

A copy of this issue (I ran off 140!) is being sent next week to every active publisher plus ten or fifteen other important people.

TALABWO

Hopefully it'll arrive before the fullerts.

Our First Issue

approx. 10 January 1977

This is yet another of those damnable Diplomacy fanzines, this one a somewhat strange creature known as TALABWO, emanating from Grendel Press International, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Conrad F. von Netzke, 5005 Diane Avenue, Apt. 74, San Diego, California 92117, USA.

The odd thing about TALABWO is that even I am not yet too terribly sure what it's going to be like. A few things are settled, so let me tell you those. TALABWO is a journal of variant Diplomacy. It will not carry any game reports; such games as I run are in my other journal, COSTAGUANA. Rather, this will devolve to a magazine of commentary, letters, ideas, new games (maybe), variant hobby news, and untold numbers of other things. (One of these untold things will be told at length farther along.)

Frequency? Subscription rate? Trade policy? These are all items that have yet to be decided. A lot of the decision will be based on response from the recipients of this number. Possibilities: Trades will be accepted on an all-for-all basis, but if I were you I wouldn't hop to offering a trade until I found out the frequency of publication. (My guess on that is quasi-monthly.) Sub rate will probably be thirteen issues for three dollars US, which I think (if there hasn't been another ghastly drop) is about £2 Sterling. Issues are sent surface mail.

So let me get started on what's to go in this one, and you can decide if it's worth having another one.

FIRST ARTICLE

Miller Numbers - Do We Even Need Them?

In response to some recent blurbs that I printed in COSTAGUANA with respect to the Miller Number Custodianship and the current effort to unseat the incumbent, I received the following letter from Stuart Dagger of Aberdeen, Scotland, who I believe expresses the general opinion among gamesmasters outside North America (letter excerpted to relevant parts):

"...my interest ((in variants)) is very localised and doesn't extend in any way to the organizational aspects of the hobby.

"...does it really matter who is the Miller Number Custodian? Both Miller and Boardman numbers have always struck me as a particularly pointless piece of amateur bureaucracy. The only answer I have ever been given in answer to the question of why we have them is that they are a help to the "ratings experts," but I don't regard this as a satisfactory reply since in my view the hobby would be well rid of rating systems as well!

"...The British hobby has managed perfectly well without Miller numbers for years and I don't see why the American one couldn't do the same...."

And Stuart knows whereof he writes; Miller Numbers are not in general use outside North America, never have been, and - at the rate things are going - never will be. And there are a number of publishers in North America too who are either questioning the utility of the numbers, or are ignoring them.

Why? Boardman Numbers for regular games are almost universally accepted, even in Europe. What's wrong with Miller Numbers that makes them the poor cousin? Here to the point, can anybody refute Mr. Dagger's assertion that the only reason Miller Numbers exist is for purposes of ratings (which statement, if true, would obviate the whole matter since there is no variant.

rating system in existence just now)? And if the poor little numbers are worth anything at all, can they be saved, and can the irascible Scot and his cohorts be manipulated into using the damned things at long last?

I wonder. I can think of more reasons than ratings for numbering games, but the prime question remains with us even then: whatever the reasons, do we need the numbers?

Of course not. They are a useful tool for some, that's all. I suggest that the reason Boardman Numbers have gained near-universal credence and Miller Numbers have not is a matter of sheer volume: there are far more regular games played than variant games, and in the latter category the total is subdivided into a huge number of different game types. The biggest argument for Boardman Numbers has always been one of simple librarianship; it is easier to keep track of hundreds of examples of the same thing by a simple reference system than by a complex one. And a number like 1979A0 is far easier for reference purposes than "the third regular game started in 1979 in Fred Hammerflügel's OSTROPOVICH, the one where Italy was played by Gamal Abdel Sadat and won in 1911..." But with variants, where's the problem? Even the most popular games have only had a few sections run (compared to regular games); with the sole exception of a ten-game Youngstown series that was run in Canada (and, as it were, never finished), I can't think of any two variant games that are really easy to confuse.

