

THIS IS NINE INNINGS #1, Drag Bunt Press Production # 8, written and published by Andrew P. Hooper, who is solely responsible for its content. LOC's and requests for trade can be sent to me at: BLEAR HOUSE, 214 N. Brearly, Madison, WI, USA, 53703. Thanks are in Order to Jeanne Gomoll for the Logo, and to Carrie Root for assistance in areas that are too numerous to mention. This zine was published concurrently in issue # 16 of the Turbo-Charged Party-Animal Apa, October of 1987.

So, I am camped out in front of Mike DuCharme's 280 foot screen Television tonight, observing the ape-like hooting and flapping of hands by the fans in Minneapolis, as their home-town favorites are introduced. They roundly boo and revile the Tigers when they are announced, but this is the manner of fans everywhere. We need not take it personally.

The noise, which might be compared to a B-52 taking off from a short runway, is particularly intense in Minneapolis, because they play ball indoors here, under a giant inflated bubble made of old trash can liners, which is honored with the title "The Hubert H. Humphrey Memorial Metrodome," or something like that. This is a lousy place to play baseball, but it makes a crowd of 50,000 sound like 250,000, and gives the game all the restful ambience of a Brazilian Soccer Final. I have a lot of other problems with the Hump Dome, but more later; the game finally gets under way. (After the singing of our National Anthem. I want to see Frank Zappa play the National Anthem at a ballgame someday, but I'm still waiting.)

Frank Viola, the Twins' pitcher, is the best left-handed pitcher in baseball over the last four years, and the Tigers are humiliated by his fastball in the top of the first, and made to look even stupider by his curve ball. Kirk Gibson, Tiger slugger and walking commercial on the dangers of inbreeding, waves at it so feebly that he looks like a character trying to hit the "slow ball" in one of those old Warner Bros. cartoons...the one where the batter cuts three times at the fluttering ball, usually thrown by Bugs himself, and the umpire bleats "One-Two-Threestrikesyerout!"

He (Gibson, not Bugs Bunny) stumps back to the dugout, throws his helmet at the wall, and yells "Fuck it!," loud enough that we might have heard it even if the camera hadn't been taking a tight closeup of his face. Nice work, NBC.

And the Minneapolis fans go wild, which I suspect they will do often tonight. This is a side of Minneapolis I haven't seen before. Most of my dealings with the city have been through attending Minicon, which is a pretty wild convention, but those are fans of course,

Well, here we are. I've been waiting seven months for this, and I intend to enjoy it. My beloved Detroit Tigers, who I have followed since long before I was ever a Fan, have made it through this long season in triumph, pole-axing the sadly slumping Toronto Blue Jays on the last three days of the season to win the American League's Eastern Division. Now, they meet the Minnesota Twins to see who will represent the league in the World Series.

Efforts have been made, by people who really ought to know better, to convince me that the Twins, who have not won the pennant since I was two years old, are somehow more deserving of victory than the Tigers, who, were the champs as recently as 1984. These infidels do not, alas, understand what it is to be dedicated to something from birth. I have been rooting for the Tigers since I was, as Laurie Anderson would say, a Hershey bar in my father's pocket. The argument that these Twins, who have the audacity to pretend at the title after winning only 29 of 81 games outside of their home park, are somehow cuter and more endearing than the Tigers is not going to cut it with me, so you can all just save your breath.



INNINGS

and this is to be expected. Most people from the Twin Cities are supposed to be rather reserved, and seeing them waving something called the "homer hankie," reminiscent of Pittsburgh's "terrible towel" of several years past, and screaming for blood, is unsettling.

I saw the very beginning of this pennant drive last April, at the aforementioned Minicon, when the Twins had reeled off a number of victories in a row, and showed some of the form which has brought them to the present. I wrote an article about it for Cube a few months ago, but I primarily addressed the question of what happens when a convention gets to be as big as Minicon is now, and I don't think I captured the flavor of the weekend very well. I was embroiled at the time in the ongoing political spasms which have seized Apa-69, and was also trying rather half-heartedly to keep Ray Russell from leaving the Turbo-charged Party-animal Apa in a fit of turbo-pique, so I had nowhere near as much fun as I would have liked. The air-conditioning also gave me a head cold, which made me snore, which made Bill Bodden and Nevenah Smith, who were in the room with me, rather jittery. They've declined to share a room with us again.

There were some fine parties, including one held by the small knot of dedicated lunatics who are mounting the Milwaukee Worldcon bid, featuring the legendary "blue stuff," as vile a concoction as can be imagined, and a lot of aggressive hand pumping by the people whipping the bid forward. One finds it hard to figure out how to approach these people. They are banking on a number of hotels that haven't been built yet being available by 1994, which seems a dangerous thing to assume in Wisconsin, where decisions to build hotels and convention centers can be dragged out for 10 to 20 years. The convention where they have had the bulk of their con-running experience is X-con, and I've gone on record in the past as to my feelings about X-con; let's just say I don't think it the most appropriate place to train for the problems of running a worldcon.

But then, I really rather like a number of them, despite their continual political angst, their vile humor, the fact that they live in Milwaukee, and so on. I think they might well be able to put on a passable Nasfic, given enough lead time to bring together all the disaffected Milwaukeans that have been staying away from the bid so far. So hey, let's do them a big favor, shall we? Let's support Perth in '94, and keep Milwaukee from having the misfortune of having to chew up all they seem to want to bite off.

And ah, as I speak of blue stuff, also known as "Industrial Smurf Solvent" to some, along comes Kirby Puckett, the only black person in the stadium that isn't from Detroit, known affectionately as "the Smurf" by some of the Minnesota

fans. He stands in the box against Doyle Alexander, the Tiger pitcher that has gone 9 and 0 since coming to Detroit from Atlanta, and one can see why the nickname has been applied. He's 5 foot, 8 inches tall, and weighs 220 pounds, a brown teddy bear-like man, gifted with great strength and speed. It's almost as if the huge crowd of pale squareheads have made a pet of him, their toy, something not entirely real. They love him unreservedly, but it's like the love bestowed on a favorite dog or horse or rosebush, untrammelled by any of the respect the man is obviously deserving of. This bothers me, as I'm sure you can tell, but is it really my growing partisan contempt for the Twins and their fans that makes it seem so galling, or does he feel it too?

He's certainly easy to pick out of the crowd on the bench. I thought last year that I'd never see a team less racially balanced than the notoriously bigoted Boston Red Sox, but here it is.

Alexander, who looks thin and drawn on the mound, like a survivor of the Bataan death march, gives him nothing to hit, and Puckett pops the ball up for an easy out. For this inning, anyway, Alexander looks almost as good as Viola did; he strikes out two, and we are out of the first inning.

Now NBC treats us to a file tape of the ongoing scandal of the artificial playing surface here in the dome. It's springy, like india rubber, and when the ball hits it the right way, it will rebound high into the air, over the heads of fielders, often out of the field of play altogether. It's clear that this condition favors the Twins, since they play here all the time, and many teams will only be here six times during the year, as was the case with the Tigers. I can't claim to be a purist who despises all baseball that isn't played on real grass in the sunlight, but this does seem to be a pretty extreme stretch to put the game through. They show a picture of Gary Pettis, who is maybe the best fielding outfielder in baseball, letting a ball bounce over his head in center, but "letting" is probably the wrong word...he charges the ball to hold the runner to a single, and the ball hits some sort of seam in the turf, and it's over his head in an instant.

