## Martin in the Margins

Written By

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FADE IN

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE

The room is quiet, and a ghost in full viking garb is sitting at a table, staring ahead, looking bored. This is ROLLO OF NORMANDY. He takes a long, slow sip from his coffee.

RAMESSES THE GREAT, who compliments his pharaoh costume with a pair of reading glasses, is perusing a magazine titled Famous Historical Figures Quarterly.

BETSY ROSS sits with them, as she puts the final touches on her American flag. She takes a moment to mull it over before shrugging and pulling out a Nintendo DS.

ROLLO

Ramesses, you'd better bring 200% to the annual Historical Ghost Dodgeball tournament. We play Bonaparte's team first. That creep can throw, man.

RAMESSES

Yeah, I'm not going to be able to help you guys out this weekend. Sharon and I have to leave Friday for that wedding out in Wisconsin, remember?

ROLLO

What?! Where is your dedication to the team?! This is a league game, Ramesses! If you don't come, I'm going to have to play Taft! WILLIAM. HOWARD. TAFT.

BETSY

Aw, come on, Rollo. He's got team spirit.

ROLLO

(to Betsy)

Forget it, Betsy. You're out of your element.

(to Ramesses)

You have to come! It's a league game.

**BETSY** 

I don't know why you're doubting Taft. He's got spirit.

ROLLO

Betsy! You're out of your element!

RAMESSES

Come on... Taft's got spirit.

ROLLO

We literally are spirits! We don't need spirit! That comes with the player! Historical Ghost tournament. Hear that? Ghost. If there's a ghost that doesn't have spirit, they've got some serious issues they need to work out.

Just then, MARTIN VAN BUREN walks into the lounge. He wears an overcoat that compliments his sideburns.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Speaking of ghosts with no spirit...

Van Buren trudges over to the soda machine. Rollo's eyes follow Martin as he speaks to Ramesses and Betsy.

ROLLO (CONT'D)

Martin Van Buren. Nearly brings a tear to your eye. The guy was president of the United States of America. Freaking president! And no one--except for a few rejects who fill the void of their empty lives with obsessive research on nothing worth knowing -- knows who the guy is. Pathetic. How does he get up in the morning, look at himself, and actually convince himself that he is worthy enough to be seen in public? He is the absolute last person I would want on my team. Just a sorry sack of sheer unathleticism. Softball just isn't in his--

Martin, who is revealed to be seated at the same table as Rollo, is staring at Rollo with an annoyed look.

Rollo just stares at him blankly and sips his coffee.

ROLLO

(mumbles)

Sorry, Marty. It's a league game.

Cue Title.

BLACK SCREEN

BALKUS (V.O.)

Alright, class. It's the moment we've all been waiting for. Term 4 projects.

FADE IN

INT. BALKUS' ROOM

BALKUS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm sure you've all heard of this project. I assign it every year, and it's probably the single, most important thing of your lives.

Van Buren enters the room. It is filled with ghosts and students. He walks by a clique of other ghosts who are laughing. Upon seeing him, they stop and stare him down. Van Buren makes eye contact with a ghost wearing colonial leggings, a jacket, and a wig. This is JOHN HANCOCK. He snarls at Van Buren as he walks by in slow-motion.

Balkus is addressing the class.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

And now, you guys are going to select your historical figures. Just a warning: The best, most popular people get picked early on, so have a backup ready.

A nerdy looking kid raises his hand straight up in the air. This is ALEXANDER. Balkus notices him.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

Yes, Alexander?

ALEXANDER

Where's Joey?

BALKUS

Hm, excellent question. I guess I'll just have to pick for him. Thanks, Alexander.

Alexander sits back in his chair and smiles haughtily as his peers glare at him.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

Let's begin. First up, Alexander.

Alexander gives a fist pump as he proudly stands up.

ALEXANDER

I will be selecting John Hancock, American hero.

The ghosts all turn to Hancock, who smiles as they congratulate him. Hancock turns to the lone Van Buren to scoff at him.

Alexander sits down as Balkus writes.

**BALKUS** 

Ah, Hancock. Great pick.

ALEXANDER

Thank you, Balkus. It's truly an honor.

