

The Last Word™

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When the book broke

Memory...All alone in the moonlight...

Because Ronald Reagan stole your Social Security benefits you had coming, you need to find a whole new career like you're 18 again. So I've been studying Python as if my ass got bitten off in public (as a wise man would say).

Discovering Python brings back fond memories of my youth when I learned Atari BASIC. But one day, the book broke.

This is a story I've touched on before, but in less detail. When I was growing up, we bought an Atari 800. This was my main computer for 12 years. For programming, I used it even longer. This was the computer that had a booger flung down inside of it. Personal computing back then meant you should have some BASIC knowhow.

One afternoon, I was working on a little progie-wogie that used formulas from the celebrated Atari BASIC Reference Manual. I don't know why. I didn't even know what the formulas were for. I was using them just to be using them. If I knew why, I wouldn't have told anyone why. Wimpy people don't get to know these things.

One of the formulas instantaneously produced an error message. It turned out it was because the formula in the manual had either an extra or missing parentheses. I didn't know where to delete or add a parentheses to make the formula work.

So I did something really cool. I hurled the Atari BASIC Reference Manual across the den with all my might! What a sight to see!

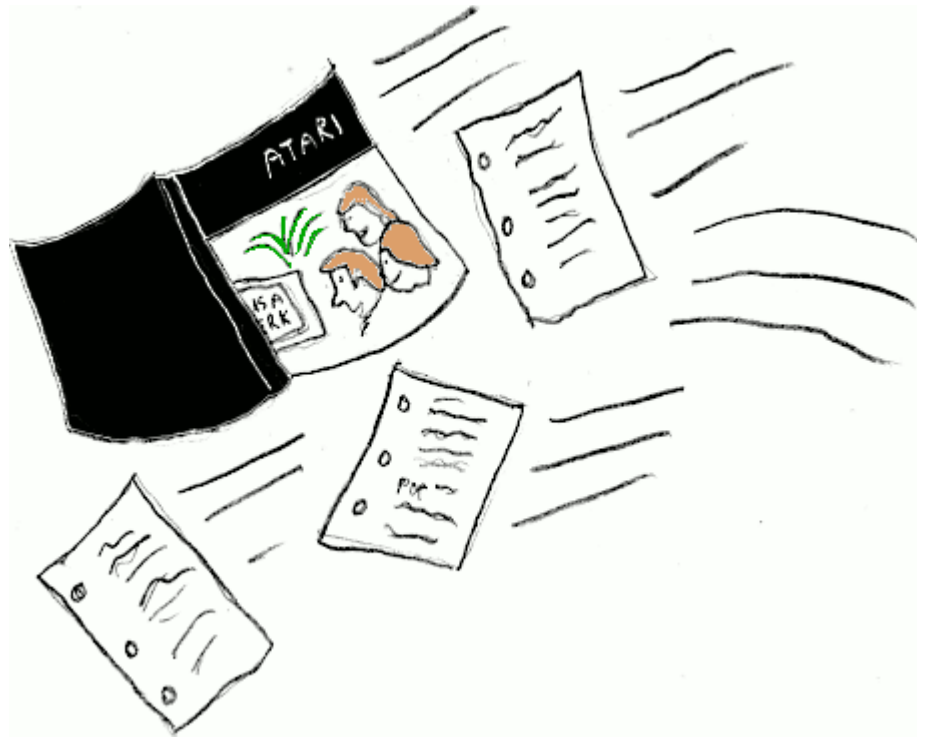
Now, remember, the manual was bound in a cheap 3-ring binder style. The rings didn't even close all the way. I once noticed that someone had etched "Mondale '84" on the back cover, but that wasn't the issue here—though I will give credit for backing the right candidate. We had already reattached some of the pages using those little round stickers, and they still kept tearing. The manual was too important to throw away.

When I threw the manual, the pages went flying everywhere! They landed all over the room!

The best part is that I came up with a huge list of things I was going to raise hell with Atari about in a letter. Near the top of the list was the feared "two-line lockup bug" that would make the computer freeze up and lose all your work. This list also included the fragility of the Atari BASIC Reference Manual. It had fallen apart like this once before without much prodding. I wrote in the letter that throwing it across the den wasn't the first time "the book broke." I don't remember if I ever actually mailed this letter.

