Episode 903: Go Ask Malice: Listeners' Questions for Michael Malice

Guest: Michael Malice

WOODS: All right, I think we'll have a little fun here because I've got some good questions for you.

MALICE: Am I being detained?

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah. Let me start, especially because, believe it or not, there will be a few people who for whatever reason are not familiar with Michael Malice. I don't understand how that's possible. So let's start off with an area that you know an awful lot about, and that is North Korea, because I did get a number of questions on North Korea. And we'll come back to a few of those, but the first one is, if Kim Jong-un does decide to go out in a blaze of glory, let's say, who would be at immediate risk? Would he prioritize leveling Seoul with traditional weapons or nuking Tokyo or — ? What would be the priorities? And knowing that his ICBMs are unreliable at best, would he even bother going for the gold in his mind in attempting to nuke any part of the U.S. including Hawaii or Guam?

MALICE: Well, Hawaii or Guam, that wouldn't happen. So if he had his druthers, I'm sure the first place would be Tokyo, to do the most damage, because they hate the Japanese violently. However, Seoul is very close, so that becomes a question of how much of a risk do you want to take and how much damage do you want to do. So that's just a strategic question at that point. But he would almost certainly want to do as much damage as possible. And I think they also are prepared, come an attack, to storm the DMZ and kind of invade the South, is a possibility. So who knows where those missiles are going to fly? But definitely Seoul would be the easiest target.

WOODS: What are the conditions under which a Korean reunification would take place, and what would it look like?

MALICE: Well, we talk about this in my book, and there's several different scenarios. One would be the North would be sort of a protectorate of the South. The economic disparity and cultural disparity between the North and the South is much greater than between East and West Germany. When Kim Jong-il met the South Korean president, he was scared to learn that they were having a little bit of trouble understanding each other, because the languages have grown a little bit different from each other in terms of dialect. So that's one scenario. It also depends on the circumstances under which they're reunited. If they're reunited in the sense that the North is destroyed and the South takes control, we might be looking at a Marshall Plan situation. So no one

really knows. These are not — you know, it's not like the board game of Life where you get married, then you get a job, and then you retire. There's infinite possibilities.

WOODS: Somebody wants to know actually if you have a favorite personal story from any of the interviews you've done on North Korea, where either the interviewer or another panelist just stunned you in terms of their ignorance on any particular topic, preferably North Korea.

MALICE: Well, I'm not stunned by — The reason I wrote the book, among other things, is I was watching all the press and discussions about North Korea and everyone was getting it completely wrong. To have a good line from *Atlas Shrugged*, I was going to put a stop to this once and for all. So now I guess there's not really an excuse, because when you read my book, you're really going to get the situation. You're not going to have an answer, but you're really going to understand how they think, how it got to be this way. The line I always say is the book starts off as a fairy tale and ends as a murder mystery, because how did this family turn these 25 million people into prisoners and slaves? It didn't happen overnight. It was very piecemeal. The walls kept closing in decade by decade.

Well, when people don't know how to pronounce Kim Jong-il. That happened recently. That is the one that I'm just kind of shocked by, if you're working the press, if only because they talk about it so much.

WOODS: Right, right. Somebody wants to know why did China and Vietnam not turn out like North Korea?

MALICE: This is a very long, very complicated situation. To begin with, Korea was bifurcated before Kim Il-sung took over. So China was never bifurcated by external forces. I'm not that heavily familiar with the Vietnam situation, but Vietnam was much later than the Koreas, so they aren't analogous at all other than geographical proximity.

WOODS: Now, on a more — let's get to more personal sort of questions for a moment here. Somebody wants to know, you've done celebrity ghostwriting.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: Give us a few examples of people you've written for.

MALICE: Probably the biggest names are comedian D.L. Hughley and Matt Hughes from the UFC.

WOODS: Okay, and UFC is — ?

MALICE: Ultimate Fighting Championship. He's a cage fighter.

WOODS: So somebody wanted to know: how did you get into that? How does anyone get into that?

MALICE: Anyone, I don't know. It's extremely difficult. It's the — celebrity books are the blue chip of publishing, because you know you're going to get a return on your investment and you're going to get publicity regardless of the book's sales, so it's very easy to sell, or the easiest sales. I got into it because I had an editor who had a book proposal of mine that was similar to a book they were doing. He wanted to get me onto that project, and when that fell through, Matt Hughes was Plan B, and that one turned out to be a *New York Times* bestseller. So it's very, very difficult to get into. You have to have credentials under your belt, and you have to know how to be personable.

WOODS: How do you — I wonder if you can even put this into words. Maybe this is something you do on instinct or something. But how do you get to the point where you can really write in the voice of another person?

MALICE: Well, it's not always as simple as that, and I mean, that kind of stuff where someone is like not talking to the person and just writing the book — like if Britney Spears writes a novel and that's ghostwritten, that person has never met Britney Spears. So that's not been the case with any of my books. I think it has to do with, part of it is being obsessed with vernacular and having a very high level of empathy and understanding of how other people think and what their values are.

WOODS: Let's talk about the Michael Malice case in particular. How did you break into it? And you're saying you need to have credentials. Okay, obviously if you've done this several times, those become your credentials because you've got a track record. How did you break in not having done this before?

MALICE: Well, I had one book, because I had a blog that became a book, and then Harvey Pekar had written my biography, which his editor had read. And having a book proposal is also going to be proof that you're capable of writing. And this editor had taken a chance earlier on someone, and that someone had been Neil Strauss, who wrote *The Game* at his behest, and Neil had been a *Rolling Stone* writer and he did several major bestsellers: Marilyn Manson, Jenna Jameson. He did the Mötley Crüe book, *The Dirt*. So I guess Neil Strauss kind of paved the way for me for Jeremy to take a chance on me. That's what Jeremy told me.

