

ISSUE 26

INSIDE

Zines Seen & Letters
King Demetrius
& the Dropout
Americana Latina 1821
WorldDipCon IV
The Greatest Diplomacy
Player
Dip Quiz Results
Auf Heller und Pfennig
Review - *The Cunning Plan*
SpOff House Rules
The Subtle Joys of Being
Little

THE GAMES

Armageddon (Storm)	Page 27
Avagadro (Mercator)	Page 20
Bedlam (Diplomacy II)	Page 26
Cannibalism III	Page 27
Cochise	Page 24
Dragon (Youngstown)	Page 24
Enid (Apposition)	Page 30
Eurymedon	Page 21
Foghat	Page 24
Gong (Gunboat Stab)	Page 19
Hannibal	Page 26
Heraclea (Downfall)	Page 30
Ithaca (Diplomacy II)	Page 26
Jaxartes	Page 21
Jigsaw	Page 28
Kiss	Page 29
Leuctra (Hoplite Wars)	Page 18
Lighthouse (City State)	Page 30
Millennium (Fin de Siecle)	Page 30
Naxos (Downfall)	Page 30
Orchomenus	Page 30
Pydna	Page 29
Qarqar (Gunboat Stab)	Page 21
Raphia	Page 23
Salamis (Gunboat Stab)	Page 28
Trebia	Page 21
Utica	Page 21
Verona (Rise of Rome II)	Page 28
War of the Ring	Page 29
Xerxes	Page 23
Yarmuk	Page 23
Zama	Page 23

DEADLINE

SATURDAY

17th SEPTEMBER

SPRING OFFENSIVE



A MONTHLY POSTAL DIPLOMACY ZINE FROM STEPHEN AGAR, 79 FLORENCE ROAD,
BRIGHTON, EAST SUSSEX, BN1 6DL. TEL. 0273-562430, COMPUSERVE 100276,775.
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EDITORIAL

A week to go before the deadline and this is unabashed displacement activity. I'm half way through tidying up my "study" - well, the carpet is now visible in small patches, but it's hot and too much like hard work, so I thought I'd switch the computer on so I could kid myself that I was actually doing something useful. I classify this sort of thing as work (in the sense that when Esme is doing housework I say I'm going upstairs to do some "work" to give the impression that there is a fair distribution of household labour) but Esme regards it all as play. All I can say is it may well be play, but if that is the case why does it feel like hard work most of the time? Ooops, that sounds rather pathetic doesn't it, it must be the heat. Even the cats have taken to gearing up from their usual 85% of the time spent sleeping to around 95% of the time spent sleeping. Some evenings recently I've got home and just dozed off for a couple of hours, when of course I should be upstairs "working" on writing a few diplomacy letters. I sincerely hope this isn't the start of global warming as the thought of living in a Mediterranean style climate has no appeal for me.

Well, I have no less than four requests for hold-overs next time due to holidays. Rather than have even more games running to interim deadlines, this is a 5 week deadline again and if you're going on holiday you'll just have to make do. Sorry.

There is a theme to the article reprints in this issue - it is the many and varied reasons why you should fight on even if you're down to one or two units and your position is hopeless. All the articles are from the USA, but the message is international.

WorldDipCon IV or "Some of My Best Friends are French..."

Well, no actually, they're not - but that's an accident of geography. Let me make my position clear from the outset - the French did not really cheat. The anti-French hostility which surfaced at WorldDipCon (which stemmed from the curious play of the large French contingent in the Diplomacy tournament) was a result of a genuine cultural difference between the English/Swedes/Americans and the French.

Cultural differences must surely explain why some French players went out of their way to eliminate all non-French players and then throw the game to one of their number in an effort to make sure the World Champion was French. Their lack of individuality and willingness to subvert their own position for the Greater Glory of La Belle France must indicate a different mind set from the rest of us. This urge that many French players have to promote other French players at all costs must make their domestic tournaments rather predictable and probably explains why the French only feel the need to play games out to 1905 or so - because after a couple of hours everyone will have agreed who they are going to surrender to, so why continue? Given that this is a cultural difference we shouldn't hold it against them, should we? At WorldDipCon they obviously didn't have any choice but to fix the Diplomacy Tournament, driven as they were by this unusual cultural imperative.

