

# **Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s Study Guide**

**Generation of Swine: Tales of Shame and Degradation in the '80s by Hunter S. Thompson**

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# Plot Summary

This book is a collection of Hunter S. Thompson's articles, primarily from the *The San Francisco Examiner*, between 1985 and 1988. The articles are primarily about contemporary American politics, but Thompson's own drug-crazed, maniacal adventures are also a major source of material.

Near the beginning of the book, Thompson's political writings primarily deal with American relations with the Soviet Union. Thompson sees President Ronald Reagan as badly outmatched and easily manipulated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. By the end of 1985, however, Thompson is primarily writing about Ted Kennedy's withdrawal from the 1988 presidential race, which Thompson believes might allow a Republican to retain the White House. Articles from early 1986 focus on the conflict between Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy and Reagan. Thompson sees Khadafy as an absurdity, but equally believes that Reagan no longer has the credibility in the Arab world to deal with Khadafy effectively. By February 1986, Thompson is focused on the overthrow of Haitian dictator Baby Doc Duvalier, and Thompson unsuccessfully attempts to travel to Haiti to cover the story. Instead, Thompson ends up in Key West, Florida where he briefly goes into the marine salvage business. In the summer of 1986, Thompson devotes a great deal of coverage to Attorney General Ed Meese's report on pornography and violence, which Thompson finds to be an insanely incorrect and moralistic document. At the end of the summer of 1986, Thompson makes a bet with Jack Parker, a wealthy man from Arizona, about the rushing yards that new Dallas Cowboys quarterback Herschel Walker will gain in the 1986 season. Parker continuously finds Thompson as Parker comes closer to winning the bet, but Parker ends up losing money to Thompson by going double or nothing on the Super Bowl. During this same time period, Thompson begins analyzing the 1986 Congressional elections, which Thompson sees as going more to the Democrats than most forecasters expect, and Thompson is proved to be right when the Democrats retake Congress.

By the end of 1986, Thompson turns his attention to the developing Iran-Contra scandal in the White House, which occupies most of Thompson's attention through the summer of 1987. At the beginning of the scandal, Thompson is firmly convinced that many of the key players in the scandal, such as Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and Vice President George Bush, will go to jail for their roles. When this does not come to pass, Thompson is incredibly angered by what he sees as a failure of American democracy to deliver justice. Also in 1987, Thompson begins focusing heavily on the 1988 presidential election. Originally, Thompson believes that Democratic Senator Gary Hart will win the presidency, but when Hart is brought down by a sex scandal, Thompson realizes that Bush is again a viable presidential candidate. By the end of the book, Thompson believes that the Democratic Party is doomed and will not retake the White House by the end of the century. Thompson despises Bush but realizes he will win the election by the fall of 1988. At the end of the book, Thompson sarcastically offers to go to work for the Bush Administration.



# Pages 9-40

## Pages 9-40 Summary and Analysis

Thompson begins his author's note by writing that he has used more lines from the Book of Revelation over the years than any other work, but not because he is religious but because its madness is incredibly powerful and Bibles are always accessible in hotel rooms. Thompson then describes his desire to escape from journalism but that it sticks with him like an addiction. Finally, Thompson ponders on the existence of heaven and hell and describes heaven as worse than hell.

"Saturday Night in the City" details Thompson taking his girlfriend Maria to a tattoo parlor in San Francisco to get a tattoo just to write a story about it. Thompson is exhausted from lecturing for the past week and desperately needs to meet his deadline, so the easiest way to go about it is to have Maria get a large tattoo of a panther. While Maria is tattooed, Thompson recalls his days riding motorcycles through the streets of San Francisco in incredibly dangerous conditions. Thompson is sad that those days are gone and that he is now looked upon as a respectable person.

In "Showdown in the Pig Palace," Thompson is awoken by a phone call at three in the morning from a friend who is a political strategist. The political strategist does not want to talk about politics, but Thompson demands the latest numbers from the close Senate races. The two spend the next couple hours putting odds on the different elections. They decide the Republicans will probably take Alaska, Missouri, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama, while the Democrats will win in California, Colorado, Nevada, North Carolina, and Florida.

Thompson begins "Nixon and the Whale Woman" writing that he drove east of San Francisco to follow a humpback whale that has swam up the Sacramento River for an unknown reason. When Thompson returns to his hotel at three in the morning he encounters a group of swingers, and Thompson tells them the new Attorney General Ed Meese will put them in jail.

"The Hellfire Club" discusses the sexual scandals of the televangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker and the politician Gary Hart. Thompson compares them to rich English men in the seventeenth century who took part in orgies and assaulted random people. Thompson considers the modern sexual scandals tame by comparison.

In "Gary Hart Talks Politics," Thompson discusses the 1988 Democratic presidential primaries with Hart, who had recently been involved in a sex scandal. Hart believes that the field is wide open because none of the candidates have crafted any kind of actual policies. Thompson believes Hart will reenter the presidential race, but despite the fact that Thompson likes Hart personally, Thompson believes Hart will lose badly.



"A Generation of Swine" begins with Thompson describing people's obsessions with testing different aspects of their health at home. Thompson then attends a showing of the movie "Rocky IV" at a San Francisco drive-in, and after the movie tests his pulse on a heart rate monitor. Thompson's pulse is a 64, which is quite good, but everyone else gets very high pulse readings from the machine. Thompson ices his finger and then gets a pulse of zero.

Thompson writes to his editor in "Buffalo Gores a Visitor" to discuss ideas for his upcoming columns. Thompson begins by telling the story of his friend Skinner who was gored by a buffalo in Wyoming while trying to cover a story on the Aryan Nations Church. Thompson then lists a number of projects he intends to work on, including visiting the set of the television show "Miami Vice" and the Super Bowl in New Orleans.

In "The Geek from Coral Gables," Thompson complains about the media coverage of Hurricanes Elena and Gloria. Thompson is convinced that Dr. Neil Frank, director of the National Hurricane Center in Coral Gables, is incompetent and that the hurricane coverage has mostly been an effort to boost the ratings of the news show "Nightline".

"666 Pennsylvania Ave." reveals Thompson's concerns about the upcoming meeting between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Many people are convinced that Reagan will be outmaneuvered by Gorbachev, but Thompson is more concerned that Reagan will start the Armageddon.

In "Death to the Weird," Thompson describes a nightmarish flight that was meant to go from Denver to Aspen but is forced to turn back to Denver. The mayor of Denver threatens to have Thompson arrested for smoking a cigarette on the flight, but Thompson is more focused on the fact that he is missing the Monday Night Football game. Thompson steals \$100 from the mayor at the end of the article for compensation.



# Pages 40-71

## Pages 40-71 Summary and Analysis

"Bad Nerves in Fat City" is an extended complaint by Thompson about being hounded by other members of the press while trying to meet a deadline. CBS News attempts to interview Thompson but he sends them away, and when Dan Hinkle attempts to interview Thompson, the interview is disrupted by an angry woman pounding on the hotel room door.

Thompson begins "Full-time Scrambling" by describing television as a terrible and evil yet inescapable business. Because Thompson is supposedly a television critic, he installs a large satellite dish at his Woody Creek, Colorado home. Thompson's friend Cromwell tells Thompson that he will have to buy a descrambler to watch most channels.

