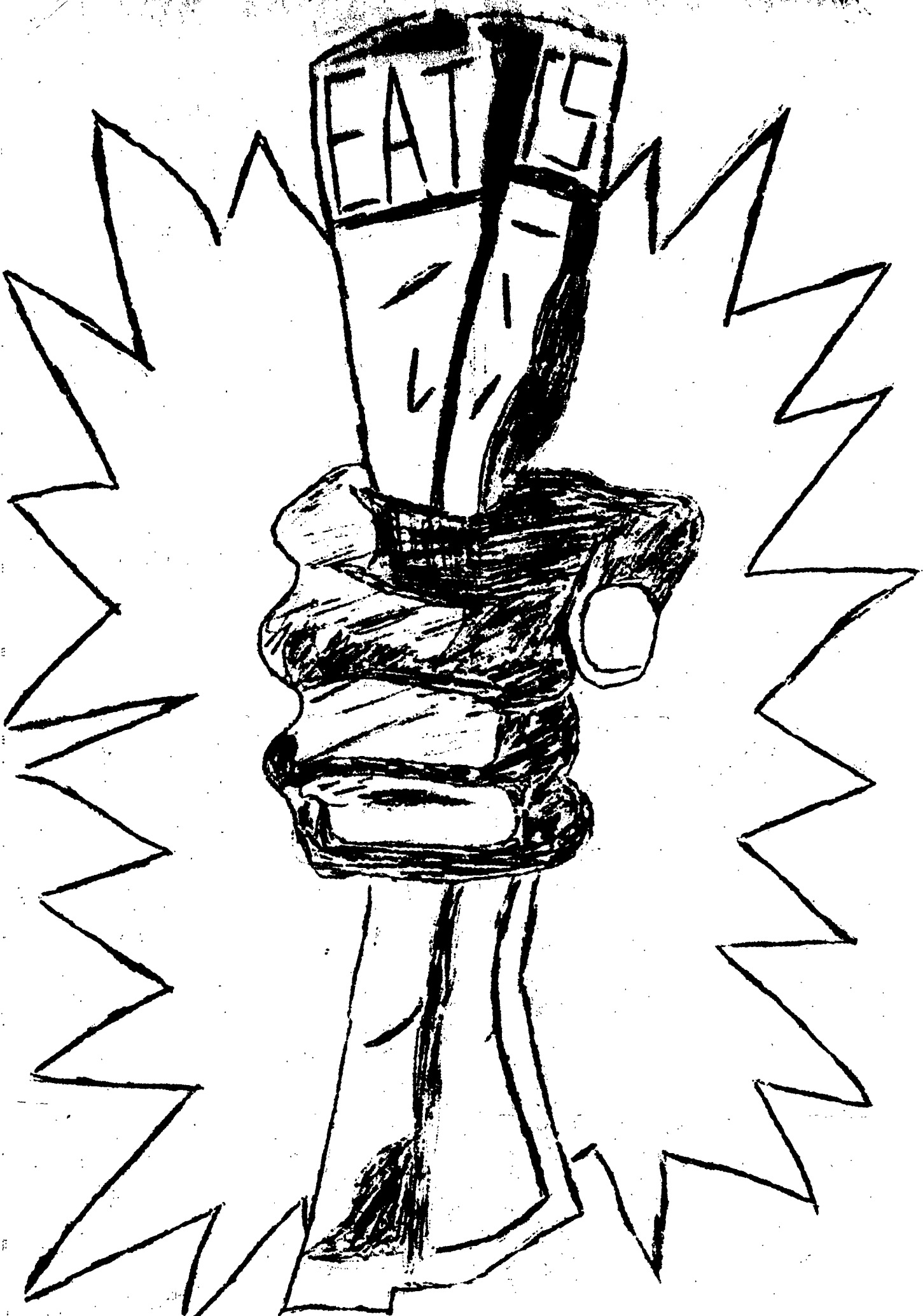


THE MAGAZINE THE MEN READ

40-1



GREATEST HITS

EDITORIAL

Well, where were we? As I type, the Tonight programme is paying a tribute to Charlie Chaplin, 'whose genius has brought joy to the world'. It seems, in a way, a fitting comment on the passing of 1972. In a year when many of the giants seemed to pass away - Callas, Stokowski, Presley and Crosby - Chaplin stood head and shoulders above them all. In a sense, of course, it is easy to feel bias, as a lover of films I guess that a lover of opera will feel the loss of Callas more; a lover of classical music the loss of Stokowski, but Chaplin represented something else - the little man.

