

Spicy // System *Redux*

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Most people who hear that I am a semiprofessional poker player don't know how to react. Some obviously think I am a luckbox, bound to lose every dime eventually, as "the house always wins!!" Others think I am sinning and destined to become nothing but a godless heathen that produces nothing for society. Very few people on the street appreciate how much skill, judgment, and knowledge goes into every hand of poker that I play. Several months ago, I started writing this guide in an attempt to create a semi-comprehensive primer that would help people grasp the diverse yet important fundamentals of No Limit Holdem in cash game form. It's probably -EV for me to tell people how to beat the same type of games I do, but that's ok. I learned a lot from Pitr in my early days and feel like it's only appropriate to give back to the community. And anyway, when one of you climbs up the NL ladder and stacks me a thousand times using the stuff you learned in my own superfantastic guide, I know I can rely on the kindness of A Sad Robot or Moquel to put me up in a log cabin or an igloo.

On the same note, it's in your best interest not to spread this information/style every which way, which is now made much tougher by locking this in the Spicebox. The more people who know how to play NL/PL cash games well the lower your long-term profits will be. Obviously, just reading a book or even this guide (which admittedly is laced with awesome) isn't going to be enough to really kill the NL games if you're a new player. It takes experience (lots of it), patience, a sick disregard for money, and the ability to swallow, absorb, and overcome bad beats to truly become a good no limit poker player. I've said it before, but I'll say it here for kicks: experience, in the long run, is better for your game than reading. You do need to read things (written by people better than you, hopefully) to get a foundation for your game, but you'll never win in the long run without tons of experience, no matter how much you read.

For those of you who don't know me or my story, I've been playing NL and PL cash games since December of 2004 and put in thousands of table hours over that time. I've won well over \$100,000 since then from NL/PL cash games, starting initially at NL25 and having grown enough in skill and bankroll to take a few stabs at levels as high as NL4000. These days I tend to play shorthanded \$10-\$20 NL.

These strategies can be adapted for tournaments, but they tend not to do so great there with the shorter stacks and higher blinds. Survival is key there and you don't usually want to risk your entire stack on image plays, information, or as a slight favorite. Your options are simply more limited in tournaments. In cash games, however, you should be willing to exploit every edge and advantage you can create or are offered. This means if you think by pushing all in with a flush draw on the flop will yield you lots more money later on when you do so with a set, by all means, shove ahead. Thinking in the long term is extremely key for

good NL cash players.

As far as PL vs NL games, there are differences but I'm not really going to get into them. The major and most obvious difference is that PL involves more pot control and makes you plan how you are going to play the hand earlier than NL, but otherwise, I don't think of it as a HUGELY a different game. Everything in this guide applies to NL, and 95% of it does to PL. NL is the obvious focus of this guide.

As far as the format of this guide, I divided it into four parts – introduction / discussion of strategy and off-table issues, identifying and then exploiting your opponents, preflop play, and postflop play. If you want me to address something (either a topic or a specific hand), let me know in the forums thread and I'll probably talk about it. My goal, overall, is to be as totally comprehensive as possible while still making the guide readable to players of all experience levels. Let me know if I am unclear and I'll modify and explain my comments.

Finally, you can reach me through AIM, in this thread, PM, or #poker on zIRC. I don't mind watching, talking or helping people out with their game (especially regulars) if I'm not doing other things or playing my own games. I'm proud to say that several people have become better players thanks to my direct help outside of this guide. One player who I put a good amount of my time into improving, Unamuno, is now a winning player at NL400 and is probably winning at NL600. I've helped lots of other people too, so don't hesitate to ask. If I am busy, don't worry, I'll let you know. Feel free to mock me viciously, send me love notes, or to sell me a cotton candy machine through the above methods.

In advance, you all can thank the_docta for harassing me every second of every day asking me to initially write this guide so he could suck a little less. I also want to thank A Sad Robot for being my crappy editor and late night love muffin, I couldn't have done this as well as I did without his help. I'd also like to show my appreciation to Unamuno, Mr Tim Caum, Wintermute, Scotsman, Wyoak, and Moquel for contributing stuff to this whole writing process. I also want to throw a thank you at the general #poker on zIRC bunch because hey without them I'd be slightly less entertained at 5 am.

Part I : General Concepts, Strategies, and Theories

In this section, I'm going to discuss a lot of theories and concepts that might not directly apply to your game at the table. You may be familiar with some of these concepts from your prior play; however, it's pretty important you grasp all of these fundamentals so I'd recommend not rushing through them if you're at all

new to the game. It's sort of a primer to the game, so when I discuss the actual playing aspects, the fundamentals will be totally covered. You cannot be a winning player unless you understand and apply all of the following concepts.

- Bankroll Management

There are a lot of very good poker players who can't manage their money. Look at Stu Ungar, for example, or any otherwise good poker player who either wastes their money on other gambling-related activities where they have little or no edge or blow their winnings playing over their roll. The concept of bankroll (as opposed to general money) management is more restricted to the latter of the two.

The conservative bankroll perspective dictates that you want at least 30 buyins to your game of choice. That means at NL50, you want a \$1,500 roll, and at NL2000, you want a \$60,000 one. The moderate perspective on the subject is 20-25 buys, which is what I recommend if you're not massively multitabling or playing short. The lowest bankroll level I advise that you need to take a one-time shot is 15 buys, but you've got a pretty high risk of ruin (or pain, at least) there. Nobody wants to lose a buy in when they're that far over their head in both skill and money. Don't take stabs just to take stabs – if the bigger game is incredibly awesome, that's a good reason to stab. Losing \$500,000 at NL50 is not a good reason to take a stab at NL100. Also, if you're either a new player, multitable a lot, play 6-max, or play a very LAG game, the number you use for bankroll figures should be higher, not lower, on the scale of 15-30 (or even higher).

The other thing that falls in this category is not playing with scared money. Don't play at a game you're worried that you're going to be killed at, or at a level way above your roll just to get a quick win. That also means not buying in for anything less than the full amount (unless you have a very specific reason to, but I never have). It's stupid to buy into the game short if you're scared because you'll still be scared with the little bit you have and will play suboptimally anyway. You'll be playing against players better than you're used to and for stakes you have very little experience with. If you feel uncomfortable with the prospect of losing every dollar you have sitting on the table, you will consciously or subconsciously limit your upside and shouldn't bother remaining in your seat.

Also, don't play with things like rent money, money you need to sustain your cocaine habit, or money you use to support your abusive girlfriend. You'll be a much worse player if you do since you play far away from what would be

considered optimal. Play at a game where if you lose, it simply doesn't matter. This financial feeling of invulnerability will turn into fearlessness and you'll be a much better player because of it. Beats will matter less and you'll be able to focus more on good play, not financially good results. Read this paragraph again, it's important.

- Finding a Good Game

This is an extremely important concept to grasp. Someone smarter than me said (paraphrased) "It doesn't matter if you're the 10th best player in the entire world if the top nine are at the table with you. You're the fish." Although I doubt you'll be worried about running into a table of awesome players, you still need to be VERY selective about table choice in no limit, much more so than limit.

The first thing you want to look at when you're trying to find a table is the statistics shown in the lobby. What's the average pot? This is a good indicator of the amount of action at the table. If the site has it, what's the % of the players that go to the flop? That's indicative of how loose/tight the table is. A high average pot size is usually what you want to see when you join a table. Those things are pretty obvious, though.

Less obvious things to look for are stack sizes at the table. You don't want to be at a table with only huge stacks, and you don't want to be at a table with extremely small stacks (early in your career, this is true. Once you learn how to make adjustments to short stacks, they become easy victims and you seek them out.). A good mix is ideal. You want to see a big stack or two because that means people are willing to gamble, and a reasonably small stack (50BB or so) is good too because usually, you can bully those players around (weak-tight players, looking for a double up or fold) – or they'll help instigate action by playing wildly. These are just trends I've noticed and not ironclad rules. A very big stack may mean that player is very good and running well, a bad combination for you. A shortstack may not be a moron taking a stab or a guy with all his money on the table but instead a very good player trying something different. Pay attention otherwise you won't find out who your enemies are until it's too late.

In addition, you want to look for players you've beaten before, or ones you know are really bad, if you're a veteran at the site. You also want to be on the lookout for tilted players (you can probably tell from chat, or if you witnessed a really bad beat). You should be watching the game for a bit before you sit so you can get a feel for the tone, pace, and players in the game. Finally, players who think you are bad (assuming you aren't) may make a game worth

playing. If there's any off-table information you gather that you feel is exploitable, the game gains value. Don't bother playing in games with Al Krux for double your normal stakes (I almost did this once). Find a better place to hunt.

Finally, you should more often than not have to wait on a waiting list before you get a seat, especially at the bigger fullring games. A surprising amount of people are confused by this statement. I pretty much stick to this maxim: If you're not waiting for a seat, the game probably isn't very good*. It's ok to play while you wait for another game, but your money-making playing time will not be optimized unless you're playing at the most profitable games available.

* I don't really believe that any more. I play high stakes short games and as such there's rarely a waitlist because there's so few games going. For full ring, it's still true, but it's far from an absolute rule. On some sites, you'll never have a waitlist but the games can still be awesome. You can make lots of money at non-waitlist games and the edge from just playing the best games is only crucially important if you don't have a lot of time to spend playing. At lower limits, there are a lot more table options available and table selection does become an important factor in how much money you are able to make from your session.

- Where and What Stakes?

