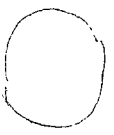
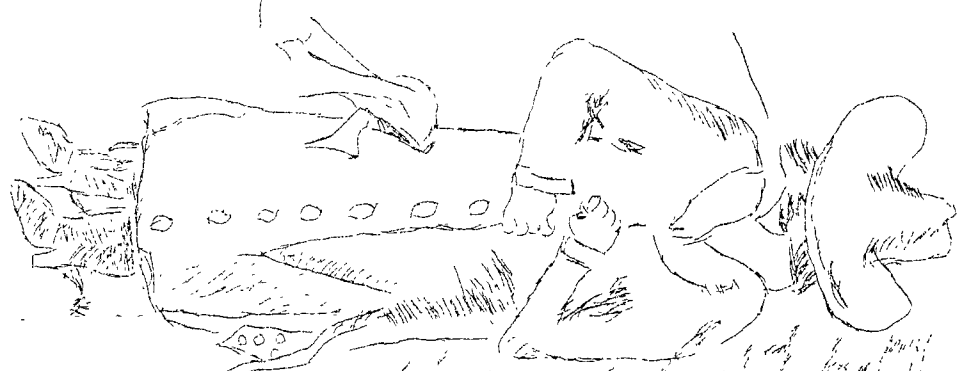
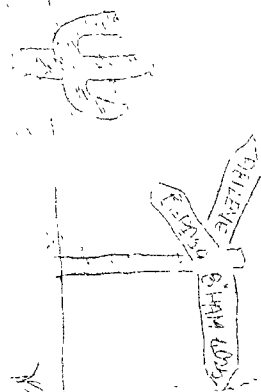


IFN MAH
PRISLEY DODD'S
GET HIM MAH
BUCHMAN
WILL ...



OK, DOUBLEDAY, WHEN
LIL' YVES ST LAURENT
GIVES THE WORD, OPEN
UP!



THE
THING
ON THE
WALL
43

Ah do confess, when granpaw Staplehurst
invited me to a necktie party, ah had
anticipated some thin' a tad more
eschatological...

Hello, good evening and welcome to another appalling issue of your favourite appalling zine. This is The Thing on the Mat 43, and please, please don't forget the "The" when you refer to it. No names, no packdrill, but no "the", no restraint on the dentist's drill - I have friends in high places, you know. Thing (aargh) comes once every blue moon, and under the present government that's roughly every four weeks - I'm certainly feeling blue at the moment, although it's difficult to pin down exactly why. Perhaps I'm pining for the joy of work, perhaps I'm mad. Yes, that must be the explanation. Subsidise this madman now at the following rates:

£1 for three, £2 for eight and £5 for twenty issues. For this you get a service unrivalled in the history of the hobby, and you can at least be thankful for that. God knows, ~~one of me is bad enough, but if we were all so inefficient we wouldn't be talking~~ about the NMR problem and how to cure it - we'd be awarding Diplomacy games for longevity, like Oscars.

I am Peter Doublecay, of 302 Lordswood Rd, Harborne, Birmingham B17 8AN, and I am aided and abetted by
Chris Spall, for whose address see his bit on page 23.

Suddenly I am struck by a lack of inspiration. For those of you who wonder what this is like, I can reveal that it's like being hit over the head with a sock full of vacuum. Never mind, all I have to do is fill the vacuum with a contents list:

Contents

- p3 Editorial on dandruff. See how high you can get on dandruff?
pp4-7 A peek inside Birmingham. It's all happening here, folks.
pp8-9 An appeal on behalf of the excellent Trevor Mendham and his excellent product.
pp10-12 Rather less of an appeal on behalf of Half Man, Half Bisquit
pp13-21 Snail Bag - letters from Dick Barton, who will kill you, Jeremy, Tullett, Brian Frew, William Whyte, Don del Grande, Andy Sibb, Pete Birks and a large helping of Geoff Challinger which overcame me before I knew what was happening. I'm sorry, it won't happen again. *And Oliver!*
p22 Games, and don't say I don't do everything I can to make this zine a disaster.
p23 Slap and Tickle, with a little help from my little friend ...
pp24-8 Back Chat, a selection of everything which a more normal editor would put on this page, where it belongs.

Put like that, it doesn't sound like very much. Put like anything, indeed, it doesn't sound like very much. So here you have it, a zine full of sound but signifying nothing - hold it up to the light, not a brain in sight (a small prize is on offer).

What? The deadline? Oh, all right - Friday 4th April

* * * * *

For those of you who complained that the last cover was 'sexist', I have commissioned my resident artist (known to my psychiatrist as "my other half") to draw me a set of truffles on the same theme.

Zines unseen - Greatest Hits is still a little tardy, but who cares, eh? Lukasenna is also rather late, and this is more worrying, because I have sent him a letter. This could portend disaster. The last time I sent someone a letter that long it was to Simon Billenness, in time for issue seven of Flame - replete with brilliant wit and knowledge, but now I can't even remember what I was on about because he folded rather than publish it ... and this could have happened to young Dalton also. One hopes not, but let's face it, Leicester is a fairly severe bummer for anyone. Have I missed an issue?

