

The Cunning Plan

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INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to THE CUNNING PLAN, first issue of AGE OF REASONS first subzine. It has been launched in order to house some of the variants which are becoming more popular. It might also cover some other things that Gary and Andrew don't have time for. I have called it TCP, after toying with loads and loads of suggestions (very few polite). I think I settled on this one, not so much because it is a cunning plan, but because of my appearance being very similar to Baldricks'. Actually thats a complete lie, but heck, intros are difficult to do at the best of times. I am writing this at least a month in advance of the launch so it may well be very out of date when the time comes. At this stage you should find the following over the next four pages:

A few bits demanding some kind of feedback, Some zine reviews, a few variant waiting lists, a gamestart for my very own AirForce Dip, a bit on the film Aliens 3 and the gamestart for ALL READERS, pay close attention to that one cos you're all in it. (Well with a game fee of £10 I'd be mad not to include everyone! - naw I jest again, no game fee really.)

OPINIONS WANTED

Your feedback is needed and wanted, please write in be it on Dip, Variants, the hobby in general, religion, politics, life the universe and everything. Look I'm a desperate mad and if I don't get a few juicy letters I will be forced to invite some of you by name to send in something, so be warned.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

Just in case you find general chit-chat a bit difficult to manage, heres a specific slot where you can off load a gem buried deep within your heart of hearts in the intimate setting of AoR and its few hundred readers. Over the years of playing both ftf and postal games you peeps must have accumulated some memorable moments from a particular game or other. We would all like to share that moment with you, be they good; some wizard stab, a lucky guess that clinched victory, or bad; a vicious, heartless (but brilliant) stab at little defenceless old you, or some whacko (mis)adjudication from some rabid GM... or just anything really. Drop me a line, go on, you know you want to.

VARIANTS

The main theme I hope to have in TCP is variants. Standard Dip and Gunboat can be found in the main body of the zine, but for those with a taste for adventure lets try something different. We are already kicking off this bit with AirForce Diplomacy. It involves the use of a third kind of piece (an AirForce) and will ultimately be played on a WWII type board. This will be the third game of this kind played, the first being in CUT AND THRUST and the second in BOREALIS. So what other variants are on offer?

HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

For those who are not too adventurous HRE is very similar to the standard game. Each major power is a kingdom and in addition each player controls a neutral 'Duchy'. Switzerland becomes a passable supply centre which is controlled by the Pope. The remaining neutrals (five) are controlled by the Emperor. Both the Pope and Emperor are elected by the players from amongst their number. These dignities have special powers. From time to time they 'die' thus forcing another election. I like the election angle, it adds a new and interesting dimension.

1939 II

This is played on a World War two board and has two additional pieces, Bombers and Tanks. The original Lew Pulsiver rules have been reviewed to iron out some of the anomalies. This variant requires only 5 players.

AIRSTRIKE

Basically this is just the 'Gunboat' equivalent for AirForce Dip. If you like the idea of trying out this third type of piece but due to current commitments couldn't manage a full game then this might be for you. All the usual AirForce Dip rules will apply, but players will be anonymous, all communication being done through the press or military action.

THE REST

In addition to the above selection I am prepared to consider any others that there would seem a demand for. The conditions for these are;

- (i) I have copies of the rules.
- (ii) I get at least 3 interested names.

If you are interested in the rules for any of the above, please send an A5 SAE plus two second class stamps to cover photocopying. At present I do not envisage having game fees as I am assuming only the most hardened cases will dip their toes in the variant lake.

ZINE REVIEWS

LIES, DAMNED LIES AND DIPLOMACY. (Hereafter known as LIES). Issue 1 came out in October 1992, A5 stapled booklet, 28 pages, 75p inc post from Bill O'Neill, 57 Britten Drive, Great Malvern, Worcs, WR14 3LG.

It looks professionally produced, the style reminds me of ELECTRIC MONK, so first impressions are pretty good. Whilst I have only listed the address of a single editor above, I gather we are dealing with a trinity here, 3 eds in one zine. Bill O'Neill is of DeExicido fame, then there is Richard Jackson who used to run the UK variant bank before James Nelson, and finally Richard Egan who had a hand in the now defunct VIENNA. Given the experience and long involvement these 3 appear to have had with the hobby it is not exactly a virgin publication. I think this means that the old lags of the hobby will feel perfectly within their rights to have higher expectations of LIES that they would have for a rag thrown up by a novice editor. Since I am not an old lag of the hobby, I suppose that I could allow myself full reign to a wide-eyed, open-mouthed, novice-faced expressions of glee at this sparkly looking zine. Hell if you wanna see your name in print why settle for the LITTLE ORIGINAL SINS, NERTZ or BOREALIS of the zine world when you can travel first class? (Incidentally there is nothing wrong with a cut n paste as opposed to a dtp produced zine!)

