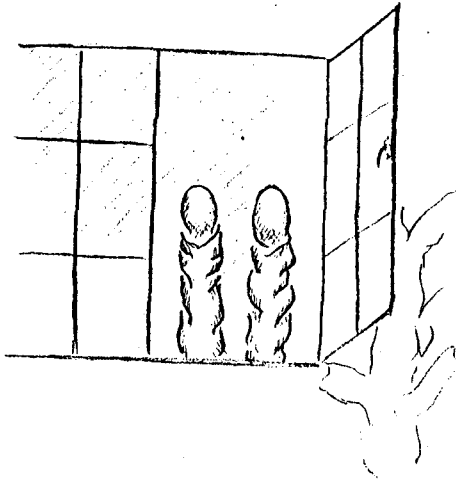
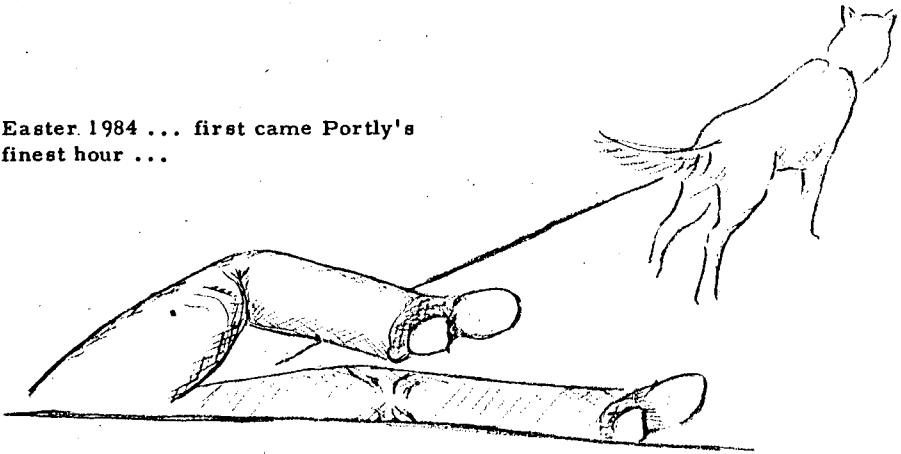


# Dolchstoß

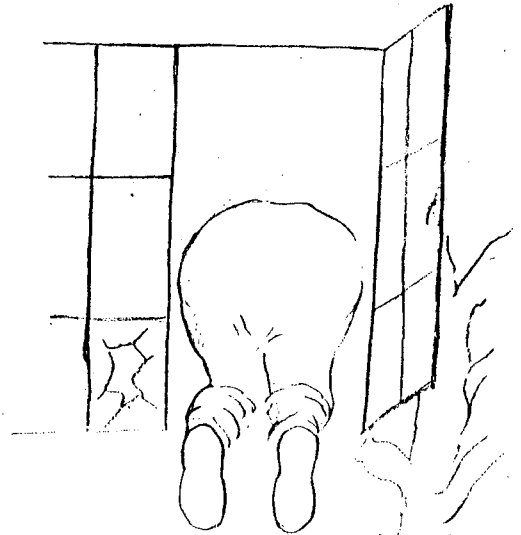
No. 75

45 p.

Easter 1984 ... first came Portly's  
finest hour ...



... then came Tringers' finest hour ...



... and finally, it was Doubleday's  
finest hour.

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\*

This has been (from my point of view) or will be (umgekehrt) the three-quarter-century issue of Dolchstoss (est. 1972), a journal of musical and culinary affairs, published by Richard Sharp, 27 Elm Close, Amersham, Bucks, who reluctantly admits that his post-code is HP6 5DD, and who can be telephoned at 02403-6148 at rare moments, or at Gerrards Cross (dunno code, dial Slough and add 8) 87241 during reasonable working hours (9-5, give or take long lunch hours on Tuesday and Thursday). The deadline for orders for all games is:

7.30 p.m. on FRIDAY 1st JUNE 1984

and you are strongly recommended to get them in by post if you can, as we do answer the telephone (when it isn't and we aren't temporarily disconnected) but we don't always notice what you say. If you really need to phone, the office is better - overseas players who have to phone ignore all these remarks and just phone! Does anyone know a cheap way of getting an IBM typewriter cleaned, cos this one sure is grotty? Sorry if there are typing errors in this issue, but it should give Piggott some nits to pick. See you.

