

before but the owner of the boat was broke and willing to make a deal for some money.

Don, the fellow I talked to, was a big-time acid dealer in San Francisco who had recently turned to dealing marijuana. He had actually hired the boat before I spoke to him and sent it south to Mexico hoping for the possibility of a score. The fact that I was in at this time with Jesse's and my seam was sweet news to him, so he called his skipper in Mazatlan and we made the final arrangements, agreed to terms, and shook on the deal.

After completing those arrangements, I saw a friend in San Francisco who owned an airplane. I didn't want to use an airplane but I wanted one available in case I had to. Dr. Billyboy, the dude I talked to, owned a Cessna 240. He said he was ready to move at a moment's notice, all I had to do was call him from Mexico and tell him when to land. I didn't trust Dr. Billyboy completely, mainly because he had a Texas Ranger complex and liked to walk around with 358 Magnums tucked in his belt. His credentials were good though. He had made a dozen runs that I knew of personally and he always did them well.

At the end of a hectic week I had all the preliminaries ready, a boat in Mexico, a plane that could come down at the first phone call, and another contingent of dudes who agreed to bring down a truck to move the load on the ground. Neither Jesse nor I were ready to move the weed along the Mexican roads without assistance. We wanted some good equipment to rely on. We needed a couple of radios, a house to store the weed if necessary, and we also needed more money. The *bread Life* magazine had given us was almost gone. We owed Louie \$2,000 for the rest of the field and another \$300 to \$1,000 for the actual moving. We had the two grand for the field but we didn't have any more, so it was up to me to get it. Before I left on the return flight to Mexico I contacted some old friends who were in the music business and arranged for them to finance the trip. They put up \$5,000 for a double return on their money, plus the right to sell a third of the load at wholesale prices. I agreed to the deal, and left for Mexico three days before Louie was to harvest our field.

Gene and I flew to Acapulco the same day. Jesse met us at the airport and drove us to Jessé's rancho. Early the next morning Jesse picked up Sanchez and flew us back into the mountains. He carried a load of fertilizer and irrigation pipe for some of his growers, so we were packed into the plane on top of the supplies. Gene shot pictures all the way, the take-off, the flight, the landscape below us, and the landing. When we landed, Raul was waiting for us with six mules. The trip up into the mountains the second time was a repeat of the first trip, although I considered myself a veteran now, pointing out things to Gene along the way. Gene's camera was in his hands all the time. The campsite didn't seem to mind, as my Polaroid had broken the ice.

We stopped at Sejora Sala's for breakfast and Gene shot her portrait. Then we took off for Rafael's house. It was comical watching Gene adjust to the mule's saddle as we started up the trail. I sympathized with him, remembering my own battle a few weeks before. When we reached Rafael's house he welcomed us. Louie was there with his wife and children. Our arrival was somewhat ceremonial, and I was glad I had remembered to bring some mezcal. That night we all got gloriously drunk and Jesse and I put Gene through the master's bed routine. Finally I told Gene to grab his bag and sleep outside with me, which he gladly did. As we lay on the ground looking at the stars, fireflies burst out of the bouganvillea like miniature searchlights, lighting up the area. Gene was full of the same mystery and admiration I had experienced on my first trip, and I listened quietly as he talked. The need to communicate one's feelings about the mountains is overwhelming. As he was re-creating his experiences, I fell asleep.

The next morning we breakfasted early and mounted our mules before it was light. Gene wanted to get some pictures of the sunrise and Jesse and I wanted to be in Louie's field as soon as possible. Louie and his family had returned home the night before, after Gene and I had gone to sleep. I was amazed that they had taken off in the dark but Sanchez said it was no problem, they were used to the mountains.

We rode the same trail as before, going faster this time because our

mules were fresh. When we reached Lupe's house, half a dozen campesinos were there, sitting around a fire. We were introduced around. Lupe explained that he had hired the men to help with the harvest. They had brought along seven burros to carry the marijuana.

Lupe's wife had a meal prepared so we had a quick bite. Gene had pictures and none of the campesinos seemed to mind although they averted their faces when the camera was pointed their way. Then we remounted and rode to the field. When we arrived the campesinos led up the animals and moved in among the plants. Wielding machetes they began lopping off the foxtails and upper branches. The foliage were set aside in separate piles as they worked. While the campesinos cut the plants, Jesse and I carried the bundles over to the edge of the field. Sanchez had brought along several large burlap sacks for the marijuana, but we didn't stuff the marijuana in the sacks, instead we wrapped the sacks around the bundles of grass and tied them with twine. The marijuana wouldn't be sacked until after it was dry.

It amazed me how few plants it took to make a large, twenty-kilo bundle. In a few hours Jesse and I had thirty bundles tied at the side of the field. Gene photographed the whole process, moving among the tall plants as the campesinos worked. I was fascinated by the quickness and dexterity of the campesinos. They moved with grace and agility. One old man named Diego, who seemed to be *jefe* of the group, was especially agile, jumping around the plants like a young kid as he mowed them down. Diego had a high-pitched twangy laugh that echoed through the field. His running commentary on everything kept the rest of the campesinos laughing. During the day I grew fond of him, and he reciprocated by tossing especially beautiful colas at me every chance he got. "*Aquí, Jerónimo,*" he'd yell. "*¡Fume ésta! ¡Te pone muy loco!*"

By two o'clock the field was harvested. One of the campesinos brought the burros down and we tied the bundles on their backs, four bundles on each burro. The loads completely covered the small beasts. After securing each load, Diego led the group in single file down the trail, heading for Lupe's drying shed. The shed was located in a distant part of the arroyo, some five miles beyond the field. The fact that Lupe had a drying shed pleased me and Jesse. Any farmer who

lives in the high mountains and goes to the trouble of constructing a drying shed is obviously serious about his business. To the growers whose access to tools is enormous, this may not seem like much, but to the campesino in the high Sierras, an effort such as Lupe's is impressive.

It was especially significant when you consider that most of the marijuana grown in Mexico suffers from inadequate growing time and little or no curing. It is cut before it is mature and bricked before it is dry. There are a lot of reasons for this, not the least of which is the hard-up entrepreneur who, in his impatience to fill an order, makes the grower harvest his crop before it's mature. Not all entrepreneurs are guilty of this, but enough are greedy so that a lot of mediocre marijuana is smuggled into the United States. Another reason why so many farmers harvest their crops early is the Federales. In many states in Mexico, especially the west coast states of Michoacan, Nayarit, and Sinaloa, it's a matter of harvesting a crop early or not harvesting it at all. Much of the grass produced in Sinaloa is mediocre—although Sinaloa does produce some of the finest mota in Mexico—because most of the farmers in the state grow extremely paranoid toward the end of a six-month growing season, when they see the small aircraft used by the Federales buzzing around their mountains. The Federales know when marijuana matures as well as the farmers, and one of their favorite games is to seek out the fields just as they are being harvested. That way they hope to corral as many growers and helpers as they can. When the soldiers discover a field being harvested, they move in with their flame throwers and machine guns. To reduce this possibility, farmers in Sinaloa and Nayarit plant and harvest early, hoping against hope that they will be able to harvest a mature crop.

A third reason why so much marijuana is harvested early is simply because of ignorance on the part of the growers. Many farmers harvest their plants as soon as they are head-high, and then brick the grass before it is dry. These farmers aren't particularly concerned about quality; after all, they still get their 50 or 60 pesos per kilo whether the weed is mediocre or not.

When we arrived at the drying shed the burros were stripped of

their loads and allowed to roam free. The campesinos spread the marijuana out on the ground around the shed. The fox tails were taken inside and spread out on special racks. The drying shed measured about 15 feet square, and was made of thatched material so it could breathe. The four walls were lined with racks. As Jesse and I watched and Gene photographed, the campesinos filled the racks with colas. Lupe explained that the colas would be allowed to dry out of the direct rays of the sun, while the rest of the weed would lie in the sun. At night the grass lying outside on the ground would be strung up with twine. In the morning it would be spread out on the ground again.

After the campesinos spread out the marijuana, Lupe paid the men and thanked them. He arranged for them to return in a week to help move the load out of the mountains. As they were preparing to leave, Diego came over and shook my hand. "You have the box that makes pictures," he said. "Show it to me." I pulled my Polaroid out of my bag and handed it to him. "Where do the pictures come out?" he said. "You put the film in this end," I said, holding the camera for Diego to see, "and when you push this button a picture is made." "Make me a picture," Diego said.

While the other campesinos watched, Diego jumped up on his mule. He sat stiff and formal in the saddle, his ancient shotgun balanced on his thigh. I snapped the shutter, waited sixty seconds, then pulled the picture out. I handed it to Diego. He held it delicately in his remarkably fine hands, gazing at it. After five minutes, a big smile broke on Diego's face. "Incredible," he said, shaking his head. "Incredible." The other campesinos crowded around to see Diego's picture. Then they too wanted pictures. I photographed each one sitting sternly in his saddle, gun balanced carefully on lap or shoulder. After they all had their pictures taken, Diego shook hands with me again. "Una semana," he said, smiling. The men rode out of sight.

For the next week Gene, Jesse and I hung around Lupe's house. Every morning we rode up to the drying shed and rotated the plants, shifting the colas from rack to rack, and turning over the branches on the ground. Sanchez and Raul went down to the village below to arrange for more burros. They were due to return at the end of the week.

I easily slipped into the mountain life. Each morning I awoke and wandered down to the stream and bathed, plunging my arms deep into the cold water. Sometimes Lupe's children accompanied me, while Tomas, six years old, scowling like a chimpanzee, while Ester, little Tomas, stared at me in wonder.

Nine years old, Ester was a strikingly beautiful young girl, so slim and perfect when she removed her clothes to bathe, my heart stopped. Her hair hung down in cascades, like a black spring erupting off her head, and her skin was of such a luscious, golden brown it was hard for me to take my eyes off her. I was struck by the enigmatic womanliness of the child, she was both child and angel, goddess and devil, earth mother and temptress, holy madonna and mudfaced urchin all in one. Ester was not only a woman, she was all women, and her stern-faced canyon-deep eyes gleamed at me with a million dark fires, like ten thousand tons of coal were burning behind her brows, sending billows of lightning out of them.

Antonio, the two-year-old, toddled and stumbled after us when we walked down to the stream, his little half-erect penis leading him along like a divining rod. Each morning after bathing, I was guided back to Lupe's hut by the slip-slap of Nadia's hands making tortillas. When I reached the hut the smell of coffee was so strong my stomach jumped. I had never had such an appetite, and the thought of eating what Nadia was preparing was delicious torment. I spent long hours each day either anticipating Nadia's food, eating it, or remembering it.

Lupe's family rarely ate meat, and for two days I watched silently as a baby goat wandered about the house. One morning Lupe slaughtered the goat. Watching the metamorphosis of that animal from a small living creature to skinned carcass to succulent chops on my plate that evening was both appalling and satisfying. To expunge some of the guilt I felt, I got up after dinner and went outside and offered a little prayer for forgiveness to the baby goat's spirit.

Four days later, Sanchez and Raul returned with six burros. The marijuana was dry, so we stripped off the small branches and stuffed them into burlap sacks. The colas were sacked separately, then bound firmly with strong twine. Under ordinary circumstances the mari-

juana would have been bricked at this time. Jesse and I were adamant about keeping our grass in bulk form, however. Bricking ^{not only} destroys the quality of the marijuana, but sophisticated buyers in the States are reluctant to buy bricked kilos. Not bricking our weed meant that it took twice as many burros to move it out of the mountains.

Many growers still brick their weed—bulk marijuana is still the exception rather than the rule in Mexico. To brick weed, it is spread out on a large tarpaulin and dampened with water. Much of the commercial grass in Mexico is actually soaked in a sugar solution, presumably so that the sticky sugar will help bind the kilos in brick form. Actually the sugar is put in to add weight to the kilos, for plain water will bind the bricks. Each kilo of sugar weighs one kilo, however, and when you're selling weed for \$30 a kilo, why not add twenty or thirty kilos of sugar—especially when it costs only a few cents? A lot of the rip-off dealers who work the border employ special sugar men, dudes who are hired to brick the marijuana once the load's brought out of the mountains. The marijuana is taken to a special warehouse where it's spread out on tarpaulin and sprayed with the sugar solution out of a 55-gallon drum. A 100-kilo load often ends up weighing over 120 kilos after it has been sugared. When a gringo buys his sugared kilo, it weighs 2.2 pounds, but when he gets it back to the States and unwraps it, he finds that it has shrunk down to a pound and a half.

Most growers use crude presses made from old automobile parts to brick their grass. The presses are made in all sizes, but the favorite ones make cigarbox-size kilos, a convenient size. The presses are simple boxlike affairs into which the marijuana is stuffed by hand, then an iron plate is fitted over the weed, and a hydraulic jack used to press it down. Making bricks in this manner is a slow, laborious process. In the early stages of our careers, Jesse and I once worked for three days helping a group of Mexicans brick 600 kilos.

While we were stripping and sacking the weed, Diego and his men rode up with four more burros. We now had ten burros, enough to

haul the load out of the mountains. One of the burros would carry food and utensils for the campesinos. It was important that the caravan not be seen along the trail or in any mountain settlements, therefore the men would cook for themselves while hauling the load down. Three of the men with Diego were *pistoleros*, hired to guard the load from *bandidos*.

The emergence of *bandidos*, campesinos who roam the mountains and ambush unguarded loads moving down the trail, is a new phenomenon in the weed industry. Most of the *bandidos* are marijuanos or ex-marijuanos who prefer to rip off loads rather than to grow a crop themselves. There is an intense rivalry between various small communities in the mountains, and campesinos from one area won't hesitate to move in on another area—especially when large amounts of weed and money are involved. Often a group of campesinos will rip off a load to fill an order of their own, but most successful ambushes are the result of carelessness on the part of the transporters or the smugglers themselves.

Now, no load moves out of the mountains without *pistoleros* along to guard it. Timing is critical in transporting weed, and a delay on either end of the trail causes hardship not only for the campesinos moving the weed, but also for those picking it up. Sanchez' plan for moving our load was simple but effective. One man was to ride two hours ahead making sure the trail was clear, the *pistoleros* were to ride as flankers alongside the burros carrying the weed, and the *muleteros* would handle the animals. The rest of us would bring up the daylight Sanchez explained that we would be able to move during the outskirts hours for the first two days only, or until we approached the outskirts of the small village below. After that, all movement must be at night. He also said that it was best that Gene and I not accompany very difficult any further than the small village, for the trail became very difficult after that and the men did not want to have to stop for any reason. Jesse, on the other hand, would accompany the load on down to make sure our interests were cared for.

I was somewhat peeved by the idea of not accompanying the load all the way down but realized Sanchez was right. Gene was certainly

in no shape to make the week's journey down the mountains, and even though I was, I knew the smart thing to do was to go along with Sanchez' suggestion. Four or five nights on muleback in the Mexican Sierras with a ton of weed and potential bandits and Federales and natural disasters is not my idea of a garden party. Besides, the logistics of the trip demanded that I get out of the mountains as quickly as possible so I could check up on the boat. I had to call Berkeley and find out if the boat had moved down the coast to where it was supposed to be; I also had to make sure that the two dudes I'd hired to bring a truck down had actually done so. Sanchez sensed my disappointment at not being able to accompany the load out of the mountains, and suggested that I meet it in a small village in the foothills. "Maybe you can bring your truck in to the village and meet us there," he said. "It would save us a day's journey."

"I'd be glad to pick up the load in the village, Sanchez, I'm sure I can do it."

"It is very difficult reaching the village I am speaking of," Sanchez said. "I will make arrangements with Jesus that you have someone to guide you. It takes six hours in a truck, over a very bad road."

"No matter," I said. "My friends are bringing down a good truck. I'll be there."

So it was set. Jesse would accompany the load out of the mountains, and Gene and I would drop out of the caravan and fly out with Jesus. I could then take care of the final arrangements with the boat and meet the load in the small village with the truck.

That afternoon the load was secured on the burros and we started down the trail. The advance man rode ahead, the *pistoleros* rode out as flankers, a couple of men accompanied the burros, and the rest of us followed. The last few hours of daylight saw the burros spread out along the trail, the *muleteros* casually riding among them. When it got dark the *muleteros* moved in and bunched the burros up so they wouldn't stray off the trail. The rest of us closed the gaps between our animals. At night it gets pitch black in the mountains and no lights were to be used. The mules themselves would find the way. The first few hours of darkness were exceedingly uncomfortable for me; not

only was the steep trail causing me to ride up on my saddle, but I couldn't get over the instinct to keep my hand up to ward off branches. The *muleteros* moved fast, not the slow pace I had grown accustomed to when traveling with Sanchez. Behind me I could hear Gene puffing and wheezing as he attempted to maintain his grip on his mule, but I had no sympathy to spare. I was having the same trouble. Finally, after two hours of struggling, I sat back in my saddle and let my animal have his way. I found it much more comfortable to ride this way, hunched over the horn with my head down and eyes half closed. My mule kept his nose to the ground as he followed the trail.

That first night there was only one rest stop, at a small hut where an Indian family gave us water. We rested twenty minutes and then the *muleteros* drove the animals down the trail, switching their legs with leather crops. On one section of the trail we passed through heavy undergrowth and thousands of fireflies erupted out of the darkness, lighting up our caravan. The fireflies bounced off the men's shoulders and sombreros like sparks off stone.

