

The Luck of the Draw by Brett Paufler

So, I'm just supposed to lie back and relax?

Say what's on my mind?

Maybe go back to my childhood?

I liked playing games as a kid. Especially the ones that revolved around luck, or the perception of luck. You know, like Backgammon, Risk, or Battleship. They seem like they are all about luck, but there's still a little strategy involved, and well, if you have an edge... The bottom line is, I was lucky, and the more I won, the luckier I seemed to get.

Then one day when I was playing Battleship...

I was working my usual pattern. It looked random, but when the game was over, you'd be able to see a finally tuned geometry if you looked for it. Anyway, while I was playing the game, right in the middle of it, I saw this little orange rhinoceros about 3" tall holding up a sign saying B6. So what was I to do? I called out, "B6," and what do you know? I got a hit. I let the little orange guy -- Rhino's his name by the way, if you're interested. Anyhow, I let Rhino call the rest of the shots in the game and I knocked ole Tommy out of the water with ten straight hits. Tommy didn't believe it was luck, and pounded me pretty hard for cheating, but the weird thing was, the next day when I was playing Davy in a game of Memory, not only did I have an orange rhino looking under the tiles for me and giving me hints, but a blue swordfish that walked on his hind legs as well. Later, when I figured out how to talk with the little guys... fates I call them, or lucky charms. Anyhow, when I figured out how to talk with them, Sword-o told me he didn't like Tommy's bad attitude, and besides, he always wanted to be on the winning team.

I guess I don't have to go down the line. I started collecting fates. I wasn't so much playing Monopoly, Kings Corners, or Parcheesi, as I was recruiting little harbingers of luck. By the time

I left for college, I had over a hundred of the little guys staying with me in my dorm room. That's when I took up poker.

I guess the thing to do, is just run down a typical game. Usually what I like to do is have the new guys, the fates I've recently won, sit in my shirt pocket or look over my shoulder. To be honest, I don't really trust them at first and I want them to learn how I play, you know, how I do things. Anyhow, I have one of the old guys, someone like Rhino or Sword-o whose been with me for a long time, just sort of keep them company, explain what is happening, and make sure the new guys stay out of trouble.

The next thing I do is make sure I'm generous with the other players, the guys around the table. On a good night I'll take in a grand or two, so I like to bring the beer, pay for the pizza, and put together a few hors d'oeuvres. You know, a cheese plate, chips, salsa, whatever, spicy chicken wings, the works, all my treat. Also, when I show up, I like to explain to everyone at the table that I'm going to win, that it's just a fact, and if they have a problem with that, they shouldn't play, or at least not bet too much. I do this because some of the fates can be... finicky and they like things to be just so. They don't mind me winning -- cheating everyone else around the table blind really -- but they like everyone to have a good time. So most nights I just operate it all like a psychic circus or a magic show. You'd be surprised how much grown men are willing to pay in order to be told, "You have the two of clubs, the three of diamonds, and absolutely no chance of drawing that inside straight. In fact, I already have you beat without drawing a card with my lowly pair of sevens. So what do you say, \$500 to call my bluff?" At that point they usually just give me the pot.

By the end of the night, they are used to losing, but they still can't resist the urge when I plop \$10,000 on the table versus their last \$50 and say, "How about it? One last hand. My \$10,000 for whatever each of you has left on the table." Of course they take it. They don't see the nervous looks on their fate's faces. You know, it's not like it's a coincidence that the little guys just happen to be standing on the table when I say this. Little yellow leprechauns,

blue unicorns, and purple fairies, all worried about being separated from their lifelong friends, but not always. Sometimes the humans they've had to hook up with are real jerks, so they're happy to go home with someone new. Needless to say, I always win the bet and take my opponents' fates home with me. It doesn't make a difference how powerful a person's individual lucky charm is. I simply have too many of them on my side, and the ones that I have are more than happy to stack the deck, tell me where to cut, push a pair of dice over so they land up seven, or do whatever it takes to win, so more of their friends can win their freedom and come home with me.

See, that's where the guys in the shirt pocket come back in. If it's a fate's first game or two with me, it's only fair that they get to see how I operate before they decide to join up with me permanently or not. You know, reassure them that I give my opponents a fighting chance, and if they really wanted to, that they could return to their childhood chum, or go home with anyone else at the table for that matter. That whatever they choose to do, it really is entirely up to them.

For instance, just last week, I lost two of my guys to Sam, Sam T. The name might be familiar to you. Twins on the way. Down on his luck. Sad sack type guy. Two of the new guys felt sorry for him, and figured they'd give the twins a fighting chance. Anyhow, Sam said he'd been coming to see you for years. Seems almost criminal to me to treat a guy for years and never cure him, but I guess the thing that really struck my interest -- you know, caught my attention -- was your practice of letting patients go double or nothing on the bill by rolling a pair of dice or cutting for high card. Anyhow, that's why I'm here. I'd like to take you up on that offer, winner take all. You can pick the game if you'd like. No?

I guess I could throw in my usual offer of \$10,000 as well. What do you say?

OK. I understand. I mean, it's a sucker's bet after all, but I feel it's only fair to warn you that we're taking the snake --

Sigmund I guess you call him these days. Anyway, we're taking Sigmund with us one way or another. In fact, we already kind of have him in our back pocket as it were.

Now don't be that way doc...

Just take is easy. This isn't the first time anyone has ever pulled gun on me, and I know it seems like a long shot, and I don't know what the odds are exactly, but trust me, if you pull the trigger, it's only going to backfire on you, because when it comes to luck doc, you're all tapped out.

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