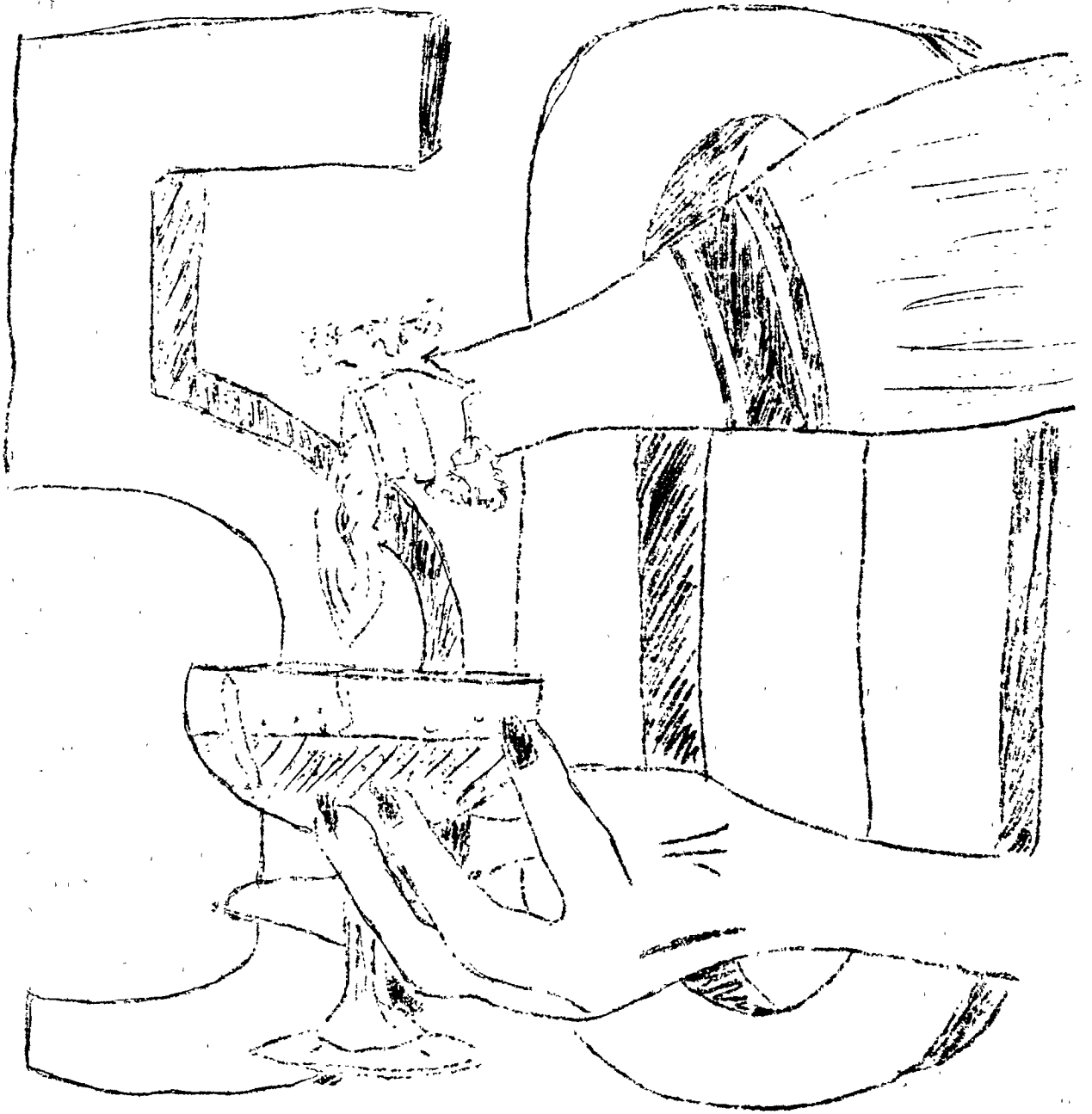


DIB DIB DIB



A warm welcome to the 50th issue of Dib Dib Dib - a bumper issue celebrating a milestone I thought I'd never reach. The cost is a fixed rate of 40p per issue in the UK and 23p + postage overseas. Anyone wishing to send money, send it to Tom Tweedy, 29 Stanley Hill Avenue, Amersham, Bucks., HP7 9BD. Tel. 02403 4513