But ego trips aside, what is on offer for the prospective subber/player, (oops my first mistake thus far, you see to sub to LIES you MUST play in a game.... I agree with Stephen Agar of SPRING OFFENSIVE here, it seems a bit rough. I sub to over 20 zines, if I were to play games in all of them I'd have no times for anything else!) So a couple of points off gentlemen, if you want to encourage active participation why not have a first/second class post for players or subbers? or a 10p levy on non-players, or little quizzes, article/letter writing for which the prize is a free issue? What happens when you have 76 games running and you just can't run any more? What will the trading

policy be in LIES?

Items include: an editorial, a 6 page letter column, games reports from EXCIDIO, NFL prediction contest 1992, New Muse, hobby news, games reviews (ADEL VERPFLICHTET and NEW WORLD), waiting lists are Necromancer, Valles Des Mammoths, Peninsula, Menshevik, Adel etc, Sopworth and of course Diplomacy. My fave bit was the article on the origins of the postal hobby, mainly because it included (an albeit microscopic) copy of the original Calhammer Diplomacy map, which is interestingly different from the one we have all come to know and love/hate.

So would I recommend LIES to you? As my understanding is that the bulk of the AoR readership are comparatively new to the hobby (correct me if I am wrong Andrew/Gary), I would advise hanging on for a month or two, just to see what the older and wiser lags have to say!

THE MOUTH OF SAURON Vol VIII:1, Sept 1992, 52 A5 pages of compressed text; price unknown but it includes postage, available from Mark (Crazy Markie) Nelson, 21 Cecil Mount, Armley, Leeds, West Riding, LS12 2AP. It appears approx quarterly.

A highlighted warning on the cover of MOS NOT being a feud free zone, might act as a red rag to a bull to other faint hearts, but being brave or stupid or both, this merely serves to encourage me to set aside my copies of ELECTRIC MONK, A LITTLE ORIGINAL SIN, SIDEWALK and AGE of REASON (shock, horror, gasp!) to have a gander. Being a recipient of the MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE (an excellent rite of passage into the hobby if you ask me), I am only too willing to get some parental guidance and step gingerly into MOS.

MOS VIII:1 provides you with an editorial, a bit on zines at Xmas, hobby quotes, 11 pages of letters, TV Opera by Pete Doubleday, Mark Boyles summer vacation, an article on comix with special reference to Predator, Aliens and Terminator. A bit of bridge, Christianity and Vegetarianism by Ferrel Wheeler, SF Fandom in the last 12 months, the hobby novice by Edi Birson, a couple of Dip tests from Harold Reynolds. In addition to the above, there are other bits and pieces all over the place but I am not listing the lot its 52 pages for goodness sake, send Mark some money and list them out yourself.

It won't take a mental giant to have noticed a lack of games in the contents of MOS, which is mainly because there aren't any. As for whether there ever were or not I don't know, (answers on a postcard please). I suppose this makes it more of a chatzine than a gameszine. The articles are interesting and well written. They consist of archive material aswell as more recent stuff. This is not the place to find a simple games animal, but thats fair enough, there are plenty of other zines where one can play anything from postal tiddlywinks to chemical/nuclear/ bomb the bastards with poison gas Dip. I don't know how Mark chooses the articles he does, he may have a vast stock of them waiting in the wings.... anyway its all very different from your standard Dip strategy stuff.

Its quibble corner now and at the risk of being slapped about a bit I would like to say that having got the feud warning - I expected (hoped for you cruel bastard - ed) a bit more hobby blood and zine gore. With a hobby like Dip where deception and well prehaps not dishonesty but rather a lack of honesty are to be positively encouraged, a hefty dose of even brutal "telling it like it is" is fine by me. I guess that having had the MNE for the past few months has gotten me used to expect more of the same. I felt that MOS didn't have enough of its beloved editor.

Well I'm ending now because the zine contained an interesting flyer which I believe will appeal to the AoR readership. So if you like articles on anything but SPRINGBOARD and the unwanted convoy, you might be pleasantly surprised.

OTHER ZINES SEEN;

BOREALIS, SPRING OFFENSIVE, ELECTRIC MONK, SIDEWALK, MARK NELSON EXPERIENCE, CUT AND THRUST, SPRINGBOARD, 'FROGGY', IT'LL BE OUT NEXT WEEK, SMODNOC, A LITTLE ORIGINAL SIN, MOPSEY..... and probably a few others whose names escape me for the moment.

