

Megalomania 66

January 1995

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 0181-683 2815, CompuServe 100343,362) Subscribers pay 30p an issue and waiting lists are open for Regular Diplomacy and nothing else.

Editorial

Come on, who wants to buy a very nice blue 1992 Citroen ZX, less than 16,000 miles, still under warranty, serviced at required intervals by Citroen main dealers, electric windows, electric sun roof, Kenwood RDS Radio Cassette. Reasonably priced at £5,900. I have been trying to sell this car for a month now, but I have had only one inquiry.

The new car is great, though I am still having problems adjusting to the indicators and headlights being on the opposite side of the steering wheel to the last four cars I've had. When I want to flash my headlights at someone who has cut me up or done something else stupid I often end up squirting water on my windscreen instead!

I have just returned from a visit to chez Agar to deliver some old zines and to admire young Kate (now two months old). Stephen wishes me to say what a nice baby she is, so I'll say it just to keep him quiet - the truth is that at that age they don't really do much except eat, sleep and cry, and so are rather boring except to adoring parents and grandparents.

Christmas was a fairly child-orientated event, spent in the company of my eight (I think) nieces and nephews.

I started my new job at the beginning of December, but I've spent most of the month on courses in lovely Feltham.

The courses take place at a business park in Feltham called Bedfont Lakes. The main occupant is IBM, and the rest are high tech companies as well. It's one of those strange modern places where all the buildings look as if they're made from bits of Meccano and will fall down (or least be uninhabitable) within about twenty years.

The SAP Training Centre has a thing into which you are supposed to pour unwanted drinks and stack empty cups, and it gives me a certain amount of harmless fun watching people trying to work out to do (wrong ideas include dropping full cups into this device).

Mission from God

The future of *Mission from God* is still under discussion. The story so far is that Kim Head had offered to take it over, but without knowing this I had proposed that I should do it with support from Neil Duncan.

The Midcon Hobby Meeting may or may not have agreed that a consortium of Kim, Neil Duncan and myself should do it. Anyway, Kim has said that she doesn't think a committee is the best way of running *MFG*, and feels that I could produce something that looks better, so where does that leave us?

The consensus is that Kim would bring a fresh approach to it, and I have to agree with this argument. Anyway, I only offered when Neil told me that he didn't want to do the job (but would be prepared to contribute if someone else published it). I can only re-iterate that I would be quite happy for Kim to do it if she wants it, and would contribute to it.

Kim's proposal is that she would produce issues bi-monthly or quarterly, A4 photocopied, with deadline dates for contributions. She already sees a wide range of zines and would trade *MFG* as widely as possible.

To be honest, I think the only major advantages I have are that I have a PC and email, which obviously makes production easier and enables me to make it look prettier than something done on a typewriter. On the other hand, we have to set Kim's obvious enthusiasm for doing the thing against the fact that I only offered to make sure that it gets done (and done properly).

I don't want to get into a fight over who does this, so I'll put the ball back into Kim's court for her to decide what she wants to do, though obviously I'd also be interested in any other opinions on the way forward for *MFG*. I am still happy to do it, but Kim has first refusal.

[This would be an obvious subject for the **Hobby Services Group** to discuss, but it hasn't really been set up yet, and I think we need to get this resolved as soon as possible.]

Eurocon Thirtysomething

This is an idea which arose from a conversation I had with Stephen Agar.

The idea is to organize a holiday in France sometime in the summer, probably a fortnight in September. Here's the tricky bit: we want to attract what for want of a better phrase we might call the 'thirtysomethings' (though age is actually fairly irrelevant), and definitely not the serious games players who attend events such as Castlecon.

The emphasis would be on doing a bit of sightseeing, a lot of relaxing and a fair amount of eating out. Oh, alright, you can play a few silly games if you want. This is still at the early planning stage, so we have no firm ideas of where to go (though almost certainly it wouldn't be as far south as the Dordogne), or what it would cost. If anyone out there is interested, perhaps they could let me know - obviously ideas or suggestions would be very welcome.

The Budget

The budget was fairly dull overall, though two issues do stand out:

The first is obviously VAT on fuel. Whilst it is very entertaining to see the government having a difficult time on this subject, I have to say that I think that there is a strong argument in favour of putting VAT on fuel, mainly on environmental grounds. The obvious drawback is that it is broadly regressive, and obviously affects pensioners more than most, but both of these problems could be dealt with by uprating benefits. The government made two critical errors: not introducing it in one stage, and not being sufficiently generous with the compensation early enough.

The second issue that interested me was the question of mortgage arrears. Here we have a government that wanted to increase home ownership and make the labour market more "flexible" by removing much of the

protection that employees used to enjoy (and leading to more people working on short-term contracts).

