



Deadline

For all games: Tues 30 March

Your credit is



This is high / low / pitiable.

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Subscription

Sign ... 20p this and most subsequent issues, so long as the size remains at ten pages.

Gamefees

RR - 50p inc map 1829 - £1.00  
Diplomacy - £1.00 Maya II - free  
Abstraction - 75p Anything else?

Please note that if your credit is above £3.00 you are entitled to one free gamestart. Each extra pound in credit gets another free gamestart.

RR excluded, of course - you think I can afford free maps??

Waiting Lists

Diplomacy

.. none ..

& 7

Abstraction II

Julian Shepley  
Dennis Love

& 5

The Maya II

Simon Billns  
Colin Grubb  
Derek Baskett

.. almost defunct?

& 5

RR Map N

Craig Miles

& 3/4

RR Map L/C ?

Craig Miles

& 6/7

Organic Lettercolumn

At the end of another mail-less week, I was flattened this morning by the huge and very entertaining MWR! lettercolumn, which now occupies pride of place in the zine; so much so that Brian will be using a guest letter-column editor next issue (quote from Richard Walkerdine : 'Please don't mention MWR! too often though; there's no need to cheapen yourself in this way'. Fair enough, guv - still, don't knock free publicity).. This merely reminded me that I have few if any letters to type, which is a bit of a pain because I burnt up all my week's mania in an inexplicable burst at lunch today and don't see this issue being particularly inspired. No vomit this time, lads; if you still need your monthly fix, I'll send it under separate brown-paper cover. Therefore, just to be lazy, I shall use what letters I've got at random points in the zine; so don't look for even the usual amount of lucidity and coherence.

One other problem about this issue is that this week sees the OUSU and JCR elections - the Oxford-wide and JCh-narrow student bodies respectively. This doesn't affect me, does it? I mean, as an establishmentarian anarcho-syndicalist (etc) I despise all hacks. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond my control, like beer-hyped, deranged, tired and emotional megalomania and dysfunction of the political medulla, I seem to be personally involved in both, tomorrow I hawk circulars for the Rampant Mackerel Ashtray party (come on you trendy pseuds: you can identify the reference), which is fair enough, because the presidential candidate happens to be a personal friend of mine (what other type is there?). He is running on a platform including the proposition that Oxford shall be declared an electron-free zone (let's see the Law Lords try to quash that one!) and as you might expect is the only serious candidate in the election. Who would seriously elect Tory or Labour on student councils? Both are adamant that they are not running on a party political basis but on student-oriented manifestoes, so why stick to party names? Because there are enough cretins in Oxford that will vote for the party rather than the candidate, that's why. The soi-disant policies in the manifestoes are as vague as one might expect given that OUSU does nothing anyway; specifics tend to be that "OUSU must have more control over JChs" ((why?)) or that "as Conservatives we will have better communications with the government"((though not any real influence)). Better still, we're promised another 'Ragnarock' festival. For this I pay money? Are they likely to get Springsteen? The whole thing revolves around the CV, a cynical little device to list spurious achievements and to claw a better position in the rat-race. No wonder British management is so poxy: sack the lot and run industry by computer. Thanks to the CV, job applicants are able to convey a totally false picture of their ability. Indeed, apart from the President's rooms, the only reason to stand for office in the JCR is for the entry on the CV.

Did I say that? I, the man standing for JCh treasurer? It has already involved me in a day of vote-catching and discussion, and may take a further slice of my time this week. I think the reason I'm standing is that the sight of a JCR manned by dribbling incompetents as at present gives me dyspepsia. I hope I'm not post-rationalising the desire to enter the job on my CV. After all, Magdalen JCR has a budget in the region of £40,000, and in the hands of politically 'aware' gurus this is an awful lot of money to go down the drain on dumb causes. If I win I shall be bored out of my skull by committee meetings, but at least it gives me the chance to be gratuitously rude to my opponent. There is very little that any student body can do. As a generally despised body, OUSU does even less. I can vouch for this, being the political agent for the Rampant Mackerel Ashtrays; thrillingly, I was privileged to be present at a meeting of its supreme executive, which overcame the lack of any kind of central direction in order to cram a whole host of decisions into thirty brief minutes. The hustings at Merton were moved back from 8.00pm to 7.30pm. All present agreed that the NUS rep candidates would not need to be present at lunchtime hustings. and that was it. It seems

..... ..  
Thing Game Two RT155B rd 2...