So why have Miller Numbers? My answer is this: By using them, some people have an easier time of keeping track of things, and nobody is hurt in the slightest. Who's helped? Ratingmasters. Librarians cataloguing games (e.g. variant bank directors). Article-writers trying to compare, contrast or discuss games, or make comments based on past games played. Admittedly, the need is not yet huge for conveniences of this sort, but it may be some day. There are now more than two hundred different variant games extant; if the variant banks ever attain their goal of having all or nearly all available, it would seem to me to be very useful to have a numbering system to use in making lists and catalogues. (It would be especially useful if all variant banks used the same system, but perhaps in this hobby that is a little too much to wish for.)

If you hadn't already guessed, I see Miller Numbers as akin to the library catalogue numbers (in the USA, the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress Systems are the standard ones) that most libraries use. Whether publishers use the numbers in the conduct of postal games is of little concern to me; I, like Stuart, couldn't care less about ratings.

But since some people do care about ratings, why not help them out (as long as nobody is unduly inconvenienced)? Ideally, why not utilize Miller Numbers as both a library tool and postal game designator system? One of the biggest drawbacks of the current Miller Number system is that it is utterly useless and incomprehensible to anyone who isn't thoroughly familiar with variant games and isn't armed with seemingly interminable lists of identifying 'codes' and 'designators' and 'cross-reference charts,' few of which exist and none of which are regularly kept up to date. (To my knowledge, the last full listing of all Miller Number designators was compiled by me, over two and a half years ago.)

So how about a useful system? Which leads, conveniently enough, into

SECOND ARTICLE

A Proposal To Utterly Revamp the Miller Numbers

Owing to brilliant space allotment, this article begins next page.

Some long time ago, Hartley Patterson put forward the first known proposal to revise the Miller Number system to make it more useful. His work was promptly ignored; it was later 'revived' in expanded form by Jeremy Maiden, but that effort too seems to have gone nowhere. Frankly, I can't understand why this should be. To quote a statement I made not too long ago, revising the Miller Numbers is a job that in outline form should require about fifteen minutes' time. I have therefore expended the required fifteen minutes (actually, as I type with but two fingers, this article will take me eighteen or nineteen minutes to type, which means my quote was wrong by three minutes), and have contrived the following idea.

My system is founded in the catalogue of the musical compositions of Joseph Haydn compiled by Antony van Hoboken; it has been expanded from that basis to reflect the fact that we are dealing with variant Diplomacy games, not string quartets.

Here is how a 'new' Miller Number might look:

X.C.4b (79Fv)

That number is in four parts, and each section works like this:

X. That's a Roman numeral, not a letter. Van Hoboken divided his catalogue into groups (Roman numeralised) according to type; I suggest Miller Numbers divide variant games into groups according to number of players, with 'I' being used for games with variable numbers of players or games that may add players as play progresses.

C. Within each main group would be several sub-groups, designated by large letters according to the type of games included in the sub-group. These sub-groups would be standard throughout all main groups. For example, all games based on Tolkien might be lumped into sub-group A, and this letter would stand for Tolkien games through all the main groups. Obviously, this means that not all main groups use all sub-group letters. But so what? It's cohesive, coherent and consistent.

4b. Within each sub-group, each individual game will be designated by an Arabic numeral. If there are two or more versions of the same game (requiring an identical number of players) extant, these would be differentiated by lower case letters.

(79Fv). This is the postal designator, and is exactly the same as a Boardman number except for the 'v' indicating (did you get it yet?) variant.

Thus our X.C.4b (79Fv). Ten players, sub-group 'C' (whatever we agree that shall be), game 4, version b. Beyond that, any games that have postal sections begun can have postal designators assigned, and anybody who wants to keep track of such stuff can record the postal designators beside the full Miller Number (= Catalogue Number). Games-masters, if they care to use numbers at all, need only use the postal designator; the rest is useful mainly for 'variant maniacs' who will surely have all the lists they need, and for the variant banks which will make the lists in the first place.

