

Megalomania 60

July 1994

A fanzine associated with the games hobby, published at the start of each month by its editor, Chris Tringham, 10 Jubilee Court, London Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 6JL (Phone 081-683 2815, CompuServe 100343,362) Waiting lists are open for Regular Diplomacy and nothing else.

Editorial

Well, this is the special 'Beat the Curse of Agar' issue. Two months ago, when I tried to produce an interim issue between the normal alternate month issues, I wrote an article making fun of Stephen Agar and as a consequence was struck by the 'Curse of Agar'. The article, and indeed the whole issue, perished in the computer disaster.

On the subject of problems with computers, I apologise for the bizarre effect on page 4 last issue. What seems to have happened is that the printer had a mad moment and decided that it couldn't print it all on one sheet and so split it over two. Unfortunately I had left it printing when this happened, and by the time I came back to check how it was going, it had finished the whole thing. As it was still possible to make sense of it, I decided against re-printing it.

So, here we go again, with what may be a smaller issue than normal (not that my 'normal' issues are exactly large). I have decided for the time being to produce an issue of some sort each month, and see how it goes. This time last month I thought I was going to be working in Hong Kong for three months starting at the beginning of August, which would obviously have rather disrupted production of the zine.

That now isn't going to happen, something I view with rather mixed emotions, but it certainly simplifies matters as far as both *Megalomania* and *Midcon* are concerned. I am currently back working in Finchley, though only for a month or so, and after that it's anyone's guess.

I have decided to open another Diplomacy waiting list, and will probably launch a modest publicity drive to get some subscribers, possibly distributing some freebies at Manorcon. Which reminds me that I haven't yet booked. I think I've decided to go up on Friday afternoon and come back on Monday morning, but I'm sure my plans will change before then. I hope to see you there.

A short holiday

In the middle of June I spent a week in Norfolk on holiday with the extended Tringham family. My sister and my two brothers each have two or more children, so this was rather different to my normal French holidays (or indeed my normal life). In spite of this, I enjoyed it, and even managed to get a few decent meals out, though all at lunchtime. There seem to be some good pubs in the area, though the Egon Ronay guide had de-listed the best of them for reasons that weren't immediately apparent. The best place was *Riverside* in Kings Lynn, a restaurant that also serves simpler fare outside on a terrace overlooking the river.

One of the local specialities is crab, something that I greatly enjoy. My favourite dish was 'Crab Thermidor', served hot, in the pub that Mr Ronay had removed from his guide, and another did a crab salad with no less than two dressed crabs.

The World Cup

I remember having an argument with Brian Walker a few years ago on the subject of the World Cup being in the United States. I maintained that it would be a big success, whereas he thought it would be a disaster. I report this only because I believe that events have proved me right. The stadiums are full, they haven't meddled with the rules, and the football has been of a good standard.

The TV coverage, on the other hand, has been somewhat indifferent. The thing that amazes me most of all is that the picture quality is so poor. In the age of satellites and high quality landlines, surely they can do better than this? The pictures from the Superbowl, for example, are crystal clear. I do not understand this.

The BBC is the obvious winner, ITV having selected second-rate linkmen and commentators (Matthew Lorenzo, Tony Francis, John Helm et al) and one of the dullest 'experts' in Don Howe (as

a Crystal Palace player, Ray Wilkins is obviously exempt from criticism). The BBC have Alan Hansen and Terry Venables, but unfortunately they also have the increasingly eccentric Jimmy Hill.

However, the BBC 'team' of John Motson and John Fashanu were quite appalling for the Argentina vs Norway game. I only watched the second half, in which my favourite exchange was when Fashanu talked about how Maradona had 'nutmegged' a player, and helpfully explained that this meant putting the ball between a player's legs and running past him. Motson then offered exactly the same explanation! Danny Baker spent much of his show the following day repeating some of their more bizarre exchanges, mainly from the first half.

One problem that both BBC and ITV coverage suffers from is that although England aren't there, the English angle is never far away, most obviously with the Republic of Ireland, but also with Premiership players in other squads (Efan Ekoku, Erik Thorsvedt etc.) and Philip Don, the English referee.

An honourable mention for Eurosport, whose commentators include Archie Macpherson and Angus Loughran (Statto from the BBC Fantasy Football League). Both combine a love of football, a good knowledge of the game (without being boring) and a willingness to venture an opinion. The only drawback is that they're in a studio in Paris and not at the games in the U.S.