What, you mean this game relies on dice? I thought that sort of thing went out with Monopoly. I may be too cool to allow this to continue.

The throws for round two as omitted last issue were 5, 3, 6. Three players sent me builds for eighteen points, for which many thanks. However, I'm holding this game back until I get stand-by orders from Craig Miles, who has kindly offered to replace the recalcitrant Terry Hill. I'll send the adjudication in a week; all players are welcome to change their orders. Last hex built by your company :

the meeting went on for two more hours after that, but at that point the inside of my lungs felt a considerable craving for clear air. I can talk rubbish with the best of them, but I do rather like to get something done.

So I'm not as dissolute as I'd like to appear, even though I spent a solid nine hours last Friday stone drunk. I can't afford to be that inattentive to reality, and this is true of editing a magazine as well. You may have wondered why I'm bothering with the Thing at all, since I obviously don't intend to run a games empire. As usual, I have no clear answer to myself, but one major thing that will keep me going until I get through University is the job experience it gives me. Yep, it's the old CV again, though at least I can get some enjoyment out of this entry. Essentially, if I want to get any sort of a journalistic job when I graduate, and I may well do, I should really be gaining experience on one of the rags that Oxford's talentless prose-hacks delight in; but I can't stand the waste of time nor the appalling mental effort in getting round jumped-up wimpo editors and a chronic absence of news, so I'm doing this instead. I still need to attend to mass-appeal and so on; as this month's 'nutty but loveable' letter has it,

Len George "John Norris' advice to you seems eminently practical. I don't know  
Middx John's background" - civil service - "but I am now involved in teaching  
lending principles to bank-managers and potential bank-managers.

Viability of projects and assessing the demand for customers' products is part of my job. I think the same way as John: there is an obvious way to survive and expand by meeting the demand for Cricketboss etc.

You may not have had to compromise with the world yet, except for shop-assistants and scouts, but it will be necessary for you to do so. The alternative of everyone having to do things your way is unacceptable in terms of total social cost. In the case of Thing I doubt that you will compromise and it may remain a very interesting minor production for this reason."

Yes, it's Doubleday the menace to society again. What will my probation officers think? Yet again I've put my metaphorical foot in it and given a wrong impression of my activities; actually, I live a life even more dreary than those of my readers, as any ex-Oxbridge student knows. I cannot afford the time to rampage all over the place, and anyway a host of actions like the 'T-shirt' incident would be unspeakably sordid.

"Pat on head - ee lad 'twas different in my day. I wish you well but you don't know you're born" - yes, the image is a problem, probably most off-putting to newcomers if not all-comers. As Brian Dolton says, I am possibly the Hobby member least recognisable from my writing: pass the carpet slippers and pipe, Jeeves.

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Thing Game Four - just to keep you on your toes. Game Three next page.

In fact, for various reasons including false information and illegibility, I've cocked the addresses up. Sorry, Wilman! In such circumstances I'm glad to accede to the general demand for a double deadline, so moves in next time if you haven't sent them already. orders on file may be changed. New addresses:

A Christie Jane Steers: 67 Hendham Rd, Tooting, London SW17

E Dave Euson : (Term) L7 Bateson Hall, Mary Rose St, Alec Rose Lane, Portsmouth,  
Hampshire PO1 2BL  
(home) 6 Gaveston Drive, Berkhamstead, Herts, HP4 1JB

F Les Hazlwood: 159 Pinewood Drive, Bartley Green, Birmingham

G Julien Shepley: Shackleford House, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey GU8 6AX

I John Wilman : 37B High St, Ely, Cambs, CB7 4LT (Phone Ely 2392)

R Chris Gordon: 63 Festing Road, Portsmouth, Hants  
(Home) 12 Glebe Rd, Cleethorpes, 5th Humberstone (from 26 March)

T Nigel Bateman: 63 Festing Rd, Southsea, Portsmouth; Hants.

A Dolchstoss record is claimed for the number of mistakes, forced and unforced, made before the game is even started. Please check all addresses carefully! As one player has cleverly observed, R and T do indeed live in the same house: surely players of your calibre can get round this diplomatically? I'm already getting confidential reports on progress - keep it up!

"It may be just about possible that you could gain an ever-widening readership for your writing in *Thing*, but I believe that this is not as likely as your finding better possibilities of an audience in other fields and eventually folding for that reason"

Preen, preen... but Len, the only other field currently open to me is that of the College magazine, and the audience for that is not the sort that I could bear to cultivate. I may not be good at Lit Crit, but I know sufficient to see that this level of writing won't get me anywhere professionally. Any offers?

