HOW TO SURVIVE THE APOCALYPSE

A BURNING OPERA
You are standing on a vast flat plateau of cracked desert. You have been up all night, once again, and dawn’s early light is just beginning to reveal the crabbed outlines of distant mountains, even as swirling dust clouds descend, obscuring the view. Out of the gloom, a rag-tag marching band of rabble-rousers, heretics, and refugees appears...
A bullhorn-wielding bunny appears, taunting the man they call Stetson, the cofounder of the desert festival.

THE HAT SPEAKS
BULLDADA
Very rousing, very carnivalesque. But if you think a party in the desert is going to assuage your cosmic homesickness you’ve been hitting the kool-aid a little hard.

STETSON
It’s not a cult or a carnival. The spectacle is not a substitute for experience.

BULLDADA
Hey Mr. Festival Founder, haven’t I seen you on YouTube?

STETSON
When we stop consuming we create. And a living culture is born.

BULLDADA
Are you trying to tell me that throwing some kind of Mad Max sock-hop in a dustbowl is gonna fix our wounded society? You gotta be in a zip lock cult to believe that shit.

STETSON
What else you gonna believe? The world around us is falling apart. This is a chance, a shot. We’re running out of time. So burning a man isn’t such a bad plan. Adversity brings us together. We have to build on the visions we dream. When we burn the old we can forge a new reality.

TICKET
LAWYERS
You agree to abide by the following rules: All vehicles entering and exiting the gates are subject to search by the gate staff. You agree to follow all federal, state, reservation and county laws. Commercial vending, drugs, alcohol, M-80s, fireworks and rockets, and all other explosives, prohibited. And by using this ticket you voluntarily assume the risk of serious injury or death. That’s right, we said death.

BEAUTIFUL FREAKS
BUD
Look at that camp in distance. It’s like a city of tarps, holy fuck! We’re like American gypsies. Look at these beautiful freaks. I want a piece of it. Nothing grows here. But dreams and desires. It’s time to party.

GYPSY DOGS
GYPSY DOG
We rose up from the wreckage. We moved like gypsy dogs.

We’re hunting for something we can call home.

The swirling dust cloaks the scene and parts again, revealing a Greeters Station. Grizzled gatekeepers welcome (and occasionally offer spankings to) a long line of dusty pilgrims, most of whom have driven hundreds of miles to the festival.

WELCOME HOME (TRANSMUTATION ZONE)
DARKO
This is a transmutation zone.

You never know what lies in store. I hope you have prepared yourself.

To give and take and give some more.

This is a transmutation zone.

Come on!

There’s no spectators in this show.

We’re all diving in the deep end here.

Leave no trace when you leave this place.

And hydrate till your piss is clear.

SPRITE and DARKO
I hope you have prepared yourself.

Hit all the malls along the highway.

Got sunscreen shades and bicycles.

Got condoms, tarps and cans of beans.

This is a transmutation zone.

Come on!

GREETERS
Have a little revel, work, revel and greet, work, revel and drink, fuck around, greet greet...
EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY NEED

JANET
It took two years for my friend to convince me
I needed to be here
With my child gone and husband run off
After seven long years he ran
My friend thought it would heal me, release me
Renew me, reveal me
"Embrace the change" she said
Then she flaked

SPRITE and JANET
Cornflaked and snowflaked
And mandrake and rattlesnake
Heartache and jailbreak
But don’t cry for my sake
‘Cause everyone aches and sighs
And everyone flakes and lies
Eventually everyone waits
And gets what they want
Well gets what they need
Everyone gets what they need

The three newbies wander toward a large Central Camp full of Burners. To one side, grinning freaks in bright furry clothes lie in a puppy pile. Call them E-tards. On the other side stands a group of snarling, leather-clad handy-babes. Call them Stomp Grrlz. They are cooler than you.

BURN IT UP
BROOK
Who are these people?
What do they seek?

Who are they kidding?
Is this relief?

