What a game last night. It had a little bit of everything. A big fourth quarter from LeBron James. A career game from super-rook Daniel "Boobie" Gibson. Five technical fouls, the last of which saw that piece of garbage Rasheed Wallace hurl his headband into the crowd. And a 91-87 Cavs win that evened this series up at two games apiece. The man, the myth, The Hnat tells us all about it in his latest and greatest effort.

THE SUMMARY:

Have you ever played with the bonus features of a DVD? Those extra menu options that allow you to watch a movie with French subtitles, or with the director's commentary (I always liked Steven Soderbergh's commentary on how he cast Shaobo Qin in *Ocean's Eleven*: "Basically, we needed a little guy who could make himself fit into a box"), or to see the original trailer ("hey, that little guy made himself fit into a box!")?

One of the other common features is the alternate ending, which allows you to see a different path that had been contemplated for the story line ("*Luke, I am your ... mother?* *DAMMIT LUCAS, WHO WROTE THIS *#$^*#@% SCRIPT!"*). This Eastern Conference Finals series with Detroit feels like we are watching the same movie over and over ... except we do not know if we are going to see the original ending or the alternate.

The first 40 to 45 minutes of the movie are always the same:

- The two teams play an evenly matched first quarter;
- The Cavs take the lead in the second quarter, and go into the locker room with "The Diff" in its happy place;
- At halftime, the Cavs' coaching staff plays a few rounds of Tetris instead of preparing for the second half;
- The Pistons look like world-beaters in the third quarter, erasing the Cavs' lead and taking a small advantage of their own;
- The Cavs fight back, and tie the game around midway through the fourth quarter.

At that point, we're left wondering whether we see the "Pistons Win" or the "Cavs Win" ending. Indeed, we do not know which one is the "real" ending, and which is the alternate.

Last night, it was the "Cavs Win" ending, as Cleveland (thanks to a 13 point outburst in the fourth quarter by LeBron James) prevailed by a score of 91-87. The victory evened the best-of-seven series at two games apiece.

The game truly followed the script described above. The Cavs held a slight advantage (26-22) at the end of the first quarter, then pushed that lead to seven (50-43) at halftime (they led by as many as 12 points during that period). The Pistons scored the first eight points of the third quarter to erase that lead, and took the lead (67-65) into the fourth quarter.

After a Rasheed Wallace jumper gave Detroit a 77-74 advantage with seven and a half minutes to play, the Cavs went to work. LeBron was fouled on a drive, and hit both free throws ... then Drew Gooden drained a baseline jumper (a consistent theme for him throughout the evening) ... then Sasha Pavlovic had a breakaway layup ... Daniel Gibson followed with a technical free throw (the T was whistled on Wallace, which is like saying "the sun rose this morning") ... then Gooden drained another jumper ... and then *another* jumper ... and finally, LeBron hit a "are you kidding me?" 22 footer, giving the Cavs an 87-79 lead.

The Pistons did not roll over - Richard Hamilton made a couple of jumpers in the final minutes, and an Antonio McDyess tip-in with five seconds remaining cut the Cavs' lead to two points - but James iced the game with two free throws. A wild Wallace three-point attempt missed the mark as time expired, and the Cavs had a hard-fought victory.

James led everybody with 25 points and 11 assists (he also had seven rebounds, for those of you tracking his triple-double threatitude). As many commentators pointed out, however, it really wasn't a superstar performance from LeBron, as he did not sell beer in the stands at halftime. Rising to the challenge of increased minutes in the wake of Larry Hughes' foot injury, Gibson responded with 21 points. Gooden also added 19 points of his own. Chauncey Billups led Detroit with 23 points, but Cleveland still managed to pressure him into more turnovers (five) than assists (two). Hamilton was right behind him with 19 points for the Pistons.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Truly Blessed: Those are the words tattooed to the back of Gibson's arms. It also applies to Cavs General Manager Danny Ferry (who presciently selected Gibson in the second round of last summer's draft) and Coach Mike Brown (who had to play Gibson given Hughes's injury and the lack of other alternatives). The rookie from Texas had the game of his life.

It wasn't just that he scored a career-high 21 points (although that is impressive enough); it was the *way* that he scored them. If you hear that a three-point bomber like Gibson or Damon Jones or Donyell Marshall scored 21 points in a game, you immediately figure, *he made seven three-pointers*. Not so! Gibson actually did not shoot that well from beyond the arc - he made one of his four attempts - but he drove the ball to the hoop time and again, and Detroit did not know how to stop him. The one way they did slow him down was by fouling him (Gibson attempted a career-high 12 free throws) ... and the man they call "Boobie" made them pay (he *made* a career-high 12 free throws).

Gibson also had three rebounds in traffic, came up with a couple of steals, and took a charge against Billups with two and a half minutes to go.

The most telling moment came during the second quarter. Gibson made a shot, and also drew the foul as he was knocked to the ground. As the rookie picked himself off the hardwood, the telecast switched to a shot of LeBron with a smile on his face. It wasn't his Global Icon smile, or his I Know You're The Opponent But I Love You Man smile; this was a genuine, from-the-heart smile that as much as said, "I've been Batman for a while now, and maybe this kid can be my Robin."

Truly A Stud: For the second time in as many games, LeBron elevated his game in the fourth quarter, providing the boost that the Cavs needed to get the double-you. Unlike Game Three, when LBJ posterized Wallace on a dunk, LeBron did not have any particularly memorable shots in the fourth quarter. This time, it was a rather quiet procession of outside shots, layups, and free throws. (He also had three assists in the final quarter.) Probably his most important shots: the pair of very ordinary, but very critical, free throws with four seconds remaining. If he misses either one of those shots, Detroit has the chance to tie the game. If he misses *both* shots, he has opened the door to potential disaster. As a less-than-reliable free throw shooter throughout the season, either of those outcomes were definite possibilities. But LeBron stayed calm, swished both shots, and snuffed out Detroit's remaining hopes.

