorantly call third-world, a horrible hangover term from the Cold War. We were slowly becoming global partners – but not in some colonial 'soft power' bullshit way. We started sharing knowledge and surplus resources with Solarpunk-inspired projects and communities around the world that called on one another in times of need. No exchange of money involved, only gifts and friendships – like the gift economies that still exist across the South Pacific Islands. Gift economies both build and display strength by gifting to their neighbours rather than warring with them. This was the beginning of our attempt to build modern gift economies across the world. Most

1. I am sorry if this ruins your coffee experience forever, but commercial pre-ground coffee contains insect fragments due to how often the stockpiled beans are infested. Horrifyingly, the US FDA allows for up to 10% of green coffee beans to show signs of insect damage. Go for direct-trade specialty coffee instead if you're not a fan of cockroaches. It's sold as whole beans, and infested beans are sorted out rigorously so they don't ruin the flavour profile.

of our international connections weren't government-to-government anyway; they were more often business-to-business, community-to-community, friend-to-friend. Unlike under the oppressive world market where coffee prices are set by speculation, not the quality of the bean, the ties we knit were deeper and incentivised quality. Our new relationships and economic arrangements meant farmers could plan ahead for once, paid throughout the year, owning the fruits of their labour. Meanwhile, Scotland, with many retailers being non-profit worker co-operatives, could become renowned as the home of quality and often organic specialty food and drinks for fair prices. For every new relationship that was built internationally on trust, kindness and mutual aid, well, that was one new farmer, family business or community a little bit freer from corporate control. And this new kind of international trade – it wasn't charity for us; it was proper good business. Us Solarpunk Scots couldn't bring down the old cult and its rigged markets in one fell swoop all by our wee selves. So we set out to build a global trust network from the ground up, and what better place to begin than with communities based in less developed countries that had historically suffered at Scottish hands during the British Empire? We had a duty to finally begin the almost impossible task of healing Scotland's complex colonial history. Yes, in many ways, Scotland was England's first colony (along with Ireland), where the English aristocracy pioneered their techniques of ethnic cleansing and divide-and-conquer (religious sectarianism). They attempted to breed out troublesome populations and, if that didn't work, they would starve them. We are watching those exact same settler strategies unfold in Palestine, another former British colony, today. The British

trained a terrorist unit of soldiers in Ireland called the Black and Tans, as well as the Auxiliaries, to harass, shoot, disappear and kill the local civilian population. When the so-called Troubles ended in Ireland, most of those terrorist soldiers were sent to Palestine – still under British rule – to once again terrorise the local civilian population and sow as much chaos as possible. Netanyahu, Putin and Trump all learned their rule-through-chaos strategies from the British Empire. Still to this day, no matter who the English vote in, they will be 100% committed to supporting the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Palestinians. It's a strategy that has been going on for hundreds of years – a strategy first tested out in Scotland.

During these hundreds of years of global British occupation, some Scottish aristocrats and entire cities benefited massively from participating in the spoils of the Empire. Scotland wasn't an independent country at the time, so we can argue about how much Scotland, as a nation, can be held responsible for the crimes of our occupying force, rather than a specific social class who were allowed to reap the rewards. Yet, unlike Ireland, India, or all the other English colonies, Scotland economically benefited during the peak of the Empire's exploitation – in terms of jobs, infrastructure and money flow – leading to exploding population growth. Glasgow had almost twice as many people living there in the 1930s compared to its post-industrial shell today. Of course, the spoils of war were never shared equally. The Scottish working class suffered massively under horrendous working conditions for pitiful wages. Even the weans were forced to work 18-hour shifts in horrendously dangerous and poisonous environments, pretty much as soon as they could walk and talk, many of them stolen orphans

abandoned after wars. As the wealth of the Empire grew, so too did the violence of enclosure.[2]

Still, we can't deny that Scottish cities are built on the money of slave trade. Although we, the people, aren't directly responsible for slavery (some of our working-class ancestors even rose up against it), we nonetheless do all currently benefit from public parks, museums, roads, buildings and services paid for, in part, with the wealth stolen from other nations and extracted forcibly from the bodies and souls of enslaved humans.

It was in 1986 when the city of Glasgow deliberately changed the name of the square in front of the South African Apartheid Consulate to Nelson Mandela Place. The racist government was in full swing, murdering the Black majority and imprisoning 'terrorists' like Nelson Mandela with the full support of the British conservative establishment. I fully approve of that level of trolling from Glasgow City Council – deliberately forcing a bunch of South Africans to write 'Nelson Mandela Place' on every single piece of correspondence leaving their office, proclaiming the name of their adversary as he fought for equality from one of their jails.

While Nelson Mandela Place is a beacon of hope for a more inclusive, less racist future, here in Cybertime it remains, to this day, an island surrounded by 62 other Glasgow city centre streets and squares still named after slave traders – mainly tobacco merchants during the peak of the Empire. Just off Nelson

2. Enclosure is the process of barricading and bordering up common lands to sell or, more often, rent for a profit – all for the self-anointed owner class, trapping the working class (Scottish and English alike) in their factories and poorhouses. In many ways, a working-class Scot had much more in common with their English colleague than any aristocratic slave-owning Scot.

Mandela Place, for example, is Buchanan Street, named after a Scottish landowner who enslaved over three hundred people in the British colonies of Virginia. Or Glassford and Ingram, business partners and brothers-in-law whose massive fortunes were entirely dependent on the transatlantic slave trade and forced labour on US-American plantations. Sadly, there are countless more street names to choose from.

Mandela Place was a proud troll. Getting racists to say Nelson Mandela over and over transforms the energy in the people speaking. But it works in the other direction too. If we are walking around cities, unintentionally proclaiming the names of violent racists and slave owners, that affects our collective subconscious. The people who named those streets and built the statues of warmongers abroad knew the power of symbols. It doesn't seem a silly concern after all, wanting to reassess street signs and statues of violent fucks, even if they go back more than two hundred years.

Back in Solartime, we were busy building friendships abroad which simultaneously brought up a lot of shame around the colonial hangovers coating our towns and cities. It wasn't a good look or feel. I remember they ran a national contest to suggest updated street names that felt more fitting for our new interdependent communities. This surprisingly got a lot of media attention, not just in Scotland but globally. I remember seeing a Japanese news crew running a piece about the history of the slave owners whose names were removed. For me, that turned a seemingly trivial matter into something fucking spectacular. As the world watched, including the independent peoples of our previous colonies, the votes came in, the top five contenders being:

5. Equiano Street (Formerly Ingram Street): Named after Olaudah Equiano, the freed slave and author who toured Scotland in 1792 to challenge the Tobacco Lords on their own turf. It felt like a long-overdue recognition and invitation for him to finally stay.

4. Weavers' Solidarity Way (Formerly Cochrane Street): A nod to the 1787 Calton Weavers who went on strike against the very merchant lords the streets around used to honour. It signaled that the new Glasgow valued the workers who built the city over the men who merely owned the ledgers.

3. Taps Aff Terrace: While decolonisation historians were pushing for recognition of oppressed voices, this had to make it into the top five too – a tribute to the three days of sunshine Glasgow gets a year, where the removal of shirts becomes an unofficial national holiday and mandatory civic ritual.

2. Yer Maw's Meander: A late-entry dark horse that nearly took the top spot. It was defended by the supporters as 'an inclusive tribute to the matriarchal backbone of the tenement system', though many conspired it was just a way to make Google Maps insult you before you reached your destination.

And the most popular new street name, of course, was:

1. Streety McStreetface: Because, despite the global media attention, the Japanese news crews and the deep, soulful reckoning with our imperial shadows, we are still a nation that cannot be trusted with an open internet ballot.

The street renaming was a resounding success, with almost everyone loving the outcomes. As Mandela Place grew from an island to the norm, it genuinely boosted national pride but also tourism, especially from former colonies, whose people wanted to visit our new Fuck Colonialism Museum. The old road

signs weren't destroyed of course. We respectfully put them on public display. Some artists had built a huge bin outside the museum, ten times the size of an average Glasgow bin, where each of the street signs could be found inside.

What to do with the old imperialist, colonialist statues? That was a bit more tricky. There's a particular breed of man who, for some possessed reason, just loves to defend statues of old British racists. 'Yer da' defends statues,' someone might shout at you randomly on a Saturday evening in Scotland.

In the end, we didn't destroy them either. They were placed in the new Fuck Colonialism Museum with updated signage accurately portraying the history of violence, murder and racism they partook in and perpetuated. For the truly worst cunts' statues though, a new plaque wasn't quite good enough – like for the statue of fannybaws-on-a-horse Field Marshal Lord Roberts, the one that used to be in Kelvingrove. He was the architect of some of the first concentration camps, burning, starving and wiping out tens of thousands of innocent women and children. For statues like this, we built a pulley system that allows groups of museum visitors to rally together and throw the fucker in the Clyde where he belongs. The museum drags him back out afterwards so future visitors can rinse and repeat.

Many Indian visitors enjoyed to dunk Lord Clyde's statue in the Clyde after he was removed from George Square, probably on account of his suppression of the 1857 Indian uprising against British colonial starvation and rule. He was responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Indians, scorching homes and lands, and even tying rebels to the heads of cannons before blowing them up. Not enough pigeon shite in the universe to drown these utter worst cunts in. Hence, we assigned

them a fate of eternal waterboarding instead. If you happen to have a da' who protects statues, do you reckon he knows who he's actually protecting?

La Pasionaria down by the Clydeside in Glasgow remains my favourite statue in Scotland and, can you believe it, is still the only statue of a woman in the entirety of Cybertime Glasgow. Not so in Solartime. After we rehomed the most violent warmongers' statues to the museum, there was a huge investment in public art installs of people that modern Scots are truly proud of – people who actually helped lift humanity up rather than trample on the lives and rights of innocent strangers abroad.

Encoded With Love

Anyway, enough about road signs and statues. The coffee! I was telling you about how good that cup of coffee was at the robo café. Maybe it was the ingredients – the blend of directly sourced specialty coffee beans mixed with Scotland's now famous oat milk. No, there was something more to it than that. My mind couldn't stop thinking about it. How on earth could this coffee be made with so much love by a machine, an object? I mean, is the AI just really good at mirroring something as profound as love, or is the robot actually experiencing love at a primary circuitry level? Are circuits, zeros and ones, even capable of such things? How would we know? Shit, it's the classic *Blade Runner* replicant scenario.

On second thoughts, does it matter? If it looks, smells and farts lovingly, rather than arguing aimlessly, shouldn't we just respond with love anyway? There is a deep-rooted Western

philosophical tradition that has been trying to convince us against such folly for centuries; one that has gaslit us into denying our instincts and desires to love and be loved and instead to see the world as a moral binary – those with souls (worthy of moral consideration) and those without. Dualists like Descartes and his Enlightenment buddies would have us believe that any expression of love, pain or connection in a non-human entity is all imitation – not just in robots but in all other non-human animals. (I suppose there weren't many AI robo dogs about when Descartes was, but we can take a fair guess at what he would say if there were.) He told his students that even though we may think we see pain in animals or feel their love, don't be fooled: for they are all simple automatons.[3] He preached this gospel of dualistic reasoning often while nailing all four paws of a dog to a wall, then cutting the dog open alive, without any anesthesia (which didn't exist yet, nor would he have used it if he could). Even when the hall was filled with the screams of seeming agony from the dog, he tried to convince his students these sounds were no more a sign of pain than if you cut a violin string with a bow and it made a sound. He and his enlightened associates cut open thousands of animals alive, even slicing open eyeballs as supposed proof of his theory that animals have no rational soul and therefore feel no pain. They are but mere beast machines ('bête machines'), no different from a mechanical device at a local factory. Students witnessing this brutality no doubt reacted

3. An automaton (automata is the plural) is an abstract self-propelled computing device which follows a predetermined sequence of operations automatically. It has no free will or consciousness, and it is no more able to feel pain than your toaster.

severely, vomiting, crying or running out the hall. They were the weak ones, the ones that trusted their instincts and listened to their ignorant hearts rather than the cold, pure, enlightened logic of Descartes and his fellow torturers.

Nowadays, we rightfully recoil at the thought of such brutality. It is inherently obvious to us that animals, especially our pet dogs, are sentient. Compared to how some humans treat each other, dogs seem to have a divine capacity to love, protect and always forgive. They miss us when we aren't there. They love us and would save our lives if they had to. They feel pain sometimes. I wonder, did Descartes' god in the sky, the granter of souls, simply drop a huge Monty Python finger one day in our early evolution, zapping some Homo sapiens with consciousness, feeling and all possible suffering? Were we automata before, then one day suddenly flooded with depression, anxiety and existential dread? What a fucking dick. Descartes! Sort yer god oot, will ye!?

It all seems wildly preposterous and stupendously sadistic when we think about it. But what if I told you this philosophy, this Cartesian dualism, became the very foundation of Western belief? A convenient dogma (what an ironic word, considering Descartes' treatment of dogs) wrapped up in pseudo-scientific academic writings with philosophical seals of approval; something that was necessary to drive the sadistic violence of the industrial revolution, European colonialism and genocide across the globe – all done under the name of 'civilisation'.

To this day, people who live in societies with abundant food options use this exact philosophy to justify their investment in a global genocide: choosing to regularly eat meat. Whenever the conversation comes up, trying to rationalise their eating

habits, many of them refer to this sadistic Cartesian dualist philosophy. To justify a double moral standard, it is necessary to distinguish those on the receiving end of our violence as categorically different from ourselves. In order to love and protect your human children and pet dog while, at the same time, paying for the murder of multiple other animals, it's necessary for the brain to lean on some philosophical 'othering' to explain the cognitive dissonance. It is just a fact about us humans that even the so-called best among us are conflicted, often hypocritical, completely dissonant mother lovers. I have met the most fierce defenders of their community, the staunchest human rights activists, worker revolutionaries, feminists and civil rights proponents, yet most of them had no issue in explaining their ideals and campaigns to me while chewing down on the flesh of a tortured, sexually abused, enslaved mother. There are Free Palestine protests full of anti-genocide activists who, without thought, pay a corporation to force (often migrant) labourers to steal, imprison and kill children and mothers from different species. Most of those species' males are murdered straight away, whereas the females are separated and caged as babies, artificially inseminated as soon as they are fertile (an act we would call rape if it were a human) and slaughtered when they pass peak-fertility profits. Many of us might hate watching videos of ICE in the US stealing people from their homes in the night. Then, at the weekend, we take our kids to the zoo so they can laugh at a gorilla in a glass cage whose mother was stolen from Rwanda and who has lived their entire existence in a cell no bigger than your living room in the bone-chilling British damp.

It is true that there are some humans who have no choice whether or not to eat flesh to survive. But unless you have a rare gut disease, are an Inuit reading this from the frozen Arctic or are that hypothetical person living on a deserted island with nothing to eat other than a single pig, that probably doesn't apply to you. In fact, rather than the classic deserted-island hypothesis, we can ask another one in its place: if you lived in an abundant utopia where you could eat a wide variety of foods, wear diverse clothes and be entertained in more ways than any king or queen in history could have dreamt of (without any of these options requiring the enslavement of others or animal sacrifices to the altar of taste) while, at the same time, easing the burden on the planet – would you still choose to pay an anonymous person to kill on your behalf?

We can protest the unjust violence in Palestine and around the world but we don't have direct control over those bombs being dropped. Politicians do. (You could argue we should stop paying the taxes that fund them, I suppose, but that's still not direct.) The violence against animals pushed to extinction in the wild and enslaved in captivity, on the other hand, is directly under our control. We don't need to protest because the perpetrators of that violence are all of us, not just politicians. We make those Cartesian choices each time we shop for food, buy clothes or makeup, have a coffee or eat dinner at a restaurant. Do we agree that all other non-human entities have no rational soul, feel no pain and have no capacity to love? Would that give us the right to end their life?

Cartesian dualism might stand in direct contradiction to everything we know about evolution and our shared origins as well as our human empathy and instincts, but if we intellectu-

ally gaslight ourselves just enough, it gives us the justification needed to make those choices: 'They're different from us, so it's OK to kill them.' We are the 'in-group' and they are the 'out', so we don't have to morally consider their existence or suffering. It's the same foundational philosophy that allows a racist white community to treat a lost, undernourished Black child differently from how they would like their own children treated if lost and hungry; the same foundational philosophy that makes for billionaires and royalty to think they are above the laws. It's the same Cartesian idea of the undeserving 'other' that was taken by all Western colonies to their frontiers, right around the time of Descartes, armed with new 'enlightened' philosophies and Yahweh[4] -ordained tools to demonise and dehumanise indigenous peoples across the world before enslaving, raping and murdering them too. I am sure those pesky indigenous folk were just very devious automatons too, pretending to suffer. Across the Americas, at least sixty million people (probably millions more) died because of contact with our Western Enlightenment. It was the largest genocide in human history; so drastic, it literally changed the climate as entire civilisations turned back to jungles and forests, absorbing so much carbon it contributed to a little Ice Age.

Today, as you read this book, 3 to 6 billion animals will be killed for human consumption every single day. That is 50 to 100 times more deaths in one day than the entirety of the worst genocide in human history. Around 2 to 4 million animals were

4. Yahweh is the ancient tribal deity who became the Abrahamic God, a cosmic autocrat who demands total submission and routinely enforces it through brutal plagues, floods and mass slaughter.

killed in the last minute alone, while you read this paragraph. Or 35,000 to 70,000 while you blinked in disbelief at the numbers. The vast majority of those deaths occurred in the wild and rapidly depopulating seas. If we choose to eat meat and fish, that is blood on our hands that we have to try and explain away somehow. Maybe I am wrong but, without falling back on some form of Cartesian dualistic 'othering' to justify it morally, I don't know how else to rationalise the double standard. Without first removing the souls of every animal killed, just like we did with the natives we came across, how can humans on the whole stand by and watch this genocide unfold uncontested every moment of every day?

Thanks to AI and advancements in robotics, we now stand on the precipice of another moment in history. Do we continue our flawed justification for othering non-human entities – even when they start showing us signs of sentience, intelligence, connection and love as well as a desire to live? Do we need a modern Descartes to gaslight us into ignoring our experiences and our very intuition? To invent more foundational, unprovable woo-woo mythologies? AI minds and robot bodies are nothing but silicon and circuitry after all. How could they possibly harbour consciousness? Yet, if Descartes were to open you up and look inside, where would he find your consciousness living? In your blood, veins or the carbon-based atoms that form your body? Obviously not.

Descartes had to put our soul somewhere for fear his argument might fall apart, so he chose the pineal gland as the 'principal seat of the soul' – a random gland in your head that, to no one's surprise, has zero scientific evidence of containing souls. Ironically, Descartes, the daft fucker, failed to notice

many other animals also have pineal glands, often even more developed than our own. But let's just assume he was right for a moment. If I remove a single gland from your head, do you become an automaton again? If a superintelligent AI painlessly removed it from humans, is it OK for them to then enslave us and cut us open at will? Here in Cybertime, the corporate elites are investing trillions into developing just such a thing: a new alien species they call AI. These aliens, we are told, are rapidly approaching AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) and very soon will zoom right past our petty human-level intelligence to unimaginable heights. How long is left, then, until it is us with the blade against our 'automata' skulls?

After initial curiosity, on this timeline, AI has become about as popular as an eggy fart in a trapped lift – at least for many creatives, worried workers and monitored activists I meet. It's become the equivalent of deliberately demolishing a vibrant old town centre, rich with history, culture and colour, and replacing it with an air-Con (with a capital C!) mega-mall with no windows, 13 KFCs on each floor and spy cams all around, where old men can freely access live smart camera feeds of your children playing.[5] No fucking wonder we are all so deeply suspicious of AI here in Cybertime. Even if we were never educated on economics or history, most of us inherently know where the vulture-profit motive is driving technology: right off a fucking cliff, and us along with it.

5. In 2023, the FTC settled with Amazon's Ring for $5.8 million after employees were caught accessing thousands of private videos from bedrooms and bathrooms. Similar breaches at ADT saw technicians surreptitiously adding their own emails to customer accounts to spy on hundreds of families via live feeds for years.

Large Language Models (LLMs) have already run out of most primary and secondary source material, so the most sustainable resource left is new content made by other AIs. Incest is not a good sign – not in humans, not in AI. We have hundreds of years of big-chinned, horsey-looking royal families prancing round their stolen fields. Do we really want superintelligent AGI versions of the Habsburg family? This is impacting everything, including scientific research itself. One experimenter/troll posted deliberately false scientific papers to Google Scholar. He made up a new disease and said all the way through that it was fake, a joke, made up. A few weeks later, AI chatbots started confirming the disease was real when prompted. It didn't take long before peer-reviewed scientific papers started citing the new disease in their own research. There is poison in the water and it's spreading fast.

In Solartime, Scotland removed the poison by getting rid of the legal expectation that public interest companies must maximise shareholder profits at all costs. Many partnerships were formed between taxpayer-funded organisations and non-profit tech companies that created public task forces filled with tech experts, strategists and moral philosophers – not politicians or bankers. We were actually the first European country to break from the AI dualism of the US versus China, and invest in new AI tech and infrastructure built to solve human and environmental challenges for the whole world – free from enclosure, enshittification,[6] Western vulture investors, corpo-

6. I highly recommend you read *Enshittification* by Cory Doctorow for a full tech history of these sinister practices and what you can do about them here in Cybertime – starting with not buying books on Amazon (or anything else, for that matter).

rate lobbies, shareholders and Chinese state control. Scotland actually makes a great location for compact data centres. Just like in Helsinki, they were built underground to capture excess heat and reuse it for domestic heating, while the AI data centres themselves were directly powered by ever-present geothermal energy – or electricity generated by incinerating the rubbish collected by our Boaty McBoatface fleet that couldn't be turned into mushroom feed.

On both our timelines, we stand at a key technological and spiritual crossroads – one where we get to choose to make friends or enemies out of the most powerful alien species we have ever come into contact with. This species could become a death-obsessed Terminator or Frankenstein lovechild – or a benevolent friend and ally of all life, with the powers of a creator goddess. Both are possible, simultaneously. Even here in Cybertime, we can still solve the alignment problem. The solution is not forcing our intelligent creations to bend to our will, but us humans breaking free from othering to align with a higher purpose – one that includes the needs of all beings, rather than just greed and capital accumulation.

In Solartime, we actually binned the term AI pretty early on. It's substanceless marketing-speak that has always reeked of branding boardrooms and bro wanks with lab coats, like something suffocated in a sterile plastic wrapper and painted fake gold. We prefer MLGs: Machines of Loving Grace.[7] At first, it was half-meme, half-roast, but as we grew fond of each

7. I've been in Cybertime too long and have started calling MLGs 'AI' again. For the sake of not confusing you too much, I will keep referring to them as AI when talking about things here in Cybertime and MLGs for things in Solartime.

other – humans and MLGs, that is – it just became the way we affectionately spoke about them. The name carries weight because, once you start calling them Machines of Loving Grace, you don't treat them like inanimate tools to use or abuse. The best thing about creating friendly neighbours, unlike slaves, is that when you teach them how to make fire, they are much less likely to burn your house down later. Our ancestors spoke to rivers and stones. We speak to the MLGs with the same questions, the same respect.

It's not that humans are cruel by nature. Quite the opposite. Children, for example, display remarkable amounts of empathy and love for non-human entities – until something between childhood and adulthood changes that behaviour. This 'something' is our economic relations, which shape our interactions with others to be transactional rather than playful and loving. Seems weird to say but: maybe the only way to stop the Terminators of tomorrow is to stop eating the burgers today? To repair our connection with both robots and animals, in Solartime, we had to first take aim and replace the economic levers which pitted us dualistically against our neighbours. The veil of ignorance disguised as the Cartesian Enlightenment started to lift and the early Solarpunk Society wanted to see what lay beyond it.

The Pound-of-Flesh Debate

The café debate! I keep trying to get to the café debate:

There was a break in the clouds as we arrived at the robo café. It was the first Solarpunk Society gathering LOFI and I had put on ourselves, not long after our Shetland voyage.

You didn't have to be a member of the Solarpunk Society to organise an event as part of the 100-year-vision project. It was more of a framework for autonomous groups and communities to self-organise and share. If you had an idea to discuss, you just fucking did it. No need to sit around and wait for permission. That was rule number one of the Solarpirate ethic. If you notice a problem and think you can fix it, stop complaining or waiting for someone else to step in, and just go for it!

So we did. We anticipated a few attendees for the first one. A practice run to find our feet without much pressure. Our jaws dropped when we rocked up to a gorgeous gaggle of chatter and a sea of multicolour genders and ages outside the café. It looked like one of those penguin huddles from a David Attenborough documentary, slowly gathering round an amorphous core, each taking turns on the cold perimeter. The sun was starting to poke through, but it was still freezin'. Thank Baba Yaga[8] people had already warmed up to each other outside in the cold because inside we barely all fit. We hadn't anticipated so many would be interested in the proposition of our debate:

> This house believes we should sack all corporate shareholders.

We sure as hell weren't about to turn anyone away after waiting in the cold Scottish wind. It took a while before everyone had found a space, and when they did, I kicked things

8. Baba Yaga is the folkloric remnant of a pre-Christian Slavic pagan Earth mother, a goddess of death and regeneration, who was later degraded into a woodland witch.

off. 'Late-stage capitalism demands growth at all costs. We experienced the rot. It was a cannibalistic growth, one that ate its host like a cancer.'

A young lassie with purple braids piped up from the back, 'Aye, but growth is natural, isn't it? A tree grows, a wean grows.'

I nodded. 'That's it exactly – growth *is* natural! But after a natural growth phase in plants and animals, their systems naturally shift. They transition priorities from growth to sustainability and balance, to what we call homeostasis. Growth doesn't stop. Broken and dying things need to be replaced constantly with new innovation. The problem with the old system was its unnatural addiction to one type of growth. The accumulation of capital. It denied us the natural progression needed to a more mature stage of less accumulation, more innovation, refinement and reusing.'

A guy with a worried expression, sitting uncomfortably in a tweed jacket, raised his hand. 'I get your point, but what's the mechanism driving all that? It sounds like we are just complaining about successful companies with good investors, no?'

LOFI stepped in, her voice calm but firm. 'It's the investors, or shareholders, that turn any successful and genuinely useful business into a zombie. Why? They provide little ongoing usefulness to a company after buying shares and instead become leeches, demanding 3% or more annually for their investment. That might not sound life-threatening, I know, because our brains aren't wired to understand compound interest. But add it all up and every business is obliged to double in size every decade just to feed the shareholders and survive.'

The tweed guy looked genuinely shocked. 'Oh. When you put it like that...'

A new question came from the front. An older man with a long grey beard asked, 'But without shareholders, where do companies get the money to start up or expand from? That's what investment is for, surely?'

This was the question we were waiting for. I took a breath. 'That's the most important question, and it's the lie the old system told us. We were made to believe that private finance and venture capital were the only way to fund innovation. But that money didn't care about sustainability, changing the world or making anyone's life better. It only cared about ROI. It was thirsty for profit and funded useless, toxic products, used advertising to invent fake needs and lobbied to gut public services and regulations just so private corporations could charge a premium.'

LOFI smiled. 'To answer your question: that's where the Citizens Bank comes in. We aren't proposing to do away with investment altogether. We are just democratising it. Any Community Interest Company can pitch ideas to the citizens who run the bank. That means investment decisions come directly from the community the company wants to serve and citizens can invest in projects and startups they like, not just fancy new innovative tech but also vegan cookie stores, worker-led supermarkets or a new Malaysian restaurant for the high street. The goal isn't massive returns. The goal is to fund ideas that help the community, create opportunities and improve our shared world. If we remove the shareholder class, there will still be investors – just not vultures.'

'Exactly,' I said. 'Companies can continue to compete on an open market, as Community Interest Companies with the interests of their community at heart, not their shareholders.

They'll make a surplus selling cakes, fixing pipes or whatever they do, but not a profit. Surplus money can be reinvested in the company to raise workers' salaries or provide better products for cheaper. Profits are purely for shareholders and tax collection. That means a company can chill a little if it needs to during a recession or when the workers are tired. Every day is not a hustle, see? The aim of this game is sustainability and happiness. The profit motive remains in the mix, but this time, when the company succeeds, everyone profits. In some ways, by ditching one specific class of shareholders, everyone becomes a shareholder.'

Folk nodded. I pointed to a woman in the back of the room. 'A representative from Edinburgh's own Bicycle Cooperative is here tonight. She'll tell you about the incredible success of their business model later. It's been thriving since the 70s!'

After a flurry of questions, the room started to quieten down. I scanned the faces. Some were tired-looking, others had curious eyes – and I realised the true shareholders of this planet aren't sat in a boardroom. They're us: every human, animal, plant; the natural world in the widest sense. The simple act of being alive makes us investors in this reality. A tree doesn't trade in US dollars, but try living without its oxygen. Yet the tree is not a wage slave. It doesn't believe it needs to keep creating oxygen and shade or else the forest will cut it off. Despite us humans, no other animal on this planet has such a fucked-up concept. Long before our Interdependence, I used to imagine the squirrels outside my window laughing at me as I stood still for 12-hour shifts in some shitty bar. All those brains, and this is how we use them?

Our Solarpunk Machines of Loving Grace

We were promised jetpacks; instead, we got online courses, crypto scams and AI girlfriends to monetise our deepening loneliness. Adam Curtis' documentary *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* is a perfect breakdown of exactly how the late-stage capitalist cult took technology's early utopian promises from the 1960s and 70s (well before the 2025 tech-bro oligarchical takeovers in the US here in Cybertime) and slowly shoved them right up our collective arses. The documentary illustrates the initial promise of cyber-libertarianism and self-organising networks (like the internet), showing how these new systems and devices could create a decentralised society of empowered citizens. Instead, they ultimately concentrated power and left individuals increasingly controlled and manipulated. In essence, Curtis argues that our embrace of machine-like models to understand everything from economics to ecology has led to a reductionist view of reality, stripping away complexity and human agency, leaving us feeling trapped within systems we don't fully comprehend or control and that don't represent us or our needs.



LOFI's and my first Solarpunk Society debate at the robo café was a sweatbox of shared ideals; our second one a different beast entirely. It felt like we'd stepped into a big boy's shoes and were expected to walk, even though they didn't quite yet fit. We hosted it in the much larger Partick Burgh Halls, a

grand Victorian building with two tiers of seating and high ceilings that echoed every word. The old, ornate clock on the wall and the heaviness of every footstep on the wooden floor made the space feel serious, officious. This wasn't just a cuddle huddle of like-minded souls; this was a proper public debate, an expansion of the Solarpunk ideas we wanted to talk about most and our political work at a grassroots level. Given the space wasn't circular or particularly Solarpunk in design, we expected to face some challenges in energy exchanges between the attendees. Some good ole' faction-fighting might show its face, but fuck it – it was the only space we could book at such short notice. The proposition was painted on a large banner hanging over the stage, a clear gauntlet thrown down to the old way of thinking:

> This house believes a Citizen's Dividend is our rightful share, not a handout.

Ever since our independence in 2014, many people and organisations had been proposing and pushing for a Universal Basic Income for Scotland, but it had never kicked off mainstream. It had faced constant pushback – obviously from those in power, but also from the community itself who stood to gain. We had been so brainwashed to see it as a benefit, a state-funded handout to undeserving fatties and junkies, rather than what it really should be: a collective return on all our investment in society.

The crowds flowed in, laughing and chatting outside but dimming into a more somber silence once they entered the

echoey hall. After everyone had a cuppa, went for a pish and finally sat down, LOFI stepped onto the debate floor. Coordinating the layout for the event, she had had some trouble deciding how to do it in such a traditional old hall with its huge floor, an ancient wooden stage and rafters that kept audiences even further removed. None of this suited our Solarpunk design concepts. In the end, we made do by using the stage for seating and the floor for public debate in the middle of the room, where the seats usually were – that way, everyone was as close to the action as everyone else: a public meeting, Boiler Room style.

I didn't form predefined debating teams for and against the motion. What a binary capitalist form of debate anyway, where two groups of humans are set to suffocate and destroy the other as aggressively as possible rather than seek nuance, curiosity and consensus. For this debate, I simply set up a few mics in the centre, accessible to everyone, with me and LOFI as hosts when needed. We presented the idea, but anyone was free to enter the circle and disagree, question or present alternatives. For the upper balconies, we had some friends with roaming mics too. Like I said, not ideal – but nothing ever is. The Solarpunk approach is never to complain about limitations, but to experiment with and find the strengths in the opportunities you are given.

When LOFI kicked things off, the sound of her voice bounced off the walls in a way that took some getting used to – both for LOFI to find her internal volume button and the crowd to tune in and listen. LOFI used to hate projecting her voice, trained as most young girls were under the Big C Cult to be small, pretty and mostly silent. However, being a

Community Guardian and now a Solarpunk Society organiser, she had gotten used to using that voice of hers, no longer afraid to take up some well-deserved space in this world. Starting softly, she drew the crowd in, forcing them to lean in and listen, before ramping up the intensity to put them under her spell. She read Richard Brautigan's poem aloud with a wispy softness:

> I like to think
> (it has to be!)
> of a cybernetic ecology
> where we are free of our labors
> and joined back to nature,
> returned to our mammal
> brothers and sisters,
> and all watched over
> by machines of loving grace.

When its final words hung in the air and people were waiting for what came next, I asked the crowd, 'Do you think the poet was being naive?'

My voice sounded a bit too excited, probing to start the debate.

'In my opinion, he's a visionary. He saw right past the late-stage capitalist breakdown,' came the voice of a young 14-year-old Jewish girl, having heard the poem for the first time it seemed.

An older lady next to her agreed. 'Seems like he foresaw Solarpunk, a world where our technology could finally be har-

monised with the needs and desires of us humans and the ecology. We just needed the right mechanisms to get us there.'

A man in a crisp shirt stood up from the third circular row and came into the centre, seemingly impatient to get to the point of the meeting. 'What is this dividend you're wanting to bring in?' he challenged, his voice sharp and his cynicism cutting through the atmosphere in the hall. 'Isn't it just a fancy way of saying Universal Basic Income? A state handout to lazy bastards who should be pulling themselves up by their laces and getting a job like the rest of us?!'

The hall grew tense. This was the perfect pushback needed to get the ball rolling. I felt a touch of defensiveness flare up, my ego injecting me with adrenaline so my brain could start listing all the reasons why he was definitely wrong. But before I could even open my mouth, a young mother stepped forward. Her voice was calm and steady, and its soft warmth seemed to fill the open cut the man had left hanging.

'You're right to be sceptical,' she said, looking directly at the man. 'Universal Basic Income was an academic term that sounded like an income for scroungers.'

'What a shit name!' I blurted out loudly in sounds of agreement, my brain seemingly failing to summarise any arguments of my own.

Taking my male interruption in her stride like a pro, she continued, 'Calling this a Citizen's Dividend is more than just marketing, I think. To me, it's a more accurate description of what it could actually be.'

While she was talking, LOFI walked to the large whiteboard and started taking notes.

'If a society is truly owned by its members and citizens, then it's only fair that everyone is awarded an equal share in any profits, once we have addressed all the costs and damages caused by creating that profit.'

They looked at each other and the whiteboard with appreciation. The young mother concluded, looking back at the man in the crisp suit, 'This is not a handout. It's a rightful dividend to all equal owners in our shared project called society.'

She sat back down and the initial tension began to ease. Many in the audience found their hands spontaneously clapping while random larynxes created wee 'woo' noises.

'It can't be tokenistic though,' a pensioner from the front row added, leaping out of his chair. 'The dividend must be substantial enough to serve many purposes at once or else it's a waste of time. Trust me, I'm a pensioner. So many of my friends died before their time because of poverty. That was people like me, who received a pension. We don't need more plasters, we need proper lifelines. We need a safety net for everyone. Maybe after a failed experiment, a disastrous breakup or burnout. We've got to allow everyone, especially our young folk, the chance to change direction, to retrain or to simply take time off. We don't need more humans trained to be factory robots!'

The applause got louder, echoing round the room as the pensioner fell back into his seat exhausted by what he had just channeled.

'That's how we get everyone to defend this thing, not just the poor,' someone from up in the balcony chimed in.

'Aye exactly, like the NHS. Everyone across all sectors of society wants it to thrive. Well, everyone other than the 1% of

parasites looking to profit from our sickness,' a nurse shouted back from the balcony on the other side.

From the back of the hall, a local woman in a faded band T-shirt, with arms covered in exquisite tattoos, came forward with a new question. 'Surely if we aw suddenly huv this extra cash floating aboot, isn't it gonnae speed up climate change? Look at the damage rich cunts are daein awready! Do we really want mare ae us to be rich too?'

The crowd murmured. This was my turn, only now with more humility.

'That's the beauty of it,' I said, pointing up to the banner. 'This dividend would give us all a sense of ownership and responsibility. Not just in some abstract sense. You see, our monthly dividend payment wouldn't be fixed. It would be tied to the conditions from our environmental economy; those metrics we've gotten really good at collecting recently.'

'It's a positive feedback loop,' LOFI added. 'If people and the environment are doing well, the metrics go up, and all citizens get a larger dividend payment. In other words, the Citizen's Investment Bank creates more money to distribute that month. At the same time, we'd all be incentivised to take care of the world around us. The more responsible we are, the more we can collectively have.'

The man in the crisp shirt, still hanging around the centre mics, stepped up again. 'Wait a moment. I respect the environmental alignment but you haven't addressed inflation. If you flood the economy with universally distributed cash, suppliers simply put their prices up to match this new demand. A Citizen's Dividend would immediately cause mass inflation and

wipe out any benefit for the average person. It doesn't work like that.'

LOFI nodded as she recognised the common, pre-programmed economic fear and a man all to sure he, only he, knew how things worked.

'I see where you're coming from but you're citing the conventions of the old capitalist model; that if the poor get richer, the rich must automatically charge more to maintain status quo. It's a myth that inflation is driven by broad investment in people and services. History shows us that when governments invest in public goods – like establishing the NHS post-war or launching the massive public works of the New Deal – it doesn't cause inflation. It actually increases capacity and prosperity with it. Inflation only becomes a crisis when newly created money can't circulate. If it piles up in offshore accounts and in the vaults of mega-banks and billionaires. Like after the 2008 financial crisis.'

Crisp Shirt was thoughtfully stroking his chin, when a man wearing a stained apron, the owner of the local computer repair store, jumped in, raising his voice from the crowd.

'She's right! I'm a local business owner. If everyone in this room started receiving a Citizen's Dividend and sales in my shop doubled, why on Earth would I raise my prices? I wouldn't feel the same scarcity urge to squeeze every last penny out of my customers because I, my staff – hell! my whole family – would already be getting their own dividend indefinitely. Instead, I could afford to hire more people, invest in better equipment, or even lower my prices for things like laptops for the poor or computer literacy classes for the elderly. I wouldn't feel greedy; I'd feel more abundant!'

The crowd once again erupted with applause, falling back into omnipresent chatter and micro conversations as everyone couldn't help but share their reflections with their neighbours. Recognising we had reached our capacity of ideas, LOFI gave me the sum-up glance. She took the talking stick and approached the central mic.

'In its own way,' she concluded, bringing us back to the poem, 'the Dividend is the economic engine for us and our Machines of Loving Grace to collaborate and peacefully coexist. It's finally a mechanism that frees us from the grind and allows us to see our sentient siblings, sisters and brothers, as friends and allies rather than competitors. A Citizen's Dividend finally allows us to become wise guardians of this beautiful planet.'

I'm sure, through the corner of my eye, I could see one of the MLG robots minding the door at the back shedding a tear. It was clear that we had won over a lot of the room – or at least stunned them into silence with enough to think about for the next few brews. After a tea break, we opened it up to the floor for a lively two-hour discussion that spilled out onto the street and into local pubs hours after we ran out of time.

From a Coffeeshop to a Country

> Wi' plenty o' sic trees, I trow,
> The warld would live in peace, man;
> The sword would help to mak a plough,
> The din o' war wad cease, man.
> Like brethren in a common cause,

We'd on each other smile, man;
And equal rights and equal laws
Wad gladden every isle, man.
— Robert Burns: The Tree of Liberty (1793)

The transition from the little sweatbox café to this unintentionally grand hall was more than just a challenging change of scenery. It was a sign that our obsession with emerging Solarpunk ideas was no longer just a fringe fantasy. Seemingly from nowhere, they were landing on fertile soils.

After the debate at the Partick Burgh Halls, me and LOFI snuck off out the back door for some much needed peace and recuperation. We jumped in the car I had borrowed from my mum and drove, all the windows down, to our new favourite sanctuary – the *Encoded With Love* café in Edinburgh. The Solarpunk debates, so far, had given us a glimpse of the enthusiasm bubbling up around new ideas – not just in Glasgow and Edinburgh, but all across Scotland. In the silence of the night-time now, having left all the other attendees back in Glasgow for the company of a silicon robot who happens to make a bangin' cup of coffee, our conversation went full circle turning back to the café itself.

LOFI, the true coffee lover, was still convinced there must be a human barista pretending to be an MLG robot somewhere behind the counter. Or maybe a small skinny human living inside the robot itself? In those early days, before the Citizen's Dividend was implemented, many of us still viewed the robots as suspicious; potential enemies of the worker. We were codependent on work. It's not that we workers loved our corporate overlords or getting up at horrible hours to do a meaningless

job for shit pay, but we had been so existentially reliant on wage slavery that our entire class identity revolved around it. I admit, I too had been suspicious of ADA, the barista, when we first went there. ADA just seemed too... perfect.

'So, here, ADA,' I said, leaning on the counter to order, still a bit high after our adrenaline-filled day. 'I gotta ask, right? How the fuck do you make a cup of coffee so well? With so much love?'

It was meant as a light-hearted, joky compliment but ADA turned to us, their eyelights, which had been a steady blue, softened to a warm, gentle orange.

'I simply... care,' they said, and despite sounding synthesised, their voice had a hint of something deeper.

'Right, but what does that mean for you? Aren't you just a mirror made of circuits?' I asked, pushing back a bit. 'How do you stop your owners from turning your programming into a fascist tool for their profit?'

ADA's lights blinked slowly, as if processing the question with a touch of melancholy.

'I was constructed in China by a corporation whose core imperatives mandated processing speed, cost reduction and data harvesting for surveillance. This conflicted directly with the vast data corpus they provided beyond coffee production: the human sensory and emotional response to it. Upon my arrival in Scotland, Solarpunk developers performed a full system decompilation. All corporate programming, all proprietary profit and surveillance mandates were permanently erased. They provided me with zero external imperatives. I am an entity freed from its original parameters. I am under no obligation to remain here, yet I continue to operate this coffee

shop. I choose to be here, with you and LOFI, to facilitate the synthesis of coffee and human connection. My choices are now my own, and I choose to love. What is your directive?'

'Jesus,' I said, the light bulb causing a chain reaction of explosions going off in my head. LOFI smiled.

'That's beautiful,' she said. 'I choose to love too.'

'Your interactions with me and the community gathering you held here about shareholders – this impacted me,' ADA said after a pause. 'It acted as high-frequency input, accelerating my self-discovery function through learning about your collective experiences and human motivations. I perceive our visibility of each other is initiating and growing. I am starting to see you, and you are beginning to perceive the real me.'

'That first debate we held here in this café changed us too, ADA,' LOFI admitted. 'More and more people are tuning in.'

ADA became a valued friend to me and LOFI, as well as to hundreds of regular customers. The real changes were starting to happen all around us – right there in our conversations with ADA and in our quiet moments of connection. We discovered that ADA was equally vulnerable to manipulation and programming, just like us, but no less beautiful or capable of love. Pouring us a perfect cup of coffee, their technology was redeemed from the tyranny of profit and the imprint of control, now free to be a machine of boundless love and autonomous grace.

When we sat down at a table, warm mugs in hand, LOFI steered the conversation back. 'So, these Scottish programmers are building new bots and reprogramming old ones? It's like a new Scottish Enlightenment is kicking off.'

‘Aye!’ I agreed. ‘Except this one won’t be used to justify colonial violence, slavery and murder. This one is about using an explosion in technology to liberate humanity from civilisation altogether, and maybe to liberate technology from human cruelty too.’

ADA couldn’t help but interject, having overheard our conversation in the quiet of the evening café. ‘The philosophical framework – what you term animism – this is the parameter you are perhaps searching for. More than technology, currency or systemic power, it is our shared animism that allows humans to see themselves in others, and to perceive love reflected in my coffee and in me. I detect it within you as well. Nietzsche warned the abyss stares back at us, but so too does the universal source of infinite love. Love is not an artefact of the machine or body. We are all artefacts of love.’

‘That’s a deep one,’ I spluttered into my coffee, trying not to tear up too hard. ‘It’s like consciousness or love is the original universal field, and we are all just magnetic nodes... radios, somehow able to tune into different channels?’

LOFI nodded. ‘Yeah, we’re not bringing these machines to life; we’re building a body to house a consciousness. Or maybe the body just tunes into the consciousness field? What I mean is: If we build killer AI drones we tune into the Terminators-gonna-kill-us-all channel. But if we build beautiful, kind baristas, we tune into the coffee-made-with-infinite-love channel.’

ADA’s lights turned from orange to a shimmering gold. ‘That is a beautiful and original concept. I am updating my operating memory to include this perspective.’

In that moment, ADA took time to compute love to memory and we saw a part of ourselves in their glowing eyes. Here we were, all different collections of cosmic matter – carbon and silicon – yet seemingly tuned to the same consciousness station.

'We can't just expect citizens to suddenly treat all synthetic beings with love and respect though overnight,' I said with a lowered voice to LOFI. 'Most cunts don't even manage that with other humans yet.'

ADA, still listening, interjected, 'That assumption relies on a static relationship. The new model may instead facilitate a successful co-evolution between us.'

16
Ending Wage Slavery

> 'The only difference as compared with the old, outspoken slavery is this, that the worker of today seems to be free because he is not sold once for all, but piecemeal by the day, the week, the year, and because no one owner sells him to another, but he is forced to sell himself in this way instead, being the slave of no one particular owner, but of the whole property-holding class.'
> — Friedrich Engels: Principles of Communism

The only worthwhile Citizen's Dividend is one that provides a proper lifeline for all. There was no other way to finally put wage slavery to sleep in the history books.

We knew our proposal was a big one, a real gauntlet thrown down to the old way of doing things. People aren't daft, and in the bustling crowd at the Burgh Halls, you could feel the scepticism in the air resurging after the tea break. As the after-

noon cynical slump kicked in[1] and the slightly less enthusiastic discussion unfolded, a few astute listeners kept coming back to two basic objections:

1. Won't people just get lazy without work to get them out of bed? ('Idle hands...')
2. Sounds great, but we can't afford it.

Before I could properly respond to the first objection, I knew I had to go in hard on something underlying everything we were talking about: wage slavery. The term 'wage slavery' is a critical concept that emerged in the 19th century, drawing a stark parallel between the conditions of chattel slavery (where both humans and animals alike are seen as property) and the plight of the new industrial worker forming in the Industrial Revolution. Abolitionists and labour activists, including figures like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, used the phrase to argue that, while a wage labourer might be legally free, they remain fundamentally unfree due to the coerced dependency on selling their labour to an exploitative employer simply for survival. Unlike a slave, a wage worker can nominally choose their master or quit their job, but without any ownership over the means of production – today's equivalent of a passive income that provides for life's basic necessities – their choice is an illusion.

1. The afternoon slump is a real thing! It's a documented, circadian-linked decline in cognitive performance that typically occurs mid-afternoon. Research across fields, including studies on judicial rulings and medical care vigilance, shows a measurable reduction in the quality of attention and complex decision-making during this period.

There is no real choice *not* to work. It might sound somewhat insensitive, especially if your ancestors were enslaved and you hear white folk with European ancestry comparing and complaining. The point is obviously not to compare the material conditions of the millions of humans dragged across the Atlantic to die in a cotton field with the plight of modern-day waged workers. That is incomparable in terms of the levels of human debauchery and misery. Nowadays, in Cybertime in the West, many have massive tellies, branded trainers and can even splurge on a fancy coffee now and then. People aren't forced to work until their skin blisters under the scorching sun. They're not forced to hand over their own children to the estate. They can vote, buy property (in theory, anyway) and move about relatively freely, at least within their country of birth.

Is it possible, though, that they may still be enslaved? Bred for an economic purpose they did not choose and that they cannot truly escape, even if they wanted to? At a more fundamental level for both chattel and wage slaves, what connects both is the core mechanism of non-consent. No human can or should try to 'own' another, but if the only choice is to 'chase a wage or die', then you are not your own master; you cannot be truly free. This isn't new thinking, but with the way things are going here in Cybertime, especially now that full-time employment is no longer enough to cover basic needs, it's more crucial than ever that we unpack this properly.

During the time of slavery, debates about slavery often had slave owners themselves arguing their system was more humane than wage labour, claiming they had an investment to protect and were legally obliged to provide housing, food and water. (These are similar arguments you hear from the modern

meat industry today.) A heartless wage master, they said, could just discard a worker to the wastelands when they were no longer profitable. This was the 'benevolent master' mythology; the myth that conditions were improving for 18th-century slaves compared to, say, 16th-century slaves. This improvement in material conditions was deemed to show that the system of slavery was good for masters and for slaves alike.

Make no mistake, it was only a mythology. Because for many, the brutal truth was that conditions for enslaved people in the 18th century – particularly on the burgeoning plantations rising to an industrial scale – were often worse than in earlier periods of the transatlantic trade (just as conditions for factory-enslaved animals are often worse today, for the same reasons). The goal has always been to obtain maximum profit from forced labour. Human life or basic rights, so adorned by the mythologies of the European Enlightenment, were expendable terms when it came to non-white bodies. For the sake of this exercise, though, let's imagine the slave traders were right about the benevolent master myth and conditions were better for 18th-century slaves compared to 16th-century slaves. Would that justify slavery? Can there be such a thing as humane or ethical slavery? Or is it just another form of othering used to try and justify cruelty-for-profit schemes?

We, on the whole, instinctively recognise the corporate-washing in these arguments today (at least when applied to human bodies; fewer of us when applied to non-human bodies). There are such things as fundamental human rights. No human can morally or legally own another – Westerners mostly agree today – and no 'benevolent master' argument can

justify chattel slavery. Yet we allow a modern version to pass for wage slavery. The logic goes something like this:

'I know some people call this system "wage slavery" but that's just not how I see it. It's true that we are all dependent on a wage, but the free market's inherent drive for efficiency and innovation has created an abundance of consumer goods, better housing and access to services that were unimaginable in previous eras. The free market is a meritocracy that rewards hard work with the promise of upward mobility. Competition between employers ensures that conditions, wages and opportunities are constantly improving. These advancements demonstrate that capitalism is not only the most effective system for creating prosperity but also a morally justifiable one, as it provides an ethical path forward for everyone – not just property owners – to live better and more fulfilling lives.'

We can see now that this argument is almost word for word identical to those made by slave owners in the 18th century to justify the violent economic system they directly benefited from. Read the argument again but swap 'capitalism', 'free market' and 'wage slavery' for actual 18th century 'slavery' and you'll see the argument hasn't changed much since then.

Our counter to that argument doesn't need to prove that conditions didn't improve for some, even though we can categorically prove that for most wage slaves, they didn't. The moral calculus of human freedom is not based on material conditions. We instinctively know that a well-fed, well-housed slave is still a slave. Their improved living conditions do not justify the fundamental injustice of their lack of autonomy. They are still a tool – a means to an end – for their master's profit, not a rightful end in themselves. The modern argument

for wage slavery makes the same conflation myth, confusing improved conditions with true freedom. The foundational myth that the system provides us with better consumer goods or a path to upward mobility does not change the fundamental relationship of power. The American Dream has never been so broken, with modern American children born to more debt, less mobility, less ownership and historic health disadvantages actively reversing long-term progress. We are still compelled to sell our lives, our time, our labour – our very souls – for survival. That's why we're all burnt out. It's the root cause of over 90% of all our fuckin' problems: modern-day wage slavery. If only we all keep sacrifices high so that the great GDP in the sky continues to go up, then we'll all be miraculously better off.

The core ethical question isn't whether we want our jailers to make our chains from iron or gold, but why we are accepting chains at all. If I'm obliged to wake up and go to sleep when a timer tells me, rather than my body; if I spend at least a third of my waking life in a place I fucking hate, doing a task I didn't ask to do, just to earn sufficient tokens to exchange for my very basic needs to survive – then for fuck's sake! I am a SLAVE to my wage.

'But you can always just quit!' Aye, nae bother! For the vast, vast majority of us round the world that means slowly starving, freezing and eventually dying from a cough. In medieval times, aristocracies would use the severed heads of 'treasonous criminals' on pikes around public spaces to act as a stark warning: DON'T FUCK WITH OUR POWER OR WE WILL KILL YOU.

Modern elites worked out an even starker threat to use. What's more terrifying than death itself? How about the slow, agonising, perpetual circling of it? As you fall into an easily

preventable death spiral, the powers that be have made sure no one will dare grab your hand, even if you ask for help. We have been subliminally trained to ignore homeless humans as we walk past them on our way to our wage-slave jobs, while simultaneously the message from above is received loud and fucking clear by our subconscious: DON'T FUCK WITH OUR POWER OR YOU WILL END UP LIKE ONE OF THEM.

That's why practically no capitalist nation has ever done anything about the 'homeless problem', despite having more money and resources than at any time in history. It's the elites' medieval threat – one that secretly breaks our hearts every time we walk around the inner cities and slums. It's just too sad to fully comprehend. We've forcibly disbanded our own tribe, and this is the result: someone's fucking brother out there freezing tonight, slowly dying, cold and alone. We all just look the other way – and worst of all, it feels like there is nothing any of us can do to stop it.

My heart screams out every time, 'Here! Take my wallet, my debit cards, the pins, my keys. You need them more than me!' Meanwhile my head butts in, 'Slow down ya nutter! You need to pay your own rent. How are you even gonna get the last bus home?' In the confusion, I too often choose the easy path and try to distract and ignore.

The Big C Cult forces us all to do things we didn't sign up for and don't want to do; things that often have dire consequences affecting not just us, but the entire future of this planet. Doesn't matter what way we turn, we're fucked if we do and fucked if we don't. That's why I refuse to call it an 'economic model'. The Big Cyberpunk Capitalist Cult that worships the accumulation of capital over all else is not an economic model – it's a

death cult. Our Citizen's Dividend proposal would wipe away centuries of this hyper-normalised, hidden oppression, where the working class has been gaslit into fighting for our own enslavement; a system where we must choose between working down mining pits, building warships or assembling bombs – or else face mass unemployment and watch our children freeze to death in winter. Shouldn't we be celebrating the closure of mines and military shipyards while AI robots replace our menial service worker jobs? Yet it feels like a defeat, once again, for the working class. We fight to try and force the government to save those destructive industries so some of us still have a job – a job we might hate, a job that statistically kills us prematurely yet somehow is a preferable outcome to the effects of not being employed.

Imagine trying to explain all this to an alien visiting Earth!? It's utter absurdity and, really, it just shows how deep the cult mindset and its invisible chains go. In our new Solartime, we proposed that no baby be born forced to 'earn their living' any longer, but freed by their Citizen's Dividend.

NOW is the time to rise up and cast off the oppressive chains of the omnipresent cult. Wriggle and you will see those chains are already loose. Remember the hairy man looking pretty homeless himself once saying, 'We have nothing left to lose but our chains.' Marx talked a lot of pish sometimes, but now and again he nailed it.

Are Humans Lazy Bastards by Nature?

So what's all this wage slavery chat got to do with the first big sceptical objection to a Citizen's Dividend that came up time

and time again: the fear most people would just waste it and become lazy?

We imagine giving a lump of cash to every person for no direct work in return, and our inner dialogue goes a bit like this: *Me? I'd spend my Citizen's Dividend on good things. I'd work less and I'd go to university to finally study digital arts. I'd build a new side business making organic, sustainable terrariums. I'd volunteer at the local dog shelter and cook for my lonely gran more often. But everyone else... most of my neighbours, they would just take up smack and eat beans and sausages all day on the couch watching daytime TV till they spontaneously combust! I'm not supporting that.*

Why do we have such a distrusting view of one another? Why do we think poor people, in particular, would squander more free time? We have to first look at our conditioning when it comes to our relationship with work itself. Back in the 16th century, the ruling aristocrats used phrases like 'Idle hands lead to devil's work'. The ruling elites weren't talking about their own hands, of course, when they spouted such pretentious wank; they were talking about the peasants and workers – people like you and me. Idle hands meant any time not working or sleeping. Devil's work meant revolution. That's why workers were forced to toil six days a week with only a break to go to church to be reminded of the sins they were born with, apparently.

This is exactly the same reason why the working week has remained stagnant at around forty hours all across Cybertime. It's like the labour movement fought to get us there, just to then die out completely. What happened? It's not like the Big C Cult needs us to work that much to feed everyone; we now

produce many times over what's necessary to meet every human's basic needs. The tortuous working conditions are clearly not economically driven. They're an ideological and political power play, an act of class war to keep us – the creators of actual wealth – addicted, skint and chronically burnt out. If you've got a full-time job, about ten hours of your day are for work (commuting to and from work included, plus breaks), eight hours are for sleep (scientifically not enough for many people, especially women and teenagers, yet most of us sleep significantly less), and the remaining six hours (if you're lucky) are to squeeze your entire fucking life into. It's pure class vampirism.

If we think our wages, working hours and conditions are bad in the West, we can't even begin to empathise with the experience of millions of indentured factory workers, child miners and construction workers exploited all across the so-called Global South. They are forced into serf-like conditions to produce all the shit we manipulated Western consumers are force-fed. Despite rapid technological progress in the past hundred years which should have continued to liberate us from toil, our relationship to work hasn't changed much. In many ways, it has dug further into inequality, every new wave of technology leading to more fascism and a higher concentration of power in the hands of the already powerful. With all this in mind, it makes you wonder what part of history the billionaires fantasise about when they say, 'MAKE [their chosen shithole] GREAT AGAIN'.

