

This issue is just full of New Year's Resolutions...

THE VOICE OF DOOM

#70

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by BRUX

PERSONAL GLIMPSES AT FAMOUS DIPLOMACY PLAYERS; Bruce Linsey



"First I ignored Woody's telephone vote, then I printed his letter marked not for print, then I told him he couldn't have an Ombudsman!"

The cartoon above was taken from the last issue of Just Among Friends, a superb zine which has just folded. In my opinion, JAF had in the last year become one of the finest zines in the hobby, especially because of the (sometimes biting) humor printed in the "Personal Glimpses", and I (and many others) will miss it. This issue of VD is dedicated to Al Pearson and the excellent zine he published (and, I hope, will someday publish again).

Oh...the cartoon? Well, one out of three ain't bad...

More daddy-type news: George and Jennifer Leritte are expecting their first kidlet shortly, and I understand that John Kador and his wife are gonna do the exact same thing!

The Voice of Doom is a journal of postal Diplomacy published every now and then by Bruce Linsey, 24A Quarry Drive, Albany, NY 12205. Phone (518) 459-9250. Subs are 10 issues for \$5.00. Standbys are wanted. There are no game openings, and there will be none for a long time.

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Mid-monthly issue...no games...just articles, letters, and other assorted junk!

Contract Diplomacy

by Jake Halverstadt

2

The only thing worse than the interminable wait for the latest issue of your favorite dipzine and its game results is the wait for a game opening. This is a real problem in a number of the most respected publications. Sideline subbers will be the first to tell you that reading the exploits of other players is nice, but that the play's the thing.

The average postal Dip game may last into 1908 or 1909. Thus, a lot of players may compete in a grand total of one or two games in their association with a zine. With the exception of FTF action in the occasional con, the hobbyist may never get to test his skills against players he might only read about.

This is unfortunate. Imagine the number of players who might wait a year or more to get into a game in their favorite zine. Think of the matchups of players that might never come about. John Kador might never find one of my gonzo missives in his mailbox. I'd love to see some of the game's great stabbers up against John "Hemophilic" MacFarlane. What about a game with John Pack in Germany, Kathy Byrne in Italy, Bob Osuch in France, and Woody in Austria? With Blitstein in Turkey?

We may never know the outcome of the "dream" games each of us has in mind.

How can we get more players together in more games without overloading the publishers and their space limitations?

I'd like to propose a fast, action-packed variant that helps negate the early in-built dominance of several of the Great Powers. For lack of a better name, let's call it Contract Diplomacy.

Inspired in part by the card game "Spades," each player submits with his Spring 1901 orders his prediction of the number of supply centers he believes he can hold by the end of 1904, the game's end.

This "bid" would be kept secret by the GM, though he might choose to publish either the total of all players' bids or the bids themselves, without identifying their sources.

Play of the game continues as usual until the end of 1904, when a winner is determined by a simple point system. Any player who fails to control the number of SCs he had bid receives no points. The remaining players get three points for each of the SCs he has bid for, with one point given for each additional SC taken. The player with the most points wins.

For example:

	<u>Bids</u>	<u>1904 total</u>	<u>Points</u>	
Austria	6	10	22 (wins)	Based on 1979E <u>Brutus Bulletin</u> John Michalski, GM
England	6	5	0	
France	5	3	0	
Germany	5	8	18 (second)	
Italy	4	3	0	
Russia	7	0	0	
Turkey	4	5	13 (third)	

The point differential discourages the player from making a low bid he knows he can easily beat, as surplus SCs are worth fewer points. The confident player who makes a large bid risks not filling his contract and thus getting no points at all.

As a game of Contract Diplomacy lasts only four game years, there is an emphasis on both diplomacy and rapid growth -- two sometimes contrasting principles.

Each player is forced to balance his desire to defend his home SCs with his pursuit of alien centers. The player probably cannot afford to get bogged down in the usual quagmires of the Balkans, Scandinavia or the Low Countries. To avoid this, he must negotiate quick settlements with the other Powers, enforce those settlements, and focus his energies on other targets. Time, as they say, is of the essence.

Player, spectator and pubber can benefit from the employment of Contract Dip games. The player is tested in the knowledge of both his game and the game. He must quickly assess the aims of his neighbors, and negotiate to the best advantage.

The spectator is treated to a fast-paced game with wide-open action. The press should

be spectacular. Any player, bidding wisely, could win the game. The player with the most SCs, because of a reckless bid, could lose the game. And the armchair general will find it easy to determine when new games will be available.

The pubber benefits because he knows precisely how long each game will last, enabling him to make long-range decisions on scheduling and cash flow (which, of course, makes little difference to a number of pubbers). More game starts, though, mean more game fees. The increased action should help bring in more subscribers, and help keep current subscribers happy. Half a loaf is better than none to somebody on the standby list.

If the average game does last into 1908 or 1909, Contract Dip would enable twice as many players to get involved in games over any given period of time.

The system could easily lend itself to "all-star" or "tournament" applications. Three Contract Dip games could be run simultaneously, with the two highest scorers from each game to be joined by a "wild card" player with the next best score, making a field of seven for a championship game. Thus, an invitational tournament of 21 players could be winnowed down to a champion in 19 months.

Using Contract Dip as a playoff system, contestants could get in as many as five round-robin levels in FTF action in a day and a half, leaving half a day for a traditional game for the championship.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: "Doomie of the Year" is a nice award, but it is, in the final analysis, merely a writing contest. I'd like to see some sort of tournament (not necessarily the one I have proposed above) to determine a VD champion. Participants could be chosen either by poll or by invitation.

With the 100th issue of VD looming not far over the horizon, I think that issue would be the ideal time to crown a champion, in a "Centennial Tournament," as it were. A two-tiered tournament could be begun in VD #80 or #81, and be timed to conclude in #100.

I'd be interested in reading the views of other Doomies concerning a VD playoff. I'd love to see one.

((Thanks, and five free issues, to Jake for a novel proposal. I agree with all the advantages he points out in the article, and think that Contract Diplomacy would make a good, highly playable variant. The only objection I might have is one that applies to all time-curtailed games: alliances dissolve in the last year as each player merely grabs all the dots he can.

I don't know about running such a tourney in VD, though. For one thing, I pretty much prefer to stick with regular Dip here, but even more importantly, I don't think I'll be ready to open new games by #80 or 81 -- that's less than a year away! But, I am flattered by Jake's suggestion and hope that Contract Dip will be playtested somewhere, if not here.))

The Kraziest Envelope I've received a while is from John MacFarlane (he's right, you know!):

630 Totavi
Los Alamos, N. Mex. 87544

GOD'S ULTIMATE GAMING MISTAKE
24A QUARRY RD.
ALBANY, N.Y. 12205



The Gossip Column

From Scott Hanson (12/1/82):

Dear BRUX,

I guess I'm a publisher "guilty" of double issues, and I have no qualms about it. But I'm unique -- I peg my sub fees to printing costs and postage. I tried a sub balance system, but found the book work confusing. So now I charge 55¢ an issue, and keep track of my losses -- and when I've lost more than 55¢ per subber, charge a double issue to make up for it. So in Irksome, you get what you pay for, and if you sub till I fold, it works out even.

Aah, houserules out of the MILKY WAY mess -- I personally just decide that if a proposal is a joke proposal, that NVR = no -- in fact, I do that for any proposal that seems unlikely or is before about 1905 -- anything that borders on making a game irregular. But such GM discretion isn't your style. How about something like this -- "For any proposal to pass, at least 1/2 (1/3?) of the players actually submitting orders that season must vote." It's simple and solves the problem. Or does it create a new problem I haven't thought of? If so I'm sure you'll point it out.

But Woody's protests are pretty silly -- seeing as you listed right with the proposal that NVR = yes -- it's not as if he had to dig through your houserules to find it. ((This is not correct. I didn't list the fact that NVR = yes along with the proposal, although my houserule on the subject has come up time and again and thus should be familiar to all players, including Woody.)) Your pages of HRs have nothing to do with it. In a situation where NVR = yes, I'd rule the same way -- tho in that situation, NVR would not have been yes.

I enjoyed Alex's piece on hunting -- it's big here in Minnesota too. Goose hunting is big in my hometown -- it's near a refuge that's a big stop on one of the migration routes. You've got to be a pretty good shot, tho, to get a goose that's a mile above you and flying 60 miles per hour. Deer hunting is big up north. "Jacking" here is called "shining" and is done with a spotlight. Terrible...illegal. In junior high a friend and I stole a shiner's spot and used it to shine on unsuspecting couples parking on country roads -- at least until we became interested in parking ourselves. The best way to hunt deer though is with a bow -- the deer has the advantage then -- and if you get one, you've earned it. But hunting isn't really my style -- I'm more the wine and fireplace type like Alex.

The next Irksome may be dipping into some controversy itself -- wait and see.

((I appreciate your suggestion for an improved houserule regarding game-ending votes; however, I don't think it would solve the problem. Suppose four of the MILKY WAY players had voted yes -- don't laugh, one player actually did -- and Woody still forgets to vote. I'd still be faced with the same exact argument that I have now -- did he or did he not cast a vote? And should the game end due to one player's forgetfulness regardless of how four other players voted?

I used to go out to the local lover's lane with my cousin Rob and park behind occupied cars, then suddenly turn on my headlights, high beams and all. We got some pretty interesting reactions a few times, but I won't go into them now...

Thanx for writing. I'm looking forward to the next issue of Irksome.)

From Mark Luedi (11/29/82):

Dear Bruce,

You're right, only for those who are not faint of heart, less than iron-willed constitution, and resistant to all sorts of corrosive substances. They say I'll be out of the hospital one of these days. Now that I've got three (recent) issues of VD under my belt, I feel like a capable veteran, ha ha, ready to take on anything that might be thrown at me!

The thing I think that bothers me most about the Coughlan-Martin feud is that people are starting to take sides in the fight. Start drawing a line (very heavy black magic marker will do) right through the hobby and sure enough, there'll be people on either side of the line. Unfortunately, there will be plenty of people who get the line drawn right

through them (spppplat) because they weren't wise enough to get on one side of the line or the other. Well, that isn't what I meant to write about, anyways.

Suggestion for your NVR situation. How about $NVR = \frac{1}{2}$ yes and $\frac{1}{2}$ no, and it takes one full no vote to defeat a draw/concession? That way, if more than one person forgets to vote, the thing isn't going to pass; but should just one person go NVR, it passes. I put that in my HRS, because I thought it a good compromise of the problem. No complaints yet! (Of course, it's only been about a month since the HRS were first formulated, but...) Gee, it's so much fun to be innovative! It also takes care of NVR due to NMR. I'm sure (in fact, I'm confident) that adding fractions is well within your capabilities.

Re: letters (which seems to be what VD is all about). How about including the date at the top along with who it's from? Then EVERYONE can see how old the letter is, whether it was written before/after such and such a date, and I'm sure the writers of those letters might feel as though a courtesy has been extended to them since EVERYONE will now know when the letter was written. It might also discourage suspicions and accusations that everything printed in VD is covered with mold or fungus or cobwebs.

As for a preference on whether letters should be excerpted or not; well, I've got mixed feelings. I find that both methods have their advantages. And disadvantages. At this point, I'm going to make what may be a fatal assumption: you do edit your letters, in a rather subtle and sparse (?) manner. Those letters come off whole; you don't get the feeling that something's missing. However, personally, I'd rather have somebody expunge all the extraneous, trite stuff, rather than have other people read it. Although I must admit it is sometimes interesting to read other people's extraneous and trite material. The other end of the scale, the letter column consisting almost solely of excerpts, presents a more lively column and several different views of the same subject can be presented together. Also, touchy topics can be skirted without having to scrap the letter. While the one method is long and honest; the other is shorter, perhaps more enlightening and informative to read, and more interesting. All pretty subjective and I'm sure most everybody is well aware of the differences and has their own preference. I tend to equally like/dislike both methods. (But, keep up the good work of doings things your way!)

Now, what else was I going to say? You should already have the COA for next month (this month by the time you get it?). Anyways, being a Doomie is so much fun! All my friends are so envious of me! Thank you BRUX for allowing my dreams to come true. I guess that's all for now. Count your nukies before you go to sleep tonight. Bet you won't be able to count 'em all unless you're an insomniac!

((I'd just as soon count the number of people who would like to see me nuked, judging from letters received recently!

I once turned down a suggestion similar to yours, that I date the letters I print. I've changed my mind now, as you can see. If a letter is not dated, that means the writer didn't put a date on it. That ought to answer any questions anyone has about when a letter was written.

Yes, I do edit letters. I try to leave out the parts which are totally not of public interest, and I sometimes fix up people's grammar as well. (Sorry 'bout that, John Kador!) Your suggestion for $NVR = \frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$, like Scott Hanson's, would not necessarily solve the problem. Suppose six players vote yes and Woody still forgets to veto...

There is of course room in the hobby for both types of letter column, excerpted and run-'em-as-they-come. There are many people who prefer each type.))

From Mike Ditz:

Dear BRUX,

I agree with your original ruling on MILKY WAY. If rules are not to be followed why bother having rules?

((Your reasoning is concise and correct!))

From Mark Berch (11/29/82):

Dear Bruce,

Several comments made by Coughlan in #68 deserve response.

1. "In ombudsman cases, the GM is always given the benefit of every doubt." This is absolutely untrue and I don't understand why Gary would say such a thing unless he's trying to discourage people from seeing an ombudsman. If this is his reason, that would be a shame, since an ombudsman can be of great service. Even if that were an accurate description of ombudsman Michalski's ruling in Gary's 79KG ((R3)) protest (and in my opinion it isn't), it would be a gross overgeneralization to move from one protest to his sweeping statement quoted above. I wonder if he checked with other ombudsmen before he made such a statement. Moreover, I know it's untrue because that's not my stance. In at least one such case my ruling was printed (in Passchendaele) so it's on the public record, and I did not give the GM every benefit of the doubt.

2. Gary says: "Leeder Poll results. The lateness and lack of details (such as number of voters per zine, average vote per zine) would never have occurred had Leeder kept to his previous policies of giving out the results to several zines. Here DW's troubles have closed off most information to the entire hobby whereas the same news in the hands of others, who would not have had troubles, would be out by now."

This is greatly uninformed. The results were late in 1981, late in 1980, and have been late nearly every year. In fact, Leeder probably did the calculations faster (under pressure from Rod) than he has done in the past 4 years. Moreover, the results have been available to others. I phoned Rod on approximately Sept. 22, about 7 weeks after the deadline. He knew by then that DW would be seriously late. He gave me whatever information I asked for (I didn't bother to ask for the "voters per zine" because I wasn't planning to publish that information). I asked if I were getting "special treatment". He said no, he'd give anyone who called whatever info they wanted.

That 7 weeks is not out of line with past experience and I can tell you that it is often difficult to get hold of Leeder in late summer because he travels often then.

3. Both you and Gary take cracks about charging double for double issues, with you calling it a "beastly practice". Why? If you get twice as much you can't complain about paying twice as much. It works that way with ice cream cones and dipzines. If some pubbers charge only a single price for an oversized issue, fine, I applaud and appreciate their generosity, but that doesn't make the rest of us beastly. I always charge double. My subbers can rely on getting 11-12 pages for a single. Doubles run 23-24 pages and I charge double. Take DD #25/26 or 44/45 for example. The topic simply took 23-24 pages to cover. I could have:

- a) mailed part I, then part II (#25 and #26),
- b) mailed #25 and 26 together as two separate issues, #25 and #26.
- c) called it a double, #25/26 and charged double.

If I'd done a), then my practice would not be beastly. But all I'd be doing by this is paying the USP"S" an extra 135 x 20¢ = \$27.00. Why should I throw out \$27?? I'd also have to waste at least an extra hour addressing everybody twice.

(b) would avoid these two problems. All it would do is waste space by doing a colophon twice. And most would see no difference between doing (b) and just calling it a double issue 25/26 -- it's solely a matter of how the material is stapled together.

So I do (c), and I see nothing wrong with it. If I could afford to charge a single issue rate (35¢) for a double issue, I'd have no business charging 35¢ for a single issue. Of course I lose money on the 35¢ per single issue, but the postage savings on the occasional double issue partly offsets that.

4. For the record, I agree with Gary's editing technique. If 5 writers write on 5 topics, I as a writer and reader would prefer to have it grouped by topic rather than by writer.

5. I disagree with Gary about a unanimous vote not being required to move a game, in part precisely for the reason you gave. And partly because it's an impossible mess to come up with another standard. If in a late-game situation, 1 player in 3 cannot block the move (i.e. 33% of the players), then can 2 in 7 (only 28%) in an early game?

On another topic, I see you refer to Woody's policy of accepting orders a day after the deadline if he hasn't done the adjudication as "screwy". I see nothing screwy about it. It's simply a different policy, and one that is not intrinsically better or worse than the strict GM. While I personally prefer the strict GM, a reasonable and logical case can be made that Woody's approach will produce a better game. It all depends on your values.

NMRs hurt a game. If a GM has a player's orders why hurt the game unnecessarily? The higher a value you place on avoiding-hurt-done-by-NMRs the greater the advantage is to accepting late orders which avoid NMRs. If the GM hasn't done any work on the game, what's the harm? So long as the GM makes clear his policy in this matter, players have no cause for complaint, and there is nothing screwy about this. You view a deadline, I assume, as an absolute cutoff, but many GMs do not. Many will accept late orders if there has been extraordinary mail delay, for example. Woody is hardly alone. Conrad von Metzke would accept late orders up until the time the zine was mailed provided they were postmarked before the deadline, and players liked that extra consideration. Woody's approach is every bit as valid as yours.

Finally, on the front page of VD #67, you have this debate on how quickly the games in Retaliation are being run. This is of interest to the players in R, but they've got their zines to tell them the true facts. And for the others -- who cares? I don't, and I'd be surprised if many of your non-R players care. Ditto for all this discussion in #68 about how Martin decided not to go to an ombudsman on the 81AM ((Swedish Roundabout)) game. I'm sure those in the game are all atwitter over this, but the rest of us...

