



FUCK 2020

or

**The DIY Guide to Dealing
with the Shit-Storming
Dread of Life Right Now
by Adam Gnade**

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Now

BY ADAM GNADE

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INTRODUCTION

How do we kill the beast? How do we stick a spear in its heart?

We all feel like we're not doing enough (or anything). We all feel time slow or speed up or rot in place—in stasis and suspended animation as we're stuck in our quiet houses, our messy apartments ... as the world burns, as good people fall.

We all feel fear but maybe we brush it away. We're not that different, right? Me and you? Us? This is unfamiliar territory. No one is thriving.

I don't know about you, but I feel like a freaked-out kid who got off the bus at the wrong stop and is now lost in a new part of town. I feel like a hunted animal on foreign terrain (I'm used to the forest floor, but this is gravel). I feel like a speck of dirt in a strange land of giants—and here I am, too small to make a difference, too weak to make it through the day.

The fucking DAY.

We pay so much attention to the day now in absence of so much else.

Every day I tell myself (on repeat), "What the fucking fucking fucking FUCK am I supposed to do now, man?"

And I have no answer to that. Sorry. I wish I could tell you something better. I may have leads and ideas and endless determination, but I have no solutions.

I don't blame anyone for watching endless Netflix until their eyes glaze over or getting wasted by noon. It's not helping you, but I don't blame you. We're all trying to get through the day.

The day again!

FUCK the day.

The day is a monster now.

And tomorrow?

Tomorrow is unthinkable, impossible to pin down, terrifying.

How do we live in a world where tomorrow the news might say, "Alright, this is it, assholes. It's too late."

Maybe we ignore the news? Is that what we do?

Or we listen but we don't let ourselves hear? I'm guilty of that.

I tune it out all the time. Sitting at the kitchen table while rain taps against the window. Tune it out. Lying in bed looking at my phone at 2am. Tune it out. Turn away.

Turn away. Turn away from death tallies, from stats and facts, from briefings, from plans to open the economy too early, from shortages, from rumor and uncertainty, from rapist candidates and racist cops, from a planet we're killing, from the internet devouring itself in a sea of small and pointless wars, from an administration that cares more about the money our lives make than our lives themselves.

See, the thing is "Our lives themselves" are what matter. Endurance is what

matters. Finding some indomitable, unconquerable spirit in yourself when all you want to do is sleep? That's what matters.

The hard work it takes to find (and maintain) poise, calm, and steadfast resolve, this is what matters. It feels impossible and I don't know how to do it either, but it matters.

So, you will assess the facts, do the work, weigh your options, decide what's true, stare with clear eyes at the beast until you are a great stone wall around those you love. Until you are a fountain that knows when to spurt and when to shut off. Until you know the difference between "Fuck you" and "Fuck off," the beautiful defiance inherent in the latter (and the impotent defensiveness in the former).

You won't be a solitary island anymore but a chain of islands—an archipelago

of helping your brothers and sisters, of takin' care of business like a motherfucker, of gettin' shit done even when you hear the bells of doom calling. You will be terra-extra-firma and higher ground and you will be a tree with roots that shall not be moved. If enough of us are strong then we can stand up for those who aren't able, right?

But how?

How do we do this?

We're all figuring that out, but it's important to have something to move toward. You don't shoot an arrow without a target. You don't throw a spear without something to hit. Even if you know you can't hit the target yet you keep trying because one day you will—if you work hard enough and with sensibility, determination, and fixed purpose. One day your arrow will fly true and hit bullseye and one day your spear

will sink into the heart of the beast and the beast will die. The point is to keep trying, right? The trick is to push forward while the real winds howl.

Here are some ideas for you...

-Adam Gnade, Aug 2020

Today this Battlefield is Mine

1) Sometimes you must tell yourself what to think. Program yourself. Cram thoughts into your head until you believe them. Shove them in to push out the bad thoughts. You tell yourself this: I am determined to survive despite the odds.

2) You tell yourself this: I will be rational in the face of uncertainty, but I will have no mercy for my panic and spiraling thoughts. You will tell them, “You cannot have me. Today this battlefield is mine.”

3) You will tell yourself this: I will do what I can to thrive because my life has meaning to those close to me—especially if their survival depends upon mine. I will survive for those I love.

4) You will tell yourself this: Calmness, mutual aid, and deliberate action is the road that leads away from anxiety.

5) You will tell yourself this: It is in our best interest to take care of those in our immediate vicinity. I will not yell, blame, rage, or judge. I will be honorable, sweet, quiet, and helpful.

