

**How
To Be
Alone Forever**

by

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My dear, accept this dedication; it is given over, as it were, blindfolded, but therefore undisturbed by any consideration, in sincerity. Who you are, I know not; where you are, I know not; what your name is, I know not. Yet you are my hope, my joy, my pride, and my unknown honour.

–Soren Kierkegaard
‘The Crowd is Untruth’

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Introduction

A little while alone in your room will
prove more valuable than anything else
that could ever be given you.

-Rumi

How To Be Alone Forever is a practical guide to daily life for those who are completely alone in the world.

That bears repeating, using slightly different words:

This book is about how to live from day to day, in the short, medium, and long terms, whilst being completely Alone. Forever.

To be Alone Forever, in the near-literal sense, is a rare and strange state to be in. One of its many peculiarities is that the condition is only explicable to those who are in it. If you are not Alone Forever, this book is not for you.

What does it mean to be Alone Forever? This turns out to be an unexpectedly tricky question to answer.

The shortest and simplest answer is that the person who is Alone Forever is not in any kind of romantic relationship with another person, never has been in one, and most likely never will be in one.

Being Alone Forever brings with it a range of practical challenges. Which is what this book is primarily about. The *reason* for being Alone Forever is of secondary importance to the *fact* of being so.

Regular people cannot understand Alone Forever. The Alone Forever understand it well enough – they are it – but nobody else does.

So it does bear repeating, many times.

If you are Alone Forever, you are not now (and nor have you ever been) in a romantic relationship with another person, and there is little prospect of you ever being in one.

You will also, typically, have very few friends – usually only one or two good ones.

You might even have no friends at all.

All of society's customs, traditions, institutions and assumptions are built around the presupposition that people are *connected* to other people in a multitude of intimate ways that you, being Alone Forever, are not.

There are consequences. Daily life for you is vastly different to daily life for everybody else in your world. Your life is unrecognisable to them. You are effectively

invisible. You have to get through life completely alone, without any of the practical and emotional support that people commonly provide each other.

It all poses a multitude of practical problems, that this book provides assistance with.

What kinds of problems?

Everybody has somebody. You don't. Unless you are a literal hermit, your life will still intersect with other people on a regular basis. Even if that's just at work, or within whatever remains to you of your biological family.

Those other people, whoever they are and wherever you encounter them, will have lives. They will assume that you too must have a life: a world of people and events and friendship and love and sex. How do you deal with other people when they are curious and ask you questions about this non-existent life? And conversely, how do you deal with other people when they show *no* curiosity about you, and ask you *no* questions (as is more often the case)?

How do you care for your own health, mental and physical, as time passes?

How do you cope with a suffocating sense of being the most complete, abject failure who ever walked the Earth?

What will you do with all your spare time? Other people have family and friends to spend time with. You are Alone Forever. What can possibly occupy the thousands of empty hours that other people occupy with... other people?

As you get older, how do you deal with issues that arise from the natural ageing process? You will have nobody to help you when you are old and sick. What will you do, when your old age comes? What steps can you take now, to help yourself then?

Why do anything? Why bother living out a natural lifespan at all? One of the most common sub-types of Alone Forever is made up of those who are certain they will not reach old age, or even middle age. If you are one of these, do you just hope to randomly die at some point? Or should you make... arrangements?

Should you commit suicide? If so, how, and when? If not, why not? Suicide is never completely off the table for the Alone Forever. We have a unique perspective on the question. We know that suicide can be a sensible solution to a set of practical problems, rather than an act of life-denying, abject despair.

What about *escaping* from Alone Forever? Why not get out, and climb aboard the same boat that everybody else is on?

Would you still want to escape, if you could? Is escape even still possible?

Where are the escape routes located? How do you get there?

All these, and more, are questions that will be addressed in this book.

If you have read this far and you still don't understand what it means to be Alone Forever, congratulations, you are not Alone Forever, and this book is certainly not for you.

As for the rest of you – I will see you on the next page.

TYPES AND SUBTYPES

When we think of the future, we imagine it as the *outcome* of our present circumstances. We extrapolate from where we are now, to envision where we will end up. We who are Alone Forever tend to have vivid imaginations. We believe we know how things will end for us.

The life lived by somebody who is Alone Forever has several distinct possible outcomes.

Here are the most common:

1) You escape being Alone Forever while you're still young. Many of the teenagers and twentysomethings who pick up this book will escape. Seems impossible now, but you *will* escape. Sooner than you think, you will no longer be Alone Forever. If you're a young person, you're almost certainly going to find a way, or a way will find you. Being Alone Forever, for most young people, is just a stage you are passing through, even if you don't currently know it.

2) You succumb to the despair of being Alone Forever, and kill yourself. A relatively rare outcome, this one. I don't have any hard data (the Alone Forever are not a well-studied tribe of people), but it seems intuitively correct to say that most people who are Alone Forever refrain from killing themselves. If we have serious illnesses, mental or physical, then yes, we're rather keen to get on with it and get out of this place. But otherwise? Nope. We go on, living our empty, pointless lives, until nature does the job for us.

It is hard to kill yourself. It's hard to steel yourself to do it. It's hard to find a good method of doing it. Easier to plod along, day to day, hoping something will turn up. This is the manner – plodding along from day to day – in which most of us get through the danger zone when suicide is most likely. I'll talk some more about this in the later section on Suicide.

3) You bumble through, somehow, and get into your 30s and 40s, where you make a concerted effort – or you just get lucky – and manage to scramble onto the lifeboat just before your strength gives out. This will be the path followed by a goodly sized portion of this book's readership. Escape for you will come along a lot later than for others, but escape is still escape. Well done, and don't kid yourself that you miss your old Alone Forever life.

4) Nothing ever happens to you. You never escape. You live your entire lifespan, however long that is, just as you are right now. Alone Forever.

This is the group for whom this book was written. I am a member of this group. For you to extract the maximum benefit from this book, you should be, too.

Those of us in this 4th category eventually reach some sort of accommodation with ourselves. We discover that the state of being Alone Forever is not so bad after all. We're perfectly fine with being who we are. The days when we made massive efforts to pretend to be somebody else are a *long* way behind us.

Now the only outstanding question is: what to do about everything?

At this point, you might think you know what kind of book this book is going to be. *'Oh, this is one of those make-the-best-of-what-you've-got types of self-help books...'*

Well, it is, and it isn't. All I'm here to do is show you how things have gone for me, and make some practical recommendations for daily living that will be useful to anybody who is Alone Forever. Whatever type you are and whatever stage you're at, there is something in this book for you.

Perhaps you're just starting out, just realising something is very wrong.

Maybe you're a scared teenager, watching all your peers embark on their lives, with a horrible, sinking feeling in your stomach.

Or you're somewhere in the middle, a young adult moving through your twenties, and having to watch your few remaining friends getting married and starting their own actual 'lives'. While you get on with... while you get on with what? While you get on with nothing. Going for walks. Watching TV. *Reading!*

Or perhaps you're a long way past the opening acts of the Alone Forever drama. You're an older adult now. You're nearing middle-age. Or you *are* middle-aged. You get up, you go to work, you watch TV, you read a few pages of a book, you go to bed. Your life is a peculiar sort of joke. You're constantly surprised that you haven't got around to killing yourself yet.

Or perhaps you're near the stage where I currently am. Alone Forever and... not minding it. Seriously. It is possible to get here, and for 'here' to be your permanent mode.

Most of the misery of being Alone Forever comes from struggling against it, twisting and turning on the spot, trying to escape because you think that's what you have to do – because you think that's what you should do.

And you should struggle. At the early-to-middle stages of being Alone Forever, you definitely can and should do your best to escape.

But by the middle-to-end stages of the process, the calculus changes.

After a certain point of being Alone Forever, if escape has not happened, *escape can never happen*. This book has been written primarily for those who are at or approaching this crucial inflection point, or who need a helping hand to get there. Clarity and contentment arise when we stop fighting who we plainly are, and wholeheartedly embrace these peculiar Alone Forever lives that fate has provided us.

EVERYBODY THINKS THEY KNOW SOMEBODY ELSE LIKE YOU

How common is it to be Alone Forever? Many who are Alone Forever say they know somebody else in so-called ‘real life’ who is also Alone Forever. I’m sure it does happen that we can run into one another in the real world, but my feeling is that the Alone Forever type is scattered far and wide across the face of the Earth, with so few overlapping instances that such cases cannot be considered anything like the norm.

‘What about your very own Uncle Dave? You know, Uncle Dave, who lives in his flat on his own, with just his cat for company? Isn’t he Alone Forever?’

Well, *no*, he’s not Alone Forever. Uncle Dave once had Aunt Davina, see, whom he divorced some years ago, after which he dallied with a couple of other women. Whatever his circumstances, now or in the future, Uncle Dave is not Alone Forever and never could be.

‘All right, smart guy. What about Sheila’s eldest girl, what’s her name, Sharon? What about Sharon? She’s never had a boyfriend as far as anyone knows, and she spends all her time in her room listening to that mad music of hers.’

How old is Sharon?

‘Sixteen.’

Uh. No. Sharon is not Alone Forever. She could *become* Alone Forever, and she might find a lot that interests her in this book (in an advisory and warning sense). But right now? Definitely not. She is not Alone Forever. *Much* too soon to call. Come back in ten years. *Twenty* years. Next?

‘Okay, how about, er, this bloke who hangs around the local supermarket? He absolutely stinks. He’s always talking to himself, and the police often have to be called. Nobody knows his name or where he’s come from.’

Right. I think I know the gentleman you mean. And again, no. Mental illness and alcoholism are common. Solitary, furtive behaviour is common. They do not automatically make somebody Alone Forever. To be Alone Forever is uncommon.

‘What about—’

Enough. Everybody who is Alone Forever is likely to be the only person in their immediate experience who is Alone Forever. This is part and parcel of the condition.

'So what is Alone Forever? I still don't get it!'

I said it at the start, quite clearly. It's somebody with little or no history of romantic relationships, with anyone, ever. And possibly also no friends. You're making something very simple needlessly complicated. The one who is Alone Forever knows well enough who he or she is. They don't require any external definitions or validation.

'So why are you writing this section?'

It's all by way of Introduction. I'm still thinking about the more general readers, who might be confused about what Alone Forever is. I wish to resolve their confusion.

'Why? I thought this book was a book about and for the Alone Forever? Why are you wasting time speaking to the likes of me?'

Good point, normie.

WE CAN BE HEROES

You look out the window – and there they are. All the people.

All the people, hurrying along the street in their mysterious, hurrying ways.

They don't seem to need hobbies and interests and strangely repetitive books to get through their days. They have each other.

You have nobody. It seems to you now – and has seemed to you for a long time – that the only material outstanding question in your life is how, when, and where you will die, and whether that death will be from natural causes or an unnatural death by your own hand.

If you are actively, clinically depressed at this moment, this book might help you, or it might not. This book is about surviving whilst being Alone Forever, and even thriving within it as much as possible.

Being Alone Forever is *not* the all-consuming failure and ultimate personal defeat that you might think it is.

There was a time when people like you and I would quietly wander off into the wilderness in order to quietly die, causing as little inconvenience as possible to our tribemates. For most of human history, basic survival was a communal effort. Individuals who did not rub along well with other people faced a kind of instinctual ostracisation and internal exile that presented them with a stark choice. Back in those conditions – arguably until as late as the 19th and early 20th Centuries – you and I, unless we were independently wealthy, might have little alternative to walking off the nearest cliff-edge.

Social and economic conditions have changed, at least in the affluent West, and at least for now. We live in the most extraordinarily privileged niche of time, where it is possible to live a comfortable, even pampered life as one Alone Forever, having little or no contact with other people beyond the daily necessities.

The solitary, grubby little deaths of the Alone Forever no longer have to happen.

You do not have to lose your mind and your dignity when you are Alone Forever.

You do not have to end up in a smelly room, surrounded by dust-encrusted bookshelves containing books that you no longer want to read, mocked and scorned by the neighbours, reviled by work colleagues.

You can be happy and be Alone Forever.

You can be content and fulfilled in your life, and be Alone Forever.

You can *realise your destiny* when you are Alone Forever. Granted, it is a peculiar destiny. Not a destiny that you would ever have chosen for yourself. But that's destiny for you.

There was a time in my Alone Forever life when I would have snapped this book shut in disgust right about now.

'What's this guy on about, saying I can be happy? How can I ever be happy without the only things – true love, friends, children, activities, a proper life! – that make lasting, true happiness possible?'

We have much to discuss.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This book is not about escaping Alone Forever. This book is not intended for those who are only passing through. This book is about living the Alone Forever life to its fullest potential.

So before we go much further, let me say it again. You are better off not being Alone Forever. If you can find a path out of this labyrinth, take it and go. Be sure not to stumble back in by mistake. The title of the book is *How To Be Alone Forever*. This book is not about *not* being Alone Forever.

I want to make that plain from the outset. There are a plethora of advice books that perform their function by claiming ironically to do the opposite. E.g., a book called *How Not To Write A Bestseller* would be about how to write a bestseller – and so on.

Later in this book, there is a short section about how to escape being Alone Forever, because I believe that one should never say never to anything. Human beings were meant to live together. We were meant to form romantic relationships, start families, have friends, and live these ‘lives’ that they’re all so fond of living.

This book is for people who do not do any of that.

If escape from being Alone Forever is your dream, the biggest favour you could do yourself would be to close this book, right now, and get yourself one of the many hundreds of self-help books that *will* help you to not be Alone Forever.

I’ve read a few of those books. They’re well-written. They’re persuasive. They’re packed full of the standard kinds of advice that people will tend to give you (be true to yourself, stay positive, take risks, etc.).

They might actually work for you. Give them a chance, if you haven’t already.

Being Alone Forever is nothing to be aspired to, nothing to be actively pursued. Not even ironically.

In my rough estimation, escape from being Alone Forever is still possible until your mid-30s. After which, the trap closes neatly around you. There might be no escape.

Whatever age you are, if you still feel you have a chance and you want to pursue it, get out there and find a way to stop being Alone Forever.

The rest of you, those of you who are Alone Forever and know it, have my sincere condolences. I'll see you on the next page.

WHY AM I QUALIFIED TO WRITE THIS BOOK?

One thought might have been uppermost in your mind when you opened this book: *is this person somebody like me?*

A fair question. It requires a full answer.

What gives me the authority to speak to you about being Alone Forever?

You have battled on alone through your entire life until this point. You had to work out everything for yourself. Why should you take on-board any external opinions now?

Why should you listen to me?

Here are my Alone Forever credentials. I am a man. I am white, heterosexual, of average height, and average build. At the time of writing (early 2018), I am a year or so short of my 50th birthday. I have never had a romantic relationship with any girl or woman. Not even a short-term one. Not even a day-long one. Not even a one-night one.

I also have no friends. I once did have friends – two good friendships, that were formed during my schooldays. Those friendships lasted for several years after our schooldays, but came to a natural end before we reached our mid-20s. Why? Because real life started for my schoolfriends, but did not start for me. Friendships require a certain level of shared experience, or equality, in order to function without imbalance. Once imbalance is introduced, the friendships teeter and eventually topple. My friendships toppled and shattered, and I let them.

Since my mid-30s, I have worn spectacles in everyday life. I started going bald in my late twenties. Currently I sport the now-fashionable shaved-head look. Facially, I am neither one thing nor the other. In some lights, I might be said to be good-looking (particularly so before I lost my hair). In other lights I have a plain, lumpen kind of face. I have a slightly large nose and a somewhat pointy chin. But this is just me grasping for possible reasons why I might be considered physically unattractive, because that's the easiest explanation for being Alone Forever, and people always want to hear explanations. My appearance is not remarkable either way.

I am a somewhat quiet person. I seem to be the exact type of quiet person whose quietness often aggravates other people. The Alone Forever tend to hear this question a lot: *'Why are you so quiet?'* At other times, I aggravate people by speaking too much, about things they are not interested in. So, to recap, when I'm silent, people want me to speak; when I'm talkative, people would prefer me to be silent. If there is a simple reason for being Alone Forever, this might be it. Again, though, I am aware of people with much more objectionable personalities, even outright obnoxious ones, who are very far from being Alone Forever.

I have enough raw acting ability to pass myself off as a regular fellow, for a short time. If you and I were to meet, and if my energy levels were high enough, you would not register anything 'wrong' with me. Not at first.

I have tried to escape being Alone Forever. From time to time over the past three decades, my orbit has crossed with that of various women who were available, and whom I found attractive.

I made the traditional sorts of approaches, in various clumsy but unmistakable ways. *'Hey, do you fancy going out sometime...?'*

A polite but firm 'no' was always the answer. (In a later chapter I will look at one of these occasions in more detail and attempt to draw instructive lessons, or whatever.)

I don't smell of anything other than deodorant and talcum powder (I'm old-fashioned).

When I was younger, a girl did once agree to go out with me. At the time I was working as a barman in a busy pub. The girl was a regular customer. She seemed friendly and I asked her out. When she agreed, I was dizzy with shock. That is not a casual turn of phrase. *A girl had agreed to go out with me.* I was then nineteen years old.

My shock lasted about an hour. That's how long it took the girl to come back to the pub and tell me she'd just remembered she had something else to do on the night of our proposed date. 'Some other time,' I heard myself saying, exactly like a character on television. She agreed. Some other time.

There was no other time, for her or for any other girl or woman.

I have never had sex. This is a tough thing to say out loud, even in the pages of an anonymous book. There's always a good chance I'll be tracked down and jeered. When you're a man who has never had sex, you're automatically seen in a certain light, and it's not a good light. Adult male virgins are societally considered pathetic for not having had sex. We're not allowed to express any regret about it.

At the time of writing, there exists a major socio-cultural concept known as 'entitlement'. People like me – *losers*, in the collective insta-judgement of others – are automatically assumed to be manifesting 'entitlement' if we express even the slightest regret about not having had sex.

There is much social prestige attached to having relationships and sex. When you don't have these things – ever – you suffer a commensurate lack of prestige. There is no point in anyone sighing and attacking the fact that this societal moré exists. The fact is that it does exist.

When you are Alone Forever, the question continually arises of how much or how little to reveal to other people. In my daily life, I have always followed the path of concealment. Nobody knows who I am or how I live. I don't make any efforts to instruct or inform other people about the strange state of Alone Forever. I let people think whatever they want to think. They seem content to do so. I don't appear to be any kind of 'man of mystery' to them. I am rarely asked any probing questions. They stay on their side of the line. I stay on mine.

It's not difficult to be a concealer. I imagine it's much harder to be a revealer, and have to put in all that sheer exhausting effort trying to explain something that very few people will understand anyway.

When you're an Alone Forever concealer, you don't have to do anything. There is no need to hide something that nobody can see. Alone Forever occupies a conceptual blindspot in the world at large. This book will be incomprehensible to the general reader. Such is the way it is, and such is the way it will always be.

When I was younger I had a vague, unexamined belief that somehow, things would change. '*Just wait. Something will happen*' – the second-favourite piece of advice that

people like to offer to the Alone Forever. (*‘Just be yourself!’*, of course, is the outright winner.)

I see normal, socially-integrated men who look somewhat like me – i.e., a generic middle-aged white man – all the time. I see them in deep and happy romantic relationships, with their own families.

Things have not greatly changed for me since I was a child. Or if they have, they have changed in the opposite direction.

Alone Forever is the kind of state that self-perpetuates. A self-reinforcing syndrome. An existential feedback loop *par excellence*. The longer you are Alone Forever, the more the conditions that brought it about tend to curdle and harden in place. I’d take an educated guess that after the age of 40-45 or so, the number of Alone Forever escapees is very small – effectively zero.

At this stage of life, my thoughts naturally turn to various practical matters.

My physical health has started to wane in various ways. Nothing serious. Just the early signs of natural wear and tear starting to show themselves. All the practical questions that I posed in the opening pages, and more, are questions that confront me on a near-daily basis.

In this book I write from the perspective of a middle-aged male, through every distorting lens that goes with it. My age should be a factor that you take into consideration. My gender, too. There is no such thing as an objective view of anything, least of all the strange status of being Alone Forever.

What is in this book is what has worked for me, with my individual mind, body, circumstances, fortune (good and bad), and predilections. The canny reader should trim their sail accordingly, as he or she navigates these pages.

I am eminently qualified to write this book. I have lived the Alone Forever life. I am still living it. It is how I will live until I no longer live. Alone Forever is not something that I am in the process of becoming. It is something I long since became. The door snicked shut behind me a long time ago. There is no handle on this side. I no longer even look for one. I am Alone Forever.

WHO THIS BOOK IS *NOT* FOR

This book is not for those who are ‘between relationships’, or who happen to be feeling a bit lonesome right now. Alone Forever is not a passing phase of one’s life. Alone Forever is the definition of one’s life.

A great many people imagine themselves to be ‘loners’, while being nothing of the sort. A man of my acquaintance once told me (in a dramatic, low-pitched voice) that he was ‘something of a loner’. At the time I knew him, this man was coming to the end of his second marriage, with a third looming on the horizon. He had five children. He had a multitude of friends and acquaintances. There is no sense whatsoever in which he was, or ever could be, ‘something of a loner’, never mind Alone Forever.

If such is the kind of loner you are, perhaps there have been times in your life – long periods, even – when much of what is said in this book will resonate with you. You are more than welcome to read on, but you must know that yours is the kind of solitude that is but a passing phase. You will get over whatever happened to you with that woman, that man, whoever. There will be another relationship along for you within a relatively short span of time. And you’ve got your friends to console you while you wait.

This book is also not some ghastly self-help screed focused upon ‘owning your okayness’. I have read and enjoyed material from the self-help canon, but have never found anything like the book you hold in your hands.

I will be making the case for Alone Forever to be considered a net positive – perhaps not at the start, and not for much of the middle, but definitely after that. Mature Alone Forever can be a surprisingly fulfilling life to lead.

So there is more than a whiff of self-help about the book, I will admit. One of my key intentions is to change your way of looking at yourself and at the condition of being Alone Forever. We who are Alone Forever have the potential to transform our understanding of ourselves and come to regard this strange state not as the curse we once believed it to be, not as the lack of a life, but maybe – just maybe – as the best possible life to have. And that is classic self-help territory.

But there are huge obstacles in the way. The Alone Forever life does not come easy.

The main problems of being Alone Forever are twofold.

There is the central problem itself: you're alone, and it's *hard* to be alone, in all sorts of practical ways.

Then there's people's incomprehension of what and who you are. If you live alone in a cabin on a mountain, fair enough, other people are not an issue for you. But if, like me, you live in the midst of a bustling modern city, and you have a job, and some remaining family nearby, other people can present you with a whole other set of challenges to deal with.

This book will examine both aspects of the problem and recommend strategies and solutions from my own experience, which is necessarily different from yours.

You won't agree with everything I have to say. Perhaps nearly all of what I have to say will be objectionable to you. This will particularly be the case if you are currently in those treacherous early-to-middle stages of Alone Forever where depression and suicidal ideation are the staple ingredients of your day-to-day experience. I have written this book specifically for those of us who are mostly past that stage. If you are predisposed to not find anything in the Alone Forever life that's worthy of joy or celebration, this might not be the book for you.

Whatever your individual Alone Forever circumstances, this book should still be an interesting read. Because there just aren't that many of us about.

THE PRACTICAL TIPS

As you read through the book, you will encounter Practical Tips centred and in bold. Each Practical Tip will amuse, annoy, or instruct you according to your individual lights. Here is my first and most useful piece of advice:

Practical Tip #1

**Tell nobody that
you are Alone Forever.**

Keep it all to yourself.

Even if you ignore or deride every Practical Tip in this book, don't ignore or deride this one. The question of how much or how little of yourself to reveal to other people might be the only truly universal Alone Forever question. It applies to all of us, no matter our separate circumstances. It is the Prime Question. How you deal with it will have huge knock-on effects on many other areas of life.

My wisest counsel, at this juncture of my own Alone Forever trajectory, is to reveal nothing.

You don't have to fret about other people working it out for themselves. There are a *lot* of possible assumptions between other people and the truth about you. Nearly everybody will be content to believe the easiest (wrong) answer to the puzzle of who and what you are.

(That's if they even see you as a puzzle at all. Most people won't. If people do consider you and try to work out your 'secret', you'll most likely be assumed to be a very private, ultra-furtive gay man or woman. Eventually you'll learn to be fine with that.)

Don't expect your family, work colleagues, or friends, if you have any, to have any special insight into you.

Don't expect anybody on the Internet to understand, unless they are Alone Forever too, and even then there can be surprising blindspots and contrasts between your

experience and theirs – and vice versa. We are not the same as other people; nor are we the same as each other.

You can try to break this advice. I urge you to break it, multiple times, with many different people, until you yourself have seen the true wisdom of it.

Everybody who is Alone Forever should try telling somebody else about it at least once. Just so you can learn for yourself precisely where you are, and how very, very far away that place is from the understanding of other people.

Regular people effectively inhabit another reality. When you tell them you're Alone Forever, you are presenting them with a set of incomprehensible concepts. At best, you'll be seen as an unlucky-in-love eccentric who likes his own company too much. Their solutions for you are predictable. I will predict them now. 'Just be yourself' and 'be confident' because 'there's somebody for everybody'. Go to a mirror and start practicing the politely neutral face you'll make when you're told these things, over and over. You're going to be doing it often.

Soon enough you will understand why there is no point in sharing the details of Alone Forever with other people.

And really, just try seeing yourself from their point of view. Can you blame them for not understanding? Alone Forever is the strangest idea ever, from their point of view.

My case is a fairly representative example of how and why the world generally finds our lives to be incomprehensible. I am close to the age of 50. I have never had a romantic partner. I am clean and tidy. I can hold a decent conversation. Outwardly there is nothing at all 'wrong' with me. I'm a good enough actor to convince other people that the genial, amusing kind of fellow whom I pretend to be is in fact the person I am. That I never mention a girlfriend or a friend never seems to occur to them.

Nobody gets it. *Nobody*. No matter how much or how well you explain it to others, they can never understand. People live with and among other people. Naturally, by necessity, by habit and custom, through mutual need, this is how things are. Living with and for other people is fundamental to everybody's experience of day-to-day life. It is the invisible ground of their whole being. So don't add frustration about other

people not ‘understanding’ to your already-mountainous pile of woes. Telling somebody that you do not share in their most fundamental set of experiences is as peculiar and unlikely as telling them you don’t breathe. What do you think they’re going to think?

The majority of readers who come to this book will be at a stage of their personal Alone Forever trajectory in which they will want to escape being Alone Forever. You most likely will want to get hold of the thread that will lead you out of the labyrinth. You don’t know what the thread is, but you know it must exist.

This book is not that thread.

If anything, this book will only lead you deeper into the labyrinth. We remain interested in concepts of salvation and redemption long after we have consciously discarded the framework in which they are meaningful.

Salvation for the Alone Forever is not out there, with ‘them’.

Our true and only salvation is where we are right now. With oneself, alone.

Part One

Looking After Yourself Alone

“Take care.”

-popular saying

THOSE WHO FAIL TO PREPARE...

The lives of those who are Alone Forever generate an abundance of practical challenges. Not least is the challenge of looking out for our own personal health and safety. Caring for oneself requires a delicate balancing act. We must prepare in advance for the very worst that the future might bring, without being overwhelmed by fear of that worst-case future. Given the abundance of horror-filled future scenarios that we can imagine, this is easier said than done. When we contemplate the Alone Forever future, our thoughts understandably incline more to death and suffering than to life and happiness.

But there *is* life before death for the Alone Forever, and we should prepare for it.

Only we can look after our health. Nobody else is going to. You may be on good enough terms with your remaining family or your work colleagues for them to make concerned faces whenever you are unwell. That's nice. But those people are not going to be watching over you through the long, long hours that you spend alone at home. It's when you are alone in your room (the quintessential Alone Forever state) that you must stand or fall – or more often just lay, gently whimpering, until the fever passes.

We should spend time *now* planning for *then*. If you fall ill and need supplies from the outside world that you can't fetch for yourself, who will you ask to fetch them for you? If there's nobody to do things for you (and eventually, there is nobody), then the solution is simple. Get everything you need for yourself, before you need it.

