



**HERE
WE
GO
AGAIN!**

**ISSUE
THE
FIRST**

HERE WE GO AGAIN! : A postal games fanzine, available from Steve Agar, 3 North Road, Chester-le-Street, Co. Durham, DH3 4AQ. Price = 35p an issue. This time there is a print run of 150+. Publication is bi-monthly.

EDITORE:

Pete Birks may well be heard to mutter "better never than late," but despite small outpourings of acid from Brixton's one and only perpetual student (and I'm talking about attitudes, not lifestyle), this issue has hit the streets nevertheless. I don't really want to regurgitate the contents of the flyer I put out a couple of weeks ago, so you had better judge the zine for yourself. This issue contains a couple of "obvious" articles, but bear it in mind that I intend to use this issue as a novice package, supplemented by a 4 page explanation of the mechanics of postal gaming, and the latest issue of Compedium. Any cynics who scream that I promised to make this issue 20-24 pages when it's really only 12 sides long, should note that the contents are the equivalent of 26 pages of an A5 litho zine.

Bruce Lindsey, a relatively new U.S. publisher has contributed a small article to this issue and put me in touch with several decent American editors. I can only really afford to trade with 6 or 7, so I thought that I would suggest that any U.K. editor who would like a couple of U.S. trades should contact me and I'll arrange them for him. This way the British hobby could collectively receive all good U.S. zines, keep our fellow islanders informed of their machinations and, hopefully, improve international co-operation at the same time. Any takers? On the other hand I could send a couple of useful addresses to the adventurous subscriber who isn't afraid of international postage rates. Time for the proper stuff, I surmise.

**DEADLINE
FRIDAY
6th.
MAY!**



IN THE BEGINNING...

by Pete Swanson
and Steve Agar.

"My original plan for postal Diplomacy is one that has been maintained to this day. I envisaged seven players, making alliances by mail among themselves, and mailing their moves to me by stated deadlines. I would adjudicate the moves according to the Diplomacy rules, print up the results, and mail them out to the players and any other interested persons."

- John Boardman.

That happened eighteen years ago in New York. The great judges up there somewhere are probably undecided whether inventing postal Diplomacy is a cardinal sin or not; nevertheless, Dr. John Boardman will suffer the consequences. In May 1963, the first issue of Graustark went out - it arranged the first game, one of only five players, one of which was using a computer to make his moves! Graustark has appeared regularly ever since.

The hobby spread through the States via science fiction fandom, and North America still leads the field by a wide margin in terms of numbers; there are about 75-80 U.S. publishers, compared to about 35 in the U.K. In July 1969, the genesis of postal Diplomacy in Britain was Don Turnbull, who started Albion. Later Don's games were run in Courier, as they still are - Don always kept his wargaming background though. Don still manages to catch the headlines occasionally, only last month it was announced that he had been granted the marketing franchise for Dungeons & Dragons in the U.K. by T.S.R.

Independently, the sf fans in Britain started War Bulletin in May 1970. Originally run by Dave Berg, it continued under Hartley Patterson until its fold in early '74. These two early zines soon found each other and effectively founded the hobby in Britain. Other zines followed, notably Ethil the Frog and XL which have both since disappeared. Ethil folded at issue 46 only to restart in July 1975, only to fold again less than two and a half years later (although it took a further year to get John to admit that he'd folded...). John Piggott's original Ethil was commonly held to be the best regular Diplomacy zine in Britain, and perhaps the world.

May 72, however, saw the beginning of the ultimate stimulus for Diplomacy in this country. Graeme Levin, publisher of the professional magazine Games & Puzzles, started the British Diplomacy Club (BDC) which was eventually to develop into the National Games Club (NGC) in early 1973, under the leadership of Richard Sharp. With the help of advertisements in G&P and a flyer in the Diplomacy box, the NGC probably did more than anything else to keep the hobby growing during its formative years.

Only Courier is still with us from the list of pre-1974 zines, both Dolchstoss (Richard Sharp) and Ethil having died relatively recently. Then came the boom of postal Diplomacy in Britain - in June 1973 there were 225 players and 9 zines, by the beginning of 1975 there were more than 400 players in 33 zines. Things have settled down since then, the latest figures showing 591 players in some 35 zines. One of the interesting statistics is the changing of the average number of games per player. It reached a peak in early 1974 at about 4½ - now it is around 2.7 games per player. Perhaps this is due to postal charges, we've seen them quadruple - gone are the days when Andy Davidson was playing in over 50 games, though I'm still stupid enough to play in over twenty games.

1975-76 saw a split develop in the hobby between the NGC zines and the 'independents', as they grew to be two rival forces - though it was really a battle of personalities, Will Haven (of Bellicus fame) vs. Richard Sharp. As the NGC started to adopt less insular policies the arguments petered out. During 1976, the NGC suffered the consequences of a committee system - everyone left the work to everyone else. Nicky Palmer introduced bureaucracy with a capital 'B'. It didn't seem to matter though. The inefficiency of the NGC became something of a joke to the established hobby members, and enough novices seemed to be getting through the system anyway. The end of the NGC dawned when Richard Sharp made his zine, Dolchstoss, independent of the organisation - after this the NGC quickly drowned in its own arguments and failures - Sharp made repeated pledges about the future of the NGC, but failed dismally to deliver the goods. When Richard Sharp left his games in limbo and folded Dolchstoss in early 1979, the NGC finally became spoken of in the past tense.

Of course there have been other hobby organisations - namely the Diplomacy Federation (DipFed), the International Diplomacy Association (IDA/UK), both of which stem from the old NGC vs. independents struggle, while the Postal Diplomacy Association (PDA) appeared last year under Malcolm Brown, only to fold six months later when Malc dropped out of the hobby. Oh, the fatal attraction that organisations have for Diplomacy players.

In many respects the hobby has changed fairly radically over the last two years. Up to 1978 this hobby revolved around Richard Sharp and his associated hangers-on (Piggott, Baird, Doubleday, Birks, Rayner etc.) with a few other editors of a durable quality (Bullock, Walkerdine etc.). All of this has changed - today the hobby is dominated by the editors who entered the hobby relatively late, circa 1977, while all of the aforementioned "hardcore" have disappeared, with the notable exceptions of Birks (Greatest Hits), Baird (Filibuster) and Bullock (New Statsman). Another change has been the shift of emphasis in the zines themselves - the likes of Sharp and Piggott were the leading lights of the hobby in their day, due to their writing ability and their emphasis on non-games content. Nowadays the majority of zines cover this chat side of the hobby (eg. Chris Tringham in Megalomania and myself in the old Pigmy, now HWGA). There are still a few purist zines around (Fall of Eagles and Tinamou being the most notable), but they are few and far between.

Mainly due to the efforts of the likes of Clive Booth, Robin Hood and Keith Thomasson, there has grown up what is effectively a hobby within a hobby - that of postal games other than Diplomacy, the most popular of which seem to be Kingmaker, Rail Baron, Railwar Rivals, En Garde and Soccerboss. Many Diplomacy players still foster the archaic notion that no other games are worth playing postally - of course this attitude is rubbish. The trend away from Diplomacy was really to be expected, as bored novices started to formulate postal rules for their favourite games. Few would argue that if you are after player interaction, then postal Diplomacy is the game, but that does not necessarily invalidate the rise of the "games" hobby.

What about the future? Following the collapse of the NGC there has been no flyer in the Diplomacy box, while the demise of the PDA has resulted in no national advertising. What to do about these problems is still the subject of debate within the hobby, but it looks certain that one way or another we will have to get Philmar to reconstitute the flyer, even if we don't form an official organisation to cover organised recruitment campaigns. Given the failure of such organisations in the past, present GM's are unwilling to back anything smacking of officialdom - the rise of another Richard Sharp is not as much feared as what the consequences would be when he too gets bored with the whole thing. Informality and anarchy seems to be the order of the day, hobby services being provided by volunteers, not an organisation.

A mention must be given to the handful of professional publications that cover the postal Diplomacy hobby. In the U.K. there is The Game of Diplomacy by Richard Sharp, published by Arthur Baker and priced around £7.50 (well worth the trouble you may have in tracking down a copy - 150 pages of good solid stuff) and Diplomacy Games and Variants, from the fair hand of Lew Fulsipher, priced around £2.75 and available from Games Centre, London. There is another book available, The Gamer's Guide to Diplomacy by Rod Walker and published by Avalon Hill, but as yet I have been unable to track down an import copy.





MOST OF THEM ARE HUMAN...

Several, though by no means all, of you will have heard of a Diplomacy zine called Pigmy, which was my brainchild for over 2½ years. I folded Pigmy in January 1980, mainly due to my own lack of enthusiasm for a project that absorbed an ever-increasing proportion of my ever-decreasing amount of spare time. Looking back on my "career" as a zine publisher, only a few weeks after announcing Pigmy's fold, I can't help but find it remarkable that anyone is willing to sacrifice a whole weekend (30 to 40 hours) just to produce a rather amateurish Diplomacy zine, which makes a rather handsome financial loss! To have to persuade a feeble body that it really should get up before midday on a deadline weekend, to adapt one's muddled brain to the organisational and administrative necessities of sending out 100+ copies of your creation, and to bear the consequential loss suffered by your social life, seems characteristic of a rather odd strain of masochism. However, it should also be remembered that being a zine publisher puts one in a position of responsibility - you have to try, to the best of your ability, to print correct game adjudications, to ensure the smooth running of the games in your care, and to take proper care of the various subscriptions entrusted to you. It is no great surprise that several editors fail to live up to their responsibilities in one department or another (names like Piggott, Sharp, Herlihy and Malcolm Brown etc. spring to mind).

