

Boulevard of broken dreams

Day Four of the World Series of Poker was a bloodbath and the reigning champion, Joe Hachem, was among the victims. Barry Glendenning in Las Vegas reports.

Of the 8,773 players dealt cards on Day One of the World Series of Poker main event, only 45 remained as of last night. With the tournament set to finish on Thursday, there are genuine concerns (well – whisper it – hopes) that matters may be drawn to a premature close, thereby affording the occupants of the pressroom some long overdue pool-side lounging time.

Day Four alone was a bloodbath that saw 346 players eliminated and balefully cashing in their chips. Among them was reigning champion Joe Hachem – the Australian crashed and burned after going all-in for USD 97,000 with pocket aces against two other players, one holding pocket jacks, the other AQ. Another jack on the board gave one of them a set and sent a disappointed Hachem to the rail in 237th place. Last year's winner goes back to Melbourne USD 42,882 richer – better than a poke in the eye but mere chump-change compared to the USD 7.5m he banked 12 months ago.

One potential heir to Hachem's throne is current leader Jamie Gold, who is barely visible from behind his enormous USD 7.3m stack. The vast majority of the individual chips piled neatly before him are worth USD 10,000 each, with each representing another sorry loser's buy-in and broken dream. A former Hollywood agent from Malibu, 36-year-old Gold possesses all the charm and charisma you'd expect from a man in his profession and has been rubbing some of his fellow competitors up the wrong way.

After throwing USD 200,000 into one massive pot, he forced another player to bottle it by looking him straight in the eye and announcing „you don't wanna call“. Having given the matter

considerable thought, the opponent in question angrily folded AK face up. Gold promptly smirked and mucked his cards without showing them, in the process riffing all over his frustrated victim's pain. Nice.

Some of the best entertainment to be had away from the tables, meanwhile, is around the back of the convention centre at the Rio, where the World Series of Poker dealers take their cigarette breaks and bitch enthusiastically about the players whose tantrums and whinges they're forced to listen to as they shuffle up and deal for hour after hour.

Shortly after one of only two women to make it to Day Five, American trailer-trash queen of poker Annie Duke, busted out, the men and women with the nimble fingers could be found in buoyant mood. „Good fuckin' riddance,“ snarled one New Yorker, punching the air with delight. „She never fuckin' tips and all she ever does is complain.“ Another was equally pleased, but for more misogynistic reasons: „I just don't want no woman to win this tournament,“ he shrugged. „It just wouldn't be right.“

Earlier in the week, another dealer went off on a spectacular rant about pay conditions. „We're working 15 hours a day for less money than a trashman gets,“ he thundered. „Less money than a trashman – can you believe it? The sad thing is we're surrounded by more trash on those tables than any trashman will ever have to cope with.“ With a field of 8,773 competitors already whittled down to 45, the disgruntled dealers have been taking out the trash in style.