

No Limit by Pete Hautman
Simon Pulse

You know I go through a lot of books. I get them for free, spend an hour or two with them, and then just throw them away, so it's nothing out of the ordinary for me to say, I spent an hour with No Limit before chucking into the trash, or for me to say, it was an hour too long. However what that information doesn't convey is my feelings of betrayal. Believe it or not, I don't normally feel the need to write a blasting review of a book. Usually if a book sucks, I just throw the piece of garbage away, try to forget about the entire thing, and move on with my life, but there was something about this particular piece of drivel that riled my ire.

Perhaps it is the fact that the Simon Pulse imprint claims that the book is edgy, daring, and real. Now I'm an old man, or at least compared to the teen's these books are aimed at, I'm an old man, so edgy and daring I may not know, but real... Let me tell you, this book is not real. In 50,000 words or less, the "hero" Dennis Doyle--Denn to his friends--goes from a 16 year old kid doing freelance landscaping to being quite possibly the best poker player in the state, owner of three cars, and a restaurant! He owns a freaking restaurant! Not bad. Not bad at all for a story that spans all of June, July, and August. I mean, this kid has some winning streak. But real? Real it is not.

I suppose the pretension, the gall that the publisher has in claiming that this story might be the slightest bit realist or that it might be some sort of morality play is what set me off. I mean, if you want to read a wet dream about poker or if your idea of realism is an unbelievable turn of luck then go for it, but it ain't real. Casinos do not let minors play in them, and--believe it or not--the type of guys who play poker in the back room at all hours of the day and night are also the type of guys who turn violent if they lose more than a few bucks, especially to some snot nosed kid. Just add it up. Three cars, the gold bracelets, the stacks of money, the restaurant: how long do you suppose it took those folks

who lost all of this to acquire it? Three months? Try an entire lifetime, and if you still believe in easy come easy go, perhaps you're not old enough to realize what that means. My life savings is just that: what it took me my entire life--the last thirty years--to acquire. You think I'm just going to happily hand it over to some punk kid who comes waltzing in on my poker game and gets lucky? Dream on. Even if I wasn't going to beat the crap out of the kid, rob him blind, throw him in the trunk of a car and leave him for dead in some shallow swampy grave; even if I wasn't going to do that, I just might call the cops on him when it looked like I was going to lose. A minor gambling in a card house, that ain't legal anywhere that I know of.

So, the story just ain't real.

And don't even get me started on the morality play aspects. The back of the book says, and I quote, "The cards are dealt, the money is bet... and the worst possible thing happens. Denn wins." Um, and how is that bad? Oh, right. He loses all of his old friends. Wow! Now that is harsh. Or I suppose it would be, if Denn cared in the least, but he doesn't. Here's the closing passage.

I own a restaurant and three cars and I am the best poker player in the state--maybe in the world. I am rich, but I don't care about the money anymore. I don't even care about being the best. All I want is to play cards, to run my fingers over those slick, hard surfaces, to feel that cold power flowing in and out through my hands and eyes. I am waiting for the phone to ring.

One more hand.

Yeah. That sounds like the final passage from a tale about a guy who picked up a deck of cards... and then the worst possible thing happened. He found his passion. He found his calling, and he found out that he was incredibly, unbelievably good at it. Perhaps the best at it on the entire planet! And this thing, this skill, this talent, what does it provide our hero with? What indeed? Nothing short of a restaurant my friends, nothing short of a restaurant, but therein lies the snag, the rub, the catch if you will.

The place isn't a strip club, a bar, or a house of ill repute, it's a simple steak house, almost too wholesome to be real, and that my dear friends is the true tragedy of this tale. If you're going to write an over the top wet dream for recovering gambleholics, then you want to finish with a big gushing climax. Unfortunately, this book ain't got one. It sputters flaccidly along for 50,000 words only to leave you feeling unsatisfied at the end, perhaps with a sour taste in your mouth, as you vaguely wonder how in the world such a piece of deng ever got published. Who knows? I hear Pete Hautman won an award or something. Maybe one of his other books is halfway decent, but as to this one, I'd say there's No Limit to its unrealistic banality.

{Sorry. I'm sorry. Years later, I reread my review, and having had a bit of a lucky streak of my own in the interim, I have to say that I'm doing a complete 180 and admit that the story is totally realistic and spot on. So, my bad. And that comment about a shallow grave in a boggy swamp, just a joke, no skeleton in my closet... or water soaked back yard, as the case may be..}

{}{}{}© Copyright Brett Paufler{}{}{}

{}{}{www.Paufler.net}{}{}

{}{}{If it looks like an opinion, it is an opinion.}{}{}

{}{}{If it looks like a fact, it's probably still just an opinion.}{}{}

{}{}{Please see terms of use for complete details.}{}{}