

Armistice Day



Issue 1

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig (Punch, November 1918)

ARMISTICE DAY

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ISSUE ONE

In the two years since I folded *Spring Offensive* I have been enjoying a break from the routine of zine publication, satisfying myself with the occasional foray into Diplomacy on the Internet. But web sites and e-zines are to a “real zine” what using a condom is to “real sex” (if you know what I mean). It may be more or less equivalent, but if you had a choice you’d go for the tactile option every time. Zine editing is a drug and I am not alone in being an addict. I miss the freshly copied paper, the collating, the quick fold and the enveloping, the licking of the stamps and the drive to the main Post Office in Brighton at 2.30am. I also miss the correspondence – it is so depressing when Esme gets all the real letters and I am left with the bills. In short, I want to start a new postal Diplomacy zine and this is it.

Why *Armistice Day*? Well, I wanted something on a World War I theme, something that reflected the “end of the road” (as this must truly be my last Diplomacy zine, surely), and something where the .com domain name was still available. Perhaps those who thought that I took the word “offensive” in the title of *Spring Offensive* a little too literally, may appreciate a zine title that represents the end of conflict. I did consider a few other names. My first

preference was *Journey’s End* – named after the classic play by R.C. Sherriff about the First World War (first performed in 1929). Indeed, I went to the extent of re-reading the play, something I hadn’t done since I was a teenager. It seems rather tame and slightly clichéd by modern standards, but I still enjoyed it. It’s still in print so if you fancy a bit of culture there’s a 2000 Penguin edition. Sherriff was unlucky enough to be 18 when war broke out so he fought in the trenches throughout WWI, so the play is a depiction of the war with a degree of legitimacy. I hadn’t realised that Sherriff went on to have a successful career writing screenplays for films such as *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *The Invisible Man* and *The Dambusters*, but then I tend not to notice who writes a screenplay. The reason I didn’t use *Journey’s End* was primarily because no one I mentioned it to got the WWI reference (Philistines!) and so they just thought it sounded like a retirement home. To cap it all someone else was using “journeysend” as a domain name. Other titles considered and discarded were *Mid-life Crisis* and *Spring Offensive* (been there, done that, never get to 100 now).

So what sort of a zine will this be? Well, there’s only one sort of zine that I know how to produce and you can’t teach an old dog a new trick. So I am thinking of an old-fashioned Diplomacy zine, with a touch of variants and

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hobby history, and a bit of nostalgia about entering middle age. A zine for people born in the 60's (or late 50's at a pinch). Not that youngsters wouldn't be welcome, but they would probably be too busy with their Playstation2s and Eminem and/or Bob the Builder CDs to find it appealing. Maybe a sort of *Dolchstoss* for non-bridge playing, 30/40-something liberals? I want this to be a slim and efficient zine – not a fat and slow one – so I am looking at a 16-20 page maximum. I want the zine to be fun, not a chore. Non-Diplomacy games would be cautiously welcomed if anyone else offers to GM.

What is more problematic is whether or not there is sufficient demand for a traditional Diplomacy zine these days. In the last couple of years the number of Diplomacy zines (and to an extent all postal games zines) has fallen steadily. This may well be a permanent and fatal decline, as I suspect there is a minimum number of active players needed to sustain any sort of recognisable hobby. In short, there may not even be enough demand to get this zine off the ground. I reckon I need an active circulation of about 80 to sustain the zine and keep a couple of games of Dip going to keep me nice and regular (as someone's mother probably used to say, albeit in a different context). That said, I am going to print 100 copies of this issue and mail them out to all the likely addresses I can find. It goes without saying that I will trade with anyone who will have me – which will help to maintain the Archive anyway.

ADSL

I suppose ADSL was a bit of a 40th birthday present for myself. Well, that and the new Hi-Fi in my study. Well, you've got to pamper yourself, haven't you. For those who don't know ADSL stands for "Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line" or in other words it is an Internet connection that runs about 10 x the speed of a conventional 56K modem. And much to my surprise it works too. The BT cap turned up, asked me where I wanted the sockets, spent about 30 mins installing everything – and presto! I was convinced something would go wrong, but it was surprisingly trouble free. Of course, I thought that once I had ADSL I should try and think of something to do with it. Therefore, just for the hell of it I used Napster to download MP3s of every UK No.1 Hit Single since the charts were started in 1952 up until the end of 2000. That's over 700 tracks (or approx. 68 CDs if I turned them into conventional CDs for the car). Some of the 50's singles were a bit difficult to find, though only one song defeated me – an appalling charity version of *You'll Never Walk Alone* by "The Crowd" (I had to go and buy a second-hand copy of the single myself just to complete the project).

This quest would not have been feasible over a normal 56K link, but with ADSL it was quite easy. To round it off I downloaded all Eurovision Song Contest Winners since the contest started in 1956, and spent a pleasant New Years Eve with friends playing them all (in chronological order, naturally). Everyone remember The Hurreys contest-winning *Diggi-Loo Diggi-Ley* in 1984 (Sweden) or *A Ba Ni Bi* by Izhar Cohen and the Alpha-Beta in 1978 (Israel)? I have to admit, it was the

realisation that I was spending my spare time downloading Eurovision Song Contest Winners that finally convinced me that maybe editing a zine was not such a bad use of my time after all.

The downside to ADSL is the cost - £40 a month – and the fact that you need to have a BT line to get it. For that you get a connection that you can run 24 hours a day, unmetered. I am running it on a PC using Windows 2000 with no problems at all. Unfortunately ADSL is only available within close proximity to BT exchanges – if you want to find out if you can get ADSL go to <http://64.39.11.43/release4a/availability/checker.html>.

VICTOR MELDREW? MOI?

As many of you know, I have been a supporter of the Labour party since I was a teenager, but there is one issue over which I find the Government's attitude quite despicable. Last week there was a lot of fuss over the Government predicting a measles epidemic in young children due to a reduction in the number of people letting their children have the MMR vaccination. Now everyone knows that it is very probable that the MMR vaccine is as safe as any other established vaccine (as recent studies have confirmed), but it is hard to completely ignore all the anecdotal evidence about children whose parents have been damaged by MMR, and another survey confirmed that 1 in 8 doctors think there is a link between MMR and autism. Whatever the truth, until two years ago it was possible for a parent to go to their GP and arrange to have a measles vaccination separately. However the Government has now deliberately prevented further imports of the measles vaccine from France, so that option is not available to parents in the UK (although it is in France). This is a form of blackmail. Having denied parents the right to purchase a vaccine to have their children vaccinated against measles, they now have the nerve to complain about the possibility of a measles outbreak. This is breath-taking hypocrisy. I don't normally feel much sympathy for the scare-mongering tendency, but I think the denial of choice is outrageous.