The other part to finding a good game is playing on a good site. My recommendations for sites at the upper levels differ from those I recommend at the lower levels. Pacific poker is the site which I started and has a crappy software, terrible support, no multitableting, and a horrid rake for NL players (\$4 cap regardless of the limit, the highest game spread being a wonderful \$600NL), and no rakeback or bonuses. The players are really terrible but I don't recommend anyone stay there for too long. The Boss network (like Fortune Poker) is another site with poor software and ridiculously bad players. Rakeback is available and support is decent. Party is my main site and is the most well rounded of all NL cash game sites – but unless you have rakeback, the Party points system disfavors No-Limit players. Pokerstars has a small cash game playerbase and the games are tougher there on average. Ultimate Bet and Cryptologic skins are both nice but I've never spent a lot of time there. Pokerroom's software is horrific but they spread a high range of games.

Assuming you're new to the game but have a big enough bankroll for all NL games up to, say, NL400 (\$2-\$4), you're probably wondering where you

should start. NL25 and NL50, at least on party, are pretty much both equal harbors of suck. Most people can beat those games with very little experience in No-Limit. At NL100 you start finding some people who know what they're doing on most sites but if you read this guide you should be more than capable of beating the game soon enough.

NL200 is really the first test of a no-limit player's ability. The games here are noticeably tougher and ramp up in aggression and skill pretty quickly. NL200 is really where you should spend the most time in your early days once you have a bankroll, because that's where you'll make sure you've learned all the important skills and you'll have a chance to sharpen your reads / abilities while it's still relatively cheap to do so.

I also don't recommend starting at NL200, either, even if you do have the roll. Start at NL100 or below, but as I said - once you get here, stay awhile, and I really do mean it. NL400 is very tough, and NL600 is even tougher. The higher you go, the more aggression and talent you'll have to face (for quite some time, anyway, but we can talk about that later). There are still fish at the higher levels, but you'll be contending with people who are legitimately skilled at NL400 and NL600. Everything I said applies even more if you play 6-max. Make sure you can truly beat the game you're playing before you move up, because the last thing you want to be is the fish at the table at a game you can't beat.

- Multitabling

Multitabling is something that I used to do a lot more in my early days than I should have - I once played 20 games for 3 hours in a row, a mix of limit and no limit games, over several sites, and even a PLO game - on two monitors. I used to do 16 games consistently and I got pretty good at juggling them around. I believe that this was the backlash from being confined to 1-tabling Pacific for 8 months and then suddenly having the entire internet at my disposal to play.

Initially starting off at NL, with a solid start from playing limit for so long (I was a winning player up to \$15-\$30 before I started switching), I beat the 25NL and 50NL games barely trying, and I beat them 10 or 15 at a time. As I climbed the ladder, though, more and more of my opponents were paying attention, were very aggressive, and I started to like shorthanded play. I realized what I had been missing out on and I cut back the number of NL cash game tables dramatically. A cookie-cutter strategy will get raped by opponents who pay attention. I realized this by the time I got to NL200.

I don't really recommend a starting player playing more than two tables at a time. You can't get a strong read for the table, with or without Poker Tracker + PokerAce-esque software, unless you're paying attention. Playing any amount of tables after 6 is basically playing the cards, alone, and you're totally missing out on information your opponents are offering you during other hands. Focus is an absolutely essential part of a good player's game. Every hand you play, whether you're in it or not, you should be paying attention. Remember what your opponents are doing, and if they get to a showdown, remember what they have for later. Try putting them on a hand and see if your read was right. We'll discuss this more in a bit. My point was, though, you can't do all that without a lot of experience and practice, and it's made much, much tougher by multitableting.

- Seat Position

This is a short little concept but it's pretty important. You want to act after the loose players, and before the tight players. This way, you can raise the loose players and not let them be the ones dictating tempo. You're able to act after the tight players, preventing them from blasting you with a big reraise and allowing you to have a higher chance of taking all their money postflop. You also want to be seated after the big stacks for the same reasons – you want them to act so you can see what they're doing before you make your decisions to be involved with the hand since they can stack you (or double you up). Small stacks can really go anywhere, it depends if they're wild or not, but they generally fall into the opening statement. These are all general concepts and there are tons of exceptions to them (all player-based), but they're still important to have a grasp of.

- Shorthanded vs Ring

I love shorthanded Holdem – these days, it's the game I play the most. I used to despise it – everything seemed so swingy, everyone seemed so ridiculously aggressive. Once I became just as good and aggressive as the rest of the table, if not more so, though, I started to love it. 4-handed NLHE is probably my favorite form of the game. It does have much higher variance than ring, but variance goes both ways. Better players also have a bigger edge at short tables (look at the final table of the WSOP 6-max NLHE this year for an example). To start off, you're probably best off at 10-max, but getting experience at 6-max makes you a more aggressive player and all players should try it at least once or twice in their early career. Once you become a good player, you can decide on your own if you want to 'permanently' be a ring player or 6-max. The most optimal way to be is to be able to play either depending on which game is better.

- Live vs Online

I don't have much to say here having not played live very much, but I recommend you don't play NL cash games live until you have a strong handle on your game online. You'll be nervous, and probably a little scared, playing with everything on the line, the first time live. This'll drive you away from optimal play and that's never a good thing. People tend to bluff less live since online there's no one to laugh or roll their eyes at them, but they're usually less patient than people playing thirty two games online and as such their holdings are worse. You'll also find very weak players at a much higher frequency live than you will at the identical stake online.

Even so, I recommend playing slightly lower than you do online when you start off live until you get a better handle on your live play and the nuances that come with it. When you're less concerned about the money, you play more natural, and your tells are less prominent, etc.

- Sucking up the Beats

This is another crucial concept to a good player. The flop, turn, and river are just random distribution of cards that aren't rigged and will sometimes happen to fall in such a way to cause you displeasure. You cannot let this bother you – at all. Read what's in the bolded text in that paragraph over and over again until it sinks in. Be grateful for your money making opportunity (losing an all in preflop with AA vs KK) and move on to the next hand. Tilt is your worst enemy at a no-limit table. For some people, remembering all the times you didn't get sucked out on – or, the times you sucked out on other people – helps numb you to the pain of a bad beat. For me, the 50" plasma on the wall I bought from poker is my helpful little reminder that most of the time, I don't lose in those scenarios.

Part II : Identifying and Exploiting your Opponents

I wanted to address one more important concept before we start discussing cards – and that's identifying what sort of player your opponent is and then adjusting your game to exploit him. In this section, I'm going to identify the majority of player types you'll come up against, important specific tendencies you should try to figure out if opponents are capable of, and general strategies against those players. The other reason I'm writing this section is to create a cast of villains I can use when we talk about opponents in postflop play.

Obviously, note taking is the way to remember all the necessary information

about an opponent. Use them and use them as much as you can – in limit, you can always just make an educated guess as to whether or not an opponent would do XX, and only be threatened with at worst losing extra bet or two. You don't want to be stabbing in the dark in no limit. If you can't pay attention well enough to take notes, your money is better off not being in play.

General Player Types

You won't see many other types that don't fall under at least one of those categories (although you may see mixes, some postflop TAGS and preflop LAGs, etc. Most are self-descriptive and the stuff I have here is just for a general reference. Experienced players can probably skip this first section.

- Tight-Passive

Plays mostly good cards, rarely raises. This is the type of guy to limp JJ in ep and not reraise you, and also probably wouldn't reraise you in position with QQ or KK (although neither would I versus some players...smoothcalling can be incredibly profitable if you know what you're doing). You'll be in trouble if he flops a set or another strong hand on you in position and you try to bet a marginal hand or bluff. Stay aggressive and you should be able to beat him.

- Loose-Passive

Calls with a lot of hands that probably have no business being in the pot. Since he doesn't raise, rarely you'll have any idea where you stand, so you need to value bet your strong hands and tune down the trickiness.

- Loose-Aggressive

Plays a lot of hands and likes to raise and get in there. My personal favorite style and the one I play most of the time (remember, good players change gears and can be any player type they willingly choose – whatever will make them the most money). A good LAG will play any two in position if the odds are right. A stupid lag can be easily beaten by just playing tight. A smart LAG is very, very hard to contend with. This is the the style of choice by most of the good players, and it's pretty common to have at least two of these in higher stake and short handed games.

- Tight-Aggressive

My recommended style to beginners. Play only good hands, with good

odds, and mostly in good position. The tighter you play preflop, the easier decisions you are faced with postflop.

- Legitimate Maniac

Plays any two, usually for a raise, in usually MP and later. Not super tricky but very hard to put on a hand. Play tight and aggressive versus this guy.

- Ultra-Maniac

Plays any two, for a raise or a call, in literally any position – and can make a boatload of plays with or without a hand. Play as tight as you realistically can and then stick it to him when you do in fact have a hand.

- Legitimate Retard

New to the game with no clue. Bet your hands for value and don't do anything tricky at all.

Specific Questions / Notes

Beyond general player types, you also want to pick out and note specific things your opponent does that you wouldn't assume your average player would do. Write down all things that make you raise an eyebrow. These are the things that will make or lose you a lot of money in no-limit. Note the types of cards your villain plays and the general type of the player in your notes as well. In addition, you also want to note all things like the following specific tendencies:

- Does he Check-Raise?
- How big are his value bets?
- How does he play when he hits a draw (miracle or obvious)?
- Does he bluff? Semi bluff? Can he bluff bet a missed draw on the river?
- Can he limp-raise in early positions? With what?
- Is he able to get off TPTK, even when he raised preflop?
- Is he winning or losing this session?
- How does he perceive you? Is he aware of his own image?
- Is he a multitabler? If so, does he do this out of boredom or is he solid?
- What do his overbets mean, if he makes them? What's his reaction to overbets from others?
- Can he tilt? What sort of plays tilt him? (his own idiocy or the "idiocy" of others?)
- Do showing him uncalled hands have an effect on his play?

- Does he make continuation-bets? Does he frequently fold to c-bets from others?