((On the contrary, I view player-GM disputes as one of the most interesting topics in the hobby, whether or not they are conducted in the zine in question.

I wish you'd stop defending the way the Leeder Poll was handled this year. The original deadline was June 30. I finally got the issue with DW with the full results in late November. That's nearly a five month delay! If I were running the poll, as I've said before, complete results would be available the day following the deadline, and they'd be published in my zine as quickly as possible. While I appreciate Rod's giving out any details to those who wanted them via phone, I'm not about to blow several bucks to find out all the details. The Poll was mishandled this year, and I'm glad the arrangement will not be repeated next year.

I was wrong about double issues being a beastly practice and accepting late orders being screwy. Actually, double issues are screwy and accepting late orders is a beastly practice. I personally think that if a publisher can't afford to publish a given issue, he ought to think about increasing his sub rates. It is more fair to tell your readers that "the sub rate here is 90¢" than to say that "the sub rate is 45¢" -- and then turn around and charge them twice that amount because the issue is larger than normal. Or, you could keep a list of sub balances and charge per page. But I do agree that there is nothing really wrong with double issues; I just don't like them personally.

As for accepting late orders, I do think there is something wrong. When I tell my players that the deadline is, say, January 7, they know that the deadline is January 7 and not January 8 or 9 or 15. Woody and others who have this ~~sloppy~~ beastly policy might as well tell their players that "the deadline is January 7, but the real deadline is January 8!", or some similar nonsense. Also, I wonder how Conrad von Metzke's players felt about seeing an unused set of orders printed in the zine, superceded by a later set. What if the old orders indicated a stab of an ally? Not only is such a practice beastly, it's sloppy as well. If you're not going to have a deadline on a given day, why bother saying that you are?

Also, that would give players in some games a longer deadline than others. For instance, I generally have JUPITER adjudicated by Friday night, but rarely have QUASAR ready till Saturday afternoon.))

From Mike Mazzer (11/26/82):

8

Dear BRUX:

This is in response to your phone call of Wednesday night requesting my opinions of the "MILKY WAY Affair", based on the exchange between yourself and Woody in VD #68.

1) Shortly before the affair broke, I looked up the coordinates of the Andromeda Galaxy in my astronomy book. Afterwards, I called the Palomar Observatory and found, to my astonishment, that the coordinates hadn't even moved a fraction of an arc second. Apparently this controversy isn't as profound as you make it out to be, BRUX.

2) MOST IMPORTANT POINT: The game has not been in any way affected by the mishap of the "concession" to Turkey, therefore there should be no basis for a problem. If the game should be disrupted by either of you Bozos, then I will be extremely pissed. (And when I'm pissed, I can take Al Pearson two falls out of three. (Just kidding, Al.))

3) Woody's letter in VD I think is 90% tongue-in-cheek. Your response is an over-reaction, and Woody's response to your response (which you described over the phone) would also appear to be an overreaction. In light of the fact that the game has not been at all disrupted, further action by either of you is unwarranted.

4) I agree with Kathy's comment that 4,000,000 houserules cannot replace an ounce of common sense.

5) NVR = yes is a bad rule. NVR = no is the only alternative. It is completely unjustified to assume that a player who send in orders for a season wants anything other than for the game to continue. Any disruption caused by someone forgetting to vote yes is overwhelmingly outweighed by the problems caused by having a game end prematurely. This is not the first time this has happened, too. I refer to HERCULES and KEPLER, though nothing came of those because the outcomes were inevitable anyway. Draws should be the unanimous decision of those "present" (NMR = not present) and should pass only if everyone who sends in orders votes yes.

6) I hope that this is only a lover's quarrel by the "Romeo and Juliet of Suite 100" and that you two will soon kiss and make up.

I thought Olsen's "Pilgrim Meets the Dipimaster" was the best thing published in any zine at any time.

If I had been Blitstein, I'd have taken the win and run. Then you'd really have seen a controversy!

((That would've been neat!

As for your six points concerning the MILKY WAY dispute:

1) I think that this is a profound issue. Please don't insult my controversies like that ever again!

2) I too hope the game itself will not be affected.

3) I didn't think Woody's letter was tongue-in-cheek. I thought it was a very genuinely angry protest of my actions in the game.

4) I agree too. But common sense and houserules have different functions. Moreover, not very many people have ever accused me of possessing common sense to begin with...

5) NVR = no is not the only alternative. I have several better alternatives from various Doomies.

6) Well, it remains to be seen whether Woody and I will kiss and make up. It sure is lonely here in Suite 100!))

From Ron Brown (12/3/82):

Dear Bruce:

Just thought I'd drop you a quick note re: VD #68. Indeed no, I'm not at all angry about the way you handled the Austrian article topic. You did very well. In fact, I appreciate the way you handled it. Thanks.

Issue #68 was once again a fantastic issue. Between you, EE, and Magus, I'm amazed at the output you guys are capable of. The subscribers of your zines appreciate all the extra time and effort. I know I sure do! Keep it up!

((Ron's reaction to the business about the "Austria" article is a clear illustration of why he is so well-liked and respected throughout the hobby. People tend to think very highly of someone like Ron, who can handle criticism and not get angry about it. Some people may think I'm a busybody or a trouble maker for inquiring about the article to begin with, but my friendship with Ron is strong enough to withstand such barbs.

I also want to say that I appreciated Ron's sending along the article for my use in Supernova at a time when I needed an article on Austria.))

From Konrad Baumeister (10/29/82, excerpt):

Yo Bruce,

Isn't the hobby just a little too poll-heavy these days? I think next GMAW will have something on that... I've been voting in most of them, but no more. From now on I support only the Beyerlein Player Poll (for old time's sake) and Steve Langley in whatever venture he decides to embark upon. The proliferation of polls in the last two years has weakened the effect of all of them. And I've some very basic problems with the N.A.Zine Poll, at least the way it has been run. No fault of John Leeder's but I just don't see what good it is.

((I agree that the format of that poll could be greatly improved, and I also agree that there are far too many polls in the hobby today.))

From John Caruso:

Dear Bruce,

Long time no hear. I'm sure you've been disappointed. I just could not let last issue go by without my comments.

For your newer Dummies, I mean Doomies, Bruce takes pride in this zine being a home for controversy, "The Home of Controversy" is more properly representative. Unlike BB which Bruce attempts to emulate, VD is much different. With one or two exceptions BB never created the controversy, only accepted others and printed it. Bruce, you on the other hand, create your own controversies for the most part, even at the expense of your own players if need be, and even if it means to do so without proof or without any first hand experience whatsoever. On to specifics (How am I doing so far Bruce?). ((Very well. I'm already amused!))

Bob Arnett -- Bruce, you call him a liar. Unless something new has come up, which I doubt, this has to be over the Jane Proskin thing. The story is you, Bruce, asked Bob to put Jane on his standby list. (Proskin is a fictitious person made up by Bruce.) Shades of Bernie Oaklyn. Later, Bob along with the rest of dipdom finds out that Proskin is a fake. Bob removes Proskin off his list. Bob says he didn't know, Bruce says he did know and claims he's a liar. Mark Berch says Bruce told him that Bruce had told Bob and Kathy at the beginning. Kathy says as far as she knows, she and Bruce were the only ones to know and that, when Bob found out, he was shocked and immediately removed Proskin from his list and complained to Bruce. The gist of it is this -- the only written proof is a note Bob has from Bruce requesting he put Proskin on the list, with no reference to Proskin being a fake. Everything else was verbal. You people decide. Did The Home of Controversy make this whole thing up? Where is your proof that Bob Arnett is a liar? If you Bruce cannot prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Bob Arnett is a liar, then you yourself are a liar for unjustly calling him one. ((Don't be silly. I claim that Bob knew about Jane; he lies in denying it. There is no proof either way. That doesn't necessarily mean that I'm the liar and not him. You are of course free to believe his story rather than mine; I'm not responsible for your mistakes.))

Next Dick Martin's GMing -- how can you judge someone else's GMing without ever playing under him? On who's word are you going? ((Kathy Byrne's, Gary Coughlan's, and Bob Olsen's, not to mention certain things I have read in private letters from Dick.)) I've played under Dick. Yes, he makes mistakes (we all do), and he corrects them. Yes, he is a little sloppy and sometimes late, we all are (except for your perfect record) ((??)) just human, not machines. Dick may be a below-average GM, so are a lot of people -- I am. By what

right do you have to blast someone's GMing? Because he was taken to an ombudsman? So were you. He was at least ruled in favor of -- he stayed within the bounds of his rules. That's more than you did on at least one occasion when the ombudsman ruled against you, in favor of the player. ((You don't even have the slightest idea of what you're talking about! I don't get "taken to an ombudsman", I call one myself when I feel that a player may have a legitimate gripe. I do this out of fairness to my players, and I'm sure most of them appreciate it. Nor do I view losing an ombudsman's decision as anything to be ashamed of, let alone an indication that I have broken a rule. It's purely and simply a resolution to a questionable call.)) Should we, dipdom, attack you as a GM because you lost? Dick has said some dumb things, but he has yet to carry one of them out. And as the BNC says, you can't lodge a complaint before the illegal deed is perpetrated. You are not presenting the facts about the situation, only your biased opinion. What playing experience do you have under Dick? ((None whatsoever. But to answer your question about how a GM can be judged without playing under him, there are several ways. One is to hear from those who do play under him. I have heard from several of Dick's players. A second way is to read his houserules. I have read most of Dick's houserules, and he treats them like a joke, which in my opinion is the root of many of his problems. A third way is to read his zine generally and pick up some of his GMing philosophies. For instance, I have read in Retaliation that Dick doesn't set up the board; he just trusts his players to know what they are doing when they order their pieces. Considering that players in VD and presumably elsewhere are constantly ordering nonexistent units and switching A's for F's, etc., it is purely and simply sloppy GMing not to look at the setup when doing an adjudication. A fourth way is to follow his games. This I haven't done very carefully, in the case of Retaliation. A fifth way is to note how many people sign up for his games, and especially how many of those have experience in playing under him, and this I haven't really done either.))

Regarding Woody -- where do you get off telling him he CANNOT go to an ombudsman? He has a legitimate complaint. He is inferring, either by accident or deliberately, you left out his "no" vote. Whether it's a phone order or not, that's his right -- you obviously did not satisfy his request -- if you had or do, he will not request the services of an ombudsman. I don't care to venture on how successful he might be on a phone order appeal, but he does have a legit gripe if he cares to persue it. Are you refusing him his right of legitimate complain? Is it the players' game or the GM's game? Your ombudsman list of 4 are long-standing dipdom people, all with good reputations. But why not use the OSS list? There are over a dozen respectable people on the list, including two from your list. The OSS is a service, a list of people who have volunteered to do ombudsman work. ((Thanks, but I'll stick with the four I've got. I do think the OSS is a good service for those GMs who haven't already decided on which ombudsmen they will use, however. As for your first question in the paragraph, in VD a player does not always get an ombudsman on request. For instance, one player recently ordered "F Hol S Bel", and requested outside arbitration when I rejected it. I did not call an ombudsman on that one as my houserules specifically ban such an order. Likewise, Woody has absolutely no case -- my houserules say that I will write down and repeat what I receive over the phone, and that what I hear is final. Obviously, such a rule requires that the players trust the GM -- no problem; my players for the most part know they can trust me and those who don't should not be playing here. Or, to be more succinct - and you may quote me on this -- in this situation Woody did not get an ombudsman because he didn't have an automatic right to one under the VD houserules. I am fully aware that there are GMs who will call an ombud any time a player requests it (at least, I think there are such GMs), and this too is an acceptable policy.))

Regarding double issues -- some of us just don't have the resources to be able to lay out huge sums of money, out of our own pockets, each month. For myself, if I have to put 2 stamps on my zine, I have to charge for 2 issues. Since changing jobs last December, money is very tight. I have no comment on those who send 20 reduced pages for double issues, except that maybe they pay a lot for copying, or that their sub rates are too

low. It was suggested to me to raise W to \$1 an issue. I can't see how I can do that. What if I put out a one-stamper? I'll feel like a thief. Each pubber sets his own policy, what his fees are, whether he makes money, breaks even, or loses his shirt. I'd rather pay \$1 an issue for a double issue, for a zine filled with fun and entertainment, than to get a controversy/attack zine for free. But that's every subber's choice -- whether to get that zine or not. ((Agreed!))

Looking forward to meeting you again at New Year's Eve Con. So is Woody. I'd like to know how you are going to explain away Woody's game ending, then due to a change of mind and heart, at your own expense, you decided to continue the game. There must have been something wrong. You couldn't have restarted it on one player's challenge. But you called up the 7 players. What's the story?

((The story is as I've already told it. The game ended, and all seven players agreed to carry on, presumably because they felt it had ended prematurely. I didn't have to restart it. I did it as a favor to the players, because of the unusual and unexpected ending.

Regarding the opening part of your letter, I don't really attempt to emulate BB or any other zine, although BB would not be a bad zine to try to imitate. VD is VD, with a style all its own. Also, I don't create most of the controversy here on my own; it takes two to tangle. The MILKY WAY business, for instance, was my doing only to the extent of my strict adherence to a (possibly) poorly designed house rule; but Woody is the one who started in with all the protesting.

I've commented on the topic of double issues elsewhere, and so will add nothing more other than to agree with you that it's the pubber's choice.))

From Dick Martin (12/2/82 - 12/8/82, excerpts):

Bruce,

OK, you want controversy, you got it. Unfortunately, this is just one more example of controversy through your own ignorance. Considering that you've been a Retal subber for several years now, I'd think/hope that you were paying at least a minimal amount of attention to the things you harp on so easily now. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case.

Let's start with R7. Jack Frost, the GM, charged a \$4 game fee. I've never charged a game fee in my zeen myself, and I thought the price outrageous. But no, I let Jack do it and didn't even charge him a sub fee (if he can charge outrageous game fees, why not make him pay a sub fee?). As the game progressed, Jack proved not to be the most reliable guest GM, and I received his adjudications after mailing Retal on several occasions. Good little ~~idiot~~ pubber that I was, I ran off the results and mailed them out to the players ASAP. I never charged a penny of my "costs". To the best of my knowledge, Frost never sent adjudications to the players himself.

After 1981 ((I think)), I just took to sending out Frost's results as soon as I got them. Then he stopped sending me the results. I know that I mailed out copies of every adjudication that Frost sent me, at my own expense in time and money. As a pubber, I took it to be my responsibility to make sure that players in guest GMed games were still getting adjudications. Bob Olsen had asked me what was going on, so I didn't think the players knew. So I wrote Jack several times, inquiring as to what was going on. No reply. With Kathy Byrne's USOS getting ready to place the game, I was preparing to pick up the game and run it to conclusion (as I had when my guest GM didn't pan out in R6).

Suddenly, I'm informed by Steve Langley (after a very frustrated query by me) that Jack has been running the game himself for a few months now and it was going into Magus, so the results would get out "on time". How could I possibly be more offended? I'd gone out of my way to see that the players got their game results on time, at least the results that I knew of. I'm involved in untimely results only in a most indirect manner -- not publishing a zeen to put around them. Any real problems with regularity rest squarely on Frost.

To top it off, when I met Jack Frost in Chicago in May (six months into my "irregularity"), I asked him whether he planned to keep running R7. He replied something

to the effect of, "Yes, the adjudication is in the mail to you." At the time, the game was delayed due to the birth of Jack's twin daughters, not my publishing schedule. But I know, BRUX, the only good excuse for GMing delay is death, and even then the GM had better have a damn good reason. ((Sorry, I don't agree. Even dead GMs should do their players the courtesy of getting the games out on time. If any GM of mine delayed the game simply because he was dead, I'd kill him.)) I feel sorry for BRUX Jr. if he ever breaks a leg on a VD deadline weekend. Diplomacy is the most important thing in life, of course... Chicago was, by the way, the last I ever heard from Jack Frost except for one adjudication he sent me -- I stupidly sent it off to the players and tossed it into the next Retal. Frost would probably still be getting Retal as my "guest GM" if the game hadn't been rehoued.

I feel resentment at the transfer because I'm being blamed for its "untimeliness". As Ron points out I "was not even the GM, just the publisher". Yet the game was moved from the publisher, not the GM. At fault -- the GM. Yeah Bruce, "I'm pulling this stunt with R7" (whatever that means!) and if anybody ever again treats me like Jack Frost did with R7, I'll probably behave the same way. As far as I'm concerned, Jack Frost is as unethical a GM as Gary or Oaklyn are as publishers. ((I think that if all you have said above is true, then you have acquitted yourself adequately, and I apologize for my snide remark in response to Ron Brown's letter in VD #68. A copy of this page is going to Jack Frost, who is welcome to comment here if he wishes. I'd also be interested to hear what Steve Langley and Ron Brown have to say about this.))

Why do I ask that it not be called "R7" any more? Well, I gave it the name in the first place, and it's insulting to see me linked with a crook like Jack Frost in any way. "50¢ for costs"?! Hah!

In retrospect I came down too hard on Steve Langley. He just seemed to wander into the crossfire first, when it should have been directed at Frost. Sorry, Steve.

By the way, Ron, how many issues of Retal have "Where is R7?" written on them? You know, the ones that also have my new address (the one I got in August) on them? Do you have one or two on hand, maybe? Hey, I know you're busy, but still...

I made it a point to put out a few issues at decent intervals before I stated that I'd no longer adhere to a set schedule. Some people may not resub, that's fine with me. Then again, I have a couple of subbers paid up past issue 150. You win some, you lose some... Since my objective is 45 subbers, I still have a few more winning losses left.

I blasted DW for being something it was not supposed to be. I'm not going to trade for a quarterly zeen that comes out annually. I publish when I want to and say so. By no means is this "precisely the same thing". I've told my subbers quite honestly that I won't be on schedule any more. DW was always "at the printers". If you can't see the difference then you must be pretty thick.

