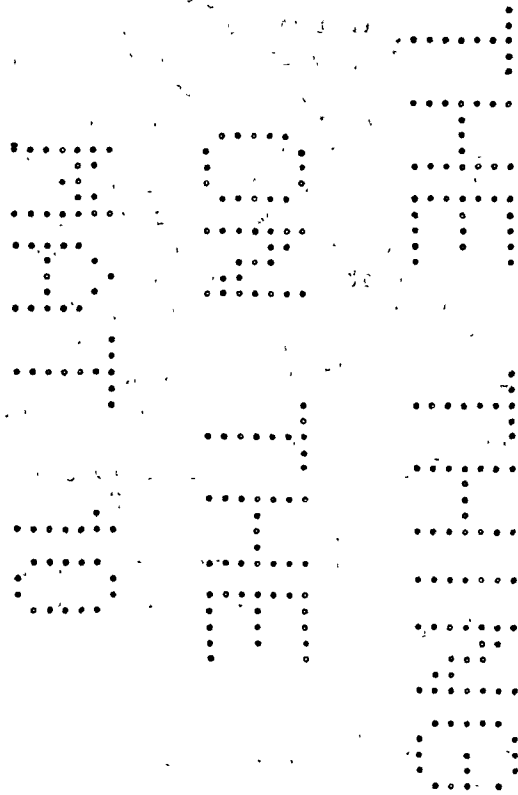


Just when you
thought it was
safe to stop
adding



Produced along that ol' dotted line, and in a tearing hurry, by

Peter Doubleday

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Gaaah ... this is the second time I've typed this up, adding yet more delay to the enterprise. The selected duplicator for this issue behaved slightly irrationally, as you might expect for a duplicator that hasn't read its Kant.

Price the next, and as far into the distance as I can see (did I tell you I was tremendously short-sighted?): 25/30p

(depending on size of issue)

Gamefees

Gamelists

I can't give an up-to-date list of these, because I still have twelve weeks' backlog to deal with. Take the following as guidelines:

Diplomacy: £1.00
Railway Rivals: 75p inc map
Abstraction: 75p
Sopwith: 75p
The Crusades: £1.00
The Bourse: 50p - prize money is £3.
The Maya II: free.

Diplomacy ... empty, as far as I can see.

Railway Rivals ... Maps N and B, or name your alternative. N is full: start next issue.

Sopwith, Crusades ... both half full. The former will start soon: the latter will start if I can satisfy myself that I can cope.

The Bourse ... is currently about to start parallel to Thing Seven. Get in there!

Urghllmhpghmkk. I seem to have started several letters, editorials and so on; with this sort of thing (whether or not I actually have is irrelevant. I am here today, brothers, to tell you that ultimate reality isn't worth the paper it's written on), although the exact spelling seems to vary with my mental state. Be that as it may, you can be sure that it's heartfelt; even Burgess has difficulty literalising a fart, so I can be forgiven the inability to spell out a head cold/depressed snarl/hangover - the phrase is multi-purpose, you see. Currently it refers to the first of these. But you don't want to be bothered with this, do you? You want me to round off this issue as soon as possible, don't you?

Unfeeling bastards.

Well, here we go again with another fun-packed issue of the wonder-zine that John Wilman rightly refers to as "Oh no, not that again", and everybody else simply ignores. Sensible chaps. This issue is so inexcusably late that I cannot afford to leave it any longer. Therefore, I put down my copy of 'Even Cowgirls get the blues' (a truly half-baked and ratbastard tedious book, but more appealing than taking up the trusty keyboard once more) and commence my second editorial this issue. It isn't easy, you know. By rights, I should be working towards a well-merited First (well, I be more intelligent than that lot, b'aint I?), but I can't shake off the depression for long enough. This is the nastiest cold I've had in a long time, and the only reason I can write thus to you at all is because I'm doing so through a whisky and caffeine-sodden haze. Let us, therefore, take time out and consider the topic of editors and alcohol, rather than continue this futile editorial.

Editors and Booze

Rather reminiscent of 'More songs about girls and chocolate', isn't it? The two are just about inseparable.

Once upon a time, editors were held together by a love of games: this is what made the Hobby in the days of Polycon, DesContent and so on. Editors actually played things like Speed Circuit, and even on occasion Diplomacy. We now lack this link, and after a brief scrabble to find an alternative (such as a common desire to chat about Nuclear Power, or something equally declassé), editors thankfully settled on alcohol (the more bizarre mind-muddiers are illegal, and, worse, next to unobtainable). Alcohol is safe. Alcohol is worthwhile. Alcohol can make you feel you're more important than you really are, which is a great boon for the sort of squitty little ego that publishes the 'average' Diplomacy zine. John Marsden, hitherto the general recipient of this accolade, has in fact bucked the trend by giving alcohol up; I submit that there is a direct correlation between this and the improvement in Ode's position in the zine poll. Alcohol is boring.

boring Boring B o r i n g BORing BORING.

Any nosy little games freak who wishes to confirm his prejudices on this has only to look as far as Pyrrhic Victory, which of late has shrunk in a gross simulation of Brewer's Droop as Allaway takes to Pernod so far that he can hardly see the typewriter. Woodhouse's excesses are similarly affecting that otherwise well-favoured zine, Blackmail. There is nothing at all intrinsically interesting about manic degeneracy, despite what Birks may have been led to believe; and, fun though it was at the time, it is usually impossible to convey adequately via the written word. Thus the collection of scrappy 'Wot I did on my Hols' essays that emerged from Counter-Eurocon. Alcohol may even be the reason why GH had become so stale until issue 100 (and may still continue being stale, for all I can conjecture. It's still damn' good, though)). Alcohol, typically, seems to have nothing at all to do with Denver Glont's production process; Glover is weird enough to spew trash without the use of artificial helpmates. Alcohol even appears to have taken its toll of megastar dwarf Creese, who admits that in his job at Molinaire the five-martini lunch is taken as a model for all sorts of social gatherings.

Need I say that this is not a healthy trend? I have been around students long enough (quite long enough ...) to recognise that there are deeper realities in life, although gamesplaying is probably not it. We must stretch out and grasp these realities.

I can't reach. My nose is dribbling. Pass the bottle.

