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"HOW'D YOU MEET
YOUR GUY?"
"I CHIPPED MY TOOTH
ON A QUAALUDE. HE WAS
MY DENTIST."

HUNTER THOMPSON

By Mark von Pfeiffer

Preface: Excerpt from dinner conversation. 2003 CineVegas Marquee Award Presentation for Dennis Hopper at The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino.

Mark von Pfeiffer: Who would walk away from a cage match you versus Hunter Thompson?

Dennis Hopper: Is that lunatic still in the running? No, no, no I don't

think we'd be in the same weight class, but it's rumored he's done his back in. I've never seen him up close, so I can't be certain.

Robyn Leech: Oh, he would destroy me. That man has stared into the abyss and walked away so many times. Screw the army, we should have sent him to Iraq.

MvP: Hopper, it's hard to believe

you've never met Hunter. It seems to me you would have traveled in the same circles, more or less.

DH: We spoke on the phone sometime in the '60s. I was at a party, probably fucked up and I couldn't understand his words at all. I handed the phone off to someone else, but he did seem to have a lot to say.

In Search of Wandering Swine: Lightning Strikes Twice, Thompson Back on the Vegas Throne

Aside #1: How it happened does not matter, but I am writing this goddamn piece with what is a broken or severely fractured left wrist. That in itself is novel. Two additional facts upgrade the situation to singular: I have no health insurance, and am so hideously behind my deadline that my editor has put the apartment under 24-hour lockdown. My guardians – faceless men in hooded, black velvet capes who smoke "fancy" hash cigarettes and fade into the shadows when pedestrians wander too close. Yesterday, the "agents" cut the heat to my apartment by bushwhacking a nearby gas main. Certain communications I have received indicate that my phone is next. No phone = no email. No email = no sending the piece; and then the goons move in.

Two thick sleeping bags are fashioned into a makeshift tent. I use a handful of chopsticks and a roll of military-grade duct tape to construct a crude cast for my lolling wrist. Each letter east of "H" on the keyboard brands itself with searing clarity onto my dizzied limbic system. I am going to write this bastard straight through, pausing only to freebase smelling salts and pleasure myself. Let's begin.

To be read in the voice/style of a Discovery Channel narrator: From Moscow to Tulsa, Bangkok to Brooklyn people jitterbug to Vegas in a never-ending stream. They come to get a taste of The Red Carpet. French author Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) asserted that morality is dictated by the majority, who, by virtue of old age and/or infirmity are unable to participate in the various intrigues and crazy, drug-fueled orgies of the young and virile. This dictum is permanently suspended in Nevada. Granny throws her diaper to the wind, straddles the stool and burns the Red Bull and vodka train deep into the morning hours. It is never-ending

"THIS AMERICAN DREAM THAT I'VE BEEN SEEMINGLY OBSESSED WITH SEEMS TO BE COMING TRUE RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR EYES. IT'S KIND OF A PRIVILEGE TO LIVE AT THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT."

Photograph by: Paul Chesley

and you are always the guest of honor. Everyone comes with hope, most leave with lighter wallets, splitting headaches and a vague sense of accomplishment. Some never leave.

Individual skirmishes aside, Vegas wins the battle each day and it will win the war. It churns more cash through its guts in one weekend than Wall Street does all year. By 2104 Vegas will stretch from New York to LA, and in its base attribute it already does. The city is a human impulse made corporeal. The big-brained thugs who made Vegas knew something: Americans pinball en delirium their whole lives trying to take the work and the sleep out of the work-sleep-buy triangle. Only two things will do this: fame, and easy money. Vegas sent Custer on his last charge, Vegas books the Jerry Springer show and Vegas brings people to an otherwise undesirable and desolate wasteland that just one hundred years ago was darker than a car-load of assholes at midnight. Now under the neon dreamland flare of a billion lightbulbs, tourists cavort and convulse in the oinking, sweating Foxtrot towards the utopia of financial freedom. If that fails, they're always guaranteed the booby prize of a cheap piece-o-ass.