Even so, many subscribers (particularly novices) expect too much from the lowly editor - to them an ignored letter is a severe rebuke, a late issue a disaster. If you are merely the reciprocant of a badly-typed, hastily put together zine, it is far too easy to underestimate the amount of effort, of one sort or another, that has gone into it. If a subscriber thinks he is getting a raw deal, he is usually quite willing to let the publisher concerned know of his opinions - even if it is only in the form of a nasty letter to a rival zine. In short, our average editor is occasionally abused for his efforts - he missed someone off his mailing list, forgot to underline a failed move, or worst of all, allowed his comments to stray from the postal games hobby to something less serious, such as politics and religion.

The old NGC gave a false impression of efficiency and formality that couldn't stand up to even a casual glance. The old Diplomacy box flyer implied that this hobby was much more of a professional affair than it really is, an impression confirmed by a novice's first look at Dolchstoss (RIP), with the strange elitist vocabulary common to all Diplomacy zines, Richard Sharp in particular. It is true to say that any false impressions gained this way were soon dispelled after a couple of months - but it could at times lead to serious misunderstandings. Early in 1977 Peter Sanham made a name for himself in Diplomacy history by writing a series of vitriolic letters to Greg Hawes (then publisher of Turn of the Screw). Upon re-reading Peter's letters I can see examples of the typical misunderstandings that a newcomer can experience when he first enters our hobby - so for those of you who weren't around during the Christmas of 76, I print Peter's comments in full.

PETER SANHAM (3.10.76):

"On checking the deadline for the next set of orders for regular Diplomacy games I was astonished and very annoyed to find it to be the usual 4 weeks after the last one. Since you delayed posting the last set of orders for a whole week, the very least you could have done would have been to have extended the deadline by the same period of time. You might have the courtesy to offer some excuse as to why you have thus shortened the length of our diplomacy period for this season. All you have said so far is that you hoped to see one or two of us at some meeting or other, which explains absolutely nothing, either about why you didn't post TotS at the usual time, or why you shortened our diplomacy time. I am sure there are a lot of other disgruntled players who would welcome an explanation as well.

"There is another very important query I would like to make, concerning the publication of move results. Is it really necessary for us to buy the whole of your magazine? All I am interested in are the results of my game. As you will appreciate, playing Diplomacy by post is a very expensive pastime. Is it essential for me to pay good money for pages of garbage that have no relevance to me? Surely you can just send me the one sheet. It should even save you work. And it would save me 5p a month. It's not much, but with the considerable amount spent on postage each month it is worth attempting every economy. How about it?

"Another thing. I don't remember asking you to print my letter in the last issue of TotS. In fact, I resent your inclusion of it without my prior knowledge. If, as I suspect, it is the case that you cannot afford to reply individually to each letter you receive, then, again, you ought to have explained that. I realise, of course, that the subject of my query and your reply to it might have been of interest to a number of people and that it was useful to include it in the magazine, but that does not excuse your action or negate the embarrassment or surprise I felt at suddenly encountering my name and my private letter used to fill a space in your publication.

"I am sorry if my letter seems rather strongly worded, but since applying for membership of the NGC I have continually found myself ill-used at their hands. The organisation is appalling and you seem to be doing little to counter the impressions I have received.

"Needless to say, I regard, especially, the reduction of our diplomacy period, due merely to your tardiness in sending the last results, as unnecessary, and therefore unforgivable. Just what the hell are you playing at? Negotiations are tricky as it is. We need the time. How do you explain arbitrarily interfering with our game?"

And again...

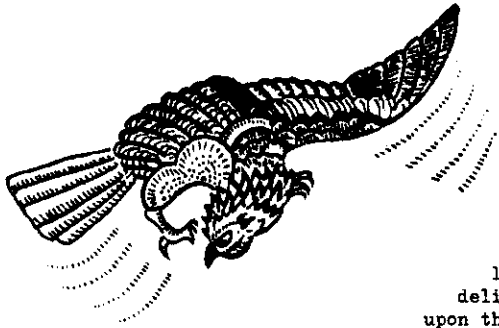
PETER SANHAM (15.10.76):

"For the second time in succession you have allowed a full week to pass before issuing the results of last season's orders. Are we ever to be allowed to play our game properly, and with some degree of regularity? Why has it taken you so long to send the results this month? No doubt you shall not bother to extend the deadline this time either, and we shall be deprived of yet another week's negotiations. Your sluggishness and apparent apathy are becoming a source of some not inconsiderable irritation. Is it not about time that you faced the fact that your position entails some degree of responsibility, and started to show some concern for the interests of the players who are dependant upon your services. You did not even warn us this time that the results would be late. It is Friday evening and there is still no sign of them. For goodness' sake, let us get on with our game. Please."

An object lesson on how not to write a letter of complaint to an overworked editor. It is characteristic of a newcomer to postal gaming that a late issue, even a delay of only a week, should cause such concern. With only a few notable exceptions, Diplomacy zines are late as often as not. Delays of up to a week are not to be taken as a disaster - if you are worried the sensible thing is either to ring the editor up or ask another subscriber if he has received his issue. To many people the non-games content of a zine ("pages of garbage" to Peter Sanham) are the most interesting part of a zine. Many editors get most of their enjoyment from the chat they publish, rather than from the games they run. A subscriber should accept what he is given to a large extent, if most of the others enjoy the chat included, then the editor will include it despite you. If thousands object to a particular topic then the publisher will probably drop it in the face of mass protests. You should not ask a publisher to send you only part of his zine because the convenience to you will be out of all proportion to the inconvenience that you will cause him.

With regards to publishing letters, it is an accepted hobby rule that any letters sent to an editor are intended for publication, unless they are marked "do not publish", "DNP", or some equivalent. Most editors will abide by this convention. If you fail to mark your letters in this way, you really have no cause to complain if they end up being published.

A publisher goes to all the trouble to produce a zine, primarily for his own benefit, for the kick he gets when he sees his name up in lights. Of course he has certain responsibilities to his subscribers, but it must be remembered that without his efforts the zine would not exist at all. All publishers are frustrated journalists and authors, who vent their literary frustrations on a captive audience. Do not expect too much from them. Most of them are human, after all.



STALEMATE LINES

The face-to-face game of Diplomacy rarely sees the emergence of stalemate lines, face-to-face play is far more fluid than the often cumbersome and deliberate play of a postal game. Once you give the players a whole month to decide upon their orders, it is inevitable that the good player will put a lot of thought into how he can use his units to his best advantage. The frequent result of a lively postal game is a draw, usually brought about by player vote because the game has fell prey to that vulture of postal Diplomacy - the stalemate line.

It would be impossible to list all the variations of stalemate lines that could be constructed on the regular board as they are too numerous, however it is true that there are only a handful of areas where a stalemate line is likely to develop. A stalemate line occurs when one or more powers manage to construct a line of pieces across the board to prevent enemy pieces from passing through, with enough pieces immediately behind the stalemate line to provide sufficient support for the front line pieces to enable them to retain their position, irrespective of the strength of the attacking forces. Hence areas likely to support stalemate lines are those where a few adjoining provinces border many provinces on one side (to provide room for the pieces supporting the line), yet border few provinces on the other side (thus limiting the number of units that can be brought to bear on that province by the attacker). A good example of such provinces is the line Mun-Boh-Sil-War-Mos - this line can only be attacked from the five adjoining provinces, Tyr-Vie-Gal-Ukr-Sev, yet only Tyr can attack Mun and only Gal can attack Sil - hence if one side orders A(Mun) & A(Sil) S A(Boh) then there is no way that the attackers can brake through, for they only have three units on Bohemia and nothing to cut the support of either Mun or Sil. The War-Mos part of the line is more vulnerable as the attacker can get two units on either of these provinces while cutting the support of the other province at the same time - hence the defender will need two supporting units to be certain of holding these provinces, A(StP) & A(Pru) will do nicely. The defender need only order A(War) MS A(Mos); A(Pru) S A(War); A(StP) S A(Mos); to be 100% certain that the Mun-Boh-Sil-War-Mos line will hold no matter what is thrown against it. Of course there are variations on this line, but the basic stalemate line along the German-Austrian border is easily the most likely area of the board for a stalemate to develop.

