



THE THONG ADJUSTER



Vol. 1 No. 5



December 2006

The unofficial online magazine of the Iron Thong Golf Gang



Page 1

The putter speaks

Page 2

Golf jokes of the month

Page 3

Golf rules of the month

Pages 4-5

Golf tips: Fixing a slice;
Golf Photo of the Month

Pages 6-10

Chapter 6 of "Murder on
the 13th Green"

Page 11

Iron Thong member profile
Johnny Martinez

The Putter speaks

A word from the editor

Happy holidays to all Iron Thongers, wherever you may be this season! I hope Santa brings you that brand new, latest technology, toe and heel weighted, shiny, expensive whatever club your heart longs to own. And may you use it to knock the little white ball long and straight, or chip it to the pin, or roll it into the cup this upcoming 2007 golf season.

As you read this, December will be here and our officer elections will be complete. My congratulations to all our new officers! Now we need to gather behind them and make every effort to keep The Iron Thong the best golfing group in San Antonio. If one of our officers asks you to sit on a committee, or reserve a tee time, or anything else, please help. It takes all of us Thongers to make a successful club.

And we have been successful! This group began with just a handful of guys wanting to "share some good time together." Now our membership has grown, our finances have increased, and more and more decisions are going to have to be made as to how we conduct our organization in 2007.

Our second tournament is coming up in January. Prizes will be higher than last tourney, and we'll have more folks playing. I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to competing against all of you, hopefully this time without any injuries to slow me down.

Once again, congrats to our new officers (Boone, Flores, Linares and Hernandez, I bet).

See ya'all Saturday,
Steve





The Thong Adjuster is published online monthly for The Iron Thong Golf Group members.

Go to <http://www.IronThongGolf.com> to view the current issue.

Articles, including for sale items, can be submitted at any time. Send them to the editor at stevevanwert@hughes.net.

Board
of Directors:
Sam Pierce,
John
Hernandez,
Steve VanWert

2006 Iron Thong
officers:
President:
Vacant
Vice-President:
Sam Pierce
Secretary:
John
Hernandez,
Treasurer:
Steve VanWert

Jokes of the Month

1 Paul and Big John are playing golf at their favorite course, but on every hole they are being held up by a twosome of women who are always half a hole ahead.

The women are great golfers, but they are playing terribly slow. Finally, after watching the women in the distance as they stood over their putts for what seemed like an eternity, Paul decided to do something.

"I'll walk ahead and ask them if we can play through," Paul said. He set off down the fairway, walking towards the women. But when he got halfway, he stopped, turned around and headed back to where Big John waited.

"Can't do it," Paul said, sounding mighty embarrassed. "One of them is my wife and the other's my mistress!"

"OK," Big John said with understanding. "Then I'll go ask them."

Big John started up the fairway, only to stop halfway and turn back.

"What's wrong?" Paul asked when Big John got back.

To which Big John could only reply: "Small world, isn't it?"



2 Ron went to the doctor complaining about pain in his elbow. The doctor had him pee in a cup and then took the sample and dumped it into a small machine. After a few seconds the machine spit out a piece of paper, the doctor looked at it and proceeds to tell Ron that he has golfer's elbow, to take a few aspirin and to ice his elbow down every night.

Ron was pretty incredulous that this machine could diagnose all this from a urine sample, so he decided to test it. That night he went home and had his wife, daughter, son, and dog all pee in the cup. Then to make it interesting he added a little motor oil from the car, and to top it off he masturbated into the cup as well. The next day he went back to the doctor, who put the sample into the machine. This time the machine churned out a much longer piece of paper.

The doctor looked at it for a while then said, "I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is that your wife is having an affair, your daughter is pregnant, your son is using heroine, your dog has rabies, and your car needs a new transmission. But as for the good news, if you stop jerking off so much, that golfer's elbow should clear right up."

Golf rule of the Month

Q *Do I get relief from aeration holes on the green?*

A Most golf courses, at least once a year, aerify their greens. Aerification, or aeration, is the process of punching small holes in the green; actually, small “cores” of turf and sod are cut and removed from the green, which leaves holes. It usually takes the green a couple weeks to heal following aerification. During those couple weeks -- and especially in the several days immediately following aerification -- the aeration holes can certainly affect a putt, especially if your ball happens to come to rest right on top of one. But does that mean a golfer whose ball is affected by aeration holes is entitled to free relief?

The answer is a qualified no, with an exception possibly provided through a local rule. That answer that can only be determined in a roundabout way, unless you know specifically where to look. Start with Rule 25-1, where we learn that you can get free relief from abnormal ground conditions on the putting green.

But are aeration holes considered an abnormal ground condition? The definition of abnormal ground conditions is this: “An ‘abnormal ground condition’ is any casual water, ground under repair or hole, cast or runway on the course made by a burrowing animal, a reptile or a bird.”

