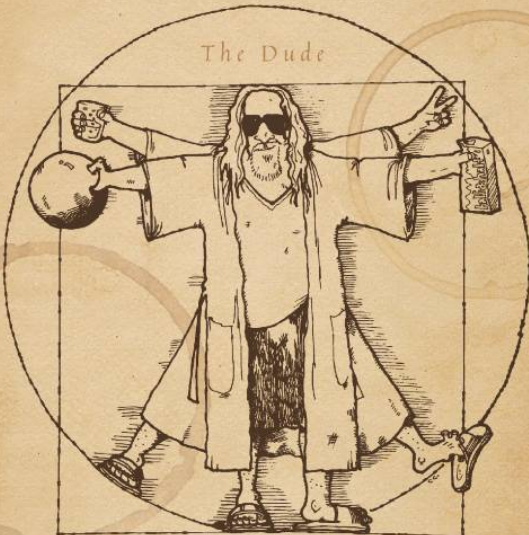


FROM THE CHURCH OF THE LATTER-DAY DUDE

# THE DUDE TESTAMENT

The Dude



A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLANATION OF  
"THE BIG LEBOWSKI" & DUDEISM

{THE FIRST SECTION OF "THE ABIDE GUIDE"}



OLIVER BENJAMIN & DWAYNE EUTSEY

# **THE DUDE TESTAMENT**

## *The Gospel According to Lebowski*

*A Philosophical Explanation of  
“The Big Lebowski” and Dudeism*

From *The Abide Guide: Living Like Lebowski*  
By Oliver Benjamin and Dwayne Eutsey  
Published by Ulysses Press

More information: [www.dudeism.com/library](http://www.dudeism.com/library)

### **INNERDUCTIONS**

Although there are over 600,000 ordained Dudeist priests around the world (as of July 2020) currently taking it easy for all you sinners out there, that still leaves 5,999,880,000 people (give or take a few) who have absolutely no clue what the Church of the Latter-Dude is or what Dudeism is all about.<sup>1</sup>

As founders of the world’s slowest-growing religion, we’re cool with that. All that proselytizing and converting, condemning and persecuting, crusading and jihading that some of our compeers in the world’s Big Beliefskis go through to feed the bull-dogma...well, it all just seems exhausting.

It’s certainly not the kind of missionary position we prefer.

Still, with so many folks living such stressed-out lives these days, we’ve decided to put aside our strict regimen of lounging around on our holy hammocks and sacred sofas to enlighten up an uptight world that’s apparently gone crazy.

Why? Because we believe that times like these call for living more like Lebowski...and we’re talking about the Dude here.

### **The Dudeist Frame of Reference**

For Dudeists, *The Big Lebowski* is more than just a movie. It’s a way of life, the philosophical rug that really ties the universe together.

That’s a hefty claim to make about a film, especially one that flopped when the Coen Brothers released it back in 1998. It may even sound downright silly or even sacrilegious for us to make such a claim about something that is, after all, merely entertainment.

However, we’re not trying to scam anyone here. If we understand it correctly, “mere” entertainment has always been an essential part of religious life, especially in Western civilization. Ancient Greek

comedies and tragedies, for example, were integral to Athens' sacred civic ceremonies. Medieval morality plays promoted Christian values to a wide audience more effectively than priests blathering Latin from the pulpit. These forms of mere entertainment served the vital function of unifying folks into communities and helped to create, promote, and reinforce the very ethos of our culture.

We agree with many wiser fellers than ourselves who say that movies serve a similar purpose today. Filmmakers reach into the same deep, mythic pools that their theatrical forebears plumbed to create narratives they hope will resonate profoundly with viewers. George Lucas did for *Star Wars*, Francis Ford Coppola did for *Apocalypse Now*, and Adam Sandler did for...well, not all films are life-changing.

Still, even in films dismissed as escapist diversions, what draws viewers to them at some level is an enduring mythic (and often unconscious) hope that through the light projected on the movie screen they'll see themselves up close, as the band U2 once put it. The stories we create, after all, whether told around a campfire, written in a book, performed on a stage, or projected onto a screen, usually end up creating us as well.

That's why we believe *The Big Lebowski* is more than just a "cult film." Cults, after all, are on the fringe. Yet with its millions of fans (according to Facebook), *The Big Lebowski* might better be described as "religious." Anyway, that's the way the worldwide Dudeist movement sees it. What is a religion, after all, but a cult that caught on?

It's not just about popularity, of course, otherwise, *Titanic* would have its own religion too. In religious texts and figureheads and characters we discover our deeper selves. And though the movie's main character is a slacker who calls himself the Dude, his eyes are a blue million miles.<sup>2</sup> In other words, he fits right in there in our collective unconsciousness, comforting all of us uptight, downsized, single-minded, multitasking, overworked, underpaid, plugged-in,

pissed-off, shit-on, run-down, zoned-out sinners by embodying what life is truly all about.

We're talking about *taking it easy, man*.

Yes, it's really that simple. Unfortunately, though, it's a message the square community doesn't give a shit about. Keeping us uptight, after all, helps them keep the baksheesh. Though the Dude was dismissed as a bum by overachievers like the millionaire Mr. Lebowski, and as a deadbeat by real reactionaries like the Sherriff of Malibu, we recognize him as a bona fide hee-ro. That is, the modern epitome of a long, lazy tradition of Dudes (both fictional and historical) revered across the sands of time for reminding us, in different ways and in different places around the world, to just chill the fuck out.

The problem is, most of these revered Dudes who once personified and vivified the Dude Way in their time and place are today no longer openly associated with the Dude word. Pan, the lazy Greek god, for instance, may have been pretty well regarded back in his day, but he no longer draws much water in our pious, preachy communities.<sup>3</sup> And languid philosophies like early Christianity and Buddhism have become oddly achievement-oriented since their uncompromised first drafts. It seems that where Great Dudes were once an integral part of the whole durn human comedy, they've gradually been swept under the rug, so to speak.

That's why we founded the Church of the Latter-Day Dude: to bring this Dude shit back to light, man. As we explain on our website:

*While Dudeism in its official form has been organized as a religion only recently, it has existed down through the ages in one form or another. Probably the earliest form of Dudeism was the original form of Chinese Taoism, before it went all weird with magic tricks and body fluids. The originator of Taoism, Lao Tzu, basically said "smoke 'em if you got 'em," and "mellow out, man,"*

*although he said this in ancient Chinese so something may have been lost in the translation.*

*Down through the ages, this “rebel shrug” has fortified many successful creeds: Buddhism, Christianity, Sufism, John Lennonism, and Fo’-Shizzle-my-Nizzlism. The idea is this: Life is short and complicated, and nobody knows what to do about it. So don’t do anything about it. Just take it easy, man. Stop worrying so much whether you’ll make it into the finals. Kick back with some friends and some oat soda, and whether you roll strikes or gutters, do your best to be true to yourself and others—that is to say, abide.<sup>4</sup>*

This here *Abide Guide* is meant to help you do just that.

## THE DUDE TESTAMENT

### All I Need to Know I Learned from Watching *The Big Lebowski*

The big picture! It’s hard to see sometimes. Whether we’re looking at it from a little bungalow on Venice Beach or a huge mansion in Pasadena, our thinking about life can become very uptight. There are so many strands to keep in our heads, man. It can be stupefyin’. What we need is something to help tie it all together. Luckily there are ways, dude. I can get you a TOE (theory of everything) by three o’clock. Or maybe you’re just looking for a well-woven tapestry of ideas, a foundation that will make you feel at home in the world. If that’s what you’re after, then listen to this a-here *Big Lebowski* analysis we’re about to unfold. It’ll really help you make sense of the whole durn human comedy. Parts, anyway. We’re talking about *Dudeism* here.

There have already been lots of those so-called “theories of everything,” which purport to sum up what life’s all about. For most of human history, TOEs have been conveyed through tall tales and scribbles on walls, and later through books and organized religion and law. But today people are busy, as I know you are. So the most popular way to step back and take in the “big picture” is through the compressed frame of reference that cinema provides. Now, many learned men have disputed this, but we believe that *The Big Lebowski* is the film for our time and place, high in the running for best movie ever, and so it makes a purty good substitute for all those severed TOEs scattered about out there.<sup>4</sup>

Okay then, what makes *The Big Lebowski* the most important—nay, most *religious*—movie of our day and age? It’s an important

question. Like most great books or philosophies or religions, the most powerful moving pictures help us perceive a much broader portion of the world than we normally witness in the course of our day-to-day lives. And, what's more, they do so without straying too far from the center of humanity. In the parlance of *The Big Lebowski*, they really tie our ruminations together.

For a brief two hours, great movies provide us with certain information. New shit comes to light and we are made privy to it. How much we dig the story that unfolds before us is usually determined by how broadly and deeply that light penetrates us. In other words, truly great movies shine light upon the whole darn human comedy. Not just the parts.

In the Coens' case, a lot has to do with their use of the wide-angle lens. Filmmakers who employ wide angles draw the viewer more intimately into the frame of reference. And the Coen Brothers are the uncontested philosopher kings of wide angles.<sup>5</sup> I'm not just talking about interactive hardware here—not only do they employ the widest angle lenses in their films of any auteurs in Hollywood, they also examine a broader view of the human condition than just about anyone in the league. And though it might not seem so at first, *The Big Lebowski* is likely their widest. And wildest. It's a purty good story too—makes us feel all warm inside.

Moreover, though it may not be evident upon first viewing (or second, or even the tenth), *The Big Lebowski* might well be the “widest” film in history. It stands (or slouches) alongside other great works of literature that tried to tie all of humanity together: Dante's *Inferno*. Melville's *Moby Dick*. Homer's *Odyssey*. The Bible. Compeers, you know?

Surely one of the reasons people find such inspiration and solace in *The Big Lebowski* is that, like those other farseeing works of literature, it sits on a bluff overlooking valleys and oceans, peering over the past and future horizons of civilization. With humor and humanity, it teaches mankind how to “fit right in there.” Consequently, like other great pieces of literature that are still

argued over and discussed and quoted long after they were composed, *The Big Lebowski* seems destined for the same sort of immortality. No other film has engendered so much scholarly speculation in such a short time, and no other film has engendered such ardent fans with such a propensity to employ its parlance in common conversation. And though some dismiss it as a ludicrous stoner comedy with a ridiculous plot, no other film provides such a welcome frame of reference for our time and place. We take comfort in that.

What follows is our attempt to ferret out the essential lessons of the film and how to incorporate them into the “big picture” of your own life. We'll mosey along the trail of the film with you, pointing out important lookouts along the way from the back of our high horse. You may not agree with everything we have to say, but remember, this is all just, like, our opinion, man. Take from this what you dig and forget about any TOEs we might accidentally step on or cut off. We're not trying to scam anyone here. No harm intended. More than anything else, we're sympathizing here, dude.