Mind you, however disenchanted I get by being patronised by this Government, it is nothing compared to how sickened I am at the capacity of William Hague to change his policies every five minutes to fit in with whatever issue happens to catch the public attention. There is a man not fit to govern if ever there was one.

Another scare-mongering topic is mobile telephone masts. Before Christmas I got a letter from a near neighbour pointing out that One-2-One had applied to put a mast on the top of a local church tower and asking for my support to write to the planning committee of the local council to voice my concern about the potential damage to my children's health. As I have a One-2-One mobile phone and given that the local reception is rubbish, I immediately wrote to the council voicing my support for the mast. I said I hoped that they wouldn't give in to the irrational fears of others (who probably get more microwave radiation from the old microwave ovens in their kitchens than they ever would from a mast at the top

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of a church spire). Fingers crossed that my reception is about to get a lot better.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS?

In polite conversation I was always told that one should avoid politics and religion. I could slag off William Hague (but that is unlikely to be controversial) and I could slag off the patronising tendencies of our current Government (although I voted for them). However, at the risk of truly offending potential subscribers from the offset, let me ask - what did you do to celebrate Christmas this year? Was it an opportunity for giving and receiving presents and other miscellaneous over-indulgences – or was it a religious holiday? I have to confess that I am not a Christian (pretty difficult to claim to be one when you don't believe in God), though I think I do exhibit a fairly conventional Judeo-Christian morality, as befits my upbringing. The degree to which the Christmas celebration is now almost complete non-religious was brought home to me by the advent calendars my children had this year – Kate's was a *Bart Simpson* calendar, while Freddie's was *Toy Story*. Neither mentioned the word "advent" at all, and one even had additional chocolates after Christmas Day to continue the countdown until New Years Eve (thus celebrating two holidays for the price of one).

Now, I don't have a problem with all this, indeed I think it is all about time that Christmas was acknowledged to have minimal religious content. Ever since I was a teenager I have been cynical about all this "Jesus Christ was born on Christmas Day" nonsense, as that is quite clearly not the case. It is well known that Dec. 25 was popularised as the date for Christmas, not because Christ was born on that day, but because it was already popular in pagan religious celebrations as the birthday of the sun. Mithra, the Persian god of light and sacred contracts, was born out of a rock on December 25. Rome was famous for its flirtations with strange gods and cults, and AD 274 the pagan emperor Aurelian established the festival of *Dies Invicti Solis* (the Day of the Invincible Sun) on December 25. Although it is difficult to determine the first time anyone celebrated 25th December as the birth of Christ, historians are in general agreement that it was sometime during the fourth century.

Indeed, it is difficult to see how it could even be possible that Jesus had been born on 25th December. Early Christian teachers had other dates in mind (Clement picked 18th November, while another document that has been dated to circ. AD 243 suggested that Jesus was born on 28th March). Rather amusingly as late as 1647 Parliament passed an Act making the celebration of Christmas a criminal act, as it was considered not to be a Christian holiday at all. The present-day popularity of Christmas dates from the mid-late Victorian period and it was promoted largely because of the commercial value of the holiday to the economy (everyone knows that the big Christian festival has always been Easter – well, since the 2nd century anyway – but that's another story). That's what makes it amusing when people denounce the commercialisation of Christmas, as it is essentially a

holiday that owes its modern form to such commercialisation.

Assuming you accept the Bible at face value, there are additional reasons why 25th December is unlikely. First, we know that shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks at the time of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:7-8). Shepherds were not in the fields during December. Luke's account suggests that Jesus may have been born in summer or early autumn. Second, Jesus' parents came to Bethlehem to register in a Roman census (Luke 2:1-4). Such censuses were not taken in winter, when temperatures often dropped below freezing and roads were in poor condition. Taking a census under such conditions would have been self-defeating.

If Jesus Christ weren't born on Dec. 25, does the Bible indicate when He was born? The biblical accounts point to the fall of the year as the most likely time of Jesus' birth, based on the conception and birth of John the Baptist. Since Elizabeth (John's mother) was in her sixth month of pregnancy when Jesus was conceived (Luke 1:24-36), we can determine the approximate time of year Jesus was born if we know when John was born. John's father, Zacharias, was a priest serving in the Jerusalem temple during the course of Abijah (Luke 1:5). Historical calculations indicate this course of service corresponded to June 13-19 in that year. It was during this time of temple service that Zacharias learned that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would soon have a child (Luke 1:8-13). After he completed his service and travelled home, Elizabeth conceived (verses 23-24). Assuming John's conception took place near the end of June, adding nine months brings us to the end of March as the most likely time for John's birth. Adding another six months (the difference in ages between John and Jesus) brings us to the end of September as the likely time of Jesus' birth.

So now you know.¹

CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Anyway, my Christmas was one of the better ones I can remember since my childhood. With Kate being six years old and Freddie just four, they are at the ideal age for Christmas, as cynicism hasn't completely set in. Freddie was even sent some of my old toy soldiers for Christmas (by my father) and he adored them – he didn't regard the fact that they were second-hand as a problem. It was quite a shock to see toy soldiers I hadn't seen for approximately 25 years – and in very good condition. On a whim I typed the manufacturer of the soldiers – "Timpco" – into an online auction site and was horrified to see these soldiers selling for a bout £5 each – and Freddie has been sent about 40 of them (and my father has many many more back home, including a whole wild west town...). I have a feeling that Freddie's present may silently "disappear" one evening...

¹ A I am phenomenally lazy, what little research I have done to back up my point of view on all the above has been confined to the Encyclopedia Britannica and <http://www.ucg.org>.

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Sadly my boxes of HO-OO Airfix soldiers I had have long since disappeared – I must have had 70-80 boxes of them. I remember devoting many hours to trying to stand them all up (as they came in a box on a spure, they inevitably weren't flat on the bottom). WWII Germans fought my commandos on the coffee table in the living room. Waterloo Highland infantry fought off French Cuirassiers, while the French Foreign Legion inevitably beat the Arabs. The Romans with detachable shields were one of my favourites and they inevitably beat the Ancient Britons in one of my battles. As well as the figures I had all manner of buildings - Roman Forts, Le Haye Saint farmhouse, German gun emplacements, pontoon bridges, tanks, etc. etc. I remember that the WWII British Infantry were called "Infantry Combat Group" and I never knew why. Occasionally in a fit of enthusiasm I even tried to paint them, but the bendy PVC plastic the figures were made of inevitably led them to shed their skins like snakes. Eventually (around the age of 12) I graduated to metal 25mm soldiers and the Airfix figures must have hit the dustbin soon after. A quick check on ebay shows that they now they go for £20-£30 a box. For a complete guide check out: <http://soli.inav.net/~edzwil/>

That got me into a spell of reminiscing about all the other toys I had as a boy which I adored. One of my favourites was a *Johnny Seven* gun – a seven-in-one weapon with a grenade launcher, armour-piercing shell, anti-tank rocket, anti-bunker missile, a tommy-gun, fired 10 bullets as a rifle and had a detachable cap pistol. I remember spending many happy hours pursuing the dog around the house, and how upset I was when I left it a little too close to the electric fire and it melted a little. Still, it was heaven (and now selling for about £200 in its original box!). Another favourite toy, whose name I cannot remember, was a secret service agent's attaché case that concealed a gun, (which could fire from within the case) and which could assemble into a sniper's rifle and a camera (which really worked). *Very Day of the Jackal*. And to think most of us are too squeamish to give children (well, let's be honest – little boys) toy guns these days. How times have changed.

