



Dead Editorial

Crowl, slobber, sniff... you'd like to know why this issue is so late, wouldn't you? well, it's due to a number of things, not least of which is the dreaded Christmas, which precluded my getting at the duplicator between 25 Dec and 3 Jan (!). Since I was still at work on 24 Dec this was not helpful. Neither, I should add, was the rotten quality paper I first used, causing a delay of three days while I got more. It won't happen again, - honest: I mean, I'm not likely to get work again before July 1983.

Subscription

20p this issue; probably 25p the next three (else 20p); then, who knows? With greater custom, I cannot be forced to lose this type of money; so beg a friend not to subscribe!

Editorial Address

Peter Doubleday
202 Lordswood Rd
Harborne
Birmingham B17 8AN
- but from 14/1/81,
Magdalen College, Oxford, OX1 4AU

Deadline

For RB - 29 Jan 82
For everything else - 29 Jan 82.

Waiting Lists

<u>Diplomacy</u>	<u>Abstraction II</u>	<u>The Maya II</u>	<u>Ma Mar 81</u>	<u>Rb Mar I/C</u>
John Wilman	Julien Shepley	Simon Billnsnone.....	
Julien Shepley	Dennis Love	Colin Grubb		
Dave Huson		Derek Baskett		
- plus 4	- plus 5	- plus 5	plus 4/5	plus 6/7

.... and 1820: John Wilman (?)

All free bar RB (50p inc map)

Chat Productorial

My scout has left me. Or to be more accurate, my scout has been sacked from the college as a whole. In a way, this is terribly sad, because Nellie will never find work anywhere else. One morning I looked up from my breakfast and saw her dribbling out of the corner of her mouth. This was not exactly pleasant; luckily she wasn't standing over the cereal at the time. She's been horribly bald for some time, now; this baldness is hard to conceal, as she's well under five feet tall. All in all, she was rather decrepit and the work she did was of little real use. When she did anything at all, she cleared the room by the simple expedient of lifting everything off the floor and dumping it in neat little piles round the circumference. As a result Diplomacy zines, old copies of the Times, and even History work was left in hopeless confusion around the room, and every other day I had to spend an hour trying to put some sort of order to the stuff. Getting any work done in these conditions was difficult even without my nightmare essay crises. Nevertheless, I feel very guilty at her demise.

But what is a scout, I hear you ask? Well, in the context of Oxford a scout is a person who nominally cleans your room, leaving the student free for more important matters like ~~attending~~ attending lectures. Naturally it doesn't quite work out that way; for one thing I don't go to lectures, which are even more pointless in History than in other subjects. But in general, the scout is none too happy to slave all day long clearing out a student's Augean filth. They have their own little room, so little that no student could be forced to live there, and having salved their consciences by dribbling briefly round the rooms under their charge they retire thereunto to drink coffee with their cronies, to eat toast, and to ratter. This of course is what most students spend their time doing, but a scout does not have to pass exams. They are all senile, they either have no powers of conversation or will gossip all day long, keeping the student from coffee with his friends; and they all expect whacking great tips from the clientele at the end of term. I don't know if you watched the BBC programme on the Ritz, but essentially the scout is a throwback to the same era: an era when students, ay Magdalen at least, could afford the grand vie and expected the service to go with it. The modern student is different. He wears soiled jeans and sweatshirt, sandals in the winter, is semi-shaven because he hasn't yet learned how (being rather dim practically: of course, in the old days he would have had a barber perform this service) and shack's up with any bird he can lay his greasy hands on. In the old days they were all poufs, if we are to believe the current line in spy scandal. Certainly there are Oxford poufs aplenty, and unfortunately they're not slow in letting you know - not merely have they come out of the closet but they're swingin' gaily from the chandelier. Anyway, we gave Nellie a small party before she went (splittin' a bottle of champagne in lieu of a larger tip to allay our consciences, thus gettin' at least some of our money back), and she confessed to us that it was only in her time that young ladies had been known to, er, take up co-residence. Either the students of the past were much better at concealing their amours from the scout, or they simply found somewhere else. So, if you buy a vintage Rolls and find stains on the back seat, you'll know where they come from. If we'd only had Sylvia, the amazing witty scouse scout, we'd have been regaled with a lot more detail.

