

WAGERS OF SIN

Let me tell you about my last trip to Sin City for the World Series of Poker. It all started when I found out I could win millions of dollars in a few days just by playing cards. It sounded like easy money, but little did I know, even though my reads were all perfect, the river would be deadly, and I would be on the outs in just seven unlucky hands.

When I first sat down at the table, I knew I'd be there for a while, so I made myself comfortable. I mean really comfortable -- so much so that I could have stayed there motionless for hours. I could get used to this. On the first hand, I slowly peeked at the royal couple. I felt great after the flop and turn gave me top two pair with no flushes or straight possibilities on the board, and I put my aggressive opponent on Big Slick. Needless to say, the great feeling was short lived once the river came, and my chip stack took its first hit.

I stared across at the guy who had just taken my chips, and I couldn't stop thinking about how great it would be to be him. It was obvious from his fancy clothes and distinguished demeanor that he was a man of wit and romance, and now he'd just taken the early chip lead. That should have been me. Getting ahold of myself, this time I started out on Route 66, rounded out the number of the beast on the flop, and amazingly, got yet another one on the turn. How could I lose? Sure, there were some suited connectors on the board, and I was pretty sure the big stack had two more that connected to those, but come on, I couldn't lose to an open-ended straight flush draw, could I? Yep, I could, and I did, and took another hit.

I decided to think more positively after that hand. After all, how many poker players could read other players so well as to know exactly what they had two hands in a row? I mean, I figured I would almost certainly win this tournament in the end, since I couldn't possibly play better than this. No one else in the tournament was as good as me. As if on cue, I looked down to see rockets. The flop had a dog and a deuce, rainbow, and the turn was a seven. I was certain that my opponent had only paired the board once and needed the river to take me down. I should have realized it wasn't going to be my day when again the river gave him what he needed, and it took my stack down another notch.

At that point, I found myself daydreaming about how great it would be to take home the millions. I was already wealthy by anyone's standards, but I felt thirsty for more. I looked at my next hand to find my old friend Kojak staring back. The flop and turn brought two more knaves to seriously strengthen my hand, and I got this strong feeling that my remaining opponent had hit both the ace and queen that had come as well, and I was going to make some money. As before, I was accurate on my read, but the river crushed me again.

My head was spinning from the latest loss, when my eyes landed on the hottest cocktail waitress I'd ever seen. My mind wandered towards the few areas of her uniform that were left to my imagination. Just as I was starting to drool on myself, the royal couple snapped my attention back to the poker game. The flop made my hand a double date with a stray under, and the turn was another low blank. The way my opponent made his river bet, I knew he was sitting on a weak pocket pair and praying for it to find a friend. Damn that river once more.

That fifth consecutive bad beat sent me into a frenzy. I lashed out at everyone around me in a fit of rage. After being restrained by the pit boss, I controlled myself just enough to peer down at a King Crab. This time I paired the wise man on the flop, grabbed a crab on the turn, and given the remaining rainbow spread of cards in between mine, was sure again that the only thing I had to worry about was the guy that had been sticking around with the speed limit he'd been dealt that hadn't yet improved. At this point, you can guess what came on the River Styx.

There was then a short break and my stomach was growling at me, so I headed over to the nearby buffet to feed my sorrows. I ate until my stomach was about to burst, and then waddled back to the table to play what would be my last hand. The ladies I was dealt seemed like they might be able to hold up when the flop and turn were all unders of different suits, and spaced nicely to prevent any straights from creeping up on me. The only guy I hadn't successfully bet out of the pot was obviously in love with his Anna Kournikova and couldn't let go despite no help on the board, so I pushed all in on the river knowing he'd look me up.

After that experience, I'm counting out poker for good.