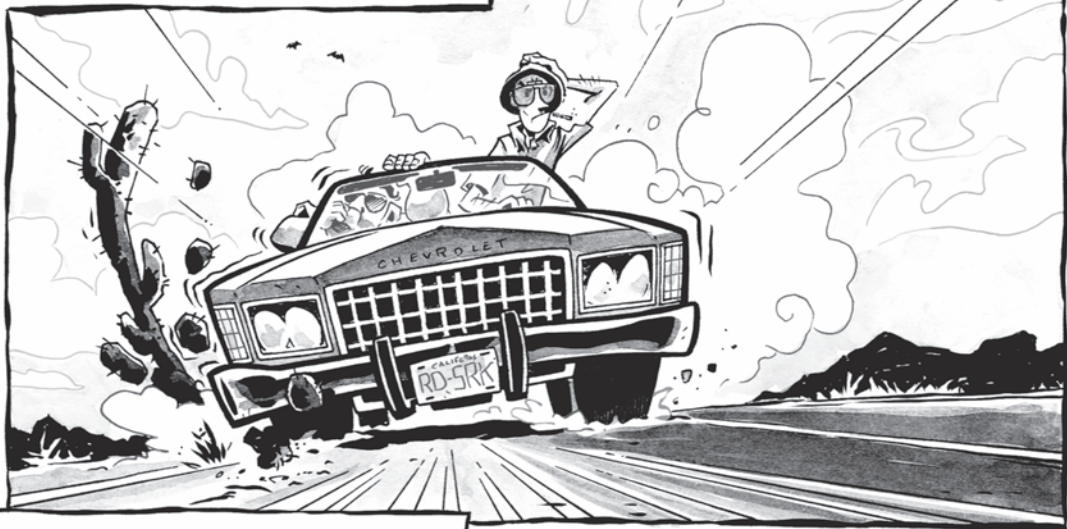


PART ONE

We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold.



I remember saying something like:



I FEEL A BIT
LIGHTEADED;
MAYBE YOU
SHOULD DRIVE.

And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about a hundred miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas. And a voice was screaming:





Then it was quiet again.



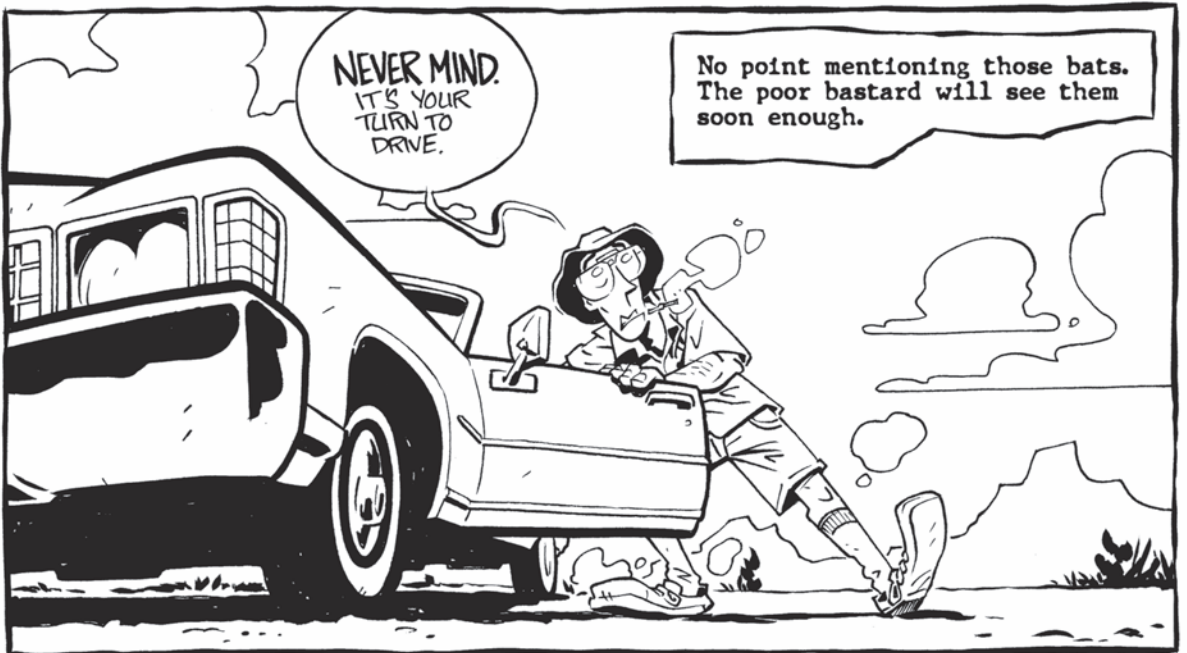
My attorney was pouring beer on his chest to facilitate the tanning process.

WHAT the HELL ARE YOU YELLING ABOUT?

