

Abdullah: This podcast is for adults 21 years of age or older. We talk about cannabis history and advertise cannabis products. If you're not 21 come back when you are.

[*Spoke Media*]

Abdullah: Hey, how's it going folks? It's Abdullah.

Bean: And Bean.

Abdullah: And welcome back for yet another episode of great moments in weed history. On this podcast. My partner and I, who are both cannabis journalists and media makers go through one of the more fascinating points in the very, very long history of cannabis. I have no prior knowledge of the story we're about to hear, Bean has written and researched it and he's going to be telling it to me and to you, we are going to smoke some weed, we're going to have some tea. We're going to have a good time. Bean, what do you got going on?

Bean: Oh, I've got a story for you today that is on the grand scale about fucking with the man and it stars somebody who is not just a weed hero and not just a media hero, but for both of us. I think a weed media hero.

Abdullah: Ah, I'm stoked to hear about it. I'm about to twist up a J here. Let me get started.

Bean: Yeah. If you're not quite there at home now as a wonderful time to hit pause. Do what my partner is doing. Roll something up. Pack something up. Split your blunt. Cause if you're ready and we're ready. I think it's time for another

[*Great Moments in Weed History Theme*]

[*Spoke Media*]

Abdullah: Alrighty. So Bean, I've got this weed ground up here. Why don't you get us started?

Bean: in 1967 New York times magazine published an article titled *the hashbury is the capital of the hippies*. It was written by a young journalist who is not just reporting on the summer of love. So this is 196. In real time, but he is experiencing it full throttle. He's right in the thick of the action.

Abdullah: Interesting. So, uh, he's in San Francisco and Hashbury is a, a word for Ashbury, I suppose. Like the neighborhood, The street in San Francisco.

Bean: Yeah. Well it's these two streets that intersect Haight and Ashbury in San Francisco. And this is like the center of psychedelic culture, center of weed culture. At one time the grateful dead are living there in a communal house. Janis Joplin lives there, the Jefferson airplane,

Jimmy Hendrix. It's like all happening. This is the summer of love and this journalist gets like his first big break to write a story about it.

Abdullah: Gotcha. Wow. What a fun assignment.

Bean: Yeah. Let me give you a little line from the story and then maybe you've got a guess who we're talking about, I think we're getting close to guess time, but let me read this one first. He says, this neighborhood is the orgiastic tip of a great psychedelic iceberg. Marijuana is everywhere in hashbury. People smoke it on the sidewalks and donut shops sitting in parked cars or just lounging on the grass and golden gate park.

Abdullah: Okay. Who would this be? It's 67.

Bean: This journalist's brief residency in San Francisco kind of retains the afterglow of a golden era for the rest of his life. This is like, you know, people who - I talked to a lot of old hippies, you know, personally and professionally. And you know, this is one of those golden areas in history that I think in a hundred years people will still look back on or 500 years, you know, we had an episode where we talked about Paris in the 20s and what that meant, and this is like the psychedelic version of that. And this journalist is like, I said, you know,

Abdullah: Is It Hunter S Thompson?

Bean: It is Hunter S. Thompson.

Abdullah: Hey! Amazing. You know what's so interesting is to hear about the beginning of Hunter S Thompson's affair with psychedelia and with this culture, because I feel like every time I've read a book or seeing a movie about him, he's already in the thick of it. So to hear him coming into that world, I mean, I can't wait to hear the details of this story. Definitely read the guy's work, really fascinated by it, but I don't know much about the man himself and I know you do Bean so I'm stoked to hear about it from you.

Bean: Yeah. He's a brilliant writer, a brilliant thinker, and sort of, you know, this cultural idea of him that we're left with now comes from, you know, honestly a lot of people just watching the movie Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, who've never even really read his work or just this idea of like the ultimate crazy wild party legend and what gets lost is somebody who care deeply about journalism, who cared deeply about this country and saw a lot of the problems that we're facing now coming and somebody who cared really about weed culture.

Abdullah: Absolutely. And I think it's as time has gone on, the association that people make with psychedelics or a lot of the drugs that we're talking about in this era is as party drugs as recreational drugs, not as what they were seen as at the time, which is mind expanding drugs, consciousness altering drugs that will allow you to see the world in a more compassionate way and a more detailed way, uh, in a better way.

Bean: Yeah, I'll say better too.

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: Um, speaking of, I think, uh,

Abdullah: Here we go. Here we come. Altered state of mind.

Bean: Here's to Hunter. So we'll follow his journey a little before we get to our specific great moment, which is a killer one. While he's still living San Francisco in hashbury at the same time, he's experiencing the summer of love. He's also writing his first book. Do you, do you know what it was

Abdullah: No. What was the first one?

Bean: He wrote a book about the hell's angels.

Abdullah: Oh yeah, that's right. I've actually read a bunch of that book. Not the entire thing. I got it from my friend Joe in college. And that is a harrowing story. I mean, it really is a, a crazy experience.

