

Black Frog



I had this issue all typed up and ready to go only an hour ago. I was just waiting for today's mail, for any possible last minute order changes in 80HS. Then I thought I would run it down to the xerox shop; fold, staple and address the things in the laundromat next door; and then mail them on the way home. The things would have been in the mail within two hours after the deadline.

But two things happened. (1.) Today's mail didn't bring any last minute order changes--but it did bring a letter from a subber that is, to me anyway, a bit distressing. (2.) The Xerox shop that I normally use has increased its prices. This place, up until this week, has charged 4¢ per page (albeit 9¢ for copies on both sides of the page) and 43¢ for color pages. They now are charging 5¢ per page (but 20¢ for copies on both sides), and 66¢ for color pages. This meant that the issue would have cost \$1.36 per copy to send out instead of the 83¢ by last week's prices. The planned issue had eight pages, cover (these cost 7¢ each) and a color page.

O.K., I am now back home retyping this thing--what will come out of it remains to be seen. The Xeroxing is no damaging setback, there are other places that I can get it done at the old prices or maybe even better prices. It is primarily that they are not as convenient.

But it is that all of a sudden I am wondering if it is all worthwhile and if anybody (you subbers out there) really appreciate the extra effort that I go to in an attempt (honest I have been trying) to make Black Frog a unique and better than average zine.

Jack Masters

.....
THE LETTER

1, December 1980

Dear Jack:

Charles W. Letcher
3325 Sepulveda Blvd.
Apartment #3
Los Angeles, California 90034

In issue #25 you asked for feedback on recent issues. O.K. here is my feedback:

Pug Bocarsley story--It stunk.

Issue #22's "expensive pictures"--much less than funny.

Christmas Gift Catalog--A piece of trash (I cut out the
SUPERNOVA address & threw it away).

Editorial in issue #21--Good.

Talking Southern--Not only is it not funny, it is ridicul-
ous.

You asked for comments, you got them.

Charlie

P.S. Aren't we in luck, I see a new "How to talk Chinese"
is coming. Oh, brother.

.....

A REPLY TO CHARLES LETCHER

Thank you for your comments, and yes I did ask for
them. Black Frog is certainly missing the boat as far as
your concerned. You may well be much happier receiving
and reading a zine such as Voice of Doom.

Certainly people have different tastes in what they
enjoy or in what they find funny. My own sense of humor
is developed along lines that many people are not going
to appreciate. This I know and it does not necessarily
mean that there is anything lacking in the humor or in
the people that don't appreciate it.

However, if a significant number of subbers to BF
share Letcher's views--then I am getting way off base.
And, since this thing is costing me a considerable bundle
of money (donations and subs have covered less than 50%
of the actual cost) maybe something should be done about
it.

Some specific comments:

Re the Pug Bocarsley story. In my mind it is one of
the best I have done, along with the Malcomb X and Conrad
Shortley stories that were published in Voice of Doom.
If you don't like it--you probably won't like much of what
you read in BF. It seems strange to me that the story
would not be universally well received. But other than
Letcher's I have gotten two other very negative responses
regarding it, but also a couple of very positive responses.

Re expensive pictures. Yes they are expensive. If they are not being appreciated by the readership--perhaps they should be dispensed with. The pictures that were going to go in this issue included the one of John Michalski that I have had on hand for quite a while and another one of Kathy Byrne. This one of Kathy was sent by none other than Kathy herself.

Re Christmas gift catalog. I do not regard this as one of my better efforts. I thought it was a little bit innovative--but nothing to be especially proud of. I had originally intended to put eight more pages in it--but cut them out at the last minute as an economy measure. The primary purpose of the issue was to embarrass Dick Martin into subbing to BF. It worked very well in this regard because since it went out, I have gotten a \$12.00 check from Dick.

Re Editorial in issue #21. This should have never gone into BF. Readers are interpreting it as an attack on Dan Palter which it was never meant to be. True I used Palter and Perlmutter as examples, but

Re Talking Southern. I would not be surprised if a lot of readers failed to appreciate this. I guess it would depend a lot upon your background, where you were born and where you have lived. I was born in Missouri, lived five years in Arkansas and then seven in Minnesota before coming to California. In Minnesota I used to receive a great deal of ribbing about my "southern accent." In California nobody seems to notice it.