This system would only be useful if the variant banks adopted it - at least, the World Variant Bank, which seems to be the only one actually functioning now. (Is the North American V.B. still going? I've heard conflicting rumours, and would like to know for sure.) It will be a more descriptive system than the one we have. It would provide consistency to what is now nothing more than arbitrary chaos. (Hm...is there any other type of chaos?)

So what now? Well, first somebody has to agree to the system. Then we have to decide what those sub-categories will be. My suggested list is:

- A - New board, identical rules
- B - New rules, standard board
- C - Historical 'simulation'
- D - Science fiction & fantasy (except Tolkien)
- E - Tolkien
- F - Economic
- G - Multiple units used in play
- H - Variable board (e.g. Black Hole)

I'd suggest we keep the number of categories to a minimum; more than the above may be needed, but I can't think of any game that wouldn't readily fit into one of the above. What I think it would be well to avoid is having so many categories that they start overlapping, and games start fitting readily into two or several. Also, proposed sub-groups C through H above obviously imply a changed board and altered rules; however, in sub-group A should be included any games that have rules changes solely for the purpose of allowing for the board changes. (This last thought has some difficulties, I know; maybe we ought to think about it rather carefully.) When you think on it for a while, you may find that we don't really need groups A and B at all; let's face it, there's really no such thing as a change of board and identical rules, which perhaps obviates group A, and the number of games building new rules onto an unchanged board is fairly small and in any case consists almost entirely in 'old' variants (meaning the group will not expand much in future).

Ideas?

ARTICLE THREE

Is Postal Diplomacy Doomed Altogether?

George Phillies, one of the most knowledgeable all-around gamers known to me, offers a few interesting predictions in a letter to me:

"Please recall that we are approaching the end of postal Diplomacy as a growing hobby. There have been a lot of people who have been saying that Avalon Hill, by selling many Diplomacy games, will cause a big boost in the hobby. I suggest that the experience of boardgamers with the Simulations Publications game flood shows just the contrary. As the number of gamers was increased, PBI boardgame play died; people found that the hobby had aged to the point that they could find an adequate number of opponents for face-to-face play. One can already see the same happening with multi-player games other than Diplomacy. Note the popularity of, e.g., Kingmaker in larger f-t-f groups. As A-H floods the market with Diplomacy sets, the need for p-b-m will die. (Also, as Flying Buffalo and other computer groups get into the act, the need for many publishers will die.) The hard core of the hobby will stay on, as it has in board-gaming, but the hobby (or at least its core) will not grow."

I can't say I entirely agree with George's predictions, but I think he's generally on the mark. Frankly, the 'core' of the postal hobby has been numerically rather static for some time now; the total number of active players may be zooming higher and higher, but the central group does not in proportion expand. Only in England is this not so, and even there a levelling-off seems in progress as a few of the old hands retire to be replaced by newer hands, some of whom displace and some of whom merely wilt themselves.

Postal Diplomacy has long been divided into two general 'schools'; those who play the game as an end in itself, and those who use it as a means to some other end - generally article-writing, press release creation,

making pen-friends, or whatever. The "game-only" school is the one that George's prediction most applies to, I think. These people are perfectly willing to work with one of the computer services, e.g. Flying Buffalo, in spite of the absence of press, articles or other frills. These are also the people who, I suspect, are most likely to seek out other gamers who want to play in person - not only Diplomacy, but any and all other wargames - and thereby gradually erode their need for postal play.

But the group with subsidiary interests will continue, regardless of availability of local opponents. The 'extras' that come with gaming by mail will keep them there, no doubt.

Then, too, there are some other factors that George either has not considered or has not yet been able (for lack of data) to evaluate. He suggests that multi-player games are growing in popularity with wargaming groups; but unless one is affiliated with a fairly good-sized group that meets fairly regularly, it is often quite difficult to get a group of seven or eight together for the time needed to play and finish a Dip game. This is largely why in-person Diplomacy was all but abandoned in San Diego not too many years ago; we had too much trouble getting a full board, and even when we got it the games were seldom finished owing to sheer length of time required. Then there's the matter of press and articles which obviously cannot come with in-person playing; a lot of us love the stuff that accompanies the games far more than the games themselves. Whether our interest is in serious analytical studies or in humour, we eagerly await the more verbose magazines - I know many postal players, and I am one, who never look at the games until we've read all the other stuff.

