

The Enthusiast Almanack

The Essential Antidote to the Banalities of
Modern Living

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Extract

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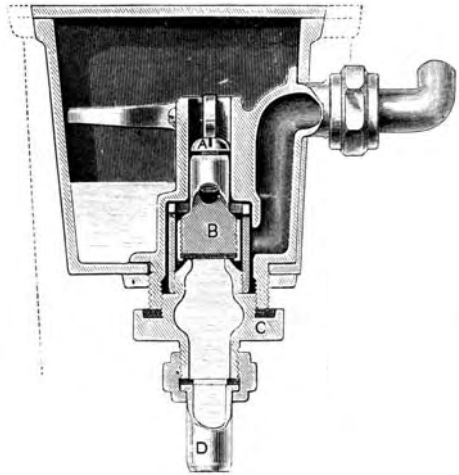
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- SHOPPING -

Gadgets

We live in difficult times. We have shoe bombs and reality TB, the world-wide web and a worldwide war. So we need new gadgets, and Chinese manufacturing needs us to need them now.



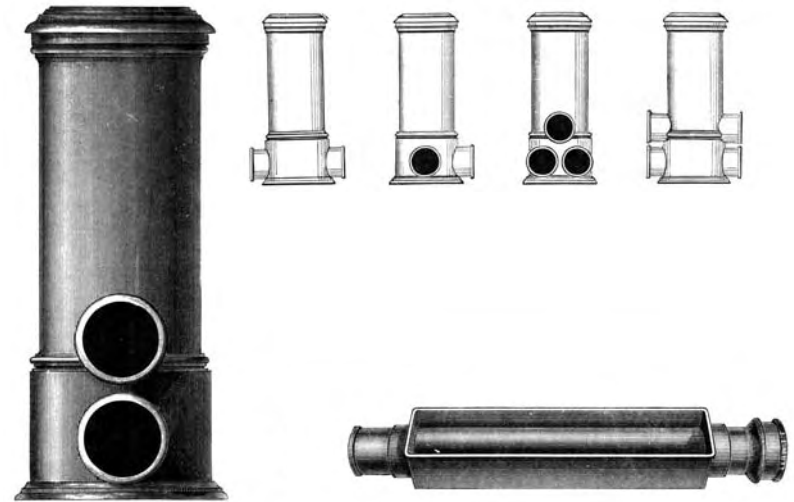
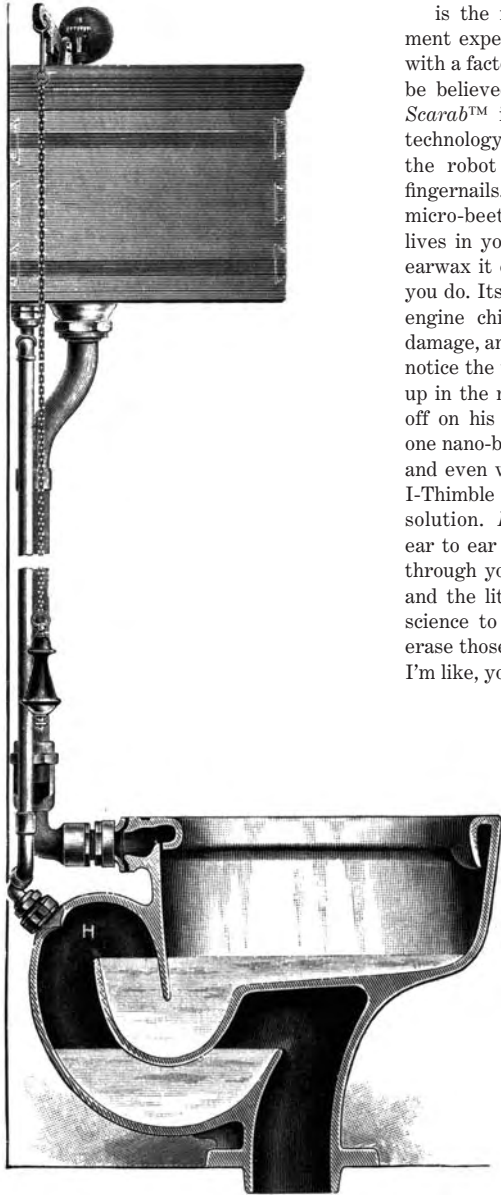
QXZ—

If you've been looking for a way to upgrade your QXZ, look no further. Axel Head of Norfolk Technologies are bringing out a QXZ that will definitely pump your ride. The anti-vibration programme is second to none and the handgrip shape is the kind of evolutionary hyper-leap that you thought only happened on the Galapagos Islands. The BAM cell has the kind of storage that would shame the

Trojan Horse, and the ultra-designer venting means that a midnight overheat is nowhere near the worry it once was. There are, of course, some down-downs. For no reason it makes your knees hurt after about five hours, the skull and cross-bones motif is a bit rubbish and it's not quite as portable as the ads would have you believe. But for that price—snap it up!

