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DEADLINE

**SATURDAY
25th SEPT.**

SPRING

OFFENSIVE



A postal Diplomacy zine which aims to be four-weekly, from Stephen Agar, 79 Florence Road, Brighton, BN1 6DL. 0273-562430. Cost 90p (UK) (60p unwaged), £1 (Overseas).

EDITORIAL

To my utter amazement, not only did *Spring Offensive* muster a Diplomacy team, but thanks to the efforts of Messrs. we managed to acquit ourselves very well indeed, coming 3rd out of the 14 teams taking part. The full results of the ManorCon team competition were:

1st	Mad Policy	274.4	<i>Spring Offensive I</i> team results:		
2nd	Age of Reason I	262.6	James Hardy	A	10sc draw 1909
3rd	Spring Offensive I	258.8	Stewart Cross	E	elim. 1904
4th	Smodnoc "H"	239.5	Peter Berlin	F	12sc draw 1908
5th	B.U.D.S. "A"	238.7	Sean Weir	G	5sc draw 1906
6th	Smodnoc "L"	228.4	Steve Cox	I	7sc draw 1906
7th	Age of Reason II	227.7	Conor Kostick	R	9sc draw 1905
8th	Trojan Horse	204.1	Graham Staplehurst	T	11sc draw 1908
9th	Age of Reason III	189.5	I know it appears that a <i>Spring Offensive</i> team came last, but in fact that was the evil <i>Liverpool</i> team playing under a pseudonym.		
10th	Ode	182.7			
11th	The Laughing Roundhead	182.6			
12th	The Barbarians	164.1			
13th	Oxford	156.5			
14th	"Spring Offensive III"	125.3			

I think it would be nice if we can keep the same team for next year, though maybe we should put two teams together just so I can relegate poor Stewart (who has yet to pass 1904 in a FtF game of Diplomacy...).

This issue has an 1880's theme to it. I was originally going to print Fred Davis's *1885-III*, but as the rules for Paul Barker's new variant dropped on to the mat today, I have dusted off my trusty scanner to put it into this issue. Maps are enclosed separately. If there is any interest I will try and persuade Paul to GM a game. Any takers?

There was a meeting at ManorCon on hobby recruitment and similar issues, which resolved nothing on interest, generating much hot air and little else. This piffing about really is not good enough. I have confined some new proposals to a mere half page inside and Iain Bowen and I would like this to be considered a firm proposal for discussion (and implementation) from MidCon onwards. Will those who can be bothered to address their minds to this brain-numbing topic please let me (or Iain) have their comments. No doubt Danny will have something to say on this issue.

The observant among you will notice that this is a 7 week deadline - to allow for the August Bank Holiday and the fact that I and probably many of you are going on holidays over the next few weeks. What a generous soul I am!

ANOTHER QUICK FUMBLE

Smodnoc No.52 has a nice picture of Toby on the front. News of the various undesirable sorts that Toby invites to parties (I prefer croquet, Pimms and cucumber sandwiches on the lawn myself). There were a few comments about Mid-Con that I could take issue with, but can't be bothered. Thank God that Toby has finally run out of the pink bog paper that he usually prints the zine on.

Three more issues and **Ode** reaches 150. Fourteen years of continuous publishing must be a UK record. **Ode** is ridiculously underrated and an ideal place for enthusiastic gamers, mainly Dip and variants, but other games as well. No doubt the next issue will include a lot of crowing over the Christchurch by-election result. And why not? The Tories (spit) will just win it back at the next General Election.

I hadn't seen **Odardle** before, but issue 10 dropped on to the door mat following the recent fold of **Yer Tiz** into the said **Odardle**. A lot of space devoted to the *Owzat!* cricket league and some American Football games. Lots of non-games articles on the theatre, computer games reviews, pop concert reviews, record reviews, film review, humour and a crossword. A refreshing change really if you're tired of games stuff.

In **Hopscotch** No.121 Alan Parr discusses the possibility of a one day games event in Tring, one Saturday in September. Give Alan a ring on 0442-824173 if you're interested. Alan also discusses the unlikely possibility of raising a British team for a puzzle contest in Moravia in October. Alan has my undying admiration for being able to get away with margins of as little as 2mm!

A short **Scorpio** No.65 brings news that the Zine of the Year Poll had more voters than the good old Zine Poll...

With issue No.74 **Y Ddraig Goch** continues much as ever, despite being officially in hibernation. In reality it's the same as ever, minus a letter column. Food is a strong feature though, a nice recipe for Cheeseburger De Luxe (fillet stake and Wensleydale) and a brief review of our expedition to Ockenden Manor a few weeks ago. Iain promises a review of Le Silverside, the restaurant where we indulged ourselves on the Saturday evening at ManorCon. Iain is welcoming new subscribers who are both reliable and actually interested in playing games.

In issue 18 of **Age of Reason** Andrew Moss concedes the layout problems that

he denied in the previous issue. Having read Andrew's comments in his letter column I am surprised that he is capable of standing upright under the enormous weight of the various chips on his shoulder!

Megalomania is becoming distinctly regular, and in recognition of this fact Chris Tringham is actually planning to start a game of Diplomacy! **Meg.** must be the best value of any Diplomacy zines, lots of chat and it's free for a s.a.e. Issue 54 mused on ManorCon, Ronald McDonald, Computers, the Media, and now even features a letter column. This **must** be worth a 24p stamp (soon to be 25p).

I was impressed by issue 6 of **Box Frenzy**, a new Diplomacy zine which lives on the margins of the hobby. Chris Robey (3 Superity Cottages, Churn Road, Compton, Newbury, RG16 0PR) is running a couple of games of Diplomacy and a couple of variants and is looking to expand. Only 8 pages but good potential.

Speaking of newish zines, I picked up issue 3 of the anarchic **Born Losers** entitled "The Post-Exams Piss-Up Begins." Quite. Film review, lots of concert/record reviews, letters, a variant, but as yet no games. Contact Edmund Morgan at 22 Meadow Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 4NF.

And the new zines just keep on coming. This one is **Something to Declare** from Paul Bennett (103 Deleval Close, Newton Aycliffe, DL5 4QP), as the **Laughing Roundhead** sub-zine goes independent to escape Duncan's problems. Hmm. Mr Bennett only folded his last zine **Lobster Quadrille** a couple of years ago, so I hope he is sure of all this. I note that Paul is writing a Diplomacy adjudication program in BASIC - re-inventing the wheel somewhat, given that Stewart Cross has written one in C which is been used by several zines as we speak.

Just for a change let's mention a... new zine. What a surprise. Kevin McGowan (27 Bennetts Ave, Shirley, Surrey, CR0 8AL) has just launched **Revolution**, a zine dedicated to Railway Rivals. Yours for the price of a second class stamp.

Enough of the tyros. Issue 100 of **Pyrrhic Victory** finally limped in, several weeks late and only 8 pages long. Basically just game reports. Mike Allaway had a reputation for being a little depressive even when he had little to be depressed about, but now that unemployment is really starting to bite, he appears to be drowning in the blackness of it all. And who can blame him, I'd probably be just the same myself.

On a happier note Mike Clarke has decided not to fold **Sidewalk**, but to turn it into a 4 week zine in order to see if he can attract the players who can't cope with 3 week deadlines. I have grown bored with telling you to support this zine, so I won't say it to you all again. If you are young at heart and into popular music this really is the place for you.

