

# ESCAPE INTO DYSTOPIA

This season's political theater has surpassed adjectives, leaving "surreal," "circus-like," "outrageous" or "absurd" in the dust — policy based on Tweets and politicians graded on their high-school yearbooks.

The New Yorker's Pulitzer Prize-winning media critic Emily Nussbaum, describes this year's television season as reflecting "a familiar modern mood, the feeling that we're all living in crazytown."

The Nation called it "The Dystopian Boom": a season with "The Leftovers," "The Good Place," "Black Mirror" and "Electric Dreams."

"The opening of Netflix's dense, trippy new limited series 'Maniac' does not give viewers much reason to feel hopeful," writes the Hollywood Reporter.

## 'Adjustment Day'

When it comes to dystopian novels, Portland author Chuck Palahniuk is ahead of his time, known for measuring modern-day angst long before our current pinball political climate.

"Adjustment Day" draws a future America doomed to a return to tribalism, a spinning gyre of miserable subservience, a mass of humanity beholden to a privileged few — and all defined by racial identity.

In a single day, academics, politicians and journalists are killed, their ears harvested as bounty. Television and radio stations, internet websites, all broadcast the same message at the same moment: "Adjustment Day is Upon Us."

There is no changing the channel.

Names on a list are to be destroyed systematically eliminated, but a key tenet of Palahniuk's "there is no list."

Inspired by an aged oracle named Talbott Reynolds, the political philosophy relies on strict racial apartheid and male dominance. This is a proletariat movement with America's long-suffering workers rising with blood force. With Reynolds' aphorisms as guidance, the unemployed, underemployed, the steamfitters and the press operators "see themselves slay their oppressors and then rise to rule their own fiefdoms."

Some "hightail it to the border." Others "suck death from a tailpipe in a closed garage."

The dirty work of the revolution is driven by men with "nothing to lose"; recruits are those who hate the society that has "left them no means to achieve the status that all men crave."

Informants are rewarded with currency made out of human skin, meant to be spent within 30 days or

## CANNON SHOTS

R.J. MARX



to rot away. All citizens are required to carry a copy of a blue-black book — to fail to do so could lead to being reported.

Citizens of the former united states (sic) involuntarily shuttle to homelands: blacks receive the South, renamed "Blacktopia"; whites to Caucasia, and gays to Gaysia; others exiled to their native homelands or warehoused in "retention centers."

## 'Submission'

Similar cultural unraveling occurs in Michel Houellebecq's "Submission."

The novel provided a stir after its 2015 publication and led to 24-hour police protection for the author body-guard after the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks.

Set in present-day France, the dystopia shift comes as Western culture gives way and the Muslim brotherhood ascends to power. "Many of the usual political issues don't matter to them," Houellebecq writes. "To them it's simple — whichever segment of the population has the highest birthrate, and does the best job of transmitting its values, wins."

The narrator, a professor specializing in the work of 19th-century writer Joris-Karl Huysmans, is fired from his academic position, along with everyone in his department: "They gave us two hours to clean out our desks."

As in "Adjustment Day," all is settled in a flash — money is frozen, guards close down the university. The storm breaks, the fighting begins. "You could make out groups of masked men roaming around with assault rifles and automatic weapons. ... It was impossible to get a clear picture of who was doing what."

While Houellebecq's world is less violent as Palahniuk's, the repression is numbing, defeating intellectuals, artists, teachers and women. Especially women.

"The summit of human happiness resides in the most absolute submission," in Houellebecq's fictional society.

Women leave the workforce en masse. Palahniuk's new leaders, like Houellebecq's Islamic elite, select their "home" wives, field wives, chambermaids — all required to undergo genetic testing to prove their worthiness. Women are "baby-making machinery"



Chuck Palahniuk



Michel Houellebecq

for chieftains. The birth of every child brings a government subsidy.

Palahniuk's women wear sexless gingham, aprons, clogs — "long sleeves and long skirts were the rule" — Houellebecq's the burka and the veil.