**THE LEBOWSKI LITURGY:  
Lessons for Living like Lebowski**

**1. You can die with a smile on your face without feeling like the good Lord gypped you.**

As if paying homage to the earliest human art form, the story starts off with a simple campfire chat, just as cavemen did around the burning branches eons ago. An elderly cowboy narrator starts us off by unfolding a tall tale about a tumbling tumbleweed—namely, an unemployed former hippie in the early 1990s, around the time of “our conflict with Sad’m and the Eye-rackies.” The narrator seems wildly out of place to comment on something happening in such a contemporary setting, but keep in mind that *The Big Lebowski* is shot in such a wide angle that it could be said to transcend the laws of space and time.

What is it that is so special about the shlumpy main character that can inspire such awe and admiration in our narrator? Certainly it’s not his wardrobe (flip-flops and a bathrobe), nor his wealth (he has to pay for a carton of half-and-half with a postdated check<sup>6</sup>), nor his nickname (“Dude—that’s a name no one would self-apply where I come from”). Nevertheless, the Stranger assures us that the Dude is “the man for his time and place.” In fact, the cowboy is so dumbstruck by the Dude that he loses his train of thought halfway through the introduction. We’re pretty baffled ourselves.

And just what is that time and place exactly? That’s the end of the 20th century, in Los Angeles, the city of angels. It’s the limit of the

great 3,000-year westward expansion, and the end of a particular era marked by unprecedented violence and ideological extremism. Most of those ideologies turned out just plain wrong, even though millions of people died face down in the muck fighting in their defense. Now, with nowhere left to go, his horse hitched to a post alongside the bosom of the Pacific Ocean, the cowboy is obliged to make sense of it all. What’s it all about? It’s a question that people have asked for ages, sure, but perhaps is more salient today than ever. So much is happening so fast that “it all” has become a swiftly moving target. Luckily, the Stranger’s encounter with the Dude and his story provides an answer he finds acceptable, one that can put a smile on his face before darkness finally warshes over. Hopefully it will do so for us as well.

**2. Allow there are some nice folks out there.**

First of all, the narrator is a friendly guy. That’s evident right off the bat. “They call Los Ang-elees the City of Angels. I didn’t find it to be that exactly, but I will allow there are some nice folks there.”<sup>7</sup>

The fact that he’s essentially kindly is one of the reasons he’s the only feller in the film who truly sees the Dude for what he is: an unlikely savior, despite his outward appearance and strange moniker. If you’re not going to approach “the whole durn human comedy” with an open, affable attitude, then you’re not going to get the point. Friendliness is the only asset you can share that doesn’t cost you anything—and in fact makes you richer the more you give it away. It’s the ultimate anti-gyp,<sup>8</sup> a pyramid scheme inverted.

In a day and age marked by greed, mistrust, and corruption, where neighbors don’t even know each other and people are divided along party lines, religious lines, lifestyle lines, and all variety of other arbitrary squiggles in the sand, it’s easy to forget just how much we have in common. It seems as if we have been divided and

conquered by the interests of others, not our own. Yet our differences are far more minor than we are led to believe. And though the Stranger is so friendly and accommodating that it borders on the humorously anachronistic, it is the Dude who truly raises humanistic fellow-feeling to the level that Socrates, the Buddha, and Jesus intended. *Shoosh*. Three thousand years of civilization really lost its train of thought there.

### 3. It's down there somewhere, let me take another look.

The story starts in earnest with the Dude arriving home to his modest Venice bungalow with his carton of half-and-half, only to be assaulted by thugs who have broken into his house. “Where’s the money, Lebowski?” one shouts while shoving the Dude’s head in his toilet. Even during this distressing interlude, the Dude is accommodating and clever enough to joke, “It’s down there somewhere, let me take another look.”

When *The Big Lebowski* came out in 1998, it too went straight into the toilet. *Where was the money, Lebowski?* It barely made back its investment. Luckily, it was indeed down there somewhere, and people did eventually take another look. In retrospect we now know that its original failure was because it was too unprecedented, too complex, and just too plain weird for audiences to digest right away. Even die-hard fans contend it takes at least three viewings before the whole thing begins to make sense, to snap into focus. And yet, life is far more complicated and unpredictable than a standard Hollywood movie—more like *The Big Lebowski*, actually. The plot doesn’t make sense, for one thing. Maybe the problem with life is the same as the problem with *Lebowski*: We just don’t give it enough chances to explain itself to us. And we expect it to make sense and wrap up all the loose ends. Fat chance! Life is an endless

string of funny *shtuff*, language problems, and ringers being thrown out for ringers.

Even the Dude admits, later in the film, that his thinking “has been very uptight” and that certain assumptions had prevented him from solving the movie’s central mystery. We who have taken *The Big Lebowski* as a commentary on what life is all about make it a point to be on guard against our own “uptight thinking.” We have to try to treat the world in the same way as we treat the movie—as a complicated case, but one that we can enjoy nonetheless, if we keep our minds flexible enough. In the end it may not be a problem to solve, but a story to enjoy.

### 4. Don’t say “hero,” ’cause what’s a hero?

There once was a time in cinema where the good guys wore white and the bad guys wore black, and their moral behavior was just as Old Testament as their hats. But of course, that got old fast. These days our grey matter is far more interested in the grey areas. In response to this didactic haberdashery, movies soon enjoyed the rise of the “antihero”—that is, someone who may not be 100 percent morally upstanding, but whom we nevertheless sympathize with, because we ourselves are morally closer to Silver than to the Lone Ranger.

In the mid-20th century, perhaps as a response to three major wars and the horror they produced, along with the dark side of a growing urbanization, the dystopian *film noir* genre took hold. *Film noir* was characterized by a strong male lead who was somewhat of an antisocial creep, yet who proved to be morally head and shoulders above those around him. Nowadays, these so-called antiheroes are everywhere in Hollywood. They’ve Bogarted the joint, in the parlance of our times.

Yet, these characters are antiheroes in affect only. Though *noir* heroes' clothing may tend to be black in color, they're still purveying a strict interpretation of white-hat cowboy morality—namely, it is the hero's job to go out into the world and do his best to “do the right thing, no matter what the cost.”

Conversely, the Dude (whose clothing tellingly tends toward earth tones) may be the only real antihero in the history of film. Why? Because he is so utterly, unapologetically unheroic. Whereas most heroes are marked by complacency at the beginning, they are ultimately called into action by a stark necessity. The Dude is the exact opposite: Though we learn that he was an activist for civil liberties in his youth, he has done virtually nothing in the intervening decades. “My career's slowed down a little lately,” he notes, without a trace of wistfulness. Whenever the “call to action” came in his life, the Dude let his answering machine take a message. *The Big Lebowski* chronicles perhaps the only thing he has actually “done” since his student days. Only, it's not even his choice. Others basically Shanghai him into action.

Perhaps we're meant to laugh at him at first; but given what we are forced to consider later in the film regarding the so-called heroism of military and business titans, it appears that the Dude's laid-back, utterly *passive-ist* approach to life may, in fact, be a perfectly heroic crusade. Part of the problem is that activism is such hard work. But Dudeism, on the other hand, is a crusade that the average person can easily incorporate into his or her life. And while some might find this a selfish lifestyle, what social scientists now know about the nature of happiness suggests the opposite. Merely acting as an example of self-contentment and non-aggression has a powerfully calming influence on everyone we come in contact with.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Dudeness is a highly contagious form of communicable *ease*. Notice how much affection the Dude generates from all those around him—he even brings a measure of comfort to human “paraquat” and known pornographers.

## 5. There's a little you should ask.

Let's not beat around the Bush. The film starts with Bush the Elder declaring war on Iraq. Now, in spite of all the philosophical and ideological pronouncements, if there's one thing Desert Storm was really all about, it was the “fucking money.” Yet there's nothing strange about this. Money is one of the principal pillars of civilization. Are you surprised at our tiers? Gotta feed the monolith.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Big Lebowski*, characters may espouse the value of work, heroism, freedom, story, production value, feelings, and so on, but what they're all really after is more money and power. “Where's the money, Lebowski?” is the refrain underlying the entire wild 118-minute ride, even as it's camouflaged by all varieties of competing philosophies, lifestyles, and ethical proclamations. Well, all except for those of the Dude, of course. All he expressly wants is to get his rug back (the thugs pissed on it before they left). However, even this modest fragment of material want ends up affording him all sorts of woe.<sup>11</sup>

The Dude thus provides an example of exalted ordinariness and humility, which we might all aspire to if we ever want to enjoy this a-here story you're about to unfold. Looked at through the long (and wide!) lens of history, everyone is astonishingly ordinary. The words of proto-Dude Oscar Wilde seem especially apt in a bowling alley decorated extensively with “googie” motifs: *We are all of us in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.*<sup>12</sup>

As if to set the stage for this Dudeist ideal, the opening credit sequence may be one of the most beautiful ballets of ordinariness ever filmed. A standing army of extras bowl in slow motion, showcasing a wide variety of everyday folks having a grand old time. It's easy to forget, with all the beauty and makeup and stylishness inherent in cinematic production, that we are in fact these roly-poly rollers, not dramatic heroes or villains. And thank Dude for *that*. That sounds exhausting.



## 6. You're like a child who wanders into the middle of a movie.

It turns out the thugs mistook the Dude for another Jeffrey Lebowski, a millionaire, whose wife owed money to their boss, a porn mogul named Jackie Treehorn. The next day, the Dude tells the story of the rug to his belligerent Vietnam vet best friend, Walter, who suggests he try to get compensation from the guy whose rug was meant to be pissed on in the first place. You know, just like in the Bible. Rugcompense. A wee for a wee.<sup>13</sup>

As they're arguing about this, their bowling teammate Donny keeps asking what they're talking about. Walter scolds him that he's out of his element. "You're like a child who wanders into the middle of a movie!" he says, refusing to fill him in. There is no reason why Walter should be so impatient, other than the fact that he's desperate to fix immediately what he considers to be a matter of critical importance. In other words, he is an action hero in the classic sense of the word. No time to argue. Chop chop!

Only problem is, it's not a matter of critical importance. It's only pee stains on a rug.

We are all like children who wander into the middle of a movie—every moment of our lives. Our lives are stories of unending complexity. Far too often, the best thing to do is to just say, "Fuck it, let's go bowling" instead of drawing a line in the sand and laying down the law. Had Walter and the Dude just acknowledged this from the start, none of the troubles that follow would have happened. If there's one thing we learned in *The Big Lebowski*...when the world kicks you, don't kick back. In most cases, it's a better idea to *kick-back* and try to enjoy the cycle.

