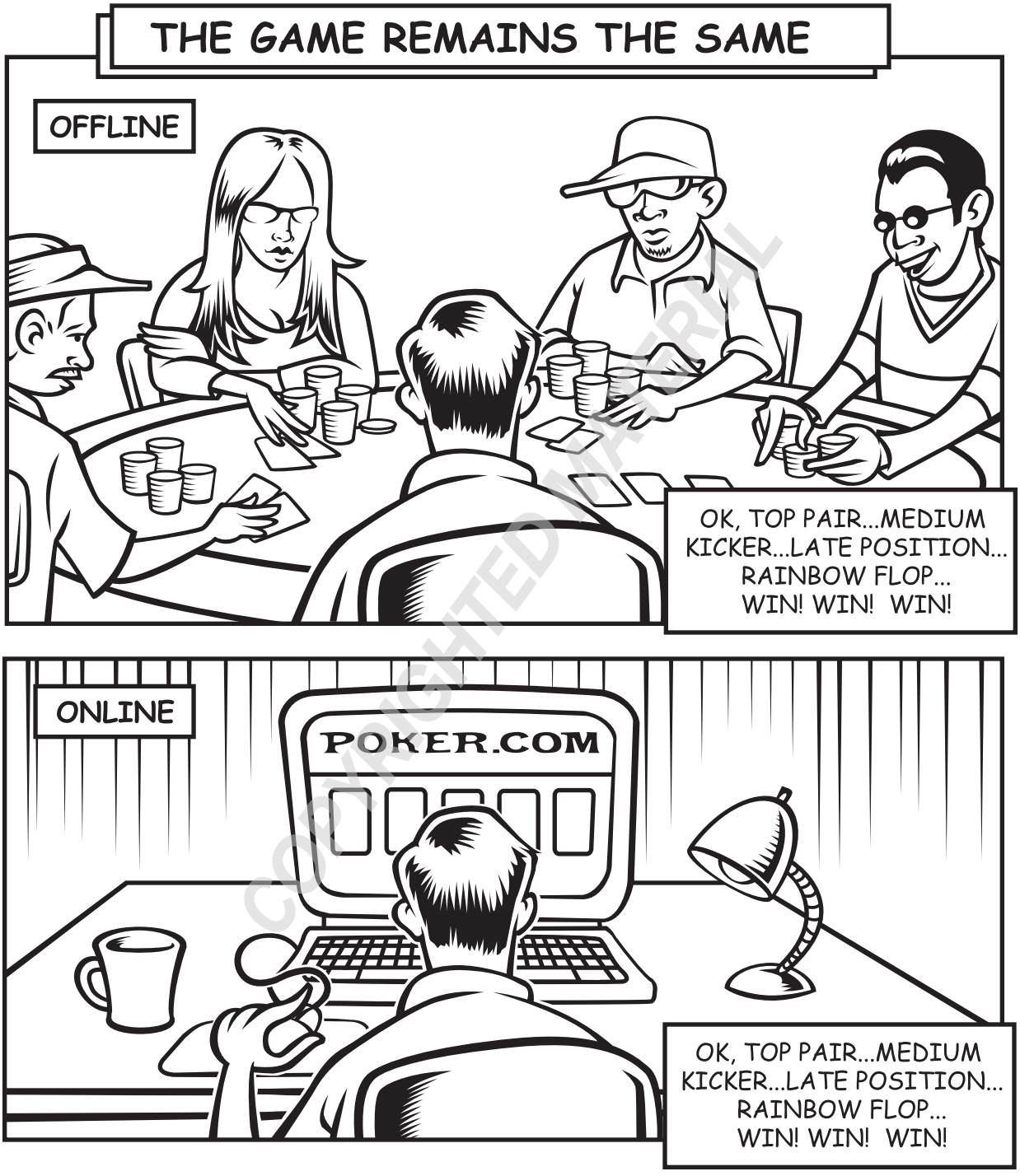

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1 Welcome to the World of Online Poker

Maybe in order to understand mankind, we have to look at the word itself: "Mankind." Basically, it's made up of two separate words—"mank" and "ind." What do these words mean? It's a mystery, and that's why so is mankind.

—Jack Handey, *Deep Thoughts*

The Short Stack
Online Poker: Technology Meets Game
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly
The Internet, the Law, and You
The New Poker: How the Game Is Changing

You might remember Jack Handey from old *Saturday Night Live* episodes. Great guy. Funny. Helluva card player.