One man knew all of this. He knew that its total disease was pleasure-hard-humping bliss that lasts till 5:59 each morning and begins anew at 6:00. It ran somehow contrary to his version of the American Dream, and he was going to topple the piston-hipped juggernaut, wash away the endless hurricane of meat and money to expose the good things underneath. For a short period in 1971 he was the Genghis Kahn of Vegas. He and his attorney made their foxhole on the strip, their strategy was simple: They would have so much fun, become so deranged with hilarity that they would simply blow the fuses. Vegas would buckle under their terrible glee. Bulwarked by certain chemical "aides" they joined the battle, and the result was *Fear and Loathing: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*.

"There was every reason to believe I was heading for trouble, that I'd pushed my luck a bit too far. I'd abused every rule Vegas lived by – burning the locals, abusing the tourists, terrifying the help. My only hope now, I felt, was the possibility that we'd gone to such excess, with our gig, that nobody in a position to bring the hammer down on us could possibly believe it... When you bring an act into this town, you want to bring it in heavy. Don't waste any time with cheap shucks and misdemeanors. Go straight for the jugular. Get right into the felonies."

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas pg.173

Vegas still stands. This weekend, nearly thirty years later, Hunter S. Thompson has returned. His friend and Emmy Award nominated idolizer Wayne Ewing is unveiling his documentary



Breakfast with Hunter at the CineVegas Film Festival and has "dragged Hunter kicking and screaming across the country" in order to field questions and receive adoration. Thompson is in a foul mood due to back problems for which he will soon have surgery, but for now cause him constant pain. Tread lightly.

He is staying in an opulent suite at the Palms Hotel and has set up the bedroom as Foxbase Alpha. A towering, high-tech media center dominates the middle of the room. It is wired to the kooch with every means via which one might communicate with, or record the world: satellite, broadband, mojo wire, vcr, dvd, dat, even a 1974 ReVox A77 reel-to-reel analog recorder. His "team" of voluptuous female assistants, clad in stiletto heels and rubber latex sprint to and fro, eagerly filing clandestine reports, the subject matter of which I am, "Unilaterally denied access to." He and his entourage of artists, defense attorneys, high-powered financiers and movie stars are busy watching an instructional tape concerned with the Do's and Don'ts of successful political propaganda. Nancy Reagan is serene in the Cyclopean eye of the 65" flat screen television.

Nancy Reagan: "*I'm not the speech maker in the family, so let me close with Ronnie's words, not mine. Whatever else history may say about me, when I'm gone, I hope it will record that I appealed to your best hopes not your worst fears. To your confidence rather than your doubts. And may all of you as Americans never forget your heroic origins, never fail to seek divine guidance and never, never lose the natural, god-given optimism.' Ronnie's optimism, like America's still shines very brightly. May god bless him...*" At this point the video is paused.

Hunter S. Thompson: It's important now, for me to interject this. It is a published and accepted fact that, I guess it was during the '50s, that Nancy Reagan gave the best head in Hollywood. Ever since I've learned that I've never been able to watch her. I've done you a favor here; you'll always think about it when you see her.

There are several quips from the chorus about the size of Nancy's cranium, and hence her mouth, but it is Thompson's remark that resonates. He speaks in short, clipped sentences out of whichever side of his mouth that his signature cigarette holder is currently not. Often his words trail into mumblings; often he rises to incoherent, staccato rantings. People may take this as an absence or derangement of mind, not so. He simply doesn't give a twirling fuck if you understand him or not. When, from time to time, he reaches an even canter, as seen above, it is to maintain the tone of his aura the permanent dervish that synchronically attacks and defends against anything within a 100-foot radius.

After the program ends people exchange hugs and wish him well on the upcoming premier. Except for a twenty-year-old French magazine with his face on the cover, we are alone.

