

***Winning at
Internet Poker***
FOR
DUMMIES®

**by Mark “The Red” Harlan
and Chris Derossi**



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About the Authors

Mark “The Red” Harlan: Mark “The Red” Harlan was born in Rawlins, Wyoming and has lived exactly the life you would expect as a result. Armed with a degree in Applied Mathematics (from a school he never utters the name of), he began a 20-year stint in the computer industry. Red has worked with several cutting-edge Silicon Valley companies ranging from Apple Computer (where, among other positions, he was Human Interface Evangelist — making applications easier to use and openly berating those who didn’t) to Danger (makers of the T-Mobile Sidekick). Alarmingly, Red has probably already touched your life, since he designed the bidding schema that is in use by eBay today. Red has a heavy writing background (some of it actually readable) having authored *Notes from the Fringe*, InfoWorld’s most popular computer column in the heyday of the Internet; and the *DevEdge News* for Netscape’s developer community. Red now sports the hefty title of Chief Marketing Officer at CyberArts Licensing, a company providing software for the next generation of poker rooms on the Internet (such as www.gamesgrid.com). CyberArts is the place where Red mixes his love of poker with his deep understanding of graphical user interfaces to make online poker easier to use, better looking, and considerably more fun. Today Red lives a glamorous lifestyle, roughly akin to a well-to-do college student, in Santa Clara, California. Red welcomes non-spam email at mharlan@cyberarts.com.

Chris Derossi: Chris Derossi is a 20-year computer veteran and serial entrepreneur. Having started his first company at the age of 14 he has worked at a myriad of corporations since (creating several along the way). Among other positions, Chris has been: the Chief Architect of the Macintosh Operating System at Apple Computer, the founder of ePeople, and the CEO of Trading Technologies. Chris was a founder of *MacTech* magazine and has written extensively for the computer industry, in publications such as *Byte* and *Dr. Dobb’s Journal*. Today, Chris is the CEO of CyberArts Licensing, a software company working feverishly to take Internet skill games (including poker, naturally) to the next level. Aside from running day-to-day business matters, Chris is responsible for the entire architecture of CyberArt’s poker offering (seen at www.gamesgrid.com), ensuring that the technology is stable, robust, and hugely scalable. For the last 15 years Chris has been an avid poker player and is often found clutching the first place trophy in the tournaments he enters. Chris was born in Laramie, Wyoming and today lives in Henderson, Nevada (a stone’s throw from Las Vegas) with his wife and two children. Chris can be reached at cderossi@cyberarts.com. Red and Chris both man a *Winning at Internet Poker for Dummies* discussion board at <http://pokerbook.gamesgrid.com>.

Dedication

From Mark “The Red” Harlan: I dedicate this book to Jacqueline because I always said I would, to members of the Math Alliance just because, and to my Uncle Poison because legends should live on.

From Chris Derossi: I dedicate this book to my wife, Jennifer, and my children, Grayson and Miranda, who are always there with love and support.

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And my sincere thanks to you, the reader. Nothing here is possible without you. It sounds trite, but that doesn’t make it less true; you have helped fulfill a lifelong dream of mine. I sincerely hope something in these pages makes you think, learn, or at least laugh. In the Western world, time is the most precious of all commodities; I truly appreciate you spending it with us.

From Chris: My name would not be on this book at all if it weren't for the monumental talent, effort, and graciousness of my coauthor, partner, and friend, Mark Harlan. Writing a book takes an enormous amount of work and creates a mountain of pressure. Mark not only handled both with ease, he did it while keeping his sense of humor and unique, thought-provoking outlook on life. Mark deserves most of the credit for what's on these pages, and he has my thanks and respect for all of the sleep he gave up to get it done.

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Finally, thanks to the many, many people who have helped and encouraged me while I've spent countless hours in entrepreneurial pursuits, of which this book is just a small part. I consider myself to be fortunate enough to follow my dreams thanks to my family, friends, and associates.