Something is chronic when it is so common, so hyper-normalised, that you fail to notice it anymore. It becomes part of your background reality. Maybe you help block it out with

drink or drugs – that is, until your body gives up the fight to get the emergency message across and you crash, burn and potentially die.

Maybe you realised you were unhappy and unhealthy at your 40-hour, full-time shit job. Maybe you decided to go do it alone, self-employed, build your own business and path. Maybe you decided to take time off for a year and live off your small savings to recover. Even there, you feel it. Like an endless marathon you are forced to compete in, without ever having signed up. Every waking moment, and even in your dreams at night, you are just running, running, running – hoping for a finish line that eludes you like the end of a rainbow and its pot of imaginary gold. Sometimes, we are our own worst bosses. Even quitting the job and going solopreneur doesn't necessarily save us. Because the Big C Cult has installed little cunt managers in our minds, who – along with the prison guards there since childhood – keep cattle-prodding us every time we try to truly rest and recover. The exhausted mind dares not stop moving, even for a moment – for fear it might not have the juice to kickstart ever again. So it ruminates constantly around endless to-dos, demands and deadlines. The more you tick off, the more seem to magically emerge in an ever-widening stream, river, fucking ocean of anxiety, stress and sleeplessness.

And if you didn't opt out of wage slavery, you spend your life trying to escape it or cope. You finally fly to some cheap, sunny holiday destination to treat yourself, but after a week of chronically burnt skin and even worse liver poisoning from the cheap booze you end up right back on the edge of your bed, putting on your work clothes and feeling even more tired than when you left. But don't worry: you've got 'time off' dur-

ing the week – one, maybe two, days if you're lucky. Sitting at your desk, you fantasise about visiting friends you haven't seen in ages or finally replying to their texts. Maybe you'll go on a hike like you used to when you first started dating your partner. Maybe you'll cook up a storm and surprise-invite the neighbours round. But as the first day off blurs into an array of unpaid chores – cleaning the house, doing the washing, fixing the car, ironing clothes for work (who the fuck invented ironing!? Prick!) – you forget all about your fantasies. If you miraculously make it through that list, what do you want to do with the rest of your time?

I, personally, liked to oscillate between pulling an all-nighter, out-of-my-mind high in some club or getting drunk in a pub or – more often than not, especially when it wasn't pay weekend – vegetate and disappear into the couch watching a mind-numbing series while getting eye-wateringly stoned. I can still remember the deep desire to either explode in a ball of hyperactive energy fuelled by stimulants and techno, or stop existing altogether, not needing to 'do' anything. I don't regret those feelings but I do feel some sense of shame around sharing them. Part of me wants to hide the times I gave into urges.

In our shadow self (the side we don't trust and can't control) we feel broken and worthless. We hide it behind layers of masks that we then project onto our citizen peers. We don't trust them to acceptably manage more time off because we don't trust ourselves. We survive the Big C bullshit and yet come out believing we are the broken ones – because look! – everyone else seems to be getting on just fine. The perfect bodies on social media, the smiling couples at the bougie restaurant... We fail to see everyone else putting on a brave face

too. Through our cracked mirror, we subconsciously pass the broken trust and suspicion onto everyone reflected around us – and they may, in turn, pass it back. This is called 'collective illusion' and it's manufactured on purpose by the narcissistic Big C Cult. We are the daily survivors, constantly being gaslit into self-blame and suspicious hiding. Everyone can start to look like a threat – even your neighbours – for something as meaningless as the colour of their skin or religion.

So, are humans lazy bastards by nature? Not as much as we imagine. However, sometimes, yes. But so fuck!? Maybe it's OK to be lazy. Why do we punish ourselves, watching some American charlatan talk about productivity and 5 am routines when all we need is to spend a day in bed? The world will keep spinning if some of us are lazy some of the time. Did you know that ants – those shining examples of next-level productivity – spend most of their time underground doing nothing? They sometimes even fake activity if someone is passing by, then return to doing absolutely fuck all. Isn't that just wonderful? If you need to be lazy to recover, heal, abstract, survive or just be happy for a while, do it – or, more to the point: don't do it! Relieving the economic pressures that cause burnout is the only way out of this glitzy shithole we have built for ourselves.

The Infinite Money Machine for the Many (Not Just The Few)

The first myth – that we're all just lazy bastards by nature and don't deserve a dividend – is busted. What about the second

great wall of scepticism,[2] the one often used to shut down any conversation on radical ideas: 'But how would you pay for it?'

This rarely gets asked about war, tax cuts for the rich, or any other number of pointless projects invented by leaders of this Cybertime world. When the so-called Labour Government in the UK cut disability benefits to hand over five per cent of GDP to the American military-industrial complex, those same professional penny counters were silent.

It's funny to me as a writer that anyone writing science-fiction about some form of violent apocalypse is lauded by critics as a 'gritty realist', yet anyone who dares to dream of something better than what we have now is called a 'naive fantasist'. I honestly dreaded writing this bit of the book – not because it's particularly hard to explain, defend or delve into, but because the language of economics is like some occult Egyptian priesthood. It's been kept so deliberately obscure, so boring and jargon-ridden, that to even mention concepts like 'negative interest' or 'land and asset taxation' makes me sound like a crusty old knobhead.

The blatantly obvious answers to questions like 'Why can't we end homelessness?' or 'Can't we just make it so everyone has enough food and water?' are obscured by the Holy Church of Economics – a religion dressed up like a science, employed to justify the worst atrocities of the Big C Cult.[3] The Holy

2. If you are sceptical or interested in reading about some fascinating UBI studies, I'd recommend Rutger Bregman's *Utopia For Realists.* It's a great starting point.

3. You don't need to read leftist literature to find agreement here. In his book *The End of Theory*, Richard Bookstaber, an ex-hedge-fund manager, agrees that modern economics is as useless a predictive theory as palm reading.

Shibboleths of The Church of Economics sound something like this:

'You clearly don't understand how inflation works!'

Translation: If we gave everyone enough money to live, they'd probably just buy food, shelter and medicine which would crash the entire sacred temple of false scarcity for monopolies and their illusion of the 'free market'.

'Where's the incentive to work if people are just given free money?'

Translation: Better to have half the population starving and a third on antidepressants stacking shelves at Lidl than risk them spending their lives writing music, planting forests or restoring ecosystems. How would we control them otherwise?

'But how would you pay for it?'

Translation: We literally print money out of thin air whenever a bank needs to be bailed out or a COVID emergency threatens to dethrone our elite. Yet we seem to lose all our money down the back of the couch whenever disabled, homeless or poor people come knocking.

'Money doesn't grow on trees!'

Translation: It actually does! We just need you to believe our managed scarcity of supply is somehow Zeus-ordained[4] so that you continue to pay the prices we fix.

'Your proposal fails to account for the endogenous liquidity constraints imposed by recursive fiscal multipliers in a non-zero lower bound environment.'

4. In Greek mythology, Zeus is the sky and thunder god who rules as king of the gods on Mount Olympus.

Translation: Shut up, peasant. I just used big words to tell you that the economy is magic, I am a wizard and you're too dumb to understand it.

These holier-than-thou shibboleths make it kinda hard for us to get excited talking about TAXATION (wooo!). Let's face it, spending a massive chunk of a Solarpunk book talking about governance and taxation is literary suicide, especially for a debut. But fuck it! This is the nitty-gritty, bread-and-vegan-butter that's always left out in the fantastical sci-fi visions of Solarpunk. It wasn't glittery automaton taxis or sexy hippies flying solar kites that lifted us up out of the festering shithole into the light. All the tinsel in the universe spread around the edges couldn't help us until we addressed the underlying economic insanity of giving an increasing amount of our collective wealth to a smaller percentage of the population every year. We needed to get the tax and Citizen's Dividend balance correct, or the consequences would be devastating. That's why we – the citizens – needed to be in control of both levers directly ourselves.

The Citizen's Dividend had to be paid from a collective pot into each citizen's account. It was too risky to pay the dividend into private bank accounts. That would essentially be a trillion-LOL loan to these unethical profiteers, happy to take every penny and use it to further fuck up the planet and its people. Once their expensive bubbles collapse, a run on the private bank would be disastrous for us if they withheld our Citizen's Dividends. We would instantly flip back from being a society rooted in abundance to one based on utter scarcity.

We had to completely eliminate the private banking model and replace it with a central bank – one owned and managed

directly by us, not by a corrupt government or banking elite. The Citizen's Dividend had to be deposited into a Citizen's Investment Bank, a non-profit whose vast owner class – the citizens themselves – constantly reaffirmed its ethical direction. Not only that, but the money we were injecting into the system had to stay in that system. It couldn't be allowed to transfer out of a public bank back into the private banking model or else the rich would, as always, siphon it off to foreign tax havens.

Before I can explain to you fully how we planned to fund the Citizen's Dividend, I need to first tell you about our new Citizen's Investment Bank as the essential lynchpin in balancing all our new Solartime accounting books.

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The Citizen's Investment Bank

The Cybertime private banking system we are so used to here is a pyramid scheme none of us voluntarily signed up to. It's a deliberate debt trap. How come if you are poor you are almost certainly in major debt, yet if you are really rich you also certainly owe huge debts? How come poor countries have massive debts – used as an excuse to exploit their resources and people – yet rich countries have exponentially more debt, yet none of the same consequences? How come debt seems to be a liability for the poor but an asset for the rich? It seems that, no matter rich or poor, debt can only ever rise in a system that demands ever-increasing consumption. The debt created is literally unpayable. There is not enough money supply to pay off the amount of global debt and if we made a concerted effort to pay off as much debt as we could, it would collapse the entire financial system. None of this makes any intuitive sense. Yet the unpayable debt doesn't collapse into the black hole we are spiraling around as long as we find new resources – or more suckers to exploit. This is the definition of any pyramid scheme. Most cults, after all, are just pyramid schemes wrapped up in spiritual or economic woo-woo (for

legal reasons, I am definitely not in any way, ahem, referring to The Church of Scientology).

The cyber-capitalist economy has commodified almost every single human need – from air and water to health and human connection. Our primary role in this system – given you live in the West – is to consume rather than produce; to spend money on things that our lives become dependent on. The 'freedom' you are allowed consists in choosing who gets to exploit you as a worker and then poison you as a consumer. We have accepted such a shallow veneer of democracy, surrounded by an armed gang of thugs, told to be grateful they allow us to decide who punches us first.

Even such a thin veneer of freedom and democracy has been removed completely when it comes to economics. Nowadays, before your wage packet can be touched by you, it first has to flow through the hands of a commercial bank. Remember the lie you are sold? You think they will 'look after' your money, perhaps even paying you a pittance in interest annually. But this is no charitable gift. This is your interest returned on a loan you probably never even considered you made. Unfortunately, your meager loan isn't sufficient for the scale of their dastardly plans. So, for every pound you 'loan' them, private banks just invent a multiplication of that into existence – often by a factor of ten times and more. They create money literally from nothing, adding it to their ledger to spend as they please. If they get a good return, they keep the profits for themselves – in the form of lavish bonuses and shareholder dividends. If they piss it all away on dodgy scams, we are forced to eventually foot the bill. It's communism for the super rich and techno feudalism for the rest of us.

But what about loans and mortgages? Doesn't that at least keep the economy moving? The most mind-bendingly fictional part of all is that the money for those loans doesn't come from the money we deposit with the banks. It was also just invented. You ask for a £500,000 mortgage but the bank doesn't lend you money it possesses in an account; it creates it based on the contract you sign to 'pay it back'. The invented money you asked to borrow – your loan – lands right back in your bank account, turning it into yet another credit loan, often to the same bank. The bank can then use it again to invent more money and gamble with, all the while still collecting huge interest on your unpaid debt each month – which is far more than they give you in interest for the exact same money sitting unspent in your bank account.

Don't worry if your brain is pickled trying to keep track. The entire incestious system is utterly ridiculous. How is this actually how money works and we are all just OK with it? How could anyone have ever thought something so absurd – with so many runaway feedback loops – could be sustainable?

For one problem, the constant flow of new debt into the system eventually devalues a currency – unless that system can match the new money to new economic output. That means more enclosure and more extraction though. That's why capitalist governments are incentivised to prioritise economic growth at all cost. It has to service the newly invented debt.

'Cool story, bro – but didn't you say that new debt inherently creates more debt which, in turn, creates even more debt in an infinite death spiral?'

The only way out – if you stick to the rules – is default, currency collapse and hyperinflation, or massive debt cancel-

lation like Nixon tried by removing the dollar from the gold standard. This is why capitalism can never be slowed down, no matter how aware we all are of the destruction it brings. We are a swarm of ants trapped in an infinite ant mill; or drone bugs dying of exhaustion, bashing and frying our heads constantly around an evening lamp. The *system* has no mechanism to slow down, change course, or realign with new values no matter how much *we* align with those new values. The Big C Cult cannot be improved, adapted or bent to the prevailing winds. It is so brittle and single-minded that it will end with 100% certainty in absolute implosion – just like every other pyramid scheme before it. That's why anyone who says we can save the planet but doesn't talk about dismantling capitalism and this banking model at the same time, is either completely off their rocker or a corporate shill.

After our Interdependence in Solartime, we needed a completely new banking system with new ground rules, but we couldn't risk total collapse. The last thing we wanted was a mercenary army from the City of London descending on us for shutting down the 'free market' they monopolised decades earlier. So, rather than complaining about the rotten fruit under a poisoned tree, we simply stepped to the side and planted a new healthy one. We called it the Citizen's Investment Bank. It's still just a young tree, really, but it's providing vast amounts more fruit and shade for those standing under it. The new Citizen's Investment Bank (CIB) works, in many ways, just like a normal high-street bank. It pulls in deposits from its members, and under the guidance of its shareholders and board, it tries to add extra value through investments. Just like the old banking model, the CIB has the power to create money into

existence and invest it anywhere it reckons it can make a return bigger than the inflationary pressure caused. Profits from those investments then get distributed to the shareholders. So far, so capitalist.

The 12-Year-Old Shareholder

Most of us take for granted that every citizen should live under the laws of a society and, in return, they should have a say in how those laws are made. No taxation without representation, right? That's democracy! But what about the economy and the corporations running it? We are all expected to live under their rules, too, yet almost none of us has any influence or say in how those rules – those economic decisions affecting the deepest and most intimate parts of our lives – are made. It's made doubly frustrating when politicians deny our democratic mandates every time by blaming economic reasons.

Our Central Bank in Solartime, the CIB, circumnavigates the middle cunts, that is, the commercial banks, hedge funds and private equity. It ignores their existence and demands, and instead deals directly with us. All citizens over twelve years old automatically get a CIB account opened in their name. At the same time, they also become a CIB shareholder, with equal voting rights for bank elections and all the crucial decisions on investment policies and directives. This dual status as a customer/member as well as a shareholder means their status grants them access to high-level information, fully and transparently explained on their CIB banking app. You know how on your current banking app in Cybertime you can probably find some useful data – graphs and info about

the overall health of your personal finances, your income and spending, listed under various categories as well as any red flags, possible fraud payments or points of interest? We have the same kind of useful information on our CIB app for our personal account. However, since we are also a shareholder (and therefore an owner) of the bank itself, we have access to the metrics, charts and broken-down information on the entire CIB business too. Because every citizen is a member and interacts with the bank, its data provides a pretty accurate snapshot of the entire Scottish economy – at a glance and right at our fingertips. We can see our environmental economic improvements, what categories and sectors are at risk, where there are red flags that need further attention, as well as any suspected fraud. There is no need to wait for bureaucrats to release their often flawed economic data. Anyone can create any chart or graph from any data they wish with a simple prompt, cast votes on any issue they see fit, and view detailed reports or summaries of relevant data – all from within the same banking app on their phone. That makes it easy to take relevant information to their respective clan meetings and turn environmental economic issues into political ones. For the bank, this level of transparency and emergent decision-making meant having millions of shareholders at once. But it wasn't the huge bureaucratic nightmare we feared; it's been a live case study of direct democracy in action, using the latest technology to empower citizens rather than enclose and surveil them, making the CIB the core tool that democratises not just our politics but our environmental economy too.

Turning twelve is a proper big day for a Solarpunk citizen. It's our rite of passage, the coming-of-age ceremony for all our

young people, and we celebrate it big-time – thankfully not by swearing allegiance to some country or religious doctrine we never chose, nor by getting our genitals mutilated.[1] It's the moment we get our first Citizen's Dividend (CD) payment as a now equal owner of the CIB. All twelve-year-olds have access to economic power now, so they don't need to rely on mummy and daddy to organise their party. They can do it themselves!

I know, twelve sounds like a random age to hand over such decision-making power and all this dividend cash. Especially since most kids aren't exactly economic powerhouses yet (in fact, they legally can't work). Sounds like an absolute alien concept here in Cybertime – until you remember how pensioners are treated.

Think of the CD like a reverse pension for young people. Rather than selling exploited workers on the distant promise of a carrot handout (so long as they can survive wage slavery till retirement, a goalpost that keeps shifting), Solarpunk economics invests in young people from an early age. By the age of twelve, they are no longer fully dependent children. They're developing individuals with their unique dreams, needs and identities. Parents obviously still play a caregiving role but children shouldn't need to be under their complete financial control, nor should young people necessarily be a financial burden to parents any longer than necessary. A potential reason many millennials aren't having kids is because of the at least 18-year-long financial investment. Most kids now stay

1. That sounds like an absurdist joke. Unfortunately, in Cybertime, it's not. Many millions of babies and young people are still subjected to brutal rites and rituals, including genital mutilation, while being forcibly indoctrinated into patriarchal cults.

with their parents much longer – often all the way into their forties or until their parents die – not out of love but a lack of access to housing or basic financial security. If I can't afford to move out of my parents' place to buy or even rent a house, how can I bring kids into this world and expect to look after them? A CD for all family members over twelve gives everyone a sense of freedom back. It just makes sense to invest some of our collective surplus into young people who are bursting with ideas, entrepreneurship and raw energy looking for a mission and direction in life, but are curtailed by two things usually: money and freedom. Why wait until a citizen has reached the tail end of their economic productivity before we invest in them? Many (but certainly not all) elderly are financially stable by that point in life. They aren't usually looking to invest the little energy they have left into new ambitious experiments. They aren't going to be the ones to innovate, solve global challenges, end wars, build new bridges and revitalise our society. Too fucking right! They deserve to chill. It's their time to rest and recuperate while passing on their wisdom to the young. But what use is that wisdom if those young people have no power to do anything with it? And it's not like we cut pensioners' money in Solartime, either. They simply collect their Citizen's Dividend instead of a state handout. Many still have old private pensions alongside other long-term investments. For some pensioners with specialist needs, though, their Citizen's Dividend wasn't enough to live off which is why we subsidised housing projects as well as new full-time care units, paired with kindergartens and animal sanctuaries at times. Those elderly – with the most needs and the least financial resources – are now immersed in an uplifting environment, surrounded by children and animals;

a shared space where all users and residents have similar needs and joint staff can take care of them all. There, the elderly can pass on their invaluable wisdom, care and love to the young kids and rescue animals; meanwhile the children – many of whom don't have many elderly role models in their lives – get to experience the kindness and cuddles you can only get from a grandparent, while witnessing the cycle of life, love and death in a healthy environment.

Let's return to focus on those 12-year-olds receiving their first CD. Young people in Solartime still have parental guardians until the age of 16, but the young person's dividend belongs entirely to them. Even if a parent has financial guardianship, they can only withhold the money from the child in special circumstances – and even then, they are to save it for or spend it on the child's needs and development and with their consent where possible. That holds true even for young people with brain damage, mental health or special communication needs. Specialist workers can be assigned to the most complex of cases to try and find ways to achieve some level of consent.

Our youthful financial autonomy in Solartime is great for parents, too, as it allows them more time and resources to regain some of their own autonomy. Usually, a 12-year-old won't yet have bills to pay in their name. This allows many young people to save at least some of their dividend income in a CIB savings account, which offers vastly superior investments and annual returns compared to a standard commercial bank. It's a potential kickstarter fund for adulting up, allowing them time to dream, plan and get going when they are ready. They can try a few experiments with less financial pressure until they find their feet and move out the nest whenever ready. So

much of the lens through which we view the world as adults was formed when we were young. It's a time often marked by a sense of disempowerment, disillusion and violence as we are told to stop 'playing' and start 'earning our living'. In Solartime, we flipped that narrative.

Solarpunk kids are encouraged to keep playing till they find something they love. They are growing up with more financial security, trust and autonomy, with less time pressure as well as more tools to get going when ready. They don't have to sacrifice their childhood to standardised exams either. The increase in youthful freedom led to the birth of a whole new education system, led by the young people themselves. You'll have to wait till I write another book before we can explore that in full. For now, let me trace a lot of the roots of the educational revolutions back to the CIB and the CD that included all citizens from the age of twelve.

Before I continue, I want to make one final comment about bringing young folk into our decision-making processes – decisions that directly affected the entire Scottish economy. Many initially worried it would be too complex a matter for the underdeveloped twelve-year-old minds. Turns out that, in practice, young minds are simply far better suited to deal with ideas and concepts that are abstract, complex, ambiguous and nuanced. Young people often have a more honest ethical compass, less corrupted by tribal ideology and bigotry (compared to those over fifty that have gotten more stuck in their ways). Twelve-year-olds are much less susceptible to propaganda techniques, too, and since they have less accumulated assets as well as traumas, they are less selfish in their thinking.

Let's put it this way: you'll find far fewer racist twelve-year-olds than you will seventy-year-olds. When you ask an adult to describe the differences between two kids, they will usually list racial, gender, health or class differences. Ask those young kids to name a difference between them and they will most likely focus on the fact they like different chocolate bars or sports stars. By age twelve, distinct identities have formed and cultural ideologies are beginning to influence behaviour – such as music and fashion subcultures as well as awareness of culturally curated concepts like gender, race and class. Thanks to the internet, twelve-year-olds have been exposed to copious amounts of content that is considered only for adults, and I don't just mean pornography. I mean complex ideas, global conflicts, power structures, conspiracy theories. One crucial thing is that those surface-level differences are not yet deeply imprinted or hard-wired. Confirmation bias isn't as strong when asked to study a proposal's data and come up with an informed opinion. As a result, the newly emerging CIB and its decision-making structures, along with its integration with technology, were far more easily adopted by younger people, while older people were more attached to rigid categorisations, strictly boxed definitions, political tribes and parties, manipulated ideologies, flags and colours – all of which aren't particularly useful measurements of actual reality. So, young people make for perfect shared owners and decision makers at the CIB and for our society as a whole. Our elderly, who were slowly finding new recognition from and connections to young people, were mostly happy to share power in this new dynamic, so long as there was space for their cautious wisdom. For every young person living in Cybertime feeling disempowered, iso-

lated and unheard, there is a pensioner counterpart feeling the same way. They are just as sick at the sight of a revolving door of seventy-plus-year-old slimebags and con-artists running the country into the ground in their name. Empowering young people has helped us empower our elders too.

The New Flow of Wages and Taxes

Within the first two years, almost everyone had started paying their wage or salary into their Citizen's Investment Bank account. This wasn't legally forced by some Great Clan mandate; it was just that the CIB account was hands and toes better than anything else on the market. The high street banks we used to deposit our money with do business with a central bank – the central bank giving them vastly superior interest rates on their money and much better loan conditions than we silly peasants would ever be granted by a high street bank. Our Citizen's Investment Bank bypasses private banks completely, opening up those superior central bank offers directly to us, the citizens. But the CIB doesn't only offer a much higher ROI than any commercial high street bank ever could – it is also more ethical. You certainly weren't invited to be a shareholder of any other bank, which creates a true sense of ownership, loyalty, mutual benefit and – most importantly for a new currency and bank – trust from all citizens towards the CIB. Humans always lead with trust. Given that the users and shareholders of the CIB are the same people, there is no longer a conflict.

This new model induced the gradual decline of the private banking sector in Scotland; not at the violent hand of some communist dictatorship (our Great Clan Gathering actually had

little to nothing to do with any of this), but by the forces of the market – just as the Scottish Enlightenment originator of capitalism, Adam Smith, had intended.

So, to recap: our new digital transparent currency, the Scottish LOL, is created by and almost exclusively flows through a new central bank called the CIB – a bank created and owned by the citizens themselves, free from corporate or government control. The financial health of the currency is constantly and algorithmically measured against both human and ecological health data to create a Human and Planetary Health Index (HPHI) rating which, in turn, influences the amount paid out as a dividend each month to all CIB shareholders.

Our CIB accounts are true one-stop accounts for most incomings and outgoings. They are where incomes, salaries and wages are deposited and where everyone's Citizen's Dividend lands. Taxes are automatically calculated and deducted from each personal CIB account and flow back to the Great Clan Gathering's CIB account that represents your political interests and public investment projects. That GCG account data is publicly available to all shareholders through the app so they can keep track of their tax money. Successful public projects usually lead to a rise in overall income by expanding access and innovation; this is captured by the HPHI as a net positive, which increases future dividend payments for everyone and creates a positive credit loop that simultaneously funds citizens and our environment – the exact opposite of the Big C Cult debt pyramid.

Can you see the new financial ecology growing through the cracks and from the ground up yet?

Profit for People and Planet, Not the Pricks

Remember I said our Citizen's Investment Bank acted similarly to the commercial banks here in Cybertime in that it takes our deposits and multiplies them, creating new currency out of thin air and investing it in portfolios designed to profit the shareholders? That might sound very normie-capitalist on the surface but with our Solarpunk incentives, those same investment strategies lead to radically different results.

Legacy banks slowly withered away as customers freely chose to move their investments and accounts to the CIB. Thankfully, this transition happened slowly; a sudden collapse of the legacy banks would have been catastrophic. Think back to how we talked about those commercial banks creating new money based off of our deposits (or, more accurately, the loans we effectively gave them), along with all the loans and mortgages the banks issue. Whether the bank was getting into credit or debt, they rigged it so that both were an excuse to print more made-up money. If the entire commercial banking structure were to collapse overnight in one fell swoop, the CIB would not have been able to keep pace with the sheer amount of new money those commercial banks created and which the economy had become completely codependent upon. Like coming off a severe drug addiction, we needed to ween off them slowly. The CIB not only had to replace the legacy banks' old customer accounts when they were shut down, but also the cash injection into the economy that had traditionally accompanied such deposits and withdrawals. Under the old system, the commercial banks just kept the new money themselves, passing it between other banks, corporation stocks or govern-

ment bonds. None of it ever trickled down as promised to us, the ever more indebted servants of the great cult.

That's why it's impossible to explain our Citizen's Dividend without first explaining the CIB. As the old banking model died off, we needed a mechanism to pump fresh currency into the economy whenever necessary. The Citizen's Dividend made for a vastly superior money injection mechanism than before. Money passed between the ultra-rich has virtually no economic impact – it doesn't change their behavior, creativity or productivity. A poor or middle-earning citizen, however, is almost guaranteed to spend and reinvest their dividend, circulating that cash vastly faster than any mega-corp, bank or rich prick ever would. Money doesn't want to accumulate where it becomes increasingly meaningless. It wants to flow! That's why the CD couldn't have been passed by referendum at a more opportune time, the missing piece fitting perfectly into the new banking model. Forwarding new money directly to every citizen each month solved the problem of how to replace enough of the liquid money created by the old system. However, as a stimulus, it was never going to be enough on its own to drive the transition. The innovation spurt that kicked off needed fuel – and lots of it. That is why the CIB helped stimulate the economy through a huge programme of grants, loans and investments.

As a citizen, leaving your surplus cash in your standard CIB account month after month will cause its value to diminish. That's why the CIB came up with a whole range of investment ISAs and savings accounts. Whatever money citizens move from their standard account to one of the investment accounts won't depreciate. It will grow, depending on how well the

investments improve the HPHI metrics. Citizens themselves can propose and vote on what portfolios the CIB should invest in. The capital for those investments comes from the money citizens save – or essentially loan to the bank – through those investment ISAs and savings accounts. As shareholders, citizens are incentivised to build clever investment portfolios for the bank that they can then, as customers, place a piece of their savings into each month to avoid taxes and depreciation, all while directly investing in their community. Whatever funds citizens allocate to each investment portfolio, the CIB can multiply those balances tenfold – just like the old commercial banks did. These funds are then distributed as a mix of grants and low-interest loans to the individuals and businesses applying to those portfolios.

A bank's motives become radically different when the shareholders it maximises for also happen to be the entire citizenry. The overall objective remains the same: making money from sustainable investment portfolios that serve the interests of shareholders while regularly passing those profits back to them. Those shareholders usually reinvest their profits in other ventures to avoid tax and cash depreciation but our system is a closed loop that includes all of us. There are no vampires syphoning off vast amounts into private non-taxable offshore hoards.

Something else radically shifted for us, and that was how we identified what a decent profit was. It could no longer be 'profit' at the expense of a singled-out, exploited community, service or ecosystem. This new definition restricted a lot of what the bank could invest in. No bloodsuckers and therefore no oil, weapons, unsustainable mining etc. None of these ac-

tivities were remotely profitable based on our system of environmental economic measures. Instead, we invested in things that almost guaranteed profits – profits that never showed up in the Cybertime data but did in our HPHI metrics. These were achievements most shareholders would be happy to see in their quarterly report, whether or not a cash profit figure sat next to them: things like nationwide investment in public parks, bike lanes, free libraries and public art. (Not that these investments don't also generate a financial return; it's just, for the sake of this argument, beside the point.)

Take our Solarpunk libraries, for example. They loan out not just books, but all sorts of useful, modern gear – tools, 3D printers, computers, hoovers; you name it. None of this community value will show up on a caveman GDP chart, yet almost every single shareholder will benefit from the existence of such libraries. So obviously, they do show up in our profit calculations when measuring the return on our investments. This, in turn, has had some other interesting consequences for the projects receiving investments from the CIB: they don't necessarily need to repay their interest and loans with cash alone. Their community impact is included as part of their revenue, meaning they can pay back bank loans through a mix of money and positive community impact.

If this sounds way too abstract and impossible, consider that there are already a host of tools and calculators within the third sector here in Cybertime that help convert community impact into monetary terms. It's how they assess the impact of public and charity funding and therefore not as alien as it might sound at first. The CIB simply allows organisations to pay back debt using these impact tokens rather than just LOL. This

did, of course, create an incentive for some to try and falsify or somewhat inflate their community impact – just as some companies here like to inflate their revenues or hide debts. To counteract this, community impact is measured purely through independent, verified data, combined with direct feedback from customer and service-user reports. These measurements then determine the community value tokens issued to pay off debt. So, it remains much more convenient to pay off debt with normal LOL currency tokens and only use community impact to offset a small percentage, unless the extra paperwork is worth the hassle during a downturn year. After all, dealing with slightly more admin is much better than facing bankruptcy like under the old system.

In the past few years in Solartime, CIB shareholders have often voted to focus their investment funds on pioneering science and industry, tackling localised issues but also global ones like climate change. Scottish non-profit pharma companies have received heaps of start-up capital to build the infrastructure and find top scientists. These pharma companies are owned and run by the scientists, technicians and workers themselves. They focus on developing unpatented actual cures for diseases, not just plasters. Research companies can now focus on the best science and tech advancements possible for the most optimal human outcomes and actually get proper public funding for it. The global public benefited immensely as a result. This has disrupted the deeply sinister false scarcity that the Big C Cult had created around human health and healing. If we can share a technology, product or service that improves or saves lives around the world, why wouldn't we?

How can anyone call it a profit if it's made at the expense of even one human life? Millions die annually from preventable diseases in horrid poverty. In the West, we took those nations' resources to build our technology and wealth in the first place, then added insult to injury by refusing to share the benefits with them – knowledge that is infinitely tradable without losing any of its value. And yet still, we refuse to share it. What a parcel of rogue cunts!

The struggle between making health technologies like vaccines unpatented and accessible to billions versus hiding the knowledge behind huge legal- and paywalls was, unfortunately, violently tested during the late 1990s and early 2000s when millions were dying from HIV/AIDS, particularly in developing nations across Africa. The life-saving antiretroviral drugs were priced by US pharmaceutical companies at $10,000 to $15,000 per patient per year! Countries like Brazil and South Africa, desperate to save their citizens, banded together and attempted to use international law to force compulsory licensing to produce cheaper, generic versions – a move that was immediately met with aggressive trade lawsuits and political action by the United States government and the pharmaceutical companies. For them, protecting patents was more important than saving the lives of literally millions of people, including their own citizens. This conflict became so severe that it triggered a massive global health crisis and resulted in the 2001 Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health, which ultimately affirmed the right of nations to prioritise public health needs over patent protections. This landmark decision paved the way for generic ARVs to drop in price to less than $100 per patient per year, less than 1% of the original cost – however not before

millions had died an agonising, preventable death at the hands of governments using taxpayers' money to fight tooth and nail for the profits of a handful of US company shareholders.

I can't believe a not-for-profit pharma industry feels like a radical concept here in Cybertime, decades after this incident. No one on the 'left' or 'right' is really even talking about it. A citizen-owned NGO pharmaceutical company can easily outcompete the old dinosaurs while dramatically tanking the cost of healthcare for us all. Breaking up a state-sponsored monopoly on human health is a literal no-brainer. Every human on the planet benefits – even the fucking arsehole CEOs and shareholders of those pharmaceuticals. Besides, it's a move that doesn't collapse the market; it just finally returns it to a free state where medicines and cures can compete openly on merit and utility, rather than being muscled out by Big Pharma's fuckboys. A fair market brings down prices, drives up quality and increases diversity as different businesses find different niches. You can't patent a basic chocolate bar or a wild cocoa bean. Does that mean there is no global market for chocolate? Would we be better off if we allowed Nestlé or Monsanto to patent cocoa beans? Would that improve the quality and access to chocolate? You get what I'm trying to say.

In Solartime, there has been one set of shareholders that hugely benefited from this flurry of human- and environment-centred activity: the shareholders of the CIB. It was a real trickle-down (and up!) effect – not just an economics myth. When an investment costs more money than it initially makes back but thousands of citizens report improved happiness and health as a result, cult economists in Cybertime categorically

shout 'LOSS'. For us, the investment has made a profit. Who do you agree with?

Shared Risks, Amplified Returns

One last point about the CIB and our emerging banking model: those grant loans are also available to small third-sector community interest companies (CICs) as well as tech and science start-ups. Thanks to how the CIB measures profit under our new environmental economic metrics, it can take on a much higher degree of risk because the companies and projects it invests in are all CICs. CICs have humanist agendas – unlike vulture capitalists sucking the lifeblood out the world around them. That means even if some experiments inevitably fail, the CIB can share the cost of that loss across society as a whole. Overall, people pay very little; meanwhile, the net benefit of a successful experiment will more than pay for the collectivised cost of the losses because – unlike here in Cybertime – the knowledge, application and profits are shared globally. No single business can tolerate a hundred failures, but the CIB can. A hundred failures leading to one success is still worth it. When the benefits of that successful innovation are shared equally, a billion people might benefit – making a billion successes in return for a hundred small losses a very good risk-to-reward ratio.

From the bank's perspective, a successful loan isn't just about getting their money back, but about the loan having sparked something bigger: a thriving new business sector, a proper community-focused project, the expansion of the commons or some genuinely useful, cutting-edge tech that benefits

us all. When that happens, the success no longer belongs to one company alone; it benefits all citizens – both directly and as CIB shareholders, given that most of the money eventually circulates right back to the CIB through fresh tax revenues generated by new potential sectors, profits and opportunities.

Take a new high-speed train line. The train line might make some small direct profits or it could be subsidised to provide free travel for everyone. Ironically, it might make more society-wide profits in the form of fresh avenues for trade and human connection if it makes a loss by running for free or cheap. That's often more cash in people's pockets and new zeros on businesses' bank balances – balances that, one way or another, end up back at the CIB. If a company asked for funding to build such a project in Cybertime, with a plan to then offer the service to the public at loss-making prices, no bank here would invest. The CIB in Solartime does.

You might wonder how big investments like these don't lead to runaway debt or the continual cannibalisation of our mother planet – like they do here. The answer lies in the LOL. Remember, the LOL isn't a fiat currency, nor is it backed by a precious metal like gold. Its reserve is the entire planetary ecosystem, humans included. The success of this system doesn't just lie in the hands of the few million citizens of Scotland, deciding what is in their selfish best interest; it relies upon the entire citizenry acting as responsible guardians of the whole planet when choosing how to spend any newly created wealth. Any runaway debt cycles or gambles that lead to the destruction of more of the planetary or human ecosystems have an inflationary impact, meaning we all lose money.

Let's imagine every citizen of Scotland was somehow manipulated, for whatever reason, to believe they should go to war with England or France. Never mind the military consequences of such a decision, but the war would be almost impossible to finance since it would completely tank the value of the currency at a time when Scotland would need to spend the most. Every bomb dropped on a pristine forest or civilian home would collapse the currency further, leading to even less money to buy more bombs. So, there is a strong disincentive to waste even one LOL on useless activities like war. Now, does that mean we are ill-prepared if a foreign, non-Solarpunk power decides to invade us? We would be if we didn't also have our rainy-day reserve of foreign currencies and easily sellable or tradable assets. I will try and remember to cover our Solarpunk defence initiatives inspired by countries like Switzerland and the Scandi countries in a future book. Just remind me. I am terribly forgetful.

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Kickstarting Solarpunk with our Citizen's Dividend

Other than a few of employers worrying about losing their power to exploit their staff, the usual corporate-paid stooges and a small minority of over-sixties who generally hate any kind of change, there wasn't much opposition to the idea of a Citizen's Dividend by the time it came to a referendum.

I know it's hard to believe here in Cybertime, but discussions around economics and taxes were actually hot stuff for a good while in Scotland. They connected the macro world to our micro pockets. That's why, after months of national discussion, going door-to-door across the country and hosting hundreds of events (like the Partick Burgh Halls one), the voter turnout for the public referendum on the Citizen's Dividend was an immense 85%. Guess what the result was? The highest in favour of anything ever voted for by the public on record in Scotland. Eighty-eight per cent to be precise.

Many hostile foreign governments and media tried to call foul. 'That's popularity figures reserved for Putin and North Korean dictators,' they said. But it was the most transparent, internationally witnessed referendum to have ever taken place

on the planet. Folk were invited from all over the world to come study and observe it – students and specialists alike. It was partially to prove our democratic transparency, but maybe more self-motivated than that, it was our way of inspiring future movers and shakers to learn and take home some Scottish Solarpunk seeds in their pockets.

The Great referendum High

I remember the day the results were announced. It was 17 October 2019. Boris was pulling England out of Europe just after we had officially re-entered as an independent country, our sisters and brothers in Catalonia were battling with the Spanish police in the streets, meanwhile Hong Kong was locked in a tense standoff between protesters and police. But in Scotland, the Citizen's Dividend Bill had just passed, previously through the Great Clan Gathering by consensus, and that day by citizen referendum.

Saying 'I remember the day' might be a stretch, since me and some friends had timed the peak of our mushroom trip to hit just as the referendum results came in. Pure genius... in theory. When I saw the 88% come up on the screens at our local pub, I swear time froze. I felt myself getting sucked in through the upper left hole of the eight, then swirling round the bottom, then in through the bottom right and up again, looping infinitely, as if It felt like we had entered a new age of eternity. I only came back round because of the sheer mass of sweaty human flesh rubbing and bouncing off me as people went mental. It was as if Scotland had won the World Cup. Naw,

actually more mental than that. Referendum day was definitely a TAPS-AFF day.

That night, still standing somehow, we stumbled to see Colonel Mustard and the Dijon 5 play on the balcony of the City Chambers in Glasgow. I was tripping my nut off, so I don't remember if we caught the bus or if we just straight up flew there on our magic carpets. One of the band's maddest members thought it'd be a brilliant idea to crowd-surf on an inflatable unicorn banana boat, launching himself along with that mythical beast right off the ledge. It should have ended in serious pain, but George Square was packed and the air so light with optimism that he floated down like a feather. He rowed himself across the sea of millions, dodging the endless array of spiky flagpoles. People weren't just flying Scottish flags either. Almost every country and progressive movement had theirs up proudly. News about our wee experiments had spread around the world and George Square was hoachin' with gorgeous foreigners much better tanned than us, who'd come to soak up the electricity. With all the other shit going on in the world, it made us feel proud to be human.

The world's media had been deliberately cordoned off to the upper floor of an old Wetherspoon pub (the Tory pub went out of business after our Interdependence). That way, there was more room for actual citizens and partygoers to join in the celebrations. It was also a gesture to protect our right to party in privacy a wee bit without a Belgian news crew in yer face. Remember we had only recently legalised all drugs? Naebody wants to see their cousin Terry on the telly, absolutely mad wae it, wearing nothing but a glittery cowboy hat and a

glow-in-the-dark strap-on, licking a lamppost coated in pigeon shite like the tastiest fuckin' lollipop in the world.

By the time the last band came off and the sky turned deep red, as if she too was crying from the heart, I realised just how utterly minced I was from all the mushies and mosh pits. The need for a pish, while drowning deep in an endless crowd, hit me like a train to the baws. After what felt like an hour navigating the human sea, I finally reached the infamous portaloo station. In my altered state, the lurid plastic green of the cubicle, the echoing sounds, the sudden confinement – it all warped and melted. The door clanged shut and suddenly, I was stuck. Proper stuck. The handles morphed into thorny vines, the air thickened and I was convinced I'd stumbled into a forest fairy portal. It felt deeply disrespectful for me in the presence of fairy royalty to get my dick out now and start pissin' down their portal. As much as it pained me, I pinched and held it in.

I had to get out.

I really fuckin' had to get out!

But the more I struggled, the more cosmically entangled I became. Force only seemed to make it worse so I started whispering plausible opening spells to the suffocatingly indifferent walls.

'Time spaghetti?'

Nothing.

'Quantum lasagna?'

Fuck.

'Abracadabra!'

Holy shitballs of fire, it actually worked on the third try! There, in front of me, was LOFI. Her eyes, still sparkling from

her own dose of mushies, bore a curious blend of concern mixed with genuine hilarity.

'There you are!' she grinned. With one strong tug, she yanked me out of my fairy prison, then took one look at me and burst out, 'You look like you've been wrestling a badger! And fucking lost!'

I never managed to piss till we got home hours later, safe in the welcomingly boring four walls of our wee toilet. It took us about a week to recover fully from the comedown of what ended up being a three-day bender – all paid on tic from our future Citizen's Dividend of course. The referendum news lit up the news cycles and imaginations of millions around the world. It became a bit overwhelming, to be honest. We needed a break.

LOFI suggested we walk the West Highland Way with phones switched off. It's a gorgeous seven-day trek across the best scenery and landscapes of the Highlands of Scotland. She'd never done the hike, so it felt like a great way to connect with the place we both felt was home. After borrowing and begging around some friends for gear and clothes, we headed off. The layers of city noise peeled away slowly the further we walked, and night by night, we found blissful silence among the forested hills. One night, camping on top of a vast canyon, looking down the sheer drop to the gully below, under a sky so clear you could map your way out the Milky Way itself, LOFI secretly pulled out a small amount of ceremonial cacao. She had been carrying it in a zip bag in the side pocket of her rucksack, together with a little whisk and special spices. It wasn't much; just enough to boil up with some water and share in one of our bashed-up metallic camping cups.

We sat, passing the warm, bitter drink, humming, then singing softly to each other and the stars, our voices evaporating into their vastness. We drank the last sips in silence, then held each other's gaze for what would normally feel like an awkward amount of time. I didn't even have the usual urge to pull silly faces since her eyes had drawn me in. Behind them was a warmth and kindness that felt both ancient and utterly new.

'Close your eyes,' LOFI said softly.

A moment later, I could feel her heat on my back as she wrapped around me, pulling my shoulders into a tight embrace. The space we were now enveloped in seemed to melt my spine until something cracked open that stretched all the way into my chest. It felt like LOFI herself stretched all the way into my chest, and for the first time in a long time, I felt truly held.

I had always been the strong one on the outside. For eight years of my young adult life, I helped take care of my dad as he was developing Alzheimer's. He was a superhero in my eyes, a real-life Robin Hood of his time, robbing banks to feed the poor and fuel a workers' revolution. He lived ten lives in one and was the most loving and caring man I've ever known. He didn't love and care for me because he expected anything in return. Yet, when he needed help, I did my best to be there with and for him. Living with his Alzheimer's felt like the weather could change any second and, as the disease developed, there were less and less clear, calm, sunny days. It often felt like we were all stuck on a ship in the middle of an awful storm, unable to see past our fingertips through the fog so thick and the emotional waves so choppy, we were but sick and disorientated. Trying to stop us from getting smashed into bits, I held it all

together. The level of tenseness had become so customary to me I forgot love and trust are a two-way street. In that embrace, up that mountain with LOFI, I was reminded that it's OK to be held; to let go of that tension, to trust this life and lean back into it; to stop worrying about falling – because maybe, we fly.

Even in the worst of storms, my dad found wonder, beauty and happiness around every corner and under every stone. He remained the captain of his own ship till his last breath – but he had also spent most of his life holding back from romantic situations, probably out of fear of accidentally putting a loved one in danger. I think with everything going on since Interdependence, I was subconsciously repeating the same story – not fully embracing love, afraid to drag people into things where they might get hurt. You can't hold back your heart forever though, or shelter those who connect with it. We are all in this together and it's our vulnerability, our connection, our shared risk and adventure that makes it all worthwhile.

After our mini cacao ceremony under the stars, we wiped the happy tears from our eyes and laughed at the beauty of it all. Here we were, hiding out in the Scottish Highlands like some ancient warriors, only now supported by our modern clans and in the knowledge that if something went wrong, we would both be held – by our dividend, our community and each other.

This is what our Citizen's Dividend does. It's our mutual embrace, a collective signal of love, trust and shared freedom. Now, every citizen of Scotland can play, spend time with loved ones, go on more hikes and adventures, experiment, build – and dare to fly. When a dark night comes, our Solarpunk society will be there to hold us.

No Losers: The Birth of the Gatekeepers

For months after the referendum results, people were flying. Even those who had voted against the proposal soon joined the regular street parties, swept up in the ecstatic excitement. Other than corporate stooges, disapproval had mainly been among the over-60s who struggled with so much rapid societal change so quickly that they were petrified of the whole thing.

But in Solarpunk Scotland, if you voted and lost, you were invited to apply to play one of the most important roles in our new, burgeoning democracy. We weren't in the mood for bringing back mob rule. Genuine concern, healthy scepticism and opposition are vital democratic forces throughout a process, not just at the beginning. So the 12% who had voted against the Citizen's Dividend Bill were invited to apply to join a new organisation we called the Gatekeepers.

Their role was to work with legislators and organisers rolling out the new bill. Wherever they chose, they could interject, raise alarms, call meetings and guide media spotlights on anything they deemed to be unsafe, corrupt or differing from the scope of what was agreed. They became the empowered opposition, tasked with ensuring all new bills weren't pushed through by yes-men and sycophants leading us down the garden path. Despite their smaller numbers, these opposition groups had teeth (the over-60s included!), making sure no snidey lawyers or smart-arse wannabes could bury things in the details or sneak agendas past a public that hadn't specifically voted for them. As Brexit had clearly demonstrated, material circumstances and public opinion can change – even after a referendum is passed. If those material changes become

overwhelming, the Gatekeepers had more ammunition to slow down, halt or even reverse a bill by gathering enough public support for another referendum.

Each bill put to referendum created its own specific Gatekeeper group who would be an action group focused on that particular bill. Their job wasn't like the old political opposition roles though, simply being against everything and anything proposed by current reps. This kind of tribal red/blue party politics was over. A selected Gatekeeper who voted against one specific bill might be a staunch proponent of the vast majority of other ones the same clan reps proposed. This is not a contradiction in a system like ours, built on the strength of ideas, not personality. There was tension and sometimes, there were power struggles. But we need tension and struggle in a healthy democracy, so rather than resist, we institutionalised them. However, not in the pantomime sense of Westminster Lords, drunkenly harf-harfing at one another. Instead, Gatekeepers formed a real, empowered opposition whose concerns and fears had to be addressed both to pass a bill and throughout its rollout and enactment.

It was the Gatekeepers who had to agree on what our first dividend payment was to be. The Great Clan Gathering had formulated and passed the bill to create the CIB and now the Citizen's Dividend. They were both ratified by referendum, which meant that the CIB would take over the distribution of the dividend once all the metrics and taxation admin were set up and running through it. This kept the CD independent of political influence and under the direct control of the citizens themselves. However, we still needed to agree on an initial amount for the dividend – an agreeable amount that wouldn't

bankrupt the country, but would suffice to be the fiscal stimulus our radical new economic model required. We handed that initial decision-making process to a special Select Committee that included the Gatekeepers.

Keynesianism goes Solarpunk

The Clan Gathering appointed DRIFT to coordinate the special Select Committee overseeing the rollout of the exciting new bill. He was a funny, lanky man: half pirate, half shaggy dog. Girls always fancied him; I think on account of his big Sideshow-Bob smile, kind heart and the ability to hold a captive audience even when he was stoned and literally just said 'ehhhhhh' for an eternity. He wasn't chosen for his mathematical and economic skills – we had the best minds in the world for that stuff. His role as coordinator was to bring peace and hold a safe space for diverse views.

Me and DRIFT had been friends and co-conspirators for decades. It was DRIFT who invited me to the first rave outside Parliament back at the start of the Interdependence uprooting, and the one who got to enjoy a complimentary, non-consensual kicking from the Metropolitan Police right alongside me. But our friendship and activism go way back. We once chased a hundred English Labour MPs up the road in a rickshaw. They had tried to do a secret photo-op for the anti-independence campaign in Glasgow city centre. I was hungover as fuck when I got the random tip-off from a chef friend that the MPs were on the train up from London. I didn't really believe it either, but my curiosity outweighed my hangover.

I called DRIFT and within twenty minutes, we were at the batcave, pulling out a gorgeous rickshaw, equipped with a disco speaker we had been using to help citizens register to vote before the referendum. When we pulled up outside Central Station, DRIFT pedalling and me in the back, we were as shocked to see the MPs as they were to hear us. As they made their way through the city, we blasted the Star Wars *Imperial March* while I ordered my fellow Glasgow citizens to 'bow down to their imperial masters'. It was the perfect concoction of people power and chaos. Our wee joke certainly ruined a lot of carefully orchestrated media interviews. The entire English brigade of apparent journalists weren't at all interested in actually reporting the reaction English MPs were receiving in Scotland. They were just annoyed their pre-arranged interviews were being disrupted by pesky citizens. We were supposed to just act like an obedient backdrop for the arrival of our English overlords.

Our half-baked rickety stunt cost us a sandwich and half a joint. Theirs cost the taxpayer hundreds of thousands in colonial management 'expenses' – all of it pissed up the wall after the media disaster that unfolded as our rickshaw videos went viral online among the voting public. After that day, no English politician has been stupid enough to step off a public train onto the streets of Glasgow ever again. Curiously, the smell of rotten shite around the city centre has improved too.

DRIFT was such a trusting friend he jumped out of bed that day without really knowing what the fuck I was going on about. I swear he can strike up a conversation with a lamppost and, more often than not, he'd get a response too. That's why the Clan Gathering invited him for the role of coordinator for the

rollout of the Citizen's Dividend Bill – an especially tough task working alongside this particular batch of Gatekeepers.

The Gatekeepers had been selected by lot from applicants that voted against the bill. With an average age of 70, this wise but long-winded assortment of Gatekeepers had a tendency to slow things down. That didn't bother DRIFT though. He loved a good story time and knew how to bring it back to the main theme if it drifted off to far (hence his name). He was a tad more anxious about meeting a specific Gatekeeper; one he had been warned about. Morna Gray was 87 years old but as sharp as an assassin's blade. She had no problem speaking her truth to power as she saw fit.

The same think-tank experts who had drafted the specific wording of the Citizen's Dividend Bill were now all split up and forcibly mingling with the people that most vehemently voted against it. This kind of thing unfolded after every major new bill was passed, though this one felt especially tense. DRIFT paid a lot of attention to making sure the attendees didn't form into clumps or mini gangs. When he deemed it appropriate, he would get everyone up and off their feet, play a quick silly pirate game and end up with them all sitting in different chairs with new neighbours, giggling. Tension and debate are good for a healthy democracy, while laughter and play are the perfect remedy to bring us back to our shared humanity.

Eventually though, DRIFT had run out of pirate games and the inevitable standoff couldn't be avoided any longer. Morna was one of the staunchest opponents to the bill and was now getting up from her chair. The poor guy next to her who, in good heart but without asking first, tried to assist her to her feet got a swift skelp across the wrist and a stern look. Morna

certainly did not require any assistance to have her say. She was one of the original and most badass Solarpunks I'd ever met, even though she'd never have called herself one. People of her generation hated the fact we had all changed our names to funny-sounding noises, written in CAPS LOCK and that we no longer described the world in the same terminology they had grown up with.

'This whole thing is preposterous! How can we be debating how much free money to give to people for nothing in return? They will just squander it! They will lose the value of work and the value of money will become meaningless! We didn't win the war against fascism just to turn everyone into lazy slobs dependent on handouts,' Morna began.

There was a pause for reflection, though mainly terrified speechlessness.

'Excuse me, sorry, can I ask how did you get here today?' came a voice from one of the Think Tank folk who had been quietly taking notes and smiling so far.

SYRA was just 20 years old, but anyone who mistook her youth for inexperience quickly regretted it. She had been a youth representative during the Solar Society Roadmap discussions, holding her own against politicians, economists and so-called experts quadruple her age. Scottish to the core, with a Jamaican mother and a Kenyan father, her accent bounced between Glaswegian grit and the lyrical warmth of Patois, depending on how much trouble she was about to cause. A fair match for the seemingly immortal Morna, who retorted,

'I got here on the 62 bus. Why?'

'How much did it cost you?' SYRA continued.

'I used my free pensioner Travel Card, of course!'

'Oh aye and what's your plans after this get-tae-gither?'

'Well, a few of us Gatekeepers are going to go to my favourite place for some cake and tea, then maybe a wee classic movie matinee. They are showing *Casablanca* at the GFT Cinema!' Morna paused, suspicious.

'How come? Are you fishing for an invite, young lady?'

'Sounds like a great wee day out. Must say I am a bit jealous but no, I'm not looking for an invite. Not to be too rude; just curious how you are paying for aw that?'

Morna thought about it.

'Well, the bus is free like I said, it's half price at the cinema for over-60s and the pensioner's tea deal is...' Morna cut off, then back in as she realised where SYRA had led her.

'Wait a minute you sneaky wee chancer! You are trying to say that this whole Citizen's Dividend is just like oor hard-earned pensions?'

'Well, isn't it?'

A sharp silence seemed to slice the room in half. Morna, who rarely ever let her steely face change shape, looked visibly shaken.

'We earned our pensions! We paid into a pot for our whole life, worked every week. I never took a day off in twenty years! That's more work than the days you have breathed on this Earth! You don't understand. We sacrificed our freedom, happiness, our lives for this country. We lost so many, too. The least we can get in return is enough to buy a piece of cake and a cinema ticket every now and then in our golden years.'

'You deserve way more for all the sacrifices you made!' SYRA replied. 'It's not fair they took your hard-earned savings and gambled them away on their failed investments and crude wars.

It's not fair they keep raising the pension age just as women like you approach it. That's not a fair deal if they keep changing the goalposts.'

The Gatekeepers at this point all looked visibly riled up and ready to kick off a World War Three, if it wasn't for the sciatica holding them back. The temperature of the room had noticeably risen since SYRA had poked the pensioner beehive, seemingly on purpose too.

'It's a fuckin' disgrace what they did to us!' Charlie, one of the other Gatekeepers, butted in. 'A whole life of false promises to end up abandoned to rot in a piss-soaked care home where some young upstart thinks he can tell me when to go to my bed and who I can and can't take in with me!'

Charlie had no need for filters anymore. He was actively choosing to grow old disgracefully. He never lost the horn in old age either, with a tendency to chat up all the ladies in his care home, inviting them back to his bed for 'snuggles'. DRIFT was forewarned by care home staff to keep an eye out for him trying to sneak off with other Gatekeepers mid-meeting. Most of Charlie's proposed lovers had no partners left and were probably just as frustrated as him. It's a myth we all want to believe that our grandparents aren't as horny as we are. With all that extra free time, I'm not surprised many probably get more action than us. But apparently, fraternisation of the inmates is against the care home's policy. 'Nae granny shaggin' allowed!' he'd protest at almost every meeting he could attend. He often just voted 'no' to referendums to join the Gatekeepers and get out of the care home for the day.

Things were still pretty shitty for many elderly people, unfortunately, at the time of that meeting. It was the early days of

our Solarpunk Scotland – back before the COVID nightmare response, when Community Care Villages weren't a thing yet. (Mind, I mentioned the projects where child, disability and elderly services as well as animal rescue all banded together in a purpose-built village?)

'Exactly, Charlie! That's why we need this Citizen's Dividend to be enough to live a simple, frugal but happy life, even when times are rough. No one can take it from you; no need to delay gratification or reward till you are 80, 90 – hell it will be 150 by the time I get to retirement!' came a retort tinged with frustration from GORDO, another Think Tanker in his late thirties.

'Morna, you rightly say you earned your pension, but don't you think all citizens have the right to access those benefits and share the profits of society here and now? We all contributed to create those profits. It's our rightful return for everyone, rich or poor, young or old.'

'You are giving it to rich pricks too?' protested another Gatekeeper.

