

The most faked zine of 1982 just hasto be:

DIPLOMACY DIGEST

Issue #59	Mark L Berch	Subs: 10 for \$3.50
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Draw vs Strong Second	Alexandria VA 22304	Circulation: 134

The theme for this issue is probably the most enduring debate in the hobby. Which is better: A draw or a second (or third) place finish. People will discuss this for as long as the game is played, because it deals with the central question of why people play Diplomacy at all. What do they hope to get out a game which they are not going to win? I've tried to include a mixture of an extended debate (there have been several on the topic) and some individual comments.

OK, here's some more names of those attending Origins '82: Eric Ozog, Dan Stafford, Tom Mainardi, Steve Arnawoodian, Guy and Libby Hail, Mark Larzelere, Kieth Mercer, D&M Beyerlein(?), Brad Wilson, Ben Schilling, Bob Arnett, Mike Barno, Stuart Lancaster, Tom Swidler, Steve Duke, John Daly, Pat Colon, Konrad Baumeister. I've included an update issue of Farrago (I hope!) with this issue to those I think may be interested. I haven't received my confirmation from them yet, a problem I understand others have had as well, with Atlanticon.

Two announcements before I forget. Dick Martin 7400 Columbia Ave #4 College Park MD 20740 is preparing a hobby census. All pubbers are strongly urged to send him their sub lists by June 30 at the very latest. Don Ditter 910 Hope Street #12A, Stamford CT 06907, the Boardman Number Custodian, has just published Everything #52; GMS whose game-conclusions haven't been published should send him the details. Also, as Bernie Sampson is no longer to help Don, he is looking for someone who can type and publish the zine. Don would supply the information, mailing labels and \$\$\$\$. If you are interested in doing that, or even part of the job, contact him about joining the BNC's staff.

The Fine Column #51

Is it Ever OK to Charge People For Back Issues They Never Asked For?

Yes, in my opinion, it is, and I have done so dozens of times. In Kathy's Korner of Whitestonia #16 Kathy, quoting an anonymous subber, said, "This same person told me a very interesting story, on how when he subscribed to a certain zine, the publisher tried to pass off a past issue and charge him for it saying the two were related! The writer said "No way Jose, you can charge me for one issue, but I will not pay for unrequested back issues." Thanks for writing and stating my point so well."

Anonymous will remain so, but the pubber was me. Mr A sent in a sub check after #51 had been published. The problem was, #51 had the answers to the Hobby Quiz in #50, and a lot of the answers didn't make much sense without the questions. So I started his sub with #50, i.e. 50-59. Back came a postcard of complaint. The sub, he said, should have been started with #52 --- both #51 and #50 were back issues. Being a sensible fellow, however, he suggested a compromise --- start the sub at #51, and give him

#50 free. I wrote him back to agree. I also ² explained that I considered #51 to be the current issue, and not a back issue. I will always send the new subber this current issue. I have his money, and I don't think its proper to ask him to wait what could be weeks until the next issue is published --- the zine is a form of a prompt receipt. And I explained why I felt that #50 and #51 were so linked. This has happened with two other pairs of issues. #20 in Feb '79 was almost exclusively a response to #19, and #39 had extensive refernce to #38, so in both cases, I started people with the earlier issue of the pair.

And this isn't the only type of circumstance in which I charge for unsolicited back issues; indeed, it isn't even the most common. Suppose someone's sub ends with e.g. #55. By the time he finally gets his cheque to me, #57 has been published (remember, with no games, people don't have that incentive to keep their sub always up to date). Rather than starting with #57, and thus giving them a "gap", I'll start the sub with #56, a back issue.

I see nothing wrong with either of these practices, and Mr. A is the first to complain. Considering what little it takes to get people to bitch in this hobby, I consider this lack-of-complaints to be a tacit agreement with my policy, so I don't intend to change it. I will, however, as with Mr A, back off on specific complaint.

