

Introduction

In the Book of Water we talked about how all religious and spiritual beliefs are essentially the same, and people only think they're different because they're focused on the details rather than the big picture. In the Book of Metal we covered history, mythology, and science, to show how advanced concepts are finally starting to explain what ancient people were trying to say back when the words to say it didn't exist. Now, in the Book of Earth, we look at philosophy, practical applications of Marzodian values in daily life. I'll spoil it for you a little, it's not all Kumbaya, peace and love. That's an end result, but it doesn't work as a path.

Part One: The Unbound

Morality is simple, but people complicate it. You don't need hundreds of laws, you only need one: Preserve harmony. The group good is the same as the moral good, every time. Course, then you'll start running into complications as far as methods for getting it done, but keep your eyes on the prize and you should do fine. People who get confused about morals are generally focusing too hard on the wrong thing, either that or looking for an excuse to do what's wrong.

Evil, then, we can define as simple selfishness, the willingness to screw somebody else to advance your own standing. Tribalism, of course, is a coward's compromise, you won't screw your group, just people outside it. Let me tell you, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades, so you might as well lose your inhibitions, grow a pair, and admit what you are. If you're the kind of person who makes excuses for not helping outsiders, like "that homeless guy begging for money is pulling in \$100k a year," or "those refugees are terrorists and criminals," how about you do us all a favor and just admit you don't want to help rather than pretend you believe bad excuses? Wouldn't you rather I think you're just immoral than that I think you're immoral and stupid? You're wasting a lot of time and energy on a disguise that I can assure you isn't working.

For those of us who want to be good, then, how do we do that? Do we give away all we've got and passively accept anything that comes our way? Course not, if tribalism is the coward's evil, passivity is the coward's good. You have to be a force for change in the world, and that means leveraging your time and resources, using them as weapons and armor so you can be an opponent the forces of evil will have nightmares about. So how do you decide when you should rock the boat, when you should sit quietly, and when you should tip it over? I have four rules that'll tell you when to fall in line, when to step out, and how to step out.

1: Rebel When You're Right

- Authority is a fine thing in the right hands, it keeps everyone on the same page and manages resources effectively. It's also the tool of tyrants. Before you rebel, ask, is the authority fair? Is it just? Does it uplift and empower those under it?

2: No Dragons

- Expert opinion is a softer version of authority. It sets limits, and some of those limits don't need to be set, because sometimes a guy just drew as much of the map as he knew, then wrote "here there be dragons" because he didn't want to admit he'd reached the limits of his knowledge. Note that this is not an invitation to draw your own dragons, this is a call to validate what you're being told. Listen to the best-informed person available, test it where you can, and if you don't know something, just shut up.

3: Think it Through

- This is very simple. You can be right all day long, but being right won't stop you from ending up like a bug on a windshield, so if you want to stop a car, come up with something better than flying in front of it. The driver doesn't care.

4: The Mesopotamian Method

- Mesopotamia was the birthplace of civilization because they were uniquely positioned to get the best ideas of three continents and combine them, because while an idea is a great start, it has to be combined with other ideas to go anywhere meaningful. A bigger pool of ideas is always better, and keeping people out shrinks the pool. It's shooting yourself in the foot in terms of progress, so you should only do it if the person you're keeping out will shoot you somewhere more critical. A single chain link isn't a useful tool, it's a paperweight.

To give you a better idea of how to apply these rules, we'll turn to mythology. We'll look into the rebels and tricksters of stories around the world, the guys who won't sit still in class and cause the occasional apocalypse. I'll give them ratings out of three on each rule, depending on whether they did terrible, fine, or great in upholding the principles, then the total will be their overall score. 12 is perfect, and I don't want to ruin it for you, but nobody gets it. These aren't saints, they're outcasts, and some of them try, but they're all still problem children at heart.

I: Prometheus

If you don't know who Prometheus is, well, I don't believe you, but okay. Let me tell you the story of the Greek god who by all rights should be the major deity of modern times, because he exemplifies the high points of Western morality, perfectly balancing individualism with societal obligation. But before I tell you about Prometheus, I need to tell you about the Titans, the Greek gods before the Greek gods.

The Titans were led by Cronus, who was the son of Ouranos, the primordial deity of the sky. Cronus overthrew his father and was the big man in charge for a while, and when Ouranos told him he'd one day be overthrown by his son just as he'd done to his father, he decided he wasn't having that and ate his children as they were born. Rhea, his sister and wife, was perhaps understandably upset by this, and when she had a sixth child, she gave Cronus a rock to eat instead. I always wondered whether Cronus had questions afterward regarding the texture and taste of this most recent child, but the myth doesn't mention it, so I'm left with no answers. This sixth child was Zeus, who, sure enough, led a rebellion against Cronus and overthrew him, then locked him up in Tartarus. You have to wonder, would Zeus have even felt the need to do that if

Cronus hadn't been an infanticidal, cannibalistic douchebag? Seems like Cronos should have looked inward for the source of his problems, and I'm not talking about the five gods in his belly.

But the thing about this story, is Prometheus was a part of Zeus's rebellion. He was one of the Titans, and then joined Zeus's bunch, the Olympians, and overthrew Cronus. This will be important later. For now, just know that, by some accounts, Prometheus came down to Earth after the war and made humans out of clay. You know how it is, you have a stressful day, you need to unwind, so you create a sentient race. Everybody needs a hobby.

By other accounts, all the animals, including humans, just kind of existed, and Prometheus and his brother, Epimetheus, were given the job of handing out different qualities to them. Epimetheus handed out hearing, sight, smell, fur, strength, was very open-handed, and when he came to the last animal on the list, humans, his bag of tricks was empty. Prometheus said no problem, let's give them intelligence and call it a day, and that was that. No matter how you slice it, Prometheus was the reason humans are different from other animals. And he didn't stop helping us there.

Zeus decided if there were going to be intelligent animals, he needed to get something out of it. It's not really detailed why he felt entitled to a slice of our cake, but he sure did, and demanded sacrifices. Prometheus had our backs again, though. He stuffed all the good parts of a bull into the stomach, made it look like a pile of guts, then took all the bones and covered them in fat. Then he went and got Zeus, and he told him he'd made two piles of animal parts, and all Zeus had to do was decide which pile he wanted to be his forever, out of every sacrifice. Zeus chose the pile of bones and fat, and Prometheus found some urgent business a long way off pretty quick, before Zeus figured out he'd been tricked. This was the beginning of Prometheus's quick slide down the crapper.