KID

(from back)

You know we all hate you, right?

BALKUS

(infuriated, screaming at the top of his lungs)

Hey! Don't you whine just because you weren't cool enough to get the most awesome historical figure this nation has ever seen! You would damn lucky to have him!

HANCOCK

(shouting)

See that, Van Buren? Yet another year where good ole' Hancock gets picked first.

The ghosts laugh.

HANCOCK (CONT'D)

(snotty)

Tell me, do you honestly think you'll be picked this year? Just give up, Van Buren. Give it up.

BALKUS

(calm)

Alright, class, moving on.

MONTAGE: SELECTIONS

--Balkus picks a name out of a hat.

- -- A student announces his pick.
- --Van Buren looks over to the crowd of ghosts congratulating each other and smiles humbly.
- -- The clock ticks.
- --Balkus reads the name off a piece of paper.
- --Balkus writes in his gradebook.
- -- The clock ticks.
- -- A student announces his selection.
- --Van Buren sits quietly, twiddling his thumbs, looking less hopeful than before.
- -- The clock ticks.
- --More of the other ghosts give each other pats on the back.
- -- The clock ticks.
- --Balkus crosses names off his list.
- --The other ghosts crack open bottles of sparkling cider and celebrate in their corner, as Van Buren's head hangs low, a frown upon his face.

END MONTAGE

INT. BALKUS' ROOM

Balkus crosses another name off his list.

BALKUS

Alright, class, that's everyone. Start your research this weekend and we can-

Just then, the door opens and a groggy-looking slacker dressed in sweatpants drags himself to his seat. This is JOEY. He is eating a bagel.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

Ahhh, Joey. How nice of you to join us. We were just selecting our project topics but don't you worry, we've taken care of everything for you, okay?

Joey rolls his eyes as he slouches in his seat.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

So, Joey, your historical figure will be...Martin Van Buren.

Van Buren looks up with an expression of shock on his face. A smile widens upon his face. Hancock's gang looks over to him with disgust.

STUDENT (O.S.)

(shouting)

Who?!

The class bursts into laughter, and the ghosts do the same, mocking Van Buren.

BALKUS

Quiet down, class.

The class settles down.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

No need to make fun of Joey because he has...

Balkus can't contain himself and bursts into laughter.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

(laughing hysterically)

...Martin Van Buren!

Again, everyone erupts into laughter.

JOEY

Hold up, have we ever even learned about this guy?

Balkus gets intensely serious.

BALKUS

Joey, you know I don't waste time teaching about insignificant fools like him.

The bell rings as the students file out.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

Get a head start on those projects, folks!

Van Buren smiles and walks over to Hancock and his friends. One of them, dressed in Mongolian robes and wearing an ancient winter hat, steps in front of him. This is GENGHIS KHAN.

GENGHIS KHAN

Well, well. Looks like we've got a first-timer here, boys.

HANCOCK

Shut up, Khan. He's not famous just yet.

Khan steps aside to allow Van Buren to approach Hancock, who sits comfortably in nice chair.

HANCOCK (CONT'D)

Listen, Marty, I don't really know how else to break it to you, but you just, well, aren't that important.

VAN BUREN

How is that? When I first got into politics I-

HANCOCK

How do I say this, um. Lemme see. "John Hancock: American Hero". "Martin Van Buren: Insignificant Fool". Do you hear the difference? Maybe just a little?

VAN BUREN

(angry)

I'll have you know, Hancock, that I was elected to be the 8th President of the United States in-

Hancock shoots up from his chair and throws his hands up as if to suggest he doesn't want any trouble.

HANCOCK

(sarcastic)

Whoa!!! Did you say--no way--president?! I had no idea! My gosh! We've got a big bad president on our hands here, boys.

Genghis and the others snicker as Van Buren lowers his head and exits.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE

MARIE CURIE'S TABLE

Van Buren carries his tray to a table where a woman in a labcoat is seated. This is MARIE CURIE. She is clearly on the weird side, as she drinks water out of a beaker.

MARIE

(like a mom)

What's wrong, Mr. President? You haven't sat next to your good pal Marie Curie in-

VAN BUREN

Nothing, Marie. I just...

