

**Special Report:** Reel 'em In • Filthy Rich • Polly & Roger



# Strictly Slots

The Magazine for Slot & Video Poker Players

DECEMBER  
1998  
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**7 rules for  
successful  
slot play**



## 6 **HOT** Slot Picks!

How **you** can  
**win more**  
using advanced  
video poker  
strategy

**Big Bang Piggy Bankin'**  
**Double Diamond**  
**Pick 'em Poker**  
**Empire • Sphinx**  
**Treasure Tunnel**

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## Readers Talk Back

**S**ince this is our first issue of *Strictly Slots*, I've taken the opportunity to run some comments I received from *Casino Player* readers when I asked for feedback regarding the launch of this new magazine. Never before have I received so much mail—in fact, of the hundreds of letters and e-mails, only one person, from Wendover, NV, wrote to say he didn't think *Strictly Slots* was a good idea. I certainly hope our premier issue changes his mind! All of the comments below were e-mailed to me (which is why you won't see city names), and I certainly look forward to your letters, comments and questions in the future. You'll find my address, e-mail address and fax number at the end of this column. Thanks for all your support, and enjoy the magazine!

—Adam Fine,  
Editor-In-Chief

I'm so excited about your putting out an all-slots magazine for people like me. It's about time someone came up with this idea. I have been wondering for a long time why no such magazine existed and even toyed with the idea of doing one myself. Now I can let you do the work! The minute it's available, sign me up.

Mary DeFalco

*Strictly Slots*? Yippee! I remember the first time I saw one of those slot machines that stands eight feet tall, and offered a different game on each level, I thought "OK, now what!" I couldn't find the blasted coin slot, let alone the applicable denomination. On top of that, it took three on-lookers and myself several minutes to fig-

**Yippee! I remember the first time I saw one of those slot machines that stands eight feet tall, and offered a different game on each level, I thought "OK, now what!"**

ure out what to do. No, I'm not stupid, but for me, moving from a blackjack table to this monster was quite an eye-opener! Just tell me how soon I can subscribe to *Strictly Slots*!

Ginger Todd

I think your idea for *Strictly Slots* is a great idea and I would be an early subscriber. With all of the variations of video poker, it would be nice to have more information on each game as to how to get the most for your play and the different strategies needed for each game. I would also be interested in learning more about which slot machines would be the best to play in regards to their pay schedules. My husband, Rich, and I really enjoy *Casino Player* and look forward to receiving it each month. Keep up the good work.

Connie Becker

Two votes here for *Strictly Slots*. My wife, Gloria, and I are mainly interested in slot info. I am strictly a video poker fan. We would appreciate a magazine dedicated to that type of play.

Ken Kasinski



## Strictly Slots

The Magazine for Slot & Video Poker Players

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
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**SENIOR ART DIRECTOR**  
Lisa Robertson

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
Melissa Cook

**SENIOR EDITOR**  
Roger Gros

**SLOTS EDITOR**  
Frank Legato

**VIDEO POKER EDITOR**  
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**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
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Jeremy Parnes

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**  
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**PHOTO/GRAPHIC EDITOR**  
Rick Greco

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS**  
Lori Goudie, Diane Stevens

**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR**  
Helga Petersen

**WEBMASTER**  
Gerald Asher

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
Carol Altman  
Anthony Curtis  
Liam Daily  
Scotch Henderson  
SKip Hughes  
Jean Scott

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# Big Bang Piggy Bankin'

Williams/WMS Gaming

## Slot Type:

Three-reel; three-coin multiplier; single pay line; "Dotmation" L.E.D. bonus game; quarter, half-dollar and dollar denominations

## Payback % range:

86.34%-97.09%

## Avg. Hit Frequency:

Every 6-7 spins (14.89%)

## Top Jackpot:

16,670 coins

## Availability:

NV, NJ, IA, IL, IN, Canada, Caribbean

## Commentary

Big Bang Piggy Bankin's primary three-reel game includes 10 possible winning combinations, ranging from three coins for a single "wild pig" symbol (playing max coin) to 1,200 coins for two 7s with a "wild pig" symbol. The "wild pig" symbol substitutes for all others in winning combinations. The pay table also includes special bar symbols with the image of the pig, which count both as bar wins and to trigger the bonus game. Three pig symbols of any kind on the pay line activates the "Dotmation" bonus screen, a circle of 10 "piggy" characters with a rotating arrow in the middle.

## Bonus Round #1

Each piggy character on the bonus screen is assigned a random bonus coin amount. The animated arrow circles around until it stops on one for a bonus amount. The bonus is recorded, the pig turns into a bomb, and the arrow begins to circle again. When the arrow lands on a bomb, the bonus round ends. Bonus amounts keep accumulating as long as the arrow lands on a pig character. Additional bonus amounts of 15, 40, 60, 150, 400 and 1,000 coins are awarded for reaching the third through ninth pig character without hitting a bomb. If the arrow lands on all 10 pigs without hitting a bomb, a 15,000-coin top bonus is added to the accumulated 1,670 bonus coins, the individual random bonus awards, and any pay table combination in the triggering reel result.

## Another Bonus

A second bonus feature involves the piggy bank on the "Dotmation" screen during normal play (that is, whenever it isn't in the bonus round), which holds a random bonus coin amount of 5, 10, 15 or 20 coins. Every time the player gets three blanks, the piggy bank amount increases by one coin (rather like the original Piggy Bankin'). Three "Break The Bank" symbols on the pay line collects the amount in the bank.

## Good Little Piggy

The two bonus games and the primary reel game are completely entertaining. The pig characters on the animated bonus screen dance, grunt, squeal and turn into various characters (including Elvis). Aside from its entertainment value, the bonus game occurs with good frequency and can be lucrative. The 15 percent base hit frequency (a hit of some kind every seven spins or so) could be improved, but the entertainment, great bonus game and huge bonus coin amounts more than make up for it. One bonus round can result in hundreds, even thousands, of credits, and chances are you'll land more than one. This machine is a kick.



