



**The Totalitarian Mind
Guest: Michael Malice
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Michael Malice is the author of [Dear Reader: The Unauthorized Autobiography of Kim Jong Il](#) and appears frequently on *The Independents on the FOX Business Network*.

WOODS: I was telling you before we went on that I'm sorry to say I was unfamiliar with your work until a good listener alerted me. I always tell people I get some of the best suggestions from the listeners. So I looked you up, and I thought, who is this guy? I'm looking at all your work. Somebody has actually written a book about you. Who in the world are you? So before we get even into *Dear Reader*, the book I want to talk about, I demand that you account for yourself, man. Who the heck are you?

MALICE: Well, I have been in Galt's Gulch this whole time. Sorry you weren't invited, Tom.

WOODS: That's right. Apparently not. I thought I was one of the cool people, but I guess not.

MALICE: Nope, you're going to have to keep being janitor a bit. I am by trade a celebrity ghostwriter. I write books for celebrities. But I've had a book written about me by Harvey Pekar. Harvey is the creator of *American Splendor*. He passed away four years ago. The book is called *Ego and Hubris*. Laissez Faire Books carried it. They gave it a great review. They said Michael Malice is the hero of his own life. I've gotten some negative reviews. *The Onion* called me a human cockroach. And I've been hardcore involved in the liberty movement since college. And trivia question: I own Ayn Rand's copy of *The Fountainhead*.

WOODS: How did you get that?

MALICE: My 21st birthday was coming up, and there was a website called *Paper Tiger*, and the guy worked closely with her estate, and he was releasing some of her library books from her personal library, and I just emailed him wondering what else is coming up, and that was one of them, so my mom snagged it for me for my 21st birthday. So I'll be buried with it.

WOODS: Well, that's a very, very unusual and interesting thing to have—

MALICE: Wait, one more thing, sorry, and I have a copy of *Atlas Shrugged* signed by William F. Buckley, which I got personally signed.

WOODS: Wow! And, of course, my listeners will know that *National Review* absolutely trashed that book in its review.

MALICE: Oh, of course.

WOODS: Oh, yeah, they accused her—they said that her tone is that of a concentration camp guard—to the ovens, go!

MALICE: To a gas chamber, go!

WOODS: To a gas chamber, go! That's right, yeah, even worse.

MALICE: And when she died, William F. Buckley, the embodiment of class, the obituary said, Ayn Rand is dead and so is her philosophy. And yet here we are 30 years later and her philosophy and what it brought forth is very much alive, and him and his disgustingness is not.

WOODS: Well, it's interesting that there's no real interest in the work of Bill Buckley anymore. Nobody is reading his books. Nobody is reading *God and Man at Yale*.

He used to have these debates, three-on-three on public television. This was one thing that I liked. He would have one actor and then two qualified people on each team, and they would go at each other. And I recommended to the producer of Judge Napolitano's old show on FOX Business, Freedom Watch, I said if you brought that back and had a foreign-policy debate between interventionists and non-interventionists, everyone would watch.

MALICE: Yeah, oh, yeah.

WOODS: They never even got back to me. That was a good idea. I'm sorry. That was a good idea. All right, you know what? I feel like I don't even want to talk about your book. I want to talk about you. But I do want to talk about your book. I want to know one last thing. I've done some ghostwriting for a couple of people, but how does somebody get that as a gig? To be a celebrity ghostwriter seems like a pretty hard thing to land.

MALICE: It is, and it was a series of fortuitous circumstances. Basically, I had an editor who was familiar with *Ego and Hubris*, and he had a book proposal of mine to do a book, and he stated he couldn't make an offer on it, and he said we're doing a book that's too similar. And he said I talked to my editorial board, and I said, hey, don't you want to sell Coke *and* Pepsi, and leave RC Cola for somebody else? And they said no. So they said, what I want you to do is I want to bring you on to write that other book, and I want to get rid of that writer. He couldn't do that, and then he goes, hey, would you be interested in doing a memoir, and I said, sure. He said here's the thing: the guy's a Christian, not ironically. And I said, that's great. When I was in college, many of my good friends were Christian, wonderful people. What's the problem? And then I'm like, who is it? And he goes, it's Ultimate Fighting champion Matt Hughes. And then I

got worried, because he's a super jock and a farm boy, and I'm an urban, Jewish kid, intellectual. I didn't know that I had anything in common with him. And we became great, great friends.

