

MEGALOMANIA 8

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A Postal Diplomacy fanzine

Sunday 24th September

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Megalomania drops cover shock horror sensation probe mystery investigation by the Sunday Times 'Insight' team.

No, well you're not missing much - the most recent idea for a cover was a telegram from Mike Jervis, with his built's for Mania 7 which arrived on Friday after the deadline. It's a good thing I was feeling generous. Instead you will get a page of chat and news that should have been in the editorial.

Big news this week is that Roy Taylor is losing interest in Diplomacy! His zine Jigsaw is being split into two, one of which will complete the Dip games he has started, with the possibility of gametarts when he gets down to a dozen left, and will run to four-week deadlines, plus a Soccerboss etc. zine. It is obvious that Roy's main interest lies in the latter of the two, and with the Soccerboss consuming an increasing amount of his time, a cut-back on Diplomacy was inevitable. It seems that it will be fairly drastic, since almost all his trades are being ended, a sure sign that he wishes to cut himself off from the Diplomacy-orientated mainstream of the hobby. The loss of Jigsaw at this time is not too severe a blow, since there plenty of zines around chasing players just at the moment. It's a good thing that Roy had admitted this now, rather than struggling on against his better judgement as one or two have done in the past.

News on Scotch is rather less definite, with Iain leaving the decision until he is settled in at Leeds and can assess the feasibility of producing from there. A year is a long time in publishing, eh Iain? The subject of folding zines brings me naturally to new zines: how do they compare with their predecessors and each other? I would be interested in your opinions (and perhaps a rating/10) for the following: Whiskey Mac/Megalomania/Pigmy/Pyrhic Victory/Entente/spirit of the age/Griffin/ and how do they compare with the zines of yesteryear?

"A few odds-and-ends that better go somewhere" dept. Two publisher's COAs: John Piggott to 32, Munsterburg Road, Canvey Island, Essex, and address which is amusing on more than one level. Isn't love wonderful! Well, anything that gets Piggott to cycle to work has got to be quite amazing. Mick Bullock is moving back to 14 Nursery Avenue, Halifax, West Yorkshire HX3.

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This typewriter really is driving me up the wall, since it seems incapable of getting spaces between lines correct, plus the faint letters and miscellaneous silly little problems. Smiff-Corona rule OK? If the next issue is late, it'll be because SCM are trying to repair it, something which in John's case has taken several months.

I think I prefer the cartoons.

MEGALOMANIA MEGALOMANIA

Usual problem - How does one start an editorial? It would be so much simpler if I could just launch into the first subject; which is POLYCON (this name having been officially adopted since I suggested it in M5, he said, somewhat vainly). Obviously, Bob deserves our congratulations and thanks for a hugely successful event, about which there are few complaints (at least as far as I know, none of them are about Bob's organization, but about the 'hardcore', 'softcore' or something similar). After the flak that Dave Allen attracted last year, Bob must be pleased that it went off so well, since there are no shortage of people ready to complain at the slightest provocation. The key to it as far as I can see is that he put in a lot of effort beforehand, so that his job on the day was as straightforward as it ever could be. Name badges and maps were both appreciated, though predictably enough most drivers managed to leave their maps at home, and the name-badges were fine, as long as one leaned over and squinted at them. That, of course, rather defeated the object, though caused some amusement - Bob Lloyd appropriated a badge with 'Karen Simpkins', which didn't fool very many, but the best piece of chace was caused by Keith Loveys, who persuaded Martin Feather that he was Richard Sharp, and proceeded to insult Martin's series of drawing which have been appearing in Dolchstoss. I think that Richard co-operated in this deception, and I'm not sure whether Martin ever met Keith and Richard under their true identities. All good fun! Where was I? Oh Yes, thanking Bob Brown: the venue was excellent, with a fair number of tables and chairs in the main room, plus a games room equipped with snooker and pool tables, plus table football and so forth. Preston may not be the best town in Britain, and it is rather a way from London, but it does have the basic facilities required - a decent pub and Indian restaurant, and a number of local hobby members to provide floorspace. The next bit is fairly obvious: What about next year? Whether we go to Preston or somewhere else, I would hope that the burden will not be put on one person: the administrative business of taking bookings and money need not be undertaken by the organizer, as long the two keep in contact, and it should be possible to find a group of people able and willing to spend an hour dealing with people as they arrive, instead of leaving it all up to one person.

