



writers consistently commented that the book had "cinematic quality."

At the time I was more focused on the ensuing book tour than making movies. But that all changed in August of last year.

I received a call from UltimateBet inviting me to participate in the upcoming season of *Best Damn Poker Show*. When I learned the show would be shot near L.A., I decided to put some test footage together in order to visit studios and shop the concept. Admittedly, the plan had some flaws. For example, I had no funding, no script, no cast, no film team, no location and less than a month till I flew to Tinseltown. But the main thing was...I had an idea. The rest is just details.

Three days later, I'm having lunch with two local producers, a director and a potential investor. An hour later, the project is funded, contracts are signed and script development begins! The next two weeks is a blur of script rewrites, auditions and location hunting. One of our casting challenges is to find a female poker player who speaks Russian and has model good looks. Unlikely in upstate New York. What's a boy to do?

YouTube to the rescue!

After discovering that there is a great deal more Russian porn than you could ever imagine, I discovered "SovietBabe." Ironically, she had a video audition for *Best Damn Poker Show*. She was perfect. Beautiful, articulate, Russian, loves poker, beautiful (did I mention that already?). SovietBabe, aka Olya P, agreed to join the cast and we were on our way!

My director had never played poker before so we had to introduce him to this great game. When my 8-year-old son took down a pot with 9-2 offsuit after a rainbow flop of A-J-4, he learned about bluffing. When another player hit his straight and doubled up through him, he learned about pot odds. And when I won the tournament with 7-5 suited (a hand featured in *Life on Tilt*), he learned about fate.

A week before the shoot, Olya P calls.

She's on the set of a reality show and might be extended and miss the shoot. I alert the director to develop a Plan B. Two days before the shoot, Olya P calls again. She's been extended. Good news for her. Bad news for us. I call the director and tell him to implement Plan B. When he responds, "What's Plan B?" I know we're in trouble. It's 3 p.m. Tuesday and I need a female, Russian, poker-playing hottie on set by 10 a.m. Thursday - and this is Albany, not Hollywood.

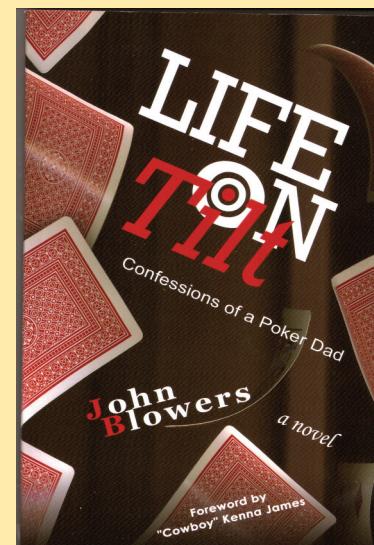
We decide to work through the local Russian community. The only problem? The character's first name is Suka, which doesn't have a direct English translation, but it's basically the same as calling an American woman a bitch.

Oddly enough, I receive dozens of photos of hot Eastern European and Russian women over the next 24 hours. One image and description captures my attention: A woman named Rozanna, a former prima ballerina for the Russian ballet who lived in Azerbaijan until she was 19. But all I have is a first name and a Russian email address. I try tracking her down via 4 degrees of separation and, finally, 10:30 the night before the shoot, I'm about to call the director and postpone when my phone rings. It's Rozanna! She's willing to reschedule appointments at the spa she owns and thinks her friends will find the character's name strangely appropriate for her.

We shoot for 12 hours on Day 1, including scenes at the top law firm in the area, a new Melting Pot restaurant and several houses. The Melting Pot had a clause in their release that we weren't allowed to "be sexy with the food." This became more problematic with each take of Rozanna eating a chocolate-covered strawberry offered to her by our leading man.

We couldn't crack the bureaucracy at Foxwoods, Turning Stone or Mohegan Sun, so we then pack two dozen cast and crew and two tons of equipment to head to Philadelphia to shoot at the Riverside Rounders poker club. We needed a crowd

The film is based on the book *Life on Tilt*.



of poker players for a tournament scene and they had invited me for a book-signing. I love it when a plan comes together! Former Top 10 poker pro and fellow **Poker Pro** contributing columnist Charlie Shoten flies in to join the other 85 cast and crew assembled. We shoot for 16 hours, finishing at 5 a.m. with a hotel room scene...complete with a hot room-service chick who drove in from Long Island. God, I love this business!

It's now the following Sunday evening...crunch time. My flight leaves 6 a.m. tomorrow and the director's still layering in the soundtrack we just received from Josh in L.A. I'm playing a tournament to relax. An hour's drive from the director, I enjoy the friendly banter of the Saratoga Poker Club as I wait for my phone to ring.

At 9 p.m., my nut flush gets cracked when some clown hits his open-end straight-flush draw on the river. Before I can lament this bad beat, my phone rings. The DVD is ready!

Off to the director's, then a quick nap and off to the airport. We've got a movie to make!



*Next installment...drugs on the movie set, test screenings in New York and Vegas and raising \$12M for a movie with just a smile and a dream...*