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The Iowa Caucus is decadent and depraved: Painful observations in the nation's first state to act; no one has any business caring about this...who let these miserable freaks vote?

By David S. Lewis

The horsemen slumber, the heroes in their graves;
there is no music of the harp, no joy in the palace,
as there was of yore.

--Beowulf

DES MOINES, IA: Iowans are known for their corn and love of politics. When it is time to elect a new President, they are the first state in the Union to act, with their confusing caucus and absurd over-coverage in the media. I believed the hype; I watched CNN and CSPAN (and CSPAN2, mind you) like an addict for the last couple months, unable to get enough information on this impending campaign season. My first as a professional journalist, and perhaps the most important in the history of America...was I thrilled? You bet your ass. I was going to Iowa, I was to glimpse History. Ah, sweet naivete; had I only known how many hicks, fools, and general miscreants we could fit into the wretched state of Iowa I would have stayed home. I was clueless...under-prepared...my research woefully inadequate, I finalized an expense agreement with my editor.

I can't say enough evil words about the imbeciles who live in Iowa. It is unfortunate, really, because several were kind to us, showing us around the complicated "Skyway" (a sheltered sidewalk for the Des Moines business class, so they can stay comfortable in climate-controlled aloofness, well above the rabble). Yet I must declare Iowa some kind of American Australia; a prison-state for the worst of our country. I hate them, and I will never return, not for anything. They are an ignorant and embittered people with shit for brains and no sense of humor, let alone political acumen.

Ah, but I digress...here already, at the very beginning. This is a narrative; I must start more or less at the start. Ah, wait...the lovely La Chupa Cabra has challenged this notion of mine. "Why does it have to be a narrative? It's all bullshit, and it's too long." She has a good point, I suppose. This thing is very likely to deteriorate into useless babble. If you wanted a newspaper account of the thing, you could have just picked up a fucking newspaper. This trip was a brief journey through Burning Hell for me, and now it's my turn.

My preparations for the trip were in strictest accord with what I believed was the True Significance of the Iowa Caucus. If you tell me I have to cover a Hurricane or Revolution, I know what to expect; that is my Political Arena and I know exactly where to buy the necessary firearms. By comparison, I have almost no real experience with domestic political coverage, and it was with these limitations that I went about securing my provisions. I brought the gun, of course, and several small recreational explosives...those were obvious. When covering a revolutionary party in a third world country, it doesn't always behoove the journalist to advertise his occupation, but it seemed as though exactly the opposite would be true in Des Moines. I roped a four-foot

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silver barracuda to my front bumper and inserted small American flags into every orifice in the automobile. Two large door panel magnets reading "PRESS" completed the outward appearance of the Free Press Mobile Unit...easy enough, but what about the rest of it? What about the drugs? Obviously, speed was going to be invaluable, and my Memphis-based colleague had already knocked over a preschool, equipping us with 70 small-dose Adderalls. For my part, a quantity of psychedelic mushrooms would give us a hasty escape route if the regular scene was too heavy.

I felt ready. I set out for Memphis early on January 1st to pick up John. I had barely cleared the city limits when a large low-flying goose attacked the car; I swerved wildly across the icy highway and still saw the fucker's feet in vivid detail through the windshield. Ominous, this thing... I swallowed the lump of terror in my throat and grimly continued on my way.

When I arrived in Memphis, John and his lovely lady treated me to delicious barbecue ribs and many fine beers; we had planned to leave early the next morning in order to beat the 5 p.m. press check-in but it was clear that we would never wake in time. John, relatively new to the trade, suggested we leave that night. I slurred my accord...it was the only way. He staggered into his chambers and came back with an eerily light load: two suits and a large winter hat, the furry sort, with long earflaps. I stared at his luggage, uncomprehending. He didn't even have a jacket; surely I hadn't forgotten to mention that the Mobile Unit was no longer equipped with a functioning heater?

"That's all you're bringing, man?" He seemed confused, and then remembered something. Trotting to the kitchen, he returned with a bottle of Johnnie Walker Red. I shrugged and we left for Iowa.

