

The Curse of Lono Study Guide

The Curse of Lono by Hunter S. Thompson

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Plot Summary

In *The Curse of Lono*, Hunter Thompson travels to Hawaii to cover a race for a magazine. The trip turns into an extended stay. Though troubled with lousy weather, Hunter explores Hawaii's lore and legend, beach life, and fishing culture, in his unique and legendary way.

Hunter Thompson is hired by *Running* magazine to cover the Honolulu marathon. He invites his longtime friend, the artist Ralph Steadman, to pack up his family and join him in Hawaii. En route to Honolulu, Hunter meets and befriends a wealthy entrepreneur named Ackerman. The two agree to meet up later in Kona. In Honolulu Hunter is picked up at the airport by Gene Skinner, a man whom Hunter knows as a former opium trafficker and pilot for the CIA. Gene was hired as Hunter's photographer.

Hunter discovers that Ralph injured his back in a recent snorkeling accident. Anxious to have Ralph functional for the marathon party that evening, Hunter tends to his injury. That night, Hunter and Ralph attend the party, but the still-injured and ill-tempered Ralph puts a damper on the festivities. The next day, Hunter, Gene and Ralph cover the marathon, yelling profanities at the runners as they go by. Their assignment finished, Ralph and Hunter move to their rented compound in Kona.

Hunter is disappointed to learn the compound is less secluded and less glamorous than advertised. Hunter's new friend, Captain Steve, wants to take Hunter and Ralph out on a fishing expedition, but the constant rain makes this impossible. With the compound located right on the shoreline, Hunter begins to worry about the ever-worsening weather. Anxiety runs high as the storm prohibits outdoor activity and waves begin to push their way into the compound.

Hunter, Steve and Ackerman brave the storm in a near-disastrous, drug-addled boat outing. They return to find the compound flooded and Ralph gone back to England with family in tow. Hunter moves to the hotel where Ralph was staying, there to look after Ralph's dog, left behind due to its intense red-flea infestation. There in two adjoining, red-flea-quarantined suites, Hunter secretly helps Ackerman package and mail an entire harvest of marijuana.

Everyone, Hunter included, is surprised to see that he is still in Hawaii. Hunter hangs around with fishermen, hating their macho superiority and heaping abuse upon them whenever possible. Finally Hunter himself goes out on the waves and manages to catch a large marlin, the most prestigious fish possible. Seeking to subdue the fish, Hunter shocks the crew by crushing its skull with an antique Samoan war club.

While weighing the fish, Hunter makes a spectacle of himself, loudly ranting and raving. Onlookers are offended when Hunter arrogantly identifies himself as the Hawaiian god Lono, returned at long last. The faux pas proves disastrous. His life now in danger, Hunter flees to the ancient City of Refuge, where legend tells that any man may find

sanctuary, regardless of his crimes. Safe in the city, park rangers provide him necessary goods and services while he smokes, drinks and writes of his Hawaiian experience.



Frontmatter and The Blue Arm

Frontmatter and The Blue Arm Summary and Analysis

In *The Curse of Lono*, Hunter Thompson travels to Hawaii to cover a race for a magazine. The trip becomes an extended stay. Though troubled with lousy weather, Hunter explores Hawaii's lore and legend, beach life, and fishing culture, in his unique and legendary way.

The book opens with two Ralph Steadman paintings. Each shows an archaic sailing vessel approaching the Hawaiian coast. The second bears a quote from Rudyard Kipling's *Naulahka* which cautions westerners against trying to "hustle the east." Following is a selection from Mark Twain's *Letters from Hawaii*, relating the origin of the Hawaiian god Lono. In a moment of anger, Lono slew his wife. Overcome with grief, the god sought solace in wrestling and boxing, eventually instituting the athletic games called the *makahiki*. Lono finally departed the islands in a three-cornered raft, promising one day to return. This promise, explains Twain, is why the Hawaiians were willing to accept Captain Cook as Lono returned. The facing page shows a Steadman rendition of the Captain Cook monument.

An exaggerated, cigarette-smoking portrait of Thompson graces one page. On the facing page is a letter from *Running* magazine requesting that Hunter S. Thompson cover the Honolulu Marathon. This is followed by a letter from Hunter to Ralph Steadman, suggesting that Ralph join him on the assignment. Hunter explains that he has taken the liberty of entering Ralph and himself into the marathon, where he imagines that they will take a quick lead in the race by sprinting for the first three miles.

Hunter is on a plane forty minutes out of San Francisco. He hopes to read up on Hawaii, but presently needs to use the bathroom. Unfortunately someone has occupied the restroom since takeoff. After some coaxing from the airline staff, a wealthy man named Ackerman is expelled from the restroom. A near riot is averted. Hunter notes, with some disgust, that the man's arm is dyed blue, indicating that he has been rooting around in the toilet bowl. The facing page displays a picture of a smiling Ackerman emerging from the restroom. His entire arm is vibrant blue.

Hunter retreats to the dome lounge. There he encounters Ackerman. The two men strike up a conversation. Ackerman proves well-connected and savvy to the who's who of Hawaii. The two hit it off, with Ackerman suggesting that they meet later in Kona. Hunter is fascinated by Ackerman's knowledge of Hawaiian stories, myths and legends. He is particularly drawn to stories of Hawaii's City of Refuge, where even the worst of people can find solace and sanctuary. Following is a two page drawing depicting a wall of wood carved statues. One bears a resemblance to Hunter S. Thompson.

The story is interrupted by a selection from *The Journal of William Ellis*. The entry addresses the City of Refuge, also known as the *puhonua* at Honaunau. The gates are



perpetually open. Asylum is available to all. The attendant priests will slay any person who violates the sanctity of the pact. Ackerman, nodding off, reveals that the City of Refuge is visible from his front porch. With Ackerman finally asleep, Hunter reads the story of Captain Cook's desperate arrival at Hawaii. With the ships falling apart and the crew nearing mutiny, Cook lays anchor near strange shores. Following is a two page sketch of sailing vessels approaching a mountainous shore.