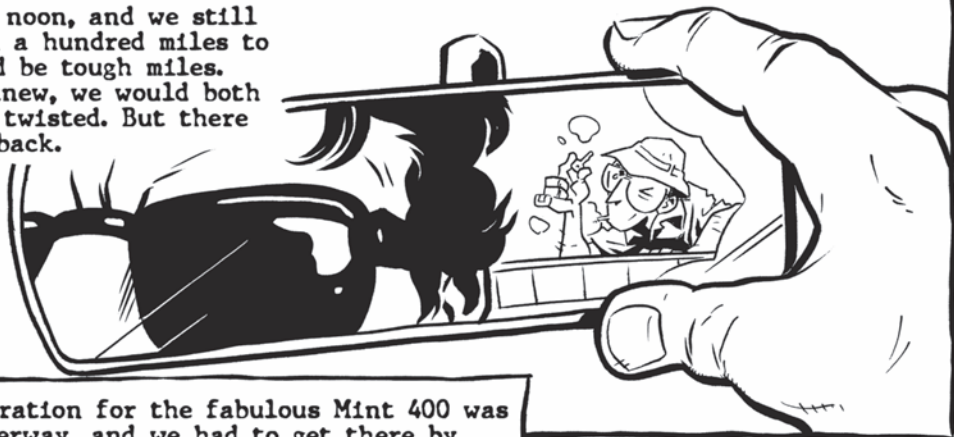


NEVER MIND. IT'S YOUR TURN TO DRIVE.

No point mentioning those bats. The poor bastard will see them soon enough.



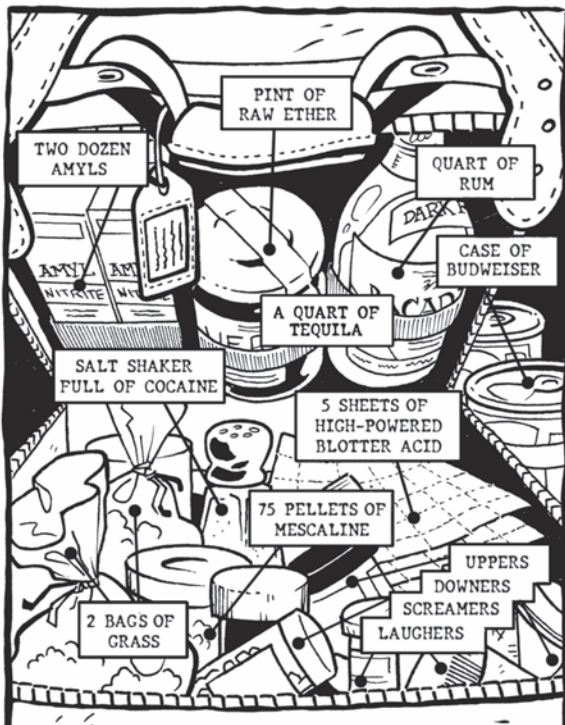
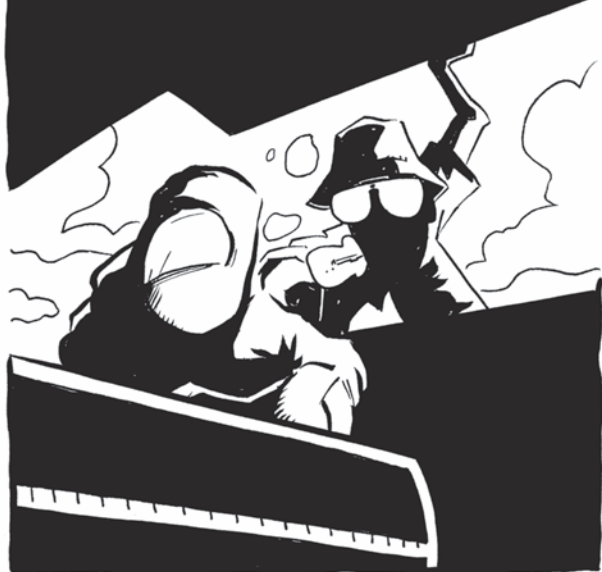
It was almost noon, and we still had more than a hundred miles to go. They would be tough miles. Very soon, I knew, we would both be completely twisted. But there was no going back.



Press-registration for the fabulous Mint 400 was already underway, and we had to get there by four to claim our soundproof suite. I was, after all, a professional journalist; so I had an obligation to cover the story, for good or ill.



The sporting editors from the magazine that hired me for the job had also given me \$300 in cash, most of which was already spent on extremely dangerous drugs. The trunk of the car looked like a mobile police narcotics lab.



Not that we needed all that for the trip, but once you get locked into a serious drug collection, the tendency is to push it as far as you can.

The only thing that really worried me was the ether.

There is nothing in the world more helpless and irresponsible and depraved than a man in the depths of an ether binge.



And I knew we'd get into that rotten stuff pretty soon.

ONE TOKE OVER THE LINE, SWEET JESUS!!!



ONE TOKE OVER THE LINE!!!



One toke? YOU POOR FOOL! Wait till you see those goddamn bats.

My attorney saw the hitchhiker long before I did.



LET'S GIVE THIS BOY A LIFT.