Which is a fairly wishy-washy way to start an issue of Greatest Hits, but I think that it is deserved. However, to more cheerful matters. Following on from my points about next year's Eurocon, I have received a very interesting letter from Paul Simpkins, and the promise of one from Richard Sharp, which has not, as yet, arrived (Surprise, surprise!). Elsewhere will also be a chat about my doings since last issue, and quite eventful it has been! (But then again, I guess everybody's was.)

Of course, a problem with editorials is deciding what to write. Everything, after a fashion, could be placed elsewhere in the zine - reviews, recounts, regurgitations and rehashes of other articles. All I can really talk about is the state of the hobby, and such material eventually wears pretty thin. However, having said all that, this is exactly what I intend to do! It was all sparked off by a conversation with Tricky Dicky (in a pub, where else) in which he said, basically, that there was no fun in receiving the vast majority of zines, nowadays. Sadly, I felt I had to agree. At the present time, I feel I am in a better position to assess my feelings on zines which in general I receive, having returned to Canterbury for the first time in nearly a month, and thus viewing about ten zines at once. My earlier view is shown to be something of an exaggeration. I enjoyed reading all of the zines in question (I see no point in naming them and thus unintentionally starting a feud) but the point that struck me was the speed with which I was able to get through them, and the paucity of interesting material within each particular zine. In other words, what was there, was interesting, but there wasn't enough.

But then again, I am not a typical reader. I tend to skim over the articles on games, or the reports of non-Dippy games, simply because I feel that neither the subject matter, nor the style, will interest me. A zine producer has to be a very good writer indeed to make uninteresting subject-matter worth reading. It may well, however, be of great interest to others, and therefore has a place in the zine. Others, however, have nothing worth reading to the non-player in a game - and it is these zines, I feel, that are contributing to an isolationist feeling within particular zines. No comment about other zines received, hardly any interaction between players, etc. Let's look at it this way, of the zines you receive, how many would you still subscribe to if you were not playing a game in it? If there become too many zines like this, then the hobby could collapse into a mass of one-zine players - they can play all the games they wish without changing to other, untried zines (better the devil you know.....) and just play their one, two, three or even four games within the one particular zine. Fine for Diplomacy playing, sure, but not much kōp for the cohesiveness of the hobby.

What should be done? Well, to not take a biased view, nothing. If that is the way the hobby is leaning, who am I, or who is anyone, to be so presumptive as to claim the right to turn the tide? Surely, however, it will make most zines far less enjoyable to read, and possessors of a smaller circulation?

Damn! I've just realised that because I wanted to watch the thing on Dubček (I must write an article on that sometime, perhaps in August...) I have missed most of The Old Grey Whistle Test on Beeb 2. Sod it. Still, I guess I wouldn't have got this page typed with all those new-fangled lights flashing out of the square window on the outside world..... A very disjointed editorial this - that's the trouble with stream of consciousness writing. Do you know that some people actually write out their editorials before typing them? (No names, no packdrill...) Where do they get the time? It's all I can do to type this stuff out for the first time, let alone make it into a work of art, but then again, that's what separated the amateurs from the professionals, I guess. It might also be an explanation for the inordinate number of typing errors - I change my mind on what to type, subconsciously, of course, half way through the word! But then again, it may be just because my fingers have poor aim and my brain has bad coordination. Duhhhhhh.

And not a word about reaching number 40! Not far to the half-century, now, and then it's downhill all the way (metaphorically, not a comment on the standard of the zine, I hope) to the century. Mind you, by then I expect I'll be the hundred and nty-nth person to have done it. I only just found out today that I won't even be the first PhD zine producer, Bob Brown is one already, and a lot higher than I can ever dream of reaching. Christ, he actually writes things not get published, like!

