

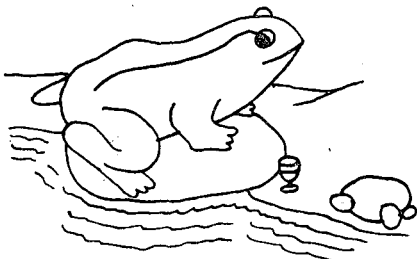
ethyl the frog

I

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY — A FANZINE
IS LIKE FERMENTING GRAPES. IT
TAKES A LONG TIME, BUT WHEN YOU
FINALLY BRING IT OUT, YOU GET
SOME MIGHTY FINE WINE!

BLEAH!
VINEGAR!





ETHIL THE FROG is published monthly or so by John Piggott, 15 Freeland Road, Ealing Common, London W5 3HR. Available for substantial contributions, trade, or 25p per copy (double for foreign airmail). This issue is being distributed gratis to nine-tenths of the known world, and is the last one that anyone will get for nothing.

ISSUE 1: 12 FEBRUARY 1977

Dedication: To the Laws of Fanzines

- 1: Good fanzines are produced for the benefit of their editors
- 2: Good fanzines contain material which cannot be obtained elsewhere

EDITORIAL

And so I sit down once again to bring you another issue of this peculiarly stereotyped fanzine, a scant thirty-five months after the last. In its previous life Ethil reached issue 46, and I trust that my decision to restart the number sequence from scratch will cause plenty of confusion among collectors; enough confusion, indeed, to serve as an Awful Warning of the sort of thing that can happen to anyone who tries to drop out of this hobby but doesn't quite make it. Ethil, I'm sure you agree, is an abject lesson to us all.

This dramatic resurrection would have happened quite a few months earlier, were it not for Glyn Palmer. When the rumour-mongering was at its height, he had the brilliant idea of bringing out a fake issue. This would surely have fooled a lot of people so, rather than spoil an excellent joke, I delayed my own publication to enable Glyn to wreak havoc among the Gentiles. Alas, the hoax never turned up, and it now seems that it never will. Glyn wrote the whole thing, I'm told, but when he gave it to Roy Taylor ('Rat' to his enemies, and he probably has no friends) for typing and duplication he was fobbed off with excuses. Finally he made one himself, and left.

Another reason for the delay is that I have been assisting Richard Sharp for the past few months in writing an Encyclopedia of Games. Crazy? I thought so, and I hope you all rush out and buy it when it finally hits the streets, because the publisher is taking quite a chance on it in my opinion, although the parts Richard wrote by himself might be worth a bob or two. Anyway, this took up a lot of my spare time, as writing for professional publication is a lot harder than dashing off a few quick sonnets for the next Bellicus. Now the mighty tome is on its last ~~leg~~ stretch, and I can devote time to writing for fun again.

You might have thought that these factors were sufficient to explain the slight delay; after all, the Encyclopedia job, if not the Hinckley Hoax, was adequately publicized throughout the hobby. But no. The list of doubters, who have denounced the revivification of Ethil as an April Fool joke, is one which any magistrate's court would be pleased to see on its charge sheet. Mick Bullock, Steve Pratt, Pete Swanson, Richard Sharp, Clive Booth and many other nerds will soon feel the weight of my retaliatory boot on their figurative backsides, although obsequious apologies occupying many pages of their next zines could well mitigate the expression of my most righteous wrath!

In contrast to this disgraceful show of disbelief, I should like to draw attention to the exemplary forbearance of Chris Rick. Chris, who has chosen as subject for his MSc thesis 'Patience in Absurdity', carried out his initial research by sending me a cheque for Ethil - in November! This makes him my number one subscriber by a hefty margin, and I applaud his ability to wait in silence as well as his evident good taste in reading matter. I just hope he thinks it's worth it after all this time.

Well, that's it then. Do I win the MP zine poll now?

The Ethilfrog Manifesto

Yes ! From the vast, Olympian heights (one flight of stairs, actually) of Flat 6, 15 Freeland Road, comes a series of Presidential decrees issued by your editor in the interests of full public debate. Readers are warned not to sign anything until they have read the small print.

Ethil the Frog will appear every four weeks, more or less, in this reduced-size format. Holidays, poker games or important TV programmes may force me to extend the intervals occasionally, but I shall always publish at least 12 issues every calendar year (except this one). I'll aim for a turnaround - deadline to doormat - of one week, though I can't absolutely guarantee it; as Goya and Picasso have demonstrated, you can't hurry a work of art.

The price will be 25p per issue, payable in advance for as many issues as you want (try to stick to multiples of £1 for large amounts, though); this will include postage inland or by surface mail overseas where appropriate. Foreigners who want to get Ethil airmail must pay 50p, I'm afraid. Postage costs are an international scandal. Notice that I'm reviving an almost-dead hobby tradition by setting a sensible all-in price for my zine and sticking to it; the modern stratagem of charging $\frac{3}{4}$ p per page plus postage plus $3\frac{3}{4}$ p surcharge when there's an R in the month is wasteful of time and, in the final analysis, quite unnecessary - I wonder how many mistakes caused by these intricate calculations have gone undetected, to the detriment of reader or publisher? For further convenience, and to tie in with the credit arrangements run by most publishers nowadays, the game fees I charge will all be multiples of this basic 25p rate.

When sending money through the post, remember that crossed cheques and postal orders are the only secure methods; they are non-negotiable and can be traced if lost. Pound notes in sealed envelopes are probably safe enough, but illegal, and there's no way of proving anything either way if one gets mislaid or stolen. To send coins in a letter is, of course, asking for trouble; unused postage stamps of $8\frac{1}{2}$ p denomination or less are infinitely preferable if you want to send small amounts.

Overseas readers should send currency notes rather than cheques drawn on foreign banks, which incur a hefty conversion fee at this end (65p five years ago, and well over a quid by now, I shouldn't wonder) - I should expect the sender to pay this fee. For small amounts, remember that International Reply Coupons are worth 10p each to me.

Enough of this sordid, but absolutely fascinating, topic. I've already mentioned one excellent hobby tradition I'll be reviving; on, now, to another. It's a funny thing, but many of the people who habitually bleat about how much better the hobby was before the advent of the NGC/Richard Sharp/Ethil/postal Kingmaker/what-have-you are assiduous in ignoring the most basic and obvious hobby tradition of all, that of rewarding contributors with free issues. It isn't so much the polite behaviour one would expect in a civilized community (although it is, of course), but sheer common sense to dangle a carrot in front of anyone who performs a favour, because it's part of human nature to expect a reward.

