



Riding on the Edge: A Motorcycle Outlaw's Tale

John Hall

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Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson put the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang in the spotlight in the mid-1960s with his chronicle of this notorious West Coast organization. But that was the West Coast. Now, author John Hall has written his own account of the Pagans, an equally notorious gang that created its own form of chaos up and down the East Coast. The group still exists today, but Hall's personal memoir focuses on the late 1960s when he was president of the Long Island, New York, chapter. The author describes this period as a unique time in which the Pagans achieved legendary status in the outlaw biker world because of their readiness to take on anyone, whether it be the law or rival gangs. Hall's first-person account is a detailed remembrance of the characters he rode with—and sometimes buried—and a lesson in the importance the members placed on belonging to this club.

Hall, who has a college education garnered after riding with the Pagans, can draw from a myriad of disciplines, including sociology and history, for examining this wild and intricate biker culture. In addition to teaching history at Penn State, he has served time in prison and worked as a bouncer, bartender, gambler, and freelance journalist, among other professions.

Each chapter begins with a quote from a well-known author, historical figure, or an ancient historical reference, setting up a reference to the Pagan culture. One quote, "Let them call us barbarians. We are barbarians. It is an honorable title," comes from Joseph Goebbels. But as much as the author tries to explain the personality of this club, he admits that the task can be overwhelming, such is the complex mix of characters wearing Pagans colors. "You have to understand that unless you were a part of these guys, it is impossible to understand why they did anything the way they did," Hall said. "And if you were a part of it, you didn't even try to understand."

This book may not help readers understand entirely the culture, but it's still a thrilling ride.

KARL KUNKEL (August 15, 2008)

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