There are a lot of other problems with this park as well. The lighting is considered to be the worst in baseball, and routine pop-ups are regularly turned into doubles or even inside the park homers when they get lost in the shadows overhead. The ceiling is the lowest of any domed stadium anywhere, and if the ball strikes it, it remains in play, forcing fielders to judge the carom as it returns to earth. And then there is the noise. With no open top to stream out of, it reverberates and shivers around the inside of the bubble, building into an almost unbearable cacaphony, which seems to infuse the Twins with determination

and sap the strength of visiting teams. (Not, mind you, that this has been much a problem until recently, since the "old" Twins seldom did much worth yelling about.) In the top of the second, Darrell Evans stands in, his perfect wrists still supple at age 40, and struggles to find his timing on Viola's slider. The crowd noise seems to press him down, into the captive clay of the batter's box, and he goes down swinging at pitches that have already impacted with the catcher's mitt. 1-2-3, nothing across.

I don't dislike all domed stadiums, far from it. This place is great to see a football game in. I came up here a few years ago, to see the Wisconsin Badgers batter the University of Minnesota into unconsciousness, and it was wonderful to be able to take your coat off at a football game. The springiness of the turf here is a godsend to football players that get their teeth driven into it time and again.

There are other domes which are even decent for baseball, the Astrodome in Houston, and the Kingdome in Seattle. One of the highlights of the month and a half I spent there last year was going to see the Mariners play a few games. The fact that it was indoors didn't seem to affect the quality of those games, which has a lot to do with the high, airy ceiling they have out there. They hit a lot of homers there, too, but few seem as cheap as those which barely clear the right field wall in Minnesota.

Seattle in general was something of a mystery to me. It has mostly defied my efforts to write about it for over a year now, even though I went to two conventions, three ballgames, the world's fair and some amazing parties. Something about life there seemed to me to be more suited for experiencing than for recalling it later; much of my memory is lost in a haze of high-quality Northwestern Micro-Brews and Vonda McIntyre's fudge.

I went out there to get married, of course, one of the more dementedly romantic things I've done in my life, but one which I remain unrepentant about; it was definitely the right thing to do. I might never have made it through it, however, if not for the warm and sincere welcome I was accorded by members of Seattle Fandom. It went like this: I got on the plane in Madison, where it was 20 degrees F, and snowing, and awoke in Seattle five hours later, where it was 62 and drizzling, the air charged with the aroma of Mountain rhododendron blossoms. Carrie's presence had a lot to do with the sudden improvement in my mood, but I think those rhododendrons had a lot to do with it too; It was a flashback to the portion of my youth spent in West Virginia, when that same smell filled the air I breathed at age eight. It said something to my brain that put me immediately at ease, and let me lay back and enjoy the ride.

And then, five minutes later, we were across the highway at the Red Lion, plunged headfirst into the last Norwescon held there. If possible, it seemed to be more crowded than the Chicago Worldcon

was, the halls choked with five thousand fans, at least half in costume. I was introduced to such luminaries as Jane Hawkins, Jerry Kauffman, Suzle Tompkins, John D. Berry, Art Widner and Victor Gonzales on the dance floor, over the thundering of the Talking Heads Swamp... They seemed to have been briefed by Carrie as to my existence, but I don't think they expected anyone as large as me, nor anyone as clearly demented by the shock of the contrast between Madison and the convention. I only lasted for a little while before collapsing from exhaustion and going back to the room to watch some odd documentary on the sort of accidents that leave smoking body parts strewn all over the neighborhood, punctuated by ads for Iver's Fish restaurant, filmed in glorious "clam-o-vision."

The next morning, we went up to the top floor of the hotel, where Carrie said she wanted to show me something. I was willing to be led, so I placidly stumbled behind her, a bottle of Smith and Reilly in hand, expecting to see the Seattle skyline or something equally pedestrian. Instead, when we got to the picture window at the end of the hall, and looked out into the perfectly clear and sunny morning, there was the floating mass of Mt. Ranier in the distance, larger and more...well, amazing...then I had ever imagined. I stared at it, slack-jawed, for some time, and then...well, yes, it remains among the most romantic moments of my life, equalled only by our weak-kneed stagger before the judge a week later, and the realization that this was it, wasn't it?

We were married in Bellevue on Thursday, the 27th of March, the week after the convention. Mike DuCharme was there interviewing for a job as a librarian out in the San Juan's somewhere, but he could not, alas, attend the wedding. It was rather like the Paul Simon song, "We were married on a Rainy day/The sky was yellow, and the grass was grey/We signed the papers and we drove away/I do it for your love," except that the sky was a deep blue-white, and the grass was rioting in green, and again that mountain was there lowering over us, as we stood next to the spindly flowering crabapple trees in the courthouse parking lot and grinned for photos. We went out for a Mexican Dinner with a bunch of Carrie's co-workers, got a little hyp-motized, then went home and watched Hill Street Blues. And were, my God, married.

Perhaps this is why so much of what made Seattle great eludes me. I had my mind on other things, even when we went to the ballpark. Two days after we were married, I was on a plane home again, and the whole week seemed to recede into dream. Fortunately, I got to go back again in May, and Carrie returned to Madison for good in June, but there were times in the weeks that followed that I would awake from one dream and wonder how much of what I had done in the last few months was part of another. I'm still waiting to regain full consciousness.

The bottom of the second now, the meat, as they say, of the Twins' order. Alexander seems to have established a rhythm, pitching without obvious effort. And here we have Hrbek and Brunansky, affectionately reviled around the league as Shamu and Bruno, the two big guns in the Twins' line-up. Now these two guys can draw a walk or two, keeping their on-base percentage well above the infamous Moreno line of .300, but the lead-off men in front of them don't... their strikeouts are way too high, their walks too low... backwards, of course, meaning that a lot of the time these two behemoths come to the plate with no one on base. And yet the Twins win.

Now the two of them labor like Trojans to get the enormous bats they use around on Alexander's butterfly-like curveball, and the best they can manage is a few foul tips before being struck out. But now, a leaner wolf arrives, Gaetti, the evil-looking third baseman, who seems to have found his homerun swing again over the past two years. (The statistician Bill James alleges that it was found in a dumpster half a block away from a house belonging to a shortstop that has played for the Mets and Expos, but we need not dignify such accusations with our consideration.) There is something about Gaetti tonight, a sharpness around the eyes that tells you he is ready to play... then Sturm and Drang among the squareheads. Gaetti sees Alexander hang some sort of off-speed pitch up around his sternum, and he needs no invitation to pound it over the center field fence. Chet Lemon throws himself into the blue rubber wall, supposedly manufactured from recycled condoms collected by the cub scouts of Minnesota, but he cannot catch the ball. One to nothing. The fans howl as Gaetti jogs around the bases. One to nothing. The Twins congratulate him. One to nothing. Hang on Alexander, this may be a rough ride.

Now a dull moment in the game as some small, rebellious skraeling has pitched a beach ball onto the field in right, but there's no effect, as this is not Candlestick Park and there is no Pacific wind to snatch the bloated thing, so it lies inert on the plastic. I say flatten the thing and leave it there, a rainbow fungus nurtured by the humid dome atmosphere.