PS Debris from Easter: one SF novel, one crash-helmet, one sleeping-bag, one squashed Mars bar (now eaten), one shoe-box, one non-sf novel - sale by auction on ...

## EDITORIAL

### Seven Days in April

Wednesday 18th - arise early feeling pretty damned pleased with self at completing typing of 32-page D 74 by Tuesday night, despite having kids stay over till Sunday instead of Friday as planned. Envelopes done, too. Sellotaping not. Bron does it, self making helpful comments - only 10 minutes late for work instead of an hour, which it would have been if I'd had to deal with the sticky stuff. Test run of 24 copies during coffee-break - no problem... Different story at 5.01 p.m., though, isn't it? By 6.45, with help from sympathetic member of staff, have achieved a further 48 copies, 24 of which need collating. When this machine decides to bitch, it does a good job - it sticks after every half-dozen copies, and it takes several minutes to persuade it to get going again. Frantically staple players' copies, stuff them in post - as they disappear remember I haven't upgraded the postage to 16 p. on the D 46 players' envelopes. Covered in ink, sweat and confusion, adjourn to bath with Dornford Yates and a large gin. Bron feels sorry for me and cooks the supper, though it's really my turn.

Thursday 19th - doubly depressing start to day - have to cope with \*\*\* photocopier again, and no car to escape in as Bron's got it to take the girls home. Also letter from French embassy demanding payment for hospital treatment in 1978 - well, they can wait another couple of years. (I was very ill that summer, you know.) Still, McGivern expected today, an encouraging thought. Consumed with foreboding, decide to do test run during morning again. Twelve minutes later leave photocopier's den with 96 perfect copies and bemused expression. Can feel damned thing smirking behind me. Come 5.30, nothing to do - adjourn to Packhorse with D74, consume not very good pint, read Battleship Bismarck and await Bron. Women always late, though not serious if in pub. Then two hours' McGivernless darts at Emperor, then give up, go home. Detour past Eagle looking for black MGB (one pub much like another, Eagle much nearer Newcastle). No joy. Not surprised to find MGB in Close (naughty!) with somnolent McGivern slumped at wheel. He staggers in, festooned with boxes of wine ('Wine merchant client owed me favour'). After supper he diffidently proffers bottle of brandy (same client, big favour). 'Don't drink it myself,' says he, 'probably no good.' Study label - Remy Martin Centaure Napoleon. 'At least it's French,' I say. 'Try some!' He does. 'Not bad, tastes like Scotch, doesn't it?' We discuss methods of Birks-proofing bottles for a glass or so, and then to bed.

Friday 20th - Good Friday, so-called, and Portly's Finest Hour. Up betimes, and mail rest of Dolchstoss, McGivern assisting heroically. Come opening time, have just persuaded him to stroll down to Eagle when knock at door heralds bizarre SF apparition of indeterminate species. Not fooled, but can't work out which way up he is until recall crash helmet goes at top. 'Morning, Steve,' I say upwards. Tell him glad tidings that Paul and I walking to Eagle. 'Ooooh,' he says, 'I'm tired.' Paul and I walk alone, only 1.1 miles, all downhill. 'This is quite a steep bank,' says Paul, referring to the 250-foot Chiltern on which we live. 'No, Paul,' I say kindly, 'this is a hill, a bank is —' 'Something you keep your money in?' '... something you have an overdraft at.' Arrive at Eagle - a coup! John has forgotten to lock the back gate, and there we are at 11.59.10. 'What time do you call this?' he demands. Time to consume pint before Bron-handicapped Doubleday eventually arrives at 12.15. Then 28 games of darts (301, X in, X out) in two hours, Paul winning 13, self 10, Darth Vader 3 and Bron 2, both against me, but I get satisfaction of finishing 54-48-32 against McG who says, 'Hard luck,' not being in gear at this stage. Back home to lunch, resisting Steve's efforts to buy curry all round, then settle down for leisurely afternoon's bridge, eventually interrupted by a train-transported Tringham, who

