

BOOK II:

GAMESMASTERING

CHAPTER 11

FUNDAMENTALS OF GMING

Adjudicating Postal Diplomacy Games

by Doug Beyerlein
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INTRODUCTION

Gamesmastering a postal Diplomacy game requires seven players and a thorough knowledge of the rules of the game. But to be a good gamesmaster requires much more. A good gamesmaster must be impartial in dealings with the players, timely in reporting each season's results, and accurate in adjudicating the players' orders. Many a gamesmaster has ruined a game for the players by failing in one of these three important areas, and there is no doubt that inaccurate and confusing adjudications lead the list in this respect.

The purpose of this chapter on postal Diplomacy adjudication procedures is to present and discuss how adjudication problems can be minimized and each season's results presented in a clear, concise style. This results in less potential confusion for the players in complex situations and more enjoyment of the game by both the players and the gamesmaster. Understanding and use of these procedures require some organization and time on the gamesmaster's part. But compared to the potential problems that can result from doing things the wrong way, doing things the right way is much easier in the long run.

ACCURACY AND THE USE OF REDUNDACY

No gamesmaster is perfect. Adjudication errors will occur. But the goal of every good gamesmaster is to minimize the frequency and magnitude of adjudication errors. The best way to do this is to be as redundant as necessary in all phases of the adjudication process. Specifically, this means going step-by-step through all parts of the adjudication process in detail and in duplicate where necessary. Examples of where redundancy should be used are presented in each step of the adjudication process described below. The use of redundancy will require the gamesmaster to take extra time in adjudicating each game. My rule of thumb for adjudicating a regular postal Diplomacy game is 30 minutes per game season. Gamesmasters who do not feel that they can allocate that much time to each game that they are gamesmastering are running too many games.

The adjudication process is described in detail below. Basically, the major components are:

1. filing of orders prior to adjudication
2. recording orders
3. resolving combat on the board
4. reporting results

Let's look at each component.

FILING ORDERS

Prior to each season's deadline the gamesmaster receives orders from the players. Keeping track of each player's set of orders is vital to the proper conduct of the game. Nothing will cause greater player dissatisfaction than seeing the season's results with the 'No Moves Received' notation next to the player's name because the gamesmaster lost the player's orders. The best and easiest way for the gamesmaster to prevent this problem from occurring is to immediately file each set of orders as they are received from the players. This doesn't mean throwing the orders into the incoming mail pile; it means separating them from non-game mail and putting them in a place where they can be found later. This will not only make it easier to find all of the orders when the deadline arrives, but by keeping the orders on hand for a minimum of one game year after the deadline disputes can be resolved if the player remembers submitting one set of orders when the gamesmaster reports something different.

There are two filing systems that I have used. For a number of years I used a manual filing system that consisted of a file folder. Today I use a computer filing system. Both work -- if they are used. Lets look at each.

The manual filing system can be anything in which the orders are placed as they are received. A standard office file folder works fine. Each day's mail is sorted and all game-related correspondence and orders are separated, read, and then placed in the file. It is important to read all correspondence and orders as they arrive in case there is any confusion, questions, or comments from the players that need to be immediately resolved. A reply to the request for another copy of last season's results lost in the mail, if handled immediately, can prevent a delay in the game. Likewise can a correction to a prevently unnoticed adjudication error. Then when the deadline arrives the orders are all available in one location where the gamesmaster can find them.

A computer filing system works in the same manner as a manual file. My particular system is set up on an Osborne computer and uses WordStar word processing software, but any word processing or data base system can be used. The key to using any computer filing system (or any system, for that matter) is putting in the information (orders) as they are received. After publishing a previous season's results I set up a new file for the coming season. This file contains all of the unit positions for each country as of the end of the previous season and looks as follows.

1977AM -- Spring 1921

ENGLAND (Dave Pengelly) a lva, a stp, a sil, a war, a lon, f pru, f nwy,
f nth, f gbot, f mid.
FRANCE (Tom Butcher) a kie, a pie, a par, f tyrr, f adr, f wmed.
RUSSIA (Horst John) a bul, a mos, a rom, a ven, a boh, a mun, a gre,
a tyr, a gal, a ser, a ukr, a sev, f tun, f nap,
f ion.
TURKEY (Fred Winter) f por.

I am now ready to record the orders as they are received from the players.

RECORDING ORDERS

Immediately upon receipt of each set of orders each individual order is entered into the above computer file. This minimizes the chance of misplacing orders prior to the actual adjudication. The game situation is updated with the orders using the word processing system. When all of the orders are received before the deadline the file looks like:

' 1977AM -- Spring 1921

ENGLAND (Dave Pengelly) a lva s a war-mos, a stp s a war-mos,
 a sil-mun, a war-mos, a lon-bel, f pru-bal, f nwy-nwg,
 f nth c a lon-bel, f gbot-swe, f mid h.
 FRANCE (Tom Butcher) a kie-mun, a pie-ven, a par-bur, f tyrr-tun,
 f adr-ion, f wmed s f tyrr-tun.
 RUSSIA (Horst John) a bul-ser, a mos s a ukr-war, a rom-ven,
 a ven s a ser-tri, a boh s a mun-sil, a mun-sil, a gre-alb,
 a tyr-mun, a gal s a ukr-war, a ser-tri, a ukr-war,
 a sev s a mos, f tun-tyrr, f nap s f tun-tyrr, f ion-tun.
 TURKEY (Fred Winter) f por h.

All of the orders are now available for the adjudication as soon as the deadline for orders arrives.

The advantages to using a computer system like this are (1) most of the typing of the game orders is done in advance of the deadline, and (2) the units' positions are taken from the last season's results rather than from the orders submitted by the players. Typing the orders in advance saves time once the deadline is passed and helps produce quick turn around in sending out the game results. And using the last season's results as the starting positions for the coming season's orders helps to minimize errors that can result from a player sending in orders based on incorrect unit positions or accidentally changing an army into a fleet or vice versa. Players can make mistakes just as easily as the gamesmaster.

A manual filing system is not as sophisticated as a computer system. The game orders cannot be typed in advance of the adjudication without later revision. However, the coming season's starting positions can be listed on a sheet of paper in advance. As orders are received they are added to the list. The list is then used to resolve combat on the board.

RESOLVING COMBAT

All of the previous work in organizing a file and recording orders as they are received is to minimize the opportunities for gamesmaster error prior to the actual game adjudication. When the deadline arrives everything is available for immediate adjudication of the season's results. There are three steps in resolving combat on the board:

1. setting up the board situation
2. adjudicating the units' orders
3. checking the adjudication

Setting up the board situation. I have known gamesmasters who brag that they don't own a Diplomacy game set and adjudicate orders from a conference map and others who adjudicate orders while sitting at the typewriter reporting the results. These gamesmasters are going to make errors. To consistently adjudicate accurately the game board must be used. The units should be placed in their positions prior to the coming season's movement. This is done based on the listing of the units in the file. The number of units for each country should be counted to make sure that no unit has been accidentally left off the board. This can happen when a player forgets to order all of the country's units or implicitly orders some units to hold by not explicitly ordering them. When all of the units are on the board the orders can be adjudicated.

Adjudicating the units' orders. I use the Boardman adjudication system to determine if each individual unit's order succeeds or fails. First, each unit's order is read and the appropriate indication of the unit's movement or

support (or convoy or hold) is made on the board. I have a wooden block set and I place units which are moving on their side pointing at the province to which they are moving. Units supporting or hold are placed upright. Convoys are indicated by placing the army on the fleet pointed at the province to which the army is ordered. The particular method by which one indicates movement on the board is not important; what is important, however, is that the orders of the units on the board are clearly visible and understandable to the gamesmaster.

Once the units have been physically moved on the board to indicate the season's orders then the actual adjudication can begin. In addition to using the board I use a printout of the computer file containing the orders (an adjudication sheet) and two marking pens: one red, the other blue. To indicate whether the unit's order succeeds or fails I underline each order (blue if it succeeds; red if it fails). Any two colors can be used, but it is important to use two colors so that each order is underlined rather than just one that fails. The reason for underlining orders which succeed is to force the gamesmaster to actually look at every unit on the board rather than look at only orders which fail (a common gamesmaster failing (pun intended)). It is easy to miss a failed order simply because it is away from the main action on the board or it is at the end of a chain reaction of standoffs. By underlining in blue ink orders which succeed the gamesmaster is certain that each unit's order has been reviewed. And the red underlined failed orders stand out on the adjudication sheet. This use of two colors is redundant, but it is very effective in eliminating adjudication errors.

Checking the adjudication. Once all of the orders have been reviewed and marked on the adjudication sheet (computer printout or manual listing) the adjudication should be checked for accuracy. This is done by reading through the adjudication sheet order by order and physically moving the units on the board which succeed in moving to another province and setting the units back upright that tried to move but failed. Where a unit is dislodged and forced to retreat it is placed on top of the unit that dislodged it. On the adjudication sheet the open provinces to which the unit can retreat should be listed. If the dislodged unit is annihilated then the appropriate notation (I use '/a/' to indicate annihilation) should be made so that this also can be included in the reported results. Any other special notations (/nso/ = not so ordered, /nsu/ = no such unit, /imp/ = impossible, etc.) should also be made at this time. If it is a fall season then the units' positions on the board can be used to determine supply center ownership. A completed adjudication looks as follows.

1977AM -- Spring 1921

ENGLAND (Dave Pengelly) a lva s a war-mos, a stp s a war-mos, a sil-mun /r-ber,pru,otb/, a war-mos, a lon-bel, f pru-bal, f nwy-nwg, f nth c a lon-bel, f gbot-swe, f mid h.

FRANCE (Tom Butcher) a kie-mun, a pie-ven, a par-bur, f tyrr-tun, f adr-ion, f wmed s f tyrr-tun.

RUSSIA (Horst John) a bul-ser, a mos s a ukr-war /r-ukr,otb/, a rom-ven, a ven s a ser-tri, a boh s a mun-sil, a mun-sil, a gre-alb, a tyr-mun, a gal s a ukr-war, a ser-tri, a ukr-war, a sev s a mos, f tun-tyrr, f nap s f tun-tyrr, f ion-tun.

TURKEY (Fred Winter) f por h.

Note that for this example that I have only underlined failed orders rather than try to show how the adjudication sheet will look with blue underlining when an order succeeds or red underlining when it fails. Such are the limitations of black and white reproduction.

Now that the adjudication has been checked the season's results are ready to be reported to the players.

REPORTING RESULTS

The players only see the season's results when they are made public by the gamesmaster. A poor adjudication will be reflected in the season's results report. Unfortunately, a good adjudication will not necessarily be obvious to the players if the gamesmaster reports the results in a confusing or complicated format. Simplicity and clarity are the keys to a good season's results report.

When John Boardman invented postal Diplomacy in 1963 he needed a notation system to tell the players what happened each season. He came up with the idea of underlining failed orders in the results report. Since then other gamesmasters have invented other systems, but Boardman's idea of underlining failed orders is still used by a majority of gamesmasters. It is the system that I use and recommend. (One side note: Underlining is not possible when results are reported on electronic mail systems (CompuServe, The Source, etc.) and the alternative system of surrounding the failed order with asterisks or brackets is used instead. For example: *f ion-tun*.)

Note that there are a number of other notation systems that are used for indicating which orders succeed and which fail. Perhaps the best known is the ROHAN system (named after a zine of that name which first used this system in the early '70s). Orders are reported in the format of F ION-tun, where the capitalized province name is used for where the unit is at the end of the season. For the example above (F ION-tun) the move to Tunis failed. If the move would have succeeded then it would be printed as F ion-TUN. I don't particularly care for this style of reporting results, but I admit that it is purely a matter of preference. For more information on this and other notation systems I recommend that you contact a gamesmaster using the particular system that interests you.

The specific unit abbreviations that I use conform to the idea of using the first three letters of the province name, except when the first three letters may be ambiguous (for example, Nor can be either Norway, North Sea, or Norwegian Sea). In the ambiguous cases I use the abbreviations with which I am most comfortable. Typically these are the abbreviations in general use when I first started postal play in the late '60s (examples: Nwy = Norway, Nth = North Sea, Nwg = Norwegian Sea). It is not important exactly what abbreviation is used for an ambiguous case as long as it is obvious to the players what the abbreviation stands for.

In the early '70s Conrad von Metzke used a notation system for reporting orders which used all lower case letters (a mos-war) rather than a combination of upper and lower case (A Mos-War). Conrad was (and is) a two finger typist and anything that would increase his typing speed was worth a try. Using only lower case letters is faster and easier than typing both lower and upper case and does not decrease clarity of the results report. I type slightly faster than Conrad and use a few more fingers, but I still like and use his lower case notation.

Each unit is individually listed in the results report. There are times when this may be redundant when two or more units are jointly involved in an attack or supporting a unit holding. However, the added clarity of listing each unit's order separately is well worth the redundancy and the extra space required. When units are jointly listed (for example: a war-mos s by a lva & a stp, or a ber ms a mun) there is a tendency for less experienced players to copy this style of notation when submitting their orders to the gamesmaster. This is a bad habit for a player to get into as some gamesmasters will not allow orders to be submitted this way even if they then use this style of notation to print the results. In addition, it is difficult for the gamesmaster to quickly count all of the individual units listed in the results report when some are grouped together. Units can then be lost by the gamesmaster when typing up the results.

The specification of possible retreat options is necessary when a unit is dislodged. Retreats take place after the season in which the dislodgement occurs and it is important that both the gamesmaster and the players know what retreat options are available to the dislodged unit. The gamesmaster must know the retreat options so that the players can be told what provinces are open for the retreat and so that once the player of the dislodged unit orders a particular retreat it can be checked by the gamesmaster to make sure the retreat is legal. The other players must know what the retreat possibilities are so that, if necessary, they can make conditional orders for the coming season based on the retreat decision.

I use two methods of specifying retreat options. This is redundant, but I want to make sure that it is clear to all of the players just what all of the retreat possibilities are. For example, the Spring 1921 adjudication for 1977AM above shows the following order for English A Silesia: a sil-mun /r-ber,pru,otb/. A Silesia failed to move to Munich and was dislodged from Silesia. The retreat options are Berlin, Prussia, or off the board. Remember: it is always possible to retreat a unit off the board and this option should be included with the other retreat possibilities. In addition to specifying the retreat options with the orders I repeat them in the summary information section of the report which follows the listing of the order results. For the English A Silesia mentioned above I write, "English A Silesia is dislodged and must retreat to Berlin, Prussia, or off the board." Thus, if any player misses the retreat listing with the orders it will be seen in the summary.

Retreats for the past season should be specifically noted prior to the report of the order results for the current season. I do this by listing all retreats ordered from the previous season at the top of the current season's results report. Thus, if the English player orders A Silesia to retreat to Berlin, then with the Fall 1921 results this retreat and any other are listed at the top of the report. The same format is used for reporting the results of draw and concession votes proposed in the previous season.

Another important part of reporting the season results is the supply center ownership listing presented at the conclusion of the fall season's report. This is an easy area in which errors can be made. The most common error is not listing a supply center. This usually results from the gamesmaster not listing each individual supply center owned by each country or not counting all of the centers listed to check that the total equals 34.

Without a doubt the worst way to report supply center ownership is to list only the changes from the previous season and only whether a country has builds or removals. More than one gamesmaster has used this system (or, more appropriately, non-system) of keeping track of who owns what. Not only will errors be made, but players will become confused as to what centers their opponents own and new players entering the game (or stand-bys submitting orders) will have absolutely no idea of what centers they or anyone else owns on the board.

Another mistake that gamesmasters can make is using the designation 'home' to represent the home supply centers that each country owns at the start of the game. This use of 'home' can lead to two problems. The first is that it is visually difficult to count the number of supply centers listed for each country at the end of a fall season. This can lead to an error by the gamesmaster in knowing just how many centers are owned by each country. The second problem is that centers can accidentally be assigned to two countries. This happens when, for example, England is listed as owning 'home,nwy,swe' and France has 'home,bel,lon.' Because one does not see 'lon' repeated twice it is not immediately obvious that both England and France are being credited with the ownership of London. Explicitly listing the name abbreviation of each supply center owned minimizes the likelihood of this error going undetected by the gamesmaster.

The format that I use to list supply center ownership (shown below) is borrowed from Conrad von Metzke. It gives both the number of centers owned by each country and a list showing each individual center. Other gamesmasters have invented similar listings. I like Conrad's best because it lists the number of centers owned by each country immediately after the country name rather than after the list of centers. That may be a small difference, but it helps to make explicitly clear the number of centers owned by each country.

For Fall 1921 in 1977AM the supply center listing looks like:

E: 10 ctrs - lon,lvp,edi,hol,den,swe,nwy,stp,ber,mos constant
 F: 7 ctrs - par,mar,bre,spa,bel,kie,mun build one
 R: 16 ctrs - sev,rum,vie,tri,bul,say,con,ank,ven,rom,tun,bud,ser,gre,
 nap,war build one
 T: 1 ctr - por constant

One can quickly count the number of centers owned by each country. And the total number of centers obviously equals 34 (10+7+16+1). After the listing of centers for a country the winter adjustments (builds, removals, or constant) are provided. In this case, England is constant (does not build or remove); France builds one unit, as does Russia; Turkey is constant. It should be noted that the number of builds and removals is not necessarily equal. In the above case Russia was two units short at the end of 1920 and then lost a center to France in 1921.

In this above example there are no neutral supply centers left on the board. However, in the first few years of most games there are often neutral centers that have not yet been occupied by one of the seven major powers. These neutral centers should also be included in the supply center listing. Doing so helps the gamesmaster keep track of them until they become part of the holdings of a major country and makes it possible to use the listing to see that the total center count equals 34. I list neutrals in the following way:

N: 2 ctrs - swe,bel

One last comment on the listing of supply centers. Some gamesmasters use various notations (underlining, lower case letters, slashes through the letters) to designate supply centers lost in the previous game year. Some also use different notations (underlining or upper case letters) for centers gained. This additional information on which centers changed hands in the previous year is interesting, but also can be somewhat confusing. When lost centers are listed the number of centers owned is no longer obvious and some notations are ambiguous to players and other readers not familiar with that particular notation (this is especially true for the notation of underlining centers lost or gained). For this reason I do not include this additional, but nonessential information.

The last part of reporting the results is the summary information section. This section includes information on retreats and annihilations, as mentioned above, plus other items of interest to the players which they will have to know in preparing their orders for the coming season. These items include any changes of address, requests for stand-by players, draw and/or concession proposals, and the deadline for the coming season.

The specification of the deadline details should include what orders are requested, which orders may be made conditional, and when the orders are due. If the gamesmaster is someone other than the publisher of the results then the gamesmaster's address and phone number should also be included.

Usually it is obvious what orders are to be submitted for the coming season. If the spring season results report has just sent to the players then everyone knows that fall orders (and accompanying post-spring retreats, votes, etc.) are requested for the next deadline. However, confusion can occur after a fall season when there are winter adjustments to be made and the gamesmaster does not explicitly specify what orders are required for the coming deadline. Does the gamesmaster just want winter builds and removals, or spring orders also? From the player's standpoint it is always best to include spring orders

in these situations. But there are times, when because of a complicated diplomatic situation or a vast number of multiple conditional orders are required to cover all possibilities, that a player may not want to submit spring orders if they are not needed until after the winter adjustments have been reported. Not only should the player know exactly what the gamesmaster wants by the deadline, but in situations like these the player should be allowed a separation of seasons, if requested. Other situations where it is a good idea to explicitly specify the orders to be sent include retreats and vote proposals to end the game.

I also find it a good idea to state in the summary information section what orders may be made conditional when one of these multi-order situations occur. This is an extra service for the players benefit and is simply to minimize any confusion that may occur among less-experienced players when submitting orders in complicated situations. As players become more experienced they learn when they can make conditional orders, but for newer players it is not always apparent.

The last and most important part of the deadline information that needs to be included is the date and time of the deadline. While it seems obvious that this information should be included with the results report many gamesmasters have strange ways hiding it from the players. The worst case of this that I have seen over the years is the placing of the deadline information in the gamesmaster's houserules. This is something like, "The deadline is always four weeks after the publication date." One has to only lose the houserules or play in a number of games with many different gamesmasters and it will never be obvious just when any one game's deadline date is. Somewhat better is printing the deadline information in another part of the game publication away from the results report. But then again why force the players to thumb through other material when it is just as easy to include this information with each game? The final problem that can often occur is the lack of a specific deadline time with the deadline date. This is important for players phoning in orders. Not providing a deadline time leaves the situation ambiguous as to just how long the player has to submit orders by phone prior to the deadline. Specifying a deadline time also minimizes the chance that a player will call with orders on the deadline evening after the game has been adjudicated or the gamesmaster has gone to bed.

So, now after all of the above verbiage, just what should a season's result report look like? Lets return to the example of 1977AM. First, Winter 1920 and Spring 1921 results.

1977AM -- Winter 1920

ENGLAND: Build A London.
 FRANCE: Build A Paris.
 RUSSIA: Build A Sevastopol. Two units short.
 TURKEY: No removal received. GM removes A Albania.

1977AM -- Spring 1921

ENGLAND (Dave Pengelly) a lva s a war-mos, a stp s a war-mos, a sil-mun /r-ber,pru,otb/, a war-mos, a lon-bel, f pru-bal, f nwy-nwg, f nth c a lon-bel, f gbot-swe, f mid h.
 FRANCE (Tom Butcher) a kis-mun, a pie-ven, a par-bur, f tyrr-tun, f adr-ion, f wmed s f tyrr-tun.
 RUSSIA (Horst John) a bul-ser, a mos s a ukr-war /r-ukr,otb/, a rom-ven, a ven s a ser-tri, a boh s a mun-sil, a mun-sil, a gre-alb, a tyr-mun, a gal s a ukr-war, a ser-tri, a ukr-war, a sev s a mos, f tun-tyrr, f nap s f tun-tyrr, f ion-tun.
 TURKEY (Fred Winter) f por h.

English A Silesia is dislodged and must retreat to Berlin, Prussia, or off the board. Russian A Moscow is dislodged and must retreat to Ukraina or off the board. The deadline for retreats and Fall 1921 orders (which may be made conditional on the direction of the retreats) is Monday, 17 October 1983, 7 pm PDT.

The Fall 1921 results report:

1977AM -- Fall 1921

English A Silesia retreats to Berlin.
 Russian A Moscow retreats to Ukraina.

ENGLAND (Dave Pengelly) a lva s a mos, a stp s a mos, a ber s fa bur-mun /nso/, a mos h, a bel-ruh, f bal-pru, f nwg-nat, f nth-eng, f swe-bal, f mid-nafr.

FRANCE (Tom Butcher) a kie-mun, a pie-ven /r-mar,tus,otb/, a bur s a kie-mun, f tyrr s f wmed-tun /r-glyo,tus,otb/, f adr-ion, f wmed-tun.

RUSSIA (Horst John) a ser-tri, a ukr-mos, a rom s a tri-ven, a ven-pie, a boh-mun, a sil s a war-pru, a alb h, a tyr s a ven-pie, a gal-war, a tri-ven, a war-pru, a sev-rum, f tun-tyrr, f nap s f tun-tyrr, f ion-tun.

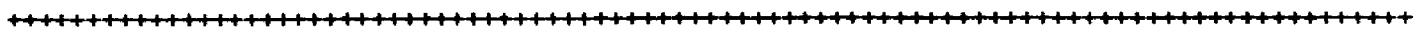
TURKEY (Fred Winter) f por h.

French A Piedmont is dislodged and must retreat to Marseilles, Tuscany, or off the board. French F Tyrrhenian Sea is dislodged and must retreat to the Gulf of Lyon, Tuscany, or off the board. The supply center chart follows.

- E: 10 ctrs - lon,lvp,edi,hol,den,swe,nwy,stp,ber,mos constant
- F: 7 ctrs - par,mar,bre,spa,bel,kie,mun build one
- R: 16 ctrs - sev,rum,vie,tri,bul,smy,con,ank,ven,rom,tun,bud,ser,gre,nap, war build one
- T: 1 ctr - por constant

The deadline for the French retreats, Winter 1921 builds, and Spring 1922 orders (which may be made conditional on the retreats and builds) is Monday, 14 November 1983, 7 pm PST.

Now, that is not a very complicated results format for the gamesmaster to use and yet it is clear and understandable to the players and all other readers. That is the key to a good adjudication.



Keeping Game Records

by Len Lakofka

Organize all of your record keeping materials as soon as the game starts. Your working file is composed of a file folder with the Boardman Number on it. You should include a blank supply center chart form in the file. Run off 50 copies of such a form and put one in each game's working file. Update this form after EVERY season. Spring seasons need only be recorded if there is a player change. The form should look similar to this:

Boardman # _____
 Magazine _____
 GM _____

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 etc.

AUSTRIA
 ENGLAND
 FRANCE
 GERMANY
 ITALY
 RUSSIA
 TURKEY

Total: _____

Player record:

A: _____
 E: _____
 F: _____
 G: _____
 I: _____
 R: _____
 T: _____

After any player change list the reason for the change (such as D = dropped, R = resigned, etc.) If you ever transfer the game mail the record to the new GM.

Each season place all new correspondence into your working file. On the deadline sort the orders (clearly marking late and superseded sets, if any). Staple all of this together. ((Not necessary.)) After you have run off the adjudication report attach it to the orders for this season. It is wise to have a divider in the file. Place the orders and the new adjudication into the front section of the file. When new orders arrive place them in the back section. MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO PUT THE MOVES IN THE FILE EACH DAY, AS THEY COME IN. DO NOT LET ORDERS PILE UP!!

When the new deadline arrives use last season to set up the position for the new season. NEVER depend on the player's accuracy for unit placement. Adjudicate the season and then staple the adjudication to that season. Place this in the front section of the file and put the old season in your record file. Note that you do not have to keep old seasons that are more than one game year old. You MUST ALWAYS retain the LAST season in case there is a player protest.

When the game ends print the entire game report in your magazine and be sure the Boardman Number Custodian receives a copy. Here is an example of a completed supply center chart:

1971EK
 LIAISONS DANGEREUSES
 LENARD LAKOFKA

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13
A	4	5	5	6	6	7	6	6	4	2	1	1	-
E	4	4	4	3	5	5	5	7	7	5	6	5	2
F	6	6	6	6	5	2	2	1	1	1	-	-	-
G	6	7	8	9	9	11	12	11	12	16	15	17	17
I	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	2	2
R	4	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
T	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	7	9	9	13

- A: Bob Katzive D S'04, David Fujihara Out F'13
- E: Dennis Brackman D F'09, Tom McCarthy
- F: Ray Converse D F'05, R. Lewis R F'08, CD Out F'11
- G: Larry Blandin D S'08, Tom Keller Wins by concession
- I: Conrad von Metzke R F'02, Tom Leahey D F'03, John Hendry
- R: Guy Hall Out F'04
- T: Tom Cleaver

If you take care with your records right from the beginning you will not have many problems as the game progresses. Sloppy record keeping will result in gamesmaster errors and/or lost moves. A catastrophe such as the loss of moves will not help your gamesmastering career!

Organization -- the Key to Successful GMing

by Fred C. Davis, Jr.

Accurate records and good physical materials are the heart of any good publication. Your game maps are basic. Each of my maps is permanently mounted on heavy cardboard, mostly composed of corrugated boxes from old wine cases. I tape two layers together to make a thick enough base so the map tacks don't come through the bottom. I store my maps vertically. Some players with more room hang them on the walls. I've purchased a large collection of map tacks in the seven standard Dippy colors. You can find these in little plastic boxes in any good stationery store. Plain tacks cost 35¢ per box, and those with scored, crossed, or dotted heads cost either 40¢ or 45¢. ((Editor's Note: This article is several years old, so prices will be higher now.))

You'll need at least 14 boxes, so the initial investment is high, but it's worth it to have a permanent set-up which will last indefinitely. I use plain tacks for armies, and the marked ones for fleets.

One advantage of tacks over acetate and grease pencils is that you can pick up the tacks and move them at will. I usually make the complete move as ordered by each power in adjudicating moves, except that sometimes a standoff is obvious before I finish. The tacks are small enough so that two, or even three, will easily fit into any province. I use very light arrows, drawn with a No. 1 pencil, to indicate supports. It is then quite easy to see which moves succeed.

I maintain a separate folder for each game. I use the multi-pocketed kind. In the first pocket I place the orders for each game as they arrive. I've drawn a chart resembling a baseball scorecard on the lower portion of this pocket. I place a checkmark in the correct box for that power and move period when the order is filed. I use a "P" if the order is phoned in, and "NON" for No Order Needed, for build/removal periods when no adjustments are needed. This way I can see at a glance whose moves are in, and who's delinquent. I leave the box blank if no move is received, and keep a stroke tally at the far left on the number of moves missed by that player. In the second pocket, I keep sets of the rules, and in the third I keep sets of the maps. ((Editor's Note: Please keep in mind that Fred GMs variants only; thus the reference to keeping copies of the maps.)) The fourth pocket is used for permanent comments and criticisms of the game. Some of these may be published when the game is over. Each folder is of a different color (Atlantica I is green, Abstraction is red), so I can get the right one at a glance. The names are printed on them, of course, but the color system is easier. I also have a separate folder to hold my house rules and the Bushwacker universal buck slip. The buck slip is attached to all shipments of rules, acknowledgements of cash receipts, etc., with various boxes to be checked as pertinent. This saves a heck of a lot of writing.

I have a set pattern for adjudication called the EFGIART system, in which the moves are always handled in that order of countries. This more or less corresponds to our left-to-right and top-to-bottom way of writing or scanning a map. By keeping to a strict pattern, I feel that I am less likely to overlook something. The press releases, however, are printed in whatever order I find most satisfactory from a typographical or esthetic viewpoint. (It's frequently necessary for me to cut down the sizes of press releases, since I try to keep my zine down to eight pages. I also try to correct spelling and grammatical errors.)

I underscore all failed moves right on the players' own orders. Then, I type up the orders more or less in the order in which the players have written them. However, I always run strings of moves together, and follow up a move with its supports. Some players do not write their moves in this orderly fashion, and you have to hunt all over for their supports. Never type directly from the players' orders to your stencil if you can avoid it. Always try to type up the moves on paper first, so if you make a mistake, you can always correct it before typing the stencil or master. This also gives you a chance to esthetically rearrange the orders for better typographical appearance if the original typing comes out with awkward hyphenations or lines containing single words. Above all, always proofread your work before going to press.

You'll have to be your own judge on the amount of your game fees, but remember that you can expect postage and publishing expenses to continue climbing. If you set your game fee based on current postage rates, you might be running deeply in the red when that game is being finished some two years from now. Allow yourself some margin for error to take care of unexpected expenses. And keep a careful record of who's paid what, in case you have to refund the money.

With the advent of the Western Union Mailgram, I decided to give every player a secret code number, so he could make use of telegraphic orders. (The problem with Mailgrams is the lack of a signature. Some other player could be sending in the order.) There are many ways of assigning a code number or name. You could be completely arbitrary. Then no one could ever "crack" your system. However, it's easier for you if you do have a system. I do have a system, based on three numbers. Naturally, I'm not going to tell you what it is, but it does make the assignment of code numbers quite easy for me. Should I lose my list, I could reconstruct the code numbers immediately from my key. You could also use the player's Social Security number, or the last four digits thereof. But whatever system you use, never reveal your method to anybody.

One final bit of advice to potential GMs. Don't bite off more than you can chew. Start out with just two games, and see whether you can keep up. There's plenty of time to branch out afterwards with more games.

I was asked whether adjudicating variant games was any different than running games of regular postal Diplomacy. Well, the basic mechanics are about the same, but there are a few minor differences. The first is deciding just which game to offer. Sometimes, you may wish to run a game which you have designed yourself. Sometimes, you may see a design published elsewhere which you think would be fun to play. Or, you may receive some suggestions from your readers or other people on a good game.

You also have the option of going through the North American Variant Bank Catalog to see which categories of games are available. You might be interested in a particular time period, like the Ancient world or Medieval Britain. Or, you might want to play a game with certain special rules, like hidden movements, Army/Fleet convoys, economic backgrounds, or more or fewer than seven players. Having selected a category, you could order copies of some of the games within that classification to see which one you like best. (The NAVB Custodian stands ready to give you a brief opinion on some designs, with the caveat that one man's meat may be another man's poison.)

When selecting a variant for play, consider the different Mark Numbers. Usually, the higher Marks are better games, having been refined after actual play experience. This does not always hold true if a different person other than the original author offers a further updating. Sometimes the new person improves the game, but I can think of at least one in which the later Mark was a regression.

OK, so you finally decide which variant to run, and get your players signed up. There are two things to keep in mind. 1. The board may be different. 2. Some of the rules may be complex or tricky. In a regular game, some people have an almost photographic memory of the board, and say they can adjudicate without even looking at a real board. Others set up a board to adjudicate each season. In either case, you would have no permanent record of the units' locations. You can't do this with a variant. You must set up a permanent map and keep it in a safe place.

Some people prefer to use acetate covers and grease pencils. I prefer to use map tacks. True, this will slightly damage one copy of the map. However, I've found that this master map could be used for several games before wearing out. With everyone now having access to photocopy machines, it's worth spending the small sum to have an extra copy of your map for this purpose. Securely mount your map on a piece of heavy cardboard. Most of today's maps are no larger than two 8½ x 11 sheets, and may fit onto a single sheet of regular or legal (8½ x 14) paper. In the early days, many designs were made full-size for FTF play, but outside of Youngstown few of those games are played any more. In some cases where giant maps have been made, a smaller "conference" map has also been provided.

The advantage of tacks over grease pencils is that you can adjudicate more quickly, moving the pins as you would wooden blocks, and leaving two or more pins in a single space until you finish the adjudication. The one danger of using pins is that if the map gets knocked to the floor, a few of them could fall out. I have spent some time crawling around on a rug looking for a lost German or Turkish unit. I still think the system is worth this extra effort.

Moore's maptacks are available in all of the standard colors in stationery stores, in little plastic pillboxes. I use plain ones for armies, and those which are scored or dotted for fleets. If you can't find any scored or dotted ones, it's easy to make your own "fleets" with a little dab of paint or liquid paper (or nail polish). You can also buy these tacks in pink and brown for additional powers, or to represent special units or things. I used pink pins to represent mines in a "Blow-up" game, for instance.

Always have a copy of the rules handy in the folder in which you keep your game's orders and records. This is true even if you designed the game. Don't depend on your memory for any special rules. I have not felt badly about checking the rules for my own games since the DipCon at which Allan Calhmer asked me to hand him the Rulebook. He said, "Just because I invented the game doesn't mean I don't need to check the Rulebook!"

In my opinion, each postal variant game will take an average of twice as long as a regular game to process, allowing for special checking to be sure that all the rules are applied correctly, and to respond to the questions you're going to receive from your players about the game. Therefore, I'd strongly advise you to start off with not more than two variants, and to run not more than three at any one time.

After a game starts, you may find a flaw in the rules or map. This is one reason it's a good idea to have a new variant playtested FTF before opening a postal section. However, this is not always possible, especially if you are a bit isolated from a lot of other diplomats. If the flaw is serious, you are faced with three choices. One, you could take a vote among the players on effectuating a rule or map change immediately in the current game. Two, if the game hasn't progressed too far, you could offer to start it over again with the revised map or rules. Three, you could slog on with the present game, but offer to start a new version with the revised rules as soon as it's over.

I have used all three methods. If the first method is used, there must be a unanimous agreement for the change to be effectuated. My former houserules permitted a change if all but one player agreed, but after this led to a disaster in one game, I changed it to require unanimous consent. Starting over again is the best idea if you haven't progressed much beyond Fall 1901 or its equivalent. You must offer refunds, however, to any players who don't wish to continue. In the one game I restarted, "United States Dip", two of the original players declined to continue. Fortunately, I had two standbys available to take their places.

You will also have a different problem with standbys in variant games. For regular games, you can have a single standby pool for all your games. For variants, you need to keep a separate list of standbys for each type of game. Each standby should be required to pay some type of fee, since you will have to supply him with a set of the rules and maps for that game.

Getting standby players can be a problem. Try to get as many as you can before the game starts, and keep recruiting them throughout the game. Offer cheap prices and other special deals to try to keep your standbys happy. You can afford to let a one- or two-center power go into Civil Disorder, but it's a disaster if a player of a big power drops out and you have no replacement. You may have to hold up the game for an issue until you can replace him. Somehow, it's usually easier to find a new player for a large power than for one reduced to one or two centers!

Finally, don't forget to advertise your game openings and your need for standbys. Be sure you're listed in the Zine Register, even if you're only running a single game. Have fun!

((Regarding Fred's third-to-last paragraph: some people, myself included, disagree strongly with Fred's comment that it's OK to let a one- or two-center power drop into CD -- but you'll read all about that elsewhere in this handbook.))

CHAPTER 12

ON RULES AND HOUSERULES

The Great Houserules Debate: a Look at Both Sides

by Paul Gardner and Bruce Linsey

(The question of whether or not houserules are desirable has raged throughout the hobby for years. In the following debate, non-houserules advocate Paul Gardner and houserules proponent Bruce Linsey put forth the cases for their respective positions.)

Bruce: Houserules are quite helpful to both players and GMs. For starters, they help to ensure that the GM will be consistent. If he has already stated publicly how he will rule, then he is less likely to change his ruling if a situation re-arises.

Paul: Houserules for postal Diplomacy aren't necessary. Consistency can only come from the GM. Rather than ensure consistency, HRs can give rise to massive inconsistencies with a GM who selectively enforces his HRs or rarely looks at them. If a GM is consistent, he won't gain any help from HRs in staying that way. Work habits are more important than rules used or not used.

Bruce: I'll freely admit that houserules which are selectively enforced might give rise to "massive inconsistencies". I had in mind ~~here~~ houserules which actually get used reasonably consistently. So what's the problem with those?

Paul: Bruce, the main problem with having a set of houserules in your zine for the play of postal Diplomacy is the slipperiness of the English language itself. In writing houserules, the GM is establishing a set of laws which, like the laws of this land, are open to different interpretations even by two people knowledgeable in those very laws (as we see even at the Supreme Court level, where 5 judges may interpret one way, 4 another). How then can you expect any given player to come to the same understanding, from a group of words, as the GM intended? The answer is that you can't, and the result of differing interpretations of the same rule by a GM and a player is likely to be that the player will feel screwed -- or the GM will appear to have "caved in" to pressure from the player.

Bruce: But all you're really saying here is that houserules must be well-written and reasonably clear to have value, a position with which I agree. The logical extension of your argument is: why have any rules at all? After all, the Rulebook isn't perfect or totally unambiguous either, yet we all agree that we couldn't have Diplomacy games without it.

Houserules are clarifications of the Rulebook's unclear points, and adaptations to postal play, which the game rules were not designed to cover. The fact that they might not be perfectly written is not a valid excuse to scrap the whole idea; it's only a reason to write them carefully.

But GM consistency aside, there's a more important function still. Houserules communicate a GM's technique to his players. Without them, a player has no reference as to how the GM is going to rule in any given circumstance. You might say that it is sufficient to know that the GM is going to rule fairly, but what exactly is a "fair" ruling? To take a common example, a GM may or may not allow draws which don't include all surviving players -- either way is "fair". But a player is entitled to know more than that the ruling will be fair -- he's entitled to know exactly what the ruling will be on this matter, and the houserules are the medium by which the GM communicates such rulings. (And to go back to your point about slippery language, I see nothing at all "slippery" about a rule stating that "Draws need not include all survivors".)

Paul: As a player looking at a GM, I look at his punctuality (or lack of it) and whether or not he makes mistakes. Aside from those two things, I notice the format of the report -- technique is not something that matters, only the result, and that depends only on the GM and his work habits.

I see another problem in the potential for inconsistent enforcement of houserules by the GM himself. As a new publisher just having completed the writing of a set of HRs the GM is likely to stick closely to what he has written, but over time that may change. He'll find that items of his code seem trivial or more important than first anticipated, and his enforcement of the rules will alter to that degree. On the other hand, he may just lose interest in the things altogether (Bruce, maybe you will never tire of houserules, but some of us others may). If so, the things just sit there until a dispute arises, then out they come to quell the uprising -- never mind that the decision might have gone differently while the rules were gathering dust.

Bruce: Hoo, boy! So not only do you regard houserules as ambiguous and slippery little creatures, now we also learn that they are seldom-used, dust-gathering old documents hauled out of storage by uninterested GMs only to quell the occasional uprisings in their games. With such an unjustifiably dismal view, it's no wonder that you don't like houserules!

Please allow me to set the record straight. Houserules are no more than a written statement of the rulings that the GM would (presumably) make anyway. Some houserules are used each turn (like the one establishing how long it is between deadlines), and some are used less often. Some may never actually come up at all, but so what? At least they're there if needed. Yes, some GMs may be inconsistent when it comes to enforcing the rules, but that's not an argument against having rules. All that means is that the houserules may need some revision, or that the GM should be more careful in following them.

I concede the point that houserules are boring (to most people), but that is irrelevant. Nobody actually intends that houserules be read as entertainment, any more than the Rulebook itself is meant to be interesting. They are a reference guide to facilitate the functions of the player and the GM, no more. Publish them once, and they're out of the way.

Paul: Thanks! I'll take any concession I can get. As you say, houserules are not entertaining, so nobody reads them except for the GM and other GMs. They lurk in a GM's files, unread by the player, waiting to harass and waylay him should the GM deem him out of order.

This leads to my next point; that certain players will successfully employ the houserules to their advantage, while other players either won't try or will do so unsuccessfully. This is not to say that the player should not use any means at his disposal to gain an advantage -- he should. The rub is that since no two sets of houserules are going to be the same and will have varying influences on the outcome, they effectively make a variant of each game in which they are used. Most of these are not as drastic as the changes used in our favorite variants, but they are an added element, nevertheless.

Bruce: Randolph Smyth had a term for the wrinkles that arise thanks to different sets of houserules: he called them "variations". I actually think it's a benefit to have such variations in the hobby. Not everybody likes black press, but some people do. Some people like two-week deadlines; others prefer five. A leisurely stroll through this handbook will show you that different opinions exist on DIAS (Draws Include All Survivors) games and the use of standbys. So I agree with you that each game is different -- and I say, what a loss it would be if they weren't!

Certainly you are correct to observe that some players use houserules to their advantage. A common example is that a player will (or will not) write a sorry-I-stabbed-you letter as soon as the deadline has passed, depending on how strict the GM's deadline policy is. But so what? Some players successfully use the rules on supporting and conveying to gain an advantage too. I say more power to players clever enough to eke every possible edge out of the rules!

