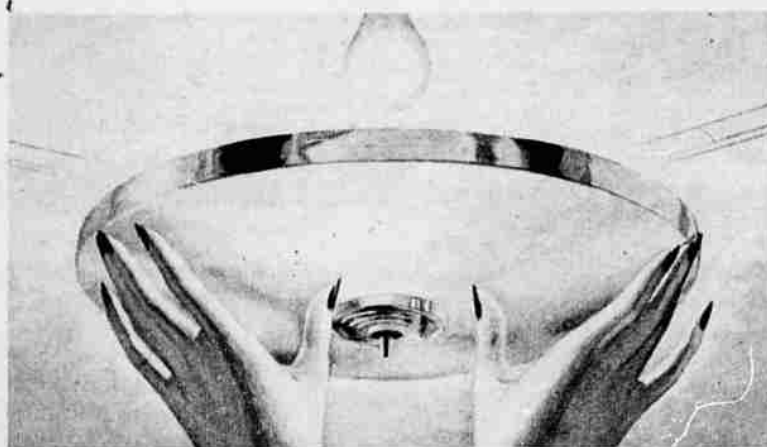




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Case of the Jackpot Genius

by William T. Brannon



He drills a small hole, inserts a wire, and trips the jackpot lever.

Art by Paula Beevor

THE MESSAGE from a sheriff in a Midwestern state was brief and, the Chicago police thought, a little vague. This was the gist of it:

Two young men, unknown in the county, had appeared at a private club and obtained admittance with guest cards on four different occasions. But the club manager thought their actions were suspicious. After the fourth trip, they had driven away in a new Cadillac with Illinois license plates.

The number was checked and traced to a Jack Madison, who occupied bachelor quarters at a swank Chicago apartment house. Madison was picked up and held while a routine check was made. There was no record of his ever having been arrested, but residents of the apartment house called him a mystery figure.

He had no known occupation, yet he always seemed to have plenty of money. He often left town for a week or more at a time.

Questioned by detectives, Madison said he had independent means and didn't have to work. Then he was asked about his trip to the county where his actions had aroused suspicion. "So that's why you picked me up!" he exclaimed. "I'll tell you what happened there."

In a back room of the private club, he said, were some slot machines. Madison and a companion, Harry Excell, had gone there to play the one-armed bandits. They stayed only long enough to hit the jackpot, which they had done on all four occasions.

"That couldn't have been just luck," said a detective.

"Sure. But you can hit the jackpot

every time if you know how," Madison said. "It takes two men. First, you drop some coins in the jukebox to make noise. Then the two men go to the slot machine. While one drops in coins, the other stands behind it with a sharp hand drill. He drills a small hole, inserts a piece of wire, and trips the jackpot lever."

"If you want to go back, you plug up the hole with a piece of wax and wait until the machine is full again. Then you take out the wax and trip the jackpot lever again. We did it four times and decided that was enough—we didn't want to push our luck!"

The sheriff was notified that Madison was in custody and that he had confessed robbing the slot machines. The sheriff replied that he didn't know anything about any slot machines. In fact, he said, he had no knowledge of any slot machines in his state. He merely had asked for the investigation because the club manager had reported the two men seemed suspicious.

"This is the first I've heard about any jackpots," the sheriff concluded.

Madison insisted that he had violated no law. "The slot machine is illegal in that state," he pointed out. "It isn't supposed to be there and legally it isn't. Since it isn't there, you can't take money from it illegally. You can't put me in jail for that!"

Since the other state didn't want to press charges, Madison was released, but the incident had a far-reaching effect on what was left of the slot machine industry. Old-type machines were backed against walls and securely fastened so no holes could be drilled in them. And manufacturers made sure that new machines were sturdy enough to resist any effort to puncture them.