

# Dolchstoß

No.29

20-3-75



We apologize to readers of a nervous disposition for the horrific nature of this issue's cover. In case it's not very clear, I should explain that this pic commemorates a great Diplomacy occasion - ScotDipCon 4. On the left, frantically holding his moustache in place with one hand while trying to sign IOUs with the other is Duncan 'Thunderguts' Morris, mercifully obscuring Ronnie Fisher. Then comes a head which may be Colin Walsh's and may not. The leering satyr in the aluminium pyjamas is Brian Yare, and behind Brian's right ear is an empty bottle of Ramrod, produce of Young's of Wandsworth (advert). Then comes the unmistakable teutonic fuzz of Pete 'Superdwarf' Birks and finally your editor, fast asleep but still smoking. Poker-chips from Selfridge's, cards from the Rhu Municipal Tip, photograph from Wink Thompson, to whom all complaints should be sent.

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## STOP PRESS

This is that annual rarity, a very late issue, which will bring joy to the editorial columns of Bellicus, Hannibal, etc, but irritation to readers. I must apologize for the delay, particularly as I have inadvertently got caught by the Post Office's deadline and let you all in for an extra stamp.

Originally it started as planned lateness - the bad but unavoidable timing of my holiday meant producing two issues in ten weeks rather than the usual eight, so I decided to bring this issue out a week late. Then things went wrong: between us Steve Doubleday and I managed to lose the cover drawing, but worse still I then found I had lost last issue's camera copy with the headings - hence the hand-written ones in this issue. Added to this I've had a lot of extra work to fit in, in order to pay for said holiday when the time comes.

## EDITORIAL HOLIDAY

I shall be on holiday from 28 March (Good Friday) until 15 April (Lousy Tuesday). My address is not likely to be any use to you, even when I find out what it is, but I will notify all Committee members, and if you want to write to me one of them will be able to tell you. It's in an extremely remote part of south-west France, and I would guess letters will take at least four days to get there. I shall be very busy before I go, so no chance of a letter - if you want anything, phone me.

## NGC 100

While I am away, Richard Walkerdine has agreed to take over the forwarding of NGC 100 correspondence. His address: Cheriton, 15 Crouch Oak Lane, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 2AN.

## NGC ELECTIONS

Subject to Committee approval, Pete Cousins has agreed to run the 1975 elections. Anyone wanting to stand, or to make suggestions about the running of the poll, please contact Pete at 35 Miltons Crescent, Godalming, Surrey.

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for all games except 77C, Friday 18 April to Richard Sharp. 77C only, Tuesday 15 April to Gus Ferguson.

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# EDITORIAL - Richard Sharp

There was not a lot of response to last time's editorial. About half a dozen people wrote to beg me not to drop games from Dolchstoss; nobody supported the opposing view, and it does now seem that majority opinion favours having at least a few, good-quality games in the club's central publication. Naturally I am glad about this, as it is the way I think myself.

In an excellent letter to Retief, John Piggott mentions the point I made about splitting the general section from the gamezine. Ideally, John says, Dolchstoss should revert to being a gamezine like any other, while someone else produces a club Bulletin on the lines of the one I used to do myself. Problem, says John, is to find such a person.

Richard Walkerdine, in a circular sent to members of the Committee, echoes the suggestion for a bulletin to be sent to every member, produced by someone who would be the 'Editor' on the Committee (and presumably not a gamesmaster). Apparently Paul Simpkins has said he is willing to take on the job.

Moving away from the dull world of reality, where men are men and words mean more or less what they say, we come to Bellicus, where words say nothing and mean less, and men are Will Haven. As might be expected, Bellicus has nothing more to offer than another, similar letter from John Piggott and the usual personal vendetta against me. How do I bear it? Can it be that I don't take Haven seriously enough?

What does all this lead to, anyway? In the first place, it looks as if most people like the existing set-up, the exceptions being what may be described as the two 'anti-Sharp' groups, the IDA heavies under Richard Walkerdine and the lunatics under Will Haven. Not that I am necessarily opposed to the idea of a separate NGC Bulletin starting up again so long as I don't have to run it - I cannot understand John Piggott saying that amalgamation of the Bulletin and Dolchstoss didn't reduce my workload. It practically saved my sanity, mate! But I do think there is evidence that people haven't considered all the factors involved.

