

TALABWO

Our Second Issue

approx. 10th February 1977

This is TALABWO, a journal of essay, commentary and discussion on Diplomacy variants produced by Grendel Press International, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Conrad F. von Metzke, P.O. Box 626, San Diego, CA 92112, USA. Subscription rate 12/\$3.00 by surface mail (one-third off to members of the American Wargamers Association). Trades, see below. Games are not played in these pages.

TRADE POLICY: TALABWO will trade all-for-all with any Diplomacy publication which runs variant games or deals in any way with the variant field. Receipt of this issue constitutes a specific offer to trade with any such publication, and I sincerely hope you'll take me up on it. Offers of trades with journals that do not concern variants will be considered as well, but I must reserve the right to decline on the simple grounds that I cannot possibly print huge quantities of these issues; neither my schedule nor my ditto machine will handle it. But feel free to enquire.

Complimentary copies are automatic for: the Boardman Number Custodian; managers of variant banks; Lew Pulsipher (Diplomacy World variant design columnist); George Phillies (American Wargaming Association); Ferkin Doyle (playtesting); Dick Vedder (for no particular reason); and all associate Miller Number custodians (you know who you are).

Unless you are covered as a complimentary recipient, or have taken out a trade or sub, this will be your last issue. If I've not heard from you by the date of Issue 3, I'll presume you're not interested and will drop you from my list.

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AFFILIATIONS: TALABWO and its publisher are affiliated on a reciprocal exchange of information and help basis with the American Wargaming Association, a service group devoted primarily to general wargaming but with some interest in Diplomacy. The group is especially worthwhile if your interests extend to more than one game or group of games; newsletters, a regular high-quality magazine, tournaments and conventions, steady exchanges of information - the benefits of membership are many. Further information can be obtained from Red Burr, 71 Beacon St., Arlington, MA 02174. TALABWO will occasionally mention noteworthy items provided us by AWA; the more they send, the more we print, so get to it, folks.

TALABWO is also affiliated with the World Variant Association, which is little more than a group of a few highly interested variant buffs doing as much as possible to promote interest in and availability of variants. WVA is not a formal organisation in that it has no formal rules or documents; nevertheless, it gets things done. A fair amount of what comes to you in these pages will have been channeled through WVA first, or instigated by one of that group's chief participants.

NGC VARIANT BANK (now known as UK VARIANT BANK): The director of this institution, Hartley Patterson, asks me to squelch the rumours abounding that UKVB deals only with its own members. This is absurd, and was never the case. UKVB will sell what it has to anyone interested, without prejudice. UKVB is primarily a sales outlet; it does not pretend to deal in archives work, and all enquiries in the latter vein are referred to the World Variant Bank.

Because of this rumour-squelching necessity, perhaps I ought to run down the variant bank list briefly. There are:

1. UKVB - Hartley Patterson, 'Finches,' 7 Cambridge Road, Beaconsfield, Bucks., HP9 1HW, United Kingdom. Provides mimeo (soon litho) copies of two to three dozen popular variants in standard UK versions, plus some newer designs stocked on a test basis. Lists available.
2. WVB - Walter Luc Haas, Postfach 7, CH-4024 Berne 24, Switzerland. Undoubtedly the most complete bank around, and very nearly 'complete.' A fantastic source of information to the variant buff. Lists available.
3. NAVB (North America) - David Kadlecak, Box 802, University of Santa Clara, Santa Clara, CA 95053, USA. An excellent collection, though newer designs may be missing. No lists; you'll have to know what you want before you order.
4. AVB (Australia) - Larry Dunning, 46, Holmesdale Road, West Midland, 6056, Perth, Western Australia. Very new and still small, but the director seems awfully eager and, after all, he's dealing with a limited market. This one will be growing rapidly, I'll venture. Lists available.

DICK VEDDER asks me to offer a public apology for my unauthorised paraphrasing from a letter he wrote; this was done on Page 8, Paragraph 2 of TALABWO First Issue. I had thought I had permission for this reference, but after a telephone conversation with Dick I find I had not. Dick is not withdrawing or retracting his letter or its contents; he merely asks that I consult him before using his material. I shall.