Paul: As a player, I have for the most part been lucky enough to get GMs whose effect on the game is benign, but it has worried me that a GM with a gargantuan set of houserules and a more authoritarian outlook than mine would assert himself into the game as a "Big Brother is watching" type of influence. Some players may prefer a firmer hand than I, but even those must dislike the feeling that someone "up there" is checking the rules all the time to try to catch him/her in an infraction.

Bruce: I don't know of any GM who is constantly trying to "catch" players. Your argument here is not against houserules per se, but against strict rules and over-sealous enforcement thereof. The misconceived premise is that more houserules = stricter GMing; the fact is that a GM could (and some, like Randolph Smyth, have) write fairly comprehensive houserules detailing how he will GMing leniently. Conversely, Paul Rauterberg was a fairly strict GM -- he once opined that GMs ought to make players write out each province name in full. Yet he ran games with no houserules at all! So your assumption that "gargantuan houserules" go hand in hand with an "authoritarian outlook" is not correct; that being the case, your last paragraph isn't really an argument against houserules at all.

Except for extreme cases or spotty enforcement, houserules cannot possibly do any harm. The worst possible case is the rule which turns out not to be needed at all in a given game. If there is no harm done, why not have them?

Paul: HRs cannot by themselves do any harm, granted; it's the way they are used and when they are used that could potentially lead to trouble or abuse. Even if they do no harm, why (on the other hand) have them?

Bruce: Because they can do good. I've already given my two most substantive reasons: that they communicate the GM's rulings to the player, and that they help ensure consistent GMing practices.

Paul: Well, we now have a situation where any one of 5-600 people in the hobby could qualify to be a GM, because once you've played a few months you know all you need to GM postally. A copy of Supernova or Masters of Deceit will fill in details like how to write orders and deal with GMs ("Your Honor..."). A lot of stuff that I see in houserules is common courtesy ("I will honor requests that you not be put in a game with so-and-so") or common sense ("Joke orders will be treated as holds"). In 3½ years of playing in 35 games (or so), only once have I seen a case arise where the GM cited houserules (or lack of them in this case). And that involved a misplaced unit -- obviously he just needed a better tracking system, but he installed a new houserule.

Bruce: The "common sense" matter I've already covered -- just as the term "fair" doesn't necessarily yield a unique ruling, neither does "common sense". That is, I can use my "common sense" (such as it is...) and arrive at a completely different ruling than you would when using yours. So while I agree that some houserules (including the two your cited) are dictated by common sense or common courtesy, the majority are not.

I'm surprised at your 35 or so games with but one GM reference to his houserules, but the fact that houserules aren't quoted often doesn't mean they aren't used often. Even discounting the most obvious example of deadline intervals (a houserule which gets used every season), we have numerous houserules that are used all the time. Publicizing draw votes. How to handle No Vote Received. Standbys. Whether or not preference lists are used. Phoned orders. And on and on. These matters come up in virtually every game even though a GM might not explicitly quote his houserules in dealing with them.

Paul: Instead of a set of houserules, a GM could use a season or two from currently-running games to show new players how he will adjudicate. Such things as calling of standbys and retreats of NMRed units can be explained without creating a legal tool. Diplomacy is really a beautifully simple game; let's not clutter it up with unnecessary documents like houserules.

Bruce: If adjudication reports were all that needed explanation, you'd be right. But the game reports are only one of many items that a player should be familiar with before playing under a new GM. As for explaining other matters without formally putting them into houserules; now you're splitting hairs. OK, if you're more comfortable writing these things down informally and not calling them houserules, I suppose that's fine. But it seems to me that if you're going to write down such basics for your players, you might as well do it all in one place for their convenience -- and presto! -- there you have your houserules, whether you've thought of it in that formal sense or not.

In my personal opinion, a GM who does not publish reasonably comprehensive houserules is being unfair to his players. Either he hasn't given consideration to how he will handle various circumstances, or he has but is not communicating his conclusions to his players.

Paul: In any disputed situation, a GM's best weapons are flexibility and willingness to be open in discussing conflicts, with the ability to make his decision stick through a reasoned account of his decision process. From a player's perspective, knowing that a GM will listen and be fair is more important than knowing he's got 37 pages of houserules written by Thomas Jefferson.

Bruce: (Sigh...) Flexibility and willingness to discuss disputes have nothing to do with the length of a GM's houserules. And I don't know of any GMs who have 37 pages of...

Paul: Besides, why handicap a GM? A person who is able to adjudicate a game fairly and consistently may not be able to write a set of houserules that will clearly lead to the best decision without leaving himself open to second guessing and recriminations later.

Bruce: This is true. A GM may be perfectly capable of adjudicating games, but have difficulty writing houserules. No problem, though; he can always copy from someone else's HRs (changing whichever rulings he doesn't agree with); or use a houserules template, such as the one in this handbook, to facilitate the task. I agree that a GM should not be handicapped by having to write all his houserules from scratch.

Well, I think we've hashed things out from both the player's perspective and the GM's. Care to summarize your position?

Paul: Sure. Well, Bruce, I've noted your replies to my arguments and haven't been swayed. The best you've come up with is that "DIAS" is not slippery and that players want to know whether a game is "DIAS" or not. OK, "DIAS" is understood by all, but make the game more fun -- let the players vote before the game starts whether they want DIAS or non-DIAS. Let them vote on black, grey, or white press. As I said earlier, houserules are unnecessary. Let players get more involved in the game they're playing without getting an extra mechanism into play to influence the result. As I also said earlier, Diplomacy is a beautifully simple game -- let's leave it that way!

Bruce: It's perfectly all right to let players vote on the DIAS or press rules before the game, provided the GM doesn't mind. But that's beside the point. Whatever rules happen to be in force ought to be made known to the players, and I don't see this as destroying the beauty or simplicity of the game. I've noted your arguments, and all throughout this debate you keep raising lots of side issues which, while important, have no bearing on whether or not a GM uses houserules. The rules might be slippery. They might not be enforced consistently. They might be used to dictate "authoritarian" rulings with which the GM will "harass and waylay" the player. They might just sit gathering dust. They might not be read by the player. And so on.

Yes, we all agree that houserules, if used, should be clearly written and fairly applied. But on the central question of whether or not a GM should use comprehensive houserules in running his games, I haven't been swayed. For the sake of consistency, for the sake of communicating his GMing style and rulings to his players, I think he should.

+++++

A Houserules Template

by Bruce Linsey

Potentially, every GM has comprehensive houserules. What I mean is that each and every GM will have to rule one way or another on any of the myriad of situations that might arise during the course of a postal Diplomacy game. The difference among GMs is that some of them have the foresight to determine these rulings in advance, and the fairness to write down their decisions for the benefit of their players who want to know them, not to mention for the sake of consistency.

This article is for those GMs who agree that written (or "formal") houserules are a necessity, at least to some extent. It is not easy to formulate a good set of houserules. The task is doubly hard if you start from scratch and try to think of everything on your own. What is needed for the GM who wishes to approach this task seriously is a good houserules template -- a summary of those situations which should be covered. Please note that the function of such a template is not to make recommendations as to how you should rule, but simply to point out those matters on which you ought to have written guidelines. The specific rulings will reflect the tastes of each individual GM. (In two or three drastic cases, I've broken down and inserted strong recommendations, however.)

My organizational approach in devising the following houserules template is not the same approach you should adopt in actually writing your houserules, by the way. Houserules are best grouped by topic; all rules pertaining to press, for instance, are placed together in one section. This facilitates their use as a reference source for both you and your players.

Here, however, I have approached the task from a different perspective. I have disregarded subject matter entirely, and created three lists grouped by importance. The first group I will call "primary houserules". These are the topics that in my opinion must be dealt with in order for a game to progress reasonably smoothly. The second list I will call, naturally, "secondary houserules". These situations really ought to be covered too, but they aren't quite as basic or important as the primary ones. A game might well flow smoothly without one or more of these...but then again, it might not. The third list consists of the "tertiary houserules", which are for GMs who want to cover as many situations as is reasonably possible. Their omission will not cause any harm.

By writing down your answers to some or all of the following questions, then, you can compose a set of houserules as concise or as comprehensive as you like.

I. The Primary Houserules (no GM should be without 'em!)

1. Abbreviations. What requirements will you have for abbreviations, and what abbreviations will you use in your adjudications reports? You may want to explicitly address the troublesome cases of "Nor", "North", "Nor Sea", and "Liv".
2. Errors and Protests. Are players required to report errors to you? How will you handle them once discovered (either before an intervening season has been played, or after)? What will you do if you and the player disagree on the correctness of a ruling?
3. Minimal Player Obligations. What specifically must a player do in order to join a game? In order to keep playing? Must he maintain a subscription? Pay a game and/or NMR fee? (NMR fee: a fee refunded to the player if he doesn't NMR out...)
4. Season Combinations and Separations. Will you normally use summer/fall and autumn/winter/spring combinations (the North American system), or will you go with spring/summer and fall/autumn/winter (the British system)? When will you separate winter seasons -- always? On a single request? When two players request it? Only when a majority of the players request it? When there are at least three builds/removals to be made? Only in 1901? Will failure to submit orders count as a separation request?
5. Deadlines. What will be your usual deadline interval? For what reasons might a deadline be delayed? How strictly will you enforce your deadlines?
6. Deception of the GM. Will you permit players to deceive you, and exactly what would constitute such deception? If not permitted, what is the penalty for a player caught deceiving you? (Note: I'm going to make an exception here to my no-recommendations-in-the-template policy, and strongly urge you not to allow deception of the GM.)

7. **Written Orders.** Do you have any requirements (such as a date, a game season, a Boardman Number, a country, or a signature) regarding information that must appear with a player's orders? How will you handle multiple sets of orders if any or all of them aren't dated, or if they're dated identically? Do you have any format requirements such as separate sheets of paper for different games, or using only one side of the paper?

8. **Phoned Orders.** Will you accept orders by telephone? (If so, always read them back to the player!) How late will you accept phoned orders? Will you attempt to call players collect if they have no orders in by deadline day?

9. **Conditional Orders.** Upon what may a player make his orders conditional, aside from the results of an earlier season played at the same deadline (that much is necessary)? Upon another player missing his orders for said earlier season? Upon whether a particular GMing error was made, or its resolution? Upon the answer to a specific question about the game rules or your houserules? Upon a codeword submitted by another player? Upon whether a season separation occurs? Upon who is playing a country for the current season? Upon another player's vote?

10. **Missed Deadlines.** What exactly will you do when a player misses a deadline? Will all his units hold, and will those dislodged be permitted to retreat? May unordered units receive support? Will you call a standby? What will you do if a player misses his builds? His removals? His retreats? (Missed removals are tricky: the "farthest from home" rule is hopelessly ambiguous -- see "A Rulebook Quiz" elsewhere in this handbook for discussion.) Will you give different treatment to missed Spring 1901 orders than to other seasons? If so, precisely what procedure will you use?

11. **Dropping and Resigning.** When exactly will a player be considered to have dropped out of a game you're running? (Two consecutive NMRs? X NMRs out of Y game years?) Do you have any special requirements (such as final orders) for resigning? What fees, if any, does a dropout or resigning player get back? May a resigning player nominate his own replacement?

12. **Badly-written Orders.** Will you consider an order to support or convoy a moving unit to imply a valid move order as well? Do you require the correct coast in orders pertaining to fleets in StP, Bul, or Spa? Will you accept orders with a unit unlabeled or mislabeled? Will you accept combined orders like A Con & A Smy S F Ank? Will you accept parenthesized orders like A Par-Bur (A Mun S)? Do you require the nationality in an order to support or convoy a foreign unit?

13. **Press.** Will you print press? For what reasons, if any, will you edit or censor it? Will you allow grey press (which doesn't name the country submitting it)? Black press (which purports to come from someone else)? Will you have a dateline reserved for the GM?

14. **Game-ending Procedures.** Who may make a proposal to end the game, and when? What limitations, if any, will you place on such proposals? Must a proposal be unanimous to pass? (Another strong recommendation: yes, you should require unanimity.) How will you treat an NVR (No Vote Received) if the offending player gets his orders in? If he doesn't? What system will you use for reporting the results of the vote? Will a passed proposal take precedence over a board victory in the same turn, or vice versa? Must draws include all surviving players? How will you handle two or more proposals which pass simultaneously? What provision, if any, will you have for ending the game over the objection of a stalemated player?

II. The Secondary Houserules (not a bad idea to have 'em!)

1. **Arbitration.** Who has the final say as to whether an arbitrator will be called, you or the player? How do you choose him?

2. **Aliases.** May a player play under an alias? If so, must he inform you of his true identity?

3. **Who May Play.** Do you reserve the right to choose who may or may not play in your zine? Do you allow players to name others with whom they won't play?

4. **Preference Lists.** Will you use preference lists or choose country assignments by random draw? If the former, how specifically will you apply the lists in assigning the positions? Will you publish the lists?

5. **Spring 1901.** Will you delay the Spring 1901 deadline (more negotiation being needed) if a certain number of players request it?

6. **Postal Strikes.** How will you deal with a postal strike in your country? In one of your players' countries?

7. **Standby Doesn't Respond.** If a player is about to NMR for the second straight turn and his standby didn't send in orders either, will you play the turn anyway or delay the game while a third person is called? Does the non-responding standby stay on your standby list?

8. Changes of Procedure. Will you allow the players to change any aspect of the game, such as to start allowing black press? What provisions will you have for amending your own houserules while a game is in progress? For overriding them if they dictate an unexpected and unreasonable ruling?

9. Impersonation of GM. Will you permit impersonation of the GM (e.g. a player sending out a phony readjudication)?

10. Abuse of GM. What will you do if a player becomes abusive toward you? If a player somehow gains access to, and raids, your GMing files?

11. Special Types of Orders. Will you accept general orders? Joint orders? Perpetual orders? Orders a turn or more ahead of time?

12. Third Party Orders. Will you accept orders submitted through a third party, either at the player's end or yours?

13. Alternate Media. Will you accept orders by telegram? Special delivery? Postage due mail?

14. Conditionals on Missed Orders. Will you allow a player to distinguish (e.g.) between a declined build and a missed build in writing conditions for his spring orders? Similarly, may he distinguish between an unordered retreat and a deliberate retreat off the board? (The distinction is that he may have an "NMR probe" if you permit this.)

15. Missed Deadlines. Will you consider a player to have missed the deadline if he submits orders but none of them are valid? If he doesn't submit orders but does submit press, votes, or whatever? If he submits retreat or adjustment orders, but neglects his spring or fall orders?

16. Intent to Continue. If a player misses one deadline and doesn't have orders due at the next (e.g. he NMRs in F '01 and gets no builds in the (separated) winter), must he inform you of his intent to continue playing by the second deadline in order to avoid dropping?

17. Subscription Lapse. Assuming you require players to maintain a sub, how many grace issues will you give a player after his sub runs out before dropping him?

18. Standby Policies. If a standby doesn't get into the game, will his votes, press, etc. still be considered? Might he ever be asked to stand by in that game again for the same country? For a different country?

19. Substitutes. May a player who will be unable to continue for an extended interval assign his position temporarily to a substitute? Does he have the right to dictate any aspect of the substitute's play? To later resume the position over the substitute's objection?

20. Mutual Support. Will you accept the "MS" abbreviation as a mutual support (e.g. A Pru MS F Lvn instead of A Pru S F Lvn, F Lvn S A Pru)?

21. Legal Orders. Will you consider an attempted order to be legal based only on the unit positions at the beginning of the turn, or will you take into account other units' orders as well? (For example, suppose a convoy route exists from Con to Bel. A Con-Blg is thus ambiguous; is it still ambiguous if the same player also orders F Aeg S A Con-Bul?)

22. Adjudication Format. What information will appear in your game reports, and what notation will you use to convey it?

23. Results via Phone. May players phone you for game results, and if so specifically when?

24. Adjudications Arriving Late. What must a player do if he does not receive his game results in time?

25. Unused Orders. If a player's orders are not used (because they were superseded, or because they were conditional on a non-occurring situation), will they be revealed to the other players? (Strong recommendation: no way!)

26. Press Publication. What will be your policy regarding when to publish press? In particular, will you always publish press the same turn it's received even if a separation occurs and the press might pertain to a season as yet unplayed? May press be conditional on actions on the board?

27. Unnecessary Convoys. Can an army's move be thwarted by the dislodgement of a fleet ordered to convoy it, if the convoy wasn't necessary?

28. Unadjudicable Situations. If two or more legal adjudications exist for a given set of orders (such as in "Pandin's Paradox"), how will you handle it?

29. Self-dislodging Convoy. May a player convoy in a foreign unit to dislodge his own?

30. Declining Support or Convoy. May a player explicitly decline a support or convoy for one of his units?

III. The Tertiary Houserules (for the GM who wants to be meticulously complete)

1. Transferring a Game. Under what circumstances might a game be transferred to another GM? How will you assist in such a transfer?

2. Hopeless Orders. Is a player required to submit retreats or removals if he has no chance of survival (i.e. he'll be out this turn regardless of what he does)?
3. Dead Press. May players who have been eliminated still write press? May total outsiders write press?
4. Fetal Press. May press be written for Winter 1900 (the gamestart announcement)? If so, how will you dateline it?
5. Inland Fleets. May fleets be built in an inland province?
6. Winter Funny Stuff. May players build and remove units during the same winter season?
7. Negotiation Times. The Rulebook prohibits negotiation before retreats and adjustments. Will you then prohibit it in your postal games, and if so, how?
8. Declining Builds. The Rulebook states that during the winter, each player's number of units "must be" adjusted to equal his supply center count. Do you require players to make builds that they don't want?
9. North Atlantic. That little dot in the legend (which on some boards is located in the North Atlantic Ocean) -- does it mean that the North Atlantic is a supply center?
 ((Editor's Note: The author is clearly a nut. Obviously, the answers to questions #5-9 above are all "no". Nothing like picking apart the fine points of the Rulebook and the game board, eh?))

It is my hope that the above houserules template will be of use to new GMs in the process of writing their own houserules. And if you want to get someone to edit and organize them for you, why, just call Steve Knight, who enjoys doing such things...

A Rulebook Quiz

by Bruce Linsey

You be the GM...

1. The Rulebook says that an army may move to an adjacent province if that move is unopposed, but it also says that the dislodgement of a fleet ordered to convoy an army will result in the failure of the army's move. Suppose France orders A Bel-Hol, and the move is unopposed, but England orders F Nth C FRENCH A Bel-Hol and Russia dislodges the English F Nth. As a GM, would you:
 - A. Permit the French army to move because it is unopposed?
 - B. Disallow the French move because the fleet ordered to convoy the army is dislodged?
2. When a country in civil disorder is forced to remove a unit due to the loss of a supply center (or when a player simply misses his removal), the Rulebook specifies the order in which units must be removed with the following rule: "The unit farthest from home (most distant from the nearest home supply center as computed by the shortest available route including convoys) is removed first, the fleet before the army. If more units are equally eligible for removal than should be removed, priority is established by the name of the space in which they are located, the earliest in alphabetical order coming off first."
 Suppose then that France is in civil disorder and is left with A Bel and A Alb. Also, assume that a valid convoy route exists between Alb and Mar, and that it is made up of Austrian and Italian fleets. If France must make a removal, which unit would you as GM remove?
 - A. The army in Albania, because it is four spaces from the nearest French home supply center, whereas the army in Belgium is only two spaces away.
 - B. Remove the army in Belgium; it is two moves from the nearest home center, whereas the army in Albania can reach Mar in one move with the help of a foreign convoy.
3. Again, France is in CD, this time with armies in Lon and Syr, and must make a removal. Suppose now that no convoy route exists from either Lon or Syr to a French home center. Which piece is removed?
 - A. Army London is removed; it cannot reach a French home center at all.
 - B. Army Syria is removed; it is much farther from home than is Army London.
4. This time France is left with F Spa(nc) and A Ruh, and must make a civil disorder removal. Which unit comes off?

A. F Spa(nc) is removed because both pieces need two moves to reach a home supply center, and fleets are removed before armies if they are the same distance from home.

B. A Ruh is removed. The fleet controls the entire province of Spain by its presence on the north coast (this is made clear elsewhere in the Rulebook), and Spain is only one space away from Mar, whereas Ruhr is two spaces from Par or Mar.

5. "...an order by one country which supports an attack by another country against a space occupied by one of the first country's units does not permit a move dislodging that unit, but may be valid for other purposes," says the Rulebook. This is in the section that prohibits self-dislodgement. But suppose you as GM are faced with the following orders:

ENGLAND: A Bel-Hol, F Nth C GERMAN A Den-Bel

GERMANY: A Den-Bel, A Ruh S A Den-Bel

FRANCE: A Hol H

Does the German move to Bel succeed?

A. No, because England would be convoying a foreign army in to dislodge his own unit, and a player may not participate in his own self-dislodgement.

B. Yes; the Rulebook does not prohibit a player from convoying a foreign army in to dislodge his own unit.

6. You as a GM are faced with the following set of orders:

ENGLAND: A Naf-Tun, A Nwy-Swe

RUSSIA: F Swe H

GERMANY: F Den S ENGLISH A Nor-Swe

FRANCE: NMR! F Mid U, F Eng U, F Nth U, F Ska U (("U" = "unordered"))

Do you permit the English move to Sweden to succeed?

A. No. It is not clear whether Germany was trying to support a move from Norway or from North Africa.

B. Yes. According to the Rulebook, a badly written order which can have only one possible meaning will succeed. The German support was clearly being given to the English army coming from Norway, so it succeeds.

Responses to "A Rulebook Quiz"

((Editor's Note: I'm not going to give details of people's replies here, but only a quick tally of the results and an overview of the situation. A total of 19 people replied to this quiz.))

Question 1 (the unwanted, dislodged convoy)

15 people said that the army's move succeeds, and 4 said it does not. This is a genuine Rulebook contradiction. Each GM must decide how he will call this one.

Question 2 (France, in CD, must remove A Alb (which has a foreign convoy route back to Mar) or A Bel)

11 people said to remove A Alb; 8 said to remove A Bel. The question here is whether a foreign convoy counts. The "farthest from home" rule is hopeless ambiguous on this and other points. No single "right" answer.

Question 3 (France, in CD, must remove A Lon or A Syr, neither of which can get home via convoy)

10 people would remove A Lon and 9 would remove A Syr. The Rulebook does not yield a definitive ruling on this.

Question 4 (France, in CD, must remove F Spa(nc) or A Ruh)

9 people would remove F Spa(nc). 10 people would remove A Ruh. The question here was are we counting moves or spaces from a home center? Because the "farthest from home" rule is so dreadfully constructed, I ignored it entirely when I ran games. The houserule I used in its place read as follows:

"((Missed)) removals will be made by the GM, who will remove units from non-supply center territories outside of the player's home country first, then units from supply centers not in the home country, and finally units from non-supply center territories within the home country. Within each of these three groups, the GM will remove units in alphabetical order, based on the full name of the spaces affected." I strongly suggest that you adopt this or some similar substitute in your games; the situation of missed or CD removals is not uncommon.

Question 5: (self-dislodging convoy)

Only 6 people would prohibit the self-dislodging convoy; 13 say it's legal and I agree. The Rulebook prohibits only moves and supports in one's own self-dislodgement, not convoys.

Question 6 (Germany orders F Den S ENGLISH A Nor-Swe)

11 people ruled the German order ambiguous; 8 would let it succeed as a support for English A Nwy-Swe (thus dislodging the Russian fleet there). This is the clearest of the bunch; the 8 who let it succeed are absolutely wrong. The German player has no way of knowing whether England is going to order Army Norway to Sweden, or Army North Africa to Sweden. Both are legal due to the existence of a convoy route from NAF to Swe at the beginning of the season, so "Nor" is ambiguous in this example. Had there been no F Mid, the German support would succeed, although some GMs might not even allow that. The only possible justification for allowing the German support is a houserule proclaiming that "Nor" = Norway, but that was not a premise in the question, and such a rule is uncommon (nonexistent?) in North America. My relevant houserule read: "In considering the legality of an attempted move by an army, the GM shall base his decision on whether only one legal interpretation exists INCLUDING POSSIBLE CONVOY ROUTES. The meaning of an order cannot depend on what other units are ordered to do, but it can depend on where other units are ((in this case, potential convoying fleets)) to begin the season."

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Let's Encourage Diversity - the Case for Non-conformism

by Allen Wells

In his article, "Let's TRO Away Some Hobby Customs", Donald Sigwalt encouraged a large degree of standardization to be accepted in the hobby, in particular: standardization of HRs, notation, and order writing with the intent of removing GM interpretations, rules interpretations, ambiguities, and differences in rulings from sine to sine. While I agree that he is addressing a valid problem, I claim that the solution he proposes would not be good for the hobby. Like any standardization, it would dampen innovation and take much of the diversity out of the hobby. I will try to explain how I think this would hurt.

INNOVATION: One of the reasons I decided to start my sine, Dot Happy, is that I hoped I could do some things better by doing them differently. Everything from 12-page game start packets to address labels to orphan insurance to a new notation with 4-letter sea codes to maps to yellow press, I have left very few things untouched. While there have been people who objected to some things I do, and while there are some things I try that don't work as well as others, all in all the response has been very favorable. In fact, some people have subbed to my sine because I am innovative, and a few of my innovations are beginning to catch on.

While I agree that many of the innovations I have made are not profound, and many of them are outside the scope of the standardization Don was talking about, if I had been required to use a standard notation, format, and HRs, I would not have started DH.

With the number of new sines starting now, maybe that would not have been too bad, but even if one of the innovations I am starting becomes widely used, then the hobby would have lost something by not allowing it.

I guess it all boils down to the fact that whenever a standard is made it usually is not the best possible, and that standard can kill any attempts at improvement.

DIVERSITY: The hobby is no longer as small or as homogeneous as it was 10 years ago. Publication can vary from 3-weeks to quarterly. Prices vary from free to over \$1.00. Specialty sines like Diplomacy Digest, Diplomacy World, and Everything are increasing in number. The focus of sines can vary from the black press of Brutus Bulletin to the strict HRs and GMing of BRUX's Voice of Doom to the humor of Black Frog to the focus on the games themselves of the Libberterrian. No sine stands out at the top because people's tastes are as varied as the sines and every sine has people who hate its style. But that is fine because the hobby is big enough to support this diversity.

The standardization Don talks about would hurt this. The subbers of Brutus Bulletin would not like having their black press taken away any more than the subbers of Black Frog would want to endure it. The Libberterrian would be as loath to give up its phantom moves and relaxed standby policy as I would be to take the formality out of mine. Jim Bumpas gets along fine with no formal set of HRs while BRUX isn't ever satisfied with his.

Even worse than the HR standardization that Don talks about is the move format standardization. Zines that try to crowd a lot of games into a little space frequently

will write A Arm-Rum (S by A Ser, C by F Bla). This like this save the pubbers a lot of space and the subbers money. On the other hand, many sines (ayself included) will write the whole thing out for clarity.

And I think this state of affairs is good. A player can get samples of many sines (using the sine directory), look at the adjudications, check out the HRs, and then decide what sines he wants.

There are many, many sines now with a record number of game openings. The player cannot complain of a lack of choices.

CONCLUSIONS: Does this mean that I think nothing should be done about the problems Don points out? Not at all, but I think less drastic means should be used.

One important thing is that the players should be able to tell in advance what will happen when a given set of orders are sent in. It is not enough to simply be consistent as a GM since players will try to use your position (as the TRO debate clearly shows). GMs should be clear on what things they allow, what orders need, and what will be done in exoptional cases.

But, you say, this is beyond the ability of a player to remember all these variations. But this is not needed! In the normal course of events you will provide acceptable orders and all will be fine. If you made a true mistake then you have made a mistake and no amount of standardisation would likely help you. If you want to intentionally mislead someone or "abuse" the houserules, then a simple check of the HRs (which every player should have) will show the right way to do it, if it can be done.

However, some work needs to be done in preparing for this. Such phrases as "unambiguous" need to be clearly defined. This is rarely done, and is not easy.

In addition, a guide on topics to be covered in HRs (although not which way they should be done) would be helpful. This way new (and present) GMs could "check off" the list to see if his HRs are complete.

Another aid would be a set of complete, but different, HRs.

Are my HRs there yet? No, but I'm thinking about it. Give me a couple of months.

((This article is old, as you can tell from the people and zines named. But the underlying ideas are still as valid as ever.))

A Houserules Forum

by Conrad von Metzke

1. In two of my rules -- one dealing with defrauding the gamesmaster, the other concerned with dropping out of a game by missing moves -- I state that if I have occasion to invoke the rule, the culprit will be removed from all games in my journals. This means (and I intended it this way) that if Fred Furd tries to deceive me in the "Zealous Zebra", and is also playing in the "Bashful Bison", I will throw Fred out of both games even though he committed no sin of any kind in "Bison". Also, if Fred misses two moves in a row and drops out of "Bison", he will also be dropped from "Zebra" even though he has continued to send moves regularly for it.

My questions to you are:

A. Is it reasonable to write rules this way, meting out two punishments for the price of one? Or should I confine my terrible justice only to the game in which the offense was actually committed?

B. Is it possible that the "all games" clause is appropriate for the more severe of the two examples (fraud) but not for the other (missed moves)?

2. In my houserules on appointing standbys and replacement players, I end with this line: "Normally, the gamesmaster will not bother standbys with the effort of assuming apparently doomed positions (one, two, or maybe even three units), unless in his judgement the position is significant to the game situation." As it stands, this rule suffers from a serious flaw; it allows the neutral GM too much interpretive latitude in determining what constitutes "significant". There are people who insist that any position is significant, in the very least in that it forces the other players to deal with it rather than providing the option of ignoring it.

Anyway, I'm going to fix this one. Shall I reword it to say:

A. That I will always try to find a replacement for any position, no matter how small or hopeless;

B. That I will never replace one or two-unit slots, but will always try and replace three or more (and please note, I am less concerned with where we put the cutoff -- after one unit, two units, or wherever -- than I am with whether a cutoff should be established at all);

C. Something else?

3. This question deals with houserules that I have never used, but I'd like your thoughts. What do you think of rules that state:

A. That no replacement players are allowed; if somebody drops out or resigns, the country just lapses into anarchy?

B. That replacements are allowed, but only if all other active players vote to allow a replacement to take over?

4. There is a rule which I had meant to put in, but managed to omit; it's my own favorite invention of mine, the "neutral 1901 moves" bit. It is built on the supposition that a missed move in 1901 will, ipso facto, cripple the missing country so severely that the game will tilt out of balance and all seven players will be hurt. Therefore, in advance of each 1901 move, I announce "neutral orders" (all the way up through builds) which will be used if someone misses; such moves are only intended to provide basic positioning and gain those neutral centers which each power is routinely "guaranteed", and one stipulation has always been that no other power's territory will ever be attacked by these "neutral moves", and no "tossup" centers will ever be contested. Thus, England would be sent to capture Norway, but only with a fleet; France would take Spain and Portugal, but never Belgium; and so on.

A. Is this a worthwhile rule, in your view?

B. Should I be writing these neutral orders myself, or should I have some uninvolved friend do it?

C. How about this: In Spring '01 Italy attacks and takes Trieste. What sort of "neutral" order can I (or my friend) concoct for Italy in the fall?

5. How do you feel about country preference lists when a new game is begun? Should they be used, or not? In commenting, please consider the following:

A. What happens if preference lists are requested, but only (e.g.) five people submit them? What happens to the other two?

B. Should preference lists, if used, be "stage-managed"? That is, should the GM use the lists to give everyone their highest possible choice (even if that requires denying someone his unique first choice, so as to give everyone a better slot), or should the preference lists be used literally even if that sticks someone with a sixth or seventh choice?

C. If preference lists are not used, and random draw is the rule, is it acceptable to "stage-manage" the random draw, i.e. to guarantee that a player who has joined more than one game doesn't get the same country in both?

6. Other than demonstrated cheating, are there any legitimate reasons for a GM to expel a player from a game?

7. Most houserules, mine included, permit players to vote to end the game in any way they wish: draw, concession, whatever. In such votes, what do you think the criteria should be? You need not limit yourself to these points, but here are a few specifics that interest me:

A. How many "yes" votes should be required to pass any given proposal? One? Half? Unanimous?

B. The reverse -- how many "no" votes should cause the proposal to fail? Is one enough?

C. Most GMs treat votes not cast as abstentions. A few treat them as automatic "yeas"; I know of at least one who calls them automatic "nays". Which do you prefer?

8. It's my intention, in my next rules, to prohibit black press -- press written by one player in such a way that it appears to have come from someone else (e.g. Germany datelines his press "Paris"). Opinions?

9. Regarding voted concessions/draws: Some GMs use the rulebook absolutely (DIAS -- Draws Include All Survivors), and some use Player's Choice (voted end, any way they like). A few are using a modification of the latter, limiting the choices before game-start to "x"-way draws (where "x" may be 3, 4, or 5 powers). Is this latter a form of GM interference in the outcome?

10. Is any houserule legitimate if stated in advance, or are certain possible rules inherently wrong? (E.g.: "Players who are eliminated lose all remaining sub credit", "Starting players must submit name, age, standby orders for at least one other game in the zine, and a photocopy of their driver's license", "Proof that a player has a felony conviction on file will be grounds for instant expulsion", etc.)

11. Costaguana, and other journals, have for some time had a houserule that allows players to put "sealed orders" on file with the gamesmaster. This is intended as a hedge against a missed move. Under this system, if a player misses a move, the gamesmaster will take the player's sealed instructions to an uninvolved person (normally a local friend who knows how to play but is not involved in the particular game) and have him fashion orders from the player's guidelines. ("Sealed orders" are not normally actual moves; rather, they are guidelines to the player's aims in the game -- future intentions, names of allies and enemies, etc.) Is such a system a benefit or a harm to the game, and why? ((Editor's Note: Conrad's "sealed orders" mean precisely the same thing as the "general orders" discussed elsewhere in this handbook.))

12. When a unit is dislodged and forced to retreat, should the GM list the various options for retreat, or should he let the player figure things out for himself?

13. Would it be acceptable to have no houserules at all -- such as Costaguana once had? (At one time, my "houserules" consisted of the following statement: "In adjudicating games, the gamesmaster will use (a) the Rulebook, and (b) common sense." And that was it!)

Responses to "A Houserules Forum"

Question 1 (two punishments for the price of one)

Randolph Smyth: The only trouble could arise (in throwing a player out of a game when he's done nothing wrong) when rating the game. You'd have to be able to back up your reasons for throwing out the player; as long as this could be done, I see nothing wrong with your present rules. Controversial, but O.K.

Mark Berch: Expel from both games for deception of the GM, but not for dropout. I do not want to play with a cheat, period, even if he did his cheating in another game. On the other hand, his dropout could be just an accident; carelessness.

John Crosby: I feel it is reasonable to get the "double whammy". The fraud issue addresses a basic approach to conduct of the games and interaction of those involved. "Guilty in one -- guilty in all" is thus reasonable.

With regard to NMRs the question is a little more difficult. But the real question is whether players are allowed to selectively commit suicide in a game for whatever reasons they choose. Players owe it to the other contestants to pursue the game to its completion. Selective withdrawal should not be permitted; thus "out in one -- out in all" is reasonable.

Question 2 (standbys for small positions)

Stephen Wilcox: I have seen too many one- and two-center powers placed into civil disorder, only to break the stalemate line available in the stop-the-leader alliance attempting to form. Whenever possible, call a standby for any one-center power. If none are available -- call me!

David Anderson: It's best to replace anything significant, but in the case of hopeless one-unit spots, I wouldn't bother.

Jeff Hoffman: I strongly agree that any and all units on the board should have an active player assigned. I want to present an example to support my case.

Imagine Germany has overrun the Western powers and is facing Italy and Turkey. England has been reduced to one unit stuck in Portugal. Germany has set up a blockade of the Mediterranean, with a fleet in the Mid, and a support. Assume that the English player then drops out. If England is declared to be doomed and just sits there in civil disorder, then Germany has received a great advantage in the game. Italy (or Turkey) can't capture Portugal and use it as a support for an attack on the Mid-Atlantic. Germany, in effect, has been assigned the unit in Portugal. ((Editor's Note: Not quite. Under these circumstances, Mid can still be forced by enemy units in Spa(sc), Wes, and Naf. If the unit in Por is a German fleet, Mid cannot be forced at all. But Jeff is still making an excellent case.)) If a player is assigned to play England, then Germany is forced either to provide more support for Mid or negotiate with England to keep its support. Likewise, with a cooperative England, Turkey and Italy have a chance to break out into the Atlantic.

I admit that being asked to take over a doomed position may not be the greatest opportunity in the world. But it can be fun. If given such a case, why worry? It was the previous player that got the country into such a mess; there is no onus on you. What have you got to lose? You should play Diplomacy to have fun and win. You should take over doomed standby positions to have fun.

I feel strongly that players who volunteer to be standbys should realize that they will probably end up with poor positions. This should be stated and made clear from the beginning.

Bruce Linsey: I'm with the masses. Civil disorder is always bad for the game. See my article on the topic elsewhere in this handbook.

Question 3 (no replacements; replacements only if all players agree)

Randolph Smyth: ((Not using replacements is)) the British system. I don't like it. Tenacity alone ensures a fairly good finish in most games, and the final result is little more than a lottery if a large power drops out. The way you phrase ((the second part of the question)), I don't think replacements would ever be approved in practice. There is always one player who stands to gain from another nation's inactivity, and he would be a fool not to veto the replacement. I think it would turn out virtually equivalent to "no replacements", with the extra work of conducting the votes.

John Crosby: As long as this is stated up front, it would be acceptable. Rules should definitely state whether replacements will or will not be permitted. If a vote were instituted, an alliance might be able to block a replacement to their benefit. I do not feel this is the way the game was meant to be played.

Conrad Minshall: Okay, although I prefer standbys. I am playing in one such game. ((On part B)) Seems ridiculous. Surely you'd never get everyone to vote for the replacement!

Question 4 (neutral 1901 moves)

((Editor's Note: Conrad didn't print most of the replies verbatim. He did print some thoughtful comments, which read as follows:))

Conrad von Metzke: Let us make short-shrift of one of these lingering questions: the matter of using neutral moves in case somebody misses a move in 1901.

My thesis was that 1901 is especially critical if a game is to get off to a balanced and effective start for all players. By missing a 1901 move, a country will throw the game completely out of whack right away, and that can have a tendency to spoil it for everyone. (Note that a 1901 miss can be more damaging for some powers than for others. For instance, it practically eliminates England from any possible contention. Italy is almost as bad.)

In the past, I have solved this, I thought, by stating that if a player missed a 1901 move, I would immediately replace him/her, no second chances, and meanwhile keep the game going by fashioning "neutral" moves designed merely to allow the country a chance at basic positioning and the neutral supply centers it normally gets anyway.

Replies to my question were many, varied, and fascinating. And it is particularly interesting to me that not one person endorsed the system out of hand; everybody had some qualifier or another.

Kevin Tighe put it this way: "I don't like neutral moves, they're unfair to the players and to the country they're used for. I do agree that the NMRing player gets tossed out; good riddance. But why not delay the gamestart one more issue for the new player? This ensures that a 7-player game starts with 7 players, not 6 players and a neutral. In Redwood Curtain, I have such a houserule, and have had to use it for both gamestarts. None of the other players complained about the extra delay."

Kevin's implied point is awfully valid, I'd say. A neutral move gets a few units shuffled around, sure; but it fails to address the real issue, which is -- where is the warm-blooded person who is supposedly playing the country? Neutral moves do not negotiate. And a game is going to be almost as unbalanced by a player who doesn't negotiate as by a player who doesn't show up at all.

On the phone, Dave Kleiman presented to me his alternative to the "neutral move" solution. Dave announces his gamestart and sets a deadline two issues thence. He then requires that all players submit tentative (preliminary, subject to change as needed, of course) orders by the date of the first issue thereafter. For any country whose player does not do so, a standby is announced in the usual manner, and the standby takes over if the original player defaults.

Bruce Linsey: I think Dave Kleiman's idea is probably the best solution, and if I were still GMing I'd scrap the neutral moves I once used and adopt this system instead. I cannot resist pointing out (and providing a bit of ammo for the purists who say that the affected units oughta just hold) that in 1976IB (Graustark), Tom Thorsen's Italy NMRed in F '01, leaving him with no builds. He went on to an 18-center victory in 1912, so anything's possible... (but notice how far back I had to dig for that!).

Question 5 (preference lists)

Michael Pustilnik: Preference lists should always be requested. Otherwise, no one will ever get the country he wanted, and everyone will enjoy the game less. Countries not assigned to those submitting preference lists should be randomly assigned to those who don't submit lists. If preference lists are used, they should be strictly adhered to. In some cases, "stage managing" random draws is a good idea, but don't let the players know!

Stephen Wilcox: I prefer random assignment of countries. I fully understand some people's reasons for wanting preference lists, so I also gladly accept the assignment of countries the way Conrad Minshall did it in 1985A. First he randomly assigned the countries for those that wanted random assignment (like me -- I got England). After this he used the preference lists to assign the remaining countries to those that submitted preference lists. In other words, if someone had sent in a preference list with England as his first choice, he could not get it because I was randomly assigned it first. Kind of confusing, but I think much better than forcing preference lists upon those who prefer random. Or even worse, assigning the least-liked country (usually Austria) to the one that never sent in a preference list.

Ken Hager: I definitely believe that preference lists should be allowed. The players are investing time and money; why shouldn't they be allowed to play the country of their preference if possible? I can see no good reason not to accommodate them.

If some people submit preference lists, then I do my best to satisfy them. I then conduct a blind draw to assign remaining countries to the players who had no preference. After all, no preference list is just a way of saying that you'll be perfectly happy with any country.

Bruce Linsey: I prefer the preference list to the random draw. They should be used if the game's GM wants to use them. By non-submission of a list, a player has indicated no preference and thus should be given whatever country is left over.

There are several algorithms which might legitimately be used in selecting countries based on preference lists. Any reasonable such algorithm is acceptable. (And I don't even see why you refer to one as "stage-managing" and not the other in your discussion. Both have sound mathematical justification.) In Voice of Doom, I simply eyeballed the lists and chose what looked to be fair assignments. Of course, I was usually helped by the fact that I'd open five or six games at a clip, and so could shuffle the lineups to account for such factors as geography, suspected cross-game arrangements...and, non-compatible preference lists.

