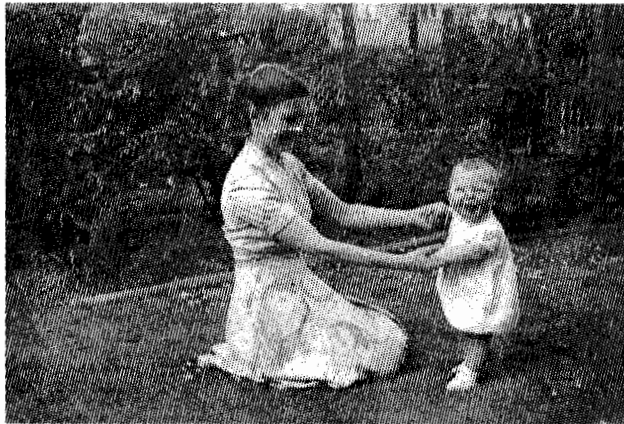


GREATEST HITS 262

THE ZINE WITH SOUL



And how has 2003 been for you so far? The chances are, if you are any kind of friend of mine, the answer is, "shite". Just about everyone I know has been having a bad time of it. Richard, who hated not to be best at anything, once again outdid everyone else I knew, by dying.

Richard's funeral was the first that I had ever been to. I'm not sure what that signifies. Neither have I ever broken a bone or bought a condom, but I doubt that these mean much in the grand scheme of things. Alan Parr has never been inside a betting shop. (I am, I wish to point out, completely unaware of Alan Parr's bone strength, of his funeral attendance record or his condom-buying proclivities — the example given is for illustrative purposes only).

Richard's funeral was on March 17th. I got to The Saracen's Head at about 1.30 to find Keith Loveys drinking something non-alcoholic. Despite this, and the fact that he was wearing a tie, I still recognized him.

Greg and Debbie Hawes arrived shortly after, followed by Paul and Anne McGivern. Somewhat to my surprise, Stephen Agar appeared, and then I had to introduce him to most of those present, which shows how the old hard core pre-dated even the now hobby relic Stephen Agar. Adrien Baird, Geoff Tonks and Pete Cousins appeared, after which Barbi Burke's daughter (now about the age that Barbi was when I first met her, I think) came in to ask us to make our way up the hill to the crematorium, so that we did not

walk past the house when the hearse was there.

With immaculate timing, Andy Holborn walked through the pub door just as we were all leaving.

On reaching the crematorium a few familiar faces were already present and several more appeared later. Steve Doubleday, sporting a snazzy new flat-top haircut, Paul and Karen Simpkins (Paul now a distinguished white-haired man-about-town, Karen as beautiful as ever), Glyn Palmer and Colin Harrison. And, striding up the hill, ignoring modern conveniences like the internal combustion engine, was John Piggott. The weather, defying the norm for funerals and March, was absolutely glorious, shirt-sleeved stuff.

Members of the family, friends from the pub and other assorted acquaintances ensured a good attendance. The hearse was magnificence itself, right down to the black horses.

The funeral was a humanist service, with reminiscences from Colin Harrison and Stephen Walsh, whom I had not met for nigh-on 30 years, when Richard had invited me along to his home game in Notting Hill (three other players in that game were Tony



This is **Greatest Hits 262** from Pete Birks, Top Flat, 4 Lewisham Hill, Lewisham, London SE13 7EJ. It costs £1 in the UK, more abroad.



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Circulation is now around 62 and gradually decreasing.

GH 263 will probably be out mid-August and the **DEADLINE** for **GH 263** is mid-July 2003

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EDITORIALpage 1
Everything else is fairly random....

Holden, writer of one of the best poker books ever, Amada Holden, one of the best British librettists in the past 100 years, and the guy who founded the magazine *Loot*. Compared with them, I guess Richard and I must be classed as failures..).

The music consisted of a couple of Schuman's *lieder* (one of them better known in the UK as *Who Is Sylvia*) and ended with Beethoven's Ninth, the fourth movement. I suspect that Richard would have preferred the end of the fourth movement rather than the beginning, but I guess that the timing of that in crematoria would be a little bit difficult.

I said to Paul McGivern afterwards that I only had a couple of lumps in the throat (or, to be accurate, one lump, two times). The service was full to overflowing, with well over 100 people present. Another old bridge partner of Richard's, Dick Whittington, was there, as was the irrepressible Vic, famed for his "I'm going to bid 3NT because, even though it's a lousy contract, I have a better chance of making it than you have of making the 95% Four Hearts".

Keith Thomasson also came to pay his respects, which I thought was very nice. And, once again, I failed to recognize him. Why this is, I do not know. Perhaps I just never meet him in circumstances when I expect him to be Keith Thomasson, if you see what I mean.

Afterwards we repaired to the back of the Saracen's, where a feast had been laid out. Andy Holborn got past his third pint and Glyn started to resemble that old mumbling reminiscer on *The Fast Show*, where only about one word in 50 is recognizable.

I had a nice chat with Paul and

Karen, who now have "a property in France near Bordeaux" (as Paul termed it) or "a trailer home" as Karen called it. Sounded quite nice. Also available for rent, said Paul, never missing a chance to network.

I wish that I could have stayed longer, but I was tiring (possibly in both senses of the word). And it was a very sad occasion, not just because of Richard's death, but because, well, basically, that was the end of the hobby as far as I was concerned. Greg and Ron and Glyn and Adrien and Paul and Steve and Andy and John, not to mention Dave Crichton, Steve Jones, Geoff Tonks, Doug Wakefield (already never seen these days), The Saracen's Head, 46 Whielden Street, Dominic, Pippa, Richard's sisters Mary and Barbi, all of them, I may never see again.

And much of my past was laid to rest at Richard's funeral. I know that Greg muttered something about meetings again, but I have a feeling that it won't happen.

BUT IT WAS A BLOODY FINE DAY.

