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Issue

21

# MEGALOMANIA



**A  
POSTAL DIPLOMACY  
FANZINE**

# EDITORIAL



This is an unusual editorial, in that it is being typed up on Friday evening as I embark on the production of the 21st issue. Normally, I either do it in advance, or leave it to the end. You will gather that I am doing this for a particular reason.

The fact is that I really can't imagine how I'm going to fill all the (currently) blank pages that will make up this issue. I usually think this before I start typing, but somehow it all comes together. On this occasion, there are other difficulties which make me wonder whether this will happen. I'm also feeling rather disillusioned with certain aspects of the hobby and Megalomania; I wonder who I'm doing all this for. To me, the hobby divides up into two groups: the people I know, and the people I don't. Fortunately, the first group is continually expanding, as I meet hobby people at cons and The Lamb, and discover them to be almost invariably good company (I'm sure I could phrase that more elegantly). However, there are a lot of people whose only contact with me is to send orders or money at regular intervals. You might find it incredible (Clive Booth certainly does) that I haven't the faintest idea who some of you are - I can make educated guesses, but often have little information to base them on. I slave over a hot typewriter for three days in an effort to interest, entertain, inform, provoke, and arouse you, and all I get is: 'Dear Chris, Here are my orders for Game 94. Cheers, Eric Boring.' That's it. Exciting, huh? I assume he's happy with the zine, otherwise he'd say something, but then even duff issues (7, for example) produce no response. The only thing guaranteed to provoke him to write in sentences and paragraphs of English is an adjudication error or lost orders.

That baffles me, it really does. It makes me wonder how many people really care about the zine as more than just a vehicle for Diplomacy games. I have always tried to make Megalomania interesting to read, so I regard the lack of response as an indication that I've failed. Or have I? When I speak to people about the zine, most say that they enjoy reading it and find it interesting. They are in a minority, of course, because I have no way of finding out what other people think.

I mentioned various "difficulties" back there. One is another price-rise at the Hanway Print Centre that increases the loss I'm making - I am also forced to put the price up (see elsewhere for details and justification). So, not only do I have to slave over a hot typewriter for a weekend, but it also costs me a lot of money.

## MR. DIPLOMATS

(continues opposite)



I am now working (gasp), as a shop assistant in John Menzies bit in Alders of Croydon (3rd largest department store in the country). This is a bit of a shock to the system, as I'm expected to work for most of the time (which I certainly didn't in the DHSS). So, not only has my free time been cut dramatically, but I feel rather less inclined to spend my evenings doing stuff for the zine. As a result, I have only one page typed up in advance and the chances of getting another eighteen done between now and Sunday evening must be pretty slim.

I am, however, strangely enjoying working there - I suppose it's partially the result of having been unemployed for a few months, but it's certainly better than being a 'Casual Clerical Assistant' in the DHSS.

I mean, I actually meet people and do more than just sit behind a desk. The week before last I moved millions of Christmas cards from the basement to the third floor, which wasn't exciting. Last week I worked in the shop, and was actually allowed to serve customers (two weeks after being employed to do just that!) on Friday (like yesterday, when I started writing this editorial). I'm sure I'll get over my enthusiasm fairly quickly - customers are a wretched nuisance, you know.

Right, so now I tell you I'm intending to fold. Except that I'm not (hard luck!), I am, however considering various changes.

As I see it, I'm producing two zines - one is the bit I really enjoy, the chat and articles bit at the front, whilst the other is the games. The Diplomacy games force me to produce the zine every four weeks, whereas the chatty bits should be produced when I feel able. This issue is one which I probably wouldn't produce now, but for the Diplomacy games. The obvious answer is a thin issue, but when I'm charging you 28½p for it that seems unfair. Perhaps I should re-arrange the pricing structure to make allowance for that; but I then involve myself in a lot more paperwork, so I'm reluctant to do that.

I might split the two parts, along the lines of The Tinamou, with a regularly-produced games section and an irregular "supplement" of articles, chat and so forth. Again I fear that it might end up being more troublesome than the present arrangement, and people will doubtless complain if I use different formats for the two halves. I'd welcome your comments, though I might go ahead with it anyway if I have problems with a subsequent issue. (It may be forced on me for the Christmas issue, as the projected deadline falls a few days before the 25th and a full litho issue couldn't possibly be ready to post till the following weekend at the earliest.)

