

# DIPLOMACY DIGEST

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5th Anniversary Blowout

Mark L Berch  
492 Naylor Place  
Alexandria VA 22304

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Five years is a long time for a Dipzine, but thats how long DIPLOMACY DIGEST has been around. 1977 is a year that most of you weren't even in the hobby for. Most of the zines which started that year are already gone --- names like Suicide, Against the odds, Lies, Deceits, and Nefarious Schemes, Ninth Circle, The Imperium, Non-Sequitur, Beaucuillion, Dragon and the Lamb are now just part of the hobby's past. Off-hand, the only other North American zine from 1977 I can think of thats still around is Ter-ran.

So I'm in a mood for celebrating. I've put in an order for some more "white-out" and liquid paper (I buy it by the case). And the theme of the issue, frankly, is me. As I said a year ago, the response to the Beyerlein interview was so positive that I was going to do it again. Perhaps I fogot to mention that I would be the interviewee rather than the interviewer.

This may strike some of you as excessively egotistical. It shouldn't. Most long term pubbers have egos ranging from extremely large to something capable of filling the intergalactic void. I've made no pretense about it. False pride may be a dreadful failing, but false humility is even worse in my book. In fact, humbleness in my opinion is a greatly overrated virtue--- if you accept that its a virtue at all, which I don't. Its up there with being able to spell and type and proofread. Nice, I suppose, but hardly essential. Essential to whom, you ask? To me. Who else would I be talking about?

The Postal Diplomacy Tournament, which started early in 1980, has finally ended. The winner was Don Ditter, who won 2 of his three games. Next were Fred Townsend, Walter Blank and Robert Osuch, each of whom also won 2 of their three games. Rounding out the top 10 were Lee Kendter, Sr, Gordon Argyle, Russell Bleu, David Ezzio Vic Carpenter and Mark Larzelere. 8 of the 10 have been DD subbers. I served as Ombudsman for the tournament, and some interesting questions came up. The Tournament Director was Bob Sergeant, and he took over some of the games from defaulting GMs.

Almost ready at this point is the souvineer booklet for DipConXV. It includes the complete standings of results, the results of the player survey (some surprises!), an analysis of how countries did (both here and at 6 other cons), answers to various questions people asked, plenty of comments from attendees, a new blood listing, the story of how it all came about, the top board game moves (I hope), and much more, all crammed, I hope, into 23 pages. This will be automatically mailed to all those who played, others may buy it for \$1, from me. In England, its 60p surface, 11 air (stamps accepted). Hm, a few more lines. It also includes reports on some other events at the time, Steve Langeley on a secret scoring system, and my comments on the DipCon Soc meeting.

In the interview, (( )) is by Berch, as are the footnotes.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK BERCH

In early August, 1982, Mark Berch sat down with John Kador and talked about his perspective on Diplomacy, the game, the hobby, and some of its participants. Kador's report:

I first met Mark Berch, appropriately, over a Diplomacy board shortly after I moved to Washington, D.C. in 1976. I had been playing Diplomacy for about five years, both postally and face to face. My first impression of Mark was unmemorable, for indeed, I don't remember it. I do recall that I took no particular notice of his gameplaying skills and that his country did not figure in the endgame.

I saw little of Mark for the next few years, although we occasionally found ourselves in postal games together, as standbys, never both as original players. Consequently, we have never squared off in a fresh postal game. With the information I have now, such an encounter is not a prospect I relish.

Eventually our consistent cooperative spirit over the Diplomacy board extended to other activities. We both share a fondness for the theater. On more than one occasion, my wife Anna Beth and I in the various and sundry theaters of D.C. encountered Mark and Mona Berch. As skillful players, always preferring plans to serendipity, we agreed to meet regularly for evenings of dinner, theater, and conversation. The dinners were generally edible, the theater experimental, and the conversation freewheeling with the specific and rigorously enforced limitation prohibiting any discussion of Diplomacy. Anna Beth and Mona, let us say, were quite insistent on this point.

This interview came about after I gave Mark some feedback on his "interview" with Doug Beyerlein. I offered the comment that an interview, unlike a conversation, had more planning to it, both pre- and post-questioning. As an example of what an interview might be like, I offered to conduct an interview with Mark himself as the object.

Few mortals can resist such an invitation, and Mark proved himself completely mortal. I took the opportunity of reviewing back issues of Diplomacy Digest, and even invited a few hobby personalities to suggest some questions. On a Sunday afternoon, we began.

KADOR: Let's start with current events. At the time of this interview, you are just back from DipCon XV, the annual highpoint of the postal hobby. What is your estimate of the state of the Diplomacy hobby?

BERCH: I think the hobby is in pretty good shape right now. Of course, all this depends on what you want to get out of the hobby. If all you want to get out of the hobby is reading press, for example, then you judge it by how many press 'zines there are. So the state of the hobby is always going to be dependent on what one is interested in.

KADOR: How should the state of the hobby be judged, then?

BERCH: I tend to look at the state of the hobby in terms of such factors as what services are being provided to people who need them. Is there an approximate balance between game openings and the demand for game openings? Are there a lot of orphan games hanging around? Is the hobby growing in terms of people?

KADOR: Your conclusions?

BERCH: The services are in reasonably good shape. We have a novice packet that is still being distributed. Bruce Linsey tells me he's mailing about one a week. It's a very good packet; far better than the ones used in the '70s. The Boardman Number Custodian is

functioning. At present, Don Ditter does not have a publisher, but he indicated he has a very good prospect. The Miller Number Custodian is in operation and is giving out numbers, I understand. We don't have an international subscription service operating right now, which makes it difficult for people to subscribe across the Atlantic. <sup>page 3</sup> Diplomacy World is coming out regularly. Orphan games are being rehoused. So the basic services are actually being taken care of. There are no really devastating feuds going on right now and that's always a good sign. Now, I'm not saying you have to have no feuds at all, but it's good to see that there are no really destructive feuds going on right now. Of course, after this interview, there may be, who knows?

KADOR: Diplomacy, the game itself, is more than 20 years old. It's one of the few games whose sales are building every year.

BERCH: How do you know that?

KADOR: Avalon Hill assures me that this is so. Even applying the appropriate discounts for self-interest, the sales for the game are strong. <sup>3</sup> Most games have their moment in the sun and then after a few years, fade into oblivion. Diplomacy is different.

BERCH: True, 20 years is most unusual for a game. There are not many that last this long.

KADOR: What do you think accounts for this popularity?

BERCH: There are several factors. The first is the fact that every game is different because of the importance of personality. If you get into a game with seven people, and then you get into a second game with seven different people, the games are going to be radically different, even though the pieces, the board, the map never changes. There is a freshness to a game of Diplomacy that one doesn't have in a game of checkers, for example. The other factor is that Diplomacy does not have a lot of competition in its field. It's a large game, and it is reasonably well-balanced. And it's a game that bears replaying. There are few other games that appear to be able to fit all those characteristics.

KADOR: Is the Diplomacy hobby of which we're a part a result of the game's popularity or a cause of it?

BERCH: Both. Diplomacy has spawned a subculture. Very few games have done this. Even a game like Monopoly, which is much older than Diplomacy and more popular, has not spawned much of a subculture that provides contacts among Monopoly players. There are now Monopoly tournaments and even books on Monopoly, but the associated cult doesn't exist.

KADOR: What attracts you to the game? What makes you a Diplomacy groupie? ((Apparently, I heard this question as "Why do you publish?"))

BERCH: I like to publish. There are a lot of old articles which I think people would like to read, and I want to give these articles a second life. Also, I want a forum to be able to say whatever I want to say, whenever I want to say it, and how I want to say it. And

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1. This refers to Supernova, a 35 page booklet which is available from Bruce Linsey, 24A Quarry Drive Albany NY 12205. I strongly recommend that anyone fairly new to the hobby get hold of this; there's a lot of solid advice in there.

2. There used to be an International Subscription Exchange, with one person here and one person in England. If you wanted to sub to a british zine, or pay a gamefee to play there, you paid in US dollars at this end, and credit was then transferred to the British agent, who paid in Sterling to the british GM. Active players even kept standing accounts with the ISE, which was run, I beleive, by Edi Birsan.

3. How John comes to this information I do not know. I've never know AH to reveal any sales information about Diplomacy.

the only way to do that is to publish your own 'zine.

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KADOR: How often do you get to play Diplomacy?

BERCH: Playing is a problem for me because I rarely have a whole afternoon to shoot playing FTF. I personally enjoy the postal game more than the FTF game or the tournament game. I find the FTF game a little too much of the hurly-burly rush. I prefer a more leisurely type of game where I can choose my words more carefully. The other factor is that I'm quite successful in postal play, and in FTF play I'm generally a failure. One naturally gravitates toward the game one is more successful at. For me, it's not even close. I have done very poorly in the great majority of my FTF games and even in my tournament games. ④

KADOR: How do you account for this difference?

BERCH: I'm not sure.

KADOR: It seems surprising. You're pretty much unmatched in your knowledge of the game . . .

