

“Aw, man, it’s just what you need—a break from the action. Hell, you could bring Jocelyn along. I bet she’d like sticking a round into a stag—and gutting him too!”

There was much laughter on that. “Bow hunting season isn’t too far off. That rut’ll be started soon, unlike little Auggie here who is already in heat.” With that, the obligatory slap boxing began. It was like a cat rubbing it’s head on something. They were scenting each other. When things calmed down a little, the brothers looked at each other and at Aug. He could tell something was up.

“OK, out with it,” Aug said. “Something’s bothering you. I can tell.”

The brothers looked at each other and then down and then kind of grinned and looked at Aug. Mike spoke. “Well, it’s funny you should ask that. We were talking about the . . . uh . . . ‘device’ and . . . ah . . . well, we think we may have miscalculated a little.”

Aug was like “Miscalculated a little? Tell me, just what the hell does miscalculated a little actually mean?”

“Well,” came the reply from Mike, “we may have used just a teensy bit too much . . . material . . . in the device. I think the casing is safe from accidental activation but . . . uh . . . I wouldn’t want to be too close when it goes off. That might not be too wise.”

Aug was surprised. “Get out.”

Steve said, “Well, we were talking about it, and numbnuts here thinks it may be a lot more powerful than we were thinking.” He paused a minute and looked at Mike and then at Aug. “We . . . uh . . . we went snooping around in Poseidon’s, and we were looking at things, and now we are thinking—there’s gonna be some major demolition if you blow that thing.”

The look on Aug’s face showed that he was clearly not thrilled with the new information.

Steve continued, “Don’t get us wrong, it shouldn’t arm itself unless you pull the trigger, but when it goes, well, it’s gonna go.”

Aug looked at Steve in disbelief. “I thought you guys knew what you were doing!”

Mike chimed in, “Hey, it’s an inexact science, and we never said we were science majors. It’s also not like we had anything to test it out on before rigging

it. Or that we knew exactly what we were up against.” Mike took a long chug of beer. “Anyway, it’s too late to do anything about it now.” Mike took another swig. “Oh, I can tell you that you can go ‘fishing’ for what yer looking for. I think you’ll know what I mean when you get in there and look around.”

Aug nodded and asked, “Do I still have my fifteen minutes?”

Mike nodded. “Affirmative, boss. We didn’t screw that up!”

Aug nodded and pounded his Corona. He asked, “Do you guys have any other good news for me?”

Mike flipped two key sets over to Aug. “The first key is the Burnt Pine key you wanted. That’ll getcha in the door, but I’m not sure what you can do about the alarm system. The second keys are for TOPS’L. You have number 116.”

Aug continued, “And anything else? Like the location of some boxes? Hmmm?”

Mike and Steve looked at each other and then down. Steve sighed and said, “We don’t know where they are. They lost our tail. I don’t know what happened. I think we were spotted. They took everything up 1 headed toward Daytona, and then they killed the headlights and turned off on some roads and shook us. We never found them. They could be anywhere.”

Aug thought about that and leaned forward, looking at them very intently. “You guys wouldn’t be fibbing, would you? You’re not holding out on me, trying to scam some of this for yourselves now, would you be?”

Mike and Steve both raised hands up on that accusation. “Scout’s honor, Aug Man. We wouldn’t do that to ya. You know us better than that. We wouldn’t screw ya over. We just don’t know where they ditched us.”

Aug said, “Hell, I know I can trust you. And thanks again for getting me out of the water the other night. I think I’d have drowned if you hadn’t a reeled me in.”

Mike said, “Aug, that wasn’t anything that you wouldn’ta done for either of us. Besides, we had to work with the navy during our army stint. Amphibious assaults and sea rescue were something we trained for.” Mike paused and smiled. “That is, when we weren’t too drunk to do training!” They all laughed.

Aug pocketed the keys that he had been fidgeting with. “There’s a black Cadillac that followed me around earlier. There are two guys from Upper Terra

who are probably inside. They didn't look too happy. You need to be on the lookout for them." The brothers nodded in understanding.

Mike asked, "So what's the game plan, boss?"

Aug thought about it. What was the game plan now? "Guys, whaddaya wanna do? Go for the gusto still? Or let the metals slide? Take the probable sure thing, or swing for the fences?"

The brothers looked at each other. They grinned. They looked at Aug. "The fences, of course. You know that we like fencing things anyway. You know us better than that."

