

# THE DEAD SEA MOB

**A word of warning before you read on: if you are averse to bad puns, repeated references to the sea, pirates and swashbuckling, then please skip this article now to avoid upset. For those who are brave enough to continue, let me introduce to you, The Dead Sea Mob; an artistic and illustrative collective whose core members, Tom J Newell, TwistedLoaf, Godmachine and Drew Millward, were nice enough to answer our questions.**

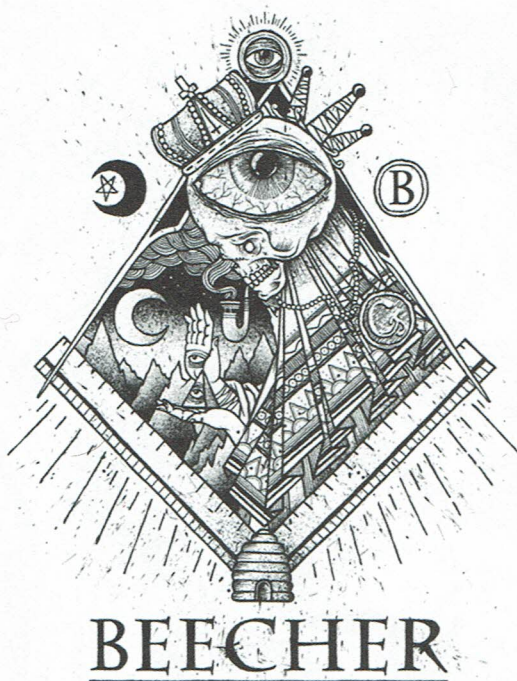
Brought together by the cosmic power of Twitter and the determination of their 'I don't take no for an answer' manager (referred to in this interview as 'Chairman Meow') the Mob now tour the country conquering the high seas and,

of course, the art world. So hold on to your treasure, placate Polly with a cracker and prepare for a lot more nautical nonsense.

**You all seem to have a similar gruesomely mythical theme going on in your work, especially the**

use of that evil eye. Is that what brought you together? You are all quite established artists already, so why the decision to team up?

**Tom J Newell:** I think more and more artists/illustrators are latching onto the fact that skulls, and the associated gruesome imagery that surrounds them, are undoubtedly the most awesome things that any human could ever draw. I think we fell onto each other's radar because we were all drawing this kind of stuff. I don't know about anybody else, but my decision to join up with the collective was purely based on the fact that the other artists involved are amazing at what they do, and that pushing myself to make something



**BEECHER**



**MOGWAI**  
ERIC W.  
 KNIGHT/NIGHT OF MAY WAI

even half as good as them is a challenge that I was happy to take on.

**TwistedLoaf:** We are actually triplets, except much better than triplets as there are four of us. We were separated at birth, to protect us from the evil spirits out to destroy the legendary prophecy of 'The Dead Sea Mob'. It is written in ancient sea scrolls that one day in the 11th year of the 21st century they would be brought together by the evil pen of the apocalypse. Either that or something else...

**Godmachine:** I put on a show in Cardiff with Mr Gauky and Drew, and it got such a good response that it bounced around the Twittersphere for a while. Chairman Meow picked up on it and asked if we would like to do more. So that's me and Drew in. Tom Hovey, or whatever he's called, paid Meow some money and cried down the phone 'til we let him in, turns out the fucker is amazing at drawing. Tom Newell stepped up after Ollie Munden (still a member but more on the home team) joined I Love Dust.

**Drew Millward:** Despite what you may hear from some people, being an illustrator/artist/designer, on the whole, is pretty insular. It's a lonely life of sitting staring at pens, paper and Photoshop. One of the few outings that occurred last year was to Cardiff to draw at an event organised by Mr Godmachine. It was fun. We drew, we drank, we enjoyed ourselves. As a passing idea we mentioned how it would be cool to do this sort of thing in a van and travel around... That idea somehow got out of hand.

I just like the idea of creating work as part of a group. It allows me to take risks that perhaps, if I were working alone, I wouldn't try. I think once you have built up a career as an artist, you are slightly limited to producing work in a similar vein, whereas when you are working within a collective, it allows you to step out of your comfort zone. I kind of view it as a side project to the day job.

