

DIPLOMAG - MENSA DIPLOMACY SIG NEWS

NUMBER 17

May 14, 1977

Attached to this issue is the revised SIG Membership List. While several people chose not to pay their dollar in SIG dues, and, hence, have been dropped from the rolls, this was virtually offset by a steady stream of inquiries from other M's wishing to join. So, we now have 38 active members, with more coming. Our new members include: Todd Crowder, Thomas Farrier, Lewis Geer, Mark Luckstead, Bill Moen, Steven Ralston and Philip Wik. Welcome to the SIG, gentlemen. I see there are exactly seven of you. Just right for a new game, perhaps. (See below).

I regret that other responsibilities will keep me from attending the San Diego AG. I had fully intended to go until we were hit with several events at once, which forced us to scrub the mission. David Blank, last year's Mensa Diplomacy Champion, will be there to defend his title. Don Dewsnap will also be there. I hope some of the rest of you Californians will also show up. There will definitely be a Dippy game. Unfortunately, the Fangmaster, Don Horton, is taking the easy way out. He's going to France instead. C'est la guerre. If everyone receiving this newsletter who intends to be at the AG will immediately send me his or her name and address, I'll xerox and circulate this list among all of you attending.

DOES ANYONE OUT THERE CRAVE TO BE A GAMESMASTER?

A suggestion was made to run a game of Postal Diplomacy here in DIPLOMAG. As you know, my own zine, BUSHWACKER, runs only variant games. To date, all Regular games have been run in Don Horton's CLAW & FANG. I'm very happy to have this state of affairs continue, but it has occurred to me that we might have one or two frustrated GM's among our membership, or that Don might be getting swamped with game requests.

If anyone out there wants to GM a Dippy game (Regular, that is), I can offer three alternatives. One would be to ask Don Horton to make you a Guest Gamesmaster in CLAW & FANG. This method is working successfully in several Mensa games right now. The second possibility would be to run a game here in DIPLOMAG. Since this newsletter now comes out only once every two months, you'd have to use carbon or Xerox copies for alternate months and send these game reports out yourself to the players and stand-bys. (You'd have to present me with copy ready reports for the mimeographed issues, and I'd cut the stencils, and include them with the regular issues of DIPLOMAG.)

A third alternative would be for some SIG member to start his own zine. I'm rather surprised that no one has done this to date. Here would be a chance to start small, with a single all-Mensa game, to see whether you'd enjoy being a GM/Publisher. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

RESULTS OF IDA ELECTION (As promised last month). Lenard Lakofka, 644 W. Briar Pl., Chicago, Ill. 60657, was elected IDA/North America President after an internal power struggle over whether or not to include some unexpected ballots received from IDA's U.K. Region. It was determined that only North American ballots should be counted, but provisions will be added to the By-laws permitting Overseas members to join. With the IDA election results now official, I can even more heartily endorse your joining it. Send your \$2.00 to either Len Lakofka, address shown above, or to the IDA Treasurer, Capt. Steven Brooks, 4960-B Ave. C, Great Falls, Mont. 59405.

Our own SIG member, John Baker, was elected as IDA/NA Ombudsman. The U.S.A. Representative is Bob Hartwig, Jr., U. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, and the Canadian Rep. is Cal White, 1 Turnberry Ave., Toronto, Ont. M6N 1P6.

WHAT IS THE MILLER NUMBER CUSTODIAN? (One of a series for Novices)

The Miller No. Custodian historically has issued game numbers for variant games, just as the Boardman No. Custodian does for Regular games. He also keeps some statistics on variant postal games, such as final reports, sometimes called Supply Center Counts, showing who won, came in second, survived, etc. More importantly, the MNC has been by tradition the party responsible for assigning a designator number for each newly designed variant played postally. The designator is a lower case letter or letters identifying the specific variant. For example, when this job was begun by the first MNC, Don Miller of Wheaton, Md. (for whom the numbers are named), he took the four variants listed in the 1961 Rulebook which had been played postally, and designated them "a, b, c and d". "a" is a 3 x 3 team game, less Turkey. The very first "new" postal variant was Middle Earth II, a Tolkien variant, which was given the designator "e". From that point, the designators multiplied rapidly, and had reached "hh" by 1976. Thus, a game of Abstraction which was the second variant game to start in 1976 would have been called "1976Bco", the "B" standing for the second variant game of the year (following identical procedures to those for issuing Boardman Nos. for Regular games), and the "co" indicating that the game played is Abstraction.

