

7/6d.

Issue 22

# MEGALOMANIA



**A  
POSTAL DIPLOMACY  
FANZINE**

# INTRO

Another issue of Megalomania, another few weeks gone by. The response to my complaints last issue was fairly predictable, with many of the people who regularly write defending those who don't. No-one has complained about the price rise, and most people seemed fairly sympathetic in fact. I still reckon that the zine is worth 40p (or 37½p, which is the price to subscribers), and I hope that most people will agree. In fact, the price-per-page is the same as for issue 1 (16 pp/25p), and costs have risen dramatically since then. People don't seem to have liked Boring, and I regard it as a rather inelegant way of going about things anyway, so I'll shelve it for the time being. If I do produce another supplement for the games, it'll be reduced photocopy, stapled in the centre of the zine so that you won't be able to tell it from the main zine. I eventually discovered the Rank Xerox place here in Croydon, and tried to get a quote. I regretted this when the woman behind the desk starting doing the most amazing sums, apparently proving that it would cost £100 or so. When I persuaded her that it was 5 runs of 150 not 150 runs of 5 the price came down a bit, but there isn't much between it and litho so I'll only use it to save time (and the journey to and from Islington twice).

I must apologize to some people who have been receiving the zine somewhat erratically - this mainly applies to non-players, though with last issue I seem not to have sent it to all the players. It's really rather silly, since collating and mailing aren't that difficult or time-consuming, and no doubt I will be lambasted in Pigmy and elsewhere for this lapse. If perchance anyone has missed an issue for this reason, phone or write and I'll send you a replacement. I seem to remember this happening last year as well, and Agar attacked me then. He's quite right, of course, but my problems arise when the process is interrupted (as it was by Geordiecon) and I leave some to do later. Then I don't do it because I feel no urgency, and it gets later and later till I get involved in the next issue. Issue 21's problems were caused by Games Day - I couldn't remember to whom I had given copies! I should have taken a lot more copies, both for Sealy's stand and the various subscribers I encountered there.

The simple fact is that I'm an administrative incompetent, and I must just ask you to bear with me.

Talking of Agar (we were?) brings me to the Postal Gaming Newsletter "25 Years On No. 2" (or 3, as we numerates would call it) from peter calcraft. This seems to be an attempt to breathe life into the corpse of the NGC, an organization you may remember from your childhood - it's General Secretary is taking an extended holiday from the hobby and liabilities greatly assets financially speaking. Steve has taken the proverbial hatchet to these plans, and has done a fairly good job with it - not that it

# MR. DIPLOMATS



was particularly difficult, since Pete's proposals are the usual mixture of good intentions, superfluous bureaucracy, megalomania, sheer stupidity and a few good ideas. It would, however, be a pity if the good ideas were to get lost in amongst the sillier suggestions. Whatever people may say, the hobby should have a body of some kind to do the things that individuals cannot. I am convinced that people treat an official body with a great deal more respect than an anonymous person, and this can be important when organizing cons, getting publicity and so forth. It might also make it possible to have a more rational and effective scheme for dealing with zines that fold a la Ethil.

But any such organization does not need to recruit members or issue newsletters or any of the other things that people keep trying to organize. If money is needed, there are several ways of getting it - and I'm sure it would be easier to get money for a properly-organized body. An annual membership fee isn't worth the trouble of collecting it, and it certainly can't be introduced unless something is being offered in return. Anyway, if you want to see Peter's proposals in detail, an SSAE to Robin Hood, 103 Oxford Gardens, London W10 6NF will get you a copy of the newsletter. Agar lives at 3, North Road, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham DH3 4AQ.



The recent announcement by the Post Office that letter charges are going up again in February came as a considerable surprise to me, as I thought they'd fixed a rate that would last at least a year. As an essentially postal hobby we suffer more than most from any increases, and it's bound to adversely affect the hobby generally, and Diplomacy games in particular. But then we've all had enormous tax cuts ain't we.

Which I suppose leads me into a political bit, but there's really no point. I disagree totally with the policies and approach of the present government, but all I can do is sit back and wait for them to get over their initial enthusiasm or destroy the economy. Can't wait.