REFERENDUM: The referendum concerning the Miller Number Custodianship is now under way; deadline for return of ballots is 26th February. If you are a publisher and have not received a ballot, and want one, write to Fred C. Davis, Jr., 3012 Oak Green Court, Ellicott City, Maryland 21043, USA. In UK write to Stuart Dagger, 27 Cameron Way, Bridge of Don, Aberdeen, AB2 8QD, Scotland.

NEW MATERIAL

FIRST ITEM: The question of charging fees for assignment of game numbers is a hot one in the hobby these days, and I suppose I'd better make some sort of statement on the matter as concerns my assignment of Miller Numbers. I don't intend to charge anybody any fees. However, I have no objection whatsoever to the principle that, if fees are needed by a Custodian to offset costs which he can't afford to pay in full by himself, such fees are perfectly justifiable. Accordingly, I am not about to make an ass of myself by issuing some blanket promise that Miller Numbers will never, ever cost anybody one cent no matter who issues them in future - as if I have the power to make such a statement! It's really very simple; at this writing, and in the foreseeable future, I don't need contributions

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because I'm able and willing to bear the costs. But if this situation ever changes, for me or for anyone in my position in future, then the hobby should be expected to make some contribution.

SECOND ARTICLE: If you're a publisher running variants, have you tried filling a new game lately? Most of you will agree, I think, that it isn't too easy. Unless and until you can arrange some widespread publicity for your opening, it will take you quite a while to get your players - particularly if you're running a large variant.

Based on some comments by Gil Weiger, I've devised a scheme which might just help this problem toward solution. The idea draws on the past experience of a little newsletter called 'Game Openings,' printed and distributed in the UK at one time (it's apparently now defunct) and on a short-lived similar project by one Steven Tihor of New York. The idea in both cases was to make available on a regular basis a list of all known openings, and thus dramatically increase the publicity that a given gamesmaster could get for his new game.

I suggest the revival of this idea, with some modifications. And though I'd much prefer to see someone else publish the thing, I'm going to get it under way myself, as soon as I find out your reactions. As I conceive the project, it would operate as a one- or two-page flyer published monthly, and sent free to any publisher who indicated any interest at all (or to any non-publisher who provided postage); it would list any and all known variant game openings, without prejudice; and would include a brief description of the game (scenario, number of players, relative strategic balance of board, costs, etc.). The point would be to get other publishers to reprint some or all of the items from each issue in their own journals, thus bringing the information to the players. All that I'd request of any publisher who asks to receive such material is that they agree to make some use of it.

In order for such a scheme to succeed, a few things will have to be established in advance. First, I'd like some comment on whether the idea is feasible as it stands, and if not, why not. Second, it will obviously be necessary for a fair number of publishers to agree to receive and reprint such material, so if you're in this category I'd appreciate your dropping a card or note. Third, somehow I'll have to arrange to accumulate the material that will go into the issues. This won't be a big problem in most cases, but those variant publishers who don't trade, or who send their issues surface from overseas, will need to be ferreted out somehow. Ideas?

And with reference to overseas publishers, perhaps there should be one edition of this flyer for North America and another for UK? (Where appropriate, both editions can always cross-reference data, but in general UK players aren't interested in North American games and vice-versa.)

Okay, readers, it's in your court. Say something.

THIRD ARTICLE: Lew Pulsipher has recently sent out a letter to a number of people attempting to initiate a variant game review system for use in Lew's column in Diplomacy World. His letter proposes a fairly extensive summary format for each game, covering essential features of each and including space for the reviewer's comments on the 'worth' of each game. I presume this was prompted at least in part by the widespread feeling that the mere knowledge of a game opening isn't enough; it would help if people knew a little about the game too. (To the uninitiated, what does the term 'Youngstown Variant' really mean?) Lew's interest is in

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getting this material into his column, but he suggests that if anybody cares to compile it and reprint it in a single volume, he'd gladly turn over his material.

I'm not trying to steal Lew's thunder here, but I think it might be better for all of us if we worked on both projects at once. The gist of the present browse is to propose that we undertake immediately to develop a complete listing of all known variant games, in review/description format (a la Lew's outline), to be published in a single volume which will then be updated with supplements every so often to cover new games. In the process of putting together this volume, we can have Lew skim off whatever items he wants for his articles; or Lew can develop his own articles and give us the same material. (What Lew does will be, of course, his own business; I see that I'm tending to separate this article into 'Lew Pulsipher' and 'everybody else,' and that's not at all the intent. What I hope to see happen is that we will put together a group working on the development of a unified publication of variant review/description capsules, and that one of this group - Lew Pulsipher - will use some of what we develop for wider distribution through his articles in DW. Is that clearer?)