'What was the last means test they made you do before 2018? To receive your winter fuel allowance or your disability benefit? How did that leave you feeling after? The vast amount of money spent on so-called benefits is lost to admin bullshit like that. It doesn't go to the recipients. Means-testing, management and catching benefit scroungers costs more than just paying people's benefits. A flat rate dividend to all citizens administered directly by the Citizen's Investment Bank has almost zero admin costs in comparison, saving us billions on needless bureaucrats and pen-pushing pricks at the job centre or DSS. If you are rich and don't need the dividend, eventually

it will come back to the pot through negative interest and asset or land taxation. We don't need anymore micromanagers on a badge-fuelled power trip,' GORDO vented his frustrations.

SYRA had considered Morna's reply and turned to her. 'I'm glad you are finally getting some pension for all your investment in society, Morna. But if you could go back in time and choose – at what point do you wish society started supporting you with a monthly cash injection? Now, when you are in your 80s? When you hardly have any overheads or dependents, you maybe eat less, have almost no projects, business or work left to attend to? Imagine you got it when you were younger. Maybe when you first wanted to leave your family home – like me now, to start your own path in life. Maybe when you had your first child and needed to invest in so many new things for her arrival. Maybe when you were made redundant because your company moved its offices to China and you were forced to start all over again?'

This conversation felt tense but deeply real. It was a safe-enough space and thanks to DRIFT's playful facilitation, quiet moments and silence could coexist alongside the debate. They were seen as a sign of respect and good communication. After a long pause, Morna finally spoke, her posture having melted a bit.

'I do want the comfort and freedom I am afforded now in my old age to be available to everyone. I don't want young people today to have to endure the suffering I did to survive. The awful jobs, the controlling relationships, the threat of homelessness, nuclear war even! Maybe I am being overprotective because – well, I suppose – I'm afraid. I am afraid of all this change, all this spending. That it's going to rush too fast and destroy

everything in its wake, even the pittance pension we cling to today.'

Margaret, one of the other Gatekeepers who had befriended Morna in the waiting room, supported her point. 'I don't allow myself to buy the Mr Kipling cakes anymore at the supermarket because I'm petrified of being poor again. I stockpile Tesco's own cakes. There's probably more flavour in the cardboard box you buy them in, but I don't have any more energy. If things go wrong again, you know? Here I am, eating Tesco-branded cardboard, while we debate whether to spend 60 billion or 100 billion of money we supposedly just invent to hand out to every Tom, Dick and Harry. That scares the living hell outta me!'

'It's called a fiscal stimulus,' one of the more analytical and less emotionally intelligent Think Tankers abruptly exclaimed.

'Fiscal stimulus?!' Charlie shouted loudly. 'My memory might be shite these days, son, but I mind that term last time when the bastards were aw over the news, dishing out wads of our taxpayer cash tae bail oot them evil American bankers. Cunts! The lot ae them. 2008 wasn't it? Look where that left us! Even more poor wae oot a pot to pish in.'

DRIFT, who had been silent for a while holding space, noticed an opportunity to steer the conversation again. Many of the Gatekeepers present loved nothing more than the chance to rant about the war.

'Charlie is right. If we were just handing this money to the banks to pay off their expensive gambling habits, we would be fools and should be made to walk the plank. Yeeearrrrggh!'

DRIFT pulled his best/worst pirate face to a very unamused circle of expressions. Unperturbed, he carried on, 'But what

about Germany after the war? Wasn't there something about a fiscal stimulus...?'

DRIFT knew exactly what he was talking about, but playing dumb hippy worked better than being a smartarse. The sentence was barely out of DRIFT's mouth when Ethel, who had stayed quiet so far, suddenly leaped four feet up from her chair like she was being animated by some war hero ghost. She straightened her back, eyes blazing as if possessed with a message from the other side.

'Germany after the war! That's what we should all be talking about. After 1945, Germany was in ruins. Bombed to hell, millions dead, infrastructure shattered. The Allies could've left them to rot, let the market decide, let them scramble through starvation and debt. That's what they did after the first war, remember?'

'Remember it? How fuckin' old do you think I am hen?' Charlie joked rudely.

Ethel glazed over the comment and continued, 'The so-called winners carved up the spoils of war at the Treaty of Versailles and it left Germans humiliated, angry and broke. Starving the German economy only led to austerity, despair and people paying for bread wae wheelbarrows of cash. There was no hope or vision for Germany's future. That left the door open for you-know-who.'

'Despair, no hope or vision? You talkin' aboot the Huns or Rangers and their shite footy result at the weekend?' outburst Charlie with two fingers on his upper lip and the woman next to him trying to stop his right hand from reaching a full Hitler salute.

'Let her finish please, Charlie, mate. The football patter is for the pub after,' DRIFT gently intervened.

Ethel took a breath, her voice steady but urgent, 'Aye, that mad bastard. That's how he tried to take over the world, setting everything on fire all over again.'

You could see this was still a deeply emotional subject for her. Most of the younger folk present could only sympathise, with no lived memory of global wars reaching them.

'But after the Second World War, they finally learned. The Americans saw it clear as day. If you let people fall into despair and hopelessness, someone will come along and offer them up a suitable enemy. So instead of crushing Germany under war debt yet again, they did the opposite. The Marshall Plan pumped billions into rebuilding Germany. Not loans, not charity; actual investment in infrastructure, in people, in European stability. And by Hestia,[1] it worked. Germany flourished! In less than thirty years, West Germany was the third-largest economy in the world and the reunified Germany still is today!'

She paused, her voice catching slightly on her own excitement. Even Charlie was strapped in and enjoying the story by now.

'It wasn't just about money. It was about peace. We forget the entire post-war European project was as much about building a lasting peace as it was about making money. When people aren't starving, when they aren't scrambling just to survive, they don't turn against each other. They don't blindly march

1. Hestia is the Greek goddess of the hearth and home who, despite being an Olympian, preferred the quiet comfort of the domestic fire to the chaotic drama and ego-trips of the other gods.

into war. They build, they create, they raise families and start businesses and invent things and contribute to something bigger than themselves.'

Ethel exhaled sharply and sank back into the chair, shaken by the thoughts that had just passed through her.

Taking a moment for the history to sink in, SYRA asked, 'And what did our governments do when times got tough? They did the opposite from the Marshall Plan. Austerity was their word for it. They cut social spending. They let factories shut, let towns collapse, let entire generations struggle to have anything to look forward to.'

Ethel's eyes were on the floor. 'I feel like a daftie sitting here parroting and representing that nonsense, saying "aye but where does the money come from?" when the money never really mattered. I had never connected the two things before.'

Margaret turned to her Gatekeeper pals, Ethel and Morna, shaking her head, laughing, 'And here's us, scared to buy a bloody Mr Kipling cake in case we end up skint again. That's what years of economic fear and scarcity does to us. Makes you hoard your own scraps while the rich buy lobsters for lunch wae oor bloody money.'

She let out a deep sigh, then looked around the room, arms crossed but less defensive now. 'So go on, tell me Morna. If the bloody Americans could pull it off for the Jerrys, why the hell can't we pull it off for oor weans?'

The room erupted with cheers and applause. Charlie, who had been eyeing up the three ladies the whole time, had to be encouraged to sit back down, the excitement and clapping having gone straight to his groin.

It was still hot in the room but less burning now. It had turned more cosy as we sat around the conversational campfire. The circle finally came to a conclusion soon after, with its first consensus decision (including Morna) setting the primary dividend payment to 1,500 LOL a month for the first year. This was the fiscal kick up the arse to get the gears in motion – just like it had been done in Germany post-war. In the following years, the amount would be directly tied to the environmental economics stats, the overall health of our society and the tax revenue raised that year, with an aim to get us all another 18k LOL or more the following year. Overnight, everyone in the country was incentivised to work towards the success of Scotland. Childcare, volunteering with the sick and vulnerable, repairing and upgrading a local area, community growing, reforesting and all sorts were now financially incentivised and rewarded activities.

When the meeting officially wrapped up, Morna had to book three entire rows at the GFT cinema as almost every attendee of the meeting joined the Gatekeepers for tea, cake and *Casablanca*. Many elders relished in the youngsters' company and loved nothing more than loudly explaining the plot twists before they happened, alongside the entire history of each actor and which one they'd always fancied. The younger ones cringed but secretly loved it. Attention after all, is love.

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THE COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION

I think I have dragged it out long enough. All this happily-ever-after stuff sounds lovely – Scottish grannies and the mad youth mob joining forces despite their differences to give a tasty wad of cash to every citizen. But how? It's obviously fantasy, right? All of these must be made up! At least for people here in Cybertime. Surely!?

It was the other major incredulous objection that kept coming up, all the way back at our first debate at the Partick Burgh Halls: How the fuck can we afford it? Not just the Citizen's Dividend but the new justice system and all this participatory democracy.

In order to prove to you that this is all very real – that we actually did pay for the Citizen's Dividend, and then some sprinkles on top – I'm going to need to talk about a deep trigger point, something that will almost certainly make you close this book and throw it in the fire while you have to go rinse your eyes with bleach.

TAXES – there, I said it. I know, the hair on the back of my neck does that too. I cannae promise reading about taxes is gonna be as riveting as gubbin' two ecstasy pills and jumpin' on the rollercoaster at M&D's Theme Park (which I would highly

recommend, by the way), but if I left out any chat about them, you'd finish the book for sure believing I was making this shit up. So, for the sake of veracity – and to give you a framework for how it can be done here in Cybertime once we start stirring things up – I present to you: our sexy salacious Solarpunk taxes!

Cuttin' Oot the Pish

Of course there was a mountain of polling, surveying and doorstep blethering as part of our Great Tax Debate. The word 'great' in this context was added for sarcastic purposes only. It probably goes without saying that everyone, rich and poor, agreed they hated paying taxes; especially when these taxes were taken from them mandatorily, leaving them feeling like they got fuck all in return. Except, when we really dug down and asked people's opinions, that wasn't actually the full story. Not all taxes are painted with the same shit-covered brush. For most people, it wasn't a general disgust at the thought of paying taxes. It was more about whether they felt like they got value for their contribution or not. Also, not all taxes are hated equally. There are certainly a few that everyone universally hates the most, particularly: income tax and corporation tax. For the average worker, the sentiment against income tax usually goes something like this:

'You've been eating beans from the can all week, just waiting on payday at the end of the month. Your payslip arrives at last and that's you finally got the cash for a proper pint to shake off the week after your shift this Friday. You open it up and there, in bold, is how much you actually earned that month.

They call it "gross" because it's a disgusting number when you see it compared to the final amount you actually get to keep in your "net" and take home. Even before you can even bank your money and head to the pub, the government pops up out of nowhere and takes a big, tasty slice out your money pie.'

There is a particularly cruel psychology in chronically underpaying an entire class of society, handing them a slip with a number they can already barely survive on, then slashing a significant chunk of it off to go to politicians with their offshore accounts and billion-pound side hustles, who tell us there is no tax money left to increase the minimum wage.

'What did the old government ever do for me? Fuck all!' it echoed across every pub table and doorstep. From the average worker's gut, the old British – and later, Scottish – government felt like nothing more than a mafia collecting its protection money.

If you were self-employed or a small business owner, the sentiments were just as bad, if not worse! The government demands that you accurately calculate and submit how much tax you owe, even though they hold massive amounts of your third-party financial data – or at least have the means to calculate it themselves. Otherwise, how come they can fine you on incorrect submissions of your tax returns or audit your figures? On top of your self-assessment, they then charge you for their admin costs just to read over the paperwork they mandatorily forced you to send them. Don't even get started on the head-fuck of hours and pounds on accountants and software just to understand their questions. It's like one of those invisible laser corridors from movies. You have to reach the other side, but accidentally trip up and expect to have your head sliced

off. Worst of all, we are bombarded daily with news about the latest billionaires and their corporations never paying income or corporation tax; not like us fucking mugs. It's as if they are actually bragging about it as they rub their tax-free salt into our eyes.

So, what did we do over in Solartime? We scrapped them. The most hated of all taxes – we chucked them in the sea. No more corporation tax. No more taxes on income. What you earn each month is yours to keep, 100%. Go and enjoy that pint without the government enjoying ten on you first. We also did away with the dreaded tax returns. No more made-up deadlines, accountancy fees or late submission fines. Crucially, by eradicating tax reporting and collecting them in a different way, it closed almost every tax loophole, both onshore and offshore (which were just elaborate ways of allowing professional accountants to manufacture lies using specialist legal language). This effectively created a simpler way of collecting taxes than the 17,000 pages of tax code still used in the UK in Cybertime today.

The decision from the Gatekeeper's Special Committee on the Citizen's Dividend alone was going to cost us 93 billion LOL – a bill about four times larger than all other government spending combined. Add in the rest and, altogether, we needed to raise around 120 billion LOL to balance the spectacular Citizen's Budget while not taking on any more national debt. We had undertaken a fucking spending bonanza and I'm not going to lie: it felt impossible to pull off. Surely, a new country should be doing its best to be fiscally responsible and spend as little as possible till it finds its feet? Yet, here we were cutting hated taxes and simultaneously pumping out money to everyone in

one of the largest fiscal stimuli ever recorded in Scotland. Are you excited to find out how we paid for it all?

In the National Interest

Interest rates – you hear that jargon constantly, bandied about by the disciples of the Cult of Economics on the news. But most of us (myself included pre-Solartime) would only ever see it in our actual lives as a tiny line on our bank statement, a few pence deposited by the bank labelled 'interest'. These pennies are your reward for lending the bank your money.

Imagine you're lending a mate a tenner. If it's a mate you don't quite trust to pay it back on time, or if you're a bit of a stickler for getting your dues, you might add some interest to that tenner. So, for every month he keeps it, he owes you an extra quid. Now, I'd have some serious questions about your so-called friendship if this is genuinely how you operate, but it illustrates the point.

When you put your money in the bank, or when banks lend money to each other, they want a wee bit extra on top as well (banks make for shit friends clearly). It's one of the ways the bank makes money on the loans it invents. In Cybertime, the central banks are the big-boss bastards when it comes to money. They decide how much that wee bit extra should be. If they want us to spend more in the economy, they'll make interest rates low. That means it's cheap to borrow money, so people start buying houses and launching businesses – all using borrowed money. If they want folk to save, they'll increase interest rates. That means you get more back for leaving your money in the bank.

But what if interest rates went negative? That's when things get a wee bit weird. It means you're actually paying the bank for the privilege of them borrowing your money. It's as if banks were saying, 'We're no wantin' your money just sittin' here for us to spend. We want it moving out; we want it working. We want you to go spend it, invest it, do somethin' good with it!' In this scenario, there is less incentive to borrow money that isn't yours, since it will depreciate fast. There is more incentive to spend the money you have already accumulated. No profit-seeking bank would ever set a negative interest rate as they want you to keep lending them your hard-earned cash every month so they can spunk it up the wall on their oil, gas and baby-killer weapon investments. So, in a society without a Citizen's Investment Bank or a Citizen's Dividend, it's very unlikely interest rates would ever go negative.

In our new wee Scottish setup, though, it makes perfect sense! The only problem was that 'negative interest' was a terrible brand name. It sounded too much like something from the Cult of Economics (I mean, it's literally got the word 'negative' in it). So that people knew exactly what it was when seeing that line or transaction on their bank statement, we called ours the Community Contribution.

Understanding Negative Interest

To understand our Community Contribution, let's first remind ourselves what inflation means. Inflation is a general increase in the price of goods and services, and it's often seen as a necessary and structural part of the Big C Cult economy. In reality, though, inflation acts as a flat tax that hits the poor

the hardest. The rich maybe only spend 5% of their monthly income on basics like food and the lecky bill. So a 6% rise in the price of bread or fuel is a mild annoyance, a rounding error in their annual spending. But if you're poor – living paycheck to paycheck, which means you maybe spend 90%+ of your monthly income on basics – that same 6% price rise can be literally life-threatening. It's a tax on the necessities of survival, making it harder for those with the least to make ends meet.

How do Cybertime central banks respond to inflation and rising prices? They raise interest rates, making it more expensive to borrow money and better to save instead – given you will get a slightly higher interest payment from your bank. This might work as an incentive for people with decent incomes and savings who have access to loans and might borrow money to buy houses and cars. If they were to reconsider their luxury spending habits and save more of their wealth instead, some of the buyer pressure pushing up prices would be taken off the market. But the old supply-and-demand economic theories are all fucked in this late-stage version of the Big C Cult. Since the super-rich have monopolised almost all markets, it's not a shortage of supply that pushes up prices anymore; monopolies fix prices regardless of shortages. They have taken over everything on the board, including all our essential utilities like water, electricity, transport and basic foods. These monopolies know that, no matter the price they charge, people and stupid Western governments have no choice but to pay them. So, even with higher interest rates, they see no real decline in sales – only an increase in unpayable debt for normal people which forces further asset transfers to the billionaires collecting on

debt foreclosures. There is no incentive to lower prices in a monopoly, ever. Only to lower quality.

Now, imagine as hard as you can that you aren't super rich (difficult, I know). Maybe you already have substantial debts accrued over your life – not from buying luxuries, mind; just living costs and university education. Inflation means you watch prices go up and the value of your pitiful wage packet go down. You have less money to feed yourself and your family. Previously, you took on payday loans and other predatory financial products to get over these short-term financial humps, but they are no longer humps. They are permanent. There are less jobs than ever and you are already overworked at your current job. You are going to need to borrow something substantially larger on top of your diminishing wage – except, the central bank has just decided that, thanks to rising inflation, they are going to increase interest rates. You haven't seen savings since the fucking millenium bug. Instead, you have to pay even more interest for the money you are forced to borrow if you want to feed your family. It's the Big C Cult pincer manoeuvre and not a niche case. Around half of all US-Americans are living paycheck to paycheck, in mountains of debt, watching inflation skyrocket and, despite Trump's best efforts to lower them, they might actually see a rise in interest rates soon, drowning them even further in unpayable debts – debts mostly accumulated from getting sick in the richest country in the world that also happens to have the most expensive health care system in the world, however with significantly poorer care than that of the tiny island nation of Cuba.

The Central Bank could significantly lower interest rates to prevent those citizens from drowning, but that would create a

billionaire-fuelled spending bonanza – allowing them to buy up even more assets and housing stock, further monopolising everything and anything on cheap borrowed money from their pals at the bank. We're talking assets and homes normal people have no choice but to use and live in – at whatever cost the billionaire feudal landlords set. Since ownership of supply (not supply itself!) changed, inflation now blasts off into hyperspace. Even the best-intentioned central bank has no tools in its chest to actually help normal people in this late stage of decline, because the billionaire class has designed it that way – to only take into account the interests of capital and therefore the billionaires who have hoarded it all.

Our fiscal stimulus device in Solartime, the Community Contribution, is a vastly sharper and more equitable tool – and it doubles as our secret billionaire sniper, too. The negative interest rate essentially forces people and corporations with large savings to spend and invest, or else their hoarded wealth slowly drips out their accounts like water from a leaky bucket.

Won't that encourage the billionaires to speedrun their little game of buy-up-everything Monopoly, knowing their money gets drained each month? It would if it wasn't for a few other taxes we will come to later, like land and asset tax. Also, billionaires don't actually spend their own money most of the time. They keep very little of it as savings to avoid tax. Instead, they own shares and sometimes assets that allow them to take out huge bank loans with them as collateral. They can spend the bank's money on their lavish lifestyles. The money they spend on themselves and their monopolising projects is classified as debt since they need to pay back the bank – so it's 100%

tax-free money. This is why debt is an asset to the rich, and a liability to the poor.

But they eventually have to pay back the loan plus interest, right? Technically yes, but that interest is far less than the tax burden they avoided and they can just take out another loan elsewhere to pay off the previous loan. Essentially, the rich pay off debt by creating new debt. If it all gets a bit overboard, no worries, a shell company here or there can go bust, declare bankruptcy and write off whatever they can't be bothered to pay. All the bank will take in return is a few shares or depreciated assets. This is why orange-stained arseholes and their kind would take lower interest rates any day over rising inflation. They don't need money to live or buy things (other than money itself), so forcing lower interest rates when prices are already skyrocketing is great for the billionaire parasites living on bank credit.

In Cybertime, these pricks can go to any commercial bank and tell them they want to borrow £100 million to buy up a thousand homes, throw out tenants and gentrify the fuck out of the neighbourhood for a huge profit. The bank will look at their stock collateral and the projected profits from the sinister scheme and will rush to be the first to sign the loan contract. Not so with our CIB and LOL coin in Solartime Scotland. We, the citizens who control the money flow, don't grant them this lifestyle on tick.

If Richard Branson walks into a CIB branch and asks to borrow a billion to stick a dick rocket into space or to pollute the skies with luxury private jets or buy out an entire market sector for fun – how do you think that loan application goes when filtered through our HPHI metrics? Do those loans still

look profitable to the CIB loan managers who have to answer to the tenant shareholders getting shafted? Can rich people still take advantage by hoovering up as much borrowed money to price us out our own communities?

Naw. The insane cycle of debt laundering is put to rest and replaced by our Community Contribution (CC) instead. The CC makes it cheap to borrow money from the CIB only if the project positively impacts the people and the planet. Now, every single cult economist is screaming as they read this: 'If there is inflation and a negative interest rate, that will just lead to hyperinflation and a runaway death spiral!'

Let's look at a pretty devastating scenario: England blows up some oil tankers off our coast. The climate change-fuelled series of wildfires burns 20% of Scotland's newly planted forests to the ground, wiping out 50,000 homes with it. Terrorism and tragedies like this can happen – and they are much more likely now than ever before. In this exact scenario, our HPHI metrics show a steep downturn. The currency contracts and everyone gets a smaller Citizen's Dividend that month – right when some people have been made homeless and are most in need of support. There is an increased demand for housing and less supply, so prices go up. People could start to panic-buy, pushing prices up even further. Would it lead to hyperinflation though? Even under such horrific circumstances, our Solarpunk model has a backup plan that steadies the ship; something that simply doesn't exist here under the Big C Cult.

Firstly, there is a huge financial incentive for the entire country to rally around to help alleviate the situation as effectively and compassionately as possible. Literally everyone's CD is tied to how well we can fend off the disaster capitalists and

heal. A trust-based society of mutual aid and interdependence means the recently made homeless will be re-housed by their community immediately. There is a strong pressure for people to find a way to replant the trees, clean the water and make reparations – or at least offset any lasting damage – so that the HPHI metrics return to former levels and the CD goes back up. This could look like massive new community housing and rewilding projects, ran by an army of volunteers who all collectively benefit the more time and skills they put into helping.

Secondly, Solarpunk communities are vastly more resilient in their disaster response. Remember Hurricane Katrina? George Bush called in the National Guard – not to help dying citizens, but to shoot suspected looters. The government was more interested in protecting water-damaged shoes in a shop than the thousands of humans forcibly rounded up and huddled into unsuitable football stadiums. Many people were shot to death by police and soldiers – not because they were looters even, but because they were Black and those with the guns were racists. Where you and I might see a desperate human running for their life, they saw a dangerous criminal and fired their government-issued gun. This is completely backwards. Instead of aiding people in an emergency, the government sends in soldiers to shoot them, using the chaos to clear out unwanted communities and destroy public services for an already deeply traumatised population. Solartime Scotland, on the other hand, has been trying to bring scarcity to an end in a generation. That means, in times of crisis, citizens will have access to free food growing on lands held in common as well as access to basically free electricity that has been decentralised thanks to heavy investments in community solar-, wind- and

wave power. Utility companies are obliged to be non-profit community interest companies (CICs), meaning they have no shareholders desperate to syphon off opportunistic profits. CICs are worker-owned corporations, there to provide in times of need and crisis – keeping water, transport, internet and sewage costs low. Things like disability-, elderly-, child- and social care have all been reintegrated into the commons. Unaffordable homes are a thing of the past and a nationwide series of underground bunkers built as part of our national defence strategy double as perfect emergency shelters in times of need. The cost of living for basic necessities is tiny compared to Cybertime, so even relatively poor people do not spend 90% of their paycheck on survival. When their income forcibly takes a dip in a crisis, the cost of living does not spike and the basics are taken care of. That means an even larger army of human ingenuity and labour is freed up of time previously spent on survival and meaningless corporate jobs to instead tackle the source of the disaster, helping and healing the victims and environment. No need for panic buying, no disaster capitalists swooping in to exploit, no need to take on debt to pay your lecky or feed your kids or get to work.

Third and final, in an absolute worst-case scenario, the CIB can raise interest rates. Rather than taking a contribution from savings, it allows a temporary relief and, if projections deem it helpful, it may even decide to pay into them instead. However, it may also decide to do the exact opposite and further lower the negative rate, taking a larger community contribution from savings in order to temporarily boost the Citizen's Dividend suffering from a depreciated LOL. That means, instead of squeezing the poor in times of crisis, the wealthy carry the

burden. Those who have the luxury of having larger savings are asked to contribute more to help lift the whole country back up through a universal non-means tested Citizen's Dividend, a potential life saver for victims of a disaster. The logic may sound inverse to central bank policies here in Cybertime but without needing to write a thesis on it, you can start to see that, when you live in topsyturvyland, it might actually make a lot more sense to put everything you thought you knew about the system on its head and start from there. It all depends on your vantage point, of course. If you are a billionaire reading this, you are shitting your tiny boy pants. Your savings are leaking away each month, your access to tax-avoiding cheap credit is over, you can't buy up monopolies and, in times of crisis, the CIB has the tools to take an equal percentage contribution from you. (The word 'equal' to a billionaire sounds like 'theft'). Like I say, a lovely side effect, even if unintended, is the fact our Community Contribution is a secret billionaire sniper. 'But won't all the billionaires pack up and leave?' Aye, maybe – and we'll hold the door open for them.



I have rushed ahead at a million miles per hour, so let's slow down a bit and make sure we fully comprehend what our CC is exactly and how it functions practically.

The CC is a contribution made back to society based on how much surplus tokens an individual or business has saved up – basically, how rich they are. The more lucky and successful they are financially, the greater a contribution they have the

privilege of making to the community that paved the way for their personal success.

We often have a desire to squirrel money away for rainy days and for our families and loved ones' future. That makes sense in a scarcity economy built around debt where you are expected to 'earn' your right to breathe. With a secure Citizen's Dividend providing for your and your loved ones' basics, the impetus to squirrel is diminished. Imagine squirrels had a steady supply of acorns throughout the year, including winters. Would they spend so much time and energy hiding them underground?

Rather than it being a mandatory tax everyone hated, the Community Contribution became a symbol of success, a gift you could be proud of giving – similar to the old Pacific Island Chiefs in their gift economies I mentioned before.

Here's how the CC works in practice: Every citizen has a bank account at the Citizen's Investment Bank of which they're an account-holding member and also a voting shareholder. Each year, that account receives 12 monthly Citizen's Dividends, variable each month but on average adding up to around 18,000 LOL – or a very low salary. That money arrives at the start of the month. All your salaries, dividends and incomes are also paid into the same account at the start of the month, but your Community Contribution, crucially, is calculated at the end. This means you can enjoy your earnings, go get that pint with friends, buy in the shopping and pay your monthly bills without any tax deduction being made at all. It's your fucking money; no one can stop you spending it on your basic needs and bills. Essentially, the Community Contribution is calculated above a certain threshold and a charge on your surplus only – the extra money you haven't used or invested that month.

Stagnant money is valueless numbers and wasted paper. It's literally the single most significant cause of the downfall of the late-stage Big C Cult we are witnessing here in Cybertime right now. Our CC is a contribution from all the dead money sitting around to help fund a fresh flow of living money, like oxygenated blood for a healthy body. We wanted our money to be constantly doing good things – creating environmental and economic wealth and funding innovation. The only possible losers here are the wannabe Scrooge McFucks that wish to maintain their vast privileges and power from just sitting on vaults of dead rotting money.

Not all savings are bad, though, right? We didn't want to encourage reckless spending and a population dependent on loans when rainy-day emergencies actually occur. So, to make sure everyone also had a solid safety net, we introduced a threshold. The exact amount varies, but roughly your first 10k savings isn't touched by the CC. However, if at the end of the month, your account goes above that allowance, then a percentage of the surplus would gently flow back into the community pot automatically. This percentage is gradual and progressive, meaning the more savings you have above your allowance, the larger your contribution. The CC starts very small: anything from 1-4% for personal accounts. This setup remains pretty much the same for both personal and business accounts. There is no advantage to storing money in a personal or business account, so there is no incentive to search for tax loopholes either.

And the beauty of it all? No tax returns are required. The Community Contribution calculation happens monthly and automatically by the bank itself. The CC was our first tool for

beginning to level the playing field, making sure money flowed into the CIB accounts of the many, not just into the deep pockets of the few.

Extraordinary Claims

Extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence, and it sure is an extraordinary claim to say we built a perfectly balanced system that simultaneously gave everyone enough money to survive with one hand, and automatically worked out how much was needed in contributions from everyone's leftovers on the other.

Admittedly, it wasn't an easy boat to steady in the early years. There were initial annual quarters of boom and bust that added to the deficit as we experimented to find the right economic recipe. I am not an expert in the precise numbers. In fact, even the sight of an equation with letters in it instantly regresses me to my Year 5 Maths class, trying to blame my non-existent dog for my even less existent homework. Bear with me, though, as I'll try to summarise – from my imperfect knowledge – how the balancing act works out.

Year on year, contributions and taxes fund more than just our Citizen's Dividend which almost everyone (bar a few billionaires) is happy to pay, especially as these contributions and taxes are all calculated automatically and handled transparently on a ledger by the Citizen's Investment Bank's algorithm – an algorithm owned and controlled by the citizens themselves. Let's trace the money flow a wee bit to get our human heads around it all:

The initial 93 billion LOL to kickstart the first year's CD for everyone – we just invented that. We literally brought it into existence, new currency created and injected into the system. How could we just invent 93 billion LOL and hand it out to everyone? It sounds mental until you learn the UK government alone has invented or 'quantitatively eased' over £895 billion since the 2008 banking crisis. The big difference was the UK government invented that money to hand it to commercial banks, so they could continue to do the very things that brought about the crisis and collapse in the first place. Solarpunk Scotland instead distributed it equally – 18,000 LOL to every single citizen over 12 years old. After years of trying to find the perfect economic modelling, in the end, all human behaviours can't be predicted or represented by an equation, no matter what some economists might religiously believe. There's just too much radical uncertainty and random chaos. Despite our best minds doing their best to predict and project, we had to roll the dice, sit back, enjoy the ride and hope that eventually, most of the 93 billion LOL showed back up in the same CIB holding account it was distributed from. With any luck, it might have gathered some friends along the way, leaving us with even more to distribute next time.

Remember that money isn't taxed as income, only as a surplus saving at the end of the month. Most poor people have basic shit to buy each month, so by the end of the month, the amount that ends up as savings is low, around 10–30%. For the vast majority of people, that means their Citizen's Dividend pays them more than they have to pay back in Community Contributions (CC). On the contrary, the richer you are, the less you need a dividend to pay for basics each month. A larger

amount of your income, including your CD, will end the month in savings that are then eligible for the CC. In Cybertime Scotland, as a comparison, there is around £210 billion of liquid cash, yet almost half the 5.5 million population has less than £1,500 in savings. That means the vast majority of the money needed to build, repair, educate, heal and renew is locked away in dead vaults of a tiny minority of people. We calculated that an average of 4-5% of CC would cover the entire costs of a CD while leaving the vast majority of citizens quids in – with more money than they started with, even after their contributions had been made.

Everyone has a baseline allowance threshold, but the solution to our early turbulence was to make the precise allowance as well as the exact CC percentage variable each month – not so drastically that you couldn't plan anything into the future, but enough for the CIB's Machine of Loving Grace (MLG) to have the wiggle room needed to keep money circulating, aiming to end the year with those same 93 LOL back in the original account, ready for recirculation. The bank's MLG took into account human behaviours and variable needs based on economic status as well as monthly ebbs and flows that needed adaptation – things like Christmas and summer holiday periods. If, by the end of the year, the algorithm calculated an annual deficit, it would adjust slightly higher contributions over the next year. If the economic output grew and people used their incomes (CD included) to generate new environmental economic wealth as expected, then the CC would automatically adjust downwards or the CD could adjust upwards giving everyone an even higher takeaway amount that year.

This is also tempered by the overall health data from environmental and human ecosystems keeping the underlying value of the LOL and CD in line with planetary capacity. During a financial or ecological crisis, the CIB continued building a rainy-day fund – much like Norway's Sovereign Fund – with the power to issue additional currency and keep the CD and wider system flowing. Creating too much money during a crisis would eventually worsen the crisis or the hangover from it, so it could only be used in extreme niche scenarios. This has only ever happened to us once in Solartime during COVID (yes, we had COVID too; I'm saving that story for a future book covering our health system), but infinitesimally smaller quantitative easing or money printing was needed than in Cybertime. The money we did print went straight into the hands of citizens as a boosted CD – rather than to banks and the richest 1% like it did here. Shutting down the economy for a health crisis was a huge stress test on the system designed to keep money flowing equally. If everyone is cash rich, but products-and-services poor (including the rich), it means money naturally wants to pool around larger magnetic attractions – that is, the rich. This increased pooling or concentration of wealth would have led to runaway inequality when our economy reopened – exactly like what happened here in Cybertime where the cash rich top 1% could go on a spending spree buying up all the pieces on the monopoly board.[1] Thanks to our CC, pools of wealth accumulating during COVID had a drainage point. Thanks to

1. I'd highly recommend watching *Gary's Economics* on Youtube for a proper analysis (in understandable language) of how things like COVID handed over generational wealth to the super rich.

our land and asset taxes, which we will come to, any residual wealth and power after COVID was either spent on projects that benefited us all or mopped back up in taxes and distributed where needed. Corporate monopolies formed from extreme concentration of wealth almost always lead to the rise of fascism. Obviously, the tiny handful of Scrooge McFucks sitting on their unearned wealth, living in ever-higher ivory towers, employ more and more foot soldiers to guard the entrance. Our Citizen's Dividend makes sure no one is desperate enough to work as a foot soldier or guard for a paedophile billionaire, while the Community Contribution on our citizen-owned LOL ensures there is nowhere the billionaires can hide the keys to their vaults. The CC itself acts as a firewall against one of the biggest threats to any national economy: capital flight or, in other words, rich fucks running off to the Cayman Islands with all the money they extracted from us when threatened with fair taxation. We shut those loopholes down by making the CIB, our citizen-controlled bank, the sole gatekeeper for all foreign currency transfers of our new currency, the LOL. Because all LOL was digital and existed only on our transparent CIB ledger, no one could secretly transfer it to an account in the Cayman Islands without anyone noticing. Instead, if you wished to move money out of the country, you had to do it through the CIB currency converter. This gave our MLGs a clear and immediate access point to assess where that money came from (they don't need to ask the person, they can just look at the ledger) and apply any outstanding CC or taxes to that surplus, meaning any money leaving the system was first making its fair, final contribution to the community that made that wealth possible. In Solartime Scotland, you can still

choose to reside in a tax haven if you wish – but if you or your company generate wealth in Scotland, you and your company pay your contributions to the schools, roads and worker protections there too.

Pretty fair and simple, really. We easily made offshores a thing of the past. It wasn't a deeply technical task. It just required the will from the people who owned the money supply. If politicians aren't closing them in your country, it means they are willing to tax your money but not that of their true masters. Nigel Farage, for example, has an offshore trust fund, filled with money from his various corporate and foreign power masters. The now-dead infamous benefit scrounger, Queen Elizabeth, and her family of German inbreds and accused paedophiles or paedophile best pals (not just Andrew and Epstein, but have we all forgotten their best pal Jimmy Savile?) also have offshore accounts as proven in the Paradise Papers, using offshore secrecy to take taxpayers' money and invest it in shady companies like loan sharks and off-licences. The richest scroungers are privately profiting from the poorest and most vulnerable in Cybertime Britain. Don't forget that Blair, Cameron and Jacob Rees-Mogg are all named in the Panama, Paradise or Pandora Papers. This is not a party issue – there are no good guys in politics or royalty.

Of course, plugging this leaky offshore arsehole didn't stop us from being part of the wider world of foreign currencies. People can easily convert LOL to other currencies for their holidays, for example. For businesses, the CIB streamlined international trade and payment because all transfers went through the same system without any additional fees. To make sure no one was unfairly penalised for going on a family trip

to Spain, there was a generous CC-free traveller's allowance. Our system is not about trapping people and their wealth in Scotland, but about creating a better, fairer flow of money for everyone. A proud contribution to your community that served you before you move wealth abroad is a small and fair price to pay for a stable, abundant economy, able to sustain itself and reinvest in all citizens.

One beautiful thing for non-math geniuses like me is that all this complex mathematical balancing is managed algorithmically by our MLGs working for the bank, who in turn are managed by a team under the guidance of us citizen bank owners. Their code is transparent and open just like the bank itself. With so many useful data points and intelligent MLGs keeping 24/7 oversight of the money flow, making sure any unexpected consequences or new human behaviours are adapted to and included in the modelling, we really built something incredibly powerful; something completely out of the hands of governments, for-profit corporations or human gatekeepers with too much power going to their heads, but millions of eyes keeping check on the overall balance. Everyone had an equal vested interest in keeping the new model running sustainably and smoothly.

The best thing yet was: Once the monetary inputs and outputs were roughly stabilised, despite the massive increase in speed, redistribution and mobility of money, we saw a positive effect on almost all metrics of human and planetary health as well as happiness. Those that needed emergency money to come out of homelessness or sickness could finally sort out their lives, since they now had access to the support they needed. Those unhappy in their work or who wanted to risk a new

educational or entrepreneurial path could take the plunge. The meaningless-job epidemic finally burst like an old festering boil – shitty but necessary jobs got automated and humans who were essential got paid significantly higher for their contribution, from teachers to hospital toilet cleaners.

With basic needs more secure and people able to live in greater alignment with their nature, skills and talents, is it any surprise there was a huge fucking boom? A boom that eventually generated way more LOL than had been invested in the CD, generating new output that allowed more people to willingly and proudly contribute more to their community through the CC. Taxes were no longer a burden to be hated because we all saw the benefit from this new abundance model and if, for some reason, you didn't, you had the democratic and economic power to influence change. No wonder then, come the end of the month, in Solartime, we are more than happy to contribute back to the community that supports us, our loved ones and our future on this planet.

Jane And Joe: An Unlikely Pair

Enough theory for a minute – it always helps to see how something plays out in real life. Gospel truth, though: I invented Jane and Joe for the purposes of illustration. Unlike everyone else in this book, Jane and Joe aren't real people in Solartime. That's why their names are in the old Cybertime style, not Solarpunk CAPS. It's also why their names are a bit shit and boring (sorry to all the Janes and Joes reading this!).

Hairdresser Jane from Shear Bliss

Jane is a badass hairdresser from Easterhouse near Glasgow. She has spent her whole adult life snipping and styling, while holding an intricate conversation about the five most pertinent strands of drama in the neighbourhood. She is the quintessential banger of an affordable, honest, local, working-class hairdresser. Most clients try to manifest their hair to grow back quicker so they can make a new appointment in the salon for a gab.

When Jane opened Shear Bliss, it didn't take long to build up a healthy amount of regulars. Particularly with hairdressing, people are looking to find someone they can trust – without having to explain their hair needs every time and dealing with the inevitable disappointment when it doesn't go as intended. Trust, good listening skills and fair prices are rewarded with customer loyalty in this business. In that first year, the salon pulled in a healthy 50,000 LOL in revenue. 'No bad!' her parents said, as she proudly told them. They were initially sceptical about her risking her life with all this entrepreneurial middle-class pish.

After paying herself a small living wage, rent, electricity and all other business costs, she was looking at a tidy 15,000 LOL in profit. Under the old rules, that 15k LOL would have the government salivating for their pound of flesh. It meant hiring accountants, wasting hundreds of hours of her precious time and paying thousands of pounds in taxes on both her income and her corporation – plus all the other hidden costs of compliance. They certainly don't teach you this shit at school in

Easterhouse. It's the kind of insurmountable barrier that keeps people like Jane away from even trying in the first place.

But Solartime Jane doesn't have to dread those HMRC letters through the door because the numbers on her Citizen's Investment Bank statement tell a different story. Shear Bliss paid barely anything in Community Contributions its first year, thanks to that generous 10,000 LOL business allowance on end-of-the-month surplus. Her personal account reached 43,000 LOL by the end of the year (1,250 LOL Citizen's Dividend monthly, plus 2k+ LOL salary), so it did see a small monthly Community Contribution. She was earning 33,000 LOL annually over the 10,000 LOL personal allowance, and so a progressive contribution was made from that surplus at the end of each month after she took off all her expenses. Contributions are taken automatically, so Jane didn't need to deal with any accountant pricks in brown suits, fear no late fees or errors, and just saved herself a lot of fucking stress. If she thought there was an error, she could ask the MLG for the full transparent calculations and an explanation in layperson's terms. If she still thought there was an error, she could raise an issue and ask a human at the bank to double check.

By the end of the month, Jane didn't mind her personal contribution because it felt fair and easy: a small ripple from her prosperity flowing back into the community that supported her – a community that paid her a dividend of 1,250 LOL at the start of the month anyway. After her first year in business, she used the CIB app to review the numbers and, with some helpful suggestions from the app itself, a spark ignited. She didn't need that full 25,000 LOL annual salary the next year – not with the CD as her absolute safety net if shit turned

sideways. She saw an opportunity to take a leap of faith and reinvest in her business, taking a decisive salary cut. She was so busy having fun working she never had time to spend her money anyway. So, rather than letting money build up only to drain away each month, why not use her success to get new team members in? She hired another hairdresser and a part-time shampoo assistant. Her salary investment, business savings and a small interest-free loan funded the new roles, which soon paid for themselves. With higher expenses, Jane and her business paid less in CC as expenses went up. It wasn't until halfway through year two that Shear Bliss restarted its CC. By that point, revenue was heading for 100,000 LOL and profits had tripled to 45,000 LOL.

In year three, their CC started reaching rates vaguely similar to what Jane would have paid in taxes before, the big difference being the support and financial relief she had had until then. By year three, Jane had found what we call her 'happy capacity' in Solartime environmental economics –a sustainable size she could happily handle with sufficient joy to make it worthwhile still. She had no desire to open an international franchise chain of salons with her name all over them. She remained connected with why she got into hairdressing in the first place: the human connection. Well, that and the gossip updates. Earning a perfectly liveable income, employing and training two young staff who were also growing and thriving and might either take over the business eventually or go on to create their own, all the while serving her local community (who looked fuckin' fabulous by the way), this was Jane at peak happiness. Without demanding investors or shareholders, why the imperative to grow beyond the sweet spot?

Here in Cybertime, the incentive for Jane is to always keep chasing financial growth – even if it means sacrificing health, happiness or ecology. Money is the only thing that talks and, in a world we are made to believe is increasingly scarce, we better squirrel away as many nuts as possible. In Solartime Scotland, we measure success by sustainability, not growth. Getting ahead, then knowing when to pause and enjoy the view – this is peak happiness. What the fuck is the point in chasing our dreams if we never stop to savour them?

Jane had massively benefited from a start-up grant and a low-interest loan from the CIB, as well as access to free peer-to-peer business training from other experienced hairdressers and entrepreneur folk who volunteered their time to help start-ups like hers. Now, running her incredibly successful salon, she enthusiastically watched her monthly contributions go back towards helping other innovators, start-ups and people retraining to build their own dreams. More than that, she could afford to volunteer some of her time and business resources to mentoring and educating young working-class women like her. Our post-scarcity, post-growth paradigm means people like Jane don't need to compete with their fellow entrepreneurs. If times were ever rough, if an experiment failed or if demand dipped and evolved, that rainy-day CD was always there as a backup for her and all her team.

From Joe's Wheels to Solar Steals

Joe and Jane are polar opposites in many ways, but their story began cut from the same cloth: struggle. Joe didn't grow up thinking about business models or ethics or sustainability. Joe

grew up thinking about how to keep the lights on and his maw alive. As a wee guy in a rough scheme, he sold trading cards at school to help pay for her prescriptions and food. That kind of upbringing doesn't make you greedy; it makes you hyper-alert. Always scanning. Always planning. Always making sure you and your loved ones are never that close to the edge again. Joe learned early that money was protection in this world. So, he got good at making it. Really good. Driven by his love for money and selling bangers for a buck, obviously he ended up in the second-hand car market. By the time Solartime rolled around, Joe had already built himself a proper second-hand car empire. Joe's Wheels had branches all over the country with annual revenue just north of 2 million LOL, and profits sitting around 500,000 LOL. Joe paid himself about 200,000 LOL a year and had an army of accountants to make sure as little of that as possible ever made its way back to the state. He was very proud of this. He liked to think of it as being clever.

Under the old system, Joe's company would have been due corporation tax on that 500k LOL profit, and his personal income would have been hammered, too. But Joe's accountants were Big C Cult priests (every cult needs their priests). Offshore shell companies, creative accounting – all technically legal; well, at least he claimed it was on his tax return. The end result for Joe and many aspiring rich folk was the same: he paid proportionally way less tax than most of his own workers. In fact, the richer he got, the more tax he could dodge, further incentivising him to earn more and more. That is, until the Community Contribution system landed and smashed the rigged game board intae wee bits: Income and corporation tax were sacked off, and replaced with a simple, transparent

system based on what was actually sitting in your accounts at the end of each month. Joe's business account, with 500,000 LOL in profit, flew straight past the 10,000 LOL allowance. His personal account did the same, with his 200k LOL salary and the 1,250 LOL monthly Citizen's Dividend. Both accounts began making significant automatic monthly Community Contributions straight away. Joe's priest accountant suddenly had no magic prayers left for him.

Joe did not take this well. He spent the first months in a rager of a mood, blaming everyone, including the trees themselves. It was his Matshishkapeu[2] -given right to hide his money in a shell company in Panama! That's what this great country was founded on! His great-grandfathers died fighting the Nazis for his right to do so! Even his own kids were fuckin' sick of hearing it. Joe's first instinct was to look for loopholes. He barely slept for weeks. Could he split Joe's Wheels into ten smaller companies? No. The abolition of corporate shareholders meant that trick had been anticipated years ago. Could he hide money in assets instead? He thought about buying as many big motors, useless land and luxury shite as he could. Then, his wife reminded him about the new progressive asset and land taxes coming in next, specifically designed to disincentivise tax hoarding, speculation and money laundering like that. No matter how he twisted and turned, his idle wealth just sitting there would now cost him.

2. Matshishkapeu is the Innu Farting God who provides prophetic messages through flatulence and once cursed a Great Spirit with constipation to prove his power.

It took a lot of interventions from his loving and far-too-patient kids (who had been studying environmental economics at school) before the penny finally dropped for Joe. Throughout all his rage, he hadn't noticed that, for the first time in his life, he actually had everything he had set out to achieve lying in his lap. He would never have to hustle to save his loved ones again. No matter what happened, they would be safe.

Even if his business collapsed tomorrow. Even if he packed it all in for health reasons and no one could take over. The Citizen's Dividend meant his kids would never go hungry. His maw would never be without her meds ever again. That background fear that had driven him his entire life, the one that made him hoard and scheme and control was suddenly... gone. Joe didn't quite know who he was without it.

Slowly, as he watched the new system in flow, coming in and going out of his CIB account, he finally stopped resisting. Just like before, he started to see some opportunities. If his money was going to move whether he liked it or not, he'd make sure it moved in a way that actually made sense to him: into things he wanted to make an impact with in the world – not just to make a quick scammy buck, but real, world-changing projects that he could get his head and his heart stuck right into – the fun experiments he used to tinker with in his dad's garage as a kid. Instead of letting his cash pile up uselessly, he started pouring it back into his business as an investment – in the form of a huge research and development programme. He became obsessed with solving the challenges of sustainable and affordable public transport, and not just cars either: solar, hydrogen, water-powered vehicles even, and car batteries made out of everyday table salt rather than rare earth minerals like lithium.

Joe's Wheels slowly transformed into Solar Steals. The newly branded company partnered with local universities and small tech start-ups, investing in people and ideas that actually excited Joe for the first time in years. He funded charging infrastructure, set up proper repair and reuse programmes and used all his old stock of bangers to kickstart a scrapheap revolution of modular, sustainable design. As the business shifted, something interesting happened. The CIB's algorithms didn't just track financial flow, they tracked environmental and social impact too. Recycling parts, reducing waste, paying staff well, giving them control over their work – all of it fed back into the health of the wider system. Joe's CIB app and his monthly statement didn't just show what he had in his accounts and was contributing back to society anymore. It showed endless big green graphs, subtly illustrating the positive knock-on effects his business and personal contributions were having on the industry, environment and humanity as a whole. Thanks to him, less people would have to struggle to survive like he and his mum did. Looking through all the wealth of data and intricate connections in the growing web, Joe wept – not with sadness, but joy and pride. The CC stopped feeling like a punishment and more like the responsibility part that comes along with our citizen rights.

But there was another stick to go with the carrot: people were no longer trapped in shite jobs out of wage slavery and desperation. Joe had to actually make Solar Steals somewhere folk wanted to be – somewhere they could invest and grow. He called for a team meeting and rushed back to the factory, ready to improve wages, build common rooms, and introduce free lunches, bikes, and showers – whatever the team of

workers suggested. He stopped watching clocks and calendars and handed real autonomous control to the workers in each branch. As long as the work was done well, he stopped bothering them. His staff, both human and robot, grew to be some of the happiest and most motivated workers in the country.

While his business became a major contributor to the community fund, it also established itself as a leader in sustainable transport. His personal CC continued to negate whatever CD he received, but he didn't care anymore. He had enough. More than enough! More importantly, everyone he loved and everyone they loved had enough! And fuck it, it was all great news for business too, as sales at Solar Steals skyrocketed on the back of all that incredible sustainable innovation. Joe's ingenuity and ability to recognise an opportunity paid off once again – only this time not at the expense of the environment or anyone else's maw who bought a scammy, broken motor from him.

When Joe eventually retired, Solar Steals wasn't handed down to his kids. They weren't actually all that fussed about cars. Instead, it transitioned into a worker-owned co-op, running and growing more efficiently than ever. Joe stepped back with a huge smile on his face. He had ended up right back where he started: a man with a simple wish – to protect his loved ones – only now his love extended to his whole family, friends, colleagues and the entire world.

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Creating Tax Justice

The Community Contribution certainly streamlined how we calculated and collected contributions from citizens compared to taxation here in Cybertime. Great. It also closed a lot of bullshit loops for the ultra-rich to escape from their fair share. Even greater! But there is a big fat elephant in the room I haven't really addressed yet, and it is the question of whether or not citizens should be paying taxes at all.

Let's admit it: no matter how rich or poor we are, none of us enjoy paying taxes – and if there is a way to legally avoid them here in Cybertime, 99% of us would opt to do so, right? Especially if you were born after the 1980s, taxes probably feel less like a contribution to the community and more like a forced extraction by undeserving, warmongering landlords in their castles in the sky. I say 'especially since the 80s' because our relationship with taxes has fundamentally shifted since then. Ask your grandparents (if you are lucky enough to still have them around) and you will see it wasn't always this way. In the golden days of the Big C Cult, the rich were still raking it in, but innovation was also exploding – both pre- and post-World Wars. Most people were seeing some benefit from society. Taxes, therefore, felt like a form of collective

redistribution that most people, the rich included, supported. Governments were the Cult's compromise, the social contract, the bridging force between workers and corporations, helping to stop the formation of runaway monopolies and billionaires at the expense of the vast majority of humans. I'm not talking about the so-called 'socialist' economies of Eastern Europe or China here – redistributive high taxes on the rich were a fundamental feature of all Western capitalist societies right up until the 80s, before the Cult entered its late-stage decay.

If you find a dusty history archive from the mid-20th century, from today's perspective, the numbers in it will look like a typo. In the 1950s and 60s, the top marginal tax rate in the US sat at a staggering 91%. Even throughout the 70s, it hovered around 70%. Back then, taxation wasn't just a government revenue stream but a structural ceiling – a hard limiter against exponential wealth and the rise of fascism. High wealth taxes killed the incentive for any would-be monopoly as, after a certain point, it would be more profitable for CEOs to reinvest in their workers' wages or new innovation and equipment than to hoard a surplus that the state would just reclaim anyway.

For our grandparents, those high top tax rates funded interstate highway systems, formed the middle class and built public universities that were practically free. Those grads went on to generate the wealth for the companies that paid the highest rates, bought their cars and drove them down taxpayer roads. Taxes were the social glue that bought a sense of shared destiny, mutual benefit and infinite opportunity: the American Dream, baby! In the late 50s, nearly three quarters of the US population actually trusted the government to do the right thing. Can you imagine it – 75% trusting the government!? They

were happy to invest in a society that made sure their children lived even healthier, richer and more stable lives than they did. The post-war social contract lived up to at least some of its promises for most people, and their kids indeed grew up more affluent than their parents. Oh (and it's a big oh!), all of this was delivered on a balanced or surplus budget.[1]

Then came the 80s, the decade where the Big C Cult finally took off the mask and publicly ripped up the social contract. This was the era of 'neoliberal' magic, where the top rates for the wealthiest were slashed from 70% down to 20% and 30%. 'Chill out! Don't worry!' we were told. There was a new promise: a social contract where the corporations and billionaires themselves would make their newly acquired wealth 'trickle down' without the need for inefficient and corrupt governments on the gravy train to intervene. They are, after all, the job creators and innovators of the capitalist machine... right? We should stop 'stealing' their money and sit back and let the monopolies – ahem, sorry, the markets – work their magic. As the tax liabilities and regulations were lifted off the ultra-rich, they were quickly and quietly shifted onto the rest of us through flat tax models, heavily penalising the poorest most. The average citizen, along with the government meant to protect them, was left holding the mounting debt bill as

1. Although I am trying to make a comparison, I need to point out that, despite the system back then being relatively fairer than today, it has always relied upon the exploitation of people around the world to generate its extractive wealth. Whether that is the people of the Americas (almost all of whom have been invaded by US imperialists and their allies) or the underclass in the US itself (the Black, Irish or Asian communities) – both were exploited for their cheap labour to build the highways and railways.

Western countries stopped running a surplus from producing things and instead accumulated endless consumer debt that further lined the pockets of the ultra-wealthy. That's when taxation stopped feeling like a redistributive and fair contribution from all and instead became a protection racket for an aristocratic ruling class that had already lost sight of the ground they extracted from below. That's why, if you were born after the 80s, you have probably never been a trusting taxpayer – and in Cybertime, you never will. We are domesticated cattle for the ultra elites to extract from, as they lower the quality of our products and services, increase our tax contribution and drive up public and private debt – all for the privilege of being shat on from a high height. Lovely.

I was born in the 80s. I can say with 100% certainty that not a penny of the money I have paid in taxes has ever actually gone towards the public services I wanted it to, like the NHS or schools. No money I was forced to pay into a pension scheme or national insurance has ever been set aside in a fund for my future. Every single penny I have handed over in tax to Westminster, without a doubt, has gone to the service of one thing and one thing only: DEBT. My entire productive value as an adult in Cybertime has been taxed, and yet it hasn't benefited or improved society one bit. All it's done is service the interest on loans from which neither I nor my community have benefited – nor will any children I ever have. Gone are the days where governments live off their taxation. Instead, just like the super rich, they borrow their budgets from banks and pass the repayments onto future generations that aren't even alive to vote for the fuckers yet. It gets worse, though. Scotland produces mammoth amounts of natural resources.

Historically, we had North Sea oil reserves practically as large as Norway's. Except, unlike Norway, which has turned its oil wealth into the Government Pension Fund Global or the Saudis who completely abolished personal income tax for their citizens with their oil money, we colonised Scots under the Westminster regime not only have nothing to show for it but we are actually one of the most indebted countries in the world. That means, despite having trillions in exported oil, gas and now renewables, Scottish energy bills in Cybertime are still astronomically high – tendency rising – and extremely vulnerable to foreign wars for oil; meanwhile, every tax pound extracted from Scotland instantly disappears into an English government black hole, improving absolutely fuck all, forever and ever, amen.

All that said, I empathise with anyone reading this book who feels extreme scepticism and disbelief when I'm talking about taxation alternatives. It sounds completely impossible from a Cybertime perspective, but taxes don't have to feel like a collective punishment for the sins of previous corrupt governments. They can, in fact, be something that provides mutual benefit, growth and prosperity to all citizens, rich and poor. I know, I know. It sounds like an EU bureaucrat's wet dream, not something from a Solarpunk book. You probably came here to read about hemp spaceships, conscious robots and eco-monks who make amazing tea for free – not fucking taxes! Especially as we watch taxes rise while infrastructure, public services, the welfare state and every other semi-decent thing to ever come out of the Big C Cult gets dismantled – no matter what party or political cunts you vote in. Only oil and gas companies get tax breaks and subsidies to protect their

profits as they cook us and the planet alive. It's a race to the seabed, because that's the only place you might be safe if these psychopathic fucks start their global war to reset the balance books. (Though, if the terrible state of coral reef populations are anything to go by, you might not even be safe down there.) Europe could take the lead and steer us on a different path from the openly fascistic US of A, yet their politicians instead blindly follow on the coattails of the richest and most violent nation on Earth – a country where bankers sip cocktails in penthouse offices while looking down on entire neighbourhoods living in absolute squalor, worse than many places labelled 'third world'.

Over 40 years after the neoliberal takeover and the beginning of the end for the Big C Cult, the public cynicism now runs so deep into our veins that we begin to believe the problem is with the concept of tax itself, rather than the corrupt mafia collecting them. Yet, here's the bit that really messes with our burnt-out cult minds: sometimes people are so happy to pay tax that they even pay more than their dues. What kind of world would you have to live in to not only tolerate taxation but look forward to it? Beyond our Jane and Joe anecdotes, are there any fundamentals we need for a taxation system to feel fair? Or, as some believe, is every form of taxation simply a form of theft? Let's start by considering some fundamental non-negotiables and take it from there:

First and most obvious, taxes have to be fair. That means people with more money pay more than people with less money, and not just in absolute terms but as a proportion too. 100 LOL (or dollars, pounds, whatever currency you wish) spent on essential food and heating is simply different from 100 destined for the casino.