Aug smiled. He did know them better than that. "OK then, well, since you guys got shaken on your tail, now I gotta come up with a new plan. I was figuring I'd wind things up with Jack on Sunday, snag Keith, and then we could raid the storage facility on the way outta Dodge. Maybe we can still do that. I just need to figure out a way to find out where he stored everything. Let me sleep on it. I'll call tomorrow." He stood up to leave. "But keep your eyes open. Ain't no one gonna wanna give up a portion of anything. And everyone wants to know where the jewels are hidden."

# Burnt Pine

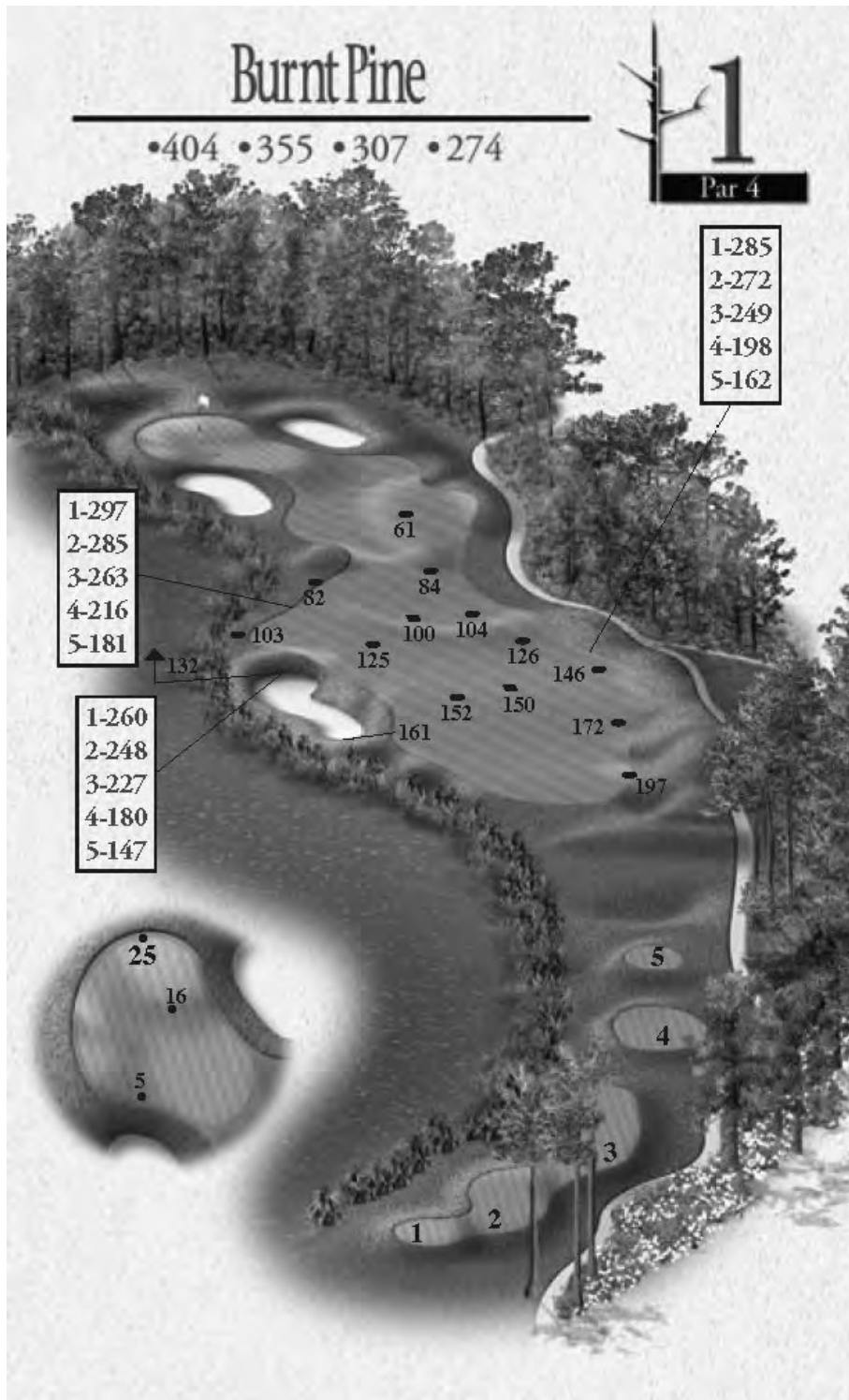
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**1**  
Par 4

1-285  
2-272  
3-249  
4-198  
5-162

1-297  
2-285  
3-263  
4-216  
5-181

1-260  
2-248  
3-227  
4-180  
5-147



## CHAPTER 18

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### TEE BOX

Aug had taken an executive suite at the top of the Sandestin Hilton. It was a lovely set of rooms that set him back about seven bills a night. The cost was no matter. He probably wouldn't be around to pay the credit card bill anyway.