Some people seemed to resent the fact that certain people were not actually at the Poly for very long, and didn't play many games. (I find myself in a strange position, here, since I spent most of my time with the 'hardcore', but agree with those who criticise us to a certain extent, and quite see what causes the resentment.) The arrival on Saturday morning of a group of people who wandered around making disparaging comments about the games being played, and then rapidly exited, bound for the pub, must have irritated those who were already there and playing games. 'Who do they think they are?' is a natural reaction, but I can assure you that the feeling was to a certain extent mutual! When I walked into the building, with the 'hardcore', I was greeted by the sight of a large number of people playing games, most of which do not interest me, a few people I knew and a large number whom I didn't. As far as I was concerned, I had very little in common with the majority of people there, which is a rather strange feeling, given that it was a gathering of the Postal games hobby. There were a number of people whom I wished to meet, but the majority were engrossed in games, making it rather difficult to start conversations. I found Paul Openshaw, exchanged a few insults with him, and looked around for interesting people. When a large group set off for the 'Lamb & Packet', I went with them because it was obvious that they would wish to chat and socialize rather than play games. (The problem with playing games is that it ties you down to one spot, to talk to one group of people, rather than circulating freely - if you're stuck with boring people there is no easy way to escape!) I just didn't consider that playing games for all, or most, of the Con was the best use of the limited time available. For those who do, fine, spend your time that way, but don't expect me to!

(I ~~probably~~ realise that I may have offended/annoyed some people by that statement, but I think it needs to be said; I don't find everyone who attends games cons interesting, nor do I expect them to find me interesting. The only way an event of this type works is if people find the people with the same interests (games or otherwise) and 'do their thing' together. Anyone who expects every one games player to get on with every other games player had better think again. End of paragraph. Change of subject.

(Brief pause to cool down - listen to the Jilted John 'B' side, I think)

"Then on Saturday we go the bus shelter at the end of the road/ we sit in it and mess around/ and then we go and buy some chips/ I love Sharon and she loves me/ and we are 'Going Steady'/ and one day when we've saved up, we're gonna get married."

'Going Steady' J.G. John (EMI- INT 567 -)

And I'll dedicate that one to my brother (Steve) and his girlfriend - yes you've guessed it - Sharon! This has been a musical spacefiller, or at least it's turned out that way.

Since the 'Reviews' page seems to have been forced out due to lack of space (or rather lack of time to type another 4-page section), and for the second successive issue, I'll complete this truncated editorial with some general comments on zines.

Entente (Shaun Derrick, 101 Ringwood Highway, Potters Green, Coventry, CV2 2GT) deserves a mention for perseverance (~~AAA~~) in the face of adversity. Despite some rather critical reviews from various editors, myself included, and the lack of a single gamestart or orphan game until issue 5, Shaun has continued to publish regularly. It has gradually improved over the last few weeks, and despite various deficiencies ((Hell, what a place for my spelling, to go pieces)) in grammar and spelling, plus a unique idea of layout, Entente isn't that bad. It's main problem is Pyrrhic Victory disease: silly mistakes left uncorrected do get on the reader's nerves after a while. It really is amazing how much difference you can make by being that bit more careful, as Entente demonstrates, certainly when compared with the previous five. Perhaps there is still a way to go, but at least he's going in the right direction! As ever, I would recommend you to write for a sample copy so as to tell whether you want to sub, since my comments are merely personal opinions, and I wouldn't want to put you off - well, perhaps in one or two cases I might, but not usually.

Talking of Pyrrhic Victory, I can't say anything nice about it, so perhaps I ought to say nothing at all. Perhaps not! The latest issue features some dire photocopying, but then it doesn't matter a great deal if the original isn't worth reading, and very little of PV is worth reading. An anonymous columnist who managed to construct sentences even more horrific than the editor's, and express the most nonsensical sentiments made a thankfully brief appearance, and has now disappeared up his own..... Two or three pieces in the latest issue are worthy of comment - a letter from Mike Jervis, setting out his criticisms of the zine, treated with contempt that it doesn't deserve. Above it is a long and boring letter all about Bristol's public transport system, which Peter Calcraft surely can't have intended for publication: in fact, it occurs to me that it might be a joke, attempting to be more boring than the original article, but somehow I doubt it. If you know the times of buses from Nailsea to Bristol? Do you care? The rest of the zine is shown up by John Miller's bit, which combines literacy with humour and a sense of layout. Enough of this Piggott-style bitchiness, and on to a zine about which I can be pleasant.