While a minion is dispatched to terminate the interloping beach toy, the announcer Bob Costas decides we should hear something about what sort of music the players like to listen to. Across the country, men in torn T-shirts are saying "Aww, fer Chris'sake," and poking their itchy thumbs on the remote control MUTE button, but I glean a gem from this; Tiger rookie infielder Jim Walewander, a speedy young Toledo Mudhen who was brought to a seat at the head table for the last few months of the season, claims that his favorite Band is The Dead Milkmen.

Now the Milkmen are not exactly the second coming of Paper Lace or the 1910 Fruitgum Company, but they are interesting, and it's so refreshing to hear a ballplayer answer that question with something other than Willie Nelson or Lionel Richie that it makes me sit up and notice. Good for you, Jim, and crank up your Neo-Punkabilly comedy-thrash in spring training next year; nobody ever made it to the big league by being quiet. A word of advice though... if you've got the new album, you might think about turning it down at the part where they scream "Take that, Stevie Ray Vaughan! Take that, you cheesy Texas mother-fuckers!" People from Texas are unusually serious about that sort of thing...

The Tigers escape from the second without further damage, and as I begin to doodle a picture of Billy Martin being drawn and quartered by Ted White in a Sarong, they are up to bat in the third. The first man up is the 3rd baseman Tom Brookens, who has stood for ten years now as a monument to the triumph of hard work over a lack of talent. Time and again Sparky Anderson, the Tiger manager, has tried to replace him with a younger, flashier player, but each time the replacement has failed and Brookens has turned up at third base again, despite his ghastly fielding and oft times worse hitting. He can play any position in the infield, although none of them very well, and he's one of those people that managers just seem to like to have around for the continuity he represents. It sometimes seems as if Sparky looks at him and says, "Well, I must have a pretty good team if I can keep this guy in the line-up on a daily basis and still win games." Now, of course, as I wax poetic about him, he strikes out swinging.

Then, as quickly as the Twins struck in the last inning, the Tigers have tied it up. Mike Heath, an itinerant catcher of no fixed ability, drives one of Viola's fastballs into the center field seats, and it's one to one. The rest of the inning is uneventful, but I am filled with new hope at this sign of life.

Something is beginning to cause me concern, but it has nothing to do with the game. Casting about for something to prepare for dinner this evening, I came up with one of my Stir Fry/Curry nightmare combinations, involving what I believe was beef, and sundry members of the onion family. They have begun to bubble and ferment in my intestinal tract now, sending small reports up and down my body like the distant rat-a-tat of Tamil Death squads in the night. I decide to confuse the issue further by having a beer.

Thinking about Curry, as well as gastric distress and beer, makes me remember the mildly insane Leroy Kettle, an English Fan of low birth whom I came across during our trip to Worldcon this summer. My previous acquaintance with him had been limited to a rather disjointed

reading of his contribution to the "Ten for the Mexican" fanthology, a travelogue entitled "Sphincters at Dawn," which detailed in full the gaseous hazards of sharing a room at a convention with Rob Hansen. The reading I heard was delivered by Stu Shiffman at last year's Wiscon, in part, until his uncontrollable laughter got the best of him, and someone else snatched the zine away and concluded the piece. This was done, incidently, with a mildly cherubic-looking Rob Hansen sitting in the room, silently allowing himself to be libeled in public for what must have been the thirtieth or fortieth time.

The reading did make something of an impression on me, on two counts: The first, that Stu Shiffman ought not to be allowed to read in public, and the second, that this Leroy Kettle sounds an interesting fellow, and one ought to keep his name in mind.

So, on our second night in Brighton, Spike walks up to me with an evil grin on her face and a shabby, middle-aged civil-servantish person in tow, who is already well into his 7th or 8th beer of the evening, and proclaims "This is Leroy Kettle. Leroy, this is Andy Hooper. You two should...uh...talk." I could tell that she was fishing for some way to tell me that here was, at last, a truly dedicated individual, one that we might call a real party-animal, and my equal in almost every theatre of excess. If I had but known, or she had been but a little clearer in her suggestive throat-clearing and laughing, what followed might have been avoided.

There came that fateful hour of sunset over the grey channel horizon before us, a sky that promised more than rain as we strolled west on the road above the beach, and the inevitable casting about for a place to eat. We ended up on a narrow road about three blocks from the Metropole, an avenue we came to call "The street of many restaurants," looking in the window of a wide variety of disreputable looking places for one that seemed free of cholera and likely to be able to serve all eight of us. Leroy had somehow formed us, including himself, Spike and Rob Hansen, Jeanne Gomoll and Scott Custis (her Iowa slave-cossack), Carrie, Hope Kiefer and myself, into a crack team of whining, half-drunk, ravenous arrested-development cases, unable to agree on anything, particularly where to eat. How we had gotten out of the hotel I can't say. Kettle had begun a torrent of oddly-accented gibberish as soon as I shook his hand, and there we still were, hours later, babbling about nothing at all. I was enjoying it thoroughly.

Hansen, acting as Kettle's Bagman, finally said, "Oh, look, there's-a-nice little-Indian-place-why-don't-we-eat-there?" Before anyone in the party, some of whom had been pulled onto the gastric roller-coaster that is Indian Food by Hansen just night before, could protest,

Kettle had cried out "Right-ho, what a fine idea. Indian it is, then," and shoveled us into the place en masse.

I should mention that my experience with Indian food, at least before that night, had been somewhat limited. I sat next to Hope, who had managed to live in London for six months without figuring out the first thing about it, which is no small trick itself. We two neophytes were separated from the rest of the table by Spike, who does not share food for religious reasons, and were thus left alone with the evil Kettle, who began to order a bewildering array of mysterious Tikas and Curries for our joint consumption, all the while lashing down glass after glass of beer and hollering mild abuse at the waiters, who seemed to be very nervous over his presence. "Perhaps he is known here," I thought, "possibly from Seacon in '79. Clearly the fool doesn't remember the vile epithets he hurled against Indira Ghandi on his last visit here, and even now Thug footpads are lying in wait for us on our route back to the hotel. I shall end up by taking a poisoned dart meant for this berk, and H.M.G. will be forced to issue an official apology for allowing a visiting American tourist to fall afoul of an attempt to finger the man who had been sending detailed floorplans of the Minster for Overseas Development's garden shed to Moscow Centre."

Unfortunately, nothing so exciting happened. We talked about books and fans and the weather, which had been filthy, what a surprise. We agreed that the hotel were being complete bastards about a wide variety of things. We had wonderful Onion Bhagees. We kept drinking.

On the whole, everyone was satisfied. The meal was put on Carrie's Plastic, allowing me to collect up lots of spare cash from all the other diners which I later used to buy books in what was not called "the Huckster room," or "The Dealer's room," but "The Booksellers' Room." How refreshing.

Later that night, I got to pining for news of the pennant race, and Leroy allowed as he felt for my loss, but that his game of choice, Cricket, was far superior. We argued about this for some time, and we kept drinking.

Finally, I commented as how since I had two gloves and a ball in my backpack, we might throw it around a bit. I had been carrying the bloody things all over England for two weeks, in hopes of finding time to keep my arm in shape for the titanic struggles between pitcher and batter that rage almost daily off our front stoop, but this was my first opportunity since arriving to actually use them. So, we decided to try it out, right there in the fan room, at two in the morning.