EDITORIAL

I must start the editorial thanking all those who sent hearty congratulations on Dib reaching the magic 50 - it's all much appreciated, and omissions by Pete Mearns and Iain Forsyth are duly noted. This is supremely satisfying for me I can tell you. I never thought I'd survive this long. It may not surprise you to know I've thought of folding Dib more than a couple of times in the past (though I don't suppose there's many editors who haven't). Mind you, this was not because I didn't enjoy writing to you, or getting letters back, it was mainly due to stress - such as when the printer acts up or I'd bugged up a disc with the games on (putting me a bit behind). At times such as that I wondered just what the hell I was bothering for. Funnily enough, one of the worst times was coming up to this 50th issue. At about issue 47, 48 I began thinking about what I wanted to do for this issue. I didn't want to produce a potted history of what Dib has done over the 4 years or so (not that I could remember anything anyway), and I knew it was 'the usual form' for editors to do something special. Trouble is, I didn't actually feel like doing anything special. Not that I'm lazy - certainly not - nor did I want to cheat you out of a bumper issue, I just thought producing a special issue would be rather pointless. Then, on the other hand I thought, Dib has not done anything different the whole time it has been in existence, I MUST do something different for the 50th issue. Aaaaarrh, fold I thought, have done with this dilemma, be original, but unfortunately this is the result. You're lucky, generally I turn my back on unsolvable problems, on the grounds I've got other things to do without worrying about what I can't do.

So what HAS Dib achieved since I dragged it into the hobby? Not a lot as other zines go, I've tended to

keep away from what other editors see as the norm. I suppose I was more interested in the technical side of printing a zine, than in actually writing one i.e. better printing, typewriter, word processor, style of print - the ultimate, like this, double columns - yet still make it interesting enough to read. That's where the letter column came in; that and the games allowed me to carry on while I learned.

Mind you, on the side I introduced today's much-used version of the postal Sopwith game along with the Sopwith Ratings (which Andy Murby now produces). In actual fact it was to see how the Sopwith game would run postally that I brought Dib out in the first place; which I did by trying to tack it on as a subzine to Clive Booth's Chimaera. This idea failed miserably because Clive couldn't get his publishing dates right, so Dib started going out as 2 or 3 page photocopied game sheets to those playing in the games. Mind you, this was only until issue seven, when I finally got my 360 Gestetner - I was really determined to give this zine editing lark a go then. I'm not saying Dib is the BEST looking zine around - I know that some litho'd ones look better - but there's not many better looking mimeo ones, if I may say so myself. Oh, if only I had a good photocopier...

I was helped a lot in getting started by all the other editors then, mostly Richard Hucknall (who started off the famous Dib letter column by sending in The Letter that started off the chameleon fiasco), but at that time it was easy because other editors traded widely, and in actual fact made me feel welcome. Mind you, the fact that I was known in some small way through the letter columns in other zines helped - I wasn't a stranger just coming into the hobby, seeing a few zines and then just starting up.

I decided from the very beginning that, apart from seeing how the Sopwith would run, Dib would be a zine for the subscribers; a forum for anyone to feel welcome; to feel they could write in anything without fear of being ridiculed because of age, grammar, spelling, subject, or whatever. Hell why should I bother, I was comparatively old (seeing as most of my subscribers were students), my grammar and spelling are atrocious (they still are!), and as for subject... well anyone that can put up with chat about George North's inflatable dolls and Chameleons, needn't worry about what subjects crop up.

The only thing I never did, for no reason I can think of other than I thought it had all been done before, was never take the editing path of the normal zine. The seemingly obligatory baptisms of fire zines go through before they fold. I never did quizzes; questionnaires; introductory flyers detailing what Dib intended to do; potted histories; or many Diplomacy articles. Not that I didn't want them included in the zine, I've always encouraged others to write them if they wanted, I just never felt comfortable writing them myself. I think once again this boiled down to the fact I thought it had all been said before. This attitude is admirable for those that don't wish to see me repeating myself, but it does seem to spoil things for the novices that once from time to time, perhaps there should be a library of well-written hobby articles that one could go to so novices can get to appreciate the likes of 'Piggott's Law of Fanzines', the 'Bedbug Island' tales, Birks' article on 'Irving Tedious', Rob Chapman's 'Introduction to Diplomacy', and so on. Surely these gems cannot be allowed to be forgotten? Come to think of it I wouldn't mind collecting all these on computer if I had the owner's permission...

But I digress. Where do I go from here? More to the point where does Dib go from here? Well I'm certainly not going to fold now I've just passed the hard bit! After this issue it'll be down hill all the way to the one hundred mark. Maybe I'll try a

few quizzes? (As if my subscribers would answer questions!) A questionnaire might be nice. It's about time. Actually I've been pondering for some time now as to whether I should try another type of game in Dib to help break away from the label of merely being a Sopwith zine. What game though, that's the problem? Something on the lines of En Garde, or perhaps Formula 1 - but I would definitely need a dedicated outside GM with plenty of time on his hands to run it. I'll have to think on it... but if you have any suggestions write in (might as well 'ave done a questionnaire, gov...). One bit of interest anyway, Richard Downes says he wouldn't mind CMing a Bourse - fine, but I think I'll wait until I see if it generates any interest. Anyway, enough of me... what about the hobby and me?

