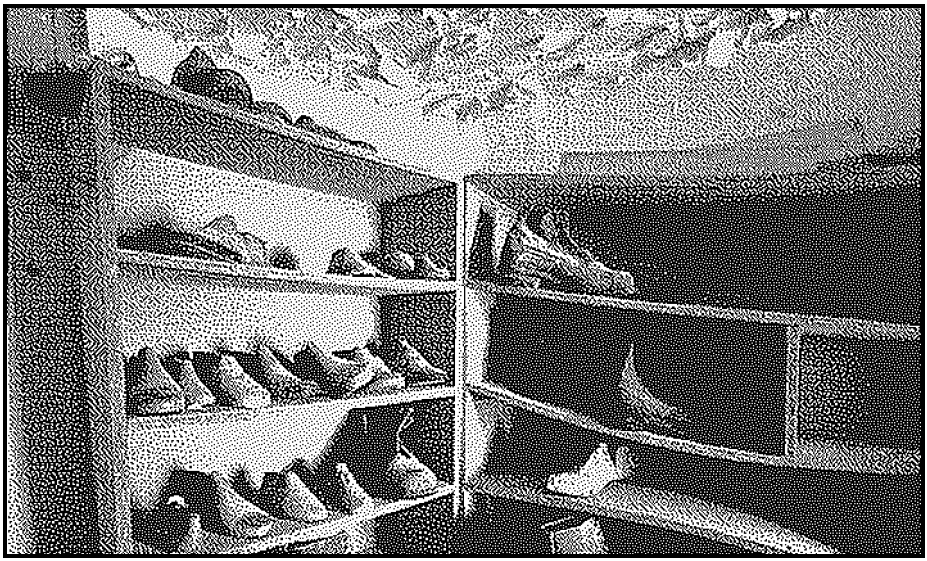
HOUDINI

September 2026, Part Two Free



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Staff

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//DNGN// A Maze of Lanterns

Read it online

By Staff
September 18, 2026

//DNGN// is HOUDINI's monthly dungeon synth and pulp-fiction pairing. This month: Ursula K. Le Guin's "Mazes" and "The Lantern Tapes" by Phantom Lantern.



Listen on Bandcamp

Mazes by Ursula K. Le Guin

I have tried hard to use my wits and keep up my courage, but I know now that I will not be able to withstand the torture any longer. My perceptions of time are confused, but I think it has been several days since I realised I could no longer keep my emotions under aesthetic control, and now the physical breakdown is also nearly complete. I cannot accomplish any of the greater motions. I cannot speak. Breathing, in this heavy foreign air, grows more difficult. When the paralysis reaches my chest I shall die: probably tonight.

The alien's cruelty is refined, yet irrational. If it intended all along to starve me, why not simply withhold food? But instead of that it gave me plenty of food, mountains of food, all the greenbud leaves I could possibly want. Only they were not fresh. They had been picked; they were dead; the element that makes them digestible to us was gone, and one might as well eat gravel. Yet there they were, with all the scent and

shape of greenbud, irresistible to my craving appetite. Not at first, of course. I told myself, I am not a child, to eat picked leaves! But the belly gets the better of the mind. After a while it seemed better to be chewing something, anything, that might still the pain and craving in the gut. So I ate, and ate, and starved. It is a relief, now, to be so weak I cannot eat. The same elaborately perverse cruelty marks all its behavior. And the worst thing of all is just the one I welcomed with such relief and delight at first: the maze. I was badly disoriented at first, after the trapping, being handled by a giant, being dropped into a prison; and this place around the prison is disorienting, spatially disquieting. The strange, smooth, curved wall-ceiling is of an alien substance and its lines are meaningless to me. So when I was taken up and put down, amidst all this strangeness, in a maze, a recognisable, even familiar maze, it was a moment of strength and hope after great distress. It seemed pretty clear that I had been put in the maze as a kind of test or investigation, that a first approach toward communication was being attempted. I tried to cooperate in every way. But it was not possible to believe for very long that the creature's purpose was to achieve communication.

It is intelligent, highly intelligent, that is clear from a thousand evidences. We are both intelligent creatures, we are both maze-builders: surely it would be quite easy to learn to talk together! If that were what the alien wanted. But it is not. I do not know what kind of mazes it builds for itself. The ones it made for me were instruments of torture.

The mazes were, as I said, of basically familiar types, though the walls were of that foreign material colder and smoother than packed clay. The alien left a pile of picked leaves in one extremity of each maze, I do not know why; it may be a ritual or superstition. The first maze it put me in was babyishly short and simple. Nothing expressive or even interesting could be worked out from it. The second, however, was a kind of simple version of the Ungated Affirmation, quite adequate for the reassuring, outreaching statement I wanted to make. And the last, the long maze, with seven corridors and nineteen connections, lent itself surprisingly well to the Maluvian mode, and indeed to almost all the New Expressionist techniques. Adaptations had to be made to the alien spatial understanding, but a certain quality of creativity arose precisely from the adaptations. I worked hard at the problem of that maze, planning all night long, re-imagining the links and spaces, the feints and pauses, the erratic, unfamiliar, and yet beautiful course of the True Run. Next day when I was

placed in the long maze and the alien began to observe, I performed the Eighth Maluvian in its entirety.

It was not a polished performance. I was nervous, and the spatio-temporal parameters were only approximate. But the Eighth Maluvian survives the crudest performance in the poorest maze. The evolutions in the ninth encatenation, where the "cloud" theme recurs so strangely transposed into the ancient spiralling motif, are indestructibly beautiful. I have seen them performed by a very old person, so old and stiff-jointed that he could only suggest the movements, hint at them, a shadow gesture, a dim reflection of the themes: and all who watched were inexpressibly moved. There is no nobler statement of our being. Performing, I myself was carried away by the power of the motions and forgot that I was a prisoner, forgot the alien eyes watching me; I transcended the errors of the maze and my own weakness, and danced the Eighth Maluvian as I have never danced it before.

When it was done, the alien picked me up and set me down in the first maze—the short one, the maze for little children who have not yet learned how to talk.

Was the humiliation deliberate? Now that it is all past, I see that there is no way to know. But it remains very hard to ascribe its behavior to ignorance.

After all, it is not blind. It has eyes, recognisable eyes. They are enough like our eyes that it must see somewhat as we do. It has a mouth, four legs, can move bipedally, has grasping hands, etc.; for all its gigantism and strange looks, it seems less fundamentally different from us, physically, than a fish. And yet, fish school and dance and, in their own stupid way, communicate!

The alien has never once attempted to talk with me. It has been with me, watched me, touched me, handled me, for days: but all its motions have been purposeful, not communicative. It is evidently a solitary creature, totally self-absorbed.

This would go far to explain its cruelty.

I noticed early that from time to time it would move its curious horizontal mouth in a series of fairly delicate, repetitive gestures, a little like someone eating. At first I thought it was jeering at me; then I wondered if it was trying to urge me to eat the indigestible fodder; then I wondered if it could be communicating labially. It seemed a limited and unhandy language for one so well provided with hands, feet, limbs, flexible spine, and all; but that would be like the creature's perversity, I thought. I studied

its lip motions and tried hard to imitate them. It did not respond. It stared at me briefly and then went away.

In fact, the only indubitable response I ever got from it was on a pitifully low level of interpersonal aesthetics. It was tormenting me with knob-pushing, as it did once a day. I had endured this grotesque routine pretty patiently for the first several days. If I pushed one knob I got a nasty sensation in my feet, if I pushed a second I got a nasty pellet of dried-up food, if I pushed a third I got nothing whatever. Obviously, to demonstrate my intelligence I was to push the third knob. But it appeared that my intelligence irritated my captor, because it removed the neutral knob after the second day. I could not imagine what it was trying to establish or accomplish, except the fact that I was its prisoner and a great deal smaller than it. When I tried to leave the knobs, it forced me physically to return. I must sit there pushing knobs for it, receiving punishment from one and mockery from the other. The deliberate outrageousness of the situation, the insufferable heaviness and thickness of this air, the feeling of being forever watched yet never understood, all combined to drive me into a condition for which we have no description at all. The nearest thing I can suggest is the last interlude of the Ten Gate Dream, when all the feint-ways are closed and the dance narrows in and in until it bursts terribly into the vertical. I cannot say what I felt, but it was a little like that. If I got my feet stung once more, or got pelted once more with a lump of rotten food, I would go vertical forever… I took the knobs off the wall (they came off with a sharp tug, like flower buds), laid them in the middle of the floor, and defecated on them.

The alien took me up at once and returned me to my prison. It had got the message, and had acted on it. But how unbelievably primitive the message had had to be! And the next day, it put me back in the knob room, and there were the knobs as good as new, and I was to choose alternate punishments for its amusement… Until then I had told myself that the creature was alien, therefore incomprehensible and uncomprehending, perhaps not intelligent in the same manner as we, and so on. But since then I have known that, though all that may remain true, it is also unmistakably and grossly cruel.

