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Railway Rivals

Abstraction II

1829

The Maya

... and indeed any other game that's
worth playing by post. Just try
me !

Deadline, such as it is;

Friday ~~23~~ 20. NOV 81

Editorial address

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Productorial

And as yet another zine crawls out of the woodwork, let me bid you welcome to issue one of "The thing on the mat" (to be abbreviated to 'Thing' for purposes of plugging, slagging, or other derring do). Once more the hobby shows signs of frenetic expansion; once more the number of zines on the market begins to exceed the average life expectancy of each (a detail I include as a courtesy for those wishing to apply matrix-analysis to the genre); and once more the question arises, who needs a new zine?

Well, I do, for one.

In itself that isn't very encouraging to the potential subscriber. Piggott's er'th Law of Fanzines is all very well for a zine with a captive audience culled from orphans of other zines' fables, trades, short-term test subscriptions, etc. For a zine in a competitive market, editorial self-interest needs to back up editorial narcissism. I hope to be able to impress you all with my boundless enthusiasm for the job, in that this is at present a guarantee against an early fold, but unless I can interest you in the contents, the Thing is doomed. Looking at the productorial so far, I don't think I'm succeeding, so let's get down to the nitty-gritty.

The Thing is going to be a Diplomacy Magazine with a strong slant to what other games soever that are playable by post. Henceforth the silly dialocution 'zine' (as opposed to circumlocution)(although strictly speaking, I should have used diaphrasis as opposed to periphrasis) shall be confined, within these pages, to those productions only which are wont to describe themselves as such. The Thing is a thng of quality, if not necessarily of brevity. Anyway, as I was saying before I so rudely interrupted myself: in the first instance I shall devote myself to the running of Diplomacy, that most admirable of postal games. Without undue denigration of other games, I must say that few of them hold a candle to Diplomacy. No other game contains the same degree of player interaction that makes Diplomacy unique; no other game requires the same degree of concentrated effort to achieve its aims, and consequently no other game gives such satisfaction when these aims are fulfilled. Now, ideally I would like to cater for all needs, novice and experienced, by providing gamestarts on the two levels so that ne'er the twain shall meet. In practice, consumer demand as reflected in the turnover for the waiting lists is unlikely to admit of such a solution; but if all else fails as expected, I shall try to organise invitational games for the elders and betters of the hobby. New zines inevitably appeal more to the novice end of the hobby, but rather than cater solely for their immediate needs this particular new magazine (see? I remember, though I don't expect anyone else will) intends to offer as a sort of Excalibur a golden standard to which the tyro can aspire. This is an effort doomed to failure, but I like to think of it as a noble one nonetheless. And so, let us end this productorial pro tem and continue with the glorious

THING HOUSE RULES FOR DIPLOMACY As of 1/5/81

1) All rules in the 1971 (American) rulebook apply, except where modified or superceded below.

2) Intentional deception of the G.M. is rewarded with expulsion.

Likewise, the G.M. undertakes not to interfere in the players' affairs by interference in any way.

3) (a clause in Birks' Legalese) Registration in a game creates a contract between player and gamesmaster. The latter agrees to run a game to conclusion, as efficiently and accurately as he can, and, if he can no longer continue to run the game, to ensure that the game is somehow continued to a natural conclusion. The former agrees to play in a game throughout its length, or until he is eliminated. Failure of one party ((that's you, mush - I'm cool)) to abide by this agreement will result in the forfeiture of all rights.

((or put another way: Let's all be jolly decent, chaps...))

4) Should a player miss two sets of orders in a row (NMR), his units will be placed in anarchy for the rest of the game. Barring extravagantly exceptional circumstances, I will only allow a player to re-enter a game after being placed in anarchy in the following way: at any subsequent time, he may send me one sae (first class stamp only) for each other player still having units participating, and I will notify these players of his reinstatement. Such reinstatement will take effect as of , and including, the moves of the following season.

5) Games will be run to a 2-season year, the Spring season including Spring retreats and the Autumn season including Autumn retreats and Winter builds/removals.

6) Retreats and builds/removals must be included with the relevant season's orders. They may be made conditional on the events of that season, but obviously not on the retreats (unless builds/removals) or builds/removals of other players. That is, the game is considered to be divided into years of five parts, within which orders are simultaneous : Spring, Spring retreats, Autumn, Autumn retreats, Winter.

