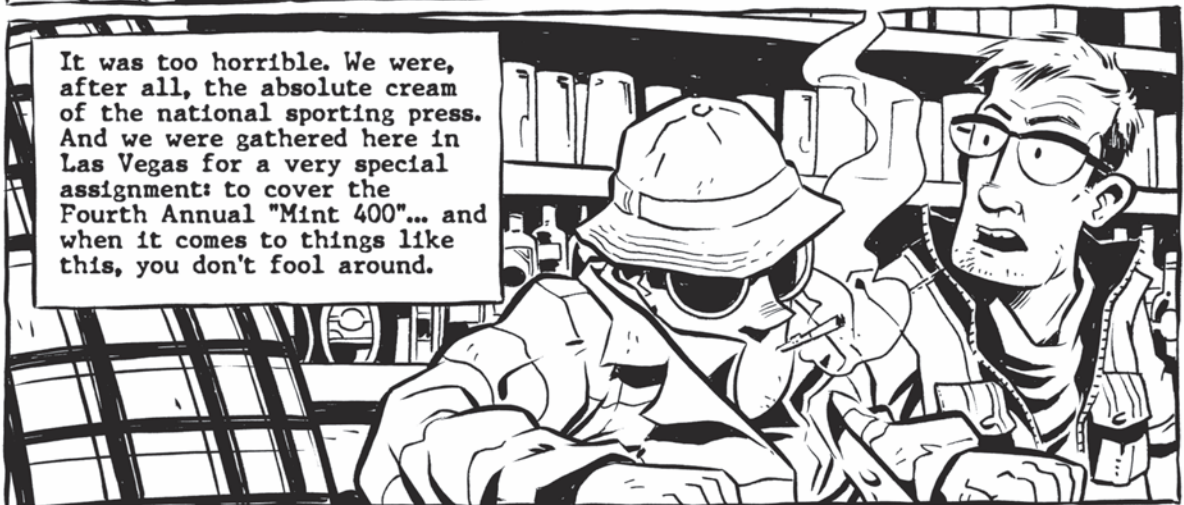
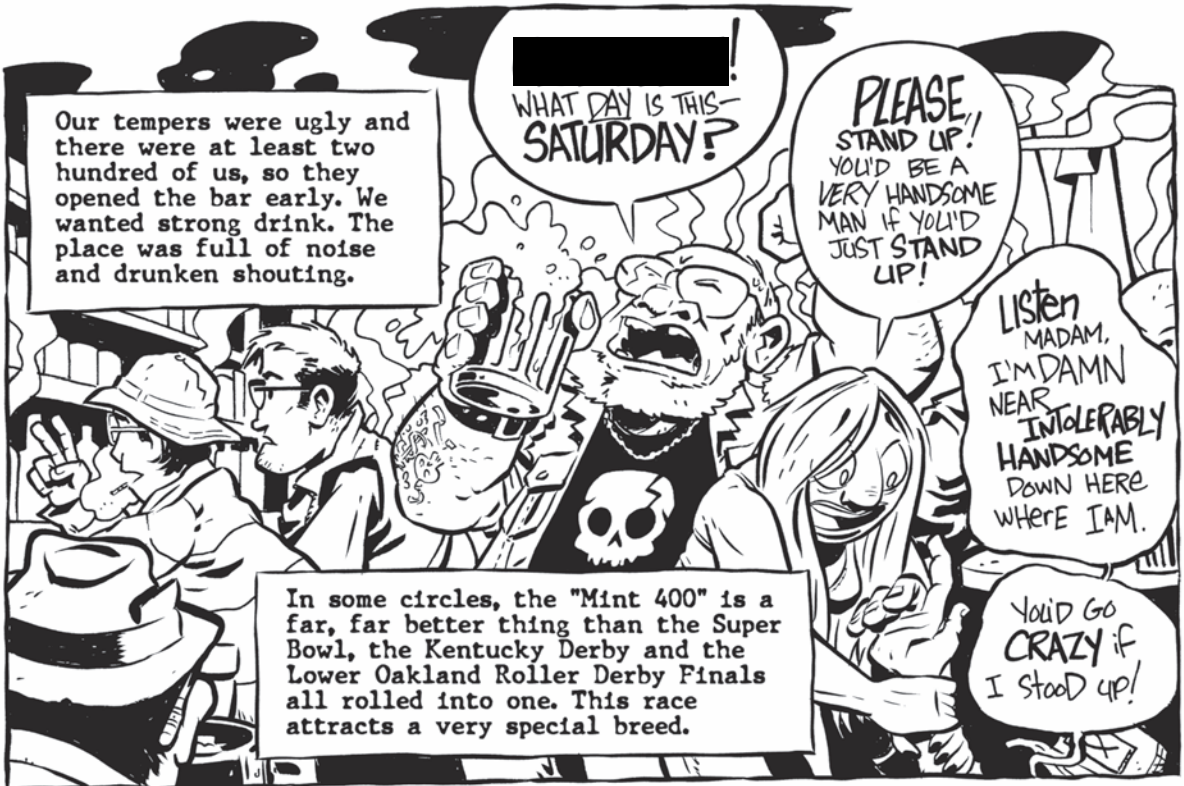


## 5. Covering the Story... A Glimpse of the Press in Action... Ugliness & Failure

The racers were ready at dawn. Fine sunrise over the desert. Very tense. But the race didn't start until nine, so we had to kill about three long hours in the casino next to the pits.