Prompted by the flight attendant, Hunter prepares to return to his seat. Hunter and Ackerman exchange farewells. Ackerman shares with Hunter a small vial of illicit drugs, which Hunter pauses to imbibe before again wishing Ackerman well. The facing page displays a sketch of a frowning Captain Cook. Following is a two-page abstract of Cook fused together with a sailing vessel. The chapter concludes with an excerpt from The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook, detailing Cook's order to drop anchor in the bay of Kealakekua.



Adventures in the Dumb Life and Fire in the Nuts

Adventures in the Dumb Life and Fire in the Nuts Summary and Analysis

Hunter and his fiancée are met at the airport by Gene Skinner, who, ignoring the nagging threats of a meter maid, is half-parked on the sidewalk. Gene is surprised to again see Hunter in the field. Hunter explains that boredom drove him out of retirement. The author explains that Gene used to work for the CIA, flying helicopters as a front for smuggling opium. At the end of the war, Hunter spent several weeks in Saigon doing drugs with Gene. Hunter is surprised to learn that Skinner was hired as his photographer for the Honolulu marathon. Considering their past together, Gene is disappointed to hear that Hunter doesn't have any drugs.

With the crowd getting restive and the meter maid growing increasingly angry, the group quickly packs the car and speeds away. Gene careens recklessly through traffic, intentionally killing a stray dog. Gene won't drop the drugs issue. Feeling pressured, Hunter lies that Ralph has the drugs. The two men discuss if and eventually how they will cover the marathon. Hearing the Hunter has entered the race, Gene discourages him from participating, citing the runners are just too fast. Hunter eventually agrees.

Later, Hunter and Gene find Ralph at the bar of the Ho-Ho Lounge. He's in pain, his back injured in a recent snorkeling accident. Gene and Ralph argue over the whereabouts of non-existent drugs. Horrified and confused, Ralph limps away. Throughout the chapter are several surfing-related paintings. The first shows surfers mustering for the 1980 Pipeline Masters Surfing classic. A second picture depicts a cluster of surfers being savaged by a curling wave. The third and final work shows surfers flying headfirst off a tall wall of water.

Beginning a new chapter "Fire in the Nuts," Gene and Hunter talk at the Ho-Ho lounge. Rain beats down incessantly, Hawaii being in the throes of "Kona weather." As Skinner warns Hunter against certain racial groups, Hunter contemplates how the weather might inflame Hawaii's racial tension. As Skinner's behavior becomes increasingly racist, Hunter worries that the Samoan bartender will turn violent. Skinner tells a few stories of local interracial violence. Hunter goads him on, prepared if necessary to flee the bartender's wrath.

Hunter's fiancée calls down from the hotel room. Sportswriters have been calling, asking about Hunter and Ralph's participation in the marathon. Hunter advises her not to talk to the press and informs her that there will be a marathon party that evening. She insists that Hunter speak to Ralph, who is very unhappy, reminding him that Ralph has brought his wife and child all the way from England. Hunter makes one last attempt to provoke the bartender, but then finally wishes him farewell, shaking his hand goodbye.



He Was Not One of Us and The Doomed Generation

He Was Not One of Us and The Doomed Generation Summary and Analysis

Back at the hotel, Hunter finds the afflicted Ralph groaning piteously while an elderly Japanese woman massages his back. Ralph berates Hunter for keeping company with a "dope addict" and is disgusted to learn that Skinner will serve as photographer. He complains to Hunter about the many difficulties that he and his family have endured and relates the story of how he came to be injured. The author's exaggeration of Ralph's litany suggests that Ralph is being unreasonably maudlin. Outside the hotel, the rain continues unabated.

Hunter calls down to the gift shop to order a ripe aloe plant. He also asks if they have anything to cut or pulverize the plant. The gift shop suggests a set of knives, but Hunter insists on something more exotic. There is an argument on the other end of the line. A second voice offers to sell Hunter a heavy Samoan war club. Hunter accepts, requesting that it be sent right up. Later, Hunter pulverizes the aloe with the club and applies the resulting mush to Ralph's back. This, he explains to Ralph's wife, will neutralize the poison from the coral and allow the swelling to subside.

When Ralph proves unable to sleep, Hunter convinces him to eat a bag of valerian root. Ralph quickly devolves into a state of drug-induced incoherence. Worried that Ralph might have overdosed, Hunter tries to counteract the valerian root by offering Ralph a bottle of whiskey. One sip later, Ralph vomits all over the bed. Hunter moves Ralph to the shower, closing the bathroom door so Ralph's family won't hear his screams.

Later, at the marathon party, Ralph's poor health and sour demeanor is a depressing influence. A disagreement between Ralph and another guest nearly moves Hunter to fight on Ralph's behalf. Following is two page spread of the marathon's "calorie loading party," depicting several runners eating pasta and drinking beer. The next day, Ralph and Hunter interview several runners, immersing themselves in the jargon of marathon running.

Beginning a new chapter, "The Doomed Generation," Hunter's group is set up at the starting line. The author makes a distinction between few racers who hope to win the marathon and the many runners who merely hope to finish. Following is a two-page spread depicting the thousand-strong runners gathered at the staging area. Another two-page spread depicts runners passing through a gauntlet of surly onlookers (likely Hunter and his team) who shout insults as they pass.

With the race begun, Hunter's group rides a press van further up the course to set up roadside near Wilbur's house. Hunter and Gene heap abuse on the racers as they pass,



confident that the participants won't stop to retaliate. Hunter marvels at the grace of the racers, comparing their rhythmic footfalls to that of a whispering engine. He notes that the marathon becomes increasingly loud and disorganized as racers give way to runners. Hunter's group retreats from the rain into Wilbur's house, where they drink and watch football, monitoring the race via radio. Later they move to the finish line to cover the race's completion, where Hunter and Ralph are thoroughly impressed by the athletic grace of the winner.

Hunter ponders the question of why so many people race without hope of winning. He reasons that marathon running might represent a new ethic, where the biggest achievement lay in not giving up. Following is a sexually suggestive two page spread of a male runner tripping a female runner. A second painting depicts an abstracted, mutilated runner crossed with the likeness of a totemic figure. Hunter considers that running may be the last recourse of a disillusioned boomer generation. Following are a pair of two page spreads. The first shows a bloodied runner "hitting the wall." The second shows a pile of exhausted runners post-race.



