

MINUTES OF A FULL "FIC JOBBIES" STAFF MEETING, HARBOURNE (HTH) BRANCH

Attended by all staff, 127 in number. Date: 1 Sept 1983

The minutes of the last meeting were read out and duly approved, though Mr Codswalp added the reservation that they were "not long enough". A man with a fork-lift truck then came to take them away for pulping.

TWE

Mr Burke then announced subject for this meeting, Mr Peter Doubleday, late of Madalen College and now residing at 302 Lordswood Rd, Harborne, Birmingham B17 8AN. Object of meeting being to determine suitable job for subject. Mr Codswalp asked for reports from observers on qualifications of subject.

THING

Mr Burke informed meeting that he had trailed Mr Doubleday for three weeks and wished to submit expenses of £150 for psychiatric treatment incurred as a result. Apart from reading several novels of dubious literary value, eating meals of even more dubious nutritional value, practicing with his ochre pipe and declaiming sections of Homer to an audience consisting of two copulating dogs, four pre-pubescent schoolgirls from across the street, and a man whose wheelchair had seized up, he had done nothing.

ON THE

Ms McRetin reported her research from the files. Subject had ten O-levels, five A-levels, and a First in Modern History at Oxford. He could speak fluent Fortran and programme a variety of computers in Ancient Greek. Good with hands, as grade eight with aforementioned ochre instrument indicated. Brain the size of a neutron star, and twice as dense. Certified genius by the Lord of Men In White Coats.

MAT 22

Report of a Mr Simon Billenneys was read out, suggesting that subject was "personable, able conversationalist, all-round good egg". Thrown out as inadmissible evidence through juvenile mentality of source. Report of Mr Michael Fenyon suggested that subject was "abominably rude, coarse, vicious, obscene, and not really a nice person at all": meeting decided that this should not be taken into account, since Mr Fenyon was in the habit of describing anyone with ten typing fingers and a mouth thus. Mr Rabid read out the list of suggested forms of employment: taster and blender for the Severn Trent Water Authority; manual gelder for elephants at London Zoo; Prime Minister of Grenada; rubber-band twister for 125s; intensive demonstrator to teach MPs how to talk English.

Job recommended: Combination tutor to thick public school oits and bar staff at Eocles in Oxford.

Mr Codswalp asked that it should be entered into the records that he dissented, seeing the job as Prime Minister of Grenada as more within subject's abilities, in that "almost every other incompetent you can think of has already had a go".

Next meeting scheduled for:

26th November 1983. Phone if necessary - 0214294108

Productorial

"To me it's essential to forgive divine". I don't know who first cooked up that piece of nonsense, but I hope all you godly little chaps out there take it to heart in any case. This issue is late, but then if you have read Things attentively you will know that I do not write of relevant matters such as games at any time, reserving this space exclusively for broad issues. So what's one more amongst many?

I am feeling depressed.

Many thanks to those of you who were kind enough to get your orders in early as stipulated. The fact that your efforts were vitiated partly by my all-pervading depression, partly by circumstances beyond my control and to do with re-starting the zine after such a long absence, is neither here nor there. Although it must be somewhere. So, if you find it, please affix a neat label and return to sender. By next deadline - or two weeks after, whichever seems the more appropriate. There now follows a roll of honour, on which is inscribed the names of those who got their orders in for the deadline as set:

Brian Moore; Dave Erridge; Richard Morris; Robert Loszynskyj; Derek Crompton.

This is a short list. Like the short list for All Souls, it omits several very worthy individuals. ~~Not /not /not /not /not~~ I do not wish these people to feel left out, even though they are. For the most part they are left out through mere technicality, like for instance having moved house five times since the last issue of Thing or having blinked and missed the deadline. The main reason is a short list, in any case, is that there are very few people stupid enough to play a game in Thing, for which I take full blame - although since I'm going to find the said stupid people, I just don't know; I think the marketing's at fault, because Benyon seemed to have no trouble, even to the extent of getting Birks to play the preposterously unworkable Golfross. This is what it is, you see. I can proudly announce that Thing eschews all gimmicks, all johnny-come-lately fads, all obvious crowd-pullers. Yes, with Thing all you get is plain, unadulterated, whining inefficiency, and by the very nature of the beast you don't even get much of that. There are two ways out of this. One is to write more about games per se, and if I can get hold of hallucinogens powerful enough to convince me that I can do this interestingly, I may well do so. The other is to announce a gamestart in the editorial in order to convince people I am interested, nay desperate, enough to get on the job. So here it is:

Thing Ten Railway Rivals RT...K Gamestart

Will Geoff Challinger, Steven Rennie, Simon Billenness, Chris Spall, Ken Bain and Paul Brine please convey their willingness to submit to the usual farce of my GMing by the next deadline, please? I would also like a choice of colour preference and start towns, which can be chosen from the following (coastal) list:

Marqate, Ramsgate, Folkestone, Bexhill, Eastbourne, Brighton.

* You may regard this as an exhibition game. In a way you are all on show, but what I mean by this is that my GMing is on postal playtest for the final time. I intend, gentlemen, to make this an error-free game, to which end you will be glad to know that I shall, come each deadline day, be burning the wick at both ends or whatever it is you do with these things in order to get the adjudication finally and irrevocably correct. This will then act as an inducement to others to risk playing in Thing, which will mean I can start other games, which will boost my circulation, which will make me FAMOUS and RICH beyond my wildest dreams as the game-fees roll in, and then I can win the zine poll and I can retire and I can live happily ever afterward.