I certainly mucked up my own chances of doing well in the Gladys Awards this time, didn't I? Like a twit I plugged the awards, giving my views on each category, and then I forget to print the address so you can send all your votes in! What a gherkin! Some of you tried, I hope. Why James Cowie even sent me his votes... too late for me to send on though. Damn... next year for hobby domination. The one hard thing to take is that the miserable Dolchstoss got an award - Sharp will be insufferable (well, more so than he is now). Please God make him come below Dib in the poll (is it possible to come 50th?).

I meant to mention the last couple of times, but forgot as usual, Geoff Challenger's latest hobby offering of a Diplomacy statszine called The Fat-Lady Sings; which is a form of the Who's Where Pete Calcraft was supposed to do. Apparently the last WW appeared in the final New Statsman run by Mick Bullock in 1979! It was then passed on to Pete Calcraft who has since been trying to get one out. Anyway, TFLS is interesting for what it is: it details exactly who's playing where. Also interesting to note only three zines - Ode, Vienna, and Zeebv - run more Diplomacy games than me, and I'm not even classed as a Diplomacy zine. Geoff Challenger, 117 Shrubbery Road, South Darenth, Kent, DA4 5AP.

FOOTBALL PROPER
From George North

I wonder if football will one day die the death? After all, nothing lasts for ever and attendances are dropping off gradually down the years. Mind you, if games like football and cricket last for several generations we will always have supporters that are young to replace those old ones who have been everywhere, seen everything, and maybe grown heartily sick of the very game of Football. Just the same there have certainly been a few changes down the years to keep the regulars happy. I mean, a few years ago who ever heard of Oxford United? And if you go further back than that there were times when even Aston Villa had a football team.

When I was a lad, way back in the dark ages, the players could charge the goalkeeper and kick the daylight out of the opposition with their heavy toe caps and rake a shin with studs protruding half an inch out of the bottom of the boot, supposedly for gripping the turf.

To me the wearing of boots presented its own particular problem for they were fine if you tied the boot laces and hung them round your neck until you got to the ground, but to wear them and try to travel across the road and down a concrete path was like walking on the Fakir's bed, or when you don roller skates prior to going on the rink. You could hardly stand in the boots let alone walk or run to the place; plus the boots normally had nails half an inch longer than the stud and protruding well inside the boot. Hence the thick woolly socks to soften the blow. Add to this the dreaded shin pads from ankle to knee-cap and there you had the full suit of armour, footballer for the use of.

So the heavy hobnail boot is gone, thank goodness, and so too has the laced up football. How that football ever got off the ground is not known. First find a sucker who has such a ball and then borrow a pump and connector and you are part way there. It takes some sort of technician to pump up the ball, pad the splits, tuck in the tit, and manoeuvre a crochet hook to weave the lace

through the holes without leaving too big a lump on one side where the lace had gone. To head a ball was some sort of Russian roulette and you could get away with it nine times out of ten. But catch the lace when heading a ball and you were in dire straits.

Not that I want to teach granny to suck eggs but so many of the niceties of football seem to have gone or been superceded that nowadays it is so difficult to realise these things ever existed. We have mentioned the pumping up of the ball and the lacing, but also there was the stitching and how long will it last. The first you realise anything is wrong is when the owner of the ball suddenly scoops it up for a close inspection and has a heart attack when he realises the stitching is coming undone. Then somebody either knocks it from the owner's grasp or the owner decides what the hell, the ball belongs to his bigger brother anyway, and he lets us continue so long as we don't toe poke it. Famous last words because no matter how careful, once a stitch is broken it spreads like wildfire and slowly the bladder comes into view until it either bursts the ball or the owner grabs it up and runs it home for repairs. Alas, they don't make balls like that anymore.

But strangely enough there would be at least a dozen games going on at the same time in every open space available, from the Lordship Lane Recreation Ground and the Tottenham or Hackney marshes, right the way up to Wood Green football ground to White Hart Lane - and the spectator was spoiled for choice. As a child one did not expect to pay to see a game, naturally. The Recreation Ground was free. At Wood Green you risked torn pants and a thick ear when you got chucked out, and at Tottenham it was a challenge rewarded by a boot up the backside, but complimented down below where one could nick the lump sugar. You could also watch the game by hanging off a rail above the steps. So my gang spent many a Saturday at Tottenham where bunking into the ground was almost legalised since the feeling

there was that the youngsters ducking under the turnstile were the paying customers of tomorrow. Just a token show of catching defaulters was all.

