

Stone Age News



THE STONE AGE EDITION OF THE REAL NEWS OR HOW I ALLEGEDLY SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION ©2002 Ski/skirealnews.com

Half News

Staff Box

Stone Age Edition ©2002



In the Landfills that Time Forgot...

our story begins and ends. It is a nasty, prehistoric, fossilized, archeopathic blueprint of the twisted strands of DNA implosive impulses of the primitive primate in us all.

*Half a Mind to Leave Ya,
Half a Mind to Get UP and go...
Starcastle, 1978.*

That song leap into my conscious mind during the 24 hour decompression slumber that woke me dazed and confused and sweaty in the post 98 degree heat.

It is a frightening prospect to wake with an obscure tune bouncing around your skull, let alone going down the Chez Pablo record vault and pull Epic Records AL35441 from its resting place to confirm those lyrics.

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On a hot summer night, there were slow worker-ant movements outside the South Side's largest open pit landfill, new Comiskey Park. At the main gate, there was a large Nordic looking walk up crowd at the ticket booths. Then came the waves of families hedging across 35th Street. Then came the barreling city buses trying to punt those slower moving families to the Dan Ryan Expressway.

I had been called, badgered, demanded, coerced, humbled and cursed to attend the Sox-Twinkie contest with a posse of Outlaw Eastern alums, the exact body count I would not know until they arrived just before game time.

I had arrived early. Too early. Ninety minutes early. I would have been content to lean against the bar at McCuddy's but....

I stood on the grassy knoll near the spot where it once stood, looking for telltale clues of its untimely assassination from the Chicago sports scene. But then my attention was drawn to the belly shirt fiesta of the swaying crowd. The public beaches were closed, so it appeared that They had decided to drift to the park that evening like lemmings to the edge of the sea.

Then the nursing homes let out, and old dudes in mid 60s windbreakers and checkered pants began to bump into the ticket windows in search of a friendly conversation. That frightening peak into the distant future was soon soothed by another wave of belly shirt fiesta.

The White Sox were imploding before the city's eyes. Management had just fired pitching coach Nolo Contendre. The ghosts of the infamous White Flag trade of five years ago was in the air like crystalized urine under the Union Pacific railroad tracks. The Sox gave up at the midseason point five seasons ago when the team was only 3 games out of first place. Today, the team is fading towards last, 14 games behind the Twins, the team Bud Selig wants to nuke off the MLB planet through contraction because "small market" teams cannot compete with the "big Boys" like Jerry Reinsdorf.

I heard a rowdy chorus of "Mr. P!" behind the ticket line. Unless my friends have disguised themselves as a middle class Black family, I would have to continue to wait. It was no telling who would be showing up for this game since they had toasted their bodies under the 99 degree heat at Wrigley, and were toasting their livers at the Billy Goat as I attempted to find shade on the grassy knoll.

The crew arrived just before the opening ceremonies. Betz was also meeting a friend from Aurora, who brought her kids. Crime reporter Phil was giddy by the prospect of a city doubleheader, now changed into a Sox jersey to blend into the crowd. Brian was in a his best sun-drunk mood.

At the ticket booth, the numbers did not add up until we saw the tickets. Half price night. the second in a row. The Sox were in trouble; another reckless walk-

up gate was in the wings. It was upper deck, vertigo enhanced viewing for the evening slugfest.

