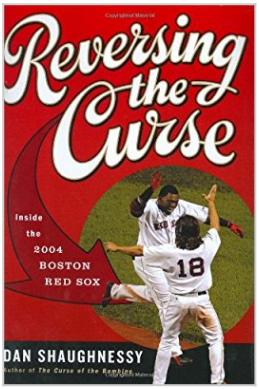

Reversing the Curse

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For nearly a century, the Boston Red Sox played the underdog to the indomitable New York Yankees in what ESPN named the number-one sports rivalry of all time. But in 2004 the snakebitten Sox finally got their revenge. After Aaron Boone's history-making Homeric blast, which sent the Red Sox packing in October 2003, and the infamous deal that put A-Rod, baseball’s highest-paid player, in pinstripes, the age-old rivalry escalated to dizzying new heights. The result was a season in which a plucky team of comeback kids improbably brought down the House That Ruth Built and went on to right eighty-six years of jinxed history by winning Boston's first World Series since 1918. From right on the frontlines, from the front office to the bleachers, Dan Shaughnessy goes inside to chronicle this unforgettable journey, revealing how a self-described band of "idiots" was able to accomplish what eighty-five teams before it couldn't -- or didn't. We witness the colorful antics of baseball’s best-known stars, the dramatic play on the field punctuated by bench-clearing brawls, and the cold war-style battle being waged behind the scenes. We sit alongside young Theo Epstein as he tries to settle in to one of baseball's most scrutinized jobs. We watch with the Red Sox brass into the wee hours of the night as the Yankees come almost unbearably close (again) to squashing Sox dreams. We join the players on the wild ride to redemption, replete with Jesus in the outfield, a lunar eclipse, and a bloodied sock on the mound. We also come to understand in an intimate way what it’s like to be caught up in all of this as a fan. With lively reporting, penetrating insight, and a keen sense of history, Shaughnessy brings the 2004 season alive in all its glory, drama, and euphoria, definitively recounting a sports saga that will long be etched in the minds and hearts of baseball fans around the world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Sportswriter Shaughnessy, whose bestselling *Curse of the Bambino* chronicled the Boston Red Sox's interminable World Serie drought, now follows the team's happy trails, portraying its colorful characters, false starts, stumbles and eventual triumphs during the 2004 season. The story keeps rounding back to the relationship between the Red Sox and the Yankees, which Shaugnessy compares to the relationship of the "USA-USSR, circa early 1960s." But there's more to the story than just the team's rivalry with the Yankees, and the book maintains a nice balance of on-the-field reports and behind-the-scenes drama. Shaugnessy, a *Boston Globe* columnist who gained access to the team's players and managers, focuses on some of the main actors in this soap opera: Theo Epstein, the boy-genius general manager; Pedro Martinez, the enigmatic pitcher; Manny Ramirez, the talented-but-lackadaisical outfielder; and Johnny Damon, the "Jesus action figure" center fielder. Shaughnessy's top-notch reporting and dry wit put this honest, entertaining work near the top of the list of this spring's baseball books. Two eight-page photo inserts not seen by *PW. (Mar. 30)*

About the Author

Dan Shaughnessy is an award-winning columnist for the *Boston Globe* and the author of several sports books, including *The Curse of the Bambino*, a best-selling classic. Seven times Shaughnessy has been voted one of America’s top ten sports columnists by Associated Press Sports Editors and named Massachusetts Sportswriter of the Year. He has appeared on *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, *The Early Show*, CNN, *Nightline*, NPR, *Imus in the Morning*, ESPN, HBO, and many others. He lives in Newton, Massachusetts.

