

the dirtbag times



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THE SHART OF THE DEAL

the dirtbag times is a magazine for dirtbags by dirtbags.

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Americans are not used to failing. Vietnam was such a failure that the military, Congress, and four presidents took the better part of two decades to thoroughly explore the ditches of failure before all involved finally agreed to go home, and not before going home was the only way to save any semblance of face. The failure in Vietnam was so absolute that it informed how all Americans conceived of the military. Vietnam veterans were unfairly shamed for their involvement. The draft was abolished. Americans lost their patience for any sort of military action and expected results quickly without boots on the ground. It took September 11 to change American perception of military action. And the Bush 43 regime very quickly pooped all over that with "Mission Accomplished" and WMD's in Afghanistan and Iraq. That action, much like Vietnam, took the better part of two decades and a flight from responsibility that barely allowed America to save face.

This is the backdrop for a major plank in the election and re-election of Donald J. Trump. Trump 46/48 ran campaigns of isolationism that promised no military incursions in foreign wars. Trump, after all, was a real estate mogul with world-renowned negotiation skills. I mean, he wrote *The Art of the Deal*, right? Well, of course he didn't. That book was ghost-written, but the perception that President Trump can walk into a boardroom and gain concessions from the toughest of situations has been pushed forward by television producers and political campaigners alike. American might will be asserted and any situation our troops find themselves in the Commander in Chief will figure a way out for them that not only fulfills the goals of the mission but benefits the United States as a whole. It turns out that Trump is a pitiful negotiator and a jingoist opportunist that gambled and lost horrifically. His loss has been so complete that it will likely have forever ruined America's standing in the world. History will likely call Trump's actions in Iran by something pithy like "Trump's War," "Trump's Folly," or perhaps "The Shart of the Deal." Either way, he has fucked up in a way that even the least astute of American citizens understands.

Most Americans can understand the basic crux of the Iranian situation. Ten years ago President Obama was able to help spearhead a deal with Iran, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, that halted their nuclear program and eased crippling economic sanctions against Iran. The superpowers of the world came to the table with America to get this historic deal done. Trump gleefully tore up the JCPOA in 2018 and eventually the plan fell entirely apart. After immense lobbying on the part of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, America assisted Israel in military action against Iran. Israel has had a boner for Iran for decades and has tried to convince

Every president for the past 50 years to assist them in Bombing Iran back to the Stone Age. Every preceding president refused to back Israel. Until Trump. Most Americans understand that Trump and his family have deep economic ties to Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern regimes. It is not hard to trace the money back to the Trumps gaining economically from assisting Israel. Had this excursion worked as planned, it would have crippled Iran, fomented a pro-Western regime change, and allowed Trump's allies to benefit financially from taking a greater role in Iran's energy production system. A complete victory with much reward and little at stake, like Trump's invasion in Venezuela earlier this year that fomented a pro-Trump regime change and capture of Venezuela's oil production capacity. As to whether that was truly a bargain is an argument for another day (short take: it is not) but it was widely considered by Trump and company to have been a complete success. Why wouldn't a similar approach work in Iran? It sure would help get the press off his ass about the Epstein Files.

We now know that Iran was not the same as Venezuela. Trump failed in clearing Iran for a pro-Western regime. This failure was achieved by burning through 70% of American munitions AND by emboldening the new Iranian regime to seize and shut down the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman that then connects to the Indian Ocean. 25% of global oil trade is conducted by ship through this waterway. Iran now maintains armed control of the Strait. It charges tolls to friendly or neutral countries. It denies passage to ships from countries it deems enemies. This disturbance of trade is the reason why that gallon of gas that cost \$2.39 in January now costs \$3.95. There are only two ways to do anything about this: complete and total annihilation of the Iranian regime (i.e. nuclear war or a deadly boots on the ground operation that will make Iraq look like a boot camp training exercise) or a negotiation of a new Iranian deal. Well, that's gonna be Trump activating the Art of the Deal, no? Yes, no. Everyone understands Trump wants a deal too much. He truly *needs* a deal because his war is super unpopular with everyone (especially his base who elected him because he promised *no foreign wars*) and the economy for the average non-stock holding citizen is abysmal between inflation, government instability (DOGE and its cuts), ICE raids running off labor, and the tariffs that have caused everyone's costs to rise. Not to mention he needs a win of some sort to offset electoral losses and those pesky Epstein Files. Iran has no need to deal when they have the run of the table. They have their nuclear program, they have consolidated extremist power, and they have the ability to make the world suffer through trade interruption. Trump created the very enemy that will utterly defeat him.

