

THE VOICE OF DOOM

#72

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by BRUX

I'm just thrilled to death! There are absolutely no NMRs in this issue -- nor are there even any miswritten orders, nor any GMing errors, nor even so much as a misspelled press release. It could only happen right here -- in a mid-monthly issue of the Garbage Disposal of Postal Diplomacy!

Two zines that I have just begun to receive deserve mention. First is Glen Taylor's DIJAGH, whose initials stand for "Diplomacy is Just a Goddam Hobby". Sounds like he's got quite the attitude, hey? Send for a sample from Glen at 3007 Hewitt Ave. #428, Silver Spring, MD 20906. Ask for the price of his cookies while you're at it. Seriously, his first issue had some pretty good stuff, including a cute reprinted article on Tunis.

I've also begun mutually subbing to Chanticleer, a French/English language zine published by hobby veteran Michel Liesnard, Avenue de Tervueren, 415, Woluwé-Saint-Pierre, B-1150, BRUXelles, BELGIUM. Michel was kind enough to send me a sample a few weeks back when he printed a picture of me on his front page. I had already sent him a sample of VD as part of an effort to expand my zine into Europe, and our issues crossed. Then I heard from him again, accepting my offer of a sub exchange. Even for an English-only reader like me, C seems to have a lot to offer, including a nice letter column. If you're interested in seeing a good zine from Belgium, check it out. Living in a town by the name of BRUXelles, you know he'll make a good little Doomie!

So far, no other response from the Europeans publishers I wrote to.

The VD standby list for regular Diplomacy consists of the following people: Peter Ansoff, Dan Gorham, George Leritte, Peter Ashley, Jim Chatfield, Dave Marshall, Randal Husk, Nelson Heintzman, Ty Hare, Mike Ditz, Eric Kane, Mike Mazzer, Bob Howerton, God, Peter DeLuca, Konrad Baumeister, Mark Duarte, Peter Blitstein, John Kador, Dave Carter, John Banke, Scott Hanson, Pat Conlon, Tim Lynch, Rob Wittmond, Paul Rauterberg, Jerry Lucas, Don Burd, Lanny Myers, Ed Wrobel, Bob Sweeney, Mike Jones, Dave Spector, Jim Finley, John Davies, Jeff Panches, Gregg Stebbins, "Jane Proskin", Mark Paul, Larry Lansing, Bryan Jurkowski, Mark Keller, Brian Orloff, Gerry Austin, Chuck Kaplan, Bill Highfield, Rick Ragsdale, Dave Newell, and Dick Martin. For Proxy Plomacy (the JUPITER game) the list consists of George Leritte, Dick Martin, John Davies, and (England only) Mark Larzelere. If you want on or off either list, please let me know.

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 not be any for an awfully long time.

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How many times have you heard statements like, "Whether I get one or two builds this year depends on a lucky guess," or "He guessed correctly, got lucky, and won the game."? Well, I personally don't believe that there needs to be any such thing as a lucky guess in Diplomacy. This game is one of psychological persuasion, and the player who realizes it will tip the odds significantly in his favor.

Let me illustrate my point with an example from a game in which I am playing Germany. The Italian player and I had agreed that we would invade France, and spring 1901 saw me invade Burgundy with Italy going to Piedmont. The Frenchman had trustingly ordered A Mar-Spa, A Par-Pic, F Bre-Mid. So fall '01 presented a dilemma. I could either try for Paris, risking a standoff from Picardy; or I could support Italy into Marseilles, which could be stood off if France ordered A Pic-Bur, A Spa-Mar. France was in a quandary. "Which move should I defend?", I knew he would ask himself. He could defend either Paris or Marseilles, but not both.

At this point, some German players might have simply tried to outguess the Frenchman. But that is not the proper way to succeed in Dippy. What did I do? I sent him off a letter, making the following points:

- 1) I'm terribly sorry about the opening to Burgundy - England and I had agreed on a joint attack of you and England had reneged by not moving to the Channel. Please trust me; I'll support you into Belgium. (This was not intended to convince France. It was intended to make him think that I was trying to convince him!)
- 2) If he still didn't believe me I could understand it - and a possible alternative would be for him to order A Pic-Bur, A Spa-Mar; thus ensuring that Marseilles did not fall to Italy.
- 3) Under no circumstances would it be wise for him to try to stand me out of Paris, because it would leave his army in a very weak position, since I wouldn't be moving there to begin with.

So, I craftily concluded, go for Belgium - I'll support you. But if you really don't think you can trust me, you might as well defend Marseilles.

OK, put yourself in the French position, and what would you do? Germany has just invaded you and you know, despite his "story", that he will continue. Then he (subtly) warns you that A Pic-Par is a weak move, claiming that A Pic-Bur, A Spa-Mar is a much better defense. What would you do? Well, the player in question probably had nightmares, but the letter convinced him to defend Paris while Italy, with my support, took Marseilles! And that season will forever cause me to sneer whenever somebody says "lucky guess" in relation to Diplomacy.

The method I used is known as misdirection. Had I decided to do things somewhat differently, there would have been other ways to get France to move back to Paris. It was obvious after the spring, for instance, that Austria was on good terms with Italy and me. So had I wanted to, I could have had Austria tell France my real moves - with the probable result that France wouldn't have believed him and would have moved the wrong way. Or, since I gathered that England was friendly with France, I might have casually mentioned to England that I would be taking Paris, hoping that he would tip off the Frenchman. I strongly considered both of these. But me try for a "lucky guess"? Bah! Humbug!

((I'm amused to note the change in my style over the past three years -- that's how long ago this was written! The game referred to is '79CF, which has since ended.

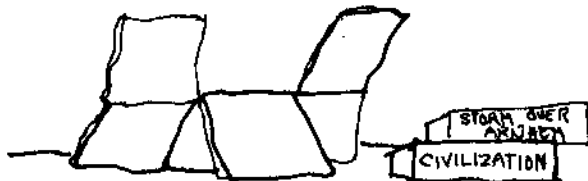
I realize now that very occasionally, one may have to resort to pure guesswork, but the idea of the article still holds true in almost all cases.

I still have a dwindling number of old, unpublished articles in my files; they'll all eventually find their way into these pages.

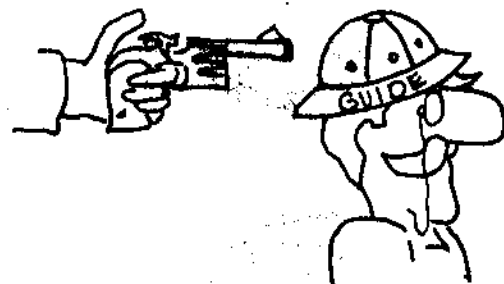
P.S. The above plot seems utterly transparent to me now...))

Despite the constant ribbing I give Avalon Hill I do realize that they are by far the best adult boardgame company in the world. If the only games they came out with were Diplomacy, Kingmaker, Squad Leader, and Freedom in the Galaxy, no other company could hold a candle to them. In hopes of making a great company even better I offer these New Year's Resolutions.

AVALON HILL'S 1983 NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS:



Cut out the nonsense of the semi-rigid boards. They are as warped as the President's economic policies and aren't durable at all. The worst thing is the little note they put in the box saying that they were doing this as a favor to us. That's the best line since: "You've won some dancing lessons..."



