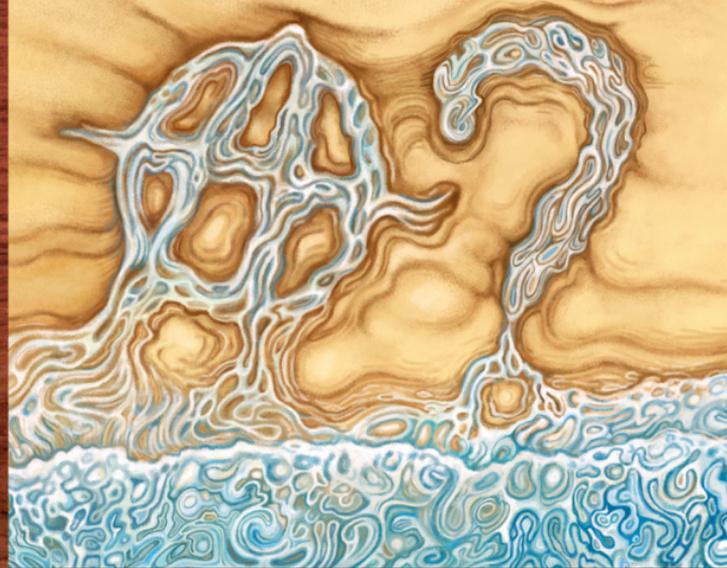
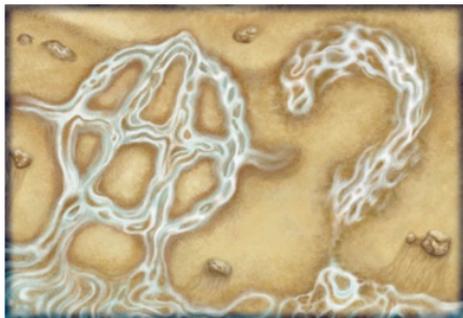


What  
Anarchy  
Isn't



# WHAT ANARCHY ISN'T



**Written by Larken Rose**  
**Illustrated by Poxodd**

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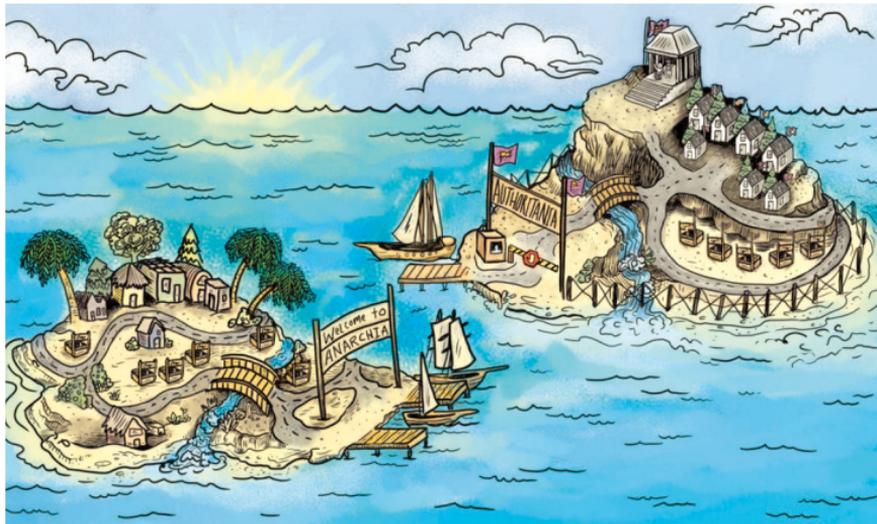
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Many people, when they hear the word “anarchy,” think of chaos and mayhem. They therefore assume that anyone who calls himself an “anarchist” must be in favor of disorder and violence. But that is the complete opposite of the truth.



Just as the word “monarchy” means “rule by one person,” the word “anarchy” literally just means, “rule by no one.” But even that idea—the idea of a society without a government—makes some people imagine a primitive, savage type of existence, full of violent conflict and without compassion or organization. But that, too, is a completely inaccurate picture of what anarchism means.

In fact, most complaints about anarchism are the result of people misunderstanding what the philosophy is all about. Most people who are scared of “anarchy” are scared of things that anarchists don't want and don't advocate.