And finally, I'd think that the inherent difference between Diplomacy, the multi-player game, and most other Avalon-Hill or SPI creations, which are generally two-player, may account for the longer life of the former. In Diplomacy, as says its inventor, the big difference is the simultaneous movement. I don't agree; that's a pure technicality, enough to earn him a copyright and no more. The real difference is interaction among people; with your average A-H or SPI game, it's one on one from outset to dénouement, as in chess or draughts. But the essence of a good Diplomacy game is to work to know your opponents as people; this is especially the case if you play repeatedly with the same bunch. Long ago I suggested that Diplomacy was closer to a game of psychology than of war, and I still believe this. And therefore, the interest in playing the game - so one can meet more and more new people, and get to know the old names better - sustains longer than in an 'ordinary' wargame where the entirety is the game itself.

George is probably right that the hobby will not mushroom out of sight, as some have predicted; he's also probably right that the "hard core," the small central group that does all the hobby service work, will not expand dramatically. But I think he's dead wrong in suggesting that familiarity, proliferation and/or the availability of computer gamesmasters will cause "the need for p-b-m" or "the need for many gamesmasters" to die away.

Of course, if he is right, then we hopeless addicts had better consult our lawyers about a will fairly soon. (Memo to those taking this line seriously: I will finish law school in 1978 and pass the Bar in Spring 1979. If you can hold off on your will-making until then, I'll be happy to quote a fee....)

CORRECTION OF ERROR!

The next-to-last paragraph of Page Two says that the World Variant Bank is the only one in operation, or so it seems. Not so; the NDC Variant

Bank in Great Britain is doing well also. It is, however, a semi-private Bank; formerly, one had to be a member of the NGC to buy from it. I am told this is no longer so, but am not certain.

In any case, this brings up

ARTICLE FOUR

Some Comments on the State of the Variant Banks

There are, ostensibly, four variant banks of note in existence. The World Variant Bank, of course, is going full-steam; within its self-imposed limits, so is the NGC Bank. The North American Variant Bank seems to be in a state of on-and-off limbo, unless I'm sorely misapprehended. And then there's the small but enthusiastic bank forming in, of all places, Australia - undoubtedly that one's intended to serve local needs only, but they still have a place in the scheme of things.

The variant press is full of ideas for cooperation among variant banks; wouldn't it be nice if this could at last be reality?

Step one, I think, is to revive the North American bank. Dick Vedder has offered to take it back, and in fact wants it back; considering that he did virtually all of the work that went into putting it together, I cannot conceive of any opposition to this desire of his. I therefore call on Dave Kadlecak, who last had the Bank as far as I can tell, to ship it immediately back to Dick (Department of History, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ 85721). Dick will be happy to advance postage, or repay such costs, if needed.

In fact, I'll make my own offer. If Dave is willing to give the variant bank back to Dick, I'll volunteer (with Dick's approval) to act as messenger. I will, at my own expense, drive to Santa Clara, pick up the Variant Bank, drive it to Tucson, and then come home. (This presumes that Dave cannot ship it for some reason.)

Step two is to develop some loose affiliation among all the variant banks, with the idea that they will (1) exchange materials, to the extent that they are permitted to do by their own 'charters' (i.e. NGC may have substantial limitations on this), (2) exchange information freely and without constraint, (3) act in concert to secure materials that are open to all but perhaps difficult to obtain by some, and (4) catalogue their materials uniformly (cf. SECOND ARTICLE, Page 2).