Of course, I respect the right of the French to play the game of Diplomacy any way they want - I just don't want to play in the same tournament as them, that's all. The three top players in the individual Diplomacy Championship were French (although French players were in a small minority overall). Some may say that the top two players, Pascall Montagne and Stephane Gentric (although good players in themselves) achieved that status because they were handed absolute wins on a plate by other French poodles. Contrast the team competition where the nationalities were more or less dispersed equally - the competition was won by the Swedes, followed by an English team (congrats Toby).

Now this isn't just paranoia, the examples of fixed games are far too many in number to be dismissed. How about the French player who opened A(Mun)-Boh to support another Frenchman playing Russia; the Frenchman who opened A(Mar)-Pie-Tyr to support another Frenchman playing Italy; a French player due two builds who refused to take them lest his French allies found it threatening; the two French players playing England and France neither of whom had built a fleet in the first three game years! And it was all quite open and banal too. French players frequently embarked on a course of systematically eliminating all non-French players (and said quite openly that that was what they were doing) and then agreed a draw between themselves. FtF Diplomacy only works if all players act self-interestedly; once you have cartels the game becomes a utterly meaningless. The French who acted in this fashion did their more honourable countrymen no favours at all by acting in this fashion - I for one won't be heartbroken if they don't make it to MidCon in November (even though MidCon, unlike ManorCon, waives registration fees for overseas visitors). I only hope that there is a rule somewhere which restricts the British National Diplomacy Championship to British nationals or residents here (and if there isn't let's have one). I don't want the NDC turned into the farce which was played out at WorldDipCon!

And now there is to be a WorldDipCon in Paris next year... Maybe they should just agree the winner of the Diplomacy Championship now and save us all a lot of time and effort. The more I see of the French Diplomacy hobby, the less I want to have anything to do with it. The French don't seem to play Diplomacy, they merely indulge in (and seem to enjoy) organised mutual bottom-licking to twenty minute deadlines. Not what I enjoy myself, but as I said, it's all down to cultural differences.



I was struck by how few zines were available at ManorCon for people to pick up and peruse at their leisure. I off-loaded about 20 copies of **Spring Offensive** (and picked up three new readers), but apart from **SpOff** the only other zines around were **On The Game** and **Greatest Hits**. That gave me an idea. If any editors want to send me any flyers advertising their zine (160 copies say) I will make sure that everyone at MidCon receives one with their Registration Pack (yes, we're going to have a proper Registration Pack filled with Goodies this year). If any zine editors have spare copies lying around but aren't going to MidCon, send them to me and I will make sure that they are put in a



WORLD DIP CON IV

(Courtesy of **Smodnoc**)

prominent place for people to pick up. Many zines look as though they could do with some new subscribers to get a few more games going, so why not take up this offer, whether or not you're going to be able to make MidCon yourself or not.

Speaking of MidCon, can I make a special plea for everyone who is free the weekend of 18-20 November to see if they can come along and play a few games. The Registration Fee is a reduced rate of £8 until the end of the month, and if the reduction isn't enough of an incentive for you to book early, then why not do it as a favour to the organisers. A flyer is enclosed with this issue - read it and write to Brian with a cheque for Registration today!. Now don't laugh, but I would quite like to organise a Tiddly-Croquet Tournament. The rules are exactly the same as croquet, except you use a table-top and have to get tiddly-winks through the hoops. It's a better game than it sounds and the tournament is limited to eight people, so if you're interested let me know. Stewart Cross won't be at MidCon so the rest of us should stand a chance. OK, it won't have the character of a ManorCon croquet tournament in the baking sunshine, but at least the playing area will be flat. Other things I'd like to organise is an Intimate Diplomacy Tournament and the playing of at least one FtF Diplomacy variant (if Steve Cox can be persuaded to draw us another nice pretty map). I think the best sort of variant to play at a con is one with as few rules changes as possible, but with a totally different board - any suggestions?

What with the arrival of a baby at the end of October (give or take a few weeks either side), I suppose there remains the possibility that I won't make MidCon at all, which would be a shame as I'm already looking forward to it. In that case I may need a volunteer to step into the breach and run these Tournaments for me. Any takers?