Well, I hate to be pathetic about this, but I can't really see me doing a lot more this issue, for various personal reasons that wouldn't interest you even if I were prepared to run over them. You may notice a slight absence of games in this issue; this is partly because I have a handful of orders stuck in America thanks to the half-baked activities of one Charles M. Hendren III, a workmate of mine, but mainly because I am inexplicably lacking several others altogether, and suspect the workings of the American Postal Service. Why do I suspect these fine, upstanding types? Because I got another note a few days ago explaining that they'd damaged my post. Aargh! Froth! I have to communicate with people across the Atlantic, if only to get my taxes back (I've never understood the moral justification for this, since I was being paid more even than the average American, and he doesn't get his taxes back; however, I'd rather take the mazoolah than let it go to the Dept of Defense). I have to rely on the USPO. Since they have managed to delay several letters badly, mutilate others ludicrously and deliver some properly just to confuse the hell out of me, I feel I have to try to fill out the complement of orders. Players will therefore be sent their game reports sometime this week, after I have managed to do impossible but necessary things such as contact John Wilman by phone.

Owing to a slight inability to complete this in America (well, they pressed money into me hand and overcame me moral scouples and sense of duty - the problem was that they expected me to work round the clock for it, which put paid to a lot of the typing), I have created even more of a mish-mash this time. You will find (I hope ...) that the back eight pages of this are in A5 format, as a sort of 'supplement', and durned odd it's going to look, too. Needless to say, this is not intended to be a permanent feature; I just hope it's legible this time. I'm certainly not going to type it over again if it isn't.

Yes, well, this was supposed to be a lettercolumn ...

Jeremy Tullett "Teddy Hall may have been many things, and a goodly number of
Oxford them unpleasant, but it was not a public school hole. As I
 recall very few members were public school educated. Indeed,
 let us be honest - few members were educated at all.

"As for my local whorehouse - I was rarely seen in women's colleges, and where I was it was generally St Anne's, whose only redeeming feature was the proximity of the Horse and Jockey ((and many other fine pubs in and around the Birmingham area)). If it's tarts you're after, may I suggest any SEH disco. It was my distinct impression that one only went to these events with the express purpose of getting laid.

"I believe that Woodhouse and I do feature in other zines (notably GH), but perhaps not side by side in the same letter column. I can only recall meeting the man twice, at the last two Noccons, although I expect he's been at a few of the Lamb meets I've attended ((Come, come: Mike is scarcely the sort of person you can fail to notice, even at the Lamb)). He strikes me as a very sound character; he certainly has the right attitude to women, not to say life in general, the universe, and everything.

"Glad to see your activities include Ball crashing, although I am disappointed that your method although evidently painful was so dull. Climbing walls is much more fun. I was on SEH ball security one year, and was amused by the way one appeared at different places, three times, only to be thrown out each time. I escorted one man out. on learning that I was reading Chemistry, told me that if I would care to make him some mescaline he'd get me a good price for it. Perhaps I should have taken him up on this, but I didn't.

"I only went to one Ball in four years as a guest rather than an official, and still couldn't see what all the fuss was about."

- Jeremy Tullett (about \$5 per hour, Pete) ((hee hee))

As to the disco, it is my distinct impression that anyone who goes to one anywhere does so with the sole intention of getting laid. Indeed, whole age-groups seem never to set foot outside their door in leisure time without the express purpose of getting laid. Isn't the human race wonderful?

(More on Tullett) Actually, as for Balls, I must admit that they aren't everyone's cup of tea. I wouldn't have gone to it myself had the opportunity of crashing not presented itself; it wasn't just meanness that prompted me to do so, you know. What you have to realise is that a Ball is not a social affair, which is just as well, because I hate all things social. The principle is to go along dressed up like a schmuck, waste half a bottle of champagne that is too good to be given to anyone under the age of forty, eat a meal which would be exquisite in surroundings that would allow the chef to prepare it properly but which is en effet slaughtered by the fact that he has to deal with it standing up in a tent, . . . and laugh like drains at all the other idiots who are doing all this, because they are infinitely more pretentious and pathetic than you. Where else would I get to see the inmates of the London season at such close range? Were it not for the fact that they possess so much money to which I, as State-Registered Ubermensch, am rightfully entitled, I would find them a whole lot funnier yet.

Anyway, as I think I said, the best thing of all was the kiddie-castle, which was splendidly surreal at four in the morning.

I would like to explain to John Field what a fist-fucker is, but even I think that such matters are best left outside the realms of a Diplomacy zine. Suffice it to say that it's unspeakably sordid, the sort of thing that a man who carries his keys hanging outside his right pocket in San Francisco would do to a man with keys on the left, and is, given this, self-explanatory. If this is not sufficient, I suggest you look it up in Vonnegut's Jailbird (Defence From Art), and don't say I didn't warn you. May I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere wishes to all readers of a tender or aged disposition that the above, unusually carefully worded, exposition, should not cause unseemly embarrassment, frothing at the mouth, or releases of rare nervous conditions, etc. It is not my purpose to hurt my fellow man in any way whatsoever (which is one of the reasons I do not, myself, indulge in the peculiar activity in question), and I am deeply hurt to feel that my occasionally unfortunate lapsi menti might cause even a twinge of mental pain to the sensitive. Besides, I need the money.

You were quite right about the pink oboe, John.

Dor del "Inough about that stuff I know whatericket is (even
Grande though, with all the 'English' sports like soccer and rugby
(USA) (Berkeley holds three consecutive national titles over here)
nobody seems to play cricket), but what exactly is 'Cricketboss'
And why would it take forty-five minutes of die-rolling per
match?

Oh, insofar as this is going to England, my father vents to throw this in: he happens to coach some kids in some traditional American sports (ever hear of baseball? Of course,) and one of the kids is the son of some pop singer called Brian Auger; I've also heard that "in England, he's almost as popular as George Harrison". Has anybody out there heard of this guy, or his band, "Search Party"?

Yes indeed, son, I would not be at all surprised if Brian was as famous as George Harrison over here. By the way, exactly who is George Harrison, my good man? Not that I have heard of Auger or his band, but then unless they play Nielsson's little known Chamber Suites for cello, piano, electric guitar and rhythm section (opus unassigned because of semantic problems in placing them at any point of Nielsson's career), they are never really likely to cross my path.

