



LET THERE BE RANGE!

Crushing SSNL/MSNL No-Limit Holdem Games

TRI, SLOWHABIT, NGUYEN AND COLE, CTS, SOUTH

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Who is the best player in the world?

The obvious answer to this question is a superuser. For those who don't know what a superuser is, it is a player who can see other players' cards. Naturally, to become the best player we must figure out a way to acquire this skill. Since the majority of us don't have parents who are shady executives at poker sites, it is impossible for us to be blessed with such greatness. The next best thing we can hope for is to make educated guesses what holdings an opponent may have. Our goal is to transform ourselves into pseudo-superusers. We hope by the last page you'll have enough knowledge to reach that status.

We will use position, bet sizing, combinatorics, and different lines to help us define our opponent's hand range. Once we have an idea of what Villain's hand range is, it's easy to express our creativity in situations where we want him to fold, call, or raise. You may be thinking that poker cannot be this easy; otherwise, everyone would be playing nosebleeds already. You're right. The thing is, the best players in the world estimate hand ranges better than you. Their guesstimates are more accurate and, thus, they are closer to achieving pseudo-superuser status than the playing field.

Chapter 2: The Fundamentals

No, it is not the fundamental theorem Sklansky came up with. It is the variables that you should take into consideration before making a poker decision. These variables are hand range, pot equity, and fold equity.

Hand range is a set of holdings your opponents may have based on their positions and actions in a given hand. **Pot equity** is your share of the total pot. **Fold equity** is the percentage of the time you win the pot without a showdown. Lastly, your **expected value (EV)** is the average win or loss on a specific hand.

Whenever high stakes players talk about a hand they use these variables and combinatorics, which will be discussed in the following chapter. These players employ a free program called PokerStove that computes your hand's equity against your opponent's estimated hand range. Naturally, you should continue in hands where your equity is high and typically fold in situations where your equity is low. Equity should be the first thing you think about before you decide to check, bet, or fold.

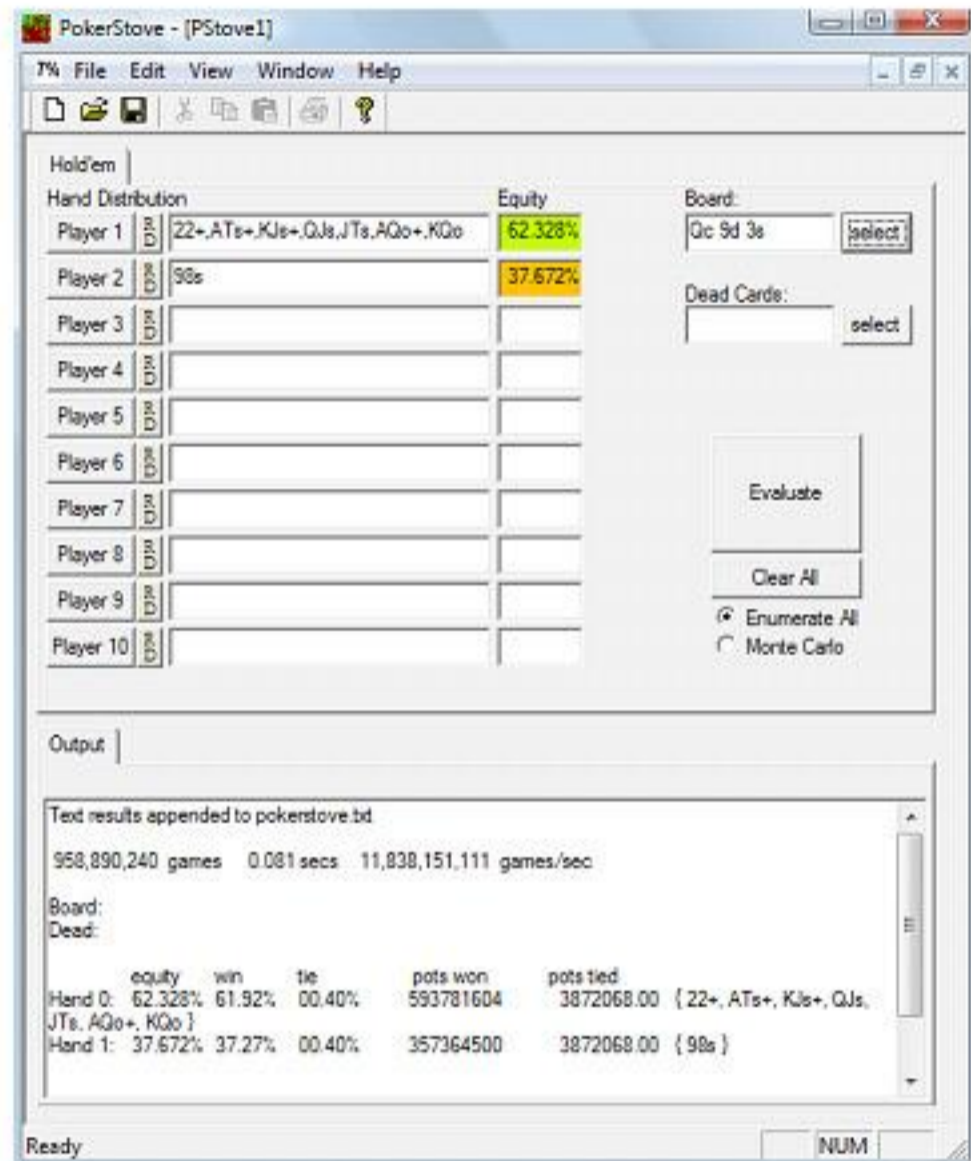


Figure 2.1: An example of a player analyzing his equity verses his opponent's range.

Folding equity can be solved using basic algebra. Below is the formula that shows how often an opponent has to fold in order to make a bet or push +EV. If you are too lazy to solve simple algebra problems, you can visit DailyVariance.com, click on FE Equation, and plug in the numbers.

Fold Equity Formula

X = Breakeven Folding Frequency

L = Maximum Loss

V = Villain's Equity

P = Current Size of the Pot

W = Maximum Gain

H = Hero's Equity

$$0 = XP + (1 - X)(-LV + WH)$$

Chapter 3: Combinatorics

Don't let the title discourage you. Combinatorics in this context basically means combinations of hands. In hold'em, there are 1,326 possible hand combinations; because there's no difference among the six possible combinations of AA or the sixteen of 72o preflop, the number of hand combinations can be reduced to 169.

Suppose a really tight player opens UTG with 10% of his total hands in a regular 6-max game. Assuming he's opening with the top 10% of his hand range, Poker Stove reports his possible holdings as {77+, ATs+, KTs+, QJs, AJo+, KQo}. Let's enumerate these holdings to see how often he's opening with a premium hand.

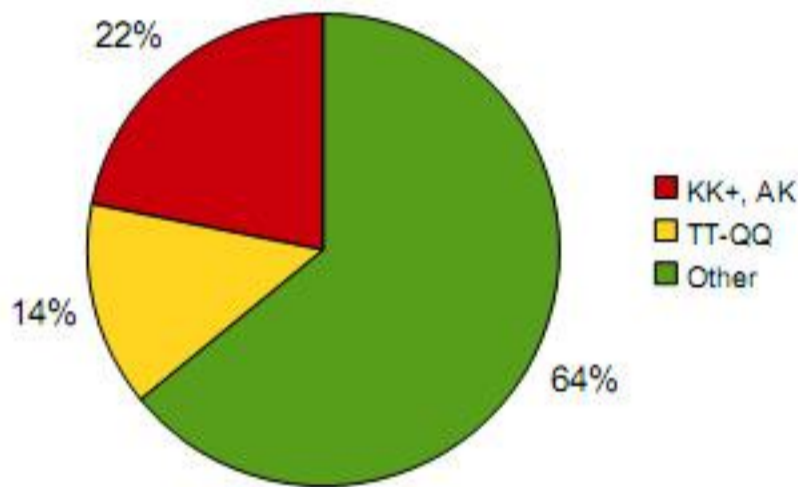


Figure 3.1: Graphical representation of UTG's opening and continuing ranges.

As you can see, despite opening with such a tight range, Villain will only have JJ+/AK about one-third of the time; two-thirds of the time he has unpaired hands. Thus, when Villain opens UTG and folds everything excluding TT+/AK, he's folding 82 out of 128 times. That's a lot of folding.

Example 3.1: S2/S4 6-Max
 UTG opens to \$14.
 We re-raise his bet to \$48.

Premium Pairs	Medium Pairs	Large Unpaired	Large Suited
AA - 6	TT - 6	AK - 16	ATs - 4
KK - 6	99 - 6	AQ - 16	KJs - 4
QQ - 6	88 - 6	AJ - 16	KTs - 4
JJ - 6	77 - 6	KQ - 16	QJs - 4
		Total:	128 hands

JJ+, AK = 40 hands Unpaired: 80 hands

Figure 3.2: Data table of UTG's opening range and their related combinations.

In Example 3.1, we risk \$48 to win \$20. This means Villain has to fold 70.5% of the time for us to break even. We determined 70.5% by $48 / [20 + 48]$. Considering that he will fold 82/128, or about 64%, this is almost enough fold equity to make this an EV neutral play. However, we haven't accounted for the times he may call with a big hand preflop, only to allow us to make a better hand or take it away post-flop.

Although this is a trivial example with a few assumptions regarding Villain's preflop play, it illustrates the simple concept of combinations. Now, how do we use the concept of combinations to hand read? Here is a simple example that should get you a little excited.

In Example 3.2, we open on the button and a particularly aggressive player three-bets us from the small blind. If we know he's the type to fire 100% of his range on a Kxx flop, we should call a lot in position and min-raise (or a little more than min-raise) his continuation bet. Here's why.

On a Kxx flop, the number of combinations Villain will bet/fold is more than the number of combinations that gives Villain a pair of Kings or better. On a Kxx flop, there are six combinations of AA, three combinations of KK, twelve combinations of AK, and twelve combinations of KQ. He'll re-raise with KJ about half the time, so that's six combinations. So on a Kxx flop, he can continue with 39 [6+3+12+12+6] hands. Before you think that is a lot, think of how many combinations are in his re-raising range. If he's re-raising KQ and KJ, he's likely to re-raise with TT+ and AJ+ as well. That's 50 [6+6+6+16+16] premium hands that he'll have to fold if we raise. We haven't accounted for the random suited connectors or small pocket pairs in his hand range yet!

Thus, because Villain is likely to continue only with a static set of hands, as his range widens the profitability of raising him increases.

Example 3.2: S3/S6 6-Max

SB: \$800

BB: \$203

UTG: \$612

MP: \$175

CO: \$715

Hero (BTN): \$620

Preflop: Hero is BTN with 7♣ 8♣

3 folds, Hero raises to \$24, SB raises to \$77, 1 fold, Hero calls \$53

Flop: (\$160) K♣ 6♥ 4♠ (2 players)

SB bets \$115, Hero raises to \$230, SB tanks ...

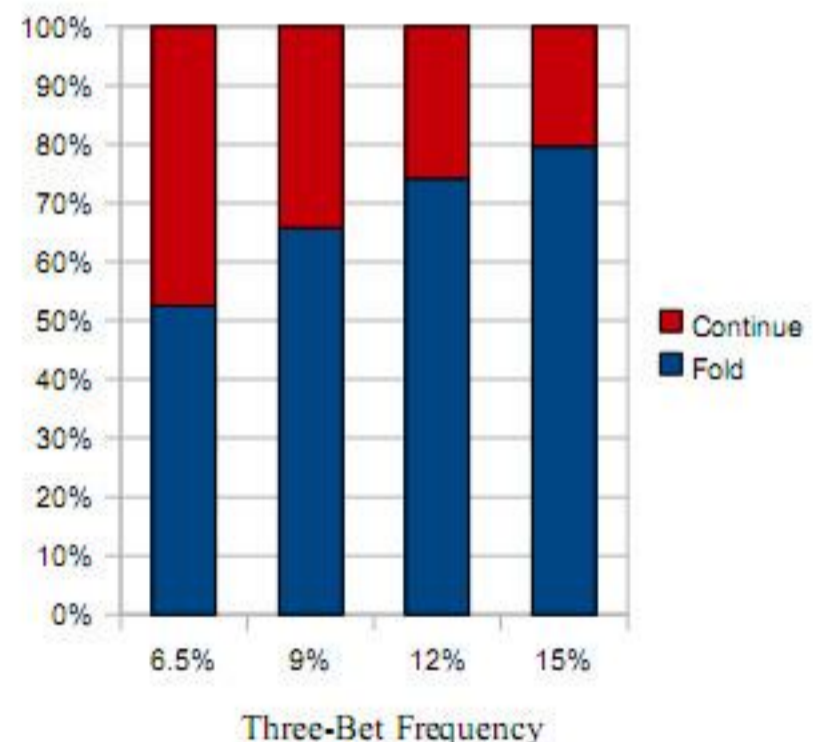


Figure 3.3: Illustration of the high frequency with which aggressive three-bettors will need to fold to a flop raise.

Let's take a closer look at the EV calculation behind Example 3.2. After Villain makes a continuation bet, the total pot is \$275. Thus, we only need to be successful 45.5% of the time to break even ($230 / [275+230]$). Since Villain will fold 50 hands and call with only 39 hands, we show an instant profit. Again, the 50 hands don't account for his non-premium holdings, such as suited connectors and small pocket pairs. We also haven't accounted for the times he has 66, 44, or 75 and won't fold. However, if you include those hands in his range, then the number of combinations that he will fold increases dramatically. That's because he will likely re-raise with hands such as 33, 55, 77, 89, 9T as well.

What if Villain is smart and starts shoving against our flop raise?

Exercise 3.1:

Record how many times the blinds check on K and A high flops after three-betting preflop. How often BTN checks behind on the same boards after three-betting a MP or CO player?

One thing you should keep in mind is if Villain is smart, he wouldn't be continuation betting on Kxx flops with a 100% frequency in the first place. There's a large divide between what people actually do and what they should do; otherwise, poker wouldn't be as profitable.

But for the sake of discussion, let's assume Villain is smart and will recognize we won't have Kx that often and might re-bluff us.

With such reads, we should consider shoving over his continuation bet or raise to an amount where Villain knows we are committed. Every time Villain calls, we have 24.5% equity since we have a gutshot and a backdoor flush draw. Under this scenario, how often does Villain have to fold for our bluff-raise to be profitable?

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{EV} &= X (\text{pot size}) + (1 - X) [(-L \times \text{Villain's equity}) + W \times \text{Hero's equity}] \\
 0 &= X(275) + (1-X) [-.755 (543) + (275+543) \times .245] \\
 0 &= 275X - 210 + 210X \\
 0 &= 485X - 210 \\
 \mathbf{X} &= \mathbf{43.25\%}
 \end{aligned}$$

For our shove to break-even, Villain has to fold 43.25% of the time. If Villain is betting with 100% frequency on such flops, we should consider shoving every time. You might get some extra fold equity if you raise high enough that you've committed yourself to calling it off. This type of raise size may give the illusion that you want to lure Villain into the pot.

The decision to min-raise or to shove depends on two criteria: stack sizes and type of opponent. For 100BB stacks, the decision to min-raise or to shove shouldn't matter too much since Villain needs to fold the same percentage in both situations. Thus, if Villain is aggressive enough to re-bluff, we should be more inclined to shove over his flop bet. If not, we can use the min-raise (or slightly bigger than min-raise) as a cheap bluff. As stack size increases, we should use the min-raise more since it's cheaper than shoving over Villain's continuation bet.

Another adjustment we can make if Villain starts shoving against our flop raise is to tighten up our preflop range and min-raise his flop bet with our monsters until he adjusts. As you improve, you will notice poker is all about adjusting. It is like a game of rock-paper-scissors, and whoever adjusts the best wins. Fortunately, the majority of low to mid-stakes players don't adjust or they over-adjust, which is basically the same thing.

How To Find Combinations

Unpaired Hands

Step 1: Find total number of cards

Step 2: Multiply available cards

Step 3: Add each product

Example: How many combinations of AK and AQ are there on an A 2 5 flop?

Solution:
 $(3 \text{ Aces})(4 \text{ Kings}) + (3 \text{ Aces})(4 \text{ Queens})$
 $12 \text{ AK} + 12 \text{ AQ}$
 24 combinations

Paired Hands

Step 1: Find total number of cards

Step 2: Solve $\frac{C(C-1)}{2}$

Step 3: Add each quotient

Example: How many combinations of 22 and 55 on an A 2 5 flop?

Solution: $\frac{3 \cdot 2}{2} + \frac{3 \cdot 2}{2} = 6$

Putting It Together

Here's an example where we use combinatorics to analyze a hand.

Villain is a solid 21/17/2.5 type opponent. Hero probably has the same image and a 35% stealing frequency. When Hero opens on the button, Villain usually re-raises from the SB with AK, sometimes raises with KQ, and rarely raises with KJ/KT. When Villain check-raises the flop, he's representing a big king, 88, or 44. Villain's range also includes flush draws and occasionally a gut-shot.

It's not often he's check-raising this flop with KQ, KJ, or KT. The reason is if he's the type of player who check-raises this type of flop with these holdings, then he's the type to re-raise preflop with these hands as well. Players who check-raise with hands like KQ, KJ, and KT on this board understand their image well enough to know that they will get called lightly or played back against. It's suicidal for a nit to check-raise these hands on

this flop because he ends up overplaying his hand. That's why you hear a lot of nits cry "that's the bottom of my range" whenever they get called and lose. That's the thing: When people call, they are hoping you are at the bottom of your range. Otherwise, they wouldn't have called.