The advantages of such a system are obvious - with a whole weekend to produce the game reports I would almost certainly achieve a higher accuracy rate than at present, and would be doing the whole thing under far less pressure. As I will be forced to work some Saturdays while I'm at Menzies (till Christmas) this might make the difference between the zine appearing and not.

Anyway, enough of this speculation. I've said similar things before, and been attacked for boring people, so I'll just solicit your comments. Say something, even if it's 'I don't care' - please!

As I said at the beginning, I doubt if this'll be a very good issue - I'm suffering from some combination of Hay Fever/allergy/common cold - whatever it is, it's making me feel rather under the weather. Plus I'm tired, due to the fact that my body hasn't got used to getting up at 8 am rather than 9 or 9.30 - I don't go to bed any earlier, so I'm losing out on sleep. And, of course, I ain't adjusted to working a full day either. I've been finding it far harder to get this issue together than any this year, and it really is the work of one weekend on this occasion.

Enough of this whining - I'll only have it all thrown back at me over the next few weeks in other zines, and it'll be interpreted as the prelude to a fold. I don't think it is, but it may mark the end of the zine in its present form.

The last four weeks have been quite good for me really - what with Geordiecon, two things at The Lamb, a new (albeit temporary and badly paid) job, and Palace on top of the League. On, on, more words.

# we reg re t th at du e

It seems that Steve Agar was only joking when he said that Pigmy was about to fold. Some joke, huh! Apparently his 'A' level results were good enough for him to be able to take the Oxbridge entrance exam this year, for which he will have to spend an extra year at school. Whether this amounts to more than just a postponement of the inevitable remains to be seen.

Nothing has been done about the Ethil games recently, though John Marsden has offered to take any games that don't have a new home (in his new zine Ode, of which more later he said, desperately hunting for the flyer). Greg Chapman (Games by Post) has also offered to take on some orphan games, in his new zine with a silly name. You see, he's folded GBP because he hasn't got a gamestart yet. I don't understand this.

Steve Plater has bought himself a photocopier, so the latest TOE is 44 pages photocopied centrestapled A3 (twice the paper size I use) for 20p. Since he has to pay 44p per copy to the company for the use of his own machine, and postage costs amount to nearly 20p, I calculate that he's making an even larger loss than me. Since he can afford it, whilst I can't, The Orient Express is far better value for money than Megalomania is every likely to be. Rats....

OK, John Marsden's new zine. It's called Ode, and will have a 'definite emphasis on games'. He says that he'll keep a low profile, which is a pretty meaningless statement, but presumably means that he doesn't intend to annoy people like what I do. I know John from meeting at many cons, and a good deal of correspondence over the last couple of years. I therefore predict that Ode will be run competently and efficiently - John's been around long enough to realise what he's letting himself in for, and avoid the most obvious mistakes. I wouldn't be at all surprised if it bore more than a passing resemblance to Finnisterre....

Incidentally, what is going on in Wealdstone? As you may or may not know, it is printed "professionally" in a shop. (you may have noticed that being unable to turn the duplicator handle prevents Graham from instilling any character into the zine). The issue before last featured one page upside down, for which Graham apologized in the latest issue. Unfortunately, the pages have been printed in a totally random order, making it even more difficult to work out what Graham's on about than usual. If you pay someone to duplicate a zine, you might at least expect competence - unfortunately, Graham probably hasn't any other way of getting it printed.

This page is dedicated to Rob Chapman, who keeps complaining that I'm not adventurous enough. I suspect I may have gone slightly overboard, but that'll teach him to criticise me! If I were really following his advice, of course course, you wouldn't be reading this, as he doesn't approve of spacefillers. I would say that spacefillers are a long-established hobby tradition, and as amateur as mimeo, but then he'd accuse me of inconsistency and everything else under the sun, and I don't have room for any more feuds just at the moment, thanks. I'm already lumbered with Malcolm Brown, who I'll deal with on the next page. Come back in a few months, Rob, and I'll try and fit you in.