Of course I know what Baseball is, dum-dum: I am the only person I know who could import any amount of safe but officially no-noed drugs through American Customs on the grounds that 'my relative Abner invented baseball' (neither of which implications is true). Rugby, of course, is a game fit for Americans,

Frenchmen, Australians and other ethnoid with no brains whatsoever between the lot of 'em. Oh! Berkeley and Stanford are very pleasant campuses which I would recommend to anyone, but for their unfortunate habit of espousing this appalling game.

I mean, throw the ball backwards? Is this the American way? No Sir...

Len "I seem to remember writing you a five page letter after I
George received Thing (about) 7. Then, before posting it, I said
(Harrow) to myself "What are you playing at, Len? You're a gamesplayer, not someone looking for a pen-friend", and tore it up."

- and then he goes and writes me another three pages. The man is vaguely loopy. -

"Thing is a very interesting read, but so would many books I don't take from the library because my number one choice for spare time is games playing. I will admit now that you are interested in games and know a bit about some.

... "Thing would have been great for me when I joined the Hobby (under two years ago) but now it does not cater for my developed taste for more intricate games, which I personally believe will be the growth area in gaming ((echhh wot's wrong wiv 'gamesplaying'?). These may well be computer-assisted at least.

... He then goes on to ask me, nay implore me, to take on a game of Mystic Wood Gued by Greg Chapman ("I hope this does not raise your hackles by looking like arm-twisting, but Greg is a good man who should be encouraged in the Hobby. You should be flattered to be his first choice for his Mystic Wood game whether or not you say yes"), and to claim that I am a seven foot dwarf standing on the shoulders of a five foot giant (Pirke). (like it...).

Er, what can I say? Len is very much like a genial version of Greg Chapman, whom older readers may remember as being notable as the only correspondent to Limpy to make Steve Agar look sane. I mean, he was ravingly incomprehensible: it seems to be a common trait amongst those who push Postal Game of Nations (he was also one for Postal Hidden-Movement Simultaneous Ludo, as I recall).

First of all, I am deeply offended by the suggestion that I know a bit about some games. Sir, I know more and own more games than most other Hobby notables put together! Sputter, sputter. By this I refer to such games as Crace the pages of Games and Luzzles when it was any good, rather than to these new-fangled ways to wear the corners off dice they seem to find popular nowadays. Name me a game of imaginative design, and I almost certainly own it.

Mystic Wood, for the uninitiated, is not such a game. It raises mindlessness up in such the way that Transcendental Meditation raises consciousness. One more trashy effort from the hands of Terry 'Pot-Boiler' Donnelly, who jumps on bandwagons like they're going out of fashion (indeed, I believe that they did just this, fifty years ago), it is to be regarded with all the superiority an underdeveloped twenty year old can muster. I pass, sirrah, and have even now sent the task on to Dick Linnett, who I'm sure will find someone for the enterprise amongst the more witless sections of the Hobby.

If I understand you right, Len, then I would suggest that a 'developed taste for the more intricate game' is, in fact, a distinctly regressed taste. I have yet to be convinced that Cric etboss and the like take one iota more skill or mental involvement than 'suaristic' games such as Railway Rivals. As Aldous Huxley would say, "If this be the future of which you speak, then..." ... well, in actual fact, he would blather on mystically for twenty pages, without really coming to the point, which is that you can include me out.

Len and I are obviously not of the same type, so it's as well for both of us that his sub has run out (which is what prompted this letter). Shame really, because under the gamesplaying perversion, he's a congenial chap at heart.

And just to prove that not all loonies who write in are old-lags, I shall follow the precepts of my venerated namesake Steve and let many of my new readers introduce themselves. As Sharp once said, "they must be wondering what they've let themselves in for".

Nicholas
Clifton (£1)
(Kent)

"Ha! I say again, Ha! You think you've got a new subscriber, don't you? You think that I was so overawed by your publication that I decided I must have it at all costs, don't you?"

(This man patronises Barclays Bank, and should be impaled through the spleen until he improves in political acumen or at least screams satisfyingly enough for the bleeding heart liberals (sadist div?))

"Well, you're wrong. Even if Simon Bill-ness did send you my name I am going to be cruel and heartless and ignore all your pleas for money, so there."

P.S. The cheque for £1 enclosed is just a mistake; by the way, please keep sending me Thing free of charge.

Better luck next time?

Tony Robline (Essex) (£3) "As a relative newcomer to the Hobby I find it difficult to know which zines are suited to my interests - usually the games themselves, Hobby chat and general editorial meanderings."

I see: being cagey, are we?

"I'm not too keen on politics or ST; I'm afraid. So, please enrol me on your subscription list"

Cause and effect, thou art not dead!

"By the way, are you related to Steve Doubleday? He introduced me to postal gamesplaying"

No, I'm not, other than in the purely nominal sense that we're both rather large. He seems to have been fairly active in recruitment; this isn't the first time I've heard the plaintive cry "I was introduced to it by Steve Doubleday".

Gordon Powell (Lancs) (£1) "P.S., I am making the cheque payable to you. I assume this is right?"

Of course it is, Gordon. Of course it is. You just leave minor financial details, like what the damn! number is on my Swiss Bank Account, to us. Actually, I have no account payable to 'Thing'; I seem to recall Richard Sharp (twice in one issue, the lucky chap) having difficulty in opening a similar account for Dolchstoss. "It's a business, isn't it?", they said. Yeah, the sort of business they had in Coventry after Mrs Thatcher was elected.

Don Stewart (Liddy) (£2) "After reading John Wilman's review in WYB I thought I would send in a couple of quid to subscribe to Thing..."

EEK! Another loony! Why anyone would be tempted by Wilman's review to subscribe to Thing, I don't know; thanks indeed, John. You know what appeals to your subscribers better than I.

By the way, if anyone's wondering what those little figures in brackets are doing so nakedly displayed, I should point out that they're not there to embarrass any subscriber not foolish enough to pay me in multiples of five pounds. No; they're there simply in case I forget how much to credit these worthies, which, given the backlog of paperwork that accumulated while I was in America, is more than likely.