Stage managing the random draw is fine, though it is not then totally random. Partially-random draws are often used in multi-round tournaments to keep players from playing the same country twice.

Question 6 (legitimate reasons for expulsion other than demonstrated cheating)

Conrad von Metzke: Virtually all the responses mentioned what I guess I thought of as "the obvious": missing moves too often, and letting a subscription lapse. Because those two points were almost unanimously mentioned, I'm going to treat them as "given" and deal only with other things noted.

Bruce Linsey: Non-demonstrated cheating. The player has lied to the GM over the phone. Clearly this puts the GM in a tough spot, but he has justification (it could even be argued, obligation) to expel the player.

Mark Berch: I have never seen the logic of expelling for failing to keep up a sub, though it's legit to do that if it's put in the houserules. If the sub runs out, cut off the zine, but as long as the player gets his orders in, he should be permitted to stay in the game.

Randolph Smyth: A player who uses the game as an outlet for a personal extra-game feud with another player, either in the press or in the orders ("A Smy goes to Con in an effort to beat up that alcoholic Nazi nigger...") would be appropriately censored in my zine. Pushed to the limit, I suppose entire sets of orders could be voided, but I've never heard of such an actual case.

Also, a player who voted against a draw in a classic stalemate position would be asked for a reasonable explanation for holding out; if not forthcoming, I would declare the game over (my houserules detail the procedure, though I've never had to use it). More a matter of expelling the game from the player than vice-versa.

Question 7 (requirements for ending a game by vote. treatment of non-votes)

Michael Pustilnik: The unanimous consent of those submitting orders is required to pass a proposal. One "no" vote is enough to kill it. An abstention should be considered a "no" unless it is part of an NMR. And a GM should not list the vote breakdown; just the result.

Randolph Smyth: "Yes" votes must be unanimous (including "no votes received"; see later comments). This seems obvious, as otherwise six 3-center powers could vote for a 7-way draw over the objection of a 16-center power. One "no" vote must kill any proposal.

I hold votes open until the following deadline if I receive only "yes" (with other players not responding). If a proposal is not vetoed with a specific "no" the second time around (the original "yes" voters can change their minds), the no-vote-received is treated as "yes" and the proposal goes through.

I'd feel funny about ending the game with a concession to a one-center power; I expect the players to take the game a little more seriously than that, and I haven't been disappointed in my zine so far. In theory, though, the players are free to concede to, or draw with, any surviving player...or to vote to abandon it, I guess -- it's their game...

I normally just announce that a proposal passed or failed. However, any player can request that his vote be made public, and I'll do that for him (with no trickery possible). This has diplomatic consequences, particularly when several players are trying to sniff out a "holdout" to an "obvious" draw -- all may agree to go public and discover the contrary voter by elimination. Actually, this has never been used to my knowledge in my games, though people frequently make votes public for other reasons.

Konrad Baumeister: I have always preferred to let the players end the game in any way they saw fit, so long as it was unanimous (defined by me for my zine as the absence of objection to a proposal). Randolph Smyth is correct in saying that odd things can happen. I was once party to a game where the thing (1976DU, I think it was) was conceded to a one-center Germany...which was in civil disorder. After the vote, some players objected, arguing that the GM should have known they were not serious. (Not me, I was serious enough, and enjoyed the whole affair tremendously.) The GM, Bob Hartwig, to his everlasting credit, held fast, replying that a vote is a vote, and if a player isn't serious casting it this time, when will he be? Darned right, too.

Bruce Linsey: I had about the same experience -- twice. Two of the games I was running were ended by vote before the players actually wanted them to end (one of them to a one-center Turkey), and being more lily-livered than Bob Hartwig, I let the games go on (after getting unanimous approval from the players). Ultimately, we're here to have fun, and if all the players think it'd be more fun to continue, then who cares what the BNC (or any other outsider) thinks? Of course, I would have been quite within my rights not to continue the games, too...

Question 8 (black press)

Konrad Baumeister: I always ran black press in my games. The stickiest problem I faced was when one player took offense at what another wrote...but he suspected the wrong player, and got rather personal about it. At which time, the player accused, innocent, asked that I state for the record that he did not submit the press release. I said sorry, can't do that; theoretically any player can deny black press but the author (who might try it too) and that would remove the essence of it.

Bruce Linsey: I'm not especially fond of black press. Just for kicks, I allowed it in Voice of Doom only in the April Fool's issue each year -- the first issue published on or after April 1. Generally, I wouldn't make a point of reminding players about it beforehand; some always remembered and a few were always taken in. To date, no GM has been nutty enough to copy me.

I also ran a couple of all-black press games for players who preferred it that way.

Randolph Smyth: I usually read the press for the game I'm in, but never take it seriously until I have something to confirm it from the player who (supposedly) wrote it. In my zine, anything goes as far as black/grey/white press is concerned. But any rule is okay as long as the players know what it is.

Michael Pustilnik: I don't see what is wrong with black press, but if you really want to give your players some protection, you can use the system used in Magus. Black press is permitted, but is put in a separate section at the beginning of the press and is clearly labelled. It would be a shame to forbid black press, because it tends to be funnier and better-written than ordinary press.

Question 9 (draws include all survivors; limiting draws to a specified number of players)

Ken Peel: There are very few GMs left who stick with the rulebook DIAS (Draws Include All Survivors). I think that is too bad. My own background in postal play originated in an out-of-Dipdom experience with high school gaming friends (who included Doug Brown and Mark Stegeman). We played the variant World Diplomacy for several years before becoming aware of the larger postal hobby, and, except for one game, the presumption was DIAS. It makes for a more serious game, and a more paranoid one at that. On the down side, it can also drag out a game where the players have lost interest. So I guess in the net I think that both DIAS and non-DIAS are valid ways to play the game, each with its own advantage, but I think it is too bad that DIAS games are now so scarce. Only Graustark and Retaliation, as far as I am aware, have them.

On other rulings limiting draws to a specified number of players (by the GM), I think that is a mistake. I certainly wouldn't play under such rules; but, if it is in the houserules, I would say it is legit.

Randolph Smyth: Yes, it is a form of GM interference; whether justified is another matter. If all 7 players decide in Fall 1901 that they want a 7-way draw, how can the GM possibly enforce such a restriction? More practically, I've been involved in a game that ended in a 5-way draw, all five players being essential to a "classic stalemate". The x-way draw proponents will sooner or later have to trash such an arbitrary rule, I think.

Stephen Wilcox: I prefer non-DIAS games. Any method of voting to end the game that needs every player to vote yes in order to pass is fine even if the GM doesn't allow certain outcomes. I can't understand why a GM would refuse certain outcomes if the players want it. Any GM that does this should be considerate enough to announce the fact prior to collecting game fees and starting the game.

Conrad von Metzke: Have you noticed the common thread in all these discussions, both here and in prior issues? You name it, it's okay as long as players are told in advance (thus giving them the option of withdrawing themselves from play). Only Ken Peel states an outright preference for DIAS games, and I'd venture to suggest that the lack of available games under that system is a reflection of its relative ((lack of)) popularity. Sure, it would be nice to have them, if nothing else so that a newcomer could try things both ways just to see. But I'd offer that the consensus is obvious.

Allow me to go a bit afield and offer the speculation that the desire to have an unencumbered vote on a draw is a small-scale reflection of the greater desire to take control of one's own destiny in life overall. Few, if any, of us really want to be told what to do; in some cases we tolerate it, but we rarely wax exuberant over the possibility. I'm suggesting, of course, that the desire to vote whatever conclusion to a game we wish may not actually have anything to do with the game at all; it may merely represent our perceived attitudes about individual rights and personal freedom. Thus, do the players really "own" their games? Yes, that's the popular notion. But does this attitude really say anything about the game per se, or is it merely representative of a consensus among players, and the resultant "go with the flow" gamesmasterial procedure?

I too prefer non-DIAS games. I was one of those who protested vehemently when the DIAS rule was added to the Rulebook. (Others, especially Rod Walker, were much louder, but they didn't get their way either.) I freely admit that I want the option to decide the game result, if I have any say at all, based on whatever personal variables I elect to consider. Personal freedom is of great importance to me. Postal Diplomacy is one place where I can insist on having it, and be guaranteed of getting my way. Thus, I would elect not to play in a DIAS game. Those who choose to do so -- well, my ethic on personal freedom can hardly deny them the opportunity, wot?

Question 10 (is any houserule legit if stated in advance?)

Peter Sullivan: Yes, any rule is legit, provided it's stated in advance... If someone's stupid enough to sign up for a game with "unfair" houserules, that's their lookout. Changing houserules in the middle of a game is a different matter -- this should only be done with the consent of all the players, as I did with my revised houserules.

Ken Peel: Literally speaking, no; some houserules are "wrong". I mean, could you imagine a houserule requiring proof of monthly commission of postal fraud? Catch my drift?

Bruce Linsey: Any houserule is legit if stated in advance. Nobody has to play.

Randolph Smyth: Yes, certain possible rules are inherently wrong. The examples you gave are on the borderline, since a player with advance notice may simply go elsewhere if he doesn't want to, or can't, comply. But you can go further, to the point of discrimination/unreasonableness: "No females need apply", "Anyone named Randolph will be given Austria", "What am I bid for a favorable ruling on this debatable point?", "Any player may win the game immediately by sending his girlfriend over for sexual services"...obviously some "rules" go beyond anything relevant to the game or zine.

Bruce Linsey: Right, but nobody has to play, dagnabbit! Stop telling me I can't require my players to send their girlfriends over...

Konrad Baumeister: Well, in theory I believe that the GM can run the game any way he'd like, so long as the players know about it. In practice, most people's houserules are similar in the essentials. I have been unpleasantly surprised on occasion, but could only blame myself for not checking houserules prior to playing in those zines.

Conrad von Metzke: "Anything goes as long as it's stated in advance." Have we heard that somewhere before? This question was propounded, and the examples created, by Elmer Hinton, and his reply -- which is not printed because I left his letter in the car, and the car is in the shop for three days -- largely echoes the "in advance, it's okay" school.

I attribute the dichotomy seen in the responses to mere semantics; nobody is really on a different wavelength. The question was posed using the word "legitimate", and some took it to signify "appropriate to a postal Diplomacy game" while others saw it as meaning "legal and proper under the law of land".

I doubt that anyone would dispute this: Any rule, no matter how outrageous, is "legal"; no penalty will ensue. However, there is an array of rules which would be perforce ridiculous, and under which no rational being would play; Ken's "postal fraud" idea is but one classic example, and Randolph invents several others.

But. To hark back to the previous question, suppose I elect, for whatever stupid reason, to include an asinine rule; any of the examples offered will do. Who is to deny me the right to make an idiot of myself? Isn't this my right, as an expression of personal freedom? I mean, of course you may laugh me out of the hobby, but don't I have the inalienable right to be an ass by requiring, let us say, that all orders be submitted wrapped around an unmelted ice cube? ((Editor's Note: Well, if you weren't laughed out, you'd sure as heck be frozen out...))

There's a grey area here too. Some "legitimate" rules may nevertheless be "outrageous" when compared to the going norm. Suppose I write a rule that says it will cost you ten dollars each time you make a move. Is that wrong?

But there's one thing nobody touched on, and I think that needs to be given thought. What about the unwary novice who has no standard of comparison? Now, obviously no rational being is going to be sucked in by the screwball rules (e.g. Ken's postal fraud), but there is every chance that someone might be snared by an apparently "normal" rule (\$10 a turn) that is in fact quite outlandish. On that basis, I wonder if perhaps some standard of houserule isn't in order, at least to the extent that the responsible community will (as Dick Francis would put it) "warn off" the offenders, and avoid emulation at all cost?

Changing rules in midstream is rather another issue. I do not see anyone suggesting that this is reasonable, and I am hard-pressed to invent a justification for doing such a thing without player approval. Privately, I would carry it further and assert that such actions are tantamount to fraud, and ought to be dealt with as such.

Bruce Linsey: Conrad's remarks evoke the following thoughts. There is more than mere strength in numbers; there is wisdom as well. While it might be possible to find one sucker who'd fall for a \$10-per-turn gamefee without doing a minimal bit of checking around, I doubt you'll find seven all at once!

It is perfectly acceptable to make certain houserule changes while a game is in progress. The clearest example is the case where the GM isn't actually changing the game's procedure, but simply covering a topic heretofore not mentioned. Suppose a rookie GM forgets to mention season separations in his houserules until the subject comes up. He is perfectly justified -- and wise -- to add a houserule covering the matter. Rules which actually change the game's procedure are much more questionable, and of course this is what Conrad and others had in mind. If the GM allows himself to make such changes as part of his houserules to begin with, then players can hardly complain once the rule is implemented; however, they'd better be darned sure that the GM isn't about to lay any whoppers on them! The way I used to handle it was that I could make changes to the game's procedure, and any player had the right of protest, after which I'd have all the players vote on it. But such a rule must be applied with great temperance; in practice, I never received a single protest to the implementation of changes to a game in progress. Your best guide here is to act with the interest of the game(s) foremost in mind.

Question 11 (sealed orders)

Bruce Linsey: "Sealed orders" are harmful to the game. The assumption being made is that a player must choose his own strategy, but that he is not necessarily responsible for his own tactics. Unless one believes that tactical skill plays no role whatsoever, it is not legitimate to let a non-player decide a player's orders.

Ken Peel: I like the idea of sealed general orders. As far as I know, you and Rod are the only people currently using them in their houserules, although I understand that the practice was more common some years ago. Some may knock the system because it helps prevent players from gaining unearned windfalls due to the (gasp!) possible NMRs of others. In my philosophy of the game, no player has the inalienable right to unearned gains. Too often Diplomacy games are thrown or skewed from dropout players -- and certainly, I accept the blame for a good share of that myself. A mechanism to buffer the effect of an NMR or player change is a good idea in my book.

Konrad Baumeister: I have never really liked this system, as it has the potential to make a lot of trouble for the GM. People I have known that use sealed orders do not always (surprise, surprise) go to the trouble to get neutral players, etc., and often end up making up their own "logical" orders, it has been confided to me. I won't name names, though obviously you are above suspicion; nonetheless, even if done completely legitimately, players often harbor doubt.

Randolph Smyth: I allowed "sealed orders" when I was living in Ottawa, close to friends who did know how to play. Since then I've disallowed them for practical reasons, but have no objection in principle. I feel they are at least as legitimate as proxy orders, where one player orders another's units -- and the latter practice is widely accepted, though uncommon.

Question 12 (listing retreat options)

Randolph Smyth: I list the options, but I remember a couple of times when I made a mistake! In any case it's the player's responsibility to verify my list.

Stephen Wilcox: The only thing that matters here is consistency. It would not be fair to do it for some and not for others.

Ken Peel: Couldn't care less, as long as it is stated one way or another.

Bruce Linsey: It's up to a GM whether he lists retreat options. My personal preference is that he do so. Gee, this one really had everyone polarized, didn't it?!

Question 13 (having no houserules)

Randolph Smyth: There is nothing fundamentally "unacceptable" about a lack of houserules, though as an ombudsman I would lean heavily in favor of the player in case of any dispute. I wouldn't enter a game without houserules myself, even if the GM's reputation was beyond reproach -- I often use the houserules to my best advantage, and want to know where I stand without the trouble of asking for a ruling in every situation.

Bruce Linsey: My response in a minute, but first let me answer Randolph's remark about ombudsmen. I would tend to lean heavily in favor of the GM if the governing provisions germane to a particular dispute were not set forth in the houserules. Randolph has it backwards, in my opinion. In failing to state his position on a certain matter, the GM has effectively left himself the option of ruling any damn way his heart desires; on the other hand, the GM who states his rulings in advance is locked in. This is at the core of my argument that "player-oriented" houserules generally are synonymous with comprehensive houserules. The GM's power to make arbitrary decisions is in inverse, not direct, proportion to the completeness of his rules. End of sermon.

Pete Sullivan: It is acceptable to have no houserules, provided that everyone knows what they are. ((??)) Provided you've got no barracks room lawyers, everything should go swimmingly. If we can run our country ((the United Kingdom)) without a codified constitution, I'm sure you can run a little game of Diplomacy without houserules.

Ken Peel: I think at least basic houserules are important, as much to protect the GM as the player... I have experienced that houserules are more important for novices than for experienced players. There are certain very common practices in postal play that sometimes take novice players by surprise. I have seen cases where more clearly stated procedures at the beginning of the game would have saved a lot of grief later in the game. Still, my preference for houserules is that they stay as basic as possible and hinge on the common sense of the GM to the extent practicable. Some player like more detailed and voluminous houserules than do I, but that is just a matter of personal preference.

Bruce Linsey: First, let me disabuse people of the notion that it is possible not to have comprehensive houserules. Every GM has them. The only difference is whether or not they are written down in advance for the players.

That aside, it is acceptable, but very undesirable, for a GM to operate without written house rules. Whether or not he has them, he is going to have to make certain rulings throughout the course of the game on such matters as season separations, black press, deadline intervals, and dozens of other points. What harm can possibly arise from (gasp!) letting the players know how each of these situations will be dealt with?

"Common sense" is well and good, but unfortunately it doesn't yield a unique ruling on a whole lot of questions. If I want to know whether an NMRed, dislodged unit in your games is automatically disbanded, it doesn't help me to read that your ruling will be dictated by "common sense" (whatever that is).

((Whatever you decide on each of these points in the games you will run, I hope you've found it useful to read a variety of different viewpoints.))

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CHAPTER 13

NMRS AND DROPOUT PLAYERS

The Spring 1901 Miss

or

What Do We Do from Nothing?

by Edi Birsan

One of the situations that any experienced publisher will come up against is a No Moves Received situation in 1901. For new publishers, who do not have the experience of playing and publishing numerous games, this can be a particularly trying moment. There have been several ways the situation has been handled.

1. Tough Luck Stance: The country holds in civil disorder for the Spring 1901 moves. The player must send in fall moves to remain in the game. The effect on the game is overwhelming! I doubt that any country has ever won a postal game in which it started out by missing its spring moves! It gives a tremendous edge to the adjacent powers as well as hurting those distant players who cannot take advantage of the situation. It allows a fluke or short lapse by a player to have the greatest possible effect, on the average, on the game. Very few GMs use this ruling.

2. Good-bye Charlie: The country is given to a new player, the original player being tossed out of the game with forfeiture of his game fee and deposit. A new deadline is set for the Spring of 1901, as the game is delayed to allow for the new player to negotiate. The effect on the game is a minor imbalance because the new player has lost negotiating time and will have to face a new set of players who have already been dealing and writing for at least three weeks or one deadline. This type of GM response was favored in the late sixties, and it should be noted that while quite a few players were tossed out of games under these rulings, not once was a major or minor row caused. So should you lean to such strong action there will more than likely be general support for the action in case of any review.

3. Anonymous Moves: Along with the above ruling this is probably the most popular GM response. It merely involves the GM making or getting a set of neutral anonymous moves. It is wise never to reveal the source of the neutral anonymous moves, especially should it be the case that the GM made the moves. For no matter how impartial the GM or some neutral is, there may always be fears of pre-knowledge of favoritism. Rarely has a GM been accused of this in public, though no doubt several have had their ethics grilled in back room discussions.

4. Standard Openings ((also known as neutral Spring 1901 moves)): These have been kicked around and they allow an immediate out for the GM who wishes to avoid the problems of using anonymous moves. A possible set of such neutral orders or standard openings might be:

AUSTRIA: A Vie-Tri, A Bud-Ser, F Tri-Alb
 ENGLAND: A Lvp-Edi, F Lon-Nth, F Edi-Nwg
 FRANCE: A Par-Bur, A Mar-Spa, F Bre-Mid
 GERMANY: F Kie-Den, A Mun-Ruh, A Ber-Kie
 ITALY: A Ven H, A Rom-Apu, F Nap-Ion
 RUSSIA: A War-Ukr, F Sev-Bla, F StP(sc)-Bot, A Mos H
 TURKEY: F Ank-Bla, A Con-Bul, A Smy-Con

The advantages are that they move the game along, allow time for the GM to hear from the offending player, and allows in general for a much softer response to the problem than the Tough Luck or Good-bye Charlie stances. The disruption to the game is again relatively small compared to other alternatives. The GMs should keep this in mind when writing their houserules or responding to a 1901 GM crisis.

Of course these measures should only be implemented after a careful search for the moves and I seriously recommend that the GM should call the player collect to keep the problem from coming to pass. Under the circumstances, few people in their right mind would object to the call, and those that do can refuse it and suffer the consequences.

((For perhaps the best solution yet proposed to the Spring '01 NMR, see Dave Kleiman's way of handling things, discussed in "A Houserules Forum" (response to Question #4) elsewhere in this handbook.

I cringed on reading Edi's description of anonymous moves. Why are so many GMs so supportive of undermining the whole purpose of the game in this way? My opinion, expressed elsewhere too, is that such a practice is completely unethical and should not be used, ever. And if, as Edi hints might happen, the GM himself makes the moves; then it's time for that so-called GM to find another hobby. And if on top of all that he does this clandestinely and doesn't reveal that he himself made the moves... gawd, never mind...))

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Coping with the First NMR: A New Proposal

by Mark L. Berch

GMs hate NMRs. GMs are there to run games, and an NMR means that, in part, the game isn't being played. On the other hand, the game is for the players, so GMs do not want to interfere. These two values come into conflict. The more a GM does to prevent an NMR, the more he is, in some sense, inserting himself into the game. GMs differ in the relative weight they put on those values, and for that reason (and others) they differ in how they try to cope with an NMR.

The best way is to head it off in the first place, using what is called NMR insurance. That is, the GM maintains a list of his players' phone numbers, and attempts to call collect to those about to NMR on deadline day. But most GMs don't use it, and even if they do, it doesn't always get the orders.

In North America, nearly all GMs use the same system to prevent a second NMR; they bring in a replacement player, who was called to stand by after the first NMR. The first NMR is a different story.

The Spring 1901 NMR is a special case. Many GMs just let all units hold. But there are three other approaches. The first is to put "neutral" orders into the houserules, and use those in S '01. For example, A Par-Pic, A Mar-Spa, F Bre-Mid. The second is a system called "Good Bye Charlie". The player is immediately yanked, a replacement is brought in, a new deadline is set, and the GM hopes that the players will give the newcomer a fair shot. A third system, as yet unnamed, is a variation on this. Players are to send in preliminary orders once they get their country assignments. This gives the GM an early warning if one of the players is not interested. This allows him to bring in a replacement player even earlier than the deadline. In principle, this could be done with any season's orders, though I've never seen it done except for S '01.

Beyond that, the great majority of GMs will just let the units hold. Don't interfere, they reason, and let him pay the penalty. Unfortunately, all too often the price is really to be paid by the replacement player, who gets a position damaged by the NMR.

One approach is to ask the players to submit, and keep updated, general orders. If no orders come in, the GM will contact (usually by telephone) someone not in the game (usually a local player), read him the general orders, and ask him to create some specific orders based on those GOs. There are some obvious drawbacks here. It's a fair amount of work. Players may not bother sending in the GOs. The GOs may be obsolete, or so vague as to provide little real guidance. It also, in a limited sense, brings another person into the game. This person will have to exercise some discretion in most cases, and the GM may not require that he even follow the GOs.

A second approach is "phantom orders". It is similar, except that there are no GOs at all to work from. The phantom player is asked to make reasonably neutral, caretaker orders. This is much more controversial. The phantom is not operating under any guidance from the original player, and the other players have no way of influencing him. At least one game was ruled irregular, in part because the phantom orders were not neutral. This system, for very good reason, is rarely used. ((Editor's Note: "Rarely" ought to be "never". Any GM who would use "phantom orders" clearly hasn't understood the whole point of the game -- that orders should be subject to influence by other players' negotiations.))

My plan is the very essence of simplicity: the GM uses the same orders all over again. Spring orders are used for fall; fall orders are used for spring.

It has several clear advantages. There's no extra work for the GM. No other player is brought into the game in any capacity, which avoids the criticism sometimes made of general orders. The orders really were written by the player, albeit for a different season.

The drawback is that it gives only partial protection for the position. This is, after all, a compromise solution. If the piece originally moved, it's obviously going to be unordered the following season. That is, the player isn't going to be able to follow up on his earlier gains, and may not even be able to keep them. There is a certain amount of justice to that. What it does preserve are supports, and these can be vital to keep a position from rapidly crumbling. If a stalemate line has been formed, it should be able to survive a change of player, or a shafting from the Post Office. Other players will then be less tempted to say, "Let's prolong the game, in the hope that an NMR will destroy an opposing stalemate line that we cannot crack." In addition, if the player has set up an arranged standoff, that will operate again. The player can't change his plans or adapt, but he can persevere.

If the GM uses standbys, this will still count as an NMR, and a standby will be called. If not, this system could be used indefinitely, unless the player returned.

The complication comes with winter NBRs when the player could build. The GM could use the last winter's build, or just not use this system for winter. It's a small point. It obviously can't be used in S '01 and W '01, and will probably be pretty useless in F '01 and S '02. But later on, it could be quite effective, especially for powers in defensive positions.

I dub this the "WAP" plan -- War by Automatic Pilot.

One favor I ask. If you decide to use this plan in your games, let me know. I'd like to see if it's getting any kind of acceptance.

((This is quite a sensible suggestion, and if I were still GMing games I'd probably implement it. I hope that a few GMs will try it out.))

Dropouts and Position Deposits

by Lew Pulsipher

One of the most serious problems a publisher faces is players who drop out of their games. Not only does this disrupt the game, it forces the publisher to find a replacement for a position that is not good, more often than not. One fairly common means of approaching this problem is the game deposit (also known as the position deposit) ((or the NMR deposit or NMR fee)). When a player signs up for a game, he is required to provide a monetary deposit of a few dollars as incentive to keep him in the game. If the player drops out, then he forfeits his game deposit and the replacement player is entitled to it. The deposit finally goes to the last person to play the position, either when it is eliminated or when the game ends. Some people question whether this deposit deters dropouts, but there is little doubt that it encourages replacements, especially to take over a doomed or nearly doomed position.

Many players are much more likely to take over a poor position when they at least have the consolation of receiving a few bucks after they've seen it through. Publishers can also expect that people willing to pay the deposit are more reliable than those who will not pay it in the first place. The disadvantage of this system is that it increases initial cost to the player, and that if the publisher drops out he takes those additional funds with him. This may act as a deterrent to some people to join a game using this system, though I have not found this to be so.

((It's not as common now for the GM to give the deposit to the replacement player. For example, I would keep forfeited NMR deposits, and compensate the replacement with three free issues. Another system in use is to charge each player a \$10 NMR fee, and deduct \$5 from his eventual refund each time he NMRs. Alas, it has been shown that NMR fees don't do a whole lot of good in discouraging dropouts.))

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Shall We Blacklist Dropouts?

by Linda Courtemanche and Bruce Linsey

(The question of how to handle players who drop out of games has plagued the Diplomacy hobby since its beginning, and will probably always do so. In this discussion, Linda Courtemanche and Bruce Linsey debate the merits of some possible methods of dealing with dropouts.)

Bruce: In my opinion, people tend to look at the NMR question from the wrong perspective. That is, people generally tend to look at NMRs as a Bad Thing (which they are, of course), and at those who commit them as people who need somehow to be punished. I favor the maintenance of a blacklist of players who NMR out of games, but not as a vehicle for any sort of punishment for the offenders; rather, as a means of protecting the players who take the time to be reliable. This position has been frequently misunderstood in the past, so let me elaborate a little now. There are legitimate reasons for NMRing out of games, and there are far more common cases where players just lose interest and don't have the decency to end their involvement in the game cleanly. All too often, these players then look for a new game, a new zine. And once their position deteriorates again, or their interest wanes again for whatever reason, they drop out of still another game, not caring that this action harms the game for the remaining players.

Thus, a GM who takes care not to place such a player in his games is in fact doing his reliable players -- the ones who will play out their positions and wish their opponents would do likewise -- an enormous favor. It could be argued that the GM must treat all players equally, but in this case, I don't think that applies -- we're talking not about a player currently active but a potential player. In my opinion, the GM not only has a right but an obligation to take some measures to see to it that the game will be an enjoyable activity for his players. Part of that responsibility is reflected in the common acceptance of the fact that a GM should, say, publish promptly. But another part of that responsibility is to see to it that the game is not infested with players likely to drop out. And how does a GM keep track of players who abandon their positions? He can hardly be expected to scan other zines carefully enough to have all this information in his head. For that reason, I personally believe that dropouts should be placed on a list of some sort (perhaps blacklist is too harsh a term?), and people so listed should be given an awfully hard time about joining another game. I reiterate: it isn't punishment or vengeance or anything like that -- it's in the interest of those people who have earned the most consideration, the reliable players. I'll tell you what: if a GM shows this amount of concern for his players, then I'm going to want to sign up for one of his games because I know it's likely to be well-played.

And what, you ask, of the normally reliable players who because of some isolated circumstance are forced to drop out of one game (or several games at one particularly bad time)? Obviously this is a sticky situation -- people in this category don't deserve to be listed as unreliable, or barred from future games. I would simply ask that in such a circumstance, the affected player write an explanation for his action

(nothing complicated -- a note along the lines of "I dropped out because I was going through a difficult time" or "I don't have a good reason, but it was my first time and I don't intend to let it happen again" would suffice). His name is of course then not listed, and he can start fresh. But to take no action against the true deadbeats simply because of a few isolated cases, or worse, to take no action because of some misguided (in this case) notion that a GM cannot be biased against even a potential player, is wrong. It is wrong because it does not consider the interests of the reliable players.

Linda: I agree that it is a decided shame for reliable hobbyists to have to put up with habitual deadbeats. However, I'm afraid that the blacklist (I'm calling it that because I can't think of another name for it either) is not really a workable concept, since in practice it tends to create Good Guy/Bad Guy categories. And there are really too many situations that fall into a grey area between the two. Consider this one: the player who lives in an area with a notoriously erratic Post Office. He/she may try to plan sufficient lead time, but may be prevented from succeeding by late zine deliveries, slow mail service of orders to the GM and equally slow delivery of negotiation letters, flyers, etc. This unfortunate person may begin to get a reputation as a frequent NMRer, simply because of the sins of the Postal Service (American or otherwise). It would certainly be unfair to punish this player by placing him/her on a blacklist, or even to steer other hobbyists clear of this player. As for phoning in orders, the cost can be prohibitive to many, and it is not always allowed anyway.

Work and personal schedules, illness, family problems, and so on can also make it tough to always get moves in on time; we all know that, and you did address the problem, Bruce. But I think that the blacklist concept will make people feel that they have to be on the defensive, as if their honest dilemmas are just "excuses" to be believed or disbelieved. I know that's not what you have in mind, but some people will take it that way. And of course, people cannot usually guard against hectic weeks, because most domestic disasters are unexpected in their length or severity.

What I am really trying to say, Bruce, is that the NMR blacklist is an ideal solution in a less-than-ideal world, so unfortunately it will not work. It is assuming that a smoothly-running business can be made of a collection of semi-organized, sometimes egotistical, very busy, well-meaning, and all-too-human Dip players. I am afraid that some good people will perish along with the deadbeats if this system were used, because the judgement calls which would have to be made would be very tricky, and I don't think that anyone could honestly be impartial and perceptive enough to draw the line correctly in all cases.

Bruce: You make your case extremely well, and in fact I'm mostly persuaded. But please recognize that, however hard-assed it may seem, the "blacklist" suggestion was an attempt to deal with the important and difficult question of how do we keep unreliable players from ruining games for the rest of us?

I understand -- and now agree with -- your point that the innocent should not suffer along with the guilty. Even with my lenient procedure for letting people off the list, some negative stigma would accrue, and hard feelings would result, in cases in which the dropout was not at fault.

How about a somewhat less formidable procedure? Instead of approaching matters from a negative standpoint, how about the other way 'round? Set up an "honor roll" of reliable players who have met certain standards of reliability based on the number of games completed and/or length of time in the hobby. That way, the names listed are chosen in a positive way, and at the very least, the project appears less formidable in nature.

I can already hear the objections. What about novices, who have not yet had a chance to establish reliability? Won't innocent people get shafted by not appearing on the list when their drops were, again, not their fault? Who decides the criteria for reliability, anyway? Who maintains such a list and how does he get his info? Would such a project be complete enough and unsoiled enough by feuding to be a legitimately useful tool for GMs trying to provide their players with reliable opponents?

I don't pretend to have all the answers. But I do know from my own experience as a player and GM that dropouts are a problem and, in my opinion, something has to be done to discourage them from ruining games for their co-players.

Back to you, Linda.

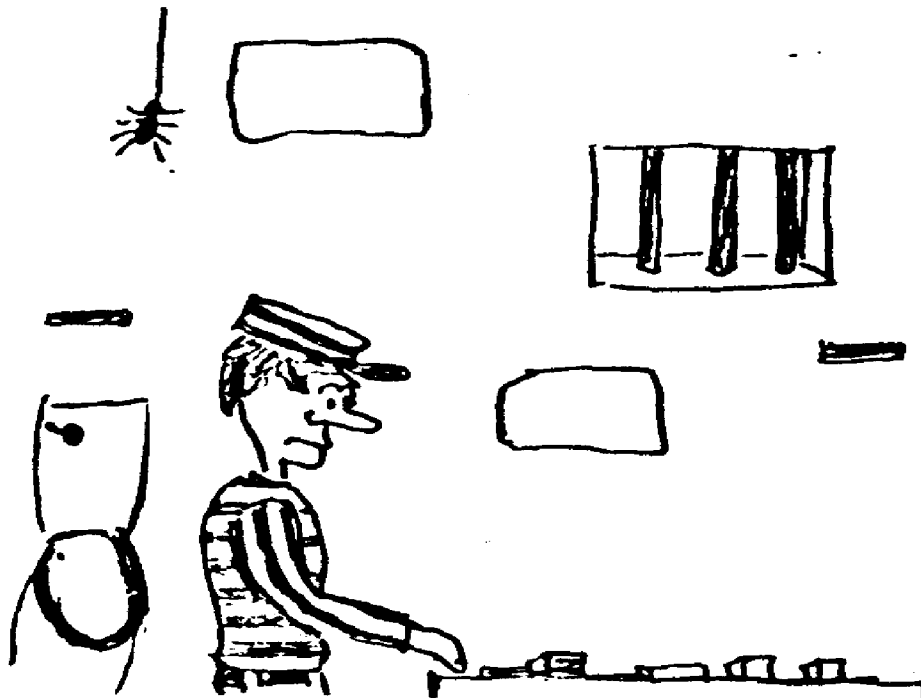
Linda: I am glad to see that you are now approaching the NMR problem from a more positive standpoint -- that of a hobby honor roll instead of a blacklist -- but I am afraid neither approach is destined for success on any significant scale. My reasons? You stated them quite well: (1) Novices would not have a leg to stand on; (2) There is no completely impartial hobbyist I know of to head such a project; (3) Where does the information on "reliability" come from, and where are the lines drawn?

For a long time, GMs have attempted to establish rules to stop or curb NMRs; by and large, none of these rules have fazed the deadbeat or the fair-weather player in the least. NMR fees are written off in players' minds from Day One. A pubber who denies a continued sub to a habitual NMRer will simply lose subbers. Postal screw-ups come with the territory, and no hobby actions can keep zines and fliers from arriving late or not at all. Telephoning orders can become an expensive proposition.

All of this adds up, sad to say, to a situation that no one has been able to solve thus far. It further points to the fact that if some hobbyist does ever luck onto a foolproof NMR insurance, it must be embraced by the whole hobby in order for it to have any effect. And I have yet to see any project, person, idea, or rule that every hobbyist agrees upon!

There is one consolation, however, for the reliable hobbyist -- and that is, I really think that people who NMR out characteristically are going to get a bad reputation anyway. Word spreads fast in the hobby, especially when alliances are stymied by NMRs which prevent them from a grand sweep of the board. Hell hath no fury like an ally NMRed on, and he or she who is stung will usually drift off into other, more dependable alliances if a consensus begins to form against a particular player. Note: I am in no way advocating crossgaming here; I am simply observing that -- in hard reality -- this is all that players can do to guard themselves against deadbeats; to formalize any anti-NMR campaign is bound to be impossible and ineffectual, as has been proven time and time again, and it is bound to stir up feuds.

Bruce: Lots of problems, no easy solutions. How will you new and potential GMs out there handle players who NMR out of your games?



Your players will come
from the strangest places!

CHAPTER 14

THE STANDBY PLAYER

Abolish Civil Disorder!

by Bruce Linsey

In Great Britain, standbys are rarely used for postal Diplomacy games. Positions which are dropped, no matter how large, are usually put into "anarchy" -- their term for civil disorder.

In North America, on the other hand, a standby is usually called to submit backup orders in the event of an NMR; and he takes over the position if the original player drops out.

There are pros and cons to both methods, and this article will not delve into them. What I do wish to attack, though, is the policy followed by many North American zines; that of assigning a standby to large positions but letting smaller positions go into CD. Some zines even have clauses in their houserules like "Abandoned positions will be given to a standby if they are three centers or larger; otherwise they will be placed in civil disorder."

The problem with such a policy is that the GM has arbitrarily declared that a position of three or more centers is "important" enough to merit having orders given to its units, while a position of two units or less is not that "important". This strikes me as not only arbitrary but artificial as well. In a properly played game, every unit is potentially important to the outcome of the game.

Consider for instance a game in its late stages, with the powers at 17-16-1. The one-center power may have his unit in a vital position on a stalemate line, and it may be needed to give a crucial support. Put it in CD, and the draw becomes a win for the 17-center power. In fact, a situation similar to this occurred in a game I GMed. Jerry Austin assumed control of a one-center Italy, allied with Dave Claman's France, and played a vital role in Dave's Mediterranean campaign. Without the help of that one Italian fleet, it is very possible that Dave might not have gone on to win. Had the country been placed in CD, the game might have been a four-way draw instead.

Another example is in order. Take the case of a French player who (and this could be at about any time during the game) is trying to order his Army Marseilles to Piedmont. If Italy has an army already in Piedmont, then one of France's options (other than somehow obtaining the necessary support to dislodge A Pie) is to persuade Italy to move A Pie-Tyo, or A Pie-Tus, or whatever. And this is how it is supposed to be! Every piece on the board should receive its order subject to the persuasive techniques of the other players. (I once used precisely the same argument when I criticized the Rulebook's ban on negotiations prior to retreats and adjustments.) But I don't care how skillful a diplomat the Frenchman is; if that Army Piedmont is in CD, it just isn't going to move out of the way.

All of this leads me to the conclusion that every position and every unit plays a role in the outcome of the game. Bob Osuch once took a two-center Turkey to victory, and Rod Walker in The Gamer's Guide to Diplomacy relates how in one game on record, a standby took over an Austria in a very precarious position. His last army had been dislodged from Vienna in the spring and retreated to Bohemia. Through negotiation, he regained Vienna in the fall and by game's end he was in second place. So there is no such thing as a totally hopeless position, and therefore, every unit ought to have a player to order it each season. In my opinion, if you're going to use standbys at all (and I favor doing so), you should assign one to every abandoned country regardless of size. I hasten to add that I am aware that not every GM has 20 or 30 people on his standby list, and that it isn't so easy for those who don't. I was one of the lucky ones (my standby list often went up into the fifties), so I could always afford to practice what I'm preaching. It is a pity that some GMs cannot do this, but even more of a pity that some choose not to. I urge all GMs reading this to give careful consideration to the points I have raised.

My feeling is that even the tiniest country just might tip the scales and affect the balance of power in any game. And that is why there was no such thing as civil disorder in The Voice of Doom.

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They Also Serve Who Stand By and Wait

by John Leeder

Right from the beginnings of postal Diplomacy, one of the crucial, basic questions has been: what do you do when someone quits the game? And the answers have tended to divide into two camps: 1) replace him with somebody else, and 2) do nothing.

By far the majority of publishers have embraced policy #1 ((in North America, that is)); however, there are still a few publishers around who don't use replacements. If a player resigns or drops out, they simply put the country into civil disorder. This philosophy is most strongly rooted in Britain, and this article was in fact inspired by a comment from British GM Mick Bullock.

In 1901 and All That #44, Mick stated: "Standbys are ridiculous, though most people probably never stopped to think about it. My philosophy is simply this: that seven people start out to play a game, and one (or some) of that seven is going to be the eventual winner, by fair means or foul -- and if that includes frightening the opposition away, well and good. Sure, dropouts and C.D. spoil the game...but who the hell ever proved standbys improve things?"

This article intends to prove just that.

The weakness of Mick's argument is that people who resign from, or drop out of, a game are almost never "frightened away". Resignations and dropouts occur mostly because of factors completely unconnected with the game itself: increased workload, illness, shifting of interest and other personal distractions. Sometimes people will quit in frustration because the game is spoiled by factors outside their control (e.g. Arnold Proujansky's resignation from 1973AG after the post office twice lost his orders, causing crucial NMRs). However, players who will quit because someone is getting the better of them are, I think, few and far between; almost nobody is "frightened away".

So most dropouts and resignations are caused by factors outside the actual Diplomacy game. Now, Mick admits (and I'm sure everybody agrees with him) that dropouts and countries in C.D. "spoil the game". The way they spoil the game is by giving an unfair advantage to some player(s). Obviously, if your neighbor goes into C.D., leaving a ripe power vacuum and undefended supply centers sitting within easy reach, it will benefit you more than it will help the guy at the other end of the board.

Conversely, if your ally suddenly disappears in the middle of a tight campaign, it hurts you; but it hurts you less if he is replaced by someone. You at least have a chance to talk the new player into contributing to the alliance. If you have a strong pact based on concrete benefits for both parties, a replacement player can be made aware of those benefits.

It may be impossible to keep a game "pure" and totally unaffected by outside factors; but the use of replacement players offers a chance to minimize the unfair advantages and disadvantages doled out to the remaining players, when those outside factors cause someone to resign from, or drop out of, the game.

The question can be viewed from another angle as well. Many Diplomacy players look on the game as a historical simulation of a rough sort, and subject any problem to the test: "How well does it approximate real life?"

Here, the use of standbys passes the test as well. It is certainly not unheard-of for a country to undergo a change of government in the middle of a war, and for the new regime to get a grip on things and continue pursuing the conflict according to its own priorities. But it is unheard-of for a country in wartime to suffer a collapse of government to such an extent that the civil authority is not replaced by anything. And in the unlikely event that such a thing did occur, the military units would not simply sit down and wait to die; they would in all probability attempt to return home in order to restore order. The civil disorder rules are highly unrealistic in this respect; the use of replacement players restores some realism to the game.