Part III – LET THE SPICE BEGIN - Preflop Play

In this section, I want to explain your general strategy and then go through a lot of hand quizzes to get everything down. It's pretty simple – my strategy is odds-based with a focus on mostly implied odds. If you play my way (loose-aggressive), you'll find yourself playing hands that most people would usually throw away. What this does, though, is disguise your hand so you can stack morons that can't get off a semi-big hand (which is a LOT of people) – overpairs, top and bottom pairs, etc. People will huff and holler at you for being a fish (HOW COULD YOU PLAY XX THERE YOU FISHSTICK) but you can just smile as you rack up the chips.

Preflop General Strategy

Assuming a 10-handed, relatively average table, with one or no calls and no raises ahead of you, play these hands 80% of the time the following way. 20% of the time you want to do something other than what I recommended, versus good players, just to disguise your hand. For example, if you never raise UTG with AA, when you do raise UTG with AA, wary players will know you don't have AA.

UTG / UTG+1 – Raise AA – 88, Call 77-22 (if the table is passive enough, otherwise, fold). Raise AKs, AQs, AKo, AQo. Fold anything else (fear of being dominated or played back from a later position is why you fold things like KQ and JT).

EP – Add AJs/AJo and KQs to things you either raise or call with.

MP / MP+1 – Add ATs, KJs, and open raise any pair above 55.

LP / CO – Raise any two Broadway cards, any pair, any suited connector above 34s, J9s, Q9s, K9s, A9s. If confident in postflop play, add suited aces, but be wary of domination.

BUTTON – Any ace, suited king, suited connector, or suited 2 gapper (64s, T7s, J8s, are all ok here) If you play a hand here first in to the pot, raise. Decide whether to call or not if limpers are in the hand based on your read of the villain.

SB – raise anything better than Q8o. Call here with hands worse than your UTG standards (AJ, etc) when heads up vs BB 25% of the time. Versus people outside

of the blind, be more likely to just call with hands even as good as AKo. The more callers out of the blind, especially in early position, the less likely you should raise a non big pair.

BB – check anything worse than Q8o, raise anything better if h/u vs the sb. Otherwise, follow the raising requirements for UTG if playing out of position.

The more calls ahead of you, the more likely you are to call, and not raise, especially if you're out of position. I don't like raising with AKo in the BB with 4 callers, and I don't like raising AQo with 4 callers to me even on the button. Calls ahead of you also obviously helps boost your odds and, as such, lowers the quality of hands you can call with. Remember our governing theory – IMPLIED odds. Make sure you determine what action to take based on which types of players are in the pot, what players are still left to act, and the general tone of the table, in addition to odds and position.

Also, at a 6-max table, use the requirements for UTG, MP, LP, Button, SB, and BB for each of the six seats. You'll be playing noticeably looser and you should be much more willing to open raise rather than limp if you're going to play at all. 6-max tables are much more aggressive and if you're not aggressive enough, you'll be run over – this is why new players should stay at 10-max games. 6-max (and shorter) depends on feel and intuition much more than a guide or chart which will only come with experience.

Versus a 3x raise from an average player who you have no read on with NO PLAYERS HAVING PREVIOUSLY CALLED.

UTG / UTG+1 – Reraise AA/KK (for value), AKs/QQ/JJ call 35% of the time, reraise 65% of the time, Call TT/99 and AKo. Vs tricky or tight players, tend to call more and raise less. Versus loose/aggro players, be more willing to dance, however, UTG raises at a 10 handed table command a lot of respect. Be wary.

EP – Same as UTG. As I said, an UTG raise is a huge sign of strength and you need to respect that, regardless of the opponent, most of the time.

MP / MP+1 – Call 88, AQs, AJs.

LP / CO – Call 77, suited broadways, 9Ts, AQo.

BUTTON – depends HUGELY on player. If he's a retard, call here with any suited connector or better and try to connect well enough that you can crack the other guy. If he's a tight passive rock, fold all but what you're calling with in LP.

SB / BB – Out of position, bad odds – stick with UTG rules but add 88 and 77 if you're in the BB. Calling here also depends where you were raised from, and by whom. If the raiser is a loose, aggressive, tricky player, from a late position, you can play a wide range of hands. If it's a tight UTG or EP player, you have to recognize this and play tight as well. If you are being consistently raised by someone when you're in the big blind, you need to start making a stand – become increasingly more willing to reraise or call him with worse hands than I'd usually recommend once you have a man pegged as a blind stealer. Remember, though, that even people who steal your blinds do, once in awhile, pick up a monster.

Versus a raise, in position, with AT LEAST two players having called (at a 10-handed game) and with a relatively low chance of being played back at by the remaining players. CALL with suited connectors, offsuited connectors higher than 560, any pair, any two suited broadways, any ace-x suited, and suited 1 or 2 gaps higher than 57s and 7Ts. All of those, and...

















The worst and most dangerous hand group you can play versus a raiser and callers are offsuit broadways - especially those with gaps. You'll still play them a good amount of the time, but, you need to be very careful of domination. Calling a raise with hands like KTo, AJo, KJo is how new players lose a lot of money when they flop the second best hand. If you don't have a strong read on the raiser, play these hands VERY cautiously.

Don't go broke with KJ on a K-x-x board vs a preflop raiser, please, it makes me sad. I'm not saying fold these hands outright, but a lot of players overrate these hands, especially versus a raise from a usually solid player. Don't be one of them. Suited versions of these cards are also only slightly less tough to play - AJs, KTs, etc should still be dealt with carefully. The newer you are to NLHE, the more careful you want to be with these bunch of hands - even if they're suited. It's hard to generalize and say "always fold KTs on a ten-high flop versus the preflop raiser!" because no generalization will always be true. Postflop play carries a lot of intuition with it and you need a strong feel for the game before you'll be confident in your decisions. The tighter you play AT, AJ, KQ, KJ, KT the easier decisions you'll have postflop. Those five hands are probably some of the trickiest (and potentially, most dangerous to your bankroll) hands to play in no-limit cash games until you get used to the game.

I don't expect anyone to memorize those hand rankings– they're there to give you an idea of what you're playing and where. In summary, In position, you should play just about any two cards, if given good enough odds, to try to flop a hand that's able to stack your opponent, even if he's shown strength with a

raise or if he's proven himself to have trouble getting off a big hand.

Preflop Hand Quizzes (I'll post answers / my opinions in several days. Feel free to post your opinion on any of the following hands, debate and discussion is totally welcome and desired.)

1. You are at a ten-handed table in the C/O with A  J . EP, a Tight-Passive player, who rarely raises, comes in for a 3x the BB raise. He has always bet the flop if he raised preflop and has shown an ability to have trouble laying down his big pocket pairs / TPTK. MP and MP1 call. MP is a tough Tight/Aggressive player who you have lost several big pots to in the past few hours. You call. Everyone else folds to the Big Blind, who makes it 9x to go. Everyone calls back to you. What's your move?
2. You're at a 6-max table on the button with T  7 . UTG, a maniac, makes it 7x to go. MP and LP call. MP and LP are both Tight-passive players. Your move?
3. You're UTG with Q  Q . You raise 4x the BB. A loose-aggressive player reraises you from MP to 12x. All fold around to you. He has 45 BB and you have 125 BB. What's your move?
4. Same hand, same action, this time, he has 250 BB and you have him covered. Now what?
5. You have 8  9  in the C/O. Four people limp to you. You limp. All fold to the BB, who raises to 6x. All call. What's your play?
6. You have A  K  UTG+1. You raise to 5x. Action folds around to a tight-aggressive player, who makes it 15x from the C/O. Your play?
7. You have A  A  on the button. UTG, a maniac, raises to 5x. Action folds around to the C/O, a new player who has shown himself to be unable to get off any sort of pair or better, who calls. You have 125 BB and have them both covered. What's your move?
8. You have Q  J  in LP. You open raise to 3x. Folds to the SB, who raises to 9x. Action folds to you. Your move?
9. You have 7  8  on the button. UTG+1, EP, MP, MP+1, and LP limp. The CO

minraises. What's your move?

10. You have 7 ♦ 8 ♦ in MP. UTG, UTG+1, and EP all call. UTG is a good, tricky player and EP is shortstacked with only 20 BB. What's your move?

11. Same situation, this time, you have A ♥ K ♣

12. Same situation, this time, you have J ♣ J ♠

13. You have 7 ♣ 8 ♣ in the BB. Action folds around to the button, who is a maniac. He raises to 5x. Your move?

14. You have 4 ♣ Q ♣ in the SB. Seven people limp to you. Your move?

15. You have K ♥ Q ♥ in the C/O. EP and MP limp, LP raises to 4x. LP is a loose-aggressive player, but the other people at the table have been tight and passive, except for EP, who has been very active at the table with a very wide array of hands. Your move?

SUPER SPICY PROBLEM 1!

UTG (\$1000)

MP (\$4000)

LP (\$500)

BUTTON (you) (\$1500)

SB (\$1500)

BB (\$2500)

Blinds \$5-\$10

You have A ♣ K ♣ on the button. You're sitting at an online six-max table. UTG folds, MP raises to \$50. MP has been pretty active, and has shown down hands like A8o and K9o that he raised preflop. He has trouble folding even marginal hands before the flop, but postflop, he's ok. He's won a lot lately and that's only made his play worse. He also has never 3-bet preflop during your entire 3 hours at the table. LP minraises to \$100. LP has made four \$1000 rebuys to the table, partially due to having lost two all-ins with the nuts only to have been rivered - both times by MP. The chat window has been blaring with insults from LP directed at MP for the past ten minutes.

You haven't played much - in 3 hours you've only shown down AK, QQ, and TT, and all were sets or straights by showdown. The blinds behind you are tight but aggressive and unafraid to gamble, especially the big blind. You've played with him before and you know he's a player who pays attention and is more

than capable of making a move for his entire stack.

