In this fascinating book Alex examines in forensic detail exactly what the generic poker population does in situations that arise again and again. Having analysed databases comprising of millions of hands, certain very specific and predictable trends are clear. Alex explains exactly what they are, why they exist and – most importantly – how you can exploit them.

EXTRACT

Most incredible poker players who also coach are going to teach you the style they use in higher stakes games. So, you're going to learn a lot about Game Theory Optimal play, because those players need to randomize their inputs so as to not be predictable. However, if you are going to play against a generic poker player who calls 80% of triple barrels, then you really shouldn't randomize a triple barrel bluff at all. You should bet second pair with a mediocre kicker for value and check/fold your missed draws. Incidentally, that is the actual number that I have seen across most databases. 80% of the time an average player will call a river bet. A professional player will only call 40% of the time, if that.

This might seem confusing, but I can prove to you that you call too much on the river. When was the last time you folded to a 1/3-pot-sized river bet with any kind of pair? When was the last time you saw a 1/3-pot-sized bet on the river that was a bluff? Right. You probably never fold to a bet that small, but you've almost never seen someone do that as a bluff. And if you're willing to call 1/3-pot, then you are usually willing to call half-pot. This goes into the human incentives we discussed in the previous chapter. There's no way to lose emotionally when we call a bet, especially if we are playing with tournament Monopoly money. If we call, we either muck our hand when we're wrong and no one cares or we win a big pot and look like a genius.

In general, databases around the world reflect that human beings are terrible at folding and bluffing. If I grab a sample of hands from pretty much any game on earth that isn't a $10,000 buy-in live tournament or a $10/$20 cash game I will see a 10% raise on the flop. This means that people are raising nut flush draws, sets, and two pair on the flop. That means if you continuation-bet A-K on a K-8-7 rainbow board and your opponent makes a pot-sized check-raise, then you should fold!

Oh my God! Crazy, right! How exploitable you'll be! Yet, imagine if you were in a poker room where it was punishable by death to check-raise bluff. Would you ever call with A-K on the K-8-7 board if your opponent in that poker room check-raised? No! Of course, not. You'd be a fool to. Yet, you live in that world. And you don't fold. Why? Because someone could bluff you? You'll be right most of the time, but the thought of ever losing is just unacceptable to you?

To my knowledge, my profits from poker are near seven figures, if not there. However, I get outplayed every day I play. It happens. Sometimes, people get one over on you. But the fact of the matter is human beings do not want to bluff. If you get caught bluffing in a live poker room then you are treated like an idiot. No one wants to feel that. Bart Hanson, a live poker training expert who has been a winning player live for more than a decade, agrees with this sentiment. On his website, Crush Live Poker, he is always reminding his players that check-raises at medium stakes games are rarely bluffs, so play accordingly. On the turn, people raise even less. Usually 7% of the time when facing a double barrel, either by checkraising or raising. On the river it's 4%. That means on the turn they're raising precisely their turned two-pairs and their slowplayed sets. And on the river they're raising royal flushes and better.