I felt very guilty that I forgot to vote in the Zine of the Year Poll after Mark Boyle wrote to me asking me to vote and including a S.A.E. If sheer numbers voting is the criteria for success than the ZotY Poll will always be streets ahead of the Diplomacy Zine Poll, unless Ryk Downes can afford to send out S.A.E.s as well. Of course, what matters for most people is that they are thought well of by their peers - which is why Diplomacy zines (like this one) will always value success in the Zine Poll more than in the ZotY Poll (which is just as well, isn't it!). After all what chance does a purist Diplomacy zine (or any zine which caters for a specialised interest - e.g. Railway Rivals) have if it gets voted down for being specialised? At least so far, being a purist Diplomacy zine has never been a disadvantage in the Zine Poll - though of course being a Railway Rivals zine would be. Horses for courses, no doubt (and a bit of a bummer if you do run a Railway Rivals zine no doubt).

Well, it's time to put this issue to bed, but I see a couple of inches of white space below me. The need to fill up gaps like this is an urge which has been inbred into zine editors since Gestetners were first invented. What to say? I could confess that I've just put an advert in **Games & Puzzles** in the name of the **Postal Diplomacy Association**. What, you may well ask, is the Postal Diplomacy Association? Well, I have a theory that adverts which appear to come from an organisation of some sort will be more successful, so I thought I'd have a go and see what happens. I raised the idea with Dodds and Tringham a while back and they thought it might work. In so far as it exists the "Postal Diplomacy Association" will only have one task - to place adverts in likely periodicals advertising the amateur PBM scene. Nothing else. The advert specifically refers to other board games too, so we should get some multi-gamers. What gives me the right to do this, well I suppose the fact that I pay for the advertisements out of my own pocket and that I have the interests of the hobby at heart. If anyone else wants to get off their backsides and do something using different tactics, there is nothing to stop you, is there?

Time to sit back, hit the Brandy, and start planning baby things. It may be 10 weeks, but as we all know that's only just over two issues away and when you're my age, time just zooms by. Until next time...

The Subtle Joys of Being Little

by Rod Walker

There is too much emphasis on WINNING in the hobby. That is as true now as it was ten years ago. The hobby has been flooded with articles on how to "win" at this, and "win" at that, how to stalemate and draw, how to make big gains, etc, etc. There is rampant a school of thought (I use the term loosely) which states that if you do not "win" or "draw", you have "lost". The most outspoken member of this bunch of egomaniacs is Andy Phillips. The most remarkable is John Beshara, who refuses to take a replacement position smaller than 15 units and has declared in writing that he will not play under a GM who won't guarantee to restrict his replacements list to Besh's friends. Such are the extremes to which the "win-only" school can lead.

These people have lost sight of the true fun of Diplomacy; playing the game. You can do that with one unit. Does it really matter how you end up? When the game is over, it is OVER, and the fun derived from playing it is also over. I would rather play an entire game with only one unit than win it. The challenge (in this case, of staying alive), the excitement, the fun are all there.

A corollary of the deluded "win" philosophy is the silly notion that a 1- or 2-unit position isn't worth finding a replacement for. ANY position, no matter how small, may be a very important one, a vital situation, interesting and exciting to play. It may even determine the final outcome of the game.

I have over the years made something of a speciality of playing small replacement positions. I enjoy them; they are very relaxing because you have nothing at stake to begin with and you can do what you want. Those who have played such positions with any regularity can certainly testify that some of them turn out to be quite surprising. There was, for instance, a 2-unit Italy which Conrad von Metzke converted into a win.

An example I always cite is a 1-unit Austria I took over. I made my first moves in the Fall. In the previous Spring, my single army had been dislodged from Vienna and was in Bohemia. Russia and Turkey were allied and were sweeping the board. Hopeless? Not at all. I allied with Russia, talked him into stabbing Turkey, recovered my entire homeland and ended the game with 6 centres and 2nd place. Despite the fact that I perforce was hitched to the Russian star, it was an interesting and vital game to play, especially since I had a large hand in managing the Russian victory campaign.