"I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THIS,
IN SPITE OF THE TROUBLE IT'S CAUSED ME.
BEING SHOT OUT OF A CANON
WILL ALWAYS BE BETTER THAN BEING
SQUEEZED OUT OF A TUBE."

HsT: This is a wonderful magazine.

MvP: It looks French?

HsT: Yes it looks like a great story there, but I can't.

MvP: Read French?

HsT: I could, I took four years of it, but it takes me a while to get back into it. I just like the magazine. I'd like to subscribe to it. Some interesting artwork here. You know in Europe their magazines are different than the ones we have here.

MvP: It's a funny moment when you're reading a twenty-year old article for the first time that's written in another language and you're the subject. That's fame.

HT: Well I'm usually going so fast that I haven't read all the stuff I've written, let alone what's been written about me. When I do I enjoy it. There is no work until it's sold. Remember that.

MvP: I've seen that picture of you shooting the typewriter there (referring to French Magazine). Were you shooting it for shits and giggles or had it wronged you?

HsT: The photo was originally for *Time* or *Life*; and this typewriter had failed once too often. So I was executing the typewriter. That was a worthwhile death.

MvP: Have you ever had a near death experience involving gunpowder?

HsT: Oh, quite a few. That's nothing I want to go into.

"Some people will tell you slow is good-and it may be, on some days-but I am here to tell you that fast is better. I've always believed this, in spite of the trouble it's caused me. Being shot out of a canon will always be better than being squeezed out of a tube."

Kingdom of Fear pg.173

MvP: Wayne Ewing told me a story about a "Test of Faith" you put him through. Essentially he was to remain motionless as you used a shotgun to blow out the doorframe in which he was standing.

HsT: Yes. Yes. Wayne, I'm sure that's exaggerated, but something happened.

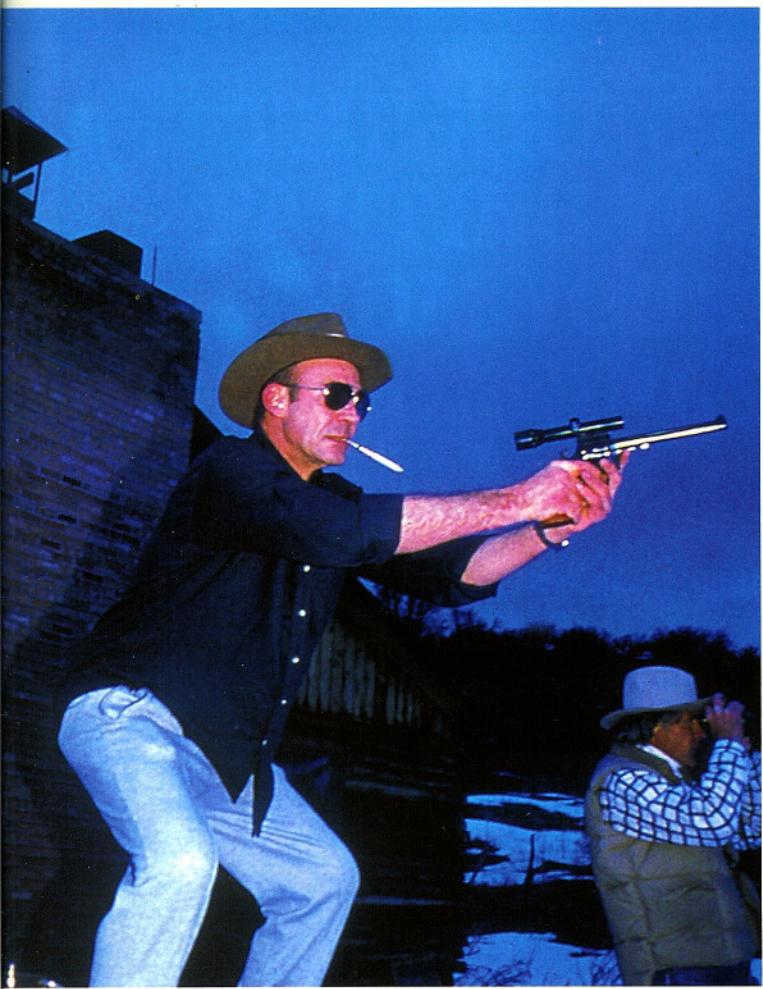
MvP: Do you write strictly via typewriter? What's your method? You go from notes on yellow legal to condensing into prose on the typewriter?