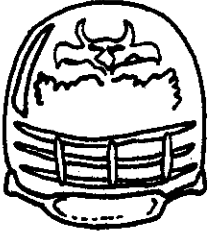
As Switzerland is roughly in the centre of the board, adjoins several provinces, and is also impassable it is perhaps easy to see why it usually ends up in the middle of a stalemate line. It makes life easier for the defender if one of the provinces in his line is impassable anyway and it fits in nicely with the Ger-Aus line discussed above. However, for a stalemate line to be effective it must traverse the entire board, hence the defender must find some way of sealing off the western Mediterranean. Generally speaking there are two major divisions in the western Med. area - that of the line Mar-Spa-MAO and that of Mar-Gol-WMS-Tun. Both of these lines can become solid with a little support from units immediately behind them, the first example needing three units, the second example needing two. The geographical impasse of Gibraltar is an obvious bottleneck for fleets, an area where armies will be of little value in themselves. Often a stalemate can develop in this part of the board when an expanding England meets a growing Italy, as both need to cross the Gibraltar divide if they are to reach 18 centres. There is one other bottleneck for fleets in the shape of the Ionian Sea, which is a large area bordering no less than nine provinces! Obviously control of the ION is vital for any power hoping to dominate the Med, thus it is not uncommon to see Italian and Turkish fleets drawn into a hopeless stalemate over the ION which can only be decided by a land battle which will determine who controls the vital provinces of Albania and Greece.

It's all very well discussing where the main stalemate lines are and why, but from the player's point of view there are only two things of real interest, firstly how do you construct one when you're losing and secondly how do you break one when you're winning. Constructing a stalemate line can be very difficult unless it is planned well in advance - the trick here is to recognise the necessity for such a tactic so that you can manoeuvre your units into position and ensure that you have the correct balance between fleets and armies to hold the line you're aiming for. For example, if you want to hold the Mar-Gol-WMS-Tun line then ideally you want a fleet in Mar, not an army - but the chances are that you'll only get a fleet there if you know seasons in advance that one will be necessary. Trying to construct a stalemate line with another player against a third party can prove to be very difficult, because it will only take one misunderstanding between the two of you to upset all of your carefully laid plans - in this situation it is often a good idea to entrust the ordering of both sets of units to one player to ensure there are no cock-ups. Beware of false stalemate lines, that is lines which are generally secure if you can predict the exact manner of the attack involved, but can be broken if your opponent tries something different. You must have sufficient units behind the line to cover all eventualities.

In a sense the way to prevent the construction of a stalemate line is ridiculously easy - merely capture one or more of the provinces needed by your opponent, but this is easier said than done, and your opponent may have devised a variation on a stalemate line to take into account the provinces you have captured. The only sure fire way of breaking a stalemate line is to get one or more units behind the line before it is formed - a unit behind the line can cut the support of the rear pieces in the line for the front line units, and it will use up four or five of your opponents pieces to track it down and finally destroy it. If you are to do this, it will be necessary to push ahead with a couple of units further than is strictly safe and you must make use of conditional retreats, for frequently the only way to get behind a forming stalemate line is to retreat behind it!

Of course things are not always as straightforward as having one offensive and one defensive player. Often, both powers believe they have a fair chance of winning outright - in this case stalemate lines are often formed and subsequently broken. For a line to hold you must order the correct defensive moves, if you try and move forward you can often allow your enemy to break your line and you may lose the game completely. A common tactic to try and overcome stalemate lines is to try to tempt the defending player out of his position by a carefully planned retreat - unless you are convinced that your opponent has overplayed this tactic and retreated too much, too soon, do not advance. Once deserted, set positions are difficult to take up again.

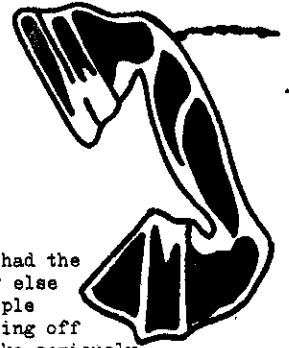
Well, that's how I see stalemate lines, scarcely a definitive article by a probably below average player. I hope that it is of some use in achieving or avoiding a draw - depending on your point of view.



THE AMERICAN FOOTBALL GAMES CORNER!

A brief introduction to the fascinating world of simulated Am. Football.

by Alan S. Watson.



Just what the hell's going on in the boardgaming world these days? I remember when everyone had the good sense to realise that the ONLY game to play was Diplomacy. Well, I've got to believe it, how else will the "hard core" maintain its status? I ask you, imagine the mentality of all these funny people actually going out spending funds from their hard-earned student's grants to pretend they're fighting off dragons, orcs and wizards to get treasure. Or think of all those poor misguided souls who even take seriously the simulation of wars from the past, present and, wait for it, the FUTURE! Now I ask you, it isn't really on is it? Next thing you'll be telling me that the poor suckers are playing simulations of sporting events (ha, ha, ha). What?! You can't be serious. How dare you tell ME I've got my head in the sand? I take that as a serious provocative statement and give you notice that our Alliance between the beloved Kaiser and your bloody Emperor is terminated. I've a good mind to stab you in the Balkans for that!

Well, so far, so good. If you haven't screwed up your magazine in disgust at this tomfoolery, perhaps I should get on with the real subject of this article. Yes, you've guessed it, SPORTS GAMES. Just ask the Sales Department of Avalon Hill Gaming Company which is their most rapidly expanding range of boardgaming subjects and I'll bet you'll find they'll tell you - sports games. A.H. aren't the only company to realise the potential of these simulations however, several companies have made first class games in the last few years, covering almost the whole gamut of sport. Whether your taste is Boxing, Basketball, Ice Hockey, Tennis, Golf, Baseball, Sailing, Horse Racing, Motor Racing or even American Football, there's a most enjoyable game just waiting to be purchased and played. It has been drawn to my attention that several companies have even managed to design a passable simulation game of SOCCER - although the optional rules of kissing the goal scorer have presented a few design problems.

As most of these simulation games are designed and manufactured in the United States, it isn't too surprising that perhaps the widest range of games are simulations of what I have come to realise is one of the most exciting sports of all - AMERICAN FOOTBALL. Now before you go off wetting your pants at that statement, look at the facts. Using the natural defensive mechanism to stave off what we don't understand, a lot of Englishmen poke fun at the game - "...set of bloody fairies, wearing all that stupid padding and barging into each other - no sense in it at all", was once a common place utterance. However, take another look next time it's on TV - yes folks, even our hallowed shrine - the television has been increasingly invaded with displays of American Football in the last couple of years. Only last month the American College's ROSE BOWL was shown on one channel, whilst the rival channel was shoeing the professional team's final THE SUPERBOWL (equivalent in a funny sort of way to our FA Cup Final). Such has the popularity of this game increased. In Japan, the inscrutable little men have adopted it as a national sport - and as most British Leyland dealers will grudgingly admit, the Japs are no fools.

Almost by chance, three years ago, a copy of Avalon Hill's FOOTBALL STRATEGY came into my possession and it didn't take Charles Vasey and I very long to realise we were looking at a winner. This is one of the most enjoyable and playable games currently available. The rules run to a mere four pages of easy instructions - so even a Dippy player can manage to pick it up reasonably quickly - even without a good working knowledge of the real game.

To start off, one team kicks off from the 35 yard line of the pitch. The distance the kick goes is decided by a dice roll - one of the few times YOU don't have total control of the play. The results are tabulated in a table format to ensure quick reference. The pitch itself incidentally, is marked off in 10 yard lines across the pitch, throughout its total 100 yards length. The idea of the game is to make at least 10 yards in four "downs" or plays, to maintain possession of the ball. Eventually you are aiming to score a touchdown at your opponent's end of the field and then to "convert" it.

The team that kicks off usually manages to drive the ball somewhere between their opponent's 15 and 25 yard line. In simulation and also in the real game, the receiving team usually manage to gather the ball and become the "offensive" team. Now this team has four chances to outwit their opponent and make a ten yard advance. In American Football each play sets off from a line of scrimmage, the ball is passed back to the Quarterback ("Scrum Half") and he either runs with the ball or passes it to one of his eligible receivers. One forward pass is permitted per play and can often lead to a spectacular territorial gain - there again, he could fall to connect with the pass, have it intercepted, or get caught in possession of the ball and driven backwards for a loss of yardage. To determine the play, the offensive team in Football Strategy has a choice of 20 different offensive plays, whilst the defenders have a choice of 10 defensive plays. A realistic matrix of the offensive and defensive plays is consulted by both players, which determines the result. Say a player selects a Slant offensive play, he makes a mental note and awaits his opponent to pick a defense, lettered for the novice from A to J. Now in this example, the defense picks "E" - he picks this card from his pack of defense cards and conceals it from his opponent - we don't cheat much in this game, you see. The offense is playing his first attacking play, known as First and 10 (first attempt for the ten yards to make). He announces Slant and the defense card is exposed. The result is now read from the matrix and it is +4 yards. The ball marker is advanced 4 yards and the offensive player has now three plays left to make 6 yards. Continuing, the defense selects "E" again (usually a good percentage chance of little yardage gains) but unluckily for him, the offense picks a "hole" in his defense and selects Run Pass Option - the matrix reads +20 yards and the ball now advances another 20 yards. Clearly this is in excess of the required 10 yards already, so the ten yard marker is advanced up the side of the pitch with the trailing edge at the line where the ball has been advanced to. This is a reminder to the more forgetful where he has to advance to in the next four plays. In so doing, i.e. making his 10 yards, the offense now has a further 4 plays to make another 10 yards. It isn't all defense bashing however, depending on an astute defensive call, anticipating certain offensive calls, the ball can be FUMBLE*d* i.e. possession lost by the offense; INTERCEPT*ed* i.e. an advance is made, but possession lost; or INCOMPLETE meaning either no advance or a loss of yardage, making the distance required in the following plays have to be in excess of 10 yards. Each result has a specific simulation time taken and a game lasts for four "quarters" of 15 minutes simulated time. In a good moving game, high scoring could take place (touchdown = 6 points, conversion = 1) or with two equally matched players, who know each other's weaknesses and on a good day, the scoring could be very tight indeed.

