

I would like to give my views on the "Black Hole Affair". This has received considerable attention in zines such as BB and presents some interesting questions of GMing ethics.

BLACK HOLE in 1979IC, in Bruce Linsey's Voice of Doom. This was organized as a local (southern California) game. Prior to gamestart, Bruce wanted to fone the players to make sure that they were agreeable to this, but did not have a number for Dave Barker. Matt McKibbin had ~~xxx~~ mentioned Dave in his initial letter, so Bruce foned Matt to get Dave's telephone number.

According to Matt, Bruce informed another player, Jack Masters, that he (Bruce) had gotten Barker's phone number from Matt. Masters then ~~xxxxxx~~ supposedly used this information to the detriment of Matt and Barker. Matt considered Bruce's actions to be "quite unethical" and wrote to the BNC asking that the game be called irregular. The question is, how did Matt find out about this Linsey-Masters conversation that was supposedly so improper? According to Matt, Masters told Dave Barker directly. And Matt learned this fact directly, "for I was standing next to Dave during the call ((from Masters)) and heard the whole conversation." (underscoring is Matt's) Thus, Matt learend of ~~xxxxxx~~ the supposed Linsey-Master's conversation directly from Master's himself. A very cozy story.

The only problem is, it isn't the story that he originally told. In his first letter to Bruce, he said "Through the grapevine I have ~~xxxxxx~~ heard that you mentioned to Jack Masters that I knew Dave Barker's phone number." Note that he says he learend it indirectly --- "thru the grapevine." Why did he change his ~~xxx~~ story?

Once Bruce had heard from him, Bruce tried to track down the story, for he did not remember telling Masters anything of the sort. Jack Masters said that Bruce hadn't told him that, nor had he told anyone else that Bruce had given him this phone number. So, just who was the grapevine? It had to be the other 4 players. Bruce then phoned them. All four of them said that, no, Masters never did mention anything about a phone number. Thus, faced with the fact that his story would not be supported, McKibbin changed the story in a very significant manner. Bruce treated the original story as deception of the GM and expelled him from the game.

Some of the fuller details took place in telephone conversations, which raises an interesting question. Suppose a GM is certain that an attempted deception has occured (e.g. by phone) but cannot prove it? Should he expall the player? Failure to do so would constitute a refusal to enforce one's houserules, and would presumably embolden the liar to try again. But to expell would bring down a firestone of criticism by those who see no particular reason to accept the GMs word rather than the player's word.

According to Bruce's version of the phone conversation, Bruce asked Matt who, specifically, Masters told about the fone number, other than Barker. He named three players. Bruce then confronted him with the fact that all three said that Master told them no such thing. Matt then still insisted that Masters had told this to Barker. However, it would be inexplicable that Masters, having supposed evidence of ~~xxx~~ A-T freindship, would tell it only to T. Further, according to Bruce, Matt then chaged his story and denied his earlier charge, saying now that Masters was just warning the others about an A-T (Barker McKibbin)alliance. The fact that Master was using now became the fact that Matt and Dave went to the same school! This however, Bruce did not know. Instead, the story was that Dave Barker told Jack Masters this himself! That is to say, the evidence that Masters was using against Barker and McKibbin came from Barker himself. And, again to quote Bruce's version of the phone call: "Jack Masters used the information he got from you to blackmail Dave into telling him that we go to school together!" This is quite a change from the original story.

Of course, it also comes from a phone conversation. However, it is at least consistant with McKibbin's version as printed in Whitestonia.

There he said that Dave Barker did in fact tell Masters that they went to school together. However, a careful reading of the letter gives no clue as to whether Masters was telling people this fact, or the phone number fact. Matt is being deliberately vague, about just what it is that Masters did.

This is not the only vague thing in Matt's Whitestonia version. Linsey is accused of both telling a "lie" and "on several occasions Linsey would distort my story". But the lie and distortions are never specified. He also indirectly accuses Linsey and Masters of collusion, albeit unsuccessful. : "He managed to so misdirect Jack, that Jack's story (which was itself bogus) didn't even manage to be close to Linsey's" Again, no details are given. However, this is consistent with Bruce version of a phone conversation, in which Barker ~~and~~ said that he and McKibbin felt that Masters and Linsey had conspired to cover up what had happened.

Further weakening McKibbin's credibility is a self contradiction in his version. He says: "Linsey cried foul after they were reported to Lee Kendter Sr. Linsey to this day believes that I wrote to Kendter without his (Linsey's) knowledge, in order to get the game declared irregular." But 3 sentences later he says that "I did so with the full knowledge and consent of Linsey who told me to write Kendter in the first place." How could it be both "without his (Linsey's) knowledge" and "with the full knowledge" both?

Another aspect of this which tends to show that the story was changed was the question of timing. Barker's letter to Linsey says this: "When country assignments came out Jack Masters called and asked if I knew Matt since you had told him that Matt had my phone number." This is generally consistent with the second story, the direct knowledge, and indicates that this occurred at the very start of the game. However, McKibbin's letter (first) to Kendter said "Mr Barker and myself began receiving letters from players about the possibility of an alliance between Mr. Barker and myself... Soon after receiving these letters, Mr. Barker received a phone call from Masters." Now, these letters seem to hark back to the "grapevine story" Also, they indicate that the phone call came not at the very beginning of the game, but after some letters had already been received.

I might add that Bruce did not receive any complaint at all until he heard from Matt with a note enclosed along with S02 orders. At this point an A-T alliance was obvious on the board (S01: A Smy-Arm, A Vie-Gal).

John Caruso, writing in Whitestonia, labeled the evidence as "phoney proof". I do not think, however, that the record can support such a description. It seems clear to me that, even judging only from written materials, that McKibbin did in fact change his story on a fairly important matter --- how he ~~found~~ did find out about it. If the phone conversations are to be believed, an even more important thing was changed: The nature of what it was that Masters actually did. This is at the core of the ~~x~~ affair.

Part of the GMing job is to be ethical and impartial. McKibbin's charges went directly to that point, and thus he was obliged not to try to deceive the GM. If the story was changed, then at least one of them was not true. In my opinion, Linsey's expulsion of McKibbin was correct.

I might add that I don't see anything wrong with Linsey telling anyone that two players know each other, tho obviously everyone should be informed (tho presumably Masters took care of that omission!). At the start of the present DW Demo game (1980AY), the GM, Eric Verheiden, told everyone that Vagts and Marley knew each other. (They were local to each other). At any rate, players in a local game are generally going to assume that there's a good chance that any given pair of players will actually know each other.

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