1 The Moon and the Stars

Finally, the planets were aligned. Truly.
A lunar eclipse, the first ever during a World Series game, gave the moon a bloody hue. And while the Boston ball club seemed to be comfortably leading in the fourth and final game of the World Series, Sox fans in Dunstable, Massachusetts, and White River Junction, Vermont, wandered out of their homes to take a peek at the big red ball in the black sky.
Finally, the Boston uniforms were not too heavy. Larger forces ran the base paths with the Olde Towne Team. The Red Sox were going to win the World Series. It had only been eighty-six years.
Eighteens and eighty-sixes were all over the place. It was Wednesday, October 27, 2004, the eighteenth anniversary of the last time the Red Sox lost a World Series in a seventh game. It was also the eighty- sixth anniversary of the last time the Sox won a World Series, when they beat the Cubs in six games in 1918 with the help of a stout left-handed pitcher named Babe Ruth. Now, eighteen years after the ’86 Series and eighty-six years after winning in ’18, the Sox were going to eighty-six the Curse of the Bambino. And a giant full moon was bleeding red as it rose in the sky above Presque Isle, Maine, and North Conway, New Hampshire. More than a thousand miles to the southwest, where the Sox were writing history, the scarlet moon was hidden by a cloud cover over Busch Stadium in St. Louis. The Sox were far from home but never alone, and the voices of the Nation could be heard in the National League park as the Bostons took their 3–0 lead into the late innings of Game 4. The game had been decided on the fourth pitch, when Johnny Damon, the Jesus action figure who played center field for the Sox, led off the night with a home run over the right field fence.

Trot Nixon added two more runs with a bases- loaded double in the third, and pitchers Derek Lowe, Bronson Arroyo, Alan Embree, and closer Keith Foulke were nailing down Boston's fourth consecutive win against the overwhelmed Cardinals. In the end, the poor Redbirds, who had defeated the Sox in the 1946 and 1967 World Series, were mere props in the runaway Red Sox story of 2004.

As the inevitable and wonderful final out neared, folks were still cynical in Great Falls, Rhode Island, and Putnam, Connecticut, and any other place where Sox fans were gathered. They'd been duped before by Boston teams who seemed to have it sewed up, only to compound decades of misery with yet another colossal fold. But this time it truly seemed different. This time the Sox were going to finish the job. After all, they'd already passed the toughest test of all. They had done what no team in the history of baseball had ever done—they had won four straight games after losing the first three games of a seven-game series. And they had done it against the hated New York Yankees, the bane of Boston's baseball existence since 1920, when Ruth was shipped to the Big Apple for one hundred thousand pieces of silver. The Sox and their fans had been paying a price ever since. Some called it the Curse of the Bambino. This was the night it was all going to end.

In Marshfield, Massachusetts, Paul and Marilee Comerford woke up their young daughters and put them in front of the television so they would always be able to say that they witnessed the event. It was the same scene in Medford, where Hank Morse roused eight-year-old Abbey with one out in the ninth. This was history, and Hank had to hold her small face in his giant hands so that the little girl's sleepy head wouldn't drop while Foulke wound up for each pitch.

Vacationing in Ireland, Steve and Karin Sheppard of Nantucket prepared a second wedding. They'd married in April of 1986 and concluded their wedding vows with "Till death do us part, or until the Red Sox win the World Series." The full moon had dropped from the sky in Iraq. It was already Thursday morning in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit when Captain Mike Tilton of Laconia, New Hampshire, sat in a morale welfare center watching the game on television with about forty-five other soldiers, all Red Sox fans, most from New England. All members of the First Infantry Division, they had gathered in the dark at 4 a.m. to watch Game 4. It connected them with home.

It was almost dawn in Spain, where Harvard softball player Pilar Adams and dozens of other American students gathered in a bar in Seville. A well-known local matador was buying drinks for the young Americans every time the Red Sox rallied, and when victory seemed assured, a couple of students from New Hampshire and central Massachusetts made plans to swim naked across the Guadalquivir River. They would have time. Classes didn't start until 8 a.m., aand the Sox were playing more quickly than usual.

At 11:40, just twenty minutes before midnight back in Boston, with one on and two out, Caaaaardinal shortstop Edgar Renteria hit a hard one- hopper straight back to the pitcher's mound. The ball seemed headed for center field, which would have raised anxiety levels throughout the Nation (tying run at the plate? Here we go again!). However, Foulke, who had been purchased in the previous off-season for exactly this kind of moment, leaped and gloved the ball over his head. He took seven or eight steps toward first— was he going to run all the way over there and make us wait even longer?— then underhanded a short toss to first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz, and the Red Sox were World Series Champions.

