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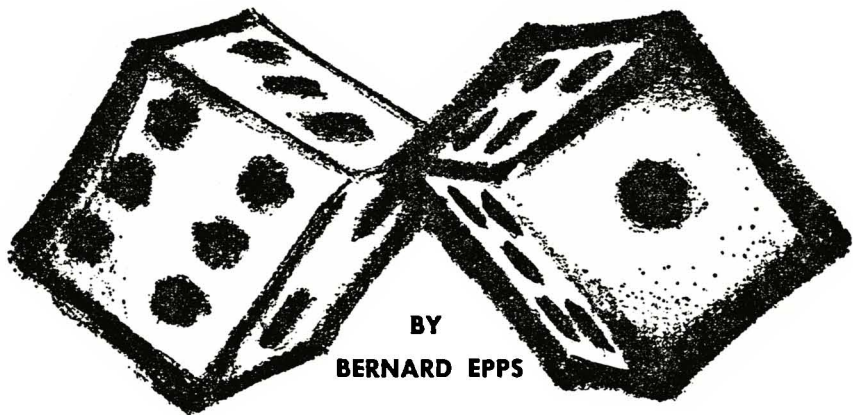
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# CONNED



BY  
BERNARD EPPS

*You just couldn't beat Jerry, the Pup, in a crap game.  
That's why he's doing a dime store in the state pen.*

**N**OPE!" said the bartender, flicking his rag along the empty bar. "I ain't seen Jerry, the Pup, in quite some time and I ain't likely to neither, since he's up in the Big House. He's doin' a dime store, I hear, five to ten years. Let me get you another beer and I'll tell you how it happened.

"Well—you know Jerry, how he's always lookin' for the smart buck, how he figures he's sharp enough to con the Queen out of her crown jewels, or something—well, he's in here one night, see, sittin' on that stool right next to you there and it's a slow night like tonight. Mon-

day, I guess it was. Monday's are always slow. Anyway he's sittin' there and poundin' my ear about how good he is as a soft-con artist and, to hear him tell it, there ain't a broad or a sucker in the whole United States of America can stand up to him when he gets in the groove. I mean, he figures he's another Yellow Kid or something.

"Well, pretty soon, two customers wander in. There's been guys wanderin' in and out while we been chewin' the rag, of course, but these two come in and you can see right away they been celebratin' somethin' big. The guy is red in the face

and his tongue's falling all over his lip the way guys do when they've had one too many. And the twist is kind of a skinny, washed out blond but she's had her fill of the booze too, see.

"Well Jerry, the Pup, looks 'em over and moves in.

"You got to admire that guy. He turns on the charm and has you eatin' out of his hand even though you know he's connin' you! *You* know how it is with Jerry, the Pup!

"Anyhow, pretty soon he's the best of friends with these customers, see, and they're buying drinks back and forth, and they're talkin' horses and it comes out that this guy made quite some killin' at the track that day and that's what they're celebratin'!

"In my business, you know, you kind of learn to keep your eyes and ears open. You got to learn to spot trouble before it starts, see, and you'd be surprised the things I hear when no one knows I'm listenin'. Well, I'm serving drinks and keepin' a close eye on Jerry's technique, see, and I can see he's turnin' over in his head how to work this fish loose from his scratch. And, somehow—I don't know how it happened and probably the fish don't know either—the talk turns to crap games and Jerry the Pup says he knows where there's a floatin' game that night and he's goin'. Well, the fish falls for it! He figures it's his lucky day and all, winning all that bread at the track, and he wants in.

"'Okay,' says Jerry, 'I'll just make a quick 'phone call,' he says, 'to find out if the game's still on,' he says, 'And I'll be right back.'

"The fish says, okay, and Jerry gets change from me and makes a call from the booth in back. Now, I figure, Jerry don't know where there's a floating game. There's not a regular crap game in town will let him within two blocks of the dice!

"You ever see his loads? There's one corner shaved just a leetle bit and just a leetle bit more paint on one side than the others. I mean, they're not changed enough so you can *see* anything, but enough to give Jerry the viggarrish—that extra edge—he thinks he needs! Jerry couldn't run an honest game if he was paid to!

"So he makes his call and I figure he's callin' some buddies of his to set up a game someplace, just for the fish, see.

"Hold on a minute and I'll fetch you another beer. Hey, I got some of this new German stuff the boss started keepin'. You want to try one? Comin' up! Now, let's see. Where was I?

"O, yeah. I heard the rest of the story from Mabel down at the Hotel Carmoty. I don't know if you know her but her and me's been keepin' company the last few years and she tells me everything that goes on down there. She says that Jerry and a few of his sharp friends come in the club just about one, see, and they

all seem pretty happy, Mabel says. She says they was laughin' about how the sucker kept stuffin' his winnings in his pocket everytime, like he didn't trust anybody, see, and everytime he fades a bet he has to pull the money out again! She says, they figured here was a real, all-American pigeon!

"Anyway, the fish gets about five hundred ahead and then Jerry switches in his loads and the fish is pullin' dough out, pullin' it out, until he was down more than seven hundred and there wasn't any more! So Jerry takes him back to his hotel, tells him how sorry he is about his losing the scratch, meets his boys around the corner and takes them to the Carmoty to celebrate!

"But, when it comes time to pay the tab, Mabel notices something funny about the twenty they give her. She shows it to the head-

waiter and the head-waiter calls the fuzz.

"You should have seen their faces, Mabel says, when the cops put the arm on them for passing queer! Here was Jerry, the Pup, figured he'd pulled the cleanest con of his life and instead he'd lost some five C's and wound up holdin' a fistfull of worthless queer!

"He tries to tell them he won it in a crap game but you think they believe Jerry, the Pup? They're happy enough to get their hands on him! 'Crap games is against the Law,' they says, 'and for passing counterfeit you do a five and dime!'

"That's pretty good beer, ain't it? Those Germans really know how to make good beer. I used to know a German. Willy, the German, they called him and he made his living by crashing parties, see, and, one time . . ."