BERCH: It's not that! Diplomacy is very different from chess in that regard. The knowledge of the game is important, but it's not sufficient to do well. I believe it's a personality issue. It may be that I come across too aggressively in FTF play. It may be that I'm just not good at lying in a FTF context. It's always difficult to know why one fails. ((And so tempting to make excuses))

KADOR: You've said before that postal games tend to be more sophisticated tactically and strategically.

BERCH: Yes. It's really not possible to sit down and do long-term planning in a FTF game. It's very rare in a FTF game to plan beyond a full game year. If you're in Spring 1906, it's very difficult to plan for Spring 1907. Whereas in a postal game, you can plan for 1908 or even 1909. Partly it's because you can pick your words much more carefully. There are some advantages to FTF play and some to telephone games, but by and large, in the long haul, postal produces a better game. ⑤

KADOR: Let's talk about rules. You've delighted in dissecting the rules to Diplomacy, looking for paradoxes and inconsistencies. But let's address the Big Question: What is the purpose of rules?

BERCH: The purpose of the rulebook is to ensure people have a good time playing the game. The purpose of the rulebook is not so many traps for the unwary. That is why I tend not to take a real strict view of things. That's why I feel the badly written order rule, particularly in FTF play, should be given its full scope.

KADOR: You're a strict constructionist when it comes to the rulebook?

BERCH: I think some postal GMs take the attitude that they can add requirements to the rulebook. Generally I think it's a mistake to go stricter than the rulebook. For example, a very common error is when a player forgets to give the nationality of a foreign unit he is conveying or supporting. There are many GMs who will disqualify the move. And they note that the rulebook is always very careful to designate nationalities in the examples. But the rulebook does not specifically require it. And I don't see that GMs improve the game by requiring it. I don't think they're making it a more enjoyable game when they disqualify an order for failing to give information

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4. This is not an exaggeration. I've played in 11 tournament games, and in only 3 of them have I finished above 3 or 4 centers, and only one of those could be called a really good game (a 3-way draw with 12 centers at GenCon '81).

5. On reflection, this answer probably overstates the point. Long range planning is possible in FTF games, but it's much more difficult than in postal games. And a reasonable case can be made for the proposition that telephone produces the best game.

which the rulebook does not specifically state you have to give.

KADOR: Some perfectly respectable GMs will disqualify, for example, F Spain to MidAtlantic Ocean, because the piece is not completely described. page 5

BERCH: To me, that business of getting stricter than the rulebook is not adding to the enjoyment of the game. So I don't see the need for such strictness. ⑥

KADOR: Do you agree the rulebook is relatively well written?

BERCH: As most wargames go, the Diplomacy rulebook is in extremely good shape. There are other wargames in which there are literally dozens of situations where it's not at all clear how something should be handled. There are no really serious problems with the Diplomacy rules. To me, the only thing that comes close to a serious problem is the section dealing with civil disorder, and that will come up in the average game. ((CD does, not the Rulebook ambiguity))

KADOR: The rulebook has been rigorously analyzed. Is it possible to devise a set of rules for any non-trivial game which is impervious to such attack?

BERCH: Chess is not a trivial game, and one can write a totally unambiguous rulebook for chess. In fact, such a rulebook exists. The problem comes in when you consider the wide range of subtle types of errors that one can make in postal Diplomacy.

KADOR: Can one write a completely unambiguous set of house rules to cover every postal Diplomacy circumstance?

BERCH: The answer is probably no. The most exhaustive set of HRs I know is Bruce Linsey's. And yet it is possible to go through The Voice of Doom's rules, and come up with circumstances that are not precisely covered. This is not an exercise, I might add, that I'd encourage anyone to actually do, because it's just going to encourage him to put out more rules. It's not necessary for the rulebook to be ultra exact in every detail. ((I meant House Rules, not Rulebook))

KADOR: Are players well served by GMs with real specific houserules or GMs with fewer, elastic ones? ⑦

BERCH: There are probably about a dozen circumstances that ought to be covered exactly in the houserules. Beyond that, it's a matter of taste. There are, however, certain things a player is entitled to be told in advance about the way a game is run.

KADOR: Example?

BERCH: Draw votes. If a draw vote fails, how will it be conducted? Will the GM say, "the draw vote failed," or will he say, "Berch voted against it," or will he say, "the vote failed 4 to 2"? These are going to be important, because if a player is going to be embarrassed by the results of a draw vote, then he may be discouraged from actually proposing it. The player is also entitled to know whether or not standbys are going to be used. He is entitled to know how a Spring 1901 NMR will be handled.

KADOR: Some GMs say, "Well, I know what to do; all a player has to do is write me in advance, and I'll tell him."

BERCH: Sometimes it's not possible to write to GMs in advance. I don't think it's necessary for a GM to have an exhaustive set of HRs. On the other hand, I think the players are better served the more thorough the HRs are. ⑧

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6. Some argue that players need some room for the deliberate disorder. I agree, but there are plenty of ways to disorder F Spa-Mid, such as F Wes-Mid.

7. Actually, the hobby is well served by having both types of GMs around, so that players can take their pick of what kind of GMing they want.

8. Then again, some players just don't care, or have seen a zine for so long that they have a good idea of how the games will be run anyhow.

KADOR: Why?

BERCH: I think it's a practical matter. If a <sup>page 6</sup> ruling goes against him, the player does not want to feel that the GM is singling him out. Let's say the GM's HRs say, "If I am given an undated set of orders and a dated set of orders, the dated set of orders always takes precedence." If the situation comes up, and the GM can point to the HR and say, "Look, these set of orders weren't dated and they went into the trash can as soon as I got your dated orders," then the player is not going to feel he's being discriminated against. In the other case, the more informal reasoning invites a fight.

KADOR: So a thorough set of HRs avoids arguments?

BERCH: Right. The real value of HRs is that they avoid a lot of arguments. It may or may not produce a better game. But it will avoid the situations where a player can feel that the GM is just coming up with a solution because the GM does not like the player. (9)

KADOR: Talking about GMs, you've often said you feel you would not make for a good GM. Why?

BERCH: Frankly, I think I'd make a lot of mistakes. I'm not that careful in transcribing (10) Moreover, I do not find the act of adjudicating particularly enjoyable. Finally, because of my lifestyle, I would have trouble getting the results to the players right away. I'm not in a situation where I can set a deadline of Thursday and then be sure of putting everything in the mail on Saturday, or Sunday, or even

Monday. I could not give players the assurance that they could get fast turnaround. Most of all, I don't see a great need for it: there are plenty of good GMs around.

KADOR: How did you first get involved in the game? How did you first hear of Diplomacy?

BERCH: Well, that goes back a ways. I've always played very competitive games. When I was in elementary school, I played a lot of Monopoly and another Parker Brothers game called Big Business. I come from a pretty competitive family, so I played with my brother and sister. After that, I played chess. In order to excell at chess, you had to put in a lot of study, and I didn't enjoy the game that much. So later on I switched to bridge. I played a lot of bridge when I was an undergraduate. By the time I was a graduate student, I was playing a lot of poker. ((Poker was the only one of these games I ever made any money at))

KADOR: You went to MIT, right?

BERCH: Right. I had a bunch of pals who were fellow grad students in chemistry. One of them said that he knew this group of people at Harvard who every Friday dressed up in tuxedos and played this strange game which consisted of a lot of negotiating. Well, I always thought of myself as having a golden tongue. So we got a hold of this game. We

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9. This point should not be minimized. I have heard people complain about decisions which went against them more than 5 years after the fact. Player confidence in the fairness of the GM is extremely important, because if you don't have it, you will get totally paranoid in case of an NMR, or an enemy outguessing you, etc. If a GM can simply point to a houserule, the player may still feel its a stupid decision, but he won't feel its personal bias --- and players are very quick to jump to that sort of conclusion. In addition, if the GM can point to s specific HR on the subject, he can often avoid a delay of game, since the player may be dissuaded from going to an Ombudsman if he sees that the HR means he has no chance of winning on an appeal.

10. It goes even beyond that. At DipCon XV, I was asked to read the orders for some of the seasons at a pickup game on Friday afternoon, by some people who certainly ought to have known better. I only did this for a few seasons, but I don't think therewas a single season that I didn't make at least 2 errors just reading the orders. Transcribing the orders for the Top Board game which I did back in DD #21/22 was sheer torture -- in proofreading I caught a lot of errors, but nowhere near all.

all chipped in. We agreed that the last person who left MIT would get to keep the game. That turned out to be me. (11)

KADOR: So that's how you learned about Risk.

BERCH: Not quite. I'd say during that time we played about 25 to 30 FTF games. But eventually, the people left our group faster than we bought new people in. Finally, the group died out and sometime later, I graduated. (12)

KADOR: So you took your game to Washington?

BERCH: Yes. One day I put a notice on a bulletin board in a large office building saying that I was looking for Diplomacy players. I got a response from someone in a local gameplaying group. I learned from him that there were other people who played Diplomacy. And there was also this hobby playing postal Diplomacy. This was the first I ever heard of it, because when we bought the game, there was no flyer in it. (13)

KADOR: When was all this?