As for the hand, since he doesn't have a pair of kings often, what else is he check-raising with? We don't have the A♥ so that increases the chances Villain check-raised with the nut flush draw. Holding an ace also decreases the chance that Villain might slow play AK preflop since there are only nine combinations of AK. We also hold an 8 so there's only one combination of 88 left. There are three combinations of 44.

Example 3.3: \$10/\$20 6-Max

SB: \$3287

BB: \$1484

UTG: \$2020

MP: \$2262

CO: \$2994

Hero/Tri (BTN): \$2670

Preflop: Hero is BTN with A♣ 8♣

3 folds, Hero raises to \$80, SB calls \$70, I fold

Flop: (\$180) K♣ 8♥ 4♥ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$135, SB raises to \$415, Hero calls \$280

Turn: (\$1010) 6♣

SB bets \$750, Hero calls \$750

River: (\$2510) Q♠

SB goes all-in, Hero calls all-in

Now let's estimate the number of hands Villain is representing: four combinations of sets, very rarely will he have a king, and a lot of flush draw combinations. We can estimate his flush draws as {A♥ X♥, J♥ T♥, Q♥ T♥, 9♥ T♥}. So Hero called.

On the turn, Villain bets again. The six strengthened Villain's hand range in that he might have turned a pair of sixes to go with his combo draw on the flop. He might have turned a straight draw to go with his flush draw. Or he might have picked up the flush draw. Using PokerStove, against a range of {88, 44, A♥Q♥, A♥J♥, A♥T♥, A♥5♥, A♥4♥, A♥3♥, A♥2♥, K♥Q♥, Q♥J♥, Q♥T♥, J♥T♥, J♥9♥, T♥9♥, 7♥6♥, 6♥5♥, KQo} our equity is 47%. If we remove KQ from his range our equity rises to 60%. Getting two to one, Hero called.

On the river, his hand range remained the same. He might be a sick player who's shoving a pair of queens on the river as a bluff and for thin value. However, this is rare since most Villains think a pair of queens is good on the river and want a cheap showdown instead.

When Villain shoved, he either had the nuts or a busted draw (oh that sounds familiar). He might have AK. Against the hand range we gave him earlier, we're good about 38% of the time while getting two to one. Considering that he could have played his draws in this manner, plus the chance that he only plays KQ like this some of the time, Hero called. I won when he showed me A♥J♥.

Example 3.4 demonstrates another common situation. Consider a rainbow board composed of one high card and two low cards, such as {Q 2 4, K 3 8}. In these situations, do you see how narrow his range is if we hold A4 or A8? Unless he's the type to flat AA, KK, and AK preflop occasionally, we should continue playing the hand, especially if Villain has a tendency to check-fold on the turn if we call his flop check-raise. If you don't know whether he does or not, call his check-raise next time and see what he does. How else are you going to know?

Example 3.4: S3/6 NL 6-max – 6 Players

SB: \$660

BB: \$770

UTG: \$676

MP: \$100

CO: \$721

Hero (BTN): \$640

Preflop: Hero is BTN with A♠ 4♠

3 folds, Hero raises to \$24, 1 fold,
BB calls \$18.

Flop: (\$51) K♦ 8♥ 4♣ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$43, BB raises to \$120,
Hero raises to \$234, BB folds

From this example, it is important to recognize that in situations where we represent the nuts or air, our bet size doesn't have to be big. Doubling the amount of whatever Villain puts in should suffice since, after he calls, the pot should be large enough that he'll have less than a pot-sized bet left on the turn. It is also unlikely he'll call the small three-bet and would shove himself—especially when he's out of position.

If we have air, we should consider re-bluffing since Villain's range is polarized to the nuts or air. He likely has air since it's hard to flop a set.

One interesting spot that occurs often but players rarely notice is the check-raise on a flop of JT2r and T84r. At first glance, it looks like both flops are the same because Villain's range is top pair, draws, and sets. If we take a closer look, we will notice how the draws from each hand are different.

On a board of JT2r, players are more likely to check-raise with KQ than 89 because it has great equity against a calling range and they don't mind getting it in on the flop. On a board of T84r, players are less likely to have a good open-ender when they check-raise because most players check-call with 97 or J9. Thus, when facing a check-raise where a good open-ender is not possible, it is more likely Villain is check-raising with gutshots and overcards. In these situations, a re-bluff is very profitable.

Chapter 4: Common Low/Mid-Stakes Leaks

The most obvious reason why low to mid-stakes players are worse than high stakes players is that they can't read hands as well. Therefore they are less aggressive and don't fight as much for pots. As you become a better hand reader you'll realize **no one ever has anything** and you should battle for more pots.

Limped Pots

In low-stakes games, there are a lot of limped pots; rarely do the players in early positions lead out. They always check and when the late position player bets, they fold and move on. They didn't even notice they were in the pot because it was a limped pot and they had other tables to worry about. Before you say you don't think you're one of them, we're going to go ahead and say you are: 95% of low-stakes players do not fight for limped pots. They check-fold if they don't hit anything.

Players always talk about how many BB/100 they win, but they never stop to think that if they won a limped pot or two every two orbits their BB/100 would increase tremendously. Taking down a three-way limped pot will increase your BB/100 by three. Limped pots are the easiest in the world. No one fights for them. No one cares.

Next time you're in a limped pot, just bet and fold if you face any aggression. If they call the flop, we would usually (85%) follow with another bet on the turn because players like to peel the flop with small pairs, gutshots, overcards, or whatever hand they open limped in late position with. We're pretty sure a turn bet with 100% frequency is profitable as well, though we don't recommend it since there are better alternatives.

Since this is a book and not a poker forum, we can't just say bet without providing academic reasoning. In a pot where a late position player open-limps (or one player open-limps and a late position player over-limps), what do you think these players' hand ranges are? If they held any premium hands, they would have raised preflop. Thus, on a flop like Kxx, Qxx, Jxx, or even Axx, they rarely have top pair because they would have raised preflop with any hand combinations that give them top pair. For this reason, it is really easy to take the pot away from them on the turn when a scare card appears.

We wouldn't try to steal limped pots with flops like Q♣6♠8♠, 9♠T♠J♣, or K♠8♠Q♣. These draw-heavy, coordinated flops hit a lot of players' limping range and you usually will need two barrels to win the pot. However, if we have some pot equity on a draw-heavy flop then we can bet. It is not a good idea to steal with 32o on a Q♣6♠8♠ flop but you should bet with JTo or 3♠2♠.

Image

Players don't use image enough, especially the nits. Nits should semi-bluff more often. They should also two and three barrel more. Since nits never bluff in big pots, when they do bluff it's hard to call them down because their bluffing frequency is so low. If a person bluffs one out of ten times on the same board, it's hard to call even if you know he's bluffing once in a while. Another reason for nits to bluff is when other player types are dealing with a nit and facing a tough decision, they'll often revert to The Nit Theorem. "He's a nit. He can't be bluffing." Last I checked, The Nit Theorem hasn't been disproved.

Nits should also fold TT and JJ more often when facing aggression. When you're a nit, everyone knows you're a nit. So when you show aggression in big pots, the hands they hope you have are primarily TT and JJ. This is the main reason why nits usually cry, "That was such a terrible play. That hand was the bottom of my range!" Seriously, isn't that why they called? When was the last time you made a call and hoped Villain was at the top of his range?

Generally, the majority of players should treat JJ like 99 and give both the same value. Most of the times when we get either of these hands in on the flop, we are either against sets, overpairs, or a draw that has at least 40% equity against our hand.

By the way, I am a proud nit so don't think he's hating on his fellows.

Sometimes I feel pot control is a concept high stakes players created so they can fry the bad players faster. I have nothing to say except the next time you're in a hand and you want to check back the turn with top pair, medium kicker or an overpair, bet.

Good players peel a lot of flops because they want to steal on later streets. Their hand ranges on the flop rarely improve on the turn, since they usually have about five outs if they have a pair plus a kicker and two outs if they have a pocket pair. If they have an open-ended straight draw or a flush draw, they have eight or nine outs. That's not a lot of outs. In the best-case scenario, they hit their flush draw on the turn nine out of 47 times (assuming you don't hold one of the flush cards). That means the other 38 times they'll miss and fold. Therefore, you should bet.

Betting the turn also makes you a tougher player. Opponents know they won't get cheap showdowns and are more inclined to fold on the flop or the turn. Betting the turn also helps make your bluffs more credible because your range isn't polarized to the nuts or air. People in low and mid-stakes games don't check-raise (semi-)bluff the turn often. When was the last time you did that after making a continuation bet? If Villain calls your turn bet, you get a free showdown when they usually check the river out of position.

As you can see, there's a lot of merit to betting the turn. You might cause slightly better hands to fold and you can get value from worse hands. Had you checked the turn and called a river bet, you would lose the same amount on the hand by betting the turn but without the aforementioned benefits. Obviously, if your opponent is a crazy maniac who would bluff the river if you check back the turn, by all means check it back. However, the majority of players who check back the turn overuse this reasoning because they just want to play a small pot without the nuts. They hope Villain checks the river so they can make an obvious river value-bet that often doesn't get called.

Another common thing among low to mid-stakes players is checking behind on the turn after betting the flop with an open-ended straight or flush draw because they want to see a free card. This is like saying they want to lose 38 out of 47 times. You lose 38 times because that's the number of times that you miss your draw. When you check behind on the turn after betting a draw heavy flop, Villain will know your range is weak and can play well against you. If he has a draw himself, he'll bet the river to move you off your hand. If he has a good pair, he'll check-call your bet. Villain might even check-raise, though that's as rare an occurrence as a bluff.

High stakes players like to bet enough on the turn so that they'll have the correct odds to call if they get check-raised all-in. This also increases your fold equity because that's how you would play your nut hands. In addition, by betting and leaving yourself a small amount behind, it shows that you're committed and discourages your opponent from making a play at you. If he does shove all-in (which doesn't happen often), you can call and hit your outs to tilt him.

Balancing

In theory, balancing is a great concept. In practice, players don't execute this well. The idea behind balancing is to make yourself a tougher player so people can't accurately put you on a hand. How else are you going to get paid when you hit your monsters? But what's the point of balancing when your opponents choose to ignore it? If I only play AA and KK preflop and people keep paying me off, there's no need to "balance" my range. There's a reason why live nits just fold and fold only to stack a young player's AK. Thus, it is ludicrous to balance for the sake of balancing.

In short, up to 3/6 against almost everyone, just play. Bet when you think your opponent's range is weak (strong) and check (or fold) when you think it is strong. Once you move to 5/10+ games against tougher players, balancing your range in different spots is important because these players are observant and will beat you up pretty well if they have an idea of where you are at most of the times.

Playing Out Of Position

It boggles my mind how much people like to play out of position when not forced to. Poker is a game where you make money by avoiding difficult spots with marginal hands. You don't get penalized for folding preflop. The worst thing that can happen is people call you a nit. Nevertheless, people still like to play hands out of position.

The reason playing out of position sucks is because we don't have a lot of choices. It's hard to manage the size of the pot. It's infinitely more difficult to run a three-barrel bluff out of position than in position because Villain could be flatting with the nuts on three streets. It is also harder to extract value. With the nuts in position, Villain doesn't have to raise your flop or turn bet because he closes the action on the river. We can't choose to see a free showdown on the river and we win fewer pots.

Our advice is simple: fold.

A good general rule for showdown value is when he can't beat the fourth pair on the board, he's betting at least two-fifths of the pot.

In Example 4.1, Villain checks the river and Hero checks hoping that his pair of sevens is good. In this situation, against a decent opponent, Hero's pair of sevens is never good. Thus, Hero should consider betting the river, especially when a flush draw is legitimately in Hero's range. Villain will often fold a pair of kings since we'll also bet with our straights, sets, and two pairs.

Another misunderstanding with showdown value is checking back the flop with ace-rag hoping to see a cheap showdown. Any competent opponent will realize this and fire the turn and follow through on the river. It's hard for Hero to call on the river since Villain's bluffing frequency isn't high enough. Not only that, Villain might be bluffing with a better hand.

We'd like to point out that we should be more inclined to showdown with AK than A5 on a T82r board because AK dominates more hands if it improves; it also has twice as many outs against top pair. On the contrary, we should bet with A5 because this causes A6+ type hands to fold and we rarely improve. It is important to determine what type of opponents we should check back ace-high against.

Some players will put you on ace-high and bet turn and bet river to prevent a showdown; there are those who will gladly get to showdown with KQ. Figure out who they are and be more inclined to bet against those who won't give free showdowns.

Note that in the above situation where our range is face-up that our range is rarely strong. We usually have ace-high and at best, a hand like K4. We will discuss later situations where our range is face-up and what we can do about it.

Example 4.1: S3/S6 6-Max

SB: S1287

BB: S602

UTG: S728

MP: S465

CO: S1123

Hero (BTN): S937

Preflop: Hero is BTN with 7♠ 8♠

3 folds, Hero opens, 1 fold, BB calls

Flop: K♥ 3♥ 9♣ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets, BB calls

Turn: T♠

BB checks, Hero bets, BB calls

River: 7♥

BB checks, Hero checks

Players try to out-level themselves too much. This is because players overestimate the amount of psychological warfare going on in low to mid-stakes games. There is no “He knows I know he knows” shenanigans going on. If he's a nit, he's sitting there with the nuts. We have seen lots of hands where a decent player is in a pot against a nit and will talk himself into calling by thinking, “He's a good player so he balances his nuts in this spot with bluffs. Therefore, I must call.” Hero obviously gets shown the nuts and chalks it up to a cooler. The only hands the nit balances in his hand range are the nuts, the second nuts, and the third nuts.

I blame this type of syndrome on the high stakes players. He wouldn't be surprised if they created leveling just to make players play bad—which brings us to another point.

Reading Too Much High Stakes

While we can learn a lot from great players' thought processes, you should only use those to improve your own thought processes. This means when playing in low-stakes games don't expect people to know what you're trying to represent. We can't recall how many times players bluff, get called, and go on tilt because, “You're supposed to know I wasn't bluffing. *I knew* you had AA. I guess you're not good enough to fold that since I either have the nuts or a bluff. And I rarely bluff.”

First of all, don't expect people to fold overpairs. The reason we make moves is because we think our opponent's range is weak, not because we think it is strong and hope he makes a heroic fold when we represent a stronger range. Moreover, if you rarely bluff, then why did you do it at that particular time?

Players don't value backdoor draws enough. Often times, we'd rather have a backdoor flush draw by the turn than a one-pair hand. The main reason is the equity we have against Villain's calling range on the turn. If we're holding a crappy pair, we have at most five outs and those outs aren't even clean. With a flush or straight draw, we have a lot of outs if we get called. We can also continue putting pressure on my opponents if we miss on the river. We'll be able to fire one more barrel if the river card strengthened my perceived range. After all, bet/bet/bet is what you would do with the nuts, right?

It also balances your overall game. Players will think you are a crazy aggressive maniac when, in reality, you are just playing your equity.

Equity, Equity, Equity

The number one thing you should consider at all times during a hand is your equity against a standard hand range. It is vital to know that whenever you make a move you have some equity if you get called.

For example, you hold 55 and the flop is 9TT. Although your hand might be good, your hand's equity is horrendous against a standard range of 9x, Tx, QJ, 87, AK, AQ, AJ. Moreover, it is difficult to play hands like 55 out of position because you often get trapped. Opponents also often improve on a river card that you are not sure if you should bluff or not.

Conversely, if you have KJ on a flop of 9TT, your equity is decent against any hand and you're rarely drawing dead. We see players making continuation bets on flops such as 569 with AT or KJ. While you do have overcards, you will often need to fire three barrels because whatever hands call the flop aren't going to fold the turn often.

There is a misconception that if you call the turn, you have to call the river. This couldn't be further from the truth. Although the river card doesn't change Hero's equity versus Villain's hand range that much, what if Hero's read on the turn was incorrect? By calling the river, we would compound our previous mistake.

Players also make the mistake of calling too much on the earlier streets only to fold on later streets. Low and mid-stakes players like to call a lot preflop and on the flop. There is nothing wrong with this. The problem, however, is that they end up folding to a turn or river bet. It is better to just check-fold the flop or even preflop, especially when we're out of position.

On the contrary, there are merits to calling the flop and turn in the low and mid-stakes games because players are rarely three-barreling. How many times have you had the nuts and people bet, bet, shove into you for three streets?

Not All Fish Are Alike

We enjoy outplaying other good players as much as you. But it is important to recognize that the richest players in the world are the best fish fryers. Not surprisingly, there are a variety of fishes at the tables.

Some fish are overly aggressive and like to win every pot. Against these types of opponents, you can start calling more with your marginal hands or wait for the nuts.

Another type of fish calls a lot but is very passive. They are bad at extracting value out of their strong hands and generally play passively. Whenever this type of fish bets, fold. Don't try to level yourself by thinking he's balancing or adjusting. He's not. Just save yourself money and fold. And since they call a lot, you should make thin value-bets against them. At the same time, they are the type of players you shouldn't expect to fold. Please don't bluff them.

Against those who will never fold preflop, figure out what amount they are willing to put in with rags. You can determine this amount by increasing your preflop raise to 5x, 6x, 8x, etc. until they fold. Raise to this amount with premium hands and be prepared to win a big pot.

Be more inclined to bluff fish who are passive and are willing to fold when scare cards appear. Additionally, increase your river bluffing frequency against them. Don't try to outlevel them since they are always on level one. Thus, until they give you a reason not to use the motto, "Once a donk, always a donk."

