

EXCITEMENT CITY

UNLIMITED

#6

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Good Riddance, Bruce

THE STORY OF MISHA MAZDA

Tired of manhandling a cart full of groceries each week and emboldened by my bigger than expected Christmas bonus (see, it is good for something), Barbara and I broke down and bought a new car. After perusing the car books and consumer reports, Barbara singled out four possible cars including the Mazda 323 Basic Hatchback. So we visited the car dealership.

At a dealership we discussed the various options and decided upon the Basic model (no flash upholstery) with an automatic shift and air conditioning. And yes, they had the exact model on their lot. After looking at it and going on a test drive, we put down a \$200 deposit straight away so that Barbara could get to use it as soon as possible. Right now the weather is a bit too cold to wait for buses.

After a few days wait to have our loan approved by the bank, we call the dealership to arrange a pick up. Oh, there's been a problem, they say. The car we put a deposit down on had to be sent back to the manufacturers. Hmmm. We call the manager that evening and the story changes. Well, by mistake, that particular car had already been sold to somebody else before we put down our deposit. However, the manager is nice. A Manhattan dealership has the same colour car with power steering for only \$240 more. Uh huh.

We take turns yelling at the saleswoman and manager over the phone for over half an hour. "We make a mistake and you want to crucify us!" wails the manager, as Barbara and I insist that they sell us the replacement for the price of the car which we put the deposit down for. The manager refuses to sell the car without at least getting the cost price of the power steering (which comes to \$200 - the price of our deposit - how cute) and threatens to simply return our deposit otherwise. Finally we figure we do want power steering anyway, and we're getting it for cost and we want a car straight away, so we settle "I don't run a shoddy business", declares the manager. He promises to call at 10am the next day to tell us if we can pick up the car the following day. He doesn't. Isn't it a shame you have to buy foreign cars from American salespeople?

Like Scott Hanson and Frauke Petersen, we name our cars. So welcome Misha Mazda.

Of course now our income is being gobbled by loan payments and insurance. Consequently, now seems as good a time as any to announce the first ECU price increase. I'll still be subsidising you a lot but not as much as before. Starting this issue, ECU will cost 75¢ to North and South Americans. Everyone else will pay \$1.00 to receive this airmail, which is still less than the cost of the postage alone. OK, you receive less insults per page than the average Blunt Instruments but you can't have everything...

EXCITORIAL: WHERE ARE THE NEW QUALITY ZINES?

The latest Everything contained some good news. After a sharp drop in gamestarts in 1986, the hobby rebounded in 1987, starting well over 100 Diplomacy games. There also appear to be a good number of new zines. However, the problem with the North American hobby nowadays is not the number of zines but the overall lack of quality.

In the newcomers there is a general lack of "fannishness". There is not as much personal contact characterised by chatty letter columns and hobby news with lots of personal comment. We need more of the kind of relaxed exchange of views which transforms zines into more of a community, instead of just rather introverted vehicles for games. By pursuing quality, I don't mean that we should try to rival the depth of formal magazines or the professionalism of computer moderated PBM companies. We're just earnest amateurs who spend some spare time dabbling in running games and writing articles. We have fun and make friends (so long as we're not a pompous twat like Bruce Geryk). The special ingredient we have to offer is ourselves. Unfortunately, I feel editors just aren't putting enough of themselves into their zines.

Enough of the general stuff, let's name some names. As far as I'm concerned, the two best fannish zines are Costaguana and Praxis. The Abyssinian Prince was doing well but Jim Burgess folded it just as I felt it was getting into its stride. Other good fannish zines include Cathy's Ramblings, House of Lords, the terribly underrated Vertigo, Life of Monty and the subzine High Inertia. KK/Whitestonia is definitely in the same spirit though I don't like the style as much. The problem, for me at least, is that there aren't enough zines of this calibre and there don't seem to be many new ones in the pipeline.

The class of 1987 is dominated by zines which just run games. Zines like The Home Office, The Volcano City Times and Vortex do a good job of running games to tight deadlines but I feel a zine should be able to do more. Penguin Dip is well written and beautifully printed but the latest issue contains only one throwaway reference about another hobby zine. Over There looks promising (though the latest issue is late) and Random Thought won't live out the year if Jeff Zarse finds the hobby as unrewarding as his fellow Bad Boys. To be honest, the zine scene looks pretty bad.

There is some hope. The revived Passchendaele and Nutmeg look very promising but both editors need to be careful and avoid over-commitment. I expect Dystopia and Cross Rifles to improve radically as their editors learn more about zine production and the hobby in general. And, of course, there are several zines I don't see at all which sound promising like the new Canadian publications, Hagalil Hamaarvi and Northern Flame.