Both novelists take a cynical, almost hopeless turn: "The facts were plain," Houellebecq writes. "Europe had reached a point of such putrid decomposition that it could not save itself any more than fifth-century Rome could have done. ... Europe, which was the summit of civilization, committed suicide in a matter of decades."

## Doyle to the rescue

If after these reads you are in a state of utter despair and cable news fails to offer succor, as a palate cleanser I recommend Brian Doyle's sunny, bittersweet novel "Chicago."

Doyle, the late, great Portland-based writer and editor is best known for his Oregon coastal imaginings and kinship with Pacific Northwest culture. In "Chicago," he writes a fictional memoir about a young journalist working for a Catholic weekly newspaper and experiencing the wonders of 1970s Chicago.

His merry band of housemates is quirky, quizzical and loads of fun, as he establishes an intimacy between the most diverse of people, and in his own particular way, with a dog named Edward who is capable of communication at the highest level.

Doyle describes the city down to the rattle of the El train and the whiff of Comiskey Park in a year the team even made a credible go for the title. I lived in the city at the time myself — 1977, when the Sox were in first-place for most of the summer — and remember those real-life characters: Richie Zisk, Chet Lemon, Eric Soderholm and Oscar Gamble. (The White Sox finished third in the American League West.)

The author zeroes in on details we don't always observe: "odd fascinating corners and sights — the city's obscure fountains, remarkable trees, and "a hidden aviary with more than a hundred parrots and parakeets of every color and species, tended by a tiny old man who could not have been more than four-feet high."

Advice from a Doyle character is a welcome antidote for the chronic dystopia that feels all too real: "Drive safely," he writes in "Chicago." "Be joyful. Be tender. Everything else is secondary to tenderness. Remember that."

# Just give me anything with Blake Lively

To decompress from the news, I persuaded Mr. Sax to see a movie. Before I go any further, this might be a good time to say it's always been a struggle to get Mr. Sax to leave the house to see a movie. He prefers to do his watching in a recumbent position. When we were dating, some 30 years ago, he warned me his favorite films are ones he falls asleep to. Meanwhile I can count on two hands and maybe one foot exactly how many movies we've seen together in an actual movie theatre.

The movie I dragged him to last weekend was "A Simple Favor," starring Anna Kendrick, Henry Golding, Rupert Friend, Andrew Rannells, and Blake Lively. "A Simple Favor" could be described as upscale suburban thriller. The story is a beautiful married mom (Lively) who asks her best friend (Kendrick) a simple favor, to pick up Lively's young son from school. The trouble starts when Lively fails to collect her child, or respond to Kendrick's texts or voicemails.

Blake Lively grew up in Tarzana, California, in the San Fernando Valley. Her father is an actor. She's a natural blonde who looks like she should always be close to a surfboard. I first noticed her in 2007 when she was cast as the character Serena van der Woodsen in the television series, "Gossip Girl." You may recall her performances in "Savages," or "The Green Lantern." In real life, she's married to the actor Ryan Reynolds. They have two children. Eschewing the L.A. film biz lifestyle, they moved to my old stomping grounds about an



hour north of New York City. Despite their bona fide celebrity status, locals do their best to treat them as though they're just another adorable young family. Blake Lively is fun to watch. It's easy to imagine her wearing a baseball cap backwards at Pee Wee soccer. "A Simple Favor" reflects a wealthy and well dressed society where a woman with a dicey past and a need for a new friend, and

money might plot to screw over also an insurance company. There's a scene in the film where Lively's character confesses to Kendrick's that her enormous, stunning house is for sale, but no one's buying. It also falls to her to keep the whole sham afloat since her husband, once a rising star novelist, hasn't produced another book.

The character played by Lively portrays a woman once upon a time I'd have been drawn to. (I'm too old now for that level of drama.) Unlike Kendrick's character, I'd never have been her doormat, but I might have been her drinking buddy. What mom of elementary school kids doesn't crave a stiff afternoon martini before the hassle of providing dinner? A cute contemporary touch is Kendrick's character producing her own blog to share tips with her mom friends how to pack a perfect school lunch — and play true detective.