As no fanzine can recklessly dole out large quantities of cash to the deserving poor, sending anyone who contributes that issue free is a realistic alternative. And so anyone whose article, letter or artwork I print will receive this boon, subject to obvious limitations: if you send me a postcard which reads, 'Dear John, Can I move A(Spa)-NAF without convoy? Yours, Evan Evans, Penmaenmawr', I'll quite likely print it, along with a caustic reply - but don't expect to get anything apart from the pleasure of seeing your name noised abroad !

As well as the politeness angle, contributors' copies give a handy let-out for anyone who enjoys his regular fix of Ethil but can't raise enough cash to buy vast quantities of zines at a time. Such a person would be a schoolboy, but not anyone else in my experience: anyone in work or collecting Government handouts ought to be able to reserve five bob a month for something he enjoys, and if he can't, maybe he needs a wet-nurse. Put it in perspective: these days, 25p buys ten fags, or gets me half-way to work...!

Every so often this hobby throws up a cheapskate who tries to wriggle out of paying his share. The latest example came in a recent 1901 and all that, when a chap tried to persuade Mick Bullock to send him a copy of each issue minus the Railway Rivals page. Mick made the valid point that a fanzine is a work of art, and (in Mick's words) cannot be hacked and chopped and desecrated to satisfy anyone's petty little financial

whingings. But, that aside, how could anyone even contemplate putting Mick to a lot of extra trouble - sorting out a special copy, keeping it separate during addressing and envelope-stuffing, and so on - for the miserable saving of sixteen pee a year? I frankly am bemused at Mick's self-control.

But getting back to the point: anyone who sends me interesting stuff regularly, even if I only print (say) half of it, will be bombarded with this rag mercilessly, even if his credit rating drops right down to the level of a Healey - or below.

All this is not to say, however, that there will be no place for those who just want to sit and watch. Quite the reverse - the more paying subscribers I have, the happier I shall be. Printing costs work so that the price per copy decreases as the print run goes up; but I'll need 100 or so readers simply to break even at this size, and I hope and pray that I'll be able to expand fairly shortly. A readership of 200 will enable an average size of 28 pages, I calculate, and 300 will have me up there with Dolchstoss at 40 pages, by which time I'll come up against the problem that there's only so much typing that can be done in a weekend...

Every issue will contain plenty of 'literary' material for people to read and giggle over. This might well be related in some way to games, but there again it might not be. Examples of the sort of things I have in mind will be found elsewhere in this issue; what else I print will depend on what I'm sent by you lot, won't it?

Anyway, I need subscribers if Ethil is to succeed in this new format, so I'm sending this introductory issue to vast numbers of people throughout the hobby in order to attract readers. (I'd be grateful if editors reviewing this rag would point out that if anyone wants a copy of this issue but hasn't had one he need only write to me and ask; I'll be glad to provide a free sample). One person, as noted earlier, has already sent me some money, and I have in fact approached two others, of widely differing views and authority, for their opinions.

The reaction of Lord Lucifer was at once elegant, immediate and decisive, setting in motion a truly complex series of events which will shortly culminate (I have no doubt) in the transfer of certain funds to my account at Coutts & Co, 440 Strand... Fetlock, I regret to say, declined to emulate his better; he refused point-blank to subscribe, and I have no alternative but to use underhand methods. Fetlock, take heed: unless I receive some money from you in an instant, I shall reveal your secret identity to the world (and, by implication, yourself to public ridicule) in my next issue!

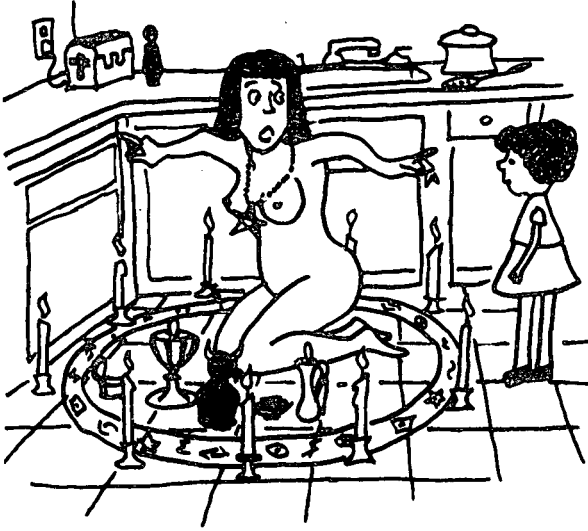
Game Openings?

Ethil is a Diplomacy zine; ergo, I shall run Diplomacy games. This reasonable statement of intent conceals my deep distrust of the so-called games zines, which open waiting lists for twenty different games, from Dungeons and Dragons right down to Solo Whist, none of which are really suited to postal play. Bah! I shall have no part in any such nonsense, and in consequence the roster of games which I could contemplate running is nice and short:

- 1) Standard Diplomacy, of which it has been said.
- 2) Diplomacy variants, of which entirely too much has been said in certain places. At present I am 'off' variants, and will run none at present; but I realize I may change my mind in the future.
- 3) Games connected with Dippy games in progress: a Bourse, or those betting competitions that Richard Sharp apparently no longer runs in Dolchstoss, are obvious examples, and there must be others which have not yet been thought of.
- 4) Guessing games which occupy little space in a zine; examples are Mastermind, Jotto, and 'Patterns' which Mick Bullock once ran in 1901...

I must say I'm wary of types 3 and 4. Although fun to play, and useful from the harassed player's viewpoint because you can easily write your orders at work in the lunch-hour, these games are very susceptible to cheating. I'm not saying that cheating is happening in any such game now in progress, mind, just that if it did take place it wouldn't be possible to stop it.

At the moment, anyway, I am opening lists for regular Diplomacy only. At present, I don't know how many games I will eventually run; at its height, the old Ethil had 13 going on at once, and I experienced no special problems in terms of workload. But every game occupies space in the zine, and I want to preserve a happy balance between game reports and material of more general interest. Positive feedback operates here, of course: extra subscribers = bigger zine = room for more games, and extra subbers =



"Not now, dear - Daddy's asked Mummy to cast a spell on Roy Taylor"

more game openings wanted. Excellent - as long as I remember not to let the whole thing get too unwieldy.