What's your move? (I'll answer more questions about this hand if you need more information)

My Answers

1. You are at a ten-handed table in the C/O with A ♦ J ♣. EP, a Tight-Passive player, who rarely raises, comes in for a 3x the BB raise. He has always bet the flop if he raised preflop and has shown an ability to have trouble laying down his big pocket pairs / TPTK. MP and MP1 call. MP is a tough Tight/Aggressive player who you have lost several big pots to in the past few hours. You call. Everyone else folds to the Big Blind, who makes it 9x to go. Everyone calls back to you. What's your move?

There are a lot of things pulling you in different directions here. EP, the initial raiser, is a guy who probably has a quality hand that is almost definitely ahead of yours right now. You've got good odds provided by MP and MP1, but MP is a very good player and may end up causing you trouble. Calling the first raise is ok with position. However, once the BB reraises, over all those people, even without a read on the BB, you've got to let it go here. If it was AJs, call away. Your hand does NOT do well in a pot like this. I'd call here with T9s, ATs, 67s, and hell, even 44, but not AJo. Your hand is far too easily dominated and you're just spewing money getting involved in a hand like this. Unless you flop a straight or 3 Jacks, I'm pretty sure you're not going to win this hand, because even if you do flop the best hand – you may not know it

2. You're at a 6-max table on the button with T ♠ 7 ♣. UTG, a maniac, makes it 7x to go. MP and LP call. MP and LP are both Tight-passive players. Your move?

Assuming stacks 100BB, you have to let this go, especially with calls from tight players ahead of you. Although I like when people tell me that they have good hands because I know they'll usually have trouble getting off them, this hand's just not good enough to dance without deeper stacks. I might call early in a session in the hopes of establishing a retard image if I flop something good and take down the pot, showing my 'horrific' hand all the while.

3. You're UTG with Q ♠ Q ♦. You raise 4x the BB. A loose-aggressive player reraises you from MP to 12x. All fold around to you. He has 45 BB and you have 125 BB. What's your move?

Out of position I do a "stick-reraise" here. This is also similar to what I suggest doing in the Spicy Question. You want to reraise here not all in but enough that you may as well consider yourself to be. Raise to 35x or so. If he plays, he's either going to push or call, but you may as well just consider him all in at that point and open bet the rest of his

stack on any flop. Pushing here may get him to fold hands that you want calling, while just reraising may get him to stupidly commit himself.

There's one more factor here. If he bought in short, that's a sign that he's probably not really too keen on losing a lot of money at this table (even if he's a loose player). If he didn't care, he'd probably buy in for full. Reraising may get him to dance where if you threatened to stack him, he'd go away (even if it's a small difference in numbers, it's a big mental leap for some people). If he's tilted and lost his way down to his current stack, push. His range is corrupted enough by the chance of tilt that pushing is fine in that spot.

4. Same hand, same action, this time, he has 250 BB and you have him covered. Now what?

This is the fun version of the question. You have two options. Call and outplay him on the flop and beyond or reraise here to find out where he's at. Here's the problem. If you play well postflop, then it's an easy call. Why? Because if you 4-bet preflop (and he's a decent player), he will not play with something worse than QQ except maybe JJ and TT which he'll get off of without hitting a set on the flop anyway. Yes, you'll find out where you're at by reraising. He'll fold hands worse and call or reraise with hands better. Calling is the most +ev decision here unless you're new to this whole thing, in which case, raise.

If he does call your reraise, tread carefully. It'll be tough to know if he's slowplaying or if he's trying to get lucky on you.

5. You have 8 ♣9♣ in the C/O. Four people limp to you. You limp. All fold to the BB, who raises to 6x. All call. What's your play?



Easy question - easy limp.

6. You have A♥ K♥ UTG+1. You raise to 5x. Action folds around to a tight-aggressive player, who makes it 15x from the C/O. Your play?



If you're playing very aggressive and have a really loose image, it's an easy call. If you've been playing tight then you can probably lay it down with a grimace. Shorthanded, I call regardless. As is, though, I think it's a call. Pushing is stupid here with 100BB behind. Very. (think about what he'll have when he calls and what he'll have when he folds)

7. You have A♣ A♦ on the button. UTG, a maniac, raises to 5x. Action folds around to the C/O, a new player who has shown himself to be unable to get off any sort of pair or better, calls. You have 125 BB and have them both covered. What's your move?



Raise to suck out some value here. At a mid-high nl game, I probably reraise to 15-20x with these reads. Calling is ok but only if you are really amazing at poker and have a lot of faith in your ability to fold AA postflop if you're behind.

8. You have Q  J  in LP. You open raise to 3x. Folds to the SB, who raises to 9x. Action folds to you. Your move?



Probably an easy call. If you've been playing as I would be, as in raising lots of pots, being very active, I wouldn't be surprised to see hands as bad as 55 and A8. In position you usually have to call here. Folding isn't horrific, though, especially if the SB has been tight or conservative.

9. You have 7  8  on the button. UTG+1, EP, MP, MP+1, and LP limp. The CO minraises. What's your move?



Call intending to fold to a reraise preflop / if you miss postflop.

10. You have 7  8  in MP. UTG, UTG+1, and EP all call. UTG is a good, tricky player and EP is shortstacked with only 20 BB. What's your move?

If EP wasn't shortstacked and UTG wasn't tricky, raising to 3x here wouldn't be bad. You'd have a very well disguised hand that would be very easy to get away from postflop if you missed and you'd win a nice sized pot if you connected. Unfortunately, EP is shortstacked and UTG is tricky so you have to call here.

11. Same situation, this time, you have A  K 

I wondered who would have different tactics for 11 and 12. With a tricky UTG and a short EP and players behind, a standard raise 'just to see what happens' is in order. Raise it to 5x or so and see if UTG comes back with a reraise (probably let it go depending on the odds he gives you). Easy call if EP decides to push (and nobody else called your reraise).

12. Same situation, this time, you have J  J 

If you're going to limp one of the two hands, it's the first one, not this one. This hand you need to raise to try to isolate unless you want to play it for set value alone (which is ok to do sometimes). Make it 5x here as well with this one difference : if UTG calls the 5x, as well as anyone else, and then EP pushes, you want to push or at least reraise here. UTG, if he had AA/KK and was looking to limp-raise, might hope EP would push and then try to trap you after he does, but that's really tricky and far above the thinking of most players below NL400. I don't like the prospects of getting into a 4 way pot with some guy all in for 20BB apiece. Push and thank Allah for the amazing pot you have a good chance to win with such wonderful overlay.

13. You have 7 ♣8 ♣ in the BB. Action folds around to the button, who is a maniac. He raises to 5x. Your move?

Some of these answers made me giggle. "Defending your blinds is important but you can't do it here!!" "This hand isn't good enough to play against a maniac!!" It definitely is. Defending your blinds is "important" but not nearly as much as some of you seem to think it is. This hand isn't about defending your blinds as much as "reacting to a raise that probably means nothing with a hand that has value". Here, if you've been playing tight, pop it back at him for 15x. If he's got a real hand, you'll know about it, and he'll probably reraise (if he calls you have to see what comes, obviously). If you've been playing loose, this is an easy call to make and then see what comes postflop.

I later addressed someone's argument about this hand being too bad to call with these stacks:

He's a maniac. An important tool you have to win this pot is to rid him of his initiative by raising him preflop. You're not trying to go to a flop - ideally, he'll throw away his hand preflop. If he raises, we toss it. If he calls, we play the flop (most likely we lead at it). 15x is the highest I'd make it here, depending on my confidence in beating him out postflop (if I felt like I had him dead to rights, I'd consider making it as low as 10x).

I haven't talked about postflop play but I guess I will here for a second. This is one of those hands where I'm not betting based on the strength of my cards, I'm betting on his inability to call with his.

Let's say you have 7 ♣8 ♣ and action is as I described. You raise to 15x over the maniac and he calls.

Flop comes A ♥K ♦7 ♠

I bet here all week long and twice on Sunday. Unless he has a big ace or better, he has to drop his hand there (I realize some maniacs won't be able to make this fold with like A2. Don't reraise preflop, then, vs that kind of moron). If he raises, I fold.

Flop comes Q ♣J ♦9 ♥

I may bet here, I may check-fold here. It'll depend again on specific reads of the guy, but this board is terrible and very hard to bluff at considering the very wide range of hands that this helped. Note, however, as scary as it is for me, it's probably at least that scary for him. A smallish lead bet (maybe 1/3 of the pot) would probably be my first and last shot at the pot.

Flop comes 7 ♠8 ♦3 ♣

Since I'd usually bet here, I'm pretty forced to bet this, too. I hope that he has 99

or something and I get to stack him. Alternatively, if he's really aggressive, I could see myself check-calling the flop and then either betting out or check-raising the turn, but those are pretty advanced player-specific plays.

14. You have 4 ♣Q ♣ in the SB. Seven people limp to you. Your move?

Those of you who read SSHE know that this is an easy call due to the implied odds you're being offered (for a detailed answer : in limit, most people would call here because at worst, it'll be one more bet to them, and they'll have crazy odds to win a nice pot. Their implied odds, though, are lowered since they can't stack anyone. The mix of "better implied odds" even taking on the extra risk of someone raising you out makes the play still +ev.)

15. You have K ♥Q ♥ in the C/O. EP and MP limp, LP raises to 4x. LP is a loose-aggressive player, but the other people at the table have been tight and passive, except for EP, who has been very active at the table with a very wide array of hands. Your move?

Barring other reads I call. I don't really mind letting LP take another stab at it. Let your position do the hard work for you. Call and let the T-P table call behind you. Fold to a semi-big reraise, obviously.

SUPER SPICY PROBLEM 1!