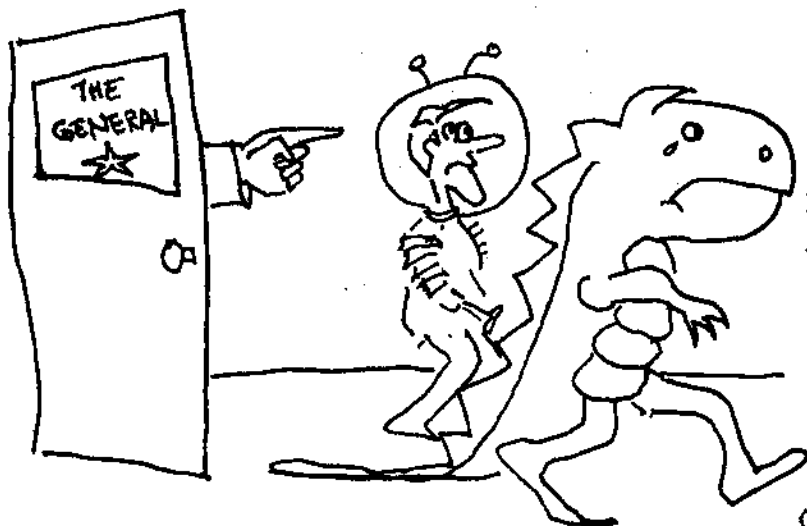
Fix up the mistakes in the rules to Source of the Nile in which having a guide increases your chances of getting lost. They admit that ~~this~~ rule is a misprint but have yet to correct it...



Stop jumping on the dragon bandwagon. Wizard's Quest could be dropped, Magic Realm is very good but was released too soon, it needs some rule changes. Titan, Dragonquest, and Down With the King are a lot of fun, but don't make much sense...



Statis-Pro games aren't that interesting because all you do is flip cards. A good New Year's resolution would be to create a new game that challenged the player's brain a bit more...



A new magazine should be published that treats the science fiction and fantasy games only. The General serves a readership that is biased against these games. Magic Realm was once listed in the top 20 games by Games and Puzzles Magazine, while it's dead last in The General's poll.....



And of course, lest I forget, this should be the year that the curse of all Diplomacy fans should be retired.....

M. PAUL

The Gossip Column

From Brian Orloff (1/4/83):

Dear BRUX,

I am writing in response to Jake Halverstadt's response to Alex's Column on hunting. Let's take this perhaps one step further to bring out some points neglected by Jake. The next time you go to McDonald's and order a quarter pounder, think about the poor cow that was slaughtered mercilessly so that the hamburger could be taken. Is it sport to kill helpless animals like that? Think of a lamb. He is perhaps the most docile of all animals. Is it nice and sporty to slit his little neck for the sake of lamb chops? He doesn't stand much of a chance, does he? Less of a chance than if he were left alone in the wild or on the farm.

Have you eaten a tuna sandwich lately? Well, think of the beautiful porpoises who were ruthlessly killed along with the tuna just because they couldn't jump high enough to avoid the trapping net. When you bite into that sandwich, think about Flipper.

I live in a rural Kansas town, and thus I know many farmers and other poor individuals who must hunt in order to survive. They have big families, and know other people who also aren't so well-off. If there is ever a surplus, it goes to other needy families in the area. If an elk is "bagged" then every bit of it is used around the area. His skin becomes a rug in front of the fireplace, and his meat is evenly distributed to all those in need. What isn't used is preserved for the winter when things get really bad. I've grown up in a family of hunters (although I don't hunt myself, I just target shoot), and in a community where hunting is a part of existence. Nowhere is there more concern for ethics in hunting and the handling of firearms. Maybe you didn't realize that hunters pay for the fish and game commissions in the various states. These commissions help farmers stock ponds with fish, and make sure that the animal populations do not waver dangerously low. Without the hunter's willingness to pay for a license, and their desire to see the laws enforced, many species of bird and animal would have long since died out.

Do not get me wrong. I respect Jake's opinion, and I even agree with some of his points. Apparently he has let the work of a few vandals influence his opinion of hunters. There are two sides to a coin, one just has to keep a clear mind when coming to conclusions, and not clutter his mind with biased opinions.

((I think that a clear distinction can be drawn between killing animals for food, either on a farm or in the wild, and shooting them for "sport", which I believe is the practice Jake was criticizing. The former, if done in the most humane possible manner, at least has a purpose and therefore some justification; the latter is simply, as Jake put it, the act of a pervert.

As for the valuable services which are financed by the fees hunters pay for their licenses; I'm sure that there are possible alternative means of raising such money. The argument you present sounds no better to me than "let the crooks buy guns because the money they pay the gun retailer will keep him in business -- and so he can sell guns to private citizens who want to defend themselves against the crooks!".))

From John MacFarlane (12/29/82):

Bruce --

Did you catch Walker's article in The General? While attempting to snare some more Diplomacy converts from the ranks of the hard core wargamers, he wrote, "you have nothing to lose but your dice, your fifty page rulebooks (with attendant amendments, attachments, charts, tables, modules, errata ad infinitum...)" Obviously, he's never seen your houserules!

((I guess not!))

From Mark Berch (1/1/83):

Dear Bruce,

Your comments on double issues (VD #70, p. 7) do not make sense. You call the practice of charging double for double issues "screwy", but you say that it's OK to keep a list of sub balances and charge per page. Don't you see that this is a distinction without a difference? Look, at Diplomacy Digest, singles are 11-12 pages for 35¢. Doubles are 23 pages for 70¢. But I could describe that just as well as: "Subs are 3¢ per page. The issues are bundled as 11-12 pages which I call "singles" or 23 pages which I call "doubles", but either way it's still 3¢ per page." So what's the difference -- both descriptions amount to the same thing -- except to you one is screwy and the other is OK. The per page charge is not only more complicated to explain to readers, it is also a LOT more work, which is the main reason why very few people do it. You have to keep recalculating the sub balance, and that's not so simple since 11-page singles are then 33¢ and 12-page single are 36¢ -- why should I get into all that crap, especially since my printing costs are the same regardless of whether I go to 11 pages or 12 pages? Moreover, you have avoided my question, which I'm not going to let you do. As I've said, I have to charge 35¢ for an 11-page issue to keep my losses at a reasonable level. But sometimes topics come along (e.g. that of #25/26) which cannot be covered in 11-12 pages. Why should I mail this in two parts, Part I (#25) and Part II (#26)? That's all that extra addressing and \$27 extra in postage, so why should I or anyone go to the extra time and cost?

Your calling the deadline policy of Woody (late orders accepted if game not GMed yet) or von Metzke (late orders accepted if mailed before the deadline and received before the zine is mailed) as "beastly" is ridiculously egocentric. You seem to be insisting that everyone use the word "deadline" the way you do or it's beastly, or "sloppy". It's not in my opinion the least bit sloppy, and is every bit as precise as your definition. It is not tantamount to saying that "the deadline is Jan. 7 but the real deadline is Jan. 8." It says "your orders must be received by Jan. 7 to be guaranteed of use, after that they will be used only if I haven't GMed your game as yet." I see nothing sloppy about that -- it simply reflects a value that the GM has which is that NMRs are so bad that he will try to avoid them if he can do so without causing any harm. And if he hasn't GMed the game yet, there isn't any harm or sloppiness at all (provided, naturally, that the players are informed as to how things are done). It's simply a different meaning for the term, and you have failed to show that there is anything intrinsically "wrong" or harmful in using a concept different from yours. (And to answer your question, in Conrad von Metzke's games, if an earlier set of orders is visibly scratched out and replaced by a later set because the later orders came in after the deadline, well, players know that that is the risk they take if they don't make the deadline with their final orders.) I am glad that there are people like Woody around to give players a choice in such matters, and I don't see any need to subject such GMing practices to abuse.