And finally, in a lettercolumn that I had resolved would be only two pages long, we come to a letter Alan Parr promised me some time ago:

Jazz from "Sad to say, Hanson didn't make a great impression on me, which
 Thing isn't to say that I didn't like it; simply that I cannot recall
 anything about it. Mind you, I'm a great fan of the less-good
 composer. Things like Bay' Tintagel, or Poulenc's Piano Concerto,
 or anything at all by the wonderful Gottschalk, make me go all weak at the knees.
 Did you know that someone once said that Saint-Saens was the only great composer
 who wasn't a genius?"

"I've given some fairly deep thought to your enquiry about jazz - not deep thought, you understand, just lots of little superficial stuff (the kind that doesn't make your head hurt) and I really haven't produced anything at all. Like any other form of music, jazz has a fairly wide range, and different listeners get different things out of it, so it depends what one is listening for ((I nominate this sentence for the John Hersden award for Studied Non-controversiality)). Some people like to listen to stuff that reminds them of the classical music they know, in which case something like the Modern Jazz Quartet, using fugal and canonical form, lots of counterpoint, etc, will attract them. Others, of course, want to listen to something that gives them experiences that are not found in conventional music, so they'll want perhaps some primitive blues singing or possibly a big band playing to bring the roof down or perhaps improvising a bass head arrangement.

"So I don't know that I'm much help to you, but by all means come back to me. For what it's worth I seem to remember that I started to get really interested in music in all its forms at about age seventeen. It didn't take me long to decide that a diet of popular music was, shall we say, not completely satisfying to me, and though classical music attracted my interest the sheer quantity of it daunted me, and I remember that as much as anything I settled for jazz as a music that had a recorded history of some fifty years in total (a bit more, of course, by now) ((about two hundred years, if we go back to the negro original. Just how old are you, Parr?) and that it was going to be a lot easier to get an overall picture of the music and to find my place in it than it would be in classical music."

I am left, of course, with very little idea of what to try out: although I'm certainly glad to learn more of the bizarre workings of Alan's brain. If I didn't know better (being acquainted with several of the breed), I would say that only a mathematician could come out with such a weird reason for musical choice (to be fair, he does go on to say "Of course, there were other reasons"). It is interesting to note that, had Alan been of my generation, he would have probably been moved to take up reggae (this being the equivalent limited field of the current accessible musical scene), and would therefore have much more in common with Mirk. Indeed, he would be publishing a sort of games-orientated Putty Piffo, without open commentary on reggae, and there would not be this fatuous discussion on the merits of games vs chatzines, because there would be no difference.

I suspect that my interest in music began almost parallel with Alan's, although it led me by the nose to late Romantic classical music (see, there are classifications in this field just as much as there are boundaries to be perceived between pop and jazz ...). Jazz actually frightens me, because there is so much of it, and so much that an uneducated, resolute middlebrow like myself would classify simply as turpid crap. This would include all the stuff enumerated by Alan except the modern Jazz Quartet, which I might well reject on different grounds: that it is based on a fundamental misconception of taste, like ELF.

It is interesting also to question what other people's musical tastes would be like if they, like the noble Parr and myself, had been unaware of the existence of two-four time until age seventeen. What if Junior Choice and, indeed, the whole of radio one were to be proscribed or X-rated? What if we tiny tots could only choose between radio three, the throat-gargling music they usually play on four inbetween low class middleclass plays, the sort of genteel parlour music one usually hears the only musically talented member of the family play at home, or John Peel?

What if?

Doom, Gloom and Depression

No, not the title of yet a third editorial, but an attempt to sum up my recent record purchases. I suppose the sentiments could apply to my overdraft at Blackwell's Music Shop, now, at £217, so high that I have been warned not to make further classical purchases until I pay it off. Nothing daunted, I put my U.S. earnings safely away inside a building society account and trucked on over to Our Price to buy the latest Springsteen and Dibe Straits albums. Thus was I greeted with yet more doom, gloom and depression. Taking matters a step further, I removed myself to home in order to duplicate this farce, and am now lacking both albums, for which I have taken no notes whatsoever. This is going to be a peculiar review.

Why bracket the two together? Mostly from laziness, as usual. However, they do have something in common, in that they are both intensely downbeat albums from 'artists' who can more often be cheerful and bouncy. I realise that Springsteen's subject in general, the lowlife of the American working male, is damned depressing in itself, but his treatment of it is normally great fun: acid rock can be hugely depressing, but hard rock will not fit into the mould. Perhaps if these chaps came up with something outside 2/4 time, they might find it easier to be as depressing as Sibelius, say, or Schmidt (whose unavailable fourth symphony

((man walks into shop. "I'd like Schmidt's Fourth Symphony, please"

Shop assistant: "Oh, you mean the unavailable one."

Man: "The Unavailable? I'm sorry, I was under the impression that was one of Mahler's." ... duhhh ...

concerns the death of his daughter, and is a masterpiece of the morbid). You think I'm going over the edge, talking of Springsteen, Sibelius and Schmidt in the same, albeit lingering, breath? Well, apart from the pleasing alliteration, I have a perfectly good reason. Springsteen's solo album, 'Nebraska', is unrelentingly morbid. The first song concerns a 'Bonnie and Clyde' type couple who want to die together in the same electric chair (this is cunningly entitled 'Nebraska', a name redolent of depression for all who have been there). Subsequent songs include 'Johnny 99', whose hero goes on the rampage after his mortgage is foreclosed (although I might perhaps have phrased that with a little less unintentional bathos, because it isn't the main point of the song); 'Highway Patrol', about a cop with a no-good brother, and 'My Father's House', the by now familiar Springsteen theme about a son having regrets about busting up with his father. There is not one chink in the gloom in the whole album.

So, is it worth buying? While I was in America, I was informed that Bruce was wont to appear in small bars in New Jersey out of the blue, walk up to the barman and ask if he could play a few of his songs. "Wonderful", I thought, although the prospect of 'Jungleland' going down on an acoustic guitar is a little windblowing. However, do you realise how many small towns there are in New Jersey? Or how many bars there are in each one? Since I had no means of transport in any case, the whole thing was out. Yet had I been able to see him, I would have probably been treated to some off this album, with perhaps the irritatingly incessant harmonica removed; and then I would not have bought the album. On record these songs do not go down so well. There is no variety, no sparkle, and if I wanted to spend an hour at a wake I would go to Ireland, where they have a more entertaining concept of these affairs. Protest songs on records are fine in American bars, but a little out of place in the English living room.

