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Game Openings? Yes

Introduction

Here I am again: On the home front, me and Angie are still apart. I've lost my job as a direct result of losing Angie. I tried to enlist in the Air Force last week but I was rejected because I'm too nearsighted and I almost have Glaucoma. The pressure in my eyes isn't bad enough to be Glaucoma but it's high enough to keep me out of military service (at least until the draft starts). So now I'm looking for another job. I've tried Kodak and the Post Office so far. Wish me luck.

In the Dippy hobby this past 4 weeks I received the last issue of Claw and Fang. There wasn't much to it but then there wasn't much to any of the last few. Horton also stated in that last issue that he was cutting all ties with his guest GMs so I guess I made the right decision to publish on my own.

I received Voice of Doom #33 with Kieth Sherwood's article saying A Vie-Tro was a fraud from the beginning. Still, the debate over Tro has raised some legitimate questions and I wrote an article about the controversy. The fact that Sherwood wanted the order to be an ambiguous one does not mean there isn't a problem somewhere. I don't think the debate should be stopped.

As for H&M, this time I've got a couple articles, believe it or not. No letter column though - nobody wrote to me, Boo Hoo. I'm so lonely. Please write to me. I need a letter column - I can't write enough articles to fill up this rag.

My stand by list consists of one person (Dick Martin, esteemed publisher of that excellent and almost 2 year old zine, Retaliation). I need more standbys since I've already had to use Dick. Standbys are rewarded with one free issue of H&M for every complete game year played as a standby. If a standby finishes out a position he gets an extra 3 issues as an extra bonus. Can I put you on my standby list?

I still have plenty of game openings. Two people are signed up for the Demo game (Baker and Tuharsky). There is no game fee for the Demo game, which will be carried in the main zine unlike all other games which will be carried on an insert basis starting with this issue. The Demo game will also include alot of (interesting?) comments by yours truly. I have two regular games going on now and I'd like to start 2 more besides the Demo game. If you want to play let me know.

Despite my unemployed condition I'm going to send out some samples this time to other publishers in hopes of drumming up some trades. After all, there's two articles in here this time - I can't let them go to waste, can I? Speaking of articles, if anybody wants to submit any to me for print in H&M I'd be more than happy to accept them. I won't promise to publish anything but those I do print will get their writers 5 free issues of H&M.

Well, I guess that covers everything for now. On with the articles...

A PERSONAL VIEW OF DIPLOMACY

by Donald Sigwalt

For my first article I thought I'd try a "how to" article. I, myself, enjoy reading articles on how to play individual countries, such as the one on Italy in Claw & Fang #123. Unfortunately, Turkey is the only country I feel I'm qualified to write about and I'd like to save that subject for a future issue. So right now I think I'll concentrate on those subjects that apply to all countries.

First of all, it is my opinion that a player should always play to win, that is, control 13 supply centers. To me it is a sin to set a two way draw as the ultimate goal in a game of Diplomacy. I don't believe any player should ever willingly accept a 2 way (or any other) draw. And no player should ever play for second place - no matter how bad his/her position is.

Next I'd like to say that it is not necessary to have allies to win a Diplomacy game. Only temporary allies are needed. Never form an unbreakable alliance with anyone. Remember, those other six players would take your supply centers if the opportunity arose and, if given a chance, you should take theirs too. That's what the game is all about. You can't fight everyone at once and survive but eventually, if you are to win, you must stand alone and before it's over you might face every other Great Power on the battlefield. The trick is to take them one at a time and to be alot stronger than they are when you meet.

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In the beginning it takes 2, maybe 3 countries to destroy another country. So initially you'll want allies (only temporary, of course) and the more the merrier. But more importantly you'll need a plan of action. Before the game even starts you should have a good idea of who your first victim is to be and who is to help you subdue said victim. Of course you can only make plans that are subject to change. Each game and each set of players is unique. Your initial diplomacy should be aimed at not only implementing your original plan but also at determining if that plan is indeed the best one for the particular game you're in. It could very well turn out that the country you want to ally with is headed by a player who turns out to be untrustworthy or simply incompetent. In such cases your intended victim could prove to be a better ally to you. But it takes time to find out what the other players are like so try not to commit yourself in the first game year. Keep your options open, don't let your defenses sink too low and don't antagonize the other players. Go for the neutrals and scout out your possibilities.