WOODS: And then once you start doing it, you get other opportunities because you're good at it, you have a track record —

MALICE: No, you have to be a hustler.

WOODS: Yeah.

MALICE: You have to know how to hustle.

WOODS: Have you had the same literary agent from the start?

MALICE: No, no, no. Most people are incompetent. My agent now I'm very, very happy with, but yeah, it's not been the same.

WOODS: Hmm, okay. All right, so there's — some of that stuff has sort of interested me. Now this is a really — if you don't want to answer this one, don't —

MALICE: Okay.

WOODS: — but I have people who, because of my — I have an email list on just entrepreneurial things, so I have a lot of people who think that way. And they want to know how many streams of income a guy like you has, like how do you support yourself. And have you ever had a job, a traditional, 9-to-5-style job also, and if so, what did you have to do in order to be able to quit it?

MALICE: The blog I was working on took off. That's what let me quite. Income streams is just writing articles, when I do talks or whatever, and writing books. Yeah, *Dear Reader*, because I did it through a Kickstarter, I get a fair amount per book, so when the people buy it, it really supports me. I mean, that's a big, big help. So I don't have multiple income streams yet — I guess I do, but I guess it just each kind of adds up and makes it a whole big thing together.

WOODS: Right, sure.

MALICE: I mean, the whole story of *Ego & Hubris* is me getting away from the 9-to-5 nightmare.

WOODS: Yeah. All right, let's leave that. I'm going to ask you a completely random question. Again, these are all — well, not all. I'm throwing a few of my own in here and there, but I really did want people who listen regularly to have a chance to ask you whatever they want to ask you. And one of them was: "Here's a question I like to ask of people I'm just getting to know. Have you ever seen a movie that you absolutely hated? If so, which movie was it and why did you hate it? I've found people's responses to this to be highly illuminating."

MALICE: Well, I hate movies in general, and when I say that, people think I'm being provocative or whatever — by which I mean, if I'm going to a movie theater, I'm out 10 bucks or 15 bucks and 2 hours of my life. And the odds of the return on that investment being realized are very, very low, and I don't know if it's a function of being older or if it's a function of the culture, but I think as I've gotten older I've found movies to get worse and worse and worse. Or maybe because they're so repetitive, so when you see them at 18 it's awesome but when you see them at 38 it's like, I've seen this already. So there have been lots of movies — oh yeah, I'll tell you two that just came out in the last year that drove me crazy. *Bad Santa 2*, which was the sequel to my favorite comedy, and *Rings*, which was the sequel to *The Ring*, which was one of the best movies ever.

WOODS: I love that movie. Not the sequel that you hated, but —

MALICE: Yeah, *The Ring* is phenomenal.

WOODS: Terrifying. I thought terrifying, yeah.

MALICE: So my dad when I was four or five thought I was old enough to see *Poltergeist*. I was not. And for those of you who are too young, *Poltergeist* is I think is fair to say the scariest movie of all time, not because even the movie itself is so scary, but when you're finished watching it, it stays in your head and messes with you.

WOODS: Yeah, I'm probably four years older than you, three or four years older, and I saw that movie when it came out too and I was terrified of that too. I wasn't even ten years old.

MALICE: Yeah, it's an absolutely terrifying movie. And it's hard to even say what makes the movie terrifying, but that one does. Movies like *Saw* are not scary; they're just, you know, kind of — I haven't seen them, but they're gross. So *The Ring*, I was a grown up and I went, Well, I'm a big boy now, I can watch it. And I watched it and I enjoyed it and I was fine. Then I went to bed by myself in my house and I had to turn on the lights because I was scared [laughing]. So *The Ring* is amazing and scary. So I hate both of them because they took something wonderful and they just crapped on them, and it bothered me that something that I held in esteem has kind of been a little bit mitigated by these sequels.

WOODS: Tell me why you prefer not to call yourself a libertarian.

MALICE: Because it has connotations that I don't like. For example, a lot of people hear "libertarian," they think Libertarian Party. They think minarchist, and I am more convinced of anarchism in a moral sense than I am of capitalism in an economic sense. And a libertarian is someone who thinks less government is better; however, there's also the strategic case to be made, which I don't know that I hold but I'm amenable to, that maybe it might be better to have it worse in the short term because then it'll collapse. Like these are strategic arguments that I can wrap my head around.

WOODS: All right, I'm curious about some of these questions that are coming through here too about Ayn Rand, because I know that — obviously she didn't want to be called a libertarian. She had choice words for libertarians. But I know you are an admirer of Ayn Rand —

MALICE: Oh yes.

WOODS: — have many good things to say about her, but you would not call yourself a Randian. And yet, most people in our society, if you say anything kind of about Rand, they will classify you as a Randian. So what is it about her or the ideas or whatever that makes you stop short of calling yourself a Randian or an objectivist?

MALICE: Well, she explicitly said if you're an objectivist, you have to agree with everything part and parcel, and since I don't as an anarchist, by her definition — and I think she has the right to define objectivist how she likes — I'm not an objectivist. Why I'm not a Randian is because I think there is a certain grimness to her approach. All of her novels, all of them, the plot is the hero recedes from society and kind of isolates himself. That's the constant thread. I don't think that's a good approach. That's not my goal at all. I think that a lot of her — just there's a lot of her views that I — I think that

her belief in the blank slate is false, and this is central to her thinking. So because of all this, I can't really call myself a Randian.

WOODS: When you say the blank slate, you mean that people are born into the world —

MALICE: Tabula rasa, meaning like we're not born with any kind of — I'm using ideas in the colloquial sense, not in the accurate sense — "ideas in our head," whereas there's lots of — you know, there's all sorts of engineering in our brains that kind of trick our thinking that we're discovering.

WOODS: Yeah.

MALICE: Cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias, the fact that you're going to trust the words of your friends over an enemy when it comes to facts. There's all sorts of things that the mind is kind of working against itself.