Advertising japes

I was slightly startled by the TV advert a few weeks ago, telling us that we should not purchase 'Still Tango' because it was not authorized by the owners of the 'Tango' trademark. I thought this rather unlikely, given the rather expensive TV advertising campaign that they had used to launch the product. Of course, it was just a publicity gimmick, but a couple of weeks they actually had to recall the product because of a production fault! Ha Ha.

Stephen Agar is a liar

I think it may be time to institute this new feature. Mr Agar has been trying to persuade me to part with my zine collection so that he can build up the 'Midcon collection' and offered to buy me a curry in return. He came round about three weeks ago, and we spent an enjoyable evening sorting through them and recalling long-forgotten people and zines. But then he disappeared without buying any sort of curry.

Chris Morris

Having recommended the new Chris Morris show on Radio One, I then managed to miss the first two. The first featured a call to John Gummer - they asked him to come up with some general attacks on the Labour Party for the Labour Party to use as a standby during the strikes. He duly obliged.

The third show featured a number of phone calls about a tortoise, which they claimed to have removed from its shell. The problem was that all the people they called were concerned and helpful, so it didn't really work very well.

Another rather dull idea is the feature where small children are asked questions while they have a sock in their mouth. Very amusingly, words such as 'suck' come out sounding slightly different.

Rather funnier was the interview that Morris's alter ego Wayne Carr (geddit?) conducted with the members of Two Unlimited. The joke was to treat them as serious musicians rather than frontmen for writer/producers who work behind the scene.

I also enjoyed his attempt to annoy the staff in clothes shops by asking them for imaginary items of apparel.

A very mixed bag, but I will continue listening to the rest of the series.

Off the Rails

Well, these rail strikes are starting to get to me. I was on holiday for the first one, but apparently the traffic was lighter than normal. I didn't have too many problems for the second one, but the third one was a real nightmare - it took twice as long as normal to get to work and get home again. If this is what privatisation is all about, I think we're all in trouble.

American Excess

I have just received a special offer from American Express. A new more affordable version of their card, it says. You settle your account in full by direct debit 3 days after the statement date (at first I thought this was a misprint, but it clearly isn't), and the credit limit is only £500. So, you get up to 30 days interest-free credit (less than most credit cards). So, it's cheap, right? Er, no, it's £20 a year. Somehow I think that this is one offer I can easily resist.

Not More CD's

The Brodsky Quartet: Lament
Elvis Costello & The Attractions: Trust
Come on Feel The Lemonheads

A rather diverse collection. The connection between the first two is obvious, and indeed Costello is on of the tracks on the Brodskys album. Musically this is similar to 'The Juliet Letters', but that may just be because that's what string quartets sound like.

The Lemonheads are as good as ever on this album, with perhaps more thoughtful lyrics than previously.

As for 'Trust', I bought because I don't have it on CD and it's now got extra tracks. It was recorded in 1980, and produced by Nick Lowe and Roger Bechirian (the latter being the producer of the excellent Undertones, and co-producer with Costello of the Squeeze album 'East Side Story'). My favourites are 'Watch Your Step', 'From a Whisper to a Scream' and 'Shot With His Own Gun', but it's some way from being his best album.

Real Cheese

I keep meaning to write about this (or perhaps I already have, and I've forgotten about it!). There is the world of difference between the bland stuff that you can buy in nice plastic wrapping at supermarkets and real, traditional cheese. I make occasional visits to Neal's Yard Dairy (now in Shorts Gardens, WC2) to stock up on real cheese, though I have to admit that I'm not very adventurous - the Keen's Cheddar, Colston Bassett Stilton and Mrs Kirkham's Lancashire are my staples. It all tastes so much better than the nonsense that supermarkets sell under the same names, and I think it's worth paying extra for it (and it is quite a lot more expensive). Go on, try some.

Computer Waffle

I am continuing to explore CompuServe, but rather gingerly. I now have a copy of the CompuServe Navigator, which allows you to set up a 'script' which it then executes. For example, you can download a list of the items that are in a particular forum on CompuServe, and then go back and download the actual items that you want. All I've used it for so far is to send and receive mail, and it wasn't entirely successful - it retrieved the three messages, but the 'In Basket' denies all knowledge of them. The files are there, and I can look at them, so all is not lost, but it's clearly not right

I was reading in *PC Plus* about Chicago, the next version of Windows. Apparently the 'double-click' to 'launch applications is being replaced (I agree) but so is 'drag and drop', accused of being unintuitive (what?). As with all Microsoft products, the right button on the mouse now comes into play, which is definitely a good thing. Still a long time to wait, but it looks like it'll be worth it.