.....

A READERS OPINION POLL

Enclosed with this issue will be a readers opinion poll. This is a mandatory poll! If you don't have enough interest in BF to return the poll, I'll assume that you don't have enough interest to continue to receive the zine!

Only answer those questions that you feel you want to, but do answer honestly and accurately. It will be worthwhile and of value only if you do so.

Since I haven't drafted up this survey yet, and have absolutely no idea what is going to be on it at this time --there is no point in discussing it further here.

THE BLACK FROG
IRONCLAD
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

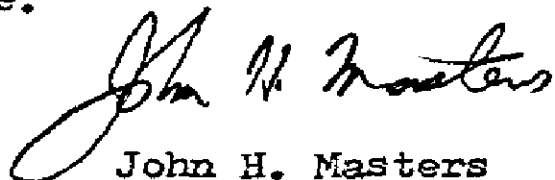
Effective December 4th, 1980, I am making the following guarantee to BF subbers and donors.

(1.) If you are one of the initial 40 or so people who are receiving BF by a donation of what you felt it would be worth--and are not happy with what you are getting--let me know before January 1st, 1981. I will return the full amount of your donation plus 50¢ for your trouble and I will do this sometime during January. You are welcome to keep all copies of BF that you have received to date!

(2.) If category (1.) above applies to you, but you don't want to drop out of a game you are playing in BF. O.K., I will also let you have a full refund and continue to play in the game. You will have to supply me with self-addressed, stamped envelopes to return the adjudications to you in and I will retain \$3.00 of your donation as a game fee. If your donation was less than \$3.00 (and this applies to three of you) you will have to ante up the difference.

(3.) If you are one of the 30 or so later subbers that paid a subscription fee for BF and don't feel you are getting your money's worth in the zine --or if you feel you are getting your money's worth in the zine but just plain don't like it--let me know before January 1st, 1981 and I will refund the unused portion of your sub plus 50¢ for your trouble. And I will do this sometime during January 1981.

(4.) In order to qualify for any of the above, you still must return the reader's opinion poll to be sent with this issue.



John H. Masters
December 4th, 1980

CURRENT STANDINGS: BLACK FROG TROPHY DERBY

The seven Black Frog Diplomacy players (Four Horsemen game series) with the highest average percentile ranking after season 1905, will be eligible to compete in the "fifth horseman" game for the coveted Black Frog trophy. These are the current standings:

country	player	game	1901 perc.	1902 perc.	average
AUSTRIA	Lew	80hs	63	41	38
	Schaller	80hr	33	22	07
	Cusack	80id	11	18-	38
	Giddings	80hu	02	18-	14
ENGLAND	Grabar	80id	68	37	35
	Townsend	80hu	41	62-	53
	Perlmutter	80hr	41	37	03
	Colombo	80hs	24	15	08
FRANCE	Gallagher	80hu	99	66	83
	Guajardo	80id	82	75	39
	Carson	80hr	62	75	95
	Albrecht	80hs	45	75	83
GERMANY	Mercer	80id	87	50	30
	Kuszynski	80hs	54	72	81
	Carter	80hr	70	50	57
	Rodriguez	80hu	09	07-	13
ITALY	Schwartz	80hu	89	78-	81
	Schiwautz	80id	70	91-	95
	Hanson	80hr	48	63	81
	de Vries	80hs	28	31	62
RUSSIA	Conner	80hu	82	56	83
	Tilley	80hr	82	56	72
	King	80hs	70	56	43
	Shufeldt	80id	49	43-	72
TURKEY	Mooney	80id	74	42-	21
	Burnett	80hr	51	65	70
	Hartman	80hu	51	42-	53
	Hart	80hs	27	42	53

There they are. The French and Russian positions seem to be the most hotly contested; the Austrian and English the least hotly contested. If the 5th horseman game was to start today, it would include Lew, Grabar, Gallagher, Mercer, Schwartz, Conner and Mooney. But nobody can be really counted out yet.