OK, let's say you get through 1901 unscathed and you have determined that your original plan is feasible. The ground work has been laid during your original diplomacy so put your plan into action. But don't stop there. You've got to keep on your toes. While you're carving up Victim #1, an eye should be turned to finding Victim #2. Use the same procedure as for Victim #1. Get an idea of who you want next and how you want him. Then keep your options as wide open as possible while finding out if you can get what you want. Now, if you think you can get it, go for it - but if your goal seems out of reach, set another one. Never rest on your laurels! While you're devouring Victim #2 set up Victim #3, and so on till there ain't no victims left to be had. By then you'll be the winner.

All this takes a good deal of negotiating but that's why they named the game Diplomacy. A game should never boil down to just tactics until there are only 2 players left with empires. Even then there are probably some diplomatic avenues that can be explored. While there are 3 or more players left there are always, for the good diplomat, negotiating tricks that can be used to his advantage. Don't convince yourself that a game has slowed - keep active diplomatically throughout the game. Keep in constant contact with the other players as the game progresses. There is always something to write about. Don't ignore the possibilities of press releases. And in emergencies there's always Ma Bell to fall back on.

So now you're resolved to making plans ahead of time, keeping one step ahead of everyone else and doing alot of negotiating. But how do you know which course of action is right for you? As I said before, each set of players is different and things are further complicated by the fact that each country has its own set of strategies and tactics. It really takes a great deal of intuition to know which player would make a good ally, but with practice your diplomatic skills can be honed and sharpened like the knife you'll be stabbing with. There are a few points to keep in mind while negotiating: 1) It's not necessary to confine yourself to the absolute truth, but remember that out and out lies, when revealed for what they really are, cause other players to mistrust you. Pretty soon you'll have a bad reputation in that game (which could spread), and then when you need an ally, one might be difficult to find. So try to keep your lies to a minimum and your options at a maximum. 2) Remember you're not looking for a life long companion but a temporary ally. Of course your "ally" doesn't have to, and shouldn't, know that the alliance is only a temporary one until you're taking his empire apart piece by piece. 3) Always be on the alert. The player you are negotiating with is most likely not telling the absolute truth at all times and remember, if he's any good at what he's doing, he's trying to do the same thing to you that you're trying to do to him: 4) Don't dictate another player's moves to him. The most you should do is "suggest". 5) When you write to another player you must convince him that what you're writing is the truth. You have to do this whether you're lying or really telling the truth. The truth is no more believable than a lie.

I said before that each country has its own strategies and tactics, but generally, when you devise your plan of attack, keep the following in mind: 1) Think about the long term effects of your plan - a certain plan might get you a few fast centers but in the long run it may benefit another player more than you. 2) Try to develop a corner position - one where your rear is protected. Try not to overstretch your flanks. Don't try to expand everywhere at once. 3) Try to keep a balance between your land and sea power. You can't control Europe unless you control the land and the sea.

To sum up, it takes work to win a game of Diplomacy. It takes a great deal of letter writing and communicating with the other players throughout the game. It also takes alot of long and short term planning. And effective planning requires careful study of the board positions and movement possibilities. Also, a thorough knowledge of the rulebook is essential. But the single most important thing you need is a strong desire to win:

TRADES

As I said in the intro, this issue is going to alot of publishers. Right now I receive 2 zines but I'd like to increase this number so I can be more aware of what's going on in the hobby. Also my circulation is low. So I decided to send samples to other pubbers in hopes of getting some trades and hopefully a couple good plugs, too. I need both. So I'll trade with anybody who wants to. I know some pubbers don't trade and I think that those who don't are missing something.

Whether you want to trade or not, you're welcome to play in H&M and if you can find it in your heart to plug me I'd appreciate it alot. Maybe this zine is not as good as some others but I am a good GM and do offer well run games to anyone who wants to play.

by Donald Sigwalt

Some things in this hobby do need to be changed. In one area, a big change is needed in the way orders are written by players, the way GMs interpret those orders and the rules of Diplomacy; and the way game results are displayed to the players.

In a word what is needed is standardization. A standard form for writing orders is needed, including standardized abbreviations; GM's interpretations of the rules must be standardized and the game results display must be standardized.

