

Full Moon in June by Capt. Jerry Smith

I woke up on the front porch bed, the trees a stirring trouble, but with a yard so bright I knew it was full moon in June. I'd always made it a point to take my best customer fishing at what I felt was just the right moment on this comin' summer moon, and it was time. A solitary customer, he knew how to wait on the crabs destiny. I'd go now.

I took the old spinning rod with the Centaur reel. Knew I'd fish it easy, 'cause the old reel was aluminum frame with brass gears, and they only took so many big fish before that bezel would give up. The reel was loaded with some 30# spyder wire, and lots of monofilament backing, just to bring the good stuff to the top of the spool. I loved the open bail, and the serrated aluminum drag knob. On the right rod, a Centaur could flick a bait way over a hundred yards, wind providing, of course.

There was some breeze tonight! This moon was peeking and hiding, and the trees were shaking and then still, as I grabbed a dip net and headed for the boat. It was a small inboard, with a four-cylinder engine, and I'd drilled the rudder quadrant so's it could turn pretty nearly on its own length. 'Course, I had to hold the wheel when reversing, so the rudder didn't kiss the big, slow turning propeller. Other than having a towbit in the stern, it was an excellent tarpon boat. I missed "Sun Dog", my old wooden tarpon boat. A windy fella name 'Charlie' had done the old boat in, on August 13th, 2004. Seemed like yesterday.

A short time later, just idling toward the Pass, the water couldn't decide whether to be murky or clear, calm or wind-swept. It was a howlin' night with a lot of activity. I thought the fish would be spooky. Then I found a few crabs, just right for finding out.

Pass crabs are funny. They can be spunky as heck, and then die on the hook in a heartbeat. They can be wimpy looking, and last for almost ever. I took some extra with the old dip net, but then, there were plenty for the takin'. I put some weed in the bucket just to keep 'em happy. It was so pretty out, I thought of an old friend, and wondered how he was doing.

It was a Rocky Russ kinda night, just beautiful, and then some. Kinda night Rocky would say something on the VHF radio like, "Well, we've had our lines out for twenty minutes, and it's so nice I just hate to put a crab on, so we're fishing bare." Well, fact of the matter was, a few drifts later and then some, I figured it probably didn't make any difference if I had a crab ahook or not, 'cause I wasn't gettin' bit. That's when I thought

of Rocky Russ one more time.

"When things are slow," Rocky would say, "You jus' got ta go to every place you ever caught fish, and try, and pretty soon it'll happen." Yeah, I learned a lot from my friend Rocky, and so did a lot of others, and not just about fishin'. Just about friends.

I went a few places I knew. The Pass is full of those places. Didn't matter if I was catchin' or not, 'cause the late night had cleared up just fine, and it was quiet, so very quiet. And then I slipped up in the Northwest side on Mondongo Shoal. It was perfect.

The Big Eyes were bunched up so pretty, and not spooky at all. Just finning, and every once in a while, taking food off the surface. I had the perfect setup. I could lay way out, and set a crab tight in amongst 'em, with the old Centaur and the Higgins spun glass rod. And that just what I did.

Now there wasn't a whole lot of catching goin' on, but there sure was a lot of "early releases". I wished I'd brought the superglue for my solitary charter, but then again, it was just fun spending crabs. Every third cast or so, I'd jump one off, but mostly I was just having a time sticking that hook. It was a #4 Mustad ring eye, a 60-pound mono leader. Bit old fashioned, but that was how my customer was. He was having a great time.

Now I'd like to tell you a story, and say that my customer finally got one to the boat, maybe even took a scale. Even a small one. But, it just didn't happen. But what was happenin' the whole time was one of those Boca Grande nights! Full Moon in June. No place like it anywhere! You had to be there. Like my card said, "Think tarpon, you gotta believe!"

So with that full moon a chasin' the western sky and the morning just beginning to put the stars asleep, I eased on to the dock. A yawn now and again, just a little chill in the air, the green smell of island shore and spent tide, and a satisfied customer for sure. No tip this time. No need. Just a promise, "same time, next time." I am my own best customer.



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