In retrospect, I suppose it's fortunate that we didn't manage to break anything. In his condition, I doubt Kettle could have caught a cold without using both hands, but he did his best. He

looked at the Glove, a nice Wilson Outfield model, like it was some sort of cancerous growth on the end of his hand, and tried to barehand the ball several times. We had a good time, though, until Roy let one go by him into the stack of pint mugs stacked at the now quiescent bar, with a horrible noise that reminded me of a box full of Jelly Jars being thrown downstairs. This brought the wrath of the much-harried Greg Pickersgill down on our heads, who spoke to Kettle as if he were a misbehaving pet, and drove us forth from the room with fiery invective.

I saw Roy just one more time that weekend, in the bar at 3 AM on our last night at the convention. Conjecture had it that much of the days at the convention had passed by in an unconscious haze for him, and here he was, making up for lost time. He had reached the staggering stage of the evening by then, and as I stumbled upon him, I found that he had stolen some poor non-fiction collaborator's Hugo award, and was brandishing it about the room like a primitive totem. We had our picture taken, together with the stolen Hugo, and minutes later Carrie and I left to go pack for the train ride back to London.

I like to think that Roy may well still be at that bar.

The bottom of the third passes in a minute, almost literally. The Twins go down in order, punctuated by a miserable strike-out by catcher Tim Laudner, and I begin to believe that Alexander may have his stuff after all. On to the top of the fourth.

Here once more is the muscular Kirk Gibson, a former football player who was once cursed with the title "The next Willie Mays." One wonders when people will realize that there isn't going to be another Willie Mays, ever, and stop crushing young players with these associations. Gibson himself looks dragged down by the weight of unrealized potential, and what's worse, he seems to have no idea how to time Viola's fastball. Some baseball sage once said that "Hitting is timing," and "Pitching is upsetting timing," and if so, Gibson ought to get into the box with a stop watch in hand, because he has no idea what he's up to in there. He at least makes contact with the ball this time, but the Tigers go down 1-2-3 again, and we go to the bottom of the fourth.

In walks DuCharme, in between shifts of the seven or eight jobs he's working these days. We generally see him for three or four minutes at a time, during which he pokes around for postage stamps and curses and grunts at the content of his numerous phone messages. Tonight, though, he is interested in my opinion on a movie playing up town, so I run upstairs and print out the text of a neo-Ebert review I had thrown together the night before. It reads like this:

TITLE: MATEWAN
WHERE SEEN: Stage Door
DATE: October 2nd.

One of the continuing puzzles in American movies is the strange case of John Sayles, perpetually cast as our foremost "Alternative" film maker, the name that comes to mind under the heading "Independent." His work has now proven an ability to make money equal to that made by "major" directors and does very well on cable...he's shown himself willing to work with major studios, at least with his scripts...so why should he remain narrow in focus? Why not make a few larger films, now that the money is there for the taking?

Submitted then, for our perusal, is the exhibit Matewan, Sayle's latest film, the story that he's been waiting for ten years to film. It's a lushly furnished period piece about the struggle to bring a union into the coalfield hills of West Virginia, lacking as usual any firmly established "stars" to lend their vulgar light to the proceedings. (With the possible exception of James Earl Jones, who seems to get better and better.) The title refers to a fictionalized town where Sayle's has distilled all the blood and nobility and treachery of fifty years of strike and strife into one small valley, that between reluctant scabs, professional gun thugs, marauding hillbillies and a small town police-chief with a two-gun rig, provides employment for more little-known character actors than any film in recent memory. Another director would have used M. Emmet Walsh and Richard Farnsworth and Darren McGavin to make this movie; it's part and parcel of what keeps Sayles a "minor" director that he chose to employ actors from the region he was filming in instead.

It's not a very complicated film; the bad guys in this movie are about as one-dimensional as Sayles gets, though even they have some tinge of reality to them that other film makers miss. When the shooting finally starts in earnest, near the end of the film, we're so pent up in waiting for it that the actual event seems rather subdued. But then, this is not a Wes Craven picture...not that Sayles would mind working with Wes Craven again. It's just that his style has to do with making you understand a thing, rather than merely letting you see it. The reaction shots in this film may be the best I've ever seen...the story is told in people's faces, probably more than by the dialogue, which encompasses all the hoariest Woody Guthrie/Wobbly cliches you can think of, down to the point of emblazoning "Takes more than guns to kill a man," on the tasteful one-sheet. It may be that Sayles took on too much for himself here trying to write and direct and act -- again, quite well, and with great energy -- in a film with this large a cast, that big a second unit. Even given more than adequate resources

to make the major film this was expected to be, Sayles can't open up the screen for us, give us wide focus, the big picture worthy of Cinemascope and California power lunches

But there is no denying the power of this film, and the depth of the emotion it contains, both within its characters and the dedication of its director to his task. There is nothing in this film that looks forced or opportunistic...one imagines Sayles must have felt great satisfaction in being able to go to the location he wanted, rather than taking pot luck on the streets of New York, as in Brother from Another Planet, or being trapped in a series of extremely small interiors, as in Lianna. If things lie down a little too pat at the end, we're more than willing to let it go in the face of the many fine performances in front of us, and the obvious delight with which every shot is framed. We are dealing here with people who still think that making movies is fun, and I for one hope they never completely grow up.

DuCharme reads, it grunts, and runs out into the rain without his car keys. I think he's one of the best housemates I've ever had. At least, he's one of the most entertaining.

The bottom of the fourth is also very short, as the Twins go down in order without getting the ball out of the infield. Perhaps Detroit's mystic charms -- a pitcher that has never lost in Minneapolis, a pitcher that never loses in Detroit, a pitcher that never loses -- will have some effect after all.

The top of the fifth is also largely uneventful, save for a shot toward left field hit by Darrell Evans, right at the Twins' shortstop Greg Gagne (Pronounced Gag-knee. Go figure.) which bounces right off his glove, and yet is ruled a hit. This is a common occurrence of course, a hometown writer working as the official scorer is understandably biased in favor of the local boys, but this seems extreme. Perhaps this is why the Twins have been charged with the fewest errors in the majors this season.

On the other hand, perhaps I'm clutching at any available straw to belittle this team, hmmm? The rest of the inning is uneventful as Evans is forced at second on a fielder's choice by Heath, and the game is half over.

It's odd...I used to rather like Minneapolis for another reason. Up until four months ago, this was where Minnesota Public Radio's A Prairie Home Companion originated, a weekly excursion into good will and high moral purpose that made everyone love Minnesota and Garrison Keillor, America's tallest radio comedian.

But that's all gone now, and all we're left with is re-runs and the image of the wives of the Twins' players, all of whom appear to be beautiful, blonde, Nordic women with eyes of ice, leaping up and down in the stands, blowing police

whistles at ear-destroying volume, and waving those goddamn "homer hankies." I mention to Carrie in passing that, should I ever end up pitching for the American League pennant, if she comes out to the park waving a homer hankie and shrieking my name in a shrill, bat-like voice, I will pretend not to know her. She replies that there is little to worry about there.

But I was talking about Garrison Keillor.

