

Dolchstoß

ISSUE 30

(with new miracle
BATTLEGROUND,
the Danish
dog's breakfast)

EDITOR: RICHARD SHARP *

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:—

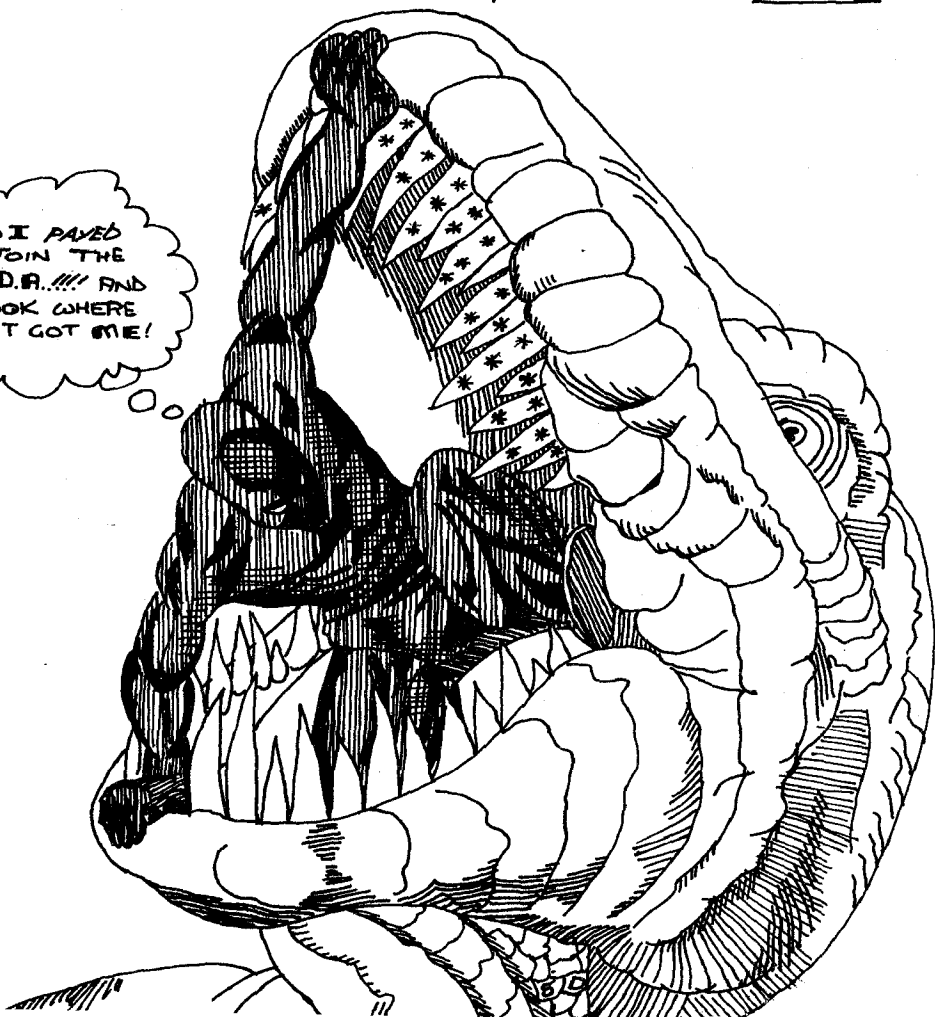
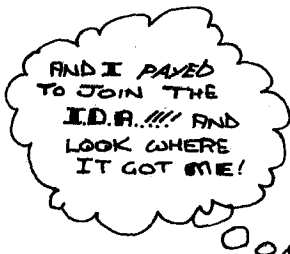
RICHARD WALKERPINE