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Introduction

For something like 150 years, people have been playing poker on shady riverboats, in smokey backrooms of otherwise legitimate businesses, in booze-laden college dorms, on cramped tent floors, and at family kitchen tables. Although the games are often social events, the underlying purpose is always the same: play, play, play, and try to take as much of whatever you possibly can from the steely-eyed person sitting across from you. Be it pretzels, lingerie, or cold hard cash, what your opponents have is what you want. Victors get the spoils; losers get large servings of crow (usually served cold with no garnish).

A few years ago, the Internet came along, and along with it, the first “Big Change.” Now you can play against people anywhere in the world, at any time of the day, and for varying sums of money. And the card house where it all goes down is exactly as far away as your computer.

Early concerns of cheating and the inability to see the faces of your competitors, crossed with the uncertainty of passing electronic cash to an unknown foreign entity, gave many would-be online players reason to pause, but the efforts and technology aimed at making the game safe have prevailed. Internet poker has truly exploded in the past couple of years, no doubt due in large part to the numerous televised poker events and Internet sponsorship of some of the top players in the world.

The Internet traffic statistics are staggering, with the busiest poker sites dwarfing the clientele at brick-and-mortar casinos: At any given moment, tens of thousands of players duke it out on a multitude of tables. Internet poker was nothing 10 years ago, and today it’s a billion-dollar industry with no signs of subsiding.

In some ways, the online world is identical to the real one. You can play Texas Hold ’Em, Omaha, and Seven-Card Stud. You can play less popular competitive games, such as Pineapple, Five-Card Stud or Draw, or wild card games, depending on the site. You can compete for play chips or hard currency. You can play in ring games or tournaments.

But in some ways, the online world is very different. You have to be able to judge a site for quality. You have to download and master the software. You have to make electronic transactions over-the-wire to move your cash. And don't forget that you have to choose between table sizes and game types.

At first it can all be a little much. But don't despair. You have a clear path through this wilderness. Come along, and we'll take you there.

About This Book

This book specifically covers the nuances of Internet poker as compared to everything in the brick-and-mortar world. You should think of *Winning at Internet Poker For Dummies* as an augmentation to any and all poker knowledge you already have; you definitely shouldn't think of this book as the stand-alone, end-all, be-all poker reference. We've written this text to dovetail cleanly with *Poker For Dummies* (Wiley), but it can just as easily walk hand-in-hand with any other beginning or intermediate poker text.

Thinking Internet poker is identical to brick-and-mortar poker can be a costly mistake. The two are similar, but they have key differences. Our main goal is to point out the differences and help you avoid the myriad of pitfalls lying in wait for the unsuspecting.

We help you discover the nuances of an Internet poker table, pick a site to your liking, and transfer your electronic funds. From there, we take a peek at online poker psychology and delve into some of the unusual table sizes and games that, for the most part, only exist online. After we get you playing, we give you handy tips and tricks on how to stay ahead of the game — and hopefully even win.

Conventions Used in This Book

Some of the special terminology we use in this book includes:

- ✔ **Brick and mortar:** We use this phrase to describe real, physical cardrooms where you sit across a table from live human beings. It doesn't necessarily have to mean casinos; in most cases, you can just as easily think about any home game you play in.

- ✔ **Godzilla:** Large radioactive monster that mostly hangs out in Tokyo bay. Aggressive player with a good poker face — bad temper when losing. Known as *Gojira* in Japan (“go” from the English gorilla and “jira,” the Japanese word for whale). We talk about Godzilla a little in Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Hard currency:** When we use this phrase, we mean the money that you have on deposit with a poker site — the actual money that you gamble with. When you place a \$1 bet online, you put hard currency on the line. We use this phrase to minimize confusion with money as a general concept. Chapter 4 is where we talk about transferring your money online.
- ✔ **Ring game:** A single poker table, with anything from two to ten players, where everyone competes for hard currency. You can come and go as you please in these games. Some brick-and-mortar players call this game form *money play*.
- ✔ **Tournament:** A special form of poker where you pay a set entry fee, plus a smaller registration fee, to receive a set amount of tournament chips. Players compete, busting out one by one, until only one person remains. Chapter 10 is where we start to get down with tourneys.