One feels that an obituary, or a personal reminiscence, would be in order, but it would just be too long. Hell, I met Richard in 1972. Perhaps the rundown of *GH* can consist of a history of *Dolchstoss*, which would inexorably be a history of my own involvement (or lack of it in later years) in the hobby as well. OK, there would be a five-year hiatus, when *Dolchstoss* was not published, but that would be a mere aside. I guess that in "hobby history" terms, that is what has been leading up to. I still have every copy of *Dolchstoss* from issue 12 or so on, in a filing cabinet in this room. The "hobby history" for that would

be a giant project, perhaps even a year an issue. But that, I think, could be my final opus to the hobby as well. Because in the end, I guess we all get a little bit tired.

But, to more cheerful matters.

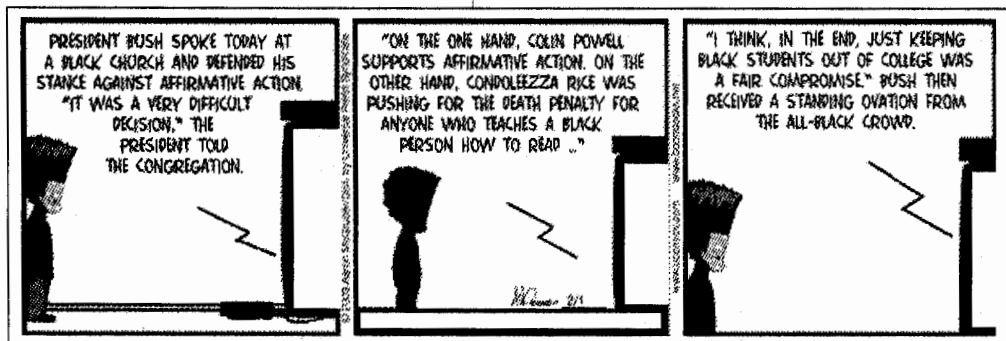
Since the start of the year I have been to Brussels on a company trip, and to Sky studios in west London (darkest Osterley, in fact) to see Jimmy White fluke his way to £150,000 in a poker tournament. That this was his biggest win at anything for many many years was not lost on us watching in the studio. In my drinking days I would have blagged a seat in the stretch limo that took Jimmy, Joe Beevers, Barny Boatman, Roy Brindley, John Duthie and Jesse May back to the Vic on Edgware Road. Apparently Jimmy spent a lot of money in the bar that Friday night...

But, I'm older now. I got in a courtesy car and got myself dropped off at Victoria. It's been a while since I've waited for a night bus at 1.30am at Victoria. I had forgotten what detritus of human society you came across there.

One thing puzzles me. The 36 bus from Victoria to Lewisham takes about an hour and 15 minutes. But the Night 36 only takes half an hour. So, I ask myself, *why don't they run the Night 36 bus during the day?*

And, speaking of faster route times, we now have the congestion charge. I was a fan of it before it was introduced and I'm a fan of it now. A couple of weeks ago I hopped on a bus at Oxford Circus at 5pm. This got me to Charing Cross in about 8 minutes. Before the congestion charge, it could take half an hour. Well, this was academic, because you never bothered to get on it before the congestion charge was introduced. Walking was far quicker.

Some days the roads seem fuller than others, but in general, the traffic flows far more smoothly. (Well, that I can use the verb "flows" rather than the previously more



accurate “judders” is testament to this.)

My trip to Brussels was part of Informa’s “investing in people” initiative, or something like that. Anyway, we editors were press-ganged into a three-day trip to Brussels — out Wednesday morning, back Friday lunchtime — at the end of February. Wednesday afternoon and Thursday were, believe it or not, *bloody hard work*. Even more surprisingly, the whole thing was actually useful. First, you got to talk to people from the company that you hadn’t really talked to before. Second, some of the exercises *actually achieved something*. OK, some of them didn’t, and some of the people there were, well, basically a waste of any kind of space that you care to define, but on the whole the affair was rewarding.

I was also converted to the usefulness of psychometric testing. As you may recall, it once got to the stage that I refused to complete one of these things at a job interview, since the net result was always “well, we can’t employ you after looking at this”. And, I have no doubt, Informa wouldn’t have employed me either. But they inherited me, so they didn’t have much choice.

These psychometric tests categorize you as either a D, an I, an S or a C. You can be mainly a D with C characteristics, and so on. You can also have a different self-image from “projected image” from “what you are really like”.

As I told Emma Corbett (our HR boss) before I took the test, I went off the scale on the D side, in self-image, projected image and in “what I am really like”.

“Ds” are dominant. “I’s” are inspiring. “S’s” are supportive and “C’s” are compliant (there are other words that the initials stand for, but those are the ones that I remember). It came as little surprise to me that most of the people in Informa are supportive ‘S’s. Quite a few of the marketing people were inspiring ‘I’s and a lot of the people whom I have never understood were compliant ‘C’s. Only five



of the 41 were Ds, and one of those wasn’t really a D, which left four of us. So, it’s true, I really am different from most other people (and a confirmed social disaster). I got on with the other Ds brilliantly. It was like finding soulmates. It’s just the rest of the world that I can’t cope with and which can’t cope with me.

But, basically, we Ds can never get jobs at interviews. Oh yes, there were two other Ds besides we four. One was the managing director of the division, and the other one was the publisher. The problem with Ds is, *they are not team players*. Now, have any of you ever seen an advertisement for a job that says “team players need not apply”? I doubt it. Ds also welcome confrontation as a means to an end. This is why Cs drive us mad because, like the dinosaur in *Toy Story*, they do anything to *avoid* confrontation. And ‘I’s always come across to us as fake. (By the way, ‘I’s are also notorious for missing appointments or being late for them *and then laughing about it*. This is also guaranteed to send Ds spare.)

So, I learnt a lot from that session. But my favourite quote came from one of the other Ds at our (rather empty) table. The girl who was nominally a D, but we knew was really more of an S, suggested when we were heatedly discussing how to approach a problem: “Shall we have a vote on it?”. James (a D through and through) said “there is no place for democracy in D-Land”.

Priceless.

We ate out at a couple of restaurants. One was nice but we got rather slow service. Apparently Informa had forgotten to tip when we were last there. The second, Le Roy, on the grand square, is a restaurant

TO AVOID AT ALL COSTS. The food was poor. Not horrible, but just bad. Solid butter, cheap white bread, chicken in a mass-produced sauce, that kind of thing.