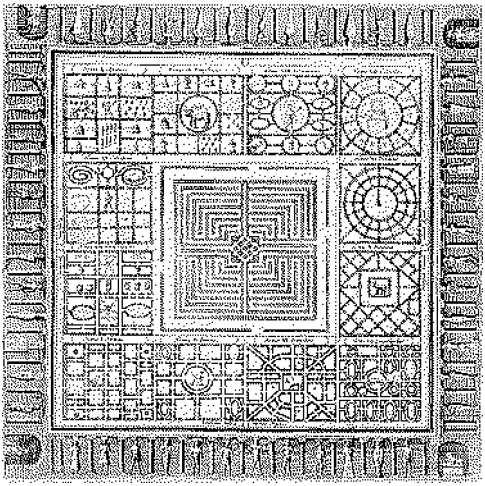
When it put me into the baby maze yesterday, I could not move. The power of speech was all but gone (I am dancing this, of course, in my mind; “the best maze is the mind,” the old proverb goes) and I simply crouched there, silent. After a while it took me out again, gently enough. There is the ultimate perversity of its behavior: it has never once touched me cruelly.

It set me down in the prison, locked the gate, and filled up the trough with inedible food. Then it stood two-legged, looking at me for a while.

Its face is very mobile, but if it speaks with its face I cannot understand it, that is too foreign a language. And its body is always covered with bulky, binding mats, like an old widower who has taken the Vow of Silence. But I had become accustomed to its great size, and to the angular character of its limb positions, which at first had seemed to be saying a steady stream of incoherent and mispronounced phrases, a horrible nonsense dance like the motions of an imbecile, until I realised that they were strictly purposive movements. Now I saw something a little beyond that, in its position. There were no words, yet there was communication. I saw, as it stood watching me, a clear signification of angry sadness—as clear as the Sembrian Stance. There was the same lax immobility, the bentness, the assertion of defeat. Never a word came clear, and yet it told me that it was filled with resentment,pity, impatience, and frustration. It told me it was sick of torturing me, and wanted me to help it. I am sure I understood it. I tried to answer. I tried to say, “What is it you want of me? Only tell me what it is you want.” But I was too weak to speak clearly, and it did not understand. It has never understood.

And now I have to die. No doubt it will come in to watch me die; but it will not understand the dance I dance in dying.

THE END.



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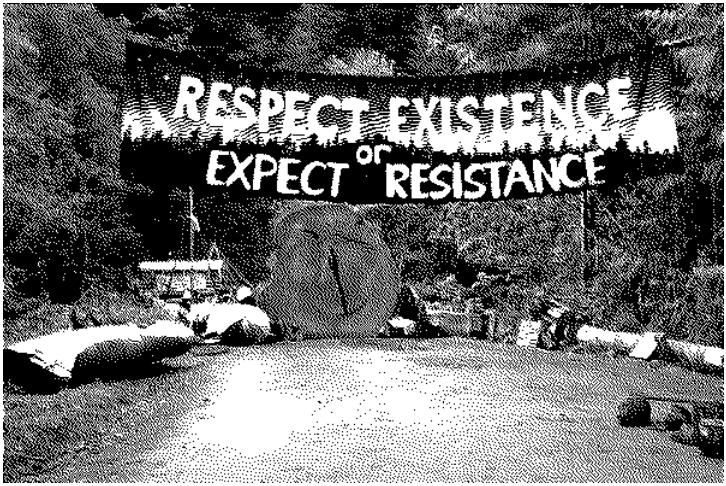
[IWW Archives] The Secret History of Tree Spiking

Read it online

By IWW Archives
September 20, 2026

Originally printed in the mid-1990s, Judi Bari shows us that we must ponder all outcomes before creating official stances and plans of attack. It is a cautious tale that every political organizer should take into account.

By Judi Bari - Anderson Valley Advertiser, February 17, 1993, and the Earth First! Journal, December 21, 1994; reprinted in Timber Wars, © 1994 Common Courage Press.



In May, 1987, sawmill worker George Alexander was nearly decapitated when a tree-spike shattered his sawblade at the Cloverdale Louisiana-Pacific mill in northern California.

This grisly accident sent shock waves through our community, and eventually led Northern California Earth First! to renounce tree spiking. Southern Oregon and Southern Willamette Earth First! joined us, as well as a few Earth First!ers from Stumptown, but that's all.

The rest of Earth First! still endorses spiking, and many of them even today react to our no-spiking policy by denouncing us as traitors and dismissing us as wimps, without ever considering the reasons for our actions. Because of this, because there are so many new Earth First!ers who don't know this history, I think it is time to re-examine the issue of tree-spiking. A few years ago, George Alexander and his wife Laurie agreed to talk to me about the 1987 incident. The following account is based on my conversation with them.

"I was the perfect victim," began George Alexander, "I was nobody." George, a life-time Mendocino County resident and son of an old-time Willits logger, was 23 years old and just married, with his wife Laurie three months pregnant at the time of the accident. George's job at the mill was called off-bearer. The off-bearer operates a huge band saw that makes the first rough cut on logs as they come into the mill, sectioning off slices of wood that will later be cut to standard lengths and planed for finished lumber.

Off-bearer is one of the most dangerous jobs in the mill. The saw that George Alexander worked on was sized for old-growth logs-52 feet around, with a ten-inch blade of high tensile steel. "That saw was so powerful that when you turned it off you could make three more cuts through a 20-foot log before it stopped," George told me. One of the dangers of working as off-bearer is that if the blade hits a hard knot or metal debris (from old fences, choker chains, nails, etc., embedded in the wood), the sawteeth can break. To protect against this, workers have to wear a heavy face mask and stay on the alert, checking each log as it goes through.

George knew the job was dangerous, but he also was confident of his skill. "I always figured that if the blade ever hit me, it would hit me on the urn." he said. He knew every sound the saw made, and could tell by listening when something was going wrong. He also knew to look for the tell-tale black stains that usually show up on the smooth surface of the de-barked logs if metal is present in the wood.

Although George Alexander was an LP employee, he was no company man. Louisiana-Pacific had earned his disrespect long ago through the callous way they treat their employees. "We're not even people to them," he said. "All they care about is production." The perfect example of this L-P management attitude was Dick Edwards, the day shift foreman. Edwards was always after everyone, but he seemed to go out of his way to harass George. In the months before the tree spiking,

Edwards would often stand on the catwalk overlooking George's work station with LP Western Division head Joe Wheeler, just watching George work.

L-P has never been known to spend too much time maintaining equipment or worrying about worker safety. But in the weeks preceding the tree spiking incident, conditions had gotten worse than usual. The bandsaw blade was wobbling when it ran, and cracks had begun to appear in it. But when George and other workers complained, Edwards shined them on, saying the new blades were not in yet, and they would have to ma1ke do. "That blade was getting so bad," said George, "That I almost didn't go to work that day."

Normally when a big tree is sawed, they start from the outside and square off the edges first. But the tree that George was sawing on May 8, 1987 was a 12-inch pecker-pole, and because it was so small he took the first cut down the middle. Halfway through the 20-foot log, the saw hit a 60-penny nail. "That nail must have been recently placed and countersunk," George told me. He had checked the log when he started cutting it and had seen no sign of the metal. And because he hit the nail square-on, there was no warning sound. "Usually there's a high-pitched metal sound and you have time to get out of the way," explained George. "This time I didn't hear nothing but 'BOOM!'"

The next thing he knew, George was lying on the floor covered with his own blood. "I knew I was dying. And all I could think about was Dick Edwards, and all the shit he gave me when I complained about the saw. I tried to get up, but they pushed me back down. I tried to beckon to Edwards so he would come close enough for me to get my hands around his throat in a death grip. If I had to die, I wanted to take that bastard with me."

A 12-foot section of the huge sawblade had broken off and hit George in the throat and face, ripping through his face mask and cutting into his jugular vein. His jaw was broken in five places and a dozen teeth were knocked out. The blade was wrapped around him, and his co-workers had to blowtorch it off while they tried to keep him from bleeding to death.

"The saw hit me flat," said George. "If it had hit me with the teeth I'd be dead. I'm only here because my friend Rich Phillips held my veins together in the hour before the ambulance came."

LP didn't call the press right away, but when they did they had a field day. "Tree Spiking Terrorism," screamed the headline in the Santa Rosa Press Democrat. And even though there was no evidence that Earth First! was involved, the Eureka Times-Standard proclaimed, Earth First! Blamed for Worker's Injuries." Mendocino County Sheriff Shea put out a widely quoted press release that was almost gleeful in its condemnation.



"This heinous and vicious criminal act is a felony offense, punishable by imprisonment in State Prison for up to three years," he wrote, "Still undetermined in the investigation is the motive of the suspect or suspects, to deter logging operations or inflict great bodily injury and death upon lumber processing personnel," Even Louisiana-Pacific President Harry Merlo got into the fray, blaming "terrorism in the name of environmental goals" for George's injury.

Meanwhile, George and Laurie Alexander had a different take on the incident. "I'm against tree spiking," George told the press from his hospital bed. "But I don't like clearcutting either." Laurie also tried to include L-P in the list of culprits. "I hate L-P," she told me. "I like trees." But the press wouldn't print a word Laurie said, and George's comments about mill safety and clearcutting were mentioned in only one news article, by Eric Brazil of the San Francisco Examiner.