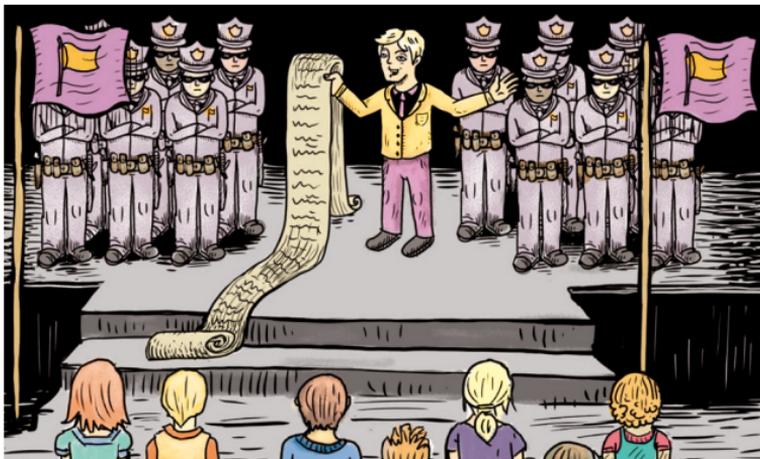
To help correct such misunderstandings, we will use the example of two fictional islands: **Authoritania**, where there is a ruling class (government), and **Anarchia**, where there is no ruling class of any kind. These will be used to illustrate what “anarchy” actually means, and what it does not mean.

One common misconception about anarchy is that it means “every man for himself” or “survival of the fittest,” where everyone has to be selfish and self-sufficient, where there is no real cooperation or organization, and where people all behave like violent, selfish animals.



This comes from the **false** assumption that there can be no order or structure to society without government—that without some sort of governing political body, people couldn’t and wouldn’t find ways to get along, cooperate and organize.

But in reality, government is never about true cooperation. Whether it is a republic, a democracy, a dictatorship, or some other form, government always constitutes a ruling class which gives commands called “laws” and uses violence to punish anyone who disobeys. That is not **cooperation**. That is **domination**. It is one group forcing its will on everyone else and making them obey.



Government forces people to fund its ideas by way of “taxation,” and forces people to cooperate with its plans by way of “regulation” and “legislation.” Ultimately, both are enforced by men with guns.

In contrast, true **cooperation** is about people voluntarily working together, of their own free will, without anyone else forcing them to. And people already do this, in thousands of different ways every day, without politicians or “law enforcers” making it happen. So no, obviously **cooperation** does not require the existence of political power.



And while it is true that authoritarianism and government power can be used to force people into various forms of **organization**, that does not mean that people are incapable of organizing **without** being forced, which they obviously already do, in many different ways.

In fact, the most productive examples of organization are already anarchistic in nature. Consider, for example, your favorite grocery store. Everyone involved in the hugely complex operation of growing, processing, transporting, displaying and selling food participates **voluntarily**.



Customers choose where to shop and what to buy, and all the other people involved—truck-drivers, stock boys, check-out clerks, administrators, etc.—do things in exchange for getting paid. This purely **voluntary** arrangement allows for an amazingly complex degree of organization and cooperation without anyone being **forced** to participate. This is literally **anarchy** in action.

In contrast, whenever government does something, a very small group of people (politicians) comes up with an idea and forces everyone else to go along with it. In the authoritarian version of a supermarket, the ruling class would tell people what to produce and how much, and would tell customers what they **must** buy and what they **must** pay for it. Anyone who did not comply would be punished in some way. That is how government always does things.



(Some anarchists prefer the term “**voluntaryist**,” because the philosophy is based upon the idea that all human behavior should be based upon voluntary interaction, not force.)

Another common but incorrect assumption is that, if there were no government, people would have no way to defend against criminals or foreign invaders. But one does not need a badge or special “authority” to have the right to defend himself or others against attackers and thieves.