Bean: Yeah. And you see his style as a writer and his insights, but he hasn't really gone full Gonzo. He's reporting in this wild environment, you know, he's fully, as they say, embedded with the angels.

Abdullah: Oh yeah. He's involved in their activities. I mean, he's, he's very much there.

Bean: He's almost too involved by the end. Um, and so one of the things he realizes is just like the hippies, a lot of the hell's angels smoked weed in fact, so much that they had a special patch that they made that you could put on your jacket that would identify you to other hell's angels as a, as a weed dude. I'm gonna say acquaintance of the podcast, hell's angels. I don't want to presume friendship. I don't want to say friendship.

Abdullah: Yeah. Down with some stuff you do, not down with some stuff you do not sure if you're down with what we do. But you know, here's the fig leaf just in case

Bean: Certainly have no problems with you if you don't have any problems with us.

Abdullah: We're cool. We're cool.

Bean: Um, but what he also realizes is that while the hippies are smoking weed and taking psychedelics, and they're looking for sort of these consciousness raising mind expanding

effects, he says the angels quote gobble drugs like victims of famine turn loose on a rare smorgasbord, uh, until they achieved a screaming delirium.

Abdullah: There's that poetry. Right? In one sentence, he kind of describes this bacchanal, you know.

Bean: Yeah. And, and for the rest of his life as a reporter and as a person, he is kind of looking at these two extremes of the political spectrum you have on the one hand, like free love utopians. You know what I mean, this hippie ideal that we can use these substances, cannabis, psychedelics to break through everything that's keeping society square and, and top down and, and, and in the bottle. And then this other world of these really far right authoritarians, you know, at their heart, the angels are rebels, but they're also a repressive force in society. You know, and when the Vietnam war protests really heat up, there were hell's angels out there beating hippies because they supported the war. You know? And so this is from the book hell's angels. He says that same venom that the angels are spewing around in public, a lot of people are just keeping bottled up in private. And I think we see that kind of coming out en masse now, right?

Abdullah: Yeah, absolutely. And now we're at a time where the media, and in some cases the president himself is goading people to tap into that negativity. You know what I mean? And, and to bring that, uh, the dormant hatred in their hearts into reality to manifest that. And that's a freaky thing. It's really interesting that Thompson saw this at very, very early stages.

Bean: Yeah. I mean, even more foresight in this next line, he says the people who are most effected by technological obsolescence. So like the idea that we're all going to be replaced by robots or you know, there's going to be shitty jobs everywhere. He already sees this coming and he says the people who are going to be most negatively affected by it, are the ones least capable of understanding the reason for it. So the venom builds up much quicker and it feeds on their ignorance. He stops hanging out and blazing weed with the hell's angels when they

Abdullah: Oh yeah. What happens? They kill a guy?

Bean: No, they beat the crap out of him. Oh yeah, that's right. They beat the crap out of him. So this is part of that. Him getting a little too involved with his subjects. He crosses the line and they beat the shit out of him.

Abdullah: Yeah. There's this really interesting TV appearance where he kind of goes back and forth with one of the angels and they debate how this beat down happened and who was right or wrong:

[Clip]

Interviewer: Why did they thump him?

Hell's Angel: All right. This man here, you got into a man's personal argument.

Hunter S. Thompson: That's an outright line. No, no go ahead and tell it.

Hell's Angel: This is my side of what happened.

Hunter S. Thompson: Okay, you weren't there, so why don't you preface it with that.

Hell's Angel: This is what, this is what happened. And you see if this isn't right. Junkie George's beating his old lady.

Hunter S. Thompson: I Remember that.

Hell's Angel: Junkie George, Junkie George's dog, now listen to this. Junkie George's dog bit him right, here came the peacemaker, right? He doesn't have a patch on it. He isn't in that club, you know and Junkie George's stiff. You walked, you walked right up to him and you said only a punk beats his wife and dog. These were your words, now you said it, you said it to this man and

Hunter S. Thompson: He finished it off,

Hell's Angel: And he said a Hunter you want, you want some of this and you said no, but you got it anyway. And when he hit you three or four others of them hit you too.

Bean: He stops the reporting on the hell's angels, but he never stops reporting on what he calls the drug culture. Weed people,

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: Us.

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: And he's one of the first people to really do that, you know?

Abdullah: And represent those cultures in those people in media that's read by squares. You know what I mean? Like actually communicating something about the mores of hippy society to non hippie society.

Bean: Yeah. It becomes a really important conduit between those two worlds, but he's never pretends to be, he never pretends to be objective about anything. And in essence, Gonzo is all about destroying fallacy that such a thing exists. And he certainly doesn't try to be quote objective about weed. He says, I have always loved marijuana, it has been a source of joy and

comfort to me for many years. I think of it as a basic staple of life along with beer and ice and grapefruits. And millions of Americans agree with me.

