

*Rake in the chips
playing today's most popular poker game!*

Texas Hold'em

FOR
DUMMIES®



Mark "The Red" Harlan

*Co-author of Winning at Internet Poker For
Dummies*

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®

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Texas Hold'em For Dummies®

**by Mark “The Red”
Harlan**



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About the Author

Mark “The Red” Harlan was born in Rawlins, Wyoming, and has lived exactly the life you’d expect as a result. Armed with a degree in Applied Mathematics (from a university he loathes so much that he refuses to even utter the name), he fell headlong into a 20-year stint in the Silicon Valley’s computer industry.

Red’s professional experience includes human-interface work at Apple Computer, development of the bidding schema used by eBay, overseeing application development at Danger (makers of the T-Mobile Sidekick), as well as co-founding CyberArts Licensing (suppliers of the poker software seen on the MANSION and GamesGrid sites).

At the tender age of 8, he won a pinewood derby competition in the Cub Scouts, giving him his first heavy swig of victory that would forever warp his oh-so-soft-and-pliable mind. Under the influence of this experience, he started playing poker that same year (“might as well win money if you’re going to win”) and became good enough by 2005 to be a net money winner in that year’s World Series of Poker.

Red is a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors and has an extensive writing background ranging from penning InfoWorld’s Notes from the Fringe during the heyday of the Internet, to being lead author of the book he thinks everyone should own (his mom does):

Winning at Internet Poker For Dummies (Wiley). Red maintains a Web site of poker articles at www.redsdeal.com and welcomes non-spam e-mail at RedsDeal+HEFD@gmail.com (be sure to include the +).

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my mom, Marijane, and my brother, J. Scott Harlan, mostly because you're two saintly islands in a world that could desperately use more of your type, and a little because you've put up with me all these years.

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Introduction

Turn on the TV, drop by a news rack, spend ten minutes in any college watering hole, or for that matter walk into your local supermarket and you can see firsthand the stranglehold that Texas Hold'em has on the public. Twenty years ago, when I'd play Hold'em in a casino, it wasn't unusual for people to stop and ask me about the game. (I just have one of those ask-that-guy-he-looks-harmless kind of looks, I guess.) Now my *mom* tells me about it.

Hold'em is a game that is deceptively simple: There are four chances to bet (pre-flop, flop, turn, and river) and five ways you can act when you do (check, bet, call, raise, or fold). Yet within that simple mechanism, you'll find truth and trickery, boredom and fear, skill and misfortune — in other words, direct reflections of the things that make life worth living.

Hold'em is a game of both skill and chance — and infuriatingly, which of these things is the most important often changes without warning. Needless to say, this interaction is what makes the game gut wrenching at some times and great at others. If you want to find a sucker, don't hang out at a chess table. Then again, if you can't take being beaten by chance, it'll be better for your blood pressure if you spend your spare time knitting instead.

Amazingly, about 95 percent of the people who play Hold'em in a professional card room (be it online or at a casino), lose money — all because of the insidious nature of the *rake* (a small cut of every pot the house takes). Don't lose hope, though. Hold'em is a game that *can* be beaten, and by buying this book and referring to it often, you're absolutely taking the right first step.

About This Book

This book is a grand overview of Texas Hold'em.

All *Dummies* books are designed as references. You don't have to read it from beginning to end, cover to cover. My advice is to treat it like a salad bar: Load up on the things you're most interested in, and pass on the items that seem a bit too smelly.

In some of the later chapters, I make reference to concepts and ideas I cover earlier, but the cross-referencing here is heavy. I always point you back to the fundamental concepts for brush-ups.

Don't stress out as you read these pages. You're not expected to remember everything and, hey, you can always come back to anything you need to be recharged on.

Conventions Used in This Book

New terms are always written in italics, with a definition that follows close on its heels. If you're a text skimmer and find yourself running across a new word you don't know, back up until you find the italicized word (or just look in the glossary or index). You might also see italics used for emphasis — and I can definitely get emphatic from time to time.

Monofont is used for Web sites and e-mail addresses. There aren't a lot of site references in this book, and you certainly don't need to have access to a computer to learn or play poker, but there are some very valuable references out in cyberspace that you need to be aware of.

The sidebars you see in gray text are not required reading for the book, but will usually relate to the text being discussed to illustrate it more fully (or in some cases, it's just me trying to make you laugh). You'll find a sidebar at the end of this Introduction.

What You're Not to Read

Don't worry about any of the paragraphs labeled with a Technical Stuff icon. Those are present merely for

completeness and to give more illumination to the terminally hard core.

There are two chapters you should bypass at the start. Get a little more general theory and practice under your belt before you tackle them:

✓ **Chapter 13:** This one is all about the concept of game theory and assumes you already understand the other poker concepts that are in this book.

✓ **Chapter 22:** Get solid in the other topics in this book before you go out and try to get even better.

Remember: You need a good foundation before you can build a fancy house.

Foolish Assumptions

I've made several assumptions about you as a reader — might as well clear 'em up right here to avoid any future embarrassment. I assume that

✓ **You're familiar with playing cards.** You know that a deck has 52 cards, with 4 suits and 13 cards in each suit. You know what a Jack, Queen, King, and Ace are.

✓ **You would rather beat other people in poker than have them beat you.**

✓ **You have any range of poker experience going from none to a lot.**

✓ You want to improve your game, no matter how good it is, right now.

✓ Trying in vain to get a cocktail waitress's attention is worse than having one stop by your table when you don't need her.

How This Book Is Organized

I've organized this book in parts to make it more readily digestible. Yum.

Part I: Everything's Bigger in Texas: Welcome to Texas Hold'em!

Chapter 1 gives a synopsis of larger concepts you'll run across in the book: how the game is played, how *to* play the game, and *where* the game is played.

The remainder of Part I talks about the hand rankings in poker, how to read a hand, betting, blinds, and etiquette. It's this section that also talks about one of *the* most important facets of the game: your bankroll.

Part II: Texas Hold'em: Play by Play

This section covers, in detail, the betting and play surrounding your hole cards, the flop, the turn, and the river. It includes getting hints as to whether you're holding a winner or a loser and subtleties like check-raising.

Part III: Movin' On to Higher Stakes: Advanced Strategies of Hold'em

This is where things start getting really meaty. Knowing how to play other players at the table, bluffing, and trapping are all covered here. This part is also the one that deals with math (including pot odds) and game theory.

If there's one part you should really focus on in this book, it's this one.