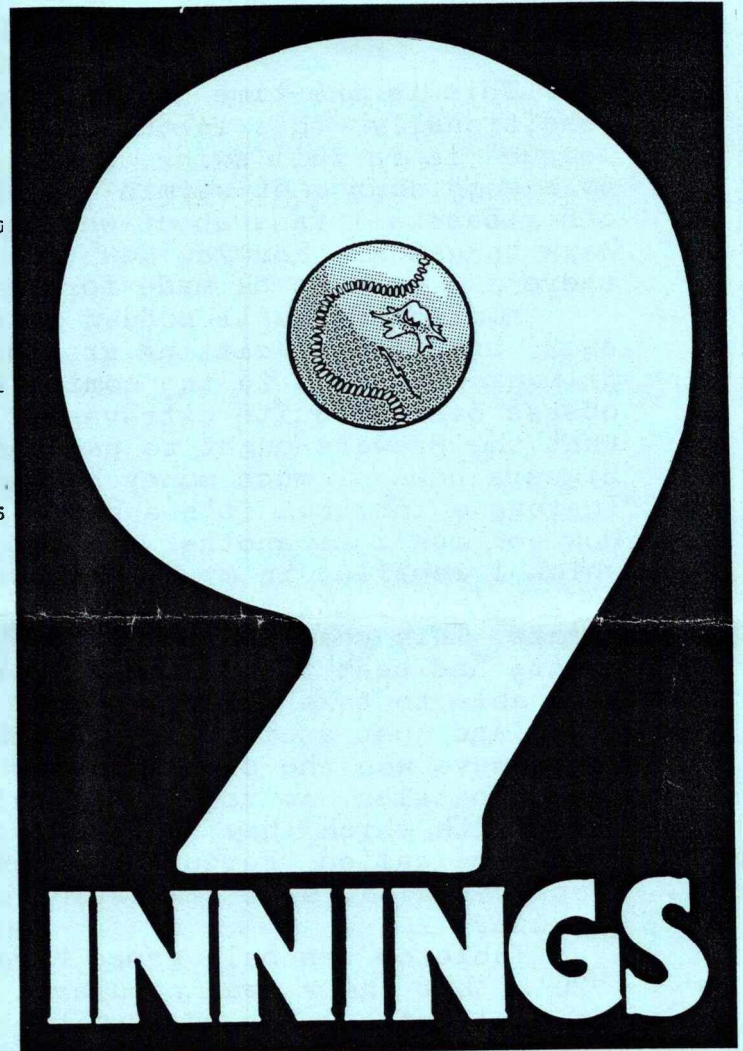


This is Nine Innings #2, brought to you by Andrew Hooper, a denizen of BLEAR HOUSE, 214 N. Brearly St., Madison, WI 53703. Member fwa. This, the truncated "sophmore slump" issue is brought to you in the hopes of re-establishing that brevity is the soul of wit.

Nine Innings is available for the usual, with extra copies available for a buck a pop. This particular issue will also be distributed with the 20th issue of The Turbo-Charged Party-Animal Amateur Press Association. Happy 20th, you hackers, it's been wild getting this far. Nine Innings has regretfully decided to refrain from supporting anyone in the current TAFF race, but that's no reason you shouldn't still contribute! In fact, this zine will donate one dollar to TAFF for every home run hit this coming season by Chicago Cubs Right Fielder Andre Dawson.

DRAG BUNT PRESS #16



This is the frightening thing about egoboo: It's more addictive than that goddamn snow white. I sent out the first issue of Nine Innings on about the 7th, and the locs and trades began coming in about a week later. This is something that's real easy to get used to, and I've become an honest-to-ghu mail junkie, measuring time from one unpredictable visit of our ex-beatnik mailman to the next.

