

CAROLINA!

Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson

By ERIC GLENN
Photo Editor

A few weeks back, I was sitting in my office, well maybe not mine, but an office never the less, and rifling through a mountain of press releases on obscure bands, dull movies, and too-long-running theatre productions. I was looking for something to review, but all the good ones were gone. Such is life.

But down at the bottom towards the back was a book and a folder labeled "Hunter." On the cover was an ominous man wearing mismatched clothes and toting an equally ominous shotgun.

So naturally I flipped through it. It seems we had been granted an interview with the lovely Miss E. Jean Carroll, and I, not being one to miss a chance to talk to someone other than myself, decided this was a task demanding my unique talents. Little did I know that within the confines of that biography of Hunter S. Thompson, a gonzo journalist in the early '70s, was debauchery galore, emotional devastation, hilarious escapades, numerous sex tools and more than a few moments that would bring me to love, hate, revere and loathe its subject.

It seemed like a simple enough assignment. Read the book, talk to the writer, write the review. Idealism is grand. So I started in on it.

THE REVIEW

"He was god, he was everything, he was Hunter," was the author's opinion of who he was, but I think that it is more adept to say he is a man shrouded in a myth. And this book has helped to dispel a little of it.

The thing that kept popping into my head as I went deeper into the book was the way Thompson would do things that no one else would.

He was the guy who would dare to do the unthinkable and stand in awe when he succeeded time and time again. But these were acts we wanted to perpetuate. He would say the things that we wanted to say and could only say in our deepest nightmares.

He was such a gifted liar that he was able

to tell the truth, without benefit of source or fact, for the sheer reason that it was true or maybe it just needed to be said.

To the generation born at the end of Vietnam, Hunter S. Thompson is only a footnote in American history, but to the generation that came before us, he was one of the most widely read and listened to writers of his time, writing for a small underground publication called Rolling Stone. His freedom to state the obvious and to say the things that John Chancellor couldn't, or wouldn't, had made him attractive to many and a target for some.

His rise in the '70s after a stint with Rolling Stone and a number of hit books to his credit, such as "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," "Hell's Angels," and "Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72," Thompson was bound to eventually be written about.

The book itself is written in a strange, but intriguing way, switching between chapters from biographical interviews to account Thompson's life to fictionalistic accounts from Hunter's Colorado farm.

Instead of a boring two hundred page essay tracking his life day to day and year to year, E. Jean Carroll opted for a more stylish and more honest view of her subject. A friend of Thompson's for a few years, Carroll had access in a way that allowed for an in-depth interview with the man of today and several dozen interviews with the people who knew him best. Through these interviews she has created a tapestry of rich hues using Hunter himself as the pattern and his friends, loves, enemies and family as the fabric.

Carroll creates a fictional character in Leatia Snap, Ph.D., an expert on birds, who journeys to Hunters ranch in Colorado to examine his prized peacocks not knowing that ultimately she would have clothes hacked off with a rather large knife in a hot tub and forced to write her oppressor's biography.

It is through this character that the author chose to weave her tale. At first, the use of a third party to tell a story was a little hard to get used to, but after chapter 3 I stopped won-

dering if she was real, and I stopped caring. The character, if not the person, was real and that was good enough.

I asked the author why she chose to show all these things, the guns, the drugs, the indulgence, through the eyes of a fictional character, (in reality Leatia Snap was the girl friend of the most famous murderer in pre-1800's England, Johnathan Wilde). "I promised Hunter I wouldn't send him to jail," she said. "The man commits felonies from the time he gets up till he goes to bed. This way it's inadmissible in court."

In Snap, Carroll invested virtues and chastity and a certain amount of conservativeness that is hilarious and startling when it comes up against the deplorable creature that calls itself Hunter. The author purposely made her a tame person, passive in every sense of the word, and into this world of sex, drugs, guns, and creativity she is thrown.

The results are varied to say the least. But through the interactions of host and guest, we start to get a picture of Hunter that he doesn't want to be seen, the real side that is inside the myth.

"The myth has taken over. I'm really in the way as a person." Hunter said.

The persona that he projected for thirty years is that of a misfit, a weirdo, an anarchist and an egomaniac. And at the start of the book this is reinforced. But as we switch back and forth between the biographical sections of the book that look at his early life, we see the things that shaped his life. We are witness to the quiet impact of his father's death on him, and we see his relationships with family, friends and eventually the law. We are privy to the beginnings.

We see how the people around him adore him and his neglect of that love. We watch as his marriage breaks up and, through the interviews with his ex-wife, we see the torment of



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Author E. Jean Carroll


lost love.

The ironic thing is that through the entire book the only people that really had a problem with Hunter were authorities and the society that he disassociated himself with.

E. Jean Carroll has created a brilliant biography that could have been filled with judgment and sarcasm but isn't. Through the interviews with the people that knew him, we are given an honest picture, both good and bad. From the writer we have no decree of judgement, no commentary. She just sits back and lets us make up our mind as to who he is. I liked that.

The format is what endeared the book to me. The fact that she didn't tell me what to think as so many other bio's do. Through the length of the book, we get millisecond revelations as to who he really is, the generosity as well as the cruelty.

Some people go through life and are misunderstood, mislabeled, and misquoted. Hopefully this biography will clear up a little of the myth and show more of the man.



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