refuses to cut in and peers suspiciously at us over my back issues of Megalomania for several ours. For ours, read hours. Feeling slightly foxed by 5.30 or so, propose curative walk to Crown at Little Missenden, only 4.5 miles, mainly downhill. Paul game for anything, Chris visibly weighing drawbacks of exertion against Bron's driving, Steve tired. Eventually Paul, Chris and I stride away Crown-ward, in single file because path narrow, shouting back and forth like, as Paul says, a discarded take from Last of the Summer Wine. Eventually stand on glorious summer evening looking down over Misbourne valley half a mile distant. 'Crown's down there,' say I. 'Five to seven,' says Paul, 'shall we trot?' No. At Crown, rendezvous in garden with Bron, Steve, Barbi, Patrick and Portly, a failed Dobermann. Consume numerous pints of Morrell's in increasingly unglorious weather. Portly spots the Black Rabbit or some such in the thickening mist, and absent-mindedly sets off in pursuit, with master attached, the effect of which from my angle is the sudden and total disappearance of Patrick from my side, except that I just glimpse his heels flashing past my left ear. This trick, though obviously carefully rehearsed, brings tumultuous applause from bystanders. We depart in dudgeon, though not before I have poured a pint over Chris's trousers as an Easter offering (he apologises sheepishly). Consume vast quantities of chilli con carne, and are just debating what to play when Colin and Ermintrude arrive, having waited patiently all evening in the Eagle. Oops. Inevitable Fictionary Dictionary marathon is followed by bed, and about time too.

Saturday 21st - not officially Good Saturday despite manifest superiority to Friday. Paul, Steve and self depart early for Emperor, bearing Tringham, who looks pale. Stop at Gerrards Cross for shopping, but still at pub before 12.00. Facetiously claim dart games before noon don't count for weekend championship, then unfortunately have long winning streak and find others agree with me. End of championship. Arrival of Glyn Palmer, more bridge, more beer, things progressing nicely. Until we get home, and find ourselves keyless. 'I shall ascend yon pear-tree,' says the valiant Tringham, and does, to general astonishment, effecting the world's most energetic bog-hogging to date. More bridge (what did the others do?), then back to Emperor for more bridge. Visit to Beaconsfield Indian, evidently restored to its former status as the best for miles, after a disappointing recent visit. Can't remember any more about Saturday.

Sunday 22nd - somewhat surprised to find myself at 9 a.m. playing something called Cosmic Encounter with Steve, Paul and Colin. Evidently borrowed this from friend at pub. Funny. Paul abhors the futility of war, I scoff at the fragile intelligences I crush, etc., and we go on doing so all weekend, annoying everyone. Good game for before breakfast. Eventually route march to Eagle, where joined by Tom Strickland. We incur the undying hatred of the locals by shanghaiing the only table large enough for the domino school, and (once more bridge has begun) the non-bridgeurs compound the felony by pinching the dominoes themselves. Back at ranch, afternoon passes peacefully until arrival of Tony Crouch, minus hat, plus family. More bridge, Crouch departing 25 p. better off and clearly very pleased with his day's work. Back to the Eagle for ... no, wrong, this time it's silly dart-games in the grand hard-core tradition - Over and Under, Fifty-One, etc., though I can't persuade anyone to play Shanghai, the only one I ever win at, so keep coming second. Sulk. Back home for ye traditional roast beef, an enormous great thing that only just fits in the oven. Bron excels herself, and I am surprised to find myself deploring the absence of Birks, who almost alone among the Old Guard is not a junk-food disposal machine. I suppose something must have happened after supper, but I can't recall what ... oh yes, we played Fictionary Dictionary again, Palmer scorning to use the dictionary but finding enough words in his head to confuse everyone. Exit Palmer, due at work in a couple of hours; rest of us to bed in varying states of collapse.

