

Double issue!

*News on BLACKJACK
and other good bets!*

21 NEWS

VOLUME 1
NUMBER 3
MARCH/APRIL 1991
PRICE FREE!*
*via e-mail



Also:

- *Shuffle-tracking a single deck*
- *Ups and downs of bankrolls*
- *How to play over/under*
- *Card-counting in Red Dog*

INSIDE

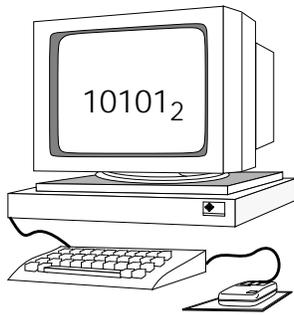
FEATURE ARTICLES

- Jacko's Philosophy3
"Blackjack" in Massachusetts4
Las Vegas vs. Reno4
Blackjack in Montana4
Tracking the Single Decker6
The Ups and Downs of Bankrolls5
FIVE CARD GRIFFIN8
Over/Under Strategy ..11
Red Dog ..14
Tournaments ..14

REGULAR COLUMNS

- 2....Mike's Philosophy
2....Oops
11....Product Reviews
15....BLACKJACK CONDITIONS
15..... Las Vegas
21..... Reno
24..... Atlantic City
25..... Minnesota
25..... Washington
26..... Canada
27..... Bahamas
27..... Cruise Ships
28....Getting There and Staying There
32....Other Voices

21 NEWS



21 NEWS is by and for a computer networked group of blackjack players. This non-profit publication is composed of direct submissions as well as edited excerpts from articles posted on computer bulletin boards or news groups. Contributions of articles and assistance are welcome and will be of benefit to all. It is published monthly or bimonthly.

21 NEWS is absolutely free when received electronically via computer mail. It is distributed in Postscript, which is a format understood by many printers. Get placed on the regular distribution list by sending e-mail to the address below.

21 NEWS discourages postal mailing of hard copies. A fee may be charged for postage and printing costs. Inquire to make arrangements.

21 NEWS charges \$0.00 per word for classified advertising. Block advertisements are \$0.00 per square inch. Advertisement space is allocated on the basis of availability and the editor's discretion.

;-) or :-) is a smiley face, meaning "ha ha"

21 NEWS circulation is 100+ world-wide.

USENET e-mail address:

21NEWS@ishmael.leis.bellcore.com

Postal mail address:

21 NEWS

P.O. Box 5901

Somerset, NJ 08875-5901

USA

© Copyright 1991. All rights reserved.

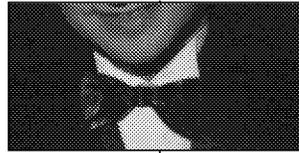
Editor and publisher: Michael Hall

Contributors: See attributions (in many cases computer addresses are used to protect the identity of an author.) Views of contributors are not necessarily those of the editor.

Mike's Philosophy

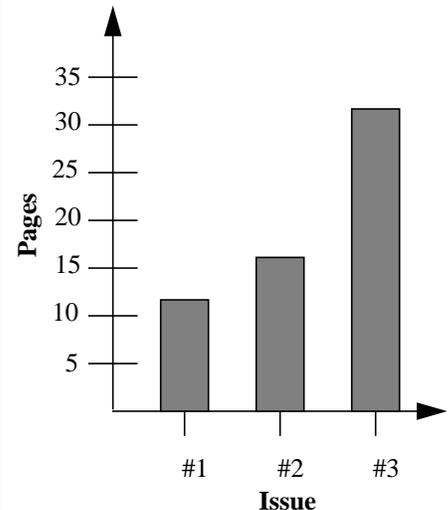
Michael Hall

I must say, I'm totally blown away. The quality and quantity of casino reports has improved immensely. Just look at all the



This graph shows the growth...

GROWTH IN PAGES FOR 21 NEWS



casino reports in this issue! We have very detailed coverage of Las Vegas, Reno, and Atlantic City plus tidbits from a lot of other places. No reports from Tahoe this time, but I guess I can't blame people for preferring Reno.

You may notice that there is some redundancy in the reports. I include redundant reports, so that you can see whether information is confirmed by multiple sources. In some cases, you'll see that there are contradictory reports.

Also, the less editing, the better, as far as I'm concerned.

The quality and quantity of articles has improved tremendously... so much so, that I had to cut out some very good articles from this issue, saving them for next time. The articles lost to the "cutting menu selection" included casino errors, which casino has the best cocktail waitresses, the ruin formula, and blackjack in Australia. If you have any thoughts you'd like to toss at these subjects, write them up and maybe I can include your thoughts in these articles.

On the other side of things, I have been making incremental improvements to the layout of **21 NEWS**. Any suggestions are welcome. For this issue, you'll note that I've introduced two different bars above articles - the solid bars, like the one above this article, indicate that it's a regular column. The fuzzy bars, like the one on the next page, indicate that it's a feature article.

I also merged and reformatted the columns on "Packages, Lodging, and Travel" and "Food, Freebies, & Fun." You'll now find all this information under "Getting There and Staying There" (page 28 of this issue.) The major grouping is now by city, with each category (i.e., Travel, Packages, etc.) repeated under each city.

Page 28... that reminds me. My how you've grown! 32 pages in this issue! This is getting up to Real Magazine Size.

My fear is that at this exponential rate, **21 NEWS** may be close to 60 pages next issue!

Actually, we may indeed get that kind of growth once I get hooked up to CompuServe and GENie, two other major computer networks.

Meanwhile, keep those casino reports and articles coming! ♣

Oops

The Editor

There were a few mistakes last issue (January/February, #2.) Here's the important ones:

- On page 9, a report for "Binion's" was listed, but this should have been included on page 10 under "Horseshoe Club." Same difference.
- On page 16, Vishal would like to correct his review of *Theory of Gambling and Statistical Logic*; the review says that the book does not discuss ruin or money-management, but it does. ♣

Jacko's Philosophy

jacko

It must be a full moon because all kinds of crazy ideas are coming out of the woodwork into the computer network. Here are some rambling comments about this and that.

Single Deck Game

Shuffle Tracking: Forget it. This game is so easy to beat to begin with.

3% Advantage: Cumulative over all your action? Forget it.

Penetration: No way you are going to see 90% or even 70% penetration in a heads up single deck game. At an average of 5.4 cards per round, you will probably get 5 rounds, 6 max. Playing 2 hands (8.1 cards/round), you might get 4 rounds if they're feeling charitable or the count is negative for the last round. The standard game is 3 rounds of 3 hands or 2 rounds of 4 hands or more. One time I had a dealer at the Horseshoe deal three rounds of four, until one time I bumped up my bet on the third round and that was the end of that. The moral of the story is that if you're stuck at a table with four players and empty spots, play extra hands. Avoid those tables downtown with only 5 playing spots. I doubt it's worth playing the 7 spot single deck games on the strip like the Frontier or Trop with bad doubling rules (although I think the Frontier stands on soft 17, if you believe what's printed on the felt) in preference to double-any single deck games.

Comps

How it Works: Assuming they think you're a "normal" player your comp rate is about half of your average bet per hour. The normal requirement for a room only comp at a lot of places on the Strip or in Atlantic City is 4 hours a day at a \$50 average bet. You should always get rated in Atlantic City, since you have absolutely nothing to lose. The worst case is that you get rated "3" (tight player) or worse yet "4" (undesirable). I got a "3"

last time in Atlantic City. Bummer. Lower comp rate. I think it probably makes sense to get up and leave a table after you have run through a positive shoe/deck and made some large bets so that the floorman will think you make higher average bets. If you depart from a negative shoe making table minimum bets, your rating will probably suffer. Leaving at a shuffle is kind of natural too.

Comps in Vegas: Getting rated in Vegas is a toss up. First off, rooms and food are cheap to begin with, so it's worth less to you. However, one idea is to approach the floorman after a big losing session and ask for a meal comp. This way he'll have to get your name and your losing session will go into his personal memory banks as well as the casino's institutional memory, the computer. Some places pound on you to get rated, others ignore you. Go with the flow. The Horseshoe gives out \$4 food comps at the drop of a hat. I doubt they'd even ask your name for that one. Remember that it's natural for a normal (losing) player to want to get rated and comped to recoup some of his playing losses. Only shifty card counters refuse ratings.

Rule of Thumb: They expect to win about 20% of your trip bankroll from you each visit (maybe less from day trippers to AC). Thus your buy-in at the table becomes a part of the formula used to determine your comp value to the house. It helps to pad this statistic somewhat. I suspect a guy who comes in with \$500 and plays to a \$100 average bet for four hours (i.e. gets lucky and isn't wiped out right away) isn't going to get comped as well as the same \$100 bettor with a \$5k buy-in.

Credit Line: It's generally easier to get comps when you have a credit line with the casino, however, once they approve you for a line, they will expect you to "play to the line" (i.e. make average bets commensurate with your credit line, i.e. 1% or 1.5% of your line) which is more pressure than I care to get involved with, personally.

Drinking in the Casino

Acting Drunk: In my opinion the "drunk act" has the greatest potential for playing unmolested or with the bosses' encouragement. My high rolling friend and card counter Mr. X put down the drunk act at the normally very tight Circus Circus over New Years and had them eating out of his hand. Of course, to do it right you have to really get drunk. Why not? You can still keep a good count. Especially at single deck, where you start over every other hand.

Staying Sober: If you don't like to drink or fear losing control (or really do lose control) then the way to act is not the Kalhua and Cream routine (where you drink just the cream on top - this fools nobody, especially at the Horseshoe). Instead, you want to look like a poker player who's taking a break at the 21 tables. Get Evian water or other bottled water. They understand that poker players don't booze it up. Hold your cards like a poker player would. This is not really a great "act" but it's somewhat internally consistent at least.

Tipping

Morality of Tipping: In Vegas, the dealers make not much more than minimum wage, plus the toke rate. Worse yet, the poor cocktail waitresses have to pay the sales tax on the price of your drinks out of their tip money! (As I understand it). So give these poor people a break and toss them some money once in a while. Don't stiff the poor cocktail waitress. I find that the best time to toke dealers is when nobody else is giving them anything. (Unfortunately this is often when they are winning!). Don't worry about impressing the floorman or any of that bullshit. *Just Do the Right Thing.*

Benefits of Tipping: A lot of the time, the dealer will find a way to make it up to you. Sadly AC dealers are hamstrung in this regard and generally unfriendly anyway, so they get less than Vegas dealers. Also, dealers get real irate

if you're a red or green chip player and they see you hoarding piles of silver on the table from your blackjack wins. They like to see that stuff getting bet for them. So if you're not going to give it to them or the cocktail waitress, get it off the table so at least their relief won't give you dirty looks too.

"Going South"

The above notwithstanding, a dealer I know told me that people who pocket chips really piss them off - *especially* credit customers. So if you're playing on a marker, or getting rated, it's probably a good idea not to do this, or certainly *do not get caught*. I guess it depends on the club. If they're assholes and don't tolerate winners, I suppose you'd have to.

Gambler or Counter?

How to Look Like a Gambler: It helps to show at least a passing interest in the other games in the casino, espe-

cially the sports book. It makes you look more like the compulsive gambler (that you really have become, anyway) and helps the dealers and floormen see you as a "regular guy", not some computer nerd card counter scum.

How to Look Like a Counter: By the way, do not *ever* back count a single or double deck game in Vegas. Dealers and floormen are incredibly alert to this, and will tag you as the lowest form of life on earth when they catch you doing it. Believe me, they'll remember you for a long time.

Money Management

Normal is Noticeable: I think normal card counter money management is kind of a give-away. Even if you mix up your bets they see you working in the same general range.

Wild is Wonderful: A better approach, I think, is to go hell-for-leather and look for an infrequent 10x win rather than trying to double or lose your bank-

roll each time out. When you feel a nice streak, stick your neck out and double or quadruple your unit size. If you get stung, fall back to your normal bet size. How many times have you been sitting there at the table playing for hours with no profit, when some bozo rolls up with a \$100 "money plays" and turns it into a few grand right in front of your eyes? When the dealer seems to be busting more than usual, or you've won 8 of the last 10 hands, or you're catching 10's every time you double, go for it. I think this has the nice result of making you look like more of a "gambler" - you probably end up with more losing sessions than usual which is also good for your cover, and when you win big they figure you "just got lucky". I'll bet you get better comps too - as well as the "hot babes" who come out of the woodwork when they see stacks of purple chips on the table.

That's about all I have to say right now. Take it or leave it. I hope you find this helpful. ♠

"Blackjack" in Massachusetts

irwin:

So I go into a convenience store tonight, to get some milk. I'm feeling lucky, so I figure, "What the hey, I'll buy myself a lottery ticket." Well, the Massachusetts Lottery Commission has about umpteen billion (give or take a couple) different types of the scratch-and-win type of lottery tickets. Since they didn't have one on craps (can't have the hot babes loitering around the convenience stores, now, can we?), I got the "Blackjack" ticket.

Game three: "your hand" - 15, "dealer's hand" - 16.

Hold the phone, Jackson!!!! The dealer's gotta hit that 16!

someone else:

I got one that was even worse: "your hand" - 11, "dealer's hand" - 12. I guess the people at the Mass. Lottery don't play Blackjack much. :-) ♠

Las Vegas vs. Reno

blackstock:

Reno is a lot like downtown Las Vegas - perhaps a bit smaller. The nice thing is that you can walk just about everywhere. Driving up and down the strip, and dashing across it on foot, really got to me. Downtown Reno is somewhat nicer than Downtown LV, too.

True, Reno has mostly D10/11 rules, but I don't know of a single casino there that doesn't offer a single deck game. The heat is generally less, and the penetration is better. The over/under bet is more widespread. The Flamingo Hilton in Reno has a better game than any I saw in Las Vegas. It's the only game I've ever seen that gives the player an advantage off the top. Bally's is right behind, with the only difference being that the dealer hits soft 17. For a comparison, the Bally's Reno game is actually better (because of DAS) than the Binion's game (and the penetration is better, too).

After a recent trip to Vegas, I'm starting to think that the Reno is a better place than Vegas to make money, especially if

you want to bet only nickels or dimes. That doesn't mean Reno is a better trip. Vegas certainly has more to offer for entertainment. And the blackjack there is certainly beatable. But I believe it may be more beatable in Reno. ♠

Blackjack in Montana

ieemd:

The Montana Legislature received a blackjack bill in the last few weeks. I am still waiting for my copy of the bill, so I don't know exactly what's in it. I do know that the game would have to be dealt from a 5 deck shoe and that a maximum bet limit will be around \$20.

The sponsors of the bill say that right now it doesn't have a very good chance of passing, but when the legislators begin discussing the budget they may find a need for extra revenue. That is when the bill will be pushed hard (about March).

Montana already has video poker and keno, live poker and keno, bingo, lottery, and horses.

More when I get the bill... ♠

The Ups and Downs of Bankrolls

Part 1

jacobs:

Here is some output from my simulator, for a very short run of 10 sessions of 10,000 hands each.

The conditions were as follows:

Cards are dealt from 1 deck with 71% penetration. Dealer must stand on any 17. Player may double-down only on first two-cards. Double-down allowed on soft hands. Pairs may be split 3 times. No double-down allowed after splitting pairs. Player may take insurance when dealer has an ace showing. Surrender is not allowed. Head-on play.