Earth First!, on the other hand, was much less generous in their reaction, displaying practically no sympathy for this innocent man who had just been through such a terrifying ordeal caused by a spiked tree. And after advocating the tactic for years even putting out a manual on how to do it and teaching tree spiking workshops at [the]

Earth First! Rendezvous, when the shit came down they tried to disassociate themselves from it. "This is probably the first time we've made international news, and we weren't even involved in it," was one comment attributed to Earth First! in the San Francisco newspapers. Dave Foreman came off sounding even more flippant, as he was quoted as saying, "I think it's unfortunate that somebody got hurt, but you know I quite honestly am more concerned about old growth forests, spotted owls, wolverines, and salmon - and nobody is forcing people to cut those trees," This moral arrogance didn't win Earth First! many supporters in our area. In fact it discredited Earth First!'s claim of non-involvement, and made it even easier to tar us with the incident and portray us as unfeeling "terrorists."

But did Earth First! spike that tree? The answer is almost definitely no. Back in 1987, Earth First! was just getting started in Mendocino County, and the only issue at the time was old growth. There was no consciousness yet about baby tree logging, and the spiked tree was only 12 inches in diameter, There were signs that this may have been the work of a disturbed individual. LP traced the tree to a cut on Cameron Ridge Road near the coastal town of Elk, where neighbors had been complaining about LP's liquidating the forest and threatening their water supply. One of the local residents was a strange 50-year-old man with bleached blond hair, who drifted in and out of the area and mostly kept to himself. He liked guns, and was described by neighbors as a survivalist. Before the tree spiking incident, loggers reported finding mutilated animals around the site--a beheaded deer hanging from a tree, a skinned dog draped over a bulldozer - hardly Earth First! tactics, to say the least.

The Mendocino County Sheriff was certainly aware of the survivalist tree spike suspect, but they were strangely quiet about him, and the case was eventually dropped without any charges being filed. Recently, when I got my FBI files, I found out why. The sheriff's reports on the spiking were included in my file, and I learned that the suspect's name was Bill Ervin. He lived in southern California, but he owned property in Elk and sometimes stayed there in a crude cabin. Ervin freely admitted spiking trees on his own side of the property line, and he did it because L-P is well known in this area for cutting a few feet past their property line and taking their neighbors' trees. "I may get crucified for this," Ervin said when questioned by the sheriff. "I may be in error, but I understand that one can spike trees on one's own property."

Bill Ervin made no secret of the trees he spiked. He marked them with yellow flagging and left the spikes sticking part way out of the trees. He borrowed the hammer from his neighbor and told him what he intended to use it for. He also told a truck driver at the LP logging site, and he told a California Highway Patrol cop. So it is reasonable to assume that LP may have known in advance that there were spiked trees in the area. But if this was the work of a lone crazy person, that still begs the question of where he even got the idea of spiking the tree. The answer is probably Dave Foreman's book, Eco-Defense.

There is also reason to believe that the tree that broke George Alexander's sawblade was not spiked on Bill Ervin's property, but rather was hit while lying on a log deck after it was cut. The saw hit the spike about nine feet up the tree. If you figure a foot for the stump, that means it would have to have been spiked ten feet off the ground. Bruce Anderson described the technique like this in the May 27, 1987, Anderson Valley Advertiser: "One average-sized person teams up with a midget. The midget gets up on the shoulders of his partner to hammer in the spikes. LP can nail those pesky terrorists before they nail the trees by arresting any stray midgets they spot roaming around Mendocino County."

Bill Ervin also insists that he used only 16-penny (approximately six-inch) nails on the trees he spiked. No other size nail was found when the sheriffs and LP security cops inspected the trees in the area, and there is no evidence that Ervin ever possessed either any larger nails or a hammer big enough to pound them in with. Yet the nail in the log at the Cloverdale mill was a 60-penny, 11-inch spike. The sheriffs gave Bill Ervin a lie detector test, however, and they claim he failed on the following questions: "Did you spike the logs at the log deck on Cameron Road?" and "Did you spike any trees outside your property?"

So all in all, it's still unclear who was at fault in the Cloverdale tree-spiking. We don't even know if the tree was spiked to keep it from being cut, or to create a martyr and make Earth First! look like terrorists. But it really doesn't matter whether an Earth First!er, a lone survivalist, or L-P president Harry Merlo himself spiked that tree. The point is that if you advocate a tactic, you had better be prepared to take responsibility for its results. And I don't want anything to do with causing the kind of injuries suffered by George Alexander.

> The point is that if you advocate a tactic, you had better be prepared to take responsibility for its results.

While George was convalescing from those injuries, he was contacted by someone from the yellow ribbon gang of pro-timber stooges. George doesn't remember her name, just that it was "some woman from Humboldt County." She asked him to go on tour with her denouncing Earth First! for tree spiking. And George refused.

No matter what you think of LP's forest practices, this much should be clear: George Alexander is not the enemy. He has no say over his bosses' policies, either in or out of the mill. I have heard Earth First!ers say that doesn't matter, he shouldn't be working at an LP mill. Well, I shouldn't be driving a car either, but that doesn't make it okay to put a bomb in it.

After George refused to go on tour denouncing us, he was forced to return to work at L-P before his injuries even healed. His and Laurie's baby was about to be born, he needed money, and there were not many jobs where he and his family live. George got worker's compensation for the time he was off work, but LP didn't offer him a cent for the trauma and hardship he suffered. They made a big public show of putting up a $20,000-dollar reward for the information leading to the conviction of the spiker, but George Alexander had to file a lawsuit against Louisiana Pacific to get anything at all. And while the company was crying crocodile tears over his injuries in public, in private they were fighting him tooth and nail over his damage claim. He ended up with just $9,000 and an involuntary transfer to night shift. "They used my name all over the country," George told me. "Then they laid me off when the mill closed down."

"LP is just sorry I didn't die," said George Alexander. "Yeah, I know," I replied. "They're sorry I didn't die, too."

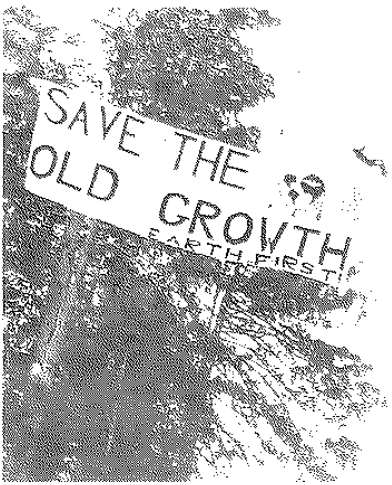
Tree-spiking is a failed tactic by any standard. It has been practiced by Earth First! for 10 years now, and I think it's fair to say that the results are in. Here's [an excerpt of] Dave Foreman's description of tree-spiking from Eco-Defense

> Tree-spiking is an extremely effective method of deterring timber sales, which seems to be becoming more and more popular. If enough trees are spiked to roadless areas, eventually the corporate thugs in the timber company boardrooms, along with their corporate lackeys who wear the uniform of the Forest Service, will realize that timber sales in wild areas are going to be prohibitively expensive.

Believing this to be so seems to be an article of faith for some Earth First!ers. But a look at the actual history of Earth First! tree-spiking will show that it hasn't really worked out that way.

The most intensive spiking campaigns occurred in Oregon and Washington, although there have also been tree-spikings in California, Colorado, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, Arizona, British Columbia, southern Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, and New Jersey, to name a few. And I'm not going to say that none of them saved any trees, because in a few cases they did, especially early on, or in areas without a timber based economy. But the successes have been few and far between. Even unabashed Earth First! apologist Chris Manes, writing in his well researched book Green Rage, could only come up with two timber sales that were canceled because they were spiked, one in George Washington National Forest in Virginia, and one in the Wanatchee Forest's Icicle River drainage in Washington state. I don't know about the trees in Virginia, but the Icicle River sale has since been cut. Earth First! activists from Shawnee in Southern Illinois also report that when the hard-fought Fairview sale was finally clear-cut, the only trees that were left were a few oaks that had been spiked.

But there have been scores and scores of tree-spikings, and in the vast majority of cases, the Forest Service or timber company just sent people in with metal detectors and, often with great public fanfare, removed the spikes and cut the trees. Sometimes spikes were missed and sometimes they hit the blades in sawmills. But the timber industry has made it quite clear that this is a price they are willing to pay.





The first known tree-spiking in Earth First! history occurred in the Siskiyou Mountains of Oregon in 1983, on the Woodrat timber sale on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. Notice was given of the spiking, and some of the trees were marked with yellow ribbons to make them easy to find and verify. The BLM reacted by having the loggers cut the trees and leave them on the ground for firewood cutters to saw at their own risk.

In 1984, a group calling itself the Hardesty Avengers mailed a letter to the Oregon Register-Guard announcing that a 132-acre sale on Hardesty Mountain in the Willamette National Forest had been spiked. The area was scheduled for helicopter logging by Columbia Helicopter. The Forest Service responded with a plan it called "Operation Nail." sending 20 Forest Service employees into the woods to remove the nails before they went ahead and cut the trees.