Six weeks or so ago, Robert Sacks sent out to a very limited group of people a proposal that somewhat resembled what I've just suggested. I think it's full of serious flaws, but the basic idea that inspired it is worth considering. The problem with the Sacks proposal - hmm; make that "problems" - are that it's too selective in its list of those included (for the most ghastly example, it excludes entirely the World Variant Bank, and excludes from the formulative process the NGC Bank); it has a proposed set of bylaws ('governing agreements' - Sacks should have been a lawyer!) that, in my opinion, will do more to stifle than ease the purposes of the effort unless substantially revised. (Some examples: The 'agreements' unnecessarily tie the 'Federated Variant Bank,' as it's called, to the Diplomacy Variant Commission - DVC - which is Sacks' own group, an outgrowth of an Int'l. Diplomacy Association committee since repudiated by IDA; DVC has for some time been a group of questionable merit and insubstantial accomplishment. The 'agreements' establish two classes of participants, Directors and Members, the only

substantive difference being that Directors sell variants and Members do not. There are some rather grotesque proposals for 'impeachment of Members and Directors' by either the Principal Director - a.k.a. Librarian - or the DVC, the complexities of which are frightening to contemplate - why not a simple sentence like, "Any member who fails to perform his duties for (a specified period of time) shall be considered to have dropped from the group." Well, this could go on, but I'm getting too far off the track....)

Nevertheless, though I cannot accord with Sacks' particular proposal, he does have a point. Some sort of close relationship, whether official or unofficial, strikes me as a useful idea. My ideas for such affiliation would run along these lines:

1. If there is to be a "governing body" to oversee variant banks, it should be comprised of, and created by, the governing officials of each participating Bank. No other organisation or group need be involved.

2. For purposes of coherence, the variant bank federation should adopt a uniform classification system, or numbering system. In this vein I'd suggest that, by whatever means they decide upon, the variant banks arrange to have someone in charge of classifying each new variant and issuing it a number as it comes into the Bank - cf. SECOND ARTICLE, p.2. The 'Miller Number Custodian' would thus be responsible only for issuing postal designators. (This presumes that something akin to my proposal for revising the Miller Numbers is adopted.)

3. In general, it should be a maxim that variant banks do not operate for profit. Prices at cost or slightly above cost to cover expenses in maintaining the bank or scrounging up rare variants.

4. Variant banks should agree to exchange materials with one another, at cost, or on a trade basis, to the extent that the recipient bank is willing to exchange. This means that a small bank such as the new one in Australia, presuming that it's willing to send whatever it has to anybody, should be entitled to receive whatever it wants from anybody. However, if a participating bank agrees, let us say, to exchange only certain items, or to exchange only under certain restrictive conditions, then exchanges should be *quid pro quo*.

5. Dick Vedder has suggested, and I concur, that some effort be made to put legally-enforceable binders on the transfer of variant banks, such that if ever someone in physical control of a pile of variant bank material stops functioning in his variant bank duties, the material can be reclaimed. This is a nice idea, though the mechanics of it seem to me to be immense. The problem would be mainly one of enforcement. If we draw up contracts that are legally binding, that's fine, but is there anyone in this hobby with the time and the money to pursue in court any breach? And what about transfer across international boundaries - not much of a problem between USA and Canada, but elsewhere it would be incredible. But - it's an idea.

6. I'd like to pursue the idea of having variant banks undertake to copyright the materials deposited in them, to the extent that this may be possible (remember, most variants are closely related to 'Diplomacy,' which already has a copyright attached), in the name of the designer(s). This would, if it could be worked out, allow the variant banks free use of the material for non-commercial purposes (cf. Item 3), but would reserve to the designer(s) any and all rights should commercial use of the variant be contemplated by anyone.

Comments from the gallery?

THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE MILLER NUMBERS

As many of you know, and as all of you will know in about ten seconds, the hobby is in the midst of a dispute. A substantial brace of publishers and players is claiming that the current Miller Number Custodian, MNC, ought to be removed from office forthwith. Another substantial brace of hobbyists disagrees. The current Custodian, Robert Sacks, has been accused of - and defended against accusations of - incompetence, malfeasance, misfeasance, nonfeasance, creating a climate wherein nobody can work with him, and so on and on.