**Even with the obvious similarity in your artistic subject matter, as a collective do you think you'll encounter difficulties agreeing on**

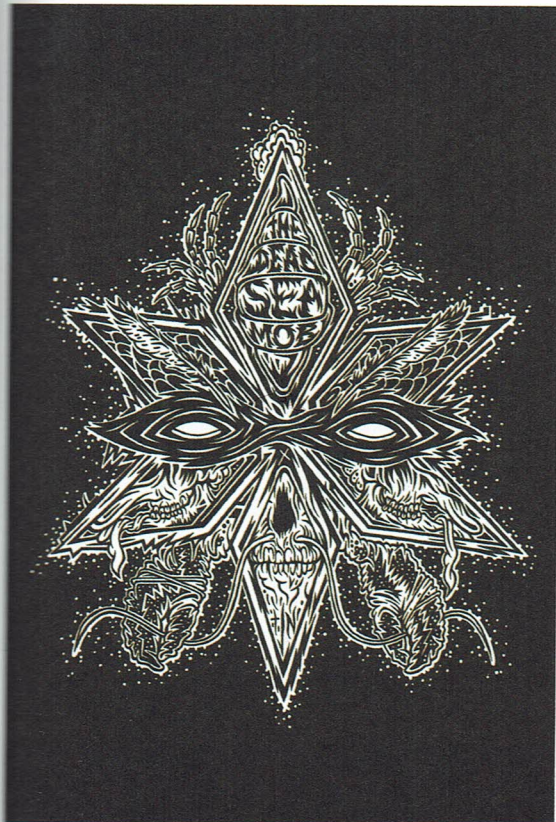
**a concept and creating a collection of pieces that work well together?**

**TL:** I don't think we will ever encounter problems agreeing on concepts, as, although some of our work may seem that it follows similar trends and themes, we all work very differently and approach our work in very different ways. I think we are all learning from one another the more time we spend together. Working alongside talented mobsters like these boys cannot but make you up your game.

**TJN:** There haven't been any problems so far. I think we're pretty much on the same page already, and any differences and contrasts between our individual styles seem to make the work stronger as a whole.

**GM:** I can't see it being a problem. I think we are all well aware of what needs to be done and, with our artist egos, I imagine we'll all be aiming to outdo each other; it will cause some healthy drive. Like sparring partners.

**Can we still expect to see as much individual work from you all or will**



**“I am still getting over the ‘troubles’ I had growing up in a monastery run by clowns with grubby nails.”**

**you be operating mostly as a collective now?**

**DM:** I kind of see this as a bit of a break from my own work. I will certainly still be creating my own work, as, no doubt, will everyone else. It's just another outlet, and it gets me out of the house.

**TL:** We are all working on loads of interesting projects independently from the The Dead Sea Mob. For me personally, I am getting inspired to do more and more fucked up work than ever before. It's a beautiful thing, pushing each other to create a collective consciousness of mega metal pirate killing artistic sickness.

**GM:** I think it will affect our

work greatly but it won't stop us producing our own pieces. I know Drew and TwistedLoaf are machines churning out amazing work...as is Tom.

**TwistedLoaf's work is self-dubbed 'beautiful filth', which I think perfectly encompasses what I've seen from Dead Sea Mob so far. What inspires these aesthetically fantastic yet nightmarish and dark images?**

**TJN:** My inspirations are fuelled by stuff that I hate as much as the stuff that I love. I think all the dark imagery that I churn out is a direct reaction to the sickly sweet, cutesy bits 'n' bobs that clog up the public

eye. I continue to be influenced by the Powell Peralta/Santa Cruz skateboard imagery and rock and roll/hip hop visuals of my youth and I don't think I'll ever really shake that.

**TL:** I am Mr TwistedLoaf and my work is indeed beautifully filthy. Personally that is what I think is most beautiful about the world: the darkness. I reckon we have all been touched by the dark hand of the macabre and I am still getting over the 'troubles' I had growing up in a monastery run by clowns with grubby nails.

**GM:** Fuck, I have no idea. I guess when I choose to express myself it's either bat shit crazy or melancholic and dark.

**You guys burst onto the scene at the start of 2011 with your show 'A Shot Across the Bows' at 55DSL', how did this first official outing go?**

**TL:** 'A Shot Across the Bows' was a real pop-up show. We only had a few weeks to rustle up our first show as The Dead Sea Mob and it came together perfectly. The murals took a few days to knock up. Drew,

Tom J and myself started by buying a load of booze and staring at the big white boards, scratching our heads. Drew smashed it out in two days. Every now and again he would pipe up and mention how much he hated every piece of music that was played on the shop stereo. Tom J was slightly in shock I think, as this was the first time I had met and drawn with the crew, but he soon started chipping in with his fair share of filth and cool swear words. Godmachine and Chairman Meow came in on day two and rocked the shit out of it. GM blasted out his mural in a day. I suspect the Meow was spiking his coffee with Guatemalan rocket monkey powder. The show was awesome and the groupies were awesome too, I spent ages in the disabled toilet of McDonald's after the show... but that's another story.

