The C-minus Conspiracy

I.

It was a beautiful summer day—the kind of day that left me with no choice but to go to a game at Wrigley. The only problem was that I didn’t have tickets, but I knew how to solve it. We pointed ourselves in the direction of Waveland and Sheffield. Scalpers could always be found hanging out there. A last minute ticket was going to be more expensive than usual because the Cubs were having a good season for once. However, they had struggled a little in late July and now in August. I was hoping they would snap their current four-game losing streak today. Young Kerry Wood would be trying to stop the bleeding for the Cubs, and the way he had pitched this year instilled confidence in me and the fans. I was still kicking myself for missing his twenty-strikeout game earlier this season. My favorite player, Mark Grace, was having a great year, and it was pretty fun watching Sammy Sosa hit a boatload of homers. Rod Beck was saving almost every close game which was a huge upgrade over last year’s Adams-Rojas closing tandem.

“Need tickets?” The brusque voice drove me from thoughts of Rod Beck’s majestic facial hair and into the present. I stopped watching the ball hawks shuffling their feet and adjusting their gloves in anticipation, and my eyes fixed on the source of the voice. A bearded man stood in front of us, and he looked shadowed, despite standing in direct sunlight. I kind of enjoyed the effect, but Sandra closed herself off to the unseemly character, pretending to scan the line forming by the bleacher entrance. The haggard man in front of me clutched several tickets surreptitiously in his hand, a worn Cubs cap pulled low over his forehead. It was the kind of cap that proudly displayed a sweat high-water mark.

“Um, yeah. Two please.” He held out the tickets, and I started to pull out some cash.

“Twenty bucks,” he muttered.

“Whaat?” I didn’t think I heard him right. I expected to have to detach my arm and give it to someone to obtain tickets, and these were for pretty good seats on the first base side.

“Don’t worry about it.”

I was puzzled by the price and a little suspicious, but I handed him a twenty anyway. I pocketed the other bills I expected to have to part with. Last minute, cheap tickets on a beautiful day didn’t just happen.

“Thanks,” he said, pressing the tickets into my palm. I noticed there was another small card there along with the tickets.

“Hey, what’s this?” I asked, but he was already swept away by the throng.

“Check into it!” I heard him yell through the crowd. I pocketed the tickets and fingered the blue cardstock that was slightly larger than a business card. I flipped it over, expecting to see some lame entrepreneurial crap, but filling the expanse of the flipside were no words, just a symbol I recognized from my high school days. It was a C-minus-looking symbol, but the “C” part was a Chicago Cubs “C.” “What the hell?”

“We’ll have to look it up online when we get home,” said Sandra, “Let’s get in there, Sean! I think batting practice is already happening, and I want to watch Glenallen Hill.”

“You might be the only one,” I replied, still curious about the mysterious card.

“Forget the card! Let’s go get some food.”

We wandered around the corner onto Addison, and through the front gate. We bought nachos and beer and were about to head to our seats when I saw Sandra just standing and staring. She looked like I would have to reboot her. I grabbed the food and walked over by her to see why she seemed to be spacing out. In front of her, tucked off to the side of one of the vendors was a small, inconspicuous door.

“What the heck is your…” My words stuck in my throat because there, right above a small brass knob on the gray door, was the exact same symbol that was on the business card--a C-minus.

“Well, that’s odd,” said Sandra.

The C-minus Conspiracy

II.

“Why have I never noticed this before?” I mused aloud. First, I had received the blue card bearing the C-minus logo from a scalper, and now here was the same symbol on a door inside Wrigley. “I must’ve walked by here a hundred times… how have I never seen this?”

“Ah, it’s probably just some sort of stealth marketing. The product it represents will probably show up sometime soon,” reasoned Sandra, “Before we know it, everyone will have one of… whatever it is.”

I took out the rumpled blue card and compared it to the logo on the door, bewildered. “I guess I’ll just try to check into this later. Let’s go to our seats.”

At that moment, some Wrigley Field security officers approached us. “Sir, Ma’am, can we see your tickets?” The head officer scanned the tickets once I handed them over. He shook his head. “We’re going to have to ask you to leave—we have reason to believe you’ve purchased scalped tickets.”

I raised my arms in a hapless protest, but I knew it was no use. “You’re right… we’ll leave,” I said, resignedly. Sandra shot me an irritated look. As they escorted us to the gates, I took one look back at the door. If it were some sort of guerilla marketing, they sure did make the logo small. I immediately made plans in my head to get legit tickets as soon as possible, so I could investigate further. Meanwhile, at home I would fire up Navigator and do a search on C-minus.

Once we got home, I couldn’t even think about anything but finding out more about this mysterious logo. I switched on the computer, and soon the familiar ping-gurgle-fuzz sounds of the modem filled the apartment. I tried several different search terms, but the only meaningful result that really came up was a very spartan website for a “C-Chemicals” company. The logo was nowhere to be found on the site, so I had my doubts about any connection.