Make an assessment.

Make a list of every item you might conceivably need.

Procure the items.

Store the items, and review them regularly.

Imagine the most extreme possible scenario, and work your way down from there.

Imagine a proper end-of-the-world event in your lifetime – a major financial crash, a meteor strike, nuclear war, whatever. Almost overnight, your world is transformed into the standard sort of post-apocalyptic hell. Suddenly, your major worry is no longer whether you can endure another episode of that TV show you've started

watching because you've got nothing better to do with your spare time. Now there's an endless supply of spare time – but no more TV shows, ever. No more electricity. No more hot and cold running water. No more supermarkets with food on the shelves. No more law and order. Nothing beyond basic subsistence, and cowering in place hoping the gangs of mutant biker cannibals don't find you.

What's your plan, then? My post-apocalyptic plan is simple: to kill myself as soon as I am certain it really has happened.

Doubtless there are some survivalist types among the ranks of the Alone Forever who would relish the opportunity to test themselves in such a transformed world. I am not one of them, and nor are most of us. We who are Alone Forever are adapted to (and arguably produced by) a *very* particular set of cultural and economic forces. Social order, electricity, sanitation, a functioning economy – these are all prerequisites for our continued existence. The disappearance of those conditions would signal the end of (most of) our lives.

Fortunately, the other hazardous scenarios that we encounter when we are Alone Forever are more trivial. The common cold. A pulled muscle. A sprained ankle.

For most people, these things are truly mundane, barely noticed, and dealt with almost as easily as with a blown lightbulb. Most people have resources to call upon that we don't. They have other people. They have wives and husbands, boyfriends and girlfriends, children and neighbours, friends and colleagues. All can be pressed into service as required.

For us, things are not likely to be so straightforward. Many of us will still be on good enough terms with *somebody* to ask them, at an absolute pinch, to fetch us some painkillers if they'd be so kind.

For just as many of us, though, Alone Forever means exactly that. We will always have to fetch our own damn painkillers from the pharmacy.

Better, then, to already have our medicine with us.

That's the thrust of the present section: make a list of things you might need in the future, *and get them now*. It's a great idea and you need to implement it.

PRACTICAL TIP #2
CREATE A FULLY-STOCKED
MEDICAL BOX
(AND KEEP IT FULLY-STOCKED).

- Make a list of everything you might ever need to deal with every illness, ache and ailment you might ever have.
- Congratulate yourself for already possessing the things you already have.
- Go shopping for the rest.
- Store everything in a box.
- Make a list of everything in the box. Ensure the contents of the list and the contents of the box are always in correspondence. Whenever you use something from the box, replenish it.
- Appoint a fixed date every month to review the contents as required. Update the list accordingly.
- Stick to this routine doggedly, even if you enjoy year after year of unbroken good health. The day will come when you'll have cause to congratulate yourself on your own foresight. Knowing you have this resource to draw on is in itself a source of comfort. You're Robinson Crusoe without a Man (or Woman) Friday. Act accordingly.

Below is my list. It is tailored to my individual needs and existing health complaints.

MY LIST

Paracetamol – quantity: 64 (2x standard boxes of 32)

Aspirin – quantity: 64 (2x standard boxes of 32)

Co-codamol – quantity: 64 (2x standard boxes of 32)

A decongestant – a non-drowsy one for the daytime, and one that'll help you sleep at night. I prefer the liquid form, but tablets are OK too.

Sticking plasters (a.k.a. Band Aids) – 1 complete *unopened* set. (You may often find yourself raiding these for the odd item.)

Cough linctus – a few bottles covering a couple of varieties of cough (tickly, chesty, etc.).

Stomach-settling remedy. Antacids, salts, that kind of thing. Easily available, relatively cheap, and if you've got nausea, invaluable.

Antiseptic cream – 1x tube, unopened.

Throat lozenges – *both* varieties: the regular antiseptic kind, and the more powerful combined anaesthetic-antibiotic kind. Tyrozets (a UK brandname) are my preferred choice.

Deep Heat – in rub-on form or spray-on form? Depends how agile you are. My preference is for the rub-on form, as I find it difficult to direct spray-can nozzles in the right direction. Whichever option you choose (go for both if you're a completist on the Alone Forever Medical Box front), 1x tube or 1x spray-can.

A gel ice pack – back pulls and miscellaneous muscle strains have accompanied much of my early middle age, and I have found the kind of cheap gel pack that can be either frozen in the freezer or heated in the microwave invaluable. A homegrown solution of a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a towel will do the same job, of course. It might not cure, but it'll provide relief. A nice non-smelly alternative to the rub-on stuff.

Scissors – those dainty little medical ones.

Gauze and bandages.

Eye drops – if you can afford to, get every type of eye drops, particularly the ones that treat mild infections and 'redeye'. Be especially careful about the expiry date on eye drops. Typically, once opened, eye drops must be discarded within the timeframe specified on the enclosed leaflet. (Yes, yes, Big Pharma is out to make money from our gullibility, or whatever, yes. Do as you see fit.)

If you live in a jurisdiction where antibiotics are freely available over the counter, include antibiotics in your Medical Box. I'm assuming you're aware that different types of antibiotics treat different kinds of infection, and that antibiotics are useless against viral infections such as the common cold and influenza (the general public's

stubborn resistance to this fact is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our time). Do your own research on the matter. Stock up with whatever you can.

A properly stocked and frequently maintained Medical Box is no more or less than every household should have, Alone Forever or not.

Don't pretend you haven't got time for any of this. Just *don't*. For the Alone Forever – for *you* – the need is bordering on critical, in my opinion. When that hour of crisis comes, your Medical Box could make the difference between life and death – or at least between comfort and discomfort. Either way, it's worth it.

If you have been Alone Forever for long enough, you will have endured periods of solitary illness and convalescence, and you know how utterly wretched such periods can be. Being Alone Forever is a comparative stroll in the sun when you're fit and well. Being Alone Forever when you're ill is a particular kind of groansome torment, as I discovered for myself a few years ago.

One Monday morning in 2012 that was just like any other Monday morning, I was walking to the local supermarket when all at once, a strange weakness came over me. I stopped, tried to pull myself together, realised instinctively that I was not going to, and returned home. By the time I got home I felt almost ready to call myself an ambulance. I collapsed into bed, and lay there in a huddle for the best part of a whole week.

It was some kind of stomach bug, but with the oddest symptoms. There was no vomiting. There was just constant diarrhoea and persistent nausea. And there was no respite after a day or two, as with most stomach bugs. The effects lingered, on and off, for about ten days. I could barely eat. I was barely out of the toilet. I was weak and chilly all the time. I lost a lot of weight. I had a kind of trembling, fearful anxiety all the time.

I have since considered the likelihood that this stomach ailment was partly or wholly psychological. In 2012 I was at a very particular point of my Alone Forever trajectory. I was heading for my mid-40s, and had just begun to perceive that being Alone Forever, in my case, was not going to change. Alone Forever was no longer

something I was temporarily putting up with until the conditions of life righted themselves. Alone Forever had become the fixed and permanent condition of my life.

I tend towards the sceptical side when it comes to matters of the unconscious mind, but I would not consider it too fanciful a suggestion that my 'stomach bug' was the surface manifestation of my most deeply-rooted anxieties.

But whatever the illness 'really' was is almost beside the point.

The point here is that when debilitating illness strikes the Alone Forever, we can rely on nobody but ourselves to provide practical assistance. *We* are the ones who must dig ourselves out of every hole we fall into.

MIND HOW YOU GO

A lot can happen to the unlucky Alone Forever. People are an immense source of practical help to each other. We only have ourselves.

We often hear bad-luck stories regarding physical mishaps from the world of the non-Alone Forever, and think: ‘If anything like that ever happens to *me*, I’ll be in big trouble’.

At the time of writing, I’m following the story of a blogger – not one of the Alone Forever – who slipped on a wet patch of a bathroom floor and injured his back in such a way that he was rendered almost immobile. Two months later he was more or less back on his feet, thanks to the extensive help of family and friends. ‘I don’t know what I’d have done without them,’ he says in one of his blogs.

What will happen to *you*, if you ever slip on a wet bathroom floor and hurt your back in the same way?

Never mind the immediate, perilous situation of having nobody close by to help you. Never mind having to haul yourself to a phone to call whoever you have left to call, or summon an ambulance, or whatever. All of this on its own would already be a nightmarish ordeal for you. But it would just be the start of a greater ordeal.

How will you cope with several weeks or months of severely impaired mobility? How will you cope with doctors, hospitals, the practical day-to-day running of your affairs? What’ll you do about work? Who is going to give you lifts to and from the hospital? What’s that you say? You’ll get buses or taxis? Okay, fine. Who is going to help you from your front door to the taxi or bus? And then, on the return journey, from the taxi or bus to your front door? And who is going to help you with those mundane tasks around your home that you can suddenly no longer do?

It’s the kind of scenario that does not bear thinking about. Better not to be in the situation in the first place.

A huge factor in your Alone Forever preparedness should therefore be *prevention*.

Anticipate the possible (and impossible) outcomes of your most common actions – like stepping out of the shower onto a wet floor. Adjust your behaviour accordingly.

Being Alone Forever is a bit like being the last person on Earth after a strange apocalypse has removed everyone else. When you live as the Last Man (or Last Woman), *you must take care*. You should always keep uppermost in your mind an awareness of your situation. The slightest unlucky slip or trip could prove so problematic to you in the long run that you're far better off not letting it happen in the first place. For you, in your circumstances, an innocuous muscle tear or broken bone might soon overwhelm you with practical challenges that quickly become life-changing, possibly even life-ending.

And so we come to a massively important tip, and one whose importance is easy to underestimate:

Practical Tip #3

**Be watchful and cautious
in every space you inhabit
and every action you take.**

Well, *duh*, you might be saying, but it bears repeating, and it also bears elevating to a daily creed, consciously practised.

Be watchful. Be cautious.

Watch yourself in the shower – the scene of many a slip and trip that has life-changing consequences for all kinds of people. I frequently forget to pick up the soap from the sink before getting into the shower. Then, with my shower well underway, I notice that I have no soap, and I attempt to snatch the soap from the sink whilst still in the shower. I lean all the way over, my feet still in the shower, my fingertips straining to reach the soap in the soapdish...

I no longer do that. Instead I step out of the shower and I get the soap. And then when I get out of the shower, I drop a towel on the wet floor. I am cautious and watchful. You should be too.

When you are Alone Forever, you should never descend a staircase whilst over-encumbered. You must always have at least one hand on a stair rail. If you have to make two or more trips up and down the stairs, instead of one, so be it.

Another example: when exiting a shop, or stepping off a bus, I always check both ways along the pavement for oncoming cyclists.

Don't give other people a chance to ruin your day, or your life.

If a boisterous group of teenagers is walking towards me, I will cross the street to pass them on the other side, and I will pretend not to hear any remarks that might come my way. Yes, I know – they'll almost certainly be perfectly fine to walk past. Not a lot of teenagers make a habit of menacing strangers in public. Most are OK. I do know this. But the very small chance that the approaching group of teenagers is *not* going to be OK is a chance that I do not have to take. So I don't take it.

'But you can't live your life that! You can't live in constant fear!'

Who said anything about fear? I am not living in fear. These are all practical, common-sense precautions for the avoidance of near-catastrophic outcomes. And I do not live with them always before me. The avoidance behaviours soon recede to the background and become automatic.

Some of these countermeasures might be time-consuming, yes. But what are you actually in a hurry *for*? Is your life really that occupied?

When you're Alone Forever, one slip, one misstep, one freakish, unlucky mishap, could cost you everything. When you're Alone Forever you don't have much to lose, but it's still *something*. You have your health, your daily rituals and observances, your habits and hobbies. All the things you like to do. You don't have anything else but them. Protect your interests, scant though they be.

You can never completely insure against misfortune. I am not suggesting that these steps could ever insulate you against unforeseeable bad luck. My advice is only to exercise a degree of prudent care and attention in everyday circumstances, and to cultivate a shrewd appreciation of just how vulnerable you are when Alone Forever.

Practical Tip #4
Brush your teeth
at least twice a day.
Use mouthwash.
Floss.

You should keep dental distress to a minimum. Invest in an electric toothbrush. Learn to use it properly. I.e., *don't* physically brush your teeth with it. The vibrating bristles are already brushing your teeth for you. You simply move the brush from site to site within your mouth, pressing gently against — and between — the teeth.

Use a mouthwash. My preference is for the simple, cheap, supermarket own-brand variety. The more expensive kinds tend to aggravate my sensitive teeth. But the fancier plaque-and-tartar-busting ones might be just up your alley.

The aim of all this dental hygiene is not to *attract* people. If you don't know by now that you're not going to *attract* people, you've wandered into the wrong book.

The aim is to minimise your visits to the dentist. Once every six months for a check-up should be as often as you go. Each visit should last not much longer than the time it takes the dentist to examine your mouth and compliment you on your oral hygiene.

'But, Anonymous, I don't live in a socialist paradise like you do. I can't afford to visit a dentist twice a year! What do I do?'

In that case just brush, floss, rinse, gargle, spit, chew your food carefully, and fall back on that old Alone Forever standby: hope for the best.

Practical Tip #5

Consider what you eat.

I'll keep this one short. I know that for many of us – yes, I said 'us' again – being permitted to eat what we like, when we like, is one of the few attractive features of being inherently unattractive to others. So this practical tip very nearly didn't make the cut. I've decided to leave it in, from a health point of view.

We need to have good health to have good lives. One of the most practical steps we can take to achieve good health – and this is demonstrably and objectively true – is to pay attention to our diet. The Alone Forever person who comes to rather *like* the Alone Forever life (if you last until your 40s, you almost certainly will get to this stage) will want to prolong that life as comfortably as possible for as long as possible.

Consider my cautionary tale a while back of my 2012 stomach bug, or whatever it was. That experience was so salutary and frightening that I began to consider going vegetarian. Something I recently accomplished at the time of writing.

The vegetarian or the vegan is not immune from contracting food-borne illnesses. But at a stroke he or she removes from their diet the number one cause of such illness: meat.

And that's all I have to say about the topic of diet. Note the wording of the Practical Tip here. I'm not recommending that you switch from your diet of fizzy drinks and chocolate to a diet of lentils and wholemeal bread (or whatever the two comedy extremes would be). I only recommend that you give what you eat some close consideration from the perspective of your entire lifespan. This book is all about how to live a full and happy life – yes, dammit, a *happy* life – whilst being Alone Forever.

WATCH YOUR BACK

One day in 2012 (that year again) I got on the bus to work and found it difficult to settle comfortably in my seat. A nagging pain in my lower back would not go away. To call it a pain, at this stage, is to give it too much credit. It was more of a *twinge*. By early middle age I'd already had enough back problems to know the early signs, and to know that this wasn't serious. I knew that if I took care of myself and watched how I sat, how I walked, how I bent over, and was careful not to exercise too enthusiastically, the twinge would recede on its own accord without developing into anything more inconvenient.

I got off the bus. My route to work lay on the other side of a busy road.¹ I waited patiently to cross. A gap in traffic opened wide enough for me to scurry across the road. About halfway, something went *snap* in my lower back. Sudden, stabbing pain seared through my entire body.

I made it to the other side of the road, bent and reeling like an old man. I made it into work. I was okay when I sat still, but the slightest movement was agony. I went home, crawled up the stairs – and went through two weeks of being severely compromised on account of reduced mobility. It was a month before I felt fully myself again.

The lesson is simple. 'Don't break into sudden runs when you've just felt a twinge in your back' is the particular lesson here. The general lesson is to look after yourself. *Look after yourself*. It's not just an empty cliché that people toss at each other without thinking. Well, it is that, but for you it is the principal commandment of your daily praxis. Look after everything about your health that could compromise you. Look after your hearing, your vision, your teeth, your back, your stomach, your legs and your feet.

Practical Tip #6

Sit up straight.

¹ Q: Why did the Alone Forever cross the road?
A: Who cares what that guy does?

Exercise daily.

Maintain good posture. Exercise every day. Even if it's only for 5 minutes. Do it.

Keep it simple with the exercise. The aim is not to 'get ripped'. You're only maintaining basic health. Do something like fifty push-ups a day. Break the fifty push-ups into two twenties and a ten, so as not to strain yourself. Do twenty knee-bends. *Slowly*. Do twenty of those arms-akimbo hip-twist things that you see lines of people doing in old black-and-white propaganda movies. Do these *slowly*, too. Make this your daily regime.

Go for walks.

Take the stairs at the office.

Purchase a cheap set of dumbbells, and lift them at random moments.

Exercise in some way for five to ten minutes a day. Fifteen minutes, if you want to push it.

The aim is not to improve your appeal to other people, remember, but simply to preserve yourself. Remember that you are Alone Forever (if you have any trouble remembering).

What does being Alone Forever mean? It means lots of things, but in this context it just means *taking care*. Your life is already awkward enough as it is.

An extra tip for the over-35s: don't overdo the exercise.

It's easy to get carried away and bend too deep, stretch too far, twist too quick, and do yourself more harm than you would have done by doing nothing.

My bad back of 2012 was partly, perhaps majorly, triggered by me getting a bit too exuberant with my own daily exercises. Even if you feel like a spring chicken, it only takes that one unlucky pull to ruin your next couple of days, or weeks, or even longer. So tread carefully with the exercise. Find the sweet spot for you between too much and too little. Occupy it.

MENTAL AS ANYTHING

Some people who read this book will be concerned about mental illness. It's not worth trying to pretend otherwise. A life Alone Forever has certain consequences. Prolonged isolation leads to excessive self-examination. Excessive self-examination leads to all kinds of mischief. If you're not careful, you can find yourself pulling on a thread that unravels your entire psyche. Depression, psychosis, schizophrenia. Take your pick. Have all of 'em together if you want. Go on.

During my stomach-bug weeks in 2012, I feared going insane. My mind kept snagging on things in a very peculiar way, revolving in circles, around and around, over and over. Thoughts of failure and irrevocable doom dominated my mind to the exclusion of all else. *By living as I have lived, I kept thinking, I have failed more utterly and more miserably than anyone else in the history of living has ever failed. And it is too late for me to change now, even if I wanted to (which I don't).*

Physically and mentally weakened, I feared being stuck in that state for good. Insanity might be nothing more than the state of being trapped in a few recurring thoughts that you cannot get out of.

I lay in bed, under a mound of blankets, shivering. I paged through medical websites, looking for explanations of my symptoms – a bad idea, by the way, which leads me to my next Practical Tip:

Practical Tip #7

Beware mental health hypochondria.

Mental illness and being Alone Forever only *seem* to be tightly woven together. If you are reading this book and you are Alone Forever, there is a strong chance that you believe the cause to be some flavour of mental illness. It only stands to reason. The human mind tends to believe whatever it's repeatedly told. Other people have always done their best to persuade you that you have a problem. They have always been in a broad consensus that there is something wrong with you. Whether they delivered their view up close and personal, or more abstractly in the guise of 'society' (as seen on

TV), people have told you, over and over again, that you are, in some fundamental fashion, not right. You are strange. You are peculiar. You are creepy. You are difficult. You are hard work. You are *wrong*.

By this stage of your Alone Forever life, at whatever stage you have found and opened this book, you may have a formal diagnosis of a recognised mental illness from a medical authority. You may take medication or be embarked upon a course of therapy, or both. Or you may have just arrived at the stage of wondering if it is finally time for you to seek ‘help’ from those proper medical authorities, instead of just wandering the Internet and worrying about it.

I cannot recommend that you either do or don’t do this, that, or the other. But I do strongly recommend that you give serious thought to this book’s central thesis: that the Alone Forever are not damaged, sick, or failing in any way that really matters. Being Alone Forever for me is not an error. It is a faithful reflection of what and who I fundamentally am.

I am not attacking the concept of mental illness itself. Whether or not mental illness ‘exists’ as anything more than a by-product of culture is an interesting topic, but it is not within the scope of this book.

Mental illness is like any other illness – attributable to a specific cause. I believe you can become mentally ill through being Alone Forever. This is not something I am going to attempt to deny. Being Alone Forever is one of the least salubrious environments for mental health that it is possible to be in.

Which is why one of my major Practical Tips is to get the hell *out* of being Alone Forever, if you are still minded to, and if you still can. If Alone Forever is not who you fundamentally are, then you are in a place you were never meant to be, and you need to get out of it. Many readers of this book will solve most or all of their mental health problems in an instant by getting a girlfriend or boyfriend, or even just by making a friend. This is straightforwardly true. Many wander into Alone Forever who don’t truly belong here, and they can get themselves out. This book is for the others, for ‘us’ – the ones who were meant to be here, and can only ever be here.

When I was struggling through that stomach upset in 2012 I genuinely feared for the first time in my life that I was ‘losing my mind’, as the saying goes.

I’m the kind of person who frets that a sore throat is sure to be throat cancer. Who wakes up with blurry vision and expects it to be the start of going blind.

Mental health hypochondria can be its own bizarre low-level form of mental illness. It is a syndrome with a recognised etiology and treatment.

But here is the truth. You can no more think yourself into being schizophrenic than you can think yourself into having a broken leg. If you’ve made it to full biological and cultural adulthood (mid-twenties or so) without going insane, the chances are that you never will, not really, no matter what happens to you. (Or what doesn’t happen to you.)

We think a lot about mental illness, and we rightly fear it. In our Alone Forever lives, we possess relatively little. Mental illness is an ogre that could sweep our lives away at a single blow. All that we have would be taken from us by the loss of our minds.

The only effective way out of mental health hypochondria is to forget about it. Which means creating the conditions where you stop obsessing about your mental health all the time.

Constantly agonising over ‘what you’re like’ and how your life has gone so wrong is, finally, something that you have to leave behind. Don’t worry – this leaving-behind isn’t something you *do*, in my experience. It’s something that happens naturally to the lifelong Alone Forever. Over time. We will return to this topic in full at the end of the book.

THE GRIMMEST SCENARIO

Do you worry about dying alone in your room and not being found for a long time?

Do you think about who will find your dead body?

Do you imagine how decomposed your dead body will be, when ‘they’ find it?

And do you have these thoughts regularly?

Part of our assumed Alone Forever attitude is to grandly proclaim (to ourselves, because sure as hell nobody else is listening) that if we die alone, we’re not bothered who finds our dead bodies in our smelly rooms, because we’ll be dead.

I subscribe to this attitude, in theory.

In practice, my feeling is that I am very much bothered about becoming one of those people you occasionally hear about in the news.

I suspect that most of us are bothered about it.

In January 2006, local council officials in Wood Green, London forced entry to a flat after neighbours complained of an unusual smell. A mound of post lay on the doormat. In the living room they discovered the decayed corpse of Joyce Vincent, a young woman who had died sitting on her sofa. Tests showed she had died about three years previously. Her TV was still on in the corner of the room.

Such stories are of universal interest, but they strike a particular chord with the Alone Forever.

Joyce Vincent was not ‘one of us’ in the strictest sense. She was an attractive young woman who had experienced several romantic relationships throughout the course of her life, but had no family or close friends with whom she was in contact.

For me and, I suspect, most other readers who are Alone Forever, the ultimate fate of Joyce Vincent is a very real prospect. One misstep in the shower – one arrhythmic heartbeat that doesn’t correct itself – one misjudged dose of medication – and weeks, months, or years later, the authorities are barging their way into your fortress of solitude to find your mouldering carcass slumped on the ground.

One can only hope that Joyce Carol Vincent died quickly and without suffering – and that, if a similar fate should ever befall us, we do, too.

My primal fear of being Alone Forever isn't so much dying alone as suffering alone, helpless in the grip of some medical emergency. The thought of laying injured and dying, and nobody being there to help. Here is where the lack of practical support that people offer one another will be felt most keenly.

Let's say you slip on the stairs and render yourself unconscious, somehow. If you're discovered in good time, you will be saved. But if you're left for more than a day, you're dead.

What can you do to make sure you're discovered?

Once again, there are steps we can take to mitigate the problem.

Practical Tip #8

**Come up with a method
to notify somebody
if you fall into distress.**

This might be as simple as asking your one remaining friend or friendly family member to check in with you regularly. Face it, they already know you're strange. You're not giving any big secrets away by making this request of them. They might feel honoured to be the person you pick to mount a Doomsday Watch.

If that is not an option, there is a slightly risky technological solution.

Set up an email account that permits the scheduled sending of emails. Create a draft email, postdated to the following day – bear in mind that you will have to change the email's send date to the following day *every day*. The idea is that if you fail to update the send-date, through some injury or incapacity, the email will auto-send, alerting whomever you wish to be alerted, and you are saved.

Make the addressee somebody you know and trust enough to carry out the instructions in the mail, and hopefully not be a dick about it if the email gets sent by mistake. (You might also choose to *bcc* the email address of your local police station. This is a very problematic step in an already-risky scheme, but it's worth considering.)

Here is an example of what the email might say:

Hi, this is [your name].

As you know, I live alone, always have done, always will do.

I've often worried what would happen to me if I suffered an accident at home and couldn't get to a phone.

So I set up this email to automatically send to you if I failed to check in every day.

Please give me a call on [your phone number].

If I don't answer the phone, please check out [your address].

This email might have been sent by mistake. If so, I apologise in advance.

Many Rgds

[Your name and address]

If you have pets, you could adapt the message to cover your embarrassment, like this:

As you know, I have [pets] that I love dearly. Living alone, I often worry about their welfare if anything should happen to me.

I know – however you shape it, this email is potentially explosive material. Anybody who receives it will instantly know more about you than you might want them to. If you do also include the police station as an addressee, you could be wasting their time. Because in order for this email *not* to be sent, you have to manually change the send date to the following day *every day* without fail. The effects of an accidental send do not bear thinking about. If you lost Internet access for any reason...

In addition to this postdated email solution, there are doubtless a variety of smartphone apps either in development or already in existence that could be used to the same end. Again, though, these apps would rely on the smooth working of technology, which makes me wary of employing such a solution myself.

So I don't do anything like this. The possibility of accidental triggering, whether through my own forgetfulness or the Internet flaking out on me, is larger than I find comfortable.

If I keel over unconscious right now, at this very moment, whilst tapping away on my keyboard here in my solo abode, the chances of anybody finding me before I die are virtually nil.

I choose to take my chances. Alone is how I have lived and will always live. If alone is how I am destined to die, so be it.

At the moment, I am relatively young and in relatively good health. My attitude might change as the years pass and my health wanes.

I choose to conceal my status as one Alone Forever from all other people. As such, I won't risk the exposure to other people that an accidental send would result in. You imagine that everybody you know knows who you are and how you live. The truth is that none of them know precisely who you are and how you live. Most other people will have a vague, unexamined notion that you are 'a bit of a loner', etc. – but beyond this point, their imaginations don't engage with you very much at all. The solitary individual matters very little to the socialised majority. This needs to be known and understood.

STING LIKE A SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

To conclude this section: Alone Forever is not a disease and should not be treated as one. Alone Forever is a destiny – a peculiar destiny to be sure, but a personal destiny nonetheless. It comes fully-featured and bedecked with all manner of hazards. This section has been about the prevention of some common aches and ailments, and an exploration of certain future scenarios that we all dread.

Be careful not to get scratched by the thorn of mental health hypochondria.

I am not aware of any mental exercise, medicine, meditation technique, or panacea for the soul that will speed up the natural process of growing a strong, hard shell around oneself and living inside it for the rest of your life.

The purpose of your life as somebody who is Alone Forever is to survive.

This is not a book about how to feel miserable about being Alone Forever and then kill yourself.

It's a book about How To Be Alone Forever. And this brings me neatly (or scruffily, if you like) to perhaps my most controversial mental health-related Practical Tip:

Practical Tip #9

**Retain some degree of contact
with other people.**

**It is advisable to remain
socialised to *some* extent.**

This does not mean having friends. It does not even mean, necessarily, staying in touch with family.

It might just mean having a job, going to it every day, getting to know your work colleagues as people, and having them as your social group.

The Alone Forever life is all about context and contrast. It is about enjoying your solitude, your privacy, and your acres of time in which to do whatever the hell you like.