Monday 23rd - stagger down to find Doubleday half-way through the washing-up. Pretend to busy myself at other household tasks while he does the other half. What a

man. Today's pre-breakfast activity is the Times crossword, done standing up to keep us awake. After half an hour or so my father appears, asks how long we've been at it, says, 'Oh dear, that's not very good, is it?' and departs again. Stung, we finish crossword, except for final, unfair clue (it relates to a non-alcoholic drink, a specialist subject of which we have no knowledge). Bron wanders in, says, 'Why haven't you filled in CHOCOLATE?' and produces breakfast. We then do another crossword, sitting down, Paul reading the clues (quite well) while we shout the answers. ('Royal house, 8 letters,' says he. 'Hannover?' I suggest. 'Not a royal house,' says he sternly.) Then off to the Emperor for more bridge, where joined by John Balson - he, however, is immediately nailed to the wall by Computer Weekly, and we don't see much of him. Sharp luck turns at last - see bridge column - and I spend the long hours as dummy calculating that Doubleday buys at least 1.7 times as many rounds as anyone else but is only 1.6 times the size, which seems all wrong. Ron Fisher also arrives at last, hot-foot from the M6, and for the first time since Friday we have enough cars, even if no one fit to drive most of them. Back home, 7 of us shatter the last vestige of hard-core tradition by playing Diplomacy! In the garden, at that. The cast-list deserves to be immortalised: Colin Walsh (E), Richard Sharp (G), Ron Fisher (R), Paul McGivern (T), Bronwyn Sharp (A), Adrien Baird (I) and Steve Doubleday (F), with Tom Strickland as GM. If you're wondering how Waird got there, he turned up during the morning in the most pornographic little shorts, and, such is the merciful power of the subconscious, I had forgotten all about him. Anyway, at opening time everyone stabs everyone else, and a 7-way draw is declared as we decamp to the Eagle. This produces the weekend's last arrivals, Pete Birks and Leila, and some very tired darts. Back home, the survivors demolish huge quantities of cold beef, then crash out.

Tuesday 24th - up betimes, to work, dropping Bron en route and leaving Messrs Doubleday, McGivern, Walsh and Yvonne snoring. Ah, but this St George's Day - no, not really, but at the Emperor, beer 50 p. a pint, etc. Give up work at 11 and retire thither, just in time to see McGivern sheepishly drinking ginger beer! (Steve on hard stuff, others gone home.) Resist efforts to chuck us out until 3 p.m., then home, where Paul and Steve play War at Sea in the garden, Steve winning this effortlessly as the Axis by 'forgetting' he is only allowed 7 U-boats and taking the German die-roll modifier for them, so that when I return from collecting Bron a bewildered Paul is wilting under a storm of 14-inch shells from about 10 submerged Bismarcks. I then challenge Steve, offering 2-1 odds for £1, but he dislikes the look of my opening move and upsets the board all over the garden. He then makes amends by playing time-handicap Scrabble for 1 p. a point, and I win 422-289, the whole game taking only 27 minutes. And so back to the Emperor for another half-dozen 50 p. pints and the last rubber of the weekend. Final accounts for the bridge: Bron +£3.25, Richard + £1.65, Adrien + £1.25, Tony + 25 p., Steve - 25 p., Tom - 65 p., Glyn - 85 p., Colin - 90 p., Paul - £1.85, Arnie - £1.90, which amazingly adds up. Those who decamped without paying/collecting, and the twit who overpaid, will find their D credits amended. At about 9.30, unable to force down more pints at any price, repair to Chinese where Paul and Steve treat us to an excellent meal, Steve's initial mutterings ('Small helpings ... do they do takeways?') eventually dying away as we fail to finish the eighth course. But Steve's finest hour has now come - on arriving home, well, yes, we have got the key, but it won't turn, will it. Steve's vivid imagination instantly peoples the house with vicious desperadoes bent on theft (what of?) - 'they always latch the door, you know'. Heroically, if impractically, he volunteers to wriggle through the Birks-sized gap between the tumble drier and the window frame. 'You can't get through there,' says Bron, 'I'll do it.' Steve relieved. 'You won't,' say I, 'you're pissed and that thing cost £150 we didn't have.' Steve despondent - but climbs pear tree. Paul and Bron bravely hold protesting tree while Sharp prudently retires to safe distance. Steve gets foot through window. Muted applause. Then Steve gets foot through open bit of window. Louder applause. Back to the brandy, and that's another Easter done with.