His private balcony gave him a view of Poseidon's down on the beach below. There was activity down there to set up for the grand opening the next day. The sun was shining brightly, and there was no cloud to be seen. There was no breeze. The humid warmth rolled over him when he stepped outside. The humidity stayed on his body like clothing. It was close to eleven o'clock. It was easily over ninety degrees out. It was time to go meet his maker.

The drive to the course took about fifteen minutes. His car crossed the Emerald Way and reentered the security zone and curved around more dream homes. Aug wondered where Robin Leach and his camera crew were.

He arrived at the course about fifteen minutes late. The clubhouse at Burnt Pine was empty. The July temperature was too hot in the midday for anyone to be anywhere but the bar. Only an idiot would play golf in these conditions.

Aug parked and opened the trunk of the car. Before he could step to the back of the vehicle, a cart had already appeared. The man in the cart looked to be in his late thirties. He had thick black matted and curly hair and a thick black mustache. He also sported a set of guns that made obvious some sort of iron-pumping regimen. This complemented a well-built physique on a man standing just under

six feet tall. His Greg Norman shirt was already showing signs of perspiration from the heat. "Augustus? Hi. I'm Chuck Hvala. I hope you don't mind, but Jack Dough invited me along to make the foursome."

They exchanged handshakes. Aug loaded his bag on the cart. "Pleased to meet you, Chuck. It's nice to have company around." Aug rotated his head. "I need to go pay, don't I?"

Chuck replied, "Oh no. Jack covered everything. And we need to get going. You're late, and we all are waiting. It looks like we'll have the course to ourselves today. It doesn't look like anyone is out here." He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past eleven. "Well, let's go." They drove off to the tee box.

The other cart was awaiting them at the tee. There were two gentlemen there. They were sitting in the cart, chatting with each other and pointing at various features of the golf course. As Chuck drove up, the gentlemen exited their cart and came together to exchange greetings. Both gentlemen were maybe five foot six and of wiry build. They had thick black hair showing under their sun visors, and they appeared to be older . . . maybe midfifties. Everyone had golf shorts and golf shirts on. The heat was already showing a bit on everyone. The greetings were exchanged. Chuck and Aug met Clayton Clakker and Jack Dough. They shook hands.

Jack spoke first to Aug. "It's nice to finally meet you. And it's nice of you to finally make it. We were getting worried. You know, this isn't too bright a time to set a tee time here in midsummer."

Aug replied, "Why, Jack, it is nice to finally meet you too. Sorry to keep you hanging around. But that's funny to hear you say that about the tee time. I thought you liked an eleven AM tee time."

Jack seemed surprised. "Whatever gave you that idea? It's roasting out here right now. We are going to be burnt to hell before this day is over!"

Aug replied, "Dunno. Just seems like I was talking golf with someone who had mentioned that midday was your favorite time to play." Aug looked at Clayton. "So, Clayton, what do you do? What brings you here today?"

Clayton replied, "Me? Me, I'm looking at investing in one of the properties here. I live over in Baton Rouge, and it's not too hard to get over here and enjoy time off, so I'm kinda scoping it out. And what about you? And what's up with that eye? That looks kinda nice there."

Aug answered, "Oh, my company shipped some goods to help Jack here open up his latest gift to Sandestin. A lot of the furnishings used at Poseidon's came from Europe, and my import company brought them in. I figured I had to come see the show. Yer all goin' tomorrow, aren't you?"

Chuck chimed in, "Yeah, I'm planning on going."

Clayton stated, "I will unfortunately miss it. I'm gonna have to take off tomorrow morning."

Aug was surprised by this. "Really? Too bad. It oughta be quite a show." Aug started loosening up with his driver. "And Chuck? What brings you here?"