BURNERS
I’m pissed and half insane
And I’m goin’ down the drain
I feel lost and stuck between
The camera and the TV screen
Want to sink into the wonder

We got food and drugs and shelter
We got gear for nasty weather
We got tiki lights and toys
We got decadence and joy

Not this debt I’m buried under
Let’s get high so we can find
The Coney Island of the mind

E-TARDZ
Want to build and not to bury
All the dreams that I still carry

STOMP GRRLZ
Just want to fuck and drink some beer
And party beyond hope and fear

BULLDADA
Don’t trust hippies or the punks
Aw fuck it all...our ship is sunk

BURNERS
Burn it up and burn it down
Bless yourselves with ashes
Let it burn
Ashes ashes comin’ down
Dust is only dust
So let it burn

We got devils in our closets
We got no one here to stop us
We got plenty of confusion
We got paranoid delusions

But never mind, we don’t really care
We’ll torch it anyway
You know that even junk will burn
And keep the dark at bay
And warm us through the night
And gather everyone
Into the fire of change

Burn it up and burn it down
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The dust returns, but much fiercer now. Eyeballs grow useless, particulate matter invades nostrils, and half-built tents are blown apart. It may be a metaphor, or a premonition.

STRANGE WEATHER
WIND DIVA
Strange weather
Hangs overhead
Hot dust or hard rain
Blows from empty skies
Is it the shift or a shattering
What will it bring?
In the harsh light of dawn
In the bluster of the long hot day
Strange weather, strange weather

Strange weather
Hangs overhead
Dust storm, it falls fast
Blows from empty skies
Is it a call to arms
Or just a fling down history’s Spiral stairs?
I wonder what will it bring
What we did here
In the long, hot day
Strange weather, strange weather

The newbies are not happy. They are learning that there is no hiding from the dust we are.

EVERYONE GETS WHAT THEY NEED

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WHERE IS THE SWEET SOUND TO BE HEARD?
Where is the pivot that moves the world?
The foghorns blow...
I don’t know
The two friends light the figure. A crowd gathers. Everyone tells their own story (like always).

MISINTERPRETATION
MASHUP
BEACH BURNERS
It’s performance art, man
But he’s taken it to the beach
Like a hobo hootenanny, right on dude!
He’s burning away his karma
It’s a post-punk, post-industrial, post-ironic immolation celebration
Tongue and cheek? Hmmm...
This is fucking awesome! Anyone got any beer?
Burn it down, burn it down
Burn the sucker to the ground!

A bunch of hippies, just a bunch
Don’t you know the Sixties came and went? Let it go
This is too weird, I don’t belong
Let’s get out of here
He’s a jilted lover, desperately trying to build community in an age of isolation
It’s fairly obvious
Ancient yagna, healing fire
Flaming one, source of life
A ritual, a flame of magic
A call to all the Pagans and Wiccans to converge
Burn the man!
Burn the man!

Time passes, in the artificially sped-up manner of dreams or movies.
It is a few years later, and another man is ready to burn on the beach.

THE PYRE
BEACH BURNERS
Rubber tires and Christmas trees
Mannequins and kerosene
Safety nets, tubs of grease
Burn it, burn it, burn it, burn it
Let it burn
Aches, ashes, dust to dust
Flaming god of love and lust
Melted crust, yes we must
Burn it, burn it, burn it, burn it
Burn it up and burn it down
Bless yourself with ashes, let it burn
Aches, ashes, coming down
Dust is only dust so let it burn

SCARECROW MAN
Ah-ah-ah...
Officer Friendly breaks up the proceedings. Frustration reigns.

