

Story 5 of 22

5at

Sun, 20 Apr 2003

Thompson has 'Kingdom' of fear and loathing

"What a long, strange trip it's been."

-The Grateful Dead

Cats have nothing on Hunter S. Thompson, who says he's died 16 times in his lifetime - "all documented." The edgy drug- and gun-soaked lifestyle of the self-described "gonzo journalist" would suggest there are a few kilos of truth here.

Thompson, 66, roared into the American Zeitgeist in the mid-'60s with a book on the Hells Angels motorcycle community, a work that helped launch a journalistic - some would say hedonistic - career full of politics, weaponry, various controlled substances and "bad craziness."

His latest work of nonfiction and fiction is "Kingdom of Fear," a collection of anecdotes, political diatribes and wild nostalgia trips in the same vein as previous collections, such as "Generation of Swine" and "Songs of the Doomed."

"Kingdom" is Thompson's post-9/11 warning to America that the powers-that-be are up to no good in the war on terrorism, instilling fear in the public and threatening civil liberties in the name of national security. He weaves this message into the fabric of the book.

I call it fiction and nonfiction because with Thompson, you have to get into his mind - if you dare - and into his off-kilter way of interpreting people, places and events, such as his 1970 run for mayor of Aspen, Colo., on the "Freak Power" ticket - an election he nearly won. That and other escapades are described in vivid and, some may suspect, acid-flashback detail.

The reader should be able to interpret his leaps up and down the spectrum from truth to slight embellishment to downright fantasy.

For example, there's his account of a long-ago adventure that begins with his plowing into sheep on a rain-soaked highway and ends with "the Doctor," as he's known, fleeing a bookie's burning trailer with a future Supreme Court justice at his side.

In an old essay talking about hunkering down for Y2K, he offers tips that could apply to concerns of today's terror-survival culture: "I, personally, am hoarding bullets, many thousands of them. Bullets will always be valuable, especially when your lights go out and your phone goes dead and your neighbors start running out of food."

He also takes some corrosive jabs at officials in Colorado who tried to prosecute him in 1990 on assault, weapons, drug and other charges, all of which were later dropped.

As you'll learn in "Kingdom," Thompson is loyal to his friends and full of loathing for his foes. His words cut like a knife, but they're so over-the-top, you can't help but snicker with delight.

For Hunter fans, this is a must-read to find out what's on the doctor's mind these days. Newcomers can use this book as an introduction to Thompson's wild-eyed kingdom.

Kingdom of Fear