Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas Study Guide

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas by Hunter S. Thompson

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Plot Summary....4

Part I: Chapter 1....6

Part I: Chapter 2....8

Part I: Chapter 3....9

Part I: Chapter 4....11

Part I: Chapter 5....12

Part I: Chapter 6....13

Part I: Chapter 7....14

Part I: Chapter 8....15

Part I: Chapter 9....16

Part I: Chapter 10....17

Part I: Chapter 11....18

Part I: Chapter 12....19

Part II: Chapter 1....20

Part II: Chapter 2....21

Part II: Chapter 3....23

Part II: Chapter 4....24

Part II: Chapter 5....25

Part II: Chapter 6....26

Part II: Chapter 7....27

Part II: Chapter 8....28

Part II: Chapter 9....30

Part II: Chapter 10....31

Part II: Chapter 11.....32
Part II: Chapter 12.....33
Part II: Chapter 13.....34
Part II: Chapter 14.....35
Characters.....36
Objects/Places.....38
Social Concerns And Themes.....40
Techniques.....41
Themes.....42
Style.....44
Quotes.....46
Adaptations.....47
Topics for Discussion.....48
Literary Precedents.....49
Related Titles.....50
Copyright Information.....51

Plot Summary

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas tells the story of Hunter S. Thompson's journey to Las Vegas in 1971 as a journalist for a sports magazine. Thompson is accompanied by his "attorney," a Samoan whose only counsel seems to consist of recommending drugs. Indeed, Thompson's assignment is only an excuse for the pair to rent a red Chevy convertible and scream off into the desert with a trunk full of illegal narcotics.

After picking up a hitchhiker who subsequently flees in response to their drug-induced hostility, Thompson and his attorney stop at the Mint Hotel. Thompson has been assigned to cover the Mint 400, a motorcycle and dune buggy race on the outskirts of the city. Despite some initial difficulty securing their reservation and attaining their press packets due to their inebriated state, they travel to the racetrack where the Mint 400 is to be held.

Unfortunately, the dust stirred up by the racers makes it nearly impossible to see what is happening or to ascertain a winner. Thompson departs the track with scant information for his story. In the meantime, he and his attorney have been running up a tremendous room service bill and carousing in the bars and casinos of Las Vegas. Drug abuse and sleep deprivation render the two deranged, particularly the attorney, who threatens Thompson with a knife in a sudden frenzy. Although the situation is diffused, soon thereafter the attorney departs Las Vegas for Los Angeles.

Thompson remains in Las Vegas for some time after his attorney leaves. As he becomes increasingly paranoid about being arrested or called to account for his room service bill, he decides to return to L.A. His flight is delayed by a telegram from his attorney telling him to stay put, because Thompson's been hired by *Rolling Stone* magazine to cover the National DA's seminar on illegal drugs. At first, fueled by anxiety, Thompson decides to leave Las Vegas anyway. He climbs into the Chevy and heads east, but when the California Highway Patrol stops him, he realizes that he is in no condition to drive himself to L.A. He also rethinks his decision to refuse the job covering the seminar. The twisted irony of a drug abuser mingling with cops and narcotics investigators is enough to make him turn back toward Las Vegas.

Arriving at his suite in the Hotel Flamingo, Thompson finds his attorney with a young runaway, Lucy. The girl, a would-be artist who draws portraits of Barbra Streisand, is clearly drugged. Thompson's attorney has taken advantage of her sexually during her semi-aware state. With some difficulty, Thompson convinces his attorney that Lucy is a liability, and the two drive her to another hotel-under the guise of taking her to a Barbra Streisand concert-and leave her there. Though Lucy later attempts to contact Thompson, she is brushed off and not heard from again.

The DA's conference is an unqualified waste of time. The only thing Thompson learns is that the investigators are ten years behind in their estimation of the extremity of the drug problem in America.

One morning, a maid enters their suite to find Thompson asleep and his attorney vomiting in the closet. After a brief altercation, Thompson and his attorney explain to the maid that they are narcotics investigators there for the seminar. Taking their fabrication one step further, they hire her as an undercover operative. The maid leaves with a promise not to tell anyone what she has seen.

Soon after the episode with the maid, Thompson drives his attorney to the airport. Thompson intends to remain in town longer, but over the next few days his actions start catching up with him. He realizes it's time to return to L.A. With the seminar over, cops and investigators have made a mass exodus to the airport. Embittered by his perception of the conference, he boards a plane and leaves, having pushed himself beyond fatigue and into a state of near-hysteria.

Part I: Chapter 1

Part I: Chapter 1 Summary

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas opens both ominously and comically with the narrator and author, Hunter S. Thompson, noting the early effects of the massive amount of narcotics he has consumed. Both the narrator and his companion-identified only as his "attorney"-maintain this drug-warped state through the rest of the tale, indulging copiously in every illicit substance they can acquire. In spite of the violent effect of the drugs, the narrator and his attorney drive their rented red Chevy convertible through the desert with a purpose: Thompson is a journalist sent by a New York sporting magazine to cover the Mint 400, a motorcycle and dune buggy race located in the sandy outskirts of Las Vegas. Troubled by his hallucinations, the narrator asks his attorney to drive, but with more than one hundred miles to go before they arrive at their hotel, both men are irrevocably inebriated. In this state, they cross the deserted landscape, stopping only once to pick up a hitchhiker-an over-eager kid who has never ridden in a convertible before. With this newcomer to observe their behavior, Thompson wonders how long he and his attorney will be able to maintain any appearance of normalcy. In order to pre-empt any suspicions the hitchhiker might have, Thompson begins a fairly lucid explanation for their trip through the desert. He and his attorney, Thompson says, are in search of the American Dream. However, as he speaks, Thompson grows progressively more antagonistic and his line of argument becomes harder to follow, which frightens the hitchhiker. Realizing this prompts Thompson to recollect the events leading to their trip.

The pair had been sitting in the Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel drinking Singapore Slings and getting high on mescaline when a dwarf approached with a pink telephone. The magazine Thompson works for ordered him to travel to Las Vegas for the Mint 400. Though this ruined his attorney's weekend plans, the two prepared to depart together for Las Vegas.

Part I: Chapter 1 Analysis

Fear and Loathing does not begin with the narrator and his attorney already in the grip of a hallucinogenic high; it begins as the drugs first take effect. In this way, Thompson sets the stage for the progression of narcotic highs and lows that will take place throughout the rest of the book, while simultaneously including the audience in the narrator's entry into distorted consciousness.

Called the "Great Red Shark" by Thompson, the large, bright red convertible he drives is quintessentially American in both its flamboyance and in its excess. Chevrolet, the car's maker, is a well-known corporation, and according to Thompson, the only possible producer of the vehicle that will carry him and his attorney on their journey to the American Dream. The only thing as necessary as the car on their journey is the

collection of assorted drugs and alcohol in the trunk. Unlike his attorney's blithe acceptance of their circumstances, Thompson seems aware of the danger of driving at ninety miles per hour with little or no control over their faculties. Of course, for the reader, there is some amount of uncertainty here; Thompson could have been aware of the danger as it happened, but it is equally possible that this perspective was only gained in retrospect.

Losing their grasp of reality more with each passing moment, Thompson and his attorney pull to the side of the road to pick up a hitchhiker. In a metaphorical sense, the hitchhiker represents both the reader (who is a newcomer to this drug-twisted world) and whatever fraction of the narrator's consciousness is confused about his distorted mental condition. The hitchhiker symbolizes anyone who might enter this situation innocently. His reaction to Thompson and his attorney provides a yardstick by which to measure how detached from reality they have already become.

This journey is an exhibit of planned inebriation. Thompson and his attorney know they will not be in their right minds before they arrive at their destination. Indeed, altered consciousness is their intention. The day before departure is spent gathering drugs. What is unknown is how they propose to navigate the everyday situations they will inevitably encounter. Thompson's discussion with the hitchhiker offers an early look at the confusion and disorder that will ensue. While aiming to put the hitchhiker at ease, he achieves the opposite effect. Though it makes sense to Thompson's addled mind, the boy clearly does not comprehend. Feeling misunderstood, Thompson grows hostile and, as his aggression grows, so do both comedic and potentially dangerous repercussions. Thompson is growing violent, yes, but in his nonsensical earnestness, he is genuinely funny.

