

ethil the frog 8



EUROCON FOLLIES

Glyn Palmer shows the French how an Englishman behaves.

This record-breaking eighth issue of Ethil comes to you as always from John Piggott, Flat 6, 15 Freeland Road, Ealing Common, London W5 3HR. Available for substantial contributions, trade, 25p per copy, or the Invocation of Mephistopheles. Our US Agent is Conrad F von Metzke, P O Box 626, San Diego, CA 92112: rates are 11/85 surface mail, 8/85 airmail.

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DEADLINE: Friday (9 am) 16 September, 1977



Yes, I had an excellent holiday - thanks for asking. I'd have liked to give a full report on it, but to do it justice would have taken the whole of this issue and half of the next, and I don't suppose you're that keen to learn about it...

A few highlights spring to mind... like a drunken Birks falling twelve feet from the sleeping platform at five o'clock one morning - fortunately for Pete, but unfortunately for Andy Holborn, who was underneath, Pete fell on something very soft... Then there was our day trip into the Medoc peninsula, beyond Bordeaux - we were relaxing in a seafood restaurant in Pauillac when a chap with a pure Oxbridge accent (much plummier than mine!) asked me how England had done in the Third Test, and whether Boycott had scored many runs... No doubt other zines will report my consumption of frogs' legs, so I'll merely say that I thought them exquisite; which is more than can be said for the snails Peter Charlton ordered on our last night. Due to extreme drunkenness he was unable to wrinkle half of them out of their shells, and in the end he gave most of them away... Later that night (much later!) Glyn Palmer had been asleep in bed for three hours when he was aroused by the drunken catcalls of Charlton, Sharp and Wright, who together were relieving Iain Drylie of 260 centimes at Solo; "What's all this racket?" enquired the bleary-eyed, tottering Glyn, and Charlton said solicitously, "You look so tired, Glyn - you really ought to get some rest..." to the accompaniment of general mirth...

And then it was over. Up and down, up and down, boing-boing-boing-boing-boing we bounced for five hundred miles in Glyn's car (bloody French roads). We nearly managed to run out of petrol in Abbeville, but not quite; the sight of several dozen Watney's signs up the N1 to Calais made us wish we'd succeeded. On the hovercraft Glyn and I sampled the local gin and tonic; sipping our drinks as to the manner born, we tried to ignore Andy Wright, who thought there was something funny in the spectacle of our drinks spilling over as the craft pitched and tossed. And finally dry land was reached. There wasn't a Watney's house in sight, but nonetheless we knew we were in Kent. How did we know we were in Kent? 'Cos Glyn entered a roadside loo and saw the word 'wanker' scrawled on the wall....

All in all, a very successful and enjoyable holiday; full marks to Richard Sharp and the rest for thinking of the idea in the first place, then bringing it to fruition. Thanks, people.

All things considered, this issue should be appearing surprisingly quickly - and it's four pages longer than I expected it to be, as well! Nevertheless, I still have enough material for a few more pages if I had time to type them.

As a Diplomacy zine, Ethil is in a rather unique position, as less than 50% of my subscribers are actually playing in any games. I suspect only Dolchstoss has a similar proportion. Up to now, in the speed vs volume stakes, I've opted for fast turnaround; am I right to continue? I should appreciate comments, especially from players.

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COURT AND SOCIAL

When you're on holiday you tend to lose interest in the outside world. And so it was that when copies of Mad Policy arrived during Eurocon I gave mine only a cursory glance before returning to my breakfast croissant. I did notice a big sign on the front cover, saying 'Please read the editorial on page 2' - but as I dislike being ordered about I didn't read that page.

Later the same day Pete Birks came up to me. 'Piggott, I have momentous news,' he said.

'Spill it, wack,' I ordered.
'Archbishop Makarios has died.'
'Whaaaaat?!'

To say I was interested would be a gross overstatement: nevertheless I felt the need for more information. As it happened, the only thing I could find that bore any resemblance to a newspaper was the copy of Mad Policy; and I thumbed its pages anxiously, wondering whether old man Walkerdine had done for Makarios' demise what he had done a couple of issues before for the rings of the planet Uranus.

Well, he hadn't. But he had announced his intention to fold the zine - though it will run down gradually, we can only expect a few more issues, then *phut*.