In 1985 in Southern Oregon, Earth First! was engaged in a high-profile direct action campaign to save Cathedral Forest in the Middle Santiam Wilderness. Demonstrators blockaded roads, staged the first tree-sits ever, and even occupied an area scheduled for blasting with dynamite, some of them actually sitting on the charges. In the midst of these actions, a few Earth First!ers took it upon themselves to spike some of the trees at Pyramid Creek. And to read about it in Chris Manes' book, I can see where people get the false impression that tree spiking is a drastic but effective last resort. "Despite continued opposition in the form of civil disobedience," writes Manes, "the road crept inexorably toward the sale. AS a last ditch effort, (Mike) Roselle sneaked into the stand one night and spiked it. He sent a letter to the timber company announcing the spiking, and signed it "the Bonnie Abbzug Feminist Garden Party, a reference to the voluptuous ecoteur in The Monkeywrench Gang. The authorities caught neither the allusion nor the tree-spiker."

What Chris Manes doesn't tell us is that the spiking didn't work. It caused a spate of negative publicity, and it caused Mary Beth Nearing, one of Earth First!'s most inspirational organizers, to publicly distance herself and the Cathedral Forest Action Group from the spiking and Earth First!. But it didn't save the trees. In fact, Mike Roselle himself, speaking in Rik Scarce's book, Eco Warriors, admits that the spiking "barely slowed them down." The Forest Service sent rangers in to pull the nails, and the trees were cut.

Other areas in Oregon that were spiked and cut include the Hobson and the Deer Creek sales in the North Kalmiopsis, the Top and Skook sales in Hell's Canyon

National Forest, Bull Run in the Mt. Hood area near Portland, and a Boise-Cascade sale in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. At this last site some of the spikes were missed by the loggers and made ii into the mill, breaking teeth off of six saw-blades. The saw teeth shot across the mill like bullets, injuring no one but terrifying and angering the mill-workers.

In fact, the main effect that tree-spiking seemed to be having in Oregon was to piss people off. In June 1987, Earth First! was protesting the Lazy Bluff timber sale in the North Kalmiopsis roadless area. Tree-sitter Randy Prince was perched 80 feet up in an old-growth fir when a logger cutting in an adjacent area hit an 11-inch spike and damaged his chainsaw. The logger stormed over to Randy's tree, revved up a saw, and, screaming something about tree-spiking, began cutting down the tree with Randy in it. He cut out a notch 1/3 of the way through the tree before he was talked into stopping. Shaken, Randy denounced tree-spiking and publicly distanced himself from Earth First!, and the Lazy Bluff timber sale was cut.

By this time it was becoming clear that something was going wrong with the tree-spiking strategy. It seemed that all this publicity was backfiring, putting the timber industry in a position of having to cut trees or lose face. So when Holcomb Peak in the Siskiyou Mountains was extensively spiked in June 1987, the spikers tried to correct past mistakes and do it "right". No notification was sent to the press. Instead, the BLM, the logging contractor, and the mill-owner were quietly notified, in order to give them an opportunity to quietly back out and cancel the sale. No luck. Instead, they called the press and made the incident into a media circus, with BLM rangers posing for photos in the woods with tree spikes, and the timber industry rallying to raise a $13,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the spikers. And the trees were cut.

The ultimate media manipulation in the tree-spike wars, however, came in 1988 when Senator Mark Hatfield and Congressman Bob Smith (known to jaded Oregonians as the Representatives from Timber) were on a tour of the Gregory Forest Products sawmill near Glendale, Oregon. In an amazing display of synchronicity, at the very minute when the congressional delegation was watching the operation of a band saw, that very band saw just happened to hit a spike and explode. The delegation had just been shown spikes found in logs from the Silver Fire in the North Kalmiopsis. None of the dignitaries was hurt by the flying sawblade, but they were predictably impressed. "Tree-spiking is a radical environmentalist's version of razor blades in Halloween candy," was Congressman Bob Smith's comment.

Meanwhile, some of the Oregon Earth First! activists were getting tired of answering for this ineffective and marginalizing tactic. "Personally I don't think it works," Earth First!er Steve Marsden told the Seattle Times when asked about tree-spiking in June 1988. Fellow Earth First!er Bobcat expressed the same frustration, complaining that it makes them have to talk about "tree-spiking pro or con instead of old growth pro or con." but pressure was great within Earth First! to refrain from criticizing a tactic that others still engaged in. And tree-spiking was certainly going on outside of Oregon.

Spiking in Washington state was just as extensive as Oregon, and its results no better. Starting with the temporarily successful Icicle river spiking in 1986, sale after sale was spiked and cut, including the Lake Creek and Natches areas of the Wenatchee National Forest, Green Mountain and Granite Falls in Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie, and Storm King Mountain and Karamip in the Colville National Forest. The only spiked sales that I could verify as "probably still standing" are the Spoon sale and Olston Quirkendale in Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie, and they were set aside in the spotted owl ruling, not due to the spiking. In 1989 the Sugar Bear sale was spiked in the Cedar River area near Seattle. Although the cut in the watershed was eventually halved due to a public campaign by Earth First! and others, the spiked area was cut.

Spiking was not saving many trees in Washington, but it was certainly raising the ire of the timber industry. Band saw blades were broken by tree spikes in four different Washington sawmills between 1987 and 1989, resulting in the standard cries of "terrorism." Finally in September 1989 the timber industry and corporate press mounted an all-out assault on Washington Earth First!. A four-part series was published in the Bellingham Herald listing acts of sabotage in the area, quotes from Eco-Defense, and the names, addresses, places of employment and photos of key Earth First!ers. No proof was given to show that these public Earth First!ers were actually responsible for any of the sabotage listed, but the atmosphere was so hostile that no proof was needed. Earth First!ers had to leave town for their own safety.



The classic example of tree-spiking regularly cited by Earth First!ers as proof the tactic works occurred on Meare's Island in British Columbia in 1985, where the Society to Protect Intact Kinetic Ecosystems (SPIKE) drove 26,000 helix nails into old-growth cedar trees. What the tree-spike advocates didn't tell you is that there was a whole campaign going on over Meare's Island, and the spiking was only part of it. The issue on Meare's Island is native land rights, as the Claquet people who live there have never ceded the land or signed any treaties. When the Canadian government attempted to sell timber rights on the island to MacMillan Bloedell, a coalition of natives and whites fought back with a lawsuit and a five-month occupation. When MacMillan Bloedell tried to come in and cut before the court could grant a restraining order, hundreds of people massed on the beach to prevent their helicopters from landing. The court finally halted the logging until the final ruling. That ruling is expected soon, and the Canadian government has stated that if MacMillan Bloedell wins in court they will take the timber spikes or no spikes.

Closer to home, California has had far fewer spikings than our northern neighbors, with many of them occurring in 1987, the same year George Alexander was hurt by the spike at the Cloverdale LP mill. Just one month after that incident in Mendocino County, Trout Creek was spiked in a last-ditch attempt to save it from being cut by its owner, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E). Friends of Trout Creek had been negotiating for a compromise, but when the spikes were discovered, PG&E angrily broke off negotiations. Things looked bad until Earth First!er Sequoia came up with a plan. She organized a protest in which people were asked to withhold $1 from their PG&E

bills and mail in a green card to show public support for saving Trout Creek. PG&E received so many green cards that it backed down and agreed to save the whole grove with no compromise.

There were also a few tree-spikings in California's National Forests. A minor uproar occurred in June 1987 right after the Trout Creek spiking when it was discovered that a spiked sale in Mendocino National Forest had been cut anyway and sent on to the mill, despite injuries to George Alexander one month earlier. A 202-acre sale in Tahoe National Forest was spiked and cut, as was a 240-acre sale at Running Springs in the San Bernadino National Forest, sold to LP at Inyokern. One of the strangest tree-spiking incidents in California was again on LP land, this time near Guerneville in Sonoma County. The newspapers received a notice that the Sonoma County Coalition to Stop LP had spiked trees at the Silver Estate. No spikes were found, but nonetheless LP said it had a suspect. He was described as "a black man with a bone through his nose who rides a bicycle and carries bows and arrows," obviously a better example of LP's racism than its investigative capacities.

As tree-spiking continued across the US, the government increasingly tried to crack down on it. Although no spiker has ever been caught, laws were passed to make spiking a felony in California. Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. In 1989, the federal government passed its own laws, and that brought the FBI into the picture. When the Post Office timber sale in Clearwater Forest, Idaho, was spiked, the FBI responded by rounding up University of Montana professor Ron Erickson and several of his Earth First! students. They were forced to give hair samples and fingerprints, write "Stumps Suck" 25 times, and submit to a federal grand-jury investigation. No evidence was found to link them to the spiking, and no charges were brought. But this intimidation served to separate Missoula Earth First! from its support in academia. And the trees were cut.