The Zine Column #52

Fakes, More Fakes, and Berch-O-Mania

Last issue I mentioned that a minifake of DD, "Grandson of Lexicon" had been distributed, and I said I'd give credit to the hoaxer, who could identify himself by telling me exactly how the envelope was addressed. Dumb, real Dumb! The hoaxer has now amused himself by mailing copies of the address label far and wide, so the result was a steady stream of credit-taking. First up was Guy Hail, who gave a rather complete account of who he consulted, where he got the typewriters and all that. Very thoro, Guy. Then Bruce Linsey took credit, but the handwriting was suspiciously good (was this a forgery?), and besides, Bruce did a full size hoax, DD #42, so I can't see him doing a minifake. Ron Brown took credit, but with such a minimum of boasting that I'm suspicious. Sorry Ron --- modesty just doesn't cut the mustard around here. Kathy Byrne said, yup, she did it, and even went to the trouble of having that letter posted from Des Moines (I could see the foldes on her envelope, so she must have mailed it to Iowa inside a small envelope rather than a business sized one). Andy Lischette said he did it. His sub ran out a while back, so naturally he informed me that he should get some free issues for admitting to the fake (regardless of whether its true, eh Andy?). Then Woody said he did it, saying he "spent months studying your style and tried to copy it the best I could." No, Woody, the Berch style cannot be copied --- even the spelling errors are difficult to simulate. Then Gary said that he did it, saying some army buddies did the mailing. Sorry, Gary, it just wasn't ambitious enough for a Coughlan-fake. And, significantly, the last person to take credit was Jack Fleming. Well. I suppose its possible that all 8 of you independently came up with an absolutely identical fake and by an astounding coincidence no one got more than one copy. A trifle unlikely, tho. So I'll have to ask for the typed master (not a copy) before I give the credit. I still think, tho that Jack Fleming did it. And I claim a hobby record for a zine with 8 people taking credit for a single fake.

Next was "Diplomacy Digress", labled as "#59a --- Endgame Statements", a 7-page job. The issue was quite entertaining, with a series by "Davidson Crockett" for games that got easier and easier. Others are attributed to Byrne, Mercer, Pearson and Ron Brown. The parody of the Zine Column starts, "Gee, things are nice in the hobby now that most people have acknowledged by godhood. Only a few troublemakers are left now, and their days are numbered." This is followed by 2 pages of very clever cracks about what is going on in the hobby, and at the end was explicitly labeled as a fake. I have not the slightest idea hwo did this, tho whoever it was has a fine sense of humor --- the paragraph about Masters and Linsey was hilarious. I'm sure the faker gets JAF and COA. If you want credit, send me an original master of any page but 5. I'll send copy of this to whoever wants one and will send an SASE, but copies will be light (goto P 11)

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((Our discussion begins with this item, which first appeared in Arena #2 2-27-72, and then got wider attention when it appeared in the 1973 IDA Handbook))

PHILOSOPHIES OF PLAYING DIPLOMACY by Edi Birsan

Within the Diplomacy world, there are several strong currents of attitudes on the play of the game. The intensity of these views approaches the point of a philosophy of play altho often lacking the qualitative aspects of philosophy in the common sense of the word.

Some time ago, John Beshara wrote a small outline of his "Philosophy of Winning Diplomacy" (Hoosier Archives #7) in which he stated that the "first minimal objective is to insure a stalemate." That is, provided that you cannot win the game, your actions must be directed so as to deny victory to any other player. The obsession with victory of the Win Only School has many followers including the designer Calhamer, Pronitz, Phillips and Beshara.

Directly opposed to the victory only school comes the Strong Second school of thought championed by Brenton ver Ploeg. They hold that as victory becomes unattainable the best course of action is to secure as strong a finish as possible (hopefully second) and not necessarily stop the front runner.

While there have been other possible possible entries on the list of possibilities, let us deal with the confrontation between these two and see if it is possible to come to some sort of conclusions.

Suppose I am a player that has come into a game with mixed Win Only and Strong Second people and I have no philosophical trappings. My first question is who would make the best long term ally? The Win Only person is ideologically committed to stabbing me as soon as it looks like I might have a possible shot at a win. The Strong Second player, in direct opposition would tend to interfere less... Thus, the strong Second character would be the better ally. My second question is then, who is the best player to attack? To attack the Strong Second player would stack the game with people of the win Only School ((i.e. eliminate everyone else but them)) who would be determined to stop any front runner. To attack the Win Only people would stack the board with people who are determined to finish as best as possible and will probably bicker among themselves, making victory that much easier. Also, the Strong Second people tend to be more narrowminded when they are attacked and tend therefore to continue to fight to the death, while the Win Only school shows much more flexibility in alliance partners and will, if it looks like there is another front runner offer to ally with the previous attacker to stop the new front runner. Therefore, the Win Only school makes the best enemies.

In a game in which there are mixtures of only these 2 philosophies and say no outsider let us look at the board again. From the Win Only point of view, it is only natural to choose a strong second person for your long term ally for the same reasons as above. The same goes for deciding whom to attack. For the Strong Second person, the best ally is one of his own kind, while the best enemy is again the Win Only person.

In a game with only players obsessed with victory, what can we expect... there will probably be few or no long term alliances. Second, there will be probably no victor if the players are of the same skill in tactics and reading of the front runner. That is, we can expect to see constant stalemates.

In a game of only strong second players what can we expect? First off we can expect a higher proportion of wins than in Win Only games. Second, we can easily expect long term alliances. We will probably witness a scrambling for SCs instead of position as the game moves into its final stages.