Part I: Chapter 2

Part I: Chapter 2 Summary

Thompson travels to the L.A. office of the magazine for which he works, where he is given $300 for any expenses he might incur on his trip. When his attorney complains about the small amount of cash, Thompson reminds him that only minutes ago the pair of them had been sitting□idle, bored, and broke□in a hotel lounge. That kind of sudden turnover, he says, is the American Dream. Following through properly on this opportunity involves specific steps: (1) They must procure the car - the oversized American convertible; (2) They must acquire a supply of cocaine - the drug that will keep them fueled for the sleepless journey on which they will embark; (3) They need a tape recorder for listening to what Thompson calls "special music;" (4) They will need to wear loud, showy clothing. More simply, they must be as loud and as outrageous as possible.

The two gather their equipment, using various methods of intimidation, and drive to pick up the rental car. Though they are clearly incapable of taking responsibility for the vehicle, they are allowed to drive off the lot. After gathering the remainder of their supplies and consuming what mescaline they have, the two take a swim in the ocean, have breakfast, and head east on the Pasadena freeway.

Part I: Chapter 2 Analysis

There are two reasons for this trip taken by Thompson and his attorney. The first is occupational. Thompson is, after all, a reporter and he has been hired to cover a story. The second□and in some ways more important□reason is psychological. Thompson is rebelling against social and biological norms as he screams off into the desert and loads his body full of narcotics. At the intersection of these two motives is what Thompson calls "gonzo journalism." Receiving little direction from his employer, Thompson makes the story up as he goes along. With no one to police his habits, he maintains a state of extreme intoxication, and it is in this unorthodox manner that he produces his articles.

This demonstrates more of the ways in which Thompson and his attorney are unable to blend with the rest of society. They threaten the employees of an electronics store and shout curses at the car rental agent, even though at no point are Thompson and his attorney treated with the disrespect, rudeness, and hostility that they dole out. Their personality excesses, compounded by the effects of the drugs, spill over into all of their interactions. While these interactions are certainly comic, they are also disturbing. Their potential for violence is extreme, unreasonable, and barely controlled□if controlled at all.

Part I: Chapter 3

Part I: Chapter 3 Summary

Thompson opens the chapter with a short digression about the hitchhiker's comment about never having ridden in a convertible before. He fantasizes briefly about turning the keys over to the kid, but dismisses the idea. This prompts a somewhat longer discussion on the significance of cars in American culture.

Feigning a heart attack, the attorney pulls the car off the road, frightening the already terrified hitchhiker even further. By now, the pair is almost completely unable to control their behavior, and the hitchhiker flees into the desert while they call after him.

Back on the road with the slightly less inebriated Thompson behind the steering wheel, the two get into a minor argument over some spilled cocaine and the attorney produces a Magnum .357, which he handles in a mock-threatening manner. Again, Thompson seems to realize the potential for disaster in their situation: driving with a head full of narcotic chaos, the difficulty of trying to check into a hotel in their condition, and the possibility of being arrested. Nevertheless, he has no intention of calling the whole business off. Instead, he tries to play damage control, driving faster in an attempt to arrive at their destination before he becomes completely incoherent.

In some strange way, Thompson believes in what he is doing. He considers himself a representative for his generation, just as he does Joe Frazier, Tim Leary, Bob Dylan, the Kennedys, Owsley, and Muhammad Ali□all of whom have been neutralized or eliminated by progress and cynicism. They are from an era as far distant from 1971, the year in which Thompson writes, as he is from the society he rebels against.

When Thompson and his attorney arrive at the hotel, not surprisingly they realize that check-in is a challenge to which they are not quite equal. As Thompson speaks to the desk clerk, her face changes into that of a moray eel, causing him to panic and flee to the bar. While waiting for their room to be prepared, Thompson's hallucinations become increasingly intense. He sees reptiles chewing on people's bodies and the carpet in the hotel bar appears to be soaked with blood. Still, even in the condition they are in, Thompson and his attorney are intent on accomplishing their goal. With that in mind, Thompson approaches the press table to gather his credentials and his attorney heads to secure their room.

Part I: Chapter 3 Analysis

Thompson's opening statements about giving the convertible to the hitchhiker summarize, in a very short space, all of his ideals. The "Great Red Shark" represents success and the achievement of the American Dream. To turn that car over to a young hitchhiker□who, in his innocent ambitions and his wide-eyed idealism, is the archetypal American□would repair the inequality that sets Thompson above his compatriots.

Giving the car to the hitchhiker would illustrate another kind of philanthropy, as well: the passing of wealth from one generation to the next. In other words, Thompson's actions would not be generosity per se, but rather the continuation of the American system of values. However, such an idyllic vision cannot last. Thompson knows that giving the boy the car would only get him arrested. Furthermore, whatever his goodwill toward the kid might be, Thompson is a frightening picture, slobbering and rambling in his drug-induced hostility. Unlike the Okie hitchhiker who has been insulated against the changes in American culture, Thompson has lost his innocence through exposure. As a result, even his best efforts at reclaiming goodness must fail. The hitchhiker is an anachronism. When Thompson tries desperately to explain to him the reason for their journey to Las Vegas, he is trying to justify his older, more jaded self to his younger, idealistic self. Justification is not possible, though, and the kid runs off into the desert in a state of panic.

In his notebook from that trip, Thompson finds the line "Kill the body and the head will die" written. He claims that he does not know precisely what he means by that, and moves into a discussion of 1960's political and cultural heroes who were supplanted by the arrival of the 70's and its cynicism. With Joe Frazier, Timothy Leary, Bob Dylan, Jack and Bobby Kennedy, Owsley, and Muhammad Ali all irrelevant, impotent, or dead in this new era of American culture, people like Thompson no longer know where to look for guidance.

Hallucinating, paranoid, and babbling by the time they arrive at the hotel, Thompson and his attorney are absolutely stoned. Metaphorically, they are attempting to navigate a society from which they are violently alienated. Everyone and everything around them appears hostile, but they are clearly not alone in this state. According to Thompson, the hotel desk clerk barely bats an eye when he begins to rave; Thompson and his attorney are only two among hundreds of freaks and outcasts. This does nothing to alleviate their alienation, though. It simply demonstrates the unfriendliness of the present culture to the one that immediately preceded it. Stuck in the 1970's and longing for the 60's, Thompson and his colleagues can only hope to bumble and bluster their way through a world that has already left them behind. The gradual formation of the Drug Culture, a subject that will arise later in the narration, was one way in which people like Thompson attempted to combat their sense of estrangement from culture-at-large. From the terrifying, blood-soaked imagery found in Chapter 3, it is evident that this attempt was not a successful one.

Part I: Chapter 4

Part I: Chapter 4 Summary

By the beginning of Chapter 4, Thompson's hallucinations have calmed somewhat. He is no longer in a state of total panic, but is reminded by his attorney that he narrowly avoided being arrested after yelling confusedly about reptiles in the hotel lobby. Once in their hotel room, Thompson tells his attorney that they must visit the Mint 400 racetrack before dark, but that they have the time to watch the news on television before they leave.

On television is news about the Laos invasions, which is too disturbing for the attorney to tolerate. They shut the television off and prepare to leave for the racetrack. The attorney falls into a drug coma while driving on Main Street and runs a red light. Thompson takes control and they continue on to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of Lieutenant Calley." At the track, Thompson leaves his comatose attorney in the car and watches the contestants enter their bikes while listening to the rhythmic booms of the Mint Gun Club. As Thompson talks to the man in charge of registering the riders, his attorney appears, shirtless and clearly inebriated. The man at the desk looks at the two critically, prompting them to leave. His attorney shouts curses over his shoulder as Thompson leads him back to the car.

Part I: Chapter 4 Analysis

By now, Thompson has stopped seeing gigantic lizards and huge pools of blood. His hallucinations have been reduced from screaming insanity to a low hum. He responds to this by taking more drugs. Thompson and his attorney never allow one high to dissipate before plunging headlong into another one. Taking the wheel from his comatose attorney, Thompson feels suddenly and remarkably clear-headed, but even this clarity is abnormal. In this state, he wishes ardently that he could hear the conversations taking place in the cars all around him. Later, while talking to the registrar of the Mint 400, he imagines entering the Great Red Shark in the race, loading his attorney up on acid and installing him behind the wheel. Within their own context, his thoughts possess a certain logic, but when exposed to outside reasoning they□like the half-naked attorney□show themselves as out of place as they actually are.

Part I: Chapter 5

Part I: Chapter 5 Summary

Thompson and his attorney, like the racers and the rest of the press, are at the track and ready by sunrise. However, the race does not begin until 9 a.m., so everyone waits at the casino next to the pits. In the crowd, a man in a Harley-Davidson shirt tells the story of how he arrived at the Mint 400. During an argument with his wife about his plan to go to Las Vegas, he became physically abusive. Subsequently, two men he had never seen before attacked him. One of them asked him where he was going, and when he told him the Mint 400, they handed him ten dollars and drove him to the bus station. After traveling all night, he arrived in downtown Las Vegas.

