

“ TRANSCRIPT ”

Anyone who has played a claw machine can relate to the experience of having the claw perfectly positioned only to see it weakly graze the prize before pulling back up. "No Man!" It may seem like the machine isn't even trying. And well... "It is not your imagination, those claw machines are rigged!"

There are a couple of beloved stuffed animals that I have that are from a claw machine, a koala and a bear.

That is Vox.com writer, Phil Edwards.

"I looked at the instruction guides for a few of the biggest claw games out there. Take for example, the manual for Black Tie Toys advanced crane machine. If you look at page 8, section subheading Claw Strength you will see a horrifying piece of information. "Managing profit is made easy. Simply input the coin value, the average value of the merchandise, and the profit level. The machine will automatically calculate when to send full strength to the claw."

Alright, so if it cost 50 cents to play the game, and the prize inside cost 7 dollars. To make a profit of 50% full power will be sent to the claw only about once every 21 games or so. That sucks. They also randomize that winning game within a range so that players can't predict when exactly it will happen. And you might notice a subheading that says "dropping skill" they can program the machine to make you think you almost won. They taunt you with it. You see the stuffed animal flying in the air. And then it drops it. And that just ruins everything. So, most of the time claw machines are more like slot machines, than like skeeball or wack-a-mole.

"Who's in charge here!" "The claw!"

The question of whether claw machines are a game of skill or chance goes back decades. The earlier versions back in the 1930s had very little element of skill and were marketed as highly profitable for their owners. This was the depression era and people were desperate for ways to get money moving. During a crackdown on organized crime in the 1950s federal law classified claw machines as gambling devices and prohibited the transportation of them across state lines.

After those laws were relaxed in the 1970s newer claw machines from Europe and Asia spread throughout the United States. They actually started calling them "skill cranes" because the joystick gave players more precise control. But owners had increasing control over profits as well. And they've been met with a patchwork of state and local laws and regulations. If machine operators want to make that claw really really unfair against the players, there's not a lot stopping them. Most of the regulations focus on the prize size, not the strength of the claw. That's a reason that you might see fewer of the "win a free iPad" claw machines or "win a free iPhone" claw machines around. And more of just old fashioned stuffed animals.

It's great if players know what they are up against. Especially since sites like Youtube have enabled claw machine enthusiasts to broadcast their victories. Like this guy. "I'm Matt Magnone. Join me as I venture out and win as much crap as I can from claw machines!" My best outcome of this is not that all the claw machines go away. Since I first wrote this article, I've spent a dollar on claw machines... and I've lost.

All I want for people to know is that they are not the problem. The claw machine is the problem.

"Ah, you piece of crap!"