Does the Trades Descriptions Act apply to food - because I'm sure Brian's 'Himalayan Chicken' had never even seen a postcard of Mount Everest. Not a bad meal, though, and it didn't make me feel ill! On our return, all manner of strange people were in attendance, including Mike Allaway (with whom I am currently playing in DAS 'Condwenna': I'm Italy on 6 centres (inc. Tri & Vie) and he's Austria on 3 - it's now Spring 1902). Brisk was there, fully ten feet from the bar, as well as all the regulars - though Nick didn't let Audrey come (spoilsport), and Dribbleday had to go to bath (er, Bath). As the evening drew to a close, Thorby suddenly (and quite inexplicably) offered to pay for a round of Snowballs if the six people who happened to be nearby at the time drank them. I could have understood this if he had chosen either a cheaper or more revolting drink (viz Birks), but even with Davidson involved there was never any real prospect of them not being consumed (I was going to say 'drunk', but then I realised you might take it the wrong way - and Davidson would probably sue me). Exit Thorby, £3.50 or so worse off.

I actually played a game of ftf Diplomacy last weekend! Dave Clarke rang me up on Saturday to try and persuade me to be the seventh player, and despite the fact that it was in North London I decided to go. The game went on a bit too long, and was notable only for Steve Doubleday's abysmal performance: you'd have thought someone as experienced as him would have realised that the Key Lepanto is fatal for Austria. Having suffered the inevitable devastation he survived on one centre for the rest of the game. However, an interesting problem presented itself at the end (we agreed a 2-way draw before resolving it!):

- RUSSIAN F(Sev)-Rum S by A's(Ukr & Gal)
- TURKISH A(Rum)-Sev S by F's(BLA, Arm)
- ITALIAN A(Ser)-Rum S by A(Bul).

There's probably no problem there, and we were just getting muddled, but we did spend at least ten minutes arguing about it - Steve and myself came to the same conclusion, but weren't convinced that it was correct. Answers on a postcard please.

Torjborn Strom wrote to me a while back about his new zine, The Baltic Battler (I think - I've mislaid his letter) which will be in Swedish and English. As someone whose knowledge of foreign languages is basic in the extreme, I am full of admiration for anyone who can produce a zine in his second language. Apparently, Diplomacy is sold in only one shop in the whole country, so Torjborn has become the agent for AH in Sweden with the hope of increasing sales of the game. He hopes to become part of the UK-based hobby, so is seeking subs and trades here - I hope people will support him in this. Write to Torjborn at Lansmansvagen 19. S-370, 10 Brakne-Hoby, Sweden for details, and he'll probably send you the first issue.

Before I forget, some more addresses of people I've mentioned: Greg Chapman (GBF) 27 Edinburgh Way, Dersingham, Kings Lynn, Norfolk, PE31 6JJ; Steve Plater (TOE), c/o FCO, King Charles Street, London S'1, marked 'Tokyo' in the top LH corner. John Marsden (Ode), 6 Mauldret Road West, Manchester M20 9WB; Graham Box,(Finn), 15 Earls Crescent, Wealdstone, Harrow, Middlesex; Rob Chapman, 7 Baymount, Paignton, Devon (he produces Putty Riffe). Malcolm Brown (TFPO), 20 Lincoln Close, Downside Estate, Dunstable, Beds.

There, wasn't that fascinating! Quick spacefiller - I see that the new Philips portable TV adverts show a Diplomacy box in the background. Just thought you might like to now that! You can't actually see that it's Diplomacy unless you know that

it's 'The New Game of International Intrigue', since the silly sods put the box the wrong way round.

# to an ind

## Financial News

A long conversation with Adrien Baird on the subject of zine finances has forced me to consider the profit/loss position of Megalomania, as a result of which I present the following information:

83 subscribers @ 0.28½	= £23.65
42 trades @ 0.20	= £8.40
10 copies @ 0.18	= £1.80
	<u>£33.80</u>
+£5(notional game fee)	<u>5.00</u>
	<u>£38.80</u>
Less postage (approx)	<u>£12.00</u>
	<u>£26.80</u>

(as compared with 33p), and the only cheap rates will be £3/8, £5/15 (and 3 copies for £1 for any sub amount above £5). If you send less than £3, I'll charge you the full 40p an issue, and if you send £3-£5 I'll count the excess (over £3) at 37½p an issue, and spend any odd shillings that remain.