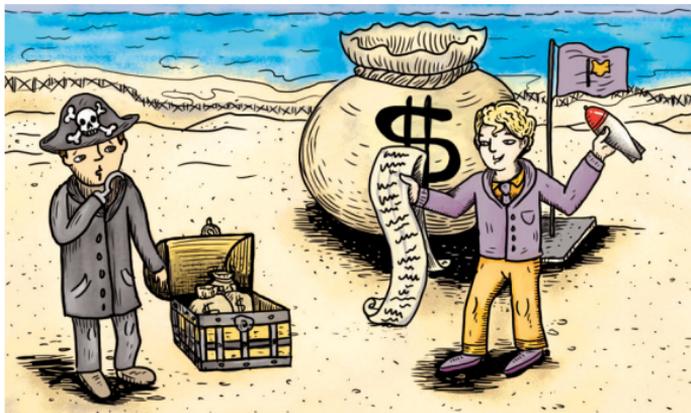
Everyone already has the right to use defensive force—on his own, or with others for mutual protection. Anarchy means no one has the right to rule (i.e., no one has **special** rights); it doesn't mean people can't get together to exercise rights that everyone already has. In a stateless society, even professional protectors would only have the same rights as everyone else.

Another concern that some people have is that, if there were no government, then smaller, private gangs would spring up to rob, oppress and enslave people. There are a couple of reasons why this fear is misguided.



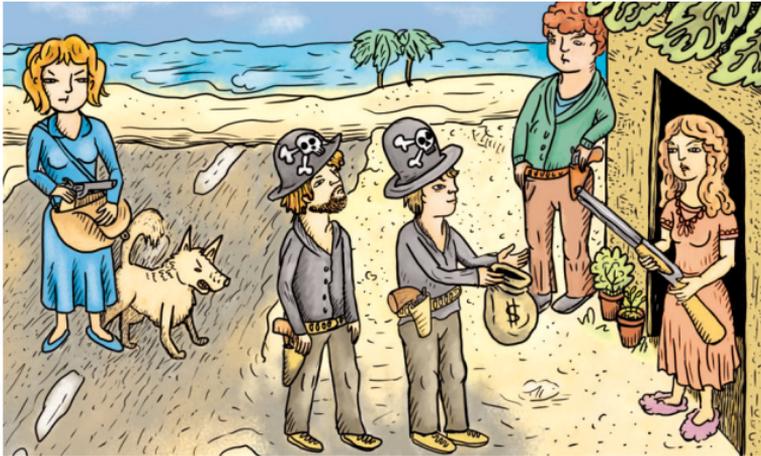
First of all, even private street gangs and organized crime today exist mainly because of government, not in spite of it. Notice how many gangs today get their funding from trading in illegal “black markets”—drugs, gambling, prostitution, guns, etc.—which were all **created** by government “laws.” In a free society, thugs and thieves—individually or in gangs—wouldn’t have any “black markets” to take over.

More importantly, people who fear that without government, “warlords” would take over, are ignoring how much people’s **perceptions** matter. A criminal gang which everyone recognizes as illegitimate and immoral has far less power than a gang whose aggression is perceived to be legitimate and “legal”—its commands and demands being called “laws” and “taxes,” and any who disobey being seen as “criminals.”



In other words, a population is far more likely to be oppressed by a gang which the people themselves imagine to have the **right to rule** than by some gang that everyone knows is bad, and that everyone would feel perfectly justified in disobeying and resisting, even forcibly.

Imagine a private gang trying to do what government now does—extorting and bossing everyone around—but imagine if they tried that without any aura of legal **authority**. Then imagine how a well armed population would respond. The gang would fail, quickly and dramatically, and all those who resisted them would be viewed as righteous heroes.



But when the people feel morally obligated to obey the politicians' "laws," any who resist are viewed as "criminals" or "tax-cheats," even by their own friends and neighbors. Most people see government domination as necessary and valid, and so they cooperate with their own victimization.

That is why government gets away with far more oppression and extortion than private gangs ever could: because most of the victims of “legal” thuggery and theft see it as necessary and legitimate. Millions of people tolerate the confiscation of a huge portion of their earnings and tolerate having many of their choices and behaviors forcibly limited and controlled by way of “legislation,” as long as the people giving the orders are seen as a legitimate political **authority**.



But in a situation where the people don't accept the idea that someone else has the moral right to rob them and rule them, the people stop cooperating and start resisting.