Once you have that first one, you're kind of in the system. It's a lot easier. And because of *The Fountainhead* my name is always on all my books, so I'm not even technically a ghostwriter. It's a co-author.

WOODS: Yeah, that's right, because I was looking at the books on your site, and your name is indeed on them. Whereas, mine isn't. But I'm glad, because I don't want the people I'm writing for to have to deal with all my baggage. They have enough problems.

All right, so now we're talking about your book that's more or less ghostwritten. There's a conceit to it. Give us the premise of *Dear Reader*.

MALICE: So *Dear Reader* is the unauthorized autobiography of Kim Jong Il. It's the world's first unauthorized autobiography. I have invented a new genre for this great, great man. So what I did is, the usual ghostwriting process, as you know, you sit down with the client, and you work together, and you create a narrative based on your life. In this case, Kim Jong Il was not available to me. A—I'm not Korean. B—He's deceased. So I went to North Korea, and I got all of the books that they have for sale here, and I read the entire Western library of books, and I adapted that into his life story told from his perspective.

WOODS: So let's talk about some of that life story. Just at the very beginning, when we read about his birth and the circumstances of his birth, he is describing—or you're describing through him; I don't know quite how to put it—interesting natural phenomena that just happen to be occurring at the moment of his birth.

MALICE: Well, it wasn't just happening to be occurring. According to the North Korean mythology and propaganda, he was a miracle child sent from heaven. They refer to him in these terms even though North Korean is essentially atheist, and this is kind of to show that he's been chosen to follow the lead of his father, the great leader Kim Il Sung.

WOODS: Now, when you were reading through some of these works that you got in North Korea, did you in fact detect a kind of a religious tone running through the portrayal of this man?

MALICE: It's very, very intentional and conscious that there is a religious subtext to the North Korean literature, and this is why currently there are many refugees that go to China because the border has become porous between North Korea and China, and when they come back and they're smuggling things, they get kind of a slap on the wrist. However, if they have Bibles on them or they are found to have talked, even, to a Christian in China, they're given the death penalty. So they are very, very atheistic in the sense that this is competition for them. Because they have very consciously established a national religion. They have a Holy Trinity: they have Kim Il Sung, the Great Leader, is the father; they have Kim Jong Il's mother, anti-Japanese

heroine Kim Jong-suk, and she's always referred to as "anti-Japanese heroine," and Kim Jong Il is the Christ figure. He's this beautiful baby boy born on Mount Paektu, which is kind of their Mount Zion at the very North of Korea, although in actuality he was born in Russia, but according to them he was born at the top of this mountain and the weathered changed and the ice on top of Lake Chon cracked, and there was a new star in the heavens, and everyone in Korea just kind of lost their minds with happiness when this beautiful day occurred.

WOODS: I want to continue with the book in just a minute, but I can't help asking: when you were in North Korea, were you able to talk to people about the government? Could people speak freely? Were they suspicious of you? Did they think you were some kind of an agent? Did you talk to people?

MALICE: Yeah, anyone who goes to North Korea, you have a guide with you the whole time, and what I did is I didn't drink. I'm not a big drinker anyway. I didn't have one drop of alcohol the entire time because I wanted to be very, very on and figure out what was real and what was staged. And I wanted to break my guide. I wanted to get through to her to figure out what she really thought. I was born in the Soviet Union. So I know all these little tricks that you use when you're living in a surveillance state. I grew up in a Russian household. So I just kind of picked up what my parents and grandparents knew how to do, and using my ghostwriting techniques, which is when I try to break down someone's façade—because every celebrity has their kind of PR answer, but when you're writing a book, you want to get to know them as a real person and have some new information. So I tried to kind of establish trust and let her feel safe. And she got drunk one night, and one of the things I was telling her about, and this was a very, very telling moment, and I will never forget it. It was chilling in retrospect. I was telling her she reminded me, which was true, a lot of my mom, and seeing her and how she lived in North Korea told me what my mom had to have gone through living in the Soviet Union in the '50s, And she looks at me and she goes, well, then your mother must have hated Russia. And that's such a telling thing to say and a kind of dangerous thing to say in a sense, but they, especially the guides—people who have interaction with the West—they know this is all baloney and nonsense. The bigger the lie, the harder it is to maintain, and they're told so much nonsense about the first family in North Korea that if you have any level of intelligence you're going to realize it's absurd.