In later years it was the travelling and waiting for buses and trains that put me off, plus the struggle to survive inside the ground amid the mad, swaying, pushing, shoving, kicking, punching, hysterical, arm waving crowd of loud, bawdy beer swilling giants. You have to be six feet something to see over the heads of that lot, and with my luck I get stuck behind a pillar, have a banner waving in front, or umbrellas turn day into night. Get there early and grab a front railing then sure enough the fattest policeman in the ground would come and hibernate before your very eyes.

Then we moved to Harold Hill and from our upstairs window we could see across the brow of the hill whether a football match was likely on a Sunday morning, and if so I would be out and waiting behind goal during the warm up session and fetching and booting one or two balls just like old times. Then we moved house and the Harold Hill team I was following changed its venue to a field a couple of miles away and I would cycle every Sunday and continue to give my loyal support. I did this right up after they charged us 1/6d to go in. This was a silly price really because you could watch the game through the wire netting and yet being outside isn't quite the same as inside, is it? So I paid my fee and had one eye on my bike and the other on the game.

I suppose all teams have monetary problems and Harold Hill was no exception. Even the dressing rooms were hired out for wedding receptions and I have seen many a poor mutt dragged from the touch line by some woman from the reception who demanded that he old man come and listen while the best man read the cards. A sad day indeed for that poor fool.

But the final straw came when Harold Hill was taken over by a new manager who stopped the pay packet of the players which was one pound and ten shillings a match. The team broke up after that and I started going to the park again while the players eventua-

lly joined, now that they were well over the hill, the Romford Brewery football team, and that must be a step in the wrong direction in anybody's book.

Back at the park I watched Venus and Red House football teams but it was never quite the same. Often I would stay for half an hour, rain or shine, but enough was always enough and I would wander back home and wait for Match of the Day on telly instead. It is not known why one leaves halfway through a match on a beautifully sunny day but if you see, week after week, a bloke who looks like Brotherston falling over himself every five minutes, the urge to stay begins to wane.

But this morning I had a good excuse because with two blank pages of Postal Football still to be completed, and inspiration completely gone, it was a relief when Peg gave me a shopping list and handed me the trolley to get the shopping. I sat in the park on the way back and watched Brotherston until the score reached three nil. The sun was shining and it was too good for football as I sat on the bench and enjoyed myself. Then I took up my trolley and made my way to the park gates and across the main road. I knew it was risky with a bag of tomatoes perched on top of the trolley but I bounced down the kerb and away went the vegetables with me in hot pursuit. Cars in front and cars behind, a horn blasted as I edged the tomatoes over towards the kerb, only now they were not vegetables but little jars of snopake and inking rubbers that I was guarding with my life until the ref blew his whistle and I sat up with a start. The players were marching off as I staggered dreamily to my feet and smiled dopily at an old lady who scampered off as fast as her legs would carry her. The trolley hadn't moved and all was well with the world. I wonder who won the game?

So you see, the game still holds a fascination for me in spite of the aggravation and it is likely to last for the rest of my lifetime, I guess. Don't know about yours. But why is it so popular is a complete mystery to me, but I shall be there again on Sunday with about eleven other people

all hollering and knowing more about the rules than the silly old referee. I was even asked to run the line once - once - instant fame - but I wasn't having any of that. Half a game is my limit most days. How about you?

((Ah how this article brought back memories - thanks, George. I can remember when we used to use the good ol' soccer boot where one had to nail the hard leather studs into the boots. These boots sorted out the men from the boys! Boot rash was a painful experience. I used to be in all the football teams when I was at school (various schools - we travelled around a lot), meaning I must

