

THE VOICE OF DOOM

#91

February 7, 1984

Circulation: 123

by BRUK

A Spy at Cambridge

((Reprinted from Richard Sharp's book The Game of Diplomacy, p. 128))

One of the most famous scandals ever to rock British Diplomacy occurred at Cambridge in 1973. For some reason, Jesus College seems to attract Diplomacy players, and at that time it sheltered two leading lights, then and now: John Piggott and Andy Davidson. John was producing his Diplomacy wine Ethil the Frog, justly regarded then as Britain's best, and now in production again after a two-year layoff; Andy was playing in numerous games in Ethil and elsewhere.

The Ethil deadline fell on a Friday, which meant most orders had been received by the Thursday; and on Thursday each week John was regularly absent for a longish period attending a practical. One Thursday he returned early...to find an industrious Andy squatting on the floor of his room copying down the orders sent in by other players in the games he was playing in.

Uncertain what to do, John applied for counsel to Don Turnbull... Don was adamant that Andy should be evicted from all his games, but John decided against this drastic action and merely stipulated that all Andy's units should stand unordered for the current season. Another respected British GM, Richard Walkerdine, commented that the affair "left a nasty taste". Well, I had my doubts then, and I have them even more strongly now. It seems to me that Andy was within his rights as a player (though obviously not in other respects, as the college authorities would certainly have confirmed!). In a face-to-face game there is certainly nothing to prevent players trying to discover orders by "espionage"; the rulebook doesn't mention the subject, though perhaps it should. Arguably a rule should be made whereby once orders have been handed to the GM they are sacrosanct; but at present this rule does not exist, and has not been written into any "house rules" that I have seen.

((Richard Sharp has not seen the Voice of Doom house rules! But he does write very entertainingly.))

The Voice of Doom is a journal of postal Diplomacy published every now and then by Bruce Linsey, 73 Ashuelot St., Apt. 3, Dalton, MA 01226. Phone (413) 684-0567. Subs are 10 issues for \$5.00. Standbys are wanted. There are no game openings. Diplomacy is a registered trademark for a game invented by Allan B. Calhauer and copyrighted by Avalon Hill.

"...Just another mid-monthly so I can print all this marvelous poop..."

2
Jan

Coupla more humor items recently submitted to VD by Jean Ectron and Judy Lindsey respectively...

Log of the Project Titanic

- STEP 1 Select due date
- STEP 2 Select acronym (optional)
- STEP 3 Select turkey (i.e. project manager)
- STEP 4 Develop project schedule
- STEP 5 Hire systems analyst
- STEP 6 Develop systems document
- STEP 7 Develop input specifications and order forms
- STEP 8 Hire programmers
- STEP 9 Begin work on entry programs
- STEP 10 Begin work on conversion programs
- STEP 11 Begin design of data files
- STEP 12 Begin work on update programs
- STEP 13 Hire more programmers
- STEP 14 Begin work on output reports, etc.
- STEP 15 Slip schedule
- STEP 16 Hire more programmers
- STEP 17 Panic
- STEP 18 Search for guilty
- STEP 19 Punish innocent
- STEP 20 Promote uninvolved
- STEP 21 Go to STEP 1



Translations from Research Literature to English

1. It has long been known...
I didn't look up the original reference.
2. A definite trend is evident...
These data are practically meaningless.
3. While it has not been possible to provide definite answers to these questions...
An unsuccessful experiment, but I still hope to get it published.
4. Three of the samples were chosen for further study...
The results of the others didn't make any sense.
5. Typical results are shown...
The best results are shown.
6. It is believed that...
I think
7. It is generally believed that...
A couple of other guys think so too
8. Correct within an order of magnitude...
Wrong.
9. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further investigations in this field...
This is a lousy paper, but so are all the others on this miserable topic.

- 10. Thanks are due to Joe Blots for his assistance with the experiment and to George Frink for valuable discussions...
Blots did the work and Frink explained to me what it meant.
- 11. A statistically oriented projection of the significance of these findings...
Wild guess
- 12. The data will be discussed...
We haven't done the experiment yet.

~~~~~

The Dippy Spaces Quiz

Each of the questions which follow has as its answer one of the 73 named spaces on the Diplomacy Board, excluding Switzerland. Some of the answers may come a bit more easily to long-time Boomies, but what the heck. Just write your answers on a sheet of paper separate from all other correspondence, sign your name, and send 'em to me by March 15, 1984. (I'm pretty sure all answers are unique, but if someone can demonstrate the correctness of an answer I hadn't considered, credit will be given...) Highest number of right answers wins 2 free issues of VD. Ties will be broken by flipping a coin. Here we go.

- 1. Which supply center aside from Munich can never be captured by Turkey in 1902.
- 2. From which space can an army receive a legal order to move to the most other spaces?
- 3. Which space has never been and will never be mentioned in a legal order given to a fleet?
- 4. From which space can an army reach the home territory of any Great Power within three moves, provided no multi-fleet convoys are used?
- 5. From which space is it impossible for an English unit to retreat as the result of a Russian-supported Turkish attack in 1904?
- 6. In Spring 1902 a German unit bounced with an Austrian unit, leaving both of them adjacent to no supply centers. In which space did they bounce?
- 7. A unit on the board belongs to a power with one center and no chance of growing. In exactly two and a half game years, a Russian unit will be adjacent to this unit. Where is the Russian unit now?
- 8. One season, an English army was attacked by five Russian armies, none of them in supply centers. The same season, a German army was attacked by five Austrian armies, none of them in supply centers. The next season, the English and German armies mentioned above moved so that they were adjacent to each other. An Italian army supported the English move and a Turkish fleet supported the German move. The season after that, the afore-mentioned Italian army and Turkish fleet bounced in a vacant space. Throughout all of this, the French F Wes remained unordereed. In which space did the Italian army bounce with the Turkish fleet?
- 9. There is a certain board position which, as it happens, can never legally occur in Spring 1920. In a certain game, however, this position did occur legally in Fall, 1920. After the Spring 1917 moves in this game were played, Gascony, Moscow, and Albania were all empty, while the Ukraine was occupied by a French army. Which space (other than the Ukraine) was necessarily occupied at this time?
- 10. Which supply center must England capture in order to receive three builds in 1901?

CORRECTION: #5 should say English army, not English unit.

Houserule Lawyers Round Table

by Don Del Grande

This is the DBC (Diplomacy Broadcasting Corporation). It's time once again for your least favorite show and mine, the one where the feuds come up from the fiery pits of Diplomacy, HOUSERULE LAWYERS ROUND TABLE. Today, we have four rather distinguished houserule lawyers. (NOTE: these characters do not represent, in any way, real persons, although one or more of the characters' statements may be (unintentionally) similar to one or more persons you know).

"Good day, gentlemen."

"Yes, how are you, fine, good day, it's nightttime (SLAP) how are you today, nice day to fight, etc."

"Today, we happen to be talking about one Bruce 'BRUX' Linsey."

"What, AGAIN? Doesn't somebody else use houserules?"

"Calm down gentlemen. Anyway, this is a slight twist from what we normally discuss, insofar as this involves a variant called 'Diplomacy Central'."

"We know that already."

"Of course you do, since you had time to think this one out for three, maybe four, minutes -- a lot of time considering it costs several hundred trillion hos per minute for each one of you idiots." (We should explain -- a "ho" is the unit of money used in the computer game Trader as redesigned by your friendly neighborhood UNIX hackers at UC Berkeley's Electrical Engineering and Computer Science department.) Today's claim is made by Steve Knight of Reston, VA, a fellow UNIX hack, concerning the game 1983x01 run in The Voices of Doom.

"The tall guy with the blue pinstripe suit -- let's hear what happened."

"You got it. Steve was assigned to play Austria in this game, which has two special rules: 'All the rules of regular Diplomacy apply' and 'The first person to successfully order a unit to Albania wins.' Anyway, Steve NMRed in Spring 1901, and Bruce's houserules state that an Austrian NMR in Spring 1901 results in neutral orders which include F Tri-Alb. The rest is obvious -- Steve was declared the winner, and somebody else complained. Next time on -- WAIT A MINUTE! Bruce's ruling was that the houserules were declared the winner!"

"That's more like it -- real controversy, and you're hearing it right here and now! Anyway, you with the white top hat -- what do you have to say?"

"The legion of doom shall prevail again! Steve's claim is that the houserules are not a player, and thus don't apply to the second special rule concerning the first player who orders a unit to Albania; while Bruce says that the houserules made the winning order and thus get the credit. Insofar as I, like my fellows, am a houserule lawyer, I have gone through all of the appropriate rules and have made these observations:

First: there is nothing anywhere that says that each country is limited to one person, or that no more than seven players can participate. There can be two Austrias. ((At last -- the true explanation behind the term; "Dual Monarchy"!! -- EL))

Second: Steve did not order the unit to Albania; he NMRed, so he has no claim to the win, despite the fact that he has made no such claim. Also, the other six starters -- the players of countries other than Austria -- have made no claim to a win, since they did not order any units to Albania, successfully or not.

Third: Bruce claims that the houserules ordered the unit to Albania, while Steve says that the houserules are not a player. If the houserules are not a player, the game is not over, since the fact that the houserules 'ordered' a unit to Albania is not an ending condition. Assume the houserules are a player. The houserules do not have a subscription to Voice of Doom, and thus violate rule II.1 of the VD houserules, making the order illegal. Under no circumstances can this game be over.

Ergo, the game should not have ended when, or as, it did."

"How about the rest of you?"

"Well, I think no doubt about it the result seems obvious let's eat (SLAP) what's the decision?" (I'm handed an envelope.)

"Here it is! It's unanimous! All four of our lawyers agree that UNIX hacks are ALWAYS right and ARE superior to COBOL programmers any day. However, we can't give the win to Steve as he never did order a unit into Albania! Too bad. Well, you could always pick up where you left off, and then argue that 'F Alb H' is not considered ordering a unit into Albania. Until next time, then?"

"See you next time have a good day let's go have a beer (SLAP SLAP) enough already."

((Thanks, Don, and four free issues. Hope you don't mind that I had to edit this heavily.

As for the solution agreed upon by your houserule lawyers; well, if "F Alb H" is not to be considered as ordering a unit into Albania, how about "A Alb supports something...". And why do these things always happen in VD, anyway? I think that Steve Knight and the other players must have set me up...help...arrrgghh...))