I've also taken over positions which were hopeless right to the end. So what? Think of the brilliant KAMIKAZE attacks and suicide missions, the flare of tactics that holds up the potential victor and gives the winner's laurel to somebody else. You can do that, even with one unit.

You can also help create a stalemate line. There is considerable challenge to this because the orders of two or more players have to be co-ordinated, and there is always the excitement of the unexpected stab, the missed deadline that leads to breakthrough, and so on.

Winning a game can be exciting, too, of course. The point is that ANY position can create its own blend of uncertainty and suspense and surprise which are the elements of excitement. I do not, personally, see any difference in the suspense of waiting to see if you've gotten your 18th centre or lost your last one. So do not scorn the "little" positions.

[Reprinted from Runestone #91 (9/2/75) editor John Leeder]

This article was supplied by Mark Nelson, for which many thanks.



((The following article originally appeared in Saquenay No.31, dated June 2nd 1973. I am assured that every word is true, and that the greatest Diplomacy player of all time remains, relatively, unknown to the outside world. If this article can rectify that injustice, then the existence of Greatest Hits will have been worthwhile.))

The Greatest Diplomacy Player

by Ernie Melchoir

There can be no doubt that the greatest Diplomacy player who ever lived is Robert Decker. His play makes even the most difficult diplomatic and tactical situations look obnoxiously simple; he was almost never eliminated, and once he got to eleven dots he virtually always won. A favourite pastime of his was to take one-dot situations from other people who dropped out of games to see if he could win them. At the last count he had won ten out of fourteen such attempts, although my unofficial count which includes many more game reports a slightly lower rate.

One night, however, Mr. Decker made a claim that even his idolizers didn't believe he could fulfil. He said, "I clearly win about 5/7 of the games in which I have only one dot. Therefore, by the converse theorem, I should win about 1% of the games I play without any dots left on the board." Of course, no one believed him, but that night when he was England we were more than happy to put him to the test. After just five years, Mr. Decker had been eliminated.

"Now how will you win?" asked Germany, reminding Mr. Decker that in four million eliminated positions in official standard Diplomacy not one had emerged victorious.

"We'll see to that," replied Decker calmly. "I think people get irrational when they get down to 0 dots. Sometimes, indeed almost always, they don't even bother to turn in orders. Of course they don't win!"

"Just what type of orders were you planning on turning in?" asked a somewhat worried Austro-Hungarian player.

"You'll see."

When the moves were due, Turkey, that turn's reader, read:

"France. A(Pic) S A(Bel); A(Bel) S A(Bur); A(Bur) S A(Bel); A(Lon)-Yor; A(Wal) S A(Lon)-Yor; F(ENG)-Lon; F(MAO)-WMS."

"Russia. A(Nwy)-Lon; F(NTH) C A(Nwy)-Lon; A(Lp)-Yor; A(Edi) S A(Lp)-Yor; A(Fin)-Swe; F(NWG)-NAC; A(Mos) S A(Sev); A(Ukr) S A(Sev); A(Sev) S A(Ukr). Press: The French are the stupidest players I've ever seen, and they will be wiped out. The south is quite capable of standing up to the Turks."

"England. All units stand. Press: All remnants of English armies shall go to Spain, pillage the land, drink beer and take such other actions as shall allow them to have a good time."

The French player, deep in his concern for the success of the English invasion, mumbled "Go ahead, see if I care."

What an effect this statement had! The entire French Army was busy fighting the Russians, Germans, and Italians, while the English were having a good time in Spain. Soon the entire French Army and Navy had defected to England. "Hey! Look!" screamed the German, "my armies are turning pink!" Indeed, by the end of the 15 minutes diplomacy period all 34 armies and fleets had defected to the English, while the 16 original English units remained in the box. Further, disregarding all orders to the contrary, all were proceeding full speed for Spain. In a fit of nationalistic fervour, the Serbians raised an Army of their own (white in colour) and it too defected to England. Of course, by now the wine, women and pillageable buildings of Spain were terribly over-burdened, and there was some question as to what could be done with all 34 armies and fleets. By skilful oratory, Decker proclaimed, "I direct all my armies to go forth to all the

nations of the world and spread the good news of Spain." It just so happened that in going forth, the English had captured all 34 dots on the board, and the other nations had to concede to Decker before the Spanish problem reached fever pitch.