With this kind of history, you have to wonder why some Earth First!ers cling so tenaciously to the myth that tree spiking works. One of the explanations commonly given is that, regardless of whether it saves individual trees, spiking is an economic constraint on the industry. "The idea could have come from the Chicago Business School," says Chris Manes in Green Rage. "If the cost of removing spikes is high enough, the cut will not be made, or at least the decreed profit margin will discourage logging in [controversial] areas." With this logic, Chris Manes would have flunked Econ 101. There are several flaws in this theory. The strategy of tree-spiking was designed for federal lands, where most remaining old-growth in the US is lo-

cated. In these cases it is the Forest Service, not the timber company, which bears the cost, both of removing the spikes and of charging lower rates for the timber to make up for the risk of broken saws. The Forest Service is not required to make a profit, since it is financed by tax money, and one of the scandals of the looting of our national forests is that the Forest Service subsidized big timber by paying for log road construction and selling timber below cost. Between 1982 and 1987, the Forest Service received $800 million a year in federal timber sales, but spent $1.2 billion a year making the timber ready for sale. That's a loss of $400 million a year. There aren't enough tree spikes in the world to make a dent in this agency.

And even in the case of tree-spiking on private lands, this economic theory assumes that the price of lumber is fixed, so that any increase in production costs will result in a decrease in profits. But old-growth timber is so valuable, and there is so little of it left, that the timber industry could charge anything it wanted and still sell every stick. Any increase in production costs due to tree-spiking would simply be passed on to the consumers.

Nor are the timber companies put off by the threat of injury to employees, as we have already seen in real life. Dave Foreman tells us in EcoDefense that tree spiking is "unlikely to cause anyone physical injury even should a blade shatter upon striking a spike, which is an unlikely event." But Foreman also admitted to the Christian Science Monitor in 1987 that he had never seen the inside of a sawmill. And it is clear that he doesn't understand the depths of depravity of the timber companies. The routine maiming and killing of timber workers is coldly calculated into the cost of the lumber, and a few more injuries are hot going to stop them. LP made this clear after George Alexander was hurt. "LP will not let tree-spiking be a deterrent," said spokeswoman Glennis Simmons. And she meant it. LP kept running the logs from that same spiked sale through the mill, even though workers encountered two more spikes and broke another saw blade. Other timber companies were just as emphatic. After the Buse Company in Everett, Washington broke four saw blades on tree spikes in 1987, manager Ron Smith commented: "I assume they think if they do things like this, the timber industry will get discouraged and will just quit cutting trees. But I don't think that's going to happen.

And it hasn't happened. Yet just because Dave Foreman told us 10 years ago that it would, most of Earth First! continues to ignore reality, no matter how much experience we have. The forests that Earth First! had been instrumental in saving in this area (Trout Creek, Cahto Wilderness, Headwaters Forest, Albion, and Owl Creek)

have all been saved through blockades and public organizing campaigns, often combined with lawsuits. And it's time we faced the truth about tree-spiking. It is unquestionably dangerous to workers. It needlessly endangers Earth First! activists on the front lines. And it [more often than not] doesn't save trees.

Ironically, most of the early advocates of tree-spiking--including Dave Foreman--have all left Earth First! for safer harbors after suppressing debate by treating any questioning of their tactics as heresy.

And, although most of them have refused to make any public statements about it, the Earth First! groups that most strongly advocated tree-spiking in the early days have quietly abandoned the tactic. Yet the myth lives on.

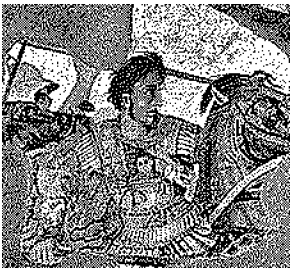
Last month in Maine, a letter was sent to the local press stating that the trees at Mt. Blue had been spiked by Earth First! I don't know if the letter was real or fake, but a group of Earth First!ers blockading Mt. Blue were subsequently arrested, dragged through the coals from their campfire, and roughed up in jail. And I wondered if a new generation of activists is going to repeat the mistakes of the last 10 years. Those of us who are out on the front lines putting our bodies in front of the bulldozers and chainsaws can't afford to be isolated and discredited by something as ineffective and incendiary as tree-spiking. If we are serious about putting Earth first, we need to choose tactics because they work, not because they seem macho or romantic. That's what no-compromise really means.

HISTORY IS AT WAR WITH ITSELF

Babylon Dialectic



Tecumseh



Alexander



Blackbeard



Zhuge Liang

The pages of history have been torn out of the Library of Time. Lead Tecumseh, Alexander, Blackbeard or Zhuge Liang into the war and put them back. Washington waits at the end.

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Scan the code to play.

The official card game of HOUDINI Magazine.

FRESH DECK ALERT – What 2000s Skate Video Are You?

Read it online

By Salty P. Slug
September 22, 2026

Slug hath returned from her summer slumber with a new Decker experience.. and it may just be her best work yet!

Author's Introduction

"What 2000s Skate Video Are You?" is a personality quiz made in Decker.

You will be assigned a legendary 2000s-era skate video based on your answers to five personality-related questions. In addition to your personality type, results also include: a link to watch the video, general information about it, as well as my pick for best part and song in each one.

I selected each video on my own internal criteria. I tried to pick my favorite videos of the era that remain iconic in their overall aesthetics of both the edit and skater styles, as well as accounting for the inclusion of iconic spots and tracklists. There are lots of hidden things throughout, including a secret tape.

Read more about my journey making this quiz at the end of this article, below the quiz embed.

HAVE FUN!

Play The Quiz

Get it on itch.io

Play What 2000s Skate Video Are You? on itch.io

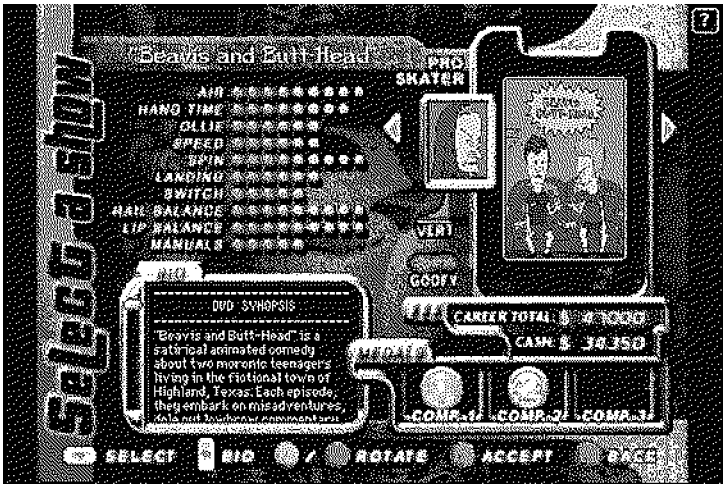
Is the embed above not working? You can also take this quiz (and leave a comment) on the project's page on Itch.

About This Deck

I have a lifelong love of skate culture and personality quizzes, and I love making things in Decker.. so this project is a perfect and inevitable combination of my interests.

I did extensive and thorough research for this Deck. I spent countless hours scrubbing through my favorite old skate videos on YouTube and picking my absolute favorites. My wife and I then sat down and developed personality types for video one based on their style, content, and context. We originally had eight possible results for the quiz, but quickly realized that was going to be WAY too much work to develop. After some deliberation, we filed it down to the five options that made it into this final version.

After the initial development of the idea, I wrote all the copy myself, researching along the way. I should note that I did use Wikipedia as a basis for the "DVD SYNOPSIS" sections in Question 5. During this time, I began collecting assets for the project, organizing them into folders for each question.



Almost every relevant asset and piece of information you may have encountered is period-accurate. Many of the background images come from screenshots of pre-

2010 Tony Hawk games. A large portion of the sound bytes are also pulled from game dumps of those games. The logos used in the mall are the ones those companies used in that time period. The energy drink cans are the exact design iteration from the early-to-mid 2000s. The little tidbits the cashier tells you about the energy drinks came from old product reviews I found on the Wayback Machine. I even tried to use popular slang from that time, when possible.

In total, I worked on this (off and on) over the span of eight months. I'd like to give a special thanks to Internet Janitor and Ahmwma for helping me figure out some of the code for this deck. And also I'd like to doubly thank Internet Janitor for making my favorite program! It's such a special creation that I plan to use for years to come.



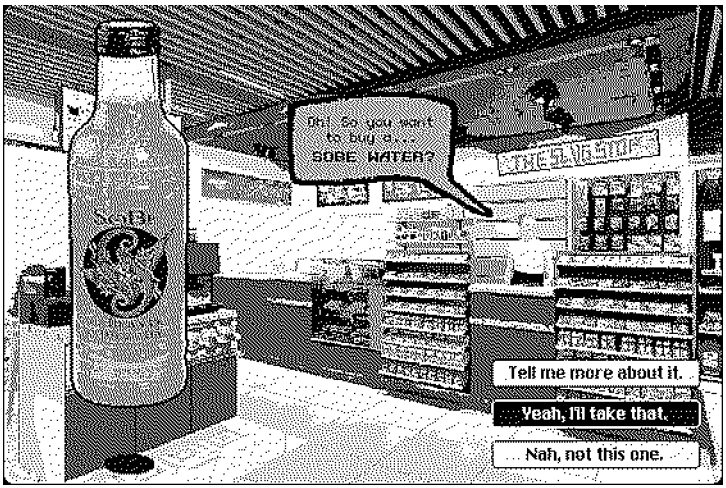
Development Timeline

After I first thought to make this quiz, I knew I had to make it in Decker. What ensued afterwards was hours of asset digging, meticulous research, and personal reflection on the skate videos I watched as a young kid in the 2000s.