But it is hard to enjoy being Alone Forever if being alone is all you ever are.

Going to work for eight hours a day, five days a week, enhances your appreciation of being Alone Forever.

Other people, and the lives they lead, and the ways that they talk about them, and the ways they interact with you – all will provide a healthy contrast to your own life. At the end of an average workday, I flee back to my solitude with deep gratitude and almost indecent levels of joy. No shit.

Part Two

Hell is Other People

I owe my solitude to other people.

-Alan Watts

It's relatively straightforward to be Alone Forever when we are by ourselves. We're world champions at being alone. If they awarded medals for sitting on our own in our rooms, our chests would be garlanded with ribbons and shiny brass.

I can deal with not being around other people. It's no problem at all. Being by myself is something I am really, *really* good at.

Problems only arise when other people walk onto the stage.

What is the most pressing issue facing the Alone Forever? Some would say that the most important thing is the maintenance of good health; others that you should look to your external circumstances – decent home, tolerable job, a wholesome and varied set of day-to-day routines; others will insist that you have to work out the best ways of dealing with other people before you stand any chance of living a decent life. All of these are equally important.

In this section, we will look at what it means to live amongst other people, and how we might deal with some of the issues that arise from being Alone Forever in a world largely composed of other people and their affairs. Everywhere you turn, you will encounter other people and their expectations. Make no mistake. This social world was made by them and for them. It was made wholly in their image – not yours.

We live lives in which other people are of reduced significance. For this reason alone, paradoxically, other people are of *great* significance to us. Dealing with them will always be an issue.

How should we conduct ourselves among people? Should we practise concealment of our Alone Forever status from others? If so, to what extent? Fully or partially? Do you let it all hang out, and inform your sceptical local populace that you are Alone Forever? Do you meet the problem halfway, and volunteer no information up-front, but if asked, spill your guts about this whole Alone Forever thing? Or do you maintain an iron-clad cloak of secrecy around your Alone Forever life (which is a lot easier than you might think)?

Do we think they believe us? Do we think they *understand*?

Then there are all the adjacent issues. How do we cope with the transition from our lives of solitude to the hurly-burly of daily life out there with *them*?

These are big questions. I have few answers. Just a few general observations and guidance, gleaned from my own experience.

OUR EMPTY WORLD

To be Alone Forever is to be somewhat like the protagonist of a well-known (but oddly uncommon) sci-fi scenario. The hero wakes to find himself completely alone in an empty world. Other people are no longer a feature of the external world. He must fend for and look after himself, by himself. He must do something that is one of the most beloved touchstones of self-help literature: he must *take responsibility*.

The sci-fi scenario breaks down for us when we look out of the window and see the busy, populated world that has always been there. All those people, all hurrying along the streets in their mysterious, hurrying ways...

We are not as they are. Does this make us better?

Popular lore has it that 'loners' commonly think themselves better than the so-called man or woman in the street. To be scrupulously fair to other people (just for once, in passing), we must acknowledge that there is a grain of truth to this. Most of us have entertained thoughts about being superior to the people whom we live among and meet on a daily basis, or even to the abstract gorgon we call 'society'.

But this, too, is only a phase that soon passes. One of the things we eventually learn about being Alone Forever is that none of our states are permanent. Feeling superior is just an aspect of youth that most young people are afflicted by at some time, Alone Forever or not. Puffed-up feelings of superiority are no more definitive of the Alone Forever than the first leaf of spring is definitive of all trees. The greater truths of being Alone Forever supersede any of its passing conditions.

Everything that other people say and think of us is, in the final analysis, unimportant. The key phrase here being 'the final analysis'. It takes time to get from one place to another. Looking back at my angry young self, I would never have dreamed that I would one day be genuinely uncaring of what other people thought about me. But that day has long since come.

At my current stage of being Alone Forever, the only people whom I know and interact with on a regular basis are the people I meet at my workplace. I see and speak to nobody else. I shook off my last remaining schoolfriend over twenty years ago. My

biological family – never a close-knit one – scattered to the winds after the deaths of my parents.

I work in a busy office of about twenty people. Over time, one gathers information about work colleagues and builds up a mosaic picture of their lives. I know all my colleagues' essential likes and dislikes in the realms of food, TV shows, types of weather, political viewpoints, preferred romantic-sexual partners, and holiday destinations. I know whether their parents are still alive, and their parents' approximate state of health. I know the names of their children and how they're all doing at school or work.

My colleagues know very little about me. If they have ever noticed the fact that I never seem to have anything personal to talk about, they don't show it. I believe most of them never have realised that I don't seem to go anywhere or do anything. I have no friends, so I never mention a friend. I don't go on holiday – a short train ride to a neighbouring town is a major excursion for me. They know that both my parents are dead. They know that I live alone, that I read a lot, and that I like technology and gadgets. They know I am 'a private person'. That really is about it.

I don't refrain from speaking about myself and my life at work because I am 'keeping secrets', but because there is nothing to know.

I used to imagine that my work colleagues might think of me as enigmatic and interesting. I have come to understand that they see me as aloof and secretive. From their point of view, in the popular parlance of everyday speech, I am firmly 'up my own arse'. Which irritates and amuses me in equal measure.

This cloak of invisibility is *necessary*. Other people can never know the truth about the Alone Forever. Your life will always be a mystery to them. This is how it must be.

I still live in the city in which I was born and where I grew up. You might imagine that running into people I know in the middle of my home city would be a reasonably common occurrence. But this is not so. When you are Alone Forever, you are by definition a person with few or no friends, and no social inclinations to speak of. In the years during and after school, yes, you will often bump into people you know on the street. That phase will last for several years until it peters out and eventually stops.

The mathematics of Alone Forever are inexorable. Knowing only a few people means that you will know ever-fewer people as the years pass by. By the time you reach your thirties, you will likely know so few people that it'll be a rare day indeed when you encounter any of them in public.

By the time I approached forty, whole years could pass without me encountering anybody in the street who was familiar enough with me to stop, look, and say *'Anonymous! Is that you?'*

But it does still happen from time to time. A long-lost school chum (who was never really a chum). A cousin I've not seen since boyhood. Somebody I worked in a pub with when I was twenty-three. People like that. In the majority of cases, I'm tasked with a few minutes' polite chatter, which I am more than capable of dealing with, thank you very much. I have remarked elsewhere in this book that if you were to meet me for the first time and interact with me for five minutes, you would never notice anything 'wrong' with me.

By the time you get to the stage of being Alone Forever where you're reading a book about it, you probably no longer expect other people to do anything for you. You've met all the types of people you're ever going to meet, and they're all pretty much the same. You no longer particularly want people to have a good impression of you. People are the absolute focus of each others' lives. You have begun to understand that people are not and never will be the focus of your life. Nor you of theirs.

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

The secret of painless interaction with other people is to encourage them to talk about themselves.

PRACTICAL TIP #10

**Have good conversations
with people by continually prompting
them to talk about themselves.**

It's easy.

It's effective.

Nobody will notice you doing it.

Even if you think you are the worst conversationalist in the world (and you're not: I am), you can do this.

Prompting people to monologue about themselves takes surprisingly little effort.

I promise you that nobody will notice what you are doing, if you do it properly. The trick is to not make it so obvious that the other person cannot fail to notice it.

A year or two ago, I was browsing in a bookshop when I heard a voice behind me: 'Anonymous?'

I turned, instantly booting up my social interaction routines. Everyone who is Alone Forever should become accustomed to switching from your private, solitary self to your public-facing self, *instantly*.

It was a young woman, Angela, from the office. She'd been on annual leave, and then I'd been on annual leave. We hadn't seen one another for nearly a month.

She had some news that she'd already shared with the others at work, but not with me. She was now engaged to be married. She held up the engagement ring for me to admire, as if showing it to another woman.

'Very nice,' I said, pretending to give the diamond a close examination.

'Thanks,' she said – and spent a minute describing her fiancé.

At this point I realised that Angela would happily spend the rest of our short time together in talking only about herself. She would ask me no questions, awkward or otherwise, that might have me floundering. I would not be asked if I was enjoying my annual leave, what I was up to here today, or anything like that.

Angela's next topic was her recent trip to America, where she had been stopped at Immigration and cross-examined about something for some reason that completely escaped me. I had stopped properly listening. I was just nodding and saying 'ah!' and 'really?' and similar things whenever the verbal cues demanded them. By this stage I had more or less given up paying attention to the conversation, and was just coasting to the end.

My vital energies tend to *give out*, when it comes to other people.

I am not Alone Forever because other people are horrible to me. People *can* be horrible to me, and sometimes they are – but such is the universal experience of everybody, not just the Alone Forever.

I am Alone Forever because I have no enthusiasm for other people.

Other people are interested in other people in a way that I never have been, and never will be.

Another example. Again, I was in the centre of town – all my encounters occur in town; I am never in public anywhere else for long enough for anything to happen – when I met not just one person I know, but *two* of the blighters.

They were a married couple from my office building. Suzy worked a few desks away from me. We were on moderately-warm terms. She was out with her husband, Alan, who worked in an office on another floor. I knew both of them well enough for it to be appropriate for the stop-and-chat routine to play itself out.

We were standing in front of an Italian restaurant.

'I'm a bit peckish,' said Alan, looking over my shoulder.

I knew what was coming.

Suzy's eyes widened.

'Let's go in for a bite to eat!' she exclaimed. 'Come on, Anonymous, come and have something to eat with us...'

I agreed. Ordinarily I would cry off, claiming vital business elsewhere. Other people rarely believe this excuse, and you shouldn't want them to believe it. It's just a social politeness.

We went inside the Italian restaurant.

This was an exceptional occurrence for me.

It had been twenty years or more since I had been inside any kind of restaurant.

The reader might be taken aback by this claim, possibly even sceptical.

How could I, a citizen of a modern Western city, have not been in a restaurant – a *restaurant!* – for the overwhelming bulk of my adult life?

Right there we have a handy litmus test of being Alone Forever. If you struggle to comprehend how it is possible for a grown man not to have been inside a restaurant for twenty years, you may not be fully Alone Forever in the sense that I am addressing in this book.

If, on the other hand, the notion of a normal adult human male in a large Western city never having been inside a restaurant for most of his adult life is perfectly comprehensible, even normal, then you have passed the litmus test and you are truly Alone Forever. Congratulations.

We got seated, Alan and Suzy and me.

We all picked up menus. I pretended to look at mine while observing Alan and Suzy out of the corners of my eyes. I had no idea of the protocols, the conventions, that govern being in a restaurant as a party of 'friends'. I waited to see what my two companions would do. I was dealing with a lot of things on a number of levels. Not just the new environment and all of its unwritten rules with which I was unfamiliar. I also had to deal with two people who were constantly chatting to me and to one another as well. The noise of the restaurant and the overlapping conversations going on all around me also seemed very intrusive.²

² I am not unaware that I show many of the classic symptoms of certain types of autism, particularly the celebrated 'Asperger' variety. I have never sought a diagnosis, but I have little doubt that I would be so diagnosed if I did. So why not get a diagnosis? That is the wrong question. The right question is why would I ever *want* to get a diagnosis? As an adult, the only true benefit would be to be able to wave a piece

My vitality felt wholly depleted. Coming here was a mistake, but it was a mistake I'd already made. I would now have to see it through.

If I was a character in a book I would have got up and walked out, with or without a plausible excuse. This was not a realistic option. I quite *liked* Suzy and Alan.

This is the strange thing with us: we often still like other people, in moderation. We are not the complete misanthropes that society thinks we are, and that even we sometimes imagine ourselves to be.

We all had chips, with some kind of pasta burger thing. I love vinegar on my chips. I cannot eat chips without vinegar, and lots of it. But there was no vinegar on the table.

I stopped the waitress – a pretty, full-on Italian young woman, who had an enchanting way of listening with her head tilted to one side. I asked for vinegar and she fetched me a large bottle with a screwtop lid. The kind of bottle that you purchase from a supermarket to refill a shaker. I was glum. 'Is there a vinegar shaker?' I said.

Alan burst out laughing. 'Take the top off,' he said. 'There'll be a thing in the neck to shake the vinegar with.'

He was right. I asked him if he'd been here before. No, he said, he never had.

There was a peculiar, stretched moment of silence. I was behaving exactly as somebody who had never been to a restaurant in his entire adult life would behave.

The remainder of our impromptu lunch passed without further incident, and after another forty minutes or so we parted on warm terms.

At home I felt so drained that I had to take a nap. I only sleep in the daytime if I am ill, so this was a measure of what had happened that afternoon.

The incident occurred several years ago. To this day, whenever I pass by that restaurant, I look inside it, and remember the day I sat there as a customer, at a table with other people, just as if I was a regular person with friends who did things like that all the time.

of paper at my employer and ask them to keep the noise down in the office. That is literally the only benefit. It's not enough.

The event was an anomaly. The thing about anomalies is that they're anomalous. There is a better-than-evens chance that I won't visit another restaurant in my life again.

MISCELLANEOUS ASIDES

Living Alone Forever has consequences. To pick one at random: when we don't see people for a while or interact with them on a regular basis, our voices can grow faint through disuse. Whenever I take a week or two off work, I barely speak a word during my entire absence. Sometimes I'll have a brief dialogue with a member of staff in a shop. Sometimes I will make a phone call, or receive a phone call, that involves speech. Sometimes none of these things happen, and I am almost literally silent for two entire weeks. Then I'll return to my job, which involves dealing with people on the telephone, and my voice usually takes an hour to warm up and start sounding normal. In that time, people will ask me if I have been ill, because I sound so hoarse.

Other interpersonal consequences?

When conversation with other people does take place, I find that I have to say everything twice. I have to say everything twice. *At least* twice.

The first time I say anything, people are not ready to listen to me, for I am generally the opposite of talkative. As such, people spend the entire time after I've started to talk in thinking about the fact that I am talking. They don't listen. And so I have to say again everything that I've just said. Sometimes I have to say it a third time, or even a fourth. Quite often, the person to whom I am speaking later shows no sign that they have retained any memory of anything I said to them.

An amusing side-issue, perhaps, but for me this is one of the most aggravating elements of being Alone Forever. People have numerous ways in which they will critique you for being quiet, but they will then simply not listen to you when you do speak, or assign any value to it. You're scorned for being silent, but scoffed at for speaking.

What else is inside this miscellaneous ragbag of grumbles? Much of the anguish that arises from being Alone Forever arises from being obsessed about one's 'life' in the popular sense of that term. The story of who you are – your friends, your passions, your lovers, your travels, your experiences, your aims and ambitions. It's not

uncommon for one who is Alone Forever to singularly lack everything that other people would recognise as being a 'life'. We fret about this.

I would make a basic point and a more advanced point on this topic. The basic point: *don't* compare yourself to other people. Just don't do it. You'll spiral down the sinkhole fast enough as it is without giving yourself extra nudges all the time. This is such good advice that it's been stated and restated in a fabulous array of manners countless times over the millennia. *Set not your heart on another's possession*. Etc.

If you can genuinely realise a state where you know that other people's lives are nothing to do with you and that you must not use them as a yardstick to judge yourself against, congratulations. You have achieved not just the ideal state of being Alone Forever, but the ideal state, full stop.

The more advanced point I would make here is a bit more alarming. You might not like this.

Our 'lives' are fictional. I don't mean that they're fictional 'in a manner of speaking'. I mean that they're literally fictional.

Our lives are a story we tell ourselves, and one that we too often allow others to tell *for us* as well – which influences how we tell our own story, which in turn influences others' version of our story, and so on. 'Life' – as it is meant in the phrase 'to get a life' – is a *very* recent cultural construct. Having a life in that sense seems to mean that your life must consist of remarkable events and interactions with other people, or it is no life at all. I disagree with that view, and you should too. If you have a roof over your head, food in your belly, and agreeable methods of passing the time, you definitely already have a life, make no mistake about that.

We should never hold other people accountable for being unthinking and unobservant. On the contrary, we should be thankful that people don't see us or understand us.

We spend most of our youth, and a good chunk of our mature adulthood, resenting other people for their seeming inability to perceive what and who we are. But if we hang in there long enough, the time will come – the time *must* come – when that resentment flips onto its head, and we actually celebrate the fact that other people are *other* people and we are ourselves.

Let them continue to ignore and misunderstand you.

How could things be otherwise?

This book is all about helping the Alone Forever reader toward the place where you accept that Alone Forever is your real and binding state, forever.

Other people are not going to get you out of this thing. Nor did they put you here. Being Alone Forever is what and who you are.

Time to grow up and accept that there's not going to be any great last-minute saviour walking through the door.

A surprising number of the Alone Forever seem to credit other people, as a bloc, with extraordinary levels of perception and understanding. And then blame other people for not arriving at a perfect appreciation of who we are and how we live.

Other people are not really your problem. Never have been. Never will be. You yourself are your problem. Your misunderstanding of the role that other people play in your life is the problem.

There are several places on the Internet where the Alone Forever gather in enough numbers for something that resembles conversation and debate to break out.

The main topic is of course the perennial favourite: 'How Do I Get A Girlfriend/Boyfriend/Wife/Husband/Family/Friends?' A question that is not within the scope of this book. This book has been written by one who is past the stage where 'getting a life' is an ongoing, meaningful project. I already have a life. The Alone Forever kind.

The second big topic is the topic of the current section: 'Other people are annoying!'

Let's face it. Despite everything I've said up there, the problem of other people is rarely an easy one to deal with. Even if you manifest the detached equanimity of a Buddha, other people can be fucking annoying.

PRACTICAL TIP #11

**99% of the annoyance
caused by other people**

**can be removed
by ceasing to want
their understanding or help.**

This might be the most ‘problematic’ Practical Tip yet, so let’s drill down into it.

There is a very prevalent view amongst the various Alone Forever communities – a view I used to hold as well – that if we can only get other people to *understand* who we are and how we live, then everything will be somehow ‘better’ for us than it is at the moment.

Granted, me saying ‘stop wanting other people to understand’ is a bit like instructing you to stop thinking of a pink elephant. But once you have entertained the notion that it is possible to stop wanting the understanding of other people, you give the attitude a chance to flourish.

Not that there’s much chance of getting other people to understand in the first place.

I invite any reader who has not already attempted to convey the essence of being Alone Forever to other people, to attempt it at the next opportunity.

Pick a likely candidate, anyone at all. Attempt to explain to them just who you are and how you live.

It *might* go well. People are unexpected in all sorts of ways. You might have an acquaintance or a family member who is equipped to understand. Sort of.

But for most of us, the experiment is not likely to go well.

There must logically be normal, everyday people in the world who are capable of understanding what it is to be Alone Forever, but I have never encountered any of them.

Getting to the stage of Alone Forever where you are past the stage of wistfully wishing that other people could only understand, is one of the most important stages to reach. *You need to get here.* If you follow none of the other advice in this book, follow this one. Kill the part of you that still pines for the understanding of other people. Everything else follows from this.

And don't head in the wrong direction with this. You are not setting yourself up in opposition to other people. 'Other people are the root of all evil' would be the wrong way of looking at it.

Other people are *nothing at all* to the true Alone Forever – and I do not mean nothing in the negative sense.

I mean that other people are nothing in the sense of not being at all relevant to any meaningful consideration of how one should live and conduct oneself.

Other people are not the root of anything, least of all evil. *One's own mistaken perception* that other people are somehow arbiters of reality, of what should be considered normal and abnormal, is the root of one's own unhappiness and dejection.

I was going to italicise that last sentence, or offset it from the rest of the page in some way, as a blockquote or something, but in the end, I didn't.

I trust the reader to ferret out the meaning. I imagine you, reader, as somebody who is Alone Forever like myself. Like myself, you will be accustomed to spending a great deal of time in solitude, and you are therefore well capable of teasing out the meanings of texts and contexts.

If these last few pages have triggered anything like an epiphany in you, great. Epiphanies are good. We like our epiphanies, don't we? I can't get enough of 'em, personally.

Once you get here – and I mean *really* get here, not just as an assumed posture (don't pretend you don't know what I mean) – your journey to the ideal place of safety within Alone Forever is all but complete.

**STOP THINKING THAT OTHER PEOPLE
KNOW YOU'RE ALONE FOREVER.
NOBODY KNOWS YOU'RE ALONE FOREVER.**

What you think other people think about you is one of the litmus tests that determine whether you are Alone Forever – or whether you are still on the road towards it, and thus still have time to escape.

If you think that other people ‘know you’re Alone Forever’, then *you are not yet fully Alone Forever*. The one who is Alone Forever knows that he lives very far from the understanding of other people, and necessarily so.

If you know that other people do not and cannot know you are ‘Alone Forever’, then you have spent enough time Alone Forever to know that the condition might as well be higher mathematics from another dimension – one of those crazy sets of equations that suggest we’re all jellyfish in a higher reality or something.

That really is how it is.

‘Well, you say that, Anonymous, but my cousin knows that I’m Alone Forever because I told her one night when we were drunk at a party, and she understands...’

Stop. Roll back to what I said earlier in this book.

If you still have friends; if you still have close acquaintances; if you’re still going to parties: then you are not yet fully Alone Forever.

You might be very close to being Alone Forever. It doesn’t take much for the last few wisps of personal contact and social life that you might have remaining, to simply vanish, sometimes overnight. It happened to me.

But you’re not there yet. I lasted until my late 30s before I was properly Alone Forever in the sense that I have sketched out in this book. This is the stage at which you look around you and find all the exits blocked - not merely blocked, but sealed-over, vanished as if they never were. *That’s* when you are Alone Forever.

Having a friend or cousin with whom you get occasionally drunk. Going out with workmates. These are wide-open exits from being Alone Forever. You might not ever use them, it might still be tough to get through them – but they’re still there. You can still escape. There is still ‘hope’ for you, if hope is what you want.

THE SECRET THAT KEEPS ITSELF

How much, or how little, to tell other people?

Here is where I turn from general advice – what I think most people who are Alone Forever, in most situations, should do – to the particular, and describe what I have done in my own life. This will not be right for many readers, whose individual circumstances and lives will of course differ from mine.

But it will be useful as a measuring tool. I doubt there is anything in the experience of others who are Alone Forever that is not in some way useful to oneself.

I've already stated my Prime Practical Tip for the Alone Forever: **tell nobody that you are Alone Forever**. Or if you do, don't expect them to understand much, if anything, of what you tell them. All they're likely to think is that you've found a cunning method of pretending you're not gay.

My personal policy is to offer no information, and be very careful about what you do reveal. You want people *never* to think about you.

Here we come to the great saving grace: other people are not interested in how the Alone Forever live.

Remember Angela from earlier in this section? She was the former work colleague that I met in the bookshop. She spent the ten minutes we stood together just talking about herself, at my prompting. Her attitude throughout that encounter is the typical attitude of all other people towards you. Nobody will spend more than the occasional passing thought in wondering why you never seem to mention a friend, or why you alone of all your colleagues never return from your weekends or from annual leave with tales to tell.

Nobody is interested in your life, or in how you conduct yourself or live from day to day.

I have worked in the same office with the same people for almost a decade. They will still ask me, in all innocence, if I have some interesting plans for the weekend.

I used to think they were fishing for information, that they were curious about the life of their strange middle-aged unmarried colleague who never mentions a friend.

I came rather late to the understanding that the opposite is the case.

Practical Tip #12

**Understand that you will always
be mistaken for things you are not.**

Deal with it.

Embrace it.

Use it to your advantage.

One of the many side-effects of being Alone Forever is being mistaken for something you're not. People have to believe that other people are definite somethings. Being Alone Forever is a *long* way off the spectrum of most people's experiences. You will gradually come to understand that other people hold beliefs about how you live that don't match with your actual day-to-day life. Others' misconceptions about you will be hilariously wrong in most cases.

Over the years, I have pieced together a fairly accurate picture of what other people think about me and about my 'life'.

My picture of their pictures of me is based on my general observations of how people think, coupled with particular instances from actual stray comments and overheard conversations.

People regard me as somebody who has a secret. Not a deep and dark kind of secret, but a secret nonetheless.

The Alone Forever have no secrets other than the fact of being Alone Forever. This secret is effectively kept by itself.

We have no other secrets, on the whole. But people will always try to fill in the blanks for themselves. They will always provide you with clues as to how they see you.

Other people tend to believe that I am the most furtive gay man in the history of the world. Numerous indicators have tipped me off about this over the years.

For example, I take a close interest in football (inexplicably called 'soccer' in some remote areas). I watch games whenever I can. I possess a goodly amount of knowledge about the clubs and players, about whatever's currently happening in the

world's top leagues, and about the technical side of the game, too. (It's all about exploiting space, innit?)

Almost without exception, people react with surprise when they learn that I am a football fan. And there is often scepticism, too, as if I'm lying about liking football. I often have to answer a random football question or two, as they test my knowledge.

On the whole, other people believe that I am, that I must be, that I could *only* be – a gay man.

Being gay is the only thing that makes sense about me to other people. So it is what they believe, pending definite evidence to the contrary – which of course can never appear, what with me being Alone Forever and all.

At my workplace, people react in a strange fashion whenever I say or do anything that suggests I find women attractive. E.g., if a beautiful actress is mentioned, and I express admiration of her in *that* way... People suddenly become very still, and stare straight ahead. They seem embarrassed and uncomfortable. After long reflection, it occurred to me what they are thinking: '*Oh no. Anonymous is pretending he's not gay again...*'

It used to irritate me when I was younger. When I was in my late teens, and first perceived that my nearest family had all assumed I was gay, I hated it. It was the 1980s, and there was still a substantial stigma associated with being gay.

Gradually, though, I learned to accept that it was the only thing most other people would ever think about me. It's a reasonable working assumption for them to make, from their point of view.

I prefer to be thought gay, rather than have other people know the truth about me. I am a man who has never had any kind of romantic relationship. I am a man who has never had sex. Better they think *anything*, than know that.

Constantly being mistaken for something you are not brings with it a great temptation to tell people that you are Alone Forever, and try to explain it to them.

This is something we are always prone to, as it happens. The desire to communicate ourselves to others, and have them understand us, might never fully leave us.

From time to time, it's a temptation we will give in to. Who has not had the scary thrill of imagining what it might be like? How easy just to lean over to the next desk at the office and mutter 'Pssst! Debbie! Guess what? I've never had a girlfriend. I haven't got any friends either. I'm Alone Forever!'

What stops us doing this?

What stops me is the certain knowledge that the unfortunate Debbie could never understand what I would be trying to tell her. It would require a long and exhausting session of explanation. It would not succeed, and the failed effort would not result in anything positive. Debbie wouldn't get it, no matter how much time I spent telling her about it, and I'll just be frustrated and angry with myself for not knowing better than to even try.

As I have already stated several times, you need to verify this for yourself, if you haven't already. So go ahead and try to sketch out the state of being Alone Forever to at least one other person.

How do people commonly react?

Best-case scenario is that they see you as some type of unlucky-in-love stock character – like Martin Short's character in the 1987 movie *Innerspace*. Somebody like that.

They will decide to offer you a lot of advice, which will include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- Just be yourself
- Just wait – it will happen...
- Just be yourself!

For the average man and woman in society, the phrase 'just be yourself' has the properties of a magical incantation. Any interrogation of the phrase – such as politely asking what it really means – will usually be met with impatience and irritation. Because everybody knows what 'just be yourself' means. It means just being yourself, *obviously*.

I strongly advise against entering into debate with other people about the topic of just being yourself. Yes, you could reasonably point out that you have been yourself for your entire life. It is yourself that other people seem to find problematic. People seem to want you to be other than yourself. How can continuing to be yourself ever bring about any change?

There is a contradiction here that can never be resolved. The circularity of the ‘just be yourself’ conversation is something that aggravates people very quickly. Remember that other people have never had to make the kinds of efforts that they expect you to make. Relationships, friendships, and sex are all things that just happened for them. You, on the other hand, can’t even get laid on Tinder. You effectively live in another world.

‘Just be yourself’ is a secular commandment that everybody lives by, and it can never be questioned. So don’t question it. You will gain nothing from engaging with other people in a discussion about what it means to be yourself.