So Nellie is now gone, and I suppose she's had her ration of life. From my description you will guess that she had little prospect of re-employment in any case, even without the current lousy economy. She wouldn't have been sacked had the college not wished to save money after the high cost of current repairs, and she wasn't given much warning. So, if you ever wander down the High in Oxford and admire the gleaming new Magdalen tower, remember the dribbling scout. She'll be at home with no-one to talk to, because for obvious reasons all her social life was at college and her husband's dead, and every room will be adorned with a neat little border of rubbish. When the border reaches the centre of the room, Nellie will quietly fade away.

I would be the first to point out that the scout system is hopelessly outdated and very much a waste of money, but I'm not best pleased to see it go this way. In their customary cackhanded way, the college authorities have produced another piece of human flotsam, as pathetic in her way as any of Maggie's 3 000 000.

But all that was entirely irrelevant, wasn't it? This is a games zine, isn't it? And so, to salve my guilt complex,

The Games Productorial

This is, after all, the season of Christmas. Not that any of you lot sent me presents, but all the same it is around now that the games industry does most of its trade. Because the seasonal cheer restricts the manufacturer's width of choice, we should be resigned to the dreary mixture of family favourites and fun, fun themes, from henmen and battleships to the bomb disposal game. But why is the range of interesting games so limited? I think the colossal tastelessness of the aforementioned bomb disposal game is symptomatic: anyone with a shred of imagination could have predicted the response. Waddingtons have none, and indeed their most appealing game of late is the re-issued Hare and Tortoise. As the brand leaders in this country they should surely be making more of an effort.

Not that effort would necessarily help. Enthusiasm there is aplenty in Germany, but where are the games to go with it? What was their last games poll? - Puzmikub.

I look around my room ((actually I don't. I stare at a blank wall, but where's the dramatic impact in that? If I fell over backwards I would be able to look around my room, but then I wouldn't be able to type. So, until I learn to type with my metatarsals, you'll have to be satisfied with prosaic licence)), I look around my room, I say, and I survey a broad selection of commercial games produced in the last eight years. It saddens me that I can think of very few that I haven't got, but wish I'd bought. I counted my games once; without wargames, the total must run to around a hundred. Do you know how many of those get played regularly? - about ten. And David Watts and others wonder why zines have so little to say about games...

To delve further into the subject, fully 60% of my games are two player, usually abstract. Now, without boasting, I should say that I could invent a new game of this type sitting in this chair. I don't even like two player games very much. Whatever happened to good old family games for four or more players? Whatever happened to them? Who said they had much of a tradition in the first place? Diplomacy is not a family game, and even such negotiating games as Organised Crime, playable by a handful of people, suffer from the basic defect of play balance. The nub of the matter is that it is not in anyone's interest to be aggressive to any single other player when the other two or three benefit more than you do; in organised crime you will lose irreplaceable pieces in any attack. In order to build a balanced game the inventor should perfect the rules to achieve this balance over an extended testing period of hundreds of games. Yet commercial games reach the market in a matter of months after conception.

Most of them are shabby.

Most have unclear or silly rules.

And few provide a wealth of strategy.

This is another sore point. Either I'm missing something, or most multi-player games are not very challenging. Take Alaska, a game from Eric Solomon, who can scarcely be accused of not putting enough effort into his inventions; yet the strategy in Alaska, despite the attractive and appealing chrome provided by the event cards, seems surely to be a case of building an efficient route to the island fast and ferrying back as many containers as possible without regard to what the others do. Is this right? The concept is good, but it doesn't lend itself to a variety of interactions as does, for example, Hare and Tortoise, which correspondingly takes a lot more thought. Involved strategy means an involving game: I don't want to sit around for half an afternoon making mechanical moves and hoping for luck to come my way. There's more excitement in playing with a Rubik Cube even when you've worked a solution out. I used to wonder why mature gamesplayers found Sorcerer's Cave so much fun, but it's obvious really; the feeble excitement generated by watching your cardboard party blunder around the board almost entirely under the influence of the dice rather than their owner is but a more honest version of other supposedly challenging games. And even in a game like Venture, a 3rd Gamette not presumably produced by AL, the pleasure gained from thinking out your own strategy in collecting cards is marred by the way the game ends before you have enough cards to do anything positive with. Perhaps this is sloppy design; I don't know, but I'm not sure

that a better mix of cards would have avoided unbalancing the game in other ways.