The night before had been one of many mirrors and more cigarettes celebrating the New Year, and so I had one sleepless night and a ten-hour drive already under my belt. This hazy drunkenness seemed a very serious problem...then John broke out the kiddie speed. I was sober within ten miles and almost completely insane by the Missouri border. We burned over the nighttime prairie, meticulously planning the various phases of the endeavor, entirely unable to recall these plans only minutes later...a steady stream of gibber heated the car as we twitched along. John seemed to buy new cold weather gear at every truckstop; he ended up with several jackets, a fleece scarf, and even gloves. Born and raised in Chicago he has never learned standard shift, so I was left to drive the entire way...agony. Over twenty hours of driving with only a short break, and I could tell my nerves were shattered. This was no way to begin this thing; horrible hallucinations as the road slivered underneath us, long streaks of light undulating from oncoming headlights, a perilous confusion and irreality to the entire trip. There was no turning back, and there was no rest. I hunkered down and tried to keep my wits about me.

We rolled into Des Moines around noon, with over 150 milligrams of speed boiling our brains. We found the Polk County Convention Complex easily enough, and well ahead of the credential deadline. There had already been some bad noise from the media people. Two days before the caucus I received an email demanding \$200 for the workspace I had

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reserved. There was no money in the expense account for this, and I wasn't about to spring for it; not for an electrical outlet and a hard line to the Internet...but these things were critical. I replied to the email from Chris, the media-relations director for the Iowa Democratic Party, with an offer for a vintage speargun in exchange for an outlet in a supply room. Chris expressed a willingness to work with us, so I brought the speargun, in case he decided to take me up on it.

The young lady at the credential table didn't understand, however; her eyes widened in alarm as I mumbled something quick and quiet about "spearguns" and "supply closets." She was clearly ready to call security when Chris happened our way. As though he wasn't busy enough, the idiot with speargun had actually showed up...he hid his dismay well and told us we were welcome to the workspaces at the back of the media room and the hard wires in the Google/YouTube press lounge. We still had access to the streaming figures and anything else in the Convention Complex, including the free bar in the lounge. I thanked him graciously but he didn't seem interested in the speargun. I am sure he had a lot on his mind, or perhaps he didn't know how to swim...I was happy to keep the thing anyway.

O God, how I hate these kinds of events, this kind of coverage. My mind swims back through the fog, to New Orleans, where I was stripped of my many weapons at the door of the hotel...they lifted a Czech military pistol, a diver's knife, and various other oddments from my person and I was labeled shortly thereafter as the "man in the hat" by Mayor Ray C. Nagin. These people hate me, instinctively...they know I have no real business being there, despite the suit and fedora, or maybe because of the attire...and here, in this lounge, I can tell that my esteemed colleagues in the press corps would feel a sadistic satisfaction were they to witness the police, finding my eyes dilated, pulling the mushrooms from my briefcase and beating the dogshit right out of me, here in front of God and everyone. But fuck them, anyway; especially the self-important pricks who make up the Broadcasting Corps. So what if my articles are overly long and jarring in content, slim on substance? At least the substance is there, whereas these ugly fuckheads are ALL on someone's dole. I might be a bit long-winded, but so is Rush Limbaugh, and scurvy as I may appear I will never spin you.

Although many of the candidates had left the Complex to attend events around town, Ron Paul was still there and I was able to talk to him for a moment. He looked worn out; he is an older fellow and the campaign trail has a way of battering a fine, healthy man into a smearish pulp, but he was game enough to answer my obligatory questions about the Diebold electronic voting machines slated to be used in the upcoming elections.

"I don't know enough about them, but if they aren't reliable, then I don't think we should use them. I don't see anything wrong with a paper ballot; that way there is a paper trail." When I asked whether he thought we would see a paper ballot this November, he just shrugged dismally, a weird vacant look in his eyes. This is pure speculation, but I think Ron Paul is a politician that has never seen "true democracy" at this level. The race for the presidency is not something that occurs at the platform or policy latitude; it operates solely in the media spin zone. Ron Paul is a slight man, diminutive like Dennis, and

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despite his dignified bearing, he wears those damned little sweaters under his blazer. He is a sincere man with little or no subterfuge about him, and he is a doomed candidate. He has done well enough already to give hundreds of thousands if not Millions of college students and Mountain Libertarians a terrible hope-complex, but the bulk of America sees that sweater and imagines him in a nursing home more easily than the Oval Office. More esoteric observations on Ron Paul later; it is easy to digress here, with the shock of all these terrible pills flooding my guts with artificial energy and blistering my tongue so badly the free beer tastes like battery acid...John had almost totally lost his voice, and was unable to offer up any questions, so I asked the candidate if he would allow a few photos.