Being oneself is what has led one to being Alone Forever. When people say ‘just be yourself’, what they really mean is ‘be somebody whom other people will like and find attractive’, but *do not ever* point this out to them. If you do point it out, watch out. Prepare to be cast as the Bad Guy, or Bad Gal, once again.

The incommunicability of being Alone Forever is one of the most frustrating aspects of our state. The occasions when we genuinely open up to others – the way the TV shows are always telling us to do – are rare indeed. All we get in return is misunderstanding, contradictory platitudes, and displays of anger if we try to debate the issue.

We might want people to see us as we are. But people can so seldom see anything at all about us, that the effort to make oneself visible rapidly brings about a peculiar kind of existential exhaustion. ‘How can they not know?’ we ask ourselves, frequently.

Remember that you are Alone Forever. Being so comes with certain baggage. Not being understood by other people is one of the trickiest loads we have to bear.

All of which might sound more than a little ‘neckbeardy’, granted, but eh, whatever.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

My final tip in this section follows on from what I've just been talking about. No matter how annoyed other people make us, there is nothing at all to be gained from being rude or unpleasant or nasty to them. On the contrary – our dealings with others must always be polite. Once you have given up all hope of being understood by them (and you should give up that hope as soon as you feasibly can), you are left with a decision on how to behave towards them in the course of your daily existence.

Just be courteous and polite to other people. Be a proper gentleman, or lady, with them. You should strive to be the most exquisitely well-mannered man or woman anybody could ever meet. (Don't overdo it, though, serial-killer-style.)

No, other people very often don't deserve our courtly politenesses – but this tip is more for your sake than theirs.

Practical Tip #13

**Be courteous, polite and well-mannered
to other people at all times.
(Within reason.)**

Don't be trampled on by others in your eagerness to please them. Strike a healthy balance between being courteous and helpful to others, and being their doormat.

Other people are not your enemy. They are not your ally, either. They can be friendly acquaintances, sometimes even friends if we're lucky. Most often, though, other people are 'just there'.

I catch the same bus to work every day. I like to pass the fifteen-minute journey in reading a book. Even in my mostly empty life I often still find it difficult to make time for reading, so this daily reading time is precious to me.

One day recently, a young man occupied the seat directly on the other side of the gangway, and started talking to me. He launched into a story about himself without any preamble. He had got home last night from whatever he had been out doing (he mentioned what it was, but I missed it). When he entered his block of flats he

discovered that the communal stairwells and landings were in darkness. He had immediately called the building management company and told them about it, but as far as he could tell they hadn't been out yet.

I made polite noises, and listened to the young man's story. After the first few seconds, I detected that he was mentally challenged in some way, but not to a great extent. My mother would have said he was 'a bit simple'. I always feel obliged to be extra-polite to people who might not have the same kind of life as the majority, being a member of this grouping myself.

So I wasn't rude to him, as many in my position would have been. I *like* not being rude to people. I will listen to them if they seem to need to be listened to.

What prevented me from getting up and moving to another seat at the back of the bus? Or just saying to the young man 'I'm sorry, but I want to read'? Nothing prevented me from doing either of these things – and they would have been effective, too. The young man, 'simple' or not, would have understood and left me alone, I'm sure.

My calculation was that it was more important not to be the cause of dismay or discontent in another person than that I got to read for fifteen minutes.

I tell this anecdote not to embiggen myself, but to illustrate something about the Alone Forever that I would bet holds almost universally true. *We are* polite. *We are* dignified and courteous.

Our manners are exquisite.

We will hold a door, or lift a heavy shopping bag, for anyone, man or woman, young or old. We observe social niceties in ways that relatively few people actually do.

But how about when other people provoke you? What then?

One of the drollest ironies of life when you are Alone Forever is that people will frequently express frustration with you for being quiet, but then display limited interest in anything you might have to say, unless it conforms to the *very* narrow band of communications that they evaluate as being 'down-to-Earth'.

With that in mind, there is an urgent requirement to control one's temper. Get ahead of any impulse you might have to explode in righteous wrath. The Alone

Forever are meek and mild. We are far from being the evil, explosive sociopaths of popular lore. Or, if we are evil sociopaths (and I think we all *sometimes* are), we should only be so in the privacy of ourselves.

Maintain your gentlemanly poise. Or your ladylike serenity.

Keep your detachment.

When it comes to pretty much everything that other people care about, remember that you don't really have a horse in the race. Politics, celebrity, culture, travel, clothes, socialising – what do you care, what do you *really* care, what anybody else says or thinks about any of these?

Remember that being Alone Forever is something that has already happened to you. It is the permanent, unchanging condition of your life. You're not going to get out (if getting out is what you want) by lecturing people about religion or politics or the inherent worth of their favourite TV shows.

Or maybe you're Alone Forever *and* you're a fan of libertarian politics, or whatever. Great. Rather you than me, but I'm pleased you've got something that keeps you occupied. We all need something. But when it comes to speaking to others about our various things... What are you trying to achieve? *Whether people think well or ill of you is not going to affect your life.* You're Alone Forever. Your life is hidden away behind hundred-foot-thick armour plating. They're never going to see or understand. They're never going to give you any *credit*. Understanding and accepting this truth is a huge milestone in the Alone Forever life.

No matter how many times people needle you for being quiet, but then talk all over you when you try to say something, keep your face sunny, and your tone civil.

With all of that said, it's not wrong to harbour secret grudges against other people. I am something of a wishy-washy sentimentalist when it comes to other people. I really do want to think well of people. I would like people to think well of me. But quite often I end up thinking: 'Why do I even bother with these fuckers?'

Part Three

Alone Forever From Day to Day

The greatest thing in the world
is to know how to belong to oneself.

-Michel de Montaigne

OUR DAILY LIVES

When you're Alone Forever, you spend a lot of time listening to other people talk about how they live their lives and spend their time. Other people's lives are populated by other people, and by all the events and warmth thereof. Marriage, children, parties, holidays, meals at restaurants, strolling around shopping malls together – to us it's effectively another world, another reality. Even if we've progressed past the point where we want to have people in our daily lives, people are so obsessed with people that we cannot help but be infected by their incessant chatter. Even when we're alone and there are no other people around, we still have to contend with our own conditioned expectations of what constitutes 'real life', and with how very far away we are from it. There is no escape. Every character in books, on TV, and in movies has the same kind of life, more or less. Wife, husband, friends, job, meaningful activities. There is never any escape from the stark evidence of how other people live their lives, and how we don't live anything like them.

How to cope with it all? This is one of the core problems in the Alone Forever life.

There is no one simple answer. 'Don't let it bother you' is not the kind of suggestion that I deal in. We don't have direct control over what bothers us and what doesn't. If only the mind worked like that.

There are several layers of insulation that we need to wrap ourselves up in when confronting the issue of 'other people'.

One of the layers involves actually going out into the field and being among people. To which end:

Practical Tip #14

**Get a job that you like,
or at least one you don't hate too much.**

This is partly about vaccinating yourself against people by being amongst them for eight hours per day, five days a week. But it is also about subsistence. The Alone Forever, unless we have a private income, must work. We must have our own money.

This Practical Tip is one of my more debatable ones, because for most of my teens and twenties, I despised work. I resisted getting a job for the longest time.

I was in my 30s before I shook off a semi-NEET³ lifestyle and embraced wageslavery. Working turned out to be the lesser of multiple evils. I like having things. I like being in the state of total privacy that comes from having my own home. When I was unemployed and drawing benefits, my existence was more or less hand-to-mouth and I did not own my own property.

Other people are a problem for us, and having our own money solves many of those problems. Money enables us to live in complete freedom and solitude, and work is the necessary price we pay. Having your own money enables you to design the exact kind of solitude you prefer.

I used to want to see society overthrown. I have been through the stage of waking up every day and longing for the Apocalypse.

Nowadays I want nothing more than for the world's current socio-economic machine to grind on forever, or at least until just after I die.

Society as it is – *exactly as it is* – is our Alone Forever life-support system.

Hate it if you must, hate yourself if you must, but if you're not planning on killing yourself right now, you need a survival capsule in which to reside. Society is the capsule. This is a hard lesson to learn, because one who is Alone Forever will often have spent most of his or her formative years in resenting and even hating 'society'. The time comes when we must recognise a startling and unwelcome truth. Society, which awarded so much bounty to others and left us so miserably paupered, nevertheless enriches and protects the Alone Forever in innumerable ways. We could not exist without it.

³ Not in Employment, Education or Training. NEET.

SHIELDS UP!

When we're out there, with people, how to behave? How to conduct ourselves, comport ourselves, *hold* ourselves? All who are Alone Forever will manifest some type of behaviour or speech, or both, that marks them as awkward and strange in the eyes and ears of other people. This attracts attention and comment, which kicks off a negative feedback loop with which we are all very familiar, I am sure. The more they despise us, the more despicable we become, which makes them despise us even more – and you're way ahead of me. If you're not way ahead of me, why are you reading this book?

People cannot conceive that somebody like you could exist. People have a general awareness that there are such things as losers and weirdoes. They might regard you as being a loser or a weirdo, or both. But in general, people are not always on high alert for peculiar people to enter their local sphere of interest. You can glide in and out of people's perceptions, live on the edges of their awareness. This is where I reside, comfortably, with everyone I know at my workplace, and with the ever-dwindling number of people whom I know outside of the office. I live on the periphery of other people's lives – way, way out.

By orbiting other people's lives, rather than merging with them, we can still live well from day to day. We can get along with people to a certain extent. We can even be amiable, and cultivate a few wispy friendships with them. Being among others does not mean having to go crazy or dissolve in a vat of acidic resentment. If you want to live in full stealth mode under the noses of other people, you can.

Some general advice on this front:

Don't draw negative attention to yourself. If one of your hobbies is extreme right- or left-wing politics, the break room at your office is the wrong place to hold forth about such matters. Save it for the Internet. Ditto if you harbour a grievance against any category of society.

Don't smell. I was about to say that not smelling is half the battle when it comes to getting along with other people but really and truly, not smelling is almost all the battle. Don't be one of those weirdo-loner types who smells like a combination of

extra-mature cheese and stale urine. People are already predisposed to think ill of you. Don't load the gun and hand it to them.

Practical Tip #15

Keep yourself clean.

Keep your clothes laundered.

Keep your living space tidy.

Shower regularly and wear clean clothes, even in extended downtime from work. Change your bed linen often. Do laundry. If you live with your mother, great, not only are you an Alone Forever stereotype, but that good woman is probably going to do your washing for you. If you're very lucky/incredibly spoiled, she'll do your ironing too.

Stock up on deodorant so that you don't run out. Have the bottle you're using and a whole other bottle spare, at all times.

Get the vacuum cleaner out and vacuum-clean your living space at least once a week.

Mop hard surfaces.

Wipe down work surfaces with a clean cloth and one of those handy disinfectant spray things.

Get some basic financial knowledge and work out your finances. Spend at least two weeks, preferably a month, tabulating every single expense you have. The results will surprise you. Practise frugality, if you have to. Or go all-out for extravagant largesse, if you're lucky enough to have the spare capacity.

Make all of these things part of your routine and they won't be at all effortful. They will just become part of what you do, and part of you. It's a long life ahead, and you can be happy in it. Organise yourself and trim your sails accordingly.

WHATEVER IT IS, IT HAD BETTER BE GOOD

In this chapter, I will recommend that the reader gets a hobby. Better than a hobby – an *obsession*.

You need something to do with your Alone Forever life. Doesn't matter what it is. It might be something as simple as writing a thousand-word blog post on every TV show and movie you watch. Or cataloguing all your books and music and DVDs in a systematic fashion. Or writing your own book. Or filming your own stop-motion movies with your smartphone and a lump of plasticine, using cardboard sets that you design and build yourself. Or – you get the idea. *Something*.

Many readers will experience a sinking feeling during this section. I know I did whilst writing it. *'Take up hobbies and crafts? While my peers are out having sex and getting married and living real lives? All I've got to look forward to is building a matchstick cathedral?'*

To which my answer is, once again, a not-so-gentle-now reminder that this book is not a self-help book designed to show you the way to love and marriage and friendship and fulfilment in the world.

This book is called *How To Be Alone Forever*.

This book is not called *How To Stop Being Alone Forever*.

If you are going to be Alone Forever, you need something to do other than just going to work and watching television.

Practical Tip #16

Stay busy.

Keep occupied.

Get a few projects to work on

and work on at least one of them every day.

Your main purpose in life will be one you invent for yourself. Other people's purposes in life tend to revolve around other people. Your purpose does not involve other people.

Get something to do, and do it. Whatever that thing is, is *your thing* from now on. Be obsessed with it.

If you have always harboured a secret wish that you could be a painter, a sculptor, a poet, a musician, an actor, a dancer, or whatever – here’s your chance. All the time in the world is yours to do with as you please. But you have to be obsessed, or you’re never going to get anywhere. Other people who do things have other people to do things *for*. They have significant others and family members and friends to inspire them and cajole them and be proud of them. You only have yourself and no other. If you’re not obsessed, you might not even properly start, never mind get finished.

Obsession is not the same as enthusiasm. You’re not always going to be overly enthusiastic about your obsession. It takes us a long time to learn that creative projects reach their completion *slowly*. Books are written and symphonies composed via an iterative process that takes place across a relatively long span of time.

We’re accustomed to romantic images of the artist, seized by inspiration, wild hair flowing, dashing off his magnum opus in a flutter of calendar leaves. By comparison, the workaday, incremental nature of how actual projects are completed in the real world is somewhat deflating.

I am not always enthusiastic about my writing. I have learned to only work on projects that inspire me in some way (such as the present project), but even then, writing is more perspiration than inspiration. But I am always obsessed with the notion that writing is my only true purpose in life. Obsession trumps enthusiasm, every time.

I have other minor purposes as well. Watching TV. Reading books (as well as writing them). I enjoy a spot of computer gaming. But writing is number one. Writing is the reason that my Alone Forever life continues. No matter what else happens or doesn’t happen to me, I have my writing.

I recommend taking things as far as they can possibly go, and then exceeding even that limit. Conceive a grand Mega Project of some kind, and devote yourself to that.

Practical Tip #17

Do something big.
A long-term super-project.
The bigger, the better.

Writing a book, composing a symphony, becoming an actor – something of this nature is required. The kind of long-term, major project that isn't a way simply of filling time but is *the reason* for your time.

What about watching all the films of Bela Lugosi in chronological order, and journalling the experience online as you go? You could turn it into a quirky book, with or without autobiographical digressions, and publish/self-publish it somewhere⁴.

When you're Alone Forever, you have the time and usually the inclination to do things that nobody else can do. I recommend getting on and doing them.

I often half-joke (with myself, natch) about taking up the building of actual cathedrals made of matchsticks. The mental health benefits of spending even half an hour per day on the proverbial matchstick cathedral, is almost incalculable. (If you do build a matchstick cathedral, and if you do end up committing suicide, don't forget to symbolically destroy it beforehand.)

But I am already occupied. Writing books is my version of constructing matchstick cathedrals. I write and publish my own books. I used to send them out to actual publishers and agents for their consideration, but nobody has ever wanted to read my stuff. Eh. So it goes. My indifference to whether or not the world will take notice of my activities is part of the reason I'm Alone Forever.

Other people and their opinions – what are they to us?

Something else to do might be to plan a Grand Tour of the world before you make your exit.

It has been a long time since I was actively suicidal, but if I was, I would not simply up and hang myself. I'd want to spend every last penny I had first in at least seeing something of planet Earth. This doesn't mean going on some ghastly quasi-mystic journey of self-discovery – although that, too, might be your thing.

⁴ I would read *the shit* out of that.

Say you want to up and away to a meditation retreat commune thing in deepest Wiltshire, or the farthest corner of Asia. Why not do that? Who is stopping you?

I have written this book from my own perspective, that of a stay-at-home sort of fellow. I have not left my home city for many years. It is a decade or more since I last laid eyes upon the sea, or any body of water bigger than the duck pond in my local park. This, for me, is enough.

Perhaps your something to do, your Mega Project, will be to escape being Alone Forever. Nothing can ever be demonstrated to be impossible. No matter how deeply embedded in Alone Forever you are, if you still want out, you might find a way out. Impossible? Yes, we know very well how impossible it is. But much more impossible things are done every day, and you know this is true.

The urge to discover the exit might be enough on its own to lead you there. Make escaping Alone Forever your Project. Devote yourself to it every day. Not a day should pass without you taking some substantive action towards escape. Be like a prisoner of war shaking handfuls of soil from his trousers. Read lots of books and websites about getting out there and meeting people. Try everything. There are lively sub-sections of the main Alone Forever online forums where the regulars swap advice and discuss escape strategies. Most of the advice is useless, of course, coming as it does from other prisoners. But deciding what is and isn't useful could all form an intriguing part of your Mega Project. Good luck.

I keep a journal. I go through phases with it. Sometimes I will make a journal entry every day. Sometimes those entries are a couple of thousand words long. Sometimes they're a couple of hundred, or a dozen words long. I also go through phases – weeks, months – of not making an entry at all.

You should start a journal too, if you don't already.

The benefits of journalling your Alone Forever life far outweighs the drawbacks. In the years to come you will be able to look back on yourself and witness the archaeological layers of your self being laid down as time rolls by.

ON FAILURE

What is daily life for the Alone Forever? There are many answers to this question. *Routine and dull* is the best answer, and the answer we should count ourselves lucky to be able to give more often than not. The best life is one in which very little happens, or nothing at all. (If you don't already agree with this, just hang in there and eventually you will agree, trust me.)

One of the signature notes of the Alone Forever condition is to be in a near-constant state of conflict against a feeling of total failure.

By now it should not surprise the reader to learn what my answer is to the problem of failure.

Give it up. Give up the feeling of failure.

That Alone Forever 'failure feeling' can come and go. It can be constant, or fleeting. It can leave us alone for long stretches of time. At times, it can even seem to have been vanquished – but in my experience (so far), the subjective feeling of failure is never truly defeated. Even if we can reach the plateau of acceptance and self-knowledge that I sketch in this book, it seems impossible to be rid of that one last stubborn twinge of regret. The twinge that says to us: *They all have so much. How is it that I alone have nothing?*

No matter how secure your footing, sooner or later, you will slip. Something will happen, or you'll remember something, and down will come that heavy fog of failure. It might only persist for a day or two. Sometimes just an hour or two. Or a minute. But it's a bugger to be in, however long it lasts.

While it is here, the fog obscures everything else. The main sting of failure is that it seems so irrefutable. All your hobbies and interests and mental habits are so many wisps of delusion. You're amazed that you were ever able to fool yourself with them.

We have failed to become the kinds of human beings that our society and culture mandates as 'normal'. People who don't have people aren't really people. To be Alone Forever is to have failed in life.

This is objectively true if we agree that ‘life’ can only mean ‘the sequence of events and experiences that typically occur to people of my social and cultural background’. There are other ways to define life, but it’s this definition – life as the sum total of everything that happens to you – that’s the one we’re conditioned to perceive as real. A person is born, grows up, has friends, gets married, reproduces, has a rich and fulfilling time of it, and dies. This is life. And this is the life that we manifestly do not live.

The thesis of this book is simple. To be Alone Forever is not to be a total failure. Quite the opposite. A peculiar kind of success can be made out of living one of the oddest lives it is possible to live in this massively socially-connected world.

Society is a hall of mirrors. When dealing with other people, you should understand how much you are affected by your perception of what you believe their perception of you is. When we deal with another person, we automatically self-generate the image we believe they have of us.

Our sense of failure is nothing more than our own imagining of the judgements of us that would be made by others. Other people would unhesitatingly recoil in horror from my life, and brand me a failure (if they’re honest). There is nothing I can do about others’ opinions of me, but I can certainly do something about my opinion of myself.

Why should failure be the judgement I make *of myself*?

Who gets to decide what life is, and what the value of *my* life is?

Is it me who gets to decide? Or is it somebody else? If it’s somebody else, is that the actual (few) other people whom I know, or is it other people in the aggregate guise of ‘society’? I.e., my own imagination of them again.

This seems to be an easy question to resolve. *Of course* it’s me who gets to decide! Come on now, ask me a hard one...

Hold on, though. If it’s me who gets to decide, then things are potentially complicated by whether or not I can trust myself any more (or less) than other people. How do I know that I know enough – about myself, and about this apparent world – to form a proper judgement?

Can I set aside all judgement? Might it be best to simply live, without judging either myself or others' judgements of me? Is that possible?

And what if other people are right? A quotation that has always bothered me: 'In the struggle between yourself and the world, always take the world's side,' said jesting Kafka, and would not wait for answer.

Why should this conflict between self and other – and others – be so?

Do things have to be like this?

If things don't have to be like this, then it is I and only I who can decide on the value of life as a whole and my life in particular.

Now we are heading towards the kind of territory that TV and movies love to depict us in: the stage where we declare ourselves 'beyond good and evil' and embark on a killing spree of some kind. I won't bother dignifying this view with another word.

It will not surprise the reader to hear that I have firmly come down on the side of myself. Other people's views about me and my life are not my concern. Whether I know enough, too little, or too much about life and the world is also not my concern. I will work with what I have and if what I have is wrong, it is at least my error. It would be a much greater error to choose other people's potentially even more compromised knowledge.

It is possible to trust in and value oneself without becoming the kind of raving monster the TV and movies would have us believe we are.

Ultimately, there is only one certainty I can have, and that is the integrity of myself.

The purpose and value of my life is for me alone to decide, and no other.

The only failure that can harm us is the failure to grasp this truth.

Failure is the name we should give to the feeling that arises when we mistake other people's purposes for our own. We know what other people value the most, and we know that we don't live up to it.

The situation could not be any clearer. We know that other people effectively live in a different world from ourselves – but we judge ourselves by their lights anyway. Are we *crazy*? As long as we continue to do this, then yes, we are very crazy.

Failure is the belief that our lives must be the same as other people's (or not so dissimilar that they can easily notice).

Judgement surrounds us at every turn, but all judgement is our own judgement. Other people do not judge us in the way we think they do. We are the ones who ratify their judgements. We effectively judge ourselves for them, when we judge others' judgements of us to be valid. It is all a monstrous mistake, a misunderstanding of the very essence of who we are. We are Alone Forever. What does it matter what this or that other person, totally absorbed in their own 'lives', thinks of us?

How can we even be sure that they do think of us?

The fact is that most other people pretty much forgot about us a long time ago. We, strangely, cannot seem to forget about them. Try as we might to shrug off the burden of our awareness of other people's perceptions, it seems we cannot. We carry other people's judgements of us *with us* for a long time after other people have ceased to be a meaningful presence in our lives.

Failure is the failure to grasp that all the prefabricated categories of failure under which we have been operating – are false.

Failure is the failure to recognise that you have imported all your concepts of success and failure from other people, from a parallel world that you can look at and hear a lot about, but which is, in the first analysis and the final analysis, nothing to do with you.

The only failure that is truly meaningful to us would be the failure to grasp the fact that being Alone Forever is not *failure*.

This might be the most controversial point I make in this book, and the one that is hardest for the reader to accept.

I set out stating that my beliefs and opinions are peculiar to me, and you would have to perceive them accordingly, and adapt them to your own outlook as you see fit. I reaffirm that stance now. Everything I have just said about failure might seem to be

so much whimsical poppycock and tomfoolery to you. A lovely little game with words. Fair enough if you think so.

But should that matter to me? If you think it should matter to me, I invite you to read this section again.

THE HARDEST TASK OF ALL

In the end, we have to give up failure, and giving up failure is hard. For much of our Alone Forever lives, failure is all we've ever had.

My complete and unmitigated failure was always something of which I was oddly proud. I'd done nothing with my life. I'd failed at everything I'd ever tried. But at least I had made the most resounding success of failure! Life could take everything from me, my looks, my youth, my few friends, my hair, my health, my hope, and eventually my life, but there was one thing that could never be taken from me: Failure.

In time, I began to perceive that I would have to give up my idea of myself as the Ultimate Failure. I had always drawn a curious solace from being a world champion of failure. I was the most wonderful failure who had ever existed! There was some resistance to the idea that I had to let it go. It felt as if I was going too far, that I was a footstep from the edge of a cliff.

But that is what has to happen. Alone Forever is a state that strips the individual of everything. Finally, you must even give up being the great failure that you think you are.

Part Four

Exit Strategies

I have always known
that one day I would take this path
though yesterday I did not know
it would be today.

-Ariwara no Narihira

Being Alone Forever is one of the most perilous situations that a human being can be in. To live a solitary, invisible life in the twenty-first century, under manifold kinds of social pressures, is trickier than anybody who's never experienced it would give it credit for. Daily life for the Alone Forever involves surviving in an environment that is inimical to survival in a host of ways. The strains are emotional, psychological, practical and – as indicated by the Forever part of Alone Forever – unrelenting.

Non-Alone Forever readers might be smirking and/or snarling right now. The few Alone Forever-themed online forums frequently play host to 'normie' passers-by who pop in to express the very particular brand of seething contempt that the non-Alone Forever tend to reserve for the Alone Forever. My opening paragraph above is the kind of tasty morsel they love to snack upon. But this book isn't for the 'normies' – so fuck 'em.

However... It should be acknowledged that many Alone Forever problems *are* on the trivial side of the balance sheet. In a world of hunger and conflict and suffering of all magnitudes, being a well-fed loner in a modern liberal democracy does not seem to be all that much of an ordeal. Get the basics right and you'll have a gilded life by comparison to a large chunk of suffering humanity. Get a tolerable job. Don't fall down the stairs. Don't forget to pick up a fresh loaf of bread. Always have some headache pills handy. Eat well. Do something that you're interested in. Take general good care of yourself. That's about it.

We share life's petty burdens with everyone else. In most respects we are no different from anyone else. Which is nice.

We are different from all other people in one respect that makes all the difference.

We are Alone Forever.

Some of us will be lucky enough to still have a friend or two. But many of us have no allies, no helpers, no companions of any description. Biological family members and work colleagues don't count.

At times, being completely alone in life can be a thrilling prospect. And at other times, let's be honest, it's just a wearisome drag. Life is already difficult. The difficulty level of a life spent without friends and lovers is multiplied a hundredfold, and time is always passing.

Finding yourself where you are and who you are, you have to consider your future in certain very specific ways, and make certain very specific preparations.

Paying conscious attention to how you live from day to day is the place to start from. The basics. We have covered the personal Alone Forever health and safety basics. I hope the overall message there has sunk in.

But there is another layer to the Alone Forever life that we might be less sanguine about examining too closely:

You need to consider how you might ultimately have to die.

In the first parts of this section, we will look at yet more practical survival tips for living in our separate, scattered, empty worlds. I'll also be recommending you get a pension plan, so brace yourself for that.

In the final parts of this section, we will look at possibly the trickiest question that we might ever have to face. The Alone Forever question that somehow never completely goes away: suicide.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE

In Part 1, I advised you to create a medical box, and to check and update its contents regularly.

In a similar vein, I also recommend assembling a host of general items that will come in useful in your general day-to-day Alone Forever lifestyle (if we can call it that).

I often playfully compare being Alone Forever to surviving in a post-apocalyptic scenario. It is only a half-playful comparison. As a general rule of thumb, equip yourself as if you genuinely are the sole remaining human on Earth, and you won't go far wrong.

Practical Tip #18

Draw up a SURVIVAL items list.

Here is my list:

Food and water: enough to last through a personal emergency scenario. Say 2-3 weeks' worth of both. Research it properly, and make provisions according to your own body type and calorific requirements.

Emergency food store tips: favour dried goods and canned goods. Rice and beans and nuts. Pot Noodles. As with everything perishable that you store, note the expiry dates and maintain your stock accordingly.

Don't bother storing huge amounts of food and water. Two or three weeks' worth is probably as much as you need. You would only need longer-term supplies of food and water in the event of a full systemic collapse of society, the economy, and law and order. If you've done some reading on this topic, you will know just how quickly everything that sustains our civilisation's pampered way of life could unravel. You will also know that you would not want to survive the aftermath. The Alone Forever are adapted to a very particular set of circumstances. There is no scenario in which the

electricity goes off and never comes back on that I would want to survive. Granted, it'd be interesting to watch the fall of civilisation from up close. But after a certain point, quite early on, the end-of-the-world novelty would wear off and I'd be checking out. I suspect you would be, too.