6) You will tell yourself this: The best thing I can do right now is sleep eight hours and wake up tomorrow better than I was today.

7) You will tell yourself this: Fear and undue anger is my enemy. I will act calm until (by force of sheer will) I am calm. I will breathe and make plans quietly (realistically, and with resolve) and I will LIVE.

This Fucking Year

It's been a rough slog, this year. People close to me are coming apart. They're trapped at home and they're trapped in relationships that snuff out their fire. They're living in poisonous places without money or resources to get out. They're broke, scared, in trouble with the law, sick, mourning, being sued, tricked, getting disillusioned and knocked around. They talk to you like hunted animals, wide-eyed, burned-out. It scares me. It scares me writing this and it scares me remembering it.

Life in America has been a total shit-show lately and that has made it harder to see the good things around us.

But I'm looking.

I'm looking because we only have one life and that's the most brutal fact in the

world. One life, one time here on this terrible, lovely planet and if we waste it by not living as well as we possibly can then what's the point?

Life is about trying to find things worth living for in the midst of depression, war, political strain, money troubles, civil rights violations, and horrible news that seems to come every day; it's about looking for goodness in trying times—because all times are trying. Of course we have sweet moments and easy days, but life can be daunting and sometimes it seems like it would be better to sign off for good—pay your check and go, step into the dark. Even in my worst moments I know that's not a solution.

Suicide. It's something that sticks with me even when I'm doing my best. It reminds me. It nudges me. Makes offers, offers plans. It whispers in my ear like a snake when things are going well and it screams inside me as soon as shit takes a

turn south.

Some of us battle this every day.

Of course things don't just "get better" like people always say when they're trying to be helpful and this book won't solve all your problems. No book will do that. Anyway, not all problems are solvable. What you can do is try to live as well as possible and hold onto as much happiness as you can grab.

There's a way to live out there that's not so shitty and I'm trying to find it every day. Sometimes I have it. I know where it is and how to hold onto it, and when it comes along it's mine. Other times it's not so easy. Which is why I wrote this set of notes. They're imperfect notes, contradictory and naive maybe, but writing this sort of thing is how I help myself pass through the shit-storm and I hope it will help you as well.

The Remedy for Anxiety is Action

1) Find a way to be selfless in your assistance of others without being self-sabotaging.

2) Your work is always better when you're taking care of yourself. It's worse (and ineffectual) otherwise. Don't waste your time.

3) Victory is the only thing we will accept. Write a "V" on your wall, on your hand, on your notebook. Rally around that V. Remember it, remember victory when all else seems daunting and insurmountable.

4) This is how we win: We don't take no for an answer.

5) If you're looking for what you can do and you're not finding answers, ask people. Ask how you can help. Almost

everyone needs something right now.

6) Make a list of what you can do and then do that.

7) The remedy for anxiety is action.

Activity as Life Preserver

One of the best ways to pull yourself out of a shitty black pit is activity. It's kind of a fake-it-'til-you-make-it thing. If you are fortunate enough to be able to do this (and not everyone is) you MOVE. By power of will or sheer desperation, you force yourself out of bed, drag yourself down the hall, get moving, keep moving. It hurts like hell at first and it feels false. It feels as if you are a reanimated corpse—you're moving, but are you alive?

Here's the thing: We're a lot like cars. Your battery dies in a parking lot; you find someone with cables or you call AAA and they jumpstart your car and ... your engine roars gloriously to life. Great. Problem solved. But if you were to turn off your engine at that moment, the battery would still be dead. In my experience, the AAA person (or whomever) always tells me something

along the lines of, “Nowww make sure you keep your engine running for at least 40 minutes before you turn it off. Get those RPMs up high.”

I don't know anything about machines, but somehow by the magic of the internal combustion engine, your car gives your battery life by keeping the motor running. Once those 40-some-odd-whatever minutes are spent, your battery is charged. Not as good as new but close to it.

We're like that too. The sheer act of making ourselves move gives us life. By activity we recharge and after a while (I fuckin' *wish* it were just 40 minutes) we are a little more alive than we were before. Our muscles move. Our blood carries oxygen to our brains. Our synapses fire. We keep moving, we make lists, we get shit done, we eat, we take out the trash, we trudge in (what feels like) an endless fucking deathmarch to

the store, to the bathroom, to school,
to the bank, and pretty soon it's not as
much of a deathmarch anymore.

We stay moving, we begin to heal.

It's not a cure, but it's a start.

