

CHAPTER 26

SNAKE EYES

The condemned man always likes the finest of everything. Who cares what price there is to pay when you are already condemned? This feeling had driven Aug to let the presidential suite at the Hilton Sandestin. He didn't really need the full dining room to seat ten or the full kitchen. The giant bed was nice and so was the in-room spa. He just wished he had been given the real opportunity to enjoy it more.

The day was spent with e-mails and messages. He spoke to Jocelyn. She was on her way back to Florida. Her father would be OK. Aug told her he loved her and that he would contact her in a couple days when things calmed down. It would all be over soon. The spa looked very inviting after the call.

The view of the Gulf of Mexico was spectacular. From the sixteenth floor, he could see miles of turquoise water. Today he saw hundreds of boats. A smile crossed his face. There were boats and yachts from thirty to one hundred twenty feet in length. Ferries ran back and forth from the watercraft and a large staging party raft to the beach along a water-access corridor. PWCs were getting airborne off the waves. Children and parents and pets swam in the Gulf of Mexico. Various news agencies' cameras and crews reported on the scene.

The hundred yards of white sand covering the beach from the waterfront to wooden paths that access the parking lot were almost obliterated from Aug's

view by the sea of humans covering them. Volleyball was being played. Footballs and Frisbees were thrown. Other beach games were played. Sand sculptures were being created. Parasols dotted the shore.

Stepping out on the balcony and tasting the sea air, he could hear the band playing below. A temporary stage had been erected, fronting the sands from which the musical entertainment flowed. Manchild was on stage. Their jazzy sound was melodic and soothing. The people on the boats were oblivious to realities of the world. Sure, most of them undoubtedly knew that a war is ongoing in Iraq, but who here really cared today? It was a day to have fun.

The Iraq war thought made Aug chuckle. The United States has hundreds of military bases around the globe in over fifty different countries, but no one in the United States protests any location around the globe except for one. The logic was funny to him. It's OK to have bases around the globe and have people in the military, just as long as they aren't in a place that is a combat zone. At that point, it is not OK. It's OK to be a soldier and have a job that entails the realities of the risk of death and dismemberment or other casualties such as separation from family, just as long as you never have to face those risks in a combat zone. That's the beauty of the USA. One can still say whatever you want without fear of a bayonet in the belly. Too bad the rest of the world isn't all so free of such combat. Well, Aug was heading for a combat zone. His combat zone just wasn't military in nature.

His mind came back to what he saw before him. Poseidon's was below him. If he had a sixteen-story playground slide, he could have slid right down to the roof of the building. Various coral reef displays, complete with reef dwellers, covered the four walls of the building. The reef formed the name of Poseidon on three sides of the building in three different scripts. The glass sky lighting rose from Poseidon's and sparkled like a diamond in the sun. He imagined that from the boats, it looked like a glittering jewel on the roof, reflecting sunlight. Periodically programmed colored light beams would project through, and the gem would change colors or go multicolored. The prism of Poseidon. Aug could envision how beautiful it would shine at nightfall when the coral reefs lit up.

The mind of Aug wandered again. It wandered back a year. He remembered Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. He looked at the jewel and thought

about the shuttering job that lay ahead now that Hurricane Bill was building in the Gulf. The storm was projected to hit Panama City, and that was close enough to Sandestin to potentially cause major damage. There was no way building permits would have been issued without a shuttering plan, but there were so much angled glass and so many large glass panes that hurricane shuttering of Poseidon's must be a daylong project to accomplish.

It was opening day and night for Poseidon's, and all the stops had been pulled out. Golf carts ferried land participants back and forth from the parking areas under the watchful eyes of security. A daylong free full feast for everyone was set up. The sand sculpture competition themed around the concept of Poseidon was visible from his room. There were clown acts and magicians roving the beach, bringing joy to children and adults. Police and security patrolled the beach area. It was casino day and night inside Poseidon's. Tonight was to be topped off with a massive fireworks display. It was to be an incredible grand opening for all. It was a temporary magical mini-Atlantis for a day rising up against the ocean.

Augustus had been to Atlantis before. He had been at Atlantis on a Saturday night. The particular Atlantis in memory was the one located in Nassau in the Bahamas. It had been a year ago. The night he had been there was a magical night.