This chapter takes a similar approach to the question, "What is online poker?" Basically it's made up of two words: online (the technology) and poker (the game). So we'll take those two words in order. In addition, this chapter includes an overview of the specific strengths and weaknesses of the online game *vis à vis* live poker, a discussion of gambling and legal issues, and a look at how Internet cardrooms and TV tournaments are changing the game.

"Online" (The Technology)

This book uses the terms "online poker" and "Internet poker" more or less interchangeably. Being online means being on the Internet, or connected to the global network of networks that links computers and allows you to surf the Web, send e-mail, download music, and of course, play games.

There are many, many ways to play online poker right now. In fact, you can dart over to Yahoo!, MSN, or any of the other major portal sites and be playing in, literally, seconds. You'll be playing real poker with real opponents for play money. The thing to keep in mind here is that, at this level, you're playing an online card game just as if you were playing bridge, hearts, rummy or—a Detroit favorite where I grew up—euchre. Internet card games have been around virtually as long as the World Wide Web itself, which brought interactivity and graphics to the Internet.

Euchre is a four-player "trump" game popular in the U.K., Canada, and the northern U.S.; it's also a popular U.S. Navy game.

So if you've played any kind of multi-player game on the Web before, you'll find that online poker works much the same. The game designers create a virtual environment intended to simulate a real table game. You get a top-down view of a casino-style poker game, with two to ten players seated. You'll see yourself represented there as well as your opponents, who could be from anywhere in the world. The cards in your hand and any community cards on the table are displayed clearly, as is the "money" that you have in play. Throughout this book, we will refer to these Internet poker games as online cardrooms, online poker rooms, or poker sites. Figures 1.1 to 1.3 show three examples: PacificPoker.com, PartyPoker.com, and UltimateBet.com.