I talk to the trees, that's why they put me away ...

MIDCON REVIEW

Midcon

MIDCON?

(Hernia)

Well, the Royal Angus ain't no Caesar's Palace, and that's for sure. About the only thing the two have in common is the lousy beer and even more dreadful bar prices - although with the Palace they're dreadfully low to rope you in, and at the Angus they've already lassooed their steer by the simple method of being chosen once more as the National Diplomacy Convention. Consequently, the bar charges obscene prices for a wide variety of drinks that nowhere outside Sloane Square drinks seriously. And, since the Diplomacy Lobby is full of people who drink seriously, this is a major pain in the crav. Now, oh why, is it so necessary to choose the Angus every year? Are none of the hotels down the Hagley Road, famed scenes of some of George Kelly's more everyday perversions, better qualified? Do they not have rooms? Conference chambers? A pinball table? It being Birmingham, I suspect the beer is just as dre dreadful, but surely it cannot be so heavily, toxically priced. For the price of a hangover at the Angus Roberto Calvi was forced to go through a more realistic version of Waterloo Bridge ... Perhaps the Convention is misplaced in Birmingham. Perhaps some more northerly latitude should be favoured, like Leeds. Let's give those bastards in London a taste of what it's really like to live in the rest of Britain ...

But of course all this is irrelevant. People do not come to a Diplomacy Convention to drink. Subhumans and crazed pineal mainliners like Woodhouse may do, but they are on the whole sensible enough to bring their own supplies of inferior cognac along. People come to the Royal Angus to sleep.

I know this to be true. I was there.

Well, not sleeping, but you know what I mean. Now, I readily admit that I did not follow the herd in MidCon attendance. For a start, I only turned up for the first two days, in each case at eight o'clock in the evening, so I must have missed out on a lot ... of something; I'm not sure what. Personally I'd rather bunker down in a tin shack shooting cheap smack and listening to the surf sweeping my trains and shack away. Indeed. What use are brains at a Convention where everyone is determined to play *Civilisation*, for God's sake, or *Nuclear War*, or *Acquire*? As a man deeply involved in the gaming fraternity, as I believe it is now termed by idiot American sociologists researching into the ethics of Dungeons and Dragons, and whether or not it is more corrupting to our youth than Starsky and Hutch, or Boy George, or talking to racial inferiors without a gas mask ... as I was saying, and I suppose there's no backing out now, I must inform you that Hartland Trefoil are now issuing a free pass to a double lobotomy at the hospital of your choice with every box of the first named game. A game that levels you with the Ancient Egyptians - pushing huge motehrfuckers of pyramids (cardboard) over the board to some ancient, mystic, half-forgotten purpose. Back-breaking work, and I'm sure very physically satisfying, but where's the sense in it? And why should I be looking for sense? After all, did I not myself play a couple of games of Nuclear War, and one six-player effort of Acquire?

Well, I won the Acquire.

But to begin at line fifty one, it says here. Having finally dug the barbed wire of Snow Hill station as was out of my thighs, and ignoring for the sake of brevity the question of why they seek to protect what is now a desolate car-park for desolate cars from the prying eyes of Russian spies, I finally found the Angus, which to my confused and raddled recollection seemed to shifted its position subtly since last year. Possibly this is simply a poignant commentary on the degree of degeneracy of my brain. And who should I meet coming out of the Angus but my old bunkmate Keith Black, man of a thousand variants and the only LimerCon attender brave enough to make use of the sauna in the vicious pitch of a force two storm (and this was without drink. I mean, these games-playing types are really vimpy)? Well, you may answer this as you will, but since I did in fact meet the man it isn't going to make a whole lot of sense if you come up with any other name. So here I was with the choice of coughing up six quid registration fee and joining the serried ranks in the games room or accompanying Keith as he made his way to a pub he remembered from last year. Who said Free Will was dead? I chose the latter.

Now, I have no wish to be rude to Mr Flack. It would, in fact, be pretty futile, since the sod doesn't even subscribe. I shall just send him a plastic dog-turd through the post. However, it seems to me that the task of finding a pub sited next to the hotel should not be too difficult to anyone not in the last stages of leprous brain rot. I mean, here we are, and Keith says to me, "Follow me, I know this great little pub that serves draught Bass", and so I do, and why not? because compared to Ansell's little CAMRA Bird of the Year (I knew it was a bad year, somehow), Bass is worthy of a Trockenbeerauslesen for frothy brown wines (NE If you think there aren't any of these, wait until you try Australian Whites). And he leads me off a slip road for Great Charles St, and round a complicated series of streets in what looks like Birmingham's lost bomb-scarred district, and onto Broad St ... "Are you sure you know where we're going?" I asked, helplessly. "What's the name of the street?" "Dunno" "Well, the name of the pub, then" (Actually I have no idea what names they give to Birmingham pubs nowadays. I have no call to go in there. On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia) "Oh, I have no idea what the pub's called. I just know a round-about way to get there. You'll see, soon." And, lo and behold ... as we pass the Rotunda on our way back north again, through the rolling mists ahead can be distantly perceived a familiar shape - accompanied by hollow, mournful barks like a flock of Canada geese dying of radiation poisoning. Yes indeed. Ahead lies a Ford Cortina, T Reg. This must be Birmingham (although I was beginning to suspect that Keith had led us to Walsall by mistake). Only in Birmingham, where automobiles have replaced incest as the number one psychiatric disorder, could someone lavish twice the money on defending a car from attack from vicious niggers bent on ripping off its chrome as it costs to tow an equivalent heap from the nearest junk-yard - the cause of the hooting was an incredibly powerful knocklok device. Did I say Walsall? Before the fog lifted one might have surmised the Channel. Walking away on a direct line to the Angus I reflected on whether to put the poor dear out of its misery, if only because THE FUCKING HOUSE WAS DRIVING ME OUT OF MY HEAD, but before I could come to a conclusion we came upon the pub. Right next to the hotel. Well, you let people who work on computers for a living guide you round the real world for a change, what do you expect?

