



HOW A POKER NOVEL BECOMES A FEATURE FILM

SHUFFLE UP AND EDIT!

By John Blowers

Only 20 Percent of the Book
Will Make It to the Big Screen

Editor's Note: *This is the fifth in a series by John Blowers about the struggle to get his book, **Life on Tilt**, made into a movie.*

THINK BACK to the first time you referred to yourself as a poker pro. Remember that moment? Maybe it was a family dinner. Maybe someone introduced you at a social event. Maybe it was on a loan application. But, at some point, you identified your vocation as a professional poker player. What type of reactions did you get? Probably a range from “Hey, that’s cool!” to “Stay away from my daughter!”

OK, with that in mind, envision me telling folks I own a film production company in upstate New York. I generally get two reactions. If I’m near my hometown, people tend to wonder why anyone would operate such a company in this area and assume it’s a front for some nefarious activity. If I’m in Los Angeles, people immediately assume we produce porn flicks and want to get introduced to various adult film stars (btw, if you have Sativa Rose’s number, let me know).

The truth is: Owning a film production company is a lot like being a psychic. You can put out a shingle, call yourself whatever you like and then begin to tell people how you perceive the future. In my case, the future involves millions of people around the world flocking to see the definitive poker film, *Life on Tilt*.

Two major differences between me and the corner psychic are wardrobe and investors. While the corner psychic tends to dress like a gypsy and meter out advice for a few bucks per minute, I’m stuck with a closet full of suits and need to attract a different class of investors.

STARTING UP

In June of last year, I assembled a small



The author (right) with WSOP bracelet winner Gary Styczynski, a member of Team Tilt.

group to begin the venture capital effort. Team Tilt, as we became known, consisted of a retired CEO of a major chemical company, a leading venture capitalist, a marketing executive, a WSOP bracelet winner, a movie producer and me. We took our test footage (see Jan./Feb. issues of *Poker Pro*), developed a business plan and put together a term sheet.

A friend of mine was opening up a Melting Pot, so we set up an event there and invited a bunch of individuals who fit our income/net worth profile. Our dog-and-pony show lasted about 40 minutes and included the president of our non-profit partner, Junior Achievement. A month later, we had our first few investors, had opened two LLCs and had cash in the bank. Phase one of funding was in place and we were ready to Jay-Z this mutha! (aka, we were “on to the next one”).

Our first order of business was to flip 50 percent of our startup money into an active production so we could generate

some revenue. We chose a production filming in New Orleans since we intend to shoot a majority of our film’s non-poker sequences there. The project we selected is called *The Somnambulist* and I find myself on set with Eddie Furlong, whose most memorable role is likely that of John Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*.

Anyone who has ever been on a film set will relate to the incredible amount of down time that exists. There are also countless individuals involved in the production. I begin to gain a first-hand appreciation for why movie budgets can balloon so quickly. I continually ask one of our producers, “What’s that guy doing? Will we need that for *Life on Tilt*?” or “Who’s she and what’s her phone number?” Ah, the due diligence never ends.

My first day on the set is actually an all-nighter. The cast and crew are shooting in an uninhabited house near the warehouse district. I arrive on the set

