

Megalomania 64 November 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) Subscribers pay 30p an issue and waiting lists are open for Regular Diplomacy and nothing else.

Congratulations....

...to Esme Grant and her husband Stephen Agar on the birth of Kate Templeton Agar, who entered the world weighing 7lb 6oz at 1.27pm on 31 October 1994.

Editorial

Well, here we are again. I have to admit that I'm not feeling much like producing an issue of *Megalomania*. The reasons are a combination of my attempts to find a new job, and a general lack of time to work on the zine in advance of the deadline weekend.

The news on the job front is quite encouraging, and I am currently waiting to hear from one company with whom I had a good interview but who wanted a reference before they would make a decision. Since the job seems to involve the sort of work I want to do, and would give me a large pay rise, I am hoping that they do make an offer.

I had one rather unsuccessful attempt at an interview, when one recruitment consultant arranged for me to meet someone in a wine bar just off Leicester Square. I was there, and apparently the person who was going to meet me was also there. We didn't manage to meet, but it has been rearranged for next week. I have also had the offer of a one-year contract....

This has of course involved me in the strange world of recruitment consultancies. I contacted three, and one has been excellent, one has made some effort, and the third has so far been hopeless (apparently forgetting about me, then suggesting two possibilities but failing to do very much about it, then finally sending my cv to these two companies). The most difficult part of this is that I am working in a small office with three other people and can't really have sensible telephone conversations with recruitment consultants in those circumstances, leading to the sort of discussion where they ask questions to which you can give yes/no answers.

All good fun!

On the Buses

I watched an interesting TV programme about bus privatisation last week. The main subject was the way that Stagecoach have built up their market share by using rather underhand tactics, and they interviewed people who had worked for them and who had run companies with whom Stagecoach had entered into competition. Their is very well-documented evidence of the methods that Stagecoach use (running buses a few minutes before their competitors to starve them of revenue, knowing that they have the resources to survive and eventually exploit the monopoly they will inherit. The Monopolies and Mergers Commission has slapped them on the wrist several times, but seem powerless to do more.

London has so far been exempted from de-regulation, though the various bus companies (previously part of London Transport) are being sold off to the likes of Stagecoach. These companies will be tendering to run the services on behalf of London Transport, so there won't be competing services (at least not yet)

MidCon 94
Royal Angus Hotel
Birmingham
18-20 November 1994

Football

Crystal Palace are looking much better right now, and should really have beaten Newcastle a fortnight ago. They played really well, and missed an emarrassing number of chances, but Peter Beardsley's late goal was more than a little cruel. They didn't play quite as well against Everton, but got the three points anyway. Then the 'away' Coca-Cola Cup tie against Wimbledon, another not terribly good game, but Palace deserved to beat a Wimbledon side that reverted to their

old style (and were short of several players who were injured or cup-tied).

Then Palace picked up another three points by beating Leicester, and suddenly things start to look a great deal more comfortable than a fortnight ago. I continue to be optimistic about their prospects, particularly as they have one of the meanest defences in the league (apart from one aberration).

On the Box

Well, there is at last some decent stuff on TV now that Autumn is here.

The highlight is undoubtedly **Cracker**, with Robbie Coltrane as Fitz, the psychologist who can sort out everyone's problems but his own. The first story of the new series saw his wife (played by Barbara Flynn, so there's another reason to watch it) leaving him, and the police reluctant to make use of his services.

Meanwhile, a fanatical *Guardian*-reading Liverpool fan is determined to avenge the 95 who died at Hillsborough by killing policemen, police psychologists and *Sun* journalists. So the police call in Fitz, and he sorts it out (well, mostly), though still no sign of Barbara Flynn. The end of the second episode featured one of the most chilling and effective murder scenes I have ever seen.

Have I Got News for You is back, for its regular pre-Christmas series. The first show had 'Judge' James Pickles as the rather confused elderly guest, and Martin Clunes as the guest who's in on the joke. Meanwhile the panel try to work in references to stories about Angus Deayton in *The Sun*.

The Fast Show is probably near the end of its run, but is highly recommended nevertheless, and even better there's a new **Harry Enfield** series starting on Friday.

I haven't watched the new series of **Between the Lines** because I'm still waiting for BBC-2 to repeat the second series, but I'm not sure why I bothered

given that no-one could fail to be aware that this series sees Tony Clark out of the police. Meanwhile, **Drop the Dead Donkey** has continued to disappoint though the most recent show was quite funny and the Sally Smedley pregnancy story shows some promise.