Finally. The seemingly interminable wait was finally over. The Curse had been reversed.

Catcher Jason Varitek jumped into the arms of Foulke—that would be the cover shot on Time magazine the week the leader of the free world was reelected. Mientkiewicz joined the happy huddle, followed by Arroyo, who had come out of the dugout. Then more teammates streamed from the bench, the bullpen, and their positions on the field. It was a giant pile of happiness and hair. Overcome, catcher-leader Varitek collapsed facedown on the infield grass while his teammates hugged and hopped around him. Within minutes, close to five thousand Red Sox road-trippers were congregated around the third base dugout, chanting "Let's Go, Red Sox!" while the players doused one another with Mount Pleasant, 2003 Brut Imperial (green bottles with orange labels). Around the globe, bottles were uncorked, church bells pealed, and car horns honked.

And in the small New England towns where the October skies are blackest, the crimson moon shone brightest. If you looked at it long enough, and maybe had some Brut Imperial coursing through your veins,

the smiling image of Babe Ruth started to appear on the full face of the scarlet sphere— like a Bambino version of Jackie Gleason's fat face on The Honeymooners.
How sweet it was. New England's midnight moon dance, beneath the cover of October skies.
Red Sox fans needed no more signs. The man in the moon was Babe Ruth.

The 2004 Red Sox were the Laughing Gashouse Gang, a band of rogues who let their hair down, drove motorcycles, drank shots of Jack Daniel's before games, wore their shirts untucked, and smeared pine tar all over their helmets. They grew beards, shaved their heads, and braided their hair into blond cornrows. Pedro Martinez looked like he had black broccoli under his hat, and Manny Ramirez's barbershop explosion could not be contained by any cap or batting helmet. They were raggedy men who proudly called themselves "idiots," but when it mattered most, they did two things no team had ever done: They did not merely lift the Curse of the Bambino, they demolished the eighty-six- year-old pox on the House of Fenway. They had Jesus playing center field, for God's sake.
Sitting in bed at home in Cambridge, watching the Sox celebrate on the Busch infield, fifty-three-year-old Mike LaVigne knew what he had to do. A house painter and assistant soccer coach at Boston College, LaVigne grew up in Groton, Massachusetts, one of five children of Dr. Richard LaVigne, chief of radiology at Burbank Hospital in Fitchburg. When the LaVigne children were young, their dad would take them to work with him on Saturdays, and they'd help him by stamping some of the x-rays. Part of the routine included breakfast at the Moran Square Diner, where Dr. LaVigne was always teased about the Red Sox by its owners, Angie and Louie. They were Italian immigrants who loved the Yankees because of Joe DiMaggio. The Yankees, naturally, were always beating the Red Sox, and Angie and Louie took delight in breaking the doc's chops. When Dr. LaVigne was on his deathbed in 1979 at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, he made a final request of his son Michael. He said that if the Red Sox ever did win a World Series, he wanted Michael to buy the best bottle of champagne he could find, take it to the diner, and say, "This is from the doc!" Thursday, October 28, 2004, was an unofficial holiday in New England. Not much work got done. Thousands of fans went to Fenway Park early in the morning and greeted their returning heroes by dawn's early light. Kids were late for school. Teachers were late, too. The entire Nation was functioning on a second consecutive week of late nights and early mornings. Warren Zevon's "I'll Sleep When I'm Dead" served as the mantra for the nocturnal masses. On the morning after the final late night, Boston newspapers were suddenly scarce. The Boston Globe had more than doubled its daily press run—from 500,000 to close to 1.2 million—but papers were still hard to find after fans hoarded stacks of the daily rags. Within twenty-four hours, copies of the 50-cent October 28 Globe were fetching $25 on eBay.
It was more than a sports story. It was bigger than the magnificent deed of a band of twenty-five baseball brothers. It was bigger than a Nation founded on hope. By the autumn of 2004, the Red Sox were America's team, almost global. Their championship run marked the end of an eighty-six-year quest that had consumed the lives of millions of people with roots in New England. The Red Sox connect generations. They remind you of your father and mother, maybe your grandfather, too. And they remind you of your sons and daughters and all that you taught them when they were young. Like green eyes, freckles, and big feet, love of the Sox is passed through bloodlines, and the shared passion can bridge gaps that come with maturity and growth. In every family there's inevitable distance—sometimes geographic, sometimes philosophical or emotional. But the Red Sox are common ground. They connect and unite.
In the second two weeks of October 2004, Sox fans connected as never before. Siblings who'd grown apart started calling one another. People who moved away after growing up in New England watched the games on TV from their homes in Colorado, Arizona, and Florida, as they remembered growing up with the mellow voice of Curt Gowdy pouring out of the porch radio into the humid summer nights. The citizens of this global Nation watched the games and thought of parents or spouses who had died. They thought about how much they missed Uncle Joe and Aunt Elizabeth.
Those who'd adopted Boston, millions of students who spent their college years in New England, shared the family secret. They carried with them a love of the Sox, along with memories of that first beer in the Fenway