Why are new zines like this? Are editors afraid of getting caught up with feuding so they keep away from the mainstream? Now that the hobby has largely put aside feuding, surely there shouldn't be much fear of feuding? I must admit to being rather mystified.

Normally I'm fairly optimistic about the hobby. Whenever some hobby Cassandra pops forth prophesying imminent hobby doom, I can always look on the bright side. However the general lack of good, light-hearted fannish fun in the hobby bothers me. That's why I enjoy the hobby and I'd like to see a little more of it.

THE GAMES

WILLIAM RUFUS DEVANE KING

SPRING 1908

MILLER# 1986Bcn05

One minor correction this time. Barbary was playing one build short so his adjustments should have read "no change or build one".

Retreats: Barbary f spanc-mao

Builds: Germany a kie, a mun, a ber

Austria (Kevin Tighe)

Removals: Italy f cre

a con s Persian a arm-ank

Barbary (Jake Walters)

f nao holds, f por-spasc (no such unit), f mao-sao, f iri-mao, f eng s f
iri-mao, a alg holds, a sah s a alg

France (Jeff Hoffman)

a par s a bre, a bre s a par

Germany (Mike Pustilnik)

f swe-bal, f nwy-bar, f bel-pic, f nth c a hol-nwy, a hol-nwy, a den holds,
a ber-pru, a mun-sil, a kie-mun, a tri-bud, a vie s a tri-bud, a tyr-tri,
a ven s a tyr-tri, a mar-spa

Italy (Robert Acheson)

a gas s a spa-mar, a spa-mar, f rom holds, f alb-adr, a gre-alb, f aeg-gre

Persia (John Crosby)

f ant holds, a tun holds, a lib-eth, a arm-ank, f ion-cre, f smy-aeg,
f sms s f ion-cre

Russia (Conrad von Metzke)

NMR! a bud, a ser, a rum, a bul, f bla all hold

Turkey (Doug Brown)

NMR! a ank holds

Retreats: German a mar-bur/pie/otb, Russian a bud-gal/otb, Turkish a ank-smy/ale/otb

Press

Rome-Moscow: Your creditability with me is zero but if you use the two builds to attack Germany I'd accept it. You can play for second place so be it. but if you really want to stop Germany you'd combine with Persia and split those two Turkish centres.

Rome-Jordan: Naples will be open but if you want to hurt Germany I'd suggest taking another of the Barbary centres. After all it's his fleets that will prove to be your biggest problem.

Persia-Italy: After S07 you promised unimpeded access to Ion. Why then cre-ion.

Persia-Barbary: Is Italy still your buddy? How about peace? I moved as promised.

GM-Italy & Persia: Diplomacy via the press, eh? Come on guys, write letters!

GAMENOTES

Since nobody objected, we'll be using the ECU houserules from now on (with rule 8 waived).

Could Rudi Rudisill (9933 Clearfield Avenue, Vienna, VA 22180) submit standby orders for Russia and Bob Gossage (9201 S. Central Park, Evergreen Park, IL 60642-1405) submit standby orders for Turkey. Thanks.

John Crosby has moved to 9031 Cardiff Road, Richmond, VA 23235 and Conrad should be back at his home address.

Deadline: Saturday, February 27th, 1988

WAITING LISTS

Stab: Derwood Bowen, Doug Brown, Glenn Petroski, Brad Wilson 3 wanted

Downfall of the Lord of the Rings: Doug Brown, Cathy Ozog, Rod Walker,
Mike Dominskyj 4 wanted

There are no gamefees for the above variants. Rules are available on request.
Roll up! Roll up! These will be GMed by myself.

Railway Rivals: GM Brian Longstaff

Map N (New England): Mark Nelson, Martin Kloosterman 2 wanted

Map T (Middle Earth): Mark Nelson 4 wanted

No gamefee but Brian charges one international reply coupon per turn and the
maps cost about \$2. Could Doug Brown specify which map he'd like to play?

International Diplomacy: GM Mark Nelson

Martin Kloosterman(Australia), David Stone(Trinidad), Edward Ainsworth (UK),
Laurence Cronin (Grenada), Ron Cameron (USA) 2 wanted

This is a "Seven Nations" game with one player allowed from a single country.

International Diplomacy: GM Bob Gossage

John Piggott, John Cain 5 wanted

This is just a free-for-all international game. Anyone is wanted.

Standbys: Cline 9: Conrad von Metzke, Jake Walters?, Tom Ramsey?

International Dip: Bill Young

All Purpose: Doug Brown, Martin Kloosterman

I still need standbys and lots of them. If you sign up you receive one free
issue on the spot. If you submit standby orders which are used, you receive
a further three free issues.

SIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSIGNUPNOWSI

WORLD DIP CON UPDATE #2

I received my first registration fee a couple of weeks from John Crosby.
Unfortunately, that's the only one I've received so far. I feel I must impress
on you all that you have to register beforehand to ensure that there will be
a place at the convention. The accomodation is not unlimited, so you risk
missing out on a room if you don't pre-register. Because some people may have
received the last flyer late, I've decided to extend the deadlines. Now, if
you register before February 29th, it will cost \$10. If you register any time
after the end of February, it costs \$15.

Several people have told me that they're definitely going: Larry Peery,
Fred Davis (and Joe Santella et femme who will be there on vacation). Come
on guys, register! Possibles include Jay Shefelt, Eric Verheiden, Ron Spitzer,
and Bill Young. I'm definitely going myself. My prediction so far is that
5-10 will finally cross the big drink.

Next issue I'll dig out figures on travel costs.

LETTUCE

((Editing a letter column can be a real pain. Even after filing away half of this month's mailbag, I am still left with ten letters with sections worth printing (including some excellent stuff from Mike Hopcroft, Alan Stewart and Gloria Jacobs). So if you were wondering why I never seem to print your letters...))

Mark Nelson ECU arrived a few days ago, forwarded from Leeds as I'm still on vacation. This temporary C.O.A. must have fooled you as I haven't been shot. // I am currently having problems finding a foil, having decided that the use of pistols is not the mark of a true gentleman, which is long enough to be of use so I suggest we postpone our duel until a later date.

((I suppose this dispels the myth that British hobbyists don't take feuding too seriously.))

Gloria Jacobs Greetings fellow bah-humbuggers! It is really refreshing to know that I am not the only one driven to distraction over the whole Christmas shtick. People up in WASP-land forget that there are other religions and other holidays. I am waging a losing battle, and you wouldn't believe the sympathetic looks I get when I tell people that I am not going home for Christmas. Why not wait when there aren't 95 million people on the roads? Then I start to feel guilty for not getting in the spirit of it all, but it isn't my holiday.

Christmas gripes include: the horrid muzak in stores
plastic decorations everywhere
preempted quality TV shows
commercialization & folkiness at the same time
carols on all radio stations
(but I did like the reggae versions)
nothing to do 24 eve or 25 day
peas on earth (they lose their color)

((Next we have to endure Valentine's Day (well, that's not quite as bad - no religion) and then, after that, Easter complete with Garfield with bunny ears tacked on...))

Alan Stewart Greatly enjoyed your British 'zine reviews, but they were all so complimentary that I could not determine which ones were really worth getting. My only two current U.K. 'zines are War & Peace and Dolchstoss, both of which are as good as any 'zine in North America. Say, I don't remember reading your opinions about Dolchstoss -- I have no doubt you have some! Here's a free idea -- why not do a publishers political spectrum, placing all publishers of whom you are aware on a line L _____ R. Boardman, Walker, yourself, Caws, Sharp, myself -- should be an interesting exercise.

((The reviews were complimentary simply because I just reviewed the top twenty and I don't trade with crap. The truth is all ten zines I described are well worth getting. I can't be bothered to trade with Dolchstoss. Although Richard is a very good writer, I can't bear his rabid right-wing politics and his view that the hobby should be exclusively Diplomacy-oriented. I still stick by my view that Praxis and Costaguana are the world's two top zines; I certainly find them better than War & Peace, Denver Glont and Prisoners of War. It seems that many editors feel that as far as zines are concerned, that the grass is greener on the other side of the Atlantic. I suppose once I find British zines better than American ones, I'll know that I've truly become Americanised.))

((As regards putting editors into some kind of political perspective, after flicking through my card index file, I came up with five very general categories.

| left-wing | liberals | wings moderates | conservatives | right-wing |
|---------------|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| Billenness, S | Berch | Coughlan | Caws | Piggott |
| Birks | Billenness, M | Knight | Ellis | Stewart |
| Boardman | Burgess | Linsey | Holley | Wilson |
| Courtemanche | Davis | Ozog | Walkerdine | |
| Creese | Hanson | Peel | | |
| Doubleday, P | Hopcroft | | | |
| Marsden | von Metzke | | | |
| Martin | Tighe | | | |
| Walker | | | | |

I didn't know where to place several people. Steve Hutton doesn't fit in anywhere with his generally right-wing economic and foreign policy views and principled support for gay rights and secularism. Glover Rogerson is a problem since he's a self-styled "right-wing anarchist" who really seems to fit in the left-wing category. Bruce Linsey is a toughie. He says he's right-wing but he's always been a social libertarian and secularist.

What strikes me immediately is how much to the left I judge my readership to be! I suspect I'm turned off by conservative zines and right-wing subbers are turned off by my views. So it goes. It was also a little tricky comparing the Americans to the Brits. Fred Davis and John Marsden are both old-style liberals but what is referred to as "liberalism" in Britain is more to the left of liberalism in America.