RICHARD SCOTT

TONY BALL

ART EDITOR: STEVE

DOUBLEDAY



EDITORIAL in which your editor nearly decides to fold, then doesn't quite	3
ELECTION '75 - will Richard Nixon stand for Variants Secretary this year ?	4
LETTERS - bleats from the TDA, bouquets from fans, brickbats from Davidson	5-6
TREASURER'S NOTES - Tony Ball announces that <u>Dolchstoss</u> will cost £1 a time !! ..	7
FTF - Paul Simpkins in Dewsbury, Chris Harvey in Walsall, me in Brixton	8
SCRABBLE - Peter Dean providing the only artwork we've fitted in this time	9-11
ALL-BRAN offers you a chance to catch a dose from <u>Walkerdine</u>	12
ONE GOOD REASON for reading this is that it may be Richard Scott's last one	13
GAMES, bringing you the latest from the fighting fronts of Europe	14-23
QUIZTIME is our brand new effort from Alan 'Magnus Magnusson' Bustany	23
CHESS with the latest scores and some propaganda from Tony, presented by Brian Clark	25
ADS wanna lift to DesConTent ? wanna buy used paper off Craig Nye ? wanna	26
NEW MEMBERS - the NGC welcomes the 56 most patient people in England	27
ADDRESS CHANGES, POSTAL RATING UPDATE and a MESSAGE TO GAMESMASTERS	28
DESCONTENT - Roll up ! Guess Doug Wakefield's weight and win Pete Birks !	29
FORMULA I gets a whole page to itself with superstars Mike Wassall, Andy Evans ...	30
BATTLEGROUND adds 6 pages of incomprehensible warblings for our biggest issue ever	

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This is a very late, badly typed and altogether shame-making issue of Dolchstoss, the new rival to Belligus. Apologies are showered on all readers, but especially the new members, who have had to wait even longer than usual. The main reason has been a serious and unforeseeable upheaval in what I laughingly call my job, causing me to waste valuable time and energy wondering what the hell to do next. Other excuses, and gloomy forebodings, will be found scattered throughout the zine.

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Data for New Members I don't see myself organizing a proper introductory letter before DesConTent, and after we'll have to revise it anyway, so very briefly here goes: game-fees for Diplomacy and variants are £1 plus £1 returnable deposit, for Scrabble 50 p., for wargames variable, for chess nothing. Dolchstoss comes to you free this issue, thereafter at 15 p. if you want it, from the General Secretary, Richard Sharp, 27 Elm Close, Amersham, Bucks. All money should be sent to the Treasurer, Tony Ball (address p.7). To play postal Diplomacy, write to Richard Walkerdine, Cheriton, 15 Crouch Oak Lane, Addlestone, Surrey, KT15 2AN. To play a variant, write to Richard Scott, Desscot, Kingwood Common, Henley on Thames, Oxon. To play Scabble, write to Peter Dean, 16 Mansell Road, Greenford, Middx, UB6 9EP. To play chess, write to Brian Clark, Croft, Cooper Lane, Potto, Swainby, Northallerton, Yorks. To play wargames, write to Nicky Palmer, Lehwaldsvej 3 8g, DK-2800 Lyngby, Denmark. If in any doubt about anything ring Richard Sharp during office hours (see number below). If not in any doubt about anything, see a psychiatrist.

*

DEADLINE - Friday 30 May for BDC 18, 21, 22, 24, 54V, 59R and newcomer 26. Tuesday 27 May for BDC 77 (Gus Ferguson). Friday 7 June for BDC 12, 17, 86V and NGC 100 unless complete orders received by the 30th.

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From: Richard Sharp, 27 Elm Close, Amersham, Bucks, Tel.01-242-6281 (day), 02403-6148 (home). Printed by Instant Print West One, London W1. Threatened with extinction by the Post Office.

EDITORIAL - Richard Sharp

Well, you've all heard the rumours: Dolchstoss to fold, Sharp to resign from the NGC, Nathan in power bid shock, etc. Here are the facts.

Due to circumstances I could not have foreseen, it will probably be necessary for me to find another job in the near future; and it is quite likely that any other job will leave me less spare time than my present one. Moreover, unless and until I do change jobs I am being forced to take on more and more spare-time work to eke out my grossly inadequate salary. As a result of this the NGC - which I must remind you is totally unpaid - has begun to suffer in terms of efficiency. The delays to Dolchstoss have been had enough, but the everyday running of things has suffered even more. And things have been made worse by extraneous complications - e.g. my surprising qualification for the final of Crockford's Cup (bridge, you ignorant lot) which knocked out the whole weekend on which Dolchstoss should have been produced.