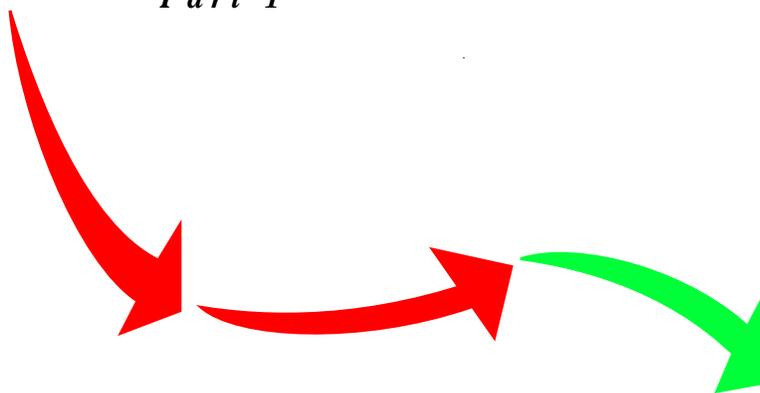
The first table to the right was obtained using a 4:1 bet spread (minimum bet of 2 units, maximum bet of 8 units.) As you can see, the results varied quite a bit between the different sessions, but the player came out ahead in each session. If more sessions were run, there would undoubtedly be some losing sessions. The average bets size was about 3.8 units, and overall gain was about 1%. A second run would probably give a significantly different value for overall gain. The columns labelled "low" and "high" show the extremes in the player's loss/profit during each session.

The results in the second table were obtained under the same playing conditions, but a flat bet of 2 units was used.

This time they overall result is slightly negative, but it is apparent from the individual sessions that the overall result is only accurate to about $\pm 0.5\%$. The player lost in 7 of the 10 sessions.

My whole point is that you can pick a good strategy, play it perfectly under realistic conditions, and still lose money. I consider 100,000 hands to be a realistic number of hands to play in some number of years, and what I'm curious about is what would my chance be of losing money over this kind of time scale.

If you could consistently get good playing conditions, then I would say your chance of coming out ahead after 100,000 hands is very good. However, you are likely to lose big time on many gambling trips during this time. ♠



Next time in Part 2 - what to expect for a single blackjack session

10 Rounds of 10,000 Hands with 4:1 Spread

round	action	bank	change	low	high	gain
1	44,206	892	892	-90	1055	2.0178%
2	44,462	1,411	519	-210	566	1.1673%
3	44,186	1,982	571	-397	573	1.2923%
4	43,286	2,506	524	-477	524	1.2106%
5	44,175	2,517	11	-122	731	0.0249%
6	43,387	2,844	327	-242	447	0.7537%
7	43,383	3,477	633	-129	693	1.4591%
8	43,464	4,020	543	-83	617	1.2493%
9	44,853	4,262	242	-353	298	0.5395%
10	44,378	4,473	211	-461	767	0.4755%
total	439,780	4,473	---	---	---	1.0171%

10 Rounds of 10,000 Hands with Flat Bets

round	action	bank	change	low	high	gain
1	22,956	-125	-125	-338	3	-0.5445%
2	22,916	-167	-42	-182	9	-0.1833%
3	22,952	115	282	-17	301	1.2287%
4	22,984	-222	-337	-337	55	-1.4662%
5	23,108	184	406	-13	473	1.7570%
6	22,897	32	-152	-168	171	-0.6638%
7	23,025	-8	-40	-194	81	-0.1737%
8	22,970	6	14	-56	172	0.0609%
9	23,020	-61	-67	-194	44	-0.2911%
10	23,045	-69	-8	-108	178	-0.0347%
total	229,873	-69	---	---	---	-0.0300%

Tracking the Single Decker

Michael Hall

I know someone who claims to successfully shuffle-track a single deck, making a profit with just flat-betting.

At first, my knee-jerk response was that the shuffle-tracking of the many decks outweighs the shuffle-tracking of the few or the one. After all, it takes only seven imperfect riff shuffles to randomize a single deck, but exponentially more shuffles to randomize multiple decks.

However, many casinos are moving to complicated zone shuffles and/or stutter shuffles to make shuffle-tracking of multiple decks difficult or impossible. Meanwhile, a typical single deck shuffle is riff, riff, fine strip, riff, riff, which is pretty thorough but possibly easy to track. Even if you can cut out just one little low card on average, this translates into a large advantage for single deck, while you need to cut out about $8+8=16$ low cards for an equivalent advantage on 8 decks (8 low cards for the true count of +1, plus another 8 to boost it to +2 to have the same percent advantage as single deck, because of the large negative basic strategy expectation for 8 decks.)

I have run computer simulations to study shuffle-tracking for single deck games. Although I intend to apply these

results to blackjack, the same results would also apply for poker, bridge, or any other card game played with a single deck.

I studied the RRSRR shuffle, which is Riff, Riff, Strip, Riff, Riff. The computer did the riffs by cutting the cards in half (± 2 cards) and then imperfectly interlacing them (66% 1 card dropped, 26% 2 cards, 5% 3 cards, 2% 4 cards, and 1% 5 cards.) The strip was accomplished by taking a random 3-5 cards off the top repeatedly, dropping the strips onto a pile, reversing the order of the cards except within each strip.

The shuffle was repeated 100,000 times. I then plotted the distributions of the cards.

Below and on the next page you'll find graphs for the RRSRR shuffle.

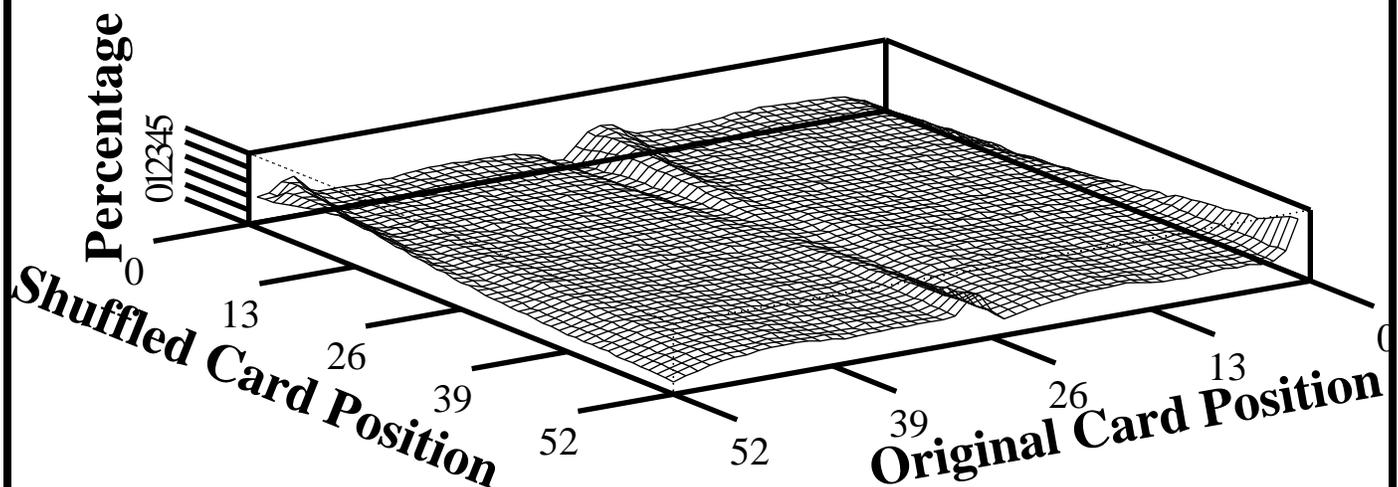
As an example of how to read the graphs, at (1,52) you'll find the number 5 on the numeric chart (top left hand corner). This means that about 5% of the time, the card at the very bottom position (1) will wind up at the very top (52). On the 3D plot, this is represented as the peak at the right side.

What you should note from this is that you can track certain cards accurately.

You can, with some confidence, cut in or out of play the card that was on the bottom before the shuffle (i.e., the burn card.) For example, suppose the dealer does not deal the last 20 cards. If the bottom card was a "10", then you should cut as close to the bottom as they allow; cutting off 10 cards will give you about a 75% chance of cutting the "10" card in to play. If the bottom card was a "5", then you should cut 20 cards off the top, which gives you about a 60% chance of cutting the "5" out of play.

Unfortunately, you rarely know the value of the bottom card (except in Reno where the first card is not burned), and the other cards aren't so predictable. Aside from a few cards at the top, bottom, and middle, the cards are essentially randomly ordered; the abundance of 2's in the chart on the next page is an indication of the even, random distribution, because $100\%/52$ is about 2%. This is not just an artifact of rounding; you see the essentially the same thing on the higher resolution 3D graph below. This randomness is perhaps not too surprising, because there are theoretical results "proving" that 7 imperfect riffs are sufficient to randomly order a single deck.

3D Distribution of Cards with RRSRR Shuffle



FIVE CARD GRIFFIN

Michael Hall
Steve Markowitz

The Five Card Griffin can now be found at Resorts in Atlantic City. A Five Card Griffin is just a 2:1 payoff bonus for getting exactly 21 on exactly five cards when the dealer does not also have 21. (When the dealer has 3+ card 21 or blackjack, a player's Five Card Griffin pushes or loses, respectively.) This rule is also known as "5 Card 21."

The authors have written analytic and simulation software to determine how best to play with this rule and how much it's worth. The charts associated with this article summarize these findings.

It turns out that the Five Card Griffin is a decent bonus - not a worthless gimmick. The other rule variation currently available in Atlantic City is late surrender. Basic strategists will find Griffins much more valuable than surrender, while card counters will find Griffins a

bit less valuable than surrender. The value of these options is summarized in the table "Gains from Griffins and Surrender."

The table below, "A Comparison of the Effects of AC Options on Advantage, Profit and Risk," gives you a detailed look at the simulation results. Advantage is the total amount won divided by the total amount bet. Profit is the average win. Risk is shown by giving the chance of doubling 500 units before going broke; the risk of ruin before doubling is just 100 minus this number.

As you can see on the facing page in a table, "Gain from Griffins at Various Counts," Griffins are more valuable at lower counts. This is simply because they are more common when there are lots of low cards left; however, this does not mean you should increase your bet

during negative counts, as the gain from Griffins just isn't big enough to justify that.

The simulations realistically recreated the Resorts shuffle; this shuffle is described in a box on the next page. The penetration used was 75%, but lately Resorts has slipped back to their old habit of giving just 60% penetration, which isn't doing them or us any good.

For a thorough discussion of these findings, we refer you to our article in the March 1991 issue of *Blackjack Confidential*.

The proper strategy to use with the Five Card Griffin rule is shown on the next page for basic strategists. (Use normal basic strategy for situations not indicated.) Strategy adjustments for card counters are shown on the subsequent page, for High-Low and Hi-Opt I counts.

A Comparison of the Effects of AC Options on Advantage, Profit, and Risk

8 Decks, 75% penetration, realistic simulation of Resorts shuffle,
7 players, 100 million hands apiece, AC rules

Rules	Basic Strategy, Flat Bets			Counting, 1-8 Spread		
	Percent Advantage (±.01)	Profit per 100 hands (±.01)	% double 500 units (±.4)	Percent Advantage (±.02)	Profit per 100 hands (±.02)	% double 500 units (±.4)
AC	-.47	-.53	2.6	+.48	+0.9	81.5
AC+Griffin	-.31/-.29	-.35/-.32	7.8/8.0	+.61/+.63	+1.2/+1.2	86.9/87.4
AC+Surrender	-.40	-.45	3.7	+.66	+1.3	89.3

Note: When there is a slash dividing two numbers, the first is the result of regular basic strategy, and the latter is the result of using proper 4 card strategy, as described in this article. The results in the basic strategy columns were with basic strategy and flat bets, while the results in the counting columns were with High-Low count, 1-8 spread and strategy adjustments -1 to +10, leaving the table when the count hit -1.

Four card basic strategy with Five Card Griffin

- Always hit hard 12.
- Hit hard 13 against everything except 4, 5, and 6.
- Hit soft 18 against everything except 6, 7, and 8.

Two card basic strategy with Five Card Griffin

- Hit soft 13 (A-2) versus 5, instead of doubling.



Gain from Griffins at Various Counts (in percent)

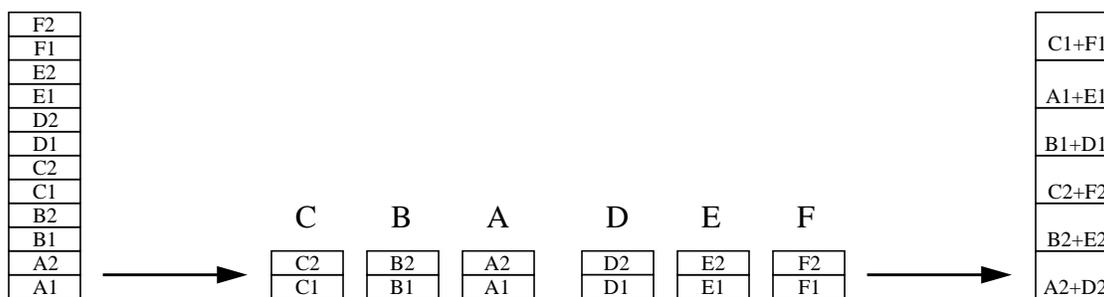
True Count	Counting Method	
	High-Low	Hi-Opt
+10	.07	.06
+9	.08	.06
+8	.09	.07
+7	.10	.09
+6	.11	.10
+5	.12	.11
+4	.14	.13
+3	.15	.15
+2	.16	.16
+1	.18	.17
0	.19	.19
-1	.20	.20
-2	.22	.22
-3	.24	.25
-4	.26	.28
-5	.29	.32
-6	.32	.36
-7	.36	.41
-8	.40	.46
-9	.44	.51
-10	.49	.58

Gain from Griffin and Surrender (in percent)

Rules/Strategy	Basic Strategist +-.015	Card Counter +-.03
Griffin with regular strategy	.16	.13
Griffin with proper strategy	.18	.15
Late surrender	.07	.18

Six Zone Random Pick Shuffle

Resorts as of February 1991 (also TropWorld) is using a six zone shuffle described here and emulated by my realistic shuffle blackjack simulator. Unplayed cards (approximately 2 decks) are plugged into discards (approximately 6 decks) in three random spots. The eight decks are cut in two, usually to the dealer's right. Then each pile is broken into three as shown in the figure.



Half of one of the piles A, B, or C (dealer's random choice) is shuffled with half of one of the piles D, E, or F (dealer's random choice). The cards are shuffled with two riffs and the result is placed in the "done" pile. This process repeats until all the cards are in the "done" pile. The "done" pile to the right in the diagram represents the results of one possible order of picks.

4 Card Hand Hit/Stand Strategy Adjustments

8 decks, Atlantic City Rules plus Five Card Griffin

High-Low (2-6 = +1; 7-9 = 0; 10-A = -1)

Player's Total	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Hard 18	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Hard 17	S	S	S	S	S	S	-8	-9	S	-1
Hard 16	-5	-7	-8	-9	-10	H	H	H	+10	H
Hard 15	-2	-4	-5	-6	-7	H	H	H	H	H
Hard 14	-0	-1	-3	-4	-4	H	H	H	H	H
Hard 13	+4	+2	-0	-1	-1	H	H	H	H	H
Hard 12	+8	+6	+4	+3	+4	H	H	H	H	H
Soft 19+	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Soft 18	H	H	H	H	-8	S	-1	H	H	H
Soft 17	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

Hi-Opt I (3-6 = +1; 2,7-9,A = 0; 10 = -1)

Player's Total	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Hard 18	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Hard 17	S	S	S	S	S	S	-7	-7	-10	-1
Hard 16	-4	-5	-6	-8	-7	H	H	+10	+7	+10
Hard 15	-2	-3	-4	-5	-5	H	H	H	+9	+10
Hard 14	-0	-1	-2	-4	-3	H	H	H	H	H
Hard 13	+3	+2	-0	-1	-1	H	H	H	H	H
Hard 12	+6	+5	+3	+2	+3	H	H	H	H	H
Soft 19	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	+10 *	S
Soft 18	H	H	H	H	-8	S	-0	H	H	H
Soft 17	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	H

* Hit when count is greater than +10

Note: Stand if the true count is above the listed number or if there is an "S"; hit when the true count is below the listed number or when there is an "H". The exception to this rule is Soft 19 vs. 10 on the Hi-Opt I chart. Basic strategy is to stand four card hard 13 versus 4, stand on four card 14 versus 2, and stand soft 18 versus 8.



