

Michael Swanwick's Periodic Table of Science Fiction

40

Zn

Zirconium

91.22

It's Not Virtual Anything?It's Real Zirconium!

Real baseball is played on a diamond. Virtual baseball is played on a zirconium. You wouldn't think so small a difference would matter, but real baseball fans are snobs. If it isn't a diamond, they reason, it doesn't glitter as brightly.

Piffle!

A lot of the hostility real fans feel toward virtual sports stems simply from the fact that virtual athletes are so much better at what they do than real athletes are. Every sport has its golden age. You remember basketball in the 1990s, with Dr. J, Moses Malone, the Dream Team ? Compare that with what it's like today. By merest chance, the golden age of virtual baseball is now.

Which is what makes the current scandal so unfair! Even if the charges against the Chicago Hackers are upheld in a court of law and it's found they did indeed sit out the World Wide Web Series by running strong expert systems in place of themselves, what does that prove? There are always a few rotten apples in every barrel.

What's shaken the faith of so many unreal fans is the involvement of "Virtually Shoeless Joe" Jackson, the great unnatural batting talent, whose trial continues today. Nobody put it better than the anonymous ten-year-old script-bunny who broke into the court's system and placed a streaming video on the welcome screen.

It shows a ragged newsboy, tears in eyes, who sobs, "Say it ain't so, Joe!"

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