New zines continue to thud in - why are they all bigger than mine, I ask? (I've been asking this ever since the days of playing rugby at school, but you didn't want to know that.) Narrigan is fabulously neat and contains much of interest to the gamer/player of all those long-winded games you'll never see here (so ask Phil Murphy about them). Lost Cause is an excellent little games zine which includes the world's first Vietnamese sub-zine. John Marsden claims it's like early Ocar, but don't let that put you off (nay, but I jest). Vienna is, well, big. Very big. Mindblowingly big. Oh god, I think my mind's just blown ...

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DD: U U EEEE	TTTTT OO
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dandruff

Well, it's one I haven't tried on before, isn't it?

What I would have liked to say was the reason for the delay was my cold, that old stand-by of editors past and present and particularly of this present editor past (duhhh ...). Well, I did have one. The evidence is before me, in the form of a bucket full of linen, phlegm and bleach in roughly equal proportions (my mother refuses to wash my handkerchiefs with the rest of the wash on the grounds that "your snot gets everywhere" - oh that I could say the same of my writing). However, the perpetrator disease has all but vanished, leaving behind as memento only a vast depression and a constant supply of chemically neutral - it must be chemically neutral by now, because it no longer has any effect bar a slight distaste on me - mucus which replenishes itself by some arcane means somewhere in the vicinity of my adenoids. One can always tell when the worst is over, because it changes colour to a sort of translucent mustard, from an original ~~by/V&A/Kick~~ lumpy grey-green festooned with streaks of red and shot through with little shafts of bone and redundant skin. You know the sort of shade of mustard - you're all gammas players - it's the exact shade which 3M used to use in the manufacture of the bonus die in Win, Place and Show.

Well, if I have to suffer for my nose, why not you?

Anyway, as I say, it's all over now (all over the bucket, yes, I know, thank you), and I no longer have it as an excuse. Some might say it is callous of me to harp on about the interior decoration of my pharynx when all over the country pensioners are dying from the strict application of Caring Capitalism, but I must beg to disagree. If these senile old fools would only realise that they have, at best, five good years left to them in the best of health and consequently use that health constructively by going out and murdering their local Conservative M.P., we wouldn't be in the mess we are in today (although the bucket still would be). As my old friend Adlai used to say, people generally get the sort of government they deserve, and on the evidence it is hard to see the British as being anything other than the relicts of Mr Augustine of Hippo's worst logical nightmares. We are all Fallen, indeed, and after watching the latest Conservative Party Political Broadcast (and arguing with my mother over whether those birds were herons or not, all the way through) it is difficult not to believe in the supremacy of Free Will. All those questions ("Why have the Conservatives decided to start, as it were, from scratch?" - "Because, as it were, no-one can brainwash an entire population without emptying their head of all values and achievements first") and no answers. How the author of The City Of God would have laughed. The moral poverty and intellectual bankruptcy of this government is hard to credit when one considers that a cynical technocrat in France, a demented, confused yahoo in America and an anti-semitic blob of fat in Germany are all presiding over economies which have consistently out-performed our own and promise to continue to do so. But the moral poverty and intellectual bankruptcy of both opposition groupings is not merely hard to credit - it is mind-bending. Owen is still the man who told us in 1979 that we should support the Shah because he was our good buddy, Steel confesses that he doesn't really have the ambition to take over the shattered reins of a withered nation and Kinnock is, in the popular parlance of which he is so fond, a Twatt. Isn't anyone going to produce a PPB which asks a bunch of rhetorical questions of rather more bite and end up with an honest request to the electorate to explain the rationale behind the seven years of Caring Capitalism we have so far struggled through?

Yes, It's True

Birmingham is quite definitely the centre of the universe. To prove this is quite simple. I did so yesterday, in an idle moment of lingering rarity in this bustling metropolis, by constructing a map of the universe on an A4 sheet of paper, suspending it and a piece of string from a drawing pin, outlining the direction that the piece of string took and then repeating this process. As every schoolboy knows, the intersection of these two lines gives the inustrious experimenter the exact midpoint of the diagram he is using - in this case, that of the Universe. And, of course, the small blob which constitutes this intersection proved upon examination to be more or less exactly the position of Birmingham vis-a-vis the Milky Way.

I have presented this argument to several moaning minnies and doubting thomases who have objected that, quite apart from relativistic dilations (which I must say are not at all easy to model using a bit of string and a tin tack), the said intersection also falls on a point which more or less represents Milton Keynes, Troon, Ouagadougou or, for that matter, most of the landmass of Betelgeuse IV. Clearly science will not suffice for these fools, so I present a list of the achievements of my noble city of residence which should convince the most ardent cynic of the Revealed Truth that Birmigham is, indeed, the Centre of the Universe:

- ★ Joseph Priestley discovered Oxygen here (remember that every time you try to breathe in!).
- ★ Birmingham buckles were famous round the globe during the Imperium, thus guaranteeing Civilisation by ensuring that Trousers did not Fall Down.
- ★ Queen Elisabeth, Oliver Cromwell and William Shakespeare all did not sleep anywhere here, thus making the city a unique cultural phenomenon.