Listening to Radio 4 (for the excellent **Week Ending**, which seems to eschewed jokes in favour of satire) I heard a trailer for a new humorous Radio 4 show from Richard Stilgoe, and then on Mark Steyn's **Postcard from Gotham**, Andrew Neill's humorous new American accent.

BOOK REVIEWS

FEVER PITCH

Nick Hornby

This book modestly describes itself (on the front cover) as 'The best football book ever written', though to be fair, this is a quote from a review rather than a claim by the author or publisher. I would add 'by a fan', and then it is fair (Eamon Dunphy's 'Only a Game' and Hunter Davies's 'The Glory Game' being two better books about football in my opinion).

This is an excellent description of life as a fan, its joys and frustrations, and I have no trouble relating to it. I have supported Crystal Palace for the same length of time that Nick Hornby has supported Arsenal, and the similarities greatly outweigh the differences.

The book also explores many of the issues that have faced football over the last quarter of a century. It is slightly strange to read Hornby's accounts of mindless-hooliganism-given-that-it-has now been virtually eradicated from the game. I remember a game against Manchester City when a small gang of 'hooligans' from that club were in the area of the ground where I stood. They were blindly following their leader, and were truly a pathetic sight.

The book inevitably deals with Hillsborough: all-seater stadiums are now here to stay, and we are getting some very impressive redevelopments as a result. I think that it's a great pity that more clubs didn't follow Newcastle's example and incorporate at least some (covered) terracing in their plans.

This is an excellent book for all football fans, or for anyone who wants to know why people take football so seriously.

PAPER TIGERS Nicholas Coleridge

MURDOCH William Shawcross

Both of these are major undertakings by any standards. Coleridge spent eight years studying the newspaper barons and their empires, and by sheer persistence managed to get interviews with virtually all of them. **Paper Tigers** chiefly consists of profiles of the great newspaper groups and the people who run the companies, topped and tailed with some analysis.

The profiles are all very thorough and informative, and the author has clearly spoken to a wide range of different people to get a full picture. The trouble is that there are too many profiles and not enough interesting stories to be told. You can develop your own composite newspaper baron - eventually inherited the company after working their way through various menial jobs, fought a battle with the unions over new technology, engaged in a life-or-death struggle with another media baron for supremacy in a medium-sized US city, nearly bought The Times and/or the New York Daily News, and is now installed in palatial offices on the top two or three floors of the newspaper offices.

The differences are fairly obvious - some interfere, whereas others leave well alone. Some are only interested in the business side, whereas others are actually fascinated by newspapers. It is an amazingly incestuous world, where deals are done and battles fought between a fairly small number of people and companies.

On the whole, I found the Shawcross book about Murdoch more satisfying, given that there is room in its 559 pages to give us an insight into a fascinating character. The book starts with the near collapse of News International in 1990 under a mountain of debt, but then goes back to explore his upbringing and the early days.

The most interesting material concerns his attempts to modernise his newspapers and the growth of the TV empire. Reading the book you realise that Murdoch took a huge risk with TV - the battle between BSB and Sky could have destroyed both companies but for the merger almost exactly four years ago. Since this book was published, Fox (his American TV network) have acquired the rights to show NFL

games, and BSkyB is being prepared for flotation. This ought to give Murdoch the freedom to develop his media empire even further.

I suspect that Shawcross started this project feeling slightly hostile to his subject, but ended feeling a good deal of admiration for the man, and I can't help feeling the same way (mainly because he takes risks - and most of them seem to work!). A very interesting book.

MY LEARNED FRIENDS Adam Raphael

This book is five years old, but deals with a subject that has changed little in that time - libel. It is essentially an account of the author's involvement in Jeffrey Archer's case against the **Daily Star**, which led in turn to his own action against Stewart Steven, then editor of the **Mail on Sunday** and now (I think) editor of the **Daily Mail**. It also covers various celebrated cases such as the one brought (successfully) by Neil Hamilton and Gerald Howarth against the BBC, and the farcical events surrounding Charlotte Cornwell's action against Nina Myskow and the **Sunday People**.

Raphael goes on to suggest that the libel laws have destroyed the old fearless **Private Eye** (at least in part because the company has money and so is worth suing) and generally make life difficult for journalists. A good book on an interesting subject.

THE WIMBLEDON POISONER Nigel Williams

This struck me as having more than a passing resemblance to Tom Sharpe, in that the central character finds all manner of strange and unbelievable things happening to him, and never seems to be in control of his life.

