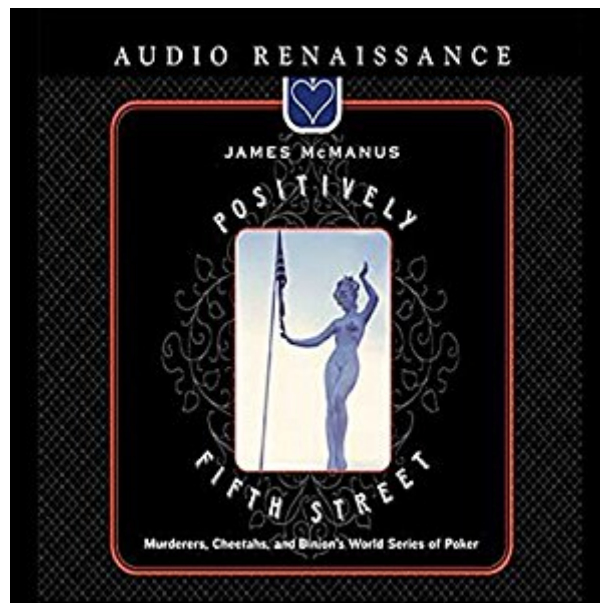




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# Positively Fifth Street: Murderers, Cheetahs, And Binion's World Series Of Poker



## Synopsis

Rough sex, black magic, murder, and the science of gambling meet in the ultimate book about Las Vegas. James McManus was sent to Las Vegas by HarperCollins to cover the World Series of Poker in 2000, especially the mushrooming progress of women in the \$23 million event, and the murder of Ted Binion, the tournament's prodigal host, purportedly done in by a stripper and her boyfriend with a technique so outrageous it took a Manhattan pathologist to identify it. Whether a jury would convict the attractive young couple was another story altogether. McManus risks his entire HarperCollins advance in a long-shot attempt to play in the tournament himself. Only with actual table experience, he tells his skeptical wife, can he capture the hair-raising brand of poker that determines the world champion. The heart of the book is his deliciously suspenseful account of the tournament itself—the players, the hand-to-hand combat, and his own unlikely progress in it. Written in the tradition of *The Gambler* and *The Biggest Game in Town*, *Positively Fifth Street* is a high-stakes adventure, a penetrating study of America's card game, and a terrifying but often hilarious account of one man's effort to understand what Edward O. Wilson has called "Pleistocene exigencies—the eros and logistics of our primary competitive instincts." --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Excellent collection of poker history coupled with an intriguing murder trial. I would eliminate a lot of the diverse tangents since I skim read through many pages and stick to the interesting items. A

great story however, and so exciting to have an inside view of a Main Event final table. Well written and honest, sometimes to a fault!

MaManus has great style and insight and his take on tournament poker, sex and life and death in Las Vegas is excellent. His insights in to the death of Ted Binion are interesting but he may have been a little too close to Ted's family to have a completely clear perspective. The prosecution never proved their case beyond a reasonable doubt. The death of a heroin junkie is almost always due to the drug not foul play and it takes a lot of direct and circumstantial evidence to reach beyond a reasonable doubt and the proof against the accused was speculative at best and non existent at the worst. Sandy Murphy and her boyfriend were convicted on suspicious circumstances and other factors not evidence. The turkey baster and Burking theories were never more than the fantasy of the hired expert brought in from N.Y. The Supreme Court of Nevada has reversed the murder verdicts against Sandy Murphy and her lover and ordered a new trial not on lack of reasonable doubt but on other irregularities in the sensationalized trial which was unfair to the accused. Perhaps McManus will write a sequel dealing with the new trial. However this time he should stay out on the strip where his line of sight may be better. Also I would like to read his insights as to life on the strip and tournament play at the Bellagio. Maybe his publisher will provide the seed money again.

Positively Fifth Street is one of those rare nonfiction books that read like a great first person novel. It doesn't hurt that McManus follows in the gonzo tradition of Hunter Thompson on his journey. The book begins with McManus a professor and freelance writer who is hired to write a story on how women are appearing more and more at the World Series of Poker and how women are becoming more visible in the game. But this is no ordinary World Series, because the Binion family that has run the event every year since its founding is distracted by the murder trial of sibling, Ted Binion. And to top it off, author, narrator, Jim McManus is also a bit of a poker player himself. Jim wants to enter the tournament with his writing advance, but he doesn't have enough money. He has two college aged children and two young children at home and nothing but bills. With all of the tension of the story Jim is sent to cover, his own personal tensions slowly become the center of the book, especially after he enters the tournament and goes up against famous players, including the author of Jim's favorite tournament book, TJ Cloutier. I found the writing very immediate like a conversation that happens immediately after the event. I also found the tension internal and external was enough to sustain the multiple storylines. McManus seems to end each section of commentary at a natural

conclusion and this makes the transitions easy to follow. I enjoyed Alvarez' great history ONLY GAME IN TOWN and found Anthony Holden's BIG DEAL quite interesting, but neither was as fun to read for me as POSITIVELY FIFTH STREET. This is the kind of book that you can enjoy regardless of your poker knowledge. It may even convince you to take up the game.

McManus is a writer for Harpers Magazine as well as a writing teacher, somewhere below on that list he's a long time poker player. Old players like Doyle Brunson and Amarillo Slim honed their skills through decades of play but McManus admittedly extracted most of what he knows about Hold Em from reading poker books, though he was corrupted by summer stays at his grandparents' house as a kid. With an advance of a few thousand dollars to cover the World Series of Poker in 2000 for Harpers Magazine, he elected to try a different perspective and attempt to get his research by actually entering the tournament. The entry for the main tournament was \$10,000 so the advance was a great deal short of just an straight out buy in entry. McManus had to score at least one satellite tournament win to assure him a seat. The book has 3 main stories, James McManus' progression through the WSOP, the murder trial, James McManus' life in respect to the whole ordeal. The murder story concerns the clout of the former owner of the Horseshoe Casino, Ted Binion (hosts the World Series of Poker) by his estranged girlfriend Sandy Murphy and mutual friend of theirs, Rick Tabish. In the first few pages it is painfully obvious McManus has a well honed ability to construct sentences and resurrect words that have accumulated years of dust to phrase them with. I opt not to agree with some of the other reviewers on the format of inter mixing the stories together because there is a need for character building to pull off the resulting plot. If he were to just include the World Serious of Poker portion, it would have just been another poker book about a guy who placed only 5th and not a writer there to investigate two stories. Anything less than first place certainly could not warrant a story on its own merits so I enjoy this book as is.

An amazing book. Somehow the author is simply telling the story of how he played in the World Series of Poker but also weaves in all of the following:- Murder- Adultery- The history of poker- The history of cards- The history of Las Vegas- The mob- What constitutes "cheating" on your wife?- High ethics- Discussions of game theory- His own family tree And just about everything else. All of it in brilliant prose that makes it fascinating. At the same time he brings you to the poker table and you feel the tension of re-raising TJ Cloutier with the author. I felt sick a few times as the author described playing pocket jacks aggressively. If you love poker or gambling or marriage or reading or

life, read this book.

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