However, these are fine, evocative songs of the spirit and pain of middle America; so, buy your American bar, set it up to obscure the living room, put the record on the turntable, and we're away.

I seem to have spent much time on semi-irrelevancies, with the result that I have little space left to cover the Dibe Straits album, 'Love over Gold'. This is certainly one that is tailor-made to the English living-room, although much of it is as intensely depressing as 'Nebraska'. It would seem that the recession has encouraged all arty types to parade their social consciences, although the most 'relevant' title on this album, 'Industrial Disease', is so flippant in execution that it somewhat mars the effect of the rest of the record. Side one is particularly atmospheric, with an atypical Spanish-style treatment of much of the guitar-work, although there are some rather strange riffs appended to this style. No hum: probably their best to date. Go out and buy it.

Productorial

Hello and welcome to the show that never ends, but only finds feebler and feebler excuses to put off the dreaded first moment of typing. How come I never have any idea of what I'm going to put into each issue, but start with my mind its usual complete blank? I bet Graham Greene never has this problem. Graham Greene, like Pete Birks, is a professional, which means to say that he can use any old rubbish and make it appear fresh and glowing. The reason I mention Pete is because, as the more discerning of you will know, he has produced the much-heralded 100th issue, thus joining an erstwhile select crowd of two (namely Mick Bullock and Don Turnbull), who hitherto were the only publishers in this ephemeral field to reach the ton. With impeccable timing, I, of course, have missed all three, although Pete had the decency to send me a two sheet abstract from the issue in question - if decency it be, since I possess at present the cover, my game report and a tantalising contents list which must surely qualify as a Cruel and Unusual Punishment. Birks should watch out. This is a milestone which undoubtedly has a vicious effect on already brutalised minds, in much the manner that having been on the moon tends to ruin any future an astronaut might have. Of the two precursors of this achievement, the first resorted to closeting himself with his Atari Space Invaders and the second is now the UK guru of Dungeons and Dragons. Birks' eyes are too bloodshot to cope with the first out, and his finely-honed brain incomparably too puerile for the latter, but one wonders quite where he goes from here. Enough of this, which has been done to death in a million other editorials I haven't even seen.

The reason I mention Graybags is that I've just read a review of his latest novel, "Monsignor Quixote", in the Washington Post. The review confirmed two things I already knew in my heart. American reviewers are paid money for old rope: this particular worthy spent two pages recounting the plot in a suitably adulatory manner for an author whom everyone recognises as a Great Master, and little time paying attention to the specific value of the book. As a result of this, I know also that this time, as ever, Graham Greene has produced a book of apparently more worth than it actually contains. All right, all right, I could be wrong, and who am I to trust the resume of a reviewer, but it would appear that Greene is up to his old tricks of obfuscation again. Simply put, the book revolves around a priest whobelieves that Cervantes wrote a biography of his ancestor, rather than straight fiction, and because of this is apt to live an updated version of the life of what he imagines to be his great predecessor. This allows Greene all sorts of dinky little parallels, so that his priest can at one point exclaim "I'm not compelled to follow the novel: I'm a real person, with real free will!". Neat, huh? Of course, novelists everywhere are apt to make too much of free will, which is a ludicrously simple and undramatic concept, but even with this caveat Greene is plumbing the depths of trash philosophising. In the same excerpt the priest is pictured blowing balloons out of condoms (dear me, I'm sorry, David, that naughty word, quite inexcusably essential to my sense, just slipped out), which is not quite as original a conceit as the reviewer seems to think - Tom Robbins made more out of it than I can imagine Greene would. Greene is, in short, an overrated novelist: it's all very well being a Doubting Catholic novelist, but when this means taking every viewpoint on the ethics of evry situation you create, and saying nothing of any of them, then frankly I am not impressed. Feel free to ignore this, because a review of a review is necessarily going to be somewhat lacking in relevance to the original, and I've just realised that this is precisely what this is; however, the conclusion is probably my final and irrevocable word on the Greene oeuvre, having read perhaps three books in total, in my usual

bigoted way.

As you may have noticed, that was the weirdest productorial I have penned so far. Not only was it actually a review rather than a productorial and one moreover which sneaked up on me as much as it did on you, but it also started in the middle of the zine (unless I be much mistaken). The reason for the latter is simple. Clearly, this is not my typewriter. For one thing, every word should be clearly legible. I am in fact using the office typewriter, which is a glorious electric model with self-correction facilities and a nice large typeface that should be about right when I reduce this issue to an A5 booklet. Doubtless the typewriter is the only holiday romance I shall have, and like all others of that ilk it will fade and disappear over the horizon all too soon, but while it lasts it will at least be more productive than most others. Of course, it may have the drawback that, now you are able to read the trash I type for the first time in ten issues, you'll be so disgusted that you'll cancel subscriptions but why should I let a little matter like money spoil my fun? And because I am using the office typewriter, this necessitates that I be in the office this fine and sunny Sunday morning (all mornings in Virginia are fine and sunny. It's dead boring, really) - the alternative is to knock the machine and take it home, which is a flagrant breach of America's draconian property laws, but, and this is more important, would in any case give me a king-sized hernia - which will not be possible for the entire issue. It looks very much at the moment as though I shall be going to Arizona before the week is up, which is a jolly little complication to add to an already hideously complicated production process. However, more of this later.

The reason it turned into a review was that I had been inspired by a review in the self-same issue of the Post to cover a topic I have long wanted to waste space in Thing with. Namely: the tendency of authors to repeat themselves. My inspiration was at first sight an unlikely one: I was drawn by the paragraph heading in a review by Thomas Disch, which ran, "Were her characters not men of straw, they would not catch fire and burn so easily."

This man is a man with a damn fine turn of phrase, thought I, even if he did write in "On Wings of Song", distinguished by having the silliest central premise I can remember for a Science Fiction book.

And then I thought, but why waste such a superb (and accurate) put-down on a review, instead of using it in a novel? Further, why waste it on a review in the Washington Post, which has seen better days (and you know which those were), and is in any case accessible to only a small minority of the world's population? Think big, I thought, bigly. Why, this sort of phrase could be a veritable music-hall turn, used on tours all through every little literary backwater, making the reputation of its author and putting him on the gravy train for life.