Faced with the obvious advantage of attacking Win Only players a curious attachment has been added to their philosophy. That is the great bluff of the fight to the death. Often the Win Only people will try to counter the logic of attacking them by stating that they will fight any betrayal to the death. This is so much talk, and in practice rarely comes true. When there is a fight going on with a Win Only player

and another and it looks as if a new front runner may have a chance to secure an un-stoppable position, the Win Only player will invariably approach his attacker and state "If we don't stop, so and so will win!" Only the interference of emotional factors (lead feud) will tend to make a confirmed Win Only player rather die fighting for someone else's win. ((Actually, its not quite that simple. The fight-to-the-death threat can be credibly made by a Win Only player provided that either A) the game is still fairly young --- early game or perhaps the start of midgame, or B) the Win Only player is extremely weak at that point. In A), the death struggle will likely create not a winner elsewhere, but only a leader --- its too early in the game for a nearly unstoppable player to be created. The Win Only player can accept his conduct generating a leader. In B), it doesn't so much matter, if the Win Only player is so weak that he can't stop a strong leader anyhow. His only chance to become strong enough to stop (or help stop) a leader is to get the fight called off --- which requires this threat. In short, his goal is to become strong enuf to stop a leader elsewhere, and he can expect to have to try any tactic to get to that point. Also, remember, such a threat has a certain amount of camouflage value. Win Only players, as Edi points out, make good targets, and such a threat makes you look like you aren't a Win Only player)).

As part of an empirical proof of the above I must point to my own experiences. In New York City, which might be called the home of Win Only there was a period of almost 2 years in which there wasn't a single win in a Face to Face game amongst the normal Diplomacy crowd. It was only with the increase of the Strong Second School and a third crowd described later that finally brought a victory to New York boards. Now, with the TDA consultant's ((sic)) in the city pushing the Win Only School we are again witnessing a rise in the number of stalemates in the city. To study alliance preferences, one has to dig into the records of say Pronitz and Beshara on the postal circuit and will find the pattern of the win only school. For mixed games, you can follow the games of say Ver Ploeg. These will sustain the pattern that logically follows from the ideology choice. ((I don't know how far this will get you with ver Ploeg. He won an awfully high percentage of his postal games.))

The problem now arises in how to spot a member of either school so that one may use the predictable behavior patterns to one's advantage. Prior to this article most players usually betray themselves in writing and by that label themselves. I'd have to suspect that after this article, there'd be a verbal switch in many of the Win Only camp while they maintain their philosophy in practice. Then the only way to spot one is by a careful screening of the past games and a quick alliance analysis correlated with school type, which may be a lot of work, but if it is to be done, it will bring results. ((In the vast majority of cases, this kind of analysis is impossible unless you've actually been in a game with a person, or know someone who has been. Simply going thru the moves of a game is not going to give you a great deal of information in the majority of cases.)) The problem of recognition is crucial and it will probably be one of the major reasons that the Win Only School may quietly persist from now on, altho hopefully in decreasing numbers.

Thus, the Win Only school provides an interesting threat to our hobby in that if it dominates you will witness an increase in stalemates and a corresponding decrease in wins. This will tend to frustrate the players and rob the game of enjoyment. This in fact did happen in New York, after a long period of stalemates people were getting bored and annoyed at those whose obsession with victory leads to the denial of it to others and locked up boards. Which brings me to a third philosophy of play.

The most important thing, and by all true measures the first minimal objective is not to secure a stalemate, a strong second or even your own victory or survival, but is in fact to ENJOY the game. A game in which you are bored, disgusted, annoyed and unhappy isn't worth a damn if you win or lose. To equate victory or placing in the top part of the board with enjoyment is to lose sight of the pleasures of the game, an alliance kept thru thick and thin, or an impossible position played out to the best of your ability. To lose sight of enjoying your games is a true loss in a philosophical sense of the word.

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((The discussion continues Impassable #26 9-9-73. In what follows, material in triple parenthesis is by John Boyer, editor of I))

PLAYER PHILOSOPHIES: A Balanced View by Eric Verheiden

Recently, some controversy has developed over player attitudes toward game finishes in Diplomacy, in particular --- since there has been little dispute that everyone likes to win best of all --- those finishes inferior to a win. The primary instigator of the controversy as of late has been Edi Birsan, who ran a poll on player attitudes last year and who more recently has been propagandizing the Diplomacy community with his own philosophy in several so-called "objective" articles. Actually, their objectivity is on a par with Larry Peery's "objective resolution" of the Walker-Beshara feud some years back, however that particular dispute will not be dealt with here. ((See? Absolutely no one is immune to making cracks, even when the target (here, Peery) is totally unrelated to the issue at hand. No one but me, that is. You would never catch me inserting remarks about, say, writing styles, into an article about, oh, playing styles and philosophies. It couldn't happen. Never.))

