

*Swinging for
the fences*

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Cubs fluent in sign language

It has been said that the end of days will be foretold by seven signs. Seven remarkable, inexplicable occurrences that defy imagination or challenge even the sturdiest mortal resolve. And at the completion of those seven signs, the world will, I don't know, blink out like bad cable reception.

We may not notice them for what they are when they happen. It takes some distance, some perspective to truly see what they all have been leading up to.

By my count, we're only one sign away from Armageddon, that sign being the long-awaited, long-feared Cubs-Red Sox World Series.

It happened in 1918, the last time Boston claimed a championship banner, and since then there have been countless volumes churned out about curses and hexes and Babes that go bump in the night.

But with the Cubs and BoSox each three wins away from advancing to the Fall Classic, it's possible that the Seventh Sign may soon be upon us.

If that's true, we must look back and consider the first six, the terrifying and wonderous moments that have all of Cubdom praying over their Old Styles and Dusty Baker Beanie Babies

1. Cork and beans: Sammy Sosa, the man who has personified the Cubs on the field for the last decade, had a rough go of it in the year he became the 18th man to hit 500 career home runs. Back in May, in a game against the Pirates, an errant Solomon Torres fastball slammed Sammy in the labonza so hard his batting helmet shattered.

A couple of weeks later, in a game against Tampa Bay, something else of Sosa's shattered which probably made him long for the days of fastballs to the noggin. And a year that had begun with much promise for Cub fans suddenly careened into a baseball season straight out of "Dr. Who."

2. A swarm welcome: Okay, they might not have been locusts. But the swarms of gnats that invaded the Friendly Confines during an early August series against Arizona had fans and players thinking, how bad could a rain of toads be?

Now, the whole state seems to be locked in the death grip of a ladybug horde so massive and menacing it's downright Hitchcockian. If anyone sees Tippie Hedren flitting about town, please promptly inform the local authorities.

3. Prior's crash course: This is why the AL has the designated hitter: so that superstar pitchers don't have to run the bases and accidentally collide with small, scrappy middle infielders.

When Mark Prior and Braves second baseman Marcus Giles 86'ed each other on the basepaths during a game at Wrigley just before the All-Star break, it looked like the Man with the Golden Arm might be down for the count.

If you felt a tremor that day, it was caused by every breathing soul in Cubdom falling to their knees at the same moment.

Prior injured his pitching arm and was on the DL for almost two weeks. Area hospitals reported at least 87 Cub fans were checked into intensive care with heart failure.

Of course, he came back and went 10-1 with an ERA under two the rest of the way. Didn't make that moment any less terrifying.

4. Crazy Train pulls in to Addison: On August 17, Ozzy Osbourne sang the 7th inning stretch. At least, that's what we were told he did. Might have been some sort of Satanic chant. Might have been a mangled version of "Iron Man." No one's really sure to this point. But

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somewhere, the devil must have been shaking his head.

5. The Shawn-shank Redemption: Shawn Estes, he of the NL's worst ERA (6.09, going into this game) took the hill in late September in a game the Cubs needed to win to keep pace in an NL Central race tighter than Bill Wirtz's pocketbook.

Estes, generally known as the Shemp of an otherwise dominant rotation, redeemed himself in the eyes of the Wrigley faithful with the most improbable four-hit, complete game shut out in recent memory.

He wouldn't pitch again for the Cubs, and most likely won't ever. He doesn't need to.

But how in the name of Calvin Schiraldi did that even happen?

6. "G-1000" elected in California: Yeah, this has nothing to do with the Cubs. But come on. Arnold Schwarzenegger holds the highest office in one of the most economically

important states in the union.

Ever see "Escape from L.A.," in which California has split off from the mainland and become a hive of chaos and lawlessness by the year 2013? I'd say we're right on schedule.

Which brings us to the present day. Nothing is guaranteed, but look back on the summer that's been. Could anybody outside of a Greek tragedy have predicted any of that? It sure feels like the cosmos are lining up.

This is how the season ends: not with a whimper, but with a bang.

Chicago hosted the Fog Bowl in 1988. The last time the Cubs were in the NLCS, the Giants and A's went on to play the Earthquake Series.

Brace yourselves: the Apocalypse Series is coming to a ballyard near you. Get your tickets early and make your peace with the Lord.

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