However, there is one ray of hope - that the backbench Tory revolt might force the government to abandon their cuts in the BBC external services. Not much, I know, but better than nowt

I assume most people have now heard of Papermate's Replay pen - certainly almost everyone who comes into Menzies seems to want one - but due to a cock-up of epic proportions they're virtually impossible to get in Croydon. We've had 70 in so far, and as fast as they come in we sell them. Somebody, somewhere, vastly underestimated the potential demand, and I'm getting a bit tired of telling people that we ain't got any. Just thought you might like to know.

I'm a bit amazed at the rapid success of the hobby meet at the Lamb - when Steve Doubleday and myself arranged it in the first place I was worried that only three or four people would turn up and the thing would fizzle. Now I get quite irritated when there's a five-Wednesday month!

Four weeks ago at the aforementioned gathering, I was foolish enough to mention that I was feeling hungry, and made things worse by going off for some food with Charles Vasey. We had actually got inside the French place next door when he managed to persuade us that we didn't want to eat there. There followed a route march to Tottenham Court Road and the quest for the holy hamburger in McDonalds (a place with which I am not greatly enamoured). However, we didn't go in there because it was too full, but instead followed Vasey, who had promised us something unusual. Walking still further (it was now raining!) we eventually came to a back door in a side-street, and wandered down some steps to find a long queue, loud music and lots of people. Over the bar was a TV screen, but it was showing Baseball.....

Yes, it was the Chicago Pizza Pie Factory - or something of a similar name. It is decorated with signs stolen from the streets of that city, has tapes of a non-stop disco station flown in from there, and generally pretends to be American. After what seemed like an age spent admiring the decor, with Vasey trying to explain baseball to us, they announced 'Charles for 4', and we were shown to a table almost directly beneath the speakers. The food was quite OK, though unexceptional, the music was too loud, and quite awful, and the whole concept pretty baffling. Very fashionable no doubt, and hugely profitable, but a bit weird. One humorous touch - the 'Elton John' and 'Olivia Newton-John'. Geddit?

Having decided that a taxi would be quicker and cheaper, we stood in Oxford St waiting for one to condescend to stop and take our money. We made it back to the Lamb by about 10.20, having missed most of the goings-on (assuming that there were some). Still, it was different.

Three weeks later, I found only two people there, and one of them left shortly afterwards after giving me a copy of DAS. Ken and I went across the road to the 'New Calcutta', which seems to have improved recently (either that or I'm getting used to it), as the curry was very enjoyable and didn't even make me slightly ill. If anyone else wants to come along before the Lamb, we usually go across around 6.30 to 7. Ken was full of tales about Dribbleday's party and the behaviour of a certain well-known hobby dwarf at the aforesaid party. If this story is to be made public, it'll presumably be in NMR, Ken and Brian's new zine (write to Brian Creese at 52a Deacon Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT2 6LK for a free first issue - he might even give you his account of these strange happenings). Which reminds me of an amusing incident in the Lamb - the barmaid came round to collect empty glasses and asked Ken about his badge bearing the legend 'NMR'. This produced a stream of gibberish that was quite embarrassing to the rest of us - after a few guesses (chess and housing (!!)) Ken told her that it was to do with postal Diplomacy, which didn't produce the usual blank look: Again, I expect a fuller account will appear in NMR.

Unfortunately, only seven or eight people turned up the whole evening, so it was fairly quiet - but still enjoyable. My fears expressed on the previous page (written a few days ago) may yet be realised, which would be a great pity. It has been suggested that it should be monthly, but I doubt this would make any difference - the people who turned up last week are the regulars, and it was the people who come every now and then that were missing - presumably because of other commitments or the weather. Having it more frequently gives them a better chance of getting there. Anyway, I enjoy it even when only a few people turn up. Quick reminder, though, that we meet at the 'Lamb' in Lamb's Conduit Street on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, theoretically from 7.30, though actually from 6.30 or even earlier.

In spite of having 24 pages this time, I'm running short of space yet again. It's Saturday evening and I have 13 pages typed up. Allowing for the games, and stuff planned but not actually typed, I will have no trouble filling the zine. Lack of time may force me to extend production to Tuesday, but I hope to have the zine posted by the end of the week. If only I could type faster, this would be a doddle, it really would. Have to work on it.