Atari did make sturdier copies of the manual but didn't let us have one. One day, we were walking through the computer department of a store and found an Atari being sold that came with a properly bound version of the manual. It was exactly the same except for the type of binding. Atari let a select few have this edition, while everyone else was stuck knee deep in the binder hoopla.

It's sort of like how they made a new version of BASIC that supposedly corrected the lockup



bug but wouldn't send it to customers. Apparently, however, that version introduced new bugs in its place.

All of this was around the time of the *De Re Atari* brouhaha. Every book and magazine about Atari BASIC told you to simply consult *De Re Atari* for important information you needed for your program. It was like the '80s version of "reinstall Windows" in that it was useless advice that self-ordained "experts" always gave. We looked at every bookstore and library for *De Re Atari* and could never find it. It turns out that it had gone out of print—yet we were being told to buy it anyway.

These days, you can find reprints of *De Re Atari* for free online—now that nobody needs it.

I never threw away the pages of the Atari Basic Reference Manual. I kept all the loose pages and cover, but they were all widely scattered in different boxes. Suspiciously, I haven't seen them since the home invasions 15 years ago. I bet the burglars are beating off to the ATASCII character map right now.

Your old heroes are racists and monsters

The Democratic Leadership Council—the establishment wing of the Democratic Party—hasn't been this mad since Abraham Lincoln freed their slaves.

The smug careerists who make up the party leadership have earned every bit of scorn we lob their way. Nobody else can raise so much money only to be defeated by a party led by a game show host who became a twice-impeached President. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee raised all that dough only to refuse to run a House candidate in our district. Much of what the party raised for the presidential race was squandered on a giant blue sphere in Las Vegas with Kamala Harris's face on it—like the telescreen in George Orwell's *1984*.

Why should anyone give them money when they either misspend it or won't even run candidates?

The party hasn't fired anyone for this political malpractice, which proves the whole party has become a money laundering scam.

Just as bad as this grift is the deterioration of the party's policy agenda, as the DLC has taken over the party. Instead of the unassailable populism that drew us into the party after Ronald Reagan's reactionary misadventures, today's Democratic Party supports ideas that are unbelievably fucking stupid. These ideas are so authoritarian and extreme as to be disqualifying.

After losing the election, they've made numerous racist online posts. As with the media cheering child abuse under the guise of fighting COVID, they're saying the quiet part of what they truly feel out loud. A recent online post from a Democratic supporter said:

"Fuck Latinos and Arabs. There. I said it. Hope you all get deported and banned."

Another self-described Democrat said:

"I'm looking forward to Latinos and Muslims getting the reckoning they deserve. ..."

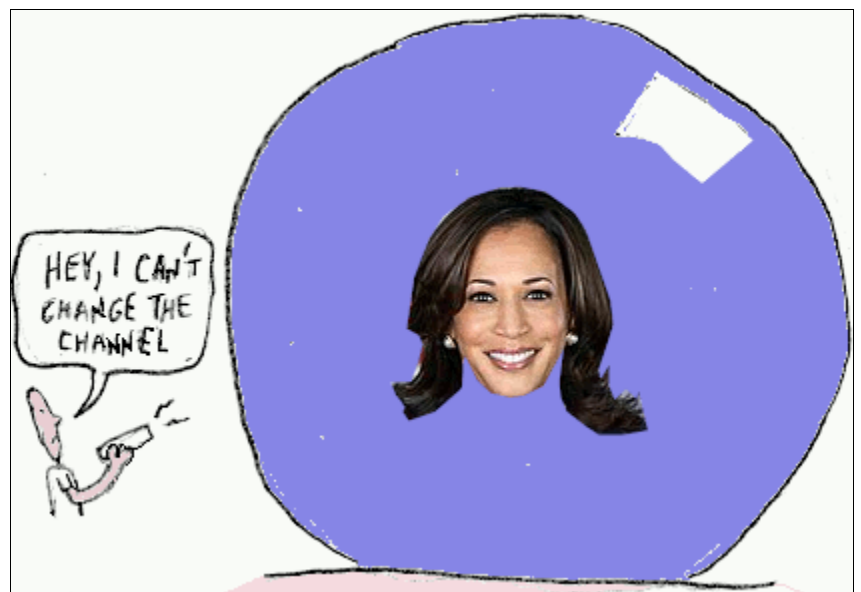
"Time for democrats to focus on white people."

