Fausto was faustastic again yesterday afternoon, carrying the Indians to a 6-2 win over the floundering Twins, who we've OWNED this season. In today's B-List, Buff displays some serious Man Love for Raffy Perez, applauds the move of Asdrubal to the two home and Casey to the nine hole, and plays another round of Managerial Head Scratchers. It's the best Cleveland Indians column in existence. It's The B-List.

FINAL SCORE				
Indians (81-58)	3	0	0	0
Twins (69-71)	0	0	0	0

W: Carmona (15-8) L: S. Baker (8-7) S: R. Perez (1)

Are you sure this is the same team I was writing about three weeks ago?

1) The return of Squander Ball

Just because we won the game doesn't mean it's not frustrating to have to requisition a second pond to hold all your ducks.

Honestly, I think this is a game we find a way to lose earlier this summer: after a quick three-run outburst, the Indians put together the following plate appearances:

1st: runners on 1st and 2nd, zero outs: K, K, FC
2nd: single, DP, walk, GO
3rd: single, DP, double, FO
4th: runners on 2nd and 3rd, zero outs: GO (infield in, no run), K, IBB, K
5th: single, K, K, single, single, out at home

So there's two innings of having at least one runner in scoring position and NO outs, a third inning with a single and a double, and a fourth with three hits, and ZERO RUNS.

Now, as comical as this might seem (and it seems a far sight more comical, perhaps in a tragicomic sense, *after* we won the game), the bottom of the fifth featured Minnesota scoring its only two runs of the game. In a game in which we were dominating the stat sheet, the Indians were clinging to a one-run lead. Naturally, the team's collective sphincter tightened considerably and the only baserunner the Indians had in the next three innings combined was a two-out single by Travis Hafner, who was stranded after a fly out.

Now, I should hasten to credit rookie Nick Blackburn, making his second major-league appearance: he kept the Indians off-balance and did a fine job in relief of a Scott Baker who looked very little like the man who carried a perfect game into the ninth in his last outing. But it also looked very much like the Tribe was pressing against him after blowing so many opportunities: the tenor of the game very much changed from

"Man, we're hitting this guy left and right," to "Man, we keeping imitating Chevy Chase imitating Gerald Ford as we approach the finish line."

Fortunately, these are not your July (or even early August) Cleveland Indians, and sparked by Asdrubal's leadoff bunt single in the ninth and some clutch hitting by designated bases-loaded hitter Kenny Lofton, the Indians loped across the line four runs better than the Twins. But this should have been a laugher, and instead, we found ourselves chewing our collective nails when Raffy Perez got the final out of the 8th with the tying run on third.

2) A measure of distance traveled

Is it wrong to be disappointed by a performance in which the starting pitcher goes 7 1/3 innings and gives up 2 runs? Yeah, it probably is. After all, this is a player in his second season in the majors, someone whose 187 IP already dwarfs his major-league total from last season. You give me this start from Aaron Laffey and I declare him the Next Big Thing; Cliff Lee is Back On Track with this start, Paul Byrd is a Master Craftsman. I get this from Fausto Carmona, I think, "Eh, is that all there is?"

Well, look: to feel disappointed in a start like that is getting

pretty greedy. I understand that. Not only did it put us in a great position to win, but we DID win. Not only was it only two runs, but it STAYED only two runs after it became apparent that the offense was not going to help Carmona any more in the foreseeable future. (I, for one, did not foresee the ninth. Enjoy it, yes; predict it, no.) Not only was it two runs, but it got into the 8th on the travel day before facing the West-leading Angels, saving the bullpen after Laffey's four-inning "startlet" used up two relievers and exposed two others. (Had Lewis or Betancourt pitched today after multi-inning appearances, it would be been "unfortunate.") Carmona largely stifled the Twins, and when he didn't, there was only one two-run "outburst" (for the Twins, two runs is a veritable explosion) to show for it.

But, see, I HAVE become greedy when it comes to Carmona, especially facing a lame-O offense like Minnesota's. The first inning was an infield single and a walk in the midst of three groundouts. The second featured a K and a double-play grounder. Luis Rodriguez' single in the third was the first ball hit out of the infield. And the 4th was two more groundouts and another K.

See, when you start a game like that, the lay fan is

lulled into thinking that anything other than a groundout or a K is a fluke, a cosmic error, a ruse to allow more double-play grounders. He's in complete control, right? He's Fausto™! Of course, this sort of sloughs over the fact that Carmona did allow four hits, even if two were infield singles, and needed a nice defensive reaction by Carmona himself with two men on to get Torii Hunter's liner up the middle to turn into a double play. And, of course, Carmona got 7 groundouts (counting a double play after a walk as two groundouts) and a K in the eight hitters following the second run, up until he hit Torii Hunter and ended his day.

But that's what Carmona has become: any run seems unusual, any string of hits seems out of character ... in essence, anything but Fausto™! seems like a disappointment. It's not fair.

I can't help it.

Anyway, Carmona ended up giving up two runs on 8 singles and a pair of walks. In Carmona's last 11 starts, his has gone fewer than 7 innings only twice, each 6 innings. He has given up a fourth run only twice. And his ERA has sunk from 3.77 to 3.27, meaning that as September arrives, Carmona has improved his game from mid-July.

He's pretty good.

3) When do I get *my* exclamation point?

With Torii Hunter on first and one out, Raffy Perez was summoned to face Justin

Morneau. This was simply prudent: in a one-run game, the left-handed Perez was better-suited to take advantage of Morneau's sizable platoon split than the 105-pitch right-handed Carmona.

