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DEADLINE

SATURDAY

17th SEPTEMBER

SPRING OFFENSIVE



A MONTHLY POSTAL DIPLOMACY ZINE FROM STEPHEN AGAR, 79 FLORENCE ROAD,
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COST 3½P PER SIDE (60P UNWAGED, £1.20 ABROAD)

EDITORIAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



WORLD DIP CON IV

(Courtesy of **Smodnoc**)

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

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

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



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

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

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

The Subtle Joys of Being Little

by Rod Walker

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

The Greatest Diplomacy Player

by Ernie Melchoir

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

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

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

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

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

"You'll see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



King Demetrius and the Dropout

by Steve Hall

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

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

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

King Demetrius

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

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

In the original Greek it rhymes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



AUTUMN 1903

A Roundup of News & Zines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the OGRE (Orphans Game re-houser). On **Froggy** John notes "Yes, well. Andy's promised to write to me. What more can I say?" Quite. Andy promised to write to me three months ago with a list of duplicates from the "Hobby Archive." No show though. I note that some editors are now sending me copies marked "Hobby Archive" which leads me to believe that whatever Archive Andy has it cannot be being kept up to date (Andy certainly doesn't see **Spring Offensive** anymore). If Andy ever decides to relinquish that post I would be more than happy to take it on and merge it with the MidCon Collection to produce an up-to-date catalogued collection.

One zine which I hadn't seen in its present form before is **Variable Pig** from Jim Reader (being a merger between **Polar Pig** and **Variable Title**). A wide selection of games going on (Preposterous Poetry, Fictionary Dictionary, Der Fuhrer II, Awful Green things, Railway rivals, En Garde!, It's a Raid!, Shanghai Trader and even only two more needed for a game of Diplomacy (if you want to cross swords with Kim Head and Neil Kendrick). Very short on chat and not the quickest zine in the world, but it seems to do what it wants to do well.

As regular as a bowel movement **LiES** No.23 turns up - they're catching me up! An entertaining article from Nepal by Richard Jackson (though I still have no desire to visit the Indian sub-continent), Richard Egan reviews Task Force Games **Viceroy's** (conclusion - it's a turkey) and an announcement that the **Gridiron** game is folding. I was slightly puzzled as to why players in **Gridiron** should have something deducted from their credits to pay for a Handbook which was started but never finished, but no doubt there is an equitable explanation. If a zine folds then surely outstanding credits should be returned, whether the zine was loss-making or not and I would have thought that the same should go for a game in a zine.

Nothing to Declare continues to impress with issue 15, please, please somebody immediately pick up the telephone, call Paul on 0325-321121 and offer to take the last place in his Diplomacy waiting list (your chance to crush John Dodds - don't miss it!). **NtD** sees Kim Head "outing" herself as female, which surprises me given her interest in football and postal gaming (not renowned as female pursuits - though the more women the better). A more suspicious person would have memories of Marcus Umney-Foote, Frank Dashwood and Robin ap Cynan (spot the odd one out). I wholeheartedly endorse Paul's view that people who put "Children on Board" stickers on their cars are deeply irritating. When you see such a sticker do you think "Oh, well, there may be a kid on board so I had better not smash into the back of the car, possibly killing myself and writing off my car after all. Maybe next time."? Everyone with any sense knows that stickers on the backs of cars are dangerous because the temptation is always to get too close so you can read them (in the hope and expectation - rarely realised - that they might be even vaguely amusing).

Although there was very little hobby-related chat in **Mopsy** No.104, there was an interesting 3 page article on Bryan's travels around Scandinavia as a member of a group which re-enacts Viking activity (rape, pillage, that sort of thing). Norway sounds far too expensive, but Copenhagen sounds more like my cup of tea, so maybe it would be a nice place for a weekend break.

The Brothers Grim is an experience that I would probably subscribe too even if I had nothing at all to do with postal gaming, probably because **The Brothers Grim** itself has little to do with postal gaming. It is very entertaining - I particularly like the Bastard Operator from Hell, but in the last issue (No.43) there was a very amusing **Star Trek: TNG** Drinking Game, articles about Satanic Ecumenicalism (!) and Morgan le Fay and the wackiest and longest letter column in any gameszine currently on the go. A slow zine, good for En Garde, but Simon's being trying to fill a list for Downfall for at least two years to my knowledge and he still needs another couple of players.

Ah, **Dolchstoss**. 12 issues to go to issue 200 and the threatened fold. Oh dear, try as I might I can't find any ridiculously right-wing comment to poke fun at this time. How about this one from issue 34 - "It is my genuine belief... that a left-wing mentality argues a weakness of reasoning and an inability to see the obvious which are quite incompatible with the playing of games." Everybody agree? (OK Walkerdine, I know that you agree...)

Down to the Last Farthing (Auf Heller und Pfennig)

by Reiner Knizia

This relatively new game from Reiner Knizia was much in evidence at ManorCon, where I lashed out an exorbitant sum of money (£29?) and bought a copy. Like many of Reiner's games, this is a subtle abstract game (for 2-4 players) which has some unconvincing window dressing laid on top. Ostensibly, the players play traders, setting up stall and selling their valuable wares, and in so doing they try to grab the best sites in the market, where the richest customers are. At the same time the players can try to direct nasty customers (tax collectors and the like) towards their rivals.