HsT: Exactly. I've learned more than once: If it works you're doing something right, and my thing seems to work. This American Dream that I've been seemingly obsessed with seems to be coming true right in front of our eyes. It's kind of a privilege to live at the end of the world as we know it.

MvP: If you were to earmark some of the signs?

HsT: That's too complicated for me. It's too complex. I'll be satisfied if I can get a subscription to this magazine. Paul Chesley, the National Geographic photographer, took these shots. It's good to have talented friends. I'm always amazed when I go back and see this stuff. Oh look, they've got another thing in the back on the Mitchell Brothers.

MvP: They're the ones who owned the infamous O'Farrell live sex theater in San Francisco? You once called it the, "Carnegie Hall of public sex in America." If I'm not mistaken you were the Night Manager there for a period in the '80s?



in the '60s.

HsT: I didn't consider Kesey a cult. I considered his philosophy a model for the future. We were all going to live that way. We were friends for many years. Not many people from those days are still standing.

MvP: You lived in the heart of San Francisco.

HsT: I was looking down on Golden Gate Park. There were a lot of groups going on at the time, not necessarily cults. I was enthusiastic about a lot of them.

MvP: You have a quote in your newest book, *Kingdom of Fear* to the effect that you were often arrested not for committing a crime, but for simply being too enthusiastic.

HsT: (continued on page 101)

HsT: Yea

MvP: And Jim killed Artie with a .22 in 1991.

HsT: Yea.

MvP: There were rumors circulating at that time that you were going to cover the trial for Rolling Stone.

HsT: Yea. I was friends with them. I was very careful at the time. I didn't want to provide a clear and present reminder of their association with sex, drugs and Rock 'n Roll. I thought it would go better if he was seen as a family man. Who knows who the judge might be. I knew that my presence would be a big factor to judges in San Francisco, but then hell, it's always that way.

MvP: Do you have any interesting stories as a journalist of the '60s and '70s having to do with cults? Ken Kesey...The Electric Koolaid Acid Test? You were in the shit