How can we send a Bulletin to all the members, for instance? We can't force them to subscribe, and we certainly can't afford to send it out free, which I reckon would cost in the region of £500 a year. The mailing alone would almost take a full-time staff to cope with - it takes me nearly a week already to mail Dolchstoss, which only goes to about 70% of members. Frankly I think the suggestion is impractical, and not necessarily a great improvement on the existing set-up. The advantages, if such they are, consist largely in 'depersonalizing' Dolchstoss/Bulletin/whatever and giving the members not my (or anyone's) personal views but the Committee consensus. The benefits of this to the IDA boys are obvious enough! But to everyone else I can't see that it has anything going for it. An Editorial is a place where an Editor expresses his views, isn't it? I cannot support the theory that what I say on this page (or any other page) is assumed by anyone to be the view of the Committee. Significantly, several people have said that other people make this cross error, but no one admits to making it himself! And I don't say 'we', I say 'I'. Pretty clear, I reckon.

One thing I feel bound to say, though it will certainly seem conceited and will no doubt result in my crucifixion in the next issue of new lightning Bellicus. I have demonstrated that I can get out this very large zine to its very large circulation with reasonable regularity. I very much doubt whether there are more than half a dozen other people in the club who could do it, at least without reorganizing their lives pretty drastically. And I think the few who could do it would have more sense than to want to try!

Re-reading that, I see I've given at least one false impression. I have absolutely no cause for complaint against Richard Walkerdine; though there are some things we disagree about profoundly he has conducted his side of the argument if anything rather more fairly than I have! And once off the subject of the IDA we are still as friendly as ever, so if I've given the wrong impression I apologize. I wish I could say the same for Will Haven, but I can't; the latest issue of Bellicus should be required reading for all NGC members, an awful Warning of how an inferiority complex can eventually mature into full-blooded paranoia.

### Note to New Members

Welcome. You have been much in all our thoughts lately, and argument about what you will and won't understand without assistance rages enthusiastically. If you do have any questions (however daft you may think they sound) please don't hesitate to get in touch with me or any other committee member. It's not as bad as it looks once you get the hang of it. Also, do not be deceived by the vitriol that seems to be flying around in this issue - one new member last time asked me what the death rate was at face-to-face meetings. The vast majority, in the club as in what passes for real life, are all for peace and concord; to the strident minority, which unfortunately includes your editor, arguing is just another game which we all think we can win.

### OJ

Players in OJ should now have received an issue of Waif, Les Pimley's latest publishing venture which carries details of the salvaging of the OJ games, among others. One, BDC 26, has fallen in my lap, and will probably appear in Dolchstoss from next time. This sad story is thus nearly over, and I know it reflects little credit on the club: we have been slow to pick up the pieces. Let's hope we've learnt by our mistakes this time, and will be more ruthless if a similar situation arises. In the last resort, though, the answer lies with the GMs - fold your zine considerably and no one will hold it against you, but go on kidding yourself for months that you'll publish next week and you can lose a lot of friends.

### Zine News

Congratulations to Philip Murphy, whose Yggdarsil (the spelling boob is intentional, he says) was probably the most professional-looking first issue yet. Pity he forgot to say who he was and where he lived, but that could just be modesty.... Greatest Hits 5 was incredibly grotty by comparison, recalling the old days of Grafeti when Brian Yare used to drive his car backwards and forwards over the zine during collation.... Misteimer was slightly less filthy (in the other sense) than usual - I can think of two good reasons why no nice young girl would want to be Doug Wakefield's secretary, and one of them is that she would have to type his zine for him.... Retief had a rather hunted air, with Craig already between jobs and shortly to be between houses as well, but was worth reading if only for the dreadful Smirnoff jokes that litter its pages: all this and Fifth Column, Pendulum, Comet, Shelob's Lair, Pilibuster, and more; at a time when the NGC zines are being criticized in a few unimportant but noisy quarters I would like to say that I think they are all bloody good and that all the GMs do everything that could possibly be asked of them and then a good deal more. Someone - I think it was Tadek Jarski - recently complained to me that the NGC GMs get too little thanks for what they do, it being much easier to write a complaint than a compliment. I entirely agree.