bleachers. For many of them, Kenmore Square's Citgo sign, which looms beyond the infamous Green Monster, was the lighthouse that guided them back to their dorms on those first wobbly nights of undergrad freedom.

The Red Sox, a charter member of the upstart American League in 1901, have not always been worthy of the faith and loyalty of their fans. Nor have they always been good or especially popular. They were not consistently championship-driven nor particularly well run. They were at times unlucky, inept, controversial, racist, and petty. Many years, Sox ballplayers were nothing like the fuzzy, stuffed-animals come-to-life on the 2004 roster. They were not always perceived as gritty, clutch, and talented. At times they truly were idiots, and there was nothing lovable about them. But they have always been there, as indigenous to Boston as swan boats, clam chowder, Paul Revere, the L Street Brownies, Sam Adams (the man, not the beer), and the golden dome of the State House.

For Red Sox fans, it wasn't always about winning—that was the province of the Yankee fans. It was about wanting to win. Hoping they would win. The weight of the wait. Which is why the fans came back, year after year, even after so many near misses. There was something at once noble and naive about the dynamic between the fans and their team.

As decades passed, Red Sox Nation offered no asylum for those in need of instant gratification. Believing the Sox would win a World Series in 2004 required an act of faith not unlike one's commitment to a Higher Being. There were few lucid souls old enough to clearly recall the World Series win of 1918. Fans were required to believe in something they had never seen. And they did. Through the years, Red Sox fans developed a devotion to their team that was something like a religion. Fenway became a place of worship, and rooting for the Red Sox was a lifelong passion. Just as devout Catholics search for a Sunday mass schedule when they find themselves in a new town, Sox fans sought a lifeline to the Red Sox when they left New England. In the twenty-first century, the Internet tethered Sox Nation to the mother ship in Boston. Fans could read the Globe online or follow games live on MLB.com.

All of the above brings us to the Curse of the Bambino, which gave some Sox fans a handy way to explain the inexplicable. It was too deflating to simply admit that the Red Sox were not good enough to win the World Series every year. Sox fans needed a more agreeable reason for decade after decade of second-place finishes and October collapses.

It's superstition over science, a trip into the twilight zone between the on-deck circle and the batter's box. Baseball, probably more than any sport, is governed by superstition. The black cat crossing in front of the dugout guarantees bad news, and you'd better cross your fingers when the team bus passes a graveyard or you'll never get another hit. You don't wash your uniform when you're on a hitting streak, and you don't tell your pitcher that he's got a no-hitter going because the next batter is certain to get a hit. For some, the Curse was easier to accept than the reality that the Sox somehow weren't good enough to win it all.