Here's another example. Charles Reinsel had a policy that said if all 7 countries had orders in before the deadline day, he could (and usually would) adjudicate the game and send it off even before the deadline date. Again, this is a different concept of deadline from yours reflecting a different set of values. Here, players are giving up their guarantee of being able to get in the last-minute change of orders -- they can't count on it being used if the game has been GMed already. But in return, they get a faster game -- if all the orders are already in, the GM doesn't have to wait the last few days until the deadline. Those who liked that concept of deadline, those values, could and did play in his zine.

With regard to Caruso's letter, in case Michalski has fallen asleep at the switch, I'd like to defend his honor. Caruso said, "With one or two exceptions BB never created controversy, only accepted others and printed it." Not so. Michalski created controversy whenever he possibly could, including making incendiary comments of his own on a number of occasions. Moreover, I agree with you -- there is no reason for you to have to mimic BB.

Also, since my name got dragged back into the Proskin-Arnett-Linsey business, I'd like to say that the sentence Caruso attributes to me is factually true but totally irrelevant -- it doesn't prove a thing. My own conclusion (i.e. that Arnett was dishonest) came from reasoning I outlined in DD #51 and #52, his comments about me, Volker #15, etc., but I see no point in discussing all that again. I do not, however, connect this with his business dealings and I did in fact run Arnett's little ad in DD.

Incidentally, the MILKY WAY game was hardly the first time that an NVR = yes houserule has produced an unexpected and premature end to a game. It has apparently happened several times over the past few years that I know about. This is the first case that I can recall where a GM has agreed to restart a game, though.

Dick Martin raises an extremely interesting issue: is it proper for a guest GM to move a game from a non-defaulting zine without the consent of the pubber? Should the pubber have a veto on this -- does he have the right to be mad if it occurs? I'm not sure. I was most interested to note that in the comments made by both Bruce and Dick, no mention was made of the players' rights -- Dick, for example, kept bemoaning how hurt he felt. But there's no mention in his letter about his contacting the players and asking how they felt about the move. But then, it's more fun to discuss player rights when one is a player. I should add that this happened to me once -- Lee Kendter moved 76ID from Centurion to a new zine he was starting. We were not charged any sub fee in WM?, and we had a superlative GM, so needless to say there were no complaints! But we weren't consulted, though I understand Lee did clear it with the pubber of Centurion.

I trust the MILKY WAY Affair has proved to you that no set of HRS is ever complete. You had no provision for restarting a dead game.

With regard to Larzelere's letter about how a failure to order a piece could cause a loss, there have actually been two cases on record where the failure to submit a build caused an immediate loss, 67U and 63B.

Wait a minute, I have never said something as broad as I disagree with your strict GMing (page 36). Indeed, in many cases I prefer a strict GM. What I have said is that a strict style is not necessarily any more valid than a looser style. Moreover, it depends on your definition. To use a simple example, if a player NMRs, and a unit of his is dislodged, can he retreat it? A strict GM (e.g. Boardman) says no, though I think yes makes for a better game, and as I recall you do permit the retreat.

Your proposed solution to the fart-at-the-mayor problem, and your rationalization for it, was a riot! What with all the great letters, Chuff's wicked parody and all that jazz, this was just about your best issue ever.

((Glad you enjoyed it. What I meant concerning your views on my GMing was that I've known you to disagree on many points; implied orders, e.g. I realize that you don't dislike strict GMing on the whole.)

I think it was poor judgement on your part to run Arnett's ad, but will admit that this is strictly my own personal opinion.

As I've already said, I don't like double issues personally; therefore I would prefer to raise my sub rate to correspond with the cost of my average issue. Hell, I'd even find it preferable to simply deduct an issue from everyone's sub, but keep the issues numbered singly. It is just my own style, and I do not question the validity of doing things differently. The same comments apply to my feelings about deadlines, though I feel much more strongly about that subject.

I was aware that my houserules (and therefore everyone else's) are not totally complete.

I presume that the games lost due to a missed build were being played under the old rule requiring a majority of units on the board for a win.

In my opinion, the question of whether a guest GM may move the game, and who must be consulted, should be established and agreed upon before the game begins. I certainly think the players should be consulted if they are going to be asked to sub to another zine!

I have a provision in my houserules which technically could be applied to restarting a dead game, though it's stretching the rule a bit far. It's the amendment which permits the players, by unanimous vote, to alter the procedure of a VD game.))

From Mike Barno (1/4/83):

7

SHUX,

Thanx very much for helping to make the last week so enjoyable. I disclaim anything you write about me. But you -- "Let's go up Christopher Street and look at some gays"?!? "Ask her if she's a hooker"?!? "Here's where all those damn kikes live"?!?"

Enclosed you'll find a discussion of the Vacation Dip Affair. Julie'll be glad to get back in the limelight. I didn't want to let you waste a chance at controversy.

I love how Dick tries to make Gary the culprit for the Swedish Roundabout problem. He charged Gary with misconduct which, though he didn't tell Gary, was so pitiful that even Ben Arnold wouldn't try to make a scandal of it. I mean, really, would you intentionally "lose" the orders of someone who had been feuding with you? (I'd use Masters as an example, but Dick did pretty much the same thing to him in R3.)

Alex has got a pair of brown-nosed, blue-balled toadies for a while. What good fortune.

Bow hunting is still hunting -- killing live creatures for "sport". Use a camera or go to a rifle range.

I dunno about you, but I don't want any more of the 1982 Dick Martin. The 1983 preview looked a lot better. I hope he isn't too upset by the R9 history.

P-U-R-S-U-E. You say you don't teach English?

It's absurd to let "F Den-Spa" go and then disappear. If you're going to correct undiscovered errors which leave two units in a space, why not correct others which cause results at least as illegal, irregular, and disruptive?

My applause to Pudge's letter (the second half). It's certainly better and more important than, say, his "Pilgrim" article (on which I previously agreed with Mazzerman). But Bruce proves some lefties can't play Dip.

Alex's "Sacrifice" piece reminds me of Dick and Gary. Both lay on our roses.

"Woody called me (Steve Langley) about how I would have ruled...": somewhat Coughlanesque, no?

In response to Ben: I'd rather live free than live under a totalitarian state. I'd rather live with a fair share of limited resources than be oppressed by rich capitalists. I'd rather live in the Soviet Union than be nuked. But given the choice, I'd prefer to live in a USA freer than today in which all our money didn't go into weaponry and we could live without the spectre of instant death hanging over our heads. And I'll continue to argue and work for such a state, rather than place my faith in the atom or in the discretion of men such as Reagan. Maybe we could cut back to about 10-20 warheads on each side, based on submarines relatively invulnerable to a pre-emptive strike. Target them on major cities. Theoretical result: the return of the MAD philosophy. The fear of the other side secretly keeping nukes, the basic problem with total disarmament, is eliminated. The money saved could go into strengthening NATO's conventional forces and balancing the budget. Eventually, we could negotiate limits on conventional arms as well, improving the world's economy.

