



POKER AND HOLLYWOOD

HOW A POKER NOVEL BECOMES A MOVIE

'Does Your Film Have Hookers, A Casino and a Golf Course in It?'



By John Blowers

HERE'S THE SITUATION. You're at a NL cash game in the big blind. Four people limp in front of you and you check your hole cards to discover 5-9 offsuit. Normally a good opportunity to raise and steal some easy dead money, but you check your Dolly Parton hand. The flop comes 9-9-5 and you end up felting the guy who limped from the cutoff with A-9 offsuit when his hand doesn't improve (serves him right!).

A big blind special is like dating out of your league. You feel incredibly lucky when it goes right. However, at the same time, you realize it's not a sustainable situation you can rely on. I recently watched a WSOP episode where Jason Alexander entered a pot cheaply from the big blind with Q-5 of clubs and hit a flop of Q-Q-4. Unfortunately, 2004 WSOP champ Greg Raymer was sitting in the small blind with A-Q offsuit. Jason probably lost the minimum that hand (about 20k of his 100k stack), although I'm sure he felt he was milking Raymer the whole hand.

So what does this have to do with making movies? Glad you asked. I recently had the movie equivalent of a big blind special. I was in New Orleans when I was approached by someone who had heard of our project to develop the poker-

themed novel, *Life on Tilt*, into a feature film. After I shared a bit more about the project, the person suggested they had a director who might be right for us. This is not uncommon in New Orleans as it's now the third most popular destination in the U.S. for filmmaking, and technical and creative talent have flocked to the area. What was different about this conversation is the person being proposed is a well-established director in Los Angeles whose movies I'm sure you've seen (but I can't name the individual).

"What do we do now?" I ask.

"This," my new friend indicates as he pulls out his cellphone at 11:15 at night on a closed movie set.

Moments later the phone is handed to me. "He wants to speak with you."

I accept the call and am greeted by someone who says, "I have three questions for you."

Here's the impromptu quiz I took that night:

"Does your film have a casino in it?"

"Of course," I answer. "The movie has a poker theme to it."

"Does your film have hookers in it?"

"Not only does it, but they have a couple of key scenes."

"Does your film have a golf course in it?"

"As a matter of fact, one of the early scenes is set at a charity golf tournament."

"Good. Let's meet."

And with that I return the phone to its

Editor's Note: This is the sixth in a yearlong series chronicling the adventures of John Blowers as he works with a team to develop his novel, "Life on Tilt", into a feature film. Last issue John received seed money to start a production company and was on a movie set in New Orleans, while working with a writer on an early draft of the screenplay. He also managed to get a steady dose of poker in at the local Harrah's casino there.

owner and learn we will be boarding a plane for L.A. in two weeks to meet with this person. I share the news with one of our producers on the film set and tell him to pack his bags. I soon find out the guy who arranged the meeting is the writing partner of this director and he'll need to be in the entourage for the meeting to be successful.

OUT IN LA-LA LAND

Two weeks later, I'm in L.A. poolside eating fruit and making time with a couple of aspiring actresses. Well, I'm not sure what they do, but let's assume they're in the business...everyone is out here. My cellphone rings and it's fellow **Poker Pro** writer and all-around great guy Kenna James. He's just landed at LAX – so we make plans to grab a drink. I want to introduce him to some of the others on



Kenna James



the production team later on.

A few hours later we arrive about 45 minutes late for our dinner pre-meeting before heading up Mulholland Drive to meet with the director. The venue for dinner is a place known as the Sushi Nazi (although the actual name is something different that I can't remember). For you Seinfeld fans, you may remember the "Soup Nazi." If you didn't observe his strict rules, there was "no soup for you!" This place has the same feel.

Before I arrive, my line producer, Oak, makes the mistake of ordering off the menu. When he asks for the sea urchin, the waiter tells him that it comes with the chef's special. Oak asks to get the chef's special and is informed he "broke the chef's trust" by ordering off the menu. Therefore, he couldn't get the sea urchin.

Oak begins to think he is on a new *Candid Camera* show until a few minutes later when the next patron comes in, begging to be served. It turns out he had

been permanently banned because his cellphone rang while he was in the place on a previous visit.

The intro to Kenna doesn't go particularly well, through no fault of his own. The writing partner is territorial and clearly isn't welcoming any additions to the guest list. I request that the director be called and am refused, citing "there's no cell reception on Mulholland."

A FEW DOORS DOWN...

I see where this is heading and Kenna graciously bows out. Next thing I know we are passing several celebrities' homes and, a few doors from Eddie Murphy's house, we pull up to the gated entrance of the director's home. I immediately pull out my phone, call someone and declare loudly, "I'm on Mulholland Drive...can you still hear me?" while staring at the guy who lied about the cellphone reception. Oak lets me know I've made my point.

This accomplished director is a humble, welcoming man who – after quick

WE MEET WITH A TOP HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR, AND HE GIVES US A PRIVATE SCREENING OF HIS NEW FILM

introductions – says somewhat giddily, "Do you want to see the latest edit of my next movie?"

Bear in mind, this is a \$20 million production with A-list talent and a 1,900-screen release in August 2010. And we're being offered an opportunity to see the movie in the director's private screening room??

Uh, yeah...that sounds OK to me. We spend the next two hours mesmerized by his latest creation. I can't share much about the project other than to say it's based on a true story and you will be amazed at this movie. I was impressed with the music in the movie and inquired about the cost.

"\$3 million," was the response.

After screening the movie, we speak about our project. The parallels between the film we just saw and *Life on Tilt* are lost on no one in the room. Although we had discussed making no offers, Oak is inspired to share a verbal offer, which the director feels is fair. I begin to figure out how to cash the check Oak just wrote.

A jam session then breaks out as guitars, saxophones and other instruments fuel our impromptu band. Before long, it's getting late and I need to catch an early flight, so we travel back down Mulholland ready for the next stage of this adventure. ♠

Next issue...bullet trade scams, illegal South American bank documents and other film financing secrets.