WOODS: The regime is so anomalous these days, particularly when you see the South Koreans: prosperous, intelligent, hard-working. You know obviously the North Koreans are the same people, they've got the same characteristics, and yet they're stuck in this regime. Is there any crack in the façade? Is there any prospect of anything changing?

MALICE: Well, one of the things I'll say is the fact that they are anomalous is for them an enormous source of pride. When I was working on *Dear Reader*, I was wondering: how do I get Kim Jong Il to talk about things that perhaps he would prefer to have swept under the rug that I would need in the book? If I'm going to have this conceit, which is his autobiography, he would prefer not to talk about certain things. And what I was terrified to discover is they *gloat* about

all these atrocities and horrors that they put on their people, because when you're doing things in the name of the masses, you can allow yourself any horror and no one is going to challenge you on it. So that was very, very scary. So the fact that they're the only ones left, this is great. That means they won, right? Everyone else did communism or statism wrong. They're the ones doing it right despite decades of outrage. And in fact, they regard the South as being corrupted by American blood. North Korea is the most racist nation on Earth. It is the most homogenous nation on Earth. Despite their communist pretenses, they are far, far closer to fascism in every sense. In fact, I have a line in the book which is very ironic where Kim Jong Il says, "The Dear Leader is nothing like the Führer." Well, Mussolini was called Il Duce and Duce means leader, so it's very, very much fascist in its affectations, and its xenophobia, and its militarism other than in an economic sense, but it's a textbook kind of fascist ideology and worldview.

Now are there any cracks in the nation? This is a question I get asked all the time. I was just in Prague last month, and I read this wonderful book called *Revolution 1989*. And it talks about how the Eastern bloc fell away, and how when Gorbachev took his hand off the trigger, all these countries just very quickly became free, and they thought it was a trap. I was reading this book with tears in my eyes because it's such a beautiful thing that you hear one country after another—either the government's like, all right, we give up, this is nonsense, or there was some old man in power who had to be pried away from office, and by the end they're all free, and it's just this great thing. So there's two steps. One is, you have to have this huge culture of cynicism. You have to have people not believing the hype, and the second one is, there has to be some kind of, I'd say safety net in place. The metaphor I always use is, look at what happened to the slaves after the civil war. Yes, ostensibly they were free, but these people had a hellish life for decades.

WOODS: Let's go back into history. The key event, or a key event, we'd want to talk about is, of course, the Korean War, which is viewed very differently in the West from how your subject would view it.

MALICE: Yeah, the Fatherland Liberation War, they call it. One of the points that Kim Jong Il makes and North Korea makes, which is true, is that the Korean War in the West is swept under the rug. We refer to it very frequently here as the forgotten war. Whereas there this is their kind of creation myth. This is how North Korea became a nation. According to them—and the title of the book called *The U.S. Imperialists Started the Korean War*. And one of the things Kim Jong Il, by the way, always insisted on in their literature and their propaganda is, you can't say American. You have to say U.S. imperialist or Jap devil. You have to have some pejorative attached. So even the language is being used as a technique, in very Orwellian terms, to teach people to hate the Americans and the Japanese. So according to them, the U.S. imperialists have been waiting to conquer Korea since like the 1860s, and some of these references they make, I think they make up, and then I look on Google, and they're true. The U.S. in 1860 sent General Sherman to Korea to kind of—this little ship, and they took everyone onboard, killed them, and sank it to the bottom of the ocean. Now, this is some kind of minor trade ship, but

according to them this is the U.S. imperialists' first stint to try to conquer Korea, and they've been kind of rubbing their hands ever since. There's this treaty with President Taft that they make these reference to from 1904. So we've been waiting, and then the moment came in the '50s to invade, and the great leader Kim Il Sung beat the U.S. imperialists back, and then the battle went back and forth, and he succeeded, and from their perspective in a great victory in kicking the Americans out of the northern half of the republic as they refer to it. And they always refer to Korea as one country. That's why where they have North or South Korea they will keep the N or the S lower case because the South is an occupied regime by the U.S. imperialists whereas North Korea is the free part.

WOODS: I don't really know how to respond to that. I assumed that was how they interpreted it, but honestly to think of the South that way and then look at the North as if this is the—does he have anything to say about Stalin's role in green-lighting the northern invasion?