The basic question of player philosophy comes to the fore in the following hypothetical situation: suppose you are in a game in which the players have managed to avoid the usual grudges against each other and in which you have second place, perhaps not an exceptionally strong second place but second place all the same. Player B is the clear leader and will win, if anyone does, and who is attacking the beleaguered powers C, D, and E. C, D, and E will be doing well to survive if you remain neutral; if you attack them, most if not all will be eliminated. So the question is, assuming that such an alliance has a reasonably good chance to stalemate the board, do you ally with C, D, and E against B with the understanding that the survivors will receive equal credit in a draw along with you, or do you simply attack C, D, and E ruining their chances for a respectable finish, if any, and guaranteeing B's win but also giving you a "strong second" finish? Birsan refers to a player taking the first option as a "win only" player, "obsessed with victory" and clearly an "inferior ally" even tho in the above situation, the player does not win, but only receives equal credit for the draw with minor power allies and further is the only sort of player who will ally --- and of necessity keep the alliance to retain the draw --- with the minor powers whose position would otherwise be helpless. ((Whew! Whatever happened to the old tradition of just one idea per sentence?)) A player taking the second option is referred to by Birsan as a "strong second" player and is touted as a "superior ally" in just about all situations, even tho this "superior ally" is ideologically committed to stabbing and if necessary eliminating all players but the leader, even if he cannot win himself, in a quest for a "strong second" ((henceforth SS)) place, and the requisite large --- but essentially meaningless once he has second place secured --- number of Supply Centers.

The flaw in Birsan's reasoning derives from the fact that he considers the relative merits of "Win Only" ((henceforth WO)) and SS players only from the point of view of the leader, which of course is the situation Birsan, who has recently won his 12th game and whose eventual stated goal is to win 5 times with every country, is interested in. From that point of view, it is quite apparent that a SS player, who is less disinclined to let the leader (i.e. Birsan) win, is preferable to a WO player, who would be more disinclined to let the leader (again Birsan) win. However, from the point of view of any player but the leader --- which is of course the situation most of us usually find ourselves in --- the situation is exactly reversed. A WO ally would be more inclined to stalemate the game and force a draw including the non-leader and thus giving him equal credit with every other survivor. The reason every player gets equal credit is simple: it is assumed that the player has contributed an essential part in arriving at the draw, other wise, he would not have been included in it. In any event, a SS ally seeing he couldn't win himself, would be more inclined to stab the non-leader, to eliminate competition for second place and to achieve as strong a finish as possible in terms of SCs. Thus, it can be seen that while a WO player can maintain a strong alliance until the end of the game, a SS player, especially one who is unable to win himself, in the end must play only for himself, executing stabs against weaker allies when necessary.

So, from the point of view of the average player, who cannot expect to become the leader in even a large percentage of his games, but who can expect draws fairly frequently under the right circumstances, it is clear that if anyone is to be tossed out of the game on the basis of philosophy, it should be the greedy SS players and not the more cooperative WO players.

In line with Birsan's hints for spotting WO players in his EDITorial "Philosophies of Playing Diplomacy," published rather inexplicably without rebuttal for such a controversial subject in the IDA Diplomacy Handbook, here are some hints for spotting SS players; one should not how well they apply to Edi Birsan in particular.... SS players are typically obsessed with victory, and disinclined to consider draws, especially those which fail to give them some leeway to convert them to a win with a well-executed stab. They tend to stab more frequently --- and with more enjoyment --- than other players, especially against a too-trusting ally in the mid-game who has left his rear weak while moving on another front. They have an obsession about picking up SCs, even if said SCs are of little use or less use than than ((for)) the potential ally they belonged to. Finally, their alliances tend to be arranged to give them good offensive potential against their allies at some future date, but not the reverse. ((remember, this stabbing is, according to Eric, done to preserve their second place position)).

However, it should be noted in fairness that in many (if not most) situations, philosophy is irrelevant. For instance, if a WO player is unable to stop the leader, at least not without getting stopped himself, he might as well take what he can get, be it second place or whatever. Similarly, if a SS player finds himself the target of the leader ((which, if he has done his diplomatic homework, really shouldn't occur that often)), who is driving for a win, the SS player would probably be more inclined to settle for a draw including him that to insist that the leader be allowed to win the game at his expense. Further, emotional factors often come into play. A player may decide to extract some revenge... two players may become so firmly allied that neither will attack the other regardless of consequences.

Thus, perhaps player philosophy is not significant enough to be considered at all in forming alliances, such factors as the strategic potential and, most important of all, the personal relationship between the members of the potential alliance taking precedence.