Figure 1.1 PacificPoker.com

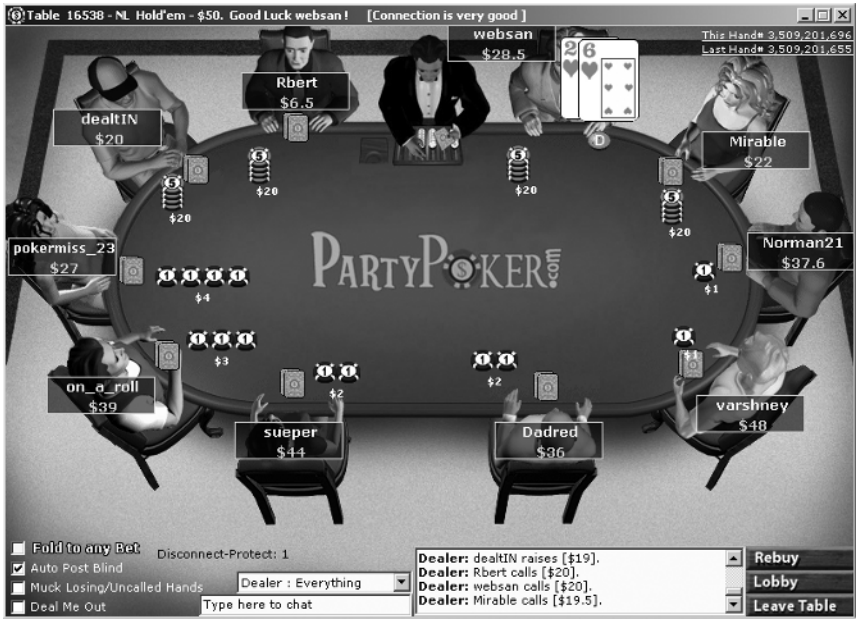


Figure 1.2 PartyPoker.com

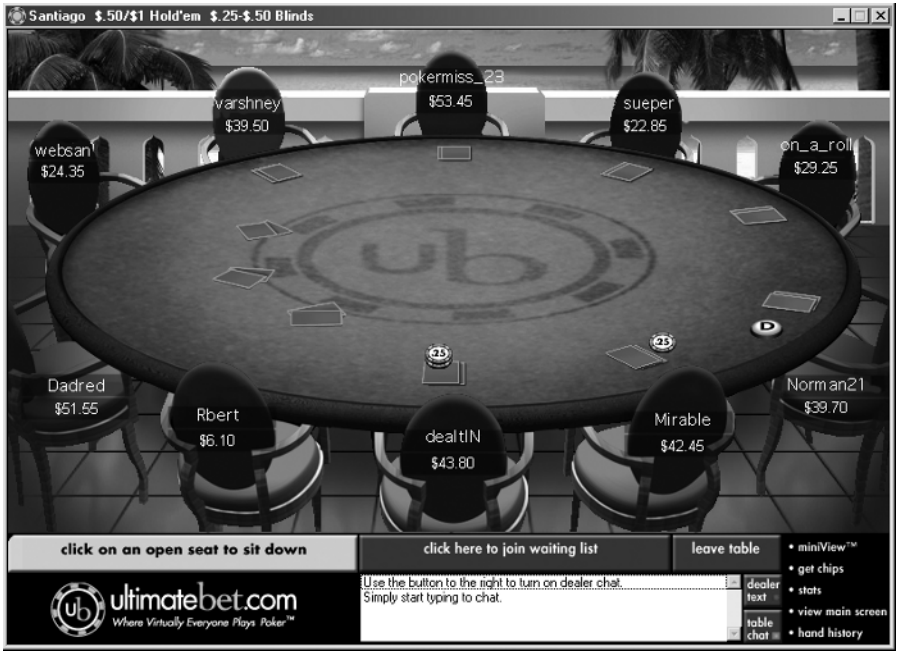


Figure 1.3 UltimateBet.com

Anything you'd want to do in a real game, you can do at these virtual tables. I'm talking here, of course, about actual game-related actions such as posting a bet, raising the pot, folding your hand, and so on. If you want to holler for another whiskey or aim for the spittoon across the room—well, you'll have to make other arrangements. To check, bet, raise, or fold, you simply click the corresponding on-screen buttons with your mouse. The virtual "dealer" keeps the action moving, all day, every day—forever.

As graphics and game design have grown more sophisticated, so has the virtual "ambience" at these web-based table games. You can hear the cards being shuffled or the clicking of chips being thrown in the pot. Some sites have added motion graphics so that you can watch the dealer fling cards around the table or see other players fold their hands to the center.

No poker game is truly complete without *table chat*, the players' endless running commentary of cheers, groans, jokes, and small talk. With online poker, table chat means typing messages back and forth on your keyboard. These messages appear in the *chat window* for everyone to see, just as if you were speaking aloud at a cramped casino table.

What's Really Happening

The scenario described in the preceding paragraphs depicts the general experience of the online player, assuming you're at a well-designed play-money site. Let's consider the technological nuts and bolts that underlie this.

First of all, the reason you're able to play against other players, or even access the game in the first place, is because your personal computer—sitting there peacefully, humming away—is actually connected to the most massive and sophisticated communications matrix in the history of man. I'm talking of course about the Internet. And the Internet, radically simplified, is just one big computer *network*. Your computer is "talking" to other computers by sending the data and decisions that you type or click across telephone lines (or cable lines, or what have you).

The game itself, the "brains" of the operation, is situated on the computer(s) maintained and programmed by the host or website or service that you're connected to—Party Poker, Yahoo!, and so on. (There are some technical discrepancies here, but we're talking generally.) It's here, for instance, that the *random card generator* determines which hands are being dealt. Here, too, is the computer code that determines and enforces the rules of the game. So in a perceptual sense, we can imagine that the "dealer" or the "house" is located in this *central game system*, this cyberspace junction in which you and all the other players are coming together.

Back again to your happily humming personal computer. The *interface* of the game you are playing is the graphic or textual content on your screen and the way it responds to your activity. This is the colorful casino table that you see, the buttons that you click, the chat window that records your typed messages. The central game system sends raw data through the network to your computer. That data is displayed through the interface in a way that makes sense to us dim humans—a card is flipped, or a new hand is dealt.

These three elements—the network, the central game system, and the interface—combine to make possible the experience of playing our beloved game of poker over the Internet. This is a heavily condensed and simplified explanation, but we'll be referring to it later when considering some real-world and non-abstract issues and concerns.

So when we talk about playing online poker, we're talking about using your Internet-connected personal computer to approximate the experience of playing real poker against real people. It is not, generally speaking, about playing poker against computer opponents or *artificial intelligence (AI)* agents. There are many software packages that provide this experience (see Appendix A, "Additional Resources: Books,

Websites, and Software"), and they can be excellent learning tools, as well as fun games in their own right. Some websites and online services have computer opponents as well, but these are not true poker games—they're more akin to the *video poker* slot machines that you see in casinos.

"Poker" (The Game)

Now let's spend some time with the second part of the question, "What is online poker?" And let's make it quality time, shall we? Let's pour some drinks and put on some music and really get to know one another.