I might mention also that an Irishman, Der Garvey, seems to be involved in a somewhat similar project for the UK and Ireland. I've no idea if Mr. Garvey intends a mere listing of games to be bought, or if he plans descriptions as well. But he's obviously thinking along my lines, so maybe he'll get in on this too?

How do we do this? Well, first we'll need some volunteers. The more who are willing to help out, the better. I don't mean to sound exclusionist, but it would probably be best if you had some experience with variant games, having played several or gamesmastered a few or designed one based on knowledge of others. It's probably true that anyone who can write his language can put together a competent review, but if you aren't familiar with variant games you may have a problem being fair and/or accurate. So - anybody who cares to volunteer to help, welcome; but please be fair to yourself and to the hobby and assess your own qualifications in advance. (No need to send a resumé; if you feel you can do the job, that's enough for me.)

Then when we have our roster of warm reviewers, we divide up the games and write our reviews. Fair warning; there are several hundred variants to deal with. If we get fifty people helping, we'll each need to do only a few; but if only a dozen volunteer, we may each be asked to write thirty or forty items. If you're going to get in on this but wish to put some advance limitation on the extent of your participation, please be sure you let me know that limit in advance (if you can).

Then when all the reviews are compiled, some lucky soul gets to type and print the whole mess. (Maybe that's something else that needs to be divided up?) I'll tell you right now, I'm not going to do the printing; I'll gladly get in on the typing of stencils, but this is something for which we need a better reproduction process than ditto. And since I see no way whereby we'll be able to afford commercial work, I guess that means we find some dumb volunteer who has a mimeo. (Another thought; we type up a few master copies and then Xerox additional as needed. This is likely to be expensive, however. Figuring four games reviewed on a page, we may be looking at up to a hundred pages. I can Xerox a hundred pages in an hour for about five dollars. Mimeo is much cheaper.)

If you want to get in on this in any capacity, write me a letter. Once I have a list of names, I'll print up Lew's proposed review outline

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and submit it for your comments. And then we can get to work. Of course this project will only prove possible if quite a few people participate.

Some points to ponder: How do we bear the costs? (There will be the costs of obtaining most of the variants to review, and the costs of printing the eventual pamphlet. And though we'll certainly sell some copies, don't count on making the best-seller lists.) Should we have cross-checking of reviews to help eliminate an individual reviewer's personal blind spots or prejudices, and guard against embarrassing error? Should we lump all versions of a single basic variant into a single review, or give each separate treatment? Should we ignore altogether variants that are generally agreed to be wretched? Should we cull out all variants that use the standard game board, and make a mass listing of all of them in one place (thus devoting only a line or two to each)?

[illegible]

OLD MATERIAL

ASSOCIATE MILLER NUMBER CUSTODIANS: I've enlisted the services of James Hymas as associate custodian for the Dominion of Canada. Associates are also needed for UK, Europe and Africa/Asia/Australasia. And eventually I'm going to have to find someone to act as my own backup in case I get run over or hit by The Bomb. I have a number of feelers out for these jobs, and will probably be able to report results next issue. (For instance, UK and Australasia jobs have been formally offered, but replies haven't arrived yet.)

REVISION OF THE MILLER NUMBERS: This subject drew a huge response, so we're now getting into a rather long article. Sit back, light your pipe and get ready.

Two specific problems in my proposed revision drew extensive comment. First was its relative complexity, and second was the matter of categories into which games will be placed.