Abdullah: Yeah. It's true. Not on the grapefruits thing though too tart, but I got to say that I totally agree with the cannabis thing and also like that idea that, look, this is a guy who consumes pretty hard substances pretty regularly. That shit takes a toll. Cannabis is probably the one thing in his psychedelic diet that's kind of counteracting some of the beleaguerment that all that drug use could actually, uh, have on you.

Bean: Yeah. And, and, and going back into these earlier days, you know, he is much more experimenting with grass as they might've called it and, and psychedelics and a lot of the harder drugs and a lot of the problematic outcomes that come with that come later in his life. And, and honestly come at a point where his heart is sort of broken by this country. Um, and we're going to get into kind of a central story of that. But, but when we think of him as a younger person, as a writer, participant in all of these things, I think it's important to keep that distinction that like he is kind of a pretty serious guy. He loves his weed, he loves his psychedelics, but he's not really sort of out of control person that you know, even is depicted in *Fear and Loathing*.

Abdullah: Right, right, right. Good to know. Because for a lot of people, as you said, that is the only idea. The only sense you get of the man is from that movie. And he's like drinking the DMT from a funnel

[Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas Clip]

Hunter S. Thompson: We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold.

Abdullah: We've got this guy, Hunter S Thompson, he's a young journalist. The world is his oyster. What does he do next?

Bean: His interest in drugs never waivers. Somewhat fatally in the end, but he also gets really interested in politics. And so, uh, this is a mini great moment within a great moment. 1970 an idealistic young attorney name Keith Stroup

Abdullah: Hey! Keith Stroup:

[Clip]

Keith Stroup: And I'm here to say there's absolutely nothing wrong with responsible use of marijuana by adults, regardless of why you smoke it, and it should be none of the government's business, whether we smoke or why we smoke.

Abdullah: Medical cannabis, legend, cannabis legend. We'll definitely talk about it more on the show. I'm sure he definitely deserves his own episode. But glad to see he's making an appearance.

Bean: Yeah. A friend of both of ours, big time friend of the podcast, if you love weed, he's a friend of yours, whether you know him or not.

Abdullah: Big time.

Bean: So he started the national organization for the reform of marijuana laws.

Abdullah: NORML.

Bean: Yeah. And you can go to norml.org for more information. Um, but in 1970, Keith is just this young guy. He really loves weed. He really fucking hates the government's war on weed. And he also sees a place for himself to become essentially the first ever lobbyist for legalization and to create this grassroots national organization in support of it. Um, so he doesn't really have any money and you know, he doesn't have much support. He's just founded the organization. And, uh, in 1972 to try to drum up some, you know, some juice for NORML, he gets in his Volkswagen camper and he drives it down to the democratic national convention in Miami where there's going to be all these protests and demonstrations and just politicians and everything's going on. Uh, and he is sitting in the bleachers watching a speech and he starts to smell something. And uh, I'm sure you've seen it. I did a video once for vice. That was, we went to Hunter Thompson's house.

Abdullah: It was a weed dinner at his house.

Bean: Yes. And Keith Stroup was the guest of honor and he told this story.

[Clip]

Keith Stroup: I was at the democratic national convention in Miami in 1972. NORML was only a year and a half old. And the first day that I was at the convention, I smelled marijuana at some, somebody under the bleachers where we were sitting was clearly marijuana. And I looked down and I saw this gangling figure that I had never met, but I hit see pictures of him in rolling stone at that point. And I thought, son of a bitch that has to be a Hunter Thompson. And I went up to him and introduced myself and said, I just started a marijuana lobby called NORML. I thought maybe we should get to know each other. And of course he reached out the joint and here you want some marijuana. And we formed a friendship that lasted until his death.

Abdullah: Oh wow. That's incredible. So I didn't know that Hunter S Thompson was involved with NORML at all. That's, that's pretty amazing. Uh, and the fact that he actually met Keith Stroup right at the inception of the organization. That's pretty fucking incredible.

Bean: Yeah, that's a, and it's a really heady moment in, in Hunter Thompson's life. This is now 1972 and fear and loathing in Las Vegas has just come out in book form after it was first serialized in rolling stone.

Abdullah: Right.

Bean: And so he's just becoming a celebrity. Um, the book is a sensation and now he's like young and famous for the first time, but right on the spot he's like, I'll, I'll help you, I'll be your big supporter. And he goes to NORML conventions and gives speeches and the, but the biggest thing he does is he introduces Keith to all the people that he knows who are secret weed heads in politics.

Abdullah: So Keith Stroup suddenly has the inside edge via Hunter S Thompson to make NORML a real thing.

BEAN: Yeah, he, he gives him all these contacts, but he also like comes to the NORML conventions, which by now he's like the biggest weed celebrity really. You know there's like Cheech and Chong and Hunter Thompson. So I'll read to you Keith's description of Hunter giving a speech at the 1977 normal convention.

