



Because we're a writer and spend most of our time doing what those with real jobs call nothing, we were, one morning last week, sitting in our chair, smoking cigarettes and staring out the window.

Even this is overstatement. Staring implies intent, or at least focus, and there was none. We were just looking at the surf. The tide went out for awhile, then it came back in. We found ourself smiling, thinking about the Coeur d'Alenes.

The Coeur d'Alenes are an Idaho tribe. After being all but ignored for 150 years, the Coeur d'Alenes are back in the news. No, they didn't attack Boise. It's much, much worse than that. The Coeur d'Alenes have announced their intent to establish a national lottery. Hide the women and children.

Not just another supermarket lottery, the Coeur d'Alenes' numbers will be accessible from your couch. Callers, a potential 200 million of them in 36 states and the District of Columbia, will charge their bets on either a credit or bank debit card via an (800) number. (Industry experts suspect that, when the Coeur d'Alenes' venture goes on line sometime this year, jackpots will quickly jump to the hundreds of millions of dollars.) (Its only real competition will be Powerball, whose jackpots, with only 19 states and the District of Columbia, recently broke the 100 million dollar mark.) The North American Association of State and Provincial Lotteries is, to the surprise of no one, squealing like a stuck pig.

"It's one thing to set up these games within their reservations," association mouthpiece Anthony Cooper screeched, saliva bubbling, "but it's another thing for them to bring their gambling outside, into people's homes." Still another they'd thought of it first. "Every house that has a telephone will have a lottery terminal under what they're doing. I suspect many states will oppose this." If there was ever a safe bet, this is it.

Regardless who runs them, lotteries are an interesting business. In the bad old days, lotteries were know as the numbers racket. The numbers racket was run by gangsters and played an enormous role in elevating disorganised crime into illegitimate business. Large financial empires were built on the simple truth that humans love to gamble, even when the odds are horribly against them. The numbers racket proved positively that people will stand in line to bet their rent on which number will be drawn from a hat.

The federal government, concerned for our welfare, spared no expense freeing us from the clutches of ruthless thugs who preyed on our weakness without declaring the income. No stranger to the wisdom of taking in more cash than you pay out, the federal government embraced the numbers racket and franchised it to the states.

The lottery quickly demonstrated a startling ability to separate citizens from their money without demanding it at the point of an audit. As Bugsy Seigel must have said shortly after he invented Las Vegas, it's great when a plan comes together. State sponsored gambling is an idea whose time has come, and the casinoization of America has become, next to prison construction, the public sector's leading growth industry.

Enter the crafty Coeur d'Alenes. Like all native tribes, the Coeur d'Alenes are a sovereign nation. Where states must comply slavishly to the whims of the great white father in Washington, the relationship between the federal government and tribes is set out and defined by treaty and 150 years of court decisions. As regards bingo parlors and casino gambling, individual tribes are free to conduct business any way they see fit within the confines of their reservation. Even so, tribes have uniformly agreed to follow state gaming laws; in face, in many cases, to exceed them.

Consider the lowly Pequots. By underhandedly offering the best odds in the country, the Western Pequots' casino in rural Connecticut generates more profit per square foot than any casino in Atlantic City, a statistic that has caused Donald Trump, not an amiable man under the best of circumstances, to snap pencils between his pudgy fingers and take lunch with senators. Bingo parlors are one thing, messing with the boys in Atlantic City is quite another. The revenue for the Coeur d'Alenes lottery will make the Pequots look like low rollers.

Listen to the squeals. "States want to be able to manage their gaming within their own jurisdictions," says Mr. Cooper, a reasonable man, of the unfairness. In this context, states' rights means the great white syndicate wants its cut. And therein lies the rub.

The innovative touch the Coeur d'Alenes bring to the table, aside from the world's first dial-in lottery, is that only they and their partner, Unistar Entertainment Inc. of Denver, will share in the take. The arrangement seems to conform to treaty law, but the states and provinces allied in the North American association are no more amused than Al Capone might be.