Yet this, of course, is precisely what most authors do. Herodotus is famous for one book only; not because he wrote others which are lost in the mists of antiquity, which is a fate common to most classical authors, but because he lived of the proceeds of that one book for the remainder of his life. He invented the concept of the "Lecture Tour", which is still popular around America to this day: simply make one good observation, and repeat it ad nauseam to every Elks and Kiwanis club dinner you can find on the eastern seaboard. Naturally this is unfair to Herodotus, who was an essentially decent chap. He was an accomplished public speaker, and his audiences would often beg for their favourite sections to be read out to them. Lesser talents have, however, profited by his inadvertent example. Dickens, for whom I have little regard, although I must concede a considerable worth to the cause for which he often wrote, is another example of an author resting on his laurels.

Two of the prime examples, however, are those authors beloved to Birks (thus adding the sheen of a spurious consistency to the whole production), Hunter Thompson and Phil Dick. I like these authors, and so I type them out complete with christian names - isn't the subconscious funny? However. One thing you cannot help noticing about Hunter Thompson's books is the frequency with which he harps on the "Jackrabbit" theme, or on his time as a sports writer, using leads like "The precision, jack-hammer thrusts of the Dolphins stomped the Steelers as they thrust through the defense, stomping and ripping like a jack-hammer, penetrating with passes of pin-point precision ..." etc. Thompson is a drug-addled freak, but even so I think he would be surprised at the number of times he recycles old material. Dick, on the other hand, has the excuse that for much of his life he was a hack writer, albeit an exceptionally fine one. Thus, a lot of his work is based in the same kind of universe, featuring telepaths, "minning", "flivvers" and the like with absolutely no explanation or further detail. I always meant to do some sort of analysis of this in Thing, and maybe someday I still will ... or maybe I'm just too lazy. Yeah, I guess that's it. These are examples which stand out from my extremely limited and middlebrow reading, but I'm sure they can be multiplied in many other areas of writing.

I found all this rather depressing. Indeed, I was even depressed when I noticed Alistair Maclean doing it (all right, you can laugh, but he wrote at least one good book - a small prize for guessing which one). This is all part of the process of growing up, I suppose, and discovering that almost everyone else is as lazy as you are when they can get away with it (and one of my principal assets is that few people are as adept as I at getting away with laziness). Show me an author who never repeats himself, and I'll show you an author who has written at most a handful of books in a very long career.

* * * * *

Hobby News

Yes, I have some which may not be so outdated as to be completely worthless. Richard Walkerdine, stung into action by the mammoth achievement of Greatest Hits, has re-launched Mad Policy at issue 74, reasoning correctly that if you recommence publishing at issue one all over again, as Piggott did, then there is little incentive to continue "just to break the hundred". If Richard resumes his old publishing schedule of one issue every three weeks, which would please J. Marsden no end, then by my calculations he should overtake Greatest Hits by about issue 140, due around this time, 1986. There you are, Richard, a target! It would probably be less heartache to put out a contract on Birks, of course.

I would include an address for MP, but I've left my file cards at home (in Reston, that is: what's the betting that they don't manage to accompany me all the way home?). I shall endeavour to include it at some later date. MP will undoubtedly be required reading for anyone stupid enough to be hooked on this hobby, and I wish Richard every success. Yes, Richard, I would be delighted to trade: put me down for a gamestart, please.

Other moves onto the market include the takeover of Puppet Theatre News by Gary Piper, also at whatever inflated issue that worthy organ has reached by now. I expect I shall be trading with him as well, even though mention of the name Doubleday tends to induce Gary to froth at the mouth and spout a good deal of piffle and nonsense. PTN is almost certain to feature Mercator strongly, a whole world variant which in my humble opinion makes little sense and is a royal pain in the ass. Is this a recommendation? It doesn't look like one, but I don't intend to discourage you from taking a look. If you like Dib Dib Dib, you will probably love PTN.

Thank You, Uncle Sam ...

We have a good deal to be thankful to the U.S. of A. for, such as the invention of fast food, the election of the funniest political figure since records began, and the nuclear protection of the Free World from the godless commie hordes, but I think we can afford to let our gratitude for their contribution to an efficient world postal service slide. Not that I entirely object to the fact that it takes ten days for a letter from England to reach these shores, whereas it takes only five days going in the opposite direction; not that I really mind visiting the local Post Office, of which there are not a superabundance, at lunchtime and finding a line as long as the one for Hell, with only one person at the service counter and four more milling visibly around in the background eating their lunch. After all, everyone is entitled to a lunch-break, although I could wish that menials might deign to stagger theirs at what is the busiest period of the day. After all, the U.S.A. is not the world's most inefficient when it comes to time of delivery, despite a coast-to-coast letter that I received last week a mere three weeks after delivery: a letter posted in Egypt, for example, is likely to arrive even now with a postmark bearing the proud legend "Allah preserve President Sadat!" After all, there is little left in the kitty to pay the gallants of the USPO, because in the finest traditions of American Federalism it is absolutely essential to pay the armed forces 98% of all money taxed on the grounds that everything else is best left to private enterprise.

I can dig all this.

What really bugs me is the sheer apologetic, synthetic niceness of their bungling.

Yesterday I received a letter so ridiculous it almost had me in hysterics. It ran as follows:

Dear Postal Customer,

((Oh, so I'm a customer now, am I? Obviously it's news to the USPO that Roland Hill introduced the concept of paying on despatch rather than on receipt, as recently as 1840))

The enclosed letter was damaged in handling in the Postal Service.

We realise that your mail is important to you and you have every right to expect it to be delivered intact and in good condition. The Postal Service makes every effort to properly handle the mail entrusted to it, but, due to the large volume, occasional damage does occur.

This facility handles more than three million pieces of mail daily, therefore, it is imperative that mechanical methods be used to maintain production and insure prompt delivery. Unfortunately, this does not always permit the personal attention to individual pieces of mail we would like it to have. Damage can occur if mail is insecurely enveloped or bulky contents are enclosed. When this occurs and our machinery is jammed, it often causes damage to other mail that was properly prepared, and mixed with the improperly prepared mail.

We are constantly striving to improve our processing methods to ensure that incidents of this nature are eliminated. I sincerely regret any inconvenience this may have caused you.

... P.S. If you would be interested in a tour of our facility to see how your mail is processed, please call 573-0400 ...