# Double Diamond

International Game Technology

## Slot Type:

Three-reel; two-coin and three-coin multiplier game versions; single pay line; wild symbol that doubles and quadruple jackpots; nickel, dime, quarter, half-dollar, dollar and premium denominations

## Payback % range:

75%—98%

## Avg. Hit Frequency:

Every 6-7 spins (15.18%) on the two-coin; every 7 spins (13.98%) on the three-coin.

## Top Jackpot:

Two-coin version, 1,600 coins  
Three-coin version, 2,500 coins

## Availability:

All jurisdictions permitting games of chance

## Commentary

Double Diamond is IGT's classic three-reel game with double and quadruple jackpots achieved by landing winning combinations with the wild "Double Diamond" symbol. The primary pay table includes nine possible winning combinations, with max-coin payouts in the more common three-coin version ranging from six coins for one cherry to 2,500 coins for the top jackpot. One wild symbol in a winning combination doubles the payout; two wild symbols quadruples the jackpot, and three wild symbols wins the top jackpot.

This was the game that started it all, the first slot to offer doubling and quadrupling wild symbols—a bonus feature that has since been imitated in hundreds of other slot machines. The relatively frequent doubled jackpot sustains play for a good while, and the occasional quadrupled jackpot results in huge payoffs.

This has been one of the most popular slots in the country for years, and has provided the standard by which other slots are judged. Frankly, it's a toss up between this machine and "Red White & Blue" as IGT's most popular game, but with frequent multiplied jackpots like these, who cares? We still love this game.



# Empire

A.C. Coin and Slot

## Slot Type:

Three-reel; three-coin multiplier; single pay line; wild symbol and "nudge" feature on bar symbols; secondary bonus game; quarter and dollar denominations

## Payback % range:

90%-93%

## Avg. Hit Frequency:

Every 3 spins (35.7%)

## Top Jackpot:

10,000 coins

## Availability:

NV, NJ, MS, CT, IA, IN, FL, Caribbean

## Commentary

The primary reel game includes nine possible winning combinations, ranging from two coins for one "Empire" symbol to 10,000 coins for three "Empire" symbols on the pay line. The "Empire" symbol is wild above and below the pay line. Three wild symbols in any position on the reels pay a secondary 1,000-coin jackpot. Special bar symbols "nudge" to the pay line.

The slot is built to resemble the Empire State Building, with a King Kong-like gorilla figure climbing up the side. A special "Climb" symbol on the reels causes the gorilla to climb toward "bonus floors." If the figure reaches the "70th floor" before a timer runs out (you've got a minute and forty seconds to get him to the top), a bonus of 10 coins is paid. Reaching the "90th floor" pays a bonus of 15 coins; reaching the "100th floor" pays 25 coins. The bonus feature is accompanied by jungle drums and conga music.

## Monkey Business

The bonus race of the gorilla climbing up the side of the building is hilarious—it's one of the few games in which you'll actually find people laughing while they play. The nudging bar and wild "Empire" symbols make for great single-line hit frequency, which extends play long enough for several bonus games and permits good wins with little initial investment.

The bonus amounts, at 10, 15 and 25 coins, are a bit too low for our taste. Higher bonus amounts (perhaps 25, 50 and 75 coins) would add a lot more excitement to the game—although this game isn't about getting to the top, it's about the journey that takes you there. Additionally, because you're on a timer to get the gorilla up the building, you'll find yourself playing much faster than on a typical slot, and that means you need to watch your bankroll.

But the sheer entertainment value of the theme, with the conga music blaring and the gorilla climbing the building, more than outweigh any drawbacks. The primary game is loose and fun, and provides sustained entertainment, independent of the bonus game. AC Coin & Slot is already coming out with multiple variations on this "climbing contest" theme. If they're all as hysterical as this one, we can't wait to play them.



# Pick 'em Poker

Bally Gaming

## Commentary

Pick 'Em is a proprietary video draw poker game. Each hand contains two face-up cards and two separate sets of three cards, each with one face-up and two face-down. The player picks one of the two three-card sets to complete his hand. Single coin pay table: Nines or higher—2; two pair—3; trips—5; straight—11; flush—15; full house—18; quads—100; straight flush—200; royal flush—1,000. The max-coin payouts are 5X multiples of the singles through the full house, with bonuses for the top three hands: quads—600; straight flush—1,199; royal flush—6,000.

The generous pay table and high-hand bonuses can boost the credit meter and replenish losses in a hurry. This is real

video poker, but it's different from other games. Next month we'll give you expert strategy that will boost your return to well over 99 percent. It's not complicated, but it does require readjusting your thinking, as you are always choosing between 3-card sets.



## Slot Type:

Five-coin, Nines-or-Better video poker game in Bally "Game Maker" multi-game, touch-screen video format; nickel, quarter, half-dollar and dollar denominations

## Payback % range:

97.49% average, 98.48% with perfect strategy

## Avg. Hit Frequency:

Standard draw poker frequency

## Top Jackpot:

6,000 coins

## Availability:

NV, NJ, MO, AZ, IA, CT, ND, IL, IN, Canada, Bahamas

# Sphinx

## Atronic Casino Technology

### Slot Type:

Multi-coin video slot with second-screen bonus game; available with three, five or nine pay lines; max bet per line ranges from 3 coins to 45 coins; nickel, quarter, half-dollar and dollar denominations

### Payback % range:

90.99% (three-reel, five-line) to 91.48% (five reel, five line)

### Avg. Hit Frequency:

Every 3-4 spins (29.72%)

### Top Jackpot:

3-coin version, 2,500 coins  
5-coin & 9-coin versions, 10,000 coins  
25-coin version, 25,000 coins  
45-coin version, 50,000 coins

### Availability:

NJ, AZ, CO, FL, IA, IL, IN, MO, MN, NM, OR, NV

### Commentary

The primary game is a multi-line video slot with 32 possible winning combinations. Pays range from five coins to a variable top prize based on the line and coin configuration. The most common version currently available is the 25-coin version, which has five pay lines and permits bets of 1-5 coins per line. The top jackpot on this version is 5,000 coins, times the number of coins bet per line, for a 25,000-coin top prize.