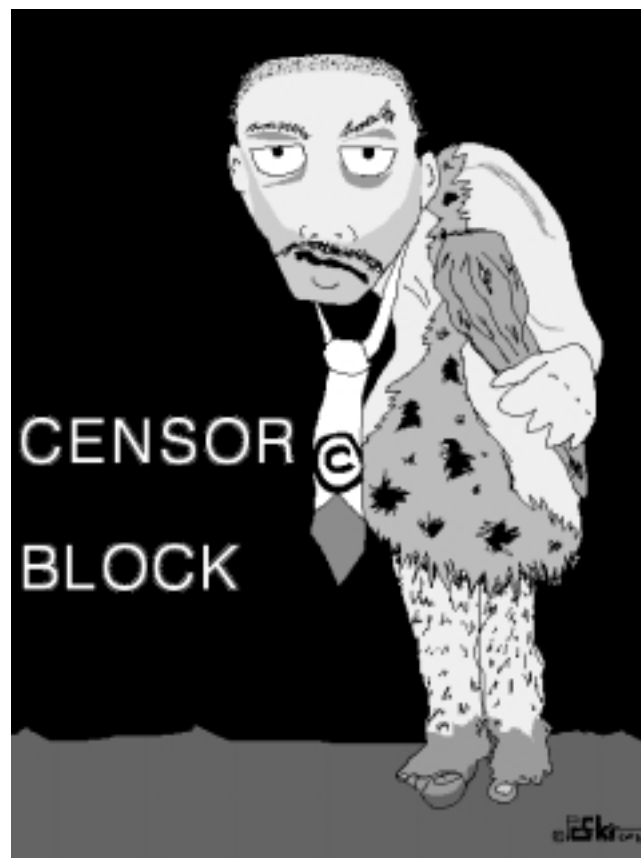
But Laura and Phil had forgot to check their backpacks. So at the gate, they were dismissed back around the park to the old Comiskey graveyard to deposit their oversized, dangerous luggage with some long-haired, acne freaked teen in a unmarked white cargo van. The privilege of losing hope of seeing your property ever again was two dollars.

They said Wrigley was in the same bag check funk. The donut hut outside the ball park was taken over by the Trib nylon goon squad, for the \$2 check-in fee. The result of the new security is just another insult to the average fan.

Betz and her friend left to the washrooms, Laura and Phil left for the bag check hell, and Brian and I waited for the bag checking to return before we got sucked into the main concourse no-signage to the upper deck confusion marketplace. While waiting, we saw the new Sox pitching coach with a clipboard wander around the main gate. We assumed that he was trying to sign a starting pitcher for this evening. He then went to the Sox Learning Center, where picnic tables surrounding t-ball batting cages. Another wasteland from the marketing department. Not waiting any longer, we wandered to the end of the concrete runway, then up five decks to the upper deck. The upper deck concourse was low-brow, little vendors, a clear lower class stigma that would probably cripple the youngsters for generations to come.

So we missed Mag Ordonez's first inning home run; but we heard the fireworks, and the ripple of applause. The upper deck concourse is like an Egyptian tomb. Sound does not carry.

When we arrived into the row, Brian and I immediately got beers to calm our nerves. And then Phil had to immediately get our attention on his latest situation:



It could be best summed up as follows: You have to keep your Hounddog from roaming around minefields. It was the least expensive piece of advice that I could possibly give under the circumstances.

I had also suggested that he give his friend's cell phone to the first homeless man we see when we exited the park, but that sug-

gestion fell on deaf ears.

By the time the sun had set, and the full moon was rising, the wind chill dropped fiercely, and the crew was moaning about freezing to death after being burnt to hell at Wrigley.

By the seventh inning, the garbage began to swirl on the field. It is natural. Sox Park is the largest open landfill operating on the south side. Within an inning, a large white piece of paper had drifted from the outfield to the pitcher's mound, and then began to rise to our eagle perch. "That's my summons!" Phil screamed after being told of its significance.

Brian was despondent at this point in time. Two rows in front, a squirrely sixteen year old was making a coy move on a smile full of braces. "I am down to living my life vicariously through a sixteen year old," he moaned. "He's gonna get more action tonight than me!"

"Not unless you give her your nuts," I remarked handing him back his bag of salted unshelled peanuts.

But as the teens got closer, her younger brother appeared to interfere, or attempt to "negotiate" some compensation/blackmail. But that idea was soon erased when we determined that in the second seat adjacent to the lovers was her mother! It was probably the remains of a Jerry Springer mobile home trailer trash family reunion enjoying their \$36 consolation prize. Such a thought even got creepy to us, even in the testosterone induced fever associated within our own CroMagnon row.

The ballgame was pretty mean-

ingless after that episode. Things are not always what they seem. Brian pooped Phil's bubble on the later-ego Fred Bauer's Princess Di story; just like his own vision of reality was cripple from finding out that Ski did not go to Toyko for the Mets-Cubs opener a few years ago. "But the story was so vivid," he mumbled from the cold and additional beer.