He notices the beaker.

VAN BUREN (CONT'D)

Are you drinking water out of...a beaker?

Marie puts her hand on his shoulder.

MARTE

(quietly)

Don't change the topic. Something's bothering you, isn't it?

VAN BUREN (CONT'D)

(whining)

They just keep making fun of me, okay?!

MARIE

Who?

VAN BUREN

Hancock and all them.

MARIE

Oh, those jerks.

They look over to Hancock's table.

HANCOCK'S TABLE

Hancock and his buddies are having arm-wrestling matches near the soda machine.

MARIE CURIE'S TABLE

MARIE (CONT'D)

But, I heard you finally got picked this year for the Balkus project! Congrats! VAN BUREN

(grumpy)

I wasn't **picked**, okay, Marie? I was given as a punishment.

MARIE

Sheesh, so-rry, Mister Grumpypants!

VAN BUREN

(grumbles)

I'm thirsty.

Van Buren gets up and makes his way to the soda machine.

MARIE

(calling after him)

See, this is why you need a beaker! I won't be thirsty for a while, no siree, not with my trusty beaker of water!

## HANCOCK'S TABLE

Hancock looks over his shoulder to see Van Buren at the vending machine next to him. They all go silent as they watch him grab a soda through the machine.

VAN BUREN

(awkwardly)

Hello, boys.

HANCOCK

Hey, everyone. Looks like Martin Van Buren is trying to talk to us...or should I say...Martin Van Ruin!

The table bursts into laughter as Van Buren tries to shrug this off.

VAN BUREN

How can you be so rude to someone who served this country? During my presidency I-

HANCOCK

Listen, Mr. President...you were a president, right?

Van Buren nods.

HANCOCK (sarcastically

sympathetic)

Just because you were a president, doesn't mean you are a big shot. You're just not the FDR type. You're more of a Millard Filmore type. Ya get what I'm saying?

VAN BUREN

Oh, come on! I'm not that low!

They ghosts all look to each other awkwardly and avoid eye contact with Van Buren.

VAN BUREN (CONT'D)

(trying to make his
point)

Look it, just ask Lincoln! He'll tell you the truth! How about it? What do you truly think of me, Honest Abe?

They all turn to LINCOLN, the very tall man with a beard and a top hat.

LINCOLN

Dude, you're lame as hell.

They all laugh at Van Buren, who stands still, not knowing what to do.

HANCOCK

Face it, Marty, you've got the class slacker doing your project. That's worse than not getting picked!

They laugh as Hancock gets up and approaches him.

HANCOCK (CONT'D)

What's he going to write about? How much of a failure you are? Let me show you how to be a real American hero.

Hancock takes out a Sharpie and scribble his huge signature on Van Buren's head, who is stupefied at this point. They all laugh some more before he collects himself and leaves.

MARIE CURIE'S TABLE

Van Buren sits back down in his seat.

MARIE

Well, how'd it go? Did you make new (MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

friends? I saw you chatting over there and laughing! Oh, you boys! Always making jokes to each other about something!

VAN BUREN

Not now, Marie. Please. I just can't be accepted no matter what I do.

MARIE

(shocked)

You mean...they **didn't** befriend you?

VAN BUREN

Didn't you win 2 Nobel Prizes?

MARIE

What?

VAN BUREN

Nevermind.

There is a long awkward pause.

MARIE

Alright, listen, I'm going to tell you something I don't tell most people.

Van Buren leans in.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Sometimes, when I get really angry and need to let it all out, I just take a beaker and-

VAN BUREN

(angry)

Dammit, Marie! Don't you understand that there are some problems that can't be solved with a beaker!

MARIE

(hurt)

Sorry, I was just trying to help.

Van Buren lightens up after a moment.

VAN BUREN

The point is that this Joey kid is just going to worsen my reputation.

MARIE

Well, why don't you do something about it?

VAN BUREN

(catching on)

You mean like making sure Joey works hard on his project?

MARIE

(blank faced)

I mean, I was going to say kill Hancock but that works, too.

VAN BUREN

Right. Now how can I do this?

MARIE

Oh that's easy. Just get him alone and bring a steak knife-

VAN BUREN

I meant the kid, not Hancock!