To pass the time and keep my mind off my discomforts, I thought of our efforts in getting up into the mountains. It was satisfying to think that our labor was responsible for the load now moving down the trail. Forever after when I lit up a joint in San Francisco, I would appreciate the logistics involved in moving every little bit of mota from Mexico to the United States. All the lines and loops and links that eventually connect in one joint were slowly braiding together. I was pleased to see the whole structure, to be part of it and know its full value.

At dawn we stopped at a hut where breakfast was prepared. The woman of the house accepted coffee and beans from our pack animal and in less than forty-five minutes had fed everyone. Gene had a package of cookies in his pack and shared them with the men. I ate and like I was breaking a long fast as I ate, and each bite tasted exquisite.

We rode all that day and into the night, stopping briefly to eat and rest. We were approaching the village, and the *muleteros* intended to detour off the main trail. Gene, Raul, and I were to go on through the village to the airstrip. Jesus was due to fly in the next day to pick

us up and take us out of the mountains. When we came to the fork in the trail, the men and burros went on and Jesse and Sanchez stopped to say goodbye. "Raul will take you on down to the landing strip," Sanchez said. "When Jesus arrives with the airplane, tell him we will be in Hostopan in four days' time and you are to meet us there with your truck. He will arrange to have a friend accompany you. *Bien viaje, hombre.*"

"*Bien viaje, hombre,*" I said.

Jesse held out his hand. "Have a good trip down, man, and make sure you get the truck to Hostopan. These guys can't wait around in that place more than two or three days."

"I'll be there," I said, "as long as Zeke and Hoff made it down to Acapulco."

That afternoon Gene and I waited beside the dirt airstrip for six hours. Both of us were beginning to think that we'd got our signals crossed, when finally Jesus' airplane fitted over the valley. The sound of his airplane was sweet to my ears. When he landed, he explained that he had to make an extra stop for other farmers in a distant part of the mountains. He also had a lot of material for the local farmers, including fertilizer and irrigation pipe. He demonstrated by hauling out a dozen large sacks of fertilizer and throwing them on the ground. Two noncommittal campesinos who had been waiting beside the field for hours quickly moved forward and took the supplies, lashing them on to their mules. Jesus spoke briefly with them and they rode off. He then grabbed our equipment and tossed it into the plane, motioning us in. Gene and I both jumped in and we were off.

After gaining some altitude, Jesus swung back around the canyon where Lupe and Sanchez were leading the string of burros down the trail. "If we can spot them," he said, "so can the Federales." I peered into the canyons as we passed over them. I could see nothing. "Everything stops when the sound of an aircraft approaches," Jesus explained. "From now on they will be moving only at night. It is exceedingly dangerous from here on in." I looked over the mile after mile of rolling mountain canyons and tried to imagine soldiers and farmers doing battle down there. Except for an occasional hut perched

up on a mountain top, there were no signs of life. "I don't see how anyone can see anything," I said. "To me it's like a patchwork quilt." "And the eagle," Jesus laughed. "You must have the eyes of an eagle." Jesus laughed. "You must have the eyes of a snake!"

silence of a snake!"

The abrupt transition from mule to motel room was startling, but three hours after leaving the mountains Gene and I were taking showers in a motel in Huatamaquilpa. I had picked up the station wagon at Jesus' rancho and Gene and I were preparing to drive to Acapulco the following day. I wanted to make sure that Zeke and Hoff, the two dudes who had promised to bring down the pickup, were actually waiting for us.

Zeke was an old-time beatnik smuggler who had gotten in the game a year or so after me and Jesse. Jesse and I hadn't worked with Zeke except in a peripheral way, sometimes providing him with weed when his own connection was out of town or otherwise unavailable. We also loaded planes for him occasionally, since his specialty was barreling loads across the border in souped-up Cessnas. His running partner, Hoff, was a tall, thin dude who was the dealer of the outfit, his specialty being offing the weed once it reached the States. Zeke's half of the partnership, aside from insuring that loads got up to the States, involved raising money and copping the load. He was also the pilot driver behind the outfit, goading it on when it bogged down. He never flew planes across the border himself, preferring to hire Vietnam vets and out-of-work airline pilots instead. His one problem was that he lived in sort of a fantasy land and he tended to bullshit a lot, which put a lot of people off his case. In fact, the reason I had been able to

hire him to drive a truck to Mexico was because his own scene had collapsed. Investors shied away from him, especially since his last two loads had gone down.

The functions of smuggler and dealer in the marijuana industry demonstrate, perhaps better than anything else, the actual structuring of the entire dope culture. Zeke is a smuggler, like me and Jesse, while Hoff is a dealer.

Smugglers are involved in moving marijuana from the interior of Mexico into the United States, whether by airplane, ground vehicle, or boat. The smuggler delivers the load to a dealer, who transports, distributes, and sells marijuana inside the United States. Sometimes dealers are also smugglers and sometimes smugglers are dealers, but this is getting rare. Dealing and smuggling are two different enterprises, connected by the product, but separated by Grand Canyon differences.

The people who smuggle weed come in all sizes, shapes, sexes, and colors. State senators' sons have been arrested for smuggling marijuana and so have janitor's sons. Hippies, beats, squares, straights, they've all been popped at the border with weed in their possession. There is no particular type that dominates the industry, although there are certain classifications into which most smugglers fall.

First, there is the old-time Mexican-American smuggler. The Mexican-American smuggler has been in the game for a long time, and is the primary supplier of most of the southwest and of the large urban ghettos. The Mexican-American smuggler is the most successful since he's been at it for years, with family and racial connections in Mexico that are well established and usually secure. Mexican-Americans form the Texas Syndicate, the largest organized smuggling ring in existence. The Texas Syndicate has good connections on both the Mexican and United States sides of the border. They don't have to worry about being popped, since everyone is paid off. They are never popped in Mexico, and if a fall occurs in the States, they know the officials who can be bought. The Mexican-American smuggler has little to do with the hip community. He sticks pretty much to his own areas and

deals with his own people. Many of the Mexican-American smugglers have established legitimate businesses with the money they've made from weed. They put their profits in liquor stores, small construction firms, appliance outlets, laundromats, ranches. Except for the fact that they smuggle a hell of a lot of weed, most of them have little to do with the current drug revolution. The rash of arrest statistics at the border and the large amounts of dope confiscated do not reflect their activity, simply because they hardly ever get arrested. A final thing that differentiates most Mexican-American smugglers from their gringo counterparts is that they also move a lot of heroin across the border, something most gringo smugglers shy away from.

Second is the Bohemian-beat smuggler. These are individuals who have been part of the Bohemian scene for many years, who smoked weed in the fifties before it was popular, and who got into acid and speed before the invention of the Haight-Ashbury. Most of the Bohemian-beat smugglers work out of some type of creative bag, and fall into weed smuggling because it is a profitable and exciting way to finance their work. Most of them started out small, tripping across the border with a few keys for their personal use, not really intending to become professional smugglers. Because it was so easy when they got started (most Bohemian-beat smugglers got started in the trade during the early sixties), they continued on and became very good at it. Many of them graduated into big-time smugglers, in the sense that they consistently move two or three hundred kilos across the border each month. Jesse and I considered ourselves in this classification.

Third is the hippie-longhair smuggler. These are the young kids who entered the business during the last few years, primarily because of the fantastic demand for marijuana among their peers. Again, many of them started out very small but some are now very heavy smugglers, utilizing aircraft, boats, cars, trucks. Many of the hippie-longhair smugglers work out of some sort of music bag, and many of the operations are financed by rock bands. The reason for this is pure economics. If a band is blasting \$500 worth of weed a week, why not finance a trip so they can score their own? From that beginning it's a simple step into peddling the smuggled weed to other bands and

people. Some of the biggest shipments of weed brought into the United States are financed by successful young rock and roll stars. Unlike the Bohemian smuggler, who tends to operate individually, the young hippie-longhair smugglers usually have quite an organization behind them, lots of bread, lawyers, good equipment. They enter the business like they play their music, totally and with great enthusiasm. The hippie-longhair smuggler is also the one who created the drug revolution. It is his peers who are demanding the weed, and it is his contemporaries who are creating the climate of oppression in Mexico that is changing the whole industry. On the other side of the coin, it is his example and all-pervasive attitude that will eventually create the changes in the laws governing the use of marijuana.

Fourth is the weekend smuggler. This is the tourist, college student, young longhair, or surfer who goes to Mexico for a short vacation and ends up scoring a kilo or two. Sometimes trips are made specifically to score, but the cop is seldom over five kilos. I personally think that before Operation Intercept, the largest number of kilos smuggled were moved by the weekenders, simply because of their number. Often the trips are one-shot adventures, but occasionally a successful weekender graduates into becoming a real smuggler. If he does, he automatically falls into one of the other groups.

Another category of smuggler that is quite new on the set, appearing since Operation Cooperation, in fact, is the granddaddy smuggler, usually a crusty old individual or couple who has been influenced by a younger family member, probably a young hippie rebel grandson, into driving loads across for fun and profit. I personally know of three of these operations, where white-haired old folks merrily trip their way across the border in their Winnebagos with two or three hundred kilos stashed inside the panels. This type of operation is especially popular among old-time dudes who were on the set when booze was outlawed, many of them remembering smuggling liquor in their youth. Prohibition and the current laws against weed are similar. This category also includes some old renegades who have lived all their lives outside of society, boat captains and adventurers who find smuggling weed satisfying and profitable. The last time I was in Mexico I met two men, both in their sixties, who were either scoring or waiting

to score. They were vibrant old dudes who had already made half a dozen trips.

Aside from the common denominator of weed, most of the above-mentioned classes of smugglers have little or nothing to do with one another. They approach their craft differently, utilize different tools and often expect different results from their endeavors. The primary difference between the Texas Syndicate-type smuggling operation and the modern Bohemian-beat-longhair smuggler, what I like to refer to as the California smuggler, is that the one utilizes border connections and violence if necessary, and the other doesn't. The California-type smuggler relies on a smaller ungreedy operation that prefers to move smaller loads with ingenuity and cool, relying mostly on the fact that less than five percent of the border traffic can be physically checked. During our own trips neither Jesse nor I ever carried guns, always during that if we did fall we would either split at that moment, or figure that if we did fall we would either later in the courts.

Aside take the fall and work it out later in the courts, the Texas Syndicate-type organizations, on the other hand, have a predilection for using force if necessary. If a member of the organization is accidentally popped and none of the covering efforts (*mordida*, etc.) prevail in smoothing things over, the smugglers are not adverse to removing the obstacles by more direct methods. This is what happened in 1966, when the Bono brothers, two Mexican-Americans from Los Angeles, were accidentally popped by two green immigration officials near Mexicali. The brothers had a ton of weed in the back of an old army four-by, and the officials, thinking they might be making a deal, so the brothers overpowered them, tied them up in an abandoned shack, and set fire to it, killing them.

This is not an altogether uncommon experience for border-American when dealing with the Texas Syndicate—or Mexican-American smugglers in general. Their particular code of ethics, rooted or in the Mexican personality, does not normally consider surrender or acquiescence in any way. They are ready to work things out, share their load as it were, if the border people are reasonable; if they aren't, the guns are under the seats.

No smuggler, Mexican-American or gringo, likes this type of trip

to go down. It brings the heat all along the border, and the individuals responsible are usually caught. The reason it doesn't happen often is because of the grease that is spread out along the border; often it slides along nice and easy and no one gets hurt. When someone does get killed, it's usually because either green guards or inexperienced dope smugglers have been involved.

Not all of the young gringos who get involved in weed are immune to violence, however. In recent years, because of the fantastic amount of publicity surrounding weed and weed smuggling, an ominous pattern has developed along the border. Hundreds of young gringos with little experience in Mexico or in weed get a stake together and highlight it to the border looking for a fast score. These kids are a perfect setup for the ripoff artists—both gringo and Mexican—who work the border. The kids get to the border with a third-hand connection or no connection at all, and attempt to score, hoping for the quick trip back home with a stash. There is no way of knowing how many of the young dudes have been taken for a ride in the desert "to see the stash" in the last few years, but every month or so a couple of bodies are discovered. The finds warrant an inch or so in the local newspaper, that's all.

The ripoff trips are not confined to towns along the border. Both Phoenix and Tucson have become known as real bummers, towns where a dude has to be pretty slick to hold on to his stake.

The ruthlessness that has invaded what I call the border dope trade, a trade that has little to do with the smuggling industry going on in the interior of Mexico, incidentally, has occurred because of a number of factors. For one thing, many of the one-shot dudes who come down to the border to score approach the industry with such naïveté that they ask to be ripped off. The profit potential available in the weed industry has also attracted hundreds of petty criminal types, hoodlums and gangsters who find the relatively innocent weed-heads easy prey. The important thing to remember about the burgeoning weed industry is that it was initiated by noncriminal types, youths who, if they had any previous criminal experience at all, were probably involved in nothing more serious than joy-riding or shoplifting. Many

of the more serious criminal types who are getting into smuggling in a big way are prone to violence, which is occurring with increasing regularity along many parts of the border. There's an old Mexican saying that goes, "A man who uses his hands on a woman doesn't know what his tongue is for"; the same is true of dope smugglers who use violence. It's a bum trip all the way down the line, and, like the Bono brothers, who after murdering the border guards were captured and are now in prison, doomed to defeat. Violence goes against the nature of weed itself, and the people who approach the game like junior high school gangbusters usually don't last long.

In recent years, the sophistication of the antiweed forces both within Mexico and along the border has necessitated a specialization on the part of those involved in smuggling and dealing. The structure did not occur accidentally, nor did it happen overnight. It was the natural culmination of many trips and many falls, and the eventual recognition of the facts of life.

When Jesse and I first started smuggling weed, we copped the loads together. I drove them across the border and Jesse sold them in the States. We soon found out that this wasn't where it was at, however. Any man who risks his ass on the street, whether in a plane, a car, or a boat, is a fool to risk his ass on the street. After a couple of close calls where Jesse almost got popped, we changed our operation and linked up with some dealers. In fact, we formed a partnership with the dealers. They provided us with the money to cop, we did the copping and delivered the load, and they sold it. Jesse and I realized that offing weed wasn't our scene. We didn't have the time. We didn't have the social grace. We didn't have the temperament. I myself never did like getting stoned with a bunch of weed-smoking squares while they sampled our product.

The people we linked up with were good dealers, able to run the social set down and bullshit with customers and blast weed all day. Our partnership was a success because we kept the ends of the industry separate. The dealers did the selling and Jesse and I did what we did best, moved weed across the border.

The efficacy of this pattern is not always easy to impress upon dealers, however, especially when they are putting up the bread. Whenever money moves south across the border, I don't care whose hands it is in, it enters into a sort of never-never land, tending to disappear mysteriously, wafted into the mountains, as it were. For this reason almost every big dealer I know of has tried at one time or another to smuggle his own weed. This way he can not only control his bread, if he is smart he can cop his weed cheaper—since he will be buying direct from the source. Also, hired mules are cheaper than smugglers who are partners, so he can save money that way. There is still another reason why dealers often attempt to do their own smuggling, however. There is a mystique running with the dealer who has the reputation for being able to cover every aspect of the set, from fields to street, as it were. It impresses customers, who assume that if a dealer is getting his weed direct from the source, it must be pretty good weed. It also makes them feel good to be able to buy from a dealer who is able to furnish them with weed when other dealers can't. In many cases, dealers who go to Mexico to take care of the smuggling end become permanent smugglers because they find that their talents lie in that direction. Also, some smugglers switch their roles and become dealers for the same reason.

Any reasonably sophisticated smuggling operation that is successful today is structured somewhat along the lines of Jesse's and my trip. We have entered the baroque period of marijuana smuggling, and those knowledgeable in the trade consider that if a dude is copping the weed, running it across the border, and selling it, then he is doing it wrong. Most small operators have been squeezed out of the marijuana industry in the last few years, and the sophisticated operations have taken over. I do not mean sophisticated in the sense that the operations are Mafia-controlled or bankrolled by big-time gangsters, but sophisticated in that all the loose ends are together. Marijuana has really become an industry; weed cooperatives have taken over to fight the antiweed cooperatives set up by the Mexican and American governments.

Specialization has occurred in the weed industry not just because

of the antiweed forces, however. The different natures of the two ends of the weed business are also responsible. The difference is reflected in the attitudes not only of smugglers and dealers, but in the attitudes of the public toward smuggling and dealing.

In the attitude toward smuggling and dealing. That is, they think of the public and dealers have different heads. They approach their problems differently, have different motivations, and they approach their problems from opposite sides of the border. Leaving marijuana out of it for a minute, and at the risk of oversimplifying, I would say that smugglers are in the game for the *rush* and dealers are in it for the *money*. The smuggler gets his kicks outwitting the border and the dealer gets his kicks driving a Mercedes 280 SL in front of his friends. Smugglers live in a sort of Old West fantasy where it's them alone up against the baddies (United States Customs); dealers live in a sort of 1920s Great Gatsby flapper dream, waiting for the chauffeur to open the door of the Duesenberg.

In the public's mind the differences between the two are reflected in the attitude that smugglers and smuggling are romantic (especially among the young), and dealers and dealing are dirty and evil (especially among the old). Both of the images are true and both are untrue, but the relevant fact here is that smuggling things across borders (anything and any border) does have romantic connotations not normally associated with dealing and peddling. The romanticism is a confined to squares on the street either, the smuggler himself is a victim of it. He is neither immune from imagining himself romantic, nor can he ignore the fact that others think him so.