Thompson watches as the correspondent from *Life* magazine slumps drunkenly onto the bar. Feeling suddenly sickened by the behavior and disorganization of his fellow journalists, he turns away. When the race begins, the first ten vehicles disappear from sight almost immediately, with no hope of appearing again in under an hour. The journalists return to the squalid little bar and casino to await the next heat.

In an attempt to see something of the race, Thompson is driven out onto the track in a Ford Bronco provided for the use of the journalists, but the dust cloud caused by the racers obscures the entire event. Returning to the bar, Thompson begins to drink and make notes.

Part I: Chapter 5 Analysis

The man in the Harley-Davidson represents a second sect of American society just as foreign to the mainstream as Thompson and the drug culture. This man is representative of the kind of person for whom an event like the Mint 400 is deeply significant.

The correspondent from *Life* magazine is in some ways similar to Thompson, but also a type unto himself in that his journalistic credentials are solid but his perceived capacity leaves much to be desired. Confined in the sleazy concrete bar/casino, the Mint 400 crowd is a simultaneously funny and depressing collection of fools awaiting a meaningless event in the middle of nowhere. To add insult to injury, the race they have gathered for turns out to be hopelessly hidden from view.

Part I: Chapter 6

Part I: Chapter 6 Summary

Thompson opens Chapter 6 by explaining that he has only vague memories of the Saturday night preceding the race, supplemented by cryptic statements written on note cards and cocktail napkins. Remembering how harsh the drug laws in Las Vegas are, Thompson admits that he is not entirely comfortable wandering around the city under the influence and in possession of a car full of narcotics. Nevertheless, he and his attorney drive to the Desert Inn to see the Debbie Reynolds show. After an ugly scene in the theatre, the two are thrown out. From there, they head to the Circus-Circus, believing that there they will be inconspicuous.

After some time in the Circus-Circus, Thompson and his attorney begin to come off their ether high and to feel the effects of the mescaline they have consumed. The attorney gradually slips into a panic. Thompson decides that in order to avoid yet another scene, they must leave. He attempts to get his attorney out of the bar as quickly and as quietly as possible, but the man is too unreasonable. Finally, Thompson drags him out but not before he makes a spectacle of himself and falls, flailing, to the floor.

Part I: Chapter 6 Analysis

As Thompson and his attorney sit in the bar of the Circus-Circus, the attorney begins to complain of a drug-induced paranoia that is slowly taking hold of him. Thompson attempts to combat this by telling his companion that they are sitting in the "vortex of the American dream." Indeed, in a purely visual sense, it must seem that way. The bar at which they sit turns constantly like a merry-go-round, and the noise and the opulence of the casino are symbolically a version of the American Dream. Conversely, seen from a slightly different angle, it is a terrifying vision full of confusion and danger. The pair leaves the Circus-Circus and return to the Red Shark, which is both a safety zone and a means of escape. The car, whose size and flamboyance once seemed excessive, now appears demure and simple beside the perversions of the Circus-Circus.

Part I: Chapter 7

Part I: Chapter 7 Summary

Thompson and his attorney return to their room at the Mint, where they find a key to the room of the photographer they are meant to be working with. The attorney has a paranoid delusion that the photographer has stolen the woman he met earlier at the racetrack. In truth, the photographer has had nothing to do with the woman, nor did she have any real attachment to the attorney. This incident again shows the attorney's violent side and reveals a razor-sharp hunting knife with which he threatens the entire crowd on the elevator. Thompson hustles his attorney to the room, and leaves him there in order to move the car to the hotel garage. When he returns, his attorney is in the bathtub listening to a radio cranked up to full volume. He has finished the remainder of the mescaline and is in a deep drug-induced funk. He asks Thompson to throw the radio into the bathtub. Thompson does so, but not before he unplugs it. When he realizes what Thompson has done, the attorney follows him out of the bathroom, brandishing his hunting knife. Thompson fends him off with a can of mace and finally the two come to an uneasy peace.

Part I: Chapter 7 Analysis

After parking the car in the garage, Thompson enters the hotel casino and sees huge crowds of people gathered around the crap table. After losing his grip on the American dream so many times, he is surprised to see people still chasing it, rolling the dice and hoping for a stroke of luck. These people, he has to remind himself, do exist; they are not simply caricatures. This is an unusually lucid moment for Thompson. The effect of the drugs seems to have dissipated and he realizes that everyone is searching for the American Dream one way or the other.

The attorney's suicidal/homicidal frenzy represents the frustration of a person who has been cheated out of the American Dream one time too many. As Thompson continually reminds us, his attorney is Samoan. As such he is an immigrant, one specific type of American. His struggles with success and alienation offer an interesting counterpoint to Thompson's. Where Thompson tends to become melancholy and introverted when his ideals are frustrated, his attorney becomes violent. It seems that the attorney, as a relatively new American, is full of the idealistic passion that has been so often squelched in Thompson.

Part I: Chapter 8

Part I: Chapter 8 Summary

After the violent confrontation with his attorney in the hotel bathroom, Thompson introduces a subject he has, thus far, not mentioned: the effects of long-term drug abuse. He mentions a doctor and former LSD guru who used to live near him. When one day he asked the older man for advice and opinions about the use of LSD□which, at that point in his life, Thompson had never tried□he was disturbed by the sight of the doctor puttering around his garden, humming to himself and unresponsive to Thompson's questions. At that point, Thompson decided to avoid the drug that had caused such damage, but his resolution only lasted six months until he broke it one night at the Fillimore Auditorium in San Francisco. From there, obviously, his use only increased.

This memory leads Thompson into a discussion of the experience of living in San Francisco in the mid-1960's; its meaning, its vigor, and the thrill of being a member of such a generation.

Part I: Chapter 8 Analysis

Thompson's first two experiences with LSD (his visit with the doctor and his first hit in a bathroom in the Fillimore) are not positive. In fact, there is a certain amount of shame and disgust involved in each. In the Fillimore, for example, Thompson spills some LSD on his shirt, which a musician subsequently sucks out of the fabric. Despite this, Thompson attempts to redeem these events, and himself, in his discussion of life in the 60's. While the feeling of solidarity and the conviction that what they were doing meant something does not quite elevate excessive recreational drug use to the height of sweeping social improvement, it at least explains the enthusiasm with which such questionable activity was undertaken by so many members of Thompson's generation.

The innocent delight with which Thompson describes the 60's stands out in sharp contrast to the harshness, savagery, and violence of the world in which *Fear and Loathing* is set. It is impossible not to perceive the deep disillusionment and disappointment in Thompson's narrative.

Part I: Chapter 9

Part I: Chapter 9 Summary

Beginning to panic, partially as a result of the hotel bill he knows he is running up, but primarily as a result of the narcotics he has been continually consuming since leaving Los Angeles, Thompson makes the decision to flee Las Vegas. His attorney has already departed for L.A. earlier that morning, leaving Thompson with a car full of cheap souvenirs, drugs, alcohol, and a gun. Thompson prepares to leave and stands reading a newspaper while he waits for his car to be brought to him by the parking attendant. The newspaper is filled with nothing but grim headlines□heroin overdoses, drug deaths among American GI's in Vietnam, conflict between anti-war demonstrators and police, and so on. The chapter ends with a mention of Muhammad Ali and his sentencing for refusing to take part in the Vietnam War.

Part I: Chapter 9 Analysis

Thompson's decision to leave Las Vegas before he is arrested or confronted by the hotel about his enormous bill demonstrates a residual survival instinct that has remained even as all of his social instincts and sense of responsibility have mainly dissolved.

When Thompson reads the newspaper, the headlines are bleak. For the second time, Thompson speaks of Muhammad Ali. Ali is obviously something of a hero to Thompson and a very interesting figure within the context of *Fear and Loathing*. As a boxer, Ali makes a career of violence. When it comes to war, however, he is pacifistic. In this he represents the paradoxical combination of ruthlessness and idealism that is so typically American□and so very close to Thompson's own character. Like Thompson in his nostalgia for the 60's or his daydream about turning the Red Shark over to the young hitchhiker, Ali recognizes the wickedness of the time in which he lives and attempts to make a stand against it. However, though Ali and Thompson may be comparable in their feelings, they are disparate in their reactions to their feelings. Ali is a conscientious objector. Conversely, Thompson is a gonzo journalist with a profligate lifestyle□a little ridiculous, a little repulsive, and far from a hero in any conventional sense of the term. To his credit, Thompson never attempts to make himself out to be a hero. He is as honest and forthright about his massive indiscretions as he is about his utopian dreams.