### Whinge, Snivel, Grizzle ...

And plenty of it, yet in fact most games coped well with the short deadline, including even D 44I, to whom I offer my thanks and congratulations. The only games not printed this issue are D 39W, where John Balson and Andy Holborn have been having work problems (though the missing orders are not theirs!), D 45, where one player has asked for the extension, and D 46, where one player has exercised his right to claim a double deadline. I therefore pour scorn on the wretches who pretend not to know that 'a three-week deadline' means deadlines are three weeks apart, including the production delay. We used to play to them all the time, you know, in some zines in the early 1970s. However, I hope it won't happen again - the current deadline is the usual four weeks, and subsequent ones should be the same until we get a 5- or 6-weeker over the summer holiday.

\*

### Upcoming Postgamgathers

People keep saying 'see you at Manorcon/Midcon', but will they? Both events are in Birmingham (Why? Why won't anyone tell me why?), and the prospect of spending even one weekend, let alone two, so far from nourishment alarms me. In any case, Manorcon is over the weekend described by its organisers as 'Friday 13th to Sunday 16th July', when we shall be playing in the Notts Congress (but what about a flying visit on the Saturday, Greg? - they're advertising cricket!) - details of this event from Nick Kinzett, 11 Daleway Rd, Green Lane, Coventry, CV3 6JF or ring 0203-414759. Midcon is being held (by people who at least know how long a weekend is) from 9th-11th November. This is a weekend when I'm due to have my children here, but one of them is too young to go into a pub, and I'm not drinking in the Royal Angus Hotel to please anyone. I have, however, written to the ex-wife to ask if I can swap the weekend, so there is some chance I may make that one, details of which can, I assume, be obtained from Chris Tringham, 204 Beulah Hill, London SE19 3UX.

\*

### Zines Noticed

Most welcome arrival of the month, for me, was Diplomacy Quarterly 6, with the updated openings survey produced by Peter Calcraft. Loving dissection of this survey by your editor begins elsewhere in this issue. A fine effort by Pete, and no doubt many readers will want a copy, which they can (probably) get by sending a sub to Peter at 25 Garners Lane, Davenport, Stockport, Cheshire... Also welcome was 20 Years On, the hobby information zine listing all British and many foreign hobby services, now edited by Mark Billenness, older (or younger, or even twin, I don't know) brother of former editor Simon. Trade accepted, Mark; address for this one is 20 Winifred Rd, Coulsdon, Surrey, CR3 3JA... Only one I got this month which raised my blood-pressure was The Church Mouse from Dave Thomas (16 Ballater Close, Burnside, Stanley, Co. Durham) - I know everyone says that this formerly right-wing hobby is now left-wing, but I never thought anyone with the intelligence to play Diplomacy would ever be capable of advocating the abolition of private education. There is simply no possible argument for this, as is borne out by the 'arguments' advanced in the zine. Come off it, Dave - you were on a more hopeful tack when you were trying to convert McGivern from alcohol to FRP games... Megalomania arrived yet again, Tringers making a serious bid for zine-poll stardom, though he won't get much of a vote from me by saying I am 'instinctively wrong about almost everything' - in fact I am right about absolutely everything, as confirmed by a moving testimonial from hobby genius Pete Doubleday in this month's letter column... Mad Policy arrived, though without any moves for my game - I have been trying to get a second game somewhere since November, and have actually been sent four more gamestart notices, though so far I haven't seen a single adjudication. How long do games take nowadays, for Pete's sake? ... Also received the various foreign zines I trade with, but the rush of the past three weeks has left me no time to excavate my dictionaries and see what SAU/G, Oxymoron, et al are saying about me.

THE DUTCH HOBBY

Jan Feringa

As far as I know, the first game in the Netherlands was played in 1973. Soon there were contacts with Walter-Luc Haas, the Swiss publisher of Europa and Bumm, and in 1976 Diplomacy became a section of DUCOSIM (Dutch Conflict Simulation).

In 1977 DUCOSIM gets a zine, and the first Dippy Championship is organised. Later the zine is renamed De Conflictgazet.

In 1980 Diplomacy becomes an official 'gaming group' within DUCOSIM. The Diplomacy section of the Conflictgazet gets bigger and bigger. In 1981 the first 'pure' Dippy-zines are born: De Diplomat and Oxymoron. The former folded after a few months; the latter still exists. The number of players increases very rapidly. In 1982 another zine shows up - Je Maintiendrai. The most important event in that year, however, is a Dutch version of the game, manufactured by Jumbo. The rules for the preliminary rounds of the Championships are radically revised. The same happens in 1983. A third zine sees the light - Brutus, edited by a group of notorious Diplomacy players.