BERCH: I'd say about April of 1976. I also found out about DipCon IX in July, '76. I signed up for that, and that was the first time I saw a game of Diplomacy that I wasn't in. And there were like 20 or 25 boards going on at the same time, so it was a real mind blowing experience for me. Most of my contact with the postal hobby at that time was limited to one issue of Diplomacy World, and a few samples. So there were a lot of people there who were vague names to me, like Len Lakofka, Walt Buchanan, Robert Sacks, and a few other people. That's how I got back into Diplomacy after taking up the game in 1967 and then going through several years in which I was out of the game entirely. The reason I got into it was because Diplomacy is the most highly competitive game of any that I've played and it also bought a hobby along with it. (14)

KADOR: And then you signed up for a few games?

BERCH: Yes, I sent away for samples, the usual routine. There was a local publisher, Cliff Mann who published The Watergate, and I started playing there. In 1976, I signed up for four games, and that really got me into it, but good. (15)

11. Several of them dropped out or settled for a Master's degree. The rest got their PhD in a reasonable amount of time. It took me seven years to get mine, and if I had not had a very patient professor to work for I never would have made it.

12. I don't know what this answer has to do with Risk, a game I probably ran across in High School and play on very rare occasions.

13. The flyer did not appear until 1971 in the games. Actually, as it turned out, I could have found out about it had I gotten involved in the MIT Strategic Games Society. Of course, had I done that I probably would have met Robert Sacks, who I think was with MITSGS at the time, and that would have been that!

14. What game is the most competitive, I hasten to add, is an entirely subjective evaluation --- a reasonable case can also be made for chess and poker. But Diplomacy seem to me to provide a more comprehensive form of competition. Competition in chess, for example, except at the very top, is a much more narrow and abstract thing, and is necessarily limited to the fact that there is so little communication involved.

Both Poker and chess provide only limited amounts of psychological warfare, which is of course at the heart of Diplomacy. I also recognize that chess has a hobby, a subculture attached to it too, but that subculture seems, for my limited knowledge, to be much more closely tied to the game itself than the dippy hobby is tied to the game of Diplomacy. There are zines, for example, such as Greatest Hits and Whitestonia which really have very little to do with the game per se.

15. The Watergate folded after only 17 issues. But Cliff kept insisting that he'd resume publishing, and thus warded off any attempts to transfer his games. Alas, we had no Kathy Byrne in those days. The only game that didn't die was my 76EN, and that was because I was absolutely determined that my game wasn't going to get sunk, no matter what Cliff said or did. And it wasn't.

KADOR: When did you first decide to publish or to serve the hobby?

BERCH: By early 1977, it was clear to me that I wanted to publish a zine because people whose zines I was getting were clearly enjoying the whole business of publishing a magazine. But I wasn't interested in GMing.

KADOR: So you looked around for a slant?

BERCH: At the '76 DipCon, someone had suggested a zine which would reprint recent articles. That struck me as an interesting idea, except for the part about the articles being recent. At that point, the idea gelled that the best way to do this would be to reprint older articles that people hadn't seen. So at that point I set out to get a hold of somebody's zine collection. And that turned out to be Bob Correll, a Canadian publisher who had recently stopped publishing.

KADOR: That was in July, 1977. (16)

BERCH: Yes. Not too long after that, Doug Beyerlein offered me the zine collection from his days as the Boardman Number Custodian. (17) So that's basically how Diplomacy Digest got started. I was looking to publish. I felt there would be a market for this kind of material. And I didn't want to GM. I had to have some kind of angle. So this was, to use a biological term, a "niche" that I felt could be, to user another biological term, "exploited."

KADOR: What are you giving up in your life in order to be able to play, publish, and otherwise serve the hobby?

BERCH: You never know what you give up. If you go to bed with one woman, you never know what woman you could be going to bed with instead. I would probably be making a more serious attempt to write fiction and sell it. I would probably spend more time writing to my non-Diplomacy friends if I didn't spend so much time writing to my Diplomacy friends. And I would probably have to find another mechanism for finding friends.

KADOR: You're married to a powerful woman, Mona. How does Mona feel about Diplomacy and your involvement with the hobby?

BERCH: Mona has very mixed views about my involvement. On the plus side, she knows that I need a competitive outlet. Diplomacy fills that competitive drive, she realizes, and that without it, a lot of this drive would get forced on her, with numerous unpleasant consequences. On the other hand, she has no interest at all in the hobby. Mona begrudges all the time I spend on the zine. She feels that I spend too much time on it, and that has caused arguments from time to time. I don't believe she fully accepts the fact that I've made friends in the hobby. She finds it extremely difficult to believe that you can actually make friends and only see them once a year, if that. And she feels that if I spent less time interacting with people in the hobby, I'd have more local friends.

KADOR: Diplomacy can be hard on marriages.

BERCH: Absolutely. The Diplomacy hobby has, in fact, caused divorces. (18)

KADOR: Do you have advice for married publishers?

16. I began publishing in July 1977. Correll's collection gave me enough material to get the ball rolling, altho I knew that it wasn't enough for the long term.

17. Actually, it was only a piece of his BNC collection --- apparently he had given a couple of chunks of it away already, and even then still retained some. For this contribution, Doug was given a 6-year sub to DD. He then wrote me asking why I thought I'd last that long, as very few zines did (Er, 6 year sub plus postage re-embursement) Thats 5 down and one to go, Doug!)

18. This is, I suspect, particularly true for GMs, who must often do a big chunk of work in a short period of time. They are going to be quite reluctant to put if off for a week because the wife has other plans. With DD, I have no real fixed deadlines, and that gives me a flexibility that GMs simply don't have. That, in turn, makes DD less of a strain than I imagine other zines are on a relationship like that.



BERCH: For staying married?

KADOR: Yes.

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BERCH: Well, I'm not a marriage counselor, and I don't think I can give any meaningful advice to somebody whose situation I don't know the specifics of. I don't think I can come up with anything they can't come up with themselves.

KADOR: You stand for diversity in the hobby. While there's no issue too trivial for you to have an opinion on, you, like Voltaire, defend the rights of others to hold divergent opinions.

BERCH: Well, there are limits. For some opinions, I would not be willing to die.

KADOR: Dying for an idea puts a rather high price on conjecture.

BERCH: I would be willing to sustain a few scratches for some ideas and their right to express them, but that's about it for some publishers. But yes, basically I'm very much in favor of diversity in the hobby. I don't look with favor on those who try to set certain types of limits. (('Cept those I want to set, of course!))

KADOR: Why is diversity so important to you?

BERCH: Because diversity is one of the things you're supposed to get out of the hobby. If you play FTF, you're going to see a lot of the same people all the time. But postal diplomacy gives you something different. It gives you the opportunity of meeting totally different types of people all the time. Now, you may not take the interaction beyond the game that you're in. But many people do, and they become friends with sorts of people that they would never associate with.

KADOR: And this melting pot is good for the game?

BERCH: I think so. But there's another reason. People have to publish and write about what they enjoy. And that means you have to leave a lot of room for people to have varied interests. (19)

KADOR: How about diversity in GMing styles?

BERCH: It's important because it allows people to pick and choose. If you want a strict GM, you're going to be frustrated if there are no strict GMs in the hobby. If you want a two-week game, you're going to be frustrated if no one's running two-week games. Diversity allows people to specialize, and it allows people who are interested in that particular specialization to have a choice. The more diversity, the more choices. And if people can find zines to meet their needs, then they are likely to stay in the hobby. (20)

KADOR: You bring a very tolerant view to the hobby.

BERCH: It comes from my own political background. I'm a civil libertarian. And I'm also a Jew. And both of those things entail a great deal of tolerance toward other views. I can disagree with the attitude someone is taking, but from the overall health of the hobby, the more diversity that there is, the more room there is for people to contribute and not to be overshadowed by someone else doing basically the exact same thing. (21)

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19. That is, if there are a lot of topics that are for one reason or another taboo, then those interested in them, and interested in discussing them, will be shut out.

20. Interestingly enough, there's a significant number of players who play with only one or maybe two GMs and that's it. They will play in game after game with that GM, and, for whatever reason, do not try others. It might be interesting to find out how many people are in this category, and why they operate this way. It may be that, having found someone they trust, they see no need to look further. Or maybe they don't see the point in subbing to two zines when they can get their gaming covered by one.

21. That is, with diversity, each zine can be very different. If zines tend to be the same, then the better ones will leave the poorer ones in the dust, with no reason for anyone to sub to them.

KADOR: One Berch characteristic I've noticed is a deep sense of intrigue. A penchant for secrecy. What in your personality accounts for all that?

BERCH: I'm not allowed to answer that. I don't know if it's my personality. There's a lot of intrigue in the hobby. People do say things to me in confidence. If you don't want them to say things to you in confidence, then just break a few of those confidences and you won't have that problem anymore. I consider the breaking of a confidence a very destructive type of act toward the hobby. (22)

KADOR: Why?

BERCH: Because then it makes everyone suspicious.

KADOR: You're assuming that some information should be kept confidential.

BERCH: Yes, there are circumstances where I would say information should be kept confidential. There are people who feel that most hobby arguments should never be aired. If there are personal disagreements, they don't belong in the hobby press, they just belong in private letters.