Peter Blitstein's letter struck a chord with me. Gary, Dick, and Woody used to talk like that. I wrote a very similar letter when I came into the hobby mainstream $2\frac{1}{2}$ years ago. I've kept such an attitude and published that way, without my zine being a warehouse. Maybe I'll send Peter a sample if you'll give me his address.

"Broken Record" was great!

New Year's resolutions: (1) To write Alex more than you; and (2) to finally accept status as a Doomie -- MAYBE.

May your '83 be fulfilling!

((You're right about bow hunting -- it's no better than using a gun.

Do you have a better way to handle the problem with "F Den-Spa"?

Write Alex more than me? Do you mean you'll write her more than I will (no way!), or you'll write her more than you'll write me (possible). I'm her toady too, you know, but don't tell anyone...))

From Mark Paul:

8

Dear BRUX,

Since you have been into double issue, I thought I'd send you a few more cartoons. Don't pay me for these, let's just call it a late Xmas present. A hobby store near me conducted a poll that I thought the VD readers might be interested in. They asked each paying customer to list on a piece of paper the three wargames which were their favorites. This is the list in the order of the games with the most responses. The store sells a lot of D&D stuff so there's a bias in this poll, but the results are still interesting.

D&D -- 65	Wizard -- 5
Squad Leader -- 42	Melee -- 5
Traveler -- 32	OGRE -- 5
Freedom in the Galaxy -- 40	Africa Korps -- 5
Cosmic Encounters -- 38	Waterloo -- 5
The Russian Campaign -- 12	Quebec 1759 -- 5
Third Reich -- 10	Divine Right -- 5
Panzerblitz -- 10	Wings -- 5
Titan -- 10	The Creature That Ate Sheboygan -- 4
Fight in the Skies (Dawn Patrol) -- 9	Victory in the Pacific -- 3
Civilization -- 9	Source of the Nile -- 3
4000 A.D. -- 8	Diplomacy -- 3
Samuri -- 8	Stratego -- 3
Stellar Conquest -- 7	Gladiator -- 3
Midway -- 7	Empires of the Middle Ages -- 3
Imperium -- 6	SPIES -- 2
Richtofen's War -- 6	Anzio -- 2
Swashbuckler -- 6	Risk -- 2
Runequest -- 5	

Dragon Pass, Wooden Ships and Iron Men, Napoleon, Conquistadors, Dune, Magic Realm, Kingmaker, Starship Troopers, Austerlitz, D-Day, and Gamma World were all mentioned once. While not being wargames, the following games were also listed: Rail Baron -- 9, Acquire -- 7, Marakesh -- 4, 221-B Baker Street -- 3.

((Thanks for some interesting info (Jim Williams take note!).))

From Ralph Morton:

Dear Bruce,

These are just a few lines to say "hello", and to let you know that I've not forgotten you. I saw your note in issue #66 of Voice of Doom. Thanks for mentioning me (it was really unnecessary, but I'm grateful anyways). I'm aghast to learn that VD averaged 30 pages per issue in 1982!! How on earth do you do it? That must constitute an enormous investment of time. (I'll bet you round up your students at gun-point to type, collate, address, stamp, and mail VD. Fess up now, Bruce.) What outrages are you planning to perpetrate on the hobby in 1983? With all the fakes that've shown up this year, producing fakes will be blasé.

All for now. Sincere best wishes to you and yours over the coming festive season.

((So who ever said I wouldn't print the message in a Christmas card? I agree with you that producing fakes has become boring; there are just too many of them around these days. One or two good ones a year would be nice... Thanks for the card, and thanks to all of you who sent Christmas cards!

No, I don't make my kiddies publish for me. But I don't hesitate to take advantage of other potential help that shows up -- just ask Lousy, Highchair, Barno, and Kane!))

From Rick Ragsdale (12/29/82):

BRUX,

Mike Conner is back in the pubbing business after a protracted illness. LSD #24 contained a letter from Bill Quinn which contained some information others may find interesting.

Bill says that, along with his publication of Everything, he's undertaken "the task of making a fully accessible computer archive of Diplomacy games and players."

Sounds interesting, and harmless enough, no? But he goes on, "...in Jan. I'll be getting around to entering back issues into the data. From there the information can be sifted to come up with detailed histories of individuals. This will allow anyone requesting the background of a particular person to know which and how many games a player is currently playing, which and how many game finishes the player has, and how the player finished (if he did finish). Armed with this data a player can deduce (sic) possible trends his opponents may demonstrate during a game (i.e. plays for the win, drops out, or resigns often)."

I don't know about you and other VD readers, but the thought of some gnome sitting up nights, poring over old Everythings plumbing data into his black box in order to compile a dossier on me doesn't sit well. Granted, the information is already available to anyone who wants it, Bill is simply making it more accessible. But is that necessarily good for individuals and the hobby as a whole?

What about running an informal poll among VD readers -- is the Bill Quinn Everything hobby dossier a good idea, or just another example of mindless data crunching for no good reason? How do the "old hands", those with the most data to enter and therefore presumably the most accurate dossier in terms of spotting trends in play, feel about having that information readily available to the rankest novice?

I'm just conservative enough to view with distrust any attempt to systematically catalog my past behavior. When I visited Hanoi twice as a crew member on various missions to exchange peace conference delegates back in '74 I expected to be photographed and interviewed with an eye to fattening any dossier the North Vietnamese might have had on C-130 crew members then operating in Southeast Asia. The Diplomacy hobby was the last place I expected to pick up a dossier. Am I just paranoid, or are others concerned about the "Quinn Files"?

As I said in a letter on this subject to LSD, kudos to Bill for tackling Everything, and a smart flip of the big bird to him for starting his KGB-like files.

((I've got mixed feelings about those who analyze data about Dippy players, either for a ratings system or for a comprehensive history such as Bill plans. On the one hand, I cannot question the right of such people to do this, nor do I question that such data might have value to certain players. On the other hand, I personally don't like rating systems and the like, nor would I find any particular value in a file like Bill's. (Although in fairness, I should point out that I maintain a blacklist of VD dropouts.) In the final analysis, it is well to keep in mind that there's nothing you or I can do about it, if someone wants to maintain such a file, other than to avoid supporting it. But I too would like to hear what other Doomies have to say on the subject.))

From Mike Barno (1/4/83):

So, Bruce, you're going to leave the Vacation Dip discussion to those involved? Okay, then, I'll speak up.

Background: VacDip (it was also called R9 was Julie's excuse for getting hobby attention and Dick's respect. She was very interested in Dick, who was engaged to another girl, and she spent a lot of time with him; but he took her for granted, like his reputation. When VacDip was announced, Julie wanted to play, but Dick didn't want her to. So she wrote to those of us who had signed up. (Myself, Scott Hanson, Bob Olsen, Scott Phillips, Mike Mazzer, Mark Lew, and Dan Stafford eventually played; I don't know which ones were signed up at the time.) Her letters introduced herself as "Dick's silent partner"

and asked us to pressure Dick to let her play. He filled the game without her, but she became a hobby celebrity and the ESM's ((Endwell Society of Mediocrity)) cause du guerre.