It is pure coincidence that the right-wingers appear to slipping off the end of the spectrum. Honest.))

Alan Stewart I agree with your comment in #4 that the Republican race suffers for lack of a liberal republican, not that scoundrel Packwood though -- the only thing he should be running for is the county line. It would give sensible people a chance to boo and hiss him frequently if he ran, though. No, some liberal republican would be a desirable addition to the race for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Ir's still represent a sizable voting bloc and it's important to keep them in the reservation. No one should go so far as thinking of putting one on the ticket, but allowing one to mouth off at will and receive some measure of feigned respect as a legitimate candidate would keep trendy voters in line. Secondly, the whole Republican debate is taking place in at atmosphere of spuriously dogmatic conservatism -- spurious because there's no reason to believe that DuPont or Bush or Dole is all that right-wing in his heart. They feel that the way to imitate Reagan's success is to imitate his ideology, but it is his genuineness and ability to make his prescriptions sound like simple common sense that makes him a popular figure. An active articulate liberal Republican would add some balance, and hopefully honesty, to the debate. //

I'm ready to make a prediction -- it is Dukakis who will emerge from the pack and win the nomination if any of the seven dwarfs does. He is also the most electable of the seven in a close race with Gore. Paul Simon would be stomped. Image, and all that.

Mark Berch Yes, Dukakis does give in to gay-bashing, but is one issue enough to disqualify? In fact, as gay-rights issues in practice are usually fought at the state level, might electing him prez be the best way to get him out of the governor's chain?

Paul Gardner I'm probably going for Michael Dukakis. What you say about him is true. Ultimately, he's not responsible for the current strength of the Massachusetts' economy. His strength lies in his experience. He is an executive with 8+ years in office and that's been his life time ambition. I think he has the energy, brains and integrity that the current president lacks.

Robertson is more than a bugbear. There is a large constituency for this guy - not enough to ever elect him, but plenty to keep his issues viable, and perhaps enough to win some state races and create some strongholds. I may be over-reacting, but I don't like seeing these religious guys in politics, because their ideas are so anti-democratic and their followers so fervent. Guess I'm the one who should have more faith.

((It seems Alan Stewart would like a liberal Republican in the race for the same reason that I'd like to see a conservative like Gore or Nunn in the highly visible but ultimately powerless position of Vice Presidential candidate. Both the Republicans and the Democrats need a "balanced" tickets to appeal to the moderate voters. It's a shame Alan doesn't name prospective liberal Republican candidates. Are there any?

Dukakis does seem to be breaking out of the pack. I think he and his organisation are suited for a long, closely-fought nomination battle. I expect him to do better in Iowa than most commentators have predicted and then stomp Hart in New Hampshire to establish his heavyweight credentials. To use a British analogy, the campaign could be seen as a game of conkers. Hart is a 20 conker and Dukakis is only a 1. However if Dukakis beats Hart in the New Hampshire primary, he becomes a 22.

None of the Democrats is perfect from a left-wing perspective. Dukakis is weak on the gay-rights issue although his views on Central America seem surprisingly acceptable. Paul Simon seems prisoner to pro-Israel PACs, at a time when Israel needs honest criticism from the States not unconditional support. The others I've already criticised at length. Liberals will have to choose from what's on offer. On the other hand, conservatives must be uneasy with a choice of either Bush or Dole. Nobody electable is as extreme as Reagan.

Robertson will do better than predicted but I still feel he is a flash in the pan who will just give the Republicans a bad image. Apparently, the religious right has often mobilised behind a candidate at a local level. More often than not, they lose and then wonder if God really wanted them to get involved in politics. Consequently they just fade away. The same thing will happen on a national level once Bush, Dole or even DuPont wins the nomination and keeps Robertson off the ticket.))

* Gloria Jacobs Living in New Hampshire has both its positive and negative aspects. You get to be part of the "first in the country " to make or break a man, but the political inundation begins so much sooner that the Nov. 1988 deadline will be met by a "Thank God that it is over" from me. I am getting very disgusted with the current political scene. Everyone is analysing the image of the men who would be president, and paying scant attention to the message. When I can find messages, they start to sound incredibly similar. Jackson, Robertson and LaRouche are probably the only candidates not rehashing a worn-out party line. Two loonies and one egomaniac (which is not to say that the other two do not deserve the latter honor as well, just that Jackson seems to be playing with a fuller deck). // I would dearly love to see a one-term 6 yr. presidency and a time restriction on the length of the campaign. The idea behind all this would be to refocus on issues.

What do you think of a constitutional amendment prohibiting current office holders from campaigning for another public position? Seems reasonable to me. If I were a Mass. resident I would really resent the amount of time Dukakis is spending out of state. Same for all the Congressmen not in Congress, but pumping flesh in the north country. They were elected to perform a service (ie to do a job) and they are not. In other businesses they'd have been sacked long ago, don't you think?