He had been dressed very nicely. He wore a fine Italian red silk shirt with tasteful ruffling that had set him back quite a few c's. His Brioni pants were tan and tapered. They fit his tall, slender frame perfectly. Jocelyn's outfit had cost him good coin. Her white deep-back Mugler dress centered on the waist with a beautiful diamond-fold design. When she bent over the table to roll the dice, she made sure to lean forward so that everyone would watch the tumble.

Jocelyn was magically rolling. Most times that they had gone to a craps table, they had blown a thousand or less but had enjoyed doing so, and they did not always lose. But their gambling was for entertainment. For Aug and Jocelyn, the cost may have been different, but the enjoyment was the same as the enjoyment of visiting a fine restaurant or the movies or theater or museum. It was an event to entertain. It was the enjoyment of both love and loving time with each other.

They didn't keep track except in their heads, but the times they had lost probably outweighed the times they had won. Well, that was why he had an investment in casino stocks anyway. In the end, the house will probably win.

Tonight was the night to get their money back and more. The dice had been in her hands for forty minutes, which meant a few different things. One thing it meant was that it now took five minutes or so for the table jockeys to pay off any roll. There were at least a hundred bets stacked all across the table. Another thing that this meant was that the locusts had flocked to the table. The table and the area around the table was packed, and the smoke was pouring from cigars and cigarettes. The booze was being poured into the patrons because the tips were good and the casino wanted happy drunks who would gamble back their winnings.

Jocy was at the end of the table, rolling the full length of the carpet. She had muscle, and the dice were thrown with force. There was no limp wrist in her body.

Aug looked around and saw that people were stacked three deep, trying to get a slot. Since everyone was sardined, there was little elbow room. This meant that Jocelyn had plenty of wiggle room. She was wiggling herself into Aug at every opportunity.

Many women scream and giggle at a craps table when any good number is rolled, but that was not Jocelyn's style upon rolling a good number. Jocelyn seductively smiled and rubbed her hands and body against her lover. She was pounding Zombies to his Woodford Reserve. At the start, she had given him a peck on the cheek for luck for every roll. Now she had graduated to a full mouth display. Aug was surprised that the table was not levitating off the ground from the men standing there.

Not everyone at the table was male. There were some couples in attendance. George and Gracie Burns were there. So were Golda Meir and Shimon Peres. At least the gamblers reminded Aug of those historical figures. Mixed in were some schoolkids who were there who had little to bet with and were embarrassing themselves amongst the rest of the money flowing. There were more singles and couples around the table who might normally be reserved, but tonight they were cheering with every roll. There were some happy Arabs and some emotional Arabs living and dying on each roll as they bet the farm, looking for a big kill. Edgar Allan Poe seemed to be at the table standing next to some big black guys who looked like they had been NFL linemen.

Everyone's eyes went from Jocelyn's cleavage to her hands to the roll as she bent over and rolled and rolled again. "Hard ten" was the call. "Fifty-five! The point is made! The lovely lady rolled a hard ten!" The table roared in approval. Jocelyn could not resist smiling into Aug's eyes and exclaiming quiet enough for only Aug to hear but loud enough for most of the table to hear, "MMMMMMMM, a hard ten, one of my favorite numbers"

Jocelyn was playing heavy on numbers and hardways. She had a two-hundred-dollar pass and max odds and a fifty-dollar hardway. Jocelyn pulled in twenty-five hundred, but he was so busy with his own bets and thoughts he couldn't really follow what she was doing.

Aug was in lust, so he was hard to think about his winnings, but he needed to. His tray was filled with black hundreds with a few purple fives. Both of them had been betting heavy tonight.

Aug played a come-bet strategy. The come bets were odds maxed at a fifty-dollar base with a century riding maxed on the pass line and another quarter each on the hardways. Jocelyn had been rolling hard number after hard number, and he had been pressing up against her. It had paid off well so far. Now he raked in a grand from his odds and another hundred from the pass, as well as another two and a quarter from the hardways.

He needed insurance on the come-out roll. It was time to go for a bigger kill. There was three hundred dollars of come bets to protect. He called his hardways off, left a hundred on the pass, hopped the sevens for fifty each, and laid a two-hundred-dollar horn. The table had seen him bet this strategy already tonight, and they were now comfortable with how to set up his bets.

Jocelyn kissed him and rolled a seven. The table erupted in cheers. Free money was continuing. This got him seven fifty plus a hundred on the pass, but he needed to spend three hundred to stay up on his bets plus another three hundred to stay up on his come bets. He netted two hundred and fifty. Aug kicked in another hundred and pressed up across the board against her. Jocelyn kissed him and rolled another seven. Another explosion of cheers came out.