So that's why Thing, despite running '81 and '82, is not going to become a gameszine. I'm interested in games; I own a vast collection; but there's only a few that I want to talk about. The rest are just mildly engaging also-rans.

And with this in mind, I shall head on to a review of Civilisation. No, I'm not questioning the basis of society; I meant the game.

Civilisation by Bartland Trefoil (1986, 95, if memory serves me)

Francis Tresham very kindly sent me this free, for reasons I won't go into here. I have enjoyed '82, Bartland's first game, tremendously, even though ftf it suffers the problem of fiddly accounting and also doesn't give players who are far behind any real chance to catch up - but that's another story. Their second game, Kingdoms, is also of considerable interest: it's a brave venture into the realm of multi-player abstract games. As such it has its problems, which I mentioned on the last page, but it's nevertheless a fine game for the awkward number of five players. For all these reasons, then, it will not be easy for me to confess that Civilisation is a great disappointment.

As it happens, the game seems to be gaining swiftly in popularity, so whatever I say shouldn't make any real difference. It gained a rave review in L&P, and in their recommended Christmas buys was described variously as "a really splendid game", a game "for people who want something to get their teeth into", and "this tremendous game". So what's the big deal? Open the box and you're confronted with a rather good three piece board divided much as the Diplomacy board for purposes of area movement. There's also a host of sturdy cardboard counters. But these are largely the same: boats aren't used much, and cities are no more than a development of the other piece, your basic fighting unit. Obviously Bartland expect the fun to come from the cards, then, which are also well presented and come in several packs; a game like Kingmaker gains unmeasurably from the period flavour that the cards impart. Ever wanted to be Duke of Somerset? Or to own Coventry? In Kingmaker you actually feel that this is what you're doing, though of course the game itself is a Dodo. Yet at least there's a sense of excitement that comes with the turn of every card, at least until the game becomes familiar. There is no such excitement in Civilisation. Ever wanted the Bubonic Plague? Or to own Poetry? The cards are all there, with an uninspiring silhouette, a random numerical value, and a message as to what other card you can buy with this one. There is also a deck of commodity cards, like Pit only with the excitement taken out.

So, the end result is that your armies march turbidly across the board, occasionally breeding rapidly enough to turn into a city, to the accompaniment of "Oh look, I've got Architecture. Now... er... nice..." Other boogaloo words available include Clothmaking, Democracy and Law; but what do they mean? One more giant step along the Archaeological Succession Table, that's what. Even the combat system, essentially mutual annihilation, contrives to take any satisfaction out of the game.

All this is really a great shame, because the subject matter interests me a great deal. I can take the contrived opening positions of 'tribes' called Egypt, Assyria, Africa, Illyria and so on; reality has to make some concessions to the game. It would be nice, however, if the game could take some concession to the imagination, though as you can see it doesn't to mine. Civilisation is the new game for Convention attendees everywhere who are intense enough to want to spend their whole weekend on one game purportedly covering a wide subject. e, I'll just wait for Bartland's next offering, which may or may not be that appealing fantasy board and they were talking about in Griffin as well. Perhaps it won't be, and if so we'll have the brand of manic gamesplayer to blame who prefers a colourless arithmetical exercise to while away the odd ten hours or so. Is this where the quality end of the industry is heading? After the spreading misapprehension of M players, who whatever one may say about the more reasonable proponents have had the general effect of swamping the market with over-serious, PCB clones, it hurts to see the era of longwinded games following in their footsteps.

The Bombastic, Ranting Editorial

Being an excuse for a letter column, since I haven't had enough letters, and anyway, why should I bother typing out

LETTERS

for you slimy creeps? So, this isn't that. It's a

Bombastic Editorial, which rants (or vice-versa, except that there is no verbal form of bombastic)

So, you think I have nothing to say, eh?