When you talk to a smuggler you usually find an individual who considers himself a rebel, a loner, a sort of daredevil. Most smugglers are smart, have been involved in many scenes, have had some experiences in Mexico before marijuana became the reason for going there, and have an interest in the country beyond weed itself. In fact, many smugglers engage in the business because it is the only trade that allows them to remain in Mexico. Most smugglers live outside the mainstream of society and are discontent with reasonable, secure pursuits. Most of them are victims of a vision that places them on the edge of life itself. I believe that many smugglers enter the game

because it's something like war, a pastime where life is lived on the edge, where the games played are real games, where nothing is hidden, and where every move has to be conscious. A lot of smugglers enjoy the rush, the intense energy that explodes through the body when the border is approached. At the border the rush is on the surface, a prick-retractor, as a smuggling companion of mine says. And then, some smugglers are enamored of weed itself, considering it a tool that if introduced to and used properly by mankind, will save society, alleviating some of the hassles that plague the world today. These smugglers feel compelled to deliver as much weed as possible into the hands of kids. For them smuggling is a mission.

Finally, a lot of smugglers get into the game because they enjoy the direct conflict with the establishment. This is especially true now when so much energy and equipment of both the Mexican and the United States governments are being brought to bear against the border. There are hundreds of new guards, weed-sniffing dogs, electronic teletypes that relay messages and monitor traffic, radar, informers, drone aircraft flying the borders, and all the other man-made and natural snags that smuggling is heir to. To overcome these obstacles and make money and not be dependent on an eight-to-five job and be able to do what you want when you want is why a lot of people get into smuggling.

My own reason for getting into smuggling—to lend specifics to generalities—was to obtain freedom to write. When supporting a family while trying to write became impossible, I fell into smuggling. I didn't plan it that way; it just happened. I have never been interested in smuggling *per se*, nor have I been particularly interested in weed as a salvation for youth. For me smuggling was a means to an end. True, the rush was important when I approached the border, because it is somewhat like the rush experienced when creating something. It never overwhelmed me, however. My desire to write got me in the smuggling game and my writing about marijuana got me my first exposure in print, a fact I look upon with a Zen Buddhist's appreciation. The rhythm works in wondrous ways. The money was never important beyond its ability to provide the freedom I needed to write.

surprising as it may seem to cynics, money is not the motivating force that leads all people into smuggling. In truth, very few dope smugglers make a great deal of money and lawyers' fees take up so much of the bread and hardships who ends up with a hacienda in Mexico, every and the smuggler who ends up with a rare bird.

that the smuggler, I imagine, is a rare bird.

smuggler's dream, I imagine, is a rare bird.

Dealers, on the other hand, are essentially businessmen who most open to be dealing in weed rather than automobiles or whatever. Most dealers use other people's bread and make their money doing other people's shit. They don't like the rush and can't take the border. Many of them don't like Mexico. Dealers are sociable; smugglers tend to be solitary. To be social is necessary for a dealer, however, since dealers are salesmen. Dealers also, especially if they are successful, attract large crowds of people around them, other dealers and middlemen and hangers-on who enjoy the peripheral benefits all successful dopes provide. Smugglers usually like to run alone, although sometimes they run as partners, like me and Jesse, and sometimes as couples, man and wife teams who use that guise to aid their smuggling. Dealers are more money-oriented, they get their rush in status and material things, property, cars, legitimate businesses. They also crave the accolades of people in their set.

Other interpreters of the drug scene may disagree, especially many dealers who pride themselves on their anonymity, but I believe many dealers have a definite need to be recognized, especially by their peers.

This need exists despite the fact that if a pop occurs, it's usually because of someone in the set, not someone out of it. A maxim of the weed industry says there's no such thing as a well-known, successful dope dealer; the attributes are contradictory. Many dealers refuse to follow the maxim though, and end up falling behind the sidewalk rush, the need to be known, to expose themselves, to sit in coffee houses, to announce their success by driving big cars and buying big houses or acting big-time in front of the squares on the avenue. For a lot of people dealing is like being a rock star, however—you have to be noticed to be appreciated.

Dealing, as opposed to smuggling, must be considered the yardstick

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for the whole hippie-longhair-Bohemian drug culture of the last few years. During the early days of dealing, a small group of people took a hell of a lot of risks and made a lot of money. They also set the stage for most of the changes that eventually occurred in the drug culture. In 1965, there were no bankrollers around who would put up ten or twenty thousand dollars to finance a run for weed. Consequently, all the bread had to be raised on the street a dollar at a time. Participation in the financing of a run required a sense of morality that seemed to pervade most dealing; this was before the era of universal ripoffs and burn artists.

Perhaps I can explain dealing better if I speak in terms of acid and other drugs rather than marijuana. The short history of acid dealing demonstrates the change in dealing and handling all underground drugs better than marijuana, because it was acid, not marijuana, that made dealing popular among white, middle-class kids.

During the first few years of acid dealing, from 1963 to 1965, when the drug was entering the American consciousness, the only acid available came from the Sandoz Laboratories in Switzerland. It was very expensive and difficult to get, so only a few people could deal it. During these first few years of drug discovery, all the hallucinogens were approached with a sense of spirituality by users and dealers; the whole process of coping, dealing, and using was almost reverent. I was living in Patzcuaro, Mexico, in 1964 when a friend stopped by my house. He had just driven in from Yucatan, where his wife had given birth to a baby while under the influence of peyote; the whole delivery had been conducted under the influence of peyote, the husband and midwife also eating the buttons. "This is a holy plant," he said, handing me a button. "You must be very careful how you use it. It can do you as much harm as good."

The hallucinogens were considered powerful medicine at this time, and the individuals who had been initiated into their use considered themselves fortunate, dwellers in a Garden of Eden, privileged to be partaking of a sacrament. Bad drugs, adulterated drugs, ripoffs, and burns were unheard of. Dealers were considered priests of the new religion, a religion predicated on new chemicals and stimulants pro-

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vided by—who? They came from nature, everybody said. LSD became popular, and backyard chemists like Augustus Owsley the Third started manufacturing and selling it in gram lots. People the Third started dealers were making and the good life they were saw the money dealers wanted to get into the Garden of Eden also. leading and decided they wanted to get into the Garden of Eden also. pretty soon every community had its dealer, just like it had its local rock group. And like the rock stars, many of the early dealers, guys like Goldfinger, Charlie Running Dog, and The Ghost and even Owsley himself, became folk heroes in the underground, adding not only status to the dealer image, but mythology as well. As more acid became available, more dealers dealt it.

Because it was so expensive—acid sold for \$4,000 a gram wholesale in 1966—a lot of second-rate bathtub chemists without Owsley's talent or concern for quality started mixing their own batches. Other dealers hired commercial chemists who were hungry, and as a consequence, quality became secondary. A lot of bad acid hit the streets, acid that was laced with methadine and strychnine, and whose primary purpose was not to produce magic, but to provide peddlers with money. Bum trips were common, and the great ripoff was on. The element of sacredness, of spirituality, disappeared—if it had ever been there. Acid became just another high, and the more you could take the better. Kids on the street opened their conversations with accounts of how many "mikes" they dropped the night before, and how this was their thousandth trip, and did anybody have any more acid so they could get on with their second thousand?

The changes acid use went through affected marijuana. As the backyard chemists flooded the market with acid, the price went down. At the same time, marijuana, which had been available fairly cheaply from Mexico, started going up in price. In 1968 you could score tabs of acid on the street in Berkeley for a dollar, yet the kilos of marijuana that had sold for \$100 now cost three times that. Acid was suffering not only from being adulterated, but also from a bad press, and marijuana went up in popularity. Many acid dealers stopped dealing acid and moved into marijuana. A hell of a lot of money had been made in acid, and those bankrolls were turned loose in the weed fields.

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At the same time, the big bread being made by a lot of the rock group men, many of them very straight and very successful in their business, heard about the profits being made in marijuana and decided they wanted in. Those who were hip enough to have connections in the underground contacted dealers who needed financing and decided willing to accept partners. One friend of mine who operates a very successful legitimate business in San Francisco while also dealing a hell of a lot of dynamite weed tells of being approached by dozens of straight business types, real estate agents and used-car dealers who had the money, and other entrepreneurs who wanted a piece of their bread around. Almost any dealer will accept an investor as partner because it lessens his own financial risk. The investors have little or nothing to do with the actual smuggling or dealing; in fact, that's usually one of the conditions of the partnership. All they do is put up the money for the run and then sit back and wait for their bread.

The emergence of bankrollers changed the nature of smuggling and dealing, but was a natural result of the separation of duties caused by Operation Cooperation. Many smugglers became hired hands, workers for dealers who in turn were working for bankrollers. Some smugglers who weren't into working for others, but still understood the necessity for leaving the dealing to someone else, started selling the deal, that is, they'd cover the scene in Mexico themselves, arrange for a load of weed on credit or with a small down payment, then return to the States and find a bankroller to finance it. Thus they reversed the process so they could keep better control of their own end. One of the hassles working with dealers and bankrollers is that inevitably a boss emerges—one has to, as far as I'm concerned. Jesse and I always kept our operation south of the border from any takeover on the part of financiers or dealers, entering into agreements only after it had been established that we would take care of things down in Mexico, and they would handle the United States end.

Part of the mythology of dealing lies in the fact that, like the

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the real dealer never hits the street. Most of the action that smuggler, the street involves middlemen and brokers, dudes who are occurs on the street finding weed for one source and selling it from settling up sales, finding weed for one source and selling it from another. It's in the street where all the head trips and bad scenes go down, the street has always been that way. The dealer who has his shit together can remain mythological because he can remain invisible, known only to a few select middlemen. The fact that so many dealers fail to remain anonymous is due partly to that ostentatiousness that infects so much of the rock underground. Dealers don't put out that infects so much of the rock underground. Dealers don't put out hit records though (except for a few dealers who are successful rock stars), so their reputations must be promoted by a sleight of hand, now you see him now you don't, does he or doesn't he?

Sometimes dudes enjoy the reputation without becoming dealers, instead they become the victims of dealers. Such a dude is Frank Werber, once a successful folk-music entrepreneur, and now involved in an extremely successful restaurant catering to dope dealers, rock stars, and narcotics agents. Werber's myth blossomed behind a dope bust where he was supposedly set up by two mules who were popped at the border and said they were working for him. When he was acquitted of the charge and the two finks themselves were punished, Werber was on top of the heap. He had a big-time music rep, a big-time dope rep, and he was a partner in the favorite hangout of everyone in the trade.

The glamour is so great, in fact, that some lawyers defending clients like Werber get involved in the dope trade themselves, financing trips and becoming silent partners by doing so. I know of two lawyers in the Bay area who make as much money financing weed runs as they do defending clients who've been busted for dope.

Dealing was simple in the old days, now it's an integral part of underground economics. Half the new-car dealers and real estate agents in San Francisco would go out of business if dealers stopped buying. There are more Mercedes sedans in San Francisco than there are in Berlin, and they're mostly owned by rock stars and dope dealers. In 1971 a young longhair was stopped by the police while hitchhiking across the Golden Gate Bridge. He was carrying a brief-

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case containing over \$75,000 in cash. Since the money wasn't stolen and the kid had no record, he was released. A few months later another young kid walked into a showroom on Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco and paid cash for a new Rolls Royce. Many of the kids with big bread are beneficiaries of a new movement in the drug culture, a movement brought on in some respects by the U.S. government itself. After acid and grass, dealers discovered hard drugs, and the drug that has served as the link between marijuana and hard stuff is cocaine.

When Operation Intercept was implemented along the border, a curious thing happened within the drug culture. The government operation didn't stop the old-line weed smugglers, the Mexican Americans and others who had family connections in Mexico, but it was relatively successful in stopping many of the young longhairs, the ex-acid dealers and rock stars who were into supplying their people, plus the white middle-class, university-oriented crowd. In 1969, the weed supply dried up on the street, kids who had been into marijuana started substituting other drugs. And obviously, if a thousand newly trained guards and dogs were stopping the weed traffic, the only drugs that would be getting through would be the easily concealed stuff—heroin, morphine, barbiturates, pills, etc. Dr. Roger C. Smith of the Drug Free Clinic in Marin City told a Senate subcommittee that, "It is interesting to note that the use of dangerous drugs by adolescents increased dramatically following the implementation of Operation Intercept and the subsequent shortage of marijuana at their level."

Kids who had been smoking a little bush started dropping pills, shooting speed, taking barbiturates, anything to keep a head on. It was during this period that heroin started filtering into the white, middle-class underground. Kids who had never touched smack began chipping it, and riding in on the coattails of heroin came the rich man's high—cocaine.

With the increased hassles in Mexico created by Operation Cooperation, many of the hippie-longhair smugglers moved into cocaine and,

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on the other side of the world, hashish. Both drugs are easier to transport than bulky marijuana, and both bring higher profits on the street. Dedicated weed smugglers didn't believe in moving hard drugs. Culties, however, because they didn't believe in moving hard drugs, cocaine is not only the rich man's high, it is also the drug that made hard drugs respectable in white, middle-class communities.

The single-mindedness of many weed smugglers and dealers is not difficult to understand given the nature of marijuana itself. Heroin is almost exclusively smuggled and dealt by heroin addicts, individuals who have gotten into the trade to support their habits. Cocaine, on the other hand, while recruiting many ex-weed dealers, is still a hard drug. Each drug has its own mystique, and users are drawn to them for specific reasons, reasons that are manifested in the drugs themselves.

William Burroughs describes cocaine as the most exhilarating drug he has ever used. The drug effects are very short-lived. When the user is high on cocaine, he experiences fantastic amounts of energy and power—but he must continue snorting or shooting it to stay high. Coca leaves, the source of cocaine, are chewed by the Indians in Peru to enable them to carry heavy loads for long distances in extremely high altitudes. A street name for cocaine is "incentive," and the drug does give one that, even though the incentive is temporary. Prolonged use of the drug causes sleeplessness, destroys the mucous membranes of the nose and throat, and eventually the brain itself, and makes some users hostile and aggressive when high. Cocaine acts as a powerful aphrodisiac for some people, its devotees maintaining that until you've balled on cocaine, you haven't balled. "It's all in the orgasm," is the way a friend of mine put it.

Cocaine has always been popular among the wealthy intelligentsia and politicians of Mexico, and among entertainment people in Hollywood. It seems to be the drug you fall into after having gone through all the others. When weed dealers discovered the popularity of coke, many of them started moving increasing amounts of it into the United States from Mexico, Panama, and Peru. Uncut cocaine costs \$4,000 a kilo in Panama. Any coke worth its name can be stepped on (cut)

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four times, so a dealer who buys a kilo of uncut coke will end up with about eight pounds of incentive to dump in the streets. Since an ounce of good coke goes for from \$700 to \$1,000, depending on how much it's been cut, the final street value of one kilo is close to \$125,000.

Marijuana, unlike heroin and cocaine, is nonaddictive. Marijuana is a sensitizer like cocaine, and heroin is a desensitizer. Marijuana is the super downer, it deadens every aspect of a person's sensibility. When a person shoots smack, he is on an escape trip. In fact, heroin the womb. Nothing bothers a person high on smack, not even the fact that he might be dying. In fact, the ultimate smack trip is to OD; every addict secretly longs for that journey over the rooftops. Heroin also, for reasons I have never been able to understand, always seems to involve a lack of trust. Perhaps it's the nature of the drug itself; anything that creates such a need in the body, a need that has to be satisfied at all costs, is inherently dangerous. Anytime you deal with an addict, you are dealing with a person you can't trust. An addict's primary concern is always his own need; if that need is fulfilled regularly, then things can go along very normally; if the need isn't being fulfilled, every aspect of every deal is trepidatious. The addict will lie, cheat, fink, steal, even kill to satisfy his need. For this reason alone most weed smugglers stay away from smack. The karna behind it is just too heavy.

Marijuana is another thing entirely. In the first place, you can't get addicted to weed and therefore you're not going to be dealing with people who need something desperately. This is not to say you don't meet people you can't trust in the weed industry, far from it. The problems that arise out of weed trafficking almost always involve peripheral aspects of the industry, however, money, personality hangups, general time and organizational fuckups, misunderstandings, etc. They seldom have anything to do with the nature of marijuana itself.

After spending the night in Huatamaquilpa, Gene and I drove to Acapulco. We were to meet Zeke and Hoff at a motel outside of town. I was apprehensive as we approached the motel because one of the hangups in the smuggling game is organizing people to be on time.

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Half the fuckups in the industry are caused by people who don't keep appointments, who misconstrue instructions, who dally along the road while a load is waiting to be picked up. Timing is all-important in the smuggling game, the judge that sentences every operation to success or failure. The difficult thing for most gringos to understand is that Mexicans move on one time plane while gringos usually move on another. There is also a third time plane involved when weed is being moved.