Not the kind of news you want to get in the middle of your holiday, even though (it must be admitted) it wasn't unexpected.

To me, MP's best days were four years ago - about issues 15-20. Walkerdine was wild and uninhibited then, and we didn't yet know about his handsome, clean-shaven face and his perfect, white teeth. Even the zine poll was but a glint in his eye. MP was the scene of one of the best press wars the hobby has known - certainly the best one. I've played in - and a great time was had by all.

Later MP somehow lost a lot of its fire, first with the acquisition of John Morrison's Annexe subzine (which has never maintained the standard of its parent), and more recently with an embarrassingly bad SF serial by Paul Willey - I can only assume Richard didn't want to hurt Paul's feelings by rejecting it. But when I think of how much more entertaining an extra page of RJW would be in place of 'Rokkor'.... well, it makes me want to subvocalise, that's all.

Let's not forget the other hobby tasks Richard has carried out in the past: the Boardman numbers, The Finishing Touch, the

mastermind behind IDA/UK, and so on. The annual zine poll, too, is a permanent addition to the fabric of the hobby.

Richard gives as reason for his departure the fact that he's spending more of his time on interests outside Diplomacy. Fair enough, I suppose - one couldn't expect him to keep up such a high level of hobby-related activity forever. But I hope Richard will still wander around the fringes of the hobby for many years yet; for, among all the infighting and feuding that goes on, Richard is one of the few people who could find something nice to say about anybody... and would, frequently.

'Well, Alter-Ego, what do you think?'

'The Old Guard are going, Piggott, you mark my words. Bullock, Walkerdine, Pete Birks... I think we'll soon be back to the levels of inexperience we had five years ago.'

'You mean when Ethil the Frog had published more issues than the average zine?'

'Right, Piggott.'

'Who will be the next editor to fold, in your opinion?'

'Greg Hawes. There hasn't been a TotS for about three months now, and when we got drunk with him a month ago he admitted he didn't know when he would resume publishing.'

'But, Alter, didn't he say he was hard at work in a Schweppes' bottling plant for ten hours a day?'

'He found time to lose some money to us in Tony Holden's poker game, Piggott. And there's weekends as well. No, Hawes' is just thinking of excuses. You had better cancel our trade agreement with him.'

'Check, Alter.'

'Check.'

Roland Prévot was a pleasant surprise at Eurocon. He was a surprise because no-one recognised him. Richard Sharp claimed Roland had shaven off his beard (Roland has never had a beard), I claimed he used to be much plumper (he has never been plump).

Roland received several surprises for his part. One of these was beating Birks at darts; another was beating Sharp at Scrabble. But the biggest surprise of all, I suspect, was the way we English Diplomacy players talk to each other.

'What do you think of us?' he was asked.

'Well, I think everyone in the British hobby is either a stabbing rat, or a wretch.'

Those of us who have experienced this hotbed of stabbing rats and wretches at close range will know what Roland means.

But of all the wretches and stabbing rats we have known, one man stands out as the most wretched of all, the King Rat. His name, Fisher, is a byword for perfidy and chicanery, and such is his bulk (he has so many chins he's like the Chinese telephone directory) that his viciousness and treachery seem all the more shocking.

I mention Mr Fisher's volume because it has some relevance to what follows. You see, the latest scandal attached to his name is the prospect of a drinking contest - in fact, not to put too fine a point on it, he (together with such unlikely-sounding associates as Sturt and Holborn) claims he can drink Sharp and myself under the table!!

Unfortunately, the rules proposed by the ineffable Fisher offer a considerable (and totally unfair) advantage to his own side. Although The Tinamou 30's 'Pancake Roll' mentions Boozy's Law (a person's capacity for beer is directly proportional to his body size) no account is taken of this important relation - instead, a crude count of the number of pints drunk, it is proposed, will decide the winner of this contest.

I should like to challenge these wretches to a more sophisticated contest, in which Boozy's Law will be allowed for. Simply, the number of pints each person drinks in a given time (say, five hours) will be divided by the original volume of his body: the resulting fractions (which would be expressed as 'corrected pints') would be compared, and the contestant found to have drunk the most corrected pints in the time allowed would be named the winner, and would receive a valuable prize.

