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John Moe: With conditions like depression and anxiety, it's not always a realistic option to obliterate the problem—to find the cause of the suffering and destroy the issue entirely, to be cured, to be healed and go back to normal; whatever normal is. No, that doesn't always work. Sometimes you need to meet the problem, greet it, learn to live with it. That can be a lot of work. It can also sometimes be the best path forward.

It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Hanif Abdurraqib is an author, essayist, poet, thinker, cultural critic. He's received really thunderous critical acclaim and numerous awards for his writing, including the MacArthur Fellowship—often called the Genius Grant. His books include *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us, A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance*, and *There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension*—which is newly available in paperback. *There's Always This Year* is part memoir, part exploration of basketball, part love letter to his hometown of Columbus, Ohio—which he left and returned to—and it's about the significance of LeBron James, who also left Ohio and returned.

Hanif writes about challenges he's faced, including incarceration and being unhoused. It's a beautifully written and remarkably moving book. I've never read anything like it. Hanif also deals with clinical depression and anxiety disorders. I had a wonderful conversation with him about basketball, about running, about depression and anxiety, and about building and maintaining a network of support for when things get bad.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Hanif Abdurraqib, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah, thank you for having me. I really appreciate being here.

John Moe: I tried to describe your connection to LeBron and his role in your life to my wife when I was talking about doing this interview, and I kind of fumbled on it. Would you wanna give that a shot? Like, who LeBron has been to you in your life?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. Well, I mean we both came up playing basketball in Ohio around the same time—he on a much higher level than I did. And we are around the same age. And I think there's a way that much of my life has been watching him ascend and watching him continue to ascend. And so, yeah. I mean, I think he's—you know—first and foremost an Ohioan who I feel aligned to just due to our generational similarities. But you know, in addition to that, his is a story that is unique. I think he embodies this kind of fascination I have with what it is to leave a place and to return to a place and to answer some questions of home.

John Moe: Have you compared yourself to him? Is that a thing? Because he sort of had this ascendancy and then kept rising, which is not how it goes for most people through their lives. Most people have had challenges and setbacks. You know? Growing up with him and maturing with him in your life, has comparison been an issue?

Hanif Abdurraqib: No. I mean, I think our lives are so vastly different. You know, I think I've always been kind of grounded in the fact that— But I do think that a big thing that my book is attempting to do is to complicate definitions of what it is to ascend or what it is to "make it", quote/unquote. And you know, I think one comparison—or not even comparison, but parallel point—in the book is kind of me writing about the downturns in my life and, you know, moments where I was unhoused, moments where I was incarcerated; and lensing them through these moments of really vibrant ascension on the part of LeBron James.

And so, I don't know if that's a question of comparison, but it is a question of kind of mirroring our lives. And you know, I think not… even through a lens of envy or frustration, but through a lens of "this is just the way it works". The way it works is, you know, you are on the outside of a life that is either gradually or rapidly ascending, and your life is not doing that. And you know, it feels like something better than what you have should be touchable for you but is not.

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John Moe: Is there such a thing as when you started playing basketball in your life, or was it just always there from as long as you can remember?

Hanif Abdurraqib: It's always been there for as long as I can remember. I mean, I grew up in a neighborhood that was kind of anchored by a really meaningful basketball court—like, a very literal basketball court where a lot of great players in my neighborhood played, and a lot of great players from other neighborhoods made pilgrimages to, to play. And so, basketball was always a part of my life, because I was always a witness to it. I had older siblings who would play on that court. You know? These things were really important to me, and it was kind of a shared language in the community I grew up in. If you did not play basketball, it's not like you were completely ostracized, but if you did play basketball, it offered a—it broadened the chance to—it made a chance for a broader, wider community opportunity.

And so, that was really vital for me. And you know, I don't know a life without basketball at the center. Or I don't remember a time in my life where basketball was not at the center. And so, yeah, it was a way for me to translate my desire to be close to people.