This afternoon was spent watching Palace beat Arsenal. Now will someone take them seriously? The match presented an interesting contrast with last week's against Manchester City. That was a marvellous game of football, played by two sides with the right approach to the game who weren't frightened to take risks. The football writers went a bit over the top in praise of the game, but there's no doubt that if more teams played that way football would be much more entertaining. Good luck to Malcolm Allison - he deserves to succeed, and if things continue as they are at the present he certainly will. Arsenal unfortunately seem to believe in a rather more dour way of doing things, and it certainly seems to bring results, so who can blame them? Palace responded by playing in a similar sort of way, and the match was therefore a typical 'competitive', exciting derby game - non-stop action, but with a

lot of emphasis on midfield battles. As a result, Arsenal's "ball-winning" centre-half, Willie Young (6ft 3 ins and built like a tank) played an important part. Sigh... I'm still unimpressed by Arsenal, though I can see why they have been so successful recently. Give me Manchester City any day.

Paul Openshaw is selling his duplicator plus £15's worth of stencils, ink and paper for £20. He wouldn't actually recommend it to anyone, since it doesn't really work very well - basically it wastes a lot of paper and ink, but produces good copies (if you've got the patience!). Sounds like me trying to sell a Smith-Corona in Menzies - unconvincing. Still, there might be someone with money to throw away - if so, write to Paul at Badock Hall, Stoke Pk Rd, Bristol BS9 1JQ.

More rubbish at the back I expect, and my account of Games Day/the so-called Sharp wedding reception, a long lettercol, an editorial and a zine review or two are all to come, so I'll put a thing that is only of limited interest here to give you summat to complain about. Take it away, Jonathan...

Eurocon: Victor Ludorum Tournament

Jonathan Palfrey

Name	Da	Br	Cr	TT	Ch	FD	Bo	Sc	SC	La	Sp	Fr	Du	Og	Po	RR	Sk	So	Tot	1st 5	
Steve	21	0	13	12	7	9	0	7		2	6		6	8	4	4		6	105(1)	53 (2)	
Mark	1	12	5	5	5	7	8		4	5	9	9	3	1	7	5	6		92(2)	28 (8=)	
Greg	19	5	3	9	9	5	9	6	3					2	5		2		75(3)	45 (4)	
Malcolm	8	6	14	2	11	11	6	1		7	4								72(4)	41 (5)	
Richard S	17	16	11	5	13			8											70(5)	62 (1)	
Derek	18	8		14	9		2	2			2	3	8				0		64(6)	49 (3)	
Jonathan		11	5	7	6	11	4		3	5					2		4		56(7)	23 (10=)	
Richard W	7		10	5			1	4	5	5	3	5	4	5		1	1		56(7)	22 (12)	
Dave T	15	10		3			1	0		7	7	5	3		0		0		55(9)	28 (8=)	
Andy D	0		8	1	5	8	5	5	7			0	0	0	3			1	45(10)	14 (19=)	
Dave A	11	12		0			7	1	9	0	6	1			0	3			43(11)	23 (10=)	
Tig	10	4	4	11	2	1		10											42(12)	31 (6)	
Simpers	16	1			1	4	4	0	3	0		2		4			3	3	41(13)	18 (15=)	
Tony	13				4	0	3		6					6		7			39(14)	17 (17=)	
Pete Birks	4	3	0	10	2	2		9							1				31(15)	19 (13)	
Glyn	8	6	16												2				30(16)	30 (7)	
Chris	11	1	1	4				3	2	0									24(17)	17 (17=)	
Mick	13		6									4							23(18)	19 (13)	
Bronwen	4	14	(fix!)	0															18(19)	18 (15=)	
Claire	5		9																14(20)	14 (19=)	
Jenny	1		12									1							14(20)	13 (21)	
Ian											1		2					4	2	9(22)	0 (23=)
Karen	5		2																7(23)	7 (22)	
Rosi						2													2(24)	0 (23=)	
Andy H		8																			

Scoring: 1 pt per person you beat, plus 1 extra point for the winner

Key: Da=darts, Br=bridge, Cr=cribbage, TT=Table Tennis, Ch=chess, FD=Fictionar  
FD=Fictionary Dictionary, Bo=Boat race, Sc=Scrabble, La=Laska, Sp=Spellmaker,  
Fr=Frisbee, Du=Dungeon, Og=Ogallala, Po=Poker, RR=Railway Rivals  
Sk=Skirrid, So=Sopwith, Tot=total points, 1st 5=points from five most popular  
tournaments, figures in parenthesis are positions. Thanks, Jonathan.