There was no published mention of the Curse of the Bambino until I wrote a book with that title in 1990. Before the book, there were various theories regarding those near misses and outright collapses. Certainly the preposterous fold of 1978 put the wheels in motion that Sox fans were destined to suffer. In that memorable campaign, the Sox led the Yankees by fourteen games on July 20—but managed to blow the entire lead and then lost a one-game playoff when Bucky Dent hit a pop-fly, three-run homer into the net above the Green Monster. But there were other frustrations. The Sox lost the 1946 World Series to the Cardinals in seven games after being prohibitive favorites. They lost a one-game playoff to the Indians in 1948 and blew the final two games in New York in '49 to lose the pennant to the Yankees by one game. Boston's Impossible Dream summer of 1967 ended with a World Series Game 7 loss to the Cardinals. A big fold in 1974 prompted the estimable Peter Gammons of the Globe to declare that Sox fans "won't get fooled again." But the fans always came back, and in '75 they were rewarded with another World Series, only to lose again in Game 7. Then came the mind-blowing disappointment of 1986, when the Red Sox came closer to winning a World Series without actually winning than any team in baseball history. The Sox led the Mets, three games to two, and carried a 5– 3 lead into the bottom of the tenth inning at Shea Stadium. With two out and nobody

aboard, the Mets came back to win on three consecutive singles, a wild pitch, and an error-for-the-ages— a ground ball that skipped through the legs of Bill Buckner and into history.

Through all that, there was no Curse of the Bambino. In ’86, George Vecsey of the New York Times wrote a column in which he suggested that the Babe might be taking out his wrath on the Red Sox and introduced the word “curse.” But nobody cited Ruth when the Sox lost Game 7 two days after the infamous Buckner gaffe.

In 1988 I received a letter from Meg Blackstone, an editor at Dutton. Ms. Blackstone suggested a dark history of the Red Sox tracing back to the sale of Ruth. She said we could call it The Curse of the Bambino. She’d picked up the expression from her grandfather, a Dorchester house painter named Arthur Whitfield Davidson.

The book came out in 1990. That year, the Sox marched to the playoffs but were swept by the Oakland A’s as Roger Clemens imploded on the mound in Game 4, and the Curse became a handy theme for network broadcasts and headline writers across America. Over the next fourteen years, it took on a life of its own. The paperback version went through twenty- two printings and was updated three times, swelling to 248 pages from the original 207. It was a standard title on some local high school reading lists. In the final edition, released in August 2004, Red Sox general manager Theo Epstein talked about buying the original book at Coolidge Corner’s Brookline Booksmith when he was home on break from Yale.

But it was the cult of the Curse, not the book, that the Sox dealt with after 1990. The Curse became a cottage industry, spawning a musical, an award-winning HBO special, rock songs, poems, board games, ice cream flavors, cookies, bumper stickers, Web sites, and T-shirts. Before the Red Sox played the Yankees in the 1999 ALCS, it was brought up on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives when Ed Markey declared that the Curse of the Bambino was “in the same league at the Curse of Macbeth . . . In the same league as the ancient Curse of King Tut’s tomb . . . and even in the same league as the biblical Curse of Yahweh.” This was read into the Congressional Record.

The 2003 ALCS climaxed in an excruciating fashion for Red Sox fans—again to the delight of the Yankees. After a yearlong joust with the Evil Empire, the Sox led the Yankees, 5–2, in the eighth inning of the final game of the series in Yankee Stadium. It was the season-record twenty-sixth meeting of the two teams, and with Pedro Martinez on the mound, the Sox were set to win the American League pennant. But then Grady Little left Pedro on the mound too long. The Yankees rallied for three runs and ultimately won the game after midnight in the eleventh inning on Aaron Boone’s walk-off homer off Tim Wakefield. In any ranking of the most painful Sox defeats of the last quarter century, the Boone game belongs on the dubious medal stand alongside the Bucky Dent game of ’78 and the Buckner game of ’86. Perhaps because it was most recent and it came at the hands of the Yankees, many Red Sox fans elevated the 2003 loss to the gold medal platform. And the Bambino’s fingerprints were all over the place.