As things now stand, order writing, especially abbreviations are atrocious. Orders are sometimes illegibly written. They are usually undated. Sometimes it is not revealed on the orders what game they are for. And the abbreviation problem has recently led to a heated controversy in the Voice of Doom where the order A Vie-Tro was ruled ambiguous. Not every player is guilty of badly written orders but enough are to give us GMs some terrific headaches. To make a GM's life easier I propose the following form of order writing should be accepted hobbywide: Orders should be on paper measuring at least 3"X5" but no larger than 8"X14". They should contain the following: 1) the submitting player's name and address; 2) the date the orders are written; 3) the country the player is playing; 4) the season(s) and game year(s) the orders are for; 5) the Boardman # and/or the name given to the game by the GM; 6) the orders themselves; 7) press for the game; 8) the player's signature and 9) nothing else. Also, orders for a different game should be on a different sheet of paper.

The actual orders themselves must be standardized also. First and foremost, the hobby needs a set of mandatory standardized abbreviations. There are 75 spaces on a Diplomacy board. The first 3 letters of all but 11 form an unambiguous and easily remembered abbreviation. (StP is the common accepted abbreviation for St. Petersburg.) The 11 culprits are: Gulf of Bothnia, Gulf of Lyon, Liverpool, Livonia, North Africa, North Atlantic Ocean, North Sea, Norway, Norwegian Sea, Tyrolia, Tyrrhenian Sea. One abbreviation should be chosen for each of these provinces (or bodies of water) and the chosen abbreviations should be adopted hobby wide as the only unambiguous and acceptable abbreviations. Why one abbrev. when in most (every?) instance more than one unambiguous abbrev. can be formed? Because only one abbrev. is needed and standard abbreviations would eliminate problems such as A Vie-Tro.

Also regarding orders: each unit should be ordered seperately and completely. Examples: A Ser S A Arm-Rum, A Arm-Rum, F Bla C A Arm-Rum. When a unit supports or convoys another unit of a different nationality, that nationality should be written in full in the order. Ex.: A Sev S TURKISH A Arm-Rum. Orders involving St. Petersburg, Spain or Bulgaria and a fleet should specify the coast the fleet is on or moving to.

As for GM interpretations, they really shouldn't be standardized but eliminated all together. If orders are written as I describe above, the only thing a GM would have to interpret is a player's handwriting. No way to eliminate that I guess.

Interpretations of Rules can and should be eliminated, too. Not by brainwashing all GMs but by shoring up the rules. There are some loopholes (or so I hear) and as BRUX pointed out in VOD #32, "... the Rulebook was not concieved with postal Diplomacy in mind and therefore must be altered to allow for the differences between FTF and postal play". So really what is needed is an overhaul of the rulebook - it has to be adapted for the postal hobby. Personally, I would not attempt to undertake such a project - I do not know the rulebook inside out. Besides, such a project would require input from many different hobby members.

On the game results display, a standard form would make reading the game results much easier. Such a standard form should include for each country: 1) the country; 2) the player; 3) each order, as written by the player - wheter valid or not, plus each unit that is unordered. Also, another system of abbreviatinns should be adopted for such terms as dislodged, no such unit, ambiguous, etc. Listing each order as the player writes it will facilitate the finding of adjudication errors.

I doubt these proposals will be widely accepted in the hobby. Throughout the years it has been the custom that each GM handles his games his own way. What I'm proposing in effect takes some of the GM's freedom away and breaks tradition - a very hard thing to do.

My proposals are serious and I think they should be seriously considered. I look forward to the hobby's reaction to this article. I'd like to know what my players (present and future) think about playing with mandatory abbreviations and the rest of my proposed order requirements. If my players are receptive I'd like to rewrite my houserules to include these proposals. I encourage other GMs who agree with what I've said to also rewrite their houserules to include my proposals. Really what is needed is a standard set of houserules. I would not attempt to write them - this is also something the entire hobby should be in on. I will go as far as to say that the Voice of Doom houserules would make an excellent guide for a standard set of houserules.

Obviously it would take effort on everyone's part to institute these changes. If the changes are effected the result would be fewer conTROversies. But the big question is - Would the results be worth the effort?

The End

Well, there you have it - Hoof & Mouth #14. I think it's the best one yet, but I do hope #15 will be better. Still haven't reached 4 pages. Maybe next time, if I get some letters to print.

Oh, I forgot to mention about samples. If you'd like a sample of H&M just write and let me know. Include your address and a stamp and I'll send you the latest H&M asap.

Remember, I want trades, plugs, players, standbys, articles and subbers. Letters, too.

By, for now. See you in 4 weeks. Good Luck till then,

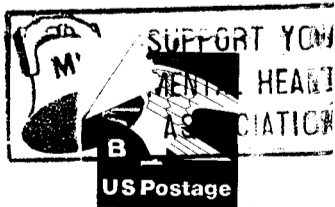
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