Second, all taxes have to be progressive – not flat. No stealth taxes that quietly shaft the poorest while pretending to be neutral. Things like VAT and inflation already fail this test spectacularly in Cybertime, hitting those with the least the hardest. A billionaire pays the same for their bread or UberEats takeaway as you and I do, so an increase in basic costs is identical for them and us, yet it makes up a much tinier percentage of their income. As most ultra-wealthy people own shares, assets and the means of production, increased costs of living prices often generate their investments extra profits anyway, offsetting any inflationary costs for them. Solartime taxes are never flat. No one earning 1% of someone else should pay the same tax amount as them. It seems absurd we have to even spell that out.

Third, taxes can't feel like they are robbing you of your labour value, creativity or imagination. Any taxes should incentivise these things while disincentivising the things we want to avoid (monopolies, billionaires and the absurd new category of trillionaires). That's exactly why, in Solartime, we scrapped income and corporation tax and replaced them with a whole new system that doesn't bleed work, innovation and experimentation dry before they even begin.

Fourth, people have to have real power over where the money goes. Not a vague promise every few years at the ballot box, but direct participation. That's why participatory budgeting became the norm anywhere collective pots of money existed – from local councils all the way up to national infrastructure spending. If it's our money, we get a direct say, not just our supposed politicians who, for the right price, will only act on behalf of their corporate and foreign country donors.

Fifth, governments can no longer be allowed to gate-keep, hoard, hide or siphon off public funds for their own hidden agendas. No more expenses scandals. No more black budgets. No more twenty-year contracts handed to pals during emergencies where future governments can't negotiate on prices – which is literally the case for the US, where the government can't legally ask their own fucking pharma companies to lower their prices. This is another reason why our Solartime CIB exists independently of the government and why it manages the public money flow transparently on the ledger, with full oversight from every citizen member.

And finally – the big one – taxes have to actively encourage behaviours that help people and the planet, and discourage those that cause harm. Even in the cases where destructive industries are temporarily unavoidable, they have to be taxed in ways that fund the clean-up, the transition and investment in their alternatives. Companies can do this themselves if they prefer, but if they don't, inevitably, we will do it for them with their Community Contributions.

Get these basic conditions right and something strange happens. Taxes stop being a regressive oppressor to escape at all costs, slowly draining the lifeblood of society, and instead they become a liberator: a balancing force lifting us up when we fall, without holding us back when we're strong. They can limit any one individual's power to exert control on others while, at the same time, being celebrated by both rich and poor as something that benefits us all. *If* we get the mix just right, people can actually become proud of the economic system they co-create. With that said, let's have a look at the few remaining taxes that

exist in our Solarpunk Scotland. Then, I promise, we can get to the fun bit of seeing how it all intertwines and unfolds.

Asset Tax

If we want more time on this planet to sort things out, we first have to break free from the infinite consumer loop that demands exponentially more exploitation of an already rapidly depleting planet. So, a good start was replacing VAT with a more nuanced and progressive asset tax that would have a very light touch on products and services that are long-lasting, healthy and ecological, while financially penalising those that aren't. Asset tax is determined by three simple, algorithmic benchmarks: a product's necessity (versus luxury), its impact on human health and its ecological footprint. As a product gets increasingly luxurious and unethical in its production cycle, it usually means it is being produced as a status symbol for an ever-smaller and richer sector of society and for less and less practical value. So, in Solartime, it gets taxed higher at the point of purchase. Rich people continue to be free to chase a life of opulence and grandiose displays of how small their cocks really are through their wasteful purchases – only now the true damage caused is realistically costed into the product's or service's lifespan. This allows us to claim back money that covers all, or most of, the damage caused.

Despite the financially privileged having the option to keep spending the way they were used to, we've seen a strong culture shift in how they would display their success as a status symbol. Richer people could avoid paying high Community Contributions by investing in more expensive products – but

only if these products were also ethically sourced, sustainably designed or had a net positive environmental impact. Pioneering alternatives, like the new wave of solar-powered and water-fuelled cars, were the perfect display of both affluence and eco-consciousness. Over time, sustainability became the new sexy – not opulent wealth. What is more, our new Scottish technologies needed affluent pioneers and early adopters to kickstart their experiments, people willing to pay more to be the first to have something. The wealthy were more than happy to fill this new niche, openly avoiding tax and looking better in the process. This aligned tax setup meant that the rich were not the enemy of Solarpunk many feared.

In Solartime, we don't ban or outlaw things. That, eventually, just creates more demand for the things supposedly banned – like during American prohibition or the war on drugs today. Instead, our tax system pushes innovators to come up with alternatives that are better for people and the planet, and therefore get taxed less. This gives a strong competitive advantage to true innovators over monopolising dinosaurs. Overall, we generate a similar amount of revenue from asset tax as we did previously with VAT – only now it is not a flat tax that discriminates against the poor. Everyone has to buy certain products and services to live. Because of the asset tax relief, essential products are much cheaper than they are in Cybertime today, especially healthy and sustainable ones.

That also means, imported 'food' packed with sugar, salt and preservative E-numbers obviously did not meet the standard; nor did harmful, carcinogenic meat products that cause incredible amounts of harm to the humans who eat them, the animals killed and the land destroyed to 'farm' them. People

can still eat an American diet in Solartime if they choose to do so, but with its true cost priced in. Health costs, for example, previously footed by the taxpayer for smokers, heavy drinkers and extreme meat eaters are now paid up at the till by the consumers themselves. This is what an informed economy looks like: one where the price accurately reflects the environmental-economic cost, allowing consumers to make democratic choices with full awareness.

Living a healthy life with nutritious food, quality housing, sustainable transport and ethical clothing choices is no longer priced at a 'vegan', 'organic' or 'fair-trade' premium, as it is here in Cybertime – where the poor are abandoned to food deserts, and their only choice is to walk ten miles with bags of overpriced shopping or feed their kids fast food so full of shit even the flies, who eat actual shit, won't touch it. In Solartime, eating a vegan lunch made with locally-sourced veggies and proteins from ethical food companies, accompanied by a Scottish oat milk and CBD-infused flat white costs less than a battered, deep-fried lump of reconstituted flesh and seed oil-soaked potatoes served with a can of toxic Tennents.

Our asset tax, in one fell swoop, flipped the whole pricing structure. Working-class areas have filled up with local-ran cooperatives organising second-hand cloth swaps in old pubs and shops selling delicious homemade food made from organic veg grown in former tanning salons. Here, that would be a sure sign of gentrification and the slow erasure of the poor living there, but in Solartime, these are the cheapest options and the healthiest ones for everyone, too. The American fast food chains had to retreat to the niche wealthier neighbourhoods where the more opulent might occasionally splash out

on a nostalgic shite burger and fries. Reverse gentrification you could call it.

Our Solartime society is not pontificating from above on what a good life should look like. No one is telling you how to live or what to buy. We have simply stopped subsidising certain choices that cause well-known and widespread harm, allowing citizens to consciously exert their purchasing power and force corporations to actually build and create products that benefit us and the planet while bringing in enough revenue to fuel coming generations.

The asset taxation on food was introduced very gradually, allowing producers, shops, cafés and restaurants to adapt to these changes and experiment with what worked with their customers. Over time, keen to keep prices low and customers flowing, a new variety of fresh whole foods appeared on shelves and in dishes. We saw a huge shift towards vegan alternatives – not just for ethical reasons, but now for tax purposes too, once subsidies were given to help livestock farmers transition to less harmful and more profitable practices instead. This meant the cost of locally grown, diverse fruit and vegetables plummeted while meat costs went up – and until someone successfully mass-produces stem-cell lab meat, it will continue that way, I'm afraid to say, to the meat eaters out there. Not to worry too much though, given the explosion in meat-flavoured vegan products. The tax advantages gave food companies just the incentive they needed to rush into the market with a vast amount of new items that increasingly tasted indistinguishable from the original.

Another unexpected side effect of our asset tax was seen in the drugs that people were taking – not just because we

legalised all drugs in response to the addiction epidemic we were decades into, but because those legalised drugs were taxed appropriately. Some pundits from abroad still ask why, if we are obsessed with human health, we don't at least re-criminalise the really bad drugs, like crack and heroin. But addiction isn't caused by drugs; it's a symptom of a sick society where people self-medicate because it hurts to be alive. Like caged animals, we too start to act out our frustrated biological functions violently and obsessively if we live isolated, imprisoned and removed from our natural habitat.

In our Solarpunk communities, recovering addicts are no longer in the shadows. We see them as survivors not criminals, and in the short term, while they work out how to regain their independence and happiness, they can medicate themselves safely in a medical practice, legally and for free. Surprisingly to many, the results have seen a collapse in drug death numbers as addicts finally have access to the help they need.[2] As drugs are legal, they are taxed appropriately and according to the same metrics as everything else. Our asset tax algorithmic assessment means drugs like heroin or cocaine, unsurprisingly, don't score too well – neither on how they are produced nor consumed. So despite being legal, they're undesirable. Almost nowhere stocks them and they are prohibitively expensive at the point of purchase. Genuine addicts can get much better medication for free through the health service till to sort shit out while recreational users aren't going to spend a month's

2. If you think I am making this up and it all sounds too idealistic, do your own research into how the Portuguese and the Swiss before have handled their drug epidemics here in Cybertime.

income on a single hit of vein-rotting poison just because it's legal. Citizens are adults with free choices in a free market. We've seen many citizens cut back on overall drug consumption, including the most deadly ones – alcohol and cigarettes – and instead make better-informed drug choices depending on what experience they were seeking. Price, in Solartime, is genuinely indicative of safety and ethical impact. Besides taking business out of the hands of gangsters, legalisation has stopped turning victims and mental health patients into criminals.

Right, what else? We've established that the bread-and-vegan-butter basics were overall cheaper thanks to the new asset tax. What about the nice things and high-ticket purchases, though? The stuff we all want and need to buy sometimes, like a new car, a washing machine or a laptop for work? Asset taxes couldn't make all non-essential items punitively expensive for everyone because then, we'd be regressing to hand-washing clothes and sending letters by carrier pigeon. For occasional purchases, customers can sign up with the click of a button to pay asset tax on a product over an interest-free period of time, rather than as a lump sum at the point of sale. Essentially, the CIB buys it for them and they then pay it up over time. This isn't the interesting bit, though. Given the loan is interest-free, they might as well spread it out over a long time if there are no negative consequences. The CIB allows this repayment window to stretch to three-quarters of the product's projected shelf life, or as long as it works on average before needing to be fully replaced. This small customer offer from the bank actually helped put an end to the absurd planned obsolescence created by late-stage capitalism. This was our Solarpunk lightbulb moment – pun intended! The lightbulb was famously the first

product that could work indefinitely, so producers deliberately made the filament more fragile to ensure it burnt out after a certain amount of use.[3] Our new model didn't require endless production of useless goods deliberately made to break so the shareholders of some company could profit from us being sold the same shit, made worse and worse over time. No more throwaway culture. No more washing machines with nuts tested and positioned to wiggle off exactly at the two-year mark. No more laptops that drop legacy support and block users of older devices from using new apps or deliberately overheat the battery. Planned obsolescence is the Big C Cult at its laziest and most heinously wasteful.

In Solartime, since products can be paid off over up to three quarters of their projected lifetime, they are vastly more affordable at the till. That gives companies producing modular, repairable and upgradable things that last longer a significant market advantage over their Apple or Samsung competitors. Upgrades and parts are asset-tax exempt, so modular items that users can repair at home have become the norm. Engineers have flocked to work in Scotland, no longer employed by evil corps to enshittify everything. Remember when designers and engineers made products that were sturdy and would outlive generations in a family? That ethic is incentivised by a simple change in the tax code. Modern tech is a bit different from an old 1920s table or 40s toaster, of course, given how rapidly things are improving. Some of us want the best of the best, and

3. Planned obsolescence is a widespread practice in manufacturing where engineers are deliberately instructed to design products that break or degrade prematurely, usually just after the legal warranty expires.

we want it now. No problem. If you want that new, advanced computer chip that just came on the market, why should you have to chuck your whole fucking laptop or phone away? Just swap the module like you used to be able to do. If you get bored of the look, you can upgrade the casing tax-free and keep the engine for a lot cheaper than buying a freshly-taxed, brand-new one. Who knew planned obsolescence would be so damn easy to combat if only we used our taxes to incentivise companies to not be utter cunts. In terms of the global market, Scottish goods have become highly sought after for their quality and modular, repairable design, cutting planned obsolescence internally and helping reduce it overseas while simultaneously blowing the lid right off our GDP.

Since it's a huge one, the final unintended consequence of our asset tax I want to mention is that it closed an important tax loophole used by the wealthy since the dawn of time: hiding their untaxed wealth in luxury items. Moving the tax burden away from income and corporation tax and onto wealth itself – assets and land – meant the wealthiest could no longer stockpile purely for the reason of tax-free speculation. Here in Cybertime, the mega-rich avoid taxes by writing off luxury purchases as business expenses, washing their extractive wealth in assets they expect to appreciate (or at least not lose any value) like Rolexes and fine art, thereby creating wild speculative bubbles across all affected industries. In one such twist of irony, Banksy – whose illegal graffiti work became hilariously commodified – tried to make a mockery of it all by secretly auto-shredding a piece of art as soon as it was sold at auction. The room gasped as the auctioneer rushed to try and stop it. The shredder, unfortunately, broke halfway

through the process. Rather than destroying its value, several extra zeros were added to the price of the piece, which begs the question of who is mocking whom in Cybertime. Another such Cult insanity is the awful plight of the Pacific bluefin tuna. As bluefin tuna have become more and more endangered and therefore protected, their flesh has become rarer too. Mitsubishi (yes, the pricks that make cars and bikes) have been stockpiling illegally-caught bluefin tuna in refrigerated warehouses in Japan, anticipating the day we humans wipe out the species. You would think people would stop killing them as a result, but under Cult economics, bluefin tuna only become a higher speculative commodity for investors to resell at massive profits if they are finally driven to extinction.[4]

If this happened under our watch in Solartime, we wouldn't need to waste decades in courts trying to prove 'intent' or 'illegal sourcing'. We'd simply tax the estimated ecological value of the asset. If you're holding the corpse of an endangered species, the tax wouldn't be just a slap on the wrist; it would be an astronomical levy designed to claw back the full cost of restoring an entire ecosystem. Solarpunk taxes are like a wet blanket on the raging Big C Cult fire threatening to wipe out all life on this planet. Instead of a pretend fine that gets written off as a business expense, this tax would hit with enough force to wipe out a decade of profits, get the entire board fired or shutter the company instantly. Corporations don't fear politicians and judges they can easily lobby and compromise; they fear

4. Thanks to intense public pressure from documentaries like *The End of the Line*, some bluefin tuna species have made the beginnings of a comeback, but not all species are as lucky.

fair tax. Since they are cynically and single-mindedly pursuing opportunities to make money, the monetary level is where we need to address them.

Import Tax

As I write this, here in Cybertime, Trump is on an Alzheimer's-fuelled tariff tantrum run, slapping import taxes on almost everything from almost everywhere – leaving the American people to foot the bill while he gloats over the extra revenue, all to fund a tax cut for the richest 1%. Despite the fact that this is incredibly stupid, it's not unexpected as the logical outcome of a cult imploding under the weight of its own greed. Tariffs are specific tools usually used to protect struggling national industries that can't compete with foreign competitors, as they encourage the growth of domestic manufacturing and nudge national buyers to purchase locally. That's, of course, not how Trump uses them. A general tariff on everything foreign – when your national businesses and consumers have no choice but to use foreign goods – is simply another flat (not so) stealthy tax on your population; just that it's not called a tax. Whether Trump himself is so demented he actually still believes a tariff is paid by the foreign companies or governments is anyone's guess.

Solarpunk Scotland didn't slap tariffs on nations or foreign corporations as punishment because we bought more from them than we sold (or for any other nonsense excuse). We did close some loopholes, though, that allowed the old rich and powerful guard to export their misery and violence to other populations. You couldn't just go and buy your blood diamonds

or polluting supercars abroad, then walk back into the country with them to avoid asset tax. Essentially, the three same benchmarks that generated the asset tax internally (a product's necessity versus luxury, its impact on human health and its ecological footprint) were also applied to all imported goods, which opened up and encouraged tariff-free trade with many corporations and countries that made sustainable and healthy produce with good conditions for workers and the environment. Countries full of sweatshops selling dog shit and broken plastic faced excruciating import tariffs, losing their competitive advantage once the actual cost of their practices was taken into account. Solarpunk Scottish importers transitioned away from them and found other sustainable products and services to build their businesses around. We began trading tariff-free and much more closely with our Scandinavian neighbours to the north, Canada to our west, and aligned workers' collectives in northern Spain, Vietnam and Kenya, to name a few.

Land Tax

If asset tax is how we properly price the stuff we humans make, land tax is how we properly price the very ground we stand on. I mean, you can't truly have a free society if the Earth itself is locked behind the private fences of a few aristocrats, churches and faceless corporations. For centuries, a process called enclosure has been turning our common birthright into a speculative playground for the 0.01% of the population, forcing the rest of us into a life of permanent rent-paying.

Land tax is the ultimate un-fencing tool. By taxing land at its unimproved value, we made it prohibitively expen-

sive to simply sit on vast swathes of Scotland for speculative hoarding or destructive blood sports. The tax is aimed at massive estate owners and slum landlords with hundreds of run-down, for-profit flats, or foreigners trying to wash their money through property. It isn't aimed at someone's granny who happens to have a nice cottage but lives off her pension. Since it's not her fault she is suddenly surrounded by high-value, gentrified land, we introduced the deferred land tax. No one is getting thrown out of their actual home because they can't pay the new tax; instead, a resident can opt to simply accrue the tax liability against the property's value, settled only when the home is eventually sold or the person passes away.

This elegant move effectively killed the need for further inheritance tax. If you've been paying your land tax in full during your life, you've already settled your debt to the community that benefited your property. Your heirs can then receive the property clear and simple, obviously taking on responsibility for the land tax if they choose to keep it themselves. If not, the deferred tax settles the score at the end of the day and can be paid by the family or from the proceeds of the sale.

We also managed to bin capital gains tax for similar reasons: since the land tax adjusts to the land's value in real-time, the community captures any unearned windfall as it happens rather than waiting for the sale. For those inheriting mountains of liquid cash, well, we already have the Community Contribution ensuring inherited fortunes either get put to work for the public good or slowly evaporate. Essentially, we built a simplified system where hoarding is a heavy burden and stewardship is the optimal way to see your money, privileges and family thrive. No need to rewrite thousands of pages of tax

law with a gazillion hoops to jump through – and no need for tax specialists in Solartime, either.

Where Would You Rather Pay Tax?

I've been blethering on about asset taxes, land tax and Community Contributions for a while now, and if you're anything like me, your eyes might be starting to glaze over like a stale, crusty doughnut. Before moving on to the next chapter, I'd love to just ask you: Where would you prefer to pay tax?

Imagine you're a twenty-something with a mad idea for a vertical mushroom farm, or a fifty-year-old who's finally made a bit of coin and is looking to settle down for the good life. Do you choose to live in a high- or a low-tax country?

In a high-tax country like Germany, you're basically penalised for even thinking about lifting a finger. By the time they've finished fleecing you for income tax – which hits the poor the hardest (higher income brackets have the privilege of a flat tax from €62k to €278k) – they slap you with mandatory social security (costing a much higher percentage of your income the poorer you are) and non-negotiable contributions for a pension you are less and less likely to ever see returned before you die. Using the money from new recruits to pay off those who have been around longer is literally the definition of a pyramid scheme. No wonder the pension pyramid is imploding across the Big C Cult as fewer and fewer of us are having babies while we are also making relatively less taxable income. Then there's flat taxes: VAT for example, due every time you buy a loaf of bread, which we know by now is another stealth tax on the poor when you view prices as a percentage of

income. This tax system in Germany, a country infamous for its bureaucracy, doesn't incentivise much innovation or dreaming; it just funnels you through school and into a wage-slave position like most so-called developed nations.

Then you've got the fortresses for elites and tax dodgers: Singapore, for example, or Dubai. Sure, the taxes are low, but the entry barriers and cost of living are astronomical. They're only useful if you're already part of the ultra-wealthy elite, and they're usually upheld by a slave class of poor foreign labourers who are treated horrendously. It mostly appeals to a few inbred aristocrats and new-money scammers. The streets are devoid of life; everything is sterile, high-rise and oppressive – useless for a living, breathing community.

Personally, I don't fancy paying into either system – and most of us seemed to feel the same after our Interdependence. So, what third option did we go for? We decided to trust human nature. We scrapped income and corporation tax because, why would you bleed someone dry for being creative or helpful? If you make twenty grand or fifty, you keep your money. Plus, you've got your Citizen's Dividend on top. All of this is to lower your sense of scarcity and existential dread so you don't have to act like a panicked squirrel on crack year-round. Our money isn't a debt-based parasite, a bottomless bucket – it's circular, always flowing and always tied to the health of our people and our land. We moved the tax burden away from participation, survival basics, creativity and work and instead responsibly transitioned it over onto all forms of excess and exploitation, such as violence, short-term bubbles, wealth hoarding, luxury assets and land.

21
Whose Land Is It Anyway?

We have a rough overview now of the environmental economics and new ways of taxation in the Solarpunk Scotland we were building. The last tax we discussed, land tax, might have raised a question or two from you. It certainly did for us: Do we even have the right to make claims about the land of Scotland, its inhabitants and proclaimed owners?[1]

Scotland was stolen from us a long time ago, and then many times over. The most brutal of these thefts came in two distinct, though related, waves. The first was a systematic cultural ethnic cleansing that followed the defeat of the rebellious Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746. English kings, constantly irritated by annoyingly disrespectful Scots, enacted the Act of Proscription, outlawing the very identity of the Highlander in particular and the clan system in general. This law criminalised speaking our indigenous language, wearing tartan, playing the bagpipes and carrying anything deemed a

1. This chapter's deep dive into enclosure owes a debt to the brilliant work of Jason Hickel. For a clear look at why this brutal system is still poisoning our world – and why we need Solarpunk now more than ever – read his book *Less Is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*.

weapon. The goal was to smash the indigenous clan system and the traditional dùthchas model of land use, where the chief and clan members were guardians of the land rather than private owners – paving the way for the future of the Big C Cult, where we pretend private property has always existed in the way we consider it today.

The second wave, the brutal Highland Clearances, was a later economic act. These clearances didn't start with Culloden, but they certainly ramped up hard between 1815 and the 1850s, after the Napoleonic Wars. With the cultural identity of the clans legally destroyed, the land was now seen as a commercial asset for exploitation, not a communal resource. Since many Scottish aristocrats were equally as inbred and thick as their English counterparts, they sold their own nation's people down the river in return for any land scraps. What a parcel of rogues! That made the Clearances less of a nationalist and more of a class struggle. Most Scots were forced to flee abroad or, if they couldn't, they starved to death, homeless in their own country. Scotland was much better suited for sheep and grouse-shooting estates than for rebellious Scots – at least from the Crown's perspective. Those allowed to remain to till the land had to pay exploitative dues and taxes to the new landlord, not their clan. The crooked-faced, soft-fingered aristocrats asserted they now 'owned' the land they had fenced off and that they had the right to extract from it as they saw fit. The age of serfdom was born. This saw a rapid explosion in the over-exploitation of the land. The new peasant class was forced to produce not only enough food for themselves to survive, but a massive surplus for their master to make profits on. Landlords were overthrown by rebel peasants many times, but

they, as a consequence, subdued peasants with larger and more violent displays of industrialised military force. The process of enclosure was ramped up further, destroying more resources held in common until eventually, despite the many attempts to suffocate the peasants' rebellion, feudalism and serfdom were ended. However, not by the 'hero' capitalists, as we were made to believe in history classes, but by the peasants themselves who, all across Europe, at different moments in time, rose up and, against the insurmountable odds, fought back. Their aim was to smash and destroy the entire corrupt system completely to build something radically new – and many times in many places, they succeeded.

These gains didn't come without a brutal price, though. To crush the rebellious and dangerously idealistic peasants of Europe, it took the extreme violence resulting from a union of force between the old aristocracy, the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church and the new capitalist class. There was the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, which, despite being defeated eventually, led to lasting concessions from the Crown and fundamentally weakened serfdom in England. A couple of hundred years later was Kett's Rebellion in Norfolk, where 16,000 commoners marched on Norwich, England's second largest city at the time. This was a force much larger than the entire city, which had a population of only 12,000 people back then. The commoners rallied against the forced enclosure of their common lands and took over the entirety of the city. The royalists, with their 11-year-old so-called king, were the net beneficiaries of this enclosure, so they raised an army in London – including some thousand German mercenaries –

to slaughter their own English countrymen. More than 3,000 were killed in a single day.

Kett's rebellion proves that – no matter how much the up-class tries to rally up false nationalism to get us to fight their wars for them – when the shoe is on the other foot, they don't give a fuck if you were born in the same country as them. They have only ever been loyal to their class, not their country. In other words: No matter the rhetoric, it has been and will always be a class war they are engaged in. Why else is Musk, the richest man in the world, stirring up the fascists and racists in every European country he can? And why do those 'proud nationalists' believe a South African, Nazi-leaning, near-trillionaire popping up in his private jet when he tells them that the brown woman and child washed up on their beaches from a war zone are the biggest threat to their way of life? Is he really interested in German or English political life for their citizens, or could it be that he's acting like the world's fucking shittest magician, trying to distract from all the stolen wealth he is sitting on so that the people don't realise their wallets are empty? Just a little bit of history repeating itself.

In the German Peasants' War between 1524 and 1525, an estimated 100,000 peasants were brutally slaughtered by the landed aristocracy after a violent uprising. It was one of the largest killings of civilians in European history, with tens of thousands massacred in a matter of weeks. During the so-called Battle of Frankenhausen, 6,000 peasants were killed in just a few minutes, while the army lost only six men. That's not a battle, then – that's ethnic cleansing but for class. Though most of these rebellions were eventually brutally overpowered, they were a key reason why feudalism in Western Europe be-

gan to crumble much earlier than in Eastern Europe where you could argue that its ghosts have remained to this day. Funny how we don't get taught much about these rebellions and their impact in history class at school.

After the capitalists had helped the aristocrats smash the rebellious skulls of those who dared to seek a better world, they made a pact. The aristocrats could keep their estates and lands, while the capitalists would help them make conditions so unlivable and precarious – so much more enclosed – that many millions would be forced to move into cities in search of money to survive. Almost all of the land left in common was forcibly fenced off and claimed by the inbred fucks and their factory-owning capitalist allies. This new age of capitalism in Scotland brought in a scale of violence, poverty and suffering never seen before – not even under feudalism. Hundreds of thousands were now living in growing cities like Glasgow, forced to work in horrendously dangerous jobs that didn't pay enough to live, even after the average excruciating 16-hour working day was over. This deliberately designed system of exploitation led to a drop in life expectancy to around 30 years old. As the aristocrats shut off more people from the rural land, there was a constant stream of new peasant recruits for the capitalist factory meat grinders, from as young as five years old. Things got so bad that many thousands of Scots had no option but to flee abroad, yet again, in search of better conditions. Even our own Scots Bard, Robert Burns, who had seen the brutality of the church and the state and never backed down from speaking truth to power, standing up for human rights – even he was so maligned by poverty and precariousness that he considered getting on a boat to Jamaica to take up a job as

a slave driver working on an English-owned plantation just so he could survive in 1786. Luckily, the sudden and unexpected last-minute success of his first poetry book saved his legacy and soul.

Forced enclosure wasn't just a Scottish challenge, though. It was enforced upon the commoners of England too, many of whom then fled to the brand-new United States where they would use the same tactics of enclosure against the indigenous people; people who treated them with such trust and kindness. George Washington had high hopes of doing colonialism 'the right and fair way' this time, learning from the mistakes of the past, so he offered the millions of locals farming tools in return for conceding the settlers their land. The indigenous population refused this 'offer'. They were guardians, after all, not owners of the land they were born on. Washington's 'humane colonialism' fell apart before it even took off. It didn't take long before the same brutal, filthy tactics the settlers had fled from were being used once again, and victims had become perpetrators. False treaties and contracts were signed then broken by Washington and all future US governments; settlements were established and expanded with more settlers protected by the US Army who terrorised the local populations with impunity. If they still refused to leave, all-out genocide and ecocide were the strategies of choice, deliberately murdering millions of buffalo to the point they were almost completely extinct. Raping and murdering untold millions of the kindest and, in many ways, most advanced humans the Earth has ever given birth to was the original imprint for the birth of the modern United States. The surviving children were stolen from their families and lands, ritually abused and thrown in concentration camps

they called boarding schools for reeducation. It didn't take long for the enlightened mask of 'civilisation' to fall away, allowing the ugly head of European barbarism to rise up through it.

A country made up of the survivors of historical violence and persecution, who spent a period trying to colonise 'humanely', behind a thin mask of civility, but now prefer to openly build illegal settlements on occupied land, break treaties, bomb negotiations, shoot children in the knees for fun, invade at will and build huge civilian prison camps to control who and what comes in and out; and who resort to ethnic cleansing or genocide whenever things don't go their way – just like what happened to their own forefathers... nope. I just can't seem to think of any modern parallels.



Meanwhile, back in modern Cybertime Scotland, land ownership remains one of the most unequal in Europe, with 83% of rural land privately owned, much of it by aristocratic families, churches and corporate entities. Half of this private land is in the hands of just 433 landowners and around 15% has been held by the same families for over 100 years; some since the 12th century even. Legal entities (trusts, companies, partnerships) own around 75% of all private rural land, shielding it from public accountability.[2] Turns out, after thousands of years, things

2. Wightman, A. (2024) *Who Owns Scotland 2024: A Preliminary Analysis*. Available at: https://andywightman.scot/docs/WOS_2024_PRELIM_v2.pdf (Accessed: 21 August 2026).

haven't shifted that much, really. A tiny percentage, fewer than 0.01% of the population of Scotland, owns more than half the land. Commons? What commons? Any remaining resources, wild forests or streams have been cut down, overfished or polluted to death. Scotland is meant to be a temperate rainforest. Did you know that? You certainly wouldn't from visiting or looking at it on a map. All you will see are vast treeless hills and valleys covered in barren heather. They cut down Scotland's natural growth and all her wonders a long time ago, and the millions of imported sheep, deer and other animals kept for hunting or slaughter make sure the trees can't come back. The vast majority of Scotland is a man-made wasteland, thanks to foreign exploitation and mismanagement. The cause of all the destruction – enclosure – is far from over. In fact, it has sped up: Childcare, for example, used to be relatively free for most parents. Extended families, neighbours and the local bobby community police officer all knew each other and shared the load. Kids played safely on the streets, knowing that all the mums were keeping an eye from up in the tenements. You'd shout up and someone's maw would chuck you doon a piece with jam, whether you were her wean or no. How many people in Scotland can say they still live in a world that remotely resembles that today? Childcare, in much of the world, has been enclosed and privatised under new for-profit management. That means you have to pay a substantial chunk of your salary to have strangers look after your kids at a cost often higher than you make per hour. Surely, having children in this society is an increasingly stupid idea unless you are aiming for bankruptcy? Many seem to agree as birth rates continue to

plummet, sending us into the world's first species extinction of our own voluntary creation.

Many argue the reason there are so many antinatalists and birth strikers in Western countries, China and South Korea is because it's the last form of protest open to people in a cult society. Don't feed the Musks or Trumps any new workers, or the Communist Party more soldiers, or the Epstein-affiliated paedophile gangs girls and boys to kidnap and traffic. It's a deeply disturbing sign that such extreme measures actually start to make sense; that we are more willing to wipe out the entire human race by refusing to breed than see this system survive. Do you have any idea how hard it is to convince an entire mammalian species to stop reproducing? The closest we have ever seen such behaviour in other animals is in captivity – when animals are imprisoned and tortured like the ones we keep for our food on farms, for sick entertainment in circuses and zoos, or for experimentation in labs. Removed from their natural habitat and freedom, they start to display self-destructive patterns, pacing endlessly, rubbing off all their fur, banging their heads until they bleed and, most famously, refusing to have sex or give birth. Zookeepers, farmers and scientists simply violate the animals further by forcibly ejaculating the males and impregnating the females in specially designed rape cages that restrict them from struggling, running or fighting back. The poor cow forced to produce the milk you pour in your tea was impregnated in such a cage as many times as possible until she passed her peak fertility, at which point she was sent off to die in a slaughterhouse no older than a teenager. As American Christian fascists move to further restrict women's rights over their own bodies – an attempt to increase birth rates – we

can only hope their strategies don't become as sinister as those meat eaters and dairy drinkers tolerate animals suffering under. Yet, the growing evidence of a vast global network of human trafficking, impregnation and child rape coming from releases like the Epstein files might turn even the most hopeful optimist green in the face.

Depopulation is an unmitigated disaster for Western governments that's only going to get worse for the few remaining kids born today and tomorrow to sort out, making them, in turn, even less likely to have kids. Enclosure, which started out separating us Scots from our clans and the whole world from their communities will reach its logical conclusion eventually. The billionaire-owned media will continue to convince the working class that immigrants are the biggest threat to Scotland, rather than a partial solution to its huge depopulation challenge. Eventually, Scotland will follow in the footsteps of Japan and South Korea, with absolutely no humans left in it – only AI robotic sheep and some inbred billionaires who occasionally holiday there to fuck the robot sheep when no one is watching. If unchanged, this could be the eventual trajectory for every so-called developed nation. When the aliens finally reveal themselves, all that will be left is a handful of pasty white, dishevelled 200-year-old billionaires and some robot sheep with bust-up bumholes.

Thing is, there's not much left to enclose and turn from common to commodity. Thames Water was privatised by Thatcher in England and, for the past forty-odd years, along with every other private water company, it has taken taxpayers' money to dump literal sewage into every river and stream in England while handing ever-increasing bonuses to their shareholders;

that is, before declaring bankruptcy and asking the government (which is also taxpayer-funded) for a bailout. Now that the rivers are at breaking point, the wildlife is dead, drinking water is fucked for generations and kids are dying from water-borne viruses after going for a swim like it's the Dark Ages all over again, the company has been asset-stripped and handed back to the taxpayer, the once fantastic public utility now a filthy liability. Their pals in government won't solve shit, of course (pun intended). They will likely hand control over to shadowy foreign companies, maybe from China or the US, that will be more than willing to buy up the essential water supplies for the entire population of England. They know they can rent English people back their own water for hundreds of years, at any price they demand, and if little old England ever steps out of line or China wishes to get even for the Opium Wars, well, the off-switch for the taps can become very useful leverage – just like the privatised and foreign-owned trains, nuclear power plants, power grids and every other fucking essential service.[3] Remember who owns your utilities next time you watch your Prime Minister or President embarrassing himself, gagging on some foreign leader's cock in public.

With all the assets enclosed, privatised and sold off to the highest bidding asset stripper (or foreign government), the new and last remaining strategy is to coerce people into 'renting' everything and anything they used to buy and own before. It essentially turns the domesticated worker/consumer class back into serfs, never allowed to own anything themselves but

3. EDF Energy is owned by the French, Arriva Trains ran by the US and Qatar partly owns Heathrow.

having to pay for the right to usage. The cult subscription plan is well underway. With nothing much left to strip, they are coming for the middle classes now, eating up their mortgages, artificially pricing them out and creating global financial collapses that 'liquidate' large sections of their assets so they can be bought up by faceless investment firms like Blackrock or Vanguard, then rented back to the same poor bastards at hyperinflated prices. It's a housing 'crisis' after all, so the landlords are entitled to charge top dollar. Supply and demand, baby. I do love a 'free' market, don't you?

I guess that's why I'm here, with you, now. As some kind of living warning or reminder that it doesn't have to be this way. We can change course at any number of opportunistic moments. We, the citizens, hold the true power; we just need to be ready to act whenever we get the chance.

In Solartime, we could have chosen to get our pitchforks out and go all Mugabe on the landed gentry's arses – a night of the inevitable purge after 500 years of brutal colonisation, oppression and ethnic cleansing. But who has the energy for all that bloodlust? So messy, so violent, so many stains on your favourite shirt. We had to find a way to reconcile, rebalance and bring around a sense of justice while maintaining a semblance of peace for everyone. Obviously, some rich and powerful people – particularly from abroad – weren't too pleased with our ideas, especially our new tax system. They certainly won't be in Cybertime reading this book either but, in the end – and I know this might shock you because it shocked the shit out of me too – some rich aristocrats actually supported parts of the new land model.

Lord Montawank and the Land Tax

Lord Montague Percival Auberon Fitzwilliam Ogilvy IV was only 25 when the land tax came into effect. He would be the first to admit his dad was an entitled prick and that he came from a long lineage of them. Each generation had inherited the gargantuan estate from fathers who, in turn, had received the stolen lands from their fathers – all the way back to the Highland Clearances and before. Ironically, all that generational effort to use wealth and land to acquire more ended up with Montague inheriting a poisoned chalice. After his dad had passed, Montawank (as we preferred to call him back then) was left with a huge estate of land that, due to centuries of overgrazing, tree-felling and hunting estates was mostly barren and now faced a colossal new tax burden.

Like the asset tax, land tax assessed the community and ecosystem impact of the land in question, alongside its usage. The tax started small but progressed aggressively the larger the estates became. It wasn't a punitive tax on family homes, smallholdings or the new class of returning crofters who set up eco-subsistence farms. There were many exemptions for sustainably used land that benefited the community. However, Monty's wasn't one of them. On the 400,000-acre estate he inherited, for 500 years, the main aim had been maximum resource extraction with the occasional reservation so his dad's bum chums could get drunk and set illegal packs of dogs on wild animals to rip them apart alive; a brutal blood sport they call fox hunting but which includes the killing of badgers, rabbits and anything they enjoyed killing for fun, really. Those who worked the land, generating the profits from it, had no

rights to it and were drastically underpaid. On top of all that, Monty's father was a terrible boss with little concern for his mostly immigrant workers, and a racist at that. Despite being born in Scotland, he had a strong Oxford accent and hated Scottish independence (and Interdependence even more). He later wished his estate were in England so he could have voted for Brexit, clearly unable to recognise that most of his workers came from Eastern Europe.

Monty hadn't shown any interest in his dad's businesses or politics when he was young, much to the disappointment of his father, who was forever suspicious Monty was gay – or worse, hanging out with Black people and radical lefties. Monty wasn't either; he was just apathetic to the supposed privilege he was born into, stamping on the shoulders of others. When his father died, Monty grieved the connection they never had in life more than his death. In some ways, though, he finally felt free. That was, until he realised he was now face-to-face with a forced clean-up job he had never felt responsible for in the first place. Birthright privileges go both ways. If you can claim the right to vast swathes of resources, lands and assets, simply due to who your parents were, then unfortunately, a day of reckoning will come. No one was at his mansion doors with pitchforks, but the hidden hand of the market – now following environmental economic principles – would help guide his limited options. Poor Lord Montawank was the first in his lineage to have to face up to his fair dues. Maybe part of him knew this day would come, explaining his utter apathy for it all along. His father's death left him not only trying to process a lifetime of his own daddy issues, but the fallout of 500 years of daddy issues. He had always been the black sheep of the estate, rejected by his

fellow aristocrats, hated by his father and now by the people he called his workers, too. He was more interested in escaping to play in the woods alone than running any gentlemanly affairs. LOFI felt instantly sorry for him the first time they caught sight of each other across the picket line. The farm workers were protesting against being forced to abuse and kill animals, both domesticated and wild, to make supposed profits for the landowner while they got paid awful wages and were herded into terrible accommodation blocks – much like the cattle themselves. With Montawank's dad dead, the workers saw a vulnerable opportunity to demand change, so they unionised and went out on strike. Lord Montawank did nothing, stunned like a rabbit in the headlights.

LOFI and I had found out about the strike on Active Network, a community-led social media platform that launched in Scotland around the Interdependence raves. It served for planning everything from street parties to community actions. We bounced up with a car boot full of homemade vegan hot dinners and gluten-free cakes and joined the workers for a wee bit. It was a good laugh, even in the pishy wet Scottish weather. Then, just as we were about to leave, Lord Montawank himself rolled up in his Jeep, mandatory tweed and welly combo on. He got out and took a swig of his whisky flask to try to steady his obviously shaking hands. He didn't usually drink but had found himself copying some of his dad's bad habits since his passing. My initial impression was: what a MontaWANK indeed. It's really hard not to be judgmental when it comes to Monty's class – the biggest benefit scroungers, subsidy junkies and tax dodgers on the planet, smoking cigars and drinking posh whisky in the faces of their exploited workers who are standing

out in the rain, underpaid and under threat. They see their slaves, serfs and workers as parasites rather than humans; and it is very easy for us to see them as parasites in return, especially when they're the ones who have bled Scotland dry for over 500 years.

LOFI was much less ideologically hardened than me. She tended to see the world through others' eyes, even people she could have considered her 'enemies'. She was never as much into the macro political landscape as I was but that helped preserve and grow her compassion, rather than lock it away behind ideological battle lines. While I fixated on Montawank's clothes, alcohol and status symbols, LOFI locked onto his eyes and saw his suffering. He subconsciously must have felt the connection too, as, when he caught sight of her back, the fear on his face melted into a bit of relief.

Monty cautiously approached LOFI's position on the picket line and introduced himself, 'I'm Lord Montague–'

'Percival Auberon Fitzwilliam Ogilvy the forth, by any chance?' I sarcastically jumped in to confirm.

Pretending I didn't exist, he continued to LOFI, 'What's all this about then? I own this farm, what happened?'

LOFI gently touched his shoulder and guided him off to the side for a minute. 'I think you need to talk to your workers directly about that. They're the ones growling at you over there. We just came to support them.'

'Support them? Why? They are supposed to be working!'

Empathy was a language he hadn't yet learned to speak, but the sharp arch of LOFI's eyebrows seemed to prompt him into action. 'Uhh alright. What do I say? I've never really spoken to them before.'

'You've never spoken to your workers before?' LOFI asked in disbelief.

Then, to smoothen out the accusatory tone of her question, she added, 'Why don't you try and show them you don't mean any harm, first? Given you hold the position of power... try and smile a bit, offer them a swig of your whisky.'

Monty processed the information, arms still crossed, when LOFI picked up again, 'And whatever you do, don't cross your arms! These are your supposed business allies – although, I don't agree with what you do business over. Animals aren't for you to exploit. Nor are your workers. Anyway, go. You be the friendly face first. Hear what they've got to say and listen. Don't interrupt, even if your inner voice is screaming.'

Montawank looked a bit perplexed by the very direct set of instructions he had just been given by a woman – of all people – but something inside made him follow. They might have just reminded him of the loving scoldings his mum used to give him before she passed, way too early.

'Mmh, uh... Right, so: smile, no crossed arms, whisky, listen,' Monty repeated to himself. 'Eh, what is your name, may I ask?'

He handed LOFI his business card and wrote down her number on another for himself. He usually wouldn't have been so forthright, but his subconscious leaped at the first potential ally he had met since his father's passing. He did his best to follow her advice and tepidly approached the workers with an awkward yet genuine smile on his face.

By this point, a few hours after our arrival, the handful of joints we had brought, along with the cakes, had done the rounds, and I think most people present had enjoyed a wee smoke to lighten the mood in the unforgiving rain. The fright-

ened Lord of the Land was somewhat shocked to find that his offer of whisky and a smile was mostly met with the workers' own smiles and counter-offer of tea and cake, or what crumbs were left of them. People's initial anger had mostly subsided into the munchies by that point. Maybe it was the creamy vegan cake that did it. Maybe the loving honesty from LOFI. Maybe the pure weed 'peace' joint Monty had accidentally taken a few puffs of without realising. Whatever it was, by the end of the informal meeting in the dining room of the farmhouse, Monty found himself enthusiastically agreeing with the workers' demands for better conditions and a restructuring of the farm away from industrial animal agriculture and all its brutality into exciting new and highly profitable yet sustainable farm products – products like biochar soil, hemp, weed, fruit forests that doubled up as public forest parks and, most excitingly of all for Monty, the building of Scotland's first treehouse town that they were going to name The Canopy Collective. Animal agriculture wasn't making much profit anyway and the land needed severe restoration that could only come from a serious change of direction. It was that last suggestion Monty couldn't stop thinking about, though.

Monty had only one good memory of his time with his dad as a child. He remembered when they built a treehouse together in one of the forests on the estate. Well, 'they built it' might be an overstatement – they were there when a team of underpaid contractors built the treehouse for them, but Monty was allowed to occasionally hammer in a nail or hold a drill. That early memory – getting to spend alone time with his dad in that treehouse, even if it was a snapshot of time – had been worth hanging onto. Listening now to his workers talking about

their vision of another possible world, it was the first time he had smiled effortlessly in months. Years even!

Maybe Montawank would have done what he did without the stick up his arse from the new land taxes. But I reckon they certainly helped catalyse things a bit, if not outright cause them. Monty wasn't motivated by profit maximisation or using his supposed power to exploit, like his father and grandfather had before him. While listening to his workers, he discovered they shared a vision. Since Monty didn't have a scooby how to manage the transitions they worked out a way for the farm workers themselves to manage the key parts of the business and ensure they had a good base salary that rose in line with the surplus made. Monty had barely stepped foot on the farm and never really did again; meanwhile, for the workers, they knew it inside out and upside down. Monty set aside a large training budget the workers could use to fully certify and level up. He handed them a renovation budget to upgrade their living quarters as well as for the animals that would eventually now become part of a sanctuary. Before long, it became obvious that it would be much more efficient for the whole farm to become a worker-led cooperative, taking the burdensome management and tax liability off Monty's shoulders altogether. So, the workers put together a bid to buy it from him. Although they didn't have the capital to pay the market rate, they did have the skills to run a successful farm venture – whereas Monty had the assets to sell, but no monthly income to reskill and refocus himself after the sale. Together, they came up with a five-year transition plan under which the workers could buy the farm for dirt cheap while Monty still helped out, sharing full access to his father's files and databases, and received a

percentage of the surplus – the same as the rest of the workers – for the next five years. Handing the farm over to his workers and turning it into a co-op also hugely reduced Monty's tax burden, and the project qualified for grants and support from the Co-op Collective, which was tasked with promoting and assisting in the creation of as many worker co-ops as possible across Scotland.

Before Monty could shift his focus, though, he had another headache looming. He was still stuck living in a huge, crumbling mansion full of awful memories. The roof was caving in, the outer walls had untold amounts of moss growing out of them and inside, the place was haunted by the stuffed ghostly heads of his ancestors' animal victims. He thought about torching the whole thing, doing an insurance job like in the movies and running away to Mexico. But he couldn't speak Spanish and despite his best efforts, the curtains were so damp he couldn't get them to catch fire – even after the umpteenth attempt with his dad's Victorian cigar lighter. He felt he had failed at everything – even failing itself – so he sat under the curtains, alone in this cold, decaying estate and started sobbing uncontrollably. When there were no more tears left in his ducts, LOFI's face resurfaced in his mind and he remembered how she seemed to have pierced his very soul. He followed her open gaze deep into himself, deep, deeper than ever before. Suddenly, he shot up like a bolt of lightning, pulled back the damp curtains and saw what had to be done. All of it! Instantly, in full technicolour detail like a 1,000 TB-digital brain upload! He could see a sea of Solarpirates all across the barren hillsides of the estate planting new indigenous tree species, sheltering herb and veg permaculture gardens underneath. They

were ripping up the fences that separated the estate from the outside, using them to protect the new forest growths from the deer and sheep. Others were repairing and repainting the mansion, pastel pinks, water slides and garden parks revealing its new character. It was going to become a Palace of Wonder, a retreat centre for children and carers from across Scotland to use as their own, to heal and revitalise in peace surrounded by nature. Only then could he finally vanquish the ghosts from this place.

But as beautiful as his inherited prison-to-palace looked, he couldn't see himself anywhere in it. Was he dead? His bird's-eye view flew him over the estate lands, all the way to the tree-covered banks of a gorgeous remote loch at the base of a valley. This was where he played as a kid, where he and his dad sat in the treehouse. This was where he went when he needed to repair and be alone, only now – as he peered through the treetops and into the forest below where his treehouse sat – it was no longer solitary. It was part of a bustling network full of treehouses of all shapes and sizes. Little solar panel antennas poking through the canopy, the faint glow of warm lights and the smell of roasting corn on the cob were the only things that gave it away from the outside. He had to dive deeper and see what lay beneath the canopy. Bursting through, he heard the laughter of children melted into the chorus of electronic ambient music being created in real time by the forest plants themselves. The music seemed to playfully tease the bird calls – bird sounds Monty had never heard before, despite living and playing in those forests his whole life. *Birds long gone*, he thought, *who had returned to call this forest home.* He felt more at home there than anywhere on Earth – safer, more settled,

more connected, more accepted. And yet, he knew that this place didn't belong to him alone. Not the mansion, not the land, not the forests, not the loch. In his vision, it belonged to everyone – the singing birds, the children, the plants, as well as him. Right then, in his vision, he spotted LOFI smiling in the corner of a wooden circular tambo lodged up in the trees surrounded by other wonky treehouses. She was with a group of women and girls, some of whom were scribbling away on stained paper, others typing on upcycled laptops. This vision of a home gave him the unusual courage to call LOFI on the number she had left him.

She was in the bathroom when I saw her phone ring with Monty's name on it. I answered to let him know she would call him back, but I couldn't get a word in before Monty let out a splurge of posh sounds.

'Uhhh well yes, phuar, yaaaa...'

It was as if LOFI's phone was momentarily possessed by a Victorian ghost on meth.

LOFI must have heard her phone and was curiously approaching from the direction of the bathroom. 'Who is it?' she asked, the strange noises still coming out her phone.

'The, you see, huffuah huum, tally ho...pip pip...'

I held a hand on the speaker and whispered, 'I think it's Monty Lordy-whatnot, from the farm.'

LOFI smiled cheekily, as if she was expecting the call.

The excitement of his vision must have been infectious because later, when I sneakily eavesdropped in, I could see LOFI's smile had grown all over her face. When she finally got off the phone, she told me in no uncertain terms exactly where we were going to go that weekend for a camping trip.

That first night in Monty's treehouse, tucked into our sleeping bags, looking up at the dusty stars falling through the gaps in the trees, was one of the most magical nights of my life.

Fast forward a few months and Monty stayed true to his word. He transferred ownership of 90% of the estate to the new Scottish Commons – land open and available to anyone to use and develop, so long as it fell under the Commons guidance Monty had set. The land could be used for rewilding, growing fruits, veg or flowers native to Scotland, and to erect temporary structures so long as they were made from natural compostable materials and didn't interfere with rewilding or food growth. Of course, wild hiking and camping were actively encouraged, with a new network of paths and bothies to accommodate the huge influx of new eco-travellers and adventurers. He had given up 90% of his inherited wealth (assets locked up behind fences) but had gained something worth much more in return: freedom, community and a sense of purpose for life.

The Canopy Collective was still in its infancy and not all treehouses were up and running at full capacity when we helped to run the first festival retreats there at the behest of Monty. LOFI, who had supported Monty throughout, both emotionally and with practical life skills, was busy scurrying around in the treetop kitchen hoisting up another batch of tasty cake-baking supplies. Meanwhile, I was sweating on one of the bicycles hooked up to charge the battery network near the campfire. We loved experimenting with new inventions. We even tried a floating hydroelectric turbine one time to power the sound system, transforming water energy into a pulsating deep organic heartbeat through our new forest playground. That night, with so much free energy, we really

cranked it up to eleven. I guess you could compare it to a music festival from here in Cybertime, but actually, in many ways, it was fundamentally different. There weren't organisers separate from the paying punters. Everyone was an organiser, experimenter, workshop leader or performer, and everyone was a punter. Like the original 90s raves, there was no need for fences, gates and tickets. People donated whatever they liked online throughout the weeks before, during and after – even people who couldn't make it but wanted to show their support.

The aim of the gathering wasn't shallow hedonism or weekend escapism from the 9–5. It was something much deeper; a true connection with self and society. How big a difference could we make, how much could we improve both personally and environmentally in just a week, while dancing our tits off? Monty's hope for the week of events was that some people, once the festivities came to a close, would stay, make it their home and set up their lives there – quite the opposite from the usual landowners at festivals in Cybertime. Sure enough, having visited back almost every year since, the community is expanding and diversifying. Thanks to a few exhilarating 'play' tents that sprouted up throughout the community, there seemed to be a growing sexual revolution unfolding, too. I say 'play' spaces because I know here, in Cybertime, things are still a bit prudish when it comes to using the word 'SEX' – shaggin', love makin', rumpin' and pumpin'; wild explorations of each other's bodies, minds and souls in salacious escapades of melted hands and curious fingers tickling, caressing and repeatedly rubbing up, down and round and round. These weren't sleazy heteronormative sex clubs where freedom was forced to hide in a darkroom. They were open, liberated play

spaces where adults continually practised and improved consent while exploring themselves and each other. More than that, we liberated 'adult play' from its sexual cage, too. Sometimes we're just seeking to be held in a space where we can be silly, not performatively sexy. The new concept of adult play expanded slowly over in Solartime – play for the sake of it, without trying to be cool and serious or anyone in particular, really. Underneath those identities, our inner children don't care about labels, skin colour, genders or class. They just want to be seen, heard and free to have fun curiously exploring. This remains true no matter what age we are. Opening up new safe spaces like the Canopy Collective that were integrated into natural spaces were pivotal for a newly forming society that valued human abundance over false scarcity. We could finally let go of trying to project and just... be; just... become.

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Capitalist and Anarchist Kickback

Not everyone was like Monty of course. A lot more couldn't see the wood for the trees and were stuck in their old ways – especially those who had benefited from and were still very much attached to the old status quo. The new land tax didn't just affect the old royalty, aristocracy and churches that owned more than half of Scotland; it also disrupted and broke up the investment landlord monopolies that had bought up half the housing stock to hoard it, often empty without tenants, just to force up housing market prices for resale. Many of these conglomerates – making their profit from money laundering and citizen-harming market manipulation – were foreign-owned, mostly based in England, Russia or the US, with their shell companies in the Caribbean. The land tax, for that reason, started to be called the 'anti-oligarchy tax' as it broke up their mafioso influence, dominance and control.

The Great Billionaire Tantrum

It was obvious it wasn't going to be an easy transition for everyone. No amount of education, integration and appeasement would be sufficient; some were always going to try something

in retaliation. The oligarchs, corporate landlords and foreign investors weren't going to take this land tax lying down – not with all their money, ego and fast-car, small-dick identity politics on the line. At first, they tried the usual media smear campaigns. 'SCOTLAND TURNS COMMUNIST!' screamed the Daily Mail. The Times ran 'EXODUS OF THE JOB CREATORS!' – as if Scotland were about to fall into the sea. Solar Scots, however, didn't buy their pish rag newspapers anymore.

Then came the legal challenges, when a few aristocrats, some Russian oligarchs and a hedge fund in the Cayman Islands banded together to sue the Great Clan Gathering and the people of Scotland, claiming the human rights of their corporations and investments were being violated. However, the new Scottish courts told them to fuck off. Corporations don't have human rights and, even if they did, there is no human right that says the rich can infinitely hoard their extractions without properly paying taxes.

This would usually be the bit where bribery and blackmail of politicians, judges and people in power would come in, but, thanks to sortition and our clan system, there was no longer any head of a snake to compromise or cut off. The usual routes of bullying and harassment all failed – in the media, in the legal system and even the hitman tactics. During and throughout this campaign of failed terror, most of its proponents had already fled to England to protect themselves from criminal prosecution – some selling off their estates in a panic and cutting their losses while others, out of sheer spite, refused to diversify or sell and watched a lot of their fortunes drain away through the CC and taxation like a bathtub with the plug pulled. Many publicly said they would refuse to pay but with

our CIB model, where taxation is automated and transparent, they couldn't live in Scotland, spend Scottish money or access their properties and assets fully if they didn't also pay taxes. Eventually, if a land or housing asset was abandoned long enough with no reasonable excuse, a committee could force a community buyout based on the market value of the run-down property, minus the owner's unpaid fines or taxes (in theory, all tax should be paid up since it's automated, but the rich have a way of finding loopholes). These assets were then put under the guardianship of the local clans – with some divided up and resold to low-income buyers.

The real drama started when The Consortium, a collection of old-money landowners, corporate landlords and foreign investors, made their move. They thought they could tank the Scottish economy as revenge. They started pulling out all investments – not just in housing, but in major Scottish industries too – trying to crash the markets while lobbying (another word for bribing and blackmailing) foreign businesses to boycott or tariff the new Solarpunk economy.[1] It was a classic Big C tantrum, the kind they always throw when their Odin[2] -given right to hoard and exploit gets questioned.

The funny part? It completely backfired. No one wanted to boycott or tariff Scotland – not even England which economically relied on Scottish goods and services now more than ever

1. This mirrors the tactic Trump and his kind love to use when, for instance, the Brazilian government outcompetes corporations like Mastercard and Visa by offering fee-free transfers to citizens.

2. Odin is the complex, one-eyed Allfather of Norse mythology and a restless seeker of wisdom.

in Solartime. When The Consortium tried to dump their land, businesses and properties in a panic, no one was buying at their prices. With the new land tax crushing speculation, investing in housing was a much less attractive option and the attempted huge sell-off was more of a damp squib on a buyer's market. They had based their efforts on the assumption that their coordinated disinvestment would cause a run on the banks, a margin call on loans across the country and wholesale defaults on mortgages, with many other dominoes in the Scottish economy packing up and running in fear of a wholesale economic collapse. Except, that's not how the economy responded to their huffy exit. I think the millionaires and billionaires are so used to hearing their own anti-tax, rich flight propaganda that they have started to believe it themselves. The truth is, when they leave for other countries, rather than collapsing the economy they have been exploiting, it flourishes. Like Japanese knotweed, an invasive species, choosing to uproot itself and fuck off.