But it's made me jittery at the same time. Here I am, having sent out two zines in three months and I continue to have a weird kind of performance anxiety, linked to my apparent inability to publish the second issue of anything. Running down the list of fan credits which I actually acknowledge, we see SeattleWire #1 in early '86, SkankyMoFo #1 in July of the same year, Nine Innings #1 in November of '87, and Take Your Fanac Everywhere #1 in January of '88. It's not a bad little list, but do you begin to see a pattern here? Yes, it's true: I apparently live in such cowering fear of the sophmore slump that I've been unable to bring myself to use a title more than once.

Since Nine Innings was the most effortless of the series for me, it seems the logical candidate for a second coming.

Besides, this is the time of year when we miss baseball the most, those of us who miss baseball at all. A number of housemates (Let's face it: all of them) here cringe when I remind them that spring training is just around the corner, and regular games will be waiting for them when they come back from Minicon, but I try not to let this bother me. I'm still smarting from the ignoble way in which the Tigers choked in the AL championship, and I can't wait to get a second chance.

This is the time of year for grasping after second chances. Traditionally, this is the time when what is called "the hot-stove league" is in full swing, as baseball fans around the world huddle up to a good source of warmth and get into screaming arguments with other baseball fans about who is a better pitcher, Dwight Gooden or Mark Langston. (For you New York Philistines out there, I think there's a case to be made for the latter...)

Madison Fan Bill Bodden came over the Blear House a little while back, and we were sitting around talking about the prospects for the Milwaukee Brewers in the coming season, something which Bill can obsess over to quite extravagant lengths. And after we had agreed that the Brewers ought to pay their star Mexican Left-Hander Ted Higuera however much money he wants, Bill said, "Y'know, I liked Nine Innings a lot, but it's a shame you did it at the end of the season. Now you can't do another one before April, even if you want to." To which I replied, in my best tight-lipped, laconic Gary Cooper, "Why?"

You see, baseball fans are all closet alternative history freaks. This year we're going to be asking ourselves, what if the Giants had beat the Cardinals for the NL pennant? Would they have been able to take out the Twins? Or would the Twins have swept in four? And just as those who secretly wonder whether or not Hitler could have won the civil war have wargames, with which they restage famous battles, so too do baseball fans have silly little tabletop games with which they replay World Series past. My personal favorite is a game called "Pursue the Pennant," which is probably the most complicated baseball simulation ever produced without the aid of a computer.

Tabletop baseball games have been around since at least the 1920's, but their real popularity seems to have grown greatly after the publication of a curious book by a curious writer, Robert Coover's The Universal Baseball Association Inc.: J. Henry Waugh, prop. It's the story of an introverted accountant who has run nearly fifty complete seasons of an imaginary baseball league, using paper, pencil and dice. The narrative weaves in and out of the real world and the fantasy world, and by the end of the book, the line between them is severely blurred. Coover is, in my estimation, one of the greatest living American writers; this is probably his greatest work.

And it may just be coincidence, but the year after the book was published, there were three or four new baseball table games on the market, and there's been a new one every year since.

So, Bill and I decided we'd sit down and create our own alternative ending to the season. (We had to pick the 1986 season, since that was the most recent one we had game cards for; besides, you people in Minneapolis have had enough attention for a while.) The series which most compelled us was the apocalyptic close to the National league pennant race, where the much ballyhoo'ed New York Mets almost choked in a six game series with the Houston Astros. Mike Scott, who has been in the news recently more for docotring the ball than striking people out, was spectacular in that series and throttled the Mets convincingly. Had the series gone seven games, where the Mets would have had to face him again, many people feel Houston would have gone to the World series. And like all alternative history, who can say what effect this might have had on the world at large?

Bill, who is no dummy, and who I keep trying to goad into doing some fanwriting of his own, decided he'd like to have the Astros, so that he'd feel like trying his best to win. I, on the other hand, saddled with the obnoxious and insufferable Mets, felt a strong urge to take a dive.