The only thing wrong with this system is that as the number of variant games designed multiplied, no one could keep track of the designators any more. The designators are issued strictly in order of applications received by the MNC from GM's, without regard for the type of variant. The act that two letters are adjacent means nothing. Thus, "gm" is Napoleon's Europe, and "gn" is Interplanetary.

Assistant Miller No. Custodians have been appointed for Canada and Europe, to issue numbers and assist the MNC in collating data. However, many European GM's have chosen not to bother applying for Miller Nos.

A split in the ranks of variant fans occurred following the IDA Meeting in Baltimore in July 1976. A call was issued for the resignation of the current MNC, Robert Sacks, due to dissatisfaction with the way in which Mr. Sacks was handling the public relations part of his job. (It should be emphasized that neither BNC's nor MNC's are elected or appointed. The post is handed down from one retiring volunteer to another, based on the sole judgement of the outgoing Custodian. It is strictly a labor of love, although there are small financial reimbursements from the IDA for the cost of issuing numbers.) Conrad von Metzke, who had been a previous MNC, offered to resume the position. Mr. Sacks refused to resign. Walt Buchanan, publisher of DIPLOMACY WORLD, sought to end the impasse by suggesting that a poll be conducted among all the world's Diplomacy publishers, to see whether they preferred Sacks or Von Metzke as MNC. The rather surprising results of the poll were an exact tie between those who preferred Sacks and those who preferred Von Metzke.

As a result, Conrad von Metzke withdrew his claim to the MNC post. Currently, von Metzke is engaged in a recategorization project of all variants into nine basic categories. These include such classes as ancient historical, modern historical, science fiction, and fantasy. Separate categories exist for Tolkien and Youngstown variants because there are so many of them. (Youngstown is the world's first 10-player game). Von Metzke will issue a "Variant Number" to any GM who plans to run any Diplomacy variant postally. The advantage of these numbers is that they should show instantly the type of variant which is involved. For example, all games including an "a" in the designator are ancient historical scenarios. Within each category, each game will be numbered consecutively. The first ancient historical variant will be called "a1," the second "a2", etc. No one can keep track of all the various numbers in his head, but variant buffs should be able to recall most of the nine basic categories easily.

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MILLER NO. CUSTODIAN (Cont.)

Meanwhile, Robert Sacks continues to issue Miller Nos. to those who request them. He has indicated that he, too, intends to reclassify the variants into a more rational system. Only time will tell which system will survive. As I was very much involved in the poll to determine who should be the MNC, I will not go into the issues here. Anyone who reads BUSHWACKER knows where I stand. Novice players who missed this battle should know that there are now two separate groups within the variant sub-hobby, one rallying behind Sacks and one behind Von Metzke. The Sacks group has an organization called the Diplomacy Variant Commission, or DVC. The people supporting Von Metzke have a more relaxed and informal organization called the World Diplomacy Assn., which also has members in the U.K. and Europe. If you are interested, each of these men publishes a zine containing news of the variant hobby. These are:

LORD OF HOSTS, Robert Sacks, 4861 Broadway, Apt. 5-V, New York, N.Y. 10034
TALABWO, Conrad von Metzke, 5005 Diane Ave., #14, San Diego, Calif. 92117

If you have never tried or studied Diplomacy variants, you are missing part of the fun in the hobby. Try playing one someday, just for a change of pace. About 25% of all current postal games are variants. While over 300 games are in the variant banks, the great majority of postal games played have been of about ten leading variants.

Rules for most postal variant games are obtainable directly from the GM who's going to run them. Rules for almost any game are available from the Variant Bank Custodians. Each issue of DIPLOMACY WORLD also contains the rules and map for one variant. The two leading variant bank custodians are:

Dave Kadlecek, Box 802, U. of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, Calif. 95053 (North American V.B.)
Walter Luc Haas, Postfach 7, CH-4024, Basel 24, SWITZERLAND (Central European V.B.)
(I'll be running a new variant in BUSHWACKER, soon. Send 25¢ for sample copy.)
(This ends the series. Any more questions you'd like to ask? I'll try to answer them.)

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We received a terrific plug for Mensa in the Baltimore Sunday Sun, which ran a 3-page article on the Maryland Mensa activities, including a photo of yours truly, in their magazine section on April 24th. We got in a plug for the Diplomacy SIG. Expect to have another article on just Diplomacy in the same paper in a few months.

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