



My 14-Hour Search for the End of TGI Friday's Endless Appetizers



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07/18/14 08:05AM Filed to: MARATHONS

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What if I told you that mozzarella sticks never had to end? That for \$10, you could eat for free (for \$10) for the rest of your natural life? That there exists a spot in the space-time continuum in which it is always Friday? That there are free refills on all Slushes™ excluding Red Bull® branded items?

"Endless Appetizers" Mark Beginning of Our Collective National Suicide

Though famine still takes its toll on the unfortunates across the sea, the greatest nation in the...

Last Monday TGI Friday's **unveiled a new promotion** (available at many TGI Friday's locations, but none on the island of Manhattan) whereby customers can gorge themselves on unlimited appetizers—without fear of punishment, embarrassment, or ostracization—for a one-time payment of \$10. The promotion is called "Endless Appetizers."

The day after "Endless Appetizers" was announced, I went to TGI Friday's in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Sheepshead Bay. I wanted to challenge the hubris of a company co-opting the infinite for a marketing gimmick. I wanted to demand accountability from copywriters.

I wanted to call their bluff and eat appetizers until they kicked me out, to seek the limit of this supposedly limitless publicity stunt.

I soon learned the limit does not exist.

Prelude: The King's Gambit

In preparation for the depravity to come, I fast the night before, eating a only light meal of a bacon cheeseburger, four chicken McNuggets, and a small fries at midnight.

Ten hours later, my editor, Max Read, messages me to outline the conditions this exercise must meet:

- I will not take advantage of the TGI Friday's wifi, read a book, or go to sleep.
- I will stay at least six hours past the restaurant's 11 a.m. opening time.
- I will consume mozzarella sticks with the voraciousness of bacteria feasting on the muscle tissue of a corpse. (This is not so much a condition as a given.)

He then proposes a bonus:

If you can stay till 1 a.m. I'll give you a week off.

In a separate conversation, my colleague Taylor offers to pay me \$3 for every mozzarella stick I eat past the first 30.

The offer before me is now one week's vacation and theoretically infinite profit.

Plate One: The King's Gambit Accepted

Due to traffic, I arrive at the Sheepshead Bay TGI Friday's about 20 minutes after its 11:00 a.m. opening.

Figuring that honesty is the best policy, and that, at some point, it will become extremely difficult to conceal from the waitstaff the fact I have been sitting in the restaurant for 14 hours slowly eating mozzarella sticks, I decide beforehand that I will be up front with the TGI Friday's employees about the nature of my undertaking, including potential rewards.

My waitress is a young woman named Gabby, who has straight black bangs and a long, low ponytail. Gabby tells me she has been off for a few days, and has only just heard the gospel of the TGI Friday's Endless Apps deal herself. I ask her if I can take advantage of the deal right then at that moment, and she reads aloud from a list of eligible items penciled on her order pad in round, swooping letters. I tell her I would like to order the unlimited mozzarella sticks. She tells me that, according to the restrictions of the promotion, I will only be permitted to receive unlimited quantities of one item, for example: barbecue boneless buffalo wings. I tell her I would like to order the unlimited mozzarella sticks.

11:34 a.m. My first plate arrives. The mozzarella sticks are golden, dense, and huge. Each one is greater than the width of two of my index fingers. As a frequent and enthusiastic consumer of mozzarella sticks, I estimate that these are about twice the standard size. They are softly cuboid, not cylindrical, for reasons I assume are obscure and related to the maximally efficient, foolproof method by which they are packaged, shipped, and cooked. They arrive in herds

of six, lightly dusted with shavings of "Parmesan" and "Romano" and flakes of parsley. (Over the course of several orders, this coating will become increasingly patchy, as TGI Friday's and I stop standing on formality.) An order normally costs \$7.50, which means I will have to eat at least two in order for TGI Friday's Endless Apps to qualify as a "good deal." Each plate of six contains 1,100 calories.

They taste like goddamn garbage.



I would prefer to stop eating after the first one. I seriously regret not getting the potato skins, which appear on the menu alongside the word "FAV" printed inside a white circle with scalloped edges. A key at the bottom of the appetizer page explains that the presence of this symbol indicates the potato skins are a "House Favorite." The spot next to the mozzarella sticks listing that could conceivably be occupied by a "FAV" badge is vacant.

I do not blame the waitstaff of TGI Friday's for the taste of the mozzarella sticks, which, for the entire length of my stay, will be marched to my booth piping hot and accompanied by an inch-deep cup (two, if I so request) of marinara sauce, as advertised.

Nor do I blame the kitchen staff that cooks the mozzarella sticks to what must be called, thanks to their menacing consistency across the span of the day, a kind of perfection, every time.

I blame the TGI Friday's test kitchen executive chef (a prepaid cellphone that Guy Fieri texts recipes to while high on whippets) for making the prototype of these sticks accidentally one full moon—for by accident is the only way such an item could ever have been deemed suitable for human consumption—and then never copping to the mistake.

12:00 p.m. I order my second plate.