UTG (\$1000)

MP (\$4000)

LP (\$500)

BUTTON (you) (\$1500)

SB (\$1500)

BB (\$2500)

Blinds \$5-\$10

You have A ♣K ♣ on the button. You're sitting at an online six-max table. UTG folds, MP raises to \$50. MP has been pretty active, and has shown down hands like A8o and K9o that he raised preflop. He has trouble folding even marginal hands before the flop, but postflop, he's ok. He's won a lot lately and that's only made his play worse. He also has never 3-bet preflop during your entire 3 hours at the table. LP minraises to \$100. LP has made four \$1000 rebuys to the table, partially due to having lost two all-ins with the nuts only to have been rivered - both times by MP. The chat window has been blaring with insults from LP directed at MP for the past ten minutes.

If you read my opinions of the other questions, you know my opinion here. I don't like doing everything in my power here to try and isolate JUST MP or LP. You'd rather play

against one person than two in this spot, usually, but LP's money seems to me to be pretty much up for grabs if played right.

LP is obviously tilting, but, I never said he was a bad player. You've got a tight table image. More people tend to pay attention at these levels than not. If you push, or reraise to \$500, I think LP can get away here most of the time, and usually so can MP, being faced with a pretty huge raise here. You might win a small pot (\$165 or so, and the chances of MP/LP having AA/KK/QQ/JJ and stacking you here part of the time when you push or reraise make the play even worse) by pushing or reraising too big here.

Calling is bad here as well. By calling, you're letting the blinds call (at least one will be smart enough to call getting what will almost always work out to be \$90 or \$95 : \$300 with something like 56s with huge implied odds). Calling's not a bad thing, but you're not maximizing value. You DO want to play against bad players, but you don't want to play against the whole table. By calling, when you hit a big hand, you'll make some money for sure, but I don't think you maximize it in this situation. Say the flop comes K-J-7 with 4 to the flop. You may hurt a KQ, KT, or a QT that doesn't get there, but these people aren't really that committed to the pot and they'll usually be able to get away from most semi-weak hands here.

The best option here is to raise. Raising to \$300 or \$350 will stick LP and, to a lesser extent, MP, to the pot. If LP calls, you're not ever ever folding to his push on the flop heads up, and if he pushes, you can happily call preflop. MP still has decent odds to come along for the ride, which you want to happen. You have no idea if LP will call or not when you make your first reraise. Neither does MP. Odds are, though, MP will call your reraise based on your read. LP probably will, then, too (if not push) getting pretty awesome odds.

Say both call. Now you've got a hugely bloated pot, with an excellent hand, which is now technically heads up (remember, although LP isn't all-in, he may as well be. He has no more impact on your decisions in this hand.) versus a moron who you almost certainly have dominated. If you flop an ace or king or a powerful draw and he hits a piece also the money is certainly going in sooner or later. If MP and LP don't connect and fold, you've still made a lot of money on the hand. Even if LP goes all in on the flop and MP folds, if you can beat him (which you are a favorite to do preflop), you're probably very well off regardless of the flop.

The hand plays similarly if LP goes all in PF after your reraise.

Part IV : Warning : May cause indigestion : SPICY POSTFLOP PLAY

This is the most important part of no-limit cash games. Yes, preflop play is important. Some people are very talented at preflop play and tend to do excellent in tournament play where postflop play isn't as emphasized. Preflop play in NL

ring/6-max, however, is mostly about maximizing your earning potential postflop. Summarized, you want to create opportunities preflop to win the villain's whole stack postflop.

Our whole strategy is based on implied odds. You may want to call preflop with a marginal hand, taking the worst of it, based on the chance of making a hand big enough to stack the villain. You may even want to call on the flop with hands that are still taking the worst of it and try to draw out, even if the price isn't great. Pay attention to the people you're playing with and try to figure out how much action they'll give you if you do in fact hit (both obvious and disguised hands) and try to use that information to help you calculate whether you should draw or not. You'll get a better feeling for when you should draw and when you shouldn't as you get more experienced.

Postflop play is something you will develop a talent at over time. Obviously, the way I play isn't the only way for you to play and it'll take time to figure out your preferences and to hone your instincts. I got yelled at the other day for calling a pretty large river bet with 2 ♠ 2 ♣ on a 9♥-Q♥-6-5-Q, all red. He had A♥J♥, for a busted heart draw. How did I know the deuces were good there? I had closely watched him play and I knew how he'd play his draws (he'd check-raise the flop, check the turn, and then bet the river pretty much whether he hit or not). I had a feeling that in this hand, he had semibluff check-raised with either JT or a heart draw and then bluff bet when he missed on the river. That sort of instinct comes from experience at the table, experience playing, and experience with the villain (both observed and direct experience).

In this section, I'm going to help you become a better postflop player by explaining when and how much to bet as well as how to develop and use your instincts. I'll also try to help you navigate around some of the tricky danger spots (overpairs, etc). This will probably be the last section unless I decide to go and add a miscellaneous section later.

Postflop Betting / Tactics

Remember, first off, that some of the concepts/examples need to be extrapolated to general situations and that they're not iron-clad rules that apply every time. This isn't "pansy poker" we're playing (read: limit). You can't do the same thing every time in every situation because eventually, you'll lose. Remember to use your reads and history with the people you're playing with into account before you make any decisions postflop.

There are a lot of different types of bets you can make on the flop. Continuation and probe bets are both stuff covered in Harrington on Hold'em and are

probably the most common bet made postflop by good players. If you raised preflop, versus one or two opponents, on most flops, you want to bet the flop, about 1/3-2/3rds of the pot (that's called a continuation bet). If you've been shown weakness by one or two villains on the flop, especially if you have a marginal hand, you may want to make a 1/3-1/2 pot bet (called a probe bet) to see where you're at.

There are exceptions and warnings that you have to be aware of. I don't make a continuation bet into three people or more if I've missed. I also don't make continuation bets into even two players if they're tough and tricky or if the texture of the board doesn't make me happy. If the board is Q♣ J♠ 8♣ and I raised preflop at a 6-max table with a red 6-7, I'm probably not going to be betting that into two players. Same sort of thing goes for a flop of 5-6-7 when I have KTs. Think about the kinds of hands your opponents have been calling with in the past and how many of those hands have been helped by the flop before you bet. The more opponents you have, the more hands you have to worry about connecting, and the less you want to bet with air.

The other warning about continuation bets is that if you get called on the flop, you need to proceed very carefully on the turn. There are some people, including me, who will call a lot of bets on the flop fully intending to bluff you off on the turn if I think you're a habitual c-bettor. The best way to treat the situation is if you're called on the flop, you should probably give up on the turn if you haven't improved. If you do have a marginal hand or a hand that's probably 2nd best, you may want to keep betting, if only since if you check, a lot of people will bet more than you can call with your hand once you show them weakness. Betting lets you keep the initiative which is a good thing in this spot. If you get raised on a flop c-bet and you have nothing it's a fold versus most straightforward opponents.

You also need to be aware of when you should and shouldn't make a probe bet. I use the term probe bet a little more freely than Harrington does. If you have K-7 in the BB and the flop comes Q-7-4, with three (total) players in the pot and no raise preflop, I like betting 1/2 the pot there to see what happens. If I get called, I have to proceed cautiously, and if I get raised, I'm done with the hand. Another example of a good probe bet would be betting in last position with two villains with 66 on a board of K-9-7 when it was checked around. When making a probe bet, you're paying for information on where you stand which will save you money on later streets if you didn't have that information.

Remember, probe bets are bad versus multiple villains, you are playing tough / tricky opponents (or very very passive opponents), or if the texture of the board is connected and/or suited. Also, be wary of making a probe bet with an Ace on

the flop if you don't have one (it would be a good probe bet to bet with a hand like A-4s on the button if checked around on a A-J-8 but probably bad with J-7s).

Another type of bet is a Position bet. It's pretty simple. If weak or tight players have checked to you and you're last to act with few and non-tricky opponents (read : those who don't love to check-raise), you may want to consider a bet here with any two cards. If you bet \$15 into a \$30 pot, (3-handed to the flop) you don't have to be right in betting very often to show a profit on the play. I especially like doing this when it's just the BB, one other player, and myself, because the BB already had his money in PF and has a huge range at this point and the other player has already shown me weakness by checking. Be wary at doing this at the very lowest of levels because people will check-call far too much. Stick to mostly value bets there. The best position bets are made on dry boards (draw-free) against tight players, usually with no raise having been made preflop. Like I said in an earlier reply, you're betting here on their inability to call with their hand, not on the strength of yours.

That brings me to the value bet. Think of a value bet like you're selling someone something and you're trying to offer them a good price. You want to extract maximum value from your hand without losing your moron. The best price on the flop against most players is half the pot. You're still making draws pay, it's low enough that marginal hands may dance, and it's enough that if you get raised, you'll probably be able to let the hand go. I make value bets most often on the turn and river, but I don't bet half the pot there unless I'm against an unknown player.

By the river/turn, you have a decent idea about the strength of what your opponent has 60-90% of the time (that % gets higher as you get better or play against worse opponents). Having a decent idea what he has, strength-wise, and knowing what kind of player he is will allow you to calculate your bet accordingly. Against some players, you can bet all in on the turn for 4x the pot and you know they'll still call with AA (even at NL600 / 1000). Put all the puzzle pieces together in your mind to give you maximum information about their hand, remember how they played their previous monsters/drawing hands/marginal hands and then bet from there.

The final type of bet you're going to make is called a blocking bet. Against players who may rarely raise but like to bluff, sometimes, it'll be cheaper for you to see a showdown or to see the turn/river cards to bet rather than check-calling. In those spots I tend to bet small, usually 1/2-1/4th of the pot, and I only do it heads-up versus a specific type of opponent. Think of blocking bets as 'buying' the next card/a ticket to a showdown on the river. I also tend to do a slightly different version (betting more) of this if I'm sure my opponent is drawing on me

(whether I have a hand or not) in an attempt to block him from taking the betting initiative and seizing the pot, even if I don't have a hand at all. If he's missed by the river, I'll stick in a bigger bet, and since I've shown strength on all streets, he'll have to fold his missed draw or even his weak pairs (which he'd otherwise win if I checked the river). That's an extreme use of the blocking bet, and most beginners should stick to its original definition without an awesome read on their villain.