WOODS: I'm sure this isn't quite what she had in mind, but I'm fairly certain that at least some linguists are of the opinion that there's something to the structure of the mind that predisposes us to be able to learn languages and to —

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: Anyway, all right, so there are those things.

MALICE: And also, like in terms of applying her politics, the idea that if Barry Goldwater had run a more philosophical campaign he would have won and her really unflinching belief in democracy, endorsing Nixon, refusing to endorse Reagan — I mean, these are, I think — she's not a Machiavellian.

WOODS: So how did you first encounter her work?

MALICE: I'll tell you exactly — I was in a bookstore at the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and I saw her books and I loved the art deco style. And *Atlas Shrugged* on the back cover said, "This is the story of a man who said he would stop the motor of the world and did." And I thought it was a science fiction novel a la *Ghostbusters II*, where there are all these gears underneath Manhattan and there's a literal engine, blah, blah, blah. And there's a guy sitting there and he said, No, no, no, no, you've got to read them in order. Read *Anthem* first. Then if you like that, read — So I judged those books by their cover. Nick Gaetano was the artist, and they were just absolutely stunning, the early '90s versions of her books.

WOODS: I think those are the ones that I read, actually. The early '90s was actually when I read her stuff.

MALICE: Gold and black covers.

WOODS: Yeah. And I bought them — yeah. I thought they were stunning. I bought them and read them over spring break. I read one over one spring break; I read the other

one — because I had already read *We the Living*, which I thought was great, and then I got these other two that I read over each — one spring break apiece, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*. And I found them absolutely absorbing. I thought that the criticisms that you would hear from a Bill Buckley just didn't ring true for me at all. I thought they were very, very compelling. I actually — I seem to be in a distinct minority here. I did not like *Anthem* at all, because I read *Anthem* last, and so *Anthem* was kind of a let down after the great, massive, epic works. This little *Anthem* just couldn't live up to my expectations. But anyway, so I was a big fan of these books, even though there were parts that I wouldn't have written that way and I didn't much care for.

All right, so you encountered these ideas — and by the way, I was also compelled by that "stopping the motor of the world." Wow, okay. This, I know I've got to read this. So it's not just — I think most people today when they hear "Ayn Rand," they think "selfishness." Honestly, that is their entire understanding of Ayn Rand.

MALICE: Yes. But dog-eat-dog.

WOODS: So let's start exactly there. The thing is, there are parts of her novels where there'll be a character who does a kind thing for another person, and the person will thank the person for the kindness, and we'll be told, Well, listen, I'm helping you for my sake because I delight in your company and I want to see you do well. But I'm doing this for me. You know, is it excusable for somebody to listen to that and hear that type of theme repeated over and over again and say, Well, I guess she's all about selfishness?

MALICE: Well, I mean, she uses that word incorrectly. And in fact, Donahue asked her, "What's so great about selfishness?" And she goes, "Use a different word. Self-esteem." And it's like, yeah, if you are saying that your life is the highest value and that which furthers it is great as long as it's not at the expense of others, when you put it in those terms, it's almost New Agey. So when she was writing the introduction to *Virtuous Selfishness*, her collection of essays, it as like, "Why do you have to use that word?" And she said, "For the exact reason that you fear." And it's like, that's not what selfishness means. Selfishness means complete disregard for other people, and I'm going to get mine and I don't care — if I'm enriched by a nickel and I ruin this family, I'm — you know, and it's like, that's not what she's advocating, but that is what that word implies. So it's a very bad word choice.

WOODS: But it's extremely provocative. To write a book called *The Virtue of Selfishness* is shocking, whereas the word she probably needs is very awkward, like a word like "self-regarding" is probably better.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: But you're not going to write a book — *The Virtue of Self-Regardingness* doesn't go anywhere.

MALICE: Sure, but I mean, I don't know. That's a marketing issue.

WOODS: Yeah, that's a marketing problem.

MALICE: But she was insisting that she was not doing that, that "selfishness" means only — "selfishness" means concern with the self and everyone else who's using it is using it wrong. And I think it was — I forgot who it was, the guy from the American Philosophical Association, he confronted her and said, "Show me a dictionary," and she got all agitated. Because the dictionary definition very clearly is concern with the self to the detriment of others or to the disregard of others, which she was not for at all and which I certainly am not for.

WOODS: Okay, so that is what most people think about when they think about her. They think of capitalism and they think about that. And they think about —

MALICE: Exploitation. They think of defending exploitation.

WOODS: Right. And maybe they think about her larger-than-life characters.

MALICE: And the thing is, in her books the exploiters are the villains. The villains are capitalists. They're not always government people. Like, she said explicitly, "The worst of all politic phenomena is the statist businessman."

WOODS: Yeah. Unfortunately, not a lot of people are prepared to draw subtle lessons and distinctions — or they don't know any of this about —

MALICE: Well, when she was on Tom Snyder towards the end of her life, Tom Snyder says, " Many people think you're nuts," I think was the word he said, and she goes, "No, they want you to think it." And he's like, Oh, I got you.

WOODS: Ah, nice, nice. That's good. That's good. Another thing I respect about her —

MALICE: Though she was nuts in many ways, though. She absolutely was.

WOODS: Oh, look, no doubt about that.

MALICE: She wouldn't get her cats fixed so that they could have that pleasure. Did you know that?

WOODS: No, I didn't know that.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay.

MALICE: That's pretty nuts.

WOODS: Yeah, that's pretty nuts. One thing I admire about her certainly is that, like Milton Friedman, whom you can also see opposite Phil Donahue, she is quick on her feet and just a dynamo when she's being interviewed.

MALICE: Yes. You've got to watch these videos. They are the acme of being free market. They're so hilarious.

WOODS: Also because she leaves her interlocutors speechless.