KADOR: One of the intrigues with which you're associated is the Bernie Oaklyn affair. You put some effort into proving that Oaklyn is in fact Bernie Tretick, a veteran Diplomacy player of tarnished reputation.

BERCH: To me, the question of whether Oaklyn was Tretick is really not the major question all along. As far as I'm concerned, if I were in Tretick's shoes, I would have come back into the hobby under a pseudonym, as well. If you look at what I have written, I have never objected to him using a pseudonym per se. What I objected to, however, was when he entered games under a pseudonym and didn't tell the GM when he knew that he should. What I objected to was when he used the pseudonym to hide the fact that he was in a game with his own son.

KADOR: It was the deceptive element in his practices, then, that you objected to?

BERCH: Yes, that and the fact that Tretick vilified people for pointing out the truth. Now, he could have admitted it. He could have ignored it. He could have even denied it, as far as I'm concerned. But what I did find objectionable was his turning around and vilifying these people. Tretick lied about people in the hobby. I mean, he just made up stories, incidents that never occurred. And then he would tell his readers about that. That to me was more important than the question of his identity. (23)

KADOR: Does it surprise you that even to this day, Tretick still has some supporters in the hobby?

BERCH: No, because the hobby consists of a lot of nonconformists. And they're going to be people who do things simply because everyone else is doing something different. There are, in fact, very few well established zines where he is allowed to play. What does surprise me is the fact that Tretick does not seem to learn from his mistakes. He's been kicked out of zine after zine for doing the exact same things. (24)

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22. Actually, I don't think that I do have a "penchant for secrecy"; I should have challenged John on that point in the interview. I'll talk about just about anything. I do put some letters off the record, but not out of a "sense of intrigue."

23. In the July 82 issue of FLD, he's apparently gone back to using the Bernard A Tretick name, for whatever that's worth

24. I refer to his tactic of waiting till a game is well underway and then when the game starts to go badly or some such, he claims that he was set up, or the game was organized improperly. He pulled this on Kendter, McLendon, Sergeant, and, most recently, Jim Benes .

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That to me is most mysterious. It indicates that he is not completely healthy, for a healthy person usually learns from his mistakes. Dug!!

KADOR: Let's shift gears here. The other side of the rules question is the ethics question. I'm interested in the ethics that guide Mark Berch. I'm going to give you a list of game actions whose ethical legitimacy have been questioned. Could you practice these actions, and if not, why not?

BERCH: Okay, shoot.

KADOR: As a player, passing letters from one player to another player.

BERCH: Letter passing is simply another diplomatic tactic. Like any diplomatic tactic, it has its advantages and its potential drawbacks. I have on very rare occasions passed letters. I feel that in most cases the advantages of passing a letter are outweighed by the disadvantages. As a result, I don't do it very much. 25

KADOR: That's a very nice Utilitarian argument, but is it ethical or not?

BERCH: There's nothing in the least bit unethical about it. Of course, if I'm allied with someone in a game and he thinks it's unethical, I'm not going to disagree with him. If he complains about a letter passer, to the extent that I can agree with him . . .

KADOR: That is, the extent that you haven't passed letters in the game yourself . . .

BERCH: Right, then I'll agree with him. But I think people make a little too much of letter passing. It's a risky tactic.

KADOR: How about forging a letter from one player and sending it to another?

BERCH: Forgery is another tactic which is, so far as I'm concerned, not unethical. However, the risk and the benefits are even further out of balance with a forgery. I've never attempted a forgery. Most forgeries fool no one. The best chance for fooling someone with a forgery is to make something which is obviously a forgery and try to get some implications out of that. 26

KADOR: How about forging the actions of a GM? Forging an adjudication?

BERCH: First of all, the simplest way for a GM to handle this is to put a rule in the house rules: either it is or it isn't allowed to forge adjudications. If the GM says it's okay to forge his adjudications, then as far as I'm concerned it's permitted.

KADOR: Yes, but all this begs the question. Is it ethical or not?

BERCH: I believe that tactic is unethical . . . unless the GM says that it is. The problem with forging adjudications is, it interferes with the services the GM provides. If a player has to phone the GM to authenticate each adjudication, then he's getting into a situation where he's not really getting what he's paid for: that is, a written adjudication that he can rely on.

KADOR: I think it's safe to assume that you'll judge as unethical such tactics as intercepting orders to the GM and stealing them or altering them, but how about merely inspecting them?

BERCH: Even there I would say it's unethical. It gives too much

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25. Of course, if the person you are passing the letter to is himself a letter passer, then it is less risky, but even there you can get yourself into trouble if he informs the person whose letter you have passed. Games seem to vary in this regard. In some people are passing letters like crazy, with envelopes bulging with letters making the rounds like an overworked intern. In other games (I heard of one like this) the first guy who passed a letter was exposed for his villainy, and all his neighbors used that as a great excuse to eliminate him.

26. For example, after creating a forgery, you could a) claim you were fooled by it, and use that as an excuse for an otherwise inexcusable act, or b) claim that, having

power to the players who live near the GM. The whole thing produces a certain amount of corrosive suspicion. When you send in your orders, you don't want to worry that another player will slip into the GM's dormitory room, for example. Cause if you're going to be plagued by such worries, then the game is just not going to be fun. (27)

KADOR: How about passive deception. Let's say a player wants an advantage by playing in the same game with a brother, for example. Both people send the GM independent entries. Are they obligated to reveal the relationship?

BERCH: Yes. The GM is going to want to know it. He's entitled to know it.

KADOR: So all the GM has to do is ask.

BERCH: The GM can't go asking everyone who signs up for a game whether they're related to one whose name is different. Obviously if two people named Smuskovitz sign up for one game, then he's going to get a little suspicious. But if two people named Brown sign up, most GMs just aren't going to bother checking. I think it's improper to sign up for a game with a relative without telling the GM. You know, the GM may not want to GM a game like that. That's the reason. (28)

KADOR: The great thing about ethics is that you don't have to justify them. You just have to own them. Okay, how about this question. We've touched on it before: is it ethical to play under a pseudonym?

BERCH: It's a difficult situation. A pseudonym deceives both the GM and the other players. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with playing under a pseudonym. But the GM's got to be told about it.

KADOR: How about the ethics of cross game threats?

BERCH: That's a tough situation. I have never made a cross game alliance offer, or reprisal. I don't believe such arrangements are in the best interest of the hobby. If you press me, I'd say cross gaming is not ethical.

KADOR: What happens if a GM knows that a player deceived the GM but, for one reason or another, cannot prove it. What sanction does the GM have?

BERCH: That is a real tough situation. Deception of the GM, presumably, is ground for expulsion. But how can a GM expell someone if you can't prove he's violated a house rule? I'm not completely sure how a GM should handle a situation like that. A lot of it is going to depend on his own reputation. He's going to have to make a cynical judgment. If a GM can say "Look, I'm a real established GM and if I say there was a deception, people will believe me," he's probably better getting rid of the deceiver. But if he's a new GM, he probably is not going to be able to pull that off. (29)

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the real letter and the fake, you didn't know which was which, so beleived neither, or c) claimed that you attacked someone because you thought he did the forgery, or d) try to frame someone else for doing the forgery, persuading others that he did it. I realize there are those who think a forgery is unethical, and I would not really want to argue the point. I'd be interested to know, however, if they would find any or all of those a) - d) objectionable. After all, in no case are you signing some one else's name to a letter and trying to pass it off as legitimate. Comments?

27. This question is based on an actual incident of a player inspecting the GM's cache of orders, and was reprinted in DD #38. #39 had McLendon's defense of the player, if you are interested in that side of the matter.

28. And of course, close relatives sometimes have unrelated names. My point here is that the GM is entitled to know what kind of game he is running. If two players are relatives, then any ethical GM will inform the other players of this fact --- which he can't do if he doesn't know.

KADOR: DipCon XV used the Berch Scoring System, a system that you modified after some criticism of it. Did you see anything at DipCon XV that might suggest additional modifications?

BERCH: Further modifications? No. The thing is, I didn't get people coming up to me and complaining about things I hadn't considered. It may be that I'll get complaints in the mail, but I don't have it as yet. This is as opposed to 1979, where I got a lot of feedback right then and there. (30)

KADOR: Were you surprised by the low number of outright victories, considering the relatively luxurious amounts of time the players had?

BERCH: I would have expected more wins. Part of it has to do with the fact that the games were not as competitive as they could have been. Also, we did not push any of the boards on the first round to play faster. We let them play at their own speeds. Most boards played longer game years, rather than trying to fit in many game years. So they used up their time in that way. (31)

KADOR: The first round started on Saturday at 1:00 PM. We had up to ten hours. By 11:00 PM, only one board had not finished.

BERCH: You know, friendships form during a game, and players may just have decided that a 17-17 center draw was just not worth stabbing your ally for. Now, perhaps you, John, can give a bit more information about how a player can go to 17 centers and just not go for the 18th center. I don't know, I wasn't right there playing. ((The interviewer finished the first round of DipCon XV as part of a 17-17 draw.))) ((Note how Kador ducks the question!))