When you play shorthanded, or with very aggressive players, you may find yourself considering a blocking bet on the river. However, if you feel you have a strong enough read on your opponent, weigh your other option – checking to induce a bluff and then calling the bet. Blocking bets tend to make worse or missed hands fold, marginal hands call, and really good hands raise. Check-calling may induce some players to bet their hands that are worse than yours. If you feel that your opponent is the type of player to let themselves hang if you check, remember the paraphrased words of Layne Flack : “Sometimes you have to let the donkey do the pullin’.”

Check-raising and slowplaying are the next two things to know about. I don't really check-raise. Since I'm constantly betting and raising, checking is just odd for me and raises more eyebrows than it does induce any bets (this creates bluffing opportunities for me, however). Of course I do check-fold or check-call once in awhile, and if I'm doing those, then occasionally I have to check-raise just so people don't start thinking “when he checks, he's weak or drawing, so I'll always bet when he checks.” I don't like check raising even with a monster hand, except maybe for a backdoor draw hitting on the river or something else really disguised on one of the later streets. The river check-raise is a powerful move but one most people don't use too often. You look like a genius when it works but a moron when it doesn't. Learn how aggressive your opponent is before trying something as tricky as the river ch/r.

Let's say I have 44 in the BB at a 6-max table and a tight-aggressive UTG player raises to 4x. I call. The flop comes 9-6-4. Most people would check-raise here. I, however, bet this out most of the time (80% or so). He'll fold AK/AQ/AJs now, and if I had checked, I would have probably made a continuation bet out of him. That's not good. However, if he has TT-AA here, I get a nice sized raise out of him most of the time and he will certainly be committing himself to his hand, which is very good for us. If he does raise me here, I may 'reluctantly' call, check to him on the turn, let him bet big again, and then call the turn - push the river or push the turn, depending on stacks (note if he has 99 here I lose all my money most of the time, reload, and move on). We'll talk specifically about playing with and versus OP's (overpairs) in a bit.

Slowplaying vs a loose-aggressive player is fine and I love doing it in position. I don't recommend you slowplay out of position against most people with one exception which we'll talk about later. Don't slowplay most trips or straights. Trips can be either counterfeited by the river or dominated and if you're lucky enough to flop/turn a straight, it's usually disguised well enough that you make more money playing it straight up rather than slowplaying. Don't slowplay the retard end of a straight, period, ever, unless you're heads up or 3-handed or you KNOW you're up against an overpair. Morons that slowplay 7-9 on a 6-8-T deserve to not make any money. Bet it down hard because people will have trouble believing you A. played 7-9 and B. were lucky enough to flop it. You'll get action from tons of hands here. Don't check. Don't slowplay hands unless they're very unlikely to be sucked out on and if you're in position, or if you think your opponent will hang themselves (bluffing or otherwise). Make sure you take your image and the number of players in the hand in account before slowplaying.

I've got a couple specific pointers that I'll share here that talk about fastplaying. Fastplaying is the opposite of slowplaying (O RLY) and it involves you betting your hand like there's an axe murderer bearing down upon you and you have to bet as much as you can before he gets to you and severs your favorite testicle. Flopping bottom two pair or top and bottom pair is a good example of when to do this in a multi-way pot. Two pair is rarely good enough to slowplay in that sort of situation. Playing a weak two pair on the turn/river, or when you get raised on the flop, is something that I really can't help you with. It'll depend the villain more than anything (and how he plays his top pair / overpairs, since that's really the only thing you're beating with bottom two that you'll make any money from). I also fastplay a hand like AQ on a Q-J-9, and if I run into strength after showing strength I don't feel bad about letting it go. If you have a weak or marginal hand, or a hand that can be easily weakened by the turn/river card, you want to bet it strong and try your best to take the pot down as soon as you can – or at least find out where you stand.

Semibluffs, when shown weakness, are something I do quite a lot in position. OOP, I don't like betting so much but I still probably do versus one or two opponents. I don't really make a pure bluff on anything other than when scare cards hit, or, if I believe an opponent has missed a draw but my hand isn't strong enough to win if we saw a free showdown. If you've got your villain pegged as a guy who can make laydowns, especially if he can make tough ones, and your image isn't totally slutty, consider bluff-betting at a scarecard on the turn or river – especially flush cards. Against some people, you can bluff people off big pairs when an overcard hits (especially an ace). Find out who to do it to otherwise you end up “pulling an Unamuno” and firing three barrels down just to get called the whole way.

Example : Let's say you have 5♠ 6♠ . You call after two others on the button. The BB raises to 3x. All call. The flop comes 4♥ 7♥ J♣. The BB bets half the pot here, a standard continuation bet which he's made a million times before this session. You call, intending to take away the pot on the turn. The turn is a Q♥. He waits awhile before checking. You bet 3/4ths of the pot and he reluctantly folds. If he reluctantly calls here instead, you'll have a tough decision as to whether or not to bet again on the river.

Make sure your bluff bet size isn't peculiar – that is, make sure that it's not any bigger than the bet you would make if you actually had the hand you're representing. I don't really like condoning to beginning players to call continuation bets on the flop and then raise big or bet them when checked to on the turn, but I do that a lot (the Turn Twister, Moquel and I christened it). Versus a lot of opponents, who will constantly bet the flop if they've raised preflop, you may find that calling the flop then either leading / ch-r / flat raising on the turn will win you a lot more pots than you'd expect. This will also create action for you when you do this with a real hand (especially if your bluff is called and you end up showing down nothing but a 6-high after you made a big river bet). Also, you will be shown the nuts here several times as you develop your instincts – don't let it get you down. Be very careful when deciding to bet the river if your turn bluff was called. Also, if you consistently move people off their hands, they may eventually get frustrated and either tighten up and only do it with quality hands or lay a trap intending to get it all in on the turn. Be prepared and make adjustments.

Bluff defense really comes down to focus. Can your villain bluff? How has he done so before? Does he do it a lot? How much does he bet when he does it? Does he bluff at scare cards or can he just bluff raise you on the flop? You need to pay attention to find those things out. The other tip I have on bluffing is to watch those people who LOVE to bluff – and let them hang themselves. This is who I was referring to before when I was talking about the exception to my slowplaying rule. If you can check-call and the player will bet down big at you with air, then go right ahead and check-call all day if he doesn't learn his lesson. Versus some players, you can even induce a bluff by checking a scarecard (even if it completes your draw) and watch them bet off their chips into your stack. The best way to defend against a bluff is to figure out how your opponents bluff, the rate of their bluffing, and what he bluffs at/with.

Onto playing and defending with/against overpairs. People love to wake up and see AA. At the beginning levels, if you are following this guide, there will be few hands you will make more money off of your opponents having. People cannot fold their overpairs. It's a chronic problem for most people. I was the same way –

I used to say to myself when I got all in preflop with JJ (a long time ago) and the board came 7-5-4-x-x, even when he showed down AA, I'd seriously say "oh well, I would have probably gotten all the money in on the flop anyway **WTF**" You need to think to yourself "what hands would my opponent play this way that I'm beating?" If there's a lot in that range that is ahead of your overpair, don't feel bad in letting it go (especially the lower overpairs).

At most levels, there's one note that I love to write on a player more than any other one and that's "cannot get off his overpairs". I know I'll be busting this guy at least once in this session when I hit two pair or a set up against him. That's exactly what you want to do. Find out how your opponents play their overpairs (some minraise, some bet huge) and then pray for a time you flop a big hand against them and bet it crazy. This is also where the exception I was talking about earlier about slowplaying comes in. If you've got a big hand out of position versus what almost definitely is an overpair AND he's the type of guy to bet that hand down big the entire way, check-calling is perfectly fine.

Example : I'm playing a \$5-\$10 NL game. I have 7 ♣K ♣ in the Big Blind. Villain opens UTG for \$35. He gets 6 callers before it gets to me. I call too. He's been relatively tight. Most people have \$1000 or so, I have \$1500 and I have him covered.

The flop comes Q ♣ 8 ♣ 8 ♥ . I check, he bets \$125 into a \$235 pot and somehow it folds around to me. I'm not really too worried about him having QQ or an 8, and I'm really not too worried about him betting AK or even something like JJ. With so many players in the pot, he really can't have anything other than AQ/AA/KK (or, yes, QQ). I also don't really like drawing to flushes/straights on paired boards but I'm pretty confident here that he only has AA/KK. I call.

With nearly \$500 in the pot going to the turn, the turn card comes a 3 ♣. I lead out here because hey, that's what I say to do in the guide, and I'm pretty sure he may check if I do. It also is right to bet because it seems pretty obvious to me if I check raise that'll he'll figure out that I've got to have a flush or trip 8s and probably induce him to fold. I bet \$300 into the \$500 pot. He debates for a pretty long time but calls. I'm almost sure he has AA or KK at this point, and I'm pretty sure he won't be going away. Maybe he puts me on 99/TT/JJ/KQ/AQ and that's how he calls, but I don't know how he continues (but I'm thankful he does of course!)

The river comes an offsuit blank, and I wait five seconds (fake debate to hopefully make him think I'm unsure) and I put him all in for another \$750 or so. I'm pretty sure he'll call all in here if he's called down this far. Also, a lot of people read river-all-ins (and lead bets, for that matter, on scare cards) as a bluff for some reason. I sit and watch him call the rest of his stack away. With a total of

nearly \$2500 in the pot after he calls, he flips over A♥A♠ and I scoop the pot. People love their overpairs and you need to be careful just how much you love them postflop.