Abdullah: Gotcha.

Bean: When Hunter's turn to speak came, he stood up at the podium and barked. I don't know what all you, people are so happy about when I can't find any marijuana. What the fuck is going on here?

Abdullah: Way to get the crowd on your side right off the bat. Wow that's great man. As they say, open with a joke.

Bean: So that's the background of this speech where he's saying, you know what the fuck is going on? I can't get any marijuana. What are you so happy about? Keith says, of course, I had been up in Hunter's hotel room the night before and he had way more weed stashed away than even he could use. But nevertheless, he continued. All the progress that you're talking about doesn't mean shit if marijuana smokers can't get good marijuana.

Abdullah: Hey, that is the God damn truth, ain't it the truth still today?

Bean: Absolutely man. And, and Keith says, you know a, a bunch of the people in the audience, but what do you think they would do at that point?

Abdullah: Throw a bunch of weed at him.

Bean: They start pelting him with joints pelting. I've never heard of someone being pelted with weed before.

Abdullah: I mean, I would take that and you know what I mean? If someone was like, do you want to be pelted with joints? I'd be like for a second. Yes.

Bean: Do you want to be stoned with stones or do you want to be stoned with joints?

Abdullah: I'll do joints, jointed as they call it. So he's officially jointed

Bean: He's getting pelted with joints. But Keith says the point he was making in only the way he could was that as long as anybody is getting arrested, you know, it's premature to celebrate any of the victories that you have fully. All right, so we're gonna take a little break in a minute and then we will get to this incredible campaign to subvert the system and fuck the man that constitutes the heart of today's great moment and we'll hear about that in just a minute.

Abdullah: Awesome. We'll be right back.

[*Smoke Weedia*]

Abdullah: We're talking about Hunter S Thompson weed legend media legend, weed media legend. When we left off, he was about to do something really, really big. Bean where we at?

Bean: Yeah. So like I said, you know, this is like his most outlandish prank, but it's also like his most serious attempt to shake up the system and usher in this new world of freedom and weed for all. In 1967 when he got his first royalty check from hell's angels, the book, he used it to buy a small cabin out in the woods outside Aspen, Colorado, which is, you know, where I was when I shot that video.

Abdullah: Right. Okay. Gotcha. Hunter S. Thompson's house.

Bean: So when he moves there, Aspen is already sort of like a magnet for writers, artists, thinkers, and misfits of all kind. And he loves having a place where he can get away from his crazy life. You know, when he's out on the road reporting it's Gonzo 24/7 but he's got this place to come back to and rest and actually do his writing work.

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: But unfortunately the local authorities in Aspen are real reactionaries and when along with him, there's this big influx of hippies coming to Aspen. They want to, you know, they'll take jobs as cooks or ski instructors or they're just like bummiing around, the Sheriff's department is like, fuck this, fuck hippies. We've got a nice quiet ski community. Uh, the Big Lebowski

[Clip]

Sheriff: Stay out of Malibu, deadbeat! Keep your ugly fucking goldbrickin ass out of my beach community.

Bean: Uh, so they are like, we are going to get rid of these hippies by any means necessary. And there's all of these charges of false arrest and police brutality.

Abdullah: Fucking fascists.

Bean: Exactly.

Abdullah: But yeah man. And this is a time when having long hair and looking like a hippie not only could get you like a vagrancy arrest or a drug bust for weed, it could just get you your ass kicked by the cops or just by locals. Um, and so this is all happening in Aspen, right when he moves there and it's not just the heads and the hippies that are getting fucked with. A year after Hunter Thompson moved to Aspen, the Sheriff's department searched every locker in Aspen high school for weed based on one anonymous tip.

Abdullah: Oh my God.

Bean: Yeah. Sheriff Whitmeyer himself and I've seen a picture of this, in a 10 gallon hat with a pistol strapped to his hip and a lit cigarette dangling from his lip, went and threw the girl's purses one by one. Guess what? They found?

Abdullah: Uh, some makeup, loose change.

Bean: Let me rephrase it. Guess what they didn't find

Abdullah: Weed?

Bean: None.

Abdullah: Of course not. That's crazy that they wasted all that time, uh, for an anonymous tip for looking for a bag of weed. Like literally if you called any police station America today and were like, one of the kids at the high school has some weed, the cop would be like, yeah, no fucking shit. You know what I mean? But it was this weird moral battle that these motherfuckers were, you know, they thought they were engaged in.