Newspaper Price Wars

I confess to being rather bemused by the newspaper price wars. *The Times* obviously made some circulation gains by reducing its price to 30p, but was it really sensible for *The Daily Telegraph* to cut its price down to the same level? I suspect not. *The Telegraph* is already easily the highest-selling broadsheet paper, so the gains in that market are unlikely to be substantial, and the extra subscribers are going to have to come from the mid-market tabloids.

The really insane thing about these price cuts is that (I believe) the newsagents are still getting the same profit margin in absolute terms, so the revenue for the publisher is being cut even more sharply than it might appear at first sight. Which is why the *Telegraph* share price plummeted when they announced the price cut.

As for the economics of selling *The Times* at 20p, that's anybody's guess. You have to admire Murdoch - first he used his newspapers (mainly *The Sun*) to subsidise the expansion of Sky, and now that's profitable he's returning the favour. Somebody's going to have to do something about him if and when he gets into a dominant position in both print and broadcast media, they really are.

ARMAGNAC 94-BI (Autumn 1902)

Austria-Hungary (HARRY BOND)

A(Rum) S A(Bud) - Ser (CUT, DISLODGED TO Bud); A(Bud) - Ser, A(Tri) - Ven (FAILED); F(Alb) - ADS

England (KRIS MORRIS)

F(NWG) S F(NTH); F(NTH) S F(Lon) (MISORDER, nso, DISLODGED TO Yor); F(Lon) - ENG (FAILED); A(Edi) Stands

France (STEPHEN AGAR)

F(MAO) S F(Bre) - ENG; A(Pic) S A(Par) - Bur; A(Par) - Bur (FAILED); A(Bur) - Ruh; F(Bre) - ENG; A(Gas) - Par (FAILED)

Germany (NEIL DUNCAN)

A(Mun) - Bur (FAILED); F(Den) S F(HEL) - NTH; F(HEL) - NTH; A(Bel) S A(Mun) - Bur; A(Hol) S A(Bel)

Italy (TOBY HARRIS)

A(Ven) - Tri (FAILED); F(ION) C A(Tun) - Apu; A(Tun) - Apu; F(Nap) S F(ION)

Russia (RICHARD SHARP)

A(Fin) S F(Nwy); F(Nwy) S GERMAN F(HEL) - NTH; F(Swe) Stands; F(BLA) S A(Gal) - Rum; A(Gal) - Rum; A(Ukr) - Sev

Turkey (IAIN BOWEN)

A(Ser) - Gre; A(Bul) S A(Ser) - Gre; F(AEG) S F(Smy) - EMS; F(Smy) - EMS; F(BLA)-Ank (MISORDER, nsu); F(Con) Stands

Adjustments:

A	Bud Ser Tri Vie	4	No change	
E	Lon Edi Lpl -Nwy	3	Loses 1	Removes A(Edi)
F	Par Por Spa Bre Mar -Bel	5	Loses 1	Removes A(Ruh)
G	Mun Den +Bel Hol Ber Kie	6	Gains 1	Builds A(Kie)
I	Ven Nap Tun Rom	4	No change	
R	+Nwy Swe Rum Sev War Mos StP	7	Gains 1	Builds A(War)
T	Gre Bul Con Ank Smy	5	No change	