FINE LINE
ELEMENTALS
This may be the moment you’ve been waiting for
This mess is really lame
But awesome just the same
From here on you’ve had a vision
There’s a fine line
Between fucking up and a mission

A glint appears in Moustachio’s eye.
Hippie dippy beads and formal gowns
Thigh high boots and fairy wings
Playboy robes and vinyl skirts
So short they lift on their own
Red hot panties on Santa Claus
A strap-on for Jesus H. Christ
Accessories for the body and mind
So the body won’t mind you at all
Accessories for the body and mind
So the body won’t mind you at all

Every man and woman
Every guy and girl
And tranny and tomboy
And oldster running wild
Is a blinky blinky star
Shining out on this dusty stage
Shining out from this dusty stage
Inside is out, outside is in
The costume that you wear
Is your marvelous, ridiculous,
Maniacal, lascivious, ostentatious
Dreamtime skin

THE POISON PATH
SHAMONICA
When I was an innocent child
Mama done told me, warned me about the ways of sin
Mama would scold me for being wild
And tell me to take my medicine
Which I did
They say that Eve ate the apple
Cause the serpent seduced her with his lies
They say the fruit was forbidden
And by eating the fruit she would die
But what if Eve were the first one
to dare?
And what if the snake were the bringer of light?
And what if the fruit just opened her eyes, all three of her eyes?
Put that in your peace pipe and light it light it light it on up
What if the world is a vision
A dream from beginning to end
Why not shake the dust, the veils
From your eyes
And make poisons and demons your friends?
A morning cup of joe
The tiny line of blow
A hit or two, you know
Intensifies the show

I KNOW A PLACE
MOUSTACHIO
I know a place
A long gone ancient lake
Far beyond the mountains
On the edge of the law
Empty and cracked
A mirror of the sky
Where monster trucks rage
And rocket cars break the bounds of sound
Beyond the pale
Beyond the law
Beyond the world
Beyond the pale

An alkali void
(What good’s a void if you can’t fill it up?)
An empty mirror
(We like to see ourselves in broken glass)
A blank canvas
(We can paint the town a devilish red)
A blazing waste
(And wasted we will be)
I know a place
(Where you don’t have to worry)

INSIDE OUT
JEAN/GENIE and GAZEBO
MANGO FANDANGO
It used to be a desert out here
A low rent look of khaki
Denim and scruff
But then the drag queens came
And fabulosity reigned

Rubber thongs and vermilion lace
Perversion and grace
Leopard stockings and Chinese robes
A menagerie of cheap shades
Bones in your nose
You know anything goes out here
Anything goes out here
Purple pudenda and dangling dongs

I Ain’t nobody gonna kick you off
(Never have to worry)
They won’t even know we’re there
(Anarchy is honest)
Cacophony is gonna eat this up
(Pass the ammunition)
This is where we’re gonna break on through
I know a place
(Burn it up and burn it down)
I know a place

Like all trips (and dust storms)
the flashback ends. The sun begins
To set behind the mountains and
The whole city starts barking
Like wolves. The newbies are
Unprepared for the evening. But
Flamboyant reinforcements arrive.

What good's a void if you can't fill it up?
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I know a place
(Where you don’t have to worry)
A long time ago
In the Hollywood hills
They swallowed the crystal light
They spiked the punch
They drove the bus into the center of your mind
The poison path
The shaman’s brew
The witch’s stew
Pandora’s box in a bowl
Straight to your mind
Let me know what you find
On the other side of the looking glass
Eat me, drink me, gorge on my psychedelic life force

They say that your brain is a filter
They say your nerves are technology
So, baby, why not press all the buttons
Punch in all the codes, do the math, the science
Pull the switch, turn on the lights
Oh the places you’ll go
The things you will think
The creatures you’ll meet
Oh the potions you’ll drink
When you take the poison path

Thoroughly confused, the newbies have no choice but to hop on to the nearest art car. The vehicle resembles an enormous yellow duck festooned with condoms. (Get it? A rubber ducky!!! Har-dee-har-har...)