((I don't know. If I'm looking for another job, I want to be employed while I search. In any case, it seems the voters want experienced candidates, rather than people who have been on the sidelines for a couple of years. As for a 6 year, one term presidency, I have my reservations. Presidents would not have to worry about reelection which should make them more likely to pursue unpopular policies. However, there would still be party pressure not to stray too far. I would like to see a liberal president set up a national health service, introduce rigid gun control and abolish capital punishment but, on the other hand, we might see a conservative invade Nicaragua and nuke Tehran. It would cut both ways.))

Alan Stewart I challenge your (#4) and Doug Brown's (#5) assumption that the Reagan administration has been one long series of administrative botchups. On the contrary, it has been marked by strong, able cabinet members administering their portfolios determinedly and with distinction. Some of the cabinet members, like Cap Weinberger, may have been too strong in battle for the nation's good, but this only serves to underscore the general point.

When I speak about administrative success, I'm eliminating irrelevant concerns such as policy defeats in battles with Congress or even scandals. Such things have little to do with whether governmental administration, pure and simple, is being conducted effectively, although these things receive more attention in the media.

((This isn't much of an argument, Alan. Your first paragraph is just an assertion and in your second paragraph you don't specify what constitutes an effective administration. You just discount losing votes in Congress and scandals.

What makes a successful administration? Let's say success depends on a number of factors including keeping one's promises, running a clean administration (both in terms of ethics and constitutionality), overcoming opposition from other branches of government and non-governmental groups maintaining a healthy economy and, finally, winning political arguments and influencing public opinion. Overall, the Reagan years have not been distinguished as you claim.

Reagan has clearly failed to keep his campaign promise to balance the budget. Not his fault, I hear you cry? However winning votes in Congress is a measure of effectiveness. To be fair, Reagan has managed to get tax reform and several amounts of contra aid through both Houses, but on the budget Reagan has increased the deficit by failing to block spending he opposes and increasing military spending. If the President runs such a great administration, why have 110 people in the administration been convicted or indicted. The attorney general spends more time answering charges than presenting cases in court. There are deep economic problems, such as the trade deficit and growing poverty. Finally Reagan has failed to build a consensus for two ideas he holds very dear: aid to the contras and the outlawing of abortion. He also failed to establish the Republicans as the majority party. I can't see how Reagan can be considered an effective administrator.))

((That's enough on politics for one issue! Unfortunately, due to the inclusion of As The Pound In Your Pocket Turns Into A Dollar, I can only spend one more page on letters. So I'm going to hold some comments over till next time, including some comments by Mike Hopcroft and Mark Nelson on the media, TV and Dr Who.))

Mark Nelson International Diplomacy. If players send you pref lists when they join up then the game will be able to start quicker. Likeways, if they send those personality profiles you're soo keen on then that'll speed things up. As for houserules yours are fairly reasonable, however since I'm going to bring a new set of my own houserules out, I'll send you a set of these.

An interesting point was raised in a game I'm GMing (not in TYG) where the editor sent in orders for Autumn 1904 when it should have been Autumn 1903. After much thought I had to NMR the editor in his own zine!!! On the other hand if you send in orders without any game date they are taken to be the next set.

Bob Gossage First of all, I'd like to accept your gracious offer of GMing your next international Diplomacy game. I have a computer and word-processor, so typing the results should be no problem. I've decided to use your houserules, as they're what I'd design anyway. I'm wary of only one rule: the Fall/Winter combination and prophetic retreats. I'm sure that there won't be any problems though. // I have one small question about terminology: exactly what is a "ratings player" and what's wrong with them?

((As outside GMs both are you are free to devise your own houserules and use personality profiles only if you're interested in them. My houserules are designed to give me full control over the game if necessary, though, in practice, I'm a very lenient GM. For instance, I certainly would not NMR somebody for just putting down the wrong season on their orders!

I favour a two season year because it helps games to move faster (a crucial advantage for long deadline international games), and it is the system I'm used to. Rule 3 of my houserules (where I reserve the right to exclude from my games "ratings players, troublemakers, rules lawyers and similar vermin") is a little tongue in cheek but I am making a serious point that I don't want players who will ruin my enjoyment of the game. "Ratings Players" are hobbyists who are concerned with maintaining their position in the various ratings systems. I gather there have been occasions when players have tried to have games declared "irregular" by the BNC so that their bad performance won't affect their rating. I don't like that approach to the game because I feel it means taking the game too seriously.))