Damn, how do I go on? Well, let us talk about the place of Greek in society. I feel very strongly about this, having been privileged enough to be taught Greek; and I don't see why I should let the fact that it's irrelevant to games stop me. If you must, in the manner of Creese and other petits bourgeois, take evening classes to improve your opinion of yourself, let it not be in Industrial Archaeology. Let the subject be something truly useful, like Ancient Greek. It is far superior to Latin, in which nothing of any real importance has been written, but that at copious length. With Greek one may read Homer in the original, which I can assure you beats hell out of Penguin classics; and while that would be enough for any other language, the now-educated petit bourgeois may refer to the only corpus (or, since we're on the subject, soma) of plays worth knowing, those of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. As if this were not enough, it is a pleasure merely to think in Greek (in which, inadequate as I am, I may only partially indulge): in Greek, the irregular verb is regular, the choice of tense and mood is staggering (though I believe Sanskrit edges ahead here at the price of a certain artificiality), and the variety of adjectives, bewitching. Greek borrows from a range of different cultures; native and other; Latin in typical fashion stamped on its near neighbour Etruscan rather than improve itself in this way. In short, Greek is a far more civilised tongue and deserves to be taught as the first Classical language rather than the second. I am positively glad to be able to announce that Greek is the principal influence on my writing style, though this may be taken as somewhat of an insult to my teachers.

You don't believe this, do you? A certain J W——, editor, of Cambs, intimates that the style in which Thing is couched reminds him of Thingham. I do not take this lightly. Indeed, it is a gross insult to the good Thingham, who writes far more fluently (though not more easily if his production schedule be anything to go by ((welcome back, Chris!))), to lower him to my level. This same Mr W—— goes on to suggest that I am looking for 'street credibility': Sir, I would not recognise this quality if I met it on a dark night in a side alley, though you may depend upon it, I should thrash the blighter to within a hair's breadth of its miserable life. Perhaps, then, one should pass on to consider the opinion of a Mr C—— & B——' partners in libribus (though my Latin may not be trusted, for reasons of loathing which I hope I have made clear). You may recall that this curious symbiosis accused me of sounding like the Third Editorial in Filibuster, — a disreputable journal the likes of the Constitutionel, repressed, I may remind you, for sedition in 1817. How dare they accuse me of resorting to the sort of thin pastiche apparent within those pages? I may be unreadable, but I am so with originality, and I trace my tradition with pride through the dark days of 1453 to the late-flowering glories of Plethon, Cantacuzenos and the rest. I have strong sympathy with the Orthodox, unlike Mr P—— B—— of Brixton, soi-disant plebeian and would-be convert to the Catholics, who insists that my writing style is similar to that found in his grimy pages. It is? This business of literary comparison is obviously beyond me; I thought that I merely wrote in my usual bumbling, rambling style, "undoubtedly one of the best writers in the hobby", as H—— E——, a local lad, would have it. OK, Mike, you can stop cringing now; if mine is one of the best, it's no wonder that the hobby has such a fast turnaround of members. And what was wrong with issue one, anyway? I quite liked it, but what does one expect from a first issue?

Sod this elliptical style of reference; it was alright for Pope, but then in his day they hadn't invented stream of consciousness. From now on, libel be damned; come out into the open, you buggers, so I can hit you.

Geoff Challinger writes, "I was interested to see you taking the same attitude over the zine label as I tried to take with Home. However, a cursory glance at Home now will show that I've abandoned this. The thing is that a magazine is something of very high standards, whilst a zine is an amateurish production. Only GH, NRR! and Ripping Yarns come within the definition of a magazine. I'd like to think that Home will one day be in that category, but until then it's a false claim to call it a magazine. Similarly with Thing: I don't think you could justifiably say as yet that it has the professional polish that a magazine has." He goes on to point out that this comment applies to issue one, but I expect he'll be willing to extend it to issue two, and for that matter to this.

As Pirk's says in so many inappropriate places, categorisation kills. 'Amateur' and 'Professional' mean little when you consider that you pay as much for an issue of Thing as you do for The Times (Oh God, maybe I shouldn't have put it that way...). Amateurish I take slight exception to, when I consider the relative merits of my own work and that proffered by the Sunday People. The Thing may not be pure genius, but then I don't see why this should invalidate my claim to abhor cliché and nasty abbreviations like 'zine'. The production values may be tatty, and I may not be prepared to resort to Litho printing, but I can't see why the three magazines mentioned should be more due that title than the Thing - they are merely more accomplished examples of the genre; which is not something that worries me here. In continuity with the image in general, I shall continue to call The Thing a magazine.

