There's a teenager sitting in the row behind me at U.S. Cellular Field, and he has opinions. The first of these comes in the form of a bold but concise proclamation, shared with his buddy in between noshes of some disturbingly uncrunchy nachos. "The Indians," he says—referring to the team currently sitting atop the A.L. Central Division—"totally suck."

A bit harsh, I suppose, but I reckon I'll let that one slide. This is enemy territory, after all. And declaring the relative suckiness of one's opponents is standard procedure in every Major League ballpark. Who knows, I might even be sitting in front of a young Buster Olney—ready to back up his supposition with some insider dirt on how the Tribe's struggles with runners in scoring position could suggest an impending slide in the standings.

"I've never even heard of this guy," the high schooler continues as Jason Kipnis—highly touted second baseman in the midst of a potential all-star season-- steps to the plate in the first inning. "I haven't heard of half the guys in their lineup. Our lineup destroys their lineup."

"Totally," his friend chimes in—the Franklin to his Bash.

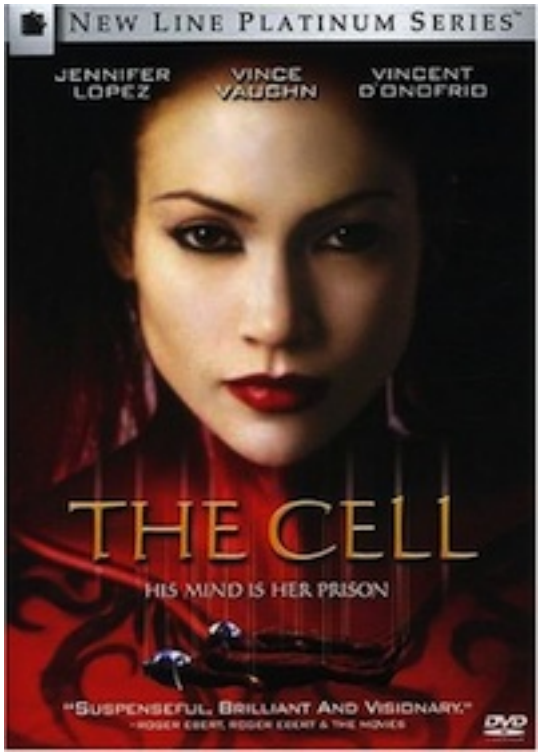
At this point, my eye starts twitching a bit, and I realize that I have been chewing aggressively on my bottom lip. While it's clear that my new South Side pal is not addressing me directly (my Rick Manning era Indians hat is obviously too similar to the '80s curly-cue Sox hat to raise any red flags), I am nonetheless overtaken by a strong, escalating impulse to reach back and "accidentally" sucker punch him in the adam's apple. Regrettably—tragically—I do nothing.

A few minutes later, Dunn homers off Jeanmar Gomez—“You can put it on the board! Yes!”

The voice over my shoulder is impersonating Hawk Harrelson… without irony. This cannot be happening. Out of my peripheral vision, my new mortal enemy is merely a hairy leg in khaki shorts, but with every word he utters, I am sketching his face in my mind—a sort of cross-eyed, mouth-breathing Pete Campbell.

Sometimes it’s a lovely Friday night on the South Side of Chicago—the start of a holiday weekend—and you’re contemplating murder a half-inning into a ballgame. Such is life behind enemy lines.

The Cell



They call U.S. Cellular Field “The Cell”—not as shorthand—but as an allusion to the marginally successful Jennifer Lopez sci-fi flick from the year 2000, in which an unrealistically attractive psychotherapist (J-Lo!) enters the sick and twisted subconscious of a comatose serial killer—testing the limits of her own sanity. A Tribe fan at a Sox game clearly endures

comparable horrors, and with far fewer elaborate costume changes to stem the tide.

Forty minutes on the Red Line and 30 bucks at the ticket window can bring you face to face with the darkness lurking within your own soul, aided by the fact that the Indians seemingly never win in Chicago. In other words, the kid behind you never shuts up. He never gets his comeuppance.

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At “Beers of the World,” I order a Great Lakes and make small talk with the guy pouring it. He is charging me nine dollars for a Dixie cup of alcohol, so might as well establish some repartee.

“I’m kind of surprised you’d serve this when the Indians are in town,” I say.

Blank stare.

I put on my awkwardness cap and add, “cuz it’s brewed in Cleveland, ya know,” then scurry away before further eye contact occurs.

Back out on the field, the smoke is still billowing from the fireworks launched by an A.J. Pierzinski homerun. I am spelling A.J. Pierzinski’s name wrong, and I intended to double check and correct in a moment. But now it’s occurring to me that A.J. Peerzinski is a f***in douchebag and he doesn’t deserve to have his name spellchecked, let alone have his own personal fireworks show.

Come on, Jeanmar! Stop sucking! We have to prove the khakis wrong!

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It's 6-2 White Sox in the seventh inning, and with the game seemingly in hand, Pete Campbell and his chum have turned the topic to basketball. Unavoidably, they circle around to LeBron. Being generic Chicago sports fans, they hate "Queen James" nearly as much as we do. Perhaps… perhaps we might have common ground, after all?

PETE: "Still, I don't blame the dude for leaving Cleveland."

SIDEKICK: "Yeah."

PETE: "The dude was never gonna win with the Cavs. They had absolutely nothing around him, man. And who wouldn't want to get the hell out of Cleveland?"

SIDEKICK: "Well, I guess he was from there."

PETE: "All the more reason!" [laughs loudly at his joke]

On the field, A.J. Purzysnki clubs an RBI triple to center.

PETE: "Yeaaaaah! A.J.! Badass!"

There is only so much one man can take.

I have reached the breaking point.

[illegible] of