## 7. Take the road less rambled.

The Dude takes Walter's advice and visits the millionaire Lebowski. Before the meeting, the millionaire's toady assistant Brandt takes the Dude on a tour of Mr. Lebowski's "various commendations" hanging on the wall of his office, all of them expressly mentioning the word "achievement" in one way or another. This is obviously in stark contrast to our non-hero Jeffrey Lebowski's life of non-achievement. However, instead of feeling blue about it, it's clear that the Dude couldn't care less. Despite this rare opportunity to see what vast riches and honors he might have accrued had he applied himself in college instead of smoking "Thai stick" and "occupying various administration buildings," the Dude seems pretty content with his choices. Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" suggests that life is full of forks in the road and that we have to be happy with the choices we've made. It is an attitude of nearly Nietzschean integrity, one that few of us are *düdermensch* enough to actually pull off.<sup>14</sup>

## 8. Nihilism is exhausting.

Of course, the Big Lebowski angrily refuses to reimburse the Dude for the soiled rug, calling him a "bum."<sup>15</sup> But rather than waste his energy fighting about it, the Dude says, "Fuck it," and leaves. Despite the tongue-lashing, he's in a good mood. He takes a rug from the house anyway and proceeds to flirt with a sexy young woman in a bikini sunbathing by the swimming pool.

But this, in fact, turns out to be Bunny, Lebowski's wife, the one who started all the trouble in the first place by owing money to Jackie Treehorn! Not only is she salaciously flirtatious with the Dude, but she also nonchalantly points out her boyfriend, passed out drunk in the pool. He's a nihilist, she explains: "He doesn't care

about anything.” “Oh, that must be exhausting,” the Dude replies, joking about his unconscious state. But there’s more to it than that—though the Dude stands in stark contrast to the big overarching *ideologies* of the 20th century, he also stands apart from their annihilating opposite, nihilism: the belief that nothing means anything.

After 20th-century science finally shot out the tires of religion, and then two world wars slid down the shorts of science, the notion that life was utterly pointless took hold among some of the more sensitive members of Western society. Nevertheless, the notion that “nothing means anything” runs so counter to everyday human experience that only German philosophers, mystical gurus, and teenage Goths have ever been able to convincingly pull it off.

Unlike those who, like the ubercapitalist Lebowski, adhere to static philosophies etched in stone, or their counterparts—like Uli Kunkel—who embrace a nihilistic postmodernism that threatens to liquidate all structure and human accomplishment, the Dude merely says, “Fuck it,” and excuses himself from the argument. To the Dudeist way of thinking, life is a liquid being passed from temporary container to temporary container. It’s a distinctly pragmatic approach to making sense of this strange movie that we’ve all walked into the middle of. What’s your drink, Dude? Naturally, it’s mostly half-and-half.

### 9. Will you just take it easy, man?

So far, the movie has served up two examples of what the Dude is not: He is neither an ideologue, nor a nihilist. Now we get to see yet another prime example of the *un-Dude*—his best buddy, Walter Sobchak. They say opposites attract—this universal principle is apparently at the base of this unlikely friendship.

Walter’s weakness is not vanity (like the other Lebowski), nor is it vacancy (like Uli)—rather, it is violence. Back in the bowling alley, Walter stands up for everything he holds sacred by pointing his handgun at an opponent who disagrees with Walter’s assertion that his toe has slipped over the line during a turn. It is such an outrageous response to such a minor infraction that we howl with laughter. Yet overreactions like this occur every day and they invoke howls of a different sort. And often we’re the ones waving around the figurative firearms. Uncontrolled anger makes S.O.B.s out of all of us.

As they leave the alley, just ahead of the police, the Dude begs Walter to “just take it easy, man!” It is a refrain that will repeat at various times throughout the film—one of the most defining phrases of the Dude. Though a hackneyed old hippie bon mot, it’s more applicable today than ever. A few decades of “can-do” ambition and eagerness have obscured the fact that the entire goal of our society should have been to help us “take it easy.” Explicitly reflecting Reagan-era individualism, idealism, and ambition, Walter seems to reject this as impractical. “Doesn’t anyone give a shit about the rules?” he screams. Yet to rework a key line from the New Testament: “The rules were made for man, not man for the fucking rules.” And to paraphrase Voltaire: “The ideal is the enemy of the Dude.”<sup>16</sup>

An overemphasis on justice and retribution has resulted in what some pundits call “The Age of Entitlement.” This is one of the reasons so many of us feel angry all the time. Yet, followers of the Dude should see those lines drawn in the sand not as provocations, but rather as helpful suggestions. Then we could fulfill the prophetic promise of our Dudeist ancestors and enter a true “Age of Enlightenment.” As the Dude puts it, “It’s just a game, man.” He might as well be referring not to the league bylaws, but to life itself.

## 10. Tie your room together.

Back at his house, we find the Dude not only in his home, but also at home in the world. The initial loss of his rug, which “really tied the room together,” is now more clearly put in context. Again and again in the film the Dude retreats to his modest bungalow to rest and recharge from the challenges that the outside world has imposed on him. And each time, he is able to find his center quickly by performing unorthodox meditative routines. In one scene, we see him freshly bathed, performing *tai chi* on his new rug,<sup>17</sup> a White Russian cocktail in hand. “As for compensation,” the Dylan theme song to the movie goes,<sup>18</sup> “there’s little he would ask.” The Dude doesn’t ask for much.

Having a cave to retreat to was fundamental to the evolution of human psychology. Regarding *home* as a sacred space instead of just storage for stuff is crucial in helping us deal with the dipshits waiting for us just outside the door. They say your body is your temple, but as temples go, it’s a little soft and vulnerable. A modest but quiet space with a good lock on the door is the little compensation we should ask.<sup>19</sup>

## 11. Be there, man.

In literature and films, landlords are usually depicted as greedy and cruel. But the Dude is such a loveable guy that his landlord, Marty, comes to him for support and kindness, even though the Dude is behind on the rent. It seems Marty is an amateur (very amateur) dancer and wants the Dude to come see his “cycle” and give him “notes.” Whereas many of us would say yes and then make an excuse for not showing up, we know that the Dude is on the level when he says he’ll “be there, man.” The Dude may not harbor much of cash value, but clearly he esteems friendships above all else. It is

one of the qualities, along with his “well tied together” room, that bestow on him a sort of tattered royalty in a world that would otherwise deny him any stature at all. Yet unlike actual royalty or wealth, friendship and floor coverings are credentials we all can acquire. And at the end of the day, what meaning does social standing have, except in the eyes of our compeers? Be there for the world, man, and the world will be there for you. You know, the Royal We.

## 12. What makes a man? A pair of testicles.

Despite having been given the brush-off by the tycoon Lebowski, a few days later, the Dude is invited back to the mansion. It seems Bunny has been kidnapped, and the old man wants to hire the Dude to help rescue her. “Big” Lebowski even breaks down in tears as he describes his love for the bimbo and wrestles theatrically with the meaning of manhood. So then, his confidence was all a show and actually he’s an old softie? Accommodating to a fault (and seduced by the first easy money of his life), the Dude finds his good nature hijacked into helping out.

In this, perhaps the central exchange of the film, Lebowski posits to the Dude, “What makes a man...is it being prepared to do the right thing, no matter what the cost?” to which the Dude flippantly replies, “Sure, that and a pair of testicles.” In other words, he doesn’t recognize this arbitrary obsession with “manhood” that people still carry around with them in a day and age where physical prowess no longer confers an advantage against wild animals or marauding tribes. Perhaps it is this more than any of his other traits—an unencumbered, nontraditional attitude toward manhood—that so ironically marks him as the “man for his time and place.”

As may be appropriate in a film in which the main character's moniker is "the Dude," the meaning of manhood is approached from a variety of angles over the course of the story. The Dude, of course, came of age in a universally long-haired era when masculine ideals were questioned and feminism took root, though that skepticism didn't last long. In fact, if nothing else, the gung-ho '80s seemed to raise the macho *modus operandi* into a virtual *manifesto*. This scene asks us to re-examine the query by addressing a flaw in its construction: What makes a man? A pair of testicles. To maintain any relevance at all, the question should be "what makes a *good* man?" And of course, the answer is, the Dude. He is *good*, man. And thurrah.

### **13. It's like Lenin said, you look for the one who benefits.**

Not to split hairs here, but it wasn't Lenin who said that. It was Cicero (Latin: *cui bono*). And though the Dude misquotes him, and uses the line to arrive at the wrong deduction about what happened to Bunny (that she kidnapped herself to scam money out of her foolish husband), it actually proves to be the solution to the entire case. The Dude's fatal flaw is that he, like most of us, tends to place too much trust in the wealthy and powerful. Like your average Pomeranian,<sup>20</sup> we are pack animals who reflexively trust those "bigger" than ourselves.

Had the Dude initially considered "who benefits" from Bunny's disappearance, he should have suspected the Big Lebowski—spouses are normally the first suspects in criminal investigations. Only, he presumed the old man was on the level and that his tears were genuine. Why? Because "he's fucking loaded."

Though the United States was founded on egalitarian principles, the population of this country is more trusting of the wealthy and powerful than people are in just about any other place on earth. No

matter how often it happens, every time a tycoon or politician is discovered to be a fraud, the citizens seem genuinely surprised. Noam Chomsky has ranted endlessly about what a good job the U.S. power structure has done in "manufacturing consent"—that is, in maintaining an illusion of democracy so that people feel in control, even as they're being shepherded slavishly around.

Perhaps we could all benefit a bit more from this healthy distrust of the power structure. Again, this was an idea introduced by the Dude's generation, conveniently forgotten and whitewashed over soon afterward. It may be time to revisit this *a priori* operative skepticism: that power and virtue are fundamentally at odds with each other. After all, this was a major contention of the world's more peaceful religions—Christianity and Buddhism—at least in the original, uncompromised first drafts. Shouldn't it be part of Dudeism as well?

### **14. The beauty of this plan is its simplicity.**

The story moves forward here when Walter unexpectedly joins the Dude in making the million-dollar hand-off to the kidnapers. As a direct result of Walter's naked greed and militaristic mode of operation, it all goes horribly wrong. This, despite his assertion that "the beauty of this plan is its simplicity. When a plan gets too complex, everything can go wrong. If there's one thing I learned in 'Nam..."

This is a line that would be funny if it weren't so eerily prescient. For decades after the Vietnam War, the United States knew better than to embroil itself in unnecessary overseas combat. That, in fact, was the one thing we supposedly learned in 'Nam—that modern warfare is the very definition of complexity. And everything that can go wrong probably will. When it involves human beings and their conflicting desires, there is no such thing as a simple plan.