Product Reviews

Over/Under Report

hall:

The Over/Under Report by Arnold Snyder is available for \$29.00, plus \$4 for shipping and handling, from RGE, 414 Santa Clara Ave., Oakland, CA 94610.

This is 17 pages printed on a single side and stapled together. In this sense, it is definitely a disappointment. But we shouldn't judge a book by its cover (or lack there of.)

Here's what you get:

- effects of card removal on o/u bets
- correlations of many popular counting systems to over and under bets
- correlations of six o/u systems
- recommendation of the "Over/Under Count" (A,2,3,4 = +1; 10 = -1)
- hit/stand strategy adjustments and insurance cut-off for over/under
- value of each over/under true count point compared to normal true count
- advantage for blackjack, over, and under bets for each true count
- combined advantage for blackjack, over, and under bets
- frequency of true counts for 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 decks, 65%, 75%, 85% penetration
- estimates of player advantage for flat betting, 1-2 spread, 1-4 spread

The charts with advantage and frequency of true counts for 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 decks, 65%, 75%, 85% penetration are valuable. They will let you estimate your advantage for whatever betting scheme you choose for those numbers of decks and those penetrations. It's a poor man's computer simulator, if you will.

From a purely practical view, I doubt if the Over/Under Report is going to pay for itself for many people. Of course, if you are a big-time over/under player, then any little bit of information could save you lots of money in the long run. So, the \$29 comes cheap to some, and to others it's just too expensive. ♠

Over/Under Strategy

ginsberg, jj, and hall

hall:

You may place up to the amount of your blackjack bet on the over/under side bet. If you predict whether your first 2 cards are over or under 13, then you win. Ace counts as 1 for this bet.

ginsberg:

Here are the results of an afternoon's analysis on over/under.

The first thing I did was to compute, for a single deck, exactly what the likely sums were for two cards selected at random; it turns out that on a clean deck, your chance of winning the over bet is .466 and your chance on under is .449.

Next, I modified the deck to include one more/one fewer of each of the various ranks, and recomputed the chances of winning. Since I wanted to have a *single* number for each rank, and the effects on the over and the under bets are different, I weighted the over bet by a factor of 2.5 relative to the under bet, since you are about 2.5 times as likely to make the over bet. I also assumed that seeing cards below 7 was good for over, and seeing cards 7 or above was good for under. (This isn't quite right; it turns out that taking a single 6 out helps *both* bets!) Here is the effect on the over bet of removing each card:

<u>card effect</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	
A	.019	+3	+2	+1
2	.019	+3	+2	+1
3	.016	+3	+2	+1
4	.006	+1	0	+1
5	.003	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	0
7	-.003	0	0	0
8	-.006	-1	-1	0
9	-.009	-1	-1	0
10	-.012	-2	-1	-1

Columns "A", "B", and "C" are three different systems for over/under - the integer values approximate the true ones.

To decide when to bet, I included the fact that the effects on over and under are different. For count A, the break-even points are +3.66 for an over bet and -5.30

for an under bet. So you should bet when the count hits +4 or -6.

For count B, the break-evens are at +6.09 and -8.83. Since the count being +6 really means that it's somewhere between +5.5 and +6.5, you shouldn't bet at +6, though. Bet at +7 and -9.

hall:

Snyder recommends Count C, which is his "Over/Under Count". It's easier, plus it has a better insurance correlation (same as Hi-Opt I.)

For this count, you should bet on under for counts of -4 or lower, and on over for counts +3 and up. You should raise your bet size for counts of -5 or lower and for counts of +3 and higher.

Insurance should be taken for counts of +3 and up, just like Hi-Opt I. Each over/under true count is worth a whopping 2.70% for over and 2.58% for under and .35% for blackjack; compare this to a High-Low or Hi-Opt I true count point, which is worth .5% for blackjack (and is not very good for over/under at all.) For the over/under count, when you average the over/under advantage together with the blackjack advantage, you wind up with more like 1% advantage for each positive over/under count, and a .5% advantage for each negative over/under count (though it's not a very linear function.)

jj:

The over/under count (A234 = +1, X = -1) has only a 0.60 blackjack betting correlation, a 0.85 insurance correlation, and a 47% playing efficiency. Playing variations are not going to provide much gain with only a 47% efficiency. But on the next two pages, you'll find the single-deck strategy variations that I derived.

hall:

Over/under strategy adjustments for late surrender can be found in the March 1991 issue of *Blackjack Forum* (also that issue has an unbalanced over/under count.)

Over/Under Strategy Adjustments (For Single Deck, Pair Hands)

Split Pair?

Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
AA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	>-8	>-6	>-6	>-7	>-3
XX	>+23	>+18	>+13	>+7	>+6	N	N	N	N	N
99	>-1	>-2	>-4	>-7	>-6	N	>-17	>-13	N	>+5
88	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	<+7	<+3	>-3
77	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	<-2	N	N	N
66	>-2	>-4	>-7	Y	Y	<-0	<-7	N	N	N
55	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
44	N	N	N	>+6	>+5	N	N	N	N	N
33	>+15	>+4	>-3	>-6	>-6	Y	<-27	<-35	<-28	N
22	N	Y	>-8	>-5	>-6	<+32	<-18	<-26	<-26	N

Double Pair?

Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
55	>-15	>-18	>-20	>-24	>-22	>-10	>-7	>-4	>+3	>+2
44	>+15	>+11	>+7	>+2	>+1	>+14	N	N	N	N

Hit Pair?

Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
AA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
XX	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
99	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
88	<-7	<-8	<-9	<-10	<-9	<+9	<+10	<+3	<+0	<+4
77	<-7	<-8	<-10	<-10	<-10	<+11	<+17	<+11	<-3	<+4
66	<+2	<+0	<-1	<-3	<-3	<+43	<+39	<+29	<+41	<+20
55	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
44	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
33	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
22	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Over/Under Strategy Adjustments

(For Single Deck, Non-Pair Hands)

Double Soft Hand?										
Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
A9	>+14	>+12	>+10	>+6	>+5	N	N	N	N	N
A8	>+14	>+7	>+5	>+1	>+0	N	N	N	N	N
A7	>+4	>-2	>-17	>-16	>-15	N	<-27	N	N	N
A6	>+0	>-8	>-14	>-22	>-15	>+17	N	N	N	N
A5	>+11	>+5	>-2	>-7	>-9	N	N	N	N	N
A4	>+16	>+5	>+1	>-4	>-5	N	N	N	N	N
A3	>+8	>+5	>+1	>-3	>-3	N	N	N	N	N
A2	>+9	>+6	>+2	>-1	>-2	N	N	N	N	N

Hit Soft Hand?										
Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
A7	N	N	N	N	N	N	<-7	<+21	<+13	<+7
A6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	<+11	Y	Y	Y	Y
A2-A5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Double Hard Hand?										
Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
11	>-12	>-14	>-16	>-18	>-17	>-7	>-5	>-3	>-4	>-1
10	>-13	>-15	>-17	>-20	>-18	>-7	>-4	>-1	>+8	>+4
9	>+1	>-1	>-4	>-7	>-7	>+3	>+8	N	N	N
8	>+13	>+10	>+7	>+2	>+2	>+14	N	N	N	N
7	N	>+18	>+13	>+9	>+7	N	N	N	N	N

Hit Hard Hand?										
Player's Hand	Dealer's Upcard									
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
17	<-17	<-18	<-19	<-17	<-17	<-15	<-7	<-11	<-18	<-3
16	<-8	<-9	<-10	<-12	<-10	<+6	<+6	<+3	<+0	<+4
15	<-6	<-7	<-9	<-10	<-10	<+11	<+12	<+9	<+6	<+7
14	<-3	<-5	<-6	<-8	<-9	<+15	<+23	<+18	<+18	<+12
13	<-0	<-1	<-3	<-5	<-6	<+30	<+30	<+28	<+29	<+17
12	<+4	<+3	<+1	<-2	<-3	<+47	<+41	<+29	<+41	<+23
2-11	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Red Dog

j a c o b s a n d d g 1 0 +

jacobs:

I wrote a program to track the cards and play "perfect" Red Dog. Single deck Red Dog can be beat by computer if they will let you use a 25:1 bet spread. The "perfect" strategy needs at least a 10:1 bet spread just to break even, and this is only for single deck games. I don't have a counting strategy for it, and I'm not sure one exists that is applicable by humans. It is not nearly as favorable as the over/under bet, and becomes much more difficult to beat as more decks are used. Ironically, the house edge from "basic strategy" play of Red Dog decreases as more decks are used.

The house edge for a 5 deck game is only 2.83%, so the expected return is about 0.972. With a 25:1 bet spread, the perfect strategy can get about 0.5% advantage against the 5 deck game. Good luck getting away with a 25:1 spread.

Red Dog isn't as "linear" as blackjack, because the player edge drops significantly whenever enough cards of any one denomination are removed such that it is no longer possible to get an 11:1 pay-

off for trips. The other twist is that any card can either help or hurt the player, depending on when it shows up. As a result, the favorability of the cards is much more dependent on the exact composition of the deck, and none of the cards can really be identified as "always good" or "always bad".

dg10+:

I put together a spreadsheet that works out the exact (dis)advantage of red dog given the composition of the deck. (The game is simple enough to get the exact odds without any simulations).

Some results are: (some of which were previously noted by Jacobs)

The disadvantage (with 5 decks) is about 2.8%.

The cards that are favorable to the dealer are 2,3,K,A The cards that are favorable to the player are 5,6,7,8,9,10,J 4 and Q are neutral (Notice the symmetry: if you think about it, the symmetry is obvious.) The cards that have the most impact are the 2 and A.

The effect of pulling out one 2 or A

from a single deck game is to increase your advantage by about .7% (or $.7/n$ for an n deck game) So, you would have to pull out *all* of the 2's to make it an even game.

The advantage of pulling out a 3 or K is about .2%. The advantage of pulling out a 5 or J is about -.2%. The advantage of pulling out a 6-10 is about -.3%.

So clearly, the 2's and A's have the greatest impact! The point is that theoretically counting can work, but the biggest difference between counting blackjack and red dog is that in BJ you have to overcome an initial disadvantage of 0.5%, and in red dog you have to overcome a huge 2.8% disadvantage.

Disclaimer: My calculations assume the use of basic strategy throughout (e.g., double when high card - low card is greater than or equal to 8.) Clearly your advantage can go up if you adjust your strategy to reflect the current deck composition. I'll work on this in the near future.

I'd like to devise a relatively simple count system and try some simulations.♠

Tournaments

m b n , m a n n y s , a n d h a l l

m b n :

I've never played in a tournament, but may perhaps enter an upcoming one at Bally's (Reno). Here are the rules (from the flyer): \$300 entry fee (no additional buy-in required) Each round consists of 30 hands A rotating puck is used to determine first base The top two players from each table advance into the 2nd and 3rd rounds Optional re-entry fee is \$150. Top two players from each table in the Re-entry Round also advance into Round 2.

They don't say how many players at each table. There are three preliminary rounds and a Final Round. Top prize is \$20,000, scaling down to 6th-20th places getting \$600 each. (Total prize fund is \$50,000, based on 140 entries and 60 re-entries.)

m a n n y s :

I think I've found a great beginner tournament. It's in Carson City at the Ormsby House, held monthly on the fourth thursday. I have called for *all* the details. Here is what I have so far:

Registration at 4PM. Tournament starts at 7PM Buy in of \$25 gets you \$500 in tournament chips. An additional buy in of \$20 for \$500 in tournament chips is allowed. Winner gets 60% of all entrance fees.

What I don't know: How long the tournament lasts? If there is more than 1 round? Any restriction on number of players? When can you get the additional buy-in? Do 2nd and 3rd place pay anything?

Overall, this sounds like a lot of fun. For the \$25 buy in, you get true nickel

chips (as in \$.05 on the dollar). That's sort of like playing with Monopoly money. I could go for that. And if the tournament is played at a minimum \$5, that's like a 25 cent minimum. I like it.

Anyway, I'll have to wait for the flyer for all the info.

Since wild betting is almost a rule in blackjack tournaments, I wonder if there are players who join the tournament just so that they can get 1-50 or 1-100 betting spreads without heat? JA Nugget in Sparks has a blackjack tournament with entry fee of \$1000, and you need a \$300 buy in for each round (3 rounds I believe).

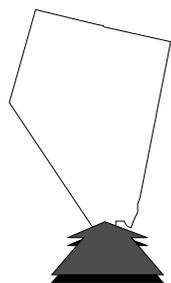
h a l l :

Blackjack Confidential lists dozens of tournaments in each issue. ♠

BLACKJACK CONDITIONS

The blackjack conditions here were observed during the months of February and March. The symbols give a summary. Good, so-so, or bad condition symbols refer to casinos that are good, so-so, or bad for normal card counters. This does not necessarily include casinos that are good, so-so, or bad for basic strategists, over/under counters, shuffle-trackers, etc.

Las Vegas



Barbary Coast
Circus Circus
El Cortez
El Rancho
Flamingo Hilton
 *Four Queens*
Fremont
Horseshoe
LV Hilton
Maxim
Rio
Westward Ho

 *Excalibur*
Golden Gate
Mirage
Western

 *Dunes*
Fitzgerald's
Frontier
Golden Nugget
Holiday
Las Vegas Club
O'Shea's
Pioneer
Riviera

 *Barbary Coast*
El Cortez
Golden Nugget
Horseshoe
Union Plaza

 *Caesars Palace*
Golden Nugget

 *Alladin*
Lady Luck

Conditions Legend



Good conditions



So-so conditions



Bad conditions



Heat



Over/under bet



Double exposure

irwin:

The LV Hilton and Rio seemed to have the best playing conditions. I didn't ask about the rules as each casino, so one that I don't have listed as having DAS or RSA may indeed have them, it's just that I didn't observe them.

hall:

All I can say is that the conditions in Vegas are good for card counters, but there is a fair amount of counter-paranoia on the single deck games. I strongly recommend not increasing your bet very often, if at all, after the top of the deck. Of course, you sacrifice advantage and increase the risk of ruin by doing this, but it's better than getting barred. They seem to have a knee-jerk response to increasing bets after the first deal, while they are oblivious to decreasing bets.

Keep notes of when and where you play and how well you did, and then return during different shifts. Occasionally play through a deck using just regular basic strategy, looking at the cocktail waitresses or anything except the cards. Freeze your betting level if the pit boss starts watching. Use all sorts of different betting styles to confuse them; betting large at the top of the deck and reducing if the count goes bad is a good approach, but even then you should mix it up a little, so that they don't lock on to your pattern. It might be best to play the double deckers at casinos where there are single deckers; this way you can get away with a decent spread, while the elite pit personnel are sweating over the single deckers.

You can find head-on play at both single and double deckers at odd hours...

you probably won't play head-on for very long at one time, but people will come and go, giving you head-on play maybe 33% of the time, two players 33%, and three or more players 33%. Penetration on both single and double deckers is 70-75% at best, 50-66% at worst.

Barbary Coast

blackstock:

I know, I know, you get barred here for betting nickels and dimes. But I wanted to take some money from them. 2-deck, Strip rules + DAS [-.28%]. I jumped into a game with a positive count and left with a negative (about 10 minutes later), bet flat, and walked away \$5 richer.

hall:

75% penetration on double deckers, strip rules, no peeking under 10's, and I can't remember if you can double after splits. I experienced no heat or attention from the pit, despite the reputation of the Barbary Coast. However, the dealer here was extremely nasty. My wife was playing by my side for the first time, and she was having problems with the face down game rules - she was doing things like picking her bet up and putting it on top of her cards when she stood, instead of just leaving the cards beside the bet if they didn't slide under. The dealer repeatedly snapped harshly at my wife for such mistakes. My wife remarked that it was very different than in Atlantic City, and the dealer quipped, "We like to think that the players in Vegas are intelligent." (For the record, my wife is intelligent - she just

didn't know the face down rules.) My wife also froze under the pressure of having to apply basic strategy in a casino for the first time, so I had to give her lots of strategy advice; I had feared that this might attract attention from the pit, but perhaps it had the opposite effect. After all, card counters don't bring their dumb blond babes/wives with them to the casinos ;-)

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, 60-70% penetration. (Don't remember if they still have surrender.)