There's a lot more to the game than the above simple ((??)) explanation, but an average player can pick it up in less than half an hour - well my six year old took that long before he went on to whip me, an "experienced" player. The finer points of the game dawn on you as you get more used to playing. In essence, a player is using strategy - not a guessing game - to work out his opponent's style of play and out psycho him. Believe me, once you're hooked, grown men actually or even sweat with the tension in the game.

Once you're really into the game, you may find that you'd like to know more about the real game. Well, modest to the last, I edit a publication entitled Punt & Pass, a mimeo mag of an average 20 pages (sorry, sides) with articles on the real game by our league players, American sports writers and Avalon Hill design staff. Throughout the regular National Football League (N.F.L.) season, we publish a summary of the previous month's league results.

So popular has this totally "Un-British" sports game proved, we have established a National League here in England with players as far apart as Aberdeen, Grimsby, Nottingham, Lake District, London and even down there in Devon somewhere.

The spontaneous nature of the game makes it unsuitable for postal play (unless you submitted umpteen conditional orders), but much to the amazement of the Yanks, we have established a telephone league. This has flourished for two years so far and the interest in it is increasing all the time. Charles Vasey even had a full article describing the mechanics of this new innovation published in Avalon Hill's sports' magazine All Star Reply. Now I know they're mad, I hear you mutter - well, ask any of the players and you'll be surprised.

A telephone game is arranged between two players say in Aberdeen (Bill Watt, coach of the ABERDEEN OILERS) and London (Peter Hatton, coach of the KILBURN COWBOYS) with an umpire designated for that game. He may be from Kendal, Nottingham, Leeds, Hleanor ((where?)), Darlington or any other location. The game is restricted to 50 plays for economic reasons. The umpire is the go-between and pays for the calls in the game. He throws a dice for the Kick Off and places the ball where it ends up and calls the receiving player stating "the ball is on your 20 yard line, it's First and ten - your first offensive play please" - reply "Side Line Pass" (or whatever it may be). This is recorded by the umpire and the receiver replaced. Price 3p for that call. Next he phones the now defending player - "the ball went to the Oilers 20. Your first defence?". Reply, "F" - Umpire records this and announces the offensive player made "Side Line Pass", reads matrix and announces the result - a gain of 4 yards and indicates the ball is now on the 24 yard line, 2nd and 6 (yards to make in the next 3 plays) and asks for the next defence. Reply "C". Receiver replaced (another 3p call) and the umpire rings Aberdeen and tells him the result, soliciting his next offensive play in the meantime. "Quarter Back Keep" - umpire announces result of 15 yard gain and that the ball is now on the 39 yard line and its 1st and 10. He asks for the next play. Effectively in 50 x 3p phone calls he receives 50 offensive plays and 50 defensive calls as the match progresses. It works out sometimes over the minute for the call when a player gets a bit rattled and starts stammering or making some rude comments, but on average, a game costs an umpire £2.00/game. A regular season will be to play in EIGHT games, whilst umpiring in FOUR. So, net cost for eight enjoyable games, plus a chance to win your league and go into the SUPER BOWL, is a massive £8.00 or £1.00/game. All players are kept informed of league standings, game commentaries from the umpire are written up and published, usually substituting actual American Football players names in an amusing report. This Pro Anglo American Football League (for that is what our association's leagues are called) is incorporated together with the other real American Football articles and all sports reports, reviews and letters in Punt & Pass. This little cracker of a magazine costs players a mere 25p/issue including postage. Recently, the introduction of Avalon Hill's "TITLE BOUT" boxing simulation led to a sub-zine being added, entitled The Square Ring - all for the same price. But that's another story.

American Football games vary considerably from the extremely playable and simple, as above, through statistically orientated games, based on actual N.F.L. season statistics, such as PAYDIRT, BOWLBOUND and T.H.E. Football Game. These games use actual teams and individual players' records to simulate the probable result of a match up of two National Football League teams or American College teams. They can be great fun, especially if you're really into American Football and are armed with the National Football League Record Book.

Another variation, N.F.L. STRATEGY by Tudor Games is even more realistic, without the burden of individual stats. This is a sophisticated game with scoring dials, automatic time recording and has 44 offensive plays and 20 defensive plays. Each offensive play made is on a full card of results - the defensive card has five clear box areas on it and when overlaid on the offensive card and inserted into a device on the plastic playing board, a probability selector is activated. The result is one of three results shown, depending on whether the ball is left, right or centre in the field. It also indicates where the ball stops laterally - but I won't confuse you with too much detail now.

((Thanks for the article Alan, much appreciated - I only hope a few more people get round to writing articles of a similar length for next time.

If you wish to delve deeper into any of the subject's discussed in Alan's article write to:

Alan Watson, 38 Hummersknott Avenue, Darlington, Co. Durham, with a large S.A.E. or Tel. 0325-65609.))

G.M. INTERFERENCE?

mainly by Mark Berch, mutilated by myself.

Let me begin with a few biases:

1. My perspective is that of a player, not gamesmaster.
2. The purpose of playing is to have fun, to enjoy a good game.
3. The purpose of the rulebook is to facilitate no. 2, rather than just provide traps for the unwary.
4. The same should apply to the adaption of the rulebook to postal play.

There is a sentence in the rulebook which, if gamesmasters would only use it, would promote the above goals and produce a superior game. "A badly written order, which nevertheless can have only one meaning, must be followed." Note the verb: "must". Let's look at how this can be applied to the most common types of badly-written orders.

I. PLAYER FAILS TO STATE NATIONALITY OF FOREIGN UNIT HE IS SUPPORTING.

Thus, SO1: A(Ven) S A(Mun)-Tyr. Most GM's would disallow this - however, contrary to popular belief, there is no requirement in the rulebook that the nationality of a foreign unit receiving support should be specified - this "rule" is the invention of postal GM's. The rulebook is extremely specific on what is required for a valid support: "To order a support, it is necessary to write the location of the supporting piece, the word 'supports' or its equivalent, and both the location and destination of the piece receiving support." (Rul IX, 1) Note that it does not state, "Location, destination and ownership if foreign." It is true that Italy does not have A(Mun) in the above example, but the order does not state that he does. Further, the "Badly written" rule covers this nicely; it can have only one meaning, because there is only one unit in Munich.

II. PLAYER FAILS TO STATE COAST UNIT IS LEAVING FROM.

Thus, F(StP)-GoB. There is again no requirement that this coast need be stated. Rule VII, 7 begins: "In each set of orders, the space each unit is in is written first, followed by its order." Note that it says "space," which is defined (VI, 1) as "province or body of water." That definition was included to foil the Coastal Crawl, by indicating that "space" includes the entire province. Further, the rulebook carefully sets forth two circumstances where the coast must be specified (where a fleet enters a two-coasted province and either coast is possible, and when building fleets in StP) but this circumstance isn't one of them. Finally, the "badly written" rule can be applied, as there is only one fleet in StP.

III. PLAYER MISSTATES THE COAST UNIT IS LEAVING FROM.

Thus, in SO1 F(StP no)-GoB. This situation is more complex, as a portion of the order is incorrect. However, disallowing the move seems an extremely serious penalty for giving some wrong (coastal) information that wasn't required, but is provided as a favour to the GM. An analogous situation would be disallowing "F Hollind - NTH."

(GM: Sorry, but you don't have any fleet in Hollind.

(PLAYER: I only added the extra letters at the end to help you avoid confusion with my F(HEL).



A typical GM.
(Peter Calcraft?)

They weren't required by the rulebook. Your action serves as a disincentive to my being more fully explicit in the future.

Again, the "badly written" rule can be invoked, as there is only one unit in StP, and it "occupies the entire province." (VII, 2b)

IV. PLAYER MISLABELS AN ARMY FOR A FLEET OR VICE VERSA.

This is probably the most common error in writing orders; eg. A(Tri)-Alb. The entire situation closely resembles no. 3, in that the labelling of a unit F or A is not required according to the rulebook. "Tri-Alb" complies with the rules, for they only require that you list "the space each unit is in." Further, there is nothing sacred about those particular abbreviations, you could have A for 'Armada' and F for 'Footsoldier,' or you could just use U for all units.