Why Do They Lie to Us? and Tits Like Orange Fireballs

Why Do They Lie to Us? and Tits Like Orange Fireballs Summary and Analysis

The next day, Hunter and Ralph (with family in tow) leave Honolulu for Kona, where Hunter has reserved a seaside retreat. Ralph is anxious to recover in Kona's milder climate, but the author foreshadows that misery awaits them all. Following is a two page spread depicting several runners wearing their "finisher" award shirts. Hunter befriends a local ship captain known simply as "Captain Steve." Steve gives Hunter a lift to the retreat. On the way, Steve suggests that they later take the boat out and do some fishing. The narrative is briefly interrupted by an excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*, detailing Hawaii's ceremonial acceptance of Cook as the returned god Lono.

After an unusual run-in with one of Steve's former colleagues, the captain shares a horror story about what it means to be a captain-for-hire. Out on the water, far from civilization, anything can happen, particularly when clients pay top dollar for fish that never bite. The two men arrive at their destination only to discover that the retreat is little more than two shacks perched right on the waterline. The rain continues for the rest of the week. A two page spread depicts a giant red wave curling over the ocean.

While the weather is normally calmer on the Kona Coast, the weather has "turned around," now coming from the west. The surf is perilous and rising. Captain Steve shares a horror story of just how dangerous the Pacific can be. Worried that a sudden surge might wash them all away, Hunter calls the police to ask what the recent "wave warning" means to those so close to the water. The police assure him that a Civil Defense siren will alert him should he need to be evacuated. A two page spread shows two men surfing through a curling wave. Following is an excerpt from Mark Twain's *Letters from Hawaii*, where he refutes the notion that the Pacific Ocean is a calm, restive body of water.

In a short chapter titled "Tits Like Orange Fireballs," Hunter discusses Lono, the Hawaiian god of excess and abundance. He and Pele, the sexual volcanic goddess, are modern Hawaii's two favorite deities. Pele is believed to often takes human female form, appearing as a young surfer, a jaded harlot, or an old hitchhiker. Lono is seen as a wise ruler, but possessed of a fiery temper. His carousing ways often put him at odds with his wife, whom he one day accidentally slew in a fit of rage. Hawaii still celebrates the games that Lono instituted before his grief-stricken departure from the islands.



There Are No Rules and Trapped in a Queer Place

There Are No Rules and Trapped in a Queer Place Summary and Analysis

Optimistic that the weather will soon clear, Hunter invites his son Juan to Hawaii to enjoy the water sports. Looking back, the author shudders at his naiveté, reflecting on the horrors that they were yet to face. He summarizes the trials of the coming months, foretelling of terrible storms, an obsessive need to sail, and ugly social behavior. Despite all hopes to the contrary, the rain continues.

The Kona fishing fleet remains docked. The rain keeps everyone indoors, where Hunter's football fanaticism annoys Ralph as much as Ralph's eccentricities annoy everyone else. Ralph blames Hunter for their predicament and worries for the well-being of his family. He is particularly concerned that the mental strain might be too much for his young daughter. Unfortunately, despite everyone's desire to be elsewhere, the weather makes it impossible for anyone to leave the island. Despite the pervasive dampness, Hunter continues to write, drink and smoke.

Following is an excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*. Having finished the ceremony and feast, Cook makes his way back his ship. Wherever he walks, men, women and children drop to their knees and keep their head to the ground until he passes. Unbeknownst to Cook, the time and manner of his arrival to Hawaii closely matches the prophecy of Lono's return.

Beginning a brief chapter, "Trapped in a Queer Place," Christmas is only a few days away and the weather has worsened. Football season is over. Waves now crash on the lawn, only six feet from the porch. One wave nearly carries Hunter from the swimming pool to the ocean. Ralph and his family sleep together on the living room floor, bags packed, ready to flee at a moment's notice. Following is a two page spread depicting Hunter drowning beneath a diving board, surrounded by a school of sharks.



Bomb Fever and South Point

Bomb Fever and South Point Summary and Analysis

Hunter grows increasingly irritable, frustrated by the continued poor weather. He feels betrayed by the people who promised him that Kona weather would be sunny and mild. In retribution, Hunter celebrates Christmas Eve by detonating a large cluster of firecrackers on the doorstep of a neighboring charter fisherman. The bomb detonates prematurely and with more force than Hunter had intended. The many firecrackers within continue to blast for several seconds, the occupants of the house screaming in terror. Hunter is horrified and ridden with guilt; the joke has gone too far.

Hunter recalls the Hawaiian story of the "Law of the Splintered Oar." During a series of inter-island wars, King Kamehameha himself took to raiding peaceful coasts. One day, a fisherman defended himself by hitting the king upside the head with an oar. Later, the king would forgive the fisherman and institute the Law of the Splintered Oar, a law intended to protect peaceful citizens against raiding. On the facing page is a picture of a splintered oar fused with a fountain pen. It signs the name of King Kamehameha.

The decision to use the bomb came to Hunter earlier that evening. Already sick of lies, he is driven past the breaking point when a local caretaker tries to con him into buying a tin boat for \$12,000. Disgusted and angry, Hunter declares that he is tired of the lies and prepared to resort to bombs. Yesterday, Captain Steve took Hunter and Ralph out to fish, promising that they would catch a marlin. Hunter wasn't surprised to go home empty handed, but Ralph was disappointed. Hunter pities Ralph and his family, forced to spend Christmas under such deplorable circumstances.

The chapter closes with an excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*. King Kealakekua greets Captain Cook and, in the midst of much ceremony, the king removes his hat and cloak and places them on Cook. On the facing page is a portrait of Captain James Cook. Ralph Steadman has altered the picture to give Cook face-paint and a pair of horns.

Beginning a new chapter, "South Point," a week has passed since the group has been able to take the boat out of the harbor. Captain Steve suggests, since the weather has "turned around" it must be calmer on the other side of the island. Unfortunately the surf is too rough to sail, so Hunter and company grudgingly occupy themselves by drinking and setting of bombs. Hunter and son Juan take up golf as well.