If I had to use one word to describe the nature of the marijuana business, that word would be *waiting*. Waiting to score, waiting to meet the man, waiting for the man who will take you to meet the man, waiting to pick up, waiting to deliver, waiting to wait. In Mexico, smuggling marijuana is a life lived in motel rooms, on the street, in towns that become scary from too much time hanging around. Mexican time is not time in the ordinary, *norteamericano* sense, but spatial, can time is not time in the ordinary. Successful dealers operate on the time moving on a different plane. Successful dealers operate on the assumption that time in Mexico does not exist, or if it does, it exists somewhere in the back of the imagination, lingering over you like old age or death. In Mexico, four P.M. at the cafe means midnight, *mañana* means next week, and next week means we don't even bother thinking about it. A load of weed promised by Tuesday next means that you make a phone call next Tuesday from Acapulco to see if your marijuana is out of the mountains yet. "Oh, no, *maro*, but *mañana*, I'm promising you. . . ."

My own experience with Sanchez told me that when he said he would meet me in four days, he would be there. If I was late with the truck, a dozen men would have to hang around a town they were not a part of—an unpardonable sin in smuggling. I also knew, however, that there was a chance Sanchez and the load could be delayed a few days somewhere along the trail. That meant that I would have to hang around an unfamiliar town. The logistics involved in moving weed get more critical the nearer you get to the road. Once on the road, or next to it, there is no room for fuckups. Things have to be timed perfectly —trucks, people, boats have to be in place, nothing can be where it isn't supposed to be. The difficulty of all this is that everything also

has to be prepared to be someplace else—immediately. No plan can be final; every plan has to leave room for contingencies. The real danger occurs when the people involved aren't ready for contingencies, when someone can't move immediately—after days and weeks of hanging around doing nothing.

Like many things in Mexico, marijuana smuggling is sort of patiently evolving chaos. Successful gringo smugglers in Mexico are recognized as supreme masochists. When I started my smuggling career as a mule, or runner, driving loads across the border was a pleasure compared to the endless hours spent waiting in motel rooms, the days and weeks spent passing time in towns grown stale from too many visits, and the countless conspiratorial assignments to fix dates and times for further assignments.

When Gene and I drove up to the motel where we were to meet Zeke and Hoff, I was relieved to see a nice new four-wheel-drive pickup with California plates in the parking lot. As we parked our car and headed for the office, a door opened and Zeke stepped out. "Whaa whaa whaa," he laughed. "You guys ready to go hunting?" He grabbed me in an *abrazo* and pounded my back.

"Goddamn, you made it," I said. "I sure am pleased to see you. How is the setup here?"

"Purty as a pitchur. We booked a room for four, tol' 'em our two buddies would be arrivin' soon, an' t'morrow we got a guide t'take us huntin'."

Zeke laughed as he helped us carry our gear into the room. I always dug being around him, his whole demeanor was one of hulking good will. He kept everyone in stitches with a vast repertory of tall tales. In fact, the one hangup with Zeke was that his tall tales grew on you and you began to believe them. He told his stories with such sincerity that half of California and all of Mexico was snowed. Whenever he operated in Mexico, Zeke put on what he referred to as his "outfit": a fifty-dollar stetson, hundred-dollar Tony Lama boots, and a four-hundred-dollar custom-tailored western jacket. "You gotta play the game when you come down here, goddammit," he'd yell. "The Mex's expect it and this is the real me anyhow, haw haw haw!"

inside the room Hoff was lying on the bed reading. He jumped up and shook hands. "How about a shot?" He held up a jug of tequila and filled four glasses. "To celebrate a successful hunting trip," he said.

"If Stretch's brought down his boat to where he's supposed to be, it'll be a success," I said. "How long have you guys been here?"

"We got here yesterday. We already checked out the road up north. It's good all the way, no patrols, no nothing. Tomorrow when we go hunting we're going to take the rig off the road. The manager here knows the country and he's got a brother-in-law who'll guide us."

"We're going after jaguars." "Fantastic. I'll drive up the coast tonight and see if Stretch has moved his boat down. You guys can hunt for the next two days and then meet me in Aquila. Then Zeke and I will go meet the lead."

"Solid, baby." Zeke slapped my hand. I was beginning to feel the rush, the excitement that builds up when the threads start coming together. It always makes me feel good. Part of the success of any operation is keeping a rhythm going. It pleased me that Zeke and Hoff had organized the hunting expedition. The knowledge that coworkers are doing their part is important. The hangups possible in any smuggling operation are so numerous else.

any sloughing of responsibility always puts a burden on someone else. It also creates tension and causes mistakes. I was especially pleased that Zeke had arranged to hire a guide for the next day. Every tourist in Mexico has to have a reason for being there. If you're not hanging around the big hotels and beaches, you'd better have some scam ready to cover your presence. Hunting is popular all along the west coast of Mexico, and Zeke and Hoff were natural hunters. As far as Gene was concerned, he could hunt with his camera. It was a good cover for our real hunting expedition.

That evening we went into town and got slightly *borracho*. When we returned to the motel I packed a small bag and got ready to take off for Laguna de los Leones. Stretch should have moved his boat down from the Sea of Cortez by now. If he had, everything was set. If he hadn't, I'd have to call Dr. Billyboy in San Francisco. He could

fly down in twelve hours. If the boat was where it was supposed to be, I intended to forget about Dr. Billyboy's airplane. For one thing, Stretch's boat could carry all the weed Jesse and I had, and for another, I personally didn't like to move weed with airplanes.

During the mid and late sixties, 95 percent of the weed smuggled across the border was moved in ground vehicles. All types of vehicles were utilized, cars, campers, vans, pickups, trailers, even giant diesel-powered semi-trucks. Most of the large shipments of weed smuggled across the border by the Texas Syndicate moved in large semi-trucks carrying legal shipments of frozen fish, scrap metal, and vegetables. A ton of weed can easily be concealed under such a load. One outfit working through Juarez smuggled their weed concealed under tons of animal entrails, oozing across the border for months until customs agents got wise to them. When Operation Intercept was implemented in 1969, smuggling methodology, which was being revolutionized anyway, abruptly changed. Most big smugglers started using air-craft and boats, ignoring surface vehicles completely.

Few things cause more controversy among smugglers than how to move weed. Each method—land, sea, and air—has its devotees, and each devotee has his own particular style of operating with his chosen method. After cars and trucks became impractical, Jesse and I started using boats. I dig boats. For one thing, smuggling by sea has a long tradition behind it, and both Jesse and I had experience with the sea. Jesse had been a commercial fisherman and I had once been a merchant seaman. We also had access to a boat, which is the most important factor of all. The Mexican coasts are ideally suited for boat traffic. There are literally hundreds of small inlets, lagoons, bays, and deserted beaches where a smuggler can anchor, load, lie in if necessary, and, not least of all, hide. Another factor that increases my enthusiasm for boats is that most of the weed grown in Mexico is grown within fifty miles of the coast. A load can, theoretically, move from the field down to the coast and be put aboard a boat without once having moved on a road.

The disadvantages of boats are that they are slow, they require an experienced crew, and they cost a lot of money to outfit. There is also

a hell of a lot of organization involved in making a successful run. The slowness doesn't bother me because I believe in doing things slow and easy—especially when dealing with weed. The one factor that is a pain in the ass is the crew. One never knows until that critical moment just how time, on a smuggling operation somewhat similar to the one we were now on, the skipper of the boat we had hired decided at the last minute not to take the load. Jesse and I had moved three-quarters of a ton of weed out of the mountains, sat for three days on it in a small town in Morelos, then went to the coast to meet the boat. The skipper of the boat thought he knew Mexico as well as he did his boat, and when we arrived with the load in the middle of the night, that dense fog he had made up his mind that the vibes weren't right, that he should hang out for another day or two and clear his papers properly with the Port Captain before taking on the load and splitting.

"Jesus Christ," I said, "what d'you want to be, a legal smuggler?" "I just don't feel right about it," he said. "The timing's not right!" "Fuck the timing! That's our job. We've been sitting on this weed for a week and you say the timing's not right. Man, you're gonna take on this load."

I'll never forget what happened next. Leo, the skipper, was a headed German with no smuggling experience but with a master's knowledge of the sea. I looked straight into his eyes. "You were hired to pick up a load and deliver it to northern California. That's all you have to do. You don't have to fuck with the Mexicans, worry about papers, or hassle with the man. All you gotta do is load this shit on your boat and get out of here, do you understand?"

I was so mad I would have shot somebody. Leo looked at me, clenched and unclenched his fists. "Man, I'll take it on, but if anything happens, I'm holding you responsible."

"That's right, I am responsible. And once the shit's on your boat, you're responsible. Now let's both of us do our jobs."

Any type of smuggling run that involves a number of people is inevitably tension prone. Leo was worried because he had never smug-

gled weed in his boat before, and still wasn't attuned to the fact that when you do something illegal, every aspect of that trip is illegal. If he had waited around to clear his boat with the Port Captain, perhaps the trip would have still gone down all right. There's also the chance the Port Captain might have gotten suspicious of Leo, maybe wanted to bite him or otherwise get some coin. Leo's problem was that he didn't trust me. The one thing about a smuggling operation, however, is that each person in on it has to trust the others implicitly. The fact that Leo got scared when it came time to load his boat illustrates one of the inevitable hassles with working with a boat—time. A lot of dudes can stand ten or twelve hours' pressure, the time required on a plane trip, not many can take the three or four weeks of pressure, which any boat trip requires, however.

I have never liked to use airplanes on smuggling runs because I know so little about them. Jesse and I had loaded a number of aircraft on bandit runs, but the trips were always put together by others. Our job was simply to cop high-quality weed and deliver it to the plane. Many smugglers who used to be very heavy into ground vehicles now use airplanes exclusively and swear by them, refusing to have anything to do with any other type of rig. A few smugglers have even taken flying lessons so they can pilot their own planes. My theory about moving weed precludes using an airplane, because I don't like to get involved in any trip that, come an emergency, I can't personally handle every aspect of myself. Obviously, if I can't fly an airplane, I can't handle every aspect of a plane trip.

Another thing about smuggling with planes that bugs me is, unless you own your own plane there is a good chance you can fall behind somebody else's bumper. I've heard reports of smugglers renting aircraft that had just returned from another smuggling caper run by someone else. The number of airplanes for rent is limited, and the heat knows what's going on at most airports after a few dope runs. A new gimmick The Man is installing on rented aircraft nowadays is a transponder, an electronic sensor that feeds information back to a master control center as to the plane's whereabouts at all times. More than one run has fallen because the dude piloting the plane was followed

all the way down and back by a little electronic beep. The main thing that disturbs me about airplanes, though, is that once they go up they have to come down. If you're packing 500 kilos of primo in your back seat, sometimes you just don't want to come down.

Boats are something else. If you have an experienced crew working in a certain area, you can be as tight as a drum on international territory. Boats are something else, theoretically at least, international territory on your boat. It is also, theoretically at least, the twelve-mile limit on you at thirty knots, but a reasonable person has a fighting sea once you've passed the twelve-mile limit. In practice the twelve-mile limit doesn't mean much, especially when the Coast Guard is bearing down on you at thirty knots, or even the whole boat if that becomes a chance in a boat. If he has things set up right, he's prepared to dump his load on a moment's notice, and the smugglers who are flying planes and sailing boats today will be driving trucks or maybe even be mailing their weed home by parcel post tomorrow. Many successful smugglers have, in fact, started using cars and trucks again for the simple reason that the feds are getting too good at nailing planes and boats. Smugglers who return to ground vehicles rely on percentages, figuring that there's so much traffic moving between Mexico and the United States that a goodly number of loads are bound to get through no matter how much surveillance there is. All kinds of ground vehicles are still being used, but the successful rigs work in cycles, with the customs people usually six months behind the smugglers. Mules will drive loads across concealed in especially rigged motor homes, the retired-folks rig, as they are called. When the heat pops a few of them, all those type rigs are suspect and the smuggler switches to something else. The secret of success with ground vehicles is always to be a couple of steps ahead of The Man. As long as you set the pace, always being inventive and ingenious, then it's the dudes who copy you who will fall. Some of the most successful rigs working the border right now are nondescript family cars that have been taken apart and completely rebuilt at great expense. The smugglers who use these rigs specialize in moving small loads of extremely high-quality weed across the border, often making

the behind-the-scenes realities of the industry. Drivers, or mules, who are hired by smugglers to drive specific loads are called. They have nothing to do with copping, nothing to do with the weed. They never see the weed. They are hired, often in Mexico, and told where to deliver the load across the border, and often they never see the weed. They do with keys to a car in Mexico, half in advance and the other half given to a flat fee, half in advance and the other half upon delivery. In some cases mules are a regular part of the organization, do not want to be part of it, and drive upon partners getting equal shares. In other cases they have nothing to do with a straight fee. Many sophisticated organizations like to hire unaffiliated mules because it lessens the involvement—and the danger, only for a straight fee. The contact man in the organization, which insures anonymity for the rest of the group if the load goes down, if the mule breaks down, he can incriminate no more than the one dude he dealt with.

A number of criteria are used to pick mules—appearance, experience with the border, sex, personality, etc. The best mules work anonymously, both physically and personally. Many couples work as mules, sometimes driving loads across with their children. A successful organized operation utilizing a hired mule will often have some background details worked out in case of a fall. Sometimes an ad will be placed in a local newspaper in a town removed from traditional weed areas. The ad will request the services of a driver to transport a car back from Mexico for a retired couple who don't want to drive their own car back. The ad is legitimate, the individual who answers it is hired and drives the car back into the United States ignorant of the fact that it's loaded with weed.

A variation on the theme is for a smuggler to pick up a couple who are hitchhiking through Mexico and let them borrow the car. The smuggler lays a story down about a family member being sick, it's necessary for him to fly home immediately, etc. If the couple agrees to take the car and they get it across the border safely, a not unreasonable possibility since they won't be burdened by any of the paranoias that usually plague hired mules, then it's simply a matter of the smuggler retrieving his car once it's across the border. Naturally the

two or three trips a week. There is one dude in San Francisco who is considered a genius at building this type of rig. He has already built a total of seven cars, the first of which has been running regularly since 1967, and none of his cars have ever been popped.

Rocky, the genius who builds the pop-proof smuggling rigs, and Space, his running partner, are a legendary dope-smuggling duo in the industry, at least among longhairs. Rocky is a tall, gangling dude who looks like Little Abner and runs around San Francisco in bare feet and a blue work shirt with the tail hanging out. He's an authority on wines and mathematics and metallurgy and he's absolutely brilliant when it comes to blueprints and welding rods. His specialty is creating smuggling rigs with hermetically sealed compartments and special doors that require handmade tools to open. The compartments are so ingenious that one of the tests he gives his cars is a ten-hour shake-down conducted by expert smugglers. Space, his partner, s-s-s-s-s speaks l-l-l-l-like t-t-t-t-this, absolutely unable to open his mouth without stammering so bad he's impossible to understand. In one of my last dope runs I agreed to load their latest rig for its first run. I copped fifty pounds of the best primo weed in Mexico (that's all the car would carry), and loaded the car. To give the car the super test, Space and Rocky drove it across the border themselves, Space with his machine-gun stammer and Rocky with his bare feet, long hair, and balls hanging out. As soon as they drove up to the customs shed, The Man thought he had a live one. They were moved into the secondary inspection area and everything came out of the car, clothes, seats, seat belts, floor mats, even the ashtray. When The Man couldn't find anything inside the car, he went underneath it with mirrors and probes and lights, and thumped the sides. Finally a big German shepherd weed dog was brought out and he went over the car. Nothing. Not a sniff. After three and a half hours at the inspection station, Space and Rocky drove home with their fifty pounds of primo.

Because of the increased sophistication on the part of the weed industry during the last few years, many people are involved in peripheral aspects of the trade and must be considered smugglers, when actually they are only hired hands who have little or nothing to do

smuggler doesn't let his car out of his sight when it crosses the border, for when trips like this are set up, it's important to pin the action at the crossing. If the car is popped and the customs people believe the couple's story about driving the car home for a stranger, they will more than likely have the couple deliver the car to where it's supposed to go. If the smuggler's dumb enough to be there waiting for it, then he's popped.

A third variation is for a smuggler to work in consort with a garage in Mexico. When a gringo brings his car in to be repaired, a mechanic accomplice loads it with weed. The smuggler finds out where the gringo lives, and once the car is home safe, goes there and rips it off and recovers his weed.

When mules are hired who are aware of what they are doing, certain criteria must be met. In the first place, common sense tells one that a mule should have no previous record. If a person is even remotely associated with weed via previous arrests, he shouldn't be hired as a mule. The mule should also be made absolutely aware of all the potential dangers he faces if he is arrested at the border. The customs people have a way of instilling fear in young arrestees at the border, and fear is usually what makes a mule crack. A mule must have a plausible story prepared and he must stick to it. And no matter what happens, the mule must be absolutely sure that he is not going to be abandoned by his confederates. If the customs people are able to make him believe he is going to be sacrificed by his crime partners, then it's all over for the smuggling operation. For this reason it is also important that a mule be paid commensurate with his task. Many smuggling operations go down behind simple things like not enough money at the right time, fear of being abandoned, no plausible story, etc. The smuggling ring that hires a cheap mule and then fails to back him up usually ends up with the whole load on their backs.