Birmingham is the Centre of the Universe

- ★ The Central Library is a noted centre of Freemasonry and sundry Illuminati activity, being in form an upturned ziggurat. Needless to say, nothing inside it works.
- ★ The last time it was recorded to rain frogs, the area affected by this vital biblical event was Birmingham (in 1956).

I trust we shall see no more of this tarradiddle

~~I trust we shall see no more of this tarradiddle, then.~~ Birmingham is quite clearly of crucial importance to everything, most especially the Hobby. Not only do we hold our major national Convention in Birmingham, but we now see a major explosion in participation by the good men of God's Chosen County. On the one hand we have the graduates of the Birmingham University Games Club, such as Andy Eates, and on the other hand we have the dedicated young revolutionaries of the Birmingham Hobbymeet. If that is one can describe any body of men who include in their ranks Robin ap Cynan as 'revolutionary' ... However. Every month or so, a group of what appear to be unemployed layabouts foregather at the 49ers pub just opposite New Street Station in the Bull Ring. On closer inspection these people still look like a bunch of unemployed layabouts, for this is a profession shared by virtually the whole population of the metropolitan area in this sad age of 'Er In Power. However, to a man we are serious gamesplayers, fortified with the heady wines of intellect and, for the most part, trying to smoke ourselves to death. In case of serious accident we have our lawyer on hand,

the Welsh whizz-kid of the Writs, who specialises in just the sort of cases which may occur in a hobbymeet - sudden divorce on grounds of alcoholism, or, in the case of extreme violence, simply talking the bastards to death.

We even managed to play a game, last time, 'Fortune' (nice components, shame about the rules), even though on reflection I let Matt Harrison hijack the interpretation of the mechanism for selling finished product, so that Woolworths did rather better than they should have done. Still, the game does claim to "give you a taste of how real business works". It was designed back in the seventies, obviously, otherwise it would be known as 'Bankruptcy'.

We've had the Lamb Mafia; we've had the Warwick crowd and the Bristol mob. What price the Birmingham revival, eh? In the words of Colin Welland, "The Erummies are coming".

Meanwhile, a funny thing happened to me on the way back from London the other day. It was the last train, from Euston, a dreary rail-ridden effort which takes three hours normally and in this case took longer because it was diverted through Nineaton, whereupon it stopped dead for ten minutes and wild rumours spread throughout the carriage to the effect that we would have to change for Birmingham. Fortunately I was too tired to pay attention to these rumours, otherwise I would have been stranded at Nineaton station for six hours of a rather cold morning. However, the trauma of hanging around did have the effect of allowing me to get to know my fellow passengers a little better. The particular gentleman in question had started up a conversation at the London end of the journey on the subject of inner city refurbishment, which he claimed was his line of business as he worked in the 'enveloping' of houses in Handsworth. He was dressed in a snappy blue suit and an astrakhan coat of subdued but wealthy appearance, and every time I sank my head back into the erudite tome I had brought with me he reopened the conversation by remarking that "all those bloody sociology professors don't have the faintest fucking idea what they're talking about", or that "some of the houses I go into, man, you wouldn't be able to walk in let alone live in the wrecks. We're just enveloping pig-sties. Most of them have bogs, but they don't use them. It's degrading - these people aren't human." Just another right-wing loony, I thought, but since it is difficult to avoid a man who wishes to pass away the hours of cusk on a modern train I kept up a fairly neutral stance in responding to him. Then he started talking about drugs. At first he seemed more or less repelled by the drug culture in Handsworth, but it wasn't long before he pulled out a sachet of herbal substances and began waving it around, opining in a loud voice that there wasn't anything that could beat high-quality Colombian... This is not normal behaviour by my usual standards, and I shrank back into my seat a little. He then departed briefly to the loo to roll up, which seemed remarkably cautious in view of what he proceeded to relate to me of his life-style. During this lull, a genuinely weird set of people arrived in the seats behind him, including a tweedy woman who might have passed for a sociology lecturer, a strange male hanger-on, a tubby dink in glasses who giggled wildly at anything and everything as though the coke she was carrying internally had just burst his bag and a couple of docile young men dressed incongruously as punks. Well, they had to be. They had the typical pasty skin and general bone structure of Eoy George, so that I think they would have looked slightly bizarre in any other get up. However, they were not your usual punk - in the consequent conversation between them and the tweedy female, who had just returned from a night out at some poxy social-conscience play in the West End, it was they who talked about mortgages and the weather and the tweedy moron who yakketed on about declining standards of compassion in this country and broached titillating subjects of sexual innuendo. When the guy in the blue suit returned they were well into a discussion of contemporary mores and their reflection in the modern theatre, at which the envelope-man said, loudly, "Twats", and set down. This caused a temporary pause, but they were soon off again. Two of the most visually haggard females I have ever seen sat down opposite my man and he engaged them in conversation about whether they were too young to get married - I would have admired his chat-up style but for the fact that he was directing it towards a pair who might easily have stepped off the set for 'The Return of the Undead'. Meanwhile, an hour into the journey, the train had staggered as far as Hemel Hempstead, and the berks in the back were poring over a road map of the south of England. "It's only thirty miles out." "Only thirty miles!" "My goodness, but this is disgraceful!" "This would never have happened under Cripps and Attlee." The two charming young ghouls had gone to sleep. Baulked of his prey, the guy opposite said "Arsenoles" very loudly indeed, but by this time the gang behind him had decided that he was basically harmless and barely broke stride.