John Moe: The book, *There's Always This Year*, is a wonderful book. And it kinda weaves through your life and weaves through basketball. Is that something that you chose that—you know, "Here is a sport, a culture, a cultural phenomenon that I'm going to hang my life on as I describe my world"? I mean, is it intended as metaphor, or is it just you telling the story of a life that happens to have a lot of basketball in it?

Hanif Abdurraqib: No, it's a requirement. You know, the metaphor is a requirement, and basketball was a flexible place to make that metaphor come to life—or a flexible way to make that metaphor come to life. In part, because so much of the book revolves around my

anxieties around the passage of time or what it is to lose time or feel time slipping away; what it is to—through the understanding of time slippage—commit oneself to paying close attention to the things that keep them, or that have kept me, or that managed to keep me tethered to the world. And so, basketball was a good metaphorical entry point to that. Not only because I'm talking about time in terms of LeBron James's supposed immortality, but because the actual shape of the book and the countdown clock that runs through the book—which, for me, created a kind of urgency in the writing. It created a kind of urgency and a real confrontation.

So, before I start any book, I ask myself what is it that I'm afraid of? And I'm not necessarily trying to conquer that fear. I'm trying to grow a more intimate relationship with it so that I can live alongside of it more fruitfully and with more curiosity. And to have a kind of countdown clock hovering over the process of making the book really led to this intense confrontation with a fear that I was immersed in—the fear about time and loss and how much time I do or do not have left. And I really wanted to make that confrontation. I wanted to wrestle with that very publicly on the page. I wanted people to be able to see it, to immerse themselves in it, and to perhaps confront that themselves.

John Moe: That's interesting that you talk about this anxiety and this confrontation and this battle you have with the passage of time. Because when I read it and when I have listened to other interviews with you, you seem kind of at peace with it. You seem to be philosophical about this passage of time. You talk about "what I want to do in the time that I have left on this planet" and, you know—as somebody who kind of has anxiety about the passage of time myself—I found it very soothing to read what you had to say about it.

Did you win that conflict? Did you get to a better place where you are more at peace with it?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. I don't know if it's necessarily about winning or losing. I think that, for me, it has been and remains largely about reframing my relationship with the passage of time and aligning it more towards gratitude than anxiety, which is a kind of winning. But the anxiety is still— The anxiety fuels the gratitude. The anxiety is the lens through which the gratitude is being kind of presented to me.

[00:10:00]

Because without that anxiety and without that ever-present fear, I would not have the impulse or desire to say, "Okay, I would like to take something—you know, I would like to create a universe wherein I'm honoring these slower moments that might mean something to me greater than what I believe them to mean."

John Moe: How do you find that gratitude? How do you find that ability to slow things down and appreciate things?

Hanif Abdurraqib: I think by decentering my own ego and making it so that I am not kind of hyper-focused on myself as the most important, you know? Or even my own survival as the most important thing. I have trees in my backyard. And now, as spring kind of nudges its way back into the picture here in Columbus, birds are returning to them. And I think there is this kind of irritation I once felt when I first moved into this house like five years ago about

the cluster of birds that gathered around a tree and kind of joined together in collective song. It was not exactly harmonious, but certainly was loud. And you know, now I find myself having gratitude for even having access to having a window through which, if I open it, I hear a series of notes pouring in that are not necessarily always beautiful, but the sound itself is kind of comforting. The sound itself that says a cluster of living things have come to share the good word with me, even if the good word is just a series of noises to my own ear.

And through that good word, they are—at least somewhat, or at least potentially, or at least ostensibly—sharing the language of their living that I have access to, which reminds me of my own. My own presence. And even that kind of decentering of my own comfort in my own ego that says, "I wish those birds to go away so I can watch my TV show or play my video game," that's kind of a major way that have realigned my relationship with these slower moments: asking myself, "What can I extract out of every minute that reminds me that I am still here for now?"