Nobody is going to argue that missed moves and quitting players are good for a game; but their adverse effects are more effectively countered by the use of standbys and replacement players than by putting countries into permanent civil disorder.

Now that we've established the value of using standbys, the next question is how to set up a standby system. There are two main setups commonly in use in postal Diplomacy; I call them the "gamelist" and the "zinelist". ((Editor's Note: The "gamelist" system John is about to describe has since gone almost completely out of fashion, for reasons to become obvious...))

The "gamelist" system is a time-honored one and dates back to the earliest days of postal Diplomacy, when multi-game zines were unknown, and each zine was a vehicle for the play of one, and only one, game. So a standby for a given zine was automatically eligible for one game only. When multi-game zines developed, some GMs nevertheless continued the practice of maintaining separate standby lists for each individual game.

Although many GMs continue ((as of the mid-70s)) to use the gamelist system, it seems to be gradually giving way to the "zinelist" system.

If the gamelist system is falling out of favor, there must be reasons. Certainly there were advantages to the system; for example, a standby who is eligible for one specific game is theoretically going to keep a close eye on the progress of that game, and keep up to date on the tactical situation and alliance structure. He might keep less well informed if he were eligible for a large number of games at once.

However, the gamelist has at least one major drawback, intensified by the particular use that has been made of it. Most GMs have treated it as an "ordered" system. That is, there is a "first standby", a "second standby", and so on. The first standby gets all standby requests, until he finally connects and ends up in the game. Then the second standby moves into first place on the list and gets all requests until he enters the game. And so with the third, fourth, etc...

And here is where the system breaks down.

It is essential to the success of standby and replacement systems that transitions between outgoing and incoming players be as smooth as possible. The other players in the game have a part in this. If they want to minimize a player change's disruptive effects on them, or even gain some advantage from it, they must communicate with the standby even before he gets into the game, in order to maintain alliance or try to swing neutrals or enemies into friendship. This communication inevitably involves the giving out of a certain amount of information. But most players are going to be reluctant to divulge confidential information to a standby if there is a possibility that the standby will not get into the game at that point, but will pop up later in another position, possessed of vital information which could give him an advantage. The "ordered gamelist" has the tendency to reduce players' willingness to communicate with standbys, thus striking a blow at the very core of the replacement system's effectiveness.

The "zinelist" system is by far the most popular alternative to the gamelist and is, in fact, the most popular system in the hobby. As the name implies, it is simply a list of people who can be called upon to stand by for any game in the zine. The zinelist is often called a "pool" or "roster" ((or more often, just a "standby list")). In the trivial case, the one-game zine, the gamelist and zinelist are identical. In a multi-game zine, the zinelist has the same inherent disadvantage as the gamelist -- reluctance of players to communicate with standbys -- but the effect is greatly reduced by being spread over a larger number of games. The greater the number of games, the smaller is the probability that a given player will be called upon to stand by more than once for a given game. With a large standby roster, the probability becomes very small indeed. ((Editor's Note: And with a sensible houserule, it becomes still smaller. A given player should never be asked to stand by for two different countries in the same game, for the reasons John gives a paragraph ago.))

The only real variations on the zinelist involve the gamesmaster's method of calling upon standbys. Sometimes this is done in no particular order at all; the GM will call on people by whim, or because he owes someone a favor, or because he thinks so-and-so would fit well in such-and-such a game. This is dangerous, as it leaves the GM open to the appearance, if not the reality, of favoritism.

Better to use a definite order for calling upon standbys. I do not know of anyone who uses an "ordered zinelist"; i.e. a "first standby", "second standby", and so on. The drawbacks of that are obvious. Most people who use a zinelist use a strict rotation setup; after a standby is called upon once, he goes to the bottom of the list. New entrants to the roster begin at the bottom. This is my own practice, although I will pass over the first-place standby in extenuating circumstances, to maintain geographic balance, to avoid having the same combination of players in too many games, to avoid having a player called upon twice in succession for the same game, and so on. With a large roster, it's possible to take these factors into consideration. When a first-place person is passed over, he remains atop the list until a suitable spot comes up.

Another wrinkle which I have recently introduced into my setup, with good results so far, is the "star system". The reasoning behind it is as follows: the element of chance, which determines which standbys actually get into a game, can operate to the disadvantage of some people on the list. Presumably, every person on the roster is ready and willing to get into games as a replacement quite often, while others plug along faithfully sending set after set of orders without ever getting into a game.

Therefore, I added a new element to my system. When a player gets into a game via the standby route, his name is transferred to the bottom of the list and I put a star by it. When a starred name reaches the top, I immediately transfer it to the bottom again, removing the star. In effect, the players who don't get into a game are given two chances on the ensuing round, while a player who has recently gotten a

position retains his spot in the rotation but loses one chance at another one. This gives extra opportunity to those who are faithful standbys without reward, and spreads the players more evenly throughout the games. So far I know of no other GM using this system, but it has proved successful for me, and I can recommend it.

Alternatives to the gamelist and zinelist: well, there's the publisher who has no formal standby list, and simply pulls names out of the blue when he needs them. This is not a classy way to do business, as well as being dangerous ((Editor's Note: Not to mention rude, disgusting, and downright stinky. Don't ever do this!)). It would be perfectly ethical for the desired standby to decline to answer, leaving the GM high and dry. Even if the solicited person took the trouble to write and say no, a delay of the game would be necessary as the GM hunted up a new standby. So the GM who wants to use standbys but does not keep a standby list is simply courting disaster.

Another, even more pernicious policy, is best illustrated by an example from my own experience. I was playing Austria, allied with Russia, and doing fine. Suddenly, Russia resigned. The GM had no standbys, and my ally went into civil disorder. As if that weren't bad enough, the GM came up with a standby by the next season and simply stuck him into the Russian position. All of a sudden, Russia had a new ruler and that ruler was attacking me, with never an opportunity for communication on my part. This was an example of how a GM can misuse a standby setup so that some players are definitely harmed by it. Players should always have the opportunity to communicate with standbys. ((Editor's Note: Absolutely, and that GM ought to have been drawn and quartered. Please don't ever screw up your games by inserting a standby with whom the players haven't had a chance to negotiate.))

In summation, a GM needs to have some sort of a standby setup. From my own experience, for the reasons outlined above, I recommend a rotating zinelist, with a "star" corollary. Whatever system you use, it should be well thought-out for maximum smoothness and maximum fairness to all players.

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And the opposing point of view...

Please (Don't) Stand By!

by Jerry Jones

The subject of standbys is one that I can get my teeth into! For as long as I can remember (which is about the time a standby came in and screwed up my first postal game), I have been opposed to standbys. Are they needed? Most will immediately respond with a yes. Why? Because they help maintain the game balance. Hogwash!

When a standby enters a game, one of two things happen. One, the standby does little more than as if the units had remained in civil disorder. Or, which is far more often the case, you've got a brand new game and you'd better treat the entire game as brand new. How many standbys do you think go back and look at the earlier game results? If you think any do, then you're a dreamer. No, they look at the current position and make all decisions from there without any regard for what's gone on in the past. Try to convince the standby that the war between him and you is a "phony war". Lots of luck! Try to convince him that Belgium was only to be his until Fall 1905. Dream on! ((Editor's Note: Of course, you could always pass along the appropriate letters...)) The minute a standby steps in, everything that transpired in the past is for naught. How can anyone believe that promotes play balance? No, I fail to see the love affair that the North American hobby has for the standby.

Do I have a better way? C'mon, I'm just an agitator. I do believe that the games would continue ((without standbys)), possibly in a different manner; one that would require new skills. Let's look at some basic game situations and see how the no-standby rule would affect you:

1. You have a strong alliance, and your ally NMRs. As the other half of the alliance, you have a couple of options. One, since his supply centers are more than likely exposed to you, you will either try to protect them until he returns (assuming he might), or try to take the majority of them for yourself. The other option at your disposal is to send him the moves you want him to make and have him sign them and forward them to the GM. I prefer either of these options to having an unknown entity come in as my new "ally?"
2. You are attacking a smaller country, and he NMRs. This is probably the most common. As the attacking power(s), this will probably speed up your attack time on that country by a year or two. It is up to the other countries to band together all that much quicker in an attempt to stop you. But if you are that close to eliminating a country, the other powers deserve what they get if they haven't already banded together to meet you head on.
3. A player NMRs in the early game. This is the only time that I would ever

consider player replacements. After Winter 1901, never. For a Spring '01 NMR I would not be opposed to the GM using neutral orders and asking for a standby; in Fall '01, no movement and a standby called for. After that...nothing.

Granted, the non-usage of standbys would only work well in a reliable zine that comes out on time, keeping player interest. But I'll tell you what; I have nothing against winning a game because of the fact that I was the only player willing to complete the game. When I sign up for a game, I agree to compete against six other players in a head-to-head conflict where the majority of those who start out will lose. Adding new wrinkles doesn't seem to me as if it's going to improve the odds.

I suppose that I've incited some people to riot with my sacrilegious disregard for the standby, but before you take to the streets, ask yourself: what has a standby done to me? (Notice that I said to me. Rarely have I seen a standby do anything for me.)

((My personal preference is in favor of standbys, but I do regret that there aren't a few more GMs who don't use them, as there ought to be games for players of all tastes. As a new GM, will you be using standbys?))

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You've thought it over and decided that you'll use standbys after all. Then the next thing you need is to think out a few good policies on...

Administrating a Standby List

by Bruce Linsey

If you do, indeed, opt to use standbys in your games, you'll need to formulate some procedures pertaining to your standby list. Following are some guidelines and recommendations, based on my own experiences.

It's better to maintain a single list of potential standbys for all your games than one list for each game. (That is, choose John Leeder's "zinelist" option over his "gamelist", for reasons discussed in his article earlier in this handbook.) The exception would be if you run variant games -- then you'll have to maintain separate lists for each type of game you run.

Standbys are a bit easier to come by if you publicly offer them some sort of reward; say, three free issues upon finishing out the position, or the NMR fee of the player they replace, or whatever. After all, standing by is in and of itself rather a thankless job, usually, but a necessary one. Some compensation is in order.

You should publish your standby list frequently. That way, people are aware of whether or not they're on it, and can ask to have their status changed according to their current wishes. Also, active players can watch the list and let you know (in confidence) if there's anyone out there they don't want called into the game. Such requests should be honored within reason.

On the other hand, be very leery of the opposite type of request: that you do call a certain standby into a particular game. If the request comes from a player in the game itself, I'd go so far as to make a mental note not to do so. If the request is from the standby, it's probably innocuous (perhaps he just saw that it's a lively game) and of course it's nice when someone volunteers to help, but you still may be contributing unwittingly to a cross-game arrangement. Ignore such requests, and just let 'em take their chances.

If a standby doesn't respond to a call, he should be removed from the standby list -- who needs unreliable people there? (Dropouts should of course be delisted too, if applicable.)

Never insert a replacement player into a game without prior announcement, as the players must have their chance to negotiate with him first (and vice versa).

Standbys may submit press, votes, proposals, and so on; but I recommend you ignore anything submitted (unless your normal policy is to allow outside press anyhow) until the guy actually lands a spot in the game. I still recall with some irritation an incident when a standby was called for a game in which I was a player. The original player returned, but the GM considered the standby to be "in" the game long enough to print some unflattering press directed toward me. Ah well -- that should be the worst tragedy that ever befalls me, I suppose -- but the point is made.

When calling a standby, print his name and address for the other players' benefit. Make it clear to the standby that he is being called. You should assume that he's not going to notice his name in the sine itself, and write him a personal note. I had a standard form I used for this purpose in Voice of Doom, and it looked like this:

Dear _____,

Thank you very much for your offer to stand by for games in this zine. In this issue, you are asked to stand by for the country of _____ in the game called _____. Addresses of the players follow. If you need a copy of the houserules or any other information about the game, please let me know.

Best,
Bruce

AUSTRIA:

ENGLAND:

FRANCE:

GERMANY:

ITALY:

RUSSIA:

TURKEY:

This form was printed on colored paper (to make it more noticeable); for each player asked to stand by I would fill out a copy and enclose it with the zine. I would assume that each person had the current positions and supply center holdings, unless he was a brand new subber. But for standbys who didn't save earlier issues and needed such info, I would always forward it on request. In fact, to be technical, the "other information about the game" even included the entire published history of the game, if such was requested. (Well, I know that seems a bit much, but the standby is entitled to check things out to whatever extent he chooses -- like who stabbed who four game years ago.) Thankfully, only one person ever made this request in VD. It was far more frequent for the guy simply to tell me that he needed a current supply center chart and the houserules.

By the way, remind your readers from time to time if you do use a standardized form like this. I was startled once to learn that some of my potential standbys, not realizing that they'd be called in via one of these slips, were futilely scanning the game reports for their names, issue after issue after issue...

Also, in my opinion you should never ask a person who has either played in or stood by for a game to stand by for a different country in the same game. Once a person has played the role of one country in a game -- even to the extent of merely standing by -- it must be assumed that he is in possession of privileged information that only that country would know. I've seen a few screwy practices in my day: one well-known GM once asked someone to submit standby orders for two countries at once in the same game, and another asked a player who had been eliminated to stand by for a different country. (And if you can believe it, both of these guys have won the North American GM Poll!) Such practices are bad for all concerned.

On the other hand, it's not only acceptable to keep calling on the same person for the same country, it's desirable! That way, the guy gets a "feel" for that country's diplomatic situation, and the other players get a feel for his would-be stance. If he eventually gets in (as he probably will, since the original player is repeatedly NMRing), he'll be that much more into the flow of things. In fact, I used to have an informal policy of doing this in VD, and no one ever complained.

Because of the need to avoid calling one person for different countries, and the desirability of calling one person repeatedly for the same country, you'll need to keep track in your game records not only of actual replacements, but of unsuccessful standby calls as well.

That leaves only the question of how to choose who you call. If you have a long standby list, you'll actually have this luxury. You can use a rotating system as described a couple of articles back by John Leeder, and if you do the process is pretty much mechanical. Or you can do as I did, and just choose whoever on the list you think is most suitable. Several factors went into my decisions. Roughly in decreasing order of importance, these were:

1. Had that person ever stood by in (or played in) that game before? As the same country or a different one? (Same country, call him! Different country, no way!)
2. How did that person fit geographically with the other players? (Try to keep all players non-local to each other.)
3. Did I know of any other game(s) in which the person was already a co-player with a current player in this game? Did I know of or suspect any extra-game factors that might affect this game should I call this person? (If either answer is "yes", try not to use him.)
4. Had the person mentioned to me that he was eager to get into a game? (Try to call him!) That I should use him as a last resort only? (Try not to!)
5. Was he already in other games in my zine? (The fewer, the more chance he had of being called.)
6. I didn't, but you might want to, take into account the person's country preferences. Or if he's played a certain country often in your zine or elsewhere, you might not want to call him for that country again (though many players wouldn't care; and if they don't, you shouldn't).

Whether or not you agree with each of my standby policies, it's important to decide on (and publish) some of your own.

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CHAPTER 15

ORDER! ORDER!

Conditional Orders

by Francois Guerrier

Conditional orders are a method of making moves contingent on past orders (such as a summer retreat when making out fall moves) which, thanks to combined seasons, are unknown to the player at the time. As such they are very useful as they allow for season combinations (e.g. summer/fall, autumn/winter/spring, etc.) with no damage to the players' knowledge of the board situation. ((Editor's Note: It is customary (in some circles, anyway) to refer to the fall move season and the autumn retreats after fall; thus the two terms are not identical as in real life.))

First, some premises: (1) allowing conditionals must not contradict the Rulebook (which is relatively easy, as conditionals are purely a postal practice; nevertheless, careless allowance of conditional orders could break the simultaneity-of-movement rule); (2) Diplomacy is a game played for fun; there's no reason why a player shouldn't have all the facilities we can think of; (3) the conditionals used shouldn't enable a player to "see" into the future.

So, conditional orders are based on "past events". In Passchendaele games, past events are defined as past builds, removals, retreats, and adjudication errors.

(1) Moves made conditional on past builds, etc.: You are Russia and have F Sev, A Rum, A Gal, and A Mos in the local situation, and Winter 1902/Spring 1903 orders are due. Turkey has one build, all of his home centers being vacant. One way of writing your Spring 1903 orders would be:

"If Turkey builds a fleet in either Con or Ank, my orders are F Sev-Bla, A Rum-Bul, A Gal-Ukr, and A Mos-Sev.

Otherwise, my orders are F Sev-Rum, A Rum-Bud, A Gal S A Rum-Bud, A Mos-StP."

And, there are several variations to this format: your conditionals may establish any condition you like or may relate to past events anywhere on the board. They may be based on a combination of past events...about anything goes.

Note that while the player is entitled to know what happened, he has no right to know why or how it happened. A player may learn whether England built at all; but

not whether his failure to build was due to an NBR ((No Builds Received)). This is very important as a player would probably gamble on a spring NMR if he knew his opponent had NBRed, as NBRs and NMRs usually come together. Allowing such conditionals would allow a player to guess with reasonable confidence what his moves are, i.e. all units hold -- and that knowledge is forbidden by the simultaneity-of-movement rule. ((Editor's Note: Rulings on this would be far from universal, however. I and a number of other GMs would allow moves contingent upon another player's NBR, reasoning that since it's an earlier season, the players have the right to know about it. If a player is able to use an NBR as an NMR probe, so be it.))

(2) Moves made conditional on adjudication errors: Sometimes it is difficult for a player to be sure an error has been committed, or what type of error it was. For instance, a player could be hard-pressed to know for sure whether "F Sev-Bla, F Ank-Bla" means "F Sev-Bla, F Ank-Bla" or something else, such as "F Sev-Rum, F Ank-Bla". He could then submit conditional orders contingent on "F Sev-Bla, F Ank-Bla" being the correct adjudication, asking for a delay if this isn't the case.

This covers the "chronological" types of conditionals; however, there are other circumstances in which a player may also use conditionals. A sketchy list of these follows:

(3) Moves made conditional on whether there will be a season separation or not (e.g. "If Winter 1904 is played alone, I build A Par; otherwise, I build F Mar."). This doesn't really break the simultaneity-of-movement rule, while it gives players greater flexibility. A player may be willing to gamble on an opponent's sloppiness (and hope that he won't write conditionals) if the seasons are combined, and make aggressive builds. His strategy may be quite different if he knows his opponent will know his builds for sure through a season separation. I believe that allowing this doesn't compromise the simultaneity-of-movement principle as the player is not attempting to know what his opponent will do -- or whether he has submitted conditionals or not -- but rather how the game is to be played.

(4) Moves made conditional on a ((rules)) question, or rather, on the answer to the question ("Dear GM, Is F Tus S A Rom-Ven legal? If so, I do ____; if not then ____."). This is a bit in the "innovation" area, but is nevertheless perfectly legal; it is also a way of helping players avoid screwups, without endangering the principle that concurrent moves should be secret.

(5) Moves made conditional on the submission of a codeword by a specified player. A more controversial rule. Briefly, codewords are a useful method of saving precious negotiation time; instead of writing Player X and waiting for his reply, and then discussing his reply, and then waiting for his reply to your reply, you can send him a message saying, "Dear Ally, We have a choice -- we can do any of A, B, or C. If you like Plan A best, submit codeword 'Pink' to the GM along with your moves; if you prefer B, submit 'Blues'; if you like C, submit 'Yellow'. Then, you make your own orders conditional on his submitting one of the three codewords, or none at all, and that's it.

Some say that codewords should be disallowed as they might be used as an NMR probe; thus a player could submit conditionals on his ally not submitting a codeword, deduce that this equates to an NMR, and stab. Balderdash; a player may not include a codeword along with his orders for a myriad of reasons (e.g. the proposed plans are unacceptable to him, or he just forgot, or he may even have omitted the codeword deliberately to prepare the ground for one of his stabs...!). If a player just assumes that failure to submit a codeword equals an NMR, then he might be in for a nasty surprise.

Others have said that codewords could act as a probe of player intentions; this too is fallacious. A player may submit a codeword and do the exact opposite of what was requested. ((Editor's Note: He's right on target. Codewords, like negotiations, do not necessarily reflect the upcoming moves accurately. Their use, and conditional orders based on same, are a perfectly legitimate means of telescoping negotiation time when the deadline is drawing near.))

Therefore, codewords are accepted in this zine.

(6) Moves made conditional on who controls a position: Every once in a while a player NMRs and the GM selects a standby, who will replace the original player if he NMRs a second consecutive time. This naturally creates some measure of confusion, as the players aren't too sure who will control the country in the following season. Allowing the players to make their moves conditional on who controls the country allows them to act on the basis of the standby's diplomacy if he should take over. This minimizes the usual plight of the standby by adding credibility to his initial negotiations. Some people object to this, but I don't really see why: this does not in any way violate the simultaneity-of-movement principle.

Some concluding notes: always remember that moves made conditional on a player NMR per se or on simultaneous moves (e.g. "If France moves A Par-Bur, then I do A Mun-Bur") are disallowed in this zine ((and any other correctly-run zine)) as per VII(4) of the Rulebook. If you are uncertain as to whether your GM will accept a certain conditional, it might be a good idea to make your conditional contingent on its acceptability, i.e. "Dear Mr. GM, Here are my orders made conditional on...; since I'm not sure whether this type of conditional is acceptable, you will also find alternate orders to be used in case you don't accept my conditional..." This may save you a lot of grief. ((Editor's Note: It's always a good practice to include a set of orders labeled "all other cases, or in case of overlapping conditions"). Sometimes it's just too easy to get mixed up trying to sort out all the possible permutations of what might happen...))

((Francois neglected to mention only one type of conditional order that I can think of offhand. Some GMs consider votes on game-ending proposals to take place before the adjudication occurs, and some of these GMs publicize information about who voted how. In such games, we have...

(7) Moves made conditional on how another player voted (e.g. "If Germany voted yes to the draw, I order _____; otherwise _____").

Note that as a GM you should avoid revealing the conditional orders that didn't get used, and even (if possible) the fact that those used were conditionals.))

Joint Orders

by John Piggott and Richard Sharp

((Editor's Note: Joint orders are orders from two or more players submitted on a single sheet of paper.))

John: Joint orders, a peculiar disease of so-called master diplomats, have been endemic in other zines for some time. Only recently have they spread to Ethil the Frog ((John's zine)), but spread they have done, with a vengeance -- four sets of Joint orders in EtF #35, three this time. Since some of you appear to have gotten the wrong idea about these things, I thought it best to say a few words about them.

First, in order to be valid, a set of joint orders must be signed by both parties. This is essential to prevent forgery.

Second, neither party is permitted to include "escape clauses". A common mistake appears to be that people think they can have the orders invalidated if one of the parties alters his own set. This is absolutely false; saying "If the Turkish F Ank moves anywhere but to Con, these orders are invalid; use the separate set I submitted last week" in a set of joint orders is quite obviously just as illegal as submitting an ordinary set of orders saying "Move F Sev-Rum but if Turkey doesn't move F Ank-Con ignore this and move F Sev-Bla". In both cases, one is trying to make one's orders conditional on the same season's orders of another power, which is clearly forbidden. In the future I shall ignore any such escape clauses in joint orders.

A corollary to this is that each party to a joint order set has no guarantee whatever that the player who actually mails the set to the GM will not alter them to his advantage; and the GM has no choice but to accept the orders, even if they have clearly been tampered with by another power, as long as they bear the signature they're meant to. At least, that's the way I see it. After all, if you don't trust your ally implicitly, why organize joint orders at all?

Finally, I'll remind you to make it absolutely clear which set of orders you wish to apply, should you submit more than one set in a given season. The recommended method of distinguishing between different sets is to qualify them as "first set", "second set", and so on. Failing this, I'll use the set with the latest postmark, or, lacking postmarks, the set last opened.

You are not permitted to make your orders conditional on earlier sets having arrived or not. Escape clauses such as "Use these orders only if the joint orders from Turkey haven't arrived" are quite illegal. You must specify which set you want used without qualification.

Richard: ...I've been doubtful about this subject ever since I started GMing. Some observations may be of passing interest:

1. "If you don't trust your ally, why organize joint orders at all?" Because you don't trust him, I thought.
2. Basically, I agree with your principle that one should not be able to make one's orders conditional on another country's. (I know I've been doing it ((as a player, presumably)) but I thought it was generally allowed, and who am I to handicap myself when people want me to cheat?)
3. If one accepts your theory, joint orders become entirely useless. In fact, if one player is allowed to fiddle with the other players' orders, joint orders are less safe than ordinary ones. In effect, a player whose orders have been tampered with has signed something he's never seen.
4. Though the sending of anti-stab orders may be illegal, there's no way under the present rules that a GM can bar the reverse practice: that is, sending a set of orders marked "first set", and marking the second set "second set", so that if the latter arrive, they become valid.
5. It therefore seems to me that there is a loophole in your policy which would in effect allow conditional orders to be sent. That is: A and B send in individual orders (attacking each other) marked "first set". A then prepares two copies of a set of joint orders marked "second set", signs one, and sends it to the GM, leaves the other unsigned, and sends it to B. B signs that and sends it to the GM, who now has two sets of orders bearing the appropriate signatures. But, if A fails to send in his joint orders, then A's signature on B's joint orders is lacking, B's second set is invalid, his first set is used, and he has protected himself against a stab. Equally, if either player changes any order, the GM will have two conflicting sets and will be unable to decide which one to use.

John: Hang on there, you've got it wrong, I'm sure. If a set of joint orders is submitted and signed only by one party, then surely the orders in that set for the signing player's units are valid, and those for the other (non-signing) player's units are invalid and not followed. ((Exactly.)) This is basically the same sort of situation that sometimes happens when a player consults the wrong issue of a zine in writing his orders and requests movement for units he doesn't possess. You can't declare a player's orders totally invalid just because he orders a couple of units that don't belong to him.

However, here's a problem: what if a set of obviously joint orders is submitted, signed by neither party? If the GM can't figure out who sent them, he'd have to declare them invalid; in fact, a strong case could be made for declaring them invalid even if one could tell who sent them on the basis of postmarks, etc.

This whole business of joint orders is a pain in the ass. It might well be simpler if we ruled that they are illegal under any circumstances. Personally, I've never had much use for them; racking my brains, I can think of only two instances in my career as a postal player when I've had recourse to joint orders, and in both cases this was merely a device so that I could stab the other party. It was successful once, and unsuccessful the other time.

((Mark Berch, after reprinting the above in Diplomacy Digest, appended the following comments:

"The first question to consider is whether or not to permit such joint orders. Aside from pragmatic considerations of whether it's worth the bother, this decision is likely to turn on your philosophy of GMing. Do you consider yourself aloof from the game, just an impartial mediator unconcerned about how the players accomplish their goals? Or do you prefer to insert yourself into the game in some ways? In the former case, you'll permit joint orders -- after all, you don't care how the players conduct their diplomacy or how their orders get to you, how many sheets of paper they appear on, etc. In the latter case, you may well ban them as a tactic you don't approve of. The same how-involved-in-the-game-do-I-want-to-get question arises in deciding on whether to write commentary, permit proxy orders, and the like.

Once you've decided to permit joint orders, there are some basic decisions you'll have to make. For example:

1. How will you deal with joint orders which may or may not have been altered? Suppose B sends in joint orders with A's signature clipped off? Or with A's signature replaced with C's? Is that attempted deception of the GM?

2. What about errors which may or may not be deliberate -- what kinds of them will void the orders? Suppose A signs B's orders and vice versa? Do both sets have to have the same official date?

3. What kinds of strictures or limitations will you accept? If a player says, 'These joint orders are final and cannot be superseded', but later sends in another (non-joint) set, which one will you honor? Suppose a player says, 'Void if any of these orders are changed in any way'?

4. Can joint orders be presented for just some of the units, with the rest of the units ordered in a conventional format?"

These questions should be carefully considered before you start GMing; and the general question of will you accept joint orders at all, at least, should be answered in your houserules.))

And if you do decide to allow joint orders, watch out for beasts like...

The Great Joint Orders Coup

by Richard Sharp

The Great Joint Orders Coup was one of the best swindles ever brought off in a postal game, and in my opinion is the highlight (so far) of the nefarious career of Duncan Morris. As the gamesmaster of the game concerned (1974DG), I was involved in it, to my initial confusion and later amusement.

In this game, Duncan played Turkey; Russia was a good but relatively inexperienced player, Dennis Love, who knew not Duncan. Dennis's strategy was a sound one -- he based his dealings on the northern front on a strong alliance with Germany, which left him free to become involved in a difficult southern triangle with Turkey and Austria.

At one point, Dennis sent Duncan a three-page letter. The first page consisted of general pleasantries, ending roughly, "I think we should proceed as follows;", and over the page came the suggested Russo-Turkish joint orders. They were headed up with the country names and game details in the approved fashion, and carried the rider: "These orders replace any previous orders sent for the relevant Russian and Turkish units." The orders for the northern Russian units, which were cooperating with Germany against England, were left blank, as being none of Turkey's business. The third page consisted of more general chat and exhortations to joint action.

So far, so good. Joint orders are a perennial headache for GMs; nervous players try to wrap their joint orders in conditions and exceptions to insure themselves against betrayal, which is illegal. But it is a common misapprehension to think that joint orders afford some sort of protection. In fact they do have a valid use, for example where you are certain of your ally's cooperation for the coming season, and your sole concern is to see that no wires get crossed. But that's all.

Unfortunately, Dennis had made one awful blunder -- at the bottom of the second page he signed his name. Duncan saw his chance; he took this page, wrote in his own orders, signed it...and filled in the blank Russian orders, ordering the Russian units to make a full-scale attack on Russia's ally, Germany! He then sent it to me, without comment. I was puzzled, but one thing was clear: this was a perfectly valid set of Russo-Turkish joint orders, duly signed, dated and correct in every way, which superseded the orders I later received from Russia. So I printed an adjudication using the "joint orders".

A furore ensued. Dennis protested that the orders were a "forgery" and that I could see they were not completely in his handwriting; this was undeniable, but the signature was genuine, which was all that mattered. In fact there was evidence of an attempt at forgery on the back of the orders (the first page of the letter), but this page had been crossed out by Duncan, who explained that he had at first thought of using it to forge a letter from Dennis to a third party before the simpler and better ruse occurred to him. Germany rang me up demanding an explanation -- was this cock-and-bull story of Russia's about forgery and deception true, or was Russia just trying to stab him and get away with it? Naturally I couldn't answer. I was adamant that the orders were valid, and the more I thought about it the surer I became.

Alas, though the coup succeeded brilliantly, it did not prevent Duncan finishing seventh in the game! Russia's obviously genuine outrage convinced Germany, and they patched up their alliance, while Russia now rounded on Turkey in a fury, assisted by Austria, who had been an amused spectator and knew a good thing when he saw one. There could only be one end to this onslaught -- a pity, after a brilliant piece of improvised skulduggery which deserved a better fate.

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 And the American counterpart to Duncan Morris is of course the nefarious Ty Hare. Put a player like Ty into a game with a GM who doesn't use common sense, and you get...

The RIGEL Affair

by Bruce Linsey and Chuff Afflerbach

Bruce: A quick question for budding GMs out there: the Russian player signs a blank sheet of paper and sends it to France. France fills in some orders for Russia, and forwards the paper to the GM. Are these orders valid?

If you said yes, you agree with me and probably most other GMs. The Russian orders are valid even though France wrote and mailed them, because the signature on the paper belonged to Russia. Indeed, I have accepted such orders in the past.

Now let's change the question just a bit. The Russian player writes France a letter, signs it at the bottom, and sends it. France crosses out the text of the letter, leaving the signature untouched, fills in some Russian orders, and forwards the paper to the GM. Are these orders valid? Before you say no, keep in mind that there is a Russian signature on the paper! Therefore, what is really the difference between this question and the first one? The intent of the Russian player? But GMs can't take intent into account -- the GM must simply adjudicate what is there; no more, no less.

I was faced with this dilemma last season in the RIGEL game. The Russian orders printed in Voice of Doom #98 were not in fact those sent in by Russia (Dave Kleiman), but rather were received in the form of a letter from Kleiman to Ty Hare (the French player). Ty had crossed out the text of Dave's letter, leaving the signature untouched, filled in some orders for the Russian units, dated the orders close to the deadline so that they would be "later" than any orders Dave submitted, and sent this bogus document to me.

Ty had obtained a ruling in advance from me (it took me several days of deep thought to decide how I would rule) and told me precisely what he was doing, so deception of the GM did not enter into it. When I finally told Ty that I would accept the Russian orders as valid, I also warned him that my decision would in all probability be overturned by an ombudsman, should Dave ask for one.

The deadline came and went, and VD #98 went out with the bogus Russian orders. A few days later, while at KaneKon, I received a phone call from an irate Dave Kleiman, demanding to know who had submitted those orders. Ruefully, I gave him the whole story, and told him that if he cared to protest I would invoke the "Greater Good" rule in the VD houserules, disallow the bogus orders, and send out a readjudication. He considered this carefully for perhaps a nanosecond, and protested. The readjudication was sent out, and appears this season with the RIGEL game report. The Russian orders printed there are the real ones submitted by Dave Kleiman.

It might be asked whether I was correct to accept the Russian orders Ty sent in the begin with. Technically, I had to accept them, but common sense would dictate otherwise. After all, think of the ramifications: players could be ordering each others' units all the time, one player might take control of all seven countries, outsiders could submit orders for players in a game, and so on; all provided they had correspondence from the player in question, to which he had affixed his signature. Nobody in the hobby would be safe signing his name ever again. A simple sub check would become a blackmailing tool of monstrous proportions. Chaos would prevail. The hobby as we know it would cease to function.

The problem is that such common sense considerations generally cannot and should not play a role in these decisions. It is well known that in a Voice of Doom game, you have to operate under the assumption that the GM has no common sense. This is not to say that Bruce Linsey the person has no common sense, but only that he will be extremely niggardly in applying it to his games. Games are run by the rules, and goddammit, rules are meant to be followed.

However, that's what the "Greater Good" rule is there for: to override those situations which are so contrary to the dictates of common sense that even this GM is offended by them. Ty has since called me a "wimp" for backing down without even going to an ombudsman, but the possibility remains, however slight, that the ombudsman might not have wanted to apply his common sense either and sustained my ruling on those grounds -- and then boy would I be up shit creek!

On the other side of the coin, Nelson Heintzman (the German player) has accused me of "mental masturbation" for allowing the orders to begin with. I doubt this -- my brain would appear not to have yet reached puberty.

So what of it? I'd like to have some responses to this situation (which is not a gigantic hoax, by the way, in case anyone has any doubts). Should I have allowed the bogus Russian orders? Was my later decision to disallow them correct? How can I avoid this sort of thing in the future? And why do these things always have to happen in Voice of Doom?

Chuff: The final disposition of the RIGEL Affair will set an important precedent, not only in the vast Diplomacy world, but in the less significant realm of everyday life as well.

A quick question: A Russian signs a blank check and sends it to France. France fills in the amount and takes it to the bank. Is this check valid?

If you said yes, there may be a career for you in high finance. The Russian check is valid because the signature on it belongs to the Russian. Indeed, banks have accepted such checks in the past with itchy fingers.

Now let's change the question just a bit. The Russian writes France a check, signs it, and sends it. France crosses out the amount, leaving the signature untouched, fills in a new amount, and takes it to the bank. Is this check valid?

Before you call the cops, keep in mind that there is a Russian signature on the check! So what the fuck is the difference between this check and the first? The Russian's intent? Hyork!

Believe it or not, I tried this scam after reading about the RIGEL Affair in VD #99. I told my banker precisely what I was doing so fraud would not enter into it. It took him several nanoseconds of deep thought to decide to accept it. He also warned me that his decision in all probability would be overturned by an auditor if anybody ever got wind of it.

A month later the statement came back with the bogus check. The banker got an irate phone call, ruefully blurted out the whole sordid story, and confessed to being provoked by the "Greater Greed" rule. A corrected statement was issued and the sucker finally got his money back.

Of course, I called the banker a "wimp" for backing down without even going before a judge. The pigeon who wrote the check has accused me of "financial fornication", but what the hell...

Dare I sign this?
Chuff

Bruce: Okay, I was wrong to accept the bogus orders. After racking my brain for a suitable way of avoiding such situations in the future, I ultimately devised the following houserule, which I urge other GMs to adopt:

"Orders need not be written or sent by the player owning the units, but in any case where orders are written or mailed by another player, they must also include the sentence, 'These orders are valid even though not written and mailed by me', with the owning player's signature affixed. Players may not forge this sentence, nor in any way affix it to a set of orders other than for their own units; to do so shall constitute deception of the GM."

This seems the best solution: players may still sign a blank sheet for another player to fill out and send in, but only by writing a sentence which they would never write under any other circumstances, making the intent perfectly clear. Thus, the GM avoids having to determine a player's intent, and nuts like Ty Hare and me will have to find other stimuli for the purpose of mental masturbation.

General Orders

by Randolph Smyth

General orders are a form of NMR protection, sent to the GM to be kept on file against a possible NMR later. Many GMs will not accept them; I will, but since there are no other players within range of a short-distance telephone call, I have to act on them myself. For this reason they must be as unambiguous in their instructions as a true set of orders would be.

Most GMs that accept general orders will call another (neutral) player and arrange for him to give orders for the position. In this sense, "neutral" means having no connection with the game, quite a different thing from the "professional neutrality" of the GM. General orders can indeed be quite general; something as simple as "attack Austria" can be followed by units on the Austrian frontier. One should try to be more specific, or at least establish secondary priorities, if an entire set of orders is desired from the neutral.

In my position, I can only deduce orders which are the only logical outcome of the instructions given. For instance, "Each unit will support the adjacent unit which is (1) capable of being supported (2) adjacent to two or more foreign units (3) whose position is first in alphabetical order, if a choice still exists after applying (1) and (2)" would be an unambiguous set of "defensive" general orders. Condition (3) could be modified according to who one's enemies are. "Attacking" general orders are also possible without ambiguity, but applying them in specific situations several game years later may lead to unwanted results.

General orders may of course be changed at any time; most GMs require a periodic affirmation of them to keep them in their files. None of my players presently has general orders on file; I'm just as glad, since they can be a pain to maintain. Still, they are a good form of protection if done unambiguously (I'll tell you whether you slipped up somewhere); if anyone wishes to submit them, please send them on a separate sheet of good-quality 8 1/2" paper, since this is least likely to get lost. I do not take responsibility for your NMR in any case, as the orders may be lost after many months floating around your file; yet it does no harm.

NMRs which are covered by general orders are still charged to the player; i.e. a standby will be called, who will take over after a second consecutive non-receipt of current orders. I would recommend a second mailing of orders more highly if you can spare an extra stamp every month: it's very rare that two letters mailed in plenty of time will fail to get through unless there are legitimate postal problems, which should delay the game anyhow.

((I personally am of the school of thought that general orders should not be used at all, as they substitute the tactical skills of the person submitting them for those of the player. (Note: this is not true in the case of Randolph's requirement of totally unambiguous general orders; however, in most cases the author of the specific orders is involved in the choice of tactics to at least some extent.) My view is that tactics (and not just strategy) should be subject to the effects of negotiation by a player's opponents, and that the use of GOs makes this impossible, thus violating part of the spirit of the game. If you must allow them, I recommend you impose the strict requirements Randolph describes.))

Proxy Orders

by Richard Sharp

Proxy orders are one of the few remaining causes of controversy in the postal hobby: is it permissible for one player to authorize another to order some or all of his units? Most American GMs and some British ones say no; I say yes and quite a few other British GMs agree, some with minor reservations.

The diplomatic advantages of having (or claiming to have) even a single foreign unit under your control are tremendous. Certainly if I am reduced to a single unit I will gladly offer it to another player (houserules permitting) because it will be more useful to him than one of his own, therefore he is more likely to keep it alive than to eliminate it. Providing it is always clearly understood that the original player can resume command at any time, his orders taking precedence, I see no objection to this.

A couple of proxy order stories will illustrate the advantages. In 1974N I played the Anschluss as Germany; when Austria was attacked by Italy I put the Munich army under his orders, which worked well. The Italian attack was called off, and it was time to move against France, so I resumed control of my unit and ordered it to Burgundy. France (David Johnson) knew that Austria had been ordering the army; when he rang me to complain about the invasion I protested indignantly that Austria had written the offending order! There was a long silence at the other end, followed by a single very rude American expression and a conclusive click. No, Dave wasn't fooled...but he couldn't be a hundred per cent sure either way. The difference can be very important.

The other situation is a beauty, which is still continuing as I write. In 1977DL I am playing Italy to Nicky Palmer's Austria; Nicky had a bad time in the opening, and was soon reduced to one unit, which he turned over to me as I had supported him against the Russo-Turkish alliance. At this point, Turkey stabbed Russia, perhaps prematurely. I am having a lovely time with the Austrian army; I told both Russia and Turkey it was under my orders, and promised each of them it would do something different; what it actually did was attack Turkey on Russia's behalf, then -- having been dislodged by me -- retreat to a Russian-owned supply center. Naturally, I swore to both parties that this was not at all what I had ordered, and that the cunning Nicky had clearly decided to order it himself. I have now cooked up an implausible explanation, and hope to keep the particular ball in the air for at least one more season. This sort of thing keeps all one's opponents in a state of perpetual indecision, an ideal state of affairs which is impossible without the proxy-order option.

((A more telling reason for allowing proxy orders is that they are clearly within the spirit of the game: if A gives B permission to order his unit(s), then the orders technically are A's -- he's simply given B a blank check to do as he will with the unit(s). There is really little difference between this and an arrangement wherein A physically writes the orders dictated to him by B each turn, clearly a legitimate circumstance; the bottom line in both cases is that the player who owns the units has the final say.))



Some houserules can
be a pain in the butt!

CHAPTER 16

ETHICS AND THE GM

You Mean GMs Have Feelings Too?

by John Kelley

When a player and a GM have a conflict, who is right? I think most people would agree that the fault tends to be shared in many cases. However, the player is almost always the "complaining" party; in other words, the party who initiates the "making an issue" of the matter. Some players wish only to harass; there are few enough of these not to bother addressing them. The majority bring up what they feel is a legitimate, reasonable issue; some get very negative reactions and the situation goes downhill in a hurry. In order for you (as a player) to avoid such reactions and actually accomplish something (your original aim), there are ways in which you can tread lightly enough around even hypersensitive GMs and maybe even get your way.