This he obviously regarded as a major affront, so he returned to talking to me. Somehow the conversation got round to the topic of the road system near Bury St Edmunds, and how the fellow had been round it five times once before finding his way out on his bike. "You get the freedom of the road on a bike, of course," he said, "especially if there's two hundred and sixty of you. One thing, you don't cut up a couple of bikes with your car. You're liable to find there's a whole pack behind you waiting for revenge. We just draw up alongside at seventy miles an hour and kick the shit out of the pannelling."

This sounded familiar, so I tried the name Hunter S Thompson on him, but he'd obviously never heard of him. Warming to his theme he described several maniac friends whose idea of relaxation it is at 3 am in the morning to hold drag races down the Bristol Road with the police. ~~"I've never known him to be caught", he said, "It takes a special kind of mind to~~ take side-roads on the flat at 90mph. Most policemen in this country can't have that kind of mind. The ones that think they do usually end up in hospital." Meanwhile the other conversation had wormed somehow around to the Marquis de Sade and '120 Days of Sodom'. With coy laughter the tweedy imbecile was describing some of the less sordid and more tedious early segments of this remarkably uninteresting book, explaining that "One has to have a reason to ask for it - it's banned, you know. Perhaps," she leaned over and tapped the punk on the knee, playfully, "you could claim it is for, ah, research". Her unappealing blubbery friend came as near as I've ever seen anyone to dissolving with laughter; I stared distastefully at my nails and my friend the biker was spurred on to greater heights. "What a bunch of complete dimmocks," he said, without pausing, "Now, when I say this guy is a maniac, I'm speaking relatively. I mean, it just doesn't seem dangerous to him. He works on six week shifts in the North Sea as a capper. He's six feet five and eighteen stone, and that's small for a capper. Basically, if you get it wrong, you've got four and a half tons of metal swinging into you at twenty miles an hour. He earns a fortune out there, but there's not much action back in Birmingham to spend it on. So he spends the time getting into fights to keep in shape. There was a black guy threatened him with a knife, so he followed him into a Handsworth pub and took him on with his bare fists. Now, you just don't do that in Handsworth. The whole pub turns on you without questions. The whole pub turned on him. He ended up in hospital with concussion and five of them had compound fractures." The bunch behind tried to keep up over this, but it was a vain effort. While they opined that the West End no longer tackled the radical themes of yesteryear he went wildly on, talking about several friends who appeared to spend most of their lives revenging rather ordinary insults about their sisters by wading in and demolishing the perpetrator. "I just hang around with them, really," he said, "I'm not a full-time member of the Blue Angels. But it does come in handy. No-one hits me, because they know they'll have the whole group, real bastards, down on them. It's not nice getting involved in a gang fight. I've had my jaw broken three times and my cheekbone in butterfly stitching. And my skull fractured. And I don't get involved, as a rule. Most of my friends go around with axe handles and flick-knives, just to be on the safe side. Remember that fight with forty gang bikers outside the Law Courts a couple of years back?" I admitted that I did. "Well, that was them. And the killing of a taxi driver a few months later. I just seem to know a lot of these people, it's all an accident really." By now the rest of the carriage was entirely silent. "The worst thing about gang fights," I said, conversationally, "isn't the threat to the skull when you go down. It's the chance of getting a kidney exploded." "Nasty," he agreed, "I've only seen it happen once. It makes a sound like a pea pod being popped open."

Pretty soon we were at Luneaton and I very nearly got off under the instructions of the guard, garbled over the tannoy. On the other hand, the only line out from Nuneaton not going to Birmingham ended up in Leicester. "I'll have no trouble there," said this guy, "I know three girls sharing a house there quite well." At two thirty in the morning? Good god. I briefly considered the prospect of bashing on Brian Bolton's door at 2.30 and decided that it wouldn't make me very popular. How could I explain that I was in severe danger of being dragged into a perverted household of twisted freaks, like fiends and sex maniacs with a heavy preponderance of depraved girls? What if he escaped where the action was and came out fully toolled up in leathers? These like people tend to stick together. I could end up as the initial axe murder before a night of vile orgy. I considered asking the tweed female and the dike for refuge, but on reflection decided that this might be even worse.