I guarantee that I, sipping meekly and apprehensively at a single half of Young & Co's Ordinary Bitter, would win hands down against such celebrated soaks as Fisher, Palmer and Sturt.

Is it a bet, Ron?

One possible venue for this drinking contest, of course, is MidCon, which will be over and done with before my next issue I comes out. I shall be there, usually to be seen propping up the bar with an empty glass in my hand (hint), and I hope to meet a lot of you there, too. (This is your zine, and I want to meet you... tee hee, readers).

For the benefit of new readers, MidCon will take place over the weekend of 9/11 September at Hugh Stewart Hall, Nottingham University. The rate for Bed and Breakfast

is £5 a night; to register, contact Dave Allen, the organizer, address on page 17.

One week before MidCon, I am asked to note, Stephen Andrews, 744A Lordship Lane, London N.22 (phone 889 3542) is planning to hold a FTF Diplomacy game. The date is either 3 or 4 September (write first - better still, phone). Crisps provided...

Not for me, Stephen. Me, play FTF Diplomacy? Never!!

'Hey, Piggott, you look like you've lost a crate of Glenfiddich and picked up half a can of Watney's. What's up?'

'I am apprehensive, Alter. I fear what my enemies may say about my name in their next zines.'

'What? Don't be silly. Just because a few people saw your passport, with your middle name inside?'

'They all laughed at it, Alter.'

'Madmen humour easily, Piggott. In any case, what does the Passport Office know? Just because they think your middle name is Cuthbert---'

'AAAAUGH!!'

'--that doesn't mean to say they've got it right, does it?'

'Mm, no, I s'pose not.'

'Anyway, remember all the good things that happened to you while you were on holiday. That duplicate bridge match, for instance--'

'Hey, yes, Alter! I really slaughtered that Sharp fellow, didn't I? Migod, +51 imps on a mere 16 boards and first place by a margin of 23! He'll never live it down - he fancied himself so much, as well!'

'You know, Piggott, Sharp played so badly in some of the hands I thought he'd been taking lessons from Paul Willey.'

'No, even Sharp didn't play that badly. And, after all, it was while I was partnering Richard that I bid and made that slam.'

'Yes, that was truly inspired bidding. You opened 1S, administering three smart kicks on Richard's left kneecap; he replied 3S in a silly, high-pitched whine, and then came the master stroke: your bid of 6S in a drunken, slurred voice, casually upsetting Craig Nye's drink. In the code you'd agreed, Richard knew the partnership was missing one ace but had a guarded King in that suit.'

'Yes, Alter, if I'd been a second later in upsetting that glass of wine Richard might have bid 7S, and we'd have been down.'

'Have you decided what your next step will be in the world of bridge?'

'I am giving up the game, Alter. It cannot assimilate a player of my supernal ability. What to do instead is a question which has occupied my mind greatly of late. I think I may take up Snakes and Ladders, or maybe Snap.'



Letters

STEPHEN DOCWRA I sincerely hope that this letter is not taken as condemnation of what I believe is a thoroughly enjoyable zine, albeit lately on the thin side. But I do have one complaint which I feel must be brought to your attention. This, by the way, is the first letter I have ever written to an Editor (apart from The Times) after over two years in the hobby, which shows how strongly I feel about the matter.

This morning, as is my wont, I took up my position atop the executive throne and, during the ten to fifteen minutes needed to complete my motions, perused the copy of Ethil ? which had just arrived. Page three showed that Ethil, with its most reasonable game fee, must be worth playing in. As a wealthy Capitalist Entrepreneur, I want to keep the impoverished away - unfortunates, I know, but they're a bloody menace at Diplomacy.

However, to return to my complaint: upon finishing my ritual cleansing, I reached out my left hand in a purely reflex gesture to find, to my horror, the complete absence of my executive soft toilet tissue! Can you imagine my consternation? Embarrassment forbade me from screaming down the stairs to the general office; after all, it may be all right for the Company Secretary to be caught with his trousers down at the office Christmas Party, but at 10.30 on a Thursday morning it is not the done thing. Fortunately I have always been a man of great resource, and soon pages 7, 8, 9 and 10 of Ethil had been flushed into the great unknown, no doubt soon to reappear upon the beaches of England's leading resort.