"PS Do you think that *GMing* at all is prostituting your talent?"

No. On the evidence of game four any old slag has a more marketable commodity than is my *GMing*, but I intend to persevere. This is a games-zine, dam yo eyes. And to prove this, and to answer David Watts,

.....

Can there be any of you out there who don't know how wonderful this game is? Evidently there must be, since my waiting list is moving like the APT; so I'll say a few words for the defence.

Trains are boring, aren't they? Who can put his hand on his heart and honestly declare that he has never wanted to cut the tongue out of a train-spotter? I know I can't. Nonetheless, trains are a very good subject for games, because they provide a clear network and easily defined objectives. Rail Baron is marvellous face-to-face, particularly when it encourages the more senile members of the congregation to sing songs from old Musicals about the Alton, the Rock Island Line and so on. Postally, the game suffers from lack of this immediacy. On the other hand, 1829 is a much better game postally, contrary to public opinion. It no longer takes all day, and the necessary curtailment of absolute information results in an interesting tactical challenge which is lacking in the face-to-face version. FtF decisions are fairly mechanical, since any experienced player will know a good buy when he sees one - namely, the big three in general; the absence of dice is not necessarily good, because it results in an almost tedious predictability. Give the postal game a try; I have a moribund list open.

Railway Rivals is easily the best of the lot, postally; only the postal game balances the dice effects and forethought properly. You can still lose irritatingly, though, as I have proven in the past by practical experiment; however good your network, a bad set of runs can cripple you, and this can leave you at the mercy of the dice. This is where 'freight rivals' comes in; I shall be watching the game just started in *Ode* with great interest. I am convinced that the running system, with a little train that moves round the board continually picking up and depositing loads, will sort out the more efficient networks better,

.....  
Thing Game Three (Voice 10) farce, farce, moans inept GM...

~~As (Lon), (StP) st unordered~~  
 England (J. Jaruso) NMR! Fs (LNC), (NWG), As (Lon), (StP) st unordered  
 France (resigns due to lack of interest) F(Lpl), F(Por), F(MAO), As (Bel), (Bur) st unordered. Grrr!  
 Germany (I. Giles) Fs (NRI), (SKA), As (Hol), (Fun), (Pru) all st unordered NMR!  
 Italy (A. 'Hero' Watson) ~~F(Smy)-Con~~; F(IOS)-AES; F(Nap)-IOS; A(Ven)-Apu; A(Tyo)-Ven  
 Russia (anarchy) F(Swe), A(Mos) st unordered  
 Turkey (M. 'Hero' Mantle) A(Jev) S A(hum) MS A(Bul); F(Con) S A(Ank)-Smy  
 Austria (R. Pratt) A(Bud)-hum; F(Gre) S A(Ser)-Bul; A(War) S A(Vie)-Gal; A(Tri)-Vie  
 Retreat Italian F(Smy)-EMS

A pox on the lot o' ye! Ray got his orders in this morning: hence the typing mishmash. England is bound to drop out, but what about Germany? Unless Ian continues, I propose a three-way draw I/T/A: no vote - agreement. Free game?

Other variants of railway rivals may conceivably improve upon the original. Two that David Watts has included in RGA are 'Leapfrog' and 'Economic'. In the former, each player has a specified number of leaps over adjoining track owned by another player; these leaps may be up to three nexes in length. Surely this must soon become the accepted norm for the 'hilly' boards like A, G, K and O; the opportunity for invasion of other players' monopolies, which is one of the major skills of the game; is suitably increased on such boards. In 'Economic' the players submit tenders for each of the runs; the lowest tender on a run has two trains, the next lowest one. Extra-realistic though this is, I cannot claim to have the faintest idea how it plays; the only game I tried, RR99C, I lost convincingly miserably.

Related to the 'Economic' variant is the 'Doubleday' variant. This was, alas, invented by Steve, and has never seen the light of day. The idea is to merge RR with 1829; companies are floated, and the money that they make goes either into the company coffers or into the pockets of their venal directors. Capitalist swine! This is perhaps the most promising variant dialectically speaking, which is I mean like where it's at, emit? Even that enemy of the people David Watts claims that RR is a teaching aid. The whole idea sounds great fun and will probably be too complicated to work at all; please, anybody, show some positive interest before next issue, and I'll dig out the relevant issue of Gallimaufry to copy out the rules.