Aeration holes are holes, of course, but they are not made by burrowing animals. Are they ground under repair? If they are, then aeration holes fall under the definition of abnormal ground conditions.

So now we turn to the definition of ground under repair. The pertinent part of that definition is this: “Ground under repair is any part of the course so marked by order of the Committee or so declared by its authorized representative. It includes material piled for removal and a hole made by a greenkeeper, even if not so marked.”

Hmmm, “hole made by a greenkeeper” seems to describe an aeration hole. Or does it?

Back to Rule 25-1, or more specifically, Decision 25/15. This decision gets straight to the point:

“Q. Is an aeration hole a hole made by a greenkeeper within the meaning of that term in the Definition of ‘Ground Under Repair’?”

A. No.”

No. OK, so if the USGA and R&A say in Decision 25/15 that aeration holes do not qualify as “hole made by a greenkeeper,” that means aeration holes are not ground under repair. And if they aren’t ground under repair, that means they aren’t an abnormal ground condition. And if they aren’t an abnormal ground condition, then golfers do not get relief from them under Rule 25-1.

So, no relief from aeration holes unless ... unless the Committee in charge of your course or competition has adopted Specimen Local Rule 3c that appears in Part B of Appendix I to the Rules of Golf. Because such a local rule would be of limited duration, it would not be printed on the scorecard. If it is in effect, it should be posted on a notice board for all to see before beginning their round.

Specimen Local Rule 3c says this:

“• c. Aeration Holes

When a course has been aerated, a Local Rule permitting relief, without penalty, from an aeration hole may be warranted. The following Local Rule is recommended:

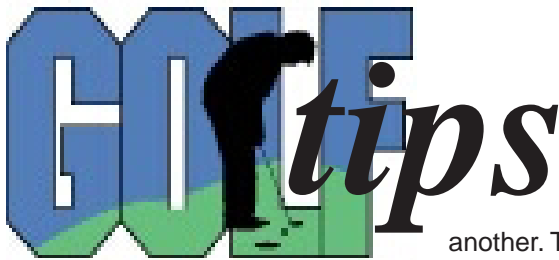
‘Through the green, a ball that comes to rest in or on an aeration hole may be lifted without penalty, cleaned and dropped, as near as possible to the spot where it lay but not nearer the hole. The ball when dropped must first strike a part of the course through the green.

On the putting green, a ball that comes to rest in or on an aeration hole may be placed at the nearest spot not nearer the hole that avoids the situation.

PENALTY FOR BREACH OF LOCAL RULE: Match play — Loss of hole; Stroke play — Two strokes.’ “

So, how do we sum this up? The process of reaching our conclusion may have been convoluted, but the answer to our original question - do you get relief from aeration holes on the putting green - is pretty straightforward.

No, unless the local rule cited above is in effect.



Fixing a slice

From Roger Gunn

(Editor's Note: This article is written from the right-hander's perspective, so lefties should reverse any handedness or directional elements in the text below.)

The Impact

Let's start by making sure you're clear on the type of impact that causes the slice. When the ball is slicing to the right, that means it's curving in a left-right motion across the sky. For the ball to do this, it must be spinning in a clockwise direction.

Imagine that the ball is on a peg, and that all it can do is spin one way or another. To spin the ball clockwise, the club has to swing more to the left with the clubface pointing slightly to the right.

In a golf shot, this is exactly what happens to make the ball curve across the sky as a slice. This can often be confirmed by looking at the divot. On the course, the divot produced by a slice swing is often pointing well left with the ball ending up well right of the divot's direction. This is a classic slice.

The Grip

The grip has little to do with the direction of the swing, but everything to do with where the clubface looks at impact (e.g., open, closed, square).

Grips can be very individualized. A grip that produces a perfectly straight shot for one player can cause a huge hook or a slice for

another. That being said, you can make certain generalizations about the grip regarding slicing.

If your hands are turned too far to the left on the club, it's much more likely to return with the face looking to the right at impact.

Here's the guideline: In your stance, with the clubface square to the target, you should be able to look down and see at least two knuckles on your left hand. If you see three or even four, that's fine. Your grip is not contributing to your slice. Another guideline is to look at the "V's" formed between the knuckle and thumb on both hands. These should point up to somewhere near your right shoulder.

The Stance

It certainly seems logical that if a golfer is missing often to the right, then before too long he or she would aim more to the left to compensate. With slicers this is, in fact, the case. But aiming to the left will cause the swing's circle to be too far to the left, exacerbating the slicing motion.

Doublecheck that your aim is not too far to the left, especially with your shoulders. You can lay a club on the ground, parallel to your target line, to check your aim. Or you can have a friend check your alignment. Just make sure that your feet, knees, hips and shoulders are parallel to that club on the ground and to your target line.