FILM REVIEW

ALIENS 3

At the time of writing I am unsure how much (if any) space I'll have spare in TCP, and since I have recently seen the film I thought I'd say a few words about it. I am not a great cinema goer, but following the excellence of Alien and Aliens I felt that I had to check this one out. I am assuming that you are all familiar with at least one of these films, so forgive any of my incomprehensible ramblings if you are one of the uninitiated.

Things all started badly with a myriad 'leaks' about the theme, setting and outcome of the film. I guess this is a standard drawback of follow up films but I was still pretty disappointed by what I'd heard. First and foremost I gather that there would be no third film without Sigourney Weaver, and she would not take part if 'guns' featured heavily, so there were effectively no guns. I am not a violent/blood thirsty man, but the wholesale slaughter of ruthlessly murderous aliens is fair game in my book, so the prospect of them merely getting a slap on the wrist and being told (firmly) "Not to tear peoples heads off again", filled me with gloom.

I am also sentimental at heart, so when the little girl 'Newt' and Colonial marine 'Hicks' got killed off in the first few minutes I was gutted. They were killed as the space ship crash lands on a maximum security prison planet. They with SW as 'Ripley' formed a sort of nuclear family you could identify with and cheer on.

The fact that the rest of the cast were horrible rapists and murderers or losers of some other kind left me not really caring about what happened to them. I did not feel a part of the 'team'. Us 'Aliens' fans always knew it would be a pretty hard act to follow, any number three would have to of been pretty damn special to get our juices going - but this wasn't it.

Basically it was a re-run of the first film, a single alien, a dark maze, a few pitiful weapons and a limited number of personnel, (dwindling as the minutes ticked by!)

A big problem in my eyes is that the film raised more questions about the aliens themselves than it answered. This is particularly annoying when it is alledged to be the last film in the series. The second film built nicely and logically on the first, we learned a lot more about their life cycle and habits. It all made sense. Number three seems to have taken a step backwards. In the first film the alien killed people, we assume it was because: (i) It was being hunted, (ii) It was scared/in a foreign environment, (iii) For food? In the second film, with the presence of an egg-laying queen, people were not killed so much as captured to be used as hosts for the eggs. Killing still happened, but more in self defence. In number three, the principle alien 'knows' that Ripley is carrying a 'Queen Embryo' and does not kill her. However it does kill everybody else rather than capturing them to host the eggs the future queen will lay.

Also, this main alien was itself hosted by a dog, okay, thats an interesting development but why was its final appearance different because of that? I felt this difference was illogical after all, there is a species of wasp which lays its eggs in a catapillar. Now when the new wasp emerges it is exactly the same regardless of what kind of catapillar it hatched out of. So should it be with the alien - unless they have a damn good reason why not, and this was not explained.

Previous films have already shown the aliens to be afraid of fire - presumably because could be damaged by intense heat. But our matey in number three was buried under thousands of tons of molten lead and yet was still able to leap around like Olga Corbet.

C'mon guys, the weight of the lead alone would of imobilized the thing, let alone what the heat would of done to it. Then just to add insult to injury Ripley dies in almost an exact rip-off of Terminator 2, so minus several more points for lack of originality.

I have also just thought of another inexplicable fiddle factor. In number two, the queen alien has her egg laying bits blown off (very nasty) and yet she has laid some eggs for number three? Ok, so perhaps she still does have an egg or two up her sleeve but... she travels from the planet to the Sulaco on one of the dropships and is killed on the Sulaco landing pad. Ripley and crew were travelling in hypersleep - one assumes deep within the bowels of the Sulaco and not in the dropship, please explain. Given Ripleys character, a huge dollop of understandable paranoia about the aliens, surely she would of searched the dropship for alien droppings? Or even of tossed it over board just to be on the safe side? Again there are too many technical, biological and character inconsistencies for my liking.

If you are into SciFi you will no doubt see it for yourselves whatever I say, but I am seriously tempted to say, don't bother, ysave your cash.

I was going to end this piece with an outline of what I thought would have been a good format for an Aliens 3 film, but instead I'll throw the floor open to you readers, write in and tell me your storyline. With any luck I will print one or two of them next time.

AIRFORCE DIPLOMACY - CAMEL - WINTER 1938 BUILDS

Austria (Andrew Moss) L Tri, A Vie, A Bud.
England (Andy Mansell) F Lon, L Lvl, F Edi.
France (Chris Latimer) F Bre, L Par, A Mar.
Ger (Richard Popleston) L Ber, A Mun, A Kie.
Italy (Andrew Davies) A Ven, L Rom, F Nap.
Rus (Ludger Wilmott) F StPsc, L Mos, A War, A Sev.
Turkey (Jonathan Barber) A Con, F Ank, L Smy.

PRESS:

Biggles - All: Wot? No Press? Okay, have some from me. 'Biggles' is the reserved date-line for your beloved GM. For the rest of you its 'country'(govt). Please try to get your orders to me promptly, many thanks.