MALICE: Oh, no, no, no. This is what's great. First of all, there was a big argument between I think it was Mao or Deng Xiaoping and Kim Il Sung at one point, because North Korea for decades played Russia and China against each other to get aid, and North Korea was in a literal sense a welfare state. They were living due to the welfare of the other larger nations. At one point China was so ticked off at North Korea that that they put on display in their museum this letter from Kim Il Sung begging Stalin or Mao for help during the Korean War. No, according to them Kim Il Sung pretty much did it single-handedly. There are sometimes references to Stalin helped enormously or Mao helped enormously, but those are increasingly hidden as much as possible. In fact, the North Korean people aren't even taught about World War II. They're taught about the Pacific War, and they are taught that it's a function of Kim Il Sung driving the wicked Jap devils out of the North Korea because the idea that the Americans and the Japanese were at war with each other does not fit into the narrative because those two nations have been colluding to conquer Korea for centuries, and in fact, they don't even teach about Hiroshima or Nagasaki there.

WOODS: Say that again?

MALICE: They don't teach them about Hiroshima or Nagasaki. My guy had a vague awareness of the Holocaust. If you go to any school in the States, you're going to have on the map an atlas of the world. You're going to have all the countries. You don't have that in North Korea. You have a map of Korea, and I spoke to refugees, and they said the only countries that they're taught about are Japan, China, Russia, Korea, the United States, and maybe there's one or two more, but that's it. That's where your world begins and ends—and the rest of the world exists, but you don't really care about it.

WOODS: I've heard from one or two people that one of the many factors that led to undermining the communist regimes in eastern Europe was the VCR—was that people could get evidence of what life was like outside their crummy part of the world, and that was a major

ingredient in getting them to rethink the way they lived. Well, likewise, the Internet is like the VCR to the zillionth power. Are they keeping the Internet completely out of North Korea?

MALICE: Well, let's talk about this; it's a very key point. In North Korea they don't really have electricity, except in Pyongyang, and if you look at that—there's a very famous picture of the Korean Peninsula at night taken from space, and the northern half is jet black, and the southern half, including Seoul, is all lit up. So there's I think less than 100 people in the whole country who are allowed on the Internet. Even if people had computers, they really wouldn't be able to plug them in anywhere. But the same phenomenon with these VCRs is happening in the North because many people have contacts with the South or have contact in China. Now China obviously is not a free nation, but compared to North Korea, their information is enormously free. I lived in China, and I went to an Apple store, and I went on the Internet, and maybe I can't learn about Tiananmen Square, but pretty much anything else I can look up, and it'll be fine. So North Korea—one of the things I'm finding with *Dear Reader* and in giving these talks is that they're not crazy. They're actually very conniving and clever, and they're addressing this criticism. So as the North Korean population is understanding that the South is wealthier than they are, the propaganda has changed: we're keeping Koreans pure, whereas the South might have more money, but it's the money of prostitutes giving up their chastity to the U.S. rapists.

WOODS: All right, now, back on planet Earth. Going into this project—you must have known that there was going to be a lot of creepiness, that you were going to be writing things that would seem completely bizarre to the Western reader, but at the same time, there must have been things that surprised you that you weren't expecting at all that just came completely out of left field. Can you share one or two of those with us?

MALICE: Well, a lot of the things that, you know, the very casual references that they make that are just absolutely hilarious as asides. The thing I'm fighting as well: Westerners view Kim Jong Il as this kind of clown figure, and they're aware of these wacky stories, and I always say: Kim Jong Il is like the Batman villain the Joker. Yes, he is a clown, but if you look just past that clown, you have many, many bodies, and the focus shouldn't be on his clown makeup. It should be on the corpses that are there and that still remain there.

One of the funny stories, is Kim Jong Il is in high school and his teacher comes and gives a guest lecture about the *Mona Lisa* and how great it is, and this goes on at length, this story. And Kim Jong Il gets up and starts berating him that the *Mona Lisa* is not a masterpiece, and it's not good art, and you should be ashamed of yourself. And I went home and I asked my mom, why does Kim Jong Il hate the *Mona Lisa*? And my mom, who had her good Soviet education thinks for just two seconds, and goes, "Because it's ambiguous." And that's exactly correct. The *Mona Lisa* has the cryptic smile, and therefore it's not good art, because the only purpose of art is propaganda and putting forth a lesson that everyone can understand. And the point of this propaganda, of course, clearly has to be the glorification of the great leader Kim Il Sung. And they say this with a straight face. So that's just absolutely amazing.