See, we did play games at Eurocon! Interesting to note the effect of only taking the five most popular events: Richard wins, Glyn moves up, whilst Mark and Andy slip down. Davidson ought to win a prize for coming last in so many events, don't you think - especially Ogallala, a game he brought along! Note that Andy Holborn was unable to enter most of the tournaments as he didn't arrive till the second week



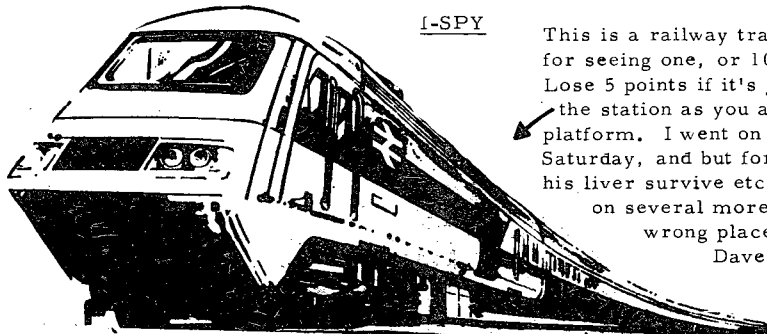
# GAMES DAY V

(Being an account of 24 hours or so in the life of the editor, in South Norwood, Victoria (and various adjoining areas), Kew, Farnham Common and Upper Brixton and all stations to Auckland Road. A buffet car will be provided, and the bar will be open throughout the journey. Jokes and sarcastic asides are provided for the amusement of passengers. Please fasten your safety belts and extinguish all cigarettes (yes, Greg, all of them). And now we'll begin....)

It is presumably a law of nature that things happen in twos and threes, so that in order to be in one place doing one thing prevents you doing something else. The problems arise when you have to give up something you'd like to do because it clashes with something more interesting. I try to go to every Palace home game, and only Diplomacy cons have caused me to miss games in the last three seasons. As last year, Gamesday clashed, so I decided to go along in the morning and only watch Palace if it proved to be boring. Then I was invited to Richard Sharp's wedding, so ruling out the Palace match and forcing me to leave Gamesday at lunchtime. (It was also the weekend of the National Poker Championships, not that I was ever going there!)

In an unprecedented display of enthusiasm I got up before 10 am, so as to get to Gamesday in reasonable time. Unfortunately I went the wrong way out of Victoria station, and walked for 10 minutes before remembering that I had a map of London in my diary.... Arriving at the Royal Horticultural Hall about forty minutes after the appointed opening hour, I noticed a long queue to get in. Rather than joining it, I wandered in to the entrance to investigate, and found Charles Vasey going through another turnstile without having to queue at all! I followed, and as I walked up the steps the first thing I saw was the 'Postal Games' stand, bedecked with Pete Sealy, Keith Thomasson, Robin Hood and Ian Lee. I deposited my spare copies of Megalomania and wandered off in the hope of finding one or two people I knew. I then came across a vast number of people, many of whom had travelled vast distances - unfortunately I was in a hurry, so couldn't really stop and chat as long as I would have liked. Willy Haughan, Richard Gooch, Tony Hetherington and one or two more of the Newcastle mob were manning the 'Gamesworld' stand, David Watts was on the 'Railway Rivals' stand, and everyone else was just wandering around. Don Brown was one person I hadn't expected, whilst many of the Lamb regulars (Bain, Creese, Shears, Thompson(P), Hill, Thorby, Allen, Doubleday and so on) were there demanding copies of Megalomania that I didn't have. I also came across Mark Gleeson and Derek Wilson from Eurocon, and even Davidson I'm afraid. John Lee, Jeremy Hoare (Voice) and Dave Parry (Necromancer) carried out their threats to attend, giving me the opportunity to meet the faces behind the zines. Geordiecon veterans Tim Davison, Howard Sayles, Brian Dolton, Bob Howes and Pete Calcraft were also around /....

### I-SPY



This is a railway train. Score 5 points for seeing one, or 10 if it's moving. Lose 5 points if it's just pulling out of the station as you arrive on the platform. I went on one train on Saturday, and but for Birks (long may his liver survive etc.) would have gone on several more, probably to the wrong places.