KADOR: Do you attribute the few number of wins to the relatively modest difference between victory and a two-way draw? How about second?

BERCH: So far as I'm concerned, the winning has to be done by the winner. If the scoring system gives a significant amount of points to the player coming in second, then it bribes someone to let a third party win. It says "John, I'd like you to help him win, and to make sure you help him win, I'll give you some points for it." That's why I don't give credit for coming in second.

KADOR: A logical extension of this view would be to subtract centers for the losing players.

BERCH: Now this system encourages people to give their centers away. This is my objection to Walker's system. Once you see someone is going to win, the first thing you want to do is to get rid of all those centers that are going to push you up to second place.

KADOR: It also discourages that last stab, doesn't it?

BERCH: Right. If you're going to be penalized for coming in second,

29. The problem with just turning a blind eye to it is that the player will get the message that he can do this with impunity and will be tempted to do it again, perhaps just to flaunt his immunity. On the other hand, nothing but nothing in this hobby stirs more dispute than a GM expelling a player. And if the GM has anything less than a smoking gun, he risks a firestorm of criticism if someone in the game objects. I hope no GM ever asks me what to do in such a situation.

30. At the tournament, one player complained to me, approximately along the lines of, "If it weren't for your dumb scoring system, I would have survived, but they all wanted the extra nine points each, so they eliminated me." I asked him why they eliminated him rather than someone else. "Because I only had 3 centers." When I pressed him as to how he got to that bad situation, he said it was a long story about a poor choice of allies in FO1. I told him that no scoring system should shield from destruction a player who does not have the strength and/or allies to take care of himself.

31. Fred Townsend has suggested that the gap be widened between a 2-way draw and a win, to encourage people to go for it. This is of course the exact opposite of the complaint that I got in 1979, viz, that the gap was too large between a 2-way draw and a win (30 and 60 points respectively) --- so large that players were flipping a coin, double or nothing style, so that at least one of them would get a good score.

you will be discouraged from attempting an off-chance stop. What I want to do is set up a situation where it is genuinely hard to win. It's hard to win because the system is not going to "pay" someone to let someone win. I'm not persuaded by the arguments of those who say, "well, I let him win; I got second out of it; therefore, I should be given points." (32)

KADOR: Whatever the system, evidence suggests that the scoring system influences the style of play.

BERCH: Any scoring system will make a difference in the style of play.

KADOR: A small but vocal minority has an interest in conducting tournaments without the players knowing details of the scoring system.

BERCH: That introduces a conflict in values. The first value is that of having a good, old fashioned FTF Diplomacy game. If that is your goal, then, yes, you do not want anyone to know what the scoring system is. But if that is your goal, then you don't need a tournament at all. You just need a big room, lots of nice tables, and players.

KADOR: And the second value?

BERCH: The goal of selecting a winner. Any tournament is going to have a significant number of strong players. They are going to be the ones who capture most of the top spots. The question is, Who's the best? If you have a secret scoring system, you introduce a major element of luck into the determination of who's best.

KADOR: Example?

BERCH: Let's suppose you're England and you have 17 centers. Turkey has 16 centers, and Germany has one. Let's assume that winning is impossible. The only problem is: Turkey wants to take the solitary German center. The question for England is: Do I let him take that center or do I not? Depending on what England does, the game will end 17-17 draw, or 17-16-1. Under the Berch Scoring System, England should allow him to take it, because the system rewards a two-way draw rather than a three-way draw. Now, under the Calhmer System, a perfectly respectable scoring system, England should not allow Turkey to take the extra center. That system puts a premium on having an undisputed lead. If you lose your undisputed lead by going from 17-16-1- to 17-17, you're going to lose those points. The problem is, if you don't know the scoring system, you're just going to apply your own personal philosophy. If you're lucky, your personal value system is going to coincide with the scoring system. In that case, you're going to do well. But if you're unlucky, your personal value system is going to be different from the scoring system. You will, in a sense, have guessed wrong.

KADOR: You resent the randomness, then?

BERCH: Yes. We have a game that has no dice, no spinners, and no randomness in it. Why should we introduce an element of pure luck in determining who is actually going to win. To me, that would be a shame, because the lack of randomness is one of the charms of Diplomacy. (33)

KADOR: Let's talk about personality conflicts and feuds. Some of these feuds are as old as the hobby itself. Is there anything healthy about these feuds, or are they invariably destructive?

BERCH: There are some feuds that are over issues. Those tend to be the healthiest of all. There are some feuds where the two parties genuinely enjoy the matter too much to give it up. The classic example of this is the Rod Walker-John Boardman feud, in which, as best I can determine it,

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32. Of course, if you make the scoring system such that people really have to earn their wins, there will be fewer of them.

33. There is naturally another side to this, and in the sournineer booklet, there is a short article by Steve Langeley giving the other side. John Michalski has also championed a secret system. So far as I am aware, the only tournaments which have used a secret scoring system were two run by Dave Reynolds in Sacramento, and he reports they went well.

they have both just enjoyed this feud too much. (34)

KADOR: In Diplomacy World #31, you give a few guidelines for dealing with controversy in the hobby press. One of these techniques you titled, "Write Not In Anger." Do you find that a tough rule to observe?

BERCH: Oh, it's a very tough rule. I've broken it several times myself.

KADOR: Why is it important?

BERCH: It's important because, generally speaking, whatever you're trying to accomplish with the letter has a better chance of being accomplished if you wait. If you're writing purely for cathartic reasons, then, sure, write immediately. Of course, then there's no need to actually mail it. But if you're doing it for any reasons other than purely internal, you're likely to be more effective and you're going to be more persuasive if you cool down before writing. (35)

KADOR: Let's talk about fakes and faking.

BERCH: Sure. Love it.

KADOR: You've had experience in faking, haven't you?

BERCH: I've done very little of that. I put out a fake of Volker-wanderung which nobody paid attention to. And I've contributed to the occasional fake. I wish I had more time to do it. By and large, if somebody wants to fake a zine, they should contact me because I'd probably contribute something to it. (36)

KADOR: So you think faking is a respectable part of the hobby?

BERCH: Oh, sure. Absolutely. It's more than respectable. With a few exceptions, it's very desirable. Al Pearson put out a fake of Diplomacy World. It's a riot. It's a very good satire. I think any publisher should consider it an honor to have their zine faked. (37)

KADOR: Did you when Diplomacy Digest was faked?

BERCH: Oh, sure. The fakes that have been made have varied in quality, but I have been entertained by all four of them.

KADOR: Are there limits to what ought to be done in the name of faking?

BERCH: I don't think you ought to interfere with the games. I don't think you should try to put in an adjudication that might fool the players. (38)

KADOR: Another way you serve the hobby is as ombudsman. One player with direct knowledge of your skills wrote me, "Mark Berch is the best person to mediate a dispute in which issues must be sorted out and resolved." In a player versus GM context, how do you approach your role?

34. Every few years, Rod writes Boardman and suggests that they resolve their feud, thru one mechanism or another! These attempts are then rebuffed in one manner or another, and things go back to normal. Boardman is fond of stalking off when Rod offers to shake his hand, tho of course that doesn't occur too often. For better or worse, that feud, which I believe holds the hobby record for duration, is so far out of the hobby mainstream, and so infrequently expressed, that it might have to be relegated to the status of a primate, hot hobby feud. Or it may even be dropped, who knows.

35. Then again, if you're really furious, you may be in no mood for listening to advice from Berch. But I can think of at least 3 letters I have seen this year that probably would have been much more persuasive had the writer calmed down first.

36. That is, if they want a group effort, such as the "Brutus Bulletin #69" fake, one of the all time classics. Actually, most fakes are solo efforts.

37. On the other hand, if a pubber makes it explicitly clear that he does not want his zine faked, it would perhaps be best to lay off (e.g. Graustark)

38. That kind of fake has been done and has drawn complaints. Its also a poor idea to do a fake as part of a feud, as a way of retaliating against someone. Something like that is more likely than not going to backfire.

BERCH: The first thing you have to get hold of is the houserule or knowledge that there is no pertinent houserule. The second thing you have to do is to realize that your role is not to second guess the GM. What you want to do is to see if the GM followed his own house rules, was his adjudication in some sense fair, and if there is no houserule to go on, is the GM's activity outside of normal GMing practices. (39)

KADOR: Can you illustrate with an example?

BERCH: I had a situation where a GM made a civil disorder removal. Then he said, "Don't worry, this is the correct civil disorder removal." Well, as it turned out, it wasn't the correct removal. The GM applied the rulebook wrong. But he had gone to some lengths to claim that he had applied it right. The question: was the player obligated to catch the error? Somebody caught the error, but the GM did not delay the season. Rather, he said that "everyone should have caught this error and adjusted accordingly. If only one player caught it, tough." Well, that's a difficult situation.

KADOR: How did you rule?

BERCH: I ruled that since the GM had been so emphatic about his looking up the situation in the rulebook, he should not have assumed that everybody would catch an error like that.

KADOR: Let's talk about personalities. I'll give you a list of hobby personalities. Can you give me a concise impression?

BERCH: Okay. But I can't guarantee conciseness.