See, Zeus didn't like that Prometheus had just made him look like an idiot. He decided he'd do something petty and spiteful, because I guess he thought he came out of that not looking quite bad enough, so he took away humanity's ability to make fire. It's not stated exactly how that worked, just that it happened. Well, Prometheus came to the rescue again, of course, he brought us fire back from Mount Olympus, and in some tellings he brought agriculture, science, math, medicine, just about everything we ever needed, really. It was a very nice gesture, all in all, so it kind of sucked that Zeus decided the appropriate reaction was to chain Prometheus up in the Caucasus Mountains and have an eagle come by to rip his liver out every day. Whatever you do, do not piss off Zeus. God of Justice my ass, he was a real prick.

Now, Heracles eventually came and cut him loose, and then Prometheus told Zeus there was a prophecy about one of Zeus's sons overthrowing him, which is really a weird family tradition. The ancient Greeks really had a thing about sons overthrowing fathers, that and incest, they just couldn't get enough. Zeus figured, between the centuries of torture and the heads-up about the impending patricide, they were square, and didn't do anything else to him. Prometheus, for his part, didn't create any more sentient species or trick Zeus into eating offal again, so it was all fine. Don't you just love happy endings?

1: Rebel When You're Right - 3/3

Prometheus rebelled against both Cronus and Zeus, he's quite possibly the only figure in the mythology of any culture who ever rebelled against two distinct divine regimes, he's the poster child for individuality and free thinking. But it's important to note he wasn't just a rebel because he had too big an ego to fall in line, or because he wanted to be cool and edgy. He saved his bucking the system for important stuff, like when the King started eating babies, or when the other King started arbitrarily punishing lesser creatures to show everybody what a big badass he was. It was his willingness to rebel against corrupt authority that defined him, but he had no problem with Zeus's authority when Cronus needed to be taken down.

2: No Dragons - 3/3

While it's not in the story, I can't see Prometheus creating or allowing barriers that don't have a good basis in fact.

3: Think it Through - 1/3

Lots of people want to change the world, but the world likes itself very much just the way it is, thank you, and if you go stepping on toes, eventually the owner of the toes will make you wish you hadn't. You need a plan, you can't just charge in. That's where Prometheus failed. His heart was in the right place, but his head wasn't, and soon after that, his liver wasn't, every day, for centuries. Don't let it happen to you.

4: The Mesopotamian Method 3/3

Prometheus had every chance to just hang out on Mount Olympus and try to hook up with Aprodite like all his friends, but instead he helped humans. And later on, even Zeus was glad he did, because it turned out Gaia, the Earth, created the Giants, a race that the gods couldn't kill, and they needed humans to do it for them in the Gigantomachy. Can you imagine the side-eyeing Zeus would catch from the other Olympians if that had come up after he kept humans from having fire for centuries? Hermes would be sitting over there like "oh, hey, no problem, gods can't kill Giants, but humans can! I'll just run down and ask one, they love us, they really enjoy those cold nights without fire after SOMEONE TOOK IT FROM THEM." Then Zeus would make him Prometheus's cellmate, but all the other gods would still be thinking the same thing.

But seriously, this is exactly why you need to elevate others. You can't do everything, and maybe there's no big problem right now, but one day there will be, and also, what are you talking about? There's millions of problems right now, do you live under a rock? And it's perfectly fine to be strong and smart and capable, but 90% of everything is being in the right place at the right time, and the other 10% is having the right help, so solving problems comes down to making sure there are as many strong, smart, capable people as possible. Mathematically speaking, the greater number of people are capable of solving a problem, the greater the chance that one of them will be in the right position to do it. By elevating as many people as you possibly can, you raise the odds of problems being solved, even if you don't solve them

yourself. If you think it's not worth anything if you don't get the spotlight, do me a favor and hit yourself in the face with something really heavy.

Total: 10/12

Prometheus is perfect in intent, just short on long-term planning. Honestly, if you're going to be like anybody, be like Prometheus.

II: Lucifer

In a book on rebellious deities, leaving out the most famous one would just be weird. Would it surprise you at all to know Satan isn't evil? At least, not originally, not in the Bible, but we'll go into the Quran and classical literature after we've got that cleared up. Biblically, Satan may even be a nice guy. We don't know, because he's Heaven's District Attorney, and we only ever see him doing his job. In the original texts, Satan is almost definitely an Angel, and just as good and loyal as Gabriel, Michael, or any of the others, but God's put him in a role that invites hate. Let's explore the big steaming pile of crap that got dumped on this poor guy.

His main moment in the spotlight is in Job, where he keeps telling God "sure, Job is great, because you haven't screwed with him enough yet," and God lets Satan screw with Job. Now, either God is a real prick, or Satan is doing his job and God is allowing it. Actually, scratch that, God is a prick in this story either way, if you kill someone's whole family of course he'll be in a bad mood. But if Satan is fulfilling his role, at least this makes some sense, that God's enemy didn't just walk up and say "bro, I double dog dare you to completely destroy that dude's life," and God just does it. Satan's job, assigned by God, is to find a weakness and see if the person really is loyal and faithful. See it again in Zechariah 3:1-2, Satan is prosecuting Joshua, and God isn't having it. In Matthew 4:3-8, he comes to Jesus and tempts him to sin, just business as usual.

But the real clinch on this idea is I Chronicles 21:1, where Satan caused David to do a census, but oh, wait, that was actually God, in II Samuel 24:1. Either the Bible is having a little trouble figuring out the difference between the Lord of all Evil and the Benevolent Creator of the Universe, or Satan was acting on God's orders, doing his job. This makes sense of the Book of Exodus too, where God kept hardening Pharaoh's heart when Moses would come tell him what God wanted. Either God was playing an extremely sadistic game of "why you hitting yourself" with Pharaoh, or this was Satan doing what he's supposed to do. Either way, seems a little unfair, God had no reason to be testing Pharaoh's faith, I'm sure Pharaoh worshipped Ra, but Satan acting on God's orders at least keeps it from being complete nonsense, and this reading of it is fully justified by the confusion in Chronicles versus Samuel. The only way none of it makes sense at all is if you see Satan as God's enemy.

