

the love of golf

Fore!

fs



Johann
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DEDICATION.

Where do I even begin? First, a hearty thanks to my brother, who so kindly deceived me into thinking I had a shred of talent in this sport, a belief largely founded on my utter cluelessness about the game's rules, which occasionally gave rise to brief, glorious delusions of competence. On the flip side, a tip of the hat to the numerous friends with whom I've shared the greens over the years—friends who have delivered advice in the way only true comrades can, with the blunt yet brotherly suggestion, "Don't quit your day job!" I intend to heed this sage counsel with all seriousness.

"I know I am getting better at golf because I am hitting fewer spectators." — Gerald R. Ford

INTRODUCTION.

I would welcome you to the peculiar world of golf. A game that simultaneously elevates the spirit and crushes the soul, often within the span of a single hole. But this is a game so unpredictable, that one moment you're feeling like a deity commanding the elements, and the next, you're questioning your very existence and purpose in life.

Golf, dear reader, is not a sport; it is a mockery and a revelation, a joy and a drudgery – it is a journey into the discovery of the self, more often than not, the darkest and most infernal embers of the soul. It is a grand and untamed rollercoaster of emotion, played out on meticulously manicured lawns that serve as both the stage for triumphs and the backdrop for tragedies. It is where grown men, mostly, or mostly grown men and sometimes women, chase

after an elusive white nemesis, wielding clubs with names that sound like they were borrowed from a medieval armoury – drivers, irons, and the ever-ominous woods.

Mark Twain famously quipped, "Golf is a good walk spoiled," but perhaps he failed to appreciate the game's full grandeur. Twain was at best, subtle in his understatement. In truth, it holds the power to spoil not just walks, but entire weekends. For every amateur golfer, there exists a personal saga of battling not just the course, but the very laws of physics. Here, in the game of golf, Newton's laws seem more like mild suggestions, where every water body or bunker mysteriously possesses a gravitational pull specifically designed to challenge every notion of the sciences we claim to understand.

This book aims to take you on a journey through the highs and lows of this noble pursuit. From the glorious tee shot that, against all odds, finds the fairway, to the putt that circles the rim of the hole only to decide it's just not ready for commitment – we'll explore every facet of the game that

keeps enthusiasts coming back for more torment amidst isolated moments of pure and untethered euphoria.

We'll explore the camaraderie that flourishes in the bunkers and the rivalries forged on the fairways. We'll pull back the curtain on the secret or questionable societies of the 19th hole, where scores are settled and tales of near-glory are shared over drinks that numb the bitter sting of defeat. Had Shakespeare lived in our era, it is golf, not the allure of romantic entanglements, that would have inspired his prolific prose.

Golf is a game that provokes those timeless rhetorical questions, even among the most unrefined players who handle their clubs more like ploughshares: "Why do I do this to myself?", "Why am I here?", and "What is the purpose of life?"

And yet, before the echoes of our despair fade, we find ourselves teeing up again, convinced that this time, this game, will be the one where 'things come together'.

So, grab your clubs and join us as we celebrate, commiserate, and jest with the game that is, for many, a lifelong love affair characterized by brief moments of ecstasy and prolonged periods of agonizing blunders.

Through laughter and tears, we'll come to appreciate the weird and wonderful game of golf, a sport that teaches us it is not the triumphs but the labours that truly test our mettle and inspire us to become better men. Sometimes. Welcome to the odyssey of the amateur golfer, where every shot is an adventure, and every round is a story waiting to be told – preferably with a healthy dose of humour and a side dish of impudence and intoxication.

"Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated." — Arnold Palmer

DISCLAIMER.

Before you take the plunge into the verdant abyss that is golf, there are a few things you should know. Consider this your warning label, the kind you might find on hazardous materials or the latest diet fad.

Taking up golf is not a decision to be made lightly. It demands sacrifices that would make even the most ascetic monk, reconsider.

Monetary Drainage.

First and foremost, prepare your wallet for a relentless assault. Golf has a voracious and insatiable appetite. Your bank account will haemorrhage money on equipment that promises to shave strokes off your game but often only adds

to your frustration as you slowly realise that “the club maketh not the man”. And let's not forget the designer attire because, as we all know, looking the part is half the battle – specifically, the half that doesn't matter in the least, but costs you a fortune, nonetheless. Most fools, across the ages, have adorned themselves in lavish abandon as a means of overcompensation. Golf is no exception.