I headed over to the Barbary Coast, to see if their buddies at the Union Plaza sent them my picture. I played for about an hour, with 2 floormen watching me pretty intently. I left with a 20 unit win. Instead of cashing in the chips there, I take them with me to the Maxim, where I exchange 25 of the 40 units in BC chips for Maxim chips, as a buy-in. I've decided that this is the fastest way to leave a casino, and they won't have quite as good a handle on how much you've won.

Caesars Palace

blackstock:

I'd heard about "the best game in the world" at Caesar's, but I didn't find it now. They did have 4-deck over/under shoes, which I made 5 bucks on. (Standard strip rules + DAS). *[I believe these are 6-deck over/under shoes, not 4-deck -ed.]* The only hand-held games were 2-deck \$25 minimums.

jdt:

I wandered through Caesars one afternoon (Monday) and they had several tables of 6 deck with over/under for \$2 and 3 minimums. Other tables were \$5 and \$10. There seems to be only one pit with over under.

Circus Circus

hall:

2 rounds dealt to 7 spots on single deckers, strip rules, no peeking under 10's, \$1 minimum minimums. There is a sign that makes me suspicious that they may be using a modified "dealer's blackjack takes all" rule. Ask about it before

you split 8's or aces versus dealer 10. This is a decent game, especially for the low budget player. You will not get in many hands per hour, and you can play for \$1 minimums, with a pretty good constant advantage - you could probably last a whole weekend with a \$50 bankroll, spreading \$1-\$2, if you wish. On the other hand, there's absolutely, positively no heat, so higher stakes players may find this a good place to make a slow but reasonable profit. Note that 7 spots means ~42 cards are dealt out by the second round, so you can use strategy adjustments effectively towards third base, though only ~21 cards are seen for your second bet, and the game is face down so you won't see all those ~42 cards until after the second round is over.

msh:

My friend John and I arrived in Las Vegas about 1:00 in the morning after an 8 hour drive from Santa Barbara. There were two major delays due to a mudslide and snow flurries on the way. After checking in to the Frontier, we walked down the street to Circus Circus.

The blackjack tables seemed very crowded for early morning on a Thursday. They have 1-2 deck and shoe games, standard Strip rules, penetration varies depending greatly on the dealer. The only place with two seats open was a 6 deck shoe game. There were very few discards, so it must have been soon after the last shuffle. As I played, a tremendous number of tens came out. After about three decks played, the true count was nearing -10. At this point I was completely amazed to see the cut card come out. They were dealing a six deck shoe, face down, with only 50% penetration! The shuffle was very simple; the discards and the played cards (each three decks) were mixed, about 35 cards from each at a time, with a few riffs and a strip. It looked very easy to track, but I'd never done any shuffle-tracking, so I decided playing a six deck shoe with 50% penetration was not a winning proposition.

I found a seat at a two deck, \$5 minimum game. The table was full, so conditions were not optimal. The penetration was generally about 75%. I was playing Hi-Lo with a 1-4 (\$5-\$20) spread, and doing most of the +6 to -6 strategy vari-

ations for hit-stand, and hard double. My luck was incredible, however. I was tipping liberally, drinking moderately, and started to bet a green chip occasionally. I was up nearly \$250 in a couple of hours. I was winning so fast that it was impossible to camouflage the fact. A new dealer, after I happened to bet a green chip off the top of the deck, called "green plays", and then "green pays" when it won. That was the extent of the attention I received. Before leaving I went back to a \$2 minimum two-deck game, where there was a guy playing beside his three stuffed animals. I don't think he was an expert, because he tried to split a 9-Q. The dealer not-so-kindly explained that you had to have a pair to split. About daylight we walked back to the Frontier in the rain. I think it odd that the walk is only about a block; it seemed much longer when I was sober.

Later I returned to Circus-Circus. The only seat I could find turned out to be a 1 deck, standard strip rules game. This is a dead even game for a basic strategy player. Could this be the best game in Vegas?

I was just inside of third base, where a guy was toking more than he was betting for himself. Before long, he tapped out and left. When the relief dealer came, Pam, the original dealer, colored up about \$100 in tips! When Pam came back, everybody kidded her, because she didn't even ask the guy what his name was. Later, a new deck was brought in.

The pit boss examined the fronts and backs for defects, the dealer did three riffs, and then offered the cut. No wash, no strips, just *three riffs*. I immediately remember I read somewhere that three perfect shuffles of a new deck has a 30% advantage for the player (five perfect shuffles gives a 50% advantage to the house). I have no idea what three fairly sloppy looking shuffles do, but it makes me very nervous. Your humble narrator flat bet the minimum for about 20 rounds, and didn't notice a trend one way or the other.

[There is probably no reason to fear a new deck in a single deck game. In Blackjack Forum, Snyder's article "Ruffled by the Shuffle" states that two perfect riffs result in an expectation .08% worse, while three imperfect riffs result in the same expectation as a totally ran-

dom shuffle. -ed.]

I thought for a while that Pam would consistently deal three rounds to five spots, but it turned out she was using a cut point that would only deal two rounds from positive decks. This is quite bad, I think. The other dealers would never deal more than two rounds to 3-7 spots. The pit boss came over and moved the table to another pit, once tables began to close. The limit was raised to \$5 for new players, but the original players at the \$2 table could still make \$2 bets. This was about midnight I think. I ended up playing the 1-deck game at the same table for about four hours. Casino executives might think that was unusual, but there were two other apparently non-counting players that did the same. With a session that long, I would find myself losing track of the cards every 30 minutes or so. A mental break for a few minutes seemed to help tremendously. I ended the session just better than even.

Dunes

blackstock:

All I saw were shoes. I didn't play them.

El Cortez

hall:

75% penetration on single deckers, downtown rules, no peeking under 10's. 75% penetration on double deckers, double after split, resplit aces.

Great for \$5 minimum bet. I had fun playing here. The place has a reputation for heat. Indeed, there is one floor manager assigned just to watch the two single deck tables, which are adjacent. After I had been playing a while, the pit boss came over to watch my table, while the floor manager watched the other table. Then both watched my table. I was mixing up my betting, and actually I think they were concerned with the other player, who was betting "large" amounts (\$50 is big money for this casino.) Having my glamorous wife along on one trip here was probably a mistake, because it seemed to attract more scowling pit personnel than usual, I guess because we (being a well-dressed handsome couple IMNSHO) stuck out like a sore thumb in

this down-scale place (though many blackjack books advise that having your wife along is good cover.) They even seemed to give my wife heat when she was playing basic strategy without me on a double decker, because she said that they were repeatedly making remarks about how she was winning (however, she was using a small spread and using a "gestalt count" - guessing at the count, that is.) They are definitely uptight here, but I do think you can beat them if you are careful. You might be best off to play the double deckers and mix up your betting a bit. The dealers are friendly, even if the same cannot be said of the pit personnel.

El Rancho

blackstock:

As far as I'm concerned, this place brings the major news. It's a fairly small place, terribly uncrowded, with many shoe games and a few 2-deckers. No DAS, but they pay 8:5 on all natural BJ's for bets between \$5-100. From my calculations, the 8:5 payoff is worth .5%. This makes the game almost dead even. Another interesting thing is that they offer a "players club" which pays you \$50 after you've played 30 hours of \$5 minimum in any 60-day period. That's approximately 2000 hands of \$5, or \$10,000 action, which means that \$50 is another .5%. (They'll also pay \$250 if you play \$25 minimums for 30 hours.) So, if you play it right, you've got a little less than 1/2% advantage off the top.

The bad news here: Two of the dealers I played with (out of perhaps 10) did something I've never seen before: they didn't reveal 2-card player hands which won because of dealer busts. This amounts to a decrease in penetration (which was about 70%), and, if it becomes "law" in that casino, counters will have to try to estimate counts of unrevealed hands (something I think is very possible). It was strange, because only a couple of the dealers did it. I don't know what to make of it. I hope this practice doesn't catch on elsewhere.

piercy:

The El Rancho was offering 8-5 on blackjacks with the only restriction be-

ing that you bet in multiples of \$5 to get the full payoff. I grilled a couple of dealers about any other rule changes but they were basic strip rules, double deck, and \$5 minimums. I don't recall what the penetration was.

Excalibur

blackstock:

Huge place, and perhaps a hundred BJ tables. I looked and looked for non-shoe games, and finally found 2 double-deck tables. Standard strip rules, no DAS.

hall:

75% penetration on *some* double deckers, \$5 minimums, strip rules, double after split, no peeking under 10's. I think DAS. Shop around for a friendly dealer who may give you 75% penetration - avoid those who give only 60% penetration. I was surprised that the dealers here were generally about as friendly as those at the grind-joint Horseshoe. What's wrong? The dealers have to be making decent money at the Excalibur, right? Very nice casino, but if you order a drink, it will not come before your double deck true count hits -20.

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, 50-60% penetration.

Fitzgerald's

hall:

60% penetration on single deckers, downtown rules, no peeking under 10's.

Flamingo Hilton

blackstock:

Crowded Friday night. Mostly shoes. I did find and play a 2-deck \$10 minimum DAS game [-.28%] and broke even. There were some \$5 2-deck tables, but they were all full.

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, 75% penetration.

Four Queens

blackstock:

2-deck, DAS, HA6 [-.38%].

hall:

70% penetration on single deckers, downtown rules, no peeking under 10's, resplit aces. All action \$5 minimums and up.

I bought in for \$40, and I was playing head-on, spreading \$5-\$20 (mixing it up a little) and winning, while carrying on some small talk with the dealer. I put out \$5 into the middle of the table and asked for silver. Eyeing my \$20 bet, the dealer said softly, "Let's put it here" and pushed the red chip next to my four red chip bet, as a tip bet for the dealer - and he winked!!! I had been planning to tip \$1 - clearly the dealer knew I was counting, but I wondered if he realized that \$5 was a huge chunk of my expected hourly profit. Hoping for better penetration or at least his not reporting me to the pit boss, I said "okay", and we won our bets.

Indeed, after that, he was dealing as deep as I could ever hope for - about 80% (or maybe even 85%) when I had out a big bet (i.e., positive count), 65% when I had out a small bet (i.e., negative count). My God, it was like a dream! What the hell is one's advantage in such a circumstance... it must be astronomical, approaching 3%! We were cruising along at a very fast clip, at least one hand on average per 10 seconds, even with shuffling taken into account. I was winning so much that it was embarrassing. I discretely stuffed chips in my pockets, and I started betting \$20 off the top, going down if the count went bad, never up. I tipped the dealer a few \$1's. I was still winning and stuffing chips in my pockets, when sadly the dealer was replaced with a not-so-helpful female (my dealer rotated to a double deck game.)

Nevertheless, I was still winning against the female dealer's constant 70% penetration. With my pockets bulging and still quite a lot of winnings left on the table, I started wondering why the pit had paid no attention to me. Was my action too small for this up-scale place? Or were they watching me from the sky? I tipped the dealer \$1 a few times, and I cooled my betting to a 1-2 spread and

then for 15 minutes I flat betted - I figured that would bore the hell out of anyone watching from the sky. I then grabbed the chips still on the table, tossed a dollar chip to the dealer, and directly exited the casino. I had my wife cash in the chips later. Mission accomplished - profit \$196 for an hour's fun. I did lose about \$50 to the variance of flat betting that last 15 minutes, so my profit would have been a bit higher if I hadn't gotten paranoid, but I feel I did the right thing.

msw:

It has a far better atmosphere (in both senses) than the Horseshoe. I played a 2 deck game for a couple of hours. One thing I noticed was that they would shuffle any time a new player entered the game. Several very positive decks were shuffled away when random old ladies sat down. I saw two certain mistakes on the part of dealers here. One miscounted a player's hand, and then was corrected. She had already scooped up the cards, but could tell what the hand had been and realized that the player was right. The pit boss was called over and fixed everything. Another dealer only paid half of a double that I won, until I pointed it out to him. At other casinos I thought there were two mistakes made by dealers paying my hand, but I was too busy counting to be sure. In the future I need to pay more attention to my hand and the dealer's total, instead of assuming the dealers are always correct.

Another event that concerned me was that a dealer took my cut card, which was near the top of the deck, and stuck it in the middle before he cut the cards. It was very quick, but both my friend and I saw it. I'm paranoid about cuts to begin with. If you watch people, at least 80% will cut the cards in the middle. If I were a dealer, I could pull quite a few tricks if I knew where the cut was likely to be. For that reason, I generally cut far off-center. Overall, \$5-\$20 bets made me \$100 here.

Fremont

hall:

75% penetration on double deckers, so that's a good game. Avoid the single deck games with only 66% penetration,

downtown rules, and much more attention from the pit.

Frontier

jdt:

The Frontier offers several of their single deck tables for \$1 minimum.

hall:

Single deck, 2 rounds dealt to 5-6 spots, so this is pretty crummy, at least when it's crowded. Downtown rules, and doubling is restricted to 10, 11 (and maybe 9). Yuck! Suited blackjack pays double - big deal.

msw:

I played the 1 deck, \$1 minimum game at the Frontier. Double only 10-11, A-J of same suit pays double. I won about \$20 in an hour, spreading (\$1-\$4).

Gold Coast

blackstock:

2 deck, DAS, hit soft 17.

Golden Gate

weinstoc:

Here I found a \$2.00 single deck game and sat down to play. Again, I was practicing counting, but they would only deal two hands to a deck making the opportunities few and far between. At one point the count went sky high for the second hand, but just as the dealer was about to deal, two ladies sat down and cashed \$20.00 bills, and the dealer shuffled when he was done making change.

hall:

70% penetration on single deckers, downtown rules, no peeking under 10's. Great for small action. No heat. \$1 minimums available.

blackstock:

Nasty place. 1-deck, HA6, no DAS, horrid penetration. The dealer shuffled after two rounds of two players.

Golden Nugget

hall:

You have a choice of 1, 2, 3 (over/un-

der), or 6 decks. Don't waste your time on the 3-deck over/under games - they're machine-shuffled - but the \$10 maximum over/under bet makes me wonder whether the games are beatable or the management is stupid. The single deck games are even worse, because with 4 spots in action, they will deal 1, 2, or 3 rounds, depending on the count. This is not only impossible to beat, but also it's positively devastating to non-counters as well as counters (costing between 1.5% and 2.0%, according to Griffin's *Theory of Blackjack*.) Any time the advantage slips away from the casino, they shuffle up. For head-on play, they will deal 40-60%, depending on the count. The dealer picks up on the count from your bet or a card counting floor manager or the dealer's own counting skills (I saw all these techniques being used.) The double deckers deal only about 65%, so you can easily find better elsewhere.

Surprisingly, the best blackjack at the Golden Nugget is probably found at the six deckers. They were cutting just half a deck out (90+%) during the first two days of my stay, but then they started cutting out a full deck (83%) after that. Minimums for shoe games are \$1, \$2, \$3, \$5, \$25. This totally blew me away, because in Atlantic City, the only six deckers are \$25+ minimums, and the penetration is only 66% (while the eight deckers are \$5+ minimums, and the penetration is only 75%.) And the rules were like Atlantic City, plus resplitting including aces. Comparing the single deck games in Vegas to the shoe games in Atlantic City is like comparing apples and oranges, but here was a sweet orange Vegas shoe game that was clearly vastly superior to the rotten orange AC shoe game in every respect. I had a hard time deciding during my first two days whether to play the 90+% penetration six deckers at the Golden Nugget or the 70% penetration single deckers typical of other downtown casinos. Which has the higher hourly profit? The lowest chance of ruin? The lowest risk of getting barred? "My kingdom to have my Sun Sparcstation to run some simulations," I thought. A 1-4 spread seems to tick off the pit bosses on single deck games, but I imagine a 1-8+ spread might be possible on the 6-decker, since all the counting pit bosses are

tending the single/double deck pits. Anyway, I only played the 6-decker for one shoe, because I figured the 90% 6-decker would be around later for me. I was wrong.