And then that's it till Revelation, which we'll talk about later. Up to this point, Satan isn't King of Hell, or a rebel angel, or any of it. Ezekiel 28:11-19, Isaiah 14:12-15, and Luke 10:18 all have traditional interpretations of being a reference to Satan, but I'll tell you what, you go read them, not just those verses, but the entire page they're on, and then you try telling me they're about

Satan. They're very much about other things. Satan as a secondary, veiled topic, well, it could be, maybe, but you don't want to play "this verse is clearly about x, but it's also secretly about y" with me, I'll turn your whole religion upside down. Outside of that, there are some scattered references that connect Satan to sin, and Paul in particular will not stop ragging on the poor guy, but we don't get any more insights into his nature or real, concrete actions.

Then there's Revelation. Look, I could write you a whole book about each chapter of Revelation, and you could write a whole book telling all the reasons I'm wrong, and then a third person could come write another book saying how stupid we both are and how obvious the real answer is, and none of us would have solid ground to stand on because we're all trying to analyze what amounts to John having a divinely inspired acid trip. It's never totally clear whether John is describing past, present, or future, and even if you somehow nailed that down he's still talking in metaphors, and we could discuss them all day and never get anywhere. Remember when highly educated scholars, smarter and better informed than me and you put together, knew exactly what it would look like when the Messiah came, then some carpenter's son came walking up like "okay, guys, I'm here, let's go," and the scholars were all like "uh, haha, no?" Well, interpreting fever dreams sent by God ends like that every single time, so I'll tell you what I THINK it means, but if you think different, you're perfectly entitled to.

Revelation 12 shows a woman wearing a crown with 12 stars. She's having a baby, and a big dragon, identified as Satan, is sitting there, waiting for the baby to come out so he can eat it, because this baby will rule the Earth with a rod of iron. Well, the baby is born, Angels rescue it, Satan chases them to Heaven but gets booted out along with his Angels, verse 8 saying "there was no longer any place for them in Heaven," which definitely implies they were all allowed there up to that point. So, to me, the woman is all 12 tribes of Judah, shown by the crown, the baby is Jesus, Satan gets fired from his role as divine DA once Jesus comes along, and Satan is understandably upset. If you'd had the same job for thousands of years, you would be too. Then Satan goes off and gives his power to a talking lion with ten horns, seven heads, and bear's feet, and we don't really hear from him anymore, till a spirit like a frog comes from his mouth later, and then he gets locked up for 1,000 years. I told you, you never know what's happening in Revelation.

Pretty much what happened there was Jesus was born, and the new order of the day was mercy, so Satan got kicked out. He started raising a fuss, and God locked him up. Or maybe it wasn't that at all, but you know what it wasn't? Satan rebelling against God before Genesis, because if it was, who the hell are the woman and the baby? Making this work as a primordial event means twisting it and confusing the whole path even more than it already was, making me wonder why God would even tell John anything at all, if he's going to be that unclear about the whole thing. Revelation already borders on completely useless, don't make it worse to fit a theory that's not seen anywhere else in the whole Bible.

Satan is Heaven's Quality Assurance guy, and if you ask me, he got fired 2,000 years ago. Now, given the timelines here, that also means he got out on parole 1,000 years ago, and if you want to say he went back to his old job, trying to prove God still needs him, well, that seems likely

enough, given how upset he was about getting fired. He might even have more leeway now than he did before, without management looking over his shoulder, making him fill out reports. Satan can still be exactly who you thought, but the backstory the Church sold us on him was pure bull. Same as any regime, an enemy galvanizes the base, gives us something to unite against, and since God's whole deal is omnipotence, a worthwhile enemy has always been hard to find. The Church had to work with what little they had, and they invented Lucifer out of a divine prosecutor and a handful of verses that had nothing to do with him, because it was either that or bring back Ba'al.

Turning to the Quran, the djinn Iblis is playing the part of Lucifer, in Surah Al-A'raf 7:11-18 and Surah Sad 38:71-85, which both tell about how Iblis refused to bow to Allah's most recent creation, Man, bringing up all kinds of perfectly valid points about his superiority, but Allah wasn't having it and kicked him out. His position there was always kind of tenuous, a djinn basically being a demon, and far as Allah was concerned, this was the last straw. Other than that, the Quran connects him to sin and establishes him as Allah's enemy a lot more satisfactorily than the Bible does. Turning to classical literature, in Dante's Divine Comedy, Lucifer is barely mentioned, he's frozen in the lowest level of Hell, chewing on traitors. In Goethe's Faust and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, he's a holder of knowledge, and he'll be glad to let you have it if you just give him your soul.

But it's not until Milton's Paradise Lost where we really see Lucifer as we know him taking shape, a charismatic rebel, with all kinds of great lines about ruling in Hell rather than serving in Heaven, and the mind being its own place, and really just chock full of the kind of stuff that makes teenage rebels all tingly. Let me tell you, every single thing you think you know about Lucifer, Archangels, war in Heaven, anything, comes from this poem. Paradise Lost had a more profound effect on modern Christianity than the Bible did, and if you've read them both, you know it's true. Not that that's a bad thing, it's actually a really great read, but a poem from 1667 just doesn't carry the same theological weight as the Hebrew texts that predate most of the world's written records, does it? But technically there's nothing stopping it from being true, maybe Milton had a prophetic vision, which would really just make the Church of Satan an even bigger stain than it already is.

See, Lucifer was all set up to be a bringer of knowledge and a rival to God. Given Satan's unclear position in the Bible and all the Biblical events that most definitely did not happen, from a scholarly, historical perspective, like the Flood, the conquest of Canaan, just really any number of things, it would have been laughably easy to paint the Bible as a book of lies, exaggerations, and omissions, a divine smear campaign against God's rival, who'd rather see humanity progress than be ignorant animals living in a garden. Lucifer could have been Prometheus all over again in a religion that promotes progress, the responsibility of higher beings to help the lower, and rejection of tyranny. Instead, the Church of Satan is a Halloween mask for Atheists who find there's not quite enough shock value in saying they don't believe in God. It's a bunch of teenage rebels making Internet memes, and a waste of the religion that could have easily swept the Western world.