This, then, is my complaint. The paper currently being used for this famous zine has, unfortunately, reactivated my age-old problem: ITCHY PILES. I considered taking legal action against you but my solicitors have advised otherwise. But I would ask that, in compensation, you revive a service to your readers as in a previous issue. After all, even Government Izal, although of a most painful manufacture, does have its uses.

((Serves you right for perpetrating such a heinous act. Another problem associated with Ethil's shiny paper, which you seem to have glossed over, is that the ink rubs off on one's testicles; Ian Lee, Eric Willis et al may take comfort in the fact that perfectly blameless people are sometimes blackballed by Ethil..))



GLYN PALMER To preserve what remains of my reputation, I must present my version of the events which led up to Davidson's dubious and ill-deserved victory in the late Ethil 'L' game. The facts are simple: Davidson, with that mixture of lies, bluff, threats and crude bribes with which he usually lubricates his diplomacy, made me an offer I could not refuse! (His part of this squalid bargain was not, I need hardly say, fulfilled). Thus he gained the advantage over that great and good man Richard Sharp, displaying in the process a blatant cynicism, a shameless effrontery and a moral turpitude unmatched since the Borgias - an instructive, though scarcely an edifying, spectacle. But let us leave the subject of Davidson; it presents but few attractions.

((There's so little information in this paragraph that it could almost be an extract from Prime Minister's Questions in Hansard! Fortunately, I was recently able to transfix Glyn with a blistering gaze, and with tears in his eyes he admitted that Davidson had promised him concessions in another game. 'The streets of London are littered with the corpses of those who put their trust in Davidson,' I said, and, to reinforce my point, trounced the fellow at Solo. Glyn will not make the same mistake again - of that you may be sure.))

"O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" - I refer, of course, to your gibberings in the latest Ethil (on reaching which I felt obliged to hurl the organ from me, with an oath as I recall) on the subject of popular music. Of four Editors known to be addicted to this treachy rubbish two

(Stutt and Birks) have folded their zines and two (Bullock and Walkerdine) have announced their intention of doing so. Can this be the beginning of the end for the relaunched EtF? or merely a momentary aberration? In either event, let us see no more of this drivel. As for Dave Tant, who is almost a contemporary of mine, he should be damn well ashamed of himself.

I enjoyed 'Myth'... although Mr D'Amassa fails to point out that the correct procedure when under mortar fire is to: a) dig in; and b) call down artillery support, or better still, an air strike, assuming one is available, which it never bloody well is!



JOHN LEEDER Thanks for printing my letter, and for your trenchant comments on it! There are a few loose ends which I shall now try to tie up.

What exactly is your definition of 'turnaround'? My conception of it is 'deadline to post office', whereas yours seems to be 'deadline to doormat'. Is the British mail service so reliable that one can actually count on delivery to a given part of the country taking a given number of days?

I was under the impression that taking a week between deadline and publication was standard practice in Britain. It happens in North America too, but it's a deviation from the accepted standards, rather than an adherence to them. Was my impression correct?

((First-class mail between cities in the UK generally takes one day; so if I post a letter in London on Thursday afternoon it should normally be delivered on Friday morning. Most times, it is: this is a very small country, remember. Our second-class service behaves much like the American first-class service, with letters taking anything from one day to a week or more in transit. This is pretty damn stupid, of course; our two-tier system is theoretically designed to give preferential treatment to the most urgent mail at the expense of the rest, but even the Post Office no longer seriously denies that all items of mail could be delivered within 24 hours if necessary, and that most second-class stuff is deliberately delayed for no better reason than to blackmail the public into using the more expensive first-class service.

((Anyway, 'turnaround' in Britain is deadline-to-doormat. Just another example of a transatlantic language difference: on

the tube ('subway') the other day I saw a group of Americans gaping in disbelief at the signs saying 'WAY OUT' - one even took a photograph of them!

((Most British zines reach their players within one week of the deadline - that's what I ought to have said. However, I suspect that British players as a group don't get as het up as their American counterparts would if a zine occasionally has a late issue. Which is no bad thing, I may add: the impression I get of the average American Diplomacy zine would be a good cure for insomnia, but no fun to play in....))

