



## ICEPICK #5

Another issue of that pointed publication, Icepick. The fifth such, to be precise. Your editor is Lon Atkins, 9942 Voyager Circle, Huntington Beach, CA 92646. Early February 1977. A Zugzwang Publication for SFGA..... Our motto: "Stick it to the bastards!!"

My topic this evening is to be a sharp one, though not as expected... No flashy parodies of Guy Lillian's prose style, no stinging exposes of Hank Reinhardt's vast losses at Hearts, no biting faanfction with SFPAnS as the villains. NO, tonight we deal instead with darts. You know, those little feathered missiles hurled at a target by Englishmen in pubs.

Not long ago Kathy and I were browsing in a local bargain shop. I spotted a dart board ("complete with three brass darts...") for the princely sum of \$1.98. So, how could I resist?

Darts had been a sport I enjoyed when young. Of course it was bulls-eye tossing, not English scoring. In fact, the favorite game of myself and my comrades was throwing from pine tree to pine tree in the front yards. The longest throw that struck and stuck was best. With youth, the game was set aside until years later.

I was in England -- spring of '73. It was a rare business trip, taking me to London instead of Kalamazoo or Jacksonville or Newark. Determined to enjoy my good fortune, I leaped at the invitation by one of the local bigwigs to have a spot of bitter and shoot darts at lunch. We were accompanied by a third chap. (He was head of Customer Service, whereas my host was head of Software.)

My first shock was the target. Instead of a proper bulls-eye, it was a pie. The circular target was divided into twenty sectors. There was a center -- double, in fact. There were two rings, an outer and a middle. It looked like a random configuration.

The object, I was told, was to start by hitting the outer ring -- the "double value" ring. Then subtract from 301 until reaching exactly zero with the final toss -- which, by the way, also had to be a double. Quite bewildered, I took random aim and hurled the thing. I was determined to put a quick end to the coming humiliation.

"Double twenty!" exclaimed my opponent. "Played this game before, have you?"

"No," I muttered. "Sheer luck. Used to throw at a bulls-eye when I was ten or eleven. That's all."

Unnerved by my lucky toss; my opponent failed to score a double for a while. I subtracted merrily with every wild throw. The acerbic comments about "American hustlers" mounted steadily. Finally the Software Manager got on the board and proceeded to roll off an impressive series of throws. Very nearly, I was caught.

Fate, however, had prepared a little joke on the English. Just as I was surpassed, a flakey shot hit double 19. I was zero!! That's a win in the UK!!

My defeated opponent took his seat and signalled for a refill. "I'm let Tony try you," he said, "Seeing as he's a regular player like yourself. I never play 'cept on holidays and business occasions."



"I'm sure not as talented as Lon here," demured Tony. "That first and that last throw he made was quite revealing. If I may say so."

"Fellows, this is the first time I've played darts in twenty years! I'm just lucky. You've both heard of beginners luck, right?"

"Oh, yes, of course," they both said. I saw that a devastating loss in this second game was my only chance of redeeming my amateur standing. My first throw was aimed at the lowest number -- 1.

The English, being clever, have flanked the high 20 with jeopardy -- it lies beside the 1. My throw missed the lowest, displaying my inaccuracy, and hit the highest.

"Double twenty, again!" exclaimed my new opponent.

"A mere accident," I said hurriedly and threw again spastically. Thunk!! My second dart landed in the dead center -- fifty points. My third throw hit the oak door, but the distainful looks I received marked this as useless camoflaug. The American had been pegged as a hustler -- even though there were no stakes.

My new opponent was quickly on the board. His accurate throws soon reduced me to a poor scornful second. It was bliss. These English are touchy folk when it comes to their national pastimes, as I had already discovered. (Yet another story.)

Fate then intervned again. Whoosh! Whish! --I had scored triple 20 and triple 18. The interval was narrowed. As the non-player observed, I could now win with a double 19 -- for the second game in a row.

My opponent, however, threw first. He squared up his manly jaw and stiffened his British lip. His score was 17. The first dart hit the 1-sector right on. A double 8 would now win for him.

Unfortunately, his eager throw just drifted over the line and hit in single 11 territory. The third dart could not get him off. Half of 5 is  $2\frac{1}{2}$ . He tossed an elegant three.

I stood at the line, knowing the pressure that always afflicts us fast guns. Swoooosh!! I hit the outside rim of the target -- no points. Wifffflleee!! I threw past the target entirely and bounced the dart off a horse brass on the wall. Thunkkkk! I threw the dart inadvertently into the double 19.

"Hummpfh!!" noised my opponent. "Hope the game didn't bore you."

"Not at all. I'm a rank novice. Couldn't beat a blind wombat."

The two Englishmen looked at each other. Then they looked at me. Then they looked disgusted. I suddenly realized my slip of tongue. "Mighod," I rushed on in a futile effort to retify my error. "Over six million people play darts seriously in England. Surely one of them must be better than me."

Somehow the remainder of lunch was strained. My hosts were distinctly cold to my suggestion that we try poker that evening. "I've always wanted to learn poker," I said. They frowned.

After this traumatic experience with the game, I left darts until that bargain presented itself. Then I started testing my luck again. Shortly thereafter I went out and bought a set of \$7.00 darts at a local game shoppe. It did wonders for the inexpensive board I'd purchased.

Now I flex my arm and hurl darts with increasing accuracy. Practice will make me unerring. Then I can write off my impulsive purchases as business expense. I can use my darts to awaken dozing employees.....