The video presentation of the reels and bonus screens feature intricate three-dimensional, Egyptian-themed graphics. Three or more scattered "scarab" symbols (in any position on the reels) pay from two to 50 coins, times the total number of coins bet (for a top possible scatter award of 450 coins). The "Tut" symbol is wild, and so is the top jackpot symbol.

### I Want My Mummy

Three or more coin symbols on a lit pay line activate the animated second screen, called "Tut's Two-Tiered Bonus." This is a three-dimensional image of the inside of a pharaoh's tomb, containing five sarcophagi. Four hide bonus amounts of five, 20, 100 or 250 coins. One hides the image of the Sphinx. The player selects one sarcophagus, and if the Sphinx is revealed, a second chamber opens revealing five more sarcophagi. The player then selects one of them for a second-tier bonus of 100, 200, 250, 1,000 or 2,500 coins. This amount is multiplied by the per-line bet for a top possible bonus of 12,500 coins.

The graphics and sound in this game make it very entertaining. The spinning reels (complete with a mechanical-sounding "snap" when they stop) and bonus chambers are intricate in their detail, and the hit frequency is high enough to result in sustained play without boredom. Atronic's mastery of three-dimensional video makes this game worth a try, and the complexity of the payouts will keep video-reel fans playing and playing. But sample other Atronic games as well. You may find "Volcano Island" and "Desert Racer" are more generous.



# Treasure Tunnel

Sigma Gaming

## Slot Type:

Three-reel; three-coin multiplier; single pay line; bonus jackpot multiplier; quarter and dollar denominations

## Payback % range:

85.08%—97.52%

## Avg. Hit Frequency:

Every 7-8 spins  
(13.29%—14.86%)

## Top Jackpot:

15,000 coins

## Availability:

NV, NJ, MS, CT, IA, IN, MO, LA, IL, NM, AZ, WI, CO, SD, Caribbean

## Commentary

The primary reel game includes nine possible winning combinations, ranging from two coins for one cherry to 3,000 coins for three "Bonus Jackpot" symbols. "Bonus Jackpot" symbols substitute for all other symbols in winning combinations. One symbol in a win activates the "Treasure Tunnel," a tunnel in a box on top of the machine made up of concentric rings of neon bearing the multiplier amounts 2X, 3X, 4X and 5X (the center). When activated, the rings of the tunnel flash until they stop on a multiplier amount, which then multiplies the reel jackpot by that amount. Two "Bonus Jackpot" symbols in a winning combination multiply the jackpot by five prior to activation of the tunnel—the tunnel bonus then results in a jackpot multiplied up to 25 times.

The bonus feature is a blast, heralded by music and an announcer shouting, "It's Treasure Time!" The "Bonus Jackpot" symbol lands with good frequency, enacting the bonus feature for a jackpot that is at least doubled (there is no "1X" in the tunnel). The sounds, flashing lights and frequency of the bonus tunnel make this game great fun, and the multiplier amounts keep you playing to extend that fun. However, the base hit frequency is every 7-8 spins, so you may find yourself dipping into your bankroll during dry spells.



# Parrot Power

**VLC's "Polly & Roger" multi-line video game  
is now available in two versions—regular and "Power"**

**W**hen Video Lottery Technologies, Inc. changed its name to Powerhouse Technologies, Inc. last year, it was more than just symbolic. The change marked the maturation of the company's VLC, Inc. unit as a developer of video slots for casinos.

The move also heralded the availability of popular multi-line video games like VLC's pirate-themed "Polly & Roger" in a new, improved format—a modern-style machine that is every bit as entertaining as anything on the market.

VLC invented the multi-game video slot in the mid '80s for bars in Montana, and as video lottery terminals for various states and Canadian provinces. When the company crossed over to the casino industry in the early '90s, it simply took its "Winning Touch" video lottery terminal, with a few modifications, into casinos as multi-game, touch-screen video slots to compete with Bally's "Game Maker" and IGT's "Game King"—which had already introduced the multi-game genre to U.S. casinos.

While many players loved the original Winning Touch, the fact that it was designed for lotteries made it pale to Game Maker in many respects. The '80s-style graphics, music and sound effects appeared primitive, at least by '90s casino standards.

In the summer of 1997, VLC unveiled its "Winning Touch Power Series," a completely revamped version of its original multi-game unit that proved the company can run with the big dogs of the industry. A powerful computer processor runs the new unit, enabling striking graphics and intricate images throughout. A state-of-the-art sound system blasts clever sound effects related to the individual games.

Several new games were released with the Power Series, but VLC was careful to include new versions of the most popular games from the original Winning Touch. One of these was an improved version of "Polly & Roger," a five-line video reel game.

## Multi-Feature

While some players viewed the Power Series version of Polly & Roger as a replacement of the original, there were thousands of players who considered it simply an extra choice in a game they had come to love. According to Dusty Fasbender, who headed the development team that created the game, Polly & Roger has an inherent appeal that has nothing to do with fancy graphics. He says it's popular because it incorporates multiple special events into normal play.

One of these events, present in most Australian-style games, is the scatter pay. Three, four or five "Polly Parrot" symbols anywhere on the screen pay two coins, five coins or 10 coins, respectively, multiplied by the total coins bet. The maximum betting configuration available is 50 coins per pay line—a max bet of 250 coins, resulting in a top possible scatter award of 2,500 coins.

Fasbender says the design team brainstormed over what to include as the main bonus feature of the game, to set it apart from the Australian-style games that already had a head start in many U.S. markets. "We decided to try offering two different bonus features," he says.