Another said:

"I hope Gaza gets turned into a parking lot."

Still another:

"ICE is going to love to see my incoming calls."



This racism is not an outlier among party leaders in recent years. In the 2020 primary, Bernie Sanders won Nevada thanks to the Latino vote—but the party's response was to ignore Nevada and

other states and say that only the segregationists in South Carolina and Virginia mattered. Virginia lived down to expectations in 2023 when Democrats there refused to renominate some of their best legislators and replaced them with psychopathic maniacs.

We were horrified when Donald Trump won in 2016, but on some domestic and international issues, some Democrats later managed to set the bar even lower than he did. That took effort. Never in a billion years did I expect it. They also kept digging in when proven wrong. A 2008 Yale study said using facts to rebut falsehoods by right-wingers only made them cling to their myths even more. Trying to educate them made them dumber. The report used the Bush regime's false charge that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction in 2003 as an example. Another example was Bush's claim that tax cuts *increase* government revenue—which is impossible unless you're a magician. Democrats today are essentially Bush-era right-wingers, as they double down when proven wrong. They have all the emotional regulation of the frustrated kid who was debunked and then exaggerated all that was wrong in life and regularly ranted about it.

There's always been a tiny cadre of windbags who we were happy to just ignore who tried branding themselves as great forward thinkers. An example I used recently was someone at NKU who crammed professionally printed tracts into our hands claiming that schools were teaching too many informational works instead of fiction, and that it was part of a grand conspiracy to ruin society. They completely glossed over the scandal of overmedication of children. Similar themes were spread by the mainstream press, which might seem at odds with their usual positioning, unless you see that these ideas are embedded in almost every major institution in the land.

Any person who has even a shred of common sense is absolutely fed up.

Never have heroes

What does it say when you realize your heroes were living a lie?

You wouldn't expect your favorite commentators to back up your stances on *every* fine point. But it's a different story when they take positions that are completely disqualifying from them being trusted at all. They've also resorted to name-calling and bullying—even against their own fans, who they subsequently lost.

I've read a lot of books on current affairs. I acquired some books around 2019 or early 2020 that I was so happy to have, and I couldn't wait to find the time and energy to read them.

But after that, these pundits really let us down.

I never got around to reading these books. Our former heroes stabbed America in the back. These books—along with some I had already read—were unloaded onto a Little Free Library so they wouldn't hog my shelf space. Some of them were brand new copies of brand new books, but I never read them, because I knew it would be just empty words.

I repeat, their stances today are disqualifying. They never seemed to hold these positions before—but now they've figured out where the money is, and that's more important to them. If they had these stances earlier, why did they advocate for the precise opposite positions at the time?

Former fans of these commentators say they feel like a partner in a marriage who is taking the kids and leaving because the other partner is abusing them. The pundits respond by badmouthing these old followers—like the marriage partner who stays behind and talks shit about their spouse.

Last month, I mentioned Keith Olbermann, but another person just like him is Jim Hightower. It's shocking how much he started insulting his audience once he knew where the money was. Suitably enough, this started right around the time his mustache got shorter.

Most of the commentators who abandoned us have only ever cared about money, because if they cared about much else, they wouldn't have sold out and let down their fans. They certainly love money more than they love their country. It's also clear they like money more than any desire to fight the growing militant racism of their copartisans. They *damn sure* care more about money than about us little old fans who supported them in all the years before.



Unlike party moguls and media apparatchiks who we already knew were idiots, there's no way in hell some of these analysts believe their later bullshit deep down. But this only shows what sellouts they are. There was a brief time just after the Bush recession when I was so strapped for dough that I tried to make money with this zine. Throughout the 2010s, I also tried to stay afloat with other projects. But when I realized I couldn't make money by appealing to my fan base, who didn't have any money to spend on my work, I didn't sell out. Instead, I stuck by what I believed—even though I knew I wouldn't make money from it. That's called integrity.

Also, I investigate and come up with solutions. I thought some of the books I did read were good, but looking back, they had a shortage of solutions. I've endorsed using antitrust laws to abolish the hated system of credit scores. I've urged requiring schools to abide by warranties governing the quality of education they provide. These are among actual *solutions* I've had.

But *who the fuck* would trust solutions from talking heads who sold out as spectacularly as they did?

