



The Education of a Poker Player (High Stakes Classic)

Herbert O. Yardley

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From Reader Review The Education of a Poker Player (High Stakes Classic) for online ebook

Nick says

Poker strategies and stories from an American spy who grew up playing cards in Midwest saloons in the early 1900s and mainland China on the precipice of WWII.

Andrew says

I enjoyed it more for the told-over-poker stories than for the actual poker advice, which mainly relates to games there are seldom played anymore.

Kai Wen Choy says

This book is widely heralded as the first treatise on poker. It is an interesting read, filled with interesting stories by a man who has, by all accounts, led an interesting life. But I suspect most are not here to read about Yardley's exploits in life.

Yardley died in 1958, just before the onslaught of Texas Hold'em on the poker world. Today, the games described by Yardley have all but been displaced by Texas Hold'em. Players of Texas Hold'em would, I suspect, not find much useful reading in this book.

That being said, Yardley does a fantastic job of explaining the thought process of a poker player when it comes to betting. Most of it is, surprisingly, still relevant in the modern game. Lastly, Yardley's observations on the general nature of poker itself is timeless. Intelligent players will no doubt gleam some useful information from Yardley regardless of the game they play.

Oh, what I would give for Yardley to be alive and playing at the WSOP Main Event.

Bap says

I first became interested in poker in high school. My father gave me this book to read illustrating how to play hands, when to hold em, when to fold em. When I played in high school, I often brought 50% of my net worth to the table, say about 30 dollars. I continued playing in law school and have played off and on for the past twenty years. I still bring about 30-40 dollars to a game.

Yardley got his education when he started playing in a town in Indiana when his parents died when he was age 17. The owner of a saloon took him under his wing and taught him how to play. Yardley has tales to tell.

Kenneth says

I've had this in my backlog of poker books and forgot about it. The author had a pretty interesting life (seriously, look him up on Wikipedia) and this book gets in to the two main parts of his life with regard to gaming.

The first part is as a youth in Indiana who learned to play various poker games at a gambling hall in his home town. He eventually becomes a type of house dealer and shill when the owner takes him under his wing and starts tutoring him.

There are some pretty interesting stories that are told here about the people of his hometown who would come to play and the out-of-towners who would try to fleece them, or get fleeced.

The second part of the book takes place much later in the author's life when he's living in China as a codebreaker before Japan drags the US into WWII. He describes the looser games at the ex-pat hotels in China and the other people he meets at the tables there under the setting of imminent war.

This was really his guide to playing poker so there are a lot of pages devoted to card play that won't interest the average reader. And the dated language could possibly offend some readers when he's talking about the Chinese people he interacts with. I like a lot of his guidance, even if it's tedious to read. I did find it a bit more interesting to read about the house rules back in Indiana. Card game lovers will be glad to know that a lot of the unlimited and IOU betting that's described here went out of style in the mid-40s to 50s and are only in the movies now.

Richard Herbert says

The first ever poker read.....its serious old school but its a classic.

Sam says

Excellent mix of poker strategy and anecdote of learning the game in early twentieth century Indiana from the local master, and teaching and playing while working as a code breaker in China.

Joe says

This book is bar none, the best poker book ever written. It is such an unknown treasure, I laugh every time I ask if someone has read it, and they say they've never heard of Herbert Yardley. This is the memoir of the man that created MI-8. And, he'll teach you how to withstand a table full of card sharps chomping at your wallet.

Leta says

I have no idea how or where I got this book but it's been in the bookcase for several years now. So far the technical language is too far beyond my rudimentary knowledge of the game for me to enjoy the book. I may or may not finish it before I pass it on to a poker-playing friend.

So after a little research I learned what the poker terms meant which helped rather a lot. The book is largely divided into chapters based on different games (draw, stud, hi-lo, etc) and gives tips on which hands to fold on, etc through the device of example hands which is very informative but makes about half of the reading feel like a statistics textbook. Each chapter also has Yardley's anecdotes about learning the game from Monty, the guy in his hometown who ran the poker den (Yardley paid for his college education on his poker winnings), and from the time that he spent in China working on breaking the Japanese codes. The most accessible part of the book is Yardley's stories about teaching Ling, his guide/minder/translator how to be a better player.

Yardley was born shortly before the turn of the 20th century so the most popular version of poker played these days - Texas Hold'em - isn't covered. (Wikipedia tells me that Hold'em dates back to the 20s but didn't become popular until about the 80s.) Yardley's casual racism is another reminder of how old the book is - my copy was published in 1957.

I'm glad that I read the book but I'm not keeping it.

Roger Boyle says

Read it in no time - good fun.

Bit of an odd format but compelling - unfortunately completely overtaken by history, especially Internet gambling. But nice that he had such good stories to tell.

A novelty, now, rather than a contribution.

David Rauschenbach says

Favorite Quotes:

The next morning we were on our way to the tailor's, where I had ordered several suits of clothes. The tailor, while fitting me, began to jabber to Ling.

“What does he say?” I asked.

Ling spat judiciously, Western style. “He wants to know what side of your trousers you wear your

waterspout.”

“Well, I’ll be a son-of-a-bitch,” I said, imitating Monty after all these years. “Tell the bastard he flatters me.”
— p71 — Tags: funny

All officialdom becomes involved in red tape and suffocates under its own documents, but the Chinese, without the aid of dictaphones, duplicating machines, and other devices, are peculiarly lost in their own memoranda. They must be years and decades in arrears of events. One can visualize the governmental departments of the future steadily losing ground until eventually the morning memorandum on the desk of an executive will have to do with events which occurred in his grandfather's time and the Chinese ideal of identification of the living with their dead ancestors be wholly realized.

— p92 — Tags: funny

“Kid,” said Monty, “I’m going to read you excerpts from ‘The Purloined letter’.” He took from the shelf a volume by Edgar Allan Poe. “If you give what I read some thought, you will profit in your poker playing.”

“This,” continued Monty, opening the book, “is one of the characters Poe invents, Monsieur C. Dupin. Dupin is discussing the intelligence of the Prefect of the French police. He says:”

‘Many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years ago whose success at guessing in the game of even and odd attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and that lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, “Are they even or odd?” Our schoolboy replies, odd, and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself, the simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;—he guesses odd, and wins.’

‘Now with a simpleton a degree above the first’ (Monty continued reading) ‘he would have reasoned thus: This fellow finds that in the first instance I guess odd, and in the second, he will propose to himself upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;—he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning by the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed lucky—what, in its last analysis is it?’

“Poe is asked this question,” said Monty looking up from the page. “Poe replies:”

‘It is merely an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent.’

“Do you grasp what I have read in its relation to poker?” Monty asked, sipping his drink.

“I think so,” I said. “If you overvalue or undervalue another's intellect you will guess wrong. If you want to know when to call and when to bluff, identify yourself with your opponent's cunning.”

“Exactly,” said Monty.

— pp14-15 — Tags: enlightening, interesting

Jay says

Much of Yardley's technical advice has been surpassed by a new generation of thinking and computer simulations but his human observations and advice on how to understand what is happening at a poker table are timeless.

An added benefit is to see into the mind of someone who was highly successful in other interesting endeavors.

Judging the book for what it was and when it was written, it was a technical masterpiece that provided more reliable information than anything before it;

Frank says

Fun, serious, evokes a former time. Yardley mixes stories of learning to play poker as a kid with serious advice on how to play, and adds colorful reminiscences of play during his career as an international codebreaking U.S. spy in the 1920s and 30s.