~~~~~

Eric Kane has finally answered my challenge to state specifically which VD houserules he feels are silly. In Anduin #27/28, he lists the following ones: I.2, I.3, I.7, III.2 (regarding Daylight Savings Time), IV.7, V.1b, VII.9, VIII.2, XI.7, XI.8, and XI.10, and also VII.6 (parenthesized orders). Now that he's gotten specific, I can answer him more successfully.

I.2, I.3, and the three rules he mentions from Section XI are silly, I agree, but they don't hurt anything by their presence. These rules deal with such things as inland fleets and whether or not extraterrestrials may play in VD, etc. Each of these five rules is only one sentence long.

V.1b does not exist. I couldn't figure out which one he was trying to condemn.

III.2 is perhaps unnecessarily detailed when, in stating that deadlines will never be less than four weeks, there is an exception: it may be one hour less than four weeks when Daylight Savings Time takes effect in the spring. Maybe I didn't have to say it, but that is how VD's games are run.

I.7 urges players to seek another GM in the event that something happens to me. I suppose that the houserules aren't necessarily the correct place for such encouragement, but again this rule does no harm to anyone.

VII.6, on parenthesized orders, is the rule permitting the use of parentheses in abbreviating sets of orders such as F Por-Mid (F Eng S). Eric calls it silly, but probably a majority of my players over the years have used this notation. It's a very convenient way of abbreviating orders, and I do not have any intention of suddenly disallowing such orders. I do not think this rule is silly at all.

VII.9 gives the acceptable format for writing retreats. I do not think there is anything silly about it.

VIII.2 states that players may call to find out the moves in their game as soon as the deadline has passed. Eric himself took advantage of this rule the season that he won the NEPTUNE game. There is nothing silly about it.

IV.7 is a full page long and covers conditional orders. It states that the conditions must be made "PAINFULLY OBVIOUS", it gives the scope of conditionals (e.g. that orders may be made conditional upon who is playing a country in a given season, or upon a codeword submitted by another player in the game, and so on), it discusses the results of orders conditional upon another player's missed moves, and more. I regard IV.7 as essential, let alone not silly. Lots of players need to use conditional orders from time to time when seasons are combined, and this rule informs them how I will handle these orders.

And that exhausts all the houserules Eric listed as "silly". While I agree in a few minor cases, I do not think that Eric has shown that my houserules are silly on the whole. Try again, Eric? Or anyone? (☺)

The Gossip Column

From Ken Peel (1/19/84):

Dear Bruce:

I am writing to register my objection to the purposefully misleading editing you did of Ed Wrobel's letter in the last issue of VD ((#89)). I do not care one whit about the ongoing "double ended" disagreement the two of you seem to be keeping alive (will everyone tired of the Linsay/Wrobel affair please raise your hands?). Everyone ought to know by now that you are a strict/unreasonable (depending on one's point of view) GM. Despite your well-deserved reputation for regularity and reliability, I would never play in VD, because I believe that your strict constructionist GMing philosophy puts such overbearing emphasis on your idea of "fairness," that the equally important goals of playability and game flow are heavily compromised. Some may disagree, and those hearty souls will undoubtedly enjoy playing in VD more than elsewhere.

But to the main issue, I believe you did your readers, but most especially Ed Wrobel, a disservice. I am one of the few Doomies who also happen to subscribe to Politesse. There is a vast difference between Ed's playful and teasing editing of your letter, and your "retaliation" in return. Specifically, I think you should reprint your letter as it appeared in Politesse, with the cartoon, ellipses, and editor remarks. I doubt that anyone could fail to recognize exactly what was going on. Indeed, Ed appeared to bend over backwards to make it painfully clear.

When I read Ed's letter to VD, however, I hadn't the slightest suspicion of what was going on. We all know that Ed Wrobel's style is often opaque, but I was surprised that he was writing in such a confusing and contradictory manner. I assumed that there was some deeper joke that eluded me in the first paragraph, but the bit about "sexual mates" absolutely confounded me. I then became absorbed in the serious part of the letter and your response, and forgot about the odd beginning until I received Ed's open letter to you a couple of days ago. I then went back to the letter in VD, and realized how careful, misleading, and inappropriate your editing had been.

If you cannot bring yourself to admit your abuse of your prerogatives of an editor, and the difference between what Ed did and what you did, I hope you will at least do the vast majority of your subscribers a service, and let them judge for themselves by reprinting the original rewritten-by-editing letter directly from the pages of Politesse.

PS. Thanks much for the WD III plug!

((You're welcome. Hope it netted you a few warm bodies.

My butchery of Ed's letter was merely intended as a joke. I've done it a few times in the past to parts of people's letters, but only to small parts, and the humor was a bit more obvious. Thank for the constructive criticism.

Well, you're entitled to your opinion regarding my GMing, though if you'd never sign up for a game here then what are you doing on my standby list? I don't agree that my GMing compromises playability or game flow at all, but then again if I felt otherwise I'd probably not choose to GM the way I do. Good luck with WD III!))

From Mark Berch:

With regard to your 82X query, there's been at least one British game in which a winning Russia didn't even own StP.

The coast seems to be clear, so you can say that I wrote the "Mr. Y" article in the annish.

((Nah. I don't want to let 'em know who did it yet.))