John Moe: Was that hard to get to?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. And I mean, it remains hard. You know? I think it's an everyday practice. I mean, the birds are one example, but that's an easy example in some ways. The harder example is—you know, I travel a lot, and I have to be in crowded airports and on crowded airplanes and these things that, I think for a lot of people, are understandably really frustrating things. Because airports are exhausting, and airplanes are loud sometimes with people's collective noises. But for me to say, "Wow, isn't it amazing that I kind of get to go to a place and read work that I love that I've made, and I get to share in community with people who have read that work? And we get to have conversations about the things that have kept us kind of propelled, the things that propel us forward to the next moment and the next moment. And I get to absorb all of that."

And all of that is propulsive for me. To hear one thing that some someone else loves that has taken them from the morning to the evening is fuel for me. And so, you know, all of these things that help me remind myself that I'm pretty small in the big scheme of it all. Like, you know, all of us are kind of—we're standing at the feet of something bigger than ourselves. And the world is very large, but I think I feel a responsibility to—within that larger world—carve out some smaller worlds that are a bit more generous and more survivable.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with author Hanif Abdurraqib in just a moment.

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[00:15:00]

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We're back with Hanif Abdurraqib, author of *There's Always This Year: On Basketball and Ascension*.

We've been using the word “anxiety” to talk about your relationship to the passage of time. I mean, is it—is your anxiety also of the diagnosable-by-a-doctor generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder? Does it take the form of the kind of daily battle that a lot of people have with anxiety disorders?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. I was diagnosed with multiple anxiety disorders, generalized social anxiety and panic disorder, when I was—gosh, how long ago now? 22/23? But also, you know, when I look back on my childhood, these were things I was enduring without knowing it or without having a proper language for it or language at all for it. You know, I played sports a lot as a kid. You know, I played sports in high school and college, and I played soccer. And there were moments in soccer games where I would perform well, but I would not necessarily— There are parts of me where it's like, if the ball were coming towards me—you know, if I had to make a quick decision, I would be able to do it. But I would feel what I now know is anxiety.

Back then, I thought it was just adrenaline. It's easy to kind of write these things off when you're a child as small, insignificant fears, or what have you. But I was really fortunate, I think, to find language for it in my 20s. Because I could say, “Oh, that's what that is! That's what that's been my whole life.”

I also think— You know, I know that diagnoses can be—they can have all kinds of impacts on people. But for me, it was such a calming thing. It was a really calming thing to say, “Now I have a name to the feeling. And I have a better understanding of myself.” And also, it was comforting in a way for me to hear, you know, this isn't—you kind of don't fix this. You learn to live with it.

John Moe: Yeah. How have you managed it, beyond just the knowledge that it's there?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah, I think I'm particularly good at management now. But you know, for much of my 20s, it was a struggle—particularly because I was also diagnosed with depression shortly thereafter. And I think the specific combination of anxiety and depression when they are kind of—you know, at least for me, they're not always in concert with each other. They're not always kind of co-mingling. But when they are, that is a real struggle. And so, it's really challenging, because I think the way I deal with it has become—it's evolved. It's evolved as I've gotten older.

And I think one way I deal with it now, particularly my anxieties, is just—I'm so good at shrinking the day. I'm so good at shrinking my day into a series of 30 minutes at a time. What's next, kind of one-foot-in-front-of-the-other kinds of things. And it's because if I get even a little too far ahead of myself, that really unlocks a door through which—if I walk—I'm kind of wandering through a dark house looking for a light switch for a long time. You know? Which is how my anxiety often feels.

And so, you know, there's a real routine. I'm so routine-based. And I feel like people are often curious about how and why I am so rigorous about my routines. But I'm so rigorous about my routines because if I even slip out of them at all, I feel like I lose that which grounds me. I lose the things that make me feel, you know, grounded in a kind of comfort and a deep understanding of my own self.

John Moe: What kind of routines are we talking about?

Hanif Abdurraqib: I'm a big runner. I run about— Uhh, let me do math. I'm bad at math. I run about seven/eight miles a day. So, whatever that shakes out to a week.

John Moe: Wow! That's a lot of miles is what that shakes out to.