My first reaction to these problems was to say I would resign and fold the zine, or possibly hand it over to someone else. This was reported in Fifth Column and Misteimer, since when I have been deluged with letters and phone-calls begging me not to do anything drastic and offering various kinds of assistance. All this of course is balm to the ego, and I'm very grateful to all those who offered.

Reconsidering, then, I decided that most people appear to prefer a late Dolchstoss to none at all, and that perhaps it would be defeatist of me to fold it at this early stage, before I know what's going to happen. So I shall go on producing it for the present, but I fear there will probably be at least one more late issue. Those playing in the games may well prefer to have them relocated elsewhere for shorter deadlines, and if I get 100% applications for a transfer in any game I will try to arrange it.

So far as the General Secretary's job is concerned, one thing is certain: it will be bad for the club if I try to keep on with the present arrangement. Unfortunately, of those who would run the club better than me (Nathan, Walkerdine, Ball, etc) none I think is interested in my job. John Piggott has muttered vaguely that he might stand but I suspect he's more interested in producing a zine than in handling the paper work. Add to this that of the present Committee Messrs Ball, Walkerdine and Scott are not going to stand for their present jobs (nor is Mick Bullock, I hear) and it's clear that we are going to be a little short of experience next year. The Treasurer's job is the biggest headache administratively: again, of those I felt were capable of following Tony's prodigious performance (Nathan, Wakefield, Cousins) none has the time to do it properly. Tony has even been heard to say resignedly that he supposes he'd better stand again if no one suitable comes forward, and while that would be a weight off my mind it's a sad thing when a hobby becomes a duty.

There is quite a widespread feeling that with the continuing growth of the club the time is coming to start paying those who do the work. This would certainly be one answer: I myself could justify the time I spend on it if there was some sort of pittance to show at the end of the day. But personally I don't think the time is quite ripe for this, though it will undoubtedly come.

Meanwhile my own position is clear. I can go on with Dolchstoss for the moment, though certainly at a reduced level of efficiency. I cannot undertake any other club work at all - not the servicing of membership applications, and certainly not the running of the Committee, organization of meetings, etc., though I am prepared to attend such meetings and even chair them if required.

So, Mr Returning Officer (that's you, Cousins), I announce my candidature for one of the 'general' posts on the Committee on those terms. What this means to the electorate - the members - is that they have a simple decision: should the editor of this rag be on the Committee or not? If I'm not elected it won't make much difference as Dolchstoss will go on appearing until I get fed up or the Committee tells me to stop! My manifesto is simple: I know what the hell's going on, so vote for me. Meanwhile the General Secretary's job is vacant: it involves answering inquiries and applications and organizing the Committee. Good luck to whoever takes it; it's a light job compared to the Treasurer's or DipSec's but with Dolchstoss it's too much.

ELECTION '75

You'll never believe this, but the Committee has distinguished itself by voting to adopt two totally contrary procedures for these elections! At a meeting held at the City University Union on 15 May to discuss DesConTenT, four members of the Committee attended; it should have been five but Norman Nathan, who organized it, doesn't play Scrabble and forgot to tell Peter Dean the meeting was taking place. As well as DesConTenT the elections were discussed, there being technically a majority of the Committee present (4 out of 8, including Tony Ball who has the casting vote on all financial matters and myself who, I presume, has it on administrative ones). This meeting, which also uncluded Pete Cousins as returning officer, voted to run the elections on the basis of a 9-man Committee as last year. Meanwhile in a postal vote run by Nicky Palmer a 4-1 majority voted for a 12-man committee, adding one extra Diplomacy member, one for Scrabble and one for Wargames. The niggers in this odd woodpile are Scott and Ball, who voted for both motions.

As time is so short now, I have to make a decision. I decree then that the election will be to elect 9 members as last year but the first task of the new Committee when it meets (presumably at DesConTenT immediately after the elections) will be to decide whether additional members should be invited to join. It was a provision of the original rules that the Committee had an absolute right to create other full Committee members at its own discretion. I hope this arrangement will satisfy everyone. Now over to our friendly Returning Officer ...

PETE COUSINS

Many thanks to all those who wrote and talked to me about how the elections should be run, especially Nicky Palmer, Norman Nathan and Richard. Everyone seemed agreed on the major points but disagreed on the minor ones. I propose the following:

Nominations are invited in writing only for candidates to fill the present Committee positions, i.e. General Secretary, Treasurer, 4 Diplomacy, Scrabble, Chess and Wargames.