Well, that's the scenario. Try as I might I can't help but view it as a totally abstract game with the players putting down one of two sorts of tiles (Market Stalls and Customers/Obstacles) onto a grid. Each turn a player either puts a market stall on the board or picks up a counter blind (to add to the one always in hand) and then plays one of his counters. Playing a Market Stall on to the board scores points at the end of the round depending on the Customers and Obstacles in the same rows (either up and down, or across - each Market Stall scores twice) which you or the other players have put on the board and the value of the market stall played. Playing a Customer (some are positive, some are negative) or an Obstacle affects the value of the Market Stalls already on the board, or those yet to be played. As you would expect there are a few particularly nice Obstacles which can be placed on the board (e.g. a Bag of Gold which doubles scores) and some nasties (e.g. the Evil Eye which wipes out all scores). The Fire Obstacle is essentially neutral (it splits rows for scoring) but is very useful from a tactical point of view.

So, the essentials of the game is that each player takes it in turn to play a counter, either trying to prepare fertile ground for playing a market stall of their own, or in order to ruin the position of their opponents market places. After a while the 6 x 5 grid on which the game is played fills up and when it does the scores are calculated by assessing the value of each row (which may be negative) and then awarding that score to the owner of each market stall in the row multiplied by the value of the market stall (one to four). The players then get cash equal to their score (except it is so messy to dish out lots of cardboard coins that I just keep score on a piece of paper).



The game consists of three rounds, each player getting his low value market stalls back after each round, but forfeiting the high value market stalls for ever. So you have to be careful when you play the multiple markets stalls as they can give you the biggest pay-off (though if you end up playing a multiple market stall on a row which ends the round with a negative score you will end up losing lots of cash). As you would expect the winner is the player with the most dosh at the end of the game. The large number of Obstacles and nasty Customers means there is a lot of scope in this game for bashing the other players, but if you spend all your time playing Customers and Obstacles you cannot score - you have to take a risk and play a market stall eventually. This game can become so tactical that some people take simply ages to decide what to do - so don't play this game with anyone who takes games too seriously (e.g. Steve Jones, Geoff Hardingham, Keith Loveys etc.).

This is an excellent game for a con. It's quick (30-45 minutes), simple to learn, highly tactical, and (as usual with so many German games) has a solid and colourful feel to it. No doubt I would have been more sympathetic to the scenario if I could speak German (what is a "falschspieler"?), but the numerical value of the counters is what really matters. After two or three plays you soon get to grips with the basic tactics and you'll find the game very "morish" - you want to play another game just to see if you can do better (a bit like Minesweeper the first time you use a PC with Windows).



Recommended (especially late at night after too many drinks), though the game is also OK for all-round family entertainment (well, Esme likes it).

World Dip Con IV

I must be getting old and boring. When it came to driving up to ManorCon/WorldDipCon after work on the Friday evening, I very nearly said "Sod it" and went home instead. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the fact that various people were bringing zines for me to pick up, that I'd promised Nick Kinzett a lift, and that there was supposed to be a **Spring Offensive** team in the Diplomacy Championship, then I think I would have just returned home to Brighton and slouched in front of the TV. Don't get me wrong - ManorCon was extremely well organised and all in all good fun, it's just that the thought of driving from Croydon up to Birmingham (and hence round half of the M25) on a Friday rush hour did not appeal and I knew the weather was going to be hot and sticky all weekend (which always makes me feel less than sociable). After a while all cons start to blur into one, and if you are really going to enjoy yourself you have to be in the mood - and I guess I just wasn't in the mood.

The journey was hell. I sloped off from work early (5.15 when I've been working until 6.30-7.00 most nights), but some two hours later I was still on the M25. The M40 was little better, I doubt if I got above 40 mph until I'd past Oxford. I arrived chez Walkerdine pushing 9.00pm, too late to eat, too early to sleep. The first thing I did was put my name and that of Stewart Cross down for the Croquet Tournament as I knew it was limited to 16, but fortunately there was only 12 or so names on the list. Stewart had won the croquet the previous two years, but wasn't coming up until the Saturday morning, so he was keen not to miss out on a chance to play. I even reminded William Whyte (editor of the once legendary, but now mythical, **NERTZ**) to put his name down (as the beaten finalist for the past two years) which he duly did. The significance of this minutiae will become apparent. A couple of pints later (it would have been more, but as is usual for Birmingham University the promised bar opening hours of 6.00-12.00 turned out to be 6.00-11.00), having soundly beaten Duncan Adams at Intimate Diplomacy, experienced a game of **Grass** with Robin ap Cynan (editor of the once renowned, but now Missing in Action, **Monochrome**), John Morgan (editor of the once sporadic, but now even more sporadic, **Assassin's Handbook**) and others, and thoroughly enjoyed a game of **Once Upon a Time** (supplied by William Whyte), it was time for bed. At least by this time I was feeling more like attending a games con and my good humour was returning.

There's nothing wrong with the rooms in the Halls of Residence in Birmingham if you are only staying for a weekend, but I thank God I didn't go to university there, because I couldn't conceive of living in such a basic claustrophobic space for 3 years. I was particularly disappointed that, unlike previous years, the room I had didn't have a kettle - I know that sounds like nit-picking, but it meant that there was no way I could make a cup of tea/coffee before falling unconscious in the early hours or when I finally got up (and given the degree of dehydration brought on by excess quantities of alcohol and the July sun, even a cup of weak Nescafe with UHT milk can be, if not pleasurable, certainly welcome). At least the fact that a fridge was provided did mean that Robin's ap Cynan's Chablis could be kept at a temperature fit to drink. I cursed the fact that I had forgotten to bring an alarm clock, but despite that setback I still managed breakfast the following morning (I cursed even more when packing to go home on Sunday lunchtime when I discovered I had brought an alarm clock after all - it was just hiding in a spare pair of underpants).