Incidentally, some of what they've said in recent times is not only extreme or childish but also factually wrong. They've spread the false claim that the Koch network funded folks who spoke out against COVID totalitarianism. For one thing, I'm still waiting for my Koch check. For another, the Koch machine *supported* the failed lockdowns. They helped fund a study through the University of Kentucky in support of these measures. I admit I was suspicious of bad actors exploiting our side of the issue, but most opposition to COVID tyranny came from the grassroots. The false claim of Koch involvement is like when the AP accused those who exposed the environmental damage caused by the 2023 train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, of being paid off by the Kremlin.

So many legacies in tatters.

This story about a newspaper isn't hot off the press

This is yet another funny story about my classmate when I was a high school junior who constantly goofed off and entertained us. This is a tribute, if you will.

When the school year started, one of my teachers from another class warned me about this student, saying I might get distracted because he goofed off so much. My classmate lived up to this soaring promise.

I just now remembered an incident that took place on one of my very first days of junior year. Our main teacher was talking to the class about something. I glanced behind me and saw the aforementioned student grab a newspaper off the teacher's desk. Then he sat there reading it while the teacher was talking, as if to signify how bored he was.

He held it aloft in front of his face and rustled the pages loudly.

Then the teacher got really mad.

Needless to say, it was pretty damn funny!

I think there was one other time when this student decided to just lay on the floor. But I might be confusing that with an incident in another class involving a different student. I also remember my classmate just getting up and walking around the classroom. There might have been a time when he was sent to the in-school suspension room next door and made so much noise that the classroom was evacuated. But that might have been me—after I got completely fed up with the school. Actually, I think it was both of us, but on separate occasions.

By then, school was really just a daycare for teenagers. We didn't actually *learn* anything.

This student was among several who made such an impression that I still talk about them all these years later. You may know that there was a girl who was in my class that year for only *one day* who I still talk about because of her behavior that day. There were several schoolmates from around 2nd or 3rd grade who were also memorable. I thought a couple of them were jerks back then, but I'd love to meet up with them now and talk about the good old days. They were viewed negatively in their day,



but the historic assessment of them is generally positive.

Hot chocolate got wasted



Because they've refused to leave their home for the past 5 years, the laptop underpants crowd has everything delivered. Groceries, restaurant meals, you name it! Not bubble gum—as they're afraid of bubble gum—but everything else. But don't just assume someone is part of the boxer brigade just because they got something delivered. They might live too far away from businesses, or they might be sidelined by a long-term health condition. So I'm giving the star of this story the benefit of the doubt.

In this narrative, a man ordered hot chocolate from Starbucks and had it delivered to his home by an Uber Eats bicyclist.

It was all going smoothly until the cyclist brang the hot chocolate. As soon as the customer grabbed the bag, the bottom of the bag broke. The cup of hot chocolate fell through the sack and spilled all over his floor.



He posted about the experience on Twitter. At the end of the post, he observed, "This is Trump's America."

I don't think he was actually blaming Donald Trump for the torn bag. I think that statement was just a metaphor. Despite all of Trump's many failures, I somehow doubt he snuck into Starbucks and poked holes in all their bags. On the other hand, it's fair to blame a long succession of political leaders for the incident, because the economic disasters of recent decades have probably forced companies to use inferior materials for bags.

The post was accompanied by a photo of the man's floor coated with hot chocolate.

This sounds absurdly like the guy in college talking about unruly imps tampering with the tobacco in his pipe. It's also like a story we found online in which someone smuggled an entire Panda Express meal into a public library and dropped the whole thing on the floor.



Comic books! Baseball cards! Mad magazines! Game day bucket go boom!

Comics got ru! Comics got ru! Nerrrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp! Nerrrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp! Nerrrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp! Nerrrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp! Kablammo!

Because this is a day ending in *y*, we're going to regale you with more stories we gleaned from the public Internet about rare comic books and baseball cards getting destroyed in stupid ways.

We found a thread initiated by someone talking about their inadvertent destruction of an early Spider-Man comic. When they put it back in the protective envelope after reading it, it got caught on the adhesive tape and torn. Someone replied saying that when they were growing up, they were reading an X-Men comic book at school, when some kid "walked up, grabbed it and ripped it clean in half." The teacher refused to punish the attacker, because it wasn't a "real" book. This commenter also said a guy selling a rare Hulk book at a garage sale got in a big argument about how much it was worth, and burned a hole in the cover with a cigarette.