7) Where necessary the GM will make retreats/~~builds~~/removals for the player as follows: Units not on a supply centre will be disbanded first, followed by those on foreign supply centres, followed by those on home supply centres. Where a choice exists, it will be resolved by lot. If a player does not submit orders for all contingencies he must be prepared to accept the results: complaints will be ignored. ((Rule one: never type house rules (or 'houserules') by stream of consciousness: they will inevitably come out incomprehensible.)) The GM retreats units by the simple expedient of disbanding them.

8) Moves arriving after second post on the day of the deadline will be accepted only in the following cases: a) The envelope bears a first class stamp and is post-marked three days prior to the deadline (always accepted), and b) The relevant game has not yet been adjudicated (accepted only at the GM's discretion). It is the player's responsibility to get the moves in and not that of the GM.

- 9) Telephoned orders are acceptable, though it should be noted that I cannot be contacted by 'phone at the University.
- 10) For the convenience of the GM, orders are requested on separate sheets of paper for each game. Failure to comply will not result in an NMR, although seven sets of orders for as many games on four square inches of lavatory paper in erasible biro is very likely to. The GM will take a tolerant attitude to scruffy orders, if only because he is prone to the same sin...
- 11) Two or more sets of orders indistinguishable in priority by date, 'mk. x', etc will result in the GM picking one at random. Contradictory orders on the same sheet will result in that unit misordering. Ambiguous orders will result likewise: units must be identified as armies or fleets, as appropriate, and coasts must be specified for fleets where either is a legal move. NB: 'Nor' will be taken as the abbreviation for Norway, 'NWG' for the Norwegian Sea; 'NOR' will only be taken as the latter if lower case is used elsewhere in that set of orders for land provinces. Likewise, 'Tyr' is the Tyrol, 'TYS' the Tyrrhenean Sea, 'TYR' quite possibly ambiguous.
- 12) Standard notation will be used in the GM's reports; if you're not sure what this is, ask me before the game starts.
- 13) Every effort will be made by the GM to avoid a dropout in 1901; should such seem inevitable, the game will be restarted with a replacement player and positions reshuffled. Provisional orders for accidental NMR in AOl are therefore much appreciated. Preference lists will be used where available, but unless a player specifically refuses to play a given country in them he will be expected to play what he is given, on pain of credit confiscation.
- 14) Engdgame proposals will be accepted for voting by the remaining players; unless otherwise stated, failure to vote counts as rejection except in the case of a NMR.
- 15) Players may sign a piece or pieces over one season at a time only.
- 16) GM errors will be corrected if the GM is notified of them before the following deadline; subsequent corrections will only be made if in the opinion of the GM they are too minor to have altered the course of play substantially.
- 17) Common sense rules, even if it doesn't really exist.

And lo, the end of the paper was nigh. And he spake unto himself, and he was sorely perplexed; for the space remaining was of use not to man nor beast.

I had intended to round the page off with the jolly addition of house rules for Railway Rivals, but there isn't room and I can't find the bloody things anyway. I shall include them next issue; for the nonce, suffice it to say that they are extraordinarily simple, in that each game shall consist of six rounds of three throws common to all players to build their networks, and six rounds of six run each over which the players compete, these runs covering all thirty-six key numbers twice each.

And as we roll effortlessly onto the fifth page, what else have I got to say for myself? Well, I think I can guarantee a very efficient GMing service for Diplomacy at least. I have at various points in my life GMed quasi-postal games amongst my friends. I intend to put special care and attention into games involving newcomers to the hobby, since I believe that it is the newcomer's first postal game of Diplomacy that has the greatest influence on what enjoyment he gets out of the hobby, and therefore how long he remains in it ~~paying me money for this farrago of rubbish~~. I do not intend to go 'supernova'; I have a fairly good idea of the workload I can manage, which is to say about six or seven games of Diplomacy, together with (I hope) four or five of RR and two or three others. Now, I don't of course know this for sure, but I obviously won't achieve it for several issues while the magazine (nearly slipped into plebbism there) struggles to gain the credibility of its potential public. In the meantime I shall revise this estimate where necessary; but it may reasonably be regarded as a working objective. My GMing of other games is more problematical; this is a vulgar and rather foolish way of saying 'as yet indeterminate'. I can see possible problems with the RR; should I get in too sticky a mess in this, I shall try to find another, guest, GM who can cope. God forbid....