On the free Friday morning I made my way to the museum of modern art where, after half an hour, I bumped into Graham and Rasaad, who work with me. None of the other editorial staff put in an appearance. We were unsurprised.

It’s a very impressive museum, built downwards in a spiral around an open space that goes seven storeys down. Obviously the Magrittes and the Delvaux were the most popular (plus the single Dali, *The Temptation of St Anthony*, which the museum had almost apologetically tucked away). But there was some sensational modern stuff as well. Pal Bury’s work was very interesting. I also liked Albert Crommelynck’s self-portrait with his family (very disturbing) and, from earlier times, James Ensor’s “Russian Music”. The only unfortunate thing was that, once again, one morning was just not enough time.

I drove myself to Brian Creese’s 50th birthday party in darkest Earlsfield, meeting Ken Bain for the first time in many years. John Dodds was there for a short while, but had to return early to write out more cheques for the army. Richard Bairstow appeared and, quite frighteningly, *we had a conversation about working out*. Richard then admitted that, although he was still freelance, he was a bit more free and a bit less lance at the moment. Times are hard for us guys hitting the 50-arena.

John Harrington was also there and Geoff popped down from Nottingham, so we talked about his biking back from Africa.



Curiously, the music did not appeal much, neither to me nor Johnny H. I have to assume that the three-year age gap, now so nominally irrelevant that I had forgotten that it existed, still had some relevance for choice in music. Indeed, Brian had some photos of him stuck on the wall and these included "the hairy years". Brian, quite clearly, was one of the last real children of the 1960s when it came to music. He went to college as the 60s were closing and graduated when the heights of sophistication were Yes, Genesis, ELO, ELP and Focus. I went to university in 1973 when Brian was graduating. By the time I finished at Kent in 1979, all these bands were about as dead as dinosaurs.

In May I managed to squeeze in a week in Las Vegas, playing in the media charity tournament at Binion's and meeting what seemed to be the entire London poker-playing scene in exile. Once again I won at the \$4-\$8, although I didn't win as much as I would expect to, given the number of hours I played. There were two rea-

sons for this. One was that on the last night I just played to enjoy myself, and I lost \$100, *but I had a bloody good time doing it.* Sometimes you just have to relax. (In fact, even in this session, I only lost because I hit a bad beat on the biggest pot of the night). I was also giving players too much credit, placing them with some of the \$2-\$4-level skills on Paradise. They weren't that good. As Sklansky points out, giving players too much credit is as big a mistake as is underestimating them, and I suffered accordingly. Net profit for the week still \$280 though.

On the way back, I actually talked to someone on the plane from JFK to Heathrow. Well, she had the window seat and I had taken some Night Nurse, so I said "if you want to get out for a walk, hit me as hard as you like. I'm used to it". Anyway, her name was Margaret and she was on her way to an aunt's funeral in Kent. She also managed to get to sleep. It's an odd thing, isn't it, since I feel that sleeping with someone is, in some

ways, a more 'intimate' act than having sex with them, since it implies a great deal of trust. Yet it's something that perfect strangers do together on a plane quite often. Odd.

More on the poker pages.

And I think that's about it on the Birks outings front for the entire year so far. Work has been horrendously busy (which is one reason that **GH** is late). While typing this, I still have a Powerpoint presentation to put together not looking forward to this at all -- why did I agree to it?), a column to write for *Enterprise Risk* and something to think up for *Insurance Day*. And this is all after four hours' work this morning laying out *European Insurance Market*.

Oh yes, that was one other outing. I had a day at Lloyd's hearing all about the Russian Insurance Market, and an evening in Match Bar, one of those hip bar like places that I would never normally walk into.

In other words, this doesn't leave much room for inspiration to produce **GH**, for which I apologize.

PISSED FOR A POUND: A VENTURE INTO THE HEART OF DARKNESS IN PORTUGAL

Reprinted from *Blackmail* 14, 1983.

WRITTEN BY
MIKE WOODHOUSE

It hadn't been exactly a quiet week. A zine to produce in four days, a birthday to celebrate (mine, but I ain't counting any more), a cocktail party to get to in, for chrissake, a suit, and a trip to Portugal to undertake.

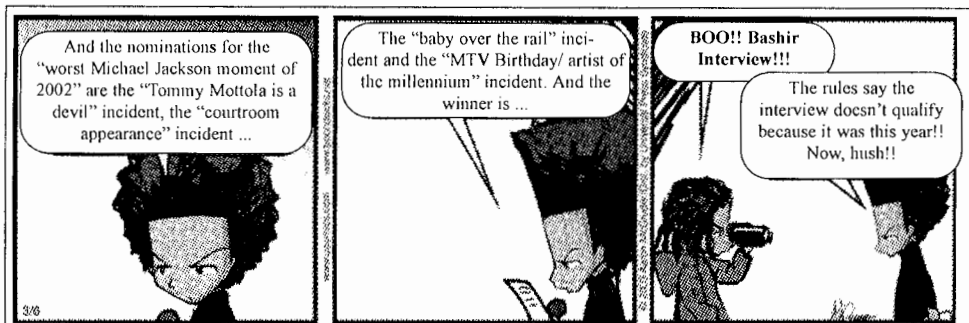
On the Thursday I awoke, somewhat bemused to find myself on Birks' sofa. A little later I was able to recall having travelled there from the Lamb with Allaway et al. Not "al", actually, but Marie; you understand? Some time later, when all had roused themselves, we moved at a sedate pace towards the Malt & Hops, a fine house on the Caledonian Road, just around the corner from St Pancras where our departure for Luton was scheduled. Three or four pints of Marston's Pedigree later) after having been joined by Messrs Dolton, Thorby,

Tringham et al (No al wasn't there) I now remember), the evil Gamble arrived) bidding me a Happy Birthday. I'd completely forgotten about it, and a couple of pints later, I'd forgotten again, not to remember for some few days.