If you are of a delicate disposition breakfasts at ManorCon are usually best avoided, consisting as they do of very greasy eggs, bacon and sausages and cold toast (though Richard Walkerdine did recommend the grapefruit and cereal as being relatively grease-free). Never being one to let the unpalatability of food stand in the way of my appetite I ate the cooked breakfast eagerly while waiting for the Team Diplomacy Championship to start. The **Spring Offensive** team consisted of James Hardy (A), Fred Fall (E), Stewart Cross (F), Paul Barker (G), John Boocock (R), Steve Cox (T) and myself (I). Having come third last year, I must confess that we did not cover ourselves in glory this time. The best performance in our team was Steve Cox as a 8 centre Turkey (6-way draw), then Paul Barker (6 centre Germany,

5-way draw) and myself (6 centre Italy, 6-way draw). Everyone else was eliminated!. I quite enjoyed my game - as Italy I formed an instant alliance with Austria (Nicholas Parish) in an effort to carve up Alan Sharples (Turkey). Things went well initially (I took Greece in A01, the Aegean Sea in S02 and Austria took Bulgaria in A02), but Brian Frew (Russia) stood by Turkey and eventually we were pushed back. In the meantime Eric Roche (France) and Mick Dunnett (Germany) had eliminated Alain Hirsch (England) and then turned on Russia who was by now up to double figures. After a couple of years in which France and Germany laid into Russia, while R/T/A/I patched up their differences to stop the F/G alliance, a 6-way draw was agreed with France (10), Germany (7), Italy (6), Russia (5), Austria (3) and Turkey (3).

When the final results were announced we ended up 12th out of 17 teams. It could have been worse, I suppose. My Diplomacy game having ended after lunch, I enquired of Steve Jones (the organiser of the croquet) as to who I was supposed to be playing. Imagine my surprise to discover that Stewart and I were not included in the draw, but that William Whyte (who had put his name down after us) was! This did annoy me, not so much for myself (because I never get past the second round anyway), but because Stewart's main motivation in coming to ManorCon was to defend his Croquet crown and he was being prevented from doing so in what seemed an arbitrary fashion. There is a lesson here for anyone running a Tournament at a Con - if the number of spaces is limited then you should number the spaces on the sheet asking for names so that the order in which people sign up corresponds to the order in which the names appear and, once you construct a draw for the Tournament, take down the old list or people will still be signing up thinking that they are going to get a chance to play. However, Steve Jones did the honourable thing in the end and altered the draw so that Stewart and I could play. I was duly hammered by Nicholas Parish 14-4, while Stewart (because of his record of having won the last two years) was given a bye to the final, to play against the winner of the best of this year's entrants. Late on Sunday the final took place between William Whyte (last year's beaten finalist) and Stewart, and much to William's extreme irritation Stewart won it again, though this year it was extremely close, 26-25.

The evening saw Robin ap Cynan, William Whyte, Chris Tringham, Stewart Cross and myself visit a relatively inexpensive, but very pleasant, French restaurant called Le Silverside. A good time was had by all (their terrine was particularly good, as was Robin's choice of wine). Upon returning to the con, Robin, Chris, Stewart and I occupied a table in the open air and demolished another couple of bottles of wine (courtesy of Robin, for which many thanks). You probably won't believe this, but we then spent a good hour playing a single game of **Mornington Crescent** during which our knowledge and expertise of the underground system was sorely tested and the winner (if you can have a winner at this sort of thing) was probably Robin who delighted in the poetry of Arnos Grove and Parsons Green (while I was confined to the more mundane Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Circus and Leicester Square). Tringham was so drunk and so embarrassed at having spent an hour reciting tube stations that all record of this silliness has been erased from his long con report in **Megalomania**, but you can trust **Spring Offensive** to tell it like it was.. Stewart thrashed me at a moonlight game of croquet (by this stage I was incapable of walking in a straight line, never mind hitting a croquet ball in a straight line) after which I should have gone to bed. Of course I didn't. Instead I played a couple of games of **Heller und Pfennig** and didn't return to my room until well past 3.00am, which is not good news when you want to be up at 8.30am.

Still I managed it. I even arrived at Nick Kinzett's in Coventry, at 10.00am precisely (as promised) to give Nick a lift back to ManorCon. My payment was a couple of boxes of old zines, for which many thanks. Hence I didn't make my appearance at the Con until pushing 11.00am when I was immediately denounced by several people for having slept in - a despicable slur considering that just this once I had actually managed to get out of bed quite early (unlike some of those

making the allegation). There was no time for games Sunday morning, as Chris Tringham, John Dodds, Brian Williams and myself retired to a local hostelry for lunch and a MidCon Committee meeting, to try and work out the plans for this year's MidCon in November. We're not the most decisive bunch in the world and making some decisions was like drawing teeth, but we got there in the end. By the time we got back to the Con, I only had time for another game of *Auf Heller und Pfennig* (which I had by then actually bought for myself at the Just Games stall) before setting off on the return journey to Brighton.