That only really leaves me with 'Kleinstaaterei', a pretentious little variant which I really must get around to devising. The idea is that players own a town in Germany and build out of it as normal; but, while revenue comes from the railway, the object is to conquer as many of the other cities as possible. This is done in Diplomacy fashion, with armies whizzing along the rail network. The whole caboodle is set in the time of the Zollverein, or around 1815-1848. However, when it comes to putting flesh on these bones I'm afraid I've been a little lax. There are no books on the finances of the time that I know of, so I shall probably have to make the fiscal system up. No problem, really; what does get tricky is that, in the period in question, Prussia enclosed more than half of Germany, and what's more the Austrian Empire had influence over much of the rest. Both of these historical facts are going to make 'Kleinstaaterei' a bugger to design for the German map, which has towns awkwardly grouped for the purposes of this variant. Well, I shall endeavour to solve these problems over the forthcoming holidays.

In other words, there are several possibilities in RR that haven't even been explored by the inventor as yet. Even if we restrict ourselves to the standard game, it is still a popular pastime to design new maps. I have a special interest in this, not because I have my own map, but because the only game I won was on John Marsden's 'L & M' map. It is an interesting map, and its defects serve to highlight the problems in map-designing:

There has to be a major challenge to the players. On the 'L & M' this is the linkage of Liverpool and Manchester, by far the two most important towns, with valuable linkage routes on the side. These latter are impeded principally by the Mersey canal, which divides track up nicely.

The balance of mountains/hills is very tricky. On the 'L & M' the centre of the board is devoid of these obstacles, which makes the task of establishing an efficient route so much easier, and wrecks what might be skilful efforts to establish a monopoly in any valuable region. On other boards the excess of hills can inhibit any real choice as to the expansion of the network: this is in my opinion the worse evil.

Designers must choose a suitable area for the map with care. I know this sounds obvious, but most designers are soppy train-freaks, grrrrr, and go for an area because it was important historically. In the context of a game with hindsight, maps like G are pretty fatuous affairs when played 'straight'. As David admits, the best games are C, E, and perhaps L and M, where the balance of terrain is just subtle enough to pose the players awkward questions at every turn.

Right, I hope I haven't been too boring there; I hope to stimulate either some discussion or some interest in the RR waiting lists, which are probably easiest to fill. Richard Walkerdine complains that he isn't interested in either of the two maps on offer; I wave wombat-puenda at his nose. To him and others I say, if you don't like what's on offer; ask for something else; the waiting lists are all my own work so far, because no-one has. Oh, and Richard suggests a bourse: any takers? Rules available on request.

## The Divine Invasion

Dear Reader: in olden times, when zines bore names like 'Frigate' and 'Grafeti' and were even more illegible and dull than they are now (yes, it is possible), the approach to filling out the pages was different. Oftentimes the privileged subscribership would cluster round games reports in which they had not the slightest interest, filled with appalling press and directed by vacuous minds. In those far-off days no-one knew that Raines Park even existed, much less that it was of any interest; Joy Division was but a whisper on the deranged mind of a suicidal maniac, and no-one suspected that one day would come the great Messiah, Amy whose deeds lie in the Book of Reggae.

Gentle Reader, do you know what inspired those early pioneers to turn briefly aside from Diplomacy and to dabble in the Black Art of creative writing? Science Fiction.

Yet, now, that interest is almost extinct. It is, therefore, with great pride that I bring you news that even the great Piggot, he who knows all or at least a dam' sight more than we mere mortals, possesses. In twelve to eighteen months' time, a new mega-talent will burst onto the scene with a novel loosely based on SF.

Naaah, it isn't me, worse luck. The name to look for is F.J. Dunstan, an old friend from school, whose first novel will be published by Fontana early next year; look out for it.

There is, of course, no connection between the foregoing and the latest book from Phil Dick, whose title is as above. He "takes a giant step along a vector he has long been travelling, and may be pointing the way to the new extended SF of the post-1980 period", according to Norman Spinrad. I object to this. I picked Dick up on his earlier style, which was essentially as a master of the extended conceit. Because he was a hack-writer during the late '50s and early '60s, much of this early work bears the hallmark of rush and sloppiness, and often leaves the reader with no clue as to how the conceit will be resolved until Dick finally decides to wrap it up and rush it to the printers. Even at his most irritating then, however, Dick remained endearing; the story was good, clean, compelling fun, even if it was usually meaningless.