The effects of this game have been numerous. It is reported that many more players are submitting orders for 0-dot powers than did previously, though none of the attempts so far has been successful to my knowledge. One English player's Army defected to a 0-dot France, and had to be destroyed by the English fleets. Statistician Conrad von Metzke reported that there was simply no way his computations could include a gain of 34 dots in one turn, and has stricken the game from his official records. And since it was my Diplomacy game that was being used that fateful night, I hope Mr. Decker can convince all the defectors to defect back, because I am taking a lot of insults about keeping 30 English armies and 20 fleets around the house.

[Reprinted from **Greatest Hits** No.19 (December 1975)]



King Demetrius and the Dropout

by Steve Hall

I do not quite know why I am sitting here writing this when I could be out having a good time, but I have a bone to pick. It is with those people who, when they find themselves without allies and losing centres, just throw in the towel, or less dramatically, crawl into the woodwork.

NMR! NMR! The sound of a surly crowd chanting "Civil disorder!"

I relinquish the floor, briefly, to the old poet of the city (Alexandria) who said it so much better.

King Demetrius

"Not like a king but an actor he put on a grey cloak instead of his royal one and secretly went away" - Plutarch, **Life of Demetrius**.

*When the Macedonians deserted him
and showed they preferred Pyrrhos,
noble King Demetrius didn't behave
- so it was said -
at all like a King.
He took off his golden robes,
discarded his purple buskins,
and quickly dressing himself
in simple clothes, he slipped out -
just like an actor who,
the play over,
changes his costume and goes away.*

In the original Greek it rhymes.

I believe we can find a successful analogy here to Tournament Bridge. It often occurs, in a two session match, that a bridge pair gets off to such a bad start that they know it is useless to play the second half. Their best form cannot retrieve the losses from their early mistakes. yet they do play - it is the rarest of exceptions to find a pair dropping out - and not just because they have already paid their money. They know that they owe their opponents good competition all the way through. They realise what an annoyance it is when a pair does not show up in the evening. And they know that on those occasions when they are doing well, they can expect and depend on their opponents to be present to the end and give them a fair and honest fight.

It is not because of the fact that bridge is played face to face. With so many players, each pair is pretty much anonymous aside from the stars, and no one could point a finger at dropouts. I believe it is that the players have developed a respect for the game, and for the other players whom they have joined in competition. Sadly, there is no similar level of respect among players in Diplomacy. It does not matter that Diplomacy engenders suspicion and bitterness; there is a wealth of deception and foul play at the bridge table too. (Anyone familiar with psyche bids will know what I mean.) The IDA and GMs have discussed this problem ad nauseam, with blacklists, lockouts, and all the other big brother tommy-rot. Why can't we simply push for a higher level of respect and concern for fellow players among our diplomatic brethren?

And if moral persuasion isn't enough, I will offer this. I am playing in a game now, as England, which is currently into Fall 1905. As the year ends, I find myself reduced to two units. I have not had an ally since the fall of 1902. And in my current position, I can guarantee surviving until the end of 1907. Meanwhile, Germany has just been eliminated and Turkey will die in 1906. (Turkey is in civil disorder. NMR! NMR!) I never had more than four units, and every move since 1902 I have been attacked by at least one enemy. It takes more than luck to last that long. I credit reasonable tactics and sagacious diplomacy for my survival. And let me tell you I learned enough about tactics to write my own book and have enough left over to teach my enemies a few things.

A further example. In another game, I am Russia. in the opening move, I am attacked by Turkey, Germany and England, while Austria asks me why the hell I am in Galicia. But then England walks all over Germany and I talk Turkey into switching and going against Austria. It is now 1905 and Austria is dead; I have seven units. But this is not the point of my example. When Germany was down to one unit I wrote him and said, "Look, I have nothing against you personally. I liked your letters. Why don't you join me as my mercenary in a three-way alliance with Turkey?"

So, for the last four moves, he has done everything I said, and more, he sends me lengthy tactical summaries every turn which dovetail nicely with my diplomatic efforts. He is having a ball with his one unit, and may well find himself part of a three-way draw!