This is why the presence of government drastically increases the chances of people getting robbed—in fact, increases the chances to 100%, since **every** government “taxes” the people it pretends to “represent.” Meanwhile, the **lack** of an authoritarian ruling class makes the people far less susceptible to being extorted and dominated, and far more likely to disobey and resist any would-be thieves and thugs.



To put it another way, warlords already **did** take over, called themselves “government,” and convinced their victims that it was righteous and necessary for the warlords to dominate and exploit everyone else, “for their own good.”

Relying on government to prevent theft and oppression is completely ridiculous, since government is the biggest thug and thief there is, confiscating far more wealth than all other crooks and criminals combined.



And government “protection” is **always** hypocritical. Government “law enforcers” may sometimes find and lock up some private thugs and thieves, but every government also commits “legalized” theft and extortion itself and calls it “taxation,” while insisting that it needs to do that in order to protect the people from theft and extortion. As patently absurd as that is, most people still accept it without question.

When someone first considers the idea of a stateless society, he may also worry that the people who are truly malicious, destructive and sociopathic (and there are such people in the world) would be free to do anything they pleased, with no one to stop them. But this concern is again based on a basic misunderstanding of human nature.



People who are willing to victimize others, by their very nature, don't **care** about morality, or right and wrong. They don't care if what they are doing is right, and they also don't care if what they are doing is legal. They care only whether they can get away with harming others.

In some instances, a would-be crook or thug might be deterred or stopped by force (or by the threat of force), whether by someone with a badge or by someone without one. What makes this deterrence work is **not** the legislation or the official badges, but the simple threat of harm to the crook.



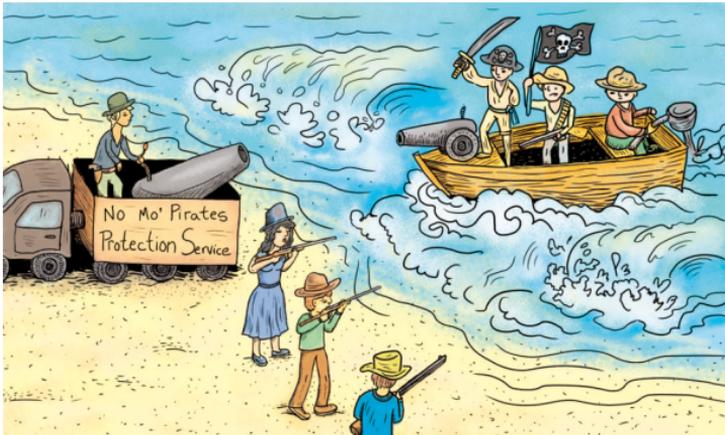
A sociopath doesn't care about laws or social rules; he cares only about avoiding pain and hardship for himself. And that is true regardless of whether government exists or not. It makes no difference whether the threat comes from the police, or another citizen, or even another criminal.

Discouraging nasty people from hurting others does **not** require special “authority,” only the ability and willingness to use defensive force. If the intended target of a would-be car-jacker pulls out a gun, it doesn’t make any difference to the car-jacker whether that person has a badge or whether there’s a “law” against taking people’s cars.



Without a ruling class, decent people would still have every incentive, ability and right to organize and cooperate to defend against thugs and thieves, and they wouldn’t need any badge, official title, “legislation” or special rights to do so. And, as with any service, people can hire others to help with protection; every person doesn’t have to do it himself.

Now, some people might assume that if people organize for mutual protection and defense, then that **is** government. But that is not at all the case. Political authority is **not** about people coming together to do something that everyone already has the right to do; political authority is about one group of people claiming the right to do things which normal people do not have the right to do, such as taxing and controlling everyone else.