To Luton, a meeting with Keith Black, the only member of the party I didn't know, a few vodkas in the Departure lounge, and so onto the plane, a Boeing 737, for those of a mind to know such things. Thirty miniature bottles of vodka (about 2½ measures, I reckon)

and a bottle of duty-free Wyborowa., and we set down in Lisbon, to be swiftly shepherded to a waiting Thomson's coach. Wyborowa? Vodka!

It was on the coach that disaster set in. Colin and I, having decided that the coach trip was too long to go without a drink, had a nip or two of the old D-F's, with the inevitable results. I am totally unable to recall the last three hours of the day, and calculations seem to indicate about a litre of vodka was responsible.



Of course, waking up in the morning was tricky. I didn't get up until about 9 o'clock and nearly missed breakfast. Colin and I, feeling brisk exercise was required, set off to find the golf course, while everyone else, being aware, as we were not, that a 'briefing session' was to be held at 10, went there, leaving us wandering about a sandy peninsular going up to natives on building sites asking "Campo do Golf?" to little avail. We, hot and bothered, eventually, found the course, though having to walk another half-mile in blazing 80-degree sunshine to get to the clubhouse seemed an unnecessary hardship.

Green fees plus hire of clubs was remarkably reasonable 600 'scuds including a trolley — about £4.80 less now the Portuguese have devalued the 'scud — I very much doubt you'd find as cheap in GB. The clubs were standard hire jobs — lousy, and I blame them, the heat and the sand traps (everything not actually recognizably fairway was light, white, powdery sand, making a white ball extremely difficult to pick out), for my miserable performance. The 11th hole was where the excesses of the previous day caught up to me, and I had to jack it in. The first part of the penance was done.

Of course, when we arrived back at the hotel (not as easy as it sounds — remember, we had expected to be accompanied) and we were still unclear as to exactly what the hotel was called, let alone where it was) everyone was peeved that we hadn't waited for them -we'd thought they were going without us! Pete had found a supermarket making a late lunch possible. We were then reminded that we'd put our names down for a football match...

The match, played by me, Allaway, Dolton, Gamble and a lot of Swedes against a bunch of Northerners who evidently knew what they were doing, was almost a disaster. At half-time I discovered that the winners in the 15 minutes each-way game would play again) and at 1-1) I started to get worried. So I put the opposition's quickest player away with a marvel-



lous through ball and gamely chased after him, deciding, at the last moment to make an effort, shouting a lively 'Boo!' as he shot. Fortunately he still scored. Then I made a dreadful clearance, straight to the feet of a Swede, who scored. In half an hour's play, I did those two things and ended up knackered. We gratefully accepted a 4-2 defeat, at which Allaway was particularly incensed, feeling we should have won!

Every evening, except I think Wednesdays, an organist played in the hotel bar from 10pm till midnight, and in true Butlin's style, the happy holidaymakers from such exotic places as Oldham and Swindon cheerfully bellowed out "Pack Up Your Troubles", "It's a Long Way To Tipperary", and other such classics, pausing only to do their standard two renditions of the Birdie Song. Shouts from the drunken occupants of the barstools of "Do you know any Joy Division?" were met with total indifference. Frankly, by the end of the holiday I was ready to do the geezer in. Even when I asked him for Beatles numbers, all I got were "Yesterday" and "Something". Later most evenings, a more interesting singalong session would get going, usually led by a Welshman. Gamble and I once or twice tried to teach them a few Dr Hook songs, but to little avail.

Birks and Gamble must have covered every square inch of the golf course by the start of the second week losing no few balls and returning every, afternoon with increasingly sunburned faces and forearms, not to mention the back of the neck. Well, it's hardly surprising, really. The amount of time one spends wandering around the sand dunes looking for one's ball is very conducive to sunburn. By the time we came home, a shirtless Colin was a

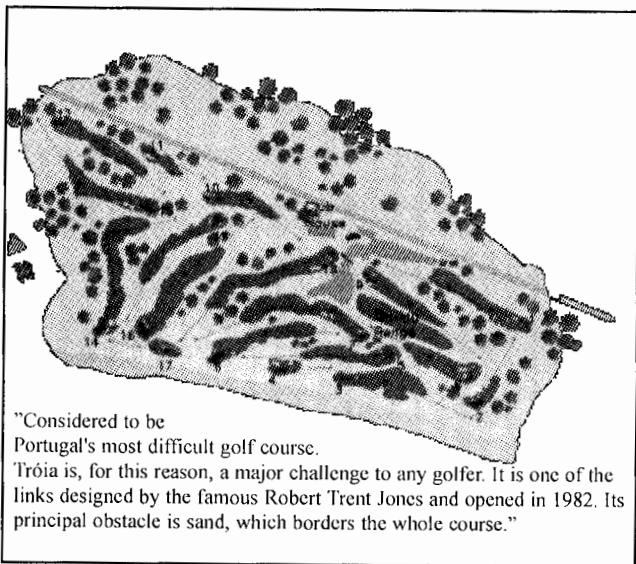
thing of wonder indeed; prompting calls of 'take yer vest off and get some sun on the rest of yer'.

Frankly, I can't remember much happening of any great pith of moment during the week; I didn't decide to try to get a suntan until an anticyclone had settled itself over Portugal, bringing 90-100% cloud cover with it, so I was easily mistaken for someone about to set off on holiday when we returned! A word or two must be made about the amazing Keith Black, however. Keith was possibly unsuited for the type of holiday the rest of us had in mind. When he suggested a swim (something I got quite seriously into after I discovered that (a) it was free to use an Olympic pool; and (b) there were a few unfettered gazabos to be spotted), I agreed readily. An hour later, as I was about to start thinking about ambling along to the pool, Keith reappeared, demanding to know where I'd got to. I hadn't thought that when he said five minutes he actually meant it — after all, we were on holiday and allowed to take our time.

Keith, along with Birks, was the only member of the party to get further than the other side of the estuary, going as far as Lisbon twice.