After a very enjoyable season or two, Dick decided to turn the game over to Julie. It had already been slowly and sloppily GMed, and it became worse. (My Spring '02 orders contained the press item "DIAS: Delay Is A Standard." Spring 1902.) Fall 1902, a couple of months later, was the last season ever published. Stafford resigned and complained about GM errors in (I believe) a single letter; to me, this certainly implies that the GMing was the cause for his resignation, considering he mentioned no other factor. Scott Phillips was dropping out at the same time, or so he said. Why didn't Bob resign? Perhaps because his last unit was placed in CD by a vacation card that the player may not have even had. Or perhaps it was because, like me, he was having a lot of fun in spite of the GMing.

In any event, that last turn was published by Dick, not Julie. Why didn't she? After all, he had Retal, the games he was GMing, and the games he was NMRing, I mean playing in. Her only hobby involvement was ego gratification and helping Dick put out the zine. And she did make a commitment to run the game. So what if she took no money for it? After all, according to Dick, it's "getting paid twice for the same thing" to pay an R9 gamefee and sub to Retal. She accepted an obligation and utterly failed to keep it. Of course, it was "only" a variant -- suppose she had picked up Sigwalt's game?

Great historical quotes: "...No one complained when I did end it..." True, nobody objected when she printed a burial of the game -- ten months after the last adjudication -- and that only after I practically berated her to do so at a ByrneCon. While you're at it, Julie, declare the Studebaker Corporation bankrupt too, will you? I doubt it'll upset anyone.

Really, though, it was unfair to give Julie a 1 in the Leeder Poll, just as she didn't deserve a 9.8 the previous year; in neither case did she do any GMing. I mean really now Julie, don't wake up or anything, but DipiMaster wasn't the best zine in the hobby last year, either. We gave you "toady votes" before you had GMed a season.

No, Julie isn't just like Dick. Dick GMS poorly; Julie GMS poorly. Dick's games suffer extreme delays; Julie's game suffered extreme delays. Dick was funloving and loved back then; Julie was funloving and loved back then. Dick can be hostile now; Julie can be hostile now. (God knows I'll never try to open a friendly conversation with her again like I did last Friday.) The two have lived together or virtually so for a long time. Both will tell you that you have no right to talk about certain matters. But no; there are differences in there somewhere. ~~Dick would never sleep with Robert.~~

Are you happy, Julie? Your name's been mentioned a lot now. I daresay I'm not the only one who felt or feels you ruined a very enjoyable game. Some of us cared more about the game than you cared about anything except getting Dick away from Alice. You won; we lost. "So who cares anyway?"

((Whew! I think I'll still keep my own mouth shut on this, at least till Julie's had a chance to present her side of the matter. I think the personal stuff could get you in trouble, though...))

From Ed Wrobel:

Bruce--

How dare you (p.34, #69)? You're singlehandedly creating a whole new species of Diplomacy player: the Doom Shaftee. Just because Berch certified your unfair ruling it's not magically fair. He himself said my intent was clear. And ambiguity should be the only reason for disallowing an order. So exclude me from membership in your "fair majority".

((Just because you didn't agree with my decision doesn't magically make it unfair. Double-ordered units are treated as holding, and I did you the courtesy of calling an ombudsman despite what I felt was a clear-cut call. I don't see how I could have been any more "fair" than that. This letter, then, unlike your previous comments on the matter, comes across as pure bellyaching.))

From Ig Lew (1/4/83):

You don't have to print the date with the letters; I can put it up there myself, 'cept sometimes when I write the letter over a period of days/weeks. I don't know what people see in trite-and-extraneous, but that's the stuff that made me popular with the lost generation, I mean you.

I wrote a big long piece about all the assorted controversies with the intent of putting together the many bits and pieces I never mailed, and sending it to you. But I never got around to mailing it, too bad.

Perhaps I'm hopelessly befuddled, but it sure sounds like Caruso doesn't know what he's talking about about the controversies.

As for double-stamp Whitestonias, I think John should charge \$1.00 and put out "half issues" occasionally. 'Twould be clever.

I've a few complaints about R2, but they're not GMing complaints. I have whined at Dick about a few things but I never had a case and I knew it. You can't do that sort of stuff in VD. What a shame. That's why I like screwy GMS.

Aw, come on guys, having your character assassinated isn't all that bad!

You don't even have to ask. I don't feel abused by Dick, nor even Scooter. Bob Osuch, now there's a man who can abuse me! (☺)

What about Stafford/Coughlan? I think Stafford is terrific (despite R2) and would be flattered if he "spread rumors" about me.

I think more people would accept publish when I feel like it if it were announced that refunds are available upon request (I suspect they are, with Retaliation).

BLACK HOLE is 3 years old?? Lord, how time flies. You know you're an old fart when you're reading DD and you wonder how "recent material" slipped in with the reprints...

Nothin' wrong with your GMing, BRUX, I like you as a GM as much as I like, say, Dick Martin.

Not so fast, Brooie, an uncoasted F Spa looks just as "impossible position" as two A's Ven. So why isn't it forced to be corrected? Better yet, why not just kill the two A's Ven (I bet he uses mirrors).

I forget the details but when I read the Off the Record quiz answers, I was surprised to see myself disagreeing with just about everyone. Basically, I let the game suffer rather than risk being nasty to a person. Some of you boys strike me as fanatic. Italy is a mad scientist who has rigged up a bomb which obliterates St. Louis, MO if this letter reaches France's mailbox, but goddammit he's taken away your diplomatic option, so you pass the letter anyway, right? Uh huh.

I haven't made any out-and-out deals since Sherwood left the CGA, but I've never quibbled about cross-game consideration. Come on. Lots of people will ally with someone they write to a lot. It happens that I write/talk a lot with Hanson, Martin, Osuch, &c, games or not. Call me irresponsible...

Olsen's letter was pretty well thought-out -- for a geologist.

Time ripe to warn the novices about me again? After all, if you saw a vicious German Shepherd about to eat a child at play and didn't warn the child...

WARNING. This letter will turn into a paper golem and eat your typewriter if it is not printed or destroyed or tied up by March 15, 1983.

Why is everyone being so mean to Dan Stafford? Perhaps Dan is just being wry and doesn't want to gross out his fans with such dense footnotes.

But I must agree that D.S. is an asshole, mm quite an asshole! (☺)

No biggie, BRUX. Any body can simply ask Woody, "Hey Woody, will an NMRed and dislodged unit in your games be allowed to retreat, or must it go off the board?" and Woody can reply "only if it's a fleet in the central third of the board" or whatever and it's on the record.

I've given up on escape clauses to let the novices know I really want to eat them, they just bug it all up. Though I do wimp out on some really dangerous ones and slip in a few "(☺)S".

I can't see why Highfield's sad. Now, when the economy stays bad all Ronnie's boys can say "Told you so!" whereas if the Repubs all won and the economy stayed bad all us

Demos would say "RR, you were wrong." (And if the economy gets better, I suppose it doesn't matter much who's in office.) So remember folks, next election vote for the candidates you don't like.

Say, I hate to be a drag, but I don't think Alex L. is any less mediocre than any other hormone-infested early adolescent.