The team decided on free spins as one feature and a second-screen bonus game as the other (most Australian-style video games include these features). The question then became how to make sure



the features were special.

"For the free games, we wanted to make sure each player won something during the round," says Fasbender. To do this, the hit frequency was raised from the 36 percent overall frequency of the primary game—a hit of some kind every three spins or so—to a whopping 70 percent during the bonus round, guaranteeing a hit of some type with nearly every spin.

The free-spin bonus rounds are activated by lining up three or more of a second scatter-pay symbol—Polly Parrot's sidekick, the "Jolly Roger" flag symbol. Landing three of the symbols anywhere on the screen kicks off three free games; four of them trigger 10 free games; five trigger 20 free games. The player's last per-line bet is frozen to apply for all free spins.

With the turbo-charged hit frequency making the free spins a blast, Fasbender's team added yet another feature to the free-game round. The Jolly Roger symbol acts as a standard scatter-pay symbol during the free games, with a pay table of wins multiplied by the total amount wagered—three coins for one Jolly Roger anywhere on the screen; five coins for two; 10 coins for three; 20 coins for four; and 50 coins for five—for a total possible free-game scatter award of 12,500 coins on the 250-coin version, or of 2,500 coins on the more common 50-coin version of the game (the version most commonly installed in nickel or quarter denominations.)

The lively free-spin round is augmented by the second-screen bonus game, a "Parrot Race." In addition to the award of up to 10 coins times the total number of coins bet for scattered Polly Parrot symbols, three or more of them trigger this race, which is different in the two versions of Polly & Roger.

The original Polly & Roger features a race of "Peg-Legged Parrots." Five peg-legged parrot characters line up vertically on the left side of the screen, and race across the screen toward a finish line. There is a different prize for each of the five possible finishing places, each a multiplier of the total coins bet.

If the player lands three parrots in the primary game, he gets to choose one of the five racing parrots. If four parrots trigger the second-screen game, the player picks two racers; and if the bonus game is triggered by five parrot symbols, he picks three racing parrots. The bonus jackpot

amounts for each of the three parrots are added together for a potentially huge bonus jackpot. Fifth place in the race pays twice the total coins wagered; fourth place pays three times the total bet; third place pays five times the bet; second place pays 10 times the bet; and first place pays 15 times the total coins wagered.

Even with the somewhat limited graphic capabilities of the original Winning Touch format, the peg-legged parrot race is funny, with the parrots doing a cockeyed hobble across the screen.

The newer Power Series version of the parrot race is grimly funny. Instead of peg-legged parrots, the screen shows the five parrots lined up horizontally, just above pots of boiling water. They then fly upward toward the finish line. The winning parrot or parrots stay on top of the screen, but the losers fall haplessly into the pots, to be cooked (sort of a variation on Monty Python's classic "Dead Parrot" sketch).

Fasbender says the inclusion of two separate bonus events means that the special modes occur much more frequently than in most Australian-style slots. "The reason we tried two features was because customers were complaining that bonuses weren't happening frequently enough," he says. "With Polly & Roger, we targeted the design so that one of the two bonus events occurs an average of once every 40 spins."

## Primary Fun

While the multiple bonus events constitute the key to the popularity of Polly & Roger, the primary game is also fun—particularly in the new, graphic-and-sound-rich Power Series version. The reason is more special features, added to the one-in-three hit frequency (which is more or less standard for this type of game).

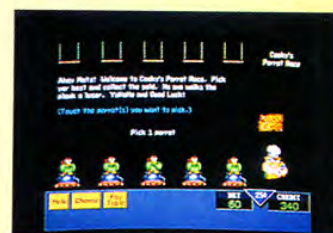
Standard play is enhanced by features common to all VLC Winning Touch units. There is no button panel or handle—all play is accomplished using the touch-screen monitor. Additionally, there is a spot on the screen that allows the player to stop the reels at any point—even a millisecond after they start spinning. (The machine's random number generator picks the results of the spin the instant the "spin reels" spot is touched, so it's not really necessary to watch the reels spin.)

The combination of these two features allows

## How to Play



Three parrots lined up on adjacent reels jump the player into the bonus round.



Player chooses one, two or three parrots to start the race (number of parrots is determined by payline on previous screen).



Parrots race up to their perches. In this photo, the player has chosen the third parrot, indicated by an "X."



Parrot three wins! The remaining four become parrot stew. Polly want some oregano?

## The bonus jackpot amounts for each of the three parrots are added together for a potentially huge bonus jackpot.

for lightning-fast play. For many people, this is the only way to play a slot machine: You know instantly whether you win or lose, and with a little luck, you can build a huge bank of credits within a few minutes. (Of course, you can also lose huge banks of credits quickly, which is why most people prefer to let the reels spin for each game.)

The standard pay schedule includes four themed winning symbols and three poker symbols, with payouts starting for lining up two on a lit pay line. Lining up two to five treasure maps pays two to 200 coins; two to five pirate ships pay three to 300 coins; two to five desert islands pay five to 500 coins; and two to five pirate characters (they look a lot like "Yosemite Sam" from the Warner Bros. cartoons) pay 10 to 1,000 coins. All of these payouts are multiplied by the number of coins bet per line, and pays on separate lines are added together.

The poker symbol pays begin at three on a lit pay line: two coins, 10 coins or 100 coins for three, four or five Jacks; three coins, 15 coins or 100 coins for Queens; and five coins, 25 coins or 100 coins for Kings.

The standard pays are spiced up not only by the frequent bonus features, but by a special "Treasure Chest" wild symbol, which substitutes for all symbols except the Polly and Jolly Roger scatter symbols. This wild symbol has a separate, generous pay table of its own: 20 coins for two on

a lit line; 200 coins for three; 1,000 coins for four; and 5,000 coins for five—each multiplied by the per-line bet. Lining up five wild symbols at max-coin yields the machine's top jackpot of 100,000 coins.