With The Divine Invasion Dick takes up where he left off in VALIS, on the other end of the spectrum, and I'm bound to say that I don't approve of this new 'vector'. The book starts promisingly enough, with a scene-setting involving the colony world CY30-CY30B and cryonic suspension. As usual, there is no 'hard' explanation of these features; they just exist. But where earlier works go on to weave a web of tangled perception around this perfunctory framework, DI goes back to the easy mysticism of VALIS. This was a book I found very difficult to struggle through, since mysticism isn't really my scene; I leave the self-indulgent sophistry that Hagbard Celine so loved to Tamlyn. As in the earlier work, Dick uses the Judaic-Christian tradition and mixes it with so many other arcane sources that it is extremely difficult for even the informed reader to keep up. And why should he? All Dick is doing is setting his own internally justifiable religion up from any knowledge he has. This is not in itself a recipe for a good novel, as VALIS proved, when it eventually wound to a conclusion with Dick's schizophrenia apparently cured. In an earlier novel, whose title I forget, he sketched the religion very quickly and then went about the business of using it to explore the inner minds of crew aboard a doomed spaceship who escaped their predicament by communal dreams - great fun, if without depth. At least in DI he has some sort of a story to tell other than the workins of the religion, but it is a sadly deformed one.

The simple reason for this 'breakthrough' into a new style of SF is that Dick's brain is addled with drugs. In the past, drugs were at the centre of his novels, such as 'Flow my Tears', whose plot relies entirely on a special type of drug. How did Dick know about drugs? - because he was pumping them into himself at a vast rate. On recovering, he 'got' religion; not in any conventional sense, but as an intense desire to explain and to tie together all the religions of the world. His two latest books, therefore, are filled with the type of mystical crap that he derided in the mouths of his drugged characters in Through a Scanner. The conceit now takes over the story, rather than being used as a device within it: Yahweh emerges triumphant from DI, rather than as a figment of a deranged imagination.

This time Dick makes a real go of turning the book into a novel. In order to produce some suspense, he makes Yahweh something short of omnipotent - an impaired

idea, although we know he'll win in the end - he's the good guy, isn't he?. Scripture tells us he will, doesn't it? - and a mystical Dick is not the sort to ignore Scripture, not when he weaves in strands from the Talmud, the Maccabees, you name it. Not that this ruins the book; it's much like watching a cheap but satisfying Spaghetti Western. Yet because the degree to which Yanweh falls short of omnipotence is entirely arbitrary, Dick is free to use 'magic' to escape from any awkward conundrum that the plot leaves him. There is no need to look further for a device to enter Barth's airspace despite the Opponent than by using the Voice of Control. At points, therefore, I am left with a sense of deep dissatisfaction.

Apart from the cathartic effect it obviously has on his craziness, it is not easy to see quite what the point of the book is. If it didn't suffer from such cardboard characterisation, I'd say it explored the reaction of ordinary people (indeed, in the case of the neo-Joseph, paranoid people) to the immanence of the godhead (immanence - good, impressive word that; I always thought Shea and Wilson used it to cover up a spot where their theology went shaky). The neo-Mary has some neat lines as she bemoans the normal pains and inconveniences of the pregnancy which she is forced to endure. In point of fact she is the most complex and fruitful character by far; but she occupies less than a quarter of the book before she is killed off. The neo-Joseph is more of a papier-mache character: when Dick can't cover a parallel in detail, he resorts to a deus ex machina, such as the blinding pink light of the earlier VALIS to announce the immanence. His presence seems an excuse for the androcentric Dick to concentrate on the winning of the Fox (a female singer) as a prize. Yawn. None of the baddies are of any depth, and the two halves of the godhead are merely petulant little kids for the vast part of the book.

If, on the other hand, the book is a story of the conflict between good and evil, all well and good: except that Stephen Donaldson does it so much more powerfully, and without resorting overmuch to the pill of mysticism.

Oh, what the hell - go out and buy it; in paperback it's only £1.50, and overall it retains much of the old compelling Dick style, which was noticeably absent in VALIS. At least with a subject so profound Dick has every opportunity to come up with some entertaining plot ideas: I love the idea of the devil being locked up in the body of a goat in a New York zoo, and am also happy to see the old strain of parallel worlds return, as it transpires that our own world is not the actual world until near the end of the book. Whatever other defects the book has, it usually avoids that niggling fault that SF books and stories on God have: I bleeding defined Him, didn't I, and He'll behave precisely as I tell Him to. Truly such an attitude, common in the hands of twats such as Moorecock, is one of *Holeir-than-Thou*. The one real worry I have is that this is the second book of a trilogy; otherwise why would he take pains to equate God with VALIS. Oh me, Dick has written enough for an ordinary reader like me not to have real grounds for complaint. I only hope that this rush of mystical blood to the head doesn't preclude the publication in *Grahada* of all his other works, such as *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, which I haven't read yet.