Of course, that doesn't stop us from looking for ways to make life simpler. Each of the characters in *The Big Lebowski* boasts his own methods of fashioning the cosmic In-n-Out Burger so that it's easier to swallow: 1) We can buy into a fascist ideology, jamming all the loose laces into little cubbyholes in a giant shoe cabinet that reaches up to the sky (Elder Lebowski, Saddam Hussein, Bush Sr.); 2) we can give up and just cast everything aside as meaningless (the nihilists); 3) we can just follow someone else's dictates and piss on the problem (Treehorn's thugs); 4) we can see every problem as a heroic imperative to attack and rectify at all costs (Walter); 5) we can just avoid the big questions and spend our lives passing the time having fun (Donny, Bunny); or... 6) if we're truly ready to embrace life in its psychedelic, ludicrous, and laughable totality, we can follow the Dude Way.

### 15. No funny shtuff.

Because Walter tries to pull a fast one on the kidnapers, the hand-off is completely botched. You see what happens? Do you see what happens? Trying to scam someone is all too often not worth it. Honesty, humility, and honor may be as unfashionable as the Dude's shoes these days, but they're still the foundation of all successful human relations. As a result of this *funny shtuff*, it seems that the kidnapers are going to kill Bunny.

Morally self-serving Walter, conversely, is unfazed, suggesting they go bowling and forget about the whole thing. He is conveniently confident that Bunny is in on the scam and so is in no danger. Not that he would care if she were, though, having already labeled her a "fucking bitch" and a "whore" and somehow blaming her for the death of his fellow soldiers decades before she was born. Despite any of these thorny ethical issues, Walter is utterly consoled by the fact that they still have the million dollars. Like many in the

neoconservative movement his character will ultimately presage, he may speak the currency of values, but when it comes down to it, what he truly values is currency. He says:

### 16. "Who gets to keep the baksheesh?"

But of course, in the long view, no one does. "Where's the fucking money, Lebowski?" points not to the central mystery of the story, but also to the whole durn human comedy and our investments in the story, feelings, and production value thereof.

### 17. What would the Dude do?

When the complexities of life bear down upon the Dude, let's be honest, he freaks out a little, reflexively losing his cultivated cool. Like us, he is no saint, is far from superhuman, and so is not likely to be deified the way other prophets of peace sometimes are. But unlike most of us, his un-Dudeness doesn't last long. That's because he employs a simple, timeworn but tested approach to dealing with difficulty. We have to check this with his accountant, of course, but it seems that he has no investments.

Because he has long been accustomed not to expect too much from the world of pain, the Dude is easily and rapidly able to overcome its slings and arrows (and later, scissors and coffee mugs). Shortly after giving an anxious report to the police, the Dude is invited to the house of Lebowski's daughter Maude for a *tete-a-tete* regarding the kidnapping. And he's pretty cool and collected by then, mixing cocktails, being fatuous, maybe even flirting with her a little. And then, on the ride home, the whole disaster is already *fug gedaboudit*. Commiserating with Maude's Italian limo driver,<sup>21</sup>

the Dude says “I was feeling really shitty earlier in the day; I’d lost a little money. I was down in the dumps... Fuck it!”

### **18. Can’t be worrying about that shit. Life goes on, man.**

As we just said, the Dude is neither saintly nor superhuman. But he is a sort of superhee-ro, with a mighty and highly useful superpower—to take it easy where others might take umbrage. It’s a power available to all of us if we can just follow in the Dude’s jellysteps.<sup>22</sup> No radioactive sloth or koala need bite us to turn us into Duderman, just an appreciation for the beauty of simplicity. What’s more, the only reason he is thrown into a panic again and again from here on in is because he strayed from the original “simple plan,” the one that had served him so well for the last forty-something years.

### **19. That’s just the stress talking.**

Moments after telling Maude’s limo driver that he “can’t be worried about that shit, life goes on,” life does, in fact, go on and provides new shit to worry about. Dropped off at his house by Maude’s driver, he’s pushed into another Lebowski limo, that of her father. As expected, the Dude is accused of stealing the million dollars instead of handing it off to the kidnappers, despite his feeble protestations that he dropped off the money. The Dude is fibbing here, and perhaps this should concern us, but at this point he is of the opinion that no one has been hurt. But the stakes are raised when he’s presented with a human toe, purported to have been cut from the foot of Lebowski’s wife Bunny—a consequence of his failure to “achieve the modest task which was [his] charge.”

Every superhero has his weakness. Whereas superman has kryptonite, the Dude has his conscience. It’s not easy being nonchalant and easygoing when you care about your fellow humans and someone’s “life is in your hands.” As the only character blessed (or saddled) with compassion and conscience, the Dude is the only one with real cause to worry about Bunny’s well-being. It would be so much easier to “take it easy” if he were truly as apathetic as his adversaries presume.

Flung into another funk, the Dude plies Walter for help and advice at a coffeehouse but is met with nothing but aloof disparagement. “That’s not her toe,” Walter jeers, brushing off the gambit as the work of “fucking amateurs.” The Dude loses his cool at this point, concerned that the kidnappers will not only kill Bunny, but will kill him as well. This prompts Walter to try something more soothing. “That’s just the stress talking, Dude,” he says. It is a ridiculous and insensitive remark, but true to some degree. So what does the Dude do? He skeedoodles. The stress needs to stop talking.

### **20. This affects all of us, Dude.**

The Dude storms out of the coffeehouse and Walter calls after him, “This affects all of us, Dude!” Walter is, of course, referring to his “basic freedom” to holler in the coffeehouse, but this, of course, is Walter’s own “stress talking”—a morbid and monomaniacal creature that truly never shuts the fuck up.

As we mentioned before, it’s been shown repeatedly by scientific experiment that mood (bad or good) is far more contagious than any germ-based disease. The way we act around others influences them and spreads out throughout society like ripples in a pond. Though the Dude may not generate wealth and innovation, which might contribute to the comforts of civilization, his supernaturally positive outlook and easygoing manner are arguably just as

influential to society as a whole. Whereas Walter's exercising of his "freedom" to shout in a coffeehouse will have negative repercussions that will likely be passed on by everyone in the room to their friends and families, the Dude spares them all his own negative vibe by getting out of the place and getting his head together. Sometimes the villain we have to save people from is ourselves. To the bath cave, Duderman!

## 21. Shomer Shabbos!

As we've pointed out, the Dude generally values rest above activity. Walter, as an observant convert to Judaism, also believes in the sanctity of rest—the Jews, after all, invented the Sabbath. But how enjoyable and salutary can rest be when it's forced and only comes once a week? Rest is restorative; it's a drug that keeps our bodies and minds limber. Like physical medicine, if it's administered at the wrong time, it can't effectively treat the disease of *dis-ease*.

As opposed to Shomer Shabbos, *Duder Shabbos* is practiced far more regularly. At least once a day, if not more, a true follower of the Dude will set aside time to say "Fuck it" and do fuck all. Whether that entails meditating on the rug, or hanging out in the bath listening to whale sounds, or just enjoying the occasional acid flashback, it is imperative that we find time to fill with emptiness. It is at our own peril that we fail to recognize our need for nothing.

As if putting his super Duder power to the test once again, the Dude doesn't take long to get the stress to stop talking. *Shut the fuck up, stressy!* It is in the very next scene that we find him relaxing in the bath with a meditation tape of whale sounds playing in the background and melting candles flickering about the rim of the tub. He languidly finishes off a flaming roach of soothing dope.

The universe seems to reward him in his efforts to cool down by sending a message through his answering machine—his stolen car

has been recovered! "Far out," the Dude coos, until a crashing noise from the other room indicates that a whole new goon squad has broken in unwelcomed to his pad.

## 22. Don't drag this negative energy into the tournament.

Again, the Dude comports himself admirably under the circumstances. After his door is broken open, and his answering machine has been smashed with a cricket bat,<sup>23</sup> he coolly leans out of the tub to see who's there and calls out, "Hey man, this is a *private* residence." Then, when the cadre of three leather-clad nihilists storm into the bathroom with a wild ferret on a leash, he nods appreciatively, "Nice marmot." It is not until the crazed animal is thrown into the water to thrash around his crotch region that he starts to scream in terror. Some people have low boiling points. The Dude is such a chilled fellow that even when confronted with the rudest behavior, it takes nothing less than the threat of genital mutilation to bring him to simmer.

In the next scene, the Dude again comically supplicates his powerful, stern, and pathologically unconcerned friend Walter for help. As they sit in the bowling alley and the Dude shares his worry that the nihilists will cut off his "chonsson" if he doesn't give them the million dollars he lost, Walter says, "You've got to buck up. You can't drag this negative energy into the tournament." Like most people, Walter can be quite the Dudeist when it comes to other people's problems.

The Dude does his best, but even he can't let the situation slide. "Fuck the tournament, and fuck you, Walter!" he wails. It is the first time we see the Dude truly vulnerable. Darkness has "warshed over." In other words, he is on the brink of letting "this negative energy" defeat him. All is lost! Remember that the Dude's quest is not for a grail, after all, or money, or even his ratty old rug. His

mythological “hero’s journey” is to remain utterly lazy and relaxed even when the world makes it virtually impossible for him to do so.

It is in this *dark tookus of the soul* moment that the mythical, mysterious, and ludicrously mustachioed narrator, the Stranger, finally appears to provide sage and timely advice. Like some kind of Okie Wan Kenobi, the Stranger plays mentor to our floundering hero when he needs it most, sympathizing and bucking him up the way Walter can’t. As the “Tumbling Tumbleweeds” song from the opening credits fades in, the camera pulls back to reveal Sam Elliott in appropriately anachronistic cowboy garb, seated next to the Dude, ordering a *sarsaparilla*.

What the fuck is this, man? Some sort of acid flashback? In fact it is, of a kind. The cowboy is a mythical American messenger, like the gods of Olympus, or the angels of the Bible, wandering in from an old Marlboro ad or spaghetti western or peyote postscript, to bring a message from the great beyond, assuring and fortifying this guardian of the *Wilde* West Dude tradition in his darkest hour. And what is his message?

**23. “Sometimes you eat the bar [bear]. And sometimes, the bar, wal, he eats you.”<sup>24</sup>**

The Dude shrugs it off. “What is that, some kind of Eastern thing?” he grumbles. And of course it could be, though the cowboy demurs. We in the West spent the latter part of the disastrous 20th century looking eastward for inspiration because it seemed as if our Occidental canon had failed us. And yet the idea that the West is about achievement while the East is about contemplation is just a convenient fiction for target marketers. It may be true that Western religion and philosophy have created more anxiety on the whole than their Eastern counterparts, but the impulse toward moral indolence and meditative passivism has been at least as highly

revered and developed by European scholars as it has by Asian ones. If there’s anything the Eastern “side” of civilization has done better, it’s to organize those impulses effectively into a common system of technique, and to officially sanction them as an “answer for everything.” Oh, and also, as is the case with Indian yogis, sometimes they even do tattoo it on their foreheads.