The essence of the arguments used against a liberal interpretation of postal Diplomacy rules rest on two points. Firstly there is a group of people that insist that by being so stringent about how you write your orders, postal GM's are introducing another element of skill, rewarding the careful player and punishing the careless. This is ridiculous, instead of introducing an element of skill, silly house rules make luck more important than necessary. The "badly written" order, according to John Boardman "...is designed for over-the-board play, and minor fluffs as a result of haste are accepted." However, if it's a minor fluff in FtF play, then it's a minor fluff in postal play, because it's the same error! Players should always be given the benefit of any doubt if the GM is to enhance, rather than ruin, the game. The other argument put forward by the ~~idiot~~ purists, is that occasionally a player will want to deliberately misorder a unit for tactical reasons, and if the GM is carefree in his attitudes he will then correct the mistake. Rubbish. Any player who wants to misorder a unit can be sufficiently imaginative as to make the order illegal (eg. F(Tri)-Gre or F(Alb)-Gre). Anyway, I have long been of the opinion that any player using such a tactic should tell the GM what he is doing, if only to put the GM's mind at rest!

Of course, players should include all the additional information (nationality, coast and type of unit), it makes the GM's life a lot easier and he has good right to be annoyed with players who do not co-operate. Even so, GM's must remember that it is additional information - not essential information.

I suppose the same principles could be extended to some orders I once received for Russia in a Pigmy game: F(StP sc)-BLA, F(Sev)-GoB, A(Mos)-Gal, A(War)-Sev. I allowed these orders - it was only sensible to correct the error. If the same mistake had been made later in the game, there would have been no way that I could have guessed what the player meant to order - however, during the first year of the game when there are relatively few units, the GM can usually get to the truth. The opening moves of the game are the most important, any GM that allows such an obvious error to cripple one of the Great Powers is not only doing a disservice to the erring player, he is penalising the other six players by making the game more unbalanced than necessary, and penalising the hobby as a whole for adding to the scrap heap of games that have been ruined by that most unpalatable of all crimes, GM interference.

AMERICAN SCENE

by BRUX Linsey.

The Diplomacy hobby is alive and prospering in the United States. So when Steve Agar asked me to do a short piece for you ~~folks~~ folks about the state of the hobby in the States, I was both flattered and enthusiastic. Having never heard of Dippy until about a year ago, I am relatively new to the game, but I shall attempt to offer a bit of an insight. Since Diplomacy is personalities, I will in this short article discuss some of the more prominent hobby people in America.

What discussion of postal Diplomacy would be complete without a mention for the man who founded it all, John Boardman? His zine, Graustark, is in its eighteenth year and on issue 413. John's rantings and ravings keep us amused, but his record of reliability and longevity may never be equalled. Meanwhile, Boardman's arch-enemy Rod Walker, who wrote The Gamer's Guide to Diplomacy, is forming a continent-wide organization with the purpose of giving the hobby a sense of unity and direction. The organization, known as the North America Diplomacy Federation (NADF) will hopefully replace the old, floundering International Diplomacy Association (IDA) so that all of the U.S. and Canada is represented rather than just New York City.

Diplomacy World, our most important zine, is now in the able hands of Jerry Jones and is going from strength to strength. Mark Berch, Dippy's resident nitpicker/lawyer, is very highly visible. He is a heavy contributor to DW, as well as the publisher of Diplomacy Digest - a zine devoted to reprinting old Diplomacy articles and inventing new ones. John Leeder's Runestone (a Canadian zine) is still alive, if feebly so, after almost 300 issues. Fred Davis and Don Horton still chug out excellent products in Bushwacker and Claw and Fang respectively. There are six or seven zines here overall which have gone over the 100 issues mark.

But the old-timers are of course greatly outnumbered by the newer faces, not surprisingly. 1979 saw several excellent new zines; some titles to look out for are Volkerwanderung, The Flying Dutchman, Retaliation, and Emhain Macha. Newcomers are quite active in service projects as well. Dick Martin, Jack Brawner, and John Daly, all new publishers, have opened an orphanage for the purpose of rehousing abandoned games. Bruce Linsey is going to be publishing a new novice package shortly.

Meanwhile, Buddy Tretick ("Bernie Oaklyn") persists in running the most fraudulent zine ever produced, with half of the American hobby caught up in wild debate over what to do about him.*

Yet another big news item here is a postal Dip. tournament being run by Bob Sergeant, publisher of the late St. George and the Dragon. Although only 35 people have entered, the affair has drawn nationwide interest and attention - a total of 49 people being required so that everyone can play everyone else in order to achieve a fair end result.

Variants are quite popular over here. One current fad is the "blind game", a ridiculous game in which each player learns only the results of his own moves and the location of any foreign units within his own borders.** This variant is so silly and so funny that I have lowered myself to play in a game of it. Crazy.

In general, I can comment that the game seems to be generating an enormous amount of enthusiasm in the United States at this time. It is my hope that U.S./U.K. ties can be strengthened and broadened. I personally would love to trade my own Voice of Doom for a few more British zines (I currently receive HWGA, Greatest Hits, and Ode). The future for us all will indeed be bright if we establish unity and friendship across the Atlantic. Maybe someday us silly colonials will get you people to see the advantages of using winter/spring combinations rather than the infinitely more complex fall/winter!

Have I whetted your appetite for Diplomacy, American style? Then write me!

((A couple of points. * Tretick used to publish La Guerre, years ago, which folded after a long agonising death - even before the fold Tretick allegedly treat his games with a disgusting display of contempt. Now he has started La Guerre again, but under the name of "Bernie Oaklyn". A fine subject for trivial earth shattering hobby arguments. ** Are the Americans unaware of Stab and Ultra Stab? Silly people...))



Keith Thomason on Postal Games!

When I received the flyer for HWGA from Steve, there was a note at the bottom: "Any chance of an article on postal games as opposed to Diplomacy (attractions of etc.?)" I phoned him and said that it was unlikely that I would be able to find the time, as I'd just started on my own production schedule. However, I am now starting such an article, so maybe I will prove myself wrong.

Before I get involved with the subject of postal games itself, I would like to comment on the phrase "postal games as opposed to Diplomacy". I look on postal games as existing side by side with Diplomacy, not opposed to Diplomacy in any way. (I know you didn't mean it in that way, Steve, but there are some people who do, and it is a shame.) By the way, when I say "postal games" in this article I will be referring to non-Diplomacy games, mainly because there are millions who could write about Diplomacy better than myself, and this is meant to be a non-Diplomacy games article. So I'd better get back to the subject.

A question which you may ask is "Why play postal games?" The answer to that would probably be the same answer that most people would give to the question "Why play postal Diplomacy?" For my part, I enjoy playing all sorts of games, and the postal medium gives me the opportunity to indulge myself to a greater degree than I could otherwise do. Many games are changed when put into the postal medium - sequential play is often replaced by simultaneous movement, Rail Baron being an ideal example. When you play Rail Baron face-to-face, each player rolls the dice for his move, and the die rolls can vary greatly from one player to another. Postally, however, each player uses the same basic die rolls for each turn, and therefore you are not going to lose because you can't roll higher than five with two dice.

One other feature of playing by post appeals to me greatly, and that is the chance to study each move closely before committing yourself to your next move, without other players jogging your elbow and waiting for you to get on with it. The game in which I find this to be the greatest advantage is another railway game, 1829, which for me is the best postal game, no contest. The complexities and range of options in this game really merits lengthy study of the game board, and I never feel I can devote enough time to each move when playing face-to-face. This could apply to Diplomacy as well, and you can easily spend a couple of hours pushing armies and fleets around, trying to figure out your optimum moves.

However, one thing I get from playing postal games is variety - if I was playing in seven games of Diplomacy my moves would be similar in form, in each game. If, on the other hand, I was playing in seven other postal games, say one each of 1829, Rail Baron, Kingmaker, Conquistador, Sorcerer, Railway Rivals and En Garde!, my moves for the seven games would be totally different, much more interesting and rewarding to me. If I did well in all seven of my Diplomacy games I would feel that I was a good player (I cannot claim to be, unfortunately). If I did well in my seven other games, I would feel that I was a good player in seven different games. Maybe I should have included Diplomacy as one of the seven different games - I do not mean to suggest that Diplomacy moves are easy or boring.

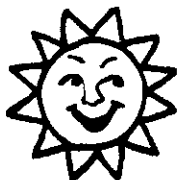
Some postal games are ridiculously simple and easy to play in, like Black Box, Mastermind and Hare & Tortoise. These games are quick to work out orders for, and can provide "light relief" when working out your orders for a deadline. Five minutes (unless you want to get really analytical about it, and you're playing two or three different games instead of just one game in a magazine. And you can get almost the same satisfaction from winning one of these games as you can from winning a bigger game - if you won you certainly did better than the other players!

Another side of postal games reveals goodies that you cannot buy from your local games shop, and if you could, you couldn't play them properly, if at all, because they have been designed for postal play. In this category fall Joust-a-Minute, which is more a game of submitting press releases than jousting; Conquest of Space, my own multi-player galactic game; Soccerleague; Cricketboss; and the best of them all, En Garde! All of these can be played with twenty or more players, which is a different scale to most games, apart from some Diplomacy variants.