I spent countless hours scrubbing through my favorite old skate videos on YouTube. I read "Best of" lists, Reddit threads, and scoured YouTube comments for public opinion on over a hundred popular videos. My wife and I then sat down and developed personality types for video one based on their style, content, and context. We originally had eight possible results for the quiz, but quickly realized that was going

to be WAY too much work to develop. After some deliberation, we filed it down to the five options that made it into this final version.

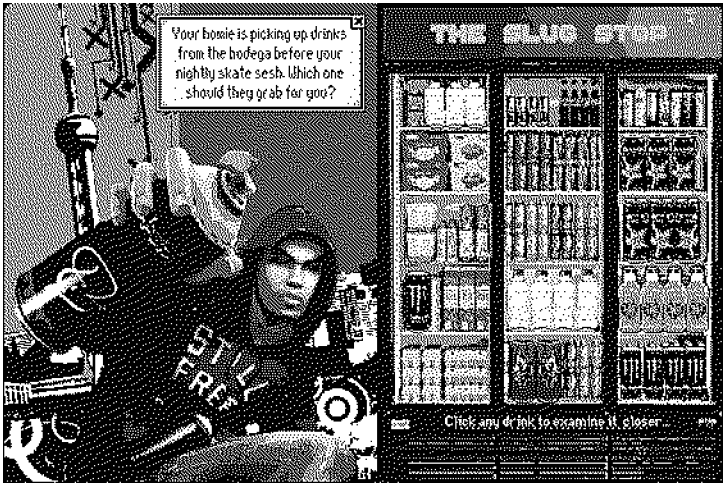
After the initial development of the idea, I wrote all the copy myself, researching along the way. I should note that I did use Wikipedia as a basis for the "DVD SYNOPSIS" sections in Question 5. During this time, I began collecting assets for the project, organizing them into folders for each question.



Also, you might've noticed that I did a bunch of frivolous, self-serving research on popular 2000s convenience store drinks, food courts, and other topics pertinent to creating period-accurate questions and imagery. Almost every relevant asset and piece of information you may have encountered is period-accurate:

- Many of the background images come from screenshots of pre-2010 Tony Hawk games.
- A large portion of the sound bytes are also pulled from game dumps of those games.
- The logos used in the mall are the ones those companies used in that time period.
- The energy drink cans are the exact design iteration from the early-to-mid 2000s.
- The little tidbits the cashier tells you about the energy drinks came from old product reviews I found on the Wayback Machine.

I even tried to use popular slang from that time, when it made sense. In total, I worked on this (off and on) over the span of eleven months. Good things take time, I suppose!



Thanks & Acknowledgements

I'd like to give a special thanks to Internet Janitor and Ahmwma for helping me figure out much of the Lil code that makes this deck work. I have no skills when it comes to programming, so y'alls help was invaluable in getting things running.

I'd like to doubly thank Internet Janitor for making my favorite program, Decker! It's such a special engine that I plan to use for years to come. I encourage everyone to try it out in some capacity.

I owe deepest thanks to my friends in the HOUDINI collective. You guys cheered me on, kept me going, and I am so grateful for your support. Thanks to Mindape and Erik for bug testing.

Finally, the biggest of thank yous goes to my beautiful wife. This project never would've even come to fruition without your big brain, input, and support. Thank you for kicking my ass all the way to the finish line for this project. I love you so much!

[SUBSTRAINS] EP. 2 – ANGLE AT THE END OF TIME

Read it online

By Mindape
September 23, 2026

In this episode of [SUBSTRAINS] – The MindApe spirals on Communication, Excess, and the Otherworldly Ambiguity of Jim's Corner, the Slug's secret hyper-fixation on this bewildering locus.



Introducing... SUBSTRAINS

Shut up about art! *How do you translate the horror of living? The forensics are clear: mutate or die. Join the MindApe as it paws through historic fragments of surrealism, body horror, chance, science fiction, and the underground. Not as commodities to appreciate, but as specimens to test for infection... Come sample the flesh... Only in* ***SUBSTRAINS!***

TODAY'S SAMPLE

S09931783: "Jim's Corner"

A mistake in the woods. A political boundary that was supposed to stop at a certain lake was completely at-odds with a small detail called physical reality. There has been ever since an obscenity, a liminal tumescence of one country manifesting within the boundaries of another. **"The Angle"**… You could call it, like so many other parapraxes, *"an encroachment from within…"*



THE OUTLYING AREA



> Jim's Corner is an Outlying Area Reporting Station (OARS) for reporting in and out with Customs and Immigration, while traveling to or from the US/Canada border anomaly in Minnesota known as the Northwest Angle - cut off from the rest of the USA by land. The OARS at Jim's Corner is a parking lot and a booth that has two similar call boxes (one outside and one inside) with videophones, shared by the US and Canadian border authorities..."



"Inside the box are two buttons, one for calling the US to check in on arrival, and one for calling Canada to check out on departure. There is a camera inside too, which presumably they use to look at you, though you cannot see them. Once you have answered the usual questions on the videophone (name, nationality, place of birth, why you are there) and they confirm that they have verified your vehicle visually using cameras mounted on poles outside, you are asked to wait for them to hang up first, officially completing the call. Then you are good to go, so long as you return here on your way out." – The Centre for Land Use Communication

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COMMUNICATING VASSALS

Watch it on YouTube

"Jim's Corner" Border Crossing at Angle Inlet, Minnesota, USA

"It is important for me to show that, in 'communication,' in love, desire has nothingness as its object. It is this way in every 'sacrifice.'" – Georges Bataille

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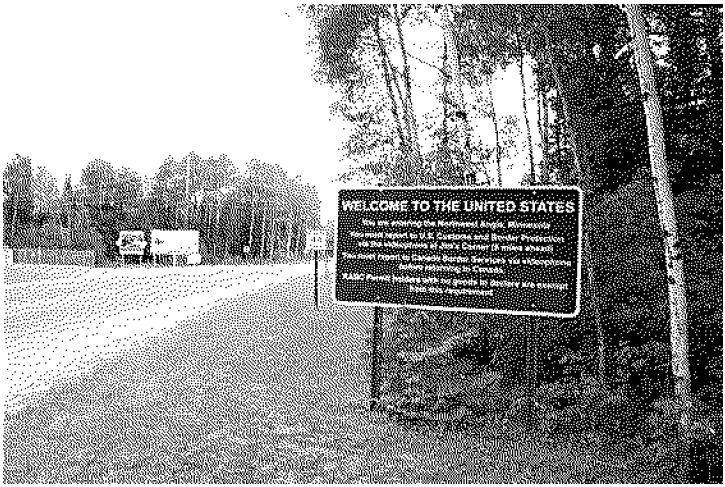
PERFORMATIVE OBLIVION

Are we witnessing an unprecedented rupture between two sufficiently lacerated entities?

As the tensions between the two **Suspect Nations** suffer a generational strain, our minds' eye strays to this oblique corner where the ritual of nothing plays out its daily excess. The combination of bureaucracy, paranoia and remote territory have come together to create a work of postural unease and strange beauty.

Jim's Corner is waiting for something to happen. *Jim's Corner* is watching. Tucked away in a remote Twin Peaks-like interzone known as the Northwest Angle, this focal point invites us to project all kinds of strange attractions, characters, schemes, and especially, long bleak stretches of nothingness.

And yet it is *"quiet, too quiet…"*



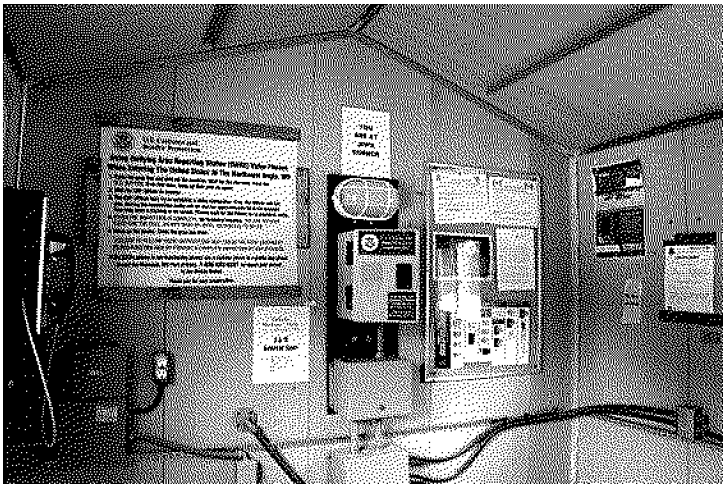
Perhaps *Jim's Corner* is the secret spot, that big red attractant that will, through its occulted character, suddenly become a flare-up for a universal conflagration. Two bewildering falsities at the edge of mutual collapse… But will their strangest output, this oddball atopos at the edge of nowhere, perhaps have enough internal clockwork absurdity to survive the double destruction?