The hotel was built, with another similar close by, on the northernmost tip of a peninsular about 50 miles south of Lisbon, with the city of Setubal across the estuary. To drive to Setubal took about an hour, but there was a ferry service which ran every 30 minutes or so. I think we went over to the town to eat four or five times, but really all our meals should have been eaten over there. The food was, without exception, better and cheaper (about £4 for a meal of, say clams with pork, coffee, and large quantities of wine was very reasonable), than that offered on the resort site itself. Laziness was a major factor in our occasional reluctance to





"Considered to be Portugal's most difficult golf course. Tróia is, for this reason, a major challenge to any golfer. It is one of the links designed by the famous Robert Trent Jones and opened in 1982. Its principal obstacle is sand, which borders the whole course."

head for the ferry point, I think; certainly as far as I was concerned.

Drink was variable in price: in the hotel a bottle of beer, which by the way tasted worse than Barbican, with a similar lack of effect, was about 56p, whereas in the open-air bar down the road it could be had for 20p! Spirits were a better bet for the most part — a large brandy (about 2 to 2½ measures) costing 50p in the hotel, although imported spirits were very expensive. Cocktails were sampled from time to time, with the connivance of one of the favoured barmen, Jorge, who was on duty with the other real favourite, José (though we only learnt this on the last night, and had christened him Bernie because of his remarkable resemblance to a youthful Bernie Winters, to the poor chap's constant bewilderment). Pete may have discovered a new one: Brandy (a triple), with Creme de Cacao (ditto), topped up with Coke. Not sure if it was original, we christened it the Black Man's Willy ("And make mine a long one?") just to be sure. I have to confess at this point to having done a lot of drinking on this holiday, although not as much, and with less pleasure, as in Dublin last year. Oh, the other barman whose attentions were often sought was one Balthazar Fino Nobre, called Knob-rot for short (by us, anyway...). This was the man I tried to persuade to watch, the Cup Final when it was shown live, telling him that Tottenham were very good, as was English football in general. Me and my big mouth. Knobrot watched about 20 minutes and wandered off in disgust, and I can't say I

blame him. I suppose he supported Sporting Lisbon or something.

By the way, the reason this is being written as a series of disjointed paragraphs on different aspects of the trip is that, despite taking copious notes throughout, I have lost them, and am working purely from a (faulty) memory.

Overall impressions then. The hotel was very good, the rooms well-appointed and com-

fortable, and the facilities, although sometimes rather distant, were generally good. It was strange to compare the lush green grass immediately surrounding the hotels and apartment blocks with the sandy wasteland that was to be found wherever the sprinklers did not reach. I hope the foundations are good — you know what happened to the man who built his hotel on sandy ground, and these were 14-storey hotels!

The resort operators took advantage of the isolation of the development and charged over the odds in their restaurants, but using these instead of taking the ferry was entirely at the visitor's discretion, so there can't really be complaints. The holiday was fairly cheap — even drinking to a large extent in the bar, I only spent about £200 over the 11 days, less than in a week in Dublin last year. It wasn't the sort of place you would choose if you were planning on seeing the sights, but for someone of sedentary character, like myself, who is quite happy to sit around reading, it was fine. The main complaint I have is about the other people there, many of whom were quite simply drongos of the first order, who

had evidently gained promotion from the Butlins league. Salesmen for open-cast mining equipment and the like, if you get my drift. (No, honestly, there was such a guy there - no one would dream up.)

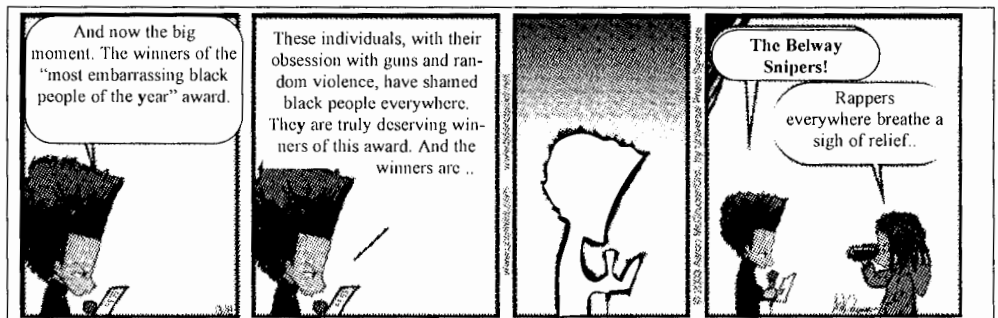
So, I had a good time on balance, but I wouldn't want to go there in a group again, although I would consider an intimate holiday-a-deux to be a more viable idea — with less emphasis placed on the social side and mixing with the other guests it would have been very pleasant. I could have done without the Swedish mentally handicapped crowd that appeared halfway through as well...

If Birks sets up another Counter-EuroCon next year, I should be interested in going, particularly if it were to involve drinkable beer (Dublin please?)

Reading that a week later, I am amazed at the amount of the story that hasn't been told, but then I have to have some memories to myself, don't I?

Anyway, Birks will probably write a small novel about the trip, so the record will be adequately complete. I need a drink.

Well, it being 20 years later, I can hardly be expected to remember that much, can I? I do recall Colin's paralytic refusal to hand over his passport when we arrived at the "Aparthotel". And I remember the golf course, which was long and hot and had one hole which could politely be described as impossible, having more in common with one of the crazy golf holes (imagine a bunker with a 10-foot cliff and a green five-feet from front to back, situated just behind it, and you get some idea of what I mean). But, an entertaining reminiscence, although what about Thorby! Now, there was a star!



And now the big moment. The winners of the "most embarrassing black people of the year" award.

These individuals, with their obsession with guns and random violence, have shamed black people everywhere. They are truly deserving winners of this award. And the winners are ..

The Belway Snipers!

Rappers everywhere breathe a sigh of relief..

My only venture into the world of face-to-face poker these days consists of the Saturday night trek through south London to Tooting for a no-limit tournament. This is a “friendly” game, although the quality of play has gone up so much in the past couple of years that “friendly” is something of a movable feast.

Clearly I am at something of a disadvantage. I only play limit poker as a rule and I play very little face-to-face, so I don't expect to end up a winner come December. However, it's a useful way to give the car a spin once a week, and I keep telling myself that I need to get out more. So I treat it as a social occasion, well worth the average £20 that it costs me.