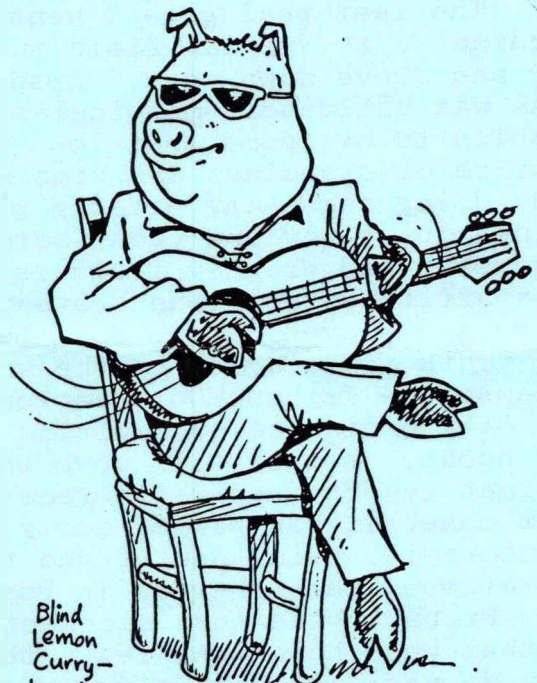
In the first game, the two aces faced each other: Scott vs. Dwight Gooden. A huge Astrodome crowd was there to urge on their heros, but there was little for them to cheer about. Bill's managerial style was faultless, but his dice were awful. I just threw together some semblance of the line-up the Mets used in the series, and stood back as they banged out ten runs on 16 hits, to win 10 to 2. This was not much fun, we both agreed.

In between games, there was a delay as Jerry Kaufmann called from Seattle. He was returning a call Carrie had made earlier, in order to ask him something about Roberta MacAvoy, and informed me at the same time that he would actually be attending Wiscon this year! Oh joy, Oh rapture. Then, while he had the drop on me, he whacked me in the side of the head with a request to be on a panel on the future of fandom at Corflu in Seattle in April.

I'm still deliberating on what I'm going to say. People who know me know that I have a general contempt for grand theories of fandom and its dynamics, but one can't go into a panel on the future of fandom and simply say "Fandom has no future." Bad taste, if nothing else. But what, honestly, does the future hold for fandom, particularly zine-reading and writing fandom? If there are any young, stupid enthusiastic fanzine fans besides me out there, I have yet to meet them. In fact, I rather like the idea that I'm part of a dying race of mad mystics, still grubbing out our little feuds and frantic bid wars while the world has turned well past the point where any of it means anything.

And zine fandom seems to be such a backward-looking lot in the first place...vis the big surprise event of 1987, the return of Walt Willis and the long-lamented Hyphen. You just know some neo somewhere has come across a copy of Hyphen or Pulp, and is running around telling all his friends about this bril new fan writer named Willis that has the best stuff out just now...

And then, Fandom has a sad tendency to eat its young as well. It's a very daunting task to try and break in to fan-pubbing when one of the more universal tenets of the field is knowing everything that ever happened in fifty



Blind
Lemon
Curry -
legendary
saxophon
blues guitarist.

years of fandom, and having a personal acquaintance with everyone that did it. Even I, whose ego has swollen to the size of the Tokyo Tower, feel the occasional twinge of idiocy when I have to admit that I haven't read every seminal work of fanwriting in the seventies, do not know Richard Bergeron from Marcel Marceau (There's an appealing image), and have never been psychically drained by the Ted White group mind.

And then when the ice weasels that pass for fan critics get ahold of you, there's hardly enough left over to fill a shot glass. So, Jerry, I still have no idea what I'm going to talk about in consideration of the future of fandom; I still don't have the past of fandom down right yet.

In game two, Bill pitched a journeyman lefthander, name of Jim Deshaies. I countered with a lefty of my own, the very dangerous and highly marketable Bob Ojeda. Following the severe caning I had administered him in the first game, Bill was starting to get into the game now, and wanted to salve his bruised ego. The two teams played an excellent game, until the eighth inning, when the Mets infield committed three errors, and in the ninth, Met relief pitcher Jesse Orosco walked in the winning run. (Mr. Orosco has since been traded to the Los Angeles Dodgers, in exchange for some silverware and a John Deere riding mower.)