That is comic book fiction. In a perfect world our representatives would gong show Trump back to Mar-A-Lago under a mountain of shun and shame. Everyone in America has suffered to a certain extent under the Trump 47. Your level of suffering depends greatly on your annual income, your color, your gender, your immigration status (real and perceived), and your sexual preferences. It is very easy for rich white male Republicans to other everyone else and reduce things to a culture war but these days that culture war holds less and less traction precisely because the economic hardships this country faces has reached deep into Trump country. Most Americans believe Trump has no idea what he is doing at best and at worst is manipulating their livelihoods to make his family and his rich buddies even richer. He cannot deny the economic reality at the gas pump. I have a 17-gallon tank and on average it takes me a tank a week to go to all my jobs and activities. What cost me \$162 a month now costs me \$267. That's nearly 2/3 more than five months ago. Everyone that does not have a purely electric vehicle is experiencing a similar rise in expenditure. Where everyone is made equal is in commerce. All gas-powered transportation is affected, making the movement of goods more costly. Those costs are absorbed by passing them onto the consumer. We have already absorbed a lot of the cost of Trump's tariffs and now we are absorbing the costs at the gas pump for Trump's war.

How does this end? I don't think it does. We have entered a new normal. Trump and company are trying every way they can, from jailing liberals to gerrymandering liberals out of power to using the courts to disable liberals from voting to ensure that the ever-shrinking popularity of evangelical conservatism maintains its stranglehold even as its proponents dwindle in number. Conservatives of all stripes understand that while Trump gave empowered them, he did so with an expiration date. They have to shift the playing field entirely to game the rules to keep them in power. Any Republican Congress would have 86'ed a Democrat president for a fraction of what they've let Trump get away with. It is up to representative democracy to do the duty that Congress lacks the morals and willpower to do. America will nonetheless vote Democrat in November. But little will change. Democrats will spend the next two years with investigations, impeachments, and other symbolic actions that will do little if anything to ease the economic pain 90% of Americans feel. Until Americans begin to grapple with the economic inequalities at its very base it will continue to apply band-aids to massive wounds while diverting attention away from the problems to culture war hot buttons. It's Trump's shart but the shit's sadly on all of us. — KELLY MENACE



CREEPY HORSE & THE LEGEND OF RIKIDŌZAN

MICROMUSING

A couple of weeks ago, I awoke like any other morning in my college dorm. Scratching my butt cheek as I zombie-stumbled to coffee, I heard the unmistakable ding of Outlook's incoming mail. I turned back and saw an email from the United States Government regarding my application for the Gilman grant. This was my final chance to afford the costs of studying abroad and finally having my head above water. I was rejected and encouraged to apply again next year. This was nearly \$10,000 in funding that would have been life-changing for me. Not just in being able to afford necessary costs while in Japan, but I'd finally have some fucking money. I have struggled living with no income for the last five years as I continue to wait for disability determination. I was sick. Not only would I not have this life-changing funding, but I could no longer afford the very basics to even get to Japan. In total, I have lost nearly \$50,000 in funding just this year.

I was so sure I would get the funding, I never considered I wouldn't. It was a sure thing until it wasn't. I didn't know what to do. My brain shorted out, and I stood there unable to grasp what I was feeling. I had no idea what the hell to do in this situation. In the past, this would've been a welcome invitation for me to get blackout drunk or put drugs in my nose. I no longer do that, and I wasn't sure what to do. I decided to do the very best thing for everyone, and I lay in bed for two fucking days straight, just bedrotting my best bedrot. I was so distraught that I couldn't even talk to anyone. I ordered shit food and crushed a couple of pints of ice cream. I was more scared of being reactionary as I decided what the fuck I was feeling. I didn't wanna post on the internet, I didn't want to reach out to anyone, I just kept to myself.