Hopefully, you have heretofore developed a respectful relationship with your GM. A little appreciation goes a long way, and while you may see him as a person providing a service for money, he sees himself as a hobbyist making no money and trying to have fun. The business-office approach won't work, and neither will the injured-consumer ploy. The fellow-hobbyist and valued-counterpart attitudes, on the other hand, tend to establish you as less of a threat and more of a team member. If you let your GM know that what he does is valued and good (presuming that it generally is; if not, why stay?), your grievances will generally get a responsive hearing. After all, why would he want to screw over such a positive person?

Promptness is another watchword. The longer an error stands, the more inertia it gathers...whereas on the other hand, if you get to your GM quickly with your point, you impress him as being squared away and interested. Most GMs will be very willing to correct or resolve problems in short order with as little delay as possible. On the other hand, after another season goes by they tend to let all but the gravest blunders stand. Speed is valuable.

If you ask for trouble, you usually find it...and lack of clarity is very much asking for trouble. For most GMs, the essentials in your orders are separate sheets of paper for each game, Boardman Number or other clear game ID, country, date (very important -- what if you decide not to stab and send another set abrogating your vicious turnabout against Germany?), signature (unless you want your orders forged; I would do this and so would many other players), and season. ((Editor's Note: In most zines, forgery of orders is treated as deception of the GM and is illegal. I assume John means he would do this in zines which don't ban it.)) Other GMs have additional requirements and requests; are they that hard to satisfy? They are there, by and large, for your own protection. The advantage is clear: if you leave no margin for countercomplaints, you deal from a good position. Will it really kill you to write out a province name if it's one of those whose abbreviation is ambiguous? If you leave it to the GM's judgement, you will probably end up abiding by it for better or worse.

So now you have a complaint and you want to bring it up? No problem. When you do, though, you will do better if you remember and avoid some easily-hit mines, such as insults (guaranteed to turn someone off), threats to resign (what if s/he says goodbye?), and arrogance (if you make it a battle of wills or a curtness contest, the real issue will become badly mired and proceed away from a resolution rather than toward such). Besides, you might be wrong (we all are sometimes, of course). You will look stupid if you get abusive and then turn out to be mistaken. Retain that open mind that got you this far.

Still isn't working? Damn. If your GM is unresponsive to all of the above attitudes, then I would say you've got a problem. Now is the time to propose the idea of mutually acceptable arbitration or third-party involvement of some sort. Still won't give you a reasonable hearing? At this point you have little to lose by dragging the issue through the public mud (it's obvious that the person can be reached through no other means). Yell, scream, threaten to resign, ask for your money back. It just might salvage something where it could otherwise not be retrieved. ((Editor's Note: Wrong. While it occasionally becomes necessary for a player-GM dispute to receive publicity, it is my experience that yelling and screaming will accomplish far less than a calm statement of the facts as you see them.))

If none of this works, there are plenty of better game openings around (fortunately!) and it's time to go hunting. And if, in looking back, you see that the fault was shared by you, it's a sign of character and decency to be able to go back and admit it -- you may heal a damaged friendship that need not have suffered. In any event, you have learned a lot about interpersonal relations as well as crisis resolution. Next time you will be better equipped, right?

Good and amiable gaming to all, and keep those minds open!

((The above article addresses the player's perspective of the GM-player relationship. I include it in this handbook because I think it's important that GMs (you, potentially) and players (your customers) understand each other's viewpoints as much as possible. If I ever do an update of the Supernova novice packet, I'll include John's article there too.))

+++++

You're running a postal Diplomacy game, and all of a sudden you hear someone yell out those dreaded words...

GM Interference!

by Bruce Linsey

Much discussion has been generated by the question of just what a gamesmaster can or cannot do before he is said to be interfering in a game. Certainly, we will all agree that the GM is supposed to act as a strictly neutral party and run his games in an impartial, unbiased manner. Yet within that description there is still plenty of room for debate. Between the impenetrable armor of the mythical GM who sits high upon his white steed of neutrality and the sticky black tar pits of out-and-out interference is a large, misty grey area in which lurk countless numbers of questionable situations.

Well, you folks know me well enough by now to know that I enjoy exploring the haziest, greyest areas of postal Diplomacy. So take a trip with me into the grey mists of GM Interference, and we'll see just what shadowy circumstances we might bump into. Now, pretend you're the GM...

- Many GMs start off their game reports with a headline describing some phase of the action on the board. But how far can a GM go? Which of the following game headlines are acceptable, and which interfere? And why?
 - "FRANCE ATTACKS GERMANY!"
 - "FRANCE, GERMANY SIGN PACT!"
 - "FRANCE STIRS UP EUROPE AGAINST GERMANY!"
 - "FRANCE STABS GERMANY -- OR IS IT A STAB?"
 - "FRANCE, GERMANY ABOUT TO GO TO WAR!"

How do you distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable headlines for a game?
- It is a common practice for GMs to call players collect if they are about to miss their moves. Is this acceptable procedure, or is it interference? If it is acceptable, then how about the GM who calls because a player has left one unit out of several unordered? Is he interfering? Where do you draw the line in this situation?
- You're GMing a game from your home town of Fake Snowbegone, Minnesota. One of your players from Noway Hosea, California, calls you up one night, and the conversation runs as follows:
 - "Hello, Mr. GM. I've a favor to ask you. I've typed up a phony readjudication for my game in your zine, and I want to send it to you so that you can mail it to the Russian player for me. That way, I can get a Fake Snowbegone postmark."
 - "I'm sorry, Mr. Player, I can't help you deceive another player. That would be GM interference."
 - "Just a minute, Mr. GM. What about Joe Schmoe, who lives 40 miles from you in Duluth and is also in the game? He can get your postmark any time he likes without your help. That's an unfair advantage! All I'm asking you to do is help reduce the disadvantage I am faced with due to an accident of geography. I don't see how that's interfering."

Do you agree to mail the phony readjudication for him? If not, how do you refute his logic?

4. Many GMs like to banter with their players in the game's press, using a dateline reserved solely for the GM. But where does banter stop and interference begin? Which of the following press items from the GM constitute interference, and why?

"TURKEY to RUSSIA: My move to the Black Sea is purely defensive. Trust me."

"GM to TURKEY: I wouldn't trust you as far as I could thrust you!"

"GM to RUSSIA: Do you really trust him? Hah!"

"GM to TURKEY: Trust you? With all those stabs you've pulled off recently in other zines?"

"GM to TURKEY: Hyork, hyork!"

5. You're GMing a game in which a player is about to win unless the other players band together to stop him. As it happens, you were all set to publish an article you had written entitled, "How to Stop the Leader". Although the article of course does not mention this particular game, would you be interfering to publish it right now, when it might well affect the game?

Or consider a different example: you have just opened a game in the current issue. Do you publish that article on the Lepanto Opening as you had planned, or must you wait? How does one reconcile one's GMing responsibilities with one's rights as a publisher in this sort of situation?

6. A hobby member has done something for which you feel obligated to criticize him in your zine. Maybe he has folded his zine and stolen everyone's sub money, yours included. Or perhaps he has been convicted of attempting to assassinate the President of the United States. The problem is, he's playing in one of your games. Is it interference to publicly chastise one of your players (and thus risk turning others against him in his game) for something unrelated to the game?

7. A player of yours calls you, and during the course of the conversation asks whether you've spoken recently with another player. Can you answer? What if he wants to know whether the other player has recently called you to find out his game results for the season just played? How far can a GM (who is, after all, a human being within the social network of the hobby) go when it comes to discussing his conversations and interactions with his players (who in many cases may be personal friends)?

8. One of your players submits for publication an article which you know is an elaborate attempt to deceive a fellow player about his playing style. Do you publish his article, and in doing so aid his deception? If his article is entitled, "Why I Like to Play for Two-way Draws" and you were also planning to publish the latest ratings which will show that he has just won three games, what do you do?

9. A player asks you, the GM, for your opinion of another player. Being ethical, you don't say a word, of course. Then he says this: "OK, Mr. GM, I want to purchase some of those old zines you have for sale, and specifically I want to buy the ones which contain endgame statements from and about this other player. These are, after all, in the public domain." You know that these issues will reveal the other player for the scum-sucking slime that he is. Can you sell them to the player requesting them? Can you refuse to do so? (Aaaaaarrgh...)

10. As a GM, you have (horrors!) made a judgement call and separated the seasons because there were lots of adjustments due this winter. A few days later, the Frenchman calls you to protest. The conversation goes as follows:

"Mr. GM, I protest. I built a fleet in Brest with the intention of stabbing England in the spring by moving it to the Channel. Now that the seasons are separated, England will know he is being stabbed and will stand me out of the Channel."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Frenchman. He could have 'seen' your build anyway by using conditional orders."

"But he wouldn't have. England is too careless a sort of player to write conditionals, and you know it."

The GM's option of separating seasons without prior warning are not covered in your houserules. Does France have a valid point? Have you interfered in the game?

Responses to "GM Interference!"

Situation 1 (headlines)

James Wall: Anyone who allows a headline to interfere in alliances isn't worth his/her salt anyway.

Mark Lew: The GM uses his brain to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable -- GM's judgement, you know. None of your examples look harmful to me, but they depend

on the board situation, I suppose. If I had any doubt at all I'd not use it.

Edi Birsan: All headlines are acceptable.

Mike Barno: I don't like headlines at all. Too easy for something in the "grey area" to upset someone. When I GMed, the only headlines I used were either humorous or objective, obvious facts. Interpretation isn't the GM's business, except in the infrequent role as demo-game commentator.

Michael Kettman: I think all the headlines are acceptable. I view headlines pretty much as advertising in the sense that the buyer must beware. I think the GM can package the game any way he/she wants and the players should determine whether or not to use the headlines. I view headlines as the packaging and hype that go with any product. Some of it is true, some useful, some false but it all adds up to the total package -- the game.

Situation 2 (calling collect to a player about to NMR; to a player who left one unit unordered)

Mark Lew: I draw the line further out than anyone I know. If I can afford it, I'll call a player to question anything that looks like a disorder, missed vote, ambiguous order, no such unit (not no such order, unless it's his own), impossible order, etc.

Mark Luedi: So long as the policy is stated beforehand, it is acceptable. Conceivably, a GM could have a policy of calling a player up for one unordered unit provided he was doing that in all such cases. (1. I don't have NMR insurance. 2. I don't pay much attention to what orders are on file or their content until I'm ready to adjudicate, which is then too late anyhow.)

Steve Knight: I'm inclined to say that both are OK as long as it's spelled out in advance, but I'd be nervous about games where a single unordered unit merits a form of NMR insurance. From there, it only seems a small step to calling and asking, "Are you sure you didn't mean to actually order F Mid-Spa south coast?" I still suppose it's OK if everyone likes it like that -- my own tastes run to no NMR insurance at all.

Edi Birsan: I would call collect only if there were no orders received. As games were not adjudicated until I actually typed up the ditto a missed unit in the orders would be discovered only then. My feeling is that I call only to avoid NMR, not to correct poor orders.

Michael Kettman: I don't believe it is interference for the GM to call to solicit moves from a player. I would view the practice as an attempt by the GM to provide his gamers with a complete game. The GM is merely doing what he can to supply as complete a product (the game) as possible to his consumer (the gamers). However, if the GM calls to solicit an order for one or any units left out of a player's orders, I would view this as definite GM interference. A player is responsible for submitting orders for his units. If he omits orders or sends incorrect orders, the GM should leave them as is. If the players agree at the beginning of the game to allow the GM to solicit such orders, that is a different matter and would be perfectly acceptable.

Situation 3 (player asks GM to mail a phony adjudication)

Mark Lew: What logic? How would you refute it if someone said, "What about xxx? He's smart. He can figure out good moves all by himself. I'm asking you to tell me his moves to help reduce my disadvantage of being a moron. I don't see how that's interfering!"?

I wouldn't mail it for him. If life were fair it would end in a 7-way draw.

Edi Birsan: As GM you don't mail other people's mail to screw up another player. I couldn't care less about the so-called advantage of nearby players. It is not my job as GM to make all the countries and players equal, only to treat them equally.

Mark Berch: You don't mail it. That's taking too great a part in the player's diplomacy. Besides which, if you send it out, it's not a phony readjudication, it's a legitimate, though mistaken, one. The GM is not there to smooth out all accidents. Otherwise you'd get letters like, "France and Germany use the same strange typewriter, so France can forge a letter purporting to come from Germany, but I can't. But I notice that you have that type of typer too. So please retype the following letter."

Bruce Linsey: Response to this was virtually unanimous -- you don't remail it.

Situation 4 (press written by the GM)

Konrad Baumeister: Hahaha. My problem is that in my zine, the datelines normally reserved for me are used all the time by the other players! While I technically have a houserule covering it, the punishment is merely "reprimand" and I haven't been able to bring myself to do even that since it's just too much fun, not knowing whether it's me or another player writing the press.

Bruce Linsey: That's a poor policy. If you're going to let players use your dateline, you should make that clear. If you're not going to let them use it, then you shouldn't let them use it. Period.

Mark Berch: No one should take press too seriously; I would not object to any of those press releases.

Steve Knight: The first and fourth responses are okay -- they're typical internal-to-the-game replies that don't raise any doubts that aren't already on the victim's mind. The second one is borderline -- the GM's reply should be to the author of the release, not to the victim. The third is interference -- throwing completely extra-game matters into things.

Chardo Edison: I think most people will say that all of these constitute GM interference. I won't disagree; all of them are. The GM should write in the press only when someone addresses him. He should not comment on press in such a way as to make someone think one way, when a player wants that someone to think something else. This goes for headlines, as well.

Don Del Grande: No interference -- like the headlines, it's hard to take any of these really seriously. How does the GM know what Turkey and/or Russia is planning?

Situation 5 (publishing a "stop the leader" article when it pertains to a game you're running; publishing a "Lepanto" article at the game's outset)

John Fack: If you believe ((the "stop the leader" article)) might have an impact, delay it a month or two, or send it elsewhere. I'd go right ahead and publish the opening article on the "Lepanto". Articles appear all the time on openings, and most people use what they want and disregard the rest anyway. After all, no one would hold a diplomatic style article or play of the game article just because the game is underway...

Edi Birsan: Publishing articles that may affect games is why articles are published. I couldn't care less if it is used directly; in fact, I find it rather humorous to watch. For example, at Origins I in Baltimore, Mike Rocamora and I ran a Diplomacy tournament with some 23 boards in the first round and 16 in the second round. Prior to the first round there was a seminar/talk etc. to about 130 people in a small lecture hall on aspects of the game. I did a routine on the Lepanto Opening and the general strategic-diplomatic situations that may be desired to be used in such a limited opening. Well, two hours later when the first round started no fewer than 12 boards featured a Lepanto Opening. (As info I also played Italy in the first round and did not use it...I ended with the best first round Italy with 15 centers by 1907.) I thought it was quite humorous to watch the effect; however, I saw nothing wrong by my giving the presentation. Big deal if you are a GM; you don't stop being a writer while the game is in progress.

Mark Berch: This is a much greyer area. The more an article is applicable to the game, the more legitimate the "that's interference" complaint is. In both cases, the GM should hold off, because they sound rather applicable, though a more general article on "How to Win" or "How to Write Good Letters" might be fine. The same would go for private advice. If a Turkish player is having trouble constructing a stalemate line, he cannot be told how to do it, but he could be told that Berch has published a compilation of stalemate lines.

Mike Barno: In theory, I see no conflict; no reason to hold back on the articles. In practice, I'd avoid the appearance of trying to influence the games, just to minimize the risk of unnecessary hassles.

Steve Knight: There's nothing preventing you from publishing the articles, although there's nothing compelling you to, either. If the zine and the games aren't fairly separate entities, you tie your hands too much -- "Gosh, I'd better not publish any articles on how to play France as long as anyone's playing a French position in my zine!" I don't buy it -- but again, that's not to say a publisher who's conscientious about such matters should publish it automatically.

Bruce Linsey: There's a simple way out of your "How to Play France" dilemma, you realize. If you don't want to interfere by publishing such an article while anyone's playing France in your zine, just publish an article about how to eliminate France -- and once all your Frances have been destroyed as a result, feel free then to publish the "How to Play" article without interfering...

Seriously, I thought Berch's answer was the best of the bunch. It's a judgement call, and the GM should carefully consider how such articles might affect the games he's running right now. There's no article that will remain unpublishable under this criterion for more than a few months, anyway.

Situation 6 (criticizing a player for something not related to the game)

James Wall: If a player deserves to be criticized then that's what he should get. A newspaper may endorse a candidate and still criticize him. A GM shouldn't lose his/her right to an opinion just because of his/her position.

Don Del Grande: It's public information -- as long as it was the truth, it's the player's fault for pulling off such a stunt.

Michael Kettman: I think it would be poor judgement on the part of the GM to chastise a player in a game for something he/she did in the hobby. It would tend to take time and energy away from the game, which is what the hobby is all about. There will be plenty of time later for browbeating, chastising, and one-upmanship. Let the game end before the rancor begins.

Mark Berch: Unless this has a direct, clear connection with the game, the GM is OK in publishing these criticisms. The problem is not with the examples you gave -- these are too easy. The problem is with something like criticizing him for a pattern of, say, NMRing out of games.

Situation 7 (player asks GM whether he's spoken recently with another player; whether another player has called the GM for the game results)

John Pack: I'd just say "use your judgement". Normally, I'd suspect it's fine to release such information.

Mark Luedi: I actually had this happen to me recently, except the player didn't use a whole lot of tact. I told him, "I can't answer your question." It seems that even the tone of voice can betray GM knowledge about a game.

Konrad Baumeister: This happens all the time in my games. All the time. When it first began, which was rather shortly after I started GMing, I was at a loss for how much I could say, but now essentially I've fallen into a comfortable pattern where I will go so far as to say, after being asked, whether or not I was talking about any game with another player, but I will not reveal what he said to me, in terms of future plans, comments about players which might affect the game, and so forth. When asked for an opinion or suggestion about what to do or what's going to happen in the game, it depends on the situation. If it's absolutely stalemated, I will say so. If I know that another player plans on stabbing the shit out of this guy I'm talking to, I will say nothing of what I know. Generally I try to turn it around and ask the player what's going on, and they are usually more than willing to tell me.

I have to admit that I really enjoy having people talk about their games with me. I'm just a curious GM. Once in a while I even learn a few tricks or ideas from players, which I might then use. My basic rule of thumb is to let them do the talking, and not say anything that I consider to be none of the player's business. I try my best to maintain a player-GM confidence.

Bruce Linsey: I have one player who very often writes me letters describing what is going on in his game in great detail, as well as telling me this over the phone. I personally find these revelations very interesting (I hope the guy's reading this) and devour them eagerly. However, I never respond to his letters on the topic and when he talks to me about the game, I limit my comments to an occasional "uh huh" or a bland, "Gee, it sounds like an interesting game" or whatnot. I'm not 100% comfortable saying that the game is interesting, since he may take it as a subconscious tipoff of an upcoming stab or some such, but I guess I can get away with that much and still be safe.

Mark Berch: All GM-player conversations are privileged, including requests for results; you couldn't even acknowledge that such a conversation existed. On the first part of the question, I'd answer, "I can't discuss whether we've spoken on game matters, but other than that...".

Bruce Linsey: But by revealing that you've talked to a player about anything, you might be giving away all the info the questioner needs to determine that you have indeed spoken with him, and that he (at least probably) did call in the agreed-upon change of orders while he was at it. Even if the questioner infers the wrong info from what you've said, it's still affected the game. I'm slowly coming to the sad conclusion that, although GMs should be allowed to have friends in the hobby, they ought not ever talk to any other hobbyists -- it's too risky.

Seriously (lots of banter on this one, hey?), you can't reveal whether you've spoken to a player about game matters (except in unusual situations, but I'm referring to the normal flow of the game), and you should be careful about discussing your conversations on any topic because of what the questioner might infer. But it's awfully hard to behave the same way among friends in this situation as you would among more casual acquaintances. This is not an easy question!

Situation 8 (player submits an article which is an attempt to deceive another; player submits article "Why I Like to Play for Two-way Draws" just when you're planning to publish the latest ratings which show him having just won three games)

John Pack: If the article's any good, I'd publish it as any other article. The players have a right to fool each other. When the ratings arrive, publish them. The GM has no obligation to help in any deception, but shouldn't interfere unnaturally either; i.e. if ratings would normally go out in an issue, they should go right on out. However, it'd be wrong to save the ratings until the article showed up so that you could contradict the article with the ratings results.

Don Del Grande: Consider each thing separately; make the decision on each as if it were the only thing to be considered.

Chardo Edison: If his article is well-written and you like it because of points he brings up in it, then I'd say yes. If you had planned to publish the latest ratings before he submitted his article, then it's not GM interference. If you decide not to publish his article at all then that is not GM interference either, for whatever reasons you give. You, as publisher, make biased decisions about articles all the time; why should this time be any different?

Bruce Linsey: It was close to unanimous. Publish either or both based on their own merits.

Situation 9 (player wants to purchase back issues which will reveal what a slime his opponent really is)

Edi Birsan: Anyone who wants back issues is welcome to them. As GM you are not in the business of censoring published history.

Mike Barno: Sell 'em. Why not? You aren't giving him anything unfair or confidential or aiding one player to the detriment of another.

Michael Kettman: The GM should sell the requested publications to the player requesting them. Not only should he sell them but he has an obligation to do so. The GM has contracted to provide a service and not to follow through would be inexcusable. The player requesting the back publications should be congratulated for his foresight in ordering them.

Bruce Linsey: The consensus on this question was that it's OK to sell the issues (though several writers said they would make the player state the issue numbers explicitly). Two or three people felt that the GM was obligated to sell, a position with which I cannot agree. No publisher is obligated to sell his product to anyone in an amateur hobby.

Situation 10 (France complains about a surprise season separation because now England will be able to see he's being stabbed before submitting his spring orders)

John Pack: Any separation judgement call should have occurred before builds had occurred. The GM has interfered unless his HRs give him such a strange right. A player-voted separation would always be a possibility and a careful player should take that into account. But, a GM call should be placed with the fall results, not made after receiving the orders or after executing the autumn and winter results.

Mark Luedi: It seems that if seasons are separated strictly by the number of adjustments, the GM should have announced with the fall results that seasons would be separated. Yes, France does have a valid point; playing the players is as much (if not more) a part of the game as is playing the board situation.

Mark Berch: This isn't even close to being a problem. France's speculations on how England conducts himself are entitled to no weight. If you felt you had valid reasons to separate seasons, that is reason enough.

Chardo Edison: Yes, you have interfered, especially since the situation is not covered in your houserules. No matter that you may argue that the English player could have written those conditional orders this time. About this one there is no doubt.

Bruce Linsey: What France ought to have done was to make his own build conditional upon whether the seasons would be separated. Any GM worth his salt will permit that.

I deliberately put this question last because I knew it was going to give me a golden opportunity to pontificate on my favorite topic. No, the GM has not interfered in this game. The correct answer to the French player is, "Sorry, I can do anything I want regarding season separations because I gave myself this power by leaving the topic unmentioned in my houserules. It's not my problem that you chose to join one of my games. If you want a game in which the GM has to rule one way or the other, rather than make an arbitrary decision, find a GM who has more comprehensive houserules!"

In climbing down from my soapbox, I should also note that although France was taking a large risk in attempting to hide behind the cover of a combined winter/spring season to make his stab work, it was his right to do so. A player is perfectly justified in using the houserules and/or game mechanics to his own advantage, just as one is perfectly within his rights to use the support or convoy rules to his own advantage. So what France was trying to do was risky and poorly executed, but it was not "wrong" per se.

An interesting question arose when the above roundtable was first published. One respondent asked, "What about this: I am in a new game, with one of the players being a player I GM for. How much can I divulge information learned about him in the game I GM to others?" For example, can I say, "He always calls his orders in on deadline day."? No, I probably can't.

This logic serves you well for a few years, until the day one of your co-players tells you, "Well, since we are playing in a game together and since I don't want you to be able to comment on the fact that I always call my moves in on the deadline night, I'm signing up for one of those game openings you just announced in your zine, effective immediately, and will call you with my moves each deadline night. That way, you are prevented from commenting about this in the game we're both playing in!"

Think about it...and think about the whole topic of GM interference, and how careful you must be to avoid it.

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What Makes a Game Irregular?

by Steve Heinowski

I have been asked to tell all you prospective pubbers out there what constitutes an "irregular" game; of course we all presume you know what the h--- "irregular" means. For those of you who don't, "irregular" is a term applied to a finished game where, in the BNC's opinion, any person viewing the game results for any reason whatsoever ought to note that something happened in the game that separates it from the "norm". Over the years the term "irregular" has acquired a very heavy connotation, whether you as an individual have the same attitudes is purely a matter of personal conjecture. For example, a "local" game might have been planned to be so and not offensive to those involved; however, a label of "gross GM violations" means the game was definitely not fair to all those involved. I shall relate to you (all) what has been established over the years as categories of irregularity. Viewing these, I hope you realize that most of this stuff is just an application of common sense, would that we all had some to spare...

1) LOCAL GAMES. Three or more players have local telephone access or live within 50 miles of each other. (OK, folks, you could also say two people under these conditions could make a game "local". If you get two people who meet these criteria, use some common sense; put one in the east (I-A-T), the other in the west (E-F-G).)

2) FAMILY MEMBERS IN GAME. A member of your family is playing in your game. (Again, use your head, don't put your sister in to fill out that seventh slot, the game will wait; on the other hand, if your name happens to be Lipshits (non-related), feel free to put another Lipshits in the game -- but do mention that this clown ain't your brother-mother-son...)

3) GROSS GM VIOLATIONS. Your methods are discriminating against one player. You're flaunting the Rulebook so much that you're running a variant, not a "regular" Dip game. Your handling of the game is so poor, it is, or was, totally unplayable. For example, it is generally accepted in PEM that draws need not include all survivors if the GM/players agree; it is also acceptable to "concede" a game to a specific player, even though he hasn't got 18 SCs. It is not acceptable to make Albania a supply center...even though it was in the original version.

4) ILLEGAL PLAYER REMOVAL. You can't just up and throw someone out of the game for the hell of it, no matter how disgusting the guy turns out to be. There may be reasons to remove a player: failure of the player to submit moves, failure of a player to maintain a sub to your zine when that obligation was made known beforehand... in these cases make the matter known to the players in the game and go from there.

5) INCONSISTENT/ANONYMOUS STANDBY POLICY. If you use a standby once, you must use it throughout the game; ditto the reverse. Anonymous SBs, a recent occurrence, is no different than starting the game where you don't know anybody -- it is a variant.

6) A PLAYER HAS PLAYED TWO POSITIONS IN A GAME. Obvious, I hope??. I gather this crops up in SB situations. If you call Player A to stand by, and he plays the position even one season, don't call him again. If you are having trouble finding a second SB, ask another publisher, he will lend you some names.

7) GM IS A PLAYER IN THE GAME. Speaks for itself, again, I hope.

8) OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES...that I feel may affect the game's ratibility. This is here for those things that could crop up that just aren't quite defined adequately in the above notes.

In summary, suffice it to say; ask yourself how would I feel as a player if my GM did that to me. That in itself will go a long way towards avoiding hard feelings and charges of irregularity.

((As this goes to press, Steve Heinowski is preparing to assume the duties of the Boardman Number Custodianship, so I felt it important to include an article officially outlining his stance toward irregularity of games. I am gratified to see that our new BNC-to-be is adopting positions as reasonable and fair as the above, and I urge all new (and old, for that matter) GMs to support him and (unless you intend to run variants) to try to conform to these standards.

Some more in-depth comments on the above points, which represent purely my personal opinion:

On #1, I'd suggest that you refrain from allowing even two local players into the same game. For my taste, it's not enough to put one in the east and the other in the west (even though I once did that in a game I was running) -- one must assume that each of the seven great powers will at some point have occasion to attack and/or ally with any other. Even England and Austria, usually regarded as the two countries having least to do with each other, can interact.

On #2, I personally don't see anything wrong with placing a family member in a game, provided that this is made known to the players and that s/he receives no special advantages. A brother or son, for example, might be no different than a close friend. But, it's reasonable to call things the other way, and you should bear in mind that this would make your game irregular.

On #4, I asked Steve over the phone whether a GM would be justified in removing a player for excessive abusiveness. His response was that so long as this matter is covered in the house rules, the GM is within bounds. Needless to say, it's wise to have documentation and to consult with other GMs and/or the BNC himself before taking any action in such a situation.

On #6, I'd go farther -- as mentioned elsewhere in this Handbook, you shouldn't even call on a player to standby if he's previously so much as stood by for a different power earlier in the game. He might be in possession of information that only that country should know, even if he never actually made it into the game the first time around.

The bottom line, I think, is that you should follow Steve's advice and use a bit of common sense. And when in doubt, ask Steve directly (or whoever is the current BNC when a problem arises...)))

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Handling Protests

by Len Lakofka

During the course of the game you will almost surely make some errors. The players will point these out to you, when they find them, and you must react correctly.

First let's speak of the protests themselves. There are no problems with a polite letter pointing out what a player believes is an error and asking you to check the material to see who is correct. However, there will be times when a player will overreact -- you must quell any desire to reply in kind. DO point out, by personal letter, that you acknowledge his protest but that you will not tolerate anything but

a business tone in any future protest. Retain his protest in your files. Inform him that abusive language and/or personal insults will result in his dismissal from the game. Be polite but firm. Novice players will often jump on you and a calm reaction by you will probably stop any future problems. ((Editor's Note: This is too pessimistic. Novice players don't "jump on" their GMs any more than experienced players, and the vast majority of all players are reasonable people, even when filing a protest.)) If another outburst does occur I suggest the use of an ombudsman before the matter goes further. Remove a player for abusive language only in consultation with others and with documentation in your possession. Always keep YOUR cool.

If you receive a phone call from a player about a ruling or misadjudication do not let him force you into any decision over the phone. He may "demand" a resolution at that moment but do not buckle to such a demand. Say that you will take his call under consideration and that you will, if necessary, consult with another GM. Do not accept any outburst over the phone. Tell him that either he talks to you in a civil tone or you will hang up. Don't yell back at him, no matter how tempted you may be to do so. Let me say that rude letters and calls are few and far between but they do happen. Some players react as if you have purposefully tried to do them in because of some error.

When a protest is about a misadjudication the solution is usually very simple. The Rulebook will handle almost any problem.

You should require information on all GM errors by return mail. Thus if a deadline extension is required you can make it before the old deadline has lapsed. Simple errors often do not need a deadline extension. Your houserules should provide solutions for simple typos that are observable by all players.

((Editor's Note: Some comments. All GMing errors should be corrected if caught in time, even errors in capitalization or underlining. You never know when the simplest mistake is going to confuse a player unnecessarily. A post card to each player is in order to set things straight.

After quite a few years in the hobby, I've not yet heard anyone define the term "return mail". Len goes into no detail here, it's not in Mark Berch's "Lexicon of Diplomacy", and the Graustark houserules don't elaborate either, even though the term is frequently used in that zine. Even my local posties couldn't help me out here. I have this paranoid feeling that the term was invented just to keep me from ever achieving hobby omniscience; however, for the moment I suppose I'm safe in assuming that "return mail" merely means a speedy reply.))

When there is a complex ruling in a game it is always good to explain it with the move. This often saves trouble later.

The greatest problems with protests will involve procedural rulings. You must be fair but always equally harsh. Never allow a late move, for example, and then say no more late moves. Never change a season ((??)) but then say that the rule no longer applies. If you allow something once you must allow it later -- remember that. Do NOT try to be the good Samaritan; this will bite you sooner or later. Do not volunteer to do anything unless 1) there is a protest, or 2) you have made an error.

If you write in your magazine that you will do one thing, then do that thing. I will give you a recent example. In a magazine there was a gamesmaster and a guest gamesmaster. The publisher ((gamesmaster)) said that builds and removals were to be sent to him, instead of the guest GM. This was done. One player sent his build to the guest GM. The publisher, in the meantime, published the winter with no build received from one player and called for the spring. Spring moves were sent in and one player (the one who sent his build to the wrong place) protested. The guest GM said that he would include the ((disallowed)) build. I protested that since it was the player's mistake, we should go back to the spring without his build. I asked for a game delay until the matter was resolved. The next thing the guest GM did was to print the spring including this guy's build! I resigned from the game due to gamesmaster incompetence. The guest GM said that I resigned, and of course did not give any reason at all! Granted, this is an error with two GMs involved. But one GM can just as easily dig his own grave. On procedural matters it is easy to make a wrong ruling. It is worse if you compound it with another error.

((Editor's Note: The utter absurdity of the above situation, alas, masks the point that Len was attempting to illustrate; viz, that a published procedure must be followed. Three people were wrong in the fiasco described above: the GM and the guest GM for running games under such a corny rule (what if seasons were combined? Who was supposed to receive the winter/spring orders then?) and the player for not following it anyway. Actually, all the players were taking their chances by signing up to play under a GM using a rule like this one...))

If you do rule and this ruling is protested by another player then turn the matter over to an ombudsman or another GM. If you are sure you are wrong don't be afraid to retract your ruling in favor of the correct ruling. Such a change is not vacillation, it is a concern for correctness. You are only admitting that you can be wrong. Don't stand (and fall) by an incorrect decision.

If a ruling on a protest is protested it is always correct to temporarily stop the game until the issue is settled. Concern for the continuation of the game is important but if this continuation buries the protest you may find the correct solution is also buried. Also you may find that the game may not be rated by one or more of the hobby's ratingsmasters. If there is a threat of a resignation do not play another season until you are sure who is playing the country in question.

((It is wise for a new GM (and usually, any GM) to seek arbitration when his ruling cannot be accepted by the player. I'm always willing to serve in the capacity of ombudsman for a GM-player dispute, provided both parties agree in advance to abide by my ruling. There are numerous other hobbyists (the names Mark Berch and Randolph Smyth leap to mind) who are also well-qualified to perform such a service. But if your ruling is clearly wrong, don't waste the ombudsman's time, and that of your players, by going to arbitration anyhow. We all make mistakes, and the more readily one can admit it, the better he'll look to his players and outsiders.))

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The Player/GM: Some Ethical Dilemmas

by Alan Stewart

There are ethical questions concerning players, and then there are ethical questions concerning gamesmasters. My interest as a player has been in those questions raised by the fact that most gamesmasters are also players. The bond of confidentiality between players and gamesmasters is a sacred one, I would hope, and I hope that all would agree that no gamesmaster should take advantage of his duties in order to secure an advantage as a player. Or so I would hope. But how does one prevent oneself from doing so?

1. You are GMing a game of Player A's. You know because of this that he is quite sloppy and negligent with his orders. Always, they arrive (if at all) just before the deadline. Sometimes they arrive after -- although he hasn't been NMRed yet because your houserules allow you to accept orders arriving after the deadline but before the zine is sent out, and your turnaround has been slow. Now you open your gamestart and find that you're in a game with Player A. Can you allow your knowledge of his sloppiness to affect any decision you might make about whether or not to take him as an ally? If so, how do you justify taking confidential information into account -- and if not, how do you prevent yourself from being affected by that information in playing the game?

2. Is paragraph #1 any different from a situation where you know that Player A is extremely scrupulous about his orders -- always something arriving right away, and often a change or two of orders before the deadline arrives?

3. You are GMing three games in which Player A and Player B are both taking part. As far as any of your readers could tell, they are exemplary players -- they ally in one game, fight in another, and don't commit themselves in the third. But they are talkative little devils -- both of course have told you in the course of their calls to change orders that the "fight" is a sham, and that they had agreed a long time ago to ally in all games, and to stage little disagreements to fool the rest of the board. Of course you said nothing to this but "Hmm-hmm" -- but now the gamestart arrives, and they are England and France and you are Germany. Does your knowledge of their habits affect your diplomacy in any way -- and if not, how do you stop it?

4. You're in a game with Player A in Anything Goes -- a zine whose houserules state that "Forgery of orders is allowed. It is the player's responsibility to design a format of orders that will make this more difficult. Give me a codeword, or do your orders up in a special way." It's a bad zine, and you're never signing up for another game there. But anyway the time has come where you have decided that you have to forge Player A's orders to survive, and as it happens his orders to you in your zine are always in a particular format -- a line is drawn diagonally from the top left corner to the bottom right, and his orders are always on the right side of this

bizarre diagonal. Now of course, maybe he has a different format for his orders to Anything Goes. But he has told you that he had to design this weird format for use in that zine, so he's just using the diagonal-type orders for all his zines -- he's had a bunch of order forms in that format run off. The ethics of forgery may still be dubious despite the houserules -- but if you decide to do it, do you do it by using the diagonal form that you know he employs? If not, what do you do?

5. You had to expel Player A (this guy is a real nuisance, isn't he?) from your zine a year ago for lying to the GM. The dispute was acrimonious, and a successful trip to the ombudsman (successful for you, that is) didn't stop a lot of people from denouncing you. You open your gamestart (say -- maybe you're in too many games?) and there he is -- Player A and you, brought together by fate. Do you resign? If not, how does this incident affect your diplomacy, if at all?

6. Same as number 5 -- except you never expelled A. You didn't think you had quite enough proof to turf him. In fact you've never spoken to him about it -- you hadn't reached the stage where you thought it necessary to confront him and get a denial. But you're sure in your heart that he lied, and has a couple of times. What do you do? Any effect on your diplomacy?

Responses to "The Player/GM: Some Ethical Dilemmas"

Question 1 (you know from GMing for him that Player A is sloppy)

Question 2 (you know from GMing for him that Player A is meticulous)

Andy Lischett: 1. Yes, I would let knowledge of Player A's sloppiness affect decisions regarding him, simply because it's impossible to forget on command. I would not, however, transmit that knowledge to Player B or Player C unless it was either available through other sources (watching his games elsewhere) or a reasonable lie.

A couple of similar but more specific things have happened to me. Once I was GMing a game with Player A and playing against him in another zine. I received a third zine in which he NMRed on the deadline for my zine in which he also NMRed. The deadline for my game with him was the next day, so I revised my orders and phoned my GM, assuming that Player A NMRed there as well. The other example was even better, but I've forgotten it, so you'll have to take my word.

2. Same answer as #1 except that everyone can see he's reliable. Then again, maybe they can't.

As a GM I get lots of orders, and get to see who routinely uses contingency orders based on the other players' builds or retreats, etc., and who doesn't. As a player I use that knowledge all the time. Against the non-contingency-order-writer I may make an unusual retreat to catch him off guard, but against the contingency-order-writer I don't get cute because it's not likely to work.

Alan Stewart: We could get into some elaborate ploys here: enter the game solely for the purpose of convincing the GM that you are an utter dingbat, so that when you get into the same game with him, you can let loose!

Bruce Linsey: That's nothing! Why do you think I ran all those games for all those years, anyway? Why, I have a record of every player who ever did (or did not) submit conditional orders, who habitually phones in moves, who voted how to 2-way draws with their allies, etc., etc. Remember all those thousands of bucks I spent pubbing? I'm about to make it back in one fell swoop: what bids do I hear for all this info??

Conrad von Metzke: 1. It is without the pale of human nature to be able to separate one's "privileged" knowledge from one's intercourse with the subjects thereof. Since one cannot prevent oneself (no matter how scrupulously one tries) from being however subtly influenced by one's ostensibly restricted knowledge of reality, one might as well not bother to try. If you know that Player A is a sleaze, treat him accordingly. Anybody who replies (with the utmost pomposity), "Of course I would deal with A as if I knew nothing" is either a liar or a fool.

2. Same answer.

James Early: 1. I don't see anything wrong with allowing your knowledge of a player's sloppiness to affect your decision whether to ally with him or her. I personally would never ally with such a player, especially if the HRs of a zine permit no late orders. Who wants an ally who NMRs every two or three seasons? I have some players like Player A in my zine, and I would never ally with them. I think it would be ridiculous to say, "Well, I'll ally with him because I'm not supposed to know he's a moron."

2. This is not any different from the above situation. I would tend to ally with such a person. If you go to all the trouble to publish a zine, then you are entitled to a few fringe benefits (such as knowing the nature of several players). What's wrong with using this knowledge to your benefit?

Bruce McIntyre: If somebody's "sloppy and negligent" (#1) with orders, people will eventually find out about it -- GMs may know sooner than the rest, but it will become common knowledge sooner or later. The fact that this particular player has never been NMRed in your zine is a red herring. If he NMRs often in other zines, surely I can attack him for that reason; if he's never NMRed in other zines, maybe I'm jumping to conclusions and he's more reliable than the evidence suggests. In that case, I'm hurting myself by letting myself be affected by that information. There's no answer to the "how do you prevent yourself from being affected" question, except that "you can't". Therefore, I feel that the question cannot be satisfactorily answered with respect to the inherent problem, until we separate those who play from those who GM. And I'm not going to be the first one.

Alan Stewart: The unanimous verdict seems to be that it is impossible for any human to prevent himself from being aware of this information, or from acting on it. I hope that none of you are ever called upon to become Roman Catholic priests or judges. A Roman Catholic priest can be defrocked and indeed excommunicated for acting upon confidential information received in the confessional. I once read a textbook on confession giving this problem: your housemaid confesses to you that she has been stealing money that you keep in your clothes drawer. What can you do? Well, you cannot go to the police (everyone would know that) but you cannot even stop leaving your money in the clothes drawer if that has been your habit because that would be using confidential information in your own self-interest. You cannot fire her, or scowl at her, no, in your day-to-day dealings you must function just as if you did not know this information. It's probably easier when excommunication is the penalty for failing to do so...

When there is a dispute about the admissibility of evidence in a trial, the judge will preside at a voir dire, a little trial within a trial, at which the legal arguments for and against admitting the evidence will be made. Often the whole evidence in question must be made known to the judge in order to determine its admissibility, and even if this is not the case, the judge will certainly have a good idea about just what the evidence would show if admitted. And yet, if the judge finds the evidence inadmissible, he is required and expected to render his final verdict in the trial just as if he had never heard the evidence.

But I agree with you. I can't imagine a gamesmaster being able to disregard this information. A judge follows a tightly controlled process of reasoning to arrive at a verdict. It is easy enough to simply not consider the inadmissible information in that process -- it's just left out. A priest acts toward his housemaid in a way conditioned by habit and well-accepted social roles. It is easy for him simply to continue with those habits and to continue performing in his role even though he knows information that might cause him to want to behave quite differently. But the process of choosing an ally is often non-logical, often intuitive; a decision is called for at the end of the process, but even the person who reached it could often not list everything that has affected him. So there is no way to replicate the decision-making process leaving that information out.