Plate Two: The Bishop's Gambit

12:15 p.m. I have now, having agreed to pay \$10 for what is ostensibly \$15 worth of mozzarella sticks, gotten "a good deal." "UP FOR A GAME?" reads the label of the Heinz ketchup EZ squeeze bottle on my table. No thanks, I'm busy. Just kidding—I'll be here for 13 more hours. I turn the bottle over—*Let the games begin!*—and am disappointed to discover that the game in question will be played on my phone rather than the ketchup bottle itself, and that I have to download a free QR code reader app to access it. For what will probably not be the last time in my life, I follow the instructions on the back of my ketchup bottle to the letter. The app begins downloading. I'll come back to it.



12:38 p.m. So far today, the music volume inside TGI Friday's has fallen just short of deafening. My booth is situated almost directly underneath a Bose speaker, and I consider asking for a trade until I realize the room was designed by M. C. Escher, and there are no tables not under speakers.

A young woman under a speaker at a round table next to me places her hand on the shoulder of another woman, who could be her grandmother, and frowns as she talks. The older woman frowns too. They are both wearing printed jumpsuits (non-matching).

12:40 p.m. The app has finished downloading. For what will probably not be the last time in my life, I scan the QR code on the back of my ketchup bottle. The homepage of a tastefully ketchup-themed Trivial Pursuit™ mobile game springs to life on my iPhone. Underneath the Trivial Pursuit™ logo is a cartoon rendering of an apple with leaves that is most likely meant to represent a tomato except that it looks exactly like an apple with leaves. The homepage invites me to "Pour on the FUN," like it is ketchup. A small text disclaimer reveals that if I "play at least 3 rounds" I will be "eligible to receive a reward." The potential rewards keep piling up for me today.

12:41 p.m. Because in my regular life beyond the walls of this TGI Friday's I am more concerned with science and the secrets of philosophy than trivial pursuits, I don't do so hot. I correctly identify "What rhymes with hug me?" as a line from the 2013 single "Blurred Lines," but I have no idea what number Thomas Kinkade frequently incorporated into his paintings (5282).

12:47 p.m. Three rounds later, the "reward" is a coupon for ketchup which, in retrospect, makes sense. I should have realized.

12:58 p.m. I peel all the breading off a mozzarella stick.



The main dining room of the Sheepshead Bay TGI Friday's looks out over the Plumb Beach Channel, which flows into Rockaway Inlet, and, beyond that, into the Atlantic Ocean. Although it represents a relatively minor portion of Earth's

hydrosphere, the water of the channel laps pleasantly at the boats tied to its dock and reflects the sun's light in sparkling waves. It is as nice as any scenic bay or rainbow gasoline puddle.

The charm of the spot is undercut by its precariousness. In November 2012, Hurricane Sandy filled the dining room with three feet of water; the restaurant only just reopened after being closed for over a year for repairs.

It is a stone's throw away from the Coney Island Wastewater Treatment Plant.

1:08 p.m. I keep discovering more mushed up pieces of bread and cheese slowly becoming coated in saliva under my tongue, which reminds me of the time I tried "oil pulling" for 30 seconds, at the direction of a friend.

1:14 p.m. A new waitress in my section is being trained by a more senior member of the waitstaff. "When you drop off food, it's protein first," her instructor explains to her, as they drop off two plates of food to the jump-suited women, protein first.

1:21 p.m. Without being asked, Gabby slides a glass of water to me, like she's handing off a cup to a marathoner.

1:30 p.m. I goddamn hate these fucking mozzarella sticks. The more of them I eat, the more I feel like I can taste every ingredient. Ingredients include: cardboard left in a hamster cage in the sun; acid.

1:35 p.m. For the first time, I heave.

1:40 p.m. Even if I ate 1000 sticks, TGI Friday's Endless Apps would be a bad deal, because they taste worse than eating nothing at all. TGI Friday's should pay me \$10 to clear out as many of these mozzarella sticks for them as I can. TGI Friday's End This App(s).

1:42 p.m. Gabby catches me guzzling water like Joey Chestnut to get my hastily chewed mozzarella sticks down. "Haha!" she laughs from a couple tables away. "I'm coming to check on you!" While the water trick makes me feel like I'm about to throw up every time I swallow a bite of mozzarella stick, it does help to mask the taste. For this reason, I consider it superior to eating the mozzarella sticks normally.

1:45 p.m. I ask Gabby if she's had the mozzarella sticks, and what does she think of them? She tells me "They're good." Gabby and I are not yet good enough friends that we can be honest with one another.

1:47 p.m. By now there are people eating alone at multiple other tables. Behind me, a man in an emerald green t-shirt and matching athletic shorts sits two booths away from a woman in a black and white dress. Because they were seated facing one another, it looks as if they are dining together at a very long formal dining table.

2:10 p.m. Because I have the boundless self-confidence of a millennial, I believe in my heart, I can accomplish any goal. It is difficult, already, to imagine eating 1 more stick, but impossible to imagine I will not eat enough to get at least \$3 from Taylor Berman.

2:15 p.m. Gabby walks by and catches me staring straight ahead into the distance. "How are you doing?" she asks. I laugh and tell her fine.

"You're going for that week, right?"

"I want to."

"Do it!"

"I've only been here for like three hours."

"It feels like forever, right?"

It does.