Checking your stance and grip can often eradicate any slice without changing the hitting motion at all. Let the ball's flight be your guide. If it's curving less to the right in a golf shot, this is exactly what happens to make the ball curve

across the sky as a slice. This can often be confirmed by looking at the divot. On the course, the divot produced by a slice swing is often pointing well left with the ball ending up well right of the divot's direction. This is a classic slice.

The Backswing

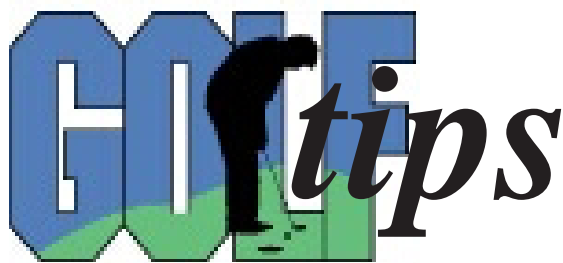
There are numerous backswing issues that can affect your impact. For slicing, the two basic flaws are a backswing that is going too much up, or a clockwise twisting of the shaft, or both.

If your backswing is too much up and not enough around, then the club is going to approach the ball on an angle that is too steep. In other words, too sharply toward the ground. A properly squaring clubface would then create an impact that is hitting the ground too hard. In an effort to hit the ground a bit lighter, the golfer with this problem often opens the face on the way through, causing a slice.

To fix this issue, take a look at your backswing at the top. Make sure the shaft is over your shoulder at the top, not over your head.

To achieve this position, you may have to feel your left arm cross your chest just a bit, creating a flatter or more rounded backswing. You may feel a bigger turn this way too. Good! Engaging those bigger muscles will only help you generate more power.

The next important element of the backswing will be the clubface position. One of the biggest mistakes slicers make is to turn the club clockwise to begin the backswing (i.e., immediately opening the clubface on the takeaway). This movement feels



Fixing a slice

Continued from page 4

like the club is going around properly, creating a good turn. Unfortunately, this opening of the club simply creates an open face at impact. True, the clubface should “open” on the backswing, relative to the target line. However, this natural opening is done with the turning of the shoulders and torso, not because of a twist in the hands.

When you are making your backstroke, just hold on to the club. No effort to twist or hinge the wrists should be made. When you get to the top, you can check for the proper position by looking at your left wrist. You should be able to lay a ruler underneath the face of your wristwatch and have it touch both your arm and the back of your hand. In other words, the back of your left wrist should be straight.

The Downswing

You know, with a good grip and stance as well as a good backswing position, I'd be surprised if your slice is still here. If these first few areas check out, you're 90-percent of the way to eliminating that slice.

To begin the downswing, make sure you start down without any lift or push forward with your arms. Your weight should shift to the front foot and your body should turn toward the target. While this is happening, you should feel a slight drop of your left arm down your torso. This will give you the feeling that you're ap-

proaching the ball by way of your right pocket. This movement will virtually guarantee that the club is coming from the right direction.

If the ball still has a tail to the right, you can add this sensation: Try to get the feeling that the club is closing a bit too soon. Feel as though the clubface is closed by the time it gets to your right leg. This should be done through softness in the wrists, with a feeling of letting the club swing. It should not be done by forcing the club to turn over with your hands. Some practice should give you the feeling.

Final Words

I have some very good news about working on this, or any other problem, for that matter. You have the best teacher in the world with you at all times, namely the golf ball. The way the ball flies will give you objective feedback about your swing.

You'll want to remember that you are improving if your 30-yard slice is now a 15-yard slice. No matter how strange a new move feels, always listen to what the ball tells you. You may be sure that the clubhead is turning over soon enough, but if the ball is still tailing to the right in flight, then you'll have to feel the club close sooner still. Not until you curve the ball to the left have you closed the clubface too soon! The feel can trick you, but the ball won't.

*A Luke Samuel Goodyear Mystery by Steve VanWert***MURDER ON THE 13TH GREEN****Chapter Six – Suzi Benning**

The North Summit County Medical Center is located just off Main Street, a block over from the new Wal-Mart. It's one of those new, high-tech, ultra-modern, angles will do better than curves, ugly as sin, modular, pre-fab buildings that are cropping up everywhere these days.

Luke and Ellen pulled up into the circular drive fronting the monstrosity and parked by one of the "No Parking" signs. Ellen held onto Luke's arm as they crossed beneath, of all things, a pair of Corinthian columns framing the automatic, all-glass front door. The foyer was empty, so they continued on down the hall toward the emergency room in the back.

"I hate these places," said Ellen, holding tighter to Luke's arm, her nails threatening to draw blood.

"I hate it today," Luke agreed.

