

# Megalomania 76 November 1995

A fanzine associated with the games hobby, published at the start of each month by Chris Tringham, 10 Jubilee Court, London Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 6JL (Phone 0181-683 2815, Cellnet 0802 183 084, CompuServe 100343,362) Subscribers pay 30p an issue and waiting lists are open for Regular Diplomacy.

## Editorial

Well, I suppose there's a moral here somewhere. If you have two things you absolutely have to do before a deadline that you can't change, it's not sensible to add something else, and still less to do a number of other things instead. It was like this: I had a week before flying off to Hong Kong, and had to get together everything I needed for the trip and put my flat in to some sort of order for Kim Head, who is borrowing my flat whilst I'm away. I decided that I had time to do **Megalomania** and **Hobby News** as well, but then I found myself spending several nights out and the time gradually disappeared.

The consequence was that I actually finished **Megalomania** and **Hobby News**, but only on Friday night, and when I took them to Staples on Saturday for printing they couldn't do them. I also discovered that there was rather more to do to my flat than I had thought, so that didn't get finished. The only success I had was that I managed to pack everything I needed for the month away.

That Saturday is one I would rather forget, as my initial confidence that I could do everything gradually evaporated and turned it something approaching panic.

It included various technology disasters as I tried to load all of the software I thought I needed, and then my printer absolutely failed to print something I needed. Eventually I had to give up and leave for the airport whether I had done everything or not. One of the casualties was my CompuServe access: after getting hold of a serial cable and improvising a phone lead I discovered that I didn't know my password! So when I got home there were 28 messages waiting for me!

The flight was uneventful, and we arrived at 4.30 pm, 90 minutes ahead of the published schedule, and to my complete surprise there was no queue at passport control (you should normally allow 20-60 minutes to get through). Virgin Premium Economy is pretty good, though I was rather spoilt by my previous journey in Upper Class. Certainly in terms of value for money it is hard to justify the extra £1,000 to go Upper Class, though the seats are wider and the legroom is much greater. The food is also different, mainly in that in Upper Class you get it served on a plate rather than in foil containers.

The return journey was equally straightforward, leaving on time and arriving (spookily enough) at 4.30 a.m. (45 minutes ahead of the published time). Heathrow is rather quiet at that time in the morning, you won't be surprised to hear!

Everyone seems to have good things to say about Virgin, whilst BA shoot themselves in the foot. Two of my colleagues were travelling from Hong Kong to London, one on BA and one on Virgin. BA refused to allow their customer to bring a guest travelling by Virgin into their hospitality lounge, whereas Virgin were only too happy to welcome them both. The result of this is that they both now travel by Virgin.

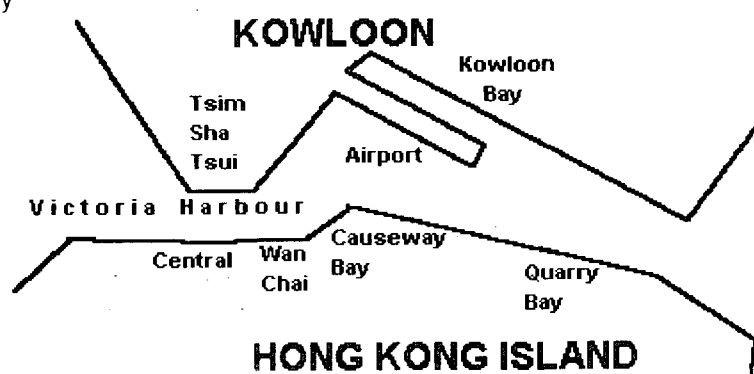
The World's Favourite Airline? I think not!

## Hong Kong (Part two)

Well, I can't complain that this has been a dull year. I reckon that work has taken me to Germany, Ireland (twice), Norway, Hong Kong (twice) and China.

This is supposed to be the best time of year (all the hotels put up their prices) but the weather wasn't as good as I expected. Certainly it was dry, but it was also cloudy and humid a lot of the time. The funny part is that the locals complain because it's getting cold - to my mind it is more bearable, but still warm, though we have had some very hot days.

Staying in a good hotel can be a very frustrating experience at times. The TV is far too clever for its own good, with two particularly frustrating features: when you switch it on it shows a pointless channel with the name of the hotel, and you have to push several buttons to get any TV channels. The channel change is reversed, so that the 'up' button moves you to a lower channel number. Every day someone comes and moves everything back to its appointed position regardless of where I actually want it to be. The nice little sign in the bathroom claims that if I put my towel back on the rack it will not be changed, which simply isn't true. That said, I have received complimentary chocolates, fruit bowls (albeit full of taste-free unripe fruit) and champagne.



Getting a taxi can also be frustrating. I am staying in Tsim Sha Tsui and working in Kowloon Bay (see map above), which is not a very easy journey by KCR/MTR railway - you need to change once and it would take 30-40 minutes). Getting a taxi there in the morning is easy, but trying to find one to get back can be a real problem.

On a couple of occasions it has taken ten to fifteen minutes to get one (not helped by the fact that there's no taxi rank, so it's the law of the jungle as to who manages to get them when they're in short supply). On the worst day there were a large number of taxis driving around with their 'For Hire' light on, but also displaying an 'Out of Service' sign. This means that they will only take fares back to Hong Kong Island (from whence they came). This is totally illegal, but there's not much you can do about it! I walked round the block and eventually, 45 minutes later, met up with two colleagues who were also waiting, and between us we managed to grab a taxi.