Since this is at least in part a letter column, needs must I conclude with "the new Jonathan Palfray" (??), Simon Billenness:

"Your comments on zine format are stimulating; so stimulating, in fact, that the idea occurred to me of doing away with format altogether. Such a zine ((ugh)) would start, say, with a few comments on an aspect of the hobby like MidCon, and you could punctuate your own remarks with those in a letter from someone ((some hope)) or even comments from another zine. The main consideration should be that these comments should link"

This I find curious. What I actually said in Thing 2 was that, "no matter how startlingly original the subject matter may be, the iron rigidity of zine format is always there"; seemingly the exact opposite of Simon's idea of what I said. John Lee is as one with Simon: "What is good news is that Peter seems to have some novel ideas about format - like not including articles (?!?) - so this could develop into something interesting." I really must be more careful with these off-the-cuff, fliprant remarks, mustn't I? All I said was that, as a 'radical Young Liberal anarchist with establishmentarian tendencies', I would 'strike an anarcho-syndicalist view at the rotten core of the system'. This doesn't even make sense to me, but my thanks to Simon and John for trying to interpret it. As Simon goes on, "I don't think this is possible, because it requires a. lots of time; b. rambling but lucid letter writers in profusion; c. a very high standard of writing; d. an amazing memory for comments in letters and an ability to link some of them in the mind, etc." (and no, Simon, I've checked, and you definitely wrote "I can see you receiving lots of letters" rather than interpolating the privative"). Apparently I don't have these qualities yet, though I don't know who Simon's informant is for a. and d. : both of these I have in profusion as an Oxford History student. Perhaps, as Simon says, these things will gell, but until then you'll get what I always intended to give you - inchoate rubbish jammed into a conventional structure.

Other letters don't really fit the mood here, so they'll have to wait for next month, by which time an even larger audience will have gathered. Keep 'em rolling, ten-foah!

And now, The Thing on the Mat is proud to announce its first semestart, with a few guidelines thereto.

With many thanks to David Watts, bless his wallet. RT155B:

N	N	A	ZZZZ	III	SSS	C	C	UUU	MMM	!!!
NN	NN	A	Z	Z	I	I	S	S	CC	C
N	N	N	A	Z	Z	I	S	S	CCC	C
N	N	A	Z	Z	I	S	S	C	C	C
N	N	A	Z	Z	I	S	S	C	CCC	
N	N	A	Z	Z	I	I	S	S	C	CC
N	N	A	ZZZZ	III	SSS	C	C	UUU	MMM	!!!

Ever get the feeling you've been here before? Well, I did, but then I live in this city, goddamnit. A certain proprietary terror grips my bowels when I consider the hordes of gibbering filth about to descend on it for the purpose of dipsomaniacal destruction; what of, doesn't matter, as long as it's close to hand, and if in the nature of things this makes it likely to be themselves, therefore, then no-one else is going to worry much. I can't call down the wrath of God on these people; the Bible has nothing for the sins of Gamble. But then, the Bible wasn't one of His better works.

And anyway, the Con wasn't like that much. Early winter is, of course, the time of year when we all gather together to play that game of games, the lifeblood of our hobby, a game of surpassing skill and concentration. I refer, of course, to darts. In 1981 this splendid pastime came under the aegis of P. Birks, and as an uninvited newshound I aimed to be in on the soulour from the start. To this end I began Friday evening by looking around for a really flaky team with which I might identify. Birk's Own hired killers, who could all hit a single whiskey from thirty yards, were no good; what I needed came to me in the form of the NMI team, who had technique the other teams could never hope to match. They were artistically awful, and it was love at first flight. I first realised this when I saw Brian Greese heave his first arrows of the weekend. Now, being of an arithmetic mien (ho,ho), I figured that, ignoring doubles and other complications, three darts at random should score on average $31\frac{1}{2}$ points, provided they all stuck in the board. This was not something that fazed Brian. Indeed, had he reversed the shafts and thrown flight first, the dart would still have buried itself to a depth of three inches: the dartboard never stood a chance. As he eyed the board keenly through his Trotsky glasses, I licked my lips - partly in anticipation, but more to take the foul taste of Tartan away. He drew his sturdy yeoman's arm back, and

"One" Could happen to anyone; aiming for the triple twenty, of course.

"Three" Although hitting the two is more difficult to explain.

"Five" Yes, a mere $25\frac{1}{2}$ points under average, and if they could keep this up then they were obviously the team for me. Sadly, the flair wore off as the actual competition approached; Ken Bain, Brian Dolton, and Mike Lean were able to reach the level of the merely mediocre. They were, however, a superb backing group for Brian; whenever he took the floor, they emulated his throwing action in a sort of pillated chorus line. This said action was, to say the least, peculiar; I may perhaps compare it to an arthritic praying mantis with terminal DTs trying desperately to work off a hangover (I think I've overdone the simile there, but what the hell, if you ask for it medium rare you end up with blood all down your shirt). But I digress from the bar, which is where it was at that evening.