One commenter said they went to an antique shop where they found a used condom smashed inside the front cover of a comic book. Another commenter said the postal service ruined a rare Spider-Girl book by folding it in half. Another threw up on a Fantastic Four comic.

Another commenter said they went to a comic convention in New York where a man tried to buy a mint copy of the first issue of *Mad* magazine. As he was removing it from the envelope, he tore the cover in two as it got caught on the adhesive tape. After ruining the priceless magazine, he did not buy it.

Another person said their local comic shop was once robbed by a masked trio. The robbers stole over a million dollars in rare comics. As they were getting away, they panicked at an inspection sticker checkpoint, threw all the comics out their window, and drove over them. Another commenter said a former girlfriend threw an entire comic collection all over her yard after an argument. Another spilled coffee on an Iron Man comic, and another ruined a comic book by spilling barbecue sauce.

Another said their mom used scissors to cut their Ghost Rider comic that had a glow-in-the-dark cover because they wouldn't stop playing video games. Another bought a huge batch of vintage comics on a rainy day. They shoved the books inside their shirt to try to keep them dry, "but they all got ruined."

A commenter said they had a collection of every *Heavy Metal* magazine between 1977 and the mid-'90s, and the upstairs apartment leaked onto them: "It ruined so many."

In this video, a man talks about how his grandfather's rare comic books from 80 years ago were reduced to pulp when the basement flooded. The magic word – *ruined* – is again used...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qnc2osb9geM>

He figured out which books were lost by noting which ones listed on his grandpa's file cards could not be accounted for. They just happened to be the most valuable comics he had: "All the Batman books, almost \$10,000 worth, gone."

Where there's ruined comic books, there's also ruined baseball cards. In this clip, a man discloses the fact



that his kids ruined his antique baseball cards by scribbling all over them with a pen...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DtVt1jUAQzM>

In this video, a man completely demolishes a 1909 Frank Bowerman card by trying to remove it from inside a lamination sheet...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wVANjriP6rg>

Lots of collectibles went wastage bastage!

Shalala picks a fight and loses



Donna Shalala has been a national embarrassment since the days when we pounded out this zine on a typewriter, all through her vanity congressional stint, and into the present day. What a career!

Donald Trump has announced only a few appointees for his second term who might actually be good. The few picks who might be good include Tulsi Gabbard, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and Jay Bhattacharya. Most of the rest are stinkers.

But what does Shalala have to say about Kennedy? Just recently, Shalala posted on Twitter...

"The nomination of RFKjr for HHS by President-elect Trump is shocking. Kennedy is an unqualified, know nothing. He is dangerous to the health and well being of every American."

That's the "vote blue no matter who" crowd talking. Yet they spoke ill of Kennedy even though he was a Democrat before he became an independent not long ago.

So—after that spam post inexplicably filled my Twitter feed—I replied to Shalala...

"You're an unqualified know-nothing."

Gotcha on that, Donna!

The Democrats just sacrificed 2 of their best senators just to save their resources to install one new senator who already had a record of incompetence and corruption. Now they're trying to reject Kennedy and Gabbard while planning to automatically confirm Tea Party demigod Marco Rubio and 4 of Trump's judicial nominees.

A bubble gum mystery!

Love a good mystery?

I once had a mysterious encounter with a wad of bubble gum. This took place at my old apartment in the winter of 1995-96.

The weather was bitter cold. The heat was on full blast. This may have been the same winter when the kid upstairs threw a brand new toy down the steps and the man got mad. My college career

was in shambles. And I was huddling under blankies in the bedroom to stave off the chill.

As I was getting situated, I felt something sticky on the edge of one of my blankets. Can you guess what it was? Here's a hint: You can blow bubbles with it.

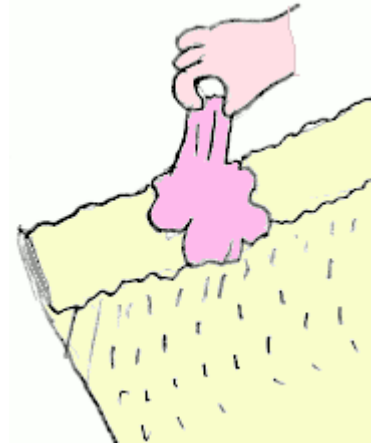
It was a *huuuuumongous* wad of pink beegee! It was gigantic. And it was fresh too.