John Miller's own zine, Mr Glasford is deserving of a larger audience, and indeed I believe that John intends to expand MrG by starting a second game. As I said above, John has all the qualities which are needed to produce a good-quality zine, and there is not a great deal critical to be said about MrG. In fact, I highly recommend it! If you're looking for a small, chatty, efficient zine then you need look no further. Take out a sub immediately.

This is fast turning into the review column that's supposed to be missing. Ah Well, who cares. The VNVS saga continues, with a 40-page issue of the zine distributed to a small number of people a few weeks ago. My copy, like every other, has 38 blank pages, and was presumably his acknowledgement that the hoax had been rumbled. However, another publication claiming to be VNVS has also appeared, looking like a cross between Rhubovia and Pyrrhic Victory, and generally less than impressive. (It's the sort of humourless exploitation of an originally funny idea that one comes to expect from half-wits, much like the 'Gordon is not a moron' record - taking the joke too far) The third and final exhibit is 'Perkin', which consists of 8 litho (reduced photocopy?) pages, featuring a gamestart and various jokes, not a few of which are aimed in my general direction. It is Mike Jervis, and it is genuine, though you can't subscribe at the moment. Well, it seems to have worked, Mike, but wouldn't it have been better to let a few of us in on it, so as to cause havoc among the general public.

I'm glad to see that Notts County are improving, and even Newcastle are showing signs of life. Last time I looked, Notts County were 7th or 8th and Newcastle about 15th. Palace are, naturally enough, on top of the Division, and still unbeaten. Testing eight days ahead, with 2nd place Stoke and Aston Villa away from home, and then Brighton at Selhurst Park. Bleeding Oldham spoiled Palace's appearance on TV on Saturday night, by playing negative defensive football, and ruining the game for 13,000 spectators.

Which seems to bring me to the end of this short editorial, though there's a 4-page 'PolyCon' report starting in the centre, plus Ken Bain's letter. I apologize for another sub-standard issue, but I seem to need more than just the weekend to produce the zine properly. Just have to start earlier, I guess. Now I need some spacefillers, I'm afraid.

It was a hot, still evening in Hope Springs, Ohio Territory. This was cattle country, and the cowboys were in town, drinking, gambling and wenching in the town's only saloon, McGraw's Bar. The rest of the town was quiet: the store (McGraw's General and Dry Goods) was closed and a clerk was dozing at the desk in McGraw's hotel.

These were rough times, and Hope Springs was the roughest, toughest, meanest town of all. There was little law in the district, and what there was, was McGraw's Law. Mr McGraw himself was at his desk in the office over the Bank, working on his books. Everything was sewn up very nicely. It was a good place to live - if you were a friend of McGraw. Those who weren't his friends were either dead or fifty miles away, riding in the opposite direction.

(Yes, folks, it's:)

dapper

Two old-timers sat on the porch of a shack at the end of the street, watching the comings and goings. One was rocking in his chair, sucking at a very old pipe, whilst the other had his feet on the rail, chewing tobacco; nonchalantly pausing every now and then to spit juice at a passing school ma'am or suchlike. (Well, I said it was rough!) They were talking of the old days. The sight of a couple of strangers riding into town caused them to stop jawing, and stare, open-mouthed.

The strangers rode slowly by, the leading one tipping his hat politely as they passed. He wore a mask around his eyes, but, and this was what caused the old-timers to stare, you could see right through it: not to his face, but the surrounding countryside, the hills beyond and even the sky at the horizon. The rest of him, from the spurs on his boots to his hat, appeared normal. He whispered urgently to his companion.

"I don't like it. What are they staring at?"

His companion turned to face him, with a curious twisting motion of his neck, of the kind that only androids can perform.

"I think it's materialization, Master," he replied. "I think you should have done it completely first, and then put on a mask, rather than trying to blank out the spaces as you went along."