The game fee will be £1.50, which seems a sensible price, higher than most zines charge but still grotesquely small compared with its true value. Two possible objections could be made. First, if anyone wants to accuse me of profiteering, he'd be well advised to engage his brain before turning on his mouth; second, to those who feel I am trying to keep potential burnouts down to a sensible number of games, or even out of Ethil games altogether, I cheerfully plead guilty! Remember, I once was foolishly playing in fifty games myself; having been there I can speak with some authority on the subject.

In the past several months, some twenty people have asked me if they could be in my first game. I told all of them 'yes'. Er... Seriously, some may have changed their minds, and others I may have forgotten, so would everyone who wants to play please reapply! In order to cut down on pre-Spring 1901 drop-outs, who have ruined several games in the past including two I've participated in myself (BDC ? and 1901 Frog), I'm going to ask all applicants to send their game fees along with their original requests - in other words (since I see I've expressed that badly), if you don't pay up you don't get on the waiting list.

When I came to consider my position about game deposits I was in a dilemma. On the one hand, I think it's been pretty conclusively proved that deposits do act as a deterrent against casual dropouts, but against that, they're a veritable pain in the ass to administrate. So, in view of the fact that my higher-than-average fees might divert the casual types to Albatross anyway, I've decided not to levy any deposits for my first batch of games. If disasters happen, I may have to rethink.

I had much the same difficulty about standby players, except that here controversy still rages, and people whose opinions I respect are on both sides of the fence. The most often cited arguments, which may or may not be valid according to your own viewpoint, are that the interposition of a standby can unfavourably alter the alliance patterns of a game, and that if a country remains in anarchy the odds are weighted unfairly in favour of its neighbours. As usual, one can rely on Will Haven to ignore these sensible points in favour of his own betise; in this case, somewhat to my surprise, nobody seemed to notice. Anyway, in Bellicus 38 Will decided against standbys on the grounds that a game ends more quickly if you have lots of countries in anarchy. If anyone could explain that I'd be grateful!

Me, I always found while publishing the old Ethil that standbys are a nuisance to administrate - a hell of a lot worse than deposits, in fact, and I never was very keen on those. But I've also noticed that sometimes a standby player, on being asked to

replace a departing player, fails to come up with the goods ! Understandable in a way, I suppose, but it really does make the whole exercise a trifle pointless as well as being a considerable source of embarrassment to the GM. And so there will be no standby players appointed for my first batch of games, and I hope circumstances won't make me change my mind in later games.

And now I come to the most difficult problem of all: house rules. When I first started Ethil back in those days of blissful youth in 1972, and for some time after, it was standard practise for every editor to spend several pages of his first issue telling the players, at tedious and patronizing length, how they might or might not behave. But more recently attitudes seem to have changed (I must admit that I missed the first issues of several of the more recent zines, so my impressions could be erroneous); it seems that less importance attaches to house rules nowadays, and more to the actual play of the game.

In a recent Greatest Hits, Pete Birks (who really ought to know better at his age) tried to start a campaign for the standardization of house rules throughout the known cosmos, producing an eclectic synthesis, he suggested, which would give recommendations to cover all conceivable eventualities. Well, the mere mention of an eclectic synthesis sent me reeling towards Chambers, and by the time I'd found out what it meant I'd forgotten the whole thing in favour of thinking up bad jokes about eclectic lights, eclectic trains and Parliamentary by-elections. Apparently that's what everyone else did, too, as the whole thing seems to have fizzled out remarkably quickly - only Clive Booth reacted in favour, as I recall. What a stupid bloody idea, in any case - what GM worth his salt would wish to abrogate the responsibility of making his own rulings about his own games? Advice, yes; decisions, no.

Opinion is in any case unanimous among reputable GM's over simple rulebook problems, such as the legality of the Coastal Crawl, whether Spain touches North Africa, and the resolution of the convoy paradox. As for more contentious rulings, well, some players might like a bit of variety in what's allowed and what isn't.

I expect everybody has seen the catalogues of outrageous manoeuvres which Richard Sharp published in the last two issues of Dolchstoss. Duncan Morris visiting his opponent disguised as the GM, Andy Davidson burgling the GM's room (though not, alas, with striped jersey and jemmy) - these are all part and parcel of that cliché-ridden thing we call the 'fabric of Diplomacy', and I maintain that if we tried to legislate against these eventualities, or provided set methods of dealing with them, half the humour and, dammit, half the fun of playing Diplomacy would be lost. And, make no mistake, somewhere in Salisbury, Rhodesia, Morris lies in wait, ready and willing to drive a coach and horses through any anti-Morris laws; for even in the best-drafted acts there are always loopholes.

When I went to my public school in 1963 I was given a little book detailing the history of the school: its traditions, distinctions and iniquities. At the back was a page headed 'School Rules', and it went like this: 'There is only one comprehensive school rule: "Boys must at all times behave well and sensibly."' They rather spoilt the effect then, by listing a couple of bakers' dozens of specific rules interdicting whistling in the corridors, eating in the streets, wearing underpants on the playing field, and so forth; but nobody could deny the essential elegance of their original idea, could they?

And so Magdalen College School, Oxford, provides the blueprint for Ethil the Frog's house rules for the conduct of Diplomacy games. The ideal simplicity one would wish, alas, cannot be attained; the need to tell people which of several available methods I shall use to run my games still exists. But there are limits; I mean, I don't really have to put it in writing that players must get their orders to me by the deadline, and that late orders will cause NMR - do I? So here goes with Ethil house rules, 1977:

"Two-season game year; Winter builds to be ordered with Autumn moves, and may be conditional; conditional retreats to be ordered with previous season's moves; unordered retreats disbanded by GM; unordered removals taken by GM (his choice); two consecutive NMR's = anarchy; deception of the GM = instant removal from all games; GM's decision final, but mistakes can be corrected if notified at once.

Five lines ! Yet I don't think I've left anything of importance unsaid. Even if I have, I suppose anyone who isn't sure of what I'd do in a given situation could always write in and ask. Me, I prefer more interesting arguments, so this editorial stop

Review column

Let's start with a rap about the Laws of Fanzines, shall we?