KADOR: Let's start with Rod Walker.

BERCH: Rod Walker is my closest hobby friend. Rod puts in a lot of time. He's a very creative person. Diplomacy World is his major hobby task right now, and he is very devoted to making it a success. Rod is a prolific letter writer. How he manages this level of correspondence, I just don't know. I consider Rod to be a very fair-minded person. He is, to my mind, one of the most problem-solving-oriented persons in the hobby. (40)

KADOR: Kathy Bryne?

BERCH: Kathy Byrne is a pretty incendiary character. She is a rare example of a person who really galvanizes all those around her. Kathy has probably the most emotionally-taxing job in the hobby.

KADOR: Her orphan game services?

BERCH: Yes. It is a job in which you see people at their worst. You see people who are leaving the hobby, who are making excuses,

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39. The thing to avoid doing is saying, "If I were the GM, I would have ruled... and therefore, that is the ruling." But I wasn't the GM, so there's no use in pretending that I was. The problem that so often occurs is that there is no HR to cover the circumstance, and no general zine policy. So the GM picks a ruling, and a player objects. Here I have to look at whether the ruling is within the bounds of generally accepted GMing practices, which covers quite a bit of territory. Time and time again, GM-player disputes --- the ordinary ones --- hinge on a question of strictness. And there's such a huge range here. Take deadlines. These range from strict-no-exceptions to GMs who will accept orders until the time adjudications are typed. Some GMs will accept late orders if the postmark indicated there was a colossal delay, and one GM will accept orders mailed as late as the day before the deadline. Given this range of accepted behavior, it's hard for an Ombudsman to fault a GM unless he suddenly and retroactively changes his policy. This means, in a structural sense, that the Ombudsman tends to back the GM, as the GM indubitably has the right to set his own policy, so long as he treats everyone the same, doesn't break his own policies, and has at least some minimal level of fairness, and, most important, fits in with generally followed GMing practices, which as indicated above, is a big envelope. P16

40. Sounds like a cross between a worshiper and a press agent. Rod has his faults just like we all do, including a temper when he feels people are being unreasonable.



who are lying, and who are making promises they are unlikely to keep. It's a position where she really has to push people. Fortunately, Kathy is a very pushy person. Kathy is a great asset to the hobby. (H)

KADOR: Robert Sacks?

BERCH: Robert Sacks is a pain. Robert is much too concerned with formalities, structure, principles, with his own ideas. Robert does not understand that if you want people to do things your way, you have to persuade them of the rectitude of your position. He seems to feel that, instead of persuading, he can simply set up a structure. Robert Sacks has a lot of energy, but the hobby does not get a great deal out of his efforts. (42) Quite frankly, I didn't find working with him a very useful way of spending my time.

KADOR: John Boardman?

BERCH: I have great respect for John Boardman's contributions to the hobby and his GMing. I would never hesitate for a second to advise someone to sign up for a game with him. However, Boardman has many habits I do not like. He criticizes people without giving them a chance to defend themselves. He has a very aloof attitude from the rest of the hobby. He will not back off from any position he takes in criticizing another person, even if subsequent events have made him look foolish. Outside of his role as a GM, I don't think people take him seriously.

KADOR: Bruce Linsey?

BERCH: Bruce Linsey is genuinely willing to help other people. He is a hard worker. He is a very interesting person; I enjoy corresponding with him. ((And having him over here for a couple of visits!))

KADOR: Jack Masters?

BERCH: Jack Masters did some ugly things. Masters is a classic example of somebody who digs himself into a hole. (43) He became obsessed with Bruce Linsey. It's a shame, because he had a lot to contribute to the hobby. Black Frog was a creative 'zine, even aside from the stuff that he plagiarized. He produced some very funny stuff. But Masters is a bit of a tragedy.

KADOR: John Michalski?

BERCH: John Michalski produced the most interesting zine that I ever read. He did that by having a degree of reader participation that was unheard of in the North American continent. I never met him. I consider his political views not grounded in the real world. His hobby standards are pretty high. He produced what he promised. He said "I'm going to provide fast games that are well run," and he did.

KADOR: Finally, how about a few words about Mark Berch?

BERCH: What can I say about Mark Berch? Mark Berch tries to put out a zine that he hopes people will find interesting. It's not as big as some zines, and it's not as flashy as some zines. And because it's topic oriented, there are going to be some issues of Diplomacy Digest that some readers are going to be totally bored with. This issue

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41. I don't mean to imply that this is her only contribution to the hobby. Her column in Whitestonia is one of the most entertaining features in the hobby, and she has organized FTF gatherings (along with John Caruso) which people have enjoyed immensely. And she's improved the rating of Italy in the rating systems with her 3 wins as Italy. And she's.....but I'll let her sing the rest of her praises.

42. He does put out a Known Games Openings list which is somewhat superfluous, as Walkers' tends to be much more complete. He has talked about a Dipzine but I do not know if it ever appeared, and he has run tournaments on the east coast. But much of the efforts that I see him do, such as his recent crusade on the Miller Numbers business just doesn't seem at all productive or helpful.

43. And doesn't know, or doesn't want to, how to get out of it.

may be one of them. But if you don't like this issue, it's like the weather, just wait till the next issue, cause it's likely to be different from this one.

KADOR: You're obviously successful in meeting your objectives, for Diplomacy Digest is received by many people in the hobby.

BERCH: I genuinely believe that if anyone is interested in the game and the hobby and they have \$4.20 per year to spend, they should get my zine.

KADOR: At times your involvement with hobby politics appears as if you're trying to create order out of chaos. Why do you try to impose structure on a hobby that basically resists organization?

BERCH: I don't feel that I try to impose structure on the hobby. (44) Every so often, people are doing things that I consider destructive to the hobby. Then I'll get on my high horse. Whenever I feel that people are being placed into categories and being criticized for being in certain categories, I'll get up on my high horse. But I don't think the hobby needs a great deal of structure. What it needs are certain basic services, reliable publishers and GMs, and players who are willing to do more than just turn in orders.

KADOR: Aren't players doing enough by getting orders in on time?

BERCH: To me, a player who is just turning in orders is somewhat of a parasite. Now I realize I'm criticizing a lot of people, because that's what a lot of people do. But the hobby needs more involvement from its players in the form of feedback to publishers, press, articles, whatever.

KADOR: Have you thought about your future in the hobby? Can you see yourself as a 20-year veteran, reprinting articles by people that have yet to be born?

BERCH: It is not meaningful to talk about things 20 years in the future. I'd like to think that I'll be publishing 20 years from now. But it's not a meaningful statement. It's like asking, "What are you going to eat for breakfast 20 years from now?" Well, who knows? There may not be cornflakes in 20 years. The hobby may not exist in that time. The hobby may be killed off by things we have no control over. Like Avalon Hill stops selling Diplomacy.

KADOR: How do you want to be remembered?

BERCH: I want to be remembered as someone who, one, was a very successful postal player; who, two, put out a zine which people enjoyed reading; and who, three, contributed to other people's zines. I'd also like to be remembered for the occasional instances where I helped other people get out of holes into which they dug themselves.

KADOR: Before I ask the final question, do you want to address any point I missed?

BERCH: I'm amazed at how certain publishers put out zines. I have in mind Europa Express and Voice of Doom. These are zines of colossal size. And it's not just filler. Enormous amounts of interesting reading go in there. I am simply flabbergasted that these people can turn out zines of >30 pages every month, without relying on huge amounts of filler and vast amounts of press. Anybody who says "The hobby is in terrible shape; look at the good old days," is invited to look at a pile of Europa Express and Voice of Doom. When did we have such good zines hanging around? It was very, very rare. These two zines, particularly, are of a quality that we rarely get in the hobby. (46)

KADOR: Like most folks, you like to have the last word. Unlike most

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44. Indeed, I don't think its possible to "impose" much of anything on the hobby. This talk of imposing this, and forcing that is grossly exaggerated. I may be able to persuade a few people on some issues, but the only times I can "force" anything is if its my project. Structure in the hobby evolves from the intersection of needs, and the willingness of someone to forfill those needs by doing the actual work.

folks, you publish a zine so you can guarantee yourself the last word. So here's your opportunity.

BERCH: It is vitally important that publishers get feedback from their readers. Without feedback, most zines will die. People often say, "the publisher is not interested in my stuff." But in most cases they're going to be wrong. If a reader puts some effort into writing something, the odds are very high that he will find someone willing to publish it. And by doing so, he will strengthen a zine that he is enjoying. He will encourage other people to write, and he will encourage the GM. It's important for someone who puts in work to realize that that work is being appreciated. Because without that realization, a publisher is going to find another activity that does give him that appreciation.

46. I don't mean to slight other zines, and I should have included Greatest Hits (a British zine) in the list as well. But there is something uniquely awesome about these three zines. Coat of Arms may well join this group if it keeps up its present pace, but there it is easier to understand because it is really a team effort, while the other three are not, at least in a formal sense of who does the typing

#### The Zine Column #55

##### The Leeder Poll Business

Writing in Runestone #358, John Leeder says, "Let me explain my motives. I have always supported Diplomacy World as a hobby institution. My feeling is that DW's circulation will be improved if it consistently is able to give its readers quality information which they are unable to obtain elsewhere or at least will obtain first in DW. I do not believe that the poll results alone are enough to turn things around for DW, but they can be a link in the chain. I feel I am doing my bit for the hobby by strengthening DW.....