Phil stands up and begins screaming at slumping Frank Thomas. "You Big Skirt!!" One pitch later, Thomas hits the longest home run in new Comiskey history. Chagrined, Phil boasts, "I motivated him."

After the game, the parking lot stub clearly stated that the gates would be padlocked within 30 minutes of the final out. Walking to the white van, we were surprised that it was still parked. However, there was a huge line of stewed, ticked off and angry people shuffling toward it. There was only one attendant rifling through similar looking nylon bags. We had a sudden fear rush that they had left their bag check claims in their bags!

The thirty minute aftergame mark was soon upon us, and we were still six groups behind the lead sortie. Since the crew had involuntarily volunteered me for the ride to the Heart of Darkness Motel on the north side, I could see the "ramming speed" escape from the parking lot.

But the lot was still full of training school rejects on demolition derby night of the living dead. A quick flooring of the gas pedal and hard left, we were snailed into several detours heading due

south. "Hey, we should go to the mines," Phil said from the backseat. "Ya, they'd remember Brian from the last time." We explained to the weary that the Checkerboard Lounge, at 43rd and King, was one of our weird road trips. The doorman only asked if are car doors were locked. The stage only had a bare lightbulb dangling from the ceiling. And Brian got shell game wasted.

We probably got within a few gunshots of the old place, but on pure local navigational skills, the Olds was rumbling north toward Lake Shore Drive. Apparently, Phil got lost in the same road destruction bypass detours the day before, but not Ski, the paraprofessional taxi driver. "Here's the postcard view," he said as he revved past the darken tombstone of the old Soldier Field facade.

We called at come places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthly atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward of intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair.

(What is a passage from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness doing here?)

There was important business to attend to. There was a possibility of a Marce sighting. Marce is the Eastern version of Bigfoot;

a physical sighting is an event.

The problem of the Darkness hotel is that there is no way to get into it. There is a huge concrete median, a triangle signal, and a neighborhood watch that wants to run these type of seedy businesses out of the city. You have to sneak in the backway, past a cemetery, in order to enter.

The parking lot was paved; blood red paint to mask the blood-stained red brick walls, and very few people milling about in the office. The hideaway bunker room door was left open to heat up the room, and to get a view of the vast nothingness of the neighborhood. Brian was in a panic. His full sized cooler was filled with luke cool water and only six beers. It was nearing midnight. He feared two things (maybe three, one the private loner aspirations that he had vocalized at the ballpark) at that moment: no beer and no food.

Classifying the day as a weekend, I refused solid food for adult beverage. Lasting myths have basis in deep fact.

"I need more beer!" Brian shouted out the open doorway. Even though most of the crew had stopped consuming, I was on my second Lite near midnight when Brian made the decision. He needed to get more beer.

Like a Northern Montana grizzly after waking up from a long winter, he went down through the parking lot, and crossed the median and gnarly traffic to a sidestreet bar called Egan's. Egan's apparently closed early. Brian stood outside the door like a lost puppy. He suddenly ac-

costed a man walking down the street. The CNN-Baghdad hoteltop view gave us a clear picture of the potential grand jury questioning of the event. However, the man turned and opened a sidedoor. And Brian disappeared.

He was either breaking and entering, making a new friend, or both at that moment. We could not tell.

A short time later, Brian was leaping across the road barriers with a large bag under his arms. Like an open field runner picking up a fumble, he made a sweaty entrance into the room.

"I did it!" he said pounding his chest like King Kong. He then had to get more ice. Then upon his second return, decided that the White Castle we passed on route to the motel was appealing to his inner child. He needed sliders. But he needed beer, too. The Mid-east crisis tension was resolved when Betz said that she would go with him to buy some food. Brian wanted to buy "83 burgers" because he was hungry.

As they were walking through the parking lot, a car pulled into the handicap/reserved space. A lost soul wanted toward the office, and then toward Brian and Betz. It was Marce. It was the beginning of an almost-all-nighter.

As Marce was reacquiring the current history of the crowded outlaw EIU homecoming (FYI to Reed, more showed up in a seedy motel in Chicago after midnight on a weakday than in Charleston), the food run was completed. No 83 burgers; but a cardboard briefcase stuffed with 30 did return with Brian.