Chuck answered, "Oh, I teach high school up in Iowa. But I had a nice lottery ticket come in, so I'm thinkin' about a vacation home, so I came down here to check out condos. And play a little golf." They were all swinging clubs around now. "And that eye of yours? What's the story behind that?"

"This?" Aug said. "This . . . this is now nothing. Hell, it'll be gone in a couple days. I pissed my girlfriend off, and she belted me one."

"Really?" Jack said.

Aug laughed. "No, not really. A bunch of Latino's work for me, and we were boxing around in the factory, and things got outta hand. I stepped back to wind up and land a roundhouse, and I slipped on a bar of soap laying around in the warehouse." He smiled at the playing partners. "Damn bars of soap! They always appear at the wrong place and the wrong time!" They all got a laugh out of that.

Chuck piped in, "That's a hell of a way to get a black eye! Anyway, gentlemen, shall we play a game while we are out here? Maybe a Skins game?"

Aug stated, "How about we play a game of Wolf? That way we don't have to worry about who has what handicap."

Clayton and Chuck looked at Aug. "Wolf? I don't know that one. How do you play?"

Aug explained, "Well, it's like this. We rotate who tees off. The person who tees off first is the wolf. Then the second player tees off. The wolf can decide to either partner with that person on the hole or pass and see what the next person does. If you pass on a partner, then you cannot go back and choose that person as a partner. After the fourth person has teed off, the wolf can either take that

person as a partner or go at it alone. That is assuming that no partner has already been selected.”

Aug continued, “We can play one of two ways or both. You can score your hole for the low score for the hole. The wolf and his partner get their lowest score. Everyone else gets their own score. Or we can do points. If the wolf has a partner, the winning team gets two points. If the wolf goes alone and wins, the wolf gets three points. If the wolf goes solo and loses, everyone else gets two points. No points for ties.”

Chuck said, “I’ve never heard of that. I dunno. What would the stakes be?”

Aug offered, “Well, let’s play points and do this. Twenty per person, or another way of saying it is sixty for the loser. What I mean is that the lowest point total has to pay everyone higher than him. So if you are lowest, you owe twenty to each of the other three. We can set the rotation by throwing a tee.”

The men looked at each other and thought about it. Chuck offered, “What the hell? That sounds different. All right, I’ll give it a go.”

Jack said, “I’ll buy in.”

Clayton said, “I dunno, my game is not that good.”

Jack berated him, “Oh, come on, Clayton! I covered your game of golf today, and that cost me a lot more than sixty bones. Don’t be a weeny!”

Clayton eyed Jack with some dismay and disgust about being pushed into it. “Oh, all right,” he said.

The men stood in a square, and Aug launched a tee. Jack would be wolf first. The remaining three triangled, and the second tee went to Aug. The tee launched again for the final two, and Chuck was third. Clayton looked at Aug and said, “Thanks a lot,” rather sarcastically.

They shook hands on it. Clayton noticed the scar on Aug’s left hand as he shook with it. “That’s a nice scar you got there on yer hand.”

Aug held up his hand. The palm exposed the remains of the knife gash that went from his fingers to the palm. “This? This is from where I got burned as a kid.” He pulled his golf glove over the mark.

Clayton said, “That doesn’t look like a scar from a burn.”

Aug said, “I never said it was from a burn. I just said it was from where I got burned as a kid.” He paused and looked out at the fairway thinking about it. “I



suppose you could say it was from the first time I died. It was like I became the phoenix, and I ascended to heaven just like my body will do when I die. Maybe when I die, my body will rise up to heaven on a bright sunny day like today.”

Clayton looked at him and started a soliloquy that baffled them all. “And how do you know that you will ascend to heaven when you die? Do you have some foresight as to such?”

Aug answered, “Sure, I know that I will ascend to heaven. I had a dream, a vision of it, just the other day. I soared to the sky and disappeared up above.”

Clayton started a pacing motion periodically looking at the ground and then at the rest of the foursome and then back at the ground as he spoke. “You know, according to Catholic theology, your body won’t actually ascend to heaven. Your soul will go, and you will be united with a glorified body. By a glorified body, I mean a body free from imperfections. Your glorified body, for example, probably won’t have the scar that you bear on your hand. All of our . . .” Clayton paused, and his voice broke as he looked at heaven before he gathered himself. “All of our body will be reunited and will be glorified.” He looked back at his playing partners. “But the physical act of ascension is only reserved for the holiest of holy figures.”