And now, the part that all you soulless chappies out there have been waiting for: pecuniary regulations. How much will I cost? ((errr...))

As yet I don't know for sure. 50% of Thing issues will be produced at Magdalen, and 50% at home. All will be stencil-duplicated, all produced on this tatty manual typewriter unless it proves totally inadequate to the task, in which case I'm in a stuck and will have to grub around for a viable (cheap) alternative. As I expect you can see, in an effort to reduce costs I have produced this issue in the time-honoured 'ugh-wot's this?' manner whereby the front coverserves as envelope, thus saving on envelopes but with concomitant rise in expenditure on staples, out-of-court settlements on maimed opening fingers, etc. Whether this will work remains to be seen. As a result of uncertainties in the production end of things, and my inpecunious status as a student (albeit an extremely rich one), the future price of Thing is by no means certain. However, in an heroic effort to attract custom, I intend to defer a final decision on the price for the first six issues (and this one comes free, absolutely without charge or obligation other than a very strong moral one), up until which time the price will be 20p, rising to 25p should Thing increase in size rapidly enough to warrant this heinous imposition,

As for gamefees, they will be as follows:

Regular Diplomacy	1.00
1829	1.00
Abstraction II	0.75
The Maya	FREE! - See below
Railway Rivals	50p <u>including map</u>

The Thing on the Mat (1) - the final fling

(Cont. from p.5) Get 'em while they're hot... Certain of the gamefees are concessio- nary in order to attract custom. Railway Rivals is such a good postal game that I feel amply justified in offering it at a price which gives those outside the cognoscentii the chance to test it out ~~without giving me~~ any significant profit. In the same way I am offering Abstraction II, a variant of Diplomacy more complicated than the original, at a cheaper price. If you want to play in a reasonably simple variant then do please take advantage of this; Abstraction is so much the better game than Stab. If enough names come forward, I may even offer good old Multiplicity, a variant which sadly doesn't seem to have seen the light of day for quite some time. If you don't have the rules to either of these, write to me and I'll send you them free. Finally, may I make a plea for volunteers for 'The Maya', a variant I'm offering free because I have a personal stake in it. Again, I'll send anyone deprived of them the rules free, but just to whet your appetite I append a synopsis. Basically ((a word with which all good synopses start)) this eight-player variant offers an enhanced set of options at build-time. It's set in early medieval Mexico, although only loosely, and the winner is not he with the largest number of supply centres, but he with the required number of temples. Temples are units with a loose defensive strength which can be built any number to a city but cannot move ((no, really?)); in any build season they may be built in place of fighting units. Yes, you can help make history by playtesting this wonderful variant for the first time absolutely free!!

And finally, Cyril,

The Shape of Things to come ((aaaah, ecstasy))

One innovation I shall be bringing to the hobby is an intriguing new postal game: Postal Correspondance. This is a sort of role-playing game, really, in which the participants take up ludicrous, untenable positions on questions of interest either in the philosophical sphere or in everyday life, and commit themselves by putting these views to writing. The GM (that's me) then collates these letters in an arbitrary order and tears the players to shreds for their asinine stupidity. The game is open ended as is usual with the genre and depends for its shape very much on the breadth of imagination shown by the participants. Eventually I hope to develop the notion into a concept and market it in a three book set at, say, \$10. I feel it should appeal especially to the gullible and tasteless American market - but in the meantime it's on offer without gamefee to you, my readers. Pick up those pens and write off your orders now!

In order to gain the support of the wishy-washy section of the hobby, Thing will eschew all bitchiness and backbiting, and I expect my contributors to do likewise. However, I have no wish to alienate that influential section of the hobby, the mean bastards. For this reason a special Tetchy Thing supplement will appear, interwoven with Thing proper for that natural, Svenson look.

Forty seven snopake blobs. Hmm.. I vote they redesign the letter 'o' to suit our modern technological society: at the moment the middle keeps falling out. Byeeeee...