MALICE: That happened — I'm just going to spoil one thing. She was going after feminists viciously, and Donahue, incredulous, was like, "Would you fight for anything?" And she goes, "How did I get here?" And he literally — the audience laughs, and he turns around shaking his head at his own stupidity, speechless. That actually happens.

WOODS: Wow, wow, that is great.

MALICE: Yeah, "How did I get here?" [laughing] It was so matter of fact.

WOODS: Isn't it amazing that, let's say 20 years ago, if you'd wanted to find Ayn Rand on Donahue, it would have been very, very difficult. And we just take for granted that anybody listening to this can just go and with a few keystrokes in five seconds watch all these things.

MALICE: And they recently found footage that they thought lost of her on Johnny Carson, which is also on YouTube.

WOODS: Oh, wow, that I have not seen. Wow, geez, Johnny Carson. I didn't even know she was on Johnny Carson.

MALICE: She was on repeatedly.

WOODS: Really? I didn't know about that.

MALICE: And he cancelled the other guests because he was so taken with her and what she was saying.

WOODS: Man.

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: But what I want to say is that, apart from these things, her philosophy, objectivism, goes well beyond this. She speaks about other — she speaks about epistemology and she has things to say about aesthetics and ethics and so on and on. So can you give us like a short, I don't want to say "dumb-guy," but like low-level briefing on the other aspects of this?

MALICE: She can. You don't need me to do it. I mean, she goes into this — she had to answer — you know, Google it. She had to say at a booksellers' conference, she was asked, "Can you define your philosophy while standing on one foot?" And she did it.

WOODS: Can you tell us what she said?

MALICE: Sure, she said, "Metaphysics: objective reality. Epistemology: reason. Ethics: rational selfishness" — or selfishness, I forget which way it was put — "And politics: laissez-faire capitalism."

WOODS: All right, now on laissez-faire capitalism, a number of people were saying, We've never heard Michael specifically refer to the Austrian economists or the tradition of thought of Austrian economics. Is he interested in this, does he think of himself as an Austrian, or does he just not really think of himself as an economist per se? They want to know where you'd situate yourself.

MALICE: I'm not an economist. I read Mises' *Socialism* — is that the one?

WOODS: Yep.

MALICE: It was torture. I think, just like Rand did, that economics is not beside the point, but people aren't getting over through economic arguments. They're getting over through moral arguments and through tribalism and emotional arguments. So I forget who it was, but they were just saying — Yaron Brook, the head of the Ayn Rand Institute, goes, The economic argument's been made repeatedly, so why don't we all have laissez-faire capitalism? And that's a very valid point. I mean, it's not even close.

WOODS: Yeah, I've more or less believed that over the course of my life, even though I love reading the Austrian economists — I'm very happy reading Carl Menger. I'm very happy reading these people, just because — I do it because it brings me pleasure. I enjoy thinking about these things, and I just love the way it shows me how the world can really work, how the world can work without coercion, and it teaches me that systematically.

But even though I get all this enjoyment out of it, I have also realized that, yeah, if we wrote more thousand-page treatises, we need those things — I mean, the free society needs all the intellectual building blocks like these. But that's not what's going to get us closer to the end point. We are going to need that stuff, but you're right, I think most people form their opinions not because they read or did not read a treatise like that; they have certain moral intuitions that they then try to buttress through whatever arguments they happen to find. If they find an economic article that seems to blend in with what they already believe morally, then they'll just latch onto it. So I think it's secondary and it tends to be downstream, so to speak, of morality and people's first principles.

But I say this as somebody who loves economics. I thoroughly enjoy studying it, reading about it, writing about it. But I feel the same way you do. If only it were the case that we could just sit people down with economics books and it would solve our problems. It solves some problems, but I more or less agree with what she had to say about this.

Let me ask you the other obvious thing about you, which would be: if you —

MALICE: Can I make a point? Is that okay?

WOODS: All right. I allow people to make — you're allowed to make one point. Go ahead.

MALICE: That's one of the reasons I wrote *Dear Reader*, is because I was born in the Soviet Union. Rand escaped the Soviet Union. We know what government is and is capable, and I think a lot of Americans who grow up here, who have it pretty darn good don't really intellectually or emotionally understand what government is capable of. So when you read *Dear Reader*, yes, it's about North Korea, but in a broader sense, Kim Jong-il, the protagonist and the narrator, it's not like he's embarrassed. He's proud of his dictatorship and his controlling of the country and all these other horrible things. So you get an understanding of how this stuff actually works and how bad it can get, and I think we're very privileged here that a lot of people just don't understand what this means in practice.

WOODS: That actually reminds me of a question that we got for you. What would have to happen in the U.S. for you, Michael Malice, to consider the U.S. to have become too dangerous or oppressive to stay in? Would it be — what would have to happen? Or is it things that you just could not conceive of happening here?

MALICE: Well, you notice how Reagan said in 1964 how we're the last hope of liberty, there's nowhere else to go? What would it take? I think, I mean, we have a long way to go. Even Sweden is not too far gone for me to be like, I've got to get out of Dodge. So I can't even imagine what it would look like, and frankly, I'm not too worried.

WOODS: On the one hand, people might listen —

MALICE: Maybe First Amendment stuff, like if people are getting locked up. Then I'd be in trouble.

WOODS: Right. Right, yeah. And who knows? I mean, there are trends out there that are very disturbing, and there are plenty of things that have happened that I didn't think would happen, so who knows? I personally am inclined to agree with you on this, and on top of that, I'm such a homebody, I just never feel — I always feel like a fish out of water anywhere other than the U.S., so I'm going to be here regardless of what happens.

MALICE: Then you need to spend more time in Canada because it's awesome. I love Canada.

WOODS: Ah, okay. Yeah, I've only very briefly visited Canada —

MALICE: Oh, it's wonderful.