In "The Worst People in the World," Thompson claims to be applying for the "journalist-in-space program". Thompson hopes that if he is not selected, the Examiner will send him to South Africa with beauty queen Vanessa Williams, where he can replace the now banned television media.

Thompson describes going to Montreal to lecture at Concordia University in "The Beast with Three Backs". The night before the lecture, Thompson goes to a strip club with Doug and Terrence, the two students that pick Thompson up from the airport. In the strip club, Thompson notices that all the strippers have leg hair. At the lecture, Thompson tells the crowd that Canada is essentially a hostage in the Cold War and Richard Nixon will be elected president in 1988.

In "The Doctor Will See You Now," Thompson receives a letter from his illustrator Ralph Steadman and replies to it. Thompson describes Steadman as a rich and debased person and claims that Steadman wrote to request royalties. Thompson tells Steadman there are no royalties but that Steadman can come work with Thompson at the San Francisco Examiner.

Thompson again attacks National Hurricane Center director Dr. Neil Frank in "Revenge of the Fish Heads," claiming that more people flee their homes on Frank's command than fled Egypt with Moses. Thompson recounts some of the hate mail he supposedly received for past criticisms of Frank.

In "Apres Moi, le Deluge," Thompson's friend Skinner calls, saying that Senator Ted Kennedy is withdrawing from the race for the Democratic presidential nomination for 1988. Skinner argues that this means that Jesse Jackson could win the nomination. Thompson concludes the article, marveling at the tremendous respect people give to the president even when they do not deserve it.



"The Dim and Dirty Road" begins with Thompson explaining that Ted Kennedy's withdrawal from the Democratic primary is ultimately because he is a poor driver and drove off a bridge in Chappaquiddick. Thompson explains that he is now having his own trouble with driving as he is no longer able to drive by moonlight alone.

In "Off with Their Heads," Thompson writes that with Ted Kennedy out of the Democratic primary, Colorado Senator Gary Hart is now the obvious front runner. However, Thompson doubts that Hart can win the primary because his base are all "yuppies," who will panic the moment anything goes wrong.

"The American Century?" deals with the beginning of the conflict between President Reagan and Libyan dictator Moammar Khadafy. Khadafy makes wild threats against the United States, and the White House threatens to punish Khadafy. Thompson believes the Arabs do not take these threats seriously because of how Reagan blundered by sending troops to Lebanon. Finally, Thompson finds Khadafy's sixteen year reign in Libya highly impressive.

Thompson marvels in "Crank Time in Tripoli" at how quickly Khadafy has made even liberal politicians discuss the possibility of political assassination. Khadafy threatens to assemble a suicide army to attack America if he is attacked, but Thompson is convinced that this army will be more trouble for Khadafy than anyone else.



# Pages 71-102

## Pages 71-102 Summary and Analysis

In "Meat Sickness," Thompson bets on the New England Patriots to beat the spread against the Chicago Bears in the 1986 Superbowl because he believes it is what Archbishop Desmond Tutu advised. According to Thompson's friend Craig Vetter, Tutu was actually telling people not to gamble on the game. After the Bears beat the Patriots and cover the spread, Thompson meets a man who claims his wife is sleeping with a member of the Bears, and Thompson advises him to call Tutu for help.

Thompson is attempting to leave Chicago for California in "Last Train from Chicago". Thompson meets a man who claims to be friends with John Madden and takes Thompson's luggage up to the train and somehow sneaks into Thompson's sleeper cabin without a ticket. Thompson produces a fake badge to convince the man he is a police officer and has him removed from the train.

Thompson begins "Kill Them Before They Eat" by saying that while many news days are slow, sometimes so much news happens at once that no one knows how to handle it. The week Thompson is writing is an example with the biggest news being the fall of Haitian dictator Baby Doc Duvalier. Skinner calls Thompson with plans to go to Haiti for Carnivale and Thompson agrees.

"Four Million Thugs" reveals that Thompson and Skinner were unable to go to Haiti because all of Skinner's contacts have been murdered by the Tonton Macoute, which was Duvalier's personal army. The populace of Haiti is now killing the Tonton Macoute, but it is essentially a civil war situation.

In "Memo from the War Room," Thompson describes the situation of Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos, who recently stole reelection. Marcos is now about to be deposed by the Filipino people, and Thompson imagines him being sent to Vesco Island with Duvalier and other deposed dictators. Thompson later gets an old Doors concert on television and believes it is a great example of true rock and roll.

Thompson travels to Miami in "The Gonzo Salvage Co." and rents a boat to take a boat captain out to his half sunk boat the morning after a storm. Thompson helps the captain, removing valuable items from the ship until they are approached by another boat whose crew wants to steal the sinking ship. Thompson strikes a deal with the crew of the cannibal boat and goes into the marine salvage business with them.

Thompson describes his new salvage business in "Salvage Is not Looting". Captain Elgin fishes and dives, Crazy Mean Brain plunders, and Thompson salvages sunken treasure. Crazy Mean Brian possesses a seventeenth century cannonball, but he cannot sell it because Mel Fisher, an famous and successful salvager, would report him





for piracy. Thompson tells Brian that he is friends with Fisher, but Brian and Elgin tell him that no one is friends in the salvage business.

In "Dawn at the Boca Chica," Thompson goes to the Boca Chica Lounge very late at night with Maria after wrecking his boat the previous morning. The bar never closes and is the most popular late night bar in Key West. Thompson decides to sell what remains of his boat and return to Colorado the next day. Thompson claims that he sells the boat to Gary Hart for the Democratic primaries.

"Let the Cheap Dogs Eat" is about the dog fighting business. Thompson argues that dog fighters feed their dogs smaller dogs and even cats to keep them mean and thirsty for blood and that the most successful dog fighters make up to \$20,000 a night. Thompson relates this to other dog stories in the news, such as a state medical examiner who was fired for bringing her dog into the examination room.

In "Ox Butchered in Tripoli," Thompson begins by noting that it is a strange week in news with the strangest news being that Khadafy butchered an ox with "Reagan" painted on it. Thompson sees this act as part of a strange pattern of violent acts over the previous week, such as a man who took hostages at an Albuquerque Pizza Hut. Thompson seems convinced that the United States is preparing for military action against Libya.

At the beginning of "Never Get off the Boat," Thompson is driving to a bar in Woody Creek, and he notices that his neighbors are calving their cows because a late snowstorm has sent them all into labor. The same snowstorm has shut down the Denver airport for several days, which Thompson believes is enough to drive the people stuck there insane. When Thompson gets back from the bar, his neighbor George calls him to help with the calving.



# Pages 103-133

## Pages 103-133 Summary and Analysis

"The Called Him Deep Throat" is split between a discussion of televangelist Pat Robertson and Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy. Thompson suggests that when Nixon was president, if someone like Robertson had openly suggested the United States assassinate Khadafy, he would have quickly been silenced by G. Gordon Liddy, whom Thompson is convinced is the Watergate leak Deep Throat.