After hearing that the Captain Cook Monument is deeded to England, Ralph and family decide to hike to the memorial. Pondering Hawaii's history, Hunter reasons that England might have controlled the entire Pacific if only it had kept hold of Hawaii. Following is a two page spread depicting Kamehameha lounging with his harem. A short excerpt from *The Journal of William Ellis* talks about King Kamehameha as the Alexander of



Hawaii. He carried Hawaii, and himself, forward by utilizing wealth and technology from the west.

With a break in the weather, Hunter and Captain Steve try to convince Ralph to come with them to South Shore, but Ralph won't hear of it. He'd rather research King Kamehameha in the burial chambers near the City of Refuge. Suddenly a hand touches Hunter's shoulder. It is Ackerman, his arm still dyed blue. Hunter invites Ackerman to come along to South Shore. He agrees, promising to bring some "chemicals." On the facing page is an abstract picture of Hunter with head elongated and eyes rimmed with red.



We're All Equal in the Ocean and The Land of Po

We're All Equal in the Ocean and The Land of Po Summary and Analysis

Hunter takes his son to the airport, where Juan is scheduled to take a flight to Honolulu. Juan tells his father that he had a good time, but complains that there has been too much tension. Returning from the airport, Hunter checks in on Captain Steve to find him busily loading the boat for their trip to South Point. Hunter is surprised to learn that Steve has already done the shopping, and that Hunter's portion of the bill comes to \$350. The plan is for everyone to meet at South Point for dinner, with Ralph and his family traveling the shorter overland route, stopping at the City of Refuge, while everyone else travels the long way by ocean.

Hunter's group sails from the harbor through a crust of burning driftwood, the remnant of a vessel recently consumed in fire. The author scoffs at the foolhardy trip, foretelling of bad weather experienced under the influence of strong chemicals. Following is a two-page spread depicting Captain Steve's disembodied head floating above the boat. The caption refers to Steve as "Captain Speed." Steve minds the wheel while Ackerman and Hunter smoke marijuana, mind the reels, and discuss the responsibilities of seamanship.

Ackerman hands Hunter a vial of white powder, explaining that it's heroin. Just then, the boat rolls, causing Hunter to lose his balance. He drops the vial, ruining the heroin. Fearing retribution, Hunter becomes suddenly paranoid. It occurs to him that he's trapped on a boat with people he doesn't know very well. The sun sets, leaving the boat to navigate by compass. Following is a two-page sketch of Hunter lounging in the "fighting seat" at the back of the ship, drink in hand.

Beginning a new chapter, "The Land of Po," Captain Steve warns that the weather is worsening. Ackerman, angry with Steve for getting them in the predicament, suggests that they might as well use the mescaline. They spend the rest of the night in drug-addled distraction, with Hunter tending the fire of the hibachi on the off chance that someone catches a fish. The author admits that the open flame was dangerously suicidal considering the circumstances, but in their drugged minds the fire had become a symbol of hope and survival. Following is a two-page spread showing Hunter at the hibachi. A huge column of flame erupts several feet into the air.

Somehow they survive the night. Hunter wakes to find Ackerman unconscious, overdosed on Dramamine and Captain Steve frantic. The ship is surrounded by a halo of garbage. Captain Steve reels in the lines to find nothing more than clean hooks. Hunter and Steve glumly look at the anchor line, realizing that one of them has to go down and untie it from the rocks. To prevent Hunter from simply cutting the line, Steve



jumps in to free the anchor. Ackerman wakes and, still angry at Steve, considers cutting the anchor-line and leaving Steve to swim back alone. Following is a brief excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Hook*. After having just spent two weeks docked in Hawaii, depleting much of the island's foodstuffs, the fleet is forced to return for repairs.

Hunter wishes to return to land immediately, but Steve would rather do more fishing. Steve has his way. As soon as Steve loses consciousness, however, Hunter reels in the lines, sets course for the harbor and hits the gas. Three hours later, just outside the harbor, Hunter lowers the fishing lines and wakes Ackerman. Seeing Captain Steve asleep near the boat's edge, Ackerman angrily kicks him into the ocean. Later, as they unload the boat, Ackerman suggests a trip to the City of Refuge. Following is a two page picture of the boat cutting across the waves at full speed, flag and fishing lines flapping behind.



The Balcony Life and Kicking Ass in Kona

The Balcony Life and Kicking Ass in Kona Summary and Analysis

Opting to skip the City of Refuge, Hunter's group returns to discover the entire Kona Coast flooded by the recent storm, the streets littered with rocks and abandoned cars. They find the compound waterlogged and vacant. Ralph and his family are gone, prompting Hunter to worry as to their fate. Ackerman suggests that they were likely evacuated, but Hunter persists in his horror, searching the ruined compound for any sign of their whereabouts.

Moments later, Ackerman directs Hunter's attention to the caretaker's cottage, where Laila awaits with marijuana and good news. She explains that Ralph, fed up with the encroaching storm, took the family to the Kamehameha hotel and plans to catch a flight back to England. Hunter is expected to take care of Ralph's family dog, left behind at the hotel. Following is two-page spread depicting stormy skies above the pool area. A large branch, heavy with green bananas, sits on the diving board. In an excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*, the fleet returns to find a chilly, even hostile, reception from the Hawaiians.

The author offers a summarized overview. Life is slow. In the wake of the storm, people abandon Kona for the mainland. Hunter spends his nights on the balcony of suite 505 of the Kamehameha hotel. The room is still charged to Ralph's name. Rupert, the family dog, is quarantined in suite 505 with red fleas and, thanks to the hotel's negligence, the Kamehameha is now legally responsible for the dog's safety and well being. Thanks to an accident involving a pool-side wasp sting, the hotel is libel for Hunter's well-being as well. Hunter has nevertheless hired a lawyer and now pursues a large settlement with the hotel. On the facing page is a sketch of a stone battle axe.

Beginning a new chapter entitled "Kicking ass in Kona," the author details the fishing scene of the Kona Coast. While the author admits that there is a great deal of money to be made in fishing, his greatest interest lies in sport fishing, where fishermen head out on the water in the hopes of landing a big, crowd-pleasing marlin. As boats return at the end of the day, the scale-masters at the Kailua Municipal Pier weigh the incoming fish before large crowds of cheering (or jeering) fans. The entire affair of presenting and weighing the fish is handled with showmanship and decorum.