After two days, I peeled myself out of bed and took a shower. I felt like I was going through a breakup, the dejection of something that meant so much to you. I stood motionless in the shower as tracks of orange hair dye traveled from my head down my body. Much like a break-up, everything reminded me of them. My social media had been littered with an algorithm of Japanese culture, food, and punk-rock. As water continued to spray in the shower, I began to do some grounding techniques, working to just put myself in a better headspace. Bedrot was no longer going to aid me; I had to suck it up. I had busted my ass to make this a reality, and it failed. I had told everyone I was for sure going to Japan. I was sad. I was embarrassed. I felt like doo-doo. I was just days from receiving my visa. It stung, but you know, as Kourtney Kardashian has said, "Kim, people are dying."

My week would not get better; I'd receive notice that my bank account had been closed.

Returning from an appointment that same day, my phone, along with my driver's license and Cashapp card, fell out in my ride. The driver wouldn't relinquish my phone for over two weeks until I pressed charges. That entire time, I was unable to access anything as I needed my phone for multi-factor authentication. It kinda felt like I was being shit on. In retrospect, I hope it was a payoff to some of the karmic debt I accrued when I was a shit stain. I decided to watch some videos for my well-being and to start doing things to get over this week. I settled down with my laptop on my twin xl dorm bed, now with a fresh sheet change.

With my online history filled with Japan and wrestling, a video caught my eye. Now I know sometimes that things are sensationalized for more views online, but this man I'm about to tell you about, is absolutely true. The man was known as Rikidōzan. He is the father of Puroresu (Japanese Professional Wrestling). This man is a fucking legend, and I think you need to know about him. Rikidōzan was a Korean man who left Korea to pursue Sumo wrestling in Japan. In the 1940's, this man joined a Japanese Sumo stable and pretended to be Japanese, and everyone believed him. The few who questioned that he did not sound Japanese, he told them he was from a farm far off in the countryside, and they bought it. Okay, let's think about this. It is the 1940s, and Japan is in an active war and doesn't have the best relations in the Pacific. Much like a honey badger, Rikidōzan doesn't give a shit.

After feeling he wasn't getting the money he deserved for his contribution, he angrily cut off his top knot (man bun), which is the way you retire from Sumo. After this, and while the war is still going on, Rikidōzan starts a black market business of working with Americans to smuggle their goods left behind in Korea to Japan. It would be a charity event in the 1950's that, in one month's time, would see him debut as a pro-wrestler. This man never stopped pretending to be Japanese for the rest of his life. He would go to America and be an evil Japanese character and then come back to Japan as their hero defeating the villainous Americans.

He would be in 29 films, all starring as himself. He had multiple girlfriends at the same time and children born out of wedlock, which was incredibly taboo in Japan. Because of his wealth from wrestling, he was able to build an empire of nightclubs, housing, and commercial properties. This man was an absolute menace. He'd leave wrestling matches without even addressing his injuries, drinking with patrons while covered in blood and sweat. It was said that if he was in a good mood, he would tip handsomely, but if he was in a bad mood, fights were going to happen. He drank heavily, chain-smoked, and popped painkillers like candy. He was known for doing drugs

just before and after matches. I also want to add that if you were talking to Rikidōzan and he became bored with what you were saying, he would drop his pants and start masturbating as you continued to try to speak with him.

Now, if this isn't wild enough, the death of this man is. Rikidōzan is hanging out at a bar when he decides a YAKUZA MEMBER has stepped on his foot. He punches the Yakuza member in the face. This is the JAPANESE MOB. Then he tries out some wrestling moves on the Yakuza member and repeatedly punches this man. In retaliation, the Yakuza member stabs him in the abdomen before running off. Now here's where it gets really interesting. The wound wasn't life-threatening. With proper rest and care, Rikidōzan would've made a full recovery. But did Rikidōzan do that? Fuck no.

Upon release from the hospital against the doctor's orders, Rikidōzan ate massive amounts of sushi and drank all the sake. The Yakuza member who had stabbed him would be hospitalized after a gang that ran with Rikidōzan found out. That same Yakuza would arrive with a high-ranking leader of their Yakuza branch to formally apologize for stabbing Rikidōzan in self-defense. Rikidōzan accepted the apologies. He'd die in a second surgery, seven days after his first surgery, because he didn't stop drinking. His funeral was attended by over 12,000 celebrities, wrestlers, Yakuza, and Japanese fans on December 20, 1963.