So what were your favourite toys? Do you still have them? And why do people pay such ridiculous prices for a bit of childhood nostalgia?



SOME RECENT ZINES

No batch of zine reviews would be complete without a mention of our Zine Poll topping *Sprouts of Wrath*, the latest issue of which was No.46. A5 format sporting the now traditional red cover, this issue is a little thinner on the ground than other recent issues, but as Mark acknowledges, that's what happens when you try and fit another one in before Christmas. Currently running 12 (or 18 depending how you look at it) games of Diplomacy and/or variants, makes it one of the largest postal Dip zines left – even before it takes over the games from *Box Frenzy* which is now folding. Mark's trenchant wit is a little less in evidence this issue, but given his description of EuroDipCon in Paris, he probably still had a hangover. The highlight of this issue has to be Mark's collection of photographs of well-known Diplomacy personalities's stomachs. I can only thank the lord that I kept my shirt firmly tucked in my trousers when Mark was prowling around OxCon last year with his digital camera. As ever, not a zine for the squeamish. Mark Wightman, 52 Park Road West, Bedford, MK41 7SL.

<http://www.btinternet.com/~mr.sprout>

Cut & Thrust continues its inevitable progression to the momentous issue 200, only six more issue to go. Very much a formula zine, but it's a very successful formula, so who can argue with that? Dane Maslen's editorial may start a trend, being on the subject of how come we always have far more mugs in the house than we could possibly ever need. Dane has 19 mugs, while Derek Wilson has 18 mugs. These are obviously mug-amateurs. We have a round 30 mugs in this house (and it would have been 31 if Esme had not broken one last week). And of these 30 mugs, I am ashamed to admit that we have bought 29 of them (the sole exception being a *Royal Mail* mug from work). (Come to think of it, I think I'll get a "Post Office" mug from work too – before they are all replaced with "Consignia".) And yes, there are still times when I can't find a clean one. One thing which *Cut & Thrust* must be commended for is its game reviews, often contributed by Richard Ashley and Steve Thomas. If it were possible to put all the reviews that have appeared in *Cut & Thrust* over the years it would be a very comprehensive survey of board and card games over the past 20 years. A good mix of games and waiting lists open for *Railway Rivals*, *Bus Boss*, *Maneater*, *Battle*, *1841 En Garde!* and *Outpost*. Derek Wilson, 6 Calbeck Drive, Woodley, Reading, RG5 4LA.

Issue 16b of *Smiffy's Marvellous Electronic Gamezine* (aka *SMEG*) arrived recently, though I hear issue 17 is already imminent. An interesting concept this zine, as half of its subscribers get it via email, while the other half get it in a printed form (A5 booklet). Richard is running a neat multi-games zine, with a decent selection of novel games. Included with this issue (well, it was posted separately, but that's organisation in an amateur hobby for you), was a complete game called *King of the Mountains* by Bob Pitman. As Richard is developing a bit of an interest in hobby history, given the overall standard of layout is very high, and considering the sense of fun that this zine exudes, I would certainly recommend it to

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someone looking for something different. Richard Smith, 106 Bracklesham Close, Sholing, Southampton, SO19 8RX. <http://www.fp.sholing.f9.co.uk>

One zine even older than *Cut & Thrust* is John Marsden's *Ode*, now up to issue 222. Yet another A5 zine (A4 seems to be something of a rarity these days), running basically Diplomacy and RR, though with lists open for Diplomacy, Gesta Danorum, RR (4 different maps), Bus Boss, Origins of WWII, 1826 and Trawling. With John moving house there hasn't been too much non-games material recently, but *Ode* has a comprehensive UK con listing and a letter column. A *very* reliable zine and without doubt an excellent place to play Diplomacy. John Marsden, 91 Westwood Avenue, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33 9RS.

Sporting a bright green luminous cover is another A5 zine, *GAME* 42 from Nic Chilton. This issue was rather late, which might explain *GAME*'s lower showing in the Zine Poll than I expected. Nice to see a report of the Yorkshire Trophy and belated congrats to John Winkley for coming out on top. Nick Parish's sub-zine *Turbo* is a "good read" as ever, adding substance to what may have otherwise been a thin issue. Attractive layout and a varied selection of waiting lists: Dip, Breaking Away, Spekulation, Middleman, Primary Colours, Acquire. Nic Chilton, 21 Nowell Street, Harehills, Leeds, LS9 6HS. <http://www.gamezine.co.uk>

The only US zine I see at the moment is *The Abyssinian Prince*, issue 240 of which turned up the other day. An entertaining read, it is a mish-mash of Jim's email correspondence, Internet postings on diplomacy, nostalgia for the old US PBM hobby (which is declining even faster than in the UK), and a sprinkling of largely incomprehensible (to me) chat about modern music. Of course, issue 240 has a lot of comment about the US Presidential Appointment (well, you can't call it an election – can you?). Jim mentions that Rod Walker, the cornerstone of PBM Diplomacy in the US in the 70's is recovering from a heart attack – hope he keeps well. Nice to see that Pete Sullivan still has a subzine here. If you want to subscribe you can send some £ to John Harrington at 1 Churchbury Close, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 3UW. John will then arrange for a sub in \$ to be credited to your account with Jim Burgess (cost \$3 per issue airmail). Alternatively write to Jim Burgess at 664 Smith Street, Providence, RI 02908-4327, USA. Wonder how this recent buying children on the Internet is playing out in the US – now that the two children have been taken into care here it just seems like a total mess for all concerned.

Walter Luc Haas

Walter Luc Haas died on 10th January. Walter started the gaming-scene in Germany, Switzerland and Austria in the Seventies – and even managed to get his mammoth bilingual zine *Bumm* into the top ten in the UK Diplomacy Zine Poll in 1976. A great contributor to the games scene in mainland Europe, he will be remembered with affection.

LETTERS

In response to asking Toby whether he would be at ManorCon this year...

