FEAR AND LOATHING



Illustration by Ralph Steadman, used without his knowledge or consent.

Editor's Note: Raoul Duke, a.k.a. Duke, a.k.a. Doctor Gonzo, in actuality Hunter S. Thompson, is coming to Dal this March 15 for an 8 p.m. "lecture" in the McInnes Room of the SUB. The following is the text of an encounter Paul Kaihla had with the

By Paul Kaihla

Some would call Dr. Hunter S. Thompson a perennial pessimist. He's suffered from an addiction to involvement with the more haunting aspect of existence not to mention cocaine, speed, LSD, ether, fast cars, Vincent Black Shadows, guns and anything else that can provide an adrenalin rush

As America's "Gonzo" journalist he's written a lot about the "doomed species" in society. Take for example, the Hell's Angels ("they're losers who turned mean and vengeful instead of just giving up"), or what he refers to as "the whiskey gentry" one would find at the Kentucky Derby ("a pretentious mix of booze, failed dreams and a terminal identity crisis; the inevitable result of too much inbreeding in a closed and ignorant culture"), or former U.S. Vice-President Hubert Humphrey ("they don't hardly make 'em like Hubert any more — but just to be on the safe side, he should be castrated anyway").

Because of a quasi-suicidal approach to life which involves a massive drug habit, nearcontinuous alcohol consumption and other forms of intense physical abuse, Thompson is rather surprised that he himself is still alive and well today.

Hunter S. Thompson's first book was about the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang and was published in 1966. It wasn't until five years later, really, that he became simultaneously a recognizable best-selling author and a counter-culture hero, when Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream was printed in Rolling Stone magazine and then in book form.

He carried on in the Gonzo mode at Rolling Stone as its 'national affairs correspondent" (you can still find his name in the masthead today). His coverage of the 1972 presidential election for them resulted in another book: Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72.

Thompson's most successful book, an anthology of his works under the title The Great Shark Hunt, came out in 1979. Thompson's eccentric public image and lifestyle have made him a subject of satire in the movies (in the film Where the Buffalo Roam) and in the comics (as Zonker's "Uncle Duke" in the Doonesbury strip). It's not difficult to follow the thread of pessimism in Thompson's writing. He set the tone of his 1972 campaign coverage at an early stage with this: "...the weight of the evidence filtering down from the high brain-rooms of both the New York Times and

the Washington Post seems to say very leery of Canadians in we're all fucked ... I feel The Fear coming on." Two years later, in an article where Thompson joyfully discusses the inevitable fall of the scandal-ridden Nixon presidence, he still is unable to see any light at the end of the tunnel and is forced to ask, "...are we entering The Age of Fear?"

Today, Thompson quips "this is the time of fear and loathing". In this era of economic failure and gutless acquiescence to the reigning conservatism, his pessimism has never been more justified.

Of course, there is a lighter and extremely humorous side to Thompson, as illustrated by this satirical account of the 1973 Superbowl:

They came together on a hot afternoon in Los Angeles, howling and clawing at each other like wild beasts in heat.

Under a brown California sky, the fierceness of their struggle brought tears to the e 90,000 God-fearing far 7

They were twenty-two men who were somehow more than

They were giants, idols, titans... And they yearned for the Ultimate Glory, the Great Prize, the Final Fruits of a long and vicious campaign. Victory in the Super Bowl:

\$15,000 each They could almost taste it. The smell was stronger than a ton of

rotten mangoes. Their nerves burned like open sores on a tog's neck. White knuckles. Wild eyes. Strange fluid welled up in their throats, with a taste far sharper than bile.

Thompson hasn't been heard from much in the past while. He hasn't written for Rolling Stone in more than four years. But he'll soon have two books out on the market: The Curse of Lono - a collaborative effort with British illustrator Ralph Steadman, who's done drawings for Thompson's books and articles since 1970 when Gonzo Journalism was first invented — and a novel called The Silk Road.

Thompson still lives in the arid hills of Colorado near Aspen. where he caused a minor revolt Thompson: I want this very pre-13 years ago when he ran for sheriff on the "freak power" ticket. He drew national media Thompson: You know, I've attention after shaving his head take hallucinogenic drugs while guy's name? on duty if elected, and rip up the Q: John Picton.

sional cock-eyed glance.

from an Aspen sidewalk cafe, very heart of my kind of rests on his porch. Inside is a journalism. twisted metal sculpture called system.