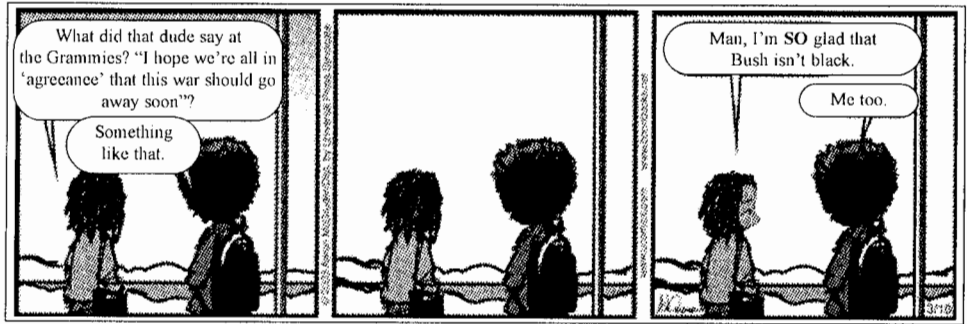
Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I actually won the bloody thing at the beginning of April. Very little change in my style of play, but one stroke of luck (Q-10 suited beating KK) at the right time set me up nicely.

Actually, my record at no-limit in tournaments online isn't that bad either. My best performance by a mile recently was the 7th out of 400-odd in the freeroll for the trip to the Irish Open. But, despite some people clearly being winners in the long run, the volatility looks so high to me that I prefer to stick to my limit games.

Not that this went too well in April, with a loss of £20 online luckily being compensated by tournament wins at Tooting and some good performances in low-limit tournaments on PokerStars.

Clearly a number of the better players on Paradise now “have my number”, which will make winning tougher. However, I am not downhearted. I expected this after about three months of playing and the performance of £20 down compares very highly with the loss of £500 within three weeks at the same stage of my previous \$2-\$4 playing experience!

I'm a better player now than I was then, although this has also meant



that I am somewhat tighter! My fear is that I will start getting a “tight” image and this will mean that I will no longer get paid off when I do have a winning hand.

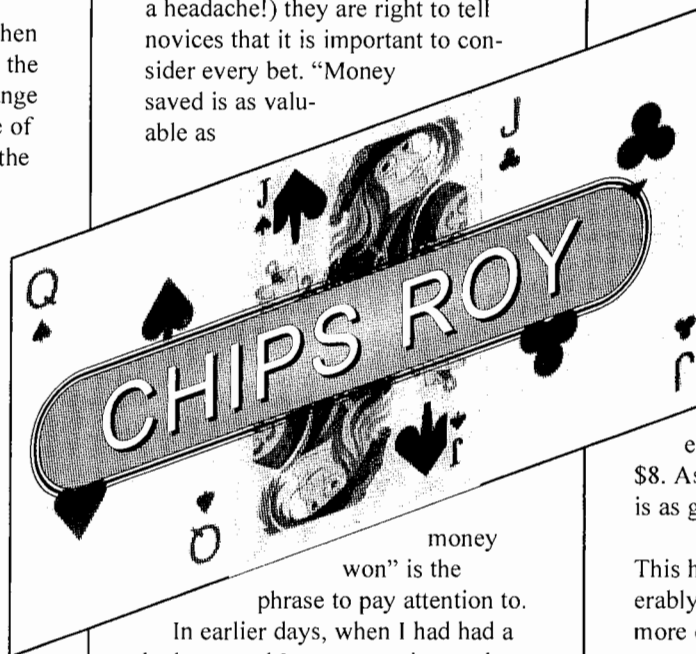
Although the pros can pay too much attention to “focus” (trying to focus all the time reduces the length of time that you can play before you get a headache!) they are right to tell novices that it is important to consider every bet. “Money saved is as valuable as

This time last year, I would have sighed, thought to myself “hell, I'm having a bad night”, and would have called. I would then check the river (assuming another inconsequential card) and I would call the other guy's bet, hoping that he will turn over QJ or QK. But, of course, he doesn't. He has a pair of sixes, or something like that. Top pair with a good kicker is worth jackshit when a reasonable player flat-calls on an ostensibly rubbish flop and then raises on the turn after a rag card appears.

These days, I will still bet on the turn (he might have called me with KQ), but as soon as the raise goes in, I fold. BUT, if the player is a VERY good player, I might reraise back! Normally, however, I fold, and I save myself \$8. As I now say to myself. \$8 saved is as good as \$8 won.

This has resulted in me losing considerably less during “a bad night”. And, more often, my “comeback” (which can appear with sudden rapidity after three hours of crap cards) period ends up putting me \$20 in front, rather than was the case last year, when it would merely bring me back from \$250 down to \$20 down.

I have also closely analyzed a large number of “marginal” hands, which have produced some odd results. The most curious is that A-10 suited, which one would imagine was a hand that would like lots of callers (and would therefore merit a flat-call rather than a raise), does MUCH better when you raise with it than when you flat-call. The same holds for A-x suited all the way down to A-2 (although this is a dog either way!).



money won” is the phrase to pay attention to.

In earlier days, when I had had a bad run, and I got some nice cards pre-flop and what looked like a nice flop, I would stay right to the end, even though common sense dictated that someone had, once again, lucked out on me. For example:

Me: ♣A ♣Q (in small blind: Two callers: I raise and am called twice)
Flop comes ♦Q ♥6 ♠2

This is about as good a flop as I can expect. I bet (keeping “control of the hand” is vital once you get to reasonable levels). The first player (a competent kind of guy) calls and the other guy folds. The next card is ♣3. I bet again. The other player raises. What should I do?



Dear Pete,

THEO CLARKE

Thanks for 261. Much enjoyed... as usual.

The stamp duty tiers worked in our favour when we negotiated to buy the house in Ipswich to which we plan to move. We pushed the price down to £245,000, using that as one of the levers. Now we have to sell Choumert Road and as I type our agent is showing a prospect the floor below me.