Well, I like the letters. The articles are only good to get one free issues. Not to read.

Ah, but is the price of EE just 60¢ or do you pay a bit more to maintain your sub...

Of course, novices are allowed to have thoughts on the hobby, but to express them? Novices should be seen and not heard. I don't want the hobby to grow.

Oh, now I'd rather not live in the Soviet Union, but I'd rather live in the Soviet Union than not live at all. And I'm not alone. I can think of a few million Russians who agree.

I don't mind NVR = yes. Takes the pain out of reducing your game load.

You don't mean you actually participate in those pagan rituals, do you?

Do you address Mark L.'s VDs "Larzelither"?

(part of) Your reply to Nelson Heintzman is redundant -- all novices are rank.

Cathy Cunning is gross. I hope she hates me.

Mark Berch is right on target as usual.

(("Half issues"? Now there's a novel idea! Your comment about Caruso hits the nail on the head, though.

So who wants to go to the time and trouble of asking any GM how he rules on potentially dozens of different situations?

I don't understand your comment about maintaining a sub to EE, and I have no idea what "pagan rituals" you refer to.

I liked your comment about the German Shepard about to eat a child at play. Your letters certainly fill the void left by Curtis Gibson after I dismissed him from these pages!))

From Ron Brown (1/5/83):

Dear Bruce:

Your latest issue (#70) arrived Monday -- I must say that I am overwhelmed by the volume you are capable of publishing time after time with no apparent "burn-out" to accompany it. I don't know how you do it, but I sure hope you can continue it for a long time. Voice of Doom is probably the best zine for the money in the hobby today.

In this issue's Gossip Column, you asked (sort of) for a few comments from me on a couple of things. I should probably ignore it -- all commenting on things does is get someone pissed at you and really does no good whatsoever. So with this firmly in mind, I will go ahead and do it anyway!

First of all, how about concessions to one-center powers? I guess I'm all by myself on this one but I don't see anything wrong with them. I mean, this is Diplomacy, right? Aren't you supposed to be rewarded for your powers of persuasion? So if a one-center power can persuade everyone else to vote him the winner, why not? The guy must be a hell of a diplomat. I'd say he's the winner if all the players in the game vote him so. From what I've read from others in your zine, I must be the only one who feels that way. You could make some houserules to say something like: "No one can win the game unless he has at least 8 (10? 12? 16?) centers AND everyone then concedes him the game." I just don't think the GM ought to interfere that much in the game. If the players want to end the game by concession, at any time to anyone, they can in Murd'ring Ministers.

How about double issues? I feel very strongly that each publisher must make this decision for him/herself. If you can't stand doubles, then don't subscribe to the publisher who produces them. No one, absolutely no one, publishes a dipzine to make money. Accusing one of doing so is ludicrous. How much do you want to lose, that's the question. Some (like you) lose more than others (like me) but I know I'm not making anything so you must be losing your ass! Which brings me to the matter of the "ridiculous game fees".

Even as each publisher has to right to

- 1) set his own price structure for a subscription to his zine;
 - 2) set his time interval between issues;
 - 3) set his own house rules;
- he may also
- 4) set his own game fees.

I am one of those who charge a ridiculous game fee of \$6.00. Why? After the last postal increase I was faced with raising the cost of something. Nearly everyone raised their sub rates (not you but some did). MM has remained at \$5.50 for 12 issues for a long time at no increase in subscription rate. Instead I raised the game fee. A Mark Berch article was largely responsible for this decision when he pointed out that a well-GMed game is easily worth \$6.00; so why not charge the players of the game what it's worth rather than sticking everybody with a general sub increase? It made sense to me and I've been doing it this way ever since. I've never had any complaints about it, so I guess those who sign up for games feel they are getting their money's worth. Also, I must note that since the higher game fee was initiated, there have been far fewer NMRs and dropouts. Is it possible that the higher game fee increases what a player feels he has "staked" in the game and therefore leads to a better game?

The NVR = yes/no situation comes in here also. I mean, after all, isn't it obvious that the sinister publisher/GM who charges so much for game fees and is sending his kids to college with all the loot wants the games to end quickly so he can make more money? It's just my opinion that you are really stacking the deck against any and all draws if you have NVR = no. Most small powers just don't have enough interest to vote. Period. But then if you have DIAS, you might as well have NVR = no as well. Speaking as a player, I only want games where NVR = yes and no DIAS. As I realize there are many divergent opinions in our hobby about everything, I want to stress that these are only my OPINIONS, not meant to be declarations of fact. But that's one of the great things about our hobby is that somebody, somewhere runs a game just the way you want! ((Very well put!))

Finally, you asked me to respond to Dick Martin's and Kathy Byrne's letters regarding R7 or 1980HY as Dick would prefer it be called now. Although Dick stated several things which are at least questionable (you objected and/or corrected his facts many times in his letter -- Kathy a player in BLACK HOLE, 4 or 5 players resigning from it, etc.) let's assume that what he says about R7 is the absolute truth. The problems with 80HY began when Dick took his extended vacation from publishing R. Up till then, there was never any problem with getting the 80HY results into the zine with the other games. Then Jack started mailing the adjudications himself and asked for 50¢ each to defray his expenses. Perhaps high, but better than an abandoned game, right? Dick was sending us adjudications too, the same we were getting from Jack, but later. Then when Dick resumed his publishing, 80HY was there but the seasons published were a year or so behind the actual progress of the game. On July 24, 1982 with the adjudication of W'09/S'10 came this note from Jack: "...it appears we have been abandoned by our publisher. Consequently, after careful consideration, I have decided to assume publication of this game." In the next adjudication on August 14, it said, "We have an offer from Steve Langley to use Magus as the new home for this game. Of course, we could always take a chance on Martin, but I am more inclined to either just continue in this fashion, or take Steve up on his offer. How about it?"

The players (Langley, Olsen, Mazzer, and myself) all agreed M would be the new home. Under the circumstances, I don't think Dick should berate the players (especially Langley) for this move. There does seem to be some sort of colossal misunderstanding between Dick and Jack, however. I'm sorry if I said anything in my last letter (VD #68) to offend you, Dick. I think you did very well during all this, and someone should have let you know what was happening. I just assumed you knew already, so I didn't write. My apologies.

Bruce, keep up the excellent work with VD. We all enjoy it very much.

((Thank you! I shudder when I hear the horror stories about some of the games in this hobby, and am grateful to be playing under a GM as reliable as Gary Coughlan.

I totally agree with your comments about concessions to one-center powers, and with your opinion of NVR = no. Also, I know from my own personal experience that a game in Murd'ring Ministers is worth much more than \$6.00! Thanx for writing.))

From Ty Hare (1/5/83):

14

Dear BRUX,

Whadaya mean, look for the Cowpies in the Super Bowl this year? What about those Detroit Lions (Loins?)?! If Dallas manages to make it to conference playoffs, you can bet that Detroit will be waiting for them and boot them Cowpies right out of the NFL! (Now if you intimate that that makes the Lions a bunch of sit-kickers...) However, I'm very pleased (and I'm sure that Jake Halverstadt is also) that the Denver Donkeys and their "cheerleading" squad "The Pony Express" (Mule Train is more like it) finished in typically fine (i.e. losing) form. Having also been "Broncoed to death" for the last five years, and now living with a Donko fan, I hope the entire state croaks from terminal Donkomania.