2:24 p.m. At the bathroom sink, a pretty woman in a chef's coat remarks upon the heat outside, where the rest of Sheepshead Bay is roasting just shy of 90 degrees. I tell her I've been in here a long time, so I'm actually freezing. She asks if I've been waiting a long time for my food, and offers to check on it. I tell her I'm just "eating slowly."

2:26 p.m. I spot my first person drinking alcohol somewhere other than the bar.

2:30 p.m. I turn off my phone to see if I can rely upon my internal clock to tell me when a half hour has passed.

2:31 p.m.? Extended fantasy sequence.

2:35 p.m.? Is it possible that man was not meant to ingest infinite quantities of mozzarella sticks?

2:40 p.m.? It occurs to me that I have a real knack for private reverie. Would this skill prove useful in any jobs? Maybe a lighthouse keeper? Manning an information booth at a national park so remote it hosts fewer than a half dozen visitors per year? Nun?

2:45 p.m.? I accidentally catch sight of the time on my way to the bathroom and realize 45 minutes have passed since I first decided to test my internal clock 15 minutes ago. The correct time is **3:15**.

3:17 p.m. Gabby and I have moved beyond words; now she just chuckles when she sees me. She brings me a third plate of mozzarella sticks.

Plate Three: The Bryan Counter-Gambit

3:20 p.m. Four hours deep, I feel relaxed, sleepy, and confident I could live in this TGI Friday's for the rest of my life, provided I did not have to eat any

mozzarella sticks. Maybe I'll come back tomorrow, order the potato skins, and eat for free for \$10 using the "unlimited" loophole until I die of an old heart at 31.

3:32 p.m. Paranoia seeps in. I send a text message to Max to ask if the offer of a free week's vacation is "a trick somehow," since Gawker Media has no formal vacation policy. He responds, "Nope." I write back, "If it's a trick, I will be your enemy for life." He says "Would never trick you." It's definitely a trick.

3:38 p.m. TGI Friday's is the most crowded it has been all day—a little over 50 percent full, with most of the seats at the bar occupied. The servers cluster in front of a computer and converse frantically about who is available to cover which areas of the floor. Gabby seems stressed, but not as stressed as the young woman in a TGI Friday's uniform who yells her name from across the room.

3:45 p.m. I don't like Kings of Leon OR The White Stripes! I like everyone else, though. I chew a stick of Orbit Sweet Mint to mask the taste of the mozzarella garbage in my mouth while I wait for my next order of mozzarella sticks to arrive.

3:50 p.m. Chaos. "Excuse me! Excuse me!" yells one of a pair of old women eating at a booth in front of me. "How about some service?" She repeats this call to service, and then again, and then again, a total of four times. Sometimes she calls out out to employees who happen to be walking by, other times she shouts it to no one in particular. Finally, a man in a black shirt, black trousers, and red tie stops at her table, apologizing profusely. He takes her drink order, and she is calm.

3:53 p.m. The man in the red tie returns with drinks. The woman tells him she would like barbecue ribs and "on a separate bill," a cheeseburger to go. Later, when her ribs arrive, she will request tartar sauce, and be informed that this is not a condiment that is available in TGI Friday's vast kitchen stores.

4:05 p.m. Somehow, suddenly, the entire surface of my table is wet, which is great because it gives me something to do. Mopping up the mess with crumpled, limp napkins, I feel like a rat taking pride in my humble trash home.

4:11 p.m. Goddammit.

My fourth order of mozzarella sticks arrives.

Plate Four: Unpinning the Queen Pawn

4:17 p.m. I discover that grinding sea salt over the mozzarella sticks makes them more palatable.

4:18 p.m. I over-salt the sticks.

4:25 p.m. Gabby tells me: "I told my manager [about your plan] and she was like..." Gabby stops talking and bulges her eyes. I ask Gabby if she would attempt the same challenge and she says tells me she would. I ask what appetizer she would choose and she falls silent for several seconds before saying "Knowing me? Probably the chicken." Gabby tells me she is rooting for me and that I will win my week of vacation.

I am the martyr of this TGI Friday's.

4:36 p.m. I realize that my shoulders have, of their own volition, begun slipping up and down to the tune of "Are You Gonna Be My Girl" by Jet. I am now an active participant in the casual fun TGI Friday's atmosphere.

4:41 p.m. During its closure due to Hurricane Sandy, the interior of the Sheepshead Bay TGI Friday's was completely renovated (though, as the company slogan set into the ceramic tiles above the new open kitchen in giant white block letters explains, the dining room was and remains suspended in a permanent state of Friday). Behind me, mounted on a brick wall and resting atop a long beam of weathered wood, a black and white photo of the New York