Against a fish who likes to run bluffs and has shown a huge bluff the last four hands, he is bluffing again if he bets huge on the river again. He is not thinking, "I've shown all these bluffs, now I'm getting paid!" He's probably not thinking at all.

We will go into more detail on this in the "Exploitability" chapter.

Not Bluffing Enough Rivers

Players don't bluff the river enough because they think they'll get called even though Villain's calling frequency is so low. The reason behind this is selective memory; we only remember the times when our bluffs get called and not the times when we bet with the nuts and Villain folds. Everyone likes to think they are bluffing the river more than they really are because it is obviously cooler to win a pot with a worse hand. Remember, you only need to take down the pot around 40% of the time with a bluff for it to be profitable. Hint: Start bluffing more rivers.

Exercise 4.1: Next time you play, open up notepad and write down how many times you bet on the river and how many times you get called.

Non-Showdown Winnings

Players often wonder why their non-showdown winnings are negative. Here's why: You don't bluff enough. If you think you bluff a lot, you're not following through with your bluff enough. Remember, if you get caught then your showdown winnings are low, not your non-showdown winnings. You aren't semi-bluffing enough. You don't re-raise preflop enough—or you do but usually give up after betting the flop. Try shoving the turn with gutshots and/or overcards once in a while and see how that goes.

You also flat a lot of hands preflop and play them passively post-flop. You fold a lot and you check more than you bet.

Some players ask me if they should change their games to increase their non-showdown winnings or leave them alone. There are a few factors you should consider before deciding to change your game. If you are a regular who set mines and has been winning at a good rate, there's no need to add additional aggression to your game since it will increase variance. We're going to guess that you don't like variance, because if you did you wouldn't set mine in the first place. Second, your game might suffer if you add more aggression because you will go on tilt easier. My advice: "Don't fix it if it ain't broken."

Non-showdown winnings are an indicator of how often you take down pots post-flop. If you feel you are bluffing and outplaying people left and right, yet your non-showdown winnings are still negative, then you're probably not bluffing and outplaying people like you thought you were. As we said earlier, you probably crank it up preflop, make the inevitable continuation bet on the flop, and give up on the turn and river. Or you three-bet preflop a lot, only to see a lot of four-bets and have to fold.

My advice: Don't bluff too much, and if you do, empty the clip. Don't hold any bullets back. Some players fire the flop, fire the turn, and give up on the river. You know who you are. Don't worry, we'll show you which spots are good to barrel in the "Everyday I'm Barreling" chapter.

Chapter 5: Exploitability

The term *exploitable strategy* is often brought up in poker discussion. Naturally, playing such a strategy sounds like a terrible idea but this is not always the case. This is especially true when we play against opponents who do not adjust against the most exploitable of strategies. The most important exploitable strategy against weak players is over-betting with the nuts. When a player is not going to fold top pair for any amount of money and you beat top pair, try your best to get all the money in. Don't bother balancing your over-bets with bluffs; they won't fold.

Against the world-class player, this strategy will not work because they fold whenever we over-bet; we will never get paid on our good hands. From our example, Villain is not this player and, thus, we should try to shove in as much money as possible when we hit our hand so he has a hard time folding by the river.

Another situation when you should use exploitable strategy against weak players is when you are drawing out of position. As you know, playing out of position is difficult because opponents can put constant pressure on us making it costly for us to draw. However, against weak players who play passive post-flop, we should consider donk betting into them to set our own price for drawing. It would be unfortunate if we check and have to fold if Villain pots on the turn.

Example 5.1: €100/€200 No Limit Holdem

SB: nevergonnafold (€20,505)

BB: Cole (€37,562)

Preflop: (€300) Hero is BB with A♦ 3♠
nevergonnafold calls €100, Cole checks

Flop: (€400) 2♣ 9♦ 4♠ (2 players)
Cole checks, nevergonnafold bets €600,
Cole calls €600

Turn: (€1,600) 5♦ (2 players)
Cole checks, nevergonnafold bets €800,
Cole raises to €5800, nevergonnafold calls €5000

River: (€13,200) J♥ (2 players)
Cole goes all-in €31,162,
nevergonnafold calls all-in €14005

Final Pot: €58,367

Cole shows: 3♠ A♦

nevergonnafold shows: A♥ A♣

Example 5.2: \$25/\$50 6-Max

alkim416: \$2,063

BOCKHUNTER: \$8,008

SamH133: \$5,622 (sitting out)

skier_5: \$7,473

MUCKEMSAYUHH (CO): \$11,784**scout315 (BTN): \$11,074****Preflop:** Hero is CO with T♥ 7♥*1 fold, Hero raises to \$175, scout315 calls \$175, 2 folds***Flop:** (\$425) 4♠ 5♣ 6♦ (2 players)*Hero bets \$366, scout315 calls \$366***Turn:** (\$1,157) 9♠ (2 players)*Hero bets \$238, scout315 calls \$238***River:** (\$1,633) 8♣ (2 players)*Hero checks, scout315 bets \$1,500,
Hero raises to \$11,005, scout315 calls \$8,795*

In the example, I “buy a cheap river” by betting one-fifth pot. I river the nuts on a great board and revert to the exploitable “over-bet with the nuts” strategy. This player will not exploit it because he is a level one thinker. The only thought process this type of player will think of when looking at 850 is, “I have two pair; I call.”

A viable line is check-raising the turn as a semi-bluff and betting the river. This has a good chance of moving good players off their hands and we can bluff a lot river cards if we miss. Against this particular opponent who won't fold for any amount of money, semi-bluffing in this situation is bad and we should try our best to draw cheaply.

Chapter 6: Preflop - The Journey Begins

The games are becoming more aggressive as players widen their range preflop by one-third of the deck and seem to increase their aggression factor by infinity. Although these types of insanely loose aggressive players have big leaks in their games, they are able to win a lot because their competition doesn't know how to counter this aggressive style. If only their competition would open up PokerTracker or Hold'em Manager and look at Villain's positional stats! From there, Hero would have an idea of what these LAGs are re-raising (or calling) preflop three-bets with.

Different players three-bet in and out of position with different distributions of holdings. One player may three-bet from the blinds with the bottom of his range, such as {22-55, 65, 8T}, and the top of his range, such as {JJ+, AQ+}, while electing to call with hands such as {JT, KQ, AJ, AT, 66-TT}. Another player may decide to call with the bottom two-thirds of his range and re-raise with the top one-third. As you can see, despite having the same preflop raising (or re-raising) percentage, their hand ranges differ.

Against opponents who three-bet the bottom and top of their range while electing to call with the middle of their range, it is very profitable to four-bet them. This is especially true if they never five-bet. Against opponents who three-bet with the top third of their range and are eager to get it in preflop, you should be less inclined to four-bet them.

Most players often have a hard time playing hands such as {99, TT, KQ, KJ, AJ} from the blinds against a CO or BTN opener. This is because they try to solve the hand preflop. Although they know the late position opener steals a lot, they are afraid to three-bet with the aforementioned hands because they don't want to see a four-bet and have to fold. This is selective memory at its best. You won't get four-bet that often. The CO or BTN will fold a lot. Start three-betting more aggressively—you'll be a better player for it.

If you do get four-bet a lot from a particular player, start shoving with {99+, AK}.

An important factor when deciding whether to call or re-raise preflop is to consider the type of opponent who opens the pot. If he's the type who likes to fold, we re-raise him every chance we get. There's no need to worry about what set of hands to re-raise with if your opponent keeps folding to your three-bets or if they often call but check-fold to your continuation bets. If you just sit down at the game and don't know what type of opponent he is, go ahead and re-raise him. Then you'll know.

Against opponents who like to call a lot, a reason re-raising range will be primarily composed of Broadway cards. These hands have great equity against a calling station's hand range and are easy to play post-flop when you hit a pair or a draw, such as a gutshot and overcards. He is also going to fire a lot of second barrels as well. The main reason why these calling stations are successful is because players don't adjust well. Most players fire their inevitable continuation bet after re-raising preflop and check-fold when they don't have a good hand on the turn. This sequence repeats itself many times and most players fail to recognize the correct strategy is to either (semi)bluff the turn more or check the next time they have a strong hand. Slow-playing is definitely a lost art because players learn how to play solid from poker training sites, and all you see is bet, bet, bet. Why bet if your opponent is going to bet most of the times you check? If you don't think he'll bet, think of the times when you check-fold your missed overs or underpairs.

On the other hand, what happens if an opponent is constantly re-raising me out of the blinds or when he's in position?

The easiest answer is fold to his re-raise. An old grinder once told me, "In poker, tight is right." When I first heard this line, I just laughed it off. As the games become more aggressive, he realize how much wisdom there is in that sentence. This is especially true against dumb loose aggressive players who three-bet you every chance they get. You keep folding and when you finally play back at them, they'll hold AQ or 99 and think something like, "Well, I'm a loose aggressive player and I have been running over the table. He's a good player so he must have noticed this. He might be getting fed up. My hand is ahead of his re-stealing range. I'll shove and if I see KK+ or AK, it's a cooler, especially with my sick table image." These types of opponents obviously shove and, of course, I show a better hand.

To be fair, Villain's line of thought isn't wrong. Sometimes with the table dynamics or player history, it is correct to get it in light preflop because you don't want players to run over you. The situation above is different. I has been folding every hand because I knew the moment I re-raise, Villain will out-think himself. These players are all over the low to mid-stakes games.

A second option is to not open as many hands and tighten up your preflop range. It's hard for an opponent to outplay you once you put in 25% of your stack preflop with JJ+ or AK.

The third option is to four-bet. The question is, how often should we four-bet and what should

our four-betting range consist of? There are two approaches for this situation.

You start four-betting in position as stack sizes increase to 150BBs or so because you'll get more folds. It feels weird to call out of position with a little more than 100BB when the pot is already 65BB. People rarely, if ever, five-bet bluff 120BB into a pot of 65BB. Even if Villain calls, you have position on him and can dictate the bet sizing and action on various boards. You obviously get fewer folds if you four-bet when you're out of position, although it's still profitable.

Another important factor is most Villains' stack off ranges become very polarized as stack size increases (150BB+). If they are only going to call it off with AA/KK and are three-betting with JJ+ (or, God forbid, high Broadway cards or bluffs), they will be facing a difficult situation when we four-bet them. A hand that we should often consider four-bet bluffing more is KQ. Most of the time when we get three-bet and are holding KQ, we either fold because we are afraid of being dominated or we call. We do so because it's too strong a hand to fold against a particular opponent but isn't strong enough to four-bet and get it in preflop.

What we should do is consider turning KQ into a "bluff" and start four-betting more. With the card removals, there are only 24 combinations instead of 34 combinations of AA-QQ/AK. It is easy to see why KQ is very powerful to four-bet bluff with given that there are 30% fewer hands Villains will stack off with.

Here is an alternative strategy. You can stop four-bet bluffing them and only four-bet with premium hands such as TT+, AK. You would never call against their re-raises with AA or KK, even in position, and would four-bet these hands as well. When you do this, your opponent will think you're getting out of line with your four-betting frequency because you can't have that many premium hands. He will incorrectly add bluffs to your four-betting range. Over time, regulars will hesitate to three-bet you because you never call and always seem to be four-betting them. As a result, they will start calling your late position steal with hands such as KJ+, AT+, suited connectors, and random hands from the blinds. This makes them easier to play against because you have the initiative and you're playing in position with lots of money behind.

A play we like to use is four-betting the first or second time a tight-aggressive regular re-raises his late position open. If he happens to have a hand and shove, I show him that I'm not going to sit there and let him abuse me. If I do get away with my four-bet bluff, I will four-bet bluff the next time the same opponent re-raises me. The reason for this is that he's more likely to give you credit the

second time around since you just four-bet him earlier. This is as far as I go in the leveling game. If I happen to be in a passive mood and have already allowed Villain to get away with three-betting me a few times, I shut down and wait for the nuts because Villain is anticipating a four-bet from me and will use the all-in maneuver with AQ and 99 type hands.

Our four-betting size should be slightly more than double the amount Villain puts in. For example, if Villain three-bets to \$100, we should make it \$234 (or a similar size) since it is an amount we would use if we have QQ+/AK. If we hold a hand such as 88/99, we should four-bet a little bigger to show we are committed to calling it off. Although we are intending to get it in preflop, we want to discourage Villain from re-bluffing us with hands such as JT/KJ that have great equity against our hand. Thus, we do not mind them folding and giving us the dead money in the pot.

The fourth option is to call and check-raise flops when you flop overs with a gutshot, an open-ended straight draw, flush draw, or overs with a backdoor flush draw. You will obviously play for stacks when you flop a pair. This is my least favorite action because I don't like being out of position.

The fifth option is to call in position. Before calling, it is important to pay attention to the effective stack sizes. If the effective stack sizes are less than 120BB, it is more profitable to fold preflop with pretty suited connectors such as 78, 9T, and 79; these hands lose value as the stack to pot ratio gets smaller. Although your opponent is re-raising light and you have position, it's hard to do anything with these hands when you don't have enough chips to play with and your opponent will fire second barrels with a mid to high frequency. Against these aggressive opponents, I'm calling all my premium hands as well. My default line is to call, call, call because he is just going to bet, bet, bet. If he's not the aggressive type, I would float flops with the intention of taking it away. We'll talk more about playing post-flop in "Three-Bet Pots" later in the book.

The last concept when playing preflop is to take into account which position you are opening from and what your opponent's position is when he re-raises you. If UTG opens and you call from the MP or the CO, it's unlikely that the blinds will squeeze without a strong hand considering that both of your preflop ranges are strong. If someone opens from the CO and you flat on the BTN, a blind is more apt to squeeze since CO's range is wide and your range is weak the majority of the time. This is a situation where it's easy to trap a habitual three-bettor from the blinds.

Flatting from the blinds with premium hands is something players don't do enough. Whenever they see QQ+ or AK, they auto re-raise any open without putting too much thought into it. Let's go over a few reasons why we should flat these hands and identify the correct frequency to do so.

Flatting from the blinds with premium hands balances our flop check-raise hand range. On a flop composed of K♠ 3♦ 7♣, a check-raise will help us win a big pot with AK and AA for a variety of reasons. If villain holds something like KT – KQ, he might have folded to us preflop if we re-raised from the blinds in order to avoid domination. However, on the flop, it's difficult for Villain to get away from top pair with a good kicker. If Villain is holding something like A3 or A7, he will have a hard time believing us if he doesn't include AK and AA in our range. This is because without those hands, our value flop check-raise range is very narrow.

Many players think it's hard to play 22 – 66 from the blinds against a late opener and wonder what their approach should be when they don't hit a set. They should check-fold—that's the easiest solution. But what if we don't want to fold on a low flop with our pocket pair? What typically happens afterwards gives the aggressive player an advantage: Broadway turn and river cards allow for him to put enough pressure on us that we fold. The solution is to check-call with our sets on the flop and later streets in order to let them hang themselves. Another solution is to start flatting with hands like QQ+ and AQ+ and re-raise with small pocket pairs.

One of the cool things about flatting AQ+ from the blinds is that you can extract a lot of value on an ace-high flop. How many times have we opened with A♠T♠ from late position and smiled on an A 3 9 rainbow flop? The example on the next page demonstrates how the player in position is forced to respond.

Hero prepares to continuation bet. Then the BB donks. Hero can't really raise the flop because BB is either representing the nuts or air. At the same time, Hero is hoping BB is a bad player and has something like A2. So Hero gets confused, and when poker players get confused they call. Turn is a queen, which is a relatively blank card. BB donk-bets again. Hero can't really do anything but call. This is one of those situations where you don't want to turn your hand into a bluff. You're in position and the amount you raise is almost equivalent to the amount of the river bet that you'll get to call off if he decides to bluff the river. So Hero calls and the river is an offsuit deuce. BB donk-bets again for a half the pot. Hero is really confused but he has top pair and a good kicker. He's also getting a great price to satisfy his curiosity. BB might also be betting a smaller ace. Hero calls and gets shown AK or AQ.

Example 6.1: S3/S6 6-Max

SB: \$802

BB: \$670

UTG: \$468

MP: \$726

CO: \$1123

Hero (BTN): \$704

Preflop: Hero is BTN with A♠ T♠

3 folds, Hero raises to \$21, 1 fold, BB calls \$15

Flop: (\$45) A♥ 3♠ 9♣ (2 players)

BB bets \$33, *Hero calls \$33*

Turn: (\$111) Q♦ (2 players)

BB bets \$76, *Hero calls \$76*

River: (\$263) 2♥ (2 players)

BB bets \$130, *Hero calls \$130*

BB shows AK

Hero mucks

Facing 3-bets

Option 1:	Fold	→	Stack His 99+, AQ+
Option 2:	Reduce Opening Range	→	Difficult To Play Against Four-Bet JJ+, AK
Option 3:	Four-Bet	↗	Four-Bet Bluff As Stacks Increase (150BB+)
		↘	Never Four-Bet Bluff; Only TT+/AK
Option 4:	Call and C/R Flops	→	C/R With: Overs + Gutshot OESD Flush Draw Overs + BD Flush
Option 5:	Call In Position	→	Call With: Premiums SCs If 120BB+ Call/Call/Call

Chapter 7: A Common Difficult Spot

Let's think about playing QQ and AK from the small blind against CO openers with deep stacks. Assume in Example 7.1 that Hero and CO each have \$1000 and the blinds are \$5/\$10.