He agreed and asked whether I would like to be in it with him. I declined and immediately saw a flash of irritation cross his face, so I relented and handed John the camera. I put my arm around Ron's shoulder and felt him tense like a cat; the muscles under the blazer tautened and I knew he was going to perform a judo throw, so I leaned close and whispered calming words into his ear: "It's okay, man. I am a Libertarian myself, or have been at times. I am on your side..." John was unable to work the damned camera, and I could sense Ron's desire to pull away, to flee the barbaric presence of John and I, him in his large furry hat and me with the wild eyes and the poor boundaries...I was able to get a few shots of him as he fled. Lo Siento, dear reader. I am in sore need of a camera upgrade, but that is simply how it rolls, sometimes. One must have a keen eye for the Immediate; one must be prepared to capture the Moment in campaign politics, for the opportunities are fleeting and we, as the Press, are automatically the enemy, the great Distorter. Pay Attention...let nothing slip by...

We felt the exhaustion encroaching, and since nothing else seemed to be happening at the Polk County Convention Complex, we decided to find our accommodations. We drove to the address I had for the Edgetowner Motel but it wasn't there; the address didn't even officially exist, not by several digits. What was going on here?

The motel was in nearby De Soto, Iowa, about twelve miles to the West. The receptionist said there was an error on the website; they had received many such complaints before. We could easily have been fucked but we found the Cozy Rest Motel, a scant two miles from the downtown area. After an odd scene in the office involving the owner's wife and a beautiful black velvet portrait of Kenny Rogers, we got the keys to our room. It was dark and likely dingy, but we couldn't care less... I could see John, the poor bastard, was wearing thin; if I didn't act quickly he would become useless and we would blow the amazing time advantage we had suffered so horribly to gain.

"Here's the plan, man. I say we have done with this terrible speed..." He nodded wearily, "We need to eat some of these mushrooms, go wreak havoc on those snotty broadcast chumps at the Convention Complex." We had run into several of these people, mean-eyed and humorless. I felt it would serve the empty-souled fucks right to be forced into dealing with two wide-eyed hack writers, and I knew the drugs would keep John awake. I had been up for several days and I wasn't confident I could address the situation properly, or find my way back to the motel on my own. The newspaper had an event schedule, and

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Mitt Romney was supposed to be speaking near the media playground. I have a real personal, spiteful hatred of Romney and his corporate approach to governing, his irritating slickness, and his snotty Yankee manner of speaking, and nothing would make me happier than to vomit foul mushroom puke all over one of his minions, or hell, maybe even him.

After a little coercion, John agreed to eat a couple of the caps. I knew we would have to get the driving out of the way, or things could become tough in the downtown traffic. Neither of us had eaten on the road; speed saps one's appetite, and I knew it would not take the damn things very long to kick in...the best plan would be a quick, direct drive to the Complex; we'd get our bearings from there.

We drove almost half an hour the wrong way. We were certainly outside the city when I finally turned around. The damned mushrooms began working within minutes, but by the time we returned to the downtown area, they nearly had full sway over us. I ran one red light on purpose, in the spirit of the moment, and was terrified when I ran the next one quite by accident. John was begging me to pull over and park when I hit the One Way street going the wrong direction. By the grace of God all that terror was in vain; we found the Complex and staggered shakily up to the press lounge, and tried to sort shit out. We ordered a couple of beers and tried to sit down to write but people everywhere around us seemed to be aware that we were up to no good. A single direct question was all it would take; we couldn't make sense to each other, even, and the breakdown would have been Total.