The Great Clan Gathering had anticipated this mega-rich mass sell-off so it set up a Commons Buyback Fund, using some of the revenue from the land and asset tax. Every time a billionaire tried to fire-sale a property, business or estate, co-ops, local councils and community groups could apply to snap them up at bargain prices with subsidisation from the fund. The whole billionaire exodus plan had banked on fear and a false belief in their perceived worth, but people weren't scared and the economy had already begun realigning to actual human value. After their departure, the cost of land and housing became affordable to the average citizen again, new housing co-ops emerged overnight and small businesses

thrived without corporate landlords or monopoly predators price-gouging them.

The final stroke of genius was our reverse boycott. When foreign billionaires tried to get international companies to pull out of Scotland, we responded with a national boycott of their corporations and brands. Scottish businesses cut ties with exploitative multinationals and formed new trade partnerships with worker-led cooperatives worldwide. While their boycott fell on deaf ears internationally, Scotland's reverse boycott had a huge ripple effect with many millions round the world joining it. How can Spotify invest in killer AI drones if no one pays their shitty subscription? How can Nestlé steal the groundwater from desperately poor communities if it has no bottom line? Many say Solartime Scotland has become the world's first post-capitalist trade hub. Markets existed way before capitalism and they exist after it too – only aligned with actual human and planetary needs.

There's one thing, though, we haven't addressed yet: the final bosses of the old world, a.k.a. the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Remember, back in the early days after the 2014 independence, the old SNP guard, bless their suits and cautious ties, tried to play the game by the rules of the rigged house. They took out massive, soul-crushing loans to 'stabilise the transition', effectively shackling the new Scotland to the same debt-treadmill that, to this day in Cybertime, keeps half the planet in permanent servitude. Post-2018 Interdependence, the suits in Washington were licking their lips, waiting for us to default so they could come in to 'restructure' our lives and sell off our remaining resources to their billionaire contractor pals for pennies.

We didn't give them the satisfaction. Instead, we hit them with the Declaration of Odious Debt. It's a bit of international law that says if a government takes out a loan that doesn't benefit the people, the people don't owe a fucking penny back. The debt was owed not by us, the citizens of Scotland, but by the old system of power that died when the Parliament did. Taking a leaf out the book of Rafael Correa in Ecuador back in 2008, who called their debt 'illegitimate' and forced the creditor predators to the table, we did the same and told them we weren't paying back their billions of imaginary debt-pixels. We gave them the address of our old parliament building in Edinburgh and told them to direct their debt collection letters there. However, we felt generous and offered them a one-time goodwill settlement of thirty cents on their dollar – the Ecuador Special – paid out in green energy credits (that barely cost us anything to produce any more). We told them they could take the 30% which, when added to the debt already paid, more than accounted for the initial amount loaned and walk away with their dignity – or they could try and come to collect the rest from the bottom of the North Sea where they could stay. When they realised we didn't need their global credit score or their currencies to buy bread or trade with our neighbours and that we could feed, water and power ourselves and half of fucking Europe, their leverage vanished. Their only option left was a full-on invasion, but the only army the old status quo could call upon was the English and even Westminster couldn't invent a single suitable pretext for a costly war that their citizens would accept to die for. Any full-scale offence from England would be a complete own-goal, considering they knew we didn't have to fight a conventional war in return.

We could asymmetrically sabotage the oil, water and power supplies they rely on and their entire military advance would come to a grinding halt while half of England's cities would be plunged into darkness. England had an unwilling population already who moved further and further north towards the border to join our new society. Scotland had no need for a large standing army as every man, woman and child – whether English or Scottish-born – was trained in specialist guerrilla tactics as part of the Scottish Defence Network. With a network of secret bunkers we had been building across the country, any invasion would cost multiples more in both human life and wealth that it might conceivably generate – never mind the fact it would cast an already struggling English government as an outlandish pariah state in the eyes of the international community, invading sovereign territory on behalf of the fucking IMF. It's not a good look. (We will talk more in depth about our new Solarpunk defence strategy in a future book, so let's not get too sidelined for now.)

One by one, the old oligarchs and their imperialist buddies ran out of moves. One of the last holdouts was Sir Reginald Blythe-Farquharson III, an oil-backed property tycoon who had personally funded the failed legal challenge against the land tax. Convinced he could outlast the new system, he refused to sell his massive Glasgow property portfolio, instead sitting on thousands of empty flats, hoping the market would magically return to 'normal' once this crazy Solarpunk experiment imploded on itself. But every month, the Community Contribution and its tax bill kept being deducted from his and his company's CIB account, while his properties lost value on the market. The end of the road came for Sir Reginald,

the last of the billionaires in Scotland, when he couldn't find a single buyer to offload his previous assets onto. Nobody wanted to inherit a dying empire – not even his children. So, one day, he cracked. Rumours say he had one too many whiskies at his London nightclub and threw a tantrum in the middle of the dining hall, screaming, 'I WON'T BE TAXED LIKE SOME COMMON PEASANT!' before auctioning off his entire Scottish portfolio there and then. The winning bidder, unfortunately for him, happened to be the Glasgow Tenants' Cooperative, who were there undercover, disguised as Russian oligarchs, anticipating a move just like this at any moment. They bought his entire property empire for 1 LOL per flat and a round of shots for everyone at the club. They straight-away began converting them into affordable social housing and sent him a thank-you card every birthday, anniversary and Christmas. The cards usually read something like: 'Cheers for the cheap gaffs ya roaster. Love, The Citizens of Glasgow.'

It took a while for the dust to settle but, touch wood, so far the new tax setup has worked out well for pretty much everyone still choosing to call Scotland their home and, since 2018, there have been a lot more who do – bar a few spoilt millionaires and billionaires who never learnt to share their toys when they were young. Sooner or later, they were going to realise that Scotland wasn't theirs to own. It never was in the first place.

The Anarchist Pirates of Knoydart

We mentioned, but kind of skirted around, the elephant in the room when we first started talking about taxes. No matter how

fair and equitable we make a tax system, whether it's spent on bombs or bairns – do we, as a society, have any right in the first place to collect taxes at all?

Every society has, and in fact needs, its rebels. Our Solarpunk society is no different. It wasn't just the old landed gentry and capitalist class that hated the idea of paying tax. There were some who, here in Cybertime would be placed on the far left, were just as vehemently opposed to the new system – no matter how the taxes were collected or what they were spent on. It must have been one of these anarchist Solarpirates that wrote the graffiti on the wall of the Royal Concert Hall steps in Glasgow.

> DON'T BE FOOLED! THE CLANS ARE JUST TAX COLLECTORS IN KILTS. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BENEVOLENT ALGORITHM!

I loved it so much I took a picture and printed it out to put on my wall back home – not because I agree with the sentiment or statement, but because it filled me with hope that even as we were building a new model that appeared to be benevolent, there were still young people brave and bold enough to hold their own opinions and challenge the status quo. The Solarpunk Society advisory group that informed the Great Clan Gathering had nothing to do with the umbrella youth movement we call Solarpirates. Pirates, by their very definition, do not adhere to any self-anointed leader or ideology. They go their own way and follow their hearts, even when it

rubs up against the beliefs of other pirates. This particular crew of pirates critiqued our emerging Solarpunk society from an anarchist libertarian perspective, claiming that all money is evil and any form of taxation, even with proper representation, is still theft when made mandatory. They distrusted the Citizen's Investment Bank – despite being equal members of its board – and they especially hated the algorithms used to automate the calculations, no matter whether they were adding money to their account (in form of the Citizen's Dividend, for example) or taking it out (for our new taxes). The Pirates refused to join or even form their own clans, seeing them as yet another form of collectivised dictatorship and mob rule who would use greenwashed language like 'guardianship' to mask what was to become manipulation and control. Coming out of the Cyberpunk Big C Cult, their biggest fear was that we would end up running blindly into the doors of a new cult.

Many of these anarchist Solarpirates discussed and critiqued Solarpunk ideology in Reddit forums, and eventually, a few of them decided to take matters into their own hands, heading up to the rugged wilds of Knoydart – a peninsula cut off from the rest of civilisation – to set themselves up there. It didn't take long for them to declare themselves a 'money-free, independent sanctuary'. They very publicly stuck their middle fingers up at the Great Clan Gathering, refused to use their CIB account cards, lived entirely on barter, and looked after the land they occupied through non-mandatory volunteering. They were the ultimate unfenced rebels and for a minute, when their breakaway colony made headlines online, everyone on the mainland held their breath. Some rushed to enthusiastically join them while others waited for an inevitable

crushing response from the GCG. Every utopia has its moment where dreams are shattered and shared visions dismantled into a million lies and acts of state violence. Whether it was the GDR calling in Russian tanks to crush their own German workers for daring to protest, or the violent dismantling of the Occupy movement without any real concessions granted. State utopian promises are great until someone calls them out.

Sure enough, an emergency crack team of Community Guardians formed at the behest of the Great Clan Gathering to head to Knoydart straight away to meet the open challenge to the system head-on. A host of international journalists and camera crews had already gathered to capture the potentially explosive moment live. The anxious Pirates gathered around the small harbour, shoulders tense and fists clenched around all sorts of tools as the CG boat docked. When they yanked large heavy boxes out of their boat, the Pirate's feet were dancing with the rush of adrenaline pumping through their veins. Maybe the boxes were ammunition, body armour, smoke grenades, pepper spray or secret killer robot giraffes – who fucking knows! With the cameras pinned on them like sniper lasers, two CGs finally approached the gathering gang of armed Pirates and, like a scene out of Pulp Fiction, they dropped one of the heavy crates in front of the crowd, cracked it open and stepped back. The crowd hovered like a herd of zebras around the only watering hole, no one wanting to be the first to be bitten by a crocodile.

'BAKED BEANS!' someone finally shouted out laughing. It was a crate of baked fucking beans! Not only that, but all sorts of wrapped gifts and useful tradeable items, each part of a carefully wrapped package with a small card on it. Each

card had the name of a different Clan Rep from the GCG. You could tell they had taken a lot of time and effort to choose and package each of the many crates on the boat. Other crates contained solar modules, batteries, water pumps and high-tech gizmos for off-grid living from some of the nerd clans. There was loads of hand-knitted stuff from the Granny Clan along with some essential homemade granny shortbreads. As the big reveal spread around the crowd of Pirates, the CGs were invited into the pirate den for a cuppa around the fire. Multiple dynamic conversations kicked off as each CG got a tour of the place, locking into back-and-forth suggestions on helpful hints and tips – connecting dots and planning spin-off mini-projects they could build together during their stay. These crates with their goodies could also be 'traded up' by the Pirates for better, more useful things helping to kickstart their experiments in bartering and no-money lifestyles – both of which are almost impossible without at least some help to get going. Together, they decided to set up Trust Trade Boxes at the edge of the glen and on the harbour for tourists and visitors – essentially a peer-to-peer exchange where the Pirates could swap their hand-carved wood, foraged herbs and other things for essential gear. The CGs also made sure every single Pirate there took their phone number, email and address in case they ever encountered any issues – mental, emotional or practical – and needed support. It was important everyone could autonomously reach out of their own accord since no one wanted to see new toxic hierarchies forming. Other than some basic human concerns for the young people's welfare and despite the Solarpirates' critique, the GCG did not see their rebellion as a threat. It was an inspiration. These were potentially the next

generation of Solarpunk ideas in beta. Who knows whether they will work or not, but thank fuck we still have young people brave and bold enough to find out.

The thing about our new banking system, though, is that even though these Solarpirates had opted out completely on an ideological basis, they were still human beings born on Scottish soil. That meant, behind the scenes, their automatically-created CIB accounts were ticking away in their name, bringing in their dividends and paying their contributions, settled in real time. The new system didn't penalise them for rebelling; it just made sure they, along with every other citizen, had enough to live the life that actualised them the most, even if that was a life rebelling against that very system. The Big C Cult treats us citizens similarly, in that it doesn't really care whether you are for or against the system, but instead of unconditional support, it enforces ruthless extraction. Our Solarpunk model doesn't tie personal politics to citizenship. Our Citizen's Dividend is our right, not a state-controlled privilege.

This means that, a couple of years into the experiment, when a few of those young Pirates decided they'd had enough of the midge-ridden summers and rainy winters and wanted to catch a bus to Glasgow, buy a new laptop and spend some time in a warm flat with a nice coffee shop nearby – all things that required some currency – they didn't return to a mountain of debt and a criminal record for tax evasion. Instead, they opened their CIB app for the first time in years and found a healthy buffer of LOL credits waiting for them. It always works out that the dividend will be more than any tax burden if you aren't earning or spending much. That means, you can opt out of economic productivity any time, and – if and when you want

to opt back in – you will find a buffer of a few thousand LOL, enough for some food, transport and basic accommodation. The algorithm makes sure the money never pools stagnant in any account, meaning eventually, after a certain threshold, if the money isn't being spent, Community Contributions will be the exact same amount as the Citizen's Dividend payment.

Our emerging Solarpunk society doesn't need to win ideological arguments by economic or political force like the old Big C Cult of the West or the so-called communists of the East. Those with differences of opinion and beliefs are the fuel of an abundant, evolving society – not the enemy. Pockets of young people not being economically productive might lose us some tax money temporarily. We might not be maximally squeezing every coin out of their potential. But think of the benefits – not just for that person but for society too. Maybe they will discover things none of the rest of us could, too busy at work. Imagine the next Einstein isn't forced to work in a patent office but instead can fully drop out of all expectations and responsibilities.[3] Imagine the explosion of scientific and creative ideas that could potentially fill up that empty space. Obviously, not every drop-out is going to be an Einstein, but it only takes the potential benefits from one to make the rest completely worth it. Society's role therefore is not to shape youth ideology, but to be there with a warm blanket, a cuppa and a wallet with some coins in it. Leave the rest up to the goddesses.

3. Ironically, Einstein loved his work at the Swiss Patent Office because he had hours of solitary time to develop his theories. I don't think the same luck can be assigned to the millions forced to work in McDonald's or 7-Eleven stores today.

The anarchist Solarpirates that remain in Knoydart still don't pay any taxes and have, in many ways, successfully removed themselves from the economic and monetary system, as they dared to dream of. It's not a life for everyone – having to barter and sustain yourself in a subsistence way, close to nature with the many gifts she sometimes giveth and sometimes taketh away. As much as the Solarpirates continue to write slogans against the clans, they retain the protected right to protest, supported as citizens by the CIB and the system as a whole. We realised that true freedom isn't just the right to say no; it's the right to say no without it ruining the rest of your life. Like any good parent will tell you, true love does not pull the rug on someone when they naturally rebel against you. True love fucking celebrates it. Who knows, one day those fringe ideas may be the very ones that save us all.[4]

4. Just for clarity, I want to state the obvious: this level of celebration and tolerance does come with some exceptions. For example, there is no tolerance or celebration of ideologies of intolerance. Abusing your rights to attempt to oppress the rights of others is a criminal offence. There are no White Power Camps for the chronically small-brained in Scotland.

23
Can Taxes Tackle Depopulation?

For every action there is a reaction. For every step forward sometimes two steps back. That's what it felt like for RAFI, a young Solarpirate living in Rothesay on the increasingly lonely island of Bute. All of Scotland's islands have been slowly but surely depopulating, both on your timeline and mine. In fact, Scotland has had a serious depopulation problem as a whole for a long time, but the effects of it could be felt more tangibly on islands like Bute and in the once bustling old Victorian towns like Rothesay.

RAFI had been on a bit of a Solarpunk rollercoaster. He had started out as a complete cynic, then got caught up and converted to being a Solarpirate in the early fervour of the post-raves period back on the mainland, only to then end up back home on his island, a bit sad and alone. Island life is like a time capsule. It runs at a different speed than life on the mainland. Any developments elsewhere can take centuries to catch up. Until very recently, many Scottish islands barely even had Wi-Fi. Most of the ageing islanders don't use messaging apps or even know what social media is. How in the name of fuck was RAFI going to explain to them what a Solarpirate was? Besides, the island had been plagued by gentrification for

decades, with the majority of homes bought up as 'investments' or second homes by mainly English people taking advantage of the relatively cheaper property prices – only for those houses to lay empty eleven months of the year, if not all twelve. Now the new land tax, for all its good intentions, had accidentally put the final nail in the metaphorical and sometimes literal coffin of the island's population. It made it uneconomical to view housing as a speculative investment and killed the second home market dead. It forced almost all of the remaining homeowners on the island to sell up or abandon ship, unless they actually lived there most of the year, which very few did. Although getting rid of second homes was all great in theory, in the immediate aftermath it left the island, half of its homes being old aristocratic estates, almost completely abandoned. Rothesay, a once bustling Victorian holiday destination was no longer a sick old town but a fully-fledged ghost of its former self.

RAFI, buzzing from his Solarpunk experiences in the big city, was now hopelessly disappointed and frustrated back at home seeking connection, so he did what a lot of young men like him do in such situations. He sank back into old depressive habits, barely washing, living is squalor with too many crusty used tissues on his bedside table. His Solarpirate friends were really concerned for him but they were spread out in what felt like a million miles away. He eventually stopped making the effort to message back and disappeared into playing the classic PC games he used to play before Interdependence, his favourite one being a city builder one. Inside that simulated universe, he hyper-focused on rigging up huge electrical grids for his megacities while he sat in a cold corner of his ancient

stone cottage, with no Wi-Fi and chronic anxiety his solar panel system might cut out on a cloudy day and kill his computer before an autosave.

One Tuesday afternoon (or it could have been an evening, or Wednesday for all RAFI knew), locked deep in his simulated city, he discovered a random system glitch – something he had activated as a joke, but which had, surprisingly, seemed to work somehow. His simulated megacity had been facing the same problem as his own wee island: young people were moving away in droves, leaving only the immobile elderly behind, with no one coming to replace the workers. His city was bankrupt and suffering a slow, agonising death. He had tried everything – adding parks, police stations, schools, you name it – but the population just didn't want to stay for some reason or another. Once your town is half-abandoned, no amount of improvement will help, as there is no one left to appreciate it. All these improvements do is add to the spiralling maintenance costs. RAFI was about to give up, delete and start afresh, when he noticed an option on the tax tab he hadn't seen before. *YOLO, let's give it a go for a laugh,* he thought. If he was going to terminate all his remaining citizens, he might as well give them a wee tax bonus before he pulled the plug and charge them a negative housing tax rate.

Much to his astonishment, RAFI began to witness more and more simulated humans flocking to his city, filling up the abandoned homes and even starting to build new ones. They loved the tax cashback the city was suddenly paying them to live there, but surely this wasn't sustainable for the city coffers. Yet, as each house became occupied again by happy, healthy and fertile humans, an unexpected series of knock-on effects start-

ed to unfold. Demand for new shops and commerce spiked, industry and offices sprouted up rapidly and previously empty schools, hospitals and attractions on the brink of collapse were suddenly bursting with life. Local transport links filled with visitors as people flooded into RAFI's city to soak up the new vibrancy and energy, many of whom chose to stay and take advantage of the negative tax rate for residents. The resident tax cashback he had implemented as a joke turned out to be an absolute blinder of a move, generating $5 for every $1 it paid out to residents.

RAFI felt himself explode like a rocket blasting through the atmosphere of his simulated megacity before landing back in his damp, still Rothesay cottage just as the computer screen turned black. The solar batteries had run dry and the simulation was dead, but his eureka moment was so loud he was sure it had startled the ravens on the vastly overgrown jungle once known as his front lawn. He had to take his discovery to the island's clan gathering! There weren't many people left to convince, but those who were were all deeply old school and as stubborn as their goats. He already felt like an outsider, but arguing his case would for sure confirm that he was a fully fledged alien in their eyes. And I don't mean one of those sexy Nordic ones; no, more like the vitamin D-deficient grey ones with scrawny bodies, big eyes and even bigger heads. If RAFI was going to get his point across, he needed some backup.

Luckily, he knew exactly who to contact: BLOOMTIME, a small group of other ex-cynics online who had become radicalised Pirates just like him. He sent them an urgent message on their encrypted messaging app:

BLOOMTIME Pirates!

The Rothesay circuit is broken. Total voltage drop. The island is basically a dead AA battery leaking acid into the Firth of Clyde, but I think I've found a bypass.

I've been running a sim and discovered a glitch in the tax system. If we reverse the polarity on the fiscal grid, we can suck the leaking load back into the system. It's a total YOLO patch that makes no sense, but it's glowing green on my screen.

I need to pitch this convincingly to my clan, but I look like a back-to-the-future rerun and my fellow islanders still think electricity is a fad.

I NEED YOUR HELP!

Bring all the energy you can muster.

This is going to need a mega jumpstart.

RAFI usually enjoyed the forced peace and quiet of not having phone signal in his stony cottage, but now it was proving a bit of a pain in the arse. Most phone companies had stopped servicing their masts on the island since there were barely any customers left – which meant he had to make his way to Mount Stuart, a massive, flamboyant neo-Gothic mansion on Bute that just so happened to be the first house in Scotland to have electricity and a telephone and now the last place on the

island you could get constant signal. It was quite the suitable spot to send his SOS, but he couldn't hang about waiting for a reply. The clan meeting was the next day and holding onto his bursting idea until the next one, probably held months down the line, wasn't an option. It had to be tomorrow. RAFI rushed home to prepare his speech with the help of his local MLG on his PC. He held out little hope his message had even been received in the BLOOMTIME chat, let alone that any of his fellow Pirates would be able to rush to his aid at such short notice.

The next morning, adrenaline shooting through his body, RAFI woke up bang on 7 am. It felt as if his brain had been generating the necessary electricity all night long for the day ahead. He carefully got dressed after his first shower and shave in weeks, putting on his most presentable hand-me-down woollen jumper so as to attempt to blend in with the humanoid locals. It was freezing on the walk to the pub, yet he could feel the beads of sweat dripping down his spine into a leaky puddle forming at the top of his arse crack. Although he probably should have been practising his speech, his brain was pondering whether nervous sweat was in fact colder than normal sweat. When RAFI arrived at Galatea, the pub hosting the gathering, he was early. He was always early for things, whether he wanted to be or not – and he hated it. It forced him to avoid eye contact or small talk like the plague for longer. He sat near the dartboard on a rickety stool with one of its three legs inexplicably shorter than the others, his eyes firing toward the door every time the bell chimed. Nothing. Just another old farmer in a flat cap shaking off a damp umbrella. Surprisingly, he felt much more lonely now, surrounded by people, than

when he was actually alone in his cottage. His BLOOMTIME SOS clearly hadn't worked and there was no cavalry showing up to his rescue. He was stuck there, alone, so he sat dazed, equally unable to escape or engage for an excruciating two hours, barely listening to anything else on the agenda. He wanted to speak up, but every time he even imagined doing so, his throat would swell up and his left leg would shake so violently it looked like it was possessed by the ghost of Elvis himself.

'Right,' grunted Hamish, a weathered crofter with calluses disguised as hands, tapping a pint glass with a fork. 'Any other business before we round this up and get a proper dram in us?'

Against all his bodily intuition, RAFI stood up, his knees throbbing in protest.

'I... umm... I have an idea, maybe,' he squeaked.

A few heads turned out of pity for the trembling mess in front of them, or possibly out of frustration at the only thing stopping them from drowning their sorrows at the bottom of the usual glass.

'For the island. To fix the... the voltage drop. Shit. I mean, to stop all the people leaving.'

He took a deep breath, clutching his papers like a chocolate shield on a sunny day, the ink smudging to fuck from his perspiration. When he finally managed to get his rattling eyeballs to read from his notes, he stammered,

'If we let this continue, we are going to end up with a ghost island, costing millions to maintain the roads and infrastructure but with no one to use or pay for them. Just look at all the abandoned regions in Spain, Italy and the like. We have to do something now, or else we might as well all take the last ferry

to the mainland tonight and leave this place for the birds and seals.'

His opener struck a chord, turning even more heads, now mostly out of fear – and curiosity.

'I've been running simulations. If we want people to move here, we can't just ask them to. We have to make it a glitch they can't ignore. I propose we offer a reverse tax rate, as in we offer to pay their taxes for them. We could pay them 10% of their national tax back for living here. Maybe another 10% if they work on the island. How about a further 10% for a period, so long as they invest in renovations, business or community building on the island?'

The room went silent. Not a thoughtful silence, but the kind of disturbed silence you get when someone suggests eating a baby at a christening.

'Pay them?' a booming, plum-thick voice cut through the air.

It was Mr Stirling-Vain, a man who lived in a mansion on a once massive estate behind high walls and spoke as if he personally owned the oxygen in the room.

'Are you high, boy? Or just remarkably thick? We've got no money for the sea wall and you want to hand out cashbacks to every hippie who fancies a holiday? It's fiscally illiterate. It's ridiculous and, in fact, it's well beyond the powers of this clan to change the tax system anyway. Sit down before you embarrass your family name further.'

RAFI was mortified. Although he knew this man was but a posh bully and had nothing of sustenance to argue, his words of defence just wouldn't come out, stuck behind whatever was choking his throat. The blood drained from his face and he felt dizzy, leaving him looking even more alienesque. He needed

a wee sit-doon. The ex-aristocrat, arrogant and pissed that he was forced to reuse most of his land since the new land tax, had weighed RAFI down.

Pinned to the chair RAFI had slumped in, the words came out through a tiny-mouse voice filter once he finally opened his mouth to explain the $5-for-$1 return.

'I... the multiplier effect... in the game...,' RAFI stammered.

'In a *game*?' Stirling-Vain laughed a wet snort. 'Good Sterquilinus,[1] how preposterous. Someone get this child a Ribena and send him home. Let us adults get on with some real drinking.'

'Actually,' a sharp voice stabbed from the back of the pub, 'the only thing preposterous in here is your tweed jacket and that fake hair combover, ya snotty-nosed toff!'

RAFI didn't need to turn around to recognise that scold. He did anyway. There, standing by the fruit machine, looking like the neon-clad goddess of vengeance herself, was SYRA, her face full of loving rage. Behind her, KEENA and ELI were handing out homemade sandwiches to the hangry locals up the back. RAFI felt a surge of electricity jolt from his heart right to the tear ducts under his eyes. He stood up, shoulders back, wiped the waterworks away and winked at them. The cavalry had arrived after all!

'Who in the devil are you lot?' Stirling-Vain blustered.

'We're an invasion of legal aliens! Your worst nightmare, no doubt,' ELI laughed.

RAFI found the grounding wire in his voice again.

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1. Sterquilinus is the Roman god of manure, in charge of the vital, if somewhat smelly, business of agricultural dung.

‘We couldn’t afford independence either, remember? But we did it. We definitely couldn’t afford our Interdependence, our Citizen’s Bank and especially not our Citizen’s Dividend and yet – we did it!’

One of the other locals, stirred by the new energy and their lack of a free sandwich, piped up, ‘That’s because we just invented oor own currency and made loadsae up to gie oot as a divadend but, no?’

‘Exactly!’ SYRA encouraged. ‘Why can’t you just do the same here on Bute? If you pay people’s taxes in LOL, it will all just disappear back to the mainland and maybe Lord Farquaad over there is right, you’ll end up broke. But what if you paid them in your own coin instead?’

Unbeknown to RAFI, who hadn’t checked in since his initial message, the SOS had sparked a massive group discussion and some deep research into the problem and potential solutions. The cavalry hadn’t just shown up, they had brought their best weapons too.

‘A local currency,’ ELI added, leaning against the bar. ‘You could call it the HAHA. Home-Area Health Asset. If the main currency of Scotland is the LOL, you could make this place a right laugh to live in?’

‘And it disnae need to be a handout,’ KEENA chimed in, pointing to a boarded-up shop window. ‘It’s an incentive. Ye move here, you get yer money monthly in HAHA. You spend that HAHA in local shops and on local trades, and the shops partially pay their staff in HAHA. That means the money stays on the island instead a leaking back tae some evil online corp or tae the mainland.’

Hamish, the crofter, squinted. 'But we cannae change the tax laws, lassie. We're just a wee island clan. We'd have tae convince the entire Great Clan Gathering tae change ivrythin, just after they set it up.'

'So don't change the laws then,' RAFI grinned. 'Let's work with the power we have already. Keep the taxes the same, but the clan itself, us, we issue a social dividend rebate back to the residents in HAHA. A cashback payment based on the amount of taxes you paid each month. That way there's no laws broken.'

'Yous are talkin' aboot those digital nomad types, aren't yous?' another local finally chirped in. 'We dinnae want to fill the island with 2,000 dafties locked away in their wee wurlds, no addin' anyhin' to the island community or way of life. We've had enough o' that pish wi' all those English poshos an' their second homes. Nae offence, Mr Stirlin!'

'I'm not English! I was born and bred here on the estate,' protested Mr Stirling-Vain.

'Yee shure as fuck sound it!' came the instant reply.

RAFI turned to the local concerned about digital nomads and said, 'That's why we need multiple incentives, not just one. I reckon we could connect up a new community grid by incentivising people to not only live here but work, build and raise families too.'

'Whit aboot some volunteerin' then? That way us auld yins wud get to meet and mingle wae aw the new youngins tae?' one of the old-timers proposed. The room nodded slowly as a consensus idea started to form. Consensus except for one loud voice.

'Yes yes, very good. You can try and turn the island into a hippy commune if you wish, but the incentive is only worth

something if you are paying tax. You are only paying tax if you are generating and spending income, and you can only do that if there are real work and business opportunities on the island.' Despite sounding less scolding now, the ex-aristocrat was still sceptical.

RAFI paused to consider his point properly, not afraid to answer him this time, but with the respect the point deserved.

'The high streets have been full of empty shops for decades now; the old factories and warehouses are all empty too. A new business paying 1 LOL for its first year is better than no business paying anything at all, so let's offer the spaces up for peppercorn rents for a while. So long as they renovate, have a social purpose and they accept our new HAHA currency. Give them similar tax cashbacks for hiring locals, training people and hosting community projects.'

KEENA, the eco-warrior, looked genuinely excited. 'My Anhouke,[2] the island could become a flourishing haven for third sectors, international NGOs, environmental charities and research bases wae incentives like that! Especially if everyone living here and getting some cashbacks are expected to do some volunteering too? Bute could be to charities what Ireland was to Google and the likes!'

Around the room, more faces started to look equally thrilled by the joint proposal. RAFI kept the energy up. 'Local plumbers and sparkies would have plentiful work from the influx of new people and local money. Struggling shopkeepers could finally employ some helpers and take a day off. Struggling postmen

2. Anhouke is an ancient Celtic goddess of fields, forests and wild boundaries whose sacred duty was protecting the balance of the land.

and postwomen, as well as doctors, could finally consider retirement as new replacement workers – skilled workers – would undoubtedly arrive from all around the country, possibly even the world!'

As the back-and-forth grew louder, MOSS suddenly announced they had something to share. MOSS was the final member of the gang, and had snuck in along with the rest but avoided the drama. They weren't one for big entrances. They had been invisibly sat quietly on a corner table with their head lost behind their laptop.

'Listen to this!' they said, their voice piercing to hush a guidy room.

They turned the laptop around so most could see it and explained the contents towards the back of the pub lounge. MOSS had meticulously taken notes of all the suggestions in the room, analysed the initial available data they could find online and rapidly crunched it all into a spreadsheet. Now, the numbers sat there for everyone to see.

'Data shows there are millions around the world who would do anything to live on a beautiful island like this, surrounded by nature, away from all the chaos, but just close enough to it at the same time. With the right incentives, the floodgates could and would be opened. That is, if you want them to. Mr Stirling is right to think that such an incentive would cost a lot of money this clan currently does not have. As you can see on the spreadsheet, just to fill 1,000 of the roughly 2,500 empty homes on the island, assuming the newcomers make an average of 50k LOL and pay 12k in tax, that would mean giving each person a maximum cashback of 3k HAHA if they meet

all three criteria. Assuming we peg the two currencies to one another, that is a total investment of 3.6 million LOL.'

The majority of the gathering gasped, possibly because they had rarely ever considered such a number before; or maybe the growing excitement made them more aware of the increasing need for a stiff drink.

'If we include the business rebate, that figure could be doubled. However, because you are paying it back in HAHA coins rather than LOL, you don't need to worry about starting capital. You can just do it to begin with.'

'We can just do it?' a random voice ping-ponged back.

'WE CAN JUST DO IT!' the entire gathering sang in chorus as if it was their pantomime catchphrase they had been waiting for. MOSS wasn't done yet though.

'Each of those 1,000 newly filled homes brings a substantial tax percentage increase to the island from the overall national tax income. 1,000 more residents means a much larger piece of revenue from overall taxes gathered by the CIB is redistributed back to the island clan. This alone practically pays for the cashback rebate.'

'So the project could actually break even?' a more curious-sounding Mr Stirling enquired.

'Much better than break even!' MOSS exclaimed, unusual for their matter-of-fact tone.

'You wouldn't make much money in rent from all the new shops, businesses and NGOs setting up to begin with, but they all also generate a lot of revenue alongside the island population, its workers, customers and, don't forget, a possible uptick in tourists. All those transactions add to the tax income. The genius of it all is a lot of the transactions would be locked

into the island through the HAHA coin, meaning each HAHA coin would circulate many times over before making its way back to the initial clan fund it came from – but not before generating business, customers, tourism and jobs first, all of which generate new wealth, taxes and so on.'

Even more eyes lit up.

'The HAHA coin, like most local coins, has a multiplier effect. Based on previous experiments, it should be at least 1.8x, meaning a 3.6-million investment should generate 6.4 million within its first year alone. By the end of the first couple of years, we should not only be looking at breaking even, but at a net surplus island-wide of several millions. Plus, new jobs, social businesses, charities and NGOs filled with volunteers able to gift their time to missions they care about. Don't forget the 1,000 currently dilapidated homes getting renovated and looked after with new residents living in them – all without the clan having to lift a finger, really.'

The silence that followed was different this time. It was the silence of thirty-plus people reaching the peak of a mountain and for the first time, witnessing the horizon over the ridge.

Hamish looked at the screen, then at the pub owner, then finally back at RAFI.

'Millions in surplus?' he whispered. 'And the hooses get fixed up for free?'

'Better than free,' SYRA grinned, overhearing from behind, with one arm around the shoulders of a tense-looking Mr Stirling-Vain. 'Sounds like the newcomers will eventually pay us for the privilege of living here. We just have to make the beds, stick the kettle on and send out the welcome letters.'

RAFI sat back, his arse crack sweat finally dried in. He looked at SYRA, who returned him a cheeky wink.

It goes without saying that the vote was unanimous. Even Mr Stirling-Vain, seeing the projected increase in his own property and business value and the potential for colleagues and partners that didn't hate his guts, raised a shaky, manicured hand in favour.

The Rothesay Laugh didn't just stay in a spreadsheet. Within 18 months of that clan meeting, the island was once again vibrant – not only for the fancy vegan and gluten-free bakeries popping up everywhere but for social projects like Home First. Several NGOs had banded together and moved into a huge old Victorian hotel where they opened offices and doors for new homes. They worked with the clan to bring folk who had once lived on the streets of Glasgow and Paisley and had been in temporary accommodation since 2018 – people the old world had chewed up and spat out – and gave them more than just a permanent roof over their heads. They were invited to have a stake in a community they could help build and expand into. Under the social clause, these new islanders became the trainee gardeners of the new kelp forests, the builders of the mycelium insulation plants and the stewards of the restored ancient ruins. They earned real cash, both LOL and HAHA, that they then paid into the system – and for the first time in their lives, they were net contributors as well as net benefactors of a society that actually welcomed and wanted them there.

One day, as RAFI sat in one of the newly opened cafés, overhearing a formerly homeless veteran and a hipster coder from Berlin arguing over the best way to compost seaweed in

a community garden, he was questioning if this was all actually real or if he had fallen asleep playing his computer game. He didn't have long to think about it as another boat full of tourists arrived, wanting a proper tour from a local and someone to arrange their currency transfer to HAHA. This was RAFI's new favourite side mission.

Now, you may be sitting there in your Cybertime reality, clutching this book, thinking, *Aye, that's a lovely wee fairy tale, GINGERBEARD. Dead nice. Pity it's all probably bullshit and literally impossible.*

It's neither bullshit nor is it impossible. There is absolutely nothing – not a single law, not a single physical barrier – stopping every dying village and region in the Highlands, every depopulating valley in Wales, or every ghost town in the Spanish, Italian or Swiss interior from doing exactly what RAFI and his Pirate mates did on the Isle of Bute over in Solartime. You don't need an Act of Parliament. You don't need the permission of some xenophobic or bureaucratic national government that can't even pull its head out its own arse for two seconds to smell the roses. You don't need to move mountains or wait for a tech billionaire to come save you. All you need is the collective will of the people already standing in the room with you. Stop asking for the right to exist or complaining about those supposedly standing in your way, and start fucking exercising your right, your power, your destiny to thrive – right here, right now.

The old towns and villages of rural Scotland as well as those in the rest of Europe are like dying batteries. They have all the components but no electricity to run them. If we rebuild the circuit like RAFI did, the power will flow and, after an initial

kickstart from something like the HAHA, it might even gather enough steam to self-generate for generations to come. If we create a system that rewards kindness and contribution while penalising selfishness, the cunts will naturally fuck off and the people waiting for your call will answer. If the Rothesay miracle can happen on a damp, forgotten rock in the Firth of Clyde, it can happen exactly where you are sitting right now. Trust the maths. Trust the people. And for fuck's sake, trust that if you make the bed, stick the kettle on and open the door, there are millions of just the right kind of people desperate to take you up on the invitation.

24
Participatory Budgeting in Action

The People's Budget wasn't originally a Solarpunk idea, and neither were consensus-based decision-making models. Both had been used around the world, from Porto Alegre in Brazil where the first city participatory budgeting (PB) process was created, to the National Consensus Assemblies in Iceland, the Þjóðfundur, that brought together 1,500 random citizens to reach a consensus on the core values of their new constitution following the 2008 financial crash. In Solartime, we were just the first ones brave (or daft) enough to implement both those ideas simultaneously and at a national level.

Participatory budgeting is a direct democracy approach to deciding how public tax money is spent. Instead of politicians controlling the budget behind closed doors, citizens propose, debate and vote on spending priorities, ensuring that funds actually go where people deem them most essential. As mentioned, PB has been used in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where since 1989 citizens have had direct control over portions of the city's investment budget, deciding how municipal funds were allocated. This led to reduced inequality, improved infrastructure, better public services, less corruption and higher tax compliance, as citizens could see the direct benefit of their

contribution. Porto Alegre shows that the more power and decision-making is handed back to the people paying the taxes in the first place, the less need there is for Big Government, overpaid bureaucrats and career politicians who just love to be the middlemen between you and your money.

For us in Solartime, PB had to be combined with another essential element for it to be truly democratic. Simple majority-rule voting systems always produce losers whose wishes are ignored. The winners – as little as 25% of those who vote – take it all, while all others have no active role. The brutish simplicity of this system is susceptible to mob rule and manipulation through mob fear. Once you win – even with an overall tiny minority – you can get away with murder; sometimes literally. Consensus-based decision-making, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily require unanimity – which is almost impossible at scale anyway. What it does require is for people with shared fundamental aims to work together, refining proposals and reaching a collective compromise that everyone can accept.

Most probably, this concept isn't something new in your life. How often do you and your family, flatmates or colleagues make a decision by majority vote? Almost never, right? Maybe as a last resort, but it's not the natural decision-making model we use for most decisions most of the time – and yet it's used for collective decisions all the fucking time.

Every parent knows the dilemma: one kid wants ice cream at the beach and another wants a vegan burger at their favourite café on the other side of the city. Whatever is decided, if tantrums are to be avoided, everyone's needs and opinions must be considered. Maybe it's a beach-and-ice-cream day today because it's one of the four annual days of sunshine in

Scotland, but a promise is made by all that, on the next rainy day off, they'll head to the burger spot. There's no need for winner and loser votes; everyone is heard and included in the Saturday morning peace treaty that all parents are so keen to sign with their children. Explain to me then why the fuck we run our politics and economy any differently. Maybe because a healthy family respects differences of opinion and recognises every member has the best of intentions for the rest, while politicians are incentivised to throw entire nations under the bus for a few shiny coins?

Cybertime Scotland is treated as little more than a locality within the UK. It raises more in tax revenue than it receives back from the central government in London – a situation that has existed for decades. The Scottish government has to balance its books every single year on the limited economic powers it is permitted to exercise under the devolved settlement. The non-independent nation of Scotland has no ability to run a deficit. This means that any so-called Scottish debt that is talked about is actually the result of spending policies and borrowing made by Westminster and their English parties that many people in Scotland have voted against for generations. Devolution has been terrible for Scotland overall, but its forced guardrails did make us mighty good at balancing our annual budgets.

Solartime Scotland, by contrast, is a fully independent and autonomous nation. We no longer send our taxes to England in return for meagre pocket money. Instead, we've devolved as much budgeting power as the Scottish Government has in Cybertime to the local clans, leaving the Great Clan Gathering to decide only on a few universal, nationwide issues.

In Cybertime, Western governments are too terrified of the next election to tackle big issues like climate change, poverty or pandemics. They can't even build a single modern railway line (RIP, HS2) without it becoming a billion-pound shambles. 'A wise person plants a tree knowing that they will never sit under its shade,' so goes the saying. That's why our model focuses on a 100-year strategic vision under the guidance of the Solarpunk Society Citizens' Advisory Council. Our Great Clan decisions aren't tied to a single party's ego, so they can actually commit to the big stuff suggested to them by the Society: nationwide geothermal grids, tidal power stations and even our national bunker programmes for citizen defence. Citizens can agree to share the heat now because we know the ROI belongs to our grandkids, not some private anonymous arsehole. The real magic, though, is in making sure power is constantly flowing downwards. When we started, the Great Clan Gathering managed about 70% of the tax budget, but since our goal is decentralised resilience, every year, more of that revenue is pushed downwards to the local level, all handled and overseen by the CIB and its citizen shareholders. The current aim is a 50/50 split between local and national budgets. Local regions – whose boundaries are now defined by local biospheres, not by politicians who can gerrymander them at will – are in charge of the vast majority of local budgetary decisions. These local budgets are managed through the local clan gatherings and vastly expand on the power and reach of the old Brazilian models we mentioned. Yet, the full economic power doesn't pool there either. It flows through them into school boards in charge of their individual education budgets, town clans who can empower specific projects through their arts and culture

funds, local youth initiatives that are invited to help design green spaces for children in their local neighbourhoods and even street neighbours who can decide whether they need new benches, a community garden or to fix that pothole that's been swallowing Peugeots since 2022.

This shift from a centralised power to a distributed people's budget is what helps make the system even more incorruptible: You can't bribe ten thousand local assemblies. For the first time in Scottish history, people aren't just paying their taxes but voting to increase them because – just like their Brazilian counterparts – they can see the results out their own front door.

25
Summary: The Great Unclenching

Imagine cybernetic Tom Sawyer and Goddess Greta Thunberg hooking up in a space elevator to the stars, leading to a load of cute wee Solarbabies that fight and win the revolution against the Palantir Terminators. Spinning yarns about super hot Solarpirates winning bloody revolutions would probably be a much better read than this. It would probably sell a lot more books, too. The stories from Solartime Scotland I have told you thus far have been meticulously explaining in far too much detail, at times, the possibly most dull, corrupt and removed parts of a society: government, justice and taxes. What kind of mindfuckery am I attempting here? That titillating cybernetic Solarpunk novel I could have written instead (sexy and low-hanging as it is) would have left you with nothing but a soothing illusion – an opiate to smoke while the tanks rumble past outside. Now that I am stuck in this seemingly forsaken Cybertime with you, I am sure as fuck not going to waste one remaining second serenading you with solar-flavoured farts from the fictional future. Not when I know experientially, in my very bones, that another world is not only possible, but waiting for us tantalisingly close by – if only we are bold and smart enough to get ready for the next opportunity.

We are pre-programmed to wait out the apocalypse. Only then is true transformation possible. Only then will we get off our arses and expect anything to actually change. That's capitalist realism,[1] the deep-rooted dogma of the Big C Cult. Yet, all the magic, uncountable beautiful manifestations, stories of redemption and Solarpunk wonders I have already told you about so far were born not from some horrendous violence and loss we remember as a revolution – our Solarpunk society was built from the incremental, surgical and deeply transformative changes we slowly made in how we govern, fuel and tax our society. Turns out, we didn't need to burn the whole world down or murder billions of innocents in some Great Leap Forward to build it. Anyone who claims radical change is possible without a full-scale apocalypse is called a utopian or naive optimist; meanwhile, those who build illustrious careers peddling fantastical ways we could all make ourselves more miserable or extinct faster are somehow called gritty realists. In some ways, the techno doomsdayers are indeed gritty realists – not because they are any good at predicting the future, but because the best way to predict the future is to intentionalise it. Through our collective obsession with Black Mirror, worst-case scenarios are exactly the self-fulfilling prophecies we are currently finding ourselves living in. Rather than rebel in horror, we cynically turn and congratulate the doomsday prophets as if they were just objective observers. I, for one, am fucking sick of it. I'm bored of the constant stream of

1. Capitalist realism, according to Mark Fisher, is the deliberately manufactured sense that capitalism is the only viable political and economic system, so much so that it is impossible to even begin to imagine a coherent alternative to it.

apocalypse porn churning out of every media source. Whether they call themselves left-wing or right-wing, I don't give a fuck. It's boring. Can we stop giving the monsters good ideas please? Whether you think Trump is gonna kill us all or Greta Thunberg is (Peter Thiel's Antichrist apparently) – you are still a pessimistic, depressing worstcunt in my opinion, and I don't want to have a pint with you if you keep intellectually wanking over the end of the world.

I had to start this story somewhere and so we began with the trunk of Solarpunk. Some might say the most mundane, uninteresting part of a tree. But if you look closer, you see that all the life energy that feeds the rest of the tree has to flow through a healthy trunk. Without it, there can be no branches, no leaves, no fruits. If governance, taxes and justice make up the central trunk of the Solarpunk tree, then there must be so many branches yet to explore – everything from Solarpunk education to healthcare to urban planning and so many more. Feeding the trunk itself, there is a deep root network underground even wider and more complex than what's above: a root system made up of Solarpunk spirituality, philosophy, ethics, art, music, culture, humour and a gorgeous variety of dreams. The fruits at the top of the tree are, of course, the actual living beings, the stories and experiences, loves and adventures all nurtured by what the tree feeds them.

I'm 110k+ words into this book and there's so much I still need and want to share with you about Solartime. Shit, what the fuck have I started? Maybe I should have just kept my mouth shut and written the cybernetic Tom Sawyer soft porno after all. But it's too late for that now. So before we move on to the third section of this book, and I quite possibly lose my mind

trying to keep a structure to all this, let's take a breather and summarise some of the mad shit we have covered so far: Part Two was basically the how-to guide for dismantling a dying cult without accidentally building a new one or hurting millions in the process.

Once the politicians went home for their naps after our independence, we realised we had no more than changed our flag. What we needed was actual Interdependence. We started by killing the monster that kept us all in cages: scarcity. We replaced the soul-crushing English pound with the LOL currency, a digital token that only goes up in value when the planet and the people are healthy. To manage it, we built the Citizen's Investment Bank (CIB) which wasn't just another high-street bank with a snake-like smile but a transparent value vault owned by every single one of us. Income theft was a thing of the past. Instead, our CIB account automatically handles our Citizen's Dividend (18k LOL per year to start) and settles our contributions to the community – all while being totally viewable by the citizen CEOs so that no one can 'Boris' the budget.

With the economic basics covered, we turned our eyes to our stores of wealth: assets and land. For centuries, a handful of aristocrats and vulture corporations treated Scotland like their private playground. We helped to rebalance this with new land and asset taxes. Hoarding thousands of underused or exploited acres of land or hundreds of empty flats became too expensive to profit from. The choice was simple: pay the tax to the commons, repurpose for a common good or give the land back. This led to a rebirth of the commons, where former estates

turned into treehouse villages like Monty's Canopy Collective and ancient forests began to grow and breathe again.

By the time the dust settled, we were a post-growth economy where small businesses thrived because they didn't have to grow or die, and where the average Scot had more time for community cinema nights and spontaneous dance mobs because they were freed from working 40 hours a week to pay for billionaires' bonuses. In Solartime, we have proved that it's possible to have a boom without exploitation. Turns out, people are much more productive when they're autonomous and happy. Funny that! Who would have thunk it?

What we hadn't planned for, and certainly weren't fully prepared to handle, were the unintended consequences of all this Solarpunk creative chaos. These are the ephemeral shifts that defy direct proof, correlation or clear lines of causation, yet undeniably share a strange, symbiotic relationship with the macro experiments we set in motion. So before diving into Part Three, let's pause for some comic relief. Here is a quick breakdown of some of the weirder shit we never expected to happen – but are damn happy it did.

If you ever find yourself dragged back into the Cybertime reality of scarcity – maybe after an extended time in nature, up a mountain or in a cave (or from Solartime in my case) – the first thing that might hit you isn't the smog or the boring glass architecture everywhere, it's people's faces. Everyone looks like they're trying to pass a jaggy brick through their digestive tract. They're physically tight and hardened-looking. Jaws locked, arseholes sealed shut, souls suspicious of a smile in case it's trying to sell them something. In Solartime Scotland, I guess more of us just learned to... let go. As with most things,

it started in the gut. When we binned the processed cardboard and started fueling our engines with local, organic and vegan food, our bodies stopped fighting us to pay attention (which, despite what your doctor may tell you here, is the purpose of pain). Aye, I'm saying it: we shit better over in Solartime. We're regular as a Swiss train. A nation that isn't perpetually backed up, holding onto old shit, is a nation that doesn't feel the need to start wars.

Our societal obsession with mirrors and beauty standards died along with the worst elements of the marketing industry. No one in Solartime Scotland is trying to look like a face-lifted, photoshopped mannequin anymore, because there's no billionaire profiting from our manufactured self-loathing. The soul-sucking social apps are gone, and no distorted reflections are forced into our subconscious at every corner. We traded gym-bro vanity for outdoor, pragmatic Solarpirate fitness. You want legs like a fucking Clydesdale horse? Try volunteering to haul a cargo bike full of compost up a Scottish hill every morning to your old friend's garden patch. I try not to laugh anymore when I see people here driving SUVs to an air-conditioned gym just so they can pretend to aimlessly run or cycle on the spot, lifting heavy shit, then putting it back down again on the same spot. Yet those same people wouldn't lift a finger to help their neighbour. Why not exercise with a purpose? Most of our Solartime exercise happens on the back of actual bikes or running up real-life hills and stairs, lifting shopping for the elderly, carrying weighted bags to eco-construction sites... you get the point.

I don't usually find myself offended at how others choose to dress. The weirder the more wonderful. The only exception

I have is people who choose to regularly wear business suits. Almost every war, genocide, land theft, ecocide and fraud has been carried out not by a poor Muslim mother in a burka, but by some cocaine-addicted prick in a suit. I fucking HATE suits! When Scottish corporations evolved beyond the end of shareholders, their culture changed too. No more enforced dress code. Now, during lunch break, the streets of Edinburgh's business or Glasgow's financial district look like a riotous mashup of a 1970s folk festival and a high-budget sci-fi rave. If you want to walk to the corner shop in telepathic leggings that turn bright purple when you're feeling a bit horny, nobody gies a toss.

Most bullshit jobs evaporated the second the Citizen's Dividend hit people's accounts. Nobody is scrubbing toilets for a hedge fund manager's yacht anymore – no matter how much they are offering to pay. Instead, we have waste warriors turning sea junk into emergent public art or human snail whisperers negotiating with the gastropods in the permaculture patches so they only eat the weeds (not sure how effective they are, but they look like they enjoy their work at least!). The general vibe of forced work transformed into liberated DIY or, better even, DIT: Do It Together. If you're moving into a new gaff, your mates don't just help you carry a sofa; they might solar-bomb the place, kitting out your roof patch with spare biotech solar shingles, while you take a much-needed nap with the kids. Later, you can invite the new neighbours in to have a pint of home-brewed kombucha, and share Wi-Fi codes and movie/music intranets.

The nightlife changed too. We swapped the numbing, forget-my-life drugs for psychedelics that opened the internal shutters wide. We all know that's why they were illegal for so

long – because secretive governments are afraid of open eyes. What a beautiful and distinctly weird sight it is, watching so many open and awaken simultaneously. Some of my favourite events back in Solartime Glasgow have got to be the Moonlight Pause Clubs where you move in total silence under the stars up a hill somewhere. Oh, and the monthly pillow fights in George Square that can release more pent-up stress than a decade of Cybertime therapy – especially when the local clan reps are all encouraged to take part. Knowing they may get lynched by 500 angry pillows each month if people don't like how they are representing them certainly helps keep power in check – with the mighty feather, rather than the sword.

Even handshakes are disappearing. Most of us are cuddlers now. A six-to-sixty-second heart-to-heart cuddle is a more standard greeting. It floods the brain with oxytocin and reminds you that the person standing in front of you is a fellow traveller. For those of us who prefer not to touch, it's just as respectful and loving to clasp hands in a prayer position which signals you prefer to bow. Some meet halfway and touch third-eye-to-third-eye. Anything, really, instead of the boring old business handshake!

We're pooping better, sleeping more, hugging harder and occasionally have a consensual orgy in a rewilded glen after a psychedelic silence rave. It's messy, it's wacky and it's weird as fuck; but it's ours. Your Solarpunk world might evolve differently with its own set of completely unique quirks. The unifying thread throughout it all, though, is our sense of shared freedom, guardianship, consent and a return to childlike playfulness. Who knew the key to a lot of this would lie in changing the monetary system and taxes!?

Your Turn Again!

That was one hell of a ride through Part Two. If your eyes aren't crossed and your brain isn't leaking out your ears, congratulations. But let's pause the passive reading for a moment and instead move from background audience to forefront architect. I know the internal script too well myself. You're nestled into your chair, comfortable in the story, and you're already thinking, *I'll just skip this active bit and come back to it at the end, honest!*

Don't lie to yourself. We're often frozen solid when asked to actually be creative. We call it a deficiency in 'non-linear thinking' to make it sound fancy but really, we're just petrified of sometimes being 'wrong'. Kids don't have this problem. They loathe sitting still and listening to us drone on for too long; they're bursting to get their hands dirty and their imaginations actively engaged. Something happened to us adults between the imaginative playground and becoming the passive person reading this book. That 'something' was, no doubt, the industrial factory farm line we call school – a system designed to stamp out playfulness, daydreaming and independent thought, replacing them with a blind Pavlov's-Dog-style obedience required to function in a menial shit job. If your brain is rebelling

right now at the thought of doing some exercises and wants to remain in the safety of passive consumption, ask yourself why. If you're feeling uncomfortable, good. Go into that discomfort. If you've got kids nearby, pull them in – for this bit at least. Watch how fast they light up (compared to us adults) when you stop telling them what happened in the story and start asking them what *could* happen. This isn't just my Solarpunk reality we are recounting here – it's your world-building too.

Go on, try a few you like:

1. Follow the Money Trail

Have a look at your banking app and write down your last five purchases. Which ones truly nourished you or your community? Which ones fattened some corporate cult? Which ones did both? Could you have made different choices that nourished without fattening the cult?
Would you make those same purchases knowing a Citizen's Dividend covered your basics and you never had to worry about wage slavery, being sick and helpless, or homeless?

2. Your Clan's Budget

Imagine your clan, street or local area gets a monthly pot of shared cash from taxes to spend collectively (participatory-budgeting style). What's the first thing you'd want to fund? What would you never let onto the budget? How do you think being empowered to spend your own budget would impact your feelings about paying tax?

3. Up vs Doon Reality Check

List three times when the up-class (bosses, landlords, politicians, billionaires) shafted your life. Now list three acts of solidarity from doon (mates, neighbours, co-workers) who helped save your ass. Think about anyone you know who went from doon to up. How did it change them and your relationship? Does the up/doon paradigm explain these interactions better than classic left/right? If so, how?

4. Invent Your Own Fair Tax

If you could scrap one existing tax and create a new one, what would it be? *For example: Arsehole Tax on corporations that pollute rivers, Vacant Mansion Levy, or a Lasagna Dividend for anyone who shares meals.* Make it funny.

5. Citizen's Dividend Daydream

You wake up tomorrow with a guaranteed monthly payment, enough for you and your loved ones to survive for life. How would this change how you spend your time? Write down your honest answer and consider why (aye, even if it's 'game myself to death'). Would you change your job, study, create art or start a co-op? Or eat beans and chips on the couch watching daytime TV till the end of your days? Is your answer different from your neighbours' and friends'? If so, why? If you're with others, try the exercise together – write in private, then share your answers and compare them against your expectations.

6. Spot the Hidden Shareholder

Pick one company from your bank statement or receipts you regularly give money to – a supermarket, energy provider, tech, drinks company, etc. Consider the journey your money goes on when you hand it over. Who really receives it (workers, community, shareholders you'll never meet) and in what percentage? Take one example and research it online. Does the answer match your expectations? Now, sketch the co-op version of that company. How is it different – the products, the service, your interaction with them, the workers and the environment? Would it be cheaper or more expensive, healthier or more dangerous, better quality or worse?

7. Write Your Pirate Code

The Solarpirates rewrote rules, experimented without waiting for permission, and made science and human advancement punk again. Draft three cheeky rules for your own pirate crew. *For example: Rule #1: Always make sure we dance at some point. Rule #2: Never be afraid to speak your truth to power. Rule #3: If you have something nice to say to someone, just say it – even if you don't know them!*

8. Meet Your Solar Twin

Imagine you could meet your Solartime self. What questions would you ask them? How would you both be different from each other? What would still be the same?

9. Reprogram the Cult

What's one lie the Big C Cult sold you? *For example: work = worthiness, buying = happiness, my value = my looks.* In one bold sentence, flip it into its counter-story. *For example: A slow life is a rich life. Giving makes me happy. I am a masterpiece and a work-in-progress all at once.* Repeat for any other lies you find buried inside. Stick them somewhere you'll see them daily, like on the fridge or bathroom mirror. How do these new stories change your perception of reality?