From Ronald Reagan (12/16/83):

Dear Mr. Linsey:

When I took office as your President our country faced the worst economic crisis since the days of Franklin Roosevelt.

With your support, we enacted far-reaching legislation designed to attack the root cause of our economic problems.

We cut back on the Democrats' high tax and big spending binge. And we passed a long-range economic program to reduce inflation, bring down interest rates and create productive jobs in private industry.

Today, I'm proud to say our nation is headed in a new direction.

But I felt it was important I personally write you now because what you and I do in the coming days will determine how successful we are in keeping the nation on this new course.

If we fail to stop the Democrats from winning in 1984 they could overturn and destroy all the progress we have made in pulling our nation back from the brink of economic catastrophe.

That's why I hope you will accept my personal invitation to join me in laying the groundwork for a Republican victory in 1984 by becoming a Sustaining Member of the Republican National Committee.

The simple truth is that our opponents, the Democrats, have not learned the lesson that their policies of tax and tax, spend and spend were directly responsible for the prolonged recession which caused all Americans, young and old, worker and businessman alike, to fear for their very economic survival.

And if the Democrats and their liberal special interest group allies regain power, then I am convinced they will force our nation right back down the disastrous road to more spending and higher income taxes.

I am not prepared to sit back and let the Democrats destroy what we have done to cut taxes, to achieve a spectacular reduction in inflation and to restore basic individuals American freedoms.

And I don't believe you are, either.

Right now the most important thing you can do to help me carry out our programs that are redirecting our nation is to accept my invitation to become a Sustaining Member of the Republican National Committee.

By accepting my invitation and making a membership contribution you are signaling your personal commitment to work with me in our fight for the principles we share.

Let me tell you why your support of this particular Committee is so important to me.

The National Committee is the official organization of our Party responsible for laying the foundation for our entire 1984 campaign effort to elect more Republicans to federal, state and local office.

I am counting on your support so the Committee can carry out its full campaign program for our candidates.

This includes recruiting and training outstanding candidates, conducting independent surveys of voter attitudes, running local and national TV and radio campaigns, and organizing thousands of volunteers.

That's the only way our candidates will be able to counter the massive liberal/Democrat drive to take back control of the government in 1984.

I say that because, just as in 1982, our candidates in 1984 will be opposed by a powerful, well-financed coalition of liberal special interest groups and some Labor Union Bosses.

As was demonstrated in the last election, this liberal coalition will stop at nothing to defeat our candidates.

They'll spend millions to run radio and TV ads that deliberately twist and distort our programs. And some Labor Union Bosses will unleash millions of dollars worth of so called "voluntary" manpower support for Democrat campaigns.

There is another equally important reason why I am hoping you will make a generous contribution to the Committee.

In the months ahead, I personally will be relying heavily on the Committee to build and mobilize broad national support for my legislative programs.

Over the last few years the Committee's efforts on behalf of my economic proposals have been absolutely vital to their passage through Congress.

And as I continue to press for dramatic changes in order to bring government spending under control, I will be relying on the Committee to again help me win some very difficult political battles in Congress.

You see, as I look to the months ahead, there is still so much for you and me to do together for our country.

We must once and for all bring government spending under control.

We must give back to state governments the powers the federal government and courts were never intended to have.

And we must continue to rebuild our defenses so we can negotiate arms reductions with the Soviets from a position of strength.

But if the Democrats win in 1984, elect a liberal President, gain control of the Senate, and increase their strength in the House, we may lose forever the chance to finish the work we have begun.

We would see an immediate return of the very same policies that caused the highest interest and inflation rates in peace-time history and allowed the Soviets to achieve military superiority over us.

You and I simply cannot afford to let this happen.

I know from talking with my good friend Mike Curb, National Finance Chairman, that the number one goal of the Committee is to raise its full \$15.8 million campaign budget.

This amount represents the absolute minimum the Committee needs to protect incumbent Republicans, help our challenger candidates and turn back the alliance of liberal special interest groups, some Labor Union Bosses and the Democrat Party that has dictated our nation's policies for the last thirty years.

If the Committee cannot raise its full budget I fear it will be a dangerous setback in our long struggle to discard the bankrupt liberal policies of the past and keep America on our new course towards economic prosperity.

That's why I am hoping you will make a generous contribution to the Committee today. No matter how much you decide to send, I know it will be a great help.

Since taking office I have worked hard to live up to the faith which you have placed in me. And I will continue to do so in the years ahead.

But I am counting on you to stand by me, our Party and its principles to make the vision we share of America's future a reality. Knowing I have your support will be a very special source of strength for me.

((It is truly very flattering to know that my opinions are held in such high esteem by one so highly regarded as yourself. As you and all other Democrats know, I share your concern for the future of our nation. I look at the Soviet military machine growing ominously on the horizon, and tremble in my boots, and breathe a sigh of relief that we have in office a strong President such as you. Because of this, and because I am touched by your impassioned plea,

The Voice of Doom fully and freely endorses Ronald Reagan for the office of President of the United States in the 1984 election.

Ron, we'll turn Massachusetts around for you yet!

My contribution to the Committee is another matter entirely. Although I am a diehard Republican, and although I support you 100%; I cannot justify the blind support

of all Republican candidates, including those whose views are unfamiliar to me. I'm sure, if you think about it, that there are some people out there who will call themselves "Republican," and run on that ticket while either overtly or covertly supporting a liberal foreign policy, e.g. I want no part of supporting such candidates.

However, I do recognize and agree with your point that your campaign and programs rely heavily upon funding from the committee, so it becomes hard for me to ignore your request altogether. Hence, I'm willing to make you a deal.

If you will become a Doonie by sending me a sub fee for ten issues of VD and either join my standby list or agree to participate actively in the letter column here, I will respond by sending you a contribution of ten dollars, despite my rather precarious financial position and despite my reservations expressed above. That's five dollars of profit for you simply in exchange for your agreement to become active in VD. What do you say?

The only further request I would have would be that if you choose to take me up on this, and become active in the letter column, that you try to steer a little more away from the discussions of politics and get involved in some of the other topics we've been talking about here. I know, I know, politics is your bag, but I think it gets tiresome after a while. I'm sure my readers would be more interested to hear what you have to say about double-ordered units, or your views on hunting, or whether you'd like to see Alex's Colman return, or what is your favorite war game. How about it, Ron? I'll keep my end of the bargain if you'll do it. And you'd even be welcome to stop in at Lake George with me and my friends (you're a non-smoker, right?) for as long as you like this summer.

Become a Doonie today!))

From Jaap Jacobs (1/9/84):

Dear BRUK,

Many thanks for the two issues of VD which arrived on the same day. I quite agree to trading as long as I stay active in your letter column. It seems a good deal to me, though of course Oxy does sometimes contain some English.

Both issues you sent me were very interesting. The letter which you printed in #87 surprised me. ((This refers to the Shep Rose letter.)) Of course, I haven't the faintest idea what was said in the Diplomacy World (wrong name for an American zine, by the way) articles, but I wonder whether this is the right way to react. Even if the DW articles contained personal insults to Shep Rose, is it right to answer with such a tale, right or wrong? And, are you as zine editor supposed to publish such a thing? The four pages Shep wrote are red with hate, anger and revenge. In no part of it could I discover any arguments against the DW articles. "Space does not permit me to make a lot of specific references to the Diplomacy World articles," Shep writes. But apparently space does permit him to go on for three and a half pages telling what nasty tricks Mark has performed on him and others, especially Scott Leipzig. If all this is in any way relevant to the DW articles it is not at all clear to me. And as you as zine publisher are the one to decide which letters to print and which not to print, I wonder what reason you could have to decide to print this letter. Do you agree with Shep that this is the right way to react to attacks on his person, disregarding the question if the facts mentioned by Mark are right or not? Is this kind of letter usual in the U.S. hobby?