BROOK
This might be nothing but smoke and mirrors
Or society’s grinding gears
Loneliness is not an excuse for Vegas
And everyone’s in their own world
Running round like a lost boy or girl
There are so many losers with stupid to burn
I wonder if I will get my turn

JANET
Don’t know where we are tonight
I don’t even know if it’s right
I’ve seen some strange things
Cabbages and kings
And I’d like to be thirty feet tall
Bouncing round like a gelatin ball
Maybe go until I hit a mountain or wall
I don’t know how I just thought that at all

CANDYFLIP
We could kick some ass in the Thunderdome
We could spank some ass in a smut shack
We could move our ass to a dance machine
We could wipe our ass in a shit shack

We could genuflect before Megavolt
Or chase down my DJ
We could meditate on the cosmic design
Of some LEDs in the clay
We could remember our dead in the temple instead
Or get lost along the way
And if we get bored, never fear
We can always piss and moan in our beer
And remember how very much better it was
To be pissing and moaning last year

Here’s to the city you’ve heard about
The neon nitty gritty
And the freaks are out
A great big blinky town
A labyrinth of clowns
For your amusement and amazement
Stimulation and engagement
Remember you’re the entertainment too
Here’s to the death march of fun!

BUD
We’re gonna rage hard tonight
We’re gonna party past morning light
I’ll be the mack
Cause they’ll know where I’m at, that’s right
With my sweet furry cowboy hat
And the whiskey in my camel pack
Not to mention I already dropped LSD
This’ll be so damn rad for me

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MC PHOENIX
Up next: Janet.

DON’T SEE ME
It’s so ticky tacky
The keyboards clacking
The 60 hertz hum of the humdrum drone
I’m all alone in a cubicle contraption
A node in a net reeling me in
Is it a sin to seek salvation in the smallest words sung to the air?

A long time ago
In the Hollywood hills
They swallowed the crystal light
They spiked the punch
They drove the bus into the center of your mind
The poison path
The shaman’s brew
The witch’s stew
Pandora’s box in a bowl
Straight to your mind
Let me know what you find
On the other side of the looking glass
Eat me, drink me, gorge on my psychedelic life force

They say that your brain is a filter
They say your nerves are technology
So, baby, why not press all the buttons
Punch in all the codes, do the math, the science
Pull the switch, turn on the lights
Oh the places you’ll go
The things you will think
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Oh the potions you’ll drink
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Thoroughly confused, the newbies have no choice but to hop on to the nearest art car. The vehicle resembles an enormous yellow duck festooned with condoms. (Get it? A rubber ducky!!! Har-dee-har-har...)

BROOK
This might be nothing but smoke and mirrors
Or society’s grinding gears
Loneliness is not an excuse for Vegas
And everyone’s in their own world
Running round like a lost boy or girl
There are so many losers with stupid to burn
I wonder if I will get my turn

JANET
Don’t know where we are tonight
I don’t even know if it’s right
I’ve seen some strange things
Cabbages and kings
And I’d like to be thirty feet tall
Bouncing round like a gelatin ball
Maybe go until I hit a mountain or wall
I don’t know how I just thought that at all

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MC PHOENIX
Up next: Janet.
THE END OF THE LINE

ANTIMONY
The spiral dance is a twisted strand Double trouble DNA band The cork screw unwinds Grapes of the vine The sparkling wine of your spine Uncorked, uncoiled A ladder ascending Stitching and mending The ties that bind The code of creation Programming us all for major mutation The end of the cycle The archangel Michael Is splicing us all with his blade But don't be afraid Remixed and remade We will dance to the beat of the final parade We will dance to the beat of the endless parade

Spiral dance is a dream distorted Data desire deferred I realize and I fantasize About finding my voice in a storm Not captured on disc Not hotlinked or twittered But screaming raw in the howling wind Its not a sin to seek salvation In the loudest words sung to the air

The next performer is the dread-headed Antimony, just back from the Amazon. There is a peacock feather in her fedora.