If you're a fan of the great and noble game of poker, I have good news for you. Poker is poker, online or off. That is to say, the game of poker is adapting quite well, thank you very much, to this new and thoroughly modern vector of the Internet. Most of the popular variants of poker (Texas Hold 'Em, Seven-Card Stud, and so on) are now available somewhere online. The new cyberspace cardrooms offer good players and good games, if you know where to go. Improving technology and canny game design are truly optimizing the benefits of online play. The essential alchemy of the game—cards and chips, skill and luck—remains intact.

There are some purists out there who will object to this assessment, and many of them come armed with very good points. The online game has some specific strengths and weaknesses—we'll get to that in a bit. But in terms of the spirit of the game, that indefinable charm that poker lovers know and cherish, the game's new incarnation online has not diminished its fundamental appeal.

Whether you grew up with poker as I did, playing with family and friends, or you came to the game later in life and found yourself hooked, you'll find that the experience of online poker is richly rewarding. The reason is simple enough: Poker is a great game. Like chess or backgammon, poker has endured and flourished and brought great pleasure to people the world over.

Basic Game Mechanics

The game of poker translates very well into the online medium. All the basic *game mechanics* used in a live game are also used in the online game. You are dealt a hand from a deck of 52 cards, and you wager on that hand (or not) against other players. As betting rounds progress, you can call, bet, raise, check, or fold. All action is represented graphically within the game environment—the virtual poker table.

That is to say, the poker game that you play online is the same one you play at home or in the casino, only the interface is different. Instead of manually handling the waxy cards and heavy chips, you click on-screen buttons with your mouse to declare your actions.

You also have the option online, as in a real game, to sit out a hand or two if you need a break. In cash games, or *ring games*, you can get up and leave whenever you like. In tournament play, you can sit out hands if you choose, but you're obligated to stay at the table until you *bust out* or, preferably, win it all. We'll get into the specifics of this in later chapters.

The objective of the game remains the same—on any given hand, you want to win the pot that contains all the bets made by all the other players in the game. You do this by having the best hand, or by giving the impression that you have the best hand and getting your opponents to fold. It's that simple.

Of course, it's not that simple at all. A popular saying about poker (well, really about the popular version known as Texas Hold 'Em) is that it "takes a minute to learn and a lifetime to master."

Online poker is an excellent way to learn the game and perhaps—with dedication and some talent—to begin to master it. The skills that you develop playing online can be brought to real-life games, and vice versa.

Luck, Schmuck: Poker as a Game of Skill

There's a common misperception about poker, most often among those only barely aware of the game, that poker is a game of chance like craps, roulette, or slot machines. Not so. Poker is a game of skill—with an element of luck. This basic quality is fixed and unalterable; it's in the very DNA of the game.

The good news is that the skills it takes to play good poker are learnable. We've talked a bit about how the immutable charm of poker and the basic mechanics of the game translate just fine into the online realm. Now let's talk about how poker skills are rewarded, whether online or off.

Practice, planning, and discipline are essential to playing good poker, and they are indeed rewarded—in spades, you might say. You'll hear a lot of talk in poker about other, more ethereal qualities of a good poker player, such as instinct, heart, and guts. These qualities, however, require a foundation of basic poker know-how and strategy. As the man himself once said, you gotta know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em.

Why Poker Is Unique

Poker is different from virtually all other casino games for one simple reason: You are playing against other players and not against the house. The house makes its money not by collecting your losing wagers, but by charging a fee to facilitate the game itself, either by "renting" seats at poker table or by skimming a percentage from each pot won—a process called *raking the pot*. Dice games, wheel games, and card games such as blackjack favor the house with mathematical certainty. Poker does not. A superior poker player can expect to win consistently against lesser opponents. That is why there are legitimate professional poker players, just as there are professional athletes.

Let's be clear—there is an element of luck in poker, and very good players do go broke. But ultimately, skill is rewarded in the game of poker. Even the law recognizes this. In some U.S. jurisdictions where gambling is illegal, poker is allowed because it is categorized as a game of skill rather than a game of chance.

This very fact makes poker unique among games typically considered gambling. And assuming that your online game is authentic and on the up-and-up, it is every bit as true for Internet poker as for the traditional casino or home game.

We'll be getting into some detailed discussion of skill and strategy later, but for now, I just want to make the point that there has never been a better time to learn the basic skills of poker. Thirty years ago, the only way to learn the game was the proverbial school of hard knocks. You would have to play real games for real money and likely lose your shirt more than a few times. It was a long, arduous, and expensive proposition.