Fortunately they didn't divert the train to Leicester, so I didn't have to make a rather nasty choice. Instead, I had to listen to this lunatic as he gabbed on about his friends,

most of whom had the happy knack of finding themselves in the slammer for GBH occasioned by some innocuous insult to their sister's honour and the rest of whom seenutheir time conning police bikes into following them into blind alleys with a 2'6" clearance at the other end - fine for slimmed down hogs, apparently, but 3" too narrow for police bikes. "I've eained down a lot since I was at school with these guys," he said, "although I did have to go into a cafe recently and wrap a bike chain round a skinhead's face because he spoke out of turn to my sister." (Author's note: this may sound a little relentless, and I agree that if I was making it up I'd probably vary the offence a little. All I can say is that this bloke and his mates seem to have a fixation about protecting their sisters' honour. I had a nasty moment when he mentioned his own sister because I'd considered making a jocose remark about her earlier. I neither have nor wish to acquire any experience of being forcibly ejected from a speeding train at night in the middle of nowhere.) By the time we reached Birmingham, half an hour later, the county walls at back were literally ashen faced, I was happily estimating the chances of a transgressor escaping this guy's friends and the various branches or their allies (he thought it around 5% on a lifetime basis - "Sooner or later we catch up with them. It's best that they take it early on while their body is young enough to heal up afterwards.") and he was explaining that as an armorer in the T.A. he had access to a machine gun in case the action got really rough.

Then we stood for half an hour waiting for a night service bus, watching the Saturday night crowd coming out of the nightclubs and strolling around the cathedral making complete waffles of themselves. It was probably quite cold, but my new acquaintance was fairly free with the joint and I didn't really notice. He appeared genuinely disdainful of the "one and a half pint merchants" who were miming buggery and screaming at each other in amongst the sparrow shit. Just as I left him he was explaining how he made money on the side by stealing Princesses and selling them to a bent uncle of his who swapped plates as a matter of course.

Now, I suppose you could say that this all goes to show that it's all happening in Birmingham. You might say that this fellow was all piss and no show, although his face did bear the signs of severe violence and he did come over in a remarkably restrained way which is hard to convey on paper. I suppose it could say something unpleasant for me that I much preferred his company to that of the old dear twinkling away about the Marquis de Sade. On the other hand it might just mean that I'm happy with someone who knows what he's about and doesn't spend his time prating on in sub-intellectual terms. What it certainly means is that I will never, never, make a good investigative journalist. If I'd followed it up I could have found out all there is to know about the Midlands underworld. On the evidence of three hours' acquaintance with one of its nicer elements, I think I'm happier with unemployment and an intact skeleton.

And so ends the longest review of a zine I am ever likely to write. I have a feeling I've said that once before in an earlier issue, but hell, everyone has the right, the god-given duty as it were, to repeat themselves in inessentials once every twenty issues or so. Figgott wrote zine reviews that reviewed the zine itself. Creese went one better and reviewed the man behind the zine, the mental reality of the thing. Now, me, I take the principle to the ultimate extension - I review the audience of the zine. Now, I realise that you may feel all this says nothing of The Roar of the Creeseprint, nothing, indeed, of Pete Turk itself. Well, I feel in a bad mood about this, a very bad mood. Do you realise I can't even claim to be the tallest loonie editor in Birmingham, now? So Turk deserves everything that's coming to him. But at least you now know where it's coming from.

The address? Well, difficult to say, on the grounds that he seems to have been thrown out of his flat at 76, Portland Road, Birmingham B16 5QU. However, his lovely, pouting landlord will no doubt pass things on to him from that address.

However, I want to warn you people: *do not read TRG with your legs crossed*. I did this today as soon as it arrived, and half an hour later I got up out of my chair to discover that my foot had gone totally to sleep so that I fell into the electric fire.

Meanwhile, you can meet us all at the next Birmingham Hobbymeet on March 17th at the aforesaid 49ers bar, where Pete appears to have negotiated a lock-in. Whether they'll have the wall-to-wall sorto-rubber installed by then he does not say.

OK, listen, kids, this is important.

Remember 'Games and Puzzles'? Have the aspirins taken effect yet? Remember 'The Gamer' (ugh), or

'Games Gazette'? Ever thought how difficult it is to get a good title together for a games magazine? Do you realise the sheer cost, even with whizzo new technology and tricky little laws that enable you to dispense with the service of career printers instantly, of producing a games magazine on a professional basis? Worry no more, kiddies, because Uncle Trevor Mendham has quite rightly junked School for Scandal as a bloody silly idea and turned to the philanthropic pursuit of producing a general purpose games magazine for the general public.

Now, there are problems. Presentation is one problem, though Trevor has sensibly averted major cost at source by producing a semi-pro booklet - not as you may think a citizeness north of the Trent who ekes out her miserable wage under present economic conditions by going on the game (erm ...) evenings and taking bets on the outcome (AIDS 3-1 on), but a large, A4 photocopied magazine with lettraset and things. It would appear to be printed by a laser printer, which should satisfy the technology junkies like Challenger. This sort of set-up can be awkward for diagrams, but somehow or other Trevor has got around the problem. There's slightly shaky graphics round the boxes in which insets are placed, but not so you'd notice if you weren't nit-picking for a review. Most of the games diagrams look professional, as though they use some form of photo-typesetting (well, I don't know the terms, I just abuse them, don't I?). The photocopying is slightly uneven in spaces, and this is perhaps the only clear way in which the chosen method of presentation falls down. Otherwise it seems to fit the bill rather well.

