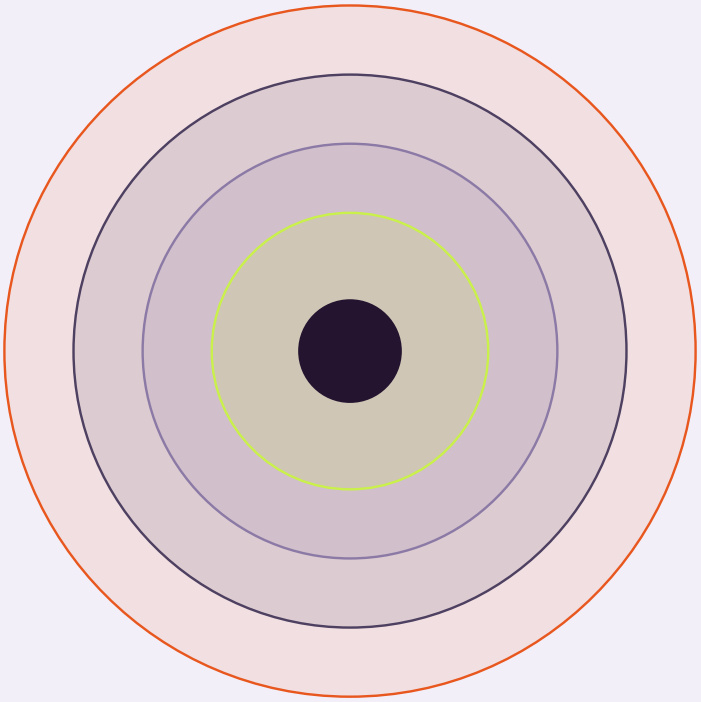


The Nerd Reich: Silicon Valley Fascism and the War on Democracy

A reading of the book by Gil Durán (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Nerd Reich: Silicon Valley Fascism and the War on Democracy, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Gil Durán is a California journalist and a former aide to Jerry Brown, Dianne Feinstein and Kamala Harris, and he writes a newsletter also called The Nerd Reich. In this book he argues that a network of wealthy Silicon Valley investors and founders, with Peter Thiel, Marc Andreessen, Balaji Srinivasan and Elon Musk among the figures he examines, is working to weaken democratic government and put something closer to corporate rule in its place. He sorts their methods into two routes taken from the economist Albert Hirschman: exit, which means building new jurisdictions such as network states and private charter cities, and voice, which means using money, media and campaigns to take over the institutions that already exist. He traces the ideas back through texts such as The Sovereign Individual and Curtis Yarvin's blog, and follows them into San Francisco's recall elections, national campaigns and the second Trump administration. The book grew out of his reporting for The New Republic and leans heavily on the figures' own public talks and writing.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Durán's central claim is that the plan is not hidden: its backers have described it for years in their own talks, essays and podcasts.

The book is built largely from public statements, not leaks. Durán argues that commentators kept treating these ideas as eccentric talk long after they had money and political allies behind them. His case is that reading the source material closely is the first defence.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Exit and voice are the two routes Durán follows: leave and build your own jurisdiction, or stay and buy influence over the one you have.

The terms come from Albert Hirschman's 1970 book Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, by way of Balaji Srinivasan, who favours exit. Durán argues the movement uses both at once. Exit shows up as private cities and network states; voice shows up as political spending, media ownership and placing allies in government.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A network state, as Durán describes it, starts as an online community and ends as a place that writes its own rules.

Srinivasan's idea is for groups that organise online to buy land, gather people and seek recognition as a new kind of state. Durán reads it as a way to step outside democratic accountability. He points to projects such as Próspera in Honduras and California Forever in Solano County, both of which met strong local opposition.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Durán treats San Francisco's 2022 recall elections as an early test of the voice route.

He describes the school board and district attorney recalls as heavily funded by wealthy donors and venture investors. He also grants that the recalls drew on real frustrations from the lockdown years. His point is that local politics is where these tactics were tried first.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The ideas have a reading list, and Durán follows it back decades.

He traces part of the worldview to The Sovereign Individual, a 1997 book by James Dale Davidson and William Rees-Mogg that predicted the decline of the nation-state and the rise of a mobile elite. Peter Thiel wrote a preface for its 2020 reissue. Durán also follows a line through Curtis Yarvin's blog writing, which argued for running a country more like a company.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Durán argues this movement sells a mythical future rather than a lost past.

Older authoritarian movements promised a return to former glory. Durán says this one promises abundance, space travel and longer lives. He links it to early 20th-century Italian Futurism, which Marc Andreessen's 2023 Techno-Optimist Manifesto names among its inspirations.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

In Durán's telling, influence runs through people as much as through money.

He presents Peter Thiel as a quiet centre of the network, partly through people he backed. Thiel was the main financial backer of JD Vance's 2022 Senate run, and Durán traces some of Vance's ideas about government back to Yarvin. Readers should take the wider web of links as the author's argument, built from public records and statements.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Durán uses the phrase apocalypse capitalism for selling end-of-the-world stories alongside world-changing products.

He argues that venture capital, short of new industries to disrupt, has leaned on AI and apocalyptic narratives to justify enormous valuations. The book's final chapter turns to Peter Thiel's public talks about the Antichrist, which Durán uses to tie that religious language back to the political project.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Durán's answer is ordinary civic work: attention, local organising and independent journalism.

In the book and in interviews about it, he argues that the public funds much of this power with its attention and money on platforms owned by the people involved. He has pointed to local campaigns, such as opposition to new data centres, as signs that ordinary people can still push back. The tools he names are old ones: reading closely, showing up and paying for reporting.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Read one primary source in full
- [ ] Look up who funds your next ballot measure
- [ ] Subscribe to one local news source
- [ ] Put one public hearing on your calendar
- [ ] Map where your news comes from

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Ask four questions of any big promise
- ◯ Read their case in their own words
- ◯ Show up somewhere local once a month

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Read one primary source in full

Pick one text the book discusses, such as Srinivasan's The Network State (free online) or Andreessen's Techno-Optimist Manifesto, and read it end to end.

Write three sentences on what it proposes in its own terms before you judge it.

MY VERSION DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Look up who funds your next ballot measure

Find the next local or state measure on your ballot and open its campaign finance filings on your elections office's website.

Note the three largest donors on each side.

MY VERSION DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Subscribe to one local news source

Choose one independent outlet that covers your city or county council and pay for it, even at the lowest tier.

Local reporting is often the only record of what a planning board decided.

MY VERSION DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Put one public hearing on your calendar

Find the agenda page for your planning commission or council.

Pick the next meeting that touches land use, data centres or a new development, and add it to your calendar.

MY VERSION DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Map where your news comes from

For one week, list every app and site where you read news.

Next to each, write who owns it and whether a person or an algorithm chose what you saw.

MY VERSION DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Ask four questions of any big promise

When a project promises to fix a city, a school or the country, ask who decided, who answers for it, who gets a say and who is paying.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Read their case in their own words

Each time you read a critic's account of a person or plan, also read or watch one thing that person said themselves.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Show up somewhere local once a month

Attend a meeting, give a public comment, or write to one local representative each month.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

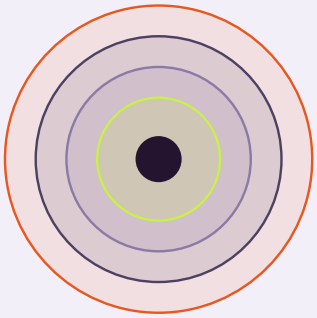
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



When the powerful say their plans out loud, the least a citizen can do is listen closely, and then show up.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER GIL DURÁN