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## **Machines that Pick Your Pocket – AND MAKE YOU LIKE IT! (Dec, 1932)**

by WALTER A. RASCHICK

No matter how clever you are, you can't beat the slot machine racket. If you play the game, you'll have to reconcile yourself to seeing your nickels flowing away in a steady stream, paying tribute to the engineering brains which have designed these mechanical pick-pockets so efficiently that they can't fail to keep half or more of the coins fed into them, giving the player nothing in return except the thrill of seeing his money vanish.

"GOSH!" you've probably said more than once, as the symbols halted, hesitated, and then swung tantalizingly away from the center row, "I almost got the bells that time. Watch this one - and out of your pocket and into the slot machine goes another hard-earned nickel.

Again the wheels whirr, and as their spinning dies into a metallic clack-clack-clack, the player stands pop-eyed before the entrancing mechanism: the plums align themselves in a row, but the middle one falls back out of line, and again there is no payoff. Another nickel is played - and this time two cherries and a lemon click into place, and four five-cent coins of Uncle Sam's vast realm trickle down the pay-out slide and fall into the money cup at the front of the machine.

"Gosh!" you chortle, with a grin as big as all outdoors, "this is more fun than I've had in a blue moon - and go right on throwing good money after bad.

Probably less than one person in 10,000 really knows anything about how slot machines work, how they are designed mechanically to extract money from the public's spacious pocket: and fewer than ten in a million really care.

Let us lift the shell off one of these mechanical pickpockets and see what makes it click to the tune of handsome profits- if robbery and profits can ethically be mentioned in the same breath.

50% of Symbols Are "Dead"

The most popular nickel slot machine in America carries the following symbols on its three reels: Gum, bell, plum, orange, cherry, lemon, and free play. Each of the three reels carries 20

symbols. The line-up of symbols on such a nickel machine selected at random, is reproduced on page 36.

This machine has been adjusted so that only every other symbol can stop in the pay-out row. Study the line-up carefully. Figure out for yourself how close, ostensibly, winning combinations come, while actually it is totally impossible for these combinations to register. Study this fascinating system closely- for it is a whole lot more economical to learn the lesson in print than it is to experiment with nickels.

### Paying Ratio Can Be Changed

It is easy to see from the chart that a free play cannot possibly be won (see 16th symbol, first reel); also, the premium of 12 nickels for three plums, or for two plums and a gum, cannot ever be achieved with the adjustment as given. For transient trade such an arrangement passes detection, but for a regular clientele, the operator changes the line-up occasionally, to avert suspicion. For the small cost of fifty cents, he can procure an extra reel strip, with the symbols arranged to his own choosing. He places this new strip on the first reel, which is the key to the whole system, and presto! "Free Play" will turn up in the winning row, and a veritable shower of plums- and lemons, too, if he orders it so -will result. Some operators change the strip on their first reel as often as once a week, to keep their steady trade happy (and unknowing).

### You Can't Beat Mathematics

The machine we are describing is set on a 75-25 return basis. Out of every dollar played, approximately twenty-five cents remains in the machine. The standard schedule of "prizes" and the odds and returns on each set of symbols on the machine set 75-25 is shown on page 38.

Theoretically, out of every 1000 plays this machine will return 253 winning combinations, or a cash return of \$38.40 out of every \$50.00 played. This makes a theoretical cash return of \$76.80 out of every \$100.00 played- pretty close figuring on a transaction involving 2,000 nickels! and set to repay seventy-five cents out of every dollar played.

### Bilking the Transient Trade

So cleverly has this system been figured out that the extraction of money from the player is almost a painless operation. Slot machine playing is perhaps the best (from the racketeer's standpoint) come-on game extant. A player contributes three or four nickels without results, then out pop two nickels; in go six more, and out pop four, etc., etc. Like the mills of the gods, slot machines grind out your money slowly, but inexorably. In fact, so gradually does the player lose his money that he actually enjoys the process.

Most machines are set on the 75-25 basis, but in outlying communities, where transients and tourists comprise the bulk of the trade, operators have machines which take as much as seventy cents out of every dollar played. Recently, when "times got tougher" -or should we suppose the sucker public is getting wiser, and fewer are playing? -operators in the Northwest changed the

ratio to as high as 10-90. Such an exorbitant ratio in favor of the operator (10c is paid, out of every dollar played; 90c remains in the machine) is used only to bilk transient trade.

Chicken shacks, wayside beer “joints,” and off-the-beaten-track gasoline service stations are the “spots” where these low percentage machines flourish. Obviously, steady customers would soon become aware of such a juicy “cut” for the operator, and stop playing.

The casual slot machine player, who never gives the “game” serious thought, is content to “feed the kitty” whenever he does play, feeling- as he loses -that he is probably playing in ill luck, having just followed a luckier player who has drained the machine of its “gravy.” And when this same casual player deposits, for once in his lifetime, one solitary nickel and receives the jackpot (an accumulation of nickels- general 1% of the total deposits from one jackpot pay-out to the next - which pays out when its chamber becomes filled: usually amounting to from \$5.00 to \$12.00, depending upon the type of machine), he brays as loudly as the operator wails. But it’s only a fake wail, never fear. The casual player in his enthusiasm and the operator in his feigned grief, both make so much noise about it that the operator’s “loss” is soon more than compensated by the contributions from other optimistic sheep.

### Machines Designed for Easy Play

There are many different styles of slot machines. Some are operated with nickels, others with dimes, some with quarters, and -in the higher-class resorts and exclusive clubs- even with silver dollars! No class, it seems, is immune from the lure of the clicking reels. Slum neighborhoods give nickel and dime devices a vigorous play. Most clubs have nickel and dime machines, and at least one quarter mechanical pickpocket. The exclusive winter and summer resorts, and almost every big-time gambling casino, have their batteries of dollar machines.