Dave Allen is 94.

as were many more I have offended by not naming. Returning to Squealy's stand after wandering round I encountered Malcolm Brown and Pete Birks. This was fortunate, as Pete was on his way to the wedding, so saving me a tricky journey by public transport. He disappeared again fairly quickly, and only when I learnt that there actually was a bar was I able to find him. By this time he had persuaded Willy Haughan to come along - he seemed rather taken with the idea of surprising Ron Fisher by turning up. Incidentally, Ron's account (in The Tinamou) gives the impression that it was a chance meeting in a London pub, and dramatises it further by suggesting that Willy was on his way to watch Newcastle lose to Watford - though that was his original plan, he was in London for Gamesday primarily! Even more people were in the bar (Brian Williams, Don Turnbull, Dave Tant and Mike Allaway come to mind - can't think why, though!).

Scene 3 - In Kew. . . The six of us (Willy and myself in Briks' car, Dave Allen and Steve Doubleday in Pete Cousins' car) agreed to rendezvous at a Young's pub in Kew. By the time we got there, they were well-established (they had probably arrived two minutes previously, and just giving the impression of having been there half-an-hour, but it still annoyed Pete to have been beaten). Surprisingly good food made it a worthwhile stopover point, and the beer was certainly better than at Gamesday (which Dave had paid 75p not to drink (?? Well, that's what he said!)). We (though not me personally) even beat the locals at darts, and so we were ready for the long trip to Farnham Common. This time we arrived well ahead of Cousins, apparently because Dribbleday had directed him by a peculiar non-motorway route.

Scene 3 - Farnham Common. The Emperor of India to be more precise, which was taken over for the afternoon by the wedding. It was, therefore, open from lunchtime till after 11 pm. The infamous hardcore had been invited, and despite short notice most managed to attend. I won't list them all, but if you think of a member of the hardcore the chances are that they were there! Unsurprisingly, most people seemed to have chosen alcohol of some form as a wedding present, though Craig Nye excelled himself by giving them an 8 ft spear. Dominic Sharp endeared himself to all present by depositing peanuts in people's drinks, something that ceased to be funny after about half-an-hour.

The happy couple rolled up in a Rolls (sorry bout that), and after their grand entrance, Richard came over to tell us of a slight problem

## **"The \*!\$\*β registrar wouldn't marry us"**

which didn't seem particularly funny at the time, but later even Richard and Bronwen saw the funny side! He was particularly annoyed because he had actually made efforts to organize it in advance - quite unSharp-like. After phoning lots of people up he discovered that 'this man (the registrar) can marry you, if he wants to', so there was nowt they could do.

Mick and Jenny Bullock plus Paul and Karen Simpkins arrived shortly afterwards, though the former stayed in his car till about 4.45 to hear the football scores. Liverpool drew 2-2 with Everton, Palace drew 1-1 with Bristol City after missing a penalty, and Newcastle lost 2-0 to Watford, much to Pete Cousins' delight. We then played knockout brag, a game of absolutely no skill, till the landlord moved us back to the other bar. This didn't disrupt the bridge game, as Glyn, Tig and Adrien demonstrated typical Weaver's Arms stoicism by playing continuously for about eight hours, with Dave Allen and Andy Wright for most of the time. At one point Adrien rather foolishly asked me to play a hand for him, and to the amazement of everyone (myself included) I got it right.

Other people just stood around drinking and talking, though the main event of the

evening (a darts match between the wedding and pub) disrupted this slightly. Richard rather unwisely extended the match from an 8-player to 12-player event, with the result that we lost - our lower order players threw away the lead that had been built up. I was guilty in this respect, though I wish to plead mitigating circumstances (I'm sure I can think some up if you give me time).

The pub gained more gold stars for providing curries and coffee, both of which were enjoyed by most of those present. Sharp then started to give out keys to the various houses he seems to own for the people staying the night - 'if you find any food, you're welcome to eat it; I think there's some reasonable stuff in the fridge' - however, it seems that he gave them the wrong key, resulting in a deal of confusion and a lot of waiting around in the freezing cold. The rest of us made our way home, Pete Cousins having been forced to leave earlier because Doubleday wanted to get home, solely in order to get a good night's sleep, taking Willy with them. Palmer (driving his sister's car) and Baird (driving Palmer's car) with passengers also set off, apparently taking most of the wedding presents with him.