That's right, Bruce, tell everybody how I'm screwing my players by delaying their games. All 10 players are really getting the shaft from me, aren't they? Particularly the ones in R2 (now in 1921 after three years of play), yep, they're really suffering. Why, they're resigning all over the place. If we want to talk about lousy GMing, I'd have to admit that your performance in BLACK HOLE was simply outstnading. How many players resigned citing your lousy GMing, four? Five? ((One.)) Oh yeah, that's right, you threw the poor novice out. And I agree totally with Tro, you should turn over your games to another, competent GM. Oh so very politely, of course. ((I would do this if and only if the players in a given game unanimously voted for it.))

On second thought perhaps we should take everything Kathy says as absolute truth. (Enough players have, and she has three Italian wins to show for it.) After all, she resigned from BLACK HOLE and not R12. ((Kathy never played in the BLACK HOLE game.)) I definitely recommend that you keep relying on second-hand "facts", I never know what you'll come up with next. Guaranteed to be a surprise!

As everybody seems to conveniently forget, I was the first person to come out against my initial protest in Swedish Roundabout, even before your "open mouth, insert foot" letter. If Gary hadn't thought that it was a Federal case and blown it way out of proportion, it would have been a non-issue a week after it began. It was as if I gave him a bucket of paint which he subsequently splashed all over his trailer -- and then screamed bloody

murder at my vandalism! I may have given him the gun, but he didn't have to shoot himself with it. What's more, I tried to take it away from him before he could do something drastic. No such luck, now I'm a full-fledged "character assassin" on an evil "vendetta" against Good Saint Gary. If he hadn't assassinated my character in EE 18, there never would have been a second protest.

Very interesting that I'm now wholly responsible for all slowdowns in Swedish Roundabout. Tell me, Bob Olsen, who originated the "delay the game to annoy Smyth, Hamlin, and Linsey" ploy? Really? Why would you do such a thing? Oh, just to be a pain, I see. If I hadn't needed more time to correspond with Smyth, I would have said "no way" to your petty scheme. But that's OK, my unintentional delay was terribly disruptive while your wholly intentional delays are fine. OK, BRUX, since it's open season on hypocrites, let's see you lay into your "Doomie of the Year". ((No way, because I entirely agree with your second-to-last sentence here. Olsen's tactic of slowing down the game to annoy the opposition was a valid one, and your baseless protests were another matter entirely. Your statement that the delay caused by you was "unintentional" is just plain false, and you know it. You specifically asked Gary to "please delay 81AM until we can find an ombudsman to rule on possible GM misconduct."))

Why don't you ask Mark Lew if you thought I was abusing him? While your at it, why don't you ask him about the Stafford/Coughlan thing? I asked him when I called for his R2 orders the other day, and was quite amused by the reply. The only "special privilege" I've asked lately is to be treated like a normal person. However, it seems that common decency is in short supply in Wichita. "Clever" remarks are just all over the place though, I guess...

Better hurry up and get all the 1982 me you can! New Year's is just around the corner and you never know how I'll turn out!

Yes, let's talk about R3, the game where not one, but two ombudsmen backed me up. That sure must be crummy GMing, even though two ombudsmen (one the BNC) ruled it a "regular" game. Just terrible. Sure, I made some mistakes, but I never claimed that I was perfect. Show me a GM that doesn't get upset when a player tries to move a game when the GM blows one supply center chart, and I'll show you a dead person. I've taken a lot of undue abuse for that game. I hear all of this talk about "players' rights", but I've never accepted the right to harass the GM as one of them. I've played in games where the GM forgot the supply center chart entirely! ((Shaddup, JUPITER!)) I lived. As a player (and I play in a lot of games), Gary's behavior in R3 was embarrassing to me, and your extra-game griping about Swedish Roundabout is right up there. I would never ask for such blatant favoritism, and never have. ((Well, it's just too damn bad if my "extra-game" griping in Swedish Roundabout caused you any embarrassment. You made a protest that was at first unspecified, and then turned out to be wholly unjustified; and I reacted. I happen to be playing in the game, remember? As for R3, I agree with you (as I said in a private letter to Gary, which you have seen) that some of his protests are groundless and that the game was not irregular. However, you yourself have admitted to me that there were delays of several weeks in that game. That alone is sloppy GMing. However, in fairness to you I must also point out that the unannounced delays have not (apparently) occurred recently. Interested readers are referred to Kathy Byrne's letter for further discussion of this.))

So Konrad had a 20-page double issue, I see no harm in that. Didn't The Chamber have a 12-page triple issue once? Of course, nobody mentions that Konrad's next GMAW was free to all subbers to make up for the double issue, do they? Of course not, Konrad and I are both purely evil. If you're so concerned with double issues, then don't sub. Nobody forces you to, you know. Likewise, nobody forces me to sub to VD if you adapt that silly policy of charging pubbers double. Then again, if you just traded, there would be no problem at all. ((Maybe not, but then there would be other problems. Like having to send all issues of my zine to pubbers who publish "whenever they feel like it". (Hyork.))

I dislike the way you've misrepresented Kathy's position to me and mine to her. Why don't you go meddle in somebody else's business for a change? ((Mainly because your business is so delightfully fascinating. Come now, come now, in this orgy of bloodletting I haven't the slightest idea of what you mean when you say I've been misrepresenting your positions. Until you're more specific, therefore, I can't answer the charge.))

It took me long enough, but I finally decided that NVR should equal no in all cases. Sure, it can drag games on due to lack of player interest, but in my experience as a GM, that has not been the case. My primary reasoning is that players don't sign up for a game by forgetting to send in the request. Since it is a willful act by the player to begin a game, it should be no different in ending it. I don't feel that players should be given the loophole of NVR = yes as it hurts the game much as no DIAS hurts the game. Subtle, but noticeable. ((I think most players would disagree with your position that no DIAS hurts a game. I don't fault you for running your own games that way, but most of the hobby has been doing it differently for years with no problem.)) With NVR = yes, you get a lot of absurd proposals. If a player is getting whipped, he is stupid if he doesn't start proposing concessions to himself every turn. A similar situation happened to me in LSD recently. Back when I had only 8 supply centers, I started to tell the GM that I thought I had an excellent shot at winning. I made the point several times over the next few game years. I vetoed every draw that came up (and I even proposed a few of them). Then, one season I forgot to vote and was stuck in a very premature two-way draw. ((Yes, yes, I see your point. As I've already said, I plan to change my houserule on the subject, although it's still your own fault that you lost the victory in that game.)) It could, just as easily, have been a concession to a 2 supply center Russia, and it still would've passed. The draw was clearly not my intent, and the GM knew it. But, since I forgot to tell him one more time, the game ended and I am stuck. With NVR = no, you can still vote for the proposal of your choice later on. I'd like to also point out that if this was a DIAS game, I stood a good chance of winning anyway -- at least two people would have been vetoing the draw, and the game would have continued. So I don't like the idea of players being punished for a momentary lapse. It makes as much sense as replacing a player for one NMR.

Then again, I can see why a GM would want to run non-DIAS, NVR = yes games. It provides for early ending games. When a GM charges a ridiculous game fee (say, \$5) and plans to send out the games with his zeen (therefore getting paid twice for the same thing), naturally he wants a high turnover. The faster he can end games, the faster he can start new games and collect more gamefees.

Take yourself, for instance. You have everybody thinking you're the tooth fairy because you cut the price of VD from 55¢ to 50¢ and make a big deal of it. A nice gesture, but really nothing more. If you're already losing \$150 per issue you send out, what's another \$5? And this gives you the right to lambaste other pubbers for trying to break even on their zeens. If you want to lose big bucks on pubbing, you have every right to do so. But to attack other pubbers for not following your lead? I guess I'm one of them. Then again, I've never charged a gamefee for any games I GM in my zeen. I dare you, Bruce, to follow my lead and do that! ((This whole paragraph is a gross distortion of my position. To set the record straight, I have never attacked other pubbers for not following my lead regarding sub prices. For another thing, I do not regard GMing as a business, and therefore I don't care whether or not I have a high turnover of games. I GM for fun, and the only reason I charge a \$3 gamefee is to defray some of my costs. I do have costs, you know. For example, when I make a GMing error, I inform all the players before correcting it. I'm sure you do the same thing in the games you're GMing, of course. What? Oh. Also, I should say that I run non-DIAS games because I think that the game is better when the players can choose which survivors participate in a draw. I don't question your right to do otherwise, but your pontifical tone in stating that other GMs do it differently for selfish reasons is entirely uncalled for.))

Who is unhappy with your GMing? Woody, obviously. Tro maybe. Me, for sure. I doubt Ed Wrobel is too thrilled. Most of the rest have resigned and left VD -- Barker, Masters, Dave White. Matt McKibbin is probably still wondering what he did wrong, and Kathy Byrne is no longer a player, so I guess she doesn't count? Sorry, Bruce, but with all these complaints about your GMing, I cannot recommend you as a GM and must tell my subbers as much. Due to the continuous nature of these complaints, I must assume that you have no desire to correct the the problems. If you don't stop messing up games like this, you may well find yourself shunned by all of dipdom except any novices you may lure in. Four million largely incomprehensible houserules and metronomic regularity do not necessarily make for a good GM as many players have discovered. ((Awright, already, let's go over this list of players you have who are supposed to be unhappy with my GMing. Woody is

upset, but over a situation entirely of his own making (he forgot to veto a concession). Tro I assume thinks I'm too strict, but he's been playing here for the last few months without complaint. I wasn't aware that you were unhappy with my GMing -- you certainly didn't express this sentiment while playing in KEPLER. I cannot speak for Ed Wrobel, other than to say that he and I have had some (in my opinion, healthy) disagreements on how strict a GM should be in his interpretations of orders. Barker left because of the BLACK HOLE Affair. Masters left because of Barker and McKibbin, and said so in a letter to Kendter, though he later changed this story. Dave White gave his reasons for resigning in VD #16, and my GMing was not one of the reasons he listed. Matt McKibbin was (correctly) thrown out of the BLACK HOLE game for deception of the GM, and he knows what he did wrong. Kathy Byrne stated in her resignation letter that she was leaving because "I can't agree with your house rules and with your ideas on the way to run a zine. Your GMing of my game was impeccable and I don't doubt that you are doing a fine job with all your games."

I'm sure if you try that you can name 10 or 12 players -- out of well over 100 I've GMed for -- that have not been happy with my GMing. And I can name literally dozens who have been very happy. However, it seems to me that the question to be asked is: why are you bringing up the BLACK HOLE Affair now, three years after the fact? While I'll be glad to debate you or anyone on the correctness of my actions in that game, it appears to me that you're merely attacking me in order to draw attention away from the criticism that has been directed toward you. The BLACK HOLE Affair is interesting and worthy of discussion, but it has nothing to do with your sloppy GMing in R3. Who was it that said that the best form of defense is attack?))

As for hunting, well, I haven't got anything against it. After all, man has displaced or eliminated many natural predators, so must fill the bill himself. However, I don't consider hunting deer with guns much of a "sport." If you want to hunt for sport, use a bow and arrow. Of give the deer guns. Now that would be sport!

((From the PS)) In a game you're GMing you print as adjudications: Austria -- A Tri-VIN; Italy -- A VEN H. Without underlines, both are assumed to succeed. You don't spot it before the next deadline. I guess this means that both players now have A Ven? How do you handle it?

Suppose that Germany orders F Den-Ska, and you mistype it as "F Den-Spa". If you don't catch the error in time, the fleet must stay in Spain -- but which coast is it on?

((Tough cookies. The first situation recently occurred in JUPITER. Since leaving both units in one province would have resulted in an impossible position, I corrected the error even though the deadline for doing so had passed.

In the second situation, normally the misplaced unit would stay where it was ordered to, if the error was not caught in time to be corrected. However, since there is no such thing as a Fleet Spain that is not on one coast or the other, and since I would have no way of determining which coast it should be placed on -- THE FLEET WOULD DISAPPEAR!

A couple of wrap-up comments. First of all, I'd like to thank you for sending me such a long letter for publication, full of juicy criticism and controversy. I enjoy printing a letter like this far more than a pat-on-the-back type letter, as this kind can produce interesting debates and discussions, some of which are healthy and valuable.

Secondly, I do hope that you (and, for that matter, John Carsuo) won't object to my departure from my traditional practice of saving my reply till the end of the letter. Your letters were so long and diverse that I felt I should reply to each point as it came up, rather than wait several pages. So, excuse the interruptions, if you will.

Third, I wish to point out to other readers that although there have been harsh words and sharp criticism between me and Dick lately, I still consider him a friend. I do not regard criticism as necessarily the act of an enemy, even if I strongly disagree with it, and I would hope that Dick feels the same way.

Fourth, if you ever criticize my GMing, BLACK HOLE is the wrong game to use as an example as it was well GMed (there was a lot of controversy, but it was not due to poor GMing). Choose instead the JUPITER game, where I've done a mediocre-to-terrible job; or the ECLIPSE game which had a postal flying dutchman. If you say I did a poor job in JUPITER, I'll concede the point and eat my humble pie, but I'll argue your criticisms of the BLACK HOLE Affair till my dying day (and it looks as though I'm destined to do so!))

From John Leeder (12/9/82):

Dear Bruce:

Is this what it's like to have time to write letters?! Of course, I'm responding to a quiz which is already over, but maybe I can add something. (I refer to your confidentiality quiz.)

1. ((On printing a letter later discovered to be intended as confidential)) There are really two situations here. (a) If it's your fault (you overlooked the writer's DNQ, typed up the letter, then discovered the DNQ), it must not be printed -- if necessary to avoid extensive repaging, white out the letter and put in a note to the readers explaining your screwup. Most people are understanding. (b) If it's the writer's fault (maybe he sent the letter, then later wrote to ask you not to print it), do your best not to print it but not to the point of inconvenience. I would never delay mailing an issue for this reason. ((The situation as originally described was your case (b).))

2. ((On the GM's brother playing under an alias)) Two issues here as well: (a) the player lives in the same house as the GM; (b) the player is a close relative of the GM. (We can assume that the brother has a different last name or an alias and/or uses a different address -- work, a P.O. Box, etc. -- otherwise the players would be aware of the situation.) (a) is not a factor if the player is gaining no advantages (e.g. the GM mails the results to the player's other address) and no houserules are violated. As to (b), the fact that the GM refuses to tell the players raises a suspicion of bad faith. I would explain this to the GM first (the fact that his game may be declared irregular) and urge him to reconsider. If he doesn't, I'd tell the players, explaining that I don't think the GM is acting in bad faith (if this is true) and suggesting that they waive their right to have the game declared irregular. If they don't -- well, the GM's been warned. Maybe he was acting out of ignorance to start with, but his continuing on this course of action after he's been told that it's not right puts him in the wrong.

3. ((On the guy who admits confidentially that he's been lying about you in your feud with him)) If the guy is lying about me, he has lost his right to confidentiality on this issue. I wouldn't quote him on other issues.

4. ((On negotiations labeled off the record)) Michalski is right. ((He said, "In a game, anything goes."))

5. ((On passing a game letter containing personal, confidential info)) Do what you like. Does France or Italy mean more to you in this situation? That's the only consideration. ((At last someone agrees with my response!))

6. ((On revealing something about a player's gaming record if it will help you in a game)) Michalski's right again. ((("In a game, anything goes."))

7. ((On passing a letter containing game info for a game in which you are playing and another which you are GMing)) Cross-game negotiating is anathema. So is a GM giving an advantage to a player in a game he's GMing. Passing the ZA information, or even hinting about it, would be a gross violation of GM ethics.

8. ((Do you publicize a GM's game openings against his wishes?)) No.

9. ((On using game info gained -- in confidence -- through an outsider)) You have innocently come into possession of the information; use it.

10. ((On the question of libelous black press)) England is being silly; ignore him. Germany and Russia can write press releases identifiable as their own work (e.g. by including tipoff words in their orders and duplicating them in their press). There's no need for the GM to do anything. But it wouldn't be wrong to publish the German and Russian disclaimers as press (leaving it up to them to establish its authenticity).

Sorry this is late -- hope it's of some use.

((Sure it is! Your opinions are highly respected throughout the hobby, and I thank you for taking the time to respond. I hope you didn't mind all the interruptions; I had to clarify the nature of each situation you were replying to so that the readers wouldn't have to go back to the original article. You and I are the only ones who answered #5 the way we did, though apparently our reasoning was different...))

From Bob Olsen (excerpts from letters of 12/5/82 and 12/7/82):

Dear BRUX,

...The "Off the Record" survey is one of the very best things you've ever published, I think. I really liked it. It's interesting to see how various people react; to find that my ideas on things are not so different from some others; to see that there are some dangerous people around; and to see that most of them seem to be you! Boy, if you ever get into a game again, you better make sure that VD #69 is suppressed! I've got an idea -- why not put that entire issue "off the record"? For the next installment, how about a question like "A big-time pubber you're in a game with once put out an entire issue of his zine filled with confessions of his excruciatingly abominable practices as a player. Do you tell the other players, or do you let this turkey get away with a bunch of stuff like in Swedish Roundabout?"

I still feel very bad about VD #68. I really feel that the criticism of Dick Martin was rather excessive and hence non-productive; since my material was the most non-productive of the lot, I feel that I owe Dick an apology. We still have rather severe disagreements on some things, but rereading those letters I find that they were rather gratuitously cruel. Guess I got a bit carried away. Unfortunately, by the time I'd come to my senses and sent you that note asking that you not run any Martin-Osuch material of mine, it was too late.

...Although I am confident that Dan Stafford's references to Gary (and, by extension, Berch and Walker) were not meant maliciously, I do think that it reflects something of a poor attitude on his part. He says he meant to "pay tribute to Mark Berch and Rod Walker (Jew and homosexual respectively)". Well, I for one find this whole attitude quite patronizing. Is it really so amazing that a Jew does this, a homosexual does that? Isn't it also amazing that a former pizza salesman could rise to fame and fortune as "The Sleaze", that an orc could edit Diplomacy by Moonlight, that a guy whose most salient characteristic is a taste for senseless controversy could put together the Novice Packet, and that, by gosh, a woman could become the game's top-rated player? Why all the labels? Dan you silly twerp (and isn't it amazing that a twerp could...), these labels are irrelevant! These are only human beings. Some are Jews. Some are tall, some are short, for all we know some could even be left-handed -- amazing that a leftie could play Dip, isn't it?