On ego-tripping: the ideal GM/publisher is a compartmentalizer. He lets his ego run rampant while typing his non-game stuff, then suppresses it while doing the games. A GM who lets his ego interfere with his GMing creates explosive situations which end up in the laps of poor oppressed Ombudsmen. (An Ombudsman, by the way, must compartmentalize like crazy! Which is why I'm still one; I've been compartmentalizing with a maniacal fervour all my life. Would you believe that some of my closest friends have never been told about Diplomacy?))

((What excuse do you use when refusing to go bowling every Monday night of the year? I tried to keep Diplomacy a secret when I joined the Cabinet Office, but the first phone call I ever received there put a stop to that.))

On standbys: I don't believe your statement that 'most players only drop out when they're well on the way to being eliminated'. In my experience, the spoilsport who quits when he's doing badly is only one part of the dropout crowd. I'd venture to speculate that most dropouts leave the game because of factors in their personal life: changes in lifestyle, lack of time, discovery of more appealing pursuits, etc. How well such a person is doing in his games might be a factor in his quitting (for example, someone playing in a lot of games and just wanting to cut down might resign from his small positions and keep a few good ones), but as I see it the question of whether or not a given player will resign or drop out or continue playing is close enough to a true random factor and I don't think I 'exaggerate its importance' at all.

I even went so far as to do a little research! Choosing as my sample space all of the player changes in games I've GM'd to a conclusion, we find that 76 quitting players owned a total of 356 supply centres at the time of their departure. This gives an average of 4.68, whereas the average

ownership of centres is 4.86 (probably lower, since I merely divided $\frac{34}{7}$ by 7, not taking into account the early stages of the game when fewer than $\frac{34}{4}$ centres are owned). So the dropouts' centre ownership is not significantly lower than the average. (Another important factor is that I use replacement players for all positions, even one-unit ones, so that there is dropout potential in all positions. Many GM's put small positions into civil disorder, so figures taken from a cross-section of GM's would likely be higher than 4.68).

I think my figures refute your contention that most player changes are in the weaker positions. Any statisticians in the crowd might inform me if my sample space is large enough and if my conclusions are significant.

((I can think of two factors you've ignored in your analysis, John: first, you failed to consider the later stages of the game, when there are less than seven players remaining (I think you'll find that brings your average ownership of centres up to about 6 over the length of the game); second, the number of centres owned is in itself a poor indicator of how well a player is doing: a player owning, say, 5 centres could be on the way up or on the way down, and I continue to maintain that in the mind of the average potential dropout it makes a big difference which side of the fence he happens to be.))



DON TURNBULL Got E7F 7 this week and was fascinated by the research results on page 3. If I am reading it right, Courier is in fact one of the cheapest of all the Diplomacy magazines if you play the games. And that's despite paying the largest game fee,

equalled only by the money-grabbing editor of Ethil. Well, it all goes to show, as they say. I confidently expect masses of requests from potential players.

((Bet you don't get any - the sort of plugs offered in that table rarely work in the way you'd expect... Still and all, I have to admit Courier is a good zine for playing in, despite Don's occasional lapses - I can think of no other GM who would not only forget his own deadline, but admit in print to having done so!! Tee hee... ((What's your secret, Don?))

One thing, when comparing the old days with the new, is that standards of printing have improved tremendously. Some years back, Courier had relatively good presentation compared with the norm; now, still using the same method, it is well down the list. How can these rich people afford offset printing? Maybe that's why Courier is so cheap.

((Evidently you haven't seen Cormorant, AVAM, Japhidrew, et al... Courier is still well up the list! As for offset printing, Leviathan get it done on the cheap, NGC members' annual subscriptions help pay for Dolchstoss, and the editor of Ethil is a good poker player who knows Tony Holden, famed Sunday Times columnist with an expense account widely rumoured to be £20,000/year. Seriously, though, Ethil's income and expenditure balance each other to the extent that, over a period of several months, I receive as much cash as I spend. This issue will cost me about £37 to print and mail; since last deadline I've banked £24.50 and have deducted £10.50 in game fees from peoples' credit, so it's evening out... just. My accounting techniques would not impress a professional, I fear.))