Nominations should be posted to me at 35 Miltons Crescent, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 2NS, to arrive one week before the next Dolchstoss deadline.

Self-nominations will be accepted, but every nomination must be seconded.

As everyone seems to want it, the elections will be decided on a transferable-vote system as last year.

Everyone I've spoken to seems to feel the need for some sort of ftf committee meetings. Of necessity, these would be in the London area (number of members, accessibility, etc). I therefore propose that after the elections each successful candidate not available for a London meeting should nominate a 'London representative'.

I will contact all those nominated to ensure that they are prepared to stand.

The 'finals' of the election will be held at DesConTenT.

*

Back to RS:

Time is now very short. It is necessary to get the nominations to Pete, print and distribute the ballot forms and get these back to Pete before DesConTenT on 20 June. Therefore the next Dolchstoss will be an 'elections only' special edition: game deadlines will be set as usual, but if necessary I shall omit the games from Dolchstoss for one issue, circulating the adjudications by photocopy to players only when time allows. I do not want any contributions of any kind for next issue except (1) election propaganda, (2) final preparations for DesConTenT, (3) Treasurer's notes. Anyone with anything else he regards as vital please contact me before sending it. Also, this special issue will have to go to all active members, not just Dolchstoss subbers, and I should be very grateful to anyone who will come and assist me with the colossal jobs of enveloping, mailing, etc. This issue must go out very fast.

NICKY PALMER: I propose to allow non-NGC members to fill wargame vacancies and play with members, against a special 'one-game fee' of 25 p. to go to club coffers, plus an extra 25 p. deposit. This is to prevent a rival wargames club springing up, as it soon will otherwise, and expand the waiting list, giving more choice and quicker turnover. Is this OK as far as you are concerned? Would you even be prepared to let non-NGC members sub to Dolchstoss, at a vastly higher rate, including the full cost of Dolchstoss plus a club profit (15 p. plus postage)?

RS: Over my dead body! Well, it must be voted on, but that's my vote. Every new category of player requiring special accounting, etc, adds to the already ferocious workload of the committee member(s) responsible; in any case, it works out cheaper to join, so I don't see the point of it.

ROBIN ALLEN: Although you despise the 'Novice Package' idea run by I.D.A. I think that new N.G.C. members would benefit from some sort of package explaining terms used in zines, the precise significance of Young's Special, and various other confusing facts. Such a publication may cut down the 'fifteen-zine' barrier at present in existence and provide an introductory laugh to those like me having problems catching up.

RS: I've said before, and repeat, that I am in favour of an N.G.C. genzine for new members to replace the inadequate broadsheet at present used. Unfortunately, this would require some co-operation between committee members who would never be able to agree about the I.D.A.! Perhaps the new committee will be able to reach agreement and undertake this useful exercise. Oh ... what is the 'fifteen-zine barrier'?

RICHARD WALKERDINE: My argument is that any organization that expresses its desire to assist the hobby in some way should be welcomed, not criticized. And if it appears to have achieved very little it should be supported and helped to achieve more, not be told to pack up and go home. Broadly speaking, IDA/UK is trying to do for the independent sector what the NGC is doing for the NGC - and the membership is 35 compared to 500! It can't achieve a lot without more support; it's doing nothing whatever against the interests of the NGC, and yet it's constantly denied the support that would really let it do something useful and at the same time criticized for not achieving anything worth while. Do you wonder that its members get a bit annoyed at the constant knocking it receives from its huge neighbour?

And please stop implying that IDA/UK is an American organization. Every single member lives in this country and the only American connection is a \$50 gift and part of the name.

RS: So return the gift, change the name, and I'll back you! Incidentally, I have said very little about the IDA except when more or less challenged to do so. Now it seems to be on the wane (two or three members I know of do not intend to rejoin), and I hope that it will eventually revert to being a wholly American organization, in which case of course I would have nothing against it - the 'colonization' aspect is what annoys me, and most other objectors I suspect. (The Yanks ruined our Empire, let's ruin theirs, he screamed.) Incidentally, I have had a friendly letter from Big IDA himself, Edi Birsan (suppressed here as I feel it was possibly not intended for publication), and it seems likely that more friendly relations will result from this, though it won't affect my attitude to the UK off-shoot.