**24. Dig styles.**

Though the Dude has bigger burgers to fry at the moment than making new friends with oddly dressed strangers, he is appropriately cordial to the man, so much so that when the Stranger offers him a compliment (“I dig your style, Dude”), the Dude cheers up noticeably and responds in kind. In truth, the Dude digs all sorts of styles. It is no mean feat, especially when there are so many “styles” evident in a tolerant modern civilization, so many of which run contrary to our own.

There’s a principle in many religions (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Norse Paganism) that one should always dig the style of strangers lest they be gods in disguise, dropping in unannounced to test our moral resolve. It’s a silly and somewhat circuitously self-serving notion, of course, but it probably had a profound effect on human relations. Welcoming strangers and digging their style, no matter how bizarre they might seem, is the grease that makes the wheels of civilization turn. Sadly, these “manners” sometimes appear quaint and laughably oldfashioned today. Radio shock jocks, sensationalist press, harried life schedules, and the commercial triumph of “fashion” have helped instill a knee-jerk tendency to criticize and prejudge people without giving them a chance to show their Dude colors. And knee jerks make jerk-offs of all of us.

There may be a semblance of truth to the old religious superstition though. We should treat strangers with kindness and



accommodation, but not because they are gods who will punish us if we don't. We should be dude to them because they are reflections of ourselves—just like the Dude's face in the "Are You a Lebowski Achiever?" mirror is an oblique reflection of the millionaire. But achievement can go fuck itself (and often does). It is only our kindness that will be reflected back outward and onward, down through the generations, across the sands of time. The man for our time and place is the one who can give anyone the time of day, no matter how rough a time they may be personally having themselves. Everyone we encounter deserves to be treated as sacred because with a few negligible exceptions, the entire world is composed of strangers. It's got that whole sacred cowboy thing goin' on.

**25. This is a complicated case. Lotta ins and outs. Lotta what-have-yous. Lotta strands in old Duder's head.**

Called back to Maude's loft, the Dude finally loses his cool with her. Like everyone else in the film other than the Dude, she stubbornly believes that she's got everything figured out already.

It takes a big man to admit he's wrong. But it takes a far bigger man to admit he doesn't have any fucking clue in the first place. Of all the claims leveled against religion, surely the worst is its outright, blatant, and unapologetic arrogance. To claim to "know" how the world came into existence could easily be diagnosed as acute megalomania if it weren't such a universal malady. It seems that human beings would rather give a wrong answer to an impossible question than say, "I don't know, sir." Am I wrong? Okay then.

Though most of the characters he encounters in the film pretend to have everything figured out, the Dude labors under no such delusions of omniscience. What's wrong with the world? What's right with it? What really matters? The Dude makes no such

elaborate, outrageous territorial claims to some sort of philosophical high ground. At several points throughout the film he happily admits his ignorance outright. While Walter is 100 percent certain that Bunny kidnapped herself, and Maude states that Bunny is "most certainly" the perpetrator of the scam, and the Big Lebowski pretends to be assured that it is the Dude who is "unrepentantly" at fault here, the Dude is the only one holding fast to the idea that the whole thing might be more complex...it might not be such a...a...you know?

Critics of the Dude make a lot of hoo-hah about how inept the Dude is as a private eye, how he can't manage to put a coherent thought or theory together until the very end of the film. What they overlook is that coherence is the opposite of creativity. What's the point in being coherent until the parts of an argument actually begin to cohere? Until then, the Dude with his jazzy, roundabout mode of expression and investigation is exactly the right type of existential detective for these complex, convoluted times—arguably even more so than Douglas Adams' existential detective Dirk Gently,<sup>25</sup> who stated in particularly Dudeish fashion, "Capital letters were always the best way of dealing with things you didn't have a good answer to." Like Dirk Gently, the Dude doesn't always have answers, but he has lots of strands waiting to be woven. That's both far-out and far-sighted.

**26. Do, do, do, look out your back door.**

After visiting Maude for the second time, and having her "not fucking listen" to a word he says and insist that he see her doctor, the Dude drives home in a good mood. He's listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival, smoking a joint, and drinking a beer. Though he's breaking several laws simultaneously, we enjoy watching him enjoy himself—it comes so preternaturally to him, after all.

Watching the Dude enjoy himself is like watching Superman shoot laser beams out of his eyes.

There is some debate over why the Dude is so happy at this point—after all, it’s likely that minutes earlier the doctor stuck his finger up the Dude’s anus to extract a sperm sample (we figure this out later). However, to conflate his good cheer with a clinical ejaculation delivered by a middle-aged male doctor surely strains at the limits of the Dude’s accommodating aspect.

Why is the Dude happy? A better question would be: Why are we surprised at unconditional cheer? And why don’t we experience it more often ourselves? There is so much even in the most miserable life to appreciate. After all, the song playing in his car is “Lookin’ Out My Back Door” and it concerns an imaginary parade of bizarre visions passing in front of songwriter John Fogerty as he lets his mind wander. It is one of the few classic rock songs that celebrate not just having sex and its variants, but the salutary effects that imagination and meditation can have on the harried soul. The “back door” in the song surely leads to the unconscious. Then again, who knows, it might just refer to his anus.

### **27. A few burgers, some beers, some laughs. Our troubles are over, Dude.**

Shortly thereafter, partially because of the pot and beer, the Dude crashes his car. As he struggles to get out of the damaged vehicle, he is surprised to find a crumpled-up piece of homework wedged in the seat. It is a clue to who stole his vehicle, and presumably made off with the million dollars! In a traditional film, this would be a turning point. But in *The Big Lebowski*, it’s just another hilarious wrong turn.

With greater investigative resources at his disposal, Walter dons a business suit and takes up the case—that is, figuring out whose

homework it is, and where he lives. Pleased that they are on the verge of getting the money back, Walter says their “troubles are over” in anticipation of the merriment they will soon enjoy after they’re finished suffering through Marty’s dance quintet, his cycle, or as Walter puts it, his “what-have-you.”

It doesn’t come to pass, of course. The Coens don’t allow the Dude more than a brief moment of satisfaction or hope before *pulling the rug* out from under him again and again. And yet the “burgers, beers, and laughs” line points to the very meat and potatoes of the movie: There never were any fucking troubles, Dude! They threw out a ringer for a ringer. In other words, all the troubles in the film were of the characters’ own making. And any real pleasure to be found in life could have been obtained cheaply from burgers, beers, and laughs. And this, before the vaunted million dollars ever entered their lives. Let’s not forget, let’s *NOT* forget...to not forget this.

Just because we’re *ennuied* doesn’t make us saps.

### **28. We’ve got a language problem here.**

After driving Dude’s rapidly deconstructing car to his house in the Valley, Walter and Dude enter the alleged thief’s house and confront the 15-year-old kid by thrusting his homework at him (in a plastic baggie, for dramatic effect), demanding an answer. And then, the incredible happens. In a film where all the characters “blather” without end, the kid who contains the answer to the whole thing (parts anyway) won’t say a peep while they’re doing business here!

For a man accustomed to using language (as well as handguns) in order to dominate other people, stonewalling is an inexcusable infraction of the rules of engagement—remember that, for Walter, nihilism is worse than nazism because even an evil argument is

preferable to none at all. Little Larry's refusal to play by Walter's rules naturally drives Walter insane. "We've got a language problem here!" he shouts, before heading outside to exact punishment by smashing the brand new Corvette that he thinks Larry procured with a portion of the million dollars. Echoed here is the cruelly delivered threat to *Cool Hand Luke* by his prison warden: "What we have here is a failure to communicate." In other words: The problem is that you refuse to let me dominate you. And in fact, Little Larry is foreshadowing a later scene in which the Dude does exactly the same thing. Little Larry may in fact be a Little Lebowski on the way.

In many ways, the entire movie can be seen as an exegesis on "the language problem" Walter objects to. Though Walter resents the fact that Larry won't reply to him, he himself doesn't ever allow anyone to disagree with him. What's the use of engaging with someone who has already drawn his lines in the sand? Though he may supposedly be "a fucking dunce," Little Larry has sized up his predicament and reflexively determined that he must employ *Dude-jitsu* in dealing with his adversaries. It is a mute echo of the Dude's principled "Fuck it" in front of Lebowski.

Perhaps it is due to the fact that he has been so expertly out-Duded, that here we see the Dude for the first time utter out of his element. Certainly this is his most un-Dude point in the film; he sinks so low as to curse out the youth in front of his dying father, and even maintains that they "know" Larry took the money! Dude, you're being verry un-Dude. Thankfully, this brief Dude-parture doesn't last for long.

As modern politics and Gallup polls prove, very few people budge from their tightly guarded positions, nor even listen to the arguments of others. As Steven Covey puts it in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, few people actually listen to each other. To employ "emphatic" listening is to understand that communication is far more complex than just a series of signs, signals, and symbols. If someone isn't prepared to listen, why waste

your energy? As a Dudeist version of that cheesy pop song might go: "You say it best/When you say nothing/Stonewall."

Yet to understand language as a fluid, creative process that must be played with and batted around is the first step toward being more Dude. No cunning linguist, but a cuddly one, the Dude plays with words and phrases like they're part of some crazy game, echoing things he's overheard from other characters in the film, always reinventing ideas to suit new situations. Other characters utilize language and conversation aggressively. For example, Walter steers every discussion toward the Vietnam War, Maude uses language as a method of social stratification, and Jackie Treehorn employs conversation merely as a tool of distraction and manipulation. But the Dude uses it to seek synthesis. By borrowing ideas and phrases from other characters, he weaves a sort of epic stoner poetry from the threads of other people's assertions.<sup>26</sup>

## 29. Jerk off by hand.

Few of us might remember that the early 1990s were filled with a brave new hope that technology might save us from one of the most problematic issues facing mankind: getting laid. After all, in the developed world, we can get housing and food and diversion, but experiencing orgasm when administered by someone else is still a challenge for most people. Thus it wasn't long after the dawn of computer porn that people envisaged a time in the near future when our sexual needs would be easily satisfied by "virtual sexuality." Soon we were all going to be fucking virtual partners without having to buy them dinner or respect them in the morning, and no one would care! Johnson? What do you need that for, Dude?

This brief flirtation with high-technonanism is captured neatly by the Coen Brothers in the exchange the Dude has with Jackie Treehorn after being invited to his "unspoiled pad" to discuss the

matter of Bunny's disappearance. Porn king Treehorn laments the fact that video technology has made it easy for "amateurs" to enter a world of porn. Like any savvy capitalist, he hopes to maintain his status by developing ever newer and more robust technologies to better administer to the ancient and much-loved pastime of rubbing one's genitals while pretending someone else is. But the Dude sees through the charade. "I still jerk off manually," he says. And why not? Why should he pay for something he can do himself?