"The Pro-Flogging View" is another response to a letter from Ralph Steadman, who is allegedly complaining about his son sniffing glue and smashing windows. Thompson recommends that Steadman send his son to Thompson with a check for \$10,000, so he can smash windows all he wants. Thompson argues that if Steadman does not do this, his son will end up shooting the prime minister of Great Britain, Margaret Thatcher.

In "Just Another Terrorist," Thompson describes Imelda Marcos—wife of Filipino dictator Ferdinand—and her obsession with shoes. Thompson reasons that compared to the amounts of money Ferdinand stole from the Philippines, the expense of the shoes is relatively minor. If Marcos could find the money now, he could buy a ranch in Libya and socialize with Khadafy.

In "The Woman from Kiev," Thompson calls his old friend and political strategist Frank Mankiewicz to try to determine how many people have died in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant meltdown in the Soviet Union. Both Thompson and Mankiewicz agree that the high estimate of two thousand dead found in the press is being supplied by the CIA.

Thompson begins "Two More Years" writing that Ronald Reagan is no longer taken seriously in the world because he will only be president for two more years. Vice President George Bush is the most obvious candidate to be the next president, but Thompson believes he will lose because he encourages the Saudi Arabian government to raise oil prices.

In "They All Drowned," Skinner comes to visit Thompson's house and catches trout using a shotgun. Skinner is very interested in issues of water usage and believes the Great Salt Lake will eventually cover all of Utah. Thompson compares efforts to lower the lake to efforts to lower Lago de Amor in Colombia in hopes of finding gold.

"Four More Games" begins with Thompson's analysis of the NBA finals between the Boston Celtics and the Houston Rockets, which Thompson believes the Celtics will win easily. Thompson continues the article by complaining about Attorney General Ed Meese's forthcoming report that is expected to link pornography and violence.

Thompson is drinking at his local bar at the beginning of "Last Dance in Dumb Town," when a man from out of town walks in trying to sell a motorcycle. Thompson's neighbor Cromwell goes to take a look at the bike, which the stranger is selling for \$5,000 despite



his claim that it is worth \$10,000. Cromwell offers to race his Jeep against the bike, which Cromwell will keep if he wins. Before the race starts, a bolt of lightning hits near the bar and knocks everyone down.

In "Rise of the TV Preachers," Thompson argues that Pat Robertson will run for president because he is lured by the power his fellow evangelist Jerry Falwell seems to wield through his relationship to the White House. Thompson does not believe Robertson can win, but Robertson may end up derailing the Bush campaign.

"Dealing with Pigs" is Thompson's reaction to the release of the Meese Report. Thompson writes that the actual published report will contain examples of every type of pornography ever known and become an automatic best seller. Thompson argues that the report may secure Meese a seat on the Supreme Court but doubts that there is a connection between pornography and violence.

In "Deported to Malaysia," Thompson receives a call from his attorney who is attempting to save a Chinese man from killing himself at a bar near the golf course. Thompson brings his clubs and meets him there, telling the Chinese man that the Malaysian government will certainly kill him if he is deported. The attorney calls immigration services on the Chinese man and goes to play golf with Thompson.



# Pages 134-162

## Pages 134-162 Summary and Analysis

Thompson attends the tenth annual Erotic Film Awards in Hollywood in "A Clean, Ill-Lighted Place". Thompson writes that the pornographic theater business is in decline, and the fact is reflected in the quality of films being produced in recent years compared to the 1970s. Later, Thompson attends the showing of a pornographic movie at a drive-in outside of San Francisco and finds that the ticket man considers the films to be art.

Thompson flies out of San Francisco to Denver on the Fourth of July in "Slow Day at the Airport". The plane is almost empty and Thompson is approached by an off-duty pilot, whom Thompson eventually recognizes as a drug smuggler he knows. When they arrive in Denver, the pilot asks Thompson to take a bag and wait for him at an airport bar, which Thompson does. The bag turns out to contain cash, and the pilot is still smuggling drugs.

In "Lester Maddox Lives," Thompson writes about the final release of the Meese report and the refusal of the Supreme Court to overturn Georgia's anti-sodomy law. Former Georgia Governor Lester Maddox celebrates the preservation of the law, and Thompson is horrified that an openly segregationist governor is still a respected political figure.

Thompson finally receives an actual copy of the Meese Report in "Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll". Thompson believes that the report, combined with the news that pornographic actress Traci Lords may have been underage when she made her first films, could lead to drastic changes in the sex industry, such as removing doors from peepshow booths.

Thompson notes at the beginning of "Welcome to the Tunnel" that Reagan and most politicians take many drugs that are legal but incredibly powerful yet wage war on others. Thompson argues that the government is waging numerous wars with no regard to the federal deficit, which will continue to grow.

At the beginning of "Strictly Business," Thompson is in Phoenix watching William Rehnquist being sworn in as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Thompson gets on a flight to Toronto and sits next to a man from the Federal Bureau of Prison who complains about the growing prison population but does not seem to understand that he is part of that problem.

Thompson flies back to Phoenix in "Midnight in the Desert" and claims to make a bet with wealthy man named Jack Parker on how many yards new Dallas Cowboys quarterback Herschel Walker will gain the next season. As terms of the bet, Thompson gets the man's new Mercedes, which Thompson promptly trades in with no intention of returning to honor the bet.



Thompson mocks President Reagan and his wife Nancy's efforts to eliminate drugs from the country in "Down to a Sunless Sea". Thompson argues that every Chinese government for thousands of years have tried to eliminate opium but have failed. Furthermore, Thompson contends that opium users are less of a menace than the power hungry because opium users do not have the energy to do harm.

Thompson calls Ed Turner, an executive vice president at CNN, to discuss the news business in "The Turk Comes to TV News". Turner believes network news shows are suffering recently because they have much more competition now. However, Turner argues that this is good for the viewer and will continue to get better as local news stations expand to create a better product and better journalists.

In "Bull Market on The Strip," Thompson is betting in the Stardust Sports and Race Book in Las Vegas very early in the morning after attending the Soldier of Fortune trade show. When Thompson returns to his room, he tries to decide how he will pack the items he bought at the show, including tracer rounds and a sniper rifle, to fly back on an airplane. Eventually Thompson gets it all packed, but he has to pay a higher fee to get a limo to the airport.



# Pages 162-194

## Pages 162-194 Summary and Analysis

Thompson writes about Reagan's veto of sanctions on South Africa in "The South African Problem". Thompson believes that the veto will probably be overruled by two thirds majorities in both houses of Congress because too many members of Congress would have to change their votes to keep Reagan's veto intact. Thompson hypothesizes that Reagan is preparing to take in massive refugees from South Africa's Afrikaner population.

Reagan is meeting with Gorbachev shortly after having his veto on sanctions for South Africa overruled in "Loose Cannon on the Deck". The defeat has made Reagan angry, but Thompson thinks it might be a complicated plot to maintain Republican control of the Senate. Thompson also believes that Reagan might botch negotiations with the Soviets because of his anger over the failure of his veto.

"Let the Good Times Roll" is about all the people who died or lost their jobs in the previous week, particularly Eugen Hasenfus and Yassir Arafat. Hasenfus is a mercenary that was captured in Nicaragua, and Thompson writes that even if Hasenfus is not killed by the Nicaraguans, American intelligence will kill him for revealing secrets. Arafat is forced to relocate PLO headquarters from Tunis because the Tunisian president is divorcing his wife, who was the main PLO supporter.