Following is a two-page spread depicting Hunter tied upside down like a caught fish. A brief excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook* relates Captain Cook's plan to detain the Hawaiian king until a cutter, presumably stolen by one of the natives, is recovered. Cook tries to communicate to the natives that, while he intended to find and punish those who have stolen the cutter, he has no intention of harming the Hawaiians.

Following is another two-page spread depicting a baited hook dangling above the ocean floor.



Fuck You, I'm Rich and Driving the Saddle Road

Fuck You, I'm Rich and Driving the Saddle Road Summary and Analysis

Hunter faces several problems. Not only must he care for Rupert, Ralph's sick dog, but he also owes rent to Mr. Heem, who will surely be upset that his flooded compound is now encrusted with a red scum produced by the soggy remains of a thousand firecrackers. Ackerman, too, has troubles. While he was away in South Point, half his marijuana crop was stolen. Now Ackerman must pick the remaining plants before the thieves return for the rest.

Ackerman convinces Hunter that saving his crop will fix all of their financial issues. Ackerman plans to mail his harvest to a ranch in Texas. Hunter reasons that the plan will either work perfectly or fail spectacularly enough that they will know not to pick up the product. The hotel doctor regrets having taken legal responsibility for Rupert, but Hunter assures him that all is well. On the next page is a picture of Hunter standing beside an erupting volcano.

Since the vet bill is in Rupert's name, the doctor will only accept "Rupert's" signature. With Hunter's prompting, Ackerman passes himself off as "Rupert," signing the necessary paperwork. The doctor complains that the dog has forced the quarantine of two adjoining rooms. Following is a two page spread of Rupert sitting on a hotel bed, violently scratching. Ackerman is pleased to learn that their rooms, 505 and 506, will be off-limits to hotel staff due to the quarantine of Rupert.

In a short selection from the *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*, the Captain's men secure King Terreeoboo. Seeing the king detained, and hearing that one of their chiefs has been slain, the natives become visibly angry and hostile. On the facing page is loose sketch of totem poles. Another sketch, titled "Property development comes to Hawaii" shows several vultures tearing apart a carcass.

Ackerman has brought several flea collars for he and Hunter to wear. Ackerman explains to Hunter that he plans to use the hotel suite, with its convenient red-flea taboo, as a bag-house for marijuana. Hunter is skeptical, worried that five hundred pounds of marijuana is too ambitious, but Ackerman insists that the red-fleas provide the perfect cover. With tension running high, Hunter reasons that both he and Ackerman need a break.

Beginning a new chapter, "Driving the Saddle Road," Hunter has fallen into a "macho" way of life, lounging at the Kona Inn bar, watching as fishermen weigh their fish at the end of the dock. Hunter, thinking upon the fascism inherent in being a captain at sea, is combative with the local charter captains. Later, on the hotel balcony, Ackerman



suggests that they try to beat the Saddle Road speed record. Saddle Road is a winding, downhill, 53-mile stretch of road. The record is one hour and seventeen minutes.

Driving Ackerman's Ferrari, Hunter races down the winding Saddle Road at speeds approaching one hundred miles per hour. Ackerman, serving as timekeeper, is gripped with terror for much of the ride. Following is a two page abstract of a hitchhiker thumbing for a ride beside Saddle Road. The chapter closes with a letter from Hunter to Ralph. Hunter reports that he has dropped out of sight, but stays in touch with Captain Steve via Laila. He writes that he has been habitually picking up female hitchhikers, interrogating them, and then dropping them off at the parking lot of Kona Surf. The implication is that Hunter hopes to encounter Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of sexuality.

A Dog Took My Place and We Killed Like Champions

A Dog Took My Place and We Killed Like Champions Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens with an excerpt from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*. The Hawaiian natives, outraged by Cook's detainment of the king, obliterate the Captain beneath a flurry of many spears, rocks and clubs. Months pass before England is able to recover Cook's dismembered remains. Following is a two page spread depicting Hunter reeling in a marlin.

In another letter to Ralph, Hunter reports that he has caught a marlin and has since been accepted by the community of fishermen. As bills continue to mount, everyone, Hunter included, wonders why he is still in Hawaii. He offers Ralph the briefest summary of his fight with the fish, digressing into a discussion of Hawaiians and their relationship with sharks. Hunter realizes with some concern that he, like the Hawaiians, is losing his fear of sharks. Following is a two page spread depicting the Hawaiian natives returning the bones of Captain Cook. One native holds a totem resembling Hunter.

Beginning a new chapter, "We Killed Like Champions," Hunter writes to Ralph about staring down the thrashing marlin. Rather than allow the crew to beat down the fish with several whacks of a baseball bat, Hunter silences the beast with a single violent stroke of the Samoan war club. The crew is stunned. The crowd at the weigh station hears Hunter's boastful cries for several minutes before his return. On the dock, Hunter shouts, carries on and beats on the dead fish using the war club. The crowd is horrified. Following is a two page spread depicting Hunter, looking larger than life and wielding the war club, screaming at a crowd of onlookers.



Yesterday's Weirdness Is Tomorrow's Reason Why and Rage, Rage against the Coming of the Light

Yesterday's Weirdness Is Tomorrow's Reason Why and Rage, Rage against the Coming of the Light Summary and Analysis

The chapter opens with a photo of Hunter posing beside a marlin, Samoan war club in hand. Scrawled on the photo are the words "Dear Ralph, we killed like Champions. Lono." Following is a letter from Hunter to Ralph in which Hunter declares that he is the living incarnation of the god Lono. By way of proof, Hunter implores Ralph to recognize the fatalistic pattern of recent events. He goes on to explain his present situation: After declaring his newfound apotheosis on the pier, immediately after catching his marlin, offended Hawaiians force Hunter to flee to the City of Refuge. At sundown each night Hunter collects offerings from those who believe in his divinity. Following is a two page spread of fish swimming beneath the waves.

Beginning a new chapter, "Rage, Rage Against the Coming of the Light," Skinner visits Hunter at the City of Refuge, intent on devising a plan for Hunter's safe removal. Hunter is distracted by the beauty of the place, hardly focusing on Skinner. Skinner finally loses his temper when Hunter uses a bullhorn to notify Mitch, a local ranger whom Hunter has befriended, that his drink needs more ice. Skinner condemns Hunter as insane, declaring that there is no way they can quietly remove Hunter from the City of Refuge if Hunter makes so much noise.