GLYN PALMER: As for the price increase, Dolchstoss will cost the same as the Sunday Times and is infinitely better value.

RS: Thank you, kind sir. Though we can't afford 200 pages of coloured advertising ...

DAVE ROSS: You may be interested to know what kind of response I got to my bit in Rocinante 1 about the question of whether Dolchstoss should run games. I heard from 5 of 6 people - and with only 20 players that's not bad - and they all thought the games were the most interesting things in Dolchstoss. A couple went on to say that they didn't like the letters, or weren't interested in them.

RS: Yes, I think there is a clear majority for the status quo. Thanks for the confirmation, Dave. The letters, of course, are mainly of interest to those who write

them, and some would be incomprehensible to new members. When one starts playing one is naturally very interested in seeing the more elderly games, spotting the good players, etc. Later one is more interested in seeing one's own name in print ! For your other point about new members being under-informed, see Robin Allen's letter.

DAVE BROWN: One point was raised about prospective members not being informed of the true cost of Diplomacy. This is a very good point that wants to be cleared up - can't the NGC get the manufacturers to tear up all the old slips - and provide new ones, even if we have to pay for them out of the profits ? Also, in answer to your rhetorical question: yes, I suspect a lot of people don't expect to pay much more than £1.10, and the £2.00 game fee and deposit does come as a big shock.

RS: I'm sorry, but I just can't accept that ! When I started I was amazed at how cheap the games were - and postage has risen over 100% since then. Anyone with any intelligence at all should be able to see for themselves that it's going to cost more than that. The point is a valid one to the extent that we are not able to control our own advertising - I don't think we can reasonably expect an operation to remove the forms from the wrapped boxes in the shops, but I certainly shall be glad when something can be done. The forms were badly thought out in the first place, and are a millstone round our neck.

ANDY DAVIDSON: I note with some distaste your proposal that players who resign because of a bad GMing decision should lose their deposits and be blacklisted. Such tyrannical arguments are the main reason that I dislike all Diplomacy organizations. I consider a player's right to resign to be his ultimate sanction against unfair and slovenly GMing and I have exercised it myself on several occasions. I'm not too worried, though, as your policy would be easy to circumvent - one could order all units to stand for the rest of the game or wait a couple of seasons before resigning with a 'legitimate' excuse. Your argument that ratings-conscious players would resign over some trivial incident to get out of a game which was going badly is a complete red herring. Why isn't this happening already ? I'll tell you - most rating systems that I know of would rate the original player of a country in most cases. Standbys tend only to be rated if their ratings would improve as a result. So there is nothing to be gained, from the point of view of ratings, from resigning a poor position. Even if your supposition was true, what's to prevent a player resigning just because he wants to ? John Piggott has resigned from dozens of games recently for no apparent reason and without attracting any adverse comment ...

RS: My point was to avoid the intolerable situation created for GMs by people like you who say, in effect, 'Rule the way I want it or I'll resign.' More reasonable players are likely to say, 'Oh well, if it means that much to him ...' and GMs (whose first duty is to consider the interests of the majority) are likely to take the line of least resistance to avoid breaking up the game. I take your point about rating systems - my impression is that drop-outs are rated, resigners not, but I could be wrong. As for John Piggott, he dropped out of Diplomacy almost entirely because he felt it was occupying too much of his time - this is a perfectly valid reason and a very different matter from simply being a bad loser. (Though Piggott is that too, of course ...)

PIA SUTCLIFFE: As the concubine of a Dolchstoss subscriber ...

RS: The letter which began so promisingly (what was I going to be offered ?) turned out to be a subliminal ad for King and Barnes, the Sussex brewers. Sharp rating, 7/10 (compare Young's 10/10, Marston's 9/10, Whitbread 2/10, Watneys unrated variant).