For a slightly longer glossary, head to the Appendix in the back of this book.

What You're Not to Read

Well, maybe you shouldn't take it to the “I boycott this” extreme, but we should let you in on a couple of things to know about this book:

- ✔ *Sidebars* contain information that you don't have to read to understand Internet poker. They serve as asides, anecdotes, or extended forms of examples. Only reading the sidebars in this book is the mental equivalent of sitting on the back porch and hearing your favorite poker stories from your uncle.
- ✔ Order doesn't matter. That being said, you can read anything you want without hurting our feelings. Read any chapter at any point. Feel free to skip around. We use copious cross-references to help you understand anything you may have skipped over during your reading journey.

Foolish Assumptions

In order to begin, we've made several assumptions about *you*, our dear reader. We assume that

- ✔ You're already familiar with the basic forms of poker, and that you have a cursory understanding of poker strategy. If you don't, turn around right now and buy yourself a copy of *Poker For Dummies* (Wiley) or some other introductory-to-intermediate text on the game.
- ✔ You can use a computer and have the ability to connect to the Internet. We also assume that you have downloaded and installed software onto your computer before. If these concepts are foreign to you, pick up a copy of *Internet For Dummies* (Wiley) and/or *PCs For Dummies* (Wiley).
- ✔ You've used the Internet to the extent that you're familiar with using search engines and making elementary transactions (for instance, you've bought something online).
- ✔ You think winning is better than losing. If you don't, we honestly can't tell you where to go for help, but we'd love to sit with you the next time you play.
- ✔ You're a noble human being. You must be if you're willing to spend this much time with us, and hey, we *truly* appreciate it.

How This Book Is Organized

We've intentionally written this book in such a way that you can jump into it at *any* point and just go. We haven't created complete word chaos, however; here's the method to our madness:

Part 1: Internet Poker Basics

This section talks about the hardware and software you need to play, includes a tour of an Internet poker table, tells you how to pick a quality poker site, and coaches you through the transfer of your precious money. By the time you reach the end of this section, you should be able to play a simple game of poker online.

Part II: Taking Your Poker to a New Level — The Cyber Level

Here we explore the variety of games available to you on the Internet, and we let you in on a few secrets about what's different in the online poker world, including a bit on the nuances of Internet poker psychology.

Part III: Taking Over Tournaments

Here you find the down and dirty on the strategic differences between the Internet and the brick-and-mortar world for tournaments. We also drill into unusual table sizes and those crazy single-table tournaments.

Part IV: The Part of Tens

Lists, lists, lists. This part is the dessert after your tasty meal. Here we give you ways to not screw up your Internet poker game, how to keep your head on straight in the heat of the battle, where to go to find more great Internet poker info, and tips on how to behave in the brick-and-mortar world after you leave cyberspace (should you ever venture out of your cave, that is).

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, we guide you toward important points by using the following icons:



Next to this icon, you find information that you should keep in the back, front, and sides of your poker noggin as you play. We think this stuff is important to remember.



The information next to this icon tells you to do something that can potentially save you time, money, and poker frustration. It helps you in the end, so read it.



Make sure to read the text next to this icon. It can save you a lot of blood, sweat, tears, gut-wrenching pain . . . and money.



“Exactly!” is what you’ll think when you read this icon’s info — it should perfectly illustrate what we’re trying to explain.

Where to Go from Here

Pretty much anywhere you want. Find something you think is interesting and go for it.