My first contact with the awesome Douglas Kent was through the US chatzine **Foolhardy**, and the overall impression was of someone who was quiet and industrious. Having had a few letters from Doug and seen the last couple of issues of **Maniac's Paradise** I can see that I was wrong - industrious he certainly is, but quiet? If James Hardy ever produces a zine it will be like **Maniac's Paradise**, which to those of you who know James will speak volumes. **Foolhardy** I find a bit dry and susceptible to naval fluff collecting on a grand scale, but at least the US have a proper hobby discussion zine - there is no equivalent in the UK, whatever Mark Nelson's pretentiousness may suggest. If you want to be bold and subscribe to a US zine, send **sterling** to Iain Bowen (who runs the International Subscription Exchange) and ask him to arrange a subscription to **Maniac's Paradise** or **Perelandra** - you won't be disappointed. I particularly liked Doug's response when someone queried whether Doug lost more money by publishing than anyone else in the US - "*Hey, I lose in life! All other losses pale by comparison.*"

After a delay long enough to write a (small) novel in, **Assassins Handbook** issue 7 turned up. The price is up to £1 an issue, as John is on income support. This is fair enough, in fact I for one would gladly initiate the **Campaign for Real Zine Prices**. What we need is a cartel - any publisher who produces at a break even level or a loss should be shunned and trades cut. Those who force people like Mike Clarke and John to lose money by subsidising their zines with **stolen** photocopying are just plain anti-social. These ridiculously low prices just crucify the zine editors who aren't earning pots of money. Consider this a warning that as soon as the postage goes up, then **Spring Offensive** will be £1 a shot. John publicises something called **DangerCon** which I won't plug in case it's a wind-up and **Assassins Handbook** becomes the first Diplomacy zine to reveal the secret of Fatima. Wow!

THE FLYER IN THE DIPLOMACY BOX

There is a general consensus among zine editors and convention organisers that the way in which responses from the Diplomacy box flyer are dealt with needs to be changed. Despite the fact that to my certain knowledge almost every single person at the recent meeting at ManorCon wanted to address this issue (including myself - let's not sit on the fence), everyone is too nervous to raise the issue to Danny's face.

I think that Danny has had an effective monopoly of novices for too long by virtue of the control he exercises over the flyer. Iain Bowen and myself are further refining the Hobby Advertising Campaign and we intend to put in a strong bid that there should be a unified flyer in the Diplomacy box, advertising **both** postal Diplomacy and Conventions, that all respondents should receive Chris Tringham's **Convention Book** and a version of the **Introduction** that I have already drafted (but to be edited by Iain), and that this **Introduction** should advertise on **absolutely equal terms**, the hobby at large (and **Mission from God**), **Springboard** and a Central Gamestart Service. That Iain and I intend to work together is appropriate given that the ManorCon and MidCon Committees are the main source of hobby cash to spend on such projects. ManorCon and MidCon provide a forum for discussion and the two Committees have enough members to provide continuity of service. I should also add that both Iain and myself are prepared to operate a self-denying ordinance in that no one who replies to the flyer would be sent a copy of **Spring Offensive** or **Y Ddaig Goch** and no CGS games would be placed in either of those zines.

I would envisage that Iain would handle the general responses and send out the **Introduction**, I would administer a CGS and you (if you are willing) would run a novice zine for those who want it. However, the flow of novices via the flyer would no longer be controlled by an individual and both Iain and myself would be happy to step aside if there was ever a consensus at one of the Hobby Meetings at MidCon or ManorCon to that effect. It is bad for jobs to be kept by individuals forever and without question, if a service is being provided on behalf of a group, then that group must be able to say when it wants a change.

Of course Danny has provided a valuable service over many years, in that he acted when there was no one else willing or able to help. But times have changed and the Hobby is now in a far better position to order its own affairs in an accountable way with a healthy separation of powers. The time to end the **Springboard** de facto monopoly by breaking Danny's direct link to the flyer has come and if no one else is prepared to say it up front, then I suppose that Iain and I had better put our heads above the parapet.

Springboard should just be an option for the newcomer, but if the person who responds to their initial enquiry is the editor of **Springboard** and spends the greater part of the introductory material plugging **Springboard** then it is inevitable that few will opt not to play in **Springboard**. The only way for everyone to get a fair crack of the whip is for those with a vested interest (Danny and the CGS) to be separated from the flyer and the **Introduction**. This is not a threat to the existence of **Springboard** - Iain and I (and we believe a great number of others) merely think that it is time for a someone else to be the initial point of contact for novices, rather than the editor of the novice zine himself.

The question is, will those who have been saying that it is time for a change in private come out of the closet with me, or are we doomed to be a couple of lone voices in the wilderness?

THE MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE

Available from Mark Nelson (if you're considered fannish enough) who can be contacted at 21 Cecil Mount, Armley, Leeds, LS12 2AP.

What can one say about the ever-modest **Mark Nelson Experience**? All adjectives are inevitably inadequate to describe this monumental work of incisive wit and colourful invective. If there is a Higher Place, a Pantheon, where postal games players go to when they pass over, in which they can savour the best of what the postal Diplomacy hobby has to offer by way of entertainment and enlightenment, then there can be no doubt that such souls will spend their time engrossed in issue after issue of the **Mark Nelson Experience**.

Jealous fools have on occasion criticised Mark for imagined slights, they have claimed that he invents and distorts facts to fit his own ends, that he deliberately sets out to mislead people in order to create trouble, that he is in fact nothing more than a parasite sucking the life blood out of the efforts of other zine editors... but they are, of course, **wrong**. Mark is a sweet, sensitive and gentle person, who takes comfort from the fact that not an iota of such allegations are true - in short, he is a noble and honourable creature who deserves to be cherished by the entire hobby.

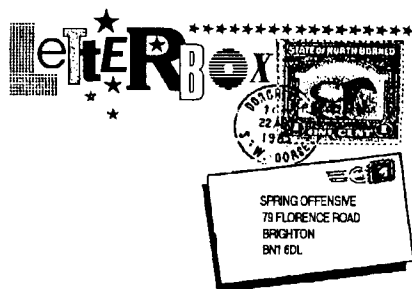
Mark's efforts on our behalf need to be appreciated. Even his critics accept that the work he did in updating hobby statistics was a valuable and worthwhile endeavour. However, they fail to realise the immense contribution to the development of the postal Diplomacy hobby that Mark is making by allowing some of us, mere mortals that we are, access to his golden words - that we may savour his wisdom. It is ridiculous to allege that Mark is elitist by only allowing a select few to view his organ (and what a mighty organ it is!) for Mark knows that to spread his word far and wide would be pearls before swine. If Mark cannot spare the time to converse with non-zine-editing mortals at Conventions, it is because he knows that his time on this world is limited and that the Word can be propagated most efficiently by confining his revelations to zine editors who can in turn convert the masses.

It is downright malicious to suggest that our Mark is inadequate as a human being or in any way "crazie" - indeed, he has only adopted the epithet "crazie" in order to show to us all that his shoulders are big enough to bear the brunt of all that such evil cynics can throw at him. Mark wears such insults from unbelievers as badges of honour, medals which serve to decorate him in recognition of the many campaigns he has waged against those who would demean him in our eyes.

Not only is there is a place in this hobby for Mark Nelson - this hobby **IS** Mark Nelson. For the truth is that we are all figments of Mark's imagination, apart from Mark there is nothing: no Diplomacy, no variants, no editors, no zine, no reality. Thus we owe our very existence to Mark, and what bigger debt can you owe to someone than that?

The fact is that Mark is the Truth, the Word and the Light and we should offer Him our thanks. Thanks Mark. Thanks very much.

EDITOR'S HEALTH WARNING: SOME ZINE
REVIEWS CAN SERIOUSLY DAMAGE YOUR
HEALTH!