The opposition to Mr. Sacks seems to have started about eighteen months ago, with the man who gave the Custodianship to Sacks - Dick Vedder. In a letter dated 1 July 1975, Vedder has a great deal to say about the impossibility of working with Sacks, of getting anything done under his aegis, and of the possible consequences of his continuation in a position of authority. (Mr. Vedder's letter states that he is following the lead of Nicholas Ulanov; however, I've not seen the Ulanov comments, which obviously predate the Vedder ones, so I've started with Dick's broadside.)

Since then, the opposition has grown. The most intriguing thing about the progress of this dispute is that the subject of it seems not to have paid the slightest attention to what was going on around him; those who come out in opposition to him or to his policies, if replied to at all, may expect to be accused of all sorts of strange things. Mr. Sacks' most recent letter to me, for instance, implies that I am a Fascist. Fred Davis has been subjected to repeated vituperation, and Sacks' Diplomacy Variant Commission once suggested that Fred Davis ought to be censured for (in effect) daring to oppose Sacks' policies. I am told by several people who were there that the IDA meeting in Baltimore last summer offered viewers and listeners with a sad spectacle of ill-mannered interruptions and downright obscenity, courtesy of one Robert Sacks. Doug Beyerlein has been flatly accused of being a cheat and a fraud. Walter Luc Hase has so many letters of insult and accusation - all unfounded, as he has demonstrated with other letters in his possession - that he has had to establish a special file for them. Walt Buchanan, Lew Pulcifer, Len Lakofka, Rod Walker...the list goes on. The latest addition is Elmer Hinton. Wowee!

Thus far, I have seen exactly one comment, by one of the aforementioned, that may be reasonably construed as offensive in an unwarranted way to Robert Sacks. (This was Len Lakofka's recent one-line diatribe in his own magazine.) Otherwise, all I have seen - and I've done a lot of looking into this - is a series of reasonable criticisms of Sacks' actions, and ever-stronger insistence that something be done to either bring Mr. Sacks back into conjunction with the interests and directions of the hobby, or get rid of him.

Eighteen months of efforts to accomplish the former having failed, an effort is now under way to remove him from his position. I have announced that, subject to hobby approval, I intend to take back the Miller Numbers (I was the custodian once before); the effective date was set at December 1, 1976. I have, in fact, already started issuing numbers to several game-masters, but all of this is with the understanding that the hobby has to have its say. Should the hobby declare my action out of line, I will turn over whatever I've done to Mr. Sacks and withdraw my claim.

Originally, I had assumed that the hobby would decide the issue by "force of opinion," through letters and magazine editorials. However, I soon realized that this method was a little too vague; before anybody could determine a consensus, chaos might have ensued. Therefore, Walt

Bucanan suggested, we ought to poll the hobby publishers to see who feels how about what. Fred Davis agreed to print and mail a ballot, and Stuart Dagger (Europe) and Doug Beyerlein (outside Europe) have agreed to count the resulting vote. With the ballot will come brief statements of position by Mr. Sacks and myself; I suggested this to Fred Davis in order that publishers who have no real knowledge of this matter might thereby be able to vote more informedly, and Fred agreed to my suggestion.

The ballot will be mailed in mid-to-late January - the statements to be included are due in on January 18th, so Fred will probably go to press shortly thereafter. I hope you'll all vote; there is a space for abstentions, and if that is your choice, I hope you'll mark it and mail the ballot anyway; please don't just discard it. The most important thing of all here is that we find out how the hobby feels, and if two-thirds of the publishers don't send ballots, what are we to assume? That the mails are fouled up? That nobody cares? That Doug Beyerlein is, in fact, a cheat - as Sacks has suggested - and has rigged the results?