We wrote frantically, hoping to concentrate on anything hard enough to stay the inevitable outburst, and resulting consequences. Here are selections from that terrible four-hour period of time:

Hard to focus...it is 11:28 pm. This makes exactly 36 hours straight of constant drug haze. John and I are in Des Moines. I may have made a mistake, here...rather, I am totally confused. Surrounded by televisions in the Youtube/Google press lounge of the Polk County Convention Complex in Des Moines, Iowa, with nearly every screen flashing Mitt Romney or John McCain; the madness is a damn worm, and the fucker is burrowing deep into my brain. I'm not making sense...the Russian newsie wanted me to show her my email...why? Hottie though...perhaps bulgarian instead. I maintained, and ultimately it was simply a test. If confronted by anyone at all, for any reason, will I start shrieking, waving my arms around until large men in black suits hurry over to beat the bloodpiss out of me? Perhaps... indeed, likely. But not the cute Bulgarian news anchor...

We got in very minor trouble for the fireworks, a brief lecture in the parking garage by one of the attendants. I told him I was Christopher Dodd's son, to bill the Dodd campaign for any damages. I am sure everything is fine.

We were supposed to go to a Mitt Romney event tonight, but we got terribly lost...I feel as though most of the last 24 hours have been us driving through suburban neighborhoods, trying to find Des Moines. The city was

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laid out by an evil drunkard and many streets run PARALLEL with avenues...maddening. We can't find anything, and it is incredibly cold in the car. John doesn't know how to drive stick...he has been lovely, purchasing gas and food like a damn champion, but I think it has finally dawned on him that I really don't have any idea what the fuck I'm doing.

Luffman wants to meet us in Memphis after the Caucus...I am afraid, I now realize. This room is very large, cavernous, and the people around us seemed to be full of hatred for us, but I don't know why. Kucinich is in New Hampshire; fucker won't even be here. I was banking on him to fulfill the obligations of the Free Press Research Grant from which I was paid...Paul gave me a series of quick answers and very communicative shrugs, but I don't think he will give me another moment. Now I am banking on Gravel being in town. Duncan Hunter is here for sure, somewhere, lurking...maybe he will talk to me. I am getting desperate, buddy; Ron Paul is at 9% and gaining...he's too good to talk to me now. McCain is in Third place, knocking Giuliani down to 7%! McCain's old ass is really jazzy in Iowa, for whatever reason...he twitches and jerks like an addict and gives the same speech, word for word, tear for tear, every fucking time.

Around three a.m. our heads were clear enough to find the car and return to the motel. We fell asleep immediately; I had been awake for three days and I finally gave up the ghost. We learned that the Caucus began at 7 p.m. the next day...in the evening. The whole goddamn affair was only to last a couple hours! I thought the polling opened at seven a.m. and everyone had all day to saunter in and caucus. We were almost completely wrecked by that point, and seemingly for nothing. I had failed; my research was inadequate and there was no reason to push on. I fell asleep with a new feeling of defeat.

The next day we decided to visit some campaign headquarters. We began at the Christopher Dodd campaign office, mostly because the shuttle driver offered us a ride when we asked for directions. Senator Dodd wasn't in, but we were able to speak with his press secretary, one Ms. Flanagan. The atmosphere in the office was surprisingly upbeat; everyone was very optimistic. At that point no one realized the Senator would bail in less than twenty-four hours. The office hummed with excitement and enthusiasm, all except Ms. Flanagan. She wore the Beautiful Smile of Defeat. She was a Samurai; she knew, in her heart, that the end was near and refused to give a single inch. We chatted for a little while about Senator Dodd's horrific lack of media coverage; had I made it to a hand-shaking session scheduled for a nearby high school, hosting a caucus that night, he would have given me all the time I wanted. Flanagan said the Senator loved the press, when he found it...I have paid close attention to Dodd and he strikes me as a an awfully decent guy, with much of the charm of Ted Kennedy; but where Dodd comes across a little naive, Kennedy has a FuckYou Pistol in his pocket at all times, and knows where Marilyn kept her pills. Chris Dodd is no innocent, but he is likely too good a fella to ever have a serious chance at the White House. One needs an aggression. A terrible thirst for control, and plenty of money...I doubt Dodd has any of those in surplus.

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We walked through the Des Moines skyway to get to the building where Huckabee's campaign headquarters are located, literally within five feet of Ron Paul's. We heard about it, but it is hard to believe until you get there...they actually shared a shitter. We were excited by the very notion, and hoped to stir up a little Unrest, spread some evil rumors and hopefully get the two offices to engage in a full out war with each other. My plan was derailed immediately by Michael P. Shaw.