Not that it's entirely Anton LaVey's fault. All he really did was come along in 1966 and establish a standard for Atheists to rally around, promoting hedonism along with ethics that weren't tied to worship of a deity or fear of punishment after death. It was really the absolute twats who came after him that ruined it, doing things like co-opting the Cross of Saint Peter, which I guarantee you they did not know was and still is a thing, they just thought it would piss off Christians if they flipped the cross upside down. Or do you really think these guys deeply resonated with themes of humility and devotion to Christ? No, didn't think so. It's really a prime example of what the Church of Satan is all about, shock value, contrarianism, and ignorant kids trying to get a reaction.

And it is just such an epic waste. Lucifer had the recognition value. He had the backstory, mostly, just needed some easy, minor tweaks. The Church of Satan could have been a religion of helping the less fortunate, striving for progress, and challenging authority when it's out of line, but instead it's just another form of teenagers writing dirty words inside bathroom stalls. It could have stood for something, if it had been run by serious people from the jump, and instead it stands for nothing. And it's really too late to take it back, it's firmly entrenched. So if any of you go off and start a Church of Prometheus, how about you take a good, long, hard look at Anton LaVey, and do your very best not to do one single thing he did?

1: Rebel When You're Right - 3/3

I'll be rating the Lucifer of popular perception here, since we've already explored why the Biblical Satan really isn't what we're looking for. And look, no matter how offensive you find it, God had no right to keep humans as ignorant animals. Lucifer did us a solid here. Can't speak on his rebellion in Heaven, we don't get a clear view of whether he was actually being oppressed or not, but the Heaven scenes of Paradise Lost were the worst parts of the poem, so can't really blame the poor guy.

2: No Dragons - 1/3

Just like Prometheus, this is inference, not actual myth, but come on. This guy would 100% throw up a false roadblock if he felt the need, no hesitation.

3: Think it Through - 3/3

His battle in Paradise Lost was actually a fine plan, God just beat it by being God. Course, since this was God's first fight ever, Lucifer couldn't be expected to know that would happen.

4: The Mesopotamian Method - 2/3

Lucifer isn't helping us because he cares about collaboration, he just wants to piss God off. But he does effectively collaborate with other Angels, so he sees the value of alliance, he just doesn't think we've got anything to offer. Gatekeeping loses you a point, big guy, everybody has something to contribute.

Total: 9/12

Stripped down to basics, Lucifer is really just Prometheus, but a little bit more of a prick.

III: Sun Wukong

Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, is a figure in Chinese mythology. He was born from a stone egg on a mountain, and the light from his eyes got the attention of the Jade Emperor. When his people reported back that it was only a stone monkey, he shrugged and went back to his work. The monkey found other monkeys to play with, and he grew up with them. They liked to play in a stream, and one day they decided that whoever could find the source of the stream would be their king. Well, I don't want to ruin the suspense, but the stone monkey did it.

One day one of his friends died, and he was so upset that he struck off into the world to find an immortal to teach him how to beat death. He found a village, but everyone was afraid of him, they'd never seen a stone monkey before, they ran away and the monkey wandered off into the woods. He heard a woodcutter whistling a tune, and he liked it so much he asked the woodcutter where he learned it, and found out he'd picked it up from an immortal in a temple in the forest. Well, the monkey followed the directions, found the temple, and met Puti Zushi, who refused to let him in at first, so the monkey camped outside the door for months. Puti Zushi was impressed with his determination and let him in, giving him the name Sun Wukong. Puti Zushi taught Sun Wukong a lot, and ended his education by telling him never to show off his skills, because people would want to learn, and this knowledge can't go to just anyone.

Sun Wukong knows he needs a weapon out in the world, but can't find one he likes. He eventually goes off to the palace of Ao Guang, a Dragon King, who tries to turn him away, but Sun Wukong barges in anyway. Ao Guang sees that Sun Wukong is too strong to be turned away, so he has his servants bring out weapons for the monkey to choose from. He finally picks the golden-banded staff, a two-ton stick that can be as big as a pillar or as small as a needle. He also gets a golden chainmail shirt, a phoenix feather cap, and cloudwalking boots.

Sun Wukong goes back home, and he expands his kingdom to include a lot more animals than just his monkey tribe. But Ao Guang doesn't like that this monkey just walked in and took his best weapon and armor, and sends Hell to collect his soul, which is a really useful connection to have, I can think of a few people I'd like to try it on. Sun Wukong scrubs his name out of the Book of Life and Death, along with the names of his friends, so he can't die and his soul can't be collected. Well, the Jade Emperor gets involved at this point, brings his whole army down on Sun Wukong. But Sun Wukong has too good a weapon and too many soldiers, and he beats back the armies of Heaven.

The Jade Emperor finally decides to ally with Sun Wukong and make him a part of the empire to solve the problem. He's made Protector of Horses, and finds he's the stable boy for the cloud horses, so he frees them and returns to Earth, giving himself the title of Great Sage, Heaven's Equal, because he's not very good at subtlety. The Jade Emperor agrees he can use that title and makes him Guardian of the Heavenly Peach Garden, and Sun Wukong accepts, but finds he's just a gardener who's not invited to Heaven's social events. He gets drunk, steals a bunch of stuff, and runs back to Earth. The Jade Emperor gets his armies together to crush him, but it doesn't start off any better for him the second time around. Sun Wukong beats all the armies till

Erlang Shen, the Emperor's nephew, fights him. They're evenly matched, there's a lot of shapeshifting, and finally Laozi throws his diamond jade ring at Sun Wukong from behind, which knocks him out, so that must have been one big damn ring.

Well, the Emperor tries several ways of killing Sun Wukong, but none of them work out, and eventually he's put in a forge to be melted down. This has the opposite effect, 49 days later he comes out, fully hardened and now able to see evil with his fiery golden eyes. He goes after the Emperor, who summons Buddha. Sun Wukong argues to Buddha that he should be the new Emperor, and Buddha says he can prove his power by sitting in his palm, then jumping out. Sun Wukong sees no problem with that, sits in Buddha's palm, jumps, runs, and cartwheels as far as he can, and reaches five giant pillars. He thinks this must be the end of the Universe, so he pees on one, as anyone would if they found the pillars at the end of the Universe, but they turn out to be Buddha's fingers. He turns his hand into a mountain, trapping Sun Wukong.