I found Jake's response to Alex's Column on hunting (VD #70) quite amusing. He seems quite concerned with the welfare of game animals which are subjected to the perverted and unsportsmanlike conduct of hunters. Yet he makes no mention of the real perverts of society: the people who raise domesticated animals for the sole purpose of killing them and eating their flesh. There is nothing "fair" or "generous" or "sportsmanlike" about slaughtering, en masse, penned pigs or cows or chickens. But no one decries this practice.

Is it perhaps because these domesticated animals are an established part of our culture and diet and are plentiful, while elk and caribou and bear are not a "necessary" supplement to our menus? No. Chicken and beef are no more necessary to our diets than would be goose or venison. I doubt there are many of us Doomies who are vegetarians (conquering Europe does work up an appetite that nuts and berries just won't satiate), but I'll bet there would be many more if we had to kill the cows and chickens ourselves to make hamburgers and chicken hot dogs (chicken hot dogs?). In this regard I respect a hunter who can kill what she eats and eats what she kills.

I do believe that the only reason people castigate hunters and hunting in general is because of their concern for the "natural beauty" of the wild animals being hunted. No one would care about baby harp seals being clubbed to death if they weren't cute.

Finally, Bruce, did you happen to see "The Last Word" with Phil Donahue last week? Phil interviewed a fellow who is marketing a game called "The National Survival Game", very similar to the Capture the Flag we played when we were kids. Played outdoors between two teams, the object is to capture the opposing team's flag. An opponent can be neutralized by blasting her with a .62 caliber pistol firing small pellets containing paint -- you hit an enemy player, the pellet explodes on her, and she's "dead". A bit like commando raiders, eh? The game sounded like a lot of fun, and surprisingly enough most of Phil's audience thought so too! Phil looked rather distressed about this ready acceptance of what he may have thought to be a somewhat violent game. What do you think about this?

((I like violent games -- they provide a harmless outlet for violent tendencies some folks may otherwise take out on real-life people.

I don't think that you are distinguishing between hunting for food and for "sport". So what about the Detroit what's-their names, anyway?))

From Jim Meinel (1/9/83):

Dear Bruce,

Regarding Dick Martin's belief that a five dollar gamefee is "ridiculous", I charge \$5 for my games which I feel is a fair amount to cover copying charges, stamps, BNC contributions, time, etc., etc. If I were like most publishers, I could charge ten dollars a game and still lose money on the zine.

Dick may have had a leg to stand on if he didn't charge any gamefee. But he asks \$3 for his games and we can assume that this amount is a "fair" amount, for him. Is it really such a quantum leap from \$3 to \$5 that changes a gamefee from "fair" to "ridiculous"?

((I'm confused by this letter. According to Dick, he has never charged a gamefee for any game he GMs in his zine, but you say he charges \$3. Would somebody kindly clarify this apparent discrepancy for me?

I don't think any gamefee is ridiculous if the players are willing to pay it.))

From Pete Gaughan (1/6/83):

Dear (?) BRUX:

I want to meet this guy Halverstadt! Aside from the fact that he once lived in Ohio (and therefore can't be entirely bad), he also talks about West Virginia the same way I do! Well, three ishes of VD have convinced me that I better only be a spectator in this zine. Too much bloodletting -- outside the Dip games -- for my taste. My own "disillusionment" (see Peter Blitstein's letter in #70) centers on my inability to convince people to write, rather than feuds/arguments, but I'm still uneasy with all this hate.

A few minutes with Pete "Andy" Rooney:

Ever notice how Bill Highchair's letters get more Republican, and make less sense, the further you read? I wonder if there's a connection...

Ever wonder how John Leeder can afford to bribe so many dippers to say nice things about him?

Ever notice how Mark Berch writes really long sentences? Ever wonder why? In his last letter, he had 324 words in 15 sentences for a 21.6 average -- including one whopping 48-word sentence!

Well, so much for now. Thank Chuff Afflerbach for his article -- with a name like that he should be a stunt man.

((Like long sentences. Wish everyone used 'em. Hate people who don't.))

From Jack Frost (1/3/83):

Bruce,

Thank you for your courtesy copies of VD #70. And of course I feel free to reply. I feel free to do just about anything.

It never ceases to amaze me just how many different ways there are to look at things. From my point of view, if seven people were willing to give me \$4 to GM, that's their business and mine, not Martin's.

My arrangement with Martin amounted to a free sub in exchange for GMing 1980HY and sending him an exclusive copy. If he didn't like the arrangement, he should have changed it.

Although he scribbled an occasional note on his zine, I can't say I remember receiving a separate request for more information. Although I did miss some of Martin's deadlines, the USPS did me in on a couple, also.

Some time into Martin's "irregularity", I did receive a nice note from Kathy Byrne.

When Martin had gone "NZR" ((No Zine Received?)) for a couple of months, I put the question of what to do with the game to the players. You all know the result.

It certainly is good to hear that Martin is publishing regularly again.

If I had to do it all over again, I think I should have sent him a line to let him know what happened.

Maybe that's why I'm such a loser at Diplomacy.

((Thanks for providing another side to the sad but entertaining saga of R7!))

At this point, you are probably all asking yourselves, "How can I earn some free issues of The Voice of Doom?" Well, there are several ways.

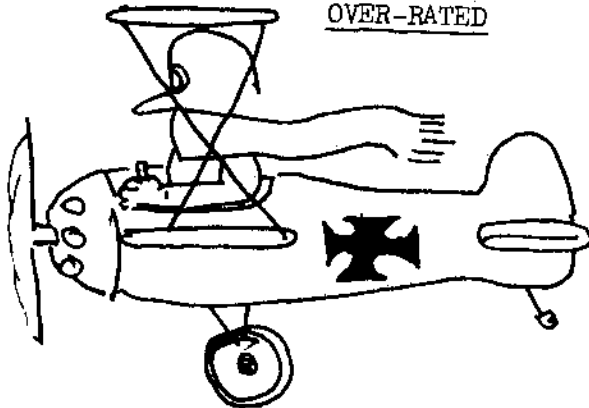
If you write an original article for me and I use it, I'll pay you three free issues per printed page.

If you bring in a new subber, and he mentions your name as his source when he subs, you've earned a freebie -- just as Bill Highfield did a few days ago by getting Porter Wightman to sign up.

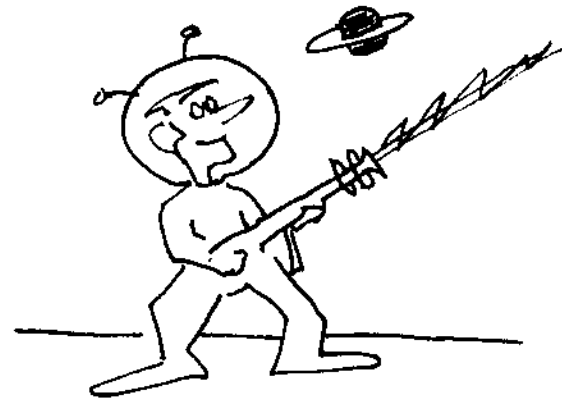
If you win one of the contests I run from time to time, the reward is usually free issues.

If you stand by in a game, and finish out the position, you've earned three big ones.