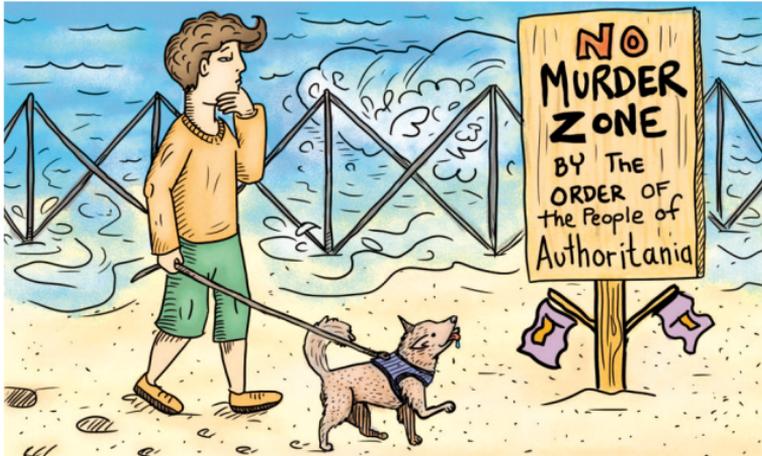
Organized defense can be very effective without anyone claiming any **special** right to rule—in other words, without having any special “authority” and without being government.

Even when there is government, there are still freelance thieves and thugs who are not deterred by the laws of the politicians anyway. But the ultimate irony is that, while so many people hope that government will protect them from common criminals, government itself always ends up being the biggest thug and thief around.



To be blunt, creating a huge gang—one far too big and powerful for the average person to resist—and giving that gang societal **permission** to control and extort everyone else (by way of “law” and “taxes”), in the hope that that gang will **prevent** theft and thuggery, is an absurd idea.

Another common objection to the idea of a stateless society (a world without government) is the notion that, if not for a group of “lawmakers” telling the rest of us how to behave, we would all behave like stupid, irresponsible, violent animals.



This claim implies one of two things: either we normal people have no idea what is right and wrong unless and until politicians tell us, or the only reason we want to do the right thing and co-exist peacefully is because politicians command us to. A quick examination of your **own** motivations and behaviors proves that neither of those things is actually true.

To argue that only government can make people behave in a civilized manner is particularly odd in a society where politicians are **voted** into power. If the people themselves have no moral code and no conscience and are just stupid, violent animals, why does almost everyone want government to keep the peace and protect the innocent?



Would a population of vicious, heartless, evil people try to elect good people to keep the evil people in line? Obviously not. Human goodness and the desire for order and peace already come from **the people**, not from the "lawmakers" they vote into office.

The same holds true of everything government does. If people are so short-sighted and selfish that they can't be trusted to voluntarily organize and fund whatever they deem important, then how can those **same** people be trusted to decide who should be in power? The implication is that the average person can't be trusted to run his **own** life, but can be trusted to choose someone to run everyone else's life.



To argue that government is necessary for keeping society peaceful and civilized is to claim that normal people can't wait to commit evil, but also can't wait to vote for politicians who will forcibly stop them from committing evil.

Contrary to what most of us were taught, government and politics are **not** a civilizing influence at all. Indeed, political authority is the arch-enemy of peaceful coexistence.



People who would never personally rob their neighbors themselves constantly **vote** for the government to do it for them. People who would never dream of trying to control every detail of their neighbors' lives think it's just fine to ask politicians to do exactly that. The game of politics constantly encourages people to use the **violence** of the state to rob and control other people, without any risk or feeling of guilt for the one who votes for that to happen.

Government, rather than serving as a check against the imperfections of our nature, instead drastically **amplifies** our greed, resentment, irresponsibility and malice, by giving us a “legal,” risk-free way to forcibly interfere with the lives and choices of our fellow man. In short, politics brings out the bully and meddling busy-body in everyone.



In contrast, without a ruling class, people wouldn't be forever asking “lawmakers” to interfere with their neighbors' lives, and thugs and thieves wouldn't be able to deny responsibility for their evil deeds by saying they were just following orders.

Throughout history, far more theft, assault, oppression, even murder has been committed by those acting on behalf of “authority” than by anybody else. Even basically good people, when they believe in government, condone things which they know would be wrong if they did them on their own.



Most people know that theft and assault are bad, but they imagine that controlling their neighbors and forcing them to pay for things they don't want is perfectly fine when done by way of the political process. Wrong becomes right when it's called “taxation,” “legislation,” “regulation” and “war.”

Anarchists know better. They know that human society will never be perfect, but that it would be a whole lot better if evil deeds were committed only by genuinely nasty, sociopathic people, rather than being advocated and committed by many millions of basically **good** people who have been taught to believe that aggression is morally acceptable when it's called "taxation," "law enforcement" and "national defense."