This whole thing reminds me of the patronizing attitudes toward any identifiable minority group -- "our native Americans" or some such drivel, as if it's amazing that any given human could achieve anything while laboring under someone else's preconceptions. Human beings. That's where it's at.

((I agree that Dan's attitude is patronizing and that people should not be judged on their attitudes or characteristics and that people who do so should be locked away somewhere.

OK, VD #69 is hereby declared OFF THE RECORD. It is now illegal and immoral to use it against me in any manner whatsoever!))

From Woody:

Dear Bruce:

I would like some answers as to why you printed my letter, which I had marked NOT FOR PRINT in VD #68 page 28. Why did you print this particular letter when you knew that the situation had changed weeks ago? (I noted Olsen's letter on page 11 also seemed out of date and falls into this same category.) Furthermore, I had spoken to you over the phone several times and we even laughed about the situation. Bruce I marked that letter not for print, why did you print it? I find it incredible when you have just opened a debate on whether or not such letters should be printed in certain circumstances. I would like you to produce my letter and send me a copy of it. Bruce, my copy is clearly marked not for print.

Just what were the circumstances for printing this out of date, not for print letter? You give the false impression to your readers that I am still taking you to an ombudsman. This is not true. The game is now running and I am playing in the game. I thought the situation was settled satisfactorily between you and the players in MILKY WAY. So I do not understand your reasons for printing my not for print letter. Please answer my

questions Bruce in your next issue of VD!

((I have indeed been fortunate. I have located the letter which was supposedly marked not for print, shown the original to two hobby members, and sent xeroxes to Woody and three other people. I also asked Woody to make a public retraction of his claim that I printed a not-for-print letter. He has replied to me, but that reply is not for print and he gives no indication that he will make this retraction. Therefore, I will do it myself:

I have not, in over three years of publishing, ever printed a not-for-print letter. This includes Woody's letter in VD #68, page 28. Moreover, I would only do so under the most extreme circumstances, and I do not expect those circumstance ever to arise. Any reader who wants to see a xerox of Woody's letter should send me 50¢ to cover my costs, and I'll forward a copy. It contains no request for confidentiality!

Tom Swider and Kathy Byrne have also repeated Woody's claim in their zines, so I sent them xeroxes. Kathy, being fair about the whole thing, has told me she will print a retraction, and I appreciate this. I haven't yet heard back from Tom.

Woody has made a very serious charge, spread it throughout the hobby, and I have disproven it. I don't think I'm being unreasonable to ask him for a public retraction.

As for leading people to believe that Woody still wanted an ombudsman; I still thought he did. This letter was the first indication I had that he had changed his mind on that matter.

As for printing out-of-date letters; I assume that an OK-to-print letter retains that status unless the writer notifies me otherwise. Besides, in this case, Woody gave me permission over the phone to run it when I spoke with him (actually what he told me was to "use your own judgement") and I told him I did intend to run it. Normally, if a situation has changed significantly, I'll either delete the letter or note in my reply that matters are different than they were when the letter was written. For instance, if Woody had withdrawn his request for an ombudsman, I would have stated this in my reply to his letter at the time. For another instance, see my reply to Kathy Byrne next.))

From Kathy Byrne (11/25/82):

Dear Bruce,

This isn't going to sit well with you -- but after the last letter I wrote -- I really don't care!

I was once asked to inquire on R7. I did -- I did this as the official co-director of the Orphan Service. Players at that time were distressed with Frost -- not Dick. When I wrote Frost, he tried to heap the blame on Dick, and said it won't happen again! Dick seemed shocked the results weren't being mailed out separately from Retal. Since I now know players were being charged 50¢ a turn, I fail to see how Dick is responsible. I do feel that someone should have told Dick of the move -- at least I had that much courtesy and we all know how he feels about me!

As for R12 -- I can't believe that in all good conscience Dick will stand by his statement that the game is only "4 weeks" behind schedule. At one point, like 1901, the players doubted we'd ever get to '02! I discussed this at length with Dick. Not behind his back, that's not my style. There was a huge delay of one season, more than four weeks during last summer. Dick can call me a liar all he wants -- but he and I both know the truth. He even told me, if he didn't get his act together -- he'd hand the game over to Larzelere.

In all fairness to Dick, the last three deadlines have been timely and it seems he's once again trying to be the old Dick Martin! Since I'm always one of the first to jump on someone -- I'm also one of the first to say when someone is getting their act together. Dick seems to be making a comeback, so my comments on burnout were probably off base. I just hope Dick is getting back into publishing for the right reasons.

As for Dick's observations on you holding letters for months before printing -- BRAVO. My letter in #68 was outdated by the time it was printed. Letters should be printed when written, not three months later.

As for your comments to Dan Stafford -- your comment after "rereading" sums up the

situation. If Gary didn't tell everyone to reread -- no one would have paid that much attention to it. Enough said!

As for Julie's letter -- she has my sympathy. For a long time, I did not receive any recognition although I was writing 50% of Whitestonia! It can be depressing -- but she should remember along with the good comes the bad! Sometimes I feel I was better off without the recognition.

My final comments are on Woody's letter. Woody wrote that letter while at my house -- I warned him to not get carried away & I know for a fact he clearly marked it "Not For Print". I was very surprised to see it in your zine! But I do know of another publisher who has taken to printing "Not For Print" letters -- I guess I'm wrong in believing Not For Print means just that!

((No, you're not wrong. It's a despicable act when a publisher breaks a confidence. I know of a few hobby members who have, and I don't like it.

Since this letter was written, I have sent Kathy a copy of Woody's letter, and she has agreed to retract her statement in Kathy's Korner that I printed a not-for-print letter. I appreciate her fairness in doing so, and wish Woody would be as fair.

Your comments on Gary and Dan are in my opinion correct. I also agree with your defense of Dick concerning the R7 game, though I await further comment from Frost and Ron Brown on the matter.

Dick has backed off his claim that the delays in R12 were only "four weeks", so I see no need to discuss it further.

Your claim that I hold letters for months is my opinion an unfair criticism, simply because it's not generally true. The letter of yours which was printed in #68 was about six weeks old. (The letter replied to #66, published seven weeks before #68.) There was no way I could have printed it sooner, because #67 (the only intervening issue) was very pressed for space. Six weeks is not too long to ask for, when you consider that I get a huge volume of mail and can't afford to publish a huge Gossip Column each issue. While I try to publish all material received as fast as possible, I hope that people don't get too impatient if their stuff isn't always in the very next issue. It's just not always possible. Besides, I would hope that my new policy of dating letters printed will answer anyone's questions on the subject.))

From Mark Luedi (12/3/82):

Dear BRUX,

The "Off the Record" turned into a very interesting "modern classic". A lot of those answers were pretty good. I cracked up when I saw that "(Mark has requested that I not print his response to this situation.))" the first time. I wonder if anyone will wonder about those. Of course, Bruce, you know my reasons (totally confidential!). Very interesting, very well presented, and good reading to boot.

I now remember the other comment I forgot to make in that one letter. Double issues. I don't like 'em; but it is the publisher's prerogative to put out double issues or to refrain from doing so. I hope it is something which will go the way of the dinosaur though. Thanks for being progressive (??)!

I guess there is a difference in "confidential" and "not for print"; correct? I mean, not a minor difference, but a major one. You can blab about the things referred to in the previous paragraph all you want ((the previous paragraph was omitted because it was not for print)), (though it would be my hope that you'd not make a fool out of yourself in doing so. And it is also my hope that you have some meager sense of discretion. And, I'm sure your readers will endearingly love you for printing this!!), but I wouldn't want to see them in print anywhere.

Hey, any odds for THE BIGGEST SECRET IN THE UNIVERSE ever being found out?

((Do you mean Judy Winsome's identity? Nope!
Yes, there is a major difference between "not for print" and "confidential".))

The Gossip Column will continue later this issue, believe it or not!

The Men Who "Invented" Postal Diplomacy

by Rod Walker

A short while ago, I received an announcement that a new dipzine was being published by Dave Kleiman (8315 Spyglass Drive, #1b, Indianapolis, IN 46260), called The Diplomat. I was reminded, reading his note to me, that this isn't the first time that name has been in use. There's a lot of history behind that title...but in a way it starts long before The (first Diplomat was ever published. It has to do with the fact that postal Diplomacy was "invented", not once, but three times!

The first time was in 1962, when our local face-to-face group was breaking up in San Diego. Some of us were going on to new graduate schools, others to the service, and so on. Conrad von Metzke, later editor of Costaguana, Diplomacy World, Everything, and numerous other zines, wrote several of us and suggested that we play the game by mail. He volunteered to serve as "referee"... what we'd now call Gamesmaster. The result was a short-lived postal game (it was never completed) and a sort of little letter-format newsletter which printed out all the orders. It looks quaint and old-fashioned now, with all the space names spelled out and an end statement as to which orders failed (as was done in the 1961 Rulebook). The newsletter came, in its later stages, to be called "Mongo", so we refer to that oldest of all zines as Mongo now. But after a couple of game years the whole thing fizzled out. (Anybody interested in seeing a complete copy of the zine can write me at 1273 Crest Drive, Encinitas, CA 92024, enclose \$1.00, and ask for Ruddigore 2.)

So far no Diplomat. We go now to 1963. In his science fiction fanzine for May (as I recall), Knowable #3, John Boardman suggested that Diplomacy could be played by mail. He never got seven people to agree with him and agree to play, but later on that year he started a 5-man postal game, the first postal game to be played to completion. He ran it in Graustark, which is still being published, and thus founded the mainstream of postal Diplomacy as we know it today. Of course, Graustark itself isn't postal Diplomacy as we know it today, since it remain fossilized in Boardman's past...periodically decrying long-past and imagined wrongs and carrying on about non-Diplomacy things which people don't particularly care about if they are Diplomacy players and/or know very much about history and politics. That's the price you pay, I guess, if you let the world and your hobby both pass you by.

Still no Diplomat. Ah, but now we skip to 1966. There was a local FTF group in and around Oklahoma City. It, too, broke up due to college, military service, and the like. Just as Conrad von Metzke had, Eric Just decided to keep the group "together" by playing PEM Diplomacy. Eric at the time had never heard of postal Diplomacy (which was by then up to several dozen zines and quite a few games). So he started printing a hand-lettered dittoed sheet called The Diplomat (ah, there it is!). He thus became the third person in the world (known to us) who "invented" postal Diplomacy. TD became part of the mainstream hobby in 1967 when he found us (and we found him), and continued to publish for almost a decade. After 1973 Eric's schedule was becoming very erratic, and eventually he turned TD over to me (1975). My schedule got very erratic a year later and TD folded when my postal gamezine, Erehwon, did. (By the way, it was Eric's 1969 fake of my traditional "April Fool" issue and my "revanche" fake of The Diplomat a month later which led to time-honored tradition of faking dipzines.)

So there's a new Diplomat! May it be as fondly regarded as the old one. Good luck, Dave Kleiman!

((Thanx, and three free issues to Rod for an interesting piece of hobby history. I wouldn't doubt that postal Diplomacy has been "invented" many times over by publishers who later either "found" the hobby or died out without ever knowing that there was a hobby out there. Who knows, maybe Conrad wasn't even first!

It's fascinating to have people like Rod around to remind us from time to time of the humble roots from which we sprang.))

Alex's Column is published by Alex Lord, Box 178, Hannacroix, NY 12087.

Dear Doomies,

Some of you mentioned that you enjoyed the poem I wrote last summer about the sea. Well for this issue I have another one for you. I hope you like it.

The Sacrifice

The mighty stallion gallops towards the shadowed figure charging ahead
cast by the golden sun.

Upon its gleaming back crouches a soul
entrapped by armour.

With heavy upraised arms and fierce blows
each swings

And as their swords disagree in facets
of blinding light

The mighty stallions stumble on the pebbles
beneath their sturdy hoofs

And each warrior gasps in disbelief as he falls
to the ground

Where his armour is pierced by the deadly thorns
among the blooming roses.

As their blood pours forth from their fatal wounds
deep beneath their armour

There is nothing to separate each other's hated blood
so it runs together

Forming a vein of crimson
in one petal

Of one of the beautiful red, red roses lying in the entanglement
of deadly thorns.



Picture thanks to Eric Ozog

A special thank you to Bill Highfield for giving me a year's subscription to The Modern Patriot and also to all the people who voted my column a tenth place. I was very pleased.



**News: Man
bites dog**

COUNCIL BLUFFS,
Iowa — It happened,
finally.

A man bit a dog and it
made news.

It also startled the
dog's owners, and the
dog.

Dennis Morris, 26,
of Omaha, Neb., was
charged with public in-
toxication and criminal
mischief after he wres-
tled the dog to the
ground and sank his
teeth into its neck until
the owners dragged him
off, authorities said.

The mixed-breed La-
brador-husky dog, a
mother of three, proba-
bly didn't fight back be-
cause she knew her as-
saiant, and had even
sat on his lap from time
to time, one of the own-
ers said.

According to police
reports, Morris "began
to get out of hand"
Saturday evening at the
Mark Helzer home and
Helzer told him to leave.

Later, Helzer heard
yelping in his yard and
found Morris "lying on
top of the dog, biting its
neck."

You mean there are weird people in
the world who aren't Doomies? Send this
guy a sample, BRUX!

Being in response to Alex's Column on hunting...

Hunting

by Jake Halverstadt

Hunting is a pasttime for perverts.

Hunters like to call themselves sportsmen. To me, this appellation has nothing to do with murdering living creatures.

A sportsman, the dictionary tells me, is a person who is fair, generous, a good loser and a graceful winner. Where is the connection with the man in the field?

Fair? The hunter lies in hiding, dressed in camouflage. When his prey happens by, the nimrod fills the air with hot lead. Similar actions undertaken in Hawaii on Dec. 7, 1941, have been called a sneak attack.

Generous? I have been on hunting trips when I was younger and less mature. My hunting friends were always generous with the bottle and the joint. The fruits of the kill were generally shared by all members of the party. Since that time, I have dined on deer, elk and pheasant killed by others. They generally come away with so much meat that they can't store it. Great quantities of flesh go to waste.

A good loser? The hunter who, despite all the technology and stealth at his disposal, comes away from a day in the field without a kill, will often bag a few highway signs. Or a dog, cat, cow or goat. Relieving one's frustrations is good for the life span.

A gracious winner? Tell that to the dead duck, bear or rabbit. They'll be pleased.

From time to time the sports pages of any newspaper of any size will feature a picture of a hunter and his victim. Kneeling next to a dead deer, the hunter is pulling up on an antler so the quarry faces the camera. The hunter will be smiling proudly.

Would the St. Louis Cardinals smile so after having beaten the 37th Street Panthers? Yet, this fairly accurately parallels the balance of power between man and beast in 1983. The Las Vegas bookies wouldn't touch this contest with a ten-foot pole, no less the proverbial eleven-foot Hungarian.

I could live with hunting if they evened up the point spread. You want to hunt bear? Fine. Face the bruin with a knife. Got a taste for venison? Run the deer down and stick a shiv in him. Would goose hunters be so willing if the birds were armed with air-to-surface missiles? Let's go fishing -- but watch out for the torpedo-equipped trout.

Better still, let's try the ultimate hunting season. Lay out a thousand-or-so acre battleground where hunters hunt hunters.

Supporters of hunting justify the carnage in part by claiming that they do nature a service by thinning animal populations. It spares many animals from starving, they say. It improves the breed, they claim.

But if we were to take that point of view, and thin the human population by shooting a few people, where would we be? Sure, we'd have a little more food to go around. We'd more than likely improve the breed. We'd also learn the thrill of a 50,000-volt charge, or dance at the end of a hangman's rope, or get ripped to the tits on some terribly efficient poison.

Fair is not fair, or so it would seem.

Certain Indian tribes had a great way to conduct wars. Rather than killing an enemy, they had a contest called "counting coups." A warrior got points for touching an opponent. Both sides lived to see the next sunrise.

If you must have the thrill of the hunt, do me a favor and count coups with the animal. Sneak up on the poor beast and touch him. You'll probably scare the shit out of it, and you can have a great time swapping stories with your buddies about how you freaked out an elk or something. Certainly a better story than tales of blood and guts and cries of agony.

If you must shoot an animal, please shoot it with a camera.

((Bravo! And three free issues. I agree entirely.))

From Jake Halverstadt (11/22/82):

Learned BRUX:

Well, the journalistic career is on hold for the last part of the year, and the kid is off the unemployment rolls. Picked up a part-time position at the local Target store. Target, a subsidiary of Dayton-Hudson Department Stores, is something like a clean, higher-class K-Mart.

When I lived in Ohio, I always called K-Mart the West Virginia embassy, honoring what I considered the asshole state of the nation. (And if Michael Spink is reading this, my humblest apologies.) Do you know why West Virginia is almost heaven? It's just across the river from Ohio.

Out here, I call K-Mart the Wyoming embassy.

Wyoming has got to have more dirtheads per square mile than most anywhere. I heard on the radio today that Cheyenne gets to host the MX dense-pack. If WWIII comes (check that, when WWIII comes) Cheyenne is gonna fry -- Minuteman, Atlas and now MX missile bases. I can't think of a better city to get leveled. Too bad I'm only 45 miles down the road.

BRUX, you worry too much! The line about eating testicles didn't bother me a bit -- I got as big a laugh as anybody over it. A couple of my adversaries in PEGASUS probably could substitute better words than testicles... Anyway, thanks for your call and concern.

And don't forget, all those nuts are being served up at Bruce's Bar. Any bar with a ~~stupid~~ strange name like that is looking for trouble.