Enough of the presentation, already - let's bite into this mutha and see how it blasts the mental molars.

Hardened gamersplayers (or if you prefer, gamers, although this is a phrase which seems to have more currency in describing people who play with toy trolls than anything recognisable by present scientific knowledge as gamersplayers) will turn at once to the equivalent of 'Gamesview', an excellent feature which told you what games to buy before you actually bought them. It had ratings for presentation, durability, clarity of rules (almost always wrong) and occasionally specialised values such as education. It had a simple/complex scale and a luck/skill scale. It had an overall recommendation expressed as a die face, which was rather neat and popular. It also had a paragraph about the game written by such luminaries as Richard Sharp or David Parlett. Now, issue 3 of Play It! (being in front of me) has an in-depth review of 'Baby Boomer' along the same lines. In fact, everything has been reduced to rating by a die face, which seems slightly debased to me (I know 1-10 was a little arbitrary, but if we're going to talk symbolism here I think the die face is much better suited to a summary). As for the review itself, young Andy Mansfield has done a sterling job in describing the pros and cons of the 'Baby Boomer' edition of Trivial Pursuit, although he rather misses the point that it isn't really a game at all. However, that never stopped G&P, so I shall cavill no further. But, five for game mechanics? And separate ratings for 'compulsiveness' and 'fun'? Highly appropriate for addictive drugs, perhaps, and 'Civilisation' certainly, but surely the two overlap rather extensively in board games?

~~Having noted this, I might also add that four pages more on 'Trivial Pursuit' in general~~ (albeit by the excellent David Pritchard, whose 'Guide to Go' remains one of the most easily readable games books I have ever read) strikes me as ever so slightly de trop. However, in the semi-pro business (\$50 a shot with a truck?) I imagine you get what you're given. If you don't like it, get out and write something yourself, is the general message, and while it's a message that has always grated when given voice in the arena of zines - where it is used as a cryptogram for the message "I am about to fold" - it has a definite application in the field of games zines. Needless to say, this doesn't remotely imply that anyone will get off their butt and write anything. Instead, we will doubtless continue with the old litany of "why doesn't anyone ever write about games?" until the writerx in the Hobby have given up in disgust and the gamersplayers have plugged themselves into the RS232 output of their BBC micros.

Ahhh ... I seem to be losing the one aspect of semi-professional writing I could once claim lay to (oh dear), the ability to terminate an article on a page boundary. Dear me, how can I ever lay claim to be a systems programmer at this rate? Let us continue.

Under the remarkably banal title of 'Games People Play', which is not merely banal but also replete with redundancy in that I cannot imagine 'Games Computers Play' and I don't think we shall see much of 'Games Chimpanzees Play' after Mr Churchill's bill is passed into law, the re-emergence of Graham Staplehurst hits me like a slap in the face from a hammerhead shark. There is something peculiarly slimy and distressing about Graham's style. One gets the feeling that the man has a strong desire to write but that thinking is an alien process to him. "This article", he begins, "is about why we enjoy the games we play, and what makes a good game." Sterling stuff, indeed, although this is not at all what the article is about. In fact it is a shopping list. After introducing a game people apparently do not play ('War in the East') Graham asks the crucial question "where does Monopoly score over Tripples?" Then he fails to answer the question. (I have the answer to it but I'm not going to tell you, so there.) He then spoils an aside on trivia games (more on that in the same issue - does this indicate that we as a hobby is washed out for ideas?) by the characteristic Staplehurst sin of self-reference - "a quiz game involving a 'robot' with a pointer that span on a magnetic base when I was about eight!" indeed ... One cannot pretend an academic, essay-like approach to a subject when one insists on projecting one's pallid little personality into that subject. I do it, sure, but then I'm endlessly fascinating. Finally Graham signs off with a page on word-games which surely shows personal bias rather than any considered attempt to relate this brand of game to the mainstream, and a bleating reference to two games he's played recently. Well, dear, I think this one rates a D- in terms of structure and rather less in dealing with the subject of the title.

However, no-one of any intelligence ever expects Staplehurst to come up with anything worth reading, so that's all right.

William Whyte contributes an article on 'Squigglo', a paper-and-pencil game originally devised within the pages of G&P. One is tempted to say that 'Squigglo' is about as trivial as the diplomacy hypercube variant for which William criticises his brother in the latest NERTZ, but that would be rather opportunist. I like 'Squigglo'. I used to play it in the Sixth Form. The article is just long enough to be worth including and not long enough to remind you of the vacuousness which precedes it.

Trevor himself reviews 'Star Search', which is a perfectly adequate job although it does tend to remind me of one of the most irksome things about G&P, that they always reviewed games which were obvious bummers. However, if you get a free review copy I expect this is not a surprising development, although the resultant vituperative letters G&P used to get from idiots who believed that provision of a free sample entitled them to a hype review were usually far more entertaining than the review of the game itself.