BLACK FROG RULES OF PLAY (House Rules)

Revised November 1980

1. Standard rules of Diplomacy apply, except as interceded or extended by these mail rules.
2. Country assignments will be made by random draw.
3. Orders are due by 12:00 A.M. PST or PDT (as applicable) on the day of the deadline. Phoned in orders will be accepted. The deadline will be strictly enforced.
4. Winter seasons, except in the simplest of circumstances, will be separate from Spring seasons. In very complicated situations, summer seasons could be separated from fall seasons. Autumn seasons will always be combined with winter seasons. In any situation where seasons are combined (e.g. autumn and winter), orders may be written conditionally.
5. The games will be expedited as much as possible and in no case will deadlines fall more than 30 days apart or less than 12 days apart.
6. To be valid, your orders must be: (a) signed; (b) dated; (c) unambiguous.
7. In the case of support, convoy, etc. for the unit of a foreign power, the nationality of that Foreign Power must be specified.
8. Phoned in orders need not be signed or dated; but be prepared of providing some means of positive identification if asked.
9. In regard to adjudications, etc., the Game-Master's decision is final. The only valid argument for discussion will occur when the GM's decision is a direct contradiction of the written rules of Diplomacy. (Avalon Hill 1971 Rulebook) or these rules.
10. The Gamemaster is not infallible and may make errors. Any error brought to his attention, prior to the next deadline, will be promptly corrected. Any error not corrected prior to the succeeding deadline will stand.
11. One exception to the above is deception of the GM. If any deception of the GM is uncovered; corrections will be made, as necessary, to compensate for this deception and to set the game straight. In some circumstances this may entail the replay of a season.
12. Games in Black Frog are played for enjoyment. The GM has a responsibility to seven players to see that they do enjoy the game. Thus, the GM can and will, remove a player from the game if his actions are creating a serious problem for the other players in the enjoyment of the game.

13. The removal of a player from a game is, however, a serious situation and will be used only as a last resort.
14. A victory will be declared when (a) one player accrues 18 supply centers, or (b) is voted a concession by the other players.
15. To vote a concession requires the unanimous vote of all players still controlling supply centers. Failure to vote on a concession proposal will be considered as a vote in favor of the concession.
16. Draws may be proposed, by any player with one or more supply centers remaining, after Fall 1904. The draw will be voted on with the following deadline and, if passed, will end the game.
17. To participate in a draw a player must have (a) three or more supply centers under his control, or (b) two or more supply centers, including one of his home centers, under his control.
18. For a two-way draw to pass, it requires a favorable vote from players controlling 27 or more supply centers.
19. For a three-way draw to pass, it requires a favorable vote from players controlling 31 or more supply centers.
20. Draws involving four or more players, require an unanimous vote.
21. The results of any vote on any proposal will be made public. These are not secret ballots!
22. Any Black Frog subscriber can enter press in any Black Frog game.
23. White, grey and yellow press is allowed; black and blue press is prohibited.
24. WHITE PRESS is defined as being normal press with a date-line from a city or province under the control of the person writing the press.
25. GREY PRESS is defined as being anonymous press with a date-line from an ambivalent city or territory. Grey press may, for instance, have a dateline of Ireland, Switzerland, Zurich, Monaco, Sardinia, Sicily, Iceland, Caspian Sea, etc.
26. BLACK PRESS is defined as press that would use another players date-line (city or territory) to hide its true authorship. The basic distinction between black and grey press is that in the case of grey press the other players will know that it is anonymous while in the case of black press they may not.
27. BLUE PRESS is defined as obscene press. The GM reserves the write to edit or censure any "blue" press.