How in the Wide, Wide World Of Sports did it get there? It wasn't even bubbling season!

The blanket was gummed up good! You couldn't just peel it off like the Gum Fighter in the Hubba Bubba ads. So I grabbed a pair of scissors and cut off the afflicted piece of the blanket.

To this day, I have no idea how the gum got there. This is even more of a mystery than the time in high school when I found some of my missing belongings on a teacher's desk. The real mystery there is that it was items that disappeared *from home*.

Better get Columbo on the case!



Flickr flickers out

The government micromanages everything we do. Freedom of choice and movement are distant memories. But while government gets bigger in its malicious limits on civil liberties, it only gets smaller in its benign activities like domestic investment. As a rule, those who support restricting civil liberties also support slashing public investment. Bet on it.

I've spent almost 25 years building my road photos page only to see it knocked down over and over again. To save space on my personal site, I stored the photos on free photo sites. But at least 2 of those sites have gone down or limited their functionality. I don't know of any new such sites. I don't want to hear any bullshit about how free photo sites aren't viable. The fact that they existed before proves they're viable. The far right's catatonic bleatings can be debunked as soon as they open their traps.

I still needed to keep my personal site from running out of space, so I got a paid account on Flickr last year. My site would load my photos from Flickr.

But now Flickr has disabled this—even though I'm paying for it. Now, when you try remotely linking to a photo, a message comes up: "Request forbidden by administrative rules."

I put in a support request on Flickr, and the response was as bad as the "reinstall Windows" spiel. Flickr said to clear the cache and cookies on my browser. This didn't work, of course. Clearing the cache is another one of these catch-alls that various websites recommend but rarely works. They didn't admit what the real problem was.

Blocking remote linking is an antitrust violation. Period. Full stop. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200. Do not even blow a bubble. But with the government's antitrust division continuing to gather dust, it's clear nothing is going to be done about it.

Because of this, I have to completely revamp my road photos page. *Revamp* is a funny word. It sounds like it has something to do with vampires. But what's happening now isn't funny. You spend half your life building a website only to see it taken away.

The result of this though is that Flickr will see more of its own bandwidth used up, because now I have a reason to replace my photos there with hi-res originals, as I don't have to fit the photos into a box on my own site. Flickr is penny wise but pound foolish.

The Internet wasn't designed to be a corporation. It used to be more peer-to-peer. The government pumps up the budget for disastrous overseas military adventurism year after disgusting year, even as the Pentagon flunks one audit after another. So I'm sure the government can afford to invest in rebuilding the Internet back to its decentralized roots where folks didn't have to rely on huge commercial enterprises. The era of "we can't afford it" should be over.

The Internet is actually less advanced and less functional now than at any other time in the past 30 years. What a complete waste of resources. We know it can be better, because it's already been better. "We the people" are supposed to be the boss. Not market fascism or a handful of conglomerates.

Mob rule

This is a warning to the public, but I haven't been able to confirm all the details.

Private equity firms and hedge funds are gobbling up residential properties, and some of these corporations are linked with organized crime. Some of these companies—who have destroyed affordable housing and worsened homelessness by converting properties into luxury homes and expelling existing residents—have reportedly hired a greater Cincinnati company to do various kinds of work for them. According to online reports, this company won't even do all the work they're hired to do—and is closely connected to the Mob.

The private equity firms put up with it because they're in cahoots with them. It's like the abusive psychiatric facility that was conniving with insurers to keep people locked up who were perfectly sane.

Next time your public officials rubber-stamp a gentrification land grab, remember that the Mob may be benefiting.

It's a conspiracy!

Some 3½ years after the pandemic stage of COVID ended, pandemic authoritarianism still forms the entire identity of...well, pandemic authoritarians.

Recently, the trends column misappeared from my Twitter feed, and I needed to get it back. It eventually came back on its own, but first, I went on Reddit's Twitter forum for help. Considering how worthless customer support is at every other website these days, I knew Twitter wouldn't be any better, so that's why I went on Reddit.

I asked one simple question. That's all. There was nothing politically charged or controversial in my post.

But—naturally—some right-winger complained that “this guy is a *very* regular poster talking about pandemic conspiracy theories.” (I'm using the traditional definition of the term *right-winger*. If the jackboot fits, wear it. And if it feels good, put it on.)