WOODS: — so I would not at all mind getting back there. All right, let's see. What did I want to — God darn it, I can't think of what I was going to say. Yeah, let's ask you this. Let's ask you this. I know from talking to you about a variety of things that you're actually quite optimistic about actually our present situation and the future, simply because if you have a baseline of comparison, if you compare the present situation to 50 years ago, 100 years ago, and so on, there are a lot of ways in which things are

actually much better. But yet at the same time, I think people listen to you and sometimes — when you and I talk, we're very cynical about politicians —

MALICE: I'm never cynical — well, okay, go ahead.

WOODS: But they've somehow, for some reason, they go from that to think that we're pessimistic, and there's no necessary connection there. So take a minute to explain what the case for optimism is. I'm constantly getting emails from people who are telling me that — we get this all the time. "This is the last election that matters because we may not have a country in 2020." Or, "We may not have a country in 2012." Or, "We'll have a dictatorship by 2016." None of these things ever come to pass, so give me your case for optimism.

MALICE: You just answered my question. Yeah, first of all, it's not that things are getting worse; it's that you're getting smarter and are becoming more aware of these bad things. So the perception is that it's getting worse, but just no, people are getting more informed as they age. When you're a kid and things are terrible and then they get better as you get older, but as you get older they look worse because now you're seeing things you didn't see as a kid. No eight-year-old knows about politics. So that's going to be one common misconception.

Another common misconception is I can't see any evidence at all by any metric other than the budget increasing that things are getting worse. I think there are more venues for speech than ever. I think you don't have unions running things like you did back in the day. I don't think politicians are regarded as heroes as they were, you know, years ago. I think the media is being held in complete contempt, or at the very least with skepticism. The last step is the universities. So I mean, the fact that I can go do a Kickstarter, do a book, and then I'm on Tucker Carlson and the president's watching and I'm influencing what's happening in North Korea. And maybe possibly, if I allow myself to think I'm moving the needle a little bit with helping these 24 million people, I mean, how great is that? So I don't see any reason for pessimism, and it's just, if you want to think life is terrible, we right now have it better than anyone on earth has ever had it ever. So if this is not enough for you, that is a you problem.

WOODS: That's a good one. That's a good one. And in fact, as you were talking, I remembered the maybe equally juicy question I want to ask you. Think about — when you first encountered Ayn Rand, what year was that?

MALICE: It was '94.

WOODS: Okay, so that's a while ago. From '94 to now, would you say that your thinking, either in general or on particular subjects, has changed or evolved significantly?

MALICE: Oh, of course. I've become an anarchist. Back then I thought — and everyone laughed at me and I was right to have this hypothesis — if we have a Republican president and Republican Congress, which we hadn't had since the '50s, that things would get better. And then we had George W. Bush — and even before 9/11, there was no talk of cutting the budget. There was no talk of deregulation in any meaningful

sense. And that was all the proof you needed. And then what happens? You get wars and expansion of — what was it? Medicare or Medicaid? And it's like, these people — and then you get to know them and they're abominations. So that's a major way my — I mean, '94, I was a freshman in college. That's my entire adult life.

WOODS: Now, Ayn Rand of course was not an anarchist —

MALICE: No.

WOODS: — and was very critical of people who were, but there are people who believed in her philosophy in general, like Roy Childs, who were anarchists. In fact, he wrote an open letter on this subject. So you didn't come to that conclusion from reading her, so how did you get from here to there?

MALICE: I think the seeds of anarchism are within Rand, and I think once you realize — Lysander Spooner is another one, although the thing with jury nullification is something I don't get how people think it's just this unmitigated good. So once you realize that law is not enforced but imposed and that the Constitution has no authority, anarchy is the natural consequence.

WOODS: Okay, but did you not thing to yourself — I get that moral ideas are — but wasn't there some part of you that thought there are a lot of practical questions that have to be answered about — maybe it's a moral imperative to have a stateless society, but that doesn't answer the question of once we get there, how's it going to work? Can it work? Will it exist for five seconds and then disintegrate? How did you satisfy yourself on questions like that?

MALICE: I am not 100% certain that it wouldn't disintegrate within five minutes. I'm not Nostradamus — well, a Nostradamus who's actually Nostradamus.

WOODS: [laughing] Right.

MALICE: That's why I say I'm an anarchist and not a libertarian, because I'm much more comfortable with the moral argument than I am with the economic one.

WOODS: Or even — I guess not the political one, but just the utilitarian, pragmatic one, to say that —

MALICE: Because 99.9% of all of our interactions are anarchist. I mean, the idea that you and I would call the cops is almost never the case, and if we would have contract disputes, that would still happen under anarchism. I mean, it's a question of fees, but I'm sure it would be pretty analogous. So I mean, that's all it comes down to.

WOODS: Back on North Korea for a minute, I've been curious to ask, and apparently other people too: when exactly did you go to North Korea?

MALICE: 2012.

WOODS: Okay. So that's five years ago. Did you get to know people while you were there or did you just interview people?

MALICE: Yeah, if you — I didn't interview, but if you read my article for *Reason* magazine, "My Week in North Korea," I lay it out how I got inside my guide's head.

WOODS: Ah, okay, all right. Now, have you gone back since then?

MALICE: No.

WOODS: Have you been in contact with anybody over there since then?

MALICE: No. They can't — they would get severe punishment for having relationships with outsiders, foreigners.

WOODS: Wow.

MALICE: Yeah, it's very, very dangerous.

WOODS: Was it tricky for you to be able to get into the country?

MALICE: No, it's legal.

WOODS: And you could go anywhere you wanted?

MALICE: No, you're on a tour. But I mean, that sounds more ominous than it is. I mean, you could very easily see yourself going to London and going on a tour.

WOODS: Yeah, sure. Okay. All right, I had wondered about that, and I also wonder what some other people asking. Really, what is the deal with the haircut?