MARIE

You want to kill the kid?!

Van Buren slaps his hand to his head and sighs.

MARIE (CONT'D)

(whispers to herself)

Genius...

INT. GYM

BASKETBALL COURT

The court is divided into two halves where a big dodgeball game is taking place. Rollo is off to one sideline with his team.

BENCH

Van Buren slouches on the bench as Rollo shouts to the team. Marie is next to him.

ROLLO

Taft! TAFT! PICK UP A BALL, WILL YOU?!

VAN BUREN

Hey, Rollo, I was thinking-

ROLLO

(grumbles)

Not now, Van Buren.

He walks off.

VAN BUREN

See, Marie? I can't even get a word out to these guys.

MARIE

Eh, who cares? You've accomplished more than half of them anyways.

VAN BUREN

No I haven't.

MARIE

What? Of course you have!

VAN BUREN

Well nobody knows that!

MARIE

That's just because you don't tell anyone about anything you've done! Like that time you won the White House curling match!

VAN BUREN

I try! They always cut me off! Watch.

Rollo walks in front of them.

VAN BUREN

Hey, Rollo, did you know that I-

ROLLO

You're not getting in, Van Buren. I'll play Taft's dead body before you see the court. HEY! WATCH YOUR HEAD!

He walks off again.

VAN BUREN

See? What am I supposed to do?

MARIE

Use Joey.

VAN BUREN

What?

MARIE

Joey's presentation is on **you**. That's your chance to show everyone who you really are and what you've done.

VAN BUREN

Damn, Marie. You're right! I've got to make sure he gets everything right! Thanks, Marie! I appreciate-

A dodgeball smashes Van Buren in the face.

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN

INT. JOEY'S ROOM

Van Buren lies on the bed, icing his head, when the door opens. Joey walks in and throws his stuff down.

JOEY

(yelling)

Yeah, Mum! I'm starting my homework right now! Just throw my bagel in the toaster!

Joey sits down at the computer and opens his assignment notebook, which reads "Martin Van Buren".

VAN BUREN

Well, this might be easier than I thought.

Joey looks up, confused.

JOEY

(to himself)

Am I supposed to call this Martin kid or something?

Van Buren sighs and snaps his fingers. The computer screen in front of Joey pops up with a window of Martin Van Buren. It catches his eye as he stares for a moment. Van Buren begins to smile as Joey squints at the computer.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Who left this here?

Joey closes the page.

Frustrated, Van Buren pulls out his phone and dials a number. The phone in the room rings and Joey picks up.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Hello?

VAN BUREN

Hello, this is Mr. Balkus, I was just calling to make sure Joey was getting a headstart on his Martin Van Buren project. May I speak with him?

JOEY

Uh, I'll let him know, thanks!

Joey quickly hangs up and goes back to the computer.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Ugh, this Van Urine guy is so lame.

Van Buren sighs and lies down again.

JOEY (CONT'D)

(surprised)

This guy was a president?!

Van Buren rolls his eyes.

JOEY (CONT'D)

(mumbles)

Never even heard of him.

Van Buren gets up in fury.

VAN BUREN

Okay, you know what, kid? The next word that comes out of your mouth is going to get you a royal beating!

He snaps his fingers and a picture of Van Buren's face pops up.

VAN BUREN (CONT'D)

Just do the damn project!

Joey inspects the picture.

JOEY

Whoa. Guy's got boss sideburns.

The camera pushes in on Van Buren.

VAN BUREN

Damn straight I do.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE - THE NEXT DAY

Van Buren sits with Curie.

VAN BUREN

The kid's hopeless, Marie. He just likes my sideburns.

MARIE

Face the facts, Martin: You're not relatable to modern audiences. That's why they don't teach you! You're not-how do I say it-in.

VAN BUREN

In?

MARIE

In. When something is "in", it's good. It's cool. It's hip. People like things that are "in". You're "out"!

VAN BUREN

I'm out and I need to get in!

MARIE

You don't **get**—nevermind. Just make yourself more relatable.