Part I: Chapter 10

Part I: Chapter 10 Summary

Thompson's plan to leave Las Vegas is thwarted by the arrival of a telegram from his attorney instructing him to remain in Vegas to cover the National Conference of District Attorneys, a four-day seminar on illegal narcotics. A white Cadillac convertible, dubbed The White Whale, is waiting for him at the Hotel Flamingo. In spite of his better judgment, with the aim of pushing his gonzo journalism to the absolute limit, Thompson decides to go along with his attorney's plan and cover the story.

Part I: Chapter 10 Analysis

Thompson, though he feels increasingly vulnerable to arrest, agrees to cover the narcotics seminar purely because of the situation's twisted humor. Interestingly, in order to accomplish this new goal, he must change cars from the Red Shark to a white Cadillac convertible he calls the White Whale. Both cars are equally powerful, equally impressive, and equally American. The Cadillac, however, is a more respectable vehicle identified more typically with established wealth and refined taste than with screaming speed and aggressiveness. This change of automobiles represents the a necessary switch in technique for Thompson. Covering the Mint 400, he was only one of a crowd of outsiders. Now, he must infiltrate an army of middle-American police officers and their wives. While he remains a gonzo journalist and lacks any hope of truly blending with the crowd he will enter, he must work to be less antagonistic.

Part I: Chapter 11

Part I: Chapter 11 Summary

Chapter 11 begins with Thompson slumped in a Las Vegas bar in the early morning desperately trying to slog through his exhaustion and panic in order to drive the extremely conspicuous Red Shark across the few hundred miles that stand between him and L.A. His attorney is gone, the car full of drugs and weapons, and he does not even know the winner of the Mint 400, rendering the original purpose of the trip moot. He is finally spurred to action by the realization that checkout time at his hotel is noon, which gives him time to get out of town before anyone can legitimately begin searching for him. Blaming the magazine that hired him, and God, for the horrifying trip he has barely survived, he takes off into the desert once again.

Part I: Chapter 11 Analysis

By Chapter 11, Thompson is a thoroughly pitiful character. Praying for forgiveness in his own blasphemous manner, it is clear that he has become completely unhinged, but with admirable endurance and desperate persistence, he throws himself back into the savage game he himself has created.

Part I: Chapter 12

Part I: Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 12 finds Thompson drunk in a bar in Baker, Ca. He's feeling the effects of the past several days, knowing that collapse is imminent, and simultaneously insisting that collapse is not an option. He describes an earlier brush with the California Highway Patrol. In his customary outrageous fashion, Thompson amuses the cop enough to avoid any legal repercussions for driving at well over 100mph while drinking a can of beer. Before taking refuge in the bar, Thompson places a frantic call to his attorney to explain just how fragile his situation has become. In the middle of what quickly becomes an argument between him and his attorney, Thompson changes his mind and decides to be at the Hotel Flamingo by the time his attorney arrives.

Part I: Chapter 12 Analysis

Thompson's encounter with the California Highway Patrol is a piercing social commentary. Even with Thompson's obviously deranged state and reckless driving, the highway patrol officer does not arrest him. Why? Thompson offers two reasons: One, the officer does not want the trouble that will necessarily come with the arrest. Two, he is impressed by Thompson's shocking honesty and total lack of remorse. This episode presents a picture of an America in which authority and the fringe elements of society enjoy a kind of uneasy respect. A very different picture of the relationship between the fringe and the establishment will be presented in the following scenes in which Thompson and his attorney interact with police officers and other officials at the narcotics seminar.

Part II: Chapter 1

Part II: Chapter 1 Summary

Twenty miles east of Baker, Thompson stops the Red Shark to take a quick drug inventory. Further down the road, he stops at a pharmacy to pick up more alcohol and a bottle of ether. In the parking lot, he reads a newspaper article about a twenty-five year old man who□under the influence of a drug overdose□clawed his own eyes out in his jail cell.

Part II: Chapter 1 Analysis

After the preceding few chapters, Thompson seems to have calmed somewhat. He still fantasizes about shooting lizards on the highway with his attorney's Magnum and he presents himself as sweaty and nervous, but the language of Chapter 1 is perfectly lucid and free of the panicked fragments that marked Thompson's flight from Las Vegas.

Part II: Chapter 2

Part II: Chapter 2 Summary

Thompson begins Chapter 2 by ridding himself of the conspicuous Red Shark. He decides to abandon it in a rental car lot at the airport, and then spends time in the airport bar drinking Bloody Marys for whatever small nutritional content they might provide.

At the airport 's car rental booth, the man behind the desk recommends a Mercedes. Thompson responds with great indignation that he will only drive an American car. Subsequently, he is given the white Cadillac convertible, which he pays for with a bad credit card.

From the rental agency, Thompson drives to the Hotel Flamingo, where he encounters a mass of police officers gathered for the seminar. Standing in line for check-in, he observes an argument between one of the cops and the desk clerk over a late reservation. Impatiently, Thompson interrupts in order to inquire about his own reservation. To the shock and amazement of the cops, the disheveled Thompson is treated as if he were a VIP.

Part II: Chapter 2 Analysis

Again referring to his tendency to sweat copiously in warm climates, Thompson explains that a doctor once told him□after being told the amount of drugs and alcohol Thompson is in the habit of ingesting on any given day□to worry only if the sweating stopped. Sweating is a way for the body to rid itself of toxins. Thompson is well aware of the effect of his lifestyle on his body, but makes no concessions to his health. It is impossible to say why, exactly, he is so addicted to self-abuse. Thompson himself does not offer many clues. His hallucinations are not enjoyable, but frightening. He does not feel physically well. Despite this, there is something, perhaps even more compelling than biological addiction, which prevents him from changing his habits. That something may be his desire to re-create the feeling of camaraderie he misses from the 60's by immersing himself in the drug culture of the 70's. Possibly, it may be an attempt to keep his mind so clouded that he does not realize what he is missing. Most likely, it is a combination of the two. Like so many of his generation, he feels let down by society. Thus, they have all taken refuge together in the stupefying effects of narcotics, adopting drug use and drug culture as a form of rebellion. In other words, drug abuse, in this context, is not simply about the highs and lows of one man. It represents an entire generation's reaction to disillusionment.

The next significant incident in Chapter 2 occurs between the hotel desk clerk and an angry cop. Stepping around the cop, whose demand for a room in the full hotel is stymied by the clerk, Thompson's audacity is again rewarded. He is treated graciously

despite his bedraggled appearance. In a sense, this represents a perversion of the American Dream. Outside the doors of the hotel, the clerk and the gonzo journalist are at the mercy of the establishment and its authority (exemplified by the police officers). Within, however, the rules are different and favor individuals differently. Thus, though American society is by no means egalitarian, rules of class and power are fluid and subject to change. This creates, under certain circumstances, an illusion of equality.

Part II: Chapter 3

Part II: Chapter 3 Summary

Thompson proceeds to his suite in the Hotel Flamingo, musing on the temerity of his upcoming task. Rather than being a passive observer in a crowd of strange personalities as during the Mint 400, Thompson must now be an active participant among a homogenous group whose values, ethics, and lifestyle run completely counter to his own.

Arriving at his room, Thompson finds his attorney□thoroughly under the influence, of course□with a young woman, also drugged. The girl is a runaway, a would-be artist who paints only portraits of Barbra Streisand. The attorney has picked her up, fed her narcotics, and used her drug-induced state to take advantage of her sexually. When Thompson enters the room, she is tense and nervous, teetering on the edge of violence. The attorney calms her by talking about her art, and lies to her about how they will meet Streisand at the Americana Hotel that evening. Thompson immediately grasps that the girl is a liability, though his attorney does not. After a lengthy discussion of what they should do with her, the two make her a reservation at the Americana and drop her off in the airport lobby before returning to their hotel.

Part II: Chapter 3 Analysis

As a ploy to make his attorney□who is unreasonable and half-sobbing at the thought of abandoning the girl□Thompson suggests they should use her as a prostitute at the seminar. Ironically enough, though he has taken advantage of her himself, the attorney finds this suggestion repulsive and claims he was trying to help her. The moral paradox of this scene makes the attorney look rather naïve. It is difficult to locate them, but the man does have moral boundaries. His blubbering reaction to Thompson's insistence that they must rid themselves of her demonstrates a ruthless survival instinct that the attorney does not possess. It is also probable Thompson is not presently as drug-addled as is the other man. Presumably, as is so often seen in *Fear and Loathing*, it is a tightly wound combination of the two.

