

From [Literary Las Vegas](#)

Preface

by **Mike Tronnes**

Las Vegas has always been a magnet for great writers, drawn to the city for the inspiration provided by its symbols and characters, and for what it says about us and our society. It doesn't matter if a writer views the town as a cesspool for the crass or a pleasure palace for the masses, this neon outpost and its denizens provide plenty to spark the imagination. It is not so surprising to learn then that there has been a wealth of brilliant writing produced about Las Vegas over the last half century. What is perhaps more interesting, however, is that these individualistic, often idiosyncratic pieces, when viewed as a mosaic, provide a remarkably entertaining and insightful portrait of this one-of-a-kind place. I've tried to capture this more fascinating, nuanced picture in **Literary Las Vegas**.

There is, of course, the town itself, with the famous casinos, the all-night wedding chapels, and the Strip. But behind the neon and the glitter, there is also an incredible array of colorful characters who enhance the town's mystique. Like everything else here, they're larger than life. Their tales are taller, their winnings and losses--in life as well as at the tables--are bigger, and their extremes of experience are greater.

Literary Las Vegas introduces us to these characters--both real and imagined, famous and obscure, from Bugsy Siegel, the founding father of Las Vegas, to Jackie Kasey, the unknown lounge comic who opened for all the big names--Frank, Dino, and Elvis--but whose own name no one remembered. Then there are the public relations hucksters who turned atomic testing into a tourist attraction, the world's best and worst gamblers, the ladies' room attendants, mobsters and their families, tourists and conventioners, showgirls, casino cheats, Howard Hughes, Dr. Gonzo, FDR, JFK, high rollers, low rollers, Mormons, and wine goddesses, all of whom give this place a special aura.

Most of Las Vegas's residents have come from somewhere else. In the early days, many came because what they were doing illegally at home was legal in Nevada. By simply crossing state lines, they were transformed into upstanding citizens. While the modern transplants might be a more diverse lot, Las Vegas remains a place unconstrained by the bounds that define most communities. As a result, Las Vegas has been free to reinvent itself as the market dictates. In its rapidly evolving history, Las Vegas has gone from "mobster and starlet hideaway, to haven of sin and vice, to its present incarnation as low-roller heaven." This hyperhistory is presented here, from the modern-day pioneers who opened the Flamingo in the '40s, to today's fanny-packers who come by the tens of millions each year to visit "Disney in the desert."

From Nick Tosches's brilliant introduction to Tom Wolfe's classic "Las Vegas (What?) Las Vegas (Can't hear you! Too noisy) Las Vegas!!!!" to Marc Cooper's hilarious '90s update of Fear and Loathing, "Searching for Sin City and Finding Disney in the Desert," this collection captures a place

through a multiplicity of views and voices. So whether you are looking for the classic kitschy Vegas of yesteryear, or the contemporary reality of America's fastest-growing metropolitan area, or the hidden world beyond the popular image, you will find it in **Literary Las Vegas**.

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8/29/96