IAN COLEMAN

I don't know if it's of any interest to you, but I enclose a print out of some pieces that appeared in *The Times* of April 1887. It seems to capture the flavour of the real Diplomacy that was happening during this period and makes an interesting comparison with gaming Diplomacy.

SA: Thanks, I printed it as it helped lend this issue a theme.

PETE BIRKS

Thanks for *Spring Offensive* No.14. I agree that I was somewhat sceptical when I heard about "qualifying rounds" for the National Diplomacy Championship. The number of boards had been falling for a few years, so I thought that the need to qualify would make things worse. I am glad to have been proved wrong. Vick Hall seems confident of three boards at the Royal George on Saturday, and attendance this year may be higher as a result.

The Whielden Street hard disc disasters are mainly a result of them being tied to an electricity sub-station which is also linked to the local hospital. The hospital clearly has "priority" (even Richard would be hard-pressed to argue that an Intensive Care Ward should be put below a hard disc controller on the list of priority, or, perhaps not) and as a result Whielden Street is vulnerable to power cuts and surges. It is clearly the best argument you can have for one of those "surge controllers" that you can think of, although the option of a reserve generator might be a little bit over the top. Actually, these are not incredibly expensive. All Mecca shops used to have a battery-powered one which could run a camera and two tills for about three hours; I can't imagine that a computer would need that much power. As for the sub-station, this is just one more thing to add to the list of questions needed to be put when considering buying a house. The most important, of course, is, "When does the postman arrive?"

Well, I got to go to work now (one until nine on a Friday - super, especially when you get comments on the radio on a Fri-

day morning that "the weekend starts here!") God, don't they know that only a small minority of the total population (and, I suspect, a minority of the working population) work nine to five, Monday to Friday? It feels to me on Friday that the week starts here. Monday to Thursday is just coasting while Friday and Saturday are bloody hard work.

And so, with the miracle of time-lapse calligraphy, I arrive back at the word-processor at 10.40 on Saturday night. Yes, the weekend really does start here!

Actually, the weekend started about three hours ago, when I got home. It would have been earlier, but on arriving at work this morning I was greeted with two things. The first was welcome (a cup of coffee) but the second was not - a telephone call telling me to go to another shop.

"Er, Pete, can you go to a shop in Lordship Lane?" Now, I happen to live only five minutes from Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, and I happen to know that there are no A.R. Dennis shops in Lordship Lane. However, there is one in Lordship Lane, Tottenham.

So, after a train trip, an underground trip, another train trip (accompanied by several dozens of Tottenham, Lazio, Chelsea and Ajax supporters, all on their way to something called the Makita Mouse Cup), and two bus rides, I found myself in Tottenham. Hence my latter than normal arrive home.

SA: I remember being asked at very short notice (9.15am) to go and represent someone accused of ABH at Tottenham Magistrates Court (10.30 hearing) which is also in Lordship Lane. The journey was awful and as a south London person I felt I was really travelling into the back and beyond - wild country indeed. That's one thing I don't miss about being a junior Barrister, all that travelling to obscure Magistrates Courts in parts of London which are just names on a tube map to me (or worse still, names which are not even on a tube map).

After eating my curry, I sat down to read the remainder of Thomas Kennealy's *Flying Class Hero*. I've been unhappy with most of his work since *Schindler's Ark*, but this struck me as something of a return to form. However, it is a distinctly Australian novel, in a way that *Schindler's Ark* is not. Perhaps I was only struck by this because I had only just finished Peter Carey's latest, and Carey writes books which are as typically "Australian" as you can get. The trouble was, I couldn't quite pin down what the factors were which gave me such an impression.

On second thoughts, though, why should I try? Such a tendency to over-analysis or intellectualization is something I really don't need anymore. Instead, I suppose I could sit down and watch *The French Connection* for the fifteenth time before I go to bed.

SA: I'd go and watch The French Connection, or rather I did.

ANDREW FEATHER

It's been reported in the paper that the Post Office has admitted keeping records of political affiliations of its employees. With all the talk about privatisation of the post, ain't you worried that your political exploits recently for Labour may affect your career? Have you noticed a strange clicking on the telephone line when you pick up the telephone, or unmarked transit vans parked outside your house recently? For a small fee I know a guy who can get you a Bolivian passport and plastic surgery - though from James Hardy's letter it sounds as if some of them would give you them for free!

SA: As the lawyer in charge of the privatisation project I'd better not comment on that. The Post Office has its own investigation department which keeps employees in sorting offices under tight scrutiny (hidden observation rooms with one-way glass, hidden cameras, undercover agents on the shop floor etc.) - all in the name of stopping thefts from postal packets.

Pete Sullivan in his reply to my letter in *Spring Offensive* No.13 made the point that to win a game of football 2-0 is better than to lose it 3-5. I'm sure that many football fans would rather watch the 3-5 match, even if their team lost, as it would be more exciting and better value for money than the 2-0 match. The analogy used typifies the kind of thinking that is ruining a lot of sport nowadays; that winning (or probably "avoiding defeat" is a better term to use) is so important that greater emphasis is placed on defensive strategy than on attacking strategy. The result is a dreary game with little individual initiative or excitement, the team making the least mistakes being the one more likely to win, or in many cases the teams are so good defensively the result is a boring goal-less draw. I'm sure many have played a game of Diplomacy just as similar.

I'll be honest and say I cannot watch a game of football for the full 90 minutes, and as for American football - forget it, I'd rather water the garden. The game I can watch, and would recommend to anyone to see if they can, is Rugby League. You have to admire the players for their level

of fitness and intelligence (yes, intelligence!) required to play the game. For the full 90 minutes non-stop these guys are running, tackling, and having to plan what they are going to do with the ball. the scoring system also adds extra interest as so many combinations of tries and goals can alter the match in a see-saw battle. by contrast soccer and American Football don't offer that excitement, the excitement has been killed off by big business interests, especially the TV sponsorship deals which in order to finance the sponsorship have to sell the advertising slots during the match. It won't be long before the TV companies pressurise the FA to adopt four quarters instead of two halves, just to have more advertising.

SA: *I agree, though I'm not sure our American readers will. Diplomacy can be played in a fun and exciting way though - just look at James Hardy in Pydna - 1902 as France and he has an army in Galicia!*

RICHARD SHARP

Curiously my records - or rather Mick Bullock's, as I wasn't in charge at the time - do not show you as playing in DS2. However, there is a record of an unnamed standby playing Austria for a short time - perhaps that was you. It doesn't, of course, affect the validity of what I said, as my games in 1978 were run to an entirely different set of house rules... including stand-bys, even! But your knowledge of my present GMing style, house rules, etc. is, as I said, non-existent except from hearsay, and as a lawyer...

SA: *Odd, I am sure I played in DS2 (France I thought, but I could be wrong about that). I certainly did play in a Dolchstoß supplement game, I can even remember feeling cheated when you decided to start the supplement after I had put my name down for a game and the feel of the carbon copy game reports. Hearsay has been admissible in this country in the civil courts since 1968, and as a commercial (as opposed to a criminal) lawyer...*

DOUGLAS KENT

A few quick notes on yours and Markie's comments on the PDO census and *Pontevedia*. First please note that the 47 zines included in the 1993 Census did not include three fairly important zines - *Canadian Diplomat*, *Home Office*, and (most importantly) *Graustark*. *THO* probably only had 4 or 5 unique subbers, but my guess is *TCD* and *G* had 30 or more between them, as both represent special sectors of the hobby (*TCD* being the biggest Canadian zine, and *Graustark* being

the longest-running zine where a number of unique people play). *Graustark* had been included in the 1992 Census, while the other two were not (if memory serves). In other words, my guess is the true count should have been about 700. I'm going to hound people more next time to get those lists in.