They wouldn't have known I posted about COVID if they hadn't gone looking on other forums. I never posted anything about it on the Twitter forum. This respondent went searching for trouble and tried to pick a fight over it. My post about Twitter contained absolutely nothing that would be expected to provoke such a response, so I assume that poster tries starting fights with other people too.

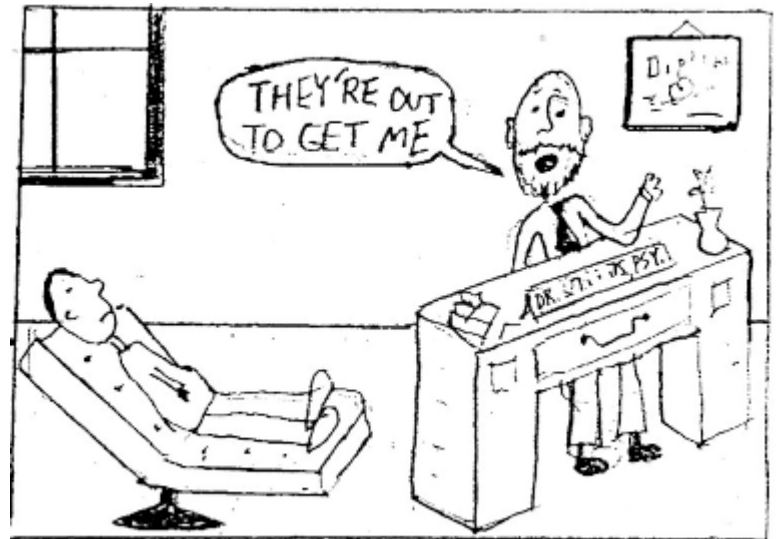
Naturally, no meaningful replies were posted, because Reddit isn't exactly genius central.

At one time, even people who were on the wrong side politically would occasionally talk about something other than their political views. You could actually carry on a conversation with them about baseball or their favorite movies. Maybe they were less extreme than the Tea Party, which has essentially evolved into the People's CDC, or the neo-Nazis who griped nonstop that it was too easy to get on disability, but those were small numbers of people whose mouths outsized the rest of their existence.

But now, everything is about confrontation.

A slickery slope

Our study of Python is very intense. Recall what your high school classes were like. That's how intense it is. The difference is that we're actually *learning* something from our Python study. It's like what our high school courses would have been like if they were actually taught competently. We've been studying Python morning, noon, and night.



Perhaps the most common expression as we study Python is “Aaugh!” At least I think that’s how it’s spelled. When you saw that word in a *Peanuts* strip, you could only guess how it was pronounced. This expression is invoked because the Windows command prompt usually quits when your Python program encounters an error, so you can’t see what your error is. You have to run your program from the Python module instead, which is ridiculously slow. This has wasted countless hours.

I’ve searched online for a way to keep the command prompt open, but no solutions have been found. Everyone on support forums these days would rather dance around and sing, “Guh-pwipe! Guh-pwipe!” Apparently, Microsoft used to allow the command prompt to stay open, but later versions of Windows have of course scrapped this useful feature.

As for this “Aaugh!” business, here’s what I’m talking about: When I was growing up, this word was sometimes uttered in frustration by adults. I began imitating it to make a point. One day, I was searching through a box full of papers for something, and as I was holding up the papers with one hand, they all tumbled over. “Aaugh!” I declared.

To give you an idea of what it sounded like, there was a commercial for N’ice lozenges circa 1983 that started with a similar sound. You may recall that N’ice was one of those over-the-counter products that didn’t do a damn thing, so of course they were widely available...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5kWTOPIG2Y>

Here’s a synopsis of that commersh in case you’re afraid a clown might jump out of your screen and pie you in your finery: A man is playing cards with his wife. He has a sore throat, so he angrily throws his cards down, rubs his neck, and says, “Aaugh!” After devouring a N’ice, the man says, “Feels slickery!”

My “Aaugh!” wasn’t *exactly* the same as in the N’ice ad. Mine had sort of a rising pitch, like a question, and it was longer.

Also, back when I was 10, we had a box of N’ice lozenges in the Horizon, which was a ridiculous place for them even if they were effective (which they weren’t).

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