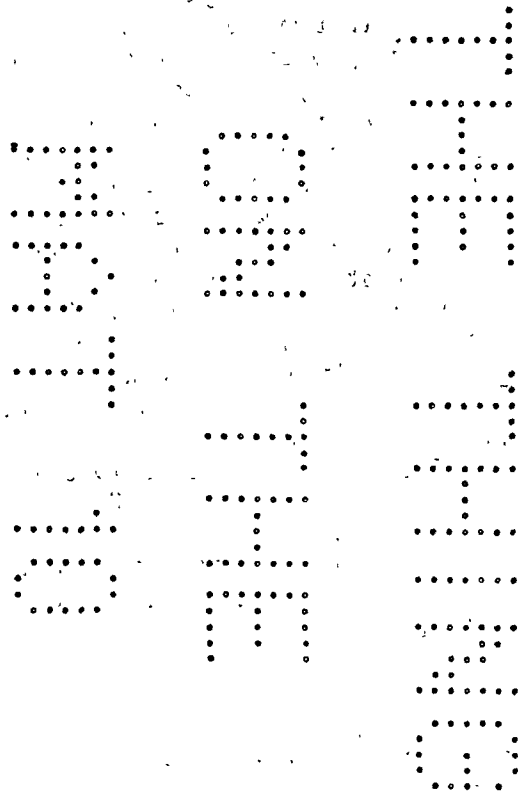


Just when you
thought it was
safe to stop
grading...



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

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

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

(depending on size of issue)

Gamefees

Gamelists

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfeeling bastards.

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

Editors and Booze

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

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

boring Boring B o r i n g BORing BORING.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You were quite right about the pink oboe, John.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nicholas
Clifton (£1)
(Kent)

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

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

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

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

Better luck next time?

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

I see: being cagey, are we?

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

Cause and effect, thou art not dead!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What if?