After investing \$125, assuming he is never bluffing, we put in another \$875 to win a \$2010 pot. We need 43.5% equity for a shove to be profitable (note this does not mean a shove is the *most* profitable play). **So if he is never bluffing, he must have jacks in his range for us to continue.**

What if he is bluffing and folds with frequency x ? Then we win $x \times (280 + 125 + 10)$. If y is our equity needed to shove profitably, we get the equation:

$$x \times 415 + (1-x) \times (y \times (1000 + 125 + 10) + (1-y) \times (-875)) = 0$$

or

$$y = (258x - 175) / (402(x-1))$$

Example 7.1: Theoretical Spot

CO opens to \$35

Hero three-bets from the SB to \$125

CO four-bets to \$280

	QQ	AKo
TT+, AK	52.4%	40.4%
JJ+, AK	47.4%	39.8%
QQ+, AK	40.2%	38.8%
KK+, AK	39.9%	37.1%
KK+	18.3%	18.5%

Figure 7.1: Relevant Table of Equities

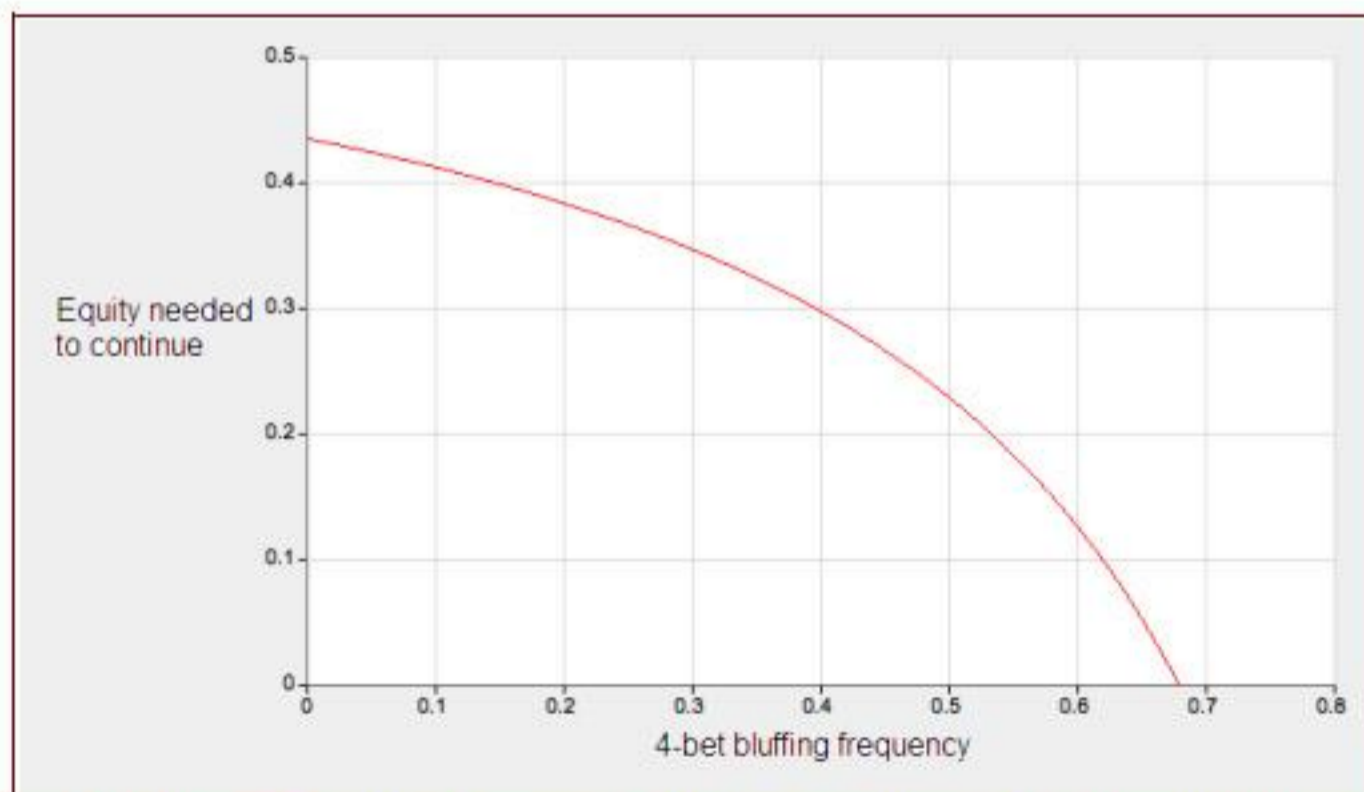


Figure 7.2: Graphic Representation of the relationship between our opponent's four-bet bluffing frequency and the equity we need to shove.

So, for example, if we have AK (QQ) in this spot and we believe our opponent is value re-raising with {QQ+, AK} then our equity is 38.8% (40.2%); our opponent must be four-bet bluffing in this spot with an 18.6% (13.9%) frequency for a shove to be profitable.

With \$1000 stacks, this model is reasonably accurate because if we five-bet, the money is going in and he can't six-bet bluff us.

But let's consider the same spot with \$2000 stacks. The major change is our opponent's re-raise and get-it-in range. Very few players will be taking TT all the way. Even fewer players will be taking QQ all the way here. Against most opponents, we are looking at a range of {KK+, AK} and sometimes an even tighter range. As we can see, getting this much money in preflop with QQ or AK is going to be a big mistake. Many mid-stakes players just chalk it up to an out of position cooler when they five-bet with their queens and run 200BB into KK/AA every time. The fact is, our opponent is bluffing a fair amount and with a hand like QQ it is frequently better to flat call and trap their bluff hands. We're still going to go broke on a 722 flop, but it's against a more favorable hand range and we extract more out of our opponent's bluffs. Playing QQ out of position can be especially tough when an ace or king flops, but when the flop contains an ace or a king it is even likelier that our opponent is bluffing! I would generally call one bet and give up if he shoves the turn. Your opponents are not that crazy, and very rarely are they going to be running 200BB bluffs. They have to strongly consider the possibility of us flatting with AA/KK/AK preflop. When we have AA in this spot preflop, it's quite unlikely our opponent has a hand that he is value four-betting due to card removal, so I would frequently call.

When we hold AK, there is one less king and one less ace in the deck. There are only **half** as many combinations of AA and KK (three combinations each) and just nine combinations of AK as opposed to sixteen. With a deep value four-betting range of just {KK+, AK}, our opponent is a whole 46% less likely to have a monster. Additionally, AK can be a lot tougher to play out of position in a massively bloated pot. For these reasons, I'm more likely to five-bet with AK. Once we've put that much money in though, it's going to be tough to fold.

You have the math at your disposal; now it is your job to accurately assess your opponents' ranges. Are they taking JJ all the way preflop when they four-bet at \$1600 stacks? Are they really bluffing with the correct frequency to allow you to continue?

Chapter 8: Flop – The Wonder Years

Players enjoy the feeling of raising preflop and making a continuation bet on the flop, frequently winning the pot with air. Thus, it's not a surprise that the majority of these players make the mistake of continuation betting almost every time they raise preflop. Mathematically, they can't have that many good hands. So how do we take advantage of these players?

The answer is based on how often they follow up with a bet on the turn. Against an opponent who makes lots of continuation bets but usually checks back the turn, I would check-call a lot of my range (pairs, gutshot and overs, backdoor flush draw and overs) and lead on the river. Against a more aggressive opponent who tends to follow up with turn bets and sometimes river bets, I'm more inclined to check-raise the flop with bluffs, semi-bluffs, and for value. Let's elaborate on my choices of action.

When we defend from the blinds against a late position opener, our hand range is stronger than Villain's hand range. Despite knowing this, it is hard to play our hands out of position because Villain knows we rarely have a premium hand. He can apply tremendous pressure on a variety of flops and make our lives miserable. Therefore, we should ask ourselves a few questions before continuing in the hand.

The first question is, "What is Villain's range and how many bets do I need to make to take the pot away from him?" On low drawy flops, we should consider check-folding because we most likely need two or more barrels to get Villain off his hand. Examples of such flops include 5♣ 6♣ T♠, 2♠ 4♠ 9♣, and 7♠ 9♣ T♣. Additionally, hands that peel these flops aren't going to fold to a turn bet very often. They usually have a pair to go with a draw and don't mind continuing.

The second question we should try to answer is, "What is Villain's range and with what turn and river cards can I pressure him?"

Here are a few boards where you should float or bluff-raise when in position: 5♠ 6♠ 9♣, J♦ 9♦ 2♣, 8♠ 9♠ T♣. These types of flops hit your preflop calling range because you can have two pair and sets. If your flop raise gets called, there are a lot of turn cards that you can bet: those that complete the draws and Broadway cards. Against a tough opponent who floats or bluff-raises often on these drawy connected boards, you should consider check-folding if you are out of position. If you are in position, consider checking behind and taking a free card if Villain check-raises a lot.

Cards that pair the board are the worst to continue bluffing with because they decrease the number of hands in your range. Additionally, Villain might talk himself into believing that your two pair was counterfeited.

One should limit his continuation bets as well. There is no exact percentage for it. Just make sure you check once in a while instead of continuation betting every flop. One reason for this is that continuation bets are expensive. Additionally, by giving your opponents a pot every once in a while, he'll give you more credit the next time you make a continuation bet and is less likely to float or bluff-raise you. Remember, it's OK not to win every pot.

The relationship between the MP, CO, and BTN is rarely discussed, but is critical for game flow considerations. When you open from the MP or the CO, it is to your advantage to have an image where the players in position believe you. To create this image, consider check-folding a few flops after your preflop opening is called. You don't want the person to your left playing in your pots or floating you when he does play. You want them to fold when you open a pot so you can get people out of position to play against you.

Against players who continuation bet a lot, check-call on a lot of dry flops and A/K/Q flops. The turn will likely go check-check. Once this happens, bet the river. I would also defend with a lot of high cards hands such as AK-AT/KQ-KJ from the blinds. These hands are great to check-call low flops with because they have decent equity and we may have the best hand at times. We also get a bet when an A/K/Q lands and we make a pair because Villain is likely going to bet at those cards. Our high card holdings also decrease the chance of Villain holding an overpair. If you are playing against an aggressive opponent who will be firing a lot of barrels, check-fold if you miss. When you do have a strong hand, **do not** check-raise. Check-call all the way.

Most players like to peel flops when they hit a pair without thinking too much about their opponent's hand range. When the turn card lands, they often wonder what to do next. Obviously, such a decision is easy if we hit our gin card. What if we don't hit and are facing a bet?

In Example 8.1, Villain opens MP in a six-handed game. Hero calls from the CO with 89s. The flop comes 5♣ 8♣ T♥. Villain makes a standard continuation bet. Before we decide whether to call, fold, or raise, we should consider what part of his hand range he's betting with. He will bet with his overpairs/sets/two pairs/draws. Will this opponent bet with his missed overs such as AJ-AK? Second, will he stack off with hands like AT or JJ on this flop?

Let's say Villain bets two-thirds of the pot with JJ and we raise his flop bet. What range of hands can he continue with? Keep in mind that if he has a hand like AT or JJ, he won't be too happy getting in on this flop; his equity is at best 40% against a range of sets/combo draws/flush draw

with an overcard. If Villain elects to call with such a hand, he will have some difficult guesswork to do because many turn cards {Q, K, A, 7, clubs} could kill his hand. Against a competent opponent who will often shove the river after betting the turn on the listed turn cards, JJ on this flop doesn't look that good anymore.

Another type of board one should often float are Axx flops. This is an even better play if there's a flush or straight draw on the flop. The majority of players will auto-continuation bet Axx flops and will check-fold the turn if they are called on the flop. If you don't know if villain does this, float a regular who continuation bets 90% of his range on an Axx flop and see what he does on the turn. Then you'll know.

Against regulars who have a narrow UTG preflop raising range (there are a lot of them in current games) consider floating on paired flops such as 22Q, 33K, and 55A. Look for flops that can hit your preflop calling range but rarely give these tight regulars a strong hand. They will inevitably

Example 8.1: S3/S6 6-Max

SB: \$594

BB: \$600

UTG: \$654.90

MP: \$640.80

Hero (CO) \$729.75

BTN: \$515

Preflop: (S9) Hero is CO with 8♥9♥

1 fold, MP raises to \$18, **Hero calls \$18**, *3 folds*

Flop: (S45) 5♣ 8♣ T♥ (2 players)

MP bets \$36, **Hero raises to \$115**, MP ...

bet on a Broadway, low pair flop and will check-fold on the turn.

The Dreaded Small Pairs

Players often have problems playing medium pocket pairs such as 77 to 99 post-flop when they don't hit a set. For example, Villain opens from the CO. Hero calls from the BB. The flop comes 2 5 T. Hero check-calls. The turn is a jack. Obviously, Villain will fire with a majority of his range here. Hero check-folds the turn or he'll have a difficult guess on the river because Villain will likely fire at any river besides a deuce, five, or ten.

The problem for these players is they rarely check-call a flop with a set. Once they do that opponents are less likely to fire on the turn. Players like to check-raise the flop with a set and hope to get paid off when a Villain has an overpair. The problem is our check-raising frequency is so low that we won't get paid off. Additionally, Villain doesn't often have a strong enough hand to stack off either. Next time try check-raising on a flop of 2 5 T and see where that leads you. Instead of the 77 you actually hold pretend you have 55 and play like it. You will find more folds than you expect.

Don't worry about "turning your hand into a bluff." You're not. You are trying to take down the pot right there and also are protecting your hand. Trust me, your friendly regulars won't float your check-raises that often.

Another line to take against players who fire too many barrels is flatting from the blinds with premium hands. These aggressive opponents like to fire barrel after barrel when they feel the turn and river cards weaken our range. By check-calling with hands such as KK/AA, you'll get paid off. Once they catch on that you do slow-play sometimes, they will barrel you less and you'll have less of a hard time playing these small pairs. Another line is the river check-raise and we'll get there later in the book.

By the way, if you think you slow-play sometimes—you don't. Try Exercise 8.1.

Exercise 8.1: Next time you play a session, write down how many times you check-call the flop with a monster and check both turn and river out of position.

Chapter 9: I Give, I Give

How many times have you found yourself in situations where you raise preflop, bet the flop, and bet the turn, only to give up on the river? This is probably the biggest leak among low to mid-stakes players. Obviously, the solution is to empty the clip more often but that's not the point of this section. Rather, we'll go over situations where you can take advantage of players who have such a tendency.

The first thing you should do is pay attention to players who will bet, bet, and check-fold the river; Hold'em Manager or PokerTracker will help with this. When players check, much of the time it's to check-fold. After all, wouldn't they want to bet the river with their strong hands to stack you? If the board is draw-heavy on the flop and turn, there's a higher chance Villain will check to induce a bluff. Nevertheless, more often than not it's to check-fold rather than to check-raise.

In Example 9.1, when you call the flop your hand range is 67, 88, 5x, 55, overpairs, and floats. After calling the turn bet your hand range no longer has air, but since the bet was small you can legitimately have draws. Once Villain checks the river, you have to bet because you will win this pot a lot of the time. Let's look at why you will win.

If Villain had trip fives or better he would've bet. The board isn't that drawy so you are more likely to have a made hand that will call his bet; there's also a chance you will check behind if he checks. If Villain has a pair of aces, he will bet more often than not because he was bluffing and now has top pair. No decent player wants to be known for bluffing when behind and not extracting

Example 9.1: S3/S6 No Limit Hold'em - 6 players

SB: \$586.40

BB: \$584

UTG: \$620

MP: \$862

CO: \$750

Hero (BTN): \$970

Preflop: Hero is BTN with 6♦ 7♦

2 folds, CO calls \$6, Hero raises to \$24, SB calls \$21, 1 fold, CO calls \$18

Flop: (\$78) 5♣ 8♠ 5♥ (3 players)

SB bets \$60, 1 folds, Hero calls \$60

Turn: (\$198) 2♦ (2 players)

SB bets \$65, Hero calls \$65

River: (\$328) A♦ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$223, SB tanks ...

value after sucking out. Villain might also fold a medium overpair such as 99 or TT since he realizes he can't beat anything but a bluff. Although you might have a straight draw in your range, you could have strong made hands that saw no reason to raise the turn.

Obviously, we're not advocating floating a player twice in hopes of a river check so you can bet. Rather, you have a draw on the flop so you call Villain's bet. On the turn you got suckered in by a small bet. Then on the river Villain decides to check. If Villain has a history of betting the flop and turn and check-folding the river, that's why you should bet the river.

Another line to use in this hand is to raise the flop. If Villain has 8x or 66, we can barrel lots of turn cards to make him fold. Additionally, he is not leading into the preflop raiser with trips too often. If Villain has a total bluff, we would rather he folds now. If he calls our flop bet, our decision on what to do depends a lot on the turn and river cards. We should empty the clip if turn and river are Broadway cards. We are obviously betting if we hit our straight as well.

Results: Villain called with A♠2♠ and won.

On the turn, Villain might be betting with 77, 87, 89, or 9T. He can have TT or a naked seven as well. On the river, his hand most likely cannot beat a pair of kings. If he has a hand like KQ or JT, he would bet. If Villain has flopped a set, two pair, or a straight when he donk-bet the flop, he would bet the river as well. The only hands that make sense for Villain to check the river are 77, 87, 89, 9T, TT, a naked seven, or turn flush draws that are afraid of getting called if he bets again.

Example 9.2 illustrates that a cheap showdown is never available when you play against a good player. Since you want to become a good player, you should bet this river with your holdings if they can't bet a pair of tens.

