



Cherry Picker: A Literate Look at Losing at the Slots

Mark Shechner

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Aren't we all following personal yellow brick roads to Las Vegas? Hasn't everyone experienced some version of Dorothy's surprise in *The Wizard of Oz* of not being in Kansas anymore?

Cherry Picker author Mark Shechner, the quintessential Jewish intellectual, university English and writing professor, and literature scholar, never feels more ordinary and all-American than when he's anonymized in the hordes crowding Las Vegas and casinos throughout the world, human hives that, for tens of millions of bees, are as fragrant as giant pots of nectar.

Moreover, as a decades-long machine player, he's experienced a lifetime of the derision projected on those who feed the slot beast and endow it with its enormous wealth.

Yet, Shechner argues eloquently, the hotels were built on the rake-off from gambling—from the high rollers at the blackjack and crap tables, the poker players betting the house on the river, and the baccarat players doing some hellacious hoodoo with stacks of chips at the ready, but mostly from the masses bathing themselves in the Ganges of slots, making up for their lack of sophistication by the sheer volume of their play.

Cherry Picker is an ode, an anthem, a psalm for Shechner's fellow krill along the whale trail, fellow suckers and pishers, chumps and chimps, senior citizens and Chinese tour groups, chasers of the blazing seven, the double diamond, the wild cherries, slot heads all, whose pennies and nickels and quarters built the casino megalith and who have, pundits and sociologists and do-gooders notwithstanding, have no desire to give up that small dimension of recklessness that adds a little spice to their lives.

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