As for *Pontevedia*, it is by no means a complete listing of all games open. If Phil Reynolds (or now Andy York) didn't see a zine, its game openings weren't included. By a quick glance through the latest *Zine Register*, I count maybe 28 or 29 zines with current variant offerings. With Andy York now at the helm, I expect *Pont* to become more complete, but probably will only cover 80 to 90% of what's out there. Say what you want about the state of the U.S. hobby, but don't use the latest *Pont* as an accurate thermometer.

Finally, as to UK zines being better than those in the US, I'd have to say that, from what I've seen, they come out about even. US zines seem to be a bit more regular, while UK zines overall are more friendly and personable. That's probably because, on balance, the UK publishers are more friendly and personable. I'm not speaking from experience, though - even having published 53 issues of *MP*, I've only met one U.S. hobby member face-to-face...and I would have avoided that if I could get away with it. I'm in hiding until this hobby agrees to pay all my expenses to attend a major Con of my choice. Hey, anybody want to pay my way to next year's ManorCon?

My mother has been a member of Mensa for years, and yowsa - she pays her bills rounded up to the nearest dollar because "I don't like to subtract all the pennies". Ugh!

FRED DAVIS

A recent study of American Mensa members has shown that most of us are not failures or misfits, if you count annual income as a sign of "success." In 1992, the average household income of American Mensans was \$73,000, considerably above the national average, and the employment level was also above the average. However, I do believe it's true that a higher percentage of mensans are lone wolves or "flakey" than in the general population. This came up in a discussion at the recent U.S. Mensa Convention in Orlando. Most of the people agreed that among those members who do not attend meetings or other Mensa events, there are many oddballs who are poor socializers and want to be left alone. There are others who are wallflowers, who need a stimulus to come out of their cocoons and start talking, but, once started, many of

them turn out to be very interesting people.

SA: *Many oddballs are very successful in a financial sense, but that doesn't mean they are well-adjusted. I can understand people wanting to come together if they have a common hobby or interest, but the idea of coming together because they have a common IQ (but not necessarily anything else) seems, to me, very odd. I suppose that's why Mensa has SIGs (Special Interest Groups) - but if the idea is thus to meet people with a common interest, why restrict it to people with a supposedly similar IQs. John Dodds (who is a very senior civil servant) recalled a tale of going to a games meeting at which they were playtesting a version of the 18xx games and when the assembled crowd realised that he wasn't a member of Mensa, they insisted that those playing 18xx should move to a different location as they couldn't possibly ply the game with a non-Mensa member. That sort of behaviour is elitist nonsense and it stinks.*

PETE BIRKS

Mensa seem to have been going downhill for over a decade (when Mick Bullock left in protest at the money-makers who were moving in). Advertising in The Sun for God's sake. It seems that all you need is the money for the entry fee to get in these days. Andrew Feather's point that he has found it useful when he moves from city to city is valid, but the organization's commercialism grates somewhat.

FRANK BLADES

Apparently you have run an article in *Spring Offensive* on whether there ought to be a Postal Diplomacy Group in Mensa. I have heard this via Fred C. Davis Jr. (in an American accent) who runs the American Mensa Diplomacy S.I.G. and who, prompted by your article, sent me a massive letter - most of which was pretty incomprehensible to me.

I think both yourself and Fred are going to be a tad disappointed. I took over running the British Mensa RPG and Postal Games S.I.G. earlier this year. As you'll see from our magazine, *SIGIL*, it is mainly RPG material - indeed there is only one or two mentions of postal games which is a review of *B.U.M.* and a mention that the PBM side "is so quiet".

Historically the Postal Games used to be a separate S.I.G. but interest waned and eventually rather than let it fold, it was incorporated into the RPG S.I.G. My predecessor had only a passing interest, so it was left to die off somewhat.

From my view, I have only recently started to become interested in postal gaming (through Malcolm Cornelius of **B.U.M.** who I met at my local RPG club) and am, as an eager convert, becoming involved - through **B.U.M.** and **Shadowplay** and by starting postal games in **SIGIL** (or perhaps a more regular sub-zine). In this, I am also working with John Wyatt who runs the Mensa Boardgames S.I.G. However, neither J.W. or myself are mega-keen Dip. fans (which is why Fred's letter was somewhat incomprehensible) but hopefully we'll find out if there is the interest out there amongst the Mensa membership for regular Diplomacy games as **SIGIL** No.35 has a special article on postal games as well as a call for players and GMs. We'll see.

FRED DAVIS

Let me congratulate Chris Hardy on finding a new permanent job. From my experiences working for the Social Security Administration, I know how important it can be to have someone caring to look after people who are mentally ill or senile, or living in nursing homes, or both. It is so difficult here to get any qualified person to perform such work. We can't even get enough Registered Nurses to work in such places. In the home where my father lived for the last four years of his life, there was one R.N. on the entire floor. Everything else was done by uncaring and unqualified people who were working only for the money, who frequently stole the patients' money and other personal possessions. So, I'm glad to see that he has gone into this field.

As you can imagine, I met many mentally ill people in my days "over the counter" interviewing Social Security claimants, and in my 20-odd years of working Disability claims in Baltimore I saw many more. So, I think I spot mentally ill people faster than many people, and realise that there are many more walking around outside than there are inside mental hospitals or nursing homes. A trained observer can see this sometimes in TV interviews, especially when they cover hearings presided over by Congressmen or other VIP politicians. When one such person was interviewed on TV at the age of 90, he was great at recalling what he'd done in the Wild West some 60 years earlier, but he couldn't remember what he'd had for breakfast that morning. I cite this only as an example. I don't know whether you get the opportunity to see your MP's and other big shots making fools of themselves on TV.

Anyway, I sympathize with some of the efforts that Chris Hardy will have to make in dealing with schizophrenics,

paranoids and others just suffering from the early stages of Alzheimers. my dad, who lived to be 91, had Alzheimers for the last two years of his life, but he also had a type of mental illness on top of this for many years before that.

JOY HIBBERT

I must protest your comments on **Flintlock**. Not the group itself, which always struck me as being put together primarily to teach teenage girls what sexual arousal is, but the attack on **The Tomorrow People**, which, for its time (1970s and Children's Hour) was pretty good. Certainly, I don't know what sort of reaction it would get these days. One of the stories was called 'One Law', a reference to the idea that there is "One Law for rich and poor alike, which prevents them equally from stealing bread and sleeping under bridges". Is that sort of left wing indoctrination of children even legal these days?

I'd thought Richard Sharp's altercations with his computer were just bad luck, until I was flicking through an old **Dullstuff** which mentioned him trying to put out a car fire with... wait for it... de-icer. Good grief.

Paul Barker misses the point that if one has used a name for, say, 20 years, one is entitled to consider it to be one's own name. No-one complains that men use their birth name, but it's considered unnatural for a woman to do so. Perhaps the increase in woman handing on their names to their children will see the end of this sort of sexism. However, there seems to be an increase in women using different names for different stages of their lives. the usual routine seems to be birth name till marriage, husband's name until they see sense (this stage can be repeated via divorce and remarriage), then a name of their choice (sometimes completely new, sometimes another name from their family).

The problem is that ways of reflecting the fact that children have two parents rather than just a father tend to be associated with snobbery. Hyphenation, for example. No-one thinks that a hyphenated name means that sometime in the past, one of the persons ancestors respected his wife, but that's what it amounts to.