Example 9.2: S3/S6 No Limit Hold'em - 6 players

SB: \$623

BB: \$666

UTG: \$540

MP: \$880

CO: \$450

Hero (BTN): \$650

Preflop: Hero is BTN with A♦7♦

3 folds, Hero raises to \$24, SB calls \$21, 1 fold

Flop: (\$54) 6♠ 8♣ 9♦ (2 players)

SB bets \$40, Hero calls \$40

Turn: (\$134) Q♦ (2 players)

SB bets \$75, Hero calls \$75

River: (\$284) K♣ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$219, SB tanks ...

If you have a hand like QJ, you should consider betting half-pot on the river for value. We can safely fold to a check-raise despite getting great pot odds. That's because Villain is rarely bluffing on the river. Before you think Villain will put us on a draw and call, consider that there are a lot of hands we can hold as well. We don't necessarily have to raise the flop or turn with a straight, set, or even two pair. We might even have AA and decided not to raise the flop in order to play a small pot.

One different line we can take on this hand is raising the turn, especially when Villain bets half-pot. He likely has a draw himself or a marginal hand that wants to get to showdown for cheap. If we raise Villain's turn bet to \$199 and he calls, we should shove the river. We want to bet big on the river to dissuade Villain from considering pot odds if he happens to hold QT/QJ. If Villain three-bets all-in on the turn, we can call getting a good price to outdraw him.

Results: Villain tanked and folded.

Another common situation is when you peel a two-tone flop with a pair. The turn completes the flush but for whatever reason, you don't believe Villain and call. If the river is a fourth flush card, you should consider betting a majority of your hand range here. If Villain has a flush, he's going to make some type of bet. So when he checks please fire the river, even if you have a small pair. You will take down the pot an unbelievable percentage of the time.

In Example 9.3, we call the turn because sometimes our pair or our straight and trip outs are good. By the river, Villain will have us beat most of the time. He could have been bluffing with AQo all the way, he could have KK, or 9T. All these hands beat us. But when he checks the river, he rarely has a flush and we could easily have one in our range. So when Villain checks, you should fire on the river.

Example 9.3: \$10/\$20 No Limit Hold'em

SB: \$2323

BB: \$1866

UTG: \$5240

MP: \$2019

CO: \$2620

Hero (BTN): \$2350

Preflop: Hero is BTN with T♠8♠

2 folds, CO raises \$70, Hero calls \$70, 2 folds

Flop: (\$170) 8♥ 7♥ 2♣ (2 players)

CO bets \$150, Hero calls \$150

Turn: (\$470) J♥ (2 players)

CO bets \$388, Hero calls \$388

River: (\$1246) A♥ (2 players)

CO checks, Hero tanks ...

Against fishy players, we advocate betting as well since fish fold way more than they should on a four-flush board. They will see four hearts, see that they do not have one, and put you on a flush every time. They do not understand polarized hand ranges.

Chapter 10: The Magic Ace

How often do we find ourselves check-calling the flop and/or turn only to see an ace on the river and hate life? Since there are 48 combos of AK/AQ/AJ/AT available, Villain will have a pair of aces a fair amount of the time. When such situations arise, what can we do about them?

Countering The Ace

1. Check-raise any river if the turn is an ace and it goes check-check.
2. Check-raise an ace on the river if the turn goes check-check.
3. Check-raise our draws if we check-call the flop and see an ace on the turn.

The cool thing about these situations is when our opponents bet (for value or as a bluff) with a pair less than an ace, they'll fold a majority of the time to a check-raise. Think of the times when an ace lands and you don't want to check back for pot control and bet for value. You'll fold a majority of the time to a check-raise. Even if our opponents have a pair of aces, they'll fold more than half the time because they know that you know they have a pair of aces yet you still check-raise. Assuming you are a solid regular, another solid regular has to give you credit for having a hand that is better than a pair of aces and fold. This is because we usually have an ace as a kicker and when an ace lands and we check-raise, it's easy for us to represent aces up.

These examples still apply if we are in position. Actually, it is better if we are in position because by bluff-raising a turn ace our opponent has to be worried that the pot will become inflated; he'll be out of position with one street to play. If the ace is on the river, our opponent still has to worry that we might have aces up or that we decided to slow-play a set on the turn. One thing we have going for us is that players rarely bluff-raise the river ace, giving us more credit that we deserve.

If you are worried that our opponent will go into the leveling war with the, "He knows I know he knows I have a pair of aces," don't. Your opponent won't think like this and will choose the safe route by folding to your check-raise the first few times you try this. Obviously, you shouldn't be check-raising his turn bet every time an ace lands or he'll catch on. If he does catch up, all you have to do is

check-raise his turn bet every time an ace lands with your monsters and he'll keep paying you off. Now he'll think that you're capable of pulling such a move. From then on he'll keep leveling himself.

Chapter 11: Line Variations

From the examples we've shown, we hope you recognize occasionally flatting with QQ+ and AQ+ from the blinds against an aggressive opponent is not a bad idea. Players rarely put you on these premium hands (rightfully so) when they consider your hand range during a hand. But having a reputation for these hands in your range allows you to check-raise bluff more because there are more combinations for you to check-raise for value with. You can also check-raise rivers (for bluffs and value) more often because it's no longer a spot where you either have the nuts or air. You can have AA, KK, and AK as well. Thus, one important concept to keep in mind is you should always try to widen your range on each end. Keeping your range too heavy on either end will make it very easy for your opponents to exploit.

In this chapter, we'll go over different type of lines you can add to your game to make yourself a tougher opponent. When we used the word tougher, we don't mean place a "Made in Russia" tag on your game. A tough player's opponents won't know when he's value-betting or bluffing, and they will end up making costly mistakes.

In poker you only have a few options at your disposal: check, fold, call, or raise. Thus, there is a finite sequence of actions you can take whenever you play a poker hand. Here's a typical hand: A player from the cutoff or button raised preflop to steal the blinds. One of the blinds calls. The flop comes Axx. The blind usually check-calls one street before folding to a turn bet. There is rarely a showdown. On to the next hand.

About a year ago, there was more check-raising on the flop after one of the blinds defended. It's not surprising that it's tougher to play against players who often check-raise with a wide range of hands. But after the concept of "don't turn your hand into a bluff" became popular, players started playing passively on the early streets in hopes of slowing down their opponents in order to see a cheap showdown. Of course, if your opponent is any good, that cheap showdown is never available.

Is there a way to counter a good, aggressive cutoff or button who steals too much? As I recommended earlier in the "Preflop Play" section, folding is the best option. But let's say we want to play back because we don't enjoy others stealing our blinds. The best line we can take is check-raise the flop and bet the turn. Remember, since we also flat QQ+ and AK some of the time, our hand range is wide enough on the flop that we can add a few bluffs or marginal hands like 77, 88, 99 on a one high, two low, or three low cards flop. Don't worry if you're not the type to check-raise the flop with a small

pair or mid-pair. You can check-call the flop, hope the turn goes check-check, and check-raise the majority of made hands on the river for value and bluffs.

The River Check-Raise

The river check-raise is a move almost everyone claims is in their arsenal but rarely puts to use unless they hold the nuts. The reason is, most are either afraid of getting called or they'll talk themselves into check-calling instead; they think their opponents' range is either the nuts or air. This is an incorrect assumption because some people value-bet thin. One cookie for those who noticed that we should check-raise opponents who often value-bet thin. Another type of opponent to check-raise is one who bluffs a lot. Now, what kind of situations are best for us to check-raise?

The easiest situation to recognize is after you check-call a flop bet on an ace, king, or queen-high flop and the turn checks through. After Villain checks behind on the turn on these types of flops, his range is fairly weak. With strong hands, he would bet the turn to extract value in case you have top pair and have a hard time folding. For this reason, it's hard for Villain to have any type of hand that can call a big river check-raise. If Villain happens to make a great read and call, then we must adjust accordingly. However, as a rule of thumb, we don't give people credit for being that good/tricky until they prove otherwise.

Pulling the river check-raise seems scary at first. But like any bluff you pull in poker, you'll get used to it after your first few times. People usually give you credit for a strong hand if you play a solid ABC game. People usually don't have a strong hand after checking behind on the turn; most of the time, they don't have a hand to call you with when you make the river check-raise. Think of the times you raised preflop, continuation bet the flop, checked behind the turn, and bet the river because you can't win with your high card. You've done that more times than you thought, right?

In Example 11.1, you check the river with your middle pair hoping for a cheap showdown and decide to turn your pair into a bluff if he bets. It is very hard for him to call your check-raise because he almost never has anything that good here. He would bet the turn with any big ace as well as sets and two pairs and check behind with a pair of aces with a weak kicker. However, the majority of the time he has air and has to bluff at the river to win the pot.

The best boards for the river check-raise are those that don't have straight or flush draws on the flop. Players don't give credit (rightfully so) when a draw misses on the river and see a check-raise. After all, if it's a draw heavy flop, wouldn't you play your made hands faster or bet the river hoping Villain puts you on a missed

draw? Two cookies for you if you think we should check-raise the river with AA/KK on these type of boards.

It's also important to be able to represent a wide range of hands when you check-raise the river. My rule of thumb is to be able to represent at least ten combinations. People will talk themselves into calling if our range is polarized to the nuts or air, especially when our nut combinations are less than five.

Example 11.1: \$5/\$10 - 6 Max

SB: \$823

BB (Hero): \$966

UTG: \$1540

MP: \$1180

CO: \$950

BTN: \$1650

Preflop: Hero is BB with 9♠ T♠

3 folds, BTN raises to \$30, 1 fold, Hero calls \$30

Flop: (\$65) A♠ 5♣ 9♦ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$50, Hero calls \$50

Turn: (\$165) K♦ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN checks

River: (\$165) 4♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$120, Hero raises to \$340

Example 11.2: \$5/\$10 No Limit Hold'em - 6 players

Hero (SB): \$1452

BB: \$218

UTG: \$2311

MP: \$1745

CO : \$1028

BTN: \$1274

Preflop: Hero is SB with 6♠ 6♣

2 folds, CO raises to \$35, 1 folds, **Hero calls \$30**, 1 folds

Flop: (\$80) 8♣ 2♠ 4♦ (2 players)

Hero checks, CO bets \$55, **Hero calls \$55**

Turn: (\$190) 9♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, CO checks

River: (\$190) 3♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, CO bets \$140, **Hero raises to \$430**, CO ...

Take a look at Example 11.2. At first glance, we represent a backdoor flush. But if your opponent is smart enough he will recognize that we rarely have a flush in our hand on this board. Let's go over the legitimate combinations that we can hold in our hand range.

We can have A♣ 2♣, A♣ 4♣, A♣ 5♣, 4♣ 5♣ and maybe 4♣ 6♣. That's only five combinations. Some players might reason they check-raise this river with a straight/two pair/set some of the time. While this sounds reasonable, the reality is that players rarely check-raise the river with those holdings. The main reason is that we don't know if Villain has the flush or not. Thus, against

competent opponents, our default assumption is that straights/two pairs/sets aren't strong enough to check-raise the river but they're too strong to check in position as Villain may check behind. So we bet and soul read if we get raised; soul read in this case means fold.

Another reasonable argument for check-raising is to fold out better hands. The question is what better hands will value-bet this river and fold? If you think he might bluffing, then we should call.

Results: Villain tanked and called with A9.

Although this is an easy hand to check-raise because we have two pair, there's a lot to learn here. This is a really good board to check-raise because we can represent a wide range of hands. Our range might be KJ, 55, 22, 88 (18 combinations) and once in a long while, JJ. It's also easy to convince Villain we have a strong hand because there aren't any strong backdoor hands. We would play hands like A5, 66-TT, and 43 in the same manner. Another reason why this is a great spot to check-raise is because Villain could be value-betting thin with AJ/QJ if he puts us on a range of A5, 66-TT and wants us to make a heroic call.

Villain rarely has better than a king on this board since he's betting KQ+ the majority of the time on the turn. When Villain bets the river, the number of combinations he can call our check-raise with is quite small. He'll have 4.5 combos of KJ, assuming Villain bet that hand half of the time, and three combos of JJ. Now compare that figure with the 12 combinations of AJ, 12 combinations of JQ, and the times he has air and has to bluff to win the pot.

Results: Villain folded.

Example 11.3: \$5/\$10 No Limit Hold'em

Hero (SB): \$1452

BB: \$634

UTG: \$611

MP: \$1324

CO : \$1111

BTN: \$2077

Preflop: Hero is SB with K♠ J♣

UTG calls \$10, 2 folds, BTN raises to \$45, Hero calls \$40, 1 fold, UTG calls \$35

Flop: (\$145) K♥ 5♠ 2♦ (3 players)

Hero checks, UTG checks, BTN bets \$115,

Hero calls \$115, UTG folds

Turn: (\$375) 8♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN checks

River: (\$375) J♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$288,

Hero raises to \$799, BTN ...

Example 11.4: \$5/\$10 - 6 Max

SB: \$1445

Hero (BB): \$2145

UTG: \$2311

MP: \$1045

CO : \$428

BTN: \$1274**Preflop:** Hero is BB with T♦ A♠

3 folds, BTN raises to \$35,

1 folds, Hero calls \$30

Flop: (\$75) K♠ T♣ 4♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$55, Hero calls \$55

Turn: (\$185) 8♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN checks

River: (\$185) 5♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$155,

Hero raises to \$511, BTN tanks ...

In Example 11.4, once Villain checks the turn in position he rarely has a flush. Most players would only consider checking back a turned flush if they have the nut flush. Trickier players might rarely check back with the second or third highest flush draws. Let's take a moment and think of how many times you have checked back on the turn with a non-nut flush in position during the last six months. Not often?

When Villain checks behind on the turn, Villain's range is weighted towards a pair, sometimes one with a flush draw. Villain might have two pair or better as well. When we check the river, Villain is going to value-bet his top pair, good kicker and obviously two pair or better. Since we know Villain rarely has a flush in this spot, we can check-raise and put him to a difficult decision. It's also a legitimate check-raise because a standard way to play a flush draw

is to check-call the flop and check the turn hoping Villain will bet. It is also reasonable to check the river some of the time since we can miss a check-raise on the turn and may try to trap Villain again. If you don't check the river some of the times with the flush after the turn goes check-check, you should.

Results: Villain folded. We might have had the best hand but that's not the point of the example!

Here's a line a few players take that players find it hard to counter: The preflop raiser checks back the flop and raises a turn bet. The majority of the time, we don't have anything and it's very hard for us to continue. One option is to three-bet. Three-betting is usually bad because we create a huge pot out of position with one more street to go. There's still a lot of money left to be played and we don't know what to do on the river if our hand doesn't improve.

One way to counter a Villain who will occasionally take this line is to check the turn more with your weak one pair hands and bet the river if he checks behind the turn. If I have a strong hand on the turn, I would lead, call his turn raise, and check-call or check-shove the river. I would probably three-bet shove the turn the majority of the time with my strong combo draws. Much of the time these hands have enough pot equity and fold equity to make the play profitable.

As you can see, it is a headache to put people on a range after they check behind the flop and raise our turn bet. For this reason, we should consider adding such a line to our arsenal if the positions are reversed. One suggestion is if there is a particular regular who you have a lot of trouble with, go over all the hands you have seen him play and see what moves he makes that give you a hard time. Analyze them and add the good ones to your own game.

Now, let's get back to the turn raise. What hands should we be raising the turn with?

The decision to raise a turn lead is related more to your opponent's style rather than your hand. If Villain's the type to always lead the turn after you check back the flop, then you should consider raising his turn bet often. If you don't know whether Villain's the type to always lead the turn, the only way to figure this out is pay attention when you are in late position and Villain is in the blinds. Go ahead and raise preflop and let him defend from the blinds. Check back the flop and see what he does on the turn. Repeat this sequence for three hands and see what Villain does. If you notice he leads the turn all three times, then perhaps you have found the answer. Obviously, three hands is a small sample size but at least you have something of a read. Thus, it's fine to raise the turn with a very wide range.

The best turn cards to raise are those that gives the illusion of making you two pair. An ace is the best of these because it's common to check back the flop with a small pair with an ace kicker hoping to see a cheap showdown. Additionally, a middle turn card {7, 8, 9} is a good candidate as well because you might have turned a small two pair, set, or gutshot. Obviously, representing a set is not a good idea because there are only three combinations of a turned set. It's hard for Villain to do anything if he has a tiny pair or a high card. No one is going to realize your turn range is narrow and start three-betting you. They will choose the safe route and fold if they don't have anything.

Question: How often should we fire the river if we get called?

Answer: A lot! If you don't have a history of raising turn bets after checking behind (you probably don't because almost no one uses this line), then Villain will most likely three-bet you on the turn with the top of his range and get the money in before the action slows down on the river. Additionally, Villain doesn't want to call and let you check behind on the river. If Villain has a strong but not great hand, he will call your turn raise and check-reevaluate on the river. He'll fold most of the time he doesn't improve.

Example 11.5: \$5/\$10 - 6 Max

SB: \$1225

BB: \$1243

UTG: \$1884

MP: \$1912

Hero (CO): \$2697

BTN: \$2474

Preflop: Hero is CO with T♥ A♣

1 fold, MP raises to \$35, Hero calls \$35, 3 folds

Flop: (\$85) 7♣ 5♣ 2♠ (2 players)

MP bets \$65, **Hero calls \$65**

Turn: (\$215) K♥ (2 players)

MP bets \$165, **Hero raises to \$422, MP folds**

A line lots of bad players execute that gets a lot of folds is the min-raise. Due to its fishiness, the majority of players don't think about adding it to their arsenal. Think about the times you face a min-raise after you raised (or re-raised) preflop, continuation bet, and get min-raised. Relive your feelings from that moment. You didn't like it too much, did you? And despite your angry feeling, what did you do the majority of the time? You folded because fish almost always have the nuts when they min-raise.