PRESS

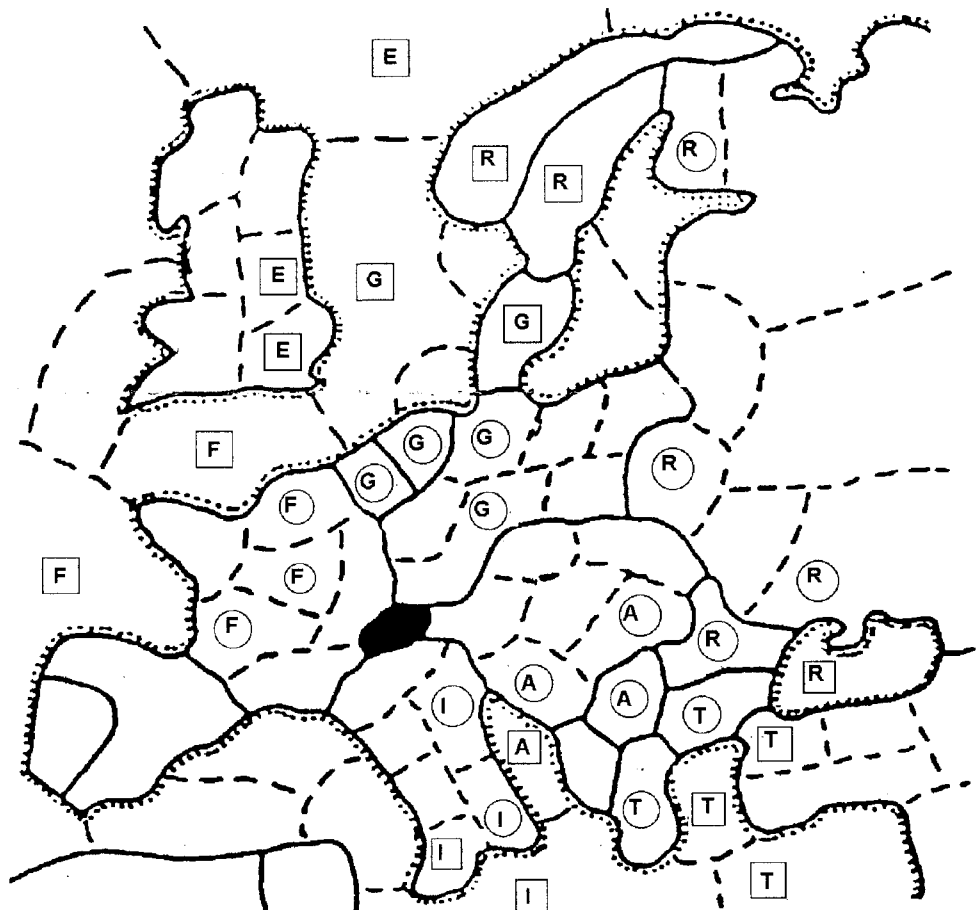
StP-Vie: If I was a mind-reader we could have an alliance

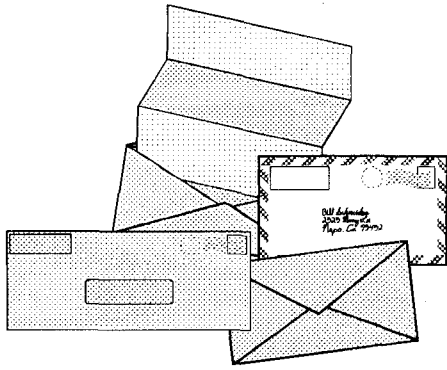
Berlin - GM: I liked the free A(Ber) you gave me on the map last time. I am quite happy to accept it. "Build 2, Get 1 Free" could become very popular.

Next Deadline: Sunday 31 July

Well, the errors seem to be reasonably under control: Neil pointed out the error on the map, and I'm sure everyone who bothered to check the position spotted it as well.

I continue to double-check both the order entry and the map, so I hope errors will be few and far between. And is it tempting fate to say that the map was trouble-free again?





IAIN BOWEN: I saw that documentary about sad—bastards salesmen and their choice of cars. I wasn't sure if the saddest one wasn't the chap with a Cavalier SRi who wouldn't let any lesser Cavalier pass him, but would always give way to a *better* Cavalier. He claimed to be able to tell by the headlights. It was an excellent series: although the thing that amused me most was all the complaints that they got from safety nazis concerned citizens who thought that it was dangerous to talk to the drivers as they drove. In fact, the cars were towed. I wonder if they do that to Clarkson on *Top Gear*?

I rather doubt it.

I'm glad that I decided to stick to Word2, we have Word 6 at work and most of the new features irritate me. Of the useful features of the upgrade OLE2 isn't much use at to me at home so the only one that I pine for the non-equal column widths. It isn't worth £99 for the upgrade.

Of course, you may find that there are some bug fixes available to download on Compu\$pend.

There are some fixes on CompuServe, though I haven't actually applied them yet. Someone at work had a similar problem to mine, and the only common factor is SuperStor (though this was the IBM PC DOS version), so that is most strongly suspected - and no longer anywhere to be found on my PC.

I don't know whether the upgrade was worth £99 (or in my case £199 for Microsoft Office, giving me the excellent Excel upgrade, plus a 'free' copy of Powerpoint), but I do agree that Word 6 is a rather mixed bag, with some rather irritating features (mainly in its attempts to be 'helpful' or 'intelligent') coupled with the genuinely useful ('drag and drop' between documents, the format painter, multiple levels of undo, and the use of the right mouse button). Personally, I consider it £199 well spent.