Definitions, first. A fanzine is any amateur publication, be it concerned with games, SF, comics, mysteries, Cabinet committees, or all-in wrestling (fanzines about all these subjects exist). The only proviso is that it must be published for fun rather than profit, and occasionally this distinction becomes rather blurred, though so far all Dippyazines have clearly and demonstrably been published for no profit at all.

You might think that the fanzine editor (sometimes abbreviated to 'faned', though I'll try to avoid using it; it's an ugly word, like the similar 'moped' which is defined as what Birks did after he had crashed it) is free of any constraints - except that if his readers don't like what he's doing they can take their money elsewhere - but you'd be wrong. A series of subtle dictums, so subtle that many editors never realize their existence if it's not pointed out to them, guide each editor down a certain road. He explores detours or byways at his peril. The editor who seeks the Enchanted Duplicator, the best possible fanzine, has very little freedom of choice; his best paths are always predetermined.

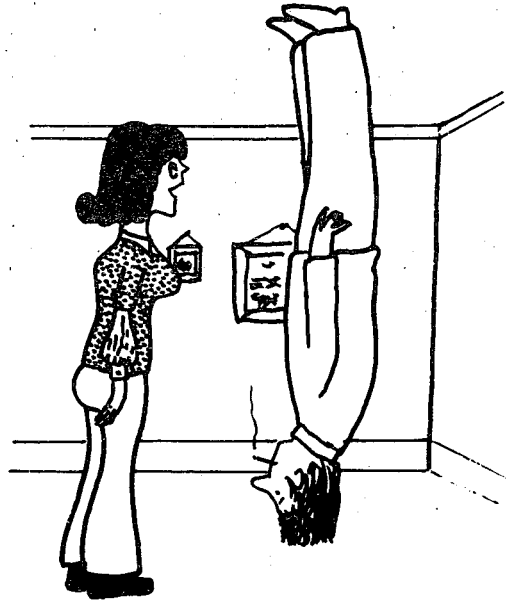
This might indicate that I'm somewhat of a fatalist, and so I am, but not in the usual sense of the word. Not for me the dismal inevitability of 'Que sera, sera'; that's anathema to any free-thinking individual. But I'm governed, as are we all, by the natural restraints we normally call 'human nature'. (Asimov had a gobble-dygook term for it: psychohistorical inertia. Human nature is what he actually meant). And though, by exerting my will, I am able to escape temporarily from these bounds if I want to, my lifeline intersects those of some thousands of other people, and all these act according to the laws of human nature - exactly according to these laws, in fact, since in a mass of people individual deviations will damp each other out.

I refer to laws, for that is indeed what they are; they are no more open to argument than any other laws of nature.

If I cause an apple to drop from my hand, I know with 100% certainty that it will fall downwards, and if my knowledge of how people work were complete enough, I could predict exactly the effect any action would have on the mass of humanity.

Politicians have an excellent grasp of some facets of human nature. They know, for instance, how easily swayed the average voter is by the lure of money; that's why taxes tend to fall and social security benefits tend to rise more in election years. Yet, for the most part (and, I may add, it's fortunate that they do) they remain as naive as the rest of us. Most politicians, for instance, persist in the delusion that you can alter peoples' attitudes by making laws. That it isn't so easy is shown by the dismal failures of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. Sometimes legislation has a completely unexpected effect: the 1974 Housing Act wasn't intended to cut down on the supply of accommodation, but anyone who knows anything about human nature could have told these politicians that the Act would have just that effect.

The classic example of this sort of thing, of course, is the American



"Richard, is this the incredible volte-face Will Haven mentioned?"

experience of Prohibition. This law was instituted as a result of the actions of a bunch of idealists who went around smashing up saloons - well, that was a big part of it, anyway. Congress thought that if they forbade the sale of alcohol people would stop wanting it, failing to realize that people valued the opportunity to get stoned and would be willing to go to considerable lengths to preserve that opportunity.

All this theoretical bullshit may seem remote from the concerns of our own little microcosm, the Diplomacy hobby, but it isn't. There are at present what? 500 or so people actively participating in this hobby, and I maintain that as a bunch they will tend to react to events in just the same way as any other random sample of humanity. In fact, what I'm pleased to call 'Piggott's Laws of Fanzines' are just specific instances of the general laws of human nature operating.

Let me confess at this point that I personally formulated neither law. I stole the first one full-grown from the maw of SF fandom, where it's been known for years among the more abstruse theorists. I introduced it here, either in an early Greatest Hits or perhaps somewhere else, a couple of years ago - and when everyone I told it to agreed what a great truth it was, I didn't see why I shouldn't take the credit for bring it to general attention.

As for the Second Law, it came to me in a blinding flash of inspiration quite recently, as I was writing a letter to Pete Swanson. Again, I can hardly claim credit for its discovery; it's been floating around SF fandom for longer than I have, although it has only now attained the status of a Law in its own right. I think it deserves that status, for it's certainly more than a corollary to the First Law.

Now, everybody knows that good laws come in threes - Motion and Robotics, to name only six. Even now, then, somewhere in the inner recesses of the collective brain of Dappydom, festers the Third Law, unknown, unloved, but awaiting only the light-bulb of inspiration for it to leap forth like a butterfly from the pupa! A consummation, I may say, devoutly to be wished.

I mentioned the Laws of Robotics a few lines ago. It was a good choice, for they are very germane to my present discussion. Readers of Asimov will recall that nearly all the robot stories depend on flaws, loopholes and misinterpretations of the Laws of Robotics which Campbell

"Why doesn't Piggott print more articles?"

"Because God only gave us a and the."



formulated for Asimov in 1941. And it's no surprise that the Laws of Fanzines are similarly open to misinterpretation and loopholes.

For instance, the First Law ('Every fanzine is produced solely for the benefit of its editor') is incomplete. As it stands, the Law shows the editor in a vacuum, producing his issues and sending them out to the readership, but otherwise ignoring them. We all know that isn't true. In fact, there are three factors impinging on the production of a good fanzine (see that magic number three again!), and they are:

1) The authority of the editor: he pays for the whole caboodle, and it is he who spends the most time on the zine. His word must be obeyed where his zine is concerned.