Away from the NGC, the most interesting new arrival was the dubiously titled Bumm, the first-ever German language Diplomacy zine, yet another from the indefatigable Walter-Luc Haas of Europa fame. Not much use if you don't speak German, I suppose, but it's nice to see other people catching our dirty habits. (And in case I forgot to write, Walter, please keep sending it, yes I will pay some time, and yes I will run a game for you)... 1901 at last produced its long-awaited (at least by me) survey of the Spring 1901 moves in 206 British postal games. Hours of fun for us to read, and no doubt for Mick to compile. 1901 has recently come in for some stick as being 'dull', a comment which should win the Calhaver Award for the most imbecilic observation of this or any other year. Thanks, Mick, now get on with Autumn '01, would you?... and that's all I can find. God, this room is a mess.

### NGC Members List

Gordon Bell has now produced 21 pages of this, coming up as far as No.594. Only some 25% have actually completed the form, though, which is a pretty good example of the sort of problems involved in any organizing feat in British Diplomacy circles. I shall have 20 pages printed up with this issue, and those who have completed the form will get a copy. Anyone who maintains he has never had the form can get one for a s.a.e. to me. Supplementary and correction pages will be printed in Dolchstoss each issue. One sample statistic: average age of respondents so far is 25 - range from 14-66 with 39 in teens, 74 in 20s, 21 in 30s, 8 in 40s, 2 in 50s, 1 in 60s. Nice to find some 23 people older than me.

# LETTERS

RICHARD WALKERDINE How dare you dismiss IDA/UK, in full view of your hundreds of members, in the arrogant, flippanant and utterly childish manner in which you answered the Swanson letter ! You want a bloody argument ? Right, mate, you've got one !

You suggest we forget the NGC caters for other games as well as Diplomacy ? Rubbish: no one is suggesting that the NGC and IDA/UK are in any way similar. But it's people like you who always forget that postal Diplomacy is a hobby that includes a large number of people outside the NGC and indeed was around before the NGC was even born. IDA/UK offers services to all - members and non-members of IDA and NGC - whereas the NGC benefits and services, such as they are, are for members alone. IDA is an open community; the IDA is a closed one.

If you're not interested in the Handbook then that's fair enough. But don't you think a lot of other people might be ? At least half the handbooks sold in this country have gone to NGC members who weren't IDA members when they bought them.

Boardman Numbers: let me tell you that it costs me several pounds a year to handle them. The £4-5 a year I get from the IDA just about covers my costs and is very welcome indeed. I don't seem to remember the NGC (with annual profits about 20 times as large as IDA/UK) offering to subsidize me !

I can't imagine what your mixed feelings are about Game Openings. I would have thought any publication that tries to tell people what zines are available, what they cost, how big they are, how frequently they appear and what openings they have (all of which are absolute parameters and allow the editor to avoid making any personal judgements) was a very worth-while document to have before committing one's money to a subscription. And what about this quote from Dolchstoss XVIII: 'This is an essential service and one which has my support' ? The argument about IDA/UK being prepared to subsidize it from annual profits of £30 but the NGC keeping all its £600 or whatever for itself applies here too.

Of course the NGC should house its own orphans - I would have thought that the very least it could offer to do ! But what of the independents ? Who's going to look after them ? Or do you want to see more debacles in the manner of XL, TFTBF, etc. We already know that you believe the NGC should only be interested in looking after its own - or so it appears. The point is that someone has to do it and if the NGC won't then IDA/UK will.

So you don't like the Novice Packages ? You might be interested to hear that the first, the Novice Publisher's Package ((ugh!)) is now in circulation. This is a small booklet which attempts to warn the prospective publisher against some of the possible pitfalls and suggests a few ways to make his task a little easier. Don't you think that's a worth-while thing to attempt ? Once again, I don't seem to have noticed the NGC trying to provide a service of this sort. I won't go into the Player's Package here as it would take up far too much room but if you remember I put this subject up for discussion as long ago as the end of November. Since then nothing more has been done about it.

((Summary of points made so far.))