Photographs by: Paul Chesley

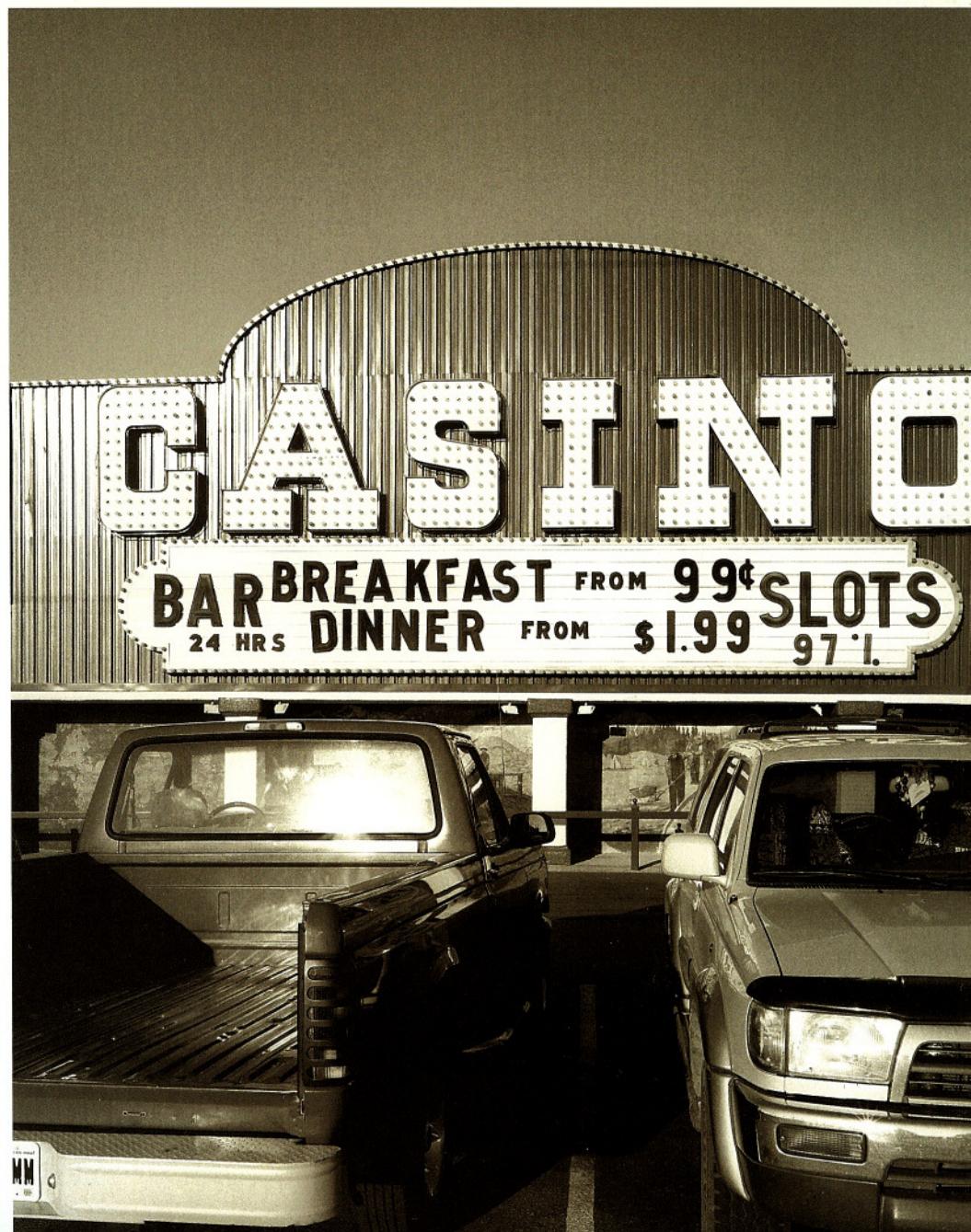
Probably so. Just being there sometimes.

MvP: If you could command your own army of robots what would be their first imperative?

HsT: Go vote. That and bury the White House. Make one of those artificial mountains.

MvP: You coming back to Vegas is like Neil Armstrong returning to the moon, or Hemingway going to Barcelona twenty-five years after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises*. It's amazing that you've abused yourself as you have and are still looking fit and blowing out pages. I'm still reading your current stuff, I'm still smiling and I'm still saying, "Damn that's badass." Journalism can be life and art at the same time, and you're the only person I've read that has lived by that philosophy for an extended period.

HsT: Holy shit... What can I say? I really appreciate what you're saying. I haven't lived this long without being curious as to how I should look at all of this, from my own position. Like what am I? What am I



doing? Not too long ago I went back to Louisville for a ceremony that was something like "This is Your Life." That's in *Breakfast with Hunter*.

Anita Thompson: There was a time when Hunter was looked at as a kind of outlaw or bad apple in Kentucky. Years later they packed Louisville's Memorial Auditorium, and Hunter was the guest of honor. Hunter made a beautiful speech about his father, Warren Zevon was there, he got to see his mother in a limo and they gave him the key to the city.

HsT: My mother brought my aunt. They were both wide-eyed. I gave them both a

pint of whatever the hell they were drinking. That was nice.

