

THE AMATEUR'S MIND

FEAR IS THE MIND KILLER

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Your opponent raises on the button and you call from the big blind with A-J. The flop comes A-J-8 rainbow. You bet out and the other player goes all in. "Oh, no...he must have a monster...it's probably a set!" In your mind's eye, Linda Blair's head just spun all the way around.

OK, you probably aren't folding two pair here – unless you happen to be suffering from poker paranoia. There are two forms of poker paranoia: MUTB (*Monsters Under The Bed*) and TFTS (*The Full Time Sheriff*). Both are caused by our primal fight or flight reaction to fear of the unknown. In this case...your opponent's hole cards.

MONSTERS UNDER THE BED (FLIGHT)

MUTB occurs when you are faced with a bet and convince yourself that the other player has a "monster." This syndrome is typical of beginners. They calculate what can beat them, and then project it onto their opponent's hole cards. It is a basic misapplication of the math. Instead of assuring themselves they are likely ahead (*probability*), they use it to justify their worst fears (*bad luck or variance*).

Although this occurs more frequently in beginners, it can happen to the "inner beginner" in all of us. It strikes experienced players when they are not at their optimum concentration levels. Perhaps they are tired, distracted, on tilt, or they overvalue their abilities and try to make "the big laydown."

THE FULL TIME SHERIFF (FIGHT)

TFTS is a deadly disease that can result in chip bleeding, or even worse, turn you into a calling station. You believe opponents are always trying to bluff and lash out by calling them down. Additionally, you may lack the experience and confidence to make an accurate read of the player and/or situation. Finally, pride and competitive spirit can cause you to make the call. (God forbid you look weak by folding.) It is imperative to recognize the symptoms of this bankroll killer and stop it in its tracks.

ANTIDOTE

The cure for both forms of paranoia is eliminating attachment to outcome. This reduces your fear of losing a particular pot. It allows you to approach each hand objectively, and listen to the story the betting is



telling you. Instead of concentrating on your cards, open your mind and take in the available information about opponents and their patterns. Ultimately, you must learn to discern between poker intuition and your fear.

- I must not fear.
- Fear is the mind-killer.
- Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration.
- I will face my fear.
- I will permit it to pass over me and through me.
- And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path.
- Where the fear has gone there will be nothing.
- Only I will remain.

(From *DUNE* by Frank Herbert)

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