Unless you're the Survivalist type of Alone Forever, in which case, good luck to you. Be sure to give my warmest regards to the mutant biker zombies.

A decent torch/flashlight

A portable radio

Electricity power-cuts of brief duration are a feature of life as it is. Having a few supplies to see you through these periods is a necessity. Always have a flashlight (often called a 'torch' in remote regions) and a cheap, portable radio. These items can be obtained in relatively inexpensive wind-up versions with built-in solar panels, to obviate the need for batteries. I have owned a wind-up/solar-powered torch and radio for several years and can attest to their reliability and usefulness.

Candles and/or battery-powered lights.

I mean those dinky little lights that you can leave in a corner of the room or on the landing/staircase, which come on at night when you walk past them. Get several of these, as you will want to put some into use immediately in the dark parts of your home. Keep at least two of the lights in storage, unused in their box (after checking that they work; and be sure to recheck them every three months). In a brief power-cut scenario, they'll prove invaluable.

If you stock up on candles as well, don't forget to include two boxes of safety matches. And if you ever have to use them, don't leave lit candles unattended.

A stout rope with which to hang oneself, should the need arise.

The Alone Forever have a somewhat grim sense of humour, but this is not a facetious suggestion. The manner of our death is the one thing over which we should have full control. In an emergency situation where you do not have access to guns and/or effective poisons, self-strangulation would be the next most logical way out.

It doesn't have to be an actual rope. If/when the time comes, anything that can form a ligature will do, such as a length of electrical flex, or (that old prison standby) a rolled-up bedsheet.

I wear a long stout belt, at all times.

Home defence.

Look out for yourself in your home. Nobody else is going to.

Imagine the worst possible things that could happen to you alone in your home. Plan what you will do if they happen.

What if you find yourself under attack at your property? From an intruder, or a bogus caller? Home invasion is a fanciful scenario, yes. I'm fully aware that statistically speaking, nothing of the sort is *likely* to happen. *But...* what were the statistical odds that we would end up Alone Forever? Pretty huge odds, but it still happened to us. In that spirit, we should prepare for the unlikeliest events without letting ourselves become unduly paranoid.

Somebody storming into your home and attacking you almost certainly won't happen. But it *could*. If it happens, what preparations could you make now to help yourself then?

Consider whether you would run away, surrender, or fight back. We've all watched too much TV, and we all fantasise about fighting back against our enemies in a stylish, balletic fashion, but from a pure survival point of view, it's practically advisable to avoid any physical confrontation with an attacker who is likely to be younger, fitter, and much more experienced at fighting.

Keep some currency in an easily findable place. Make it a decent enough amount to tempt any burglar to quit while he's ahead and make his exit. A wise burglar will know that you've deliberately left the cash to tempt him not to trash your place and/or you, and to leave quickly. But enough of them will be happy to accept your kind offer to make this a worthwhile gambit. I'd happily pay a few hundred not to have me or my place trashed, and consider it money well spent. Bargain.⁵

⁵ I know, I know. *'We're not all rich like you, Anonymous! Some of us have to scrape together pennies to eat from day to day! This advice isn't just useless for us,*

If you decide that you will fight, *how* will you fight? Do you have any actual training in, and useful experience of, fighting in close quarters against a much more motivated opponent or opponents? Again, television may have furnished you with the illusion that when you need to fight, you'll be somehow magically transformed into a competent fighter by some mysterious force. That's complete rubbish, of course, and I hope you already know it. Real fighting is hard, dirty, exhausting, brutal, and you're not likely to be any good at it.

If you still envision yourself stepping up and fighting your corner when faced with an intruder, only formal training can help you there. Consider signing up for a local class in self-defence or one of the martial arts.

Equip your home with a few basic defence tools. Buy two or three hammers. Conceal them in unexpected places. Position one hammer just inside the front door – behind a potted plant, or inside an old boot, or whatever. This is for occasions when you might return home and sense an intruder somewhere inside your property. The most prudent course then would be to back quietly out of the door and call the police. But if you're caught in a no-retreat scenario, where it absolutely *is* a question of you or them, aim for the head and strike as hard as you can. I have to stress, *if* it comes to it. You might only get one chance, so don't hold back on that swing.

Put another hammer near your bed within easy reach. This one isn't purely for security. It's also potentially a useful escape tool. If you wake up in darkness with smoke filling your room, you will have a straightforward tool with which to smash the window.

Smoke alarms.

Carbon monoxide alarms.

Get two of each. Remember that carbon monoxide alarms should be a decent distance from your gas appliances, and located up near the ceiling.

it's rubbing our faces in it! Not everything in this book will apply to every individual who is Alone Forever. Just as we are all different from the normies, we are all different from each other. This tip is specifically aimed at those of us who *do* have enough spare capital to indulge in a little precautionary burglar-baiting.

Change the batteries whenever they run out. Don't shirk this very simple duty. Again you're looking at a statistically unlikely scenario in which you will need these to save you. But again I remind you (if you need reminding): you are Alone Forever. *Nobody has your back but you.*

Fire extinguishers.

These can be purchased online for relatively low prices. Make sure you buy from a reputable supplier – check previous customers' reviews, paying particular attention to those who have actually had to use the extinguishers on a fire.

Get two, one for upstairs, one for downstairs. If you can afford it, get more than two. Get different types as well. Electrical fires and cooking fires, for example, are best attacked with different types of fire extinguisher.

As with all things, note the expiry date on the extinguisher(s), and replace when necessary.

Spare batteries.

Never be without a spare battery, of all sizes. Assign a single box or drawer to battery storage. Check expiry dates regularly, and top up reserves accordingly.

Get a burglar alarm for your home.

Your life is difficult enough as it is: burglars must be deterred. You want nobody in your living space. If you can't afford an actual burglar alarm, get a dummy box and attach it to an outside wall in a prominent position, as a deterrent. Surveys of burglars regularly return one common finding: they're all put off by an alarm system.

Get a cheap wifi camera (or cameras) to monitor your home when you're not there.

When you're out and about – whether at work, or just wandering the streets in a sad, purposeless fashion – it's good to be able to whip out your smartphone and view a live feed direct from your home.

Old tablet computers and old mobile phones can be repurposed to serve as wifi security cameras. Google all this for yourself. At the time of writing (early 2018), a phone app called Alfred provides security camera functionality for free.

Have a plan of what you'll do if you remotely see nefarious goings-on at home.

Are you really setting up a home security camera system just to watch helplessly while masked individuals creep around your home, touching your stuff and taking it?

Will you speak to the raiders through the wifi camera system?

Sound a remote alarm?

Call the police?

All of the above?

An offsite cash reserve, with a spare house-key.

Make a secure off-site stash that contains enough money to see you through at least one day, preferably a week, if need be.

Calculate how much a hotel room plus food would cost for one day, double it, and store that amount in a secure place.

Leave a spare house-key with the money.

Obviously, the location for this stash needs to be *ultra*-secure, particularly if you include your house-key. You must be one hundred percent confident that it could never be discovered by any other person.

A stout metal container buried at least one foot underground in a corner of your garden might suffice. Be certain you're not observed burying it.

Or get an old paint can, and fashion some kind of false bottom in it. Stash your spare cash and house-key in there. Add a USB stick with high quality scans of your principal life documents – birth certificate, passport, banking details, etc. (Encrypt this data.) Store the paint can among other paint cans in a location where no one would be surprised to see paint cans.

A locker at work is a good fallback location for this backup stash, but remember that a work locker is not truly your property. Your employer can open it and examine its contents at any time. Anything you leave in a work locker must be very artfully

concealed. I would never leave a house-key at my workplace, but I would leave a smallish amount of money rolled up in the barrel of an old biro – for example.

Have *two* offsite backup stashes, if possible.

If you wear a belt, get a belt with a hidden compartment in it. Or even a pair of shoes/boots with a hollow heel. (Google them. They exist.) You then have a convenient means of carrying a concealed cash backup and spare house-key with you wherever you go. If you lose your wallet and/or keys through some mishap, you've got a backup on your person.

If you're wondering what on earth a tip like this is doing in a book like this one, just think about it for a moment.

If you're locked out of your house or you lose your wallet somehow, where will you go? To whom could you turn? If you have friends, or if you're still close to family, great – call your friends or family, and let them help you.

But I don't have friends, and I would have to be in a severe state of extremity to call up the few family members whose phone numbers I still have. In a scenario where I was locked out of my house, I would want to resolve the situation on my own and with the least amount of fuss. No friends, no family. No locksmiths to break in for me. No glaziers to repair broken windows if I choose to break in myself. No neighbours coming out to see what's going on. Instead I would just open up the hidden compartment in the belt that I always wear, take out my spare key, and let myself into my house.

If you're puzzled about any of the advice I give in this book, but particularly in this section, you might not yet be completely Alone Forever. Which I suppose is good news for you.

A gun and bullets.

Sadly not an option for me, but it will be an option for many readers. If I lived in a jurisdiction where it was lawful to own a gun, I would get myself a gun without hesitation. I'm generally against other people having guns (as I am generally against other people), but I am not so squeamish when it comes to myself having one. Isn't

that hypocritical of me? Yes, it is hypocritical of me. But I am Alone Forever, so it doesn't matter. I owe nothing to the standards of the imagined world.

Guns are illegal where I live, and damned hard to get hold of by shady means. Which is a shame for me, as a gun is a supremely practical tool for self-defence *and* for self-slaughter, should the occasion arise.

If you can get a gun, get a gun. Keep it secure. Learn to use it. Join a gun club and receive proper instruction from an accredited expert. Store the weapon securely and maintain it often.

Take a long, slow walk around your living space.

New parents often do this to see their home from a child's point of view. Get down on your knees, or on all fours, and babywalk yourself through each room. Identify the narrow chokepoints between pieces of furniture where a moment's inattention might send you flying.

Taking care in the home is of paramount importance. You don't want to lay injured on your living room floor with nobody to find you.

Move your furniture around accordingly.

Take care that carpets and rugs don't stick up. If they do, take action. Nail or glue the carpets down. Flatten or remove the rugs.

Take extra special care at all times on staircases, at home and outside.

You are Alone Forever. You have nobody to help you, nobody to look after you. A moment's carelessness could cost you very dear. It could cost you everything.

Practical Tip #19

Have *some* kind of ‘pension plan’.

Act as if you WILL reach old age.

Prepare accordingly.

No – I don’t think I’ll live to be an 80-year-old Alone Forever person either.⁶ Do any of us think we’ll make it that far? Do any of us really want to?

It would depend on what kind of 80-year-olds we might be. Most of us will have witnessed at first hand what usually happens to the elderly when they cross that thin dividing line that separates elderly vitality and geriatric frailty. We may have promised ourselves that we will never get to that point. And quite right, too. The old and frail need lots of practical support. They need people to do things for them.

Our Alone Forever lives were not meant to be supported by others.

Our lives will last only as long as we can effectively support ourselves, in every sense.

But you should act as if you will reach old age. The purpose being to make sure all your bases are covered in the eventuality that, via some quirk of your personal physiology (and with the help of medical science), you *do* make it to a ripe old age in an acceptable state of health.

It could easily happen. I never thought I would get to the age of forty, but here I am now happily navigating through my *late* forties, with the big five-o looming ahead.

If you manage to reach a solid enough accommodation with being Alone Forever, and if your personal projects are deep and interesting enough, *and* if you are fortunate with your general health, living to be an old man or old woman is a very real possibility. Don’t be caught out if you get there.

A great many of the Alone Forever declare their intention to commit suicide in the future, if things don’t change for them. Their imagined time of self-slaughter is

⁶ If there are any 65+ Alone Forever people reading this – *and* if your Alone Forever status matches the criteria (no romantic relationship, *ever*; and no/few friendships) – then I would be fascinated to hear from you. Drop me a line at howtobealoneforever@gmail.com.

usually appointed for a future milestone birthday. The age of thirty is a popular one. In the online Alone Forever communities that are dominated by teens and twentysomethings (i.e., just about all of them), the denizens often declare that they will certainly be dead by the time they are thirty, and if they are not, they will kill themselves anyway.

We who have made it past the big three-o can afford to smile at the tweens, but we should remember ourselves being similarly minded at that age. I know I was.

If you're planning to kill yourself by the time you're thirty (or 40, or 50, or 60, or whatever other milestone you choose), no matter how fervently you believe now that you will follow through with it, *don't* bank on following through with it.

I'm sure that when the time comes, many *do* do the deed. For most of us, though, our 30th birthdays will come and go just like any other day, with us feeling no worse about our lives than before.

Your despair as it is right now, no matter how sharp and painful, will not be the same when you are 30. Age blunts every sharp edge. Most youthful despair simply vanishes like smoke as adult life unfolds. You may discover that you have other things to do than mope around about girls not liking you.

Therefore it is prudent to store up something for your old age.

You might think that you will be in poor health in your old age, but again, don't bank on it. The era is behind us when being elderly automatically entailed frailty and poor health.

Imagine yourself waking up on your seventieth birthday, still in excellent health, still with plenty of those matchstick cathedrals left to build – but no money to sustain yourself in a comfortable manner.

Where will you live and what money will you live *with*, when you are 70 years old?

These are questions that you need to have a good, focused think about now, whatever your current age is.

If you are employed and if your budget can stand it, join up to the company pension if you haven't already. Take out a private pension if your employer doesn't

offer one. Have *both*. Start saving in a high-interest account. Look at monetising whatever it is you do, whether that's YouTube videos, poetry, drawing, or whatever.

Take action now. Imagine what your 70-year-old self would advise you to do to help him or her, if he or she could communicate with you as you are now. '*Haha, my future 70-year-old self would advise me to KILL myself!*' is an amusing answer and in the best tradition of our doleful Alone Forever sense of humour, but it's in no way a serious answer – and you *should* take this question seriously. Remember there was a time when you never believed you would still be alive at the age you are now. Learn that lesson.

PLANNING FOR NON-LIFE

Planning for life is all well and good, but we know, perhaps better than anyone, that sooner or later things will come to a head. Sooner or later, there will be a great personal reckoning. Sooner or later, age and fortune will exact a toll and life will either end suddenly, or become something that there can be no more accommodation with. No more compromise. No more making the best of things.

The sobering truth is that, barring sudden lucky fatal accident (yes I said, and meant, *lucky* fatal accident), this stage of life is inevitable. Infirmity, whether mental or physical, or both, awaits us all at some point in the future.

Careful planning for one's death should be at the top of the Alone Forever to-do list. Or at the bottom of it, depending on your point of view.

Many of the Alone Forever express earnest wishes to meet death head-on. I am not in their number. Perhaps I am even in the minority among us. I do not relish the prospect of death at all, whether that means dying naturally or doing away with myself. For me there is nothing better than seeing and hearing, tasting and smelling, touching and thinking. Life has incalculable value, irrespective of other people and all the things they have that I don't. Other people are not life. My life as it is, is my life. This is all I know.

But I do place conditions on my life. I prefer to live in the reasonable good health that I have now. I must be mentally able to explore and enjoy the range of interests that occupy me. I must be physically able to move about and go where I please. I have to be able to care for myself. The loss of this level of capacity would be the loss of my life – a living death. At that point, the equation changes.

No matter how well-adjusted I am, the question of my future death must be confronted. Certain decisions should be taken now. Certain arrangements made.

I am always preparing for my death. Everybody, Alone Forever or not, should observe the same principle.

When the time comes, my death will be mine and mine alone to deal with. Nobody will be alongside me to hold my hand and ease my passage. I will be making all the decisions.

Assuming there is time to make decisions. Not everybody sees their death coming. Some people manage to get the whole messy business over with in an instant, without fuss, without bother. They are the fortunate ones.

When it comes to how you die, you might get lucky. You might be killed instantly and painlessly by one of the many things that can kill a human being instantly and painlessly.

Such is how I would prefer to die, if given the choice. No big build-up. No time for fear or regret. Just switched out like a light. *Maybe* I'd appreciate about half a minute's advance warning, so I could try to feel something about life, something deep, or whatever.

Many people are not lucky when it comes to the end. Many people will linger in pain and fear for a period – short or long – before their deaths. A very unlucky few will have long-drawn-out, harrowing deaths, racked by disease. Hospitals. Nursing homes. Months of pain. Slow decline, and chronic despair. My own parents both suffered this kind of death, after fearing it all their lives. I witnessed their long dying up close, and regard the harrowing manner of their deaths as their final parental life-lesson to me. *Don't let this fate overtake you.*

It is perhaps a universal fear, Alone Forever or not. Our very worst nightmares for our end *can* come true. Take car crashes. I fear being in a car crash, but not because I might be killed. I fear the possibility of *not* being killed, but grievously injured in some way. I would prefer to die instantly on the side of a road somewhere than be horrifically injured in some profoundly life-changing manner.

We are always close to death, and we are Alone Forever. We must look ahead, weigh up reasonable risks, and try to anticipate death's hand.

At the time of writing, I am several days from a very fleeting brush with death.

Occasionally I drop a stick of cinnamon into my tea, for flavour and sweetness. A few mornings ago, my tea had cooled to the point where it could be drunk in a few long gulps. The cinnamon stick inside had sunk to the bottom of the mug and I forgot

it was there. I picked up the mug and casually swigged the lukewarm tea in a few gulps. In doing so I inadvertently swallowed the cinnamon stick and it lodged in my windpipe. Not completely – I was still able to suck down partial breaths. I coughed and spluttered until the obstruction was gone and the crisis passed. The drama only lasted a few seconds, but there were a distinct couple of moments when I thought ‘this could be It’.

And my thoughts? My only wish was to get that cinnamon stick out of my throat, and just get on with my customary, boring, Alone Forever day.

We who are Alone Forever have a peculiar relationship with life. On the one hand, we have nothing, and we are frequently in a state of dejection. On the other hand, we often love living just as much as the next person – sometimes, it seems, we love life *more* than they do. Having a great, overarching purpose in life helps. Having reasonably good health, mental and physical, also helps.

I’m aware that there will be a great many readers of this book who do not have a good situation in life – readers who are mentally or physically suffering, whether from being Alone Forever, or from illness, or both. Depression in all its forms is one of the biggest Alone Forever killers. There have been many points in my life when I too earnestly wished to die.

My primary feeling after recovering from the cinnamon stick incident was one of profound relief. I do love life, and I am not ashamed to say so, as the Alone Forever often curiously are. There is nothing like being alive, so far as we know.

In this life I still have many books left to read and write. I have a virtually inexhaustible supply of TV shows and movies to catch up on. I have fragrant springtimes to enjoy. Sports to watch. An entire Internet (an Infinite Library) to explore...

But I know that the future will catch up with me in the end. We can always hope for an instant, painless death that won’t inconvenience us too much, but we cannot reasonably expect it. The overwhelming likelihood is that our deaths will come about as the result of decline over a protracted period.

For us, that kind of death is simply unacceptable. We will have no truck with it whatsoever.

Which means that, sooner or later, we will be faced with a Question.

MEMENTO MORI

The Alone Forever and suicide have a very special relationship.

We who are Alone Forever believe that suicide is how we are most likely to die.

Suicide often makes its first proper appearance in our lives where we understand the full implications of being Alone Forever. There is usually a single long moment in our lives when we fully appreciate just what and who we are, in an all-at-once flash.

We understand that we are not trapped in life. It doesn't matter what happens or doesn't happen, how difficult things get, or how miserable life makes us. *The door is always open.* At any time, we can decide that we don't want to play at being our Alone Forever selves any longer, thank you very much, and we'll take our leave now.

But here's another curious thing about the Alone Forever. We carry on.

Against all the evidence of who we are (which is nobody) and what we can expect from people (which is pretty much nothing), we stubbornly insist upon not dying. Not just yet anyway. Not while we're still interested in the things that we're interested in, whatever those things are. With me it's books, literature, writing. I would need several Alone Forever lifetimes to accomplish a fraction of the reading and writing that I want to accomplish. This is what motivates me from day to day. This is my purpose, and it's a good one.⁷

And so our relationship with suicide is a curious one. It's usually not something we are actively seeking to do at this very moment. But it's something we're always keeping our eye on.

Memento mori. Remember, mortal, you have to die.⁸

⁷ Get your own purpose. Whatever it is – even if you have to make it up; even if you have to force it a bit at first – get your own purpose.

⁸ Apologies to the reader who knows perfectly well what *memento mori* means. I have learned the hard way that many of the sayings we know from growing up in a print-based culture have not made the transition to the digital age. I work with a group of 20- and 30-somethings who failed to recognise the provenance and meaning of 'Bah humbug!' when I exclaimed it a few Christmases ago. That's just one example of countless instances of this sort of thing. I am constantly astonished by what people today have forgotten, or never knew in the first place. Nobody reads stuffy old books

The future possibility of suicide is never off the table. Suicide is never not an option. It's never not a probable future eventuality with which we'll have to deal.

Every day, if we are wise, should bring with it some version of the thought: could today be *the day*?

Most of the time the answer to the question will be 'no', but the benefit of constantly asking the question of ourselves prepares us for the coming of the day when the answer might have to be 'yes'. We have to prepare for the possibility that suicide might be forced onto us by external circumstances.

I choose to partake of life on my terms. To live well while being Alone Forever, certain life conditions have to obtain.

I would not kill myself on a whim. I would choose to kill myself only when the day came when I could no longer live independently in a reasonable manner.

First of all, before anything else, I need good health.

I need a certain degree of vitality from day to day, physical and mental.

I need good mental health in general – there is no point being hale and hearty if the mind is a shrivelled stone, trapped in a corner of its own making.

I must have functional eyesight and hearing.

Good digestion.

Continence.

Mobility.

Independence. I cannot ever rely on other people for anything.

All of these things are prerequisites for my Alone Forever life to continue. I maintain a stock of food, medicines and miscellaneous items that would see me through most short-term ailments and emergencies. I could put up with a short-to-medium period of rehabilitation following serious accident or illness, as long as I was able to care for myself during it.

But I could not bear long-term or permanent disability. That would likely be a death-trigger for me, no matter how hardy I otherwise felt.

anymore. Thus, I cannot write a book intended to be read by people of all ages, including the youngsters, without defining 'memento mori'.

Were I to lose my sight, my hearing, my general good health, and my ability to care for myself in any significant way, I would lack the conditions for life itself.

It would be at this juncture that I would turn my thoughts to making an exit for myself.

Such a determined, practical attitude to suicide is shocking to most people, and perhaps even to some of the Alone Forever, but we have to be dispassionate, shrewd judges of our life circumstances. And only oneself can be that judge. We should never, ever outsource the responsibility for making the suicide decision, for or against, to anybody else.

When it comes to deliberation over our own suicide, we must not pay the slightest attention to other people. Social mores have no business here. Our individual right to suicide is a matter that is already decided well in advance. It was settled once and for all when we became Alone Forever.

I am aware that millions of people lead full, rich lives with all kinds of mental and physical conditions. I salute those people, with all due sincerity. But I also insist upon my inalienable right as a wholly independent individual to dispose of myself as I see fit, according to my own values.

Other viewpoints are available. Feel free to subject me to pro-life arguments. I am aware of them all – and I *agree* with them all. I am pro-life. The overall tenor of this book is pro-life. This book sets out to do exactly what its title suggests. We're going to be Alone Forever for a long time – an entire human lifespan. This book wants to persuade those who have no 'life', in the popular sense, that *life* is much more than whatever the common aggregate of people take it to be. The one who is Alone Forever can enjoy a good life, if he or she only knows how to adjust their sails and sail with the wind, rather than always struggle against it.

One of the most fine-grained judgements we will ever have to make is whether the time is right for us to die.

The first thing to understand is that we might have to act a lot sooner than we might know we *have to* act. This is the great dilemma. If we judge that the time is

generally right to make an exit, is the time literally now? As in, this moment? Or, by ‘now’ do we just mean a vague ‘soon’? If ‘soon’ is the verdict, is there a danger of waiting too long?

Everything I have said in preceding chapters about the value that can be wrung out of life is true.

Granted. My life might only be a sputtering candle next to the bright searchlight of other people’s lives. I have brought no light to others’ lives. I have never been in love with anyone or had anyone be in love with me. I am a terrible friend, as demonstrated by not having had any friends for most of my adult life. The Alone Forever take great perverse pleasure in loving their lives when the majority would recoil from them in horror.

I have carved this life out for myself, on my terms. I really do love my books and my writing and my computers and my TV shows. I get up, I go to work, I come home, I occupy myself in all the ways that I find to occupy myself, I go to bed.

I love simply being alive. So far as we know, there is nothing better anywhere than being an embodied individual self in an apparent phenomenal world. Life is not the sort of thing that we can reasonably expect to ever happen again.

The drawback, as ever, is other people. We live within something called ‘a culture’ (an idea that is itself conditioned into us by that very culture) that measures the worth of its members as ruthlessly and dispassionately as the rain wets the earth. In this culture’s value system, being friendless, loveless, underachieving losers, we have been found wanting.

But why do we have to believe what they believe, see what they see? Why is their standard *the* standard?

Why is their viewpoint the one that is always privileged?

Why do we allow this wholly imaginary scale of values to act as the framework for our lives and selves?

Things haven’t worked out for me as they have worked out for most other people. They all look like they’re having a different sort of life, with their spouses and their

offspring. I didn't get that kind of life, but everything else I got – sight, sound, mind, vitality – is a more than adequate second prize. Maybe it's even the first prize.

What does all this sentimental loving of life have to do with the suicide question?

It has a lot to do with it. Loving life, I can see myself hanging on through illness and infirmity long past the point where I should put a dignified end to myself.

I can see myself falling into the same trap that I've seen several family members fall into.

I can see myself existing as a near-mummified body in a hospital bed, watched over by strangers. All people are strangers to me.

This cannot happen. My determination that it cannot happen is a lot stronger than my love for life.

What method of suicide should we use? When we think about suicide in the abstract, as a future problem, the actual method we might use is almost the last thing on our minds.

There is a disappointing lack of easy methods of self-slaughter. It is surprisingly difficult, practically speaking, to kill oneself.

Perhaps this factor alone ensures our survival past the stage when we might otherwise have 'done it'. There have been moments in my life when, if there was a button I could press to painlessly and instantly delete myself from life, I would have pressed it. Many such moments.

'The thought of suicide has helped one through many a bad night,' said Nietzsche once.⁹

Like many people who think about suicide, Nietzsche never actually got around to doing it. Eventually he broke down in public and spent the final eleven years of life in a near-vegetative state, being cared for by his family and assorted paid assistants.

Nietzsche left it all too late. I have always wondered if there was a point when he intuited his approaching collapse, saw the necessity for suicide – and shied away from it.

⁹ If you've been waiting for the big guy to show up, here you go. He showed up. Happy?

There are no easy methods of doing it. None that are palatable.

I think of myself at the age of 28 or so, at probably the darkest time of my life. I'd had friends recently enough to remember how much better life had been with them. With my friendships over and my love life never having started, I was aware that I was starting to be viewed with some curiosity and suspicion by my family. I was no longer failing – *I had failed*. The failure process was over. I was lost and hopeless. I possessed all the instincts for friendship and love, but lacked any experience of them. I repulsed women. Not in the visceral sense of being physically repulsive. I was (and still am) an average, everyday, rather inoffensive-looking fellow. I was repulsive in the existential sense. Women's attentions seemed to just... 'glide off' me.

It wasn't until I reached 28 or so that I gave suicide some serious thought, and began to consider how I might practically set about doing it. I soon discovered that there is no easy way out – a discovery that perhaps indicates a lack of real willingness to do it. One who has their mind set firmly on making an exit will get over any lingering squeamishness and use whatever method is to hand.

Practical Tip #20

SUICIDE

Consider now what might have to be done in the future, and make your peace with it well in advance.

Research your chosen method *properly*.

Procure any equipment you may need.

If the equipment requires maintenance, maintain it.

Now put the question of suicide safely into storage and *live*.

When the time comes, you will know that it's come.

Then, you must act.