MALICE: I change my haircut every month. What do you mean?

WOODS: Yeah, okay, but —

MALICE: I go to my guy and I say, "Make me something cool," and he makes something cool.

WOODS: Wow, that's pretty good.

MALICE: So get into it or get over it.

WOODS: [laughing] That's nice.

MALICE: I don't think this haircut I have now is at all even remotely out there.

WOODS: No, but I guess maybe when people look at videos of you from years ago —

MALICE: I had the horns, because the reason I had my hair in horns, it kind of looks like Wolverine, was because I was a Cato intern in '97 and we went to deliver videotapes to all of the Senate, which I'm sure went straight into the garbage. And I came back and there was a speaker, it was the late Julian Simon, who wrote *The Ultimate Resource II*, which is a *must* read for anyone who likes liberty. And we couldn't go into the auditorium because he was already speaking, but there was a monitor in the hallway. He was bald, shaved head. And I'm looking at this monitor and it looked like he had horns. And I thought I was, you know, tripping face or something. And it turned out, when he started the speech, he goes, "Since my enemies think I'm the devil." And he had suction-cup horns on his head. He died shortly — I got his autograph. He died shortly after that. So I said to myself, if I ever get to talk to Cato, I'm going to have horns. And I did, in honor of Julian Simon, who's the best.

WOODS: That — okay, that's a good story.

MALICE: But it's also fun having horns, because again, not being corporate, I can do so much more edgy stuff.

WOODS: I get emails a lot from people who want the same piece of advice, and I want to know how you would answer these emails. It's: I'm a recent college graduate. I love liberty, and I want to devote my life to advancing the cause. What do you recommend I do?

MALICE: Find a better hobby.

WOODS: But it's my passion, Michael.

MALICE: Okay, go do you. I'm not the person to advise you on this. That's not my career. That's not my goal.

WOODS: What is your goal?

MALICE: When I first started, my goal was, a) to not have an alarm clock, b) to not have to do small talk with people I didn't want to, and you know, to be able to buy cool clothes when I needed to and be a fun person. So that was my list.

WOODS: That's pretty good.

MALICE: Yeah, good work if you can get it.

WOODS: Yeah, sure. If you're Michael Malice at age 50 —

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: And let's say you're not quite at age 50 yet.

MALICE: Correct.

WOODS: You're at age 50. Where would you like to be?

MALICE: One of the things I learned throughout my career is — and I'm a bit of a control freak because everyone's a screw-up — at a certain point, you have to just let the roller coaster take you where it wants to. The idea that I would meet Harvey — if I told you —

WOODS: [laughing] I know.

MALICE: — I'm going to meet Harvey Pekar, that wouldn't surprise you. But if I said to you, When I meet Harvey, he is going to be so taken with me that this man who has spent a lifetime writing comic books about his own mundane life in Cleveland is going to write a graphic novel about you — if I said that to you with a straight face, you would have grounds to lock me up, because that's certifiable. Yet that's what happened. If I told you my first book's going to be with this Ultimate Fighting Champion and we're going to be the best of friends and really hit it off, or that I'm going to go to North Korea, or that I'm going to be on the last episode of *Red Eye* or I'm going to be on Tucker Carlson — you know, all these miracles or just wonderful things that happened. So it's crazy. There's no way I could have predicted where I'd be at age 40. But I'm sure I'm going to be much more prominent and have a lot more under my belt, but in terms of knowing where I am, that's crazy.

WOODS: Could you ever imagine working for a think-tank?

MALICE: No.

WOODS: Now, why not? I'm curious about the why not.

MALICE: Well, I could in the sense that if they wanted to pay me a lot of money and I'm the one who goes and gives talks, that's technically working for them. I just can't imagine working in an office, really, unless I have my own show.

WOODS: Yeah. Is it because you wouldn't be self-directed or because you couldn't choose your own hours or — ?

MALICE: It would be the fact that I am better at spreading these ideas than any of them, that I don't need to kowtow to suits. I don't need to — I mean, a think-tank is — I mean, they're not really efficacious and they're not entertaining, so I'm much more in the entertaining aspect of promoting liberty. So I don't even know what that Venn diagram would be.

WOODS: Yeah, I mean, I ask that because when I asked you about young people coming out of college, they always expect me to refer them to a think-tank or whatever. And you know, I see — I benefit from some of the output that the think-tanks produce. I'm not saying that think-tanks actually change anything, because I don't think generally policy papers do.

MALICE: I'm too good-looking to work at a think-tank. I'm too good-looking and well dressed to work at a think-tank. Are you kidding me?

WOODS: But I think people think, Well, it's going to pay me a salary and I'll be able to work on things that I like. So that's their aspiration.

MALICE: Okay, well, if you want to sell your soul for 30 grand a year, more power to you. The Faust story I learned is you sell your soul and you're the best violinist in the world. You're not, you know, Assistant Director of Health Research.

WOODS: Well, here's a question that is pretty long, but I'm going to read it to you because I think you would enjoy wrestling with it.

MALICE: All right.

WOODS: The guy says, "I've heard Michael talk about the disdain that elite society feels toward blue collar people, for example, like welders, farmers, etc. Where does he fall in this, given that he's been hesitant understandably to apply labels to himself, but accepts anarchist and Hamiltonian elitist? Would he then steer his children into narrow bands of education and employment that he sees as suitable, or would he value their decision to, say, follow their passion as a brick mason? They'd have to attend only private education based on his feelings toward the public school system. Yes, there are the stereotypical Trump voters at very construction site with empty Coors Light cans in the back of the truck and tobacco stains on their jeans who couldn't spell their address if it wasn't on their own driver's license. But the intellect of an aged craftsman and the passion for his craft is a truly remarkable thing that may surprise him. Sadly, these craftsmen seem to be vanishing from our society at an alarming rate. Maybe Malice would be surprised at how funny and in line with his sense of humor the insults, slams, and practical jokes are throughout shops and job sites. These are the places where many of our ideas seem to be capable of flourishing due to the independent nature or people attracted to such fields. Hank Rearden, after all, ran a foundry, and you can't be afraid to get a little dirty in that job."