Why do you print tripe that offends me-of-good-taste like that asinine letter from Ian Lee? Not worth wasting the paper. And it's no good saying that there is a moral obligation to print - you could have left it out and spared us all. Everyone knows that you, like me, are not a man of honour, so you shouldn't have felt obliged to print it at all. Since when did men of honour work for Local Government, or the Cabinet Office for that matter?

((Of course a man of honour would have declined to print the Lee letter - some things should be kept under a plain wrapper, and all that. I, being as totally without honour as one might expect, felt no such compunctions. (Actually, the real reason why I printed it was



"He fell into a category."

Ian Lee's terrifying threat to reveal the whole story in Cormorant if I didn't. I preferred my version to be the one exposed to public gaze).

((If you were hoping this issue would be free from bizarre perversions, you'll be disappointed, because later on I'm going to print a Nicky Palmer letter on the subject of Grunwick's. You can't get more perversely bizarre than that. Meanwhile, we have not yet left the invigorating subject of Master Lee, as this next letter shows....))



CLIVE BOOTH Go easy on Ian Lee. Perhaps your criticisms are valid, but new, young publishers need encouragement, not public slating. I'm not saying you should have told lies about Albatross/Cormorant and passed it off as something it wasn't, but I do think you should have tempered your comments a little. Thank God you weren't in the publishing field when I started Chimaera; for 'John Piggott' to have slated my first attempt would have destroyed me. (From your point of view, you're probably wishing you were in the publishing field then...). It's all very well for you to say that zine reviews shouldn't be taken personally, but when you're new to the game you don't see it like that.

Let me point out that I'm not one of the editors who congratulated Ian on his first issue (I don't think I was, anyway), but that's the sort of thing I would do to a new editor, just to encourage him. If there are things wrong with a zine, you can mention it in a letter, not in your zine with a circulation of 125. No, that's wrong; mention it in your zine by all means, just don't go to town to humiliate the poor editor. Once they've been around for two or three issues, and are feeling their feet a little more, then if they haven't corrected their faults you can take them to task in your zine. Anyone who has passed issue 3 is fair game, but have a little consideration before, please.

((Let's get this straight once and for all: my original comments in Ethel 6 were scathing about what Ian Lee intended to do, and I printed them mostly (I have to admit) because I had twelve lines to fill, but partly because a public pronouncement is usually more effective than a private note in a letter, and I genuinely didn't want Ian to repeat Paul Humphreys' mistakes. What happened after that was none of my doing; while opening my mail one morning I blinked my eyes for a second, and when I

looked up I found Ian Lee had contrived to tie himself to my Rack of Torture (with spikes for the Puncturing of Tender Egoes). To have refused to give the handles a few twists would have been unforgivably churlish.

((In any case, Ian had a subzine in Sauce of the Nile for some time before he took over Albatross/Cormorant, and so ought to have picked up the rudiments of zine editing months ago. He certainly shouldn't be making elementary mistakes like typing outside the frame where it says 'Do Not Type Outside This Frame' (a legend which appears on every decent stencil that's ever been made) at this stage.

((Just as a matter of interest, will someone please tell me why a person's first issue should be assumed to be substandard? Logic tells me the opposite, and that a prospective editor would normally take extraordinary care over his first few issues, on the grounds that if issue 1 is no good nobody's going to come back for a second dose; on the other hand, if an editor hits a damp patch after a good year his readers would probably stay with him in the hope that the previous standard might be resumed.

((Remember that no deadline is attached to the first issue of a zine, so the editor has as much time as he needs to produce the very best product he's capable of. That's the policy, anyway, that made my first issue a success.))

Your breakdown of zine costs: I'm getting used to seeing myself at the top of league tables now. Unfairly so in this case, but as you are obviously going to remain unmoved when I say En Garde is not a Chimaera subzine I see no point in arguing. I wonder, though, whether you counted Top o' The Pile and Who's Where as subzines of 1901aat, or Queen Victoria's Funeral as a subzine of Eclipsor? They're all distributed together for convenience's sake, so if not, why not?

Your columns 5 and 6 are incorrect as well, not only because I allow players to win my games even if they don't sub to En Garde, but also because you've failed to take into account the not inconsiderable amount players spend on posting letters to each other. I reckon you could put about another fiver onto your prices.