I must confess to having been quite addicted to the well-modulated tones issuing from the radio. For the past several years, I have found myself sneaking away from conventions at 5:00 pm on Saturday, gluing my ear to whatever radio I could find, often eschewing dinner invitations from traveling BNF's desperate for the melifluous pleasure of my company. Alas, they could not compete; I was more interested in the fate of Bunsen Ford Motors of Lake Wobegon, of Bruno the fishing dog, of the 4th of July Living Flag, than I was in the whys and whereabouts of the true fannish tradition.

Why was this?

One, it helped if you'd lived in the midwest for at least some part of your life, in that great nebulous part of America that lies somewhere west of the terminus of the Pennsylvania turnpike and east of the great divide. I live in a small city, pop. 180,000, but if I drive in any direction for a half hour, I'll find myself in the very center of the semi-mythical region that the show purported to represent.

Two, it helped if you still had relatives that lived in a small town, if you yourself were not from one. Listening to Keillor's monologues was like going to visit them, only it ended too soon, rather than the other way around as it did in real life. In real life, small towns are not populated by delightful, colorful characters that lay open their lives for your entertainment.

Three, it helped not to have lived too long in a small town yourself. The reasons for this seem obvious; stories about small-town telephone operators are only amusing if you don't have to rely on one all the time.

And four, you had to want to hear a story that you knew was patently false. Keillor himself has always admitted to certain... "embellishments" of the truth. A healthy respect for a good liar was always part of the enjoyment of the show.

He says he's off to live in Denmark for the sake of anonymity, in order to escape the fame and concurrent loss of privacy that he spent thirteen hard years achieving. Part of this seems to be due to genuine romance, his marriage to a high-school -- dare one use the archaic term "sweetheart"? -- from that country.

His presumably real desire for privacy and a quieter life seem almost beyond comprehension in the age where everyone is famous for fifteen minutes. This makes it all the harder for his fans

to allow for the gap he will leave in their lives...giving up all the money and fame and free tickets to Minnesota Twins home games, in order to keep the legend of the shy person.

(Gad...what will the KTF school of fanzine reviewing make of all this maudering sentimentality? This tawdry little elegy is assuming all the pungent saccharine taste of a plate of Sweet and Sour Prawns, from the Mandarin Garden Restaurant, Preston St., Brighton. Reservations recommended, and be aware the waiters are all half-trepanned Thai drug runners and arsonists, who will not be dissuaded from plunging three huge slices of lemon into your Coke with anything short of Theater Nuclear munitions...(I seem to have been reading too many cheesy spy novels)...But I digress.)

I'll miss Garrison Keillor for many reasons, and I'm somewhat sensitive to the sort of vaguely "Well-he-was-really-no-better-than-Bob-Tucker," and "His-writing-won't-make-anyone-forget-James-Thurber," kind of talk that I've heard at some recent events. I would put it to all you excruciatingly fannish fans out there that you've lost a kindred spirit through Keillor's gafiation to Scandanavia.

Because that's what it is. A Gafiation of the first order. He started out as the greatest fan that old-style radio ever had, and like many fans, he went pro in the end. But unlike any pro I ever knew, he decided that he'd give up the money and the egoboo and the mantle of Public Radio SMOF, in order to go back to being just a fan again. He probably didn't see it in exactly those terms, but the general idea remains the same...a kind of retrograde motion in his life, a hope that one can go home again, if you're really willing to put it behind you.

Well, I suppose this analogy is beginning to leak steam around the edges, so I'll drop it, but I hope that what I'm saying is essentially true. Because if I had been in the same position, I wouldn't have dropped that good a job for anything. I hope that he did it for the highest of reasons, because anything else would seem stupid

Now we go to the bottom of the fifth inning, and there seems to be an ominous buzzing in the air, as if the dome air conditioners have been turned on, or maybe we've stumbled into a Peter Weir film by accident. And up comes Gaetti, looking twice as mean as when he smacked the homerun in the second inning. I'm on my feet now, trying to stare him down as the camera gets a tight close-up of his bland, malevolent face. I begin to feel rather like Gregory Peck as Ahab, staring into the eye of Moby Dick, because here is the pitch, the first pitch, and HE BREACHES!!! OH, YE DAMN-ED WHALE!!! There's another long drive, this one to left field, and it sails over the reconstituted condoms and Gibson can only kick at the turf in disgust. 2 to 1. From hell's heart, I spit at thee, Gary Gaetti. 2 to 1. The worst is not yet over. 2 to 1.

And Randy Bush, a rather anemic hitter, TRIPLES off the center field wall, Brunansky doubles and Gladden singles, the Twins hit for the cycle before the door is slammed shut, they get three runs in total. Alexander rights himself, and gets Laudner and Gagne on swining strikeouts, but this is too big a lead to spot a pitcher like Frank Viola. I can almost hear him giggling and rubbing his hands with glee in the dugout. 4 to 1. The Twins hit for the cycle in the inning. 4 to 1. The curry rumbles my protest. 4 to 1.

In the top of the sixth, the Tigers will send up the top of the order to try and put something together. The noise in the dome is beginning to hurt my ears, because it keeps overdriving the mikes, sending clicks and squeals of feedback that sound like dememnted dolphins at 78 rpm out of the television. Ugh.

Lou Whitaker is first up, and for the third time in a row, bounces weekly to Kent Hrbek, who makes the play unassisted. This is getting spooky. How can as good a hitter as Lou be induced to do that three times in a row? Has he been paid off? Are they holding his wife and kids in a seemingly abandoned warehouse in St. Paul?

I must admit I looked away at this point, momentarily distracted. When I looked up again, finished with trying to find out who was on Letterman, there was Gibson taking a homerun trot, as they showed the phantom ripple of the ball impacting against the center field plastic over and over. 4 to 2. Gibson, sticking his fist in the air as he rounds third, seems to be exorcising his rage against the fans that have been mercilessly riding him in left field, which is a pity, because they'll be on him again when he goes back out at the end of the inning. Alan Trammell flies out to end the inning, and we go to the bottom of the sixth, 4 to 2. I don't think that two run lead will hold up, but then I doubt the Twins are done scoring.

Between innings, I look over the layout of another zine I'm working on, issue five of a savage and ill-mannered music fanzine called SLANDER! This is a project that was originally started by a friend of mine, one Charles Cheney, dedicated to the premise that bad press is better than no press at all. We usually write about local bar bands and underground acts, although we have recently taken to slandering bands with national or even international standing. The rule of thumb we follow is that before anyone is allowed to have anything nice said about them, we get to jump on them with crampons until they bleed from all extremities.

Pursuant to this, we do not reveal our identities at any point in the magazine, and also do our best to conceal them from our advertisers...yes, advertisers. You see, when Charley started this thing up, I don't think he had any idea that fanzines generally do not make money, and went about to at

least get his printing costs taken care of. We then sell the thing in local record stores, for fifty cents a pop, which is all gravy.

Well, here I am participating in a project that by fannish standards is of very dubious morality on two counts. First, there seems to be an international backlash going right now, against any sort of pseudonymous publishing activity, and this is understandable considering the great amount of ink and blood spilled through such cowardly means in recent years. Second, trying to make money off fanzines is as loathsome and vile a disease as a fan can be afflicted with, and usually doesn't work anyway.

So why do I go on?