Toby Harris

To be honest I no longer have the same degree of passion about hobby gossip & politics. I dropped the postal and FtF scene nearly two years ago now and stuck to email Dip only. But now even that has waned considerably over recent months and I'm finding increasingly less time (and desire) to dedicate to the game. It all seems so "so what" to me now... like, "what's it all for?" ... just moving a couple of bits around the board and feeling proud for duping some weaker minded character. Big deal.

No offence to anyone personally but the point is that I no longer feel such an urge to spend a weekend in the company of just men (and a few women - who tend to be either attached or ugly) attempting to trick some unfortunate, socially inadequate geek out of their centres! I'm getting older (ahem) ... 33 ... and enjoying making the most of what little youth still remains. That means either getting drunk or charming (willing) ladies/girls/dogs (delete as appropriate) out of their knickers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to do both together! There ain't much chance or desire of that at ManorCon.

And then there's work. The last 18 months have seen significant changes to my job role and responsibilities. These days I work hard instead of dassing! Which means I have less time during the week and need to make the most of the weekends because they're all I have. Not to mention making time for Dean, who is now 7. Again, on the one hand there is the opportunity to go out, party and meet fresh new babes (hopefully) and on the other there's the overweight, sweaty arse-cleavages that grace ManorCon year upon year. So what's it all for? Beer? Yup, good to have a few beers but nothing different to going to a club. That said, the ManorCon disco lighting was always rather feeble. Friends? Hmmm, yes, there are some... And the trophies. Being one of 6 (of 300+) to win a prize (champagne and a cheque) at the work Christmas party felt a whole lot better than winning a plaque for duping some newbie kid into moving F(Ber)-Pru on the promise that it would be supported to StP the following season (the lack of adjacency of Pru & StP being the main point of achievement).

So although I'll not say I won't go to ManorCon, the odds are against it. Even if I am living in Birmingham at the time, which is probable. But who knows. I did pop in last year to fleece the Irish (Brian Fitzfearghal and Fearghal Fitzbrian) out of their beer money in a round of poker ☺ Guess we'll have to see.

SA: Well, it would be nice to see you, but I don't think you'll be winning any trophies for political correctness or modesty! I have already sent my money off for ManorCon – as soon as I heard that there were some en suite bathrooms, I thought I'd better get my cash in. (For ManorCon details, see the back page.)

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MORE LETTERS

Nick Parish

Well, as you know, I've always liked your zines (not to mention your ability to decide to wind up the John Colledges of this world for no good reason ☺ so I'll subscribe.

SA: Well, I will send this issue to John in the hope he'll subscribe...Thanks for joining the Dip waiting list. Only six more required. Any suggestions how I should name the games? It is fairly traditional to take a "themed" approach – I've done ancient battles and 70's pop groups in SpOff. Hmm. Kids comics? Czech castles?? Failed Internet companies???

Neil Duncan

Welcome back Stephen, but are you sure this is wise?

SA: No. But then many fun things in life aren't wise! I hope I don't regret it – but things are pretty good at the moment – the kids are a bit less work – and life seems pretty well in balance. I just need to get sufficient readers to make it worthwhile (which may well be quite hard) and get a routine established. The important thing is to get some contributions – especially letters or emails.

Chris Martin

I have never subscribed to a postal 'zine before, and I am not sure how I'll like it, but I am willing to give it a go!

SA: It's a different kind of experience. But I think it can compliment playing online, provided you appreciate the inherent differences. On the other hand, there's nothing stopping you using the Internet to communicate, even in a "postal" game. I hope you enjoy the experience.

Howard Bishop

Good to see that you're back in the editing saddle! It's been a while but I guess the bug never goes away.

Could you send me a copy of Issue 1 of Armistice Day please? I could send you the latest issue of my subzine *The Tangerine Terror* in exchange (although it's not really a fair and equitable swap. Mine's only 4 pages).

SA: Yes, I think if you are inclined to do this sort of thing, the urge never goes away. On the other hand, Esme is appalled at the idea of writing anything for pleasure and can't relate to my hobbies at all.

Tony Reeves

Hooray! The best bit of news on the zine front for ages. Please sign me up and send no.1.

SA: Sorry to hear that PimS is folding, but thanks for your support. The more SpOff "old guard" on board the better! If you're not editing a zine any more, presumably you'll have time to play a few games and write some letters for publication? ☺



LET'S PLAY DIPLOMACY

BY STEPHEN AGAR

Although I could not claim to be one of the real "old timers" on the Diplomacy scene (having played my first game in only 1976) I have been around long enough to have tried to play (and GM) Diplomacy in a variety of ways, with varied results. With the popularity of the Internet, there are now more ways of playing Diplomacy than ever before, so I am going to summarise what is out there and what I make of it all.

Putting aside face-to-face Diplomacy (which is Diplomacy as it should be played) the basic options revolve around:

- how often you want the turns to take place (realtime, daily, weekly, monthly)
- the medium you want to use for negotiations (email or postal)
- how you want to get your game results (email, web page or postal fanzine)
- who you want to GM (a human or a computer).

Let's try and break this down a bit.

THE "SNAIL MAIL" OPTION

Not everyone is on the Internet or has access to email. Even those that do, may not want to use it to play Diplomacy. The postal Diplomacy hobby dates back to 1963 in the US and 1969 in the UK. The basic mechanism is that the game of Diplomacy is run in a fanzine to which you subscribe (typically \$1.50 or £1 an issue). The fanzine appears periodically (usually 4 –weekly or monthly) and carries with it the game report. The players negotiate between issues of the fanzine (by post, telephone or email), send the orders to the GM, who adjudicates the game and prints the report in the fanzine etc. etc.

The principal disadvantages of postal Diplomacy are:

- You have to pay to receive the zine (though not very much)
- Games have several weeks between moves

On the plus side:

- The fact that players pay for the zine means that you have fewer dropouts than you get in a normal email game
- Zines have far more of a sense of community about them than any web page ever will. It is a proper amateur magazine which you can read on public transport, in the living room or in the bathroom – usually with articles and a letters column far broader than anything currently on the web. Having said that, you don't have to play in a zine to subscribe to it.
- You can still use email for negotiations with those players who have email
- Games have several weeks between moves!

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Sites to check out

<http://www.fbgames.co.uk/words/mfg/mfgtoc.htm>
<http://www.postalgames.org.uk>
<http://devel.diplom.org/Postal/>

THE HALFWAY HOUSE

This is what I intend for *Armistice Day*. Although it will be a traditional postal Diplomacy zine as outlined above, it will also carry email games in which all participants have email access. Additionally, once such games have been adjudicated, the game report will be emailed out to the players, allowing them to continue their game before they receive the zine in the post. The zine will also print the game report as normal. The pros and cons are pretty much as set out above, save that you can effectively ignore the zine from the point of actually playing the game and there is a possibility of playing the game to a faster timescale (say a move every 2 weeks) -though you need to be a subscriber to play in the first place (which will hopefully discourage dropouts).