Since Operation Cooperation a new breed of mule has entered the smuggling picture; these are the professional pilots, more sophisticated, better trained, and more expensive to hire. Like their earth-bound brothers, however, the flying mule's job is to get loads of weed across the border. Many of the flying mules are members of the

Vietnam war-baby breed who dig making runs low hell-for-leather with their Cherokee 6's. There are hundreds of runs through the arroyos with the one Jesus took me and Jesse to hacked out of small airstrips in Mexico, and a pilot with a good eye and lots of nerve the mountains in Mexico, and a pilot like that in fifteen minutes, provided can make it in and out of a strip like that in fifteen minutes, provided his crew has the weed and spare fuel ready. The problem becomes extremely complicated, involving more men, equipment, and money. Smuggling his weed by airplane is that the whole operation becomes extremely complicated, involving more men, equipment, and money. Smuggling runs have become much more required of all aircraft flying in Mexico, because flight plans are now required of all aircraft flying in Mexico, and no matter how remote the spot a pilot decides to land in, there always seems to be someone there. All runs that do make it into the mountains must provide for their own fuel, and in many areas this is an incredible task. Timing is all-important with aircraft also, five minutes one way or another can be fatal. Most fuckups that occur with airplanes involve timing, a man not where he is supposed to be, the weed late in arriving, unexpected headwinds, too heavy loads. Although smuggling by airplane is the speediest method of electronic paraphernalia of America working against it. Despite this, I would estimate that after the ground operations of organizations like the Texas Syndicate, most weed is smuggled out of Mexico in small aircraft.

That night I drove to Laguna de los Leones to reconnoiter with Stretch. There are two roads into the lagoon, a main road that's paved up to within five miles of the lagoon, and a back road that's unpaved, rocky, and hard. Jesse and I picked the lagoon not only because it was conveniently located, but because of the two access roads. We learned early never to take a load of weed into any place that has only one way in and out. Ideally, when we moved our weed down from Hosta-pan we'd be able to send lead cars down both roads to scout the way for us. One of the things I intended to do while rendezvousing with Stretch was to check out both routes. I wanted to see if there was any unusual activity along the roads, construction sites that might hinder

us, idle soldiers or patrols lounging along the roads, or heavy traffic that could be considered dangerous. If one or both roads were unsatisfactory, then Stretch and I would have to choose an alternative loading place. Since it took time to move a boat up and down the coast, it was important that Stretch be at the lagoon.

I drove the main road into the Laguna de los Leones and arrived just after dawn. It's curious the rhythm an operation takes when things are going right. Zeke and Hoff had told me that before leaving the States they had the tarot cards read concerning the trip and the answer had come out, *A Dance*. They thought that was a good omen. When they crossed the border at Nogales they had their omen reaffirmed. They had brought along a small motorcycle which had no papers, and when they went through the vehicle-registration point just south of Nogales, a mariachi band was playing and the officials waved them through after giving them permits not only for the truck, but also for the cycle. All along the route it had been a dance, according to Zeke. Our meeting at the motel in Acapulco was part of that same good rhythm. I knew the rhythm was important, just as the lack of it is important. Bum trips can be sensed in the timing. Lack of timing, missed appointments, misunderstood directions, are all signs set up by nature to warn the careless smuggler that he'd better be careful. Perspicacious smugglers always read the little signs and signals that are posted along the route.

When I turned off the paved road and started down toward the lagoon, I almost ran over Stretch and Phil. I braked to a Mexican stop (a rush of speed and a quick brodie that showers dust over pedestrians) and leaped out. We greeted one another with great backslappings and dances in the dirt. Phil, Stretch's first mate, stood quietly by as Stretch and I danced around one another.

"Man, we've been trying to hitchhike into town for two hours," Stretch cried. "We want breakfast and there hasn't been a car in sight."

"It's the rhythm, boys," I yelled. "It's all a dance." I told them about Zeke and Hoff and they laughed. We jumped into the wagon and headed for San Martin.

"Goddamn, I can't believe it. When you told me to move my boat down here I was pissed. I wanted you to haul the weed up to Alma. I'm glad you had us come down though. Phil and me had the greatest trip in the world. Phil caught a forty-pound albacore day before yesterday."

Phil was a short, dark-haired dude whom I had met only briefly in San Francisco. He was an expert meteorologist and navigator, and I had taken an immediate liking to him. I was to have my first feelings about him confirmed in many ways later when things got sticky. Stretch had built many boats and was an expert sailor. The two of them got along well, which was important. Next to having a reliable boat, it was critical that the people on board get along also.

After taking them into town to eat, we spent the day cruising the lagoon looking for the best place to load. All indications were that the south end of the lagoon was most favorable. We could drive the truck right onto the beach, and the waves there appeared minimal. The north end of the lagoon was open to the sea and was buffeted by heavy surf. Since we would be loading our weed into rubber rafts and motor-
ing them out to the big boat, it was important that we not encounter any surf. If we dumped our load in the water, there would be hell to pay.

Late that afternoon I drove the secondary road back to Acapulco, a long slow drive over ruts and stones. There was no traffic and no unexpected detours. The road bisected a few hamlets, wattle and daub huts where campesinos stood alongside the road. Much of the road was built up on a levee. In an emergency, such as an army patrol approaching, a four-wheel-drive vehicle could plunge into the jungle but the height of the levee made this almost impossible, so I checked the road out carefully with the odometer and marked each spot where a vehicle could drive off safely. By nightfall I was exhausted. I parked the wagon in a small clearing and slept.

The next day I checked out the rest of the road and the rest of the boys. The motel room was deserted when I arrived, so I showed up and took a nap. About ten P.M. Zeke and the rest of the boys came in. They were just returning from their hunting trip into the

river basin north of Acapulco. They were full of tales of wild pigs and jaguars and the excitement of the day. No one had killed anything but everyone had had a ball. I told them what I had learned and we made plans for the next day. Gene and Hoff were to take the station wagon to Aquila and check into a motel room and wait for us there. Zeke and I would drive to Hostapan to meet Jesse and Sanchez. Zeke thing went according to schedule, in two days' time our weed would be on Stretch's boat.

I called Jesus early the next morning and arranged to pick up our guide at the cutoff road leading into Hostapan. Zeke and I drove over to the spot. When we arrived, Hector was waiting for us. Hector was a short, dark campesino with one eye that was perpetually lidded over. One of his arms was also withered, about six inches shorter than the other. He explained that he had been involved in an "accident" in the mountains; soldiers had ambushed a load of weed he was transporting a few years before. Zeke and I said nothing as Hector guided us down the cutoff road toward Hostapan. After driving a few miles down the dirt road he had me pull the truck off the road under a large tree. "Expérate aquí," he said. We waited while the sun went down.

While we were waiting I took the opportunity to unhook the interior and running lights on the truck. I also disengaged the light over the license plate. When it was dusk we took off for Hostapan. Although the town was only twenty miles off the road, those twenty miles were unlike any I had ever driven. There was no road, only occasional gashes cut out of the earth that showed where previous vehicles had gone. We followed cowpaths and arroyos, taking the path of least resistance. Many times I was forced to back up and start again when Hector lost his way. "I have never been on this 'road' in a pickup truck before," he said glumly.

Zeke and Hector braced themselves and hung on tight as the empty truck bounced and jolted over the ruts and ditches. I had the steering wheel to hang onto, but even that was uncomfortable. At the end of an hour I was exhausted. By the time we had gone five miles it was pitch black, which made driving all the more difficult. Occasionally

Hector had to get out of the truck and lead the way on foot, guiding us with his flashlight. I had been a little naïve when I had glibly informed Sanchez that I could make it into Hostapan with the truck. If I had known the condition of the road, I would have considered it for a long time before agreeing. It was too late to worry about it now, though. The weed was waiting.

Three hours after leaving the big tree we came to a small gate. Hector got out and getting back in the truck. Five more kilometers. Closing the gate and getting back in the truck. Five more kilometers could just as easily be twenty-five more kilometers. Might as well ask a campesino how far it is to the moon as ask him how far it is to the next village. One time I drove from Ajijic to Puerto Vallarta by going over the mountains, a distance I had traced on the map as close to 150 miles. I found after driving fifty miles, however, that the road disappeared into a cowpath. I stopped a dozen campesinos along the way and asked them how long it took to drive to Puerto Vallarta. "Oh, two hours, señor," one would say. The next would convince me that it was a five-hour drive. Still a third knew it was a seven-hour drive because his patron had driven it last week. It was twenty-four hours and three ruptured tires later when I arrived in Puerto Vallarta.

I was sure it was the same with Hector's distance. Hoff looked at me and slowly shook his head. The new Ford pickup was disintegrating under us. The camper shell moaned ominously each time I twisted the truck down another arroyo. If we arrived in one piece we would be lucky; getting out would be something else. One thing that would help though, would be a load in the back. At least the truck wouldn't bounce over the ruts like a Mexican jumping bean. My arms felt like leaden appendages and my ass felt like it had been shoved halfway up to my shoulders. All of a sudden I saw a light. "Hostapan," Hector whispered. "Turn off the lights." I turned off the lights and Hector got out of the truck. He unbuttoned his pants and pissed on the headlights, then took handfuls of dirt and tossed them on and he threw more "Turn them on," he whispered. I turned them on and he threw more dirt on, making them dimmer.

covered he was satisfied. "Now we can go on," he said. "It's important that no one see us."

Twenty minutes later we stopped beside a rock wall. Hector got out. "Wait here," he said. Zeke and I waited in the truck for ten minutes. It was pitch black outside. The silence was ominous. From afar I could hear what sounded like music. It was a cantina in town, a jukebox. Suddenly a faint Mexican *grito* lifted up over the sound of the music and faded away. Campesinos letting loose after a hard day's work. I envied them. It was chilly, so I huddled under my sweater. Zeke coughed deep in his throat, and suddenly Hector reappeared at the door. Sanchez was with him. "Buena," Sanchez said, climbing into the truck. "I'm glad you made it. Go that way." He pointed toward my right.

We skirted Hestapan, which was bigger than I expected, and ended up on the far side of town. "Turn around and back down toward the cemetery," Sanchez said.

With the aid of Hector's flashlight, I turned the pickup around and backed down toward the cemetery. As I did so a dozen figures emerged from the darkness. Each one carried a large sack on his shoulder. Jesse was among them. "You made it," he said. "I'm damn glad. We've had this stuff buried in the cemetery since last night. Let's get it loaded."

Zeke opened the back of the camper and jumped inside. The men carried the sacks out of the graveyard and dropped them behind the truck. I handed them in to Zeke. There were sixteen sacks, each one containing fifty kilos of marijuana. It took us fifteen minutes to load them, stuffing each sack carefully inside the camper shell. When the last sack was loaded, Zeke covered the weed with a blanket and locked the door. We were ready to go.

I shook hands with Sanchez and Lupe. "Gracias, hombres," I said. They gave me their limp hands and smiled in the darkness. The other campesinos came forward. I shook hands with each one, thanking them in turn. Zeke got behind the wheel. Hector jumped in beside him. He was going to guide us back to the main road. "Bien viaje," Sanchez whispered, as Jesse and I jumped in the truck.

The trip out was smoother than the trip in. Even though the cab was crowded with four men, it was more comfortable because the truck took the bumps easier. It didn't feel like riding inside an laden tin can. Once we were out of sight of town, Hector cleaned off the headlights and we speeded up. It was important that we get out of the area before sunup. At three A.M. we passed through the gate. Jesse filled me in on the trip out of the mountains. It had been uneventful except for one burro falling over a cliff. The burro was unevenly injured and had to be shot. Because the other animals were badly injured and the weed had been buried back in the canyon. Lupe heavily loaded, the weed he supposed to be. Stretch and Phil moved intended to retrieve it on the way back. I told Jesse how my end fared.

"Everybody is where they're supposed to be. Stretch and Gene are waiting for us the boat down to the lagoon, and Hoff and Gene are waiting for us in Aquila. We should be able to make the run down to the boat late tonight."

Just before dawn we reached the big tree. Hector got out of the truck and shook hands through the window. "You know the way now," he said. "Go with God." "You too, friend," Jesse said. "Muchas gracias." Hector disappeared in the dark.

Half an hour later we reached the main road. Jesse took over the wheel and aimed the truck toward Aquila. At the first Pemex station we came to, he stopped for gas. I got out of the truck and walked around the camper. I could smell the weed. "God, we've got to do something about the smell," I said. Jesse nodded. Fortunately the kid pumping the gas didn't know the smell of weed or didn't care. He was half asleep anyway. After gassing up, Zeke drove the rig a hundred yards down the road and parked it. We all three trudged back to the small restaurant beside the station to eat. "It's just too damn strong."

"We've got to cover that smell," I said. "That might stop Every time we gas up it's going to cause us trouble."

"Maybe we can tape all the cracks," Zeke said. "That might stop the smell."

"We need some ground coffee," Jesse said. "I'll stop the smell for awhile. We can stop in Santa Rosa and get some."

Santa Rosa was an hour's drive down the road. When we arrived there, Jesse parked the rig on a side street and I went searching for a market. After half a dozen attempts I found a small *supermercado* that was open. I bought fifteen pounds of coffee. The proprietor looked at me in wonder. I paid him in pesos and walked out.

Jesse picked us up and we drove out of town looking for a spot to open the camper. On the way Zeke cut open the coffee cans with his knife. Twenty minutes outside of town, Jesse turned off the road and parked behind a clump of trees. I jumped out of the truck and ran around and opened the back. The smell of cooking marijuana almost knocked me over. The inside of the camper was like a furnace. Sweat dripped from the blanket and windows. One of the big problems with transporting weed is disguising the smell it gives off. Even dry marijuana cooks when it's in an enclosed area. Smugglers try everything to hide the smell of weed and nothing seems to work. Even weed enclosed in air-tight packages is susceptible to the weed-sniffing dogs employed on the border. I have heard of dogs being able to sniff out dope stashed inside fake crankcases and transmission housings.

Our problem wasn't dogs though, it was the people who would be able to smell our truck from fifteen feet away if we didn't do something. Coffee helped because its own odor combined with the smell of weed to make a third odor. Coffee also soaked up the sweat from the weed. We quickly threw the loose coffee in on top of the weed. Fifteen pounds wasn't much but it would have to do. Jesse closed the back of the camper and locked it. I smelled around all the seams. An alert nose could discover something, but the smell was so weird that it would take a super sleuth to figure out what it was.

Back on the road we made our plans for that night. Once in Aguila, Zeke would take Hoff with him and drive the lead car to the lagoon. They would cover the main road first and then drive back around the secondary road to meet us. By going around the long way and returning up the secondary route, they'd be able to reaffirm my own conclusions about the two routes and find out if anything new had developed. We both were equipped with walkie-talkies. Once we made contact, Zeke and Hoff could take the lead and we would head for the boat.

Our walkie-talkies were effective for only ten miles so we had to stick fairly close together at all times. The map I had made on the previous run had every exit marked on it, so if anything unusual developed and Zeke radioed back, we would have time to race to one of the exits and run had every exit marked on it, so if anything unusual developed and Zeke radioed back, we would have time to race to one of the exits and disappear. It wasn't a foolproof plan by any means, but at least it gave us some protection.

One of the hangups that plague the smuggler who buys his weed directly from the grower is that he has to take care of all the logisticians directly from the grower out of the mountains. If we had been no once the weed is moved out of the mountains, it would have been our weed directly from a big entrepreneur, it would have been the our weed directly from a big entrepreneur, it would have been the problem having him deliver it directly to our boat. Of course, we'd have to pay more for it. As it was, Jesse and I had taken over the entrepreneur's role without his facilities. This didn't present too much of a problem as long as all the threads came together; if they came unraveled somewhere along the line, then it would be a different story. In normal circumstances, the entrepreneur would have moved the weed out of the mountains and stored it in a rancho for a few days. We had no warehouse or rancho so we had to get our weed directly to the boat fast.

Ordinarily Jesse and I wouldn't have attempted an operation such as this. Moving a ton of weed through Mexico is always dangerous and it's doubly dangerous when you're working off the cuff, as it were. The fact that we weren't set up properly lingered in the back of my mind, as I knew it did in Jesse's. Under ideal conditions we would have rented a rancho near Hostapan and then sat on the weed until all the tactical problems were worked out. In a sense we were ignoring the first rule of smuggling, which is, don't jam things through. The nature of the business is such, however, that despite rules, the rhythm also determines how things go. Even the best planned and coordinated smuggling operations sometimes fail, and the opposite is also true, some incredibly inept and hastily conceived ones succeed. The one dangerous aspect of our present trip was that we were leaving so little room for misuses; if there was a hangup in loading the boat, a mechanical breakdown in the truck, if any number of things happened, there'd be hell to pay. Now though my concern was with the smell,

seven P.M. I drove the pickup to the outskirts of Aquila and gassed up. We had a leisurely dinner and by eight o'clock were back on the road. We had a leisurely dinner and by eight o'clock were back on the road. We had a leisurely dinner and by eight o'clock were back on the road. We had a leisurely dinner and by eight o'clock were back on the road. We had a leisurely dinner and by eight o'clock were back on the road.

While Jesse fiddled with the walkie-talkie, I wandered around the area. We were parked in a clearing surrounded by trees about thirty feet off the side of the road. Above the trees I saw the stars; they were incredibly brilliant. It was absolutely black among the trees, despite the sliver of moon. I felt a chill creep over me. I remembered other smugglers told of their various adventures, but all I could remember were the fuckups, a few of which I had made myself. I remembered one time when I was driving out of Puerto Vallarta with a half ton of weed in the same kind of truck we were driving tonight, and I came face to face with a six-by full of Mexican soldiers. Some of the soldiers were strung out along the road with M-16s on their backs as I blew around the bend, and without thinking, without having time to think, I gunned the rig and swerved through them. They stared at me in amazement as my truck flashed past, not having time to take off after me since they didn't know what I had in back of my truck. Had they known, or had I been going slower and been stopped, for no reason as sometimes happens. . . . I didn't want to think about it. Another time some friends were driving a load of weed up north and they stopped in a service station to gas up. They smelled something burning and when they looked under the pickup bed they saw what it was.