I'm grateful to have not just one but two movie theaters in the area to help me escape reality.

## LETTERS

### An unpleasant summer in Cannon Beach

OK Cannon Beach, we have just finished the single most unpleasant tourist season in the fifteen years that I have lived here on the North Coast. What made it so unpleasant? Having to deal with all of the tourist vehicles clogging our streets and parked around our houses and even in our driveways.

Our city government, through the Chamber of Commerce, has been incredibly successful in marketing our town to the rest of the world. They have done a wonderful job for all of the merchants here. Businesses have the customers that they need. What we residents have all lost is the ability to quietly enjoy our homes due to the traffic and parking problems that have been created.

It is high time that our city government start paying attention to our needs instead of solely being focused on the needs of our local merchants. I truly don't believe that this is asking too much. There are many more residents than merchants. We actually do have the power, should we choose to use it.

The very obvious solution is to require all visitors, except those

in hotels, to use centralized parking. We then would need to provide shuttle service around town. Imagine how different it would make summer life here, for both the tourists and us.

So, where do we get the money to buy shuttle buses? How about having the Chamber of Commerce agree to use funds that would go to advertising and promotion instead be used to buy shuttle buses? They have created the problem that we are living with. Is it not fair to ask them to help make Cannon Beach more livable?

The point of my missive is simple. We, as a community, need to decide together how we want to live in this special place. Do we let those who visit ruin our experience of living here or do we make some changes to prevent being overrun in our homes?

Well Cannon Beach city government, what say you?

**John Huismann**  
Cannon Beach

### Offended by campaign advertisements

The campaigns have scarcely begun to replace retiring District

32 State Representative Deborah Boone and already one candidate's advertisements are deeply offensive.

The Republican candidate, Venetta Lower, has regularly been running a commercial on cable TV that begins with video of boisterous street demonstrations in Portland, and then intones that we need to elect leaders who unite us instead of dividing us. This is really troublesome to me on several levels:

- Are we to become afraid that street demonstrations in Portland will cause riots in District 32? If not, what is the point of this video?
- Are we to believe that the party of Donald Trump will serve to "unite us" when he and his supporters have done so much, and so often, to divide us?
- Are we to believe that this Republican will oppose the offensive immigration policies of her party because she immigrated here as a child?
- Are we to assume that this Republican nominee is going to be different because she does not include the "Republican" label in her commercial?

We do need our leaders to be truthful with us — and that is perhaps the most critical aspect of this

fall's elections.

Particularly at the local level, we need to select our government representatives based not on what lip service they give to platitudes, but on what we truly can expect of their real service in the legislature. That's why Tiffany Mitchell will have my vote.

**Daniel J. Seifer**  
Arch Cape

### Excess dune growth presents hazards

As home owners at Breakers Point we appreciate the look and protection sand dunes north of Ecola Creek provide. However, the unchecked and unnatural growth presents hazards Cannon Beach ignores.

Height and access: At 56 feet, the dunes greatly exceed recommendations by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

European beach grass: While other areas remove this invasive species, Cannon Beach insists it remain. A report by the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries cites the grass as a major reason for dune growth.

Beach access: The city main-

tains easy access south of Ecola Creek, but no maintenance north. Walkways were buried years ago. The walk up, over and down dunes, along with 20-foot cliffs left by storms, are a danger to residents and visitors.

Hiding inappropriate behavior: Hills, dips and high grass invite camping and parties. Cleanup of bottles, food debris and toilet paper, is left to residents.

While the Planning Commission slowly reviews its dune management plan, they seem intent on continued and unnatural growth. Sadly, the only member of the commission representing residents north of Ecola Creek was forced to recuse herself from the process.

Restoring the beach, responsibly managing invasive plants and maintaining safe beach access is not a question of money. Breakers Point residents will pay the cost.

City officials need to respect residents north of Ecola Creek. It's time for Cannon Beach to live up to its reputation as a friendly and idyllic city not only to visit, but also to live.

**Bill and Cathy Dugovich**  
Breakers Point Condominiums  
Cannon Beach