Lady comes across a fellow on horseback, ridin' in from the range. She's never seen anybody dressed like him before, and has to ask, "What's that on your head?"

The fellow says, "That's my ten-gallon hat."

"What's it for?"

The range-rider says, "Well, in the summer it keeps the sun off my face, and in the winter it keeps my head warm. And I can fill it up with water for my horse."

"Well, what's that around your neck?" she asks.

"My bandanna," he replies.

"What's that for?"

"Well," says the cowpoke, "when it's windy I use this to tie my hat on. I use it during duststorms to keep the dirt outta my face. Keeps my face warm in the winter."

"And what are those on your legs?"

"Them's chaps, ma'am."

"Why..." she began.

"Keep my legs warm in the winter, in the summer they keep the cactus and sagebrush from rippin' up my legs."

"Well, what are those blue things on your feet?"

"My track shoes," says the cowboy.

"What do you wear those for?"

"So people won't mistake me for a truck driver."

Well, the greedhead owners won the NFL strike. Guess I'm gonna be Broncoed to death for the next eight weeks. I reveled in seeing them get their butts kicked by the Seattle Seageese yesterday, 17-10. If the Seagulls had a kicker, it would have been 26-10. Still not good enough. Guess it's hard to kick with webbed feet. And my Browns wimped through with a 10-7 win over the Patriots. They play the Dallas Cowpies on Turkey Day. Browns usually get up for Dallas, especially on national TV. But following a 10-7 win over New England, anything could happen.

Enough of this. I shall trudge out into the blizzard that is now obscuring my view of the Rockies, and deliver this missive into the hands of the over-paid, under-brained tacobenders that staff the Fort Collins Post Office. With luck, you'll get this by Friday.

((Look for my Cowpies to wind up in the Superbowl this year, hey?

I've traveled extensively through both Wyoming and West Virginia and consider them two of my favorite states. Never mind Michael Spink; you'd better hope Al Pearson isn't reading this! Thanks for a typically entertaining letter.))

From Pat Conlon (11/27/82):

BRUX,

I have the makings of a very good hobby exposé boiling around in my head. I was even considering printing it all up on a flyer and distributing it to one and all. But why should I go to all that trouble and expense, when you'll shoulder the burden for me? Besides, it's you I'd be writing about!

Just imagine a headline with 4-inch tall caps proclaiming "BRUX MELLOWS OUT!". Of course I have a perfectly logical supporting argument for this claim.

After reading "The Storm", issue #68, I had this odd feeling. It was as though someone had threatened to drown me, but then turned around and given me one squirt from a water pistol. Your "storm" didn't seem any more than a mild puff of air on a balmy summer's day. The only exception to this came in your reply to Woody in reference to the MILKY WAY decisions.

But therein lies the greatest possible proof that you have mellowed. For so long has BRUX Vader been feared for his strict houserules and his strict application of said houserules. But now, for possilby the first time ever, BRUX has backed down from a controversial stand regarding his houserules. Although you did acknowledge the end of the MILKY WAY game, you reversed your own decision, based entirely correctly on your own houserules, by allowing the game to continue.

But what's even more damning is that you have been considering changing that houserule in question. In VD, a person's whole game can be won or lost on the omission of one minor detail, such as a date or a signature. But VD players are forewarned by the houserules of this. Consequently, when writing orders for our respective nations, we must pay attention to detail -- just as we must in so many real life situations.

So what's the difference between a signature and a vote for a concession? None! Then why amend the NVR rule? You shouldn't! Amending that rule would set a dangerous precedent. Once softness is allowed a foothold, it will creep insidiously throughout your houserules, insinuating itself into every obscure clause until the whole moral fibre of VD falls asunder. One day signatures will no longer be required; then dating one's orders will become obsolete. At this diseases worst stages, BRUX will be reading into A Mes S Bha a valid order so as not to offend the writer of said order.

So, c'mon BRUX: stand up there and fight. You were right to end the game and don't ever let anyone say differently. And don't even tolerate a suggestion that you soften your houserules. If anyone can't stand the heat they can get the hell out! Right?

And now, before these chuckles threaten to destroy completely the legibility of my penmanship, I'll drop that topic. I suppose the above argument could be described as "pen-in-cheek" or some such rot. #68 was a mid-monthly to be proud of -- lots of entertaining material. My favorite moments came when "trick photography" made Paul Rauterberg look almost human and when Mark Berch suggested that Kador's "bitches" were "blenderized".

Oh yes, I noticed the 31 Nov. deadline. I wonder if anyone fell for that.

I have decided that there can be only one person worthy of the "Doomie of the Year" title; only one person best exemplifies the Doomie tradition. But that revelation will have to wait a few more days.

Til then...

((One person did fall for the Nov. 31 deadline, even though there weren't any games in the mid-monthly issue.

I do see your point concerning softening my houserules. Although it probably wouldn't do a great deal of harm to ease up just a bit on that particular houserule (governing NVRs), such a weakening on my part could, like a cancer, lead to further decay of my traditional strictness. Thank you for nipping a potential problem in the bud.

Apparently #68 was only the beginning of the storm, which seems to be raging full blast right now. Hope the current controversies are enough to satisfy you!))

((In case anyone's wondering, the middle paragraph of my reply was written typewriter-in-cheek; I do intend to change the NVR houserule within a couple of months.))

From Steve Langley (11/30/82):

Dear Bruce,

"The Storm", is it? Bob Olsen's con report was the best thing in the entire tempest. Let's all do it again next year. "Second Annual Toadycon" has a ring to it, doesn't it?

The controversy was fairly minimal, or it went right over my head. There were a couple of items, though.

Woody called me about how I would have ruled on the MILKY WAY fiasco. I told him I would not have finished the game on NVR if there were players who did not have moves due. It was my understanding that the vote was during a winter adjustment period. ((Yes, it was, although in this case that was no factor. I heard from all seven players during the season in question.)) I would postpone the vote for a season to allow all the players to vote. If it were the case that all players had had moves due, then I would have finished the game. I was not aware that a concession to a single dot power would cause the game to be unrateable, although, on reflection, I can readily see why it would.

Considering your houserules and the well-known fact that you follow them strictly, I don't see what difference it makes how many other GMs would have ruled differently. With my houserules, an NVR is a vote against the voter. That is, if you are part of a proposed draw and you NVR, your vote is a "no" and if you are not part of the draw (or concession) your NVR is a "yes" vote. So, by my houserules, the game would have ended. I don't have a houserule to cover the situation of moves not being due. In fact, since I don't and that is a potential problem, I think I'll make a rule to the effect that concession and draw votes will only be taken in spring or fall seasons.

I find myself somewhere between you and Woody on the importance of houserules. I see your position more easily than I see his. It is easier, from a logical point of view, to dot all of the "i"s and cross all of the "t"s. From a usage point of view, I can play under Woody. I don't know for sure, in advance, how he will rule on any given point, but I do know he will be fair and will not pull any strange interpretations on me. I take this on faith rather than by having it spelled out in great detail.

My own HRs are not nearly as comprehensive as yours. I outlined the few differences I might have from the norm. I know I did not think of everything. I may live to regret it. So far I have had no houserule problems. I have had a couple of players ask me to review the moves as their records did not match my adjudication. In each case I was able to copy (xerox) their original moves to demonstrate that my adjudication was accurate. There have been no real problems. I have not had to refer to my houserules since the start of play. I do review them occasionally, just to make sure I know what I'm about.

Woody does know the rules by which the game is being played. That he GMs without houserules may be incomprehensible to you, but actually, it is only an extension of my position. You and Woody are the extremes on the subject of houserules. I'm somewhere in the middle. It is up to the players to decide who they want to play with. So far, you have far and away the largest vote of confidence there. In fairness, Woody has been a GM for a shorter period and runs fewer games, by choice.

I should also point out that the slime stabbed me in 1981D. Not that it is pertinent to the discussion, but I still want to make the fact known to all who might be considering him as an ally.

The other controversy that concerned me was that centered around Dan Stafford. As I remember it, Stafford used the phrase "terrible rumours" in his original letter to Diplomacy by Moonlight. Why, I wonder, if Stafford is so liberal and considers homosexual to be such a neutral term did he feel the word "terrible" to be applicable? Perhaps he isn't as liberal as he thinks.

Certainly, in some parts of the world, the homosexual label is neutral, or nearly so. The American Deep South does not happen to be one of those parts. Perhaps Mr. Stafford can be excused his insensitivity and his ignorance. I certainly don't mind his calling me a hypocrite, considering the source. I don't think of him as a hypocrite. The applicable word starts with an A and is of interest to Paul Rauterberg, if Bob Olsen can be believed.

((Your assessment is way off base, in my opinion. Stafford made an innocent, harmless comment which Gary blew way out of proportion. If Stafford's remark started the feud, then just as surely Gary's overreaction made certain that the whole hobby would hear of it and that the controversy would be monumentally major.

I understand fully the position of those who say that a GM can run his games without houserules and yet make decisions that are fair. The point is, though, that it is not enough merely to be fair. I don't question whether Woody (and other GMs with the same philosophy) will be fair. Of course they will -- or at least they will try to in most cases. What I do question is the wisdom of playing in a game where the rules are not spelled out in advance, either because the GM hasn't thought them out himself, or because he has not communicated them to the players. Example (one of many dozen I could come up with that can easily arise in the course of a game): will an NMRed and dislodged unit in Woody's games be allowed to retreat, or must it go off the board? Either Woody hasn't decided on this point, or he has decided one way or the other and just hasn't let his players know. OK, you say, he can decide this when it comes up. OK, I reply, but if we accept that policy then the decision might be based on such irrelevant factors as what sort of mood he's in, what he ate for dinner that night, who the NMRing player is, and so forth. I am not saying that Woody or anyone else else would consciously make an unfair call in such a situation; I'm just saying it's better to have these policies set forth in advance.

My detractors in the hobby like to say that my houserules cause more problems than they solve; this is patently untrue. In fact, most of the cases where I've had trouble concerning houserules have arisen due to their incompleteness, not their length or strictness. Example: some people criticized my handling of the BLACK HOLE Affair, saying that my houserule banning deception of the GM wasn't specific enough. (I later amended it so that lying to the GM was specifically included in the category of "deception".) Many of Dick Martin's problems as a GM have been caused because he treats his houserules as a joke, and so on.))

From Dan Stafford (excerpts from two letters; undated and 11/26/82):

BRUX,

Let me ask you this: do you believe that I am prejudiced against Jews or gays? (Read my original comments in DBM and assume for a moment that I meant it to be taken quite literally.) Actually, I'm not even sure that that is an issue here. Suffice it to say that when my comments appeared in DBM I had a lot of respect for Mr. Coughlan. Since the last two EEs have appeared, I have virtually none left for him.

((the other letter)) Wrong again, Bruxus Breath! I was not angered in the least by your response to my letter in #68. In fact, I was quite pleased by it, especially coming from someone I expected to toe-Coughlan's-line, right or wrong. I might even become a Linsey toady (again) someday.

I agree that my original letter was ambiguous. Something Olsen said may shed some light on that. After receiving an advanced copy of my letter you ran in #68, he wrote that the whole idea of "paying tribute" to Jews, gays, or whatever group was "patronizing". Well, The Sleaze is anything but patronizing -- that's why I used somewhat vague, somewhat humorous (I thought so anyway) wording in my original letter. I used the Dippy cliché "running the hobby" to mean "disproportionately influential" and I put the word "terrible" in quotes. I hoped that the last line would give away my true feelings as I believe the hobby to be "in pretty good" shape.

It would be a shame if Coughlan dropped his sub and/or blasted you in the next EE because of your response in VD #68, but it wouldn't surprise me if he did. On the other hand, it would further discredit all his other vendettas, so perhaps I should hope he does.

Perhaps you will be more successful in mediating the Stafford/Coughlan "feud" than Olsen has been as you are not afraid to tell Gary (or anyone else) when you think he is wrong (out of fear that Coughlan will fly off the deep end again).

((Gary did cut his sub to VD, although it wasn't my response in #68 that precipitated this action. Rather, he wanted my opinions on several of the controversies in which he was involved, and I sent them to him in a letter which you have received a copy of. I agreed with him on some matters and disagreed with him on others. He promptly cancelled his VD sub. If I had to do it over again, I'd do exactly the same thing. I may have lost a good friend, but I have stood by my principles of speaking my mind. I have a lot of good friends in this hobby, but none with whom I am afraid to disagree or criticize if necessary. Those who can take it are my true friends; I know that I wouldn't break a friendship just because somebody disagrees with me. Apparently Gary feels differently. I'm not angry at him; I feel genuinely sorry for him. I was one of his best friends until he cast me away. He is alienating many of the people who really liked him (Kathy Byrne, Mark Berch, Konrad Baumeister, you, me, and probably others). And in my opinion, unless he changes his attitude toward others, he is going to drive himself right out of the hobby, and I will mourn his loss if it happens. Let's all hope he can become just a little more tolerant...))

From Bill Highfield:

Dear BRUX,

I tell you, you've NO sense of humor! I was only kidding about killing Cuomo and Moynihan. Besides, it would be too GOOD for them. I am still in shock from Cuomo's victory and I'm holding New York City residents responsible when New York self-destructs from his asinine policies!!!

What do you think about Stafford's allegations against Gary Coughlan? I think they're terrible, but alas, I'm guilty of the same label-giving. Stu Lancaster and Terry Tallman started passing crap about gays in the Navy and that I must be one. Well, my temper went through the roof!!! Of course, I did not think about it and immediately started flinging accusations back. Like I've said so many times before, "I don't hold a grudge after I get even."

Punches sounds like my kind of candidate! Is he Republican? I guess it doesn't matter that much. You know, I don't vote straight Republican. If I see a good Democratic candidate (unlikely) I'll vote for him. Take this election (please). I voted for Roy Collichio (D) for Judge because he's my father's lawyer and VERY good!! After that, it was straight Republican (mainly because I didn't know who the candidates were, so I took Republicans).

The Modern Patriot is in official mourning over the losses of the Republicans. I hope the citizens of the U.S. are happy. Our economy will remain terrible for the next two years while the Democrats deny Uncle Ronnie any possibility of success! Not to mention that the plan to double the monthly pay of an ROTC Midshipman from \$100 to \$200 will go to the toilet because the Democrats don't think we need it. Have you tried to live on \$100 a month????! It's impossible!!! Every time something GOOD starts (Reaganism), the stupid Democrats ruin it. Now you know why most ROTC Midshipmen at the University of Rochester dislike Democrats! ((Golly. Thank you for educating me!))

Wait a minute, BRUX! I'm not done ripping VD apart! About Alex. I think she's a GREAT WRITER!!! I'll wait a month and then review her again. Hey, why not? I should do it EVERY month! Then she'll REALLY like The Modern Patriot! I can be a great flatterer when I want to be. Mark Paul IS a genius at cartooning. Hey, Mark...keep it up! Wanna contribute to the zine that has been dubbed "The most right-wing" by BRUX? We all know that BRUX is never wrong. Have you ever known a teacher who was wrong? I haven't! Oh well, I've rambled on long enough. See IMP's gala half-year anniversary issue next month!! Goodbye and may Reagan guide YOU to a better and fulfilling life.

~~Yoy/~~ Reagan's truly,
Midshipman 4/c William S. Highfield
U.S. Navy R.O.T.C. (and broke)

((Sorry to disillusion you, but Alex's family are Democrats, heh heh!))

From Konrad Baumeister (12/1/82):

Dear Bruxus Magnus,

Got VD 68 in the mail the other day, and as I happen to have the old typewriter out for some papers, I figured you might as well get a letter as well, especially since I'm mentioned in at least one amusing place in the issue. (Couldn't you do better than one lousy mention in 34 pages? Gads.)

Actually, if you want to know the truth, I was hoping for more controversy than VD 68 contained...after all that buildup I thought the issue might come with blood stains on it or something. Oh well, I guess one can't print what doesn't come in...

Ron Brown bit: ouch. I doubt he's going to appreciate that. Plagiarism accusations (especially if proven true later) have a way of destroying one's reputation, and if I were Ron, and if I were guilty, I would probably not be heard from again. Seriously.

One thing is always interesting -- Gary Cufflink's little complaints/snide remarks/bitches. Lately I have been much amused by his printed letters to various and sundry zines, almost all of which say something to the effect of, "Those dimwits (or worse) Dick and Konrad, gads how I hate them, long may they rot in hell, but I don't want to take the feud into another zine, so I'll just not mention them." Well, that's very kind and thoughtful of you, Gary, but merely by that mention you have done precisely that. Can't resist a single opportunity for some little snide remark. That's southern gracious behavior for you. (Says Konrad, making the same kind of snide remark. Oh well, at least I don't pretend to be above it all.)

But no, the thing with Dick and all, while I suppose I do know a little bit about it and I have my opinions, is passé. A few questions on some gamesmastering in an ancient game and Gary's not being able to take a single light-hearted joke has blown up into things like EE 18 and 19. Besides the fact that Gary has proven nothing other than that Dick gave him the benefit of every doubt throughout the game and Gary blew every chance, one after another, he has also managed to show just how very petty he can be, given half a chance. I mean, really, Dick's letter on page 4 of EE 19 (which was not for print, by the way, but what the hell, when you're Gary Coughlan, The Memphis Drunkard, one can do these things with impunity, right?) must clearly have infuriated Gary no end. I mean, the absolute, unmitigated gall Dick must have to send something like that in... But Gary overlooks whatever he feels he wants to overlook; conveniently, these overlooked items generally tend to be in the category of things Gary can't find something to attack. In any event, I'm quite sure that Gary's subbers (and mine and Dick's, to whom Gary graciously mailed copies of his latest two issues) take the whole affair for the put-on that it is. But really, let's face it, the entire brouhaha is so insignificant and trivial that it's hardly worthy of mention. My good friend Julie Martin ('member her?) thinks that the words "tempest in a teapot" describe the situation quite well. So do I. Things worse than that happen every day -- that Gary feels his problems are so much more important than anybody else's only goes to show how self-serving this would-be hobby conscience with the over-inflated sense of self-worth really is. ((Whew! How many times did you have to inhale when you thought that one up?)) I suppose that I could dig up all sorts of interesting and controversial junk on him, but it really isn't worth the effort to discredit the nincompoop.