Besides, Raffy Perez is really, really good.

Frankly, I don't know what this guy looks like starting games. He did so quite a bit in the minors and in winter ball, and who knows, may again someday in the future. He has a good fastball, a tremendous slider, and what appears to be plenty of stamina. But let's get one thing straight: I am in no hurry to see Perez' role change any time soon. Certainly not for the remainder of

2007.

Perez worked Morneau to 2-2 before getting him to fly out. Then he was so rattled (*yawn*) by Hunter stealing second and taking third on a wild pitch that he threw four straight strikes to Mike Cuddyer and got him to fly out. Granted the extra runs that made Joe Borowski superfluous (it wouldn't have been a save opportunity for Joe, or I'm certain he would have been summoned), shrugged off an inning-opening error to induce a double play and get a groundout to end the game for his first save of the season.

In Perez' hitless, walkess 1 2/3 innings,

Perez threw 19 pitches. Four were balls.

Granted, he was not entirely dominant: Cuddyer hit his ball pretty well, and a wild pitch can't be considered positive under most circumstances, but ... boy, that man can pitch.

4) Suited for the role

On August 25th, Casey Blake hit in the 9 hole against Kansas City and went 2-for-4. In the 11 games starting August 25th, Blake has batted in one of the 6, 8, or 9 slots, with 8 (in front of Shoppach or

Barfield) or 9 being the most common.

In six of these 11 games, Casey Blake has collected a pair of hits.

At the beginning of the season, Blake had a miniature hot streak batting in the two slot. This worked out well for everyone, because Blake was one of the few players in the regular lineup with some speed, and other candidates like Trot Nixon, Jason Michaels, David Dellucci, and Josh Barfield proved to be deeply unsatisfying in the role for various reasons (couldn't hit, couldn't hit, really couldn't hit, and hit preposterously,

respectively). After cooling off, Blake turned into a bit of a drag on the offense, although it was hard to tell when NO ONE in the lineup was producing except Victor Martinez and some streaks by Ryan Garko. Ultimately, Blake isn't a 2 hitter, as his .268/.340/.429 numbers attest. He's not awful ... but he's not very good.

But after getting the baseball equivalent of a neutron star level of suckage from Josh Barfield from the bottom of the order and getting the offsetting boost from replacement Asdrubal Cabrera (who IS performing well in the 2 hole), any offense from the bottom of the lineup to set the table for Sizemore, Cabrera,

and a resurgent Travis Hafner is a real net plus. And Blake can do that.

5) Less cautious, more optimism

It's a bit much to expect Travis Hafner to improve on his I Am King performance of Tuesday, but Hafner continued to appear to lift himself out of the doldrums by going 2-for-3 with a double, two runs scored, and an RBI. As telling, with two outs, Ron Gardenhire chose to intentionally walk Hafner with runners on 2nd and 3rd to have Baker (who is nine years old) face our best run-producer, Victor Martinez. So if Hafner isn't all the

way back, at least one manager appears not to consider it worth finding out for certain.

6) Managerial Head Scratchers

This having been said, after Hafner drew his second walk of the day following Cabrera's bunt single in the ninth, why is Hafner running the bases in a one-run game? If Hafner's slot comes up again, it would be either really good (because we'd batted around) or really bad (because we'd blown the lead), and the Really

Bad scenario would be better-avoided by having a runner on first who could actually *score* on a double to the wall (in this case, with the benefit of hindsight, by Jhonny Peralta). It proved moot and is a minor quibble, but a seemingly pretty obvious one.

Not to be outdone, third base coach Joel Skinner waved turtlean Ryan Garko around third to try to score from second on a single to right fielder Mike Cuddyer, who had 17 assists as a right fielder entering the game and a reputation for having one of the better throwing arms in the majors.

To say that Garko was not safe would be to underestimate the distance represented by a light-second.

7) Captains Clutch!

Peralta had one of the weirder days in recent memory, looking positively ridiculous on a trio of Very Bad Strikeouts (hey, Jhonny, your bat STILL doesn't reach that outside slider! News flash!), but pounding out a pair of doubles, the second of which came with two outs against Relief Ace Pat Neshek and his Righty-Eating

Shenanigizer to drive in the 4th run.

After a walk to Franklin Gutierrez (who accomplished nothing else on the day, providing two-thirds the ridiculosity of Peralta with two Ks of his own) loaded the bases, there was but one question: not whether Kenny Lofton would bat, but whether he could draw a third consecutive last-inning bases-loaded walk.

Alas, he could not. Although he worked the count to 3-2, Neshek refused to comply with the statistical oddity, instead throwing a strike, which Lofton laced past shortstop Jason Bartlett into center for a two-run single to close the scoring.

Although I lament the opportunity to see Kenny flip-drop the bat at the plate for another AB-less RBI, that works for me, too.

8) Everybody hits!

Well, except Gutierrez. The Tribe collected 15 hits in all, and with Gutierrez' walk, every Indian reached base. Of course, 12 of them stayed there, one was thrown out at home, and two were erased on double plays, but hey.

9) Completely False Statement for the Google Search Engine

Mark Shapiro has placed numerous crank calls to Bernie Kosar, pretending to be Bill Belichick, saying only, "I was right, your skills diminished, I have more rings, scoreboard!" before hanging up and cackling maniacally. Having heard Mark Shapiro, I firmly believe him incapable of cackling, maniacally or otherwise, and this statement is patently untrue. Fire Eric Wedge.