Yes, there are many styles in slot machines, but they’re all run on the same (lack of) principle; that is, their mechanisms are similar. They’re purposely made easy to play. You simply step up to the innocent-looking lure and put a nickel in the slot at the top of the machine. Then you reach out hopefully and grasp the shiny, attractive lever at the right side of the contraption. Pull the lever forward, as lightly or as briskly as you will. Whrrrr hum the three pictured reels, spinning merrily.

The speed with which they spin depends upon the force you use in pulling the lever forward. Once in a while you’ll jerk the lever ever so gently- and find yourself figuratively deluged in a shower of nickels. So you’ll jerk the lever gently again. But the gentle touch is no better than the robust pull. You’ll discover that in the long run, long before you’ve lost your last nickel. It just doesn’t make any difference how you pull that lever: the machine wasn’t made to be beat.

### Speed of Reel Doesn’t Affect Pay-out

While it appears to be mechanically possible to beat the “game” any “number of times in succession, it just can’t be done. That little old set screw shown you in the photographs will foil you. That’s the jinx to many a breadwinner’s fond hopes as he plays his last dollar’s worth of

nickels in a futile effort to win back that fifteen or twenty dollars he's just let slip away from him.

The hand lever sets the reels in motion and that pesky old set screw slips past the points on the reel stop star and finally, as the reel's spinning dies down, fastens itself in one of the ten notches on the reel stop star. Since there are ten points and ten notches on each of the three reel-stop stars (one controlling each reel), it is certain and immutable that only ten of the twenty symbols on each reel can ever stop in the pay-out row.

Obviously, those symbols opposite the points in the reel stop stars can never stop in the payout row; only the ten symbols in each reel which parallel the open notches in the reel stop star can do that. As the speed in the spinning of one reel may vary with the speed of each of the other two reels, different combinations of symbols in the pay-out row usually turn up in successive pulls of the lever.

Although slot machines are legally taboo in most communities throughout the United States, it is quite generally an accepted fact that the authorities are lax in regard to their operation. Owners of machines, usually political powers in their communities, shrewdly insinuate themselves into the favor of church and fraternal organizations by donating the use of several machines at bazaars, lawn, card, and house parties, ice cream socials, and the like, and forego sharing any part of the moneys taken in. Treasuries swell beautifully, as a result, and when complaints later pour into the police chief's office against rampant gambling in his city, the machine owners contact their church and fraternal friends, and the "heat" is forthwith turned off.

### Slot Machines That Steal the Rent

In St. Paul, Minnesota, where a new city administration took office on June 7, 1932, orders were given throughout the city (an earlier grand jury investigation resulted in clearing the county of slot machines) for store owners and club concessionaries to take down the machines. Less than a week passed before barbers, confectioners, beer flat operators, and other small commercial fry started protests by the score for the return of slot machines. These individuals, business being depressed as it is, suffered sorely from the lack of that \$3.00 daily profit which their slot machines had averaged.

In many cases, slot machines take in enough to pay the rent. And yet only 50% of the machine's "take" goes to the store operator; the other half goes to the machine owner, who usually owns them in large numbers and places them helter skelter at choice "spots" throughout his police-subsidized territory. These owners, usually politically influential, spend most of their time making contacts with "the right people." When their supply of money runs low, they make the rounds of their "spots," unlock their machines and count out the contents with the shop owner on the well-known "one for me and one for you" basis. Yet on so modest a division of spoils, one little club within the confines of St. Paul netted \$3,200 on two nickel and one dime slot machine during 1931; a total "take" of \$6,400 for the year, which is a lot of nickels and dimes in any man's country.

In the summer resorts throughout these United States (whether in the California mountains or the Minnesota fir country) every group of owners knows well the familiar figure of the human jackal who affably places his machines in the choice "spots" and sits back and waits for the killing. He calls regularly throughout the season for his half of the spoils. To outward appearances he is the well-groomed, prepossessing business executive, spending his summer vacation away from the traffic encounters of the cities. Actually, he is just another of the oily band of scum whose depredations are designed to make bums out of upright American citizens.

Many a mayoral candidate wins voter confidence by shouting and fuming eternal damnation to vice and gambling menaces. Most candidates include a slot machine plank in their platforms. And always, after election, slot machines are knocked down and dragged out: for a while. Usually, after two or three short months, the slot machine pledges go the way of all pre-election promises. Police officers frequent places of business which operate slot machines- and (under orders) see them not. In most cities, a private citizens must swear out a specific complaint before police will confiscate them.

The self-styled "enormous \$10,000,000 Institution" which leads the universe in slot machine manufacture prints a handsome service manual and parts price list for its customers. It reminds them: "In Coin Machine Operating, close harmony and cooperation between Operator and Manufacturer is essential for the success of both. Realizing this fact the . . . Company is constantly offering to operators- new machines- new ideas- new money-making plans."

Of course, no anxiety is voiced for the success of the man who plays the slot machines. He is merely so much "sucker money." "Keep in touch with us," the brochure continues, "and you will have the pleasure of knowing that you are affiliated with the biggest, best, and most successful business of its kind in the world."

Truly, the Operator and Manufacturer are determined on cooperation and "close harmony": nothing is so tuneful and so satisfying to the ear as the sound of the jackpot pay-off. But for those of you who play their machines- life is just a bowl of cherries- and the cherries will never pay enough to make you rich!