Such reasoning has my complete approval. Indeed, I have always sent my best play-of-the-game material to DW for precisely that reason. It's not been generally known, but when Rod took over DW, he had a zine which was not only losing a huge amount of money every issue, but was already encumbered with a debt in excess of \$2000. That can't be ignored. Rod felt, and I agree, that the best way to reduce that debt is to raise the circulation, and one way to do that is to get into DW those things that he thinks people will not want to be without. This is longstanding DW policy. DW has carried the best known demo game in the hobby (The Hoosier Archives game), Dragonsteeth Rating system, the Beyerlein Poll, Pulsipher's variant selections, etc. These are to some degree items you can't get elsewhere first. The Leeder Poll was another in this area.

Some have argued that appearing first in DW will cause a delay. With a closing date of Aug 1, most people will get their DW's by Oct 1 if not sooner, so we are talking 2 months --- hardly the crime of the century. And it's not much different from the delays that have almost always existed in the past. Then, though you could get the results a little quicker if you wanted to spend the \$\$ on a long distance call to John. Now you can get them quicker by getting a first-class sub to DW. The only real difference is that the money stays in the hobby instead of going to Ma Bell.

Others have argued that since the whole hobby participates, the poll results should be equally available to all. To begin with, I'd estimate the participation rate at less than 20%, so the argument isn't even factual. Furthermore, the DT Rating system appears first in DW, and I don't hear anyone objecting to that. And a rating system really does get data from the whole hobby. Virtually every GM and player contributes, each in his own way --- it's a much greater collective effort, a much more comprehensive effort, than the Leeder Poll. The GMs plug the Leeder Poll, the GMs print the end game scores ---- each is essential for the effort. So why should the Leeder Poll be singled out?? And finally, there is the complaint that

Rod actually paid for it. Well, so what? Rod pays for lots of DW contributions, as do other pubbers such as Bruce Linsey and myself. In short, I find all three of these arguments to be completely bogus.

And speaking of bogus arguments, I must mention Gary Coughlan. He faithfully reprinted a big chunk of my comments on this from last issue, and correctly pointed out that I am chief Consulting Editor for DW. He then went on to say that that fact "will greatly help to explain" the reason I backed Rod on this. It most certainly does not. It had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with it, and I would have written the same editorial if I didn't have that post, or if Leeder had taken his poll to a different zine. Gary also feels that the award for "Incipient Bossiness" must really go to lots and lots of other people because they too criticized Rod. No, actually it doesn't. The award didn't go to Gary merely because he disagreed with Rod ---- there's nothing wrong with disagreeing. It went to him because he expressed his disagreement in the form of a boycott of the Leeder Poll. I consider a boycott to be an extremely destructive action, justified only if something being boycotted is itself destructive. At the time I wrote, Gary was the only person explicitly advocating such action (since then, 1 or 2 others have agreed).

At any rate, since then Gary has shifted his position and won't be boycotting after all (which is just as well, since my guess is that he'll win the Zine Poll).

And Rod has announced that he does not plan to renew the deal with John after this year. Well, that's up to them. Personally, I think that if Rod still beleives the Poll will help DW, and DW still needs help, he should go ahead and renew the deal for a second year. But, as I say, that's their business

#### A BERCH AT DIPCON XV

This isn't going to be a full con report. That is going into the souvineer booklet, which is mentioned elsewhere in this issue..

As always, my main complaint was that didn't get enough of a chance to talk to my friends there. That was particularly true this year as I was trapped for huge blocks of time at the tournament & darn it all.

The tournament had 161 players, just barely behind the 163 of Origins '78, which was the largest 2-round tournament. We had 22 boards in Round 1, and 16 in round two, totalling 38. This was very good in round 2 --- at Origins '78 for example, they had 23 in the first round, and only 12 in round 2. After the 22 boards were assembled for Round 1, we had 3 players left over --- there was no way a 23rd board could be filled. Even tho these three had not preregistered, the most distasteful thing I had to do all weekend was to tell these three that they could not play in Round 1.

The overall winner was Konrad Baumeister. Also getting plaques were Russell Blau, Dave Lauerman, Eric Ozog, John Kador, Jack Brawner, Ed Wrobel, Doug Beyerlein, John Caruso, and Bruce Linsey for 2nd to 4th places. Certificates were also given out for best country in each round.

Saturday morning we had a panel discussion and question session. The panel members were myself, Kathy Byrne, Bruce Linsey, Doug Beyerlein, Rod Walker and Ron Brown. We each had our little opening statements, and then the floor was open for questions. Since there are no longer annual meetings of the IDA, the hobby needs some place where people can air views and ask questions. Topics included the use of computers in Diplomacy, how the Gamer's Guide came about, the Leeder Poll's move to DW, etc. Eric Ozog was running a tape recorder, so the next DbM may have more extensive coverage.

Saturday night was the meeting of the DipCon Society. Origins '83 was selected as the location for DipCon XVI. That will be July 14-17 at Cobol Hall in Detroit. Various amendments were offered to the DipCon Society constitution but unfortunately these were only passed in part. Alas, the suspicion level was very high at the meet-

ing, and perfectly reasonable amendments were not accepted, for reasons which I don't care to go into, but I am hopeful that the bulk of them will be repropsoed next year. The new committee is John Caruso, Eric Ozog, and Al Pearson. I have complete confidence that these three people can both plan and execute an enjoyable DipCon XVI. I probably won't agree with everything that they decide, but they have my complete support, and I hope that of the rest of the hobby as well. They will be seeking input from the postal hobby, just as we did, at various intervals, and I hope people will respond in a constructive manner.

Friday evening there was a seminar of publishing a postal wargaming zine with Gary Coughlan, Al Pearson, John Daly and Roy Hendricks. There was also a presentation of the Nixon award and other activites, which you can read about in the souvineer booklet if you so desire. The seminar went quite well, I thought, with a good balance of topic covered, and time for questions at the end.

What was the highpoint of the weekend for me? Its hard to say, but I can state what wasn't the highpoint. That was being driven by Bruce Linsey at 3:30 AM thru downtown Baltimore headed in a northeast direction, with Bruce insisting that this was the best route, better than doubling back (hint --- the campus is located southwest of Baltimore) Bruce's attempts to rationalize this ridiculous route on the basis that it would make interesting reading in VOD did not help one bit

So what was dipcon XVI? It was hearing Gary Coughlan sing the praises of fakes while staring at John Boardman.... not recognizing Allen Wells....mangling Tom Swider's name...being told by Robert Sacks that the tournament rules should state that a draw is not a "shared win"....praying that no one would object to being placed on a board with Bernie Oaklyn in round 1 (alas, someone did)....getting creamed in a gunboat game on Friday night....admiting an enormous Kingmaker board in Bob Arnett's apartment, and a beautiful 4' x 6' map for World War IIIb by Jim Yerkey...hearing Roy Hendricks explain how he puts out such an immense zine with so many non-dippy games in it.... learning of Arye Gittelman's going for Tun, Mar and Tri in FO1 ---- and getting all three!....discussing future plans for Everything with Don Ditter...marveling at weight losses by John Caruso and Rod Walker....getting the grim news on my Demo game from Eric Verheiden...hearing Marie Beyerlein saying that this was the first DipCon Awards Ceremony that she had ever gone to which started on time...trying to understand Glen Overby's tournament scoring system which actually uses three different scoring systems in one...being flabbergasted at the generosity of Dan Wilson, who made a beautiful diplomacy map all of leather (I understand blood won't stain it...) and presented it to the tournament winner....applauding Kathy Byrne on being given the Nixon Award trophy by Al Pearson (A real tall job with a pistol on top)... telling one tardy board "You're slow" and having them tell me back "You're Bald"....commiserating with Dan Stafford on a game ruined by Oaklyn recently.... discovering that Mark Larzelere didn't look at all like I expected...noting with great approval the proliferation of DipiMaster Tee-shirts...having Kathy Byrne bend my ear about Greg Fritz....listen to Rod Walker and Doug Beyerlein negotiating the sale of first publication rights to the true identity of Judy Winsome....getting a comb from Tom Swider....discovering how much fun it is to stand up on a chair or even better a table and look down on the assembled mutitude...comparing the dippy sets sold in Canada and England....being pleased that for the first time in many years, the top board didn't turn out to be a 5- or 6-way draw...admiring Bruce Linsey's nerve for wearing a TeeShirt saying "Don't Believe A Single Word I'm saying!".....

Actually, I do know what the highlight was for me --- the award ceremony. Everyone seemed to be in such a good mood, and the winners were all cheered and applauded. It was the culmination of a lot of work, a lot of planning, and a lot of letters. Seeing how it all turned out, it was worth all that it took to get it done.

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Sorry, no headline this time.