Relational Strain.

If you're in a relationship, good luck and give notice. Golf will test the depth of your relationship like little else. Your significant other may start to wonder if "tee time" is code for an illicit affair and in many ways, one could argue that it is. You'll spend countless hours away from home, roaming distant fairways, and when you do return, it'll be with the sunburnt demeanour of a wayward sailor, speaking a language filled with birdies, bogeys, and mulligans – the rantings of a madman. Date nights will increasingly be replaced by YouTube tutorials on perfecting your swing and

Saturday morning Parkruns will make way for buckets of balls on the range.

Familial Fallout.

For those with children, be warned: your offspring will grow accustomed to your weekend absences. In extreme cases, when (and I say 'when' and not 'if') your golf turns into an outright obsession, your kids might, at some point, enquire with your spouse about this peculiar man who visits from time to time in such a familiar manner and why they should call him 'Dad'. But on the bright side, you'll have plenty of time to ponder parenting strategies as you search for your balls in the rough. Again.

Peace of Mind.

Say goodbye to it. Golf is a mental game that will have you questioning your life choices, your grip, your stance, and

why the universe seems to have a vendetta against your very person. You'll experience moments of Zen-like focus, followed by the kind of self-loathing that only comes from triple-bogeying a hole you've played a hundred times. This is generally followed by a continuation of triple-bogeys for the rest of the round as you find yourself incapable of 'getting out of your own head'.

So, why do it? Why subject yourself to this torment? Because golf, in its maddening complexity and challenge, offers moments of pure, unadulterated joy. The perfect drive, the chip-in from the fringe, the long putt that somehow finds the hole - these are the moments that golfers live for. They're fleeting, but they're what bring us back to the course, time and time again. Almost comparable to the isolated incidents when your first child behaves in line with your expectations, luring you into the trap of agreeing to another and perhaps another. That is if you find time for such frivolities amidst the rigorous hours that golf – your first love – demands of you.

Welcome to the fold, brave soul. May your drives be long,
your putts be true, and your sand traps few.

***"Golf gives you an insight into human nature, your
own as well as your opponent's." — Grantland Rice***

THE ORIGIN STORY.

(SO I'M TOLD).

Now, some would argue that the universe originated from the explosion of nothing. This cataclysm supposedly transformed into an organic soup of sorts, which—defying every recognized scientific principle related to the conservation of energy—decided (despite its lack of a brain) to increase in complexity and evolve—believe it or not—upwards! While I'm no authority on the explosive origins of nothingness and the seemingly nonsensical evolution that ensues without depleting the majority of the soup to a status lower on the food chain than it was moments before, when such a chain didn't exist, I've been baffled by much simpler concepts. So perhaps the simplest explanation is often the most likely. I routinely see high school sports stars 'devolve'

into couch potatoes and armchair referees, which at least aligns with the law of conservation of energy. Rarely, if ever, do I witness in nature a swallow turning into an eagle or a guppy into a shark as a survival strategy. I say 'rarely'. However, in golf, I've observed countless attempts (and I emphasize 'attempts') at upward evolution, leaving me utterly humbled. I still find the explosion from nothing a stretch of the imagination, especially when it's used to dismiss the much more plausible and highly appealing notion of an Almighty God. But then again, that's just me. It kind of feels like an origin story must at least have an element of 'intention', don't you think? But for every rule, well, there is a paradoxical law of Murphy. No, I'm kidding. For every rule, someone will find a way to break it. Wait, what? I digress. We'll cover the rules later. Maybe. If we must. Let's get back to the origin of golf.

Golf, you see, might just be nature's singular attempt to transform or evolve lethargic middle-aged Neanderthals into something resembling Homo Sapiens. Thus, like the

origin of the world, it makes sense to start right at the beginning. It grounds the conversation. And the beginning of golf? Well, it's a tale shrouded in mystery, myth, and the occasional sheep wandering across what would eventually be known as the fairway. One thing is for sure. Golf did not start with the explosion of nothing.

To embark on this journey, we must traverse the corridors of time, extending well beyond the reach of your trusty 5-iron, to the mist-enshrouded lands of Scotland. Here, amidst the rugged terrains that would one day produce icons like Sean Connery and the world-renowned Scottish whiskies, the game of golf first sprang to life.