Well, he stays there for 500 years, until a priest, Tang Sanzang, comes by. He needs protection on his road trip, and Sun Wukong can kick Heaven's ass, so he's the obvious choice. He frees Sun Wukong on the condition that he helps the priest in return, and puts a golden circlet on the monkey's head that tightens when the priest chants, to keep him in line. They take a long trip to India and back to China, Sun Wukong learns about Buddhism, and in the end achieves Buddhahood. He gives up on being the new Emperor and settles for being the King of all Monkeys, which is probably a lot more fun anyway.

Rebel When You're Right: 1/3

He really created his own problems when he demanded equipment from Ao Guang, and once that was dealt with, should have just gone back to his monkeys and forgot about Heaven and the Emperor. But he got all caught up in his ego, and that got him into trouble.

No Dragons: 3/3

Sun Wukong doesn't accept limitations, he even sees the Jade Emperor's position as being up for debate.

Think it Through: 1/3

He's not a thinker, he'd rather hit things till they break. The fact that it works out for him so often doesn't make it the right answer.

The Mesopotamian Method: 3/3

He's always willing to work with others, he just gets cranky when he feels undervalued.

Understandable, the Jade Emperor really was being a prick, but the right answer was to walk away, not pick a fight with God.

Total: 8/12

He lost a lot of points for choosing force over strategy, and for choosing ego over retreat. He didn't need these problems, he created them himself. The lesson here is to say "maybe I can,

but should I?" He eventually made it to Heaven, but he had to learn he couldn't punch his way in.

IV: My Greatest Weakness

I know I'm not a trickster god, but I wanted to close this section with my story, because maybe it'll help you fine-tune your application of Marzodian philosophy. If you see my wrong turns, maybe you won't get lost, or at least you'll get lost in new and exciting ways.

Every time it came up, I found I didn't have an answer to the question "what's your greatest weakness?" I knew I must have one, but I could never find it, all the weaknesses that came to mind were things I had a decent handle on. But I also knew enough about psychology to know that everyone's the hero of their own story, and that everything about a person gets a positive spin in their own mind. Still, this question beat me every time, I had nothing. Can you imagine how surprised I was to find that it was also my greatest strength?

Let's rewind. When I was a kid, I was homeschooled, and grew up in near complete isolation, my family were the only ones I interacted with. Now, there were occasional kids' groups my parents would put me in, and we went to church a lot, but I wasn't actually getting socialized there, I'd just stay quiet and sit through it till it was over. That led to all the problems you'd expect, I had no social skills at all, and my initial instinct to just sit through events that involved other people was reinforced by the bullying that naturally comes from being the odd one out in a group of kids. So it was established early on that it was me against the group, whoever that group might be.

My only social interaction was online, on forums, which were kind of the early version of social media. There, it's edgy contrarianism that gets you noticed, the ability to tell someone how wrong and stupid they are anytime they express an opinion. Course, this spoke really well to a smart kid who couldn't fit in, I'd definitely found my people. And my hero was House, from House MD, which if you don't know is a show about a doctor who's a complete sociopath, and I modeled my entire personality on him, training myself to go straight for cold, surface-level logic and always say the most abrasive thing possible, because he did it, and he was always right. He was always smarter than anyone, and if he could pull it off, so could I. I watched that show so often I can still tell you at the opening scene what the patient's final diagnosis will be, and I absorbed that character in all the worst ways. I discovered primate psychology around that time too, how the monkey brain is making a lot more decisions than people think it is, and of course that explained exactly why everyone but me was an idiot.

Course, I did grow out of it, mostly. I realized abrasiveness isn't really helpful most of the time, and finally did realize that most situations carry enough nuance that the simple, straightforward logic it shows on its face may not be showing the full picture. But I'd cut corners anywhere I could, I'd disregard any rules I thought I could get away with, because I refused to actually engage with a group, or society in the larger sense. All my childhood and early adult stuff was still there, it'd just had its sharp edges dulled down, I was blending better. But my default

position was always, always to look at what the group thought and immediately default to "well, they're apes, so what's the right answer?" Their position was based in thoughtless obedience, or concerns that only mattered in a sense of broad statistics, or things that weren't going to cause a problem for me personally, so I saw them as invalid.

And the thing is, the world never forced me to realize this, I never got fired from a job or in serious legal trouble, because I was meticulous half the time and lucky the other half, so I hardly ever got caught doing things wrong. My problems connecting with others kept me from turning acquaintances into friends, no doubt, but as far as hard, concrete negatives, I got none, so I spent an incredibly long time thinking I was right and everyone else was stupid. So now that I've found my greatest weakness, does this mean I flip a U-turn, become a good little soldier who obeys rules just because they're rules? Not a chance. It's still my greatest strength, because some corners deserve to be cut, and rules never have the full context of any situation, so often can and sometimes should be broken. All it means is that I recognize now that it has a downside to be managed, which is that my default position is against the group and against others, and I should ask myself whether they deserve it before I take that position. Are they actually stupid, or is that my ingrained bias talking?

In the end, all these stories speak for themselves, I don't really need to tie a bow on them for you. But I will anyway.

Rebel When You're Right

Rebel like Prometheus. Stay in line if you don't have good reason to step out. Authority is necessary, so unless you're making a better system, don't tear down the old one.

No Dragons

Don't take anyone's word for something when finding out for yourself is an option.

Think it Through

Think before you act, don't let your liver end up as some eagle's lunch.

The Mesopotamian Method

Alright, stop. Collaborate, like Vanilla Ice. No, wait, like Prometheus. Actively seek out help, and see where you can help others, because later you might be glad you did. Build a strong network. But if you find you're not valued, don't pull a Sun Wukong and try to bring them down, that's a waste of energy, and they just might trap you under a mountain for 500 years.