((You may not believe this, Clive - no, I'll rephrase that: you certainly won't believe this, Clive, but I have never regarded En Garde as a Chimaera subzine, on the grounds that if I wanted to I could get one without the other. Two things fooled me: Allan Ovens' insistence against all the odds that EG is a subzine, and my belief that nearly everyone who gets Chimaera also

takes EG. (I've since heard that the actual figure is little more than 50% of your total readership).

((Postage costs are presumably the same whichever zine you play in, so to add an arbitrary estimate of these to every entry in my comparative table would have served no useful purpose. I agree with you that players should bear these costs in mind when signing up for a game: I'd say your figure of £5 is much less than a truly active player would pay. Remember that phone bills mount up very quickly, and use of the telephone is widespread.))

Your attack on Paul Willey was a bit harsh, wasn't it? I said much the same thing in the last Chimaera, but seem to have escaped without coming in for the same sort of stick (not that I'm complaining, mind!). It seems to me that you just wanted an excuse for attacking Paul.

Okay, so perhaps it did say 'Review Column', and we should have known it was only an opinion, but as we both made the same mistake it can't have been too clear, can it? It's your pompous, god-like, 'my word is law' approach that gets everybody's backs up. Maybe I haven't been in the hobby as long as you, but that doesn't automatically make me wrong and you right. Incidentally, has Dave Allen had a word with you about the loaves and fishes for MidCon yet?

((Dave tried to charge me £30 for my room at MidCon, on the grounds that I'm Three in One.))

But a coward's trick, writing replies in the columns of one's own zine? It may be courtesy to write a letter to the editor stating your views, but what's cowardly about putting an answer in your own zine? After all, that's exactly what you've done in reply to Paul's editorial! For my own part, it is seldom that I ever feel the need to argue, and I like to keep out of debates and maintain a low profile. The only person I argue regularly with is Will Haven, and that should be enough to tell you why I've developed the habit of replying via Chimaera. Write a letter to Will, and it invariably comes out as something different by the time he's done with it. For example, I wrote to him a few months back (while he was going on about SF) and said something like 'Elves and Pixies were common in literature and folklore before SF was even thought of'. It ended up in Belliecus as a snide remark: 'Clive doesn't believe elves and pixies belong to SF', which of course is a different thing altogether. Hence, if I've anything to say to Haven I say it via

Chimaera where it means what I want it to mean. I'm afraid I may have let my attitude towards Will colour my attitude towards other editors.

((You mean you do believe elves and pixies belong to SF, Clive? (Sorry).))

((Will Haven is of course a person to be criticized at every conceivable juncture, and civilized discussion between gentlemen is always a good thing - but anyone who publicly supports the preposterous Willey is really chancing his short arm. Clive, you escaped crucifixion at my hands last issue because you didn't couch your comments in such gratuitously offensive terms as did Willey, because you failed to make puerile jokes about my name (which really do get up my nose, for some reason; I tolerate - with difficulty - the grim spectacle of Dominic Sharp, aged 7, calling me 'Piglet', but Paul Willey's supposed to have an adult mind behind that Dagoesque face of his, though you'd be forgiven for thinking otherwise), and because I typed up my attack on Willey before you had published the offending Chimaera. (Anyway, if I attacked you in print Boot would savage me, right?). I'm continually amazed that certain people accuse me of playing God just because I put my opinions forcefully - but then, if I changed what I thought at the merest drop of a hat I might as well not bother thinking in the first place. Tony Crouch, on viewing last issue's carnage, made the valid point that if I plastered 'in my opinion' over everything I wrote it would weaken my standpoints, and I hope Paul Willey's got this far - and that he's capable of reading the long words I use. Whoops, there I go again. Tsk, all that vituperation gone to waste.