Part II: Chapter 4

Part II: Chapter 4 Summary

Returning to their suite, Thompson and his attorney find that Lucy has telephoned them. Though they try to ignore the message, the desk clerk is persistent, informing Thompson that the girl on the phone sounded very disturbed. Thompson concocts a story about her being a case study concerning drug use. Believing that Thompson is somehow connected with the police, the clerk agrees not to pursue the subject. Aggravated by the call and worried about the trouble they could incur because of the girl, Thompson prepares again to depart Las Vegas.

Part II: Chapter 4 Analysis

Nothing in particular stands out about Chapter 4, though, once again Thompson shows himself as more aware and practical than his attorney. The trouble the pair could get into is mounting. Not only are they in possession of illicit drugs and an illegal weapon, but also they are looking at potential charges of statutory rape. The smartest thing Thompson could do right now is leave Las Vegas. Still, as usual, the attorney wins out and Thompson stays on.

Part II: Chapter 5

Part II: Chapter 5 Summary

In order to keep Thompson from leaving, the attorney phones the girl at the Americana. He tells her that he has had a violent altercation with Thompson and is being trailed by the police. She is not to call him again, or the police will track her down as well.

With the trouble with the girl settled, the attorney advises Thompson to take a hit of adrenochrome, an extremely potent stimulant. The effect is dreadful. Taking no more than a drop, quickly Thompson's maniacal energy deteriorates to a state of paralysis. Hours afterward, though able to move and talk again, he remains a babbling wreck. He has gone without sleep for approximately eighty hours, and at noon the following day must somehow blend unnoticeably into the narcotics seminar.

Part II: Chapter 5 Analysis

When he falls under the paralyzing influence of the adrenochrome, the television is on, and Richard Nixon is delivering a speech. To Thompson's twisted brain the speech is hopelessly garbled, and all he can make out is the word "sacrifice" repeated over and over again. At this moment, the attorney tells Thompson to relax until the effects of the drug wear off. To struggle against them, he says, is to risk brain damage. The face of Richard Nixon dominating the scene, and the attorney's disembodied voice telling him not to fight, combine to present a compelling metaphor of society in the mind of Thompson. He cannot fight the forces that tell him to "sacrifice" his values because he is paralyzed by his own frenetic, rebellious energy. He can only lie still and hope to survive the conflict between the internal and the external world.

Part II: Chapter 6

Part II: Chapter 6 Summary

The first day of the DA's convention ushers in Chapter 6. Thompson and his attorney sit at the back of a packed auditorium dotted with huge low-fidelity speakers. Thompson is dressed in wingtips and a sport-coat, while his attorney wears a blue pinstriped suit. In spite of all of his worry, Thompson soon realizes that no one at the seminar seems concerned with what field anyone else might be in.

Part II: Chapter 6 Analysis

From the moment they enter the auditorium, Thompson and his attorney□who are intimately familiar with the Drug Culture□see that the authorities are completely out of touch with the criminals they are in the business to bust. The keynote speaker's book outlining the four types of marijuana users is pure comedy. Though they have not halted their drug use, the pair is adapting to the circumstances in which they find themselves. Thompson wears a nametag that identifies him as a private investigator, and his attorney's identifies him as an expert in Criminal Drug Analysis. This, he says sarcastically, is true in a sense.

Part II: Chapter 7

Part II: Chapter 7 Summary

The opening session of the seminar is approximately two hours long. Though Thompson no longer believes that there is a cop among the crowd who could spot an actual drug user, he remains on edge purely out of an aversion to the people he mingles with.

After a time, the attorney departs the auditorium for the hotel casino, causing something of a ruckus as he squeezes between chairs. Thompson follows him, excusing himself by saying he feels sick, and passes through the crowd with minimal disturbance. Downstairs in the bar, Thompson and his attorney meet a DA from Georgia and regale him with made-up stories about the crime that is making its way gradually across the country: witchcraft. The description of murders, satanic worship, and beheadings alarm the DA. By the time they leave the bar□with an injunction to him not to reveal what they have confided in him□he is in a state of dismay.

Part II: Chapter 7 Analysis

The gathering for the DA's seminar is, as described by Thompson, a shocking collection of grotesques; he compares the cops to a gang of drunken pig farmers, and cringes at the obese husband and wife necking in public. He may fear standing out in the crowd, but Thompson realizes he is no longer a monstrosity.

Part II: Chapter 8

Part II: Chapter 8 Summary

Thompson has been driving the White Whale around the city. His attorney has been vomiting almost continuously over the side, and at a stoplight shouts abusively at a nearby car. This eventually escalates into a brief shouting match and impromptu car chase, which results in a victory for the White Whale.

Following the chase and a quick trip to a gas station to fill the car's tires with air, Thompson and his attorney stop at an all-night diner in North Las Vegas□the city's notorious ghetto district. Aging prostitutes migrate here to live out the remainder of their lives, scraping a living from the drunks, junkies, and anyone else no longer fit for business in the tightly closed and highly selective society of Las Vegas proper. Once inside, the attorney orders coffee while Thompson reads a day-old newspaper. The scene is quiet and detached. Though they have ingested two more pellets of mescaline each, Thompson and his attorney seem fully in control of their faculties, relatively speaking. This peace is broken when the attorney hands the waitress, who appears to be a retired hooker, a napkin with a printed message. The message offends the woman, and she tells Thompson and his attorney to leave the diner or she will call the police. The attorney, clearly out of control, stands up and produces a blade from under his shirt. Leaving the waitress paralyzed with fear, the two exit the diner.

Part II: Chapter 8 Analysis

The two focal events of Chapter 8 are instigated by the attorney. During the altercation on the road, Thompson drives, but his attorney is the one who provokes the conflict. In the diner, Thompson stands by silently while his attorney insults the waitress and pulls the knife. This again reveals a sharp contrast between the ways Thompson and his attorney react to narcotics. Thompson may spiral out of control, and even indulge the need for some minor provocation, such as when he pushes ahead of the police officer arguing in the Hotel Flamingo. However, even at his most irresponsible moments, he is not violent or overtly dangerous. While it is certainly dangerous to drive a car under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, it is a different kind of danger from the one his attorney constantly stirs up. His attorney, in other words, lacks subtlety. Moreover, he seems to lack the intelligence and governing awareness that Thompson consistently maintains. The fact that Thompson narrates the tale while his attorney is only a player in it could account for this effect. However, that seems unlikely, since Thompson's behavior is never as outrageous as his attorney's. Thompson may fantasize about doing something, but he rarely acts out his fantasies. The attorney, on the other hand, appears to have no moment of consideration between thinking and enacting. This is seen most recently in his encounter with Lucy, the episode with the other car early in the chapter, and in his behavior toward the waitress. Examined side-by-side, Thompson is an idealist whose drug use is a reaction to his disillusionment; conversely, his attorney is

practically an animal with questionable morality, who lacks the ability to think things through and is an obvious danger both to himself and to others.

Part II: Chapter 9

Part II: Chapter 9 Summary

Chapter 9 begins with an editor's note (written, of course, by Thompson himself), stating that the narrator, who uses the moniker "Dr. Duke," breaks down to the point that his manuscript becomes temporarily indecipherable. What follows, therefore, is the verbatim transcription of the tape recordings Dr. Duke made throughout his journey.

Thompson/Duke and his attorney stop at a taco stand, where they haggle with the waitress over the menu and try to obtain directions to Boulder City. They tell her they are in search of the American Dream. The waitress assumes that the American Dream is a place, perhaps the site of what was called the Psychiatrist's Club, where drug pushers and stoned kids spend their time. It is not, asserts the short-order cook, the place they are looking for, but he gives them directions anyway and the two depart.

Part II: Chapter 9 Analysis

The style of narration in Chapter 9 is unique within *Fear and Loathing.* In addition to illustrating further the disparity between Thompson and his attorney, it introduces questions of identity and fact versus truth. Thompson is able to depart from the regular format of the text because what he writes is not an autobiography but a memoir. His aim is not to recreate events exactly as they happened, but to tell a story that captures the essence of the incidents in question. He accomplishes his goal of distancing himself from the action in this scene by using the pseudonym "Dr. Duke."

In addition to rendering Thompson aloof, the dialogue (rather than the usual monologue) focuses the reader on his activities and behavior without being privy to his thought processes. It is once again clear that the attorney is the more active partner of the two. In fact, in this scene, Thompson appears almost passive.