Perhaps, cut off from its administrative chain of command, the noxious air of the blasted zone will encourage rather than curtail this delicate endstate ritual. *JC* is a

producer of nullities. And yet we can think of another bearer of that two-letter acronym.

There is a kind of a theological contrivance here. We do not think we are to read salvation into anything. Rather, we detect the retroactive lesson of the End of History Embodied, Hegelian, Backwards… The eye watching you at the corner is the same eye with which you yourself see only the dead lens of the camera. The formality at the end of all administration has, as its sole positive value, the uncanny talent of detached interest, and therefore, over any mere collapse of reporting structure, the prospect of an undead persistence beyond…

AN IRRATIONAL ENLARGEMENT

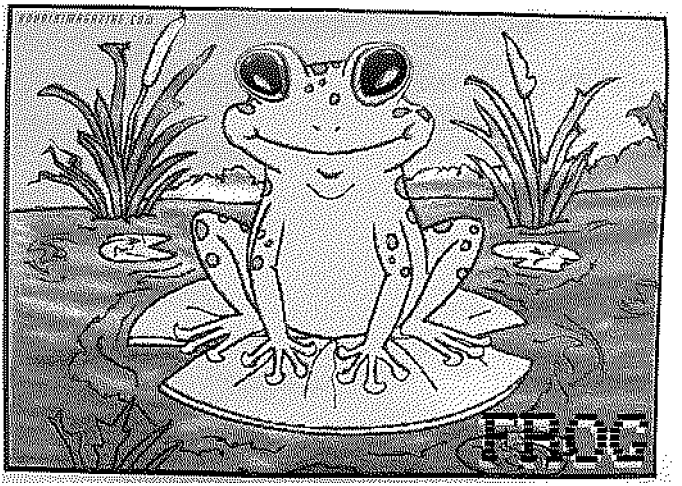


- Who or what is Jim?
- What does it look like?
- Who uses the station, and for what purpose?
- Who is watching whom?
- What else lives outside his station?

LAST TIME ON SUBSTRAINS...

We solicited amphibians and YOU delivered:

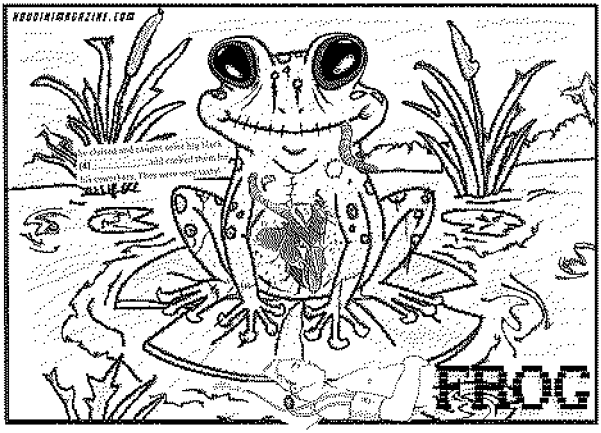
AMBR0XAN'S FROG TRANSMISSION



HAPE'S FROG TRANSMISSION



THE MINDAPE FROG



SLUG'S FROG TRANSMISSION



SHEM SHELLEY'S "FGi'E"



Watch it on YouTube

FGi'E

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Super Sentai, Godzilla movies, and other monster flicks

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06 **Solar**
Public access science from before the anti-intellectual era

07 **Cross Plains**
broadcasting out of Texas, barbarian pulp & sc-fi schlock

08 **The Ocho**
skate tapes, wrestling and every sport the other channels forgot

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Scan the code and press power.

HOUDINI.TV is a project of HOUDINI Magazine.

On Planned Obsolescence



Read it online

By MMF
September 26, 2026

MMF brings us a deep Marxist analysis of consumer society, neoliberalism, and ideology.. then wields it to discuss the political and cultural effects of planned obsolescence.

The postmodern break from the modernist "tenet" of the "firm distinction" between high art and consumerism does not also represent, as Linda Hutcheon argues, the triumph of the "marginal," the "different," the other.1 To render the work of art as a surface for commentary, criticism, reappropriation and nothing else is to situate both artist and audience in a space of no friction. If there is nothing outside of the text, there is nothing we make contact with except for texts. The subaltern cannot speak if no speaker is recognized as subaltern. If one cannot participate in collective movements when they put pen to paper or brush to canvas, so too do they lose membership in categories of social identification in their everyday lives. In our present moment of "late-capitalist individualism," Mattie Colquhoun writes, we have "left such things behind" in the twentieth century where they are thought to belong.2 Fredric Jameson thus presents the following observations on the harmony between the postmodern condition and what is called "consumer society," or more to the point, a society in which individuals think of themselves as consumers before anything else:



> Marxists and non-Marxists alike have come around to the general feeling that at some point following World War Two a new kind of society began to emerge[...] New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and country[...] by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture—these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older pre-war society in which high modernism was still an underground force.3

I want to argue in this piece that the consumer protection campaigns of the 1970s served as a bridge between the New Deal postwar welfare state and the neoliberal turn initiated by Reagan and consolidated by Clinton, resulting in the reality of postmodernism that would permeate every area of Western culture for years to come. American liberalism had been premised on the ability of that welfare state to "win the peace" by maintaining consistent economic growth to stave off crisis and class struggle. After the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system and the onset of stagflation, the working class ceased to be a cohesive unit to which a political party could appeal; the status of the consumer was more accessible as a nexus of mass politics. So it came to be that Ralph Nader and Public Citizen commanded popular support in the seventies as Congress passed waves of consumer protection laws: laws that would protect the consumer from being "manipulated, defrauded, and injured" by un-

savory business practices.4 Nader had conservative Republicans in Congress pressing FTC nominees to "become[...] real zealot[s] in terms of consumer affairs."5 He even hosted an episode of Saturday Night Live.6 By the time Jimmy Carter took office in 1977 with both houses of Congress under Democratic control, "perfection at last seemed attainable" for the consumer welfare movement.7 But in the end, it was not meant to be... or was it?

Carter managed to clock in four years as an early neoliberal deregulator, but it was not until the Reagan years that the political meaning of consumer society came into plain view. The Great Communicator nailed the point home to an audience of 80 million Americans: "Are you better off than you were four years ago? Is it easier for you to buy things in the stores than it was four years ago?"8 Atop a platform of welfare reform and tax cuts for the rich, Reagan was able to appear as more of a consumer crusader than Nader had ever been. Antitrust enforcement virtually disappeared with the proclamation that the Sherman Act was a consumer welfare statute before anything else. Tax cuts were welcomed by those who least stood to benefit from them; the freedom of one to make money, after all, ought to be the freedom of all to make money. And no one batted an eyelash when Reagan crushed the PATCO strike in 1981. The striking air traffic controllers were regarded as "outlaws,"9 while the unions were depicted as "greedy."10 Just what were these cushy white-collar workers complaining about anyway?

David Harvey defines neoliberalism as a theory of political economy according to which "human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."11 This is to collapse the class content of the traditional theory of the postwar managerial state into a single dimension. Economic growth, for Keynes, had been desirable precisely because "there would be more for everyone, rich and poor, labor and business,"12 whereas in the neoliberal picture, there was no fundamental difference between rich and poor or labor and business at all: "people should be available just as consumers and producers, interchangeable cogs who will purchase all of the junk that's produced."13 A society permeated by such ideological premises is naturally immunized against class solidarity, the thing that, for Marx, was supposed to drive the engine of history. What the hell am I supposed to have in common with my fellow worker? He buys Pepsi. I'm a Coke man.