Is it irresponsible of me *not* to discourage the suicidal from committing suicide?

No, it's not irresponsible. And I'm not encouraging it. Only an exceptionally sloppy reader will believe that I am actively recommending suicide. The overall message of this book is quite the opposite.

This is a self-help book for the Alone Forever. The situation of the Alone Forever is such that we might experience intolerable living conditions in the future. We all have our own red line. We must all know what to do if the time comes when it is crossed. Be prepared for that time, and when the time comes, look out for your own interests. That is all.

IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM

Everybody knows that suicide happens. Nearly everybody knows somebody affected by suicide. Most people can even be made to admit that the individual has a sovereign right to suicide. But somehow nobody wants to talk about suicide.

Suicide is such a toxic subject in the culture at large, that even I – who am Alone Forever, and owe no consideration whatsoever to the wider culture – find it difficult to address the subject. I hope the last chapter makes it clear that suicide is an empowering option for the Alone Forever individual. Traditional self-help books are big on thinking for yourself and ‘taking control’ and ‘taking responsibility’. Well, suicide is a topic where you and I can and must take control and responsibility. Our lives (and our deaths) will be all the better for it. Knowing where our death-triggers are located, and knowing in advance that we will act when necessary, we know that we are *safe*. We know that barring a truly unlucky set of circumstances, we will never spend months lingering in a hospital ward with cancer, or the last few years of our life in a nursing home armchair, wondering what the fuck happened. It just won't ever happen. We'll see it coming and we'll do what has to be done. Just reaching this level of determination now, well in advance, *feels good*, doesn't it?

We should not be unduly influenced by other people in anything, but particularly not in this thing. Other people, remember, are not our friends. Society does not have our best interests at heart.

If you do kill yourself – make sure you do it for your own reasons.

Do it because you have an inoperable brain tumour (for example), and you understand with piercing, unmistakable clarity that your quality of life is about to undergo irrevocable change for the worst.

Do it because you're losing the ability to walk up and down the stairs, and you can tell that things are only going to decline from here.

Do it because of a palpable reason that applies to you.

Don't kill yourself because you feel worthless compared to other people.

They're really not worth it. To commit suicide because other people haven't paid you the proper amount or kind of attention would be the most shameful failure any

Alone Forever person could endure. The awkward thing here is that many of us *will* succumb to the kinds of social pressures that I'm having fun making fun of – hell, *I* might succumb to them eventually, despite all my fuck-the-people bluster.

Many of us will come to the edge of our personal precipice, prodded there by self-hatred.

But what is self-hatred? It is a particular kind of self-judgement, based on a set of criteria derived from a framework of values.

From where do we absorb those values? Are they legitimate? Are we sure they apply to us?

People often say of suicide, disparagingly, that it is a selfish act. We need to make sure that it is completely selfish. If suicide has any element of being for or about other people, it's the wrong choice.

Part Five

Cathode Dreams and Computer Screens

I'm calculating, self-sufficient,
reserved, and I enjoy being alone.

-Melissa Sue Anderson

DON'T DO SOMETHING – JUST SIT THERE

Had I written a book about being Alone Forever fifteen years ago, in my early thirties, its tone and content would have been very different from this book.

I could forgive younger readers for thinking something like this:

'Find something to do' he says? Accept being Alone Forever? Who does he think he is? Who does he think I am? I'm nothing like the guy who wrote this book! I don't even like books. What is all this crap about 'finding something to do' and 'accepting' who I am? Who I am is the problem! I need friends and lovers. I need life!

Alone Forever is not a consistent experience over time. Alone Forever at age twenty is nothing like Alone Forever at age thirty, or forty, or fifty.

We might share the same strange fate of being Alone Forever, but we are not the same as each other. We're barely even the same as ourselves from day to day, month to month, year to year.

I can't help you learn 'acceptance' of being Alone Forever. I can only advise that you alter your outlook, not perform the alteration for you. I can testify that acceptance is possible and desirable and I can describe its positive benefits. But acceptance isn't something you can really decide to do. Acceptance just *happens* after a while. In my experience, anyway.

After acceptance – if it happens – comes the rest of one's life. And this, my temporary friends, is perhaps the only thing of substance that we can ever discuss with each other: just what are you going to do with your Alone Forever life?

I've spoken about the desirability of having a long-term project to focus upon and shape your routine around. This is a good time to reaffirm that advice: **Get something to do**. Something to keep you busy. Something to thread the days together. Seriously, just make it up if you have to. Build some of those clichéd matchstick cathedrals. Exhaustively catalogue your entire music/book/DVD/games library. Take up marathon running. Become a solo mountaineer. Collect stamps. Do all of these things. Something else. Anything else. You need it.

Whatever we choose, it should not occupy our entire time. What can we do when there is nothing else to do? Other than kill ourselves, or go properly, picturesquely, howling-insane (and then kill ourselves)?

The answer is simple.

Just watch TV.

Watch *lots* of TV. Devote several hours of your days to watching things on TV.

I am being serious here. When you can't think of anything else you want to do, just watch TV.

Get up, go to work, come home, watch TV. Rinse, repeat.

Got a day off work? Great. Spend the morning, or afternoon, or whatever, on your personal project(s). Don't spend too long on them.

Then spend the rest of the day on TV. Or on the Internet. Or both.

If there's one thing the Alone Forever have in abundance, it's time. Even if we think we don't.

I have nothing else in my life to amuse me but the things I choose to amuse myself with.

No wife or girlfriend. No children. No friends.

No social dimension to my life at all.

I only spend a couple of hours per day on my various projects. The rest of the day, I do whatever I like.

What I like is to browse the Internet in the traditional mostly aimless fashion, and watch TV and movies.

These activities fill up my days.

An adaptation of Parkinson's Law might be applied to the Alone Forever:

Doing nothing expands to fill the time available.

Pound for pound, there is enough quality content in the TV and film world to meaningfully occupy the attention and time of the Alone Forever for the terms of their natural lives.

Yes, the output of TV-land is formulaic. Everybody on TV is a regular guy or gal. Everybody on TV has a significant other, a network of friends and acquaintances, former lovers, extended family members, and the rest of it.

Sometimes you come across a depiction in TV or film of a man or woman who is alone. However. If this person is not a serial killer or otherwise unbalanced psycho (and they usually are), then the thrust of the plot will generally be about hooking them up with a significant other and making them ‘normal’.

So it requires a substantial suspension of one’s Alone Forever critical judgement to consume the overwhelming bulk of TV and film output. You have to forget who you are and what your life is like – which is more than half the point.

You must enter the worlds of TV and movies on their own terms. You will probably never get to travel to another planet and have an adventure. You will probably only ever be able to watch a hundred minutes of somebody fictional doing it instead.

It’s good enough for me.

Practical Tip #21

Always have a long-form TV series

to watch and enjoy.

Build a library of movies,

and watch at least one per week.

Pick up as many TV shows as you can handle. Two or three at one time is usually enough. Any more, and there’s a danger of spreading yourself too thin.

Long-form, episodic TV is one of the Alone Forever person’s great sources of ongoing meaning. Give me a show with five seasons’ worth of material to catch up on, and I’m happy as the proverbial Larry. At times in my personal history of Alone Foreverdom, only the thought of the next episode of whatever TV show I’m watching has got me through the days.

One of the best two weeks of my life came in the summer of 2015. I took two weeks' holiday from work. I didn't go anywhere. I spent the whole time at home, alone of course, where I watched *Breaking Bad* from the first episode to the last.

When I returned to work, my colleagues asked me if I'd had a good two weeks off.

'Oh, *yes*,' I said, and truly meant it.

If they'd known just how I spent my time off work, they'd have been horrified. I'd coasted through the two weeks completely alone, speaking to nobody but the occasional shop assistant whenever I ventured outdoors. Yet I still look back on that two weeks as one of the most meaningful and productive of my life. Not just because of *Breaking Bad*, although that was definitely a major part of it. At the time I was also working on a writing project, yet another book that nobody but me will ever read. Somehow the intensity of the writing, and my watching of *Breaking Bad*, crossed over into one another and raised my daily experience to a fever-pitch of excitement and absorption.

I watched the final episode of *Breaking Bad* a few days before I returned to work, and felt genuinely bereft when it – and my two weeks – was over.

'This is how I would choose to live,' I said aloud on the last night, to myself.

THOSE LOVEABLE ONLINE SCAMPS

It might seem inadvisable for the Alone Forever life to feature media of any kind.

Media is made *by* other people, *for* other people. To consume media is to consume vast swathes of normative propaganda. A typical hour of TV is a concentrated pellet of *their* beliefs, *their* assumptions, and *their* values.

How much media content (not counting this book) is crafted specifically for the Alone Forever? Very little. Arguably, none at all.

It takes awareness and effort to stand tall in the hurricane of other people's perceptions – and a hurricane of other people's perceptions is what all media is, up to and including the Internet. *Especially* the Internet, where other people and their 'views' are at their rawest, most unfiltered worst. Our psychological subservience to other people is what we have to overcome if we are to reach any kind of accommodation with being Alone Forever. This is a big task, verging on an impossible one in the face of all of *them* and the constant tornado of their normal, everyday lives sweeping you up wherever you look.

Which is one way of looking at it.

Another way of looking at it: the Internet provides a practically bottomless pit of diverting content for the enlightened Alone Forever person to consume and enjoy, or not.

And the Internet also provides a unique window onto the world of others who are Alone Forever. If it wasn't for the Internet, we might well lack any concrete proof that other people like us even exist.

Growing up Alone Forever, from the 1970s to the 1990s, pre-Internet, I often wondered whether there were any others like me, anywhere. I surmised that of course there must be. The conditions that had formed me, whether biological or societal (or – *yawn* – both), could not be so rare that they had only ever worked their dark magic upon *me*. It always seemed to me that I must be a representative of a type that was reasonably common throughout history. We have always existed, and necessarily must always exist. Nature has its means of reaching its ends. The loner phenotype has been with us since the dawn of time. The loner phenotype will always be with us.

So I could infer that there were others like me. There must be *plenty* of us scattered across the world. We would probably fill up a football stadium or two if we all got together.

But, pre-Internet, there was little to no chance of our paths ever crossing in any way. There would certainly be exceptional cases of two Alone Forever people stumbling across one another in the real world – it'd be damned peculiar if there weren't – but such cases could not be so common that they would overturn the general rule. We are typically Alone Forever, alone.

Whenever I thought about 'us', pre-Internet, it seemed certain that we were forever sealed off from each other with our own thoughts and our own destinies.

And really – that thought never much bothered me.

Being Alone Forever is a solitary business. We are not a community. We don't have any advocacy groups. There are no public spokespeople to represent us.

We don't want any of those things.

Time passed. The Internet got huge. One day in the mid-2000s, browsing quite at random (the best way to browse that Infinite Library), I happened upon something called '/r/ForeverAlone', a sub-forum of the mega-forum known as Reddit.

The name piqued my interest. I scanned the main page, and read a few posts.

Forever Alone seemed to have a straightforward definition. They were people who do not have, and in most cases never have had, any romantic relationships; who may have friends, but just as equally may not have friends; who may be despondent and suicidal, carefree and joyful, or both at the same time.

I read a few of the threads, and experienced a kind of raw amazement that I have never forgotten. *Here they were* – some of them, anyway. People like me! People who didn't have relationships. That was me! Some of them didn't have friends. That was me, too!

And having stumbled upon /r/ForeverAlone, I went in search of other places like it. There are some others – very few, as we might expect. Sparsely populated, and wildly varying in quality.

On each of these Alone Forever-friendly sites, the posters were asking some of the questions that I was always asking, but had only ever had my own restricted viewpoint to answer them from.

What's life like for somebody who doesn't have relationships?

What's life like for somebody who doesn't have friends?

How about getting out – *escaping*?

Is escape even possible now?

If escape is possible, what particular kinds of difficulties would I face before, during and after the attempt(s)?

If escape is not possible and never happens, what does the future hold for me, practically speaking?

Here were many of the same questions that motivated the writing of this book, looked at from an abundance of angles, through multiple kinds of refracting lenses.

I soaked it all up. The Alone Forever never forget the sheer amazement of first stumbling across others who are like them.

There are a few places of interest online other than /r/ForeverAlone. There are a couple of sibling subreddits on Reddit itself, and a few (a very few) other websites too.

/r/FA30plus was founded in recognition of the fact that the experience of being Alone Forever changes as a person gets older. The age of thirty is seen as a major milestone by the Alone Forever. We can barely imagine getting to thirty, much less living for a long time after that point. This subreddit is for the over-thirties to talk about being Forever Alone (or Alone Forever).

/r/ForeverAloneWomen is an Alone Forever-themed discussion subreddit for women's different experiences of being Alone Forever. In the online Alone Forever world, such as it is, there is a vocal school of thought that Alone Forever women 'have it easier' in a variety of ways. It's a provocative issue, and not one I have any appetite for tackling here.

At the time of writing, this subreddit is set to 'Private'. Women and men are welcome to read and post, but you have to be invited.

I'm not getting into the whole Alone Forever men-vs-women debate here. It's not an important part of my life and I heartily recommend the reader adopts the same approach. Consider it this way. Whoever is right or wrong in the Alone Forever men-vs-women debate, it will not alter anything for *you*.

Away from Reddit, there are several websites and forums that cater to the Alone Forever.

Wizchan – this semi-notorious site is purportedly filled with angry sociopathic misogynistic young men (the cartoon image of the Alone Forever). Personally I've always found it a refreshing read whenever I've dropped in. Wizchan's core philosophy is that the Alone Forever life should be wilfully chosen, rather than resisted. Those men who mope for women and pine for some kind of normal life are cheerfully castigated as *failed normies*. This outlook chimes almost exactly with my own.

Wizchan also hosts some of the best Alone Forever-themed Reading and Movie lists – and discussion about them – that you will find anywhere.

If you're offended by Wizchan's occasional bursts of craziness, and it's almost impossible not to be, then you might ask yourself what you are even doing near the Internet. And just what are you worried about anyway? The state of *society*? GTFO, normie!

A Lonely Life forums — the yin to Wizchan's yang, these reasonably busy discussion boards are ideal for the Alone Forever person who isn't at all happy about being Alone Forever and wants some like-minded companionship and sympathy. Here is where you will find the broadest range of experience, from people who mostly occupy the 'normal' part of the spectrum. If nothing else, these forums are a nice, bland antidote to the sometimes toxic atmosphere of the more, ah, 'fundamentalist' Alone Forever sites, shall we say.

And that's about it. I could speak for longer about the various parts of the Internet that host discussion and content for 'us', but it's a huge topic that properly deserves its own separate book.

There are quite a few ‘near-miss’ websites that I could have mentioned. Asexuality and Autism discussion forums sometimes seem as if they *might* cross over with Alone Forever enough to make them worth a regular visit. I will leave the reader to explore further.

I would be wary of taking direct inspiration from anything you come across online (or in this book).

There is no experience of being Alone Forever that is more or less ‘valid’ than your own. Remember that one is always Alone Forever *alone*. Your own experience is by definition *the* quintessential Alone Forever experience. How delightfully irresponsible and solipsistic of me.

Part Six

Escaping

Alone Forever

Have you heard of the illness *hysteria siberiana*? Try to imagine this: You're a farmer, living all alone on the Siberian tundra. Day after day you plough your fields. As far as the eye can see, nothing. To the north, the horizon, to the east, the horizon, to the south, to the west, more of the same. Every morning, when the sun rises in the east, you go out to work in your fields. When it's directly overhead, you take a break for lunch. When it sinks in the west, you go home to sleep. And then one day, something inside you dies. Day after day you watch the sun rise in the east, pass across the sky, then sink in the west, and something breaks inside you and dies. You toss your plough aside and, your head completely empty of thought, begin walking toward the west. Heading toward a land that lies west of the sun. Like someone possessed, you walk on, day after day, not eating or drinking, until you collapse on the ground and die. That's *hysteria siberiana*.

-Haruki Murakami

(South of the Border, West of the Sun)

And now, after all my Alone Forever flag-waving, in this section I will take a brief look at how those who are unhappy with being Alone Forever might set about escaping from it.

Many readers will not be Alone Forever in the definitive now-and-forever sense. *You want out*. You want out so badly that it's become your daily obsession. You're constantly probing the walls of your cell, testing them for weaknesses...

Good. If the desire to escape exists, the attempt should be made. You have to try. There are no advantages to being Alone Forever worth speaking of. It's not going to get you anywhere in and of itself. Anything you can do while Alone Forever, you can pretty much do with people around you (it almost pains me to say). You're just as capable of building a scale replica of Notre Dame from matchsticks, or writing the Great Bulgarian Novel, or doing whatever-it-is you do, *with* a significant other and *with* a wide, warm circle of friends around you.

That's how most people do things – *with* other people. Why shouldn't you be like most people? Get out of this 'Alone Forever' cult while you still can! If you're young enough and/or not yet institutionalised enough, you can do it. If you can do it, you should do it. You *must* do it. No question.

There really is nothing in Alone Forever worth sticking around for. Sure, you can use the time you get from being Alone Forever to go on long walks. You can contemplate the cosmos, life, and the most inward layers of your selfhood in ways that are not available to those who are firmly socialised. You can even write a fucking book about it, if you like. But ultimately, in the final analysis, Alone Forever is nothing to be aspired to.

Many readers will have come to this book not expecting it to be the unashamed endorsement of being Alone Forever that it quite plainly is.

Many readers will be angered, irked, or mildly disgruntled at my advice to 'accept' being Alone Forever, and to find something to do with your time.

A substantial portion of the Alone Forever population will never 'accept' being so, not in any way. Chafing against being Alone Forever is, for many of us, part and parcel of the condition.

Many of us will not accept being Alone Forever. Firstly for the simple reason that acceptance is not something we can ever *do*. Acceptance of being Alone Forever does not come about as an isolated act of will. It forms organically over time. If you're not at that stage yet, you still have a chance to escape.

No sane and sensible person would ever choose to be Alone Forever. I say this as one who has reached the stage of Alone Forever life in which I *have* reached capital-A Acceptance (the Alone Forever equivalent of total spiritual Enlightenment, as I will discuss in the final section of this book).

I no longer seek to escape this state of strangeness. Whatever remains of my life will be one without people in it. I'll continue to interact with colleagues at my workplace, and with the occasional neighbour and/or acquaintance whom I bump into in the street. Beyond that, though, it's just going to be me.

Perhaps it is rare for one of us to reach Acceptance. Or perhaps it is quite common. Discovering which would require a lot more research tools and resources than anybody is ever likely to spend, so we may never know for sure. We can only speculate using our own knowledge and experience.

I suspect it is not so rare for the Alone Forever to get older and reach Acceptance. But I bet it's not all that common, either.

Many of us will be picked off by insanity and suicide before we make it to full adult maturity.

But many others of us will simply – escape.

If you do want to get out of this damn thing called Alone Forever, how would you go about it?

YOU DO NOT TALK ABOUT ESCAPE CLUB

What does escape from *Alone Forever* even mean? If you're expecting solid gold advice from me on this front, you've picked up the wrong book. But I do have some ideas.

I'm tempted to get granular, but I don't want to stretch the impatient would-be escapee's patience any further than it probably already is stretched. Let's keep it simple:

Escape from *Alone Forever* entails getting the things whose absence define you as being *Alone Forever* in the first place.

Friends and lovers.

If you already have the former but not the latter, the good news is that your escape tunnel is more than half-dug already. Friends are the portal to life. You are much more likely to bump into your future wife or husband through the intermediary offices of friends than you are whilst rattling around in your empty life on your own.

You can continue being your awkward, bumbling self, if that's what you are, but there's no reason you can't have friends and a romantic-sexual relationship or two with it. I know, that latter part in particular is the wildest fantasy. *You*, with a significant other? The world would surely stop!

How do you get friends and romantic partners?

Broadly speaking, it seems that friendships and romantic relationships arise naturally from socialising with people in the generally agreed standard manner. *Repetition* of social occasions and practices is the key. You can't go to just one party and expect everything to fall into place.

Over time, through a gradual process, amid a swirl of people and happenings, something eventually 'sticks', and you discover that you have made a new friend or two – and perhaps something more than a friend. At least, I *think* that's how it goes.

Nothing like it has ever remotely happened to me. I had a couple of friends at school, but gradually lost touch with them in the years after school. I have made 'friends', of sorts, at my various workplaces over the years. But friends at work are

not *friends*, as such – they are people with whom you are obliged to associate on a daily basis, and likewise they with you. Nonetheless, you will usually end up on friendly terms with a few of them. Which still does not automatically make them your friends. A friend is somebody who can call you up – or whom you can call up – and arrange to do something together. The ‘friends’ that one makes at work are only *friends* if this further stage of friendliness materialises outside of work. None of my workplace quasi-friendships have ever carried over into day-to-day life.

I have never formed friendships of any kind in my adult life. I have never had a romantic relationship of any kind at any time of my life. Given that friendship is one of the main gateways to love and romance – arguably the sole gateway – this is not surprising.

Why is this so in my case? There are multiple, layered reasons. I’ll pick the most obvious one: I am bad at being a friend. It is very difficult to be friends with me. I tend not to be interested in other people to the required extent. I don’t like crowded places and I don’t like going to other people’s houses and I don’t like anybody visiting me. Most people are not into that scale of difficulty, and therefore most of my would-be friendships remain frozen in amber in their early stages, permanently. If any workplace quasi-friendship ever looks like it might be warming up, I give it a figurative blast of liquid nitrogen until it cools down again. I’m Alone Forever. It’s who and what I am.

I acknowledge that being without friends is an undesirable state to be in. As much as I might valorise being Alone Forever, I would never deny the simple truth of it. A person without friends and allies in this world is compromised on a number of levels: practically, psychologically, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually.

If you already have some friends, *maintain those friendships*. Don’t let your friendships wither and fade, as I did with my couple of schoolfriends. Tend to them often. Don’t let phone calls, texts and emails go unanswered. Don’t cancel meetings. Show up to social events. Don’t slip quietly away from your friends while they go on with their lives.

Having no friends is a considerably greater shame, in every sense, than having no wife or girlfriend. It is fairly common for people not to have a romantic partner, for

whatever reason. But *having no friends*? This is much rarer, and proportionally more injurious to the self. The would-be escapee should treat friends like the precious material that they are.

THE INHERENT PERIL OF HEEDING ADVICE (MINE OR ANYONE’S)

You might naturally turn to other people who are Alone Forever for advice on how to escape the condition. It seems intuitively right that only those who live as you live can understand what you will have to overcome in order to escape. Better yet, others who have escaped can tell you what life is like ‘on the outside’. If you do manage to go over the wall, the testimony of previous escapees can help to prepare you for culture shock.

But beware – taking advice from others who are or were Alone Forever is inherently fraught with difficulty. Would you take advice on seeing from a fellowship of the blind?

From time to time on the forums, a helpful ‘normie’ drops by to dispense advice, which follows a well-worn path that you don’t need to look at a website (or read a book) to hear, because you’ll have heard it all before, in various forms, from various sources.

Look at this Trio of Infamy:

1. You have to learn to love yourself before somebody else can love you!
2. Stop trying so hard – it’ll happen!
3. Just be yourself!

I couldn’t resist adding sarcastic exclamation marks at the end of each of these nuggets of unwisdom.

Number 1 is an especially egregious piece of cart-before-horse-putting. It’s plain to most of those who are Alone Forever that being loved by somebody else is one of the chief ways we can learn to love ourselves.

Number 2 is the most harmless of the Trio of Infamy (as I insist we call it). Almost everyone who has a husband or wife met that person in the natural order of things. They didn’t have to do anything, as such. They didn’t have to ‘improve’ themselves, or wear better clothes, or read books and websites about dating, or learn a whole set of

rules that they had to remember to implement every time they met up with someone. No conscious thought ever had to be expended. Their social and romantic lives *just happened* around them, as an integral part of their normal progression through life. So when normal people advise us to stop trying so hard, we should not become too vexed – it worked for them. *All* of them. Success through not-trying is the natural way.

Number 3 is the most infamous advice ever given to those who have difficulty in meeting prospective romantic partners:

Just be yourself!

I could write an entire book about the awfulness of ‘just be yourself!’, and I probably will one day. If I ever write a follow-up to the present volume, it will be called *Just Being Yourself!*

‘Just be yourself’ is the dumbest, shittiest advice that the Alone Forever ever have to deal with.

Worse than death, worse than despair, worse than howling-mad insanity, ‘just be yourself’ is the garlic to our inner Draculas.

Let’s take a moment together to look at those three words, and reflect for a short time on just what they mean to us.

Whosoever says ‘just be yourself’ spouts the most inane, empty, meaningless piece of drivel masquerading as advice that there ever was. ‘Just be yourself’ is the Alone Forever equivalent of **Work Makes You Free**.

Just being oneself is what has landed the Alone Forever where they are. The Alone Forever person is somebody who has made the mistake of being themselves their whole lives long.

Being ourselves is the reason we’re in the position where we’re being told to just be ourselves.

In order to win friends and romantic partners, I would have to pretend to be somebody drastically *other than* myself. When people advise ‘just be yourself’, what they actually mean is ‘pretend to be somebody other than your boring quiet self’.

Point out this contradiction to other people at your own risk. ‘Just be yourself’ is a firmly embedded shard of what people like to call ‘common sense’. You are not allowed to question it. Go ahead and try.

It’s worth noting here that people who spout nonsensical, shit advice are generally well-meaning. It is never appropriate to enter into full-scale argument with anybody about their well-meant-but-shit advice.

Remember my observation: we who are Alone Forever, as a collective, on the whole, tend to be a polite and well-mannered bunch. Even if our inner life is a raging volcano, on the outside we are placid and pleasant and inoffensive to others. I love this about myself. My public manners are *exquisite*, if I may say so myself, and I don’t plan to change.

‘Ahhh, see, that’s where you’re going wrong, if you stood up for yourself more, you might-’

No. I don’t plan to change.

It can be difficult to resist debating it with them. Who else have you got to talk to about this stuff? People on the Internet, sure, but there’s no substitute for face-to-face.

It can get frustrating. People are completely blind to aspects of life that to you are completely plain.

Remember that people live in a separate reality. Where *they* live, relationships take root and flower in a wholly natural manner, and then follow their courses in an unproblematic fashion, for good or ill. ‘Real life’ simply happens to most people without them having to give it any thought or make any effort.

They can never know what the landscape looks like from our side of the divide. Alone Forever is literally inconceivable to them. I have emphasised this point over and over again in this book, because it bears repeating.

And remember this as well: people are *not* obligated to help you. They were not assigned to help you escape being Alone Forever. It is not their role to be your carer in life. In the first place, you are simply not visible to them as one who is Alone Forever. They don’t know that you need to escape. They lack all understanding that somebody could be imprisoned in the way that you are imprisoned.

Abandon all notion that other people – society, the world, whatever – somehow ‘owe’ you anything.

In this section about escape from Alone Forever, it's appropriate for me to relate two episodes of me attempting to escape.

Several years ago, heading for my mid-forties, it seemed to me that if I didn't go over the wall soon, I never would. And so I tried to escape my Alone Forever fate.

My escape methods were about as orthodox as they come.

First, I asked a woman for a date.

Second, I installed Tinder on my smartphone.

Let's try to breathe normally together, and examine these remarkable happenings one at a time.

‘ELLIE’

She was a new starter at my office. Our work brought us into contact several times over the course of a normal working day, sometimes a lot more, and we began to talk. (Yes, I can talk normally to a woman. If I really focus on what I’m doing, they might not even notice anything very different about me. The Alone Forever are far from universally being the bumbling, tongue-tied, smelly loners that we are painted as being.)

Ellie was in her late forties, a few years older than me at the time. She had been divorced for a decade. She had an adult son who had safely flown the nest and had his own family to occupy him. Six months before we met at work, Ellie had got out of a relationship that had been so toxic, she said, there was no chance of it rekindling.

Ellie was bubbly and fun-loving. She seemed to enjoy talking to me. She laughed at my little jokes.

I found her attractive on every level – and she was available.