Question 3 (You find yourself in a game with two players who you know, from their player-to-GM comments to you, have agreed to ally in every game)

Paul Gardner: In this example, I must resign because it appears that not only have these two taken pains to keep their association secret, they have had relative success in doing so. Best might be to make up an excuse and bow out.

David Anderson: You grin and bear it and try to get Russia's and Italy's help. QUICK!!!

Randolph Smyth: Again, I don't see anything wrong with using the information as best you can. Nobody forced them to tell you in the first place, and since they know that you know, they will probably be taking special care to shaft you as quickly as possible. Whatever you can do in return will probably just even up the odds.

I suppose a case could be made for not publicly denouncing them if they had given you the information "in confidence". I wouldn't take such gross action in this case (i.e. if it was totally unknown to the rest of the hobby) for the simple reason that I wouldn't likely be believed, and would simply look foolish/desperate until they chose to drop the masks. But working on the assumption of an E/F alliance in your dealings with other players is fair ball.

Again, let's vary your scenario a bit: A and B are in your games, but have not indicated any "cross-game" relationship to you or anyone else. Confronted with them as E/F to your G, are you justified in spreading an (apparently false) story about their close cooperation? Sure, if people will believe you. Their relaying of information showing the truth of the rumor should not constrain you from an identical act.

Alan Stewart: There's something wrong with this argument; let me see if I can figure it out and explain what it is. We'll take a little break here.

Alan Stewart: Back again. There is nothing wrong with spreading an invented story about A and B's cross-gaming so long as you do not indicate, explicitly or implicitly, that your knowledge of their cross-gaming derived from your gamesmastering activities. Agreed. And their relaying information concerning the truth of the story should indeed not constrain you from an identical act. But if your motivation for spreading the story is that the two players have told you as gamesmaster about their cross-gaming, there must be some reason why you would choose A and B as targets of the story in the first place. Desperation, perhaps, or A and B's geographical propinquity, or just a desire to cause some random devilmint. If you can satisfy yourself that you would have spread the story about (genuine cross-gamers) A and B even if they had not told you about their cross-gaming, then the story is not tainted by privilege-breaking and is OK. We are getting into heavy casuistry here. Invented stories of cross-gaming are fairly rare, I think. How curious if a gamesmaster/player were to happen to make that rare decision to spread such a charge just for devilmint's sake about the very same two players who have told him confidentially that they are cross-gamers.

Conrad von Metzke: Damn right my activities are affected! Any player of mine who tells me intimate background of that sort is crazy! I will not, of course, release the data to my players but I am hardly going to pretend I didn't hear it when my own survival in a game is involved.

Alan Stewart: You ignore what they have told you in playing the game, to the best of your ability. You compose your first letters to all the other players as if you had never heard the confessions. You watch closely to see whether A or B refer to their confession in their letters about the game -- if they do, the privileged relationship is broken and you can do whatever you want with the information. But you can't refer to it first yourself. No one's perfect -- if they do start to attack you, don't blame yourself if you spend less energy than you would otherwise in trying to get them to change their minds, and more in trying to turn RUSSIA and ITALY against them. You do not resign. You do consider changing your houserules to specify that players' statements about game strategy and the like will not be passed on to other players in the game but are otherwise not confidential or privileged.

Question 4 (forging Player A's orders in Anything Goes, using his diagonal format)

James Early: Why not? The player should have enough sense to have a different format in a zine such as Anything Goes than the one he uses in your zine. If not, he deserves to have his orders faked! He'll quickly learn a valuable lesson.

Bruce McIntyre: Well, presumably he knew you were in the game, so why would he send you all you need to forge his orders in a game where this was permitted? It sounds more like a trick to me.

Randolph Smyth: Well, I'd never forge orders -- as far as I'm concerned it would make the game a variant, unrateable, and thus not worth the trouble of struggling to survive. But using your assumption, I "decide to do it":

Yes, I use the form. Player A knows I know it, and if he's silly enough to use the same format for the zine permitting forgeries, he deserves to be shafted. Here, I have to rely on the basic premise that only the orders themselves are confidential in GM-player correspondence, not their format.

Alan Stewart: Duplicating/copying/imitating the form is an indefensible breach of GM-player confidentiality; much, much less defensible than forging orders in a zine whose houserules allow it. So what if nobody in the hobby agrees with me? I like to be contrary.

A constant refrain seems to be that the player's senselessness is relevant in deciding whether or not his communications should be kept confidential. I don't agree.

I would invent a "format" for orders and maybe a new "codeword" ((Editor's Note: the use of "codeword" in this discussion is of course an entirely different one than elsewhere in this handbook, in case anyone is wondering...)), and send it in with a

note saying, "I've decided it's time to change my format." It would be delicious, but also unethical, to add "because my other gamesmaster knows about the diagonal one."

Question 5 (you're up against Player A, who you expelled from your game a year ago)
 Question 6 (you're up against Player A, who you didn't expel (or even confront) because you didn't have quite enough proof -- but you know he lied)

Andy Lischett: 5. No, I don't resign because he lied. Yes, I will mistrust him more than the others.

6. Same as #5.

Conrad von Metzke: Yes, I'd resign. In the case of "5", I'd tell the gamesmaster precisely why. In the case of "6", I'd delicately phrase some excuse, and tender humble apologies. But to play in a game with a known crook would obviate the fun.

Paul Gardner: 5. In this case -- stay in and take the heat.

6. Play on. If you didn't think you had enough to confront him -- you're best off to drop it.

Bruce McIntyre: The incident shouldn't affect the diplomacy at all, assuming that both people are mature enough to realize that a new battle shouldn't be fought on an old battleground.

James Early: 5. Resign. Try to avoid this guy at all costs. Why spoil the game for the other five just because you can't get along with this bum?

6. I think it would be best to resign here, just to be on the safe side. Who knows what could happen if you stay around? The situation could worsen and end up like #5 in which the game will be ruined. If you're not the type to quit a game then go after him in full force! Get rid of him!

Alan Stewart: I don't like this last suggestion of yours. So the guy is going to be attacked by one of his gamesmasters because his GM is angry at him over a matter that he's never even discussed with him? No chance for the player to even state his case? Breach of GMing ethics.

Bruce Linsey: I think James is right. The question as initially posed said that you're sure in your heart that he lied. Presumably confronting him will cause a stink that you don't want since you don't have enough proof, but if you're sure, you are perfectly justified in attacking. In fact, you're always perfectly justified in adopting any strategy you like.

David Anderson: 5. You try to get along with Player A and besides if he tried to deceive the GM in this game, you will have your problem solved for you. He will be tossed out on his ear just like in your zine.

6. Well, if you have never talked to him about it, FORGET IT. When you think he is deceiving you, bring it right up to him. Otherwise if you wait he will have succeeded and you can't do anything about it then.

Randolph Smyth: 5. Why should I resign -- no way. This doesn't seem to relate to GM-player confidentiality since the whole dispute went public. I'd thus treat the situation the same way as I would when meeting any other hobbyist that I'd tangled with in the past -- don't count on an ally and be well prepared for an enemy. Or if you're the aggressive type, start the fighting yourself. No ethical problem here that I can see.

6. If you couldn't denounce him in your zine, you'll likely get nowhere denouncing him as a player either. This seems to reduce to a question of general reputation, then: if you are determined that a given player will not make a good ally, what do the reasons matter? It's senseless to attempt to ally with the guy anyhow, just because a GM-player relationship is responsible for your opinion.

Can you pretend to ally with him, knowing in your heart that it won't last, determined to stab him before he stabs you? Why not? People embark on that strategy all the time, it seems, for no sensible reasons at all! Again, the fact that you have that impulse based on your capacity as GM shouldn't prevent you from proceeding with it.

Alan Stewart (general summation): I've learned a lot from this discussion. I'd picked up the idea somewhere that the GM-player relationship was privileged, and I read a lot into that. It appears that the prevailing norm is as described by Randolph: only the orders themselves are confidential. Fully confidential, that is. Then there is a grey area where the GM will happily use information for his own advantage but balk at passing it on to someone else.

CHAPTER 17
GM DILEMMAS

GM Quiz

by Randolph Smyth

(The first four examples are lifted shamelessly from ((Richard Sharp's zine)) Dolchstoss.) Responses follow the questions.

1. Is F Bot S F Bar-StP(nc) legal? Why (not)?
2. a) England: A Mar-Tus, F Lyo C A Mar-Tus, F Pie S A Mar-Tus, F Mid-Wes,
F Spa(sc) S F Lyo.
Italy: F Tyr-Lyo, F Tus S F Tyr-Lyo, F Wes S F Tyr-Lyo.
What happens in Tus/Lyo?
b) Remove the English F Spa(sc) from the problem -- now what?
3. England: A Bel-Hol, F Eng C FRENCH A Bre-Bel.
France: A Bre-Bel.
Germany: A Hol S FRENCH A Bre-Bel.
What happens in Bel?
4. One player sends another a suggested set of mutual orders in the course of a negotiation, ends the letter, and signs at the bottom. The second player puts the deadline date at the head of the page and sends it in together with his own orders which stab the first player. What do you think of that one!?
5. A set of orders have no unit designations (i.e. Mar-Bur, Spa(sc)-Lyo). There can be no ambiguity since previous seasons will show the nature of the units in the spaces, even when they're moving along the coastlines. However, the orders are technically incomplete. Will you decipher them if necessary and allow them?
6. An order to (a) support or (b) convoy a foreign unit lacks mention of the unit's nationality. Valid?
7. France: A Gas-Bre, A Pic-Bre.
England: F Mid S FRENCH A Pic-Bre, A Bel-Pic.
a) Who goes where (if anyone moves at all)?
b) If you said that the English support and move work, suppose you have a specific note attached to the French orders, rejecting such support if it is given. Still OK?
8. England, allied with France, is in a tactical struggle against Italy that lands him in Spain (France's center) in a fall season. He'd rather leave the center in French hands, though; is "friendly occupation" legal?
9. A California player complains that the three week deadlines in your Ontario zine are too short (he's right, given the U.S.-Canada postal situation). Can you accommodate him?
10. A letter arrives on the day of the deadline wondering where the last issue went. No current moves, of course; is the game delayed or does the player NMR?
11. If an unordered unit is dislodged, may it retreat? If your answer is "no", would you feel the same way if the GM forgot to list the unit in the previous season's adjudication?
12. France orders "A Mar-B". The Rulebook does not lay down abbreviations but only suggests the first three letters as convenient and unambiguous in most cases. Since only one space adjacent to Mar begins with B, the order is technically unambiguous if you accept the idea of abbreviations at all. Will you allow A Mar-Bur?

13. How about codewords? (For the ignorant: Player A submits orders stating, "If B includes the codeword STABINBACK with his orders, I order..., otherwise I order..." This tool may be used when A cannot decide between two options as the deadline approaches, and leaves it up to his ally B to make the decision and either submit the codeword or not. Presumably B's units will move in concert with A's for maximum effect, but there's nothing to stop B from choosing the orders for A which give him the best result for a simultaneous stab!)
14. One player puppets to another, or is incommunicado for a season. Will you accept his orders as a blank check from his ally (his signature at the bottom of a blank page, filled in by the second player)?
15. A player NMRs every other season: how long will you let it go on?
16. a) One player NMRs and you call a standby. Before the next deadline you get a letter from another player threatening to resign if the standby gets the position. Sure enough the first player NMRs again while the standby submits. What to do?
17. You misfile a set of orders and NMR a player. He questions the miss, but you reply in good faith that nothing was received. Several weeks later the orders turn up. How do you resolve this after (a) no (b) one (c) two or more further seasons have been played? (This is my personal nightmare which runs past me with every player NMR, but the problem has never actually come up.)
18. A novice requests you to correct any illegal orders if the intention is clear, until he gets experience at writing his moves. Possible?
19. a) One of your players, with a good deal more playing and GMing experience than you (and whom you honestly respect) criticizes your GMing decision in a hazy area. What's your reaction?
b) Appealing your decision to an ombudsman or similar official brings down a ruling against you. Reaction?
20. One of your players is also a fellow player in another zine, and offers to vote to end the game you're GMing if you'll do him a favor as a player (and to stonewall an obvious finish if you refuse). Anything unethical about going along? If so, what do you do about it?

Responses to "GM Quiz"

Question 1 (F Bot S F Bar-StP(nc))

Steve Berrigan: F Bot S F Bar-StP(nc) is legal and is covered by the Rulebook. A similar situation could of course occur in Spain or Bulgaria; i.e. F Wes S F Mid-Spa(nc) or F Bla S F Aeg-Bul(sc).

Question 2 (convoyed attack on F Tus, which supports an attack on the convoying fleet. two tactical scenarios posed)

Kevin Adams: a) The English convoy succeeds and the Italian F Tus would be dislodged.
b) In this case the English convoy would fail while the Italian attack would succeed.

Question 3 (England attempts to convoy in a French army which would dislodge an English unit)

Randolph Smyth: France moves; the English A Bel is dislodged. The problem is whether a nation (England) can legally convoy a unit which dislodges its own. Self-dislodgement is prohibited by Rule IX.3, and the same rule rejects support of foreign units against one's own unit. But convoys? Check with the GM if you want to apply this loophole, but with no specification to the contrary I'd be inclined to accept a self-dislodging convoy (intentional or otherwise; what the players want never has any bearing on an adjudication).

Question 4 (player B sends in player A's letter containing game orders)

Kevin Adams: Absolutely despicable. But in a purely legal sense I would think that it would be acceptable. If that ever happened to me I would be a little upset and question the second player's morals quite closely. But that leads into the topic of is all fair in love, war, and Diplomacy even if the rules say so? A good topic for discussion over a few beers.

Andy Lischett: If the GM is as hardhearted as I am, the second player succeeds.

Randolph Smyth: I'd be inclined to reject the problem orders as they stand, since the date would not correspond to the rest of the material.

Question 5 (missing unit designations)

Kevin Adams: I would say yes as Rule VII.4 states that "a badly written order which nevertheless can have only one meaning must be followed."

Andy Lischett: Yes. The Rulebook doesn't require designations.

Randolph Smyth: I regard any unambiguous orders as legal, although sloppiness is frowned on as it makes more work for me; also, it's dangerous, as taking it too far will render the order unintelligible.

Bruce Linsey: I wouldn't allow the orders. See the debate on strict CMing.

Question 6 (missing nationality)

Randolph Smyth: Yes, but I will always insert the nationality designation in my adjudication for the convenience of other players.

Bruce Linsey: I wouldn't allow the orders.

Question 7 (unwanted support, with French note rejecting same)

Kevin Adams: France: A Gas-Bre fails, A Pic-Bre succeeds due to English support.
England: A Bel-Pic succeeds.

The fact that France included a note would have no effect...

Bruce Linsey: Right. There is no provision in the rules for rejecting support.

Question 8 (friendly occupation)

Steve Berrigan: There is no such thing as "friendly occupation" and therefore England receives credit for Spain.

Question 9 (player raises legitimate point that deadlines are too short)

Randolph Smyth: If the other players are happy with longer deadlines you can stretch them. He joined the game, though, so he's stuck with the conditions if nothing else is feasible. A conscientious GM would have informed him of the problems before taking his money.

Question 10 (letter arrives on deadline asking where did last issue go)

Steve Berrigan: I would think that each player should be reasonably aware of when the zine should arrive and take sufficient action. Yes, NMR him for stupidity.

Randolph Smyth: I got a real chuckle out of that answer. I can see the poor English player now, reading his adjudication: F Nth H (stupidity), F Nwg H (ignorance), A Nwy H (imbecility), F Lon H (idiocy),...

Andy Lischett: If the GM will generally grant a requested separation for a decent reason, he should do so here.

Randolph Smyth: Yes, dammit, the game will have to wait. If it had been a day later, though, I'd have felt justified in ignoring it.

Question 11 (may an unordered, dislodged unit retreat?)

Andy Lischett: Yes. Rules say unordered units may hold, so no orders are just as good as written orders to hold.

Randolph Smyth: I say yes because an NMR (the usual reason for unordered units) is its own punishment. Rule XI says "any dislodged unit makes its retreat" (my underline), but doesn't consider postal games. My reasoning is that a player may have NMRed for Spring/Fall, but this cannot (or rather, should not) affect future seasons (Summer/Autumn). However, many GMs use the automatic disbanding rule, for reasons which have still to satisfy me. The second question simply illustrates one of the potential secondary problems which may arise when attempts are made to administer artificial penalties.

Bruce Linsey: I agree with Andy and Randolph, but as the latter points out, some GMs differ.

Question 12 (A Mar-B)

Steve Berrigan: Again, the GM can't interpret the moves -- therefore the move "A Mar-B" fails.

Randolph Smyth: The order would be allowed in this zine, but watch it! If your "B" isn't a crystal-clear, unambiguous, perfect "B" worthy of Mr. Penmanship Canada (whatever that is), the order will be thrown out on its ear with some gusto. If you find "ur" to be a strain, you won't last long in a game like this anyhow.

Bruce Linsey: Tie the guy to a tree, break his fingers, and leave him out in the woods to rot. And disallow his order for good measure. Even if an order is technically unambiguous, there comes a point when a GM may expect a reasonable degree of conformity from his players.

Question 13 (codewords)

Kevin Adams: I would say no, but this is a GM decision and hopefully his houserules make some provision with regard to the acceptability of codewords.

Steve Berrigan: I do not believe codewords are very ethical and therefore they should be disallowed.

Andy Lischett: Codewords should be disallowed.

Bruce Linsey: Codewords receive further discussion elsewhere in this handbook. They violate neither the rules nor the spirit of the game, and in my opinion should be permitted.

Question 14 (blank check orders sent through ally)

Kevin Adams: I would guess so. Again, this is a situation which it would be a good idea for the GM to set out in his houserules.

Randolph Smyth: Yes, on two conditions. I must be informed of the situation by the first player beforehand (as I see it, this is the critical difference between this and question #4). Also, in a long-term case, I require the continued assent of the first player to whatever is happening -- he can't throw up his hands, let his subscription lapse, and lose all contact with the game. The player of record must exercise ultimate control over his units, though "blank checks" are permissible for coordination purposes.

Question 15 (player NMRs every other season)

Kevin Adams: Once again another GM call. An awful lot for the GM to do. I guess he or she could set forth a specific houserule to cover the situation.

Andy Lischett: Twice. Maybe three times if something drastic happens, like nuclear war or his girlfriend dumping him (boo hoo).

Bruce Linsey: Typically GMs will drop a player for missing two turns in a row. Under that rule alone, the guy stays in indefinitely. However, a few GMs (like myself) also have houserules allowing for the replacement of a player who NMRs, say, three times in five game years or four times overall. I'd recommend using a rule like this.

Question 16 (player(s) protest your selection of standby)

Steve Berrigan: a) You control the standby situation: let the first player resign if he so wishes.

b) Same decision -- it's your game and your zine. That type of person shouldn't be in your zine if they try to pull tricks like that.

Andy Lischett: a) Use the standby.

b) Yes.

Randolph Smyth: Depends on the situation (does that get me out from under?...no...?). One or more letters saying only, "I'm resigning if so-and-so takes over" will be answered, if at all, with "Goodbye". The resignation threat(s) would never make any difference to the decision. (b) raises the question of who owns the game, the GM or the players. If all the players felt so strongly about the standby and I didn't agree (I wouldn't or he wouldn't be allowed on my standby list in the first place), my final offer to the current players would be to find a new zine for the game. Sort of a weird scenario, though, eh?

Bruce Linsey: An ounce of prevention... The GM should publicly announce that any active player may (within reason) request in confidence that any particular standby(s) not be called into his game. Such requests should be honored, and the standby list should be published regularly so that players know who their potential opponents are. If the GM has done all of this, then his answer to the objecting player(s) should be, "It's too late to voice disapproval now -- you should have said something before I called the guy. Goodbye." ..

The GM who did not take such steps in advance is on shakier ground, but is still within his rights to use the standby.

Question 17 (misfiled orders turn up later)

Steve Berrigan: In fairness, whether it was one or more seasons the original season, without the NMR that was actually the gamesmaster's fault, should be replayed with no penalty.

Andy Lischett: Burn the misfiled orders and scatter the ashes over Lake Michigan in the dead of night. Then to be fair to the wronged player, rig his next game in his favor by losing all the other players' moves for three seasons.

Randolph Smyth: Grog. As I implied, I have no real answer to this one but prayer. If no additional seasons had been played, a replay incorporating the missing orders is only natural; no new submissions. If the game had proceeded and the NMR didn't appear to be critical, I'd be inclined to apply the first part of Andy's reply. If it was a turning point in the game I'd probably dump it on the Ombudsman. Steve's answer looks reasonable in some situations, but suppose the NMRing player had gone on

to stab an ally and was doing really well? -- running back would actually hurt him! Or suppose the game had ended and had been reported? It would all depend on the situation; I don't think the procedures could be codified in advance.

Bruce Linsey: If no intervening season has been played, then it's obvious; you sent out a readjudication. ("Replay" is the wrong term, Randolph -- that implies that players can re-negotiate and re-order.) This is simply a correctable GMing error.

The situation is much more unfortunate if one or more intervening seasons have been played. The best solution is obtained by the process of elimination. Let me tell you what you don't do. You don't deceive the players in any way -- it is your responsibility now to tell them precisely what happened (if you haven't the guts to do this, you ought not to be GMing). You don't replay any seasons -- that is never a good idea, in my opinion. Players now have tipped their hands regarding their strategies. Even if none of them have stabbed, the absence of a stab is revealing. You don't, as Randolph suggests, dump it on an ombudsman unless a player requests it -- it's normally your job to make these decisions. And you don't attempt to take into account whether the NMR was crucial to the player or the game -- the GM is not entitled to make such strategic judgements.

So, I'm full of advice about what not to do. The remaining course of action is the only reasonable one. You tell the players what happened, and then (like an umpire who blows a call in baseball), you announce that, regrettably, the NMR must stand. As a matter of courtesy, I would also offer the guy a free game or a refund of his game fee, but you can't compensate him in any way in your role as GM.

Like Randolph says, you should hope this never comes up. Really all it is, though, is no more than an extremely messy GMing error -- readjudicable if no seasons have been played since; uncorrectable otherwise.

Question 18 (novice requests help with illegal orders)

Steve Berrigan: No -- a novice (such as myself) must learn to own up to his mistakes. Anyway, where do you draw the line? When is a player no longer a novice?

Andy Lischett: No, but you could tell him they're illegal and why, and suggest he rewrite them.

Randolph Smyth: 'Fraid not. Such a novice will have to learn by bitter experience. GMs can't interpret intentions not in evidence. (Regarding Andy's advice suggestion: I wouldn't bother informing a player I considered "experienced" of his errors, and as Steve mentions, where do you draw the line? Also, suppose the informed person doesn't reply before the deadline? As a general rule I never look at a player's orders until the deadline date anyhow -- just stuff 'em in my files. Therefore, orders must stand as received, whatever the author's level of experience.)

Question 19 (experienced player questions your decision, ombud rules against you)

Steve Berrigan: Accept it if he is clearly right; if it's still hazy kindly tell him to mind his own business. ((?! -- Since when is a player's own game not his business?)) ((For the ombudsman)) Same thing only this time tell the bastard to find another zine.

Randolph Smyth: In the first case, I'd submit the question to an ombudsman, although these days there are precious few players fitting the above description with respect to me. Once submitted, his decision would be final.

Bruce Linsey: What I would do depends on the precise nature of Randolph's "hazy area". If we're talking about a decision that's close thanks to a player's bad handwriting or use of a questionable abbreviation, then the GM's judgement ought to be final. But if we're talking about a grey area of the rules, e.g., then I'd submit the question to an ombudsman. Once an ombudsman is called, by the way, his decision must be final -- else why go to arbitration in the first place?

Incidentally, the question did say "hazy area". In cases where either the player or the GM is clearly right (and the other clearly mistaken), no ombudsman would be called in my games. If the GM goofed, I correct the error and proceed with the game. If the player's wrong, I politely inform him why by pointing to the governing rule or houserule, and get on with the game. I don't recommend that GMs do this (deny a player the right to an ombudsman ever) until they've had several years of seasoning and are quite certain of their ground, though. In most questionable cases, third party arbitration is the best solution.

Question 20 (fellow player asks favor; will vote accordingly in game you're running)

Kevin Adams: Damn unethical; best cure is publicity. Make it known to the other players in the games. GMs too. But if the guilty party denies it, it comes down to one person's word against another's unless you have physical proof. But what if you were propositioned via phone? Nasty, nasty, nasty.

Bruce Linsey: I agree it's unethical. But here's a poser to close out this round table. Is it OK to make up a story that someone gave you such an ultimatum over the phone, and tell it to the other players in your game together in order to turn them against him? If the circumstances were right (e.g. he is stonewalling an obvious finish in the game you're running for legitimate reasons), you could give an awful lot of credibility to your version of events. This is a good example of potential conflict of interest between a person's role as a GM and his position in a game. Think about it...

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A GMing Dilemma: NMRs and Game Delays

by Richard Sharp

Most GMing problems arise from uncertainty on how to adjudicate a certain set of moves. But an important and very common group of problems concerns a more basic question: 'Should I adjudicate at all?' The decision whether or not to hold over a game until the following deadline is one that has caused me headaches in the past and is still doing so, so I thought I'd ramble on about it for a bit and see if I get anywhere.

The latest bone of contention is not one of the games I'm running, but one I'm playing in - NGC 191 in Greatest Hits. A quick rundown on the background: as Russia, I have had appalling ally trouble. My first choice of an ally was Italy, who during the four seasons of our relationship sent only one set of orders, and got those wrong. He was finally evicted, and I chummed up with Austria (one G. Palmer) - the only times I could get him to send in orders were when I was able to stand over him and dictate them. Despite these set-backs I managed to get up to about 14 centres before my three main opponents - Messrs Piggott, Walkerdine and Baird as England, Germany and France respectively - managed to settle their private differences and put up a highly effective defence which began to roll me back. At this point, astonishingly, Messrs Baird and Walkerdine sent no orders ... and GM Pete Birks held the game over on the grounds that the two NMRs would spoil it! I have appealed against this decision, and at the moment the probable upshot is that Pete will refer the question to an impartial third party - probably the inevitable Don Turnbull.

My intention is certainly not to criticize Pete - I have much sympathy for his point of view. If you think the decision is an easy one, one way or the other, try asking yourself these questions:

- (1) Would you hold over if you received only one set of orders in Autumn 1901?

((Editor's Note: In Britain, our "Fall" is their "Autumn". The North American hobby generally takes "Autumn" to mean the post-Fall retreats.))

- (2) Would you if a one-unit country NMR'd in Spring 1907?

All GMs would answer 'no' to (2), and I think there would probably be a unanimous 'yes' to (1), though many of us would have some pretty blistering comments and might well abandon the game altogether. So the question is, where do you draw the line? In the game in question, Richard and Adrien are 2 out of 5 survivors, controlling 15 out of 34 centres - which side of your line does this fall?

My argument, thrashed out in a long phone conversation with Pete (at his expense!), was that though he had a perfect right to do as he did, thinking he was acting in the best interests of all the players, he should be prepared to change his ruling if the most powerful (and non-defaulting) country objects to it. I should say that nine times out of ten Pete would have been unchallenged, as I don't normally like profiting from NMRs; but in this particular case there were special circumstances that affected my opinion. Namely: (a) I had taken some trouble to sow confusion in this particular season, and it is possible that one of the NMRs might be due to this; (b) I had suffered so much from NMRs by other players that I am quite prepared to benefit from them for a change; (c) the Greatest Hits in question was six weeks late appearing, so the defaulters had not been exactly pressed for time. I should stress that none of these is a reason for Pete not to hold the game over - they are reasons for my adopting an unusual attitude.

The whole business of holding games over poses some important basic questions. Does a player have a right to benefit by other players' NMRs? Does a player have the right to demand that a game be held over? What difference, if any, does it make if the decision is taken before the deadline? Most basic of all, can a GM's decision be reversed once it is taken, and if so what should the procedure be?

Well, I don't think a player has a right to demand a holding-over. I am very reluctant to hold over games, myself, and have often refused to do so - for instance, I am unimpressed by the traditional bleat of 'You forgot to send me last issue', which most of us have tried on from time to time. Occasionally it may even be true; well, hard lines. I make a special case of the games in which Duncan Morris is playing, because of the almost insuperable difficulties he has to cope with; I am always prepared to hold over games involving other overseas players around Christmas; and when a player tells me well in advance that he will be out of touch during one particular season I will make some arrangement for him. Also, of course, I may hold over if it turns out at some late stage that I have made a serious GMing error. But in general I reckon that a game should be held over only if it seems absolutely essential to give all players a fair deal. And if you ever write asking me to hold a game over and fail to enclose 'just-in-case' orders ... well, you deserve all you get.

Holding over for NMRs is a very different matter. I have done it myself, rarely, and have never had a complaint. I dislike doing it because I always bear in mind that an NMR may have been engineered by another player. Another, allied point is that if the GM prints the names of the defaulters, then those players who have sent in orders are known not to have NMR'd, which could weight fractionally against them. (In NGC 191 I was very anxious, for reasons I won't go into here, that John Piggott should not know whether I had submitted orders.) I think it's fair to say that I would consider holding over if the NMRs involved at least half the players and half the units. But it's not logical: one player missing orders four times is probably more destructive than four players missing simultaneously!

I am not one of those who reserve to the GM a godlike right to do what he likes because it's his zine (Piggott's Theory). I can and do make mistakes, and it's right that they should be redressed. Profound differences of opinion are rare, and when they do arise I am prepared to have them referred to a responsible third party - though I once had a nasty shock when Richard Walkerdine in this capacity over-ruled me when I was (and still am) quite certain I was right! I have often been asked for opinions by other GMs, and am always glad to help; occasionally one learns something valuable in this way.

As a result of my brooding on the NGC 191 misfortune, and similar cases, I have reached some decisions which will affect players in my games from now on. I offer these pearls free to other GMs - they make sense, and in some cases I can now see that the standard practice is wrongly conceived.

(1) When a double deadline is in operation, or a game is held over for any reason, I will not say which countries have orders 'on file'. A player has the right to the usual degree of uncertainty as to whether he has ordered or not.

(2) If I consider a game is likely to be spoilt by one or more NMRs, I may decide not to print the adjudication at once; I will suggest that the game be held over. But if any non-defaulting player demands an adjudication, he must have one. (Remember, he will not know - though he may guess - how many or which players have missed.)

(3) If a player wants a game held over for any reason he must say so before the deadline, or he has no rights in the matter. If I agree (and I usually won't) I shall simply say 'The game is held over', without going into details.

I think (1) and (2) are simple enough, but (3) could still cause problems. Let's take one hypothetical case. Germany asks for a game to be held over, and the GM agrees. Between the deadline and publication, Russia and Turkey happen to meet in the urinal on Crewe station and - inevitably, if unwisely - discuss the game, Russia admitting that he has stabbed Turkey. The zine appears, and Turkey gleefully sends in new orders to nullify the Russian stab.

None of the obvious counters to this is really any good. Useless to say that Russia and Turkey shouldn't discuss the game before they see the results - if one of them refuses the other is certain to smell a rat. For the GM to inform all players of the decision before the deadline is an ideal but often quite impractical solution. For him to refuse order

changes from anyone but Germany is absurd - he must assume that Germany's negotiations are likely to make other people change orders.

There's no easy way out of this one, and it probably doesn't matter very much - after all, it requires several unlikely contingencies all to arise at once. But I must say that I like to have a cut-and-dried answer ready for the improbable question . . .

By way of conclusion, I shall simply repeat something I've often said before in these pages. The GM's job is to ensure that all players get a fair deal, and particularly that no non-defaulting player suffers, however indirectly, from other players' inefficiency, bad luck or whatever. If the GM occasionally has to bend the rules to preserve the spirit, he should not hesitate to do so. Where a genuine dispute arises, a good GM should admit he can be wrong, and accept arbitration by one or more responsible third parties.

((There are valid reasons for delaying a game, but I wouldn't do it simply because of NMRs alone (except to assign a player to a position which had NMRed the previous turn). My answer to Richard's "Would you hold over if you received only one set of orders in ((Fall)) 1901?" is absolutely not. I suspect that many North American GMs would, though, and if so, they ought to explicitly state where they draw the line in such situations.

For what reasons would you delay a game?))

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Giving Results by Phone: the Case Against

by Mark L. Berch

It's a few days -- or a few hours -- or a few minutes -- after the deadline, and one of your players is on the line. He may want all the results, or just one move. He may want to get started on his diplomacy early or he may just be dying of curiosity. Do you tell him?

Giving results by phone is a very common and acceptable practice. Though I've never made a study, I'd guess that more than half of new GMs would comply. It's a friendly, accommodating thing to do, and it's always fun to talk about the game you're GMing, and you like to see enthusiasm. But I would also estimate that as GMs gain more experience, they become much less likely to do this. With the passage of time, they see the disadvantages more clearly.

Most players do not have a budget for long-distance, game-related calls, except on a very occasional basis, if at all. Players who do have such a budget have somewhat of an advantage. The most extreme case I know of was when Edi Birsan called me once to negotiate, and I didn't even know the game had started yet, let alone what country I was playing.

But this advantage for negotiation is easier for the players to accept because there is nothing that can be done about it. If a player wants to negotiate by phone, he will. If players don't like it, they can (if they want) go so far as to state that they will not normally negotiate over the phone. (If that's your view, it's best to put that in your very first letter, rather than later in response to a phone call.)

On the other hand, if the GM is giving out results by phone, there's nothing the players who can't call can do about that. The phoning players will have extra negotiating time regardless of what other players think or do. Unlike negotiating by phone, which can't be prevented, this can be. Some resentment will be targeted on the GM, since he's the one who's making this inequality possible. It's true of course that you'd give the results to whoever asks, so you're not acting improperly. But your actions are allowing a "telephone inequality" to arise, and it's not necessary for this to happen.

There's another factor to consider. The great majority of even the good GMs are sometimes a few weeks late. Sure, you consider yourself reliable, but the historical fact is that even reliable GMs are sometimes late. Illness, family responsibilities, job pressures, personal problems -- the odds are, you'll run into a problem. You'll feel bad that you are late. But if you've given out the results by phone, there's going to be an enormous difference between those who can afford to call, and those who can't. The inequality that results from giving out results on the phone is magnified if you happen to be late that season.

And keep in mind that this is supposed to be postal Diplomacy. The routine use of the telephone erodes that concept.

I'd suggest only two exceptions. The first is a player who is calling at a time when he should have already received the results in the mail. You might define this as five days after the mailing date, or ten days after the deadline. The second exception is a player who is traveling, or who is about to travel, and who thus can't rely on the mail service. This shouldn't come up very often.

Beyond that, though, don't make the "telephone inequality" worse than it is. There's ordinarily no need for giving out results by phone. And finally, whatever your policy is, put it in the house rules so people will know where you stand.

((I'm afraid that I found the above arguments thoroughly unpersuasive, and while it's nice to have games run under both policies, I'd strongly urge you to allow players to obtain game results by phone. Pare away Mark's suggested exceptions and the section about GMs being late (in which case it's probable the adjudication isn't ready anyway), and there's really only one reason given for not telling players the results by phone: that some of them will find the practice more affordable than others.

This is an extremely weak reason on which to base the entire case. It is not, to be quite blunt, any of the GM's concern which of the players can afford the calls and which can't. If that were the case, then he should also refrain from charging a game fee (because some players can't afford it) and requiring players to sub to the zine (because some of them can't afford it), and so on. Postal Diplomacy games are full of advantages and disadvantages for the players. Some players can write more neatly than others. Do we then require all orders to be typed so that the player with sloppy handwriting has an equal chance of not submitting an illegible order? Of course not.

If a player can't afford to call for game results AND if he feels this will affect his chances unfairly, then he should seek out a GM who doesn't permit this. Mark's argument puts the cart before the horse, suggesting that a new GM should prohibit the action because some players will be affected. It's not up to the new GM to structure his rules to accommodate the druthers of his potential players; rather, it's on the player to sign up for games which suit his needs.

That said, I will agree that there is a place in the hobby for all breeds. GMs whose living situation makes phone calls difficult, or whose philosophy simply doesn't agree with the practice of giving out results by phone, or who otherwise have what they consider a valid reason to ban results by phone are well-advised to follow Mark's suggestion.

One final comment. Mark mentions resentment targeted at the GM for allowing results via phone. I have GMed 18 games from beginning to end, and if any of my players ever resented my giving out results over the phone, they sure kept it well-hidden. I believe that this resentment Mark refers to is almost universally non-existent.))

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| Gamesmasters and the Telephone

by Jim Meinel and Bruce Linsey

When a gamesmaster opens up the telephone as a legitimate way for players to give him orders for a game, he is creating a potential trouble area if he is not as careful in handling the phone as he is a letter. Here are some situations which may confront a gamesmaster -- how would you act in each one? (First six questions are by Jim; the last four by Bruce.)

1. A player calls you on deadline day with his orders. He has no other orders on file for that season. He recites all the information to you and you read it back to him; however, he has forgotten to vote on a draw and/or concession proposal and his vote is critical to the outcome. Will you prompt him for a vote on the phone (or in some other manner remind him)?
2. A player calls you with his orders on a deadline day at 6:02 by your clock. You have a deadline cutoff of 6:00. Will you accept his orders? What if it was 6:01? 6:00:30? If you answered yes to all three situations how long is your grace period? If you answered no to all three how do you know whether his clock is to standard time and yours is off by a couple of minutes?

3. It's deadline day again and a person has not sent any orders in. You provide "NMR insurance" for your players and this player is on the list. How many times and how often will you call him if there is no answer? Ask yourself, would you keep calling a "friend" or a "reliable" player over and over while only calling an unfamiliar player, or an erratic one, once or twice?
4. A player moves to another location and sends you his new address but does not include a phone number (obviously because it has yet to be installed). He is a player who has requested previously to be on your "NMR insurance" list. Deadline day comes and no orders from him. Will you take the trouble to call directory assistance to determine whether he has a number yet? (The call is free.) Will your answer depend on whether the player moved closer to the deadline or three or four weeks before?
5. You have a 6:00 cutoff time and it's deadline day. At about 5:30 or 5:40 a player (and a good friend) calls you to give you his orders. The two of you get to bullshitting and by the time you hang up it's 6:04. Another player subsequently calls you with his orders. Will you accept his late orders? Does he have to indicate in some way that the line was busy? Will you prompt him regarding that if he doesn't? How long after 6:04 will you accept orders accompanied by the explanation that "the line was busy"?
6. The zine goes out and a few days later you get a letter (or phone call) from a very embittered player. He NMR'd the previous season and is loudly complaining that you were never at home on deadline day or the day before. You know that he is a player who usually sends his orders in. You are about to point to your houserule about not guaranteeing to be home for phone orders and signing off with "tough luck Charlie" when you check the last issue of the zine and discover you have a typo in your phone number. What will you do? (What will you do...?)
7. You are a strict GM and will not accept a written order like "A Ber S Pru-Sil" because you require that the unit being supported be identified. Do you accept such an order over the phone, and correct it? Or do you prompt the player with a question like, "Is that Army Prussia to Silasia?" Likewise, if you don't accept "implied orders" and a player orders A Vie S F Adr-Tri over the phone, will you in any way prompt him to add "F Adr-Tri"?
8. A player, in Spring 1901, phones in the order "A Ber-Den". Will you point out to him that this is impossible? Will you ask a player to clarify "Fleet Norwegian to North"? (This assumes that you would consider "North" to be ambiguous in that situation.)
9. A player's wife phones you with his moves, saying that he is out of town and cannot be reached. Will you accept them? Will you accept moves that are given to a member of your family in your absence? If you answered yes to both of these, then will you accept orders given to a member of your family from his wife?
10. Three days before the deadline, you pick up the phone and hear an awful silence. It is four days before Ma Bell sends a guy out to fix it. As a result, several of your players try to call in their orders a day late, explaining that they couldn't call you in the past few days due to the problem with your phone. Do you accept their orders? If so, then what about the guy who NMRs and upon receiving the zine, calls you and explains that he tried to call over and over but gave up after the deadline because he knows you don't accept late orders?

Responses to "Gamesmasters and the Telephone"

introduction by Chuff Afflerbach

Rrrrring!

"Hello, Mrs. Bumstead? This is Mr. Dithers calling from the office. I'm afraid Dagwood has been called away rather suddenly on a business trip...No, just to Caracas...I know it's in Venezuela...Well, yes, he did leave a message. He said please call a Mr. Linsey right away and tell him to retreat the army in Gascony to Marseilles..."

Good for you, Bruce! You've discovered a whole new legitimate diplomatic option for us to exploit. No one would ever think of deceiving the honorable GM, but what harm is there in hoodwinking some poor, unsuspecting hausfrau?

Situation 1 (Do you prompt a player for a vote?)

Paul Rauterberg: I don't write to players who submit incomplete moves postally. Why should I give such an advantage over the phone?

Kevin Stone: Yes, I would prompt him for a draw vote. It isn't like telling someone he hasn't ordered a unit.

Steve Knight: Depends on what you mean by "prompt". You can't specifically say, "Don't you wanna vote...?" but it'd be okay to close the conversation in general with, "Anything else?"

Chuff Afflerbach: I am by nature and experience loathe to talk on the telephone. This is why I play postal games. However, my deadlines recently have been coming much closer together, and I have resorted to phoning in orders more often than I like.

My fantasy of the Game Master in his Situation Room, poised by the Hot Line, was shattered with my very first call. I had to explain who I was. He had to go find pencil and paper. He asked again which game I was in. I read my moves slowly, then he read them back. I thanked him, we hung up, and life resumed.

In that light, the idea of a GM prompting a player on his orders seems absurd. Essentially, he is only there to take dictation. Will the GM even remember that a concession vote is due? Will he notice that a support order is implied but not stated? Even an impossible move could slip by unnoticed. This is all the responsibility of the player. Once you set a precedent of correcting orders, you'll never hear the end of it. I'll get to strict GMing next, but for now remember that a helpful GM is just one slip away from being a meddling GM.

Situation 2 (Will you accept orders late? How long is your grace period? How do you know that your clock is right?)

Mark Lew: Yes. "Grace period" until I type up the game.