Chuck spoke up. “Really? Uh, I don’t remember my preacher talking about this from the Sunday pulpit.”

Mr. Clakker continued, “Well, really. Ya know, preachers don’t want to bore you on Sunday with excessive detail about what believing their religion means in detail. But back to my point, Jesus ascended into heaven, but Mother Mary did not. She is assumed to have been assumed into heaven, which means that something like the hand of God came down and pulled her up to heaven rather than her physically ascending into the sky. That is why it is called the Feast of the Assumption. You know, as an aside, depending on what one believes, the Jewish word for *virgin* actually means an unwed mother, so Mary could actually have conceived through the act of physical sex, but since she birthed the Son of Man, it would still be the Immaculate Conception even if it was through intercourse. And the Bible never states that Mary was assumed, but the pope said so in a decree of infallibility, so how could that idea be wrong since the pope is infallible in his decree? And no one knows what kind of day it was when Jesus ascended into heaven because the apostles did not provide a weather report.”

Clayton sermonized more, “Isaiah is written to have ascended to the heavens and received the vision of Jesus’s life, but then he descended and prophesized about it, and then he was subsequently physically sawed into two pieces. He prophesized, and then he spilled his guts. He literally spilled his guts. Elijah, he rode up to heaven in a blazing chariot, but that is not physically ascending as the horses took him up. Enoch, he walked with God and disappeared, but does that mean physical ascension? In Islam, the prophet Muhammad ascended into the heavens at the speed of light at which point he saw all past and history and had all knowledge revealed to him. So in Islam and Catholic beliefs, the only two beings who physically ascended into heaven were each of their greatest religious figures.”

Clayton concluded, “Of course, how can we know if any of this is true? How can we know that any of the writings are not all pseudepigrapha? I will never know until my death, but you, my friend, you may want to think twice before comparing your ascension to that of Jesus or Muhammad.”

There was silence as the other three stared at Clayton in disbelief. “Well, Father Clayton Clakker,” Jack said. “Thank you for today’s daily dose of religion that I am sure we all need in our lives. That was beautiful, but I don’t have a damn idea what in the world you just said.”

Clayton replied, “Ah, don’t mind me. Every so often, I like to get up on a soapbox and sermonize a little and then I come back to reality.” He looked at his golfing partners and said, “C’mon, let’s tee off.”

Jack went to tee off. He stared at a beautiful four-hundred-yard hole with a lake that ran up the length of the left fairway. He prepared to swing.

Aug went over to his cart, and he interrupted everyone before Jack could tee off. “Hey, everyone,” he said, “I smuggled in a flask of some bourbon. Some Woodford Reserve. Feel free to have some, but you’ll have to drink it neat. I didn’t smuggle in any ice to the course today.”

Jack gave him a rankled look. He regrouped and striped the ball down the center two hundred and fifty yards. He looked at the rest of the foursome and said, “I don’t care what the rest of ya do. I’m goin’ wolf alone!”

Aug teed off and went left into the lake. Clayton popped up his tee shot short down the right side. Chuck striped his down by Jack.

They gathered into the carts. Chuck was busy filling out the scorecard. Chuck asked, "Clayton, how do you spell your last name? Is it C-l-a-q-u-e-r?"

Clayton replied, "Noooo, you spell my last name C-l-a-k-k-e-r."

Chuck spelled the name back and asked, "Is that German? I thought that you being from Louisiana, your name would be more French in origin."

Clayton started off again, "You know, the assumption of race based upon region is so inane prevalent. Look at blacks. I have friends from the Bahamas and Jamaica who are black, but no matter where they go in the USA, they are African Americans even though they aren't Americans and—"

An annoyed Jack cut him off, "Clayton! That's enough. I came here to play golf, not to listen to you get on a soapbox all day while the heat swelters around. C'mon, fellas, let's get this round in before dark! And before I melt!"

They started driving off. Chuck looked at Aug and said, "Do you know what a claquer is?"

Aug looked at Chuck and said, "A strange Louisianan who babbles off about a lot of nothing that anyone cares about?"

Chuck laughed and said, "Well, that may be. But a claquer is also a plant that a magician uses in the audience to help pull off a trick. I thought maybe you might like to know that."

Aug sat back in that cart. *Really?* His first thought as the cart drove off was *Now that is interesting*. His second unspoken thought was *At least my vocabulary didn't get belittled again*.