Get Down to Work

1) Be vigilant in your fight. Take all necessary precautions.

2) Grow food if you're able and give it away. Send care packages to those you love if you have the money. Donate to Black Lives Matter groups. Order food for someone who can't. If you have a secure, well-paying job, don't hoard, help stock someone else's pantry. Spread it around. We succeed or fail together.

3) Find good heroes and emulate their courage and willingness to act.

4) If the work you're doing is sowing dissent, it's the wrong kind of work.

5) If you're worried about what you can do, remember this: anything good you do is better than doing nothing. All pieces (however humble) count toward the

greater whole.

6) Action will clear out your cobwebs and foggy mind. Action is a rush of air to your lungs, a tonic, and a lantern in the darkness.

7) Pick up that shovel. Get down to work.

Seven Things I've Learned During this Stupid Year

1) You don't truly appreciate the place you live until it's taken away from you.

2) I would be dead without self-medication, but too much self-medication does the job of the reaper.

3) Always question a friendship based upon financial transactions.

4) Even if you're not leaving the house, get dressed, clean up, try to look nice. It's good for your mind.

5) Don't talk shit on people's vanity. Sometimes it's not vanity at all. Sometimes it's self-preservation.

6) So many of us feel disposable among the people we know. Most of the time it's not true. Always tell your friends that

they're important if they are important.
Quite often they won't know how you
feel until you tell them.

7) One of the most radical things you can
do is to be kind to strangers you'll never
see again.

Calm Under Great Duress

1) We are being called into service right now. We must put aside petty grievances and treat those around us well.

2) Basically: chill the fuck out, okay?

3) Kindness, gentle words, and moderate behavior is for the good of all.

4) Calm under great duress is one of the highest qualities of the human character.

5) Act honorably and be dignified. Be merciless. Be a warrior but kind.

6) With Covid, we're at war with an unseen assailant. Losing your patience with others helps us all lose the fight. It's important to know who the true enemy is. Those who turn on their loved ones during a time like this are doing the work of the enemy. Now's not the time,

Rambo.

7) Taking it out on your kids is ignoble, pitiful, and unbecoming. What's important is to act effectively and do so with quiet, respectful resolve.

If Things Are Meaningless and Nothing is Important

If things are meaningless and nothing is important then we need to find ways to make ourselves important and give ourselves meaning. Sometimes it feels like the world is going to shit; that life is an absurd, grueling joke and a fast path toward death. Suffering is everywhere. War, racism, illness, genocide, murderous cops, a fresh rise of fascism and white supremacy, a dying planet ... all of this makes for a bleak, miserable outlook.

How could anything mean anything in the face of this?

Why even get out of bed in the morning?

The goal is to find meaning and importance through those around us, to seek and build meaningful relationships, to hold your loved ones close and get

to know them better, to make yourself important to someone else by doing good, selfless work. If we're all we've got then we need to be there for each other, we need to do the work to get to know each other better.

You won't find meaning by ordering things on the internet.

You won't find meaning from giant celebrities who don't care about you.

You won't find meaning by aligning yourself with any sort of corporate entity.

It's a challenge because sometimes I just want to shut off. Humans are bloodthirsty animals. Go inward. Close off. Lock the door, don't let anyone in.

This is a self-defeating stance. Human relationships are difficult. We're weird and awkward and prone to failure. We're

a lurching mess. But to love someone, to *truly* love someone, whether platonic or otherwise, will give you meaning and importance in ways you might never anticipate.

What kinds of ways?

I don't know!

That's all subjective. It's specific to you, to the people you interact with, to those you choose to spend your time with.

What I do know is this: being alone is important to understanding yourself, but being with others, loving others, selflessly loving others, loving others in a way that asks nothing in return, loving others in a way that's not about what you can get from them or what they think of you, will give your life the meaning and importance it might be lacking.

Open your door. Pick up the phone.

Write that email. Take that next step.

Questions You Need to Ask Yourself

1) Which practical, useful methods do you employ to hold onto hope when the odds seem stacked against you? Make a list even if you don't know how to start it.

2) Are the things you're doing right now wasting your time (or passing the time) or are they in some way improving your situation? Does it matter? There are no right or wrong answers here. Sometimes the most important part is asking the questions.

3) At what point do you turn off the news as a self-preservative measure? At what point do you turn it back on? Where is the balance between staying informed and being overwhelmed by information?

4) What do you consider valorous action? How do you support that action?