In the end I was glad I did go - I played some interesting games, renewed some old acquaintances, and collected lots of old zines from several people. I was particularly pleased to see Haz Bond again (see elsewhere for tales of Haz's recent troubles) and John Marsden (who may well have had a beard for 10+ years, but who I still think of as clean shaven). People who I always meant to get round to talk to included Iain Bowen (always busy organising something) and Pete Birks (always busy chasing barmaids), while events I meant to attend (but didn't) included the discussion on the future of WorldDipCon (in Paris next year) and the Pop Quiz (too preoccupied recalling the names of tube stations to attend).

Many many thanks to the ManorCon Committee (Iain Bowen, Pete Sullivan, Richard Walkerdine, Kath Collman, Steve Jones, Ken Slmpson, and Andy Bate) for organising such a successful event on such a large scale (330 attendees?) with a particular thank you to Richard Walkerdine who is stepping down from the ManorCon Committee after 10 years service (to devote more time to his cigarette card collection - I kid you not!).



The Cunning Plan

Available from Neil Duncan, 25 Sarum Hill, Basingstoke, Hants, RG21 1SS.

It's been a while since I tried to put together a longish zine review, so I thought I'd have a go at reviewing one of the most successful new zines of the last year or so (though given that *The Cunning Plan* is already up to issue 19 it is stretching it a bit to call it a new zine). *TCP* started life when at the end of 1992 Andrew Moss asked for volunteers to run a variants subzine in *Age of Reason*. As Neil was already having considerable success promoting one of his own variants (Airforce Diplomacy), he seemed like a good choice. Things went well and *TCP* grew and grew. By the end of 1993 Andrew was relying on Neil's subzine to provide almost all the non-games material in *Age of Reason*, and *TCP* (although a subzine) became more mainstream than the zine which carried it - this was due largely to Neil's decision (at around issue 7) to make *TCP* available as a separate zine in its own right, which allowed him to trade, while *Age of Reason* had very few trades. In retrospect I think that nurturing *TCP* did *Age of Reason* no good at all - it led to Andrew becoming more marginalised even within his own zine. A couple of months ago Andrew called it a day and *Age of Reason* folded into its own subzine, he continued to GM the regular Diplomacy for a couple of seasons, but now even that degree of involvement has ended. All this coincided with Andrew having all sorts of serious personal problems and when the dust settles I do hope we'll see him back in the thick of things.

So, *TCP* has been fortunate in being given a year or so to mature and grow confident within the body of a host zine, while Neil grew comfortable to the idea of running a Diplomacy zine, and now, with the *Age of Reason* inheritance *The Cunning Plan* probably runs more games of regular Diplomacy than any other zine in the country. The other advantage that *TCP* enjoyed was that Neil Duncan was not a complete novice at the zine publishing lark, having produce a punk fanzine many years previously, which gave *TCP* not only an air of confidence, but one of inspired anarchy as well.

Well, *TCP* has been effectively independent for a year now, so what are we to make of it. First and most important, it's rare among zines launched over the last couple of years in that it is reliable. That automatically gets Neil three gold stars in my book. As to appearance, well that can be a little patchy at times (more than one typeface is usually in evidence for main text), but on the whole I feel *TCP* benefits from getting away from the sort of over-rigid layout evidenced in zines such as *Spring Offensive*. The "I've just stuck it all together with sellotape" and "why use letraset all the time when using a pen is quicker" approach does seem to make the zine more cosy and less officious - so maybe I should try it myself. The content in recent issues has settled down to the letters and zine reviews formula, though in earlier issues Neil did manage to come up with some amusing articles lampooning the hobby establishment, some of which obviously took a lot of effort (such as the hobby boardgame given away with issue 12). I've criticised Neil before for printing out of date zine reviews (like some other editors, Neil seems to review zines as he gets them and when the requisite space has filled up he stops), as sometimes you can read a review of (say) issue 18 of a zine in *TCP* after you've already received issue 19. However, I suspect that this only bothers traders so isn't a big issue. There is a fair amount of hobby news in the zine, though it tends to be haphazard rather than structured and hence probably more in keeping with the *TCP* image. As a variant freak I would like to see more variants in *TCP* (which did after all start life as a variant sub-zine) but you have to draw the line somewhere.

Since absorbing *Age of Reason* Neil has decided to only offer the regular Diplomacy games report pages to subscribers who pay an extra 25p, others just get the chat and variants side of the zine. I do think that this is a pity - unless *TCP* is out of the ordinary in having large numbers of non-playing subscribers, this strategy in general will just mean that traders don't get to see game reports (and hence Neil loses less money on trades), though it must be a lot of effort to sort out who gets what. Personally, I would prefer it if the zine was just a little more expensive and everyone saw everything, but that really is up to Neil. I've played around with similar ideas myself in the past, so I know the problems when you're carrying a lot of games. On the other hand, *TCP* does not carry maps of games, so the extra space needed is not as much as it would be for (say) *Spring Offensive* and even with games *TCP* only runs to some 16 sides (8 sides chat, 8 sides games).

TCP surprised many people when it came 7th in the Zine Poll this year (although it still enjoyed a quasi-subzine status), though I wasn't one of them. It will undoubtedly do better this year, partly because some of the competition has disappeared, but partly because it deserves to. This hobby is short of fresh and reliable zines and I would predict that *TCP* will go from strength to strength, provided it does not suffer from the sheer weight of the number of games inherited from *Age of Reason*. If Neil can continue to provide reliability together with readable hobby chat then the only way is up.



SPRING OFFENSIVE HOUSE RULES

1. General

Except as mentioned below the Revised 2/5/89 rules will be used, though in effect the 1971 Rulebook is the same in all material respects. No deception of the GM is permitted in any circumstances. will accept any orders which are unambiguous, however badly written. The GM's decision is final.