MONTAGE: MARTIN IS "IN"

- --Van Buren searches on a computer "How to be 'In'". He sifts through the results and reads through articles.
- --Martin looks in the mirror at his new outfit: baggy sweatpants, a sports jersey, and a tilted baseball cap.
- --Van Buren walks into the teacher's lounge. Hancock's crew sees his new outfit and breaks into hysterics. He sits next to Marie.

VAN BUREN

What are they laughing at?

MARIE

(jaw wide open)

...whoa.

VAN BUREN

What's the matter?

MARIE

You're really trying to fit in, (MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

huh?

VAN BUREN

I guess you could say I'm wicked rad-

Marie stares in disbelief.

VAN BUREN (CONT'D)

-Yo.

--In the cafeteria, Van Buren sits with a bunch of students. They are all laughing.

STUDENT

So I was like, "dude, I'm so not passing in my homework".

They all laugh.

VAN BUREN

(laughing)

That's totally righteous, bro!

They continue to laugh.

On the edge of the cafeteria, Lincoln stands next to Marie. They both watch with arms folded. He leans in towards her, eyes on Van Buren.

LINCOLN

Can they see him?

MARIE

(eyes forward)

Nope.

-- In Balkus' room. Van Buren is in conversation with Marie.

VAN BUREN

Yeah, so now I have the Tweeter, The Facebok, the Instantgram, and the Vines all on Nextflix, so, like, hit me up, you know?

Marie stares at him and nods quietly.

--Van Buren sits at his computer and reads his Wikipedia page. He continues to read, slowly falling asleep. Suddenly his expression changes as he has an idea. He furiously types on the computer. The screen shows him changing his Wikipage.

END MONTAGE

INT. JOEY'S ROOM

Van Buren is on the bed again, as Joey is staring at the computer screen.

JOEY

He's soooo boring.

Van Buren snaps his fingers and his new Wiki page pops up. Joey's eyes light up.

JOEY

Whoa! This guy is sooooo cool!

Joey starts to take notes and Van Buren gives a fist pump.

INT. TEACHER'S LOUNGE

Marie is sitting with Van Buren.

VAN BUREN

(genuinely happy)

It's done, Marie. He actually did it. Now everyone will find out how important I really am.

MARIE

Good, I'm glad.

As this is said, Genghis Khan walks by.

He arrives back at Hancock's table and leans in to whisper into Hancock's ear. Hancock grins widely, eyes on Van Buren.

INT. CLASSROOM - A FEW DAYS LATER

CLASSROOM

Joey is sitting in a study hall, and Ms. Farrell is behind a desk, reading.

DOORWAY OF CLASSROOM

Genghis, walking alongside Hancock, points into the room.

HANCOCK

So he did the project?

GENGHIS KHAN

Yep.

HANCOCK

Alright. I'll possess the teacher, (MORE)

HANCOCK (CONT'D)

send him out of the class, and steal the notes.

Khan nods as Hancock shuts his eyes. A flash of light occurs as he possesses Miss Farrell.

CLASSROOM

Miss Farrell opens her eyes and lifts her head.

MS. FARRELL

Joey, will you go to the printer and get those papers for me?

JOEY

Sure.

She writes out a pass for Joey, who gets up, takes it, shoves it in his pocket, and leaves the room. Miss Farrell watches him leave and then quickly moves towards his backpack. She empties the whole thing and furiously tosses his belongings in search for his paper. While she goes on this tantrum, the other students look on in silent horror. Finding the presentation, she looks to the door and quickly returns to her seat. She closes her eyes and the flash occurs again.

## DOORWAY OF CLASSROOM

Hancock high fives Genghis Khan as the walk away, paper in hand. Joey walks right by them and enters the room.

CLASSROOM

JOEY

(placing the papers on her desk)
Here you go, Miss Farrell.

**5** .

MS. FARRELL

(confused)

Um, thanks?

Joey goes back to his seat, stopping to notice the mess.

MS. FARRELL (CONT'D)

Joey, who do you think you are? Clean up your mess.

Joey frowns and picks up his stuff.

INT. BALKUS' ROOM - LATER

The bell rings as the last of the ghosts, including Hancock,

file in and take their seats in the corner. He smirks at Van Buren.

**BALKUS** 

Alright, class. Let's take out the presentations.

