



Dopeland

John Birmingham

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On his publisher-financed tour, the author meets the dope smokers of Australia. The sci-fi geeks, student activists and obligatory Nimbin ferals. The conservative politicians, lawyers, cops, bankers and school teachers. And the tea-drinking, sausage-loving, lumpy-looking white folk of Tasmania. Dopeland is for anyone who's ever fired up a choice fatty, wondered whether you can drink the bong water, gone on a Mars Bar run, or just considered watching daytime TV a worthwhile way to spend your twenties. With danger, disaster and madness always threatening to derail the fabulous Dopeland Tour, you can safely sit back and enjoy the ride.

Dopeland Details

Date : Published July 1st 2004 by Random House Australia

ISBN : 9781740513029

Author : John Birmingham

Format : Paperback 274 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History

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From Reader Review Dopeland for online ebook

Channing says

Account of marijuana culture in Australia: John Birmingham travels Oz and gets stoned with loads of people. Kinda meandering (for obvious reasons), but the description of the nefarious Dutch bathtub bong was pretty funny...

Wil says

interesting, though I suspect mostly made up.

Claude says

A very immature book. I am sure this was just a cash-cow project for John Birmingham. He tries to mimic the style of his earlier works though his current lifestyle is vastly different, that I am sure that everything in this book is a vast embellishment of the truth, that or it's a poor attempt to persuade readers that he is still 'hip'.

I could be wrong here but I think some of the paragraph spacing isn't correct. He often takes the narrative off on a tangent and sometimes starts a new paragraph and other times just blends it all in to one. There is no consistency.

He also talks a lot about video games and it seems to me like he is just trying to confirm some pathetic stoner cliche. He probably doesn't even play video games. Of course I could be wrong.

The book doesn't really tell you anything remarkable about weed that you probably don't already know, (even if you are a non-smoker).

The main reason it pissed me off is because it is filled with stoner-stereotypes and cliches, and reads like a lazy attempt at bad non-fiction writing with no premise behind it.

Also he talks about eating meat and dead animals a lot. What a stupid ignorant fucking cunt. I have little respect for meat eaters. Be vegetarian or you're a stupid fucker. Simple really.

I should really adjust this review to a one star affair.

David Sarkies says

A journey through Australia's dope scene

20 August 2011

This book is about Australian's drug culture, or to be more precisely, the marijuana culture. According to the author (who wrote 'He Died with a Felafel in his Hand', which is all about share housing culture) he was approached by his publisher who gave him a heap of money to write this book, and also promised to pay any legal fees that might incur in his research. Thus he travels across Australia, visiting each of the major cities, to learn about the marijuana culture.

The impression that you get from this book is that not only is marijuana quite prevalent in Australia, but the

government is also quite lenient with it. It ranges from a simple fine in South Australia, to a warning from the courts in other states. In any case, amongst the youth culture of the country, it is viewed as being an acceptable drug. Now, I have had arguments about the legality of it with people. Some argue that it is illegal in the same way that speeding is illegal. Well, if you travel over the speed limit a certain amount then you are fined, but no conviction is recorded (and these very same people themselves flaunt the road rules as if it was of no consequence). I still fall into the category of those who say that it is not criminal to possess, and certainly not illegal to use (some countries it is actually illegal, and can range in penalties from imprisonment to death being under the influence of the drug).

Now, Birmingham suggests that one reaches a stage in life where one simply becomes board, grows up, and moves on. Well, I would hope so. You see, marijuana is like any drug (and it doesn't necessarily need to be illegal, or even a pharmaceutical) in that it can take control of your life. Those who claim that marijuana is not addictive are probably addicts themselves who are in denial. While it may not create the sickness that heroin does, there is always going to be that craving, that desire to have more, and that desire to be under its influence, because reality is simply not the same. However, there are lots of other substances that are like that (take for instance the adrenalin junky).

Look, don't get me wrong, I think marijuana can be a dangerous substance and that it can act as a gateway drug. I have seen people throw their lives away because of this drug. Either they have gone onto harder substances, or simply just let themselves fall through the cracks. It is very demotivational: you smoke it and you simply do not want to do anything else. In fact, a lot of friends that I have had who have been pot heads have got up my nose simply because all they want to do is to lie back and smoke drugs.

From this book one wonders if he is trying to write an Australian version of *Junky*? I don't think so, and if he was, he failed. While Burroughs was writing about addiction, and the impact of junk on his life, Birmingham is doing something completely different: he was exploring an Australian subculture. He was not writing a tale of his life. He was travelling around Australia rather than reminiscing on his life. No, this is not an Australian *Junky*.

Obviously Birmingham made something more of his life: this is clear because he has become a successful author. Now, I like his books where he was telling a story about his research, but I read two of his works of fiction and found them boring and uninteresting, and haven't read any since. This book is very interesting, especially how he does seem to know the drug culture in Australia and he does have a following among that culture. The problem he found, and many people find, is that once they get into that culture it is very difficult to get out. If all of your friends smoke drugs then simply deserting them is not always an option, but it is the choice one needs to make. Even marijuana is a very slippery slope into a pit of nothingness.

Andrew McMillen says

The premise of '*Dopeland*' is simple, and marvellously described by the author in the opening pages: while having a drink with his publisher, John Birmingham was asked whether he felt like writing a book about marijuana.

"Next thing you know they've backed a truckload of cash up to my front door and I've signed a legally binding agreement which _forces_ me to travel around the country smoking dope and writing about it," he writes. "There's also a clause in there somewhere making them responsible for my bail and legal fees should I get busted." All of which sounds like a pretty good deal, and one that sadly sounds less likely to be commissioned in 2014 than when it was first published in 2003.