Hmm, as for his crack about my double issues, it's worth answering, I suppose. I figure that one issue of mine is about 10-12 pages in length, and I work out my costs, and of course my prices for subscribing, from that estimate. If I put out something of twice the size and value, then I see nothing whatsoever wrong with charging twice for it. No subscribers are being ripped off; traders have it even better, since they are not charged extra for the surplus value they receive. If you want to vary the sizes of your issues, you are certainly free to do so, but don't tell me how large my issues should be, or what my price structure should be, OK? ((Nope, sorry, I hereby decree that your next issue must be exactly $15\frac{1}{4}$ pages long and you have to charge 39¢ for it...)) I remember fairly recently how I sent out one issue completely free to all subscribers; I also recall that last year this time I was putting out 20 page issues, nonreduced, which were priced at single issue rate. But nobody ever seems to remember this kind of thing.

What is a double issue? A double issue, the way I understand it, is simply the act of putting out twice as much material as is normally published in a given time span, and charging accordingly. You yourself, despite all of your "bestly practice" rhetoric, are as "guilty" as I am in this regard; I remember a long stream of VD issues that arrived weekly, like clockwork, and of which not one was longer than 12 pages. Now, not every issue had game reports, right? So, then, you were imposing upon your subscribers four times the usual (at the time you certainly considered 12 pages a normal issue, right?) amount of stuff each month, and charging accordingly. I didn't complain about it, though at 55¢ a blow it wasn't cheap, and you didn't feel you had anything to apologize for, either, though you were, in fact, issuing quadruple issues every month. That you have since decided that you can afford to go back to the humongous issues of the past isn't my problem. Same goes for Gary: his subscription fee is hardly what I would call cheap. If he decides that he wants to give away his issues, perfectly fine by me, that's up to him. I don't tell him what to charge. I mean hell, it's only a matter of looking at it the right way. For instance, suppose I were to raise my rates to 80¢ an issue, and considered 20-24 pages an issue. Then if I put out only a 10-12 I could charge 40¢. Shit, Bruce, what's the difference? Explain it to me, because I don't see the difference.

Amusing side note: the only subber ever to complain was Jack Fleming, who bitched about it in print, in a mid-month issue he put out! That cracked me up, I laughed for half an hour straight.

It is interesting that Coughlan can complain about the double issues put out in the hobby, considering who puts them out. Berch, Martin, Baumeister, you know, scum like that. Very convenient little gripe.

I support Dan Stafford 100%; totally, completely, utterly. Maybe even more. His letter made sense; at least I thought so, considering he made exactly the same point as I'd been making for two or three weeks to various other hobby persons, off the record. Gary is no victim; hell, he's the most bigoted person involved in the whole affair!

Well, that's about all I have to say this month. I did enjoy VD 68, but frankly I miss the articles. Letter columns are all fine and dandy, but occasionally you print letters from people who don't have much to say, or seem like liner notes that came in with moves, or just plain stuff that doesn't seem worth printing. My tastes are not universally accepted as the hobby norms, however, so what I'm saying shouldn't be taken as a command or anything like that...just notes on what I think.

So, enough for me. I do have a friend, however, that wants to be heard, so I think I'll just hand over the typewriter to the Mystery Lady In Black. Blue. Pink? Naw, I like black.

((We'll get to Julie's letter in a second, hey? Ok, OK, I concede the debate on double issues from a logical standpoint. And as I've already admitted (VD #66, page 54), my old weekly issues make me equally guilty. My objection to double issues is purely an aesthetic one; when I get a zine in the mail, I like it to be a zine, not two-issues-in-one or worse. To me, each number of VD is a separate entity in which I (usually) take pride. I can still tell you without looking much of what was printed in my eighth issue, or my twenty-first, or my thirty-eighth, or whatever... And when I get to #100, I'll be able to claim that I have actually published a hundred of the little buggers. You, Martin, and Berch won't. Your logic beats mine on this matter, but my way is more beautiful and fulfilling.

Contrary to your remarks, I think Ron Brown handled himself very well and can hold his head high. He didn't try to hide anything the way Black Jack did, nor did he vilify me for bringing up the subject.

As for your remarks about Gary, I'll be sending him courtesy copies of all pages of this issue where he is mentioned, and he is free to reply in these pages. I do not agree with you that his sub rates are not cheap; at 60¢ per issue EE is a steal. But, we're each entitled to our own taste, of course.

I prefer articles to letters too, in general (notice which one I pay for) but can only print what gets sent. (Or what I can write on my own, which becomes increasingly more difficult as time passes...)))

From Julie Martin:

Bruce,

I only got three mentions in VD #68, three in EE #18, and none in EE #19. All I read was "Dick and Konrad", "Dick and Konrad"... What about "Dick and Konrad and Julie"? I just finished reading Konrad's paper here on Affirmative Action and Women -- now I want equal pay for equal work! Equal abuse! I know my player rights!

But seriously folks, I think I've been invited to respond to what little abuse I did get. OK -- re Bob Olsen's remarks about Vacation Dip: the game ended because no one -- not players, not GMS -- seemed to care very much about it. Who said Stafford resigned due to GM incompetence? Not Stafford -- not to me or Dick, he didn't. In his last set of orders, he claimed I had half of his eight units misplaced, then ordered six out of eight as I had placed them! But he didn't say why he was resigning. And I had someone to take his place in any case, but I got the impression that no one really cared about the game anyway. Since no one complained when I did end it, I had to assume my impressions were correct.

Are you the one who gave me a 1.00 in the Leeder Poll, Bob? That's pretty funny, considering that last year my rating was 9.80 -- the highest in the hobby -- although I didn't get the minimum required number of votes. So who cares anyway? That just goes to show how much the poll really means.

Anyway, why didn't you resign, Bob? Or even complain to me when the game was current, not a year later? Why don't you see if you can get the game declared irregular? At the very least, why don't you see if you can tell the true story next time you talk about me? Thanks.

Gary's comments: shows he doesn't know a thing about me, and doesn't care to find out the truth. He'd rather get drunk at a con (as he has at the three cons I've attended with him) than sit down and talk to me for a half an hour and find out that I'm not necessarily "just like Dick". He only sees what he wants to see and hears what he wants to hear. Thus he quotes me out of context. I will say one thing for him -- he gave me a good laugh with that line about how you have more right to write than I do to write anyone a letter. Evidently, Gary hasn't heard of the First Amendment. Or else, he only believes in it when it suits his purposes. More on the First Amendment in a letter to Ozog -- he doesn't seem to understand it either.

Finally, Kathy: I never meant for her to take my comments as attacks directed solely and personally at her. I don't know why she took it that way, but I'm sorry she did. She also gave me a laugh with that bit about "Dick and I go back a long ways, so I personally think Julie's comments are way out of line." Really, now. Dick and I went to high school together, Dick and I went to college together, and Dick and I married each other. But that's OK, Kathy meant no insult to me and I meant no insult to her. Case closed.

((So if you believe so strongly in the First Amendment, why did you recently tell me that I had no right to write a letter? I believe that was the basis for Gary's comment.

As for Vacation Dip -- now pay close attention because I'm about to make hobby history. I wasn't involved and don't know a thing about it, so -- and you can quote me on this -- I'm not going to open my mouth on the subject. (Yet, anyway.)

I think your remarks about Gary drinking at cons were entirely uncalled for.))

From Dave Perlmutter:

"There are times when the act of doing nothing, is the best act of all"

Danton, 1791

((("Nothing doing"

BRUX, 1982))

From Ben Schilling (11/25/82, excerpt):

Dear Bruce,

...I've got to reply to Mark Luedi's statement about nuclear weapons. I do not want to see the world destroyed, but I choose that fate every time if the other alternative is to live in a country such as the Soviet Union. I have talked to people who actually lived (as opposed to visited) in the Soviet Union. I don't think that any one of us would willingly live in such a country. Two examples: it is against the law in the Soviet Union to quit your job. It is also against the law in the Soviet Union to publish anything without the approval of the government.

((I agree with your analysis; however, I'm sending a courtesy copy of this page to the Soviet embassy, and they can reply in these pages if they so desire. I have no qualms about feuding with the Soviet Union...))

From John MacFarlane (12/3/82):

Dear Bruce,

Just a few comments regarding the last VD. Okay, I admit my goof (situation #3). When it comes to feuding, I'm uninitiated, so please excuse my ignorance. Rethinking it, I agree with you and Jim Williams: print the letter and watch the guy fry.

I have to disagree with you on the situations where you would rule that a diplomatic option has been unfairly taken away from you. I feel that if someone else can figure out how to take a diplomatic option away from you, he's probably a very good player. I only know that if I was the guy whose letter you passed, I would make sure that I'd never again play with you as a GM, and you can bet that I'd also warn others.

Regarding situation #9: it would be ironic if the Turkish player had told his friend to write you as he did, knowing full well that you'd find the way out. Then, he proceeds to order F Aeg-Gre, supported by A Bul, and watches Italy get pissed! A breakdown of the A/I alliance may soon follow, especially if there was an element of mistrust in the first place.

((There's a ploy I'll hafta try some day!

Your viewpoint on the situations where a diplomatic option is taken away is as valid as mine, of course.))

From Peter Blitstein:

OK, OK already, I know I am a novice, but that doesn't mean that I have no thoughts on this blasted hobby.

I joined the hobby because I like to play Diplomacy, and FTF games are hard to get started. I had high hopes. I thought that playing by mail would be really great, because players are more committed to the game, otherwise, why would they pay? I figured that players would play for pure enjoyment.

I found that the "elite" of the hobby (publishers, "star players", etc.) continually argue about petty, silly, ridiculous points. That pubbers make up houserules that are cumbersome and ridiculous, sometimes, it seems, only to stir up controversy.

I would also like to make a point on BRUX's HRs. It may be funny to joke about their length, but they are much too long, and some are stupid (e.g. NVR = yes).

To conclude, this hobby has not lived up to my fullest expectations. If the pubbers would like this hobby to continue growing, they should think about these comments.

((I have never accepted as valid the argument that my houserules are too long; you've gotta let me know which ones should be deleted before I can debate the issue.

It is true that many of us publishers enjoy petty, ridiculous debates, and our zines reflect this. Those players who would rather not be exposed to this side of the hobby might be better off playing in zines such as St. George or Cheesecake, which are devoted almost totally to just running the games. Thanks for writing, and I hope your enjoyment of the hobby increases.))

From Peter Ashley (excerpts from 12/6/82 and 12/17/82):

Dear Bruce,

...In your questions to the readers ((Off the Record)) I think this is a great idea with some good viewpoints aired. My only complaint was having to slug through each and every opinion made boring reading. Though I can see the risk involved, I think it would have helped if the comments had been edited, but knowing this hobby you might just be inviting a feud by doing so.

I strongly dislike NVR = yes on concessions. While it is justified as in the player's wishes and a clear rule, it is the one rule that often mucks up game results other than what the players want. One bad move on the game board may indeed prevent a win against another good player, but no other move can wipe out what is potentially years of effort. And with nuisance concession votes, why wouldn't NVR = no, which is appropriate within the context of the game? And finally, this is no isolated instance of a concession vote slipping through on NVRs. I've been in two in the last two years, and though the results weren't as foreign to the game results as MILKY WAY's was, they were still different from the game's trend.

But you were right not to allow any other result in MILKY WAY above in light of your rules. That's what they are there for. Arnawoodian's GMing could really be chaos in the hands of the less-than-bright or unscrupulous GM.

((I assume you mean his stance of running games practically without house rules. I'm sorry that you found the Off the Record replies boring. I agree that they were very long and drawn out, and I figured that some readers would lose interest half way through. But I personally enjoyed reading and typing them. Thanx for writing.))

From Mark Berch:

Dear Bruce,

Surely your "Off the Record!" piece will be a classic. I've occasionally come across ethics discussions in reading through old dipzines, but I've never seen one with 20 (or even 10) contributors. Moreover, nearly all of them dealt with game-playing ethics, a subject which many consider to be somewhat fatuous or even nonexistent.

On further thought, I've come up with a solution to #2 -- the one where the friend tells you, off the record, that his brother is playing in a game where he himself GMs. Having failed to persuade either the GM or the brother to reveal the truth, I'd tell him that I feel obligated to inform the BNC, to act in the interests of the other players. I'd even include a copy of the letter to the BNC, which letter probably would have no mention of the HR (though it might). However, I would not send the letter to the BNC. I'd be careful, in fact, to only imply that I was sending the letter. Surely he will write the BNC to defend himself. In short, if I can't persuade him to make this public, perhaps I can trick him.

I was rather horrified by the large number of people, yourself included, who are willing to say that the ends justify the means in situation #3 (this was the one where someone with whom you have been feuding admits that he has lied about you -- off the record). An important principle gets set aside for very temporary, if not illusory, benefit. Is this person, who has lied about you, even worth violating the principle for? Furthermore, I really wonder if you, or those otherwise sensible people who agree with you, ever have wondered why the letter was written in the first place. At any rate, I've also enclosed a bit of fiction for you that makes my point. And I think that Olsen makes a very good point in his answer.

((Your article will either be in this issue or next. With all the real feuds going around these days, didja really have to start a fake one??

Your solution to the problem of the GM's brother was interesting, but I still don't think it's necessary to spill any beans in this case.))

The following letter from Bill Highfield was written as the first installment of a column to be run in VD. While I really enjoy Bill's material and hope he will continue to contribute to this zine, I cannot take on any subzines or columns other than Alex's. Hope this is OK with you, Bill; anybody who's anybody in Dipdom reads the Gossip Column anyway. (So much for my traditional modesty!)

From Bill Highfield:

Hello, everyone! Welcome to my column in VD. This is a radical response to Alex's Column which is also in this average zine (we know that The Modern Patriot is better so why kid ourselves). The way I see it, Alex doesn't have any competition at all (she's the only lunatic in this zine; Bruce is just weird) so I aim to give her some. You'll see awful soon that if you're a Reaganite, you can certainly take advantage of me. I even gave Alex a one-year sub to The Modern Patriot (she hides her right-wing fanaticism well, doesn't she?!!)

This month's topic is: why do postal players always get creamed in telephone Diplomacy games? The answer is simple. They (the part-time players) know we're better. They equate POSTAL PLAYER with PERFECT PLAYER. In some cases this is true (i.e. ME) but in most cases it is false (i.e. Porter Wightman, Don Sigwalt, John Banke (couldn't resist it, John)). As everyone knows I'm the only perfect player in the hobby -- I've gone 10 for 10; ten losses out of ten games. The best a postal player has done in Rochester is a 4-way draw. (I managed a third place.) I'm trying to get one game with all postal players in it. That way at least I'll get creamed by a good player and not three surrounding novices!

Our next topic is: why is Bruce a lunatic crazy weirdo? That answer is also easy, he's a teacher. I saw an old teacher of mine from GRAMMAR school (that was five years ago I went to grammar school; not last week) exiting a porno theater the other day. They're just dying for some action.

Our third topic is: yup, you guessed it, POLITICS! How many subbers of VD from New York State think that New York City should be separated from New York State? Send me your votes. Who needs that sewer anyway? I don't! I can't stand it when one city elects the governor and the other 90% of the state just watches. Comrade Cuomo won only 7 out of 62 counties and he won the election???!!! UNBELIEVABLE!!! LEW LEHRMAN for GOVERNOR of NYS! To HELL with Commie Comrade Cuomo!!!! OK Bill, calm down, calm down, hmmmmmm, hmmmmmm. There! Yoga breathing keeps me calm and sane when I need it. Anyway, that's about it. Until next time, Doomies...STAY THE COURSE!

((Kind of like old John Kelley of a year or two ago, isn't he?

I too would like to see New York City along with the counties of Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester and Rockland separated from the rest of the state, as I don't think that their politics and economics match ours here upstate. New York really is a nice state, and the average citizen really isn't all that bad, once you go north of the City by 50 miles or so (but you also have to stay out of Troy) (no offense intended to my NYC readers).

Yeah, teachers are a perverted lot, but I personally was a crazy, perverted lunatic long before I ever entered the profession, so that doesn't answer your second question. I think I was just born weird -- or else it was that hammer that fell on my head once and cause permanent brain damage -- see the front page of VD #58 to find out what I'm talking about.))

From John Michalski (12/2/82):

Hi BRUX,

Decent issue again; thanks for putting mine first. Then it can be forgotten by the time they read those other epic/foolish/etc. responses. Too bad Gibson didn't get the questions; some of the answers sounded like him. ("A True Blue would never pass a letter"...)

While we're on the subject, do me a favor and send Dave Carter (Sleepless Knights) a post card telling him that F Mar can support F Gas-Spa(nc) and F Bot can support F StP(nc)

to hold. I wrote, but I'll seem less of a picky bastard if others agree. He is confusing coasts with provinces, it seems.

Originally, I meant to write a letter regarding Alex's hunting column, but I'm so lazy these days that I haven't got to it yet. The blast at Woody does provoke pen into hand, though. I think "deception of the GM" is too harsh. If Woody forgot what he said on the phone, it is abuse of the GM at worst, and possibly just confusion or knuckleheadedness. If he knows he OKed your actions, he is calling you a liar in public; nasty form and all that, but not deception. I can't see how lying about you can be construed as a lie to you, other than in the most technical sense of saying "no-I-didn't" to your "yes-you-did". I think you would look better to battle him on the abusing-the-GM side than to persue "deception of the GM". I called Woody re his Ravioli game I'm playing in the other day, and he mentioned this issue ("attack") strongly...Do you think anyone will believe Woody could ever be confused or knuckleheaded? Has Kathy ever stabbed anyone?

Past my bedtime -- it's dark.