[00:20:00]

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. Six times a week. I take one day off. And that is a real—you know, I do understand that there are some physical health benefits that come from the running, but I mostly do it to keep my brain together. And so, that is a real big process for me. And I get up, and I do my run, and I take a similar route, and I zone out for— And then I feel like I can attack the world after that. And those—you know, I set aside two hours every day, and those two hours are mine. Like, those two hours are only mine. And even knowing that, knowing I have that, is really calming—you know—to know that there are those two hours in a day where no one can enter my orbit, and I get to return to myself at the top of every morning, is refreshing.

And you know, I take walks. I buy myself flowers once every two weeks to keep in my house and take care of. And you know, I go to the same flower shop on Mondays. I go to the same bakery and get the same little biscuit. I return to things. Because return—for me, return and routine and consistency is how I refine my relationship with what it is to be grounded in something. And I think the way that I don't— You know, there's no conquering of anxiety, but the way that I maneuver it is to be consistently, constantly grounded in something.

John Moe: When you run, are you listening to music?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yeah. Yeah. When I run outside, I listen to music. When I do indoor cardio, I tend have like a TV show. I like to have a TV show on. So. And an ideal like cardio watch for me is either a show that I know that I love, and I've seen before, and haven't seen in a while. So, like a rewatch that I love, or a new show that I've never seen before that is intriguing and/or exciting. Anything that draws my attention enough away from the action of what I'm doing for a little while.

John Moe: And is that a matter of distracting yourself from the anxiety and the depression, so you're not thinking those often intrusive, terrible thoughts? Is it just to kind of distract your brain?

Hanif Abdurraqib: It is not a distraction. I think it's just enhancing. Because, you know, I think that the way that I relate to my anxieties is that it's kind of like an engine that's always humming, or it's kind of like a low static or low feedback that is just always on loop. And so, I can't really distract from it. But what I can do is create healthier pathways through which those thoughts enter, exit, live, flourish. And I think running allows that for me. Because when I'm running, I feel like my brain is opening up in a million different directions. And so, my brain is kind of building containers for my curiosities and for my excitements. And sometimes my anxieties seep into those.

But you know, I think about it as kind of like a cocktail of many things. And that's just how it goes. But the anxiety's always there. You know, for me it's just a low hum that sometimes gets louder through the course of a day and sometimes is just kind of staticky in the background, but it's always present.

John Moe: That's the anxiety. Is that the same with the depression?

Hanif Abdurraqib: No, I think for me, my depression tends to flare up. You know, I think it comes in really bright and strong flares and then dies down. And I do think that for me now, my body reacts to— You know, it's like when people know they're getting sick, you know? My body reacts to an onset of a depressive episode in a way that I feel. Like, I can physically feel it. You know, I can feel it in the morning when I wake up and just plainly, physically, how easily and comfortably I can get outta bed. These kind of things.

And that does nothing other than the fact that it allows me to prepare. And I'm someone who—I'm very highly prepared when it comes to my depressive episodes. I feel like I have friends who know to check in on me if they haven't heard from me in a few days. I have—you know, I built a whole—I feel like I've built a whole ecosystem around how to be cared for and how to care for myself in moments of depression. Because that's the whole thing, you know? I think the whole thing is how do you make it so that you are surviving kind of an inch at a time? And so, I'm kind of thankful.

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When I was younger, you know, my depression just kind of emerged, and then lingered, and then was difficult. I think much of what I am attempting to do is say— I'm giving myself a blueprint for how to pull myself out of the water, and I'm giving the people who love me a blueprint for how to attempt to pull me out of the water as well.