Here again, the idea of the American Dream recurs, though it seemed to have been placed on the back burner. This time, however, the attorney initiates it. In the conversation that ensues, the cook and the waitress in the taco stand become confused by the attorney's metaphorical reference and believe that the American Dream is an actual place. The physical place they mistake it for is a massive black building on the outskirts of town, previously known as the Psychiatrist's Club, frequented by drug-pushers and abusers. This is a very bleak image, indeed, and paints drug use in the grimmest light. Even though this is clearly not the American Dream, by the end of the chapter, they seem to think they are on the right track. The implications of this are obvious: Thompson and his attorney, in their excessive drug use, are on the misguided track to misery and oblivion rather than to the American Dream.

Part II: Chapter 10

Part II: Chapter 10 Summary

After a perilous drive to the airport, Thompson's attorney departs Las Vegas for L.A. Driving around on his own, Thompson tells the story of a young friend of his who was arrested in Las Vegas for vagrancy and jailed without being allowed a phone call or a lawyer. Unable to meet the fine, he was booked and thrown into a cell. There he saw two drug dealers also arrested for vagrancy, who between them produce about $130,000 in cash from their pockets. Though the charges were changed to suspicion of tax evasion, they remained for only a few hours after bribing a cop to hire them the best lawyer in town. Thompson's friend attempted to speak to the lawyer himself, but was ignored. Finally, he was allowed to send a telegram to his father, who bailed him out. He vowed never to visit Las Vegas again.

Part II: Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter contains another story illustrating the ruthlessness and corruption of Las Vegas. It also highlights a peculiar structure at work in which criminals are given treatment preferential to that given much less dangerous individuals. Thompson does not mention his friend being involved with drugs, but he does refer to him as totally harmless. In contrast, the two dealers are clearly menaces to society, but possess a copious amount of money. While Thompson's young friend is not even allowed his legal right to a phone call and an attorney, two drug dealers are able to buy their way out of jail in a single afternoon. This further ruins Thompson's idealistic views. Though as a drug user himself, he cannot object to the dealers as such, he can object to their favored status both within the drug culture and□by way of a dishonest police force□the establishment.

Part II: Chapter 11

Part II: Chapter 11 Summary

Thinking of the story told him by his friend, Thompson pulls the White Whale into the Flamingo parking lot. Returning to their annihilated suite, Thompson ponders the potential penalties their actions could entail. This leads to him reminiscing about a recent incident involving his attorney.

One morning before his attorney left, a maid entered Thompson's room to find Thompson still asleep and his attorney kneeling in the closet vomiting into his shoes. The maid screamed, and Thompson's overwrought attorney tackled her and held an icebag over her mouth. Thompson, shocked awake, leapt out of bed and shouted that the maid was under arrest. After all three calmed somewhat, Thompson and his attorney fabricated a story intended to keep the maid from telling anyone else of the incident, explaining that they were undercover narcotics agents and enlisting her services as an operative. The woman left, promising not to reveal their secrets.

All of that is in the past, but Thompson cannot escape a distinct sense of foreboding as he sits alone in the destroyed suite.

Part II: Chapter 11 Analysis

Chapter 11's events are less significant than its social commentary. Thompson speaks of Timothy Leary, the inventor of LSD, as a misguided sage offering mind expansion without taking into consideration the harsh realities that awaited when the high was over. But, even though Thompson pities enlightenment-seeking acid-takers, he asserts that they got what they deserved. After Leary, says Thompson, came a procession of gurus, from the Maharishi to Charles Manson. Thompson's musing ends with a comment about the violence at Altamont. Thompson's main theme here is the clash between idealism and reality, which is near to the heart of the narrative as a whole.

Part II: Chapter 12

Part II: Chapter 12 Summary

Still in the hotel suite, certain he is about to be arrested, Thompson receives a call from his friend, Bruce Innes. He has information regarding an ape Thompson had expressed interest in purchasing. Thompson heads to the Circus-Circus to meet Bruce, but by the time he arrives the ape has attacked a man in the bar and been taken away by the police.

Thompson ends the chapter with a story about a performance in Aspen where Bruce Innes sang the same songs, laced with the same anti-American sentiments that he currently sings at the Circus-Circus. While the anti-Americanism is ignored in Las Vegas, it was met with loud and angry criticism in Aspen from a famous unnamed astronaut. When the astronaut came to the table where both Innes and Thompson were seated and began to berate the Canadian singer for his political views about America, Thompson told the man that he was an American and agreed with Innes' condemnation. The astronaut was angrily escorted away. Later, a young man approached the astronaut's table and asked for an autograph. Receiving it, he held it for a moment, then tore it into tiny pieces and dropped it into the astronaut's lap before walking away. Thompson states philosophically that you would never see that kind of a conflict in Las Vegas.

Part II: Chapter 12 Analysis

Thompson's closing statement that you would never witness that sort of conflict□between a patriot and a social critic□demonstrates the basic self-centeredness of Las Vegas. Vegas is apolitical. It is a city filled with more visitors than residents, and its fundamental concerns are not socially progressive, but shallower and more immediate. Gambling, drugs, alcohol, and a general sense of corruption pervade Las Vegas; it symbolizes the opposite of the American Dream. Equality only exists because, at any given moment, anyone□no matter what status they possess to begin with□can lose everything they have with a bad decision, a failed wager, or simply the savage nature of the city. Las Vegas stands on the fringes of America with a promise to meet the basest desires of every citizen, and no conscience to get in the way.

Part II: Chapter 13

Part II: Chapter 13 Summary

When Thompson attempts to sit down at the baccarat table, two bouncers usher him away. He calls for the White Whale and leaves the Hotel Flamingo. The car has sustained a phenomenal amount of damage considering the short time Thompson and his attorney were in possession of it. He drops it off at the parking garage, refusing to answer any questions from the kid who is responsible for checking it in. He says only that he is insured for any damage. Waiting in the airport with a satchel full of drugs and the Magnum, Thompson is understandably fearful about finally being busted. In order to kill time, he picks up a newspaper, where he reads about a captain and crew who were slaughtered following a mistaken attack on a port in Guam.

Part II: Chapter 13 Analysis

"Why bother with newspapers if this is all they offer?" asks Thompson at the end of Chapter 13. Certainly, every newspaper he has picked up through the course of *Fear and Loathing* has been filled with nothing but bad news, much of it drug-related. With each new headline, Thompson grows more and more exasperated. Ironically, though, Thompson is a journalist, and therefore possesses a very intimate and necessary relationship to printed media. This uneasy bond with his work, perhaps, accounts for a great deal of the "fear and loathing" experienced by Thompson. He is afraid to look into the face of the society that has so disillusioned him and hates the fact that he must not only face it, but also interact with it on a daily basis. Unlike the doctor and former LSD guru who can putter in his garden and hum the world away, Thompson must remain attentive even if it is the last thing he wants to do.

Part II: Chapter 14

Part II: Chapter 14 Summary

Waiting to board his plane in the Las Vegas airport, Thompson notices that he is still wearing his investigator's badge from the narcotics conference. The whole thing, he muses, was a waste of time. The only person who had learned anything at the seminar had been him□and what he learned was that the District Attorneys' Association was about ten years behind in their knowledge of drug culture.

Thompson boards his plane without mishap, but when the plane lands in Denver he rushes to the airport drugstore to get a box of amyls. The salesgirl at the pharmacy is hesitant to sell narcotics without a prescription until Thompson convinces her that he is a doctor.

He ends the chapter laughing crazily and shouting insults at two Marines he sees coming out of the restroom, imagining himself as an aberrant reincarnation of Horatio Alger.

Part II: Chapter 14 Analysis

By the end of Chapter 4teen, it does indeed seem that Thompson has learned very little from his funny yet horrifying journey. If he has found the American Dream, it is a version so twisted as to be unrecognizable. His parting shot at the establishment, in the form of the two Marines, is somewhat pathetic. *Fear and Loathing* ends on a low note with Thompson more a pitiable anti-hero than a champion of tragedy.

Characters

Hunter S. Thompson (aka Raoul Duke)

A journalist (or, as he terms it "a doctor of journalism") sent by a New York magazine to cover a motorcycle and dune buggy race in Las Vegas. He is the narrator of the tale. We never see him without his personality and thought processes under the influence of several narcotics. He is a disillusioned idealist, a product of the 60's who finds it difficult to resign himself to the 70's.

Even though he is in a constantly intoxicated state, Thompson observes his environment closely. Despite his perceptiveness, he never assumes the position of a reserved, objective witness. He sees the profligacy of Las Vegas and reacts to it with a combination of sardonic humor and grief. Perhaps even more significant than his emotional responses to the outside world, is Thompson's readiness to immerse himself in whatever is going on around him. In this, Thompson demonstrates both an insatiable curiosity□for instance, when he visits the former LSD guru for information□and a kind of foolhardy courage□as when he and his attorney infiltrate the drug conference.