One of the cleverist fakes you will ever see was distributed at DipCon, the "#31a" fake of Diplomacy World, done by Al Pearson. Everything, and I do mean every thing that DW does was subject to good natured ridicule. Variants include "Underwater Dip" ("in no case will the fish be allowed to take over the position of an eaten player.") . An article on "German 3-way draws" is full of fatuous advice. An announcement for the DipCon for next year in Tchula, MS appears. Parodies also appear of Peery's editorial style, the Master Diplomat Quiz of several years ago, and much more. I do not know if copies are still available; I tend to doubt it, but who knows.

Speaking of fakes, I have gotten absolutely nowhere on the DD fakes. Pieces of the Digress fake continue to come in, tho this is tailing off. The last piece came from Ron Brown and was so perfunctorially done that he forgot to include a note taking credit. I will no longer give 3 issue credit for people I think have done a fake. They are becoming a drug on the market. In fact, I'm thinking of offering three free issues to people who promise not to claim credit for a fake. I've gotten no piece of their first or the third fake (and only the entire master will do, folks, no more of this excerpt crap).

Whitestonia #51/52, 27 pages long and full of interesting reading (nearly all the games are banished to a subzine) has a new feature, "Editorial Page" ---- Caruso will apparently be breaking with past W tradition and "will pick one, two, or even 3 important dipdom topics to talk about and give my editorial on them." With W going the way of all flesh, can JAF be far behind ?

I should mention here that I was mistaken last issue when I said that the Whitestonia player poll was arranged so that it always appeared first in W. Its a good thing that I didn't sound totally sure of myself on that one. Sorry, John.

VOD #63 has Bob Olsen's announcement that he will combat my "slander-by-omission" by putting out another issue of DipiMaster. The issue also has some great humor stuff by M. Paul, and more merciless ribbing of Bruce by his (former) 10th grade pupil Alex Lord, whose column is now one of the highlights of the zine.

Coat of Arms #12 features such items as nepotism charges against Al Pearson for naming his daughter as Hobby Nickname Custodian, a recipe for stuffed camel, Tom Swider explaining what the verb "to Perlmutter" means, a variant by Mark Lew in which he appends a postscript pointing out problems and conflicts in his rules.

I botched it last month, so lets try it again, The Modern Patriot is published by William Highfield, 2012 Ridge Road East Rochester NY 14622...For those interested in a complete set of the wooden pieces, send \$5 (US) to Ron Brown RR #1 Low, PQ JOX 200 Canada, and he'll mail them to you first class; he gets them from the Canadian distributors of Diplomacy. Ron is leaving his teaching career and looking into computers. Bruce Linsey is still looking for a full time teaching job, and Allen Wells, the lucky dog, has his choice of working on a "sophisticated Electronic Mail system" for one company, or working for General Computer, the outfit that puts out such arcade games as Ms. Pac Man or Super Missile Command. Boy, that sure was a run-on item if I ever saw one.....

Two unusual game openings are available. Recall that last issue I mentioned the idea of a single elimination Intimate Diplomacy Tournament. Mark Larzelere has offered to run one for 8 players, and he has two already (Don Ditter and myself). He is charging \$10, which covers your game fees for as long as you are in the tournament, and a \$50 prize for the winner, with 2-week deadlines (remember, there's no negotiation). He wants only players who "already have a reputation for being reliable." If you are interested, write him at 7607 Fontainebleau #2352 New Carrollton MD 20784. I think it will be fun, and I'm looking forward to it getting started. And John Leeder has openings in his second international game --- it will have 7 players from 7 different countries, with deadlines probably at 8 weeks, and the US

slot is still open, with a gamefee of \$5. Write him at 605 15th st NW Calgary Alta Canada T2N 2B1.

One of the most amazing collection of cons reports you'll ever see appears in Diplomacy by Moonlight #43. There were substantial accounts by Randy Ellis, Russ Russnak, Michael Quirk, Bob Osuch, Gary Coughlan, Chuck Kaplan and Eric Ozog --- plus reports on a second con as well! DbM has by now established itself as the #1 zine in the hobby for accounts of face to face get-togethers. Just Among Friends #23 had two very entertaining accounts by Al Pearson of GenCon East and Michicon, done with the light touch we've come to expect from Al.

As long as everyone else is airing their complaints about how the Leeder Poll is conducted, I'll mention mine: I don't think that subzines should be included in the same poll as regular zines. I'm mentioning this after the deadline (so I won't seem to be trying to affect how people vote) but before I've seen the results.

The distinction between a subzine and not-a-subzine appears to be completely arbitrary. Alex Lord has a regular column in VOD --- it could be called a subzine just as well. Kathy's Corner in Whitestonia used to be called her column, but its label was changed to a subzine a while back with no apparent change in content. Steve Arnawoodian has a subzine (Diplomatic Immunity) in his own zine (Coat of Arms); others would label the same material as simply the zine per se. Second, and more important, subzine material tends to get counted twice in the same poll.. Kathy's Korner is, for example, one of the major reasons I gave a high vote to Whitestonia this year. For me to vote for KK as an item unto itself in the poll would be to count it twice. The alternative would be to try to conceptualize W-without-KK, and vote for that. But that's a relatively difficult exercise, and of course, with one of its major assets stripped out, W couldn't get nearly as high a vote as the zine actually deserves. Its even more acute for CoA which doesn't have any zine per se --- it just a collection of subzines. And if you vote for those subzines, then you either vote those subzines twice or you don't vote for CoA at all, neither of which strikes me as very equitable. My own solution is to vote for the zines, and not for the pieces of the zines. Leeder has already split out one aspect (the GMing) into a separate poll, so there is certainly precedent for this kind of separation. Now, I'm not going to boycott the poll and the results will certainly appear here. But I don't think the same material should be voted for twice, once as a component, and once as part of the whole.

The simplest solution is that adopted by Mark Larzelere in his "Marco Polo" which has three categories: Best Zine, Best Subzine and best GM. This is a much more restricted poll than the Leeder poll, since you are only permitted to vote for your top 5. That makes it easier for the voters, but publishers in the middle range in the hobby won't really be able to tell what people think of them, since they will get so few votes. Get those votes into Mark's hands (address below) by Nov 22, 1982, and remember, you can't vote for yourself. So if you think you really are the third best GM, give the 4th best GM your 3rd place vote, the 5th best your 4th place vote, and you then get to vote for your 6th best as your 5th place vote. Of course, other people will be voting their 5th for 5th, but your 6th and his 5th will count the same. Or you can just leave the spot blank --- vote for no one in 3rd. I'm not sure how he wants that handled. (7607 FONTAINE BLEAU DR # 2352 New Carrollton MD 20784)

New Zines Always Get A Welcome Here

North Sealth, West George Terry Tallman 16047 28th NE Seattle WA 98155

Magus 2154 Fairfield Rd Sacramento CA 95815 Steve Langley

The Vortex Bo McSweeney 1365 Edgecliffe Dr #3 Los Angeles CA 90026

Into Touch Ted Cook 9 Woodley Park Towers 2737 Devonshire Place NW Washington DC 20008  
(That last zine isn't really new, but rather is a British zine recently transplanted to our shores. He offers such games as "Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective Game and a variant called "Global Diplomacy")

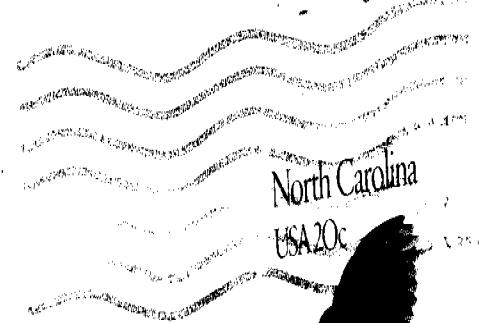
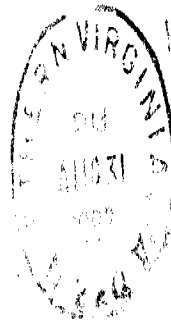
That's it for this issue. Next issue I'll return to reprints, and I've got a hot topic lined up for next month.

Mark L Berch  
492 Naylor Place  
Alexandria VA 22304

If 61 or 62 appears by your name, your sub has expired, died, ended, etc.

Late nooze --- Rod Walker tells me that Leeder did make the August deadline and so the results of the North American Zine and GM poll will be in the next issue of DW.

Fantastic DipCon XV pictures appear in Doug Beyerlein's EPGIART #154; he may have extra copies (640 College Menlo Park CA 94025)



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P. O. Box 2031  
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Larry Peery (66)  
Box 8416  
San Diego CA92102

Late Nooze here...John Caruso's Player Poll is now open for voting. Send your top 5 choices for Best Dip Player Best Variant Player, and Best Writer to John at 160-02 43rd Ave Flushing NY 11358. You can't vote for yourself. Kathy Byrne has resigned as Co-Director of the US Orphan Service, saying, "one year of abuse and complaints is more than anyone should be subjected to ... some GMs tried to crucify me." Recall that similar reasons were cited when Lee Kendter Sr resigned as BNC. Its very unfortunate that some people cannot accept the fact that if a person has a hobby job, s/he must be permitted to do it as he or she thinks best, without abusive treatment.