Legend has it that it was the Dutch who initially dabbled in a primitive game involving a stick and a ball. However, the Scots, never ones to be outdone, took this basic idea and proclaimed, "Hold my ale." They morphed it into a pursuit so riddled with frustration and obsession that it inevitably

led to the creation of 18-hole courses and the ubiquitous wearing of plaid trousers.

It is widely accepted that golf, in its nascent form, appeared in the 15th century, though historians debate the exact timing as vigorously as a seasoned golfer defends their score in a heated competition. What is certain is that the game gained such popularity in Scotland that James II felt compelled to outlaw it in 1457, concerned that it was distracting his archers from their training. Indeed, golf was once deemed a threat to national security—a fact that today's weekend warriors might find comforting as they send their balls sailing into adjacent fairways. We may have exchanged the barbaric yawp of William Wallace's "FREEDOM!" for the equally spirited cries of "FORE!" but our passion and tenacity remain as fierce as ever.

We are rebels yet; passive-aggressive ones maybe, but rebels nonetheless. We wage our private wars on that defenceless ball and, whether we win or lose, we never feel

even a slither or a shred of emasculation, for we are the man in the arena, and Roosevelt will attest to the fact that this matters. More than that – it demands respect.

Sorry. I got carried away. Back to the origin story.

Despite royal decrees, the Scots' love for golf could not be diminished. The Old Course at St. Andrews (imagine me taking a bow in reverence and respect), stakes a claim as the "Home of Golf." Its 18 holes are a testament to centuries of tradition, innovation, and the occasional curse uttered in the heat of the moment.

As golf spread like a well-intentioned rumour, it evolved. Clubs that were once crudely fashioned from wood took on new shapes and materials. Balls transitioned from the feathery concoctions that could barely withstand a stiff breeze to the dimpled wonders we battle today.

From these modest origins, golf evolved into the global phenomenon we now know, obsess over, and agonize about. It's a game that has enchanted kings, captivated writers, and even seduced presidents. Its history is a rich

tapestry, interwoven with tales of triumph, tragedy, and the unyielding quest for that next perfect shot. You've experienced this pull, haven't you? That tug at your soul, compelling you to return for more, like those quiet addictions we battle in the secluded corners of our hearts. We tell ourselves, "Not again. No more. I'm done," yet even as we utter these words, we know they're not true.

So join me now, as we pay tribute to those who first struck a ball across the rugged Scottish landscape. Raise your glass filled with the finest Scottish whisky at hand, place one hand over your heart, and with a spirit wild and free, declare with me: "...and that's how I screwed up my birdie putt!"

Sidenote: To the Americans: Bourbon is not Whisky. It is more akin to medicine that's outlived its expiration date. Fear not, though. We'll enlighten you yet.

THE COURSE.

If we aim to master golf, or indeed any aspect of life, there are a few pivotal questions we must confront:

Who am I? Unfortunately, I can't assist you with this existential quandary, but as you wander the verdant expanses and stumble through sand traps in search of your elusive ball, golf's knack for introspection will force you to ponder deeply.

What tools do I have at my disposal? This is a tactical evaluation. What resources are available to achieve the desired outcome?

Typically, I define 'tactical' as achieving an outcome with a limited set of tools within a specific environment.

We might delve into strategy later, which involves pondering, "Could I reach a different outcome by altering

the resources or the environment?" *(spoiler alert, this is the part that opens the gates on monetary haemorrhaging).*

So, in keeping with tradition, let's start at the very beginning.

The tee box.

The tee box is the sacred ritual ground from which all golfing journeys begin. It's here, amidst a small elevation of manicured grass, that players muster their hopes, dreams, and the occasional silent prayer to the gods.

The tee box is the only spot on the course where you're allowed both a literal and metaphorical uplift—teeing up the ball in a rare act of leniency from the game's otherwise ruthless regulations. It is right here, surrounded by at least six wary eyes from your fellow players, that you must prove your mettle. What you do here, on this podium, echoes in eternity. No matter how brilliant or flawed the rest of your game is, it is for this single moment that you will be

remembered. Yes, dear reader, it is here that all men, even the greatest among us, succumb to the temptation of the greatest evil in the world: the EGO.

It is a rare thing to see a man humble himself in front of this crowd by choosing any club other than the driver. A rare thing indeed.

A moment of strategy.

Each hole on a golf course is equipped with its own array of tee boxes, colour-coded for your convenience and masochistic inclination. From the championship tees, positioned as far back as the architect's malice could place them, to the forward tees offering a gentler commencement, each tee box presents unique challenges and opportunities. There's a golden rule among men, fuelling many a tale at the 19th hole: If your first shot doesn't surpass the ladies' tee, you owe your foursome a round of drinks. It seems some golfers take this as a perverse objective, consistently botching every tee shot.

