# Twitter Thread by Dr. Shadow



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## One of the most influential songs that I can recall is “All Along the Watchtower.” Have you ever really listened to it? This was originally written by Bob Dylan, covered by innumerable artists. Each putting their own spin on the ball as it approaches the plate, and in almost

every case it’s a grand slam. Think of how it begins. It’s in the A minor key, dark and driving. Like a hard rain at your back. The song literally starts off with the musical equivalent of “It was a dark and stormy night…” And there it is, the chords drilling you down into

the spot you’re standing. Try to keep your stride as the intro unfolds. The rhythm arrests you in place – you’re about to hear something important, you can’t miss this. Like an approaching freight train, the locomotive barreling down nearly out of control. You can look away

just the same as you can look away at a car accident you know is about to happen. Out of nowhere you get a taste of the scene, it’s heavy to match the beating wall of sound. “There must be some kind of way out of here, said the Joker to the Thief…” So now we have a

conversation. Two associates, clearly involved in the daily grind coalesce out of the mist. There’s a Joker and a Thief. Who among us has trouble immediately relating to at least one of them? The Joker, obviously troubled. Insanity creeping inwards. The world aflame.

He’s screaming for the escape hatch. Give me the lever to pull, whatever it takes I’ll do it.
He continues, the Thief listening intently. “There’s so much confusion, I can’t get no relief.” Obviously he’s been along for the ride a few times. Nothing making sense to him

anymore. He’s in the upside down. His words are dripping to the want to solace. For any healing balm to be presented, he’d do anything. The wall of sound drives on, quieter now in the intro to let us focus on the back alley moments which are about to transpire.

The Joker isn’t just complaining for the sake of complaining. He’s got a list of grievances. While the guitars murder your ear drums, he goes on, “…business men they drink my wine. Plowmen dig my earth. None of them along the line, no what any of it is worth.”

If that doesn't drive a nail into your soul you were born without one. He's laying himself bare! He's taking it from all sides. Think about what he's saying! He's not just up against a few people, he's taking punches left and right from entire institutions! BusinessMEN.

They're plundering whatever he yields. PlowMEN are churning his fields. And the worst part? They don't care! They can't care. They're just doing their jobs. He's up against something bigger than himself. He can't stop it, the Joker is cast adrift in a sea that harkens to

the whims of anyone else except the sailors navigating it's treacherous waters. He's up against power structures he can scarcely understand and is powerless to stop. No one knows what any of it is worth – they're just plowing it and scrapping it under. Mindlessly hoeing and

chiseling away at its true value. You can almost see him there, standing in a dustbowl with a starving family in a shack his grandfather built, trying to imagine how he'll feed his children barely able to walk.

The Thief finally chimes in. Relaxed and knowingly, as if he were expecting the Joker to have nearly lost his mind, "No reason to get excited, the Thief he kindly spoke…" Relax, bruh. I hear you. Calm down, friend. A warm, friendly voice on the other end of the phone.

Tension, and release. Tension, and release. If you ever doubt what half of music is all about, it's the duality between tension and release. The Joker can't take it anymore, and the Thief eases his mind – tension and release. The Thief follows with, "There are many here among

us, who feel that life is but a joke." A conscious acknowledgement of nihilism. So many before you, Joker, have given up. Thrown up their hands and let the pyramid of doom throw them asunder.

Listen closely – what is the Thief saying here? What does he mean? Dozens and hundreds before you have played the game and lost – because the deck was stacked against you. He's saying it like he isn't even playing the game anymore. Maybe that's why he's a Thief. Your mind

begs the question. How did they end up here? How did a Joker and the Thief arrive at this point? Where were they before? Clearly they have a past. Certainly there's consequences for speaking out against those holding the reigns, and the barrage of A minor chords furrows

our brows as we lean in to listen along. The Thief has a plan… "But you and I we've been through that, and this is not our fate…" Wow. Finally, daylight. The wretched Thief. The backstabber, the one who makes a living out of cloak and dagger dealings found a way out. He

hints at it, and the pivot is as palpable as a needle into your skin. This is not OUR fate. We've got a team now. Everyone else thinks this a joke, but not YOU AND ME, Joker. They're getting the band back together. Here it is. The tide is turning. Maybe they can team up.

Maybe they can do more than throw rocks at the plowmen running roughshod over the things they know nothing about. The intrigue swirls, the drama unfolds, “And this is not our fate.”

