

The End -1

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IN THE SPRING OF 1996, WE FOUND A NEW GOLD MINE FOR SAVANNAH:

Australia. Down Under now had twelve casinos, two of which were among the biggest in the world: the complex at Darling Harbor and the Crown casino in Melbourne. Most of the wheels in Australia were the old double-deckers that were common in Reno, where you had one roulette wheel in the middle of two tables. Only one dealer spun the ball while the other one at the adjoining table listened for the call. That second dealer's inactivity resulted in our getting seen more than usual picking up the losing bets, but overall it had no effect on the number of payoffs we received. Pat couldn't resist reverting back to the old blackjack move in some of the better casinos because Australia had never seen it before. We spent two months in the beautiful island country, appreciating its kangaroos, geological sites, water sports, lobster, and, of course, its casinos.

During the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century there were so many new casino openings in North America we couldn't keep track. New Orleans had reopened Harrah's French Quarter poker. Three casinos were now operating in Detroit, and we "motored" right to them. The Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois rivers were jammed with riverboat casinos. In Indiana, Caesar's World floated the world's largest riverboat casino, the four-deck monster it named Glory of Rome. And the Indian reservations kept pace with the riverboats. There was a second large Indian casino in Connecticut, and a new Minnesota gaming corporation, Grand Casinos, already had two large Indian reservation casinos in its home state, in addition to a half dozen more docked on riverbanks in Mississippi and Louisiana. In Canada, there were now large casinos in Niagara Falls, Hull, and a second in Montreal. The casino in Windsor had expanded, making the Detroit-Windsor trip even more worthwhile. And Atlantic City now had its Hilton, and more monsters were planned to rise up around the Marina.

Overseas, casino expansion progressed as well, though not at the North American rate. Australia continued building giant casinos that not only rivaled the monsters in Vegas, they surpassed them. Casinos were becoming so huge you could honestly get lost inside them faster than you could in giant airport terminals. In Central and Eastern Europe, casinos were busting through skies once enveloped by prohibitive communism. There were already a dozen in Moscow alone. When I saw on the news that Yasser Arafat had opened a Palestinian casino in Gaza, I at once called Joe and asked him if he wanted to give it an old Jewish shelling (I was kidding).

When we stayed in Vegas, there was a new formation of giant mega-resort casinos lining the Strip. The mid-1990s introduced the Monte Carlo, the Stratosphere, and New York-New York casinos. By the end of the decade, there was Steve Wynn's new flagship, the Bellagio, as well as the Paris, the Venetian, and the Mandalay Bay, to be followed by the new Aladdin. Savannah welcomed them all to Las Vegas. She was the perfect move to go up against all the new casinos' sophisticated surveillance systems. Each time the inspectors went to the surveillance tape, they surprisingly found that the bet being claimed by the claimer was legitimate. In the summer of 2001, during the writing of this book, Savannah celebrated her sixth birthday, still not having been cracked by either Las Vegas's multimillion dollar surveillance systems or the supposedly intelligent casino games sleuths operating them. The only way those "experts" are going to uncover Savannah's secret-how so many purple, yellow, and chocolate chips keep popping up invisibly and legitimately on roulette layouts (and now also on blackjack layouts)-is by reading my book.

Before I wrote it, I had another blockbuster idea that nearly put it on the back burner. I'd been thinking of attempting a single million-dollar move that I called the "Super Savannah." This was doing the same basic Savannah move on a number straight up, instead of on the 19 through 36 and column boxes on the outside. The only place in the world it was feasible was at the Horseshoe in Las Vegas.

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