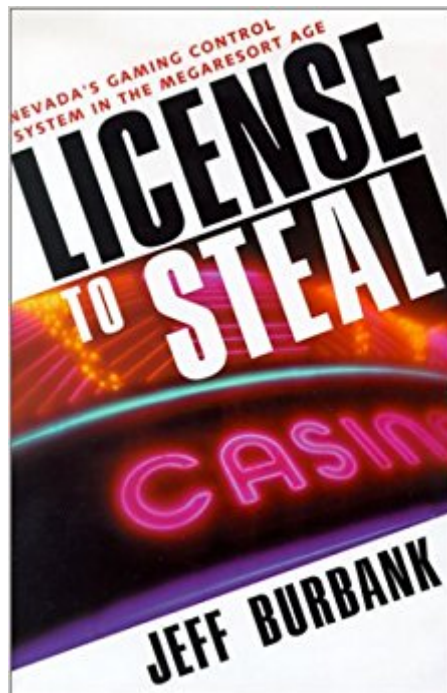




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# License To Steal : Nevada's Gaming Control System In The Megaresort Age



## Synopsis

Examining the state of Nevada's gaming laws in the age of the megaresort, this book presents seven unusual, precedent-setting case studies, taken from the files of the Nevada Gaming Control Board and Commission.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It's a fascinating book. Rich in story and the kind of historic detail one hears from casino professionals at the end of a long night. In using the state's gaming control institutions to tell the story of Las Vegas, however, Jeff Burbank gets the truth and from the sources and people who can document what happened. For fans of Las Vegas, and I am one, start reading and you can't stop."  
-- Nicholas Pileggi, author of *Casino* and *Wise Guy*  
Burbank looks at the world with the eye of an experienced journalist: he presents facts, not speculation or opinion. -- I. Nelson Rose, author of *Gambling and the Law*

Jeff Burbank has covered the casino industry for the Las Vegas Sun, the Las Vegas Review Journal, Newsweek, and the International Gaming & Wagering magazine. He has been an instructor in journalism at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, a city editor for a supplement to the Los Angeles Times, and is currently the managing editor of Las Vegas Business Press.

If you've ever put a quarter in a slot machine, you might have wondered if the game is fixed or if you actually have a chance of winning. You know that the house always has an edge, but you assume you have a chance of winning, otherwise you wouldn't play, right? In Nevada, where the economy depends on gambling, there are two regulatory agencies, the Gaming Control Board and the Gaming Commission. In general, the Commission licenses casinos and the Board enforces the laws regarding gambling. Together they have a responsibility to make sure the public has confidence in the gambling system. Jeff Burbank used to be a business reporter for the Las Vegas Sun and then the Las Vegas Review-Journal, the two major newspapers in Nevada. He investigated the casino industry from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s. During that time there were a number of landmark cases that the Commission and the Board dealt with. In *License to Steal*, Burbank describes seven of the most controversial and entertaining cases. One story tells of the casino owner who had a Nazi memorabilia collection that he liked to exhibit to a few hundred close friends from time to time. He'd throw a party, sometimes on Hitler's birthday, to show off the collection. The parties were held in his casino, but not in public view. Word got around (apparently the collection was really something) and the Commission wondered if it shouldn't do something, since one of their mandates is to ensure the licensees (casino owners and operators) don't do anything to give Nevada a bad reputation. It was a touchy problem: a lot of people were offended, but what about freedom of speech? And wasn't it somewhat hypocritical to censure someone for offensive behavior in Las Vegas, which has a bit of a reputation for bad taste? In the end, they fined the casino owner. Even in Las Vegas, there are limits to bad taste. Another story explained how a slot machine manufacturer had programmed its machines to make it look as if losing spins had just missed being winners - "near misses." The owners claimed that the machine wheels would spin randomly, as they are supposed to, but that once the spin had randomly been determined to be a loser, the wheels would re-adjust to show a near miss. This made it more exciting for the player, who would play more. But the regulators thought it might compromise the appearance of randomness. They decided the near miss feature would not be allowed, but when the company appealed on the grounds that retrofitting thousands of machines would be too expensive, the Commission cut them some slack. They still went bankrupt. Then there's the story about a Gaming Control Board employee who found a way to rig the slot machines he tested so they would pay off when a certain sequence of coins was fed into them. Burbank tells how the employee also learned how to predict keno draws, using a computer program, and was trying out the system in Atlantic City, when casino security became suspicious. This was different from the slots - he hadn't rigged the keno game, he was using an algorithm that found an element of non-randomness in the draws and exploited it. I'm not even sure that qualifies as

cheating according to Commission rules, but it certainly does by casino rules. The casinos can make up their own rules and anything that gives a player an edge over the casino is considered by the casino to be cheating. Once Atlantic City authorities notified Las Vegas authorities, the employee's boss at the Board examined the employee's office computer and examined the records of payoffs the machines he had tested and found he and his friends and relatives had been hitting regular jackpots on the machines. This caused a real public relations headache for the Commission and for the casinos. Just the fact that an employee of the commission had been rigging slots for several years was bad enough. But then ABC-TV reported that the employee claimed that commissioners had abruptly stopped an investigation into rigged machines, and that they knew that the jackpot for the Megabucks statewide progressive slots could be triggered from the central computer center, and that several other companies were programming the slots to display illegal near misses. These were claims that should have been investigated immediately and vigorously, if only to maintain the appearance of an honest system. But they weren't. License to Steal is fun to read as a collection of eccentric character sketches and descriptions of clever scams. But it's also disturbing. The Commission and Board members are all political appointees and the casino owners contribute to most of the political candidates. So when you drop a quarter in the slot and pull the lever (or more likely slip a \$20 into the currency scanner and press the button), are you playing a fair game? Or would you rather not know the answer to that question?

I really enjoyed this book by Jeff Burbank. Admittedly, I don't read a lot of books at all but the topic of gambling got my attention. The book goes in details in many aspects of gambling, from Vegas' early decades and the formation of the Nevada Gaming Control Board to the more fascinating mysterious death of Larry Volk (former employee of the American Coin Co.) to how Computer Wiz Ronald Harris beat the computer system to rack up jackpot after jackpot while working as an employee in the Nevada Gaming Control Board's Electronic Services Division. If you're into finding out more about the gambling industry or or curious about what's has happened over the decades with Vegas headlines, this is a great book to read. I really enjoy Mr. Burbank's no nonsense style and learned a lot more about gambling than I used to know. Highly recommended!

This is an incomplete and inaccurate account of events written by an outsider looking in! Anybody can obtain the public information Jeff Burbanks obtained and write about it. The man doesn't know any of the people he's written about or the real circumstances of their lives or businesses. He's not involved in the gaming industry nor was he involved in any of these cases. His silly book is a

one-sided, inaccurate, incomplete part of a story written by an outsider who never knew the people he wrote about! This books a joke written by a clown!

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