Standing on the tee box is one of those rare moments in golf where you can feign complete control. You can survey the hole, account for the wind, and select your weapon—be it a driver, wood, or for the audaciously prudent, an iron. This selection is often narrated out loud and with fanfare, as the player walks you through exactly why he believes he is making the best possible tactical choice considering the vast expanse in front of him. All of this, of course, presumes you possess the skill to execute your strategic choices. Some aspire to fade or draw the ball, only to hit it so perfectly in the teeth that the only turn they can expect, is either through divine intervention or through the solid strike of a tree, which I wager, was not part of the plan.

The Rituals.

Observing any group of golfers on the tee box, you'll witness a spectrum of rituals as varied as the players themselves. Meticulous practice swings, deep breaths, and covert glances at the group ahead, silently urging them to hasten

as if, by some miracle of overestimation, you might reach them despite being more than 300 meters apart. The tee box is a stage, and every golfer is an actor, albeit with varying degrees of skill.

I've seen these overdressed thespians boldly outline how they will navigate water hazards, curve the ball just beyond an edge, and strategically approach the green to sidestep the bunkers, only to sheepishly request a mulligan when their plans falter at the ladies tee. High-stakes wagers fly about, with bets ranging from cash to car titles, to spouses. Of course – and let the record show - that I've never engaged in such betting myself, so I can only speculate on how these high-tension gambles unfold when it's time to pay up.

The Unwritten Rules.

Beyond the printed regulations lies the etiquette of the tee box. It's where sportsmanship and camaraderie are on full display. There's the nod to the player with the honours (the

one to set off first), the eerie silence as each player takes their turn, and the mix of consolation and congratulations post-drive. Occasionally, there's an awkward pause, when no words can adequately capture the spectacle just witnessed. I've seen golfers swing so mightily that they bend their shafts. I've watched as a driver's head flew off, followed by the owner losing their head immediately after (figuratively, I should add).

But for every shot, there is at least one story per player that either matches the greatness or shares in the remembrance of an equal memory of defeat. In many ways, the tee box is a microcosm where politics, ethnicity, and class distinctions dissolve into the collective experience of the glorious and gruelling game of golf.

The fairway, the first cut and the rough.

Ah, the fairway, that lush runway of dreams, flanked on either side by the first cut and the rough. Don't be fooled by how easily these descriptions roll off the tongue.

"First cut" and "Rough" are merely euphemisms for the initial circles of golfing purgatory.

"A good golfer has the determination to win and the patience to wait for the breaks." — Gary Player

The Fairway.

This is the golfing promised land, where the grass is trimmed to perfection, coaxing the ball to sit up proudly, almost begging to be struck again. Landing here is like winning life's lottery, albeit temporarily. The fairway is where shots can be planned with precision, where golfers can strut with a hint of swagger, knowing they've played it safe, played it smart. But don't be fooled. Even the fairway holds its secrets, with

undulations and hidden riddles. To complicate matters for those who lie on the fairway, each subsequent shot must be consistent with its predecessor. And so, each fairway shot raises the bar, and not without varying degrees of difficulty despite being on the fairway. If the ball is only slightly above or below your feet, you need to compensate accordingly. To complicate matters further, the distance you play with a specific club varies when playing on a coastal versus an inland course. Even in this picturesque setting, where conditions seem optimal, players face a myriad of strategic decisions that could perplex even the most advanced supercomputer. All the while, players observe their comrades tackling the tumult of the first cut or the wilderness of the rough, much like watching a survival show on the Discovery Channel.

The First Cut.

A mere step away from the fairway, the first cut is golf's gentle nudge back towards righteousness and humility. It's

not quite the full onslaught and penalty of the rough, but it's a clear signal that you're not where you're supposed to be. The grass here is ever-so-slightly longer, exaggerating any mistake you make. If your hands close too early or too late, or if the club face is too open or too closed at the point of impact, the effects will be dramatically magnified. This often results in a bizarre zigzag across the fairway, accompanied by primitive grunts and a symphony of curses as the golfer trudges past his comrades calmly and sympathetically watching from a more favourable position on the fairway. For such players, what is meant to be a "casual" round on an average 18-hole course can quickly escalate into a gruelling half-marathon trek. Compared to the rough, however, the first cut is the equivalent of a parent counting to three for the misbehaving child. You know that trouble is looming, but you're still on the edge, if barely. When you move from the fairway onto the first cut, you essentially move into the spiritual realm. Here, strategy gives way to hope and it is in times like this, that once again, I am grateful that my prayers are not directed towards "exploding nothings" or "organic soup".