Mike Hopcroft Brian complaining about his workload; heck, I've lost count of how many games I'm in! Let's see, I'm in about 12 Dip games now, including three in Rebel. Most of them I was called to standby for, so it's not entirely of my own volition. // then there's the cline game with you, Scott Hanson's United Hockey League, 1 Kingmaker game...add to that the two zines I publish, the newsletter I edit for my local Whoclub, working on convention committees...I'm planning to go back to school this fall if I have time! That will mean adding to the schedule five or six life-or-death classes with killer exams. Is it any wonder that I'm burning out?

((Judging by your letter, I would advise to get your hobby involvement down to a more manageable level. Your education is far more important than playing games. This is just a pastime not a vocation. I'm planning on doing night classes and voluntary work this year and if that interferes with my games then tough. If you can't live your life to the full because you play too many games, then you ought to look hard at your involvement.))

ROCK'S RICH PAGEANT: THE ALBUMS OF 1987

Last year I meant to write something like this for Jim Burgess' zine but I only managed to pen one review which finally saw print in June! After spending the best part of a Saturday listening to albums and comparing notes, Barbara and I came up with the following, only to discover that Jim intends to run down his chatzine, The Abyssinian Prince. It's just as well I produce a zine of my own, I suppose...

Simply Red: "Men and Women"

A

Certainly this group has shown that one element, which is generally lacking in today's musicians, talent, pure and simple. Not only have they managed to produce a second brilliant album but also one which is vastly different in form from their previous one. Unlike most bands, they do not continue to churn out the same thing over and over again. Unfortunately this album has been mostly overlooked in the States, basically because it is not geared for the singles market. This is a cohesive, thematic album about men and women, love, sex and relationships. It is best listened to as a whole (rather like reading a novel instead of a collection of short stories). Perhaps this arrangement is not to everyone's liking but Barbara reckons this is the best album of the year.

U2: "The Joshua Tree"

A

What a contrast from their generally bland (and mistitled) previous album, "The Unforgettable Fire". Like "Men and Women" this is a thematic album. U2 yearn for peace, justice and love but the real world dashes their hopes. As a contrast to much of the over-produced music around nowadays, U2 songs are pared down to the bone: simple, yet effective guitars and haunting vocals. This is our prediction as the Grammy winner for best album of the year.

Suzanne Vega: Solitude Standing

A

I didn't know what to think of this album at first, but, after a few listenings, it really grew on me. Continuing the literary comparisons, "Solitude Standing" is a collection of short stories, some of them written as long ago as the seventies. The music has been described as "urban folk" (presumably folk that doesn't come from the hicks) and is fairly minimalist. I find this album gloriously downbeat. It's rather similar to Joy Division in that aspect, though the music is very different, relying much on acoustic guitar rather than electric and synth. The album is disparate yet intricately constructed. I find it a refreshing contrast from mainstream rock.

Hüsker Dü: "Warehouse: Songs and Stories"

A

As a contrast to groups, who spend eighteen months producing a flimsy eight song album, "Warehouse" is a twenty song extravaganza containing all new songs of depth and virtuosity. Hüsker Dü have perfected and refined their original hardcore thrash, edging closer to the mainstream. Mixing their music with a heady dose of psychedelia, they have produced a fresh and energetic rock sound, which acknowledges its roots while developing further. This is the flipside to Suzanne Vega's spare songs: a maximalist cacophony of guitar, yet controlled and mastered. Now that they've mastered short songs, they clearly have the ability to produce longer tracks without resorting to shameless padding. This is the group's finest album to date, highlighting their previous achievements while leaving room to develop in the future.

R.E.M.: "Document"

B+

I've just discovered R.E.M. After buying this and their previous "Life's Rich Pageant", I can see I missed out on a fascinating band. R.E.M. strike me as the American counterparts to The Smiths. Both groups inject fresh life into a traditional, guitar-based band structure. The vocals are not as interesting or ironic as Morrissey's but the music is beautifully crafted and performed with an infectious enthusiasm. On the strength of this album (and "Life's Rich Pageant" which is better) I intend to buy up all their previous work.

The Smiths: "Strangeways, Here We Come"

B+

Speak of the devil... I had hopes that The Smiths last album would rival their best "Meat is Murder" but "Strangeways..." doesn't quite manage it. The first side and "Paint a Vulgar Picture" are among the group's best songs but weak tracks like "Unhappy Birthday" and "I Won't Share You" drag the album down somewhat. At least they broke up on a high note, but it's clear that Morrissey and Marr had to move to fresher pastures.

Tetes Noires: "Clay Foot Gods"

B

Why on earth are the Tetes so little known when rubbish reigns supreme in the charts? The Tetes are an all-women group from Minnesota, who originally mixed a few feminist and progressive political messages in with finely crafted and well sung compositions. They seem to draw their inspiration from sixties pop songs (I swear they use an old Doors-style synth) as well as soul and gospel, which fits in well with their multivocal arrangements. This album is less overtly political than their previous work. In fact the best songs "Tell Me When", "Dear Jane" and "Pour More Water On Her, George" preach no causes at all. However they stick to their use of non-standard rock instruments such as the piano and violin. This is a very promising album.