You might think I started getting crazy ideas straightaway. But I didn’t. I was a middle-aged man who had only ever been alone. It never occurred to me to imagine that Ellie and I might become more than work colleagues.

One day, another colleague asked me when I was going to ask Ellie out on a date. I was astonished at the notion, and stared at this colleague for several seconds before recovering my wits and making a joke about it.

The idea of Ellie and I becoming romantic partners occurred to me right then, for the very first time. It suddenly made sense – eerily perfect sense. I had been Alone Forever all my life, but I didn’t always have to be. Ellie was an attractive single woman. The conditions were exactly right. I’d often thought it would take a miracle to get me out of being Alone Forever. This was it. Surely?

My imagination ran away with me. I saw the future as it now surely had to be.

I was going to have a *relationship*. I was going to get a girlfriend, and become her boyfriend.

And not least, I would finally get to have sex. Not ever having had sex is a private, piercing shame that dulls over time, but never really goes away. We can interrogate

the various interlocking sets of socio-cultural values that create the shame of being a mature adult virgin. We can firmly disbelieve in the validity of that shame, or whatever. But somehow, the shame persists.

Ellie was a chance for me to make a very belated entry into the world of proper adult life. A big chance.

Things were complicated by our workplace situation. We were colleagues in an office. We would have to continue to work together whatever happened. I could not jeopardise it with an unwelcome approach. The clever thing to do here was to work out what Ellie's answer was likely to be in advance. But how to do that?

I dithered for weeks. Ellie herself seemed to take the initiative at this point.

Within my earshot in the office, she complained loudly and at length about how she hadn't been out on a date for *years*. She said she loved Indian food, and would *love* to be taken out to a proper Indian restaurant for a proper meal.

She also said, again in my earshot, and again very loudly, that she knew she wasn't getting any younger, and she would like to find somebody to spend the rest of her life with before she got too old and wrinkly to meet anyone (*tinkling laugh*).

What was I supposed to make of this? It all seemed *perfect*. It seemed like a deliberate come-and-get-me signal.

I trust the reader is enjoying this story.

Still I dithered, telling myself there just wasn't a right moment. Really I was frightened of taking a massive leap into the unknown.

One evening Ellie and I were standing at the same bus stop after work, waiting for a bus that was so late it probably wasn't coming (and that *is* the story of my life). We were getting along well, chatting and laughing about everything and nothing.

The moment seemed just right.

'Hey,' I said. 'Would you like to go out sometime? You know, after work? Maybe at the weekend?'

Ellie's face froze in a very particular way that I came to know very well when I was young. She looked dismayed. Before she said anything, I knew that I had made a mistake. I had been completely wrong about everything.

She declined my invitation, in a manner that spared me as much discomfort as possible. Every girl or woman I have ever asked out (there have been some) has turned me down with the identical note of sweet-seeming regret. ‘You’re a great guy, *but...*’

Our workplace friendship was not damaged. Ellie remained her usual warm and easygoing self with me. It was as if my request for a date had not happened at all. (I wondered what to make of that, and I wonder still. As a man, do I have *so* little impact with women that me asking them for a date is almost literally nothing at all?)

About six months passed. Ellie and I continued to get along well – and then I asked her out *again*. Yes, I know! I’m a regular little sex pest, aren’t I?

This time, Ellie said ‘no’ in a more direct fashion than she had before. She looked me in the eye while saying ‘no’, and her tone was gentle but firm. It was a good-natured ‘no’, but there was an unmissable tonal subtext: *please stop asking me out. The answer’s always going to be ‘no’.*

I did stop asking. Ellie and I remain work colleagues, and on friendly terms, to this day. She still laughs at my jokes. She is still, so far as I know, single.

Looking back, I am glad the Ellie thing happened. Fate had seemed to offer me that late, late chance, and I did not spurn the offer. Everything seemed right. I did everything I was supposed to do. Victory seemed certain, but somehow it didn’t happen.

You may scoff at my arrogant male entitlement if you must, but I thought Ellie was a sure thing. How could I have misread those signals? I’d even picked out the Indian restaurant that we would go to on our first date, where I was sure we would laugh about not even I being able to ignore that signal. I’d also had a long think about whether I was ready for such a massive change in my life. (My conclusion: I wasn’t ready for the change, but Fate had thrown me next to Ellie, and I could not ignore Fate.)

It was a serious escape attempt. She seemed *perfect*. I think it was reasonable for me to make an approach. And it was of course reasonable for Ellie to turn me down.

This little story is not a gripe at Ellie, nor at women in general. The world is always ready to beat Alone Forever men with a big misogyny stick.

Once the dust settled, I understood something about myself that I hadn't understood previously.

It hadn't happened. It wasn't ever going to happen.

My attempt to embark on my first romantic relationship as a middle-aged man had failed.

And I felt... relieved.

I was relieved that my life would continue as it had always been.

Alone Forever.

Critics may point to a number of flawed assumptions that I made about Ellie.

Perhaps I magnified her native friendliness into something it wasn't.

Or I simply waited too long to ask her out. There may well have been interest on her side, to begin with, but by the time I got my arse into gear she'd got to know me better and realised (shrewdly, and correctly) that I was a poor candidate for a potential new relationship. The iron had long since cooled.

Perhaps I was simply not her physical type, and she felt no sexual attraction to me. This is the simplest and most likely explanation.

Perhaps she didn't want to get into a relationship with an office colleague.

Perhaps her previous relationship had ended so badly that she wasn't ready for another one yet.

Any or all of these would be solid reasons why Ellie said 'no'.

Whatever the reason was, Ellie did say 'no'. I would have been justified in closing the book forever on women and relationships and sex, and regarding it as my decisive, final Alone Forever escape attempt.

But I did have one more roll of the dice left in me.

‘TINDER’

At this juncture, in my early forties, I did still want to escape being Alone Forever. Middle age was upon me, with old age looming not too far ahead. For the first time, I squarely faced the prospect of spending the rest of my life completely alone. There was an element of frantic panic.

This is the context in which Ellie appeared like magic, and seemed to offer an absurdly convenient way out of the labyrinth. The route turned out to lead nowhere, but I’d already decided that I was getting out, and I didn’t want to relinquish the dream just yet.

So I spent a few months trying to make something happen on Tinder. This was a few years ago at the time of writing, when the (in)famous dating app was at the height of its popularity.

I uploaded a couple of pictures that I judged made me look sort-of handsome. I crafted a non-threatening, would-be-witty profile. I even told a few people at the office that I was now ‘on Tinder’. Telling them, in effect: ‘See? I’m *normal*, me...’

I limited my search to women aged between 35 and 50 who lived in the same city as me. This yielded anywhere from between five and fifteen new profiles per day. I rarely saw any repeat profiles. Tinder was properly *huge* at the time.

I started out only swiping right on the profiles of women whom I found attractive. And no, this doesn’t mean ‘supermodels only’. Most people who scrutinise the Alone Forever from the outside tend to make a slew of assumptions about us. One of the most egregious is that the reason we are what we are is that we’re too ‘picky’ when it comes to potential romantic partners. We’re supposedly setting our sights too high and holding out for the kinds of extremely attractive people who tend to end up with other extremely attractive people, rather than with the likes of us. I’m sure this is the case for some of the Alone Forever, but I’m equally sure this is *not* the case for the overwhelming majority of us.

For the record – I find a broad range of women attractive. My ideal ‘type’ would be the bespectacled librarian/student kind of woman. The type known as ‘the girl next door’.

I hope that's cleared that up.

So I was swiping right on all the profiles of the broad range of women whom I find attractive. The obvious ones, and plenty of the less obvious ones. Women of all shapes, sizes, faces, and hairstyles.

A week passed. I was swiping right several times a day. No matches. This was not what I was led to believe would happen.

And it seemed that I knew how this Tinder thing was going to go for me.

We who are Alone Forever have an uncanny instinct for how certain circumstances will turn out. The anti-Alone Forever brigade, never short of numbers or volume, can cry 'self-fulfilling prophecy!' all they like, and deliver as many thumbnail expositions of the law of attraction as they please – but whatever our reality is, is our reality.

So I knew where this was all leading, but I persisted.

I started swiping right on almost every profile I saw (*not* on literally all of them – I was aware of Tinder's algorithm that would have penalised me for doing so). Still no matches. Not one. I mentioned it to one of the youngsters at work, and she looked properly puzzled, and interrogated me for a few minutes. 'Is it set up properly? Are you *sure* you're swiping in the right direction?'

I had the app set up correctly. I was swiping in the correct direction. I was getting no matches.

I continued for several more weeks, until I stopped. In total I spent about two months 'on Tinder' as the saying already had it. I'd swiped right on hundreds of profiles without receiving a single right-swipe in return.

This experiment was over. I uninstalled the app.

My escape attempts were definitively over.

First the Ellie failure, and then the Tinder fiasco, amused and bemused me in equal measure.

I took a few long, hard looks at myself in a mirror, literally and figuratively.

I am not a staggeringly attractive man, but I had never considered myself to be physically repulsive either. But perhaps it was time to realise just where I had got to in life, and understand what I could expect to realistically happen from now on.

I was in my mid-forties. I looked the way most men look when they reach that age. Our mid-forties is when the leaves start turning properly brown at the edges. The only sign of youth I still retained was a flat stomach, having given up alcohol some years before.

But I was now completely bald. Twice a week I shaved off what little hair remained at the back and sides.

Women do not, on the whole, find bald men attractive, whatever they might claim in public to the contrary.

Alone Forever was no longer something I was in danger of becoming permanently. Alone Forever was something I had already become, *forever*.

I felt a flicker of despondency, at first.

The flicker soon vanished.

Soon, I had this immense feeling of *relief*. This outcome was exactly what I wanted. It was consistent with my persona.

First with Ellie and then with Tinder, I hadn't failed. The Universe hadn't failed me.

It had given me exactly what I wanted from people – which was nothing.

I hadn't ever really wanted to become Ellie's boyfriend, and so it hadn't happened.

I hadn't ever really wanted to get a 'match' on Tinder, and so it hadn't happened.

I didn't want to be somebody's boyfriend. I didn't want to meet a woman and have to get involved with her friends and family.

I didn't want to become part of somebody else's life, or have them become part of mine.

I didn't want to meet anybody at all, for any reason.

My life was firmly settled in its groove.

My life was what it was.

No, I couldn't wholeheartedly say I *loved* it, but it was my life and I was comfortable in it. I even felt happy, a lot of the time. Which felt than, as it does now, an extraordinary claim to make. I, Alone Forever, had the sheer *chutzpah* to consider myself happy!

So no. I don't want a relationship now. I don't want to go on any dates.

Personal happiness and contentment is a rare state in this world. Why was I trying to tamper with it?

My failed escape attempts were just two more ingredients in the stew of ‘acceptance’ that had been cooking for several years by now. All through my thirties and early forties – I now saw – I was inching towards where I had now arrived.

If love, romance and sex were ever going to happen for me, they would have happened a long time ago.

So what relevance does the story of my escape attempts have for the Alone Forever person who *does* earnestly wish to escape?

I have told my Ellie story and my online dating story as a warning.

Don’t leave it too late.

If you leave it too late to try to escape, not only is the difficulty of escaping increased by many orders of magnitude, but by then you might not even really want to escape.

By the time I started to do something concrete to get out of Alone Forever, *Alone Forever was who and what I was*, and I no longer really wished to escape.

The time for me to escape Alone Forever was twenty years ago. Even ten years ago, I would have had some motivation.

Now? Now, I just want to spend the rest of my life with books, computers, and *Star Trek*.

If there is an Ellie-figure in your life right now, don’t hold back on my account. I recommend finding out for certain. Make your approach to that person. You need to know the answer.

Online dating might also work for you – but you need to commit to it, and you need to be young enough and non-repulsive enough for it to have a chance of working. The evidence shows that online dating *does* work for a great many people, even for Alone Forever people, particularly if you are under the magic age of thirty. Try it. Enjoy it (if you get any matches).

Do whatever you can to get the hell out of Alone Forever, and don't come back. Or do you think I was joking just now about spending the rest of my life with my books and computers and *Star Trek*? I was not joking. *Run for your life.*

And that concludes my ruminations on How To Escape Being Alone Forever. Somebody else will have to write a complete book by that name. It is not within my remit.

My experience of escape attempts is not vast. I am no Houdini of the Alone Forever world. A couple of serious escape attempts were all I ever made. When they failed, I gave up. Because by then, I wanted to give up.

So this section has not been the greatest motivational piece you've ever read. Or maybe it was? If you're shocked at my passivity and willingness to accept 'defeat', take it as a salutary warning.

Essentially, it boils down to this. If you still want to escape, you should escape. Do everything you can to get out. Life will be better in the long run. It'll be worth it.

On the other hand, if you're like me, if you have stopped wanting to escape, if you have accepted your Alone Forever status, and I mean *genuinely* accepted it, rather than merely riding the fumes of your most recent minor epiphany... it feels pretty good, doesn't it?

Part Seven

How To Be Alone Forever

All misfortune springs from hatred of being alone.

-Jean de la Bruyere

Be able to be alone.
Lose not the advantage of solitude,
and the society of thyself.

-Thomas Browne

THE MISSING WORD

There is a word missing from this book.

A single word – a *key* word for the Alone Forever.

A word that tends to appear wherever the Alone Forever gather to discuss what their lives are like.

It's a word that you would expect to find in a book entitled *How To Be Alone Forever*.

Have you spotted it? Or, more exactly, have you noticed its absence?

You might be disappointed not to have found the word in question. Some readers may feel that this book as a whole is not quite what they expected. One of the contributing reasons might be the absence of this one key word.

Alternatively, you might have got to this point of the book without noticing its absence.

The word?

Lonely.

I had planned an entire section to deal specifically with loneliness. I never got round to writing it because I no longer feel qualified to speak about loneliness. Which should strike you as a peculiar thing for somebody who is Alone Forever to say.

Surely loneliness is the keynote of the experience of being Alone Forever?

Well, it is and it isn't. Alone Forever is a broad continuum of experiences. It's not an unchanging, single experience over time. It's different for us all at different times of our different lives.

Being Alone Forever, if it goes on for long enough, changes you in ways that you might not have anticipated.

At the beginning of my Alone Forever 'journey', and for most of its middle, loneliness was something I often grappled with. In my teens and twenties, many a Saturday night was a desolate scene of true existential despair. It was painful for me just to think of the inside of a cheerful pub or packed nightclub, and imagine all the teeming life that I knew was happening without me.

My fiftieth birthday is not too far away now.

I have learned a number of lessons from spending a long lifetime Alone Forever.

My typical day-to-day experience of being Alone Forever has changed. Several years ago there was a seismic shift in my general outlook. The change had been building up over time, but definitively overcame me almost all at once. None of this ‘incremental change’ bullshit that we usually have to patiently wait for. No – the change that happened for me was nothing less than the end of one life, and the beginning of another. Both lives still Alone Forever, needless to say, but fundamentally different in fundamental ways.

The word ‘lonely’ is missing from this book because I no longer feel it.

There are gradations of loneliness, from the passing background pangs that you barely notice throughout all your usual days, all the way up to those crippling spasms that dominate your entire existence.

In my youth (and until my mid-thirties), I did feel lonely most of the time. Loneliness might be defined as a persistent feeling that something vital is missing, and life is going on ‘out there’, where I am not. For so many years, to be alone was to be lonely, and to be lonely was to be deprived of a vital part of life that I *needed*. I lived with a constant, powerful awareness that I had to have people around me. I needed friends and lovers, and all the experiences that came with them, just as much as I needed food, water, and shelter. The absence of friends and lovers was a permanently unrelieved anxiety – a permanent mental, emotional, and spiritual vexation. When I wasn’t actively experiencing loneliness, it was always humming away in the background, ready to be turned up to full volume at any time, prompted by anything, or by nothing.

That was then. This is now.

I know myself, and life, better now.

Many readers will come to this book slap-bang in the middle of their own ongoing loneliness crises.

I have very little practical solace to offer. All I can tell you is that your loneliness will most likely evaporate naturally, if you wait it out for long enough.

Which isn't great advice, is it?

'Hang in there, buddy, it gets better!'

This is right up (down) there with *'Just be yourself!'* on the scale of worthless, ignorant, shitty advice that tends to be doled out to the Alone Forever. How much worse when it comes from another who is Alone Forever, eh?

So, no. I'm not saying 'hang in there' at all. The prospect of a better future is of little or no comfort in the suffering present.

But it's something that's worth bearing in mind. Loneliness is not forever. In the final analysis, the matured Alone Forever person is *not lonely*. We who have reached middle age whilst Alone Forever have long since grown into ourselves, and into our somewhat unique set of personal circumstances. Our life as it is, is what our life is.

If you are currently dogged by loneliness, then it means you still want out. Which could mean that you're not, after all, Alone Forever. You might just be Alone For Now, not Alone Forever.

The good news for you, if you are Alone For Now, is that very few people end up Alone Forever for life. As I have repeated over and over in this book (possibly almost to the point of our mutual stupefaction, but it still bears repeating): the chances are that you *will* escape being Alone Forever, particularly if you're still in your teens or twenties. If you live in a decent-sized conurbation in the affluent, liberal, developed world, with all of its dynamism and possibilities, it is borderline-impossible *not* to be rescued from Alone Forever somehow, some way, by *something*, and deposited safely on the shores of normal life. Whatever that is.

Loneliness is a fundamental ache of the Alone Forever only at the early and middle stages of the journey. You will either get out of the whole thing, or you will continue on to its later stages and become properly Alone Forever.

There is a Promised Land for us. It is right here on Earth. And you don't need a girlfriend to get in.

When your youth is gone, and when the middle-ageing process starts to nibble away at your body and mind (so subtly that you barely notice it happening at first), loneliness will become a faint background theme. So faint, in fact, that you will

almost have to make an effort to notice it's still there. Loneliness will be something that you only still feel because you remember the habit of feeling it. This intermediary stage will continue for some time. You won't really understand what's happening, even if you've read a description of the process. But something is happening that you might – weirdly – not want to happen. Loneliness itself is dying within you.

EPIPHANY MINE

You may disagree. Whatever age you are right now is crucial here. Whether you're younger than I am, or around my age, or older, there's a chance that you have completely failed to recognise your own experience in my descriptions of middle-aged Alone Foreverdom. You may feel vehemently opposed, on principle, to any suggestion of 'acceptance' of Alone Forever or 'settling' for anything less than your inmost heart's desire: life, love, friends, happiness.

I'm not suggesting that you accept anything or settle for anything. In any case, I firmly believe that the Alone Forever individual cannot *choose* acceptance. It's something that must happen to you naturally at a certain point of your development.

Such is my discovery, at least.

Throughout this book, I have alluded to a mysterious Great Epiphany that changed my entire outlook on being Alone Forever and on life in general.

Here and in the next few parts of this section, I will describe that Great Epiphany and its after-effects.

First: just what is an epiphany in the Alone Forever sense?

In general, an epiphany is a sudden, intense moment of revelation or understanding of something.

An epiphany in Alone Forever terms is a sudden, intense understanding *of the reality of being Alone Forever*.

You might joke that by this definition, your entire life is one long epiphany about being Alone Forever. But no. It isn't.

No matter how constantly aware we *think* we are of being Alone Forever, the truth is that we're not always at the peak of insight and understanding about it. Quite a lot of the time, we're barely thinking at all about being Alone Forever. We're picking our noses, we're brushing our teeth, we're absorbed in a book, we're looking for the next episode of a great new TV show, we're dealing with a tricky problem at work, we're noticing that it's the first mild sunny day of spring – whatever the things are that you do, they will constantly dilute your awareness of being Alone Forever.

Alone Forever moments of epiphany are sharp jolts of startling awareness. In a flash of insight we rediscover who and what we are, as if for the first time. No matter how intense the insight – literally breathtaking, at times – the epiphany and its after-effects are always short-lived, and we quickly resume our normal routines. Such minor epiphanies come along with reasonable regularity in the typical course of an Alone Forever life.¹⁰

For me, with my individual character and circumstances, my Alone Forever epiphanies usually go something like this:

- Devastating insight that Alone Forever is an incredible disaster.
- God, I am so different from everybody else. That's good in a way, but overall it is *not* good to be this different. No girlfriend, ever. No friends. Middle-aged. Alone. Bloody hell!
- Dry amusement at the sheer *scale* of the disaster. It's big!
- Awareness that I normally 'see' Alone Forever from far too close-up to gain a proper perspective on it.
- The epiphany always involves seeming to take several steps back to see the whole of Alone Forever in one glance. *Gulp*. Alone Forever is *huge*.
- This business of being Alone Forever is a personal CATASTROPHE of the very first order. Wow.
- There is no way back from Alone Forever. Not for me. Not ever. *Wow*.
- I live a long way beneath the threshold of other people's attention and understanding.
- Not only do other people not understand – *they don't understand that they don't understand*. They'll always take me for something I'm not.

¹⁰ Uh? You're saying you *don't* get them? Are you sure about that? You never, ever experience moments of heightened insight and awareness into the fact that you alone, out of everyone you know, don't ever seem to have romantic relationships, and precious few friends (or none)? I find it hard to believe that such a person could be reading this book. If you are one, feel free to email me and explain how you're Alone Forever but you never think about it. I would genuinely be interested. howtobealoneforever@gmail.com

- From other people's points of view, I can only ever seem to be a generic loser at large in the world.
- In a minor Alone Forever epiphany, that's my view too: I am just a common or garden loser. It's the inescapable conclusion. Stark. Simple. True.

Such, more or less, is the active content of the average Alone Forever epiphany experience.

Your own minor epiphanies (if you have them) will differ from mine. This is a point that can never be emphasised enough. We who are Alone Forever are not the same as each other. There will always be a little bit more of one thing *here*, a bit less of some other thing *there*, intermixed with plenty other ingredients of varying combinations and flavours.

Minor epiphanies can depress us or exalt us. Most often they're positive, in my experience. They're bracing, refreshing, and for me so darkly *amusing* (I find it funny that there is no way back), that I always get a little lift in mood for a few minutes, or a few hours at most.

But the good that they do for us is actually harmful when considered closely. We might come to rely on having regular epiphanies to boost our otherwise leaden general mood. This is unsustainable in the long term. Living from epiphany-to-epiphany is no way to live. You can occasionally find money in the street, but you can't survive on it. If you rely on finding money in the street for your income, you'll soon be on the street yourself.

Ditto with the minor epiphanies. If you resign yourself to drifting from one to the next, and putting up with long periods of blank misery in-between, you are effectively agreeing to live on the streets of your own self.

What you need is the windfall of a Great Epiphany. The kind of epiphany that changes the meta-framework of your Alone Forever existence. A once-in-a-lifetime Mega Epiphany whose afterglow never fades. The Epiphany of Epiphanies, that gives you one hefty shove, locks everything inside you into place, and changes you.

Permanently.

LA GRANDE ÉPIPHANIE

My Great Epiphany changed my outlook on myself, on the world, on my capital-f Fate, and on the nature of being Alone, Forever. To say it was a moment that changed my life would be understatement. Reality itself was transformed. It changed the way I understand what my life is.

Late in the summer of 2014, my eighty-year-old mother was admitted to hospital for tests. It was quickly discovered that she had late-stage bowel cancer. The disease was too advanced, and my old Mum too elderly and frail, to make any treatment worthwhile.¹¹

I was thus in the ideal emotional state for a great inner change to take place.

While Mum was in hospital I visited her every day, as did the rest of her family and her friends. Whenever I visited, I had to interact with a bewildering variety of people, in ever-changing combinations.

After one particularly exhausting visit, populated by a cast of dozens, I walked out of the hospital doors into the early evening sun. It was August. The air was still warm and sultry, but you could tell that summer was on the wane.

I needed to unwind after a couple of intense hours of dealing with people. Everybody who is Alone Forever will know what I mean here. Having to manifest a public character, having to pretend to be somebody that one is not, is always tiring. Recently, since I hit my early 40s or so, the energy required for the performance of my public character had begun to tire me a lot quicker than it used to.

¹¹ She died six months later, having suffered the kind of slow decline and harrowing final days that she had feared her whole life. It was a horror show. Readers who have witnessed cancer deaths will know what I mean here. I took it as her final lesson to me. The manner of my mother's death influenced my thoughts on preparing for my own death, as expressed in this book. We should prepare for old age and illness on the working assumption that we will be Alone Forever forever, and everything is up to us. Our worst medical nightmares *can* come true, at any time. We should anticipate every scenario and take precautionary, reasonable measures in the here-and-now.

I walked across the road to the bus stop. I had taken the next few days off work. From now until tomorrow at about this time, when I returned to the hospital for my next visit, I would probably not see or speak to another person.

I stood at the bus stop, alone. Without any prompting on my part, my Great Epiphany happened. It just happened.

Every ingredient of the minor epiphany as detailed in the previous chapter was in the Great one, but in a different way. Boosted. Intensified. Augmented.

The highlights:

- I am exactly what I am.
- There was a complex, vivid slew of emotions: relief, joy, and a sort of transcendent gratitude at the simple privilege of being... *alone*.
- I had always assumed it was wrong for me to be a solitary person. But now? This solitary person that I am? *This person IS who I am!*
- Trying *not to be* the person that I indubitably am, was constantly draining the life out of me.
- I am Alone Forever. *Ich bin für immer allein*. This is not something that I am ever going to escape, for the simple reason that *I don't really want to*. What possessed me, ever to want to? I might have once wanted to escape, but were not all those attempts... suspiciously half-hearted? With Ellie? With Tinder? It's arguable that I never really wanted to escape. Even if I did once genuinely wish to escape, I no longer do now, so the point holds.
- For the first time I consciously thought that Alone Forever might not be something I should escape, but rather something to be burrowed more deeply into. Something to be embraced.
- Being Alone Forever *doesn't matter*.
- Being Alone Forever might be the best damn thing that could ever have happened to me.

- Being Alone Forever is not some great cosmic injustice that I am tasked with fixing; being Alone Forever is rather the true external representation of my deepest inmost nature.
- Me trying to be sociable is like a rock trying to be liquid (or a liquid trying to be rock). I suppose it *could* be done, given the right circumstances (an excess of heat or whatever). I suppose there are people, including some women, out there in this wide and variegated world who would find my company agreeable for longer than a few minutes, and vice versa. But why is it my mission to bring about those far-fetched circumstances? Why should that be my whole life?
- Why should I not be what my deepest inmost nature commands me to be? Alone – forever!
- **I am exactly what and where I am meant to be.**

No, the Great Epiphany didn't manifest itself all neatly bullet-pointed like that. Everything in those bullet-points was *in* the Great Epiphany, sure enough, but it was all packaged in one great unfolding flash of insight – a flash that lasted several minutes.

Being Alone Forever is a strange life, and a difficult life. It is also plainly the best possible life for us – and the only life we've got.

The practical challenges we face are often immense. Ultimately, our lives will end in the seeming failure of death, as all lives must.

Why waste time and effort trying not to be Alone Forever?

Why tire myself out? Why make myself unhappy? Why must I always cringe before the supposed righteousness of other people's normal lives, and attempt to squeeze myself into a normal life too?

Why must I always berate myself for not being what I'm not *and am never going to be*?

Why should this hard-won feeling of contentment with myself as I am, and happiness with myself as I am, feel *so* wrong?

Who is telling me to be something else? Other people? Are they telling me who and what to be? Where are they now, these other people?

I looked around. I was alone at the bus stop.

Where the actual fuck were they? Where were these ‘other people’, whose template for living I had spent my entire life trying to mould myself into? I could see nobody nearby. No other person. Nobody stood beside me holding a gun to my head and trying to force me to be like them.

So why was I perpetually holding a virtual gun to my head, *in my head*?

Why must ‘other people’ and their lives automatically be central to my chain of thought?

Could thought that is focused so relentlessly on other people even be *called* thought? The instinct to conform is just that – instinct.

All my life I had wanted so badly to be like other people that I had denied my self.

My instincts, my natural-born inclinations and desires, had always compelled me *not* to seek out the society of other people. I had been like this ever since I was a child. I vividly recall preferring to play with my toys on my own, and being filled with anxiety whenever I was forced to play with other children. That was no passing failure of child development – *that was the real me*, making his appearance early on. He stuck around. I’d spent all the years of my youth trying my best to kill that boy off, but he had steadfastly refused to be killed, and now here he was, a fully-grown man. Who was only just now starting to understand.