5) How important is relaxation and fun in the face of gathering darkness? Is the fun you're having betraying those on the front lines? Should it matter? Are you required to match the output (or even sacrifices) of others? Is directionless enjoyment that serves as a pressure valve counterproductive or necessary? Is it healthy?

6) Everyone comes to a fight with different weapons. What skills do you have that can help your friends and family feel less freaked out?

7) What are the things (books, movies, people, songs, ideas, ideologies, etc) that make you feel stronger and more courageous? How do you spend more time with those things?

Bonus questions: Are you in denial?
Are you thinking deeply about the

circumstances you're in?

Because Dealing with Humans is Fucking Hard and So is Being Alone

1) Tell someone “good job” if they’re doing something great. Write fan mail. Send care packages. It might be the one thing that keeps them from quitting. I want to quit all the time. Every day. I get fatalistic and miserable and everything I do feels like utter shit. Part of the way I keep myself going is through outside encouragement. Don’t ever hesitate.

2) Don’t let bitter people alter your trajectory by telling you that you can’t do something. Chances are they couldn’t do it and that’s why they’re saying you can’t. You can. Or you can at least try, and at that point you’ve already beat them. Who was it that said you win by sticking around? I hold those words close to my heart. I plan to stick around. Stick around with me ...

3) Never compromise your ethics,

especially for matters of truth. As much as your memories are the sum of you, so is your ethical code. Hold onto your ethics as much as you hold onto truth. Be strong (and sure) enough to weather the fallout of a painful truth, if told for benevolent purpose.

4) Remember this: mean people are the villains in the story—the landsharks, the abusers, the corrupt, the dreamkillers. You can't be a good person and an asshole at the same time. The latter negates the former. Draw a line in the sand. Pick a side.

Life is Short and Death is Forever

1) Remember: one day everyone you know will die. Spend as much time with them as you can and make sure that time counts. Don't stare at your phone when you're together. It might be the last time you see them.

2) Often when I'm lying in bed at 4am unable to sleep, spiraling some dark and catastrophic thought through my head, I stop and think, "No, you're alive. Right NOW you're alive. One day you'll be dead. You are alive. Be happy about that even if that's all you've got." It works. Not always, and it doesn't fix what I'm freaked out about, but it works enough.

3) Life is short and death is forever. Sit quietly and eat breakfast and watch the rain.

4) Life is short and death is forever. Give

your heart to an idea.

5) Life is short and death is forever. Stop buying bigger and bigger TV screens.

6) Life is short and death is forever. Buy a record instead of booze. Buy a book. You might own that record or book forever. You won't remember the drinks you bought a week later.

7) The goal is to live as long and as well as you can. Enough awful, bitter people want you to lose so they can say, "I told you so." Don't give them the satisfaction. Life is short and death is forever.

On List-making and the Importance of an Arsenal When Your Life is Under an Avalanche of Horseshit

It's important to make a collection of true things and keep them close for when you really need them. I have an arsenal—or maybe a toolbox—of books, records, movies, ideas, quotes, memories, photos, letters, emails, etc, that I trust, and I know which ones to go to when I'm not doing well. Or sometimes I forget. I forget and I fumble the fuck around and knock my head against the wall and then (sometimes) it comes back to me and I return to my toolbox.

Mine is something like: art made by my god-sons, good Mexican food, my photo albums, *A Moveable Feast*, Neutral Milk Hotel, The Locust, Youthmovies, pasta, Sophie Scholl's "I choose my own way to burn" essay, a letter someone wrote me about my book *Caveworld*, tequila, Yukio Hashi, a few songs from Les Mis,

Faulkner, Springsteen, the movie *Frida*, among so many others ...

The important part is to collect these things and to know which things work for which situations. You don't knock a nail in with a screwdriver.

Same goes for people. If you're lucky enough to have good people in your life, get to know them well, and figure out who you should turn to at any given moment.

Some people will give it to you straight. Some will hold your hand when you need it most. That's the great thing about people—we all have different magic. Being useful (and there) for other people is one of the most noble things you can do.

You Might Succeed, but You Won't Win

Hold onto your gentleness. You can be a warrior and hold onto that gentle part you were born with. Gentleness and strength are not mutually exclusive—especially in America we're dealing with a very ungentle population. Our culture is one that's wary of moderation in any sense. We want everything and if we're not given it we'll rip it out of someone else's hands. This is not how you win. You might succeed, but you won't win.