¶. The NGC has done a few things for the NGC members, certainly, but only getting already-existing parts of itself running more efficiently (i.e. Tony Ball's excellent work on the finances and Richard Scott and myself launching the new games). This greater efficiency was attained four or five months ago, and ever since then a large number of people have been waiting to see what new pastures the club could enter. And what has happened ? Precisely nothing. I'm not absolving myself from blame of course, being on the Committee, but ... as I've been trying for months to improve the communications within the Committee I don't think very much of the blame can be laid at my door.

I think it's the NGC that does bugger all mate, so argue about that !

RS: First I must apologize for editing that rather heavily - I hope you will agree that nothing relevant has been omitted. With only two pages for letters (probably) I don't think this minority subject should monopolize all the space. I have also received letters from Pete Birks and Pete Swanson in similarly cross tones, and if I may I'll deal with those first.

Birks claims my anti-IDA posture is the result of a dislike of Americans in general and Edi Birsan in particular. The first is not true; the second is. Chris Harvey and Nicky Palmer have both told me what a nice guy Birsan is; all I can say is that he certainly conceals it well in his public utterances.

Pete Swanson merely wants me to know that his letter was not intended to be printed here. Well, I print anything unless it says on it 'do not print'.

Back to Walkerdine, then. Well, I can't win. If I ignored Pete's letter (my first reaction with subjects that bore me) I'd be accused of arrogance. So I answer it, and I'm accused of arrogance.

I accept that those who join the IDA are subsidizing others who don't and who are unlucky enough to find themselves in abandoned games. Well, more fool them, and it seems to me another excellent argument for not joining. When I signed on for games in Our Entry, for instance, I fully realized the risk I was taking, and do not require hard-eyed men with fistfuls of dollars to come and rescue me from my folly. Again, these same members are subsidizing the Boardman Numbers. I admit that I find the Boardman Numbers useful (or at least interesting), and as a GM I would be perfectly prepared to make a contribution towards the expenses so long as I didn't have to do it though the IDA. Aren't I right in thinking that the system worked OK before the IDA ever started?

I believe you now know that the NGC profits are nowhere near what you assume - in fact the profit per member is much less than IDA/UK makes. I do not see the slightest reason why NGC members should subsidize the independent zines, in which many of them have no interest; the inference that they should strike me as irrelevant and quite irresponsible.

As for Game Openings, mixed feelings means mixed feelings, some good, some bad. When I expressed support for this it was still under what I considered responsible management.

Anyway, that's enough of the IDA. The subject is, I suspect, of interest to only a tiny percentage of the membership; I suggest that future discussions should be confined to Queen Victoria's Funeral, where they belong.

It's your observations about the NGC that alarm me. Obviously your involvement with the Americans is producing some trans-Atlantic attitudes in you, notably the feeling that all progress is desirable in itself. The NGC exists to run games, and if it runs them well I can see no need at all for expansion. Have you really heard from all these people who want us to branch out into new activities? I haven't. The only consistent complaint is that we don't do enough about ftf: well, we are trying now, though it's noteworthy that the candidate who ran for last year's elections on a ftf ticket didn't get elected, suggesting that support is not as strong as all that after all.

What I like to see is the continuing expansion of the things the NGC set out to do - namely the running of postal games. The tremendous expansion of the wargames side under Nicky Palmer, Peter Dean's great improvements to the efficiency of the Scrabble, and the ever-rising standard of the club zines (whatever lunatics like Haven say) - these are the things I like to see, and to hell with organization for its own sake.

Incidentally, has anyone ever challenged the ludicrous statement that the IDA Treasurer has to be an American 'for legal reasons'? Does this apply to all 'international' organizations, I wonder?

STUART DAGGER I hope very much that you won't either drop the games or turn Dolchstoss into the 'impersonal voice of the NGC'. It is fine as it is. Just what do the 'no games' people want in their place, or is this just another case of knowing what they don't like but not what they do? I find games such as 21D, 77C and 100A interesting and feel that such demonstration games belong in the club's central magazine, and that means in Dolchstoss.