They turned the far corner and entered the waiting area for the emergency room. Suzi Benning was sitting on one of the backless benches forming a U-shaped alcove against the far wall. Many times Luke had marveled at how perfect she always looked. She was Bruce's little porcelain doll, her dark hair always brushed, her color-coordinated dresses always freshly pressed. Luke barely recognized the rumped, disheveled shell who huddled there.

Suzi is Vietnamese by birth, but she wasn't one of those party girls so many GIs got hitched up to during the war, dancing in the bars in Saigon. Not by a long shot. Her father was actually the president in whichever government was running Vietnam at the time. Bruce had met her while on guard duty at the American consulate in Saigon. She had accompanied her father to some life-or-death meeting and had to wait outside. She and Bruce began talking and things just fell in place after that.

When it was time to leave SEA, Bruce brought her with him as his wife. There were some problems to iron out with the Vietnamese government, with her family being so high-Viet-falutin' and all. But that all got straightened out, because after a couple of months, Suzi arrived in the states and in Bruce's arms.

In the years since, no one had ever seen her upset. Her precise English never cracked. A perpetual smile

lit up her doll-like face. She had become the perfect military wife, strong and selfless. About the only thing about Suzi Benning that Luke wasn't real impressed with was her love of money, but he figured she got that way back in the old country, living high on the dog, er, hog.

Luke hardly recognized her that night. Doc Cook was with her, along with Jack McGarvey. She wasn't crying, but Luke could tell that it was only a temporary respite. Her eyes were red and swollen. She held a handkerchief in her lap, twisting it one way and then the other. She looked up and saw the two approach.

Luke held out his arms to her. "Suzi," he said softly, "I'm so sorry."

She stood and, weak-kneed, leaned into him. "Oh, Luke," she sobbed, "he was perfectly fine this morning. No sign that he was not feeling well." She looked up into his eyes. "If I thought he was sick, I never would have let him play."

Luke glanced over at Chief McGarvey, who shook his head "no." Obviously, they hadn't told her of the poison, or else they weren't sure themselves. Luke pulled her into his chest as she began to cry again.

"Suzi, go ahead and cry. I'll cry with you. We've both lost our best friend, you know."

Nobody said a word as the two shared their mutual grief. Finally, she stood up straight again, and dabbed at her eyes with that poor tortured handkerchief.

"Was he in pain, Luke?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so. I talked to him right before it happened, and all he said was that he felt tired. No pain."

"Thank God," she breathed.

"He was playing the greatest match of his life, Suzi. I've never seen him play harder. When he died, he was the best. The best I've ever seen."

She nodded. "Chief McGarvey sent a car to bring me here. Can you take me home?"

Luke glanced at Jack again, and he nodded. Ellen, who was standing just behind Luke, came over. "I'll bring the car around to the back," she said.

Suzi looked up with surprise and embarrassment. "Oh," she said, "I am sorry ... I did not see you there. Forgive me for not speaking, but I was ..."

Luke interrupted, embarrassed by his lack of tact. "Suzi, this is Ellen Chamberlain, Horace's daughter. She just arrived in Summitview today."

Suzi half-bowed. "It is nice to meet you," she said.

"I'm sorry we had to meet under these circumstances, Mrs. Benning," said Ellen. "I'll get the car."

Suzi shook her head. "No, do not bother yourself. I can walk. Where did you park?"

Luke touched Ellen on her wrist. "Go ahead and take Suzi to the car. I want to talk to Chief Jack for a second."

The two of them started slowly for the hallway, Ellen towering over the petite Vietnamese. Luke watched them until they were out of hearing range. He turned to Jack McGarvey. Doc Cook was still standing nearby.

"Any official word on the cause of death?" he asked.

"The autopsy is being done right now," the crusty doc answered, "but I don't know when they'll release the results. It sure does look like poison to me, though."

"Is that why the county took over the investigation?"

Jack snorted in disgust. "The county. Right. That's why Gabriel Devlin is on the case. Summit County didn't have jurisdiction for long."

"So he's not county," Luke exclaimed. "I didn't think he was. Who is he? Some kind of Fed, right?"

Jack looked at Luke. "You don't recognize the name 'Gabriel Devlin'?"

Luke thought for a moment. Then it came to him. Gabriel Devlin was southern Florida's hot-shot DEA guy. He was the one who got the goods on Manuel Noriega's connection to the Columbian drug cartel a few years ago. He found some malcontent informants to blow old Manuel's case wide open. The papers didn't know the canary's names, so they called them "Gabriel's Trumpets." It was all over the news.

Luke suddenly blinked. "What the hell has the Drug Enforcement Agency got to do with Bruce's murder? And how did he get here so quickly?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know. Maybe it has something to do with the poison."

Luke stared at nothing in particular. "When the autopsy results come in, call me, will ya, Jack?" he asked.

"Come on, Luke. I can't do that."