((...we incline to agree with Verheiden's article. However, isn't it possible for many to be in the middle? How about players who play "logical" as a Mr. Spock type would --- considering all factors equally important. Also, isn't it possible for a person's philosophy to change with every defeat or victory? Are we truly that easily pegged in a hole? We wonder --- John Boyer)))

((The discussion then continues in Impassable #27))

A BALANCED COUNTER ATTACK by Edi Brisan Jr

Despite the aggressive polemic attack ... Verheiden still fails to come to grasp with the fundamental theory evolved in the initial article ... or the reinforcement it received, if not verification, in the Arena player poll 8 months later.

This may be due in fact to the misunderstanding of the perspective of the analysis, either by failure on Verheiden's part to read the material as presented, or the failure of the original author to properly state the frameworks operating.

The points that were made in the original article and the rewrites are as follows: In a board of mixed Strong Second and Win Only players:

1. When considering an alliance early in the game, presumably a long term alliance of an aggressive style, it is best to form an alliance with a player who values 2nd place over any draw, and best to attack a player with a WO philosophy. This holds true regardless of your personal philosophy in a game which is dominated by philosophy and not personality.
2. In a game with all WO people, we can expect continuous stalemates, switching alliances and numerous stabs.

3. In a game with only strong second ⁷ players, we can expect alliance fighting, if not of the Holy Type, with a higher ratio of wins to draws as compared with Win Only games.

4. Once an alliance has been formed and/or if you become the front runner with a SS player your chances of winning are much better than if you are allied with a WO character whose ideological commitments would force him to stab you as you become the front runner.

These hypothesis were verified in the Arena poll in which there was a direct reversal of opinions stated when asked what they would do if it appeared that they would come in second and their ally would win: The WO people said they would stab their ally overwhelmingly, the SS player stated that he would not ((this would seem true by the very definition of the terms)),

Logi ally and empirically, there is no evidence to disprove the value of the theory in presenting a tool by which to manipulate the philosophies of the players for your own goals. The logical extension of the above theory is that if you see that you are not going to win and you are under attack by the dominant alliance, your best ally would be of the WO school who would ally with you to stop the front runner, and your worst ally is obviously the SS player who would stab you to increase his SC count....

As for the claim that I have been propagandizing the Diplomacy Community with my own philosophy, this is a most peculiar attack. If there is any philosophy stand which I have advocated, it is to base your actions on an undefinable structure thus providing the player with the greatest amount of flexibility with the smallest amount of "reading" visible to the other players. In short, the best philosophy is no philosophy, or the play for the joy of it all.

Eric inadvertently illustrates the difficulty of labeling someone a member of each philosophy when he attempts to label me as a SS party member based on a superficial scanning of 71BC, and Eric's redefinition of the term. It would be very easy to make the case for labeling me either as a SS player or a WO player, tho I won't waste the space with such mindless contradictory proofs.

One point, tho, which Eric makes is of interest: that is the questioning of the significance of philosophy compared with personal relationships. For newcomers and strangers, clearly philosophy is very important if it can be determined by the parties involved. As you move to a more social and personal game, then philosophy, tho still significant, takes a lesser role to social aspects....Part of this may be associated with the fact that the two philosophies are identifiable ... in only a minority of the players. For, based on the Arena poll, the SS philosophy is clear in only 18-21% of the population, and WO in a smaller yet minority of 15-18%. That leaves 67-61% of the players with such a mix of values and scales of achievement as to not be identifiable as within either of the two groups.

I suspect that with the reinforcement that WO players get from the rating systems (the 2 most popular: ODD and Calhamer are both WO oriented) that there would be an increase in the size of the WO school thus signally an expected increase in the number of draws across the board....

((From the same issue comes this comment by Andy Phillips))

Regarding your ((Boyer's)) comments at the end of Eric's article, it is not "possible for many to be in the middle." There may be other positions than these 2, but there is no middle. "Second" in a loss either is or is not inherently desirable. Faced with Verheiden's hypothetical situation, you either do or do not ally against B. What middle can there be in that situation? Failure to act is an act like any other.

((Moving now to Impassable #28 and Eric again))

...I did not consider my article to be an "agressive polemic attack" against Edi --- or at least no more of one than his Handbook article against WO players in general and the players classified as such my him...in particular.