Ron Brown (of Canada, in this discussion): Yes to all three. 'Fraid I'm not consistent with the grace period. I've accepted orders 15 minutes late and refused 30 minutes late, but I don't know where to draw the line.

John MacFarlane: A cutoff is a cutoff; abide by it. "No" to all three. And if you're the GM, your clock is right. Make it clear beforehand how strict you are with phone orders and how risky they are. It's foolish to call only minutes before the deadline anyway; the guy pays for his procrastination.

Paul Rauterberg: I tend to honor the spirit, rather than the letter, of the law, so a couple of minutes won't faze me.

Bruce Linsey: In Voice of Doom, no late orders are accepted. If you are in the middle of giving them to me and the deadline passes, I will cut you off then and there. And we go by my clock. In practice, I set my clock each deadline by the local Dial-a-Time number, though obviously this is not accurate to the nearest second. But it's what I go by. And I generally take the phone off the hook for a half hour or so starting at 8PM (my deadline) to avoid disputes, though I once turned away a player who was ten minutes late.

To the GMs who allow a five (or whatever) minute grace period, I say "Phooey. All you're doing is setting a second deadline. Will you then accept orders at 6:05:30? 6:05:15? If your true deadline is 6:05, then that's how you should list it."

Situation 3 (How often will you try calling for orders? Will you call a friend or a reliable player more often than an unfamiliar or unreliable one?)

Kevin Stone: If someone had NMR insurance, I would call once an hour and then 15 minutes before the deadline. Everyone would get the same treatment.

Steve Hutton: Zero to three times, depending on how busy I am. In my HRs, I only guarantee to call if I get the time.

Nelson Heintzman: I would call that person as often or not as I pleased. Again, procedures for NMR insurance should be clearly explained by the GM. Basically, though, NMR insurance is a service which most GMs who extend this courtesy stress is not guaranteed. I would suggest that forgetful players view NMR insurance in the same tenuous manner as they would a state lottery. Ultimately, and without exception, the responsibility for the submission of orders rests solely with the player. The GM should not be faulted for calling all, some, or none of the players. If the lucky numbers are dialed and answered, so be it; if not, well, the player should not have let the situation come to such a pass, anyway.

Bruce Linsey: I try to call everyone four or five times throughout the afternoon and evening, though of course I make no guarantees. I try to call all players about to miss their moves the same number of times -- except that a player who NMRed the previous season and whose standby has submitted orders probably won't get called at all. If he doesn't care enough to make sure that he gets his moves in and keeps the position, then why should I?

Situation 4 (Will you call directory assistance to get a player's phone number?)

Ron Brown: No. To get NMR insurance, I must have the number. If I don't have it, the player doesn't have NMR insurance.

John MacFarlane: Yes, for the first deadline after he moves; no thereafter.

Steve Knight: No, you don't call directory assistance. If he doesn't inform you of the new phone number as soon as he's able, he's out of luck. After all, he can call and tell you the minute it's installed -- and if it's not, the point's moot anyway.

Chuff Afflerbach: It would be no bother at all to call directory assistance for a new number. I rather enjoy playing detective, and anything I can get free from Mother Bell I intend to take advantage of.

Bruce Linsey: ~~What's the beef?~~ So long as we're making all these collect calls anyway, what's the beef about calling information? I've done it plenty of times.

Situation 5 (You're yakking away with a friend as the deadline passes. Will you accept late orders from a player who was trying to call you but couldn't get through?)

Fred Davis: Yes, I'd accept the orders. They're not really "late" if the phone was busy. This has actually happened to me, but the previous phone calls were in each case purely social calls not related to Diplomacy. (Yes, there is another world out there beyond Diplomacy.) I'd accept a phone call up to 15 minutes after I'd hung up from the previous call.

Dave Carter: Anyone who waits till half an hour before the deadline to phone in his orders has no reason to complain if he cannot get his orders in because the line was tied up.

Paul Rauterberg: Of course I'll give people the benefit of the doubt. Games are supposed to be a vehicle for personal enjoyment, not a chore, and not an excuse to be a prick.

Doug Beyerlein: No, I will not accept the orders.

Jeff Noto: Under no circumstances would I accept his orders. If he waits until 15 minutes before the deadline to call, then he's a fool. Why should my personal conversations have to suffer just because someone forgot to call until 5:45 or so? This is the risk of using the telephone -- the line may be busy or nobody may be home.

Chuff Afflerbach: If you do fancy yourself a strict GM, are you going to let anybody tie up your line for twenty minutes just before the deadline? I don't care who he is -- a strict GM has no friends. Now dammit, are you strict or aren't you?

Bruce Linsey: Of course I won't accept his orders. I too will try to keep phone conversations brief just before the deadline (and I have cut people off), but if he's late, too bad. He could always tell the operator it's an emergency (well, a whole nation might otherwise crumble, after all) and have her interrupt my call.

Situation 6 (You typoed your phone number, causing a player to NMR. Whaddaya do?)

Fred Davis: I'd probably rerun the season. I did once make a typo in my phone number, showing the wrong area code, and one player wound up calling someone in New Jersey and leaving a message with the baby sitter. I often wonder what the owner thought when the baby sitter gave the message to him! Fortunately, the message did not relate to orders, but to other hobby business.

Steve Knight: This is a toughie. If the player's inability to reach you is due to your own screwup...I really don't know.

Nelson Heintzman: I would sincerely apologize, but the season stands as is.

Furthermore, I would politely point out to the player that earlier issues contained my correct phone number and that anyone playing in a zine certainly should have the GM's correct telephone number in his/her address book. To rely solely upon each individual issue for a phone number -- especially when typos are so prevalent -- is rather shortsighted.

Bruce Linsey: My deepest sympathies would be extended to the player, who still NMRs for depending (futilely, in this case) on the phone. In reply to Fred Davis, it's never a good alternative to replay a season.

Situation 7 (Do you prompt a player to correct an order missing a unit designation? To add an explicit order to an implied order?)

Kevin Stone: I would accept the orders as is and treat it just as I would a written order. The moves would fail. I would not prompt for units.

Steve Knight: No, you don't prompt specifically. If he doesn't catch it when you read back the orders, he's stuck with the bad orders.

Fred Davis: I would clarify the order as I took it over the phone. I always read back the orders people give me, to be certain of what they are saying. People often mispronounce the names of provinces or make mistakes when dictating orders by phone.

Dave Carter: I would ask the phoner if I happened to catch him ordering erroneously or failing to vote. The key here is that I happened to catch it. I'm obviously not a strict GM!

Situation 8 (Will you point out the impossibility of A Ber-Den in S '01? Will you ask for a clarification of "Fleet Norwegian to North"?)

Mark Lew: Yes, of course.

Ron Brown: Nope, I don't prompt. I just write 'em as he says 'em.

Doug Beyerlein: I will not point out players' errors in accepting orders by phone. If I did and didn't catch one, whose fault would it be? However, if I don't understand an order I do ask for a clarification.

Dave Carter: Yes, I would point it out...if I noticed it.

Kevin Stone: No, I wouldn't tell anyone that a move is impossible. The "North" situation is tricky, but I'd probably ask for a clarification.

Jeff Noto: No. Do you call up a player who writes A Ber-Den telling him he goofed? Absolutely not! So don't do it here. The same applies to "Fleet Norwegian to North".

Situation 9 (Do you accept orders from a player's wife? Via a member of your family? From his wife given to a member of your family?)

Ron Brown: Yes to all cases.

Kevin Stone: Yes, I would accept the orders from the wife. However, a spouse is the only person other than the player who I'd accept orders from. No, nobody else in my family could accept orders.

Dave Carter: Yes, I would accept orders from players' spouses. No, I would not let anyone else but myself accept orders. My wife refuses to take orders (doesn't everyone's)?

Steve Hutton: Sure. But, a player who asks his dentist to give my next door neighbor's hairdresser the orders is taking a risk.

Nelson Heintzman: Under no circumstances would I accept orders over the phone other than those spoken in the voice of the player in question. Orders over the phone should be transmitted only from the player to the GM with no go-between.

Bruce Linsey: I'm with Nelson on this one. No orders are accepted through a third party, either at the player's end or my end. GMs who are going to accept orders taken by a family member, however, should at least make sure that their relatives know how to take orders.

Chuff Afflerbach: "Hi, honey, it's me...Venezuela? No, I'm at Clancy's Pool Hall... Mr. Dithers said what?!...But he's been out of town all week!...Woodley! Only Herb would want me to retreat to Marseilles! I'll kill him! I'll...now Blondie, don't start crying..."

Okay, Bruce, look what you've done. Proud of yourself now?

Situation 10: (Your phone goes on the blink three days before the deadline and isn't fixed till the day after the deadline. Do you accept late orders from people who tried to phone them in earlier?)

John MacFarlane: Don't accept any late orders.

Fred Davis: I would delay the game, given the scenario presented here. However, I have all but one of my players trained to submit their orders by mail, except in a dire emergency.

Kevin Stone: I would go to a phone booth on the deadline day and start making collect phone calls. If anyone can't be reached and doesn't get his orders in, it's too bad. Since I wouldn't give anyone a break when the USP"S" screws up, why should I when Ma Bell is at fault?

Steve Hutton: Life's like that. I wouldn't accept the late orders. Perhaps this experience would convince a few more players that it is unwise to rely upon the telephone for submitting orders. If so I'd consider paying the phone company for screwing up my phone lines.

Nelson Heintzman: Three days of telephone disfunction -- just prior to deadline -- is a different situation entirely from that occurring on deadline day itself. In this circumstance -- 3 days of being incommunicado -- I would extend the deadline another week and notify all the players concerning what had transpired.

Bruce Linsey: The NMRing players are out of luck. That's a risk of relying on the phone.

((The telephone, as you can see, poses some tricky dilemmas for the unwary GM. How will you handle orders over the phone in your games?))

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A Spy at Cambridge

by Richard Sharp

One of the most famous scandals ever to rock British Diplomacy occurred at Cambridge in 1973. For some reason, Jesus College seems to attract Diplomacy players, and at that time it sheltered two leading lights, then and now: John Piggott and Andy Davidson. John was producing his Diplomacy zine Ethil the Frog, justly regarded then as Britain's best, and now in production again after a two-year layoff; Andy was playing in numerous games in Ethil and elsewhere.

The Ethil deadline fell on a Friday, which meant most orders had been received by the Thursday; and on Thursday each week John was regularly absent for a longish period attending a practical. One Thursday he returned early...to find an industrious Andy squatting on the floor of his room copying down the orders sent in by other players in the games he was playing in.

Uncertain what to do, John applied for counsel to Don Turnbull, also resident in Cambridge and a traditional refuge for all GMs in a quandary. Don was adamant that Andy should be evicted from all his games, but John decided against this drastic action and merely stipulated that all Andy's units should stand unordered for the current season. Another respected British GM, Richard Walkerdine, commented that the affair "left a nasty taste". Well, I had my doubts then and have them even more strongly now. It seems to me that Andy was within his rights as a player (though obviously not in other respects, as the college authorities would certainly have confirmed!). In a face-to-face game there is certainly nothing to prevent players trying to discover orders by "espionage"; the Rulebook doesn't mention the subject, though perhaps it should. Arguably a rule should be made whereby once orders have been handed to the GM they are sacrosanct; but at present this rule does not exist, and has not been written into any houserules that I have seen.

((Editor's Note: Richard never saw The Voice of Doom's houserules, which did (eventually) ban player raids on the GM's files. Before adding that rule, I'd have had no grounds for game action against the offending player; while I would have had him arrested for breaking the real-life laws against breaking and entering, he'd have been more than welcome to continue playing from his jail cell.))

Postal Diplomacy players are a friendly lot, and many of the players in my games have visited my house from time to time, either by invitation or just "passing through". Only one to my knowledge has tried to profit from his opportunity. This was Duncan Morris, and any GM entertaining Duncan would take some precautions in advance, which I did! The question remains an interesting one. If a GM takes a completely free-and-easy line, perhaps he will find his life made a misery by characters in false noses climbing up his drainpipes in the middle of the night, calling to read his gas meter three times a week, and so on. Majority opinion is that an offense against the law of the land (housebreaking, for instance) is not a de facto breach of the rules of the game, and with this I agree. Still, a GM has to protect his privacy to some extent like anyone else.

((I concur with Richard that Andy was totally within his rights as a player, since there was no houserule banning what he did. John Piggott erred on two counts: failing to secure his GMing files against such an occurrence, and NMRing Andy's units for that season without legitimate justification!

How would you, as a GM, prevent such a situation? How would you handle it if it happened anyway? What houserule will you write to deal with it?))

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Could You be a GM?

by Randolph Smyth

Here is a little test to see how you would perform as a GM in some sticky situations. I've given you five "messes" which are not unlikely to arise (you can count on an average of perhaps two such problems in the course of each game). Cover the page and work through the questions below before reading the answers at the end. No cheating!

1. While GMing a game, you moved, and one of the players NMRed on the next two deadlines. You replace him with a standby, but within a few more weeks, a letter arrives from him. He says he never received your change of address notice, and his letters to your old place were not forwarded; he only saw your new address listed in another zine. Do you leave things as they are, or will you now kick the standby out and give the original player his position back?

2. You receive phoned-in orders from a player and read them back to him. The day after the deadline, you adjudicate the game and notice that you've written "F Edi-Nor". You can't remember whether he ordered the unit to the North Sea or the Norwegian Sea. He's told you something about the diplomatic situation on the phone, so you know that a delay may hurt his chances as much as leaving the unit unordered. Will you try to phone him back to confirm his order after the deadline? If so and he's not in, then what?

3. A player claims that the orders he submitted last season were not the ones you printed in the zine. You normally throw out orders as you adjudicate, so there's no way to check this. One of the other players has stabbed him, so replaying the season will displease others. What do you do?

4. Several months after a player NMRs and his position is ruined, you come across his orders, misfiled, which would have given him an excellent game. This problem has been raised before ((in "GM Quiz", also reprinted here)); the only solution suggested was to burn the offending orders at midnight and scatter the ashes. Would you dispose of the matter similarly, or are you bound to reveal it and try to rectify the situation? How?

5. A couple of players in one of your games have a real battle going, complete with stabs -- and hard feelings. One of the players is also in another game, in a delicate relationship with another power whose player is in the process of dropping out. You neglected to call a standby on the first NMR, and the first player's opponent submitted unsolicited standby orders for the position going into disorder. The intent and effect of these orders need not be described further! Your standby list is short, but will you accept these orders from a player who is clearly only interested in a cross-game feud?

ANSWERS (of a sort)

None of these questions have right or wrong answers. ((Editor's Note: Wrong. Question #5 is extremely clear-cut.)) In these cases, though, each involves a specific oversight by the GM, and could have been avoided if the procedures had been better. You may be able to avoid these specific problems as a result, but the exercise is really intended for you to provide your own answers to the following:

1. Are you interested enough in GMing to have worked through the questions as instructed? If you skimmed the questions and skipped down here to brilliant answers on a silver platter, you may be in trouble when real problems arise in your games.

2. Did you come up with a solution for each situation; more important, did you appreciate that other people might have good arguments to use against your decision? As a GM, you have to set a delicate balance sometimes, between being decisive enough to propose a solution to a hazy problem in spite of some mild objections, and being flexible enough to yield to a higher authority (probably an ombudsman) if there is serious opposition to your ruling. ((Squeaky wheel gets the ombudsman, eh?))

3. How well are you able to articulate the pros and cons, and the thought process that led to your decision? Do you have a definite procedure to follow in case of future objections? As important as the decision itself is the perception by the players that the GM has done his best with a tough problem. To paraphrase somebody or other, you must not only govern well, you must seem to govern well. Without being too wordy, take a paragraph to explain your decision rather than a sentence to announce it -- it will pay off.

((My responses:

1. Assuming the player is telling the truth (and didn't bother contacting anyone else about the matter, and didn't take any notice of his first NMR), he's the victim of a postal screw-up. Regrettably, you can't change things as they now stand.

2. It depends on whether he told you "Nor" and that's what you read back, or you both wrote it and read it wrong. If the former, you'd likely have noticed it at the time and the move is ambiguous. If the latter, you're a horrible GM and you shouldn't be so careless, but the practical solution is probably to delay the game and contact the player for the correct order. (Of course, other players may now change their orders on file if they wish.) A neater solution, though not the "right" one, would be to simply print the adjudication using whichever of the two orders seems least favorable to the guy. If you guessed wrong, accept his inevitable protest and send out a correction. (The problem with this is that the guy may not say anything, either because he thinks he made the mistake or because he doesn't want to make waves.)

3. No competent GM throws out orders as he adjudicates. I realize that doesn't answer the question, but if you GM this sloppily, you'll be faced with insoluble dilemmas too. Save used orders for at least another season!

4. I've given my response and rationale elsewhere ("GM Quiz", Question #17). Basically, the best solution (there's no good one) is to explain exactly what happened and make no change to the current game situation. See the afore-mentioned article for my reasoning.

5. In a word, no, you do not use the orders. First off, standbys cannot just pop into the game without opportunity for negotiation. That is discussed elsewhere, and it is an absolute no-no among all ethical GMs. Secondly, you don't use this guy in that game at all (though actually it's on the other player to tell you who he doesn't want coming into his game). Thirdly, you shouldn't neglect to call a standby for an NMRed position (assuming you use standbys at all) regardless of how strongly you suspect that the offending player will return.

Randolph's estimate of situations this messy occurring twice in a game is overdoing it. If the GM is reasonably careful, matters of this gravity will rarely if ever arise.))

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CHAPTER 18

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Winter Separations

by François Cuerrier

When can a player obtain a winter separation? Can he get his GM not to separate a given set of winter and spring seasons? How does he go about doing all of this? There seems to be some confusion on these questions (in spite of an adequate houserule provision on the matter), as one player was under the impression that he could demand that I not separate seasons, and others wondered how and when they could get a winter separation.

It is in fact quite easy to get a winter separation in Passchendaele games. All you need do is ask for one, and justify your request. A separation will be granted if you can show that making conditionals would be too difficult to be practical. Thus, if combining winter and spring would necessitate four sets of conditionals, you may get a separation for the asking (but don't forget to point out why you'd need several conditionals...!). And the situation involving conditionals must be of some relevance to your position (that is, Turkey couldn't use the complexity of the French removals -- unless they affect his position in some way -- as justification for a separation request). Winter 1901 is usually kept separate from Spring 1902, so you need not request a separation then. The need for more negotiating time is not a valid justification; nor is a change of address. It's pretty much a matter of common sense.

From my viewpoint, never announcing a separation in advance and waiting for a valid player request instead is advantageous and gives the players some flexibility; if the players do not want a separation, then any GM would probably be ill-advised to play winter only; on the other hand, if a player can justify a separation request (which is easy, if he really needs one), then more power to him...

The other side of the coin is a player not wanting a winter separation. Usually, a player will cite one of the two following reasons when making such a request: (1) "I want a fast game...", and (2) "I don't want the other players to see my builds/removals."

Neither reason can receive much sympathy around here. The first reason, while in part sensible (I myself dislike games that are delayed every game-year unless the situation is complex or interesting), is out of place in Passchendaele games. They aren't specifically designed for a hasty conclusion, or to be fast-paced. While I will strive to avoid gratuitous delays (thus, the "justification" clause), speed will always be sacrificed to natural justice and common sense (as I perceive them to be), and games will be delayed whenever a player -- any player -- can justify his request. I might point out that those who want FAST games should play in zines that actually carry them...

The second reason is selfish. First, the Rulebook suggests that players should always know what builds/removals were made before carrying on with spring, and indeed this is the way it's done in all FTF circles I've been in contact with. In postal play, winter and spring are combined to save time; nevertheless, all players are entitled to know the winter results (through conditional orders or a season separation) before they play the spring season, "no separation" requests notwithstanding. Indeed, I suspect that many of those who evoke this reason are only attempting to give their opponents a tough time as they are attempting to deprive them of their fundamental rights (i.e. the right to play winter separately). Besides, the absence of a separation does not prevent one's opponents from knowing the new positions, as they can always use conditional orders...

((The question of season separations is a sticky one, because the technically "correct" solution has serious drawbacks in practice. Technically, any player should be able to get a separation whenever he wants one, even for retreat seasons. It's not just a matter of maybe-the-conditionals-are-too-complicated, sometimes a player's negotiations for the spring will depend on the winter results. One can hardly say to a fellow player, "Here are two letters. Read Letter A if you're going to build F Lon and read Letter B if you'll be building F Lvp, and...". Witness the following situation, as described by Mark Berch in Voice of Doom #85:

"I'll give another example, this time from a real game, the last DW Demo game, 1980AY. In W '12, France had to remove one of his three units. If he removed F Adr, as I very much wanted him to do, I could then stab Turkey in S '13. If he didn't remove it, I couldn't stab Turkey (because I anticipated that in F '13, F Adr would be used to prop up Turkey, and would provide the balance of power in the evenly-divided Balkans). Now obviously I am capable of writing contingencies both ways (my personal record is 7 sets of contingent orders covering 18 different permutations). The problem was my diplomacy in the pre-S '13 period. If I know I'm stabbing, I'll promise Turkey anything even half-way reasonable -- I don't want to put him on his guard, and would be willing to promise to halt my northern campaign. On the other hand, if I'm not stabbing in S '13, I want to leave a good chance to stab him later, and I want to bargain for myself as forward a position as Turkey would permit. So I cannot know what diplomatic approach to take until I see the French removal."

Mark makes an irrefutable point: that regardless of how few adjustments there are to be made or how few players want the separation, a player should get it whenever he wants it. In practice, this leads to problems; namely, that there are quite a few players out there who will request separations out of laziness, because they just don't feel like conducting negotiations this month, and this is an easy way to delay the move season till they're in the mood. Just as Berch's logic above cannot be refuted, neither can the realities of the hobby be ignored. The best practical solution may be one of compromise, say, requiring the player to give a justification for his request if there are fewer than three adjustments to be made. This is similar to Francois' method of dealing with separation requests. It has the drawback of involving the GM in the flow of the game: he has to judge whether the player's request is justified, and after all, players aren't supposed to have to negotiate with the GM in addition to their opponents. Another solution is to require two player requests, again if, say, fewer than three adjustments are needed. But now a player can't always be sure his request will be granted. As I said, it's a sticky problem with no perfect solution.

Think about it. How will you, as a GM, handle separation requests so as to provide the fairest possible game for your players?))

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The Two-season Year

by Richard Sharp

((Editor's Note: I've edited the following quite liberally, so as to Americanize the season names and other terminology. The author's ideas all remain intact.))

In face-to-face Diplomacy there are in effect five seasons: spring moves, summer retreats, fall moves, autumn retreats, and winter adjustments. If the postal game imitated this format, each year would last between fifteen and twenty weeks, and the average game from three years upwards. It was soon realized by the hobby that the performance would have to be short-circuited, and three methods are in use.

The slowest, and rarest, is that used by two British GMs, Don Turnbull and Mick Bullock -- a three-season year: spring, fall, and winter. ((Editor's Note: In North America, Don Horton of Claw and Fang used this system too. A technical point; even postal Diplomacy has five seasons. When Richard refers to a "three-season year", this means that each game-year is played in three deadlines.) When printing the spring adjudication, the GM lists all the possible retreats for any dislodged unit, and players are allowed to make their next move orders conditional on the retreats chosen, e.g. "if German A Mun retreats to Bur, then A Mar H, otherwise A Mar-Pie." In the fall adjudication the same thing happens, and builds or removals may be made conditional on retreats. Then a separate issue is published giving the autumn retreats and winter adjustments.

In my early publishing days I used a variation of this method -- the "mini-deadline". Players were asked to send their retreats and adjustments by return of post, and I would then send out a carbon-copy letter informing them of the results.

But standard procedure is the two-season year, in which retreats and adjustments must be made conditional on the results of moves. Thus when submitting your spring moves you must include a list of retreats, in order of preference, for every unit that can be dislodged. So you might write "A Mun holds (retreat: Ber, Kie, Sil, Tyo, Boh, Ruh)". The GM will check the possible retreat spaces in the order you have listed, and the unit will go to the first one available. If you have listed no available space, the unit will be disbanded (some GMs would retreat it at random, but this is bad, and contrary to the rules of the game). In the example given, you have decided for some reason -- alliance with France, or perhaps just carelessness! -- not to list Burgundy, and if that is the only available province your army will be disbanded. Headaches can occur with this method, especially when two units of the same country want to retreat to the same space, but in general it works well.

((Editor's Note: Another method which has seen a lot of use is Just's Right Hand Rule: the unit is retreated to the space immediately clockwise from the attacking unit's space. If that is closed, it retreats to the space immediately counterclockwise, and if that is closed to the space two spaces clockwise, then two counterclockwise, and so on.))

In the fall the same thing happens, but now you must also list provisional builds and/or removals. This can admittedly be very difficult, and most players will be able to quote at least one instance where they would have built something quite different had they seen the position in advance. But if you are patient and thorough, you can cover most eventualities. If you fail to list a build, you won't get one; if you fail to list a removal, the GM will make it himself, doing the best he can with the very complicated and ambiguous "farthest from home" rule ((or whatever houserule he has written to replace same)).

In America, things are done t'other way about: moves are made conditional on retreats and adjustments.

The pros and cons of the different systems are easily seen. The "mini-deadline" is certainly the best in terms of accuracy, and best reflects the pattern of the face-to-face game; but it is expensive and time-consuming. The three-season year is painfully slow -- it is maddening to have to wait an extra four weeks just to discover whether Austria is going to build his new army in Vienna or in Budapest. It is also a breach of one of the rules of the game, in that it allows diplomacy time before adjustments, though this seems less important to me.

Of the two methods of running a two-season game-year, the British seems to me rather better: one would surely prefer to make the less complicated decisions "blind", and adjustments are certainly simpler than moves. Still, you have a choice of systems, to some extent, and at least all are equally fair (or unfair) to all the players.

((I've never played under the British system, so my opinion is biased; nonetheless, I think the American way of combining seasons is superior to the British. The retreat and adjustment possibilities are usually pretty easy to enumerate, and if they aren't, just separate seasons (and do this automatically in W '01, by the way). On the other hand, there are always thousands and millions and zillions of different possible results for a move season, and a player may want to account for not only the final position, but supports offered, bounced moves, etc. To write contingencies based on all of this seems an utterly futile task to me. Despite that, I think it would be nice to have games offered under both systems so that players have a choice, so do as you prefer.

As a side note, Richard is right to point out that the three-season year breaches the no-negotiations-before-retreats-or-adjustments rule (and for that matter, so does the entire American system of combining seasons), but that is a bad rule to begin with, and should be deleted from the Rulebook and replaced with a provision for a short negotiating session. All actions on the board should be subject to the influence of other players' negotiations, to best maintain the principles on which the whole game was conceived.))

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Non-simultaneity

by Randolph Smyth

During my meeting with John Cross a couple of weeks ago, only one matter of GM procedure came up, and on that we differed! Maybe the gulf between GMs on the finer points is wider than I'd suspected; hence, the idea for another series of articles. Anyhow, to our argument:

In the event of an NMR by a player, should a GM permit orders by another (usually an ally) conditional on a second NMR which would result in a replacement taking over? John said "no" based on the concept of conditionals on a simultaneous event. The Rulebook specifies that orders must be revealed at the same time for any given season, without ambiguity, in a face-to-face context. I disagreed; my point, which I wasn't quick-witted enough to get across to John at the time, lay in the concept of simultaneity.

There are a number of events that occur between the five "official" seasons. Codewords are accepted by most GMs as legitimate branch points for the following season. They do not depend on previous results, just on the course of intervening negotiations. Adjudication errors are corrected to form the very foundation of the next season's play. Games can (and usually do) end between seasons, with the results of a vote. Most important to this particular question, players drop out and are replaced, not in the middle of a season, but in the interface between two of them. The replacement is certainly an event worthy of conditional orders based on it.

The question is, then, whether a forfeiture occurs before the season with the second NMR or after it. My own feeling is that the original player, NMRing a second time, forfeits the position the instant the deadline has passed. The GM then adjudicates the season, incorporating the NMR; and after the season has been "played", the GM looks for a replacement or declares the position in civil disorder. Any point in this sequence can be made conditional on a previous development; thus orders may not be made conditional on the NMR per se, but could depend on the (previous) forfeiture, which amounts to the same thing. Similarly, a player expecting the forfeiture could attempt some input into the choice of a replacement based on the play of the season, although the circumstances would be unusual and the final decision would, as always, rest with the GM.

Only the following season's play could be made conditional on the final choice of the replacement player; and if none is assigned, this is equivalent to conditional orders on a third NMR. John commented that this is most unfair, as the neighbors of the static power can make suitable attacking moves, depending on whether the opposing units are active or not. Face-to-face, though, a country without orders is invariably known in advance, and the above rules seem to deal with this implicit ideal. The usual civil-disorder position is tolerated by the postal hobby, and the neighbors in that case have the same advantage.

The ally of a power with a single NMR can get around John's arguments entirely; an unsubmitted codeword can be taken as evidence of a second NMR. The more direct "forfeiture conditional" simply avoids this rigmarole.

Another question that came up recently from Terry Knowles: a vote to end the game should not, in my view, be conditional on the vote of another player (as the tally is a simultaneous event). However, since most GMs specify unanimous approval

to end the game, a "yes" vote throws the responsibility to continue on the other players, and is in fact a conditional.

What, then, is the usual sequence of GM operations? (1) Check codewords and follow pertinent instructions, (2) Tally votes, if any; the game ends if the players are unanimously in favor. Postponing the tally is possible by specific player request if the conditions are publicized beforehand. (3) Throw out the dropouts, (4) Note resignations, and assign standby immediately if by specific request of the departing player. (5) Adjudicate the season(s). If multiple seasons are due, postponements of the above steps may be interpolated. If NMRs are occurring, only one season is normally played. (6) Assign standbys to leaderless positions.

((In my opinion, Randolph missed the strongest argument in favor of allowing orders conditional on who is playing a position. His "technical" logic is fine, but even more important is the fact that the original player and the standby may have taken different diplomatic stances toward a given player, who must therefore submit different orders depending on whether the original player drops out. After all, the whole idea behind the game is that players' orders are supposed to be affected by their negotiations with their opponents, isn't it? -- and how can this happen when a player doesn't know for sure who that opponent is going to be in a given turn?))

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Game-ending Votes

by Randolph Smyth

Fol Si File houserule v,2: "...The GM will, on request, withhold the identity of the player requesting a vote, and will normally make public only the news of its success/failure after the fact. However, any player may request that his true vote be made public by the GM."

This rule, applying to all FSF games, is in my experience unique; the hobby's methods of dealing with game-ending votes cover a broad spectrum. I've seen zines in which each individual's vote is always revealing in complete (and excruciating) detail, right through to what is perhaps the most common case of absolute secrecy, with only the final yes/no decision publicized by the GM. As you may deduce, I'm not in full agreement with either policy.

The only virtue of "enforced revelation" appears to be a quicker game: with all the cards face up, holdouts are pinpointed and eliminated if necessary. A GM with a lump-sum gamefee system and an eye on his wallet may be keen to institute such a rule. The idea that allies can monitor each others' good faith doesn't hold up in most cases -- a player planning a stab will vote as an alliance member until he's in position to win. The risk of a draw vote going through is necessary, since otherwise his "ally" gets wise prematurely. The result is a cleaner game (by truncation of the "dirty" bits), but a less interesting one, since it's been channeled away from the course preferred by one or more players.

The usual reason cited for the face-up rule is that there is never any doubt of who the belligerents are in a real war. Even accepting that the game should be as similar as possible to real life (which I don't), I disagree with the argument itself. History is full of cases where the instigator, by clever diplomacy and propaganda, appeared to the world as the shocked defender. Bismark was an expert; and the U.S. treatment of Japanese diplomats in 1941 is a more recent example.

The opposite extreme, where nothing is known of the mechanics of the vote (a "face-down" rule) sits better but not perfectly. The tactical commitments a player makes in negotiation can (and must, sooner or later) be backed up or repudiated on the board. The player who makes a claim of desiring or rejecting a proposal should similarly be able to prove his assertions with a public revelation of his actual vote, if he so desires. If all but one of the players choose to do this, then the holdout's view may be revealed; but if all the other players are willing to make a specific and concerted effort to get this information, it should then be rewarded. Six players who view the game as over deserve some protection against a seventh who shoots down every proposal on principle. As a GM, I have enough interest in the thickness of my own wallet to make things tougher on someone who doesn't have the guts or ability to get out and break up a locked game any other way.

Another system involves tallying the results and presenting them in the "five yes, two no" format. This represents the purest form of compromise between the

extremes; while not inferior, it gives no startling advantages either. It simply combines some aspects of its parent systems.

My houserule reflects a personal idea of what is intended with a vote. To anyone regarding it as a pure test of whether all players want to end the game, I say nonsense. Many players use a vote to probe or provoke weaknesses in the opposing alliances, or the conditions and order-of-finish as a jumping off point for negotiations. Nothing wrong with this at all -- but let's recognize that the vote is more often than not a diplomatic weapon.

I believe the proper application of my rule gives the greatest potential for interaction, cooperation, threats, and surprises -- which is what the game of Diplomacy is all about.

((My tastes match Randolph's on this topic. But the important point is that you should have a clear idea (set forth in your houserules) of how you are going to handle publicity for game-ending votes.))

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The Cloaked Error

by John Kador

Let's talk about ethics in Diplomacy. For readers who believe I've just committed a nonsequitur, please skip this article. The question for today concerns whether a Diplomacy player has an obligation to report postal errors. To narrow the problem down, let's consider cloaked errors in general (a cloaked error is apparent only to one player) and cloaked to your advantage. Perhaps an example would help.

Let's say you are playing France in a postal Diplomacy game. You have a unit in Ruhr and you have a shot at either Munich or Kiel. Germany, your enemy, has only one unit to cover two supply centers. Finally, through whatever tactics you choose, you decide to go for Munich and your orders state: Army Ruhr to Munich. When the gamezine arrives, you rip it open to your game to see what Germany did.

"The son of a bitch!" you murmur. "He covered Munich."

But something doesn't add up. You've gained a supply center. But where? You look at your orders as reflected in the gamezine and you see that your Army Ruhr has moved to Kiel, not to Munich as you ordered. You confirm your records and realize that the GM has somehow goofed. But it's clearly a goof in your favor because you've gained a center. And furthermore, it's a cloaked error because the error is apparent only to you. What should you do?

Suddenly there's a ringing sound and a little, squeaky-voiced guy over your right shoulder whispers that you should report the error to the GM.

"After all," he insists, "you've gained a center through no skill or intelligence of your own. You're not entitled to the center; it would demean the game if you accepted it now."

"Don't listen to the turkey," your alter-ego suggests to your sinister side. "It's all part of the game. If your orders get lost in the mail and your opponent benefitted, would he insist on an extension for you? Not on your life. It's all the same: orders getting lost or getting garbled. You take your chances and suffer or celebrate as the case may be."

"Stick that pitchfork where the sun don't shine! How'd you like to be the German player, losing a unit despite brilliant play? It reduces Diplomacy to the level of Go Fish or even Risk."

"Oh, yeah? What's wrong with Risk? Me and the boss play it all the time. Besides, I figure Germany had a fifty-fifty shot at losing a center. That's even odds. I don't know what you're crying about."

This dialogue continues for a while, but when you see how unproductive it is, you filter it out. You have better things to do than listen to the buzzing in your ears. You have the obligation now to apply great moral and ethical truths to resolve this dilemma: do you have to report this GM-generated error?

Let me reserve my answer to the dilemma until I describe a situation which led to an examination of my ethics. I'll share the situation with you and then give you my thinking which led to this article. Then I'll wait for any reactions to my handling of the affair.

I've never heard of anything quite like what happened to me. The situation was apparently unique because, while indeed there was a GM error and only I could detect it, the cloaked error helped me and hurt me simultaneously. The situation follows.

(I am changing a few facts to protect the identity of the game. The specific game itself is not important. There's no reason to involve my fellow players.)

In the game in question, I was allied with another player in an immensely successful alliance. By 1907, we had split the board between us. We both stood at 13 centers. But, from my paranoid perspective, our agreement to go for a two-way draw looked remote. His position seemed better than mine and I smelled an ambush. But I couldn't be sure. And I wasn't prepared to launch a pre-emptory strike. So I compromised. He asked me to hit an enemy unit to cut its support. I didn't want that support cut. But I had to have deniability. So I used the old deliberately miswritten order trick. I intentionally miswrote my order so as to make it illegal. My order, as written, would not cut support. This way, if I was wrong and my ally was sincere, I could reasonably offer my apologies for a momentary lapse. And if I was right, and my ally did stab me, he would encounter an unbargained-for hole in his flank.

But what happened? You guessed it! The GM apparently deciphered my orders as correct. Whether he made an honest misreading of my order or took it upon himself to correct my "obviously unintended goof", I can't be sure.

But whatever the reason, the illegal order was declared legal by means of a cosmetic fixup.

And my game-long ally? You'll be pleased to learn that he was trustworthy. He didn't stab me. We eventually shared a two-way victory. ((Editor's Note: A misnomer. "Victory" in Diplomacy is not shared; John and his ally shared a two-way draw.)

But that didn't change the ethical implications of the situation. An illegal order succeeded and I benefitted. I was also hurt (at least potentially) because had the illegal order failed, I would have been in a good position for a solitary victory. (Now you know why I don't want to identify the game.) What was my ethical responsibility, if any?

I did not report the error. Here is my logic.

I am consistent. I have never called a GM to task for any alleged error, in my favor or not, in six years of postal play. I had detected errors before, but never had a need to report them. Other players or the GM himself always caught the inaccuracies. I didn't see (and don't see) why I should have started by reporting that error.

On another level, how is this type of error different from "acceptable" errors; for example, orders lost in the mails? If lost orders are analogous to lost military orders in real war, aren't misread orders parallel to garbled diplomatic traffic?

Most GMs are generally scrupulous in their gamesmastering, which allows me to retain my liberal philosophy. Errors are exceedingly rare and, when they do occur, they are generally fixed without my involvement. I intend to keep it that way. If anyone has other thoughts on this matter, I'd like to consider them.

((I agree with John's conclusion that a player does not need to report a cloaked error (or any error), but I don't really feel that his reasoning is strong. The fact that he's never reported an error in six years of postal play, and has never needed to, is not relevant. It so happened that this time, he was faced with a cloaked error that only he could discover, which according to his description had never happened to him before, so that the situation was a "first" for him. Also, if all players reasoned this way, no errors would ever get reported.

My stance rests squarely upon the fact that there is absolutely no way to enforce any rule (or any moral standard) which dictates that a player must report a cloaked error, and I've never been a big fan of attempts to legislate the unenforceable. Given that, it seems to me that the best policy to adopt would be simply to report an error if you choose to report it.

Besides, what if the player didn't save a copy of his orders and cannot be sure there was an error on the part of the GM? What if he did save the orders and thinks he sees such an error, but isn't sure and doesn't want to take the risk of checking because then he'd be "morally obligated" to report it? What if he doesn't notice it till the day before the next deadline -- is he then obligated to call the GM and get the game delayed? And so on.

As a potential GM, you should seriously consider all of this. It's too simple just to include a knee-jerk "players must report all errors" phrase in your houserules. Errors might be caught or uncaught, cloaked or uncloaked, beneficial or harmful to various players in different ways. Think carefully about what you'll require your players to do -- and how you'll go about enforcing the unenforceable if you make such requirements.))

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Lou Gossett or an Understanding Mom?

A Debate on Strict vs. Lenient GMing

by Mike Barno and Bruce Linsey

[Assuming that the new publisher wishes to run Diplomacy games, he can expect to run across the problem of what to do when a player's orders fail to conform to his preferred format, or contain conflicts, or otherwise present a problem. This can take many forms, only a few of which are described here. When such a problem occurs, the gamesmaster should have some sort of policy ready to deal with the situation. Attitudes in the hobby differ as to how these problems should be handled. In this piece, "strict GMing" proponent Bruce Linsey and "lenient GMing" advocate Mike Barno discuss the philosophies involved and some typical cases.]

Mike: The whole issue seems to hinge on the GM's interpretation of the "badly written order" clause in the Rulebook: "A badly written order, which nevertheless can have only one meaning, must be followed." I feel that this rule should be followed. Yes, this puts an obligation on the GM to use his own judgement; that's part of what the players "hire" a GM for. In most cases, it will be reasonably clear whether there is "only one meaning" for a given set of orders. A review of the hobby literature (such as a leisurely stroll through this handbook) can give the new GM an idea of various cases that are NOT clear, and for which he ought to have a ruling prepared in order to avoid problems later.

(Incidentally, lenient GMing does not imply "sloppy GMing", or "no houserules", as some people believe. For example, I GMed five Diplomacy and variant games over a period of close to four years, and the games never suffered either a GMing error (excepting one transcription error in a variant) nor a significant hassle over my "lenient" rulings. The latter was true partly because my houserules were clear on this matter.)

Bruce: Strict GMing -- interpreting a player's orders exactly as they're written rather than trying to determine what he meant to write -- seems to me to be the fairest way to go. Once a GM gets into determining player intent, he is injecting his own judgement into the game more than he ought to. How does he know that a player didn't deliberately write an order poorly? Worse, where does interpretation stop and outright interference begin?

Mike: I think that "interference" has two forms. We're presuming here that the GM is honest, and isn't intentionally making rulings in favor of nor against any particular player. That's another topic, one that we won't get into here. I suppose that the game is interfered with if the GM picks one meaning for an order when another is equally possible, or if his rulings aren't consistent in similar situations. Normally, a player who's read the houserules should not be surprised or upset by a "lenient" ruling; if he notices it, he'll usually say "oh, that's what I meant." If that isn't the case, either the GM has screwed up when he failed to recognize an ambiguity, or the player simply doesn't understand the Rulebook or houserules.

A "strict" ruling, on the other hand, usually consists of the GM refusing to recognize or accept a player's incompletely- or unclearly-expressed attempt to order a unit, when a more lenient GM would have recognized the player's intended meaning. This often results in an angry player thinking that the GM has intentionally screwed him, though in fact the same ruling would apply to anyone else submitting the same orders.

The "intentional misorder" argument carries no weight with me. It has absolutely no analogy in real-world warfare. If some "rules lawyer" wants to use the GM to his advantage (and couldn't this be considered a form of GM interference?), it's up to him to find a way of misordering a unit in a way that won't be "interpreted" under the GM's stated policies.