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and meeting Zeke at the right time. We'd have to take everything else as it came.

We intended to meet Zeke about twenty miles from the lagoon on the secondary road at eleven P.M. The drive to the lagoon would take forty-five minutes and the loading should take another thirty minutes. Stretch and Phil were to meet us on the south end of the lagoon at midnight. If things went okay, they would be out on the high seas by two A.M. and in international waters by dawn.

The trip into Aquila was uneventful except for the super-paranoia we felt each time we stopped for gas. We stopped in Amotlan and bought another fifteen pounds of coffee to throw in on the weed, but even so, by the time we pulled into Aquila in late afternoon, the truck reeked. The smell emanating from the camper was a cross between mocha and mocha, guaranteed to get you high—or at least stun you. We decided it was foolish to park the truck in town, so after dropping me and Zeke off at the motel, Jesse drove outside of town to sit on the weed. After I cleaned up I would have Zeke drive me out to relieve Jesse.

The emotion you go through on a smuggling run is like a spring that gets tighter and tighter. All the pressure mounts up in the final hours, tempers flare, arguments occur, plans are questioned, doubts and self-doubts plague you. While I sat in the truck waiting for dark, I tried to figure out if we had all the loose ends together, was there anything we had forgotten? As far as I could see, except for unexpected mechanical fuckups, we had covered every aspect of the operation. Stretch had his boat in the lagoon, Zeke and Hoff were ready to drive the lead car, Jesse and I would follow with Gene and the weed. The fact that Gene wanted to take pictures of everything complicated things a little, but he'd have to take his chances. If he could handle his part of the job while we handled ours, then it was okay with me. At this time, however, we couldn't afford to take time out for him—no hanging around waiting for the proper light.

At dusk I drove back into town and picked up Gene and Jesse. Zeke and Hoff had already taken off. Their drive around the lagoon and back up the secondary road would take them two extra hours. At

The false bottom of their rig was built too close to the muffler and had caught fire. Without waiting for gas they jumped in their rig and roared out of town. By the time they reached the outskirts the whole pickup was in flames, so they left it and ran into the desert. Twenty thousand dollars' worth of weed burnt up and them in the desert with no water. They hid out for two nights and then circled back into Guaymas and took a bus home, flat broke. When the bus passed by the spot where their rig had burnt, all they could see was a pile of junk. So it goes.

Of course, there were the good times too. All I had to do was think back long enough. One time a couple of young dudes with a beat-up truck and 200 kilos of weed rambled into Nogales, and their truck died right in front of the customs shed. "Get that pile of junk out of here," the customs man said. The boys shrugged their shoulders helplessly, so three guards and an immigration flack walked over and pushed the rig off the ramp. It was a busy day and people were hurried. Once through the gate the boys fiddled with their carburetor and got the truck going again. They drove home \$20,000 richer.

There are a thousand apocryphal tales of border crossings, good and bad, and I think I have heard most of them. Trips in cars, trips in boats, trips on surfboards, trips in airplanes, trips in trucks, trips on burros, trips on foot. One time a group called the Bunkhouse Gang contacted Jesse for advice in moving 1,700 bricks across the border near Sonora. They didn't want him to go along because they'd have to cut him in, they just wanted free information. They had a Dodge four-wheel-drive camper that could carry all the kilos, a couple of motorcycles to reconnoiter the desert, and cars to take the weed out of the area once it reached the road. "Who's driving the rig?" Jesse asked. "I am," a guy named Jonesy popped up. "That's my job." "Well, good, because it looks like you guys have everything pretty well covered. Just make sure you don't let the Mexicans drive your rig."

The following week the gang moved its forces down across the desert to pick up the weed. The Mexican connection had a ranch fronting the border, so the camper was driven across the border to the

After the kilos were inside the truck, one of the ranch and loaded. Jonesy, the driver, shrugged his shoulders and climbed in beside him. Just as they were crossing the Mexicans and headed back toward the lagoon. We gave them a fifteen-minute lead and then followed. No one said anything as we drove down the dirt road. All eyes were intent on the road. At eleven-thirty Zeke called back on the radio to say that they were at the lagoon. Jesse radioed back for them to continue on around to the north end of the lagoon while we arrived at the south end. After making sure there was no one at the north end, they were to return to help us load. Everything was going smoothly. I traded places with Jesse, and he drove slowly toward the south end of the lagoon. The road ambled through coconut plantations, cutting back and forth at right angles as it skirted the fields. At one point three cows crossed the road in front of us, waving their tails imperiously as they let us by. Gene snapped pictures of the cows. The road was full of water-filled ruts. I held on as Jesse eased the truck through them. When we reached the south end of the lagoon, Jesse turned off the road. I got out and locked the hubs into four-wheel drive. We continued down the beach into a group of trees and parked the truck. We got out and walked down the beach. The bay was clear, too clear. I could see Stretch's boat sitting about 300 yards off the beach. The silver strip of moon was directly overhead, casting a slight glow on everything. It was eerie how far you could see. I saw some lights on the other side of the lagoon, a distance of fifteen miles. While we stood there I noticed the

surf. It seemed awfully high. In fact, the waves were crashing in on the beach. I knew when the moon started going down the waves would get higher. We had to move.

While we stood there I heard muffled sounds of activity on the boat. Stretch and Phil were bringing the skiffs into shore. Stretch had a fiberglass skiff and two rubber life rafts which we intended to use to haul the weed out to his boat. As soon as I heard the sound I raced back to the clump of trees to get the truck. Jesse and Gene stayed on the beach. My heart was beating fiercely when I reached the truck. I climbed in and started it, and without turning on the lights, eased it out of the trees and started down the beach. The truck seemed to make a terrific roar, especially in compound low. I was sure it could be heard all the way into San Martin. When I reached Gene and Jesse, Phil and Stretch were just coming in. They were about twenty yards out, on the other side of the surf. The waves seemed gigantic to me, bigger than I had expected. And this was supposed to be the lee side of the lagoon.

While Stretch started the ten-horse outboard to hold the skiff out beyond the waves, Phil eased the two rubber life rafts over the surf. He came scooting in on a wave and crashed on the beach. "Damn!" he cried. "This surf is big."

"Don't worry about it, let's get this shit out of the truck," Jesse cried.

I had the back of the camper open and had already thrown the blanket out. I yanked the large sacks of weed out of the truck and threw them down on the sand. Phil and Jesse picked them up and loaded them in the rubber rafts. Each raft held four sacks. While we were loading them the outboard motor on Stretch's skiff died. He tumbled in on a wave. He was soaking wet. "Jesus Christ," he cried. "Let's go. I can't hold this thing out there all night."

Both rubber rafts were full and the rest of the sacks were lying on the sand. Jesse picked up one and threw it in Stretch's skiff. "C'mon," he said. "Take this load out and come back for the rest. It'll take two trips."

Stretch leaped in the skiff and Phil and Jesse pushed him off the

He yanked the motor on and headed into the surf. The towline sand. He yanked the skiff and the first rubber boat went taut, so Phil and I between the skiff and the water. As Phil jumped in I dragged the rubber boat into the water. Just then a terrific wave roared over me. yanked the rubber boat. Just then a terrific wave roared over me. on the second rubber boat. Just then a terrific wave roared over me. stretch and the skiff hurtled by upside down. A sack of weed floated serenely out in the water. I splashed after it and dragged it ashore. "Too big," Phil yelled. "The waves are too big. We can't load here."

At that precise moment I spotted a pair of headlights moving down the beach toward us. I stood stock still watching them. Oh, Jesus, I thought, here they come. For a panic-stricken second I had visions of the beach all over the beach while the Federales drove up with their weed spread all over the beach in the truck." I shouted machine guns out. "Get the shit back in the truck," I shouted

hoarsely. "Somebody's coming." While Jesse and Phil threw the sacks in We worked like demons. While Jesse and Phil threw the sacks in the truck, I stacked them. It was important to fit them in well or we wouldn't get them all back in the truck. It seemed to take hours. I was so exhausted from yanking the large sacks around that I could hardly stand up. I looked for Gene. I hadn't even thought of him. The crazy bastard was standing to one side shooting pictures. This is insane, I thought. Just then, the headlights turned off the beach and disappeared. "Thank God," I whispered to no one in particular.

"Listen," Stretch said. "We can't load the boat here. These are freak waves caused by the moon. We'll have to do something else."

"What about the other side?" I said.

"It should be calm," Stretch said. "It was flat this afternoon."

"Let's go there then," Jesse said. "What about the outboard?"

"It's finished, water-soaked. We'll have to use oars. Let's leave one raft here and take the skiff and the other raft back to the boat. We'll get over to the other side as fast as we can."

"Can you guys make it? You'll have to swim those rafts out to the boat."

"We can make it, man. Get going!" Stretch grabbed the skiff and pushed it into the water. Phil dragged the rubber life raft in after him.

The two swam the boats through the surf.

I dragged the abandoned rubber boat up on the beach and left it

beside the blanket. Jesse and I jumped in the truck where Gene was calmly loading his camera. "These aren't going to come out," he said. "Too dark." I shook my head. "Fuckups, goddamit, fuckups. Why the fuck does this surf have to be so big?"

While Jesse drove around the lagoon, I fiddled with the walkie-talkie. After a few minutes I contacted Zeke. "Stay where you are," I said. "We can't load down here. We've got to load on your end. Make sure it's clear."

I was shaking with exhaustion. My fingers were raw from yanking the burlap sacks. Jesse's hands were gripping the wheel tightly. I could see he was pissed. "Damn," he said. "Why didn't Stretch tell us the surf was too big? That was his job."

I said nothing. We both knew it was our job to okay or not okay the loading. We were jamming, that's what. We were damn lucky not to have had our whole load jammed right back down in our faces. If we got the stuff aboard Stretch's boat tonight we would be lucky. We both knew that. We only had a couple of hours before the fishermen started out, and if we were loading weed when they got up, that would be the end of it.

On the north end of the lagoon were some abandoned structures and a group of fishermen's huts. We drove through the huts slowly as dogs barked. On the far side of the settlement we parked the rig and waited. I slumped over the wheel. My mind was completely boggled by the fuckup. I couldn't think. I wanted someone else to make the decisions. Jesse said nothing. Finally he broke the silence. "We could cancel out here and move on up the coast. In two days we could load off Cape Blanco. Just stop everything cold, stop jamming. It might be the best thing to do."

"God, I'd like to get this thing over with tonight," I said. "I don't know. . . ."

Jesse lit a cigarette and looked out the window. From the fishermen's settlement a rooster crowed. I looked at the sky. It already seemed lighter. We had to do something fast.

"I'm going to walk over to the beach," Jesse said. "If I see the boat I'll give you two flashes with my light. Bring the truck out then."

"I want to go with you," Gene said.

"C'mon, let's go." The two of them disappeared. After they left I sat quietly in the truck. I saw headlights approaching and Zeke and Hoff drove up. They parked and shut off their motor. "What's happenin'?" Zeke whispered.

"What's happenin'?" Zeke and Hoff spoke briefly. "If the boat I explained the fuckup. Zeke and Hoff pointed to the beach on a makes it back over to this side, you can drive out to the beach on a levee over there," Zeke said. He pointed with his chin toward the sea. "It's the only way to get out 'cause the rest of the area is flooded. 'If you go out I can park my rig on the levee and no one else is gonna make it. Y'might think of that."

"How wide is the levee?" I asked. "Wide as one car," Zeke said. "If I park my car in the middle of it, ain't nothin' gonna get by. The only way the Federales can get to you is if they have water wings or else drive five miles down the beach and cross over. I think you can do it."

Zeke's information got me going again. I was pissed off at myself for even thinking of quitting. Just then I saw a flash from the beach. I wasn't sure. "Did you see anything?" I asked Zeke. "It looked like a light to me," Zeke said.

I looked again and I saw the unmistakable arc of a flashlight. I started the truck. "You follow me out and block the levee," I called to Zeke. He nodded and started his engine.

As I drove out on the levee I could hear roosters crowing behind me. The fishermen would be getting up soon. Halfway out on the levee I picked up Jesse and Gene. "Stretch and Phil are over there," he said. "They've got the skiff and the rubber boat already on the beach."

Suddenly I felt better. I pushed down on the throttle and raced toward the beach. The levee was indeed narrow, one wrong move and I would have hurtled over the embankment. Three-quarters of a mile out Jesse pointed to a ramp and I turned left. We were on the beach now, hard-packed sand where we could move. I shifted the truck into second gear and raced over the sand. "There they are," Jesse cried, pointing ahead.

I saw the two boats. Phil and Stretch were huddled beside them. I braked to a stop and jumped out of the truck. The surf was absolutely flat, like a swimming pool. Stretch and Phil ran toward the

truck as Jesse and I yanked sacks out of the back. "Get 'em in. It's going to be light soon."

Working like madmen, the four of us hustled sacks out of the truck and loaded the two boats. In a few minutes the life raft and the skiff were full. Stretch and Phil pushed them into the water and the skiff toward the boat, pulling the load behind them. "We're going to swim it," Jesse whispered. "We're going to make it."

I looked toward the mountains and shrugged. "We'd better make it, because if we don't now, we never will."

Jesse and I unloaded the rest of the sacks while the skiffs were making the first trip. In ten minutes they returned and we threw the remaining sacks in. "As long as we've made it this far, we might as well include everything," I said. I reached inside the truck and hauled out a case of beer. The day before we had stopped and bought the beer for the long voyage home. In the last-minute panic of our fuckup, I had forgotten it. When I threw it in the skiff, Phil smiled.

It took us twenty minutes to load the weed and bid Stretch and Phil goodbye. As they pushed the two skiffs out into the water with the last load, Jesse and I jumped in the pickup and raced back over the beach. Zeke saw us coming and backed the station wagon off the levee. "It's loaded," I called, as I came abreast of him. "Let's get out of here!" I shifted into low gear and rounded the corner leading to the fishermen's huts. The fishermen were just getting up. They looked at us as we drove past, and one of them waved. I waved back. On the south end of the lagoon I stopped to retrieve the blanket and abandoned raft from our first attempt at loading. As we sped over the road leading around the lagoon, I looked back to see if I could spot Stretch's boat. Just as the sky began to lighten I saw the boat heading out to sea.

Smuggling by sea is probably one of the oldest forms of smuggling known to man; it is also, despite its aura of romanticism, one of the most dangerous. Not only did Stretch and Phil have the Mexican coastal patrols to worry about, they also had to worry about the sea itself, probably, after the first day, their most dangerous enemy. The journey from the central west coast of Mexico up to northern California would take approximately three weeks under normal condi-

itions, and that's what we were planning on. There are no normal conditions on the high seas though, especially in a small boat. I trusted Stretch's ability to handle his boat, because I had seen him do it, and I had really come to trust Phil in the last few days. He was an expert seaman, meteorologist, and navigator; at least they wouldn't lack those skills.

The plan was for them to head out to sea for fifty miles and then turn upwind, beating their way north. The difficulty with the plan was that they would have to sail 1,900 miles against prevailing winds and currents. They could have chosen to continue out to sea for a thousand miles and catch the trade winds which would blow them up north, but that would have entailed a longer voyage—although an easier one. Stretch opted for the first choice for two reasons: first, although the trip was harder, it was at least one week quicker; second, if something did happen to the boat or one of the crew, they could always head in and hide out for a few weeks along the coast—until they could contact me, or Don in Berkeley. Either way there were risks involved, and it didn't matter much which risks you tried to avoid, there were always others lifting their heads.

What bothered me most about the whole venture was not the sea, because I knew Stretch and Phil could handle that, it was the head trip they might go through while babysitting a ton of weed for three weeks. The anxiety and stress that accompanies a smuggling run tends to take its toll after weeks at sea. I had known skippers who were anxious as they approached their landfall that they threw the weed overboard rather than risk taking it in. I had also known skippers who lost all sense of judgment, about the sea, about marijuana, about everything, once their boat was loaded down with weed. The real dangers Stretch and Phil faced were readily apparent: The Mexican government had just purchased ten new minesweepers from the U.S. Navy, and they were using them to patrol Mexican coastal waters. Theoretically, of course, once Stretch's boat was beyond the twelve-mile limit he was in international waters and could not be touched by anyone, but theoretics don't mean much off the coast of Mexico—or off of any coast, for that matter. Any small boat is game on the high seas, especially small pleasure craft. If a boat is

"He's not here," I said. "Where do you think he could be?"
 "Hell, I don't know," Don said. "Are there any other places?"
 "Yeah, there's a bar north of town."

As we were pulling out of the parking lot a figure emerged from a telephone booth. It was Phil. He ran toward Don's station wagon and jumped in. I pulled up alongside them. "How's it going, man?" I said. Phil looked exhausted. He held up his thumb and smiled. "Let's go down to that bar and have an Irish coffee," I said. "We can talk there."

In the bar we relaxed around a table. We were all jumpy with excitement. The bar was crowded so we had to talk low. Phil told us what happened. "We had hassles the minute we left Laguna de los Leones," he said. "A boat followed us out and we thought it was the Mexican patrol boat they use down there. Stretch almost panicked. He wanted to dump the weed right then and high-tail it. I told him to cool it because the boat didn't look like a patrol boat to me. It wasn't either. It was a fishing boat making it out early. Damn, we were scared though."