There's another great story, which is an inversion. So they talk about how Kim Jong Il can shrink time, and actually it's factual. He can shrink time. He is at a conference, and he's signing documents, and he's getting interrupted by his aides, and he's hearing a speaker at the same time, and the speaker keeps stopping, and Kim Jong Il goes, "Why do you keep stopping?" And the speaker goes, well, you are doing all these other things at once. And he goes, I can. I can do three things at once. Then the literature says from that point it was understood that Kim Jong Il didn't look at time as a plane, but as a cube. And I told this to my friend and she goes, "Does he mean multitasking?" And, yes, that is exactly what he means by shrinking time. He can do more than one thing at once, and apparently he's the only person in North Korea capable of doing this. So it's a good thing he's in a leadership position, right?

WOODS: Yeah, right. Of all the people we could have, it might as well be that guy. What an interesting look into the totalitarian mind. That *Mona Lisa* example really does speak volumes. Michael, if people want to follow you online I suppose MichaelMalice.com is the place to start?

MALICE: Sure, I'm mostly on Facebook more than Twitter but Facebook.com/MichaelMalice.

WOODS: You know, I am too, and even though Facebook annoys me with their algorithm that they use to decide whether your Facebook page posts get into people's feeds, nevertheless, I have twice as many people on my Facebook as I do on Twitter, but I get like a hundred times the response on Facebook that I get on Twitter. I'm on Twitter just by default. I feel like I need to be there. I want people to visit you, and I want you to come back. Think of something else we can talk about because I want people to read *Dear Reader*—I gave them the whole title at the beginning—I want them to visit MichaelMalice.com, but there's got to be more we can talk about because I have a feeling that we could just talk for an hour about almost nothing, and it would be interesting.

MALICE: Well, one of the things that, actually, I am on *The Independents* like every week now, and they have the same question, and the answer is, I'm in a position to discuss how narratives and propaganda are used in the States because the parallels are, to use Leonard Peikoff's term, ominous. When Hillary Clinton is on stage, she's using the same techniques that they use in the North to create this kind of secular mythology about herself. I heard Yaron Brook give a talk about everyone is convinced intellectually that capitalism is superior. Why haven't we won the argument? The argument is, it's not a battle of statistics. Statistics don't change anyone's mind. It's a battle of narratives. So that's something I am really interested in, and I think it's something that not that many libertarians are aware or can wrap their heads around, maybe because so many of us have autism.

WOODS: I think because so many of us frankly—well, when I say us, present company excluded—have absorbed some of these preconceptions. They don't realize they have them. Gene Healy at the Cato Institute has a book on the cult of the presidency. Now, that's very important. That's exactly what we're talking about. It's not going to be like Kim Jong Il. It's going to be a little bit more subtle than that, but a lot of these premises—the very fact that I know

that the president is playing golf should be creepy to me. Why should I know his every—or what his wife likes to eat for dinner. This is weird. I shouldn't care about this.

MALICE: And that was one of the broader reasons why I wrote *Dear Reader*: everyone uses *Atlas* and the *Fountainhead* as these introductory texts, and I don't agree with everything Rand said, but the point I always make is, she doesn't have all the answers, but she has all the questions, and she gets people thinking about things in a certain way, and once they're there, they're kind of almost saved. But that book is sixty years old. We need more of these kinds of narratives and stories that people can use in introductory texts to get them interested in free-market and libertarian ideals. And everyone is a libertarian vis-à-vis North Korea. So my broader motive, other than having libertarians and everyone else engaged with what's happening in North Korea and hopefully moving the needle there a little bit, is to get people to discover this movement a little further and think about these things a little clearer.

WOODS: Exactly. It's easy to be opposed to this phenomenon in its most clownish form, but it's a little bit more difficult to peel back layers of the onion and see that maybe 10% you kind of absorbed yourself—you believe in yourself in the way you show reverence toward the president. I'll just say one last thing. The other day I was in a group of people, not all of whom agreed with me, and we were talking about Barack Obama, and none of them liked Obama, and one of them was saying, well, at least I respect the office. I try to have respect for the office. And I'm just sick and tired of this. I said you know what? I don't even respect the office. I am just going to come right out and say I don't even respect the office. Because once you start speaking in language like that, the creepiness and cultishness inevitably follows. Well, Michael Malice, thanks so much for your time today. If only all guests could be like Michael Malice. Thanks so much.