This means that in the twenty months or so since the first issue, the price has risen by exactly 50% (based on the £3 rate then and now). However, my price was based on John Piggott's, and that had stayed the same since the beginning of 1977. In that three-year period, price inflation has certainly topped the 50% mark! Certainly printing prices have gone up by at least that amount - the bill for issue 5, for example, was just £24, compared with probably £48 for this issue!

I'm sure that a lot of people reading this (including certain of our less intelligent zine editors) will complain bitterly about this, and claim that I'm profiteering, or should use mimeo, or something. I have only one word no, make that two - for them, which I'll leave to your imagination. I do apologize for having to put the prices up, but as all the best ~~tip-off artists~~ shopkeepers say: "it's due to circumstances completely outside our control." Even so, it's not that expensive - after all, what else can you get for 40p - four stamps (with paper and envelopes on top), 80% of Sir Jams Goldsmith's new glossy, 2 days supply of the Financial Times, a week's Daily Stars, or an eighth of a seat to watch a First Division football match, part of a pint of beer, 4 minutes of the new Led Zeppelin album, and so on.

The simple truth is that if you aren't prepared to spend 40p in order to get Megalomania, then you increase the chance of it folding - as was the case with Gallimaufry, of course.

And now I'd better make sure this issue is a good one, hadn't I!

Going to The Lamb is getting rather embarrassing these days, as the strangest people turn up. Three-and-a-half weeks ago, I arrived at about 7.30 only to find that Dave Thorby was the only other hobby person (and I use the term in the widest possible sense) present. Ken Bain and Brian Creese had been and gone to the Indian, and Nick and Audrey had just been and gone. Anyway, in an effort to be sociable I offered him a copy of Megalomania 20 - the one with the Eurocon report in - hoping that he wasn't of a violent disposition. . . .

Later, many more people rolled up - notably Charles Vasey resplendent with beard and living in East Dulwich, who was drinking some very silly things towards the end of the evening. Ken and Brian had this joke about starting a new zine, and Doubleday kept moaning about not having his name up in lights for folding Gallimaufry, and Thorby laughed like a demented hyena ( (c) P. Mearns 1979), and Brian kept complaining about his headmaster, and Patrick Thompson talked about subscribing, and, and.. it was hell.

A fortnight later, I arrived earlier, to meet Ken and Brian for an Indian meal, and Sealy was there. He just sat there, neither drinking or saying very much, and then left for a Wimpy (or something equally hideous) when we went across the road.

Malcolm was bored. Stuck at home with nothing to do. He was left with the memories (and scars) from the previous day's football match, but being a Sunday he had to be content with that. The pubs were shut, so he was frustrated in his attempt to emulate Loveys' beer consumption. It was raining, and all the old people of Dunstable were safely locked away in the homes, so a mugging expedition was out of the question for the moment. He would have kicked the cats, but they had already fled, sensing his bad mood.

WHO IS PAUL PREBBLE?

As he stubbed his cigarette out on the neighbour's dog, he started to consider how he could pass the afternoon. His mind turned to Diplomacy, and his zine The Fool Plays On, which was only three weeks overdue. Nevertheless, he picked up the typewriter and put on his boxing gloves.

Just as he did so, the phone rang. It was Paul Prebble.

"Hullo, Paul, here.

Wanna be petty and vindictive, Mal?"

"Super, Paul."

"Let's knock

that Tringham fellow down a peg or two. I've got this plan..."

SUNDAY FOR SEVEN DAYS

And Now.....

No expense spared to bring you:

"We Name The Guilty Men"

Based on

An Investigation by the

Crus of the World

Cert AA

Sung by Jonathan Palberry

Those of you with long memories.

who actually read

this thing, may remember that I said some vaguely nice things about Dolchstoss in issue

19 - something about missing it, and that 'no zine could hope to equal

D'. Only in passing, mind you, but it seems to have been the only bit that Malcolm Brown read, since he gave it prominent coverage in the latest TFPO.