28. YELLOW PRESS is defined as press by nonplayers in the game. Any Black Frog subscriber may instigate press in any Black Frog game. For a date-line he may use his home city (e.g. San Francisco), or a nonEuropean city (e.g. Caracas), or the name of a sister game (e.g. 1980HS or Pestilence), or a fictitious name.
29. Only the GM may instigate press under the date-line of Valencia or Black Jack.
30. Press entered for two or more different games must be sent in on two (or more) separate pieces of paper.
31. The GM reserves the right to place limits on the amount of press from any one player in any one season.
32. Standby players will not be used in Black Frog.
33. Rule 32 does not prohibit a player from resigning from a game and appointing another player to take over his position. However, the replacement player must meet the approval of the GM.
34. In the case of NMR's, neutral orders will be used generated by a computer program on the GM's Apple II computer.
35. Neutral computer moves will be used for no more than three consecutive seasons, after which time the country in question will lapse into civil disorder.
36. The original player may resume his position at any time, even after several years of civil disorder. Thus, the other players always have the possibility to negotiate with this position.
37. Computer generated moves will always be defensive. The computer will be charged with the task of defending home territory and supply centers (plus certain neutrals). In order to do this, the computer will order builds, retreats, removals and movements but in no cases will the computer (a) build fleets, (b) give support or convoy orders to a foreign power, (c) attack a supply center or territory of a foreign power--unless this is the only possible retreat for a unit that must retreat. Normally the computer will simply order self-support for two adjacent units, unless a foreign unit is within the computer's home territory. In the latter case, the computer will attempt to expel the invador.
38. These rules may be revised or emmended at any time by publication in Black Frog.

OTHER LETTERS?

Since we are discussing letters in this issue and since I have decided to can the funny stuff (or attempted funny stuff) for this issue, I am going to relay a few more letters.

This first one is from Don Del Grande, Priestly Hall #208, 2400 Durant Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94702.

Jack:

Received your BLACK FROG #19, but you never made it clear what the publication rate is (i.e. the frequency of publication--2 weeks, 4 weeks, etc.) I assume that it is once every two weeks since you said "24 issues or one year".

((There is no frequency of publication, Don, an issue just pops up whenever I think it is apt. The rate was "24 issues of one year whichever happens last". This means that the least number of copies you will get is 24--though it may take 24 years to get them. However if the current rate of publication continues (this is the fifth issue in 17 days) you could get as many as 104 issues during the next year. Realistically, I envision putting about 3 issues a month out over the next year.))

.....Also, it seems to me that you're charging 50¢ per issue for the things whereas in Berkeley a copy of BF (including 15¢ postage) can be made for around 35¢. that's either some profit margin or some ripoff copying service.

Best regards,

Don

((Don, your question regarding prices is rather complex and you are not the only one that has been writing in and complaining of high prices for BF. I am going to try to answer you and all of these others in the next section.

.....
I am losing my butt on publishing BF! The BF covers are offset printed on quality cover stock. I buy the cover stock at semi-wholesale prices and have it printed in lots of 1000 from a plate which I own. Still each

cover costs an average of 7¢ each. The prices I have been paying for Xeroxing are 9¢ for both sides of an 8½ X 11. Stamps are 15¢. Color, when I use it has been, in the past, 43¢ per page. We will forget about tax, which I am charged on all but stamps and the cover stock, the cost of labels, staples, liquid paper (which I use up by the gallon), typewriter ribbons, gasoline in the transportation back and forth to get the things out, and any allowance for my time. ((Just how much is my time worth in putting out BF? I spend about 10 hours on each issue. Lockheed pays me, when I am working, \$14.00 per hour and I am on strike because this is really not an equitable wage)).

Anyway, taking just stamps, paper and printing costs, the per copy cost for BF has been as follows:

# 8	\$0.40	#17	\$0.40
# 9	\$0.40	#18	\$0.74
#10	\$0.40	#19	\$0.49
#11	\$0.66	#20	\$0.40
#12	\$0.40	#21	\$0.49
#13	\$0.80	#22	\$1.07
#14	\$0.31	#23	\$0.71
#15	\$0.40	#24	\$0.43
#16	\$0.40	#25	\$0.40

This is a total cost of \$9.30 for 18 issues, for an average cost of 53¢ each. The absolute most that any subber can pay for a copy of BF (under present sub rates) is 50¢ an issue. This is some profit margin.