There's a final concept that should be talked about briefly that I didn't run into much at the lower limits. Overbets are something that some players never use and some use very often. At the higher shorthanded limits, it tends to be the latter. Defense against overbets is to pay careful attention and figure out when the villain decides to make them. Against unknowns, a rare overbet (when he has never done it before) tends to mean strength. Strong players will mix up their overbetting hands to get more action when they do it with strong hands (they're modified image plays). For example: I have 4♥6♥ in the cutoff and call a \$200 reraise from the blind after I opened for \$80. The flop comes 3♥5-K. The blind bets out the pot, \$500, and I debate awhile and overbet all-in. If he calls, I've got plenty of outs, and if he doesn't, I take down a nice pot. If he calls, win or lose, I get to show down my wonderful 4-6 and pray that the table takes notice. I adjust my game so that next few times I overbet I do so with a hand that is extremely strong. I'll be getting tons of action from anyone paying attention the rest of the session just because of that one play I made.

Hand Quizzes (assume 100BB stacks with no reads on villain unless otherwise stated)

1. You are in the big blind with A♥7♣. One player limps and the SB completes. You check. The limper is new to the table.

((3x in the pot))The flop comes A♣6♠T♥. The SB checks. What's your play here?

2. Assume you check. The limper bets 2x here and the SB folds. Now what?

3. You are in the small blind with 6♣4♠. Four people limp to you. You complete. The BB checks.

((5x in the pot))The flop comes 2♣3♥5♠. What's your play?

4. Assume you bet out 6x and the BB raises to 15x. He's a very aggressive player who is capable of making moves. It folds around to you. What's your play?

5. You have 8♠9♠ on the button. A tight player raises UTG to 5x. Three people call. You call. The blinds fold.

((25x in the pot))The flop comes Q♥9♣6♣. All check around to you. What's

your move?

6. You have 7♣ 4♠ in the BB with three limpers to you. The table has been very aggressive and a free flop is something very new. The table has been betting a lot but has also shown a collective love for the check-raise.

((4.5x in the pot))The flop is 7♥ 4♣ A♣. What's your plan?

7. You have A♦ A♣ in the BB. You are at a table you probably shouldn't be at filled with very tough and tricky players. Effective stacks are 175 BB and the game is 8-handed. The UTG player limps, EP limps, MP limps, and the CO limps. The SB completes. I'm not even going to pretend there's a question here as far as what you do at this point. You raise to 5x and all call around to the CO, who makes it 20x to go. The SB folds. Do you call now (7a) or reraise (7b)?
CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE!

7a. You call. UTG and MP calls too. Four people go to the flop.

((81x in the pot)) The flop comes K♥ J♥ T♣. What's your plan?
-or- the flop comes A♥ J♠ 9♠. Now what's your plan?

7b. You reraise to 40x. Action folds back to the CO who calls. The flop comes K♥ J♥ T♣. What's your plan? -or- the flop comes A♥ J♠ 9♠. Now what's your plan?

8. You have 9♥ 9♠ UTG. You raise to 3x. You've been very active and the table knows it. You get three callers, two LAGs and one TAG, all of whom have position on you.

((10.5x in the pot))The flop comes A♠ K♣ 9♣. What's your play?

9. You have 9♠ T♠ in the CO. Three people limp to you and the blinds call/check. The table has been very weak-passive for the most part.

((5x in the pot)) Flop comes A♠ 9♣ 7♠. All check to you. Do you bet here or take the freecard?

10. Assume you check. Turn card is a 6♦. One of the limpers in EP bets 3x here. You call. Nobody else does. River card is a K♦. EP checks. What's your move?

11. Same hand, same play, but this time, you make your hand on the river with the K♠. Now what's your play?

12. You have K♦ T♦ on the button. Two limpers to you and you call. The blinds

fold/check.

((4.5x in the pot)) The flop comes of J♦ K♣ T♠. All check to you and you bet 3x. One of the players, a tight, tricky player, reraises you. You call. The turn card is a 9♣. He pushes. What's your play?

13. You have 6♦6♠. UTG, a very tight, straightforward player raises to 4x. You make a very marginal call from the SB. The BB folds.

((11x in the pot)) Flop comes J♠ A♣ T♦. What's your play here?

14. You raise to 2.5x UTG with 6♣6♥, which is marginal but ok as a part of your metagame. The table has been very crazy due to this one player who has amassed a stack of 450x. He's a total retard/maniac, betting huge with top pair, bottom pair, no pair, everything. He raises to 10x. You call (pretty marginal but you're playing for the implied odds).

((21.5x in the pot)) Flop comes A♥8♠6♦. What's your play?

15. You have 7♣7♠ in EP at a 6-max table. You've been very active lately and have folded several times to people who have made bets at you. You raise to 3x. LP, a loose-tricky player, calls. The BB calls as well.

((9.5x in the pot)) Flop comes Q♥6♥4♣. The BB checks. You bet 5x, a standard continuation bet. LP calls. The BB folds. The turn card is a 9♣. You check. LP thinks for awhile and bets 10x. What's your plan?

SPICY PROBLEM TWO

Feel free to tell me how you would have played this hand differently on any streets before the actual question, if you disagree with a play our hero made on the flop/preflop/turn.

\$5-\$10 NL game, 7 handed

UTG \$750

EP \$1200

MP \$1500

LP (YOU) \$1500

BUTTON \$2500

SB \$2000

BB \$500

You are in LP with K♦J♦. The Button is a very loose player and is obviously just an inexperienced gambler looking for a good time. The Small Blind is a very good, experienced, aggressive player who you know is capable of making moves. He plays pretty conservative, solid poker, but you couldn't characterize him as tight. Both the Button and the SB have been winning, taken no bad beats, and have broken several players at the table (most of whom have now left). You've been pretty active, betting and opening tons of pots but have been pushed around a lot by the SB and the table has seen that. You've had to fold several times postflop due to a big bet or check-raise from the SB.

Action folds to you. You open for \$35, the standard opening raise. The button calls, the SB calls, and the BB folds.

With 3 players and \$115 in the pot, the flop comes down 7♣6♣2♦. The SB checks. You decide that you should make a continuation bet and do so for \$70. The button calls quickly (but he's done that a lot before) and so does the SB.

With \$325 in the pot, the turn card comes a J♠. The SB debates for a bit, but then checks again. You bet \$150 here for a mix of reasons (value, information, blocking bet). The button quickly calls, and the SB does think about it for awhile before calling as well.

With \$775 in the pot, the river card comes a J♥. The SB now debates for awhile and then bets out \$700. What's your play? (you have about \$1300 left). If his bet was a push, then what do you do?

My Answers

1. You are in the big blind with A♥7♣. One player limps and the SB completes. You check. The limper is new to the table.

((3x in the pot))The flop comes A♣6♠T♥. The SB checks. What's your play here?

I make a standard probe bet here and see what happens. No need to give the limper credit for an ace just yet. I bet somewhere around half the pot.

2. Assume you check. The limper bets 2x here and the SB folds. Now what?

Checking is silly and I never check here. If Jesus descended from heaven and started licking my nipple, and while doing so, distracted me enough to secretly click "check", I'd probably check-raise him to see where he's at. Check-calling doesn't give you any information and you'd be taking shots in the dark for the rest of the hand. With a read on

the twat that said "likes to take shots," then I could see checking (but I'd still probably raise and not call). As is, I check-raise.

3. You are in the small blind with 6♣ 4♠. Four people limp to you. You complete. The BB checks.

((5x in the pot))The flop comes 2♣ 3♥ 5♠. What's your play?

Leading is the only answer. If you'd lead 77, A5, 45, or 22, then there's no reason to not lead this, especially with no guarantee that anyone will be betting if you go for the ch-r.

4. Assume you bet out 6x and the BB raises to 15x. He's a very aggressive player who is capable of making moves. It folds around to you. What's your play?

I don't think he's making a move here on a board like this - not with so many people left sitting behind him left to act. This means he probably has a quality hand. He probably has either 22-99 or some random two pair (or maybe the low end of the straight).

If you raise him now, you probably will get him to fold anything other than his set or straight. I wait a long time before calling, feigning indecision, and then call. I said he was very aggressive, so that'll probably mean he'll put in another bet on the turn, especially if he thinks he's ahead. I go for the big old ch-r or check-call, depending on the size of his bet on the turn.

5. You have 8♠ 9♠ on the button. A tight player raises UTG to 5x. Three people call. You call. The blinds fold.

((25x in the pot))The flop comes Q♥ 9♣ 6♣. All check around to you. What's your move?

There is absolutely no way you can bet here. A tight player showed a lot of strength by raising, and he did so from UTG, meaning even more strength. With all those callers, and this connected of a flop, you cannot put money in here. You'll get played with by any set, top pair, overpair, club draw, JT, 78, and you'll be totally shooting in the dark for the rest of the hand. Find a better spot. You want to really connect with these suited cons in a raised pot like this - and you didn't here.

6. You have 7♣ 4♠ in the Big Blind with three limpers to you. The table has been very aggressive and a free flop is something very new. The table has been betting a lot but has also shown a collective love for the check-raise.

((4.5x in the pot))The flop is 7♥ 4♣ A♣. What's your plan?

I definitely lead here, and I'm looking to get as much money in as fast as I can here. Any club or face card could hurt you, and you really want to get heads up versus a hand like

AT or AJ and start making them pay a lot to play catchup with you.

7. You have A♦ A♣ in the BB. You are at a table you probably shouldn't be at filled with very tough and tricky players. Effective stacks are 175 BB and the game is 8-handed. The UTG player limps, EP limps, MP limps, and the CO limps. The SB completes. I'm not even going to pretend there's a question here as far as what you do at this point. You raise to 5x and all call around to the CO, who makes it 20x to go. The SB folds. Do you call now (7a) or reraise (7b)?
CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE!

7a. You call. UTG and MP calls too. Four people go to the flop.