have been fairly good as one had to 'try out' to see if one was good enough to get on the team. I was shocked when trying out for the army team to find I couldn't even touch the ball with the 'new' continental boots. Where was the shin support, and the hard toe for the sometimes necessary 'toe poke'? With the continental boot I found every time I tried to trap the ball under foot the ball would pass harmlessly underfoot completely missing the trap: "It's these short studs!" I hollered. Gone also was a time when one could take one's girlfriend, or, in later life, son, to football matches without fear of being torn to pieces. *Sigh* It's all gone.))

~~~~~

JOTTO Turn 6

Bloody hell, I've had more questions about rules fired at me in this one game than in my whole editing career. What happened to the good old days when the only thing that Sharp would ask of me was where he could possibly get a book with enough six letter words in to give him a choice? Of course UMBLES is a natural plural... YES plurals can now be sent in... NO I'm not going to tell anyone if I've chosen plurals for my secret words... and, how would I know what the hell I'm talking about!!! The kitty still stands at a HUGE £5 - someone hurry up and win it so I can be put out of my misery... \*SIGH\* and to think I started this because I thought it was a simple game.

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| KATH COLLMAN: 6th: 120101  | R.J. LAMPARD: 5th: 122112   |
| MIKE DEANS: 5th: 333353    | 6th: 212223                 |
| 6th: 231122                | RICHARD DOWNES: 5th: 211112 |
| BRIAN MOORE: 6th: 214332   | 6th: 213322                 |
| ULF JIRETORN: 6th: 241132  | ALAN POWIS: 6th: 321234     |
| ANDREW SMITH: 6th: NMR'd   | ROSIE ROBERTS: 6th: 162131  |
| RICHARD SHARP: 6th: 111011 |                             |

Zine Poll Game: So far the prize is the magnificent sum of £1, but right up until the results are made public anyone can join. Just send in your five guesses in the order you think they'll be in when the final result is in, and the closest guess gets the prize. Game fee only 25p. Already we have:-

- TOM TWEEDY: 1st Dolchstoss; 2nd Mad Policy; 3rd Ode; 4th Hopscotch; 5th Greatest Hits.
- DANIEL BROOKS: 1st Mad Policy; 2nd Ode; 3rd Dolchstoss; 4th Dib Dib Dib; 5th War & Peace.
- DAVID ABBOTT: 1st Mad Policy; 2nd Dolchstoss; 3rd Greatest Hits; 4th Hopscotch; 5th War & Peace.
- ULF JIRETORN: 1st Mad Policy; 2nd Dolchstoss; 3rd Ode; 4th War & Peace; 5th Dib Dib Dib.

I've heard nothing yet about the Zine Poll - Richard Sharp complained that he'd be the last to publish it, I'd dispute that it looks as though I might be. Perhaps I'll have won and everybody'll get to talk about it except for me. By the time Dib 51 is due out no-one will want to hear about it. Typical!

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READING BETWEEN THE ZINES

Cathy's Ramblings (14): Editor the former Ms Cunning now Mrs Ozog. An American publication, the only one of this sort of which I trade with. Normally runs to about 16 pages A4 litho printed micro type (15 cpi). Obviously this leads to a very nicely printed format with plenty of letraset and graphics (tho' many of Cathy's typing errors can prove interesting as well). I'm not sure how this compares with other American publications, but I like it because of it's close British ties (Cathy plunged into the British hobby with such gusto that her name seemed to appear in most of the popular British zines), while at the same time it still gives the American flavour of the gaming hobby. A remarkable feat I think combining the two.

It has a short (this time) editorial, book reviews, hobby chat (British as well as American), the ongoing adventure saga of Orknaire (4 pages!), interesting letter column (normally the British subscribers having friendly arguments with the Yanks), and a regular chat column, called Father Knows Less, run by some flag-waving redneck who always seems to get right up my nose. Has game openings for: Regular Diplomacy (\$4); and World of Orknaire. And costs \$7 for 10 issues U.S. and Canada, and (gulp) £1.20 per issue here in the UK. Can prove expensive and certainly I wouldn't have another American trade, but I like it. Of course it can't be included in the British Zine Poll. Cathy Ozog, 1526 N. Lawler Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60651 U.S.A.

The Ring (22): Edited by Andy Murby. This is an excellent newcomer (to me anyway as I've just started trading) which is very much like Hopscotch - so much so in fact that I'd have to say TR was modelled it. The only difference that I can see is that TR's turnaround times seem a little long (which Andy knows full well and intends to rectify), it doesn't have a letter column (but then Hop didn't for a long while) and it's tidier. To add extra interest TR also publishes every now and then the hobby's Sopwith stats, detailing who's where; Aces; Ratings, etc, etc. At 20 pages, A4 mimeo produced, content seems to be entirely editorial and games; games of every sort. Has openings for: Cluedo; Scrabble; Sopwith; Out for the Count; Sport of Kings; Soccerleague; and United. I still don't know how zines can offer this much. Deserves to do well in the Poll, but I'm not sure what Andy's circulation is - I'd give it 8 out 10, and predict it'll be between 10 and 20th position.

Andy Murby, 12 Townsend Lane, Donnington-Le-Heath, Leicestershire, LE6 2GF.