GREG HAWES: On the subject of the 'Didsbury mob' telling us what we should and shouldn't believe in Dolchstoss, I agree with Stuart Dagger that it is irritating, but I resent his dismissing anyone on the pretext that they are 'a bunch of schoolkids'. ... I reckon students have as much, if not more, to contribute to the hobby as the 'old men' of 25 and over. Admittedly Herd & Co have shown us what a bad job people can make of things if they try ...

RS: Oops ! Just turned the page and seen the bit that says 'don't publish that'. Sorry. Andrew Waldie made the same point (more forcibly) in a recent Belliscus. My view: a very high percentage of young members does drop out, sometimes with disastrous effect (Sherrad). The minority are of course among the keenest and most valuable supporters of the game (Waldie, Jones, your learned self). Andrew Waldie accused me (in friendly fashion) of being a child-hater. I'm not, but I tend to be slightly wary.

TREASURER'S NOTES - Tony Ball

16.4.75

From: NGC Treasurer, Tony Ball, 10 Arbroath Road, Sundon Park, Luton, Beds, LU3 3LA.
Telephone: Luton 596950

The suggested price increase in the last issue has caused an absolutely deafening silence! I take this to mean that most of you are in general agreement with the increase and I am accordingly deducting 15 p. from everyone's credit this month. I received only one comment, to the effect that a rise was unnecessary as the NGC's profits could absorb the extra cost. The person concerned is of course equating Dolchstoss with the NGC, whereas they are not entirely the same thing. Dolchstoss is of course already subsidized by the NGC, but I don't see why NGC members who don't receive Dolchstoss should subsidize it any further. If we were to charge the full cost of producing Dolchstoss the price would be nearer 30 p. per issue. At 15 p. the subsidy is therefore 50% whereas at 11 p. (the old price) it would have been 63%. I notice that Fifth Column now costs 15 p. per issue (plus s.a.e.!) and in my opinion Dolchstoss must be good value at the same price. 'Nuff said!

Has anyone noticed a difference in the volume of post since the postage went up? Mine has decreased from 12-15 letters daily to 2-3! Life has been much easier, for which I am truly thankful. The number of new gamestarts has also been less than expected and I wouldn't be surprised to see a tailing off in the number of new members. I think we must plan for a (relatively) quiet 12 months ahead, with the club's income stabilizing but costs leaping ahead. This, of course, is where our current surplus is most useful and can be used to contain prices over the foreseeable future.

Because it has been a quiet month there is little to report. One or two people have again raised the question of refunding game deposits. I now refund deposits immediately upon a person's elimination, or on completion of the game. I receive all NGC zines and study them for eliminations. All refunded deposits are automatically added to credit, and if anyone should want cash sending to him he must write and ask me to forward it. Incidentally, the game deposit system has now been in operation for 10 months and I hold £424 of deposits. Since it has started only 6 deposits have been forfeited through failure to stay with a game to the end, which is a remarkable testimony to NGC readers.

Can the following members please send me some more cash to top up their credit balances, which are insufficient to pay for the next Dolchstoss:

K.BAILEY, P.BARKER, L.BATCHELOR, N.BURTON, R.T.CORRELL, K.FISHER, F.H.GIMSON, W.E.M. GODFREY, L.HALPIN, C.HARDEN, V.HUANG, M.INGHAM, Helen KIMBLE, G.MILLS, L.NIEHORSTER, I.P.NOBLE, L.PARROTT, D.A.READ, A.ROZMUS, A.SCRACE, G.SIMPSON, J.SCRIVEN, C.SPIKINGS, P.M.STIMPSON, B.SYLVESTER, L.TRIGGS, A.WALDIE, J.WARBURTON, G.C.D.WHEELER.

The annual fee of 60 p. is now due from the following who have insufficient credit:
J.WARBURTON, R.PINK, N.SEALEY, L.BATCHELOR, L.HALPIN

I have deducted it from credit in the cases of P.Cousins, D.Read, W.Godfrey, J.Balson, W.Thompson, J.Parry, R.J.Sykes, J.Gravenor, C.Spikings, B.Ellis, P.M.Stimpson, A.Craddock, P.Campbell, M.Williams, S.Blyth, R.Roberts, E.Goffin, P.Farley, P.Stutt, S.Rooke.

You will notice that for some of these it is the third time of payment. How time flies!