They have achieved both these objectives, and this has led to an increasing number of people finding themselves unable to pay their mortgage when they lose their jobs (and obviously running the risk of losing their homes if this lasts more than a few weeks). In the past the social security system took care of the payments, but this is getting rather expensive for the government, so they want people to take out insurance to cover their payments.

Only one teeny weeny problem here: insurers won't offer cover to people who are on fixed-term contracts and will be reluctant to offer it to the people whose jobs are most under threat.

The Dudley West by-election was amusing - one almost starts to believe that the government could lose the General Election. We seem to have been here before, so I'm not going to start counting chickens just yet.

The British Gas bad PR goes on and on, but am I the only person in the country who thinks that their Chief Executive has been treated rather unfairly? As I understand it, he has given up various options and other benefits in return for a salary increase. This means that the shareholders and the public now know what he earns rather than having it kept secret. Surely that is a good thing?

Films

I went to see Reservoir Dogs a few weeks ago, and have to admit I was a little surprised - I expected it to be far more violent than it was. This is another example of the way that media hype gets out of control - it's certainly got quite a lot of violence, but there's only one really unpleasant sequence (to the accompaniment of Stuck in the Middle With You by Stealer's Wheel). I suppose it's Pulp Fiction next, then.

On the Box

I watched the first part of **The Wimbledon Poisoner**, but wasn't very impressed, and I completely forgot to watch the second part (which says quite a lot). **Lovejoy** finally came to an end, with a final episode that had an entirely absurd storyline. The BBC tried out a new comedy drama starring Mel Smith - I forget the title, but I remember that it was about a fat and incompetent lawyer called Stephen (now who does that remind me of.....).

Most of the Christmas TV was appalling (especially that Fry and Laurie show), though I haven't yet watched the Paul Calf thing or Rory Bremner. Time to list my top TV programmes of the year methinks. In no particular order, I'd pick:

Takin' over the Asylum was funny and poignant and definitely the best TV series about a psychiatric hospital.

The great strength of **Cracker** is the vast array of strong characters, very well portrayed by the first rate cast. The first story of this series was the best, with a chilling scene which ended with one of the police characters lying on the ground bleeding to death

The Fast Show was surprisingly good, considering that Paul Whitehouse and Charlie Higson has lived in the shadow of Harry Enfield for so long. Lots of really good characters. **Harry Enfield and Chums** was also excellent, with a whole host of new characters alongside the old favourites.

Knowing Me, Knowing You was extremely funny, and a largely accurate satire on the TV chat show, starring the extremely talented Steve Coogan.

The Day Today was an excellent vehicle for the talents of Chris Morris, with a lot of surreal bits and some quite unbelievably funny moments (repeats start this Friday at 10pm on BBC-2).

Michael Moore's TV Nation is an offbeat documentary series co-funded by the BBC and NBC that has covered such subjects as the Ku Klux Klan, the militant parts of the Pro-Life movement, and where Bill Clinton really grew up (Hot Springs, and not Hope as we would have us believe).

~~I'm sure there's more that I've forgotten, but that's life.~~

Mercury

Mercury aren't having a good time at the moment. The mass redundancies coupled with the abandonment of the payphone network led to a rash of Cholmondley-Walker and Grayson spoofs, then a few days later they dropped those two characters from their advertising.

Then there were the almost inevitable problems with the 1-2-1 special offer of free calls worldwide on Christmas Day. There are already big problems with access to the network for free off-peak local calls, and I'm sure that's put a lot of people off subscribing to the network.

Sainsburys

I went to Sainsburys to buy some wine before Christmas and got some really good bargains (including Claret for about £1.50 a bottle). Yes, there is a catch - it was their branch inside the Mammouth Hypermarket just outside Calais. What a farce that is: surely the 'single market' ought to be bringing about a harmonisation of taxes and duties?

Meanwhile it is no surprise that people in the South East make day trips to France (alongside the professionals in transit vans), and British retailers lose out on the business.

Driving Me Mad

Instead of being driven mad by Network South Central (one of the companies in the next tranche of railway companies to be sold off, I see) and the Underground, I have been suffering the M25 recently. The section I use most (M23 to M4) has not one, but two, sets of roadworks with contraflow currently in place. This has not been much fun!

I recently had cause to be grateful for radio traffic news on two successive working days - on one Friday there was an accident in the contraflow by the M23 junction, so I joined at the next junction and actually made better than normal progress because there was less traffic on that stretch. Then on the following Monday there was a bad accident in the M3 roadworks and that had a very serious effect on the M25. I heard about this after I had set off, and improvised an alternative route avoiding the motorway. It worked fairly well (though it would have been better if I'd planned it in advance) and I arrived in plenty of time - unfortunately the lecturer was stuck in the traffic so the course started late anyway!