Well, it is a lot of fun to write something just off the top of your head, utter lies, about people you have never seen or met. I think we make it clear throughout the zine that we make no pretension to legitimacy of any kind, so that you'd have to be pretty anal to take offense at what we write. Second, our being anonymous seems to have stimulated a lot of interest in the zine...we've sold out the last two issues now, and we were interviewed, in disguise, by a writer for the local entertainment rag, Isthmus. They even sent out a photographer to take our pictures under dark glasses and scarves. Now, it's been a lot of fun to sit back and hear the guesses that people have made as to the identity of the faceless editors of SLANDER!. So far, no one has come very close, and I even work two doors down from the store where the bulk of our sales come from.

As for the money, well, I put all of my share back into the zine. I suppose we have the potential to do real harm here, but there's so much fawning, idiotic journalism about local bands in the legitimate press, that we've come to see ourselves as nearly essential to the presentation of an alternative view. And, we've actually said a few nice things about some bands recently, saving our most vitriolic screeds for bands with national prominence that will never hear about it anyway. I even got to say a few discouraging words about Cyberpunk in the most recent issue, the one I'm holding here in my lap. Now if I can just get this zine to look as good as SLANDER!

The bottom of the sixth passes uneventfully. Even Gaetti the great Satan is retired without further bloodshed. The initiative has clearly passed to the Tigers, and Viola looks tired as he comes out to the mound in the top of the seventh.

And he clearly has lost it. The Tigers get four singles off him, started by Larry Herndon the right fielder, who is playing with a knee so sore he can barely get to first before the throw comes in from the outfield. Why does Sparky have him in the line-up? Clearly not for his defense, as he has been

looking like Michael Jackson in the outfield...wearing a glove on his left hand for no apparent reason.

Things get so desperate that Juan Berenguer can be seen warming up on the sidelines. He's a barrell-chested Panamanian who possess amazing speed on his fastball, but has considerable trouble throwing it straight enough for the catcher to find it before it hits the backstop. He had to beg to get this job in Minnesota, but has done fairly well with it; you can see in his his eyes that he would love to come on and beat the team that cut him in 1985, because that's exactly what the Tigers did. Immediately following the 84 season, when he helped them to a world championship, they discarded him outright.

But even with all the action, the comparative silence of the fans, the Tigers only manage one run. They look old, and slow, and they fail to take advantage of opportunities the Twins would have turned into three runs or four. I begin to sweat heavily. 4 to 3. Viola gets out of the inning, but they could have had him roasting on a slow flame.

One of the things that I'm becoming aware of is that there seems to be a subtle bias on the part of NBC broadcaster Bob Costas toward the Twins...maybe he's just rooting for the home team, but it seems like he spends a lot of time dwelling on how hard it his for visiting teams to win here...it begins to make me mad, and underlines my confidence that Detroit can beat these bums.

For his part, Tony Kubek, the other commentator, seems to have no respect for the Twins at all, and does little to conceal it. As a former Yankee, Kubek generally has little good to say about anyone in the American League. They make an interesting combination, and at least they cover the game well, letting you know what's going on. I think they should go in on a restaurant together, call it "Costas & Kubek" and specialize in Balkan cuisine. They could have a big screen TV to replay Kubek's old games and Costas' best interviews...just think, you could be sitting there eating a plate of Pastitio or Kabak Dolmadis, and there, fifteen feet high, would be Tony Kubek taking Bill Virdon's grounder off his throat in the 1960 World Series. Mmmmm, good.

In the bottom of the seventh, all the Twins can manage is a scratch single by Steve "My name won't fit on my uniform" Lombardozi, that would never have made the grade three years ago when Alan Trammell, the Tiger Shortstop, still had his arm in good working order. Youth knocks down experience once again.

This reminds me of a poem I wrote last fall. Wouldn't you like to see it? I knew you would:

Bayou Night Baseball

Through hours of cold rain
and callous talk about
the knees of old pitchers,
my friends were revealed as old
men with leathery purses in
their laps, half-hand
and half-glove, and gray,
waiting eyes
in traffic-worn faces.
Just off the porch,
shown in a blast of lightening,
a batter's box formed itself
from a slab of cement.
The lines were fresh
and invited spikes to swipe,
waiting for news of the pitch.
Speckled with rain, the street clattered
with uneasy feet
their occupations undecided,
train tickets in their pockets
wrapped in wax paper for bad luck
and the long slink home.
So, drunk on sallow beer,
we flapped out into the game,
soaking our good shoes, sobering up
in the hand space between thunder
and the driving lightning.
The windows of the house
sank deeper into darkness
as we took batting practice on the banks
of the road. The concrete
cracked and slid under the silt
a river roiling with mud and logs,
sprung up in a city street.
We were simply swallowed by it all,
swept into the swampy third-eye league
of the night.
Perhaps each scarecrow batter
has harboured the hope of the Big Time,
been broken on the rack of the curveball,
humps bent by slow swings
and the lack of Killer Instinct.
Imagining the old banter
around the cages where Tiger swings
and Cub pokes echoed on the fierce wood,
we muttered and spat, Please God,
don't let this little fucker
strike me out with a wiffle ball.
But everyone strikes out, was struck.
Failing seven times out of ten
is excellence.
Yet the night makes each
in his head a hitter,
still trading grips and fancy chances
in the county seat of baseball
at age 85.
Swamp strength got into us;
man, that tater flew !
We matched the Mud nine,
spikes high, brushed back by one minute,
driving the next
over the midnight cypress.
We were all ornery swamp polecat crazy
a country team of Cobbs
in sopping suits and stained ties,
beating back age
with slit-eyed gator hatred
the hit and run through the hole,
the suicide squeeze, surviving
all the snake-oil conniving of the night,
lifting long-drives into
the light sky eastward.

Sometime after sun-up
the rain slacked off, and we walked
toward some triple-A town,
about to be scouted.
With a new contract, a little
meal-money, none of us
will ever get old.



Now things are getting serious, as
we're running out of time. I am beginning
to hyperventilate, subtly but noticeably,
and I had better find a way to deflect my
attention for a while, or I'll be jumping
up and down and bothering my housemates
soon.

In my distracted search, I pick up
the Baseball Encyclopedia, a weighty tome
that contains the full lifetime
statistics of everyone (Of course, I
should be saying every man, because that
reflects probable reality, if not the
world we'd like to have. I hold out the
fantasy that one or more women have
played, and been succesful, in the major
leagues, and have not had their secret
revealed by their teammates, either out of
desire not to lose her abilities, or
perhaps out of embarrassment at being
fooled, but I am unable to find any
evidence for this. Then again, looking at
a picture of Harlond Clift who played for
the St. Louis Browns, "he" does seem to
have had the most delicate ankles...) who
played major league baseball since about
1880, team records, all time records,
trade registers, the result of every
world series, playoff and all-star game
ever played, manager's records, and much
more. It is, in a very real sense, a
standard by which serious baseball fans
are judged, for despite its many flaws,
it remains the reference work most
commonly accepted for the settling of
impassioned arguments regarding the
relative achievments of any and all major-
league players.

