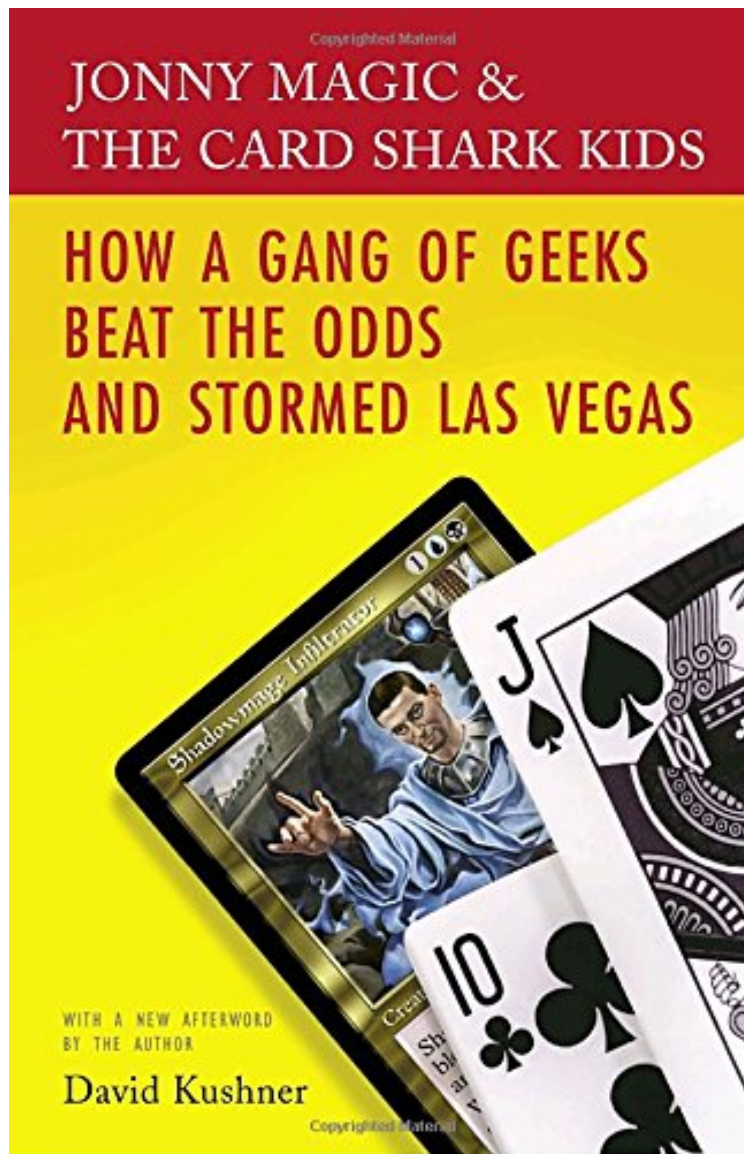


(Online library) Jonny Magic the Card Shark Kids: How a Gang of Geeks Beat the Odds and Stormed Las Vegas

Jonny Magic the Card Shark Kids: How a Gang of Geeks Beat the Odds and Stormed Las Vegas

David Kushner

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David Kushner : Jonny Magic the Card Shark Kids: How a Gang of Geeks Beat the Odds and Stormed Las Vegas before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jonny Magic the Card Shark Kids: How a Gang of Geeks Beat the Odds and Stormed Las Vegas:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Brains, games, making money and overcoming the odds. By C. J. Hulbert
Jon Finkel was an overweight, middle school nerd who was bullied, laughed at, and ostracized until he found his calling in a fantasy game called Magic. Magic combines the otherworldliness of Dungeons and Dragons with complex elements of card play and has become a cult game with tournaments of its own. In *Jonny Magic and the Card Shark Kids*, David Kushner follows the transformation of Finkel from teenage geek in the throes of Magic mania into a thin, sophisticated and extremely wealthy professional gambler who joins the highly successful blackjack counting team known as The Lawyers. The true-life story traces Finkel's evolution from bully magnet to World Champion Magic master, to card counter and shuffle tracker, to sports bettor, and onto the World Series of Poker. Throughout his adventures, Finkel is accompanied by the so-called "Card Shark Kids," a strange mix of misfits and brainiacs who find a sense of belonging through the addictive escape of Magic and carry that into the gambling world. Kushner does an impressive job of providing condensed explanations of such wide-ranging gaming concepts as the underlying premise of Magic, the mathematical foundation of card counting, and sports betting theory, while keeping the reader engaged in Finkel's ongoing tribulations and triumphs. Interwoven within the biography is also an intriguing account of Dr. Richard Garfield, the inventor of Magic, who would be a worthy subject for his own story. Ironically, the story's pinnacle comes via the success not of Finkel but of David Williams, another Card Shark Kid and Magic enthusiast, who claimed the 3.5 million dollar second prize of the 2004 World Series of Poker. Although Finkel is having success at poker tournaments, he doesn't yet have the crowning achievement to capture a literary climax to his own journey, so Kushner sneakily manipulated Williams' victory as if it was connected to Finkel. What is particularly revealing about *Jonny Magic* from a game player's point of view, is that it provides an unexpected answer to the question, "Where are all the young guns of poker gaining the championship qualities to end up as final table tournament players?" Apparently, a surprising number have been Magic players from a young age -- honing the essential qualities of discipline and emotional control long before tackling the intricacies of poker. And if Magic is far harder to master than poker, as Finkel suggests, Magic players would have a distinct edge. Yet, while Finkel's tale has the makings of a fascinating read, Kushner's book isn't as emotionally gripping as one might expect from a biography about a man's metamorphosis. Even when Kushner describes a young Finkel as afraid to go to school because of such humiliating experiences as being urinated upon, the reader might wish he had a deeper and less cliched reason to root for the game-playing underdog, who we really don't get to know at any more than a surface level. Certainly, if the inside life of a professional gambler intrigues you, *Jonny Magic* will satisfy some of your voyeuristic curiosity -- but be forewarned that at least half of the book is focused on Finkel's life playing Magic, and not on how he later accumulated his ample wealth as a professional gambler. If you're a Magic player, this might light your fire, but if you're not, you might be tempted to skip ahead to the casino action. Whatever else the book accomplishes, it does confirm one thing most professional gamblers already know: that brains are always a frontrunner over beauty when it comes to making money and overcoming the odds.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Two Stars
By christopherWay too much emphasis on the game "Magic", instead of the man who became "Jonny Magic".