Jefferson Airplane: "2400 Fulton Street"

B

Since I enjoy music influenced by the sixties, every now and then I sample some of the real stuff. I usually prefer original albums but occasionally I'll buy a compilation. "Fulton Strret" is an intelligent selection: not just a few "greatest hits" thrown together. Each side of this double album charts a separate era of the group from "Beginnings" to "Psychedelia", "Revolution" and finally "Airplane Parts" (whatever that is). The first two sides are superb songs which gradually gain more depth with the addition of Grace Slick's vocals and the band's immersion in psychedelia. Sides three and four, however, are awful, prestaging the group's degeneration into the Starship mess. This compilation provides a fascinating chronicle of Jefferson Airplane's musical rise and fall, though you may be better off just buying their first albums.

The Smiths: "Louder Than Bombs"

B

In "Paint a Vilgar Picture" off "Strangeways...", Morrissey slags off record companies which rip off fans by repackaging the same old songs. Yet "Louder Than Bombs" contains tracks which not only appeared on their earlier "Hatful of Hollow" but also their debut album. Physician heal thyself! This is a HÅsker-sized 24 song album, containing the band's last singles and B-sides, some Peel sessions plus a sprinkling of older material. Although it seems to have been thrown together with little thought, The Smiths' mastery of incisive, intelligent singles shines through.

Sly and Robbie: "Rhythm Killers"

B

A couple of years ago I saw Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare on the late, lamented British programme: The Tube, performing their reggae version of "Mull of Kintyre". I was originally sceptical, anticipating a gimmick record. To my astonishment, they skillfully adapted the song to a tight reggae beat. Their mastery of rhythm shows through in places on their latest album as they create a highly original and assured fusion of reggae and rap. "Rhythm Killers" is six extended tracks which, confusingly, merge into each other. The beat meanders and weaves adeptly, merging best with the music and rap (and even whistled classical melodies) on "Boops (Here We Go)". Not everything works on this album - in places it is a tad repetitive - but it's the most accomplished, innovative album this year.

Siouxsie & The Banshees: "Through The Looking Glass"

B-

The Banshees have chosen a varied selection of songs to cover, but this album lacks the freshness of their earlier work. At their best, The Banshees produced both forceful driving New Wave songs and dreamily atmospheric psychedelia. They applied their strengths beautifully on their version of "Dear Prudence" but they seem almost detached from these songs. This album is pleasant but unexciting.

Fleetwood Mac: "Tango in the Night"

C

I only have one other Fleetwood Mac album: their unparalleled "Rumours". Nothing on this album compares to their earlier masterpiece with the exception of "Big Love" which is just the same pathetic macho arrogance as "Second Hand News". There are a handful of catchy singles, but not enough to redeem the album from the uninspired filler.

Tom Verlaine: "Flashlight"

C

This is just as mundane and workmanlike an album as the Banshees. The songs are well written and performed but after several listenings I cannot recall a single tune. Competent but uninspired.

Jesus & Mary Chain: "Darklands"

C-

This is a very appropriately titled album containing ten very downbeat songs with such titles as "Nine Million Rainy Days". The fast-paced melodies hidden behind shimmering white noise are gone, leaving, well, not very much variety. The unremitting gloom of this album lacks the necessary uplift and anger, which groups such as Joy Division and The Cure have brought to similar material. Buy "Psychocandy" not this album.

10,000 Maniacs: "In My Tribe"

D

I bought this album mainly on the strength of the single "My Mother The War" which came out several years ago and therefore doesn't appear on this album. Sadly, it seems the group should have quit while they were ahead. The music is a kind of folk dirge overlaid with similarly and uninspired vocals. This is the kind of music you'd expect to hear in your dentist's waiting room (especially if you wanted to get the painful part of your visit over first before the root canal). The group are politically sound enough to do benefits with Billy Bragg for Nicaraguan Medical Relief but their music stinks.

AS THE POUND IN YOUR POCKET TURNS INTO A DOLLAR...

Issue 1

Winter 1987/88

This is the subzine of the International Subscription Exchange, a hobby service for the transfer of monies across the Atlantic. It will appear sporadically (though, at least, every six months) and it can be distributed and reproduced by anyone who might wish to do so. It is produced by Simon Billenness, 630 Victory Blvd. Apt. 6F, Staten Island, NY 10301, USA.

As you may have noticed I've decided to change the title of this subzine. US Dollar was a rather stodgy title so I've switched to the above. It's a line from one of my favourite albums of 1986. Does anyone know which one?