The Yakuza member was Katsushi Murata. He would go to prison for almost a decade for the Murder of Rikidōzan. Until his own death, every year he would go to Rikidōzan's grave to beg forgiveness and then call each of his sons to apologize. Murata died a very high-ranking Yakuza.

After reading this, I felt energized. I mean, I'm not going to WWJD Rikidōzan, but you have to marvel at the tenacity of this man. Who fucking drops trou and starts yankin' it because they think you're boring? Who attacks the mob and ends up with this person owing a life debt of apology? Who fucking goes to another country and convinces everyone he's one of them? Riki motherfucking dōzan. So while it sucks, I didn't get some money and can't live my best life in Japan, I have to revel in the fierceness of a spirit that can't be contained. We don't have to drink ourselves to death or pop pills to engage in life. I'm far better off that way, but maybe sometimes we need a little reminder of who the fuck we are. Rikidōzan didn't give a fuck. It's in that spirit of determination and stubbornness. May you walk into every room with the confidence of Rikidōzan, but the knowledge to be a little bit better. — *CREEPY HORSE*

Folks, you know, every month I spend hours hunched over the crumbling remains of American democracy like a monk illuminating manuscripts during the Spanish Inquisition, carefully hand-lettering Dirtbag articles onto artisanal parchment made from recycled Times op-eds and the shredded dignity of cable news hosts, then delicately roasting those tidbits over the smoldering tire fire of our national discourse until they emerge as the rich, complex, subtly smoky brisket of angsty Pamalynianisms that is my monthly piece, but sometimes ... just sometimes ... I break into an abandoned Radio Shack armed with nothing but a flashlight, three expired Little Debby Red, White, and Blues, and a trash panda I met outside a vape shop named Dr. Squishums, and together we dump a wheelbarrow full of cursed Cabbage Patch dolls, emotionally unstable echidnas, haunted iPods, and one Florida man legally married to a jet ski into the dented shopping buggy of human nonsense that is my segment ...
Meanwhile ...

I miss Colbert and am having big feelings about it. — *PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER*

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"Going into the Middle East is the worse decision ever." This is rendered without the crayon-like all-caps beloved by the Fuhrer Felon. You can look it up. He obviously doesn't follow his own advice.

So why follow anything he ever says? Oh, yeah, elected "leader" and all that. The founders put in plenty of boundaries to prevent the rise of a dictator. However, it appears they didn't take into account the legislative branch dissolving into spinelessness and the judicial branch turning into bobble-head yes-men (and woman).

Here's to 2028 *Return of the Jedi*-like collapsing statues for all his pharaoh self-idols. — *MIKE L. DOWNEY*

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BALLS

Mosquito on my balls.
there's a mosquito on my balls..
fuck it all I smacked my balls...
for there's a mosquito on my balls..
drinking talls and fuck it all
who would I smack my balls?
Hopefully a good song plays
who's got the biggest balls of them all..
— *WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON*



*ME
away*

TISH JACKSON

FIRST DRAUGHT VS. FAT TIRE

When I first began drinking microbrewery beer (now known as craft beer) in the mid 90s out West there were more or less the same tap handles in every bar of note from Bellingham to Redding and from Astoria to Coeur d'Alene. There was Pilsner Urquell, Widmer or Pyramid Hefeweizen, Black Butte Porter, Obsidian Stout or Guinness, sometimes Bert Grant's Scottish Ale [goddamn, do I miss that beer], sometimes a wild card like Caffreys or Boddingtons or Red Hook ESB, Sam Adams, Sierra Nevada Pale, and an amber or some sort. That amber could be Mac N' Jacks, Alaska Amber, or Pete's Wicked Ale, but by the early 2000's it was usually Fat Tire, what used to be the flagship beer for Fort Collins, Colorado's New Belgium Brewing.