The rest of that evening I spent in studious avoidance of the Birks crowd, who were quite clearly limbering up to wallow in a weekend of deeply meaningful mania. In Nye's elegant phrase, they were "getting wrecked". Indeed, by the following afternoon the likes of Gamble were complete writeoffs, quite an achievement in a hotel that offered a coruscating selection of abysmal beers at prices so high that it would have taken a stiff overdraft merely to reach the status of insurance liability. But this was not the following afternoon; and consequently Nye was totally coherent as he rapped on the tale of how he and Birks had made the whole train journey from London sitting gratis in a First Class compartment with the lights out all the way - so shattering the couple opposite with talk of drugs and Lessing (no, I didn't see the connection either) that those good people never said a word to each other. This simple but heartwarming yarn was embroidered even as I heard it retold in the far distance, nearer to the bar. Nye was obviously practicing to be an old salt:

by now a moving blur of a mouth on casters, he was to bid back that he was in danger of mellowing into a coma. But this was not to be: no, the comas had to wait for the Poker game on Saturday night. For now, the amphetamines flowed like aspirin.

I, on the other hand, got so much sleep that night that I had to shatter four inches of caryotid to get to the Con by cycle in time to catch the Diplomacy tournament. I tied my bike to what looked like convenient railings and moseyed on in to the Angus with my eyes steaming.

Unlike other editors I shall not bore you to death with accounts of my Diplomacy games. Curiously I played fellow editors in both. Indeed, the first was most noticeable for the whingeing of Wilman, who greeted me after each season with "Of course, if you'd only done what I told you..." It also featured an attractively homicidal start from all concerned, which at least kept the GMs entertained: perhaps some thought should be given to this problem for the next tournament. Lastly, it reminded me of the cardinal rule of ftf: the niciest person does best. Here, it was David Billing, who gained a gift alliance from Mike Chaplin's Turkey simply by being genuinely hurt at the way we were all treating him. Unfortunately, David was also in my second game, and I still feel that my bloodthirsty antics in the first were a contributory factor to his part in the ludicrous E/R/G cartel which controlled the match. The only other player to get a look in, not surprisingly, was Turkey - Peter Northcott; mind you, though absurd for a real game, the cartel worked well under rules that made each player compete against those playing his country on other boards, with a cut-off at A07. The E/R/G cartel was consequently popular at several other boards, like bidding No Trumps at Pairs only sillier. But sod winning, it made the exercise rather boring, surely even for the lucky trio. But what am I doing, talking of Diplomacy in a magazine of quality?

Back where the action is, we find Chris Tringham on his knees on the floor. There are three possible explanations for this. Perhaps he has dropped a contact lens; a very attractive girl I met at a party once claims to have lived up parties she finds dull by standing in the middle of the floor and shrieking "My God, I've lost a contact lens!", so that the next ten minutes features a scrimmage of drunken bodies looking for the non-existent thing. With Chris this is admitted; not likely. More so is that he has suddenly realised that cigarette smoke and other pollutants tend to rise, has given up the struggle to breathe at head height altogether and resorted to the purer, oxygen rich air at ankle level. Unfortunately, the least plausible of all explanations wins by a nose: Chris is trying to staple an unwrapped hog-roll to the floor. This is apparently to serve as a marker for the darts, and in the event proved much the most challenging part of the contest, for no-one in their right minds would have bet against the mighty GR team. Not satisfied with this, Birks went on to enforce rules which made each team play two matches of best of three legs, 501 up. As the first two teams battled grimly on to the double one, I was blissfully unaware of what this meant in terms of duration. This was soon to become apparent, since the NITE! team were to play the last two matches before the final. Not only this, but, fortified by the fact that I had drunk his laser by mistake, Ken managed to hit the winning double in the second leg of the last match. By this time even the superbly sarcastic chalker, like 'Kermit' Woodhouse, was beginning to sound desperate; and as we staggered off for dinner at 8.45, the aggrieved wail of Birks followed us, demanding that one of the losing team chalk the final as was apparently set out in the rules. Rules by Birks. No fool he; at the nominal head of the GR giants he was unlikely to suffer this chore.