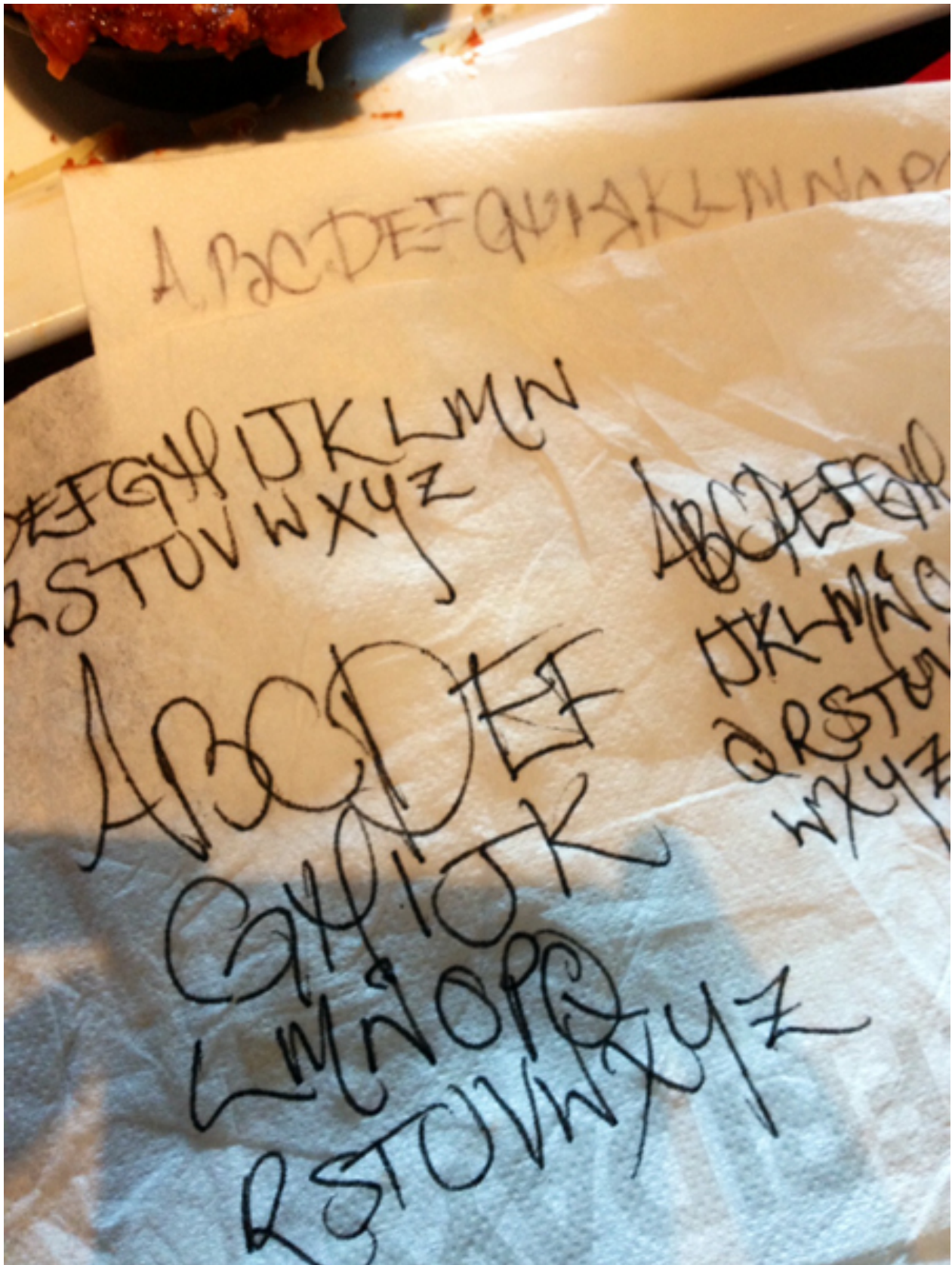
City skyline is printed on a series of overlapping vertical planks. The cushy black leather seats in my small booth are just wide enough to accommodate one person each. The one in which I am sitting faces a row of big, clean floor-to-ceiling windows, which offer an unobstructed view of the channel.

As bad as or worse than the smell of the cheese on my fingers is the sweet, heavy scent of marinara sauce that hangs in the booth as the miniature plastic tubs of sauce cool.

4:43 p.m. I can't tell if the frosted colored lamps hanging in clusters in front of the window (yellow, green, red; blue, red, white) are blowing in an air conditioned breeze or if it's just my eyes twitching from all the salt I have consumed. It doesn't seem important enough to ask anyone about.

4:50 p.m. It occurs to me that I will be able to make a wish at 11:11. I start looking forward to 11:11.

4:51 p.m. I unfurl my paper napkin to write out the alphabet on it and am excited to discover it is actually two paper napkins wadded together. I begin writing the alphabet on both the napkins in various cursive and print scripts a bunch of times.



4:59 p.m. I finish writing the alphabet on both napkins. There's room for more abecedaries, but I feel self-conscious that a server other than Gabby—who would understand—will catch me scribbling them out and think I am insane.

5:00 p.m. Or that I have a beautiful mind!

5:07 p.m. The third Coldplay song of the day plays. ("Paradise.") I reflect on the months leading up to the conscious uncoupling of Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow, specifically imagining the moment each night right before they turned out the lights in their bedroom, and how it might have changed over time as their relationship chilled. Maybe they didn't even go to bed at the same time, though.

5:17 p.m. A rib falls on the floor.

5:20 p.m. With the end of her shift fast approaching, Gabby is working about 10 tables—a process that entails a good deal of walking-just-short-of-a-run in zig-zag patterns that double over themselves as she crosses and recrosses our section of the dining room. She is still smiling. She has stopped laughing.

5:37 p.m. I receive a text message from a friend and am so excited I drop my phone in marinara sauce as I scramble to pick it up. The average beats per minute of the songs tumbling out of the Bose speakers has increased palpably.