And very nice the pub was too - I believe it's listed on the official program, for those of you who wish to venture out next time (but make sure you're armed with a couple of cans of anti-rust spray). It was, of course, full. It was so full, in fact, that the playing of deathly bad disco music on the juke-box was obligatory - I think they even had a sign up from the surgeon general to this effect - *boom* half the room sucks in oxygen and Player's No 6, the other half coughs blood and stale Bass *clap*, *clap* and vice versa *boom* half the room etc.

This may not make a lot of sense to you, although if you pause for thought you will realise that it is at least as sensible as going back to the hotel, where, one and a half pages on, things were actually going down - much in the manner of a punctured Goodyear blimp. It was only nine thirty, and already the Con had degenerated into a) the first room, filled with self-induced hunchbacks playing the sort of games that, in spectators terms, lose on points to soccer, and b) the bar, at which I met Ken Bain. This is inevitable. It is almost a ritual. The first person I meet at the bar is a always Bain; he always buys me a drink; I never reciprocate; and I get sucked into the same old group of people I know already. Even Gary Piper, who is so much more congenial face to face that you want to break all ten of his fingers to save him from himself at the typewriter. On second thoughts I don't see the point; indeed, it would definitely be a bad move. The man is, after all, nothing but solid muscle all the way up to the roof of his skull, and I strongly suspect that the way he produces Road involves taking his boots and socks off first.

Where are all the people?

I mean, this land is my land, right? Wrong. MidCon is not for socialising, unless you are the cuddly type like Steve Doubleday, who can get on with anyone in any adverse conditions. Steve, incidentally, I met on his customary ramble through the bar area: this too is becoming traditional. He greeted me cordially and was off, having sussed out the situation, to some weird corner of the Con where things were happening. Leaving me with two options - get drunk, or go back to the games room.

By a short head and a warning bell from the stomach muscles that now monitor carefully the state of my aircraft, I chose the latter, to be faced with - Tullett. Yes, for some reason he was the only person in the entire room not already absorbed in some payion radio form of world domination. He was, in fact, staring blankly into space - and why should I rock? If I didn't have a hole to go to ten minutes down the road I would probably have been doing the same. So we got Derek Wilson and a couple of others together and started in on a game of Nuclear War, Advanced Version.

Now, you may not have played Nuclear War. Briefly, it consists of a number of card-playing rounds in which the choice of card is absolutely automatic, the only option being who to nuke: this being generally decided by who nuked you last, or, in the case of Tullett, whether Doubleday is still surviving on his left elbow (on which, as I recall, there was very little nutriment. But I rock). But I rock. Despite valiant efforts, Jeremy seemed to disappear much earlier than I did. Back to the advanced version of the game, which features lots and lots of jellies like floating space platforms, IX silos, and so on. Now, in the original, there is a dinky little feature called "Final Strike", in which a terrinally nuked human can blow every last one of his weapons at whoever he pleases, who generally dies and repeats the process on someone else. This happened in about twenty per cent of games in the original version - what happened? - I mean, the game blew itself up with no actual winner; in the new version, it's even worse, because all these fancy gadgets do is string out the game another half an hour before the inevitable mega-apocalypse. The good news is that the new apack incorporates several sophisticated interceptors. The bad news is that you never have these in your hand when you want them. The good news is that you can risk all on a die throw, which either burrs up the nuke effect on the hapless victim or blows up the delivery system on the launch pad. The bad news is that it only does the latter one time in eighteen, and moreover why should a man indulging in a final strike care? The good news is that there are extra options like germ warfare, a card which passes from hand to hand (and in practice invariably to Tullett, like a bee to honey - suitable treatment for a government scientist, I expect) until the antibiotic crops up. The bad news is that the antibiotic never crops up. The good news is that the result is super realistic, with megadeaths all over the board and no winner. The Greenham Common and Guardian reader types will love it. The bad news is that the game is a bunker, a total and irredeemable lurrer.

Still, I enjoyed it. What's wrong with me? I mean it was fun at LincCon, but that was on the proceeds of half a bottle of beered at city free prices, and with a large, opulent and very very nasty cigar to jab into Keith Leveys' eyeball for no reason at all every time the ship gave any sign of yawing. Or, indeed, sober, without Leveys, there is no visible point at all. Meanwhile, over with the intellectuals of the games world, you can discern a ten-hour game of 1829 with expansion kit, including the six-way junction which obviates the need for any other kind of tile at all, I would have thought, and a set of choc-choos with magic powers the end result of which appears to be to enable a company to choose six stations at random over the board and run through all of them. Aren't expansion kits fun?