Therefore I was left with nothing really to do except to contemplate the similarity between Gamble and a Hollywood script: namely, that neither would ever resort to 'on screen' urination. The loo was several hundred feet away, but I am certain that Colin never once left for it: certain, because Gamble when drunk is something of a presence. He is, in fact, a superbly amusing clown - when he's nowhere near you. Unfortunately, in close proximity he is rather menacing; I escaped with minor criticism of my reserved, aristocratic nature, and there were no results to match the charge of tension that swept through the room as he lurched towards Keith Harvey, but nevertheless he was

not easy to get on with. And returning to the usage question, I can only assume that he is a more highly evolved form of life, and that his ... to fill his whole body as far as his head. This would also explain the turgid recital of variations on 'Win when you're singing' and flat one liners from 'Thunder Road', which did not do much to make the darts tournament pass faster. Apart from this, he was the life and soul of something which was otherwise winding down like the Tory economy. It was while musing along these lines that I suddenly began to wonder what had become of my bike. A cursory inspection of the local railings did not answer this pressing problem, which I carried with me to a meal in an Indian restaurant which deserved more than the muted Beirstow treatment it received. A tense night in which Creese found a Space Invaders machine which wiped him out vindictively before he'd got a quarter of the way through the first board, yet persisted in muttering "I'll get the hang of this yet", followed ((at a distance of two lines)); it was in this period that people started to introduce themselves with 'Hi, I liked your zine', only to be brusquely sent away with 'Well, why don't you subscribe, then?' It isn't easy producing a monthly liability. I eventually located my bike still tethered in a deserted street just outside the Gaumont, Brum's answer to the Leicester Square area; this says something for the honesty of Birmingham people, but rather more for the condition of my bike. And so I pedalled off into the sunrise, as appropriate an end as any for a Con which everyone I know of enjoyed immensely and which augurs well for next year.

*** **

And as I sit here typing this in leisure, five days after the deadline and counting, it occurs to me that John Dodds may just have been a little hasty when he enforced a two day turnaround rather than hibernate over Christmas. Quoth young Dodds, "I'm quite surprised by the large number of NHRs this month", and indeed, thirteen in seven games seems a little high by any standards; but after all, John should recognise the uncertainties of the post in a season when it is run largely by him and his ilk. I do not believe that NHRs by the likes of Malcolm Smith or Mike Banyon can be anything other than an accident. And as for his plea that it behoves him to get TD out in two days rather than wait for more orders and leave it for two weeks, pshaw! ((that's a good word... pshaw!)) Yes, pshaw! Or perhaps that reeks too much of Filibuster. Anyhow, were I playing in one of these games, I would not be best pleased by John's decision. No matter what he says, I cannot help but feel that the course of several will have been changed by his refusal to countenance delay. Thing games will not be characterised by kowtowing to the every whim of their players, but still I shall hope to take a relaxed view of lapses in sending orders in. As I type, barely fifteen lines below the last time I introduced a sentence thus, one more week has flown by, and I'm still not sure when this issue will be out. My sloth in this respect is due to an unexpected offer of employment which came to me directly after I had set the deadline and has since entailed an uneasy distribution of spare time. And if you think I have the dedication to sit here in my unheated room typing through the worst cold spell on record in my short lifetime, you are way off beam, man. If consumption is the only true mark of a memorable writer, then I'd rather you forget it.

In other words, I'm trying to attack this from two sides at once. I don't want to argue myself into a position where any excuse is enough to leave the Thing to fester for a few more weeks, and when I've finalised printing arrangements delays of this length should be pleasingly uncommon. After all, I am running games here ((I am?)). But precisely because I am running games, I will care for them to the extent of avoiding NHRs wherever possible. Once again, I'll have to ask you to wait to see how this fine sentiment works out in practice. But I could ask for no more than that Thing games are run as efficiently as those, say, at midCon; for which, I raise a final and joyous paean of well-earned praise to the skies: take a bow, Chris Tringham, Paul Simpkins, Brian Williams, Howard Seyles, and .. cr.. could it be? .. John Dodds.

And what do you mean, Billeness, by the assertion that it should be possible to meld the games reports in with the rest of the magazine by casual linkage? Are you suggesting I invite 'soc' letters on the games? Good grief...