The technological world we live in has not replaced the biological one. To some degree it has enhanced it, but to a degree it's also damaged it. Our daily obsession with gizmos and internet spectacle has surely made a dent in the human condition, even as it's extended it. You know what I'm trying to say. Are you ready to be fucked, man?

The Dude is no technophobe (he sort of digs the beeper and huge telephone, and enjoys driving around and partaking of modern pharmaceuticals), but he is also precociously wary of the dawn of the "technological revolution." The point, as he seems to understand it, is to be extended by it, not dented. Look for the one who benefits: *Cui boner*. In many cases it is not we who are aided by technology, but rather the companies who are desperately trying to seduce us with their "objects like women."

### **30. The brain is the biggest erogenous zone.**

Though the Dude replies to Jackie Treehorn's statement about the brain with a dismissive "on you maybe," this is in fact a fully Dudeist approach to life. The Dude is no swingingdick womanizer or puffed-up macho man. The Dude balls, but the dude minds as well. It is for this reason that he realizes that he doesn't hold "the smut business" in high regard. His imagination is all he needs to find a more

natural, holistic avenue to self-satisfaction. *Do, do, do, look out your back door*. Don't, don't, don't look at too much internet porn.

As if in answer to the implication that he doesn't need Jackie's "business" and can make it up himself, thank you, we get a glimpse into the Dude's rich, sexy, and surreal "life of the mind." After Treehorn drugs his White Russian, the movie ushers in one of the wildest dream sequences in cinematic history.

### **31. Just drop in to see what condition your condition is in.**

Though the 20th century was hallmarked by "big ideas," not all of those ideas were bad. One of the most famous was the notion that there was more to our consciousness than what we were strictly conscious of. The rise of the psychological sciences paid testament to the fact that "this whole fucking thing" might be bigger and more complex than we originally imagined. And though Sigmund Freud is now pilloried for focusing too much on sex, aggression, and the subliminal (vagina), there's still a lot to be said for the power, depth, and breadth of the subconscious mind.

Is our subconscious a method for dealing with conflict? Is it a vestigial leftover from a biological inheritance? Is it a way of working out problems on another level? It don't matter to the Dudeist. As long as it's "fucking interesting" and "keeps our mind limber," we'll take whatever it serves up. Just like his approach in dealing with the conscious world, the Dude's approach to dreams and imagination might be to respect its more interesting elements without getting too hung up on what it all might mean. In order to strengthen the bridge between the conscious and subconscious, a fair bit of daily "checking in" is in order. Dudeitation, baths, quietude, and "tying the room together" are all ways to ensure that

we're well aware of our condition so that we can defend against the conditioning of others.

### **32. Don't treat objects like women, man.**

After the Dude wakes up in the Malibu police chief's office, he finds that Jackie Treehorn called the cops because he was being "abusive" at his party. Still under the influence of the drugged cocktail, Dude mumbles, "Jackie Treehorn treats objects like women, man." As we alluded to above, what sort of a Freudian slip could better sum up the fetishization and sexualization of technology during the ensuing decade and into the 2000s?

Several times in the film the Dude seems like an accidental prophet. Just as he saw where our aggression was heading by dating the check September 11, 1991, as he watched Bush declare war on Iraq in the opening scene, so does his limber mind intuit what's in store for the world when it comes to sex and commerce. In 1990 (when the film was meant to take place<sup>27</sup>) and even in 1998 (when it was filmed), the world still had no idea of the degree to which people would come to "treat objects like women," that is, as objects of desire. Remember that until the iMac came out in 1998, most gadgets were strictly coveted for their utilitarian economics, not for their "sexy" ergonomics. How's the smut business, Jobsey? These days, it's everywhere. Only the four unflinchingly ironic eyes of the Coen Brothers would see that a fetish for gadgetry is a variety of porn in its own right, not just a channel for its dissemination. And that's cool. That's cool. But the dangers of techno-lust are the same as the dangers of porn: namely, a disconnect from a more innate way of living, one which tends to make humans feel healthy and happy.

### **33. Keep your mind limber.**

The Dude returns to his home to find that Jackie Treehorn had it ransacked, looking for the missing million dollars. But at long last, the Dude gets his day in the sun—or moon, rather. Maude is there waiting for him and invites him to engage in a "natural, zesty enterprise." You mean, coitus? Oh, yes, Mr. Lebowski.

It is in the cozy, hazy, post-coital dog-day afterglow that the Dude finally pieces together the mystery of the whole kidnapping case. The yin and the yang come together to make everything whole. The Dude's fluid, alternately aggressive and receptive nature lent him the flexibility to "get down to cases." It increases the chances of conception. Though he claims that it's "a strict drug regimen" that keeps his mind limber enough to figure out this "complex case," we know that the drugs aren't mere dope or drink. Nope, the Dude is all fucked up on life, and it is the resulting "limberal" thinking that allows him to see the forest for the trees in a way that is impossible for everyone else in the film, addicted to sobriety as they are. (See "Duderinos Unanimous," at the end of this volume.)

### **34. You're goddamn right, we're living in the past.**

When Maude tells the Dude that her father doesn't have any money of his own and in fact has been a lifelong failure in business and everything else, the Dude realizes that he has been played for a fool. There never was any fucking money! The Big Lebowski embezzled the money and gave the Dude an empty suitcase to give to the kidnapers. Suddenly, the world has gone downright Biblical: The meek shall be exalted, the mountain shall be laid low. As the Dude is raised up, the Big Lebowski is revealed to be puny. And also, the lion gets in bed with the lamb. And soon, we'll happen to know that there's a Little Lebowski to be begat, down through the generations.

Moreover, as if to emphasize the Old Testament nature of all this new shit, the secret of Walter's Jewishness is subsequently addressed. And it is here that the whole scope and scale of the film is illuminated. As it turns out, *The Big Lebowski* is even bigger and wider and deeper than we could have imagined.

Because his ailing car won't make it all the way to Pasadena, the Dude calls on Walter again, demanding that he give him a ride even if it is Shabbos, the Jewish day of rest. Walter obliges, but complains that it's not really an emergency worthy of his breaking strict 3,000-year old laws. Here the Dude finally hits Walter where he is weakest, pointing out that he's not really Jewish, that he converted to please his ex-wife and only holds onto the old religion as a way to maintain a connection with his loss.

It's easy at this point to see this as just a funny little bit of character development—that Walter's obsession with Judaism is just an arbitrary reflection of how sad he still is about a five-year-old divorce. But in a movie in which the Dude is dressed like a Biblical Jesus and upholds the Nazarene's moral code; in which there actually is a debased character called "The Jesus"; in which Persian carpets, Babylonian ziggurats,<sup>28</sup> Hebrew traditions, and the Canaanite landscape of Los Angeles play so prominently, it's hard not to see this not only as a means to "wrap 'er all up" but to "wrap up" the last "3,000 years of beautiful tradition" as well.

Just as the Dude is reluctant to blindly ride the "wave of the future," rejecting much of the code of progress, so is he acutely aware of the crippling gravity of history. Ideology in all forms is a pernicious combination of "living in the fucking past" and anxious attempts to ride the "wave of the future." Like many a popular self-help guru, the Dude spends most of his time living in his "time and place," and borrowing only cautiously from other time zones, lest they bump him into a higher existential tax bracket.

Thus it is here that the Coen Brothers provide the widest of all angles in the entire sweep of their cinematic oeuvre. In having Walter scream, "3,000 years of beautiful tradition, from Moses to

Sandy Koufax...You're goddamn right I'm living in the past!" the breadth of what they're imparting appears fairly staggering. It seems that, like Walter, we too are living in the past, attached to a worldview we have grown apart from. It's all a part of our sick civilization thing!

Aside from minor modifications, America and a large part of Western civilization still operates from an ancient mind-set derived from the earliest beginnings of Western culture, one that is rather outdated and arguably maladapted for our time and place. We must ultimately move on and leave it behind if we're ever to enter the New Dude Age.

### **35. The whole concept abates.**

In many ways, the Dude is like the original Jesus, who briefly got his day in the sun and then was buried and resurrected as someone rather different. Though there are several pretenders to the throne, the Dude is the only "true Jesus" in the film. Donny's sacrificial death places him high in the running, and the Jesus has the name and the Latin pedigree, but it is only the Dude who embodies the reformist attitude that the Church never allowed to come to full flower. While St. Paul and the Council of Nicea refashioned the sage of the sagebrush as a god, the Dude's humanistic spirit slouched down through the ages, westward the wagons, through new Bethlehems, ultimately ending up on Venice Beach waiting to be reborn.<sup>29</sup>

The Dude represents a possible break with this crusty old tradition, incorporating the best of the Axial Age philosophy and freeing it from the fascist imperatives that our civilization perniciously added later. The whole Judeo-Christian concept abates because it doesn't adequately represent its original virtues. And as a result, it continues to throw out ringers for ringers.

So what, then, are our Biblical “dirty undies”? The linear, progressive notion of life and time; the necessity of justice and retribution; the need for an overarching meaning and explanation for everything; the myth of the hero; the idea of an end of history and a grand reckoning; the promise of a great reward for toeing the line until then; the sense of tribal “specialness”; and perhaps most outdated of all, the fucking TOE—the idea that we can ever arrive at a stone-chiseled “theory of everything.”

There’s more to this than our sick civilization thing, however: We’re still living in the past biologically. So we have to learn to stop teasing the monkey. As an example, the Dude stands out as the only character who can properly control his limbic system. Everyone else is buffeted around by their emotions, yawping like so many marmots or Pomeranians, addicted to drugs of their own production. Walter’s anger, as it turns out, has very little to do with Vietnam. Every time he blows his top in the film, it comes on the heels of a mention of his ex-wife or other unfaithful women (“You’re entering a world of pain!” “Shomer Shabbos!” “V. I. Lenin!”). Walter is not angry after all—he’s just down in the dumps. That’s just the *depression* talking.

The Dude is radically progressive, then, not in a political sense, but in an existential one. His character represents both a break with the emotional imperatives of biology and society and with millennia-old ideology that is long past its sell-by date. Whereas everyone else is miserable and unfulfilled and lost because they think they need a “direction,” the Dude shows us a way to be “at home” in the world even without a destination in mind. Like an old Taoist monk, he goes with the flow even as he remains utterly still.

