First off, I'm going to try really hard to not bury the Cavs prematurely.

The fact of the matter is, this series isn't over. Some approximation of the Game 3 LeBron and Game 3 Cavs could show up in Game 6. Boston is already further than they were supposed to go in this postseason and the Cavs' backs will truly be against the wall. LeBron once again has something personal to prove, like never before in his seven NBA years. The Celtics have had some of the same inconsistency issues as the Cavs, and they've strung together two great games. They're due for a flat game.

So there is still a chance, more solid than grasping at straws, that this series will find its way to a seventh game. And as we know, Game 7's are a completely different animal from any other type of playoff game.

Now, having said all of that ... severe damage has been done to the Cavs, and to LeBron James, in this series. Damage that might alter the future of the Cavs and LeBron, and will certainly alter our perception of who is now a disgraced king.

Unless the Cavs find that championship-level switch that we've been waiting 10 games for them to flip, unless they win the last two games against Boston and ride that momentum to series triumph over Orlando in the Eastern Conference Finals and the Western Conference champion in the NBA Finals, the Cavs are going to look a lot different next season, and LeBron -- whether he's still here or playing for another team -- will have an elephant in the room with him. And the only way that elephant is going to leave the room is if LeBron wins a championship. Or perhaps multiple championships.

Mike Brown will be fired, probably very quickly after a Cavs elimination. He wasn't dealt the greatest of hands in the past three months, needing to work Antawn Jamison into the rotation just as Shaq left the stage with a torn thumb ligament, then being forced to adjust his rotations on the fly when Shaq returned for Game 1 against Chicago. And as has been discussed many times in this space, the Cavs being forced to accommodate Shaq on the fly is like asking the Indianapolis 500 to accommodate a dump truck on the fly.

That aside, Brown's rotation-adjusting has always been an area of criticism. He tends to add to the upheaval when things aren't going right by mixing and matching willy-nilly. At this point in the season, if you can't give players defined roles, you are going to anger them and mess with morale. That is exactly what has happened in this series. Shaq was biting his lip after Game 4, when he was benched for all of the fourth quarter. Bench players such as J.J. Hickson and Jamario Moon, who have both given the Cavs solid minutes in this postseason, have seen their playing time jump all over the board from game to game.

In Game 5, forgotten man Zydrunas Ilgauskas suddenly got the call in the first quarter as Hickson remained buried on the bench. Then, seemingly for the first time since the days of James Naismith and wooden peach baskets, Daniel Gibson made an appearance when things really got desperate.

Brown has had to deal with upheaval. But he's also had a month to smooth his rotations out, and he's making things worse, not better. He's coaching himself out of a job at the moment.

Danny Ferry might be gone as well, if for no other reason than as an accompaniment to Brown's firing. His contract is up after this season and there has been no apparent progress toward an extension. Maybe Ferry wants to make sure he has a place on a lifeboat if the Cavs do indeed strike the iceberg that is now looming mere yards off the bow. Or maybe Dan Gilbert is leaving the door open to try and attract a big name such as Gregg Popovich, Larry Brown or Pat Riley to Cleveland with the promise of the combined coach and general manager's roles, and the unchallenged authority that goes along with it. Not to mention the loads of money.

Whatever the reason, if this downward trajectory continues for one more game, there is a very good chance the Cavs' power structure will look much different next season.

The roster will look much different. A month ago, I was certain that the Cavs would retain Shaq for at least one more season. Even at 38, there is no one who affects the game on a foundational level the way Shaq does. Now, I'm fairly certain that Shaq is a one-and-done failed experiment. His low-post game, once the most reliable weapon in the NBA, has been reduced to travels, off-arm push fouls and some of the ugliest hook shots you will ever see. Ironically, his foul shooting has been perhaps his biggest strength thus far in the postseason.

If the Cavs could somehow get past Boston, Shaq could actually become more of a factor against the Magic. Kendrick Perkins, with his girth and ability to prevent ideal post-up positioning, is a tougher matchup for Shaq than Dwight Howard, who is slender by comparison.

Mo Williams might find his way onto the trading block, and probably should. He's having an overall miserable series. But he's also a streaky volume shooter who has been forced into a specialist's role since the Jamison deal. He no longer fits here the way he is going to have to fit in order to be successful. The Cavs need a more traditional point guard to fill Mo's role.

But anything that might happen with Brown, Ferry, Shaq or Mo is mere deck chair shuffling compared to the questions that will surround LeBron if this is how the Cavs end their season.

For the first time in his career, LeBron is showing real weakness. He is showing what might be fatal flaws. He is playing terribly, he is submitting to the will of his opponent, he is withdrawing emotionally, and he is doing it all with a thousand-yard stare that is usually reserved for those who have seen the horrors of war.

His injured elbow excuse left the building after his Game 3 mastery. To look at what LeBron has become in this series, there is no way you can blame it all on an injured joint. This is much deeper and much more serious. What we've seen out of LeBron in this series is a lack of interest and a lack of heart. Even he doesn't seem to know what is going on. The best he can offer up is "I spoil a lot of people with my play," delivered to the media after Game 5. Basically saying, "I've been so good for so long, you should expect that at some point, I won't play well."

You'd have to think that Michael Jordan or Kobe Bryant would have committed hara-kiri before they'd admit to something like that in the middle of a playoff series. Something is really wrong with LeBron, and it's going really wrong at the worst possible time -- right before he becomes the most coveted free agent in the history of professional sports.

It would be foolish to think that this series is going to cool teams on pursuing LeBron. There are too many desperate teams out there with cap space and blind faith that LeBron is all they need to become relevant again.

But there is a long road, filled with wrong turns, between relevancy and championships. Just ask the Cavs.

LeBron will make money for himself and his team, no matter where he goes, or if he chooses to re-sign with the Cavs. But LeBron's legacy as a great player will be directly tied to the number of rings he wins, and what we're seeing right now is a superstar player who has an opportunity to build his legacy as a winner, and he's letting it slip through his fingers almost willingly, met with little more than a shrug of the shoulders and a "Yeah, these things happen sometimes."

If LeBron doesn't have one foot out the door, it's entirely possible that he has one foot in the offseason. It's possible that he's not playing hard because he doesn't want to risk a major injury, or worsening his elbow, on the eve of his free agency.

It's entirely possible that LeBron's real "championship" is his next contract, and his parade is the national tour he will begin in early July, hopping from city to city so that powerful team executives can grovel at his feet.

And it's entirely possible that we're watching LeBron get broken down into his constituent elements right before our very eyes: ego, greed, vanity, hubris and emotional fragility. And playing like a champion, but only on his terms, when it best suits him.

LeBron's character is among the last things I thought I'd ever have to call into question. But it's his character that is losing this series right now. I am one loss away from never looking at LeBron the same way again.