Hunter expects that Mitch will soon arrive with a bag of ice. He will exchange the ice for a day's worth of collected trash. This is the routine. Mitch has explained to Hunter that Hunter is not officially here. The city is a tourist attraction. Hunter is expected to stay hidden during daylight hours. The two men, Hunter and the ranger, have become drinking companions. The ranger believes that any shark he sees might be his uncle. On some nights, Hunter notes that the ranger becomes sullen and private. On such nights the ranger seems to slither over the side, into the water, seeming to rejoin his ancestors.

A full page is dedicated to "The Song of Waahia." It mourns the loss of an artifact called "the long knife of Lono." A citation at the end attributes the work to Waahia, a Hawaiian prophet who lived in the 13th century A.D. Below the citation is a picture of Hunter sitting in his tent in the City of Refuge. On his head he wears a mining lamp. He is busily typing away on a typewriter. Beside him is a human skeleton. Following is a two page spread of a passenger plane in flight. Written on the tail are the words "Aloha Lono."



Characters

Hunter S. Thompson

Hunter S. Thompson is a famous journalist who has come out of retirement to cover the Honolulu marathon. Unlike most journalists, Hunter has no illusions of objectivity. His first instinct is to cover the marathon through participation, to become part of the very thing he seeks to investigate. While he takes this assignment seriously, it is apparent that Hunter hopes to find something of worth in Hawaii, something uniquely Hawaiian.

Hunter is identified largely by ego, locating everything, even his friends, in terms of himself. Ralph, in a sense, is an extension of Hunter's ego, reflecting the journalist with pen and paint, codifying the aesthetic of Hunter's mythology. Hunter's egotism reaches its apex when he declares himself the returned god Lono. In this way, by becoming Lono, Hunter lays claim to entire Hawaiian discourse. Hunter locates Hawaii by assimilating it into his own persona.

As both protagonist and author, the character of Hunter S. Thompson exists in a state of duality. Throughout the book, the author interjects from some point in time beyond the scope of the story. He foreshadows future events and offers insights beyond what the protagonist is currently capable of achieving. Since the narrative often self-consciously depicts the protagonist as naive, impulsive and thoughtless, there is a sense that the author can depict himself with some credibility.

Ralph Steadman

Ralph Steadman is a British artist famous for working with Hunter S. Thompson. His style is abstract, violent and often morbid, transgressing with images in much the same way that Hunter transgresses with words. Ralph comes to Honolulu at Hunter's request to cover the Honolulu marathon. It is worth noting, however, that Ralph seems unclear as to what the assignment actually is, suggesting that he has come to Honolulu primarily because of Hunter's invitation, and not because he's interested in the work itself. Clearly, Ralph is fond of Hunter.

Unlike Hunter, Ralph isn't big on taking risks. Despite his close friendship with Thompson, Ralph is appalled by drugs and wants nothing to do with "dope addicts." A family man, Ralph's wife and daughter are along for the trip. He worries for his daughter in particular, concerned for her emotional well-being in the face of so much adversity. It is likely that Ralph's family, in addition to his injury, was a contributing factor to his decision to leave Hawaii.

The author depicts Ralph with a fair amount of hyperbole, exaggerating Ralph's whining and worrying. This suggests that the narration is likely unreliable when it comes to Ralph's character as "Ralph" is filtered through the author's mockery. The chapter with Ralph as its central character is entitled "He Was Not One of Us," further suggesting



that the author considers Ralph as someone to whom he cannot completely relate. Clearly Hunter holds some affection for Ralph, but the two men are very different sorts of people.

Ackerman

Ackerman is a Hawaiian sailor, fisherman, and marijuana trafficker. Hunter meets him on the plane after Ackerman accidentally dyes his hand blue in the restroom.

Gene Skinner

At the end of the Vietnam war, Gene Skinner used Air America as a front for smuggling opium. This is where Hunter met Gene. In *The Curse of Lono*, Gene serves as Hunter's photographer for the Honolulu marathon.

Captain James Cook

Captain James Cook is the English sailor who discovered the Hawaiian isles. For a time the Hawaiians accepted Cook as the earthly incarnation of the god Lono. He is nevertheless eventually slain by the Hawaiian natives.

Lono

Lono is the Hawaiian god of excess and abundance. After killing his wife in a fit of passion, Lono departed on a three-cornered raft, promising one day to return.

Juan Thompson

Juan Thompson is Hunter Thompson's teenage son. He joins Hunter for a time on the Kona Coast.

Annah Steadman

Annah Steadman is the wife of Ralph Steadman. While she doesn't appear in many scenes, she is present throughout much of the story.

Sadie Steadman

Sadie Steadman is Ralph and Annah's 8-year-old daughter. Ralph suggests that the trip to Hawaii is very trying for young Sadie.



Wilbur

When Hunter and Gene cover the Honolulu Marathon, they stay at Wilbur's house. Wilbur is also the person responsible for arranging Hunter's stay in Kona.

Mr. Heem

Mr. Heem is the realtor who rents Hunter the compound on the Kona coast. He is allegedly crooked and prone to double dealing.

Captain Steve

Captain Steve is a ship captain and fisherman whom Hunter befriends soon after his arrival in Hawaii. He captains the Haere Marue.

Laila

Laila is Hunter girlfriend during the time of The Curse of Lono. While she is mentioned only seldom, she is present throughout much of the story.

Mitch Kamahili

Mitch Kamahili is one of the rangers who allow Hunter to hide within the City of Refuge.



Objects/Places

The Kona Inn

Hunter frequents the Kona Inn, where he drinks, writes, and watches fishermen weigh their fish at the end of the pier.

Kealakekua

Kealakekua is Hawaiian for "Path of the Gods." This is the name of the harbor where Captain James Cook landed his fleet.

Haere Marue

The Haere Marue is the boat captained by Captain Steve.

Fighting Seat

Sports fishermen strap themselves into a fighting seat to keep from being pulled free of the boat while trying to land a large fish.