MALICE: Well, I'm not Hank Rearden. In terms of aesthetics, I think things like scrimshaw and all that stuff is just, I am repelled by and find horrific. But that's a personal taste, you know what I mean? If that's what you like, more power to you. I just find it awful. I grew up in a blue collar neighborhood in Brooklyn, Bensonhurst. When I go to Hillsboro, Illinois and everyone there's a hunter, I get along with everyone great, and not ironically. I value these people and I enjoy spending time with them.

So as for if my son wanted to be a bricklayer, I mean, I just — I would want my kids to be ambitious, but I also know it's kind of difficult if your dad is someone who kind of — you know, has his own Wikipedia page, even if he's as minor a person as I am. So I have no — the disdain that these kind of media elites have is for the blue collar and their ideas and how they live, and I think that's something I don't share whatsoever. However, I don't agree with the idea that everyone has something interesting to say or everyone has their own story to tell or everyone is of value. That I don't agree with at all. I think most people are completely generic and replaceable, and even if they tell a joke once in a while, it's fine if I don't have the joke.

WOODS: What is your opinion on immigration?

MALICE: I'm not an open borders guy. I'm an immigrant. I think that immigrants have done a great deal to make this country better, indisputably. If it wasn't for immigrants, we wouldn't have had the atom bomb because those were all people fleeing Nazi Germany. But the idea that — you know, and I think a lot of these countries — like Syria, for example — of the Middle East, I do think we messed things up there and it's fair to say that we should be kind of fixing the mess. But if I run over somebody with my truck, the idea I'm going to make him my roommate with his family is psychotic, especially if they don't speak the languages I do and they don't share my culture. That doesn't make any sense to me. But I mean, that's where I guess I stand on immigration.

WOODS: But there are people, there are libertarians who think that concern about language and culture is per se collectivist.

MALICE: Well, that's why I'm not a libertarian.

WOODS: [laughing] Okay, but do you believe in the nonaggression principle?

MALICE: Of course.

WOODS: Then by my definition you're a libertarian.

MALICE: Okay, well, you can classify me however you want. I don't identify with that term, because that way I don't have to answer to people who are like, Well, you don't fit in my classification. That's nice. Cool story, bro.

WOODS: All right, how do you —

MALICE: I don't think immigration is anywhere near as important an issue as it's being made out to be, because you don't need those huge numbers of people here for the progressives to be spreading their ideas. I think the ideas and the growth of the government would be happening regardless of immigrant populations if you look at the New Deal and if you look at Woodrow Wilson when America was much more homogeneous.

WOODS: Okay, but how do you square excluding people from peacefully passing over borders with the nonaggression principle?

MALICE: Because I think everything the government does is illegitimate, but not everything the government does is equally harmful. If you have a government program and there's like a flood and you're buying people new houses, yeah, that's the nonaggression principle, it shouldn't — I mean, but that as opposed to SWATing households if they're growing marijuana and terrorizing them, the idea that they're both government so they're both equally bad, that's crazy.

WOODS: On what basis would you decide it's okay for these people to come in but not okay for those people to come in?

MALICE: I don't think that is for me to decide, and I think if I had a gun to my head, it would be level of education, would be one of them. Probably the easiest and best one.

WOODS: Then I could say — and I'm just playing devil's advocate for the fun of it here. I could say, But who's to say — maybe we need a bunch of people to perform jobs that don't require a whole lot of education?

MALICE: We have 300 million of them.

WOODS: So we don't need immigration for that reason?

MALICE: I mean, that's objectively the case.

WOODS: Maybe we need it to be culturally enriched. Wouldn't we be bored without it?

MALICE: No.

WOODS: [laughing] The one-word answer is my favorite answer on the podcast.

MALICE: [laughing]

WOODS: "No" is a good answer. Okay, but I still feel like I want to kind of nail you down on this. I get that you're saying that it's not your decision to make, but given that in the current context there is a government and they would be setting an immigration policy, the question would be what kind of immigration policy would you favor.

MALICE: I would favor a hierarchical, prioritized immigration policy.

WOODS: Would the immigration policy you favor have any — would the hierarchy have anything to do with national origin?

MALICE: Yeah, probably. I think national origin correlates very well with education level, right? So advanced nations, people are going to be going to college and bringing technical skills. You're going to have doctors and things like that, engineers, whereas some third-rate country, you're not going to find them. And frankly, the third-rate country, let's take their doctors. I don't care.

WOODS: Are you —

MALICE: One more thing. The brain drain was one of the big selling points of the U.S. They were compelling that we were getting all of the smart people.

WOODS: All right, I want to ask you one other — this one's totally unrelated. But there are many, many Michael Malice clips on YouTube online, and some of them are of you giving talks and others are of you on various television programs. And a lot of these television programs are panel discussions. Is there any particular moment on any of those panels where our confrontation with somebody else left you immensely satisfied to the point where you still look back fondly on it now?

MALICE: That's a trick question. You know the answer to this.

WOODS: Is it — well, no, I don't know for sure. I know my personal favorites.

MALICE: Yeah, you do.

WOODS: Well, they don't.

MALICE: Well, it's the one where I was talking to that professor's son and I completely —

WOODS: Oh, that was — man, did I love that. I sent that to a ton of people.

MALICE: Of course, yeah, that's — and there's a couple of others where I completely destroyed people, but I kind of feel bad for them, whereas this one, I do not feel bad for and I talk about it in my book, my forthcoming book.

WOODS: So this is a book on Kennedy —

MALICE: Correct.