((You're right about the support ruling, and Dave Carter has told me he's already discovered his error.

Provided Woody doesn't continue to make claims that his phone orders (or votes or whatever) are other than they actually were, I have decided not to persue the "deception" matter. See the MILKY WAY game notes for further comment, when they are published.))

From Kevin Stone (12/11/82):

Dear BRUX,

I've only been a Doomie for two days and I've already got a bitch. How am I supposed to study for finals when you send me 122 pages (#s 66, 68, and 69) of VD to read? Not to mention a triple issue of Diplomacy Digest! I talked with my mother last night and she asked how my tests looked. I told her I was DOOMed.

Have you ever heard of my hometown, Big Flats, New York? It is between Elmira and Corning on Route 17. It's about 4½ hours from New York City. Hopefully I'll be able to get out that way for a Byrnecon this summer. I can't make it for the New Year's Eve bash because I'll be tied up with my girlfriend. (You can interpret that any way you want.)

I have thought of a possible solution for the Coughlan-Berch controversy over the Leeder Poll and whether EE should or should not be ranked #1. If another voting category was added called "Best Single Issue", fakes would have a place to be rated without getting mixed in with the "Best Zine" and "Best Subzine" voting. Obviously, this wouldn't work in a poll like Leeder's with everything being rated, but would work in the Marco Poll. What do you think?

Getting back to VD, I really enjoyed #66. Especially John MacFarlane's Ten Commandments and Alex's Column. How old is she?

Before I close, I was wondering -- does living in Albany make you an Albanian? Merry Christmas if you are a Christian, Season's Greetings if you're not.

((Thanks! I'm left-handed, Jewish, and weird; but I'll glad settle for a Merry Christmas any time!

Alex is 15.

Nope, I've never heard of Big Flats before. Did they name it after some girl or something? Your part of the state is kind of remote from me.

I like Larzelere's current procedure of having categories for best zine and best subzine, although there could also be a category for fakes. And, these categories could easily be separated in the Leeder Poll too, though it was only this year that the results really came out so absurd.

As for studying for finals; forget it. Reading VD is much more essential to your education.))

Larzelence (excerpts):

35

Dear BRUX,

...I think you've discarded my argument for NVR = no a bit too quickly. You say that failing to order a unit can also cost a player a game. But how about an example of how this might happen? Failing to order a unit cannot cause a concession to a minor power to pass. It also cannot (in itself) cause a draw among powers not including yourself to pass. It could weaken your position so that the other side might be able to force you out of a draw or win with their orders -- but you will not be immediately removed from the decision, as you are when a draw or concession passes. You will still have the opportunity to use your negotiating skills to get back into the draw or win.

How about if I name my cat BRUX? Sorry, but I'm not going to go out and get some girl pregnant just so we can name the kid BRUX. I mean, that's a lot of trouble to go through just to get three free issues.

((OK, we'll make it four, then. Now you have no excuse not to.

I am glad to provide the example you asked for. Austria, Italy, and Turkey have just managed to throw up a stalemate line against a 17-center Germany when in Fall 1909...

AUSTRIA: A TYO H, A VIE H, A BUD S A Vie

GERMANY: F MID-Spa(sc), A GAS S F Mid-Spa(sc), F BRE-Mid, F ENG S F Bre-Mid,
F IRI S F Bre-Mid, F NAT S F Bre-Mid, A BUR-Mar, A MUN-Tyo, A BOH S A Mun-Tyo,
A RUH H, A KIE H, A BER H, A SIL H, A WAR H, A Gal-RUM, A UKR S A Gal-Rum,
F SEV S A Gal-Rum

ITALY: F POR S F Spa(sc), F SPA(sc) H, F WES H, A NAF H, A MAR H, F LYO S A Mar,
A PIE S AUSTRIAN A Tyo

TURKEY: A Rum H (d; r Ser, OTB), A BUL S A Rum, A ARM H, F Bal S A Rum (NSU), F BLA U

The failure to order F Bla properly has cost Turkey (and his allies) part of a four-way draw, and given the win immediately to Germany. A harsh penalty for a single misorder? Yes, but mistakes such as misordered or unordered units can be fatal. Just as mistakes such as a failure to say the right words when negotiating can be fatal. Just as mistakes such as failing to vote down a concession can be fatal. I rest my case.))

From Jeff Noto (12/2/82):

Dear BRUX,

Thanks for mentioning about the baby in VD #69. Incidentally, the baby is due in July, not April. Also, I think it was Craig's wife who gave birth to the boy, not Craig himself.

Excellent response to "Off the Record". I loved Osuch's answer to #5 the best. (("Do what Linsey would do, forge the middle paragraph.")) As for my response to situation #3, let me give another example. Your best defense against Woody is the response of your players. If they don't speak out against you, he really hasn't proved his point.

Speaking of which, I find this feud almost unbelievable. In the final analysis, Woody doesn't have a leg to stand on. It's your word against his. However, I also cannot see how you can claim that Woody is deceiving you. He honestly believes that he did submit ((veto, you mean)) the concession over the phone and that he labeled the letter DNQ. If anyone is being "deceived", it's the subbers who don't know who to believe. I honestly believe that the two of you have turned this who incident of failing to veto the concession into a mock feud. That's right, I think this whole thing is a hoax.

((No, we weren't hoaxing you. I agree that matters were mostly my word against his until I dug up his original letter. I shudder to think how many hobbyists might have really believed that I would print a not-for-print letter if I hadn't found it, though, just because Woody said it was true... (Though I know my word is enough for most Doomies.)

I'll have to ask Craig whether it was he or his wife who gave birth.

In my opinion, Garry Hamlin's page-plus essay in response to situation #5 was the best part of the Off the Record survey.))

From Nelson Heintzman (11/26/82):

36

Dear Bruce Linsey:

I was surprised but pleased to see my short note to you in print. Ego gratification, I suppose. Sorry my letter wasn't controversial, but perhaps my simple expression of appreciation provided for a pleasant interlude amid the fury of all those storms.

I would like to address myself to one issue, however, which I feel has broad implications for the GMing ethics of the hobby and which directly affects all players -- seasoned veterans and newcomers alike. I am referring to the MILKY WAY dispute. The essence of the matter seems to be that because you went strictly by the book and followed your houserules to the letter, a game ended in an absurdly premature manner. I would like to make the following observations:

(1) It is the responsibility of all players to familiarize themselves with the house-rules of the zine they are in. (Speaking of which, I don't have a copy of yours. Since I am a standby, it might be useful for me to have a copy.) Whether or not a player likes a specific rule, once entered in a game, that player has also entered into a tacit agreement to abide by those rules. In the MILKY WAY case, no one is agruing that your rule was ambiguous -- not even your most vituperative critic. Your houserule was clear from the start.

(2) As GM, you went by the book and the game followed your houserule. The players' failure to veto caused the concession in strict accordance with that rule. How can your GMing be faulted? To me, the situation seems cut and dried. If you had arbitrarily altered your houserules in the middle of a game, thus setting a dangerous precedent, THAT would have been a cause for concern for veterans and newcomers and an occasion for questioning GMing ethics.

(3) However, since your correctly implimented houserule resulted in a perfectly ridiculous situation (and not for the first time, either, apparently), a need for reappraisal and reform seems to have arisen. And, reassuringly enough, it seems that you do intend to remedy the situation by making some modifications to your rule.

From the vantage point of a relative newcomer to the hobby, my impression, hopefully somewhat bipartisan and impartial, is that you have taken the only proper course available. Once a game is in progress, its structure (i.e. houserules) should not be tampered with; however, at the proper time, reform can be instituted. This you are doing. So what's the problem?

As an afterthought, what was your policy -- in such an obviously inappropriate occurrence -- concerning holding a revote? Not as you subsequently did it, but where the first game would continue on as if it had never ended (without a first game winner).

((Actually, I consider this to be what did happen. Turkey won, technically, but we are all proceeding as though the game never ended. But if you mean to address the issue of whether I would hold a revote before announcing the result; no, I do not have any provision for doing so.

I must compliment you on this letter generally; for a rank novice, you seem to have a lot of insight into the nature of this problem in particular and the workings of the hobby in general. You have summarized the situation better than anyone else has, in my opinion.

There is only one point where I disagree with you: there is a provision for amending the VD houserules, and this can occur during the middle of a game. However, there is also a provision by which the players here can reject such a proposed amendment. By now you should have my houserules (and therefore, a hernia).

You ask what is the problem. A quick bit of hobby history for you and other newcomers. I've been GMing very strictly for over three years, and this style has a lot of opposition throughout the hobby (see Dick Martin's letter, e.g.). Some people like Mark Berch and Peter Ansoff disagree with my strict GMing, but realize that it's a valid way of doing things and I usually get along well with these folks. Others who don't know better vilify me for it, and refer to it as bad GMing or unethical GMing. These people I regard as simply intolerant, and I often don't get along so well with them. My policy has enough support throughout the hobby to keep VD going, and that's my main concern.))

From Chuff Afflerbach (12/13/82):

Hey Bruce,

How many New Yorkers does it take to screw in a light bulb? One, asshole.

How many Texans does it take to screw in a light bulb? At least half a dozen -- one to change it, and the rest to sit around, drink beer, and talk about what a good old bulb it was.

Stop me if you've heard those.

Remember once, I made an idle boast about maintaining a sub to VD solely through the contribution of articles? Well, it's about that time again. And as you can see from the attached pages, I've been inspired at last. And just in time, eh?

It's true what I say in the article about barely scratching the surface of possibilities. For example, I never even touched upon Relativity and its relevance to Diplomacy deadlines. Picture, if you will, one of your players being called away suddenly on a light-speed jaunt to Alpha Centauri. Eight years later he calls you up with his orders...

((That would be a tough one! Maybe I should write a houserule to cover space (and time) travelers.))

From Cathy Cunning:

Dear Jealous,

After I managed to stop laughing from reading your note, I thought -- "Poor little BRUXie, he wants a letter from me. He gets letters from all kinds of Doomies and he still wants one from me." Very greedy, aren't you? So I thought, well, if I can waste my time by writing to Tallman, then I can waste my time by writing to BRUXie baby.

Tell me, Jealous, just who exactly are the Pretenders? I always thought that was a rock and roll group. You are my only "true admirer"? I knew there was some reason why I couldn't stop from laughing. As for meeting me, I'm afraid you'll just have to go at the end of the list with Tallman and Woody Teddy Bear. I'm sure you'll like it the best there anyways. There are others at the top of my list -- the ones I dream about at night -- no, Bruce, I said you were at the end of this list!

Anyways, I was going to write you about your letter policy. I am one of the types that strongly supports an editor's right to edit letters. Most editors have the responsibility to know what to publish and what is just simply personal messages between the subber and the editor. I support Gary in the manner he does his letter column. Now I'm also the first to admit that some editors could take advantage of a subber. If this is intentional then I can only feel sorry for the editor, but I have faith in most of the editors who use this policy, and I know that they would never intentionally print anything to harm me.

By the way, I also support your efforts to increase your European trades. ((Mutual subs, you mean. VD isn't traded for any publications.)) Just wait till the British hobby sees your letter column! They will decide that we are either crazy or rich or both over here.

Speaking of being crazy, I mentioned your houserules to my English cutie Peter Northcott of Last Stand fame. (Oh, so he's $3\frac{1}{2}$ years younger than me, but what's $3\frac{1}{2}$ years? -- so he says.) That sent him into shock -- his 4 sides houserules are the longest in Britain! So when you send a copy of Voice over there, add your houserules as well. They think we're crazy because of the current EE issues, just wait till they hear from you and they'll be certain that we're all "bloody looney".

What else -- oh, thanks for the package of zines. I love your packaging -- a garbage bag, very classy. I also loved all the little notes to you on the zines -- like "Dear BRUX, Boy are you a jerk." Actually, no one wrote that, but you get the idea. It was very interesting reading them anyways.

Well Jealous, are you happy now? Or do you want to try to sweet talk me for another letter? Yes, that would be good for another laugh.

((I'll have to wait for my bruised ego to recover!

So far, no response from Europe although I sent over about eight samples...))

From Randolph Smyth (12/9/82):

Bruce:

I was rather surprised at the level of response to your "Off the Record" questions in the latest VD. Only the first few questions seemed to generate much interesting divergence of opinion, though; the answers to the final ones were rather obvious and thus unanimous.

Normally, this is the sort of survey that I respond to, and I apologize for not finding the time to contribute to this one. However, as some of your respondents implied, a lot of the situations were so contrived that a conscientious publisher would never be faced with them in the first place. It's not so much a study of "off the record" problems as an illustration of the kind of dilemmas caused by any kind of thoughtlessness or discourtesy. How do you extricate yourself gracefully from an unforgivable faux pas?

Like, suppose you were having dinner with the mayor, and right in the middle of it all you cut loose with a loud, fruity fart. Do you (1) apologize profusely and use your napkin to fan the odour into the next room? (2) ignore it and keep eating without missing a bite? (3) glare at your wife as though it was hers? (4) let go with another one, vomit on your plate, and go into convulsions on the floor in an attempt to excuse it as a medical problem? Those are the kind of unpalatable options set by a situation which should never have happened in the first place; of course, it's tough to know what to do, but in such cases the response depends entirely on the specific personalities and details of the situation. "Ethically", most of the questions have no "right" answer.

Your fearless assertion of the right to break a GM confidence if necessary to gain an advantage as a player seems, to me, to be no more than a question of priorities. Most GMs give that aspect of their hobby involvement the highest importance, and therefore would not consider ruining their GMing reputation in order to advance themselves as players. This arrangement of priorities is so universal (almost) that the hobby has come to expect it; but is it an ethical necessity? Perhaps not, but I think it's a practical one if you are serious about continuing as a highly regarded GM. Despite all the (valid) arguments that Player X was asking for it when he included GM and player material on the same page, the fact that you would betray a confidence still says something very negative about your GMing commitment. I would be disinclined to play in VD again or give you a good rating in a GMing poll, knowing that other hobby pressures had compromised your function as a GM. Despite all your brave words, if it ever came down to a practical situation of what to do, I doubt you would ever betray a confidence unless it was quite obvious that the other fellow was deliberately putting you in an impossible situation. In all other cases, it's just one of the crosses that GMs have to bear. It's a lot less of a "limitation" on play than the simple fact that you could write two times as many letters to all your fellow players if your time wasn't taken up with GMing/publishing. Would you skip an issue if you thought your playing performance would improve by writing a lot of letters on deadline weekend instead? There is nothing whatever to stop you, but a conscientious publisher simply...wouldn't. Your "Off the Record" quandary is similar.

I actually found your proposition of a situation where it was ethically impossible to write a certain set of orders far more interesting -- I might not have written otherwise.

A rather trivial case would be if your best friend discussed his games in detail with you, including plans to attack his neighbour; then the neighbour dropped out and you were called as a standby for the position. Do you make necessary defensive moves (or even a pre-emptive attack) when nothing on the board seems to call for it? Many players would say "yes" anyhow, so it's not even clear-cut, but you're really enjoying an unfair advantage; perhaps the question should be whether you should accept the standby position (i.e. submit any orders) at all.

Warming to the subject, a more interesting, likely, and definitive possibility: your game-long ally suddenly becomes quite ill. You visit him in the hospital and, to avoid his NMR, you get him to give you a blank sheet with his signature -- there's no way he can involve himself with the hobby for a couple of months. Do you have the "right" to stab him? Under normal circumstances I would say "yes" -- the ally takes his chances on your intentions. But remember that the guy was already pretty sick, perhaps not thinking clearly either, and that you knew this when you cajoled his signature. In that case, I would feel

an obligation.

If a careless GM reveals your enemy's orders to you just before the deadline, do you have the right to change your own orders to give you a better result? If you do make an important change, the game should probably be declared irregular.

I can't think of a situation which doesn't involve some variation of foreknowledge-of-fellow-player's-orders, but there are certainly many examples of that. For every player with any morals whatsoever, you should be able to develop something around that theme which would stick in his craw.

Regarding your dispute with Woody: if it states specifically in your houserules that no ombudsman will be called in except at the discretion of the GM, there seems little point in anyone giving him a hearing. Even if it went in his favour (which, from your description, seems wildly unlikely), the exercise would be a waste of time if you refused to recognize it. Nevertheless, I think it's a bad rule; a case arose in FSF last summer where my houserules left no room for doubt, but appealing to the ombudsman seemed to clear the air. I thought, therefore, that the process was valuable, even at the cost of a delay in the game.

((You seem to consider the function of an ombudsman to be ever so slightly different than I do, then, at least in some cases. To me, an ombudsman should be used to resolve GM-player disputes in which neither party is clearly and absolutely in the right (or wrong). I do not see an ombudsman as a person whose job it is to soothe the feelings of the losing party when the houserules make the situation cut and dried; nor do I see any value in delaying a game just to "clear the air". If an ombudsman is called and his explanation makes the pill easier to swallow for whomever loses, then well and good, but that's not his function and I would never go to an arbiter for that reason alone.

Your discussion of circumstances in which it might be unethical to write a certain set of orders is the only material that came in on the subject, and I found it interesting. My answer to all the situation you brought up would be to write whatever orders you wish, though; if a player is planning to discuss his future plans with you, then it's up to him to first establish that you aren't going to be called into his game as a standby. Regarding the situation where your friend is in the hospital; if you take the tack that you cannot ethically stab him, then what are you going to do when all of your current allies run out and deliberately poison themselves every time a crucial situation arises in the game, just so they can be sure you won't stab them? More realistically, what if you were planning to stab him anyway on this particular turn?

I think you may have misunderstood my reasoning when I said that, as an extreme last resort only, I would consider passing a letter which contained info on a game in which I was playing and one which I was GMing. For the record, I regard GMing as far and away my most important hobby commitment, and I would never skip an issue to gain an advantage in a game -- nor would I give away confidential info from a player to gain such an advantage, in general. (E.g. I would never say to a potential ally, "Well, I expect to have lots of time to devote to this game as the leading players in three of the games I'm GMing plan to stab for the win this season".) But the question that concerns me is: does a co-player in one of my games have the right to use the ethics governing player-GM confidence to his advantage in the game by making it impossible for me to negotiate in a manner which otherwise would be open to me? And if so, then why not lace every letter with such confidential information if you want to be sure it won't be passed?