Fat Tire Amber Ale made the company's fortune. It was one of the best selling craft beers for years. But beer trends come and go and by the early '10s easy-drinking ambers gave way to the more challenging fare of IPA's, sours, and barrel-aged stouts. Voodoo Ranger IPA became New Belgium's flagship product and eventually overtook Sierra Nevada Pale Ale as the best selling craft beer in America. Fat Tire became not only a lesser-quafted product but a bit of an embarrassment. No one wanted to drink that old, tired amber ale! The folks at New Belgium decided it was time to do something about Fat Tire. Rather than entirely retire the beer they decided to completely change the recipe, the labeling, and the marketing strategy behind Fat Tire. For starters, it was marketed as the company's first entirely carbon neutral beer. The labeling removed bicycle iconography entirely (Fat Tire is named for the slang term for mountain bikes ... a pastime that is immensely popular in the foothills of the Rockies around Fort Collins much like it is amongst the Blue Ridge surrounding Asheville, NC where New Belgium's east coast brewery is located). Most importantly, the beer was changed from an amber ale to something more akin to a blonde ale. I joked to *Dirtbag Times* arts dude Wonko Zuckenberg that New Belgium was likely setting up a New Coke/Coca Cola Classic scenario where the market would demand Fat Tire move backwards towards the original recipe but would not entirely abandon its new formula. I quietly squirreled away a few original Fat Tires and moved along.

The other day I stumbled across this sixer of a limited edition release of the classic recipe of Fat Tire to celebrate the company's 35th anniversary. I chuckled because even my dumb ass could predict New Belgium would do this eventually but

I also very quickly snatched up that sixer and brought it home. This is not a bad move on New Belgium's part. In the ensuing years after the recipe change amber ales have had a sort of renaissance with craft brewers. Drinkability and slightly lower ABV's have become more attractive to craft brew consumers. Even beers that were marketed previously as Scottish or Reds have begun to be marketed as ambers. I think specifically of Highland's classic Gaelic Ale, marketed for decades as a Scottish ale, that has had the word "amber" applied to its marketing materials. Has Fat Tire Classic emerged into a market that is more favorable for this classic brew? And is it still the same old Fat Tire we know and once loved?



Well, I decided to A-B Fat Tire Classic with old Fat Tire. Seeing that New Fat Tire is only similar to Fat Tire in name only,

I did not crack one open for this particular session. For starters, Fat Tire Classic has a very lusty explosion of bubbles and a decent foam head at first pour while the Old Fat Tire had about half the reaction. Fat Tire Classic was slightly darker. On first taste the differences were instantly notable. Old Fat Tire is smoother, sweeter, has honey notes and the faintest bit of British pale ale hop character and biscuity dryness in the finish. New Fat Tire flips that response with a very dry and Bass style bitterness strongly upfront with the faintest bit of malt sweetness at the finish. Fat Tire Classic mellows a bit as it opens up but Old Fat Tire stays pretty much the same. Really, one could say that the result of this test is that Fat Tire Classic tastes new, Old Fat Tire tastes old.

It's probably completely unfair to A-B these two beers like this because really all it tells me is that laying down Fat Tire for a few years makes it more mellow, sweet, and smooth. It really benefits from the cellaring process. Many beers do. They smooth out and gain ABV as they age. Interesting to note that on both beers you will find a "drink by" date on the label and New Belgium recommends the beers be consumed within six months of bottling. So New Belgium intends for Fat Tire to be drank right away just like mass produced American fridge lagers. It also tells me that Fat Tire Classic tastes like the Old Fat Tire woulda tasted when it was new. My hazy memory would concur. It makes me want to lay down one of these Fat Tires Classics and then open it in five years when the inevitable 40th Anniversary release comes out so I can have another inconclusive but totally fun experiment just like this. —
KELLY MENACE



TONY WILLINGHAM. Instagram Artist_Accompaniment



TISHIA JACKSON

RELISH THE JOURNEY, NOT THE END



My oldest friend died this April. Ran and I had known each other for more than half a century. I keep expecting him to call me. It's been hard to come to grips with the fact I'll never hear his laugh again, never have him get me laughing. It's been pretty somber these days.

And he was younger than me. That'll get your attention pretty fast for sure.

When we met in college, both of us were young and dumb. Over the years, we were able to cram in a great deal. Ran managed to visit 83 countries and was planning a trip to India before the Big C got him. I've been to Canada, Mexico, and England. Okay, he won that race for sure.

I got married three times, have a couple of wonderful kids. Ran came out more than a quarter of a century ago, and his partner of the last two decades was one of the funniest men I've ever met. He preceded Ran in death by just a few months. I like to think of them keeping the angels in stitches.