"Old man Chamberlain hired me to investigate the murder. So I'm on the clock. And I have a right to the info."

"I can't promise they'll tell me anything anyway," he protested. "Shit, Luke, I'm just the hick cop here. But I'll try."

"Thanks," Luke said. Just then, they heard the sound of Ellen's Continental pulling up outside the

open emergency room door. Luke turned and quickly ran outside.

Soon, they were at the Benning home and the site of Benning Realty. Even after all his success, Bruce still kept the original office in front. Suzi excused herself to lay down, but before she went, Luke asked her a couple of questions, ones he wished didn't have to be asked.

"Did Bruce leave you with a copy of his will, or any papers you'll need for the, uh, probate?"

She thought for a minute. "Oh, Luke, I do not want to worry about that now. That cannot wait?"

Luke could see he was troubling her, but he needed to look through Bruce's office before Devlin could beat him to it. "Sure, Suzi, sure it can wait. I just wanted to help, that's all. Would you mind if I took a quick look in the office? It might save you some trouble later."

Basically, Luke felt like a two-faced pile of shit.

Suzi sighed. "I know you just want to help, Luke. Go ahead. The door is unlocked from this side." She turned to go to her room, then stopped. "Luke, Bruce told me many times that if anything happened to him, you were to have his golf trophies. You might wish to pick out anything you want before the lawyers tie it all up in red tape."

She smiled a weary smile, and started to walk away. Abruptly, she stopped, turned, and said, "Luke, I, uh, reconsider what I just said to you. Please do not take the Men's Championship Trophy. I would like to keep it as a reminder of my husband."

"Sure, Suzi, of course. It'll be yours forever." Luke tried to smile a reassuring smile, but suspected it was a total failure. Suzi walked away. Ellen and Luke opened the door and entered Benning Realty.

Luke sat at Bruce's desk and began shuffling through the papers on top.

"Are you looking for anything in particular?" Ellen asked. "Two sets of eyes are better than one."

"I wish I knew."

Luke pulled open the middle drawer to Bruce's desk. "I'm just hoping to find something that might tie in to his murder. I can't believe that even Hartly Haroldson, that overbearing buffoon, would kill Bruce just to be men's champion. There has to be more to it than that."

They began to search in earnest, but they had absolutely no idea what they were looking for. After a while, they gave up. Luke leaned back in Bruce's chair and Ellen settled onto one of the straight-backed wooden chairs facing the desk. She crossed her long legs and shifted her weight slightly. Bruce tried not to watch.

"Bruce was a friend of yours?" Ellen asked. "Did you know him long?"

Bruce nodded. "Ever since I first set foot in this warm, wonderful, sandy spot of heaven," he said. "Bruce was in the Air Force, like me, and stationed at Walton Air Force Base. When I first pulled into the base and stopped at the main gate, Bruce was the security guard on duty. He was just going off shift and took me personally to the squadron headquarters to sign in."

"You were both policemen?"

"Yea. SPs. But after we found we had golf in common, we became fast friends. Bruce got out and started his realty business. A while later, I got out, too."

"Out of the Air Force?"

"Right. I tried to latch on with the Summitview police, but, hell, there're only two of 'em. I didn't have the qualifications to become a county mountie and sure didn't want to travel all over as a statie, so when Bruce told me the local private investigator in town was closing his office, I agreed to rent it from the bank and opened a shingle."

Ellen smiled. She held out her hands and made a sweeping motion. "Luke Samuel Goodyear, private eye. Sounds like a movie."

"At first it sounded like a bankruptcy. There isn't much in this little town that requires the services of a PI. Besides, Bruce kept dragging me off to the golf course. He introduced me to Rudy, and Horace, and Skipper and all the Irregulars. Without him, I'd be working in Rob Harlan's Video Emporium."

"Quite a friend, huh?"

"The best."

"How did you manage to keep your finances in order?" She blushed, surprised at the brazenness of her question. "Did business pick up?"

Luke smiled a grim grin. "Nah, I got picked up. By Cassy Goodyear."

"Oh," Ellen said, turning even redder.

"Yea, 'oh' is right. Oh God, oh shit and oh no. Before I knew what was happening, we were married. I moved out of my dingy little apartment and into Conandria. All my money worries were over, all right."

Ellen had gone this far, and she wasn't about to stop now. "What happened to the marriage? I mean, why did you, I mean, weren't you two compatible? That is, was your love life okay?" Ellen squirmed in embarrassment.

"We were compatible all right. Sexually. I think Cassy is compatible with just about everyone who ever tripped over her web. Actually, we got along all right, I guess."

"Then what happened?"

"Oh, her father tried to buy out Griffon Lakes under an assumed name – actually a bogus company name – and your dad asked me investigate what was going on. Once I identified Cash, the deal was off. And so was the marriage."