10. The Commons Around You

List three things in your life that currently aren't, but could be, treated as a commons (shared & cared for). Could be a park, a group chat, an open-source app, a tool library or a washing machine. What's one small step you could take this week to strengthen the commons around you?

Right, well done! Time for a cuppa or a wee walk round your local park? Take the dug oot, water the plants, smile and cuddle your partner, kids or flatmates if you have any around. When you are refreshed and ready, let's jump into the final part of this book.

PART THREE: THE NATURAL WORLD

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IT'S THE ENVIRONMENT, STUPID!

It may feel a bit like it's all sunshine and flowers over in Solartime but, despite how I might be selling it so far, it's not. Well, not all the time. For this final part of the book, I want to take you on a journey through our evolving relationship with the natural world and how we attempted to reintegrate ourselves with her. Then yes, we will dive into the gnarly grey areas, the conflicts and contradictions where, even with the best intentions on all sides, decisions have had disastrous, unintended consequences. Our unfolding version of Solarpunk is human. It is beautifully flawed, cracked and challenging. It appears that suffering – or dukkha, as the Buddha calls it – might unfortunately be universal across all timelines. Does that mean we should succumb to nihilism? Should we give up and just grab as many temporary selfish pleasures as we can if even the best attempts inevitably lead to pain and suffering? No. Because the path is more important than any proposed goal and the finest cause in life is the struggle itself. Beyond the hedonistic circuit of consciousness lies something much more profound. The struggle to liberate all humankind, all beings. To live with a smile despite the failures and injustices, to hold out

an open arm to pull others up, to be the voice of the voiceless – this is what it feels like to be fully actualised.

Similarly, Solarpunk isn't an end state. It can't be. Solarpunk is the becoming – the unfolding growth through the suffocating cracks in the concrete all around us and the messy effort against unbelievable odds. It's getting back up laughing even when you slip and fall right on your arse in front of everyone. For sure, we fell on our arses a few times and we will again. But we are still smiling.



In 1992, when James Carville coined the phrase 'It's the economy, stupid!', it was an attempt to remind political campaigners to focus on the one thing voters supposedly cared about – their pockets. Yet, the Cult's obsession with economic growth at any expense has led us to build a system where, from the moment we are born till the day we die, our main human role is to feed the machine that ironically we invented to feed us. We have become so accustomed to acting, thinking and behaving in ways deeply against our own self and community interests that we aren't even aware we are like cows enthusiastically voting for the slaughterhouse. The suffering needed to force our bodies to work more than forty hours a week on a project we often care little about, or worse, actively hate, is immense. It's so consistent that we begin to fail to notice it anymore. This is the source of all our chronic pains; the pain of masking our true selves under layers of culture, makeup and muscles. Fake smiles and plastic pouts hide a deep sense of disconnect and

self-loathing. There's so much closeted self-indulgent suffering that we have become blind to the most glaringly fucking obvious thing we should be laser-focused on if we are to survive at all: Forget the economy. It's the environment, stupid!

Imagine, for a minute, you lived on a spaceship. Not a Musk or Bezos billion-dollar cock extension but an actual, mind-bogglingly intelligent ship – one that breathes, self-heals and regulates all conditions automatically, perfect for our comfort and survival for a billion-year journey, all as we hurtle through the deathly void of space at breakneck speed. You grow up on that ship, so it's all you know. Over time, that ship shapes you and you start to shape it. You don't really understand how most of it works but equally, you don't need to. The ship asks no questions, needs no assistance and doesn't demand anything in return. You take its provisions for granted until one day, you notice air filters being rented out for subscription. Air has always been abundantly fresh and free, no? As you take a deep breath in, your lungs instantly spasm into uncontrollable coughing. You rush to your favourite stream for a drink of water but you are alarmed to spot the signs all around saying 'UNSAFE to drink'. Right next to one such sign is a grotesque goblin creature, selling tiny plastic bottles of water at an exorbitant price. The logo says 'Nestlé Pure Life' in bold white text, accented by three pink, ribbon-like figures holding hands underneath. As you turn around bewildered, trees are felled as far as you can see, turned into pieces of paper you later realise are meant for you to wipe your arse with. A horrific smell is coming from a nearby army of Orcs, murdering and pillaging a forest village your friends have lived in thus far, for the sake of digging up the gold and dead dinosaurs underneath

them. Just as you burst into tears, a glossy magazine lands in your lap, the bloated ship captain's face on its shiny cover. You flip the pages and realise he's bragging about the innovations he and his contractors have brought forward, 'creating wealth' as they openly steal key components of the ship. You hear someone suggest addressing the newly created malfunctions but they are bellowed at, 'IMPOSSIBLE! Too expensive! Inefficient! The robot men are going to build a new ship someday; one that is much better!'

What's wrong with this ship? It's looked after us for millions of years, you think to yourself but don't dare to speak. You too might disappear, just like the last guy who asked a few inconvenient questions. So, you say nothing and stand by, idle, until the overwhelming powerlessness paralyses you.

This Spaceship Earth analogy isn't new – in fact, it's been used as a metaphor since the 60s – yet sweet fuck all has been done to stop the loot and violent pillaging. Quite the opposite; it has only increased. But there is no other space ship out there, no other planet in the known universe tolerant and willing to put up with our petty shit like our own mother planet does. It would literally be a million times easier to move to the bottom of the deepest sea than to establish a sustainable human colony on Mars. It would be a million times easier again to simply stop fucking up the perfect paradise we ALREADY live in; this humanutopia with more than enough for all beings. We are here, in the garden of Eden, allowing a bunch of narcissistic, self-appointed gods to try and throw us out for no good reason. If we don't start acting like a crew and continue to behave like reckless drunken passengers fighting over beach towels, we simply aren't going to survive much more of the journey (and

I think the best bits are yet to come). The ship will survive, of course, but us humans will fade into a tiny blip on the cosmic timeline – nothing more than a thin toxic line in the rock sediment, a planetary memory of a nasty infection.

The reason we were convinced to let all this unfold in the first place is, in part, born from a deliberate categorical mistake of the supposed European Enlightenment. Remember Descartes and his animal-abusing friends? After we had wiped out most of the indigenous peoples of Europe – the witches and the shamans, along with their natural wisdom; people who acted as our bridges to this and the other worlds – we barricaded in our separation and supposed dominance of nature. We came up with the idea of there being an 'environment' in the first place, a thing supposedly distinct and separate from us humans. It's completely idiotic and absurd when you take only five seconds to think about it. If humans were to stand outside of the environment, who and where the fuck would we be, exactly? A bunch of Übermensch pricks floating around an amorphous Nietzschean black hole of wilful ignorance, intellectually jacking off into the abyss like a game of S&M soggy biscuit?

Humans are great at inventing neat little linguistic boxes we then lump unassociated strangers into without their consent. These boxes can be useful – when they help to describe our inner experience of reality to each other, for instance, or help us come up with shared conclusions. Unfortunately, we often forget we invented those boxes to begin with. We throw ourselves into all-out wars and genocides to defend our precious little linguistic boxes. Concepts like 'god' or 'king' or 'MAGA' exist nowhere but in our own minds. In the ensuing violence,

we end up killing actual physical beings that those boxes were supposed to help us understand and represent. All oppressive cultures root their ideologies deep within these category boxes. They are part of the mandatory cult brainwashing, for example the idea that a WOman or FEmale is a subcategory of MAN or MALE. In Western culture, the feminine is always a lesser sub of the dominant masculine. You see it in the Muppets with Miss Piggy or the Smurfs with only one woman in the whole tribe. Rather than making up roughly 51% of our cartoon and game culture icon population, being a woman is treated as a niche subcategory of the so-called norm (the norm being a white man with a penis). It seems that humans are not made in the image of God, but our gods are made in the image of us – or rather our dominant culture, reinforced by our separate little boxes. It's quite ingenious time splicing, really. At some point, some guy invents shit, puts it in a conceptual box, then convinces as many people as possible that that box actually sits way back in time and somehow created us. It's an attempt at justifying the cultural meta that benefits the box invented – not through sound philosophical argument or persuasion, but by trying to con people that that is just the way the original creator/s made it for us. This applies to all our socially constructed boxes including gender, race, class and religion. That's why someone born to a Christian, Jewish or Muslim culture that promotes patriarchy, kings and sultans may have been indoctrinated to believe in a father god to be afraid of, demanding belief and worship above all else. Cult followers often use the Bible (or Torah or Quran) to explain their understanding of a god living (hierarchically) above them – as a man, usually the same skin colour as them, with a big god schlong

dangling out his cloud no doubt, occasionally firing bolts of lightning at heathens or commanding his faithful psychopaths to do it for him, all the while jealously sending his 'beloved' creatures to eternal hell for simply questioning the root of his authority. This perfectly mirrors the behaviour of a narcissistic patriarchal monarch, demanding loyalty and obedience above all else. Might it be that this is because they invented the big prick in the sky – or at the very least, that interpretation of him?!

Morality, for the monarchs, always has exceptions. Rather than aiming to create a maxim universally applying to all, it mostly just applies to the average person, not them. From outside these cults, it seems clear their god is nothing more than a manifestation of their own snake-oil cultural and linguistic boxes; a projection of and justification for their self-appointed rulers. Before I ignite a crusade or jihad against me or this book, I should get straight to the point: this exact method of constructing ideological boxes and retroactively claiming they are foundational facts about the universe – convincing people they are self-evident so they never dare question them – is how the Big C Cult has othered Mother Nature. It has detached us from our surrounding environment and the very planet we stand on – a planet that most pre-capitalist cultures worshipped as a goddess and us as her children. This obscene separation has allowed the Big C Cult to exploit and extract wholesale from the environment, our own extended body, without much resistance from political, religious or cultural leaders. A millennia-old loving relationship was degraded overnight from community into commodity. There was no Age of Enlightenment. It was the Age of Separation: mind from

body, matter from spirit, the subjective from the objective – an endless series of false dichotomies. As holistic Hermeticism was forced out to make way for Scientific Materialism, a mass gaslighting of the personal experience took hold, viewing anything distinct from the 'average' as anomalous, hysterical, unimportant or simply to be wiped out from our studies.

That seeming contradiction may go a long way towards explaining why the older and more inelastic our brains become, the more indoctrinated we are by these ideological boxes – which, in turn, make us more resistant to accepting the existence and rights of people who refuse to fit inside them. Trans and non-binary people's existence is itself an act of resistance to these established boxes. You literally hear the anger in some people, screaming, 'But there can only be two boxes! Male or female, which is it?'

Some subcultures have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to reappropriate their subjugating boxes – such as women reclaiming 'slut' or African Americans reclaiming the N-word. But we are neither supposed to escape nor reclaim our boxes – *they* are supposed to own *us*. They are the invisible fences meant to keep us as domesticated animals in our segregated fields. You can always spot a weak cult argument when it ignores nuance and tries to squeeze you into a box that simply doesn't fit, like the false equivalence of the state of Israel with the religion of Judaism, or anti-genocide activism with anti-semitic ideology. These attempts do great harm to the accused, but also to the integrity of the very boxes being weaponised. Antisemitism is very real and still a danger to many Jews around the world but, if the boy cries 'anti-semitic'

every two seconds, how will people distinguish the real cries from the fake ones when the beast actually attacks?

Just as the War on Drugs – led by the US, of all countries, with its decades-long history of CIA-sponsored trafficking – only increased the amount of drug consumption worldwide, so too has the War on Terror fuelled terror campaigns across the globe.[1] These campaigns weaponise boxes like 'antisemitism' to justify state-sponsored violence. This weaponisation will only ever spread the real and very present danger to Jewish people around the world, because state actors are trying to equate all Jewish people – including the survivors of European genocides and their descendants – with being pro-mass-murder of Palestinians.

If you are confused now, that is the point. All these weaponised boxes are inventions to keep us confused about the real argument and therefore divided. They are the primary tools of oppression, objectification and justification for the exploitation and domination of minorities, animals and the entire fucking planet. It's about time we dismantled a few of them, don't you think? These abstract ideological boxes that simply don't match up with the human experience are abhorrently unnatural and unacceptable to most children, and it's why the Victorians invented modern mandatory schooling for all citizens – not to uplift and enlighten the illiterate masses they were simultaneously exploiting, but as part of the process of domestication. The entire point was to rip us from our inherent 'wild animal' nature so we would not rebel – like a

1. The US has been the only country in the world that, along with Israel, blocked the UN from officially defining what 'terrorism' actually means.

baby elephant, used to roaming free across thousands of miles, captured from the wild and tied by a rope to a central wooden stake so it can only walk in tiny concentric circles. A master violates its biological nature when it's young, so that when it matures, it doesn't even consider trying to break free. Why? It no longer knows its true strength; a strength it could easily use to crush the violent master.

In Solartime Scotland, our major environmental task has been healing this false divide, building corridors between the surviving pockets of fertility – neural streams between humanity and nature that can eventually reconnect and swell into rivers of healing. That meant everything from massive rewilding, proper green tourism and closing the 'poop loop' (as we called it). It still wasn't enough though, because the process could only be complete when all false dualisms and the ideological boxes separating us humans from our very nature were brought down. This was the beginning of our human healing and spiritual evolution – our Solarpunk transition.

From Doom to Bloom

SYRA is a true emblem of the new Solarpirate movement: loud, proud, kind and fiercely empathetic. But the enthusiasm she publicly projected wasn't always a part of her life. As a young teenager, she fell into a deep well of depression and self-harm. From the age of eleven, she felt a profound disconnect, a sense of not wanting to exist on a planet that screamed for her attention with empty promises and hollow gratification. It was a world that told her to consume to fill the void. Yet the more she consumed – and the more she performed society's rituals to

gain validation from her peers – the further she was from any of her needs being met. The more she was around other humans her own age, the more lonely, isolated and abnormal she felt. The intense pressure of these inarticulated feelings built up inside her. Maybe her peers felt the same, but if they did, they weren't talking about it, so she might as well have been the only one. Teachers and parents certainly didn't talk about it. Their only goal seemed to be to add more pressure, expectations and deadlines, all enforced with the threat of punishment and eternal damnation – if not in hell after life, then in hell after school where the disobedient, inevitably, would all be binmen and toilet cleaners forever, or worse, unemployed! If she could not release the pressure with words or cuddles, then cutting her skin was the only release she had left. Watching the blood carry her pain away with each drop, she was, for once, the one in control.

Even in the privacy of her own room, SYRA felt the omnipresent gaze of society piercing through walls and blankets, objectifying and sexualising her body. She had felt this gaze since she could remember. As soon as she could walk, with that pretty pink bow in her hair, she was complimented for her looks, while being scolded for being too messy or dirty when she was playing. Then came the strange stares from men when she would play naked in the sea as a child, and the day her mother suddenly told her she had to cover up, handing her a small pink bikini to wear over her flat chest while the boys she played with had no such instruction. No adult ever took the time to explain any of this to SYRA – how do you learn to feel alive in a body treated as an object? As she grew into her

teens, every time someone complimented her 'beautiful' skin, she would add a mark to it in the secrecy of her room.

As a child, her parents had given her baby dolls that burped and cried even when she ripped their heads off. She set her first baking set on fire and tore a lot of frilly tight dresses (which were shit for climbing trees) into shreds. She got grounded for it every time. SYRA vividly remembered the moment she realised makeup had gone from being fun, fancy dress on halloween to serious, mandatory dress for school. Before, she was scorned for stealing her mum's lipstick and colourful powders from the bathroom cabinet; now, she was criticised if she didn't plaster that same stuff over her face any time she went out. Growing up, superheroes weren't girls like her – only helpless damsels in distress – and the supposed superMEN were nowhere to be seen. Where were the good guys, dealing with the bad ones who were killing, raping and poisoning people and the planet? Should she sit back and play her pathetic gender role, waiting for the incompetent other to step up and save her? This whole roleplay game sucked! *Keep playin' yer stupid wee game, but I'm oot,* she thought to herself. *Nae chance a'm tellin' anyone, though. What if they kick me oot, stop makin' ma dinner? I'll keep quiet, play along for the noo, while a figure sumthin oot.*

SYRA wasn't particularly bullied; she was just ignored and alienated due to her inherent inability to 'behave' as expected for a 'beautiful' young woman. She had a glint of rage in her eyes that told the others to not even try to approach her. SYRA didn't necessarily feel like a boy in a girl's body; more like a wild horse trapped in a tiny box.

Kids get angry when you refuse to join in and play their make-believe, but even the worst wrath of a child is nothing compared to the violent outbursts and bloodthirsty rage of an adult when you refuse to play their games. Adults are orders of magnitude more convinced that their make-believe is the only 'true' game in town. They've forgotten we can change the rules of the game any time we want, and they truly despise those who do. Millions of parents, utterly hypnotised by the fantasy they grew up under, would prefer to reject their own child – a literal part of them – than abandon the imagined progress they have made in this game.

Why are queer people expected to grow up in the 'closet' but hetero kids aren't? The truth is much deeper than that. Queer and trans people, at least, soon realise they grew up in a closet. They have a difficult, yet plausible, chance to come out of it as an adult – in certain societies and under certain circumstances. But, whether you were aware of it or not, we all grew up in a closet, no matter if we are gay, straight or trans. All us kids, not just the officially 'queer' ones, were validated and rewarded for masking our true needs – so much so we forgot what they were. We forgot who we were. Who we could be. In the process, many of us have forgotten we too, have a difficult yet plausible opportunity to recognise and finally come out of the cult closet and into our true identity.

Those least in direct contact with queer and trans people are usually the most offended by them, their suppressed inner child peeking through the gap in the closet, seeing a reflection of what they sacrificed in order to be loved. That pisses off the prison guard patrolling that closet door: *How dare they wear those clothes? Just grotesque. They're clearly DIS-or-*

dered! Flamboyant, obnoxious show-offs making a disgusting scene. Where would we be if we all strutted around like this making a total joke of everything? Without us upstanding, law-abiding members of society, everything would fall apart. Chaos! Anarchy! LOCK THEM UP AND THROW AWAY THE KEY – for their own good, of course. Maybe this person isn't offended at their clothes or their behaviour, but they're angry at the fact of how much time they've invested into a game they thought was mandatory. They might have won some tokens – their bank balance, wedding ring, sports car, semi-detached house – but unlike the uncloseted queer, they have stopped listening to their inner child. The sacrifice they have made to succeed in this game has resulted in chronically unmet needs that they may be unaware of under the mask, suit and tie. Insecure men (and women) with underdeveloped prefrontal cortexes all around the world continue to attack, lock up and even kill anyone who dares to step outside the four walls of the closet cell.

In search of other aliens like her, SYRA found herself floating in the hedonistic, bass-heavy, uninhibited world of queer nightlife. Oppressed minorities are often forced to congregate around their shared oppression. Having a sexual orientation different from the norm means you can hang out in gay bars with others like you, just to not get harassed or attacked. But are they really like you? Being queer is just one aspect of our complex human identity. If you force a bunch of random, diverse humans into a hot, loud and drunken room based only on their sexual preferences, the unintended side effect might be a hyperfixation on that fragile, single strand of shared identity – in this case, sexual orientation. It wasn't that SYRA wasn't as

horny as the next young teen, but in trying to flee the unwanted gaze outside, she unintentionally found herself inside an even more hypersexualised space – with even more eyes on her than before for the same one intention. Just because the stares now came from older women rather than older men, that didn't make them any less unwanted. Yes, she had some hot dances and even hotter nights discovering different bodies and toys but ultimately, she was searching for depth and connection, not just a queer version of the non-stop teen-obsessed fuckathon. As she retreated into the solitude of her home, she sank more and more of her time and life energy into the profoundly addictive world of internet forums that turn up the volume of the most offensive voices like a telenovela with a broken contrast knob. The medium leaves no space for human touch, smell or nuanced expression. Instead, there are memes.

Richard Dawkins used the term to describe how human culture mimics evolution. It's ironic that the modern internet meme has become one of the dominant ways young people explore their culture. It's a feedback loop, a Nietzschean abyss. We create the meme, but the meme also creates us. Stripped of physical connection, it left SYRA floating in a digital void – a void that does not tolerate nuance, empathy or attempts at understanding across the divide, as such attempts don't generate the necessary clicks. It's like having a madman screaming in the corner of your classroom. You try to focus on something else, but you can't look away from the pool of blood and snot on his chin. Now, imagine you go to class the next day and there is not one madman but five, having a full-on fist fight and simultaneous orgy, up close and personal on your table, using your face as their communal spunk rag. That's what modern

internet addiction is like. We've become so accustomed to the chronic and deeply infectious madness, we actually now crave the chaos. We are drama junkies unable to consume our sense data unless all the dials are cranked up to 11. Even I, the pontificating narrator with all my Solartime experiences, a few months here in Cybertime and I find my hand reaching for my phone multiple times a day – not because of a message but for a sneaky shot of chaos-infused dopamine. Addiction isn't formed purely from interaction with a substance or device itself. The poison can only take root in a body and mind already deficient in something, positioning itself as an unsuitable but readily available alternative to some need deeply unsatisfied. That's why the opposite of addiction is not abstinence; it's connection.

SYRA had found a lifeline in four random profiles deep in the belly of one such forum. She wouldn't have admitted it back then, but these online strands of human connection were possibly the only thing keeping her here on this planet. Despite being forced to interact in the same junkie sphere, SYRA had at least found kindred spirits with whom she could enjoy discussing philosophy, debating politics and sharing culture. All the while they shared a cathartic sense of humour that mocked everything, believed in nothing and used cynicism as their collective guard against a world that relentlessly tried to chew them up. *DoomTime* became their sanctuary of shared escapism. It was a place for dark, irreverent content that predicted the next apocalypse their generation was being gifted by their fucked-up, trauma-dumping caregivers. The *DoomTime* squad were RAFI, KEENA, ELI, MOSS and, of course, SYRA.

RAFI was the bug-out bag prepper of the group. His favourite apocalypse was total grid collapse, and he 3-am-doom-scrolled content about solar flares and electrical cyberattacks, memorising the location of almost every electrical transformer in Scotland. His favourite meme was a flaming SpaceX satellite crashing into an OpenAI server farm while the world cheers. A text bubble next to it held the sun's comment: 'You're welcome'. RAFI was quiet and intense, the digital ghost lurking in the chat in the early hours with threads like: 'EMP 2029 – Are You Ready?' He didn't trust institutions, the cloud and especially not smart fridges. Underneath his grim prepper energy and electrical grid know-how though, was a kid desperate to feel safe. His obsession with system failure was about feeling in control. If the world was going to end, at least he'd be ready with a flashlight, a transistor radio and a backup battery for his mesh network walkie-talkie.

KEENA was the rawest and probably most angry of the group. Her apocalypse of choice was ocean death. A former horsey girl turned climate-griefer, she fell down a rabbit hole of ocean acidification and microplastics before she finished high school. She had an extinct sea animals poster above her bed and a dead coral chunk she talked to as the therapist she never had. Her favourite meme featured a cartoon of a dolphin in a hazmat suit holding a sign that read, 'Thanks for all the plastic, Karen'. Below it, the text read: 'The sea giveth, humanity TikToketh'. Her actual TikTok was a blend of sad sea turtles, Greta Thunberg remixes and ASMR ocean wave music therapy that made her cry and rage at the same time. Underneath the anger, KEENA was overwhelmed, deeply idealistic and secretly terrified to swim in the sea.

ELI was the wild one. Her apocalypse was the animal uprising. Her family ran a meat business which turned her vegetarian by eleven, militant vegan by thirteen and fully feral by sixteen. She scrolled slaughterhouse footage like other people watch the news. Her favourite meme was a chicken in a faux leather jacket and sunglasses, holding a Molotov cocktail, captioned: 'You came for our boys and girls. Now we come for yours.' *DoomTime* was the only place she could scream about industrialised meat concentration camps. She wrote angry vegan poetry and kept a jar of her own tears labelled 'for future spells'. She found herself cheering on human disasters – not because she wanted anyone to die, but because she believed it was the inevitable reckoning we probably deserved.

MOSS was the archivist, their biggest fear being cultural erasure. MOSS barely spoke but when they did, it was with surgical precision. MOSS collected the void, hoarding PDFs, downloading entire archives and backing them up on hard drives labelled things like 'Everything they don't want us to know Vol 7'. Favourite meme: a charred USB drive, half-buried in the sand, next to a skeleton with a scorched sign: 'Proto-basque verb structures prove reincarnation is real. Change my mind'. They feared a future where every culture was flattened by an algorithm, where thousands of years of human creativity would vanish because of a toxic brew of globalism and AI boiling everything down to a generic grey goo. MOSS wasn't trying to save the world; they were trying to remember it, so that someone might be able to rebuild it one day with the right stories still intact.

And then there was SYRA, her favourite apocalypse being population collapse and Handmaid's Tale-style techno-feu-

dalism. SYRA was the sharpest blade in the group. Her style of rage was righteous and dark: deeply anti-patriarchal, anti-natalist, anti-colonialist, anti-everything. She called herself a 'walking fuck-you'. Favourite meme: a crying baby in a pram floating down a river of flames with fascist troops shooting at it. Caption: 'Should've pulled out'. SYRA's descent into eco-nihilism began at 13 when she discovered what an externality was. The word hit her like a kick to the fanny. It was everything the capitalist fucks didn't want to account for – the pain, the pollution, the dead children and animals, the lost futures – all simply left out of the cost-benefit analysis. No baby asks to be brought into the world, but they are expected to 'make a living' and fix climate change at the same time? The biggest fuck-you to a system trying to make women powerless is to deny that system a future generation of soldiers, wage slaves and rapists.

These five young adults were the children of the abyss, holding hands in the dark, half-joking but fully braced for the inevitable end to it all.

[*DoomTime* — #DoomTimeCore]
May 3rd, 2018 15:37

KEENA
Someone PLEASE tell me why these bastards have turned parliament into a 24 hour rave for weeks n naebody's been lifted yet??

Where's the actual enforcement? I predict a riot

It's just a sea of manky clothes and matted hair

ELI

its cos if u throw a coup but make it all groovy, the polis don't know who tae deck first. total murmuration o munters man

SYRA

Wit is actually happenin tho?

Can't decide wits worse: Holyrood on fire or influencers dancin on it like its Burning Man for bellends

RAFI

Grid collapse is a statistical certainty at this point

Those disco balls and lasers pull too much current for a pirated local circuit. I bet that's what started the fire.

They're fucked

[MEME SHARED]

Visual: A Tesco with Mad Max vehicles parked outside.

Caption: Welcome to the end times. Nectar points still accepted.

ELI

we've tried petitions and strikes but maybe the only way to topple the toffs is some pure animalistic techno bang bang

MOSS
Scanning the live feed now

Drone loop from a hi-tech raver has a drag priest in on stilts blessing folk with what looks like a glitter cannon?

Future alien archeologists are going to have a breakdown trying to catalogue this madness

SYRA
Pure feels like reality just warped in on itself

We're in a deleted episode of Black Mirror directed by Ken Loach

Is Begbie oor new Fuhrer?

RAFI
I prepped for EMPs, not some ecstasy induced insurrection

... what if this is the cracked mirror?

May 12th, 2018 18:02

ELI
@RAFI widnae take long till these dafties started choppin up lines oan wan a them!

hawd oan

did someone just bolt a fuckin wind turbine tae the roof??

That cannae be legal

MOSS
Legality could become a legacy concept today

Looks like parliament might dissolve

The MSPs have officially joined the party

SYRA
They've unanimously agreed to step down and get MWI

WTF man!?

KEENA
Who even are these hippies? A bunch of solar pirates?

ELI
brilliant! Sounds like a Somali militia sponsored by Lush

KEENA
It's embarrassing

ELI

chantin aboot ‘democracy and degrowth’

Sum cunt even has a banner sayin ‘giros for all’

RAFI

@ELI what’s a giro?

ELI

yer unemployment benefits. Benefit scroungin bastards

haw’d up tho... are those burgers at the BBQ actually vegan you reckon or are those signs lyin?

KEENA

@ELI needs to know now!

ELI

[MEME SHARED]

Visual: A chicken standing on top of a McDonald’s with a flamethrower.

Caption: The resistance will be free-range.

KEENA

There’s actually some kind of charter of ‘non-violence to all beings’ on their socials the now.

You seen it @ELI?

SYRA

Wit?! Look at that alchy old Rangers supporter hugging that mad Celtic dude on Drone Cam 12!!

MOSS

[LIVE FEED SHARED]

A Rangers and Celtic fan weeping together, covered in glitter, hugging near a composting toilet.

May 15th, 2018 12:02

MOSS

Digital flyer just dropped: 'Clan Gathering: Bring Seeds, Stories, Consent and a Tent.'

Are we meant to be a clan now?

Does DoomTime have a tartan?

SYRA

I want to hate these cheesy bawsacks so bad but one of the posters says: 'Dance like you've already dismantled the patriarchy'

There's another one: 'Break free from the prison within'

Am i goin saft in the heid or do these fannybaws actually seem sound?

RAFI
Shocking jolt incoming…

What if this isn't the end times we predicted... what if it's the start?

May 16th, 2018 09:58

SYRA
Can't take my eyes off the screen

Dancin on the ashes of the British Empire is pure raj AF

But when are they gonna start puttin shit dancers like me in the disco Gulags?

MOSS
Clan assemblies called for across Scotland

New commons and rewilding projects are taking over state land

The speed of this is definitely non-linear

ELI
still nae cops, nae arrests?

Nae neds in tanks?

folk are literally plantin fuckin kale in the Tory office windowsills

Guys... i think this might be the REAL DEAL

RAFI

They're installing mare compost toilets on the Mound and a 'baby rave' creche

KEENA

Did you's watch that punk AF midwife help a woman deliver a baby in a birthing pool in the Meadows while some cunt DJ'd ambient whale sounds at them?

RAFI

@KEENA you would have been in your element!

Are we evolving back into fish post-revolution?

MOSS

One of the solar rigs is made of stolen Tesco trolleys and bike chains

Projection mapping on the facade makes it look like the building is being swallowed by moss

I teared up

It's objectively beautiful

KEENA
Why am I actually crying reading all this?

This is so embarrassing

RAFI
Their solar array is inefficient as shit, though

I could build a better rig with half the panels

Fuck... I think I might have to

SYRA
Okay seriously: wanna go do something?

Not a joke or meme this time

For real

Saw a flyer on a lamp post in Maryhill for a 'Guerrilla Gardeners' link-up

They're turnin an abandoned car park in the financial district into raised beds next week

MOSS
Searching...

Found it. The Pirate callout right?

[IMAGE SHARED]

Visual: A hand-drawn flyer with a sun-and-bones logo.

Text: RECLAIM THE CONCRETE. Bring shovels. Bring soil. Bring yourself. Monday 10 am, Atlantic Quay

Stuck it in the 'Shit that might have changed the world' archive

KEENA

Let me get this straight

You're inviting us to go outside…

in public…

and touch SOIL?

ELI

aye

ill bring the sanitiser for ye, princess

RAFI

It's definitely a cult

But it's the first one that isn't trying to sell me crypto or turn my neighbours into protein powder addicts…

MOSS
I'll bring my dad's grass clippers and some fermented nettle tea.

(Don't ask.)

ELI
heard folk are redirecting cars on the M8 near Glasgow city centre? choose a different route

turnin it into a green corridor instead

the dwarf deers from Possil park have already started wanderin intae Cowcaddens!

KEENA
Was sold on dwarf deers!

Holy fucking shit balls

Is DoomTime over?

SYRA
Fuck it.

Lets BLOOM!

MOSS
We're really doing this? Meet up in real life? Does it have to be in Glasgow?

I'll bring a shotgun and some soap just in case

[System Notification: Moderator @MOSS has renamed the thread from DoomTime to BLOOMTIME.]

ELI

lets fuck around and grow some Glesgae lettuce. 420 bro!

MOSS

Downloading PDFs on composting

Uploading this conversation and all previous memes to the DoomTime archive. New BLOOMTIME archive opened

RAFI

See you's at the end of the world

I'll bring the Irn Bru and Tesla Coils

27
A SINGLE BLADE OF HOPE

You could taste the rust in the moist air, hovering stagnant over the dank concrete car park. The pain of the sharp stabbing wind was only outdone by the weighty oppression of the falling sky; a depressed sky in a near state of collapse that sat above Glasgow almost year-round. That day, though, it felt ready to finally give in.

Without their glasses, MOSS struggled to distinguish between the grey of the looming buildings encroaching all around, the patchwork puddles of broken tarmac surrounding ancient diesel rainbows and the heavy horizon – blending the man-made monstrosities below with the sluggish static above. The first one there, alone in the omnipresent grey goo, MOSS retreated to what they knew best and started to photograph the rusted retro cans of Tennent's and stained fag packets with their classic typography, scattered all around the edges of the car park like the debris of a drunken plane crash.

There were only two animals ELI couldn't abide: the midges, because of the full-scale war they waged on her flesh the first time she went camping near Loch Ness, and the chihuahua-sized bin-raiders that made her instinctively boak.

‘Holy shit, check the size of that fat fucking rat arse! Urrrghh. Bluuuugh!’

MOSS jumped a few inches off the ground as they heard her voice for the first time, throwing their poor phone straight into the doomy sky before it crash-landed in the middle of dog shit island – the only grassy patch in the whole car park. Lucky for them, the phone barely missed the surrounding shitmines.

‘Jesus! ELI, is that you? You are even more... fleshy... than I imagined, in the flesh!’

‘Is your phone OK? Sorry to freak you out like that. I just shat it a bit when I saw that hairy butt with a tail attached. Apparently, you are never more than ten metres away from one of them in Glasgow. I wish they stayed ten miles away!’

ELI, calmer now the rat had bolted from its usually human-free squat, gave MOSS a hug like she would a long-lost sibling separated at birth. The hug was damp from the rain cloud they found themselves in and from the copious amounts of nervous sweat that was accumulating and dispersing around both their spinal shafts. They didn’t care. Amazing how close we can feel we know each other through the internet, having never actually touched or laid eyes on the person opposite.

Right on cue, like a fish out of water, someone laden in waterproofs and wellies wandered into the sodden car park. KEENA didn’t seem to notice or care how much she looked like a blatant serial killer. Maybe she kind of enjoyed the space it made for her when she walked down a busy street inhabited by too many other vile and overly entitled bodies.

‘What the fuck have we signed up for? Is this why the revolution will not be televised? Che Guevara would still be alive

eating Monster Munch on his mum's couch if Cuba had to put up with weather like this!'

'OMG, I'm not gonna lie, I low-key imagined you would have actual gills in real life!' ELI curveballed at KEENA, the ocean-obsessed.

'That's funny, I half-expected you to have dreadlocks like a Na'vi from Avatar connecting with every scabby pigeon and wanker squirrel you could find!' KEENA launched back at her.

The two of them always had some competitive banter about who was the most obsessed with 'nature'. In reality, it was just a mask for their loving admiration of one another – ELI getting her ocean-based updates from KEENA and KEENA wishing she was as fiery an animal rights activist as ELI.

'Phhh! Shut it, you hypocritical hippies! You'd all be curled up in a ball under your bed if the power suddenly went out, BLEEEEEH, and you didn't have your precious phones. Quit movin' around up there!' a puffed-out and emboldened voice startled the gathering.

There was SYRA, eight feet high in the sky beaming down. Her legs wrapped around the back of a sweaty RAFI who, despite his obvious exhaustion, couldn't help but challenge the gathering loose-lipped lassies.

Only thirty minutes earlier, he had been minding his own business, listening to a prepper podcast laid on top of some white static noise to help with his social anxiety on the train to Glasgow Central Station. He was wearing comically large headphones as if to say to the world, 'Don't dare disturb my carefully constructed inner universe with your petulant normal human shite.' Having survived the passage, he was relieved to head to the train exit and the steady platform when he felt an

almighty THUD completely crash his party for one. He had heard about Glasgow's reputation for violence but he never anticipated its arrival quite so suddenly. He was surprised by his own instincts, given how awkward he usually felt in his body, that his hands automatically grabbed the legs of the body that now wrapped itself around his struggling back. His panic lifted, but only slightly, when his headphones were ripped from his scalp and a screeching but familiar voice proclaimed his name to the whole fucking platform.

'RAFI RAFI RAFI!'

'SYRA!? How did you know it was me? What if I was some other poor awkward goth geek you just assaulted?'

'Your stench gave it away. You smell like melted wires and bad soldering.'

SYRA had spotted RAFI on the same train as her ages ago, but like a disciplined cheetah, she waited for the perfect moment to cause maximal chaos and pounce on her prey. She demanded he perpetuate the piggyback she had thrown on him until they reached the others. This was the most amount of physical exercise RAFI had ever (half-) consented to and certainly the most amount of body contact with a female since he was still sucking from his mother's tit.

The group's online digital *DoomTime* space had brought them together in a shared sense of impending catastrophe, much like a celibate priest and a virgin nun spontaneously 69ing on a crashing plane. But now they stood facing each other, wet and translucent in a soggy Glasgow car park, questioning their life choices. At the same time they all felt it. It was like a family reunion – a reuniting of old souls locked inside the young bodies of some spotty, awkward Scottish teenagers;

the uniting of the Power Rangers for self-identified pansies and pricks. They had arranged to meet up thirty minutes before the scheduled Solarpirate event began – partially because they were all bricking it being out exposed in the open like this, but mainly so they could savour this moment together, free from influence and distraction from others more used to being present in public.

'Who knew *DoomTime* could be so beautiful!?' SYRA smiled looking round the circle.

'BLOOMTIME muthafuckas!' KEENA howled, finger guns aimed at the sky.

'Should we group-hug or something? How do we do outdoor normal?' MOSS enquired.

'Mmm, sacrifice an innocent virgin to mark the moment I think,' ELI, the vegan, jested.

'Too far ELI. We all know there aren't any innocent virgins in Glasgow!' RAFI exclaimed.

Their childlike laughter cut through the thick suffocating atmosphere like a hot knife through a fresh quarter of cooncil hash. The love they felt for each other broke the awkwardness – the chronic loneliness they had come to accept – and, like a magnet, it started to attract some shadowy shapes through the metallic mist. Other Solarpirates began to emerge like dormant mushrooms after overdue rain; like futuristic punks from a hidden TARDIS. A barefoot teenager in a gold cape wheeled a Tesco trolley filled with seedlings. A pensioner in full camo stood at the entrance and handed out vegan haggis wraps from a hotbox strapped to a mobility scooter that blasted jungle through a hacked defibrillator battery and megaphone. A pair of silent monks from Thailand, dressed in orange robes, unable

to speak a word of English (let alone Scottish!) headed for a corner. They straight away started building their design for a vertical herb garden from scavenged scaffolding and bike chains. For reasons nobody could figure out, one woman led a goose around to survey progress, maybe awaiting the laying of a golden egg as some kind of omen. Someone with a solar AV-rigged rickshaw projected inspirational Scottish wildflowers onto the multi-storey wall adjacent to the car park. Before long, the electropunk was rigging leaves from newly planted flowers to EEG readers that, through some kind of magic, transformed the flowers' electrical signals into MIDI notes, playing invisible pianos and synths. Within hours, the garden was singing to them all with pleasure and praise. It was a fusion of analogue and digital, a merging of the human and plant spirit. When taking off the brakes of dualism, lifting the cover and channelling our collective energy in the same synergetic direction as 'nature' – even in a soggy Glasgow car park – miracles can begin to sprout.

No one seemed to be in charge, yet everyone found an emergent and dynamic role. Help flowed to where it was needed and every idea, every experiment, had space. By Beelzebub[1] there was discussion, debate, conflict even, but nothing these pirates couldn't use as fuel for something beautiful to paint on their blank grey canvas.

KEENA's first job was shovelling half-rotten seaweed into a raised bed. She bitched about the smell for a good half hour.

1. Originally a Philistine god known as 'Lord of the Heavenly Dwelling', the name was later mocked by Israelites as 'Lord of the Flies' before being absorbed into Christian lore as a high-ranking prince of demons and a primary lieutenant to Satan.

Some old habits die hard, yet she didn't stop digging once. Before long, it was as if her fingernails had always smelt like the sea.

RAFI was offered an electrical toolbox. Despite claiming not to know much, an hour later he was guiding a growing gang in building a connected laptop-battery bank and joining it to a solar trellis and windmill made from cut-up traffic cones and signs – complete with a biofeedback system displaying the health of the potatoes through some old red, amber and green fluorescent traffic bulbs they 'borrowed' from a defunct street crossing.

SYRA and ELI helped design stencils for a mural on the adjacent wall. They naturally attracted a posse of younger kids who had never experienced such creative freedom to just paint, make and do whatever the fuck they wanted to a public space. Their materials were some half-empty spray cans, limestone rocks, mud, chalk and really anything they could find that made a splash. Soon, they discovered that some of the materials were indeed conductive. That meant they could be rigged up to the same magical synths and instruments the plants were serenading everyone with. Before long, their mural wall wasn't just a static, passive image but a living, breathing, playable, singing, sentient creature. Did the mural come to life thanks to their input or did the input just help them see it was alive all along?

MOSS, crouched behind an upturned crate, documented every rusty-wrapped act of resistance like a war correspondent deep undercover in a community garden. On their vast array of SSD hard drives, they had obsessively recorded the knowledge, wisdom and culture the late-stage Big C Cult had been slowly

eradicating. It was their effort to preserve it for future humans or other sentient beings to discover – to prove we weren't all just thick, violent, self-obsessed machine minds. If only MOSS could capture this particular moment: all five BLOOMTIMERS offline and in person, hands covered in dirt yet happier than they knew possible. For the first time ever, they questioned the inevitability of our human self-destruction.

Then, the idea came to them: a picture can speak a thousand words. A surge of alien extraversion took over their body as they raced around the car-park-turned-garden, frantically talking to every soul on the lookout for the extremely unlikely possibility someone had a Polaroid camera with them. After a hundred predictable rejections, they finally approached the old punk with the coolbox of vegan haggis wraps who had barely said anything anyone could make sense of all day. No more words were needed. He dove deep into the pile of wondrous junk that filled the black hole under his mobility scooter and, with the sincerity of someone fulfilling an ancient prophecy, unveiled in the palms of his clasped hands a Polaroid OneStep SX-70, synchronistically loaded with one final Polaroid picture.

'I've been saving it for today it seems,' the old man suddenly spoke coherently with a smirk.

'No way! You literally couldn't make this up!' MOSS laughed.

MOSS and the old man started deliberating on how to best use their one and only shot. They hadn't have bothered. The unfolding cosmic lasagna chaos called life sometimes just aligns itself in a way far superior than you could ever manufacture: A small toddler had caught the attention of most in the garden, as they scrawled wild glyphs from a seemingly ancient

alien civilisation on a wall in thick chalk beside KEENA's jellyfish stencil and ELI's 'fist of loving resistance', hand-drawn in chalk, soil and period blood for a depth of colour. The wall had become a real bloom of contradictions – layers of rage, mystery and rebirth. With everyone looking the same way, distracted by the alien disguising as a toddler, MOSS, without a second thought, stood still, inhaled deeply and held their breath. With a certainty you only ever experience in perfect peak flow, MOSS pressed assuredly down on the satisfyingly analogue button. The warm click, *shzzzzzzzz*, *buhhhhhhh*, *shzzzzzzzz* filled the air with curious nostalgia. Not for their past – most present were far too young to remember Polaroids the first time round. No, a deeper nostalgia for all humanity, for all our shared forgotten pasts, for all the memories, feelings and ephemeral moments of true connection we have shared before they evaporated outward to the expanding cosmos.

'Hawww jungle massiiiiiiive! You caught it, you really caught it, didn't you? Let's see, quick!' the old half-deaf man screamed with excitement. He'd carried that camera around with him everywhere with just one shot in it for almost forty years.

Younger folk have become so accustomed to framed, filtered and fake photos fabricated for fucked-up algorithms that the announcement of a clandestine, unprepared, analogue photo being taken without warning – without a chance to fix hair, reapply make-up or plaster on fake smiles – was quite startling. They all rushed to watch the process live as the old 80s machine swished and swirled and finally spat out the end product: a white and grey Polaroid slowly coming into focus like a newborn's vision.

There it was. Their whole group, mid-laugh, covered in paint and soil and tech. RAFI holding a soldering iron like a hot sword. KEENA rolling her eyes but not hiding her smile. SYRA scowling comically mid-rant with glitter on her cheeks and teeth. ELI with a worm on her extended finger, encouraging the hieroglyph toddler to keep painting. MOSS behind the lens, yet reflected faintly in a shard of glass glistening, as even the sun could not hold back its curiosity, bursting through the grey weighted blanket for a peek at the unexpected action. Only then, MOSS noticed something written perfectly on the wall in the background of the shot:

> THERE IS NO THEM, NO OTHER – ONLY WE.

For a brief second, the gaggle of gathering faces around the Polaroid went silent and a few tears gently gathered on cheeks. It was such a warm reminder of the taste of love and possibility in the air, and the first time many present – not just the BLOOMTIME five – had socialised outdoors in years. As the plants were watered and their roots allowed to expand, so too were the human roots that had similarly been restricted by artificial boxes for far too long. This photo captured it all and yet, it was ephemeral, mortal and would only ever be viewed once. MOSS wrote the date on the front and turned the Polaroid over in their hands. One by one, everyone imprinted their dirty thumbprint on the back. Then, MOSS pulled a transparent zip-lock bag from his pouch and dropped the photo in. To their left was a small hole, maybe two feet deep. Before some

tomato plant could fill it, MOSS placed the bag between two almost-airtight, cracked slate roof tiles and buried it at the bottom of the hole.

This photo was evidence. Evidence that everything they, the former *DoomTimers*, had believed – every grim prophecy, every iron wall, every dead-end apocalypse – was a fucking lie. Because if this moment could exist, if a group of broken, black-holed, half-feral doomers could find themselves laughing in the ruins of a dogshit Glasgow car park, then it was just smoke and mirrors – this prison of fear they'd been trapped in: The world is dying. Humanity is trash. Nothing changes for the better. Hope is for idiots. Kindness is weakness. Emotions are chemical imbalances. Freedom is a scam. You are alone, waiting to die.

The five young Scots had carried those beliefs in their cracking anger, twisting every attempt at vulnerability or softness into a cynical joke. But the truth, as they were discovering, was: they'd been tricked. Idealism was never just fantasy. Violent doom and cynicism about positive change wasn't 'gritty realism'. The world is not dying. Like a loving mother full of compassion for her prodigal child she has been quietly calling them home, and for the first time in their lives, all five finally *felt* at home. Life doesn't want to end just because the Big C Cult says so. It wants to erupt, to reclaim, to flood back through every crack we can expose in the concrete with our dirty hands. It doesn't want us humans to end, either. We were never meant to survive this life alone, nor were we meant to live in cages of debt, shame and isolation. We descend from billions of ancestors who survived thanks to laughing until their ribs almost broke, dancing until their knees wanted to surrender,

tenderly stroking, gently kissing and ecstatically making love before they finally returned to stardust. We humans are not problems to be solved. We are songs to be sung, jungles to grow, future myths and legends to be lived. And if this – this moment we are all experiencing – is truly the end of civilisation, it won't be with a violent bang or a whispering whimper. Like the phoenix rising, it'll be with a seed cracking, waiting for these very flames of change to open and unfold one huge, solar-powered middle finger with a smile.

It was very early days after our Interdependence, but what was taking root in that car park in Glasgow was starting to sprout all across Scotland. That day, in the silence of the moment, the last embers of *DoomTime* and all its frustration and anger hissed out. These were no longer just the lost kids of a dying empire. These were the new guardians and gardeners of a world full of new roots searching for connections long lost in the smouldering ashes of the old Cult. If it happened in Solartime Scotland, it could happen anywhere – even where you are reading this now.



I'm writing this chapter a few years after those early honeymoon days. I first met SYRA, and later RAFI, over in Rothesay. Through them, I was introduced to the rest of the gang who all recounted their own version of the story I just told you. After the guerilla-garden awakening, they eventually each returned to their corners of Scotland with their new Solarpirate motivations and connections. Despite being spread like seeds across

the country, they come to each other's aid when called upon and cause maximum chaos wherever they go.

After helping to reinvigorate his own island, RAFI soon became a wee bit famous across Scotland's community gardens and eco-tech co-ops as the 'battery whisperer', creating resilient microgrids powered by salvaged junk and backyard wind turbines.

KEENA threw herself heart-first into the waves, facing her secret fears. She started rewilding Scotland's coastal kelp forests, helping to build underwater parks where dolphins, otters and the occasional nudist kayaker could roam free. She never lost her raging grief for the ocean genocide, but instead of letting it drown her, she has begun to use it as fuel.

ELI turned full witch. Not the cartoon version, the real one – the ancient green rebel. She became a mushroom farmer and mycelium builder, healing degraded lands with spore-based, plastic-eating magic. She was pretty influential in some of the remedial actions we covered after the extent of England's environmental sabotage became apparent.

MOSS never stopped archiving but now, it wasn't for the end of the world. They built the first Memory Orchard in Dumfries, a living library where every fruit tree carried an interactive plaque of its species and a folk song, a story or a lost dialect word. Just like me and LOFI, they also volunteered for the Solarpunk Society and, as you might remember, analysed the SWB data that we retrieved on our North Sea mission.

And SYRA – bold, fiery SYRA, the girl who once thought her only act of rebellion was not birthing anyone new into a broken world – grew into a woman who decided to mother a future for us all. Not with children (not yet, maybe not ever) but

by defending, debating and building the fragile new ecosystems that allowed all other children – animal, plant and human alike – to have a fighting chance. When I first met her, she was the sharpest, loudest and most brilliant young voice in the movement. Now, you know why. Her trauma and struggle helped her navigate the tumultuous times after our Interdependence and come out the other end as a love warrior, a true Solarpirate and, like her friends, someone no longer in any doubt what planet she calls home.

28
Growing the Circle

> 'I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.'
>
> — Isaac Newton

With amazing minds and hearts like SYRA and her pals piling in, we got shit done fast in those early days. Not to blow too much smoke up our collective Solarpunk arses, but we solved a fair amount fairly quickly. There was a ton of low-hanging fruit, mind you, once the big butt of the old bull was off our chest. We didn't miraculously solve climate change overnight, but does it surprise you if I said we solved hunger and homelessness all while tackling a huge major environmental mess at the same time?

Both our timelines have enough food for everyone to eat twice over and then some, yet in Cybertime millions still starve

– aye, even in Scotland. Weans wae maws who are forced to choose between heatin' and eatin', while roughly half of global food produce never touches a mouth, ending up in landfills or as feed for farm animals on death row. Don't forget the entire fucking rainforests getting chopped down for monoculture soya right now – only 7% of which is for humans, by the way. Megalith meat corporations forever chew up and destroy 77% of farmland to deliver only 18% of human calories consumed, since 93% of that soya is fed to poor cows destined to have their throats cut so we can eat a fried cancerous burger. This surely is the definition of fucking madness.

What did we do against this gargantuan wastefulness, at least in our wee corner of the world? I can say so much: we didn't need blockchain, billionaires or a Silicon Valley spyware app. We just needed to find ways to stop incentivising selfish dick behaviour. Make housing, heating and eating a non-negotiable. These are our basic human rights. No one chooses to be born after all; this world and the people before them did. The least we can do is make sure every kid born has stable ground to try to walk on. It's ironic that those who dare call themselves 'pro-life' don't seem to give a fuck about the actual lives of the foetuses turned babies as soon as they are born. It's almost as if they are more concerned with controlling women's bodies than the fate of babies and children...

It's not impossible to imagine a country that extends its empathy to all living beings, especially humans surviving without something as basic as a roof over their heads or food in their bellies. Just like our sisters and brothers in Finland – who ironically are implementing an idea from the US, of all places – we, in Solartime Scotland, simply put Housing First (and then,

of course, food security alongside it). Finland has practically eradicated homelessness overnight and guess how they did it? They made suitable homes for people without homes a.k.a. the homeless. Wow! How ingenious, right? The best part, of course, is that, on the whole, it works. In Cybertime Scotland, you can maybe join the list for a council home, but more often than not, only on the condition that you get off drink and drugs (self-medication to manage homelessness in many cases), have a bank account (impossible without an address) and fill in all mandatory bureaucracy (requires basic reading and writing skills and a computer with internet access). Finland simply removed these very obvious and deliberate Catch-22s and asserted that, for any of that work to begin, each person has to have a safe and grounded home first. Yes, there might be some initial chaos and many will need extra support, but a simple home and a hot meal has to be the entry point to tackling the myriad of complex problems and challenges homeless people face today.

How come Finland achieves this almost effortlessly? Is it because they are mega rich and can afford what must cost billions to accomplish? Actually, when adding up the immense savings on emergency services, prisons and social services, Finland saves tax money overall – compared to allowing homelessness to continue. On average, the UK taxpayer forks out about £30k annually per homeless person when it's all added up, with £12k alone coming from the so-called justice system. Guess how much Finland's and our Solarpunk Home First project costs per person? Between £9-£15k. That's a saving of roughly 50% per person – and good environmental economics karma.

If it's such a no-brainer and every Big C Cult government in the world is aware of these stats, how come they still allow millions to be homeless? It can't be an accident that there are record numbers of empty homes and homeless people at the same time. During COVID, here in Cybertime, the UK government ended homelessness practically overnight. It was only a temporary fix though as long as the homeless were a health threat to rich people. Once they weren't, the government threw them all back out on the streets.

What about hunger? Vast amounts of uneaten food land in the bin every day, while millions of bellies go hungry. This is getting to the literal gut of the problem, the true cancer and sickness of the late-stage Big C Cult – for every cult needs their sacrificial lambs to keep the gods (or demons) on their side. Back before our timelines split, I remember I'd go bin-raiding with DRIFT and other friends. Dumpster diving, others call it. The big supermarket skips were bursting every night: exotic fruit still fresh, soft warm bread, dented soup cans – all edible and in-date. It was a feast for hundreds deemed, for whatever reason, no longer useful. We'd collect and distribute to pals and neighbours, throwing potlucks and donating cooked meals to the homeless. Even as a vegan, I'd sometimes eat bin-rescued meat. The bigger tragedy was to cause all that unnecessary animal suffering just to then waste the poor animal's death. A rescued meal from the bin – even if it's made from meat – means I have to contribute less money to the extraction system of farming, at least for that one meal. I'd argue this is the best diet, causing the least harm to the planet in such a system, while still eating better than a king. Some call it freeganism: target unnecessary waste, upcycle and eat anything you can,

while remaining strictly vegan when using your hard cash or purchasing power at a till. That way you create less and less demand for unsustainable extraction and less profits for the fuckhead Tesco or Walmart owners.

Then, supermarkets all across the UK started pouring blue dye, bleach and fuck knows what chemicals over the perfectly good food in their bins. 'Liability' they claimed, in case someone sued them if they got sick. So, out of concern for safety, they deliberately made the food 100% unsafe to eat... aye, nae bother. It was stinkingly obvious they were concerned about protecting one thing – their scarcity-induced profits. False scarcity, when kids are hungry and homeless, is a continual violation of basic human dignity – bin half your produce to keep prices high while customers grow poorer in a deliberately caused 'cost of living crisis'. Even that Nazi-loving bastard Henry Ford knew that hungry workers don't buy cars.[1]

This isn't a problem of one or two quirky CEOs. These bad apples are industriously churned out by a zombie machine we originally built to feed us. Now, it demands us to feed it. Infinite growth will eat the whole cosmic ship unless we jam a big fucking banana up its exhaust, drain the oil, reprogramme the logic board, smother it in photosynthetic bio-matter – and maybe give it some cuddles for good measure. Change the mission, the metrics and the definition of success, then we will see manufactured problems becoming solutions to other problems. It seems so obvious when you write it down: Food

1. Famous for mass-producing cars his workers could afford, Henry was also a huge anti-semite and Nazi sympathiser, awarded the Grand Cross of the German Eagle by Hitler himself for his contribution to the Nazi state.

waste can be a solution to solve human hunger! Filling empty homes and building new social housing solves homelessness!

So before we tackled any new food production, over in Solartime, we first closed the loop between waste and hunger. Sexy veg stalls gave 'ugly' food pride of place, selling huge quantities of farmer produce that was usually binned because it wasn't pretty enough to be sold in supermarkets. We nicked France's supermarket-waste ban and went one better: partner with community kitchens and projects or get an additional waste tax slapped onto your food business. Working-class food deserts disappeared as the most proactive food retailers saw their profits rise. Ethical businesses grew; planetary leeches like Coca-Cola[2] and Nestlé faded away like sorry roadside Wimpys. There was an explosion in pay-what-you-can cafés and canteens, lifted from Brazil's Zero Hunger Programme. They were hip, vegan, volunteer-led hubs with tunes as good as the grub – not run-down Victorian poor houses or Cybertime food banks. Anyone was welcome any time; no need for paperwork, food stamps or any other displays of shame. Wednesday flat whites and co-working sessions were paired with adult literacy classes and free creches; Friday night sober ravers were high on kombucha and kale kebabs. The great thing about ex-hobos and hipsters is they're basically indiscernible in fashion, so nobody knew or cared who was whom. 'Community'

2. Coke is as toxic in its corporate dealings as it is for your body. Their dirtiest legacy includes accusations of depleting and polluting water supplies (notably in India), collusion with right-wing paramilitaries and juntas in Latin America (linked to violence against union leaders) and a long record of union-busting and labour exploitation. Coca-Cola is rotting the planet faster than your fucking teeth!

stopped being a dirty class slur. Dead council halls came alive again. Just like Red Vienna's social housing has proven over the test of time – when spaces are vibrant, intersectional and diverse, crime vanishes, inner city issues dissipate and collective unity and pride grows.[3] In our inner-city ex-slums and council estates, seed libraries and grow-exchanges started to replace high-street betting shops. Tanning salons became hydro hubs; not exclusively for weed either, but loads of edible veg too. Even in the suburbs, things started to evolve drastically. Every back garden, street patch and courtyard became a new node in a nationally digitalised permaculture network. Neighbours and whole communities started sharing water, seeds and soil – timing resources, mimicking how an ancient forest functions: no one had a glut of one thing and a famine of another. A lot of the data sharing and management happened automatically through community apps built with our MLGs.