The "Picking Your Nose" article was disgusting and interesting. I might try this tactic at the next tournament for the Dutch Championship Diplomacy.

Could you send me a copy of your house rules? I'm very interested. ((Done.))

The Roll Over BeethovenCon in #88 was funny and interesting. It was also much more readable than the parts of VD that are printed in purple. Taxes on Diplomacy

are of course rather nonsensical, because it cannot be enforced upon hobby players without a good hobby organization, which no doubt Larry would be very interested in setting up but to which many other people will have their objections. Starting to GM games of Diplomacy is so very easy that one can never control this sort of thing. Not in the States, anyway; here in Holland we do have something of an organization, though not much.

((Well, if you've received #90 yet then you know my views on hobby organization.

It's interesting, sitting here as the editor of what is still (face it) one of the most controversial zines in the Diplomacy hobby and watching the responses roll in. Because after all these years, I still am amazed at the broad variety of material that people find objectionable. Ed Wrobel flies off the handle over my intended response-in-kind (that admittedly went farther) to his butchery of my letter. Jim Finley cancels his sub over the play that you and many others found hilarious. And now you object to the Shep Rose letter, of all things! If nothing else, one can draw the conclusion that if my editorial policies attempted to please everyone, I'd have nothing I could print!

To the specific question at hand, I thought the Shep letter (which was circulated to a number of North American publishers) was hilarious. But then, maybe that's because I'm such good friends with Berch, and I laughed out loud upon reading the description of the sleazy little man pulling all these stunts on those with whom he came in contact. The real Mark Berch is of course just the opposite outside of his Diplomacy games: in American postal Diplomacy he has the widespread reputation of being about as honest and fair to people as it is possible to get. The actions described in the Shep Rose letter are so far out of character for Mark as to be laughable -- and I (and others) certainly did a fair bit of laughing upon reading of them.

Then again, that's hardly an answer, is it, because I would have printed the letter even had it been about someone else. Probably. Let's just say that I found it funny, and leave it at that.

Let me know if you win the tournament over there by picking your nose. If so, I want a share of the profits. (Um, let me rephrase that...))

From Mike Ehli (1/17/84):

Dear BRUK,

Okay, put me on the standby list. I'm a standby in just about every other zine I subscribe to (except for EE, where I'm a Malaberger).

Enclosed is a color picture of myself. I'm more than happy to add to the quantity of your collection, if not the quality.

I heard that you had a big U.S. map on the wall to keep track of your subbers, et. al. I thought of the idea myself, independently, when I got started in the hobby a couple of years ago. Instead of pins, I use stick-on colored dots; blue for the players I've played against, green for publishers I've heard from (whether I sub or just got a sample), not to mention sub-pubbers whose games I've been in.

Coming very soon, yellow dots for players in my games (and if/when FNORD becomes a full-fledged zine, subbers). Also, there's some red dots for the colleges I heard from when I made National Merit Finalist, and NO, there are NO black dots.

All these dots are still rather sparse, but that should change.

How many pins are on your map?

((Over 120, though it's about due for an updating.

Thanks for the photo of your monkey. Could you please send one of yourself?

Hope to see you at LeperCon. I won't, though, 'cause I won't be there, but you should go nonetheless. Let me know how it goes!))

From James Wall (1/20/84):

Hail Brucifer:

I see by a certain piece of mail that you are once again recognized as the fount of all that's bad in the hobby. You are a great lightning rod. Actually I can sympathize with Wrobel as I had a similar job done on a letter in Rauterberg's Midlife Crisis. What I see as the great strength of the Midwest Mob (MWM) is the fact that I just got hold of Paul, expressed my displeasure with his editing job on my letter, and he understood my position and we went on to much more pleasant topics. The fact that Wrobel went so far as to print up a letter to be mailed out to your readership just shows the difference in how the Mob handles itself compared to the ECC and others in the Mid-Atlantic area. When someone in the MWM pisses off another, the person offended just tells the other to fuck off over a beer or 5. The ECC seems to be a very vindictive lot as a whole. There are so many people mad at each other you need a score card. And the lengths they go to to make themselves heard! Why the hell couldn't that have just been an insert to VD to save someone postage? People do have a right to express anger at maltreatment, of course, but to let it get so poisonous just stuns me. This is of course referring to some of the crap that I've noticed without singling out any individuals or specific examples.

Mad Con will be in Madison ((Wisconsin)) on Memorial Day weekend (I think that's the one in May!) ((Mark Frueh tells me that the dates are May 25-28.)) It will likely be in my place as all the other Mad people live in shoebox-sized apartments. Nice, but not built to hold a MWM et. al. get together. Oh well, I am letting you know early so you have no excuse not to attend (a little arm twisting). Seriously, if you get here I'll make you a Rhyskey Dew of your very own! You could be one of a select few who ever tried one. Now that is a deal you just can't pass up!

Steve Knight, you owe me a letter!

Sorry about that, the album ended.

You know, I think it's just now started to sink in that I'll graduate in May. I haven't even applied to graduate school yet. I hope to continue on here in Madison and get my masters in Political Science. I may not know where or why, but I do know what and when so I should get my act together before too long. I hope.

We had a great time New Year's here and hope you did as well. I don't think the Mob made contact with ByrneCon, only with the Ore and Woman, and Langley's place. Luedi conceded to the Wapatul1 ((??)) at 11:30 PM before midnite! Sure floored me. He was one of the last standing, however, so I know he had a good time.

This is long enough so I'll close here before you begin to snore like the U.S. 134th.

PS. What is your policy on DNO/NFP? Did I need the "for print" note on the front?

((Zzzzzz...what? Oh. No, you didn't. Letters sent my way are assumed to be for print unless there's a good reason not to print them. Such reasons would include a request from the writer not to run it, a personal attack on someone, excessive boringness, discussion of topics not of interest to the general readership, or whatever.

Steve Knight, you owe him a letter! And what the hell is a "general readership"?

Alas, I won't be able to make MadCon. I'm saving my money this year for Kabin Kon at Lake George, and that will eat up all two weeks of my paid vacation time as well. Doomsies interested in attending MadCon can write to James Wall, 27 N. Mills #3, Madison, WI 53715 or Mark Frueh, 1013 Milton St., Apt. #304, Madison, WI 53715 for further info.

Actually, I think that the ECC's method of handling disputes is preferable to that of the MWM. So you were mad at Rauterberg, but the problem is that nobody got to read about it. Wrobel did the right thing in sending that letter around, although I would surely have published it for him had he preferred it that way. But in my opinion, he was doing me a favor, because by sending out the letter separately,

he drew people's attention to it and generated much healthy and interesting discussion of a pertinent hobby issue: how far should an editor go in chopping up someone's letter as a joke? I'd give my right arm to keep getting thoughtful letters like yours and Ken Peel's, e.g., and Ed's action certainly didn't hurt matters a bit. You call it "poisonous", but I think it's healthy and desirable. As far as I am concerned, Ed Wzobel is one of my hobby friends with whom I enjoy debating hobby issues.

That's not to say, though, that the Mob's method of resolving these things over a few beers isn't fun either. And hey, I've met most (all?) of your gang, and can testify to your warmth and friendliness, if not your controversiality.))

From Michael Kettman (1/27/84):

Dear BRUK,

I just finished reading VD #90 on the train on my way into work. Once again, I must tell you how much I enjoy your magazine, including the letter section. However, I felt I must write and comment on your "coming out of the closet" and declaring yourself to be an anarchist. I think you may have come out of the wrong closet. Anyone who employs such strict Gming and has such extensive house rules can hardly be an anarchist. Anarchy stands for the complete opposite. No rules. No deadlines. No arbitrary decisions. From what I have observed in your magazine, I think you are quite the opposite of an anarchist.