The Rough.

Welcome to the wilderness. If you look closely, you might stumble across famous people like Bear Grylls or Indiana Jones. Here, your expensive golf clubs are suddenly as valuable as mere toothpicks, and you might wish you had brought an axe instead. In this untamed expanse, surrounded by flora and fauna ranging from meerkats to wildebeests, your resolve is truly tested. The rough is not just about searching for lost balls; it's about rediscovering your dignity and questioning your life's purpose. It is the Garden of Eden all over again, complete with serpents and forbidden fruits. The rough is where good intentions and dreams often go to die. It is a stark reminder that the straight and narrow path is invariably the wisest route. In life, as in golf, finding yourself in the rough means confronting challenges head-on, navigating through the mess, and learning to appreciate the fairway all the more, if and when you make it back.

Journeying through the rough reminds me somewhat of Bilbo's adventure in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, aptly titled "There and Back Again."

"I've always made a total effort, even when the odds seemed entirely against me. I never quit trying; I never felt that I didn't have a chance to win." — Arnold Palmer

Hazards.

Water and sand—the diabolical duo of the golf course, meticulously designed to test the sanity of even the most zen-like players. It's as if the golf course architects, in a moment of sadistic inspiration, asked themselves, "How can we make this genteel game of ours a tad more infuriating?" And voilà, water hazards and sand traps were born, much to the dismay of golfers everywhere. You see, it's not just that the clubs we play with are probably the most ill-designed equipment for the task at hand, we now have hazards to contest with – gravitational phenomena that rival the Bermuda Triangle or the Black Hole.

"The most important shot in golf is the next one." — Ben Hogan

Water Hazards.

These aquatic abominations are where golf balls go to drown, perhaps as an exaggerated act of projection on behalf of the player. Positioned with cunning to equal the biblical Delilah, water hazards have a magnetic pull on golf balls that defies scientific explanation. It's deceptively simple: where there is water, there the ball will go. The sight of your meticulously teed-up shot making a beeline for the nearest pond is enough to make a grown golfer weep. And I have seen grown men weep and wail with my very own eyes – weep as if they were Job, with all but life itself stripped away.

Sand Traps.

Also called bunkers, and perhaps aptly so, because that's where you go to hide. No seriously, water, I can live with as the ball is gone and you can accept it for what it is, but bunkers? You could find yourself digging to China and still not rescue the ball from its sandy grave, each stroke burying

your self-esteem deeper into the abyss. "Sand is sand," one might think. Oh no! That would be too simple. From one day to the next, a bunker's consistency can vary between beach-like conditions to solid concrete. You might as well get a beach umbrella and set up camp – you might be here for a while. Invite some friends and bring the kids – it's going to be a long day. Remember the suntan lotion! And to make things truly glorious, bunkers cluster like wolves – they're rarely alone. Where there's a bunker, there's bound to be more! Trying to get out of the one, often lands you in another and so you move like a terrorist cell in hiding – from one bunker to another. Bunkers are where your previous three fairly decent shots fade into memory and the mere thought of a par, dies a slow and gritty death. Escaping from a bunker requires a delicate blend of finesse and power. The pros make this look so easy – a gentle nudge from this treacherous realm back onto the relief of the green – it's a lie, I tell you, CGI to lull us into thinking anyone can do it. It could just as well have been a politician's tale of universal healthcare and free education, once they're elected. There is no getting out of this hole with grace. Instead, you might

remember a clumsy pirate swinging a scabbard at a seagull in the midst of a storm. It's not easy – not even close. The feeling of watching your ball repeatedly thud against the steep sides of a bunker, only to plop back down at your feet, is a special kind of torture reserved for those who dared to dream of a bogey-free day.

The existence of water and sand on a golf course is a stark reminder that the game is not just about skill, precision, and strategy. No, it's also about adversity, humility, and the art of swearing under your breath, while maintaining a perfect façade of control and enjoyment. These hazards are the universe's way of asking, "You thought golf was just a game? You thought you had any skill whatsoever? You thought you had any self-respect? Cute. Try again."