It was apparent immediately that the room was filled with over-qualified, undersexed, career neutered professions. Marce should quit his hobo-journalism career to go to comedy clubs and work Deep Blue.

Throughout the night, Phil would keep mumbling to me under the guise of attorney-client privilege, "be ready." I was in no mood after six beers to be ready for any interstate, international, global personal homeland security issue.

We came to the conclusion that most summer newsroom interns have stripper names. That the current crop of journo grads have no idea that they will be composing room typesetters if their career stays on their chosen path. That money rules news coverage, ads rule money

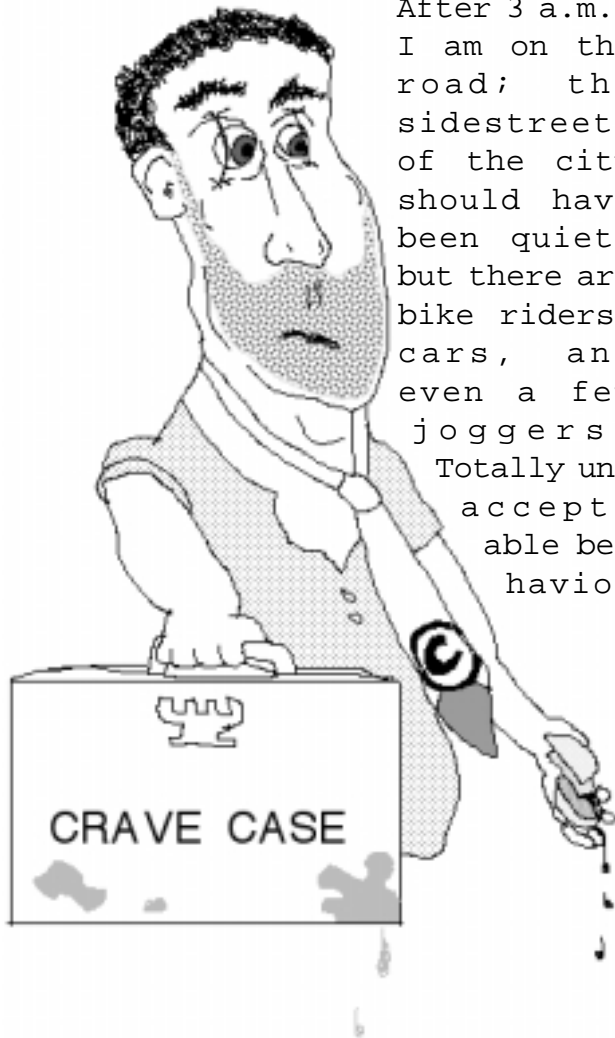
and no recent ad revenue meant no real news coverage.

It was 3 a.m. when they offered to crash and burn at the motel, blow off work in the next few hours to go to the Cub game. Phil was now prone on the bed crucifixion sprawl in pain from a day's deep sunburn. The prospect of being propped up against a leaky beer cooler under the whining sunburn nightmares of a ticking timebomb alleged pro bono client was too damn much to bear.

If Marce was to walk into his 8 a.m. journalism class with his lesson plan stuffed into the White Castle suitcase, then I should at least have the appearance of semi-professional, adult behavior.

After 3 a.m., I am on the road; the sidestreets of the city should have been quiet, but there are bike riders, cars, and even a few joggers!

Totally unacceptable behavior



considering I would have enough time merely to get home, collapse for a few hours, get up, rush through the office messages, and spend 90 minutes on ripped up roads to get to Wrigley to meet the Crew at the Cubby Bear Lounge for the pre-game ritual.

That was the plan at 3 a.m. We are too old to keep on doing stupid sophomoric things once a decade. And this appeared to be one of those moments. If Marce can walk into a journalism class with toothpicks propping up his eyes, no sleep, just to frighten the groms into the reality of the profession, then I can bear through the full 55 gallon steel drum of beer bladder pain.