DEADLINE FOR SPRING 1939 ORDERS

15 28th NOV

Game start all readers

BARMEY BATTLESHIPS



BATTLESHIP



BATTLESHIP

BARMY BATTLESHIPS - THE RULES

- (1) All subscribers to AoR are in the game whether they like it or not.
- (2) The board is a grid of 33 by 26 squares. These are numbered along the top (the x axis) and lettered down the side, (the y axis).
- (3) Each player has a single 4 square battleship placed somewhere at random on the board. They can be vertical, horizontal or diagonal. Battleships can be next to each other but they cannot overlap.
- (4) Each turn a player gives the x and y co-ordinates of a single shot. A hit scores one point. If more than one player 'hits' the same square at the same time, the point is shared equally between them.
- (5) Shots landing on an empty square, or a square that has already been hit is deemed a 'miss'.
- (6) Players may only fire until their own battleship is sunk, ie hit on all 4 squares.
- (7) The winner is the player with the highest score.
- (8) If a player hits his own ship it counts as a 'miss'. Players may send the GM an SAE and he will send them back the co-ordinates of their own ship.
- (9) Diplomacy between players is allowed.
- (10) Press is positively encouraged.
- (11) After the first turn players who NMR will suffer a one segment penalty per turn until out, where upon they will be placed on a window ledge, jeered and prodded with pointed sticks. If an NMRing player is 'hit' the penalty is waived for that turn.

(12) Below is a sample order;

NAME	Co-Ord	Press
Fred Bloggs	13,G	One more shot and John Smiths' rust bucket goes down!

(13) Below is a sample games report;

NAME	Co-Ord	Result	Score	Own Status
Fred Bloggs	13,G	hit John Smith	3.5	1 hit
John Smith	12,T	miss	1.33	3 hit
Annette Curtain	20,M	hit/sunk George Bush	2.25	no hits
George Bush	13,T	miss	0.5	sunk!

PRESS

Fred Bloggs; One more shot and John Smiths' rust bucket goes down!
 John Smith; C'mon Freddie me old mucker, can't we kiss and make up?
 Annette; Sorry Bushy, its sea-dog eat sea-dog in this game.
 George Bush; Buzzer.

(14) So it only remains for you to get yours orders to me and let the battle commence. (I wonder if Andrew could be persuaded to offer a free copy of AoR to the winner, and may be the same for the first poor (non-NMRing) sod to get knocked out, what do you say Andrew?)

THE PLAYERS ARE:-

Peter Abel, Duncan Adams, Stephen Agar, Dave Allen, Chris Allington, Simon Appleyard, Jonathan Barber, Mike Benyon, Simon Bouton, Iain Bowen, Mike Brian, Andrew Caddy, Kenny Campbell, Paul Clayson, Danny Collman, Phil Corker, Chris Cornwell, Jason Cottrell, Stephen Cox, Colin Darra, Pete Davies, Andrew Davies, Simon Devereux, Neil Dixon, Dave Dobbie, John Doughty, Mick Dunnet, Stuart Eves, Tim Franklin, Ray Furlong, Jeremy Gilbert, James Goodman, Steve Grainger, Martin Halligan, Ian Harman, Toby Harris, Joel Hirst, Jonathan Holling, John Huggett, Peter Hurcombe, Joel Hurst, Jon Jones, Michael Jordan, Mark Kellett, Richard Kennish, Neil Kendrick, Phil Keogh, Seth King, Taggart King, Eric Knibb, Julian Knight, Graham Koppenhol, Chris Latimer, Graham Leach, Richard Leeves, Robin Levy, Dave London, Alistair Manning, Gordon Manning, Andy Mansell, Andrew Marrion, Gary Marshall, Robert Mclean, Mike Meyrick, James Millington, Phil Murphy, Mark Nelson, Simon Paley, Jim Pilling, Richard Poppleston, Stephen Quay, Richard Ramsden, Mark Rawson, Andrew Reynolds, Gavin Roberts, Dougie Robinson, Tim Robinson, Doug Rood, Martin Sanders, Tim Scales, Andrew Scott, Richard Sharp, Neil Shipman, Frank Slight, Graham Smith, James Thorpe, Graham Toone, John Traknik, Mark Underhay, David Van-Cauter, Sean Weir, Nicholas Whyte, Ian Williams, Ludger Wilmott, Tony Wilson, Stewart Cross.

DEADLINE FOR ORDERS: SAT 28th NOV.

Alas your ed has ended up with this rather large and not very useful gap. So I shall just use it to urge you to respond to this first TCP in some way. If you don't I'll be forced to rip off some stuff from the huge collection of zine's that I've got and I would rather avoid that if poss.....