Since November 1982 we have had a postal rating system. It was designed by myself, and the computer program was written by Teijo Doornkamp. Yearly, the top seven are invited to play a postal game. The 1984 game has just begun in Je Maintiendrai, while the 1985 game will be played in Brutus and the 1986 game in Oxymoron. The system will be explained in Brutus 15.

At the moment, the struggle to become the successor to Paul Meerts, Kees van der Hoek, Sjef van der List (twice), Jan Feringa and Teijo Doornkamp is fierce. The final will be played in Utrecht in December.

The three zines are all flourishing with over 70 subscribers and 6 to 8 Diplomacy games.

Je Maintiendrai is produced by three guys from the Hague, and is famous for looking very nice. Oxymoron is produced by Jaap Jacobs and offers a lot of games and variants. Brutus is edited by a team from Groningen, and in addition to Diplomacy some FRP and silly games are offered. The committee of the 'Diplomacy-spelgroep' is formed by Rob van der Burg, Jaap Jacobs, Jan Feringa and Roland Bakker.

The Dutch hobby is very anxious to get in touch with foreigners, especially foreign players in our zines. Arrangements to make the latter possible can and will be made (English adjudications, double deadlines, etc.). So grab your pen and write to:  
Ivo Bouwman, v. Heutszstraat 11, 2593 PC Den Haag (Je Maintiendrai)  
Jaap Jacobs, Vincent van Goghlaan 16, 2343 RN Oegstgeest (Oxymoron)  
Jan Feringa, Radijstraat 11b, 9741 Groningen (Brutus)

\*

((RS here - sorry, there should be a BJ after the 9741 in Jan's address. All the above was of interest to me, as there was no Dutch hobby when I last looked. For the benefit of any possible subscribers to one of the Dutch zines, I can tell you that these chaps in Holland write better English than most of us do (well, most of you anyway) and that to play in a game in one of their zines is perfectly practical for a non-Dutch speaker. Many thanks for the article, Jan.))

\* \* \* \* \*

JOTTO

Here are the latest scores, children:

Larry Trask (2)	2-1-1-1-1-2	Barry McManus (2)	0-2-1-1-0-2
Mike Wassall (2)	1-1-1-0-0-2	Alan Richards (2)	1-2-2-1-1-2
Chris Roche (2)	3-1-1-2-0-1	Pete Doubleday (2)	2-1-1-1-1-2
John Piggott (2)	0-1-2-2-2-1	Rosie Roberts (2)	1-1-3-1-2-2
Craig Nye (1)	1-2-1-4-2-0	Tony Crouch (1)	1-0-3-1-1-1
Craig Nye (2)	2-1-2-2-3-1	Tony Crouch (2)	2-2-1-3-2-0

CHESS

Brian Clark

To give you some idea of the playing strength of the writer of the column, I print below my latest game. This was played over-the-board on April 6th in the Cleveland County Chess League - Division B on Board 2.

CLARK (Upper Eskdale) v WOODHOUSE (Billingham)

- |            |         |             |         |              |          |
|------------|---------|-------------|---------|--------------|----------|
| 1. P - K4  | P - K4  | 9. P - B3   | Q - K2  | 17. B x N    | Q x B    |
| 2. N - KB3 | N - QB3 | 10. B - Q5  | B - Q2  | 18. Q - Q2   | N - R2   |
| 3. B - N5  | P - QR3 | 11. QN - Q2 | O - O   | 19. R(B1)-K1 | P - B3   |
| 4. B - R4  | P - QN4 | 12. N - N3  | B - N3  | 20. P - Q4   | N - B1   |
| 5. B - N3  | N - KB3 | 13. N - KR4 | P - KR3 | 21. P x P    | QP x P   |
| 6. P - Q3  | B - B4  | 14. N - N61 | Q - K1  | 22. Q - Q5+  | Q - K3?? |
| 7. O - O   | P - Q3  | 15. N x R   | P x B   | 23. Q x R    | RESIGNS  |
| 8. B - N5  | B - KN5 | 16. N x B   | Q x N   |              |          |

Although the game comes to a rather abrupt end and contains quite a few tactical and strategic errors I was, nevertheless, rather pleased with white's position throughout. The White Kings Pawn really dominates the centre of the board and Black never managed to equalise because he failed to appreciate the necessity of nullifying its influence.