"That would have been a stupid move, throwing the weed out," I said. "The stuff would have floated right back to shore."

"I know. That's why I didn't want to dump it. Not only that, but why dump it when you don't know what's happening?"

"Did Stretch calm down after that?" Don asked.

"Yeah. Once we got outside the twelve-mile limit we both settled down. Man, you've never seen a boat fly up the coast like ours did. We had twenty- and thirty-knot winds all the way up. They blew us up here."

The journey up the coast was amazing. Usually boats have to beat their way north, but Stretch's boat caught some unbelievably lucky weather. "It's all a dance," I said.

Everybody laughed. I ordered another round of drinks. "Where's Stretch now?" Don said.

"He's tied up in the middle of the harbor. I told him I'd row out in the dinghy after I contacted you guys. I've been waiting in that phone booth for two hours."

We drank up and headed for the harbor. I parked my van a block

from the jetty, and Howard and I walked toward the docks. Don and Phil followed us. It was after ten P.M. and the harbor looked deserted. There was one bar open with a few cars parked around it. At the south end of the harbor there was a breakwater. Just inside the breakwater there was a boat. It was Stretch's boat. He was anchored fifty yards offshore.

"Go out and get him and let's talk," I said. "We obviously can't off-load through the surf. We'll have to decide what to do."

Phil got in the dinghy and rowed out to the boat. We braced ourselves in the rain and watched him. The responsibility for off-loading was on my shoulders. I had told Don when I first contacted him about using Stretch's boat that I would take care of the loading and unloading. It was up to me to find a place and time to do it. I was extremely skeptical about the weather. If we tried to take the load in through the surf I knew we'd end up on the rocks. Any other place though, and there was a chance someone would spot us.

The dinghy returned with Stretch and Phil. When Stretch got out we all shook his hand. "Phil says you had a great trip," I said. "Magic," Stretch said. "All we had to do was set the sails and hang on."

"Listen," I said. "We've got to get a place where we can talk. Let's rent a couple of motel rooms."

We drove back to the north end of town and rented two adjoining motel rooms. Phil cracked open a bottle of tequila which he'd brought from the boat. We drank, and my stomach started loosening up. I turned to Stretch. "Listen. What kind of activity did you see when you brought the boat in? Did you see any Coast Guard patrols? What's the status of this harbor?"

"Nothing, man. I saw nothing. The status of the harbor is there's nothing here. All the fishing boats tie up on the north end of the harbor and the pleasure boats tie up down where we are. The only Coast Guard boat I saw was tied up at its own dock alongside the fishing boats."

"Do you have to report to the harbor master if you stick around?"
 "Yeah. Tomorrow I'm gonna have to check in and request a guest

berth. Of course, I could just stay anchored out in the middle. They'd think that was funny though."

"What about up north where we were going to off-load? Did you check that out when you came in?"

"In this weather? Man, we made it straight into the harbor. I didn't want to go anywhere near those rocks."

"I don't think we should go anywhere near them now either. We may have to hole up and wait for a day or two before we off-load. I don't want to jam this part of it. This is where all the fuckups occur."

"You guys decide what you want to do," Stretch said. "I'm gonna flake out for a few hours. I'm dead."

"I guess all of you guys might as well sack out. We're here for the night anyway. I'm going to take a walk around town and check things out."

"Let me come with you," Howard said.

Outside, the rain had turned to a drizzle. Howard and I walked down to the waterfront. The whole town was dead. Just then a police patrol car drove up behind us. "Hey, you!" a voice shouted.

I was absolutely calm when I turned to the police. The cop sat in his patrol car and motioned us toward him with his flashlight. "You the guys driving that van I saw awhile ago?" he said. I nodded.

"Where's your van?"

"We got a room for the night. It's parked at the motel," I said.

"Whatya doin' out here?"

"We're abalone divers," I said. "We were supposed to meet a boat here tonight. We're looking for it."

"All the abb boats are tied up at the north end of the harbor. Down that way," he pointed with his flashlight. "The fishermen hang out at Gino's bar."

"Thanks," I said. The cop wound up his window and drove off.

"Jesus," Howard said. "That's all we need."

"At least we know what to look for now. I wonder how many cops they got working this place at night."

"He's probably the only one," Howard said. "It ain't that big a burg."

Howard and I walked up to Gino's bar and had a drink. Half an

hour later we walked back toward the south end of the harbor. Half-way into a doorway and watched him drive past. "He's making his rounds," Howard said.

"Let's stay here and see how long it takes him to make it around again."

We waited in the doorway for thirty minutes. Once again the patrol car drove around the corner. He passed us and headed toward the north end of the town. "He doesn't even go down to the south end of the harbor," Howard said. "I guess 'cause there's no stores down there."

I noticed the same thing. The jetty on the south end of the harbor was a quarter of a mile beyond the road where the cop turned down. If the circular pattern was his regular route, then he didn't bother driving out on the jetty. There was really no reason for him to drive out on it since there was nothing to see. The boats were anchored out in the middle of the harbor. Maybe we could off-load on the jetty.

"Let's watch him one more time," I said. "If he makes the same round I think we have it."

The cop returned in exactly twenty minutes. His route took him along the waterfront to Gino's bar, then up into town, then back around to the road leading down to the waterfront. He didn't drive down the jetty at the south end of the harbor. We could drive the van down there while he was making his rounds on the other side of town. Howard and I hustled back to the motel and woke the boys. They got up immediately.

"Don, I want you to drive right into the middle of the main intersection of town and lift the hood of your car. Pretend your car's stalled. If the cop comes by, he'll help you. Howard, you go down to the access road to the jetty and stand at the entrance. If the cop tries to go out on the jetty you stop him any way you can, wave your arms, yell, piss on his car if you have to, anything to get his attention. You can pretend you're drunk. Me and Phil and Stretch will drive out on the jetty and unload the weed. We should be able to do it in twenty minutes."

We hustled into our cars. Howard ran down to the waterfront road

and watched the cop drive by toward the north end of the harbor. Then we drove down to the south end of the harbor and out on the jetty. Phil and Stretch jumped out of the van and rowed the dinghy out to the boat. I sat in the van and waited.

I peered out the van window. It seemed that Phil and Stretch had been gone a long time. I listened to the rain rattling on the van roof. Then I heard a louder rap. I almost jumped out of my seat. Phil was beside the door, motioning to me. I jumped out of the van to help unload the dinghy.

Stretch was holding the rubber boat against the rocks. Phil jumped down beside him and started tossing packages of weed onto the rocks. During the trip up the coast, Phil and Stretch had transferred the weed from the large burlap sacks to small, easy-to-handle packages. The packages were covered with arabol, so water couldn't get in. I grabbed the packages off the rocks and tossed them up onto the jetty. The dinghy was unloaded in a few minutes and then Phil and Stretch jumped back in and paddled out for a second load. While they were out, I loaded the packages in the van. After four trips we had all the kilos loaded. I jumped in the van and started the motor. When I put it in gear and let the clutch out, the wheels spun in the mud. I reversed and tried to back out. Nothing. Suddenly Stretch and Phil appeared in front of me. They pushed against the front of the van while I stepped lightly on the throttle. The van backed out of the mud. Phil and Stretch jumped out of the way as I turned around and sped down the jetty.

At the mouth of the jetty I stopped and Howard jumped in. "The cop hasn't been by," he said. "How'd it go out there?"

I pointed in the back. The packages of marijuana were stacked up roofhigh.

"Fantastic! We better cover it up with something."

"There's a blanket behind the spare tire," I said. "Use that."

Howard covered the weed while I drove through the silent town. There wasn't a sign of life. I skirted the main intersection and headed toward Highway One. Beyond the city limits I put my foot down on the accelerator and took off.

By dawn we had the marijuana unloaded and stacked in a warehouse in San Francisco. At ten A.M. Don arrived with two middlemen

who were going to help him peddle the weed. I called my musician friends to come over so they could get their share. When everyone arrived we weighed the weed, one package at a time. There were 1,700 pounds. We valued our weed at \$140 a pound, wholesale. Middlemen would sell the weed for anywhere from \$165 to \$200 a pound, depending on their customers. Users, those who bought pounds for their private stashes, would pay \$200 to \$300 per pound.

The musicians who had loaned me \$5,000 agreed to take their double paycheck in weed, so we separated 72 pounds from the main pile and gave it to them. We also agreed that everyone involved in the trip would keep one kilo for his own personal stash. There were ten people involved, so we took 20 pounds out. The rest of the weed was divided into thirds; one-third for me and Jesse; one-third for Don and his people; and the final third for the musician backers, who would be required to pay wholesale prices for it. By letting them buy a third of the load at wholesale, we weren't losing anything, but they were gaining a lot. They could make \$50 to \$100 on each pound.

I doubt if any aspect of marijuana smuggling and dealing interests as many people—the heat, the public, the dealer himself—as the money; how much is involved, who gets it, what the weed costs and how much it sells for. Figures are difficult to come by, since no dealer is going to reveal his financial tote sheets, but through my experience and that of a few friends, plus statistics at the border, some reasonable estimates can be made. The price of weed is a good barometer of the industry, and nothing is as revealing as the cost of kilos themselves, and the changes it has gone through in the last few years.

In 1963-64, the year Jesse and I started smuggling, we could buy kilos for \$8 each in the Mexican interior. On the border identical kilos cost \$25 to \$30 each. A dealer who didn't want to risk running the border could buy the same kilos in Los Angeles for \$100 each. Once the weed reached San Francisco, the wholesale price rose to \$175 per kilo.

During the years 1963 and 1964, little marijuana was being smuggled into the United States. This was the very beginning of the drug revolution, and big-time weed smuggling was still five years away. In 1964-65, less than 700 kilos of marijuana were being brought into the Bay area (Marin County to Monterey) each month. By late 1965, as

the corners of the Haight-Ashbury began to fill up, hundreds of young longhairs were drifting south to score. It's difficult estimating how much weed actually moved through the Bay area at the time, but observers generally agree that during the banner years of 1967, 1968, and 1969, thirty to forty tons of pot were moving through the area each month of the season. The season is generally considered to last from November until late February, although in actual fact it begins in October and lasts through the middle of May. By the end of May, weed is getting scarce in Mexico. The summer drought takes over until the middle of September, when the next harvest occurs.

By 1966, the same quality kilos that Jesse and I bought for \$8 in the interior of Mexico in 1964 were selling for \$20. At the same time, the wholesale price in San Francisco dropped from \$175 per kilo to \$100. What happened was that the demand for weed by the new breed of longhair smugglers had created a seller's market in Mexico, raising the prices, and the success the smugglers were having in getting their loads across the border had created a buyer's market in San Francisco, lowering prices there. The problem increased in 1967, when the price for kilos in the interior of Mexico rose to \$25 to \$30, and the selling price in San Francisco dropped to \$75 per kilo. Granted, many of the kilos sold at this time were underweight, but the price per unit was still low enough to create hassles for many smugglers and dealers. The market was so depressed that many dealers dropped out of business, or went back to selling LSD. Then in 1968-69 two things happened: dealers, tired of explaining to customers why their bricks were underweight, began selling pound units—and the United States government implemented Operation Intercept.

In 1967, 90,000 pounds of marijuana was confiscated at the border. In 1970, over 500,000 pounds was confiscated. Figuring that the customs people are intercepting five percent of the traffic at the most, we can figure that some 10,000,000 pounds, or almost 5,000,000 kilos, was getting through. Assuming that the average price paid to the farmer in the mountains in 1970 for bulk marijuana was \$5 per kilo, an estimate which I think is reasonable, we can figure that between twenty and twenty-five million dollars was being paid for grass at its source. This wasn't the price the gringo smugglers were paying, however. It was the price being paid by the Mexican entrepreneur. By the

time the gringo got his hands on the weed, he was paying almost \$30 per kilo, which brings the amount paid by gringos for marijuana in Mexico up to almost \$150,000,000. By the time the weed reaches the border the price goes up even further, so we can multiply from there. The first smuggling trip Jesse and I made, in 1963-64, involved 80 kilos and \$2,000. Our second trip involved 125 kilos and \$2,500. On our third trip we worked in partnership with our connection in Mexico and brought back 524 kilos on credit. Our debt to the connection after we sold the grass was \$7,000. These prices obtained in 1966 and earlier. After I was arrested and no longer involved in the operation, Jesse made a trip where he spent \$15,000 for 1,000 kilos. This type of operation could be multiplied a number of times in 1966-67, and you would not even scratch the surface of the industry.

The large amounts of weed moving through the Bay area, it was this time (a lot of the weed did not stay in the Bay area, it was transferred and sold elsewhere) were partly responsible for the implementation of Operations Intercept and Cooperation. One such load is still talked about by observers of the industry. A freighter from British Honduras loaded with twelve tons of Panama Red came into port during Christmas week 1968, and while the regular stevedores were at lunch, the cargo was unloaded by a pickup crew hired by the shipping clerk, who was in on the scam. Not one joint of the Red was distributed in San Francisco. In a matter of hours the load was inside a semi-truck heading for the East Coast. Most of it was sold in Philadelphia and New York. The weed was so good that one of the dealers involved in the transaction sent \$500 to Philly to get one of the kilos back for his own use.

This kind of operation reflected a growing sophistication and organization on the part of smugglers and dealers—and on users also. By 1967-68, enough people had smoked enough marijuana to be able to tell good weed from bad, or even average weed, so they started demanding only quality. As with any commodity, the good tends to drive out the bad, so in a very short time every customer in the Bay area was demanding good weed. The demand was reflected back in Mexico by the gringo buyers and smugglers who, like me and Jesse, refused to purchase anything but quality. In our case it meant educating our entrepreneur; other smugglers did the same.

THE COAST

In 1968, the year our smuggling organization brought out the load of 1,700 pounds, Don and I figured the wholesale value of the weed at \$140 a pound. After subtracting the 72 pounds for the musician backers, and the 20 pounds for the participants in the venture, we had 1,608 pounds left to sell. We figured the 1,608 pounds was worth \$225,500 wholesale. The financial breakdown of the run worked out approximately as follows:

Money invested in trip:
 \$ 5,000 from *Life* magazine
 \$ 5,000 from musician backers
 \$ 10,000 total invested

Expenses of trip:
 \$ 250 to Luis, our original entrepreneur

250 to Sanchez, our guide
 250 for the use of Jesus' airplane
 500 for Gene's expenses
 250 for round-trip air fare for Jerry, Acapulco to San Francisco

1,500 for road expenses for Jesse and Jerry, motels, food, gas
 1,000 to Zeke and Hoff for expenses
 1,200 for boat expenses
 300 for personal expenses, mules, food, etc.
 3,000 payment for marijuana
 1,000 for transportation of goods—burros, men, pistoleros, etc.
 \$ 9,500 total expenses

Income from trip:
 \$ 238,000 received for 1,700 pounds of marijuana @ \$140 per pound
 -9,500 expenses for trip
 -10,000 double return to backers (72 pounds)
 -2,800 to participants (one kilo each)
 -20,000 payment to Stretch, skipper and owner of boat
 -12,000 payment to Phil, crew member
 \$ 184,700 net profit

WEED: ADVENTURES OF A DOPE SMUGGLER

The demand for quality weed, the change from kilos to pounds as the units of sale in the United States, and Operation Intercept all occurred within a very short time—and they all contributed to an increase in the price of weed in Mexico. By 1970 many buyers were purchasing only unbricked colas, refusing to have anything to do with bricked marijuana at all. A number of Mexican entrepreneurs began to cater to this type of buyer. The prices for unbricked colas were astronomical compared to bricked weed, reaching up to \$75 and \$100 per kilo in the interior of Mexico. At the same time, due to the scarcity of good weed in San Francisco, pounds of unbricked colas were going for \$200 to \$300. In August of 1972, unbricked colas of dynamic grass were selling for anywhere from \$300 to \$500 a pound, with many willing hands ready to snap them up when they became available.

A rundown on the price of kilos in Mexico and the U.S. follows:

COST OF KILOS IN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES FROM 1955 TO 1972

YEAR	THE MEXICAN INTERIOR	THE BORDER	LOS ANGELES	SAN FRANCISCO
1955	\$ 2 to 4	\$15 to 20	\$ 50 to 65	\$ 90 to 100
1960	5 to 8	20 to 25	50 to 75	90 to 110
1963	8 to 15	25 to 30	75 to 100	125 to 175
1965	10 to 20	25 to 35	100 to 125	150 to 175
1966*	12 to 25	35 to 40	60 to 100	60 to 100
1967	15 to 25	35 to 40	100 to 150	160 to 190
1969	25 to 35k	35 to 50k	80 to 175(lb)†	100 to 200(lb)†
1970	35 to 50k	50 to 75k	100 to 200(lb)	125 to 225 lb
1972	35 to 80k	60 to 100k	125 to 400(lb)	125 to 500 lb
1974	35 to 100k	100 to 150k	150 to 500(lb)	200 to 500 lb

*In 1966 a depression occurred in the price of kilos on the West Coast. This happened because incredible amounts of weed were coming into the U.S., every pound and his brother was in Mexico scoring marijuana, and more than that, were successfully returning to the U.S. with it!