As to his numbered points, the first is the only one I have a quarrel with and for the same reason mentioned in my article: Edi fails to consider the consequences of an alliance which is neither a total success nor a total disaster. I would maintain first that if someone besides you gets into position to win or wipe you out, his philosophy makes little difference; you still lose in the first case, and get wiped out in the second nonetheless. If you get into a position to win, barring interference from your ally, then I agree that in this case, Edi is correct, a SS ally would have at least certain theoretical advantages over a WO ally. But what if neither you nor your ally get into position to win and in fact some other player becomes the leader? Do you want an ally who will sell you out for a few more centers -- as a SS ally is ideologically committed to do --- or do you want an ally who will strive for position with you in order to stalemate the game...as a WO player will do. Similar results hold for which type of player is best to attack --- unless you expect to win, WO players are better to have around.

Consequently, for all but the top players who become leaders in game after game, WO players make better allies and worse enemies at the beginning of the game on philosophical grounds since they give you better chances to survive and hopefully draw if not win. To accomplish the latter, if you do become the leader, there are other techniques available of varying effectiveness known as "Lying" and "Stabbing".....

((Andy Phillips got in a few licks that issue too:))

It's a mystery to me how Edi got the idea that Eric was categorizing him as a SS player. My impression is that the opposite is true, i.e. Eric seems to be saying that despite Edi's advocacy of the SS school, his behavior pattern was actually that of a WO player.

As to the question of advocacy, I don't know who Edi is fooling, but it surely can't be too many people. His characterizations of Calhamerite play as "a threat to our hobby" would make his claim of neutrality a joke even if his 'patant semantics-mongering weren't so blatant. With a name like "Strong Second" (who could possibly be against that?) for one side and "Win Only" (who's for that? I'm not, you may be sure) for the other, the desired choice is evident even before the question is stated.... I mean, once you characterize a loss as a "strong finish", you've assumed your conclusion.

((A few last comments from Andy in #29))

...I'd be the last to deny that if you're up on top of the game, and rolling along in high gear that Balance of Power ((WO)) types are an anathema...The fallacy is the assumption that this is the situation you should be planning for in choosing an ally. The simple fact of the matter is: there are 7 players in Diplomacy, and everything else being equal the odds are 6 to 1 against your conveyance being the first one to strike up a tune. Thus, if you ally with a bandwagon type ((SS)) you're buying his complaisance one time out of 7 in very dear tender ((expensive money)) --- a tendency to defeat the other 5 times out of 7. No matter what your philosophy, that's bad news.

Of course, if you think of yourself as a pretty mean Diplomacy player --- and most of us do; a non-egotistical Diplomat being a contradiction in terms ---then the odds start to look better than 6 to 1....Well played games of Diplomacy are generally drawn out and will often stalemate. That the game should be bastardized or that well-played games are unexciting or frustrating just doesn't follow, tho....What talent, after all, does it take to offer someone second place when you can give it to him, and he wants it and it cost you nothing. Its so easy it's a crime. There is nothing quite so boring as the playing out of a game decided in that fashion, or where one or more of the critical (but not threatened, in terms of centers) players ignores the one in the process of winning in favor of grabbing a center or three. It can go on for years after its all decided and there's nothing left to play for.

((Ratings were a common topic at Impassable, so it was inevitable that the topic would arise again. Here's John Boyer in #41, 10-13-74))

...there are players who play for second when it is the only choice, and a few

who play for second and never first. I'm sure that a lot of standbys play for second and never first...Of course, there are many examples in history where nations did not play for first and were content to be "second" and let live some empire raging around them. One of the best examples are the Phoenicians. They were traders of a sort that most nations before and since have not equaled in daring. They invented the Phoenician alphabet which helped launch Western civilization. They were never tops in their world and even worked for empires on a paid-job status in their various armies. They survived a long time when they could have been wiped out if they simply tried military force to defend their homes. ((Or perhaps they would have ruled the world and reshaped it according to their "daring" values --- if they had gone for "first"))

Face facts, people will play for second place. Face the fact that it is a visible goal to aim for and face the fact that not everyone can win as many games as you guys ((Phillips and Beyerlein)).

((#42 brought a repost from Andy Phillips:))

Second is never "the best you can do". Its the worst possible result. No worse than 3rd or 4th or 7th, but no better either. There's no point in trying to lose, or in bothering about the number of units you have on the board when your annihilation is conceded. Until your annihilation is certain, fight to avoid it. And when it's certain, concede (or pursue objectives -- deciding who will win, e.g. -- external to your nationality-persona).