The great strength of this book is that it has a gripping storyline, though in a strange way that also causes problems because you want to find out what happens and don't have time to appreciate some of the characters he has created to inhabit the Wimbledon suburbia when the action takes place.

THE BATTLE FOR ROOM SERVICE Mark Lawson

This is exactly the type of travel book that I enjoy reading. Mark Lawson writes about some fairly unexciting places in a most entertaining way.

AROUND THE ZINES

The Cunning Plan 12 has a cover photograph of a new-born baby alongside a profile of Duncan Adams. You won't be surprised to hear that he's not very kind about Mr Adams. Inside we learn that Duncan is relaunching *The Laughing Roundhead* as a free zine published irregularly, and I read somewhere else that the games will be transferring to *Where is my mind*.

The letter column has another mention of Elizabeth Hurley, all of which is based on the fact that Neil Duncan once saw her in a pub in Basingstoke (or is there more to this that I've missed?). It does demonstrate that media hype is all-pervasive.

In *Spring Offensive* 28 Stephen ridicules my admissions about recent CD purchases; but elsewhere he reveals that he is planning to go and see Peter Hammill and Gary Glitter plus the Village People in concert. Hmmm.

There's a review of *Megalomania* of fifteen years ago, or rather three issues (20-22) from 1979. He suggests that there was a degree of elitism about multi-games zines and the non-London non-hardcore hobby in general. There may be some truth in this suggestion, and it's probably fair to say that back then I played very few games apart from Diplomacy and poker. As for the other aspect of this, I think there is a natural tendency to write about the people you know, but I really don't believe that anyone was deliberately excluded. But we were all much younger in these days.

There's a couple of pages on World Dip Con, this time from a foreign perspective. The two main subjects of debate are the French behaviour in the Diplomacy and the WDC charter debate. There is a group of Parisian players who tend to play as a cartel in tournaments all over France, and they continued this behaviour at WDC. This seems to have been universally condemned, though there is a suggestion that the English players may well have ganged up on the French players when the opportunity arose (surely not!). As for the charter, I didn't get involved in the debate but if one of the consequences of not having a charter is that the Australians and Americans will find it very difficult to win the event that does seem regrettable.

Stephen publishes a letter from me, that he hasn't published for, oh, at least three or four issues

Foolhardy is a zine dedicated to the open discussion of any topic relating to the Diplomacy hobby, published four to six times a year by Douglas Kent both in traditional form and electronically on CompuServe and Internet. I have been asked to supply UK news (which basically means a slightly edited version of Hobby News), and he also has correspondents from the various different email Diplomacy groups.

Take That You Fiend 134 has Kevin complaining about the effect that privatising schools has on the quality of the hockey pitches (all the hot political issues are covered in *TTYF*, but strictly from the self-interest angle). Apparently astroturf can be very bad for your knees, particularly if it's not properly laid, but then I've always thought that playing sport was bad for you.

I am winning the Almanac, based on my predictions for the final positions in the Premiership (published in issue 62), but it's still early days. The most amusing bit is looking for wildly wrong predictions (Everton 11th, Forest 17th from Kevin, and many people put Norwich and Southampton much lower than they are, and Everton much higher).

John is well advanced with production of Breaking Away, and expects to have it available at Midcon for something around £12 - £15.

I have two issues of *Greatest Hits*, though I suspect that the first one is a second copy of one that I misplaced.

GH 186 has an interesting piece on food, based on a book (or newspaper article) by A A Gill, the not very good *Sunday Times* TV critic. Pete argues correctly that the great strength of British cuisine is that we continuously adopt foreign ideas and adapt them, and goes on to suggest that the biggest danger to our cuisine is pre-prepared food that is some distance removed from the original raw materials. I agree - I still prefer to buy the ingredients and concoct something, even if I sometimes fail, partly because I am suspicious of what they put in 'convenience' food and partly because it gives me the choice of what I want to do with it.

Inter alia, Pete somehow manages to argue that we are still a world power, but that's an argument for another day.

There's a very interesting retrospective on the original *Ethil the Frog*, a major zine back in the early seventies (and again in the late 70's). One strange coincidence is that Pete mentions John Piggott's whinges about lack of response from his subscribers, whilst Stephen quotes me as saying similar things back in *Megalomania* 21!

There are Pete's tips on organizing a dinner party (you start by buying 14 slices of parma ham), more discussion on ASCII and Internet, people who twist telephone wires, and 'Come Dancing'.