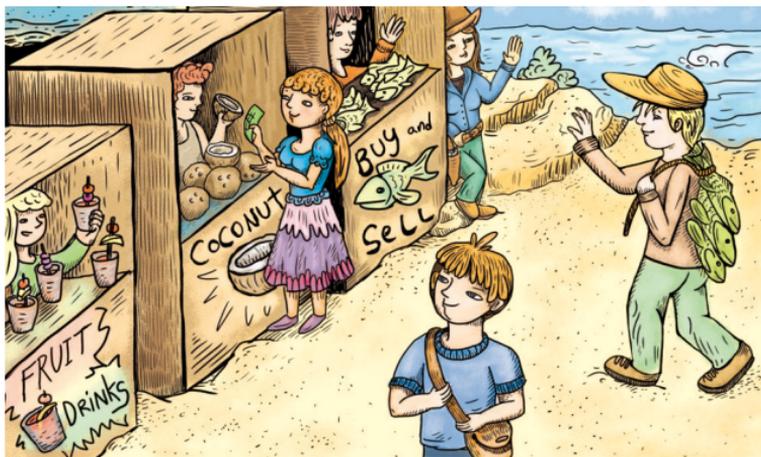
Using yourself as an example, how many things have **you** voted to have government do to your neighbors that you know you would have no moral right to do to them yourself?

The fundamental principle of voluntarism (a more specific term for anarchism) is very simple: it's wrong to initiate force against any other person, regardless of badges, laws or alleged authority. The only time the use of force is justified is to defend **against** aggression.



The vast majority of people already understand this on a personal level, but they've been taught that this basic rule of social living does not apply when it comes to the game of politics and government. Without shame or guilt, **everyone** who votes asks the ruling class to do things to his neighbors which he knows would be wrong if he did them himself.

Most people know how to get along and want a peaceful and just society. Giving up the belief in government doesn't suddenly turn someone into a violent animal, because our morality doesn't come from legislation, and our ability to organize and cooperate doesn't come from any ruling class.



Our ability, right and desire to be productive, to help each other, to protect the innocent and to stop the wicked, does **not** come from government. In fact, it is threatened by government more than by **anything else**. Indeed, most injustice, oppression and strife—most of “man’s inhumanity to man”—is a direct result of authoritarian political power.

Contrary to what politicians pretend, ruling classes do **not** produce peaceful co-existence. Instead, they intentionally cause perpetual conflict and violence, exploiting our compassion, virtue and good intentions, turning them into wealth and power for the **worst** people in the world, while crushing the freedom and prosperity of everyone else.



Of course, the people who benefit most from the political racket will do their best to convince you that it's a social necessity. But ask yourself this: have the thousands of laws, regulations and taxes imposed upon **you** made you a better, more productive and more caring person?

Is the world better off with the politicians taking **your** money and telling **you** how to live your life? Or would things be better if you were allowed to spend your own money and make your own decisions? Is society really best served by a small class of people forcibly imposing a centralized master plan on everyone else? Can the orders and threats of a ruling class make the world what it should be? Or would society be better served by **freedom**, a respect for individual rights, voluntary cooperation and peaceful organization? If this second option sounds better to you, maybe you should learn more about **anarchism** and **voluntaryism**.

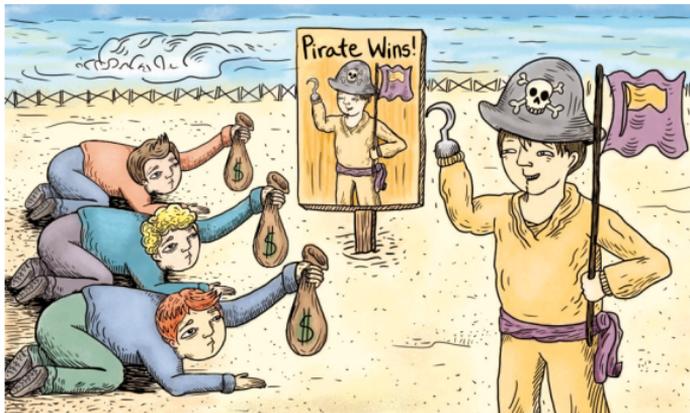


People are not perfect, and some are downright malicious and dangerous. And some people mistakenly view anarchism as a utopian idea that would only work if everyone were generous and compassionate. But if people are too stupid, greedy and malicious to be free, aren't they also too stupid, greedy and malicious to be trusted with power? If you don't trust some stranger to have control over his **own** life, why would you trust him to have control over **yours**?