LETTERS:

Chris Tringham:

(4.1.78)

That 'Parade Of Dwarfs' Article was interesting, but my main criticism is that it tries to over-simplify things. This seems to be a common fault in politics - the politicians seem to think that most people are too stupid to understand the full argument, so they use various devices to 'simplify' things. The problem is, of course, is that distortions occur in the simplification process - sometimes deliberately and sometimes not. To equate income to height is, I think, an over-simplification since people are able to alter their income to a certain extent, and are able to modify their habits to adapt to a given income. By doing this it is possible to enjoy a better standard of living than income alone would suggest, and so makes 'income' less valid as a measure of living standards. Although there are undoubtedly wide differences between the highest paid and the majority of workers, all sorts of things cut the real gap down; Taxation will be important in this respect, but probably less so than the limitations on the amount of goods and services that one person can consume, regardless of income. It is the difference in living standards between the richest and poorest that most worries people, and I would suggest that this may well have little to do with income.

The Barry McManus/Der Garvey NGC 202 controversy seems principally to demonstrate once again that sub-zines are a bad thing, and should be avoided at all cost. Most subzines are of little value anyway, (the only exception to this is Pancake Roll, which is far better than its wrapping paper, and will hopefully go 'solo' in the future) so the sooner sub-zines disappear the better. Incidentally, how can anyone with any sense wish to play in Sauce anyway?

((I had some thoughts before printing the Parade of Dwarfs article - it struck me that it would look out of place. The response it created, however (massive by the lethargic standards of the Diplomacy hobby) makes me think it worthwhile. This leads me to the point in your letter, Chris, in that you thought it over-simplified the situation. Yes, it did, but would not an article which was totally deadpan, and did not simplify at all, been above the heads of anyone but an economics graduate? I could quite well have selected an article on wealth which dealt with such obscurities as the effect of the marginal propensity to consume on income distribution and the advantages of inequalities in terms of investment response, but who would have read it? Besides being enlightening, I thought that an article performed an entertaining function, and was thus at least read, even if it did oversimplify.))

((Secondly, it wasn't a Politics article, it was an economics article, although its conclusions are, in a sense, political. All it did was to show how rich some people are in terms of income, and let the reader draw his own conclusions. It was far from socialist in its tone - indeed, your letter was more in that direction! I refer to the parts on income not being a true measurement of net economic welfare, for such is the gist of the statement that it is possible to enjoy a better standard of living than income would suggest. Also, the physical limits on spending for happiness would indicate, surely, that the excess wealth of the rich should be redistributed?

Of course, it doesn't work like that, in that the whole structure of society works not just on contentment, but on ambition and status as well. Some people may not care for the latter two, but many people do, even if contentment is sacrificed. Sir Eric Miller, for example, pursued wealth for its own sake, not for what it could buy. Many rich people in business seem to be like this, and many of them are also very philanthropic, for once they have the money, they have no desire to spend it - so they give it to charity.))

((The situation is obviously more complicated than the article suggested, but the article set its own limitations, and within those parameters, I feel, it succeeded. It managed to put over the concept of inequality in layman's terms, without making any moral judgements thereof. That further issues need to be studied is not to be denied, but the place is not here, but in the Financial Times and the Economist. You make a further point, however, about how Politicians make simple statements because they feel people would not comprehend the truth. I don't think this is quite so. Surely they are indulging in realpolitik? Callaghan can hardly say, 'I think that inflation is more important than unemployment, so we will aim for single-figure inflation at the cost of 1½ million unemployed.'? But that is what he has done, although to put it to him like that would probably result in apoplexy. Likewise, Healey cannot say, 'I was wrong and the Tories were right, so now I will adopt their policies before they get the chance,' and Thatcher cannot admit that that is what has happened. It's all part of the electioneering game.))