The Phoenicians are better known, later, as Carthaginians. You can consult the city fathers of Carthage on the value of being the second strongest power on the board. (((Well, the Carthaginians were started as a colony of the Phoenicians, but their relation is stopped right there. My example was related to the Phoenicians only --- not their colonies --- at least when their colonies grew to become independent of their mother country.....---John Boyer)))

((Doug Beyerlein then continued with a ratings aspect to this:))

I think you ((Boyer)) are missing the whole point of why I view second place finishes as near worthless when it comes to ratings. A rating system tries to gauge a player's skill in Postal Diplomacy. This is measured against the absolute standard of a win, as one can never do better than a win. By rating second place finishes as strong finishes in relationship to a win, in effect, you rate them as minor wins. There would be nothing wrong with this if the amount of skill in attaining such a finish is in proportion to the points given. But..this is not the case. All too many times, the second place finish is a cheap finish....by rating a second place finish highly we are placing undue emphasis on an easy way to get to the top of some rating systems. If that is what you want, great, but surely it makes the notion that you are rating a player's skill, suspect.

Also, I do not see any validity in your argument of using history to back up your beliefs regarding ratings. Diplomacy is an abstract game, just as chess is. Introducing the argument of realism has nothing to do with the game, as the game is not designed to be historically realistic. That should be rather obvious by the equal strengths that Calhmer gave to Germany and Turkey at the start of the game. Calhmer used the period and map of Europe just prior to World War I because it was a setting which lends itself to the concept of diplomacy and because it was contemporary enough to sell to the public....(((Well, Doug, my attempt as historical proof is not to prove the relative strength of countries in Diplomacy -- but the human element in Diplomacy -- and the fight for survival. The only possible difference between the game and the world is that in the game you could have more striving for a win, more desire to conquer all. But, as in real history, the game will still have countries or players willing to play second fiddle in order to survive. Of course, alternative goals, such as are available to a nation not wanting to become a major power (militarily), are not exactly available in the game of Diplomacy. There are only two goals possible in the

the game: Win or survive. Since it is a game with nothing more at stake than the game-fee or fame as an excellent player, we can all afford to go for the big kill. Thus, there is no such thing as peace until the game's end. But, the name of the game is Diplomacy, Doug, and that means that you can negotiate any sort of agreements --- or are you advocating a rule to make everyone go for a win or forfeit their game? This is only a game, so people can find fun just by playing and pretending they are historical rulers...In my mind, there are a sufficient number of situations and players with goals of second to justify a rating system giving points for second --- enough points to reward those who do make second -- not as a punishment for getting second! (Boyer))

((John expanded on this in #43, suggesting that a second place finish might not be the fault of the player))

No one wants to believe that there are games which one could not win. What if you were T, and then F and G dropped out of the game and replacements were missing orders, etc, allowing E to take the powerful lead. Meanwhile, your brilliant attack on R with Austrian aid is working, but both of you are pressured by England on all fronts...Surely you will admit that there is a certain amount of luck involved in all games? Rare is the game that isn't influenced by GMing errors, NMRs, allies missing crucial supports, and so on. It is no fault of the player if circumstances take the game away from him. Any argument of proving the game is being realistic about countries suffering command control ((i.e. these problems are supposedly analogous to "command control" problems in real war, sometimes called fog-of-war)) would not hold water in relation to ratings.

Sure, the aim of the game for most people and the Rulebook is to win by taking control of 18 centers, but failure by one's own stupidity is one thing and failure due to someone else's is another! I still say that a second place finish should not be punished and should be given a rating in proportion to center count with the least possible modifications. ((Its certainly true there are games where Mr #2 really couldn't do a thing about the victory of Mr. #1. This problem is often even worse in some of the larger variants. So there are undeserved second place finishes, but so what? There are undeserved wins as well, and people who get into draws when they could easily have been wiped out. You really can't worry about such things. Anyhow, Boyer and Phillips continued their debate for several more issues, but enough is enough.))

((Now for a few other writers. First up is Richard Hucknall in Fall of Eagles #22, 21 Sept 1978))

...Clearly we all start a new game hoping to win - any other objective (i.e. to help, or stop, another player from winning) is unfair to the remaining players. These hopes are often dashed quite early and so a new target has to be formulated... My own view is that it is no longer possible to win then one should play to prevent anyone else from winning and try to survive to participate in a draw....((Richard went on to state that if all players share this philosophy, and if all players play for this best possible result, and if there are no NMRs or dropouts, then the game would end in a draw. This is a fatuous and meaningless statement. Ofcourse, if everyone is determined that no one (but themselves) will be allowed to win, and plays relentlessly toward that goal, then no one will win. But so what? I've never even seen a game played postally without any NMRs, nor have I ever seen a game in which everyone relentlessly played for the best result. So he's talking about a fantasy game --- which I don't see the point of even discussing. And as for everyone (in the game) sharing that philosophy, the article engendered the following from Iain Forsyth in #24:))

I would take issue with you over your "win or stop anybody else from winning" attitude toward Diplomacy. I agree that everyone should play to win, and that cartels, cross-game alliances and such should be discouraged, but once you have a non-winning position, why be bloodyminded about the final result?