I have a cassette of music composed and performed by Mike Woodhouse. I like it enough to play it as often as most other material on my shelves. Mike dismissed it as a form of musak but I enjoy its noodly form.

JONATHAN PALFREY

Thanks for letting me know (*about Richard's death*). I don't think there's anyone else who would have bothered to tell me. I'm too remote from the scene these days; and Bron has no reason to think of me at this time. I'm sorry for her and for his children, though I never met them. Mostly I'm sorry for Richard, who probably had a very unpleasant last few months; but he's now achieved the final cure for all ills.

I first met Richard and yourself at Eurocon 1977, after corresponding for a while. I started getting Dolchstoss in the second half of 1975, the year I graduated, and *Greatest Hits* maybe in mid-1976 (?), when I was in Berlin.

Richard was always courteous but argumentative; I think in this case he picked an argument with God, and lost. He wouldn't accept that cigarettes are bad for you; but they got him in the end, before he even reached retirement age.

It won't be any consolation to him or to anyone else, but my father died of booze at 47, and he wasn't even a great boozier by many people's stan-

dards.

He just drank beer steadily, without getting plastered. Probably he had a weak liver to start with.

My wife gave up smoking while she was pregnant and for a while afterwards; but then she took it up again. I wish she wouldn't. For myself, I wish I could drink a glass of wine and stop there; but it's hard. It's actually easier not to drink at all, and recently I've been having alcohol-free days quite often.

I also know I should take more exercise than I do. But how and when? Now that I have a family, I don't have time to do most things that I want to do; how then shall I find time for something I don't really want to do? At least I almost always take a half-hour walk before lunch during the week, when I'm at work. That's something; but I don't think it's enough. I wish I could walk or cycle to work as I used to do; but the distance is 57 km and it ain't feasible.

I don't actually believe in an afterlife, but you never know. Maybe Richard is up there somewhere, drinking and smoking whatever's available, and playing Bridge with the angels.

Hope you're OK. I'm feeling a bit tired and feeble after some months of harder work than I'm accustomed to; but things could be much worse, as Richard has demonstrated.

PJB: Richard was perfectly calm in his lack of a belief in God, and I hope that I can maintain a similar attitude when I find myself drifting towards a miserable and lonely death, having defied all actuarial principles by surviving everyone I know.

I know what you mean about the exercising thing. I try to walk to work from the station (and back again) which makes a couple of miles a day. I also do some weights and try to do my "up-and-down the stairs" at least a dozen times. (Don't worry, the stairs I use don't have other people below who could hear it!) But one feels that this might not be enough.

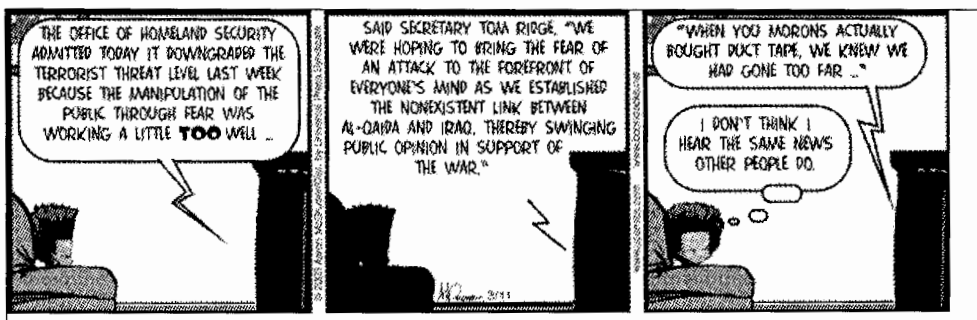
JOHN WEBLEY

I'm astounded to hear that you've joined (rejoined) the ranks of car owners. But it must be handy for trips to Worcestershire and similar, even if completely useless for day to day usage where you are. Mind you, with all that cash sitting in your account, it's probably only a matter of time before the Porsche arrives. Maybe not.

Wide screen TVs, we looked into this a year or so ago, and ended up buying a conventional 102 cm screen (40")? It seemed enormous when we first got it, but we've got used to it, and it is a very big room, as I've just realised, having bought a new carpet for it.

We didn't like the rear projection machines that we saw, and plasma was far too dear then, although I'm sure that it will become affordable in five years or so, probably less. The first one we saw three or so years ago was at least three times what they now cost.

The only problem with the one we have is the weight. Moving it around for the new carpet, we needed at least three strong people to move it, and that was risking hernias/back strains. Fortunately, friends of ours have a 17-year-old Thai student staying with them. I don't think he



expected to spend so much of his time here shifting heavy objects, but he learned several new English words from me while he was doing so.

PJB: I think that the rear projection TVs have improved dramatically in the past couple of years. I remember them not looking too hot, but the 100 Mhz ones that I have seen were very impressive. But I still haven't got round to buying one.

You are right, the car does seem a pointless frivolity that merely asks for attention and money, but comes in useful occasionally.

John Webley (cont'd):

Midcon 2002, the first time really that I've seen an extensive review. Sounds an awful lot better than 2001 in any case. You are completely right about Puerto Rico. Fortunately it's been so popular here that there aren't many first time players about any more. (and one of them won a game against four old pros last time I played ... I still haven't quite worked that out). I'm very good at coming second in the game, can't win it to save my life, good tactics, lousy strategy I suspect.

Nice comment about the student and her mobile, a syndrome that I know very well, unfortunately.

Tricia enjoyed *The Second Coming*, I thought the whole concept extremely creepy and played games online instead.

PJB: I must try to get into some more games of Puerto Rico. It really was one of the most enjoyable games I have come across in a long time and is the kind of game I would like to study more deeply.

J P R PALFREY (cont'd)

Hi Pete, it's too late, I should be in bed, but thanks briefly for **Greatest Hits 261**, which showed up today.



The postmark seems to say 8 March, but the envelope bears a UK 1st-class stamp (not correct for Europe) and a large blue Royal Mail label on the back of the envelope says "The sender didn't pay enough Airmail postage on this item, so we had to divert it to an alternative service — sorry if there was a delay."