5:54 p.m. A child a few tables over lets out a piercing, wordless scream, and then another one. Stillness; movement; silence; noise. I thank God this moment is not further despoiled by my having mozzarella sticks during it.

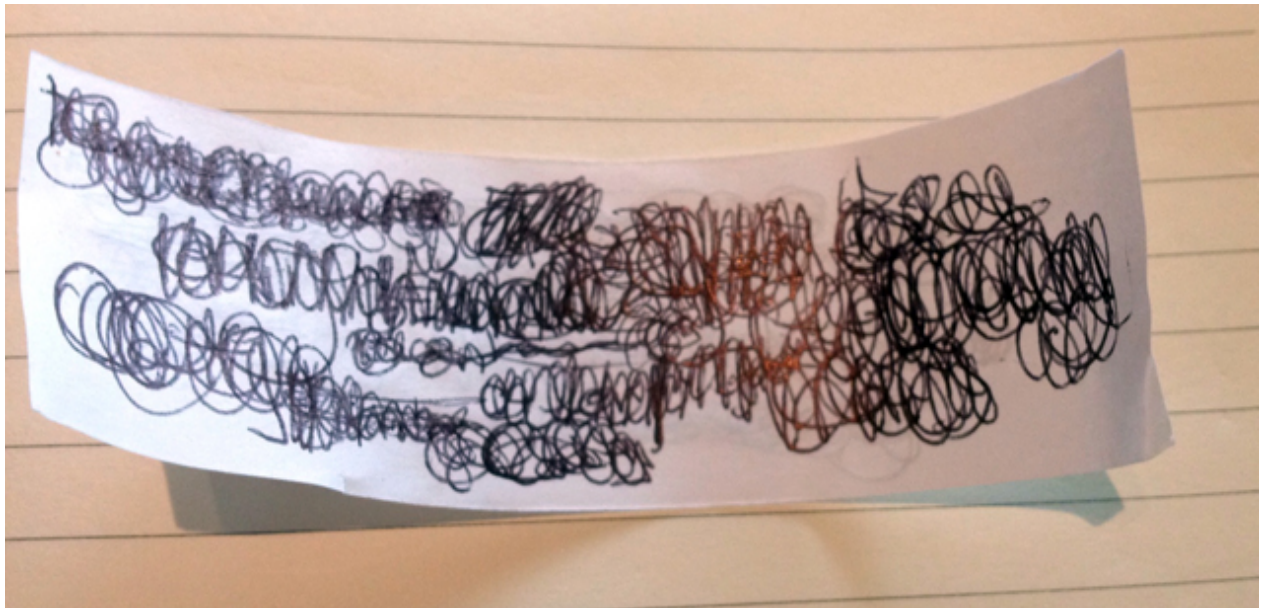
6:00 p.m. Gabby and I begin the delicate and confusing process that is closing out her part of the check without jeopardizing my Endless Appetizers. She tells me that the next jailer to keep me locked in a mozzarella prison of my own perverse design will be a woman named Marisa. I ask Gabby if she likes Marisa and she tells me she does; also, multiple times, that Marisa is an Italian-American. Perhaps Gabby is implying to me that Marisa will approve of my choice of app: *i bastoncini di mozzarella*, as they are called in her ancestral home.

6:01 p.m. Gabby shakes my hand and she and I agree it was nice to meet one another. Before she departs, she tells me the next seven hours will "fly by," which is probably the first time anyone has ever said that about seven hours.

6:05 p.m. On my third trip to the bathroom, I run into the pretty woman in a chef's coat for a third time. She and I establish a bit. The rough idea of the bit is: I keep following her into the bathroom because I love her. On my way out of the bathroom, I tell her I will see her later.

6:20 p.m. A girl who looks to be about four years old walks into the dining room wearing bright orange lipstick, and the hostess gives her crayons. She is my only rival for command of this TGI Friday's.

6:25 p.m. I write my name on a paper napkin ring I have saved for this purpose and scribble it out. I repeat this process several more times.



6:27 p.m. I turn this...



6:31 p.m. ...into this:



6:43 p.m. Glamor descends upon TGI Friday's. The people arriving now for dinner seem more markedly more attractive and dressed up than those who came earlier in the day. I am probably the worst dressed customer currently eating mozzarella sticks in this establishment. I am wearing blue corduroys, a faded white t-shirt advising those who read it Not to Mess with Texas (a place I have never been), and a brown cardigan. My unwashed hair is fastened into a droopy bun. Over this I have added a blue headscarf, for flair.

6:45 p.m. Marisa, if she is indeed here, has not yet swung by my table. I keep trying to catch servers' eyes but fail so many times it stretches the probability of chance. I have had no contact with a member of the waitstaff since Gabby left 45 minutes ago. I wonder if I have been cut off from the mozzarella sticks.

6:57 p.m. I am still being ignored. I don't care. This is a standoff. I don't even WANT mozzarella sticks.

6:59 p.m. The sticks are inevitable, though. Like death, they will find me.

7:02 p.m. I turn it back into this:



7:10 p.m. A woman at a table of four in the corner of the room says "I have to stop buying yogurts!" *Why?*

7:11 p.m. What if I just quit Gawker and work at TGI Friday's now? What if I already have? What is the nature of the Endless Apps bargain? Did I listen closely enough to Gabby? Did I sign a contract?