Whether people are inherently good, inherently bad, or some of each, giving a small group of people power and control over everyone else is never the answer.

Many still insist, “We need government because people can’t be trusted!”, as if government is anything **other** than people (some of the **worst** people around, in fact). And many still believe that obedience to authority is what makes us civilized, when in reality, it does the **opposite**. Far more evil has been committed in the name of “law” and “authority” than has been committed in spite of it.



The ultimate irony is that most people are still desperately hoping to achieve a fair, just, free and prosperous society by way of the very institution that has been responsible for more theft, thuggery, extortion, terrorism, torture and murder than all others combined: “government.”

Everyone knows that governments can be corrupt, abusive, inefficient, counter-productive, even tyrannical. But most people still assume that, if only the right people were in charge, that would fix the problem.



But over and over again, regardless of who was in power and regardless of the particular arrangement or structure of the political power—a democracy, a republic, a dictatorship, a collective, etc.—history has demonstrated that **power corrupts**, and that freedom is far more conducive to peace and prosperity than any political solution ever has been, ever could be or ever will be.

People have spent centuries trying to create a good society using different kinds of ruling classes, different kinds of legal structures, different ways of choosing rulers, and so on. But without exception, **every** authoritarian governmental construction has resulted in freedom and riches for a small few, and oppression, violence and poverty for others.



What if, instead of deciding what the throne should look like and who should sit on it, all people of good-will embraced the non-aggression principle? What if, instead of looking to a ruling class to forcibly impose our values onto society, we embraced the concept of **self-ownership**?

In a nutshell, anarchists want **you** to have complete control over your choices, your money and your life. As long as you are not using force or fraud to inflict harm onto others, they want you to have absolute freedom. All they ask is that you treat them the same way.



**You own yourself.  
Your neighbor owns himself.  
Committing aggression is wrong.**

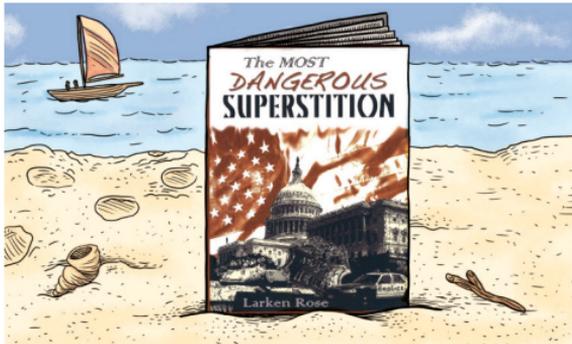
These principles are simple and obvious, to the point of being self-evident. And yet they are diametrically opposed to the authoritarian principles that most of us have been taught.

At the end of the day, you need to choose which you want: peaceful coexistence among equals (“anarchism”), or authoritarian domination, with some ruling over everyone else (“government”). The two are mutually exclusive.



Despite what would-be rulers want you to believe, anarchism does **not** mean chaos and violence, or every man for himself, and having no government doesn't mean having no morality, no organization and no cooperation. Simply put, anarchism means that **no one is your master** and that **no one is your slave**. And that's all it means.

**For a more thorough understanding of why a stateless society—based upon voluntary cooperation and organization rather than based upon government force and authoritarian control—is the only moral or rational choice, read *The Most Dangerous Superstition*.**



If you pay attention to the mainstream media, Hollywood movies, or the usual political pundits, then hearing the word “anarchist” probably makes you think of a gang of mask-wearing, bomb-throwing punks—angry, violent vandals doing whatever they can to destroy civilized society. And these days, those who wield political power are going to great lengths—making up stories, instigating conflicts, etc.—to demonize and mischaracterize what “anarchism” really means. The purpose of this little book is to counter the spin and misconceptions.

Regardless of your age, education level, income level, or views on culture or religion, don't be too surprised if, after learning what “anarchy” actually means, you end up thinking, “Wait, that's exactly what I want!”