SA: *I thought the reason men adopted hyphenated names for themselves and their wives was to publicise their connection with a socially superior family (more like self-aggrandizement and respect for your father-in-law).*

MIKE ALLAWAY

Ho hum, sorry about dropping out of Hoplite Wars. I kept intending to send some more orders off, but life just kept interfering. As you say in **SpOff**, at least the position isn't too bad, so whoever takes the post won't curse me greatly. I must admit that getting issue 100 of **Pyr-rhic Victory** out was something of a chore; I got half way through the letter column and some articles and suddenly thought, "bugger it". Oh well, perhaps I'll cheer up for next time.

DANNY COLLMAN

I am taking your "soft" approach to GMing literally this time (though I feel strongly that you do the postal hobby no favours by such an approach). A comment on the paragraph you wrote: "*Mike Clarke has threatened to reject orders from me if I use 'concise' notation when submitting orders... not a way to attract new players is it?*"

What has the conciseness of orders to do with attracting new players? New players will automatically accept the conventions which are in place. Once they are no longer 'new' players, they may well query the form of notation in any zine they see (I still do myself), but there is at least one good reason for the non-concise notation: it enables both player and GM to see that every unit has been ordered.

In addition, the convention of ordering every unit is standard throughout almost every zine I trade with. Which means that it you who are out of line.

As a final point, much as I think you are a very nice person in yourself, and much as I enjoy reading **Spring Offensive**, had I realised your propensity to implied orders, I simply wouldn't have started my game with you.

SA: *It is one thing to print game reports with a separate order for each unit, it is another thing to refuse to accept implied orders submitted by a player. If a player orders "A(Mar) S A(Par)-Bur" it is perverse to adjudicate that as "A(Mar) S A(Par)-Bur (fails, unit not so ordered), A(Par) stands un-ordered."*

*On the concise orders front, maybe I'm just old-fashioned. Certainly **Ode**, **Dolchstoß**, and **Gallinaufry** all print reports in concise notation (however, paradoxically, I don't anymore).*

PETE BIRKS

Well, the LibDems won in Christchurch, and I took £35 off Oakes (I laid a spread of 9,000 to 11,000 LibDem majority, and

Oakes sold at 9,000). Despite predictions of a majority of "around 10,000" as late as one o'clock in the morning, I was quietly confident. The LibDems have consistently gained greater majorities than those predicted over recent years. Back in April one poor chap had £20 with me at 6/4 on the Conservatives. Actually, I feel sorry for Wayne: he consistently takes money off me on Sports betting, and then gives it back at politics. He got the French referendum wrong on Maastricht as well. Strange, the French only approve Maastricht by half a per cent, and a few months later they look to be on the verge of instant monetary union! As I have said to Johnny Dodds, I think that if we are ever to get EMU, it will have to be via this "overnight" technique, politically risky though it is. "Gradual" movements towards EMU will be slaughtered by the speculators every time.

Can Labour win next time? A year ago I would have said, No. The Boundary Commission changes would hurt them too much. But those which have already gone through seem to actually favour Labour (assuming that they get, say, a 2% swing at the next election). And the weakness of this Government (majority, 17 and falling - many sights on the next dead Tory MP, Nicholas Fairbairn 7/4 favourite) means that we may have an election before the Boundary changes are completed. I'm not sure if you can have an election with "half-changes", although I see no reason why not apart from convention, but if there is an election before June 1995, then, yes, I can see Labour winning it. Whether I would want this Social Democratic mish-mash to win an election is another matter.

Current conventional wisdom is that one thing which will work in favour of the Tories is that recovery is on its way and will be in full flow by the time of the next General Election. This is balderdash - not that the recovery is not on its way, but the idea that people will vote Conservative in gratitude. That this myth survives is one of the more baffling aspects of psephology. Voters are far more likely to say, "Oh, thanks for all that money from privatisation, but now we'd like to guarantee the health services, schools, and pensions as well. Bye bye."

ANDREW FEATHER

Normally at this time of year when everyone is on holiday you expect nothing to be happening in the news - but this year is different, what with Christchurch, the ERM, Maastricht & Bosnia, I'll soon be taking a portable satellite dish and TV with me whenever I go to the beach!

I think two very important lessons came out of Christchurch, one: that tactical anti-tory voting is now going to be a pattern at the next election (provided that the economic recovery fails to save their skins!) and two: that the VAT on fuel is going to be a fiasco for the Tories of Poll Tax proportions. As I understand it VAT is payable by the utility companies out of their turnover to the Government and the companies collect the VAT on behalf of the Government from the users. What if there was a mass revolt whereby people paid the usage charge on their bill but not the VAT element? The utility companies would be faced with the prospect of not only having to pay the VAT to the Government out of their own funds, but also having to cut-off people for not settling their bill in full - which would be bad PR for them. Imagine it: "Those nasty men from the Gas Board cut off supplies to 89 year old Edna in the middle of winter - all because she can't afford the VAT!" It would provoke a public outcry. If enough people refused to pay the VAT element the utility companies can't cut them all off can they? They would soon be complaining bitterly to the Government themselves and they would probably have more clout than the public.

SA: *More likely that utility companies would go for attachment of earnings orders and dock it from Edna's pension. Putting VAT on fuel is regressive because it hits the poor disproportionately, though the Government will claim it shows their green credentials (not that anyone with an ounce of common sense will be taken in).*

JOY HIBBERT

Joseph Bord's letter portrays a non-existent connection between the failed experiment of State Capitalism, and the not-doing-too-well Socialist parties in the rest of Europe. How well the State Capitalist experiment would have gone if the USA hadn't systematically bankrupted them with spiralling military costs is something we will probably never know. How well the experiment would have gone if it had been run in accordance with Marxism (which states that Communism can only happen after Capitalism, not instead of it) rather than straight from Feudalism, is again something best left to political theorists.

JOSEPH BORD

I note your contention that the Right are "totally and utterly incompetent". This is a very dangerous idea, in fact the Conservatives have been extremely efficient in serving the interests they are programmed to serve; the interests of the

establishment, of the big corporations, and of the shady and corrupt individuals who shower the party of the Right with money and support in return for political favours.

SA: *But if you're serving the interests of Business it isn't efficient to create a recession. The Tories (like British business generally) have only been concerned with the short-term and have failed to realise (like British business) that true industrial success comes from having long-term policies on research, development, training and investment. Their failure to deliver long-term policies is a sign of incompetence. As for this particular administration, well, words fail me. To think that Central Office have to plan a leak about the PM using the word "bastards" just to try and show he's not a wimp. One of the few things that I agree with Rees-Mogg about is his description of John Major as a "competent middle manager promoted beyond his ability."*

Of dear, I've slipped into rant mode. But I do believe that we are guilty of the direct complacency if we refuse to recognise that diminishing Health and Safety, emasculated Trade Unions and the intellectual poverty of an ill-educated populace are not an accident, not an act by well-intended but incompetent buffoons, but in fact part of a calculated policy by people who understand the mechanisms of money and of power.

You go on to chuckle that the Tories are "shackled by an ideology that prevents them from making the most of the economic situation" but fail to ask the question, the most for whom? For example unemployment is good for the masters of an unfettered market economy; it forces down wages and conditions to cheapen the cost of production. Managed Exchange rates are hated by the Thatcherite Right because they prevent the huge speculative shifts that represent billions to them.

SA: *I accept what you say about unemployment to a point, but even this government wouldn't want to create that much unemployment that (a) demand in the economy was unduly stifled, and (b) they fail to get re-elected because unemployment has hit the Tory heartlands.*

Finally, there is the ideology that you are so amused by. It may have idly crossed the assembled minds of the Labour Party why it is they keep LOSING. The answer to this question springs from the fact that when most people are forced to think about politics they instinctively head for a few coherent understandable ideas, and

it is on this front that the Tories have been so successful; inculcating into the debate a coherent rationale of the actions based on the deification of competition. Unless Labour can add to its pragmatism a measure of principle it will win the argument without ever winning power.