In "A Death in the Family," Thompson attacks a den of red foxes. Thompson captures the alpha male fox in a cage and then covers it in peacock dung and feathers and liquid glue. As the fox runs away, Thompson shoots it with buckshot and is now sure that the fox will be eaten hawks.

"Back to the Ormsby House" is Thompson's short take on the 1986 Congressional elections, and it begins with an editorial note showing how many of Thompson's predictions from September had come true. The Democrats seize a ten seat majority in the Senate in the election, which Thompson predicts will cause President Reagan to retreat from media attention.

"The Garden of Agony" is an article written shortly before the 1986 elections that analyzes the role of money in politics. Thompson contends that the role of money has increased dramatically even over the last ten years. One of Thompson's sources goes so far as to claim that ten percent of political money is stolen either by the politician or his staffers.

Thompson returns to Phoenix in "White Trash with Money" and receives a phone call from Jack Parker regarding their bet on Herschel Walker's rushing yards. Thompson is frightened by this call because so many people in Phoenix are killed, especially



journalists who investigate corruption in business. Thompson never returns the call as Walker does not meet the set number of yards on Sunday.

Thompson writes about the beginnings of the Iran-Contra scandal in "The Lord and a Good Lawyer". Thompson believes that Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North will likely go to prison in Fort Leavenworth for destroying evidence in the case. Furthermore, North will probably bring down the Republicans' chances of holding on to the White House in 1988. For this reason, Thompson believes that Reagan and Bush will both end up resigning.

In "Ronald Reagan is Doomed," Thompson writes that people are already fleeing the Reagan Administration in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal. Thompson wonders why any Republican would risk another Watergate by sending money to the Contras from Iranian arms sales. Thompson concludes that the only person who stood to benefit from the deal is George Bush, and he is confident that this will derail Bush's presidential ambitions.

Thompson writes in "God Bless Colonel North" that the Iran-Contra scandal will make Watergate seem like a small scandal by comparison. Thompson contends that the only person involved in both scandals is White House Communications Director Patrick Buchanan, who sees the scandals as a witch hunt against Reagan. Thompson believes that the scandal is part of a long history of corruption in Republican administrations.

Thompson attempts to blow up his Jeep in "Orgy of the Dead," but discovers it to be more difficult than he had expected. Thompson, some neighbors, and some mercenaries attempt to hit the Jeep with rifles and shotguns to trigger the dynamite but are completely unsuccessful in their efforts. The Jeep sits there as a potential bomb for two days before one of Thompson's neighbor rigs some blasting caps to it and blows it up.



# Pages 194-223

## Pages 194-223 Summary and Analysis

Thompson begins "The Year of the Pig" by writing that although no one from the White House has yet been arrested for involvement in the Iran-Contra scandal that will likely change when Congress returns to session next week. Thompson believes that Reagan's actions in the next few weeks will reveal if he is dumb, stupid, or crazy, as those are the only options aside from retirement.

Thompson advises Reagan to retire in "Mixup at the Hospital" and claims to do so with affection for Reagan. Thompson sees Mitchell Daniels, the architect of the Republican campaign in the 1986 Congressional elections on television, and Daniels claims that there is no major problem for the Republican Party, but Thompson believes the party has already exploded.

One of Thompson's sources calls him at the beginning of "The Gizzard of Darkness" to say that head of the CIA William Casey is not in the hospital but that a fake is in his place. Thompson cannot verify the story and agrees to take his friend Heest to a psychic for legal advice. The psychic tells Heest he will go to prison, and Thompson asks the psychic about Casey. The psychic says Casey is in the hospital and becomes angry with Thompson for asking.

Thompson speculates on the odds of the contenders for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination in "Crazy Patrick and Big Al". Thompson believes that the strongest candidates now are Patrick Buchanan, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and Senator Bob Dole. Thompson thinks that Iran-Contra has ruined Bush and Pat Robertson but for entirely different reasons.

Jack Parker again finds Thompson in "Trapped in Harding Park" and is eager to double the bet, which Thompson lost, on the Super Bowl. Parker bets on the Denver Broncos without even taking the spread points the team is given and loses badly to Thompson. After the game, Thompson and Parker play golf, but when they try to leave the course the gate is locked, which causes Parker to panic and flee.

Thompson attacks the restrictive lifestyles of contemporary young people in "Expelled from the System". Thompson is particularly angry that high school students are being forced to take urine tests and face expulsion if they fail, and Thompson believes that this is creating a very uncreative generation who might be set to rebel at any time.

Thompson compares the Iran-Contra scandal to an unexplained environmental disaster known as the Carson Sink in "Gone with the Wind". Thompson believes that as more evidence is brought out, figures in the White House will attempt suicide as National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane has recently done. Thompson argues that this is because the Iran-Contra scandal is far more severe than Watergate.





"New Blood on the Tracks" deals with new White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, whom Thompson pities. Thompson writes that no press secretary has truly been good since either Pierre Salinger under Kennedy or Jim Brady at the beginning of Reagan's first term. Marlin now has the job he has always wanted, but Thompson believes he will soon come to hate having defended Reagan through Iran-Contra.

Thompson portrays the situation at the White House as becoming increasingly grim in "The Lake of Fire". Thompson writes that Bush might get tortured for information by his neighbors in Maine, and Reagan can now only leave the White House by wearing a disguise. Oliver North is now frequently quoting Bible verses to make it seem as though he is being persecuted, but Thompson sees this as desperation.

In "So Long, George," Thompson writes that Vice President Bush instantly went from the front runner for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination to being a long shot when correspondence proving that he put Oliver North in touch with another key Iran-Contra player surfaced.



## Pages 224-253

### Pages 224-253 Summary and Analysis

In "Doomed Love in the Rockies," Thompson is watching a presidential conference when his neighbor Tex calls claiming that his wife is dying. When Thompson arrives at Tex's house, Thompson discovers that Tex is actually just giving his alcoholic wife pills that cause her system to reject alcohol. Thompson returns home and sees that even Reagan is now turning on Bush.

"The Scum of the Earth" details a feud between famous television preachers like Jerry Falwell, Oral Roberts, Jim Bakker, and Pat Robertson. Thompson believes that the White House welcomes this development because it is distracting people from the Iran-Contra scandal, but Thompson is still revolted by the ministers' greed.

Thompson begins "The Losers' Club" with an attack on Democratic Senator Terry Sanford, who has managed to take three different positions on a bill in a single day. Thompson moves on to describe a major scandal at the United States embassy in Moscow, where Marine guards were giving female KGB agents access to everything. Thompson recommends disbanding the Marine Corps to solve this problem.

In "The Loved Ones," John Hinckley is considered for a furlough, which is ultimately denied because of a public outcry. Thompson also writes about a number of white collar people who were arrested the previous week. They are businessmen, athletes, and politicians arrested on cocaine charges, but also many supporters of Senator Gary Hart's presidential campaign caught up in a fund raising scandal.