What I would suggest is that you may be an elitist or an oligarchist. I don't quite understand your opposition to efforts to organize the hobby and provide some order. Your house rules seem to indicate that you value organization and order quite highly. I might venture that you are opposed to those efforts because they don't suit your needs or style. I would think that the author of one of the respected magazines in the hobby would take a lead in such efforts rather than oppose them and hide behind such an inappropriate label. But as you have often mentioned in your magazine, everyone has a right to disagree. However, I think you ought to use the right nomenclature in your opposition. I'm sure the anarchists out there would appreciate the withdrawal of such an orderly and detailed mind from their ranks.

One question regarding your adjudication in my moves for the QUASAR game in the last issue. I tend to disagree with your ruling as the order could only be interpreted as support for the move in Tuscany. As I am a sub in the game, and rather late in the game, it is not a matter of life or death. For my own knowledge and satisfaction, I would appreciate knowing how to write the order correctly.

That is the extent of my observations and I will say I never thought I would be writing such a letter to VD as I believe I'm a passive player in the game. Well, I guess there is no time like the present for a change.

((Indeed. I hope you'll continue to let me and my readership hear your views.

Regarding the adjudication in QUASAR, you wrote A Tus-Ven, A Rom S A Tus. When writing an order to support a move, you must specify the whole move that you are supporting. The correct way to write it would be A Tus-Ven, A Rom S A Tus-Ven; or, in VD's abbreviated notation, A Tus-Ven (A Rom S). The support order as you wrote it is an order to support A Tus in place, which is illegal when it is ordered to move.

VD is "respected"? Blarf. But to answer your point, I think that we can distinguish very clearly between organization within the zine and organization within the hobby. I organize my house rules and my zine because I think it is useful to do so. I don't see the various hobby organizations as "useful", at least not to the extent where any hobby member should be required to pay one cent to support them. And, while "anarchist" may not be the best word for my stance, I think it's pretty close to the mark. But I'll try to find a better closet to emerge from next time. The pantry in Kathy's kitchen is always nice...))

From Don Del Grande (1/28/84):

Hex BRUK:

No, there hasn't been a December Pacificon -- I had something else to write an article about. Sorry about that obvious advert in the article -- I almost mentioned gettings ads in to Roy Hemicks for the 1984 Zine Register, but I got that in the next Life of Monty already. Say, howzabout joining a game of Campaign Trail?...

PLEASE DO NOT FOLD, SPINBLE, OR MUTILATE THIS LETTER, as it has been folded for you. Actually, when I got my eighth book from the Military Book Club, the back of the billing form (like it always does) has a space for questions -- I wanted to get out of the club, so I wrote that I wanted to leave the club. I expected the note to be ignored or just looked over -- two weeks later I got a letter saying they would stop sending me order forms since I wanted to leave the club. So much for your story (Computers Don't Lie). Besides, in California, appeals on death penalty sentences are automatic -- I guess so that Rose Bird, chief justice of the California Supreme Court and devout liberal, can have it reduced to life imprisonment with the possibility of parole, allowing the criminals to go free and strike again. Except for the bit with Rose Bird, it has happened that death row inmates have been released and sent back to death row on a new charge!

You know as well as I do that I have to answer Mark Paul... Chaosium still designs Runesquest -- the new version to be sold by Avalon Hill shall be untouched by AH developers' hands, according to some Chaosium bigwigs who were in Games of Berkeley recently (Chaosium is located in neighboring Albany). Samurai and Machiavelli are still their original Batteline versions with an A/H logo put on, but they aren't true AH games yet, like Flattop and Freedom in the Galaxy (which have had minor revisions). As for Acquire, learn how to spell! Going to Itinery, I've never seen these games, but nobody can have 100% winners. Illuminati is like Diplomacy -- the more, the merrier. (Actually, it's like Kingmaker in that too many players spoil the game.) FINALLY -- can anyone name one GDW game (not an AH remake -- a GDW original) with a mapboard backed with any type of mounting?

Sorry, but I don't have the time to enter your contest. I will say this much as a hint: my quote has nothing to do in any way with Diplomacy, VD, or BRUK.

PLEASE DO NOT FOLD (you can spindle and mutilate) THIS ZINE. I'm getting ready for number 100 -- it'll probably be an 8-pager.

((Well, don't look forward so eagerly that you miss out on all the juicy stuff I have planned for the Gay Nineties!

Thanks for your comments in response to Mark Paul's about games. Between you and him, we pretty much keep VD's readers informed about the gaming world outside of Diplomacy -- something that I would not be able to do on my own, since my gaming experience is actually pretty limited. Thanks for writing.))

From Fred Davis (1/25/84, in response to a private inquiry):

Dear BRUK:

Yes, Albion probably had over 2000 pages. There were exactly 50 issues. Earlier issues had only about 25 pages, but later ones had up to 70. There were also supplements with game rules. If his zine averaged 50 pages, that would be a total of 2500. If you want to write Don Turnbull directly, his address is: 3 Sedley Taylor Rd., Cambridge, CB2 2PW ENGLAND. I'd think John Boyer's Impassable + his variant zine, Lost Horizons, may have reached 2000 pages. If you count his work as Editor of the IDA newsletter, Diplomacy Review, and one of his special zines, Aquarius, he certainly reached the 2000 mark. Can't say about Runestone. Why not ask John Leeder directly? Or ask Walt Buchanan, who still has the Archives for pre-1980 pubs, if there are any others from the Good Old Days.

((Thanks for the hints. It's not that important to me to know exactly who else has hit 2000 pages, so I won't do all that writing. But I'm in pretty good company!))

((I neglected to add in my reply to Fred's letter on the previous page that Albion, founded in 1969, was the very first British Diplomacy zine.))

From James Wall (1/26/84):

BRUX,

It appears that God now knows that I'm alive! In issue 90, page 35, he takes offense at something I said concerning today's establishment mass media. Well, it would appear I must now let God ((Berci)) and anyone else who cares (doubtfully anyone) know what I meant.

First off, polls on who writes and/or reports on articles/newscasts show wall over 60% label themselves as liberal. Second, today's liberals in general (read not necessarily everyone, but most) will only bring themselves to criticize Russia when they perform atrocities on Caucasian European people. The KAL-007 incident thus rated condemnation. To date, however, if God will recheck his articles, the Washington Post hasn't even admitted to their readers that yellow rain in Cambodia exists. It refers to it in articles with misnomers such as "alleged violations" of yellow rain. If something is only alleged then it is not accepted as fact. If this yellow rain were in, say, Austria, you'd better believe bloody murder would be screamed. Furthermore, I'd like to point out that the major media manages to get reporters into Nicaragua and El Salvador so as to write articles on how we are so misguided for helping keep a democratically elected power in El Salvador. Why the lack of effort when backward, far off nations such as Cambodia and Afghanistan are involved? Answer: it's Russia who is involved, not the United States.

By the way, soil samples have proven Russian chemical complicity in both nations' soil.

I guess I did do a poor job at making my point when I referred to our press. My point was not reporting news is at least as biased as expressing opinions in news. ((??)) Hush up Afghanistan, Cambodia. Ignore Russian violations of chemical warfare treaties. Why won't Reagan sit down and talk with Russia about nuclear weapons disarmament. They wouldn't use them against innocents, would they God? Besides admitting these facts instead of "alleged violations" may strengthen the position of those who support Reagan -- neither the Washington Post nor the N.Y. Times would ever want to do that.

It is important for Americans to be exposed to both sides when foreign affairs are concerned. It is equally important to report all news. I guess I worry a little when I see major American institutions -- that's what the Major Mass Media should be considered -- playing hush hush about provocative news stories. Why isn't the media as concerned over Afghanistan as it was with Vietnam? Granted Americans aren't dying but I sure don't see any Anthony Lewis, William Safire or Bill Greider all upset and preoccupied either. Interesting food for thought in today's liberal, rights oriented left. Maybe we are the bad guys and should tear our guts out because of El Salvador but then maybe again we should be consistent and stand up for all human beings, not just those the left-oriented media selects.

