

BLACKJACK AUTUMN

A True Tale of Life, Death, and Splitting Tens in Winnemucca

When Barry Meadow decided to take two months off from his life to play blackjack in every Nevada casino, he had no idea what he would find. Leaving behind his business, his fiancée, and his son, he set out on the road with a suitcase, a tape recorder, and \$8,000 on the trip of a lifetime.

He ran into cowboys and Indians, suffered the Stardust curse, split 10s in Winnemucca, and learned more about real-world gambling than anyone should have to know.

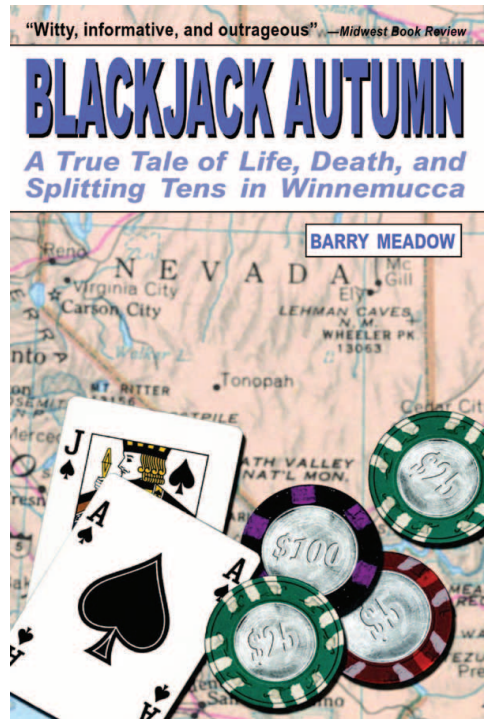
With wit and wisdom, Meadow covers such thought-provoking topics as:

- Can you really win, or is it a crock?
- Where is the world's tallest dealer?
- Lying, lying, and more lying
- Why televangelism needs babes
- The search for Stella Adler
- Interesting plots in porno movies
- And much, much more!

CASH IS KING

Knowing that cash is king in Nevada, big players not only expect, but demand, special treatment. You're a Very Important Person. Didn't they give you a slot card with your own name on it? Didn't a pretty girl in a scanty costume bring you a free scotch-and-soda while you were playing the quarter jackpot machine? Didn't a respectable-looking man in the pit issue you \$1000 in chips, and all you had to do was sign for it? At first you're pleased that everyone is treating you so nicely, but after awhile you start to think you're entitled. Where's my gourmet-restaurant comp? Where the hell are my show tickets? And that room you gave me for free?" Why was there no fruit basket or fresh flowers?

I am starting to identify a little too closely with the petulant self-indulgence of so many professional athletes, overpaid and pampered far worse than any casino gambler. If I with my lousy \$50 bets am getting spoiled, who can blame these cranky millionaires for complaining that the limousine didn't have the right brand of pretzels?



WHAT IF?

It's been a bad day. When I've had a big losing day such as this one I can't help thinking that maybe this is all one huge waste of time. We're all allocated only so many hours of life, and how many of them do I want to spend looking at cards in a smoky casino?

It doesn't matter how good a player you are. When you've had a miserable day, depression hits you like a nagging migraine that won't go away. Nothing removes your gloom. You keep thinking of the money you had but no longer have, and of the hours stolen from the rest of your life. If only you'd taken your son to the park, or gone skating with your wife, or just rested on a Jamaican beach instead of spending your hours in a casino, losing your money faster than the guy in Brewster's Millions. How foolish you are to think you can make money playing blackjack. How utterly foolish.

HOPING FOR A COMEBACK

One morning in Las Vegas, I shared an elevator with a man who looked as if he knew Methuselah personally. If he were any older, he'd have been dead.

How's it going? I asked. "I'm down a little right now," he replied, "but I'm hoping for a comeback." And that, more than anything else, may explain the game of blackjack.

The old man probably doesn't have much time left in which to mount his comeback. But you never know. Today could be his day, and here's a table with an open seat. Time to sit down, buy in, and get down to business.

Who among us hasn't had the thought to just up and go, to leave our present life behind, for many reasons or for no good reason at all? To get away, not just for a day or a week but for a long enough time to think about how things are, and how you want them to be?

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More Excerpts

JAMES BOND

Far from the Bondian life imagined by the masses, in which the professional gambler is surrounded by beautiful women who throw themselves at him on a daily basis, the truth is much harsher. You play alone, eat alone, drive alone, sleep alone. And you're always scared—scared you'll lose, scared you'll be robbed, scared you'll be barred and your picture faxed to every casino in the universe. I've never quite understood these gambling books in which the writer floats airily from one comped suite to the next, Monaco one day and Macau the next, and does nothing but win. Don't these people have lives? Wives and kids? Parents? Friends? Jobs? Pets? Don't they feel lonely? Afraid? Anything? Anything at all?

THANKS BUT NO THANKS

At 1 a.m., the phone rings. It is the casino manager. He says, "We don't want any more of your business." Well, I don't want any more of these late-night phone calls, either. Didn't Emily Post say you should never call anyone after 10 p.m.?

I've never been barred by phone before. What's next—a telegram? I guess it's really no surprise, though. The stereotype of a counter is a grim-faced man who stares at the cards all day, doesn't talk to the other customers, and never tips. My behavior today met all the qualifications. Maybe I should enroll in an acting class.

Of course, at a place like this even Laurence Olivier's playing time would be limited.

Author Bio

Barry Meadow has spent more than 30 years in the gambling world. He wrote his first book, *Success At The Harness Races*, in 1967. He's also written *Professional Harness Betting*, and *Money Secrets At The Racetrack*, which has been lauded by virtually every expert as the definitive guide to money management at the track.

Meadow's eclectic resume also includes serving in Vietnam, writing television sitcoms, playing the professional tennis circuit in India, doing standup comedy in California—and, of course, playing blackjack at the professional level in his spare time.

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