AN INTERNET GAME USING A JUDGE

A Judge is a piece of software running on a server linked to the Internet which can be used to automatically run games of email Diplomacy. Players who use it are given a “dedication” rating which increases if you stick to deadlines and decreases if you are late or NMR. Essentially the way it works is this:

- You join a game waiting to be formed on a Judge (waiting lists can be examined)
- Once seven players have registered, the Judge assigns countries in accordance with preferences and sets the deadline
- All communications with other players are sent (and received) via the Judge
- Before the deadline you send orders to the Judge
- Once the Judge gets all the Orders in it sends out the adjudication by email etc. If not all seven sets of order are in, then there is a grace period in which the late player can submit orders – but his dedication rating is affected.

There are some advantages to this approach:

- It's free
- When everyone sends in their orders, it's quick – 48 or 72 hour deadlines are the norm.
- It is possible to configure games so only “dedicated” players may join, which can decrease the dropout rate.
- Usually judge games are no-NMR games.

On the other hand:

- You have to get the syntax *exactly* correct when dealing with the Judge – e.g. if you use the wrong format for orders or the wrong abbreviation for a province (although not ambiguous to a human) the Judge won't recognise it.
- Usually judge games are no-NMR games. That means that if someone NMRs the whole game is

frozen waiting for a standby to come into the game to take over the position. Whether you find this acceptable is a matter of taste.

- Because anyone can put their name down to play (and there is no cost) you have a higher rate of dropouts than you would normally get with a postal game.
- There is really no sense of community at all – you send emails to the Judge and all you get back is a game report.
- There are some minor differences between the way a Judge interprets the rules and what the rules actually say.
- 48 or 72 hour deadlines are the norm

Now I have to come clean and say that I have always been instinctively hostile to Judge games. In the main this is because I have grown up in a Diplomacy fanzine tradition in which the game of Diplomacy was the excuse for the zine, but not the be all and end all. Hence, just getting a bare adjudication has never appealed to me. Also, I found the various introductions to using a Judge rather off-putting. To top it all the idea of “NoNMR” games with lots of standbys joining the game didn't appeal at all. However, I hereby pledge to actually use a Judge and report back on what the experience was actually like.

Judges can also be used for “real time” games with deadlines as short as 12 minutes – though organising such a game can be difficult.

Sites to check out

<http://devel.diplom.org/Email/newbie.html>

AN INTERNET GAME USING A HUMAN GM

There are a few variations on this theme – but mostly they evolve around the simple idea that you email the orders to a GM, who will adjudicate and then send the results back to you, setting the next deadline etc. Some are run via a web page, some through some sort of “club” or mailing list, and some are just organised privately.

There are many communities and sites offering this sort of service. Two worthy of mention (and which demonstrate different approaches) are:

CAT23 – Games organised through various CAT23 mailing lists. Games usually fill quite quickly and many variants are run as well. <http://www.cat23.com>. However, each game is basically run independent of the others.

Diplomacy 2000 – Games are organised through a frequently updated web site, with a choice of 1, 2 or 3-weekly turn games. Results and maps are put on the site and results are also emailed to the players. A good sense of community for a web site and highly recommended. <http://www.dip2000.org.uk>



ARMISTICE DAY

THE GREATEST UK DIPLOMACY ZINES OF ALL TIME?

This is a repeat of an exercise I have done for some years now (originally back in *Spring Offensive* No.32) but I haven't updated it for a couple of years. This is a bit of fun and not to be taken too seriously – basically what I have done is to examine all the Top Ten Diplomacy Zine Poll results from all the Diplomacy Zine Polls (1973-2000) to produce an overall ranking. I opted for something simple and awarded points as follows: First = 20 Points; Second = 15; Third = 12; Fourth = 9; Fifth = 7; Sixth = 5; Seventh = 4; Eighth = 3; Ninth = 2; Tenth = 1. Joint positions picked up the points for two places divided between them (e.g. a Joint Fifth would get 7 + 5 = 12 points divided between the two of them = 6 points each). Since the Diplomacy Zine Poll began, 89 different zines have made it to a top ten position. Zines which are shaded means that the zine is still with us (I think).

Pos.	Zine	Score	Wins	Top Tens
1	Dolchstoß	236	5	23
2	Greatest Hits	147½	4	13
3	Mad Policy	113	1	9
4	Spring Offensive	98	3	7
5	The Cunning Plan	85	1	7
6	Chimaera	78	2	7
7	Ode	64	1	11
8	1901 and all that	63		6
9	Take That You Fiend!	61½	1	10
10	NMR!	59		7
11	Home of the Brave	54	1	6
=12	Cut & Thrust	52		10
=12	Sprouts of Wrath	52	2	3
14	Electric Monk	51	1	4
15	Zeeby	49		5
16	Realpolitik	48	1	4
17	SNOT	47½	1	5
18	Puppet Theatre News	45		5
19	Hopscotch	41	1	5
20	Fall of Eagles	40		4
21	Y Ddraig Goch	39		4
22	Ethil the Frog	35	1	2
23	NERTZ	32	1	2
=24	Denver Glont	31		5
=24	On The Game	31	1	3
26	A Little Original Sin	29		5
27	BUM	27		4
=28	Jigsaw	25		3
=28	The Acolyte	25		3
30	War & Peace	23	1	2
31	Vienna	20		3
=32	A Step Further Out	19		3
=32	Smodnoc	19		2
34	C'est Magnifique	17		4
=35	Fifth Column	14		2
=35	One Man's Rubbish	14		3
37	War Bulletin	13½		3
38	Prisoners of War	13		3
=39	Back to the Dark Ages	12		3
=39	Frigate	12		3
=39	Orion	12		1

Pos.	Zine	Score	Wins	Top Tens
=39	Thing	12		1
=43	Lemming Express	11		2
=43	The Freaky Fungus	11		2
=45	GAME	10		3
=45	Putty Riffo	10		2
=47	Arfle Barfle Gloop	9		1
=47	Die Poppel Revue	9		1
=47	Mr Gladgrind	9		1
=47	The Tinamou	9		3
=47	Trojan Horse	9		1
52	Ad Nauseam	8		2
=53	Hyperion	7		1
=53	Megalomania	7		2
=53	New Statsman	7		1
=53	Pigmy	7		1
=53	Rats live on no evil star	7		1
=58	Age of Reason	5		2
=58	Dib Dib Dib	5		2
=58	For Whom The Die Rolls	5		1
=58	Grafeti	5		1
=58	Perspiring Dreams	5		1
=58	Pyrrhic Victory	5		2
=58	Watch Your Back	5		1
65	Hannibal	4½		2
=66	Bloodstock	4		2
=66	Bumm	4		1
=66	Filibuster	4		2
=66	Ripping Yarns	4		1
=66	Scorpio	4		1
=66	The Ides of March	4		1
72	Comet	3½		1
=73	He's Dead Jim!	3		1
=73	Obsidian	3		3
=73	Our Enry	3		1
=73	Retief	3		1
=73	SFCP	3		1
=73	The Church Mouse	3		1
=73	The White Cat	3		1
=73	U-Bend	3		1
=81	Chantecler	2		1
=81	Lokasenna	2		1
=81	Mach Die Spuhl	2		1
=81	Rocinante	2		1
=81	Son of Bellicus	2		1
=86	20 Years On	1		1
=86	Court Circular	1		1
=86	Gallimaufry	1		1
=86	LiES	1		1