The En Garde! campaigns being run by their dedicated GM's are so detailed that the character you control can take on a larger-than-life proportion. And this game does not have a set end-point - unless you give up, the GM packs it in or your character dies, you can play forever. And even if you should be unlucky, or stupid enough to lose your character, you can usually re-enter the game with a new one, so death is not quite so fatal in this game! One drawback to these games is that if the GM does stop, it is harder to find a substitute, but it has been done. If En Garde! sounds like D&D to those unfamiliar with it, it isn't except that you have a character to control. D&D by post is extremely difficult and time consuming, and in order to play you may have to give up most of your other hobbies and games. En Garde! can at least be run to regular deadlines, like the others mentioned above.

Postal games aren't everyone's cup of tea - what is? It is the variety in postal games that really keeps me interested, plus the chance to actually play some games - I have probably played in twice as many postal games of 1829 and Rail Baron as I've managed to get face-to-face.

If you like games in general, or are mad keen on one particular game, the chances are that someone somewhere is either running, or willing to run, the game or games that you would enjoy by post. And that means more games, more involvement, more fun. And that's what I'm after - fun.



THE RULES BANK

At the time of going to print, the following rules were available from the Rules Bank:

Hyperec III (27), Cline 9 (2), 1000 AD (4), Guerilla Warfare (1), Middle Earth VIII (2), Chaos III (1), Stratics (1), Republic (3), Lima 1b & 2b (5), Apposition (2), Beleriand (8), Sword & Sorcery (4), L'Ange et le Tigre (3), 1885 (3), Mobtown (3), Interstellar III (3), Barebones (1), Bourse (1), Intimate Diplomacy (1), Sacred Rhino (3), Abstraction II (5), Troubleshooter III (3), Pourquoi Pas? (3), Quest for the Runic Chip (6), Downfall (4), Lunatic II (2), Quantum Space Diplomacy (3), Hyborean Age II (2), Middle Earth Diplomacy V (3), Aberration IV (4), Plutocracy (1), Ultra Stab (1), Stab III (1), Multiplicity II (1), Vote (1), Geophysical II (2), Deluge (1), Post Atomic Dip. (1), English Civil War (4), 1700 Ad (5), Mercator (8), Third Age II (4), Atlantics (3), Rather Silly Dip (2), Dual Empire (4), Tunnel Dip (1), Ptolmaic Dip. (1), Canibalism (3), Shadow Worlds (1), Pacifist Dip (1), War of the Stars (4), Espionage (1), Sequential Dip. (1) plus others I can't find at the moment. I will try to track down any variant you want, if not listed above.

Games: Fleiades Cluster (6), Conquest of Space (8), Joust-a-minute (2), Sword & Shield (6), Hare & Tortoise (2), Sorcerer (4), En Garde! (12), Rail Baron (4), 1829 (4), Speculate (1), Company Chairman (2), Cosmic Encounter (2), Formula I (3), Eleusis (1), Kingmaker (4), Skirrid (2), Tri Chess (2), Black Box (2), Railway Rivals (6) and others.

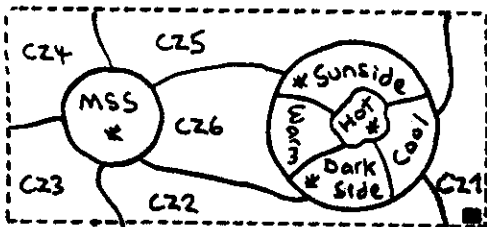
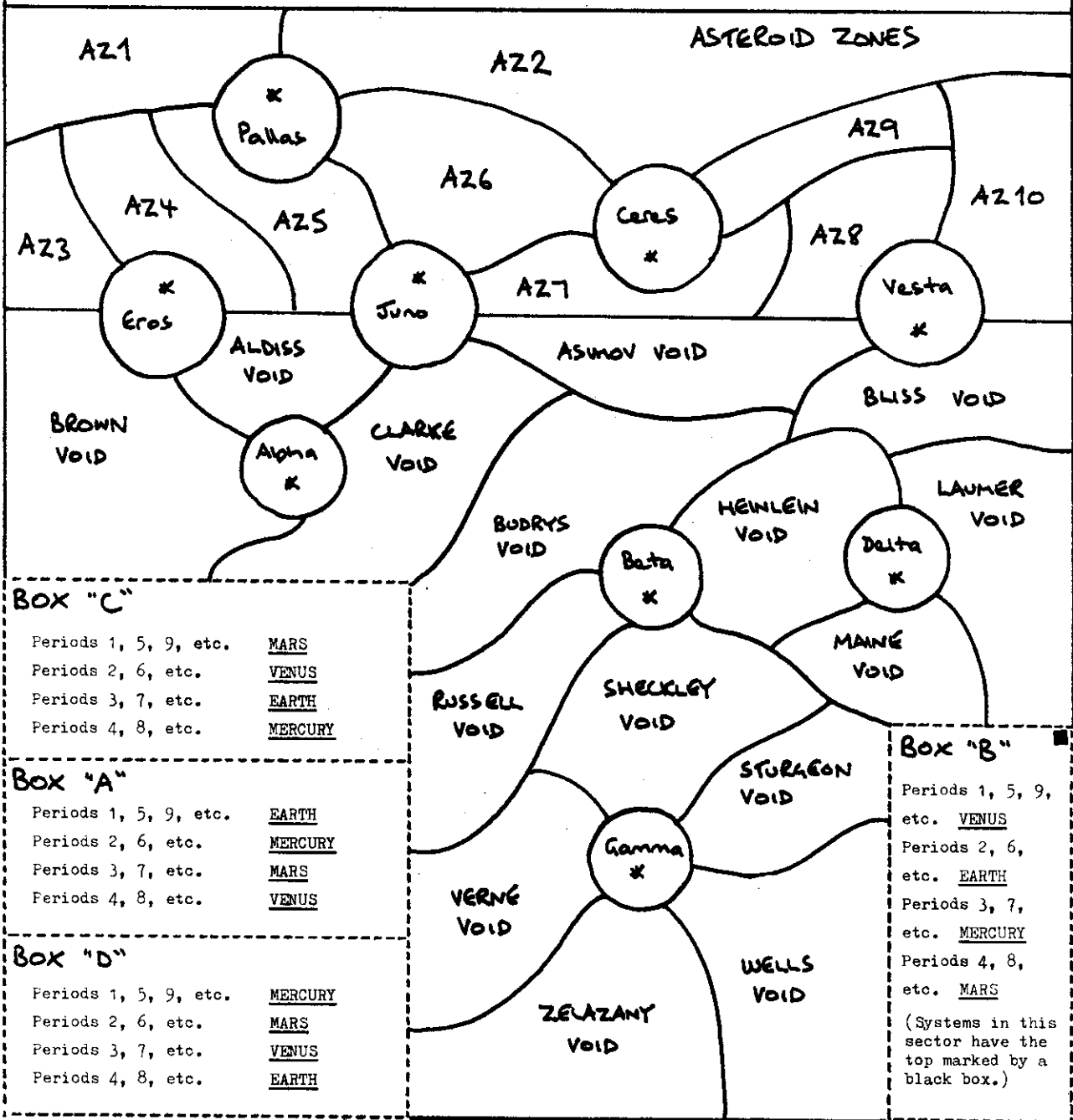
The number in brackets is the no. of pages I have to photocopy = 3p per side. So to receive any of the above, multiply the total no. of pages by 3, add a generous allowance for postage, and you'll have the amount you should send me. Please send cash in first class postage stamps (12p).

If you have any rules that I don't, please send me a copy. Thanks go to Steve Tringham and Don Brown for several of the above. Stocks will be considerably larger by next time. Honest.

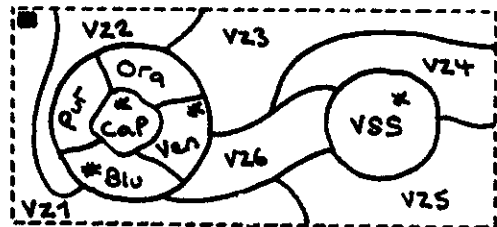
APPOSITION

A Diplomacy variant by
Paul Willey.

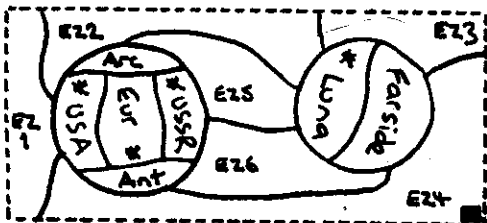
OUTER VOID ...



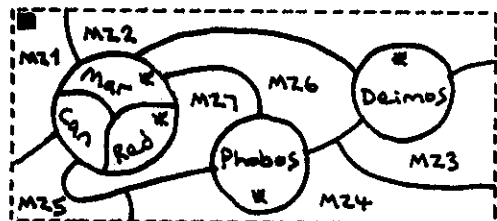
← MERCURY



→ VENUS



← EARTH

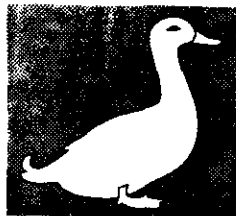


→ MARS

APPOSITION - A Diplomacy Variant by Paul Willey for five players.