"Gee, that's a shame," she said, not all that earnestly. "But I hear the case made you a hero at Griffon Lakes."

"And the divorce provides me enough money to play at being a PI, as well as play golf whenever I want." Luke smiled, his eyes beginning to water. He hadn't let himself begin to grieve, not yet. "Bruce and I hit many a ball together the last few years," he said, softly, as much to himself as to Ellen.

Mentioning Bruce brought them both back to the matter at hand. They hadn't found anything that cast even a momentary shadow on Bruce's work or reputation. His desk didn't even have a locked drawer. Even his safe was wide open.

"Well," said Ellen, "you might as well pick out a golf trophy. He wanted you to, remember?"

Luke sighed and turned around in the chair and looked at Bruce's trophy case. It was six feet tall and 10 feet wide, with five shelves filled with gold and brass. Luke got up and walked over to it.

"There are a lot of memories here," he said to Ellen, as he carefully opened the glass doors. "Here are all five of his hole-in-one trophies. I was with him when he aced number 15 last year. And seven the year before." He kept looking down the rows. In the middle of the third shelf sat Bruce's copy of the Griffon Lakes Men's Championship trophy, with his name engraved on it five times in all. It was actually a two-handled loving cup, but the lid held an over-sized three-dimensional relief of the Griffon Lakes coat-of-arms. The total effect was so grotesque that the griffin looked more like a gargoyle. The trophy was so ugly that everyone referred to it as "Old Gruesome."

Next to it was a eight-by-10 of Bruce, Skipper, Nick and Luke standing in front of that silly Mickey Mouse-shaped sand trap at the Disney World Palm Course. Luke was beginning to choke up and wasn't sure he could go on re-living these memories when his eye spied something peculiar. Luke never would have noticed it if he hadn't moved the Griffon trophy slightly to look at the eight-by-10. There was an envelope taped to the back of Old Gruesome.

"What's this?" Luke asked aloud, and turned the trophy around. It turned out to be a legal-sized manila envelope with the words "Summit Airport" handwritten on the front. Luke carefully peeled it off Old Gruesome and returned to the desk. Ellen leaned over his

shoulder as he grabbed a letter opener and slit it open. Inside were a number of legal papers, dated a little over a year earlier, apparently referring to the intended sale of Summit Airport. Luke stared in amazement as he saw that the asking price was \$10 million dollars.

Ellen saw it, too. "How much?" she asked. "Isn't that a lot for a little country airstrip?"

Luke nodded. "A lot? A great big damn bunch way too much of a lot! Summit Airport is a dinky little macadam and dirt stretch of land that barely gets used. It's too short to land anything bigger than a Piper Cub. The total land involved isn't, hell, more than 10 acres, tops, and the only building is an empty metal shed full of rusty refrigerator parts abandoned there when uh, Jiffy's Appliance Repair, across the road, went under a few years ago."

Luke stared at the papers. "Why, the place isn't even worth taking the time and effort to clean up!"

"It's way north of town, isn't it?"

"Yea," said Luke, "in an area much too low to ever be zoned residential. The only use for the land would be industrial, but the few small plants that have operated out there have closed, or almost closed, years ago. How the hell did anyone expect to sell it for \$10 million dollars?"

Luke looked through the papers a little closer and found a listing contract giving Benning Realty the right to sell. The owner wasn't identified by name, that space on the form marked "confidential." Summitview National Bank was holding a foreclosure note for all of \$1,100. Under the listing contract was an offer to buy the property for the amazing sum of \$150,000. The offer was tendered by the Conandria Development Company. In other words: Carl Cassenberg. Settled into the bottom left hand corner of the envelope was a safe-deposit key. Luke shook the envelope and it fell out onto Bruce's blotter. He picked it up. It had a three-digit number on one side and "Summitview National Bank" on the other.

Luke stuffed it and the papers back into the envelope, and tucked them in his belt.

"Come on, Ellen," he said, "I don't know exactly what this means, but there has to be a reason Bruce hid this in a place he knew I'd probably be the only one to find it."

They hurried for the door, but first he turned back to Bruce's trophy case, replaced Old Gruesome where he belonged, and picked up the eight-by-10. "This is all I need to remember you by, old buddy," Luke said.

They left by the front door to Benning Realty. As they drove away, Suzi Benning entered from the house, walked over to Old Gruesome, and turned it

slightly. She stamped her tiny foot in frustration.

"I am so stupid, so stupid!"

Still angry, she turned to Bruce's desk, picked up the telephone and dialed a number. After conversing quietly in a sing-song voice, she placed the receiver carefully on its cradle, and with tears of grief mixed with frustration still in her eyes, re-entered her tragically quiet home.

