

A preview of:

BAD AGENT

by BILL RAETZ

CHAPTER ONE COMPS

The Plaza Hotel isn't what you'd call a Las Vegas hot spot, but I'd been getting plenty of action there in just a day.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and I had just polished off a baseball-sized meatball and a plate of pasta at Lombardi's. I drank a cup of black coffee and looked at a newspaper, all the while wishing I was having a cigarette and a brandy. The cigarette was out because of the stupid smoking ban, and there would be no drinking because I was working. The smoking ban. Whoever came up with that one was probably the same person who decided that turning Vegas into Disneyland was a bright idea. Vegas is my home and I love it, but the town was a hell of a lot better off when the Mob ran it. It's still glitz and glamour and sin, sure, but it's like all that on training wheels now.

The article I read was a blurb about the size of two thumbs, and it was buried on one of the back pages in an international section, swept under the table. A man had been shot in Vilnius, Lithuania, and thrown off a building. The paper didn't give his name, but I knew who he was. The last time I'd seen him was three weeks ago, give or take. He worked for me. I folded up the paper, groaned, and worked on my coffee. That's when Mr. Banks spotted me and charged over.

Mr. Banks is the head of guest services, and he's one of those slick fellows who wears nice suits, doesn't have a first name, and smiles too damn much. Mr. Banks was all over me because I sat down at a blackjack table after lunch and cleaned up. I went away with a little over six thou. Banks wanted to make sure that I stuck around to spend it. I started to get up.

“Please, keep your seat,” Banks said. He pumped my hand up and down like he wanted to dislocate my shoulder. “How was your meal?” I thought he might pull up a chair and sit.

“Excellent,” I said. In truth, it was just average. Had I told Banks that, though, he would have had the chef dragged out of the kitchen and flogged.

“Good.” Banks smiled again. “I just spoke with the restaurant manager. Your meal has been comped.”

“That’s very kind of you, but—”

“Please.” Banks waved his hand. “It’s our pleasure. All I ask is that you take good care of your waitress.”

“Sure, sure.”

“Is there anything else I might do for you, Mr. Attewelle?”

“No, thanks very much.”

“A bottle of wine? Some champagne, perhaps?”

“No, thanks. I’m groovy.”

“Cuban cigar?”

My head snapped up. “You’ve got those?”

“The casino doesn’t sell them, no.” Banks reached into his double-breasted jacket and came out with a Cohiba. He rolled it between his fat fingers before giving it to me. “This is from my personal humidor. Enjoy.”

“You’re most kind.” I took the stick and ran it under my nose. It was the real deal.

“My pleasure.” Banks snickered. “I just hope you’re not a police officer.”

“Lots of cops smoke Cubans.” It wasn’t the response Banks wanted to hear. “No, I’m not a cop.” First lie of the night.

“Let me know if you need anything else.” Banks gave me his business card. I put it in the breast pocket of my suit jacket—next to the one he’d given me after I’d cashed in my chips. “Anything, Mr. Attewelle.”

“I will. Thank you.” I let Banks pump my hand again and watched him steal away to go suck up to someone else.

I swilled the last of my coffee as my waitress came over. Her name was Dani, and she was eight kinds of pretty. She had jet black hair, dark, fetching eyes, and her lips and nails were cherry red and glossy. She had pert breasts that stood at attention and what I call perfect hips, come-hither hips that make you sweat.

“Care for another coffee?”

“I would, but I should turn in.” I peeled a twenty out of my wallet and gave it to her. “This is for you, hon.”

“You’re very sweet.”

“A few people think so.”

“I’m one of those people.” Dani put my check on the table and took my plate. I picked it up, along with the plastic card positioned under it.

The bill had been zeroed out. I slid the card into my shirt pocket and pushed back my chair. Dani smiled and took off. She had a sweet smile, a smile I'd last seen at ten o'clock that morning when she was getting out of my bed. I'd already made good on my pledge to Banks. I'd taken very good care of her.

I went out on the casino floor, put a cigarette between my lips, and scratched a match to light it. There was an elevator between a row of slots and a cashier's cage. I went over to it and poked the button, smoking while I waited for the lift to come down. I reached inside my jacket and felt the card.

The card. An all-access pass to the casino. Only top-level managers have them. When the elevator opened up, I swiped the card through a reader. The doors closed. I was now on a fast track to the upper level, and the elevator wouldn't stop until I got there. It was like being on the Autobahn.

The doors opened. I slid along a tight corridor until I came to a door with a reader by its lock. I swiped the card. The door opened and then I was out.

Outside. By a guard rail—at the very top of the Plaza Hotel. I was on the roof and looking at downtown Las Vegas.

I went to the edge, took a scope out of my jacket pocket, and attached it to the Beretta I pulled out of my shoulder holster. When I had my gun rigged, I put my elbows on the railing and aimed the scope at the window of one of the suites at the Golden Nugget. My job was to simply surveil the room, but I'd rigged the scope to my piece because you can never know what's coming.

The blinds were pulled back, putting the room on display. You couldn't see it from the street or many of the upper floors of the Plaza. But I had a perfect view.

The man who was supposedly involved in the death of my employee in Lithuania was now killing a cigarette and working on a glass of liquor. I put the scope on his nose and left it there.

I kept watching.