Accompanying this came a note from my brother mentioning three no longer extant inserts, and an erstwhile envelope with an exquisitely fine tear

applied diagonally across. I print the apology verbatim simply to show the low standard of grammar involved. It is also instructive to note, however, that the Northern Virginia section of the Postal Services is under the impression that "personal attention" is distinctly more secure for the mail than that provided by automation, whereas it would appear that precisely the reverse is true: it is when the machine jams up, and "personal attention" is called in to deal with the problem, that contents are lost and letters misdirected. I should add that the letter in question was posted four or five weeks earlier. Moving swiftly on, we find a thinly-veiled accusation that it is my fault (or, I suppose, that of my brother, although I am designated as the customer), watered down with the reassuring possibility that some other Klutz may have done the damage. I also rather doubt that they have an employee permanently occupied in musing "Now, how do we improve our processing methods to prevent this happening?", although with the Postal Service the way it is, this is within the bounds of possibility. But what really gets me is the flash picture at the end, of an official gravely standing at a demonstration and explaining "And here, we see the tear being put in the envelope, while at the next stage Mr. Zcybkbrski will show us precisely how the most vital contents of the letter are carefully extracted, leaving only the covering note."

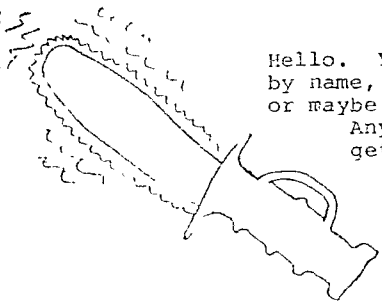
I knew this had to happen eventually, as every frequent user of the Post Office does. It might have happened at a less inconvenient time, since the original contents were a set of game reports from English zines. Since it was bound to happen, however, I could have done without this sort of ersatz explanatory garbage.

Americans, on the other hand, love it. They insist on it. Appearances are all in this country: no-one likes to say "Hard Cheese, but that's the way it is, bud". They'd rather apologise profusely and insincerely, and offer you a tour of the facilities that by all accounts is more fake than a fact-finding tour of Russia by Catherine the Great. One of the more endearing (and from my point of view, moneysaving) traits of the American is his willingness to invite you home to stay the night; analysts claim that this is one of the clearest distinctions between American society and ours, because whereas an English Tea Conversation can take on just that italicised connotation - "Would you like a cup of tea?"; "Oh, no thanks, I sha'n't trouble you"; "Really, it's no trouble"; "But I wouldn't want you to make a cup just for me"; "Don't worry, I was going to make one for myself anyway"; that sort of thing - an American will only ask you once. If he says, "Come back to my place, we can watch the ball game and you can stay over in the spare room", and you say no, he will reply, "Oh, OK then. Seeya, pal", and wander off. So I am told. Actually, I doubt it; but the point is clear, that an American is all up front. This is certainly the case when they're offering you something. When you're trying to get anything out of them, it's a different matter, because they hate to turn you down. Ask for a job, and they will invariably give you a long-winded form to fill out, even if they have not the slightest intention of offering you employment; saying "no" hurts, and it hurts them more than it hurts you.

However, this is not the place to discuss American mores and quirks in general. Some other day, I shall tell you of my theory that, if you look even relatively harmless, you can walk up to any American's front door and say, "I'm an English traveller" - embellish this with the fact that you're from London, if desired; anything else would only confuse most yanks, who are under the impression that Britain is so small as not to be able to contain more than that great metropolis - "and I'm making my way across your great country. Would you have a bed for the night", they will immediately invite you in, even if they've never seen you before, and quite possibly (if in the state of Utah) offer you the use of their daughter, into the bargain. Yes, some other day. Right now, all I wish to make

clear is that I've had certain difficulties in keeping up with my games in other zines because of this irritating deficiency in the U.S. Postal Service. On the other hand ... I have no-one other than myself to blame for the likely farcical position that Thing games will be in this issue. See, the U.S. have this wonderful system of zip-codes which are so well designed for automation that most mail is directed around the country by them before anyone ever checks the written address; which is a pity, in my case, because the United States is a very big country indeed when you manage to give people the wrong zip-code. This is what I did. Whereas I told everyone that my code was '11090', it is in fact '22090', thus leading all my mail to be directed first to somewhere in the region of New York, which is a horrible experience even for inanimate cellulose. So, it isn't always the Post Office's fault after all.

* * * * *



Hello. You don't know me. Or rather, you don't know me by name, although I'm sure you'd recognise my face mask; or maybe my balaclava, depending upon when you saw me.

Anyway. You can call me Timothy. I sure hope we get on well together.

You see, I was hoping you could help me with this big problem I have. I got this real neat job; mind, I don't get paid for it, but that's because it's more of a hobby, really. See, I like to chop people up. I guess I could work in a mortuary (you ever hear the Tom Lehrer joke

about the man who majored in animal husbandry until they caught him at it? Haw, haw), but it's kind of impersonal in them things. I like a job with real customer involvement, y'know? Although, as I say, I don't get a whole lot of paying custom.

How'd I get into this sort of work? Well, it ain't the kind of work yer Uncle Seth recommends you to, eh? I mean, there's not a lot of call for it nowadays, 'cept in snuff movies and the CIA (you didn't know 'bout that? You work in this kind of line, you meet some purdy interesting contacts). I dunno. It sort of came to me one day, like a mission, y'know?

Anyway, the job's real good, 'cause you get to work a lot out in the open. I like that in a job. I also like being my own boss; I kin use any tools I want - chainsaws, axes, one time I even use a harpoon. You dig? That feels real good: to know you can come up with results with whatever comes to hand. Long as it's got a sharp, or penetrating, edge. One day, I may even write a manual.

But there's a lot of things that don't make a whole lot of sense. I mean, how come the marks (call them victims if you want) always come in small bunches? Why are they always so young? Sometimes I get to thinking that maybe there's some Superior Being, like God, you dig? - who makes sure these dudes just happen on along at the right time. It ain't as if I ever have to go looking for them, 'cause that would be dangerous; I mean, someone might catch me at it. That wouldn't look too good. I mean, what do I say? Like, I killed these two hunderd fifty people (I keep careful count; I got my pride), your Honour, but it was 'cause I didn't rightly know what I was doin' at the time? Come on, man. Maybe that would have gone over in the old days, like with John Hinckley, before Reagan decided that insanity weren't a proper plea, anyhow, and it was screwing up the legal penalising system (good to see he don't mess with gun control, though. He got his priorities right, just like me). Not now.