You might or might not be enthralled by the prospect of a 'Risk' expansion called 'Naval Risk'. I was not.

The letter column is advertised with the caveat "Letters welcomed - but please keep them short if you want them printed." Is this a reaction to the tradition in FRP zines of writing bucketfuls of garbage and then protesting, Blakeman-like, if the writer gets sent anything not directly connected to his own 'contribution'? Er, no, forget I said that. It does seem a remarkable comment on Trevor's editorial policy, however. Unkind spirits might even suggest that I personally don't stand a cat's chance in hell of getting a letter published under this injunction ...

In the other half of the editorial contribution Trevor describes a visit to the Toy Fair in fine style. Some people, like me, thrust jokes up your nose like a twenty-dollar bill. Trevor prefers to describe the more whacky aspects of the games scene in neutral tones which leave you to draw your own conclusions. How else to explain the description of 'Radio Luxembourg Chartbusters' in the following terms: "The gimmick of the game is a cassette containing the rules and Radio Luxembourg DJs saying things like "Subway Sound move up two", as a replacement for a pack of cards"? The last time I heard a late-night Luxembourg DJ I must confess I doubted his sanity - surely no-one could possibly be such a sincerely stupid Californian air-brain - but I'm so out of touch with the real world these days that it might just be this game will be a rip-roaring success.

Look, this is possibly the only essential purchase for a literate games player. Subscribe now. £3 for a four issue subscription from Trevor Mendham, 53 Towncourt Crescent, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1PH. I of course shall be writing articles to try to obtain them free ...

Back in the DHSS

A Review in two Acts

Cast: Three Punks, One Director of an Independent Label, One Marketing Man and Me.

ACT ONE Scene One

A Punk and the Director sit in a scruffy office on either side of a pine desk. A marketing man can be seen in the corner playing with a computer terminal.

PUNK: ~~All I want to do, mate, is get back to the roots of Rock 'n' Roll.~~

INDIE: Well, you've come to the right place, my man. We have -

MKTG: - 44% base roots support according to latest surveys -

INDIE: Who rattled your cage? We have a commitment to bring down the superstar ethos, the insistence on technique, all that MOR crap. What we need is ordinary blokes off the street who can count up to three and hate with a deep and meaningless ferocity.

MKTG: - The presentational profile indicates a need for -

PUNK: Piss off, poofter.

INDIE: Well, do you fit?

PUNK: I got an O-level in woodwork and the thumbs to prove it, Paul was on heroin until the dealers declared him undesirable company, and Maurice used to be a nymphomaniac until the operation. Yeah, we're pretty average.

INDIE: But can you count up to three?

PUNK: Between us. Yeah.

MKTG: Call 'em The Thrash and wheel 'em on out. This could be very big in the 12" stakes.

Scene Two

Secretary: Mr Doo to see you, sir.

INDIE: Ah, Dougie, my man. Lie down, take the weight off your syringe. How's the boys?

PUNK: Paul claims he can't take the pressure of fame, throws TV sets out of windows, urinates into reporters' tape recorders, that sort of thing.

INDIE: And Maurice?

PUNK: Maurice claims he's hip to fame, throws TV sets out of windows, and pisses into dictaphones ... They're both fine.

INDIE: Splendid. Just as long as they keep the image up. Now, have you thought of injecting politics into your stuff?

PUNK: *(Puzzled)* They don't sell it down our way. Is it some form of downer?

INDIE: No ... Politics. You know.

PUNK: Oh, that old stuff. I thought politics went out after World War II?

INDIE: Sure, so that makes it a safe subject.

MKTG: It sells records, Dougie. Market surveys show -

INDIE: Push off, you plodding little moron. What qualifies you to comment?

MKTG: I know the industry inside-out. I see trends. I have the specialised mind to press the buttons which make teenagers and unformed minds jump.

INDIE: That all? It's pitiful. Good God, man, you could train a pigeon to do that better.

MKTG: Have I ever failed you?

INDIE: Errr ... No.

Scene Three

PUNK: What do you mean, there's more to pop than a three-chord thrash?

INDIE: Of course there is, kid. People soon get tired of just bouncing up and down and talking about rebellion. What they want now is sophistication -

MKTG: - The chance of vicarious glamour -

INDIE: -Progression -

MKTG: - Scandal! Sex!!

INDIE: - Complexity. Now, you're not delivering any of that.

PUNK: And a drum machine, an emaciated poseur playing the synth with one hand and a session musician on bass are?

MKTG: Don't forget the chubby simp on vocals with a potty like jelly on springs.

PUNK: But that's not music.

MKTG: Who said music ever entered into it? What we're working on now is the proven, scientific fact that 80% of the population can only keep two thoughts in its head at the same time.

INDIE: One of them is "boom" -

MKTG: - and the other is "clap".

INDIE: Here's your contract back, Mr Doo. We've got more important things to do.

