

King of the Rattling Spirits, novel by Miha Mazzini

"The King of the Rattling Spirits is Miha Mazzini's hilarious and touching fictional memoir of coming of age in 1970s Yugoslavia where rock'n'roll—regardless of what mothers or dictators believed—was king."

Let's hear what the first hippy in the town has to say:

"My father gave me such a hard time when I first came back from Amsterdam. He made me get a job at the ironworks and everyone there pestered me. Most of all that fucking foreman, who once caught me alone and said that he'd like to join the hippies, too, and asked me where he could do it. All because he'd heard that we had free sex and a sexual revolution. I told him to give me a photo, like the one for a passport, and three hundred German marks. My old man was the president of the town hunting association and I stole a blank membership card from him. I entered the foreman's photo and his personal data. And on the front I put that he was licensed to have free sex and take part in the sexual revolution. He was so happy! Then I went on to explain how to use the various categories, such as CATCH, DAY and WEIGHT. I also gave him that stamp you can get with a stag on, and told him to use it for underlining the big catches, such as blondes. I printed the name of our town and number 0001, the same as on Tito's Party card. The bloke was in heaven. I warned him not to keep going on about it to the uninitiated. His card was only valid among other members. He managed to realise that he was number 0001 in our town and that he had to do something about it. Within a week, four of his friends came to me, wanting to join. I increased the fee to

four hundred marks and when my father wasn't there, I made new membership cards. The business really took off. I don't know what they did, but I never once enrolled a woman. Just geriatrics, big bellied and bold, who wanted a license for free sex and the sexual revolution. Soon I didn't feel like typing anymore so I put the foreman in charge of new members and I just took a commission. I no longer had to go to work, my boss just stamped my card for me every day, and I had plenty of money for travelling around the world as much as I wanted. I saw everything, from India to Woodstock. I used to come back home just to get more cash. I told the foreman that the hippy movement was spreading fast around the world. And he himself could see in newspapers the pictures of naked babes in Woodstock and the Isle of Wight, rolling in the mud. And then one day I come back and find myself surrounded by five men with the lowest membership numbers. Why didn't I bring a hippy babe from abroad? Our women didn't want to join, but they would if they knew how fashionable free love was in the West. I urgently had to organise an international exchange, something like those volunteer projects for building roads etc. And they should be blondes! They went on and on at me. I was getting all sweaty, not knowing what other bullshit to give them. I somehow managed to get rid of them and came home only to find my old man jumping up and down with aggro. Where had all the membership cards disappeared to? He'd found my silk scarf in the hunting association's office, what was I doing there? Why was the foreman so secretive, and his friends too? What was going on? I went to sleep in some barn somewhere. But as soon as I appeared in the

town in the morning, I was hunted down and pestered. I was getting into a panic. And then suddenly it was all over. Everyone disappeared. Poof, just like that, overnight. The foreman, his friends, my old man, no one could be seen. After a while I found out that the police stuck its nose into the matter, infiltrated its own man and arrested them all. A secret society is no joking matter! I'd never been so frightened in my life. A week passed, then two. Nobody split on me. And I realised they wouldn't. Because only the oldest members knew about me, and they weren't allowed to say anything because I travelled and was their international contact, like. At the trial, they were all sentenced to I don't know how many years for being a local secret society. But if it had emerged that they were led from abroad or were a part of an international conspiracy, they'd get twice as long, maybe some of them would even have got shot. My dad was taken because the membership cards belonged to him, as well as the typewriter. At first he knew nothing, but after a couple of days he admitted everything, even to being the ideological leader. After the sentencing, I lay in my flat, realising what a good time I was having. Nobody pestered me any more. I also realised that there was no better system than communism. I'd looked for freedom all over and in the end, found it at home. Just tell me this: where else does the state remove all those hanging round your neck in one single night, eh? Literally makes you free?"