To give you an example, in Jigsaw "Basilisk", my Russia, in conjunction with Italy, could have held a stalemate line and prevented Peter Kaufmann as Germany from

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winning. I deliberately threw the game to G by attacking Italy as a) Peter had been the best player and by definition deserved to win b) It was more difficult for me to come in 2nd by attacking Italy than to merely fall back on a stalemate position and force a 3-way draw. Therefore, 2nd place was a better result for me in the position I was in. Shouldn't a player always try for the best result he can achieve given his position at the time? Of course, the ratings systems don't show this, which just goes to show how useless they are. (((I didn't really follow the "Basilisk" game so I can't really make any constructive comments. My attitude still remains that if (in your case) you could have combined with Italy to hold G to a 3-way draw you should have done so. The fact that it was more difficult to come in second was immaterial. There is another point - I too have played against Peter and I also rate him as a very good player BUT he has one bad weakness. If he isn't winning he drops out ((he gives examples)) Perhaps if you had played for the 3-way draw he would have started to NMR perhaps leaving you in a position to win! --- Richard Hucknall)))

((There is a certain purity to Iain's position --- in a sense, it really is "win only" its most literal form. You either win or you don't --- and in the latter case, your position doesn't much matter; its just some form of non-win. And as you are no longer concerned about this, you can turn your play toward other goals))

((Another person who felt that draws are overvalued, tho from a different perspective, was Brad Hessel, writing in #14 of his Diman, 2-14-76. The Calhamer Point Count gives 1 point to the win; if there is none, it is divided equally among those who draw, so that, for example, those in a 4-way draw get 0.25))

...The treatment of drawn games under the CPC system has always irked me. I believe that a game of Diplomacy to be a situation where the sum of the parts is less than the whole. Consequently, it does not seem right to me that the total reward given the survivors in the game in which no one had won ((i.e. the drawers)) should equal the victory of any one of them. I know that the theoretical justification for this state of affairs is to distinguish between the survivors where someone has won (such survivors have "lost") and the survivors in a draw (who, presumably have not lost). I see the point of such a distinction, but I feel even more strongly that the value of "gaining control of Europe" should be more than twice the value of failing by half (as in a two way draw) to do so. ((You can accomplish both Brad's goal and the goal of distinguishing between drawers and losers simply by specifying that the drawers share equally not in 1.0 CPs but in 0.8 or 0.5. Curiously, just such a system now exists in the "Modern Calhamer Point Count", which among other things, gives only 1/6 point for 4, 5, and 6 way draws. The reason, however, was to reduce the amount of work involved))

((From Impassable #75, Feb 1977 comes this press item from Mr Bear, the Austrian player in 1974HN))

The game was invented with the purpose of one player winning, not players eliminating x number of opponents, and then agreeing to a nice, comfortable draw. Who has guts anymore in this hobby! Games that are born in 3 and 4 way alliances, never changing, methodically being played are a bore and an insult to our integrity as gamers! I for one would always prefer a hard fought second (or last!) to a comfortable agreed upon in 1901 draw. I long for my novice days when alliances changed with the arrival of the moves and players wanted to be winners.

(Continued from Page 2)

And if that were not enough, a third fake has appeared, a supposed "Granson of Lexicon", postmarked from Switzerland. 4 people have mentioned this, so I assume I'm not being put on, but I never got a copy. Perhaps it was lost in the mail, perhaps the faker didn't realize that yer s'posed to send the pubber a copy of the fake --- maybe it really did come from a Uerpean subber, perhaps someone at an APO box. I'd like to see a copy. Anyhow, with three fakes in one month, I'll claim a hobby record for that too. Shy, I'm not.

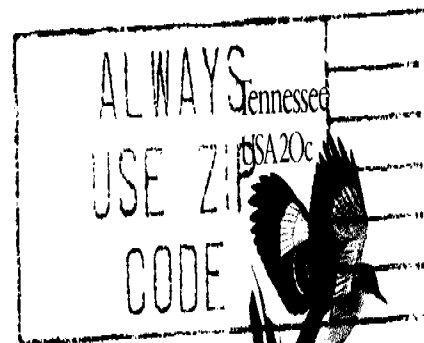
The other hobby fad that has my complete approval is the heavy mention of my name in various zines: 36 in DW #30, Whitestonia #47/48 had 59, and COA #10 had 43.

Mark L Berch
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Alexandria, VA 22304

Sorry I ran out of Room this issue;
more news will appear next issue

If (59) appears after your name, this
will be your last issue unless you de-
cide to resub

GenCon East 1982, which alas I won't be
able to attend, will be held at June 17-20
Widener College in Chester PA. I'm sure you
can register at the door, and there is a
Holliday Inn a few blocks away.



Mockingbird & Iris

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