Mad Policy (108): Churned out year after year (with but one minor stop) by hobby archivist, Zine Poll originator, villian, scab, toady, stirring trouble-maker and arch backstabber, Richard J. Walkerdine. There is nothing I'd like to say that's nice about this man, but I have to admit, his zine isn't too bad. 20 pages (it rarely goes over) of A4 mimeo, the contents consist of: Editorial, Diplomacy stats, an excellent hobby-related letter column (doesn't allow anything else), well run games, and hobby chat. It says something for this zine that in the Zine Poll it's came 2nd four times, 3rd twice, and 6th once. Also this year (you'll note somewhere else in this issue) that MP has won TWO categories in the Gladys Awards. Not a bad record I suppose. Has waiting lists open for: Diplomacy and Multimind. Out of 10 I'd give it 9 and predict it'll come 2nd once again. The zine is worth subscribing to, but man should be avoided like the plague, Richard Walkerdine, 144 Stoughton Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 6PG.

Vienna (9): Edited by Richard Egan. 30+ pages of A4 mimeo closely typed print packed with interesting articles on Diplomacy and a lettercol entirely set over to Diplomacy or related topics - other than that an article on The Russian Revolution (?); a review/postal rules of 'Gridiron' (5 pages!); postal rules for Lord of Hosts; game reviews; and masses of games. Mainly the magazine is Diplomacy orientated, if you hadn't guessed already. One other interesting thing of note about Vienna is that it appears to have its roots in (from?) the professional magazine 'White Dwarf' - though whether this is really true or not I don't really know. Anyway, apart from one small gripe about Richard's habit of not putting blank lines between paragraphs for pages

and pages to save space (I find my eyes become mesmerised by the huge blocks of print) I think V is excellent value for money, and a good zine for those interested in Diplomacy. Waiting Lists open for: Diplomacy; Downfall; Lord of Hosts; Holy Roman Empire; Gridiron; and Traveller. Once again this zine is too new for me to give any accurate detail where it might come in the poll, but I'd give it 8 out 10 and predict it should come between 15th and 25th position. Richard Egan, 64 Rookery Road, Knowle, Bristol, BS4 2DT.

Zine to be Believed (38): Edited by Nick Kinzett. 20 pages of A4 mimeo absolutely packed with games, plenty of hobby chat and a good letter column. Very much like Hopscotch in this respect except Zeeby on the face of it appears much 'busier'. I can't explain it any other way - perhaps it's because Nick has more fingers in more pies than anyone else in this hobby (except perhaps the infamous Walkerdine). An excellent reliable zine to play games in and if you like to keep up with the latest hobby chat. Has openings for: Diplomacy; Crusades; Soldier King; and Clash of Legions. Out of 10 I'd give this 9, and predict it'll come in the top 10 (maybe even in the top 5).  
Nick Kinzett, 11 Daleway Road, Green Lane, Coventry, W. Midlands, CV3 6JF.

Greatest Hits (123): Edited by Pete Birks. 25 A4 pages, mimeo produced. This grand old daddy of a zine seems to have been with us for ever, and just keeps truckin' along absorbing all the praise and flak that comes its way without in any way disturbing Pete's style of writing. (Not that GH gets much flak mind, though Pete might.) Always interesting to read, the magazine seems to have everything (including the obligatory and now legendary over-long Palfrey letters); original and well-written editorials (that Pete seems to reel of the top of his head), a huge letter column, hobby news and chat; plus reviews on films, books and games and anything else that attracts his attention. GH was once considered the cream of the hobby's crop, and in many ways still is (in the Zine Poll it has the impressive record of coming 1st 4 times, 2nd once, 6th once, 7th once, and 10th once), unfortunately, after 123 issues signs of certain tiredness seem to be creeping in, with the inclusion of a subzine to take on his games, The Thin Man (15) from Paul Oakez (waiting lists for Diplomacy; 1492; Geophysical; and Railway Rivals) and because of Pete's lower hobby profile. Still very much recommended though and I'll be very much surprised if it doesn't come in the top 5.  
Pete Birks, 65 Turney Road, London, SE21 7JB.

Veni Vidi Vici (4): Edited by Brian Frew (subzine/computer column by Bernard Emblem). This is not, strictly speaking, one of my trades (yet) but after reading this issue I feel it deserves some mention. 20 pages of A5 photocopy, centre stapled in the popular booklet format, this zine is starting off well. Contains: editorial, an 'unusual' article on things a girl can make, letters, Chess section, book reviews, zine reviews, bridge column, and a very readable computer related section called 'Marvin's Bit'. I'd get the zine for this section alone as Bernard writes as though he knows what he's talking about (talking about sensible things and not just catering for the what always seems to be 'the compulsory games section') while still making it easy for the newcomer to feel that's he's not speaking way over his head. VVV has openings for Diplomacy, Sopwith, and Chess. Recommend you see a copy - if it keeps regular deadlines and turnarounds this new zine has great potential.  
Brian Frew, 40 Thorns Close, Astley Bridge, Bolton, Lancs., BL1 6PE.

Hopscotch (52): Edited by Alan Parr. A very popular A4 mimeo 'games' magazine that came 1st in last year's Zine Poll and 6th the previous year. Has always had the reputation of being friendly, and ultra reliable and a good place to play games in. The only trouble is that from last issue Alan has been pruning the zine somewhat in preparation for his new job. The only waiting list I can see open is for United. Should do well again in this year's Poll - I'd give it 8 out 10 and predict it'll come in the top 5.  