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Indeed, the phenomenon of ideological structures acting as barriers to revolutionary agency proved to be one of the most provocative and contentious problems for Marxist theory in the twenty-first century. Against the dominant currents of so-called Marxist humanism, according to which human subjects are "somehow, in some last instance," the prime movers of social processes,14 Althusser proposed that the ideological apparatuses of the state were tools for subjective construction: ideology "interpellates" or "hails" the concrete individual subjects, creating the sort of subject it needs in order to reproduce itself.15 In the case of neoliberalism, as Richard Wolff argues, workers "had to be called to think of[...] themselves and everyone else as free market participants," and not as members of concrete social classes engaged in class struggle: "individual worth [is] measurable above all by one's achieved level of consumption," because one's consumption is "the appropriate reward for their individual contribution to production."16

Marxism was supposed to herald the development of a collective subject, the proletariat-for-itself, and for a time, it seemed that the category of "consumer" worked well enough as a stand-in. The struggle of working people could be identified easily enough with a struggle against a corporate culture that sought to liberate itself from accountability to consumers. After all, such liberation entailed collective organization, perhaps even class consciousness, on the part of the capitalists: "boardroom Jacobins," as Perlstein calls them.17 Surely, the struggle of consumers against such concentrated corporate power could at least stand in for class struggle by proxy. But

it was precisely this struggle-by-proxy that was so effortlessly hijacked by the forces of the Right. The individual subject constituted as a consumer could not be counted upon to develop class solidarity in moments where labor unions and welfare recipients were under assault, because the identity of the consumer is individual before anything else: consumption, after all, is something one does as an individual, on the basis of contractual relations with other individuals. This profound shift in political conception was felt just as much on the Left as on the Right. Wolff continues:

> Inadvertently, perhaps, the US left generally gave little more than rhetorical lip service to the demand for an end to the exploitative class structure of capitalism. It succumbed to a consumerist ideology in strategies—often justified as "realistic"—that consistently overemphasized raising con-sumption levels[...] It seriously undervalued the power of ideology generally and the importance of the consumerist ideology for US capitalism in particular[...] In its own accommodations to consumerism, the left reinforced the capitalist-sustaining aspects of [the ideological state apparatuses] and thereby frustrated many of its own goals. It did not grasp the need for and necessary scope of a counter-capitalist (and pointedly anti-consumerist) system of values to be fought for[...] as a basic component of its political action.18

Wolff's point is that the Left resigned itself to a political program that could no longer testify to the contradictions of capitalist society. It is not just that the Left sidelined revolutionary demands in favor of reform and compromise, but rather that it formulated demands on the basis of a consumerist ideology designed to channel revolutionary energy into its own reproduction. What is a demand for higher wages, after all, if not a demand to be able to consume more? What is a demand for consumer protections if not a demand for better conditions for those who are already well enough off to consume more? Faced with such thorough interpellation as we see in contemporary "consumer society," the old model of class struggle feels like a fever dream. Where could one even start?

While the general public settled into its newfound identity of consumption, the managerial state ballooned, with no less than twenty new agencies created between 1970 and 1979 and a six billion dollar budget to keep them afloat.24 In 1984, the Supreme Court awarded these agencies the power to interpret the laws that governed them.25 The sheer size of the new administrative state coupled with the deferential legal environment under Chevron encouraged an "extremely aggressive"

Executive Branch, no matter what party was in control of it, since any President would depend heavily on the agencies in order to enact any sort of agenda.26 The Reaganites were thus able to mount a campaign against regulation with the power of the regulatory state: Reagan could go around a recalcitrant Democratic Congress and relax environmental regulations by simply appointing Anne Gorsuch as the new head of the EPA. This newfound power of the state was met with confusion on a Left already suffering from the failures of 1968 that now found itself defending the "bureaucratic machinery of the modern state" from being "smashed" by the state itself, in an ironic reversal of Lenin's position in The State and Revolution.28

As Reagan continued his assault on the labor movement and civilians continued to dislodge their own identities from their class relations, political reality became less like a site of mass participation and more like a finely-tuned product sold to a carefully-curated demographic of customers. Only about half of the country bothered to vote in presidential elections in the eighties and nineties, and by the time Bill Clinton appeared on the scene in a technicolor dreamcoat to rescue the country from Reagan's successor, another 18% had been peeled off by Ross Perot's independent campaign. Two years after that, the Republicans took control of the House in a "landslide for conservatism."29 41% of eligible voters showed up for that one,30 and most of them hadn't even heard of Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America."31 Cultural positions became more heavily identified with "symbolic forms of political moralizing," because political participation was more about one's behavior as a consumer and less about one's position within the class struggle.32 Political positions, on the other hand, dissolved into bureaucracy: to be "on the Left" or "on the Right" had more to do with which public figures one would prefer to have in charge of the "state machinery," which in turn amounted to little more than which one of them one would like to have a beer with. Postmodernism reigned supreme, and its grip on politics was not going to be dislodged by some dirty hippy uprising in Seattle.



This confusion of the Left appeared within the space of cultural pseudopolitics as a psychological problem: critical consciousness sought to explain its own failures as if they were products of unhealthy minds as opposed to tactical missteps of actually-existing political movements. The activist Left attempted to come to terms with neoliberal austerity as the result of what Mark Fisher called a "deliberately cultivated depression," according to which one's social position was inevitably "their fault and their fault alone,"33 while the academic Left engaged in what Christopher Hitchens described as "competitive solipsism," the "intersectional" discourses that could offer productive analysis on little more than the subtle white supremacist biases in Law and Order or the cop-friendly messaging of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy.34 These were now psychological as opposed to political problems because the radical currents no longer saw themselves as constructing a collective subject of history: critical thought instead turned inwards, focusing on membership of one identity group or another, on self-consciousness of one's own social biases and, ultimately, on what one might do or should do as a would-be "professional manager" of state policy.35 And yet even these psychological problems were simply taken for granted, in the same way that preferences and utility curves are taken for granted in economic models, as if passed down from on high as facts of nature. To think radically was to think of oneself exactly as the bourgeois economists thought of others: as black boxes with preferences and qualities defined in a vacuum, abstracted from all reference to the tides of history.

In every case, the neoliberal production of subjects appears to us as a transcendental horizon of possible experience. We know that it is going on, we can see that we are indeed interpellated in this way, yet we can never directly encounter the conditions for this interpellation because we are just as much beholden to those same conditions. When we try to imagine a life outside of consumer society, we run into the same sort of problems as when we try to imagine the universe at the moment of the Big Bang, with time and space compressed into an infinitely dense and infinitely hot singular point in an ineffable void of nothingness. Even our attempts to resist end up hopelessly subsumed within the very process we are trying to resist. As Steven Shaviro puts it:

> The body of capital is not a particular phenomenon that we encounter at a specific time and place; it is rather the already-given presupposition of whatever phenomenon we do encounter. We cannot experience this capital-body directly, and for itself; yet all our experiences are lodged within it, and can properly be regarded as its effects. The monstrous flesh of capital is the horizon, or the matrix, or the underlying location and container of our experience, as producers or as consumers.36



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Slavoj Žižek's elaboration of Althusser's Ideologiekritik is particularly useful for translating these matters into concrete terms. In consumer society, he argues, there remains a possibility of a "moment of genuine protest," a possibility that can be

glimpsed but not fully realized in, say, the London riots in 2011, in which protesters looted malls and storefronts across the city in a "violent redirection" of "consumerist desire."37 What was missing there was a materialist account of how these desires come to exist in the first place and, consequently, how they become "caught up" in the "deadly vicious cycle" of "violence and counter-violence" between consumerist desire which cannot be realized "properly" (by actually paying for whatever goods) and the ideological apparatuses which produce such desires that cannot be realized.38

Work a standard 9 to 5 and you'll find out real fast what it's like to be caught up in this cycle. In the pilot of Taylor Sheridan's Landman, a series as brutal as it is unapologetic in its recurring depictions of working-class life in a deep red state, Cooper Norris begins a new job as an oil roustabout in Odessa, hoping to work his way up the ladder until he knows everything he needs to know in order to run his own oil company. His supervisor, Armando, invites him to dinner after his first day on the job. He tells Cooper that most of his new co-workers are ex-felons working to earn back the money they lost when they first went in. "It's better if you work for it real hard. That way, nobody can take it away." The next day, Armando is killed in a rig explosion. The episode fades to black as flames give way to smoke. No matter how hard you work for it, it can always be taken away.

Those who claim an authentic anti-establishment position today often find themselves in the same toxic feedback loop as Armando. As soon as you think you've figured out the right way to consume, the way to really get what you want, you run up against the limits of bourgeois society: you loot the mall, or else the mall loots you. But if we understand how we came to see ourselves as consumers first and people second, we might get a better idea of how to develop the opposite sort of collective subjectivity upon which any politics of liberation ultimately depends. If we understand the role we have played in the consolidation of consumerist ideology, whether as overt political agents or simply as normal everyday citizens of bourgeois society, we will be in a better position to pave the way for a more promising political project, a project with one eye to the past and the other to the future, a project that will maintain the revolutionary kernel of the Lefts of generations past while avoiding the pitfalls into which those Lefts fell. This is not to say that there is any "going back," that we might simply hand-wave away our interpellation once the curtain is pulled back. The genesis of the subject cannot be undone any more than a language can be unlearned. But to understand the mechanics of this genesis is to understand the ways

in which the subject of consumer society can acquire autonomy from or otherwise "subtract itself" from the cold waters of the capitalist society that produces it. After all, if ideology is produced like a commodity, so too is it produced in order to become obsolete—like a commodity.

Footnotes

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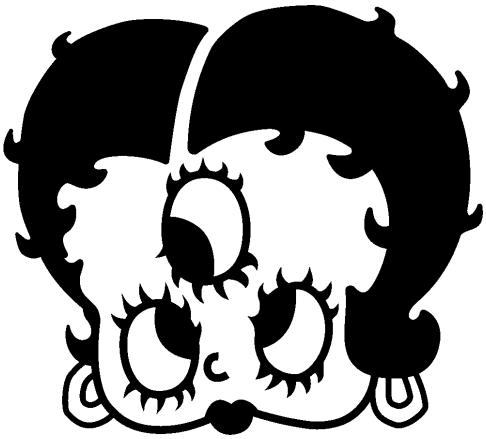
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