7:13 p.m. A man having dinner at the table next to me is eating mozzarella sticks. He looks like he loves 'em! He is wearing wire rim glasses, jean shorts,

and a #25 Yankees jersey.

7:15 p.m. What if I've been a ghost the whole time?

7:21 p.m. What if I've been a dream the whole time? What if I haven't even gotten to TGI Friday's yet because I'm still asleep the night before, and now I've wasted my whole REM cycle in this boring dream?

7:23 p.m. I order more mozzarella sticks. :(

Entr'acte: Forking the King and Rook

7:26 p.m. Marisa, who is very pleasant, helpful and attentive, apologizes for the gap in service (attributed, vaguely, to "some confusion," but what is less confusing than *endless mozzarella sticks?*), and alerts me to the presence of drama on the horizon: Because my first check has been closed out, she might have to put in a new order of unlimited mozzarella sticks to open a second one.

I tell her that this would mean the first order of mozzarella sticks was not truly unlimited, but rather had a hard cap I reached at the closing of the first check. She is sympathetic. Then I tell her what Gabby told me to say, should this moment arrive, which is *valar morghulis* ("The managers know about it.") Marisa leaves to consult a manager.

Is this it? Have I reached the limit, the aporia of endless apps? Is Marisa my savior—or my greatest foe?

7:41 p.m. Marisa returns with my fifth order of mozzarella sticks. We decide that she will charge me for one more Diet Coke (cost: \$2.80) in order to open a new check. A little unorthodox, but that is life for we, the first settlers of the Endless Apps frontier.

Plate Five: Check

7:44 p.m. No. 28 of the 30 mozzarella sticks I have received so far still has a tiny piece of plastic wrap on it, which will absolutely not negatively affect the taste.



7:49 p.m. When I get cold standing outside in winter, I imagine I'm in a stuffy attic on a hot summer afternoon, and think about how I would give anything to feel cool—a tactic that can make me feel better for up to a second. Now I try to imagine a situation in which I would feel happy and excited to receive these mozzarella sticks. The only thing that comes to mind is: wandering in desert after multiple foodless days.

7:53 p.m. A small crowd of waiters swarms a nearby table to perform the TGI Friday's Happy Birthday song, which is just the regular Happy Birthday song with a ton more clapping. At the end of the song, there is a chorus of whoops.

8:12 p.m. Every table in my line of sight is occupied, save for one. In contrast to lunch, I am the only person dining alone. I am also (to my knowledge) the only person who has been here since 11:20 a.m. eating unlimited mozzarella sticks.

Fewer than five hours left. Not even though time to watch the entire Lord of the Rings trilogy on Blu-ray.

I watch the light change from inside this TGI Friday's.

8:14 p.m. Rooting around in my purse for anything that is not a mozzarella stick, I find the wrappers of two saltwater taffys given to me by my coworker Nitasha and text her about them. She advises me to wrap them around one of the sticks "and tell yourself it's candy," like a 19th-century London orphan with access to unlimited mozzarella sticks.

8:20 p.m. A man I have never seen before approaches my table, smiles, and says "Oh, you're back. Welcome." He is wearing black pants and a black top. I tell him "Thanks!"

8:29 p.m. On my left, a family of five is wrapped around a wide, curved booth eating dinner. As best I can tell from periodic looks over, no fewer than three-fifths of the members are looking at their cell phones at a given time.

Marisa asks if I want to put in another order of mozzarella sticks "or not yet?" I tell her I would like to, which is a lie.

8:42 p.m. A sixth plate of mozzarella sticks is delivered to my table. Everyone sees this terrible thing happening and no one is doing anything to stop it.

Plate Six: Queen Sacrifice

8:58 p.m. A different man I have never seen before comes up and asks if everything's OK.

What can I even tell him?

9:02 p.m. I lose a lot of time in the gaps between thoughts. I'm not thinking of anything in particular, but I look down at my cell's clock and four minutes have passed. You ever get freaked out by the fact you can't stop time?

9:06 p.m. Even though they don't have plastic on them, the sixth order of mozzarella sticks is by far the worst. They look like I feel: flat, and greasy, and congealed. I eat one so that I can win \$3 from Taylor, and then take single bites of two more without thinking about it. When I realize what I have done, it makes me so sad.

9:08 p.m. A total body inventory sounds like something that will take a long time, so I decide to take one.

My mouth feels dry, like I've spent the past 10 hours snacking on cotton balls instead of mozzarella sticks that taste a little bit worse than cotton balls.

I would describe my awareness of the feeling of my tongue in my mouth as "VERY HEIGHTENED," which doesn't seem great since normally I can only assume it's there based on past experiences.

The back of my throat is a little sore.

My chest feels normal, because the cheese has not yet worked its way to my arteries.

My neck hurts a little bit, which has been happening a lot lately—does anyone know what that is?

I don't feel nauseated, but I also do not feel any trace of an appetite.

My stomach is physically protruding over the band of my corduroys.

My left knee, which is against the wall of the booth, hurts from being bent all day but my right knee, which I occasionally stretch outside in front of me, does not.