Most of you are probably well aware by now of the purpose of the ISE. It exists to assist hobbyists who would like to subscribe to zines from across the Atlantic. For instance if you're British and you'd like to subscribe to the US zine, Bushwacker, all you have to do is send a cheque in sterling to Doug Rowling, the British ISE rep. You tell him what the money is for and whether you would like to receive the zine sea or airmail. (To compare, airmail is fast - 3 to 10 days - but usually twice as expensive as ordinary domestic mail. Seamail is much cheaper but letters can take over a month.) Doug will then inform me of your request. The day after your request arrives, I check the day's exchange rate, convert the amount into dollars and send the editor concerned your sub money. The service is fairly quick and it saves you from the ridiculous fees banks charge you for changing currency.

The service has been running very smoothly since I took over in July. In the period of July 1st to December 31st 1987, the amounts going in each direction across the Atlantic neatly balanced. Consequently, there's been no need for Doug or I to exchange cash.

STATISTICS FOR THE PERIOD: July 1st to December 31st

| | UK to NA | NA to UK |
|-------------------|----------|----------|
| Sub Fees | \$208.18 | \$222.00 |
| Total # People | 13 | 9 |
| # Different Zines | 12 | 12 |

Obviously, the conclusion we can draw here is that North Americans generally send larger amounts of money than the British do. The stats were greatly affected by a \$80 transfer which Gary Coughlan made.

Breakdown by Month

| | UK to NA | | NA to UK | |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | Amount | # People | Amount | # People |
| July | \$32.00 | 1 | - | - |
| August | \$27.20 | 3 | \$10.00 | 1 |
| September | \$32.00 | 2 | \$135.00 | 4 |
| October | \$28.05 | 2 | - | - |
| November | \$39.25 | 1 | \$42.00 | 2 |
| December | \$49.68 | 4 | \$35.00 | 2 |
| TOTAL: | \$208.18 | 13 | \$222.00 | 9 |

As you can see the traffic from Britain is very uniform whereas the North Americans send money at very irregular intervals. I wonder why this is so? It certainly makes things rather hair-raising for me. At one point I was \$81.20 out of pocket. The next month I was \$50.75 up on the deal.

Breakdown by Zine

| <u>UK Subs to NA Zines</u> | <u>Amount</u> | <u># Transfers</u> |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Excitement City Unlimited | \$66.58 | 7 |
| Dip. Alliance Against Cancer | \$39.25 | 1 |
| Cathy's Ramblings | \$38.72 | 2 |
| Gonzo Baseball League | \$32.00 | 1 |
| Praxis | \$8.00 | 1 |
| Zine Bank | \$8.00 | 1 |
| Zine Register | \$4.43 | 2 |
| Everything | \$4.25 | 1 |
| Once Upon a Deadline | \$3.20 | 1 |
| Lexicon of Diplomacy | \$1.75 | 1 |
| Masters of Deceit | \$1.00 | 1 |
| Supernova | \$1.00 | 1 |

| <u>NA Subs to UK Zines</u> | <u>Amount</u> | <u># Transfers</u> |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Prisoners of War | \$50.00 | 4 |
| Mad Policy | \$35.00 | 4 |
| NMR! | \$35.00 | 3 |
| War & Peace | \$25.00 | 2 |
| Diversions | \$17.00 | 1 |
| Hopscotch | \$15.00 | 2 |
| Bohemian Rhapsody | \$10.00 | 1 |
| Five Year Plan | \$10.00 | 1 |
| Ode | \$10.00 | 1 |
| DibDibDib | \$5.00 | 1 |
| Mission From God | \$5.00 | 1 |
| Thing on the Mat | \$5.00 | 1 |

With the results in, I declare the winners to be Excitement City Unlimited and Prisoners of War. I'm sure it's pure coincidence that Doug and I run the ISE... I think the reason for ECU's dominance (for want of a better term) is that any new zine is bound to attract a bundle of starting subscriptions. Next issue should reveal whether I really have the edge over Cathy's Ramblings. I reckon War & Peace should also give POW a run for its money after its victory in the Zine Poll.

If you have any comments on the ISE, feel free to write to either Doug or myself. I might write a little about ISE history next time if I can find the relevant information.

Your ISE reps are:

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Doug Rowling, 228 Kinnell Avenue, Cardonald, Glasgow G52 3RU, United Kingdom

FROM

SIMON BILLENNESS & BARBARA PASSOFF

630 VICTORY BLVD. APT. 6F

STATEN ISLAND, NY 10301

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

YOUR CREDIT IS: TRADE

Larry Peery

Halliday cheer: Sen. **Edward M. Kennedy** donned a blond wig, falsies and a miniskirt, playing **Fawn Hall** to nephew **Joseph P. Kennedy's** Col. **Oliver North** at an annual off-the-record staff Christmas party last week.

DEADLINE: Saturday, ~~Jan~~ (wake up, Simon!) February 27th, 1988