The Eurocon photo on the front page looks like one of mine, as far as I remember; I haven't time to chase up the negative right now, but it wouldn't be really difficult because they're all filed in binders in chronological order. Photos are on my mind at the moment, I'm busy with my latest scheme for organizing my digital photos.

Although I have an ordinary flatbed scanner (an HP Scanjet 4470c), and it works, my Epson film scanner (for slides and negatives) stopped working some time ago and I haven't felt rich enough to replace it so far. Good film scanners are expensive. But I must do it sooner or later.

I'm vaguely thinking of getting a DVD player sometime, and they're not too expensive these days; the problem is that we could do with a bigger and better television for watching DVDs, and they're really expensive. It's hard to justify the expense because we never go to the cinema and even Ana rarely watches a film on TV.

I've started buying DVDs because I can watch them on my computer, though it's hard to find the time, and so far I've got six DVDs but I've watched only two of them all the way through (*Fellowship of the Ring* and *Harry Potter*). Several of them haven't even been opened.

Congratulations on getting yourself a

car after all this time, though London is hardly the best place to have one. I dislike driving in cities, I've hardly ever tried to drive in London, and I'd prefer not to try ever again. Stockholm was relatively easy, as it's about the same size as London but with a far lower population. Barcelona is easier than London, having relatively straight and orderly streets, but I rarely venture into Barcelona and regard it as a minor ordeal.

One thing I hate about cities is the one-way street phenomenon. I can plan my route on the map in advance, as I remember doing with Milano once, and then I get there and boom! The simple obvious route has a no-entry sign slapped across it and I have to improvise, getting in the way of the experienced natives. "It's not my fault, I don't live here, how should I know how to cope with your stupid one-way system?"

Mind you, I found the Italians relatively relaxed and forgiving drivers. If someone caused an obstruction, in my experience they just quietly went around it. I was on an Italian bus once that was cut off by another driver who was in the wrong. Later the bus was able to draw up level with the offending car; the bus driver wound down his window and I awaited an explosion, but he merely said, "Deficiente", with deliberate emphasis but without shouting; and that was that.

I'm not a keen or knowledgeable driver, I'm not a would-be racing driver, but I can take a mild pleasure in driving through good scenery on roads unencumbered by traffic lights or heavy traffic. This one can do in many parts of continental Europe but probably not in or anywhere near London. Southern England is HOR-



RIBLY OVERCROWDED compared with most normal countries, and this shows itself in the house prices and the traffic density.

PJB: *One-way systems in central London are equally dangerous for pedestrians. North of Oxford Street, the way that the compulsory directions on streets are laid out make crossing the road a matter of taking your life in your hands, since you have no idea from which direction a car might be coming or whether it will have right of way when it does.*

In addition to this, of course, even if you are aware of the direction in which cars should be travelling, there is always a good chance that there will be a cyclist going in the opposite direction.

Ken Simpson

GH 261 duly received and perused. Your views on the motor car have a general similarity to mine, in that I have never seen a car as an object of desire or even as a pleasure to use. Indeed, when I lived and worked in London (Barnes and Hammersmith respectively) between 1968 and 1972 a car seemed an unnecessary evil. I shall have to elicit reactions from Derek (*Cut & Thrust*) Wilson, a graduate of Mr Toad's school of motor-ing.

I can't help with advice on use of garages' cleaning gadgets as I've never used them, always having had access to off-street parking and a power point for the occasional vacuuming of the interior. Cleaning cars is an overrated pursuit. While the windows and the lights must be kept clean in the interest of safety, a good coating of grime should be seen as an anti-theft device.

PJB: *A car-cleaning service has just opened up a mere 100 yards from where I live. Even my mother has used it, and she lives five miles away, but have I availed myself of this service? No, I have not. This really is taking slothfulness to a new level..))*

Ken Simpson (cont'd):

As for uses, mine is retained for family visits (Lancashire) as with a number of elderly relatives I need to be able to travel at minimal notice, mother having had two emergency hospital admissions in two years. The rest of the time it is basically used to keep in current driving practice. The only trip I do that could be described as Motoring and having the slightest bit of pleasure is the annual run down the A303 to BayCon. If you are free, I can thoroughly recommend it, though your drive from Lewisham to the M3 may not be pleasant.

PJB: *Yes, BayCon becomes a feasibility now that I have a motorised appliance. However, as you say, getting to the M3 in the first place from Lewisham (easy access to France, Essex and nowhere else) could prove to be a challenge. It takes me about an hour just to get to Tooting on Saturday evening, which is no more than 10 miles.*

SOME FINAL SWEEPS

I could write for some time longer on my trip to Las Vegas, what's been happening, and a whole raft of reviews (trips on planes equals watching movies). Oh and the nightmare that is work.

Basically, from July, I shall be editing the daily for two days a week and a 16-page monthly er, once a month. The subject of this newsletter is about as obscure as you can get and I can't say that I am delighted with the current situation, even though it means that my workload has probably been reduced! The company must like me, since if they were going to make me redundant, they had the perfect

excuse to do so. However, the state of play in the company is not exactly shining.

For the moment, I'm virtually having a month off, since my two old newsletters have been shut. I've been reading up on the obscurities of alternative risk transfer, catastrophe bonds, insuratisation, and so on.

One film that is worthy of a mention is *Sling Blade*, a 1995 film that marked the directorial debut of Billy Bob Thornton. This was a *tour de force* of cinematography and acting (by Thornton in the main role as a mentally retarded man released back into the community after 20 years) that was perhaps only let down by a lack of narrative drive.

On economics, the euro seems once again to be put on the back burner. I remain marginally in favour, although I have my doubts whether it could be got through a referendum. The weird thing is that Brown wants our mortgage system to become more like that in mainland Europe, whereas it would make sense for theirs to become more like ours.

Anyway, this has been a very short and very late **Greatest Hits 262**, mainly suffering from a lack of motivation and a high degree of burnout on the part of its editor. However, I've now realized that I need to keep producing this to remain in touch with the few friends that I still have left. So, consider this yet one more instalment in "Norbert Birks, A Life In Pictures".

Whitehall Up Against The Wall

