

The Agony and The Ecstasy

Confessions of an Adrenaline Addict

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Fingers flexing convulsively, palms turned downward to hide the telltale dampness that besages the agony of withdrawal, a lopsided smile and unfocused eyes betraying the extreme agitation which grips him, the addict enters the dimly-lit ambience of a favored den and maneuvers himself distractedly across the floor. The object of his quest is painfully near, yet he feels the need to dissemble, to mask the searing compulsion which knaws and tears at his vitals: He coughs nervously, speaks briefly to acquaintances, orders a beer or perhaps lands and stares at nothing in particular for a while, constantly sizing up the situation and planning how best to carry out the remainder of his charade. He knows the coast is clear, the assigned table is unoccupied and his partner hovers nearby, having noticed all of the above within the first few moments of his entrance; yet he still feels he must not be blatant, he must not betray himself for the pulless automaton he is, he must above all preserve appearances.



The attraction grows apace, however, and soon in command of his will—he nods with forced nonchalance to his partner, and the two make their separate ways to the side of the table. They stand waiting, awkwardly immobile, having reached the physical manifestation of what they crave without quite tasting of the sensual fulfillment which will free them, for another day at least, from the relentless agony which drives them night after night to this very place.

Where is the opposition? They begin to alvivate now, hoping against hope that the necessary fix is imminent. Both addicts stare at over the convivial, unsuspecting crowd which conceals them, waiting with spasmodic jerks of the wrists for another pair of moths to be drawn into the same flame that scorches them so cruelly.

Ah! Another pair, begins to wend its way across the congested floor, the glassy stares and snapping wrists a perfectly intelligible communication for the two who await. The new duo plant themselves in positions opposite the original pair and mumble to each other in the esoteric jargon of the hardcore addict:

"Offense or defense, man?"

"Defense. Got a quarter?"

"Yeah. Watch out for the goalee's whipshot. 's fast, man, and he doesn't give too much arning."

The brusque salutations are soon dispensed with, the sacrificial quarter is injected into the voracious maw of the foosball table, and the furious struggle commences. This is the point at which adrenaline begins to play its obligatorv role as the guarantor of victory, the source of relentless attacks and lightning defensive plays, of the murderous whipshots from the rear and the reflex blocks which are their only effective defense. Only when the victory-giving tide of adrenaline has coursed completely through the straining blood vessels of the foosball addict can the true attraction of the sport be appreciated: For at the height of play, when both sides smash away and the players must be maneuvered with a furious speed and accuracy, there is no need for the normal conceptual linkages and thought-processes that usually guide us, and only adrenaline can clear these hindrances away and facilitate the simultaneous transmission of sense data from the eye to the hands. Likewise, only a surfeit of adrenaline can exorcise the powerful cravings and free the addict to go about the business of yet another day.

A cancerous social disease? A blight on the face of society, a threat to the American way of life and the propagation of the protestant work ethic? Hardly. The most disturbing aspect of foosball addiction is probably the cracking of a few overzealous fingernails or perhaps the fact that each one of these furious encounters requires another quarter, and the resultant drain upon the usually meager resources of any one devotee can leap to fiscally ruinous proportions.

But what should occupy us here is neither of these paltry considerations, as we are concerned more with the psyches of these wayward sportsmen. What drives them into this adrenaline-soaked frenzy, what sinister force transforms them into the captives of the very figurines they think to maneuver, how is the gentle social drinker (that staff of life for barkeepers) to comprehend the contorted ferocity of ruthless cunning to be found on addicts' faces at the height of play? Why this fierce knotting of the stomach, this blood-thirsty urge to attack, this primal lusting after the fleetingly satisfying sound the ball makes when it strikes the barrier inside the opponent's goal?

Ah, why indeed? This is a question I and my unregenerate addict friends have frequently asked ourselves. The exhilaration of victory is at best transient and is usually bought only by a series of heart-breaking defeats at the hands of remorseless adversaries. Unlike the adept gladiators upon the more glamorous greensward of the pool table, there is no possibility of earning money for the dedicated foosballer; the only remuneration is the chance to play another game. Nor does the prospect of adulation on the part of sympathetic and enthusiastic bystanders exist, since nobody pays any attention to the warfare on the table except other hardcore foosballers, and this addicted kinship tends to consist of a fairly sanguine and taciturn lot who are given neither to clamorous tributes for the victors nor earnest commiserations for the vanquished: All that interests them is their own position in the line of quarters which demarks the order of succession.