As to the other criticism ((that I use Dolchstoss as my personal zine, not a formal club bulletin - RS)); the only people I have heard raising this are Will Haven and the boys of the '1st South Manchester Scout Troop', and, let's face it, anything the NGC did would be wrong as far as they were concerned. Will Haven resents the fact that the NGC dominates the hobby and overshadows the longer-established independent sector. In his resentment he will use any stick as a weapon. Were you to split Dolchstoss he would criticize the games part for 'lacking content' and the monthly bulletin for being 'boringly impersonal'. You couldn't hope to win. Will, by appointing himself Devil's Advocate, probably does British postal Diplomacy a service, but by being so predictably 'anti' on all issues he makes it necessary to view all his criticisms with scepticism. Andrew Hérd and company merely parrot what their master has to say.

Incidentally, am I the only person who resents having a bunch of school-kids telling me that, as a newcomer to the hobby, I am incapable of distinguishing between fact and opinion in Dolchstoss, and that in consequence I am continually being led by the nose by you? I very much doubt it. My impression is that on average NGC players are older than those of Bellicus and Hannibal and so unlikely to think that the sun shines out of your nether regions, an illusion which Will's lot seem to have about him.

However, there is one serious criticism of the NGC that I have come across more than once. Prospective members do not seem to be told of the cost of playing postal Diplomacy before they pay their £1.10. I know one person who had actually signed up for a game before he discovered there was a game-fee, deposit and so on. I don't myself feel that NGC fees are too high, but this is not a universal opinion, and so it would seem fairest to warn people before they join.

RS: Paragraphs 1-3 - I agree entirely, thanks for your support! Paragraph 4: there is a problem here that we can't yet tackle, in that the printed forms in the boxes (designed in the old BDC days) actually ask people to join. So we can't tell them the fees until we already have them in the club. Those who write to me for details, the other main source of new members, are fully informed before they join. But the fees are so trivial I don't think it matters much. Can anyone but a moron seriously expect to get the whole lot for £1.10? Anyway, when those forms eventually run out we'll certainly cover the problem in the new design.

ANDREW HERD ((Dolchstoss)) must surely be the UK's best amateur gaming mag. But I can't write you a letter without criticizing something, and this month I think I ought to ask the rather obvious question, where is the Club's cash to go? Only the Dolchstoss subsidy should be on the expenses side thus far (and one or two odds and ends, I suppose). What tangible benefits do or will members receive for their cash?

RS: Thanks for pat on back - praise from Didsbury is a rare treat indeed! As for the cash, Tony has been soliciting suggestions for some time - your accident with your sub. suggests you don't read that page.... Don't forget, though - the cash is held for members and can't be spent; the profit is available, but only amounts to about 15 p. per member per year (guesswork, ask Tony if you want to know).

JOHN PIGGOTT In general I found the second litho Dolchstoss much better than the first, although I was scandalized to see that you hadn't redone the awful bumpy headings. Your weakest section, paradoxically, is your letter column: while I appreciate that your space is severely limited I miss the spectacle of people running off at the mouth which is now pleasantly common-place in other zines. Your editing seems to make your writers lose their character, somehow. You'll also have realized that it is a very bad idea to put an illustration in the middle of a single-column page and then type round it (p.16).

RS: But John, if I redid the headings they might be worse. Anyway, they're too damn expensive to use only once. The letters are very rarely edited at all (RJW's this time being an exception) so I can only assume people don't run over when writing to me. The design feature you object to was the work of no less than Steve Doubleday, who you will recall was your tip for art editor. Where does this leave us ...?

BRIAN SYLVESTER I don't care what they all say, I like the new transistorized Dolchstoss. Just thought you'd like to know. I do think though that you should give the Young's ads a rest - purely out of consideration for those of us who live and work in the Courage country and ruin our copies of D. by salivating hopelessly all over them. Very interesting the way the Scrabble KO is sorting out the men from the Superscrabblers; you may be pleased to know that I have just opened a game v. Grayson with a score of 100. Coming shortly: HYPERECONOMIC SCRABBLE (Cert. 'AA') I wonder if Haven would like to run it.

RS: Drop the ads? Never! Your nearest Young's is the Spade Oak at Cookham, I think - you just don't try. You must have some Brakspear's around anyway, and even Courage is OK if you know where to go. As for your slighting remarks about the KO, pray be informed that I too have just notched a ton and closed the aggregate gap v. Grayson to a paltry 3. Anyway, I think Will would be a very good Scrabble GM - he knows lots of words I don't. Like HYPOCRACY, for instance - of which he accuses me.