While instructional books and, more recently, instructional software have helped to alleviate this situation for the new player, the advent of round-the-clock online poker games marks a new era entirely. Because you never have to play for real money, you can play regularly to sharpen your game and supplement your outside reading and practice.

Practice, planning, and discipline: These are the three cornerstones to setting up your structural foundation of poker know-how. Free money online games can provide the practice you need. The Internet can also assist you in developing a plan to learn the game properly. Check out Appendix A for suggested websites, magazines, and books designed to point beginners in the right direction.

Finally, there is discipline. This is a critical quality that you must develop to be a good poker player, online or off. In fact, in my experience, it is the single most important quality to winning consistently in online poker games. The reason is simple: Online

poker is new, convenient, and right now, somewhat trendy. That means a lot of new players are flooding the online rooms, and most of them lack a basic grounding in the game.

As a result, online games—especially in play-money and low-stakes games—are relatively *loose* and unpredictable. Bets and raises fly around like mortar shells. If you play straight, smart, disciplined poker in these wild games, you can win by staying out of harm's way and making precise surgical strikes when the time is right.

Yes, poker is a game of skill; it always has been. In this dawning era of convenient and legitimate online poker, your basic skills—honed by practice, planning and discipline—are worth more than ever.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Up to this point, we've talked in some depth about what we mean when we say "online poker." It's important to have this background as we get into specifics and details. Online poker is a frontier, an increasingly busy plot of virtual real estate where an established and popular card game is converging with new technology.

As we have already established, the essential charm, mechanics, and required skills of good poker are eminently transferable to Internet play. But obviously, there are many differences as well. For one thing, if you really want to, you can easily play online poker naked. This is more difficult in a casino. Okay, just kidding—just want to make sure that you're still paying attention!

So what are the specific strengths and weaknesses of the online game? Let's break it down, with a nod to Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone. We'll start with the good news.

Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone were the star and the director, respectively, of the classic Western *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*.

The Good

The most readily apparent benefits of online poker are convenience, ubiquity, and efficiency. Or, more simply put, you can usually find a good online game easily, at any time of the day or night, whether you want to play for funny money or real stakes. This is simply fantastic. I've spent a lot of frustrating hours in my life trying to arrange home games with friends and co-workers. I like the fact that I now have the option to pop online whenever the itch strikes.

Online poker is convenient in that once you learn your way around, you can jump into a game with other live players any time it suits you. The Information Age has been lauded (or accused, maybe) of bringing about the "death of distance." It's an amazing thing when you log on to a game of Texas Hold 'Em at 7 A.M. and find yourself seated with equally passionate players from France, China, South Africa, and Cleveland. Now *that's* a home game that would be incredibly tough to arrange otherwise.

The Internet game's ubiquity is part of its convenience. There are now a few dozen online cardrooms that offer play for fun or real money, operating 24/7, every single day. Figure 1.4 shows the 24/7 tournaments at PartyPoker.com. Even if your game crashes, which they sometimes do, you need only click over to a competing site to get back into the action. Browser-based games at Yahoo! or MSN offer a quick poker fix from any web browser–equipped computer: your sister's Dell desktop or the Internet café at your hotel.

And talk about efficient. These new Internet poker games are fully automatic and often brilliantly designed. The virtual dealer metes out the cards, processes the wagers, officiates the play, and shoves over the chips—endlessly, faultlessly, and without complaint. You don't even have to tip!

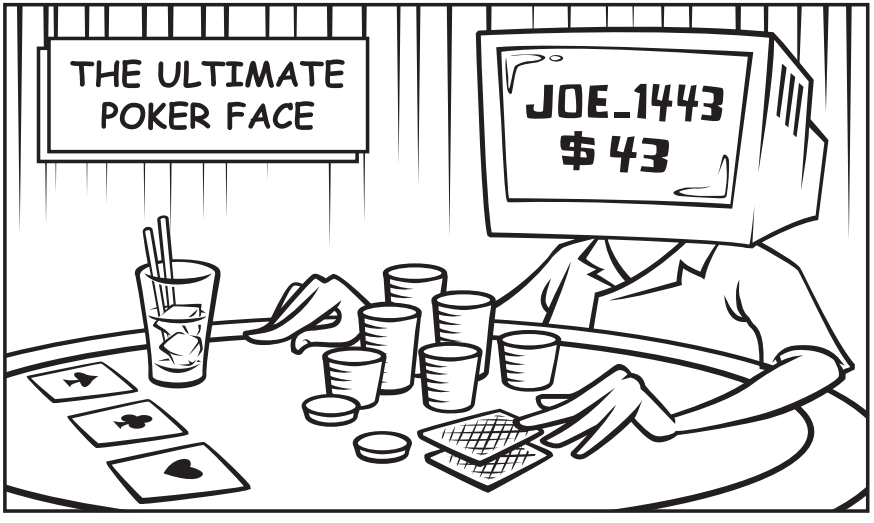
Figure 1.4 24/7 tournaments at PartyPoker.com