Hacienda

blackstock:

Yuck. Mostly shoes. Some 1-deck D10/11 games.

Holiday

blackstock:

All shoes, as far as I could tell. Didn't play.

Horseshoe

blackstock:

1-deck, no DAS, hit soft 17, RSA [-.19%]. Very crowded. (I also visited here Monday afternoon; it was crowded even then.) Very smoky. I guess, considering the rules, that this is one of the best places to play. But my experience wasn't so great.

weinstoc:

Binion's was extremely crowded, and I could find no place to sit at any of the hand-held games.

hall:

70% penetration on single decks, downtown rules, peek under 10's, and resplit aces. I was permitted once to double after split, but I imagine this was an error on the part of the dealer.

The Horseshoe has 60 single deck tables, according to a billboard. A large portion of them are open at all times, so head-on play is not just a dream, it's a common reality. Unfortunately, most of the dealers, pit personnel, and players have serious attitude problems. Those who say Atlantic City dealers/managers/players are not as nice as those in Vegas have not played at the Horseshoe (or the Barbary Coast or the Pioneer or ...)

On my last time there, I was spreading \$2-\$5. I had been there for about 5 minutes, when I won one \$2 hand, and the count went to +2 (second deal to two people), so I let my winnings ride for a total bet of \$4. (Big money, right? ;-) I

felt the cold gaze of a pit boss pierce my heart, and I looked up and made contact with her scowling eyes.

After that hand, she came out of the pit around to my chair, and told me "You are not allowed to change your bets. You must flat bet. I should have told you the last time you were here." I did not ask her why I could not range my bets while the bozo at first base could - that would have been just asking for a real barring. Instead, I played dumb and said "I'm sorry. I didn't know the rules here." (as if flat-betting were a rule imposed on all gamblers.) I asked if I could bet \$2 - trying to sound even more stupid (as if I didn't understand the term "flat-betting"). She said I could bet \$2 or \$4, but I couldn't change my bet. Bitch. I flat bet \$4 for about 10 minutes, and then cashed in my losses (yes, I had been losing) and left. I had bought in for \$40, as I recall, and I lost \$19.

Time warp - back to my previous visit to the Horseshoe a couple hours before. There's my big mistake #1 - I should not have returned during the same shift. But the only downtown casino I wanted to play that I hadn't recently played was the El Cortez, and I didn't feel like walking that far in the frigid, howling wind.

That previous time, I won \$104 spreading \$5-\$20, which apparently is too aggressive for the Horseshoe.

irwin:

Single deck, hit soft 17, RSA, 50% penetration. One night we headed downtown for some single-deck at the Horseshoe. jacko finds us there. We look for Mike Hall, who is also in town, but don't find him. Too bad. I wanted jacko to point him out to me (we haven't met) so I could go play next to him for a while, then lean over and ask him what the count was. ;-) Anyway, the table is full (of course), so we only get 2 rounds per shuffle, and I can only get a 2-4 unit spread, mostly flat betting.

maw:

The Horseshoe was crowded and smoky. I blew \$65 spreading (\$4-\$8) in about 20 minutes. Downtown rules, 1 deck, penetration was two rounds to a full table (6 spots). The interesting thing that happened was that I had given my

friend a casino card out of Thorp's book that had basic strategy on it. The pit boss came over and snatched it away from him. John said, "Is that O.K.?" and the pit boss immediately said, "Sure, it's fine." He kept walking around staring at it for about three more minutes before he gave it back, though.

Las Vegas Club

blackstock:

The sign out front says "Most liberal 21 in the world." Caca. Good rules (DAS, RSA), but all shoes.

Las Vegas Hilton

blackstock:

There's a good game to be had here. Mostly shoes, but several 2-deck games with DAS and *surrender*. I didn't see any 1-deck games, but I kind of think they may have some with high minimum bets (perhaps w/o *surrender*). They did have some rich customers. I lost \$60 here, unfortunately.

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, *surrender*, 75-85% penetration. About ten minutes into my session, as I jump from 1 to about 3 units, the floorwoman comes over and looks through the discards. I had heard that there wasn't much heat at the Las Vegas Hilton. I don't have any more trouble in the following hour and a half, though.

mshw:

It is a nice place to play, very spacious. The shoes had \$3 minimum minimums, and the two deck games had \$5 minimums. They still have double after split, and late *surrender*. I observed 70% penetration on the two deck game. At times there were only two players at my table, so conditions were pretty good. Two different guys came up while I was there, placed \$100 bets, lost, and went away. They were both on fresh decks, so I can't say what the response to somebody "Wonging" a two deck game would be. The coincidence of the trip: I would place a tip along with a \$10 (2 unit) bet while the dealer, Nancy-Jean, was shuffling. I did this three times while I was

there. Each time, the dealer up card was a five, and twice I received a natural. Nancy-Jean also offered some good advice to another player, telling him that splitting tens was not a good play. He had one of those cute multi-color basic strategy cards, but I guess he didn't always use it. The end result of the session was +\$75.

Maxim

irwin:

Double deck, 80% penetration.

Mirage

blackstock:

Cool place. The tigers are great. Didn't see the volcano erupt. Mostly shoes with DAS and RSA. Some 2-deck games without RSA, mostly at least \$10 minimum. I played a \$10 minimum game for about an hour and won \$20.

hall:

One \$10 minimum double deck table with 70% penetration - the rest were \$25+ minimums when I visited. It's really weird that when I walk into some place like the Mirage, I can't even afford to play, whereas I'm considered a "high roller" at some place like the Western.

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, 70% penetration.

eeg:

\$5 6-deck BJ tables available. (Double anything, DAS, scant 75% penetration, Dealer Hits 16, Stands on soft 17).

O'Shea's

blackstock:

All shoes.

Palace Station

blackstock:

2-deck, DAS, hit soft 17. The first dealer I had here was a numbskull. He was terribly slow, usually having difficulty counting hands with more than three cards. The last hand he dealt, I had (J,6), the guy to my left had (10,6), and the dealer's upcard was 7. I hit and bust-

ed. The guy next to me stupidly stood. The dealer turned over a 3 and hit that with 3,2,2, for a total of 17. Then he *payed* the guy who had stood on his 16. Yikes.

Pioneer

hall:

50% penetration on single deckers, plus the dealers have the same shitty attitude as those at the Horseshoe. Give me a break. At odd hours, you can play with no one else in the casino playing any other table game; this is probably not a good idea, as the pit boss has no choice but to watch your every move.

Rio

blackstock:

Gorgeous place. Incredibly colorful. It's really a feast for the eyes. The rules are 2-deck, no DAS. I won \$25 here. I will visit again sometime, and I may check into staying there, I liked it so much.

irwin:

Double deck, 80% penetration. My party found an empty double deck table, and we were joined shortly thereafter by jacko. It was kind of interesting, watching 4 of the 5 players at the table all raise their bets at the same time (Pete doesn't count). I didn't notice any heat, but John and Pete said the floormen were watching us pretty closely. After about an hour and a half, they changed the decks on us. John and I left immediately. Pete said that the dealer said "I thought they were cheating, and only amateurs left when they were winning." Let him think that. Everyone at that table won.

Riviera

blackstock:

I like this place. It is gigantic, and apparently is going to get bigger. Very well lit. 2-deck, DAS, no RSA. Lost \$75 here in two different sessions.

irwin:

Double deck, DAS, 60% penetration.

Sahara

blackstock:

The Sahara was all two-deck and shoes when I was there *except* for one table which was devoid of players (just a dealer), had a single deck spread on it ready for play, and had a sign which read "Closed Game". Your guess is as good as mine.

The interesting thing here was their "Bottoms-up" 21 game. The rules: 4-decks; dealer exposes his hole card if his upcard is a 10; ties lose when hole card is exposed; ties push otherwise; no doubling or splitting permitted regardless of dealer's hand; players natural BJ *always* pays even money, regardless of dealer's hand; 6,7,8 of same suit pays double. I suspect this game has a hefty disadvantage, but the penetration was unbelievable: down to 1/4 deck! I played \$2 for about 20 minutes and broke even. Regular Sahara BJ: 2-deck, DAS.

piercy:

The Sahara had a game called "Bottoms Up '21'." Here are the rules if anyone wants to do an analysis:

- 1) When the dealer's up card is any 10-count card the dealer's hole card will be dealt face up.
- 2) When the dealer must deal his hole card up, ties lose. Otherwise, all ties are a push.
- 3) Blackjack always wins even money regardless of the dealer's hand.
- 4) Blackjack with ace and jack of spades pays double.
- 5) 6, 7, and 8 of the same suit pays double.
- 6) No splitting and no doubling.
- 7) All 6 card hands are automatic winners.

Silver City

blackstock:

1-deck, hit soft 17 (strange for strip, eh?), no DAS.

Stardust

blackstock:

2-deck and shoes. No DAS. Good penetration in the game I played (2-deck). I won \$15 in short order.

tommyo:

Jeanne was our dealer, and was she treating us well. There was a guy to my left who was obviously counting. I could just watch his bet, and adjusted mine accordingly, but not as drastically as him. We got *no* heat.

Tropicana

blackstock:

I didn't play at all at the Trop. Mostly shoes there, except some 1-deck games with D10/11.

Western

hall:

75% penetration on double deckers, with downtown rules, no peeking under 10's, \$1 minimums.

This is a dive run by yokels. You might try pounding them with a \$1-\$20 spread - they probably won't realize what's going on, but if you happen to get barred, who cares? It's not a pleasant place to be, and they can't possibly afford the Griffin agency or anything, so other casinos are not going to find out.

Westward Ho

blackstock:

Some \$10 1-deck games. I was too tired to play that much money, so I did the \$5 2-deck games and won \$40. I'm not sure what the rules were on the 1-deck games. They may be the best in town.

irwin:

single deck, 75% penetration.

msh:

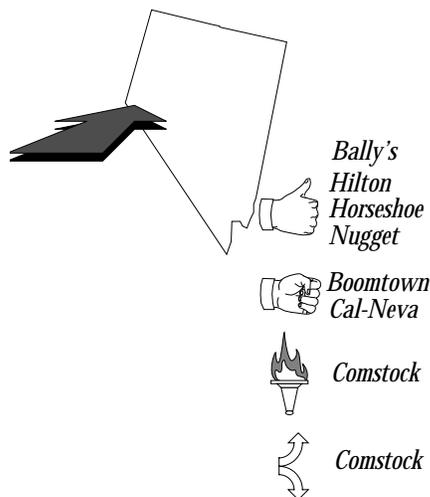
We, of course, had to stop by Westward Ho for the 99 cent beer and hot dog. It ended up costing me \$40 at the blackjack table, against a six deck shoe (Strip rules, \$3 minimum on shoes, 80% penetration).

Union Plaza

blackstock:

I got these guys back for the people who have been barred. I played 2 hands of \$5 each off the top and dropped to one hand of \$5 in negative counts (sometimes one hand of \$2), and I made \$115. It was the first time I'd tried that kind of spreading, and I think I like it. It didn't seem to draw any heat at all. Rules: 2-deck, no DAS, hit soft 17 [-.55%].

Reno



whaley:

With the exception of the Hilton, the MGM (Bally's), the Cal-Neva, and the Horseshoe, everywhere has I played had standard Northern Nevada rules. \$2 and \$3 are quite common, \$5 are common, and only places like Harrah's and the El Dorado had \$10, \$15, \$25, or \$100 tables. The games in Reno are almost exclusively single deck.

As for various small, smoke-filled, grungy places like the Pioneer (single deck), Sundowner (single deck, one \$25 table), Sands (4 deck): Don't bother. Even if the penetration were good, you'd get lung cancer after a few sessions.

Check out the Horseshoe. Great penetration with most dealers, not too crowded, no perceptible heat or shuffle-ups for small bettors with variations. They *do* aggressively try to color you up when you leave, though.

I've heard that a single deck over/under game is still good with a full table and/or 50% penetration--well, that's

what's available at the Comstock on a weekend.

blackstock:

I've been to Reno several times in the last 6 months, and I have to say that there are many more reasons than the Comstock to visit. You can find single-deck games in almost every casino. Generally, the rules are standard Northern Nevada, but the penetration is good and the heat is minimal at those places. Sure, it takes a lot to overcome the bad rules, but it's certainly doable.

The good part, though, is the exceptions. Besides the Comstock (which gave much better than 50% penetration when I was there last), the Hilton, the Horseshoe, the Cal-Neva, and Bally's all have very good games.

Anyway, I definitely think it's worth the trip. I've been to Vegas, too, and I actually prefer Reno.

Hope I've convinced you to go to Reno.

Bally's

blackstock:

Bally's has a few 1-deck games with hit soft 17, double any 2, DAS. They also have one four-deck over/under table. (Boy, I should think that shuffle-tracking a four-deck over/under game could be extremely profitable.)

Boomtown

manny's:

This place is OK during the week, but don't go there on a weekend unless you're into the old "How-many-people-can-we-crowd-into-a-casino" game. If this place ever caught fire on a Sunday afternoon, more people would get trampled than would get out. They don't open another table until they have 7 people waiting for it. The only way to get a seat is to stand behind a table and wait for someone to go broke.

Cal-Neva

decot:

Cal-Neva in Reno offers single deck, double down on anything including after split, split any pair, and late surrender.

(You get only one card for split aces, as usual.) This is available only on the third floor.

blackstock:

Only the "top-deck" pit at Cal-Neva has the single-deck mentioned above, but they don't offer double-after-split that I know about (I was last there Feb 16). Also, they've made a major change since the beginning of February: they no longer offer insurance on the top deck. This rule change looks to me like it's aimed specifically at card-counters. In my opinion, it makes the Cal Neva a dubious place to play BJ. (Also, their first-floor tables no longer double-on-9, as they used to. Just standard Northern Nevada rules.) Good penetration: 75-80%.

manny's:

I can verify this. I was in Reno this past weekend and stopped in at the "famed" third-floor of the Cal-Neva. I was appalled to see that even though they offer Surrender, they do not offer Insurance. Not a fair trade if you believe the % charts. No one at my table surrendered while I was there. And the dealer (a young woman named Maria) never spoke a single word the entire time I watched the table and played. No hello, no good-bye, no thanks, no get lost, it was really unpleasant.

whaley:

Yup, no insurance at the Cal-Neva top deck. I didn't stick around for long. On the main floor, "Double 21" -- every hour a table number is picked at random, and the next hand at that table pays double to all the winners.

Comstock

weinstoc:

According to the current Blackjack Forum, the dealers at the Comstock indicate that management is getting ready to pull out all of the over/under tables.

blackstock:

The rules at the Comstock are: Single deck, double on 10/11 only (first two cards only), no DAS, split & resplit (except no resplit aces), dealer hits soft 17. Over/under side bet is \$1-100, but it can-

not exceed the blackjack bet.

I played the Comstock's o/u game about three weeks ago (and came out ahead). There are exactly 15 tables, all with over/under, and all almost always single deck (I've seen a 2-decker on occasion). Penetration varies between 35 and 45 cards. I'm a little unsure how much heat you will get. My advice is to play relatively conservatively (that means flat betting), and make an occasional over bet off the top (I know, it hurts). One thing to realize is that the over/under action is extremely easy to spot from the sky. Another is that the Comstock's game is becoming well-known to counters as a candy store. Walk softly (but carry a big advantage).

whaley:

With visions of a 2% flat-betting advantage dancing in my head, I eagerly made my way to the Comstock, hoping that the 1 deck O/U game was still offered. Well, it was, but to summarize: the conditions *sucked*. It was impossible to play for long on an empty table without having the hoards of empty-table-phobic parasites pounce (this is true most places, though), and the dealers were dealing 50%, sometimes *worse*, to *two people flat betting table minimums!* Ugh! Table minimums were \$2 and \$3, and we played on both, moving around to avoid the crowd. There was one dealer who was dealing about 60%, but who didn't deal for very long.