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Couldn't put it down
By S.A. Really easy and interesting read. I picked it up thinking it was strictly a poker/casino story. The book went into the Magic game, which I knew almost nothing about. It was really interesting reading about how this fantasy card game created a huge group of kids ready to take on the casinos at their own game. Made me wish I had stuck with my DD and followed that crowd. An all around interesting story - I highly recommend it.

If you think a gang of real-life geeks can't take on the world and win big . . . think again. And whatever you do, don't sit down across a gaming table from Jon Finkel, better known as Jonny Magic. *Jonny Magic and the Card Shark Kids* is his amazing true story: the jaw-dropping, zero-to-hero chronicle of a fat, friendless boy from New Jersey who found his edge in a game of cards and turned it into a fortune. The ultimate bully-magnet, Finkel grew up heckled and hazed until destiny came in the form of a trading-card game called Magic: The Gathering. Magic exploded from nerdy obsession to mainstream mania and made the teenage Finkel an ultracool world champion. Once transformed, this young shark stormed poker rooms from the underground clubs of New York City to the high-stakes tables online, until he landed on the largest card-counting blackjack team in the country. Taking Vegas for millions, Finkel's squad of brainy gamers became the biggest players in town. Then they took on the town's biggest game, the World Series of Poker, and walked away with more than \$3.5 million. Thrilling, edgy, and ferociously feel-good, the odyssey of these underdogs-turned-overlords is the stuff of pop-culture legend. And David Kushner, acclaimed author of *Masters of Doom*, masterfully deals out the outrageous details while bringing to life a cast of characters rife with aces, kings, knaves . . . and more than a few jokers. If you secretly believe every player has his day, you're right. Here's the proof. From the Hardcover edition.

From Publishers Weekly
A fat, gross, know-it-all teen whom bullies urinated upon, Jon Finkel found his calling as a champion of the Dungeons-and-Dragons-with-a-deck-of-cards fantasy game known as Magic: the Gathering. His mental acuity honed by the complex card game, Finkel went on, with his cohort of Magic cronies, to conquer grown-

up gambling as a blackjack card-counter, sports bettor and tournament-caliber Texas Hold-'em poker player. Journalist Kushner, author of *Masters of Doom: How Two Guys Created an Empire and Transformed Pop Culture*, treats Finkel's saga as a journey toward self-knowledge and manhood, as he loses weight, starts scoring babes (with the help of arcane womanizing strategies gleaned from PickUpGuide.com) and develops the stoic grace under pressure that defines mature masculinity. It also symbolizes the liberation struggle of dorky "young brainiacs" who are "ridiculed, stomped and beaten" for their intellect and find solidarity and empowerment through fantasy gaming and online wagering. The author flogs his revenge of the nerds theme half to death, even after the nerd has metamorphosed into a sleek, wealthy professional gambler ("here he was, once again, being beaten down by the system for being too smart," Kushner rails after Finkel has a run-in with tribal casino officials), and his celebration of gambling's socially sterile, zero-sum path to personal growth tastes a little rancid. Still, his tour through the colorful subcultures of fantasy gaming and casino gambling makes for a lively, if somewhat pulpy, picaresque. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#) Jon Finkel was just another nerdy kid in middle school when the card game Magic swept his world. It wasn't quite *Dungeons and Dragons*, though it had a similar otherworldliness, and it wasn't quite like collecting baseball cards, though it had a similar -collection-building quality. Magic, the brainchild of Ivy League mathematician Dr. Richard Garfield, turned out to transform this overweight, bored kid into a hero among his peers. But it didn't stop with winning Magic tournaments. Finkel and his math-whiz cohorts (the Card Shark Kids) next moved to blackjack, forming the most sophisticated card-counting team in history. Then it was on to the World Series of Poker and a \$3.5 million payout. Kushner's account of Finkel's triumphs transforms gambling into the stuff of a terrific underdog story in which lovable nerds conquer the universe. Mary Frances Wilkens Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved

Praise for *Masters of Doom* Terrifically told . . . The storytelling is so fluid, so addictive, that your twitching thumbs keep working the pages. [The Washington Post Book World](#) Kushners mesmerizing tale of the Two Johns moves at a rapid clip . . . describing the twists and turns of fate that led them to team up in creating the most powerful video games of their generation. . . . An exciting combination of biography and technology. [USA Today](#) Meticulously researched . . . As a ticktock of the creative process and as insight into a powerful medium too often dismissed as kids stuff, *Masters of Doom* blasts its way to a high score. [Entertainment Weekly](#) [An] extraordinary journey . . . an exhilarating time capsule of a moment in time where anything could happen and often did. Kushner's take on this geek uprising is like a breakneck-paced comic book that you cant put down. [Newsday](#) Kushner's portrait of Carmack is lustrous and gripping. . . . An impressive and adroit social history. [The New York Times Book](#) From the Hardcover edition.