I am always ~~desperate~~ happy to fill part of the column with games played by DOLCHSTOSS readers, so if you have played a game of which you are quite proud - perhaps because of a brilliant tactical mate-in-six, or perhaps because of a deep technically accurate strategic plan which crushes your opponent rather as a Constrictor does, - then please send the score to me and your fame will be published abroad.

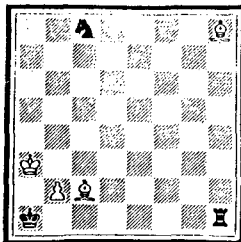
NEW GAME STARTS

751 BOB BROWN v CHRIS ROCHE. 752 CHRIS ROCHE v BOB BROWN

THIS MONTHS PROBLEMS

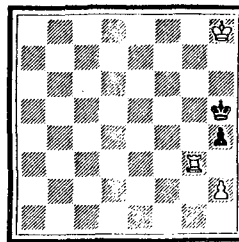
Here are a couple of problems which you should have little difficulty in solving. I found the mate-in-five to be the easier of the two. Answers in next months column.

W. Wohlers  
Die Schwalbe 1935



White mates in seven

A. W. Galltzy  
La Stratégie 1907



White mates in five

POSTAL CHESS

Why don't you join our Postal Chess League? You can play as many, or as few opponents as you wish. There are no strict deadline dates to keep to. Nothing could be more simple or more satisfying.

It is universally accepted that POSTAL CHESS IS THE SINGLE MOST SUCCESSFUL WAY TO IMPROVE YOUR PLAYING ABILITY whatever your current level.

Don't be left behind - write to me today for an opponent or two (remember to enclose a s.a.e.) My address is

EAST - SIDE COTTAGE, DANBY, WHITEY, NORTH YORKSHIRE. YO 21 2NH.

BRIDGE

We played a good number of hands of both rubber and Chicago over the Easter weekend - about 80 hands in my case. For the first 3 1/2 days Bron and I had appalling cards when we played together, avoiding complete financial disaster only when we played with someone else. Playing with Colin Walsh I even managed to get on the right end of two slams - one routine 6NT, and this horrific effort:

AKJ10xxx	-
Kx	AJxxx
Axx	Kxxxx
x	Axx

Colin opened the West hand 2C (Benjamin), I bid 2H, Colin showed his spades and I bid 3D. Colin should now (in my view) repeat his spades to show his hand type, but in fact he gave preference to 3H and I, not wanting to put this unfamiliar partnership under the strain of cue-bidding, leapt gracefully to 6H. Paul McGivern and Steve Doubleday respectfully failed to double this daft contract, which turned out to be a wise decision.

Steve led CK, which I won. Since I can't organize a club ruff, the contract seems to depend on the hearts being 3-3 with the Q onside plus a reasonable break in spades - about a 10% shot. So I played a heart to the King, finessed the Jack and cashed the Ace. Alas, South (Paul) showed out on this trick. However, all is not lost - if Paul has precisely Qx of spades I can get four discards before Steve can ruff, and one more while he ruffs ... and that was what happened.

Bron and I reached our nadir at the Emperor on Monday morning. First I made a cunning lead-inhibiting bid on the way to 3NT, but Paul didn't hear it and led the suit anyway! Then Bron forgot the system so that we played a 50% (making) grand in a partscore. But then the tide turned at last. I made a ridiculous psychic overcall of 1S with a 4-count and a spade void; Steve doubled and Bron redoubled. By the time I had escaped into diamonds a few times and Bron had obtusely returned to spades one fewer times, I was in 4D doubled, which rolled home on a cross-ruff. Then, playing against Colin Walsh and Arnie (who is part of the Emperor furniture) came this joke:

x Q AKJxx KQJ109x

I held this collection, and Bron opened 1S. 2C from me, 2H from partner, 3D from me, 3S from her. The sensible thing to do now is go quietly with 3NT, but I wasn't feeling sensible and applied the old Black. Partner showed one ace, so I bid a confident-sounding 6C. Partner had:

AKQxx Kxxx x 87x

and the hand on lead held HA but, quite reasonably, led a diamond. I hastily took two rounds of spades, off-loading the heart, ruffed a third spade and played clubs, hoping for the best. This passed off well when the hand with CA didn't have the last spade.