The lesson is clear. Don't go into the corner and pout when your neighbours turn against you. Hang on, fight for every province, and keep trying to play your enemies off against one another. But do it honourably. Somebody just might pick you up as a useful pawn, which is a lot better than being a dead king. As long as you stay alive, you have another season to try and bargain in. And who knows, maybe one of your enemies will miss a move, NMR! and you can pick up with his ally and wipe him out.

Even when there is no hope at all, have a little respect, no, a lot of respect for your enemies, your fellow players. You might need one of them in some other game. It is not so very hard to keep sending in moves for two or three units for a few more turns, and there is a great potential education in even a losing position. If you fight me tooth and nail until I wipe you utterly from the map, you will sure as hell have gained my respect.

[Reprinted from **Diplomacy World** Vol.1, 4. (July 1974)]



AUTUMN 1903

A Roundup of News & Zines

Up Around The Bend No.28 has finally appeared, but it is only a single sheet detailing Haz's woes. In short, Haz and Joy have split up in acrimonious circumstances and Haz is living with friends in Stoke on Trent. The immediate future of the zine does not look rosy - Haz has no word processor, no typewriter, no access to his subscription database and no money. Still the problems that the zine has pale into significance with Haz's other personal problems, including his lack of access to his son, Lee. My heart goes out to him.

I can well understand why Chris Tringham complains at length about the current hot spell in **Megalomania** No.60. I have always regarded hot places as locations that can just about be tolerated for short periods of time with the assistance of cold drinks and air conditioning, but anything approaching a heatwave is just too unpleasant for words. I simply fail to understand why anyone finds it enjoyable to cook themselves "sun bathing." Why stop at a little light grilling? Do sunbathers get into baths with the water at 65°C because they also enjoy being a little light boiling? The song "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" (or more likely women) seems apposite. When temperatures soar and most of England dons sunglasses and over-perfumed sunburn lotion, you will find me inside, in a cool room drinking beer. **Megalomania** does seem to be turning into a foodie zine, with most of Chris's WorldDipCon report concerning restaurants. Not so much "What I did on my Holidays," much more "What I ate on my Holidays." It almost reads like **Dolchstoss** (Richard is always either reporting on his last holiday or contemplating his next). If you believe his report Chris spent four days at WorldDipCon and played "a football game" and some Bridge, so presumably the rest of the time was spent eating? (unless you count "I observed various 18xx games being played"). All of this bitchiness has nothing to do with the fact that that Chris is trim and thin and I am, er.... not.

Despite the inclination to use naff clip art wherever possible, **Gallimaufry** remains one of my favourite zines, though it has been looking a trifle thin of late. I am not a great Scrabble player, but I did find Steve's piece on Best Play theory very interesting (the ideas coming from Richard Sharp, a former National Scrabble Champion) even though it has probably made me even less likely to ever want to play the game in serious company. Thinking about it Scrabble is one game I have never seen played at a Con. **Gallimaufry** No.142 also contained a SF quiz from Keith Loveys which I couldn't even dream of entering. As it happens I quite like SF in a disposable sort of way, but when you see some of the names used in the genre taken out of context and put into a quiz, it really does make you wonder about the quality of the writer's imagination. When you read "Servants of the Wankh", "Gendibal", "the DirDir" (sounds like a DOS command to me), "Hage-Ridarta", "Fiben Bolger", "Aisling Gheal" etc. etc. what sort of mental pictures are conjured up? Hmm... "Servants of the Wankh"? North Yorks Hobbymeet? Now there's a thought..

My inability to suspend disbelief becomes even more acute when you enter the world of fantasy wargaming. Rather than fight the 2nd Punic War or the Crimea War, some people now fight the war between the Krulgs of Matchet-Khazibim and the Sopphrrim of Benbaltougqz. Whereas once you heard learned discussions over the wargames table along the lines of "longbows only had a range of 120 metres" the equivalent nowadays would be "my Super Laser Gulag-X Gun has an effective range of 120.7km" - which as a statement of fact is one which it is difficult authoritatively to take issue with. The whole point about such games is to plan strategies within the limitations imposed by the game. Once such limitations disappear, the challenge of the game disappears. Whilst I could accept (say) Middle Earth wargaming, in which there is a coherent structure and ample materials to work with, once anyone can invent anything the whole thing becomes ridiculous. Ancient wargaming has been largely ruined by over-competitive players putting together ridiculously obscure armies just to maximise their effect under WRG rules ("my army is from the period 512 AD which is the only year in which super cataphract cavalry were armed with crossbows, lance and, unusually for the period, fragmentation grenades"), but freed from even the theoretical limitations of history I can't believe it can make a very good game.