Luke and Ellen drove over to his official town office, which is just a storefront, with a sewing machine repair shop on one side and a used bookstore on the other. There's a small receptionist's desk by the door and a private office barely large enough to house a metal desk, two chairs and a four-drawer filing cabinet. No wonder Luke spends most of his time at the VIP Lounge. Still, it gives him a place to conduct business when he needs more privacy than Griffon Lakes offers.

The sign on the door has a big clock with moveable red hands. It read "Be back at 8:00," with the hands pointing to the hour, as if anyone stopping to look would be too stupid to read the sign. Many times Luke has pictured some prospective client pausing at the door and saying to himself, "Duh, let's see ... the little hand's on the eight and the big hand's on the 12. I wonder what time that is?"

Luke unlocked the door, and they went in. Ellen looked around and chuckled to herself. "This is quite impressive," she said with a smile. "Do you take your dates here often?"

Luke looked at her, knowing that he was probably going to say something stupid. "Uh, no, only during murder investigations, I mean, this isn't exactly a date, uh, not that I wouldn't like a date, but ..."

Ellen put her hands on his shoulders and they stood eye to eye. Her smile was soft and her touch was light. Luke could feel the heat of her body even through the wall of tension in the air. "I'm sorry to put you on the spot," she said. "I meant, if we have a date, we could go to, uh, almost anywhere, and it would, I mean, be fine with me and ..."

She realized she was rambling on just like him. She lowered her hands from his shoulders and smiled again. "My, aren't we the pair?" she said.

"I hope so," he answered, taking her hands in his.

"Uh, can I help you in your investigation?" The question broke the spell.

"Yea, yea, you sure can. Look up Pauly Panishe in that rolodex and give him a call. I need to talk to him." Ellen sat at the front desk and picked up the phone, ready to spring into action.

Luke opened his office door, his usual bravado

slowly returning. "Good secretary," he said, "yell when you find him."

Luke's office, as bare as a Spartan's spare room, was furnished in early pawn. All the furniture came straight from the scratch-and-dent section of Pico's Instant Office, which Pico Morales runs out of a rented U-Store-It unit out on County Road 72. Cost Luke all of \$150. He took the two-and-a-half steps to his desk, turned sideways so he could squeeze past the filing cabinet, and sat in his executive chair, the only expensive thing in the office. Luke Samuel has a lot of respect for his glutamus. Of course, it was just borrowed from Horace when he bought himself a new one, but as Luke tells Horace now and again, "it sure makes my ass feel at home, borrowed or not."

Sitting on the corner of the desk was an empty eight-by-10 frame that used to hold the countenance of one Cassy C. Goodyear. It had been empty for so long Luke had almost gained an affection for the ribbed piece of cardboard currently filling it. He grabbed it, wiped some of the dust off on his pants leg, and carefully inserted the picture of him and Bruce, Skipper and Nick. He turned and lovingly placed it on top of the filing cabinet. Luke was still gazing at it when Ellen yelled through the door. "Pauly's on the line."

Pauly Panishe is Luke's eyes when he can't see. He's Luke's feet when he can't walk and, occasionally, his fist when he's not there to fight. He's a licensed private investigator, too, but it's not his full-time job. He tried it a few year's back, but didn't have the personal style to make it work. In other words, he pisses people off.

At one time, this luxurious office was his. He's the one who defaulted to the bank so Luke could lease it. Neither he nor Luke ever mention it, but if the truth be told, they're both happy with the arrangement. Luke's the PI and Pauly's his silent partner. More than once, over a couple of cold ones, he and Pauly marveled at the simple beauty of their relationship. And more than once, Pauly leaned back in his chair and said, "Who's going to play me when they make a movie about us, do you think? I think von Damme would capture my essence, don't ya think?"

Pauly is more than a sidekick; he's a friend. He's also part bloodhound. And smells like one, too. He works at the local slaughterhouse, chopping up beef, pork and, around these parts, a deer every now and then.

But he's always willing to help Luke when he needs him. And Luke needed him this time. Luke picked up the receiver. "Pauly, how ya doin', you effervescent pile of guano? Cut off any fingers lately?"

Luke could hear Pauly laugh on the other end of the line. It sounded more like a series of belches, interspersed with gasps of breath.

Pauly found his voice and answered, "Luke, where ya been hidin'? Out at that fancy-pantsy golfin place, I bet. Why don't you learn to live like the real people, huh?"

Pauly's one of those uninitiated who thinks you have to be rich to play the game.

"I am living like a real person, Pauly. You've been stuck in your dingy sub-culture for so long you think down is up."

Pauly resumed his staccato chuckle. "You need help, old buddy?" he asked.

It was time to get serious. "Pauly," Luke said, "Bruce is dead."

"Benning? Bruce Benning? When did that happen?"

"Just this morning, Pauly. It looks like he was poisoned."

"Ah, shit, I hate to hear that. He was an all-right guy. Any suspects?"