More squeals from Mr. Cooper's mob. "If this is allowed to happen, other tribes are going to start doing it." To Mr. Cooper, evidently, the only good Indian is a stupid one. "The next thing you know," and we can nearly see Mr. Cooper lean forward, smile grimly, and lower his voice, "you're going to be sitting at home and a blackjack wheel is going to pop up on you television screen, brought to you by your nearest Indian tribe." Not if the Donald's lawyers are bigger than theirs, it won't.

We don't play the lottery and so don't think of it often. When we do, we smile at the long range odds. Not subject to government edict, odds are set by higher law: the law of probability whose bottom line is a gem. Whatever can happen, will. In layperson's terms, given enough gerbils dancing long enough on the keyboards of enough word processors, they will eventually produce complete transcriptions of Nixon's White House tapes. By the same implacable rule, given enough Powerballs sucked up enough plastic vacuum tubes, the great casino of the universe must eventually hand over 100 million dollars to Newt Gingrich's idea of The Wrong Person.

A hundred million might be pocket change to the Defense Department (or, for that matter, to a single fleet of the Navy). but given right thought, right action, and CNN, a suddenly rich peasant with a noble vision instead of a cheap motive could make a lovely splash in the national forum. We find this thought wildly amusing. Now we have something else to chuckle about: the thought of Indians with serious gambling money.

There are about 1,600 Coeur d'Alenes. Once there were more, but that's another, less pleasant story. In the not too distant future, they're all going to be filthy rich. How rich? There's no telling, but the happy plight of the Pequots lends us some perspective. There are only 500 Western Pequots. Next year, unless a mysterious fire destroys their casino, their per capita income is expected to be a million dollars. Yes, that's one million dollars apiece. They



Last week your Professor lay a-bed in the pre-dawn hours, cosseted closely by snug comforter and woolens, R.E.M.-ing like a three-toed sloth. A man of my sensibilities often sleeps fitfully, with memories, dreams, and reality strung-out in a Dali-esque nightscape of restless images. Deep sleep is a dream to be savored, a rejuvenative dream within a dream.

Suddenly, a metallic sound and hell-hound screaming wrenched me loose from dream threads and spun me bolt upright. Raccoons! The filthy vermin were attacking my garbage can again, after already logging-in 12 successful assaults this month in their current night campaign. Don't believe Walt Disney. These mini-Sumo grapplers are tough as guts in a scrap and would gnaw through a fence of razor blades to get to a box of rotten chicken gizzards.


I pulled my bed clothes around me and bumped to the kitchen in the dark. The howling and raging continued below my stairs, the masked revellers engaged in a bacchanal, bloating themselves on a main course of crab shells and chicken bones, followed by spoiled pork chop tartare.

Hastily filling a pan with scalding water, I slipped to the front door, opened it, and tried to parboil the boors. They scoffed at me, mocked me, and hurled guttural insults from a Rhododendron bush. In humiliation, I closed the front door on the sound of my garbage can ricocheting from tree to tree down the embankment below my house.

Faithful readers, I am at my wit's end. I have posted, tied, Bungee-ed, lashed, and wired my garbage can to protect it from raccoon pillage. The Professor is a parsimonious old hound who eats almost any potential garbage. I will not put the garbage can in my garage (that attracts Mus decumanus -- brown rats) and I will not shoot, poison, or snare.

If any among you have suggestions for an economical garbage can restraint device, please notify the Professor. Nothing below ground or too complicated, please. Designs forwarded to The Edge will be scrutinized by the Professor. If suitable, we can notify Edge readers.

You will render a much-needed public service in an awkward time. Never have we known more garbage. Never has the raccoon scourge been more pestiferous.



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will be, to the Coeur d'Alenes, poor relations.

The Coeur d'Alenes are only human. When their ship comes in, assuming it's not torpedoed and sunk in federal court, these ignoble savages are going to rush right out and buy things. If what other tribes have done with their bingo proceeds is any indication, it won't be Cadillacs and firewater. No, once the Coeur d'Alenes have taken care of their people (a custom still practiced by savage cultures) they'll blow their money on land, and the loyalty of well-connected attorneys.

The Indians no longer want trinkets; the great white father will not be amused.

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