The sharp graphics, clear music and great sound effects of the Power Series version make playing Polly & Roger a lot of fun between the bonus rounds. The original version of the game isn't quite as fun from a sensory-input standpoint, but it's just as feature-packed as the new one.

One note of caution: If you play the original version of the game, you will have to learn to live with a couple of annoying features that have since been corrected on the new version. With every losing spin, you hear a mocking, two-note musical tone that sounds a little like the neighborhood bully on *The Simpsons*. And every time you win anything, even two coins, you hear a goofy, computer-music rendition of the "Hallelujah" chorus from Handel's *Messiah*. It's cute at first, but after about half an hour of hearing it, you may want to put your foot through the screen.

Of course, these are but minor distractions from the real fun of Polly & Roger, a multiple bonus game packed with clever features and a variety of ways to win money. This game is a definite thumbs-up. And if you're easily annoyed, just stick with the Power Series. ●

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# Something Fishy

**'Reel 'Em In' and 'Filthy Rich' prove that some of the best Australian-style slots are the ones made in America**

In 1995, it seemed they came from nowhere. Within a few short months, customers in the Indian gaming jurisdictions were raving about these new video slots with multiple pay lines, multiple betting configurations, encyclopedic pay tables and second-screen bonus games.

They actually weren't "new" at all. They were "pokies," slot machines nearly identical to the games that had been popular for years in casinos and private clubs on the other side of the world, in Australia. Aussie slot-maker Aristocrat had arrived in the Heartland, armed with a style of slot machine that would soon win the hearts of American gamblers. The genre would spread to Atlantic City, to Minnesota, and to other major markets within a year.

Major markets, that is, with one glaring exception—the biggest market of them all. Aristocrat wasn't licensed to sell slots in Nevada. As multi-line video surged in popularity across the country, Nevada's casinos remained the Land of the Reel—and a huge market for the hot new game style was ripe for the picking.



"Hey, I got a bite!" Reel 'Em In's bonus round delivers a fish worth 10 times the total bet, for a bonus payoff of 450 credits.

Aristocrat had more than 40 years of experience selling slots in Australia. World slot leader IGT also had its own line of pokies Down Under. But the company that would introduce Australia to Nevada, and pose the Australians their first serious multi-line competition throughout America as well, had been selling slot machines for all of one year.

It was Williams/WMS Gaming, the Chicago-based company famous for its pinball machines. Still the leader in that business, Williams initially entered legal gaming via the video lottery market. By 1995, however, it had made quite a name for itself in the casino industry, with a line of reel-spinning slots such as "High Speed" and "Jackpot Stampede," packed with wild bonus sequences, creative sound effects and high hit frequencies. In 1996, the company introduced "Piggy Bankin'," with its "Dotmation" bonus screen that would be a model for many reel-spinning bonus slots to come.

But the wild popularity of Williams' first reel-spinners would come to a screeching halt when slot leader IGT won a patent-infringement lawsuit involving the "virtual reel" technology used on the games. Williams would have to invent a new technology to jump-start its reel-spinners (which has since been accomplished), while perfecting its own line of video gaming devices. It was decided these video slots would challenge the Aussies in the budding multi-line, multi-coin genre.

Williams may have been new to casino slot machines, but the company certainly was no stranger to video games. This, after all, was the company that gave us "Mortal Kombat," the amusement game that has mesmerized our children for years.

It showed in Williams' first video gaming product, the instantly popular "Reel 'Em In." The five-line video slot was a smash in Nevada, where it served as the locals' introduction to Australian-style video games, gaining unabashed loyalists in the absence of any Aristocrat games. In the East and Midwest, the game was almost immediately as popular as any Aristocrat game already in the market, which would ultimately lead to a very healthy competition between the two manufacturers.

According to John Giobbi, Williams' director of gaming development and the creator of "Reel 'Em In," the game was already half-finished when the IGT lawsuit placed new urgency on



Reel 'Em In allows players to bet on five lines, each indicated above by a different color, and pays from left to right.

its success. "We were looking for ways in which we could differentiate ourselves," Giobbi says. "We saw an opportunity in the five-line video market, and with our background in multimedia, we thought we could take advantage of it."

Giobbi studied the Australian slot genre for clues on its appeal, and for "interesting math models," he says. He then assembled a team of four to brainstorm ways to come up with something even more entertaining. He says the team eventually decided on the theme of fishing—a good, blue-collar activity popular with millions of Americans.

Williams had the technical prowess to make the graphics as intricate as the developers wanted, but it was decided to present the all-American theme in an all-American format—the cartoon. "We decided to go with minimal animation, simple backgrounds, solid greens, solid blues—to keep the graphics easy on the eyes," says Giobbi. "Then we worked on the characters. We purposely made them cartoony-looking."

The team added easily recognizable music, hired professionals to do voice-overs (some of the voices are actually Williams employees), and presented it all with the manufacturer's trademark CD-quality sound in both slant-top and upright video slots, in nickel, quarter and dollar denominations.

The result is an Australian-style slot that is uniquely American, with a funny second-screen bonus game featuring colorful cartoon characters who have unmistakable Chicago accents, encouraging the player to go for "da big fish."

Reel 'Em In offers a made-in-U.S.A. presentation of the best in Australian-style game features. All of the Aussie mainstays are there—multiple hits on intersecting pay lines, a variety of themed game symbols for reel pays (from two coins to 2,500 coins, times the coins bet per line), and "scatter pays" multiplied by the total number of coins bet.

Not to mention fantastic hit frequency. The one-line hit frequency of 14.5 percent soars to 52.6 percent with all five pay lines lit. That's a hit of some kind more than every other spin.