John Moe: How did you go about building that support network? Because that support network and those contingency plans—that seems pretty awesome. How'd you do that?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Well, through a lot of failures and through a lot of fear. I mean, I spent a lot of my 20s—and even early 30s, I think—kind of alone and not knowing what to do in moments of spiral or anxiety or depression or real, actual pain, and being distinctly aware that I was not moving through it well. You know. I think that is a thing that was so jarring for me when I was younger: to be distinctly aware of the fact that I'm not moving through this pain well. And I'm worried about what is on the other side of that reality. If I continue to not move through this well, then that's really frightening. It presents this real anxiety on top of the ever-present anxiety. It presents this…

And so, I had to at some point take some level of responsibility for moving forward with an ecosystem of people who wanted to care for me and wanted to love me well and were waiting for the opportunity to. And it takes a lot for me to trust that; it takes a lot for me to give into that and say— You know, I think so often—and I think this is just the way it works for so many of us. We are made to look at these kind of surrenders as a failure, to surrender to allowing other people to love us. That is one way of wording it, but I don't know if that's the

way my brain looked at it back then. My brain looked at it as, “You are failing, because you cannot maneuver this on your own.”

But I don't think— A life is not meant to be maneuvered on its own. I don't believe that any life is meant to be maneuvered on its own. And for me, it is only further punishment, if I were to live a life that I assumed I could conquer independently at all times. There are many things in my life I do maneuver on my own, and there are many ways in my life that I'm still extremely stubborn about the maneuvering of those things. But you know, one really great thing that I've learned and grown up with—or grown into—is the idea of adequately surrendering myself to the fact that there is a universe wherein people really do want to love me well, and giving them the opportunity to do so.

And to be clear, not just to do so in moments of crisis or heightened—you know, heightened crisis, but to do so in moments where I am doing well. And to say that this is just an extension of how well we are required to love each other all the time, you know? I try to love my friends as best as possible always. And that makes something like the ask of saying, “Please come to my house if you have not heard from me for three days, because I might need someone and not know how to ask for someone.” That is a small ask when you live a life where you are loving someone as well as you can on a day-to-day basis.

Transition: Spirited acoustic guitar.

John Moe: More with Hanif Abdurraqib in just a moment.

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[00:30:00]

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(Music ends.)

Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: We are back, talking with author Hanif Abdurraqib.

It's such a leap with depression to see yourself as worthy of being loved, of being cared for—to see your fellow human beings as nurturing and yourself as being worthy of nurturing. That's an incredible accomplishment that you're able to do that, or at least that you were able to set that up when the shit hits the fan.

Hanif Abdurraqib: I think to see oneself as worthy is the real challenge. Right? I think there are numerous things that put us in a position where we do not feel like we can make it. *(Chuckles.)* Where we don't feel like we can really make it on our own. But I also think that I have felt— I mean, there are still days where I feel unworthy of a great many things. I mean, one large part of *There's Always This Year* that echoes into my living is that there is a way that—through the success of my writing or the success of my life as an artist—it pales so drastically in comparison to the life that I had where I was unhoused and I was in and outta jails.

And I think one question that remains always is: why me? Why did this happen? Do I deserve this?

John Moe: The success or the struggle?

Hanif Abdurraqib: I think in the moment, both. Right? In the moment, it's like that question of "why me" turns depending so heavily upon what one is experiencing at the time. When I was unhoused, I'm sure—I know I was thinking, "Why is this happening to me?" And now I look at my life, and it's a similar question—even though the circumstances are extremely different, and it's a polar opposite circumstances. But that question of a lack of worthiness, "Am I worthy of my suffering? Am I worthy of my successes?" That's such a flawed approach, because it forces us into this binary of worth that is aligned with what we are giving or not giving to the world or what we are or are not enduring.

And I don't know if that is the real arbiter for worthiness. I think my, for example, clearest arbiter of my own worthiness is "How am I tending to the vast garden of affections and curiosities that I have and the people who get to walk through that garden with me?" That is a really more useful question of worth than "What am I enduring?" or "What am I getting through on my own?"

John Moe: Is that work that you do— Is that work that you're capable of doing during a depressive episode? Or during an episode are you just like, you know, "This is where I gotta be taken care of; I can't cultivate anything right now"?