Then why, what deep-seated compulsion forces these lost souls to unleash torrents of quarters in mosachistic orgies that serve only to ruin one's fiscal standing, what is the nature of this emotional disorder that tran-

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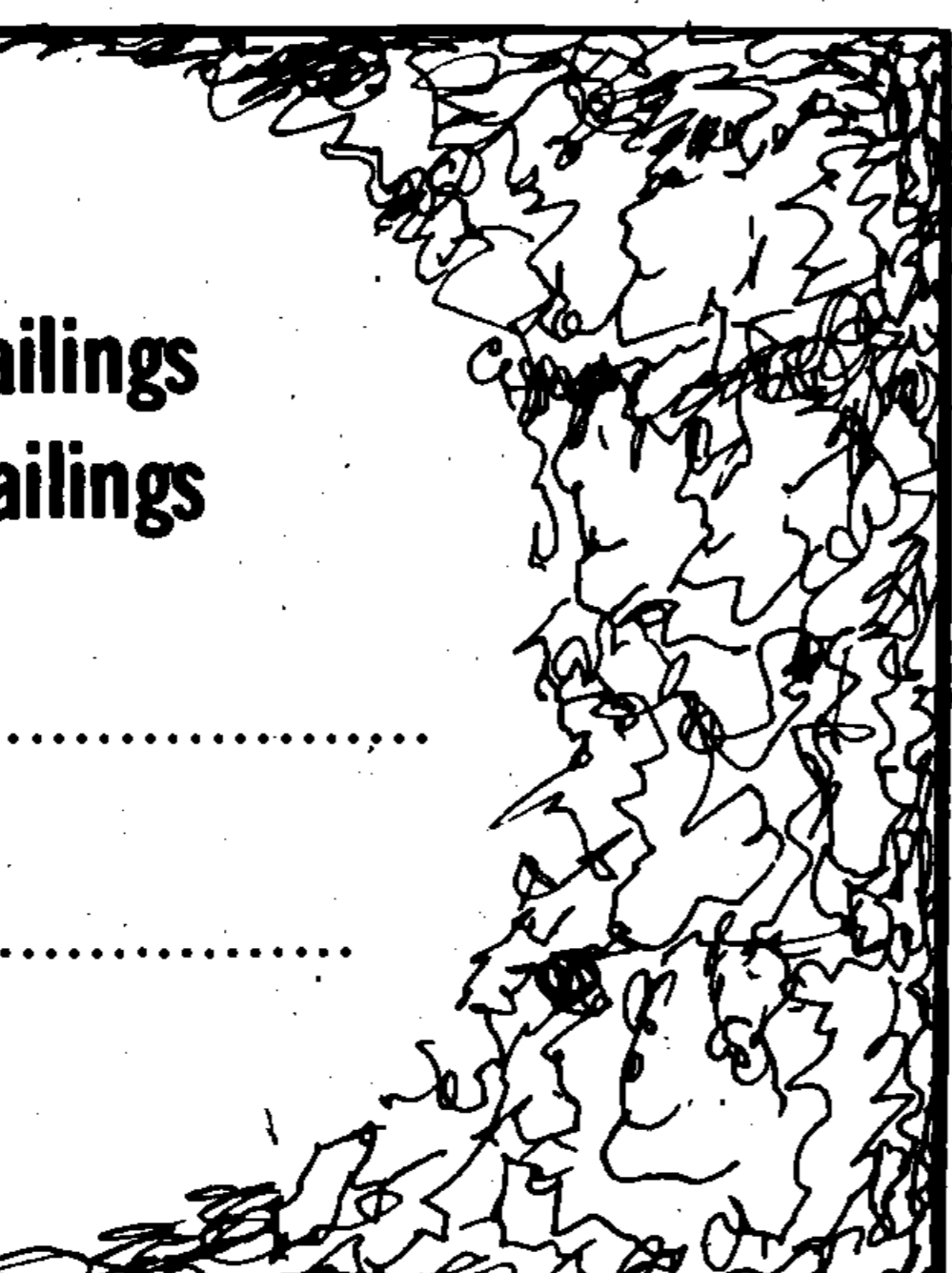
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