9:17 p.m. Earlier I said these mozzarella sticks taste like garbage. I would like to amend that statement. They taste worse than garbage. I would prefer to eat garbage, because then there would be the chance I would get to eat a bite of something good someone started to eat but couldn't finish, or paper.

The water outside TGI Friday's is black now.

9:23 p.m. I keep thinking I hear people say "Caity." I write down in my notebook that I am "definitely hallucinating."

I put my head near the table to write more and the scent of old marinara and burnt rubber fills my nostrils. I sit back up.

9:36 p.m. A waiter tries to give me another table's Boneless Buffalo Wings. Do not tempt me, Satan.

9:38 p.m. I read the menu cover to cover, except the dessert section, which I save as a treat for later. The highlights:

- A drink called the "Diddy Up" (180 cal), which is made with Ciroc vodka and Red Bull
- A bottle of Dom Pérignon (120 - 180 cal) runs for \$199.
- You can add a grilled lobster tail (210 cal) to any Jack Daniel's® steak for \$7.00, or a half a rack of ribs (460 cal) for \$6.00.
- A subsection titled "Sizzling" that consists of four items (three of them chicken) that arrive sizzling

- "Sizzling Chicken and Cheese" (1110 cal)

9:41 p.m. A male waiter tells the couple sitting in the booth adjacent to mine that, although they are taking part in the Unlimited Appetizers promotion, they cannot have a third plate of boneless buffalo wings to go. "There's all these rules and regulations," he explains. *Are there?*

9:55 p.m. I remember about 11:11 again. I get excited again!

9:58 p.m. I try to count the 60 seconds until 9:59, but I come in a little slow (about two seconds off).

10:00 p.m. Ever since I was a kid, I have calmed my nerves by measuring large increments of time in episodes of *Saturday Night Live*, which run 90 minutes and will therefore always work out to be less than the number of hours left to accomplish a particular task. At 10 p.m. I have three hours left, which is only two *SNLs* back to back.

10:08 p.m. I take a Snapchat of myself in TGI Friday's and send it to my friend Alex to see if Snapchat is broken. Because I haven't received any Snapchats all day, so...

10:23 p.m. The power in TGI Friday's goes off for one second. One waitress squeals "It's the ghost!"

I am the ghost.

10:29 p.m. I can smell something sizzling nearby.

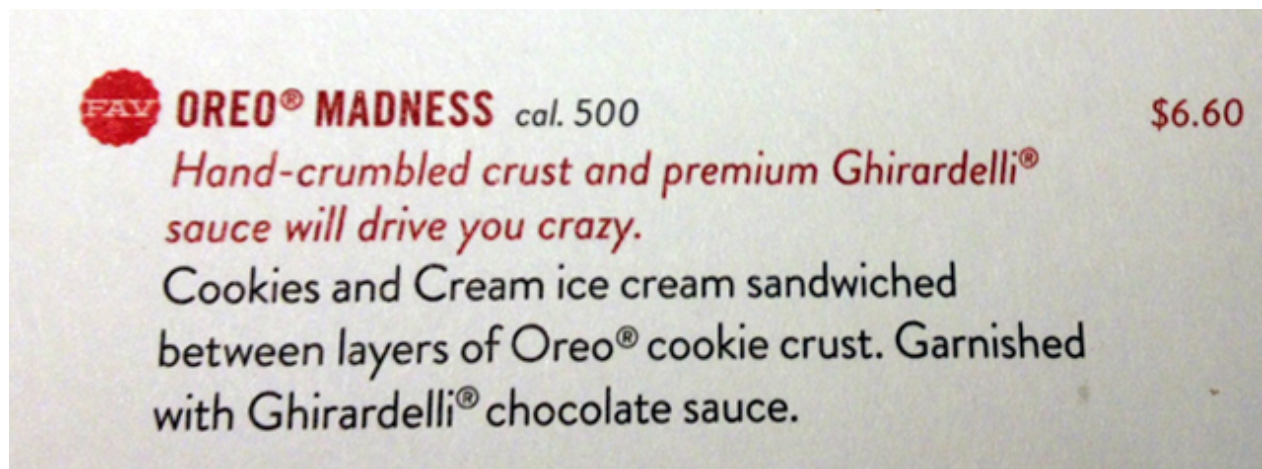
10:32 p.m. I receive a text from a colleague informing me that someone in the Financial District found a mouse in their Chopt wrap. Know what I didn't find a mouse in today? 31 mozzarella sticks.

10:45 p.m. I start to read the dessert section of the menu. It is titled "YOUR JUST DESSERTS," which I choose to interpret as a misprint of an exclamation intended to belittle the desserts. I learn you can top your Tennessee Whiskey Cake (which is already served with "butterscotch Jack Daniel's® whiskey sauce") with Baileys (70 cal) "for an additional charge." But what is the additional charge? The menu does not reveal. This is a TGI Friday's, but it is also a house of mysteries.

10:51 p.m. A further note on the menu:

Some sections feature italicized red text under their titles, offering a brief general characterization of the items to come, as well as providing clarifying information regarding the number of accompanying sides, prices for optional substitutions, etc.