Hanif Abdurraqib: No, yeah. I'm not big on cultivating. But that's the thing. Like, this is why it's the project of a full life—right?—is to say, "I am cultivating loving in"—well, hopefully—"in all the moments that I can." Because there are absolutely moments I cannot. And in the moments I cannot, I need my best attempts at love reflected back to me by the people who have been the beneficiaries of those best attempts.

And so, that's—yeah. I think you cultivate when you can, and then you receive when you can. And that's just a part of living, I think.

John Moe: Is the running part of the cultivating?

Hanif Abdurraqib: I think so. I think my brain is—it's very healthy, or at its healthiest when I'm, you know, in a post-run state. You know, I think some of that is just because running allows me to really intimately and just vibrantly tap into gratitude. Because it's a plain thing

of, “I am so thankful that I can, at this stage of my life, do these things.” You know? That's so wild to me that I can—you know, I was an athlete, and then I wasn't for a long time. And now—you know, I got back into running in 2020. And there was one Sunday—on Sundays I do my longer runs—and one Sunday last month I ran like 16 miles. And I remember thinking there's no—

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I just feel so much gratitude for what my body can do and how beautiful. To be someone who did not always want to be alive, and to say just on a baseline, granular level, “How incredible that I have survived to bear witness to and to benefit from just the plain nature of what my body can do? The fact that I can run for this long on a day where I could be doing anything.”

And I remember it was like the first full spring day in Columbus. It was like the first warm day. I remember being outside and being like, “This is— What a dream. Like, what a—” And yes, that's not a permanent thing. You know, that moment fades. But that moment is enough to get me to the next several moments, I think.

John Moe: Are those moments bankable? Can you save those up? Can you put those in your pocket and use them for when things get bad?

Hanif Abdurraqib: I think logic suggests that you can, but for me it doesn't work that way. Because when I'm in the midst of, I think, my worst depression, I'm not really actually trying to retrieve those bankable moments. I'm trying to find a new one. I'm trying to answer the question of “What will keep me alive for the next hour?” And oftentimes those bankable moments don't feel accessible, because in the moment of—in my deepest moments of depression, to think about those bankable moments is to believe that I'll never be able to access them again. And so, in some ways, returning to those bankable moments accelerates the feelings of depression for me.

Because when I am in a moment of depression, it really feels like I am unworthy of the feeling—you know, feeling as though I deserve those moments. And so, yeah, it's a challenge. It's always a challenge, but I'm thankful for those moments as they— You know, of course I hold onto memories like all people, but I tend to think—when I feel a moment of pleasure like that, or a moment of when I'm kind of pushed towards the ecstatic pleasures of the quotidian life, so to speak—what that does do for me is say, “This is just my everyday living.”

Like, this is not— I run because I like to run, and then I feel spectacular. And you know, I go home, and my dog runs to see me, because she's excited to see me. And that's a small blip of a life that is spectacular. And so, it does remind me that even the so-called mundanities are carrying a kind of spectacular nature to them.

John Moe: Do you feel like two different people when you're in a depressive episode, as opposed to—? 'Cause I imagine when you're in that state, you're not running eight miles a day. Do you feel like a different person?

Hanif Abdurraqib: No. And I think for me it's really important to not separate the two. Like, for me, it's so important to say, "I am this person who lives with these afflictions, lives alongside them. They live alongside me." And that means— I mean, I feel like a different person in that we're all different versions of the—you know, we all have many versions we graduate into or descend into and all of that. But all of them make up the full self. Like, I'm committed to the reality that these all make up a full self.

And that does help me feel less shame for the days where I don't feel up for being the version of myself that has to do the capital T Things. You know? If I say, "Okay, this is just—this is the version of me today that is not gonna be as good as the version of me was yesterday, maybe." And it isn't a separate version. It's not like a Frankenstein's monster thing, or it's not like a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde thing. It's all me. And that allows me a real sense of—you know, that pushes me slightly away from the feeling of punishment or wanting to punish myself for not living up to whatever I believe the standards are.