Bean: Yeah. And that's about intimidation. The town sees all these hippies flooding in. The squares are freaking out. Their first concern is, what about my kid? The cops, the sheriff is out there bragging about this, you know, that he searched all the lockers and all the purses and didn't find anything. And they're like, see, we're doing our jobs. And obviously this does not sit

well with not just Hunter Thompson, but a lot of people in Aspen. And so this open harassment of undesirables by the cops in Aspen would continue unchecked until a 29 year old lawyer named Joe Edwards filed the first civil rights case in Colorado history against the Aspen police department for discriminatory enforcement of ordinances that prohibited vagrancy, hitchhiking, trespassing, and blocking the sidewalk. So they're like using these petty laws.

Abdullah: Which is really what they do. You know, they use quality of life crimes, right? Uh, and they've been doing this in cities across America forever. It's, it's a way to give a cop a tool, uh, with which he can marginalize a specific group of people that he doesn't like for whatever reason and justify it. Right. And cannabis has been one of those tools for decades since the beginning of prohibition. That's what it was there for. It was there so that a cop could say, you smell like weed. Empty your pockets. I mean, they were doing this shit. Stop and frisk, uh, you know, in New York, Philadelphia at very, very recently where a cop could say, your eyes look red. You know, I remember reading it in one of the actual ordinance as it was like appears to have recently extinguished a marijuana cigarette. I'm like, motherfucker, I always appear to have extinguished a marijuana cigarette. That's what I do.

Abdullah: Even when you're smoking a marijuana cigarette.

Abdullah: Yeah, you know what? I recently extinguished one sitting right there in the ash tray next to me.

Bean: So this lawsuit works. Joe Edwards sues for all of this police harassment and wins and this really starts to change, uh, the scene in Aspen, the cops can't just get away with fucking with people. And then late one night Joe Edwards is chilling at home, probably puffing a J and the phone rings. And who do you think's on the other end?

Abdullah: Hunter S. Thompson?

Bean: Yeah, a man renowned for his late night phone calls.

Abdullah: Yeah. He seems like the kind of guy who would call you at like 2:00 AM and have a lot of shit to say.

Bean: So there's actually a famous story where Jimmy buffet, like let Hunter Thompson crash at his house for a couple of weeks and he ran up a phone bill in the five digits and he was just famous among his friends for, he'd call you at three in the morning at whatever, uh, frequency he was humming at. And uh, you pretty much had to take that call. So Joe Edwards gets the 3:00 AM phone call for Hunter S Thompson. What do you think he wants?

Abdullah: He wants to help him, uh, fuck with the shitty local cops in Aspen.

Bean: Well, yeah. And all the way to the top, he says, uh, you got to run for mayor.

Abdullah: What he tells Joe Edwards to run for mayor?

Bean: Yeah. He's got all the support of all the freaks in Aspen cause of this lawsuit. But he's also a lawyer, you know, and he's got a little power base of his own in the town and he says, Hey look, there's a lot of us, if we can get these people from outside the system to vote because we'll run a campaign they believe in, we can fucking take over this town.

Abdullah: Holy shit. Yeah. What better way to fuck with the local cops than by becoming the mayor? Oh shit. Okay great. So what happens?

Bean: Well, the Edwards for mayor campaign loses by six votes

Abdullah: Oh man.

Bean: And it's one of those deals where like, aw, if the election had been two weeks later and

Abdullah: Aw.,

Bean: But it gives rise to this freak power movement. They see like, Holy shit, we almost really did this. A lot of people like, you know, didn't even vote or get involved cause they thought, Oh that's, this can never happen. And they see six, six votes. So they decide next time they're going to run an even wilder campaign. Hunter S Thompson for sheriff.

Abdullah: What? That actually happened in Aspen?

Bean: Abso-fucking-lutely it happened. They even shot a campaign ad Thompson for sheriff. It features him riding his motorcycle through the mountains outside Aspen

[Clip]

Narrator: Hunter Thompson is a moralist posing as an immoralist. Nixon is an immoralist disguised as a moralist. There'll be thieves and audoracts in Aspen whoever gets elected. But Hunter represents something wholly alien to the other candidates for sheriff: ideas and a sympathy towards the young generous grass oriented society, which is making the only serious effort to face the technological nightmare we've created.

Abdullah: Wow. So he actually calls out that he is cool with cannabis culture, you know, grass oriented. He's down. He's got my vote for sure.

Bean: Yeah. And I've never really known what my orientation was, but I-

Abdullah: Now we know.

Bean: I believe I'm grass [inaudible] oriented. Um, and so, you know, his big issues are issues that are all coming to a head now and are still completely unresolved in our society. Police brutality, the environment, inequality and legalized weed. And so among his campaign promises:

[Clip]

Johnny Depp: One, rip up all city streets with jackhammers and sod the streets at once.

Abdullah: So like a return to, you know, to tribalism, our roots. That's great.

Johnny Depp: Two, change the name Aspen to fat city.

Bean: And this is to quote,

Johnny Depp: Prevent greed-heads land rapers and other human jackals from capitalizing on the name Aspen.