What happens if a solid regular does it? What does it mean anyway? Even if we know a regular does it as a bluff, if he does it one out of five times we can't do anything to counter it. The best boards to do it on are obviously Axx and Kxx boards. On these flops, when Hero faces a min-raise he can't do anything unless Hero has an ace or a king. Hero's equity versus Villain's range of hands that include an ace, a king, and a few random bluffs is still low. The best thing about the min-raise is you are risking 1 to win 1.5. Thus, you only need to succeed about 40% of the time to break even. So if you balance your range to min-raise with trash less than 20% of the time, you'll show a profit in the long run. It also makes you a tougher player to play against and people will be more reluctant to continuation bet every time. Congratulations for recognizing that min-raising is a line you should often use against opponents who continuation bet too much (75%+).

Example 11.6: \$5/\$10 - 6 Max

SB: \$1321

BB: \$1555

UTG: \$1654

Hero (MP): \$1445

CO: \$1577

BTN: \$981

Preflop: Hero is MP with 6♠ 7♠

UTG raises to \$35, Hero calls \$35, 4 folds

Flop: (\$85) Q♦ 5♠ 9♥ (2 players)

MP bets \$65, Hero calls \$65

Turn: (\$215) A♣ (2 players)

MP bets \$165, Hero raises to \$330,
MP folds

Example 11.6 demonstrates the min-raise against a Villain with a high double barrel rate.

Donk bets are great at extracting value and to use as cheap bluffs. They also put players on tilt. Most important of all, they help us define our opponent's hand range.

Before I expand on this, let's look at which types of opponents are great to donk bet into. We should donk bet into passive players or nitty regulars who play 10+ tables and like to fold to avoid a difficult decision. Think of how many times you see a person donk into you on the flop and you sit there wondering what they are doing it with. It's so confusing that you don't bother to put them on a hand range. Sure, you come up with some analysis like, "Hmm, that's weird. I never saw him donk bet before. He could be doing it with the nuts, two pair, or air." Then you look down at your unpaired cards and click fold. If the previous monologue did not invoke any memories, the next time you play, keep a notepad open and check how many times you fold to a donk bet.

Exercise 11.1: Next time you play, record how often you fold to donk bets.

Some of you might say you raise donk bets a lot. This may be true but it can be misleading; do you raise all donk bets or only those of fishes? You likely fold about 95% of the time to regulars who donk bet when you don't have anything. There isn't anything wrong with this. We just wanted to point this out in case you feel you raise donk bets all the time.

We wouldn't donk bet into an aggressive player without a strong hand. Aggressive players hate facing donk bets. Because they're aggressive they want to bet to take down pots. By donking we take away that option. True to their nature, they raise and follow through with their bluffs. One cookie for you if you came up with the idea that you shouldn't check-raise aggressive players but rather lead into them on the turn after check-calling the flop. It extracts value from their marginal hands that they would check behind on the turn hoping to see a free showdown.

Donking the turn also gives Villain the impression that we have a marginal holding or a draw and want to see the river at our own price. This reasoning might persuade an aggressive opponent to go crazy. Remember, nothing tilts an aggressive opponent more than check-call, check-call, check-call or donk, donk, donk. We would also donk into players who have a tendency to check back a lot of flops.

This is because our calling range from the blinds is tighter than his opening range from late position and you do not want him to get a free card.

Flops that are good for donk bets are flops that make Villain think they might get three-bet if they raise our donk bet. For example, on a flop of 4♠ 6♦ 8♦, when we donk bet this flop we might have 4♦ A♦, 7♦ 9♦, 44, 66, 88, or a sneaky overpair. Against that range Villain is likely going to get re-raised and is more willing to give up to our donk bet. Conversely, if we face a donk bet on that flop, we would fold majority of our air, call with marginal hands looking for cheap showdowns, and raise with our strong holdings.

A great situation to donk bet is when the river completes a draw outside of the one we're drawing to. For example, if we get to the turn against an aggressive opponent and check-call his bet with a flush draw + pair (or gutter). The river completes the open-ended straight draw and we lead out. Villain can make a tough lay-down because he might hold air or a small pair.

Chapter 12: Everyday I'm Barreling

Players know they should bet the turn more often after betting the flop and they should bet the river after betting the flop and turn. The question is, what are the good spots to fire second and third barrels? The simplest answer is boards where a lot of turn and river cards strengthen our perceived hand range and consequently weaken our opponent's hand range.

Take a look at Example 12.1. This is a great spot for us to continue betting because the Q♦ strengthens our perceived range. When we fire on the flop, we can have sets, overpairs, and overcards. On the turn, we can still have sets, overpairs, and some of our overcards paired the queen. We also have straight draws and flush draws. If Villain has a hand like 77, 88, A5, or 98 he will have a hard time continuing. The river, however, is even more difficult to call if it is a ten or higher.

A general guideline is to keep betting if the turn and the river cards are larger than the highest card on the flop.

Another flop to use pressure on is 4♣ 6♣ 9♠.

If we raise our opponent's bet, it's hard for him to continue if he has air or a marginal holding. It's hard for him to re-raise us with a hand like TT or JJ because he knows if he gets it in on the flop against our hand range (sets, two pairs, combo draws, flush draws with overs), his equity is at best 35%. If he calls, our turn decision will be difficult since we know he will likely re-raise us only with the top of his range on this flop. Conversely, a lot of turn and river cards will make him miserable as well.

An important criteria for barreling our opponents is considering which blind are we playing. If the Villain is in the SB, he should have a narrower range because there's a risk of him getting squeezed if he calls. We must also consider whether he has a history of flatting preflop with QQ+.

Example 12.1: S3/S6 6-Max

SB: \$802

BB: \$670

UTG: \$468

MP: \$726

CO: \$1123

Hero (BTN): \$704

Preflop: Hero is BTN with X X

3 folds, Hero raises to \$21, 1 fold, BB calls \$15

Flop: (\$45) 2♠ 5♦ 9♣ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$33, BB calls \$33

Turn: (\$111) Q♦

BB checks, Hero bets \$82, BB ...

We should also consider how our opponents play out of position with their strong hands. Do they check-call or check-raise with a set on a dry board? Do they check-call or check-raise on a board that has a flush or straight draw? What do they do with hands such as top pair, medium kicker? When we know the answer to these questions it is much easier to run a bluff. My default read is people rarely check-call with sets out of position because they hope we have a big pair and will pay them off. People also like to check-call with top pair, medium kicker a lot because they don't want to turn their hands into a bluff. What they will do, interestingly enough, is check-fold the turn or call the turn only to fold the river. Again, we blame the high stakes community for coming up with the "Don't turn your hand into a bluff" concept; players play worse when they don't know in which situations it applies.

The above guidelines are to help you recognize which spots are good to continue barreling. Now, let's consider which spots are bad to fire barrels.

Bad spots to fire barrels are when the flop comes low and the turn and river cards are ten or less. When people check-call the flop, that's the kind of turn and river cards they are hoping to see. Players call when they see what they like. It's that simple.

A common mistake is bluffing when the river pairs the board and there was a draw on the flop. It's a bad spot to bluff yet people bluff in this spot all the time and get clipped often. Betting here is bad because the paired river card lowers the number of combinations of nut hands that we can hold.

Note that we shouldn't fire lots of barrels against opponents who have a high frequency of semi-bluffing the turn. This is called the delayed semi-bluff and is a great line to use against aggressive players like us.

Example 12.2 is an example of where it's bad to think about barreling, but once you start you should empty the clip.

This flop hits a lot of BB's preflop calling range. We will get check-raised occasionally on this flop. Our hand might have some showdown value against hands like AJ or KQ. If he's a nitty player I don't mind a bet, although I would check behind a majority of the time. In this situation, I decided to bet and was called.

The turn is a king and it is obviously a good card to fire another barrel. The problem is a lot of his range {66, 65, 76, 88} that peeled on the flop isn't going to fold to a turn bet, especially on a card where our betting frequency is high. In addition, he might be trapping us with hands like 68, 44, 55, 77, or is check-calling with AA. For these reasons, I like checking back the turn and giving up on the hand. In this situation, I decided to bet. I get stubborn, too.

One important concept to think about is if I bet on the turn, I should always follow through on the river, except if the river is a three or a seven. Our measly pair of fours is never good on the river and Villain might fold to a river bet because this is how we would play our nut hands as well.

Results: I bet the river. He tanked; eventually he called and won with AK.

Example 12.2: \$10/\$20 - 6 players

SB: \$3181

BB: \$2184

UTG: \$2420

MP: \$2132

Hero/Tri (CO) : \$2355

BTN: \$1370

Preflop: Hero is CO with A♠ 4♠

2 folds, Hero raises to \$80, 2 folds, BB calls \$60

Flop: (\$170) 4♣ 5♦ 7♥ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$140, SB calls \$140

Turn: (\$450) K♠ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$388, SB calls \$388

River: (\$1226) J♠ (2 players)

SB checks, Hero bets \$955, SB tanks ...

Chapter 13: One Size Does Not Fit All

Bet sizing is an important element in poker, yet it is rarely discussed among poker players. Sure, they'll say something like "bet bigger" or, "I hate your bet size." Sometimes they'll reply, "I love your bet size because your river bet is slightly under pot," but that's as far as they'll go.

In this section, we'll learn how to use different bet sizes to gain information, to confuse our opponents, and to get a cheap showdown. The key is learning how to tailor our bet sizes to maximize our EV.

Players often fall into the trap of betting three-fourths of the pot on each street. Their reasoning is that they're harder to read if they maintain a set betting pattern. In reality, by three-fourth potting every street on most hands, you actually make yourself easier to read. This is especially true on boards where you represent the nuts or nothing when there are very few combinations of nut hands. You don't actually bet pot on every street on a board of QJ23Q with AJ, do you? If you do, what hands do you think are calling the river that you beat?

For those who are convinced varying bet sizes gives away information: Does this mean you can read an opponent's hand well if your opponent varies his bet sizes? Players don't understand by varying our bet sizes, we can manipulate the size of the pot (pot controlling) while concealing the strength of our range. It allows us to get to showdown at our price. Players often believe pot control and getting to showdown cheaply means checking behind—giving off the strength of our hand. Assuming we play against competent opponents, they'll realize that we try to control the pot size if we check behind on the turn or check-call. However, if our bet sizes vary, it is harder to put us on a range and we can get value out of hands that wouldn't call a pot-sized bet on the later streets. Below are two examples on how to extract the most value from our hands.

In Example 13.1, you basically have the nuts and you should try your best to get all the money in. Instead of making your standard three-fourths pot bet, try betting half-pot (\$120) or 40% of the pot (\$105). This might induce Villain to make a reckless raise, while simultaneously balancing against times when you missed and want to take down the pot cheaply.

Example 13.2 demonstrates a common error. Instead of varying your bet size, you decide to near pot it because you want to make him pay for his draw. Considering stack sizes, this is a situation where all the money is going in no matter what card lands on the turn after betting the flop. There's no need to protect your hand with a big bet. Bet one-third of the pot to get Villain to call with hands like TT or A9; he will have a hard time folding on the turn because of pot odds. If you open shove or near pot it, it's really hard for him to call with marginal holdings.

Example 13.1: \$5/\$10 No Limit

Hero (SB): \$1452

BB: \$1634

UTG: \$611

MP: \$1324

CO : \$1111

BTN: \$2077

Preflop: Hero is SB with K♠ K♣

3 folds, BTN raises to \$30,

Hero raises to \$120, *1 fold*, BTN calls \$90

Flop: (\$250) 3♥ 3♠ 2♦ (2 players)

Hero bets \$105-120, BTN ...

Example 13.2: \$2/\$4 No Limit

Hero (SB): \$632

BB: \$534

UTG: \$311

MP: \$543

CO : \$404

BTN: \$202

Preflop: Hero is SB with A♦ A♥

3 folds, BTN raises to \$14,

Hero raises to \$52, *1 fold*, BTN calls \$38

Flop: (\$108) 7♠ 9♠ J♣ (2 players)

Hero bets \$92, BTN ...

Situations will arise where by the river you think your opponent's range is largely composed of draws. You're on a draw and have missed as well. Bet one-third of the pot. It's difficult for him to call if he has ace or king high. If you think it's easy for Villain to call or bluff-raise, think of the times where you get to the river with a busted draw or a tiny pair and someone makes a one-third or one-fourth pot bet. You fold because you think he's trying to extract additional value. You should consider making these kind of bets on the river in re-raised pots when you suspect both of you have AK. Instead of seeing a free showdown, throw a small bet out there to make him fold.

The above examples illustrate situations where you think your opponent has nothing and can't call your bet even if he knows you are bluffing. After all, no one wants to bluff-call. One important concept regarding bet sizing is situations will arise where it doesn't matter what the bet size is. On the same note, situations will arise where Villain can't call your bet even if it is a really small bet; the above examples are such situations.

For those who argue these small bets get bluff-raised on the river, just bet bigger to avoid it! First off, bluff-raising on the river doesn't occur as much as people think, especially if you are a good player who sometimes bets one-third pot with the nuts to try to extract value out of a weak hand range. The river bluffing frequency is really low in the small and mid-stakes games. Take a moment and think of how many times you got bluff-raised on the river when you hold the nuts? Rarely. The reason is when they do raise you on the river, they have the nuts, which explains why you don't.

A lot of players always suggest bluff-raising when they are discussing a hand with their friends or on a forum but when it comes to pulling the trigger they rarely do so. They'll think, "This is a good spot to bluff-raise, but..." and choose to not make the attempt. Second, if a player is good enough to recognize that a blocking bet shows weakness, he's good enough to recognize if a pot size bet is weak or strong based on the action and board texture. Don't be afraid of getting bluff-raised. Most of the time when you get raised on the river after showing strength on the previous streets you're likely beat. There's no shame in folding. It's not like you have never bluffed another player before.

Below are two examples where different bet sizes helped define Villains' hand ranges so I could continue my barreling ways.

Example 13.3: \$3/\$6 No Limit Hold'em

BTN: \$778.30

SB: \$624.10

Hero/Tri (BB): \$624.00

UTG: \$241.00

CO: \$120.00

Preflop: Hero is BB with 4♣ 4♦

2 folds, **BTN raises to \$18**, I fold,

Hero raises to \$63, BTN calls \$45

Flop: (\$129.00) A♦ J♥ 5♣ (2 players)

Hero bets \$72, BTN calls \$72

Turn: (\$273.00) 7♠ (2 players)

Hero bets \$95, BTN calls \$95

River: (\$463.00) K♥ (2 players)

Hero bets \$394 all in, BTN tanks ...

Villain in Example 13.3 is a typical 23/15 regular who doesn't call three-bets often. Preflop was standard because I like to re-raise TAGs who open a wide range in late position and who call very few re-raises. The flop betting was normal; it was a great board to make a continuation bet on. I bet and once Villain called I decided that I was done with the hand. As it turned out, I got a timing tell from Villain after his flop call and I decided that his flop calling range was weak. On the turn, I made a small bet that helped define his hand range. If Villain had AK/AQ (or even AT), he was likely shoving the turn because the board was getting drawy. Once Villain called the turn instead of shoving, his hand range was likely comprised of marginal holdings looking for a cheap showdown. Like I have said many times, when you play against a good player, the cheap showdown is never available.

I was planning to shove any river and the off-suit king was the best card in the deck. I tanked and shoved; Villain folded.

Example 13.4: S3/S6 No Limit Hold'em

BTN: \$399.15

Hero/Tri (SB): \$608.25

BB: \$696.75

UTG: \$183.10

MP: \$1036.00

CO: \$1223.40**Preflop:** (\$9.00) Hero is SB with K♠ A♦*2 folds, CO raises to \$18, 1 fold,**Hero raises to \$63, 1 fold, CO calls \$45***Flop:** (\$132.00) 2♦ 4♦ J♥ (2 players)*Hero bets \$72, CO calls \$72***Turn:** (\$276.00) 6♣ (2 players)*Hero bets \$75, CO calls \$75***River:** (\$426.00) 5♣ (2 players)*Hero bets \$398.25 all in, CO tanks ...*

Example 13.4's Villain was 30/20 and very aggressive; I had won a couple pots off him.

Preflop and flop were standard in this pot. Again, I got a timing tell on his flop call that indicated a weak calling range with hands such as 55-TT; Villain might have held overcards as well. He was less likely to have a flush draw because he would've raised on the flop. Thus, on the turn I made a small bet on a board where Villain was forced to shove with the top of his hand range due to the nature of the board. Once he called, I was shoving any river as well.

Results: Both Villains folded because that's what most people do after calling preflop, flop, and on the turn.

Chapter 14: Three-Bet Pots

When most players hear the words *three-bet pot*, they freeze and go into a sense of disbelief. It seems they never do well in them. They get excited because of the preflop action and the amount of money in the pot so they stop thinking in terms of hand ranges.

Here are a few fundamentals regarding three-bet pots that should improve your play in the future:

Considerations To Make In Re-Raised Pots

1. The pots are bigger so people are more inclined to fight for them.
2. The stack to pot ratio is smaller.
3. Hand ranges are narrower.
4. Players don't (or can't) vary their lines as much.

Now let's get to a scenario where we can visualize what I just wrote.

Here's a typical scenario for a three-bet pot. You open in late position to steal the blinds. One of the blinds re-raises. You call with a hand that isn't AA/KK/QQ. You face a continuation bet on a Q76 flop. The turn is a nine and it goes check-check. River is an ace and you face a river bet. What do you do in this spot if you have KQ/JJ/TT or some type of middle pair? The most common answer is to flip a coin between folding and calling. Somehow, it lands on folding more than 50%. So what can you do differently so that you'll increase your chance of winning in this spot in the future?

