Op-Ed/Editorials – Gambling and the Law®: Don't Finish This Book

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There ought to be a law prohibiting anyone from writing a book about gambling who does not know how to make a bet. (There also ought to be a law against writing books if you can't write, but that is a different subject.)

Gambling has been at the heart of many stories. The best, inevitably, are by writers who know gamblers, because they are gamblers themselves.

Among the first, and most famous, is Fyodor Dostoevsky's The Gambler. The story centers on a game, roulette, and is written in a style that are out-molded today. But reading it we know that Dostoevsky was a gambler, and probably a compulsive one.

The best recent book involving gambling is James McManus' Positively Fifth Street. McManus is not only a brilliant poker player and writer, he is a gambler. He took his entire advance for a magazine article he was to write on the 2000 World Series of Poker and the Ted Binion murder trial, and used it to enter the WSOP himself. He won $247,760, finishing fifth. A real-world ending that an editor would say is as unbelievable as naming a winning poker player Moneymaker.

Which brings us to the most recent book revolving around gambling, Lottery by Patricia Wood. If you haven't heard about this yet, you will. And later, if you're male, you'll be dragged into seeing the movie.

Wood is good when she writes about what she knows: the mentally disabled, sailboats and winning a state lottery (her father won one). She writes like the beginning author (she thanks the Maui Writers Retreat) she is about everything else.

Wood does a good job of giving voice to Perry L. Crandall, I.Q. of 76. Most of the rest of her characters cannot even be described as two-dimensional. Perry's relatives are all evil, greedy lawyers and MBAs. His best friend is an alcoholic

Vietnam vet, who, despite farting and swearing and having to be over 60, becomes the love interest of Cherry, a 17-year-old tattooed cashier. Woods even has a character named Mike Dinelli, who says things like, "If this doesn't work out you are going to have much more to worry about than each other. Capisce?"

Perry wins the state lottery, so his evil family tries to get his money.

But clearly Wood never bought a lottery ticket herself.

If someone has just won $12 million, what would you want to know? How's he going to spend it, of course. But lottery players want to know how many tickets did he buy? How did he choose the numbers? How often did he play? What was the game?

Wood isn't interested in any of that. She is writing a chick-flick.

I like romantic comedies. But they have to be internally consistent.

We can forgive Wood solving a romantic triangle with the deux ex machina of a convenient fatal auto accident. And it's O.K., barely, that Perry is a marketing genius.

But, having resolved the fight over the money, Wood, for no reason, reintroduces it. Then, she has Perry give it all to his family, after he describes them as jackals. His reason? "People should get what they want," and it will stop his family from pestering him. But after one brother embezzles it all, Perry's mother pesters him for more, and Perry has no trouble telling her no.

The ending is so ridiculous, it ruins the book. So, my recommendation is stop about half way and make up your own ending. Whatever you think up would be more realistic than giving away $12 million to a bunch of jackals.

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