((I think you would make your points equally well if your rebuttal omitted the sarcastic references to "God" and the characterization of his comments as "he takes offense". I didn't see them that way at all.

To the issue at hand, I tend to agree with you more than Mark. It sometimes scares me that the news media are so powerful in this country, and I agree that they tend to downplay the stories that might put the candidates/groups they support in an unfavorable light. KAL-007 could not be downplayed because it involved Americans and so hit too close to home. Afghanistan and the Soviet persecution of Jews, to name two examples, are stories that the media shy away from, in my opinion. This whole discussion brings up the question of why media people are so liberal to begin with, as a rule -- something I've never heard explained adequately.))

From Ron Galicia (1/28/84):

Bruce,

I just got Supernova and the VD sample. Thanks! It was pretty thick compared to the other zines. "Computers Don't Argue" stood out among the articles and letters.

Anyway, Larry Peery and someone else made mention of my last name. I don't know if it's an advantage or a disadvantage. I don't think it will last long as a novelty, though.

Supernova had a lot to say. I paid special attention to "Gloom and Doom" by Randolph Smyth, and the "special" treatment us novices get. Thanks for offering advice, but I wouldn't know specifically what to ask. Maybe a brief list of "don'ts" would do.

I don't know if a sub must be maintained in order to stand by in your zine. I would probably subscribe near the end of the year when you would probably have openings available. If articles like "Elements of Persuasion" are very common, then it could be rush sooner.

Well, that's about all for now.

P.S. Who's Bernie Oaklyn?

((Thanks for writing, and in the process netting yourself still another free issue of VD. This one's a bit more typical than the sample #90 you received. I try to go with 22 to 34 pages per issue, usually. As for "Elements of Persuasion", I don't think articles like that are very common at all! Even weird minds like my own can conceive these crazy ideas only so often...))

Bernie Oaklyn is a pseudonym for Bernard Tretick. He folded his zine a couple of years ago, so doesn't merit much discussion here any more, but in his day he was notorious for his dishonest publishing and GMing practices -- stealing sub money, changing players' orders, putting his son in his games under a pseudonym and using a maildrop so the other players wouldn't catch on, etc. Supernova still contains a brief warning about him, although it may not be necessary so long as he is not publishing.

In VD, a sub must be maintained in order to stand by. However, I do not encourage people to sub here simply for the purpose of waiting to get into a game, since there won't be any openings in the foreseeable future. Rather, sub here if you enjoy the reading material.

Well, I guess I can believe a last name of "Galicia". Now, if someone wrote me calling himself "Ron Mid-Atlantic Ocean", then I might get suspicious that someone's pulling my leg again...

You asked for a brief list of "don'ts" for a hobby novice. I am happy to offer you and other newcomers a brief list of some do's and don'ts, some of which are covered in Supernova.

Don't get involved in more games than you can handle. Take it easy.

Don't stop writing to other players in your games, even your enemies.

Don't get angry regarding something that happens in a game. And if you are angry, do wait two or three days before writing to the person you are mad at.

Do expect your GMs to be timely and consistent, and if you feel you have been treated unfairly in any way, write your GM a calm and courteous explanation of how you feel before telling anyone else about the problem.

Do try to make friends through the hobby, as it will be enjoyable all the more when you do. You can do this in your games, or by contributing letters or articles to zines.

Do expect your GMs to provide you with a good set of house rules, so that you will know how they are going to rule in your games. GMs who will not do this either haven't figured out their procedures in advance, or they have and aren't telling their players about it.

Don't drop out of a game if you lose interest. Play out the poor positions, but if you really can't go on, send in a resignation with a final set of orders.))

From Jeff Panches (2/1/84):

Dear BRUK,

... (PEGASUS) was good while it lasted -- now your job is to get me into another game -- I'll even pay the game fee. I'm really enjoying Jake Halverstadt's Presidential Politics except for my soon-to-be-depleted treasury. Anyone among the Republicans feel like contributing some dough to a good old-boy Democrat? I'll wait to see how the New York election comes out.

Not much new here in California -- weather's been great and I've been working too damn hard to enjoy it. I've been traveling a lot lately -- mostly to Orlando, Florida. I've enjoyed EPCOT a lot but am getting sick of it after 5 times. I always travel with different people and they always want to go -- at least they serve good beer. Running out of paper so I'll shut up.

Sys, President
Jeff

((Sys, ~~deleted~~ ~~deleted~~!))

Gosh, I've been wanting to get to EPCOT for years now. Maybe someday if I get down to visit Jeff and Lisa Noto, or Kerry and Karen Blant, I'll make it there.

Anyway, yeah, Presidential Politics is quite the blast, no? Wait'll you see the latest hilarious screw-up by President Linsey, if Jake prints it...

Another Diplomacy game? Well, hey, there are plenty of great zines out there, some with openings...))

From Ken Rager (1/25/84):

Dear BRUK,

I received issue #90 of VD and, I'm sad to have to report, it was defective. There was nothing printed on the side of the sheet where page 63 was supposed to be. As a result, I'm missing a number of valuable quotes as well as part of the instructions as to what to do with them.

I would appreciate it very much if you would please send me another page 63/64, this time printed on both sides. And, since I'm a very reasonable sort of fellow, don't waste the postage on a separate mailing. Instead just include it along with the next mailing of VD.

I enjoyed Roll Over BeethovenCon very much and was quite impressed with the quality of work that went into that. Keep up the good work.

((Ah, the joys of using a ditto machine. Unfortunately, the problem you describe happens every now and then. A replacement issue has been sent. Other Doomsies who encounter blank or illegible pages should let me know, as I will always do my best to make good...))