On the first point, John Leeder writes: "(Your proposed system) uses longer and more complicated designations than the current one, so will be even less comprehensible on first glance to non-initiates. But in a hobby which thrives on esoterica, this may not be too important." Well, as we shall see as we go on, I think it is important; Elmer Hinton expands on John's point as follows: "The main problem is deciding on a system that is automatically understandable when you look at it, as opposed to a new 'code' system. On the latter, I tried developing a system directly from the Dewey Decimal, which is readily understandable to anyone who uses the library, but the problem develops where the length of a 'number' and the individual identifier are considered. 1921BFgh is somewhat simpler than 629.53XVII. I was also thinking more in terms of a universal system for all games played by mail, rather than an individual system for each type - Dip. variants, wargames, etc. (As a matter of fact 1921BFgh is more simple than XC4b(79Fv).) By the way, what's wrong with the present system, if all you want is a designator for Dip variants? Basically no system will be perfect, but then do we need a perfect system, more so than the present one at least?... (a)nd in the second half of the paragraph under "Thus our X.C.4b..." you say that only variant maniacs need use the full number; that gamemasters and players need use only the identifier for their particular game. Then of what need is the new system, since the very people at whom the simplification is directed don't need to use it? The people who you say have plenty of lists for variants in the first place don't need a new system. That is logical, isn't it?"

Comments such as those persuade me that my proposal is a little much. The whole purpose behind revising the numbers is that the old system lacks any semblance of cohesion; it's totally abstract, and thus is useful only to people with lists of all identifiers ever used. All proposals for any new system have as their foundation a 'categorization' of games into a fairly small number of groups, so that any person armed with only a small amount of knowledge can look at a Miller Number and derive at least some basic information about the game from it. Under my proposal, using the full number, one can tell four things armed only with a list of half a dozen or so 'categories' and a two or three line explanation of what the pieces of the number refer to: One can tell the number of players in the game, the category in which the game belongs, the year in which it was played postally, and by inference the relative 'size' (not necessarily to be confused with 'complexity') of the game inasmuch as it's a rule that larger games have more players than smaller games.

However, not all of this is essential information for a simple guide-post designator. People interested in an in-depth explanation of a game would do better to look at the thing themselves, or refer to a compendium of capsule analyses or reviews such as I've proposed on pp. 3-5. For purposes of what is essentially a cataloguing system, the year and category may well be sufficient. Which statement brings me to the contributions of Lew Philsipher and Dick Vedder.

Lew writes: "While writing an introductory article on Diplomacy variants I chose the following six scenario categories: expansions of the original game idea, realistic, historical, hypothetical, abstract, science fiction and fantasy. Everything fits into one of these categories, I think."

Lew doesn't explain his six categories further, and I fear I'm a bit confused on just what will fit where. (True enough, everything fits in one of them; but in which?) What is meant by 'hypothetical'? Where does it differ from either historical or fantasy (or abstract, come to that)? I've written Lew a letter on this, and in process I've defined the terms as I understand them. 'Expansions' means any variant using the confines of the original game map, even if that map is expanded internally. 'Hypothetical' refers to scenarios which use real geographical areas but which are politically invented. 'Historical' is obvious. 'Realistic' I don't understand in the context of scenario. 'Abstract' is an odd category in that very few games would come into it; I can think of only two offhand. It undoubtedly means maps not based in geography, either real or imaginative. 'Sf&f' is obvious.

My question about a mere six categories is, do we really impart as much information as we might? Lew points out that these six scenario groups are intended to be used in conjunction with the usual three format types: old board new rules, old rules new board, new board and rules. On this basis we seem to be talking about three sub-categories for each main category, or in a sense eighteen categories. (Actually, that's not strictly true inasmuch as anything using the old board would automatically fall in the 'Expansions' category.)

Developing a numbering system from this pattern, I'd think in terms of a number that might look like this: 1979CVhs4c. This would break down thus: '1979CV' as the postal game, as in Boardman numbers. 'h' as the scenario designator, using the first letter of each of Lew's six categories and substituting 'imaginative' for 'hypothetical.' (Anybody got a better synonym not beginning with a, e, h, r or s?) 'z' as the format designator, using x, y and z for old/new, new/old and new/new. '4' as the specific

game. 'c' to indicate one version of several of a single game, designated either in order of development or by random assignment down the alphabet.

But I'm not really persuaded that six categories are enough. Certainly we don't want too many - the ultimate in this is, of course, the present system, where in effect we have hundreds of categories, one for each game - but if we can find a way to break these six down a little more, into somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten to fifteen, we might impart still more information and find ourselves able to combine scenario and format into a single designator.

Along these lines I am extremely impressed with the proposal by Dick Vedder, which I will formally endorse with a few cleanups. Here's Dick.

"If the Miller Numbers are to be of any use at all, they must (a) be simple to understand, and (b) incorporate elements of game identification that can be used by the Variant Banks in a standardized format. So I'm going to...suggest the following scheme:

Example: 77Ay4.