My god, what higher calling can there be than the destiny of rescuing themselves from the clutches of whatever tyranny and evil has befallen them. After all, we’re dealing with a Joker and Thief. If times have gotten bad enough that even they recognize the futility of

existence, things must be pretty rough. The Thief continues, “So let us not talk falsely now, the hour’s getting late.” A cliffhanger! The Thief has almost been waiting for this moment. He implores the Joker to calm down and be rational. Yes, yes, the business are just

selling it all for scrap. It’s a mess, we know. Other before you have jumped off the roof, but that is not the end in store for us. He Thief and the Joker are up to something. You can feel it. They’re not talking falsely. And the time is short, so they have to get down to

brass tacks. They’re going to animate and engage on something. The lyrics imply it, the music drives it home. The listener can feel it in their bones. It’s happening. Whatever it is, you can see the Thief putting his arm around the Joker and drawing him in to hatch a plan.

Isn’t this incredible? Isn’t this what everyone yearns for? They’re going to throw off the yoke around their necks and punch back against the systems driving them through the millstone. The game’s afoot.

And if you’ve never done psychedelics and listened to the Jimi Hendrix version of this song with headphones on you really cannot even imagine the depths to which your own mind can traverse. Deep in the throws of a trip, you won’t even know which way is up or down. There’s a

slide guitar, a backwards guitar, a blues-based chord progression shred fest. He literally grabs you by your balls and drags you into a tornado of guitar virtuosity and studio magic and spits you out like a stale piece of Bazooka Joe. Picture sticking your nipple into a meat

grinder powered by a Fender Stratocaster run through a Dunlap wah wah pedal plugged into a Marshall half stack turned up as far as those vacuum tubes will go before you blow the whole city-wide breakers just letting the bend in Jimi’s G string along the cherrywood

fretboard pull the skin right off your bones from his two and half step bends and slides. And now we get the last verse. The stage has been set. There’s a villain. There’s a plot. There’s a team. What’s next? We don’t hear from either the Joker or the Thief for the rest

of the song. They’re gone now, beyond reach. Something important happened to them and we aren’t entitled to their input. That’s over now, they may as well be dead to us. The narrator breaks in, “All along the watchtower, princess kept the view.” Hm, well this is certainly

different than before. We're not in the smoke-filled back room of the wayside tavern listening to the dealings between society's cast-offs. Now we've got a princess, a member of royalty, keeping vigil along the watchtower.

What is she doing up there? Can't you just see her plodding back and forth through the ramparts? High up on a stone wall of a castle-like fortress looking out of her domain for something. What is it? What is she looking for?

"While all the women came and went, barefoot servants, too…" Is she a cruel princess? Is she rude and rotten? Forcing these servants and women into chattel slavery for her desires and the kingsdon's upkeep? Or is she some sort of double-agent, disgusted as the treatment of

her fellow people? Is she tired of the harsh treatment of the peasants that sow her land and fill her king or queen's coffers with taxes? Or does she reveal in their plight and her own station above them?

"Outside in the cold distance, a wild cat did growl." Here we go, it's happening. "Two riders were approaching, and the wind begin to howl." The last words of the song push us along like the hands of the almighty himself. But where are we going? Are the two riders the

Joker and the Thief? Are they riding in the dark of night to put an end to this madness? Is it the princess who is behind the plowmen and the business men steamrolling the Joker and his countrymen into dust? Are the riders coming to assassinate the princess and her depraved

royal family? Are they bearing down on the castle to free the women and barefoot servants from this life of toil and pain? Or are they coming to put political heft on their side? Perhaps the system is holding back the princess, too. She sees the unjust treatment, and wants to

break out of the matrix. Now the Joker and the Thief are about to have a chip in the game- they're about to have a princess on their side. Someone with a seat at the table who can really throw a punch. Perhaps she's made some dealings herself and is just waiting for a spark.

Maybe she's got the king's royal guards on her side, maybe she romantically betrothed herself to a king's general who is just waiting for the command from his beloved to slit the throat of the ruler who keeps his servants barefoot and in chains.

How do we know? Where does it end? It's just as foggy and mysterious as when it began. I love this song. I love the way it weaves a tapestry and then pulls back at the last second to let you stew on the details. Legend has it Bob Dylan performed this song for the first time

with Jimi Hendrix in the audience. Two days later, Hendrix recorded his own version in the studio. Dyland's version is like angry folklore. Hendrix is like you're riding into battle on the back of a dragon wielding a crystal spear given to you by the gods themselves. You're

not even sure anymore why you're there, why the hell you're riding a dragon, who you're fighting, or even if you know how to toss a crystal spear, but you can't do anything else for the time being but hang on. I simply love this song, and every time it comes on I turn it up as

far as it will go. A remarkable masterpiece. Humans have been on earth for 250,000 years or so, and I am thankful I caught the last 0.002% of it so I could listen to this. Good night. /end