Orward to the bar, since all games players, except those with eyeballs permanently sewn to an 1829 board had gone to bed, and we find that at one o'clock the thing shuts. Is this any way to treat paying custom, paying custom, moreover, in an ongoing rarasal situation? I am worried. From what I can see of the poker game, and after experiencing the full horror of the games room, Colin Caple appears actually yellow. I am even more worried. Obviously Woodhouse has managed to infiltrate the air-conditioning with leucous hallucinogens. This is less worrying. I turned my back on the poker game, since the large plastic suns of money in bright red reminded me uncomfortably of the last time I examined a bank statement, and listened to Woodhouse, the drinking man's answer to Radio Two - he goes on and on, effortlessly, all night long.

Well, you know what I mean. At some stage Marie wandered over, displaying her rare cognacoteric talents, and informed me that I was not Paul Doubleday. Having established that she wasn't either, I relaxed into depressive catatonia, lulled

by Godhouse's description of the vast amounts of money he is about to make - does this man have no decency, sense of proportion, or sympathy for a broker lun? - or was it the two blondes? And so passeth the day.

Now, at this point we take stock and figure out exactly what we're doing here. I don't mean writing the article, which was of course intended to be a page long and has of course rather exceeded its brief, if that is quite the apposite word.

No; what is the point of attending the national Con, if all you do is get drunk and meet the same people you meet every year? And I didn't even get drunk.

Fossilily I am at fault. I could be playing games. I may not be such a G but I'm shit hot with a long and tediously involved collection of SPI-ytype rules. However, getting in on this type of thing is apt to require four or five hours' kibbitzing while you wait for the board to clear, and a further hour's sifting through the cardstock. I did this once, at NecCon II. I played Russian Civil War, with Mike ... er ... what the hell was the rule's surname? Anyway, I won. I even enjoyed playing. Immensely. But you don't see such of that sort of game at Cons nowadays (partly because it's out of print), and you almost never see that sort of person, or else I'd remember his sodding surname ... Chapman, that's it. This leaves meeting people, an excellent idea in practice which doesn't work out () because the only ones who talk to you you know already. I exclude Dave Thomas here, who wandered past me a couple of times and cheerily waved hello; or rather I don't, because he's the only case I can remember of someone I would have liked talking to but couldn't summon up the necessary energy. *Ida culpa, mea maxima culpa* - but what the hell was everyone else doing? People used to complain the Lord Core (TM) were hard to get to know. This, I think, is not so. The people who are hard to get to know are the soft, games-obsessed nobodies, because they just don't make themselves available. Hell, I was there until late into the night, and you know what? Both times, the floor emptied after one o'clock as people *went to their rooms*. Do I believe this? Maybe the luxurious and cheap rooms at the Angus, five or six Doubles of which you could fit comfortably into a single at the Arizona Sheratons, are a good idea after all. Maybe I was just too depressed. Maybe I'm just generally off-putting. I dunno. But when the only new person you get to know at a Con is the laughable Derek Gaus, then you can legitimately question the meaning of existence.

Or, alternatively, play Acquire. Did you know that there are a whole bunch of people out there who know the rules, but have never figured out a strategy? No names, no backdrill, but one of them was B**** C****, and far from being the most clueless as one might expect from looking at him, even talking to him, he was actually better than the average. Do I believe this, either? Indeed, do I believe six people who want to play Acquire on the same board? This is degrading, it is degenerate, it is the ludicrous equivalent of trillist in a telephone booth. I mean, four (two) is enough for anybody, right?

Wrong. And what's more, these people have to be virtually coaxed through the game. I mean, I even had to do the scoring for them at the end. I noticed Richard Morris looking distinctly worried at this point; he is, after all, a veteran Thing player (there are people who play Postal Dip, people who play Railway Fivals, and people who play Thing. These last, like those who play Nuclear War, always lose). As a manic Double today began crashing out numerals like the Wall Street spot check board, I could see Richard debating whether or not to risk a severe beating by challenging my competence (say, my competence is beyond challenge. It is, in fact, something beyond the very confines of this world, and you will not see its like again). He finally gave in and trusted my honesty. You can all trust my honesty, you know. Who won? Me, of course.

And so we end at the pinball table, where Richard displayed a good deal more competence and I displayed roughly the same degree of dumb luck. Put first, we had to wait for the previous occupant to clear the table. It was four feet high, foul-mouthed, insisted on maltreating the table and appeared to be composed entirely of warts, acne, massive cancerous tumours, lank hair and spots. It was very unpleasant. I am informed it was, in fact, Paul Gakes - quelle surprise. And this is where I end, because I can't stand any more. Well, can you?

 So you want to be rich and famous and win at Acquire?