Another defining feature of Thompson's personality is his apparent inability to learn from his experiences. Stopped by the California Highway Patrol, Thompson□deprived of sleep and deeply under the influence of intoxicants□is allowed to move on without prosecution, purely as a result of the grace of the police officer. Here, Thompson could demonstrate responsibility and insight by pulling his car over until he is in a better condition to drive. Instead, he gets back on the road, risking accident or arrest, and knowing full well that both are a strong possibility. In fact, as canny as Thompson is and as genuinely afraid of arrest, he seems constitutionally unable to obey authority of any kind. His behavior springs as much from simple, almost juvenile, rebellion as it does from any larger concept of membership in a counter-culture.

The attorney (aka Dr. Gonzo)

A Samoan who accompanies Thompson almost continuously. Like his client, the attorney remains drugged throughout□possibly even surpassing Thompson's narcotic consumption. Unlike Thompson, the attorney is not a thoughtful character. He acts on impulse and is prone to violent outbursts as a means of alleviating his boredom.

The hitchhiker

A typical kid from middleAmerica without significant worldly experience. He is picked up by Thompson and his attorney at the beginning of the journey. Terrified by Thompson and his attorney's drug-induced antagonism, he soon jumps out of their car and flees the scene. In his innocence, he is representative of American idealism.

Lucy

A runaway girl from Montana picked up an airplane by Thompson's attorney. She is a religious freak and aspiring artist who draws only portraits of Barbra Streisand. She is drugged and sexually assaulted by Thompson's attorney. Then, under the guise of taking her to Streisand's concert, the pair leaves her at the Americana Hotel. Like the hitchhiker, Lucy begins as an innocent. Unlike the hitchhiker, however, she is unable to escape before that ideal is corrupted.

Alice

A maid who encounters Thompson and his attorney in their suite at the Hotel Flamingo. She finds Thompson asleep and his attorney in the closet vomiting into his shoes. All three of them panic□the maid because of the unexpected scene, and the two men because they think they're about to be arrested. The two fabricate a story about being undercover narcotics agents and offer to put her on the payroll as an operative.

Objects/Places

The Polo Lounge at the Beverly Hills Hotel

Where Thompson receives the call from a New York sporting magazine sending him to Las Vegas to cover the Mint 400.

Las Vegas

The city where the main action of the narrative takes place. Thompson finds the city harsh, corrupt, and unforgiving.

The Mint Hotel

The first hotel Thompson at which Thompson and his attorney stay. In the hotel bar, Thompson undergoes severe hallucinations. He sees lizards gnawing on human beings and believes the carpet is soaked with blood.

The Great Red Shark

A red Chevrolet convertible rented by Thompson and his attorney to take them to Las Vegas. With its great size and power, as well as its flamboyance, the Red Shark is a symbol of American flash and excess.

Mint 400

A motorcycle and dune buggy race through the Las Vegas desert. Thompson is sent by a New York sporting magazine to cover the race. However, between his drug-induced state and the dust clouds that hide the vehicles, Thompson leaves the track without even knowing who won.

Circus-Circus

Called the "vortex of the American Dream" by Thompson, a Las Vegas hotel and casino where he and his attorney spend the evening after the Mint 400.

The Merry-Go-Round Bar

The bar inside the Circus-Circus. Thompson's attorney becomes stuck on the rotating bar following a drug-induced panic attack.

The White Whale

The second car Thompson and his attorney rent. A white Cadillac convertible, the White Whale represents American grandeur and luxury.

Hotel Flamingo

The second hotel in which Thompson and his attorney stay. By the time they check out, Thompson and his attorney have wrecked their suite. Mirrors and lights are smashed, and his attorney's bed is a mass of charred stuffing and wires.

The Psychiatrists' Club

Mistaken for the "American Dream" by a cook in a taco stand, the Psychiatrists' Club is a large black building frequented by drug-dealers and their clientele.

North Las Vegas

The ghetto section of Las Vegas. Here, Thompson's attorney provokes a waitress, pulling a knife when she becomes angry.

Social Concerns And Themes

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas attacks the tawdry, oppressive manifestation of greed and materialism in the microcosm of Las Vegas. Outrage is the response of the narrator, an outrage that is fueled by a steady ingestion of drugs and alcohol, as though intoxication were the only possible response to the horrors of corruption and ignorance. Horatio Alger is invoked several times, mockingly, and it is Alger's dream of success, distorted in the neon glitter of the casinos, that Thompson explores.

Illegal drugs play a major part in stoking the narrator's shock and horror. A significant implication is that contraband substances are no more harmful or debilitating than the routines of contemporary life that make grotesqueries of nearly everyone. The reader is reminded occasionally of events outside Las Vegas which create a "heinous background" for this nightmare, such as the Manson murders, the invasion of Laos, atrocities in Vietnam, and random violence in the cities.

Techniques

Thompson is a master of using dialogue to pace his stories and to involve the reader with the action. The character of his narrator is established early in the book in humorously fractured exchanges with his attorney and with hapless bystanders. Another technique lending immediacy to the narrative is the use of tape transcription — pure dialogue — that reads much like a film script.

Interior monologues also reveal much about the narrator. Since these often take the form of drug delusions or hallucinations, the narrator ostensibly explores a raw consciousness, one driven to the brink of total breakdown, not only by the drugs but by the awful reality of the American dream. As an epigraph to his book, Thompson uses a quotation from Samuel Johnson: "He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man." It is this pain, exacerbated by the bizarre hucksterism of Las Vegas, that drives the author to his beastly escapades. The marathon, five-day binge he describes results from his "super-sensitivity" as one commentator put it, his awareness of the discrepancy between American ideals and the harsh working out of America's brutal manifest destiny.

This fate, the national fate of delusion and greed exemplified in the Circus-Circus casino, is given shape and a voice in the narrator himself. His mad visions make him one with the frantic "believers" of Las Vegas. What sets him apart is his uncompromising drive to locate an authentic understanding of just what has gone wrong, with himself and with his country.

Thompson is effective in conveying what Tom Wolfe calls the status life of his characters — the complete pattern of behavior by which people reveal their social, cultural, and political identities, real or imagined. With only a few words of dialogue or a simple description, he places his characters firmly in a social class or niche.

Themes

Idealism

Though his trip is ostensibly professional, Thompson refers repeatedly throughout *Fear and Loathing* to his search for the "American Dream." Though this Dream is never fully defined, the reader is able to glean some of what Thompson means when he uses the term ironically. For instance, when he refers to the Circus-Circus as "the vortex of the American Dream," he says this sarcastically; by his description, the Circus-Circus seems more chaotic, and even frightening, than idyllic.

Thompson's idealism arises primarily from the 1960's, when America seemed innocent and the emerging drug culture promised expanded consciousness. By 1971, the year in which *Fear and Loathing* was published, it has become clear to Thompson that these dreams are not going to be realized. All of the heroes of the 60's□Muhammad Ali, Bob Dylan, Timothy Leary, etc.□have been rendered either irrelevant or impotent by the dawn of the 70's. The Vietnam War, the Nixon Administration, alienation, and drug-related violence have all contributed to killing the vision of the future adopted by Thompson and those of his generation.

Drug Abuse/Drug Culture

Drug Culture, according to the DA's narcotics seminar, is a fairly simple operation with only a few drugs in its repertoire. Observing Thompson, however, it becomes clear that it is more complicated than this.

Thompson makes particular mention of Timothy Leary in his discussion of the failure of hallucinogens and other drugs to produce the effect they promised. Leary, Thompson says, was wrong to use his own life as a model for the positive effects of LSD. Unlike Leary, who had been to West Point, spent time in the military, and had a degree in psychology, many of his followers were considerably less experienced, and thus unprepared for the world that greeted them when they came down from their high. Stuck in a world and in a time he feels completely at odds with, Thompson's drug use by the time of *Fear and Loathing* is more escapist than an attempt at mental expansion. As he relays headline after headline of drug-related tragedy, it becomes clear that the drug culture of 1971 has fallen far from its early promises.

Authority

Certainly both Thompson and his attorney possess a profound contempt for authority. They enter the seminar as a roundabout way of making fools of the police, and investigators. However, in the scene between the police officer and the desk clerk at the Hotel Flamingo, where another set of rules exist, Thompson actually appeals to the authority figure□in this instance, the desk clerk□and is treated accordingly.

Thompson refers to himself as a "doctor of journalism," taking on a title that suggests authority. Also, without a doubt, within the field of gonzo journalism Thompson is an authority unto himself.