Because the game translates well to the Internet mode of play, you get a convenient game experience that is considerably authentic, relatively speaking. Playing poker online is a lot like playing poker at a real cardroom. By contrast, playing NBA basketball on your PlayStation, while fun, is rather different than actually driving the lane against Shaquille O'Neal. At least, I hope so. For your sake.

The Bad

Probably the number one criticism of online poker—and it is a legitimate one—is that you cannot actually see, hear, or directly assess your opponents. As you've probably seen on the various televised tournaments, at the highest levels of the game, a serious premium is put on the ability to *read* your opponents, to guess your opponent's cards or strategy by observing facial expressions, body language, or other telltale signs. If you're holding a good (but not great) hand, you want to figure out as best you can what your opponent is holding—or whether she is bluffing. You, on the other hand, want a good *poker face*: the ability to avoid "telegraphing" your hand by maintaining a blank or neutral demeanor.

This is true to a lesser extent at the more modest recreational and low-stakes games that you'll be playing online. It is the primary weakness of the Internet game that you cannot read your opponents in the traditional sense. Poker, it is often said, is a game of limited information. The more information you have on your opponent, the better your chance of making the right decision. When you can see your opponent sweating, or hear him breathing quickly, you have some information. How you interpret that information depends on your skill at reading your opponent (and his skill at obscuring the truth about his hand).



As of now, there is no way around this dilemma. There may come a day when broadband technology allows for a kind of "videoconference poker," in which all players are on live camera, but even this has its limitations. There's a famous episode of *Star Trek: The New Generation* in which the character Data plays poker in a holograph deck with virtual projections of Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, and Stephen Hawking. Maybe—*maybe*—holograph technology will someday remedy this problem of virtual poker.

Until then, you have to deal with this inherent limitation of the online game. And contrary to what some poker commentators maintain, there *are* some limited ways to read your opponent online, as well as methods of *bluffing* and *representing*. Careful players can still, for example, pay attention to an opponent's betting patterns and general tendencies. We'll explore these in detail in a later chapter, so stick around.

The other major complaint about the Internet cardrooms is that they tend to be much more loose than live games, even with real money at stake. This is a genuine problem, as much of the value of in-depth strategy is lost when four or five people are calling bets all the way to the end. You can make the most of this situation, however, because you will be playing smart poker and trying to improve while many of your opponents will be flailing around "having fun." We'll talk again in Chapter 8, "Navigating the Free-Money Cardrooms," and Chapter 15, "The Top Online Poker Rooms," about how to find relatively good poker at play-money and low-stakes virtual tables.

Finally, online games can be slower than live games (although they can be faster, too). Your opponents may be distracted, they may have slow computers, or they may lose their ISP connection altogether. Online poker games address this problem by giving each player a set amount of time to respond when it is their turn to act—usually 15–20 seconds. When time runs out, the player is automatically folded out of the hand. (There are some exceptions; see Chapter 9, "Take Your Seat! The Virtual Poker Table.") Still, even one or two slow players at a 10-seat table can kill the fun and rhythm of a game. Not a critical issue, but believe me—it can be decidedly annoying.

The Ugly

Western society has long had an ambiguous relationship with gambling. We like it, it's exciting and fun, but it somehow offends our more Puritan instincts at the same time. There is a simple explanation for this, so simple that it has to be true. Gambling involves money.

While poker proponents rightfully maintain that it is a game of skill, there is no getting around this fact: Poker is also a game in which wagering money is integral to the very structure of how it is played. You can play poker without real money, of course, but it does alter the game; it's not quite pure poker. Because money is involved, new complications and concerns arise that would not be a problem in the case of, say, online Scrabble (which is lots of fun, by the way).

The first problem is as old as gaming itself: cheating. Wherever there are games, there will be cheaters. Wherever there are games involving money, there will be dedicated, resourceful, cunning, and ingenious cheaters. You can bet on it.