[Someone we know from our computer network was barred at the Comstock, while making over/under bets. Maybe his sad story will be in the next issue of 21 NEWS. -ed.]

Harrah's

hall:

According to *Blackjack Confidential* (January/February), Harrah's Reno has introduced a double cut on its two deck games, where after the player cuts the cards, the dealer takes about the bottom 25% and puts them in the discard tray. If they always run out of cards and reshuffle (I don't know if that's the case), then this could be a good thing for players. When you get that extra round due to a

very negative shoe, then they'd take those low cards removed originally by the dealer and mix them with the other cards in the discard tray.

Hilton

blackstock:

The Hilton has the best game in the world, I think. Single-deck (though sometimes a very few tables of it), stand on all 17, double any two, DAS, RSA. Penetration about 70%. The double-deck games are very prevalent, with the same rules but generally much better penetration (like 85-90%). The pit is usually very tolerant, though you should be careful, because this is one place you don't want to be kicked out of.

whaley:

Sure enough, Pacos's 21 game is gone--replaced by slots. Sigh. The Hilton has DOA and DAS and resplit Aces, but it's a 4-deck game with usually \$5 minimums and packed tables with people waiting. My friend was impatient at my table inspections at this point, so I didn't get a feel for penetration. The Hilton has a bunch of other card games including Pai Gow Poker and something called "99," and at least one more that I don't remember.

jkimble:

As for the casino with the *best* Blackjack rules: The Flamingo Hilton. They have a number of {1,2,4,6}-deck games going at all times and allow doubling on any first two cards, multiple splits/doubles, etc. (their slogan is "most liberal blackjack rules in Northern Nevada"). On top of that, the pit crew is usually very friendly but, in my experience, quite good at watching for counters.

Holiday

whaley:

Tiny place, mostly for people who want to play Bingo. One young fellow was playing huge variations at the \$5 table. He had stacks of red and green chips, and was being *very* closely scrutinized by the floorman, who was busily taking notes. I decided he wasn't a counter when he played about \$250 off the top in green, but then again, he might have

done it to throw 'em off. I didn't watch his play long enough to see if he was any good.

Horseshoe

whaley:

This place has, I believe, the best game in Reno. Single deck, 8 tables, double on any first 2 cards, surrender, no DAS, dealer hits soft 17, and a *consistent 75% penetration*, sometimes 80%! This is the only place I've ever played where the dealer peeks on a 10 upcard. I got no heat for a \$2-\$8 (yeah, small potatoes) spread, jumping from \$2 to \$8 back to \$2, always \$2 off the top. I played Hi-Opt-I with only a few strategy adjustment numbers. I found going back to the Hi-Opt-I count not hard at all after a few decks. From midnight on, the place was fairly crowded, but not too bad (never had to play with more than 4 players at the table).

Penetration continued to be good until some apparently well-known guy came in and started playing at my table (both the dealer and the floor man called him by name and asked him how he did in "the tournament"), the penetration dropped to around 50%, and several high (+8 true...*sigh!*) counts were shuffled away. I decided this dealer was bad news when after a hand was done she said to the player on my right (not the well known one), "I should have shuffled when you put out that bet, but I knew there weren't many 10's left in the deck."

blackstock:

The Horseshoe has single-deck, double any two, hit soft 17, *excellent* penetration (we're talking 3 rounds of 5 players), and very fast dealers. I highly recommend this place.

The Mint Club

mannys:

The Mint Club used to be Karl's. It has about 15 tables, but only 3 were open when I visited. All single deck, two \$1 tables and one \$2.

MGM (Bally's)

whaley:

Huge place, all but 2 tables 4-deck. Packed. Good rules (DOA, not sure about DAS or surrender).

Monte Carlo

mannys:

At 9AM we arrived at the Monte Carlo Casino at the Holiday Inn about half way between Reno and Sparks. This place is so small that 40 people fill it up. They had only 3 tables open with single deck, standard Reno rules and bad penetration.

I decided to single deck Wong it, and had moderate success. I had trouble getting onto the tables because they were crowded, and occasionally I would place my bet only to find that the dealer now had to shuffle. I went ahead and played through those hands and stayed if the count warranted. Long stretches would go by before I'd get an opportunity to place a bet at one of the three tables, so my hands per hour was way down, probably as low as 20. I left with a profit of about 5 units.

Nugget

mannys:

John Ascuaga's Nugget is a nice place, but I hate to gamble there. Probably because I've never won there. Single deck, standard Reno rules. The Nugget has about 40 tables, mostly \$3 and \$5 with about 7 or 8 \$2 single deckers. A few shoes, but not so many that you couldn't find a seat at a single deck table. Penetration at my table was about 90%, but that is misleading because a full table consumed the entire 90% in two rounds, so you had to make your second bet on the basis of only 45% of the deck.

Peppermill

whaley:

I was too tired to remember for sure, but I think regular Northern Nevada rules. Packed tables. This is a very popular place on a Saturday night!

Sundowner

mannys:

Single deck, standard Reno rules except that a players 21 (any number of cards) will push a dealers 10-up blackjack. I'm not sure what this is worth, but it is definitely a plus for the players. When I left, I said thanks and the dealer looks at me and in a loud voice says "Nooo, Thaaank Youuuu!" I suppose it was because I hadn't toked her, but Geez, I was only like 6 or 7 units ahead. It wasn't like I was getting rich off her or anything. Oh well, go figure.

Atlantic City



stank:

The casinos must really be hard up for money. At Trump Plaza, Resorts, and The Taj Mahal, the default long distance company on the pay phones was one of the AOS companies. They typically charge much more than AT&T, MCI, or Sprint, but they pay big rebates back to the pay phone owner (disclaimer: my understanding of the long-distance industry based upon what I read on the net and in the newspapers). At least the phones themselves were NJ Bell phones, so users can choose their carrier by pushing 10XXX-0-area code-number.

I saw an article in the paper a few days ago about changes that the A/C casino industry wants. The main one is to be allowed to increase the maximum amount of floor space that can be used for slots (it's 30% now). As the article said, and I'm sure everyone else who has been to an A/C casino has noticed, half the tables may be closed, but people are waiting for a slot machine to become available (my own observation: the nickel slot machines, and the 25 cent Joker's Wild Video Poker machines). They also want to be able to offer some of the new Nevada games (Red Dog and Pai-Gow) and be open 24 hours a day. Finally, they want to be able to increase casino floor space

without also be required to increase the number of hotel rooms and meeting room space at the same time.

hall:

It's still possible to shuffle-track in Atlantic City, but the pickings are getting pretty thin.

The shuffle at Resorts and TropWorld is the Six Pile Random Pick Zone Shuffle. Unplayed cards are plugged in three locations into the played cards. Cards are broken in half, each half into three. Half pile picks are taken from a random pile on the left and a random pile on the right and shuffled together. This repeats until all the cards are shuffled. (See the article on the Five Card Griffin for a graphic representation of this shuffle.)

To track this shuffle, keep track of 12 regions. Hopefully 9 regions will be dealt. Note the per region count with your chips, one chip per region. At the end of the shoe, divide the end of shoe count by 3 and take the opposite sign and distribute this count across three chips. Plug these 3 chips into your 9 where the dealer plugs the cards. Then "shuffle" your chips the way the dealer shuffles his. At the end, you will have two piles of six chips (or one pile of six chips if you have added the counts as you went along.) If you get the cut card (and you should try desperately to do so), then try to cut out the high count regions (which have low cards.)

My (untuned) simulations show a 1.0% advantage with a 1-8 spread using this system, sitting through all negative counts. Normal counting with a 1-8 spread and abandoning true counts of negative one or less has an advantage of only .66%. Back-counting or Wonging (i.e., never playing except when the count is favorable and then flat-betting) probably has an advantage of more like 1.5%.

Trump Castle and the Claridge use the 5 Pile Criss-Cross Shuffle. Sands seems to have abandoned this shuffle. The unplayed cards are placed on top of the played cards at Trump Castle, while the Claridge plugs in three spots. Trump Castle then removes the top 3 decks to form the "fifth" pile and then cuts the remaining cards in two and then each in two to form a square. The Claridge first

cuts in two, then removes the top 1.5 decks from each to form the "fifth" pile and then cuts the two piles in two to form the square. Picks are taken from diagonally adjacent piles and the fifth pile, shuffles, and so on, criss-crossing. Usually there are 8 or more regions in the final pile.

You can track this shuffle in a similar manner to the one described previously. You wind up with three piles of chips, unless you ignore the fifth pile. It isn't all that trackable, especially with a large fifth pile and small picks.

You can do a simple (and still very effective) version of shuffle-tracking by just noting *one* region where there are more high or low cards than normal. Then mentally follow the region through the shuffle, and cut it in or out of play, and/or raise or lower your bet while in that region. No chips required! For your first time out, I highly recommend this form of tracking. You could even back-count a shoe and then jump in after the shuffle and cut, *if* the cut seemed good to you! Why play through a shoe where the count is going to go up and up and up and not come down?

Claridge

hall:

\$5 minimum 8 deck with surrender, just barely trackable shuffle, 70% penetration.

Resorts

[See article on the Five Card Griffin - ed.]

stank:

On the BJ tables at Resorts was a separate card explaining the rules of 5-card Griffin. Basically, a 5-card Griffin wins (and pays double) only when a player's 21 normally wins. As I understood what was on the card, the player will still lose if dealer has BJ, and it's still a push if dealer draws to 21 in 3 or more cards.

hart:

As it was a weekday, there were plenty of \$5 tables (bj & craps), and it was not very crowded. I had no trouble at

anytime during the 2 days to find a seat at a no-smoking bj table.

There was one pit offering 5 card griffin, with 2:1 payoff. I couldn't believe it, I had 2 griffins during my stay! 'course, I only had a nickel out both times :-(NOTE: pay attention, because the dealers *will* miss it. Both times, I had to point out the griffins. Which I happily did :-)

BTW, penetration was terrible. Minimum cut card placement was 2 decks, sometimes even approaching 3 decks. I did notice, though, that the penetration seemed to be better (2 decks from the bottom :-) during the day. The 3 deck cuts seemed to be much more frequent at night.

hall:

\$5 minimum 8 deck with "5 Card 21" bonus and semi-trackable shuffle. Penetration is inconsistent, but generally ridiculously poor (e.g., 60%) "5 Card 21" is worth about .16% to card counters, while late surrender is worth about .19% to card counters.

didio:

Five card 21's paid 2 to 1, but was posted only at smoking tables. Do the non-smokers get pissed? This payoff holds if the dealer doesn't have 21. It pushes a 3+ card 21 and loses to a natural. No surrender. Show burn card. Didn't play a hand here, no favorable counts during my visit.

Taj Mahal

hall:

\$3 minimum 8 deck is the lowest minimum in town, 72% penetration; stutter shuffle is not trackable.

didio:

Well-lit, high ceilings, fresh air, 75% penetration. I Wonged it, jumping in at >=+1 TC. No surrender. Hidden burn card.

TropWorld

jacko:

TropWorld was offering a pretty good game the first weekend in March, if you

didn't blink. Starting Friday they had 5 tables of 4 deck "21", standard AC rules plus surrender (which did not end with February as I expected). I played for a few hours on Saturday and they were only cutting off about 3/4 deck from the back of the shoe! Needless to say this is/was an excellent game. (Plus, on four tables the minimum bet was \$10 and it was \$25 on the other, with the customary AC maximums (500 and 1000 respectively)).

The reason I say "was" is that I went back Sunday night and they were cutting off 2 decks or 50% out of each shoe. Apparently the usual horde of locusts descended on the game and killed it for the rest of us who are more discreet. I saw one counter playing both Saturday afternoon and Sunday night, this guy was so bad he was literally eyeballing the discard rack every time he had to make a playing or betting decision.

hall:

\$5 minimum 8 deck with surrender and semi-trackable shuffle, 72% penetration. (This was in February, before the arrival of the 4-deckers.)

Trump Castle

hall:

\$5 minimum 8 deck, marginally trackable shuffle, 74% penetration. This place was totally dead when I visited on a Thursday night. Very few gamblers and very few tables open.

Trump Plaza

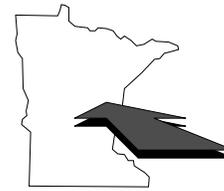
hall:

\$5 minimum 8 deck with surrender, 75%+ penetration, back-counting heaven. \$25 minimum 6 deck with surrender. Stutter shuffle is untrackable

didio:

Darker casino, harsher lighting, had friendly dealers. More Wonging until I won enough to ease my discipline and bet off the top. Others were surrendering here, but seemingly on gut feelings (14 vs. 9.) Many players whipped out their "Trump Cards" for comping purposes.

Minnesota



jmh:

I've been experimenting a little with the dealers and bosses at two casinos: Treasure Island (between Red Wing and Hastings, about thirty miles down the river from St. Paul) and Jackpot Junction (near Redwood Falls, about a hundred miles west of the Minneapolis suburbs.) Mostly little things, but enough to draw attention if any of them are *paying* attention. I've never even gotten a twitch. Given the generally poor quality of players, and the fact that I've yet to *find* another counter at either place, they might just be oblivious.

Washington



marien:

While in Seattle last week, I took the opportunity to go to one of the cardrooms that I found in the yellow pages. The place was actually a bowling alley with a side room for card playing. The card games included both blackjack and poker -- I'm not certain which poker rules were played, but I think there was a wide selection of possible variations.

There were three tables active when I arrived and the same three table had to be broken up at closing time (two were bj, one was poker). All the poker rooms seem to be open from noon until 2am, no one under 18 allowed in, and the house collects \$2 every half hour that you sit at the tables. The atmosphere is very relaxed, and customers are allowed to order food and drinks while they play.

At the table where I sat, other players

were incredibly trusting and trustworthy. If a player made a mistake that would favor another player, that player was always quick to point the mistake out. Another example is when someone would go to the restroom, he would usually ask another player to play his hands for him, so that he would not lose his seat. This friendliness was extended to both regulars and newcomers. My table may have been an exception, as an extremely heated discussion did break out at the poker table.

The blackjack rules are as follows: two decks, double on 9-10-11, no DAS, no insurance, no resplit, split aces one card only, dealer peeks, *blackjack pays 2 to 1*. The deal rotates, with each player dealing up to an entire shoe, or passing the deal at any point between hands. When a player receives the deal, he states the maximum bet that the players can make, with the max-max being \$10. All chips are \$1 and \$5. Also, he can state a certain size bank, which limits the amount that he can lose. When a player places his bet prior to deal, the dealer matches this bet with an equal-sized stack of chips that he places next to the player's bet. The winner of the hands gets both stacks of chips. Player signals are typically verbal. Player's cards are dealt up, and about nine or ten players can sit at a table.

When I first saw the quality of play at the tables, my eyes lit up like dollar signs! However, the bj-pays-2:1 rule can overwhelm just about any level of player incompetence, and he should still have an advantage over the house. According to my calculations, this one rule should favor the player by greater than 2%, giving the basic strategist an edge of about 1.5%. Running some brief simulations of these rules results in similar numbers. The level of play wasn't terrible, but even the better of players would not be able to write up a basic strategy chart. I ran a simulation with what I deemed to be a slightly-above-average player (stood on 16 vs. 7-8-9, stood on soft 18, never splits 6's and 9's, etc.), and this player still had far greater than a 1% edge over the dealer.

The night I was there, I dealt every chance I had, and set a maximum of \$10 every time except the first couple of

shoes. This was probably a blunder on my part, but I thought the mistakes that other players made would negate the two-for-ones. I ended up winning some bucks, but winning as a dealer seems to brew up some animosity from the other players. (I nipped this in the bud by ordering all the players drinks after I had a good shoe.) Also, every player at the table seemed to think dealing was a good thing, so they certainly would not object to you passing the shoe.