HOWEVER, under the item "Oreo® Madness," the red italicized text lists no price information, but instead offers a warning of this item's potential mental side effects to prospective customers:



TGI Friday's is a house of madness with many doors.

11:00 p.m. Another birthday.

11:11 p.m. I make a wish.

11:19 p.m. People are still arriving at TGIF at 11 p.m. on a Tuesday night. That's their business.

11:26 p.m. Another birthday.

11:38 p.m. I order my seventh and final plate of mozzarella sticks, reasoning that it will take me at least an hour and a half to eat one of them.

Plate Seven: Checkmate

11:45 p.m. In the bathroom, I once again run into the pretty woman in the black chef's coat, changed now into her civilian clothes (a long dress). She tells me I'm still there. I tell her she is too.

12:00 a.m. I email a picture of myself to the Gawker tips line to remind everyone that I exist and I am still at TGI Friday's. [*The email address is tips@gawker.com; it is generally used for news and gossip tips but in certain circumstances we will accept self-portraits of TGI Friday's customers — Ed.*] "I played Trivial Pursuit with this ketchup bottle TWELVE HOURS AGO," I explain in the body of the email. "I HAD TO DOWNLOAD AN APP."



12:03 a.m. In a side room, a large party that includes multiple children under 10 continues to receive multiple platters of mozzarella sticks. There are other dishes too, I think, but, just as dogs have trouble telling red from green, so has it

become difficult for me to differentiate between mozzarella sticks and caring about anything other than mozzarella sticks. Life is a like a box of of mozzarella sticks. You never know what you're gonna get, but you can predict with 100 percent accuracy that it will be a mozzarella stick.

12:07 a.m. I tell Marisa I will not be ordering anymore mozzarella sticks tonight. She brings me a bill for my soda, and I tip her over 1000%.

12:10 a.m. All the tables in my section of the restaurant are empty except mine, the large one occupied by the family in the party room, and a round booth where servers roll silverware into napkins and refill sugar trays. As they work, they argue over which of them is lazy.

12:24 a.m. A group of four employees exchange hushed, heated words over one employee's alleged brusqueness of tone. The accused employee apologizes, with apparent sincerity. The offended employee accepts the apology, with no sincerity apparent.

12:38 a.m. At a table in the middle of the room, a diner who has been drinking waves around a knife from his flatware set. Then he sets it down. His party pays and leaves.

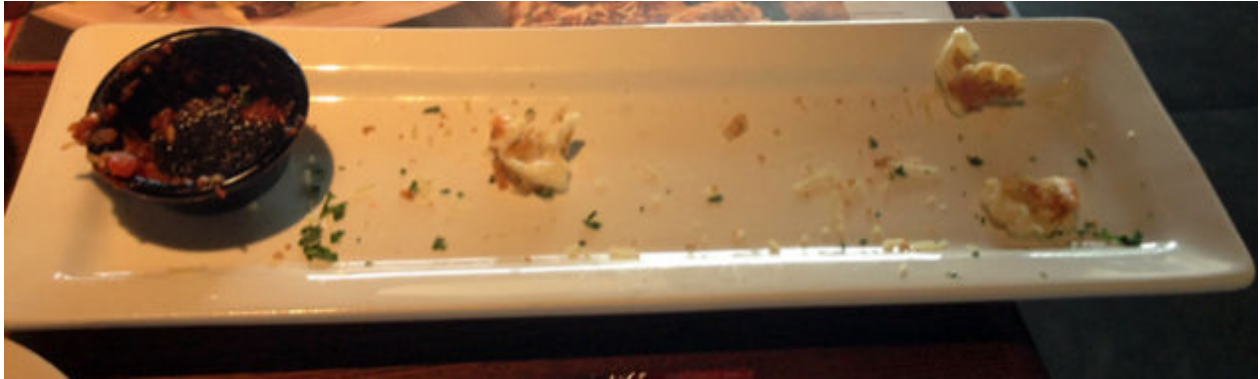
12:45 a.m. I make my final trip to the women's restroom, where more employees have shed their black shirts and trousers for jean shorts and long, colorful sundresses. Before the lights go dark in TGI Friday's, all the lights come on in TGI Friday's, as overheads illuminate the dining room for cleaning.

12:48 a.m. A family who boarded a flight from LaGuardia at the same time that I entered the restaurant this morning could now be ensconced comfortably at their hotel in Caracas. Perhaps for a late dinner they will walk to the Tolón Fashion Mall en la Calle Nicolás Copérnico—the location of one of Venezuela's six TGI Friday's.

1:00 a.m. TGI'm Not at that Goddamn Friday's Anymore.

Finale: The Immortal Game

1:21 a.m. I arrive home and throw up a little bit, but not as much as I expected.



FINAL TALLY

- *Number of plates of mozzarella sticks that potentially could have been ordered: ∞*
- *Number of plates of mozzarella sticks actually ordered: 7*
- *Number of mozzarella sticks that potentially could have been eaten: ∞*
- *Number of mozzarella sticks actually eaten: 32*
- *U.S. dollars paid to Caity Weaver from Taylor Berman for every stick over 30 eaten, at a rate of \$3/stick: 6*
- *Days off earned unless tricked: 5*
- *Additional rewards earned: Ketchup*

[Art by Tara Jacoby / Images by Caity Weaver]