Books, music, and movies were among the hobbies we shared. He was always suggesting authors and musicians that I'd never heard of, and I like to think I'm well-read and all. And he never led me astray.

One constant about Ran was that he was perpetually curious about people. Drop him into any situation, and he could find common ground in an instant. And when you were talking with him, he always made you feel like what you were saying and what you were doing were the most interesting subjects ever. He raised up everyone he came in contact with over the decades.

We were in a cab in New York once, and he started chatting up the driver, turned out Ran had worked near his hometown in Algeria. They

shared a laugh over the food they missed. We were at a concert in Maryland, and he bonded with the ticket-takers over fake IDs. He treated every wait staff person as if they were part of his family. How can you not love a guy like that?

Ran was my daughter's godfather. I think I wrote him first and then called him asking him, and he said yes without question that he'd be there where and when she was baptized. It was years later that I found out he had been working in Russia, and he had to make a special trip to be at the church for the ceremony. He never mentioned it.

Memoirist Plum Johnson wrote "At the end of our lives, we become only memories. If we're lucky, someone is passing those down." Ran's friends and family will be telling his stories for a long time, I hope.

Ran wrote in his own obituary that he wished his death came when he was shot at the age of 100 by a jealous lover. He didn't get that wish. None of us get to pick how we die. But we do have control over how we live and how we make others around us feel during this journey.

I don't want to recall how Ran died. I wish I didn't know how my dad died, my mother, my youngest brother either. Heck, I don't like knowing how Gene Hackman spent his last hours before death. I try to focus on their lives, their love, the time they were here. I feel like I owe it to them for all they did for me.

For Ran, I want to continue to enjoy how he lived for as long as I can. And hopefully, some of the good man he was for 70-plus years can rub off on me, and I can spread that around. That's a legacy worth achieving. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



PUCKER UP BUTTERCUP

The phrase “pucker up Buttercup” seems to be more and more like something soon to be said to those who once so carelessly uttered such phrases. With abject disregard for any sense of quality standard bearing or common decency those that so abhorrently claim to “Love America First” have been sold out by a Long Island Cheeto dust-covered dime store con man with the wit of a grade school bully. He has openly let the world and his followers down, not to fail to mention the nation he supposedly presides over This “man”, who fled the draft but openly considers reinstating it and mocks anyone speaking ill of its use while belittling and downplaying it openly. The guy only acts kind or generous for precious photo ops and empty compliments about how good of a person he is. When asked if he would go to heaven or hell – the self appointed modern champion of Christianity answered without hesitation – that he would most certainly go to Hell for the life he has lived, then joked but maybe somehow he might make it in. The guy later said he was joking, but left out which part – the part where he was joking about.

Democracy needs a \$1,000,000,000 ballroom most will never see much less step inside of while citizens are actively removed from their homes due to medical debt and high levels of unemployment. Democracy needs a new grand arch in the Capital so people take the most powerful nation in the world serious but somehow we can't help feed or house or hospitalize any of our sick, impoverished, elderly, or disabled because of the ongoing costs of a failed distractionary war being waged on behalf of the Epstein class. Look over there! UFO's, I mean, UAP's! Look, another state? Another war? This guy is so desperate to keep eyes anywhere but on him and his mountains of ongoing legal troubles while acting like nothing is happening and he couldn't be better off. Hell the guy's so corrupt he can't even hide it anymore. He's old, senile, narcoleptic, obese, beyond incompetent, and has been convicted of 34 felonies with more in the works. Do you think he is worried about democracy? Or staying in power by all means necessary, including sailing his own nation and followers up the proverbial river for a chance at asylum once the dust settles and we see the true extent of just what's been going on and how bad his henchmen oligarchs truly are?

If politicians wore their sponsors on their suits the way NASCAR drivers do, this administration would make all others, especially NIXON, but even BUSH, CLINTON, and OBAMA, pale in comparison at their lack of available space for sponsors and the sheer amount of additional fabric

that would have to be used to apply said patches. It would look just as buffoonish as those parading around as though they were politicians or their supposed too big to fail trickle down laws. These guys have insulted our armed forces, made light of casualties, actively worked to remove fundamental rights from the disenfranchised in the name of FREEDOM, and lampooned themselves to the point no one can tell where ego begins and person ends. No, these are not defenders of truth or freedom. These staunch few are the agitators of hate mongering and lies. They know no civil discord and so quickly lash out like spoiled little brats with wounded egos. These guys threw a Great Gatsby themed party while waging domestic war on peaceful citizens in hopes to incite violence and play the victim. G -A-R-B-A-G-E move. These are the types that'll brag about raising the price of a much needed common drug to rates that would kill most and laugh about the profit.