((81x in the pot)) The flop comes K♥ J♥ T♣. What's your plan?
-or- the flop comes A♥ J♠ 9♠. Now what's your plan?

First of all, get your ass up and out of that game if you're really as outclassed as I say you are. You're probably the Unamuno (read : fish) here, and why put yourself in that situation?

Anyway, being outclassed and all, calling is a terrible idea. You need to exploit your edges and this is as good of a place as you'll ever get. The CO really can't have a big pair here based on his prior action. That would be fairly ridiculous, especially because he limped BEHIND others, and didn't do a wacky "open-limp with KK in LP" which is slightly more common (very slightly). I'd imagine he has a hand like AK, AQ, AJs, or suited connectors.

The first flop is very, very scary. I'm pretty convinced I am beaten by at least one of my opponents right now. The CO may have a hand like AK or AJ, but the others have such a huge combined range that I'd be totally in 'guess, hope, and pray' mode if I continue. I might put some money in the pot and see what happens, but this is pretty wrong in my opinion. Without the Ah, I really have a tough decision here, but I think I'm good enough to fold this and look for a better spot that's not so rife with danger. Alternatively, I could decide to NOT fuck myself on the hand, and raise preflop.

The second flop is where you hope they have the other ace, JJ, or 99. However, since you DO have two of the aces, there's less of a likelihood of someone betting (they'd be afraid of the ace). At this point in the hand, people will either have a made hand (JJ, AJ, 99, AK) or a draw - nobody is going to be putting money in here on a bluff in a multiway, huge pot like this. No need to be sneaky to try to induce bets at this point. Lead out for 1/2 - 2/3 of the pot or so and be willing to shove it on the turn.

7b. You reraise to 40x. Action folds back to the CO who calls. The flop comes K♥ J♥ T♣. What's your plan? -or- the flop comes A♣ J♠ 9♠. Now what's your plan?
Now, I like where I'm at. Heads up, I'm much less worried (although still a bit wary) of

him having flopped something big, especially with his wacky preflop play. I don't see him taking a stab if you check, since you played it so aggressively preflop. You really can't do anything but bet 1/2 to 2/3 here and hope he either has the 2nd best hand or tries to draw out on you. If he gets aggressive and shoves his money in at that point, I probably cry and call (the pot is so big and all the semibluffing possibilities folding is definitely wrong).

2.) This time, you can try to get tricky, but you really can't checkraise here. I still like a lead bet here, probably a weakish looking one, hoping he goes crazy again. Alternatively, you could 'reluctantly' try to check-call, and hope he keeps betting at it. The problem with this is if he has a draw and DOESN'T go crazy, he'll freecard you into oblivion. This is a standard 'how to play a monster versus a moron' hand at this point. This is the simplest and most straightforward of the four miniquestions by far.

8. You have 9♥9♠ UTG. You raise to 3x. You've been very active and the table knows it. You get three callers, two LAGs and one TAG, all who have position on you.

((10.5x in the pot)) The flop comes A♠ K♣ 9♣. What's your play?
Got to lead. If that's what you've been doing, as you should be, try putting out a weak-looking lead bet and hope one of them hit the A and plays back at you. Another option you could consider is to give them a little rope to hang themselves with by then check-calling the turn and leading out the river strong (especially if the club draw misses - some people just love to pick off bluffs and they may pick then to do it, if you play it right). Check-raising the turn isn't bad either. I lead the flop, and, depending how much I get played with, either get as much money possible in on the flop or let them hang themselves on future streets.

9. You have 9♠T♠ in the CO. Three people limp to you, you limp, and the blinds call/check. The table has been very weak-passive for the most part.

((5x in the pot)) Flop comes A♠ 9♣ 7♠. All check to you. Do you bet here or take the freecard?

I usually semibluff / value bet / pot builder bet here at this sort of table. At a trickier table, a check is probably correct.

10. Assume you check. Turn card is a 6♦. One of the limpers in EP bets 3x here. You call. Nobody else does. River card is a K♦. EP checks. What's your move?
Heads up, I probably check. He's not folding anything that beats me other than maybe Q-9 or J-9 if I bet. The pot's not really that big and there's no need to go crazy here.

11. Same hand, same play, but this time, you make your hand on the river with the K♠. Now what's your play?

He hasn't shown much strength here. You can't bet too much if you want the twat to give you his money - 1/2 the pot is perfect here.

12. You have K♦ T♦ on the button. Two limpers to you and you call. The blinds fold/check.

((4.5x in the pot)) The flop comes of J♦ K♣ T♠. All check to you and you bet 3x. One of the players, a tight, tricky player, reraises you. You call. The turn card is a 9♣. He pushes. What's your play?

I don't know why nobody whined that I didn't say how big the reraise is in the question. Anyway, it really doesn't matter. You can't call here when I label him a "tight tricky player" who is really telling you he has a hard-on for this board. What are you ahead of? "Not much, JCarver!" Mash that fold button like Moquel and I mash kittens (because we're Nazis and that's part of what we do).

13. You have 6♦ 6♠ on the button. UTG, a very tight, straightforward player raises to 4x. You make a very marginal call from the SB. The BB folds.

((11x in the pot)) Flop comes J♣ A♣ T♦. What's your play here?

The only thing he'd raise UTG that isn't too happy with that flop is KK and QQ (maybe 99, but that's less likely). Any other ace or big pair is pretty happy with that flop. It's just not worth the money to try to check-raise or lead bet him off his hand on the dim hope he has KK or QQ and not one of the other hands that is certainly not folding, no matter how hard you try.

14. You raise to 2.5x UTG with 6♣ 6♥, which is marginal, but ok as a part of your metagame. The table has been very crazy due to this one player who has amassed a stack of \$4500. He's a total retard/maniac, betting huge with top pair, bottom pair, no pair, everything. He raises to 10x. You call (pretty marginal but you're playing for the implied odds).

((21.5x in the pot)) Flop comes A♥ 8♠ 6♦. What's your play?

This is the one hand that I didn't at least partially make up. I had 200bb here in the real situation. I checked, the twat bet \$500, I called. The turn was a low blank, I checked again, he bet \$1000. I pushed and he instacalled with TT. With a guy who will consistently shoot himself in the face if you let him, check-calling like this is totally fine - especially if you're afraid that betting might set off a warning bell somewhere in the maniac's mind. Versus less crazy retards lead-betting is probably optimal again.

15. You have 7♣ 7♠ in EP at a 6-max table. You've been very active lately and have folded several times to people who have made bets at you. You raise to 3x. LP, a loose-tricky player, calls. The BB calls as well.

((9.5x in the pot)) Flop comes Q♥ 6♥ 4♣. The BB checks. You bet 5x, a standard continuation bet. LP calls. The BB folds. The turn card is a 9♣. You check. LP

thinks for awhile and bets 10x. What's your plan?

I like 3-bet testing him here, even though we're out of position. He has shown that he can be tricky and your image is a weak one. Time to put your foot down and see if he has the gonads to run you down here. If he raises, obviously you muck. If he calls, obviously your best idea is to get to a cheap showdown, since you're probably not ahead of much other than a heart draw. He hasn't gone anywhere now for two betting rounds and betting the river, expecting a fold from a hand you're behind, is stupid.

SPICY PROBLEM TWO

Feel free to tell me how you would have played this hand differently on any streets before the actual question, if you disagree with a play our hero made on the flop/preflop/turn.

\$5-\$10 NL game, 7 handed

UTG \$750

EP \$1200

MP \$1500

LP (YOU) \$1500

BUTTON \$2500

SB \$2000

BB \$500

You are in LP with K♦J♦. The Button is a very loose player and is obviously just an inexperienced gambler looking for a good time. The Small Blind is a very good, experienced, aggressive player who you know is capable of making moves. He plays pretty conservative, solid poker, but you couldn't characterize him as tight. Both the Button and the SB have been winning, taken no bad beats, and have broken several players at the table (most of whom have now left). You've been pretty active, betting and opening tons of pots but have been pushed around a lot by the SB and the table has seen that. You've had to fold several times postflop due to a big bet or check-raise from the SB.

Action folds to you. You open for \$35, the standard opening raise. The button calls, the SB calls, and the BB folds.

With 3 players and \$115 in the pot, the flop comes down 7♣6♣2♦. The SB checks. You decide that you should make a continuation bet and do so for \$70. The button calls quickly (but he's done that a lot before) and so does the SB.

With \$325 in the pot, the turn card comes a J♠. The SB debates for a bit, but then checks again. You bet \$150 here for a mix of reasons (value, information,

blocking bet). The button quickly calls, and the SB does think about it for awhile before calling as well.

With \$775 in the pot, the river card comes a J♥. The SB now debates for awhile and then bets out \$700. What's your play? (you have about \$1300 left). If his bet was a push, then what do you do?

Seems to me that the SB is making a play, hoping you were just making c-bets or have a hand that can't take much heat while the button was on the draw. The 'debating' could be fake, or he could have slowplayed you, but he seems like a move-making bully that's just trying to push you around some more here. There's little gain in calling to earn overcalls since the button probably just has a busted draw - HOWEVER, since the SB either has you KILLED or has absolute air, there's even less gain in pushing. The chance of the inexperienced, gamble-holic Dolce-ish button having some donkishly played overpair, oddly played worse jack, second pair/top kicker, or some other circus of retardation and getting stupidly involved makes calling the right play by an inch. I don't fault anyone for pushing this instead of calling, but I think calling is slightly more +ev.

Versus a push, I get my chips in very quickly here.

It's been fun to write this guide for you all. Feel free to post any questions you have on specific hands/concepts/theories in this thread as I have nothing else planned. For any future questions, I encourage you all to come to #poker on zIRC and spend some time talking to the guys in there. There's a lot of us and we're all fairly retarded, self-absorbed sexually confused jerks, but everyone's game has still managed to get much better just from having a 24/7 support group and sounding board.