Variant Rules:

1. All rules as per 1971 rulebook, except as below.
2. The map does not represent actual positions, but the relationships of the planets to each other. All units move as armies on planets, and as fleets in space.
3. Game periods do not represent specific units of time, but only periods for which the planets are in certain positions to each other. Appositions remain the same for two periods in succession, and adjustments follow the second of each pair. The first game period is Period 1 i, the second is Period 1 ii, the third Period 2 i, etc.
4. Units. There are no armies in this variant, only two types of fleets, ordinary fleets (F) and X-fleets (X). X-fleets have $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the combat strength of an ordinary fleet.
5. Starting positions. The planets begin in the sectors marked on the map - Box A = Earth, Box B = Venus, Box C = Mars, and Box D = Mercury. At the beginning of 2 i, they each move in alphabetical rotation. Earth begins with fleets in US USA, Europe (Eur) and USSR. Venus has fleets in Capital (Cap), Blue Dessert (Blu), and Venusport (Ven). Mars has fleets in Marsport (Mar), Red Dessert (Red) and one on Phobos. Mercury begins with fleets in Sunside (Sun), Darkside (Dar), and Hotspot (Hot). In addition to the four planets, there is a fifth player representing Xenophobes which is in the process of invading the solar system. This player starts the game with two X-fleets in the Outer Void.
6. Builds. All Xenophobe builds are of X-fleets, and may be on Pallas and Ceres only, once these asteroids have been occupied in a build (ii) season. From Period 2 i, they may only have as many units as they have supply centres. The other Powers may not build X-fleets until they have occupied a supply centre formerly controlled by a Power with the capacity to build X-fleets. This occupation may be in a i or a ii period, when they may be refitted as X-fleets.
7. Certain areas on the board. Only X-fleets may enter the asteroid zones. For this purpose, Eros, Juno and Vesta are not regarded as part of the asteroid belt. Any unit other than one of Mercury's remaining in Sunside for more than two consecutive moves will be annihilated. Any number of units may be in the Outer Void in the same time, it being impossible to attack units in the Outer Void either from an adjacent area or from within.
8. Identities. At the outset of the game, the Xenophobe player will not be given the identities of the other players, and vice versa. Diplomacy with the Xenophobes must therefore be by open-band radio (press). If the Xenophobe player learns the identity of any other player or vice versa, invention of a closed communications device will be deemed to have taken place, and they may then conduct diplomacy as normal. The GM is not permitted to publish any information which he knows will give away anybody's identity.
9. Victory and Defeat. If at any time the Xenophobes lose control of all of the five asteroids they are eliminated, any remaining units going into anarchy. A single victory criterion is 14 units on the board. No draw including the Xenophobes is legal, though any other combination of ties is permitted by player vote.



DISORIENTEERING - An Orienteering Variant by Jeremy Maiden.

1. All rules of regular Orienteering as set out by the relevant body sometimes apply with the following modifications.
2. The competition is moved from the countryside to an urban setting. Instead of those boring check stations that you normally have to search for, the targets are a series of public houses.
3. Instead of getting a rather boring set of holes stamped on your card and then running on to the next check point, you consume one pint of the local brew and collect a beer mat as proof of visiting the place. A gentleman does not cheat on the drink.
4. Instead of the rather exciting race finish of the Regular game, the stewards wait until the end of the time allotted for the contest and then set out along the course to locate the competitors. The one who went the furthest in the right direction is the winner. The others are probably in an even worse state than he is and receive the same care and attention.

DIPLOMACY SANS DIPLOMACY!

Over the last four years I have been directly involved with over 40 Diplomacy games, as both a player and a GM, and recently I have come to the conclusion that Diplomacy just isn't what it was - the standard of play is falling dramatically! Once upon a time a Diplomacy game involved communicating with most, if not all, of the other players in the game, at least once per season. Now Diplomacy games are merely a collection of unrelated moves, a skeleton of their former selves, a game of guesswork! The player who puts in substantial effort has turned from being the norm, to a rare animal indeed, while the silent player who makes the absolute minimum of effort (if that), with the possible exception (but only possible, mind you) of sending in some orders occasionally, has become the dominating force.

I can't pretend that I am a saint when it comes to this sort of thing - indeed, I am probably one of the biggest offenders on that score - but then again it's always been that way with your average zine editor. What worries me are the players who only indulge in a handful of games and still make no effort. I honestly believe that some people enter into games far too lightly, knowing that they don't have any inclination to play the game correctly. A shift of emphasis from games to chat in our zines has resulted in players buying a zine for the reading material and playing games because they're there, rather than the converse. Hence a casual look through today's zines show significantly more NMRs in chat zines as opposed to purist zines - if necessary I could prove this. Of course people can send orders in like clockwork and still not be participating in the game to the full.

There's nothing wrong with not answering a letter, with leaving everything to last minute telephone calls or even the occasional NMR. They have not yet been made criminal offences. However, these traits do highlight a certain lack of responsibility on the part of some players that places them well into the unreliable category. That this hobby is populated by unreliable, irresponsible players like myself, I find beyond doubt.

The effect that silent players can have on a novice is striking. It's very easy to lose interest in a game if you are given the impression that no one else cares. In my opinion my first game, an all-novice affair, was my best because everyone was enthusiastic. Novices can, and usually do, have more enthusiasm than the most ancient of old-timers. We need a novice-only CGS system if we are to keep those newcomers who might otherwise leave us through disillusionment.

But you didn't think that this would end with a plug for the CGS, did you? If you want to go on to the CGS list, write to me and say so. You don't have to be a novice really, merely enthusiastic...

TAKE YOUR PICK

BY DON BROWN

What exactly is the best way of playing Diplomacy? Not the strategy side of the game, but the actual mechanical way in which it is played? Well, since you are reading this, there is a fair chance that you will have played Diplomacy by post, probably in one or more of the numerous fanzines that are around. Thus, you may say that the best way of playing Diplomacy is through the post with monthly deadlines. But is this so? Is this really the best way of playing the game, or are there better methods?

Well, for a start, this article will be a purely personal opinion; I prefer to play Diplomacy in a way that is rather different from the norm. We all enjoy different ways of playing the game, probably this is based to some extent on the success of our diplomatic negotiations in different situations. I, myself, prefer to diplomate by phone, as I feel that I can make a better impression on my opponent that way, and it enables me to gauge the success that my verbal play has had on him. I am less successful when I have to write letters (and they do take so much time!), and I just can't seem to keep a straight face when I play face-to-face!

Anyway, let's take a look at some of the different versions of the game that are around; I'll list them in what I think is a commonsense order, but please feel free to disagree.

Firstly there is straight face-to-face Diplomacy. This takes place over a very long afternoon and evening session, and can be very strenuous, or boring, depending on whether you're winning or have been eliminated in A02. If you can remain awake and you are very persuasive in the flesh then this could be the game for you. If, like me, you are prone to attacks of the giggles just when you are trying to put over some masterplan, then you may find that your country is often eliminated very quickly! This game gives a relatively unobtrusive battle, usually with no time for tactical coups, but there is some scope for bluff. I can remember the Polycon Diplomacy Final when Ian Doherty and myself had arranged for his country to stab my own so that we could lure another country from its defensive position. The 'stab' went through as planned, and everyone was fooled by my playacting when I muttered under my breath just what I thought of Ian Doherty Esq!

Rarely will there be time for a full game (ie first to 18 centres), so often the game will be spread over two or three afternoons or else terminated prematurely. The latter gives an incredibly false game and is not to be recommended at all. If playing to a time limit (eg. 9 'clock or Autumn 1906), then the negotiations deteriorate in the final stages to a mere mockery; just a case of "Will you let me take those supply centres of yours, because you are in no position to win and you would much prefer to see me win that Chris, wouldn't you?"

The next thing you could do is to expand the 'three afternoons game' into a game with deadlines every couple of days apart. The same restrictions apply as for the straight face-to-face game (ie you must be able to keep a straight face), but as the game continues at a nice steady pace, it is easy, and worthwhile, to play to the game's natural conclusion (ie 18 centres). This game, however, requires that all the people are readily in contact with each other, and so is best suited to groups of people living in the same area. The games I have played in this manner have all been played at work, though I understand that this form of game is fairly popular in some schools. Deadlines can be set so that you play one game year per week, allowing plenty of time for negotiations (but be careful that it doesn't interfere with your work - and don't stab your boss!). In this game also, there was the possibility of eavesdropping, and of leaving the imprint of false orders on a notepad by the Diplomacy board for the other players to find (though this was quickly learnt by all the players, and thus became of little use). This type of game allows better diplomatic and tactical struggles to develop and, despite my unfortunate habit of laughing at the wrong moment, it is definitely one of my favourites.

There is one step between a face-to-face game and a postal game, namely a telephone game with, say, weekly deadlines. This mode of play has yet to catch on in Britain, although it has been used frequently in the U.S. Face-to-face play does not really need a GM, but once you move onto phone and postal play a GM is essential. If you can get together seven local (in the sense of local phone calls) players plus a GM, then it would be possible to negotiate by telephone through the week and phone your orders in every Friday. The GM could then adjudicate the moves, with all the players phoning back to find out the results of their manoeuvres.