And they're not all two-coiners either. The standard payback percentage of Reel 'Em In is nearly 93 percent in both the 25-coin (bets of up to five coins per line) and 45-coin (nine coins per line) versions, and over time, the volatility does not stray more than a



Jackpot! Five wild fish wins the top prize. Nothing fishy about that!

point from 93 percent—which means it is a steady, reliable stream of action that keeps you playing for a good while. The action is accompanied by festive sound effects as the winning pay lines flash to show the player how much he's won, and on what line he's won it.

Jackpot symbols include four different fruit symbols (pays range from five coins to 200 coins); a bell symbol (25 coins to 250 coins); and three separate fish symbols (two coins for one symbol to the top primary game jackpot of 2,500 coins times the coins bet per line—a maximum of 22,500 coins). One of the fish symbols—the "live" fish—substitutes for either of the other two, which are mounted on plaques (or perhaps served on plates).

The hit frequency and low volatility of the primary game keep you entertained between bonus rounds. There are few dry spells, and relatively few two-coin hits. There are spates of four-coin, five-coin and 10-coin hits, which keep the credit meter on an even-to-upward bounce, and these are punctuated by frequent larger hits of 100 coins (five "oranges," four "bells") and a variety of hits at all levels for the various "fish" symbols. All of these jackpots are multiplied by the number of coins bet per line, which can lead to huge primary-game jackpots.

But the real advantage of the hit frequency is that it keeps you playing long enough to make the bonus screen very attainable. And that bonus game is what makes "Reel 'Em In" one





"Where's mah prize hawg?" Pick a piggy and the farmer hoses off the mud...

of the most popular games on the market. The bonus screen is triggered by getting three of the same scatter-pay "lures" on adjacent reels. (The lures are a fish, a worm and an insect.) Independent of the bonus game, three of any lure pays three coins times the total number of coins bet—up to 135 coins on the 45-coin version. Four or five of the insect lure on adjacent reels pay 25 coins and 100 coins respectively—again, times the total coins bet, for a maximum of 4,500 coins before the bonus round even starts.

The bonus screen depicts four stereotypical, sportsman-clad fishermen—and one fisher-woman—in a boat on a lake, each fishing for a bonus. Their eyes blink, they move about. The player hears country music out of Huck Finn, with a harmonica in the forefront.

Williams was careful to make the group politically correct—the characters include a young man, an old man, a fat man, a woman and a black man. The player chooses one by touching the screen, and the character says, "Hey! I got one!" The bigger the fish, the bigger the bonus. The bonus "fishes" pay anywhere from five coins to 100 coins, times the total number of coins bet (a tin can pays only three coins). As the fisherperson pulls out the bonus fish, the others call out things like "Golly, it's a whopper!" and "Lookit dat fish!" If it's a low bonus amount, you hear comments like "Aw, it's a minnow!"

In answer to a much-asked question, Giobbi says the slot's random number generator picks five bonus amounts the instant the second screen is activated—so the choice made by the player really does matter in determination of the bonus amount. All bonus amounts are multiplied by the total number of coins bet and added to the pay table award, so the maximum scatter-pay award comes to a whopping 9,000 coins—4,500 coins for the pay table amount of five insect lures plus the top bonus, at max coin.

Williams repeated the success of Reel 'Em In with "Filthy Rich," its second entry in the multi-line video genre. According to Giobbi, Filthy Rich is essentially a "clone" of Reel 'Em In, with the same percentages, hit frequency and jackpot amounts—the same basic game program—but with a different theme.

The fruit symbols are the same as Reel 'Em In, and the fish symbols are replaced with pig symbols—one on a coin, one on a bill and one surrounded by coins that substitutes for either of the



...revealing the bonus jackpot. This little piggy brings home the bacon!

other two. This time, the scatter-pay symbols are a barn, chickens and a horse.

As with Reel 'Em In, the second-screen bonus game is what distinguishes Filthy Rich from other slots. The second screen is another cartoon scene, a farmer at his pig sty with a garden hose. You hear a goofy, hayseed rendition of "Turkey In The Straw" in the background. The pigs snort and grunt. The farmer prompts the player with comments, like "Where's mah prize hawg?" or "Where's the lucky piggy?" All of the characters move around—the pigs squirm in the mud, a horse in the background chews his cud. The player picks one of the five pigs by touching the screen, and the farmer hoses the mud off the pig to reveal the bonus amount.

As with Reel 'Em In, Williams injected a bit of comedy into the outcome of the second-screen bonus in Filthy Rich. Each of the pigs takes on a different persona according to the amount of the bonus. One of them becomes a surfer with sunglasses, saying, "Cowabunga, dude!" Another goes into an Elvis shtick. If the player picks the top bonus amount, the pig sprouts wings and rises above the mud, hovering there while the bonus is paid.

"We thought about pigs flying, and decided to make that the top award," Giobbi says. "It's almost embarrassing, but you'll have a lot of fun if you sit in on one of our game design meetings."

They should sell tickets. ●



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# Weighing Anchor

**Playing slots  
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and you can thank  
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**B**onus pinball games. Secondary bonus screens leading to more screens for higher bonuses. Multiple propositions that give you the chance to double, triple, quadruple your winnings—or lose everything. Monopoly boards, spinning wheels, even animated bowling alleys for bonus money.

With all the multiple bonus events spicing up today's slot games, it's easy to forget that only four years ago, none of this existed in U.S. casinos.

In fact, as recently as 1995, when you played slots in just about any U.S. casino, you were likely to be playing a traditional two- or three-coin game with spinning reels and a single pay line. Conventional wisdom among casino officials back then held that Americans preferred their slots that way—that Americans were suspicious of fancy bells and whistles, and that the single-line, three-reel slot would be the casino mainstay forever.

But it was right around this time that a visionary named Randy Adams, the slot pioneer who, a decade earlier, had invented the electronic "virtual reel" slot machine, was acting on a longtime hunch that Americans were ready for something different. It was a hunch that would ultimately revolutionize the slot floor.