Apparently I only said it to impress Richard Sharp, as a few days later I would be in France at Eurocon with him. It's so simple, really, isn't it, when you think about it. Strangely, though, only one other person drew that conclusion. Guess? No? Well, it was his sidekick Paul Prebble. Really weird that he should have the same idea. Doesn't Arthur Koestler or someone collect amazing coincidences of this type for a book?

Mind you, it was more interesting than the rest of TFPO, and the fact that I had produced another Megalomania since then didn't really affect its topicality.

And now, if it's OK with you, Richard, I'll move on to another subject - I must say how honoured I am to be on the same planet as you. A cup of coffee and a croissant, sir? Certainly - I'll just go and get them for you. Is there anything else? A few nice things about Dolchstoss in Megalomania, Mr Sharp? Nothing could be simpler, and all these gullible fools will believe that I really mean it!

John Le Carré's  
The MALCOLM BROWN Affair  
Was the last song "SHOCK HORROR PROBE MYSTERY SENSATION DISASTER"

A reminder that Games Day "Britain's Premier Games Convention" takes place from 10.30 to 6 pm on Saturday October 20th at the Royal Horticultural Hall, Greycoat Street, London SW1 (half-a-mile from Victoria station). Admission is 50p, and there are likely to be a good number of Diplomacy players there in amongst the D & D and wargamers. I intend to be there, subject only to John Menzies (who being Scottish will probably force me to work that day). Willy Haughan said that there was a chance that the Newcastle mob would be coming down for the day, and Sealy, John Lee and Dave Parry intend to turn up. Shudder.

The new Games & Puzzles advertising GD V also contains a feature on American Football games by Mike Jervis, but the wretched magazine still ignores Diplomacy!

# LETTERS



I enjoyed Geordie Con. I'd rate it better than Mad Con II (my first) ~~at~~ even if it did not <sup>quite</sup> meet the high standards of PolyCon. But what happened to the 'hard-core'? Of them I'd judge only yourself, Ron Fisher & Steve Doubleday were there. I seem to remember Andy Davidson's letter in a recent GH quoting Richard Sharp as saying that the hard-core were those who unfailingly went to a Con anywhere and anytime. Those words look rather sick now. Is the hard-core dead?

Regards,

James

31 Knockmore Ph  
Bangor  
N. Ireland  
19/9/79

(Well I have to read his handwriting!)

((No, James, the hardcore isn't 'dead' - just resting. The hardcore are the group who were regular con goers a couple of years ago, and have since

become the "hobby establishment". The influx of newer members, and games like D & D, has driven a wedge between the hardcore and the rest of the hobby which people like James wish to preserve. The hardcore is no more or less than a group of friends who happen to be in the Diplomacy hobby. They are no longer the force in the land of a while ago, but so what?

There is, I suppose, a new wave of people in the hobby who almost unfailingly go to cons: Steve Agar, Rob Chapman, Brian Williams, John Miller, Don Brown, James, Peter Calcraft & friends and many others, myself included. It includes several zine editors, of course, and is often as elitist as the hardcore. This is the new mainstream but given time it will also be usurped by the next bunch. Several people and zines transcend these barriers - I suppose Greatest Hits does, even though Pete is without doubt a bastion of the hardcore.

The hardcore isn't dead, but several of its number are in retirement just at the moment. But so what?

# ustrial d

**No Comment**

From: John Miller Esq.

Dear Sir,

Your correspondent Mr. Peter Sealy claims that the postal Diplomacy hobby has helped him to grow out of shy introvert he was when he joined it.

Might I make so bold as to ask whether the process is at all reversible?

Yours etc.

9 Carysfort Road, London N16.

*John Miller*

**Crawler**

From: Brian Creese

Dear Chris,

I was sad to read in the last issue of M that Steve Doubleday has been forced to fold Gallimaufry.

G has been a special zine for me since it is responsible for my (limited) involvement in the hobby. I had known Steve for a couple of years, and thought him to be a fairly normal bloke. I knew him in two ways - firstly because he used to run the library which my wife took over, and secondly because I played cricket with him. I remember vividly one day after a cricket match we were heading for a pub in Woking.