Well, I can't help with the first two, but as the winner of forty per cent of the games of Acquire I've played, I should be able to give you some idea of how to go about the last. For those of you who have never clapped eyes on the inside of an acquire box let me briefly summarize the game: this seems to be a traditional procedure in game magazines, although since anyone who's never played will not have the slightest interest in the following I don't see much point in it. For the record: Acquire is played on a none by twelve grid on which players place tiles bearing their own coordinates, one at a time. Two or more tiles orthogonally adjacent form a chain (of hotels). There are six chain markers, associated with each of which are twenty five shares. A player's turn consists of playing a tile and buying up to three shares. When a tile laid connects two chains, these chains merge, paying out to the two players with the most shares in the smaller (which disappears). Each tile added to a chain increases its value up to the limit of six tiles, beyond which it is necessary to add first five and then ten tiles in order to reach the next price range. The game ends when most of the board is filled up, under certain conditions that are not official until a player announces the end. OK?

God, that's taken it out of me. I am not used, as you may know, to being concise. However, the essential point to notice is that this is not some glorified version of dominoes, where the object is to match tiles: the object is to make money. This involves both skill and a certain degree of luck, in that you won't get very far unless you either have the tiles to merge favourable chains or can rely on some hebephrenic jerk doing it for you. Bearing this in mind, my recommended procedure for winning is as follows: take one chicken, not more than two years old, and lay it transversally on a pentagonal altar table. Holding the titarius knife above your head so that it gleams in the light of the crescent moon ... what? This isn't the six player game? You near I've bought the Tamish Tamlyn Participant's Book of Technicolor Magic for nothing? Oh.

Right. So here we are, playing Acquire with not more than three others. With more than that it is about as good a test of skill as is doing an American crossword puzzle. Now, the first thing to do is to learn the payoff card off by heart. This is, I would think, quite obvious to any gambler, but gamblers are not the sort to play Acquire, so I give it you for what it's worth. Because you start with only \$6000, and the cheapest trains available can cost \$400 a share, and you may need as many as ten to get a part of the action, you will appreciate that numerical efficiency is necessary at a sub-conscious level. Otherwise you will end up sitting proudly on a pile of shares which give you control of a chain that never merges, never does anything, just sprouts dispiritedly like a cactus in a dwarf's greenhouse. Even though Acquire only lasts just over an hour, unlike some games I could mention, this is a recipe for swift mental collapse. So. The first thing to note (well, second, but you don't expect me to read what I just wrote) is that chains grow in price very rapidly at the start, so if you have a choice when you make a chain, you will only want to create a \$400/share job if a) it is going to merge very rapidly (the payoff is better) or b) it is going to accumulate more tiles very rapidly (it will spiral out of other players' reach). Actually, you may wish to create an expensive chain in order to pose a dilemma for other players with cash, but that's really just an extension of b). With me so far?

Now, as my friend Otto Bismarck says, it is necessary to have several irons in the fire - chains have a way of growing at very unpredictable rates and in some pretty weird directions. You will need to get a part of the action in at least two good prospects for being merged, because if you miss out on the first few mergers then you might as well go off and eat your remaining certificates - they won't be much use while everyone else has a chance to wheel and deal. The first important thing is more money, which you get basically from theobohus at merging time (first or second, it doesn't much matter which). What you do with the shares at this stage is relatively unimportant.

Once you have struggled manfully, or womanfully, or chickenfully (whatever) to this cushion, you will find that one of the great truths of life holds true, too, in Acquire. The money somehow doesn't matter any more. Actually there is a different reason for this in Acquire, since there is no way to mirror sex and power faithfully in a game: in Acquire, the disappointment comes when you realise that you can only buy three shares at a time. Once two or three people have benefitted from mergers, the game will consist of everyone taking the full option of shares until the relevant stock runs out (ie of everything on the board). The players will then feel the game equivalent of post-capital depression, unless of course they are me and have amassed the winning portfolio, because there is nothing much to do except feed the odd tile to your favourite chain, and at ten per price range it doesn't make much odds.

Now, it goes without saying that you should be very careful which three shares you buy. Normally this depends on the shareholdings of others, and where they are seated; there are a very few rules I can quote, apart from common sense, here. It is possible to make a great psychological benefit. My father, for example, has perfected the fine art of taking ten minutes over every move, however obvious, and then buying shares which are almost, but not quite, the best option ... this is good for a few coronaries unless you stop concentrating on what he's doing, in which case he'll slip one by you. If we try to do this back to him, he has the even more subtle tactic of waiting until almost the very end of the player preceding him's go and then hurtling apologetically off to the bog, where he remains for ten minutes while everyone else turns brick red with anticipation. Anyway ... I digress. The only trick that most people miss is that, at this stage of the game, it is best to buy into the stock that you think is going to end up as the biggest, or second biggest, chain. This will be expensive, but then, that's why you're buying into it - it will pay off with the dividend at the end of the game. Let others pratt about with the three/four tile chains, because they don't matter much. You will find that this strategy disposes of your money pile disturbingly quickly; but if you have bought correctly up to this point, you should be in for random dividends in time to replenish it. Even if you are not, control of a major stock or two could carry the game. Major is here defined purely in terms of money - this is, after all, a capitalist game, not some lousy fu fucking plastic aesthetic. A chain of twenty-one Imperials (\$400) is worth more than forty Tower (\$200), and I don't care if you did go to a better school than I did ... and, of course, the less blatantly large a chain is, the less competition you will have in buying into it.