Football

My optimism of recent weeks concerning Crystal Palace has been slightly dented by the goal drought (as featured on 'Fantasy Football League'). Palace haven't scored a league goal since November 5, and that has caused them to drift down the table. Mind you, they did demolish Aston Villa in the Coca-Cola Cup during this so-called 'drought' so it's not quite as bad as it seems, and they have played Manchester United, Liverpool Blackburn and Forest in this period. The most frustrating game was against QPR, which Ray Wilkins admitted Palace should have won. I'm sure things will improve.

Y Ddraig Goch 86 is a surprisingly solid issue, considering that Iain has not had a very good few months (on a personal level). He is cutting back on the size of the zine and cancelling some trades, but he still wants to carry on with the zine in a reduced form.

Iain claims to have a strange desire to become a Tory MP in order to clear out the second hand car salesmen and estate agents from the party so that they can resist the inevitable ascent to power of Tony Blair. Iain is one of the two people in the hobby who I believe might know something about politics, so I feel obliged to take notice of this prediction (that Blair will become PM in 1997, not that Iain will be a Tory MP).

Also on the front page, Iain remarks that he is having no luck on the job front. The ironic thing about this is that Iain is currently working with SAP and wants to get out whereas I have just changed jobs in order to work with SAP. If Iain wanted to carry on working with SAP he could choose from any number of jobs all over the world! By page 15 he has been promoted and awarded a salary increase, so where does leave us?

Picking up **On the Game** 5 reminds me that I forgot to vote for it in the Zine Poll. There's some discussion in the lettercolumn about jazz, a form of music that I can't get excited about.

In his subzine **The Blue Nose Special** John Colledge reveals that he has been taking Prozac, the new wonder anti-depressant drug (did anyone see the piece on Michael Morre's TV Nation about pets with psychiatric disorders that were given Prozac and seemed to return to normal?). Unfortunately it made John sleep for 15 hours a day!

John was prescribed Prozac to try deal with his reaction to problems at work (the latest development involved being transferred to a new job, whereupon the person who was training him was moved to another office). He is now signed off work for a couple of months.

The Cunning Plan 22 was supposed to be a bumper Christmas issue, and I suppose it is (just in time for the Zine Poll, eh, Neil!). It's also very odd, with the editorial on the back page. This rambles on about fff Diplomacy, moaning about players getting roped into games to make up the numbers (can you guess who had this happen to him at Midcon?). The irony is that Neil has volunteered to help run the National Diplomacy Championship, so will need to do quite a lot of arm-twisting!).

AROUND THE ZINES

There's a strange poll, based upon what I thought was a throwaway set of questions on the front page of the previous issue. There's the usual rather odd lettercolumn, and an article by Allan B Calhamer (I believe he once invented a game) which features his usual atrocious English - for goodness sake, the title is 'Why did Napoleon advance upon Moscow in as much as the capital of Russia was then St Petersburg'.

Dave Newnham spends a page explaining how to submit your orders, with another three-quarters of a page on excuses for late orders (there aren't any, apparently) and there's a piece by Neil on the siege of Mons (the result of a visit to the place in the summer). There's an article on the history of megagames, and Neil suggests that there must be the potential for crossover with the Diplomacy hobby. Which is interesting, because I have agreed with Marcus Watney that I will mention his megagames in the Convention Book in return for him distributing copies of it to everyone on his mailing list.

In his zine reviews Neil mentions my new car and suggests that I should soon expect begging letters - the problem with this is that I have to pay tax on the value of the car, so it makes me worse off (particularly as I'm still paying for my own car that I can't seem to sell). What with that and having to make pension contributions for the first time, I don't think I'm actually going to end up with any more money than in the old job, so please hold off on the begging letters.

The word on the street is that **The Cunning Plan** is going to win the Zine Poll. I have to say that on balance I suppose Neil would deserve it for producing such a large zine with a good balance of games and reading material, but I do feel that it lacks the 'spark' that makes me rip open some envelopes and read a zine with enthusiasm (yes, even after all these years!).

Hopscotch is apparently now produced on a 486 running Word for Windows. Alan expresses surprise that it has taken him so long to persuade this set-up to produce something that looks like his efforts on a BBC Micro. Since Alan crams a huge amount of text on to the page and regards margins as a waste of space you can probably understand his difficulties (even if he can't).