2. Starting a Game

Players should apply to me (Stephen Agar) if they wish to play a game of Diplomacy in *Spring Offensive*. Preference lists for countries will be used if supplied. There is no game fee.

3. Game System

The game will be played on a two season game year. Thus Spring orders should contain retreats (which may be conditional on that season's moves) for vulnerable units, in the absence of which any dislodged unit will be disbanded. Autumn orders should include conditional retreats and conditional builds/removals. The conditional builds may be conditional on the previous season's moves or retreats.

If two or more players attempt to retreat to the same space they will stand each other off and both will be removed from play, though a player may indicate which unit is to have priority if both units are his. If a player fails to submit build orders in an Autumn move then no builds will be made even if due. Unless there is a clear instruction to the contrary "Remove A(Par)" means "remove the army that was in Paris before this season, but may not be now." - though if there was no Army in Par at the beginning of the move, but there is at the end of the move, then that A(Par) will be removed instead. If a player fails to submit removal orders in an Autumn move (or the country is in Anarchy) then I will disband units in the following order (the furthest space from a home s.c. first): (1) sea spaces, (2) non-s.c.'s outside homeland, (3) non-s.c.'s inside the homeland, Fleets before Armies, alphabetically if more than one eligible. **Units in supply centres will not be disbanded unless specifically ordered by the player concerned.**

4. Orders

Orders should be written clearly. It would greatly assist if orders for different games were written on different sheets of paper. Ideally, each set of orders should state player's name, game, country, year and season. The orders should be dated and signed. For the interpretation of orders see above. Implied orders will be accepted, for example "A(Mun) S A(Ruh)-Bur" is a valid order to both units, however, a contrary explicit order (E.g. A(Ruh)-Bel) will override an implied order, **the unit is not considered to be ordered twice.** A mis-ordered unit attempting to move cannot be supported in place.

Orders should be submitted in good time for the deadline set in the most recent issue of *Spring Offensive*. It is a good idea to send a set of provisional orders upon receipt of the game report. Phoned orders will be accepted, but I make no guarantees about being around to take your phone call. Late orders will be accepted where possible, but games will not be re-adjudicated save where late orders are received with a first class stamp and posted before the deadline. All players should note that I am inclined to accept late orders where possible, so you should not assume that it is safe to reveal your plans after the deadline. Changes to moves already sent in will not be accepted after 5.00pm on deadline day.

5. No Moves Received

Failure to submit orders by the deadline will result in an NMR. Two successive NMR's will result in the offending country being placed in anarchy (which means all units stand unsupported) and the player will forfeit his deposit. At my unfettered discretion the Player may also forfeit any zine credit and will no longer receive *Spring Offensive*. I

will not start a game with a NMR in S01 even if it means holding the game over and finding a new player.

6. Abbreviations

In game reports provinces will be abbreviated to the first three letters of their names, capitals for sea spaces, lower case for land spaces.

Exceptions are:

GoB = Gulf of Bothnia	GoL = Gulf of Lyons
Lvn = Livonia	Lpl = Liverpool
MAO = Mid Atlantic Ocean	NAf = North Africa
NAO = North Atlantic Ocean	NTH = North Sea
Nwy = Norway	NWG = Norwegian Sea
TYS = Tyrrhenian Sea	

Other abbreviations used in game reports are:

NMR = No Moves Received
NRO = No Retreat Ordered
NPRO = No Possible Retreat Ordered
MS = Mutually Supports
Std. = Stands
A(Kie)-Hol = Failed Move
A(Kie)-Bur = Illegal or Impossible Move or non-existent unit.
* = Retreating Unit

7. Errors

In the rare instance of an error creeping into an adjudication the error should be brought to the GM's attention **immediately**. Any errors carried over for more than one season will stand. Obvious errors (e.g. failing to underline a failed move) should not delay the game and players should submit orders on the basis that the moves printed were correct (even if the game report was incorrect as to the consequence of those moves). If in doubt, telephone.

8. Game Endings

A game may be ended at any time on any terms proposed by any player or the GM by a unanimous vote of the players. The first time a game-end is proposed NMR's = assent; forgetting to vote, but submitting orders = dissent. **If a game-end is re-proposed then abstention = assent!** The identity of the player proposing the game-end will not be revealed and the GM may propose end-games at his discretion.

9. Proxies

A player may sign over control of one or more units to another player at any time for a maximum of two moves, provided that the player so doing remains in credit and continues to receive *Spring Offensive*. If the player wishes to continue the arrangement for more than two moves he must reaffirm his wishes. A player may cancel this arrangement at any time, without notice.

10. Press

Press releases for publication alongside the game are welcome and may be conditional on that season's moves. The GM's dateline is "Wilfred" and no press submitted by any player using this dateline will be permitted. The names of the 7 capitals (Vie, Lon, Par, Ber, Rom, StP, Con) followed by "(Govt.*)" are reserved for the players concerned.

11. Maps

Regular Diplomacy games in *Spring Offensive* will usually have maps with the game reports, however **do not rely on them**. Read the game report! I will have no sympathy with anyone who mis-orders on the basis of an error in a map, if the game report was correct.

12. Variants

Variants will be played to these House Rules save that I reserve the right to seek standbys in the result of a dropout.