((As for the cowardice bit, it's pretty obvious to anyone who reads Eclipsor (I suppose there may be one or two left) that Paul Willey didn't feel brave enough to send me a letter detailing his criticisms, because he knew I could pull his feeble, childish little argument to bits. This apart, there are obvious reasons why an argument should be confined to the zine in which it starts - in this case, Ethil. What were Eclipsor's readers to think, being presented with half an argument starting at the half-way mark? The latest Eclipsor shows signs of Havenism: but while Will jiggles about with people's letters out of honest malice, Paul Willey does it because he doesn't know any better. I sent him a reasonably polite letter which, in view of its explosive subject-matter, displayed a restraint bordering on the insane. The foolish Willey printed one sentence, out of context, witheringly describing the rest of it as 'pure vituperation'. Well,

it could have been dirty vituperation, I suppose... Anyway, what really made my eyes boggle was the way Willey described the sentence he had deigned to print: 'defence'. Is the man serious, I wonder? Good God, is he really so thick that he doesn't recognise sarcasm when he sees it? You know, I half think this is all a vast put-on, and that I'll get a postcard next week reading 'Everything worked - many thanks'.

((Aaah, I weary of this constant bad-mouthing. I tell you what, Paul - I'll undertake not to mention you in my next issue, and we'll call a truce, okay? Then you can get back to miscopying the Bridge scorecards, misnumbering the pages of your zine and making sure your Bourse takes the vital leap from only being the second worst in the hobby to the absolute worst in the hobby. Can't say fairer than that, eh?))



CHRIS RICK I wonder if what Geoff Challenger has been trying to say for year is in fact, 'I wonder how many suckers there are in postal gaming I can rip off'. I am of course referring to the recent full-page plug in Leviathan by Steve Plater (also a public leech) for Hypereconomic Diplomacy. This game received such a good plug that many people who had not heard of Polaris (?) sent money, whereupon Geoff disappeared from the public eye to resurface later in Ethil. The reason I mention this because of the debacle of the Howell Davies affair, and the furore that followed RS' mention of it in Dolchstoss. I don't know if you were in any way involved in that, to the extent of seizing credit or being owed money, but if you were no doubt Steve Plater would be grateful for you to pass on all money that you have to Geoff's name, so that he can distribute it among the various creditors.

Personally, I think both of them should be taken outside and shot, so abhorrent is their behaviour to me; however, the Challenger list of crimes seems much worse to me. Surely this is a good example in favour of bring to general notice the names of people who have committed such crimes. Surely someone who owes money in the hobby should be made to repay it all before returning. If you disagree, ask the many new members of the hobby who sent money to Geoff, and who must by now be very displeased with the whole thing. Better still, let's ask Geoff Challenger: why have you consistently disappeared with

other peoples' money in this hobby? I guarantee there will be no answer, and no money. What a rat.

((Geoff, I think this calls for a reply, don't you?

((On the subject of confiscation of people's credit to repay debts elsewhere, I disapprove entirely. I did not support Richard's call for GM's to pass Howell Davies' money to him for redistribution among the losers in his poker debacle, although I am one of those to whom Davies owes money. (This is not to say, of course, that I will not accept any of Davies' money should I manage to get my hands on it!):))



NICKY PALMER I've been reading Ethil in the lunch-hour, and my companions were most alarmed at the horror which transfigured my face as I read the dreadful carnage within: already locked in controversy with numerous opponents, you continue to holler, 'I can lick every man in the house', and provoke further conflagrations... Editors always think their readers love this sort of thing - can I put in a plea for a little more coolth? It gets a bit artificial when you start beating up everyone you're in contact with - Willey, Canham, Lee, Nash, Allen, Davies, Thorby, Mills, to name only the battered wrecks of this issue! Anyway, I expect you do it mainly to provoke letters, so herewith some provoked replies...

((Coolth?? Hmm. The tone of this first paragraph, Nicky, seems to indicate that you think you can lick me. Tsk.))

Grunwick: There are two issues here, union membership and picketing, but the protagonists are united in their desire to get us to concentrate only on the one which seems most favourable to them. I don't think many people would dispute that the Grunwick management acted with remarkable ferocity in dismissing people for joining and encouraging others to join a union; in fact, I suspect that most people assumed that this would give grounds for an action for unfair dismissal, though apparently it doesn't under the present law. Whatever one thinks of union membership, it is undeniably common: to sack people for wanting it is about as arbitrary as sacking all employees who read The Sun, on the grounds that their lustful urges will detract from their work.

Where the pro-management side is on firmer ground is in pointing to the violent incidents on the picket-line, and the