

Kingdom of Fear
Hunter S. Thompson

Exceptionally long and productive for a life lived constantly on the edge.

Hunter Thompson is a born storyteller. He was also an outrageous individual. The wild and crazy things he did, and got away with, make him the envy of every macho man in creation. He is probably read as well by beta males just for the thrill.

Thompson's life was so outrageous, and the documented scrapes he got into so improbable, that it gives him license to make stuff up. Without a doubt there significant parts of this book that are fiction. But Thompson, being who he is, you can't say which ones.

The book doesn't have much structure. It jumps around in time and it jumps around among themes. The major plot running through the book, if there is one, is a trumped up lawsuit brought against him by porn industry woman who rudely barged into his house in Woody Creek, Colorado – that's Aspen – it would not go away. When finally shown the door, she came back with an outrageous lawsuit that an ambitious assistant DA picked up and tried to use to railroad Thompson into prison for a number years.

But that plot provides as much cohesiveness as there is to the book.

Thompson's tales of derring-do are bit repetitive. They involve (a) drugs, (b) fast cars and motorcycles, (c) the criminal justice system. Along the way. Thompson managed to be in several of the iconic places and see the iconic events that unfolded from the sixties onward. He was the night manager for the notorious Mitchell Brothers O'Farrell Theater in San Francisco, which featured live sex and was the target of every crusading politician from Diane Feinstein on down. He ran for Sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado, just to get under the nerves of the local elite. He also, successfully, fought an initiative to expand the airport in Aspen to bring in more tourists – skiers.

He managed to be in Saigon at the tail end of the war. He managed to be in Chicago for the notorious 1968 Democratic convention, where Mayor Daley was busting heads right and left. He has photographs scattered throughout the book of himself with a great many celebrities, mostly on the dark side, such as Johnny Depp.

Thompson styles himself as an avatar, a champion of the people oppressed by law enforcement. There is no doubt that law enforcement does selectively seek out targets, of which Thompson made himself an extremely inviting one, outraging moral folks every place he happened to set foot. He was too clever, however, always being a step ahead of them, a little quick to get out the door, are able to locate criminal lawyers of extraordinary talents or friends in high places. Something to get himself off the hook. This has to have been infuriating to ordinary mortals to whom it was a moral affront to see people get away with a lifestyle like Thompson's.

Women are a leitmotif running throughout the book. There seem to have been women on tap for Hunter Thompson at any time day or night that he wanted them. He speaks fondly of a few of them, but it doesn't go into any description of characters and personalities. They were, they appear to have been simply a commodity, the kind of thing that a Chad type of personality simply attracts. He talks about his son Juan with a bit of affection, although we really don't learn anything about his personality. Let's say character development is not one of was not one of Thompson strong suits. He writes about action.

My own life's path crossed his a few times. I lived in San Francisco during the Haight-Ashbury era, when the Mitchell Brothers were getting their start. His portrayal seems to be fairly reasonable, although I found Joan Didion's account much more thorough. He talks about. He talks knowingly about the Saigon press corps. I was there for four years simply is a working stiff, and what he writes rang true in my recollection. I'm a child of the sixties. Although he claims that he did not do half as much in the way of drugs as he is credited with, one still has the sense that he was exaggerating in this book. Perhaps the same way. Bob Dylan – also featured in the book – tended to exaggerate his own experience in his songs. Quite simply, if you were that wasted on drugs, you could not have succeeded. Thompson says as much in one passage – it certainly doesn't worry whether he contradicts himself here and there – he talks about other notorious junkies such as Neal Cassidy and Warren Zevon who did, after long defying the odds, finally die.

A number of his stories leave you hanging in midair. There is a spectacular story about a Ducati 900 super bike headed for certain disaster. The story never ends – the subject changes. Likewise, a story about a so-called judge in Elko, Nevada, or is it Ely, who is in a no exit situation. Thompson is there with a hopped up 454 cubic inch Chevrolet, that absolutely trapped like a rat by the heat, and the story ends.

One of the appealing things about Thompson is his clear warning about the growth of the nanny state, encroaching government. He was concerned about government encroachment on civil liberties in the 1990s. I'm sure he could not have imagined, or rather, his worst dream would have been what the NSA in collaboration with the FBI and CIA now seem to do routinely. He would be horrified by what the FISA court for an intelligence surveillance act – has allowed these agencies to do. He would be in league with Matt Tiabbi and Glenn Greenwald in support of civil libertarians such as our Edward Snowden and Julian Assange. In fact, he would have probably had enough outrage in him to lead a political movement on behalf of these political prisoners, and might even have accomplish something.

This book appeared in 2002, three years before Thompson took his own life. His biography on the Internet said that he was facing are unsupportable medical problems. It may well be that there were some legal or other clouds on his horizon. Whatever Thompson did, he did it for himself, for the sake of ego. He didn't build much of a legacy. No organization, not much family, and a group of friends that may been loyal to

him. He didn't advance the state of civilization a whole lot. He was one-of-a-kind. He is fascinating to read. Rest in peace.