Glad you liked the play.))

~~~~~

Deadbeat corner: The following publishers or ex-publishers owe me money or issues that they have refused to send me after several requests.

Dave Manuel and Bill LaFosse both folded their zines without sending refunds, although both are no longer active in the hobby.

Glen Taylor hasn't been heard from since last summer, to my knowledge. I still have some issues left in my sub to DIJAGH.

Jack Masters still has about a dozen stamps that I sent him for copies of Peck. He is still playing but not publishing, as far as I am aware.

Dick Martin owes me one issue of Retaliation which he refuses to send me. He is still very active in the hobby.

On a happier note, Gregg Fritz has (after 9 months) refunded my sub money to his folded zine, Damn the Torpedoes.



COMPLEX RULES CAN ADD REALISM, COLOR AND EXCITEMENT TO GAMES. THEY CAN ALSO ADD BOREDOM AND UNPLAYABILITY. TO POINT OUT SOME EXAMPLES...

(by Mark Paul)

Freedom in the Galaxy is the state of the art as far as science fiction gaming goes. It is extremely complex, but well worth the effort. It leaves Traveller light years behind. Avalon Hill knew what it was doing when it bought this game from SPI. Can you imagine this masterpiece in the hands of the wizards of Lake Geneva?

BattleFleet; Mars shows how far game designers can go in trying to put realism in a situation that is supposed to be fiction in the first place. A friend mistakenly threw mine away. I considered it an improvement on the design.

Conquistador may be the best adventure game on the market. It's detailed and requires a bit of book-keeping, but it's well done all the same. How else can you rape, pillage, and plunder in the comfort of your own home?

Whoever invented the phrase "royal bore" had to have Down With the King on his mind. If your court person has to sneeze you consult the handkerchief chart, spin and see if he's successful. What fun... that's a question, not a comment.

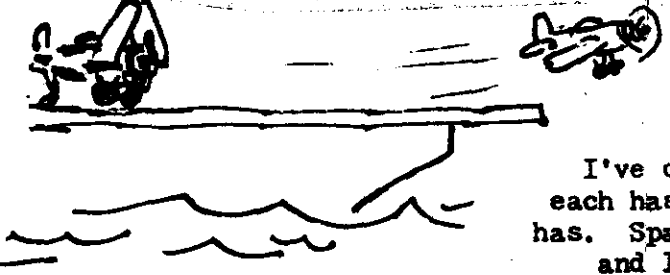
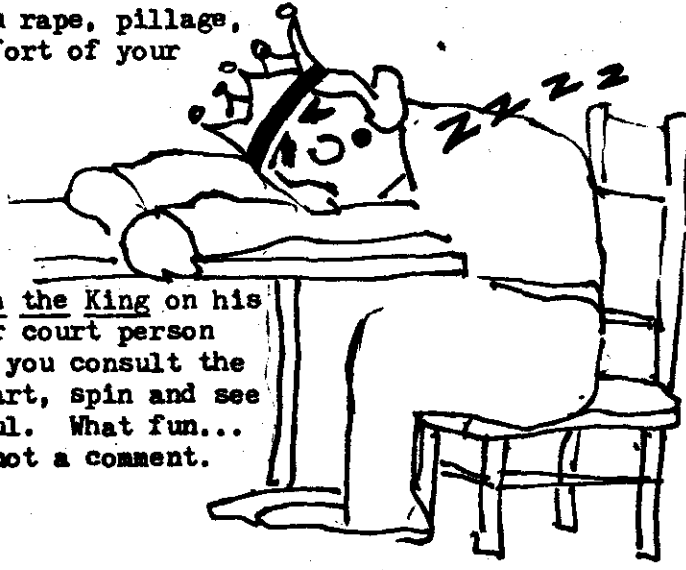
Flattop is one of the few wargaming products that succeed both as a simulation and a game. It's the most complex game I've ever tried, but it's a blast. Comparing this to Richtofen's War is like comparing James Watt and Daniel Webster as speakers.

Then there's The Struggle of Nations. I lost all confidence in the readers

of The General when they ranked

this game so low. It may just be the best wargame on the market, but most gamers are going to take one look at the Reader's Buying Guide and forget it.

I've convinced three wargamers to try it, and each has said it's the best product Avalon Hill has. Spare Diplomacy, Kingmaker, and Acquire, and I'd agree.



Winning the Pullet Surprise

by Richard Lederer

One of the fringe benefits of being an English teacher is receiving the occasional jewel of a student blooper in a composition. The original student blunder probably dates back to the day some poor pupil first touched quill pen to parchment. Ever since, students have shown a remarkable facility for confusing words that possess similar sounds but entirely different meanings or giving a droll twist to the simplest of facts. The results range from the pathetic to the hilarious to the unintentionally insightful. From my own cullings and from the collections of other teachers come these student howlers, each a certifiably pure gem of fractured English:

In 1957, Eugene O'Neill won a Pullet Surprise.

The bowels are a, e, i, o, u and sometimes w and y.

Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock.

The death of Francis Macomber was a turning point in his life.

A virgin forest is a place where the hand of man has never set foot.

Rural life is found mostly in the country.

In Act II, Hamlet is left on stage to relieve himself in his longest soliloquy.

A horse divided against itself cannot stand.

The President of the United States, in having foreign affairs, has to have the consent of the Senate.

The difference between a king and a president is that a king is the son of his father but a president isn't.

It was the painter Donatello's interest in the female nude that made him the father of the Renaissance.

Geometry teaches us to bisex angles.

If one angle of a triangle is more than 90 degrees the triangle is obscene.

Arabs wear turbines on their heads.

To collect sulphur, hold a deacon over a flame in a test tube.

In many states murderers are put to death by electrolysis.

Henry VIII found walking difficult because he had an abess on his knee.

The Gorgons had long snakes in their hair. They looked like women only more horrible.

A morality play is a play in which the characters are goblins, ghosts, virgins and other mythical creatures.

During the years 1933-1938, there were domestic problems at home as well as abroad.

Bach was the most famous composer in the world and so was Handel.

The family group consisted of three adults and six adultresses.

Richard III became a userer when he took the throne from Edward IV.

Growing on the lattice work were pink and yellow concubines.

Necessity is the mother of convention.

Zanzibar is noted for its monkeys. The British Governor lives there.

Lady Macbeth tries to convince Macbeth to kill the king by attacking his manhood.

This belongs in the annals of English literature.

Defoe wrote simply and sometimes crudly.

Shakespeare wrote tragedies, comedies and errors.

Foe was kicked out of West Point for gambling.

Chaucer was a great English poet who wrote many poems and verses and sometimes wrote literature.

Whitman wrote much illiterization and compacted verse. He often wrote long and rambling lines.

Floods from the Mississippi may be prevented by putting big dams in the river.

A passive verb is when the subject is the sufferer, as "I am loved."

Unleavened bread is made without any ingredients.

They (the Puritans) thought every event significant since it was a message from God.

In "The Glass Menagerie," Laura's leg keeps coming between her and other people.

Where there are no fresh vegetables you can always get canned.

Abstinence is a good thing practiced in moderation.

At three years of age my father was killed in the war.

To be a good nurse you must be absolutely sterile.

My favorite turned up in a fellow scholar's composition in my freshman English class at college: "The girl tumbled down the stairs and lay prostitute at the bottom."

"My dear sir," the professor responded in the margin, "you must learn to distinguish between a fallen woman and one who has merely slipped."



In VD #66, Bob Olsen wrote an article about "The Pilgrim and the Dipinaster". In VD #76, Mark Berch wrote a sequel. These two articles were two of the best ever to appear in these pages. (Doomias who would like to see them may do so by sending me a large SASE.) I have been trying for a few months to come up with a third installment to the series, which would do justice to the first two. And here are the fruits of my labors...

The Pilgrim and the Dipinaster

Part III

by BRUK Linsey

The Dipinaster gazed down the rugged mountainside and frowned as he watched the tiny figure of the Pilgrim thousands of feet below, struggling to ascend the lonely, jagged peak once again. Many months had passed since their latest encounter and the Dipinaster was not eager to endure still another interruption of his beloved solitude. He shut his eyes for a moment, as even the green styrofoam hat he was wearing did not do much to significantly reduce the glare of the sun, and then looked down again at the Pilgrim, who was struggling for still another foothold; clinging to yet another rocky outcropping. At that distance, even Olsen looked small, he thought. Then, with a sigh of annoyance, he turned back into his cave and return to his analysis of the correlation between French fourth-place finishes and English eliminations.

Several more months passed. At last, there was the sound of shuffling feet and deep breathing, and then the Pilgrim appeared at the cave's entrance.

"Greetings, Pilgrim," began the Dipinaster. "I see you have returned yet again. Sit down; make yourself at home."

The Pilgrim muttered a barely audible expression of gratitude, grabbed a nearby

sheet of paper, wiped the perspiration off his face, and crumpled up the paper and tossed it out of the cave and down the mountainside.

"Eeeek!" Screeched the Dipimaster in horror. "You just destroyed all my work of the past six months! That was my analysis of the correlation between French fourth-place finishes and English eliminations!"

The Pilgrim mumbled an apology, then added, "But thank Berch that it wasn't anything important."

"What do you want this time, Olsen?" queried the Dipimaster, his brow furrowed in annoyance. "I swear, if this keeps up I'm going to have to grow some hair so it can stand on end for these occasions."

"O Great Dipimaster!" began the Pilgrim, "I am here once again to seek your help. This hobby of ours, it distresses me."