Birks kept trying to offer a lift to Greg, completely forgetting that he now lives in Nottingham, and John Balson put in a late appearance. There then followed a rather hair-raising drive back to London in the Birksmobile, though I don't remember feeling particularly worried as he weaved in and out of the traffic, overtaking on the inside at 70 - it certainly worried most of the other drivers on the M4!

Dave made his way home from Tottenham Court Rd, whilst I was forced to sleep with Pete Birks' duplicator due to the non-ongoing situation pertaining to public transport at 12.30 on a Saturday night.

On Sunday morning I walked into Brixton to catch a bus home and complete a pretty weird 24 hours. Thanks are due to the people who made Gamesday enjoyable in spite of its over-emphasis on selling things, to Pete for the lift, to everyone at the Emperor for an enjoyable afternoon/evening, and (of course) to Richard and Bronwen for trying to get married. A good time was had by all.

## LETTERS



This person has just started his own zine

Dear Chris,

Megalo 21 turned up this morning, and you say 'please write to me', so I will. (I've just noticed that November 11th is a Sunday, not a Saturday, you fool!)

I must admit Megalo 21 left me feeling profoundly dissatisfied. You fill a lot of pages with rather dissatisfied ramblings, and then, instead of squeezing the games into as few pages as possible, you squeeze them out almost altogether!

A thought has just occurred to me. In the early days of the hobby there wasn't much "editorial matter", and certainly no letter columns. What players were encouraged to do was write press, which made up much of the reading matter. (1) Megalomania, it seems to me, doesn't encourage press - certainly I never felt encouraged to write any for Game 8. Probably because I get the impression that you would begrudge the space it would take up.

What else is there, really, that people would be likely to write about? Diplomacy, as a subject for letters/articles is largely worked out (John Lee's articles in Voice largely rehash what has been said before); someone always objects to politics or football; your brother has effectively syphoned discussion of religion off into Crosstalk (2); and there is a limit to the amount of personal information people will give away to perfect strangers. Consequently the possibilities for people writing to you are limited.

It seems to me that you are trying to run a games magazine, in a games-playing hobby, and yet pay scant attention to the games! (The fact that there are four or five

apologies for GMing errors in most issues would seem to confirm this). Frankly, I derived considerably more enjoyment from reading the latest Griffin than Megalo; in Griffin the editor, the GMs and players give the impression that they having fun. And that's what the hobby is about, isn't it? ((3))

Another thing. Am I becoming paranoid (probably), or is the hobby undergoing another split? Between those who can get to the Lamb, and those who cannot? I feel distinctly left out here in the Provinces - I get the feeling that all the news, instead of being written or telephoned to editors, goes there, and that not to be present is, in effect, to be outside the new "hard-core". Just my imagination, I expect. ((4))

I didn't like "adventurousness". I did like Howard Sayles' cartoons, though: that man is going to be a real asset to the hobby.

Palace didn't smash City, so there. Palace are fading fast, now, I reckon. I expect to pick up my £2 at the end of the season! ((5))

This is the third critical letter I've written to another editor this weekend. ((??)) I think I'm just getting fed up with the general mood of dissatisfaction in the Diplomacy section of the hobby. Why can't everyone cheer up?

John Marsden, 6 Mauldreth Road West, Manchester M20 9WB

\*\*Well, John - could it be your desire to get your name well-known that makes you write to so many zine editors? I don't really think that the Diplomacy section of the hobby is as dissatisfied as you suggest, but it is inevitable that when personalized ramblings make up a large part of a zine the mood of the editor will come through. Believe me, if editors were really bored with the hobby or their zines they would either fold or cut down dramatically on the size of the zine.

1. Press - I always encourage good press, and although I have sometimes left bits out either because of forgetfulness or lack of space, I usually try to print whatever is sent. In extending the zine by 4 pages I propose to devote more space to the games, and am therefore in need of press - so if anyone has gained the impression that I beguile the space, now's your chance to see that I don't. OK, John?

2. Politics, sport and religion will always have a place in Diplomacy zines in so far as they affect the lives of editors/readers. I see no good reason for saying that any of these subjects shouldn't be discussed in a Diplomacy zine, as long as it makes an interesting discussion. I agree that people may have difficulty finding something to write about, but I'd be quite satisfied with a few sentences commenting on something I said - I don't expect full-length letters from 125 people!