Bean: Oh wow. Holy shit. So he's definitely got some radical ideas for Aspen

Abullah: We're just getting started. And it's also, so Aspen, rich people live there, but they kind of thought of themselves as like lefty rich people. But what he sees happening is all of these real estate developers coming in and they're gonna put in subdivisions and they're going to push up housing prices any way they can until people can't really afford to live in Aspen, which always had this ski bum culture and this sort of Bohemian underbelly that used to coexist pretty well. But as these people are coming in who he calls greed heads, and I think that's like one of the greatest phrasings he ever really came up with is like weed heads versus greed heads.

Abdullah: So he coined the term greed head?

Bean: To the best of my knowledge. I definitely think so. And, uh, all of the local politics is corrupt and, and these guys are, you know, paying off politicians to get their way to do these environmentally fucked up things and he takes a public health harm reduction oriented approach to drug law enforcement.

[Clip]

Johnny Depp: It will be the general philosophy of the Sheriff's office that no drug worth taking should be sold for money. My first act of sheriff will be to install on the courthouse lawn a set of stocks in order to punish dishonest dope dealers in a proper public fashion.

Abdullah: Okay, great. So not the honest ones, the ones who are actually honest, they're free to do their thing, but anybody who's trying to sell somebody like a bag of oregano or whatever, they're going in the stocks.

Bean: Or if you're charging too much or yeah, any kind of a rip off he continues. It will be the general philosophy of the Sheriff's office that no drug worth taking should be sold for money. He says this will establish a unique and very human ambience] in the Aspen or fat city drug culture. And so he says the only realistic approach to drug laws is to make life in this town very ugly for all profiteers in drugs and any other field.

Abullah: Right. So he basically wants to turn Aspen back into like a medieval village, you know what I mean? Which is kinda awesome.

Bean: He wants to rip off the roads. He wants to ban the cops, he wants to change the name of it to fat city.

Abdullah: I mean those are pretty radical promises, but uh, he's still got my vote.

Bean: I think he's got my vote more. Um, and so this is like, to me the most surreal moment within like a, a Russian dolls of surreal moments that leads up to this. He has a public debate with sheriff Whitmeyer, his opponent.

Abdullah: Oh my God.

Bean: Who is also the same guy who went to Aspen high school and searched all the lockers.

Abdullah: And purses.

Bean: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[Clip]

Narrator: Vote for and elect Carol Whitmeyer for our sheriff.

Bean: And so during this debate, Hunter Thompson was asked if he thought cannabis possession should remain a felony for first time offenders.

Abullah: It was a felony at this time.

Bean: Yeah. One bust for weed at this time in Colorado could really, really fuck your shit up. And I don't think it's a coincidence that Colorado is the first place along with Washington state to break through on legalization and was the early pioneer in at least state regulation of medical

cannabis. I think the roots of all of that really come down to this campaign for sheriff because, and we'll get to it, but this thing blows up into a big media spectacle pretty soon.

Abdullah: Oh wow. Interesting. Okay, cool. So what happens at this debate?

Bean: Ah, yeah. So they ask him, uh, which I would say is a pretty softball question for Hunter Thompson: do you think weed should still be a felony?

Abdullah: Yeah, I know, right?

Bean: Whoever phrased the question that way, friend of the podcast, sneaky friend, of weed. You should have been, you could have been like, do you think that people should be eating babies and do they smoke weed in so-called fat city.

Abdullah: Yeah, but instead, uh, they lob him up this nice little leading question here and I'm guessing he's going to knock it out of the park.

Bean: Yeah. He says the current laws on marijuana were passed in a time of mass hysteria and total ignorance.

Abdullah: Yup.

Bean: This single law has made felons out of an entire generation.

Abdullah: Yup.

Bean: The young people now look upon law enforcement as their bitter enemy

Abdullah: Yep.

Bean: They consider cops to be narrow-minded racists who send out informants to spy on them and set them up for arrests, which can result in fantastic jail sentences

Abdullah: That's still a yup.

[Clip]

Hunter S. Thompson: Marijuana laws are one of the reasons that there's a, engendered, this lack of respect that the, uh, the cops complain about all over the country. When you get a whole generation that grows up as felons and they know that all is ridiculous and they're told all this gibberish about it drives you crazy, it makes your brain soft and your feet fall off. Even the police know it's a silly law.

Bean: So yeah. Old sheriff, no-weed Whitmeyer sees things very differently than Hunter Thompson. It's, uh, you know, they say, Oh, this election is a clear choice, but I don't think there's ever been a clearer choice for people to make between Whitmeyer and Thompson.

Abdullah: Yeah. Seriously, truly two extremes on the local political spectrum

Bean: On the, on the world political spectrum. And, uh, so like I said, the campaign just starts to catch fire. All these people get involved who've never been a part of politics. People who are a part of the town just start to see, Oh, this guy is serious. And he's got some good ideas. But a lot of people still think it's a joke or a prank. So he takes out uh, an ad in the Aspen times and this is what Hunter Thompson puts in his ad. Yeah. Yes. This is indeed a weird twist in my life, but despite the natural horror of seeing myself as the main pig, I think it has to be done or at least tried.

