

Mescaline Blues

by Robert Crisman

This is about a mescaline trip that went wrong.

It happened back in the '60s and I know, the '60s have been done quite to death and nobody ever gets the trip right but--you'll like this one.

Joey and Danny went to see Zig, a wholesale mescaline dealer on Capitol Hill in Seattle. They were planning to retail the stuff and Zig was the man to go see. Zig had a house next to the laundry on Belmont and Howell, the Hill's ass-end at the time. This was before the yuppies moved in and drove the rents over the moon. If you ever spent time in that part of town in the '60s, the chances are good that you knew the house, it being one of the places up there that sent people up in those spaceships that didn't come down for years upon years...

Joey and Danny hopped up the stairs to the second-floor rooms where Zig kept his shit. Zig ushered them in and sat them down on the couch.

Okay, descriptions. I'll make it easy. Joey? Steve Buscemi in *Reservoir Dogs*, down to the last snaggle tooth. Ugly as toads, though his squeeze, the Lovely Danielle, was a fox, just like Nicole Kidman when she played that bitch in *To Die For*. Doesn't that piss you right off?

Danny looked better than Joey, but so did most bipeds. Remember *The Usual Suspects*, and Stephen Baldwin, the short, stocky blond guy sharing the sheets with Benicio del Toro, the Queen of New York in the movie? That's Danny.

Okay, we got them out of the way. Now, Zig, who could have maybe starred in cartoons. Maybe *SpongeBob*. He was short, blond, blubbered out, and clowned out in top-to-toe tie-dye, with thick horned-rim glasses. His hair stuck straight up in spikes.

Zig was all business, however. He brought out a baggy, full of what looked like maybe an ounce of white flour. Mixed in, he said, were 100 hits of some absolute dreammaking shit.

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"So, Zig," Danny said, "one hundred bucks, but you front us this batch, we double our money, there's more where this came from."

"Yes, yes, yes, *yes!*" Zig enthused. He *loved* the trade...

Joey looked up from the baggy. "What's this shit cut with?"

"Milk sugar, man," Zig said. "Makes it all go down smooth. You want a dip, start this thing off on a high note? There's straws on the table, my man, go ahead."

Joey thought for a moment, then shrugged. Why not?

He picked up a straw and bent toward the table. He stuck the straw in the baggy and horked up a good blast.

He sat back and blinked, shook his head...

And his eyes went *way* wide! He looked as if he'd been pole-axed...

Two seconds flat! The shit had kicked *in*-like with *stomp boots* or something! He started to see stuff in all sorts of colors, millions of midget-like, shape-shifting monsters--tap dancing wombats and all sorts of weird shit like that--tumbling and knifing through deep inner space! The wombats turned into a physical representation of something by Coltrane, then into cheese dip, and then into ten million Goofys and Plutos, *all* of them dressed up like cub scouts!

They whirled and spun and jumped in slow, waltz-like rhythms, a kaleidoscope, *pulsing*... They started to chant just like Zulus...

Then BOOM!! Air raid sirens ripped through the azure! A blast out of ten million mouths! The kaleidoscope *splayed*, became bullets, reached *warp speed--and shot for the exit, right through Joeys eyes and into the room and then out the window like tracers!*

Blazit!!!!

Except even faster than that!

And now, this wide panorama below! Speeding by, blinding and--Bombs! Berlin! Destroyed in six seconds!

"Wow, man!" Zig said. "Straight out in space! I never saw nothing like that in my *life!* Check it out!"

"I am!" Danny said. "Fuckin' weird! The fuck you put in there, blastin' powder or some goddamned thing?"

"Just the Good, brother, and then the milk sugar. Stirred it around and--Wow! Check him out!"

Joey's eyes, like balloons, stared out in horror at--*something*... He started to babble: "Bullets, man, bullets... Quacking like ducks! Billions and billions and billions and *billions*...!"

Then a long, drawn out moan, and then Joey said, "Do you guys read birds?"

Danny and Zig stood and stared. Zig cleared his throat.

"I think I fucked up the mix."

Well, hell *yes*! Zig ate more cactus than Manson! He *stayed* in space. *Yeah*, the shit was fucked up; Joey'd horked like ten hits! He was lucky Zig hadn't put old, dirty *socks* in the mix...