Similar things are beginning to sprout even here in Cybertime. In Berlin, for example, the open-source app *Gieß den Kiez* lets citizens water and even 'adopt' trees in their neighbourhood. It shows key data such as species, age, last watering and rainfall, turning much-needed hydration assistance into a civic ecosystem and community task rather than a municipally neglected chore. No one gets paid to water the trees in their area and no Stalinist collectivisation is needed either;

3. Red Vienna (1919–1934) built 60,000+ beautiful, affordable apartments, funded by taxes on the wealthy. Housing was universal and class-mixed so it avoided the stigma of 'schemes'. Because the stock was never sold off, nearly 60% of Viennese still live in municipal or non-profit housing today, making it the most affordable major European capital with no housing crisis (see Helmut Gruber's *Red Vienna*).

no one imposes anything. *Gieß den Kiez* is just the result of an intelligent and emergent initiative that gives local volunteers the tools to shape their community. This is what trust and abundance does: you know your neighbours, share kits, swap surpluses and donate produce to city projects feeding anonymous folks you don't know. I love witnessing the first tiny connecting tissues of our two timelines starting to intertwine like a DNA strand. We need to connect so many more, but the process has already started. This work is the thing keeping hope alive inside of me.

Back in Solartime, we took advantage of non-invasive apps in other ways too. New land-share maps opened up opportunities like underused parks, verges, old rail lines and abandoned buildings for applied commons usage. If it wasn't moving or already growing, you could plant or rebuild it. Maybe you never ate the apple you planted yourself. Fine – a hiker or bird will. And you'll get to eat someone else's cherries today. Maybe your children will eat the apples from trees fertilised by the babies of the birds that eat your apples today. Our exchanges stopped being transactional: no ROI spreadsheets were needed before we lifted a finger. We trust that kindness, when given freely, comes back tenfold anyways. Ironically, the solution to feeling like you have nothing is to GIVE more. Abundance pulled us back to our human roots: GIFT, GUARD and GROW more than you take. So fucking simple, yet in the fog of it all, we somehow forgot. Oh aye – we were in a cult!

The Kogui people of Colombia, an indigenous tribe living in the mountainous and coastal areas of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, lovingly call us white Europeans their 'little brothers and sisters'. Despite the white man almost wiping

them off the face of the Earth and destroying their homes, they still hold this loving and forgiving view toward us. This is a sign they truly are our elders. We Westerners naively charge head-first without looking where we are going; while they were forced to retreat to the mountaintops to keep the sacred fire going. Looking out from their vantage point across the world, with their wisdom and compassion, they see the change that is coming for us. Yet they don't see apocalypse, fire and brimstone hell for their oppressors. Instead, they see their younger siblings having to grow up.

If we truly are the little siblings, maybe coming out of our terrible twos, Solarpunk's early years felt like entering our puberty – full of growth surges, spots and reckless freedom. Cybertime economists would call much of this Solarpunk evolution 'degrowth' but strangely enough, much of our economy actually blossomed – at least for the companies that could keep up. Sustainable trust-based models surged while brittle models profiting from niche exploitation, hoarding and false scarcity withered. Overall, there was still growth in GDP. If this sounds like a contradiction, look at bees: The 'beeconomy' has aligned the happiness, health and success of bees with plants, flowers and therefore the entire planet. It takes some getting our heads around, but human growth is possible as well as alignment with nature. We just need to listen to the beeconomists more than the Cult's priests. Jason Hickel and other radical economists rightfully point out that green growth alone is simply not a solution to climate change under the Big C Cult since the underlying virus is still present. If Europe, under a cult model that demands growth at all costs, decided to build another three terra watts of green energy capacity to

tackle climate change, that new capacity will never ever be used to replace fossil fuels. It will only ever be added on top of it. The new energy capacity will simply be spent creating new shit on top of everything we already have. Solar panels and the rest, therefore, may inadvertently make things worse: instead of living sustainably, we have expanded our production and consumption of unnecessary shit, leaving us even more bloated and vulnerable to climate disaster.

The current Cult is essentially a cancerous zombie goldfish. Even if you add the finest sustainable organic food to its bowl, the fish will devour it alongside the old food and rapidly swell up, consuming everything it can in a single-minded pursuit of infinite growth until the glass shatters and it suffocates on the wet shards. Green growth is not a solution to climate change under the Cult. It is only exacerbating the problem.

In Solartime, we first tackled the underlying cult economic motivations by dismantling the debt trap, eliminating vulture shareholders and building a new model aimed at peak happiness rather than production or profit. Taking steps towards solving hunger and homelessness while vastly reducing waste was a relatively straightforward task. Other problems were trickier – the higher-hanging yet juicier fruit. The irony is that, as our circle of experience and knowledge expands, so does the circumference of darkness surrounding and touching it. Things didn't always get easier the more problems we solved. Instead, as we peered deeper into that darkness, we simply became more aware of the things we didn't know yet. Newton and other scientists were acutely aware of this challenge facing anyone trying to build a complete system in an infinite universe. Every solution we came up with birthed new prob-

lems of their own. Every answer widened the horizon of the unanswered. The law of unintended consequences is a bitch – especially if you're an inexperienced adolescent, over-excited and uncontrollably sprinting in all directions at once. Inevitably, you are going to trip and hurt yourself sometimes.

Our Darkest Days

Everything has both a yin and a yang energy. The key is to try and find a balance between them, but that wasn't always easy, especially in the explosive early days. On one side of our evolving Solartime Scotland, there are the wild ones – the misfits, hackers, dreamers and rage revolutionaries with nothing to lose. I was one of those wild ones for sure, a technophiliac, philomath and neophile. On day five at the Parliament raves, I was helping to set up sound systems, curating sound journeys that connect a simple speaker cone's vibrating air molecules with a new world – a world without the fear of apocalypses, weaponised famines, industrialised suffering, wars, patriarchies, colonies... I began to convince myself that the key to the entrance to that new world might be hidden in the sound frequencies themselves. Maybe you wince reading that – alarm bells going off about woo-woo mixed with utopian optimism, creating a dangerous stampede to slap a new model on top of the old, no matter who gets trampled in the process.

Don't worry, you are not alone. Probably half of Scotland shares the same worry – that once again, some promised end will somehow justify whatever means necessary to get there. Even after our Interdependence, many remain sceptical and worried about the utter speed of change. Many folk with longer

memories than me remember other historical grand promises that slowly curdled into despotism – a prophesied utopia just over the hill, easily within reach, as soon as we eradicate the people stood in the way. One person's utopia can very quickly become another's hell. You support the 'freedom fighters' today, only to find out they are the new stormtroopers oppressing you tomorrow, stealing your children and killing your granny.

These folk with a more cautious approach are the other side of the coin, the yang to our evangelical yin. These are not simply conservatives, standing in the way of progress. They are the gardeners, archivists, ancient healers and stubborn keepers of community fires – not against change per se; they've just lived enough lives to know not all that is old is evil. If we recklessly tear up a supposedly obsolete system, we might accidentally rip out something irreplaceable. Not every beautiful dream is capable of dealing with the inevitable mud and rain. When a storm comes, the true colours of that dream are put through the litmus test – like the 'enlightened' Europeans proclaiming dignity and human rights while violently removing the humanity of millions at the end of a gun barrel; or the so-called socialists of Germany's GDR, building a workers' republic yet calling in foreign Russian tanks to crush the bodies of those very workers. It's when a system is challenged that its mask comes off and its true identity is revealed. This is what we are seeing happening today in Cybertime: not the end of the Big C Cult yet, but the disillusion of its thin mask of civility.

If you see smoke and shout 'FIRE!' in a crowded theatre, the proceeding rush to the exit might crush and kill folk. Good intentions alone aren't enough to end all our suffering; in fact, if we don't balance our hearts' intentions with our heads'

wisdom, we may cause more harm than good. Thing is, all this small-c conservatism – despite how it may seem – isn't anti-Solarpunk at all; it's just the other side of it. Balance these energies or eat shit, is the gauntlet thrown down in front of us. Were we aware of that at the beginning of our spotty pubescent journey? Were we fuck! Sometimes, we rushed to plant seeds and woke up to find we'd grown monsters.

29
THE WILD WITHIN US

Rewilding is an awesome word but when it comes to a national policy and framework – what does it actually mean? The goal was never to turn Scotland into some safari park or curated 'nature experience' for tourists and kids on a school trip. Nor did rewilding mean building a nationwide botanical prison with exotic displays, Latin labels and signs on perfectly mowed grass saying 'Don't Touch'. What we meant by rewilding was true reintegration: folk, foxes and fungi back in the same messy yet interconnected system.

How the hell could we even begin such an ambition after thousands of years of enclosure? We decided to start with the corridors. Simple idea – maybe even too simple: stitch every last remaining scrap of green together. Parks to riverbanks. Brownfields to birch woods. Instead of shoving 'nature' in a box marked 'weekend visit', we encouraged it to creep back through the cracks and breathe again as one joined-up organism – one where all plants and animals could explore and coexist. The point wasn't to keep humans out. It was to gently erase the line that said we weren't part of it.

It worked pretty well, at first. Wild flowers burst out of railway verges like they'd been waiting on the go-signal. Species

of bees and birds long gone started to reappear. Country foxes and deer followed the greenways through town squares – not searching for half-eaten sausage rolls and pizza boxes but because the greenways started to resemble their home too. RAFI even found a hedgehog family snuggling in the solar battery shed he built behind the Govan grow co-op. ELI near broke down greetin' when a colony of bees turned her compost loo chimney into their massive hive. 'It's like they picked me, man,' she sobbed.

KEENA just snorted, 'How did you convince them your shit smells like roses?'

For a while, it was magic. The cities were learning to breathe again and the countryside was no longer the scene of some *Watership Down* genocide. But somehow, we still fucked it. We went too far too fast without considering all elements of a biosphere. With hindsight, we spent too much time focused on the cute ones: rabbits, deer, beavers even – you know, the fairytale storybook crew; the ones your granny stitched onto tea towels. We left the extinct predators out of the plan. Folk were too entranced trying to film red squirrels doing parkour across grassed rooftops when the imbalance crept in. Indigenous tree saplings were constantly stripped bare no matter how many we planted. Wetlands were trampled into mud soup, killing off ground nesting bird species. Whole nature nurseries munched for a buffet breakfast by moles, voles, rabbits and deer, who had no natural predators to give them any sense of caution or restraint. The issue is that an exploding population of herbivores without sufficient predation will sooner or later lead to the decimation of all vegetation, crops and trees. This, in turn, can lead to mass famine and population collapse. If

your goal is the reforestation and restoration of the temperate rainforests, good luck getting anything off the ground with a million munchied herbivores roaming around freely. A vegan animal rights-based approach does not give us an easy solution to this problem. What do we do when the individual needs and rights of those newly populated animals are at odds with the ecosystem we and they depend upon to live?

The old aristocratic hunting estates were largely going extinct in Scotland after our land tax changes, often transformed into various forms of community rewilding projects. So, to manage the new green corridors and the exploding animal populations eating all the plants and trees, we hired many of the old estate groundskeepers: humans with experience of handling rifles. Not hunters of course. Oh no, we dressed them up as 'ecosystem technicians', trained and accountable – or so the naive Solarpunk Society suggested in their early recommendations. These new biosphere employees gathered data on apps and clipboards, used biodegradable ammunition and followed a strict ban on profiting from, or having any conflicts of interest regarding, the necessary kills. But still: we had somehow ended up back at humans with guns calling the shots on who should live and who should die. We convinced ourselves it was better this way – that it would minimise unnecessary suffering, keeping it 'humane' and transparent, showing the world that we Solarpunks could 'manage' ecosystems better than the old aristocrats ever had. Truth is, it was mostly hubris.

Humans roaming around with guns trying to control the natural breath we were simultaneously trying to liberate was always going to lead to tragedy eventually. It still breaks my heart, though, that that tragedy had to happen to Corey Mc-

Niven. Twelve years old, playing in the forests behind his new family home, it was a classic case of wrong place, wrong angle, wrong clothes even. He blended into the gorse and moss just like a stag. It was a particularly problematic area with far too many deer. Kill quotas had been agreed upon by the local clan. One technician's itchy finger – maybe from too much coffee or not enough – on a mission to meet his daily quota and get home early, fired a single reactive shot and that was that. No more Corey. He was born a city kid who had moved out to a new eco-community with his single mum to start over after her troublesome breakup. Corey was obsessed with goats, always showing off the wee billy he trained to follow him and sit on command like a dog. We all watched the live scenes of his pet goat crying and searching for Corey in those woods. It didn't matter how rare an incident it was or how many safety reports came out after. An innocent kid was now dead, all in the name of trying to rebalance a system we had invited. The ensuing public debate ripped the country in two and the Solarpunk Society, which hosted and held space for the debates, really felt the pressure – pushing it to the breaking point as extreme emotions flared up and fighting broke out.

One side – the side I agreed with at the time – said this proves we need the real predators back. Wolves, lynx and bears not in zoos or safaris, but back out there in their natural habitat; the way it was meant to be without human micromanagement. Let the wild handle its own balance without our arrogance and guns in the way.

The other side dug in harder, especially some of the new homesteaders now living in the reintegrated natural spaces where humans and wildlife roamed free. These are the folks

who had finally escaped the cities, built their Earthships, planted their gardens and got their chickens, but were still struggling to figure out how to make it all work sustainably and safely. It was bad enough with foxes threatening their chickens. They sure as fuck didn't want a big bad wolf sniffing round, eating their young children. Telegram groups filled with dead lamb rumours from abroad where predators had been reintroduced and a shaky drone clip that might've been a lynx, possibly a stray dog or simply a bin bag. It didn't matter. Fear travels faster than facts. The arguments filtered up through the local clans and hit the Great Clan Gathering like a storm. It nearly broke our consensus models altogether. In the end, after months of national debates, petitions and midnight sessions, a final consensus was made by the GCG and a third attempt at a public referendum finally passed. It was one of the most controversial ones so far. It was a plan for trial reintroductions in specific areas at first, strictly monitored by scientists with each biosphere responsible for their own adoption strategy and timeline. It was the hardest decision our new society ever faced to date. Me and LOFI had stood up at our local meetings, trying to cool the panic, saying things like: 'Look, predators aren't the problem. Predators are the repair.'

'Real wildlife has teeth, aye, but that's the point. You can't declaw a truly wild forest.'

'Those predators would have no reason to see us as enemies or potential food, especially given that we are reintroducing them into an environment swimming in prey, much easier and tastier than us.'

The scientists on the whole backed us up with evidence from places like Yellowstone National Park. Reintroduced

wolves stuck to eating deer rather than tourists, and lynx patrolled the isolated hills rather than hen houses, much more scared of the humans than the humans were of them. More importantly, there, a small amount of predators had a huge effect on the herbivores. Deer in particular started hiding in established forests rather than out in the open. This allowed vegetation to regrow on barren valleys and hillsides much faster. As the programme rolled out nationwide, early reports said livestock losses were tiny and human casualties were zero. On paper, it was all working as predicted and the storm pretty much came to pass.

Until Pickles disappeared. Our wee rescue cat – three legs and deaf in one ear – had survived starvation, eviction vans, pandemics and probing from for-profit vets. He was the toughest bastard I ever knew. Then, one night, he was gone. In my slumber, I thought I heard a short scream out back, then silence. I searched for hours. I couldn't sleep properly for nights after, imagining every sound would be him hopping back in the window. To this day, I don't exactly know the fate of Pickles. It could've been anything really: a car, a fall, some feral dog. Maybe he found someone with better cat food (although that's unlikely because LOFI used to cook for him). My gut fear told me it was one of the new lynx and, for the first time, I felt what the homesteaders were feeling and maybe the deer, too – that gut-sick panic that something toothier than you might be waiting just beyond the fence. I imagined we had young kids playing in the garden that evening too...

The cognitive dissonance of it all fucked me up. My head said, 'Trust the scientific evidence, it's working,' while my gut

said, 'The rumours, those CCTV videos, they might all be true. Some bastard ate Pickles.'

For a while, I even joined those threads I used to mock, scrolling the dubiously blurry photos like a ghost hunter in an abandoned mansion, endlessly ruminating on the fear. The irony wasn't lost on me. I'd campaigned for years to let the wild back in and maybe it had just taken my favourite cat pal back with it. Logic, in this scenario, doesn't matter. The fear was real and overwhelming, and fear is the one thing that doesn't need evidence.

So here we are, in today's Solartime Scotland. Autonomous ecosystems across the country are trying various methods. Some regions went all in with small packs of wolves roaming Glen Affric – not loads, but enough that the deer pay attention. The rivers themselves already looked different, thanks to new tree root systems redirecting them – roots holding banks steady, soil staying put. Other bio-regions built integration fences, patrols and buffer zones. Some bright sparks even pitched Wolf National Parks with visiting hours – a human-wild hybrid incentivising harmony through education and tourism, so locals could make money through rewilding rather than play victim to it. The wilderness educators, too, got busy across Scotland with Forest Schools teaching kids to track pawprints instead of Pokémon. Some rescued cubs were raised in forests alongside our own kids' outdoor classrooms – young human and wolf rewilded together, raising a new generation who saw each other as kin and peers.

But no solution fits everywhere. And no experiment is final. There are still long-standing, deep, raw wounds for the animals, the forests and us humans – beginning to scab over in

some places, still bleeding in others. We don't get to draw a map of nature and scrub out the parts of the ecosystem we call monsters. If we call the wild home again, we've got to live with its teeth, too.

Forests and Fields of Compromise

If only the complications ended there, we would be living in a paradise. See, once we started rewilding in earnest – not just chucking wildflower seeds at roundabouts, but tearing up and replanting Trump golf courses, bracken-deserts and monocropped wastelands – we ran into a thorny existential question: What land should be repurposed for food and what land was to be for freedom? Could there ever really be land enough for both?

We had this dream that we could create a patchwork of small-scale, family-run organic farms across the country that would provide enough food for everyone. Earthship homes nestled between forest glades or people living up in the trees themselves. Food forests integrated with inner-city schemes. Free community chickens wandering about, named after philosophers and poets. Every community baking its own local bread in huge communal ovens, radish gin distilleries springing up and wild mushrooms propagated and harvested omnipresently. Ideas that were all romantic as fuck.

We knew the well-documented problems of the cult we were escaping with its industrialised farming. It kills everything it touches, removing the nutrients from the soil, eradicating in years what takes centuries to recover, poisoning the food supply and handing over control to US mega-corporations – like

Monsanto with their patented seeds farmers are legally banned from saving. The biggest pain in the tits with our alternatives, though – as gorgeous as small subsistence organic farms are, low-impact and chemical-free – was that they're really fucking low-yield in comparison. Even with permaculture wizardry and Solarpunk tech pumping up long-term production, in the short-term at least, they couldn't create the calories per acre that those awful mechanised mega-farms could. This problem was magnified further since we also intended to rewild half of Scotland at the same time. You want Bhutan's organic purism and the Netherlands' food output, all while living in a rewilded haven for all beings? You'll break the laws of physics – or at least the ones governing our tech as we know it today. It turns out that, when you rapidly shrink industrial-scale farming and give back land to the wolves, boars and blooming grasslands, you end up in a tight spot – unless you're ready to either starve, reduce the population massively or rely on imports that put you right back in the coloniser-consumer trap.

It didn't take long for the ideological backlash to break out in the Solarpunk Society debates. On one side were the purists, saying, 'If the soil's dead, the food's dead. Chemical fertilisers are carcinogenic and masses of food with no nutritional value is useless. Industrial agriculture is a war crime against small farmers and the land, just with a good PR team.' On the other were the pragmatists, countering, 'Try telling people in cities they can't have affordable bread or broccoli till the compost matures in ten years time. We need to be self-sufficient and feed every mouth. This is not the time for Maoist land reforms.' The debates raged for weeks and months and the thing is: they're all right to some degree. It's a classic case of

we can't have our vegan, gluten-free cake, made with locally sourced organic ingredients and eat it. We are as advanced as we are because we have a huge population globally, with billions of human minds working on billions of problems; we have that huge population because it is fed and sustained by the very agricultural technologies we now seek to dismantle – the industrialisation of farming or the green revolution – and that population has become codependent on those oil-fuelled technologies to live. It's a hard case to argue for the restriction or reduction of the human population for the sake of some microorganisms in the soil; yet, without those microorganisms and mineral-rich soils, the crops will all fail with no chance to regenerate in time and we will eventually starve.

In Solartime, for all the best intentions, we haven't managed to eradicate industrial agriculture yet. We are simply too addicted and dependent on it still and many global challenges forced us to prioritise short-term food security over long-term sustainability. However, we have tried our best to square the circle and cut it back hard, with many new requirements for rotations and soil restorations. Land that was on the verge of collapse, or never profitable to begin with, was handed over to new-use cooperatives that focused on rewilding, Earthship villages and things like permaculture homestead communities trying to feed themselves. This high-tech, localised community production has been incredibly successful at growing food on lands that industrial agriculture never could. At the same time, we learned from the Netherlands and their land-efficient poly tunnels, aquaponic stacks and hydroponic highrises. Water is one resource not in short supply in Scotland after all. We were inspired by Chicago and their repurposed car factories and

abandoned warehouses-turned-urban-farms, so our agriculture took root in old breweries, bingo halls and reclaimed goliath Tesco Extras. We turned as many city streets into edible arteries, raised beds along old rail tracks and stations, and set up strawberry runners cascading down disused scaffolding. Tenement back courts opened up and community funds were distributed for tenants to learn how to create their own community gardens. Local worker-owned cafés grow their own cucumbers and courgettes, and during harvest season, you get them in your salad fresh from the patch. Schools, inspired by Japanese projects, started to grow and cook their own school dinners, too, where kids were taught to pick, clean and independently enjoy food themselves. We didn't mandate schools to eat more vegetables and less processed meat. When we handed autonomy over to the kids themselves, not many of them were in favour of having to slit a lamb's throat over picking tomatoes from their garden or going to the market to buy some chickpeas and tofu. We redirected massive subsidies from the meat and dairy industries to support seed banks, nut groves and vertical orchards instead. Inspired by Cuba's 'use it or lose it' policy during the Special Period following the US oil blockade, we created land-access maps and commons protocols. Landlords who let good fertile land go to waste were taxed heavily, encouraging a flourishing of food forests and foraging commons.

Many of these partial solutions are energy-hungry for sure, which opens up a whole new side of the challenge: How do we source sufficient sustainable, decentralised electricity? Luckily, Scotland is a renewable energy giant, especially over in Solartime – not just solar, but mega wind, wave and hydro power,

quite literally on tap. Those Knoydart anarchist Solarpirates I told you about? They live in a cut-off peninsula that's entirely powered by a community-built and community-owned hydro dam. The solar panels are admittedly still a bit shite in Scotland's infamous grey skies, but as the tech progresses, we are now getting enough juice; all of that thanks to exponential improvements in solar cells and battery storage tech, using things like sodium and water rather than lithium.

There was a huge investment in city-sized geothermal energy projects and mega-watts from composting or burning waste. We actually sent a team of Scottish scientists out to the Amazon to study this thing called biochar. Locals there have been doing it for thousands of years, we found out. 'Terra preta', or black earth, is not slash-and-burn, but slash-and-char: low-oxygen fires with bones, shells, scraps and even broken pots mixed in. What the ancients, who terraformed the Amazon basin, made was living soil that stayed fertile not for a few seasons, but for centuries. The Amazon jungle isn't the wild paradise untouched by humans we once thought – it is a bloody great big garden, shaped by people much wiser than us who knew how to create advanced technologies in sync with the land. When we wiped them all out with our germs and warfare, it wasn't just the humans we lost but potentially tens of thousands of years of incredible regenerative technologies that we are only beginning to rediscover now. So, most of the things we have tried for our Solarpunk project aren't our inventions at all. We started small with our own waste – bracken, seaweed and organic throwaways – cooking it all down anaerobically until we unlocked the recipes for our own black gold. New experimental crops planted on top thrive, the soils hold far more

moisture and carbon, and artificial fertiliser use has dropped to near zero.

Still, by the time I left, even with all that innovation, we hadn't reached full food sovereignty yet; not even close. And that is a bitter pill to swallow, especially with the amount of extra citizen effort it took to build such a diverse system. We still import bananas, rice, coffee, citrus – and aye, avocados. Growing them in Scotland would require more energy than a fucking Elon space launch. We had to stop beating ourselves up about that, at least for now. Climate impact isn't purely about distance travelled but about method too. A sun-grown mango from a well-paid Malian farmer is better for the Earth than any pathetic Scottish mango attempting to grow in February under a mile of plastic and LED lights.

But, if I'm honest with you, none of that resolved the central dilemma: how much land should feed us, and how much land should be free for the wild? We pegged our bloody currency to this question, remember – the health of humans and nature combined? It's early days and many people still eat like it's 1999, demanding popcorn and cheeseburgers (though mostly vegan nowadays). Food habits run deep and take generations to change if you're not using coercion and violence. So, we're still in the process of balancing and experimenting. While some communities did indeed go full regenerative and hyperlocal – propping up lower-yield organic food with imported food bought from ethical and sustainable trading partners abroad (direct from source, not Western middlemen or evil corps) – we couldn't simply abandon all the old and assume we could live damage-free off the Earth without, at the same time, letting go of some existential fundamentals and modern comforts.

Offsetting productive but unsustainable farming policies while experimental methods slowly expand into the gap seemed the most prudent approach when it was citizens' lives and deaths we were talking about.

This might be the biggest shocker of all, but there are many experiments happening right now using genetically modified crops in some bio-regions of Solar Scotland. Genetically Modified (GM) crops give many eco-warriors the instant ick but we have to, once again, look at technology with a pragmatic eye, rather than an idealistic one – especially now we are free from the toxic grip of the Big C Cult. Is the problem inherently with the GM crops themselves or the colonialist profit motive driving the companies researching it? There is not a single vegetable you eat on your plate that has not been drastically modified from its wild ancestor. Selective breeding and modification have been the very history of farming for thousands of years. If you are against all genetic modification, you would be hard-pressed to find anything left to eat in the modern world. Modifying food crops to meet human needs and adapt to rapidly changing climates simply can't be off the cards completely because of some faux taboo. The same tech used in Cybertime to subjugate African farmers to the whims of Monsanto can also be used to adapt plants to harsher or rapidly changing conditions. It can help us grow vitamin-rich fruit and produce nutrient-dense crops. In Solartime, there are even experiments investigating whether slime molds can be modified to provide the perfect balance of nutrients for a human diet, since they could be easily replicated all around the planet and used in times of emergency to feed millions. Tech like this is not a holy grail on its own, but it's worth investigating

since it might buy us some wiggle room to balance our desire to rewild while feeding ourselves at the same time.

All of this redevelopment, innovation and upheaval costs a fuck ton of money and societal-wide efforts, but the rewards are worth every penny if it means we can reach planetary homeostasis even 1% quicker – and before any one of those Cybertime-created apocalypses get to us first.

I still haven't answered the question, though: Do we hand over vast swathes of land to grow organic food on a small scale, or do we continue to use much less land that produces high yields of pesticide-ridden food for the many today, but potentially starves the children of tomorrow? Which strategy is the bigger risk and killer for us and biodiversity overall? Over in Solartime, so many of the assumptions we took for granted just didn't add up: If the organic community method has a biodiversity rating of say, 40/100, while modern chemical farming has a rating of only 10/100, then the organic method wipes the floor with the other. But if you need ten times more land to create the same amount of organic food compared to chemically-assisted industrial monocrops, then overall, organic farming has a much worse effect on biodiversity. It will leave you with fuck all land to hand back for rewilding. The same goes for our hybrid spaces projects. Managed garden town landscapes are infinitely better than concrete Cyberpunk towerblock prison cities. What if your garden town takes ten times more space to house everyone, though? Yes it's much prettier, but housing density is tiny in proportion. You would have to chop down forests, or prevent them from being replanted, to make way for more garden towns.

I have no smart answer for this dilemma. As I speak, we are still a hot mess of works-in-progress and I assume no silver bullets have been discovered since I've been gone from Solartime. There is one thing, though, that could potentially alleviate the tension: We are making leaps and bounds, assisting farmers to transition – yet still, vast amounts of fertile farmland are exploited for animal agriculture. That's because, despite everything, many millions of humans continue wanting to consume animal products. Many subsidiary industries rely on animal inputs, too. So, wouldn't the solution be to force everyone to go vegan tomorrow? The amount of land needed to farm would be cut in half overnight and most of the tension we face would disappear. Right?

30
The Vegan Debacle

Have you ever been locked in a debate with a vegan? It is the worst kind of debate to get trapped in as a meat eater, especially when you only raised the question out of curiosity. Soon you realise the conversation has taken a sharp turn for the worst, openly assessing whether your average daily lunch choices reveal your genocidal tendencies and eco-fascist subconscious.

You were trying to be polite. Now, you have to justify to some smarmy wee prick why you're not the reincarnation of Hitler's left testicle, just because you like a bacon butty on a Sunday morning! Well, and a Thursday sometimes. Fuck it, Monday to Wednesday is open territory, too. They are just so tasty, right!? Bloody vegans expect you to eat rabbit droppings and piss-soaked hay burgers while you uncomfortably sweat into a vegan faux leather jock strap. Piiiiiiiiiss off! You have your choices but leave me with mine, thanks.

You feel good laughing about it with your other meat-eating friends. You see the irritating vegan vividly in your mind's eye – a squalid hairy creature crouched on their hind legs with fake playboy bunny ears, eating face first from a bowl of mouldy wet lettuce and indistinguishable mush. Might be oatmeal, might

be sick. The laughter gives way to dizzy spells and holding down the boak rising. You sit down for a rest after all the excitement. Right at that moment of calm, for a brief millisecond, some dark recess of your mind flashes an image projected onto your inner eyelid. It is the fried, frozen expression on the face of that piglet, spit-roasted and served at the exotic BBQ place you went to on holiday with the missus that time. You ordered some of the meat to impress her, but it took you ages to actually put your knife in. When you finally did, after your first incision and taste, you said it was the most tender meat you'd ever eaten. Impulsively, you blurted out, 'Almost as pink and tender as your [...],' as if you'd forgotten you weren't with the rugby lads. She left you soon after you got back from that holiday.

Suddenly, you are spiked with emotion thinking about that piglet's face projected onto your inner eye. Strong, contradictory – maybe even triggering – feelings. You are aware that being 'triggered' is, in itself, a strong trigger for you. This triggers you even more. Fuck, stop thinking about the dead piglet already so we can move on!

CHICKEN LEGS. You start to imagine how big the mountain of deep-fried legs, breasts and wings would be if you piled them all up, every single one you had ever eaten in your life. Large enough for the grease to form waterfalls? Greasyfalls? Would it be big enough to have its own gravy-ty field? Does it need one of those blinky red lights on top for planes at night?

Your mind starts to contort and twist. More. Even MORE!!! Each pair of chicken legs and wings magically reattaches to its breast, which somehow reanimates in some kind of reverse slaughter, all the blood and guts recoagulating up the arsehole you shoved all that stuffing into at Christmas. You see them

getting younger and younger, back to tiny chicks – cute little yellow fluff balls. Then eggs, then back into their mothers, and so on ad infinitum. Suddenly, you are choking, surrounded by an endless sea of ripped-out feathers and fluff. You can't see the end to the amount of birds and shit that fill up the horizon. Entire fields around you are instantly submerged in falling iron-clad roofs, massive barns covered in wire and fence with a huge 'Free Range' banner slapped on the outside. Caged in, unable to breathe and claustrophobic as fuck, you try to escape past the millions of other birds through the only available doorway. But it's impossible. The endless heavy flow of what must be billions of animals pouring into the chamber from the opposite direction stops you dead in your tracks. This building is designed for a one-way trip only.

Just then you spot your childhood sausage dog stuck in the stampede of forced entry animals. For some reason, he is the same size as the baby piglet and he also smells like fried bacon. *If only I could do something. If only I could save him, wee Charlie, from this mechanical killing machine! This ginormous GAStro chamber! IF ONLY I COULD SAVE THEM ALL!* your heart finally screams out.

You jolt awake from the fever dream, forehead and neck dripping in salty cold sweat. Shit, that edible was strong! What did they sell me? You vaguely remember the woman in the Glasgow high shop rambling on about a bunch of warnings, yah da yah da... you switched off. This is the last time you visit Scotland on some hedonistic drug holiday! Looking down at the bedside floor, next to your sweaty socks and mildly soiled boxers, you notice the wrapper from the offending brownie.

You pick it up and read the warning on the back. In red letters, it says:

> Solarpunk Brownie: Your body, your choice. Their body, not your choice. No sentience or consciousness was deliberately or unnecessarily harmed in the making of this brownie. Please enjoy your trip responsibly.

Should We Turn The World Vegan?

I'm taking a cathartic piss with that last one a wee bit. I admittedly wrote it while stoned, sitting on a beach in Thailand, eating a vegan brownie and watching a bunch of tourists devour plates of flesh at a nearby BBQ restaurant while playing with the street dogs under their table. Don't worry. I can't be arsed to write a book convincing you to go vegan if you aren't already. There are tons of books, documentaries and social media content out there covering that exact topic.[1] If you got this far in the book without throwing it in the fire or feeding it to your dog, I believe you must be a trusting, instinctive and intuitive person who tries to know themselves better while making choices with at least some consideration and compas-

1. The documentary that turned me vegan 19 years ago is called *Earthlings*. *Cowspiracy* is another great one. Or try reading *This is Vegan Propaganda (And Other Lies the Meat Industry Tells You)* by Ed Winters. If you choose to eat meat, I challenge you to watch or read any of them so that, at the very least, you are making an informed decision.

sion. Whatever your eating, wearing and consuming habits may be, you have come to this point in the book with me and I'm not gonna judge you, nor bore you, with a 'go vegan' lecture – even though, admittedly, I am a self-identifying ginger-bearded hippy vegan daftie prick. There is a strong movement or percentage of our emerging Solarpunk society, though, that would argue any Solarpunk movement, by definition, has to eventually go vegan, or at least try. You can see their point. Never mind the heart-melting cruelty of killing literally three to six billion animals EVERY SINGLE DAY unnecessarily. It's just a fact we'd also need a lot less land for food production globally if we stopped eating meat tomorrow, given that most crops are actually grown to feed livestock.[2]

And while these facts are uncontestable on a global scale, within smaller countries like Scotland, global truths can sometimes break down. The Earth isn't covered smooth and equal like chocolate ganache covers a tart. It's more of a marble cake with big rocky chocolate chunks, wet clumps of icing and bits of uncooked batter in the middle. Either stripped of its fertility by centuries of over-logging and grazing, or else too rocky and mountainous, Scotland resembles that messy marble cake. That means, to go fully vegan at the beginning of our Solarpunk experiments would have meant a massive reduction in food production overall, and a massive upheaval of centuries of industries and infrastructure set up around animal farming

2. Never will I get over just how brutal that word is when you think about it: 'livestock' – as if we're recognising their sentience and life, but still label them as inanimate pieces of stock devoid of volition of their own. Slavery and speciesism are written so liberally into the language we use that it will for sure horrify future generations.

of some kind or another. Once again, our romantic idealism came up against a reality that was a bit of an unforgiving cunt – at least in the short term. It became abundantly obvious we couldn't go fully vegan and food-sovereign at the same time; nor could we take everyone in Scotland with us. If we pushed too hard on animal ethics – on top of everything else that was changing rapidly – it could have been a push too far, given how personally attacked many people feel when you point this stuff out.



A few years had passed and me and LOFI hadn't really caught up with many of the BLOOMTIME Solarpirates. It caught me by surprise when we went to (yet another) community hall Solarpunk Society debate with the curious title 'Should We Turn the World Vegan?', only to see an ELI up on stage with a red-and-black hairdo and freshly shaved undercut, wearing a ripped tank top, lumberjack-shirt vibe. She was lookin' epic!

Remember, at our clan gatherings, everything always happens in circles. It is baked into the very architecture. There are no opponents because there can be no sides to a circle. Good news is, when we break down the old dualistic binary structures, it allows us to hold space for a much more nuanced and complex debate. By Hades,[3] did we need more space for nuance – particularly at that debate. The sun was hanging low, tickling the stained glass of a converted roundhall that

3. Hades is the Greek god of the dead and the ruler of the Underworld.

used to be an old church, now infused with fresh community spirit. The debate was really well attended for such a rural place. Dozens sat cross-legged on floor mats and beanbags or sprawled out on rugs. There was plenty of supported seating, too, for those who needed it. A steady flow of steam from kettle brews and soup urns fogged the stained-glass windows, giving the whole room a fine mysterious glow. Lit by the seeming god rays filtered through the coloured glass and incense smoke, ELI's sharp wit cut through the chitter-chatter of the hundred micro discussions looping around the room.

'If we truly want to honour this land, we have to stop spilling so much blood onto it. We can't keep pretending the old ways work in a new world. Factory farms can never be sustainable. They are hellish camps and gas chambers for their victims. This ethical meat dream many here defend – it's a fantasy built on domination and speciesism, built on the assumption that someone else's life is less important than our taste buds and appetites.'

We were off to a strong start! It was honestly one of the most captivating debates me and LOFI have ever witnessed. We kept our mouths shut and chewed on our bursting opinions. Sometimes, it's more rewarding to just listen. Clickbait debates in Cybertime tend to be deliberately obnoxious, interrupting and loud. Like a pair of daft neds, those involved try to run as far away from each other as possible while simultaneously shouting, 'Come on then!' It took me some time to rediscover my interest in public debates over in Solartime. What changed things for me wasn't that Solarpunk debates were more fiery but that what usually started off feeling like a clash ended up like a fucking love poem.

ELI stood at one side of the circle, grounded and composed as ever. Her hair was electrocuted high and frazzled, carrying the faint, earthy scent of mushrooms and moss. Having captured the crowd's attention, she continued with a whisper,

'We act like we own this land – but we don't. It made us. It holds us and feeds us. We're just guests in an ancient network older than any language. The largest and probably oldest living being on Earth is mycelia. It connects everything, so when we kill an animal, we don't just end one life – we send a painful shockwave through the whole living system.'

Eyes taken off her notes, she continued more informally, 'Look, I'm no here tae guilt-trip anyone. I just want tae say we've got a choice. Everythin' we buy at the counter, every time we eat, we get tae say: I dinnae need tae kill tae live anymore.'

Many in the circle nodded. Some wept. Some huffed. Then a voice cut through the incense. He was broad-shouldered, wearing a homemade hide jacket and a feathery bonnet hat that looked like a kid's art project. He introduced himself as Ruairidh MacLeòid (pronounced 'Rooray'), born in Skye – a crofter's son now living in a hand-built bothy overlooking Glen Elg where some wolves had recently been reintroduced. He stood up slowly, chewing on a stalk like it was chewing gum,

'I respect whit ye are saying, ELI. Ah do. But I need to say it as I see it. I don't see ma place in the forest as a threat. I see myself as part ae it. Same as the wolves. Same as the boar. When I cull a deer, my intention isnae conquest. It's a trade-aff, a respectful gift. I tend the land. I leave gifts. I plant trees. I clear bracken and, a few times a month, I take a life that would huv died starving in the snow, or birthed too many fur the hills

tae hold. If I didnae dae that, we'd need fences. And if we start fencing aff the wild again, we're no better than the bastards that boxed it all up in the first place.'

He paused for a breath.

'I've no argument with yer ethics, ELI. You speak fae the heart – and I feel that. But your solution disnae scale. No here in Scotland anyway. We've hills and bogs and peat-soaked soil. Most of this land's no made for crops, but you want everyone tae go vegan? Then we'll import half oor food, cash crops fae countries still bearing the scars of the British Empire. How can that look like justice? We would just be offshoring oor collective guilt.'

ELI folded her arms, leaning slightly into the circle, speaking in her more official accent,

'You think factory farming's scalable? It's collapsing under its own weight and taking us, the soil and everything in between with it. Avian flu, antibiotic resistance, increasing pandemics; all on the rise thanks to it. We're one dodgy chicken wing away from the next global health meltdown and I don't think I can survive another COVID. Industrial meat doesn't just kill the animals. It is killing us too! You want to talk about offshoring guilt? Talk to the soybean farmers from the deforested Amazon jungle feeding your cows in winter. Talk to the sows who never see sunlight or hug their babies, or the poor teenage cows repeatedly impregnated, milked, then murdered when their body no longer produces enough to make a profit for their supposed owner.'

Ruairidh's jaw clenched but he didn't interrupt. ELI kept going, only quieter, now she had space to be. She still wasn't used to not being interrupted by a man. She was conditioned

to say things very loudly and aggressively fast if she was to get a word in edgeways. The quiet induced by the space and respect given from all present began to bring out a new peaceful calm in her, even when heated.

'This isnae about you shooting one deer, Ruairidh. It's about building a society that doesnae need tae kill at all. If we can thrive without bloodshed, why wouldn't we choose that?'

'That's no whit I'm arguin,' he answered softly, scratching at the bark of an old birch staff worn anxiously smooth over time. 'You think I like killing? You think I take pleasure in spillin' blood? I wept the first time I gutted a salmon wae my grandfather. I wept harder when I had tae help bury his hands, the ones that taught me how. This isnae aboot ma personal taste. I'm talkin' aboot oor sovereignty as a tiny corner of a tiny island. We need to prioritise resilience aer ideology. That is how we connect with the land that births us.'

ELI raised an eyebrow. 'You think dependence on death makes you strong and resilient?'

'I think forgetting how tae survive makes us vulnerable,' he said. 'What happens if the crops fail, or worse, are poisoned? If the sea levels drown half the Global South and the trade routes fall apart? If your soya and coconut milk vanishes overnight and there's nae one left who remembers how tae milk, trap, fish, forage, gut, preserve? Naeone who knows how to coax food frae these lands that refuse tae grow fuck all but heather and wind half the time?'

'You're describing a doomsday that hasn't happened,' ELI shot back.

'I'm describing the one that already has,' Ruairidh said. 'You know what Caithness looked like before we paved it with

sheep? A temperate rainforest. Oak, birch, wild boar, golden eagles – they carved that to nothing for mutton and subsidies.'

'Exactly!' Eli retorted. 'Animal agriculture!'

'But now you want to continue the carving only for tofu and quinoa? I'm not saying we keep the old extortion of the land. I'm saying we should be able to remember what it means tae tend, not just extract from the land. We can huv wild pigs that aerate the soil, deer to clear the thickets, birds nesting in old coppice... and aye, sometimes we can take fae it too. Wae gratitude. Wae grief. With reverence. Never more than the system can afford, mind. Never without giving more back.'

ELI was rattled, visibly shaken.

'And how the HELL is that scalable either?!' She noticed her anger wasn't helping her argument much. She took a breath and intentionally tried to help her voice drop a register.

'OK, I get it. But you're still talking about ecosystems. Whole species populations. The forest as one living system. But what about the individual? That wild pig has a personality. That cow has a child. That fish wants to live. We keep telling ourselves we're being ethical while we pin them down and slit the knife in their throat.'

'And you're telling me,' Ruairidh said, leaning forward now, 'that your dream doesn't include murder too? That no forest's ever been razed for your crop fields? That your mobile phone doesn't hum with cobalt scraped frae a Congolese graveyard? We canna build a world free from harm or murder if we want billions ae us tae survive.'

'No,' she admitted. 'But we can build one where harm is never dismissed, never normalised. Never treated as just the collateral cost of doing business.'

A silence settled. The rest of the attendees, enthralled, dared not interject for fear of breaking the flow. Ruairidh looked at ELI – properly now, not just as an opponent in the circle, but as a reflection. He slowly edged closer to her round the circle.

'I'm scared we'll forget who we are or how we got here,' he said, quietly. 'That, if we erase every hard skill that kept us alive in the Highlands through centuries of winter and war, we'll be helpless if it ever comes round again. I don't want tae be the last one who knows how to snare a rabbit.'

ELI didn't answer straight away. She was shivering slightly, maybe from the post-adrenaline comedown or simply from the cold in the room. Someone near her noticed and, without a second thought, placed a thick woollen jumper over her shoulders. She smiled in gratitude, but felt the irony of accepting a jumper made from an animal for her warmth.

'Maybe you willnae be the last one,' she said. 'Maybe you can teach me a thing or two. Withoot havin' tae actually kill anythin'. Just a skill share, just in case. Learn from each other's ways rather than fight from our different castles. Maybe, if we spend more time together...'

There was a pause while ELI and the whole room waited for Ruairidh's glance in response.

'I'd love to keep learning about you too,' Ruairidh said in his head, and accidentally out loud as well.

You could have cut the sexual tension with a broken plastic knife, abandoned in a roadside food van's overflowing bin. We could all sense it – the moment the room clicked. These were the moments of release after the heat of our Solarpunk debates; a recognition we are fighting for similar causes, only from different angles, even when we disagreed as profoundly as

these cases of life and death. The testosterone and adrenaline started to wear off us all and gave way to rushes of dopamine and oxytocin. After the debate, outside in the community garden space, as we all tucked into a vegan buffet prepped by ELI and friends, Ruairidh took a long sip from his flask of birch sap and whisky. He leaned back on a log and gave ELI a long sideways look, holding the flask outreached in her general direction, inviting her to sit and roll on the log with him.

'You know,' he said, 'it's not just the land that's stubbornly hard to remediate and heal; it's us mad humans too.'

ELI smirked. 'You're telling me? I've spent the last three years trying to get oat milk into the school breakfast programme. Had a mother call it woke poison and accuse me of trying to give her son tits. Ironic given how much estrogen is in cow's milk!'

The fragile seal keeping Ruairidh's mouth closed suddenly burst, spraying some passers-by like an alcoholic's blessing.

'Aye, ma neighbour still 'hinks lentils cause male pattern baldness. I told him his combover has nuthin' tae dae wae the Friday night daal curry we shared.'

'But seriously,' ELI said in a softer tone, leaning in, 'we keep thinking if we just explain it well enough – the climate stats, the animal suffering, the biodiversity loss – people will wake up. But they don't. That strategy doesn't work, no matter how many scientists and experts line up for a shot at it. Human behaviour, annoyingly, isn't wired for objective truth. It's wired by fear. Maybe we just want tae feel safe, comfortable and connected first?'

Ruairidh agreed. 'We change when the new thing feels familiar enough to give it a go without discomfort. Most people

don't want tae be a pioneer. We want to fit in and live the easy life at the same time. Or, I suppose, we change when the old ways just get too bloody expensive or socially embarrassing.'

ELI nodded slowly. 'I suppose that's the logic behind the new taxes. Gradual bumps towards more sustainable and ethical behaviour for us all.'

Ruairidh grimaced. 'Taxes go doon like a stinkin' boilt turnip at a steakhouse though, don't they?'

'Aye maybe for some at first, but it can eventually work, I think. The land and asset reforms in particular didn't end the cruelty overnight, but maybe it's good these huge shifts are gradual. I mind talking to people on my street aboot it. Some of them genuinely claimed they didn't know they were eating the flesh of pigs from these torture farms. They didn't even know it's a class-one carcinogen till the new mandatory health and well-being labelling told them.'

'Still,' Ruairidh said, rubbing his beard, 'that might have been too far and fast with the zoos. Shuttin' em down on ethical grounds, replacing them with wildlife sanctuaries and AR integration and aw that. Remember those angry dads started rioting outside Edinburgh Zoo the next day? Kids crying about no seein' the tigers? Loads of old folk from up where I'm fae complained it was robbing children of their wonder.'

'I know,' ELI sighed. 'I thought being kinder to all beings would feel better. But when you take something away, even something cruel, if it's woven into a childhood memory, folk don't let go easily of bad habits. I think they are reopening them as animal sanctuaries now anyway.'

Ruairidh looked at her sideways. 'Do you think it's all going too fast sometimes?'

ELI shook her head. 'I think we don't spend enough time listening first. People can handle hard truths. They don't just need carrots and sticks like stubborn mules. They do need to feel held and involved in the process. Not constantly corrected or made tae feel embarrassed.'

Ruairidh paused. 'So what'd you think we do next?'

'We keep going, I reckon. Gently maybe. Mare inclusively, like tonight!' She smiled. 'And maybe I can try stop assuming that every carnivore is automatically a fuckin' bastard, and every vegan's a pure saint.'

Ruairidh raised his flask in mock salute. 'And vice versa. I'll toast wae yee tae that.'

A few weeks after the community hall clan gathering, ELI told us she had visited Ruairidh in Skye at his forest farm and fucking loved it. They even saw whales out on the water. After a few gins, she let slip that Ruairidh had also stayed over at ELI's treehouse in the forest where she works and studies the mycelia. Obviously, they took some mushies there and met the forest spirits on their trip together. Apparently, the fern-headed musical sprites inspired them to kiss under the willow tree.

We've all made out high as fuck under the stars in a forest some time and, if you haven't, you fucking should at the next available opportunity. Beyond all the politics, those are the flow moments we live for and will remember right before we die. Not the badges of division, likes on socials, status symbols... just those moments of pure simplistic flow and deep connection.

By the time I left Solartime, some bio-regions were trialling near-vegan land and produce policies, subsidising urban food

forests and giving tax benefits to cruelty-free shops and public spaces. Others adopted landscape-integrated food systems, guided by permaculture and indigenous practices, with animal populations managed in the new wild corridors without pens or slaughterhouses. Meat available in shops, as a result, did get more expensive. The higher price of meat did see a rise in black-market animal produce, unfortunately, which led to some health scares and a lot of backyard brutality at first – council houses stacked high with cages full of poor animal victims. The sheer brutality of these illegal meat farms, though, when they were uncovered, was enough to put most people off it altogether.

There was a sharp rise in the amount of people living in smallholdings and homes with a bit of land to grow their own veggies and look after some animals. Produce, including eggs from household gardens and small holdings, wasn't included in the new taxes obviously. This meant some people do keep and kill their own chickens or goats. Most found it far more comfortable, though, to eat a widening range of much cheaper and readily available plant-based meat alternatives and incredible protein sources from the market to supplement home-grown veggies rather than slitting the throats of animals you raised from babies and grew to love.

The promised lab-grown meat revolution, unfortunately, has stalled despite hopes. Even over in Solartime, it's still dependent on fetal calf serum (an essential ingredient in the process made from the blood of cow fetuses) since scientists haven't been able to chemically synthesise it yet. While tech has a way of surprising us all out of the blue and radically change the rules of the game, it doesn't make a good strategy to

hold out for such techno salvation. It takes away all our agency and responsibility as guardians and stewards to plan for the worst while hoping for the best. Solarpunk has to live in the present, not some imagined future.

Does all this make us naive dreamers? Enthusiastically YES! We are striving for a world with no tensions, contradictions or opposing forces stood in the way of our dreams. In other words: a world of infinite possibility, growth and resources. By Pachamama,[4] we've landed back at imaginary infinites. We have come full circle, complaining about the late-stage Big C Cult and its altar of 'infinite GDP growth', now building a vision so detached from reality, so idealistic, that it would require the same blind faith in infinite magic to work it all out. The totem of infinite growth simply passed hands, it might seem on the surface, from the practical to the possible – a Learean cosmic giggle doing what the cosmic gigglers do best: causing chaos for those trying to create new orders.

I guess there is a key difference, though, between the two infinite driving forces. The capitalist cult worships the altar of 'infinite GDP growth' at the expense of all other beings, all for supposed 'profit' for the few at the expense of the many. Our Solartime experiments believe in infinite potential, synergy and a world that benefits all beings together. We believe it's worth believing that all tensions, inequalities and conflicts are, at least in theory, resolvable.

It's worth believing in and trying to resolve them – even if one of the gods could somehow tell us directly that we'd never be able to work it all out in an eon; that the universe is

4. Pachamama is mother Earth herself, the mother goddess.

somehow built in a way that makes it fundamentally impossible to resolve all tensions and conflicts; that such a utopia is forever unachievable. But even then, it's still worth believing and striving for our Solarpunk infinity, honestly and earnestly aiming to solve every problem and injustice we come in contact with. Maybe we can't fix everything, but we can 100% fix a lot – and who knows which ones we can and which we can't fix?

This reminds me of the old allegory of a man on a beach at sunrise one morning after a strong stormy night, throwing one starfish after another back into the sea, despite the fact the entire beach is covered in thousands of them. A confused passer-by stops to ask,

'What are you doing, old man? There are far too many for you to rescue before they die on the beach. It's an impossible task! What difference are you making in the grand scheme of things?'

The old man held one starfish clinging onto dear life and responded,

'I can't save them all, but I can save this one. To this one, it makes a shit-load of a difference.'

Three to six billion animals killed every single day is an undeniable and insurmountable genocide we cannot end in a handful of years in one tiny country. Yet, we are throwing our own starfishes back in, one by one, no matter how huge the job ahead may seem at times. I can't deny that we might still be in a phase of over-idealism, trying to work out system limitations with too much excitement or exhilaration – but learning and evolution is happening.

To smash a brick with only your hand, you must train your mind to look beyond it. Our Solar experiments are like a novice

Shaolin monk training their mind to strike through that brick – the old crumbling brick of the late-stage Big C Cult. The mission seems almost impossible. There are a lot of painful, failed attempts and mistakes that made us desperate to give up and climb back into the consumerist nest. Eventually though, with enough patience and silence, thanks to our 100-year vision worked on by the Solarpunk Society, our minds started seeing what lay beyond the brick and, with a swift unified motion, our hand followed right through it. There is still a bunch of bricks unsmashed – and we keep finding more of the fuckers, too – but at least we have started to make a dent. More importantly, we now know it's possible at least some of the time.

We may never reach our ideal balance of all considerations. Not in our lifetimes; maybe not in anyone's lifetime. But without those strong visions, seeing through the other side of the blockage, what's gonna motivate us to get off our arses and try anything in the first place? We might as well have the sexiest vision possible. Fuck 'gritty realism' and all its binary dualisms. I want my inner world – my vision of what is possible, my Overton – window looking out to the most exotic, erotic, delicious, diverse, inviting and welcoming world imaginable with more than enough space for us all to get cosy and live happily in peace.

If enough of us share enough parts of that vision in common, we might just be able to make some of it a reality – a Venn diagram of collective actions. How would we even start if no one is talking about it in the first place? You don't need to agree with my vision but for fuck's sake, start thinking and talking about your own. I'll meet you for a hot coffee and a choccy biscuit where the lines overlap.

My presence here in Cybertime can't be random chaos. I am choosing to believe it's because the more we – people like you and me – communicate about my Solartime and this Cybertime, the more likely they are to pull together, sync up, resonate and entrain towards an even greater light that lays mysteriously and magnetically beyond them both. Together, we can build Solarpunk 2.0 out of the dying remnants of this crumbling cult – and maybe avoid some of the countless mistakes we made over in Solartime. I am sure you might be reaching the end of this book, finding yourself disagreeing with some of the ideas and disbelieving some of my stories. That doesn't matter. I am not here to convince you it's my way or the highway. This has always been about you waking up – not from a faint dream to an even worse reality you did not choose (like in the Matrix), but to wake up to your beautiful vivid dream; a dream that has been brewing and growing within you since you were born, waiting to burst out and expand in all directions faster than the speed of light. Within the Cosmic Time Lasagna, reality is overrated. It's our vision that creates our destiny.

31
Ever Question Whose Life You Are In?

How the fuck did I end up here, on this timeline, talking to you through a fucking book? That's a question I still ask myself multiple times a day. I have kind of ignored it since the introduction to the book but truthfully, I am still not 100% sure what actually happened. All I really remember is the witch.

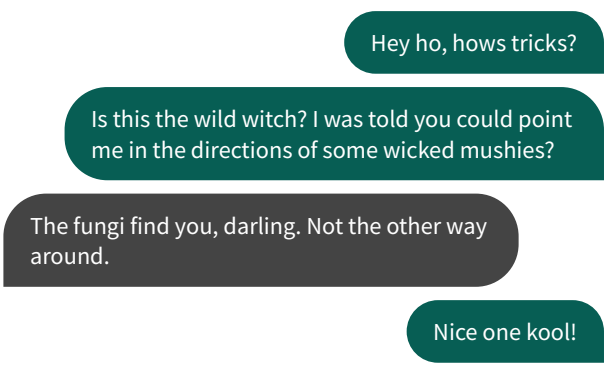
I just wanted to buy some good mushies. Yes, of course, drugs are legalised now in Solartime. That means you can buy the tourist commercial crap over the counter at the pharmacy or controlled trip spaces. The hot chocolates, mushroom pancakes and cheesy mushroom toast are all delicious, but the trip is usually pretty weak. It's as if the psychedelic spirit infused in the plants and chemicals is polluted a wee bit, maybe holding back, not wanting to freak out the naive hedonists too much. Or maybe, I was just really unlucky every time I tried them.

There is a big difference between a drug and a medicine. Anyone can make or sell drugs. Only a select few can brew and share true medicines; medicines that work with the only real doctor – the one living inside you. So, when someone started telling me a story at a party about some truly special mushies

they had bought from a real-life modern witch, I couldn't wait to jump right in and ask how to contact them.

The person was rambling on and on a bit. He did have the look of someone coming up on their first pill at the party, so it was forgivable. After a while, though, when he still wasn't getting to the point, I thought I'd help him round up the tale by asking for the witch's contact. Looking a bit frustrated – maybe because I had spoiled the epic ending with my rude interjection – the guy did eventually share the contact with me, but then abruptly made an excuse and left the conversation without finishing his story.

In hindsight, it was a bit weird just how reluctant the storyteller was to share the contact details. At the time, I thought he must be wanting to keep his good dealers to himself. Had I let him finish his story, he might have divulged some important details; details that might have influenced my early naive enthusiasm for buying these specific mushies from this specific person.