'*Dopeland*' came four years after Birmingham's 600-page epic, '*Leviathan: The unauthorised biography of Sydney*'. One imagines that writing '*Leviathan*' was an enormous effort of concentration and dedicated

research, and so a relatively straightforward narrative like 'Dopeland' must have appealed to the comparatively carefree days of the author's pot-smoking youth, which found him national success in the years following the publication of his classic sharehouse memoir, 'He Died With A Felafel In His Hand' (1994).

'Dopeland' works best in the sections where Birmingham writes – for want of a better term – 'Felafel'-style, in an edgy, darkly comedic tone that positively leaps off the page and results in many laugh-out-loud moments, owing either to the situation or the clever turns of phrase that Birmingham formulates. Much of the book is written this way, and the scene and character selection are both of a consistently high quality throughout the duration – though, to be fair, the writer's refrain that his smoke-addled memory is shot and his notes aren't to be trusted does become a touch tiresome toward the end.

The sections that drag are those that delve into the history of cannabis, from ancient civilisations discovering the plant to how it's been demonised and politicised in contemporary Australia. Not even an author of Birmingham's talent can moisten these bone-dry retellings, and it's wonder that he wasn't encouraged to cut them entirely. It would've been a stronger book without the history lessons, as the comedic memoir style is a certain winner. Ultimately, though, 'Dopeland' reads as a book of two jarring halves, and never do the two happily meet.

Jim says

Sorry to report that I didn't enjoy this quite as much as I had hoped.

Usually a big fan of Birmo (and can warmly recommend: *He Died with a Felafel in His Hand*, *The Tasmanian Babes Fiasco*, *Off One's Tits* (collected Essays) and the remarkable 'Leviathan' - a 'biography' of Sydney) - together with the excellent 'Weapons of Choice' trilogy.

I'll give you the cover blurb . . .

Packing a bag full o' cash from his naive publishers [yeah, right . . as if. (ed)] and a long list of dodgy underworld contacts from Perth to Cairns, JB steps out on a mission. To seek out new friends, with big bags of dope, and to boldly smoke where no-one has smoked before.

On his tour JB meets the dope smokers of Australia. The Sci-Fi geeks, student activists and obligatory Nimbin ferals.

[and so it goes on . . .ed]

end blurb

Quite frankly, in my opinion this 'book' was 'cooked up' by JB's publishers to appeal to some idea of 'hip-ness' amongst the smart latte drinking set which number amongst his wider audience - in order that they could vicariously 'indulge' in the mystique of consumption and enable them to nod knowingly at their next dinner party when someone else ('living on the edge' . . . ooooooh!) got a bit giggly after a stretch in the toilet. It threatened to be a reportage of the dope consuming 'silent majority' of Australians, admittedly from all walks of life, providing some insight into the history of local drug culture, the reaction of the state & federal legislature and the wider social and political engagement of the 'issue/s'.

However, it has been a wasted opportunity (imho) to explore in greater depth & clarity the afore-mentioned aspects of drug consumption and present a more reasoned summation of same.

Deborah Ideosepius says

An interesting, entertaining and informative book about Australia and Dope culture written, apparently at the behest of a publisher who contracted John Birmingham to travel around Australia investigating and writing about dope culture. An activity that involved sampling an awful lot of it as well as meeting odd characters along the way.

It is very hard to read or review this book without thinking back to *He Died With A Felafel In His Hand*. Honestly, if it was not for that hysterically funny, totally iconic story of share-houses in Brisbane would I have heard of the author or would I have been even slightly tempted to read a book about dope culture? Sorry John, you won't be surprised, but, no.

Bearing in mind that this was why I read it, the writing style stood out at once, it is noticeably more mature than *Felafel'* but there is also a hint of bitterness that was lacking from that book. The goofy young person narrating *Felafel'* is clearly very different to the one narrating *Dopeland*. It took me a while to figure out the difference, but I likely the fact that the author had matured. There is a lot of fairly random events and narrative, in keeping with a story about dope, since stoners are rather notoriously random and rambling.

Noticeable also is the format; large point print with plenty of space between lines, tasteful little dope leaf pictures throughout, highlights of the story in bold (green) face along the way and little boxes of side stories. It looks like it has been designed with every effort and technique that might capture and hold the rambling attention of someone who is stoned. As the author himself comments; people who are stoned do not often do a lot of reading, usually their attention span is not up to it.

Brisbane, North Queensland, Adelaide, Melbourne, Perth and Tasmania all secure themselves a visit on this road trip to smoke dope and secure stoned stories and it is a fair amount of fun.

Not suited to people who cannot cope with Australian profanity (of which there is moderate amounts), people who cannot cope with gross stories (because the side effects of smoking have heaps) or, probably, people who cannot follow Australian humour - I rather think they would be lost.

Sarah says

Meh.

At first, it made me want to get high. Then a few chapters in it made me want to spew. About half way through I felt like falling asleep: A journey not unlike the effect pot has on me.

I found *Dopeland* to be disjointed, many anecdotes within anecdotes that were at times incoherently strung together and I found myself having to backtrack in order to work out exactly which point in time certain events happened.

An easy read that appeared to be a lazy effort from the author.

Albion says

Fun, but not that insightful. A disappointment from a writer of such calibre. He seems to be reasonably bored with the book himself.

Danny Wynne says

I read this fairly quickly, because it was pretty damn entertaining. A fun, fast-paced book. Also, the section where JB describes what's wrong with the youth of today is not only funny, it's gut-bustingly hysterical.