All these figures had things they did well, and things they didn't. If you model your strategy on the right parts, you'll do fine, and if you don't, you'll get a time-out under a mountain.

Now get out there and cause some trouble.

Part Two: Exodus

I: Eye of a Needle

I want to start this by painting you two pictures: The America that was, and the America that is.

The average yearly income in the US today is around \$60-\$65,000 a year. That's about twenty times what it was in 1920.

The average home in 1920 cost about \$3,500. Today, \$500,000. If you're not too quick with numbers, that's \$3,500 times 143. The average home price has been multiplied by 143, as opposed to the average salary multiplying times 20.

In 1920, a new car cost around \$500, on average. Now it costs around \$50,000. That's a 100-fold increase, opposed to that piddling little 20 for salary.

In 1920, a college tuition cost around \$200 a year. Today, around \$40,000, along with an interest rate designed to keep you trapped in the payments for the rest of your natural life, and I'm pretty sure they're looking into ways to make collections follow you into the grave too. A college education has been multiplied times 200. Two hundred, as opposed to twenty.

You were never meant to survive like this. This country has been hijacked by the rich, and I'm not talking about people that live in the good part of town and have two new cars and a boat, I'm talking about billionaires, CEOs, the people who really run the world. If you make \$200k a year, relax, I'm not talking about you, because you're a lot closer to being broke than you are to being a billionaire. If you have a million dollars in assets, well, I'm happy for you, but you know the difference between a million dollars and a billion dollars? It's roughly a billion dollars. And you know what's the kicker? Most of us won't even see a million.

You know what really did it, was the Cold War. All of a sudden no nation could operate as its own thing, we had to bring other nations under our umbrella, save them from that big scary Red Menace, right? We did away with tariffs, heavy taxes on imported goods, all of a sudden it made sense for companies to have their products made in some rathole overseas for pennies, then ship them over here to sell to us for dollars, and pocket the difference. We were so afraid of the boys in red, we never stopped to think about the Green Menace, did we? We set big business owners up to take over the world, and they did it, they bought off all the politicians of every country that mattered, and they were set. This isn't conspiracy, this is documented, verifiable, historical fact! You go look into it yourself, and then you tell me I'm wrong.

Your right to a stable future was stolen from you, priced so high you can only get it if you go into debt and spend your entire life working 60-hour weeks to get it! You just be a good little cog, do your job in the machine, and hope real hard that you don't get sick or hurt, because if you need any kind of serious medical treatment you can wave goodbye to anything you've got stocked up for the future, the debt you go into on that will bust your bank account flat and go digging through the bottom for more. It's these greedy bastards at the top, international bankers and

businessmen, pricing us out of our lives, and the hell of it is they know how obvious it is. They know you can see it if you look, that's why they're always trying to get you to look somewhere else, try to get you to hate the white folks or the black ones or the gay ones, while they pick your pocket and charge you ten times what they charged your great-grandfather for the necessities of life! You stay mad at your neighbors or your boss or your landlord or whatever figurehead they've got installed in government, maybe you won't notice who's really causing all your grief. They think you're too stupid. So I'm here to ask, are you?

I'm assuming you said no, so what do we do about it? We pull out of their rigged game. Sit down and look at everything you spend money on, and ask yourself what you can do without. Every single thing that you need, that you can't do yourself or live without, is a brick in the wall of your prison. I'm telling you, the worst nightmare of these guys is that we'll all pull out of society, own land, grow crops, and barter with our neighbors for what we need. If enough of us did that, they'd feel their machine start to misfire, because the whole engine depends on all of us working all the damn time, and the population growing bigger each generation. Even just sitting still at its current output would kill it, it's like a pyramid scheme, if it stops growing it's dead.

You know the thing that helps them the most, aside from fighting amongst ourselves, is the entertainment industry. We're constantly distracted by movies, TV, games, music, social media, we don't put our whole brain into anything that matters. We're crack addicts always looking for our next hit so we don't have to think about how bad our lives are. The Roman writer Juvenal wrote "two things the people anxiously desire -- bread and circuses," and damned if we don't prove him right every single day. Long as we're kept entertained and fed, we're livestock, and we might notice how small the pen is, but we won't do anything about it, we'll keep right on serving our masters.

We have the power to make them sit up and take notice. All you have to do is stop buying so you can cut way down on working. Find a level where you're satisfied now and secure in the future, because you'll spend your whole life trying to jump one rung higher on the ladder otherwise. A king who conquers the world will die wishing for the Moon, we always want more. You have to figure out what "enough" looks like, get that, and sit down. Ask any workaholic on their deathbed, not a one of them wishes they spent more time at the office, bought a bigger house, had a newer car, it's time with family and friends they wish they had more of, but they never thought about it while they were alive, there was always just one last thing to get.

I want you to set aside time today, look at everything you have, and seriously ask, what can you do without? Plan yourself a life where you get rid of the things you don't truly need, and where you get the most practical versions of the things you have left. Maybe you don't need a new car, plenty of fine ones out there from 20 years ago. Maybe you don't need five different subscriptions to TV and music, maybe you're wasting a lot of electricity and water, I'm not going to write your budget for you, that's up to you. What I will tell you, as you go on and make your decision, is that every dollar you have to spend is a weakness for the bastards to exploit. It's another hour you have to work, it's another carrot for them to dangle so you'll keep being a good

boy. You're tightening your own chain, and I won't tell you not to, but I want you to know what you're doing.

They want you distracted. They want you exhausted. They want you blind. But you're not any of those things. Not unless you choose to be.

II: The Game is Rigged

Have you checked on white supremacists lately? If you haven't, you'd be amazed at how they've changed. They don't talk about superiority anymore, or how other races are scum, they're 100% invested in how hard it is to be white. Apparently it's a great struggle every day, fighting the good fight against a world that hates them, and most of the political Right buy into this idea. They're being pushed out of society, apparently, and next thing you know they'll be shot in the streets by squads of government goons.

And they're not totally off base. If you go on social media, you'll see racism against white people being accepted, even celebrated, while any dissenters get dogpiled. You go in the wrong parts of the city as a white person, you get the evil eye from everybody you pass. In the current Western culture, racism against white people gets excused, while racism coming from a white person is the worst possible evil. White people still hold the systemic power, but social power has turned against them hard in a lot of areas. And as social creatures, it's definitely distressing when society hates us, so it's not so much that the complaints of the Right have no basis, it's more that they're overblowing it, trying to turn it into a tangible, measurable problem that just doesn't exist. That's the divide between social power and systemic power, only one of them can actually ruin you.