The only universals in this game are the ten-tile merger limit (after which a chain is safe, and therefore a long-term investment only), and mergers. Nothing needs to be said about the first, unless you are even more stupid than a subscription to Thing implies; the second has a few wrinkles worth noting. Firstly, try to build up chains you have an interest in wherever possible, and, equally, build up chains to which they are likely to merge. This is common safety procedure. You want money in a big way, which is the why of the first, and you don't want some dumb cluck (yup, the chickens are back) to merge the chains the other way around, which is the why of the second. Now, when the merger occurs and you have to dispose of your old shares, think carefully. This is one of the major decision areas open to you. The reason? The three share limit. It is generally worthwhile, after the first three or so mergers, to swap two-for-one into the merging chain even at a considerable immediate loss. You don't want money, you want control (thus differing again from real life, where the one implies the other in most cases). Recently I have become aware of a deeper reality behind this, which is that, late in the game, it may be wiser to go for the money instead; there may not be enough time left to take advantage of an in on control. Whatever. The point is, think. Think hard. Take aspirin if necessary.

Acquire is a game of percentages, and obviously you won't always win however good your strategy. Following the above guidelines, you should thrash most novices most of the time. If lost for something to do, complicate things: again, the three-share limit makes it difficult for others to deal with a wide choice. Create new chains. In the end you will find that games of Acquire, like sex, are considerably more fun sometimes than others, and this is the one thing over which you have no control.

'Course, the same is true of chickenfeed, but I didn't think that'd grab you ...

Thing Game Six Issue 10 1829

Still, unsurprisingly after last time's massive cock-up, one or two mistakes; in mainly in the typing up of tiles. The following corrections are to be made:

3G6:1 29H4:2 9I7:5 6M9:1

OR17	Token	Tile	Run	Pay	Price	Credit	Trains	Notes
LNWR	G5-J3	3G5:1	£180	Y	£180	£950	2,2,3	
GWR	D12-D5	17D10:2	£320	Y	£250	£200	2,2,2,4	
Mid	I3-I4	-	£280	Y	£335	£10	2,2,3,3	(1)
LSWR	H10-I11	-	£130	Y	£126	£40	4	(1)
GNR	J6-M5*	27M9:1	£80	Y	£90	£330	3	(2)
LBSC	D11-D7	4D11:1	£60	Y	£100	£210	3	(3)
GER	N7-G11	-	£80	Y	£50	£220	4	
GCR	M10-N9	-	£130	Y	£100	£50	3,4,3	(3)
L&Y	N6-L7	-	£110	Y	£67	£50	4	(4)

- Notes: (1) Tile lays offered impossible
 (2) GNR garrisons @ M5 (Preston)
 (3) GCR buys '3' from LBSC for £10
 (4) L&Y garrisons @ L7

OR18	Token	Tile	Run	Pay	Price	Credit	Trains	Notes
LNWR	J3-I4!	-	£180	Y	£200	£950	2,2,3	(1)
GWR	D5-E5	-	£320	Y	£275	£200	2,2,2,4	(2)
Mid	I4-I6	-	£280	Y	£345	£10	2,2,3,3	
LSWR	I11-I10	-	£130	Y	£142	£40	4	
GNR	L8-L9	-	£80	Y	£100	£370	3	
LBSC	D7-D5	8D7:6	-	-	£90	£220	.	
GER	G11-H10	9G11:1	£80	Y	£58	£220	4	
GCR	N9-N8	-	£130	Y	£112	£50	3,3,4	
L&Y	M5-N4	-	£130	Y	£71	£90	4	

- Notes: (1) Tile requested not available
 (2) Tile requested not available

SBR13

Very little action. Dave Erridge buys the LNWR, selling a Mid to make way. John Wilman churns through Harwich, 4 GNR (to gain the directorship) - having sold all his LBSC - and ends the round. The token rests with John Froment.

Note that Ian has long since run out of Thing credit - not a reflection on my recent gamesmastering, I'm glad to say, since he hasn't sent orders since early this year - and is hereby ejected from the game. Since it is now a five player game, the shareholding limit rises to seventeen certificates. His shares go on sale, used, from the bank next round.

	PCs (S&M)	LBW	GWR	Mid	LSW	GNR	LBS	GER	GCR	L&Y	b/f	OR17	OR18	c/f*	Worth
Dave Erridge	5D	4D	?	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	£668	£712	£1525	£4968	
John Wilman C&M, Ha.	0	0	0	0	4D	0	0	5D	6D	£743	£330	£403	£2655		
John Froment C&W, Hu, P	0	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	£353	£394	£1247	£3245		
Mike Woodhouse M	3	0	0	0	3	3	6D	0	0	£637	£270	£907	£2425		
Richard Morris L&M, Ho	0	1	3	0	3	0	2	2	2	£463	£586	£1049	£3921		
Bank (old):		1	3	5	6	0	7	3	0	0					

John Froment also holds 5D SECR. * = inc. SBR12.

Note: I have summarised the payoff of the operating rounds together in these figures. I have also calculated the gross worth of each player: it may be slightly off, but I reckon the figures are accurate enough to show that the game is as good as over. I know for a fact that three of you are not enjoying this game much, and would suggest that that concession to Dave would save us all a lot of bother. The only companies liable

to be able to purchase a '5' in the near future are the LNWR and the GNR; Dave, not surprisingly, is happy to continue as at present, and until John gains the credits we are stuck with what, in my humble and usually incorrect opinion, is a very boring game indeed. Even after that, and with the uncertainty created by Ian's demise, I would have thought that the only places capable of altering are those of Messrs Wilman and Everett, and even that is unlikely in the current deadlock of the board.