John Moe: I mean, when I look at your life— I mean, prolific writer, incredibly successful writer, you know, MacArthur Genius; it needs to be stated. And just—all this running that you do, is this you keeping the demons at bay? Is all this work an effort to combat the depression and the anxiety? Or is that too simple a view of it?

Hanif Abdurraqib: For me, it is. I'm not at odds, I think, with— I think one big growth point for me was surrendering to the realities that these are parts of my brain like all of the other parts. And I don't necessarily wanna combat them. I'm curious about what they can tell me about myself. You know, I'm curious about what my depression and my anxiety can inform me about the ways that I'm required to endure the world.

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This is why I talk so much about cultivating these afflictions that I live alongside. I want to love them. I don't want to be at odds with them. I want to have an intimate relationship with them. Because through that intimacy, I learn how to manage myself through them, and I learn how to manage them through me. I think it's—I don't wanna be at odds with them. I think if I were to be at odds with them, it would lead to a lot of deep disappointment, because it's not a win or lose situation. I think for me, these things exist outside the binary of wins and losses. And instead they are better—I'm so much better informed by them when I ask myself, "What is this teaching me about how I move through the world or how I'm required to move through the world?" You know.

And that also leads to a lack of resentment. I don't resent my anxiety or my depression. I don't resent the impacts that those things have on my brain or my body. And what I do resent, I think, is living in a world that is so increasingly cruel that it struggles to— For me, seems like it will never be equipped to understand anyone's individual struggles—highly individualized struggles. Right? And so, I resent a world that is untenable for those who are suffering and those who are struggling. And I think in the name of cultivation; I'm also trying to cultivate a more survivable corner of the world. Not just for me, but for anyone who might pass through it even temporarily.

John Moe: Yeah. I mean, we've talked about this on the show; we've done segments; we've done episodes where we just check in with friends of the show and just saying, you know, "Times are very challenging right now, and times are very scary right now. How are you holding up?" So, I mean—as somebody who has dealt with a lot of depression, dealt with a lot of anxiety, all these external factors—if you look at the news, if you look at the state of the country, the state of the world, there's a lot to be sad about. A lot to be enraged about, a lot to be terrified about. How are you holding up amid current events?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Not well! And I think—actually, you know, like a real issue that I'm struggling with is that I don't think anyone is equipped to bear witness to, or even be confronted with, the scale and scope of—say—the mass deaths that we witness when we are witnessing a genocidal campaign. And additionally, I don't think anyone is equipped to witness— Even on a domestic front, I don't think anyone's equipped to witness the kind of fears and anxieties that come when we see people like ICE snatching people off the streets. I don't think we're— And even if I look down the list and go even further down than that, I don't think anyone's equipped to just deal with the firehose of news that comes out of a presidential administration that is really hellbent on distorting reality—like, distorting massive amounts of realities at the same time, simultaneously.

So, the big concern that I have, and a weight that I'm feeling—I think a lot of people are perhaps feeling—is that I actually don't think we are that equipped to bear this level of witness, and that is undoubtedly damaging our brains, I think, in ways that people maybe don't have full access to yet. And that's of deep concern to me. That's of real deep concern to me, because I don't know exactly how anyone can be asked to survive with what we now know and have perhaps have always known the world is capable of. And that is a deep concern and a deep fear. And I don't know how we're gonna make it. But I think the rate at which people are asked to kind of put their heads down and keep moving—it's untenable, and it's gonna become increasingly untenable, I think.

John Moe: How are you gonna survive?

Hanif Abdurraqib: You know, I'm thankful for the kind of micro communities I've built. I still—I live in Columbus, Ohio, where I was born and raised and where I have done much of my work. And there are people here who I love and who have known me since I was a child—you know, since I was an actual child in the world. And so, when they look at me, they're looking at a version of me that is different than the version of me that, say, people who read and even love my work know.