3. The hobby's about enjoyment, of course, but that doesn't necessarily mean ignoring things that are wrong. If you get more enjoyment out of Griffin, fine, but I don't, and I know that a lot of people share that view - that's why there are so many zines around.

4. Will Haven complained about everything in the hobby happening in London as well, but then so what? I don't see why you feel the need to dramatise the situation by calling it a split, though. Anyway, everything happens in London: why should the Diplomacy hobby be any different.

5. Bah! Palace are 4th, Bristol City are 11th. Get out your cheque book, Marsden!

Him Again

Dear Chris,

Re your complaints about lack of response to M, the question is what you expect Eric Boring to do. If you don't normally get anything out of him, you can reckon that he probably doesn't have anything very amusing or interesting to say; so do you want a whole stack of boring letters from people trying desperately to find something to say, or would you rather Eric Boring stopped subscribing altogether? ((1))



If you'd rather dispense with silent subscribers, the answer would seem to be to raise the price of the zine, giving credit or free issues for substantial responses. Why resort to exhortation when you can arrange incentives so as to encourage the kind of subscriber you prefer? ((Actually, Jonathan, I already do that!))

Personally, I think that the silent subscriber has a place in the readership. He supports the zine financially, he probably plays in it, (if he thought he had an obligation to fill its pages as well he might not subscribe at all (which you would perhaps welcome?). ((No. See my reply to John above.))

I subscribe to and play in The Tinamou, and I'm very pleased with it as a zine to play in, but I rarely write anything much to Bob, because there's rarely anything in TT which impels me to reply. In the case of M, it's quite possible that people enjoy reading it without actually finding anything to say in reply. I know that the length of my reply to a zine isn't necessarily proportional to the enjoyment I get out of reading the zine.

I don't think you can expect voluminous correspondence from all your subscribers. People just aren't like that. If you want to ensure replies from all subscribers, I think the only way to do it is actively drive away the people who don't reply - which would of course lower your circulation and increase the loss you make on the zine. Better to resign yourself to the fact that some people are only going to contribute financially to the zine.

Your idea of splitting the zine in two a la Tinamou has the advantages you mention. Personally, I'd obviously prefer the best of both worlds - a regular and interesting zine; but I suppose it may be best to resort to a less frequent supplement if you can't keep it up otherwise. If I read a zine, it doesn't really matter how frequent it is; though if I'm conducting any kind of discussion in the letter column I like it to be reasonably frequent - when months or years go by, as in the SF world, I get the feeling I'm corresponding with Alpha Centauri or something; by the time my letter appears, I've forgotten that I ever wrote it, and the argument seems ancient history.

I was interested to see you starting a con report on page 5 without revealing where, when or indeed what the con was. A puzzle for the readers, no doubt. ((2))

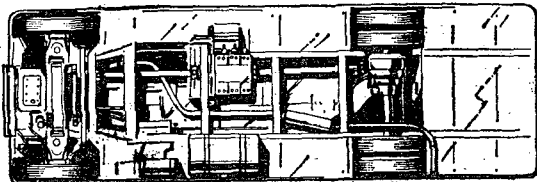
The legendary 'hardcore' are raising their heads again, I see, or at least being taken to task by James O'Fee for not raising their heads. The term is really quite archaic by now; if it has any significance, it is almost entirely historical. Last I heard, Pete Birks was counting me as a member of the hardcore, although I hardly ever go to cons. I wonder whether someone could invent a less misleading term, or whether we could agree that the group's existence is illusory and dispense with labels. In so far as there is a group, the only qualification for admission seems to be that your company is tolerated by the existing members. Perhaps one could speak of the 'Magic Circle' (but then people might think it was something to do with D & D), 'the Fellowship of the Dagger' or 'the Order of the Sacred Mushroom' or something. ((3))

Jonathan Palfrey, 29a Priory Road, Kenilworth, Warwks, CV8 1LL

\*\*No, I don't expect everyone to contribute, but that won't stop me trying!

2. The puzzle was childishly easy to solve - just read page 6 before page 5 and it falls into place.

3. But how could anyone take a group with names like that seriously? No-one would treat us with the considerable respect that we deserve.



ISPY: This is a London bus. Score 5 points and take a bath if you see one like this, because you're standing in a sewer. If Mike Jervis floats past, kick him for me, and take a bonus 20 points. If you're not in a sewer, get out of the way, because it's just about to fall on you (score 94 pts).