"77A" is just the same as a Boardman number, (eliminating the century which isn't essential and which can be quickly restored if it ever is needed). 'y' refers to the general category of variant that this particular game is a member of. This letter must be in lower case so as not to be confused with the 'Boardman' part of the number. Also, I think that each of these lower case letters, for better communication of information, should be the first letter of a word which would denote each variant category:

- * a- ancient and mediaeval historical (to A.D. 1500, incl. Europe, Africa and the Middle East)
- * c- contemporary (20th Century) historical
- e- economic
- f- fantasy and sword-&-sorcery (excluding Tolkien)
- * m- modern historical (1500-1900)
- * n- New World (pre-Discovery)
- * o- Oriental
- r- regular board, new rules (incl. Black Hole)
- s- science fiction (and 'future')
- t- Tolkien
- y- Youngstown
- x- abstract (e.g. Slobbovia, Logical)

* Combined into "h-historical"

"With the exception of 'x' each letter conveys real information about the type of game being played...."

"4" identifies the specific game being played. In our example, 'y4' refers to the fourth version of the Youngstown Variant....Where applicable, the Variant Banks would be responsible for numbering different versions in their correct chronological order...."

I would favour a little revision in that list of categories, but with that understanding I find that I agree with Dick that his system is the best of those I've seen. Subject to the discussion of categories which follows, I propose we use it.

Now to my revision of categories. First, some comments from others.

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Lew Pulsipher, by way of an example of what was wrong with my categories, notes: "'Economic' as a category means nothing to me. All the games are economic (in a sense). Does this mean a system using something other than supply centers, or what?"

And John Leeder formalizes what Dick Vedder went ahead and did, and carries it a step beyond: "I think science fiction should be separate from fantasy. There must be as many space-war-type variants now as Tolkien. Fantasy should include variants based on literary works only; 'imaginary' should be a category for settings made up by the designer...You also need an 'abstract and miscellaneous' category for games like the Circle Variant... And games like Youngstown...don't really fit the historical category..."

So our problem devolves to a very simple complexity. Apparently the sentiment is for enough categories to be descriptive, and to be able to include all games ('miscellaneous' is a bad cop-out), but not so many that we lose whatever progress the system purports to make. Referring back to Dick's list, I have a grump about the breakdown of historical scenarios; I don't see much need for oriental or new world categories, and I'd prefer to combine the 'ancient' and 'modern' into one group called simply 'historical.' My reasoning here is that Dick is breaking things down a little too much; in the phrases 'ancient historical' and 'modern historical,' the stronger word or idea is the one dealing with history. Let's face it, no matter what our breakdown, it's never going to be perfect; the only 'perfect' system is to refer to each game by a full description rather than a number or code, and as Elmer Hinton says, why worry about perfection? What we're after is a useful guide, not a comprehensive analysis.

Therefore, I propose the reduction (or conversion) of Dick's categories into the following list:

- a- abstract (and, if you insist, 'miscellaneous')
- e- economic
- f- fantasy & sorcery (ex. Tolkien)
- h- historical (comb. of cats. a, c, m, n, & o)
- i- imaginative (hypothetical)
- r- regular board, new rules
- s- science fiction
- t- Tolkien

(I've eliminated the Youngstown category because I don't think it's especially useful to have a single category for what is really one game, particularly when that one game would be equally at home in another spot. I'm also open to endorsements to eliminate the Tolkien category and restore it to Fantasy.

(I'm also thinking about that 'Economic' category. Note that it's the only one that doesn't refer to scenario; rather, it's a format term. My definition of an economic game is one that uses money or equivalent as a part of the play. Most games imply it, but few actually use it.

(If we scrap Economic and Tolkien, we're down to six categories - the same number as proposed by Lew. In point of practical effect, we have devolved to simply removing Lew's "realistic" category, dividing science fiction from fantasy, and letting it go at that. So what was wrong with Lew's system in the first place, eh?)

Okay. After all of that, here's what I propose. Because Tolkien games are as numerous as they are, I suggest we keep that category. And because Economic factors are so specialized a facet, I vote we keep that too. On that basis I propose the list I've offered on Page Eight, as it stands, to be used in the system offered by Dick Vedder.