In 2004 the Red Sox gave up and joined the chorus. The management made Breaking the Curse part of the club’s official mission statement. An eight-page manifesto at the front of the team press guide listed the goals of the organization and concluded: “To end the Curse of the Bambino and win a World Championship for Boston, New England, and Red Sox Nation.” “The Curse always kind of had an ambiguous status,” admitted CEO Larry Lucchino. “It was always included as a fifth goal. We saw it as a fundamental obligation of ownership to do it. Tom Werner had talked about it at our initial press conference before we learned the political sensitivity surrounding the use of it. But we always knew our stewardship of the franchise would be judged by whether or not we won World Series championships, and that meant erasing and eradicating the Curse of the Bambino.” As the Curse became part of the language, diehard fans came to despise it. Gammons described it as “a silly, mindless gimmick that is as stupid as the wave.” Spurned by knowledgeable fans, it deteriorated into something for tourists. The Cheers Bar Complex took hold. It relates to the fate of the old Bull & Finch Pub, under the Hampshire House restaurant on Beacon Street. Once a wonderful saloon, the Bull & Finch became an overcrowded T-shirt shop for camera-wielding tourists after the Cheers television show made the bar famous. True Bostonians fled, never to return. The Curse had suffered similarly.

After Boone’s homer crushed the Red Sox hopes yet again, convincing a new generation of fans that there

might really be a curse, the 2003–2004 hot stove season scalded fans in both cities. Twenty-eight big league teams sat back and watched in amazement as the Red Sox and Yanks engaged in the most ferocious and competitive stockpiling of rosters in baseball history. When it was over, they'd both acquired Alex Rodriguez (though Boston had him for only a few hours), and the rivals featured the two highest payrolls in baseball, prepared to meet another twenty-six times if that's what it took to settle things.

It did. With photos of Babe Ruth plastered in and around both ballparks, the Sox and Yanks battled again in 2004. A bloody, bench-clearing brawl at Fenway in late July furnished a photo op for the ages (Varitek stuffing his catcher's mitt into the handsome face of Rodriguez), then Pedro issued a late September, midnight confession in which he admitted the Yankees were his "daddy." You simply could not make up this stuff.

In an American League Championship Series that trumped the World Series, the Red Sox came back from a 3–0 series deficit to defeat the Yankees in the sacred House That Ruth Built. The dramatic comeback started on October 17, a few hours after the death of Ray Boone. Boone was the grandfather of Aaron Boone and a Red Sox scout for forty-four years. He'd been traded for Tito Francona (father of the Red Sox manager) in 1958, and he'd signed Curt Schilling for the Sox in 1986. He lived long enough to see his grandson bump the Sox out of the World Series, but he died the day his team kick-started the greatest comeback in sports history. Eighty-one years old, like so many others, Ray Boone died without seeing the Sox win it all in his lifetime.

The Red Sox comeback against the Yankees was better than the World Series. Epstein said, "It gave us a collective, cathartic exhale. The region dumped all its collective baggage at once." Finally, the Big Apple was lodged in the throats of the men wearing pinstripes. This time it was the gluttonous Yankees who choked.

Exactly one week later, in St. Louis, the Red Sox won the World Series. Curse clues were all over the finale. The Sox won on the eighty-fourth birthday of Nanette Fabray (Fenway folklore holds that Harry Frazee, the Sox owner who sold Ruth, subsequently made a killing on the musical No, No, Nanette), and the last ball in play was hit by a batter wearing Ruth's no. 3. The Cardinals had been swept only one other time in a World Series: in that one, Babe Ruth hit three homers in Game 4.

Bruce Hurst weighed in from retirement. Hurst had been the man who almost single-handedly won the 1986 World Series for Boston. He beat the Mets, 1–0, in Game 1, just as Ruth, another Sox lefty, had beaten the Cubs in Game 1 in 1918. Among Sox left-handed pitchers, Ruth and Hurst rank fifth and sixth respectively in career victories. Ruth won eighty-nine, Hurst eighty-eight. And "Bruce Hurst" is an anagram for "B. Ruth Curse." Hurst's mom, Beth, once the owner of a Ben Franklin–Ace Hardware store in St. George, Utah, died at the age of eighty-five in December of 2003. Hurst watched the game with his family in Phoenix. "I'd never seen so many fans in prayer position," he noticed. When it was over, Mr. B. Ruth Curse said, "I'm pretty sure, knowing my mom, that she would have gone up and put her arm around Babe and said, 'Let's get this over with.'" In the early moments after Game 4 in St. Louis, Steve and Karin Sheppard—the Nantucket couple who had sworn "Till death do us part, or until the Red Sox win the World Series"—got a call from Steve's mom: "I assume you'll be sleeping in separate beds tonight." They made plans to remarry. Hopefully in Fenway Park in 2005.