Nor should you need to get an InterNet account. I am informed that real soon now Compu\$pend users will be able to get at the Internet in the same way that CIX and AOL users can. Which means that we will have another huge number of clueless newbies to whine at.

I got a free month's subscription to something called ALMAC with my modem, and I finally got round to trying it a couple of weeks ago. As a committed Windows/GUI devotee, I found it horrible to use, and couldn't begin to understand what was going on when I accessed Internet. I will either wait until CompuServe provide Internet access that protects me from nasty old Unix, or try someone like PC User Group with a GUI front-end for Internet. Do Demon have one?

I understand from one of my subbers who went to Genghis Khan's at a time other than FurryCon that waiting is pretty common and that the food comes with lashings of salmonella.

John Dodds is anxious to persuade me that my illness was caused by an inappropriate mix of ingredients, and I have to admit that I was told the same thing by one of the restaurant staff. However, I am not sure that it is possible to avoid the risks inherent in this type of operation.

I have visited one other establishment of this type, and found exactly the same problems, and that's enough for me. I wonder whether I'm just getting old, but a meal such as the one that Stephen Agar, yourself and myself had at the Mallory Court is infinitely preferable (and a great deal more expensive, of course).

JOHN DODDS

Something rather odd seems to have happened to the printing of page 4; no doubt you will explain in the next issue!

I wish I knew! My best guess is that the printer memory caused the problem. I made the classic mistake of leaving the printer unattended whilst it printed a series of pages, and came back to find the problems everyone saw. By this time I would have had to reprint several pages to correct it, so I decided to leave it alone.

Now, I know that zines are ephemeral, but this issue of *Meg* must be one of the most ephemeral ever. Having spent the early part of the evening watching Brian "destroyer of Durham" Lara make the best part of the difference between

Warwickshire and Surrey, I came home to find you being unduly optimistic about Surrey's chances. I hope you are chastened.

Well, after John wrote that letter Surrey lost again but went top (!!) and then beat close rivals Leicestershire by an innings and runs before tea on the third day to collect maximum points and extend their lead. So I'm still fairly optimistic, but I don't expect too much.

It's now deadline weekend, and Durham are playing Surrey. This game didn't start very well for Surrey, but they are now 538 for 6 in their second innings, a lead of 437, so they aren't going to lose and a victory is possible.

Meanwhile, England ought to beat New Zealand quite easily, though I should know better than to make comments like that when you could be reading this on Tuesday as New Zealand complete an historic victory. Or perhaps not!

The two letters this time both came via email - which, for some reason, reminds me of a conversation I overheard in the office building where I'm working at the moment: 'it says that the details will follow by email - I think that's express mail'. Well, it amused me at the time.

I've found myself writing more letters as a result of having CompuServe. I think the reason is that I can send a short note rather than waiting till I've got all my different thought together to write a letter. Plus I just have to click on an icon rather than putting it in an envelope, sticking on a stamp and walking to the post. And the person at the other end doesn't have to re-type it.

So I sent Pete Sullivan some reviews for *Mission from God*, and Stephen Agar a letter about *Spring Offensive*, plus countless short notes about this and that, and in return I got a copy of a letter from John Dodds about rating systems, some Manorcon information, the two letters published on this page, and a large phone bill.

Stephen Agar tried to persuade me that it wouldn't be particularly expensive, but I have yet to receive a phone bill, or a credit card statement with CompuServe charges, so I'm still slightly nervous about the cost aspect of all of this. That aside, I can't deny the benefits.

Around the Hobby

In *Spring Offensive* 24 Stephen Agar reprints some quotes from old zines. The first is from someone who is now a Liberal activist spouting extreme left-wing views - I thought that it was from John Marsden, but apparently I'm wrong. The second is definitely from Richard Sharp, saying that he does not want a female bridge partner, the point being that Richard's regular bridge partner these days is his wife. As I mentioned in my last issue, publishing a zine does make you a hostage to fortune if you last for longer than a few months, and I'm sure we have all said things that we probably now regret.

Actually, it isn't particularly absurd for a Liberal to express extremely 'left-wing' views, given that in many ways they are more radical than the Labour Party. Mind you, these days the main objective of both parties is to become indistinguishable from the Tories on as many policy issues as possible. And I'm sure there are many occasions when Richard still doesn't want to have a female bridge partner!

I think I shall start a new feature reprinting the more absurd things from *Pigmy*, a fairly complete collection of which is at the top of a pile of old zines just to my right.