After this revelation, Walter and the Dude arrive in Pasadena and find that Bunny has returned to the mansion with all her toes intact. Not only was there no money, but there was never was any fucking kidnapping. Everything’s a travesty, man! And the no-longer-so-Big Lebowski is unrepentant as he is revealed. He too is shown to be as miserable and overcompensating as Walter, sobbing on the floor,

mourning a life not yet lived despite its approaching end. It is a ghost of Christmas or a picture of Dorian Gray or a Marty McFly moment of redemption for the Dude, affirming once and for all that it is this Small Lebowski who deserves our admiration. That’s terrific because, in most cases, we are *that* Lebowski.

### **36. Get out of this thing cheap.**

According to the original listed runtime of the film (98 minutes), the movie should be over now. But there are still 20 minutes to go! Now that’s fucking interesting, man. Is there an unspoken message here? Perhaps it’s to underscore the fact that the conventional part of the story should be seen as separate from what it’s really all about.

Back among the flock of holy bowlers, Walter is holding forth as usual, blathering about how the Gulf War is all about oil, comparing it unfavorably to the Vietnam War—“now that’s fucking combat.” On the heels of this statement, he and the Dude and Donny face real-life combat out in the parking lot. The nihilists still want the money, and they’re prepared to “fucks you up” to get it. Though they will settle for pocket change, Walter adheres stubbornly to his 3,000-year-old Code of Hammurabi tradition of “desert warfare” rather than adopting a more flexible attitude. The Dude insists, “C’mon man, we’re getting out of this thing cheap!” but they go to battle anyway. Walter vanquishes his enemy, but Donny dies in the melee—from a heart attack. In a war between fanaticism and nihilism, the naive pawns among us will find themselves batted around like bowling pins.

Delivering a eulogy on the bluffs south of Los Angeles overlooking the ocean, Walter tries to wrap up the life of his friend Donny, but just as the Coens do with the story itself, he too will fail. There is nothing in the film to indicate that weedy, pale Donny is a

surfer, and his best friends don't know how he wanted to be disposed of.<sup>30</sup> Walter dumps the cremains from a cheap coffee can and the ash blows back in their faces.

This is what our lives amount to in the end: a silly comedy of errors in which we aren't even truly known or understood by our closest compeers. Sadly, real life does not wrap up as neatly as a typical Hollywood movie. Yet from the Dudeist point of view, this is no great tragedy.

Ultimately we all get out of this thing cheap. Regardless of all that we might acquire or achieve in life, we are all pisspoor in death, and recognizing that might allow us to recognize the priceless value of life. Our lives are our only true asset, and aspiring toward greatness, or power, or glory, or gold utterly misses the point of what we're supposed to do with our seed capital. Living is the end in itself. It is the greatest art imaginable, and everything that helps us appreciate it is an investment in our modest temporary checking account and the club of value.

### **37. Fuck it, Dude, let's go bowling.**

And so, having accomplished little and lost plenty, Walter says to his best pal, "Fuck it, Dude, let's go bowling." It is both a surrender and an embrace. There is no sport better suited than bowling to help visualize the nature and art of living. It is both an utterly pointless endeavor and an utterly beautiful pastime. It requires no special ability or conditioning. It is profoundly social. And even a child can do it.<sup>31</sup>

It is this: Take something heavy and unwieldy and set it in motion. Try to let it flow with balance and between a tension of opposites. Sit down and rest. Then stand up and try again. *Who!* Mark it lazy eight, Dude: that is to say, infinity. We are all of us dead in the water.

### **38. The Dude abides.**

To wrap things all up, or to make an attempt at least, our cowboy narrator shows up once again. We still don't know why he's there, but we like the fact that he is. He's a comforting presence. Without him we might not have recognized how important the Dude actually is, might have laughed him off as a mere buffoon. But by placing the Dude in context, priming us to understand that he's not just a man, but that he's "the man for his time and place" who is "takin 'er easy for us sinners," the Stranger achieves the modest task that was his charge, and he can get back on that suitably high horse, rambling further on down the trail.

This, of course, is the reason mankind stubbornly adheres to the idea of religion or God, and avatars like Jesus, Krishna, the Buddha. There's something undeniably comforting in believing there's a right way to do things, something prefigured into the tapestry of the universe, the rug that ties everything together. And that there are men for their time and place that can best exemplify how we ourselves might "fit right in there." Whether these beliefs are true or not, mankind is in desperate need of them. However, after 3,000 years of beautiful tradition, might it not be high time to look toward another bearded, misunderstood monk who drinks carefully from the sacred beverage of half-and-half?

When the film's folksy narrator wishes the Dude good luck, our hee-ro says, "Well, you know, the Dude abides," and the Stranger "takes comfort in that." But "Dude" has already been established in the film as a non-personal noun, as a state of being, as in the *Dude* and the *un-Dude*. "The Dude abides," therefore, doesn't just refer to this one person in this one place at this one time, but to an eternal principle of Dudeism. Down through the ages. Across the sands of



time. It perseveres as it plays. It takes it easy for us sinners. It always has.<sup>32</sup>

The Stranger then says, “Welp, that about wraps ’er up.” But of course, on face value, it absolutely does not. The Dude doesn’t get his rug back and we don’t know if he and Walter win the tournament. We don’t even know for sure if Lebowski stole the money, and if he did, whether it was ever returned. So many of the strands in old Dude’s head are still loose, flapping in the wind like the frayed ends of a half-woven rug. But then, why should *The Big Lebowski* be neatly wrapped up when life itself is not?

That’s the way the whole durn human comedy keeps perpetuatint’ itself. The story’s ludicrous. But it’s a good story. Don’tcha think? Forget about the fucking TOE. Were you listening to the Dude’s story? Sometimes there’s a frame of reference. It’s the worldview for its time and place. And that’s also the Dude’s, in *The Big Lebowski*. Abide by this.

**Appendix One:****DUDERINOS UNANIMOUS*****A 12-Step Program for Personal Dudevolution***

We're not sure why personal improvement programs always require 12 steps. Nevertheless, Alcoholics Anonymous pioneered the idea of the 12-step program and our version is inspired by theirs. Our goal is similar to theirs, but instead of trying to overcome alcohol or narcotic addiction, the Duderinos Unanimous program is much more general, designed to help us be more "Dude" from day to day.

**1. Admit that the whole world has gone crazy. We may be powerless over it. But we can take care of our own private residence.**

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," or so goes the Zen adage. Sometimes the greatest journey of all can begin by doing the opposite—by refusing to take any more steps. After so many people telling us what we should do to make our lives better, the most dramatic act of self-improvement can be to stop "trying" to do anything. Once we realize, "It's all a game," man, we can relax and get a less uptight view on the whole case.

**2. Believe there is a Dude Way to the universe.**

Dudeism is a nontheistic religion, but that doesn't mean we don't believe there's something tying "it all" together. At least on the humanistic level, the idea that there is a natural and harmonious way in which life unfolds is not only an important part of Taoism, but is increasingly being suggested by science—via disciplines like evolutionary psychology, complexity theory, chaos theory, and other far-out new shit that's currently coming to light. Although academics may say everything is relative, and some mystics say that life is all an illusion, the idea that there is a "high road" is at the very least a useful idea that can help us feel at home in the world, or at least in our own little corner of it.

**3. Be determined to follow the Dude Way. And to follow it further on down the trail.**

One of the reasons we can end up ushering un-Dudeness into our lives is because everything is so complicated. By consciously following the Dude Way and practicing Dudeist techniques, we can help simplify things and make sense of where we're going.

**4. Where's the meaning, Lebowski? It's down there somewhere, take another look.**

By always being skeptical and always pursuing meaning rather than material, we will bring a limberness to our minds that can roll with any gutterball and deal with all the dings and dipshits that may come our way. It is only when we feel unattached<sup>33</sup> that we abide; without strings, the world can't drag us along with it when it goes fucking crazy.

### **5. Say, “Fuck it.” That’s your answer for everything.**

Again, by leaving the strands in our heads unknotted, we can easily let them go. If things don’t work out, then leave them alone. We can try to tie it up sometime down the trail when things get easier. No sense wasting energy now when you can do things more efficiently later.

### **6. Take long baths and meditate on your rug.**

The ethos of modern civilization is “Just do it,” but the Dudeist’s is rather the opposite: “Just don’t do it,” or even better, “Just dude it.” To do nothing takes courage and discipline, but in the end, the struggle will be worth it, resulting in greater peace of mind and appreciation for the simple things in life. This will not happen overnight! A lifetime of business papers cannot be towed away in an instant. What are you not waiting for? Don’t do it now!

### **7. What in God’s holy name are they blathering about? That’s just like their opinions, man.**

Lots of people will tell you that you’re crazy for following the Dude Way. Remember that you’re not the follower of a crazy cult—they are. Just because there are more people in their cult doesn’t mean theirs is better. Also, have compassion for them—they know not what they undude. Your easygoing lifestyle is a threat to their entire worldview. But down deep they’re just uptight bullies, going around blaming you for the fact that life isn’t fair. They have their story, you have yours.

### **8. Be Dude to everyone you meet.**

There is no reason, there’s no FUCKING reason why you should ever be un-Dude to anyone. You’ll never derive any benefit from being a fucking asshole. Even when pederasts curse at you, or officers of the law make fun of you, maintain an easygoing attitude. People are afraid to be nice to strangers because they might look stupid. But stupidity is in the “I” (ego) of the beholder. Anyone who doesn’t appreciate your friendliness probably doesn’t deserve it in the first place.

### **9. Be there, man.**

In the immortal words of “righteous dude” Ferris Bueller, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop to look around once in a while, you could miss it.” The art of living is practiced on a day-to-day basis. Say what you will about the tenets of painting, dance, music, and filmmaking—there is no higher art than the one you doodle with your *existencil*. Be as proud of the canvas you paint every day as you would of one they’d hang in the Louvre.

### **10. Stop making illiteral connections.**

The Dude minds his mind, man. That’s because we are not our minds. Minds can be real worthy fucking adversaries—always making us feel bad or confused or down in the dumps. And they can trick us into thinking everything has something to do with Vietnam.

Adopting a cool, rational and detached attitude about everything can help us appreciate life instead of being frightened of it. Hey...nice marmot!

### **11. Adhere to a strict drug regimen to keep your mind limber.**

While the Dude advocates external drug use both in action and words, he means them only as a vehicle to greater understanding, not escape from the world.

Though drugs have been demonized over the past few decades, we need to acknowledge that we are in fact on drugs all the time—our brains are constantly injecting serotonin, dopamine, adrenaline, opiates, and other natural forms of junk into our veins and our brains. To try to moderate this via meditation, conscious behavior, and sometimes even some well-chosen external chemicals, is akin to cooking—we just need to get the recipes right to avoid suffering (mental ) health problems.