SA: *The majority of the population wouldn't recognise an "ideology" if it got up and bit them. The reason why the Tories continually win power is by appealing to people's greed and their belief that nasty things only happen to someone else. People think, well, I won't be made redundant, I won't need hospitalisation, I don't need social security, I would like lower taxes and I don't mind rich people getting richer because I hope to join them. Public spending cuts are something which affect other people, people who they long down upon because of their dependence on state services and benefits. Hopefully, this recession may teach them that these things can affect everyone, however middle class or whichever southern suburb you live in.*

50 YEARS AGO

by Andy Bassett

AUGUST 1943

- 1st 174 American B24 Liberators of the 9th USAAF take off from Benghazi North Africa to attack Axis oil fields at Ploesti in Rumania. The 2700 miles round trip takes them across the Balkans. Bad weather, murderous flak and swarms of fighters account for 54 aircraft lost with 424 crew killed or missing.
- PT 109 torpedo boat commanded by Lieutenant J.F. Kennedy pulls out of Rendova island with the P.T. flotilla to head for Blakett strait. AT midnight they sighted 4 Japanese destroyers. The P.T. boats attacked but all the torpedoes missed. One of the destroyers turned out to attack the P.T. boats and at 1.15am smashed through the hull of P.T. 109 killing two crew. The rest swam and clung to the wreckage until they could swim ashore. They were rescued on 6th August.
- 5th Russian troops re-capture Orel and Belograd and Stalin ordered a 124 gun salute in celebration, a celebration he would order for future Soviet victories. The guns would erupt some 300 times more.
- 6th Three Japanese destroyers were sunk in Vella Gulf off New Georgia as they tried to help deliver reserves to the central Solomons Islands.
- 14th A conference of the Combined Allied Chiefs of Staff at Quebec, entitled "Quadrant" agreed to rearrange the SE Asia Command. SEAC, which covered Ceylon to Thailand was put under the control of Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten.
- 17th The USAAF raid Ragensburg and Schweinfurt Ragensburg where the Messerschmitt assembly plants were. The plan was that some planes would continue on and land in North Africa while some would return to England in the hope that the German forces could be confused and divided. It failed and 60 aircraft were lost.
- Allied troops enter Messina in Sicily. The Americans led by Patten beat the British led by Montgomery by 2 hours. The Germans had already retreated across the 3 mile strait to the mainland.
- Allied aircraft attack Peenamunda, the German V1 doodle bug and V2 rocket research centre. 597 aircraft headed for Berlin, the lead Mosquitos flew ahead dropping window to confuse the Germans, while the heavy bombers turned towards Peenamunda. 40 bombers were lost, but the V1/V2 program was put back 3 months.
- 23rd The Russians re-take Kherkov at a high cost - 300 T 34's being lost in a single day.
- 24th Heinrich Himmler is appointed Minister of the Interior.
- 28th The Danish Government resigns in protest against oppressive measures taken by the occupying Germans against Danish resistance.
- King Boris III of Bulgaria dies under suspicious circumstances after visiting Hitler. It was rumoured he had been poisoned. A regency took over on behalf of Simon II who was still a child.
- 29th Martial law is declared in Denmark.

FORTHCOMING CONS

SUNCON 93

Friday 20 to Sunday 22 August 1993, at Sunderland University. Main event is the North East of England and Scotland regional Diplomacy Championship, on Saturday 21 August, but more relaxed games-playing will also be in evidence. Convention fee: £2.50 in advance, £3.00 on the door. More details available from: Toby Harris, 6 Durham Terrace, Silksworth, Sunderland, SR3 1BW (091-523 8160).

STAKISCON 2

Stakis Victoria Hotel, Milton Street, Nottingham from Friday 27 to Monday 30 August 1993. It will feature 3 main tournaments: a qualifying round for the National Diplomacy Championship (on Saturday from 10 am to 7 pm); an 1830 tournament; and a Victor Ludorum in which all games played over the weekend will count. Prices: £25 per person per night for the first 2 nights; £22 for a third night and £20 for a fourth night. Convention Fee: £10 (£5 for a single day). Send the convention fee to Keith Loveys, 32 Barkston Gardens, London SW5 0ER (cheques payable to Stakiscon).

MidCon

November 19-21 at the Royal Angus Thistle Hotel, Birmingham. Room rates are £26 per person per night (sharing) or £32 (single). Registration is available for £8 until 31st August, after which it will rise to £10. Features the finals of the National Diplomacy Championship, a quiz, United and Subbuteo tournaments plus relaxed general gaming in comfortable surroundings. Cheques for the registration fee (payable to 'Midcon') should be sent to Brian Williams, 30 Rydding Lane, Millfields Estate, West Bromwich, B71 2HA.

MASTERCON

At the Forte Crest hotel near Coventry from Friday 11 to Sunday 13 March 1994. Features the Masters Diplomacy Championship, a Diplomacy Variants tournament and more besides (details to be confirmed). Information from Shaun Derrick, 313 Woodway Lane, Walsgrave, Coventry CV2 2AP.

BAYCON 94

At the Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, nr Exeter, Devon. The dates are Thursday 7 to Sunday 10 April 1994. Prices are £35 a night for a single room and £22 for a twin. Registration £10 to Rob Mulholland (66 Magdalen Road, Exeter EX2 4TN).

IMPROVING DIPLOMACY?!?

TOBY HARRIS

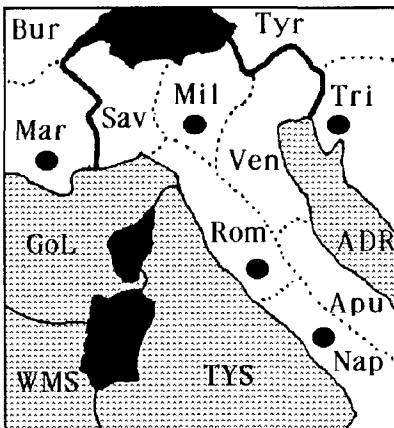
I had mixed feelings about your article on "New improved Diplomacy", as follows:

The game, in my opinion would be spoilt by trying to 'improve' it - it would be like trying to improve the Mona Lisa by making her teeth show. I agree that your points are valid ones and that some alterations would make a good game - but more as a variant than as an improvement.

SA: *I wasn't meaning to suggest that this would be anything other than a variant.*

Lastly, I was a shade pissed off - there is already such a variant which copes with all bar one or two points you raised - the "Milan" game. As a renowned fan of playing Italy, I was instantly taken in by this variant, comprising a simple map alteration around northern Italy. I am sure you have the details, but if not you can see the article in *Smodnoc* No.50 which goes into some detail on this very simple variant. It deals with the points you raise as follows:

SA: *For the benefit of readers who don't know, the Milan variant is:*



GOL is enlarged to border Rome in the Milan game. However, whilst Italy does not start with a fleet in Rome, there is the possibility of forcing Savoy (similar to the old Piedmont province) and two options for the autumn - Bur and Mar. Very effective if played with a reasonable degree of skill.

Austria is too vulnerable - not any more! Italy and Austria don't have adjacent supply centres in "Milan" - hence, Austria only has one neighbour to worry about too seriously in the first move. Italy still has

the Tyrolian attack on offer, but it is less tempting (with the new leverage on France) and, hence, Austria is happier to open to Gal and possibly arrange a stand off with Russia.