"The Death Ship" deals with a barge of trash from the Northeast that is sailing to different ports to get rid of the trash but has been refused everywhere it goes. Thompson calls Lowell Harrelson, who is the president of the company that is responsible for the barge and finds Harrelson desperate to come up with a solution. Thompson tells Harrelson that the trash market is changing, and Harrelson agrees but is still confident that he can find a solution.

Thompson begins "The American Dream" by noting that although the odds of Democratic success looked good only a week ago, many things have changed since then. First, Oliver North is likely to go on trial soon. Second, Democratic presidential front runner Gary Hart is simultaneously involved in a fund raising and sex scandal. Hart's campaign is attempting to denounce the invasion of Hart's privacy by the press, but Thompson does not believe it will work.

In "Caligula and the 7 Dwarfs," Thompson compares the implosion of Gary Hart's political career to Casey in "Casey at the Bat," except Casey would receive another opportunity, which Hart will not. Thompson writes that Hart was the clear favorite to win

the race, but now the Democratic presidential nomination could go down to a brokered convention. Thompson believes this gives Bush a chance to become president.

Thompson draws a parallel between Watergate and Iran-Contra by reprinting what he claims is a Watergate era conversation between John Erlichman, Nixon's chief of domestic affairs, and Herbert Kalmbach, Nixon's attorney. The conversation essentially rehearses what each will say if asked to testify, and Erlichman tells Kalmbach not to mention the conversation if asked about it.

Thompson complains in "The Time of the Geek" that although the Reagan Administration is obviously criminal, the Democrats still have no hope to retake the White House because of the Gary Hart scandal. Thompson discovers that Hart was actually brought down by the divorce of Senator Joe Tydings, who suspected Hart was sleeping with his wife and hired private eyes to investigate Hart.

Thompson writes in "A Wild and Crazy Guy" that Bush celebrated wildly after the Hart scandal surfaced because it distracted the public from Iran-Contra and made him a viable presidential candidate again. After looking at a variety of statistics, Thompson concludes that the Republicans are set to hold the presidency for a generation.



## Pages 254-283

### Pages 254-283 Summary and Analysis

Thompson notes at the beginning of "Ollie's Choice" that Congress has not been as harsh on the people brought to testify about Iran-Contra as it had to people during Watergate, but Thompson is confident that is about to change. Thompson believes the central figure of the hearings will be Oliver North, and North will have to make a choice about how he will handle the hearings. If North wants to avoid prison, Thompson writes, he must turn on either Reagan or Bush.

In "The Trickle-Down Theory," Thompson predicts that Reagan will not finish his term and possibly even be impeached. Thompson is convinced that Reagan's legacy will be worse than any of the other living presidents, including Richard Nixon. Thompson essentially blames Reagan for a legacy of acid rain and AIDS and ultimately the collapse of the American Dream.

Thompson begins "Four More Years" with a short discussion of the huge numbers of schizophrenics in the United States today, and Thompson humorously suggests that the schizophrenic vote is all that the Democratic Party has left. Thompson is sure that despite the criminal behavior of the Reagan Administration, Bush will become the next president because the Democrats cannot get past arguing with each other.

Thompson argues at the beginning of "Dance of the Seven Dwarfs" that the Democratic Party has been dysfunctional for years and may not take back the presidency this century. The seven candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination debate, and Thompson believes that Illinois Senator Paul Simon clearly won the debate. After the debate, Simon goes from being a near non-entity in the race to a possible front runner.

In "It Was You, Charlie," Thompson drives to the Woody Creek Tavern for lunch and turns the television to Oliver North's testimony. Most of the bar's patrons like North, and even Thompson admits that North destroys the questions of the House of Representatives' counsel John Nields. At the end of North's testimony, Thompson reminds his friend Crazy Bob that North supplied weapons to the Iranian regime, which killed hundreds of marines in Lebanon.

Thompson marvels at how fast the political landscape has changed in the previous two months in "Fat Men on Horseback". Two months ago, Gary Hart seemed to be the probable next president and George Bush might be prosecuted as a criminal, but now the roles are reversed. Thompson concludes that the main difference between Iran-Contra and Watergate is that Iran-Contra is far more evil.

Thompson analyzes the Iran-Contra testimony of George Schultz in "Cowboys at Sea" and finds Schultz to be a fool and possibly a dupe. Thompson then relates Shultz' performance to a mine attack on Kuwaiti oil tanker flying American flags. The

comparison implies that both Schultz and the ship's captain are incompetent and badly damaged.

Thompson describes some of the questioning of Attorney General Ed Meese by the House of Representatives in "Blame It on Dead Bill". Meese easily evades questions from Nields, but New Hampshire Senator Warren Rudman, a Republican, forces Meese to admit that it was at least a failure of command if Reagan did not know about Iran-Contra. Hawaii Senator Daniel Inouye forces Meese to admit that lying to Congress is perjury.

Thompson is set to speak before a group of British motorcyclists in "The Last Taxi to Scotland" but never arrives because the person Thompson asked to drive to Denver sends another man named Earl. Earl gets the taxi stuck in the mud in the mountains, and by the time they arrive at the airport, Thompson has missed his flight and is unable to get another one for the rest of the day.

In "Swine of the Week," Thompson describes a special level of hell reserved especially for crooked politicians like Richard Nixon's vice president Spiro Agnew and Ulysses S. Grant. Thompson ponders who might qualify for the award Swine of the Week, and, after considering several candidates, Thompson awards the prize to Georgia State Senator Julian Bond, who walked away from a cocaine charge that sent his lover to prison for twenty-two years.



# Pages 284-313

## Pages 284-313 Summary and Analysis

Thompson begins the article "Here Come de Judge" writing about Reagan's new Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork. Thompson believes that Bork's performance before the Senate Judiciary Committee will likely get Bork on the court and simultaneously undermine the presidential campaign of Democratic Senator Joe Biden, who is on the committee. Thompson writes that Biden's campaign is totally destroyed by allegations of plagiarism in his speeches.

In "Wooing the Degenerate Vote," Thompson predicts that Richard Nixon will make a comeback and run for president in 1988. Thompson believes Nixon will be able to succeed by teaming up with former Secretary of State Alexander Haig and because more people will be eliminated from the race by scandal before the primaries even begin.

"The Weak in the Weird" is an analysis of Bush's campaign for the presidency. Thompson writes that Bush's recent trip to Europe was meant to showcase his diplomatic abilities, but Bush hurt himself by saying that the car companies could benefit by bringing in Russian engineers. Thompson relies on Nixon's appraisal of Bush's chances to conclude that Bush will not last through the primaries.

Thompson opens "The Time Has Come" by discussing a poll that says a majority of voters will likely vote for Bush next November, which Thompson considers to be a meaningless statistic. Again relying on Nixon's analysis of Bush, Thompson writes that Bush's popularity is directly tied to Reagan. Reagan's popularity is going down because of the failure of Bork to get past the Judiciary Committee, so Bush will fail.

In "The Worm Turns," Thompson writes that the Reagan Administration looks weak because of the cancellation of a summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. One of Thompson's supposed Republican sources claims that everything Reagan touches lately seems to be falling apart. This leads Thompson to conclude that the next president will probably be a Democrat.

Thompson predicts that 1988 will be the worst year of Reagan's presidency in "The End of an Era". Thompson lays most of the blame for Reagan's coming problems at the feet of Meese, who Thompson believes will be going to prison in the near future for his role in Iran-Contra. Thompson believes that all of the smart people have already left the Reagan Administration.