But fear not, for it is not all doom and gloom. There is some reward at the end of these trials. There is some respite from the battles that leave you withered and confused. It is called, "The Green".

The green.

Ah, the green - the promised land, the El Dorado of the golfing world. After battling through fairways, flirting with hazards, and surviving the antics of bunkers, the green stands as a beacon of hope, a testament to the golfer's perseverance. Imagine you're a pimple-faced teenage bookworm who avoids eye contact with the world, and then the prettiest girl in school walks over and confesses her undying love. This is what it feels like to reach the green. A word of caution, however. Getting the girl is one thing. Keeping the girl, well, that's something altogether different. Welcome to the world of possibilities and torment.

Dreams and nightmares.

The green, with its smooth, pristine surface, appears inviting, almost serene. It is so alluring, that it may just be the modern Succubus of ancient folklore. Her long, flowing hair cascaded down her shoulders like a waterfall of midnight silk, framing a face of perfect symmetry with high cheekbones and full,

enticing lips painted a deep, mesmerizing crimson. Her eyes, pools of liquid darkness, shimmered with a promise of forbidden pleasures, drawing the unsuspecting in with their hypnotic depth. Yes, that sounds just about right – the allure and temptation of the green. Yet, like the Succubus, lurking within its contours and breaks is a fiendish complexity that can unravel the most composed among us. It's here that the game transforms from a test of discipline to one of subtle finesse. One wrong move, heavy-handed or shaky putt, and a potential birdie can turn into a humbling bogey...or worse. If I had a penny for every birdie turned bogey, I'd be a rich man indeed...and that is just counting my own.

The Putter.

Armed with the club that has inspired more love-hate relationships than any other in the bag (save perhaps the Driver), golfers approach their putts with a mix of hope and trepidation. The putter, that seemingly benign instrument of precision, becomes the ultimate arbiter of fate on the green.

It's a dance or a duel, I can't be sure, but the sound the ball makes when it finally lands at the bottom of the hole – it's nothing short of magical.

"Golf is a game that is played on a five-inch course — the distance between your ears." — Bobby Jones

The Psychology of the Short Game.

In a way, a good golfer must have at least a small dash of psychopath to accompany faith and hope. The green is where the mind games truly begin, and it is the touch of madness that might just guide you through the ubiquitous maze. Reading the green, understanding its subtle undulations and breaks, becomes a mental marathon that contorts many faces into an expression that might just support the early stages of the evolutionary theory. Golfers crouch and squint, trying to divine the secrets of the green, knowing all too well that its defences are designed to deceive. So close and yet so far. The green demands

perfection and nothing less will do. The putt, a mere whisper of a stroke, becomes a test of nerve and patience, a cruel joke played by the golfing gods who watch with amusement as balls veer inexplicably off course, stop agonizingly short, or - in moments of sheer, unfathomable injustice - lip out of the hole.

Now golf, having originated as a mostly male sport, has no shortage of sexual innuendo and all of this vernacular tends to surface on or around the green. Now, in fear of retribution, as I believe my father will read this book, I shall not list these utter profanities and vulgar exploits here, but as a seasoned golfer, you already know each one of them, having heard them so many times. So take a moment, smile, get it over and done with, and let's push forward.

The Moment of Truth.

And then, when the stars align and the putt is true, the ball finds its way to the bottom of the cup. The sound of success, that singular *clink*, resonates like a symphony, a balm for the

golfer's weary soul. So profound is this experience, that it is only right for Hans Zimmer to compose the music that should celebrate this epic moment and anyone filming a man as he waves his thanks and bends to collect his ball, is compelled to film this moment in slow motion. For a fleeting moment, all is right in the world. The trials and tribulations of the journey to the green fade away, replaced by the unbridled joy of a putt well made.

Yet, the green is a capricious lover, quick to give and even quicker to take. Today's triumphs are tomorrow's challenges, and the golfer leaves, knowing that the next green awaits, with its own trials, its own tests of will and skill.

YOUR ARSENAL

I know. You're growing weary of reading, for which self-respecting man has ever read a manual? Golf is about doing, not talking and this is hardly a manual to begin with. But before you go, perhaps a quick look at your "tools of war".

The Driver: A Tale of Hubris.