But that is the good part of the annual report, look at these figures. Of the original 30 subbers, all of whom got a sub for what they thought it was worth: These 30 people paid a total of \$188.53, an average of \$6.28 each. I have already lost an average of \$3.02 on each of them; \$90.60 total. But these people, whose individual donations have ranged between \$2.50 and \$21.00, are also getting a game out of this, and a crack at the BF trophy that I expect to cost about \$30.00. They will also continue to receive BF as long as they are alive in their game without additional charge. A pretty good deal? Of course any of them that would like to are welcome to chip in at any time with an additional donation--and many of them have. Eight of the 30 to be exact--but their additional donations are already reflected in the \$188.53 cited above.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS, I have spent every penny that I have taken in on BF subs in the publication of the zine and then have spent an extra \$200.00 from my own pocket on the thing. If I continue to publish in the same manner, I well anticipate continuing losses of \$50.00 to \$75.00 a month.

Of course I could cut losses short to some extent. I could eliminate the harder cover and simply Xerox the covers on ordinary 20# paper like most zines do. I could eliminate color. I could ditto or mimeograph. But I am not trying to put out a zine as cheaply as possible (I'll leave that to Konrad Baumeister!), I am trying to put out an unique and quality product. I don't mind subsidizing the thing to the extent of \$40.00 to \$50.00 a month in order to do it my way. But I do get upset and a bit angry when people start talking about "some profit margin" and "ripoff prices."

By the way, allowing a complete refund of subs is not such an altruistic thing as it might seem. Those of you who have chipped in the extra bucks are obviously happy with the zine (for I never asked for the extra donations). For the others, none have paid more than \$6.00 and it is cheaper for me to send them \$6.50 than to send them copies of BF through March.

.....

ANOTHER LETTER?

This one is from Mark Lew (3120 W. 79th, Anchorage, AK 99502), it goes back a month or two.

Dear Jack,

.....The main topic of this letter is my changing opinion of your zine with my favoritest zines (Grab Dots!!! for instance) when I get one in the mail I think "Oh goody goody, I can't wait", but when I get a Frog, I think "another one?!!" I think it would help your image if you started making Frog's bigger and less often.

Mark

((Well Mark, Grab Dots (or Retaliation as it is once again titled) is one of my favorite zines too. Do you want all of your zines to be similar (all of them like Retaliation) or would you prefer a bit of variety? I

like a little variety myself. As for Black Frog I have been trying to break new ground, to be innovative and to be different from other zines. Computer programs to play standy positions, game start packets, color inserts, trophies for winners, yellow press, etc. are all ways in which I am trying to do this. Whenever you try something new you take a chance, however--somethings work and many more don't. But, if you don't try you will never know.))

((As for small frequent issues of BF, however, expect them to be around for a long time. That is the only way I can mail out adjudications within 24 hours of the deadlines and to keep all of the deadlines from hitting at the same time. Also I think it is a preferable way to publish. I think a greater percentage of BF subbers read a greater percentage of BF than is true for any other zine--primarily because of the way that it is published. I receive the Los Angeles Times every morning and look at it every day. If the L.A. Times saved all of this stuff up and published it as one "monster" once a week--I probably wouldn't read it at all.))

80hs

Famine

w'02

A quiet and peaceful autumn and winter

Autumn 1902

TURK (Hart)
ENGL (Colombo)

F Aeg retreat to CON.
F Eng retreat to IRI

Spring 1903
deadline is
12/16/1980
12:00 noon!

Winter 1902

FRAN (Albrecht)
GERM (Kuszynski)
AUST (Lew)

B F BRE
B A MUN
has no room to build and will play
1903 one unit short

There was an error in last seasons adjudications for France, the French unit in Gascony is an A and not a F. The French adjudications should have read:

F Bre-ENG; F MAO (s) F Bre-Eng; A Pic-BEL; A BUR (s)
A Pic-Bel; F Gas (H)/nsu, imp/; A GAS /unordered/(H).