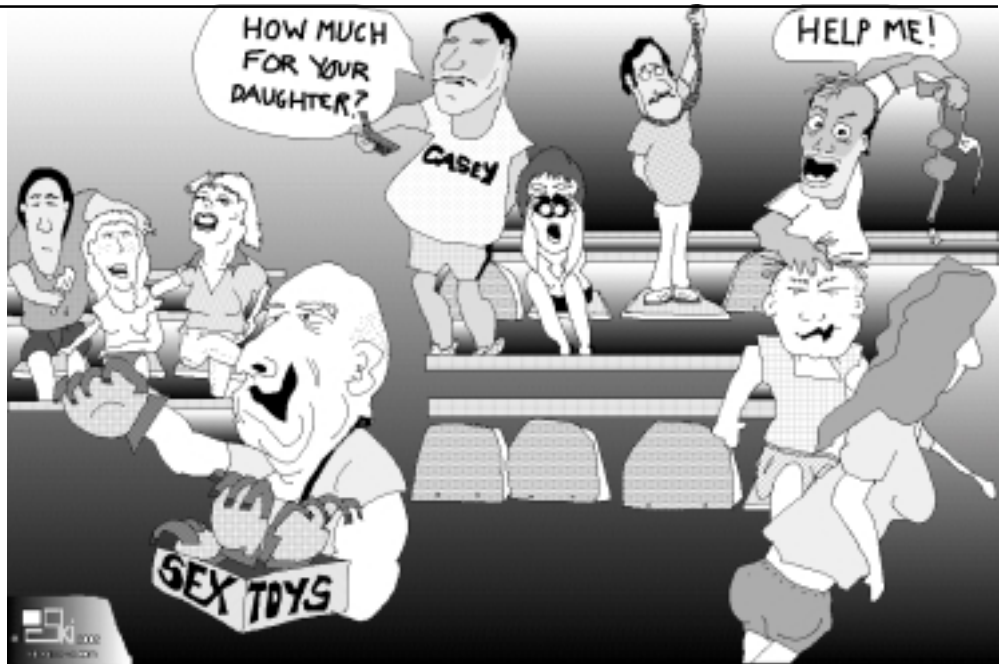
The Phils fans were huddled around Will Call before the gates opened, hoping that the Trib would scalp its own tickets so they could move from obstructed view. Betz dropped out to tour the Loop before flying to Carolina. Brian was hungry, but he did say that he had two sliders for breakfast. No doubt, kept warm inside his pillow case.

But before we entered the ballpark, Phil had to do some shopping. Why he did not want to go to the Cub store inside Wrigley, or to the large independent store across the Cubby Bear, was a mystery. He had to go to the one across from the bleachers.

As we passed the statue of Harry Carey, the waving broadcaster was placed from the thigh skyward from a block of concrete. "Just like in real life," I remarked, "they cut him off at the knees."

The symbols of the Game have

been trivialized by the marketing department. With the beaches closed due to pollution, it hit home that the Game is no longer the focal point. First, the sunshine. Second, the bleacher beer garden. Third, the ball yard. Fourth, observing the people. Fifth, the actual Game.



The Lake View neighborhood is no longer the gritty, blue collar community. The reproductive Yuppies have taken over. The storefronts now have baby clothes and children dance studios catering to the North Shore wannabees in lieu of old taverns and dry cleaners. The sidewalks are filled with baby strollers, joggers, and joggers with large dogs.

We stroll into the shop, and find it very small. Surprisingly small. But Phil went right to the clothes section; he was a man on mission.

In the embarrassing twenty minute awkward conversations that progressed slowly out of control at that point, three monumental questions were raised by the end of the day:

1. What kind of man buys lingerie before a Cubs game?
2. What kind of man brings lingerie into a Cubs game?
3. What kind of man begins waving lingerie at batters in an

attempt to start a 9th inning rally?

Things hit the low point when it was suggested that Phil complete his expensive Cub nightgown, thong and bikini purchases with a foam rubber Bear claw. He declined.

His mood had slid with the Cubs' bats. A rookie pitcher named Myers was pitching like Tom Seaver. But no one was paying much attention, as the men were more interesting in wolfing at the women who were more interesting in parading down the aisles like on a fashion runway. Base instincts ruled the section on this day.

So the game ended in another loss for Panty de Shields (2b), McGrief (1b) So-So (rf), Ouch Lou (lf) and S.S. Hunley (sunken confederate submarine recently found in the deep Atlantic)(c)and the rest of the Bruce Kimm Experience.

But Phil did not lose his new found "rallywear" for his expedition to St. Louis to Busch.