Ah, the driver, that mighty hammer of Thor, the alpha of the golf bag. It's the club that promises power, distance, and glory. It is the alter-ego of the golfer for even the unfortunate man that drives a Prius, earns his right to live if he owns a decent driver. You can live without an iron. I lost

my six iron during my very first game and I've never seen the need to replace it. I compensate with a forced seven or an easy five, but a driver? To be without a driver is to be Superman wearing Kryptonite underwear. I hope I don't need to explain this analogy. The driver, with its sleek design and promises of unparalleled distance, whispers sweet nothings of towering drives that sail gracefully down the fairway. Yet, for many, the driver is a Siren, leading them not to the safety of the fairway but onto the jagged rocks of the rough, the woods, or out-of-bounds. Dwarfish blacksmiths could not design a weapon that makes a more beautiful sound on impact.

When I look at my driver, towering above the other clubs in my bag, I cannot help but hear, "Lead me not into temptation."

The Woods: Sentinels of the Second Shot.

Then we have the woods, traditionally crafted from the trees they often send our balls back to. They stand ready to offer

salvation after a disastrous drive or to plunge us deeper into the course's merciless embrace. The 3-wood, while it can easily steer you deeper into the abyss, has often been the saving grace of a blotched tee shot. The shorter shaft gives you ever-so-slightly more control, making it generally more reliable than its big brother.

The woods promise distance with a touch more forgiveness than the driver, or so they claim. They whisper of long, sweeping shots that arc gracefully across the sky—cinematic moments in a game that's often more horror film than heroic epic. But any shot and all shots, when forced for that extra distance, will bring you woeful agony. It is here that we must remind ourselves to "let the club do the work."

The Irons: Implements of Precision and Pain.

The irons, a full set of tools both precise and punitive, are fit for every conceivable situation but mostly resemble instruments of medieval torture. They also excel at general gardening, as most players know from the deep divots left

on the fairways. From the optimistic 3-iron to the supposedly trustworthy 9-iron, each carries its own distinct brand of duplicity. These are the clubs designed for precise shots into greens, over hazards, and around obstacles. Sadly, these precise outcomes are reserved exclusively for professionals. For the rest of us, they often land us exactly where we intended not to be.

The 7-iron, in particular, might be the most Janus-faced of all the clubs—heralded as the "golfer's sword," yet just as likely to keep you truly humble. Iron shots require a blend of skill, force and finesse, a balance so delicate that it might as well be on par with understanding the female mind, if not more complicated to master.

The Wedges: Masters of the Mire.

As we near the green or navigate a particular hazard, Thor's hammer or its siblings, the woods, might not be the right tool for the job. After all, just because you have a hammer, it doesn't make every problem a nail.

Enter the wedges. Specialists in getting you out of the sand, the rough, and any other godforsaken place you might find your ball.

The sand wedge, especially, is like the friend who helps you move a couch...into a fourth-floor apartment. Or the friend who will help you find your keys in a dark alley at 2 a.m. Yet in the bunker, it may be used as a rake to draw life-sized Zen formations, merely nudging the ball around in your labyrinth of endless attempts at salvation.

The pitching wedge is a little less cruel, designed for high, handsome shots that drop onto the green with the gentleness of a butterfly with sore feet. That is, when you don't hit the shot in the teeth to send it reeling into the players lining up their next tee shot or the reeds in the shallow waterhole behind the green. "Keep! Your! Head! Down!" It is the only sentence in the English language that demands four exclamation marks, as you scold yourself through clenched teeth.

The Putter: The Fickle Finale.

Finally, the putter—the most schizophrenic of all your clubs. You may practice a hundred perfect shots, only to find your wrists inexplicably shaking when it counts, sending the ball off course. On the day, it can be a saviour or a saboteur. This is the club that ends friendships, tests the limits of sanity, and on rare, beautiful occasions, saves par. The putter's realm is one of whisper-thin margins, where victories are measured in millimetres and the line between hero and zero is as fine as the blade of grass your ball refuses to roll over.

The putter demands a calm hand and a tranquil heart, making it more suitable for the elderly than the young, fiery golfer. It demands qualities that are often in short supply after 17 holes of chaos and reflection. It is the club that asks the most fundamental question of all: "Do you believe?" It takes a good amount of courage, conviction, skill and faith to steer that ball into the cup and – notwithstanding the torment of getting there – that moment is pure bliss.

"It's a funny thing, the more I practice the luckier I get." — Arnold Palmer

GRACE

In the end, as ruthless as it is, golf is not without mercy and grace. For the novice and the amateur, there are such small graces as might help you weather the storm.