In Tikrit, Iraq, it was 6:40 a.m. on Thursday when Foulke got the final out. Captain Tilton resisted the urge to fire his weapon into the Iraqi sky. Instead, he thought of his New Hampshire home.

"I've always said that no matter how it happened, I'd make my way to Boston for the World Series," he said a few days later. "It was a little tough. You definitely wanted to be home to share it with the people you shared all the heartbreaks with. It added to the homesickness, but it sure made the month of October go by quickly. It was something we'd all been waiting for a long time. Even though we weren't with our families or friends from back home, it was good to be with a group of people from New England, sharing the moment." In the corridor outside the visitor's clubhouse at Busch Stadium after the win, Sox owner John Henry brushed champagne from his brown raincoat and said, "This is like an alternate reality. All of our fans waited their entire lives for this." Inside the clubhouse, Pedro looked into a television camera and said, "A lot

of people, if they die now, are gonna die in peace." After work on Thursday, Mike LaVigne went to Burton's Liquors in Newton and ponied up something north of $100 for a vintage bottle of Veuve Clicquot. He drove to Fitchburg with his wife, Lisa White. He wasn't sure if the place still existed, but when he turned on to Myrtle Avenue just after darkness descended, the Moran Square Diner was there—still standing but closed for the night. He set the bottle on the steps with a note: "From the Doc! Richard LaVigne." Similar rituals were carried out across New England. Cemeteries were favorite sites of the faithful. A Boston policeman drove to central Massachusetts to lay a red rose on his parents' tombstone. Roger Altman, former deputy secretary of the Treasury under Bill Clinton, had the front page of the New York Times laminated, then went to his mother's gravesite at Walnut Hill in South Brookline and buried it near her eternal resting place. She'd died at the age of ninety-four a month after the 2003 playoffs, and according to her son, "Her entire existence revolved around the Red Sox." Phone calls were made to friends and relatives. Sox fans overloaded the Internet with messages of joy and remembrance.

In the end, the Red Sox really are about life and death.

Reversing the Curse triggered the largest celebration in the entire history of the City of Boston when an estimated 3.2 million fans turned out for a victory parade on Saturday, October 30. It changed the way New Englanders felt about themselves and the Red Sox. Varitek told the happy fans, "I feel really relieved, but so proud. All the years that people have suffered. Every Red Sox fan from now on can walk into Yankee Stadium with their head up." Some people worried that older fans might give up and die when the Sox finally won, but there was no spike in the obituary section of the Globe in the days after the sweep of the Cardinals. The Nation wondered if fans might feel empty or aimless, but none of that happened. People were just happy. Satisfied. Fans found nothing disappointing about the end of the quest. They bought up every piece of Red Sox garb and memorabilia they could find. You could buy Red Sox championship dog bones at Modell's in Medford. It seemed that every kid in New England suddenly knew how to spell Mientkiewicz. The case will be made between these covers that the 2004 Boston baseball season was the most remarkable campaign in the history of American team sports. Crushed by the Yankees in the final minutes of their 2003 season, the Sox rededicated themselves to winning the World Series a year later. The Sox management did its job by acquiring Schilling and Foulke—before losing A-Rod in the final days of the front office's ferocious off- season war with the Yankees. The 2004 Sox frustrated their fans by treading water for more than three months before Epstein—in the boldest move since the selling of Babe Ruth —rocked Red Sox Nation by trading popular but unhappy Nomar Garciaparra at the end of July. From that point on, the Sox played like champions, demonstrating the camaraderie and selflessness that served them well in their darkest hours, when all seemed lost in the Yankee series.

In the final eleven days of October, the 2004 Red Sox were on a roll like no baseball team in history. They could have kept playing the Yankees and Cardinals into December without ever losing or even falling behind in a game. This time the Red Sox finally had the talent and the clubhouse karma, and the Curse of the Bambino was no match.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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