Samoan War Club

This is the Samoan war club that Hunter purchases from the hotel gift shop and which he later uses to slay the marlin. It is supposedly 300 years old.

South Point

South Point is a Hawaiian district thought to have stormier, wetter weather than the Kona district on the opposite side of the island.

The City of Refuge

The City of Refuge, also known as the puhonua at Honaunau, is a Hawaiian national park. Historically, the City provided asylum to any within, regardless of their crimes.

Kona Coast

Kona is a Hawaiian district thought to have calmer, drier weather than the South Point district on the opposite side of the island.



Kailua Municipal Pier

Kailua Municipal Pier is the pier in Kona where sports fishermen dock to have their fish weighed and photographed.

Bullhorn

Hunter uses his bullhorn in the City of Refuge to demand more ice from the attending rangers.

Humdinger

The Humdinger is the ship from which Hunter catches his marlin.

Themes

Machismo

The Curse of Lono is marked by displays of excessive masculinity, particularly on the part of the protagonist. Hunter is aggressive. He occasionally seeks to provoke other males with verbal abuse and sometimes resorts physical violence, such as shoving a lit cigarette into a man's face or, without provocation, kicking another man in the groin. This violence climaxes at sea, when Hunter bludgeons a marlin to death with a Samoan war club.

True to the masculine stereotype, Hunter is driven to risk-taking behavior. He drinks heavily, takes strong drugs, and drives fast cars. He also spends a great deal of money on firecrackers which he then uses to create "bombs." This risk-taking attitude is reflected, to a greater or lesser degree, by most males in The Curse of Lono. The only male character with no interest in risk-taking is Hunter's friend Ralph, whom Hunter depicts as whiny and "not one of us."

Consistent with macho tenants, women are not given a significant voice in The Curse of Lono. Hunter's girlfriend, Laila, despite being present in several scenes, can hardly be called a character. She rarely does anything. Hunter scarcely ever speaks to Laila, or she with anyone else. Ralph's wife and daughter, meanwhile, serve as little more than props. Women, when they are mentioned, are primarily referred to sexually.

Mythology

By 1980, the time in which The Curse of Lono is set, Hunter S. Thompson and his unique brand of "Gonzo journalism" is well established. Hunter, and to a lesser extent his friend and colleague Ralph Steadman, represents a kind of self-made mythology. The name of Hunter S. Thompson is a branded commodity. This is readily apparent in the aesthetic of Thompson's "Gonzo" stationery, topped as it is with Hunter's symbol: the dagger hilted with a two-thumbed fist. Hunter S. Thompson is, unarguably, a cultural icon.

As Thompson is well aware, Hawaii has icons of its own. In the history of Captain James Cook, Thompson no doubt sees shades of himself. Cook, like Thompson, was a westerner come to Hawaii, and Cook, like Thompson, experienced a meteoric rise to stardom. This parallel is completed when Hunter unwittingly repeats Cook's mistake, identifying himself as the god Lono returned. Hunter's flight to the City of Refuge is a symbolic reenactment of Cook's demise.

The fundamental difference between the mythologies of Hunter S. Thompson and the Hawaiian god Lono, is that Lono's discourse was not crafted by Thompson's pen. Hunter cannot claim an identity which he does not fully understand. Lono belongs to Hawaii. He is a collective understanding, the product of a centuries-long consensus.



Thompson is an outsider, like Cook before him, who cannot begin to understand the greater meaning of "Lono" in the context of Hawaiian culture.

Disappointment

In *The Curse of Lono*, disappointment is palpable. After numerous travel complications, Ralph arrives in Honolulu only to be injured the first time he tries to swim. The vacation compound, advertised as a secluded retreat, is little more than two shacks at the end of a short, muddy road. Kona weather, reputed to be calm and dry, is violent and wet. Nothing is as expected. Rather than enjoying a much needed vacation, Hunter and Ralph are trapped indoors and threatened by the very ocean they hoped to enjoy.

Hunter and Ralph are polar opposites in how they deal with disappointment. Ralph's approach is to simply give up, to take his family and leave the situation. Hunter, on the other hand, remains on the island much longer than seems prudent or affordable. He is determined to find a Hawaiian story—whatever it may be—worth telling. Ultimately, since Hunter does eventually find his story, and since much of his stay is charged to Ralph's credit card, it would appear that Hunter's method of overcoming disappointment is the superior of the two.

A question left unanswered by the book is whether or not the characters are culpable in their own disappointment. If Hunter's trip to South Point is any indication of his usual behavior, he is prone to blindly placing his trust in others. Clearly both Ackerman and Captain Steve are aware beforehand that Hunter's rented compound is likely to be a disappointment to him, but Hunter himself trusts in the word of Mr. Heem. Ralph, in turn, trusts Hunter, a man whom— for all his heart—seems prone to acting on impulse. Much disappointment can be averted if only more questions are asked.

Style

Perspective

The book is written from a first person, autobiographical perspective. The narrator and protagonist both are Hunter S. Thompson. While the narrative is focused on the "now" of Hunter-as-protagonist, most of the book is written in the past tense, with the author ostensibly relating past events from his own life. Thompson occasionally slips into the present tense, creating a great sense of experiential immediacy. This usually occurs when Hunter refers to text written in the context of an event.

Thompson, as narrator, is both invasive and unreliable. Events seem fictionalized for the sake of storytelling. Even mundane events such as checking into a hotel, drinking at a bar, being picked up at an airport, are inflected with drama and hyperbole. Characters, meanwhile, are drug-using, scheme-hatching outlaws; exaggerated icons of functional counterculture similar to Hunter himself. Throughout the book there is every indication this style is intentional.

The Curse of Lono is, at its heart, a meta-narrative. This is Thompson's attempt to create a comprehensive understanding of Hawaii's culture and history, one in which he himself can be located and defined. Thompson casts himself in the role of Lono, one of Hawaii's most respected gods. This suggests that Thompson recognizes that, whatever Hawaii may objectively be, its significance is largely subjective. In experiencing Hawaii's stories, Thompson has made them his own.

Beneath the artifice there is a core of authenticity. Hunter loves his son and worries as to the boy's opinion of his father. Hunter cares for Ralph, his best friend, tending to his injury and, later, writing to him in his absence. Hunter's guilt comes across palpably, guilt for inviting Ralph and his family into what would become a disastrous Hawaiian vacation. For all his machismo, Hunter is a caring individual.

