

# Implosion

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**Implosion:** The Fanzine that proves anyone can publish a fanzine.  
Member, fwa.

It's called a fake-out, and it's as old as playground roughhousing. The mechanics of this rudimentary form of physical humor are few and easily understood. The perpetrator saunters up to the victim and threatens to punch out his lights. (Not a promising start for comedy, but we work with what we are given...)

As the alarmed victim stares at his potential assailant. The challenger pulls back his right hand, cocks it behind his ear and keeps saying, "I'm really gonna punch ya!"

The pair stand frozen in this tableau of incipient pugilism. When the tension has reached its peak, the would-be comedian feints with his right a couple of times. Then, he flips up his open left hand and smacks the unwary victim in the face as he shouts "Take out!"

This is exactly what we Vegrants have done to that unsuspecting innocent, Victor Gonzalez. Perhaps blinded by his fantasy about becoming a **Wild Heirs** co-editor, the Tacoma Flash fell for the feint and missed the real danger.

I refer to Victor's remarks, several **APAKs** ago, about problems which might arise if Vegas' fanzine fans get too immersed in the local science fiction club. While he fixed his eye firmly on the admittedly frightening spectre of **SNAFFU**, a bunch of us found an entirely different time-waster to soak up hours that might otherwise generate fanzines.

Victor should have used the energy he spent railing about the pernicious influence of science fiction clubs on fortifying the Vegrants' trufannish sensibilities against the encroachment of baseball. Perhaps Victor, a close associate of known baseball fan Andy Hooper, simply under-estimated the potential.

Now it's too late. The Spawn of Alexander Cartwright have seized a segment of Vegas' fan population. Bending **SNAFFU** to our nefarious will stole only a few precious minutes that might have gone to **Wild Heirs**. None of Las Vegrants loves formal sf clubs so much that they imperil fanzine fanac, though we watch Ken's unbridled helpfulness, lest it lead him to the **N3F**.

The Las Virtual Baseball Association (LVBA) is another matter. Roping in eight managers, drafting the teams and teaching everyone the game (APBA Baseball, a tabletop simulation) has soaked up a lot of time that Tom Springer, Ben Wilson, John Hardin

and I might have channeled into innumerable self-referential articles. (Bill Kunkel might have re-directed some of *his* energy into additional attacks on our alleged self-referentialism, but it's hard to say if fandom would gain or lose by this.)

Bill and I formed a similar league that lasted five seasons, back when we lived in New York. We called it the Royal Amateur Micro Baseball Organization, "**RAMBO**." Non-combatant Ross Chamberlain drew our symbol, Sylvester Stallone as Rambo in a baseball uniform with a bat as his weapon. Managers claimed that Sly Himself sang the National Anthem on Opening Day

Bill and I put our teams in the same division, a mistake. His New Orleans Cruisers and my St. Louis Aliens took turns winning the pennant. (I won three; he captured two.)

Vince Lombardi to the contrary, winning was *not* the only thing. The experience itself justified my participation. It was sports roleplaying. Instead of an adventure party of elves and gnomes, I had mathematically computer replicas of real-life major league ball players.

The nature of the experience promotes a high level of manager involvement and identification. Like many leagues, **RAMBO** (and **LVBA**) started with a talent pool instead of assigning real-life major league teams to each participant. **RAMBO** Managers drafted the 25-man roster, and a 10-man Reserve List, to create entirely new franchises. The teams had names, home cities and in some cases, minutely described home stadiums.

Like their major league counterparts, **RAMBO** (and **LVBA**) teams retain the rights to their players from season to season. The mathematical model is updated to reflect the most recent major league season, but the player stays with his team until traded or released.

Nothing buries allegiance to an actual major league team like running a stat team. Even the most loyal Mets rooster ends up hoping that the players on his stat league team overrun the Mets -- and every other club they face.

After a few seasons, managers start to feel very protective about their team's stars. Both **RAMBO** and **LVBA** heighten this effect by letting teams draft several all-time greats. Since these immortals stay unchanged season after season, they are corner stones of any simulation team's long-range plans. They are the constant on rosters that fluctuate in response to real baseball's highs and lows.

This close personal identification with one's team sometimes leads managers to eccentric behavior. I've never seen actual bloodshed, but less dangerous, if no less weird, behavior is common.

One manager, a former minor ball player doing an injur

rehab year, sublimated his career frustrations by throwing heart and soul into his RAMBO franchise. Earl developed a poem, practically a mantra, he intoned before his men marched to the plate. For instance, he always accompanied the arrival of slugging third baseman Mike Schmidt with "Chunk King, King of Swing, Chinese Egg Roll. Who loves ya, baby?" For Lance Parrish, a burly catcher with a powerful bat, it was: "Lancelet Link, Secret Chimp. Who loves ya, baby? Who loves you like I do?"

Scott Morgan occasionally pretended diffidence about his Toronto Saboteurs, but he still earned the nickname "Mad Dog" for his demeanor at league meetings. When not searching for the world's largest can of beer, Scott often regaled his opponents with his latest discovers about the worldwide socio-political conspiracy, of which poor major league umpiring was a key part.

Jeff Schwartz become "the Scrapper" for his never-say-die attitude. A normal person, down seven or eight runs in the sixth inning, goes on automatic. They accept defeat and play to finish the game as expeditiously as possible. Not Jeff. He could be losing by 20 runs in the ninth, and it wouldn't keep him from bearing down maniacally on every pitch.

The worst thing about Jeff's approach was that it occasionally worked. He'd whip his team forward even when hope was lost, and once in a while, they'd catch fire and pull out an impossible victory.

At first, I stayed aloof from all the hijinks. "Stats Katz" they called me, because of my insistence that nothing stopped the pure mathematics of the simulation's formulas. Eventually, though, I introduced a little wind-up toy called Mr. Baseball. He looked just like a baseball, except for the Gene Simmons tongue flopping out of his mouth. After a clutch win, I'd wind up Mr. Baseball, and he would skitter across the computer station to my unfailing amusement.

Las Virtual Baseball Association is too new to have manifested comparable weirdness, but it will. I have faith.

Already, the personalities of several LV fans are unmistakably reflected in the way they handle their franchise. Perhaps this is the sports equivalent of psychological litmus tests like "Your favorite Stooze tells your Personality."

Tom Springer laughs a lot and picks up things easily. But every loss provokes inner agony. As with fandom, Tom is rapidly erasing the knowledge gap.

Ben Wilson started with less baseball knowledge than many of his rivals, but no one can match his dedication. He asks questions, digests the answers and constantly improves his ability to judge player talent and manage the team in the field.

JoHN Hardin is, of course, a dilettante. He doesn't know much about baseball, and he doesn't have any special insight into the simulation. But he is charming, affable and shows some talent for rolling favorable random numbers at the right time.

I've done quite a bit of publishing for the league,

averaging almost a fanzine a week with hints, rules, statistics and player aids. I've been livening up the pages of **Umpyre** with gif files of amateur nude models acquired over the Internet. It's not politically correct, but I notice that the other seven managers always start reading **Umpyre** from the back cover, where the "Ball Girl of the Month" struts her stuff.

Attempts to scare Victor Gonzalez notwithstanding, I don't think the baseball simulation league will really do much to divert Las Vegrants' zeal for fanpublishing. After all, as much as I like the players on my team, none of them has yet seen fit to send me so much as a single loc.