A telephone game, you come to the first sort of postal game, using one week deadlines (as per Armageddon Diplomacy Club, run by Stephen Doidge), thus turning the postal game into one where the phone is essential. Little scope for forgery, but impersonations could be quite common at the beginning of the game. A game report could then be sent to the players, rather than a friendly phone call, as long as a quick turnaround was maintained. An average game would last 4-6 months, and the regular deadlines would give little excuse for failing to send your orders in. This, undoubtedly, would give a very good game, if run efficiently, but I have yet to try it.

We now come to the true postal game, usually run in a fanzine which allows the use of pressreleases if you are that way inclined. Many different zines exist, so you are bound to find one that suits your interests for additional reading material. Most now run to four or five week deadlines, though three week deadlines used to be quite common in purist zines a few years back. The possibility of complex forgeries, bluffs and impersonations makes this a very interesting game, if you are prepared to put a decent amount of work into it. The telephone is again useful, usually for last minute negotiations and changes of orders. One major limitation as to how you play Diplomacy is the availability of players - it may be difficult, if not impossible to get seven players together (especially if you live in a remote area), whereas postally there is usually no trouble in finding opponents.

As far as variants go, they are played mainly by post, for several reasons. Firstly they may be sufficiently complex or unrefined so as to require an impartial GM, who would be quite hard to find for a face-to-face game. The GM will be there to give decisions on the interpretations of the rules and to referee any duels if there is a serious dispute between two players ("Choose your weapons - dictionaries or thesauri?").

Some variants, however, are very enjoyable when played face-to-face; Intimate Diplomacy and Abstraction are two that I have played myself (Intimate Diplomacy, despite being for just two players, is an excellent face-to-face game and one in which, believe it or not, there is scope for bluff!). One other reason why variants aren't played face-to-face is that very few players have actually heard of variants unless they have entered the postal hobby! There may be local variations to the way the game is played (such as having Ireland and Iceland in the game), but I have never heard of a pure ftf variant (unless Youngstown is one such - Steve?).

So there it is. Probably not a complete listing, but then I did choose to leave out such fun games as Semaphore Diplomacy, Jungle Drum Diplomacy, Space-Age Diplomacy - "Hello? This is Houston. Would you care to support me into Belgium? Beep!" and the like.

[Youngstown is a ten player variant which adds China, Japan and India to the regular board. It was designed by Rod Walker and playtested by the Youngstown Diplomacy Club after which it was named.]

AN UNASHAMED SPACEFILLER is really NoCon II, no I tell a lie, NoCon II. This one's at Northolt Community Centre, Church Road, Northolt, over the weekend of 6th-8th June, from 4.30 Friday to 10.00 pm on Sunday. Cost is a basic £1, plus a further £1.50 a night (including breakfast). Contact Graham Box for details, address back page.

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Mr. Gladgrind: In issue 34 of MrG John Miller has called it a day. Claire and I went through to Durham about five weeks ago and John was already contemplating folding then. University life has taken a hefty toll of zines in its time, people such as Mearns are in the minority. John intends to continue with a games-only MrG until all games have been rehoused. John and I have had a friendly rivalry between our two zines (MrG & Pigmy) for over two years as we both took the plunge into publishing around the same time, perhaps it is fitting that both zines should die almost together. I have no doubt that John will not be dropping out of the hobby, he has simply gone into retirement along with all other devotees of the hardcore - a term which is still relevant today with respect to the likes of Tringham, Calcraft etc.

To Organise or not to Organise; that is the question: It has now been resolved that Paul Simpkins will be running a P.O. box for the postal hobby, linked to a flyer in the Dip. box, plus Paul is resolved to sort out the G&P advertisement (which G&P may have already sorted out themselves by folding). He hopes to have something worked out by April if Philmar's co-operation can be quickly secured. James O'Fee is negotiating with Philmar over the flyers, while I aim to participate in the drawing up of an introductory leaflet and by supplying up-to-date novice packages. If I can I'll try and get down to Dewsbury for a couple of days to sort things out with Paul in person.

Fete Mearns: Usually Fete is famed for his relative anonymity, but in Puppet Theatre News 65 he makes a rare entry into the world of politics. In a nutshell Pete says that spending X billions of pounds on defence actually saves lives, for "the better our deterrent the less the chance will be that the Soviets will attack us." I disagree. In my opinion, the only power capable of substantial resistance to Soviet aggression is the USA. If you increase Britain's defence capability, especially by allowing numerous USAF bases with a nuclear strike potential, then you will only be increasing the likelihood of a Soviet attack because a) Russia will need to increase its defence because of the extra threat we will pose to them, and b) in the event of war we will become a major target, instead of an inconsequential minor power (which we really are). NO to defence spending if it means cuts elsewhere.

Greatest Hits: I can't help the feeling that GH is becoming a parody of itself. The letters are becoming increasingly sterile - a debate between Birks and Palfrey on the nature of SF and Historical Fiction is so absolutely irrelevant and vacuous that it has to be read to be believed. The vitality that won GH the Zine Poll last year seems to have completely evaporated - Pete bashes out GH to the same old formula, but unfortunately the formula is becoming a little too old. It is time GH was given a new, badly needed, lease of life.

Enigma: Must have folded by now. John Herlihy has managed three part issues since last September, the last deadline being six weeks ago. Any editors looking for games can take this as a request to rehouse E1, in which I am playing. John Herlihy has been messing his players about for long enough. By the way, for anyone who didn't know, Herlihy announced a semi-fold last issue, saying that future issues would go to his twenty or so active players only. I'm still waiting.

The Orient Express, Necromancer & Tantalus: All zines that are long overdue. Dave Parry hasn't much of an excuse as he was alive in kicking in early February when he rang me up to ask for the Pigmy variants, while Don Brown has spent his time getting drunk and sending me copies of his variant collection rather than producing Tantalus. In one letter I received the author said that I was heading in the same direction as Don by demanding outside contributions, but then added as an afterthought, "On second thoughts, a two month deadline is approx. twice as fast as Tantalus, so you may be headed in a different direction." Don take note! Steve Plater hasn't produced TOE for ages, but as he lives in Japan information is a little hard to come by.

Letters: The one thing this issue is totally lacking in is letters - I want to include an active lettercol in HWCA (well, as active as any lettercol can be if it's only printed every other month). If you have interesting opinions about practically anything, not just the contents of this issue, or even postal games, then feel free to put your thoughts down on paper. Any contributions will be very gratefully received.

Acknowledgements:

Mark Berch, 492 Naylor Place, Alexandria, VA 22304, United States of America. Editor of Diplomacy Digest.
Paul Willey, 77 Runnymede, Colliers Wood, London. Ex-Editor of Eclipsor.
Chris Tringham, 25 Auckland Road, London, SE19 2DR. Editor of Megalomania.
Brian Creese, 52a Deacon Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 6LU. Co-Editor of NMR!
Nick Shears, 1 Beechwood Court, West Street Lane, Carshalton, Surrey, SM5 2PZ. Editor of Down Alien Skies.
Richard Hucknall, 124 Southcliffe Road, Carlton, Nottingham, NG4 1ES. Editor of Fall of Eagles.
Andy Tringham, 25 Auckland Road, London, SE19 2DR.
Don Brown, 61a Church Street, Old Basford, Nottingham, NG6 OGA. Editor of Tantalus.
Keith Thomasson, 16 High Worples, Rayners Lane, Harrow, Middlesex, HA2 9SU. Editor of Griffin.
Alan Watson, 38 Hummersknott Avenue, Darlington, Co. Durham. Editor of Punt & Pass.
Bruce Lindsay 71 Hudson Terrace Apts., Newburgh, NY 12550, United States of America. Editor of The Voice of Doom.

Zine Bank: This now resides with Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Hertfordshire. Tel. 044-282-4173. If you send Alan 50p he will return the compliment with a selection of zines from his stocks.

Compedium: Compedium is a zine which lists all currently available postal zines and postal services, and it is available from John Hopkins, 35 Onslow Gardens, Saundrestead, Surrey, CR2 9AF - price 25p per issue. Issue 1 was rather out of date, but I will write to John outlining all his errors.

Rules Bank: This has been adopted by myself, list of current stocks inside.

Central Gamestart Service: This is really defunct for the moment, until a novice introduction programme gets underway, but when that magical time comes I hope to run it myself. Obviously it is desirable to put seven novices together, but in the interests of speed, players will be farmed out to zines if it looks as though wait could be a long one.

Games Openings: If you have a fervent desire to play a particular game or Dip. variant, but can't seem to find a zine to cater for your whim, then write to me (enclosing a s.a.e.) and I will tell you which U.K./Foreign zines have lists open, or, failing that, tell you which GM would be the most likely to cater to your needs.



This back page is dated 17th March, 1980. An updated back page will be produced in about 5 weeks time to ensure that this zine, in its capacity as a novice package is up to date. Backpage mark II will include a listing of all current zines.