ACT TWO

The punks are sitting in a bedroom in a back-to-back in Liverpool. It belongs to one of their sisters. One of them is picking his nose dispiritedly with a syringe. Another is gazing morosely at a picture of George Michael on the wall.

1st Punk: OK, so he's handsome and rich. He never has a bad day. He talks about women as though they're pin cushions and they love it. I still think he's a boring little fert.

2nd Punk: (*disgusted*) Those teeth! He looks like a TV quiz show host.

3rd Punk: That's it? Why don't we release an album on television obsessions?

2nd Punk: (*enthusias*) Absolutely! We can do ... Let's see ... The Benny Hill Show. How about "95% of gargoyles look like Bob Todd"? And the Liver Birds. I hate the Liver Birds.

3rd Punk: I hate Nerys Hughes.

2nd Punk: From the heart. Yeah.

3rd Punk: And one for the kids. Trumpton on drugs. Wow!

2nd Punk: Do they still show Trumpton?

3rd Punk: Who cares? We're aiming at clapped out old hacks. If we talked about 'Telebugs' they won't know what we're on about.

1st Punk: (*sotto voce*) Unless they're the clapped out old hacks who write Telebugs.

2nd Punk: And the pointlessness of meeting half-famous people - "Fuckin' 'Eli, it's Fred Titmus!" - and one on Jim Reeves, I mean, why does anyone like him, and let's open with a song that asks what the point of life is if all you do is spend it watching the telly, and, er, that's about it, really.

ME: (*Walking in*) Brilliant! That's brilliant! What are you going to call the album?

3rd Punk: How about, "Back in the D.H.S.S."?

ME: Superb! Listen, if you can get John Peel and Clover Rogerson to recommend it, I'll try it. (*Walks out*)

- 1st Punk: But there's nothing funny about all that. You can do one-liners for titles, but we'll never write anything worthwhile lower down.
- 2nd Punk: So who cares?
- 1st Punk: And what about the music? We can't write tunes either. The bloke on the Independent label will be expecting a tune. Tunes are "in".
- 3rd Punk: OK, then we'll get someone to write us a tune.
- 1st Punk: Just one tune? For the entire album?
- 2nd Punk: Absolutely.
- 1st Punk: It's just as well the record-buying public walked out before finding out more about the album, eh?
- 3rd Punk: Well, we can probably make the first side sound OK. How much do we charge?
- 1st Punk: Let's make it £2.99 and throw in a free 33rpm single.
- 2nd Punk: You what?
- 1st Punk: £2.99. Let's get back to the roots, let's do this thing on an independent basis.
- 2nd Punk: Aw, grow up. Our last 'independent' boss now owns a chain of games shops, an airline, and several nightclubs. Let's make us some money. I reckon £5.50 will just about make the nut.
- 3rd Punk: Right, that's settled. Let's get started now - I want to be in Majorca in a month's time.
- MKTG: (*Aside*) You know, these boys are evolving. In a few generations' time they could be real capitalists.



The Decline of Railways and Rock and Roll and Truth Decay by T-Bone Burnett

To be brutally frank, I have never been interested in either Rock and Roll or railways, and I therefore suffer in the terms of the title of this review by looking, as it were, down the wrong end of a telescope - I can't examine the '80s in terms of the '50s, so I'm trying to do it the other way and hence throw light on precisely why the public face of "Rock and Roll" these days is so genuinely awful where in the days when they actually played it there was a reasonable standard of achievement which has left the R&R buff with a set of enduring classics.

I think it's all to do with boeching, myself.

As is well known, the modern American single is condemned to drivel because it has to be played in a car on a long highway and lull the driver into a state of receptiveness to the advert that follows it. People like to be relaxed at the wheel of a car. It gives them a spurious sense of achievement (when actually all you have to do on an American highway is to point the thing and let it roll). Nobody likes to clench the wheel with a sweaty terror, adrenalin coursing through the back brain and eyes glazed with fear. Those few aberrants who like this sort of thing go in for Rally driving or sitting navigator with Challenger.

However, Rock and Roll initially set out to shake the listener out of complacency, not only by lyrics but with a distinctive beat. It is my contention that this beat strongly resembles the rhythm of a railway carriage and that R&R was therefore recognisable as an internal part of '50s life when people still travelled by train. There are a number of golden oldies on the theme of railway travel which make use of this congruence - The Monkees' "Last Train to Clarksville" is a typical example. However, now that we don't travel habitually by train, we've lost the connection which made the Rock and Roll rhythm seem natural.

And so it's hard to describe 'Truth Decay' in the '80s, because more than half of its songs are simple Rock and Roll with a few grace notes added. This means it sounds oddly out of place. Coupled with unusually intelligent lyrics, which begin to show the obsession with the Marilyn Monroe myth, with the shabby ethics of advertising and with, frankly, God, and Mr Burnett's bizarre voice (which sounds like he's singing through a Peruvian nose-flute), it is hard to see this one doing as well as it should. Particularly at the Import price of £6.99 ... Bring back the railroad. Buy now.