A Postscript To That Last Item: I loved the way that LeBron

refused to acknowledge Hamilton's pre-free throw trash talk, throwing his shoulder into the skinny little Piston to nudge him out of the way.

Player Of The Game?: I am not normally a superstitious person, but I will find myself semi-believing that I affect the outcome of the game. For example, if the Cavs go on a run while I am sitting in a particular seat on the couch, then I will remain there. (Oh come on, you do it too. I know you do.)

It is in that spirit that I would like to nominate my soon-to-be-ex-wife as the Player Of The Game. She called early in the second quarter, when the two teams were tied. As we exchanged pleasantries, the Cavs took the lead. As the pleasantries denigrated into a full-blown argument, the Cavs extended their lead into double digits. And after I hung up the phone in disgust, the Pistons went on a late-quarter run to slice the 12-point lead to seven.

I do not know if it is possible for me to talk to her for 48 minutes at this point. But if the series comes to a Game Seven, I will be willing to try. It would be a small sacrifice to make if it means the first Finals appearance in Cavs history.

Department Of Words I Never Thought I'd Write: Drew Gooden had the smartest play of the game. He had already iced his Game Of The Month (see the Drew Gooden Period theory, which says that Drew has one terrific game every month) with his 19 points, but then he went and played some *defense*
, if you can imagine. With Cleveland holding an 87-83, Billups drove to the right side of the lane. The interior defense collapsed on Chauncey, who seemed to be expecting that to occur, and who responded by passing the ball to an open teammate at the three-point line ...

... except that Gooden, seeing the play develop, stepped into the passing lane, and stole the ball. A frustrated Billups immediately fouled The Reverse Soul-Patched One, leading to a pair of free throws (which Gooden split).

Department Of Words That I Can Almost Always Write, But Rarely In A Good Way: Sasha Pavlovic was caught woefully out of position. After the Cavs had taken a 78-77 lead in the fourth quarter, Detroit's McDyess missed a jumper. The rebound was back-tapped to midcourt, where it should have been gobbled up by a Piston. Instead, Sasha grabbed it. (
As everybody knows, the proper place to position yourself to rebound a medium-range jumper is at the center circle.
) With nothing but open court between him and the basket, Sasha drove to the hole and laid the ball in for a three-point

lead.

Sometimes, it is better to be lucky than good. And while we rarely reward luck here at The Good, The Bad, and the Summary, we are in a good mood this morning.

In Fact, Just To Show How Good A Mood We Are In: Props to Larry Hughes for trying to play even though his left foot was obviously hurting him. (Plantar fascia injuries are not fun; Hughes is not dogging this one.) Hughes has to know that one of the knocks against him is his fragility. The criticisms of him for missing most of last year's playoff series against the Pistons also have to be ringing in his ears. Larry probably should not have been out there - his foot bothered him enough that he was consistently a step behind Billups on defense - but his effort cannot be questioned.

As Always, The Best In The Business: The best line of the night was from TNT's Steve Kerr. After his colleague Marv Albert chided him for the added sponsor for Kerr's trivia question segment (previously "Steve Wonders"; now called "Steve's Refreshing Thoughts," in a sop to Whatever Beer Company Sponsors The Segment), Kerr pointed out that he didn't even get a word in during the entire segment.

One of those fun little hypothetical questions is "what five people would you invite to a dinner party?" I think I might invite Kerr to mine.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Guys, It Really ISN'T A Movie: For the fourth consecutive game in the series, the Cavaliers held a lead at halftime.

For the fourth consecutive game in this series, the Cavaliers squandered that lead in the opening minutes of the third quarter.

For the fourth consecutive game in this series, the Cavaliers showed little energy on offense in the third quarter. LeBron would walk the ball upcourt (which really should be the signal to his teammates to start backpedaling on defense).

Now, I like the idea of taking a lead at the half for the fifth consecutive game. That part of the script is terrific. I can live with losing that lead, as long as there is visible effort. But the lackadaisical play in the third quarter has to stop, or else Cavs Nation will be asking "what could have been?".

Flops Go In All Directions: The national media has officially backlashed against the Cavs' Anderson Varejao. During his first two seasons, he gained plaudits for his energy (which, as the TNT announcers correctly pointed out, used to be pronounced
hustle
) and willingness to play defense, particularly taking charges from opponents. Now, Varejao is drawing plenty of heat for his "flopping" -- his penchant to fall to the floor when, oh, I don't know,
an opposing player has just driven his knee into Andy's chest
.

Meanwhile, Detroit's Billups had two of the more flagrant flops in recorded history during last night's game. Both resulted in fouls being whistled against Gibson, and both

were extraordinarily cheap. (One of the whistles was for an offensive foul. Billups was hand-checking Gibson; Gibson swatted at Billups's hand; Chauncey acted as though Boobie had just fired a bazooka at his chest.)

Why exactly wasn't Billups labeled as a "flopper"?

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

We're headed back to Motown, as Game Five will take place at the Palace of Auburn Hills tomorrow evening. Saturday night, the series returns to Quicken Loans Arena for Game Six. And if it is necessary, Game Seven will be held in Detroit on Monday evening.

Which ending of the movie will we see?

It almost does not matter. Just remember to enjoy this ride, because it does not come around often.