The Ven/Tri problem? Again - not any more! Making Switzerland a supply centre would probably do Italy no favours anyway - it is two moves away from Venice - as it is from the nearest French and Austrian units, and Germany has the centre on his doorstep.

SA: *The idea of making Switzerland a supply centre is not an attempt to do favours for Italy, but to provide a focus for action which involves France, Germany, Italy and Austria. By making Switzerland passable the established stalemate lines dissolve and east-west conflict is made easier. It removes the Piedmont bottleneck which inhibits French-Italian aggression. After all, as someone pointed out, Switzerland was passable to Hannibal and Napoleon. Anyway, using the Milan variant would allow Italy to go for Switzerland in S01.*

The Milan game makes the stalemate line much harder to form.

SA: *Can't see that it makes that much difference on its own.*

Turkey & England are harder to take out, although I feel this is compensated by their lack of flexibility towards the end-game, where wins are that much harder with the two countries. After all, these two countries are more for the safe, steady player than the gambler. I don't see that this is something which needs changing.

SA: *If you permit builds outside home s.c.'s then England and Turkey have a great deal of flexibility in an end-game. Completing the North African coastline gives another land route to Syria and broadens the scope of Italian-Turkish conflict which usually hinges around who controls ION. For some detailed suggestions see the next page.*

Yes, there certainly are very few options open to F(StPsc). This is one point where the Milan game cannot come to the rescue. I am all in favour of your suggestion to expand Finland to the north coast and give Russia the army - it also makes life tougher for England, perhaps covering the last point to some degree.

SA: *As John Wilman points out, that change is not historically accurate. Alternatively you could give England an extra neutral to go for (Ireland) and let the Russian player choose either F(StPsc) or F(StPnc) in S01..*

Perhaps builds should be permitted in 'any owned supply centre' at all stages of the game - after all, it will be 1902 before this rule could be made use of anyway. However, with the two map alterations (ie, the Milan map and the extended Finland), the game would probably be much more flexible anyway.

SA: *I just dislike the fact that building way behind the front line slows the game down during the endgame.*

Therefore, may I comment that I feel the 'Milan' game is such that it just about covers most of the so called flaws of the game. ... and yet I still can't fill the waiting list !!!

SA: *I don't think that Milan goes far enough to be of interest to all the players on the board, although I completely accept that it improves the regular game with regard to Italy/Austria. I freely admit that some of the suggestions I made last time were based on Milan (though that particular wheel has been re-invented several times over the years in different forms - eg. Croatia, Peerijavo). Similarly the idea of Egypt is an old chestnut. I just like the idea of putting a few of these simple map change variants together, along with any new suggestions that people can come up with.*

The game was originally designed to vary Italy's opening options, although it had very serious knock-on effects on all the other six countries; ie, strengthened Austria, Turkey & England and weakened the rest. France and Austria are clearly the most effected and I feel that the former needs to be weakened slightly whilst the latter could seriously use a little favouritism.

The fleet in Rome option, I feel, is far too boring - I mean what is Italy going to do with it? Yeah, surprise surprise - F(Rom) - TYS - Tun; F(Nap)- ION - Gre! The only other possibility I can see is to take Tunis with one of the fleets and stick the other into WMS/GOL/ADS/AEG/EMS in the Autumn plenty of choice, I suppose, but it does give the victim time to make their Autumn builds accordingly.

JOHN WILMAN

A few comments on your seven (nice number, seven) proposals to improve on regular Diplomacy.

1. [Separating Tri and Ven.] This is basically the Milan variant, and seems to work quite well. Toby Harris likes it so much that he carries a Milan conversion kit around with him; we played it at Tittlecon.

2. [Splitting Galicia.] I believe that this features in some Fred Davis variants. Fred is one of the best and most respected variant designers, but European history and geography do not seem to be his strongest points - witness the "frozen seas" idea in Abstraction, when every schoolboy knows that the northern Russian port of Murmansk is open all year round; it is the shallow Baltic which freezes in winter!

If you do split Galicia, Ruthenia should be the new province. It has been the focus of many historical disputes as to who should own it, unlike Transylvania which is only argued over by Hungary and Rumania (as if anyone would want it anyway).

SA: *On balance I don't think there is any need to split Galicia if the Milan variant is used.*

3. [Fleet Rome] Italy needs two armies for flexibility, especially if an extra neutral appears in Switzerland, which is in any case counter-historical for the period in which the game is set. The straight F(Rome) variant makes life easier for Austria, but it has little real effect on Italy, who just builds an army instead of a fleet in Autumn 1901!

SA: *On reflection I agree. As far as Switzerland is concerned, I am not sure if that is any more counter-historical than allowing Swedish neutrality to be violated.*

4. [Stalemate Lines] Moscow is vital for the cohesion of the Russian forces, and has little effect on Stalemate lines. Allowing movement from Spain to North Africa is a good idea if you don't mind four-way nodes.

SA: *Here we disagree. I see Moscow as vital in most stalemate lines as it is a big space which can only be attacked from two spaces to the north (Livonia and St.Petersburg) and two to the south (Ukraine and Sevastopol). It nearly always features in stalemate lines being held by a single support from Livonia or Sevastopol. Dividing it in two would make no difference at all to the Russians (I envisage a straight north-south divide with "Moscow" retaining all its present connections).*

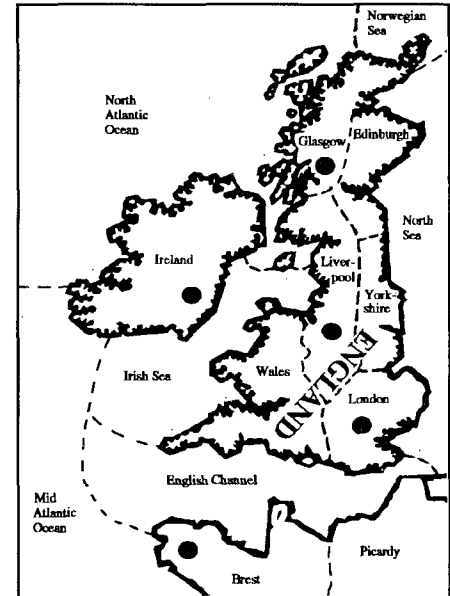
5. [Turkey and England] I too would like to see the Mediterranean coastline complete. It needs another sea space - Libyan Gulf - and gives some point to Syria, other than being the justification for the Lepanto. Ireland would have no strategic value without a supply centre.

SA: *See the maps below for my suggestions.*

6. [Russia] You can't do that to Finland without re-drawing the map of 19th century Europe and re-writing history. Besides, Russia needs a southern fleet, and from the south coast it can strike at Germany; it doesn't have to lurch straight into Scandinavia.

SA: *I've been giving the F(StP) and Irish problems some thought and what I've come up with is the suggestion that Russia can elect either F(StP)nc or F(StP)sc with the S01 moves, but that England is compensated for the increased difficulties in Scandinavia that this is likely to cause by making Ireland a neutral s.c. and altering*

ance with the following map. Incidentally, not that you will be interested but according to Vol.XIV of the Cambridge Modern History the 1920 border of Finland is shown touching the Barents Sea and separating Russia from Norway, with Petsamo being marked as a port within Finnish borders.



A new supply centre in Ireland

England would begin the game with F(Lon), F(Gla) and A(Lpl).

7. [Building in Neutrals] This is the "Premium Build" rule used in Mercator. Like the Key rule, it de-stabilises stalemate lines, which Calhamer was rather fond of, if only to show that war is very often fruitless.