Michael P. Shaw was in the lobby. I had stopped for a cigarette with a couple of the Ron Paul kids working the canvass from out of state; when I walked inside I saw Michael P. Shaw spitting mad gibberish at John, who was obviously dancing to the weird music.

"And I know you ain't gonna print none of dat." Michael P. Shaw is running for President. He is tall and very black, far blacker in color than Barack Obama. His platform consists chiefly of a strong desire to eliminate any and all enemies of the "King of Israel," most of all Iranian Prime Minister Ahmadinejad. He said he would immediately declare martial law and rule the country under the War Powers Act, and charged Congress criminal in their "dureliction of duty." Michael P. Shaw, tall and gangly as Lincoln, was wearing a slightly mis-matched suit, a bold (some might say garish) American Flag necktie and a black do-rag. He had that weird light in his eyes and shiftiness of movement that immediately identified him as a King Freak, a real lunatic, and you can't help but pay him attention, as long as he stands in front of you and keeps you within reach. We asked him why he was hanging out at the Huckabee/Paul office and he explained in terms simple enough.

"When you don't have much money, you have to spin your campaign off of other people's campaigns. It's called a Ghetto Campaign."

Two police officers stood by at the ready, fully prepared to pounce on him, but I heard one of them assuring a nervous looking young Huckabee staffer that they had "searched him earlier, and he didn't have any weapons on him at that time"...He was careful to dissociate himself from both the other campaigns, and then proceeded to enter the Ron Paul War Room and sit down in front of a computer, next to the terrified youngsters running that office, and take notes on a legal pad. This man was exploiting a weird glitch in the democratic process, and if nothing else I feel he should be commended for that...lots of madness about the enemies of Israel, but he seemingly had very little domestic policy fleshed out at that time. He claimed he was on the ballot in four states, whatever that could possibly mean...perhaps he had four people in different states who had already agreed to write him in on the ballot.

This man was best thing we had seen to that point. I could feel tears welling in my eyes...where was the goddamned story? We had frozen our nuts off and burnt our brains to black-pink crisps, and for this? For the bizarre candidacy of Michael P. Shaw? What was happening here...what went wrong?

The staffers working the Huckabee/Paul offices maintained a very cordial relationship, according to all sources, avoiding even casting dirty looks in the hallways. Neither

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campaign was willing to declare themselves the likely victor in the event of an inter-office brawl. The youngsters working for Huckabee were real slicksters, with the shiny fresh look of fervent Christians, although they denied participating in prayers before their daily canvasses. (SPIN)

Ron Paul's staffers seemed a touch less organized, but they also had Michael P. Shaw on their hands. Both offices had trained their people well: none would answer any direct opinion questions from the press but continuously referred us to their press relations people. Huckabee's guy stayed out of the office, but Ron Paul's press man, John Zambenzini, appeared a few hours before the caucuses and answered questions. He was harried, especially at first, but relaxed after a while, young and very much a pro. He finally answered the question I had been trying to ask all the college-kid staffers, namely what they thought of Paul's plan to do away with the Department of Education.

"The Department of Education has driven the cost of tuition up, not down. One of Ronald Reagan's main running platforms was doing away with the Department of Education, but he couldn't pull it off."

Interesting...although every Republican candidate running proudly declares their various affiliations to Ronald Reagan at every chance they got, or were able to contrive, the only candidate who even remotely resembles Reagan on policy is Ron Paul, who never mentions it at all. Paul is a canny little man, and knows that there were too many flaws in the Reagan Administration, including the arming of men like Osama Bin Laden, to push the issue, and he doesn't feel that he needs it. He will stick doggedly to the Constitution, and if America wants an administration with one eye on the economy and the other on that great document, they will have to discern the thing out for themselves.

"Eyes on"...we had to focus on that. We were the eyes on Iowa; we were in the belly of that terrible beast, and even there it was difficult to find our way through the bullshit.

"Cause we're so goddamned stubborn we can stand touching noses for a week at a time and never see eye to eye."

-From The Music Man (paraphrase)

Iowa, in terms of politics, is a media creation. The much-lauded Iowa caucus is the political version of Paris Hilton; it is important only because the media has made it so. The people of Iowa are not more politically-oriented, and the number of registered voters that actually turn out to caucus is testament to that...this year set records for both Republicans and Democrats, and it was still low, around 220,000 for the Dems and 120,000 for the GOP. That small percentage of eligible voters and the apathetic attitude of the Iowans we ran into was more than enough for me.