In the case of online poker, the news is mixed. On the one hand, because everything is automated, digital, and remote, it is impossible for your opponents to cheat in the old-fashioned ways. You can't have an ace up your sleeve. (Well, you can, but it ain't going anywhere.) There is no way to mark cards and no way to peek under the top of the deck or at the next guy's hand.

Of course, being the resourceful little bastards that they are, cheaters can still find an illegal edge in online cardrooms. The most common concern is *collusion*, in which two or more players at a table share information on their hands in order to gain an advantage over a legitimate player. Your cheating opponents could be talking by phone, or they could be in the same room. It could even be the same person playing two different accounts.

Many of the other concerns about cheating focus on the possibility that the underlying game system itself could be compromised, either by independent hackers or by insiders at the virtual cardroom itself. A related worry is that the online cardroom itself is either crooked or unreliable on an institutional level—that it may shut down, go broke, or simply vanish, and you will not be able to cash out your winnings. Check out the "Online Casino Security Issues" sidebar for more details.

Aside from concerns of cheating and corruption, there are the rather murky questions of online poker's legality—especially in the U.S. We'll look at this more closely in the next section.

The final potential ugly side of playing online poker is one that is rarely addressed, but almost certainly more dangerous than all of these other concerns combined. It is the very real issue of *problem gambling*, or gambling addiction. This is something that should be taken very, very seriously. Any kind of gambling, online or off, poker or otherwise, has the potential to get you into a lot of trouble very quickly. Internet poker, with its virtues of efficiency and convenience, only compounds the danger. If you have any questions in this area (or even if you don't), I would urge you to check out Appendix B, "Problem Gambling." Here you will find a basic overview and links to sources of reliable information.

Online Casino Security Issues

Here's a website that you should bookmark right away: `www.rgpfaq.com`. This is the online FAQs (frequently asked questions) document generated by the good folks at the rec.gambling.poker newsgroup. Here is a list of online poker security issues that they have identified over the years:

- The ease of collusion among players. The magnitude of this risk is a matter of ongoing debate, but it is possible for your opponents to communicate secretly or even be the same person.
- The possibility that the cardroom will not honor a redemption request, that is, will stiff you when you ask for your money. (A few of the early sites folded holding player deposits.)
- The chance that your personal financial details, such as credit card number, are stored insecurely, allowing either a dishonest cardroom insider or external hacker to obtain them.
- The possibility that the game technology is not secure, allowing others to compromise the game's or site's integrity. This can take any number of forms, from others knowing your cards, knowing what cards will be dealt next, changing what cards are dealt next, or even impersonating you and withdrawing your money.
- The possibility that the underlying game technology is programmed to deal an unfair game, for example, by failing to shuffle randomly.
- The possibility that an insider at the cardroom will take advantage of existing security flaws or secretly create new ones to favor their accomplices during play.
- The chance that a cardroom insider will compile records of your play and reveal them to your opponents for strategic or tactical analysis.
- The chance that you will be found guilty of a crime in some jurisdiction, perhaps not even your own, simply for playing. For example, if your Internet traffic is routed through Virginia, as much of it is, are your Internet activities subject to Virginia law?
- The chance that authorities—somewhere—seize your money, either while deposited or in transit, and then place the burden on you of demonstrating why they should return your funds.
- The chance that opening an offshore account will bring other aspects of your life under the scrutiny of authorities, for example, by increasing the chances of an IRS tax audit.

The Internet, the Law, and You

The legal discussions in this book are not to be construed as legal advice, but as general information only. Please see a qualified attorney for any questions about the legality of online gambling.

Now let's take a look at the final piece of the puzzle—the often confusing and still-evolving issues of Internet poker's legal status. The $10,000 question is this: Is it legal to play poker online for real money in the U.S.?

The answer: kinda-sorta. I understand that this leaves a little to be desired in terms of exactness, but it's actually the most definitive thing you can say about the matter right now. The deal is that no federal laws apply directly to the individual activity of gambling online. The Interstate Wire Act, initially drafted to fight bookies back in the days of Prohibition, prohibits wagering over any communications network that crosses state lines. But the law applies only to those accepting wagers, not to the bettor. That's why you can buy into a $5 Texas Hold 'Em tournament from your home PC in Anytown, U.S.A., but the online cardroom itself is located outside U.S. jurisdiction.

Further complicating matters is the matter of state and local laws. With a few exceptions such as the Interstate Wire Act, gambling has always been a state issue in the U.S. And this is where it all gets terminally goofy. Very simply put, the problem is that online gambling has outraced government regulation—state and local laws currently on the books do not expressly encompass this new online phenomenon. That makes it complex for a state or local prosecutor to go after individual players, even if existing local laws might possibly apply.