Issue 133 features a report on the Essen Games Fair, an event I really ought to visit one of these years, and speculates on the future of **Games & Puzzles**, which is now even more difficult to find in newsagents. The contrast here is quite depressing - is there really such a big difference between the British and German character that board games can be so popular in Germany but yet be very much a minority interest over here? Or is there a vast market here just waiting to be tapped?

The cover of **Up Around the Bend** 30 features a spoof advert for a trainspotter anorak (specially for Neil Duncan?). Inside Allan Gordon complains about games starting up again after such a long interval (whilst **U Bend** disappeared due to Haz's personal problems), preferring that they be abandoned. Harry quite rightly pours scorn on this suggestion.

There's an account of Midcon, with Haz apparently disappointed with the Hobby Discussion (no smoke-filled room, no big arguments etc.). He thinks that Stephen Agar and I looked as if we'd rather have been somewhere else - well, Mr Agar was about to drive back to Brighton and I did have other things to organize, but we both got quite involved in the debate.

Mission from God has finally appeared, for which I suppose we should be grateful, but it is rather out of date and a bit on the thin side (17 pages). There's a reasonable selection of reviewers, including my own contributions. John Harrington reviews **Megalomania**, and seems surprised that I run Diplomacy. Well, Stephen Agar talked me into doing it, but I don't regret the decision. More on **MfG** elsewhere in this issue.

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

On The Game from Paul Cockayne, 18 Henry Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 7NA

Hopscotch from Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Herts HP23 4DN

Up Around the Bend from Harry Bond, 50 Mayer Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 2JD.

Y Ddraig Goch from Iain Bowen, 5 Wigginton Terrace, York, North Yorkshire YO3 7JD.

ARMAGNAC 94-BI (Autumn 1905)

Austria-Hungary (HARRY BOND)

A(Bul) - Ser (FAILED)

England (KRIS MORRIS)

F(Cly) - Lpl (FAILED); F(ENG) - Lon (FAILED)

France (STEPHEN AGAR)

F(Bre) Stands; F(Wal) - Lpl (FAILED); A(Par) - Pic;
A(Bur) - Mun (FAILED); A(Gas) S F(Bre); F(Spa) sc - NAO (MISORDER)

Germany (NEIL DUNCAN)

A(Pic) - Bel; F(Den) Stands; F(HEL) S F(Den);
A(Ruh) S A(Mun); A(Bel) - Hol; A(Mun) Stands

Italy (TOBY HARRIS)

F(MAO) - NAO; F(WMS) S FRENCH F(Spa) sc - MAO (not so ordered);
A(Tyr) S A(Boh) - Mun; A(Boh) - Mun (FAILED); F(AEG) - Gre (FAILED);
A(Tri) - Ser (FAILED); A(Bud) S A(Tri) - Ser (DISLODGED TO Gal)

Russia (RICHARD SHARP)

F(NTH) - Lon (FAILED); F(SKA) - NTH (FAILED); A(Swe) Stands;
A(Sil) S GERMAN A(Mun); A(Rum) S TURKISH A(Ser) - Bud; F(Con) - Smy (FAILED);
A(Arm) - Smy (FAILED); A(Smy) - Ank

Turkey (IAIN BOWEN)

A(Ser) - Bud; A(Gre) S RUSSIAN A(Rum) - Bul (not so ordered); F(EMS) - ION

A	+Bul, -Rum	1	
E	Edi, Lon,	2	
F	Bre, Spa, Mar, Lpl, Par, Por,	6	
G	Bel, Den, Hol, Mun, Kie, Ber,	6	
I	Tri, Vie, Tun, Ven, Nap, Rom, -Bud,	-1	6 Removes F(NAO)
R	Swe, +Rum, Con, Ank, Nwy, Sev, Mos, StP, War,	+1	9 Builds A(War),
T	+Bud, Gre, Ser, Smy, -Bul,	4	Builds F(Smy),

PRESS

StP-Rom: Fifteen all. Now it's your turn to tell me a porky.

Berlin-Paris: But I thought I was ordering your units.

Next Deadline:
Tuesday 31 January

We had a small problem last time... in Spring 1905 Toby had A(Tri) and A(Bud), but ordered

A(Ser)-Tri and
A(Bud) S A(Tri)-Ser.

I thought about this and concluded that as Toby doesn't use implied orders I had to treat this as a misorder. I compounded the problem by mis-reporting the position last issue, but the players were informed of the real position. I have had some complaints about this, but I still stand by my decision.

I have checked all this season's misorders and verified that the players did order as shown.

DIPLOMACY WAITING LIST

Toby Harris

Only 6 wanted!

Games are currently free of charge, though you will need to trade or subscribe (or persuade me to send you the zine free).