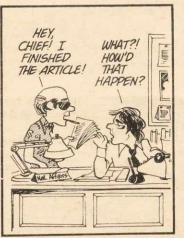
livid over an article about him which had appeared in the out-Gonzo me. But really, if you Toronto Star some weeks earlier. can't write Gonzo journalism, There was a large element of you shouldn't write it at all. And slander in it and he'd become drunken Irishmen shouldn't be

general. After an evening of preliminary discussion and debauchery in the local Holiday Inn lounge, Thompson advised me to fetch him the next day at 1:00 p.m. to do the interview. "I'll just be getting up and will be very crabby, so don't get upset if I call you a pigfucker or other nasty things when you bang on the door," he

Democratic Party).

drinks on the table) Q: They're all yours. I know

clear up first. Thomspon: Why don't we talk



bring up. O: Ya.

bald and announcing he would the Toronto Star. But ... what's that streets with jackhammers. "The Thompson: Well, Picton came vahoos were convinced the Anti- down here and got very drunk. Christ had finally appeared - What he did to me was on the right there in Aspen," Thompson same level as, say, you going said shortly after his narrow loss. back and bouncing a check on Thompson has given up the me (the Doctor had cashed a Doberman Pincers and barbed personal check for me), and then wire coils which once guarded writing that I bounced a check his cabin. His crabgrass yard is on you. Picton actually reported livened up by a half-dozen odd that I, covering politics for Rolpeacocks which stop their strut- ling Stone, exchanged mentions ting only to give visitors an occa- of politicians for favors involving sex and drugs. There was never A large Cinzano umbrella any mention of that, and that which looks as if it were swiped kind of accusation strikes at the

I probably should sue, or "The Next President," a Ralph maybe write letters to the editor Steadman drawing of Bob Dylan, - we all know how much good curtains made from American that does - but the whole thing flags, and an 80-speaker stereo punched a serious hole in my regard for the Star and Canadian When I met Thompson he was journalism in general. I think he was just trying to

He also suggested a good way to jar his mind into the proper gear for talking serious politics; Just ask me if Frank Mankiewicz is an honest man ... " (Mankiewicz is a friend of Thompson from the 1972 presidential campaign, and an old fixer on the left of the

What follows is a candid text of Thompson's views on the Toronto Star, Gonzo Journalism, the state of American politics, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, the '72 campaign, George McGovern, and the ntegrity of Frank Mankiewicz.

Thompson: This is mine right? (pointing to one of the several

you're anxious to talk about the honesty of Frank Mankiewicz, out there's one thing we have to

about the Toronto Star first? Q: That's what I was going to

cise. Is your mike picking this up?

always had a certain affection for

sent down to drink with me unless they're in good shape this one couldn't drink and he can't write

Q: So you've been pretty leery of Canadian journalists, eh?

Thompson: Wouldn't you after that? I don't mind being flogged and flayed in print - Time magazine beats the shit out of me all the time — but that strikes me as being one of the worst insults I've ever had.

Q: I should mention your new book in my story.

Thompson: That's The Silk Road. my notion of the road we've been travelling to get where we are now - which is a bad place. It's a book about the Haitian Freedom Flotilla - when a hundred Cuban refugees flooded Key West - that's the background of the novel The Silk Road is also a metaphor for the ocean.

Q: What has the lull in your writing in the past few years been, a vacation, or a block?

Thompson: Ahhh, more like giving up journalism. I keep giving up journalism. I gave up journalism before every book I've done. lv'e given up journalism once

What I missed about not doing journalism is the sense of getting interested in that story you see on the Atlanta news at maybe four in the morning, and picking up the phone and saying I want to go to Sudan and talk to Arafat. I've done things like going to Saigon; all the stories have been fast judgements. I miss the sense of being involved, but the price you pay for it is writing hurried. unedited stuff - having first drafts appear.

Q: Well that's gonzo, to go with the first draft.

Thompson: Well, not in the case of the Vegas book. That's about four or five drafts, the last time I



ever did that. But you suddenly realize that everything you write, like at four in the morning when you've been up for three days, will end up in libraries and, you know, your children will read it which takes all the fun out of

Q: Let's get to the main topic: how would you compare the zeitgeist of the Eighties to that of the Sixties?

Thompson: Well it's a different time in the sense that as a gambler, the odds politically, culturally, or even personally, are much higher now against taking risks, doing new things and have new ideas. It just appears to be a time of ... Q: Digging into the trenches?

Thompson: Ya, cheapness, meanness and fear. This is the time of fear and loathing really; this is the generation we've been waiting for. This is the Herpes Generation

Q: What do you see as the time period of the Sixties?

Thompson: I would say from 1960, the time of the first Nixon-Kennedy debate, to the time of Nixon's disappearance. The euphoria lasted into '75, but somehow all the hopefulness that came out of Watergate - that the system does work - we've cured the ills - has just turned out to be an illusion. The graph should have started going up after we got rid of Nixon, but instead of that there was just kind of a jagged peak, and then the graph went down again. It's been going down ever since. O: Why?

