

Even 007 fails in this casino caper

Written by Administrator
Friday, 19 February 2021 09:14 -

By SCOTT SAALMAN

Guest Columnist

Last Sunday, I called Mom at the casino on Valentine's Day. Sunday is her casino day. Fridays and Saturdays are also her casino days. I don't see my parents on those days. I'm a middle-aged weekend casino orphan.

To call Mom on a weekend means first calling Dad's cellphone. He then hands it to her. She never answers her own cellphone, weekdays or weekends. I'm really not sure why she has one. On weekdays, I know to call their landline (aka wall phones).

A downside to calling their landline is Dad will likely answer it downstairs at the same time Mom answers it upstairs. Then they start conversing with each other, forgetting me. They discuss what to eat for their 2:30 p.m. supper. I become a voyeur on a party line from hell. Eventually, I butt in.

"Mom?"

"M.J., do you hear Scott?"

"It's me, Mom."

"Where are you?"

"On the phone."

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“How’d you do that?”

“I called YOU, Mom.”

“But your dad is on the phone with me.”

“You both answered at the same—”

“Patty, it’s Scott. I’m hanging up.”

“Hello?”

“We’re beyond hello, Mom.”

Anyway, I called Dad’s cellphone on Valentine’s Day to talk to Mom. I could barely hear his “hello” over the cacophony of Sunday morning casino sounds: the incessant beeps that reminded me of R2D2 on speed; the exciting electronic coin clatter, creating the illusion that a major jackpot had occurred every nanosecond; the ratcheting associated with pulled slot machine handles; the desperate chatter of church-skippers at the slots making soon-to-be-forgotten deals with God; the ever-present wheel-of-fortune-like clicking; the crazed calliope, bringing to mind an image of the sweaty Devil overzealously manning the calliope keyboard in puffing fits of steam. This is the maddening soundtrack of my parents’ happy place.

“Where’s Mom?”

“She’s somewhere.”

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“That’s reassuring.”

“I hit one earlier for a thousand. I might break even.”

“I want to wish Mom Happy Valentine’s Day.”

It seemed to take him forever to find Mom. I’m sure he got distracted. He never met a poker machine he didn’t like.

The casino became my parents’ second home in the 1990s. It opened as Casino Aztar and eventually was renamed Tropicana. I suspect, at first, the name change created worry that only orange juice would be served at the bar. As much money as they have spent there, their names should be on the casino signage. I still call the casino by its original name. Aztar would make a great name for a protagonist in a James Bond flick.

Here is a script for a new 007 thriller I imagined while Dad tracked down my elusive mom on the mean streets of the penny slots neighborhood. Working title: CASINO COMPS ARE FOREVER.

Bond is bound to a slot machine by Duck Tape. He struggles to free himself.

BOND: Bloody hell. The more I squirm, the tighter the tape gets. These casino sounds are maddening! This is the ultimate doomsday device.

Enter Aztar.

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AZTAR: Welcome to your life, Mr. Bond.

BOND: Aztar!

AZTAR: There's no turning back, Mr. Bond.

BOND: It was YOU all along.

AZTAR: Even while we sleep, we will find you.

BOND: But that doesn't even make sense!

AZTAR: Sorry, Mr. Bond, but everybody wants to rule the world.

BOND: Aztar — why are you addressing me in '80s lyric-speak? Is it a riddle?

AZTAR: It's no riddle, Mr. Bond. It's an earworm. Tears for Fears was playing in the elevator on my way down. It's my happy song.

BOND: You're a madman, Aztar!

AZTAR: Perhaps, but who is the one currently in a very sticky situation?

BOND: I was assigned to free Scott's parents from the hypnotic hold that your casino has on

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them before they annihilate his inheritance. You have me now, Aztar, so release them.

AZTAR: Sorry, old chap. The gravitational pull of our comps program is far too great for Scott's parents to turn away.

BOND: This assignment was a bloody lost cause from the start.

A super-model-like cocktail waitress arrives.

AZTAR: I took the liberty of ordering you a last martini. James, meet Penny Slot.

PENNY: Your martini, James. Shaken, not stirred.

BOND: Even though you stole my line, Ms. Slot, I must say you are pretty as a penny.

PENNY: Sexist old English perv.

Entire martini splashes in Bond's face.

BOND: This really isn't my day.

AZTAR: Penny by penny, you will remain strapped to this slot machine until your final breath. The calliope music alone will make you wish your mum never met your dad. Welcome to your death, 007.

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Aztar dials cellphone.

AZTAR: Lucifer, crank up the calliope's volume. Play Tears for Fears.

Finally, I heard Mom say "hello" on Dad's phone.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Mom."

"Hello?"

"Can you hear me?"

"No."

"If you can't hear me then how did you know I asked if you can hear me?"

"I think your Dad muted the phone when he handed it to me. Yes, that must be it."

"That doesn't make sense, Mom. If your phone is muted, you would still be able to hear me."

"I'm hanging—"

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Just like that, the call ended. I should've known better than to phone bomb her casino day. Sometimes, a casino orphan can't help but feel both shaken and stirred.

Email scottsaa1man@gmail.com to order his new column collection, "What Are You Going To Write About When I'm Gone?" (\$15).

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