I was shocked to find my predictions far more accurate than those of anyone paid to watch the process...I called for the severe beating of Mitt Romney and predicted that Thompson's recent surge in Iowa would play a big part in the numbers at the end of the night...and, best of all, Ron Paul rode off with 10% of the vote. Let Independents and Democrats, as well as Republicans, vote for Ron Paul in four months. Assuming his

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monetary momentum holds out (largely generated by college students likely from their government-subsidized student loans), Ron Paul will fuck some shit up. Mark my words, you ignorant bastards. I am right, and I know this better than you.

O fuck, how I hate this caucus process...and how I hate Iowans. If you watched it on CNN, you might have noticed the resemblance to a drunken schoolboard meeting...or changed the channel, thinking you were watching public access from Butte, Montana. The whole thing is an elaborate sham; sweaty baby boomers play Duck Duck Goose for REAL delegates; Iowa is decided by counting the hands raised. They won't even publish actual votes for a candidate, only the percentages. Ridiculous...Iowans are supposedly tough on candidates, accept no double-talk and hate negative campaigning, yet they were able to overlook both Mike Huckabee's sly attack and his reneged promise not to run attack ads. They are fools and they all wear beige, all of them, and they will treat you like shit if you aren't sporting it yourself. I have such an inarticulable revulsion in my soul for these people...yes, there...an Iowan turning down the opportunity to be a delegate because she "would miss the Thurston Meet, and I've just been going for YEARS..."

I must now assess the candidates themselves. They are the players here, at least on the surface.

Mitt Romney is a vile piece of dog-shit. John McCain is a doddering old fool, almost justifiably xenophobic after having bamboo splinters shoved under his fingernails for five years in Vietnam...in no condition to make foreign policy decisions now, though. Mike Huckabee is a forked-tongue devil in a slick little package; he says he looks voters in the eye but he can't, because he is slightly cross-eyed, giving him a distinct advantage. Giuliani wasn't in Iowa long, and good for him. They whipped his left-leaning ass into a paste on the 3rd, although I doubt they will ever quite understand Why. Fred Thompson is a wonderful actor, very Presidential in his bearing, and thus gave Iowans the only link to Reagan they had, bringing him into a slim Third Place. Iowans want another Reagan in the most shameless way and it is pathetic to watch, and more pathetic to continually hear about...from them AND the candidates. Ron Paul is a small man with wonderful large ideas. He pulled in a not-insignificant 10%, but it looked costly. To his credit, there was a more visible presence in Iowa from him than anyone else, bar none.

On the Democratic side, Clinton and Obama run on the exact same platforms, and you have only to pick the package. Do you like the Grecian orations of Obama, or the steely-eyed shark-nature of Senator Clinton? While Oprah will retire back to daytime television after the race is over, we can count on Bill for at least the next four years...did you like it the first time? Some of us did, and some of us feel he sold most of our country with NAFTA...but whose idea was that, anyway? Rather, what did we get in return? Was it enough? Maybe...maybe.

Edwards made second, by a cunt hair, or perhaps even less...I heard analysts saying that his second place finish was so terrible for him it actually made him finish in a 'real time' fifth, or tenth. I don't understand why Edwards doesn't do better...everyone seems to like him, but I think they are all very excited to cast the votes for one of the Novelty

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Candidates. I can't understand it; his platform is solid, very pro-middle class, and he has been careful with himself and the money he has received for years...slicker than Whale Shit on an Ice Flow, slicker than a televangelist.