Morality

Morality within *Fear and Loathing* is on a sliding scale. The mass consumption of illicit drugs is not seen as immoral. What follows from their drug use□destruction of property, violence, etc.□is simply a result, a fact of being for Thompson and his attorney. Indeed, anything the two do that might be considered questionable is less immoral than amoral. What they are doing is not wrong; values and ethics simply do not apply to them. They are permitted to do whatever they can get away with.

A more specific example of this loose morality is the attorney's near-abduction of Lucy. He plies her with drugs, with which she has no experience, and uses her subsequent stupor to take advantage of her sexually. Clearly this is immoral behavior, but the attorney feels no guilt. However, when Thompson suggests they utilize her as a prostitute in an attempt to get his attorney to recognize she is a liability, his attorney is horrified. While he might assault her himself, the thought of someone else doing much the same thing clearly crosses some nebulous ethical line.

Style

Point of View

As a memoir, *Fear and Loathing* is narrated in the first person by its writer, Hunter S. Thompson. This technique allows the reader to gain an insight into Thompson's mental processes as the story unfolds. Such intimacy with the author is particularly useful in a text such as this one. Thompson's behavior, due to his drug consumption, is often erratic and nonsensical; however, with the aid of his commentary, the reader is able to follow the story with greater ease.

It must be understood, however, that Thompson is narrating *Fear and Loathing* retroactively. Given the amount of drugs he reports consuming, his thoughts could not have been nearly as lucid at the time as they are in the text. Thompson, therefore, is forced to sacrifice a certain amount of accuracy in order to tell an intelligible story.

Setting

The setting of the text, as its title reveals, is the desert of and around Las Vegas, Nevada. More specifically, however, a large portion of the story takes place in a number of smaller venues: The Mint Hotel, the Mint 400 racetrack, Circus-Circus, and the Hotel Flamingo.

Las Vegas, as described by Thompson, is a savage, corrupt, and unforgiving city that preys on the weak and the innocent. As such, it is the embodiment of everything Thompson believes is wrong about America. Its subdivisions, the hotels, bars, and casinos, serve only to further this notion.

Language and Meaning

As a "gonzo journalist" Hunter S. Thompson approaches language in a distinctive way. His speech, for the most part casual, is both well-educated and riddled with slang and profanity. His statements are often fragmentary, relying on the inertia of sentiment to convey their full meaning, but in the midst of the chaos, he shows himself to be perfectly capable of stepping back from his more outrageous persona long enough to reminisce lyrically about disillusionment and the fall of his heroes.

Structure

Fear and Loathing, as is to be expected of a mad drug-fueled dash across the desert and through the streets of Las Vegas, is divided into short, rapid-fire chapters, each of which describes a single scene. The two larger divisions separate Thompson's

coverage of the Mint 400 with his infiltration of the DA's seminar on narcotics. The break between these two is Thompson's aborted flight out of Las Vegas back to L.A.

Quotes

"But what was the story? No one had bothered to say. So we would have to drum it up on our own. Free enterprise. The American Dream. Horatio Alger gone mad on drugs in Las Vegas. Do it now: pure Gonzo journalism." (Part I, Chapter 2, p.12).

"Old elephants limp off to the hills to die; old Americans go out to the highway and drive themselves to death with huge cars." (Part I, Chapter 3, p.18).

"San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run but no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were here and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant" (Part I, Chapter 8, p.66).

"Reading the front page made me feel a lot better. Against that heinous background my crimes were pale and meaningless." (Part I, Chapter 9, p.74).

"Jesus, bad waves of paranoia, madness, fear and loathingintolerable vibrations in this place." (Part I, Chapter 11, p.85).

"In Las Vegas they *kill* the weak and deranged." (Part II, Chapter 2, p. 104).

"[C]ops telling each other 'we must come to terms with the drug culture,' but they had no idea where to start. They couldn't even find the goddamn thing." (Part II, Chapter 7, p.144).

"I took another big hit off the amyl and by the time I got to the bar my heart was full of joy. I felt like a monster reincarnation of Horatio Alger A Man on the Move, and just sick enough to be totally confident." (Part II, Chapter 14, p.204).

Adaptations

In 1980, a feature film, Where the Buffalo Roam, directed by Art Linson, was released. Based on "the legend of Hunter S. Thompson," the film adapted elements from both Fear and Loathing books and also incorporated characters and incidents from The Great Shark Hunt (1979). With Bill Murray in the lead role, the film depicts Thompson as a clownish psychotic. He is a mumbling outsider who never confronts his subjects openly but lurks in the background. The essence of Thompson's gonzo approach to journalism is lacking in Murray's portrayal. The real protagonist of the movie is Thompson's attorney, played with gusto by Peter Boyle, who moves from one extra-legal enterprise to the next with insouciance.

The movie was released with little fanfare and was roundly panned by the critics.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss what is meant by "Gonzo journalism."

Give some possible interpretationsof the "American Dream." Are any of these realized by Thompson?

Compare and contrast the hitchhiker and Lucy, the runaway artist. What do each of them say about innocence and the corruptive nature of society?

Discuss some of the specific references in *Fear and Loathing* in terms of the context of the book, such as Horatio Alger, Muhammad Ali, *Surrealistic Pillow*, or Timothy Leary.

Discuss the place of violence (for example, drug related violence, the Vietnam War, etc.) in *Fear and Loathing*. How does external violence influence Thompson's internal state?

List the characteristics of "the Great Red Shark" and "the White Whale." What do each of these reflect about American culture?

How reliable a witness is Thompson? Given his constant drug use, how valuable are his perceptions?

Literary Precedents

Much controversy has been generated by the New Journalism of Tom Wolfe, Jimmy Breslin, and Hunter Thompson, in part because traditional journalists believe that the "facts" tend to be tainted by the style with which they are presented, and in part because the New Journalists created a genre of reportage which seems more engaging and interesting than the more objective, drier traditional approach. Part of the criticism levied at the New Journalists was rooted in the fear of returning to the "muckraking" reportage rampant prior to World War II. Unlike muckraking, however, the New Journalists insist on the accuracy of fact and detail — Thompson and Wolfe are both exceptional scholars and researchers — and it is this same insistence on accuracy that led them to present facts within a context rather than as pure information.

It is both interesting and predictable that Thompson and Breslin have sports reporting in their backgrounds. American sports reporters, especially baseball announcers during the radio era, developed descriptive powers and sound effects to bring the game alive for listeners and readers who had to enjoy the sport by osmosis. Wolfe, observing Breslin's ability to use "pop" words to describe action, experimented with the same technique in reporting the news.

Following the cue of "Pop Artists" of the 1960s, these New Journalists combined the images and language of the ordinary world with the hard and often cruel facts which molded it.

Novelists have been quick to adapt the spirit of New Journalism to their more traditional form so that an identifiable genre of New Journalist novels has emerged. Some critics have dubbed this genre "faction," reflecting the combination of fiction and fact. Although novelists have always used facts to give credibility to their stories, and even though the historical novel is a well established and enduring form, the "factionalists" are attempting to elevate the reader's awareness that it is not only the presence of truth that is important but the relationship among those truths. Ragtime (1975) by E. L. Doctorow, for example, meticulously presents true facts from the 1930s, ranging from the rise of socialism to Houdini's magical tricks, but it deconstructs the order of information, and in this rearrangement and juxtaposition of nonsequential data creates its themes and messages in a manner that is entirely different from the "realistic" descriptions of cultures and places in novels such as Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises (1926).

The New Journalists, then, can be credited with liberating both journalism and modern fiction from some of their traditional bonds. Although what the New Journalists have achieved is not entirely "new" either to reportage or fiction, it is new in that it has become a conscious aesthetic and philosophy for analyzing society.

Related Titles

Three of Thompson's books are closer to the more traditional New Journalism than to the pure gonzo of Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. At least one reviewer has called his fifth book a novel, although the same claim can be made for most of Thompson's work, depending on what elements are stressed.

Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail (1973) is the closest of his work to conventional journalism, focusing as it does on a subject that is a matter of public record. Hell's Angels (1966) is also "nonfiction," recording several well-publicized events in the life of motorcycle chieftain Sonny Barger.

Thompson's approach to his material is almost identical in every book whether it is labeled fiction or otherwise. He is suspicious, on edge, and wide awake to nuances of nonverbal communication. He watches people closely, while he hides behind dark aviator glasses. He listens skeptically, all the while plotting escapes, hoaxes, and rear-guard actions. Most importantly, he always places himself at the center of the story, confronting and sometimes attacking his subjects, always physically committed to seeing his assignment through regardless of personal cost.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994