MvP: People label you as a political writer. Is that what you are?

HsT: I'm a political journalist. I'm a sports writer.

"The precision-jackhammer attack of the Miami Dolphins stomped the balls off of the Minnesota Vikings today by stomping and hammering with one precise jack-thrust after another up the middle, mixed with pinpoint-precision passes into the flat and numerous hammer-jack stops around both ends."

Excerpt from Rolling Stone #112 "Fear and Loathing at the Superbowl: No rest for the Wretched." Covering the 1973 Superbowl.

MvP: People say that you're a creature of the '60s and '70s. Now that Nixon's gone you're no longer relevant. I think that's bullshit. They'd label you as a straight political writer, but you're more than that. "Fear and Loathing at the Taco Stand," from your new book *Kingdom of Fear* is the simple, exciting stuff of everyday life as seen through a severely warped lens.

HsT: You talk about relevance. You're talking about it in a contemporary tradition. Relevant to what? I've never thought about that either. I wasn't relevant when I was nine years old. Relevant means what's

acceptable to the current culture.

MvP: But you are. You're continually interesting.

HsT: Well fuck those stupid mules who write these things.

MvP: I agree.

HsT: You said it right, they don't get it and I can't help them. I've done a lot to help them.

MvP: I recently saw an old black and white photograph with your picture and a quote. It was an advertisement for Levi's.

HsT: I'm glad you said that, because I'd forgotten about it.

MvP: The wonderful part about it is that it's just your face, you could be pantless for all the consumer knows.

HsT: That didn't run in this country, it ran in the European magazines. It won some award for best clothing ad. I've never bragged about that. I'll take my bows right now. But they airbrushed the cigarette out.

MvP: Your first novel, *The Rum Diary* is making the leap (continued on page 116)

Photograph by: Fredric Reschew
With many thanx to Wayne Bernath at Crazy Girls.



"HUNTER WOULD NEVER SAY THIS IN SO
MANY WORDS, BUT FOR MANY YEARS HE
HAS BEEN WRITING ABOUT FREEDOM..."

to the big screen? Does that have Depp in it?

HsT: Yea.

MvP: Who is directing *The Rum Diary*?

HsT: I don't know.

MvP: What are you expecting from it?

HT: I would like it to be a good movie. I have veto power over various things. But I don't want to write the screenplay.

MvP: What do you think of Hollywood?

HsT: That's too big a question. What do you think of it?

MvP: I fled LA last year. LA is concrete. Strip malls, overpasses, black clothing, cellular phones, horoscopes, in a word-Oprah.

HsT: She's not so bad compared to George Bush.

MvP: They should get together and have a child.

HsT: I just got married by the way.

MvP: I read that in your ESPN.com column. It looks like you're having a lot of fun.

HsT: Yea. I'm keeping regular as they say.

MvP: I saw you on a Conan O' Brian rerun the other night. You were drinking scotch and shooting guns. Same old same old eh?

HsT: Was that the shooting one? Yea we went to a range outside of New York.

MvP: I thought he'd come up to your house in Aspen.

HsT: No but we did have a film crew from NFL films out here last week.

MvP: No shit. What'd you lads get up to?

HsT: Yea. They wanted to talk about football. It's going to be on ESPN sometime, or maybe other places, I just like NFL Films. They shoot with real film. The guy who does the interview handles the camera. Puts it on his shoulder, a huge Arriflex. It was kinda fun.

MvP: In an old letter you've included in *The Proud Highway*, you talk about starting your own publishing company.

HsT: Yea I wanted to do that.

MvP: What was the name you had in mind?

HT: I believe it was going to be "Gonzo." Yea those letters bring a bunch of weird, wild plots that I had; for me they really are like an autobiography.

