

Rabies Capitalism

By Austen Tucker · 2026

Consider the frothing grimace of a raccoon in your headlights. Eyes like wet glass. Jaw working on nothing. Something in your lizard brain says \wrong\ before you can name why.

If you have symptoms of rabies, you're already dead. You just don't know it yet.

AI, in an ironic twist of fate, has made capitalism so unstable that it now fights anything that gets close to it.

I'm not here to argue that the free market will transform and survive. To do so requires medicine we don't have; and furthermore, why stop a good thing? Indeed, I believe we are dealing with a rabid market that is wholly unable to understand that the cost of effort and craft just crashed through the floor, making us all, as Neal Stephenson once said, "As rich as a Pakistani bricklayer."

For millennia, the currency that powered society was labor.

Someone needed to make the butter to feed everyone. Someone else needed to make the guns to protect everyone. The sum of all human trade systems, from the ancient rite of kings to modern market-based capitalism, has been about the division of labor.

Humans are primates with more complexities and depression. Our needs must be met: we must eat, sleep, feel safe. Maslow covered that ground for us already.

The other thing about people is that we're absolute shitgoblins when it comes to doing things equally. We find ways to distinguish "value": cleaning a toilet? Not valuable. Building Facebook? One of the most valuable things a human can do in capitalism.

And it's been a good system, overall. It took us to the moon. It ushered in an industrial revolution that gave us the highest standard of living human beings have ever known. It gave us iPhones and arguments about pizza and, for a while, a stable social order.

Has it been equal? No. But it does get results.

AI breaks a core assumption of the market: that labor is necessary and, furthermore, expensive.

A rabid animal does not go gentle into that good night.

A mammal affected with rabies becomes compelled to do everything in its power to spread the virus as effectively as possible. Hydrophobia causes a concentration of the viral load into the leftover saliva, increasing the chance of infection from bites. Hallucination and aggression, caused by the virus eating your prefrontal cortex, encourage the mammal to fight against anyone who tries to help them.

It thrashes.

It bites.

It infects.

A rabid animal doesn't know it's dying. It just knows something is wrong and it needs to bite harder.

That's what I see when I look around.

Platforms locking down APIs. Studios suing over training data. Publishers tightening licensing on works that weren't selling anyway. Companies laying off thousands while posting record profits. Everything getting more expensive while the cost of production craters.

There is no strategy. There is only rabies.

Here's the thing nobody in an economics class will tell you:

Incentive structures don't update in real time.

The people running the systems (the executives, the boards, the institutional decision-makers) were trained in a world where scarcity was the law. Where you got rewarded for locking things down. Where "moat" was the highest compliment a business model could receive.

They're still rewarded on timelines that pretend the floor didn't drop.

So when the ground shifts under them, they don't pivot.

They double down.

More extraction. Tighter control. Higher walls. Bigger legal teams.

Not because it works. Because it's the only move they know.

I'm a writer. I've watched the publishing industry for years.

For a brief moment on the internet, having a keyboard and something to say could make you a living. I had many friends who made rent in the proto-internet era as journalists, content writers, sensitivity readers, podcasters, chief-happiness-officers, the whole nine.

Cory Doctorow figured out the model before most people realized the old one was breaking: free access, supported by promotion and special editions. "Art should be free and accessible." He was right. But even the correct answer from ten years ago is about to get stress-tested in ways nobody planned for.

The Pattern Is Always the Same

Every industry does this. Every single one.

Same script, new letterhead. I've watched it often enough to put numbers on it.

1. The cost of production drops
1. Incumbents tighten control instead of adapting
1. Extraction increases even as value delivery decreases
1. Small players route around the walls
1. The walls get higher
1. The routing gets easier
1. Eventually the walls don't matter

We're somewhere around step 5 right now. Maybe step 6.

This Is Why Everything Feels Predatory.

You ever notice how every service you use got worse at the same time?

Streaming services raising prices and adding ads. Social platforms choking organic reach to sell it back to you. Banks charging fees on money they're already lending out at interest. Insurance companies whose entire business model is finding reasons not to pay.

It's rabies, friend. Rabies all the way down.

When your moat starts draining, you don't build a better castle. You charge more for the drawbridge.

Here's where it gets ugly.

Rabid systems don't just extract more. They start eating their own.

Companies laying off the people who build the products. Platforms banning the creators who drive their traffic. Industries lobbying for regulations that protect incumbents at the cost of the market they depend on.

It's auto-immune. The system attacks itself because it can't tell the difference between a threat and its own body anymore.

Here's what gives me hope: Rabies is terminal.

Not in a dramatic, overnight, everything-collapses way. But in a directional, structural, the-math-stops-working way.

You can charge more for the drawbridge. But if someone builds a bridge next door for free, eventually people stop crossing yours.

You can lock down your API. But if someone builds an open alternative, your lock becomes your prison.

You can sue over training data. But you can't sue physics. You can't sue math. You can't sue the fact that the cost of intelligence is plummeting and no licensing agreement on earth can reverse the curve.

"Okay, capitalism is breaking. What replaces it?"

If I'm going to answer it straight:

What comes after isn't a new system. It's an old one. Before the recording industry, before copyright, before the walls — there was campfire logic. Someone starts a song. Someone else changes the words. The song belongs to the circle. That's not a folk tradition. That's how most of human creative culture worked for most of history, before someone figured out how to put a price tag on a melody. The rabid market built walls around the campfire. The campfire didn't go anywhere.

Look at the discourse.

"AI is stealing jobs." "AI is plagiarism." "AI is the end of creativity."

Those aren't arguments. Those are bite marks.

That's the sound of a system that built its entire value proposition on scarcity realizing that scarcity is evaporating, and lashing out at the thing making it evaporate instead of asking the harder question.

Some of us are worth a lot. Our taste, our judgment, our ability to see what matters: that doesn't go away when production gets cheap.

It augments.

It supercharges.

It compounds.

And some of us were only worth what the gate charged.

Sit with that one for a second.

What do I do about it?

I build.

I build for a world where access isn't the product. Where my ideas are worth their weight in gold because the barrier between idea and execution is a couple of markdown files.

Where value comes from what you \do\ with the tools, not from controlling who gets to use them.

Yeah, I know how this sounds.

I sound like I'm writing a manifesto in my underwear.

And honestly? I kind of am.

But I'm also the person who built their own website, wrote their own editing system, hired AI agents to help them ship, and is currently watching the economics of everything they thought they understood rearrange themselves in real time.

I'm not theorizing.

I'm taking notes while the building shakes.

The system isn't dying gracefully.

It's going rabid.

More extraction. More control. More walls. More lawsuits. More fees. More friction. More of everything that used to work, applied harder, faster, and more desperately.

And on the other side of all that thrashing?

People are quietly building things. Shipping things. Creating at a scale that makes the walls irrelevant.

The rabies will run its course.

Nobody issues a memo when the circle wins.

It's a million people who stopped waiting for permission — building the future in the gaps between the bite marks.