"Well, no," said the Alien, for that is what he was, adapting more successfully to the vernacular than he sometimes managed. "Well, we're here now, so we'll just have to go ahead as planned. And don't call me 'Master'," he added truculently.

"Forry, Hemo Sahib" replied the turbaned robot.

They rode on until they reached the saloon, where the sound of laughter, raised voices and tinkling pianos wafted out through the swing doors.

"Must be Pay-day at McGraw's ranches", said the alien, "a lot more men than I had anticipated. Never mind, let's go!"

He attempted to dismount from his horse. He had practised a great deal for this mission, but most of his information came from fictional material. Hence a rather oddlyshaped horse, which he had repeatedly tried mounting at speed from a first floor balcony. The poor animal had consequently developed a deep depression in its back, with the result that the rider's feet nearly touched the ground as he rode away.

The Alien finally managed to dismount by jumping off. His companion slid smoothly off the back of his horse.

The masked stranger strode through the swing doors. Then he went for his confederate, who had been by the recoil, and was lying on the sidewalk. They re-entered the saloon together.

"I say..." began the stranger, somewhat weakly. He cleared his throat noisily. No-one took the slightest notice.

"Shut Up!" he screamed at the top of his rather shrill voice.

The laughter and music died away. People turned and stared.

"Who the hell are you?" said a rather burly cowboy in all-black gear.

"I'm the Lone Rider," said the Alien, trying to sound impressive. "And this is my faithful Indian companion, Hanjit. Say good evening to the Ladies and Gentlemen, Hanjit!"

"But what's your name," said the man in black.

"Well, actually, it's Maurice"

"Maurice:" the cry was echoed on all sides. The laughter was heard all the way up the deserted street. A man left his office above the Bank.

Meanwhile, the saloon returned to its normal, noisy state.

The Alien frowned. He was being ignored. He pulled his gun and fired a warning shot into the ceiling. There was a sound of a collapsing bed, a shriek and cursing from upstairs. The bar itself was silent. The Alien replaced the gun in its holster.

"You didn't oughta ha' done that, mister," said the man in black, "we don't like strangers making trouble in our town."

People backed away nervously, leaving the two facing each other across twenty feet of empty floor. Ranjit retired to investigate the workings of the piano.

"Look here," said the masked man, "I came here to clean up this town. That's my mission, and that's what I'm - er - aiming to do."

"An' I'll be aimin' right at your heart in just a few seconds," said the other.

"Draw!"

The Alien stood unmoved.

"Right, it's up to me is it?" said the man in black. He drew and fired

The Alien was far too slow, of course, and so he took the only course open to him. He turned the clock, and the universe, back a few seconds and drew first.

As you may know, the universe from which the Alien comes does not recognise time. One of the purposes of visiting Earth is to investigate the nature of Time. Since the Alien could appear at any time and place of his own choosing, he could in theory disappear one instant and return a few seconds earlier. Theory, of course, is different from practice, and it is lack of practice that makes the Alien somewhat less successful than he might have been when it comes to manipulating time.

On this occasion he got it right on the fiftieth attempt. The effect on all the people alive at that time was a rather confused feeling at the back of the mind that they were rather tired of doing what they were doing, without knowing exactly why. In Paris, a professor of psychology invented 'Deja vu'.

Meanwhile in the saloon, the man in black lay dead on the floor.

"Anyone else?" enquired the Alien, politely.

But everyone was looking over his shoulder at a man beyond. The Alien turned round. He staggered a little with shock.

"Furt!" he gasped

"No," said the man, "McGraw's the name. I run this town, and I aim to continue running it."

"Fraid not," said the Alien, "we have stepped in to save this town for Law and Order and - um - Civilization. Our projections show a definite trend to Evil an' spreading Corruption. So you'll have to stop it, and we can make you. You know it makes sense."

"Oh, hell," said the man who called himself McGraw. He sighed. "Listen," he called to saloon crowd, who were still staring uncomprehending. The McGraw's are selling up and moving out. And - the drinks are on me!"

The saloon returned to its normal state of revelry and relative chaos. McGraw, or Furt, disappeared (literally, but that's another story).

The Alien retrieved Ranjit from what was now a piano, and left town.

The old-timers watched nonchalantly as they passed.