"You will subscribe to a magazine I'm going to produce, won't you?"

"What sort of magazine?"

"A Diplomacy zine."

"What's Diplomacy?"

"Come down to Guildford and I'll teach you. You can play in the first game in the zine."

And so I discovered Diplomacy - and D & D, and Railway Rivals, and Megalomania and The Lamb.

G certainly has a lot to answer for, but many thanks for it, Steve. Cheers

52a Deacon Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT2 6LU.

*Brian Creese*

**Boring**

From: Jonathan Palfrey

Dear Chris,

Thanks for Mania 20, which arrived by second post the day after you posted it - quite fast considering that the postmark was 8.15 pm.

I couldn't make out what the cover was supposed to be.

It was quite interesting to see your account of Eurocon, as our viewpoints on it were quite different, but your account was rather long, and much of it was a catalogue of meals (in the same issue you refer scornfully to Rob Chapman's "recipe page"), so people who didn't go might find it boring.

I found this year's Eurocon very enjoyable, but not over-full of the sort of incident which makes an amusing con report. I spent most of the time playing games, something I don't normally get the opportunity to do (ftf), and as I won some of them I was quite pleased.

It is perhaps worth considering that, if we could have found equivalent accomodation, I could have had just as good a time on a two-week holiday in England, and saved over £100 on travel expenses. Still, I suppose going to France makes more of an event of it, and we'd probably have trouble finding equivalent accomodation in England.

I thought the restaurants were rather boring this year, indeed sometimes downright disappointing. The house wine was better than last year's, but as I don't drink a lot anyway, I'd rather pay a bit more and get out of the 'vin de table' bracket. You can hardly count cheap wine an advantage when you're paying out travel expenses to get there.

One thing which surprised me this year was that people did not spend the whole time playing darts and boozing - well done, folks. Eurocon has never been entirely devoured by these boring activities, but there have been tendencies in that direction, fortunately less marked this year.

Another point about Eurocon is that Paul and Karen put in quite a bit of work on it, one way and another, and there is a tendency to take this for granted. I'm not sure whether Paul is reckoning to organize next year's Eurocon - if not, we may find ourselves without one.

29a Priory Road, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 1LL

Kun amika saluto  
Due to an industrial dispute  
this space must remain empty

\*\*I found the restaurant meals better than last year, as they should have been, given the area. The simple fact is that we would be very hard-pressed to find anywhere in this country with such a concentration of good restaurants, even if we were willing to pay a good deal more. As the food is one of the major parts of the holiday, this is a major consideration. Anyway, I think most people enjoy going to France for many other reasons - it just wouldn't be the same in England!

No-one forced you to play darts or booze, Jonathan, just as no-one forced me to play hundreds of games!

I hear that Richard is going to organize next year's event, though I don't know that for sure. I hope that no-one takes Paul's efforts for granted - I'm certainly very grateful to him (and Karen) for enabling me to have a most enjoyable holiday.

### Sensible Person

From: Steve Plater

Dear Chris,

I enjoyed the Eurocon report. I'll have to attend one year - maybe I'll be able to arrange home leave to suit, and fly in from Tokyo... via Mexico, Peru and the Carribean, according to my present plans.

You appeal for a subject of debate in the letter column. No, I'm not going to suggest n----- p-----, though I sometimes wish someone would take it off my hands. How about whales? Or the microprocessor revolution? Or Japanese imports? I dare say I could produce screeds of waffle on any of those subjects. You have been warned - better find something else.

On your review of TOE, well, I appreciate the "very good read" comment at the end - that's what the zine is supposed to be. I sympathise with your problems with the staples, though mine have only just started to fall out (the staples, Jervis...) after repeated thumbing of the zine. That must mean that you find TOE so interesting that you read it over and over again. Since the new, photocopied, TOE (advt) only requires stapling through 11 sheets of A3, it should never again be a problem. Famous last words.

I see you find the Top 10's spot interesting. Other people don't like it, but have said they appreciate the serial, nuclear power debate, quizzes, crosswords, etc. Shows you can't please all of the people... On the serial, I quite accept that I don't have the writing talent of a Glyn Palmer, but I thought I'd still try my hand. I think my writing is at any rate competent, and I reckon my plot is more complex than Glyn's!