.....

Now that he hasn't won his Rusty Bolt, I expect I can confidently go ahead and print

The Jonathan Palfrey Lettercolumn

After all, I can't be said to have arrived until I've done so, can I? With this in mind I wrote to him asking quite what being brought up in a former African colony had been like, and this is what he said:

"I lived in a British colony for only two or three years; Nigeria became independent when I was six, and my memories from that time are very blurred now. Subsequently, Africa became steadily more corrupt, seedy and dangerous. I wouldn't want to put the clock back, even if it could be done, but I have no wish to be an unwelcome guest in a still semi-primitive country. Perhaps Africa will be a friendly, pleasant country sometime in the future; but I think I'll be old or dead by then. I've acclimatised to England pretty well by now."

I regard this as yet one more piece of evidence that colonialism was, on balance, a Good Thing, and that we abandoned our responsibilities that bit too early. One of my college friends has relatives who return from Nigeria every so often joyously spreading tales of seeing what looked like wellington boots at the side of the road, but which turned out to be severed black limbs; or of the still smoking remnants of a quaint system of justice - it appears that villagers cannot trust the police to deal with brigands adequately, this being a form of crime rife in the country outside Lagos, and so rather than turning those they capture over to the police, they stack

up a pile of old tires and place the offender inside: then they set the whole thing a alight.... Of course, these witnesses are self-confessedly as right-wing as hell (I wonder why the foreign office and related institutions always seem to be so staffed?), but this doesn't mean that the whole thing is a tissue of lies. Decolonialisation may well prove to be the one big blotch on the record of an otherwise steadily improving British colonial system; I maintain that this is because of an over-simple idea that all people were essentially the same sort of chap under the skin, whereas I subscribe to the heresy that wogs etc are not only at a different stage in cultural development, but are also prisoners of their own history to such an extent that they are not as adept at running their own country as we would be. Yes, the use of the opprobrious term 'wog' back there was deliberately tasteless, offensive, and provoking. The world is too full of weak-kneed wimpy liberals for its own good. And on a different, but still tasteless, tack, here's

Malcolm                    " The reason I called Thing 'The Shit on the Doorstep' was that  
Smith                    recently the lasses next door have been victimised by some mega-perverts  
(Cleveland) who kept putting shit through the letter-box. On the last occasion some  
                             chaps broke into the front room, crapped on the floor and used the lace  
curtains as toilet paper. Ughhh! "

Mr, yes, thankyou Malc. Not to be outdone, I counter with the nauseating story of strange Christmas goings-on in an unsalubrious part of Brum last festive season, when one merry japer stuffed five yards of net curtain down his lavatory for reasons unknown, causing a certain amount of distress to his neighbours. One was up all Christmas Eve bailing out the raw sewage that was pouring into his bath ... Perhaps we need colonial rule by the Nigerians?

#### So you want to know who the upper class are?

Your noble editor is in an ideal position to study the bastards at length (arm's or otherwise). After Christchurch, which is so crotch-full of Etonians that it makes you think of taking the old mustard gas out of cold storage and continuing where the Bosch left off, Magdalen is depressingly Public School orientated. The difference in tradition is largely based on religion, for my esteemed college has a long record of High Church Anglicanism which has led to the familiar corruption of the name, now pronounced 'Maudlin'. Christ Church men do not give a fart for their religion, despite being in possession of the Oxford cathedral. Their preferred moniker is 'The House', which for inmates is transposed into 'The Haise' or some similar garbled pronunciation. Still, where I cannot fill in the details of that loathsome class from my own experience, I can always fall back on the notable fact that upper-class types in Magdalen tend to associate with their fellows in the House.