This game was fun, and better than watching Drexel vs. Canisius on ESPN, but it was pretty far removed from the experience we're really craving, an actual trip to a major league game. Right now I lean towards going to the second Milwaukee home game of the year, because I'm sure we could get good seats, but I don't know if that will be enough to satisfy.

The last real game I went to was a late season Cubs game vs. the Cardinals, at Wrigley field in Chicago. Scott Custis and I took a day off and drove down on a Thursday, for a game with a 1:30 start. The game was ultimately meaningless, as the Cards had more than enough cushion to overcome that loss to the Cubs, but it stands outside the lattice of standings and wins and losses for me, a perfect day in the sun, doing something utterly pleasurable. I need those kinds of things every now and then, more than most; I have little patience for drudgery. And Wrigley field is a paradisaic haven for those of us less afflicted with the Protestant work ethic than most; all games there are played in the day, because the stadium has no lights.

This is going to go the way of all flesh in the near future, because the Tribune Corporation, which owns the Cubs, will either get the city ordinance prohibiting lights at Wrigley Field removed from the books, or they will move the team to Naperville. But for now, the nacent ivy-covered walls remain a living museum to some of the ways that baseball was played forty or more years ago. Even the scoreboard is decrepit, being one of the two mechanical boards still in operation. (The other is in Boston.)

Probably the most eloquent thing I can say on behalf of Wrigley is that when home runs leave the stadium, which they frequently do, they do not land on the freeway, or in a toxic sump, or in a 40 square mile parking lot. They land in people's front yards, even occasionally breaking windows. It's a lot like going to see a ballgame in your grandmother's old neighborhood.

For the third game, the scene shifted back to New York's Citi Stadium (I told you this was alternative history), and it opened with Sid Fernandez, a chubby lefty from Honolulu, striking out the first three Houston batters he faced. He then hit the fourth with a pitch, struck out the fifth, walked the sixth, got the seventh on a checked-swing strike out, and got the eighth to ground the ball into a double play. Thus, he nearly went through the entire order before the ball was put in play. Bill's dice stayed that bad for the entire game, and the Mets won 3 to nothing, accompanied by much fist-pumping and grinning into the mini-cam.

I have decided to insert something of a lettercol here, because that is what one does, isn't it? I appreciate everyone taking the time to write, and promise special treatment for prisoners who continue to Loc.

D.Potter, 19 Broadway Terrace #B, NY, NY 10040:

Dear Mr.Hooper,
How much is a sub to SLANDER! ?

I have been sticking 9 Innings under the nose of every local non-fan with even a spice of interest in baseball, including the local baseball buff, but they don't seem to appreciate this sort of stuff. I do.

(Thanks for the effort, but I imagine the zine would be of a hell of a lot more interest to fans than non-fans. At least your having fun, though. On the subject of SLANDER!, that's a good question. People are encouraged to make me an offer.)

Denice Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224:

...Thanks for "9 Innings." Gee, I thought I'd never loc again. Being as close to gafiation as I can be, since my Husband is still an active fan, I can never really "leave" fandom.

But you really plucked this Tiger fan's heartstrings, man. Baseball is my love now. (Did I outgrow fandom, or do ballplayers just have cuter butts?) And any Tiger fan is a kindred spirit...

You know, you're not the only one who thought Costas was blatantly biased during the series, As a matter of fact , he took a lot of heat from our local media. We have two major papers, and both accused him of bias. His reply? He as much as said that only Detroiters would be stupid enough to even bring up the subject. His arrogance was astonishing...

The Boys of Summer are gone now. Once again the skies are grey and bleak. I feel spring too far away. You and me are "FANS" as opposed to fans. You know what I'm saying.

(I got a lot of letters like this. There must be quite a few closet cases out there, fighting to keep fandom at large from knowing that they would rather watch a ball game than engage in secret mental crifanac. Fear not, friends, we are legion in the dark places of the earth...like Detroit. As for Denice's comment on the bias of Bob

Costas, his remarks about the city were clearly unwarranted. But still, complaining about the bias of the announcer when your team is losing is one of the first straws a drowning fan clutches at. (Rather like killing the messenger.)