Americana Latina 1821

by Philippe Janssens

1. The rules of Diplomacy apply except for the modifications below.

2. The map shows South America as it was in 1821. Bolivar has just created Greater Columbia; Chile has been independent for 3 years and Argentina for 10 years; the Loyalists still hold High-Peru and a part of the Viceroyalty of the Plate, future Bolivia; they are taken in charge of by Bolivia in the north and San Martin in the south; whereas Brazil is just about to become the Brazilian Empire under Pedro I.

3. Starting Positions

Bolivar, President of Greater Columbia.
F(Caracas), A(Bogota), A(Selva).

San Martin, Argentinian General.
A(Mendoza), A(Cordoba), A(Buenos Aires),
F(Rio de la Plata) [see rule 7]

Pezuela, Viceroy of Peru. F(Lima),
A(Cusco), A(La Plata).

Jean VI, King of Portugal (exiled in Brazil).
F(Belem), F(Bahia), A(Santos).

O'Higgins, Chilean General. F(Santiago),
F(Antofagasta), A(Puerto Montt).

A. Cochrane, Commander of the British forces in Latin America. F(British Guyana),
F(Falkland Isles), F(South Georgia),
A(British Honduras), A(Jamaica).

4. Victory Conditions

The winner is either:

(A) The Bolivarian Objective: The player who can "control" Greater Columbia, the Viceroyalties of Peru, Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay. In order to achieve this "control" the player must possess the original 3 home centres of each of these powers as well as Paraguay, a total of 16 supply centres; or

(B) 20 supply centres of any kind.

5. Activable Home Centres

Four powers possess an activable supply centre which when occupied, become home supply centres. These are Panama (Columbia), Potosi (Peru), Porto Alegre (Brazil) and Ile Chiloe (Chile).

6. When a player controls the 3 original home supply centres of a country required for victory under the Bolivarian objective, or Paraguay, he can build in those centres as if they were his home centres.

7. Buenos Aires

The player who owns Buenos Aires (Argentina initially) has at the same time a fleet which can only be built at Rio de la Plata. If a player loses control of Buenos

Aires he automatically loses the fleet no matter where it is.

8. Rivers:

Fleets may navigate land provinces by using a river. A fleet can control a land province of which one of the borders is a river (e.g. Paraguay, Selva and New Grenada). Thus, for example, Bolivia could build a fleet at Selva. Note that F(Ria)-Sel is illegal, whereas F(Ria)-Rim; F(Rim)-Sel is legal.

9. Coasts

The following provinces have two coasts: Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Bogota, Chubut and Patagonia Septentr. The Panama Canal will not be built for another 67 years!

10. Mountains

Certain areas of the Andes chain are impassable in the Autumn season. These areas consist of the mountains which separate Lima and Titicaca from Cusco and Potosi, and those separating Antofagasta and Santiago from Tucuman and Mendoza.

11. Abbreviations

© = Supply Centre. Home centres are underlined. Activable centres are dotted underlined.

Acre	Acre
<u>Antofagasta</u>	<u>Ant</u> ©
<u>Bahia</u>	<u>Bah</u> ©
<u>Belem</u>	<u>Bel</u> ©
Bio-bio	Bio
<u>Bogota</u>	<u>Bog</u> ©
<u>Buenos Aires</u>	<u>Bue</u> ©
Cape Horn	CAP
<u>Caracas</u>	<u>Car</u> ©
Chubut	Chu
<u>Cordoba</u>	<u>Cor</u> ©
Costa Rica	Cos
Anchov Coast	CAN.
E. Brazil Coast	CEB
Cuba	Cub ©
<u>Cusco</u>	<u>Cus</u> ©
Folida Straits	DFL
Magellan Straits	DMA
El Norte	Eln
<u>Falklands</u>	<u>Fal</u> ©
Fosse du Chile	FCH
<u>South Georgia</u>	<u>Geo</u> ©
Guayaquil Gulf	GGU
Mexiacn Gulf	GMX
Mosquito Gulf	GMO
Panama Gulf	GPA
San Jorge Gulf	GSJ
Guatamala	Gua ©
<u>British Guyana</u>	<u>Gub</u> ©
French Guyana	Guf ©
Dutch Guyana	Guh ©
Haiti	Hai ©
Honduras	Hon ©
<u>British Honduras</u>	<u>Hob</u> ©
Chiloe Islands	Ich ©

Fernandoes Is.	Ife ©
Galapagos Is.	Iga ©
<u>Jamaica</u>	<u>Jam</u> ©
<u>La Plata</u>	<u>Lpl</u> ©
Las Pampas	Las
<u>Lima</u>	<u>Lim</u> ©
<u>Mendoza</u>	<u>Men</u> ©
Caribbean Sea	MCA
Patagonian Sea	MPA
Sm. Antil. Sea	PAN
Scotia Sea	MSC
Mexico	Mex
Nicaragua	Nic ©
New Grenada	Ngr
N. Atlantic O.	ATN
S. Atlantic O.	ATS
N. Pacific O.	OPN
S. Pacific O.	OPS
Orinoco	Ore
Panama	Pan
Paraguay	Pry ©
Parana	Par
Patagonia Sept.	Pas ©
Patagonia Mid.	Pam ©
<u>Porto Alegre</u>	<u>Pto</u> ©
<u>Potosi</u>	<u>Pot</u> ©
<u>Puerto Montt</u>	<u>Pue</u> ©
Quito	Qui
Recife	Rec
Rio Amazonas	Ria ©
Rio de Janeiro	Rij
Rio Madeiras	Rim ©
Rio de la Plata	RIP
<u>Santiago</u>	<u>Stg</u> ©
<u>Santos</u>	<u>San</u> ©
<u>Selva</u>	<u>Sel</u> ©
Terra del Fuego	Tdf
Titicaca	Tit
Tucuman	Tuc
Uruguay	Uru

Note: Some of these abbreviations look a little odd because the map was designed for use with the original French rules.