Such thoughts are prompted by an unfortunate incident I suffered soon after the last Thing. Celebrating the publication of my friend's book in the time-honoured fashion, I found myself at two o'clock in the morning in New College Cloisters, slightly the worse for wear, with six men on top of me. This of course is terribly thrilling if you happen to be into that particular scene, but I'm not, and in any case the main gist of their assault was to 'debag' me. Unlike the similar-sounding process to which computers are subjected, this is not a beneficial experience. I object; I object violently; and, if there had been rather fewer adversaries I would have banged their fucking heads together. As it was, after about fifteen exhausting minutes I found myself compelled to climb the Garden Gate (15' high) in order to retrieve my trousers. While slightly drunk this is no laughing matter. Neither is it amusing that I had to repeat the process to get back to the room where I had left raw copies of the Thing, and once more to get out of college, followed by a lethal overhang and a drop of about eight feet. Nor, again, was I amused by the stream of blood that ran from my slashed neck onto my collar - "It's only the sort of thing you'd get while shaving", they said, (but with an electric razor?) and I still have a kind of duelling scar to remind me. What I particularly disliked was the nurt distaste they professed - "We were only having a bit of fun"; but I quite obviously did not regard it as a bit of fun from the start. Given the chance, I would cheerfully beat their heads in.

Over-reaction, you say. Perhaps; I am aware that one is supposed to take these affairs in a mood of levity and indulgence. Nonetheless, this is the sort of thing



that I associate most with public schoolboys: thoughtless prankstership and self-indulgence. The sort of thing, in fact, that their game par excellence, Rugby, is designed to appease. Who has not wanted to crunch someone's skull under steel toecaps (in the case of one otherwise despicable ac uaintance, fracturing his skull critically)? To deliver a smashing tackle that snaps legs or knees like twigs? But honest, you snivelling little turd, it's all in fun, all in the spirit of the game. Don't believe any man who tells you that the joy of Rugby is in the poetry; no-one wants to be in the three-quarter line, they want to be where the action is going down, in the ruck and maul.

And in its own way rugby is a very character-moulding game. Public schoolbrats come out of their education with the full appreciation that life is unfair and that you'd better screw the bastards into the ground. The one obvious joint characteristic of public schoolboys of my acquaintance is that they are heavily self-centred. In the general case this means a rather cynical subscribal to the Conservative association, or, if Herbert Public is a trendy, to the Social Democrats. Donald Jenkins, the archetypal upper-class twit who is still here largely on the basis of a miracle and the long-suffering nature of Humanities examiners, has migrated from treasurer of the Monday Club (in Oxford, real sieg heil sods) to semi-convicted Social Democrat. I regret to say that Donald is a personal friend, because politically he is an imbecile, and he is given to making use of others' emotional-crisès to persuade them to help him leaflet various dubious causes; other than that, the troubles of other students do not seem to tax him unduly. At the other extreme, we have Francis G.H.D. Fitzgibbon, a Champagne socialist. This means that he professes the overthrow of the decadent capitalist state and at one and the same time spends his lavish income on champagne parties with similar fascist thug friends. He, again, has no concern for other people, but is quick to take offence should you make passing rumpus outside his room. Other wonders of the Public School detritus include Peter Barnes, an English scholar who got through to a debating final concerning Northern Ireland whilst under the winsome misapprehension that Ulster was a city rather than a province; Paul 'You are beneath my station, you tedious little man' Newman; and an endless list of similar shallow cretins. Dinner-jacketed dodos, they strut around the better restaurants of Oxford whining nasally about how the state is busy removing all the money that pater so justly inherited. Their idea of a big social occasion is a cocktail party at which friends of a similar social standing lounge around talking politely about nothing at all, the idea being to impose yourself on others rather than to impart information or opinion; getting drunk is only decently to be done on champagne, and with luck there will be several 'secretaries' around to bed afterwards. This futile and obnoxious way of life is known to the saner members of Magdalen as 'whaugh-whaugh', because this is roughly the sound that such parties emit.

Members of the House go one better. They tend to combine social inanity with a Rugby, or Hearty, mentality, which means essentially getting as permanently drunk as possible and doing objectionable things. As an example, take the Rugby XV itself, which has an attractive little pastime that goes under some such name as 'Peekaboo'. The XV stands in the middle of the main quad and strips off; if they spot anyone watching them they will then shout 'Peekaboo', invade their room, and beat them up.

Actually I can't say exactly what puts me off the upper classes as exhibited at Oxford; they do tend to band together in a coherent whole, but what they do is not necessarily worse than what other students do, except in degree. They live lives self-contained, unadventurous and vaguely inane. Perhaps I'm just jealous, although what of I wouldn't like to say. There are more displeasing individuals around, but no more displeasing group. Perhaps one of the worst things about being at Magdalen is that there are a lot of these people about, but there are compensations, and in any case college life is so disparate that one can often avoid running into them for weeks at a time.

