

WANNA PLAY CARDS?



Men leave for weekends away from home for golfing, fishing, hunting, bowling, you name it, we've come up with an excuse for slinking away from our responsibilities. These times are not solely for the freedom to expel air from all orifices without apology, or to don whatever clothing seems suitable without quips from the fashion gallery at home. Another reason is so we can play poker.

I started playing cards for money when I heard the financial review. Of six players, four broke even, one made a "little bit", and the other made "quite a bit". In a game where there were no losers, I definitely wanted to participate.

These card games are called "poker", but they're not. A poker purist would play three or four hands then rise from the table in disgust and frustration. The first two or three hands are, in fact, poker. Five card stud. Three card draw. Seven card stud.

Then the game begins to change. The first intimation of trouble is games like Deuces Wild. Jacks or Better. High or Low Chicago. Low Ball. Then a graceful pirouette into the truly bizarre variants. Deuces, Jacks and The Man with The Axe. Blind Baseball. Follow the Queens. Pee in the Ocean. Fiery Cross. Murder.

The last time I played a guy named Bill introduced a game called Solo. at least I think that's what he called it. Queens and Sevens were wild, but because he said it was a German game, to start the play you had to say "Froek" or some such word, and if you wanted to play a heart suit you had to say something like "Siss". Bill said the game was great fun, but was sufficiently complex that he couldn't explain it to us all at once. He said he'd explain the rules as we encountered situations that called for the invocation of them.

So we were playing a game for money that no one understood, where the rules were revealed only after they had been broken, and in a foreign language. I figured I should be OK with this, because after all I'm married, and

that pretty much defines marriage. Strangely enough, Bill was a consistent winner until we tired of it, held him down, and reclaimed our losses.

Once in a while, we'll play euchre, but not often. The last time we played, Howie declared that he would "go it alone". This generally means that the player has a very good hand and will play without benefit of his partner to secure extra points. Howie is such a conservative player, it could only mean he had a spectacular hand, an unbeatable hand, a laydown winner. One player immediately declared he had to get himself a drink. This caused several simultaneous drink orders. We could see Howie begin to squirm, anxious to play his wonderful hand. When all the drinks had been made and delivered to the table, a second player declared he had to go to the bathroom. Howie was really anxious to play this great hand and asked if the player could wait a few minutes. One interferes with bodily functions at great risk to self and the public at large and Howie should have known better. The player went to the bathroom, remained a very long time, and we chatted pleasantly, watching Howie become more and more fretful. Finally, the player returned and we had a full table again. "Whose bid?", someone asked. "Dammit, we've already bid and I'm going alone!", Howie screamed.

Then someone in the other room called. "Bob, come in here and settle this argument!", and a player got up and left the table. The fuse had finally burned down to Howie's firecracker. "You guys are stupid, unfair, cheap, and you cheat! That's it! Deal me out!", and he threw his presumably spectacular hand into the air to flutter to the wet floor. Success. Another guy has lost it.

On occasion, men have attempted to escape the card games by retiring early. This strategy does not work. If the din from the card room isn't sufficient to keep a person awake, the sleepers will be woken by the players when they retire. Once awake, there is no hope of sleep.

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