Over the next few years, this issue will be slugged out in the courts by state attorneys and CEOs. There are several bills currently in development on both the state and local level. We'll dig into this more thoroughly in Chapter 11, "Playing with Real Money." So far, the government is not interested in going after the little guy playing poker on his Dell desktop system. In fact, no one has been given so much as a stern glance. Nevertheless, it is up to you as a player to determine whether playing poker for real money online is illegal in your jurisdiction.

The New Poker: How the Game Is Changing

Without a doubt, the game of poker is now more popular and widespread than it has ever been. Once associated with outlaws, gangsters, and poorly lit underground cardrooms, the game has assumed its rightful place as a seriously fun, intellectually challenging, and fundamentally social activity.

Much of poker's recent upsurge can be credited to two of our most recent and widespread technologies: TV and the Internet. Televised tournaments are now regularly broadcast on several national networks, with broadcast coverage resembling that of a pro golf tournament. (Really, think about it—applauding galleries, player interviews, and the hushed, reverent tones of the commentators.) Poker is essentially being treated as a competitive sport, and its mushrooming popularity speaks to the inherent thrill and drama of the game. Ten weird-looking people sitting deadly still and glaring at each other would not seem to be the stuff of compelling TV. And yet, somehow it is.

And, as we've discussed, the Internet has made a tremendous impact on the game. The industry website PokerPulse.com, which tracks activity across the major online cardrooms, estimates that upwards of 20,000 people are playing Internet poker at any given time. And those are just the real-money games. Conservative estimates suggest that the industry as a whole is grossing around $1 million per day.

Online real-money poker rooms	192
Average number of real-money players online at any given time	16,000
Estimated total $ of cash-game wagers in any 24 hours	$83 million
Estimated total prize pool of online tournaments since October 2003	$20 million
Gross daily poker industry revenue	>$1 million

Poker is cresting in what experts call the third wave of gambling in the U.S. Twice before, gambling has mushroomed in popularity and spread across the nation. (Significantly, both previous waves died when the government responded with near-complete prohibition.) Convenient and efficient, Internet cardrooms and TV tournaments are drawing tens of thousands of new players to the game every year.

So what does that mean to you? Well, it means that it's a whole lot easier to find a good poker game these days, and you can't complain about that. It also means there are a lot of inexperienced players—known as *dead money*—both in the online games and at the casino tables in Las Vegas and Atlantic City.

But mostly it means that your timing is exquisite. You've come to the game at a time when poker is rapidly evolving to new technologies and communication systems. It's an exciting time to be a poker player.

Poker Terms Used in This Chapter

artificial intelligence (AI) Generally speaking, the ability of a computer to approximate human thought; in gaming, a computer program designed to play a game "intelligently."

bluffing To bet or raise with a hand that is unlikely to be the best hand in the hopes of getting your opponent(s) to fold.

bust out To lose all of your chips; usually refers to being eliminated in a tournament.

central game system The "brains" of an online poker game: the computer program that facilitates the game itself.

chat window The on-screen area in which players type messages back and forth.

collusion A kind of cheating in which two or more players secretly share information at the table. It's illegal in all poker games.

dead money (1) Inexperienced players at high-level games. (2) Money in the pot by players who have already folded.

game mechanics The rules that govern and organize the game of poker.

interface What you "see" when you play poker online: the graphic and textual elements of an online poker room.

loose A poker slang term for a game in which many players are wagering freely and unwisely.

network A system of computers interconnected in order to share information.

poker face The ability of a player to avoid "telegraphing" his or her hand by maintaining a neutral demeanor.

problem gambling Gambling behavior that causes disruptions in any major area of life: psychological, physical, social, or vocational. (Source: National Council on Problem Gambling)

raking the pot A policy by which the house takes a percentage or portion of each pot won as the fee for facilitating the game.

random card generator A computer program that uses complex mathematical algorithms to simulate the act of physically shuffling the cards.

read To attempt to determine your opponent's cards or strategy by observing facial expressions, body language, or other telltale signs.

represent To deceptively wager in a way that suggests you have a hand other than what you actually have.

ring games (1) A non-tournament game. (2) A cash game.

table chat Conversation and small talk among players at an online poker table typed into the chat window.

video poker Digital slot machines, online or off, that use poker hand rankings as an organizing principle.