

Nicely Done Gaming

Gaming Math & Casino Game Design



Hand of God “Cheats” in Slot Games

Colleagues from the Class II world (slot machines with purely random, fully independent outcomes as found in fully-regulated jurisdictions like Nevada, New Jersey, Mississippi, Canada, etc.) are sometimes shocked at game “cheats” that I help develop for social casinos.

Such “cheats”, sometimes referred to as “hand of god” tweaks, are strictly prohibited in every Class III jurisdiction I’ve ever worked in. Near miss control is probably best known of these. When first tried in Class III machines, the manufacturer used standard and approved mechanism to generate an initial outcome. If the outcome was a winner, it was shown as generated but if not a winner, a secondary mechanism was used that was much more likely to show near misses, such as 7 – 7 – (almost) 7.

These games got much more play than regular games but regulators felt it was deceitful and banned its use. Regulators additionally established rules associated with Telnes-style weighted reels to limit over-generation of near-misses via standard game mechanisms. Class II slot machines (based on bingo-based or central server electronic pull-tabs for many Native American casinos) have much less regulatory control than Class III devices and so near-miss methods were legal to use.

I am unaware of any of major Class III slot providers who also place product in Class II markets taking advantage of this extra flexibility but smaller, Class-II-only concerns have leveraged this power. This may be why so many of the smaller players have able to keep so much floor space in Class II casinos despite the onslaught of the biggest players. However, near miss techniques only really work if done subtly. If cash players can detect that they are being teased and/or that the reel strips they see during spins and losers don’t jibe with the kinds of wins they get, this can easily become a walk-away-forever event.

But social casinos are different. Players have lots of experience with obviously scripted outcomes when they first start playing at a given Facebook casino, and sometimes when starting new games on the same casino. This lower-

expectation for true fairness and the lack of real cash at stake allows for much greater latitude in hand-of-god outcome manipulation. Unfortunately, too many game developers are so ham-handed with their cheats, the desired effect is greatly reduced by player detection. Just because casual players are more likely to tolerate obvious hand-of-god manipulation does mean one should crank up the tricks. This is definitely a case where less is more – the most effective cheats are the ones that aren't noticed.

So back to my shocked Class III colleagues. Is the inclusion of hand-of-god tweaks in social casino games ethical? Relative to player expectation, I would say absolutely – it's a different environment with different standards and practices than one would find with cash gaming. Class II slot machines, on the other hand, are trickier, especially as more and more Class III titles appear in Class II markets. I think that the major Class III manufacturers have made the right call: if a game exists in both Class II and Class III, I agree in having both versions play as comparably as possible.