Stephen also digs up old dirt on me by revealing *shock, horror* that ten years ago I managed such feats as posting zines with names but no address, and not sending re-adjudications to players. I thought I said as much in *Meg* 59?

Mr Agar also has a go at the difficult subject of ratings systems for Diplomacy tournament, coming up with a table from which it is possible to calculate a score between 1 and 100 based upon the final position. It is based on the final supply centre count and nothing else. I think that it might need a factor for the 'degree of difficulty' of playing each country, based upon the database of ftf results, but other than that it looks quite sensible.

Stephen also claims that his 'Campaign for Real Folds' was a spoof. I don't understand what he means by this, given that he still believes in the principles he was advocating. Obviously it wasn't a campaign in the same sense as the Campaign for Real Ale, with newsletters and members and all that paraphernalia (and I was so looking forward to the t-shirts and

membership cards), but it was someone putting forward a good idea, and getting support for it. Perhaps 'campaign' was the wrong word, but so is 'spoof'.

Currently on the disappeared list are: *Electric Monk* (3 months late), *Assassins Handbook* (4 months late), and *Froggy* (15 months late)

Stephen goes on to advocate that if zines disappear for three months without an explanation the GM ought to let someone else take on the game. This is a very difficult subject, but I do think it's worth some more consideration if we could manage to have a rational debate on the subject. I suspect that most editors in that position would secretly be glad to be rid of the games, but there will always be some who will object, and then we have the problem of finding an editor to take on the games and keeping the players happy. Not an easy job, but potentially of great benefit to the hobby.

The words 'hobby' and 'organization' are sometimes used in this context, but having been shouted down last time I raised that line of argument, I think I'll stay in my bunker and keep my head down.

Greatest Hits 184 is a little strange. It starts off reasonably normally, with some stuff on Fantasy Cricket, a rambling lettercolumn, with Malcolm Shaw explaining what a Management Consultant does (apart from earning a great deal of money, he said bitterly), and Jonathan Palfrey spending £350 on a set of fonts. Pete then talks about pirating copies of Excel and Word from work to use at home, and suggests that this will upset me because I work for a software company.

My objections to pirate software are nothing to do with my job (CMG aren't in that business), but everything to do with the fact that software developers need income from sales to invest in supporting and developing their products. Obviously a few people making pirate copies to use at home has a marginal effect, and it can be beneficial if they go on to buy legitimate copies (this was my argument in favour of home taping).

The really strange bit of *GH* comes on the back page, where Pete appears to have got lost somewhere on the information superhighway. Or drunk a lot of whisky. Or both. We are told that *GH* is to become an electronic

zine, though Pete hasn't yet worked out the system, because so many options are available.

I'll stick my neck out, and suggest that the chosen option will be photocopying. The information superhighway will just have to wait.

Take That You Fiend 130 has John Smith on the cover, and Kevin's annual account of his hockey tour to Thanet inside. There's a letter from Alan Parr, complaining that the previous issue of *TTYF* was over-respectful to Ayrton Senna, and going on to say that the only good thing about Formula One is that it has given us games such as *Speed Circuit*.

There's analysis of subscribers entries for the *Daily Telegraph* Fantasy Football League, and in best duvet-stuffing fashion a 'best of' and 'worst of' team. Meanwhile, John is running a Fantasy Football League - the goalkeepers have been auctioned, with strange results: One player has spent over half his money to acquire Seaman, Bosnich, Flowers and James, whilst someone else has spent just over 4% of his to get Pressman, Segers and four more! Next time it's defenders. John is cheating by using the score from the *Telegraph* rather than working them out for himself.

Which reminds me that Paul Oakes will be running a Fantasy League this season, with an auction in a London pub in August. Potential players should contact Paul at 66 Alma Road, Wandsworth, London SW18 1AH.

Back to *TTYF*, and John Harrington now has a fax modem and an email address (TTYF@cosmos-uk.org). Cosmos provide partial Internet access and a bulletin board, but the bad news is that you're likely to run into Brian Walker on it!

Spring Offensive Stephen Agar, 79 Florence Road, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 6DL

Greatest Hits Pete Birks, 181 Friern Road, East Dulwich, London SE22 0BD

Take That You Fiend John Harrington, 30 Poynter Road, Bush Hill Park, Enfield, Middlesex EN1 1DL and Kevin Warne, 8 Charles Street, Grays, Essex RM17 6DX

Well, I think that's it for another issue. Five is an annoying number of pages, but it'll have to do.