GH 187 has Pete complaining about the disappointing response to 186, which he thought was a good issue (I agree)

Pete reviews 'alternative' or 'new' comedy, pointing out that many of the stars have joined the establishment and are firmly established on the 'plugging' circuit. Then, unsurprisingly I suppose, we drift off into political cartoons, before a quick tirade against political correctness.

Then Pete lays into the images that are created by advertising, mainly those which present men as incompetent.

The retrospectives are *Japhidrew* and *Fifth Column*. I have to confess that not knowing either of the editors, I find these slightly less interesting; though they are certainly very valuable contributions to the definitive history of the hobby.

Arfle Barfle Gloop from Kris Morris, 10 The Poplars, Great Dunmow, Essex CM6 2JA

The Cunning Plan from Neil Duncan, 25 Sarum Hill, Basingstoke, Hants, RG21 1SS

Foolhardy from Douglas Kent, 57 Charnwood Road, New Providence, NJ 07974. Also available on CompuServe [73567,1414] in PBM Games Library 8 and Internet [doug.kent@lpp.com].

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

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

Take That You Fiend from John Harrington and Kevin Warne, 8 Charles Street, Grays, Essex RM17 6DX.

ARMAGNAC 94-BI (Autumn 1904)

Austria-Hungary (HARRY BOND)

A(Gal) - Rum; A(Alb) Stands

England (KRIS MORRIS)

F(NWG) - Edi; F(Lon) S RUSSIAN F(NTH)

France (STEPHEN AGAR)

A(Gas) S F(MAO) - Spa sc; F(MAO) - Spa sc; A(Bur) - Mar;

F(ENG) S ENGLISH F(NWG) - NTH (MISORDER); F(NAO) - MAO; A(Edi) Stands (DISLODGED - DISBANDS)

Germany (NEIL DUNCAN)

A(Ruh) - Bur; F(Den) S RUSSIAN F(NTH); F(HEL) S F(Den);

A(Bel) - Pic; A(Hol) - Bel; A(Mun) S A(Ruh) - Bur

Italy (TOBY HARRIS)

F(TYS) - GoL; F(WMS) S F(TYS) - GoL; A(Bud) S AUSTRIAN A(Gal) - Rum;

F(AEG) S TURKISH F(Con) (MISORDER); A(Tri) S A(Bud); A(Vie) S A(Bud)

Russia (RICHARD SHARP)

F(NTH) S ENGLISH F(NWG) - Edi; F(Nwy) S F(NTH); A(Swe) S F(Nwy);

A(War) - Gal; A(Rum) - Bul (FAILED, DISLODGED TO Ukr); F(BLA) - Con;

A(Ank) S F(BLA) - Con

Turkey (IAIN BOWEN)

F(GoL) Stands (DISLODGED - DISBANDS); A(Gre) S A(Ser); A(Ser) S AUSTRIAN A(Gal) - Rum;

F(Bul) sc - Con (FAILED); F(Con) - Ank (FAILED, DISLODGED TO Smy)

| | | | | | |
|---|--|----|---|---------|--------|
| A | +Rum, -Ser, -Bud | -1 | 1 | Removes | A(Alb) |
| E | Edi, Lon | | 2 | | |
| F | Spa, Mar, Lpl, Par, Por, Bre | | 6 | Builds | A(Par) |
| G | Den, Bel, Mun, Kie, Hol, Ber | | 6 | | |
| I | +Bud, Tri, Vie, Tun, Ven, Nap, Rom | +1 | 7 | Builds | A(Ven) |
| R | Nwy, Swe, +Con, +Ank, Sev, Mos, StP, War, -Rum | +1 | 8 | Builds | A(Sev) |
| T | Gre, +Ser, Bul, Smy, -Con, -Ank | -1 | 4 | | |

PRESS

Paris (Gvmt)- Berlin: For the umpteenth time, Richard and Toby are going to tear both of us apart unless you act NOW!

Russia - Austria: I can't afford the prices Toby pays for control of your units, but what would you charge for a promise never to play me again?

Russia - Turkey: If you won't write, what else can I do?

Turkey - Germany: I've just been to see *Anoraks of Fire* at the theatre - I didn't know you were so famous!

Next Deadline: Wednesday 30 November

I note with interest the fact that Ryk Downes has declared **Megalomania** eligible for the the Zine Poll, even though it doesn't run a Diplomacy game.....

Heavens, it's an issue of **U Bend**, but I've run out of space to say any more!