Alan Parr, 6 Longfield Gardens, Tring, Herts, HP23 4DN.

CAESAREAN SECTION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE OR ITALIAN OPENING STRATEGY  
by Luke Clutterbuck

When I visitied Italy I was pretty well flat bloke. You know, thinking the only way I was going to get back to dole cheque subsistence in England was to sell the camera amd the sleeping bag. I was just about to bed down on the beach in a place called Savona (represented on the board as Piedmont) and this Italian sailor cruised up to me and rattled on in a few languages until he hit one I understand. And the question was "did I want to buy any hash?" There were innumerable reasons for declining but the first one that struck my brain was money. "No thanks," I replied. "Why not?" he pestered. "Well for one thing," I said, "I don't have any money." And then a surprising event occured. "Oh that's terrible," he said, "Here, have some wine on me!"

Two hours and three free bottles of exceptional local plonk later found me so drunk that the lengthy tales of his voyages to Bolivia were positively riveting! Then and only then - and I can't emphasise this too much i.e. only after he'd bought me 3 (count them!) bottles of wine and spent two hours of his hash selling time talking to a penniless tourist did he finally do what he'd been destined to do and steal my camera and sleeping bag!

That is how to win with Italy.

Unless you want to spend the whole game demonstrating the phenominal defensive value of the country and being bored to such an extent that waiting for Godot seems like a Springsteen concert, then you must engage in some vigorous diploming. Some disagree. There are a number of openings which can be used without any diploming at all. Firstly there is what some describe as "The Alpine Chicken": Army Venice to Piedmont, Army Rome to Venice, Fleet Naples to Ionian Sea. This, and its more pathetic variations involving Tuscany and the Tyhrenian Sea, reminds me of the Turkish "Boston Strangler" [A(Con)-Bul, A(Smy)-Con, F(Ank)stands]. Both demonstrates a desire to attack someone, anyone, but a lack of guts to go through with it. Make no mistake, some countries can benefit from pussyfooting but Italy isn't one of them - you have to make a killing. The other opening in this basic group of "Italian Wanker" openings is Army Venice stands, Army Rome to Tuscany, Fleet Naples - somewhere. The basic question here is "why?"

The second major group is ye old favourite Austrian Attack. Fleet Naples goes to Ionian Sea and Army Rome generally goes to Venice. Venice can either go straight for Trieste or backhand via Tyrolia. If Army Venice makes it to Trieste then you'd be in a strong position. Unfortunately you'd also be exceptionally lucky. Unless Austria is a total fool (or too experienced for his own good) then he will see it coming and either stand you out or arrange things so that you pay dearly for your intrusion. Nonetheless it has its advantages, particularly if you can enlist Russian co-operation. The disadvantages are that it will lead to a powerful Turkey and Russia and Germany and France may move on your unprotected flanks.

The third group is the one that takes the diploming. In 1571, the Austrian and Italian navies under the direction of Don John of Austria, did a steamroller on the Turkish navy off a Greek Island called Lepanto. The so-called "Lepanto Opening" assumes an Austrio-Italian alliance against Turkey and possibly Russia. The moves are: Fleet Naples to Ionian Sea, Army Rome to Apulia, Army Venice holds (or stands after a pre-arranged stand-off with Austria to confuse their enemies). The idea then is to convoy Army Apulia to Tunis while Austria takes Serbia and Greece. The killer comes in 1902 with Fleet Ionian Sea to Eastern Mediterranean, Fleet Naples (built with the Tunis gain) to Ionian Sea. Then Army Smyrna or Syria and bobs your uncle - no Turkey. Well at least that's the theory. It takes a lot of trust on Austria's part and who's to say that Turkey won't see it coming and build a fleet in Smyrna? Still, if it works it gets Italy off to a good start. Jeff Key, an American Player, devised a variation to this called the Key Lepanto. In this scenario, Army Venice goes

to Trieste in Spring 1901 and then on to Serbia in Autumn 1901. This allows Italy to contribute to alliance with both army and naval strength. However, if you are able to talk Austria into believing you will move on and not take the chance to wipe him out in one fell swoop then it beats me why you don't use your silver tongue for something easier like, for example, talking all the other players into handing their units over to you! I have another weird idea which I'll chuck in here though no doubt somebody's already tried to do it. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument I'll call it the Rumpelstiltskin! The idea here is that Italy moves Army Venice to Tyrolia and allows Austria to take Venice with Fleet Trieste. In Autumn Army Tyrolia takes Trieste. If Italy tries to double-cross and take back Venice with support then Austria simply orders the fleet to retreat to Apulia or Adriatic or back to Trieste so that Italy will benefit nothing. Then proceed as per Key or Key Lepanto. The idea is that in this way Italy must share trust burdens as Austria holds Venice as a bargaining chip. It won't particularly benefit Austria to double-cross Italy but it should allow for a fairer alliance and as a general rule, the more fair alliances can be the more stable they will remain. I've no idea how this would work in practice. Why don't one of you try it and we'll see what happens!