No, if the hobby doesn't care or doesn't know what it wants, I want to know that. I have stated that if a vote establishes a clear preference for Sacks, I will withdraw; if it establishes a preference for me, I will pursue my claim without further ado. What I haven't said is what I will do if no clear decision is shown - if it's a near-tie, or if the number of votes cast for one party or the other is so small as to be meaningless. In the former case, I honestly don't know what I'll do; I imagine I'll make as strong an effort as possible to get the issues before all publishers in a thorough manner, and then propose a re-vote. In the latter case, I'll think about it for a while.

Unless the vote has settled the matter by next issue, I intend to print some letters from several people on the subject. I had intended to publish them this issue, but because of the upcoming vote I prefer to hold back; then, if they're still germane, we can explore the ideas they raise.

There is one letter I wish to print now, however. It comes from James Hymas of Canada, the Regional Miller Number Custodian for Canada - except that in a letter to me of January 6, 1977, Robert Sacks advises that he has "suspended" Mr. Hymas from his Associate position for alleged failure to perform duties (the same fate that befell Jeremy Maiden, Associate for the U.K., some while ago):

"It is my hope that, should there at any time be two Miller Custodians, these persons will try to cultivate a degree of amicable coöperation between their two organizations, most notably the DVC/TIDA vs. WVA. This coöperation should take the form of not assigning the same numbers to different games, not assigning numbers to games whose GNs have not asked them to assign one, having some kind of system whereby Miller-Sacks numbers could be differentiated from Miller-von Metzke numbers, and so on.

"Of course, I am sure that this type of attitude will not prevail, and we shall get one hell of a screwed-up variant statistic situation for about two years from the start, which will necessitate the assigning of new numbers all across the board by whoever is the 'winner.' What a supremely useless waste of energy.

((Note by CwM: As soon as I can get some kind of agreement on a system per Article Two this issue, any numbers I assign will be 'new style' and should solve the problem that Jim mentions.))

more....

"As I belong, or at least I think I do, to both organizations, and have a good relationship with the leaders of both, I would like to offer any help I can give to those who would like some kind of coordinating done. I am quite prepared to use my 'zine as a forum for this coordination. This 'zine is DER FLIEGENDE HOLLANDER and is available for an average of 30¢/issue."

((Jim's address is: 250 Glen Manor Dr. W., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4E 2Y1. Jim also mentions that his magazine is being used as the official forum for the Sacks-led Diplomacy Variant Commission Miller Number Recategorization effort; whether this still applies now that Sacks has fired Hymas is unclear.))

NEWS BULLETIN: Both Dick Vedder and I have just had separate contacts with Dave Kadlecik, director of the North American Variant Bank. Dave is demonstrably still in business, and tells Dick that he's eager to continue and expand his efforts. So let us put paid to those nasty rumours that the NAVB is dead; it is not, and people wanting material may go ahead and write Dave at Box 802, Univ. of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA 95053, USA.

A LETTER FROM ROBERT SACKS to conclude this issue; what follows is Mr. Sacks' response to the call for a vote on the current schism, and for a statement from him to accompany the ballot. The letter is addressed to Walt Buchanan, Fred Davis and me. A few clarifications which I have will be inserted in double brackets ((thus)).

"Included is my contribution to your farce referendum. It is filed under protest:

"1. It would be impossible to prepare an adequate statement in the week I have been given. ((The deadline was later extended to accommodate Mr. Sacks in this.))

"2. Fred Davis is totally unacceptable as 'referee.' Douglas Beyerlein is totally unacceptable as a teller - in the last year alone he has conducted one fraudulent and two rigged polls. ((This is a blatant lie, and as a matter of law is undoubtedly actionable.)) Given these two conducting the poll guarantees a total lack of credibility for the 'results.'

"3. Davis has indicated that no personal attacks will be permitted. This entire dispute has been nothing but personal attacks. Until such time as this restriction is clarified, this request for statements is a farce.

"4. You gentlemen, and your colleagues, have been engaged in a campaign of disinformation ((sic)), in some cases close to two years in length, so that this sudden reversal smacks of hypocrisy, and in any case it would be appropriate to calm the situation down before attempting a referendum.