Of course, drugs aren't necessary to get high. We can get all fucked up on life just by learning to see our lives as an acid flash-forward. By developing the powers of our imagination through regular, determined daydreaming, reading, thinking, and other psychedelic pursuits, we can dramatically enrich the quality of our lives. Of course, like the real reactionaries and their pharma-illlogical lines in the sand, we too should differentiate these “good drugs” from the “bad drugs” upon which most of our population is heavily addicted: TV, consumerism, nonstop entertainment, violence, and status-seeking.

### **12. Spread the Dude word.**

The cool thing about Dudeism in general—and *The Big Lebowski* in particular—is that it's a great shibboleth. “Shibboleth” is a word from Biblical times that was hard for some people to pronounce and so was used as a sort of test to see if they were actually members of your “league” or not.

In helping to spread the Dude word, you're bound to find other like-minded compeers, you know? The world can be a dark place if you don't have others around who dig your style. What's more, you might even help “save” borderline assholes, fascists, dipshits, real reactionaries, and human paraquat who might be looking for an excuse to stand up (or lie down) and join the Dude movement. Cast a chill upon the world, dude. And make it feel all warm inside as a result. *Halle-Dude-Yeah!* Fuckin' A, man.

To officially take the Duderinos Unanimous vow, please visit: [dudeism.com/duderinos](http://dudeism.com/duderinos).

Copyright © 2011 Oliver Benjamin and Dwayne Eutsey.

**IMPORTANT NOTE TO READERS:** This book is an independent and unauthorized fan publication. No endorsement or sponsorship by or affiliation with Joel and Ethan Coen, Jeff Bridges, Gramercy Pictures, or other copy-right and trademark holders is claimed or suggested. All references in this book to copyrighted or trademarked characters and other elements of The Big Lebowski are for the purpose of commentary, criticism, analysis, and literary discussion only.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> If you want more information, would like to be ordained (it's free and easy, just like our ethos), or want to chat with other Dudely types, visit [dudeism.com](http://dudeism.com). It's your answer for everything.

<sup>2</sup> This is a line taken from the Captain Beefheart song on the soundtrack. Though the Dude's eyes are in fact a piercing blue, there's not a literal connection.

<sup>3</sup> That's partly because the real reactionaries pinned the whole loss-of-paradise thing on him by drawing the devil in his image. They figured, here's a loser, a deadbeat, someone the square community won't give a shit about.

<sup>4</sup> TOE is in fact a common abbreviation for "Theory of Everything," at least among physicists. Where religions once provided "theories of everything," the current scientific search for this has to do with a mathematical model that would incorporate all the fragmented theories of physics into one elegant whole. Interestingly, one of the fellows leading the charge is Garrett Lisi, a surfer Dude based in Maui who lives in his van (sometimes). When we contacted him about this he replied, "I can get you a TOE by three o'clock!" Far out. Dudeism has compeers in high places. See: <http://bit.ly/10nCT>.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 6 in Robertson and Cooke's *The Big Lebowski: The Making of a Coen Brothers Film* delves widely into this.

<sup>6</sup> The date on the check he's writing as he watches George Bush initiate a war of Biblical proportions upon Iraq? September 11, 1991. Ten years to the day before the consequences of that "aggression" would be made clear. This really freaks people out. But we assure you, it's not a prophecy. The Dude is just a man, man.

<sup>7</sup> The city's name comes from "Nuestra Senora la Reina de los Angeles" (Our Lady the Queen of the Angels)—that is, the Catholic

Virgin Mary. No actual angels were ever thought to have spent any time in Los Angeles.

<sup>8</sup> Though the Stranger says, "I can die with a smile on my face without feelin' like the good Lord gypped me," he's using a term many consider offensive, an epithet for gypsies, who were seen to be dishonest in commerce. But the Dude's philosophy can be said to honor that of the gypsies. Parts, anyway. Is the Dude a gypsy king?

<sup>9</sup> *Dudespaper* article concerning this research: <http://bit.ly/elmlsy>.

<sup>10</sup> This is underscored at the end of the film by Walter Sobchak's own determination that the Gulf War was "all about oil." It is possible that this was the first commercial film to outwardly espouse this idea. *Three Kings* and the famous scene with Mark Wahlberg being forced to drink oil came out a year later. Perhaps that's why Walter's assertion is muffled by the sounds of bowling: People weren't ready to accept this idea yet.

<sup>11</sup> "Wasn't it Jack Kerouac who said, 'If you own a rug, you own too much?'" Ed Burns, *Confidence* (2003).

<sup>12</sup> "We are all of us in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, 1892. Wilde may have introduced the term "dude" to U.S. shores. See "Dude Defined": <http://bit.ly/bJnIqe>. "Googie" stars were an important part of 1950s space-age design—the era of suburban bowling alleys and lofty post-war aspirations.

<sup>13</sup> An eye for an eye came originally from the Babylonian (present day Iraq) "Code of Hammurabi" before it was adopted into the ancient Jewish canon. This "code" contains some of the most horrific punishments ever dreamed up by humankind. So, though "an eye for an eye" morality may still be popular, taking it in context might reveal its correlative brutality.

<sup>14</sup> German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche imagined the coming of a new type of man, an *übermensch* (overman or superman), who would free himself from the bonds of religious and cultural conditioning and truly think freely. He also addressed the idea of “eternal recurrence” in which all events will occur over and over again in our universe, the acceptance of which should inspire not horror, but a form of contentment, at least in “great” men. Though both the fascists (like the other Lebowski) and the nihilists (like Uli) championed the ideas of Nietzsche, most scholars contend that neither actually understood his ideas properly. We think Nietzsche would have been pretty impressed with the Dude, though—he is both a truly free thinker, and at the same time appears wholly content with all the events in his life, unsavory as some of them may seem to others.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to mention that “bum” comes from the German *bummler*, meaning “loafer,” and originally had nothing to do with the idea of mooching. A bum was a lazy person, but not necessarily a drain on society.

<sup>16</sup> “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” *The Bible*, Mark 2:27. And “The ideal is the enemy of the good.” Voltaire, “La Bégueule,” 1772.

<sup>17</sup> The Dude is even wearing professional *tai chi* shoes, not sneakers, so you know he’s really into some kind of Eastern thing.

<sup>18</sup> During recording, Dylan would play the song, “The Man In Me,” in a completely different tempo than originally agreed upon, which could be part of the reason the song has such an easygoing, improvised feel to it (<http://bit.ly/1qQX6e>).

<sup>19</sup> Note that while it may seem strange that the Dude’s door opens outward (and causes him grief later in the movie), outward-opening doors are actually safer because they’re harder to break down from the outside.

<sup>20</sup> Walter’s ex Cynthia’s dog isn’t a Pomeranian, but a Yorkshire terrier. Just as the marmot in the bathtub is a ferret, and Donny mixes up Lenin and Lennon. Also, Jeffrey Lebowski is not what you

call the Dude, his Dudeness, or El Duderino. Perhaps taking potshots at postmodernist linguistic theory, *The Big Lebowski* is full of fluxed-up semiotics. Nearly every scene involves the inability of any of the characters to communicate properly.

<sup>21</sup> Though close-cropped comedian Dom Irrera plays Tony, the role was originally meant to go to an actor “about the same age, from whose livery cap a ponytail emerges,” according to the Coens’ published version of the screenplay. This suggests a closer cultural and sartorial compeer of the Dude. But then, it wasn’t necessary. The Dude relates to everybody.

<sup>22</sup> The Dude’s jelly sandals were Jeff Bridges’ own. He also wore them in *White Squall* in 1996. Similarly, the Japanese baseball shirt was also his own. He wore that as well in *The Fisher King* (1991). The Dude obliges!

<sup>23</sup> Germans and other continental Europeans don’t generally play cricket. But the cricket bat clearly suggests a foreign and unwelcome version of the all-American baseball bat depicted on the Dude’s shirt in an earlier scene, though held, oddly, by a Japanese baseball player. The whole notion of American national identity is hilariously mangled in *The Big Lebowski*, suggesting a sort of loss of the clear parameters of an earlier era.

<sup>24</sup> The Stranger pronounces the word “bar,” but he is saying “bear” in an antiquated rustic American dialect. Though there is some disagreement about this among Lebowski fans, the theme song from the 1960s Daniel Boone TV series proves that “bar” was an acceptable pronunciation of “bear.” See: <http://bit.ly/dYnizn>.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas Adams’ character Dirk Gently was born with the name Svlad Cjelli. It seems that Eastern Europeans have cornered the market when it comes to wacky and philosophical detective work. They also don’t like to use their given names.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, it’s not just the Dude who repeats lines from other characters. In The Big Lebowski universe, certain phrases and words like “Chinaman,” “abide,” “parlance of our times,” “where’s the money, Lebowski?” “this aggression will not stand,” “no funny stuff,” “your answer for everything,” “nothing is fucked,” “have it

---

your way, Dude,” and more float around and inhabit characters’ brains like spirits. Each time a line is repeated from another context it helps to illuminate just how much we are products of our culture, rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, the Dude seems to navigate this stream of weird clichés with more finesse than the others, employing them gingerly and at arm’s length.

<sup>27</sup> Though the Dude dates his check September 11, 1991, Bush delivered his “aggression will not stand” speech in the summer of 1990. Either the Dude has postdated his check by a year or so, or in addition to not knowing if it’s a weekday, he also doesn’t know what year it is. And that’s cool. That’s cool.

<sup>28</sup> In the second dream sequence, the bowling shoe cabinet that reaches up to the sky and up to the moon behind Saddam Hussein is a clear reference to the myth of the Babylonian ziggurats, which progress-obsessed men built in order to produce a “stairway to heaven.” As a result of which, God got angry and made it impossible for man to communicate and get along by creating “the language problem.” Do you see what happens, *Domini*?

<sup>29</sup> “The darkness drops again but now I know/That twenty centuries of stony sleep/Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,/And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?” William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*

<sup>30</sup> Does it reveal anything when we find out that Donny is Greek (his last name is Karabatsos)? One wonders—in a film where “Jesus” is a vicious and deranged pedophile, might it not mean something that a character who represents the highest peak of ancient civilization is presented as a feeble dimwit? Well dude, we just don’t know.

<sup>31</sup> It is also one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, commonly played sport in the world. 5,000 years of Dudeyful tradition.

<sup>32</sup> Today, “abide” is a word most commonly used by Christians to describe their loyalty to Jesus Christ. The Dude even adopts a shlumpy Christ-like stance with beers in hand as he says his signature line. While technically it’s just an echo of the other Lebowski’s statement that “I will not abide another toe,” it’s also got some of that olde-tyme religious flavor to it. Just like that good sarsaparilla.

<sup>33</sup> In the Buddhist sense of the word. Though almost everyone has “strings” (responsibilities to family, friends, jobs, etc.) Buddhism says we shouldn’t be “attached” to the outcomes or expectations of those relationships.