Lick the boot. Lick it good. Eventually the boot kicks your teeth in and you'll act surprised, but what did you expect from licking a boot? This nation was founded by proud men and the woman that stood by their sides they had spines. These modern neck beard mouth-breathing keyboard warrior militia types are too fat to catch the ice cream man much less a predator. I.C.E. is a bad joke with a punchline that should've ended long ago. And the Dept of WAR is a bad joke straight out of 1984, one that the Lil Proud Boy in “charge” even used the three rules of INGSOC straight out of the book in a speech to defend his departments actions. He gave the American people literal double-speak and it got swept under the rug. Why? It wasn't that no one noticed. Nope, it was just that there are constantly so many examples of these types of occurrences that it's overwhelming to what's left of reporters and people. Every day reads more cartoonish than the last. Hell, The Onion is now starting to sound more real. Yet let's worry about that migrant family that picks your fruit you don't eat because its not corn syrup and make their lives hell instead of improving our own.

One of the classic play moves of DICKtators is misinformation and desensitization while they make their desperate power grabs, knowing damn well they fail we the people will have their asses. Thankfully, one can look at history and know these types never last as thankfully humans will human, and GREED CORRUPTS ULTIMATELY through and through. It is up to us as concerned everyday American citizens to unite regardless of political affiliation and recognize we are better than this and them. Let's hold these hacks accountable – LOCK THEM UP – I

believe they loved to say so brazenly while breaking every law they claim to uphold. Accountability all the way up. Let's vote them all out, write representatives, attend rallies, voice concerns about misrepresentation and the evils of authoritarianism. There is nothing just or good about bullying the weak or making others suffer for your prosperity. It's inhumane, in poor taste, and not who we the people actually are when you meet us face to face. This administration does not represent the majority of us or the U.S. and most certainly does not represent the crème of the crop of the American people. No matter which side of the spectrum or political isle you stand on we can all see these are NOT THE VALUES WE STAND FOR. Let's urge our representatives to hold the Epstein Class accountable and LOCK THEM UP.

Lesser people of rank have been simply accused, been court marshaled, or worse. If you don't stop at the intersection when the lights red and the cop sees you – you are going to hear about it. If you don't pay your taxes you will hear about it. If you rob a trust for victims and say oopsy – you will hear about it and once more you'll have to answer for it. Why shouldn't these grifters in this MAGA wannabe celebrity cult where qualifications mean nothing and loyalty is rewarded with betrayal at the earliest convenience have to hear about it too? Let's be clear USA #1 GO TEAM US! That said F-U-C-K this wave of censorship and false flag diplomacy with a H-U-G-E DECOMMISSIONED TRUMP TOWER. This dope is making us the laughing stock of the world and the guy can't even be nice to people he doesn't like on camera. What type of thin-skinned weakling attacks people seeking the truth coming to them because they don't like the answers they already know? Nope.

People of the RED HAT / BLACK HAT / I LICK BOOTS FOR PLEASURE SQUAD and ALL IN BETWEEN remember you're people, and people make dumb choices sometimes. Own this one, and move on. Remove the problems with your current actions, votes, words, and goals. We can fix this and work as a team to restore this great land of liberty and opportunity before it's a province of Sudan. We don't reward traitors. We don't reward terrorists. We don't believe what we hear when it goes against what we see and feel to be right in our hearts. We reach across the isle in times of need and prosperity bringing aid to the less fortunate while sharing the moments that build lasting bonds forge strengths well beyond our individual might. We are still are great nation and people, let's make sure our leaders represent us. Use your voice while you still have it and make it count in the process. Remember