Would you, then, for the next deadline (see end of games section - it's a short one again) provide orders for ORs 19 and 20 and SBR14, and vote whether or not to continue the game. Abstention counts as acquiescence in winding the game up at present positions.

In that I am to blame for some of the weird events leading to this mess, I'd like to offer the remaining players compensation. If I've managed to get it almost correct this time (with a new system), then I offer you a free game from scratch. If not, then I will clearly never be an 1829 GM; if you can find a better, with lists open, I'll fund a gamestart under his auspices. Failing this too, you are welcome to a game of PR, which I am able to GM on the verges of competence ... any ideas?

Thing Game Seven Diplomacy A1905

is held over as explained last issue. This issue has been so slow as to cause several of you to send me your orders for the game, for which many thanks, and I have them on file. I'm not going to tell you who you are (I mean, is there any point?) - so as to leave the others in suspense, although this has the obvious defect that if I lose your orders you'll be in some trouble. I'll consequently try to phone up anyone who seems to have NMRed. Deadline at end of games section.

Thing Game Eight RT201N Rd 9

Two (2) errors last time: NSWJR's run in 7 disallowed on grounds of excessive payments to another (STAR), and DEPEK owes BUFFOON 3 for the build Manhattan-Bronx. He would also appear to owe NERO 3 for the same privilege. I was under the impression that this build was free, so this is one of those rare Thing GMing mistakes which are actually unavoidable, guv. Scores are thus:

NSWJR: - 4 = 138 BUFF: + 5 + 3 = 165 DER: - 6 = 61 STAR: - 10 = 123
NEPO: + 9 + 3 = 37

Theoretically this cuts Derek's build last time down, but I think I'll have to let that one slide, since correcting it would have hideous consequences this time round. Sigh ...

<u>RUN</u>					
13	NERO	20	STAR	10	
14	DER	20 + 1(B) + 9(Ns) = 30	BUFF	- 1(D)	NSW 10 - 9(D) = 1
15	BUFFOON	20	DEREK	10	
16	NSW	20 - 5(D) = 15	BUFF	0	DER 10 + 5(Ns) = 15
17	NSW	20 - 3(D) = 17	BUFF	10 - 2(D) = 8	DEP 0 + 2(B) + 3(Ns) = 5
18	STAR	20 + 6(Na) + 3(Ns) = 29	NERO	-6(S) + 2(Ns) = -4	
	NSW	10 - 3(S) - 2(Ne) - 1(B) - 1(D) = 3	BUFF	+ 1(Ns)	DER + 1(Ns)

Builds (rd 10: up to 6)

NSW (K16) K15 L14 L12 = 4 + 2(S) DEREK (N47) M4C = 1 + 1(Nc)
NERO (J30) J29; ~~(K14) W12~~ = 1 + 1(D) + 1(D) - last build disallowed, due to STAR's track.

Runs for Round Ten

19 (12) St Albans - Fall River (42)	20 (53) Greenfield - Foughkeepsie (61)
21 (31) Lowell - Manhattan (63)	22 (43) Providence - Manchester (25)
23 (36) Worcester - Dover (24)	24 (13) Furlington - Fellows Fall (56)

Scores

PUFFOON (Richard Morris - black) 105 + 28 + 1 = 134
 NSWJR (Dave Griffiths - blue) 130 + 25 + 7 = 162
 DEREK (Derek Crumpton - red) 81 + 61 + 1 = 143
 STAR (Dorian Moore - green) 120 + 30 + 2 = 152
 NERO (Ian Ferguson - yellow) 51 + 10 + 2 = 63

Press

STAR - NSWJR: See? I've done as you requested now, OK?

Thing Swi Secrets Round

Did I hear someone up here shout "error"? Yup. Going to cloud movement that I think I took into account into the original, but at all events left out of the readjudication, curly suffers one more point damage (cloud-running) and Master Tuck avoids being hit for three. Adjustments made in the figures below.

Let us daily smile and consider clouds. There is, I feel, a point I am still not getting across to you. I must admit I don't like your cloud rule, but it has worked to my advantage this time ...", says Richard. "Club!", I think I can discern from Derek, whose moves this time would appear to indicate that he still doesn't follow my cloud movement system - and, of course, it's too late.

I shall reiterate (literally - this is the third time in a row I have tried to make this clear). Clouds do not reach the position they are shown at in this report until the end of the first turn of the three in the next report. I could have thought this is a simple enough concept for you to grasp, although I must admit that because I don't have a board set up for this now, at the conclusion made a mess of my adjudication. There is, I think, some point to this rule. It is intended to avoid clouds 'bonking' an unsuspecting flyer, thus enabling you to use the full board instead of being limited artificially to that part of it at least ten boxes away from the nearest cloud. As this turn shows, the remedy is not nearly any better than the disease, in that it results in a considerable amount of confusion. Let me, therefore, attempt to clear this up by the simple device of printing the positions for the clouds; that in brackets will be their position for the first turn of the next adjudication, and that outside brackets will be the position for the following two turns. I trust that my mighty brainpower is at last penetrating (oops) the thick cloud surrounding you all ...