## SIGHTSEEING

**VICTORIA PEAK** is the best known sightseeing location in Hong Kong. You have to go up, if only to stop people telling you that you really must go up there. This time I took the walk around the Peak, which gives you a good view of almost everywhere on the island and across to Kowloon, though once again it was a rather misty day.

**STANLEY** is another tourist trap, the main feature being a huge market where you can buy almost anything you could possibly want (and much more besides). My main memory will be of the bus journey down there, during the course of which the bus seem to be coming dangerously close to the sheer rock face by the side of the road. I remarked upon this fact, adding that it must be alright because the driver does the journey on a very regular basis.

**CHINA** was quite an experience. We took the KCR (Kowloon-Canton Railway) to Lo Wu, walked across the border (long queues for passport control) and into Shenzhen to pick up a taxi. Shenzhen is a Special Economic Zone, and (in theory) you cannot get into it from the rest of China without permission (or a foreign passport). It is a bizarre mixture of high-rise office building and towers with areas of abject poverty, and clearly they are struggling to provide the infrastructure

**SHATIN RACECOURSE** is a mightily impressive place. It costs just \$10 (80p) to get in, and gets very crowded! Hong Kong is betting crazy, and they stake huge amounts of money on the horses. All betting, both on and off-course is run by the Hong Kong Jockey Club, which is therefore a very powerful organization. It makes major charitable donations from its profits, and wherever you go in Hong Kong you will see its symbol on various buildings where they have provided fundings.

**Eating Out** in Hong Kong is something else. There is no shortage of restaurants of every imaginable style and type, ranging from the exceedingly simple to the extremely good.

There are a large number of enormous (Chinese) restaurants around, and they are very professional outfits. They have staff standing outside (almost invariably attractive women, usually wearing long split skirts) who allocate you a table number. At busy times they decide who is going to get into the restaurant! The best time to visit them is at lunchtime when Dim Sum is available. Lower class restaurants have people walking around with trolleys and you simply stop them and select the dishes you want, and for foreigners like myself that is the easiest way!

The large international hotels seem to adopt a universal strategy: you have a 'basic' restaurant which features a large buffet, a slightly more expensive place (in the Grand Stanford it's the excellent Mistral, which is Italian, whilst in the Nikko it's Les Celebrities, which is a bit French), a very expensive one (the Belvedere - French - and the Sagano - Japanese - respectively), plus a good Chinese restaurant apiece.

At the insistence of a Yorkshireman (for whom I am working at the moment) we went to Harry Ramsdens in Wan Chai on Hong Kong Island. I wasn't very impressed by the food (nothing wrong with it, but nothing much right with it either), and still less by the service, the highlight being the response to the order of two bottles of Chardonnay: 'you want white?'. Er, yes, I think we do. With the wide choice of food in Hong Kong, fish and chips doesn't feature very highly on my list of preferences.

We also went a couple of times to Tandoor, a high-class Indian restaurant near Central MTR station. The service let them down on the second occasion, but the food was consistently excellent.

Hong Kong is continuously changing, as they reclaim land for more developments, and the commercial areas of Hong Kong spread ever further outwards. I came across two companies who had recently moved out from Central to locations in Quarry Bay about five kilometres east, because rentals are one quarter as much, and another company moving from Times Square in Causeway Bay (2.5 km east of Central) to Taikoo (7 km east), again because of the cost. In each case, the areas had formerly been predominantly light industrial, but now the office blocks are taking over. The company for whom I am working is located in Kowloon Bay, near the airport, an area which is making the same transformation. The next stage is moving away from Hong Kong Island and Kowloon into the New Territories, and then into China itself, with land prices getting progressively lower each time.

Another puzzle in Hong Kong is figuring out their attitude to the English. They are generally fairly hostile, though I'm not sure whether it is because it has been a British colony for so long or because it soon won't be. To be fair, the logic is understandable: we didn't given the locals any say in the way the place was run until shortly before we had to hand it back, and the Civil Service is heavily dominated by British ex-pats.

One is reminded of the famous line about the Romans in 'Life of Brian'. It cannot be a coincidence that Hong Kong has become so successful whilst so many other countries in the region lag a long way behind. The problem is that most British people have a fairly low opinion of local workers, and so want to hang on to the power they have, rather than to encourage local people to move into positions of power.

Chris Patten has been arguing that Hong Kong's success is a model for Britain's future. This is a strange argument by any standards, though you can see why it is superficially attractive to an increasingly disparate Tory party. After all, isn't Hong Kong an example of what happens if the government pursues a low tax and non interventionist policy? Well, not really. There is a lot more to it than that - don't forget that Hong Kong owes much of its growth to the very low wage costs that used to allow it to manufacture so cheaply. Now the same companies have moved production to China where a huge number of workers flock to the new factories.

Hong Kong, and the whole of the Asia-Pacific region, owes its success to taking a longer-term view and being prepared to invest for the future. If we had a similar attitude in this country we might have a chance of emulating their success. Less government 'interference' probably has helped companies to grow more quickly, but it certainly isn't the most important factor.

One of my favourite bizarre stories of recent times is the complaints by the Chinese Government that the welfare system in Hong Kong is out of control. I had to read this several times to check that I understood the story, but the Chinese Communists are complaining that the Hong Kong Government is spending too much on the welfare system. This is scarcely credible, given that by European standards there is very little in the way of a welfare state, but the Chinese are worried that it is irresponsible and unnecessary!

Two pages! Mind you, I am very short of time. More around Christmas time, I hope.