Tone

Thompson's tone is defined in terms of contrast. In the face of authority, he is mocking. In the face of deviance, he is conservative. His posture is transgressive, seemingly modulated for maximum discord. Even so, Thompson immerses himself in whatever he subject matter he considers, pushing outward on the inner bounds of social constructs. Like a jester, Thompson lampoons the very court to which he belongs.

Despite his apparent love of discord, Hunter is something of a social chameleon. This comes across tonally as he adopts the discourse of the culture he infiltrates. At sea, Thompson entertains the moody concerns of seamanship and sailing. Among the fishermen, Thompson emphasizes the macho struggle between man and fish. Steeped in the experience of Hawaii, Thompson's tone is colored by its spiritual tradition.



Hunter perpetually exists in a world of uncertainty, occasionally producing a paranoid or fearful tone. Hunter's ignorance demands that he rely on the expertise of others. Betrayed by these experts, Hunter becomes jaded and cynical. In those moments when Hunter is helpless or at the mercy of others, the tone is frustrated or angry. Hunter's ego demands a starring role.

Structure

The book is broken up into twenty-two chapters, including a section of front matter comprised of type-written letters. Rather than numbers, the chapters are thematically named for the content and concepts introduced in that chapter. Chapters are interrupted by paintings, photographs, letters and excerpts from other books. These interruptions are merely physical; they in no way affect the main narrative.

Despite being a work of non-fiction, *The Curse of Lono* is a continuous narrative. The early chapters tell the story of Hunter's arrival on the island and his covering of the Honolulu marathon. The middle chapters tell of how Hunter's vacation is compromised by continuing bad weather. The latter chapters concern themselves with Hunter's many exploits as he struggles to find both entertainment and understanding. The final chapters are focused on the fallout of Hunter's objectionable behavior.

Parallel to the main story is the historical narrative of Captain James Cook. This plays out across several excerpts, inserted in the book at regular intervals, from Richard Hough's *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*. This story chronicles Cook's discovery of Hawaii, his ritualized ascension to godhood, and his eventual death at the hands of indignant Hawaiian natives.

The paintings of Ralph Steadman, found throughout the book, provide corollary to the main narrative. They depict people and events from the story in exaggerated or mocking terms. Many of Steadman's paintings are also violent, bloody or morbid, and roughly half the works offered in *The Curse of Lono* feature some depiction of Hunter S. Thompson. The inclusion of these works is tangible, profoundly influencing the reader's experience of the book itself.



Quotes

"I have already secured the compound: two homes with a 50-meter pool on the edge of the sea on Alli Drive in Kona, where the sun always shines." —Front matter, pg. 13

"From where I was sitting I could see that the arm he was trying to hide from the stewardess was bright blue, all the way up to the shoulder." —The Blue Arm, pg. 17

"Skinner was no stranger to money. Or to lying, either, for that matter." —Adventures in the Dumb Life, pg. 34

"People get edgy when the Kona weather hits." —Fire in the Nuts, pg. 46

"His family was demoralized, he said. Probably none of them would ever get back to England, not even to be buried." —He Was Not One of Us, pg. 54

"It was raining—a light, warm rain, but steady enough to keep the streets wet, so we could stand on the curb and hear every footfall on the pavement as the runners came by." —The Doomed Generation, pg. 68

"Our Christmas would be a nightmare. Fear and loneliness would govern our lives, which would wander out of control." —Why Do They Lie to Us? pg. 79

"When Pele had a party, everybody came; she was a lusty, long-haired beauty who danced naked on molten lava with a gourd of gin in each hand, and anybody who didn't like it was instantly killed." —Tits Like Orange Fireballs, pg. 95.

"On the few occasions when we all went into town together, Ralph's eccentric behavior so offended the natives that some called him 'the queer' and others called him 'wolfman.'" —There Are No Rules, pg. 98

"Most firecrackers explode and die instantly, but this thing went off like God's own drumroll... and it kept going off, and it kept getting louder, until I got The Fear." —Bomb Fever, pg. 105

"That's right, Ralph. We finally figured it out—if this side of the island is rough, then the other side must be calm." —South Point, pg. 115

"By nightfall we would find ourselves locked in a death battle with elements, wallowing helplessly in the worst surf I'd ever seen and half crazy with fear and strong elements." —We're All Equal in the Ocean, pg. 119

"It was a ugly thing to see. From my seat on the bridge I could look straight down on the main deck of the Haere Marue and see both the captain and the first mate badly disabled." —The Land of Po, pg. 133



"I was not entirely at ease with Ackerman's plan to use the best sweet in the King Kamehameha Hotel, in the heart of downtown Kona, as a bag-house for his whole marijuana crop." —Fuck You, I'm Rich, pg. 164

"So don't worry about me, Ralph. I've got mine. But I would naturally appreciate a visit, and perhaps a bit of money for odd expense here and there." —Yesterday's Weirdness Is Tomorrow's Reason Why, pg. 197



Topics for Discussion

Why does the author include excerpts from *The Last Voyage of Captain James Cook*? What, if any, parallels are present in the story?

What is the relationship between Hunter and Ralph? Does Ralph care for Hunter? Does Hunter care for Ralph? What evidence, if any, supports either case?

How does *The Curse of Lono* depict women? Are there any strong female characters? If so, what makes these characters strong?

Did Hunter intend to say "I am Lono" or was this an accident, something that slipped out in the midst of bragging?

Hunter is disappointed with his compound on the Kona Coast. Why? Is there anything he could have done to have avoided this disappointment?

In what way is Hunter similar to Captain James Cook? How are they different?

What is the significance of the Samoan war club? What does Hunter use the war club, rather than a baseball bat, to kill the marlin?

During the torrential rain storm, Hunter can't wait to leave the island. Why does he opt to stay after Ralph leaves? What keeps him in Kona?

Consider Ralph Steadman's depiction of the Honolulu marathon runner. How does he present the runners? What impression does he offer?

The Curse of Lono features several letters written from Hunter to Ralph. How do these letters influence the way the story is experienced?