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Last issue contained a serious omission; I had been asked by Alan Watson to publicise the following games that he is selling:

Airforce	still sealed	£7.50
Title Bout	(boxing)	£7.00
Circus Maximus		£6.00
Foreign Exchange		£7.00

All are Avalon Hill and the price includes postage. I apologise for the omission last time, which made the issue uncharacteristically chat-heavy.

Back page time again, and I wonder what I can say? I must apologise for the various cocks-up that the games are suffering at the moment; game three is scarcely my fault, but I apologise anyway: you need a scapegoat. The delay in production I attribute to my complete inadequacy with the plethora of duplicators at my disposal; it will not necessarily recur.

Do I really need to tell you that Rob Chapman is looking for new subscribers (and, I expect, players)? If I do, then you haven't been paying attention to whatever other zines you get. More personable even than Tweedy, more musically obscure than Birks, almost as artful as Allaway (quantity, that is; what Rob does shows the obvious imprint of one trained to the canvas), Rob runs a zine that is hard to put down in either sense. Apply now at 7 Baymount, Paignton, Devon TQ3 2LD.

One thing that that has just reminded me of, for no apparent reason, is the college band, which dreadful as it sounds to my unmusical ears does at least rejoice in the name of Rococco Filth. I include this merely because the name caught my fancy; I might almost go along to a gig for the sake of the name alone. Oh yes, and I lost the election for JCR Treasurer, to an opponent who went to the unprecedented lengths of producing a manifesto. I mean, what can you say? Random gems included the information that he had commitment to the cause of accountancy, having kept his personal accounts for five years; we are to continue the cheap-rate batteries in the college shop; and his slogan, "Try it - you'll like it.!" That this won is indicative of the general inanity of students and of the power of manifestoes. Ah well - my next job is to distribute leaflets advertising Toucon 1 around sundry parts of the university - thankyou, Calcraff, but where am I supposed to put the damn' things? It's probably too late to have much effect in any case. Then there's arranging matches for the Cricket 3rd XI next term; life is all a bundle of fun.

Outposts 11 arrives, and is much to be recommended for all interested in variants or in RR. In an accompanying, and rather difficult of comprehension letter, I learn that my zine and letter style seems a bit like that of John Dodds, which I must say hadn't struck me; and, more importantly, that there is no visible 'variants boom'. This is possibly true, since the only indication that I've had of any such thing is a plea to run Mercator (no, no, a thousand times no! I find the game boring and complicated enough merely in playing). The boom is largely an invention of editors who should know better, and just goes to show how little one can trust a man as hazed as Birks. I repeat for the benefit of anyone listening: I am willing to run any simple and interesting variant, if the demand is there; what about Multiplicity? I wouldn't even mind playing in that one. The variant OGS stands at... er .. there doesn't seem to be one, Andrew. Outposts suffers from the usual problem of lithoed zines: though even more attractively presented than most, it comes in ready-to-lose bits with no clear order to them. Andrew himself is a Politics student with distinct historical leanings, which contrasts nicely with me; a History student with distinctly anti-political leanings. Andrew Poole; 11 Upper Church Park, Lumbles, Swansea SA3 4DD.

Just what does my study of History amount to, you would ask if you knew what was good for you. Well, it's currently leading me through the political press of the late seventeenth century, which is fascinating because in many ways it mirrors the development of Diplomacy zines with readerships only one order of magnitude higher. You may well find yourself plagued with my further research on the subject in future issues, since unless I use this pathetic excuse I may not even do the reading in the first place. Birks, Chapman, Gooch, Creese, Smith et al the spiritual inheritors of Swift, Defoe and Addison? Perhaps this isn't such a good idea after all.

Pushing on to this month's new zine, we come to 'Stick the knife in'. What can I say? I now lose the distinction of being the youngest zine on the market, and what's more Nigel McCabe, at 15, comfortably outshines me in dedication. He's already run a game to Autumn 1904, although it appears this may finish next season. One thing that worries me is the vaunting ambition; Nigel, with the insouciance of youth, has elected to go KYODK and to produce a Litho zine at 40p or 35p a shot. I don't think this will work, and I would advise Nigel to change to stencil duplication very quickly; the demand for new zines, particularly those based on Diplomacy pure and simple, is not impressively large. Until Nigel gets established, the overheads are going to be crippling. Help the poor lad out with a subscription; game fees are waived. Write to 314 Rashcliffe Hill, Lockwood, Huddersfield, HD1 3ND

End of a page, end of an era.....