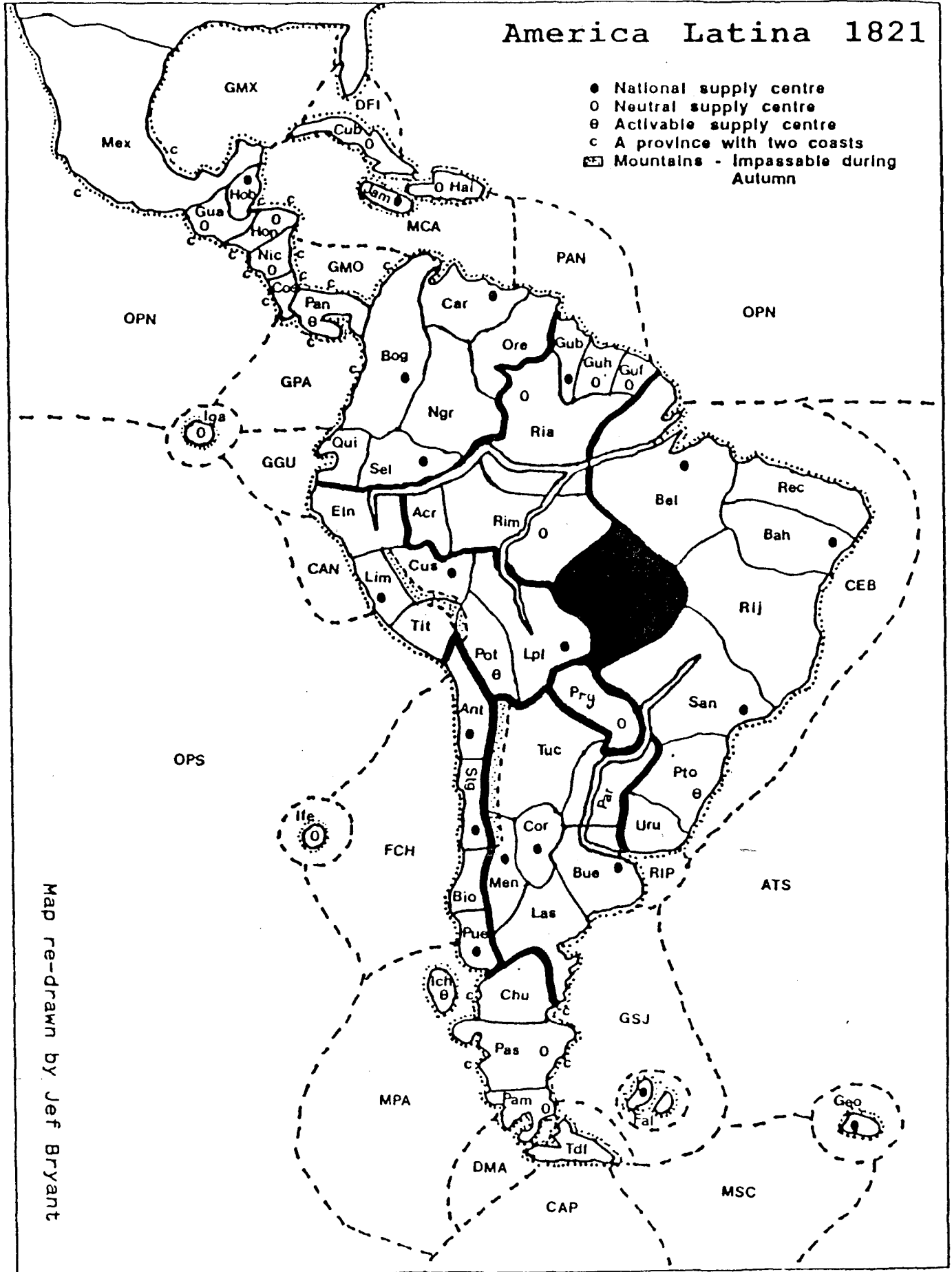
THE UKVB

This seems like an appropriate space to advertise the United Kingdom Variant Bank which is now run by **Mark Nelson**, 1st Floor Front Flat, 3 Kelso Road, LEEDS. LS2 (email: amt5man@amsta.leeds.ac.uk)

If you send him £1 he will send you the current UKVB which lists the hundreds of variants available and a few general articles. I have every confidence in Mark being able to run an efficient service and I hope we will all give him some support.

America Latina 1821

- National supply centre
- Neutral supply centre
- ⊖ Activable supply centre
- c A province with two coasts
- ▨ Mountains - Impassable during Autumn



Map re-drawn by Jef Bryant

LETTERS



Chris Tringham

I continue to be entertained by tales of your cats - perhaps you should drop all those dull Diplomacy strategy articles and run more cat articles. When I lived at home, we had two cats - the first one belonged to the people a few doors down, as we discovered when they moved to Liverpool and took her with them! This cat discovered that by sitting on the roof of the shed it could catch pigeons unaware by jumping on them as they flew past - as you might imagine, this caused rather a mess, particularly when the remains were brought in for us to admire.