These Shitty Dark Ages

Don't let the world tell you that you're too small or too poor or too anything else to make a difference. Modern culture, internet haters, and capitalism want to marginalize you, kick your legs from under you, slap your face, pathologize you, and put you in (what they think is) your place. Always push back against this. Even if something isn't possible we need to keep trying. It's how the species will progress and humankind needs to move out of these dark shitty ages, post haste.

The Most Basic Tip that Pretty Much No One I Know Follows

It's important to know what's going on in the world in order to navigate the hard times we're living in, but you have to give yourself time away from the news. Remember: this is not the full story of what's happening on our planet. Of course there are awful things everywhere and you need to know about them and do your best to help, but there are also wonderful things, kind things, selflessness, and real love. Those things don't make for good ratings. War does, pain too, death, corruption, fear, scandal. Make sure you're finding the good things too. If you can't outweigh the dark with light, at least learn a balancing act.

On “Doing”

1) It's important to disconnect, and even more important to learn how to stop feeling guilty about it. When you're faced with heavy shit 24/7 you have to find ways to unplug and do something absolutely stupid and meaningless.

Do something fundamentally dumb. It doesn't have to change the world. You won't remember half the shit you did in 2020 this time next year. Don't beat yourself up about it. When it's time to do something big and important you'll know. (Or you'll know after you did it.)

2) Read the news and read social media, but don't read social media for news. Social media is its own thing. Know the difference. Chances are you're wasting too much of your time with social media.

3) Accept that you can't force yourself to be happy. Happiness comes from switching out the shitty parts of your life

for better things.

4) Most social media influencers will make your life worse if you pay too much attention to them. They're not even living the standard they're selling. Fuck those people. Theirs is a fake or at least wildly unrealistic world. Don't set your standards by it.

5) Doing something, however small, is better than doing nothing.

6) Most things mean nothing. It's okay. Be gentle with yourself and others. Try your best to help people and have a good time. If you can be helpful and have fun as often as possible, you're on the right track.

7) Give yourself some credit. Chances are you're probably doing more than you know.

Outro

I've been thinking a lot about the Rilo Kiley song "A Better Son / Daughter." If you're anything like me, it's one of those songs you hear and instantly GET. From the troubled opening line to its triumphant fuck-you blaze-of-glory ending, it felt as if it were written for me.

Where it really gets me is here:

"And sometimes when you're on, you're really fucking on

And your friends they sing along and they love you.

But the lows are so extreme that the good seems fucking cheap

And it teases you for weeks in its absence."

That's how life has always been for me. High peaks and the deepest valleys. The

vast polarities and the swinging extremes of sweet goodness and the awful dark.

As it builds toward the end it gets hopeful but realistically so:

“Your ship may be coming in.

You’re weak, but not giving in.”

Here Jenny Lewis doesn’t sing “your ship IS coming in” because presupposing something such as that would be insulting to the person she’s singing to.

It’s like how people will tell you, “Ohhhh, it’ll get better.” Thanks, but that’s not a true statement. No one can see the future. Predicting it for someone (even with good intentions) is not helpful.

See, for some people it never gets better. Some (many) die alone—defeated, dreams crushed, plans thwarted. They reach their penultimate moment feeling

as if they are a complete and abject failure. (Whether it's true or not is another discussion; look at Melville or Vincent Van Gogh).

It doesn't always get better, but it MAY get better. False hope is a poisonous dish. You can help someone out without lying to them or throwing baseless platitudes in their face.

I don't consider myself a positive person. (Anyway, like a friend recently reminded me, positivity can be used as a form of gaslighting. Think about it.) Jenny's lyrics talk about positivity that hurts; about faking it until you make it. Is that healthy? Maybe not, but it's realistic. One of the things that lures me in with "A Better Son / Daughter" is that it's realistic. Give me a fight song with a little frank realism, maybe some contradictory moments (because we're all contradictory as fuck) and do so with beautiful language and I'm IN. I'm so in

that the song (or book, movie, poem, whatever) becomes a part of my fabric.

That's where art gets universal. Of course real universality is bullshit. No statement in art is true to everyone everywhere. BUT certain art resonates with enough people that it becomes a sort of rumbling collective anthem; it affects people in a true, direct manner. And it helps them. It leaves them fortified; gives them courage and spirit and more confidence than they had before. Good art can build morale and morale is one of the most expensive rare elements out there. It's a precious commodity these days.

That's what we're all looking for right now—a push to get us out of bed, to give us enough energy to get dressed and do something with our day, make something of our lives, not just take up space and rot on the vine like a flavorless grape.

So, thanks for reading.

Hope you're doing better than okay out there.