2) Public opinion: other editors and readers will pass judgement on a fanzine in letters and reviews. Nobody enjoys adverse criticism, and too much of it will cause a change, either by way of a dropout or a change in the fanzine's content.

3) The preferences of the readers. The editor's writings are what he wants to see in a fanzine; but what he receives from the readers for publication is what they want to read. (In this sense, you could quite justifiably say that a good fanzine is its readers). If the editor prints this stuff, the nature of the zine changes, and it can be a dangerous trap. Peter Mearns has several readers who play D&D, and by printing their contributions is encouraging this trend. Other editors, reviewing Puppet Theatre News, have commented: 'D&D, BLEAH!'

All of which goes to show that a zine

is a much, much more complex creation than we're really capable of understanding at present. We can but scratch the surface of available knowledge and construct, for instance, the sort of simplified model implicit in the previous few paragraphs.

In contrast, the Second Law ('Fanzines should contain material that cannot be obtained elsewhere') seems pretty simple. Perhaps that's just because I haven't been thinking about it for two years, but I rather suspect the First Law, dealing as it does with the problem of what makes a human being tick, will always be fairly intractable.

My basic aim with the Second Law is to launch out against imitations of G&P, of which there is an ever-present danger. I can only think of one example offhand: Owl and Weasel, which takes itself far too seriously for my taste, and seems never quite a fanzine, rather a collection of articles loosely strung together. The feeble attempts at humour which sometimes surface seem to grate rather than amuse. My point is simple: G&P pays its writers. Not a lot, 'tis true, but £10 for 1000 words is not to be sneezed at when you're writing about something you know quite well. And so, when people do write G&P-type articles (is there a decent label I could attach to these objects?) they'll send them straight to Albie Fiore at Festung Eduspiel, and he presumably will take his pick for publication under the delicate purple-pace covers of the Bedbug Island parish magazine. And we Diplomacy zine editors will be left with what G&P rejects, which for the most part will be unreadable crap.

Not that I'm claiming the sort of stuff I churn out by the million words is any better, of course (though if I couldn't do better than Richard Nash I think I'd go off and shoot myself); but my stuff is in-groupish, and it gives members of the in-group - anyone playing games by mail - something to giggle at, something they (hopefully) understand which they would never be able to read elsewhere. Take a look at 'Great Bores of Today' on page 12. I have unashamedly lifted the idea from Private Eye. I think it's just as funny as any of the originals, though no Eye reader would understand it; I doubt whether many G&P readers would understand it either. I'm sure most of the people reading this do, because they're members of the in-group that witnesses the 'war' between wargame-lovers and people (like me) to whom those little bits of cardboard are a feature of loathing. Why, dammit, I even gave the character in the

picture the clothing and hairstyle appropriate to Nicky Palmer. (And I've exaggerated his conversation only very slightly...)



Curse that three-page editorial I was going to write - while my back was turned it expanded to five! Now I've left myself insufficient room to give detailed reviews of several zines, as I had intended - it's something I've felt is needed for ages, as the only criticism - detailed criticism according to sensible criteria - currently extant in this hobby is the hideously inadequate system of 'plugs', which in some places seems to work only on a 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, otherwise piss off' system. Ludicrous.

I'd even steeled myself to review the zines I like rather than poor ones. Two reasons for this: first, it's all too easy to gain notoriety by kicking the shit out of someone, especially in a first issue; and, second, if I do make adverse comments it would be more fun for all concerned if the object of my righteous wrath could give as good as he got - after all, who the hell wants to destroy people who will destroy themselves anyway if you just leave them alone? It's just a waste of valuable insults which could be used to far greater effect against Sharp, Walkerdine or Hawes, to name but a small fraction of the available clientele.

Yet what should I see on the top of the fanzine pile but a copy of Albatross? It seems I am fated. Swanson, Bullock - you are reprimanded - for one issue!



Albatross is one of those zines which indulges itself in a veritable pullulation of subzines. This in itself is a black mark (though I don't want to explain why at the moment), but I'm only really interested in the largest of them, a bevy of burbling bleats from Richard Nash, titled 'UKDA PF'.

Where do they get these names from? I visualize this one as being invoked by a West Indian gentleman: 'Yeuk, de poof'.

From the very beginning, Humphreys and Nash have been on a Holy Crusade to attack the NGC wherever it is found. Originally this took the form of criticism of the NGC's policy with regard to the zines then

(Continued on page 15)

UNCLE PETER'S HOBBY CORNER

TISSUMENOLOGY

Not since those far-off days of early Jeyes imperforates and the rare pre-tissue newspaper squares has there been such an active interest in the field of papier-jean, or tissumenology.

Yet how many times, even recently, have you been met by a raised eyebrow and the startled cry of 'Bog paper?' when showing your albums of precious tissues to a friend or neighbour?

Now is the time to enlighten others and to gain widespread acceptance of our neglected hobby. Why not start by buying your favourite nephew a Gibbons Tissue Catalogue for his next birthday? There's the big three volume World edition, listing varieties, shades and perfumes, the double-strength omnibus issues, as well as an appendix of official and railway tissues; or the Simplified, a handy guide for the beginner. Then of course there are the ever-popular one-country pocket guides, always useful for the more energetic collector.

A few tips from me may help solve early problems. First, stick to mint tissues; used ones are often cheaper, but many are merely used-to-order and may never have seen service in their own country. Several of the Persian Gulf states have built up a nasty reputation for this unscrupulous exploitation of tissumenologists, releasing sets of triangular tissues, heavily perfumed and depicting life-size, multicoloured Old Masters in 3D. Needless to say, genuinely used examples are unlikely, if indeed possible... You may also find some difficulty in mounting and keeping a used tissue collection; note, too, the Public Health Act of 1913 (Certified Perversions and Health Hazards), para 54, line 14.

Beware of approvals. 1000 tissues for 25p may seem a bargain, but these are often duplicates or unofficial issues (the notorious tissues of Gannet Rock are totally unnecessary and entirely bogus). Even forgeries are not unknown; a recent 1948 Izal Pink (fresh pine) overprinted with 'Bronco Medicated' inverted was one of the more obvious fakes.

Don't try to save absolutely every tissue you come across: firstly, it's not hygienic, and secondly small specialized collections are of greater interest in the long run. I recently came across an amazing study of military tissues since 1939, including the rare Ministry of Defence 'bunny-soft' issue as supplied to serving Field-Marshals, and the War Department Other Ranks (coil) overprinted 'Guernsey Gaulleiter 1941' with scented swastika - a real rarity!