People had never really rejected me. Quite the contrary. If I am honest, people had more often than not behaved rather agreeably towards me, even being kind and considerate and friendly, when I let them. People were not now and never had been my ‘enemy’ in any sense. My only true enemy was *my own* evaluation of other people’s lives as a norm from which I had strayed and must align myself with.

The truth was now, and always had been, that *I had rejected people*.

Not the other way round.

Not the other way round.

In my adolescence and early adulthood, when I tried to *un-reject* people, I was no longer sufficiently like people to be successful at it. And I started to flail around in a kind of panic that I had come to call ‘Alone Forever’. With capital fucking letters and everything. Hah!

I reeled – standing there, on this mild late summer evening in 2014, at a bus stop outside the hospital where my mother lay dying. All of this, all of the above unspooled in my mind and heart and soul – and I reeled.

The insight was so straightforward and so powerful.

I am exactly what I am. How trite. How straightforward. How devastating in all its implications! My entire Alone Forever life – the loneliness, the despair, the misery, the failed escape attempts – had all been me attempting to deny what I am.

Why was all this only occurring to me now? Was it because my mother lay dying in a hospital bed, and I finally had to face up to true adulthood? Such is exactly what ‘people’ would say. I smiled, imagining the absolute self-assurance with which ‘people’ would start doling out their ‘wisdom’.¹²

Why had I never even considered that I was already myself?

That being ‘Alone Forever’ *is* me being myself¹³?

The bus appeared around the corner, slowed, and stopped. I stepped forward, got on, sat down, and watched the streets passing by in the evening sun.

Of course, I didn’t know at the time that my Great Epiphany was my Great Epiphany, and that it marked a permanent shift in my attitude.

I got home, watched a movie, and ate some dinner without thinking much of anything. My Mum was uppermost in my mind. The feeling of stunned recognition (that I was already myself and could be no other) lingered, but I set no great store by it. It was similar to the kind of contemplative ecstasy that follows a standard mystical

¹² Who knows how many ‘helpful’ emails I’ll get from armchair Freudians? I look forward to reading them all. howtobealoneforever@gmail.com

¹³ If you have had a similar experience to this, I would be very interested to hear about it – howtobealoneforever@gmail.com. A certain kind of reader will probably email me to tell me how my so-called Great Epiphany is something they realised for themselves at the age of 15, and I’m a fool for not realising it until the age of 45, etc. (You’ll have read things on the Internet. You know the kind of reader I mean.) I’ll look forward to reading such emails, but if you’re one of them and you think the flavour and consistency of this realisation at age 15, after your life-experience until that point, could ever be the same as the flavour and consistency of this realisation at age 45, after my life-experience until this point, I would politely doubt your capacity to form a proper judgement of anybody’s experience, least of all mine.

experience. In most cases, no matter how much the experiencer thinks he's been changed for good, all he's experienced has been an agreeable mental state that is already fading into memory.

Experience told me that within an hour I would be back to being my usual gloomy, self-pitying self.

I went to bed still marvelling at the scale and quality of this seeming revelation of my true self. I slept well that night.

The following day, I figuratively nudged the Great Epiphany's afterglow to see if it was solid.

It was still there. Still solid.

It remains solid to this day.

CAUTION NEEDED

The Alone Forever are prone to picking up enthusiasms the way regular people are able to pick up new relationships: one after the other, as if it's the most natural thing in the world. I no sooner have read a review of a book or film that sounds like my kind of thing, than I feel a powerful urge to read or watch it.

My description of my Great Epiphany might infect you with the belief that you have to have one, too.

Be cautious. If you get it, you get it, that's all I can say. It's like the subjective taste of water. You will know whether it's cold or warm, or whether you're even drinking water in the first place. No need to email me for verification. Never ask somebody else to verify this kind of experience for you. You're Alone Forever, remember. It's all on you.

Of course, there is no guarantee that moments after reaching the plateau of contentment described earlier in this section, a comedy tsunami of despair won't come along and wash it all away.

That could happen. We who are Alone Forever live in wooden huts on the slopes of an always-active volcano. The ground might disintegrate beneath our feet at any moment. The wrong thing could happen to us at just the wrong time, and send us careening over the precipice. Part of our estate is the cheerful acceptance that total, unmitigated disaster is always just around the corner.

Being Alone Forever is a shaky sort of life. There's no point pretending otherwise.

HOW TO BE ALONE FOREVER

So. What it says up there.

How? How to be alone forever? What sane person would even try to do it?

I hope I have shown that there is no simple answer – until there is one. And how simple the answer is.

True acceptance is the answer. Not the grudging kind. Not the kind we indulge in for many years – the ‘well, I suppose I’d better just make the best of it’ kind of acceptance that’s borne of having a minor epiphany a couple of times a year.

True acceptance is the recognition that you are *naturally Alone Forever by virtue of your inmost nature*.

True acceptance is not something that you consciously decide to make happen. True acceptance has to happen by itself.

You can’t ‘do’ acceptance. It’s not something you swallow like a pill.

If it fades away, it was never true.

Before you get to true acceptance, you have to spend a lot of energy trying to escape. Repeated lifelong failure is the fuel in the fire of acceptance.

With a boatload of persistence and at least a smidgen of luck, you *will* escape. The odds are on your side. Very, very few people are Alone Forever for life. I wrote this final section of the book mainly for the lifers.

If you do not escape, you will end up here, where I am. Middle-aged and Alone Forever, forever. This is when it’s all decided - when it’s all over. This is when you need to look after yourself in every sense. This is when you need something like this book.

Even if you disagree with literally everything I’ve said, you need to start thinking about the matters I have tried to address.

You should take all the practical steps I have outlined in the early and middle sections of this book, make up some of your own, and follow them all religiously. Then you will be mostly fine in body.

But what of your mind? Your soul, your spirit? What is the point of maintaining good health and a secure home if you're permanently weighed down by awareness that you missed the only boat worth being on?

Understanding is the key.

Alone Forever is a destiny, not an affliction. You are *not* the most misfortunate bastard who ever lived, born to a life of deprivation and of being misunderstood by 'society' (lol). The chances are you've spent years wallowing in that mud. *Strangely* pleasurable, isn't it, to feel yourself the most isolated, denigrated, doomed creature on Earth? (Have you got a meaningfully underlined copy of *Frankenstein* laying around somewhere? I have.)

I bring bad news. To be Alone Forever, properly Alone Forever, you have to give up your angst. You have to give up your suffering. Well, you can go on feeling angsty, and continue to suffer if you like, but after the transition from being Alone For Now to fully matured Alone Forever, you can only really *pretend* to suffer, for old time's sake.

Understand that, far from being the most miserable, unlucky excuse for an outcast who ever lived, you might well be the most fortunate and the most happy.

Understand that other people do not understand, have never understood, and will never understand, no matter how granular an explanation you give them. Who and what you are is inconceivable to those for whom friendships and love affairs happen as naturally as teething and hair growth. As I started out saying, and will say again now, by all means go ahead and try to make other people understand what you are. Perhaps only when you have verified for yourself that other people do not understand and cannot understand, will *you* truly understand what it means to be Alone Forever.

A great wealth of life remains to you still. Do I really have to make a list of the things worth staying alive for, and why other people and their values do *not* get to be the ones who define the scope of that list?

The bountiful world of nature. Charitable and volunteer work, if that is your thing. Books. Art. Travel. Sports. Mathematics. Computers and gadgets galore. Stamp collecting. The love and companionship of animals (is there anything better in this world than a dog or a cat?). *Building matchstick cathedrals...*

And in the end, ideally at a time and in a manner of your own choosing, the great release of death.

POSTSCRIPT

DAS BOOT

You stood on the headland and watched the boat recede until it was a dot on the horizon. When the dot disappeared you stared for a long time at the line separating the sea from the sky.

You only knew one thing, at this stage, one very simple fact: you were supposed to be on that boat. Not being on the boat was a personal disaster of the first order. It was the greatest catastrophe that could ever have befallen any person, and it had happened to you. It had not happened to anybody else, as far as you could see (you're quite alone here on the headland). Just you.

Nothing less than your entire human life depended on you boarding that boat. But here you are, standing on the shoreline. Why and how this situation happened is less important than the fact that it happened. And now you've got to do something about it.

You stood and you stared, straining your eyes to see.

Is the boat going to come back for you? Maybe it will, maybe it won't, who knows.

Is there any way you could go after it?

Without ever abandoning your watching of the horizon (because you have got to be *ready*: you wouldn't want the boat to reappear without you noticing it), you start to dream up various schemes to go after the boat.

At first you consider the simplest possible solution: dive into the sea, and catch up with the boat the hard way. But this is not an option for you. You never did learn to swim. You could not say why. Swimming is just one of many things you somehow never got around to doing.

You walk back and forth for miles in all directions. There is plenty of flotsam and jetsam scattered along the shore. All the random junk that was left behind by your patch of earth's previous residents. You're not the only person in history who missed the boat. (Sometimes you wonder what became of them all in the end – all the others who were left here like you. You don't like to think about it too closely.)

There's lots of wood, some of it rotten, some of it in good condition. There's twine. How about if you lashed together the stoutest bits of wood to make a raft? You could do that. It's not completely outside the realms of possibility.

But what do you know about building rafts? Nothing, really. And there's nobody here to teach you.

You get hold of a book called *How To Build A Raft*, and you watch a few videos on the Internet about building rafts, and then you get to work. You're a clever person. That's what all the departed people who managed to get on the boat often said of you, in strangely barbed tones: that you're *clever*.

Your first few attempts at raft-building are awful. Trial and error, though, trial and error... And patience. You stick with it, putting up with the inevitable early disasters. You stick with it, because what choice do you have?

This raft business has to work. You can't stay here on your own. You just can't. It's not natural. You'll die. You have to be on that boat. With them: with the others.

At last, it all starts to come together. Your first proper raft takes shape. Excitement mounts. You're going to do it! You look at the wide, empty sea, and you smile at the thought of the surprise on everybody's faces when they see you catching up with the boat.

Eventually, your raft is complete. The mast isn't up to much – it's just a strong branch with a couple of your shirts arranged as a makeshift sail. It'll have to do. You could easily drown while trying to catch up with the boat, but there's no staying here, is there?

You look up and around at the beach. By this stage, by now, you have been here for a long time on your own. This beach has been your home all this time. It's empty and silent now, except for the sounds of waves washing up the sand again, and again, and again, like a poem. You smile at the thought of the faces that the people on the boat would make if they knew you were comparing something to a poem.

Off you set. Instant calamity! Your raft, the labour of months – years – doesn't even make it past the first decent-sized wave. The water slops over the sides at once and you're soaked through. Trying to go any farther on this rapidly disintegrating bundle of twigs would be suicide. You're not interested in suicide, not yet, so you paddle back to shore, and go back to wandering the headland.

Every day, several times per day, you scan the horizon. You no longer expect to see the boat returning for you, but you can't stop looking out for it just the same.

More rafts are constructed. All the rafts fail. You don't give up, but you do slow down. The period between rafts grows longer and longer. The strange thing is that each raft you build feels as if it's going to be the one that'll get you to the boat. Every single time, you dream of how *this* time it's really going to work.

You're a dreamer, *and* you're a hard-headed realist. Those two poles weirdly co-exist in you. You know that the boat is now so far away that you're unlikely ever to catch up with it. You understand all this. You are not stupid. (You're *clever*, remember.) But you also know that you have to keep trying.

Soon your solitary headland looks more like a graveyard for wrecked rafts than it looks like a beach. You look around from time to time and wonder if it's worth all the effort. Which feels like the wrong way to think, as if you're betraying something. Yourself? The world? Society? God? Other people? All of them at once? Whatever you're betraying, you're betraying *something* when you think such traitorous thoughts.

Of course the effort is worth the effort! It's natural to be on the boat, sailing the seas of life with other people. It's *wicked* of you to doubt it...

Besides, not *everything* is riding on you being able to construct a seaworthy raft. There are other possible outcomes here. The more time goes by, the more it seems likely to you that you might not even have to do anything to get off the beach. Maybe the people on the boat will remember you and come back for you? *Yes*, that's it! There are plenty of different people on the boat, after all, and some of them are people whom you *know*, people who must remember you – *good* people, who will somehow understand that you've been left behind back here, on the beach, and that you're stranded and you need their help. Those people – why not call them friends? – will turn the boat around, or at the very least send some kind of material assistance. So you wait.

You wait, and you wait.

And you wait.

One morning, stepping out of the shower (you've long since made a home on the beach), you notice a patch of skin at the front of your scalp where there shouldn't be one. Over the next few months, the patch spreads. You peer sidelong at yourself in

mirrors, as you would at a stranger. Soon you have to acknowledge the truth. Age is starting to wreak its inexorable havoc upon you. It's not just taking your hair. Your face is sprouting lines everywhere. Your knees no longer appreciate you taking the stairs two at a time. You can't drink alcohol the way you used to. You often think that music is incomprehensible and too loud now.

The years have passed and taken your youth with them.

Still you scan the horizon, looking for the boat.

You've almost reached the point where you amuse yourself speculating whether there ever *was* a boat.

There definitely was a boat, you tell yourself sternly, and there still *is* a boat. You're as young as you feel, and anything is still possible. Et cetera.

It might be that the boat won't come back specifically for you – maybe it'll come back because that's just what boats do in this reality? Where boats have been once they can be again? Or something like that? What do the others on the boat-missing forums say about it?

So you wait.

By this stage, you've got so expert at waiting that waiting itself has long since become part of your existential framework, which you note in an amused journal entry. You could write whole essays on the joys and pains of waiting – and you do.

You stumble across a book written by a fellow non-traveller: *How Not To Give A Shit About Missing The Boat*. The title is self-explanatory. It's not bad in parts, but somehow you still want to get on the damn boat.

You start examining the waves that arrive on the shore, wondering if there'll be a message in a bottle or somesuch from one of your 'friends' on the boat. There's nothing.

Eventually, having wondered everything, having tried everything, you cannot help but wonder: *what if this is it?*

It's a difficult thing for you to wonder. You're strongly conditioned not to wonder that way. Everything you are is predicated on either catching up with the boat, or having the boat come back to you. In either case, you have only ever envisaged your future as one of being on the boat, somehow.

You have never contemplated a scenario in which you never, ever get on the boat.
A scenario in which your solitary beach is your home for life...

You shake your head. This whole boat analogy is really pissing you off!

What if the boat is truly gone?

What if the boat is never coming back?

One day you are brought up short, stopped dead in your tracks, by a new thought:

Say the boat *does* come back. *Would I even want to get on it now?*

At this new thought you really do feel like a traitor to yourself.

Everything you have ever been about is about getting on that bloody boat, and you are *damned* if you're going to give up, just like that!

You look around at the beach, and the wider headland. Another spring is sprung, and all is green and balmy now. The sea even looks blue. Years ago you fashioned a rather nice cottage made of flattened stones that you fetched from a quarry nearby. For dinner today you're having seasoned olives and fish, followed by some nice homebrew beer that you made yourself, and a couple of episodes of a TV show that you've started watching. You'll probably finish that book you're reading in bed before you fall asleep.

Nobody was meant to live like this!

Life is meant to be about stormy passions, and sweat, and laughter, and love! None of those things are found alone.

No – everything in you screams *no*. It's the boat, or it's nothing.

You spring to your feet, shade your eyes with both hands, peer at the horizon in all directions. (Your eyes lately aren't what they were. The years really are taking their toll. How old are you now? Older than you ever thought you'd be.)

No – you are *not* going to 'settle' for this. You are a human being! No human being would settle for silence and solitude and being... *alone forever*.

One day a visitor arrives. Wanders in, from the west. Somebody who's in much the same predicament as yourself. They do happen along from time to time. It's a surprise how many other people also failed to make it onto the boat. You exchange signals with each other occasionally. It's interesting to see how they're coping with

everything. Most of them are meek and mild individuals, much like yourself. Some of them seem properly crazy.

One day, you wake knowing the truth: the boat's not ever coming back.

Nobody on the damn boat even knows that you're not on it! Who is on the boat that you know, anyway? A bunch of old school 'friends' that you didn't even see for months, years at a time, and when you did see them their questions revealed... what did they reveal?

That they effectively lived in another reality.

Some members of your family are on the boat, true. They must know you're not with them. They must know you're not on the boat... uh, mustn't they? They never really did understand just who and what you were. Your solitariness was always mistaken for furtive secret-keeping. That was a *very* peculiar conversation you had with your sister that one time. She seemed to think you were lying about not being on the boat, or hiding somewhere on the boat, or something.

You turn your back on the sea. It feels peculiar. For all your life, that sea (and that damn boat) have been the focal point of everything. And now here you are, not looking at it, and actively contemplating life without it.

What's over *there* – what's in the other direction, the one you've always strained every part of your being to avoid turning towards?

You walk away from the sea into your modest, hand-crafted life. Nobody helped you build this. You worked for everything you have, and paid for it yourself using the kind of coin that people don't even imagine exists. Independence. Self-reliance. People don't know the half of it!

As you make your way along the grassy area between the beach and your home, you mull over the past however-many-years it's been.

It now all seems so breathtakingly obvious.

You not being on that boat isn't a matter of unfairness, injustice, bad luck, or weird circumstance.

Nobody did this to you. No agency of God or man did this to you.

Being here where you are and being what you are – *is who you are*.

A revelation so obvious and so far-reaching in its implications that you have to doubt yourself. (Just for old time's sake.)

It can't be true. Can it?

Oh, but it can. It can be true. It is true.

The truth about you is that there was no circumstance under which you were ever going to be on that boat.

You think back. You recall the period before the boat set sail without you. That was a long time ago now. The boat was moored just off this beach, its gangway stretching all the way to shore. The boat remained anchored here for *years*, slowly boarding its passengers.

All that time, you were right here next to it, living next to the boat with all the people who were preparing to set sail in it. You were a child, and then you were a teenager, and then a young adult, living next to the boat.

You could have got on it. You could have.

You didn't.

You even watched all the others getting on. You hobnobbed with the departing passengers down by the dock (or the quay, or whatever it's called: you're hazy on the terminology).

Years passed, and still the boat remained, moving gently in its shallow moorings.

You could have walked up the gangway at any time and got on the damn boat. Nobody would have stopped you.

There was no Popular Committee For Preventing You From Getting On The Boat. Such things don't happen and are not real.

You could have got on the boat. You didn't.

This, right here, is your moment.

Boats are for other people.

You exhale a long breath.

This might be the start of a whole new era for you – a whole new life. If you let it.

In fact, it might not be going too far to say that your life until now has been a sort of shadow life, a yearning for something that it was not your business to yearn for.

This life, your life, whatever it is, however big, however small, however grand or little it turns out to be, whether it leads you to heaven or hell, death or glory, or everything all at once, or nothing whatsoever: this life, just as it is, is the only life that is truly yours.

You enter your home and sit down. You open a book. You start up your computer. You get out the sketchpad. You turn on the TV. You get out the meditation mat. Or just put your feet up and do nothing. Or whatever.

You've got things to do.

None involve boats.

Appendix

The Practical Tips

1: Tell nobody that you are Alone Forever.

This is Rule number 1, in every sense, of being Alone Forever.

You do not talk about being Alone Forever. Not to anyone.

Why is this? Try talking about it, and discover for yourself.

You have to be it to know it. Other people are not it. You alone are it.

2: Maintain a fully-stocked medical box, and keep it fully-stocked.

List all the items you might feasibly need at home for all the common ailments, and all the uncommon ones you can think of, too. *Get the items.* Store them in a suitable box, and store the box safely. Check the box at least monthly. Be as diligent about this box as if you were the only survivor of the apocalypse and your life depended on this box (you are, and it does). Replace used or expired items as required. Ignore all the other tips in this book if you wish. Don't ignore this one.

3: Be watchful and cautious in every space you inhabit and every action you take.

Hey, do you fancy spending a few weeks in hospital? Me neither. So be careful. Attention on the stairs and the roads. Attention to your surroundings. Try not to let your guard down.

4: Brush your teeth at least twice a day. Use a mouthwash. Floss.

Keep yourself out of a dentist's clutches for as long as possible with the best oral hygiene routine that your money can buy. Electric toothbrush. Mouthwash. Flossing. The lot. Chew your food with care. Schedule regular checkups. No, you'll never completely evade the inconvenience and pain of fillings and so forth, but you can drastically reduce their frequency by getting serious about dental health.

5: Consider what you eat.

Good diet generally correlates with improved health. Improved health means being better able to live Alone Forever in whatever manner you're accustomed to. No, it doesn't mean a diet made up wholly of fruit and vegetables. Don't fall into the normie trap of over-exaggerating everything to its opposite. Just try to eat better. Going sugar-

free for two days a week could make a difference to your overall well-being. That's all.

6: Sit up straight. Exercise daily.

Maintain a good seated posture and do a minimum of 10-20 minutes' exercise per day, soldier, and you too can survive into middle and old age in reasonable condition whilst being Alone Forever. '*I wouldn't want to survive!*' is your obvious rejoinder here. I get it. You're planning to check out when you're 30 (you and the rest of the Alone Forever army), and you're far too cool for this aerobic school. But don't bank on always feeling that way. Exercise is the prudent course. Hedge your bets. Cover all the bases. Walk the odd mile or two. Take the stairs at work. You have nothing to lose by doing a few dozen push-ups and knee-bends per day, and a great deal to gain.

7: Beware mental health hypochondria.

Most of us will have a hazy belief that being Alone Forever is a sign of mental illness in and of itself. In some cases, yes, the law of averages alone dictates that some of us will, at some point, succumb to mental illness, or already have. But most of us will spend more time worrying about mental illness than being mentally ill. Which is a recognised form of mental illness in itself. Did you know that?

8: Come up with a method to notify somebody if you fall into distress.

We always have the unpleasant background anxiety of wondering what would happen to us if we fell down the stairs, knocked ourselves out, and were not discovered until weeks or months later. Take a deep breath and ask one of your friends, or a friendly-co-worker, or a family member, to check up on you regularly. If that's too much for you (and it is for me), consider setting up a 'dead man's switch' email. Even that is too much for me. I choose to take my chances, being still relatively young and healthy (and therefore invulnerable and immortal, natch). This might change when I pass the age of 50.

9: Retain some degree of contact with other people. It is advisable to remain socialised to *some* extent.

Get a job. That's the easiest way. Or join a hobby/discussion/encounter group of some kind in your local area. Whatever you do, the idea is to make your solitary life seem better by creating *contrast*. If you're ever going to get out of being Alone Forever, you will need to be around other people. If not, other people will frequently disappoint and irritate you so much that you'll be glad to get back to your mountain fastness of an evening. It's win-win.

10: Maintain conversations with people by prompting them to talk about themselves.

It's easy, effective, and nobody will notice you doing it. People will think you're a great listener. They'll project levels of wisdom onto you that you might or might not actually possess. Few of them will notice that you never seem to talk about yourself in conversation.

11: 99% of the annoyance caused by other people can be removed by ceasing to want their understanding or help.

Easier said than done, of course. I don't believe that 'ceasing to want other people's understanding or help' is within our conscious control. It is instead an attitude that has to develop over time. Given that much of the time when we're younger we're furious with other people for the many ways in which they fail to notice us and give us 'respect' (lol), it is of critical importance to us to transition out of that deeply harmful – and potentially toxic – worldview as soon as possible.

The ideal state of being for the lifelong Alone Forever is one in which other people are not a consideration at all, pro or contra. Don't scoff. It is possible. And you don't have to become a stonecold sociopath or stereotypical moustache-twirling supervillain in the process.

12: Understand that you will always be mistaken for things you are not. Embrace it.

The Alone Forever will most commonly be mistaken for ultra-furtive homosexuals, the men especially. If that bothers you, give it time. In a few years, it won't bother you.

13. Be courteous, polite and well-mannered to other people at all times. (Within reason.)

Don't be a pushover, but don't be a monster either. Strive to occupy the kind of middle ground that attracts the least amount of notice. Be neither a jerk nor a wuss. I take considerable satisfaction from knowing that most people who know me regard me as having solid, courtly manners. Hold doors. Say please and thank you. Never berate a store assistant, even if you think they deserve it. Tip all taxi drivers, and listen to their wide-ranging political viewpoints with non-committal politeness.

14: Get a job that you like, or at least one you don't hate too much.

If you are properly Alone Forever, you are going to be that way for the term of your natural life, however long that might be. A job is the most straightforward method of solving a couple of your problems. First, the problem of having no money with which to pay for the things you need to keep yourself in Alone Forever comfort. Principal among these is privacy. Alone-time. If you have no money, you cannot live alone, or not easily.

Second, a job enforces a degree of socialisation upon you that can feel grievously burdensome at times, but makes your solitude seem all the more luxurious because of it.

15: Keep yourself clean. Keep your clothes laundered. Keep your living space tidy.

Observe the basic disciplines of personal cleanliness. If you work, you may be in close proximity to other people for several hours per day. Do you want to be 'that guy' with the body odour problem whom nobody wants to confront? Personally speaking, I don't wish to be that guy.

Wash, bathe. Shave if you need to shave. Find the best deodorant and use it.

Launder your clothes. Get a washing machine and dryer, or use the nearest laundrette. It's no good washing your body if your clothes smell. Top tip: sprinkle the insides of your clothes with baby powder.

Let them say whatever else they want about you.

Let them say you are strange.

Let them say you are unfriendly.

Never, ever let them say you *smell*.

16: Stay busy. Keep occupied. Get a few projects to work on and work on at least one every day.

What is the Alone Forever person to *do* with themselves? That is up to you, but it must be something. It cannot be nothing. Whatever long-dormant dream you once had (uh, other than the dream of finding true love, of course), *now* is the time for you to dig it up and get cracking with it. If not now, when?

17: Do something big. A long-term super-project. The bigger, the better.

Seriously, go crazy with it. Anything up to and including world domination. If you still want to escape being Alone Forever, make *that* goal your Mega Project. Good luck.

18: Draw up a SURVIVAL list of items.

Tools and gadgets to get you through every conceivable level of personal and societal emergency. Store enough food and water to last about two weeks, or a month with careful rationing. You don't have to go overboard, as you most likely wouldn't want to survive in a scenario where you'd need your own food and water for longer than a few weeks.

Stock up on candles and portable lights. Batteries and all sorts of miscellaneous knickknacks.

Start a list now and add to it when stray thoughts strike. Then go out and assemble the contents of that list.

19: Have some kind of ‘pension plan’. Act as if you WILL reach old age. Prepare accordingly.

No matter how vehemently certain you are right now that you won’t make it to *[whatever age you currently think you’ll be dead by]*, the prudent course would be to plan as if you will, somehow, still be alive at *[that age]*. I know from personal experience that huge milestone birthdays have a habit of sneaking up on you. Life has a habit of just rolling on from year to year, decade to decade. You soon get to the point where entire years seem to last about three days.

The clever thing to do is to prepare for the possibility that you will reach not just middle age, but *old* age. And when you get there, what will you want to find? Start squirrelling away those nuts *now*.

If you do go crazy and jump off a high building on the eve of your *[trigger age]* birthday, it won’t make a jot of difference whether you have or haven’t made plans for your old age, so what harm does it do? And if or when you do make it past *[that age]*, you’ll have the smug satisfaction of having outsmarted... yourself.

20: SUICIDE – Consider now what might have to be done in the future, and make your peace with it well in advance.

Research your chosen method properly. Procure any equipment you may need. If the equipment requires maintenance, maintain it. Now put the question of suicide safely into storage and live. When the time comes, you will know that it’s come. Then, you must act before it’s too late.

21: Always have a long-form TV series to watch and enjoy. Build a library of movies, and watch at least one per week.

You might not need any prompting from me, but I heartily recommend sinking as many hours as you are capable into watching TV and movies. Don’t let it threaten your Mega Project, whatever that is – get your daily work on that done, no matter what. But then just watch TV. The years will *fly* by.

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