Editors with more than one zine in the above list include Mick Bullock (*1901 and all that* and *New Statsman*), Geoff Challenger (*Home of the Brave* and *Hyperion*), Toby Harris (*Smodnoc* and *The Freaky Fungus*), Richard Egan (*Vienna* and *LiES*), John Wilman (*Watch Your Back* and *The White Cat*) and Stephen Agar (*Pigmy* and *Spring Offensive*).



ARMISTICE DAY

ABSTRACTION II

BY FRED C. DAVIS JR.

0. All the usual rules of Diplomacy apply.

1. There are 46 supply centres, 29 home centres, 17 neutrals (see map). The Great Powers begin the game with the following units:

AUSTRIA: A(Tyrolia); A(Pecs); A(Vienna); F(Zara).

ENGLAND: F(Edinburgh); F(London); A(Liverpool); F(Plymouth).

FRANCE: F(Brest); F(Marseilles); A(Lyon); A(Paris).

GERMANY: A(Berlin); A(Dresden); F(Kiel); A(Munich).

ITALY: F(Naples); A(Rome); F(Sicily); A(Venice).

RUSSIA: A(Archangel); A(Moscow); F(Odessa); F(St. Petersburg); A(Warsaw).

TURKEY: A(Constantinople); F(Damascus); F(Sinope); A(Smyrna).

While Budapest remains the Austrian home supply centre, the army supported by that centre will initially be placed in Tyrolia.

Non-Standard Map Abbreviations: Alg = Algeria; And = Andalucia(*); ANG = Anglican Sea; Ara = Arabia; Arc = Archangel(*); ARO = Artic Ocean; AZO = Azores; BoB = Bay of Biscay; Cas = Castile(*); Cat = Catalonia; Cau = Caucasus; Cic = Cicilia; CMS = Central Med.; Cou = Courland; Cro = Croatia; CYS = Cypriot Sea; Dam = Damascus (*); DBS = Deep Blue Sea; DMS = Denmark Strait; Dre = Dresden (*); EBS = East Black Sea; Egy = Egypt(*); HBS = Hebrides Sea; Ice = Iceland; Ire = Ireland(*); Lap = Lapland; Leo = Leon; Lib = Libya; Lor = Lorraine; Lyo = Lyon(*); Mac = Macedonia; MAS = Malta Sea; Mes = Mesopotamia; Mor = Morocco(*); Obe = Oberland; Ode = Odessa(*); Pal = Palestine; Pec = Pecs(*); Per = Persia; Ply = Plymouth; RIS = Riga Sea; SAO = South Atlantic; Sar = Sardinia; Sic = Sicily(*); Sin = Sinope(*); Swa = Swabia; Tra = Transylvania; Vol = Volga; WBS = West Black Sea; Zar = Zara(*); Zur = Zurich(*).

2. The first move of the game is July 1914, and each subsequent game move will be a calendar month. The adjustment seasons will be September, December, March and June. The game automatically ends following the December 1918 adjustments.

3. A/F Rules. Move Sequence. Embarkations are adjudicated prior to simultaneous movement. Disembarkations occur during simultaneous movement and are adjudicated as being simultaneous with and independent of whatever happens to the fleet element of the A/F.

Fast Ferry. A convoy as described in the Diplomacy rulebook is limited to the crossing of a single sea space via a single fleet. To avoid confusion with A/F convoys, a regular single space convoy is referred to as a "Fast Ferry" ("FF") If a fleet attempts to FF an army, but is unable to disembark the army, then the army remains on board the fleet and an A/F is formed (see below).

Embarkation. An army may embark on to a fleet either before simultaneous movement is adjudicated and thus a legal embarkation move can never fail. If an army has embarked on a fleet and cannot disembark for whatever reason, it will remain on board the fleet as an A/F.

A/F Operations. A convoy of more than one sea space can only be undertaken by the formation of an "Army/Fleet" ("A/F") to carry the army on board. In a given move, an army may board a fleet in an adjacent sea space (thus creating an A/F), the A/F may then move to an adjacent sea space, and the army may then also disembark the army into a coastal space adjacent to the second sea space. For example, A(Lon) boards F(ENG), A/F(ENG)-MAO, A disembarks Por.

An A/F has the same combat value as a single fleet and may attack, support and be supported, but it may not FF. An A/F may support operations in coastal provinces, although it may never enter a coastal province.

Disembarkation. Disembarkation is simultaneous with other movement, thus an army may disembark from an A/F at the same time that the fleet is moving elsewhere or supporting another action. For example, A/F(TYS) disembarks A(Tun), F(TYS)-WMS. However, if disembarkation fails, then the A/F remains intact and any fleet movement (but not support) will also fail (because if it succeeded the army would be left behind to drown).

It follows that if an A/F is disembarking an army then the fleet element may use its move to support the disembarkation of the army. For example A/F(ENG) disembarks A(ENG)-Bre S by F(ENG) will displace an unsupported A(Bre).

If an A/F attempting to disembark an army attempts to move or is dislodged, then the disembarkation will be unaffected as it is considered independently of the fleet.

Exception. In order to avoid circular reasoning, there is an exception to the general rule that disembarkations are simultaneous with other movement. The disembarkation of an army from an A/F, which in turn would have had to move successfully to be in a position to disembark the army, may not have a direct or indirect effect on the success of the movement of the A/F in question, and if it does so the disembarkation will fail.

Retreats. If an A/F is forced to retreat to a coastal space, it reverts to a fleet and the army is disbanded. An army may retreat on to an adjacent fleet in a sea space and create an A/F.

Circular reasoning. In the event that any movement cannot be adjudicated due to circular reasoning, then all units will stand.

4. Direct Passage. Units may move directly between Naples and Sicily and between Andalucia and Morocco without convoy. These spaces are considered adjacent in the same way as Denmark and Sweden on the regular board.