In "The Other George Bush," Skinner calls Thompson, claiming that George Bush is completely different from the way Thompson has been portraying him. Skinner claims that Bush is more intelligent than Thomas Jefferson and is a huge fan of obscure rock acts like Leonard Cohen. Thompson finds these stories unbelievable yet still disturbing.



Thompson watches a debate between Bush and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in "President Bush Will See You Now". Thompson firmly believes that Bush won the debate and that Dukakis seemed unprepared. Thompson predicts Bush will certainly win the election.

In "I Slit My Own Eyeballs," Thompson describes October as a truly horrific month for politicians running for office, even those who run unopposed.

Thompson analyzes the results of the 1988 election in "The New Dumb" and concludes that the Democratic Party has learned nothing since the 1968 election. Thompson believes the Democratic Party as a national political force is crumbling, and it is because the party ripped itself apart in 1968 and never really put itself back together since.

Thompson writes to new Secretary of State James Baker in "Letter to the President" asking for a job in the Bush Administration. Thompson promises Baker that he can eliminate the drug problem in America and claims to be a great admirer of Bush despite what he has written in the past.



# Characters

## Hunter S. Thompson

Although Thompson is the author of the book he is also the subject of many of his own stories. At the time these articles are written, Thompson is approximately fifty years old and resides in Woody Creek, Colorado. Thompson is deeply interested in politics, and his personal political beliefs are deeply left-wing, which shows through in his vicious attacks on Republicans. However, Thompson is far from a Democratic partisan, as he routinely attacks Democratic politicians like Gary Hart for being a foolish sex addict and Ted Kennedy for being a drunk and a terrible driver. Furthermore, Thompson is an avid gun and explosive enthusiast, which puts him outside the mainstream of the Democratic Party. At one point in the book, Thompson covers a red fox with peacock dung and feathers and liquid glue and then shoots it with buckshot, leaving it to be devoured by hawks. This sort of behavior is far from that of a typical liberal. Thompson is also a user of numerous intoxicating substances, many of which are illegal, and he makes no apologies for this behavior. Thompson is also a tremendous fan of sports and gambling, which frequently leaks into his writing. Thompson makes a multi-thousand dollar bet on the rushing yards of the new Dallas Cowboys quarterback near the middle of the book and is constantly obsessed with the Vegas odds on political candidates. Finally, Thompson is an adventure seeker, which is reflected in his frequent travels. For instance, Thompson moves down to Key West, Florida for a brief period in the book, where he begins a side career in marine salvage. This career is put to an end when Thompson wrecks his own boat and moves back to Colorado.

## Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan is the president of the United States throughout almost the entirety of the book, and Reagan is also the target of many, if not most, of Thompson's attacks. Thompson blames Reagan for numerous troubles in America. For example, Thompson frequently writes that acid rain and AIDS will be the primary legacy of Reagan after he is no longer president. Thompson also frequently cites a Reagan quote that the current generation might be the one to see Armageddon as proof that Reagan is obsessed with the prophecies of the Bible and could easily lead the world to nuclear annihilation. Politically, Thompson sees Reagan as savvy but not particularly intelligent. Thompson is very convinced, for instance, that Reagan is easily outwitted by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Furthermore, in Thompson's view, Reagan has squandered American reputation abroad, which is why small dictators like Moammar Khadafy pick fights with Reagan. Thompson also believes that Reagan is either dumb or disconnected enough (or both) to have been unaware of Iran-Contra scandal as it was developing. However, during most of the scandal, Thompson is confident that Reagan will likely be forced to resign to avoid impeachment. Thompson believes that the ultimate result of Reagan's presidency has been to create a "Generation of Swine" that is completely greedy and self-absorbed but could eventually lead to another revolt like the 1960s.





## George Bush

George Bush is the vice president of the United States for most of the book. Bush is also a candidate for the 1988 Presidential Election and is ultimately elected president by a wide margin over Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis at the end of the book. At the beginning of Bush's run for the presidency, Thompson does not even believe that Bush will win the Republican nomination but will instead be spoiled by either his push to raise gasoline prices or by Pat Robertson's candidacy. Bush is also heavily involved with the Iran-Contra scandal and is the only major link that seems to tie all the other figures together. Thompson believes the scandal will not just ruin Bush's presidential run but will also send him to prison.

However, Bush's chances to win are revived when Democratic Senator and leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination Gary Hart is caught up in a sex scandal. Hart's scandal takes Iran-Contra off the front page of the newspapers and makes Bush a leading candidate again. Thompson still doubts that Bush will win with roughly a year to go, but by the time Bush debates Dukakis, Thompson realizes that Bush will win the election easily. Personally, Thompson considers Bush to be a weak man but also extremely deceitful. Near the end of the book, Thompson's friend Gene Skinner tells Thompson that Bush is actually very intelligent and has more in common with Thompson than he realizes, which Thompson refuses to believe.

## Gary Hart

Gary Hart is a Democratic U.S. Senator from Colorado and the leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination at the beginning of 1987. Thompson likes Hart both as a person and a politician and considers him to be the closest thing as an heir-apparent to the presidency since Ted Kennedy. However, in April of 1987, a fund raiser for Hart is raided by federal marshals and \$30,000 is seized. This scandal is minor compared to the sex scandal that hits Hart in May. Hart's extramarital affairs are discovered because another Senator, Joe Tydings of Maryland, was going through a divorce and thought Hart was sleeping with his wife, so Tydings sent private investigators to follow Hart. The investigators discover Hart having sex with numerous women, none of which are his wife. After the scandal breaks, Thompson calls Hart foolish to be so easily brought down, but Thompson still respects Hart enough to call for his predictions about the election after Hart drops out.

## Oliver North

Oliver North is a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Marine Corps who becomes deeply involved in the Iran-Contra scandal. It is suspected that North directed the sales of weapons to the Iranian government and then attempted to destroy evidence of his involvement and the involvement of others. At the beginning of the scandal, Thompson is sure that North will face jail time and will be forced to implicate either President Reagan or Vice President Bush if he wants to avoid it. However, when North testifies



before the House of Representatives, he makes himself seem like a national hero and begins to be perceived as one by many people.

## **Ed Meese**

Ed Meese is the Attorney General under President Ronald Reagan. In the early part of the book, Meese is working on a report on the link between pornography and violence that comes to be known simply as the "Meese Report". Thompson believes the Meese report fails to establish a link between pornography and violence, but Meese still recommends restrictions on pornography in the report. Later, Meese is implicated in the Iran-Contra scandal as the person who ordered Oliver North to destroy evidence. When Meese is called to testify before the Senate, he deals easily with the Senate's counsel, but when he is questioned by the sitting senators themselves, he almost admits to committing perjury.

## **Patrick Buchanan**

Patrick "Pat" Buchanan is the White House Communications Director under Ronald Reagan from 1985 to 1987. While Thompson's politics are far to the left of the very conservative Buchanan, Thompson still has an immense respect for Buchanan's political instincts and rhetorical skills. Buchanan also worked as a speech writer for Richard Nixon, but escaped punishment during Watergate. However, Thompson believes at the beginning of the Iran-Contra hearings that Buchanan will be forced to testify and possibly sent to jail. Buchanan is never forced to testify and instead leaves the White House to make a run for the presidency himself in 1988.