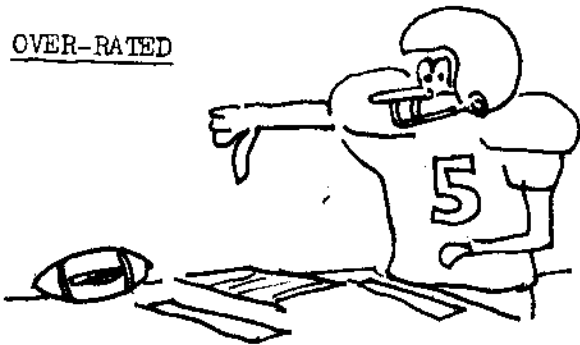
So many good games are at the bottom of many critics' lists or are not even spoken of by the many gaming magazines...many games that are spoken highly of or pushed by game companies are really not that great, and so I have started the UNDER-RATED AND OVER-RATED HALL OF FAME.

OVER-RATED

The Playboy Guide to Board Games calls Richtofen's War the best wargame on the market and the Complete Book of wargames gives it a rating of excellent. Yet I never saw a dogfight where one plane moved, fired, and then stayed still in mid-air while the other plane did the same. This is realism?

UNDER-RATED

Other than Diplomacy, Freedom in the Galaxy is my favorite game. It has elements of role-playing as well as strategy.

OVER-RATED

Long heralded by Avalon Hill, praised by Sports Illustrated and Games magazines, Football Strategy is simply a guessing game. Each time I play it I ask myself what's the big deal about this game?

UNDER-RATED

Sorcerer's Cave is an excellent fantasy game that is easy to learn and is a blast to play. I've never heard it talked about at all.

OVER-RATED

Milton Bradley has sold Stratego for years and it has many devoted followers, but I think it's dull and boring. P.S. The Electronic Stratego is an entirely different game and is much more respectable.

M. PAUL

UNDER-RATED

Conspiracy is an excellent family game that has received little or no publicity. You will no doubt check the cover several times in disbelief that Milton Bradley could come out with such a good game.

17

Instead of her usual column this issue, I am honored to print...

Children of War

a short story by Alexandra Lord

Living among the Irish was one of my unidentified dreams until I was chosen and shipped to the Emerald Country to learn everything about the history of Ireland and the political and financial problems which have been present ever since the grayed things of stone have been set on the folding green fields. This was something I could throw my whole self into, if only I didn't have a wife and two children to come home to in the evening after all my introductions and discoveries. I really wanted to come home and lock myself in my cluttered studio and ignore the giggles and the rest of the noise children create. I was no longer the family man back in the states with a pipe and newspaper; I was a disturbed writer.

One Saturday afternoon driving through Belfast, I decided to stop and buy some sausage or Paddy's for Sunday breakfast. I pulled up to a thriving center city mall; of course I was briefly searched like all the other shoppers due to car-bomb attacks and other public dangers. As I approached a small meat shop I noticed a figure standing against the bright, welcoming store front. Since he was standing against such a bright background and it was early dusk, I couldn't really identify his face until I got closer. It was a boy about... well, it was hard to tell how old he was for he could pass either for a child or a young man in different eyes.

"Grand night, isn't it?" I asked. "Mind you that's a durty wind tonight, likely to give you a dose of pneumonia, and no charge!"

His head jerked up instantly and he replied, "No doubt of that, Sir!"

And thus started our conversation. The boy had wonderful, huge blue eyes and dark, sweeping lashes. He had a tousled look about him but his black, shaggy hair was shiny and clean. He wore a big overcoat and he wore it well. His tweed trousers were neat and had a crease in each leg. I observed the hole near his hip with sympathy, for his fists were thrust deep in his pockets and I was afraid it was going to rip wider soon. He seemed to be preoccupied with something, although he didn't display nervousness.

"Would you happen to have a smoke to lend, Sir? If you could only spare one, I have a hard night ahead of me!"

I gave him a cigarette and lit one myself. He inhaled deeply and as he exhaled he began a tale that was heart wrenching, but familiar to me from my numerous interviews with Catholics and Protestants and their "troubles." His name was Sean and his mother was killed before his eyes three months ago during a raid while his father, a member of the I.R.A., was away.

"They came right in our house all eight of 'em and for some ungodly reason I knew what was going to happen, so I took my two brothers and sister out of the room, just before that blasted rifle sounded. The worst part about it was that I couldn't help her in any way. We were all in danger and we are all victims, dead or not. It's hard not to take sides. We must learn to forgive, that's what I tell my older brother Jackie, but I know he's already following in Papa's footsteps. Those footsteps lead him right to his grave, you know."

By this time I was shocked and numb. Although I had seen and heard it all before, I had never heard the story from the mouth of a child. Was he a child? He had the courage and strength of a man. He continued to tell me that he has to take care of his brothers and sister, and he fears for their lives in the Catholic ghetto where he lives.

"The crash of bombs, the rattle of gunfire and the constant moaning of sirens echo in our dreams at night, even if there are none, which is rare. My father hasn't come back yet, ever since Mummy died. Guess he thinks it was his fault, because they know he's in the I.R.A. Maybe he's dead. Before he left, he used to sleep with the whiskey jug, so we didn't talk much. All I know is that we have to stop, for we can never win, neither us nor the 'Prods.' We are all prisoners of war," he explained.

I was listening closely, my eyes fixed on his left hand, holding the cigarette. He was a lefty, like me. I don't know why I didn't notice that we were both lefties before. I saw myself in him. I saw my dad and I playing catch, going to baseball games together.

and talking man to man. I saw my mom comforting me in her lap, petting my hair lightly until I fell asleep in her arms. I saw the necessary childhood things that he was missing. How lonely he must feel when he's lying in bed and no one comes into his bedroom and tucks the covers under his chin and kisses his forehead. I wanted to do something so he would realize I thought of him as a real man.

I asked, "Sean, would you like to join me, ol' pal, for a pint o' stout?"

He answered, "Thank you dearly ol' chap and bless you, but I have to feed the children and bed them down, for we all have to get up for church in the mornin'. Mummy would have wanted it that way."

For the first time he took his right hand out of his pocket and shook mine. He had a strong, masculine handshake, although I think mine was a dead fish at the time. I forgot all about the sausage as I walked away from the meat store. For it was then I realized that I was a coward. It was dark and cold and I suddenly wanted to be at home with my wife and kids. Instead my feet took me to the nearest pub. Inside, I made a silent toast to all the Children of War.

((Thanx, Alex, for a very insightful and well-written story. This is, in my opinion, one of the best pieces of literature ever to come out of Hannacroix, NY.

Alex's Column is published by Alex Lord, Doonie of the Year, Box 178, Hannacroix, NY, 12087.))

Thus endeth another mid-monthly. I hope y'all enjoyed this one -- it's the first issue in over a year on which I haven't lost my shirt!

BRUX

Bruce Linsey
24A Quarry Drive
Albany, NY 12205

1/27/83

Steve

Thanx for subbing, and for the nice letter. Are you sure I can't print your "off the record" comments? I thought you stated your position very well. See my reply to Randolph Smyth in VD #70 for further comments.

Hope you enjoy your stay as a Doonie, and I'd be very pleased to see you become an active participant in VD. Later, etc!

Your sub expires with issue # 70

BRUX