The class pull out their papers, but something catches Van Buren's eye: Joey cannot find his paper in his empty backpack.

BALKUS (CONT'D)

First up: Alexander.

Alexander beams as he struts to the front of the class and begins. His voice is heard in the background.

Van Buren glances over to Marie Curie, who shoots him a worrisome glance. Joey pulls a pass out of his pocket and Van Buren squints to see that it has John Hancock's John Hancock. Van Buren looks over to Hancock, who waives Joey's presentation in the air.

HANCOCK

Looking for something?

Van Buren holds his head in his hands and moans as he thinks all is lost. Marie touches his shoulder.

VAN BUREN

I'm ruined, Marie. Any chance I ever had at being somebody is lost.

There is a long pause.

MARIE

(calmly and wisely)

We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.

Van Buren looks up at her slowly, and then to Hancock.

Van Buren angrily stomps towards Hancock, who shoots up.

VAN BUREN

(sternly)

Give that back, Hancock.

HANCOCK

What are you gonna do about it?

VAN BUREN

It's only fair to give Joey a chance.

HANCOCK

Why should I? He's a nobody, just like you!

His cronies erupt into laughter, but Van Buren steps forward into Hancock's face.

VAN BUREN

And what did you ever do for this country, huh?

The crowd of ghosts gasp.

HANCOCK

How dare you! I signed the Declaration of Independence in-

VAN BUREN

Did you draft it? Did you serve in the army? Did you really do anything for this country at all besides sign your lousy name on a piece of parchment?!

LINCOLN

(from the back)

Actually, it's an official document-

VAN BUREN

(furious)

Not now, Abe!

Just then, ELVIS walks in holding a piece of paper.

ELVIS

I'm looking for a...Mr. Falker?

LINCOLN

This is History. He's downstairs.

ELVIS

Thank you, thank you very much.

Elvis leaves.

(to Hancock)

Now give me that paper, or I will personally-

Suddenly, a smash is heard as Hancock falls, and behind him stands Marie Curie, who has swung a beaker upon Hancock's head. She shrugs. Van Buren smiles as he grabs the paper and runs over to Joey's desk to give him the paper.

The class claps as Alexander takes his seat, having finished.

BALKUS

Next up: Joey.

Joey drags himself to the front of the room and clears his throat.

JOEY

(reading)

Martin Van Buren, the most important 8th president we ever had.

Everyone looks around and Van Buren sighs.

JOEY (CONT'D)

What did he do? Well, he was a man with strong beliefs. He would not admit Texas into the U.S.A.

Everyone watches silently.

JOEY (CONT'D)

But you probably want to hear of some of the more exciting things he did.

Van Buren looks up, confused.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Like, for example, he was a founding father of dodgeball. And he was the first American President to circumnavigate the Earth.

His classmates look to each other and smile in content.

Hancock looks to his friends with an expression of shock. Balkus nods.

JOEY (CONT'D)

He is often viewed as the "King of Croutons" for his ingenious discovery of the delicious salad ingredient. But most notably, Martin Van Buren saved the Earth from zombies--

HANCOCK

Oh you've got to be kidding me.

**JOEY** 

--and became a famous vampire hunter.

HANCOCK

(out of his seat)

He's making this all up!

BALKUS

(nodding)

Yeah, I mean, that's probably true.

HANCOCK

(flipping out)

OH, COME ON!

JOEY

And that, my colleagues, is how Martin Van Buren became the 8th president.

They clap and Joey looks to Balkus.

BALKUS

Is that it?

JOEY

Well I also have this sweet diagram.

Joey picks up a big poster of a Martin Van Buren diagram and the class' fascination is audible.

**BALKUS** 

Whoa. That. Is. Amazing. Great job, Joey. You get the highest grade in the class, A+!

Hancock and Alexander simultaneously shoot out of their seats in anger.

HANCOCK AND ALEXANDER

WHAT?!

As this happens, the class swarms Joey and congratulates him, and all the ghosts in the room do the same to Van Buren. Van Buren smiles as he shakes everyone's hand.

FADE IN

Joey smiles as he holds up a picture of Van Buren. He hangs it up on the wall and smiles.

FADE OUT