Biden and Dodd are finished, but Dodd is probably a great guy and Biden is without doubt the mover and shaker of the left, by far and away the most Accomplished candidate. Richardson tries, God how he tries. He was wonderful for New Mexico, cheerfully signing progressive legislation into Law with no help other than an aide to hold steady his hand while signing the paper, and then quick to fetch another drink. Fine, fine, but he romped the most aggressive pro-environmental legislation ever seen in this country, setting the example for National-Level energy bills, passed in his state but brutally slaughtered in Washington. 20% of the energy in his state will come from renewable resources by 2010, if not sooner. Whatever...he is done, too, and I bet his ass is sore relieved. This has been Weird for him, and the weirdness shows...Of the two radical candidates, Kucinich was roundly mauled; the Iowa Democratic Party website has been streaming the numbers all night, with updates every 15 seconds...I missed the exact moment Kucinich fell off the site altogether, but it was relatively early. The man has been gone for two days and wasn't even allowed to participate in the last debate; I think he chose to bail and focus his efforts in New Hampshire. Not so Ron Paul, who garnered himself 10% of the GOP nomination. Workers at the RP campaign office may be dismayed; they were hopeful of a third place finish and my Vegas spreads gave them even money on that. I would caution them to hold their tears, though, for Ron Paul garnered more of the independent vote than anyone, in part due to a mobilization of over 6300 volunteers working the state. Ron Paul brought in 300 volunteers from other states and at least four other countries, including Romania, Ireland, Norway and Canada. Not great, but not terrible. I am sure Ron Paul will continue his push well beyond New Hampshire. No one from the Kucinich camp was available for question.

I have returned to the Convention Complex to await the end of this nightmare, oh, wait...the final numbers are coming in right now, and the room is echoing with the drunken laughter of the Press Corp and stereo speeches of the candidates, broadcast live on separate networks, terrifyingly out of sync...The deal has gone down. Obama has finished first for the Dems, and Huckabee won a clear, definitive victory for the Republicans. Edwards and Romney came in second for their respective parties, but this bodes well for Edwards while finishing off Mitt Romney. Romney is finished, and this news strikes a kind of fear into my heart...McCain is going to stomp him badly in New Hampshire, clearing the way for Huckabee's sneaky little ass to vie with Obama throughout the summer. Michigan will batter him into utter submission. I am shocked to say it, but that is the worst case scenario here.

O Merciful God, don't run Obama against Huckabee. The Republican nominee will be either Giuliani or Huckabee. Challengers will arise, but they will be defeated. Clinton is a canny and aggressive opponent for Obama, but one of those two will surely receive the Democratic nomination in the end, and unless McCain or Thompson reveals a Bright Golden Dick and sways the nomination in their direction, we are fucked...I'm not saying Clinton and Obama are incapable of defeating Mike Huckabee, but it will be too close for comfort for those of us made weary by the totalitarianism of the last eight years. And

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Huckabee has shown himself very capable of subtlety with his "attack ad" media stunt. This approach was obscenely effective with opponents from his own party; he could pull off a real seedy number on Obama whose past is "checkered" compared to the Baptist minister. Then again, GOP caucus-goers in Iowa were going to vote for the most "Christian" candidate regardless; no need to panic, right?

I am in the press lounge, drinking heavily. The beer still tastes odd on my blistered tongue, and Obama is giving his victory speech on the five large televisions surrounding me...each is on a different network. Occasionally two words will graft themselves together and the resulting harmonics make us all flinch as if about to be struck. Long ululating cries issue forth from one of the broadcast guys every thirty seconds or so...maybe he is laughing, or weeping. Hell, he might be calling for a mate. My head is spinning horribly, whether from drink, drugs, or raw politic I know not. I have to somehow make it back to the motel. I left John dying there, unable to rise. I didn't blame the fucker for giving up...covering a debacle like the Iowa caucus is somewhat akin to swimming naked upriver away from vicious dogs...it is exhausting and futile. The dogs are better swimmers and they will catch you and clamp their jaws on your private parts, tearing them off with a swift contraction of their powerful neck muscles. I must muster the strength for this twenty-hour-plus drive back to Memphis, and then Ohio.

Was it worth it? Was it worth the immeasurable toll it took on my body, soul, and checking account? I doubt it. But I provided coverage, dammit. I am certain of that...I was there, I saw it unfold in all of its shaky and over-hyped glory. Take it or leave it, Sir or Madam. I'm just thankful it's over...politic is far harder on the body than Drink or Drug, perhaps almost as detrimental as Exercise. If my battered body makes it home, I am certain my editor will give me a proper Ass Beating for submitting an article so long and stupid. Take it, though, and with some grace...this is the American Democratic Process at its Hulking Finest. I am lucky to have survived this far, and you will be lucky to survive another decade in this wretched land. God bless America, but may He damn you fucking Americans to Hell...especially Iowans.