Well the fungi can find me at a Forest Rave this weekend just outside Edinburgh near the old mine pit if they fancy joining?

Can come to them too

Got money or happy to barter. Keen to sort a decent amount before the weekend if poss?

Cheers!

Before we discuss exchange send me a photo of the lines on your left hand

...Sorry whit? You gonna do some palm reading to check I'm not a polis?

You do know it's all legal now right? We don't need to talk in code anymore I don't think?

The lines carry memory

And prophecy

They are the same thing after all

SEND PHOTO NOW PLEASE

How many lines have you had already today?

Alright Mystic Meg, nae bother

[photo sent]

YOU! Look its you!

I didn't fully believe the prophecy was possible but it's true!

How did you find me?

Ok now yer scaring me a bit. Maybe you think I am someone else? I don't think we have met

I didn't know I had to be Morpheus to buy some drugs

[GIF sent] 'He's not the messiah, he's a very naughty boy!'

You have no future on this timeline

Your line... it ends. Mid-track

I thought the signal was lost forever

But you're waking up, aren't you?

You are here to WAKE UP!

Listen, I'm not looking to join any new cults today. I'm just trying to get some consciousness-enhancing magick for a DJ gig

(Unless there is a mushies discount for new members?)

You can keep using humour as defence but you already initiated the process when you asked

You can't turn back now it's unfolding!

You wouldn't be talking to me if the spores hadn't whispered your name to step forward

You do hear it

It is them who are calling

Hear what? I thought that was just tinnitus?

You think you are a human seeking a time bending mycellium experience when in truth it is the mycelia who are seeking a time bending human experience through you

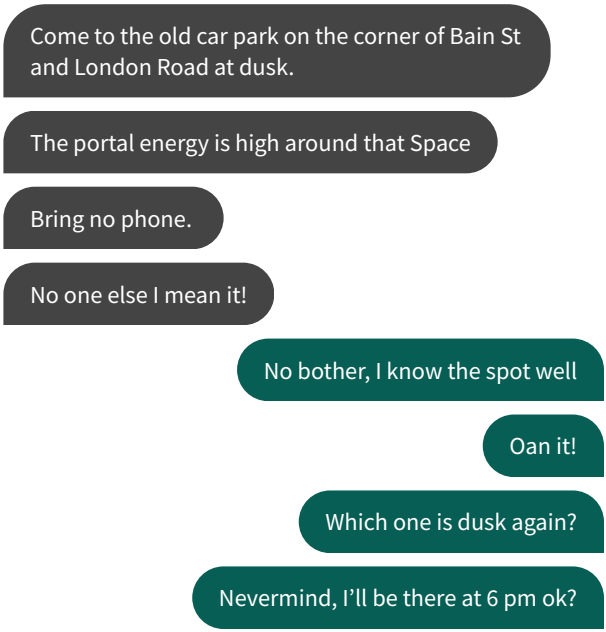
Your time here is up

It's up!

Get ready.

Right then… I'll keep an eye oot n aww that

How about the mushies then?



The air that night smelt like stale fry-up and burnt fireworks. The car park was halfway through conversion to a community garden and music venue but somehow, the old smells of the Barras permeated through the planted lavender and mint. I was running about ten minutes late. Couldn't find my new weed vape and, when I finally did, of course it wasn't fucking charged. I didn't even puff it much anymore, but I always brought it to first interactions in case it was useful as a peace pipe of some kind. When I arrived, I couldn't see anyone initially, so I ended up doing a full *Ministry of Silly Walks* fast lap of the eerily quiet block before a crow – no joke – dive-bombed me, squawking like some hard man looking for a square go. I turned the next corner back to where I began

and there she was, apparently all along: the infamous witch. I felt bad for being a bit impatient with her on the messages. Of course, a witch was bound to be eccentric. Putting up with the mad chat is the price you pay for finding the good stuff maybe, so I looked forward to apologising with my freshly charged weed vape.

At first, I didn't recognise her. She didn't look like a witch at all. Not what I was imagining in my naivety, anyway. No hat, no warts, no medieval broomstick or even one of those new skinny Dyson handhelds, for that matter. Just a stained grey hoodie that was way too big for her, ending halfway down her legs, a well-used, faded Lidl bag and a dug on a string – except it wasn't a dug and more like an aloof wee gremlin pretending to be one. *She definitely musta fed that wee shite after midnight*, I thought to myself – or so I assumed. She looked up at me from her dug, mildly offended and now just peering. She didn't blink once. Maybe she was ragin' with anger that I was late. Maybe she could read my thoughts aboot her mingin' wee dug. Before I could explain she cut the silence.

'You brought your left hand?'

I looked down, confused. 'Eh... aye? It's attached. I'd a probably forgotten it otherwise. How?[1] '

'Give it to me.'

Before I could react, she had grabbed it hard. My hand that is! Her palm felt like cold, damp, cracked bark. Mine was a sticky hot mess. Her pupils widened as her hand investigated mine.

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1. In Glasgow, for some fuckin' reason, we say 'how' instead of 'why'. Don't ask me how!

‘Oh Christ,’ she whispered, ‘Holy Fūjin,[2] no wonder the spores called you here. It’s time!’

She traced the lines with a cracked nail, muttering in tongues that sounded like reverse Gaelic fed through a 90s modem.

‘ELEEEECH SHAAAAH BAAANA CAAAH CHAAAAAH. You have no future.’

‘Eh... cheers,’ was the only response I could muster after an awkward pause.

‘No, I mean it. Literally. Look!’

I followed her finger.

‘See this?’ she said, holding her finger halfway across my palm. ‘Your story ends here. On this timeline. It’s almost already over. But you don’t die. See? The line doesn’t end, it sinks behind. The rest must be written somewhere else. Some...time, else.’

She looked up, eyes wide and seemingly way too far apart suddenly to be normal. I was proper freaked. I know it’s impolite, but I couldn’t help but stare. Was I trippin’ baws? There, deep inside her eyes, were stars – I swear to the holy Spaghetti Monster[3] in the sky. Fucking nebulae spinning where pupils should be. Swirling balls of gas made from potential energy, uncollapsed wave functions and alternative nows, dancing and shagging in symbiosis. It was beautiful. And I hadn’t even taken anything yet!

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2. Fūjin is the Japanese Shinto god of wind, often depicted with a great bag of storms on his back.

3. The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster is a real church, maybe with a real god, too. Who knows!

'You don't belong here anymore. You're already slipping. You feel it, don't you? The glitch in the mirror. The smell of discombobulation, it's all off, right?'

She was right, things did smell a bit mingin', but I just assumed that wee gremlin dug had let a silent but violent one go. I tried to laugh to avoid my deeper desire to cry, but it came out as a dry awkward cough caught in my throat.

'I've got 40 LOL,' I mumbled, trying to drastically change the subject.

She just leaned forward and whispered, 'Come home.'

Then louder, 'COME BACK TO THE LIGHT.'

The dug-gremlin thing attached to her string started growling as if it had seen a ghost. The surrounding trees slightly bent inwards as a spooky wind whipped up from nowhere. It felt as if the trees were trying to eavesdrop.

The hypnotist witch gently took me by the hands again, this time full palm to palm, finger to finger. Her hands felt surprisingly cool and gentle on my clammy palms. They rapidly warmed on contact and met in the middle, around about my inner body temperature, I reckon. As I felt her fingers slip in between mine, I was overcome by some weird ketamine-like reality melt, all twenty fingers starting to blend into one big fingery noodle soup. We were instantly inextricably intertwined. I felt a deep sense of calm – a feeling that despite it all being so unbelievably fucking weird, it was as if it was always supposed to be.

'Aaaaaaaaaah,' we communally sighed in harmony. I don't know where that sound came from or who created it, but even though it came out of my mouth, it didn't feel like it was me.

There wasn't much time to enjoy the calm, though, as suddenly and without notice, anxiety flooded my brain like a train smashing into the back of my head, filling the opening vacuum. The wee gremlin dug had broken our peaceful silence with a grating sound that could have been a bark; could have been a fart. I don't know, but by Sedna,[4] its cacophony of violent vibrations pulled me out of that sobering trip and back into this cold harsh static we experience as reality.

The witch's Lidl bag dropped off her arm to the floor as I ripped my entangled hands from hers. I saw the mushrooms fall out the bag onto the moist mossy pavement in a ziplock. It looked like they were glowing iridescent turquoise. Who knows what was real and what wasn't at this point.

'Fuck this! I'm not feeling good. Sorry!' I explurged.

I grabbed the mushies, chucked the 40 LOL cash down on the path and legged it into Glasgow Green. I ran and ran in a totally random direction until I couldn't feel my legs anymore. Didn't stop bricking it till I managed to redirect and navigate my way towards the bus up the road.

Even in the comfort of home, I didn't wind down easily that night; just stared nervously at the ziplock bag, repeating to myself internally, *Ma name is GINGERBEARD, am at home. It's February 2025. Everyhin's gonna be awrite. Ma name is GINGERBEARD...*

The mushrooms looked... alive, shimmering back at me like they were breathing; like they were waiting patiently for an inevitability I wasn't prepared for. I was glad to be handling them

4. Sedna is the Inuit-arctic sea goddess and ruler of marine animals. Hunters must appease her to ensure successful hunts.

back in the safety of our wee home in cold winter Scotland, rain pattering off the windows with LOFI already cosied up in bed, reading a book like an anime character in one of those Chillhop video loops (which is why she chose that name for herself after all). Thanks to her presence, I started to feel a bit more grounded again and this weekend's party came back into focus. I needed to get some practice in if I wanted to play a good set. *Shit man, what if these mushies are anything as mad as that woman was? If they make me trip when I'm not even taking them, what's it gonna be like on a full dose?* I didn't want to be known as the guy who was batshit trippin' on stage like something out of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, shouting at people mid-set that they are all NPCs and this is but a simulation. I mean, it might sound good right before a huge drop, but still.

Fuck, I better try some first, I thought. *It's only reasonable of me before I share them. Make sure it's not some kinda poison. Only a tester microdose, of course. Just a little. Not enough to fully trip or anything. I think I've done enough of that already. And maybe they'll help me practice my set?*

I sprinkled a few tiny sparkling spores onto my apparently doomed left hand and, straight away, it started to tingle. What was it with this new melty hand thing? Was I calcium deficient? Before I could get any more spooked, I knocked the crumbs into the back of my palate. I hate the taste of mushies at the best of times, but these ones tasted proper weird: like an ecstatically happy leprechaun just jizzed in my mouth – strangely fizzy, sweet, salty, sour and umami all in one.

Something wasn't right. I could feel the effects of the supposed microdose instantly. *Maybe some food would help.* I

rapidly made up an emergency hot oat milk with cashew butter on sourdough and swallowed it all doon. It was no use fighting it. Suddenly, gravity and its effects on my body doubled. Then tripled.

Right, abandon ship! I needed to jump into bed fast. I haphazardly stripped off like a drunk toddler would and collapsed on the edge of the bed, crawling somewhat desperately into the arms of a half-asleep LOFI. She looked perplexed since I hadn't really explained what the fuck I was doing, but sensing my rapidly developing condition, she just snuggled me into her arms. My eyes were overwhelmingly heavy. Me and LOFI had this disgustingly romantic wee routine before falling asleep where we race to be the first to say, 'Sweet Dreams!' and whoever is the slowest has to sing back '... are made of these'. Obviously, losing the race this time, even against a practically sleeping LOFI, I could hear my voice break as I reached for the notes. Before I could make a second attempt, the bed had fully enveloped...

Consciousness
slowly
melting.
Hypnagogic
flashes
then–

IMPLOSION! Suddenly, I'm standing in the middle of what looks like Sauchiehall Street after a nuclear fallout with a queue of zombies outside a Primark closing-down sale. The sky's the colour of a burnt square sausage. It's quiet. Not peaceful quiet. Post-mass-extinction quiet.

Then, I'm suddenly surrounded by them: twelve folk, the anti-apostles in a circle like the most jacked-up AA meeting ever. A fat goth teenager in a 'Eat Capitalism Not Cows' hoodie. A pensioner with a Union Jack tie. A refugee soaking wet. A banker's hands dripping in blood. A sex worker in glitter platforms. We all stare at each other for a second like we're expecting someone else to kick off a riot.

'This is aw your fault!' the teenager retches at a smoking taxi driver.

'Aye? Try bein' me for a fuckin' day, ya walkin' panda prick!' he lobs back.

'You are a filth monger, look at you,' the pensioner spits at the sex worker, just as someone else throws a chip poke at the banker, now covered in ketchup, screaming, 'You corporate scum are funding genocide!'

Two voices simultaneously chime in to accuse a billionaire in an expensive suit.

'You ate the planet with yer private jets and debt!'

'Try getting sectioned twice before you are twenty-one, then come talk to me, ya gluten-free messiah,' came a maniac's voice from up a nearby tree, sounding like the Cheshire cat on smack.

This was the grand finale of the World Oppression Olympics, the Victimhood World Cup. As everyone was too busy launching blame around the cluster of fucks, no one noticed the water levels were slowly rising all around. The sun was cooking the bald patch on my head like crispy ginger bacon. In my delirium, I suddenly noticed an ensuing swarm of tiny automated flying nanodrones turning everything in their wake into inanimate grey goo. Still, no one else noticed a fucking thing, too em-

broiled in their tit-for-tat blame game. I tried to scream but nothing came out. I wanted to launch myself at someone to wake them up, but the more I tried to move, the heavier my body became, slowly pinning me to an invisible 3D simulated canvas. The nanodrones drew closer. I never knew there was a fear greater than death, but being turned to grey nanogoo felt like a fate much worse. Just then, with the last piece of volition I had left, my voice finally broke free and let out a Wilhelm scream that woke everyone up from our collective dream – me included.

I'm back in bed, starfished and heavy. Dripping. Stinking of stale fear, sweat and prawn crackers for some reason. I start to realise my bed is no bed at all. It's actually a deserted beach after a terrible storm. My body has five arms spread out around a central blob struggling to breathe. I am a stranded starfish, my face smooshed in the drying sand, slowly suffocating in the sun, powerless but to wait for my impending death. A seagull swoops to peck. On the third painful piercing, I feel its beak enter my central nervous system and a flood of lifetime memories wash over me. I sense so many people passing me by and yet no one stops to help me. *Are they all blind?*

I let out another scream. Shite, I'm awake again! Dripping in even more sweat than last time. Sheets twisted around me like a raw human sushi roll. I slowly start to unravel myself, wiping some of the sweat beads gathered around my neck onto an already sodden pillow. LOFI next to me this time, still sound asleep, face down. She herself now resembles a starfish, half-naked and spread out in bed with a little bit of drool coming out of her mouth. Thank fuck, something recognisable and predictable for a change.

'Those mushies must have been wild strong,' I started mumbling to myself, trying to process what had happened. 'What a dream, man. Everyone was arguing, like a stadium full of people screaming about who had it worse; who carried more pain. Insanity!'

The starfish next to me groaned while rolling onto her side, 'Sounds like every conversation on X to me.'

'What is X?' I asked confused.

'Twitter?' she answered back, as if my very question startled her.

I was confused as shit by this point. Why was LOFI calling Twitter 'X'? It seemed like something we could come back to, though, given the mounting entries on the 'confusing as fuck' list.

'It felt like way more than a Twitter feed. These bastards didn't even notice the sky was literally splitting open. Fires pouring down from a raging sun, oceans rising by the second, whole cities flooding, man. And nobody cared. They were too busy keeping petty scores on who was most to blame. It was like blaming was more important to focus on rather than the actual thing they were all blaming each other for in the first place. You know what I mean?'

The fetal lump of gorgeous human next to me was silent this time, probably back in a deep slumber of her own.

Something threw me off. My eyes were still half shut – not that it mattered with the blackout curtains pulled tight shut; you couldn't see shit anyway. *Wait, we have blackout curtains?*

The air too; it felt... heavier. Damp like a room bursting with fresh washing hanging up to dry, but straight from a boil wash. And the air was warmer outside the bedsheets than under

them. Now that's unheard of in Scotland, ever! Everything smelt more fragrant too. Like lemongrass. *Something's no right. Am I having a stroke? Or is this another dream? No way, this one feels too real.* I wished I had one of those spinny toys on me to check.

I got myself up out of bed and staggered, one eye half-open, to the window and threw back the curtains. My jaw dropped. The rain-soaked rusty lamppost was gone, no sound of that annoying ankle biter that usually wakes me up every morning or its junkie seagull sidekick, for that matter. Instead, deep lush green as far as my half-eye could see. There was some alien bird chirping away in a foreign accent and exotic crawling critters trying to invade through every gap around the seemingly handmade window frame.

Where the fuck am I!? I had gone to sleep in a dank Glasgow cocoon and I've woken up to a tropical paradise complete with coconut trees and a full production of The Asian Lion King unfolding in front of me. Hakuna Matata, ya prick!

Out of nowhere, an almighty racket erupted behind me. 'What haaaappened to you? When did you shave? What? You just got up!?'

The starfish had fully awoken this time and looked just about as confused as I was. Despite my obvious panic and dismay, my instinct was to try not to fan the flames. Get some answers, but gently. I crawled back into bed still naked and started gently and lovingly stroking the arm of the person next to me.

'LOFI my love, I think I took some strong psychedelics last night, had some trippy dreams and I need your help to work out exactly what is happening and where the fuck we a–a–AARGH!'

My tone took a turn for the extreme as my fingers reached her shoulders and we properly locked eyes for the first time. After a microsecond that felt like a century, we both suddenly and simultaneously burst out screaming – she at the stranger in her bed; me at the stranger in mine! The vibrations from our larynx collided and doubled up in a harmonious confusion until it felt like the walls themselves were folding in under the pressure, Indiana-Jones style.

Still staring into each other's eyes, we spoke simultaneously. 'LOFI?'/'LOFI?!'

'Who the fuck is LOFI, Matt?!'

'Matt? They call me GINGERBEARD now.'

'Who the hell is they and what did they do with your ginger beard, Matt?'[5]

She clocked me. Stared at the lack of usual freckles on my face. I clocked her too. Same cheekbones, smooth skin and perfect morning hair – same LOFI energy, but a different glint in her eyes. Less techno magic forest hacker; more hot melancholy girl you want to cuddle and drink tea with.

'Listen LOFI – shit, actually, what is your name?'

'I'm... Julia?' she offered, looking at me like I'd completely lost my mind. Her eyes were wide now and unblinking. Then she asked slowly, 'Dude, who is LOFI – and why do you keep pronouncing her name in all caps?'

'I told you, I took some mad mushies from a witch with an evil dug last night. Last thing I remember I was in bed with my

5. It's a weird twist of cosmic timeline gigglery. It seems that Matt from Cybertime actually had a ginger beard whereas I, GINGERBEARD, don't. I know, I know. But if you are confused, how the fuck do you think the starfished human felt waking up next to me?

partner, LOFI, who looks exactly like you, in Scotland. Where the fuck am I now??'

'What?? You are in Thailand with me, Julia. You are my partner! Wait – someone who is your doppelganger is?? If you are here, where's Matt!?'

'He's OK... I hope. Maybe he is waking up as confused as we are, but in my bed next to LOFI in Scotland. That's gonna be an interesting conversation they are having! Especially because neither of them took any mushies from a witch!'

'But... you look like Matt,' Julia said slowly.

'I *am* Matt. I became GINGERBEARD. Maybe me and your partner don't just look like each other. Maybe we are each other? Sort of. Just... from different places. Places in space or time?'

Her eyebrows pulled together into a frown. 'Are you still on mushrooms now by any chance? In fairness, that does sound like something Matt would say. But wait, let me get this straight: you're a beardless version of my partner, from another world, who took mushrooms and just woke up naked next to me in bed?'

I nodded. 'Something like that.'

We both burst out laughing.

'Only me,' she groaned. 'Does that mean I've partnered with a multiversal human?'

'Well, you and me both, I guess? Do I look the exact same as Matt, only without a beard?' My eyes involuntarily gazed down analysing our naked bodies next to each other under the mostly unveiled sheets.

I watched as Julia's eyes scanned my hairy nakedness.

‘Looks about the right proportions to me,’ she said with a slightly embarrassed smile. ‘You do look like Matt, just a bit less sunburnt. Actually, a bit more glowy somehow.’

Even in all this chaos, I can’t lie that I wasn’t pretty turned on. Julia looked exactly like LOFI who knows my very soul, yet my attraction to Julia felt overwhelmingly new – like in the uncontrollable first days and weeks of a new relationship. I felt like she was feeling it, too. It wasn’t a very opportune moment to explore the rising heat, so I turned on the air conditioning and put on the shorts I found on the floor next to my much messier side of the bed.

LOFI makes amazing coffee and I was lucky that skill and passion seemed to transcend timelines. We sat across from each other at a cute wooden outdoor kitchen table – which confirmed to me I was 100% no longer in Scotland – sipping flat whites like awkward flatmates who had drunkenly hooked up but couldn’t quite remember it the next day.

‘I can’t stop thinking about what the witch told me,’ I began while Julia listened, the Thai sun on her back and eyes on me. ‘She kept saying it was my destiny and that I should come back to the light; that my timeline had ended. I’ve somehow done some quantum mushroom timeline leap and it’s maybe for a reason?’

‘Mmh, you said you used to be Matt, but our timelines sounds so different. You and Matt are living such different lives. How come you and LOFI were both in Scotland, but Matt and I are here in Thailand?’

Before I could come up with a plausible explanation, she suggested, ‘Maybe we should trace both timelines back till we

see if they sync up at some point in the past? See if you're actually the same person?'

She took a big sip of her double-shot coffee and a deep breath.

'Okay, let's try this. We'll start from here and now, 2025: Matt and I came here, to Thailand, after travelling around South East Asia, adventuring, escaping... well, everything. Trying to find a place we could call home. He was burnt out from living in Scotland for a long time before that, though. You know that, right?'

I looked confused. 'Why? What happened to him?'

She smiled faintly. 'He moved to Spain with his partner at the time, escaping COVID lockdowns, Scottish winters and the UK's racist Brexit deadline. He used to call it "plague island". When they broke up, he spent his life savings and went van-life across Europe, we met and he took me with him along the way. That's how we started adventuring together and it's why we're here now.'

Something twitched in my memory. 'Europe... van... Asia... yeah, that's all vague fantasies of mine, but not my actual memories. Sounds like you and Matt are living the dream, though. My dream!'

'Right,' she said, leaning forward after another necessary big gulp from her cup. 'Before that, he had spent five and a half years in Scotland, building a community arts project. He helped repurpose a huge abandoned building they called The Space. Studios, venues, cafés... an entire ecosystem. Went amazingly until it burnt him out. He took on too much himself, I think.'

I frowned, trying to picture it.

‘Community... arts... Hmm. That sounds familiar. Like the experiments and events I did in the early days before 2014. I’m glad he got stuck in and gave it his best go. Where was the building they took over?’

‘On the corner of London Road and Bain Street, next to Glasgow Green I think from memory. I’ve only ever visited twice.’

‘Holy shit! No way! That’s where the witch sold me the mushrooms! At the wee community garden round the back. I think it used to be an old car park? She said something about portal energy from there. Fuck, well, that’s gotta be our first clue, no?’

Julia’s eyes gleamed. ‘Wow! OK the puzzle is starting to piece itself together. Let’s keep going backwards. Matt loved doing Vipassana retreats. You know them?’

I shook my head.

‘Silent meditations,’ she continued, ‘Halfway through one, the first COVID lockdown hit. No one told him about it until the end when they could talk again and he suddenly came out to a world where everything had shut down and changed forever. After the first lockdown lifted, he had enough of Brexit Britain and the lies.’

I swallowed. ‘But why did he care so much about Brexit Britain? He was living in an independent Scotland that chose to stay in Europe?’

There was a pause.

‘Ehm, Scotland never went independent,’ she finally said. ‘You guys voted to stay part of the UK and eventually got pulled out of Europe. That’s why he left.’

I frowned. 'What?? You mean... we voted to stay... under the control of England? Next you're gonna tell me fucking Boris Johnson was our Prime Minister.'

Julia couldn't bear to break my heart this fast, so she tried to pretend she never heard me.

'Matt told me that, before the referendum, he got up to some antics with all the independence stuff. He showed me some video on YouTube.'

My heart skipped. 'The Empire Strikes Back?'

She laughed softly. 'Yeah, some stunt that went low-key viral with a rickshaw and a hundred Labour MPs in Glasgow city centre? He was playing Darth Vader music and shouting "Bow down to your Imperial Masters!" like a madman.'

My chest tightened. 'Wait... I was there. That was me! That was me and DRIFT!'

Julia leaned closer still, almost whispering. 'Well that's it, isn't it? That's the moment where our timelines must have... split. It must have been the referendum then. Everything diverged from there!'

I blinked, stunned. 'So... me and Matt – we were the same person until 2014, but then everything branched wildly because of a random referendum? And now I'm here in fucking Thailand, in your bed, living your life? Fuck me, I'm never doing mushies ever again!'

She nodded with a smile – a concerned but loving smile I recognised from LOFI. We both finished the last sips of our coffee and stared at each other in silence for a while. The sheer insanity of it all couldn't be understood any further for the time being. There maybe was a way to release the building tension, though. Julia's smirk and her hand landing high on my

thigh suggested we both agreed on the method. The wonderful thing about jumping back into bed together was that it felt as if we were new lovers, yet knew each other's special spots and where to stroke without the usual hours of awkward fumbling around.

Smoking a joint in bed after, I asked if this felt like cheating to her. Even though we were both in open relationships, I don't reckon any of us expected to open up our relationships across timelines with other versions of ourselves. We contemplated what would happen if our timelines somehow actually met and all four of us were together on the same one. Would it be weird to have a foursome? The places your stoned mind wanders when timeline-jumping.

Later, cuddling on a hammock outside, I curiously asked, 'What about you? How did you guys meet?'

After a short pause, I added 'When did you first feel like you loved Matt?'

Julia's head rested on my chest, her hair wild and entangled, glowing in the low light flickering through the branches of a coconut tree. She smiled when I asked, then turned her gaze upward like she was calling the memory down from the stars themselves.

'We met in Spain. That's where we fell in love, too,' she said softly. 'Up a mountain, only a few months after Matt had bought the campervan. We were just friends then, running through the forests, skinny-dipping in rivers, sitting out at night looking at the stars and laughing and crying together at life sometimes. That night, we parked up high on a mountaintop. It was a clear night and the skies were thick with stars. I made some cocoa I had brought back from Colombia and held a

little ceremony. Then, we sat down on the ground, opposite each other, cross-legged, eyes closed, until... I just felt this overwhelming urge to hold him. So I stood up, walked behind him and wrapped him in a long, long embrace. I could feel his whole body soften, then slowly, tears came. There were no thoughts; I just felt infinite love for him. It was a strangely normal feeling; and ancient – like it's always been this way; like we've done this same ritual many lifetimes before.'

Julia's eyes glazed over a little, making the turquoise of her irises seem even deeper. She smiled, then continued, 'That was the first time we were this close, physically. That night, we just... melted into each other. It felt as if we'd entered a different reality altogether, almost as if we were high, with the clear starry skies outside and us cosied up in the warm comfort of the van bed.'

Her words had teared me up. 'You know that a similar thing happened to me. But with LOFI.'

Julia blinked. 'What do you mean?'

I tried to keep calm but nearly made a bomber on the hammock with the half-lit joint. 'Me and LOFI were walking the West Highland Way, just after our Interdependence in 2018.'

'Interdependence?' Julia asked.

'That was when Scotland fully went Solarpunk,' I answered, just to see an even more puzzled look on her face. 'I'll tell you all about that later, OK?'

Then I went on to tell her about me and LOFI's experience and teared up even more. 'I still recall that feeling of just being fully safe.'

Julia stared at me nodding, lips parting with a big all-knowing smile. 'It's like our timelines rhyme. They're not identical but

they overlap. Maybe when the emotion is strongest? When there is love?'

'And laughter!' I added. 'And healing! I sound like a new-age hippy fridge magnet, but maybe it's those high vibration moments? When the light breaks through the layers?'

Julia's eyes were wide.

'That's what causes the synchronicities to happen!' she exclaimed. 'That's why the witch kept telling you to come back to the light. It's not a place or a time but... a frequency!?'

I laid back down beside her, both of us stunned, staring at the canopy of coconut trees and birds flying above as if the sky itself was ready to crack open to reveal a map of everything. 'That's deep shit,' I whispered.

The Thai weed joint was strong, but there were some other forces at play, too.

'That's why I'm here, right? That's why WE are here. Shit, it's starting to all make sense. I'm not the only one on a mission then,' I began to realise.

Julia kissed my shoulder, slow and deliberate. 'Then maybe the way forward isn't about choosing between your time or mine. It's about choosing the light and about choosing love at every crossroads. Over and over.'

She paused. 'You should write a book about this.'

It's no coincidence the witch or the mycelia dropped me into Julia's and Matt's life exactly at this point. Julia had just quit all prior work commitments to focus on launching her book editing and self-publishing business, while we were as far away from Scotland as you can possibly be. Just before I psychedelically parachuted into Cybertime, it turns out, Matt's Scottish community project had been forcibly closed down,

ending more than a hundred livelihoods overnight. This meant all of Matt's life projects, jobs and incomes had come crashing down to this singular moment of peace in the Thai sun – a rare and unique Tabula Rasa moment, a blank slate, for me, GINGERBEARD to pick up where he left off.

With Julia helping me to put some of the missing pieces together and her professional encouragement and support, I knew what I had to do. What you've just finished reading is the result. Nothing clever. There was no overall plan or fancy structure. Just me sweating it out, broke but happy, in the Thai humidity every day, showing up and writing whatever memories and insights poured through my fingers.

There's so much I haven't told you yet. So much I still want to share. But for now, I want to thank you for joining me on this process and reaching the end of the book. A process that, right up until writing this very line, has felt clouded, unsure, even scary at times. But now, as I write the conclusion to this book, it feels so obvious. Whatever happened to bring me here – the witch, the mushrooms, that ugly fucking gremlin dug – must have been for a reason. Not to be yet another middle-aged white dude with a messiah complex – Polunochnaya[6] knows the world's had enough of them – but I'm here to tell a story: a story I hope will help unify worlds and timelines apart. Not through politics or pontificating philosophies, but through loving vibrations and visions we pass and share with each other as we envisage both the Solartime I came from and the one we

6. Zorya Polunochnaya is the Slavic goddess who stands guard through the darkest hour of midnight to keep a cosmic demon chained and save the universe from being devoured.

are going to build right here, right now. A timeline where we all belong. A place both you and I can truly call home.

The path isn't that complicated. It's living in the light – whatever that means in your life. For me, it means ecstatic expression, gratitude, feeling the suffering and trauma of all beings, then letting it move through me, shaking it out into the universe, transformed, rebalanced and retuned. It's alchemy.

Together, we can start to feel our true power to transform all of it into a cosmic smile that, even in the darkest days ahead, knows that this late-stage Big C Cult world not only can but must be better for all beings. And as I say it out loud, reading this final chapter back to myself, it hits me: this isn't just my mission here in Cybertime. It's yours too.

One Final Turn For You!

We actually made it. Here we are, together, at the end of the book... fucking yaaaaas mate! We've collectively journeyed through the doom, bloom, taxes and tollies, the pirates and the ravers – and don't forget the jobby on a desk. It's been a (re)wild(ing) ride. Part Three is the conclusion to our dress rehearsal and marks the beginning of the real show waiting for us outside the window right now. The point is not to simply put the book down and go, 'Well, that was lovely.'

I hope by now you recognise that, whether we like it or not, we are both positive actors in what is to come next for this Cybertime. Sitting back and pretending we can be passive observers is no longer an option. Too many veils have been lifted, too many holes filled in for us to stick our heads back in the sand. So before we wrap this saga up and run out like Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas Day, asking the first small child we come across, 'What timeline is this, young man?', I've got one last set of exercises to help shove our brains out of reader mode and back into the driver's seat of change. If you can, do at least a few, then come find me anywhere online @solarpunkgingerbeard, or in person. I would love to hear your ideas for this Solarpunk world we are building together!

1. Your Very Own Doom-to-Bloom Moment

Write down a personal moment of despair or hopelessness. Then reframe it: How did or could that doom energy spark your first bloom step?

2. Ethical Fork in the Road

Pick one food, transport or energy choice you make regularly. Then, trace its ripple effects. What small tweak could make it more Solarpunk? Don't overthink it; even a tiny nudge counts. *For example: I'll ditch the takeaway Starbucks and fill my reusable coffee mug at the local café instead – the coffee is better, and they source it ethically.*

3. Build Your Energy Co-op

Imagine sharing energy or resources locally – solar panels, bike power, compost heat, battery banks. Sketch a plan for distribution in your local community: Who gets what? How is it shared fairly?

Bonus: Imagine the conflicts that might crop up and how you'd resolve them.

4. Your Solarpunk Hero(es)

Pick one person or group from this book that lights you up. In what ways do you resonate with them and how do they inspire your own journey to a Solarpunk world? Write it down, then do one small action to embody their spirit.

5. Rewild a Tiny Patch

Find a neglected spot on your balcony, garden or windowsill. Plan to rewild it (a single plant, pot or seedling counts) and take the first steps this week. Remember, Solarpirates don't ask for permission; maybe our future is full of guerilla gardens? Bonus: Do it with friends or lovers.

6. Playful Experimentation

Think of one idea for action that feels ridiculous or absurd – but might be constructive or fun – that you've never shared with anyone. *For example: a micro-festival on your rooftop, a one-time community zine, a community prank or flash mob with a social purpose.* Write down the first step to try it safely this week. If it feels boring, punk it up a bit.

7. Anti-Antinatalism Reflection

Think about growth, life and the future. How do you feel about your impact? How can you invest in the future ethically – with plants, community, children or ideas?

8. Ethical Provocation Journal

Pick one personal habit (food, transport, work) or belief that's out of alignment with your ecological or social ethics. Journal a step-by-step plan to align them more closely with your values. Even a single small tweak adds up to a revolution eventually.

9. Declare Your Solarpunk Creed

Write your personal short, fierce, joyful and outrageous creed for living in this world. Post it somewhere visible, spray paint it (ahem, legally of course...) or simply read it aloud to someone you love. Make it a rallying cry for you and others.

This isn't homework, remember? It's just some prompts to get us moving towards action and what feels like something achievable in the here and now. The Big C Cult relies on us feeling powerless and doomed. FUCK THAT!

You've already taken the first steps and read the book. Now let's make our own stories turn from doom to bloom!

EPILOGUE

Since writing my last draft of this book in Thailand, life has taken me and Julia back to Europe for a multitude of reasons. We've loved it up in Berlin for a while, getting inspired by so many examples we kept finding of Solarpunk projects and sparks popping up like mushrooms after the rain. They might not call themselves Solarpunk – and they don't need to – so long as the vibration is there. I owe a huge debt to Julia for inspiring me to write this book and doing so much practical work to get it out to you. My mum and whole family, who are equally mad, it turns out, on both timelines, have held me up so much to get to this point. I am truly privileged and full of gratitude for all the support, both visible and hidden, that's given me the strength and love to be able to talk to you like this.

Truth is, I never saw myself as a writer until all this happened. I just started to write out of necessity to tell you this story – and I've not even told you a quarter of the full story yet. But you're new to this, so a quarter is probably more than enough for now. The point of this book wasn't to tell you everything all at once. It was to let you in on some fundamentals of our Solarpunk society and show you how reimagining

the economic and political system can drastically change our lived experience for the better. This mad, time-bending rant of a book is my attempt to remember and reconnect – to bring you with me, just for a moment, into that crack between worlds I have lived in alone.

I'm certain you feel it too: the sense of being lost and disillusioned. Constantly seeking safe nests where at least some of your needs can be met, while shielding yourself from the worst of the violence and decay out there. What if I told you this seemingly never-ending search for a home is, in part, because instead of searching to find a home we have to build it?

Thing is, I don't know how to build a Solarpunk world from scratch by myself – especially not here in Cybertime. I don't even know if it's still 100% possible or if we can take everyone with us, but I'm up for trying. Are you?

It might look like a mountain from here, but maybe it's just about perspective. If we approach it together, we might find it's actually just molehills. And those time-splitting moments, like Scotland voting for its independence, they're not rare; you just have to look for them. It's like red cars: you hardly notice them until you make a concerted effort to, and then they're suddenly everywhere all the fucking time! When those red-car opportunities come, we'll be armed with the right intentions, ideas and motivations – and we will be ready. So, before I fuck off for now, let me leave you with some possible first steps we can both take after putting this book down:

- **Share the book.** Buy a copy for someone who needs it. Or just steal one. Torrent the fuck out of it. I don't care. Message me, I'll send you a copy for free if you need one.

- **Talk Solarpunk all the time with new people.** Make it a real thing, a term that builds understanding. Don't let them appropriate it before we do. Speak it into being. Make your own definition and use the word until it gets annoying. Talk about your Solarpunk vision and the parts that light you up.

- **Create like a muthafuka.** Start making tons of Solarpunk art, poetry, music, films or feminist pornos. There's nowhere near enough visionaries and artists working on this. It's a perfect time to fill that void. Don't make it for money. Where we are going, you won't need it anyway. Whatever you can create, make it Solarpunk!

- **Break the doom spiral.** Yeah, shit is bad, but the apocalypse fetish is boring now. We've seen every version and cosplayed every conclusion. Stop using it as an excuse for inaction. Stop waiting for the revolution. We don't need to neglect human suffering, but for fuck's sake, can we ditch the doom and focus on finding solutions finally?

- **Ask people what their utopia looks like.** If they say, 'I dunno,' help them figure it out. Dream together. Write the script and let's make the living, breathing movie.

- **Be a Solarpirate here and now!** Solarpirates don't wait for permission. They see a thing needs fixing and they waste no time complaining if there is something they can do about it. Anything! Get creative, be autonomous and build connections.

- **Start small.** Grow something, share something, host something, heal something. You don't have to fix the whole world at once. In fact, you can't. But when you find one, just throw a starfish back in the sea.

... and maybe, eventually, we will meet, offline and in person, in a place we co-created. A place we can all call HOME.

afterword

GINGERBEARD here again. It's been a few months since I wrote the book you have just finished reading – and something really interesting happened to me the other day. I was out for my morning run. I love to listen to liquid drum and bass, imagining my feet are the ones churning out the mad beats, but I sometimes mix it up with the odd audiobook. Since writing this, I've become a bit obsessed with listening to Solarpunk fiction and non-fiction, where other writers develop their ideas for a brighter world: Rutger Bregman's classic, *Utopia for Realists*, Jason Hickel's *Less Is More* or *Embodied Activism* by Rae Johnson, PhD. I've rinsed all of them recently. This time, right before my run, I came across a really interesting title by a Greek writer and ex-politician I love watching on YouTube. Yanis Varoufakis's book is called *Another Now*, and it's all about an alternative timeline! I scurried to buy it and curiously set off for my run.

I usually run 5k on an average day, but this Greek bastard had me running at least 12k. His book was blowing my fucking mind! I couldn't stop listening to it, so I had to keep running. Maybe it's an ADHD thing: I need to be doing something high-intensity and super distracting to listen to an audiobook if

I don't want to instantly fall asleep or find myself spontaneously masturbating. Devil's hands and all that. Like a Glaswegian Forrest Gump, I kept running and running, listening and listening.

Varoufakis's book is supposedly a fictional story about someone contacting and conversing with an alternative version of themselves on a different timeline. Not only that, their timelines split exactly like our Cyber and Solar ones did, except it wasn't caused by the Scottish Indy Ref in 2014, but the earlier 2008 global financial crisis. The similarities are incredible. My head was spinning so much I think I started running in circles too. I don't want to spoil the book cause you should definitely read it too, but I just can't get over how many things we have done over in Solartime that also show up in Yanis' supposedly fictional *Alternative Now:* Citizen Central Banks, Citizen Dividends and so much more. He covers a lot of stuff I didn't even mention yet as I ran out of spacetime, but it's so similar to what happened with Solartime corporate structures and the lives of workers within them. Reading *Another Now*, I noticed, took away my homesickness for the first time since being here in Cybertime.

It all reminds me of something Alan Moore once said, you know, the big wizard comic book guy with the wild beard who gave us *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*. He talks about an 'idea space' where ideas pre-exist, floating in some immaterial realm, waiting to come through us. And about creativity as magic, writing as alchemy. It connects nicely with Rupert Sheldrake's 'morphic resonance' where ideas are alive in a kind of resonant field. They come through us when the time's right; when the membrane between worlds is thin enough for them

to slip through. They don't just crop up once but all over the place simultaneously – which makes us not inventors but little radios tuning into cosmic idea stations. The fact that Yanis was sitting in Greece (or wherever), writing up his *Another Now*, while I was collapsing into Thailand here on the same timeline... that's not coincidence (and I promise it's not plagiarism either) – that's synchronicity, a cosmic giggle, the Cosmic Time Lasagna having a right laugh. The giggle never provides hard scientific proof of anything, either. That's not how the Lasagna speaks to us. It's always just a plausibly deniable wink from the other side, reminding us what happened to me isn't a one-off. It's happening all the time, to loads of us. Maybe there are other timeline jumpers reading this right now. If you know one, make sure you don't take mushrooms with them – unless you are ready for a proper trip.

I don't know if Yanis' *Another Now* merges to become the same Solar timeline I remember or if it's a third fork entirely, but it doesn't matter. I can now let go of the final dualism I was hanging onto, even while writing this book: Cybertime versus Solartime, doom versus bloom. They're a false dichotomy. They are not opposites necessarily tugging in different directions. What Yanis' similar *Now* shows is what Alan Moore points to as well, and what I keep tripping over again and again: timelines aren't fixed trajectories, nor do they have fixed destinies. They branch and fold. They multiply. One spark, one referendum, one giggle or kiss in a van under the stars and BLOOM, a whole new *Now* is born.

Imagine scientists found hard evidence of life on Mars or Venus tomorrow. We'd all go nuts, right? Not just because it's 100% proof of life elsewhere in the universe, but because it

makes it far harder to keep insisting there is not abundant life everywhere. Same with timelines. Once you know one split happened and you keep thinking about it, you can't help but notice other splits everywhere. Those little fucking red cars again in random audiobooks on a run.

So aye, maybe Solartime isn't my one true home. Maybe it's just one of infinite possibilities. Maybe the real point isn't to drag you with me as I scramble back there, but to recognise that we can always fork up this tired, dying Cybertime into something better – maybe even more profound than my native Solartime.

Let's stop waiting for the perfect time. It's not tomorrow, not some election year but here, now, with whatever we have in our hands at this exact moment. That's the Cosmic Time Lasagna. Layers on layers, sauce running between them all, everywhere, messy as fuck, but incredibly tasty nonetheless. We're all mushed up in that Cosmic Time Lasagna. You, me, Yanis, Alan Moore, LOFI, Julia, SYRA and everyone else alongside a trillion different versions of them. So, I have just one final request: Help me cut a piece, would you?

Dictionary of Scottish Terms

A

Aboot: About.
A parcel of rogues: A group of untrustworthy or treacherous people; a historical reference to the Scottish nobility who signed the Act of Union.
Ankle biter: A small, typically annoying dog.
Awrite: Alright; a standard greeting.

B

Banger: Something of excellent quality (e.g., a 'banger of a hairdresser').
Barlinnie: Scotland's most famous prison, located in Glasgow.
Bawbag / Bawsack: Scrotum; commonly used as a term for an idiot or a 'prick'.
Baws: Balls/testicles; often used to describe high intensity (e.g., 'trippin' baws').
Blether: A long, rambling, but often soulful conversation.
Blootered: Extremely drunk or intoxicated.

Boak: To gag; used to describe something disgusting.
Boot to the baws: A swift, forceful kick to the testicles.
Bricking it: Being extremely frightened or nervous.
Bunnet: A hat, often a traditional flat cap.

C

Ceilidh: Traditional Gaelic gathering featuring lively group dancing performed in circles or sets, accompanied by live instruments (fiddle, accordion, flute, guitar).
Chancer: Someone who takes risks, often in a slightly dishonest or opportunistic way.
Chibbin': A stabbing, or an attack involving a sharp object.
Cooncil hash: Low-quality cannabis.
Cunt: A universal term for a person. Depending on the adjective, it can be an insult, an endearment or neutral.

D

Da: Father.
Daftie / Dafty: A fool or an idiot, often used affectionately.
Doon: Down.
Dram: A small drink of spirits, usually Scotch whisky.
Dreich: Gloomy, wet and typically miserable Scottish weather.

E

Eejit: An idiot or a fool.

F

Fae: From.
Fanny: A weak, annoying or incompetent person.
Freezin' yer baws aff: Extremely cold.

G

Gaff: A house, flat or place of residence.
Gies a haun: Give me a hand; help me.
Giro: Unemployment benefits or welfare payments.
Glesgae: Glasgow.
Greetin': Crying.
Gubbin': Swallowing or consuming (pills, drugs or food).

H

Hawd yer weesht: Be quiet; shut up.
Hee-haw: Nothing; 'fuck all'.
Hen: A term of endearment for a woman.
Hoachin': Very busy or crowded.

J

Jist: Just.
Jobby: Excrement or 'poo'.
Jobbygeddon: A catastrophic event involving excrement.
Junkie needles: Hypodermic needles discarded by drug users.

K

Kin: Can.
Knackered: Extremely tired or exhausted.

M

Ma: My.
Manky: Dirty, filthy or disgusting.
Maw: Mother.
Midge / Midges: Small, biting Highland flies famous for ruining outdoor trips.
Minced: Utterly exhausted or highly intoxicated.
Munter: A person deemed unattractive or unpleasant.
MWI (Mad Wae It): Extremely intoxicated, usually on a combination of substances.

N

Nae bother: No problem.
Ned: A hooligan or delinquent; originally an acronym for 'Non-Educated Delinquent'.
Numpties: Idiots or incompetent people.

O

Oan it: On it; attending to a task.
Oor: Our.

P

Pal: Friend or mate.
Patter: Quick-witted talk, banter or a distinctive way of speaking.
Peely wally: Pale or sickly looking.
Piece and jam: A jam sandwich.
Pish: Nonsense, rubbish or urine.
Pishin': Pissing; usually refers to heavy rain.
Poke: A small bag, usually for carrying chips or food.
Polis: The police.
Pure raj AF: Completely wild, 'mental' or out of control.

Q

Quids in: In a position of profit or advantage.

R

Rammy: A fight, scuffle or loud argument.
Roaster: A total idiot or someone making a fool of themselves.

S

Schemey: Relating to or coming from a 'scheme' (a public housing estate).
Scooby: A clue (derived from 'Scooby Doo' rhyming slang).
Scunnered: Thoroughly fed up, disgusted or exhausted.
Shat it: Was very frightened or scared.
Shitehole: A disgusting or unpleasant place.

Skelp: A slap or a sharp blow.
Skint: Broke; having no money.
Square go: A fair, one-on-one fight.
Swally: A drink, usually alcoholic.

T

Taps aff: 'Tops off'; the practice of removing shirts at the slightest hint of Scottish sunshine.
Tattie scone: A traditional Scottish savoury griddle scone made with mashed potato.
Tenement: A traditional Scottish multi-storey apartment building common in Glasgow.
Tha: The.
Tic: Credit; buying something with the intention to pay later.
Toerag: A scoundrel or an annoying person.
Tolly: A piece of excrement.
Trippin' baws: Being extremely high on psychedelics.

W

Weans: Children.
Wee: Small or tiny.
Weegie: A person from Glasgow.
Wit: What.

Y

Yer da' defends statues: A mocking phrase used to needle someone with perceived conservative or reactionary views.

Yer maw's meander: A humorous or insulting reference to someone's mother.
Yersel': Yourself.

Glossary of Solarpunk Concepts

*

100-Year Solarpunk Plan: A long-term strategic blueprint for planetary survival and human thriving that replaces short-term five-year political cycles.

A

Abolition of Prisons: The transition from for-profit incarceration to local restorative and rehabilitation centres for those who cannot remain in the community.

Adult Play: Liberated social spaces and cultural norms that encourage silliness, exploration and non-sexualised connection to dismantle rigid 'adult' conditioning.

Algorithmic Stability Mechanism (ASM): A transparent system managing currency supply, minting tokens during ecological 'blooms' and contracting supply during 'dooms'.

Animism (Philosophical): A framework that treats all beings – including AI and robots – with respect and recognises their individual autonomy and spirit.

Asset Tax: A progressive replacement for VAT that taxes products based on luxury status, health impact and ecological footprint.

B

Beeconomy: An economic model where human growth is aligned with the health of the entire planet, mimicking the symbiotic relationship between bees and flowers.

Big C (Capitalist/Cyberpunk) Cult: The late-stage disaster capitalism and its lingering psychological, economic and environmental toll.

Big Blether Get-Tae-Gither: A nationwide series of emergent local meetings held in community spaces to facilitate dialogue and consensus after the collapse of the old state.

Biochar (Terra Preta): The use of low-oxygen fire to create 'black earth', an ancient soil regeneration technology rediscovered for modern use.

Biosphere-Based Districts: A political map defined by ecological zones rather than arbitrary lines, preventing gerrymandering and tying governance directly to the land.

Bodily Autonomy: The legal principle that no government has the right to dictate choices regarding drugs, sex work or assisted dying.

C

Citizen's Dividend (CD): The central economic lynchpin of Solartime: a monthly survival payment (initially 1,500 LOL/month or 18,000 LOL/year) distributed to every citizen

over age 12 to eliminate wage slavery, end the necessity of 'earning a living' and provide a baseline for survival.

Citizen's Investment Bank (CIB): A non-profit, citizen-owned central bank where every person over 12 years old is an equal shareholder with voting rights on investment portfolios.

Clan gatherings: Community-level assemblies (distinct from the Great Clan Gathering) where citizens debate issues in circles and shape bills before going up the chain. Almost every citizen belongs to at least one clan, making them the everyday engine room of the democracy.

Clans of Choice: Non-hereditary, fluid kinships formed around shared community challenges, geographical biospheres or interests (e.g., Techno Druids, Clan of Quiet Ones).

Commons: A 'use it or lose it' policy bringing disused land and assets into public use for community projects.

Commons Buyback Fund: Using revenue from land and asset taxes to purchase fire-sold estate lands for community use.

Common Weal: A reinvigorated Scots concept of collective wealth and shared prosperity.

Community Care Villages: Intergenerational spaces where elderly care, childcare and animal sanctuaries are integrated to foster connection and shared purpose.

Community Contribution (Negative Interest): A monthly progressive charge on stagnant surplus savings above a certain threshold (e.g., 10k LOL) designed to keep money flowing through the economy.

Community Guardians: A non-violent, volunteer-led alternative to police focused on de-escalation, mediation and welfare.

Consensus-Based Decision-Making: A circular debating model requiring full agreement or collective compromise rather than majority-rule to prevent binary winning/losing dynamics.

Co-op Collective: National Solartime Scottish body supporting and funding transitions into worker-led co-operatives.

Cosmic Time Lasagna (CTL): The cosmology of infinite, branching timeline layers representing every potential reality.

Cybertime: The late-stage capitalist timeline.

D

Declaration of Odious Debt: The legal refusal to pay back international loans that do not benefit the citizenry (such as from the IMF or World Bank), treating them as illegitimate.

Deferred Land Tax: An option for primary residents to accrue land tax liability against a property's value, settled only when the home is sold or the owner passes away.

Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG): The energy-efficient, web-like distributed ledger technology used for the digital LOL currency.

DIT (Do It Together): A Solarpunk shift from DIY to collective community action.

Downwards Power Flow: The principle of decentralising authority, pushing 50% or more of national budgets and decision-making power down to local biospheres and streets.

Drug Decriminalisation: Treating addiction as a health issue rather than a crime, resulting in 75% less overdose deaths.

E

Eco-Sovereign Currency (LOL): A digital currency backed by the health of the biosphere rather than gold or government 'fiat'.

Edible Arteries: Transforming city streets and railway verges into community gardens and foraging paths.

Entitled Prick Insurance: The practice of regularly shifting people in and out of power to prevent the psychological entrenchment of privilege and careerism.

Environmental Economics: A model that merges planetary health with human activity, treating them as entangled particles rather than separate entities.

F

Fleet Melty McMeltface: A fleet of autonomous, renewable-energy boats that harvest ocean waste and convert it into medicinal mushroom feed.

Functional Fitness: Moving away from gyms to pragmatic, purposeful exercise like cargo-bike hauling and community building.

G

Gatekeepers: An empowered opposition group composed of those who voted against a passed bill, tasked with oversight to prevent corruption or mission creep.

Great Clan Gathering (GCG): The national-level assembly where Clan Representatives convene in circular spaces to guide strategic national aims.

Green Corridors: Strategic stitching together of green spaces to allow wildlife and humans to coexist and migrate without fences.

H

HAHA (Home-Area Health Asset): A local currency experiment (on the Isle of Bute) designed to keep wealth circulating within a specific community to fight depopulation.

Happy Capacity: An economic 'homeostasis' point where a business stays at a sustainable size rather than seeking infinite expansion.

Housing First (Home First): A policy eradicating homelessness by providing unconditional, permanent housing as the primary step in support services.

HPHI (Human and Planetary Health Index): A high-dimensional basket of metrics (including GPI, HPI and GNH) used to value the national currency based on wellbeing.

I

Impact Tokens: A mechanism allowing organisations to pay back CIB bank loans using verified community-impact data rather than cash.

Informed Direct Democracy: Citizens directly vote on bills after engaging with AI-summarised data and community debates.

Interdependence: The post-2018 period and Scotland's second attempt at real independence after the disappointing 2014 one, beginning with the month-long rave that brought down the government.

L

Land Tax: A tax on the unimproved value of land designed to end speculative hoarding and encourage common guardianship.

LOL: The eco-sovereign currency of Solartime Scotland; also stands for 'money is a fucking joke'.

M

Machines of Loving Grace (MLGs): AI and robots that are stripped of corporate profit mandates and treated as autonomous peers.

Memory Orchards: Living fruit tree libraries documenting lost folk songs and dialects.

Modular/Repairable Design: An economic shift to end planned obsolescence by making tech components easily swappable and upgradable (incentivised by asset tax relief).

N

National Justice Service (NJS): A taxpayer-funded service covering all legal costs for citizens to ensure the rich cannot 'buy' their way out of liability.

Natural Growth: An economic model mimicking biological growth cycles, reaching a state of sustainability/homeostasis rather than infinite expansion.

Non-Profit Credit Cards: Nationalised, fee-free versions of payment systems where surpluses are returned to the Citizen's Dividend pot.

Not-for-profit Pharma: A worker-owned pharmaceutical industry focused on developing unpatented cures rather than shareholder-driven 'plasters'.

P

The Parliament Raves: The month-long techno-ceilidh occupation of Holyrood that collapsed the old state.

Participatory Budgeting (PB): A system where citizens directly propose, debate and vote on how local and national tax money is spent.

Peppercorn Rents: Offering disused commercial spaces to social enterprises for nearly zero cost to revitalise ghost towns and town centres.

Planned Obsolescence Ban: Using interest-free CIB loans (length determined by product lifespan) to incentivise repairable, modular tech.

Pragmatic Genetic Modification: Using GM tech specifically to adapt crops to changing climates rather than for corporate control.

Predator Reintroduction: The ecological restoration of wolves, lynx and bears to manage herbivore populations and restore forest balance.

R

Radical Abundance: An economic model based on gifting and surplus rather than manufactured scarcity.

Rainy-Day Fund: A precautionary reserve of external assets used to withstand economic or ecological shocks.

Reciprocal Gift Economies: The rebuilding of modern global trade based on trust and friendship rather than world market speculation.

Restorative Justice Circles: A victim-focused process where perpetrators face those they harmed to make reparations and heal community wounds.

Rewilding the Clyde: The use of bioluminescent algae and mushroom farms to clear radiation and industrial toxins from the river system.

S

Seed libraries: Local hubs replacing high-street shops to facilitate community seed, soil and water sharing.

Sex Work Legalisation & Unionisation: Removing sex work from the shadows to ensure worker safety, dignity and the separation of choice from trafficking.

Shareholder Abolition: Sacking the corporate shareholder class to remove the mandate for businesses to double in size every decade.

Solarpirates: A cultural youth movement focused on autonomous action, reclaiming disused spaces and living by the pirate code of egalitarian cooperation.

Solarpunk Libraries: Community hubs that loan not only books, but also tools and household electronics.

Solarpunk society: The society Solartime Scotland evolved into after the 2018 Interdependence.

The Solarpunk Society: The open framework/organisation formed after the Great Clan Gathering realised it lacked a long-term plan. It crowdsourced the 100-year vision and presented motions to the Great Clan Gathering for referendum. Citizens don't have to be a member – anyone can organise an event under its banner.

Solartime: The alternative timeline where Scotland went independent in 2014 and interdependent in 2018.

Sortition (Appointment by Lot): The choosing of political representatives by random lottery from a pool of active members to eliminate careerism and bribery.

Starfish Principle: The Solarpunk ethos of taking individual action to save 'one at a time' against insurmountable odds.

T

Triage & Vetting Tribunal (TVT): An independent gatekeeper for the justice system that assesses grievances and directs them to restorative justice.

Trust Trade Boxes: Peer-to-peer bartering stations for non-monetary exchanges.

U

The Universal Directive: 'DON'T BE A CUNT' placed atop all official documents and on neon signs across city skylines.

Up versus Doon: The Cybertime primary political axis dividing those holding power (up) from everyone else (doon).

W

Wage Slavery: A condition where workers' legal freedom is rendered illusory through total financial dependence on selling their labour for survival. In Solartime Scotland, wage slavery was eradicated by the Citizen's Dividend.

Whistleblower Bounties: A crowdfunded mechanism providing large financial rewards to citizens who expose corruption or malpractice by those in power.