So here's hoping we'll be seeing lots more tissumenologists in the very near future, and that all you readers who already have the collecting bug will have a fine and fruitful time at the Easter Auctions. See you at International Tissutex '77!

As a special introductory offer, I'm presenting each lucky reader of this column with a free, and quite scarce tissue. Please notice the correct method of mounting: tissue hinges should always be used, never sellotape or fish-bone glue (many are the perfumed varieties that have been mutilated that way).

Uncle Peter

T.63. British Official Tissues: March 1957, coll, roul,
unperfumed. (Designed by Crudbinge ap Rhys ap Snurlp)

440c 'Government Property' warm grey on off-white 0.25 0.05
mint used

Great Bores
of Today. 94.

"First I moved my 13-4 Howling Commando unit into hex CZR 3947-t but my opponent pointed out rule 875.32.8 para 7 subhead 2c volume 3 in the fourth revision which specifically forbids an infantry division to move there during the thirtieth movement phase of turn 22 so I fortified Ulan Bator with two 3-8s and a dreadnought to give me five-to-one odds that's a good tactic in most games but I only threw 2 giving me D-back-2 on the CRT I knew I should have made sure by putting Sergeant Hurricane forward three hexes then my opponent rolled for the random event and got double-1 rotten cease-fire just as I was about to crush him silly game wanna go home fancy a game of blindfold simultaneous Mexican roll-your-own Panzerkrieg using the Vasey-Doubleday amendments had a Pyrrhic victory Caesarean section in this one against Andy Davidson only the other week got his Knights Templar tied in knots right from the first thunderstorm . . . "



Quick Quiz

Most zines have featured a quiz at one time or another, and I see no sense in trying to buck the trend, especially as I have gained some pleasure out of answering other peoples' questions in the past. So here's my effort. I have included questions on Tolkien and on our hobby, as well as a few posers of a more general nature. I'll give a prize of £1 cash or five issues of Ethil for the best set of answers received by Friday, 4 March.

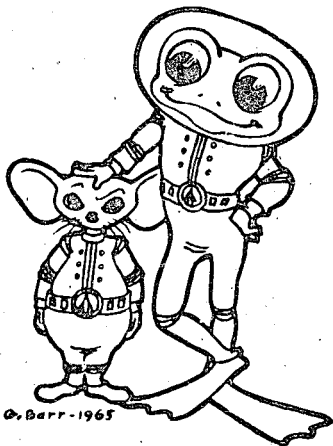
- 1) How many ScotDipCons have taken place at 15 Lineside Walk, Rhu?
- 2) In what way is John Stonehouse now assisting Diplomacy players, and what does he get out of it?
- 3) Who wrested a Silmaril from the Iron Crown of Morgoth?
- 4) If you recently bought a game called 'Othello', you're a sucker. Why?
- 5) Who published Screw Louie's First Finesse?
- 6) Name Bilbo's grandparents. (Hint: there were four of them)
- 7) Who won the first Ethil the Frog player poll?
- 8) In what way do hobbits and elves refer to the sun?
- 9) What is a diptych?
- 10) Name two professional writers whose work has featured a character named 'Spike'.
- 11) How many Diplomacy zines have been published within the hallowed precincts of Jesus College, Cambridge, and what are their names?
- 12) Who in 1976 is said to have played poker while her husband lay dying?
- 13) Where is the Rushock Bog?
- 14) Which Diplomacy variant has appeared between hard covers?
- 15) In a Diplomacy game, what is the earliest season in which the move A(StP)-Syr could take place?
- 16) What grows upon the highland of Dorthonion?
- 17) What equipment would you require if you wanted to play Leyden?
- 18) Stephen Robinett once wrote under a pseudonym. Why did he choose 'Tak Hallus'?
- 19) Who ransacked Smolensk last Sunday afternoon?
- 20) Who wrote: 'Five years ago I daresay I would have positively laughed at John Piggott's accent. Today the hobby laughs at mine.'

SCIENCE FICTION

Sharp, Booth and Dagger, turn the page instantly ! Stay tuned, the rest of you, as I intend to fill a couple of pages each issue with news and notes from the world of science fiction. I was an SF fan even before I started playing postal Diplomacy, and my contacts in science fiction are still good; I enjoy talking and writing about SF and hope most of you will find my spels interesting.

Among other things, I shall endeavour to squash the more ludicrous claims of Will Haven, who claims to be an authority on SF fandom when in fact he knows almost nothing about it. Perhaps, too, I shall incense the evil Walkerdine by telling yet again how I once ate a meal with old Mickey Moorcock and drank all the champagne...

But before we finally lose the Dick Francis fans for good, let's take a look at the Frog of the Future:



I expect many British readers will have noticed the result of the Cambridge parliamentary by-election on 2 December last, in which a new political party, the Science Fiction Looney Party, fielded its first official candidate. Philip Sargent failed by a whisker to upset the Conservative majority, receiving a mere 374 votes.

The body claiming responsibility for this strange spectacle was, of course, the Cambridge University SF Society, forty of

whose members clubbed together to raise the £150 deposit required. The aim was to get Philip Sargent into the Guinness Book of Records as the candidate gaining the least number of votes in a parliamentary election.

I feel a slight responsibility for this myself, as it happens, since it was during my term as Chairman of CUSFS that the idea of messing around with elections was first mooted. The year was 1974, and we'd just had the March election, when Heath panicked in the face of the miners and handed power to Wilson on a plate; thereafter, in quick succession, was an election for President of the Cambridge Students' Union, and a poll to elect the Bar President of Jesus College JCR. Three elections of the very utmost futility ! And so CUSFS Committee member Hugh Walker said, to no-one in particular, 'Why doesn't CUSFS put forward a candidate for the CSU election?' To our shame, nobody ignored this contempt for the democratic process as it undoubtedly deserved; instead, we all thought it a fine idea, rather a laugh in fact.

Well, a combination of apathy and exams put paid to the plot in 1974; but later, after I had left Cambridge to join the real world of sloth and social security fraud, CUSFS did indeed enter a candidate for the CSU elections. Several dozen candidates, in fact, and the ballot paper was about two feet long.