**TJN:** The 55DSL show was a really last minute thing, so I think some of the themes running through our imagery, which was mostly existing work, may have been happy accidents. Obviously there's the ol' nautical vibe floating around the

**gallery exhibitions these days are predominantly about free beer and social interaction, as opposed to actual art appreciation or sales?**

**GM:** I am new to all this and did not know that was the case. I first heard about this happening at my first ever gallery showing with The Dead Sea Mob in London at the Diesel show. There is only so much 'appreciating art' you can do in a gallery for any number of hours though. Seems fair to have a good natter with like-minded folk and get pissed.

**TL:** I see it as part of the vibe of putting on a night. But just because the people that turn up for the free beer aren't buying any art, it doesn't mean they are not spreading the word, blogging, tweeting about your show to the masses. And never discount the power of networking.

**You've just done a live art show in Bristol. Are you all relaxed when it comes to live painting and drawing or do you feel the pressure of hundreds of eyes on you, watching your every line?**

much, but I don't mind performing in front of a crowd. After a while you get in the zone anyway, so all you are thinking about is the next line. If people have come to see you draw, it is generally because they admire what you do or how you do it, so why worry?

**You worked with Andy Council and Gavin Strange at the event; who else can we expect to see collaborations with in the future, and who in an ideal world would you each love to work with?**

**TJN:** I'd be happy to 'collabo' with any decent artists who're up for it. Pete Fowler's a sound guy and his work often dips its toe in nautical imagery, so he'd be good to get on board at some point. In an ideal world I'd hop in the ol' DeLorean and, after picking up one of those Sports Almanacs from the future, I'd head back and do some album covers for Captain Beefheart.

**DM:** Anyone who is slightly worse than I am. It does nothing for the ego when you are forced to draw

## ***"I spent ages in the disabled toilet of McDonald's after the show.. but that's another story."***

whole project, and we decided on a colour scheme for the stuff we painted directly into the gallery space, but it was nice to see how each of us took the loose structures we'd put in place and pulled them in different directions.

**So, to fill in the gaps of time, the Mob then went on to hold a show a few months later called 'Dead Reckoning', which featured brand new work from all, produced specifically for the show. This was an event that in the words of TwistedLoaf, he was 'so bloody excited about, that he cried out of his willy a bit', which I can only take to be a good sign of what came to fruition at the show.**

Luckily for you lot, you're talented enough to sell art at your exhibitions, but what's your opinion on the fact that a lot of the

**DM:** I dislike it quite a lot. Generally, I work alone and in total solitude, and it suits me fine. When you are drawing with a lot of people staring at you and watching your every move, it brings with it a level of pressure that can be pretty unbearable. That said, it's always nice to get out of your comfort zone and push yourself.

**GM:** I get proper nervous. Luckily, we have our backs turned and a few people in the same boat as you. After a while though you just think 'fuck it' and get on with it.

**TJN:** There's obviously pressure to perform, but with The Dead Sea Mob I can generally comfort myself with the fact that one of the other guys is probably doing something far more awesome than me and everyone is watching him instead.

**TL:** I try not to turn around that

next to someone who is much more talented than you.

**TL:** I hear Walt Disney's frozen head is up for a collaboration at some point, I think he will be more of a presence than a contributor though. I would also love to work with some of my US heroes like David Choe, Skinner, Neck Face, Craola... the list is kinda endless, anyone who fits the Mob's twisted ethos and has sick skills.

**Your next event this month is going to help raise awareness and funds towards the Sea Shepard organisation, who help with Marine Welfare across the globe. As individuals do you have any special connection, appreciation or affinity with the sea, or has the support of Sea Shepard come about purely from the connotations of your collective name?**

# "A man without a beard is like a woman with one."

**DM:** I once fed a dolphin, and I have been on several boats.

**GM:** Personally, I love the sea. I grew up next to the sea – I could see it from my bedroom window as a kid, but I can't swim so I have a very weird relationship with it. I like to wade in naked when I am home. I don't eat fish either – they don't harvest the sea – they dredge it. It's not good what they do to the oceans. It's all sorts of fucked up.