((As to the McManus Garvey thing, if only Der would give me his address I might be able to send some Greatest Hits to him! I hate people who don't put their address at the top of a letter - Ron Canham did the same when he sent me a sub - and the absence of any nearby Leviathans meant that I couldn't send him a copy of GH! But, to return to the point, I'm not sure that subzines are inherently bad, but I can only see one thing that bodes in their favour, and that is as a training ground for prospective GMs. Steve Pratt, for example, ran a subzine before starting Ad Nauseam. Other producers, whose names temporarily escape me, have done the same thing, and the experience has usually done them good (Ah! Laurence Parrott, for example). Similarly, The Annexe, John Morrison's subzine to Mad Policy, meant that Richard Walkerdine did not have to close his waiting lists, because he had someone else who could share the workload, who was reliable. That, I think, is the test. A producer and his subzine editor must be in perpetual possibility of mutual contact (or at least the main editor must always be able to contact the sub-editor) and the sub-editor must be more reliable, or at least as reliable, as the main editor. Delays in subzine production are fatal. Though not, therefore, condemning them out of hand, I would say that they are things to be avoided unless they are absolutely necessary, and then someone who has proven himself reliable (order sending, etc) should be chosen to produce a small amount of stuff - none of this twenty-page stuff!))

John Marsden:

29.12.77. I'd like to take issue with a statement you made in GH 38, Pete. You said that 'Half the trouble with the world today is that politicians, economists and members of the public come to the right conclusions from the wrong assumptions.'

I would rather argue that the greater error is that of deriving seemingly reasonable conclusions from the wrong assumptions. This then becomes almost impossible to argue against because the particular conclusion is entirely logical - given its assumptions. The most well-known examples are probably the Department of Transport's road enquiries where one is forbidden to question the basic premises of traffic increase; and if these are accepted, the case is proven almost immediately. I would also cite a particular 'bete-noire' of mine - Mr Enoch Powell - whose arguments are extremely logical and thus impossible to refute. Assuming, that is, that is, that you accept his premises; and they are rarely directly questioned. There are many other situations where decisions are made 'because it is in accordance with the general policy' or 'it fits the theory', although an empirical assessment of the particular situation might suggest an alternative course of action.

Your article on 'The Press As Political Influence' also interested me. My parents, politically, float between Conservative and Liberal. They have always taken the Daily Mirror and the Daily Express. Nowadays I either read the Guardian or the Daily Mail. On that basis I suppose I should be confused!

Seriously, though, there does seem to be a case for the influence of press bias; if not in Britain. The reports I have read of the recent election in Australia have pointed out that the press there is so overwhelmingly Conservative that the Labour Party is operating under a permanent handicap in that its campaigns are never given a chance. This situation does not yet occur in this country - but it is perfectly possible.

More amusing was your amazement at Jonathan Palfrey's travelling. It simply reminds me of some of my great journeys; in particular one Sunday evening when I wanted to travel from London to Cambridge, calling in on a friend in Peterborough on the way, and ending up accepting a lift to Corby ('Well, it's in the right direction',). I eventually reached Peterborough (by means of two lifts and a bus) in time to catch the last bus to Cambridge! But the principle I operate on is that England is small enough to make any journey possible if you want to make it.

((On your first point, I entirely agree - but the phenomenon I described struck me as a peculiarly recent one. Political decisions are taken which are perfectly correct in themselves, but they are done for electoral reasons, or blackmail reasons and thus may be changed at any moment, even if the true reason for the action still exists! The cutbacks in education expenditure on the training of teachers, for example, was entirely necessary, but only took place because we were in a field of general recession - had we been in an expansionist phase (as in the early seventies) the cutbacks in the training of teachers would not have taken place (as they did not) even though they were necessary. Hence the large number of unemployed teachers today. Pressure is finally brought to bear on Israel. Why? Not because the world suddenly sees that the Palestinians want autonomy, but because the oil-producing countries suddenly found they possessed as much, if not more, muscle than the pro-Israeli businesses in world commerce. There is uproar over the death of Steve Biko, but the repression in Iran is conveniently overlooked because Iran is an important business area, far more than S. Africa. And so on.))

