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Memoirs of a Gym Rat: One Man's 20-Year Journey through the Bowels of the Health Club Industry

Max Hawthorne
Far from the Tree Press (Oct 4, 2013)
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This raunchy memoir reveals the salacious secrets of greedy personal trainers through vignettes of smutty gym antics.

Max Hawthorne's raunchy, revealing memoir is certain to induce bouts of calorie-burning laughter, embarrassed grins, and reconsiderations of one's gym membership. A smutty and enjoyable exposé of life behind health club doors, *Memoirs of a Gym Rat* is both a scandalizing and edifying read.

After a disillusioning trek toward his dream career in veterinary medicine, Hawthorne determines that he could turn another of his passions—physical fitness—into a job. He finagles his way into a starting position at a gym, where he gets his first peek into the often nauseating underbelly of the health and fitness industry.

In the no-holds-barred pages of his memoir, Hawthorne shares many grisly revelations. Trading between sketches of the characters he worked with and for and glaring disclaimers for those who might be inclined to trust that their memberships will be as advertised, Hawthorne takes on the health industry and strips away any illusions of glamour.

For the trainer, dreams of transforming lives are quickly shattered by the realities of quotas and cash. But monetary drawbacks are balanced with an overabundance of sex. According to Hawthorne, personal trainers are the people second most likely to have affairs, a warning fleshed out with jaw-dropping accounts of sexual favors and exploitations, memories of philandering, and cautions about transmittable nasties. Such sections are cringe-worthy in direct proportion to their salacious honesty.

That *Memoirs of a Gym Rat* is broken up into sketches and asides makes for easy, if not always consistent, reading. Pithy introductions of characters add color to Hawthorne's overarching presentation of health club life, but few members of the cast stick around for long. Most merely serve anecdotal purposes: the smelly member whose rotted onion scent chased others away; the former military trainer who drove trainees to their breaking point; a host of fellow employees whose dishonesty was inelegant enough to get them caught and fired. Archetypes begin to form. These sections are more entertaining than informative.

Editor's notes serve a curious function throughout. Hawthorne employs them to make conspiratorially snarky remarks, but the bulk of the project is so grimy and blunt that the additional sense of confidence hardly seems necessary. Little seems left out; scatological moments, both literal and figurative, abound, among so much politically incorrect behavior that one can't help but groan. "Retarded" noises, jokes about jailhouse assault, ill-timed erections, and prank calls from fake homosexual lawyers are featured among other frat-boy antics. Hawthorne's honesty on such points will either charm or annoy, or both.

For gym members current and prospective, Hawthorne lays bare the truth that gyms care about the heft of a person's wallet, not the reduction of his body mass index. Using his own development from floor assistant to personal trainer to greedy salesperson as a guide, he coaches his readership on how to be wily when considering contracts and training schedules. In the role of coach, Hawthorne's professionalism emerges, resulting in advice that may prove invaluable.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (February 25, 2014)

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