But now - even before the spectacle got under way - there were signs that we might be losing control of the situation... and with the race about to start, we were dangerously disorganized.

The first ten bikes blasted off on the stroke of nine. It was extremely exciting and we all went outside to watch.

The flag went down and these ten poor buggers popped their clutches and zoomed into the first turn, all together, then somebody grabbed the lead, and a cheer went up as the rider screwed it on and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

There were something like a hundred and ninety more bikes waiting to start. They went off ten at a time, every two minutes. At first it was possible to watch them out to a distance of some two hundred yards from the starting line. But this visibility didn't last long.

Well,  
THAT'S  
THAT.

THEY'LL BE  
BACK AROUND  
IN AN HOUR  
OR SO.

LET'S GO  
BACK TO  
THE BAR.



None of us realized, at the time, that this was the last we would see of the "Fabulous Mint 400" - By noon it was hard to see the pit area from the bar/casino, one hundred feet away in the blazing sun.



The idea of trying to "cover this race" in any conventional press-sense was absurd. It was time, I felt, for an Agonizing Reappraisal of the whole scene.



The race was definitely under way. I had witnessed the start; I was sure of that much. But what now?

By ten they were spread out all over the course. It was no longer a "race"; now it was an Endurance Contest.



Somewhere around eleven, I made another tour in the press vehicle, but all we found were two dune-buggies full of what looked like retired petty-officers from San Diego.

IF YOU WANT A GOOD CHASE YOU SHOULD GET AFTER THAT SKUNK FROM CBS NEWS UP AHEAD IN THE BIG BLACK JEEP.

They roared off, and so did we. Bouncing across the rocks & scrub oak/cactus like iron tumbleweeds. The beer in my hand flew up... then fell in my lap and soaked my crotch with warm foam.



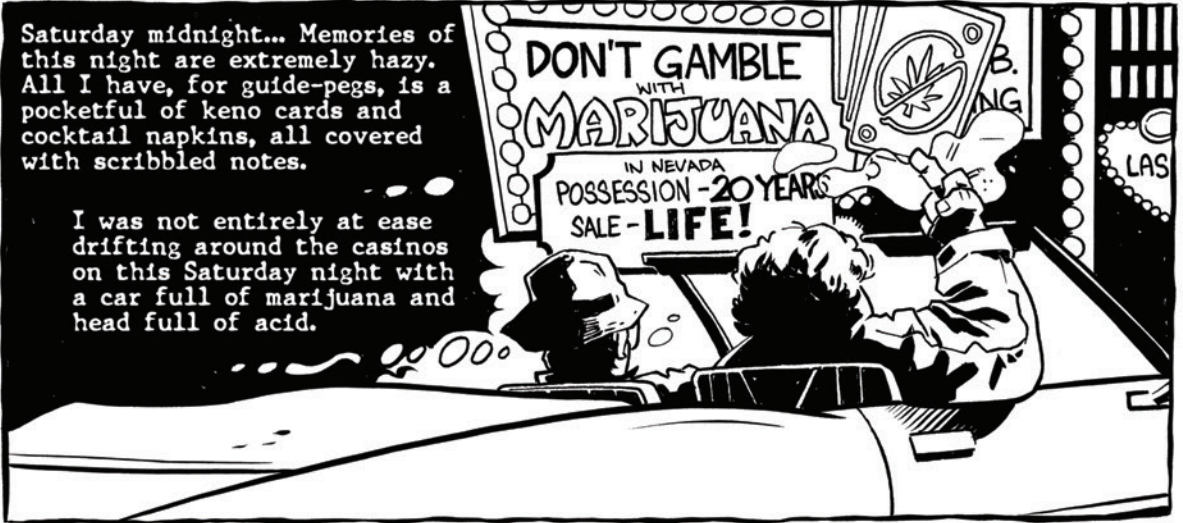
I went back to the blockhouse bar/casino that was actually the Mint Gun Club - where I began to drink heavily, think heavily, and make many heavy notes...



# 6. A Night on the Town... Confrontation at the Desert Inn... Drug Frenzy at the Circus-Circus

Saturday midnight... Memories of this night are extremely hazy. All I have, for guide-pegs, is a pocketful of keno cards and cocktail napkins, all covered with scribbled notes.

I was not entirely at ease drifting around the casinos on this Saturday night with a car full of marijuana and head full of acid.



We had several narrow escapes: at one point I tried to drive the Great Red Shark into the laundry room of the Landmark Hotel - but the people inside seemed dangerously excited.



I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT IN MY LINE OF BUSINESS IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE HEP.

AS YOUR ATTORNEY I ADVISE YOU TO DRIVE OVER TO THE TROPICANA & PICK UP ON GUY LOMBARDO. HE'S IN THE BLUE ROOM WITH HIS ROYAL CANADIANS.

WHY SHOULD I PAY OUT MY HARD-EARNED DOLLARS TO WATCH A CORPSE?

The JOB, OF COURSE.

LOOK, WHY ARE WE OUT HERE? TO ENTERTAIN OURSELVES, OR TO DO THE JOB?

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

YOU CAN'T PARK HERE!

Suddenly people were screaming at us. We were in trouble. Two thugs wearing red-gold military overcoats were looming over the hood.

