

Odds and Ends

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We'll be honest. We've been pretty sick for the last few weeks, and just got back to work Monday afternoon, so we haven't been able to put a lot of thought into this column. We'll try to make up for it, but putting a little thought into several topics.

First, we wanted to pass along a strange sight from our semi-regular winter visit to Las Vegas. There's a row of booths, perhaps 10 feet by 12 feet each, running along the Strip right outside of Harrah's Resort and Casino. They're been there for years and years; many sell t-shirts or souvenirs, but there are other types of novelty booths, including one selling photos of tourists riding a motorcycle. It was probably a Harley but we can't remember for sure - which helps us make our point - the booths are basically unmemorable.

On this visit, we noticed something very different. One of the booths had a new occupant: an eCig company, which was demonstrating the product for passers-by who were welcome to try one (and of course, to buy some). But every time we passed by (which was often - we were staying in the neighborhood), it was a very lonely place, with no customers at all. And unfortunately, every time we passed by, the lone salesperson was male. Needless to say, that made it a rather uninteresting place for us to spend much time. It also seemed like a rather odd marketing decision. It's certainly possible that whoever leased the space was unaware of the smoking fetish; but no matter what was being sold there, you would think someone would have suggested that a pretty girl might be a better salesperson; just about every other booth in that area had female sales staff, and they weren't even selling potential fetish objects. At any rate, not a particularly "satisfying" experience, but sort of interesting nonetheless when it comes to the attempt to mainstream eCigs, in lieu of the real thing.

Even sadder: if there had been a female salesperson there, and she was smoking one of the eCigs we've seen on TV recently that actually show nice exhaled smoke - that might have been one of the best sightings we would have had in Vegas this time. We visited three casinos in our abbreviated visit: one upscale, one mid-range, and one lower-end. In all three, sightings were slim. We had a few decent ones in the higher-end casino, mainly because the women were more attractive; the smoking wasn't anything to write home about. And while there were a few more smokers in the lower-end place, they were primarily of the "crunch up your face and exhale out of the side of your mouth" variety. This onetime American oasis for smoking seems to go downhill every time we visit.

On another nostalgic note, we caught a brief TV commentary today about actor Kirk Douglas and his appearance on the Oscar telecast; there was an accompanying photo from an Oscar ceremony back in the mid 1900s. The photo wasn't visible long enough for us to identify the woman he was with - but she was wearing white gloves and a cigarette in a short black holder. Can you imagine a photo like that, taken in the audience at this year's Oscar telecast?

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Written by Smoke Signals

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Although, maybe if eCigs catch on - perhaps one day they'll be socially acceptable enough for that to happen. We know that's wishful thinking, in a world where the FTC wants to regulate smokeless cigarettes, and just about the only thing left for New York City to do is ban you from thinking about smoking. Just call us optimists.

And thanks for coming by to check out the March-April issue of *Smoke Signals*.