The months went by peacefully, until the 1977 by-election allowed CUSFS to become a more prominent force on the national stage. In fact, Philip Sargent's failure to achieve his object was quite spectacular; he needed less than 23 votes to beat the record, but his 374 was enough to score a genuine political point, by embarrassing the far-right National Front Party whose candidate didn't poll much better !



SHORT NOTES: Rumour has it that Larry Niven is writing a new Ringworld novel. /// The fantasy writer Thomas Burnett Swann died last year of cancer, aged 47. /// In recent years, several low-quality series

of SF novels have appeared under pseudonyms. Most are the work of prominent SF writers whose reason for desiring anonymity is all too plain. Spies are everywhere, however, and the following secret identities are generally accepted: Richard Avery (Expendables)= Edmund Cooper. Tully Zetford (Hook)= Kenneth Bulmer. Kilgore Trout (Venus on the Half Shell)= Phillip Jose Farmer. Gregory Kern (Cap Kennedy/FATE)= Ted Tubb. Alan Burt Akers (Scorpio)= Ken Bulmer again. /// The 1977 Easter SF Convention will be held at the De Vere Hotel, Coventry, scene of the successful 1975 con which I helped run. To register, send £1.50 to Dave Upton, 49a Moor St, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 3SP; the chart-topping Burlingtons, led by ex-New Worlds editor Grah Charnock, will provide boogie music for fans to stomp to - none of your anaemic Abba crap here! Roll up, roll up, see how a real convention is organized...! /// Visitors to the London bookshop 'Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed' may have noticed, for the past several months, two unsold copies of John Norman's IMAGINATIVE SEX languishing forlornly on the shelves. Now there is only one. Guess who bought it? That's right, arch bondage freak Andy Davidson, that's who. His report: 'Disappointing'.



HUGO WINNERS: I expect a lot of you know already who won Hugoes last year - even Analog has got round to printing them by now! Nevertheless, you won't have seen the full placings, and Pete Birks told me he no longer buys Analog now that it costs 70p (up to \$1.25 in the States, come April - I wonder how many more readers they may lose?) - so here goes.

The Awards, by the way, were presented at the 34th World SF Convention, held over the Labor Day weekend in Kansas City. The organizing Committee took drastic action to limit the number attending, by bumping up the registration fee at intervals as the event drew nearer. They charged \$50 at the door, so attendance was held down to a mere 2,614. Aagh...

Best Novel:

1. THE FOREVER WAR (Joe Haldeman)
2. DOORWAYS IN THE SAND (Roger Zelazny)
3. INFERNO (Niven & Pournelle)
4. THE COMPUTER CONNECTION (Bester)
5. THE STOCHASTIC MAN (Robert Silverberg)

Best Novella:

1. 'Home is the Hangman' (Roger Zelazny)
2. 'The Storms of Windhaven' (Lisa Tuttle & George R R Martin)
3. 'Arm' (Larry Niven)
4. 'The Silent Eyes of Time' (Algis Budrys)
5. 'The Custodians' (Richard Cowper)

Best Novelette:

1. 'The Borderland of Sol' (Larry Niven)
2. 'The New Atlantis' (Ursula K LeGuin)
3. 'And Seven Times Never Kill Man' (George R R Martin)
4. 'San Diego Lightfoot Sue' (Tom Reamy)
5. 'Tinker' (Jerry Pournelle)

Best Short Story:

1. 'Catch that Zeppelin' (Fritz Leiber)
2. 'Croatoan' (Harlan Ellison)
3. 'Child of All Ages' (P J Plauger)
4. 'Sail The Tide of Mourning' (R Lupoff)
5. 'Rogue Tomato' (Michael Bishop)
6. 'Doing Lennon' (Gregory Benford)

Best Dramatic Presentation:

1. 'A Boy and His Dog' (Harlan Ellison TV production)
2. 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail'!
3. 'Dark Star'
4. 'Rollerball'
5. 'The Capture'

John W Campbell Award (presented by Conde Nast for Best New Writer):

1. Tom Reamy
2. John Varley
3. Arsen Darnay
4. Joan Vinge
5. M A Foster

Awards were also given in the Pro Editor, Pro Artist and fan categories; lack of space precludes. Thanks, however, for the information go to the winner of the 'Best Fanzine' Hugo, Science Fiction Review, edited by Dick Geis. Up-to-date information on subscription costs may be obtained from William Dawson & Sons, Cannon House, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 5EE, who are Geis' British agents.

For once I have actually read all the nominees in the novel category, and can attempt some meaningful comment. I'm glad to see that the recent trend towards giving awards to the writer rather than the work (THE GODS THEMSELVES, RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, and so on) has not been continued; THE FOREVER WAR is Joe Haldeman's first novel in the SF field, though he has previously published a semi-autobiographical novel based on his experiences in Vietnam. The Bester novel, which I had expected to win on big-name power, came in fourth. In my opinion, THE COMPUTER CONNECTION (which British readers may find in their bookshops

under the title EXTRO) was one of the biggest disappointments of the 1975 SF year; turgid and unconvincing, it seemed to show that Bester has written himself out. It happened to Heinlein at the same age, with I WILL FEAR NO EVIL (Bester is 63 years old). I suspect Ben Bova bought the book for Analog unseen, on the perfectly reasonable assumption that Bester's name would help sell magazines.

Of the other nominees in the novel category, the Zelazny and Silverberg books are standard, commercial fare. Both are successful in holding the reader's interest and are well worth your time and money. INFERNO is something else again; I myself found it fascinating in its ramifications and scope, though it's by no means an easy book to read - others have pronounced it pretentious and lightweight. The title gives it away; it's an updating of Dante's INFERNO, using C S Lewis' theology rather than the more authoritarian and unmerciful Dante version, and there are several new sins - the protagonists encounter a woman who helped ban artificial sweeteners, and she's all fat; not just fat fat, but obese fat. Can you work out why? Attention is drawn also to obsolete sins which were in full swing during Dante's lifetime - simony for instance. This, in case you don't know (I didn't), is the selling of church offices in exchange for bribes. I believe Futura will publish INFERNO later this year, under their 'Orbit' imprint; I urge you to rush right out and buy it.