*

Comments (RS): I think it is generally agreed that Dolchstoss is cheap at the price - or, alternatively, that it is reasonable to include one's 60 p. sub in the cost of the zine. Meanwhile there is no doubt about the postal slump - my own receipts have dropped as much as Tony's, my sendings from 40 a week to about 3, and the Post Office reports a falling off of nearly 20%! This of course means further rises are quite inevitable. Even at the new rates, telephoning saves enormously since 1 phonecall achieves as much as 2 or more letters. But I think the GPO is killing the postal game; certainly I myself can't consider taking on new games any more, and many others must feel the same. For God's sake; one move at Scrabble costs three bob or so now!

FTF

Dewsbury, 26 April from PAUL SIMPKINS

True to all the traditions of ftf, we only managed to scrape together 6 persons who wanted to play. Undeterred we started a variant which involved the Italian units being in 'democratic anarchy' - i.e. every player ordered the Italian units and the majority vote was followed. In many cases this resulted in them standing, though Italy did gain Trieste and Tunis.

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	
ENGLAND (Paul Simpkins)	4	4	4	4	7*	7*	9*		
GERMANY (Dave Allen)	5	5	6	6	4	7*	8*		
RUSSIA (Ian Jones)	6	6	5	5	4	4	1		
TURKEY (Graham Berrow)	4	7	7	9	9	12	13		
AUSTRIA (Roger Fox)	5	4	2	2	2	0	-		
ITALY (<u>Democratic anarchy</u>)	3	3	2	2	2	0	-		
FRANCE (Andy Davidson)	5	5	7*	7	6	4	3		@ = non-member

Turkey emerged as an obvious victor when he got three builds in 02. Russia's failure to co-ordinate his forces in the south inevitably helped Graham on his way. The rest of the board was in chaos. France took Lpl and Edi, Germany owned all 3 French centres, Russia owned all 3 German centres and England took StP and Mos (Turkey took Sev, Austria took war). Italy held out as long as Austria but both succumbed to the Turkish juggernaut. England and Germany fought frantic battles to recapture their respective homelands from Russia and France involving multi-stab tactics by everyone. Eventually Russia and France were down to just 'survivor' status and in Spring 08 England and Germany opted for joint second place to a Turkey that had just pushed his total up to 16.

One of the most remarkable features of the game was that Graham had only started playing Diplomacy the previous night - this was his first full game. Can there really be beginners luck ?

Walsall, date unknown from CHRIS HARVEY

This game was interesting because it confirmed a suspicion that I have long held, namely that the most enjoyable - indeed, best - Diplomacy game is one where personalities not tactics dominate. I doubt if I could have won this game if it had been postal. Which is one reason why I don't like postal games (BDC 59R is the other reason). All the players in this game except England and Russia were known to me; I was Austria. On the first turn I, Germany (Tony Cox) and France (Mick Murphy) got together and arranged how best to carve up the board, the agreement being that the three of us would take the first three places, though in no particular order. This idea worked well because the three of us work well together. That's not to say that the others in the game are poor players (they aren't), just that the three of us make a good team.

Russia fell very quickly to a combined Austro-German attack. I had talked Italy into 'Lepanto-ing' Turkey, which he did, but very slowly. When Russia fell I was ready to stab Turkey, whilst telling Italy I was only doing it to help him. Next turn, with Italy and Turkey at each other's throats, it was an easy task for France and I to take over Italy, who had only one of his four units in his home provinces.

After that I turned on Germany with France, and after only 4 hours' play ended up with 17 centres. I maintain that I couldn't have got that to work by writing letters to people I don't know. Mainly it would have taken too long but also it would have been impossible to weigh up the likelihood of the other two sticking to the plan. I hate postal games.

Kennington, 19 April from RICHARD SHARP

Spend morning drinking Young's Special and watching Doubleday eat. Arrive chez Birks after lunch feeling sleepy. Who are all these awful people? Piggott beats me at Scrabble for the second time in a year, and tells me afterwards the stakes were 1 p. a point. Thunder on stairs signals exodus to boozier. Sedgwick and I carve up Piggott and Doubleday at bridge, but it's too easy. After ritual darts marathon, we stop at takeaway curry joint and Steve eats three (Dolchstoss record). Finally poker and I win £5. Not enough.