The table workers had to lay out everything on the felt, not only for the camera to see, but also so that they could figure out what the payout was. His payout was fifteen hundred for the three-way seven plus another c for the pass.

It cost nine to stay up across the board. Aug kicked in the balance to press fully across the board. Jocelyn kissed him and rolled an eleven. The crowd around the table couldn't believe it. Delirium reigned.

The croupiers laid out the payoff again. Aug got three g's for the horn plus another hundred for the pass. It would cost twelve hundred to stay up. He was looking at a nineteen net. He looked at the smiling Jocelyn. She couldn't continue to do it, could she? It was destined to end at some point. The decision was painful. Shit, what to do! Aug figured, *What the hell? I'm here to gamble!* He pressed another hundred each on the sevens and on each of the horn numbers and trayed twelve hundred. The dice were passed to Jocelyn.

She turned and kissed him for luck. With her one free hand, she was somewhat indiscreetly rubbing him. "For good luck," she said, "this one's for you." It was good luck. She did roll for him. Boxcars came up.

Double sixes are a one-in-thirty-six possibility. The portion of Aug's horn bet relating to this roll paid thirty to one. This worked out to nine grand. Well, it was nine grand less the pass-line bet and horn balance and the hopped sevens. The pit bosses shook their heads in dismay. The croupiers were wowed by the action. The college students were bummed because their pass line lost, and they did not understand what was going on. The experienced crapsters who were watching the spectacle vociferously cheered. Some of them had also hit on horn bets. Aug's head was swimming. All he could manage was a stunned look at Jocelyn and a quiet "You did it!"

Her return smile slayed him. Her bets were on numbers, so the roll really didn't affect her, but she knew what Aug was betting. Jocelyn asked Aug, "What are you going to do, big boy?" She leaned her back against him, slinking her talents. "Are you going to ride me, or are you going to press me?" The accenting of the verbs with her physique left no question in his mind. Aug had to press.

It cost him nineteen to stay up. His boxcar take to the tray was seven grand. He pressed fourteen hundred of it in so that every number bet was at a neat five hundred. One-tenth as neat as the five thousand he had just picked up. His tray had colorful chips, and Jocelyn had *Brass In Pocket*.

The dice were issued. Jocelyn's kiss was issued. The chanting and cheering from the crowd descended into silence as the dice flowed from her fingers. The

roll was ogled. The dice hit the back wall cushion. One die came up a three. The other die popped into the air. It popped out of the table and bounced off the crowd and under the table beyond. Fifty voices in unison sounded like a roaring gryphon, yelling, "SAME DICE!"

The die was eventually found, and it was returned to the table boss for examination. She slowly rolled it around in her fingers looking for a flaw. The boss looked at the crowd and said, "This die is fake. It is no good." The participants of the game screamed in anger with many outrageous comments. The pit boss laughed and placed the die back on the table. "Just kidding!" she loudly stated in a controlling voice. "I was just kidding, everyone! The lady is good to go!" She laughed to herself. Some of the gamblers looked like they had just peed in their clothing.

Many participants took the break time to drink a lot of alcohol. The dice were issued to Jocelyn. The kiss was issued to Aug. The deep lean over the table occurred. Lungs were filled with air. Jocelyn rolled, and one die came up a three. The second die spun on end. All eyes were intent. It spun like a top. The die seemed to take an eternity to stop turning. Eventually it did. The second die came up a four. Air-filled lungs were expelled with vehement exultation. Jocelyn had done it again.

For Aug, the value of the seven at fifteen to one for a five-hundred-dollar bet was seventy-five hundred. It would cost three grand to stay up plus another three hundred to pay for the come bets. His net was forty-two hundred plus the pass line hundred. It took a while for the pit crew to figure out what to do for the whole table and specifically for Aug's bets. There were too many unusual calculations for the croupiers to do it fast.

A heckler began complaining about the length of time it was taking to pay the bets. Various vociferous voices violently and virulently and venomously victimized the vagrants.

The booze in Aug and the excitement of the situation, as well as the tantalizing enjoyment Jocelyn provided, took over. He had an excellent vision of Jocelyn bending over the table and having a go for all to see. A euphoric god feeling filled him. He whispered in her ear, "Mmmmm, drinking makes me soooo horny." She let out a very delighted squeal.