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From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Accidental Billionaires* and *Bringing Down the House*—the sources for the films *The Social Network* and *21*—comes the larger-than-life true tale of a group of American college buddies who brilliantly built a billion-dollar online poker colossus based out of the hedonistic paradise of Costa Rica.

One problem: the U.S. Department of Justice was gunning for them. . . .

Based on extensive insider interviews and participation, acclaimed author Ben Mezrich's *Straight Flush* tells the captivating rags-to-riches tale of a group of University of Montana frat brothers who turned a weekly poker game in the basement of a local dive bar into AbsolutePoker.com, one of the largest online companies in the world, on par with some of the behemoths of the Internet. At its height, Absolute Poker was an online empire earning more than a million dollars a day, following savvy business strategy and even better luck. Its founders set up their operations in the exotic jungle paradise of Costa Rica, embracing an outrageous lifestyle of girls, parties, and money.

Meanwhile, the gray area of U.S. and international law in which the company operated was becoming a lot more risky, and soon the U.S. Department of Justice had placed a bull's-eye on Absolute Poker. Should they fold—or double down and ride their hot hand? Impossible to put down, *Straight Flush* is an exclusive, never-before-seen look behind the headlines of one of the wildest business stories of the past decade.

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From Reader Review Straight Flush: The True Story of Six College Friends Who Dealt Their Way to a Billion-Dollar Online Poker Empire--and How It All Came Crashing Down . . . for online ebook

Tony says

Mezrich's works of fiction are generally a fun read, even if (or, perhaps, largely because) he rarely lets reality get in the way of a good story. This one, however, doesn't really work on either level. There's an obviously great story lurking underneath — or, if you're not really concerned with the facts, potentially *two* great stories. At some point someone is sure to write the more in-depth corporate-finance-thriller-esque exposé of the company's increasingly complex attempts to evade the US justice system, all-the-while shamelessly cheating their customers. But even though he obviously didn't want to write *that* book, Mezrich could still have gone for a much more classic tragedy — the David and Goliath tale of entrepreneurs up against not just better funded competitors, but the the entire weight of a broken political system, leading relentlessly to the key moment, where, hubristically believing they're beyond its reach, they take the path that ends in prison. Instead, the author decides to simply skip either of these in favour of an overly-simplistic frat-boy romp, with all the critical moments either omitted or glossed over so as to get back as quickly as possible to the fast cars and topless chicas.

Trever says

Wonderful book about absolutepoker.com since all I did in high school was play Texas Hold'em and learned how to play other games of poker on gaming sites like this, I loved the back story.

It is a wild ride.

Dave says

I don't know why I finished this book--I guess it was thrilling enough to make me want to hear the ending. This is a "dramatic narrative" account of the rise and fall of an online poker website, which went from a frat-house dream to a billion-dollar company to the subject of indictments and seizures by the Feds.

Mezrich mailed this one in--every mansion's lawn is "manicured" and at least three women are described as having "ample" chests. I was far less interested in the trappings of instant wealth than I was in the details of how and why the business succeeded and failed, but my interests were the opposite of Mezrich's.

Meg says

This one is a DNF. Got 2/3rds through the book and am not enjoying it. The story is ok, the writing is ok (not great, but ok) - neither is spectacular enough for me to keep reading.

Lawrence O'flahavan says

Better than the movie!!!

Brian says

An interesting story from the author of *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook, a Tale of Sex, Money, Genius and Betrayal* and in a similar style. Details the roller coaster ride by the founders of the Absolute Poker internet poker empire. I have my own opinions about how the government has handled online poker, and if anything those views were just strengthened by this read. Recommended to fans of Ben Mezrich or anyone interested in Poker and online entrepreneurship.

Book Lover says

I like the way that Mezrich rips a story from the headlines, and delves into with journalistic aptitude to create a readable book.

This fast paced book is about a group of University of Montana fraternity brothers, who had no gaming experience, yet moved to create Absolute Poker in 2003. They moved the company to Costa Rica where the site could operate without a gaming license. The frat boys made millions before the enactment of the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act (UIGEA), which criminalized financial transactions occurring on online gaming sites such as Absolute Poker.

If you enjoyed reading *Bringing Down the House*, you will likely enjoy reading this book.

Melinda Elizabeth says

Straight Flush charts the rise and rise of the online poker gaming industry, and how a bunch of frat boys developed a multi billion dollar business during the dot com boom.

The start up of the Absolute Poker website reads like a script for a movie – there's certainly lots of sex, drugs and intrigue when they leave everything behind and bank their investment in some dodgy banks in Costa Rica with the intent of creating an online poker environment that is just as enticing as the real deal.

However throughout the extraordinary accounts of excess and pure luck (many a car accident is had where all parties involved come out unscathed), you are waiting for an abrupt fall from grace. The people involved are continuously questioning 'is this legal'? And there's an expectation that it's all going to come crumbling down.

The majority of the book covers a three year period where they were biding their time before they floated the business on the Stock Exchange. Some ill timed legislation created a chain of events that pushed Absolute Poker's luck to the limit, and there are some tense moments where Pete is running from Canadian Mounties, websites are hacked, and Scott and Brent are forced to choose between life on the run, or time in prison for their roles in Absolute Poker.