The floor is open for opposition, changes, comments, appeals, grumps, and anything else. Full endorsements will also be accepted. But will you all please let me know what you think, because the next issue of TALABWO will have the final decision and the actual recategorization. In other words, you have one month before it's all done. So write.

A couple of loose ends. Elmer Hinton's suggestion for a numbering system for all postal gaming was kind of glossed by. If this were one unified hobby encompassing all games, I might be in favour. But the mechanics of developing such a system, and then transferring it to uncountable branches and organisations dealing with other games - many of which have only peripheral, if any, contact with us - stagger the imagination. Further, most other postal gaming groups have numbers of their own in use, and with the exception of the Miller Numbers they all seem to work pretty well. I haven't yet heard any grumps about the Boardman, Origins, Phillies, or Costikyan numbers, so I assume the users are satisfied. And, to quote Cornelius Burke, "Renumbering for its own sake is a small virtue."

Those of you who are following this, please give careful thought to the categories I've listed. If you want to propose additions, subdivisions, deletions or alterations, feel free to say so. I'm not committed to my view alone. But I can't deal with the issue unless you write, so - as I closed the next-to-last paragraph - write.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to a number of people who wrote in on the revision subject, whose letters were not cited in the foregoing. Even if your comments weren't quoted, I paid much attention, I assure you, and I appreciate your trouble.

VARIANT BANK AFFILIATION: I regret that I haven't heard from Haas or Kadlecsek on this, so any comments I make here won't represent a consensus. Nevertheless, I think I know what Haas, at least, will feel about some of the points I raised - and Hartley Patterson endorses my opinion - so we may be able to close this subject with this issue (any contributions from the rest of you?).

Hartley Patterson: "I see no need for any federation or whatever. Let each VB come to bilateral agreements with others. ((Fine with me.))

"On your points:

"1. ((Let variant banks govern themselves, without other organisations involved.)) Yes.

"2. ((Have variant banks adopt a uniform classification system and have it administered by a single person.)) Yes. ONE person.

"3. ((Variant banks should be non-profit.)) Yes.

"4. ((Variant banks should exchange materials among themselves at cost or by trade.)) No. Haas won't agree to this. A new variant bank should expect to pay for copies...." ((I misworded what I meant, Hartley. I intended to say what you just did; trade one-for-one or pay at cost.))

Hartley comments also on my points 5 and 6 with information that indicates that the problems I alluded to don't apply in the case of the

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UKVB. The NGC, which administers Hartley's bank, has built-in provision to replace him if he drops out or falls dead. And Hartley informs me that copyright is automatic in the UK.

Not much more can be done on this subject until we hear from Haas and/or Kadlecsek. Oh, and Larry Dunning, you're in this too; what say?

IS OUR HOBBY DYING? George Phillies' letter on this topic last time elicited a bit of response, so let me print it without comment (this may be construed as the "Readers' Forum" section):

George Phillies: "On reconsidering what I said about the need for many gamemasters, I realize that my words had two meanings, and I do not remember which one I meant (if I saw the distinction at all). I believe it is true that computer-type services will cut appreciably into the demand for people who put out Diplomacy 'zines which include moves, limited press and very little else, especially as the price of copying things continues to fall. (I.e. present number of masters will be adequate.) As you argued, I think correctly, making it easier to put out Diplomacy magazines (or to have one magazine which handles 50 games) does not make it easier to put out a 'zine, so magazines that include a lot of Diplomacy articles (or game variants or whatever) will continue to flourish.

"Decline" is perhaps too strong a word for what will happen to the hobby. The number of ads in the General ((Avalon-Hill's magazine)), after all, has stayed about the same for many years. This is slightly due to a variation in the extent to which A-H is willing to push the ads. It is in a larger way true that the number of people interested in PBM hasn't changed much, though the number of hard-core gamers has perhaps increased. (Whether in fact the number of hard-core hobbyists has increased or not in the last ten years is a separate matter. My own opinion is that the number has not increased much; only their visibility has increased. I gather that Jim Dunnigan, based on the SPI survey/market data, agrees with me pretty much.)"