Here's a sample entry:

		G	AB	H	2B	3B	HR	HR %	R	RBI	BB	SO	SB	BA	SA	Pinch Hit	H	G by POS	
Willie Randolph		RANDOLPH, WILLIAM LARRY																	
		B July 6, 1954, Holly Hill, S C																	
		BR	TR	5'11"	165														
1975	PIT N	30	61	10	1	0	0	0.0	9	3	7	6	1	164	180	8	2	28 14, 3B-1	
1976	NY A	125	430	115	15	4	1	0.2	59	40	58	39	37	267	328	1	0	28 124	
1977		147	551	151	28	11	4	0.7	91	40	64	53	13	274	387	0	0	28 147	
1978		134	499	139	18	6	3	0.6	87	42	82	51	36	379	357	0	0	28 134	
1979		153	574	155	15	13	5	0.9	98	61	95	39	33	270	368	0	0	28 153	
1980		138	513	151	23	7	7	1.4	99	46	119	45	30	294	407	0	0	28 138	
1981		93	357	83	14	3	2	0.6	59	24	57	24	14	232	305	0	0	28 93	
1982		144	553	155	21	4	3	0.5	85	36	75	35	16	280	349	0	0	28 142, DH-1	
1983		104	420	117	21	1	2	0.5	73	38	53	32	12	279	348	0	0	28 104	
1984		142	564	162	24	2	2	0.4	86	31	86	42	10	287	348	0	0	28 142	
1985		143	497	137	21	2	5	1.0	75	40	85	39	16	276	356	0	0	28 143	
1986		141	492	136	15	2	5	1.0	76	50	94	49	15	276	346	2	1	28 139, DH-1	
12 yrs.		1494	5511	1511	216	55	39	0.7	897	451	875	454	233	274	355	11	3	28 1473, DH-2, 3B-1	
DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF SERIES																			
1981	NY A	5	20	4	0	0	0	0.0	0	1	1	4	0	200	200	0	0	28 5	
LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES																			
1975	PIT N	2	2	0	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	0	1	0	000	000	1	0	28 1	
1976	NY A	5	17	2	0	0	0	0.0	0	1	3	1	1	118	118	0	0	28 5	
1977		5	18	5	1	0	0	0.0	4	2	1	0	0	278	333	0	0	28 5	
1980		3	13	5	2	0	0	0.0	0	1	1	1	0	385	538	0	0	28 3	
1981		3	12	4	0	0	1	8.3	2	2	0	1	0	333	583	0	0	28 3	
3 yrs.		18	62	16	3	0	1	1.6	7	6	5	6	1	258	355	1	0	28 17	
WORLD SERIES																			
1975	NY A	4	14	1	0	0	0	0.0	1	0	1	3	0	071	071	0	0	28 4	
1977		6	25	4	2	0	1	4.0	5	1	2	2	0	160	360	0	0	28 6	
1981		6	18	1	1	1	2	11.1	5	3	9	0	1	222	272	2	0	28 6	
3 yrs.		16	57	6	3	1	3	5.3	11	4	12	5	1	458	404	0	0	28 16	

This is the Willie Randolph that has been playing for 11 years in New York, for all that time George Steinbrenner's regular second baseman. I read somewhere that Willie has now played with over 25 shortstops in those 11 years, since the Yanks have been cursed for well over a decade with an inability to acquire a shortstop who could :

- 1.) Field well enough to make up for his inability to hit, or, Hit will enough to make up for his inability to field.
- 2.) Avoid being arrested for urinating in a public fountain.
- 3.) Keep from being thrown off his game by consuming superstitions.
- 3.) Keep from getting into fights with either George Steinbrenner or Billy Martin.
- 4.) Avoid being spiked into unconsciousness by Kent Hrbek, and avoid breaking his ankles while trying to spike Kent Hrbek
- 5.) Keep their throws high enough for Steve Balboni to catch.
- 6.) Field slow grounders without going down on one knee

"Bye-Bye" Balboni is a clubfoot first baseman for the KC Royals, who set a record in 1982 for being the baldest rookie in history. When Balboni was still with the Yanks, Willie used to throw the ball right at his stomach, since it was a much bigger target than his glove.

Ah, but it's too easy to make fun of the Yankees, isn't it? Far more sporting to point out Willie's consistency in reaching base, his fine walk/strikeout ratio and other good points. If you can't saying anything nice. after all...

The top of the eighth inning rolls around in time, and Gibson comes out to meet Viola. They're at an impasse, because Viola won't give him another fat one like the pitch Gibson knocked over the wall, and Gibson won't swing at the

crap that he went out on before that. After lashing about nine foul balls into the Twins dugout, Gibson is on base, spitting and cursing and scratching his crotch. He adds so much class to the game...

Then Trammell stands in, he of the hundred runs driven in. The first pitch is hit for a double, and that's all she wrote for Viola, who exits with the issue in doubt.

And thus the call goes out for The Terminator, Jeff Reardon. He is tall, bearded and squinty-eyed, the very model of a modern relief ace. His fastball probably breaks 90 miles an hour, and he is very, very hard to hit.

To make a long story less long, the Tigers hit two sacrifice flies to score two runs, but Reardon doesn't let anybody else on base, and that's all they get. But I am elated; the Tigers have taken the lead, 5 to 4. I am up, pacing excitedly around the room and muttering delighted obscenities, awaiting the bottom of the eighth.

I sit back down.

Idly, I pick up another wonderful reference work, this one with a much wider range of subject matter, The Filmgoer's Companion, sixth edition, by Leslie Halliwell. Now this is a remarkable book. Merely opening it, one can discover that Georgy Girl was considered the dying fall of the British "New Wave"...that Mitzi Gaynor's real name was Francesca Mitzi von Gerber... that Hoot Gibson appeared in the titanicly bad film Ocean's Eleven in 1961...and all this is on two pages ! You could fall down in here and get lost for life, among the German Expressionists and expatriate Russian Soundtrack composers.

This is when the knock at the door intrudes upon my mono-maniacal fixation on the game.

In come Spike, Peter Larsen and Tom Quale, who are here to pick up the material I've been working on for the Wiscon programming committee. And yes, they're here to do it to us again... another hit and run Wiscon meeting is about to break out in our dining room. Pete and Kim are no help to me at all; they flee upstairs at the sound of the word "Wiscon." Fine behavior for a convention chair, eh? It quickly transpires that I have not followed directions fully on the forms that Spike has generated for our use in this matter. Also, there is some dissatisfaction with some of the titles I have generated, even though there is support for most of them. The three of them are in a mood to cut programming to the bone, if possible, since we have very little room to use for programming at the crackerbox hotel where we are going to be cubbyholed this winter. Drat. The bottom of the eighth is getting under way.

Gladden singles to lead off. Spike wants to know who requested the return of Fat Feminism and Fandom to the Wiscon bill of fare. The three furies, I tell her, and the next hitter, Gagne, is induced to pop out to first. The pitching coach goes out to talk to Alexander. Peter and Tom begin telling loud jokes about William Wordsworth. I threaten to smack them on the snout with a rolled-up newspaper. They look at me like I'm sort of Junkie.

The smurf himself is up to bat now, and Alexander has kept him in check thus far...but not this time. Not this time. I tell myself it's too much to ask for, even as Alexander tries to sneak a belt high fastball past Puckett, and he reponds by driving in to deep center, where it springs off the center field fence like a jack-in-the-box. The tying run comes across, the mad cultists of Minneapolis are on their feet, gibbering and catterwauling, and Sparky has seen enough; this is goodbye for Alexander, with only the possibility of losing the game still available to him.

Peter asks, "Couldn't you turn the game off until we're done with this stuff?"