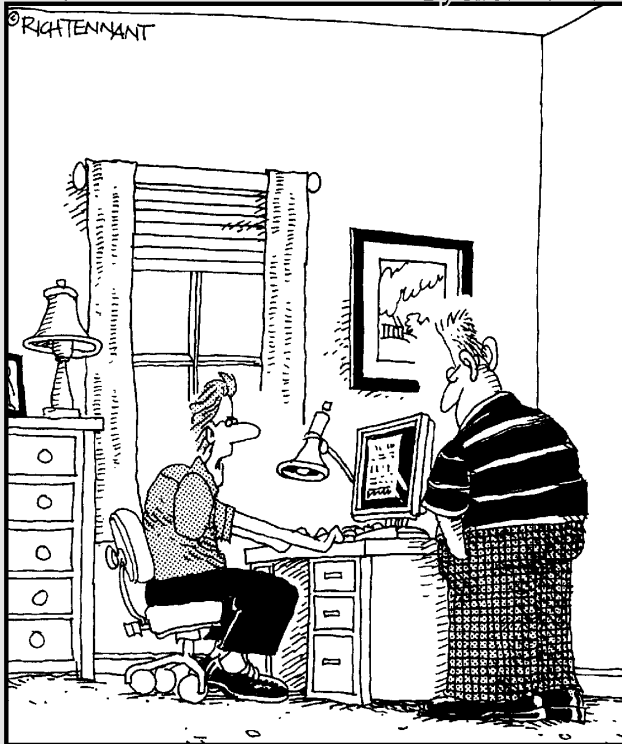
Can't make up your mind? Just pick a page . . . any page.

Part I

Internet Poker Basics

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“I like Internet poker. What’s annoying are those Word messages that keep coming up saying, ‘It looks like you’re trying to raise on the flop with a garbage hand. Would you like some help?’.”

In this part . . .

Here we cover all the basics: the hardware and software you need, criteria for choosing a site of quality, and the nitty-gritty of moving your money online. We even give a tour of an online poker table.

Chapter 1

Creating a Winning Combination: Poker, the Internet, and You

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Winning cold, hard cash (or maybe soft, electronic cash)
 - ▶ Understanding the differences between the real and cyber worlds
 - ▶ Assembling the necessary hardware, software, and poker knowledge
-

The online poker boom has been astounding. At the end of 2004, at any given moment, more than 10,000 players were competing on over 150 poker sites. On any given day, combined bets totaled more than \$130 million. And the numbers keep going up.

And not surprisingly, not all the new attendees play poker well. Sure, you have to watch out for some sharks, hustlers, and poker savants; but the misfits, slackers, and the terminally distracted greatly outnumber the dangerous players. In online play in general, and especially at the lower-limit tables, you have the potential to make *a lot* of money.

In this chapter, we talk about the basics of Internet poker, as well as the raw materials you need to play a truly fascinating form of America's favorite card game (and recently, America's favorite game, period).

And the rest of the book? Well, we talk about everything else there.

Me, Winning on the Internet? You Bet!

In case you're confused by the title of the book, we should get one thing clear from the start: Yes, you *can* win money playing poker on the Internet. Recognizing that, however, doesn't make it easy. Even if you've "mastered" brick-and-mortar play, you can't simply walk in and take the candy from all the Net brats. You come screen to screen with some pretty tough players. Heck, Net dwellers have won the past two World Series of Poker Main Events in Las Vegas. But coming out on top of your favorite game is certainly possible, and to do that you need to know your poker theory and have money to put on the virtual table.



The most important thing to understand about Internet poker is that you're still playing poker.

Knowing your poker theory

With very few exceptions, nearly all the poker theory you already know and have gleaned over your life applies in the Internet world. You must deal with nuances and fine points, yes (and you can bet that we cover those in detail, such as in Chapter 3), but poker is poker, no matter the form or forum.

If you're looking for general poker theory, you can't find much of it here (with the exception of single-table tournaments on demand, which we cover in Chapters 12 and 13), but you can find the info in books like *Poker For Dummies* (Wiley). If you aren't familiar with the nuances of poker itself, you should read and study up on general theory first before you play with any hard currency online.

In any betting situation, the basis to making money is being more informed than your opponent. If you ignore reading up on poker theory, the players who aren't so cavalier *will* beat you in the long run.



If you're not completely up on poker theory, don't let it stop you from getting started. You can always play for free chips, which we talk about in Chapter 8. In fact, you can also play in *free-roll* tournaments, where you pay nothing and still have a chance to win hard currency (check out Chapter 10).