Lewis Pulsipher: "I agree with George that postal Dip won't grow much more. I suspect the extra 10,000 or so who buy the game each year will be 'fringers' who won't want to play often by post. ((Oops! Lew's phrase was "...won't often want to play...")) This, combined with the greater availability of f-t-f play, will in the end mean no more people coming in than are going out of the hobby. But many people will play by post because they prefer written secret negotiations and lots of time to think things over; that won't die. Have you noticed, by the way, that the game openings list in Diplomacy World has increased every issue since it began? I suspect this means a lack of players, not an abundance of 'zines. Beyerlein can say whether more games are being started....

John Leeder: "I do not buy George's argument that the postal hobby will disappear due to an increase in f-t-f play. Postal play is basically different from face-to-face; some people like it better; Diplomacy is one of the few strategy games which adapts really well to postal play. Also, many Dip fans don't belong to wargame clubs, either because they don't live in a large enough population centre, or because they have no interest in wargames other than Diplomacy. Also, even within the wargame clubs, other games have proliferated so much that it is still difficult to get Dip players together, due to competition for the other games. (At least that's been my experience with the local wargames club; Diplomacy was in vogue for a while, then faded as people turned to other games.)

"George's premise seems to be that postal play is a pale substitute

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for f-t-f play, and that increasing opportunities for f-t-f will lead to less need for p-b-m. I don't see that f-t-f play has increased that much; and even if it has, that does not necessarily doom the postal game."

Greg Costikyan: "If postal Diplomacy dies, that's okay - we'll just have to continue with hobby politics. It's more fun anyway."

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Once we get this damned revision of the Miller Numbers out of our hair, this magazine ought to be less boring. To fill out this number, let me make a half-assed attempt at a game openings list; remember, my trade agreements are just now beginning, so not much has come in yet.

1. Openings in MERCATOR, a rather new and large-scale variant from Britain, described in detail in the last 'Bushwacker' from Fred Davis, who says it's fast becoming the UK's favourite large variant - anyway, openings available in 'Gunniballs' (fee in UK 80p + 5p deposit; add air postage outside UK). The magazine itself is huge and will cost you a bloody fortune, so ask them to send only the game pages by air and the rest surface. Write: Ron Rayner, 32 Wentworth Avenue, West Finchley, London N3 1YL, UK.

2. 'Stormbringer' from Ken St. Andre, 2232 E. Pinchott, No. 8, Phoenix, AZ 85016, USA, has openings (at last report) in HYBOREAN DIPLOMACY, an excellent medium-sized new game based on the Conan books. The game includes a map of Hyborea, and the rules diverge from those of the standard game in three main areas: amphibious armies in lieu of fleets; garrisoned towns; and some 'whim' factors introduced by the game-master. Up to eleven players. Varied victory criteria. Fees unknown but I doubt if they're too costly. This game will be discussed in the next issue of Diplomacy World, but if you want to play you might want to sign up now as they'll probably start long before Walt's next.

3. 'Urf Duffal' from Greg Costikyan, 1675 York Ave., New York NY 10028, USA, offers openings in the quaintly-named NEAR UTTER CHAOS, EXCOMMUNICATION!, and DUDLAND - that's a lot of reviewing, so let's just say that the rules to each can be had from Greg for a stamped envelope, and the fee for playing each is one dollar plus subscription (8 issues for \$2.00). Whups, there are also openings in STAB-HAPPY. In each case the game is one for the person interested in having some fun; these are not deep, startling new games with intricate maps; I hesitate to call them 'jokes,' but that's the best word I can think of.

4. 'The Polar Night' from Åke E.B. Jonsson, Gruvvägen 26, S-98100 Kiruna, Sweden, has one opening left in a variant about which I know absolutely nothing - PERSIAN WAR. (From the waiting list printed, I'll bet he's actually got two openings....) The best I can do is tell you that the magazine is much more interested in good games than trash; the publisher does an excellent job with his efforts; and it's one of those rare 'zines that offers an unknown game I can recommend sight-unseen, merely on the editor's reputation. (Jonsson doesn't run huge, intricate games.) Fees don't appear to be expensive (a sub, for instance, costs mere postage).

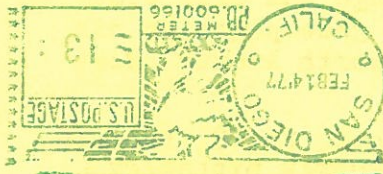
Lousy list, but it'll have to do for now. Until next issue, ADIEU....

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