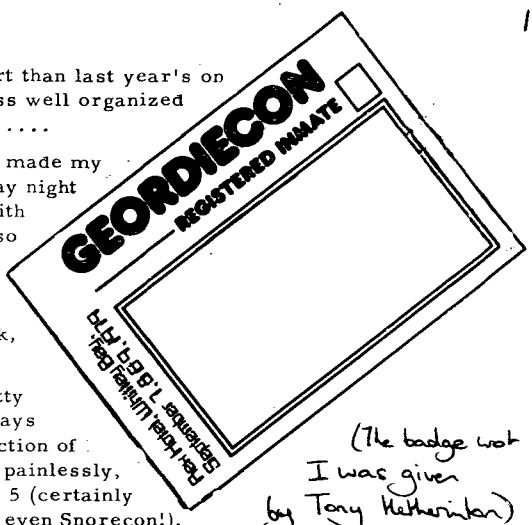
Cheers,

*Steve*

154 Teburo, Kamakura-shi, Kanagawa-ken, Japan.

This is going to be a shorter report than last year's on Polycon - it's also likely to be less well organized but at least you'll be able to read it.....

The journey up was uneventful: I made my way up to Gerard's Cross on Thursday night and spent the night chez Jewers. Keith told me that I was to be up by 8.30, so we could leave by 9. When I woke at about 8.15 and made my way down by the appointed hour, I found that he was still asleep! Despite this setback, we were off by 9.30.



The rest of the journey went pretty quickly, as most of it was on motorways and dual carriageways. Keith's selection of tapes also helped the journey to pass painlessly, and we arrived in Whitley Bay before 5 (certainly the earliest I've arrived at any con - even Snorecon!).

The Rex is a Victorian hotel which has quite clearly seen better days (I hope - it can't always have been like that, can it!). It always seemed empty to me (perhaps because it was!), and we never really came into contact with the other guests, being isolated in the "Games Room". The name is misleading, though, as the only facilities were a vast number of chairs and tables, a stage, and a very old darts board. Oh, and a bar. This was the celebrated open-as-long-as-there-are-people-to-drink-bar, except that it didn't. There was another bar, at the other end of the hotel, which did, though even there the bar staff sloped off at 3.30 am. The hotel was perfectly adequate for our purposes, and cheap to boot, so I'm not complaining. Well, OK I am: my room wasn't much bigger than a (large) broom cupboard, and the window could neither be opened or shut, and it looked uncannily like a prison/holiday camp, and there was no lock on the toilet door, and somebody told Thorby, and he came, and it rained, and I got beaten in the darts, and the Chinese restaurant was over-priced.....

Ah, the Chinese Restaurant. Thereby hangs a tale: on Friday evening, we decided to look for somewhere to eat ('we' being John Miller, Ken Bain, Brian Williams and other people whose name escapes me). Anyway, we tried the Chinky first, and sent someone (John?) in to ask for a table for 9. A perfectly reasonable request, you might think. But no, it was impossible - we could have three tables for 3, or two for 4, or any other combination, but definitely not a table for 9. So we refused to eat there, and just walked out. The waiter didn't seem the slightest bit concerned at the loss of £20's worth of business... So we went next door to the Indian, where they were quite happy to accommodate us. The food was OK, but unexceptional, and the only memorable incident was when Andy discovered that they had put banana in his curry (he had rather foolishly asked for the mildest curry, without bothering to check what it actually was!), and he then went on a bit about Indians, curries, bananas and probably Whitley Bay as well.

I'm getting a trifle sidetracked if this report is to be chronological, but I shall press on regardless. Friday evening: when I arrived there weren't many people - Paul Willey was one person I hadn't expected to see, but I'm not going to print a list of names of people I saw. Shortly afterwards, the calm was shattered by the arrival of the Spirit bunch, Rob Chapman, Don Brown and a few others on the train from the Midlands and South-West. As the evening regressed, a lot of other people turned up, obviously having travelled for most of the day - as a result, Friday was rather quieter than many other cons. We made our way to the nearest (guess?) pub, but didn't really feel welcome, so didn't stay long, and made our way to the celebrated