Adams is the marketing manager for Anchor Gaming, which in the early '90s was a Nevada route operator and owner of two Colorado casinos with a plan to begin designing slot machines for its own properties.

What Anchor was getting from the major slot manufacturers at the time was order after order of the same old, cookie-cutter reel slots. "You would go to the manufacturers and they'd say, 'This is what I've got; this is what I'm developing,'" Adams says.

"We'd say, 'We've got casinos full of that. We want something different.' But they weren't in the business of doing something

different, particularly in a limited quantity, like we wanted."

Adams decided to test the market with new slot styles developed in-house. Anchor started slowly, putting some new twists into established games that would make them unique—and would provide a safe way to test the U.S. market's appetite for change.

The first two products of this effort were a conversion kit for IGT video poker machines called "Double Down Stud" and a modification for traditional reel-spinners called "Silver Strike," which enabled the slots to dispense souvenir coins through the hopper in addition to regular coins. (The souvenir coins could be traded for money at the cage—another hedge against market resistance.)

Double Down Stud and Silver Strike were both immediately successful—in fact, both games are still popular. "Those weren't rocket-science projects," says Adams, "but the players took one look and said, 'Hey! Variety!' We decided to build a completely different package for a slot, so we built 'Clear Winner,' which was simply their favorite slot machine, re-packaged."

For Clear Winner, Anchor took a standard slot and made the front glass transparent, giving the players a glimpse at the inner workings of the machine. It was instantly popular, and has remained a fixture in major casinos since its introduction in early 1995.

"When we saw the initial results, it showed us this huge, pent-up demand for anything that was new and unique," Adams says. "And all the while, we were working on the wheel."

The "wheel," of course, would change everything. Since Anchor's research showed people were ready for a change, Adams decided to make that change radical in appearance, but without straying from the basic three-reel slot as a primary game. The idea was to add bonus events to spice up those standard reel-spinners, and to do it with flair.

Anchor designed a physical wheel that the player, landing a special reel symbol, could spin for a guaranteed bonus amount.



"We made it look like a roulette wheel to make it believable to the player," Adams says. With no slot manufacturing facility of its own, Anchor hooked up with Bally Gaming in what would be the first of many partnerships with established slot manufacturers, to make the bonus-wheel slot a reality.

The result was "Wheel Of Gold," a novel-looking contraption with one of several popular Bally reel-spinning games topped by Anchor's colorful wheel. The wheel had spaces for bonus payouts ranging from 25 to 500 coins, and an L.E.D. readout above flashing between 1X, 2X and 3X. When the player hit the special symbol on the third reel, it lit up a button, which the player hit to start the wheel spinning. When the wheel stopped, the multiplier amount stopped.

"The first of those games hit the market in late '95 and early '96, and that really started this whole slot revolution," Adams recalls.

The revolution sped up quickly with a second Anchor alliance, this time with slot leader IGT, which had secured rights to build a slot incorporating the theme, sights and sounds of the world's most popular TV game show, *Wheel Of Fortune*. The Anchor/IGT joint project took the music, crowd noises and images from the show, along with Anchor's bonus wheel, and made it into a bonus event to combine with IGT's most popular reel-spinning games on a wide-area progressive network that would allow life-changing top jackpots.

The result would be one of the most successful slot machines in history, "Wheel Of Fortune."

Casino owners took note that American players liked to do more than spin reels. Moreover, it was

at this moment that Australian manufacturer Aristocrat came on the U.S. scene with its multi-line, multi-coin video slots—first in Native American casinos, then in Atlantic City. Americans embraced the new slot genre almost immediately.

"New and different" was in. And Anchor was ready to feed the budding demand.

### Bet more, get more

The popularity of the two new slot genres on the American scene would fuel the competitive juices of all the big slot manufacturers, leading to an explosion of new styles of slot games in casinos. By this time, however, Anchor was beginning a spate of new product introductions that has yet to subside.

The first of this new wave, and one of the most outrageous in appearance, was "Totem Pole." It was a behemoth of a slot machine, nine feet tall with three sets of reels stacked atop one another. Each set of reels was a separate IGT two-coin game, with an added "Totem Pole" symbol on each reel—six coins would activate all three games. The overall package carried a pay table (triggered at max coin) for landing four or more of the special symbols on the combined nine reels. Lining up three of the symbols on each reel set won the wide-area progressive jackpot.

But Totem Pole was much more than just three slots lumped together. The new game incorporated a few innovative concepts that are now being expanded upon in many new machines. From the Australian-style, multi-line video genre, Anchor borrowed the concept of enticing players to bet more with the promise of greater returns.

The way Anchor did it was by manipulating the payback percentages on each individual two-coin slot game. "In Totem Pole, instead of basing everything on max-coin bets, we made the first set of reels 83 percent [payback]," Adams explains.

"The second set of reels is at 90 percent; the third set is at 94 percent. Adding them all gives you the experience of a 90-percent machine. It is conceptually designed so that the more you play, the looser the game gets.

"It's the fairest form of gambling for the player: If you want to play one coin at a time, I'm not going to kick you out, but I'm not going to give you as good a gamble as the person next to you plopping in six coins



at a time." Adams says the company plans to incorporate this concept into individual video slots. "As you play more coins, even though you'll have the same set of video symbols, you'll go into a different pay table," he says.

The year following Totem Pole's release would see another major product introduction for Anchor, an outrageous-looking hybrid game called "Cash Ball." For this unit, Anchor got together with Williams, which, in addition to its recent surge in the slot market, happens to be the leading manufacturer of pinball machines.

Cash Ball places the bonus game in a real pinball machine on the top box. There are flippers, bells, buzzers, flashing lights—the whole pinball experience. It is combined with a Bally slot in a non-progressive version and with an IGT slot for the multi-site progressive version.

### Skill, volatility and the gamble

As Anchor's bonus games have become more intricate, they have sometimes been stalled by gaming regulations written before the era of the bonus slot machine.