Thompson: Well, Jimmy Carter didn't do anybody any good. I happen to be, not a liberal, or a Democrat for that matter...I'm sort of an anarchist. But I still believe that if after Nixon, Carter or any other Democrat could have come in and demonstrated a real sense of achievement that things would get better for everybody and not just the rich - we would be living in a different time today.

Q: Through Rolling Stone you were the earliest and most outspoken supporter of Carter. Did he deceive you?

Thompson: I think Carter deceived himself as much as he deceived anyone else. I have 12 hours of tape of Carter in his living room in Plains in '74. I would still endorse his aspirations,

which I believe were pure and real, but it's a very sad thing to listen to Carter saying to me in his livingroom in '74 how he's going to run the country based on a few random successes in running Georgia. The voice

sounds like a teenager — a civics student in high school.

Carter was essentially an analretentive military freak who

could play Georgia politics, but not national politics. It's not that fucking hard to go into Washington and function - you could do it. You take it for granted that people are against you. That's part of the game. I think Carter was surprised that people were not going to pave the streets with peanuts or something.

I've never done anything with those tapes; I was thinking of doing something with them -

"PXXT? NOOB.

PHLAP-SLABBLE

KPPT SALMOKK

LIPPY. GORPLER

WHAT ?!

LET ME

SEE THAT!

maybe selling them back to

O: Well now we have Reagan

Do you see him as an extension

of what you called "The rotten,

fascist context of what was hap-

Thompson: It's called profit-tak-

ing. I see the whole Administra-

tion as just a profit-taking opera-

tion. Ya, the ship's sinking, it's

pening to America" under

Carter

Nixon?



time to get what you can now -"I've got mine Jack." Not many people are in a position to do it, whereas Bechtel Corpora-

Mankiewicz said Richard Nixon was the only person he knew of who went into politics to get rich. Well, he wasn't thinking of these guys in the Reagan Administration. Now even Nixon's rich, and Frank's not.

Q: But is he an honest man? hompson: (very long pause) Oh, that's a tricky question. Ya. va. I'd say Frank Mankiewicz is an honest man. He's one of these devious people you run across, but people who are honest have to develop defence mechanisms.

Q: When you covered the 1972 presidential campaign for Roling Stone, and Frank Mankiewicz was (Democratic candidate) George McGovern's strategist, you used to call him up at five in the morning to hit him with questions while his defences were down. How did he handle that? Thompson: He was pissed off all the time. I could've called someone else's press secretary or campaign manager, but then Frank would've lost a chance to get one of his priceless observations in. That's the business we're in, 24 hours a day.

Q: In that campaign you were the earliest and most outspoken

supporter of McGovern (who lost the election by a landslide to Richard Nixon); have you gone as sour on him as you have on Carter?

Thompson: George McGovern is one of the most decent men I've met anywhere. Bobby Kennedy once described him as "the most decent man in the Senate. He's a class act on his own...and you know, you don't find men in politics like that very often. To be described as "the most decent man in the Senate" is getting to be a smaller and smaller compliment now that we're find-



ing out they're all crooks, degenerates, swine, and thieves.

O: It's no secret that McGovern's thinking of running in '84; what odds would you give him for getting the nomination?

Thompson: I'd take McGovern at 100 to 1 - which is what I game him in '72 when he did win the nomination - and (Colorado Senator) Gary Hart at 50 to

Q: You've been spreading a rumor that Richard Nixon might have the gall to run also.

Thompson: (In a brooding tone) I never thought he was gone . never.

O: What would that mean for

Thompson: If Nixon ran again . Fuck, I'd sell the ranch and pay my own expenses. I would set up a bureau and kick out the jams! You know, fuck the libel laws, to hell with the courts. I don't think I could stand to cover another campaign, but Nixon running would do it.

There might not be any difference between Reagan and Nixon in terms of who runs for President, except for that Nixon believed he was in charge - it never occurred to Reagan. Reagan's just an overworked salesman . . . all those dumb movies, Governor of California, working for G.E. for 10 years peddling light bulbs.

Nixon is a more complex and ambitious type of monster. He's like a dog that might go mad. You can program it, but you can't guarantee it.

He went out one morning at five o'clock drunk as a loon - I mean berserk drunk. He'd been pacing around the White House while anti-war demonstrators were outside by the Washington Monument, and insisted that a phalanx of Secret Service agents

be woken up. The President wanted to go and talk to those kids out there, who were there for a very serious demonstration. And that crazy bastard lurched out into the streets, had himself kind of propped up and dragged down them all, and wandered around the crowds.

There he was spitting gin bubbles and talking about football and the good old days - completely nuts.

People weren't even sure if it was him. Nobody cared. Nobody even pointed a stick at him, much less a gun. You couldn't shoot a fool like that.

But they shot both Kennedys. And they even shot Reagan, Now it's about time we started saying 'we'' shot those people.

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