Arthur Hlavaty, PO BOX 52028, Durham, NC 27717

Dear Andy:

You have taken the side of Utter Unmitigated Satanic Evil in the Apa-69 wars. Worse Yet, you've done a sportszine about baseball in stead of football. Oh well, nobody's perfect, and I did enjoy NINE INNINGS. Please put me on the trade list for future issues.

(Whatever you say, Arthur)

Meanwhile, back in New York, we were treated to the pitiful spectacle of the aging Nolan Ryan, himself an ex-Met and member of the Miracle team of 1969, being rapped around by the Mets of today. They won 6 to 2, behind the unctious Ivy Leaguer Ron Darling, who was also born in Honolulu...what the hell is this, do the Mets have a concentration camp out there for the production of young pitching arms? My brilliant use of the running game is overshadowed by my self-disgust over the Met's repulsive antics in triumph. One more victory, and they're NL champs. Bill's dice remain hopelessly chilled.

Back to the Letters:

Mike Glicksohn, 508 Windermere Ave., Toronto, Ont., M6S 3L6

...Gee, you got to spend a whole evening with Kettle! I'm not even sure that I got to meet him during the worldcon, and he's always been one of my favorite British fans, despite the fact that he's clearly demented in every possible way imaginable and a fair number of ways that are beyond my imagination. And I would dearly love to see Leroy trying to master the intricacies of a baseball mitt when not completely sober! Damn! Where are the video cameras when something really fantastic is taking place?

Hmmm...I note that you allowed an ALCS game to be interrupted by a concom meeting. I guess you aren't a real baseball fan after all, just a Yuppie poseur. Too bad, I thought I'd found a kindred soul.

(On the issue of the great Kettle, I'm planning to form a dark and mysterious cult about his person in the near future...I'll keep your name in Mind, Mike. As for the libelous remark about my letting a meeting break out during a ball game, well, you have the poseur part right at least.)

Candi Strecker, 590 Lisbon, San Francisco, CA 94112

APH:

Just got a copy of 9 Innings -- I guess via Jeanne Gomoll, since there was a Six Shooter in the same envelope. (Should've been a 3-Something in there to complete the numeric sequence, but I digress...) And wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed it. You've

really got the Marlon Perkins trick down cold, of making those implausible connections between two things when it's time to change subjects. ("We've seen how the mother monitor lizard guards it's young. Humans too guard their young. Humans too guard their their young from unexpected hazards...when they insure with MUTUAL OF OMAHA...") It's a gift! Just good writing all around. I'm pretty much de-fannified by this point, but I enjoyed it anyway, despite all that annoying fannish stuff...

(Is there anyone out there who hasn't heard of Candi's Sidney Suppey's Quarterly and Confused Pet Monthly ? The issue from the summer of '86 was the only fanzine I've ever read that genuinely gave me nightmares. Well worth a look. De-Fannified? Sure. And since she mentioned it, I want to thank Jeanne Gomoll again for helping me put together the mailing. I might never have gotten it out but for her aid.)

I also heard from: Allan Beatty, Red Boggs, Brian Earl Brown, Cy Chauvin (Who tried to get me to join the BSFA !), Dick Lynch, Luke McGuff, Jeanne Meally, Stu Shiffman, and Harry Warner Jr. Promise not to truncate locs next time, folks...more time, more space.

In game five, a cold fog blew in over Flushing, and the game was played in a cacophonous haze, between the shrieking of the fans and the whine of DC-10's on final approach. Mike Scott was given another chance by his miserable, snake-bit manager, and I decided to give Dwight Gooden another try. And there must have been an odd glamour in the air, because the Mets luck deserted them, for once. They lost balls in the lights, booted easy grounders, and collided with one another in the outfield. The Astros got two homeruns, one from an aging, lightweight catcher name of Alan Ashby, and one from a reserve infielder named Denny Walling, and that was about all they needed. Mike Scott struck out 6, and was good enough for the win, 5 to 4.