"Who was that duke?" enquired the first

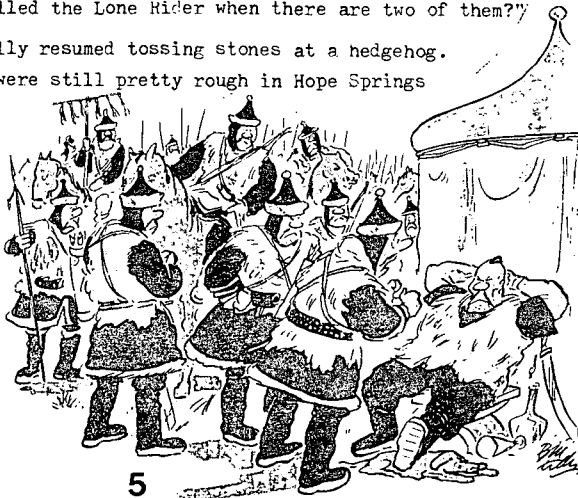
"Why, that was the Lone Rider:"

"Why's he called the Lone Rider when there are two of them?"

"Search me!"

And he casually resumed tossing stones at a hedgehog.

Yes, things were still pretty rough in Hope Springs



"Aw c'mon, Genghis—we need one more to make up a horde!"

LETTERS

Ken Cain
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Thanks for M 7, which I picked up at Preston. It's a shame I didn't meet you there, but I guess one can't meet everyone.

Polycon has prompted me to add a few not totally connected thoughts to Brian's letter about the hardcore.

Most of the people I met were not 'names', as far as I am aware, but still were interesting people with a sometimes extensive interest in the hobby. I wouldn't say I 'met' anyone whom I would think of as 'hardcore', but did observe some from a distance. I got the impression that they were more concerned with other 'members of the hardcore', sharing private jokes and just chatting to friends they maybe hadn't seen for a while.

((Absolutely Correct, Ken.))

Now there's nothing wrong with that, but it does make me wonder if Brian didn't have a point (though overstated) in describing the 'hardcore' as potential has-beens.

As you say, the hobby builds up friendships which extend beyond the hobby. This acknowledges that the hobby is basically about playing games by post and face-to-face. At a con you don't spend all your time playing games, but getting to know people as well. Nevertheless, the games are the hobby. If it is a hobby of making friends, form a pen-pal club and leave games out of it.

To return to the point I'm trying to make, the apparent attitude of the hardcore, to concentrate on their own little group, seems to me to be placing them as a group beyond the hobby. If they do regret to some extent the expansion of the hobby, then I would say it does smack of self-assigned elitism. The friendships which they have formed will, I have no doubt, last, but if that's their main interest, I'm tempted to suggest that they form a 'hardcore' zine for their own benefit. If they do not like the hobby as it is, rather than as it was, the change: The change is inevitable - larger organizations (I use the term loosely) are nearly always more impersonal, and who is going to try and put a limit on the number of hobby members there should be?

I hope I don't appear too sour - I don't mean to be, but it strikes me that there is a resentment of the hardcore and their (often presumed) attitudes. Could it be that the very existence of a group who describe themselves as 'hardcore' is damaging the hobby they are supposed to love so much.

((Well, this letter is gonna need a fairly lengthy reply, particularly as I have resisted the temptation to stick my comments in half way through the letter. Before I undertake a major demolition job, I had better say that I have a certain amount of sympathy for Ken's point of view, and am only attempting to correct what I see as inaccuracies and absurdities, without really going into a long debate on the basic question - is the 'hardcore' a good or bad thing - since that is simply a matter of opinion.

Meeting and chatting to old friends is indeed one of the main reasons why a lot of people went to Preston, though that does not prevent new people, and striking up friendships. However, it is natural that I will wish to chat to the people who went to Eurocon, people whom you might describe as 'hardcore', since we do have something in common. Private jokes are a natural result of a group of people with such strange personalities in it, and the only people who dislike private jokes are those who don't understand them, but would like to.

'Potential has-beens' has got to be some sort of joke: The people who have been in the hobby the longest, in an active sense, are the hardcore, and I see no reason why this should change. If the suggestion is that the 'softcore' will drive the 'hardcore' out, my reaction is one of utter incredulity! I won't go into the reasons why, but would just ask who would run the hobby and organize cons? Or do you expect the 'hardcore' to just disappear?