Joey jumped up and broke for the window. The window was open, thank God! Joey leaned out and retched like Godzilla.

Projectiles of puke! Stuff that he'd eaten that morning! Stuff that some other guy ate! *Stuff that had never been eaten at all!*

Puke sprayed the street! A car swerved to dodge it and bounced off a wall!

Joey reeled himself in. He whirled, gasping and vomit-splotched--screaming! "Captain Zeep, Captain Zeep! *Eeep eeep eeep eeep!* The jackboots, the bullets! They're holding my markers! *I've got to get to the clinic!*!"

Joey started *eeeping* around like a chimp on some good criss-cross bennies: "The bullets! The bullets! *Eeep eeep eeep eeep!*" And so on like that...

He scared the *shit* out of Danny and Zig. Backed in a corner they gaped at Joey hopping around and--

Joey gaped back!

Danny and Zig's eyes now...beady rats' eyes...

Zig spoke. His voice was Darth Vader's--ten fucking years early! "He makes too much noise. We kill him and bury him now in the yard in the back of this house."

"It shall be done, Lord." Danny--Darth Jr.!

Joey shrieked like a Wagner soprano and blasted on out of that room. Danny just stared. Zig said, "I fucked up the mix."

"No shit," Danny said.

Joey heltered and skeltered pell-mell up the street. He came to 15th and the Safeway on John.

A phone booth right there in the lot!

He gasped his way to the booth, grabbed the phone, which said, "Hey!" Joey said, "Clinic!" The phone said, "Okay! Quit *choking* me, damnit!"

Joey stared at the dial. "I know the number, the number, the number..." His voice was a whisper, awestruck at lightshows that danced through his ancestors' graveyard in--*Norway*? What the fuck happened to Florence? He heard *castratis* singing, what, Tosca?--off-key!--and knew then and there he was doomed.

And then came the clopping of hooves! A horse is a horse, of course, of course! Would Wilbur survive? *Would the gods understand?*

And--did Paladin have a phone at *his* desk? Too late! Joey stared at that dial. The numbers spit rap tunes. Grandmaster Flash and--*Rap*??? This was the Age of Aquarius, man! and--Disney's *Fantasia*, a logical segue! Brooms dancing and shit and--Nude girls! Las Vegas! No clinics there! Where the *fuck* was that number, that number, that *number*?

A dialtone now! He'd managed to pick up the phone! Give him a lifetime achievement award!

Those numbers there on the dial, the dial, the dial, the dial, they...*hummed*!

The humming swelled to a full-throated chorus: Beethoven's *Eroica*!

And *now*, in the distance! Gustave Holtz! *Mars*! Romantic, ominous...those coming-to-get-your-ass drumbeats for days--!

A long black stretch limo pulled up. It slowed to a crawl... Inside the limo, six figures dressed in white ties and black shirts and fedoras! *The Phi Delt*s! They rolled down the windows and pointed their Thompsons at Joey!!!

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!" Joey screamed. Quick as a a blink he grew wings! Wings like a

condor's! He flew, flew away!

Did Zig sell some good, kick-ass shit, man, or what?

Now, you might be thinking, where is this bullshit all headed?

As it turns out, to a tree in somebody else's back yard...

Two in the morning. Joey crouched naked as jaybirds, shivering and shaking, way up in that tree. His hair was a *mess*.

Two cops entered the yard, throwing their flashlights around like tomb robbers looking to rip off a pharaoh. The lead cop flashed his light up the tree and saw Joey--and then fell down laughing.

His partner helped him back to his feet.

Cop number one looked just like Joe Friday.

Joe Friday?? It sure as hell was! What was *he* doing in *this* fucking story?

Friday's partner--thank God it was Ben Alexander and not Harry Morgan! Harry was great as that colonel in M.A.S.H.--my mother loved him--but cop he was *not*...

"Well, well, well, well," Friday said, "what have we here? What are you doing up in those branches, my friend?"

"I need a horse," Joey said, "and a saddle."

"A horse and a saddle. Why do you need a horse and a saddle?"

"To get out of town, what the fuck do you think?"

"I figured you wanted to get back to the circus."

"Well...that's a--Hey! You're Joe Friday! What are *you* doing here, man?"

"Shining a light on your ass at the moment."

"But how did you get in the story?"