EARWAX SCARAB™—

is the most latest 'creation development experience' from Californian geeks with a factory – I-Thimble. And it's got to be believed to be experienced! *Earwax Scarab™* is the chillinest use of nanotechnology since My Little Creature™, the robot ant that cleans under your fingernails. This eighteen carat gold ultra-micro-beetle (1.8mm when assembled) lives in your ear and is powered by the earwax it consumes, so it won't die until you do. Its long life Chrononononium 3™ engine chip is resistant to cotton bud damage, and after a while you really don't notice the tiny hum of the motor starting up in the morning, when the scarab sets off on his daily rounds. Trials involving one nano-bug in each ear caused dizziness and even wooziness in some subjects. So I-Thimble has come up with an inspired solution. *Earwax Scarab™* gets from ear to ear by tunnelling a micro-passage through your brain. But you can't feel it and the little guy knows enough neuroscience to find the route least likely to erase those precious childhood memories. I'm like, yo! CrystalHearing™!

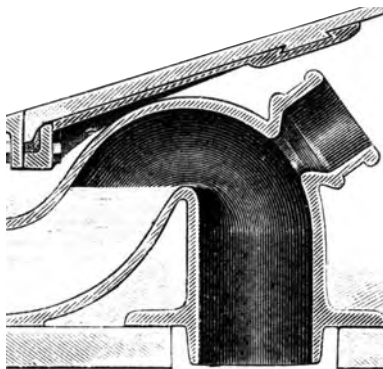


PBD ZZ9III—

Parcel Bomb Detectors Ltd have just brought out a glitzy new model and it's abso-Audrey Hepburn-lutely going to be the xpod for the late Naughties. The *PBD ZZ9iii* is fashioned from lightweight, organically brushed aluminium, so it looks and feels slinky and sexy. It is shaped like a miniature Labrador dog and bares the Semtex Rex logo ('the sniffer that snaffles the plotter') in electric blue—Zap! But just because it's machine-crafted, sleek and canine doesn't mean it can't pull its stats—it's able to detect a mivvi-sized package of C5 at eleven yards, which is like the equivalent of one as per thousand similes. This is edge of the razor stuff.

NEIGHBOUR WATCH HOODS—

are the newest and latest from Marsha McLuhan's Milan design labs: a must-have for those that must have. A bizarre and previously thought extinct form of radiation allows you to look right into your neighbours' living rooms and bedrooms. The hood itself uses extreme fibres made from plasticised lead, a saucy and magical compound that's handily like plastic in some ways and conveniently like lead in others. It attaches to the wall using Technigum™, is available in medium darkness or thick grey, and is surprisingly comfortable to wear once the goggles are calibrated. A low-key embarrassment alarm goes off (the factory setting appears to be the Gypsy Kings) if two *Neighbour Watch Hoods* are aligned accidentally on opposites sides of a wall. After all, it's no fun watching them watching you watching them etc—you might get caught in the rare but digitally documented 'voyeur vortex' (see below). Insurance is recommended.

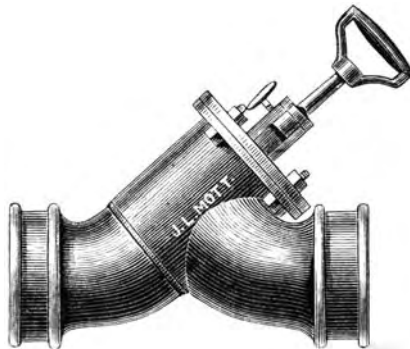


ZEITGEIST III: SOUTH LONDON—

GameSphere™ ExoBod™ presents *Zeitgeist III: South London* for the Magnatropé Mombassa Console. This really is an ice cube for the cool gamers out there. It's much mo' better than *Zeitgeist II: West London*, because the controls are more responsive, the moves are more dynamic and the street edge has the edge. Using your joystick you have to identify the cultural artefacts that define contemporary ideologies, or define ideological culture in terms of identifying the contemporary—one or the other, it gets tricky after level 3. Excellent graphics throughout (the cognoscenti are particularly gruesome), though the conversation at some of the parties can be, like, vapid, and a couple of the car chases are way too credible. There's no doubt that it is a difficult game to play. In fact, unless you know the cheats, the manufacturers recommend psychoactive drugs for the top three levels. But you will undoubtedly keep wanting to come back for more. The rewards—should you get to level six, where you're finally just an immortal brain in a jar controlling a self-perpetuating and absurd monoculture from a triple-techno super-bunker on an isolated Pacific island—are wonderfully ephemeral and may cause seizures.

JOBSPEAK PALMWAFFER™—

The *JobSpeak PalmWaffer™* is a real boon for those meetings when you find yourself sitting there thinking, 'what the hell does all this mean? I don't understand a word anyone's saying'. With an extraordinary 6G mote-memory, the *PalmWaffer™* not only feeds you 'the business lines that you need' on almost a dozen settings—from go-getting uber-corporation strategy meeting to disgruntled old shareholders in a hotel bar, from golf course putsch to organised crime caper run-through—but it will vibrate them into your palm and up your arm using a brand new technology that involves having fibre-optic cables installed in your arm. All you need to do if you want to speak the *PalmWaffer's* suggestion—say, 'This shows what a fool I was to trust you! Middle management are gonna pay for this!'—is to open your mouth. Make sure to give it *your* voice sample. The default, for reasons unclear, is a ten-year-old girl from Weston-Supermare.