Of course postal games are the hobby, but that doesn't mean that cons should consist of people playing fit games, though it is natural that being the sort of people we are, there are bound to be a fair number of games played. Personally, though, there are a lot of games which I have no wish to play, and others which are only worth playing under certain conditions. The hobby is about postal games, and cons are about meeting postal-games-players and enjoying oneself. The hobby contains people whom I find interesting, and it is that, rather than postal games themselves that keep me in the hobby.

((Reply to Ken Bain's letter, continued....

I don't believe that the hardcore is setting itself apart from the rest of the hobby deliberately, but it is inevitable that any sub-group will be attacked by those outside it: the Soccerdross and D&D groups and the Chimera/Griffin zines are just as much a sub-group, and come under attack themselves. I would hope that the overall hobby will always encompass the large number of interests it currently does. Whatever might be said, most people in the hobby do get on well together, despite whatever may appear in print. As for 'hardcore zines', there a number which might be said to fulfil that function, though there is not yet a zine devoted to the hardcore exclusively (- if there were, I assume it would be similar to the more fannish SF zines, such as Twill-Ddu). The reason is that there is no desire to be cut off from the rest of the hobby completely.

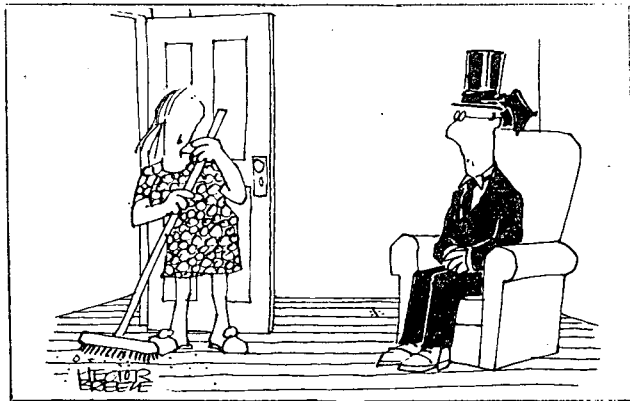
AS YOU say, anyone who doesn't like the hobby as it is has no choice but to accept it, but by the same logic, the hardcore is there and must be accepted. I argue that the larger hobby has resulted in the appearance of the hardcore, so one must put up with one to have the other: in the past, the hobby wasn't really large enough for there to be any major sub-groups. AS you yourself say, larger organizations tend to more impersonal, and that is why smaller groups such as the 'hardcore' will tend to become more important. It is obviously easier to relate to, and become 'part of' a smaller group. No-one is trying to stop people entering the hobby, but John (among others) doesn't wish to encourage more people than we can reasonably cope with. Surely that can't be wrong?

Could it be that the resentment of a group who are described as 'hardcore' is damaging the hobby 'they' are supposed to love so much.

(KB) - PS. I think you're right about cons. I can't imagine a house being able to hold even a fraction of the people who went to PolyCon. Perhaps that is the area in which the NGC should be operating - taking the responsibility from individuals to decide to a con altogether. Maybe 2 national cons per year? Perhaps this is where the NGC is operating - I think I once saw a mention of an NGC Con-Organizer, but that may just have been a proposal. In fact, I'll repeat Brian's questions - What is the NGC, and what does it do? (That's what comes of being introduced to the hobby - even ((sic)) if he is a member of hardcore, too!)

((Yes, Bob Brown is NGC FTF organizer, though the NGC itself had very little to do with it - Bob organized it, putting up his own money, and would have stood any loss himself. The NGC is totally inactive at the moment, presumably because of the recent Bullock/Sharp power struggle. I am a little concerned about this, though there is no sign of the hobby collapsing, and hope that Richard will be doing something soon. (I now find myself in the slightly embarrassing position of disagreeing with what I wrote about the NGC in the first two issues of M, since I now realise the impossibility of getting people to do anything in the NGC. Plus the fact that we don't really need a great deal done, so I think that were the election (sic) to have taken place now, I would have supported Mick - though I expect that he's pleased not to have the extra work involved.

There aren't any other letters that are really worth printing, so I'll end the lettercol here for this issue - this looks like being another 16-page one if I'm going to get to mod on monday morning.



"Do you have to spend your days off whistling solemn music?"