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5. Frozen Regions. During the period January-April inclusive, the Artic Ocean, Barents Sea, Archangel, Lapland and Iceland are frozen and any fleets in these spaces must stand. Frozen fleets may not support, convoy nor be dislodged. Armies in Lapland or Archangel may not be dislodged when the spaces are frozen, though armies in Lapland or Archangel may move out of these spaces overland (though not by convoy). Russia may build either fleets or armies in Archangel in March.

6. Exchange of Supply Centres. Any two Powers may exchange ownership of supply centres at the end of any move, the only restriction being that a Power cannot exchange a supply centre if it is still occupying it with a unit. The number of supply centres exchanged by each Power must be equal.

7. Victory Criteria. Ownership of 23 supply centres is necessary for an outright victory. If no player reaches 23 supply centres by the end of December 1918, the player with the most units on the board is the victor.

"WHICH COUNTRY HAS THE BEST DEFENSIVE POSITION IN THE BOARD GAME DIPLOMACY?"

Doug Massey

Here's an interesting exchange I had with someone I've never met:

First, her original email:

"Hi, I was on a Diplomacy website and saw that you were the e-mail guy, so I thought I'd ask you a question. Now, I know this sounds dumb, but at here at work we have a question of the day and if we know the answer we get popcorn (dumb, I know). Today's question is something like "Which country has the best defensive position in the board game Diplomacy?" So I have been looking all over the web for the answer because I have never even heard of this game."

"So if you could answer the question, I would appreciate it. I am dying for popcorn! If you don't get this message today, that's OK. I just thought I would try. Thanks."

Now, my reply:

"It's not a black-and-white issue -- it's kind of like asking who the best football team is, but without a Super Bowl to actually decide it. However, I'd guess the answer is Turkey. Let me know if that's the right answer!"

Then, her response:

"Sorry, but the 'correct' answer is England. I asked the lady how she came up with the answer (I told her that Super Bowl stuff) and she said she got the answer from Trivial Pursuit. Hmm. My friend took a stab at it and got it right, so in the end, I did get some popcorn. But thanks for responding!"

I've played Trivial Pursuit but don't remember ever getting this question. I'm glad though -- I can just imagine that my girlfriend reads me the question and says "That's not fair -- how can you get a DIPLOMACY question?"

And then I get it wrong. She would laugh for a week.

An interesting question -- and one that I would instinctively answer as either England or Turkey -- though, like Doug, I wouldn't be sure which to go for. One way to answer the question would be to just stick to

the topography of the regular Diplomacy board and consider the relative closeness of other Powers home centres. You get the following:

Those who have read my articles on balancing variant maps will know that I measure the best defensive position as the Power with the least vulnerable supply centres - in practice those with home centres the furthest from everyone else's home centres. If you examine the board closely you will find that the number of enemy SC's within 1-4 spaces of each Powers home SC's is the following:

	1 Space	2 Spaces	3 Spaces
Austria	1	4	5
England	0	1	3
France	0	3	4
Germany	0	5	7
Italy	1	4	4
Russia	0	6	4
Turkey	0	1	4

If you then apply a simple scoring mechanism of say 4 points for a hostile SC 1 space away, 3 points for one 2 spaces away, 2 points for one 3 spaces away and 1 point for one 4 spaces away, then you get the following scores:

Vulnerability Points

E = 5 points
T = 6 points
F = 10 points
I = 15 points
R = 16 points
A = 16 points
G = 17 points

So A/G/R/I have roughly comparable poor defensive positions, France is in the middle and Turkey and England have the best defensive positions (with England slightly ahead).

From my point of view it is quite a relief that the method I use to balance variants seems to bear out my gut instincts with regards to the strength of a defensive position - i.e. England and Turkey best, France better than the others. It also bears out the observation that E/F/T have corner positions while R/I/A/G are all middle-board powers to all intents and purposes.

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BLOOD & IRON

BY TOM SWIDER

Blood & Iron is a five player Diplomacy variant based on the Bismarck era. The game was designed to be playable in one evening.

1. The rules of the latest version of Diplomacy are in effect unless otherwise stated.

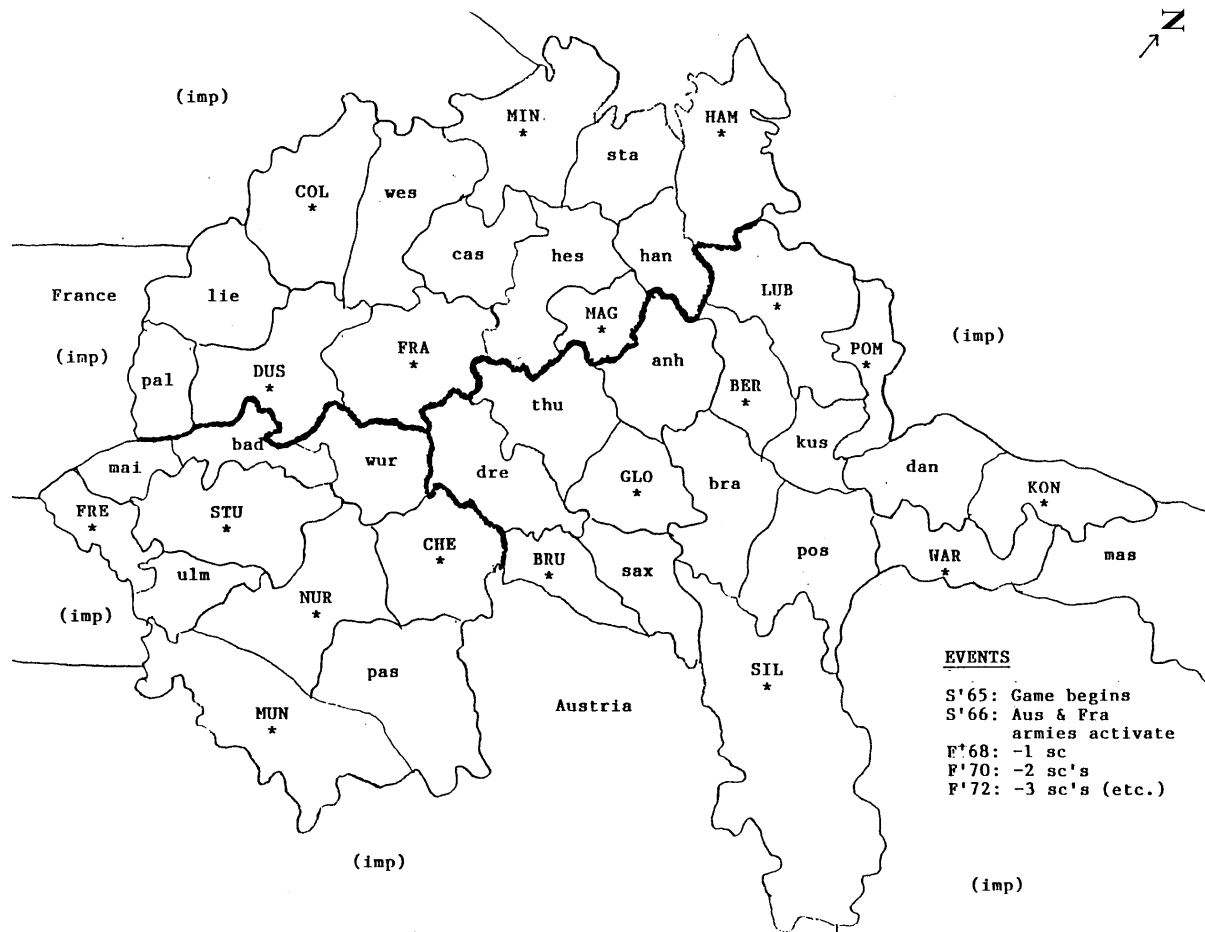
2. Setup: Each of the five players receive an army determined at random in each of the three start areas separated by thicker lines on the map: Prussia (includes Berlin), Bavaria (includes Munich) and Saxony (includes Hamburg). Players should create a fictitious name which will serve to identify the name of their country. The game begins with the year 1865, with turns progressing in a traditional Spring-rail-Winter fashion.