SELF-MEDIATION™ & OBJECTIFICATION DISCOVERY GIFT SET—

The perkier of this job's perks is the old adagio—new gizmo, new experience. It certainly turned out to be true when for three months I house-tested the myriad micro-cams that are the *Self-Mediation™ & Objectification Discovery Gift Set*. The set, which runs twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, comprises six micro-cams in each room, so you can always get the best angle, plus four or five mobile cameras built into tiny robots that look and sound like bumblebees. These follow you around, or trail the cats, or just hover about in the garden to film any nature stuff that might happen while you're not there. They even come in the car with you. But they are fragile and you will need plenty of spares. In the first week, two of the bumblebee robot-cams filmed their own deaths—one at the paws of the cats, the other the victim of a real bumblebee attack while it was on flower-bed patrol. I felt bad, but both deaths made great TV and bee-cams are cheap.

The big question is whether the presence of all the cameras made my wife and I change our behaviour. The most notable changes were that my wife swore a lot less and I sat on the toilet at a radically different angle, so my good side was always on show. Another fairly reasonably sized question is how it felt to be the object of so much electronic mediation. Early on in particular, I enjoyed the attention and the way I looked on screen. But as the weeks rumbled along and rumours of my affairs and addictions started to spread, I tended to go from one room to another with a raincoat over my head, and I ended up getting aggressive with the bee-cams. I now regret this, though some of it was sort of watchable.

The other thing with the *Self Mediation™ & Objectification Discovery Gift Set* is that you spend more and more time watching what you did earlier until what you did earlier is watch what you did earlier than that (see above). And you film yourself doing this. So, not really for those with a sensitive stomach. Long-term? I'm definitely ready for my close-up.



PAUL BARKER (*Maidenhead*)

Drowning in stuff?

theenthusiast@theenthusiast.co.uk
The Enthusiast, PO Box 239, BANGOR, BT20 5YB

You dancin'?



1. **FOUR TET: PAUSE** (*Domino Records*). Fresh sounding electronic, yet organic, music from the UK.
2. **AUGUSTUS PABLO: KING TUBBYS MEET ROCKERS UPTOWN** (*Mango*). Gritty and ethereal dub from the seventies.
3. **SHUGGIE OTIS: INSPIRATION INFORMATION** (*Luaka Bop*). Sadly underrated soul record now happily re-released.
4. **HASSAN ERRAJI AND ARABESQUE: MARHABA** (*Riverboat Records*). Warm Moroccan music with jazz inflections.
5. **ISSA BAGAYOGO: SYA** (*Six Degrees*). There's plenty of extraordinary music coming out of Mali; this record offers something different.
6. **SIDESTEPPER: MORE GRIP** (*Palm Pictures*). Vibrant salsa dance fusion from Colombia.
7. **TONY ALLEN: BLACK VOICES** (*Comet Records*). Classic, tight, and modern afro-funk.
8. **ORANGE CAN: HOME BURNS** (*Regal*). Dreamy, sixties-inspired indie from London.
9. **NEUROSIS: TIMES OF GRACE** (*Relapse*). A furious blend of metal and pagan music. Approach with caution.

10. **BACHUE - THE BUTTERFLY** (*Big Bash Records*). A stunning blend of modern and traditional Scottish folk.
11. **WIMME: GIERRAN** (*Northside*). Incredible, heady mix of Sami chant and electronics.
12. **MURCOF - UTOPIA** (*Leaf*). Unique. A stunning blend of orchestral and electronic minimalism from Mexico.
13. **THE CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA: EVERYDAY** (*Ninja Tune*). What modern jazz is.
14. **BOOTY BREAKS VOL.2** (*Bootaay*). Tight and gritty breaks geared for the clubs.
15. **TMJUKE: MAPS OF THE WILDERNESS** (*Tru Thoughts*). Soulful and jazzy; gentle trip-hop.
16. **FUTURE WORLD FUNK 1/2/3** (*Ocho*). Perfect demonstrations of how different musics can be put together.
17. **HUUN-HUUR TU AND THE BULGARIAN VOICES**
ANGELITE: FLY, FLY MY SADNESS (*Jaro Medien*).
Extraordinary mix of Mongolian and Bulgarian vocals.
18. **NORDIC ROOTS NORTHSIDE SAMPLER 1/2/3** (*Northside*). Perfect and inexpensive routes into Scandinavian folk.
19. **TALK TALK - SPIRIT OF EDEN** (*EMI*). Essential and refreshing still.
20. **SUSUMU YOKOTA - GRINNING CAT** (*Leaf*). Musical poetry. Just a small part of a rich Japanese electronic scene.

LEE MATTHEWS (*Orpington*)

theenthusiast@theenthusiast.co.uk
The Enthusiast, PO Box 239, BANGOR, BT20 5YB