I turn to him, with my eyes slitted up like the gun ports on a Brinks truck. "Listen," I say, "We me say it would be a terrible thing to find a sliver of glass in our morning cereal...perhaps it would slice into cheek or tongue, requiring a panicked trip to the clinic, and the following injection of lidocaine or other anesthetic, the ghostly tugging of the needle and thread through the flesh, perhaps even cauterization, and repeated trips for rehabilitative treatment.

Yet, isn't what comes after so much worse? The feeling that one must ever after search for a shard of glass in one's morning cereal?"

Peter frowns at me and says nothing

in return. He seems to be feeling his teeth with his tongue.

I turn to Tom, "I'se gonna pour scalding water all over Howland Owl," I intone.

Tom smirks in reply, "An errand of mercy no doubt. He's lucky he knows you."

The new pitcher is a rookie named Mike Henneman, who has done well over the latter half of the season. He looks awfully young out there; too young. He throws six straight balls to load up the bases, and out comes Sparky to reel him in too.

Spike picks up one of my forms.

"What is this?" she wants to know.

"Ah," I reply, "You mean "Stump the Drunks? It's a little thing Kim Nash and I are cooking up. We'll just sit out on the pool terrace at about 11 on Saturday and challenge the crowd to ask us SF trivia questions we can't answer. If they stump us, we'll give them a pull off of our Jim Beam bottle."

Spike laughs, "I don't know."

"Oh come on, it'll be fun -- aughh, he's bringing in Willie Hernandez!"

And he is, here comes Willie Hernandez, yesterday's hero, the last pitcher to win the Most Valuable Player award and the Cy Young award in the same year. But that was three years ago, and this year he's been more a firebug than a fireman, and I'm about ready to swallow my own left hand up to the wrist, except that I doubt my watch band would taste very good. Minnesota calls back Randy Bush, and the pinch hitter will be the veteran Don "Pluglunk" Baylor, who has been around long enough to know all about Willie Hernandez.

"I don't want it to take up a space that another, more worthwhile program could have."

I look away from the screen. "What?"

"If you want to have it on the Pool Terrace on an informal basis, fine, but I don't think we ought to let it bump anything else off the program list."

"Fine."

There is a sickening crack then, and though I can't see it, I can hear that Baylor has shot a sharp single to left, with a sound like a small child's arm being broken with a mallet. Two more runs score. The score is 7 to 5, and I feel as though I have just had a stake driven through my heart. It's an awful, sick feeling, coming as it does on the heels of a glorious seven months, filled with long, lazy double-headers, travel, winning streaks, anniversaries, record-breaking performances, weddings, and now, this. It's only the first game, but I am filled with a sensation of sinking doom.

They leave Hernandez in there to face Brunansky, and now Peter begins to take an interest in the game. They flash Bruno's average on the screen.

Peter says, "Well, The batting average...there it is. A metaphorically appropriate statistic for life in America today. It's flashy and easy to understand, easy to derive, and like many things in this country, it's truly a measure of communal endeavour that is popularly supposed to be individual achievemant..."

I look at him, stunned. "Where did you ever hear that?"

"You said it last week at Nick's."

"OUT! OUT! Let me grieve in peace!"

And they are finally persuaded to leave, but not before Spike hands me a list of eight titles. "You'll set these up, right?" she asks, hopefully. I nod yes, promise to call, and they're gone. Brunansky raps a double into left field, scoring the Twins' eighth run of the night, and the bellowing of the crowd sounds huge in the empty house.

Eric King comes in to wipe up the blood, and put down the last out, but what's done is done. Willie Hernandez has cost the Tigers the game, and it's doubtful that we'll see him again next year. 8 to 5. Not insurmountable, but unlikely. 8 to 5. The unbeatable Alexander finally beaten. The charm is broken.

Between innings, the damn phone rings. When I pick it up, there is a sound on the other end like a snowstorm at the end of a long tunnel, and something metallic, a ping or a twang of some kind. I say "Hello," stupidly, about six times, then hang up. This is all I need. The Tigers are about to eat the big one, and here I am getting calls from the men in black from the UFO's. Soon, they'll come to the door asking if I've recently seen a prominent UFO researcher, or claiming to be the researcher him or herself. They will have no eyebrows, wear curiously outdated clothing, have thick-soled shoes that I don't recognize, and claim not to know what baseball is. The phone will begin to ring regularly, and every time I pick it up, there won't be anyone there. Large, black, late-model cars will drive up and down my street at odd hours of the night, seeming to stop to look for just an instant, then driving noisily away. There will be a persistent smell of Ozone in the neighborhood. People will awaken from dreams and draw strange star charts, indicating the position of Earth as seen from Aldebran. Small circular burns will appear on the front lawn. Painful red swellings will appear on the back of my neck, and Medical science will be unable to help me. In the end, I'll disappear altogether, and there will be a brief derisive story about me on Sixty Minutes, and that'll be it. I've seen it happen a dozen times.

Well, so we go into the top of the ninth, the Tigers' last gasp in this game. Reardon is there, tough as nails, throwing pure smoke punctuated by big, bending curveballs. John Grubb, who eats right-hand pitchers for lunch, comes in to pinch hit for Brookens, and nubs out a single, but then Matt Nokes, the fine rookie hitter, is caught looking on a ball that would have been a foot outside in the first inning. There's some irony there, because it was Alexander, with his consistent pitching over the outside

corner of the plate that built that expanded strike-zone, and here his team is going to pay the price for it.

The next hitter is Bill Madlock, who came over from the Dodgers at midseason, and helped the Tigers out a lot. He's a guy with a bad reputation though, and sports writers have been fond of accusing him of laziness, drug addiction and murder, over the past few years. Tonight, he has a bad left hand, which has swollen up to the size of a grapefruit, and he cannot get around on Reardon's fastball, and he strikes out.

This leaves us with Kirk Gibson, the failed Golden boy who is now losing his hair and his mind. All season, he's been waiting for the resolution of the collusion case, which has to do with when he tried to go free agent in 1985, battling nagging injuries, batting slumps, and the derision of many Detroit fans, who feel they have been patient enough with him. Now, he's relatively healthy, the case has been decided in his favor and he stands to make some money off the deal, and here's his chance to stand out.

But no matter how much you want something, no matter how hard you try, sometimes the other guy is just straight-up better than you are. Reardon throws three blazing fastballs right by him, and all Gibson can do is wave bye-bye, and now the Twins fans are on their feet, waving those damn hankies and flapping their flippers and hooting in time to the tuneless pipings of a mad god somewhere at the center of the universe. If it were in my power to do so, I would snuff out the lives of every one of them, without deliberation or guilt. This is serious business here, people, and the ability to wave a goddamned white rag does not make you a fan.

Oh well, you probably know the rest of the story. The Twins went on to beat the Tigers in five games, and as of this writing will meet the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. Big Deal. The TV Ratings for this series will be almost microscopic, and I imagine the Twins will win it on the strength of their being able to play four games in Minnesota. Spike has since relented, and allowed me to put "Stump the Drunks" on the program list for real. The men in black have not returned. Charlie and I put out SLANDER! # 5 earlier this week, and it's been received quite well so far. Eventually, I'm sure I'll be able to find something else to live for. It's going to be a long winter, and there'll be a lot of time to figure out what went wrong. There's always fandom to keep my mind off of important things. I suppose I'll have recovered completely by next March...in time for the season to start again.