The final group is a basic French attack with some combination of Fleet Naples to Tyrrhenian Sea and Army Venice to Piedemont. This is OK if and only if you've got some solid German/English help. Otherwise delay your attack until France is embroiled in the North. It just takes too long to get the boot into France and he/she'll see it coming unless France is in enough trouble elsewhere and you appear to be otherwise engaged as well.

Fleet Naples should usually go to the Ionian Sea where it could go for Greece. The Tyrrhenian allows much less room for diplomatic manoeuvre. Army Venice is your tattle-tale so be careful where you move it as it will generally give your game away. Army Rome depends on your other two moves. Apulia and Venice are usually good. Naples occasionally as a sop to Austria. Tuscany? Well Tuscany to me is a place that should always be what the minds of those Italian commanders who order a unit there can be described as: vacant!  
 Portions of this article were based on "On Opening Strategy" by Richard Huc-knall and "The Game of Diplomacy" by Richard Sharp.

((I haven't much space to say this but thanks for letting me publish this, Luke - it's much appreciated.))

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From George 'How you like it' North: ((Well I'm not going to put this in a decent Dib letter column...))

po	quick	p	plinga
po	tie	i po	ng plonga
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in

"I disagree entirely with Peter Sullivan and enclose some music 'specially set for the tea chest with elastic strung taut just like my old friend Mike Close predicted.

P.S. The elasticated tea chest is better recognised with a broom handle stuck through the centre for bouncing up and down and decorated with jingle bells."

((Er, what was it that Peter Sullivan said... and did it warrant this kind of feedback?))

LETTERS

And who better to start off this month's column than with two new subscribers who send me money...

MICHELE & KRIS MORRIS: "Thanks for issues 48 and 49. If you think that by sending us two issues of Dib Dib Dib when we've only paid for one you can bribe us into subscribing you're only too right. We're always open to a spot of bribery and corruption! Please find enclosed cheque."

((That's what I like to see, someone with the proper standards - a welcome addition to the pages of Dib I think - these two should go far. Many thanks for the cheque Michele. And a warm welcome to another newcomer to the hobby, Bob Watson.))

PAUL FINCH: "Congratulations on reaching the magnificent double of 50 years old and 50 issues of Dib. (I'm assured the first is true by Rob Lozynskyj at Manorcon!)"

((Hah, your first mistake was believing the likes of Lozynskyj in the first place! I wouldn't believe this veteran Diplomacy player and arch backstabber if he told me my true age, 26. Er, 36... But thank you, I deserve the other compliment if for no other reason than for sheer perseverance.))

KATH COLLMAN: "What do you mean, Diplomacy is a man's game? Honestly, I've got to have something to do while Danny does the ironing, washes up, and cooks my tea! ((Taskmistress!))

Seriously, though, I started playing by accident - having bought the game for Danny one Christmas, and he'd spent so much time moaning about how he couldn't understand the rules - in the end I was goaded into saying: "Well, get the board out and we'll try to figure out the rules by playing an actual game." As the 2-player game is more a question of organization, rather than 'proper' Diplomacy, and organization is what I'm good at, being a Chartered Librarian, I found the game most enjoyable, and continued to play, though not very seriously."

((So it was you who dragged your other half into our hobby kicking and screaming, eh? You have much to answer for, Kath - especially as straight away he started out on me!

Wot? - you mean Diplomacy isn't just a man's game? This may well shake the very foundations of the longroom! Danny obviously doesn't have you under proper control. Mind you, I blame the fact that we are far too lenient with our women these days - allowing them time on their hands to start thinking for themselves. But speak of the devil, here he comes...))

DANNY COLLMAN: "I scrape, I crawl, in abject humiliation ((I should think so too - more, more)): I really did believe 'unforgivable' to have the 'e'. Indeed, only recently was my mistake pointed out to me and verified with a dictionary. Until then I had believed totally in that 'e'. Also, I was unaware that the use of 'But' or 'And' as a sentence opener was American. ((I didn't, I said it was an 'Americanism'; meaning they had the 'bad taste' to start overusing it.)) I agree that I was taught that it is bad use of English, but I have to admit that I simply like the explosive power that it has. Now I must reconsider. On the question of mental blocks - yes it has happened to me more than once. Also, mistakes can occur in typing. These I accept: they happen to me. I'll keep mine to a minimum, you do the same! ((I'll try))

Now to put you in your place: "Gibsons' are asking for suggestions on any rule changes in Diplomacy." A virtual quote from Dib 48 - and not quite right. I quote from Gazfinc 15: "They've requested our assistance in amending or rewriting the Diplomacy Rules. The original 1971 rules were revised by them in 1983, but for a start, they feel that several ambiguities should be rectified." Which I agree with. You may know the