# TREASURER'S NOTES - Tony Ball

26.2.75

As most of you are aware, the new postal rates come into effect on 17 March (7 p. first class, 5½ p. second class) and the price of Dolchstoss must rise as the club cannot afford to absorb increases of this size. Presently the majority of copies go out by 2nd class (games-players receive it first-class) and I imagine this will continue in future, so I propose a 2 p. increase in price to cover this, subject to Committee approval.

However, I am afraid that is not the end of the story. To ease Richard's collating problems it is proposed to include Battleground in Dolchstoss - in other words from next issue to make it an integral part of the zine, to be sent to everybody. This will mean an increase in the size of Dolchstoss from 32 pp. to 36 pp., and a consequent increase in printing costs. Some of you may object to a further price rise on the grounds that you do not wish to receive Battleground - but how many people now do not want Scrabble or chess and yet happily pay for them? The present price of Dolchstoss was based on a 28-pp. monthly issue, and I feel a further 2 p. rise is called for if in future the size settles at 36 pp. So from next issue, No. XXX, it is proposed that the price of Dolchstoss be 15 p. an issue. I still think this represents good value at what is after all only 8-9½ p. + postage and I hope the majority of you will agree with me.

In response to last month's suggestion of a monthly quiz with prize money, I have had an offer of help from Alan Bustany 10D Clara Way, Belfast, BT5 6FQ, N.Ireland. Alan has offered to run a quiz and wishes for suggestions to be sent to him. To start with I think it should be on a trial basis to see what sort of response is received. I will provide a prize of £2 or a free game per quiz and will of course refund Alan's expenses. Alan, can you please let Richard have your first effort in time for next issue? The subject-matter is immaterial but don't make it too easy.

Last issue's statement that DesConTenT was not to be subsidized brought forth a storm of criticism onto my head from Mick Bullock, who correctly points out that as a Committee member he has a vote, and his vote is for a subsidy. Has anyone else strong views on this subject? The money is available for a large subsidy (up to £100) and this may become necessary if the current low level of interest in the con is unchanged by June.

Here is this month's list of people with low credit balances. Several people have recently gone 'overdrawn' as Peter Campbell has just sent me the details of the Battleground game starts from BG45 onwards and these have only just been paid for. Where anyone is overdrawn I have put the figure in brackets following the name.

K.BAILEY (£1.33), R.BROWN, A.BUSTANY, R.T.CORRELL, W.CUNNINGTON, A.DAVIDSON, M.FRANK, J.FUTCHER, P.HARTLEY, R.HUCKNALL, B.LAVINGTON (9 p.), J.MACORMAIC (85 p.), G.MILLS, L.NIEHORSTER, (45 p.), A.SEDGWICK (11 p.), A.SIERLA, B.SYLVESTER (58 p.), A.WALDIE, J.WARBURTON, M.WASSALL, C.WHITE, D.YULE.

The annual fee of 60 p. is now due from the following who have insufficient credit: R.PINK, W.CUNNINGTON, D.YULE, R.PREVOT.

I have deducted it from credit in the cases of B.Hand, D.Ross, J.Hooper, G.Mills, M.Watney, S.Barns.

Finally, John Herlihy asks when will the new glossy Dolchstoss carry a centre-page spread of a full-frontal Secretary. Well, Richard?

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Comments (RS): I approve the price rises, though we could make the price dependent on the size - 28 pp. 13 p., 32 14 p., 36 15 p., 40 (next postal step) 18 p., etc. As for the quiz, I'll contribute some bridge questions if Alan wants any, or even some poker questions (Bustany flushes lately?). The matter of the DesConTenT subsidy seems simple enough to me - let's subsidize it if we need to, otherwise not. I'm all in favour of subsidizing the bar, thus forcing Andy Davidson to buy me a drink.

As for John Herlihy's ribald suggestion, a similar but better idea occurred to Pete Cousins and me as we were leaning over the bar of the Lamb one day thinking of this and that, mainly that. No luck, though. Claire? Ellie? Doug?