If you're looking for a run down on poker online and how the software works (and how they snuffed out cheating) then this book is just a basic overview of this information. Same goes for the morality of business with third party banks and money facilitators, a grey area in the early 2000's on the internet. What we get instead is an overall view of a tenuous legal situation, without the hard core legalese that can weigh down a book with too much jargon. What's left is all the awesome high flying intrigue that makes great reading.

Lorna says

Considering I read this in one day, I'd say it was a definitely a page-turner -- mainly in a gawking at the accident on the side of the road kind of way. Just unbelievable how this particular off-shore gambling site was born. Not as good as his previous Bringing Down the House, but worth reading at the beach this summer. And poker players will surely get more out of it than I did.

Leo Walsh says

In poker, there's a concept called a "bad beat." That's when you have a great had, say 3 Aces, which will win 99% of the time. And yet, you get beat by a full house of, say, twos and threes, cards which suck individually.

In a nutshell, the story Ben Mezrich tells in STRAIGHT FLUSH, his fictionalized history of the online poker site Absolute Poker is a bad beat.

The story revolves around a handful of Montana fraternity brothers who create an online goldmine, the poker site Absolute Poker. Five years later, they are well on their way to becoming the next online billionaires. Until some radical Christian Republicans sneak an anti-online poker addendum into an anti-terrorism bill. Which makes them outlaws overnight.

Unfortunately, I'm no fan of "faction" like this. It takes a deft, masterly hand to pull this off. Truman Capote's IN COLD BLOOD comes to mind. Sad to say, Mezrich falls short here in my opinion.

Too bad since it's a good business tale, the sort of thing this B-School refugee often enjoys. What's more, like poker itself, the frat brother's plight illustrates how large a part luck actually plays in success. For instance, were the bill delayed by a couple months and the planned IPO for Absolute Poker went forward, the frat boys would be billionaires. Instead, one's in prison and the others exiled to islands in the Carribean. It's also supposed to be a cautionary tale about over-regulation, but since Absolute Poker was rife with betting scandals that Mezrich describes but wallpapers over, romanticizing the "valiant" efforts the company made to address them, this tact turns on itself. No doubt, a hard-right Christian congressperson slipping the anti-poker legislation into an anti-terror bill is shadier by a few degrees since it's manipulative: what senator

would vote AGAINST protecting Americans from terrorists?

The bottom line, though, is that STRAIGHT FLUSH doesn't work 100% for me. I think it's the novelizing of history and Mezrich's glorification of a twenty-something-with-millions lifestyle seems cheesy, verging on the voyeuristic. As if he wants that life for himself, and is also repelled by it.

Three-stars. Really 2.75 rounded up. A decent if flawed book.

T Sunclades says

The writing is fine, I just don't identify with people who "party hard"

This is the story of one of the many online poker sites that sprang up in the early 2000's. We follow a group of college friends who decide to try making a site to let people play poker on for money and see what happens. They have some wealthy friends and family that help them get their start. After that we have a lot of jet setting and debauchery and hard working nights and days. Eventually the United States congress sneaks language into an anti terrorism bill, as the snakes and dirtbags in DC are want to do, that makes their entire business model illegal. A short time goes by and the feds seize the website and fundamentally shut them down.

Again, the story is fine, I just didn't care for anyone in it.

Don says

This book follows the normal Mezrich formula for telling a non-fiction story that makes an appealing narrative. He specializes in telling stories of young geniuses who do stuff that no one else has been able to accomplish. His most famous book is *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook, a Tale of Sex, Money, Genius and Betrayal* which was the basis for the movie *The Social Network*.

If you haven't read his books before, start with another one. This one is not as strong a story as the others. Also, it did not help that he was sloppy with the facts. He tells of a brother of one of the main characters coming to visit him. The brother is a 19 year old returned LDS missionary who has served his year long mission. At the time of the story, a returned LDS missionary would have to be at least 21 years old after serving the standard 2 years. Makes me wonder what else he got wrong.

Brian Besaw says

Another Mezrich hit! *Busting Vegas* meets *Accidental Billionaires*. *Straight Flush* offers a behind the scenes look at the genius behind *Absolute Poker*, the online poker explosion, and the rise and fall of the major US online sites. For someone who was captivated by the poker boom, this book offers interesting insights. And, as a student of human nature, it is an especially fascinating glimpse inside a different kind of mind. While so many, upon first exposure to poker, online or otherwise, wanted to dive in and play, with dreams of a bracelet dancing in their heads, Tom Scott just wanted to be the guy raking a couple percent out of pots and lots of pots.

The only problem with Mezrich is that you can't put his stuff down. Once again, I finished it the day I picked it up.

Pat says

While not a literary masterpiece, this was a good account of these boys and their experiences as fledgling online poker entrepreneurs. I was surprised at my reaction to their being brought down by our government after doing absolutely nothing illegal until 2 congressmen attached an illegal gambling rider to a powerful port protection bill????? They took every precaution to be sure what they were doing was legal right to the end, paying back customers if there was any sign of illegal activity when hacked! I am no proponent of online gambling, but it is sad to think that the government can decide that a business that was fine one day is totally illegal the next - but, I guess I should NOT be surprised the way it operates these days - GRRRR!

Edward Monrad says

Took me back to the good days of online poker! It was fun to reminisce about sites, bonuses, ideas, and games long gone. Also interesting to see it from behind the scenes. Without having been a player back in those days myself, though, it wouldn't have been so interesting.