First, consider the sanctity of the fairway. Landing here offers more than just a perfect pitch from which to play your next shot. Here, amid the manicured expanse, you can, course allowing, place your ball. I kid you not. You may pick up your ball, give it a rub as if you're Allan Donald about to bowl a screecher down the cricket pitch, and then place it within a club length of where you picked it up. Dainty, almost gentleman-like. The same grace is often extended – again, subject to the rules of the course and the day – when you land in a garden, next to a

sapling, in a GUR (ground under repair) or on the path. Then you can skip like Dorothy down the yellow brick road and drop your ball next to the road, click the heels of your Ecco's or Footjoy's together and continue without a care. Now the details of the drop, I will leave to you and your foursome, just to keep things real out there. Apparently, so I hear, rules are all about interpretation. While I hold a different view, of course, who am I to say what's right and wrong? I am an amateur at best, both in golf and in life.

And then there is...wait for it..."The Mulligan". This is a delightful golfing peculiarity which allows a do-over without the bitter sting of a penalty shot, transforming your gross lack of talent into a mere hiccup. Often sold during charity games or fundraisers, mulligans are "indulgences" at a fee, a time machine that allows you a second chance at the same shot and pretending like the first outcome didn't matter. But it did. Believe me, it did. I hold firm that even after your procured absolution, the odds of you repeating the exact shot, is ninety percent or

up. It's a thing with us humans. I cannot explain it, other than to conclude that it's human nature. We need to suffer the consequences of our actions. It's how we learn. If only we had mulligans in life, procured or otherwise. Years back, I played a computer game called "Earthworm Jim". Somewhere in the game there, there was a hole in the ground with a warning sign that read, "Don't jump down this hole. You'll die." I don't need to tell you what most people did, right? They hit "save game" and jumped down the hole. Yes, they died. A mulligan is a little like that, I think, but in life – we need to take accountability for our actions and perhaps this is why we tend to fluke our mulligan. I should add – buy the mulligan. Fundraisers are for good causes.

Equally redemptive is the "gimme." This term, a contraction of "give me," is a concession by your partners. It's an act of mercy, granted when they've witnessed enough of your struggle and the ball lies tantalizingly close to the hole. "That's a gimme," or "That one's yours,"

someone will say, and with a collective nod – being a moral obligation for the rest of the team to agree - your torment ends. The ball is deemed holed. It's an unspoken bond of fellowship, a shared understanding that sometimes, close enough is good enough, especially when the shadows lengthen and you've already bagged the prize for "longest day."

Lastly, there's the joy of the 'happy accident,' those serendipitous flukes where a tree or a signpost miraculously redirects your wayward ball back into play. This is the moment that many golfers turn to religion, uttering under their breaths, "There is a God!" and they'd be right of course, even though they might not have thought much about their proclamation in that moment. Like rogue elements in a chaotic world, these happy accidents remind us that sometimes, the universe conspires in our favour, winking at our foibles and turning potential disasters into anecdotes we'll recount with a laugh in the clubhouse.

"Golf is the closest game to the game we call life. You get bad breaks from good shots; you get good breaks from bad shots—but you have to play the ball where it lies." – Bobby Jones

THE 19TH HOLE.

THE SANCTUARY.

When the battle is done, and the clubs are sheathed, the warriors—spent and perhaps a bit battered—seek refuge at the 19th hole. Here, amidst tales of what could have been and should have been, we find solace and the courage to face another round. Every shot is replayed, dissected, and debated, forging strategies for the next outing where, surely, everything will go much better.

But most importantly, here among friends and comrades, we find unity. Not just as men who have survived another battle but as devotees of a sport that is as cruel as it is beloved, bound together by our collective passion for this terrible, wonderful game called golf.

In closing on a personal note.

Life, like golf, can sometimes feel a little overwhelming. We don't get mulligans and we very seldom get free drops, but, like golf, life is worth living; through the pain, through the joys, through the fairways and the roughs. When we finally get to the green, we can look back and take in the journey that got us there and then, with the hard work behind us, we see the beauty and not the challenge. And we see that we have become better and braver for it. And while the next hole awaits, with all the same challenges presented in different ways, we are better equipped than we were before. And we are not alone. Every now and again, someone might just turn to you and say, "That one's yours."

Here's to you. Here's to golf and other insanities. Here's to life. Go out there and live it.

"Of all the hazards, fear is the worst." – Sam Snead