You're probably right, though, that if it came down to it I'd not actually go through with it (shudder).

As for the situation in which you cut forth with a smelly fart at the mayor's dinner table, maybe I should make this into another reader quiz? I think you missed the best solution of all: simply stand up and loudly proclaim, "Yes, that was me that just let out that loud, smelly fart. I am proud of it and will do it again just as soon as I can work up another dose of gas," and sit back down. Now, the mayor and his company will still think you have dreadful manners, but at least they might be led to believe that you felt you did the right thing, and that's what counts, so they won't hold it against you.))

From Ronald Brown (12/12/82):

Dear Bruce,

Finally got through reading all the reactions to "Off the Record". Gee, we're an agreeable lot; that's the overall impression I get. Quite interesting if someone were going to draw up a new code of ethics.

Re your response to Woody. You are both right and wrong. First, I sympathize with your position that you acted according to your houserules, therefore there's no need to call on an ombudsman. But the real argument seems to boil down to your word against Woody's -- and for that you do need an ombudsman so you can each present your case.

You said if you felt the player was right you would call an ombudsman, but that's silly, Bruce. If the player is right, why call for someone else to settle it? All you have to do is make the necessary corrections. An ombudsman is there for the situation when you feel you are right and the player is adamant that he is right -- which appears to be the case here. Otherwise, why have ombudsmen at all?

Anyhow, I thought some GMs had houserules preventing concessions to powers with less centres than someone else -- or something along those lines. Perhaps you need a new houserule to cover such situations so this won't occur again. I'm not so sure though, because it seems to me that if the players want to end their game with a concession to a one centre power that's their right. It's not my position as GM to decide whether or not they're a pack of fools. I guess each of us will have to make up his own mind on that score.

Meanwhile, all the best for the season. Can't wait to see what Alex has to say about Christmas with BRUX (I assume you'll be around). Meanwhile, see you in Detroit?

((For sure! I agree that players should have the right to concede to a one-center power; see elsewhere this issue for discussion concerning an alternative houserule to cover the situation of NVR (no vote received).

You are incorrect in your perception of the use of ombudsmen in VD. If the player is clearly right, I don't call one -- I simply correct the error and proceed with the game after informing the players. I've done this many times, and usually the only publicity such instances receive is a brief "all players were notified that (such-as-such)..." in the game notes.

An ombudsman is called by me whenever I feel there is any room for doubt. In a case where it's just a player's word against mine as to whether a vote was submitted over the phone, an ombudsman can be of no use in deciding the matter as there are no issues to be resolved, just a question of whose word does he believe? I won't go to an ombudsman in such a case; I even have a houserule that says that what I hear over the phone is final. I consider this fair, especially because I always write down game info as I take it over the phone, and read it back to the player. For further comment on this topic, check out the second page of Caruso's letter and my comments, near the bottom of the page.))

From Eric Ozog (12/15/82):

BRUX,

Excellent articles in "Off the Record!"! Lots of good reading. Osuch is a nut.

((Agreed, but then aren't we all?!))

A very special thanks to all who contributed to the Gossip Column this month, for sending me all the controversy, humor, thoughtful discussion, and just plain light-hearted banter that appears on the previous pages. A couple of issues ago I asked whether my 25½-page letter column was the largest ever published. If so, that record has now been broken. This issue's Gossip Column was 34 pages long and contained 34 letters by 38 different writers, on countless topics. Excuse the boasting; I really mean this note as a thank you to all you folks for making my letter column what it is.

And if you see something in this issue that you like, or don't like, or need to rebut, or wish to elaborate on, or want to attack someone over, send it right in!

The following is a piece of fiction written by Mark L. Berch...

McGkurk's Response

As you all know, Bruce Linsey and I have had quite a feud going on; I won't repeat all the details since you know them already. A few weeks ago, I wrote him the following letter: "...Yes, I made up those stories about your GMing; and no, I will never admit to it publicly. What's more, this letter is strictly confidential, so suffer, asshole!" This Bruce gleefully published.

Did Bruce, or any of you for that matter, stop to ask yourself why the letter was written?? Bruce certainly didn't, because if he had, he wouldn't have published it. There are really two possibilities here.

The first is that it was sent solely to harass you. If that were the case, there would be no way of knowing whether the contents were accurate or not. All that would be necessary would be that it be something that you'd be dying to publish. Moreover, there would supposedly be no harm in falsely saying that I had lied about your GMing. You presumably already think that I have, so there's no chance that my letter would erroneously persuade you that you were right after all. And there shouldn't have been any chance that others would be persuaded, because it shouldn't have gone any further than you. So far as I'm concerned you have harassed me plenty, and the tone of the letter would be consistent with that. If you had considered that possibility, you'd have had to realize that there was no way you could be sure it was true. As it happened, that's not why it was written. But it could have been.

The letter was a test, Bruce, and you flunked it. And it was a very convenient test of your morals, because your failure to pass the test would become automatically public.

I wanted to see, plain and simple, whether you publish off the record materials. To find this out, I had to make it tempting, very tempting. I know you lack self confidence in this entire dispute that you had with me (as seen, for example, by your attempts to drag other people into it, your personal vilifications of me, etc.), so "admitting" that I was lying would be the greatest temptation of all. So that would be the bait.

At the same time, I wrote three other people in the hobby, off the record of course. They were sent a copy of the letter I was sending you. I also told them that the "I made up these stories" sentence was absolutely untrue, and that it was there just to test your morals. Those three letters went into the same mail as yours. I've checked with all three of them, and yes, they got it, and they will be saying so in three different hobby zines in the next few months. The whole hobby will know just what I was trying to prove, and they can decide for themselves whether I've accomplished my goal.

You said, very accurately, that the GMing dispute was a matter of your word against mine, pure and simple. In such situations, people make up their minds on the basis of what they know about the morals of each party, what they know about the character of the people involved. But now we do have hard, objective fact to deal with: we all know that your hobby ethics are of the sort that allow you to publish an off-the-record letter for the pure purpose of aiding you in a feud. There is no other purpose. Don't tell me that you needed this to fill games -- you've filled games before and after our feud.

By contrast, I do not break confidences. I have received dozens of off-the-record letters. None of them has ever seen the light of day, and none ever will. If you or anyone else wrote me a letter admitting wrong, and labeled it as DNQ, that's exactly the way it would stay.

Now, perhaps some of you are thinking -- well, this is an extraordinary situation. It says very little about Bruce's hobby ethics that he would print such a letter. After all, he was trying to defend himself, and such a situation would make a legitimate exception. Thus, this doesn't tell me much about his ethics, since I'd likely do what he did.

But it goes further than that. Bruce's situational ethics are such that the touchstone for printing a letter is often just: will it help Bruce to print it? Here are two other examples:

In something called situation #7 in VD #69, Bruce reveals that he will expose

something written to him as a GM from a player. Have you ever heard of a GM willing to break such a confidence? Players have been writing their GMs in confidence for years about their strategy in the game and I know of no case where a GM has ever revealed this. But Bruce's ethics are so lax that he'll make an exception for this, too.

Nor is this the only case. In situation #6, he's at it again. He's been told something in confidence about a player's own playing record. There is nothing harmful or shameful or anything there that the hobby needs to know. And yet, Bruce would blab! And what utterly compelling reason does Bruce give? Well, to use Bruce's own words, he'd blab if "the info would help me defeat him in the game". And that's basically the same reason he gives in situation #7. He proclaims that it's so "unfair" that he can't use the information. So therefore, he can use it.

So it's just not the case that Bruce just makes the exception in the extreme circumstance that he needs to defend his GMing. His ethics are so low he'd reveal confidences for as little as helping himself in a game -- even though the confidences had nothing to do with that game. Would you do that? And what do you think of the ethics of someone who would?

In short, I have exposed Bruce as a person of low hobby ethics. In our original dispute, it was his word against mine, and still is, since neither of us can provide objective proof. But this incident should give you a better view of his ethics. For Bruce, personal expediency may be all it takes to have him reveal a confidence. He has told you that I am a liar. But then, when it suits his purposes, suddenly he tells you that I'm telling the truth. Bruce is one of those people where the ends justify the means -- even if the end is something trivial like winning a dippy game.

And people, these are only the cases we know about where he'd reveal a confidence. Who knows how many other circumstances there are as well? Who knows what other types of situations there are where Bruce will decide that the means justify the ends, where Bruce will decide that the ordinary hobby rules don't apply to him?

P.S. (This PS off the record) You sucker you!

((Thank you for digging yourself into a logical trap from which I think you will find it impossible to extricate yourself. This letter is clear proof that you more than I are a person of low hobby ethics.

Let's look at the facts. I have demonstrated (and stated) that under certain conditions I would reveal confidential material. One of those conditions is the case where I know something about a guy's playing record, and needed the info in my game with him. Twenty people answered that question -- and fifteen indicated in some manner that it's all right to use the info, or at least hint about it. That's 75%!

Another case where I've said I'd break a confidence is exactly the situation that arose with your letter. Of nineteen people responding to the question, ten indicated that the circumstances are extreme enough to justify breaking the confidence in some manner. That's 50+%!

Therefore, all you have proven about my ethics is that I'd break confidences in certain extreme cases -- and in some of those cases, most of the hobby agrees with me that the action is justified!

Now, what have I proven about your ethics? Pure and simple; you told a lie about me with the intention of harming my reputation. Consider your statement, "I made up those stories about your GMing...". Either that statement is true, or it is false. If it is true, then you have made up stories about my GMing, in order to harm my reputation, and those stories are lies. If it is false, then the statement itself (that you made up those stories) is a lie, and you yourself have admitted that the letter was sent with the purpose of revealing me as a person of low hobby ethics -- in other words, to harm my reputation.

Therefore, you told a lie about me with the intention of harming my reputation. I don't think you will get half the hobby to agree that this is ever justified.

Summary; I will break a confidence in an extreme case, and you say you won't. You will lie about someone in order to hurt them, and I say I won't.

I feel, and I strongly believe that most of the hobby would agree with this, that the "unethical" deed I would do (and have done) is far less serious than that which you have done.

Now, the original question concerning our GMing dispute was, and still is, your word against mine. But as you pointed out, people make up their minds on the basis of what they know about the morals of the people involved. So, the whole hobby can now make up their minds based on what they know of your ethics and mine.

I appreciate your sending me this letter so much, in fact, that I'm adding five issues to your sub. So suffer, asshole!))

The following Crazy Envelopes will be more meaningful if you've read the Gossip Column this ish...

CIA HQ
% REAGAN'S Youth
2012 RIDGE RD EAST
Rochester NY 14622

X-RATED K.G.B. FLICKS.
% Comrade BRUX
24A QUARRY DRIVE
ALBANY, NY

Cathy Cunningham
710 W. Las Palmaritas
Phoenix, Az. 85021

Jealous Brutie Linsey
24 A Quarry Dr.
Albany / N.Y. 12205



First came "Off the Record", then "On the Record", and now an all new article about the same old thing. It's beginning to sound like a...

Broken Record

by Chuff Afflerbach

Case A:

You are Russia, at war with Turkey. You have just received a letter from Austria, in which he says that he would be happy to join you against the Turk, if only he could be sure Italy would not stab him. You have just sat down to forge a letter from Italy when the phone rings.

"Hey, Russkie," the voice says, "dis is Italy talkin'. You forgin' any letters from me?"

"Certainly not!" you reply. "That's unethical hobby conduct!"

"Das right. Anyway, don' bodder. I'm gonna hit Frenchie dis turn, so you an' Austria, youse guys got nuttin ta worry about." This is too good to be true!

"Hey, thanks for the inside dope!" you exclaim with glee.

"Don' mention it," he says, and hangs up.

Suddenly you stop dead in your tracks. Don't mention it? Don't mention it?! What did he mean by that? And what do you do now?!

After one long article and a subsequent issue devoted in its entirety to this matter, why write still another piece on the topic of hobby confidentiality? Simply because it is glaringly obvious that we have barely scratched the surface of this "Do Not Quote" discussion. No sooner is one question answered than another more insidious instance rears its convoluted head. Such as...

Case B:

It could happen to anyone -- you write two letters in one day and get them in the wrong envelopes. Penthouse Forum shows little interest in your negotiations with Turkey, but the Turkish player is chortling with joy over your flagrante delicto. In short, he wants you to puppet for him for the rest of your life or he'll grant exclusive rights to the letter to Diplomacy World.

As a last resort, you travel halfway across the continent and in the dead of night burglarize his home. You are ransacking his study for the purloined letter when he appears in the doorway, clutching the source of your anxiety in his hand.

"Looking for something?" he sneers at you.

"Give me my letter!" you scream at him.

"Your letter? Why, I believe it was addressed to me," he toys with you like a cat with a wounded mouse. "And now you've broken and entered my home with the intent of unfairly removing one of my diplomatic options." The venom oozes from his every pore.

"Give me my letter!!" you shriek, and he taunts back.

"Over my dead body."

In a blind rage, your fingers instinctively close around the nearest heavy, blunt instrument -- a third anniversary issue of The Voice of Doom. It speaks for you with authority as it falls once, twice, and then a third time upon his skull. At last the scoundrel's lifeless form crumples to the floor, still clutching the item in question.

Off in the distance, a police siren wails. The surge of adrenalin is gone as quickly as it came, leaving you drained. Alone, you must still make a critical decision, before the rigor mortis sets in. Whose letter is it now?

Far-fetched? Not at all. This identical episode actually happened to me during a game in Steve McLendon's now-defunct The Dragon and the Lamb. Luckily, that particular dragon survived this lamb's assault and the game eventually ended in a four-way draw. But the zine itself did not fare as well, yet another victim of a breach of diplomatic confidences. It seems that one too many classified memoes about NASA's Space Shuttle found its way into print; as for Steve, he is reportedly tracking satellites from somewhere in Antarctica. So you see, anything can happen...

Case C:

The practice of mailing dead skunks has spread like wildfire throughout the hobby. In fact, some players in their diplomatic haste have even mailed not-quite-dead skunks just to beat a deadline.

You are GMing a game, and the German player brags to you in his orders that he just sent Russia a real stinker. You receive a frantic call from Russia the very next day. When he opened his package, the polecat jumped up and bit him, and then got clean away! Now he has only 48 hours to track the animal down and find out whether or not it was rabid.

Here's the rub: since it is a "black" skunk game, players do not have to reveal the source of their skunks. So will you be a fair GM, stick to the rules, and doom the poor bastard to a fate too agonizing to describe?

Case X:

For reasons which must remain a mystery, you find yourself in a game of Celebrity Diplomacy. You ally with Pulitzer Prize winner Jake Halverstadt, because his letters will no doubt be valuable some day. On the opposite side of the board is that rising political star, Jeff Panches. After six successive terms as mayor of Carlsbad, N.M. (he gave up on Carlsbad, CA), Jeff has just been appointed by the President to direct the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

All is going well for your team until, one night, three burly G-men come knocking at your door. Through the peephole you learn that they are armed with writs, warrants, subpoenas, and injunctions to seize all of your Diplomacy correspondence with Jake. Complicating the matter is the fact that Jake signs all his letters with his customary copyright notice, stating that "any reuse, reproduction, or retransmission of this material without the expressed written consent of the author is strictly forbidden." Clearly, you are damned if you do and dead if you don't.

Your hand is poised, ready to flush the incriminating evidence; the bathroom door splinters under the weight of the Law. Quick, which takes precedence: National Security, the Bill of Rights, or Bruce's Houserules?

Case Y:

Father Marcus Berch is passing a leisurely afternoon, hearing confessions at the Cathedral. He slides back the panel; "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned..." the voice begins; and Father Marcus returns to his well-thumbed copy of Graustark #1.

But not for long -- soon he is hanging on every word! For the Padre has realized that the voice behind the partition, droning its long litany of trespasses, can belong to none other than the infamous Bernie Oaklyn! And it's all there...the misappropriated gamefees, the deception of one GM after another, the campaign of character assassination... and the Right Reverend is getting every word of it on his trust portable tape recorder. Now all that stands between Buddy/Bernie/Whatever-his-name-is and the diplomatic ignominy he deserves is the sanctity of the confessional.

Should Father Berch petition for a special dispensation from His Eminence, Pope Mark Paul II?

Case Z:

Alex Lord's Science Fair project is a blue-ribbon winner: from a few whiskers that she found in her backyard she has managed to clone an entirely new Bruce Linsey! The medical world is all agog, but Ig Lew is pissed.

It seems that in the Spring '58 turn of JUPITER, he voted "no" again on all draws and told Bruce to keep it under his hat. Naturally, Bruce did as instructed, but his cloned blabbed the news to everyone who showed up at TroCon.

Can ridding the world of a superfluous BRUX be construed as a crime? And which one should be done away with?

These and other outlandish cases will be cropping up more and more frequently in the pages of VD, as the hobby continues to plumb the depths of Dipdom in search of...what? An honest man? Make me laugh! Controversy? Without a doubt.

But the fact is, I happen to know the real reason for all these issues devoted to the

same subject. Don't ask me how I found out, because I promised not to reveal my source. Just take my word for it that all of this off-the-record business is simply a calculated attempt by a certain publisher to get himself and his zine into the Guinness Book of World Records with the Longest Continually-Begged Question.

So what do you say, Doomies? Will you help BRUX get his Broken Record?

(Next month's installment: "Confidentiality and the Next of Kin.")

((Seven free records go to Chuff for a classic comeback to the off-the-record discussion! Thanks, Chuff.))

Next issue will contain the games, and will be published in a week. It will be considerably shorter than this ish, probably another 22-pager. Hope you all enjoyed this mid-monthly -- and happy New Year!

BRUX

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Your sub expires with issue # 10