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The man that I thought was mine Is a small boy lost on his own The girl that I thought was me Is just the mask I wear

ANTIMONY and BROOK
Every man and woman Every guy and girl And tranny and tomboy And oldster running wild Is a blinky blinky star Shining out from this dusty void Calling out from this dusty void

SEED OF ME
BROOK
I stuck myself in a mirror Rejecting the world outside Now it's come vivid and clear That world I turned off Was the seed of me

BROOK
Why are you trying to capture my body? Why do you need to steal my face?
THE CLASH
MOUSTACHIO
He’s right you know
It’s not happening again
A passionate yearning drew us to this desert
But we’ve grown too big for our britches.

ELEMENTALS
Passion must move again or die
MOUSTACHIO
And it’s time for it to die

STETSON
It grows because it’s alive
The world is just beginning again
This is a snag, a hitch, the law can be appeased
It’s part of the plan, befriending the man

ELEMENTALS
It grows because it’s alive, it doesn’t want to die
STETSON
We are cooking up something everybody needs
Why shouldn’t they be drawn to our fire?

THE CLASH
MOUSTACHIO
I just don’t buy it,
this one last ditch bid
It was great but now it should end

PHOTOGRAPHER
For guys like me a glimpse of you is a lifeline in a labyrinth
To take a slice of your light is a taste from the table
Where truth and beauty break bread
Meanwhile, Bud wanders alone in deep playas, swallowed up in a psychedelic spin cycle. Who knew the void had a voice, or that it used a bull-horn?

You came out to the desert years ago
(Uninvited, uninvited)
Few of us really cared
(Turned the other cheek, looked the other way)
We liked your money
(Uh huh we liked your money)
And we didn’t mind the honeys
And we could see you could shoot on a dime
(That’s sexy)
And that was fine
(So fine)

But it’s quiet here in the desert
And we really like it that way
We like it here out on the edge of things
And we know you like that too
But you’ve taken it all to far, boys
You’ve taken it way too far
The crowds keep coming
Wanting something for nothing
And we ain’t giving no more
No we’re not giving no more
Stetson and Moustachio look on as their dreams go up in flames.

THE CLASH
MOUSTACHIO
We rose up from the wreckage
We moved like gypsy dogs
But now it’s collapsed and we should go home
(We’re building a place that we can call home)
Whatever you (we) say, whatever you (we) sing
They’ll catch the drift in your (our) eyes

PHOTOGRAPHER
I am not here to feed your fantasies
Your hunger for something to make you feel real
I am not a picture to mount on your wall
I am not an image to mount in your mind
The whole world is your playground
But we’re not just toys in a game
What you’re trying to capture escapes you
The moment you look through the lens
I don’t want to be real for you
And I don’t want to be fake
What do you want from me?

PHOTOGRAPHER
For guys like me a glimpse of you is a lifeline in a labyrinth
To take a slice of your light is a taste from the table
Where truth and beauty break bread
Meanwhile, Bud wanders alone in deep playas, swallowed up in a psychedelic spin cycle. Who knew the void had a voice, or that it used a bull-horn?

You came out to the desert years ago
(Uninvited, uninvited)
Few of us really cared
(Turned the other cheek, looked the other way)
We liked your money
(Uh huh we liked your money)
And we didn’t mind the honeys
And we could see you could shoot on a dime
(That’s sexy)
And that was fine
(So fine)

But it’s quiet here in the desert
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STETSON
You don’t see what we’re doing here
This is not a club for cool kids
We are doing this for all to see
We are giving light to culture
Thousands will hear the call
If we build the man, they will come
If we burn the man
Then everyone will see the smoke

MOUSTACHIO
Who cares about a bonfire man?
Nobody cares about a stupid scarecrow
We should burn a pig or a piano
Or a temple of black leather boots
Who needs another logo?
Why circle around the man
When we should disperse
Across the desert, across the land
Not gather our wagons in

STETSON
The man is the symbol of the...the pivot of the people
The center of the wheel we are just starting to spin

MOUSTACHIO
Don’t be chained to the fucking wheel
Culture dies the moment you name it

STETSON
The moment you tie it down
You are building another cage here
Another scam for another age here
Another spectacular con
But the cacophony is gone

MOUSTACHIO
Something great will be born
The flashback fades. Conventional neural circuitry reasserts itself, and Bud finds himself a cold, unkempt, and depleted human fool wandering shoeless in the golden dawn.