"Look, short version, okay? This neighborhood, right? You're trespassing bigtime, scaring the kiddies, and all that good stuff. And normally they'd bring in some regular blues to snake your ass out of the tree with a net. But the guy who's writing this thing? He wants it over the top all the way, so, what the fuck, he brought us up from L.A., big TV stars that we are and all that, except that our ratings have gone in the shitter 'cause this ain't the '50s no more, which means we come cheap, and he wanted this thing way surreal and stuff, and so bingety-bang, here we are."

This sort of made sense. I mean, Joey loaded and stuck up a tree? Everyday stuff. But, Jack Webb? A legend! Spices this nonsense right up, don't you think?

"Well, I dunno..." Joey said. "Whatever's right..."

Friday laughed. "Of course it's right! What do you think all this is? Real life?"

Joey stared down the deep hole to hell. "Never," he muttered, "in one million years..."

"Well, there you go. Now--by the way, where's what's-his-name, Danny, your partner?"

How did Friday know about Danny? What was this--a plot hole?

Who cares? What mattered was this: the mention of Danny kicked Joey straight back into Mescaline Madness! The horror at Zig's house! Danny--*Darth, Jr!* Joey *eeep eeeped* as the teeth of the madness sunk in! His neck spun 180 degrees, just like that *Exorcist* girl! *He belched like Mercedes McCambridge!!!*

Friday noted these changes. "My friend, you are out there!"

"*I need a horse!*"

"We've been through that, friend. Come out of that tree."

"I *can't!* I'm stark naked!"

"I see that now and I sure wish I hadn't. What did you do with your clothes?"

"I mailed them to Lima, Peru."

"You mailed your clothes to Lima, Peru... Why did you do that?"

"They're tracking me, man!"

"Who's tracking you, friend?"

"Captain Zeep and the Warlords! They're from *space!* They've got rayguns and shit and they're holding my markers!"

Webb blinked, stone amazed, and not a little chagrined. Ever since Dragnet went in the toilet he'd been given shit details, reduced to reeling in yoyos like this. Much more and he'd wind up on *Cops* or *Hard Copy*. Talk about long falls from grace!

"*Hollywood Squares!*" Joey yelped.

Just for a second Webb almost *lost* it! From *Dragnet* to *Hollywood Squares*? Why not a *Roadrunner* cartoon?

"Paul Lynde!" Joey said. "He's my hero!"

Webb swiftly recovered and said, "Mine too, my friend. Al Bundy's not here yet. But, getting back to the subject at hand. Captain Zeep. Why is he after you this time?"

"You know why."

"I don't."

"Oh yes you do!"

"I do not!"

"You *do*!"

"I do *not*!"

Joey and Friday--locked in a battle of wills! A battle, moreover, now being waged in a sing-song that woke up the neighbors!

Ben Alexander, his partner, said, "Joe..."

Friday snapped back to Earth. With a slash of his hand he halted the music. "Listen, my friend--"

"He's in league with my *mother*!"

This caught Friday off guard. "Who? Captain Zeep?"

"Who did you *think* I meant? Arthur Brown, the God of Hellfire? *Yes*, Captain Zeep!"

"Oh, of course! What was I thinking? Captain Zeep! In league with your mother! The bastard! But we're here to help you, my friend! We're going to hide you from *all* the bad nasties, each and every last one, never doubt it! But first you've got to come down from that tree!"

Joey stared down at Friday, weighing the options. "Will you feed me?"

Friday clapped his hand to his heart. "Consider it done, friend, I promise."

"Cheerios, maybe?"

"You can eat scampi and steak for the rest of your life, my friend, if that's what you want. Slathered in ketchup! I hear that's the best!"

"Heinz 57?"

"Oh *hell* yeah! What else? But first you've got to come down from the tree!"

Joey almost swooned! Heinz 57! Life had suddenly taken a turn

for the better!

He decided to get down from the tree.

He got halfway down. Then, of course, he fell the rest of the way.

The cops took him down to the clink, dressed him up in the latest orange jumpsuit, and tossed him into a cell.

And then it turned out those cops *lied* about Heinz 57! They fed Joey slop that *everyone* gets up in County. It was absolute shit and just--*weaugghhh!*

Bad fucking trip! When he finally came down two days later, he decided he'd stick with the weed from now on...