	Flt	Intn	Wpre	Fig	HP
Flying Bitch	(a) / (b) / (c) /	11	n	0	0
Crimson King II	(a) F (b) F(R) (c) /	11	sc	0	10
Curly Ferruthep	(a) <u>L(A*)</u> (b) L(A,R) (c) /	down		4	0
Flyer Tuck	(a) <u>A(A-L*)</u> (b) A(A) (c) I	P8	ns	3	7
Red Max	(a) F (b) <u>F(L)</u> (c) /	down		6	0

Well, I don't know what to say about this. Martin lets me know of his UGA, apologises for hitting, and I'm again. Derek crashes into a cloud, and Prion is downed because he hit a cloud last time without mentioning him - I would imagine his strategy would have been the same, but he has some right to complain. I think I went to barf ...

Clouds - moving Sw

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
 XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

- (J6)J5 (M6)M5 (L10)L9
- (J7)J6 (N7)N6 (M10)M9
- (I6)I5 (O8)O7 (L9)L8
- (I7)I6
- (H7)H6 (F11)F10 (P1+)P13
- (C11)C10 (P13)P12
- (N15)N14 (H11)H10 (Q13)Q12
- (N16)N15 (H12)H11 (Q12)Q11
- (M16)M15

DEADLINE - ME 7 DEC.

THINGS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED IN THE LAST THING

... about the bloody thing was illegible, and as usual heavily
 ... come to that quite a few other reasons too ...

Well, I was about to type this last page, what should arrive through my door than the Thing Five, thus necessitating another slight delay as I adjudicated for ... Fortunately my door comes already equipped with a letterbox, so that it ... the worse for the experience, but I don't think the same thing can be said ... here goes:

	<u>Thing Five</u>	<u>RT177L</u>	<u>Round 11</u>
<u>RUN</u>			<u>RUN</u>
21I	BBE 20 + 1 (F) = 21 SERV 10 + 1 (B) = 11	FIP 2(C) = 4	26 PBF 20 + 4 + 1(F) = 17 FIR 10 + 1 + 4(B) = 13
22	BBE 20 + 1(C) + 1(P) + 4(F/P) = 13 FIR 10 + 1(B) @ PBF 10 + 1(B) = 9 CRI 10 + 1(C) @ FIR 3 = 3		27I CRI 20 + 2(F) + 2(F/P) + 1(P) = 19 PBF 10 + 10 + 2(C) = 19 FIR 4 + 2(C) = 6 SERV 10 + 1(C) @ PBF 4 = 4
24I	FIR 20 + 7(C) = 17 CRI 10 + 1(C) = 6		27I No warrants. Held over. 28 PBF 20 FIR 10 CRI 10
25	No. 20 runs Held over.		29 CRI 20 + 1(P) = 21 PBF 10 + 1(C) = 11
<u>Runs for Round 12</u>			30 Firkir 10 + 7(S) = 17 SERV 7

- 25 (36) Metz - Bordeaux (54)
- 27I (4) Strasbourg (42)
- 30I (8) Overseas - Amiens (34)
- 31 (25) Orleans - Rouen (15)
- 32 (44) Lyon - Bayonne (56)
- 33 (66) Nice - Lyon (46)
- 33I (1) England - Le Havre (16)

 ENTER UP TO SIX RUNS

- 34 (31) Grenoble - Boulogne (31)
- 35 (22) Nantes - Limoges (53)
- 36 (14) Paris - Dunkerque (32)
- 36I (2) Cal/L... - St Etienne (51)

Scores

CRINGE (John Ferguson - yellow)	210 + 55 = 265
BBE (John Field - black)	203 + 79 = 282
SERV (Les Hazlewood - orange)	149 + 7 = 156
PBF (John Brine - blue)	137 + 20 = 157
Firkir (John Field - green)	51 + 60 = 111

Right, that's got that one (almost) out of the way. To continue with the saga of last issue: it was in fact supposed to be Thing 21 (thus explaining the cardinality of this issue), not, as many of you deduced from the illegible cover, issue twenty. Issue twenty, of which I have only my own personal copy (so it's no use asking me for one if you missed it), incorporates the sub-zine MPR '82, and is possibly still available from Brian Creese. I'm afraid that the standard of my sub-zine was not up to much, even though Brian had the effrontery to reverse the normal procedure and sandwich the main zine in amongst his own efforts. Thing 20 included a luminary 'Pub Guide' to Oxford, which for some reason omitted my name, and several letters from Mr Creese to which I had previously written a confutation of several pages - somewhat unethically, since he had the typewriter, Brian edited my responses down and made it appear that he was, in fact, answering me. I apologise for the confusion. My solicitors are on the case at this very moment. I would merely like to take this opportunity to let Pete Birks, or whoever is responsible for the next Who's Where in Diplomacy Publishing (Walkerding?), know the real situation. Actually, I thought it was one of my better issues - not only hysterically funny, which is of course my very special trademark, but also incorporating games reports which were, for once, quite correct. Were it not for Brian's boorish behaviour in attempting to efface my name from the zine, I would gladly have considered allowing him to continue the partnership. Tough titties, old chap.

Anyone interested in a game of Diplomacy or Railway Rivals 'B'? Yup, lists open...