Now the scene shifted back to the Astrodome, with Houston having to win both games at home to advance. The Mets were thwarted by good defense, and their best left handed pitcher, Bob Ojeda, had his leg broken by a line drive in the 4th inning, and had to be taken off on a stretcher. The game was eventually decided on a bunt single by the same withered catcher who hit the homerun in the previous game; he became the new media darling of the series, and a petulant Gary Carter began claiming that he had been receiving death threats, in order to explain his poor performance on the field.

We'd already changed history: The series had gone to seven games. One more try to see if we could get the Marvelous Mets to finish swallowing their own feet.

I'm rushing through this in order to be able to be able to hand out a few at Wiscon 12, this upcoming weekend, to be held in a swamp on the far south side of town. At one time, I thought Wiscon was as close as one could come to having the perfect convention. I don't think that anymore...I'm holding out hope for my first Corflu, but I'm sure that it will be disillusioning in some ways as well.

What the hell would the ideal con be like anyway ? These days, most fans seem to have a much firmer handle on what it wouldn't be like. There would be a very minor and truncated movie program, and no programming devoted to Japanese robots. The con suite would be

replaced with a huge bar, something on the order of the Rathskeller in the UW Memorial Union, dimly lit, and with thirty or forty micro and imported brews on tap. The banquet would be a barbecued rib massacre. Much programming would be held in the bar. The mixer would have live music, preferably by The Rainmakers, or The Screaming Blue Messiahs. The Hotel itself would be well out on a deserted point, on a large freshwater lake with excellent bass fishing, a half hour outside a city with a decent airport. There would be limo service to the con. The hotel would be at least 65 years old, and elevators would have those little brass cages on them, but they wouldn't be crowded, because the building would only have three floors, and most everything would happen on the first floor.

Everyone I know would be there, and people I don't like would only stay around long enough to be punctured by my razor-like wit, and broken upon the bastinado. People would fall all over themselves to write to Mike Glycer and tell him how startling erudite an experience it was to be in the same building with me. Authors would seek me out at parties, to press hardcover limited editions of their new novels into my hands, and each would be inscribed with an embarrassingly sloppy dedication that I would have to hide from the vultures from SFC and Locus... "All right, everybody, please get off those towers, we don't need anymore weight on them... My Guitar!... Hey if you think really hard, maybe we can stop this rain! No Rain! No Rain! No Rain! No Rain! No Rain!..."

Sorry, had a little flashback there..where was I ? The Game? What happened with the Mets and the Astros? I didn't think you guys were interested anymore...

The final game was played in front of the largest crowd in Astrodome history. Sid Fernandez and Jim Deshaies were the pitchers, in the one game that would decide the season. There was no scoring until the bottom of the seventh, when Glenn Davis doubled and scored for the Astros. The Mets responded with a solo homer by Ray Knight, who used to play for the Astros, in the top of the ninth. Sid Fernandez pitched into the tenth inning, until he was removed for a pinch hitter. The Mets went up two to one in the top of the tenth, but the Astros tied it again. The game went into the seventeenth inning, with both managers using virtually every player on their bench, before the Mets managed to score three runs in the top of the inning, and held off a rally that included a homer by Kevin Bass (who had struck out to end the series in real life) to win 5 to 3. The huge crowd, almost all of whom had stayed until the end, gave their team a standing ovation, then went into the streets and looted and burned until they had caused 100 million dollars worth of damage. And thus we see once more, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

We didn't feel too satisfied after the whole thing was over. Perhaps it was a manifestation of the old "You can't go home again" syndrome. Maybe the Mets were just straight up better than the Astros. We don't really care. Their music video still sucks. And I guess, with the use of a really cheap gimmick, I've gotten over that sophomore slump with hardly any pain at all. Oh Roscoe...was there ever any Beaver like you?

- BLEAR HOUSE, 2/15/88 -