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And so, there's a real sense of grounding; there's a real sense of someone saying, "I've known so many versions of you, and I've loved them all. And I would like to know whatever versions come next." That keeps me going, and it keeps me going that like so many of my friends have kids now. So many friends who I grew up with have kids. And I just think that I have to commit to at least offering them the opportunity to have a world to grow up in, or an orbit to exist in that is something different and better than what I know is existing right now. You know, I'm not saying I wanna provide a space for them to turn away from the world. I wanna provide a way to contextualize the brutalities of the world and say to them, "However,

there is still something worth fighting for. There is a way that you can channel your rage into a deep love that rewires the most touchable world for you."

And so, those things are important to me. This kind of—these cross-generational affections, the elders who look at me and still see me as a child worth fighting for and saving and showing something softer to. And me, looking at the children of my friends, the young children that my friends have had, and saying, "I would like to have the chance to remember you for 30 and 40 years as you are right now. And I want to make that happen."

John Moe: Do you think the Cavaliers have a shot at the title this year?

Hanif Abdurraqib: *(Chuckles.)* I do! You know, I think that the tough thing is the road still goes through Boston, as I see it. And I don't know— You know, the Cavs kind of were tough. They kind of melted down the playoffs last year, so we haven't seen how good they'll be in the playoffs. And I mean specifically Darius Garland, who was atrocious in the playoffs last year. But I really do think they've got the formula. They've got defensive-minded big men who are skilled. They've got two experienced guards. They have shooting off the bench. They kind of have every single piece you need.

But the road still goes through Boston, I think, for everyone. And the depth of that Boston team is just really something else. But also, you know, I think I always urge people to remember in a seven-game series, anything can happen. You know, I know we're in March Madness now, and I love March Madness. And I do love the fact that it's very much win and advance—win one game and advance. I love that. I love that it presents these kind of beautiful, sometimes fluky runs through a tournament.

But I also love a seven-game series where anything can happen. A guy gets hot, and before you know it, a team is down 2-0, you know? And so, anything can happen. It does feel like the Cals are poised. The Eastern Conference is especially kind of shaky this year. I mean, I really think that whoever comes out of the east is not the final's favorite. Because the road to the finals in the west is just gonna be so much more of a gauntlet. You're gonna be seasoned in a way—maybe fatigued, but also more seasoned. The east is just really kind of rough after those top three teams. And so, the Cavs have a path, and I'm looking forward to seeing if they fulfill it.

John Moe: Do you still root for LeBron?

Hanif Abdurraqib: Oh, always! Always. I would love to see him win another title. And I think, you know, this year and next year. I think these next two years—assuming he comes back next year, which it feels like he will—that this is really it. You know? This is a "now or never", and I feel like an off season of him and Luka kind of finding each other's rhythms is gonna be really impressive. I just think the Lakers are really looking like they could be dangerous next year. They're dangerous this year, but I think next year is really the year.

John Moe: Because they've cultivated a network of support and love around them.

Hanif Abdurraqib: Yes, they have. *(Chuckles.)* Yes, they have. They do need a center though. You can have a network of love and support, but you gotta find someone to play center.

John Moe: Hanif Abdurraqib, author of *There's Always This year: On Basketball and Ascension*. Hanif, thank you.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

Hanif Abdurraqib: Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

John Moe: *There's Always This year: On Basketball and Ascension* is available wherever you get books.

Be sure to hit subscribe on our podcast. Give us five stars, write rave reviews. That gets the show out into the world. We really appreciate it.

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We're on BlueSky, @DepreshMode. Our Instagram is @DepreshPod. Our *Depresh Mode* newsletter is on Substack. Search that up. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram, @JohnMoe. Join our Preshies group on Facebook. A lot of good conversation happening over there—people helping each other out, supporting each other. You know, it's a tough world sometimes, and we need each other. Our electric mail address is DepreshMode@MaximumFun.org.

[00:50:00]

Hi, credits listeners. Thank you so much for your support during the recent MaxFunDrive. We did great. We got a lot of good support from you, and we really appreciate it. It's so good to know that you're there for us. And we try to be there for you as well.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Ragu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings".

Depresh Mode is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music: "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller.

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!