See, they saw the Left get all riled up about identity politics, and somehow, every group other than straight white men are oppressed and important, and the Right said "hang on, where's ours?" And, understandably, they got upset that a significant chunk of society hated them all of a sudden, so they copied the playbook, started playing "we're not oppressors, we're oppressed!" They stole the strategy without thinking through how dumb that was going to look. You can't claim you, as a straight white man, are oppressed when you're living in a mostly straight, white, male system and expect that to fly. You can say you're unpopular due to the actions of your ancestors, and that's not fair because none of them asked your opinion before they did bad things. You can definitely make a case that you're hated for no good reason, and that this isn't balancing the scales so much as creating a new offense. You can say you're upset that people hate you through no fault of your own, that's a valid stance, you just can't pretend anything bigger comes of it.

Not that I'm on the Left's side either, I hate the game, not which team plays it. They talk about how all the rich people in this country are white, and look, I want you to know, as a straight white man who grew up poor as hell, that Musk has never given me gas money. Bezos never bought me a beer. Gates doesn't help me out when there's too much month left at the end of the

money. I don't know who told you they were doing that, or what benefit you think white men are getting, but the ones in power aren't sharing with us at Straight White Male Club meetings.

Now, I know you Leftists are about to bring up how black people are still currently being oppressed in the Western world, and the U.S. in particular. I'll admit that it looks true, and even is true, but not on as large a scale as you think. Poor people are being oppressed, and black people are overrepresented among the poor because of past, not current, oppression. While poor black people get arrested and imprisoned a little bit more often than poor white people, the arrest and conviction rates of poor white people are still higher than the rates for middle class black people. So hey, good news to everyone on all sides that likes whining about how oppressed they are, you can still complain, you just need to complain about the right thing. Stop being Team White, Team Black, Team Gay, and be Team Not-Billionaire, because trust me, this team is the only one that needs to win, fighting with your teammates is counterproductive for all of us.

Income is the single biggest determining factor in how oppressed you are, and there is no close second to this behemoth. The only oppressors that matter are the billionaires, they manipulate media to keep us fighting over crumbs while they eat the meal. We get oppression stories sold to us, there's always some new group who needs recognition, and in the end everybody has a reason to accept their station in life. It is what it is, I'm oppressed, there's no hope, why bother trying? Meanwhile we're fed a new Boogeyman every time we start getting bored with the old one, and we're saturated with entertainment and greasy, salty, fatty food so we never get pissed off enough to do anything. Bread and circuses, right? We're living without hope for the future, but we're fed, we're entertained, and we have a strawman to blame, so we keep working like good little cogs in the machine.

And if you think the solution is to vote harder, get the right mascot in the right office, I'm sorry to tell you that won't work. Most democratic societies are set up as perpetual gridlock. Even if they wanted to, no politician could make a change that his peers couldn't block or the next guy couldn't undo. They all have to pull together to do anything, and that pressure will not come from below. We're too fragmented, we have all these arbitrary lines drawn between us, most prominently Right versus Left, and so the only unified political pressure comes from up the chain, the billionaires, not down here where we live.

Now, of course, I'm not the first person to think we're all trapped by the elites. But did you ever notice how many people say there's a problem, then immediately tell you what you need to buy from them to make things better? Most escape hatches aren't escape hatches at all, they just want to turn you into a specific type of consumer, whether it's prepper, gun nut, eco-conscious, spiritualist, stock gambling, crypto, they tell you the world is a terrible place and you can escape it, but somehow the escape always involves buying something, usually for twice what it cost to produce. Gotta support the cause, right? They're just a small business who believes in doing what's right, don't you want to help them? That's why I'm going to tell you how to not be livestock for the rich, and it won't cost you a penny.

There's only one step: Reduce spending. Look at all the things you spend money on, and ask "what can I do without? What can I find a workaround for?" The need for money is your leash, and every time you choose comfort and convenience, you tighten it yourself. Ruthlessly cut everything you can, because dependence is slavery. If you have to be a little less comfortable to be free, isn't it worth it? Do you honestly like working every second of your life just to be allowed to exist?

It's not even that hard to do. You don't need Netflix, find something to do with your time that you'll care about rather than passively waiting for your free time to end. You don't need a \$1,000 phone, let me tell you, you'll never notice the difference if you get a \$200 phone. The only reason you need a new car is if the old one doesn't run, and everyone in your house doesn't need their own. You don't need fast food, pretty much ever, take 30 minutes and cook. Now that you ditched Netflix you've got lots of time.

You can go much bigger with this idea if you want to. You can build a self-sustaining farm on your property, and if you can't get property, you'd probably be shocked at how many off-grid communes there are around you already. Even low acreage can sustain you if you focus on cash and barter crops, or you can embrace the van life, live in a van and do odd jobs for grocery money. The point is, the system is built for livestock, and if you don't like being livestock, you have to live outside the system. It takes some work and ingenuity, but it's possible, and pulling out of the system is the only way to hurt the ones running it. If you think you'll get things changed by voting for the right mascot, ha, good luck, it's the same people running both sides. You can't win a rigged game by playing harder, you win by walking away and making your own game.

The truth is, nobody's going to change things. The time for that has passed, the parasites have their hooks in. Democratic government is intentionally designed for a constant stalemate, the only change that happens comes from both sides. And I guarantee you the rich are pulling both sides harder than all the rest of us could, even if we did manage to put aside our petty squabbles. The only way to break the game is if enough of us don't play. You don't need more stuff. You need less leash, and a life you don't have to beg to keep.