If a ten-dollar limit were always in effect, a counter could win up to \$20/hour at this game. The problem is that many people set a three or four dollar limit for their deal. I think that the other table had some higher stakes people, so shopping around for a good table is probably the most important thing. The quality of play doesn't really matter, since it's probably best to depend on getting the income as a player, and not as a dealer.

There are many dealer mistakes and tells that can be taken advantage of -- I did not take advantage of any of the actual mistakes, but some tells can come in handy. For example, if the player that just bought the dealer a drink is trying to decide if he should hit his 15 vs. ten, any encouragement on the dealer's part probably indicates that the dealer's hand is pat. With the dealer looking at the hole cards on ten, there is a tad bit of bluffing. Sometimes the dealer would accidentally flash his down card -- I still stuck to basic strategy in these situations. The shuffling is sloppy, and one can often get a read on some of the bottom cards for an initial count. Remember these cards for later, as many dealers will deal to the very bottom of the shoe (the last card isn't dealt). Another mistake that was made was when I cashed in my chips -- the 'cashier' gave me a fifty in place of one of the twenties. I gave it back to him -- I think I would've felt guilty if I hadn't. A lot different than Ren-yo or AC, that's for certain.

One thing that annoyed the hell out of me was the fact that the dealer can state his bank size, and that limits how much he can lose. In a situation where he is completely covered by all the bets, one can't double or split hands! A person can't even adjust his bet size to make up for this, because then the other players just adjust their bet size. It just seems ter-

ribly rude on the dealer's part, but I was the only one bothered by it.

Oh, and one more pleasantry that made it such a good time: the woman that sat directly across from me was totally stunning! Basically, I was in love. To top things off, whenever she would deal, she'd stand up and then lean over to reach the table, giving me a wonderful view! No wonder all the players played so poorly.

All in all, a good time, but I don't think one could depend on this game for a living. I plan to play whenever I am in Seattle, but a lot of that is just because I'm diseased. I *do* feel that I can win greater than the \$4/hour it costs to play, though. Also, I'm hoping to use some of these rooms to get a poker education. I keep saying that, but I never do it.

Canada

blight:

Just in case anyone out there is planning a trip to Winnipeg Manitoba, I thought I would offer a review of Winnipeg's version of European style casinos. Operated by the Manitoba Lotteries Foundation (Government Run) the Crystal Casino is located in the Hotel Fort Garry in downtown Winnipeg. The casino attempts to match the atmosphere of European Casinos. All profits go to Manitoba Health Services Development Fund (Health Care is also Government Run).

Location: 7th floor, Hotel Fort Garry, Winnipeg MB Canada R3C 0R3, (204) 957-2600

Hours: Monday - Friday 6 pm to 2 am, Saturday Noon to 2 am.

Games: Blackjack, La Boule, Roulette, Slot Machines, Baccarat.

Dress Code: Semi-formal (jacket and tie and equivalent attire for women).

Blackjack conditions:

Min/Max	# Decks	# Tables
2.00 - 20.00	6	3
10.00 - 100.00	6	6
25.00 - 200.00	6	5
50.00 - 500.00	1	2
100.00 - 500.00	1	2

Rules are split after splits, double after

splits, double on 10 and 11, no insurance bets, no surrender, dealers hit soft 17

Penetration is 65-75% on 6 deck games, single round for single deck with 4+ hands, two rounds for single deck with 3 or fewer hands.

History: The crystal casino has been in operation since Jan 1990. Previous to the opening of this casino, the Manitoba Lotteries Foundation operated temporary casinos which would move around the province of Manitoba, with proceeds going to the local community hosting the casino. Since the opening of the Crystal casino, this has been the only casino in Manitoba.

There was a dealer strike for approximately two months last year when the casino employees went on strike for a contract. Casino employees are provincial government employees.

The Casino does not have a liquor permit, and as a result no alcoholic beverages are served.

dt:

Calgary has four casinos. I was at the Frontier over by the saddle dome. Blackjack is the main event. They had about 30 tables of BJ. There was also a table of Red Dog and Sic-Bo, plus two each of mini-baccarat, and roulette -- no craps. The casino is open Mon-Fri, 11 AM until midnight.

The casino was crowded with players (it was Saturday night), but not many people wandering the aisles like in LV. It was very difficult to get a seat.

Unbelievably, the cashier wouldn't even take a Canadian traveler's check. I had to go the restaurant upstairs to get my cash.

BJ was divided into two equal sized pits. One had betting limits of \$1-25, and the other \$2-50. Imagine the worst blackjack rules you can think of, then take away insurance. Double on 10/11 only, no DAS, no resplit anything, and as I said, no insurance. The dealer doesn't take a hole card. All tables are 4-deck shoes.

OK, now the good news. Penetration is good. Most dealers try to cut off 1 deck, but miss on the short side. I estimate penetration of 75-85%. One dealer even commented that there were only

about 20 cards left after the last round, so he would have to try to cut off more. The shuffle is very trackable. The unplayed cards are plugged in two places -- kind of worthless since there aren't many cards to plug with. The pile is divided in two, then each half is divided in two toward the outsides. If the original stack is

- A
- B
- C
- D

then the resulting 4 piles are C D B A. The dealer takes 1/2 of D and 1/2 of A and riffles and strips a few times and sets them on the done pile. Likewise with 1/2 of C and 1/2 of B. Then repeat with the rest of D and A, and finally with the rest of C and B. I'm new to shuffle tracking, and the dealers were very fast, so I couldn't take advantage of this.

The other good news is that large, sudden betting spreads seem to be tolerated. I didn't notice any evidence of heat.

Overall, it's not a great game, but can probably be beaten with large betting spreads or shuffle-tracking. On the other hand, it's an excellent place to ski.

Bahamas

ege:

I spent 4 days recently at Carnival's Crystal Palace Resort and Casino in Nassau, Bahamas. I played BJ and craps and this is my trip report.

I probably played BJ too much. The rules are not favorable. Double down is allowed only on 9, 10, or 11 and there is no re-splitting. Other than that, standard LV rules were in place, 3-2 on BJ, dealer stands on soft 17, no surrender. They are all shoe games, 8 decks, with maybe 2/3 penetration (OK maybe 70%). They have mostly \$5 and \$10 tables with \$500 maximums, but they do have a couple of \$25-\$1000 tables. In the baccarat room they have some high roller BJ tables with \$25-\$1000 during the day but with \$50 and \$100 minimum tables at night. They had one BJ table that was reserved but I never saw anyone playing there.

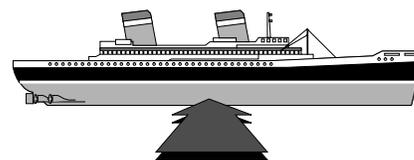
The crap table was just like Vegas. Double Odds. They have mostly \$5 tables but sometimes they opened up one or two \$10 tables. I did better at the crap

table, winning \$900 one time and \$600 another time. I'm a pass line and number bettor. I'll bet \$26 or \$27 across the numbers and press them up a few times. I won the \$900 when a shooter must have rolled 8 or 9 9s while trying to make a 6, which he eventually did!

Unfortunately I was playing too much \$25 BJ and gave most of the winnings back. I ended up stuck a few bucks. However, I was getting rated. My average bet was \$38 and I played for six hours total (I was getting killed at BJ, and at craps its usually better to hit and run), but the house gave me \$130 off my room bill. Not bad.

The casino also has roulette with both a 0 and 00 and the big wheel. And don't forget the slot machines - they have lots of 'em. I even saw some \$5 slots and one \$25 slot machine.

Cruise Ships

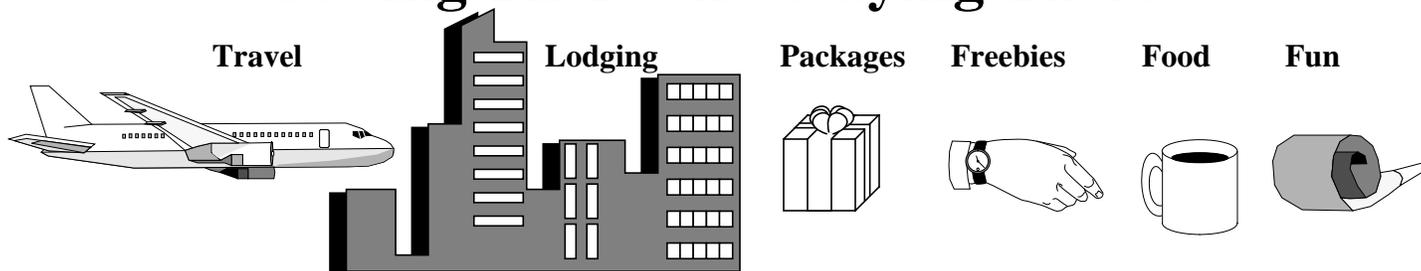


brody:

Just got back from taking Princess' Fair Princess to the Mexican Riviera and thought people might be interested in the gambling conditions on board. Three BJ tables with limits \$5 - \$100. Double on 10, 11, hit on soft 17. 6 deck shoe, cut card at about 1 deck. Tournament on last day. \$75 buy in \$20 from each of 12 players goes to first place winner in addition to winnings. (\$75 gets you \$50 in chips).

They also had one table of Caribbean Stud. Min ante \$5. You either give up your ante if you have nothing or bet another 2x ante to go head to head against dealer. If dealer has A, K or better and you win, payoff is according to schedule with Royal Flush at 100:1. I didn't notice anybody winning money at this game. Princess had a lot of personnel and other problems with their cruise and I would not recommend it to others unless it was steeply discounted (like free). ♠

Getting There and Staying There



weinstoc:

Here's a tip that may be of interest to those of you who like to stay in the fancier hotels, but hate to pay the rates advertised:

If you call the casino marketing department at most of the major hotel/casinos (it may be under a different name, but they all have such a department), they will usually be able to book a room when the main 800 number can't.

For instance, last October I booked a room at the **Flamingo Hilton** for \$69.00 per night via Casino Marketing. The reservations office wanted \$99 to \$119 for the same room but didn't have any rooms available. Also, I was told that if I gambled four hours at \$5 average bet, they'd reduce the rate to \$42.00 per night. I did, and they did (though there was some question about whether it was 4 hours per day, or 4 hours total...my view prevailed).

Las Vegas

Las Vegas Travel

jacko:

For folks in LA, America West has \$49 one way fares on some of their evening flights LAX-Vegas plus a couple of morning flights, perfect for that fast all-nighter in Sin City.

Las Vegas Lodging

ron:

Circus Circus usually has some of the cheapest rates of all the LV casinos. I found, however, that you can stay even cheaper by staying at motels near the strip which don't have casinos. I stayed for about \$15 per night (they have cheap

weekly rates as well) at a place behind the **Flamingo Hilton/Imperial Palace/Barbary Coast** area -I think it was called King David's Motel or something similar. Call the Las Vegas Tourism Bureau for details - they have an toll-free number - 1-800-522-9555. Whoops - I just called it and they only handle casinos. But these 800 numbers DO handle the smaller places as well. I called the LV Chamber of Commerce for these numbers, and they had even more than these:

800 - 458-6161

800 - 822-2268

800 - 522-9555

800 - 548-2008

800 - 345-7177

They know all the deals in town! Good luck, hotel bargain hunters!!

jjpak:

I almost always stay at the **Imperial Palace** when I go to Vegas, and to my recollection, it does have a pool. I know because I was in it last September, and it wasn't too hot to be outside then. Of course, it could be hot this September.

It's a nice place, but in my opinion, not as nice as the **Flamingo**. Remember to bring shampoo on the trip because they don't provide the little complimentary bottles in the bathroom. The only thing about it that annoys me is that they don't have ESPN or any of the cable channels. If that doesn't bother you, then you should have no problem.

The green carpets in the hallway are kind of ugly, though.

jasunas:

We had a room at the **Excalibur**; it had two double beds. The cost that we paid was \$69.00 for Saturday and \$39.00 for Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. If anyone is making plans to go out there I

suggest not staying on Saturday, Real busy. The room was real nice, the service was always prompt and friendly.

blackstock:

I stayed at the **Tropicana**, on the lower strip. The room was fair to poor. No air conditioning (and I needed it), dim lighting, poor TV. Quietest plumbing I've ever seen, though. The rest of the hotel (the "water park") was fabulous.

ble:

The **Imperial Palace** is a fine place to stay. It is located at the most interesting part of the strip. The rooms and service are not the best but better than many other places. Try to get a room in the new section (constructed 2 or 3 years ago). Also ask for one with a large tub; they are in the nicer rooms.

charlyn:

If you are going to Vegas for the first time, call a few of the strip casinos (**Tropicana, Frontier, Bally's, Flamingo Hilton, Mirage, Riviera, Dunes**) and ask if they have any specials you can get. If they don't have anything affordable, try **Binion's** and the **Fremont** downtown. They all have 800 numbers which you can get by calling 1-800-555-1212.

You can get a suite at the **Frontier** for \$85, which is very reasonable. You can get a room with a *gigantic bathtub* at the **Imperial Palace** for about \$80. If you whine at the check-in counter at the **Tropicana**, they will sometimes give you a room for \$39 but it might be dumpy. Insist on a room in the Tower or you will really regret it. **Circus Circus** and **Excalibur** have thousands of cheap rooms, but they are both noisy and cater to people with children. I avoid them. The **Mirage** is new, spectacular, and not

that expensive; about \$150 a night. The rooms are garish, though.

Las Vegas Packages

berger:

I recently received information in the mail saying I'm entitled to a great deal at Bob Stupak's **Vegas World**.

I'm sure some of you must have seen this before: \$1200 in casino money... a free gift of some sort, free drinks and free show tickets. All for just \$398.

eshen:

I've seen the package before and my parents actually did the package. They liked the deal...free room and free money to play. However there are catches...

1) Vegas World looks pretty run down. It's suppose to have a "space" theme, but to me it was dark and depressing. Kinda reminded me of a bad disco.

2) You get "action money"! For table games, it's a one time play only. So in blackjack, whether you win, lose or push, the money disappears! If you want to minimize risk, put half on black, half on red and take some money out of your pocket to cover 0 and 00. (You can only play even money games with the "action" money) This way, you'll at least get 50% of the "action" money back in real money.

3) The slot action money is only used for certain slot machines. They give you this big coin that goes in the side of the slot machine. Each coin represents \$5, so it's \$5 per shot. Also, the slots are really *tight* so don't expect much back.

4) **Vegas World** is at the end of the strip and at least 1/4 mile from the other casino. Closest ones are **Circus Circus** and **Sahara**.

The **Vegas World** deal is good for the heavy duty gamblers that don't care where they stay. If this is your first time in Vegas, I strongly suggest that you put up \$30/night for a room at **Circus Circus** and have a favorable impression of Vegas rather than stay in a pretty depressing place.

Oh, also check "Vegas Today", it's an entertainment guide book next to the registration desk of various hotels. It contains coupons for deals at different casinos. When I was down there, there

was a coupon for **Vegas World**. The cost was \$2. We got it back in play money. At least with that, you don't tie up about \$400 for something that isn't that great.

markd:

I saw a new **Vegas World** offer yesterday in the LA Times Calendar section. You get all the usual things (room, show tickets, buffets, etc.), but your "casino money" is \$400 in cash. So you are actually \$4 ahead before you even start (more if you charge the \$396 to Discover |-) in addition to the other freebies.

Knowing the source of this offer, I read it about 4 times, but there is no catch. They have the usual restrictions, like no Thu or Sat arrivals, and you have to reserve the room at least 20 days before you arrive. There's also some threat that if you make your reservation and don't cancel within 72 hours, you lose your \$396.

It says you have to mail in (or call in) your \$396 before March 2, and you can take your 2 nights any time before May 1, 1992.