3. Starting in Spring 1866, Austria and France enter the scenario in the form of a double army placed in their respective home countries. The home countries may never be entered by a unit; they serve only as a starting location for the two major powers. Each player writes an order for those pieces and one is chosen at random. In fall turns, the foreign armies must be legally ordered to attack a supply centre. Should the chosen set of orders send the army to a non-sc, discard that order and draw again. If nobody

legally ordered the unit, it attacks the province which occurs first alphabetically. If a foreign army fails to occupy a supply centre at the end of a fall turn it is removed from play. Austria and France never build.

4. Starting in 1868 and every even game year afterwards, the Diplomacy rule is applied to net sc count. The number of units a player has on the board is adjusted to be one less than the number of Supply Centres controlled by each country. Two winters afterwards this becomes two less, and so on. Victory is control of 10 SC's (or sole survivor). E.g. You have six centres and it is W'67. If you gain one centre in 1868, you would control 7 ACTUAL centres - 1 (for the W'68 rules adjustment) = 6 net The one centre gained was needed *just* to stay even. If you stayed at 6 SC, you would be -1 sc.

5. This game is only played with armies. No fleets may be build. Build new units in any owned vacant centre. Use three letter abbreviations when writing orders. The full names of each province is as follows (supply centres underlined): Anhalt; Baden; Berlin; Brandenburg; Brunn; Cassel; Chemnitz; Cologne; Danzig; Dresden; Dusseldorf; Frankfurt; Freiburg; Glogau; Hamburg; Hanover; Hesse; Konnigsberg; Kustrin; Leige; Lubeck; Magdeburg; Mainz; Masovia; Minden; Munich; Nuremburg; Palitinate; Passau; Pommeranla; Posen; Saxony; Sliesia; Stade; Stuttgart; Thuringa; Uim; Warsaw; Wessel; Wurzburg;



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BACK PAGE

FORTHCOMING UK CONS

OxCon 2001

OxCon 2001 will be held in the Arco Building, Keble College on 10-11 Feb 2001. Doors open at 10am each day with tournaments starting at 11. The format is similar to previous years with the Saturday featuring the ninth Oxford Diplomacy Championships. The Sunday will have the Oxford Settlers championship. There will be a 15-1 style quiz on the Saturday evening and for the first time there will be a Lost Cities tournament on the Sunday evening. Games Web will also be bringing a stall and will be offering games at 10% off normal prices for con attendees. Let me know if you have any advance orders.

Entry fee to the Con is £1 plus £3 to enter the dip tournament, £2 to enter the settlers or £5 all in. Students are half price. Directions to Keble college are available on request (and is available on the website) as is a list of suitable accommodation. Keble is within easy reach of the city centre and train station. Those driving to Oxford are recommended to use the 'park and ride' service to reach the venue. For further information contact either James or Declan at the addressees above or visit the website: <http://come.to/oxcon>

MasterCon North

MasterCon North will be held on Friday 2nd- Sunday 4th March 2001 (hosting the 2001 UK Masters Diplomacy Championship) at The Danum Hotel, High Street, DONCASTER. To register write to [Shaun Derrick](mailto:Shaun.Derrick@mastercon.org.uk), 313 Woodway Lane, Walsgrave, Coventry CV2 2AP and enclose £8.00 per person payable in advance or £10 on the door. Free to overseas residents. Please make cheques payable to "S. Derrick" For details see <http://www.mastercon.org.uk>

BayCon

Baycon 2001 will be held at the Comfort Inn, Kennford, Near Exeter from 1.00pm Thursday 19th April to 3.00pm Sunday 22nd April 2001 (the weekend after Easter). Bed & Breakfast accommodation will cost £25 per person per night in a shared room or £38.50 per night in a single room. There is a convention fee of £12.50 per person, which is payable in advance (£6 for children under 16; children under 5 free). Accommodation should be paid for at the hotel on departure. Hotel accommodation must be confirmed at least 6 weeks in advance (by Thursday 8th March) to guarantee a room. Currently we have booked the whole hotel but we will have to release any rooms that are not filled after the six week deadline. Send your requirements and registration fee to Rob Chapman, PO Box 98, Paignton, Devon TQ3 2YJ (cheques payable to Baycon), or email: rob@downbeat.demon.co.uk for more details or information.

WAITING LISTS

4 Week Deadlines

Regular Diplomacy: GM: Stephen Agar. Nick Parish, 6 needed. Apply to me with country preference.

Gunboat Diplomacy: GM: Stephen Agar. One on list, six needed. Apply to me with country preference.

Abstraction (Rules inside): GM: Stephen Agar. Chris Martin. 6 needed. Rules inside. All players receive zine free while they are still in the game.

2 Week Deadlines

Regular Diplomacy: GM: Stephen Agar. Apply to me with country preference.

Blood & Iron (Rules inside): GM: Dylan O'Donnell. Email game. 5 players wanted.

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FRIDAY 24TH FEBRUARY 2001

Playlist for this issue (God some of this is so embarrassing)

Beth Orton- Trailer Park; Manic Street Preachers – This Is My Truth Tell Me Yours; Jethro Tull – Thick As A Brick; Don McLean – American Pie; Roy Wood & Wizzard – Main Street; Pink Floyd – Animals; Judge Smith – Curly's Airships;

**A Diplomacy zine from Stephen Agar, 47 Preston Drove, BRIGHTON, BN1 6LA.
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