"I am obligated to consult with my colleagues in New York and New England, especially my Vice Custodians, before submitting a serious statement. This means...after...January 16.

"This would also give me a chance to discover who Abdul is and determine how serious he is. ((Here Mr. Sacks refers to what I gather is some sort of joke or hoax letter, which I have not seen, circulated among some publishers and signed 'Abdul.' I'd love to see a copy of the letter; until then, I can only gather from the vague reports of others that it involves some sort of slur against Mr. Sacks.)) I know Davis called that proclamation a nut letter - it takes one to know one - but Abdul did nothing that hasn't already been done by Hams, Davis, Lakofka, Pulsipher, Buchanan, Beyerlein, von Metzke and Walker with respect to Variant Banks, the IDA, and the two Custodianships, and unlike all of you he has no record of misbehavior in the hobby; so far he has done nothing to suggest any imbalance, and therefore must be taken seriously.

"Conrad has asked for my opinion of possible people to conduct the poll. My preference for tellers would be Leeder, Boyer, Phillips. My preference for referee is Buchanan - if he's sponsoring this as is claimed he shouldn't delegate the job of referee to anyone as partisan as Davis. ((John Leeder and John Boyer were unable to serve as tellers for the vote. Andrew Phillips was not asked, but this was probably because his name was suggested only after Doug Beyerlein had been approached and had agreed. As for the 'referee,' Fred Davis is no such; the term is pejorative. Fred is merely typing a neutrally-worded ballot and the statements sent by Sacks and me, and mailing them at Fred's own expense. Whether the ballot is fairly-worded can best be determined by waiting until it arrives and reading it for yourselves. I have told Mr. Sacks that if the ballot turns out to be prejudicially worded, as he thinks it may, I will not abide by the results if the vote is in my favour.))

"Also, I should like to see a copy of the purported transfer agreement. I have every reason to believe that it does not and never did exist, but if it could actually be proven it would change things a bit. ((Mr. Sacks refers to a codicil in the transfer of a Custodianship from one person to another, which I mentioned in print some time ago. The codicil never did exist in writing, it's quite true; it was always entirely verbal. Further, I have learned - only since first mentioning the codicil - that Mr. Sacks was never made aware of it when he took over the Miller Numbers. I said at the time that said codicil would probably prove irrelevant anyway; now that we know that Mr. Sacks was not forewarned of it, I think we can forget that point as absurd.))

"Not that it makes any difference, I should make it explicitly clear - I don't care how many farce referenda you call and how many pretenders you pull out of your hats - I have an ethical obligation to my staff, to the Diplomacy Variant Commission, and to the hobby to continue as MNC while I am able and to hand over my office to competent and ethical successors when I am unable to continue."

((I take this last paragraph to mean that Mr. Sacks will not abide by the results of any vote, regardless of what those results are. Which leaves me with a strange point of wonderment: Is Mr. Sacks saying that he has an ethical obligation to the hobby to continue as MNC even if the hobby votes that it does not want him to continue?))

FOR NEXT ISSUE: Hopefully, some feedback from this issue. A very interesting and idea-filled letter from George Phillips. The latest (and hopefully definitive) revision of the Cline 9-Man Variant (thanks, Dave Kadlecsek, for sending the stuff so promptly; you'll never know how happy I am to have my pet game back in my hot little paws again). A few Miller Number assignments which I've made. A spectacular announcement, namely that I've just been appointed to handle the variant column in Walt Buchanan's Diplomacy World - but I won't tell you that yet. A plug for a very fine magazine out of Australia, TAU CETI, one of the best of the 'newer' mags in spite of its out-of-the-way point of origin (and, incidentally, there is the beginning of a fascinating article on Australia in the latest issue of The New Yorker magazine, cover date Jan. 3), available from Larry Dunning, 46 Holmesdale Road, West Midland, 6056, Perth, Australia - write for price quote, as rates are given in Australian dollars. And lots more - hell, we're gonna have a blast with this rag, so I hope you'll write me and tell me you want more of it. For now, Happy Groundhog Day.....



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