WOODS: — where you were opposite of a professor's son, and you had just gotten done talking about what terrible people university professors are. And you referred to them as parasites and villains.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: And I loved the way you did that. I just couldn't believe what I was watching [laughing].

MALICE: Oh yeah, it was great. It was my finest hour.

WOODS: Now, had you known the guy's background before you went into that?

MALICE: No, I had never heard of him before. And he's a nobody. You'll never hear from him again.

WOODS: So it was just a glorious moment where everything was aligned properly.

MALICE: No, I think it was — actually, those moments, these types of people, there's plenty of them. You throw a rock in New York and you're going to find them. I think the problem with them is that they are so convinced that they're brilliant and on the side of the angels, they don't know what to do with someone who disagrees with them and is therefore evil by definition and who's smarter than them. I mean, I tossed him around like a pit bull with a toddler.

WOODS: Do you ever worry that you might be off-putting when you say things like that?

MALICE: Off-putting to whom?

WOODS: To the average listener.

MALICE: I don't care about average people.

WOODS: I mean to *a* person listening. To a person I might choose at random. To a random listener.

MALICE: No, because whenever I meet people, I always put out an — I say some kind of provocative or off-putting comment, because right away that gives me a measure of their personality and what they're like. And if they are someone who's put off by something even marginally inappropriate, I have no time for them because I'm never going to be able to be friends with them.

WOODS: Wow, that's good. That's good. You —

MALICE: It's like stress testing with computers.

WOODS: Geez, man. All right, I've only scratched the surface here, but at this point it's getting late in the Woods household. We are recording this across a dining room table, if you can believe that, as Michael's been staying over here with us for a couple of days. But we'll have to do more just general chit-chats, but —

MALICE: You don't have one last question?

WOODS: One last question. Let's see. You know what? I know what we'll do. I'm going to pause the recording, and I'm going to go into the Supporting Listeners group right now, and I'm going to say, "Whoever gives me a good question right now gets the last question" —

MALICE: Oh, that's a great idea. That's a great idea.

WOODS: So here we go, SupportingListeners.com if you want to be part of crazy stunts like this. All right, hold on.

All right, everybody, we're back. I asked for some questions, and boy, did I get some right away. Amazing, all over the country people are submitting questions at the last minute. So somebody asks — and if you don't get this one, you should have listened to Episode 902. He says, "How does he feel about the Mises Foundation?"

MALICE: That clown college?

WOODS: Hey! There we go. All right. And if you don't get that reference, you should have watched our debate on Alexander Hamilton. Okay. "Why doesn't he have a podcast?" Do you want to just handle that once and for all?

MALICE: Uh, I can't. So ask the next question.

WOODS: Okay.

MALICE: I said, "Patience, grasshopper."

WOODS: Yeah, there you go. Let's just leave it at that. "What's his favorite left- or right-wing freak-out in response to any of his writings or positions?"

MALICE: I actually, despite my personality and how I come off, get along well with a lot of people. I have not, I don't think, gotten any freak-outs at all that I could think of. Even that college professor wasn't — I mean, I was hitting him so hard it wasn't really a freak-out. So I can't think of one.

WOODS: All right, well, how about this. "Who can do PR work for the anarchy brand?" And what the question means is everybody I know thinks anarchy means we can all run around killing random people just for fun. How do you — is there any way to undo that?

MALICE: Who can do it?

WOODS: Yeah, or how would it be done, maybe?

MALICE: I'm doing the best I can.

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, okay.

MALICE: Yeah, I mean, I'm on it, okay?

WOODS: Why don't you like musicals, people want to know.

MALICE: Because it's an anachronism.

WOODS: Okay, but sometimes anachronisms are fun.

MALICE: I don't agree. I think anachronisms are embarrassing and cringe-worthy.

WOODS: So —

MALICE: As a writer, it drives me crazy. This is — okay, you're going to hear some autistic screeching right now. As a writer, the fact that you're having these characters and they spontaneously burst into song to explain what's happening makes no sense to me. So in terms of the suspension of disbelief, it's just such a weird form of art. I can't wrap my head around it and I find it embarrassing.

WOODS: All right, that part of it I get. I mean, I still kind of like them because —

MALICE: And it also drives me crazy when you have two characters onstage and like one's thinking and the other one's thinking and the song narrates their thought. And one has a lyric and then stops, and then other one has a lyric. It's like, that doesn't make any sense even in those terms. It's just —

WOODS: [laughing]

MALICE: I find it very — and it's impossible to maintain living in that world where people just burst out singing.

WOODS: Listen, let's end with a final question on North Korea. I think it's a really great one. "What's something you'd like to know about North Korea but that you're currently unable to learn about because of the secrecy surrounding the regime?"

MALICE: Oh, I mean, I would love to know about what the negotiations are like between China and North Korea. That is the big one.

WOODS: Yeah, yeah, isn't it indeed? So yeah, that's a good one. And maybe, who knows? Maybe we eventually do find that out. We'll have to wait and see. All right, well look, Michael Malice. MichaelMalice.com is your website. I've got a link to your book, of course, and the audiobook version at TomWoods.com/903. You are the only person ever to be a guest host of this show and probably the only person ever in the future to be such a guest host. And I am very much looking forward to having you join me for the 1,000th episode. You are the only confirmed guest for that event so far.

MALICE: [laughing]

WOODS: So far it's just you and me.

MALICE: It's like *Highlander*.

WOODS: [laughing] It's going to be in Orlando. I am shooting for Saturday, September 9th, and we're going to do something crazy and fun.

MALICE: Let's do something that Monday.

WOODS: Yeah, indeed, yeah. Yeah, I hadn't even thought of that. But anyway, look, if you're listening to the show, you will hear me talk about whatever this event is going to be, but for now —

MALICE: Ad nauseam [laughing].

WOODS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah, like this conversation. All right, thanks everybody. See you next week.