Bruce: Well, I think you're coloring things a bit unfairly. You have portrayed the typical reaction to an unexpectedly lenient ruling as one of "oh, that's what I meant", while saying that an unexpectedly strict ruling "often results in an angry player". But I've seen the reverse happen in both types of case -- it all depends on the player's philosophy to begin with, and I'd say you're attempting to attribute your likely reaction to others.

Mike: I said "usually". I, too, have seen the reverse reactions. But in my eight years of face-to-face and postal experience, I'd say that well over 90% of the "surprised" reactions I've seen are as I've categorized them. The percentage is higher yet with the least players. It would be unfair for me to say that it goes that way every time. But there is a strong trend in that direction, and a new GM ought to know that information.

Bruce: Unlike FTF Diplomacy, postal play allows a player all the time he needs to check and recheck his orders. So there is really no excuse for sloppiness, and thus I cannot feel badly about penalizing a player for writing orders sloppily. After all, any GMing decision is going to weigh in favor of some players and against others. To my way of thinking, it makes more sense to make rulings generally that favor careful players. Allowing badly-written orders to succeed favors careless players, and correspondingly penalizes their more careful counterparts.

Mike: No, no, no. Allowing badly-written orders to succeed does not penalize the other players. Consider the "ideal" situation: all seven players having the opportunity, out of each others' hearing, to explain their intended orders to neutral parties at as much length as is necessary to make their intent clear. This would leave everyone on equal turf, since no errors in communication with the GM could interfere with the game.

Now assume a "typical" postal game. Some players (we'll assume all but one, on this turn) write their orders the way the GM expects; the other does not, but his meaning is clear. If the GM invalidates the order(s) in question, that player and his current allies (careful or not) are penalized, and his current enemies (careful or not) gain a corresponding advantage. If the GM does not invalidate the orders, no one is penalized nor assisted; the game proceeds as it would in its ideal form.

So, Bruce, you're simply arguing in favor of giving an unearned advantage, one not associated with any negotiational, strategic, or tactical skill nor effort, to those players who happen not to be allied with a given person. Denying them this can hardly be considered an undeserved penalization, so far as I can tell.

Bruce: Your viewpoint is legitimate, but it's not the only reasonable one. In my opinion, writing orders is in and of itself a skill, and a deficiency in that skill might hurt a player just as surely as might a deficiency in tactical ability. Thus, I don't agree with your use of the term "unearned advantage" above.

As for your argument that "his current allies (careful or not) are penalized, and his current enemies (careful or not) gain a corresponding advantage"; true, but part of the process of selecting allies and enemies is (or ought to be) an estimation of the opponents' playing abilities. One might also be screwed by an ally's poor tactics. So if you'll grant the legitimacy of my viewpoint that order writing is indeed a skill, then I think it follows that one's allies and enemies can rightfully be expected to benefit (or suffer) from that skill (or lack thereof).

Mike: I agree that one can view order-writing either as an inherent factor in the game, or as a necessary procedural matter that shouldn't interfere with the diplomatic interplay and resulting on-board events. Your arguments and conclusion are valid for the "it's all part of the game" people, and mine hold for those who prefer to think of Diplomacy as a simulation. (We'll get to the "analogy" matter later on.)

Both of us: Whichever philosophy you choose to adopt in your games-- and chances are you won't agree with either of us on every single point-- we both feel that it's important for you to consider these issues in advance, and to let your players know at least your general philosophy, if not your rulings in specific situations. The best place for this is usually in the houserules. We also agree that it's crucial that you be consistent from player to player, and from game to game.

* * *

Mike: Enough philosophy; shall we take a look at some examples?

Bruce: Should an order succeed if the unit is mislabeled or unlabeled? I don't think so. A player who orders "Ber-Pru" has written an order to move the province of Berlin into Prussia. The rules of the game do not allow provinces to move, so the order should fail. Worse yet is the case in which a player who has an army in Berlin orders "F Ber-Pru". Again, I can't see allowing this order. The player ordered a fleet that he doesn't have, and thus the order fails.

Mike: As to the first case: What a crockpot of platypus guano, Bruce! (I'm sorry, but somebody had to say it.) Had we not argued this in the past, I'd ask you incredulously if you were serious. In your own houserules when you were running The Voice Of Doom, you had a rule to the effect that players were assumed to be attempting legal moves. (Thus avoiding "F Wes-Nor" failing because "he might have been trying to go to the North Atlantic, or North Sea, or...") That houserule alone would invalidate your argument, were it reasonable to begin with. Of COURSE the player isn't trying to "move a province" -- so what could he be saying? The Rulebook only requires a moving unit to have its current province, "to" or "-", and its destination. (For that matter, is it reasonable to disallow "Army Berlin Prussia"?) All provided; case closed, unless you care enough to write a houserule saying otherwise.

In the second case, the Rulebook doesn't ask for the unit type, no matter whether the player writes down something right, wrong, or not at all. There can be only one unit in a given space, so it's unambiguous which "wooden block in Berlin" the player is referring to. Most GMs without a hardass attitude would ignore the mislabeling and remind the player of the correct unit type. Then the question is just, "Can the unit that's really there go where it's ordered?" If so, let it go; if not, the player has attempted an illegal move (regardless of how he wrote it), and it has to fail -- player's fault, not GM's "interpretation".

Bruce: All right, I concede that my argument that the player is trying to "move a province" is stretching matters a bit, and you are also right to point out that the Rulebook doesn't require the correct (or any) unit label. This is one of those points where I (and some others) happen not to agree with the Rulebook. For my taste, it's not an unreasonable requirement to insist that the player label his armies and fleets correctly; I recognize that our tastes simply differ here and that the Rulebook supports yours. I would say that the GM is more likely to produce an accurate adjudication if the players have their units labeled correctly; thus, my ruling is not based merely on gratuitous obstinance.

Mike: Quite nearly so, though. No GM should adjudicate without checking his own records to be sure all the units are labeled correctly, regardless of his philosophy.

Bruce: Does an order to hold contradict an order to support (or convoy)? I believe so. For instance, if a player orders "A Bul H" and "A Bul S A Gre", I would rule the unit double-ordered and accordingly unordered. The Rulebook clearly states that there are four distinct orders that a unit can receive (in a spring or fall season): hold, move, support, and (for fleets only) convoy. A player who submits two different orders for a unit has double-ordered it, and double-ordered units are generally treated as unordered.

Mike: Under the rules, you're right. But consider the meaning of each order. "Hold" means "you're not ordered to go anywhere else, or support an attack, or convoy an army, so you might as well sit there and defend the space you're in." Now, a holding unit does have value: it exerts a defending strength of one against any attack. But so does an unordered unit, or one whose attempt to move is unsuccessful, or one which is convoying or supporting (though the support is broken in forcing the defense). (Note, too, that a supporting or convoying unit can be supported in place just as if it were holding.) So, instead of saying "an unordered unit is treated as holding," it can be said that "Hold" is simply a Rulebook abbreviation for "not ordered, but we ought to call it something rather than leaving it blank." There are plenty of places where the Rulebook uses a simple rule rather than spelling out implications or ruling on potential ambiguities. And some rules, such as the automatic draw including all surviving powers if there's no winner, just are not best, and are generally disregarded in postal play.

It would be different if, say, a unit ordered to support or convoy gave up its claim to the province; that is, if an explicit hold order were needed to have the unit defend its space or perform some other function. But that's not the case. "Support" includes "hold" as a subset of its implications. So does "convoy". In fact, "hold" is a set of size zero except for its connotation of "stay in place", which means that it conflicts with a move order. Some GMs, in fact, would disregard the hold order as meaningless if the unit were also ordered to move.

All in all, since "hold" doesn't conflict with either "support" or "convoy", I feel that a unit ordered as per your example shouldn't be treated as unordered. (When a GM rules as you do, by the way, he is really disregarding the support and upholding the hold order.) Yours is the correct ruling under the letter of the rules, but their spirit, their effective meaning, is better served by the "lenient" ruling. Therefore I would prefer to have and use a houserule to that effect.

Bruce: This time it's you who is attempting to change the Rulebook, namely the definition of "hold". The Rulebook does not treat the "hold" order as subservient to the other three, it treats it equally. "Hold" and "support" are mutually exclusive, and neither supersedes the other. I understand that your argument would be valid if "hold" were synonymous with "remain in place", but it isn't. If that were so, the Rulebook wouldn't list "hold" as a fourth, and distinct, type of order.

That my ruling effectively disregards the support and upholds the hold order (by leaving the unit unordered) is not relevant. The fact that "double-ordered" translates to "unordered" and that "unordered" is treated the same way as "hold" is (for the sake of my argument) an unfortunate coincidence. If "unordered" were instead to translate to "vanishes from the board", the meat of my argument would be unchanged, and this point of rebuttal would not exist for you.

Finally on this matter, I think that if you're going to start assigning degrees of priority to the various types of order, you'd better explicitly state that the other three (support, convoy, move) are all equal -- or do you plan to arrange these arbitrarily in a hierarchy as well?

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Mike: What "hierarchy"?? I simply feel that a unit should be allowed to support and hold, or convoy and hold, as there's nothing contradictory except the rule listing the different order options. I already stated that this rule doesn't allow both, and that I would change it via a houserule, as you proposed regarding the previous topic.

You haven't weakened my argument; you've simply denied it by holding up the very rule I would amend. And you've admitted that "... 'unordered' is treated the same way as 'hold'", without showing anything about "hold" that isn't done by a supporting or convoying unit.

You're right, if an unordered unit did something other than hold, it would eliminate what you describe as an irrelevant coincidence. But it doesn't. It does nothing. And just as $3+0=3$, support plus hold has the same effect as support plus nothing.

Bruce: If England, in S'01, orders "F Lon - Nth Sea, F Edi - Nor Sea", the GM is in my opinion obligated to rule F Edi as ambiguously ordered, unless he has a houserule clarifying the meaning of "Nor Sea". True, the intent is reasonably clear; and true, it's "obvious" from a tactical standpoint that England doesn't want to bounce himself out of the North Sea -- but the GM's role is not to read minds nor to optimize a player's tactics. His job is to adjudicate what the player actually wrote.

Mike: I agree with your last one-and-a-half sentences, which is why I would probably (in lieu of a houserule saying otherwise) rule as you did. But "adjudicating" does not mean that the GM should not use his judgement. You sound as if you would disallow "F Lon - English Channel" because of the missing G. Certainly there are many GMs who would agree with the first part of your second sentence, and say, "okay, 'clear' and 'obvious' -- that fleet moves to the Norwegian." I've seen GMs print the results that way in the zine without anyone questioning it. The fact that different spellings were used in your example seems to rule out any likelihood of an intentional self-bounce; only one other space could be "Nor Sea", making that one the much more probable of two equally legal possibilities. The "equally legal" point, with nothing in the orders that flatly implies one option over the other, is why I wouldn't give this one to the imprecise player, though I'd have no problem with a GM who did.

Bruce: First, I wouldn't disallow "F Lon-English Channel" -- that's crystal clear, and I'd let it succeed. As for the fact that the player used "Nth Sea" in another of his orders, that carries no weight with me. My stance is that an order's meaning should not be based on other orders, but must be considered in isolation. However, I recognize the legitimacy of the opposite viewpoint.

Bruce: If a player has A Pic and orders "A Par-Bre" (leaving A Pic unordered), should the GM interpret this as an order for A Pic? I wouldn't. The reasoning is identical to my logic in disallowing an order with a mislabelled unit: the player has in fact ordered a unit he doesn't have. What he meant to order is irrelevant as far as the GM's job is concerned.

Mike: I'm afraid that (speaking for myself, not for other lenient GMs) I agree with you on this one. Sometimes it's fairly clear what the player had in mind; imagine for instance that the player you mention has three other units on the board, all fleets away from northwestern France, and orders them all clearly. You know the player meant to order A Pic-Bre (or to intentionally disorder to create a diplomatic excuse), so some GMs would rule it as such an

order. But there's no clear line defining where "clear" situations like this end and ambiguous situations begin. Suppose the player had written "A Mar-Bur" as well (having no A Mar)? Suppose instead of Par, he had written "A Pie-Bre", or "A Mos-Bre"? Somewhere between these examples is a grey area, one in which a GM cannot be sure of being consistent. If he allows this "A Par-Bre", he'll have to set a standard for what he won't accept... and I don't see any way to measure the "clarity" of such an imprecision. So the way to be sure of being consistent (and thus fair) is to stick to the "From" and "To" that the player wrote, allowing leeway only for misspelling or messy writing.

Bruce: A player orders "A Rom S A Nap-Apu", but leaves A Nap unordered. Should the GM assume that A Nap is trying to move to Apu? I don't think so. In my opinion, each unit should receive a separate and legal order. Units which do not are unordered. The order "A Rom S A Nap-Apu" is an order for A Rom, not A Nap.

Mike: I disagree. No long justification here; the player simply has implied exactly what he expects from A Nap, and there's no reason to think that he could want anything different, such as the "hold" that you would impose.

Of course, if he also orders "A Nap-Gre" (with or without a convoy order), then he's actually given A Nap a direct order. The implied order, the assumption that it would be going to Apulia, is of less priority -- lower in the hypothetical hierarchy of orders -- than the direct order to Greece and so is no longer assumed. In this case, "A Nap-Gre" is the unit's order, and A Rom is just supporting a nonexistent move.

I know, I know -- what about "A Rom S A Nap-Apu, F Ion C A Nap-Gre, A Nap unordered"? No direct order, and the two implied orders are equally legal, with no reason to accept one over the other, so A Nap is ambiguously double-ordered and must hold by default.

Bruce: So now not only are you assigning support a higher priority than hold, you're also inventing a whole new category of order ("implied") and declaring that this falls somewhere between a "direct" order and no order! I mean, what next?! Panned orders getting higher priority than penciled ones? Italian orders superseding French ones? Come on, Mike. Either A Nap is ordered to Apu, or it isn't.

Even disregarding the question of priority, we are still faced with the question of whether an order should be allowed at all if implied. True, a support for a move implies that the move is being attempted too, but there are other ways to imply orders, and it's a question of how far the GM wants to go in interpreting these implications. If France has F Por and A Gas, do we allow "F Por executes its only legal non-foreign support order" to mean "F Por S A Gas-Spa"? If France has a build coming and Bre and Mar are occupied, do we allow the order "Build" to mean "Build A Par"? Certainly both of these are logically implied, but what's so difficult about writing a direct and specific order for each unit?

Again, your ruling is a reasonable one with which I happen to disagree.

Mike: Then why use unreasonable hyperbole? GMs have been accepting implied orders since before you ever heard of Diplomacy, and you know it.

Look, if it makes it easier to understand, forget the "priority" bit and recognize that "implied orders" are not orders at all, but rather something a GM assumes if an order is missing. To avoid problems, a GM simply writes a houserule clarifying what constitutes an implied order.

I agree that a player should have no problem writing orders properly, but when he doesn't, a GM can either assume what's clearly implied, or ignore anything that's not written in "proper" form. I prefer the former, you the latter. Simple enough.

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Bruce: Should a GM maintain his deadlines strictly? I say yes. It can be argued that more harm than good is done if the GM refuses orders which arrive after the deadline, but before the adjudication is typed. But this argument is in my opinion shortsighted. The harm done by refusing these late orders is outweighed by the need for consistency, and if a GM isn't going to consistently enforce his deadlines, there's no use having them at all.

A more practical argument in favor of strict deadlines is that a good player will use the deadline. Think of the harm done to the game if one player calls another to tell him he's stabbed him, and the stabbee is then able to change his moves simply because the GM hasn't bothered to adjudicate the game yet. It may be argued that players should take into account the GM's philosophy of deadlines and that the caller in this example was taking his chances (and of course this is true), but for my money it's a better game if the players all know for sure when the deadline is, exactly.

Mike: Well, you've already stated my arguments, so it's just a matter of priorities. I don't see any "harm done to the game" by one player taking advantage of a known GMing procedure (assuming the policy was properly publicized and consistently executed) to exploit another's indiscretion. I see plenty of harm caused by an unnecessary NMR. In one game I'm playing in as I write this, it took the U.S. and Canadian posties 28 days to move a first class letter less than a thousand miles. The GM wasn't home to receive calls, or to call collect as per his houserules, near the deadline. He readjudicated the game using the moves when they finally arrived, bearing a clear postmark; I would too.

To keep players from abusing the policy as you described, one of my GMing policies was to accept phone orders after the deadline, or orders mailed near the deadline and arriving late, only if they would prevent an NMR; late changes weren't accepted. I made it clear that players couldn't count on this privilege -- otherwise, they might send no orders at all until the last minute in hopes of getting crucial information from a loose-tongued player. I had plenty of happy players (relieved ones, often), and no major complaints.

Bruce: Your policy of accepting late orders is certainly valid if stated in advance, but then I think you ought to be using the term "guideline" instead of "deadline". Your true deadline is not when you've announced it will be, but rather at some later (and presumably indeterminate) time. It's not essential that the players know when the true deadline will fall, but it's certainly desirable.

Really, your argument reminds me of a lenient state trooper who lets speeders off the hook if they were "only" doing 56 in a 55 MPH zone. This guy's true maximum speed (before he'll issue a ticket) is perhaps about 59 MPH. But if the speed limit is in effect 59, then why tell people it's 55? Why not just make the announced speed limit correspond to the real one? The exact same logic applies to game deadlines.

Bruce: There is an analogy to real warfare here. Miswritten or delayed orders have screwed up armies and navies in real battles; why not let this be reflected in Diplomacy games as well?

Mike: Agreed, but two points:

- These are six-month game turns. Communication between military planners and top-level field commanders may not have been the best in 1901 or 1914, but they weren't one-message-only and they surely weren't one-way. Lots of questions and clarifications could be sent back and forth in the time it took an entire army to prepare and initiate a six-month campaign.

- The players have plenty of opportunity to muck up on their own. I feel the GM should provide his service as best he can, rather

than insisting that the players do things his way. To invalidate or refuse to recognize an order whose meaning is clear is to interfere with the play of the game itself. It's doing the players as a whole a disservice by being intentionally unhelpful as a matter of policy. If I'm going to the effort of moderating a game and publishing the results, certainly I'll bother to do it in as helpful a manner as I can do with fairness to everyone. And that is what the lenient GMing philosophy is all about.

Bruce: And my view is that the GM can be helpful in some ways, but not when it comes to fixing a player's mistakes. It's the player's job to get his orders straight, not the GM's to change them so that they are. And that is what the strict GMing philosophy is all about.

CHAPTER 19

GMS AND THE DIPZINE

A Subscription System of Game Fees

by Lew Pulsipher

In the early years of the hobby the lump sum or one-time game fee was universally used. This entails payment of a single fee -- around \$20 -- to the publisher, and the players receive the zine until they are eliminated or until the game ends (both systems are used by various publishers).

Recently a new form of fee has replaced the lump sum in a strong majority of zines, a form more equitable to both players and GMs. This is the subscription method, or the subscription plus small fee method, known also as "pay as you go". Using the sub method, the player subscribes to the zine he plays in, and in some cases also pays a one-time fee ((usually about \$5.00)). Once he is eliminated he may choose to renew his sub or not as he likes. So long as he is in the game, the player must continue to subscribe to the zine.

What are the disadvantages of this system to the publisher? First, he may have difficulty getting his players to resubscribe when their original sub expires while they are still in a game. In general, however, this is not a serious problem. I have used the system for four years and have never been forced to drop a player for failure to resubscribe.

A supposed disadvantage is that the publisher must wait for small resubscription payments to dribble in before buying supplies (paper, ink, etc.). This is a fallacy. In fact, the sub system may be superior to the lump sum system in this respect. Using the latter, the publisher receives a large amount at one time, which he can use for supplies. But if he uses it for other things (not uncommon), or if he runs out of supplies, then he has little income in sight unless he opens another game. This can become a vicious circle, as the publisher is perpetually behind in his funds. On the other hand, while the sub system brings in less money to start with, a continuous income is available. The bottom line is that the entire discussion of this problem is rather pointless, because no person ought to even think of becoming a publisher if he does not have sufficient personal funds with which to obtain supplies when they are needed. Too many zines have failed in the past because the publisher literally couldn't afford stamps or paper. These individuals ought never to have begun publishing.

What are the advantages to the publisher? He can adjust his sub fee so that it covers production and mailing costs. Since every player must subscribe, in the long run this means that the publisher will not be in danger of losing money ((due to inflation or an exceptionally long game, that is)). One of the dangers of the lump sum fee is that in a long game the cost per player to the publisher is much more than the fee. True, in a really short game it is sometimes less, but one really long game can wipe out the gains of five short ones. This ability to adjust ((when the sub system is used)) is particularly important now, when inflation is unpredictable and postage costs seem to change irregularly every year or two. In other words, the sub system provides flexibility and security from unexpected losses, compared with the lump sum system.

What about the players? First, no one needs to shell out \$20 only to be eliminated in four or six moves. This can understandably be very discouraging, especially to a novice. ((Editor's Note: Some GMs using the lump sum system have gotten around this by giving partial refunds to players who get wiped out early -- but what sense is there in rewarding a player for doing badly??)) Using the sub system, a similar experience would cost a player far less. On the other hand, in a very long game a player might end up paying more than the lump sum would have cost; but since he has survived that long, it is unlikely that he will not be satisfied to pay the extra because he is probably doing well. The players may be required to pay more for a sub later in the game due to inflation, but would you rather play with inflated money or with the money you used at the start of the game, as you would with a lump sum method? Furthermore, if the publisher drops out, players lose a much smaller amount. If a player is in more than one game in a zine his sub pays for both, thus reducing his cost considerably without raising the publisher's cost. Finally, a player may start a game without getting together a sum which may be quite large to younger people. With all these advantages to consider, players are more likely to choose a publisher using the sub system than one using the lump sum method.

Virtually all publishers starting today use the sub system. Some, unfortunately, combine systems (say, a sub and a substantial game fee) to give the worst of both worlds. But such people can easily be avoided by players. I expect that as old-time publishers slowly fade out, the lump sum fee will no longer be seen in Dippydom.

((The only publisher I know of offhand who uses the lump-sum fee these days is John Boardman. Things have changed still more since Lew wrote this article, though. In his final paragraph, the sub-plus-substantial-game-fee is the common way to go now -- as well it ought to be, since the game and the zine are two separate services provided by the same person.))

The Mandatory Sub: Time for a Change?

by Mark L. Berch

With only a handful of exceptions, all Diplomacy gamezines use a gamefee-plus-subfee system. This means that you pay one fee to get the zine, and a separate fee to play the game (though the latter fee may be \$0 in a few cases). This makes a lot of sense because a player is receiving two separate services, the zine and the game results.

Virtually all these zines, however, make another requirement: you must sub to the zine in order to play. Along with not deceiving the GM, it is one of the two most common houserules in the hobby. Indeed, writing in Diplomacy World #34, John Caruso notes failure to keep up a sub is the only grounds for removal of a player from his gamezine.

I believe, however, that GMs should seriously reconsider such a requirement. If a player does not wish to receive the zine itself, he should not be required to get it. Such a change would, I believe, profit both the player and the editor.

The vast majority of zines are published at a loss; I doubt there are more than a few North American zines run at a clear profit. For most zines, there is little fixed cost. Thus, the marginal cost of an issue (the cost of putting out one more copy of an issue, or the money saved by not putting out one more copy) is very close to the average cost. The one exception to this is offset or litho, and there are very few North American gamezines printed this way. ((Editor's Note: Mark is mistaken. Ditto and mimeo are also exceptions in that printing an extra copy of an issue costs practically nothing.)) This means, as a practical matter, that the editor loses more money with every additional sub. Publishers are willing to accept this loss to permit those who want the zine to get it.

But if someone doesn't want the zine, the entire process makes no sense. The subscriber is shelling out money for a product he doesn't want to get and is probably not even reading. The publisher is incurring an additional loss to send him the undesired zine. He is spending time collating, stapling, and addressing a product that someone is not interested in. In an ordinary job, we can expect to put time and effort into an undertaking that the recipient is not interested in, but why do it in a hobby? Why should a publisher subsidize, and the recipient pay for, a product that the latter does not want? The solution is simply not to require a sub. This way, the only people

who sub are those who really want the zine. I should note that publishers accept the principle that there is no point in forcing people to continue a sub if they no longer want it. About a year ago, I polled publishers asking, inter alia, if they would refund the balance of a sub if, halfway through, a subber decided he no longer wanted the zine, no reasons given. About 90% said yes. But players seem to be locked in, unless they are willing to drop out of the game.

Failing to keep up a sub presents a practical problem: how will the player get his game results? There are two ways of handling this. The first is simply to leave the player to his or her own devices; i.e. to have him rely on getting the results indirectly from another subber. This may not be a problem. If the player is puppeting to someone else, that someone may be dictating his or her orders anyhow. Many players are within local phone calls of people from whom they could get the results. Alternatively, the GM could provide just the game sheet, for a price...e.g. 30-40¢. In most cases, a rate could be set such that the GM would actually be making a profit on the deal, and the player would still be paying substantially less than he would be for a sub. This may or may not mean extra work for the GM; but then again, he's avoiding the extra work of collating a full issue.

Starting in the mid-70s or so, for an increasing number of zines, the bulk of the zine is non-game material -- and people must pay for it. If they are really only interested in the GMing services, why charge them for stuff they don't want? And if you are taking a loss on your zine, why should that loss include a subsidy for people who aren't interested in the zine per se? Permitting players to avoid a mandatory sub seems to me a sensible suggestion, and I hope GMs will consider it seriously.

((It's exceedingly rare, though, that a player would sign up for a game in a zine which he has no interest in receiving. So the problem wouldn't arise that often. Still, if I recall correctly, John Michalski didn't require a sub to the Brutus Bulletin in order to play, and I believe one or two players took him up on the offer of a non-sub.

My policy was always to require a sub, but then, Voice of Doom contained a lot of material outside the game reports that I felt players ought to be reading. I wanted my strict GMing philosophy to be known to all my players, and I felt they needed to know why some of the houserules were as they were. But I recognize that this argument doesn't apply to many zines.

In the case of small zines which carry game reports as part of the zine proper (and I think that description applies to most North American zines), it is more work for the GM to separate out game reports only for one or two players. He has to keep track of a second type of "sub" at a different rate, and remember to send these people the zine anyhow should it contain something all players must see (like his houserules). Still, for some GMs this system would be preferable, and those GMs should consider adopting it.

One other point: I don't like Mark's suggestion that the non-subbing player might be left to his own devices to find out the game results at all. In my opinion, part of the GM's job is to send game material to all the players. Relying on a third party to transmit this information is risky at best.))

Drafting the Troops: How to Fill Your Games

by Bruce Linsey

Often a new publisher (or even an experienced one) will have difficulty finding players to fill his game openings. Here are a few brief pointers which may help facilitate this task for you.

1. If there's a hobby "new blood" listing around, send samples to those people -- they are likely to be interested in joining a game.
2. Include in this sample issue at least a summary of your houserules -- many people are loath to sign up if they don't know how you'll be running the game.
3. If your own philosophy permits, be flexible about rules like black press. Let players indicate a preference.
4. Charge reasonable fees. Check out a few active zines to get an idea of the going rates.
5. Develop a good reputation, especially for reliability. This will help you once you're established; obviously new GMs will have to fill their games without the benefit of a good rep.

6. Here's a practice I used in The Voice of Doom; it worked wonders and I'm surprised it hasn't caught on elsewhere; include a "Game Entry Sheet" as an insert to the issue in which you announce game openings! This not only attracts further attention to your openings, it helps ensure that you have the necessary info from everyone. For example:

GAME ENTRY SHEET

This zine now has game openings. If you wish to play postal Diplomacy here, please fill out this sheet and return it to me with the appropriate fees as soon as possible.

Your name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: () _____

How many games do you wish to enter? _____

Would you like to play in a game with black press? _____

What is your country preference list? First choice _____,
 Second _____, Third _____, Fourth _____,
 Fifth _____, Sixth _____, Seventh _____

Name any other people with whom you don't wish to play. (Answers will be held in confidence.) _____

Do you need a copy of my houserules? _____

Should I be unable to place you in a game for any reason, what do you want done with your game and NMR fees? Return to you ___ Destroy your check ___
 Add to your sub ___

Would you like to be on my standby list? _____

IMPORTANT: For each game you wish to enter, you must enclose a total of \$6.00. Of this amount, the game fee is \$3.00, and the NMR fee is \$3.00. If you resign from the game or finish out your country's position, the NMR fee will be refunded. The game fee is not refundable.
 If you are receiving this issue as a sample, you must also subscribe in order to play. My sub rate is 10/\$6.00. Enclose all fees when you return this sheet.

That's the basic idea; details will of course differ from pubber to pubber. With a bit of luck, the above advice will help you get those games rolling.

Guest GMing

by Jeff Richmond

If you like to run games, but you're not ready to become a full-blown publisher, then guest GMing may be ideal for you. You will have the pleasure of being in charge of a Diplomacy game, without having to worry about printing, addressing, or affixing stamps to a big pile of zines. And it's a good way to find out if you really enjoy GMing enough to take that big step and become a publisher yourself.

GGMing is really very easy. Perhaps the hardest thing about it is finding a publisher who needs a GGM. Moreover, you must find one who will allow you to be a part of his publishing staff. This is not to suggest that hobby publishers are snobbish, but they may be understandably reluctant to take on someone they don't know to be reliable. After all, it reflects poorly on a zine if the publisher has to apologize for a GGM who didn't send his game report in time to meet the deadline.

So, the first thing you should do is establish yourself as a responsible, reliable hobbyist. This is actually rather simple. Just be a reliable player. The player who always gets his moves in on time has to have made a favorable impression on his publisher.

Now you're ready to get your new hobby job as a GGM. Sometimes, a publisher will advertise for GGMs. If this happens, by all means apply. Or you can always take the bull by the horns and ask your favorite publisher if he wants a GGM, or if he knows of a publisher who does.

You should be prepared to commit an hour or so a month to your GGMing duties. This doesn't sound like much, and it isn't, yet it should not be taken lightly. The delays normally associated with postal Diplomacy are magnified when a GGM runs the game, for the game report must be mailed to the publisher who in turn mails the zine to the players. This means that at the very least a week will elapse between your deadline and the time the players receive the results. So, you should do your best not to make things worse. Set aside an hour (or however long it takes you) at the deadline, get the job done, and get it in the mail without delay. Your players will appreciate you for it, and so will your publisher.

On the technical side, it is customary for GGMs to adopt the publisher's house rules. Make sure you have a copy of them. It's also a nice touch if you can type your game report to have the same "look" that the publisher uses, though this is a matter of personal preference and not really important.

GGMing is easy, fun and provides a valuable hobby service. Please consider it.

((I can offer only two quick comments. Although it is customary to adopt the publisher's house rules, there is no reason not to have your own if you're not happy running games under his. Also, when GGMing, you should include your own name and address in the game report to avoid the problem of players mistakenly sending orders to the publisher, and to make it clear to outside observers that you are GMing the game.))

CHAPTER 20

HOBBY SERVICES FOR GAMESMASTERS

The Boardman Number Custodian

by Bill Quinn

The office of the Boardman Number Custodian was originally founded to record the starts and finishes of postal Diplomacy games. To this end, each game start submitted to the BNC is given a number which consists of the year the game started and a letter designation: A-Z, AA-AZ, CA-CZ, HA-HZ, IA-IZ, or KA-KZ. In at least one year, LA-LZ was employed. The other letter series are used by the BNC of the United Kingdom for games in Europe.

Through the years another function has evolved. The BNC frequently hears complaints about whether or not a game was conducted in a fair manner and whether or not a game was conducted in a manner inconsistent with the norms of postal Diplomacy games. After hearing arguments the BNC, having consulted prominent hobby members, will offer an opinion about such complaints. This is commonly referred to as to whether or not a game is "irregular".

Should you have a question or a complaint about the way a game is conducted, and have not gotten satisfaction from your GM, please contact the Boardman Number Custodian.

((I might add that the BNC's task is a time-consuming and often thankless one. As this is being typed, Bill is preparing to step down. He did a superb job throughout his tenure.

As a new GM, you should be aware of a few things you can do to help make the

BNC's job that much easier. Traditionally, GMS send him a dollar with their game-start announcements (which by the way should include names, addresses, and country assignments for all players). Also be sure to send him the final stats (the game's result, the year-by-year supply center chart, and who played which countries for which seasons) when the game ends. If you have any questions regarding whether a practice you want to use will be deemed "irregular", contact the BNC and ask.))

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The Miller Number Custodian and those Funny-looking Numbers

by Lee A. Kendter

The Miller Number Custodian (or MNC) assigns numbers to variant games of postal Diplomacy much like the BNC assigns numbers to regular games of postal Diplomacy. The Miller Numbers themselves are different as they do more than just annually alphabetize the games. The most often asked question I get is, "What does that funny-looking number mean?". Let's look at a typical MN, 1985Zrb32. The first part, 1985Z is the same as a BN in that it tells you that this is the 26th (Z) game assigned a number for 1985. The rb32 also tells you that this is a game of "Gunboat" or no-negotiation Diplomacy. Where does that come from and what does it mean? This "designator" was developed by the North American Variant Bank and adopted by the MNC in 1981. The former system for classifying variants had become stale and unworkable. The rb means that it uses the regular board and the 32 indicates that it is the 32nd such variant on file.

All variants are classified under their own specific type in the NAVB catalog. The rb category is just one of many types of variants on file. The simpler ones may involve just a few rules changes or the addition of a few new spaces and/or centers to the regular board. Others involve extensions to the board, more or fewer players, entire new boards, many pages of rules changes, and time periods farther in the past or even in the future.

The MNC also keeps a permanent record of all variant games that have been assigned numbers and records of games that have concluded. These are published periodically in the MNC zine, Alpha & Omega.

The MNC works closely with the BNC as the BNC sometimes gets a request for a game that deviates from the norm. When these cases occur the BNC sometimes has to consult with the MNC and together they decide whether the game is different enough to receive a MN instead of a BN.

Some players think that variants are more interesting than the regular game and play them almost exclusively. Others play a variant on occasion just for the different strategy involved.

So when you're ready for your first variant game remember where the funny-looking number came from.

((Till I received this article from Lee, I had no idea how Miller Numbers were derived. As this is being published Lee is stepping down after a four-year stint in which he did a great job sorting out and maintaining the Miller Numbers.))

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The North American Variant Bank

by Fred C. Davis, Jr.

The Bank is a repository for about 700 known Diplomacy variants, most of which have been published at some time in the past 20 years in a Diplomacy or gaming zine. The designs have been classified into about 20 major categories. These categories cover many different geographic areas and time periods, ranging from the traditional European area to the entire world to interstellar space, from Ancient Greece to the far future. Many consist of rules changes for play on the regular board. Some use the regular rules on vastly different maps. Some are excellent, some are jokes, a few are unplayable.

The Bank is supposed to receive copies of all newly designed variants from their

designers or publishers, so that they may be classified and given a Catalog Number. The Miller Number Custodian can then issue a designator for a postal section of the game, based on the Catalog Number. Other variant banks in Britain and Europe channel copies of their new designs to the N.A.V.B., so that the same Catalog Numbers will be used throughout the postal hobby.

Photocopies of these designs are available at cost to anyone wishing to order them. To make it easier to decide what to order, the Bank issues a catalog every few years to show what is available. Some "customers" collect certain types of variants as a hobby. Others are looking for games to play face-to-face or by mail. Generally speaking, when someone offers a postal game, he will make additional copies of the rules and maps for his players, so they do not have to separately order copies from the Bank. While most of the maps on file are too small for FTF play, GMs are encouraged to draw full-size maps for such use. (Cheap maps of Europe and other areas are available in 5&10 stores. These can be amended with marking pens and white-out for gaming purposes.)

To order games from the N.A.V.B., please try to use both the exact name, including Mark Number, and the Catalog Number. A copy of the N.A.V.B. catalog is available for \$3.00.

Games may be purchased at the rate of 10¢ per sheet, plus postage and handling (50¢ for orders up to 15 sheets, \$1.00 for orders of 16-50 sheets, \$2.00 for orders of over 50 sheets). Orders should be limited to not more than 15 variants in any one order. All orders are sent to you by first class mail. Inquiries regarding the status of certain variants or other questions will be accepted, but must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed business-size envelope (SASE).

Bringing in New Blood: the Hobby's Novice Packets

by Bruce Linsey

Novices are the lifeblood of a hobby constantly in a state of flux. But the hobby is a strange and sometimes terrifying place to the uninitiated, and a new player can often use a bit of guidance from the old hands. To fill this need, several publications exist with the primary purpose of easing people's entry into postal Diplomacy.

The oldest of the novice packets is Supernova, which has been distributed by me since 1980 and contains many useful articles both on the play of the game and the hobby as a whole.

Masters of Deceit was founded in 1985 by Bob Olsen, and it too contains many useful articles on the game and hobby of postal Diplomacy. As this is being typed, Steve Arnawoodian is in charge of its distribution.

Still another very useful publication is Elmer Hinton's "A Word to the Wise", contained within the 100th issue of his zine Kaissa. This is a bit more limited in scope than the other two (it was written entirely by Elmer and doesn't actually get much into the play of the game itself), but is still an extremely useful item for any novice player to have.

The three publications complement one another nicely, in fact. The reader of Supernova will get a fine taste of the psychological aspects of the game, for instance; while Masters of Deceit offers a good look at the interaction and camaraderie of the hobby as a whole; and "A Word to the Wise" offers an in-depth analysis of the workings of a zine and the GM-player relationship. All of these are topics of interest to novices, and in my opinion all deserve to be plugged.

How can you, as a new publisher, support these efforts? Simply by plugging them from time to time. For the sake of your new players (and we were all new to postal Diplomacy once), I urge you to mention these novice publications in your zine every now and then.

How can you, as a new GM, help your players benefit from these efforts? Some GMs have made it a policy to furnish all their players with novice packets in the past. Gary Coughlan, for example, used to do this for all Europa Express players. To help you help your players, I hereby make the following offer, effective starting when this handbook is first published:

FOR \$5.00 AND A LIST OF NAMES AND ADDRESSES, I'LL SEND COPIES OF SUPERNOVA TO EACH OF YOUR STARTING PLAYERS (UP TO SEVEN PEOPLE). THIS OFFER DOES NOT INCLUDE THE ZINE REGISTER, WHICH IS NORMALLY DISTRIBUTED ALONG WITH SUPERNOVA.

You might well want to consider the above offer, especially if you have lots of newcomers in your new games.

The US Orphan Service - A Helping Hand to Pubbers in Need

by Jim Burgess

I must be one of the bringers of bad tidings. I'm going to try to get you to consider the day, that must come, when you will cease publishing. It is all well and good that publishers begin their journey full of excitement and anticipation, but prudent temperance will go a long way toward ensuring longevity and making my job easier. I should first say a little bit about what that job is. The USOS is committed to supporting the smooth operation to completion of PBM Diplomacy games and variants registered with the Boardman and Miller Number Custodians. At the moment, I am one of three USOS custodians. We assist publishers in placing their games with other GMs when that inevitable day comes and you decide that you can't continue to publish. A typical game, adjudicated in a timely fashion on four week deadlines, can take up to three years to play out. If you take on too many games and adjudication delays mount, then the duration of your commitment (paradoxically, perhaps) can become considerably longer. A game that I started as a player in 1979 recently ended in the spring of 1986. The original GM got married, had two children, and started a new job over the course of the game and with each additional real life responsibility, the turn around time on the adjudications became longer and longer. Finally, the game was orphaned and placed by the USOS with a new GM. The publisher left Dipdom with a bad taste in his mouth and memories of the long periods of "shuddas", as in: "I should get these games done and off my desk, but I don't have the time, so I just feel guilty all the time." Is that the way you want your pubbing career to end?

Obviously not, so what can you do about it? The first thing to do is to take on pubbing responsibilities carefully and with a good deal of thought about what your other responsibilities will be over the next few years. One way of starting out is to take on orphaned games from the USOS. Because the games are already in progress, the length of the commitment you are making is shorter and you don't have to work as hard to find players as they come packaged with the game. The USOS keeps a list of GMs who are willing to accept orphaned games. Contact me if you are interested or have questions about this option. On the other hand, life always is throwing unexpected curves at us that can make Diplomacy seem unimportant. So, even with the best planning, you may find yourself unable to adjudicate games on a timely schedule. In the 1979 game I mentioned above, the Orphan Service placed the game with a GM who started a new szine with the orphan as a beginning. Unfortunately, he subsequently had a bout with illness that made him temporarily unable to continue with the game and he had to pass it on yet again. I use this example because it seems to illustrate the important issues that confront the Orphan Service as it tries to help players keep their games moving. Be realistic and allow some slack for unexpected events. I'm not trying to take all the wind out of your sails, though. If you are considering becoming a pubber or already are one, reading this handbook is sure to help you avoid some problems. In fact, the existence of the Orphan Service should make you feel better about running games, knowing that someone is there to give you a hand if you run into problems. So by all means, PUBLISH!

Now let's look at how the Orphan Service will operate to help you when you are in trouble. My advice is to contact us first. I publish a USOS szine called *Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus*, YVSC for short, and I'd be pleased to trade with you. That would keep you in touch on a regular basis. If a problem arose, you would be ready to notify me immediately. The first thing to remember is that we're always willing to talk and work out a solution that will please as many people as possible. If you approach us first, then that task is made much easier. If a player approaches us first with a complaint, we have more unhappy people to please and things can quickly become more difficult. In addition, the problems tend to be much worse by that time. What can we do to help? First of all, if your problem is temporary we can hook you up with GMs that would be willing to pick up your games on a temporary basis. If your problem is the gameload, where you've picked up too many games to handle at once, we can help you by taking a few games off your hands to reduce the load or offer other suggestions. For example, you can give some games to Guest GMs who can keep them in your szine. You can stagger your adjudication schedule to spread out the workload. Or you can go "warehouse" for awhile and put the adjudications ahead of the rest of the szine. Each individual situation is different and the Orphan Service tries to treat them that way. If you treat us like an enemy, we can play that game too, but as Dip players we know the value of cooperation and we infinitely prefer that course. Talk to us, we can be very friendly! As a final caution, let me remind you how easy it will be to deceive yourself when things go wrong. Player interest in games goes straight down even with a short delay. You may think they "understand" because they're nice to you and don't complain too much and you may be right; however, you have destroyed their fun and they may just not care any more. Believe me, you save yourself and everyone else a great deal of pain and make DIPDOM a nicer place to be when you face up to the facts. Good luck! I hope you enjoy pubbing as much as I do!!