THE DAWN

BUD
I chased myself through a mirror
Reflecting the days to come
Now it’s come vivid and clear
The rabbit I chased
Was the end of me

The world that I thought was mine
Is a broken toy in my hands
And the girl that I thought was mine
Is not a toy at all

I stumbled into the control room
Of this carnival we call home
Nowhere to hide

STETSON
Nowhere to run
No one in control
Bud bumps into a disheveled Jean/Genie, who has maxed out on pleasure sluggary, and is doing no better than he.

JUST A MAN

BUD
I’m just a man
Just a fucked up man, that’s all
I am
Never was much I did right
So I’m doing all I can
Ask me who I am
I’m just a fuck up man
Just your ordinary fucked up man
Some people say we’re guilty
But maybe we’re just broken from the start
We’re all in this together
Just holding tight as shit’s falling apart
So never mind, I don’t really care
Let’s torch it anyway
You know that even junk will burn
And keep the dark at bay
And warm us through the night
And gather everyone
Into the fire of change
BUD and JEAN/GENIE
Transformation
Instigation
A way out of this place
This fucked up human race
A beacon for the wanderers
To gather at the edge
And light the midnight sun
Until the morning comes
I’m just a man, just a fucked up man
That’s all I am
Anything I ever planned
Got to shot to hell or out of hand
I’m damned if I try
And damned if I don’t man
I’m extraordinarily fucked up man
And now that old curtain call...

SYNCHRONICICITY

(FINALE)

BURNERS
You’ll get what you need when you least expect it
The world provides if you don’t reject it

STETSON
But what does it mean? What is the point? What does it all mean?

STETSON
Transformation occurs only through radical self expression

REPORTERS
Is this a cult man?

BURNERS
Chance is a dance
Designed to align
Reality and the mind
Synchronicity

OM

STETSON
You don’t see what we’re doing here
This is not a club for cool kids
We are doing this for all to see
We are giving light to culture
Thousands will hear the call
If we build the man, they will come
If we burn the man
Then everyone will see the smoke
BAND
AARON TAYLOR (guitar)
ANDREW PULKRABEK (contrabass, kazoo, musical director (Teatro Zinzanni))
CHARLES DARIUS (trumpet, sousaphone, guitar, banjo, bass, kazoo)
DANIELE MUTINO (keyboard, accordion)
DEAN MERMELL (keyboard, melodica)
JOHN HOLLIS FLEISCHMAN (drums)
MARK NICHOLS (Guitar, Xylo, Piano, Synth, Bari Sax)
ANDY STACK (percussion)
DAVID PETERSON (percussion, didgeridoo)

CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS
How to Survive the Apocalypse has been and continues to be a tremendously collaborative project. In addition to the above musical credits, special shout-outs go to: Phat Man Dee, who contributed melodic material to “Don’t See Me”; Aaron Taylor, who contributed a portion of his song “Bad Trip” to the track “MC Phoenix”; Julie Lewis, who co-arranged vocals on “Beautiful Freaks,” “Far Tonight,” “The Pyre,” “Party’s Over,” and “Misinterpretation Mashup”; Phoebe Jevtovik, who arranged “Temple” and co-arranged vocals on “Glowing City”; David Bergeaud, for additional arrangements on “Burn it Up,” “Inside Out,” and “Seed of Me”; Phil Smart and Davey B for playa sounds; and Daniel Rodrigues of Moondog Studios for additional recording.

CD package design by Deanna Alcorn; playa panorama by Michael Rauner; illustrations and cover design by Peggy Nelson.

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