Then came the hand of the weekend. You hold:

AKxxx A AKQJxx x

at Game All, and open a strong 1C, as required by your system. Colin overcalls 4C, and partner astonishingly bids 4S. 5C from Arnie - your go. Difficult, I think - how do you find out whether partner has the vital CA? Eventually you bid 6S, hoping that partner will bid one more with the Ace. 7C from the next hand, pass, pass to you. Now what? Well, you certainly should bid the grand - partner has no business passing 7C with a club loser. In fact Colin wisely didn't bid 7C over Bron's 6S, and holding a rather tenuous excuse for a 4S bid (QJ10xx, xxxx, xxxx, -) I didn't either. John Balson, kibitzing, reckoned Colin should bid 7C, which indeed costs only 500, but I immediately said that Bron would have bid 7S after my forcing pass, and perhaps she would, at that.

Tales of the Tournaments

Actually, the only one I'm currently playing in is the Silver Plate, a pretty undignified state of affairs when you recall that the way you qualify is by losing in one of the first two rounds of the Gold Cup. Last Thursday was the round before the regional final, and we got drawn away to a team in Norwich, who exercised their right (or our right) to demand a 'half-way' venue in Cambridge. The sandwiches were plastic, the beer ditto, and the bottled Guinness 60 p. a shot, but at least the oppo weren't up to much, and we were 26 up at half-time. It would have been more but for my opening lead on this hand:

AQx xx 87xxx KQx

You open this filth with a disreputable 1D (3rd in hand at green is your excuse), and the bidding continues with Double on your left, pass from partner, 2H on your right, 4H on your left. Your lead.

In the third set, opponents started shooting a bit, as well they might, and you have to find a lead against 6H from:

Jx x Qxxxx J9xxx

after the bidding has gone 1H on your right, 4H on your left, 4NT (Blackwood), 5D (one ace), 6H. What do you lead (and would it make any difference if partner had doubled the final contract)?

And on the very next hand, at game all, you have to lead from:

9xx Kxx Qxx Jxxx

after 1H on your right, 1S on your left, 2NT on your right, 3H on your left, 3NT on your right, end. Well?

On the first hand, I led CQ, having forgotten that my current partner doesn't play Roman, but CK would have been just as bad - only a diamond beats the contract. Partner has DK over the ace, and we can take a diamond and two spades, then sit back and wait for our club trick. As it was, declarer set up a club for a diamond discard. On the second hand, Rosie led a spade, and opponents took 13 tricks - had she led a club, I would have taken AK for one down. There is an argument for doubling - this prohibits a trump lead, partner will not lead a diamond anyway as you didn't double 5D, so a double may steer her away from spades to clubs. From my point of view, (a) there is no certainty that a double will attract a club lead and (b) there is no certainty that a club lead will beat the contract anyway. On the third hand, anything but a small diamond beats the contract - Rosie led a small diamond, and I'm afraid I would have too.

My partner found the killing defence on another hand, though - at green against red she held:

J Qxxxx Axxx Kxx

Partner dealt and passed, opponents bid 1S-4S, and now partner lurched in with 5C. Next hand went to 5S and all passed. Rosie laid down CK and saw in dummy:

KQxx Jx KQxxx QJ

(No, I don't like 4S much, either.) Partner follows with C2, showing an odd number. It didn't take Rosie long to work it out - partner's odd number of clubs must surely be 7, yet despite his passion for under-strength pre-empts he didn't open. Why not? Obviously he has a 4-card major as well, and since declarer is unlikely to have 8 spades partner probably has a singleton or void diamond. So Ace and another diamond should put 5S to sleep ... and so it did.

However, the two lead disasters above caused a problem or two, and we were only 8 up going into the last set. Six flat boards (yes, really) were followed by 1 IMP to the enemy. 7 up with one to go, and disaster - Mike and Ian miss a stone-cold slam. But stay, Sharp is still there - in the other room I contrive to put the board on the table at the wrong polarity - Rosie and I miss the same cold slam ... but the board is scrubbed, and we win by 7.