One element Adams says could improve the play experience of bonus slot games is a skill factor. Current regulations in most jurisdictions prohibit manufacturers from incorporating elements into slot machines that permit skilled players to win easier—they must be pure games of chance.

Cash Ball, for one, could be greatly improved with a skill factor, he says, by awarding higher bonuses to people who fare better in the bonus pinball game. "The pinball game randomly selects amounts for the bonus lanes," he says. "It doesn't matter how long you keep the ball in play. You could get twenty trillion points [in the pinball game], and it wouldn't matter. You'd get the same bonus. We're trying to change that, so that the bigger the pinball score, the bigger the multiplier will be on that bonus reel."

He predicts that sooner or later, regulations will change to allow some element of skill into slot games. "Eventually, they will allow a skill factor on a very small percentage of the pay table," he says, "something that would maybe take it from 93 percent to 95 percent [payback]."

Adams says frequency of the bonus game has been a problem with Cash Ball in some markets. In many jurisdictions, the minimum payback percentage of a slot machine must be met by the primary game—without consideration of bonus payouts. For players, this has led to creative bonus games that pay a pittance in coins, or in bonus rounds that almost never happen. According to Adams, the latter has been the case with Cash Ball. "People can relate to pinball, but we never let them get to the bonus game," he says. "We're going to completely re-design that game to make it more of a multiple bonus."

Adams says regulators in some markets—notably New Jersey—are currently addressing the problem of pay distribution between the primary and bonus games, by considering new regulations formulated

with input from the casino industry itself.

In the meantime, Anchor and other slot manufacturers are adding features to current games to remedy the fact that only 17 percent of a slot's payback percentage can be placed in the bonus game in jurisdictions such as New Jersey. Adams says Anchor has accomplished this by adding volatility to the bonus game—initially, by giving players a chance to gamble their bonus winnings.

"In New Jersey, we added the double-or-nothing feature," Adams says. "It has allowed us to increase the frequency of spinning the wheel." He explains that while keeping the base game at a certain minimum percentage (83 percent in New Jersey) may require that a majority of the bonus payments be small, the player now has the option of taking each bonus payment or gambling it—spinning the wheel again, betting whether it will land on a red or black space. Players can keep doubling their bet until they win the maximum allowable jackpot or until they guess wrong—and lose the entire bonus payment.

He says the other way to ensure an enjoyable primary game is by creating multiple bonus events tied to the game itself. In fact, Adams says slot games to be introduced by Anchor during the

next few years tie these events to the game in ways that ultimately blur the distinction between a "primary game" and a "bonus game."

"You're going to see multiple bonus events, some structured on actual pays within the body of the slot machine," Adams says. "Those bar combinations will no longer always be stock pay combinations. There's no reason all bar symbols need to pay an amount of money. They can 'pay' a bonus event, and the jackpots can average a certain number of coins."

"Eventually, you'll see a series of tiered bonuses, and only a little of the game's pay table will be stock pay combinations."

Adams notes that this orchestration of multiple payout events already is inherent in the Australian-style, multi-line video format. Anchor's challenge, he says, is to incorporate that type of action into the classic reel-spinning game.

Multiple bonus events and volatility through extra betting propositions make up much of the appeal of Anchor's newest product introductions. For instance, "Bang For A Buck" is a slot designed for the serious dollar player with a bonus event that is a pure gamble for higher winnings. A joint venture with IGT, the slot is a standard favorite base game with a bonus disc in the top box. Instead of being triggered by a reel symbol, the disc can be activated for any jackpot of 20 coins or more, at the player's option, to gamble half of that jackpot.

The disc contains bonus multiplier spots of 2X, 3X and 4X. But it also contains a "1/2X" spot, which cuts the gambled amount in half, and a "Bust" symbol that wipes out the entire amount.

"If a dollar player is looking for volatility, this is the most volatile game ever built," Adams says. "They don't have to take the gamble; it's their same favorite IGT game even without it. But they should understand that the bonus bet is better than a 50/50 bet—it lands on



'Bust' only 46 percent of the time. And we're banking on the fact that they won't stop at one time—they'll go that next step for double or nothing, and then the law of averages takes over."

Adams stresses that the people who will love this game are serious dollar players who are accustomed to gambling more of their bankrolls than a typical quarter player. "These players should understand that to get a big multiplier amount, you'll have to go bust a lot," he says.

"But the casinos are going to hate this. There will be people who start with 50 coins and get way ahead, and they'll feel they don't have anything to lose. That's going to drive the casinos nuts. They don't want volatility; they want to grind the money out of you."

For the broader, mid-range slot market, Adams says a mix of multiple bonuses and at least perceived skill will mark the next generation of slots. Anchor's new "Tic Tac Disco" game, for instance, gives the player the illusion he is affecting the outcome of the bonus game, which is played out on a large tic-tac-toe board. Lights flash around the nine squares, and the player hits a button to stop the flashing on a square with the goal of achieving tic-tac-toe as quickly as possible. "You'll have people who swear they know exactly when to hit the button to stop that flashing board on the right square," Adams says. "It's actually picked by the random number generator."

Another new game, "Casino Bowling," is topped by a spinning cylinder disk with spaces relating to bowling outcomes, ranging from a split to a strike. The outcome is played out on an L.E.D. display, and points in a series of "frames" transfer into bonus coin amounts. According to Adams, Anchor is developing a semi-skilled version of this game which will enable the player to actually aim the ball using a track ball and the touch-screen monitor.

Adams says the future for Anchor and other slot-makers lies in making the bonus game at least as important as the spinning of the reels. "It's all about bonuses," he says. "It's about certain things happening in these bonuses. It's about restructuring the pays within a game to pay an event, which may average 10 coins—but you have to do something to get those coins."

"And it's going to be something that's a heck of a lot more fun than getting triple bars." ●

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