"Yes and no. There are a couple of people who might have benefited from his murder. You got some time to help me?"

"Sure. What do ya want me to do?"

Luke outlined what he already knew, and a little of what he suspected. Pauly promised to do some digging. "If you can't get me here, I'll be at my VIP office," Luke said. "You know the number at Griffon Lakes?"

"Yea," Pauly replied, "I got it wrote down some-place."

"If you call me there, don't talk to anyone but me or Ellen, okay?"

"Who's Ellen? She that sweet voiced honey who called me?"

Luke smiled. "She's Horace's daughter. Just got into town. She's sorta acting like my secretary or something."

"It's that 'something' I'd worry about, pal."

"She's something, that's for sure."

"Gotcha. Is she still on the line?"

"You think she'd listen in on my conversations, Pauly?"

There was that laugh again. "Hell, no. Tell her for me she's got a great voice."

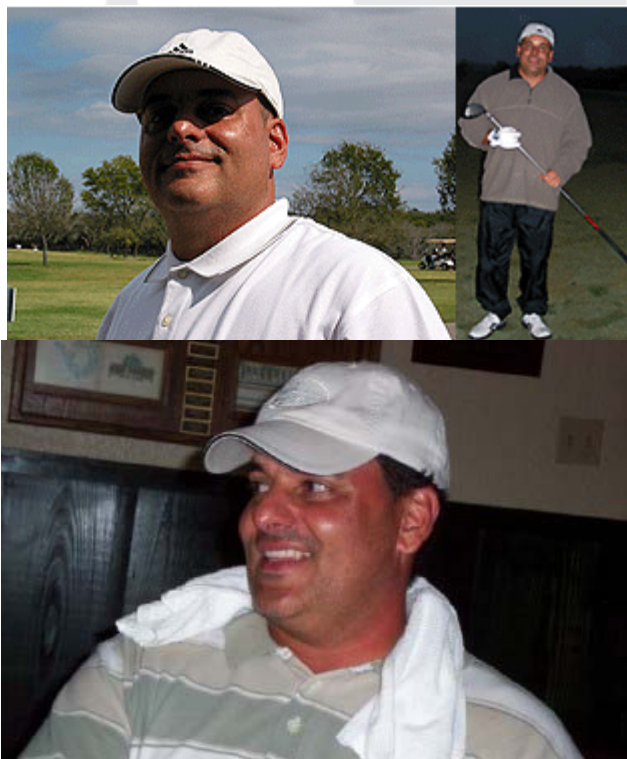
"And great legs, too," Ellen said.

There wasn't much more that could be done until Monday morning, when Luke planned to talk to Rudy Rodriguez over at Summitview National Bank.

Next month, Chapter seven, "Monday morning."

Johnny Maratinez

Iron Thong member profile



Name: Johnny Martinez

Nick Name: Johnny

Average Handicap: 15 and going down!

Average Drive Length: 275+

Clubs In My Bag: Wilson FatShaft irons, Taylor Made R7 Driver, R5 5 wood

My history of playing golf: During a California softball TDY in 1985, some friends took me out to play. At the end of my military career in the late 90's, I played a few more rounds and learned how to properly hold the clubs. I bought my first set of clubs at a pawn shop for \$85.00 in 1995. Before retiring from the Air Force in 1999, I thought the game was all about hitting the ball as far as you can to the hole. I was in for a rude awakening. After I retired I was hooked on the game. Before joining the IronThong, I played once or twice a month if I was lucky. After being recruited into the Iron Thong, my play time has increased to once a week (taking the hot summer off to devote totally to the children and family). I still hit the ball as far as I can to the hole but I now take the hazards into consideration. The hazards usually win. One day I'll learn.

My greatest moment while playing golf: Hole in one Sept 10 2005 Pecan Valley, hole #7. Don't remember much what happened the rest of the day, but there was a lot of beer flowing until the wee hours of the next morning. How special was that moment? Put it this way, if a doctor told me I only have 3 months to live, I'd say something like, "So what, I got a hole in one' on Sept 10th 2005". – Just kidding, but it was special!

What I like about being an Iron Thonger: Playing with a bunch of good people. Cracking on each other before, during, and after each round. Learning every golf rule in existence. Listening to everyone recount their round afterwards and telling how close they came to shooting a 72 etc wah wahh wahh wahhh wahh

The best and worst parts of my game: When my drive is on, which it is most of the time, it is the best part of my game. My worst part is inside 180 – 100 yards, and my unreliable putting, which sometimes is on, but rarely. I think my putter needs a realignment.

Anything else: To challenge myself and all the other Thongers to play their best and not to give up because they shot an '11' or such on a hole. I am aware that I am blessed to have the opportunity to play with these morons. I give thanks and praise to God for everything that is good in this world, and playing golf with these guys is one of those blessings!