

Hot Slots



Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

-Dylan Thomas
"Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night."

Walking into a Midwestern casino, steeped in my thirties, I become a hot little piece of jailbait. I am Lolita of Oneida, a crap table cherub, with all the promise of a two dollar lottery ticket. The middle-aged gamine rolls past the roulette wheel to the gasp of an oxygen tank and the pitter of pacemakers. Cribbing a Bukowski book title, the scene is a septuagenarian stew and I suppose that makes me a juicy little cut of rarebit tossed in to season the winter turnips.

The average player has one foot in the grave so no matter how much is lost, very little is gambled. An inheritance doomed to blood-bound ingrates escapes dollar by single dollar through the portal of penny slots. Accounts accrued by routine toil are confusing in one's twilight. What urgency takes over when there is so much money and so little time?

A vending machine dispensing nothing but cigarettes and aspirin might as well have a sign saying "Screw it all." Mix Tylenol, Newport Lights, and that bastard at the office with Advil, Salems, and the second divorce. A numbing casino cocktail helps everyone stick it out for one more night. Swallow, inhale, cha-ching.

Casino style pairs gamblers with the games they play. Themed machines offer the fantasy while themed individuals provide the vice.

THE MAN: The Jimmy Buffet (pronounced like the layout of a smorgasbord): This fellow inhabits many states but appears vaguely Floridian. Reddened by gratuitous boating, he is dressed as if spilled out from under the thatched roof of a tiki bar directly into the casino. He insists on shorts, sandals, and shirts featuring exotic flora and fauna. The music playing in the perpetual island party that is his head might be a muffled version of “Kokomo” by the post-Brian Wilson Beach Boys after they recalibrated their act to excise remnants of former genius. His lips are permanently glazed with a fine film of melted butter from a diet exclusively comprised of shellfish.

THE MACHINE: He is at his most symbolic when playing Lobster Mania.

THE MAN: Hmong Money: Wisconsin boasts a large Hmong population, welcoming refugees who were American allies during the Vietnam War. The hip younger generations may be clubbing on Saturday night, but their grandparents are flanking blackjack tables at the Ho-Chunk Casino in Baraboo. Skilled needlework embellished with silver coins and elaborate batik make up traditional Hmong textiles. The translucent ceremonial apron, or *xe*, may not make an appearance, but comfortable flowing separates and a fannypack bursting with bills comprise classic Hmong gambling attire.

THE MACHINE: Oddly, local casinos put no effort into immortalizing Hmong culture in their slots, but broad Asian themes include Thai Treasures, Samurai Master, and Maiko which feature geishas, lotus blossoms, and fans, fans, fans. I notice many Hmong people avoid these options in favor of the Pat Sajak tested, Vanna White approved Wheel of Fortune slots.

THE MAN: Prince Valstar of Hobbitville (aka Your Office Computer Guy): Bemuddled and bevirgined, this sword and sorcery rogue of internet gaming rides his valiant steed (or Toyota Corolla) to Bowler Casino so that he may roll the dice on behalf of his fair maiden, Thy Mistress Right Hand. His T-shirt bears a Frazzetta painting of a muscled man in loin cloth battling a fanged beast while a woman of pulchritudinous butt and bosom crouches lustily before her lord. He bears the dual curse of being a medieval warrior born in the wrong era and a strapping gladiator born in the wrong body.

THE MACHINE: These fellows gravitate towards slots that focus on lost civilizations such as Golden Incas, Pompeii, or Aztec Sun. They are also slump-shouldered over the “Max Bet” buttons of Enchanted Forest, Norse Warrior, or anything with jester imagery.

THE MAN: Chief My-Dream-Catcher-Is-An-Air-Freshener: Members of tribal communities attempt to represent with braids, boots, and turquoise bolas, but there is a sense among those active in Indian Country that the flow of casino money does not trickle down to the reservation. Native American hiring practices are laudable, but the end benefit of casino culture on individual tribes is open to debate. Images of Indian

kitsch clash with economic realities. A Chickasaw single mother hopes for federal funding that extends beyond three neon arrowheads lining up on a fetish-themed slot.

THE MACHINE: Native gamblers are rarely seen feeding twenties into Wolf Spirit, with its howling coyotes wearing bandannas or kokopelli playing penis-like flutes. They are often on the other side of the cashier cage.

THE MAN: The Last Cowboy: Snap shirts, straw hats, and Wranglers are worn by the final barbed wire fence men of America's wild frontier. These rugged individualists have braved wars spanning back to Custer's last stand, ridden the rails, made deals with devils at the crossroads, and shot a kennel of Old Yellers back at the farm. They remember the Alamo. Their wives gain a few pounds and strike oil on US soil just by wearing high heels.

THE MACHINE: Stampede, Rawhide, or Delta Belle appeal to these Lone Star ropers. They tend to avoid anything metro, such as machines programmed with strobe lights and techno music.

Current trends turn away from the old and fat, but old money and fat wallets are always in style. As Dylan Thomas should have written, good men, the last wave by, crying how bright the lights of the casino. Their frail deeds may have danced in Green Bay. I hope each and every one of them yanking the balled handle of a slot machine rages and rages against the dying light.

TRIED: I tried out the weirdest fringe diet I have ever attempted and lost ten pounds. The bizarre plan was to eat smaller portions and walk more. Initially disappointed with the lack of deprivation, expensive gadgets, invasive lifestyle shift, and complete absence of journals or charts, I yielded to the cutting edge concept.

TRUE: I replaced department store rouge for two glasses of Almaden and a bike ride through the country. My cheeks were just as pink for half the price.

TIRED: Costly cellulite treatments are out! If dimples are cute for your face, they should be twice as cute for your ass.

TRENDY: Emotionally revealing looks highlight your hottest internal features.