Abdullah: Yeah. Man, that's crazy. He's like literally, uh, you know, uh, in order to defeat him, he has to become him. Face/Off. You know what I'm saying? That's pretty fucking insane. But he's willing to do it.

Bean: Then as he realizes that this can really happen, they start putting out his campaign and Hunter Thompson, these really detailed policy statements and even like they print in the newspaper, like organizational flow charts of how the Sheriff's department is going to function and how these reforms are going to work and how essentially they're going to make the Sheriff's department accountable to the people rather than the other way around.

Abdullah: Huh.

Bean: This is all detailed in a book. I definitely want a shout out called the battle of Aspen. It's a beautiful coffee table book. And in it there's also these, what they called wall posters. So he's tapped into the artistic community and he's a brilliant writer. Um, so they make all their own campaign materials, ah, newsletters and you know, some of them are crazy and aimed at the freaks and some of them still making the same points just to different, uh, ears.

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: And then some are these really detailed plans. Like, look, I'm serious and this is exactly what I'm going to do. Uh, but these, these posters that they put up around Aspen, uh, have slogans like, uh, for example, today's pig is tomorrow's bacon Thompson for sheriff.

Abdullah: Oh my God. That is fucking brilliant. Yeah. Solid campaign.

Bean: And, uh, just as sort of the capper, Hunter Thompson shaved his head bald. Any idea why he would do that?

Abdullah: No. What's the symbolism there?

Bean: He did it so that during that debate he could refer to sheriff Whitmeyer as quote my long haired opponent.

Abdullah: That's genius. He turned him into a hippie, used his own slur against him. Brilliant. Yeah. And uh, it sorta gives him this like wild look, you know, almost like a dystopian futuristic half robot, hippie drug sheriff. Um, and then the other thing he does is he writes, now he's Hunter Thompson as we know him. He's, he's well known, right. And he writes an article in Rolling Stone called the battle of Aspen about his run for sheriff. And that is what makes it, blows it up into a huge national story.

Abdullah: So he's still reporting for rolling stone at this time and he turns this entire experience into a story.

Bean: Yeah. And the story comes out like say a month or a little more before the elections.

Abdullah: Wow. Holy shit. So that's like the best promo he could possibly get at this time to be sheriff. And does it upset the locals or is it just like give him a massive surge in support?

Bean: It electrifies his base of freaks and brings all these new people in. But at the same time it's square defies the squares to a like squared more squarish and they realize, fuck, this is like a threat to our fucking way of life. The Washington post, uh, runs a headline. Uh, hippies may elect a sheriff and then the New York times, the next day runs freak power candidate may be the next sheriff in placid Aspen, Colorado.

Abdullah: Holy shit. Freak power. Huh? I like that man. You know what, if the freak power movement came back, I would totally subscribe to that. I'm down with the freak power.

Bean: I think we are grass oriented

Abdullah: Yeah gress oriented and freak powered.

Bean: Absolutely. But so as election day grows near the entire town and County, are in a frenzy. Flyers are sent out to people that depict Hunter Thompson as a Nazi. And when these freaks start going to register to vote, they're just fucking with them. And, and like harassing them. And trying to keep people from registering to vote, this like most basic American, right. Uh, the law and order people and the law and order sheriff want to disenfranchise all these freaks. And so this gets so bad that there's actually criminal charges filed against the County clerk because they realize this is a coordinated attempt to keep people from voting. And it gets so crazy that the Colorado Bureau of investigation, which is like the FBI of Colorado, they come to Hunter Thompson and they say, listen, we have to tell you there are credible threats against your life.

Abdullah: Man, so what happens next?

Bean: Pretty predictably it gets even crazier.

Abdullah: And this is all before the actual election.

Bean: This is all leading up to the election. You know, they tell him you're, you're facing some serious death threats. And then here is how Hunter Thompson described what happens next in his book Kingdom of Fear. At one point, sheriff Whitmeyer hired a phony outlaw biker from Denver, a veteran of two years of undercover work for the feds who boomed into town one day on a junk chopper and first threatened to dynamite my house if I didn't drop out of the race at once, and then apologize for the threat when it failed and tried to hire on as my body guard.

Abdullah: This guy's real like uh you know, uh, he's a real fucking mercenary. He's like, alright, I'm going to kill you. All right, well can you hire me then?

Bean: And then, this is more Hunter Thompson. And then he started spreading rumors that people on my staff were in touch with Kathy powers and a gang of weathermen who planned to blow up all the bridges into town.

Abdullah: So basically they're trying to spread rumors that he's aligned with like wild leftist terrorists or something.