((I wasn't pleased with that article on the press. I took a long time saying nothing at all. Your point about Australia, though, is interesting. It brings me to a point which I should have ~~made~~ made, but failed to. The press, and the TV, which, with a virtual monopoly of 'unbias' between the two companies, means that what is and what is not deigned as 'news' is decided by very small groups of people. More and more 'news' is dictated on TV by the possession of film of the event. No film, no headline. Then there are issues which it is thought 'unwise' to play up, while others are played up for more than they are really worth. The firemans' dispute, for example, has been covered by the TV medium in a way flagrantly opposed to the firemen. The old value-loaded terminology 'Moderates' vs 'Left-wingers' etc etc and the interviews of firemen who had quit their job because they were against the strike. Fires were covered in an attempt to turn the public against the firemen etc etc.))

((In Australia the situation is no more than a joke. Even political issues are played down if they favour the Labour Party, while those that favour the Country/Liberal coalition ('Conservatives' in common parlance) are headlined, covered for days on end and boiled to death. No party can work under those handicaps, and when character assassination is also an accepted part of the media, no Labour Politician has a hope in hell.))

Paul Simpkins:

3.1.78 A good issue of GH, the first different one I've seen for three months! I presume that Bruce and GH crossed in the post but you'll have noticed by now that I didn't get GH 38. It's not too important but if you have a spare I'd like to see it.

I was interested in your article about Eurocon in the editorial section of GH. Some of the points you make are very valid, and although you've probably seen Richard by now I'll update you on this coming venture (Eurocon 2). I've located a house which purports to have 24 beds all in the same building, and I've sent the details to Richard - as far as I know he's sent of the a cheque to cover the 25% deposit as asked. The house is near Casteljaloux which is 35 miles south-west of Duras. The brochure for the place lists the distances from the house to various sites such as the Atlantic Coast (Arcachon Casino?) one hour, Spain and the Pyrenees 2 hours and Mediterranean $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours, Dordogne caves etc only 2 hours. It's called Le Grand Pichon, and no, I don't know what that means. But on information like that I'm sure that many visits such as the ones you suggested could be arranged.

One point which will affect the travelling down to the place, always assuming that we've rented it, is that I will not finish work (i.e. school) until 3-30 on the Friday before the Saturday when we take up the lease. This means that Karen and I will have to drive shifts from Dewsbury to Bordeaux during the 24 hours between 3-30 (English time) and 2-30 on Saturday (French time) and we'll still probably be 150 miles from target.

Unfortunately, schoolteachers are still one of those oppressed professions who are required to attend on the last day before the hols or lose their entire holiday pay! I don't know how many other occupations require this of their employees but there you go!

Plans at the moment are to breeze down to Brighton for the night ferry Newhaven to Dieppe, possibly taking Craig and Ellie over with us, and landing at around 5 in the morning and just driving and driving and driving and hopefully covering the distance in one day only. Mental arithmetic shows the distance to be somewhere in the region of 750 miles!

Now, just a few words on GH. I managed 10 of the film quiz and neither of the first two questions! I liked the article on dwarfs and income, etc, although it did seem to be a little long. It made a very interesting point, though. Out of interest, I get (not earn) ((sorry, that should be the other way round)) 20% less than the mythical average wage of £80, and I've trained for x years etc etc etc.

Comment on the NGC 202 affair, the real culprit is the NGC and the orphans secretary (if there was one in the affair). The game should never have been rehoused in a subzine which didn't have some proven record of competent GMing, and even when it was placed there, it should have been made clear who was running it, Bartle or Garvey. Both have left the other to sort it out, no-one actually took the responsibility. A similar thing happened in NGC 120 which you may remember started ff as a fast (3-week) no press game in Fifth Column. When Richard Scott left the hobby someone (I know not whom) transferred the game to Shenandoah Services. This meant exorbitant prices, currently 40p per issue) and deadlines five or six weeks apart with turnround taking up to three weeks! The only reason I have remained in the game and the 'zine' is that I'm going to win the game and I'm not going to throw that away lightly. General principle does emerge, however that the NGC has not taken perfect care of the games entrusted to it. Until the organisation does