**TJN:** I love the sea; who doesn't? I don't get to the coast as much as I'd like though. I'm more of a still water creature. I grew up next to a canal and got into canoeing and kayaking when I was a kid. I live next to a canal down here in London now, too. It's always good to be near a bit of water.

**TL:** I was born in the belly of a whale, so I spent my early years living off fish scraps and barnacles. I think the whole mob has a real connection with the sea from our seafaring days aboard the Good Ship Lollipop.

**This is just the beginning for you guys as a group, where do you hope to take The Dead Sea Mob, aside from the high seas?**

**TJN:** Everywhere and anywhere that I'll have us – and even places that won't have us, I suppose. We're taking it on the road, as well as keeping one toe firmly dipped in the metaphorical Dead Sea.

**TL:** We have spent many years scrubbing the decks, some of the dirtiest decks on all of the Seven Seas. Now is the time for us to take over and take this beautiful filth on the road. We want the masses to get on board, We don't want to tell anyone they can't join in our journey. There are way too many elitist bullshitters out there, we just want to travel 'round showing our drawings of melting heads and anchors to everyone. Join us! Get some tattoos and STDs on the way, cause I got loads of 'em and I am happy to share them with you all.

**DM:** Grimsby, Hull, Skegness.

**The most exciting news seems**

**to be your potential film project: a live drawing tour. This sounds excellent. What do you hope to achieve from making the film, aside from recognition for the Mob?**

**GM:** I think it will be nice to get out and meet people. A chance for other artists in my field to get out and meet people too, instead of being behind a computer.

**TJN:** I'd like to think that it's going to be more insane than anything ever has been... ever. I'm fully prepared to get a ridiculous tattoo whilst we're on the road, so that might be an interesting scene. We're going to have to pull something out of the bag to jazz up what is essentially a film about watching paint dry.

**DM:** With any luck you may be treated to some piano recitals from Tom Newell, Az may take his top off and Tom Hovey may do some athletics while listening to Elastica. I am bringing nothing to the project.

**TL:** I'm so bloody excited about going on tour with the rest of the Mob, I'm going to annoy the shit out of them with my awesome playlists, made up of The Eagles, Right Said Fred and obscure German TechnoCore.

I think documenting the tour is a natural step for us, as we do kind of feel like we're in a rock band or we're a bunch of skaters on tour. It is the same kind of vibe. We are excited about meeting like-minded illustrators and artists around the UK and beyond, whilst standing shoulder to shoulder and doing what we love best, on a grand scale.

I also plan to reveal myself and make Tom J Noodles reveal himself with me in every port we visit, I might even try pimping him out to the local sailors. He has very womanly cheekbones underneath that beard.

**Speaking of beards, the majority of you are pretty blessed in the facial hair department. Are you real pirates?**

**TJN:** A man without a beard is like a woman with one. We'll have to

throw TwistedLoaf's Gillette Mach III blades overboard and get a few amputations between us to really push the pirate vibe.

**TL:** I don't have a beard because I am dyslexic and I have ursaphobia (phobia of bears), so it's better to avoid all of that nonsense.

**DM:** Piracy is a crime, I will not accept it!

**And the last sea-based pun of the day, tell me your best swashbuckling tale.**

**TJN:** I haven't buckled any swashes in a while, but when we were up in the North East setting up The Pure Gallery show, we saw one of the Hairy Bikers and I heard he's been known to buckle the odd swash. I saw Jimmy Nail in real life once, too.

**DM:** I once fell down the hatch of a yacht when it ran aground. I am also distantly related to Edward Teach, aka Blackbeard.

**TL:** I once knocked a seagull right out when he stole one of Godmachine's sweet potato fries on Brighton beach. I felt like the king of the sea until I got shit on by 400 seagulls, which ruined my tan and wouldn't come out of my beard for months.

**With more aliases between them than Prince and Puff Daddy combined, the Mob: Drew Millward, Tim Harvey aka Tom Hovey aka TwistedLoaf, Tom J Newell aka Tom J Noodle and Godmachine can be found drawing alongside some other Mob members, Ollie Munden and HarryDraws (the first girl to be initiated), on 1 September in Brighton. An event definitely worthy of your time and your eyes.**

[www.thedeadseamob.com](http://www.thedeadseamob.com)

Words. Ro Elfberg  
Images. The Dead Sea Mob