REVIEW COLUMN (from page 9)

under its wing, but ruthless ole Richard Sharp counterattacked, and Club policy was changed to fall in line with what the Albatross duo wanted. Ooh, what a nasty trick! Faced with the awful prospect of seeming to approve of what the Club was doing, Humphreys and Nash changed their tactics, and now each issue of Albatross contains vitriolic personal attacks upon such supporters of the NGC as may arouse their displeasure; people, in fact, like Sharp, Birks and myself.

I think someone ought to tell these two, before they get too depressed at our lack of response, that big guns don't draw on ploughboys.

The sheer inanity, onality and anality of Albatross' literary content (for, when they're not mouthing about the NGC, Nash and Humphreys just seem to burble on and on in a more or less illiterate way) might be easier to bear if the games were run

decently. They aren't. For starters, the deadlines are set much too far apart. Six weeks' delay just because of mock 'O' levels? Okay, okay, when I was 14 I took mocks seriously - but not that seriously! Other evidence gives one no confidence in Paul Humphreys' ability to GM games, either; take his letter in Bellibus 37, for instance, in which he proposes 'an end to the Spa-NAF controversy' by using barges to enable armies to cross the straits without convoy. Are my readers scratching their heads in disbelief? No dandruff over the page, please! Me, I think that if Will Haven were a kinder editor he would have declined to print that letter - but I can understand only too well why he did. Huh-huh.

Many hobby members whose judgement I sometimes respect, especially when I'm drunk, have expressed their disgust at this appalling publication by refusing to trade, or by cancelling an existing trade agreement. But I, a connoisseur of the grotesque, find Albatross rather interesting in a vaguely repellent sort of way, much as I enjoy a Volstead Gridban novel or a game of poker with Dave Allen. The sheer incompetence and ignorance of accepted standards simply commands my attention, and I think I may safely say without fear of contradiction that if someone poured Araldite over the pages I wouldn't be able to put this zine down.

To cap it all, the latest issue (no 7) features a self-adulatory puff by friend Paul about how he has exceptional powers of reasoning and logic. This unlikely story apparently stems from the remarks of an RAF officer who interviewed Paul for a flying scholarship. My conclusion from all this? One day, Flying Officer Ovens will find his sense of humour getting him into serious trouble....

ENDINGS: I'm uncomfortably aware that some games from the old Ethil are still extant. I'll be contacting GM's about this individually. A few people, mostly in the US, have a bit of cash left in the coffers; they, too, will hear from me.

Don't forget: I want articles, nice interesting letters (Ethil really has to have a letter column!), and artwork - both cartoon and serious. I'm always in need of cover designs - please send a note first, though. Free issues for anything I print, of course.

Just to avoid unpleasantness: ALL LETTERS ARE ASSUMED TO BE OK FOR PRINTING UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED. See you next month.

THE BACK PAGE

Most readers know that you can't trust newspaper reports; when they talk about nutcases such as games-players it's always rubbish, and even when they make an effort to get things right the result is usually misleading. Take, for example, the headlines which greeted the latest births figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys: 'Immigrant births rising slowly' (The Guardian, 26.1.77) and 'Decrease in births to immigrants' (The Times, 26.1.77). I'll award an OJ prize to anyone who can say which of these was correct, and why.

So I don't really know whether or not to believe the report on the front page of The Guardian, 11.2.77, about this year's British Monopoly Championships. 240 top players will, it seems, compete for the right to represent Great Britain in the World Championships - on top of a nuclear reactor at the Central Electricity Generating Board's power station at Oldbury-on-Thames, near Bristol.

How will the contestants be selected? I don't know, but judging by the remarks of Gyles Brandreth on the subject at last

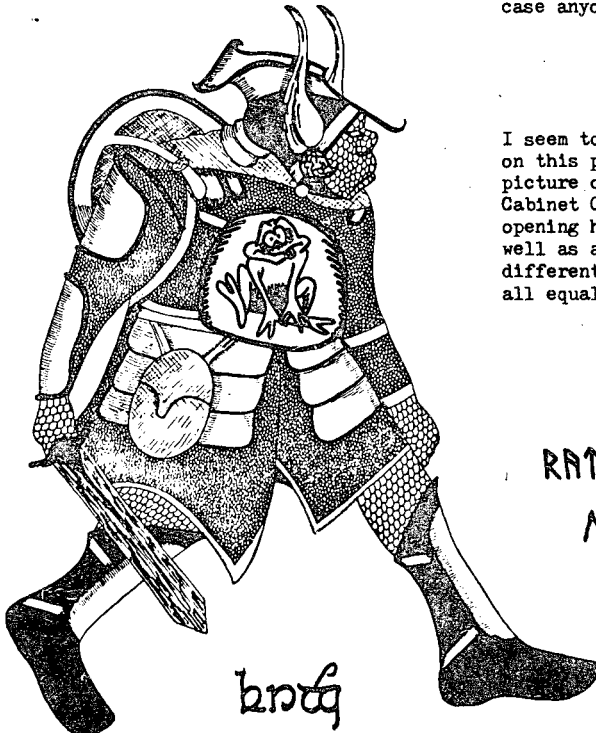
year's Scrabble finals, it may well be by invitation only. Although the sort of eccentrics you get in postal Diplomacy will do anything for notoriety, I hardly think there will be many volunteers for this event. Apparently the competitors will have to undergo decontamination procedures before and after the game, wear white coats and gloves, and film badges which fog up if the radiation level gets too high... and, most damning of all, eating and drinking and smoking will be forbidden in the playing area to prevent contamination of the players or the CEGB's equipment!

The CEGB is understandably pleased at the publicity the event is expected to engender, especially in view of current concern about nuclear safety and Energy Secretary Tony Benn's interest in public debate about the subject. The entire cost of the event will be borne by Waddington's, and presumably will include a hefty sum for insurance....

I see I've forgotten to mention the dates: the Uranium Championships will take place on September 6 and 7, with the World competition being held in Monte Carlo in October. By next issue I hope I'll be able to obtain more information, just in case anyone wants to participate.



I seem to have nothing else I want to say on this page, so I'll sign off with a picture of Glyn Palmer on his way to the Cabinet Office to complain about the opening hours of the Weaver's Arms, as well as a sagacious caption in two different languages and three alphabets, all equally incomprehensible.



RATRI·RN·MNT·J·A·ATYL

AA·9T·AF·J·NXX·PHH

4X·M·Y

hntg