The second cat was a nervous wreck, either because it had played Conquest Europa with Steve Jones and Geoff Hardingham, or because it had been living rough in a garage whilst pregnant and been attacked (I forget which reason is true). When it first came to live with us it sat in the doorway so that it could make good its escape from whichever direction it was approached. It wouldn't venture far from the house and I'm not sure it ever made it beyond our garden!

SA *Kipper has been in the wars recently. A couple of days ago I said to Esme that I thought she was limping a bit, but Esme assured me it was my imagination. Now we've discovered a deep wound on one side of one of her back legs and a strip of fur missing a couple of inches long on the other side of the same leg. It doesn't seem to trouble her much, though she has (unusually) been demanding a lot of attention this week. This hobby seems to have far more cat people in it than dog people.*

I think Nick is partially correct when he says that a certain number of subscribers will disappear with the fold of a zine, but if the games transfer to another zine some of the readers may retain an interest, particularly if the editor transfers to a subzine to finish off at least some of the games (my preferred solution). I wouldn't pretend that there's an easy solution to this, but I do think that it's worthwhile discussing the various possibilities with a view to making editors think about what is for the best when they fold.

As for tournament rating systems, I will confess that I don't understand why Nick didn't use his system at ManorCon - it seems to produce the desired result and yet to be very simple to use. Or am I missing something? No doubt some boring statistician will tell us what's wrong with this system (if he isn't too busy devising extra taxes for Mr Clarke to implement).

SA *I don't know who you're referring to...*

I actually read the rules for Skinny Dip (gasp!). Has this actually been played, and is it any quicker than Regular?

SA *Don't know. Wanna play?*

Nick Kinzett

Diplomacy Scoring Systems, very briefly... Glad you liked the simple sc-plus-duration, it shows that I can express myself concisely on occasion! My final point, I admit, was a mischievous hit against the X-way Draw Syndrome that tends to reign supreme in postal play (and so influences face-to-face play) despite being a mere variation on the equally ludicrous Places Syndrome (because it treats draws as "equal first"). The problem is that both X-way and Places Syndrome promote elimination (easy) as opposing to striving for 18+ centres (hard); and until we rid ourselves of such corrupt values in postal play we can scarcely expect better of tournaments.

SA *As you would expect I still like my system because the scoring is predominantly based on how well you did compared to the other players in the game and above all else encourages you to strive for more centres. There is no real advantage in just*

eliminating someone for the sake of it. What I want now is someone willing to trial something like my system in a Diplomacy Tournament.

The **Fall of Eagles** retrospective brought back a few memories. I never subbed to it, but before we started **Zeeby** Shaun lent me his **FoE** back copies and I subsequently remarked that they taught me more about postal Diplomacy than any other single source. This wasn't quite as adulatory as it might have seemed. For instance, Richard's love for - and hence perhaps tacit encouragement of - certain species of postal "coup" (like the controversial if entertaining forged-orders-over-genuine-signature incident) merely persuaded me to take the opposite course, i.e. quietly discourage such things. I'm sure I saved myself a lot of hassle that way. And remained about as near human as I can get.

SA *Ah.. the famous forged orders debate. Maybe I'll reprint the original editorial and some of the subsequent correspondence next issue.*

I note in passing that **FoE** too was a rundown fold. Was I too quick to concede your point, or was Richard's disillusion what you had in mind when you criticised the strategy?

SA *I would have thought that all editors running down to a fold must be disillusioned to some degree, or why fold at all? When you're putting together a zine which isn't as good as what has gone before and you know it, can you still be really satisfied with it? I know I couldn't. **Spring Offensive** will keep going strong until the day it drops, but once it drops that will be it.*

Paul B Harrison

I was dreadfully hurt by you editing my last letter about Duncan Adams - anything to protect your mate Dunx - so I wrote to him soon after I received **The Laughing Roundhead** Issue 12 on 27 April 1994 and told him I thought he was a hypocrite (but I had to admit I liked the piece on Liverpool castle). It's 15 weeks to the day, and I've yet to receive **The Laughing Roundhead** Issue 13, and my Diplomacy game report within it; presumably because he doesn't want to publish my letter.

Your debate with Nick Kinzett about "rundown folds" and "disappearing zines" was interesting, but what should I call **The Laughing Roundhead**? I think we should be told.

SA *TLR is surely an example of a Zombie Fold (i.e. undead). You may recall I was condemned at the beginning of the year when I cast doubt upon **The Laughing Roundhead's** return after a six months absence. A couple of issues later and Duncan's disappeared again. At ManorCon Duncan was saying that he'd broken his computer and he couldn't produce another issue until he had the money to buy a new one. Even if this were true (and not just an excuse) surely Duncan could have written to his subscribers to tell them what was going on. Even a hand-written letter can be photocopied. Duncan didn't contact his subscribers last time he went to ground either. If I were you I'd write to John Marsden and ask him to arrange for your game to be re-housed.. As it is, this will be the last issue of **Spring Offensive** Duncan gets from me as a "trade." No doubt, if **TLR** does reappear again, Toby Harris will write another editorial in **Smodnoc** (if it is still with us) saying that everyone should subscribe again and give Duncan another chance. It's all a shame really, as Duncan is a helpful and friendly sort of guy.*

Paul Barker

I am happy to take on the running of a couple more variants in Spring Offensive. My only proviso is that they are ones that I am more or less in sympathy with (which probably rules out Middle Earth). I'll do City State if you like.

SA: *Given the massive amount of time to produce **Spring Offensive** I would like to reduce my commitment to GMing games to Regular Diplomacy and map change variants (because I can GM all these on computer). Stewart is testing*