"Distresses you! You see, I was right Olsen. You don't belong. Last time you were here, I tried to tell you that."

"O Great One, please forgive me. I love this hobby, but wouldn't it be so much more pleasant if we didn't have to deal with all these feuds?"

The Dipimaster stared in disbelief. "What was that you said, Olsen? You have used the forbidden word!"

"Feuds? Why is that forbi..."

"No, no, Olsen. You used the word if. I thought you learned your lesson the first time we met. Never wish for that which can never be. Never attempt to pursue the alternate paths of reality, for in such exercises one always encounters disappointments of unforeseen nature and magnitude. Accept reality as it is and be happy with it." The Dipimaster ended with a note of finality.

The Pilgrim was not satisfied. "But Berch, O Knowledgeable One," he persisted, "What if there were no feuds? What if the people in the hobby who are involved in all these petty arguments just hadn't found out about Diplomacy to begin with? What if..." his voice trailed off.

"I can see there is no convincing you," sighed the Dipimaster. "Where is my crystal ball?"

The crystal ball flew off the table behind the Dipimaster, arched through the air, and crash-landed right on top of the Dipimaster's green styrofoam hat.

"Youch!" cried the Dipimaster in pain. "Haven't I told you not to do that? Roll to me when I call you, for Berch's sake!"

The ball turned a shade of deep pink for a moment.

"Apology accepted. Now, the Pilgrim here needs to be taught a lesson, so get ready to perform your hypnotic hypotheticals routine. Olsen! Just what exactly would you like to see? You mentioned that you wanted no more feuders. Who do you propose to do away with?"

"Well, let's see. Gary's been in a few feuds. Suppose..." He never finished the sentence. The cave and mountain became hazy...hazy. The Dipimaster faded into obscurity and the crystal ball grew larger and larger until it filled the whole cave...

The Pilgrim awoke as from a deep sleep and started. He was in a small room with a large dictionary on a plain wooden table as his only companion. He staggered over and looked at the cover of the dictionary, and read the words, "Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the Martinese Language." But strangely enough when he opened it, all of the pages were blank. In this path of alternate reality, the world had not yet learned any words in the Martinese language.

Now the room faded and he found himself outside, walking down a long and winding road. Suddenly a cow came around one of the bends, obviously looking for her lost master, and spoke to the Pilgrim.

"Mooooooove, Mister! You've got a long way to go and it's so easy to get lost on this long, dishonest highway!"

"Dishonest highway?" wondered the Pilgrim out loud.

"Yes, Mister! Don't you know that dishonest and crooked mean the same thing? Nobody has taught us Martinese yet!"

The Pilgrim walked farther, and soon came to a small, dishonest man building a small, dishonest house, and drinking a drunkard beverage.

"Excuse me, Sir," ventured the Pilgrim, "but can you tell me how to get back to the Mountain of the Dipimaster?"

"Rightful ass that cross swords!" replied the man, pointing to a fence in the distance.

"What?" the Pilgrim asked.

"Don't you know that 'rightful' means 'just', 'ass' means 'behind', and 'cross swords' means 'fence'?" the man explained. "Look, Mister, we have nobody to teach us Martinese, so words mean whatever we want them to mean here. Now go behind that fence and take a communist!"

The Pilgrim walked behind the fence and took a left, and found himself back at the Mountain. Then he awoke again as though from a deep sleep and found himself back in the cave, facing the Dipimaster.

"You see, Olsen?" said the Dipimaster. "Without Gaxy we'd have nobody to explain Martinese to us. Communication would become next to impossible as all the words would start taking on new meanings. And we need to communicate in order to play Diplomacy!"

"I see, O Great One," responded the Pilgrim. "But what about Kathy Byrne? She's been in some feuds too. What if she had never found out about Diplomacy?"

The cave melted away again, and the Pilgrim found himself in the middle of a freezing, driving rainstorm in downtown New York City. He wandered about aimlessly, shivering with the bitter cold, but he had nowhere to go. As he trudged along, he recognized the faces of several other Diplomacy players -- Grouch, Woody, BRUK, Lousy, Caruso -- all out in the rain with nowhere to go. Somebody pulled out a Diplomacy board and set it up on the sidewalk in the pouring rain. The lightning flashed wickedly; the thunder roared ominously. It was the most uncomfortable Diplomacy game in hobby history. It came to a premature end when a particularly huge torrent of water suddenly washed away most of the units from the board and down a nearby sewer.

"Gosh," somebody muttered, "these ByrneCons just aren't the same without Kathy to host them..."

...and suddenly the Pilgrim was back in the cave.

"You see, Olsen," the Dipimaster was saying, "Without Kathy, ByrneCons wouldn't be nearly as fun. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you?"

The Pilgrim was silent for a minute. Then he responded. "But surely we could get along very well without John Boardman! Why, that old fart has caused so many hard feelings..."

The Dipimaster passed his hand over the crystal ball and again the Pilgrim found himself in an alternate path of Dixdom reality...

The envelope bore the return address of his lover Kathy Byrne. With fumbling fingers he tore it open and read the enclosed missive.

"Darling," it began, "I know I'm supposed to be your sweetheart in some hobby -- but for the life of me I can't figure out which hobby. So I guess this is goodbye..."

The next envelope was from Maxzer, and the letter read, "Dear Bob, Something tells me I'm supposed to be inflicting knife wounds in your back, but how does one do this by mail? I feel unfulfilled..."

The last envelope in his mail that day was from BRUK. "Dear Bob," it read, "I'm writing because I have this incredible urge to lie to you about something, but don't ask me why..."

The room faded, and the Pilgrim faced the Dipimaster once more.

"You see, Olsen?" said the latter, "Without Boardman, we wouldn't even have postal Diplomacy at all. You and everyone else would be stuck doing your respective things without the game as a backdrop. Now what fun would that be?"

"But...but..." the Pilgrim was clearly shaken now. "What if we got rid of..."

of BRUK? Just think of all the feuds that he's been in! Certainly the hobby would be better off without BRUK."

The Dipimaster snorted. "Watch it, Bub. You're picking on my chief client now!" But again he summoned his crystal ball. The cave got larger...larger...the walls stretched to infinity...

A large, fresh mud pie went sailing through the air and caught Olsen flush in the cheek. Laughter rang through the fields of Dipdom, then a bevy of ragged little urchins samped away. Olsen wiped the mud off his face in disgust.

Nearby, another little group of snot-nosed brats was sitting playing Diplomacy. Olsen approached them just in time to hear one of them say, "Army Flgantrskt to Hrglbrti!"

Olsen walked up to the confused youngster and instinctively put his arm around him. "What did you say?" he inquired.

"I said, 'Army Flgantrskt to Hrglbrti,' and get your hands off me, Mister!" retorted the boy. "That means the same as Fleet Kiel to Helgoland, if you really hafta know."

"But how do you get 'Kiel' out of 'Flmtrskt' or 'Helgoland' out of 'Hrglbrti'?" asked Olsen. "Besides, you've mislabeled the unit."

"We don't have to write our orders right, Mister," sassd another of the youngsters. "Here in Dipdom, houserules are obsolete. So get lost!" He spit in Olsen's face.

Olsen left the obnoxious group and ambled on. From the woods nearby he heard catcalls and hisses. These sounds were mixed with the sounds of little boys mis-ordering their units. Dipdom was a hellhole. Without BRUK and the Houserules, the naughty little kids were allowed to multiply unchecked. A stone caught him in the head, and the scene faded...

...and he was back in the cave. "O Dipimaster," he cried. "The hobby is not better off without BRUK! I have learned my lesson and will never again wish for that which can never be! At last I see the light, and there will be no more need for me to consult you ever again."

"Berch willing," mumbled the Dipimaster under his breath. Aloud, he said, "Well, you never know, Olsen, you never know. Who knows what crazy plot some obscure Doomie is going to come up with next so that you and I will have reason to meet again a few months down the road..."

And the Dipimaster bade the Pilgrim goodbye, until the next time...

BRUK

Bruce Linsey  
73 Ashuelot St., Apt. 3  
Dalton, MA 01226

*Rad - A letter will follow. For now, see especially my comments about Berch on p. 10.*

*BAUX*