Before we take any option, let's go over the board. An opponent usually bets 100% of his range on that flop. Why? Because it's a great flop to bet since it *supposedly* hits a lot of his re-raising range. However, once he checks the turn nine, what exactly is his range? He would bet KQ most of the time and AA/KK/QQ/AQ with almost as much frequency. Unless you are known to float a lot, he would bet his two pairs and sets; he does this because the majority of your hands that call that type of flop will check behind on the turn and hope to see a cheap showdown. So when he checks, his hand range shifts heavily toward missed overs like AK, AJ, AT, or pocket pairs such as JJ/TT and random suited connectors. Now, what is your range when you check behind this board? You will probably bet any hand that beats KQ and check back the rest of the hands that are often good enough to see a showdown

but can't really call a check-raise. You can also check back sets or AA some of the time since his hand range after checking the turn is either sets or weak pairs or non-pair hands.

The river is an ace. Although it strengthens his hand range, the majority of holdings in his range are a top pair type of hand. You're facing a three-fourths pot bet on the river. What do you do there with less than top pair? If you call you only have to be correct one-third of the time to break even. Villain has to know that after you call the flop and check back the turn, you have some hand that you want to show down. You *might* have a monster and decided to slowplay. So what is the most profitable play? Why not shove the river with the majority of your range that cannot beat Ax? He'll fold all his bluffs, most of his weak pairs and call with his monsters. Assuming the pot is \$600 by the river and he bets \$450 with \$650 behind, how often does your play have to work in order to show a profit?

Finding Break-Even Folding Frequency

Shove And Get Called = - \$1100. Shove And Villain Folds = \$600 + \$450

$$S0 = 1050(X) + (1-X)(-1100)$$

$$X \approx 51\%$$

From our calculation, Villain has to fold 51% of the time. Now, if you are thinking, "Wow, that's a really low number. I'm going to bluff-raise the river more now," great! If you are thinking, "Wow, that's a high number. I'm not sure if I can make him fold that often on the river," think of all the times you held a strong hand on the river and you shoved over a river bet. How often did you get called? Exactly. This type of play works even better if you have an ABC solid image because you obviously cannot teach nits a new trick.

For those who are still skeptical, good for you. I wouldn't believe a concept after looking at a simple hand and an algebraic equation either. So let's examine another simple scenario. In this situation, the roles are switched because being Villain is so much more fun than being a good guy.

Example 14.1: S5/S10 - 6 Max

SB: S1445

Hero (BB): S1240

UTG: S2311

MP: S1045

CO : S428

BTN: S1175**Preflop:** Hero is BB with A♦ J♠

3 folds, BTN raises to S35,

1 folds, **Hero raises to S125**, BTN calls S90**Flop:** (S255) Q♠ 7♣ 6♦ (2 players)**Hero bets S175**, BTN calls S175**Turn:** (S605) 9♠ (2 players)**Hero checks**, BTN checks**River:** (S605) A♣ (2 players)**Hero bets S360**, BTN raises to S875

In Example 14.1, someone opens from late position. You re-raise with AJ because Villain opens wide from late position. The flop comes Q76 so it's a good flop to continuation bet. You get called. Turn is a nine and it goes check-check. River is an ace. You bet three-fifths of the pot and hope Villain has a small pair and calls so you can whisper how sick you are to yourself. Unfortunately, your opponent shoves and you hate life. You can't really call because he's a solid player that's capable of slow-playing a big hand on the turn to get a bet out of you on the river. Although we know he's capable of turning his hand into a bluff, there are a lot of combinations that he could slow-play on the turn. His range can be AQ, AA, QQ, maybe 58/77/66 if you re-raise him a lot from the blinds and stacks are more than 100bb. Besides, players are more

apt to call with hands like KQ/98/TT/88 and hope you're betting because it's a scare card rather than bluff-raising you. So you folded and he showed you 87.

Looking back at the hand, you wonder if you could've check-called or check-folded on the river. Unless the opponent has a propensity to float and bet rivers, I don't think checking is the most +EV play. The reasons for betting the river are: you might get value out of stubborn marginal hands, you protect your future bluffs, and most of the time, you aren't getting bluff-raised on the river. If you do decide to check, I think the majority of the time the betting will go check-fold. Unless you are Kenny Tran and like to make sick calls, your opponent likely will check behind all hands that you beat and value-bet Ax+ all day long.

At this point, I hope you recognize that if an ace lands on the river, bluff-raising all day in this spot is profitable. That's because most of the holdings in Villain's hand range are Ax or bluffs and he'll rarely hold a strong hand. The same goes for a king on the river as the only hand that can call you is KQ. With that hand, Villain is more likely to bet the turn than let it go check-check to protect his hand and to also protect his two barrel actions in the future.

Chapter 15: Planet of the Apes

When players use more aggression they instantly make themselves harder to play against. It's hard to try to run over an opponent who is more aggressive than you. All you can do is try to keep him in check and wait for him to bluff all his chips to you. What if he's a smart aggressive player (and not a random aggressive monkey) who's constantly trying to keep pressure on you? How do we strategize against such opponents?

The easiest solution is to sit out and not play against him. But assuming that such an option isn't available because it's three-handed and there's a huge fish in the game, you have to deal with him.

The way to deal with aggressive players is to play back at them. If you try to stay out of his way, he will recognize this and will continue making your life miserable. The first step is lowering your standard for absolute hand strength because their hand range is wider than a normal opponent, especially when the game is short-handed. For example, QJ on a Jxx flop usually isn't strong enough to stack off for 100bb in a normal game. Against an aggressive player in a short-handed game, you have to find a way to get the chips in. Sometimes you'll get owned when he shows you AJ/KJ, but the other times he'll fold and you'll take down the pot.

You do not want aggressive players dictating the action and momentum of the match. It will be a nightmare trying to outplay a superior opponent once he has that going for him. Besides playing back with lighter holdings, you should semi-bluff more. For example, you hold 7♠6♠ and the flop comes K♠ 7♣ 5♦, giving you a pair plus a backdoor flush draw. A strong aggressive player bets. While most usually call in this spot, there's nothing wrong with putting a raise in here. First, you usually have the best hand and will take the pot down. Second, he might put you on a draw and call you down light.

There will be times when he will three-bet and you'll find yourself hating life. Just know that he is likely to have a good hand at that moment. So even though you lost that pot, you show him that you are willing to mix up and fight back. More often than not, his aggression level in pots against you will decrease.

Another strategy is to delay your semi-bluff and crank up the pressure on the turn.

Example 15.1: \$10/\$20 No Limit

SB: \$1886

BB: \$2745**Hero (BTN): \$2670****Preflop:** Hero is BTN with 8♠ 9♠

Hero raises \$60, 1 fold,

BB raises to \$200, Hero calls \$140

Flop: (\$410) Q♣ 7♥ 6♦ (2 players)

BB bets \$355, Hero calls \$355

Turn: (\$1120) J♠ (2 players)

BB bets \$785, Hero tanks ...

On this hand, Villain bets the flop. Instead of raising, Hero decides to call. The turn is a jack and Villain bets again. Usually, players would fold here because they don't have the odds to call to hit their straight. Second, they don't know how often their pairs of nines or eights is good. Thus, players usually fold here. But if Villain is an aggressive player who often two barrels, shoving the turn here is a great line. Villain doesn't often have a good hand and naturally has to give you credit for a good one. Even if he knows your hand isn't that strong, it's hard for him to call with king-high or a draw. On the few occasions he calls, your hand has enough equity against his calling range that the play isn't bad. That's especially true if there is a decent

amount of money already in the pot. Add the potential fold equity and shoving the turn is correct mathematically because you don't need him to fold very often for the play to break even.

After Villain bets the turn, the pot size is \$1905. Let's assume Villain has QQ for top set; let's determine how much equity we have against that hand. We have about 18.2% equity; Villain has 81.8%.

Finding Break-Even Folding Frequency

Let X = Villain's folding percentage.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{EV of shoving} &= X (\text{what's in the pot}) + (1 - X) [\text{Villain's pot equity} + \text{your pot equity}] \\
 &= X (\text{what's in the pot}) + (1 - X) [(\text{what you stand to lose}) \times (\text{your opponent's equity}) + (\text{what you stand to gain}) \times (\text{your hand's equity})] \\
 &= 1905X + (1-X) [-2115 \times .818 + 3235 \times .182] \\
 &= 1905X + (1-X) [-1730.07 + 588.77] \\
 &= 1905X + (1-X) (-1141.3) \\
 &= 1905X - 1141.3 + 1141.3X
 \end{aligned}$$

$$3046.3X = 1141.3$$

$$X = 37.5\%$$

From our calculation, we only need to get Villain to fold 37.5% of the time to break-even. Considering that Villain can call our turn shove with three combinations of {QQ}, three {JJ}, nine {QJ}, three {77}, three {66}, four {67s}, six {AA}, six {KK}, nine {AQ}, and nine {KQ}. That's a total of 54 hands that can call our turn shove. Before thinking that's a lot of hands, consider that there are 24 combinations of AK and AT. Villain might bet/fold AJ half of the time so we'll account for six combinations. That's 30 out of 84 [~ 36%] hands that Villain will bet/fold. Since Villain is an aggressive player, he might bet/fold a hand like QT, 89, or JT. He also has total air part of the time as well. From our calculation, we can see why shoving the turn is +EV, especially if it's against an aggressive player who has more air in his holdings than a typical opponent.

Example 15.2: \$5/\$10 No Limit Hold'em

SB: \$950

Hero (BB): \$1100

BTN: \$1600

Preflop: Hero is BB with A♣ 3♣

I folds, SB raises \$35, **Hero calls \$25**

Flop: (\$70) K♣ 4♣ 7♠ (2 players)

SB bets \$65, **Hero calls \$65**

Turn: (\$200) Q♦ (2 players)

SB bets \$178, **Hero raises to \$688**, SB tanks

Example 15.2 is interesting for a number of reasons. It's a great board for Villain to fire a second barrel and possibly run a three-barrel bluff. Any time when it's a Broadway, low, low flop and the turn is another Broadway card and you don't know what to do, bet and shove the river if you get called on the turn.

On this hand, once we peel the flop, our hand range includes {flush draws, 4X, 7X, maybe 88/99 but that's less likely because we would flat preflop, and K9-KJ}. Thus, on the turn, it is correct for Villain to bet his range again, especially on a card that weakens our flop

calling range. Villain should also bet/fold AQ and maybe QJ or QT. If Villain gets called, he can check-fold or check-call the river since a strong hand would've raised the turn on this board to try to get more money in before the river (to avoid scare cards). Therefore, when we raise the turn we play in the same manner as a strong hand and Villain has to give us some credit if we haven't been too out of line.

Against tough opponents, it is important to remind yourself to only play pots in position. Trying to beat a superior opponent while being out of position is burning money. Why do you think no one has offered a challenge where their opponents can have the button 100% of the time? Just fold and get in pots with good holdings while in position. It's hard for a superior player to outplay you when you put 15% of your stack in preflop holding a big pocket pair.

Chapter 16: Naked Range

Example 16.1: \$10/\$20 No Limit Hold'em

SB: \$4186.20

BB: \$2484

Hero (UTG): \$2020

MP: \$2262

CO: \$2955.50

BTN: \$1970

Preflop: Hero is UTG with T♥ T♦

Hero raises to \$80, 2 folds,

BTN re-raises to \$230, Hero calls \$150

Flop: (\$490) K♦ 7♠ 2♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$122, Hero calls \$122

Turn: (\$734) A♣ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN checks

River: (\$734) 8♦ (2 players)

Hero ...

There are various situations where either your opponent's hand range or your hand range is face-up. In this type of situations, a more creative (or a more observant) player usually takes down the pot. The following examples illustrate a common situation that players get into with hands like TT/JJ.

When Villain checks the turn, his range is face-up. He rarely has AK+. He may check back AQ/AJ/AT some of the time, although he will bet more often than not on the turn to balance the time he's bluffing the ace. If we check the river, we will almost never win this pot with TT. Any worse hand is bluffing the river and any better hand is betting. Hands like JJ and QQ are checking behind. This is a situation where some players will check on the river hoping that Villain gives up instead of leading on the river themselves.

Let's go over the results if we were to bet. There are 13 combinations of TT-QQ that Villain will fold. Half of the time, Villain will have AQ/AJ/AT and call. Thus, we will get called [$\frac{1}{2} \times (12+12+6)$] ≈ 14 times. Fourteen might be too high because some opponents will fold ATo to an UTG open and don't always re-raise with AQo/AJo/ATo. Betting also prevents us from getting bluffed out of the pot.

I understand that we haven't accounted for the times Villain checks behind with a set or AK. Since that rarely happens, let's assign three combinations for those holdings for the sake of discussion. Even then, that's 17 combinations that will call if we bet the river.

Since we only need to make a 60% to 80% pot bet to win, betting is still +EV over the long run even if Villain calls 17 out of 30 times. Another reason to bet is you'll get paid off on later hands because you showed that you're not afraid of bluffing in a re-raised pot.

Another example: When Villain checked behind the flop, his range is often AA, sometimes KK/QQ/JJ/AK/AQ, and rarely air; it's a decent flop for him to fire considering we defended a re-raise out of position. Although there are 16 combos of AK and 24 combos of AA-TT, the frequency of us holding AK is far less than 16/24. Our opponent will think this as well because we will often four-bet with a hand like AK since we are out of position against a tough opponent.

On the turn, Hero is likely betting with the majority of his range: half for value and half for protection.

Looking back, what is the best way to play against Villain's range? On the turn, rather than leading out, we can check-raise if Villain decides to bet. When we do this, we represent trip aces and that is reasonably within our range since there are 24 combinations of AK and AQ. Moreover, it's a spot

where it's difficult for Villain to call since he knows that we know he rarely has an ace but we can hold an ace. If Villain calls our turn check-raise, betting the river depends on whether Villain will fold 50% of his range. So let's examine his possible range.

Villain might have one combination of AA, one-fourth of the times he checks behind AK-AT [8+8+8+8]. That makes eight combinations of AK-AT and 24 combinations of KK-TT that he will fold half of the time and (this is optimistic) three combinations of 99. As you can see, it's best to check-fold the river most of the time. That is unless Villain is the type of opponent who will fire the majority of his range on an ace-high board in a re-raised pot. Then we can make a case for betting the river since his hand range will be composed of KK-TT and rarely AK-AT.

Example 16.2: \$10/\$20 No Limit Hold'em

SB: \$2885

BB: \$1055

Hero/Tri (UTG): \$2240

MP: \$2050

CO: \$2760

BTN: \$1780

Preflop: Hero is UTG with 8♠ 8♦

Hero raises to \$80. 1 folds,

CO raises to \$240, 2 folds, Hero calls \$160

Flop: (\$510) A♦ 7♠ 2♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, CO checks

Turn: (\$510) A♣ (2 players)

Hero bets \$400, CO calls \$400

River: (\$1310) 9♥ (2 players)

Hero bets \$950, CO tanks ...

Example 16.3: \$10/\$20 No Limit

SB: \$4186.20

BB: \$2484

UTG: \$2020

MP: \$2262

CO: \$2955.50**Hero/Tri (BTN): \$1970****Preflop:** Hero is BTN with 9♠ T♠*2 folds*, CO raises to \$80, **Hero calls \$80**,SB calls \$70, *1 fold***Flop:** (\$260) 9♣ 3♣ 7♥ (3 players)

SB checks, CO bets \$165,

Hero calls \$165, *1 folds***Turn:** (\$590) 6♠ (2 players)CO checks, **Hero checks****River:** (\$590) K♦ (2 players)CO checks, **Hero bets \$355**,

CO raises to \$2710.50 and is all in

In Example 16.3, our range is face-up. We almost never have two pair or better, unless we have K9s. So do we call or do we fold?

Against a nit, I'm folding all day long. I won't get into a level war with myself because he's a nit and a nit always has it—end of story. Actually, against a majority of opponents, I'm going to fold because it's rarely a bluff. In this type of situation, the majority of players will think their hand isn't good enough to check-raise, but good enough to get value out of marginal hands. It is also too good to check and risk opponents checking behind.

Conversely, this is a spot where we should check-raise the majority of the time if we get to the river. If we have a hand like 88, 86, or 87 and hope to see a showdown, we should consider check-raising if Villain bets, especially a type of Villain who will value-bet thin.

I hope these examples illustrate the importance of

figuring out when your opponent's hand range is face-up. These situations occur often during your sessions but are difficult to identify when playing many tables. What we can do is take different lines to gain information to the point that our opponent's range is face-up.

A great player once recommended min-betting because no one ever cold-calls these types of bets with the top of their ranges. Thus, by the river, your opponent's range is left with weak holdings. While this advice is a great idea, it's difficult to put it in practice. A tough opponent will raise or bet at any chance he gets and we'll end up playing a huge pot out of position and have to randomly guess whether he's bluffing or betting/raising for value. Since the idea of figuring our opponents' hand ranges is to make our lives easier, min-betting seems counter-intuitive. You may have realized that this approach is similar to donk-betting.

Here's a simple scenario. Hero donk bets on the flop, donk bets on the turn, and check-shoves the river. Once Villain calls on the flop and turn, he'll rarely have a strong hand. Villain will have been inclined to raise our donk bets with the top of his range to balance out the times he's raising our donk bets with air, overs, and gutshots.

Chapter 17: Polarization In Practice

A lot of poker players love to use the saying, “His range is so polarized in that spot. I have to call.” In this context, it means he represents very few legitimate combinations. As we said earlier, when we bluff we look for spots where our opponent's hand range is weak *and* where we can credibly represent at least ten combinations.