Bean: Yeah, the weather underground. Were a group of, you know, call it what it is. Domestic terrorist. They blew up buildings.

Abdullah: Activists. Domestic terrorists.

Bean: Yeah. I mean they were trying to ferment this left wing revolution. So of course they, uh, if they can't kill him, if they can't scare him and they can't join him, this guy is like, I'm just going to discredit you in the town. Um, and then he shows back up and he's like, Hey, Hunter Thompson, do you want to buy a bunch of automatic weapons?

Abdullah: The balls! Uh, definitely a ballsy individual and more Hunter Thompson.

Bean: Then he offered to stop the shit out of anybody we aimed him at, and then he got himself busted when the city cops found a completely illegal sawed-off 20 gauge pump action shotgun in his car, which they happened to tow away from a no parking zone.

Abdullah: Ah, so that's what got him in the end. It was the parking authority. So this comes down to the night before the election. Hunter Thompson and his core team are like pacing the walls of this cabin I told you about outside town, which by necessity they have basically transformed into

an armed encampment. I mean, they legitimately think people might be coming to fucking kill them.

Abdullah: Right. And, and they don't even know if all this shit is gonna pay off if he's gonna win, if he's gonna lose and what's going to happen either way.

Bean: If he's going to live or die. So while Hunter Thompson and his campaign team and his band of Merry freaks are like, holed up in this, in this cabin, the Republican party and the democratic party of Aspen get together and say, okay, we're all going to vote for Whitmire.

Abdullah: No shit.

Bean: Cause there's a Republican running, Whitmire, there's a Democrat running and then there's the freak power party. Uh, and they all conspired together and say better Whitmire who we know at least is under the control of the Republicans than this guy who could really actually shake things up.

Abdullah: Oh man. You know, shame on the Democrats in this situation because what really would have happened is the traditional parties would have split the square vote and the freak vote would have all gone to Thompson. And you know, he had, it would have had a way better chance of winning.

Bean: So the next day, election day, uh, the first returns come in, Hunter Thompson is way ahead.

[Clip]

Woman: Hunter 182, Whitmire, 137, Ricks 10.

Man: Yeah!

Bean: But when all the returns are counted, uh, he lost

[Clip]

Woman: Whitmire 204, Hunter 173.

Hunter: I uh, unfortunately proved what I set out to prove and that was more a political point than a local election that the American dream really is [censored].

Bean: But.

Abdullah: Hmm, there's a but.

Bean: We have a happy little epilogue for this story.

Abdullah: Nice.

Bean: Yeah. Hunter Thompson loses the battle of Aspen. But freak power would win the war.

Abdullah: Ah, how did freak power win the war?

Bean: So in the next election cycle, the entire city council of Aspen was voted out and replaced by Joe Edwards.

Abdullah: Oh wow. Joe, Edwards.

Bean: And a whole bunch of other counterculture people in 1976 old weed-hatin' sheriff Whitmire was removed from his post amid accusations of misappropriating funds from the jail and an ally of Hunter Thompson took over and was the sheriff for many, many years after that.

Abdullah: Ha! Take that Whitmore. And at least somebody who's like minded with Thompson is actually in that post. Uh, I mean that can only mean good things.

Bean: Yeah. So Aspen, you know, alas, they never did change the name to fat city.

Abdullah: Yeah.

Bean: The streets remain paved. You know, I don't want to oversell the changes that happened. I don't believe they're, I haven't been there in a few years, but I didn't see any stocks for dishonest drug dealers. Uh, but it is a town of 7,500 people that now has seven cannabis dispensaries in its downtown core alone. And last year, fat city became the first city in history to have more cannabis sales than alcohol sales in a single year.

Abdullah: Amazing.

Bean: That's, that's the happy ending to our tale of Hunter Thompson, the battle of Aspen. And I think one of the great journalists of all time, one of the great weed dudes of all time. And, uh, you know, an inspiration to me for sure.

Abdullah: Truly an incredible story and a guy who had a massive impact on cannabis laws in the United States through his influence on Keith Stroup and also stood as an icon for freaks everywhere, ourselves included. And that's it for this episode of great moments in weed history. Thanks so much for hanging out with us. We'll see you next time.

Bean: Freak power

Abdullah: Freak power.

Bean: Great moments in weed history is a Spoke media production. It's hosted by me, David Bienenstock AKA Bean. And Abdullah Saeed.

Abdullah: We're produced by Cody Hofmockel and Brigham Mosley with help from Lee George and Reyes Mendoza.

Bean: This episode was mixed by Jonathan Villalobos.

Abdullah: Our head of post production is Will Short.

Bean: Special thanks to gold Digger studio.

Abdullah: Our executive producers are Alia Tavakolian and Keith Reynolds. Check out our show notes where you'll find more information about things we discussed today and links to our sponsors. And if you're enjoying our show, please tell your friends about it the next time you're smoking weed with them.