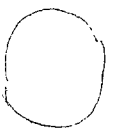
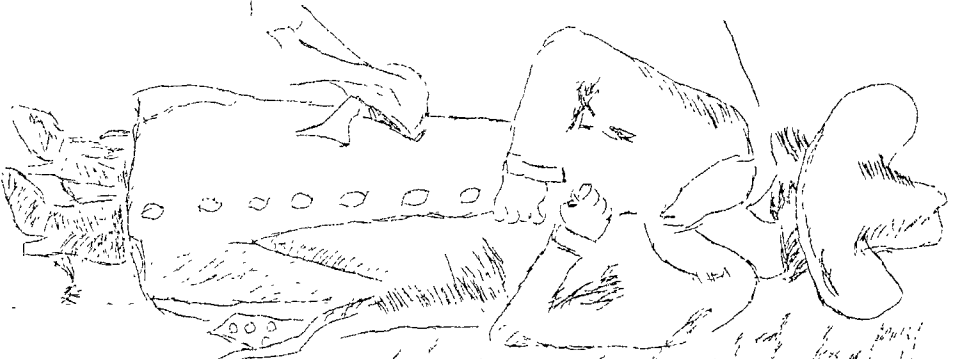




FIN MAH
PRISLEY DOB'S
GET HIM MAH
BUCHMAN
WILL ...



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 gamesplayer 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 ...

BBB RRR I TTTT I SS H H	RRR AA I L	RRR EEEE GG RRR EEEE TTTT
B B R R I T I S H H	R R A A I L	R R E G R R E T
BBB RRR I T I S H H	RRR AAAA I L	RRR EEE G RRR EEE T
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TTTTT OO	AA N N N N OO U U N N CC EEEE	DDD EEEE L AA Y Y SS
T O O	A A N N N N NO OU UN N NC E	D D E L A A Y Y SS
T O O	AAAA N N N N NO OU UN N NC EEE	D D EEE L AAAA YYY SS
T O O	A A N N N N NO OU UN N NC E	D D E L A A Y Y SS
T OO	A A N N N N OO UU N N CC EEEE	DDD EEEE LLLL A A YY SS

DD: U U EEEE	TTTTT OO
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D D U U EEE	T O O
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DDD UU EEEE	T OO

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 games 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 inu-sterious 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 Birmingham 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 Eummies 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 on 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,