

The Iceman Cometh



In 1957, it was against the law to gamble in Kankakee, Kansas. But that's *precisely* where the organizers of the World Crazy Eights Championship decided to hold their tournament that year. At the top of their list for a suitable venue was the Dew Drop Inn, Kankakee's best (and only) hotel. However, an extended engagement there by the Fabulous McGillicuddy Sisters had rendered the facility unavailable. The only other place in town that could accommodate the two dozen or so gamblers was the Southside Cryogenic Research Ranch – to be precise, the unheated *basement* of the Southside Cryogenic Research Ranch. So when Bennington Beezer sat down to play, he figured he'd be in his element. He was, after all, known in gambling circles as "the Iceman" because of his cool demeanor. Nevertheless, there was something unnerving to him about the setting. He had the distinct feeling that the ranch's cold storage clients were looking over his shoulder, then somehow relaying that information to his opponent. During Beezer's semifinal match against Ed "Eight Ball" Dinklaker, for example, Eight Ball seemed to know exactly what Bennington had in his hand. But every time Beezer glanced over his shoulder, he saw only a bunch of frozen eyes staring vacantly off into space. Eight Ball continued to win, so Bennington essayed a different strategy: he held his cards upside down. Immediately, Dinklaker appeared confused and disoriented, and he discarded his hand in reverse order, which automatically disqualified him. As he got up from the table in disgust, he shot a severe look at one of the frozen folks behind Beezer. But when Bennington looked, too, those eyes seemed just as blank as before.