A rather meaty issue of **Borealis** from Ian Harris this time, issue 21 (a Sword and Sorcery Special) running to 32 pages. The Sorcerer's Cave is well underway (now that's a game which should be reissued), there's a review of Avalon Hill's Wizard's Quest and some discussion about fantasy Diplomacy variants all of which is draped in suitable D&D attire for effect. If only the turnaround could be improved this would be one of my favourite zines; as it is it will always have a devoted, but not a mass, following. Ian has a very good sense of humour, which (unlike some e.g. mine) comes across well in print. Ian likes having discussions on game mechanics, so if that's your interest write to him at 3 Abbotside Close, Urpeth Grange, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham, DH2 1TQ.

Another baby zine to be is **Odorodle** as in issue 20 Bill Turner announces that Sandra and he are going to multiply shortly. Bill has decided to run down his games side of things, relying on Keith Lawton and Neil Kendrick to keep up the games side, not to mention the 14 pages out of 28 devoted to reviews of PC software and hardware from David Rigden. I have reservations about this sort of commitment to PC reviews - after all I usually buy glossy PC mags for that sort of thing and while it is interesting to have the view of an average punter, it isn't really the sort of thing that amateur fanzines do best. God knows what the non-computer literate readers make of it. When I say that "Bill has decided to run down his games side of things," instantly abandon in progress would be a better way of putting it - which does seem a trifle hasty as a reaction to a child not yet born. One can only assume that the players have no objections.

As Paul Norris says in introducing **Die Grosse Dampfmaschine** "Here we have a zine which is late almost to the point of Bateness." A games-only issue, notable only for Paul's suggestion that he will probably declare that he is "running down to a fold" over the next issue or two if he doesn't regain his enthusiasm. A more uncharitable person than I could observe that unless he pulls his finger out then he's in effect running down to a fold anyway.

Smodnoc No.61 is remarkable for the fact that Toby isn't more vitriolic about the treatment he received at the hands of our French cousins at ManorCon, though the cover of **Smodnoc** does in some way go to make up for that. Plenty to read, interesting con reports and lots of zine reviews, and a "What Happened Next" Diplomacy article. The fact that Toby is becoming more relaxed to publishing these days doesn't seem to have affected the zine at all (save for the fact that some of the sub-zines have gone walkies) and I would still recommend it even though Toby suggested on the telephone the other night that he would fold sooner rather than later.

I was going to introduce a **Punch**-like cartoon caption competition this issue, but I can't because Neil Duncan beat me to it in issue 19 of **The Cunning Plan**. My best (printable and non-libellous) suggestions is the guy with the cigarette in his mouth saying "well it beats woollen mittens any day" or "no you haven't got the clap, it's just that the ink has come off your copy of **Y Ddraig Gogh**." If you don't see **The Cunning Plan** then I'm afraid you'll have to use your imagination.

Ode No.158 has a cartoon on the cover which refers to the forthcoming privatisation of the Post Office as being merely rooted in dogma. As one who is intimately involved in this process I can sympathise with that point of view to some extent, though I have to say that I don't think there will be much difference from either a consumer or a employees point of view, save that in the long run junk mail and business mail may get a better deal to domestic users, though they do to some extent already. As Post Office Counters Limited closes some four post offices a week anyway, I wouldn't think that privatisation of Royal mail will change anything. Being one of the old men of the hobby, John is able to run a feature entitled "100 Issues Ago", this issue looking at No.58 from August 1984 and reprints a couple of articles from it, including one on Piggott's Laws of Fanzines. I re-read Piggott's original article from **Ethil the Frog** No.1 (second series) recently and I have to admit to feeling disappointed with the verbose and meandering prose style. That said, some 16 years after it was first published, maybe it is time for a reprint and reconsideration. I particularly enjoyed John's summary of News from