III: Let My People Go

Our world is built on a pyramid scheme, and if you don't believe me, don't worry, I'll walk you through it. The US, like most major economies, is on a fiat currency, which means rather than tying its value to something tangible, like gold, it's tied to the estimated consumption and labor of the citizens. The more you buy, the more you work, and the more you increase the population with others who'll do the same, the more the dollar is worth. And it has to keep growing, because we've got an interest rate on the national debt, and if we're not outpacing it, we're losing money. Borrowing money as a country is actually a complicated gamble on the pyramid scheme of population growth and consumerism, and if lots of us decide not to work, not to buy, they lose their bet. Do you think the Right cares about abortion, or the Left cares about

refugees? The billionaires need bodies in the machine, and they're telling their puppets on both sides to make it happen in a way that appeals to their base.

Now, you might be asking, and rightly so, whether we should be looking to make them lose their bet, bring the system down. To that I say we absolutely should. Every last one of us is one medical crisis from having nothing, most of us could only miss a couple of paychecks till the Jenga tower of our lives comes crashing down. We're slaves to a system that wants us to do nothing but work and consume for half a century and end up penniless and alone in some warehouse where they store old people till they die! That's the American Dream, how many people do you know of that do any different? And to any who aren't Americans, I'll tell you now, your tower may not be as precarious as ours, but it's based in the same system of economic slavery. This system deserves to burn, we need to topple the pyramid and expose the Pharaoh as just some guy in a silly hat, not a living god.

Now, I know what you're thinking. It's all well and good to be pissed about the state of the world, but is it really better to grow tomatoes in the backyard and never leave your property? Of course it's not. You need to find like-minded people to build a community with, or you're just a hippie or a prepper, and neither of them is really anything in the grand scheme. So here's how you build your own, better civilization. And unlike Moses, I'll only need five plagues to bring Pharaoh to his knees.

The First Plague: Land of the Free

You're going to need to set up somewhere, preferably on rural land, which will have fewer regulations than city limits. If you can't get land on your own, pool resources with other people and get some, and if that strikes out too, find someone who has land and work something out with them. You need a place where you can live without rent that's like being mugged every month, and you need space to grow crops or raise livestock.

The Second Plague: Fields without Pharaoh

Potatoes, beans, and corn are your best food crops, they'll give you the most bang per acre in terms of calories and nutrients. For livestock, goats are the MVP. If you starve a goat to death, I'd bet it's because you were trying really, really hard, and they can pop out two babies a year if you really set them to it. Pigs are nearly as good, and chickens, ducks, and rabbits are all good options.

The Third Plague: Harvesting Fire

Your combustion engines need to be swapped over to ethanol. An acre of sugarcane can be fermented and distilled into around 800 gallons of ethanol, just chop it down, crush it, throw it in a bunch of barrels of water, wait a week or two, heat it up, collect the steam. To change your engines over, swap out your fuel line and any gaskets the fuel comes in contact with, trade them for ethanol-safe rubber, then make your injectors or carb jets about 40% bigger. The entire

process of making and using ethanol fuel is so easy I guarantee you only need a day on YouTube to figure it out, no matter how dumb you think you are, and then you never need to buy gas again. Most places don't heavily regulate fuel distillation, the permit process is mostly non-existent, so go get that and become your own gas station.

The Fourth Plague: Lightning From the Sun

For electricity, you'll want to buy used solar panels. They're dirt cheap, and they don't really degrade all that much. Skip the battery bank, though, that's got to be replaced every ten to fifteen years, and it's expensive as hell. Wire your panels direct to an inverter, and use an ethanol generator at night or on cloudy days. Make sure you know that generator inside and out, and stock up on spare parts, you don't want it breaking down on you and be clueless about how to fix it.

The Fifth Plague: Builders in the Wilderness

Next step, now that your living situation is all set, is the community. You want doctors for sure, or a veterinarian with flexible professional ethics is just as good. You'll also want carpenters, plumbers, mechanics, electricians, and gardeners, pretty much any blue collars you can round up. You'll also want lawyers, because you're probably going to run into some legal turbulence as you make your way out of society, and you'll want teachers so your kids don't grow up stupid. If you can't get practicing experts, look for retirees. You need to pick these people ASAP, so you don't hit an emergency and have to go shopping around for a lawyer who'll take payment in ethanol and mechanic work. These people exist if you look for them, nearly everybody hates the state of the world, all they're looking for is a viable way to break loose, and that means community.

Once that's set, you're golden. Make sure every expert is always training someone on the basics of their job, just in case, and try to link up with other communities. Even if you're not in a position to help each other, you can still trade advice and tips. Amish communities, hippie communes, even weird prepper and militia groups, maybe you don't invite them to dinner, but it's good to know who's around if you need help. The only people you're trying to shut out are the leeches, the billionaires who steal your labor and barely allow you to live day to day in return. Everybody else should be welcomed with open arms, when the system comes crashing down you want to be in a position to help the middle-class refugees who didn't see it coming, an increased labor and skill pool is good for everyone. If all the regular people work together, the only people out in the cold are the ones who deserve to be.

That being said, there are a few Commandments.

The First Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Trade

Barter gets taxed, and if the IRS can get Capone, they can get you. Help your neighbor, receive help in return, but never call it a trade. No receipts, no debts, no contracts, just goodwill and

memory. Ask what you need from the person who has it, and be ready to help in return if they should just so happen to ask something of you.

The Second Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Be a Leech

If you take, you give. If you're helped, you help back. There's no taxes, no rent, no dues, just reciprocity. Don't drain the well and blame the drought.

The Third Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Harbor Illegal Goods

Don't bring heat down on the whole community for your outlaw fantasies. You're not Rambo, and I promise you won't get in a firefight that requires you to have more than one gun per person, or any illegal mods. No meth labs, no black-market arsenals, no unregistered stills. If you choose to ignore me, at least don't have those things on the property, and for the love of Prometheus don't go posting it on Facebook.

The Fourth Commandment: Thou Shalt Train Thy Replacement

Every skill dies with the person who hoards it. Teach what you know, even if it's basic, that's how communities live longer than their founders.

The Fifth Commandment: Thou Shalt Be Nice

Every informal organization dies of drama before it dies of famine, so don't be the one who creates it. Not inside your network, and not outside it.

Follow those Commandments, you'll do fine.

You don't have to wait for permission to bring down the pyramid. You have all the support you need already, it just needs to be organized. Pharaoh didn't free anyone because he was in a good mood, he did it because he got his ass kicked. So what are you waiting on? Bring on the plagues. It's time for Exodus.