A curious corollary to this is the fact that Mexico is now on the way to pricing itself out of the business. I believe that within the next five years the prices for kilos will be so great, and the surveillance so heavy within Mexico, that most gringo smugglers will discontinue smuggling. Already domestic weed is getting increasingly popular in the U.S. During the next few years I expect domestic marijuana to completely take over the industry.

†In the late sixties the unit of sale changed in the U.S. from kilos to pounds.

The run Jesse and I put together was unusual because the weed itself cost us so little—and the other expenses were minimal. The Stretch's boat had not already been in Mexico, it could have cost us another \$10,000 for a boat. The fact that Zeke and Hoff were willing to transport and help load the boat for \$8,000 each also came down on our expenses. They could have easily asked for and gotten a percentage—because when you're down in Mexico and need help, you don't quibble about money. Under ordinary circumstances the weed Jesse and I bought would have cost us a minimum of \$25,000. Once you subtract the cost of the weed, then take out another \$20,000 for the boat or plane, and another \$10,000 or so for miscellaneous expenses, you don't end up with a very large sum of money.

The weed industry handles a hell of a lot of bread, but very little of it stays in one hand. Smugglers and dealers I personally know have collectively moved tons and tons of weed but the money always seems to drift away, not only in losing trips which tend to suck vast bankrolls dry, but in other ways too, by drinking it up, coking it up, or spending it on expectations.

There are unsubstantiated stories of dope millionaires in San Francisco. I know of a dozen or so individuals who have two or three hundred thousand dollars stashed away, but in general there seems to be a dreariness about dope money that keeps most dealers and smugglers scratching along, even though they are moving a lot of weed. Most dealers and smugglers who make big coin in weed invest their money in real estate. One of the folktales around San Francisco during the economic recession of the last few years was that the only people buying the big expensive homes coming on the market were dope dealers and rock stars. A lot of dealers who were smart enough to establish legitimate businesses with their bread did buy big homes, but others who attempted it were corralled by the Internal Revenue Service. A few dealers and smugglers have money in Swiss bank accounts, although the tales outnumber the accounts. Mostly the bread made on a good run goes to pay for previous bad runs, or is used up in subsequent bad runs.

Dope smugglers are like oil wildcaters. The big run can always be

made, but that big run oftentimes demands bigger and bigger attempts, and every run, once completed, seems to have a way of turning into a practice run for the one that'll be really big, the one that will buy the hacienda in Mexico, or the new Mercedes 450SL and a house in Marin County. I have seen thousands and thousands of dollars disappear in just paying to keep pilots on retainer, looking for airfields, buying equipment and losing it before one kilo was ever smuggled. Also an awful lot of the money made in dope ends up in the hands of lawyers, who have probably made the most out of the weed revolution.

Another reason why there are so few really big money-makers in the marijuana business is because dealers and smugglers are continually entering and leaving the trade, especially after they've had a successful run or two—and even more so if the runs have been unsuccessful. One of the tenets of the smuggling game is, "Don't get greedy!" It's the greedy ones who fall. After making what they consider a reasonable stake, many smugglers and dealers retire to pursue their original interests. Often the money made from dope is spent fairly quickly and some of the players reenter the game, but they usually have to reorganize from scratch. Nothing changes as fast as the weed industry. Old connections in Mexico are no longer in business, old customers have found new dealers, etc. Most of the new breed of smugglers and dealers aren't interested in becoming marijuana millionaires, and the few who do get into the game with the sole idea of making money usually end up getting popped anyway.

Most smugglers have a working life that lasts no more than four years, by which time they have either been successful enough to have a little bread stashed away, or they've reached the point where they realize that dope money is easy come, easy go, with a lot of risks along the way, so they drop out. Smugglers and dealers who stay in business longer than four years are either desperate or greedy. In either case they usually end up falling.

My own fall at San Luis, Arizona, on August 30, 1966, had a bizarre twist, and while it did not prevent me from returning to

Mexico to do the run I've just described, it did turn my head around. As I said at the beginning of this book, when Speedy Blue told me I was going to be sitting in Yuma County one helluva long time if I didn't talk, I spun a tale off the top of my head that I'm still proud of.

I don't know what it was that made me invent the story I laid on Speedy Blue, maybe the Percodan. All I know is that when he gave me that sly Okie smile of his, the whole story popped into my head in a flash, with all the details, ready for any little tricks Speedy or Gomez might try. I was a writer, I had gone to Mexico to work on my novel and to sell my car. A *pocho* dude from L.A. bought my car in Guaymas and I was delivering it back to L.A. for him. The weed in the car wasn't mine, it belonged to somebody else.

My mind was speeding up behind the Percodan, which was supposed to slow it down. Speedy and Gomez loomed over me like two border bulldogs about to swallow a cockroach. I could see the bulge of the .45 next to Speedy's gut. He had a slight reddish tinge to his face and nose that spelled too much booze and too much sun. Gomez's face was impassive, a Chicano working for the gringos, the traitorous bastard! I leaned against the cell wall as they fired questions at me. I fired right back.

"What's the story, who's in this with you?"

"Nobody's in anything with me. I went to Mexico to write a novel and sell my car."

"It's against the law to sell cars in Mexico."

"Hell, I know that, but people do it all the time. You can make a good living selling old cars."

"Or stolen ones."

"Mine wasn't stolen."

"What happened?"

"I met a guy in Guaymas who bought my car. He said he'd give me \$500 for it if I drove it back to L.A. for him."

"You don't expect me to believe that crap do you?" Speedy said.

"You can believe it if you want," I said. "It's the truth."

Both Speedy and I knew that smugglers sometimes conned inno-

cent gringos into driving loads of weed across the border. I reasoned that if I could make Speedy Blue believe my story, he'd have to follow up on it. If he did, then I'd have a chance to wiggle my way out—maybe. The thing about customs agents, or any police, for that matter, is that they want to believe your story as much as you want them to believe it. They don't want to rest on a simple pop at the border, they want to get the big boys, the syndicate operation they always imagine you're part of. My story was plausible because I had just enough circumstantial evidence in my car to back it up. I had an incomplete novel in my luggage, a broken-down transmission, and no record. And, when it gets down to the nitty-gritty, I can act honest as hell.

"Who is this guy you met in Guaymas?" Speedy asked. "Is he a Mexican?"

"He's a *pocho*. He calls himself Gordo."

"Gordo?" Speedy almost spit the word out. "You're lying, you sonofabitch."

I shrugged. The only thing I could do was stick to my story. Once you started changing it, you were lost. I repeated my assertion.

"Man, I'm telling you just what happened. I was talking to a guy in a bar in Guaymas. He said he knew someone who'd buy my car.

When I met Gordo, he asked if he could drive the car. He kept it for three hours. When he brought it back he made me the offer."

"And you didn't know there was marijuana in the car?"

"I suspected there might be a little weed in it. Hell, I didn't know the bastard loaded two hundred kilos in it."

"Plus a little coke and some other stuff," Speedy said.

"I don't know nothing about that," I said.

The reason I copped to knowing there was some weed in my car was that I wanted Speedy Blue to feel a sense of honesty about me. I knew I couldn't play the completely gullible gringo, but if I could make him believe that I was naïve—and a little bit guilty—then he might believe me.

"Where were you going to deliver the weed?" Speedy said.

"I wasn't going to deliver any weed," I said. "I was delivering my car. I was supposed to take it to Los Angeles."

"You said you knew there was some weed in your car, then you were delivering weed."

"I suspected there might be a couple of kilos in it. Hell, if I had known there was all that shit in my car, do you think I would have driven across the border? I may be simple but I'm not stupid."

A great line. Not even Speedy could refute that logic. Speedy Blue turned to Gomez, his running mate. "What do you think?" Gomez shrugged.

"Where in Los Angeles were you going to take your car?" Gomez asked.

"It isn't exactly in Los Angeles," I said. "It's in a place called Pacific Palisades."

My mind was whirring fast. The Percodan head I had on was still buzzing. When Gomez asked me the question I immediately flashed back to a newspaper article I had read two years before. The article outlined a bust that occurred in a parking lot in Pacific Palisades, on the Coast Highway opposite Sunset Boulevard. "I'm supposed to deliver the car to a parking lot on the Coast Highway," I said. "Opposite Sunset Boulevard."

Gomez looked at Speedy Blue. "I know that place. It's been used as a drop zone before. Maybe we have something."

"What were you supposed to do after you dropped the car?"

"I'm supposed to leave the keys under the floormat and make it on home."

"That's all?"

"That's all."

"What about your five hundred dollars?"

"Gordo already gave me half. He said he'd send the other half to Big Sur where I live."

"You expect me to believe that shit?" Speedy snapped. "You're lying."

"I'm not lying!" I yelled back. "Lissen. The whole car's only worth two hundred bucks. I already got two-fifty. I figured if he sent me the other two-fifty it'd be a bonus. Shit, the thing'll hardly move with that bad transmission."

THE COAST

Speedy Blue and Gomez stepped to the other end of the holding cell and conferred. Occasionally they looked at me. After ten minutes they returned.

"Lissen, jiveass. We're going to follow up on your bullshit. If you're lying, you ain't never gonna see the outside again."

That morning I was handcuffed in the back of Speedy Blue's air-conditioned Impala, which had been impounded from a popped smuggler and whisked across the desert to Yuma to be booked officially. Gomez and Speedy drank beer and tossed cans out the windows into the desert. "You're littering," I said, from my handcuffed position in the back seat.

"Fuck you, freak," Speedy said.

I was taken to the Yuma police station and booked, then taken before the county commissioner and immediately released on bail—in the custody of Speedy Blue. Officially I was now working for The Man, trying to set up Gordo, the dude who had bought my car and loaded it with weed. Unfortunately Gordo was a figment of my imagination, and my imagination was going to have to get imaginative and imaginative to make Gordo real.

Speedy Blue's plan was to have Gomez drive my car to Los Angeles; I was to be flown to L.A. and the car would be put back in my hands to deliver to the parking lot. Once I delivered the car I would be put on a bus for home. Then I was to wait for a letter of indictment from Phoenix and return there to stand trial for smuggling. If everything worked out as I had said, and Gordo actually picked up the car full of weed, I would be released with nothing more than a slap on the wrist—my reward for finking!

That night, in my new roll of dumb mule now cooperating with United States Customs, I was taken out for a steak dinner (Order anything you want, Speedy said), and then put up in a motel to await the next day's flight to Los Angeles. Gomez took my sick station wagon to the police garage, where they discovered the transmission needed a few adjustments to make the journey into Los Angeles, then he took off, across the desert at night, 200 kilos of marijuana reeking in the back. The next day I was taken to the airport and put on a plane.

When I arrived in Los Angeles, fifteen United States Customs agents were at the gate to meet me, one in particular, a six-foot-seven moth dressed in dungarees and sweatshirt. "Kamstra," he said, "My name's Hugh. Glad to have you on our team. I talked to Speedy Blue on the phone this morning and he says you've been real cooperative. Lots of smugglers bilk guys like you into being mules. Don't worry about it. We'll get the bastard."

I nodded weakly.

"We're gonna make a dry run in an unmarked car first, to give you the lay of the land. After that, you'll take your station wagon down to the parking lot and drop it. Any questions?"

I shook my head.

It was a strange feeling sitting in a car with the heat, other cars following us, on a mission to drop a load of weed in a phony drop zone so a nonexistent dealer could pick it up. I was beginning to sweat. I wondered if I couldn't call the whole thing off, just confess that it was my weed and couldn't I go to jail and forget about it. I was in too deep though. As we drove from Sunset Boulevard, I looked for places to jump out of the car. Three unmarked cars followed us, each one containing four customs agents.

When we reached the Coast Highway, Hugh turned left. "That's the parking lot, isn't it?" he said, *sotto voce*, pointing across the highway with his chin.

"Yeah," I whispered back. "That's the one."

"We're gonna drive down the road a little and turn around and come back. When you bring your station wagon down here, take it over to that corner stall, understand?"

I nodded.

Hugh swung the car around in a U-turn and headed back toward the parking lot. When we drew abreast of it I couldn't believe my eyes. Three large telephone service trucks were parked in the lot, and a man was up on a pole working the lines. Across the street were two plain Chevy sedans. Inside each sedan were two men, reading newspapers.

"You guys can't be serious, can you?" I said. "This looks like a training film on how to blow a bust. Nobody's going to pick up a load

with all the heat you guys have around. You can smell cops for a mile."

"Let us worry about that," Hugh said. "We're not taking any chances. We've been after Gordo a long time."

"Oh, Jesus."

We drove back to the drive-in where my station wagon was parked. Gomez got out and I got in. The weed had been taken out of the panels and stacked in the back. My sleeping bag was thrown carelessly over it. I sighed. "Jesus, you guys. All Gordo has to do is get within fifty feet of this car and he's gonna know something's up. Look at the stuff."

"Don't worry about it," Hugh said. "You let us take care of the details." He turned to the twenty agents milling around. "You guys ready to go?" They nodded.

I drove the station wagon toward the Coast Highway. Ten unmarked police cars followed me. I felt like the lead car in my own funeral. I had wild thoughts of putting my car in low gear and taking off, a wild pursuit up the Coast Highway, half the L.A. police force behind me. Yaki! There was nothing I could do. The traffic bleated around me like hogs stuck in a slaughter pen. I looked in the car next to me. There were three chicks wearing halters. Heading for the beach. It was a sunny day and the surf was up and I was heading for a parking lot to deliver 200 kilos of weed to Gordo, a big-time Chicano dealer who didn't exist. It was insane! How did I get myself in these predicaments? All I wanted to do was write. *Shit!*

I eased off the road into the parking lot. The stall Hugh told me to park in was occupied so I parked in the next one. I got out and left the keys under the floormat. I couldn't lock the door without the keys so I opened the door and grabbed the keys and locked the door. Then I realized I couldn't leave the keys under the floormat if I locked the door. I unlocked the door and threw the keys under the floormat and walked rapidly away, leaving the door unlocked. Fuck it! It was insane anyway.

After parking the car I was supposed to walk up Sunset Boulevard for half a mile, then Gomez would pick me up and drive me down

to the bus station. I walked a mile. Two miles. After three miles I began to worry. I turned around and headed back toward the Coast Highway. Gomez met me on the way. "I can't take you down to the Coast bus station," he said. "You'll have to make it on your own."

"Jesus Christ, Gomez! What the fuck's happening? I don't have a dime to my name. How am I supposed to get home?"

"Here, take this." Gomez reached in his wallet and gave me a twenty. "Now get the fuck out of here. We don't want to blow this, we got thirty-five agents on the stakeout." He jumped back in his car and sped away.

I stood on the edge of Sunset Boulevard watching him go. I had two choices: up Sunset Boulevard or down Sunset Boulevard. If I went up Sunset Boulevard, I ended up in the Los Angeles nether land; if I went down, at least I ended up next to the sea. I needed the sea at this moment to comfort me. I walked back down to the Coast Highway. From the intersection I could see my station wagon. The telephone trucks were still there and it looked like half the U.S. Customs Bureau was parked across the street. Nobody paid any attention to me. I walked half a block down the Coast Highway and stuck out my thumb. Inside of twenty seconds a '61 Plymouth Valiant whipped out of traffic and blasted to a stop beside me. "Hiya, jump in!" a smiling Southern California mouth said.

Fags, I thought. I jumped in and settled back into the rear seat. Both queers were dressed in Bermuda shorts and T-shirts. They had rubber sandals on their feet. Very hairy and very blond with surfboard muscles and plastic teeth. A half-mile down the road the driver whipped the car off the highway and stopped in a cloud of dust. "Okay, buster, out!" he said.

"What the fuck's going on?" I said. I closed my mouth. The dude on the right was holding out a badge. It had L.A. Police on it. I sighed. Both cops hustled me out and spread-eagled me against the car. Jesus, I thought, is this really happening to me?

"Okay, hippie, where's your stash?" one of the cops said.

"What are you talking about? I don't have any stash."

"C'mon. We stop fifty guys a day along this stretch of highway and

three-quarters of them are carrying stashes. Where's yours?" The big cop who'd been driving pushed me against the car.

"Well, if you want to know," I said, "I just left my stash a half-mile back. It's in my car."

"Huh?" the cop said.

"I'm serious. I just left my car back there in a parking lot. It has two hundred kilos in it."

The two cops looked at each other then threw me back in the car. They sped around in a brodie and took off back the way we had come. I relaxed in the rear seat. On the way I calmly explained that I had been popped at the border, that the customs agents had flown me to L.A., and that I had delivered the car to the parking lot just an hour or so before. The cop driving the car looked straight ahead and nodded as I talked.

When we reached the intersection of the Coast Highway and Sunset Boulevard, he pulled off the road and parked. One cop stayed with me and the other one got out and walked toward my station wagon. It's really happening, I thought. Across the Coast Highway I saw thirty-five customs agents' heads following the cop. When he reached the station wagon he paused a moment, then walked around to the driver's side and opened the door. At that instant two dozen agents burst out of the telephone repair trucks and automobiles and rushed him, guns drawn. I sat back in the seat of the Plymouth, as calm as could be.

After the L.A. cop and U.S. Customs fiasco, I was released to make my way up the Coast Highway to Big Sur. I heard nothing about my border bust from the federal government until I was rearrested six months later. I hired a lawyer and pleaded guilty to the nonpayment of taxes on illegally imported marijuana, and was sentenced to two years in the federal penitentiary, sentence suspended, and placed on five years' probation.