Take this offer instead of the "\$1200" one.

charlyn:

My daughter and her boyfriend tried out the **Vegas World** package last year. They got approximately what they paid for; that is, it was worth about \$400 per person. They wouldn't do it again. The biggest problem with the package was that they felt trapped in **Vegas World**. Part of the fun of Vegas, unless you are a hard-core serious gambler, is roaming around and casino hopping. The "free money" you get from **Vegas World** is in the form of tokens and coupons that you can spend only in that casino. Something like \$200 had to get pumped into a slot machine. My daughter turned \$200 into \$30 playing the special slot machine that took the tokens. Not a great deal.

[Beware: **Vegas World** has brain-damaged blackjack. -ed.]

hall:

Here's some information I gathered for Newark->Vegas packages. You pay between \$300 and \$500 up front. If you gamble for 8 hours at \$5 minimum, you get back some mixture of match play and

cash, effectively lowering the cost to more like \$200. Note that round trip airfare alone is normally about \$300, and these packages give you airfare, lodging, and various goodies such as free shows and food. To get costs as low as the ones here, you may run into restrictions on when you can travel.

Agency: Air One Tours
Phone: 1-800-338-8860
Airline: Continental
Casinos: **4 Queens, Stardust, Dunes**
Nights: 2, Sun-Tue
Couple: "FREE", actually \$409 pp, \$209 after rebates
Single: add \$40
Weekend: add \$60
Freebies: ?
Gamble: \$5, 8 hours
Rebates: \$50 match play before, \$150 match play after \$100 cash after, 5 \$20 match play coupons for other casinos

Agency: Casino Caravans, Marcus Trav.
Phone: 1-800-359-4786 /201-731-7731
Airline: America West
Casinos: **Riviera**
Nights: 4, Sun-Thu
Couple: "FREE", actually \$419 pp, \$169 pp after rebates
Single: ?
Weekend: ?
Freebies: rental car for one day, more
Gamble: \$5, 8 hours
Rebates: \$50 match play before, \$200 match play or hotel credit after, \$100 cash after

Agency: Prime Travel
Phone: 201-325-2727
Airline: ?
Casinos: **Excalibur, Circus Circus, Dunes**
Nights: 4
Couple: \$299 pp, \$149 pp after rebates
Single: ?
Weekend: ?
Freebies: ?
Gamble: \$5, 8 hours
Rebates: \$100 cash after, \$100 match play after

The thing to realize about these trips is that these guys aren't very honest. They advertise that the cost will be "FREE" to qualified \$5 minimum players, but that's

because they count match play chips just like real money, whereas it's worth only about half. Always ask them to divide up the rebates to see how much is match play and how much is cash, explaining that you realize that match play chips are worth only half of face value.

My experience talking with these guys is about like my experience with car salesmen, though I have never actually gone on one of these trips. I called Marcus Travel during the America West 1/2 price deal, and they were willing to cut me a "great deal" and come down \$10 to \$409, whereas America West had cut the airfare \$150; I was not amused and didn't feel like haggling.

Prime Travel, however, was the exception; they were very straight-forward and did not try to trick me with the value of match play chips. They also definitely did not expect me to gamble, offering the gambling rebates only after I mentioned that I play blackjack. They are the cheapest of the three before the rebates and the cheapest after. They were the only one with virtually no restrictions on when you can travel and still get the advertised cost.

Las Vegas Food

weinstoc:

My first stop was the **Lady Luck Casino** where I got one of their free shrimp cocktails (about half lettuce).

I went back across the street to the **Golden Gate** and had a 50 cent shrimp cocktail, and a hot dog. The shrimp cocktail was full of bay shrimp and was much better than the one at the **Lady Luck**.

jasunas:

As far as food goes, the best (cheap) food that I had was at the **Showboat**: dinner \$5.55 with a drink. The (cheap) food at the **Excalibur** was ok for lunch and good for breakfast. At **Circus Circus**, the food (brunch) was not that good (I would not go there again.)

irwin:

The **Stardust** buffet is good, as well as the one at the **Holiday**.

msw:

Lunch at the **Stardust** buffet was not

bad for \$5.95.

hall:

Vegas is great. It is nothing like Atlantic City. You are treated well by the hotels in Vegas, who try to please you to have you stay and gamble, rather than squeezing you for every penny like in Atlantic City. I had the best pizza ever at the Cafe in the **Golden Nugget**, and it was super cheap. The buffet at the **Golden Nugget** was the best I've ever had too. I didn't try any of the \$1.99 deals, partially because I'm a vegetarian and so that eliminates all the steak deals, but anyway you get a great room and great food for low prices. Even the restaurants outside the casinos are very reasonable, compared to New Jersey prices.

Las Vegas Freebies

weinstoc:

I stopped at **O'Shea's**, where I discovered that the coupon book that was so good in October, wasn't that great in February. In particular, I couldn't exchange my free drink coupon for a glass of Harp Ale. I played a few lucky bucks which weren't lucky for me, and got out of there down \$3.00.

After picking up the obligatory free coffee mug at the **Sands**, I discovered a deal that you folks should know about. They give you a coupon which, when filled out and presented with \$10 cash, gets you \$15.00 of (non-cashable) chips. These are *not* match play chips, but are as good as cash at the tables. That is, if you bet them and win you get paid off in real chips, and get to keep the special chips as well to bet again.

irwin:

You can get Basic Strategy cards at the "Learning Center" in the **Las Vegas Hilton**. It's just the color coded chart, with the LV Hilton logo on the back. I'm tempted to get one of these cards, and ink in the strategy variations over the basic strategy. The cards are small enough (size of a playing card) that no one would be able to notice without examining it, and it has the LV Hilton logo on it, so it looks official.

Las Vegas Fun

jasunas:

As far as shows go, there was **Bill Cosby** (hey what can you say, great seats and always a good show), **Milinda's Magic Show** (nice skimpy outfits, good side acts, and ok magic), and **Round Table Show** (at the **Excalibur**, ok food, good show within a horse arena, but the fighting was preplanned). All these shows I would recommend going to go see.

Caesars is still the best place on the strip. The theater is the best (\$6.00.)

blackstock:

I did see the show at the **Riviera**, "**Splash**", and it was well worth it.

hall:

I was comped to front row seats for the show "**Splash**" at the **Riviera** (cheesy cheesecake - lots of nude breasts at the late show - some parts of the show are incredibly stupid). By the way, it's dangerous to sit in the front for Splash, because not only can you get wet, but you could get killed if the motorcycle act goes wrong; three guys go into a tiny steel mesh globe and drive around and around; then the bottom 1/3 of the globe drops open; if any motorcycle were to drift down a bit, it would fly in a straight line, possibly out across the stage and into the audience.

Las Vegas Etcetera

blackstock:

The **Gambler's Book Store** at 11th and Charleston is pretty nice. Better than the one in Reno (which is good, itself).

Reno

Reno Lodging

jkimble:

If you're looking for the cheapest, **Circus Circus** is probably a safe bet (no pun). However, you might notice that every other car cruising that corner of the "strip" is a police car; stay with the crowds if you're walking around and you probably won't even notice...

The other good one is **The Peppermill**, which has specials like \$20/night. They also have the best-looking cocktail waitresses and blackjack dealers you will ever see in your life (I live two blocks from the 'Mill and speak from lots of experience). :-)

Drawbacks to **The Peppermill** are that it's usually more crowded than other places, the bands are good but loud, and it is quite a ways from downtown (about 5-15 minutes drive or \$5-10 cab fare).

whaley:

By far the cheapest casino deal for two nights was **Circus Circus** at \$36/night for a room with 2 queen beds. Of the other places I called, \$68/night was the cheapest. The only catch was that **Circus Circus** requires two nights on the weekend (Friday and Saturday), but that was no problem. I didn't really look into non-casino lodgings, because I've never stayed in a casino and wanted to see what it was like.

The room was clean, with a huge bathroom, and a modest amount of space in the sleeping area that included two queen beds. Someone at work said that **Circus Circus** was noisy due to its family orientation (i.e., lots of kids), but our floor (non-smoking) was very quiet, and I had no trouble napping/sleeping (not that I did much of it!), even though I'm a very light sleeper.

Reno Food

mannys:

Great restaurants at the **Nugget**.

whaley:

My friend heard a good recommendation for the buffet at the **El Dorado**, so we went there for lunch after settling into our room. The only other buffet I'd been to in Reno was at **Fitzgerald's**; the **El Dorado's** was much better, and only a few bucks more. It had all the usual mayonnaise/jello salads and meats, but it also had several pasta dishes (tortellini, lasagne, and ravioli), a spicy sausage and peppers dish, lots of rolls and numerous other entrees, and an extensive desert bar. Well, the deserts didn't look that good, but they did have a frozen yogurt machine, too. The only problem was the

beverages--the waitresses didn't come around enough to suit my tastes (I like lots of water with my meals). We went to Friday dinner here too. Crowded, and we were seated next to a squealing bunch of Las Vegas high school girls (which *was* kind of fun when they weren't discussing how much the frozen yogurt looked like a big turd). The dinner wasn't nearly as good (or we weren't as hungry!), and we didn't go back after that.

I had a half-pound hot kraut dog that night at the **Nugget** (\$1.65) that was really pretty good. However, it was so smoky in there that I had to step back into the casino for a breath of "fresh" air!

One of my favorite places to go is the restaurant in the **Virginian**, which has a \$1.65 gambler's breakfast. They make *really* good omelets, and will give you a pitcher of water if you request one!

We also ate at the Vietnamese place near the **Sands** and **Sundowner**. My food was pretty good, but my friend's chicken dish looked like mystery meat.

Reno Fun

jkimble:

If you're losing/winning big and want a break from the action, look into the **Flamingo's Comedy Club** -- they have some funny acts come through town.

whaley:

Go to **The Peppermill** and check out the Fireside lounge. (There's actually one in Silicon Valley that's a pretty good replica!)

Atlantic City

Atlantic City Lodging

butler18:

The **Trump Hotels** usually offer very attractive hotel rates. If you sign up for the **Trump Plaza** Players Card (a free card) they will give you a hotel deal for about \$35/night.

Also, the **Trump Regency**, which does not have a casino on the premises, offers good hotel rooms because they expect people who stay there to lose their money at **Trump Plaza**. The phone numbers is (800)677-RESV.

hart:

Played & stayed at **Resorts**...\$86 for the room, \$20 in coin back, free buffet, show tickets (the show was closed, so we got extra buffet tickets), coupons for 50% off another visit before a certain date, and coupons for \$25 off a \$40 purchase at the Resorts Players Choice, a clothing shop in the hotel.

The room was nice. The hotel is older, and it's not as garish as some of the others. The room was big, 2 double beds, and a sleeper sofa. Windows that *open!*

Atlantic City Food

stank:

After Donald announced in advertisements that the buffet at **Trump Plaza** was only \$5.95 for lunch and \$7.77 for dinner, provided you have a slot card or a filled-out application for one, there were signs at the promo booth and buffet that any coupon offers were based on the "regular" price of \$12.95 for lunch and \$15.95 for dinner (Las Vegas/Reno patrons: see why Nevada gaming has nothing to worry about concerning competition from A/C; anyone who can afford to travel to gamble, and chooses A/C over Nevada, deserves what they get. Also, the menu selection at most of the Nevada casino buffets that I've been to was more extensive than at A/C. I guess one reason we pay so much more here is that access to hotel facilities cannot be through the casino; I haven't been to one Nevada buffet where the entrance, exit, or both, wasn't through the casino floor).

butler18:

The **Trump Hotels** have the George Foreman All you can eat buffet for \$7.77 which includes very tasty shrimp and lots of other good food.

didio:

Resorts has the \$4.99 buffet, where we waited in line for 20+ minutes at 5:30 PM on a Thursday. There was a *tacky* "Tribute to Hollywood" performance for the waiting patrons which culminated with the singers/dancers wading through the lines like politicians to shake our hands. Was the cheap food worth this humiliation? Probably. The entrees were

mediocre and the salad too. Soda cost extra so we drank bitter iced tea. The dessert was fine, I had frozen yogurt with crunchy, tasty toppings.

hart:

The buffet at **Resorts** was fair. The line moved quickly. The beef stew was pretty good, the creamed spinach was good, the parsley'ed potatoes were great. The desert bar looked good, but, I'm not a big desert person, so all I had was the soft ice cream, which was very good, as was the whipped cream.

jacko:

\$4.75 for a grilled cheese sandwich in the **Claridge** Coffee Shop???

Atlantic City Freebies

jacko:

Down at the **Taj Mahal** they are running the "we will buy your mail" promotion again. Basically, bring in a coin coupon offer that some other casino mailed to you, and the Taj will cash it in for its face value + \$10. Not quite as good as the version they ran around Christmas, when they were giving double the value, but still OK. You have to park for 2 hours first, meaning you have to get there before 8pm Sunday through Friday. (Not good on Saturday, and probably not on the upcoming holiday.)

stank:

The **Taj's** newspaper ads clearly stated that the minimum coupon they would buy (with a \$10 premium) was \$12.50.



BLACKJACK CONFIDENTIAL

Blackjack Confidential is published 10 times/year and is packed with information on casino conditions and casino industry news. Subscriptions are \$55/six months, \$99/year, \$190/two years in the U.S. - Canada and all other foreign add \$4.50 a year; foreign air mail add \$35 a year. To see a sample of a recent issue, send \$10 plus \$1.50 postage and handling. Blackjack Confidential Publishing Co., Inc., 513 Salsbury Rd., Cherry Hill, NJ 08304

Other Voices

Michael Hall

Blackjack Confidential

Blackjack Confidential Publishing
513 Salsbury Rd.
Cherry Hill, NJ 08034

Subscriptions: \$99/year (10 issues/year)

There are regular columns on the playing conditions in Atlantic City, Nevada, other U.S. and Foreign. Also columns on tournaments, industry earnings, how to get cheap food/rooms/etc., and more.

In the January/February issue, there are articles on cruise ship blackjack, riverboat gambling in Iowa, Atlantic City is thinking of offering over/under 13, among other things.

Featured in the March issue is an article on the 5-Card 21 option at Resorts. The article was written by Steve Markowitz and me, and goes into more detail than the article here in this issue of **21 NEWS**.

The other big article is on riverboat gambling. This was covered in the December issue, though the article in the current issue is a lot more comprehensive. Riverboat casinos are about to hit Iowa, Illinois, and possibly Pennsylvania and many other states. Blackjack conditions should be surprisingly favorable.

Hilton is shopping for a casino in Atlantic City - possibly Trump Plaza, Bally's Park Place, Trump Castle, and Bally's Grand. Both Bally and Trump are in deep financial doo-doo.

Blackjack Forum

RGE
414 Santa Clara Ave.
Oakland, CA 94610

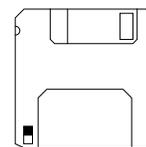
Subscriptions: \$30/year (4 issues/year)

The March issue has the unbalanced over/under count and Las Vegas Advisor deals. ♠

As reviewed in Blackjack Forum ...

Blackjack Trainer

Counting Software for the
Macintosh!



Blackjack Trainer is a Macintosh program that teaches card counting by checking your play against correct basic, or counting strategy. Blackjack Trainer comes with three built-in strategies (Hi-Low, Hi Opt I, and Expert Count), or you can supply your own. The rules are fully configurable for most U.S. and European variations.

A "drill" mode flashes clumps of cards to practice counting at speed. A "simulation" mode allows strategies to be tested over thousands of hands.

See the review by Anthony Curtis in the March 1991 issue of *Blackjack Forum*.

Blackjack Trainer was created by ConJelCo, and is available for \$75.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling. Checks or money orders only, please.

© 1991, ConJelCo.



ConJelCo

5922 Howe Street
Suite 104
Pittsburgh, PA
15232-2834

BLACKJACK TEAM

Blackjack team seeks additional members for Vegas, Reno, and maybe even Atlantic City. Write to:

BJ TEAM
P.O. Box 5901
Somerset, NJ 08875-5901