this isn't just a one-sided issue. Neglect and abuse on the Left as well as by the Right and a seeming spinelessness to reach the middle has left many wanting more, going to more extremes. And unfortunately while the current wealth exodus is happening and the oligarchs are actively draining the middle class instead of the “Swamp”, think about the meaning of the word United in the United States. Sure there are plenty of things that divide us but there are still plenty more that unite us. Speak with the intent to listen and understand your neighbor and where they are coming from and you might find some common ground even if it's respectfully keeping a safe distance! :) Happy America guys lets make some better days the American way by sticking to our guns and principles. Congress arguing they need to do insider trading because almost \$200K isn't enough to support their families while the federal minimum wage is still \$7.25 is down right insulting. Ain't NO WAY those people speak for me or you. Remember to vote against and to overturn Citizens United as corporations are not people and should NOT be entitled to a voice like you or I. Prison for profit is inhumane and unjust and any who tells you otherwise are soulless vultures preying on class warfare brought on by an intentionally failing education system designed to create a consumer class over a cognitive class. Remember when Made In USA meant made in the USA? MAGA doesn't, as their products instead come with “the American Consumer In mind” in other words – bite it loser. These doops are playing themselves and unknowingly prepping to be hearing the words “Pucker up Buttercup” all their own all too soon.

The reality is they will probably have to make a special prison for this level of corruption... If only there were an Alcatraz or Alligator Alcatraz... hmmm maybe that's a start. Texas has too many prisons so maybe we release some real nonviolent marijuana offenders and start locking up some politicians so we can get back in the swing of things like trusting in our justice system again to even the most simple of degrees. You can try to remove us but we out number you time and time again and the story always ends the same – the window for mercy is closing fast. Thankfully, 'MURICA The People buried in their screens aren't the people in the streets and the talking heads are paid sponsors of demise so flip 'em the bird and enjoy a cold one for liberty and remember Cheeto is no leader, only a schoolyard buster. Old Boys pretending to be men. The old guard is on the way out, do your part to help make sure the new guard is something of merit and not just empty excuses and promises with a shortened vocabulary and attention span. Not just plants crave electrolytes, people do too. – WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



*JACOB HIGGS. "He Didn't Invent the Wheel, He Conjured It."
IG: alien_zit*



MAREN FARMER. <http://marenfarmer.net>

RECORD REVIEWS



MIKE ETHAN MESSICK & BEN MORRIS
The Evil of Two Lessers

This Americana release is some of the most fun I've had listening to music in a long time. At six songs, it likely falls into the EP category rather than an album. However, there's nothing wrong with wanting more.

Messick is primarily

known as a songwriter, having penned hits for a wealth of Texas and country artists over the years. Morris has carved out his own Texas regional reputation with the release of a number of albums under his own name or as part of The Great American Boxcar Chorus. And yes, I've been a Morris fan for years, interviewed him, seen him countless times. And seen Messick play as well.

While tempted to wax rhapsodic about the entire album, I'll limit myself to writing about just three songs. The first is a Messick vocal tune "Boots Older Than You" that turns an old country adage on its head and is hilariously-

danceable. catchy. If you only have time to listen to one song, this has to be it.

However, if you want the 1.5 song, it's "The Devil's Tending Bar" that features both vocalists. The Messick-penned tune is thematically reminiscent of the classic "My Ride's Here" by Warren Zevon. So maybe listen to this one first if you can only catch one.

The third tune is "Hungry Hungry Hoboes" with lead vocals by Morris with his usual wordplay and spot-on songcraft.

For those who still cherish CDs, you can purchase that at your usual outlets to funnel more

moola to the artists. But frankly, these guys play music because they want to. For the less adventurous, it's on the standard streaming services. They even have a website: twolessers.com.

There's talk of an upcoming vinyl release with more songs that I'm really looking forward to.

Here's to more folks continuing to pursue their dreams. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

TISH JACKSON



Caverns of Gold Caverns of Gold

A Benefit for WNC Hurricane Relief

Caverns of Gold Caverns of Gold

a vibrant coalition of over 280 musicians from western north carolina and beyond has come together to release caverns of gold: a benefit for wnc hurricane relief. this impactful compilation album seeks to raise crucial funds for those affected by hurricane helene, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting **beloved asheville**, a local nonprofit dedicated to providing immediate assistance and long-term support for those affected by the disaster. artists include r.e.m., steep canyon rangers, kevn kinney, luscious jackson, consolidated, caitlin cary, moe., milk carton kids, north mississippi all-stars, richard buckner, the feelies, and many, many others.
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