## **Moammar Khadafy**

Moammar Khadafy is the military dictator of Libya and orchestrator of several terrorist attacks on airplanes. Khadafy instigates numerous fights with President Ronald Reagan. When Reagan threatens to respond with military force, Khadafy threatens to recruit an army of suicide terrorists to attack the United States. Thompson believes that Reagan's decision to send United States Marines into Lebanon and then pull them out after hundreds are killed in a bomb attack has left the United States with no credibility in the world, which is why Khadafy is able to threaten the United States. Reagan eventually orders a bomb attack on Libya and Khadafy himself, but Khadafy survives.

## **Baby Doc Duvalier**

Baby Doc Duvalier is the dictator of Haiti until he is overthrown in February, 1986. Duvalier flees Haiti for France, leaving the country in complete chaos. Thompson plans to go to Haiti with his friend Gene Skinner to report on the situation, but they are unable to go because Duvalier's personal army the Tonton Macoute kills all of Skinner's



contacts. Thompson writes several times that there should be some isolated island where deposed dictators like Duvalier go to swap stories of massive oppression.

## **Pat Robertson**

Pat Robertson is a very popular televangelist who makes runs for the Republican presidential nomination in 1988. Thompson writes that Robertson seems friendly on television, but Thompson hates the Christian politics of Robertson and others like him. Thompson does believe for much of the book that Robertson has the power to act as a spoiler in the Republican primary and derail Vice President George Bush's campaign.

## **Gene Skinner**

Gene Skinner is a friend of Thompson's and a political analyst. Thompson frequently calls Skinner to discuss the odds of different candidates winning elections. Skinner tries to get Thompson and himself into Haiti after Baby Doc Duvalier is deposed, but this proves to be impossible as Duvalier's private army, the Tonton Macoute, murders all of Skinner's contacts. Near the end of the book, Skinner drunkenly calls Thompson and tells him that George Bush is actually a very intelligent rebel who listens to rock and roll and recites poetry, but Thompson refuses to believe Skinner.

## **Maria Khan**

Maria Khan is Thompson's girlfriend and aide throughout the book. Thompson devotes the book in part to Khan. While Khan is mentioned in numerous articles, only in the first article does Khan actually take an active role in the story when she gets a tattoo to provide a story for Thompson.



## Objects/Places

### Woody Creek, Colorado

Woody Creek is where Thompson makes his permanent residence and the location of the Woody Creek Tavern, which Thompson often frequents.

### San Francisco

San Francisco is the headquarters of The San Francisco Examiner for which Thompson works. Thompson also spends a great deal of his time in San Francisco.

### Coral Gables, Florida

Coral Gables is the headquarters of the National Hurricane Center, headed by Dr. Neil Frank, whom Thompson considers to be completely incompetent.

### Key West, Florida

Key West is where Thompson moves briefly and enters the marine salvage business.

### Haiti

Haiti is a small country in the Caribbean that is ruled by a dictator called Baby Doc Duvalier until he is deposed in February, 1986.

### Denver

Denver is the location of the airport that Thompson uses whenever he must fly.

### Libya

Libya is a country in North Africa, which is ruled by Moammar Khadafy, who routinely picks fights with President Ronald Reagan.

### Phoenix

Phoenix is the city where Thompson meets Jack Parker and makes a bet with him about Dallas Cowboys quarterback Herschel Walker's rushing yards. Thompson also



describes it as a incredibly corrupt city where people are routinely killed for writing articles against established powers.

## **Las Vegas**

Thompson attends a Soldier of Fortune conference in Las Vegas and also calls there for odds on elections.

## **Washington D.C.**

The capital of the United States where most of the political activity of the book takes place.

## **Los Angeles**

Los Angeles is where Thompson attends the eighteenth annual convention of the Adult Film Association of America.

## **South Africa**

South Africa is a country at the southern tip of Africa, ruled by a brutal white government that Thompson claims to be the worst in the world.

## **Iran**

Iran is a country in the Middle East, and its government paid for American weapons supplied by Oliver North.

## **Nicaragua**

Nicaragua is a Central American country that is run by Communist government known as the Sandinistas. The Reagan Administration uses the money raised from selling weapons to Iran to fund the Contras, who hope to overthrow the Sandinista government.



# Themes

## The Generation of Swine

Throughout the book, Thompson frequently argues that the generation that has come of age under the Reagan Administration is fundamentally corrupted, and he refers to them as a "Generation of Swine". Two of the primary forces that Thompson believes have corrupted American youth are acid rain and AIDS, both of which Thompson at least partially blames on Reagan. Thompson believes that acid rain and AIDS have terrified young people of both sex and nature, which Thompson sees as great forces for good. With young people avoiding sex and nature, there is nothing left for them but greed and self-advancement. However, even that is undermined by new and strict policies appearing in schools that force drug tests on students and expel those who fail. According to Thompson, these policies could easily create a large number of people who will be totally excluded from the system. These people will soon become ripe to rebel against the society that has so marginalized them. Thompson thinks that a rebellion of this size could equal that seen in the 1960s. However, while Thompson is occasionally hopeful for the future, he mostly argues that this generation is doomed because the old, magical sense of America as a place of limitless opportunities is now gone and the American dream is dead. Thompson finds it near impossible that any generation could continue to hope for something better through all of that.

## Watergate versus Iran-Contra

Once the Iran-Contra scandal becomes a major piece of news, Thompson continuously compares it to the Watergate scandal under President Nixon. Thompson is immediately certain that Iran-Contra is worse than Watergate because Iran-Contra involves selling weapons to one of America's primary enemies who then used those weapons to attack American soldiers, which might actually constitute treason. On the other hand, Watergate is just one presidential candidate spying on another, which Thompson considers to be almost normal in the political world. As Iran-Contra plays out, however, Thompson develops ever more reasons why Iran-Contra is worse than Watergate. The most important of these reasons being that the people involved with Watergate were actually punished. G. Gordon Liddy goes to prison and Richard Nixon is forced to resign before being impeached. Initially, Thompson believes that the same will happen with Iran-Contra except with even more people in prison, but Thompson is disgusted with American politics when almost every key player in Iran-Contra avoids punishment. Finally, Thompson believes that the people involved with Watergate were for the most part more fundamentally decent than the people who orchestrate Iran-Contra. Thompson sees the people involved in Iran-Contra as motivated by almost pure evil and compares them to the Hell's Angels.



## Apocalypse

Throughout the book, Thompson obsesses over the idea that the world is coming to an end or that at the very least American society is doomed. This is reflected in Thompson's tendency to quote from the Book of Revelation, which describes the end of the world. Thompson quotes more from the Book of Revelation than any other text in part because a Bible is always readily available in any hotel room but also because he finds the madness in its apocalyptic language captivating. Thompson also frequently refers to a quote from President Ronald Reagan in which Reagan claims that the current generation might face the Apocalypse. Thompson takes this as an indication that Reagan is a true believer in things like the Book of Revelation and is probably consciously trying to bring on the end of the world. However, even if Reagan is not trying to end the world, Thompson is certain that the thought of the Apocalypse does not frighten Reagan. Thompson believes that because Reagan does not fear the end of the world, Reagan may get the United States involved in a nuclear war with the Soviet Union that will doom the world without any intervention from God. Finally, Thompson is also convinced that even if the world is not destroyed, Reagan has doomed the United States with a legacy of AIDS and acid rain, which have corrupted an entire generation of young people.