Aside #2: The key to understanding "Gonzo" can be found in a quote from Faulkner. I don't have it with me right now and the "Secret Agents" are cutting my phone line in twenty minutes, so I'm not going to muck about looking for it. Nearly put: "Fiction has always been truer than any type of journalism. Great writers have always known this." Gonzo is a hybridization of what did happen with what would, in an ideal world, have needed to happen in order to prove a point to the greatest degree-regardless of whether the aim is to produce simple hilarity or geopolitical meditation. (continued on page 120)

MvP: You can see when you're down and out in the early years and didn't have much cash.
HsT: Fuck!

MvP: And your aunt would send you a check once in a while. That's exactly where I am right now, so it's funny to see that you were there. Encouraging in a way.

HsT: Yea that is nice. That's what Hemingway, in a way, was for me. Sort of an indicator that you can get away with it. Writing this shit on your own terms. I thought that about Kerouac too-well by God, you can get away with this.

MvP: If you were elected President what kinds of policies would you champion?

HsT: I get a lot of money for solving these things. I have two beautiful women waiting for me, so I can't talk much more.

MvP: What was it like working for Playboy in the '60s and '70s? Swinging.

HsT: The Playboy office was a lot more fun than the Rolling Stone office, I can tell you that. Of course I had the run of the mansion, so that helped. Alright... I've got to get going. I've set aside tonight to...ah...eat some acid.

MvP: Have you really? That's refreshing.

HsT: And beat some gongs-yea. By the way, what do you have in the way of offerings? How are you going to pay for my time? Do you have drugs or...guns?

MvP: What am I putting on the altar? I could send you some empty bottles.

HsT: Do you have any daughters?

MvP: No. I could kidnap a woman perhaps. Younger, eighteen or so. Put her in a gunnysack and leave her on your doorstep.

HsT: That's a good idea. That's a good concept. Let's think about that and talk more later. I've got a ball game to watch here and I've got to do my business. Send me a bottle of Royal Salute.

And so we part. I fade into the endless waves of Docker-wearing, golf-playing mid-level executives who dream of something magical happening to them in Vegas.

This piece is not intended as a primer on Thompson. He's got around 15 books out there. Go read one, muttonhead. In a 2002 study conducted by the Ackerman School of Social Research in Harvard, Illinois, it was determined that the author's most popular book (FLiLV) is responsible for more than 5 million burnouts having read at least one book in the American canon. I am here to tell you there are more than just the one novel, and some of them are even better.

From his early series of intimate and textured portraits of Southern American life written for the *National Observer*, to his 1970 piece on The Kentucky Derby-the first fully cranked and academically recognized instance of "Gonzo", it is easy to recognize Thompson's ever-present concern for personal liberties. "Hunter would never say this in so many words, but for many years he has been writing about freedom," says his new bride and long-time

assistant Anita. And she's right. Freedom from oppression on a political tip to man's right to his own insanity, Thompson knows certain things are inalienable, and he will tell you what they are. Back to the American Dream.

In Closing:

Every one of us-every man, woman and child breathing oxygen on Earth as I type will have one inexorable moment in our lives where we will say to ourselves in absolute pious earnestness, "There is something wrong with me, I cannot get out of it, this is the last thing." It may be the second of slow time before your car is split into fractions by an oncoming train, it may last the length of the phrase, "You have cancer." Perhaps it is the whole of one afternoon when an incalculable loss comes home to roost, and that is the end. The rubber meets to road for everyone. Thompson is not getting any younger and this moment has come several times to him during a life of perpetual self-combustion. Here is what makes him special: He has repelled them-simply through the force of his own will. He is immune to despair; he is blind and bulletproof to anything outside of his own hand-picked reality. If it is disagreeable, he unmakes it. His reality is heavy Wampum. And that makes him fearless. He will live forever.

"We are motorcycle people; we walk tall and laugh at whatever's funny. We shit on the chests of the weird."

Kingdom of Fear pg.176

And so on. The End.

Blue printed cotton blend dress - Marc By Marc
Green bikini bottom - Moschino
Shoes - Marc Jacobs