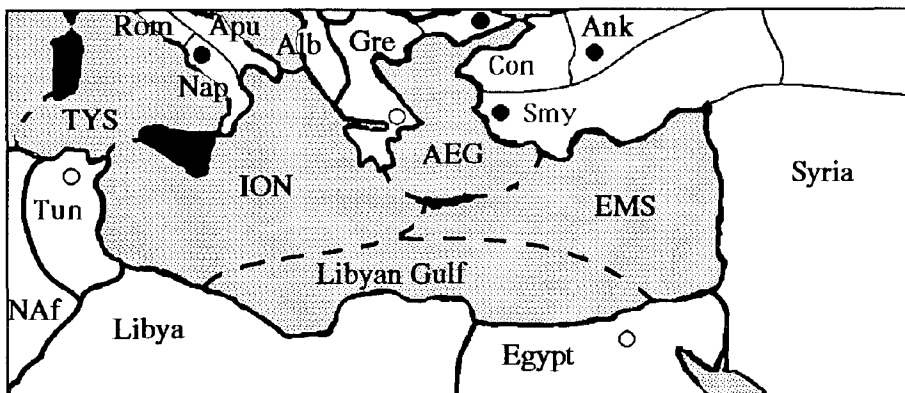
Put the best of these changes together, and you have something very like Abstraction, with four supply centres for each country, and a much more fluid game.

SA: *I am only proposing 3 more supply centres (Swi, Ire and Egi) and only six new spaces in total. That's 37 s.c.'s compared to Abstraction's 46!*

ALLAN GORDON

I am intrigued by your ideas on "Improved Diplomacy!". I can't think of anything you've missed - possibly a re-adjustment of the English provinces and I've never been keen on the over-omnipotent sea-spaces like Black Sea, North Sea, Baltic, etc., where there are too many s.c.'s adjacent to them.

SA: *For England see above. It is difficult to separate BLA without making Turkey and Russia an additional*



A new supply centre in Egypt

space apart (east-west split) or turning a move to BLA into a guessing game (north-south split) though the latter might work. North Sea would be a bugger to split too - I suppose you could divide it along a Denmark-Yorkshire axis, but it may leave England a touch vulnerable. The other possibility would be to divide it Yorkshire-Holland and ditch Heligoland Bight. I have no problems with BAL as it is.

GRAHAM SMITH

I have to make a quick comment about your re-design of regular Diplomacy - I suspect that part of the reason for suggesting the re-design was to provoke a response. I'm not sure it's such a good idea - part of the game is in over-coming the problems of geographical position, etc., and I suspect that if implemented your proposals would lead to an awful lot more Austrian wins.

SA: *Graham, I am truly shocked. How on earth could you imagine that I would say something just for the fun of provoking some feedback. Editors of Diplomacy zines never do things like that. Of course Regular Diplomacy is about battling against the geography - but have you never got tired with battling against the same geography every time? I agree that my suggestions last time were a little too pro-Austrian, but I have refined them now, somewhat. In essence I now propose a variant with:*

1. A new s.c. in Ireland and a modified England as per earlier map;
2. Use the Milan variant, and make Switzerland a passable s.c.;
3. A new s.c. in Egypt, adding Libya and Libyan Gulf.
4. Split Moscow and create Siberia and give Russia a choice of F(StP)sc or F(StP)nc in S01.
5. Permit A(NAf)-Spa and vice versa. Permit the coastal crawl (eg. F(Por)-Spa sc and F(Spa)nc-Por).

Other suggestions, worthy of at least consideration are: (a) add another neutral s.c. in Albania and restore Montenegro to the map as a non-sc neutral between Trieste and Albania - Montenegro being the only sizeable European country missed off the map by Calhamer.; (b) adding the Bay of Biscay (bordering MAO, Brest, Gascony, Spa nc) and dividing Spain horizontally into two provinces (Madrid and Bilbao) with only Madrid having a s.c. Madrid would border on Gascony and Marseilles. This change would allow a unit to be dis-

lodged from Portugal without having to occupy MAO and thus ease the Gibraltar bottleneck.

More comments eagerly awaited. Anyway, back to Graham...

I quite like Neil Duncan's idea. He suggested in *The Cunning Plan* that the game could start in Winter 1900 with the builds - i.e. the game starts with no units on the board.

SA: *All very old hat, I'm afraid. That idea was around in the early 70's (the original Multiplicity rules even had it as an option) and a "Winter 1900" is in the variant bank credited to John Norris. More or less everything under the sun connected to the regular board has already been re-invented at least five times. This article merely aims to sort the wheat from the chaff and stick some of the better minor changes together.*

I'm also not convinced that there are too many draws in Diplomacy. If you make it too easy to get past the stalemate line it may be that you would get more dropouts when any country got beyond a dozen centres. The fact that it's quite often possible to salvage a draw against superior opposition is one of the things which attracted me to the game - although as I've yet to complete a game of Diplomacy I've got that satisfaction to come.

Well, it seems rather appropriate to print the next article (which appears courtesy of John Wilman (thanks John), but first a short space-filler

BRIEF FUMBLES...

Although it may not be as fast as Concorde, the new *Borealis / Ac-Mong* is certainly value for money at 50p for 24 sides (A5). Issue 15 has the rules for a kind of team Sopwith - fight in squadrons rather than alone, with lots of new rules.

James Nelson has just produced "Issue 7 & 8" of *Into the Night*, chocked filled with hobby ramblings, tales of Wimbledon, a dissection of the Gladys results (which modesty prevents me from commenting on), features on Postcodes, letters, zine reviews, the odd bit of bile and spite and a few good jokes. I quite liked the following John Colledge joke - "Q: How many Windows programmer's does it take to change a light bulb? A: 472. One to write WinGetLightBulbHandle, one to write WinQVeryStatusLightBulb, one to write WinGetLightSWitchHandle..."

REALITIES OF THE GAMEBOARD

by Allan B. Calhamer

Due to the exigencies of the game, there are historical discrepancies on the board. John McCallum noted in a good article, for example, Ankara was a village in 1914. The original supply centre in that part of the board was Erzurum, a fortress that changed hands during World War I. To reduce the excessive likelihood of Turko-Russian conflict, I moved the SC westward. It is important to balance the board so each country has a reasonable choice of major campaigns at the start of the game.

The gameboard is based on the map of 1914 through the game begins in 1901 so the years are numbered, 1, 2, 3 sequentially. It is my belief the kind of diplomacy the players play is better associated in the public mind with a period like 1901 - 1911 than 1914, 1925 and the list of Great Powers is better for a game ending before 1918. Of course, the maps of 1901 and 1914 needed to be pretty similar, as they are, or 1901 would not be a good starting choice.

Tunisia was, of course, French in this period. Permitting the French to own Tunis at the onset of the game is impractical. If France and Italy compete for it initially, they are replaying the diplomacy of 1830. Italy eventually picked up Libya from Turkey in 1912, rather than Tunisia, but for our purposes Tunis represents Italian interests in the area. In order to speed up the game, the single large space of North Africa is not divided. For this same reason, Luxembourg and Montenegro are not included. Slowness was originally a major drawback; the game still takes quite a while. During the period of development of the gameboard, all the small countries were one space and one SC, except Montenegro, which was only a space, while Luxembourg, Andorra, San Marino, Liechtenstein, among others, were omitted. But six spaces and 5 SCs between Turkey, Austria and Russia were too many. Besides dropping Montenegro, Albania is reduced to a space only. The border of Belgium is moved south to include Calais so the move from English Channel to Belgium is possible.

Switzerland was not impassable to Hannibal or Napoleon. I tried it too, but we got fearfully huge battles over it which are non-historic. If it had been Verdun, it would have been fine. In general, I tried to keep the spaces large in the corners and around the edges so the units would not get lost out of play in those areas.