# Style

## Perspective

Although Thompson is a journalist, he almost always writes from a first person point of view. Thompson interjects himself heavily into his own stories, which is one of the main characteristics of the Gonzo style of journalism Thompson pioneered in the 1960s and early 1970s. However, Thompson is not completely reliable as a journalist. Many of the things he describes are either exaggerated or never happened at all, and it is up to the reader to read between the lines as to what is fact and fiction. This style creates a kind of exaggerated version of reality that is more capable of capturing how an event feels than a traditional piece of journalism.

Thompson is already a counter-culture legend by the time he begins writing the articles in this book. Thompson is made famous in the mid 1960s and early 1970s with books on the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang, a drug-fueled trip Thompson takes to Las Vegas with his attorney, and Thompson's coverage of the 1972 presidential election. Thompson is deeply committed to leftist politics, which is reflected in his numerous attacks on Republican politicians. On the other hand, Thompson possesses a fundamental mistrust of politicians regardless of their ideology, so Democrats also come in for intense scrutiny as well. The main difference between Thompson's attacks on Republicans and Democrats is that he rarely attacks a Democrat's motives, just their strategies.

## Tone

Thompson's tone throughout the book is combative and cynical. Thompson rails against the evils that he sees all around him, but Thompson has little faith that they will ever be remedied. For instance, Thompson frequently expresses his desire that everyone involved with the Iran-Contra should go to prison, and he compares the Reagan Administration to the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang. Thompson even expects that many of the key players in Iran-Contra will go to prison based on what happened to those involved with Watergate. However, when almost no one suffers consequences from the scandal, Thompson does not seem surprised by the outcome. Thompson sees the American political system as so basically corrupt that even what he sees as completely unjust outcomes do not shock him. Thompson also frequently writes about the possibility of the end of the world or the collapse of American society. Thompson blames most of the problems that could lead to such dire outcomes on the Reagan Administration, but Thompson also seems to imply that if the world was destroyed or American society did collapse, people might deserve it. Although Thompson's most frequent targets are politicians, Thompson never allows the people who elected those politicians to retreat from responsibility for their actions. Thompson is ultimately attacking large swaths of the American populace in his writing, but Thompson refuses to believe that people will change.



## Structure

The book is divided into one hundred and six different essays. Most of these essays are about three pages in length, and the vast majority of them were written for The San Francisco Examiner between 1985 and 1988. Two major exceptions to the latter rule are the opening essay and the closing essay. The first is an author's note that sets the stage for the rest of the book, and the second is a letter by Thompson to George Bush, who Thompson assumes will win the 1988 presidential election, offering Thompson's services to Bush. Because the election of Bush closes out the Reagan era, this letter also closes out the book. The essays at the very beginning of the book are not organized in any particular way but were likely selected to appear at the beginning because they were considered the best essays in the book. However, by page thirty, the essays begin to fall in chronological order. There is usually one a week from September, 1985 until October, 1987, but there are several gaps in that time period where articles either were never written or were not chosen to be published in this collection. The articles near the end of the book are still in roughly chronological order, but they are far more spaced out than those covering 1985 through 1987. The last five articles are the only ones written in 1988, but the first one is written in March of that year while the latest is written in late November.



## Quotes

"What do you say, for instance, about a generation that has been taught that rain is poison and sex is death? If making love might be fatal and if a cool spring rain on any summer afternoon can turn a crystal blue lake into a puddle of black poison scum right in front of your eyes, there is not much left except TV and relentless masturbation."  
Author's Note, pp. 10-11

"A Democratic victory would not change the world, but it would at least slow the berserk white-trash momentum of the bombs-and-Jesus crowd. Those people have had their way long enough. Not even the Book of Revelation threatens a plague of vengeful yahoos." Showdown in the Pig Palace, p. 18

"There are many rooms in the mansion, and weirdness governs in most of them." The Worst People in the World, p. 47

"These things happen. One day you run everything, and the next day you run like a dog." Just Another Terrorist, p. 110

"Some things are unacceptable, regardless of partisan politics, and the inexorable rise and rebirth of swine like Maddox is one of them...The man would embarrass South Africa. They would probably take away his passport and restrict him to the company of people like Idi Amin or Dr. Joseph Mengele. If Lester Maddox lives, something far better has died." Lester Maddox Lives, p. 142

"Political gibberish is not a purely American art form, like jazz and safety blitz. But in only 200 years we have raised it to a level of eloquence beyond anything since the time of the Caesars or even Genghis Khan...." The Lord and a Good Lawyer, p. 182

"He [George Bush] has the instincts of a dung beetle. No living politician can match his talent for soiling himself in public. Bush will seek out filth wherever it lives—going without sleep for days at a time, if necessary—and when he finds a new heap he will fall down and wallow crazily in it, making snorting sounds out of his nose and rolling over on his back and kicking his legs up in the air like a wild hog coming to water." The Scum of the Earth, p. 228

"Oral Roberts is a greed-crazed white-trash lunatic who should have been hung upside down from a telephone poll on the outskirts of Tulsa 44 years ago before he somehow transmogrified into the money-sucking animal that he became when he discovered television." The Scum of the Earth, p. 229

"Those lines would never have been written if Daisy had been a carrier of AIDS, or if Gatsby's lonely swimming pool took on a crust of poison water every time it rained." The Trickle-Down Theory, p. 258



"They [politicians] are mainly dull people with corrupt instincts and criminal children."  
Dance of the Seven Dwarfs, p. 265

"But Henry Kissinger, for all his nasty faults, was a true prince among men, compared with the half-bright rejects, Marine vets and born-again Annapolis grads that Ronald Reagan hired to work in the White House basement and run the National Security apparatus like a gang of demented Hell's Angels." Fat Men on Horseback, p. 271

"Any conversation that can make smart people confront a mix of Death, Doom and Failure with a straight face is probably one worth listening in on. They don't come around real often, and when they do it almost always means that at least two of the people doing the talking are in very serious trouble." The End of an Era, p. 299



## Topics for Discussion

Why is the generation that came of age under Reagan a "Generation of Swine"?

Do you agree with Thompson that the Iran-Contra scandals is worse than Watergate? Why or why not?

What is Thompson's opinion of Ronald Reagan?

How does Thompson believe George Bush is able to win the presidency after Thompson writes off his campaign early on?

What is the Meese Report and how does Thompson feel about it?

Thompson frequently quotes Ronald Reagan as saying that the current generation may witness the Apocalypse. What is the significance of this quote for Thompson?

According to Thompson, why do third world dictators like Moammar Khadafy attack the United States?

By the end of the book, Thompson believes that the Democratic Party is falling apart. What does he see as the party's primary problems?

How does Thompson view Richard Nixon and how does he relate to the Reagan era according to Thompson?