And then there's this problem. Look ... I can dig all these other things like I said. There's only this one thing really both'rin' me.

Why's there always this camera following me around?

In case you're wondering what that was, I went to see "Friday the Thirteenth" in 3-D, and it cost me enough that I figured I had to make something out of it. The premise is so dumb that I wonder why anyone went to see the first two parts (which were not, of course, released in 3-D), although the idea of resurrecting 3-D movies for a modern horror flick was just about worth the money. On the other hand, there's just so much you can do with an effect like that before it gets repetitive. During the sixth despatching or so, therefore, I took to noticing the way so much of the film was a straight rip-off from "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre". Really. Not simply the bizarre idea that a mass murderer could operate in such a fashion, without getting more than token resistance from any but the last victim: this is a basic ploy of blood 'n' guts cinematography. No; I was more interested in the way "Fl3/3" used the same sort of opening shot as TCM - a dead animal in the road, with its feet upmost, and a vanload of teenagers seen coming into focus behind it. Or in the way that the teenagers get a doomsday warning of things to come - in this case, an old man in the middle of a road, holding up a human eyeball and ranting about millenarianism. Or in many other similarities, none of which I can remember at this late date, because the film was so appallingly dull that none of its details really stick in my mind. Yet, what a peculiar thing, for one horror movie to follow its predecessor in so many inessentials; almost as though the makers were paying homage to their forebears, although in a crummy industry like this, that makes little sense.

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BUSINESS ETHICS

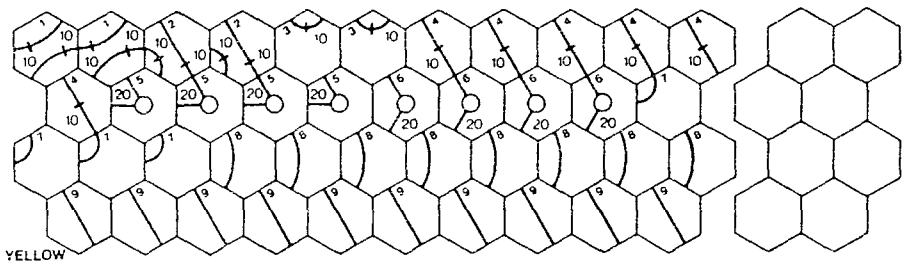
or.

My God, I'd Better Finish This Before the Boss Returns and Catches Me At It ...

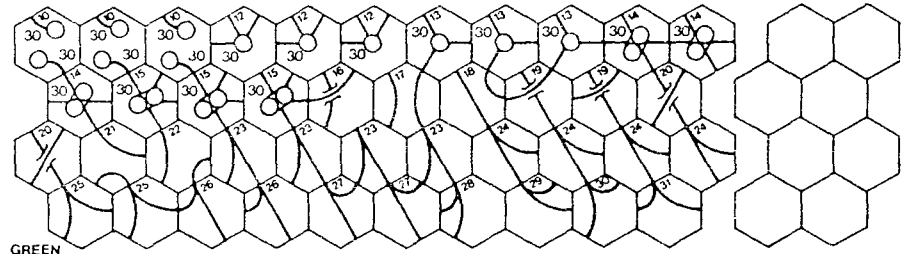
You are entitled to wonder how I manage to type this thing up at work, whilst getting paid seven dollars an hour for the time I put in, here. Yes indeed, you may well ponder on how life is basically unfair, I mean, General Motors workers make twenty dollars an hour, even Chrysler bogs get eighteen bucks, all that sort of thing, and here you sit on the office bog, reading Thing prior to putting it to a more constructive use, and all you're pulling is a measly one fifty a week and no perks or hidden benefits.

Life just isn't fair, is it?

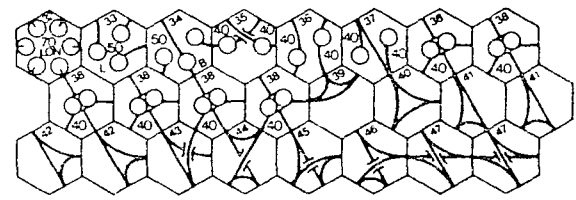
Well, no, it isn't. As to why I can afford to spend so much time at the office typewriter for my own purposes, that's an easy one. In the first place, I typed a lot of this up over the weekend, unpaid, whilst acting as on-the-spot consultant for such of my software as other people were using. Most of this is therefore an illusion. In the second place, I lack any real supervision, because that's the sort of job you're in when you program computers in a small business. Neither owner/manager of this place knows much about computers, so I can spin them pretty much any yarn I wish to about how tough this work is, how I need to come in early in the mornings (when there's absolutely no-one else around, and I can do what I like); that sort of thing. Now, I could be real mean and take advantage of this. Actually, all I do is use my spare moments constructively, by photocopying Thing or doing some related typing rather than sitting in someone else's office yakking about the precise nature of the Republican Party and Reaganomics. Indeed, by the nature of my job (which is entirely devoted to the one project, viz. the completion of a system to control telephone calls for the military), I need to put in some pretty curious hours, including the fourteen hour day not so long ago when I had to fill in for some other idiot's mistakes in order to meet a deadline. I do not, therefore, feel too bad about bending the normal working hours on this occasion.



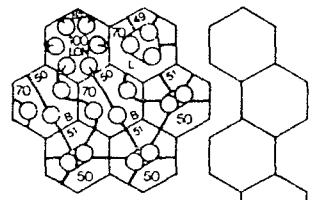
YELLOW



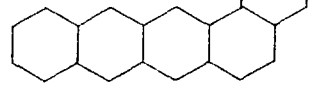
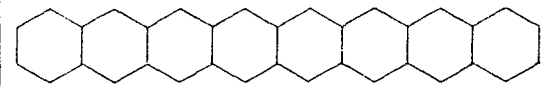
GREEN



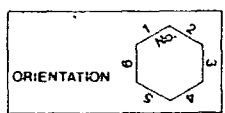
RUSSET



GREY



1829 TILE CHECKSHEET



ORIENTATION