Villain is very loose preflop and likes to splash around a lot. He was three-betting relentlessly and I decided to four-bet bluff him. Obviously, I would've liked it better if he folded. But since he was out of position, I didn't mind his call because there are going to be a lot of tough spots for him to play profitably. This is one of them.

Given the flop and stacks, what could he be check-raising with? One point if you said, “only trips.” And, of course, air. There

are only two aces left in the deck and with constant aggression in the match, Villain probably gets AK in preflop. If he has a hand like A8, that also means he's continuing with a ton of other garbage hands as well. Since there are few combinations of trips in the range of hands that he flats the four-bet with, his raise is going to be a bluff an overwhelming majority of the time.

If we call the check-raise, it would be suicidal for him to continue his bluff on the turn. Thus, I decide to call and bet very small on the turn. An important factor in this hand is I could easily have a lot of Ax hands in my range. Let's work out some math to see how often the bluff needs to work so our line is profitable. We are getting $[1935+1333]$ to $[1665+3600+1365 \times 2]$ odds on the bluff. Thus, it only needs to work 29% of the time to show a profit. Who said money doesn't grow on trees?

Another polarized situation is on four to a flush boards.

Example 17.1: \$25/\$50 No Limit Holdem

SB: cts687 (\$10,189)

BB: H@££INGGOL (\$8,647)

Preflop: Hero is SB with $Q\clubsuit 7\heartsuit$

cts687 raises \$100 to \$150, H@££ raises \$400 to \$550, cts687 raises \$815 to \$1365, H@££ calls \$815

Flop: (\$2,730) $4\spadesuit A\spadesuit A\heartsuit$ (2 players)

H@££ checks, cts687 bets \$1665,

H@££ raises \$1935 to \$3600, cts687 calls \$1935

Turn: (\$9,930) $J\spadesuit$ (2 players)

H@££ checks, cts687 bets \$1333, H@££ folds

On this hand, I backdoor the second nut flush. When Villain leads for half pot on the river, I make a clear value raise. I obviously got a little sick when I saw the three-bet. But to beat me, he has to have exactly the king of spades. There are so few combinations of $K\spadesuit x$ that his range is polarized. How in the world did he get to the river with those combinations?

Villain is a tight player and isn't going to be opening $K9o$ from the cutoff. He has to have precisely $K\spadesuit 9\spadesuit$ or KK with a spade to have us beat. Since Villain isn't going to call another raise with worse, and I was curious to see what he had, I called.

Example 17.2: \$5/\$10 No Limit Hold'em

SB: \$1,000

BB: \$4,830

UTG: \$2,192

MP: \$1,995

CO: \$1,031

Cole South (BTN): \$2,015

Preflop: Hero is BTN with $Q\spadesuit J\spadesuit$

2 folds, CO raises to \$30,

Cole South calls \$30, 2 folds

Flop: (\$75) $9\clubsuit 3\spadesuit 6\spadesuit$ (2 players)

CO checks, *Cole South bets \$60*,

CO calls \$60

Turn: (\$195) $4\spadesuit$ (2 players)

CO checks, *Cole South checks*

River: (\$590) $A\spadesuit$ (2 players)

CO bets \$101, *Cole South raises to \$380*,

CO raises to \$659, *Cole South calls \$279*

Showdown:

CO shows $3\heartsuit K\heartsuit$ - a pair of threes

Cole South shows $Q\spadesuit J\spadesuit$ - a flush, ace-high

Chapter 18: The River - The Difference Between Men and Boys

As you improve as a player, you will realize it is more profitable to play against weaker players who have a lot of chips in play. You can use your superior reading skill to put a lot of pressure on your opponent when you realize his range is weak by the river. This is the reason why when dealing with a superior opponent, there is no shame in quitting when the blind to stack ratio reaches 250BB.

Here are three examples where it is tough for Villain to call because his range is rarely strong.

Phil Ivey plays a tough heads-up game but sometimes gambles too much and does not take it seriously; he also defends his BB liberally. Having said that, he is still a very good player. An important thing to keep in mind is Ivey probably thinks I'm scared money.

As always, the best way to analyze a hand is to put Villain on a hand range. From our history, I learned that Villain can be especially tricky post-flop out of position. In position, he plays somewhat straightforward and makes thin value bets.

Preflop and flop play are standard. The key point is the play on the turn. If Villain has 33 or 99, he would bet the turn to inflate the pot hoping we have trips. With QQ, Q9, or Q3 he could conceivably check behind the turn, but there are only 13

combinations of those hands. The chance of him checking back those hands on the turn half of the time is low. Thus, we will assume he checks back one-third of the time for four combinations.

On the river, the flush draw hits and our hand certainly has bluffing value against a small pair or a better high card hand. We lead half pot and Phil quickly raises us. With a flush, he would have at least thought of what size he wants to raise and what he is going to do if we shove. Even if he has a flush, there is enough money behind to make him seriously consider folding.

Example 18.1: \$300/\$600 No Limit Hold'em

SB: Phil Ivey (\$69,597)

BB: MUCKEMSAYUHH (\$69,297)

Preflop: Hero is BB with J♠ T♥

Phil Ivey raises to \$1800, Hero calls \$1200

Flop: (\$3,600) 3♥ 9♠ Q♠ (2 players)

Hero checks, Phil Ivey bets \$2400, Hero calls

Turn: (\$9,930) Q♦ (2 players)

Hero checks, Phil Ivey checks

River: (\$9,930) 6♠ (2 players)

Hero bets \$6600, Phil Ivey raises to \$22,200,

Hero raises to \$65,097, Phil Ivey folds

One other important variable is the hand range we represent. We could have Q6/66. Since Villain probably knows we fold Q6o preflop, we will only account for Q♥6♥ and Q♣6♣ in our range. That's five combinations. Although it is unlikely we would play QQ, 33, Q9, or Q3 in this manner, it is not out of the realm of possibility. There are 16 combinations of these hands and assuming we use the line in the hand 20% of the time, we have three combinations. In total, we represent eight combinations. Although trying to fold out a real hand with such a narrow range is certainly not great, from our analysis there's a high possibility that his range is really weak. Unfortunately, the majority of Villain's holdings beat jack high.

We are risking \$58,500 to win \$37,200 so the bluff has to work at least 61% of the time to be profitable. Considering the times he has air or folds a flush, it is a profitable line in the long run.

In the example below, it is important to take into account both Villain's hand range and Hero's perceived hand range. Villain is an unknown European player. I won a flip a minute or two before this hand took place so he might be a little tilty.

Let's analyze Villain's hand range first. On a flop similar to the one above, it is rare for opponents to slow-play sets, T9, or a huge draw. There are so many hands they get action from and so many action killing turn cards that they want to shovel a lot of money in on the flop. Once Villain check-calls the flop, his range includes mostly weak pairs such as 66, T8, A9 and draws such as 5♥4♥, 87, and KJ that are not strong enough to play for stacks on the flop. For this reason, the river is a very profitable bluffing spot when the board runs T♠ 9♥ 3♥ A♣ 4♠.

Our hand most likely looks like a ten or Ax that checked back for pot control and decided to value bet thin on the river. Our goal is to fold out weaker pairs and draws, which make up the majority of his hand range. There is a good chance Villain will fold those holdings since he cannot beat a river value bet. In our example, Villain decided to check-raise.

Example 18.2: \$200/\$400 No Limit Hold'em

SB: MUCKEMSAYUHH (\$107,129)

BB: Stinko_Mikko (\$53,944)

Preflop: Hero is SB with 6♠ 5♠

Hero raises to \$1200, BB calls \$800

Flop: (\$2,400) 3♥ 9♥ T♠ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$2000, BB calls \$2000

Turn: (\$6,400) A♣ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero checks

River: (\$6,400) 4♠ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$5000,

BB raises to \$18,000, Hero raises to \$103,929,

BB folds

Since bluff-calling is not a profitable strategy, we have to fold. But let's take a minute to analyze the situation again. Villain thought we were value betting thin. Similarly, when I think someone is making a thin bet on a hand that beats me, I consider check-raise bluffing.

On the flop his range is likely to be weak pairs and draws. When he check-raises the river he is obviously representing a strong hand that improved. None of the draws got there. The only weak pairs that improved were AT, A9, A3, 43s, and 44. Let's assume he defends A3o half of the time and check-raises the flop with AT half of the time.

His hand range has a total of 24 combinations $[0.5 \times 9 + 9 + (2 + 0.5 \times 9) + 2 + 3]$ that can call our raise. Although that sounds a lot, the number of combinations he will turn into bluffs {22, 55, 66, 77, 88, 5s3s, 98, 97s, J8s, 86s, heart draws} is over 100. We are risking \$45,800 to win \$29,400 so the bluff has to work at least 61% of the time to be profitable. Considering there are so many combinations Villain will turn into a bluff, our bluff here is profitable.

In Example 18.3, we get to the river with a busted queen high straight draw on a four flush board. Since queen high is never good here, we must bet to win. Assuming Villain opens the top 45% of hands on the button, he is going to have a flush on the river a third of the time.

This is a spot where our bet size does not matter much since Villain is going to call with any spade. For this reason, betting small makes the bluff cheaper in case he calls. If he does not have a spade, he rarely calls and will either raise or fold. When Villain raises, his range is so polarized to the biggest two or three flushes or air that we are definitely going to get him to fold the 48% that we need for the bluff to be profitable.

I hope you recognize the under-bet on the river is to induce more frequent bluff-raises and also to get better bluffing odds in folding out a pair or ace-high.

Example 18.3: \$200/\$400 No Limit

Hero (SB): \$40,000

BB: \$46,200

UTG: \$54,800

MP: \$82,600

CO: \$45,200

BTN: \$40,000

Preflop: Hero is SB with $Q♥ J♥$

3 folds, BTN raises to \$1200,

Hero calls \$1000, 1 fold

Flop: (\$2,800) $K♠ T♠ 2♥$ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN bets \$2400, Hero calls

Turn: (\$7,600) $4♠$ (2 players)

Hero checks, BTN checks

River: (\$7,600) $6♠$ (2 players)

Hero bets \$4000, BTN raises to \$13,000,

Hero raises to \$27,400, BTN folds

Here are two suggestions on how to improve your river play. Analyze your sessions away from the table to get a good idea of what the math suggests the correct play is. Secondly, when your opponent raises and you have nothing, don't automatically give up and fold. Put your thinking cap on and put him on a hand range. Does Villain's line make sense? Is Villain's re-bluffing frequency on the river so high that you can re-re-bluff? Remember, there is always a slight chance Villain thinks you are solid and makes a big fold. After all, who actually three-bet bluffs on the river?

It is important to note that in all three of the example hands, the turn went check-check.

Chapter 19: The Last Bet

For good reasons, being able to put in the last bet is a rarely discussed concept in forums. The reason is those who know about it don't want others to know. Although it is a fairly simple concept when you first hear the idea, it is very powerful when applied correctly.

For example, it is much easier to shove all-in with ace-high when you think your opponent is weak. However, it is infinitely more difficult if you have to call an all-in with ace-high even if you know your opponent is weak. The reason is you don't want to bluff-call.

When analyzing the heads-up hands in Chapter 17, knowing your opponent's range might not be enough. The stack sizes have to be right as well. You want to be able to three-bet shove if your bet gets raised. The amount has to be enough so that a good Villain has to think twice before calling with a good hand that can only beat a bluff. Since we all realize that no one ever has the nuts after they check behind on the turn, we should consider three-bet bluffing the river more often when Villain's combinations of nut hands are low.

A situation where getting in the last bet doesn't have a lot of folding equity is on drawy flops such as 6♠ 7♣ 9♦ or T♠ 4♦ 5♦. The reason is simple: Your range is fairly defined when you take the donk/three-bet line on the flop. Additionally, when your opponent raises your flop donk bet, he most likely has a plan if you were to shove. If he doesn't have a plan, he would elect to call instead because he can gather more information on the turn and the river. His hand can improve as well.

Interestingly, getting the last bet in on the turn is more powerful than getting it in on the flop. Ranges are narrower and more polarized. It is difficult to call a bet/shove on the turn with one pair against a solid regular who isn't tilting. One of the reasons is when we do bet the turn with one pair, our intention is to bet/fold. Thus, when we do bet and Villain shoves, our brains are wired in such a way that it is difficult to abandon our original plan; we will come up with reasons to justify bet/folding the turn. Equity wise, unless our one pair hand is up against a stone cold bluff, it is an understatement to say our equity against a standard range of a monster combo draw or a set isn't good.

Against an opponent who has a propensity to raise your turn donk bet, you should consider taking the bet/three-bet line with a lot of draws; a gutshot with one overcard isn't that bad. Villain can't have that many hands if he often raises you. Even if Villain knows there's a good chance you are three-

bet shoving with a draw, he can't call with a high card or whatever mediocre hand that he bluff-raises you with.

Not surprisingly, getting the last bet in on the river is the most powerful. Ranges are even narrower and more polarized than the turn: You either have the nuts or you don't. Unless we have a really crazy image, bet/three-bet shove the river for 200BB with a flush on a paired board isn't exactly a good idea. More importantly, since there are no more streets to play on the hand, there is no suckout potential in the event one makes the wrong all-in call.

One important criteria is to hold hands that limit the number of combinations of nut hands Villain potentially holds. For example, bet/three-bet with A4 on a K493 is better than doing so with a hand like KJ/KT against a solid opponent. The reason is that when you are called, KJ/KT is likely drawing dead and there are more combinations of a set of 44 and AK. Against loose aggressive opponents who have been splashing around, we obviously prefer KJ/KT all day since that is considered a nut hand. On a totally different tangent, it's not a bad idea to hover the mouse over opponents' screen names to get some reads based on locations. If it's somewhere in Scandinavia or Russia, always click call if it's a close decision between folding and calling.

One characteristic to consider when deciding to bet/three-bet on the river is whether your opponent is tricky enough to check back the turn with the nuts, though such opponents are a rarity. The reason they are so rare is one cannot win a big pot if one checks with the nuts. As a rule of thumb (and I use the same rule for river bluff-raises), it's probably safe to assume they aren't that tricky until they prove otherwise.

The next page has two examples that show why getting in the last bet is important.

Example 19.1:**Hero (BTN/SB): \$21,500****Villain (BB): \$19,655****Preflop:** Hero is BTN/SB with 8♣ 9♣

Hero raises to \$150, Villain calls \$100

Flop: (\$300) 5♣ T♦ 6♦ (2 players)

Villain checks, Hero bets \$250,

Villain calls \$250

Turn: (\$1000) Q♣ (2 players)

Villain checks, Hero bets \$850,

Villain calls \$850

River: (\$2700) K♣ (2 players)

Villain bets \$2500, Hero raises to

\$6950, Villain shoves, Hero ???

Example 19.2:**CO: \$2620.10 BB: \$6070.50****BTN: \$1464.40 UTG: \$2756.90****SB: \$2284.54 Hero: \$5960.30****Preflop:** Hero is MP with A♠ Q♠

1 fold, Hero raises to \$80, 3 folds,

BB calls \$60

Flop: (\$170) K♠ J♣ 7♦ (3 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$140, BB calls

\$140

Turn: (\$450) 2♠ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$411,

BB calls \$411

River: (\$1272) T♣ (2 players)

BB checks, Hero bets \$955,

BB raises to \$2350, Hero ???

In Example 19.1, we need to strongly consider if Villain is good enough to three-bet shove with any A♣x. Against most opponents, probably not. Yet it is a spot where you should consider turning any hand that has the A♣ into a bluff and realize it's not often good when getting raised.

Example 19.2 serves as a proof of concept. Obviously, it is easy for us to three-bet this river because we hold the nuts. The question is, does our opponent ever have the nuts? If we are holding Q♠x type hands, we should consider three-bet shoving in this spot. A pair of kings, even with a queen kicker, is rarely good after Villain check-calls twice and check-raises the river. We could fold as well.

Chapter 20: The Bowling Alley, The Ski Resort, and The Ocean

At some point in your playing career, you will find yourself in the dark bowling alley or the dreaded ski resort.

The dark bowling alley is representative of the break-even stretches where you win a few buy-ins, lose a few buy-ins, and cannot seem to build any momentum. During these periods, it is best to win a buy-in or two per day to build confidence. Any small win is fine! After all, it is better than losing.

You probably realized the dreaded ski resort represents the time you decided to go on vacation at Variance Mountain and forgot to come home. During this duration, “You will run worse than you can ever imagine.” You will feel sorry for yourself and wonder why your graph is not a positive slope shooting at the right corner of the screen. And that's fine. We are all humans. The only thing we can do is hope luck will turn around, or you can re-read this book :)

From our experience, moving down one limit or cutting down the number of tables is helpful. Taking a break from the games has proven valuable as well. Remember, if you are a professional poker player, it is actually part of your job to relax and be in a good mental state!

We hope by now you have some knowledge on how to think about the game and are on your way to pseudo-superuser status. One thing to keep in mind is that you are probably excited and want to try all these moves out. We appreciate your enthusiasm. The problem is many players (probably you!) will overdo what they recently learned and end up in spewtastic mode. When you find yourself getting caught bluffing too often, cut a few points off your VPIP. Players generally revert to “The Nit Rule” and give you more credit than you deserve if your preflop VPIP is less than 20.

Let the game come to you. Don't force the action. When the opportunity arises, use your knowledge to take advantage of it. Remember, “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” Why do you think the best players are the luckiest?

Good luck at the games and drop by DailyVariance.com to say hi!