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Coupon

tom visoky

reporter's notebook

Last week Alexander Haig and I were sipping scotch at a huge table in the war room of the Pentagon. After two hours of talk about the glories of war, I asked Al a question that has long bothered me.

"Al, why are countries like El Salvador and South Africa considered strategic by the United States?"

Al peered over the rim of his

glass, a cunning gleam in his eye.

"Risk, young man," he said. "Risk!"

'Politicians are lousy Risk players. I say let the military roll the dice for a change.'

"Risk?"

Al didn't answer. Instead he pushed a button in the console on the arm of his leather chair. The massive table top slid away

revealing a stylized multi-colored map of the world — a Risk board.

"You see," Al said. "We're

engaged in a deadly game of Risk. There is a board like this in the war room of every major power on earth."

Al thrust a pointer stick at the board.

"Look here. These little wooden blocks represent armies. These are commie pinko armies," he said, pointing at a cluster of pink blocks in Russia.

"This is the yellow peril," he said, pointing to a clump of yellow blocks in China. "And these white blocks in North America are us."

"But what does all this have to do with El Salvador?"

Al's eyes blazed.

"Look!" he said, pointing at a lone pink block in Nicaragua. "The pinkos have a toehold in North America. We get five extra armies a turn for owning every country in North America."

"But now we have to forfeit those armies. Also, the pinkos have a chance to break our hold on South America, which is worth two armies a turn to us."

I stared at the board, trying to understand. I pointed to the lone white block in South Africa: "Now why is this important?"

"That is important because it's our toehold in Africa," Al said. "Africa is worth three armies a turn, and if we hold South Africa we can deny the pinkos those extra armies."

"But I don't see any pinkos in

Africa," I said. "All I see are blacks."

"Ah, but those blacks are really pinkos in disguise," Al shot back. "When they take over South Africa, they'll show their true colors."

I began to see the ominous strategy of the pinkos.

"How can we stop the commie pinkos?"

"Well, first we stop letting the politicians roll the dice. Politicians are lousy Risk players. I say let the military roll the dice for a change."

"You're right," I agreed.

"You're damn right I'm right! Now here's what I'd do. I'd sit back and let the pinkos and the yellow peril roll against each other and wipe each other out. Then I'd roll the dice, and we'd clean up whatever's left."

Al began to gloat. But then he looked worried.

"The Philippines," he sighed.

"That's our biggest problem."

"Why the Philippines?"

"The Philippines are the key to Australia. By taking them the pinkos could break our Australian gambit."

"What's an Australian gambit?"

"The Australian gambit is the subtlest and most successful Risk strategy. Whoever owns Australia can sit there and quietly amass armies while everyone else on the board is taking heavy losses. Then those armies can sweep out from down under and conquer the world."

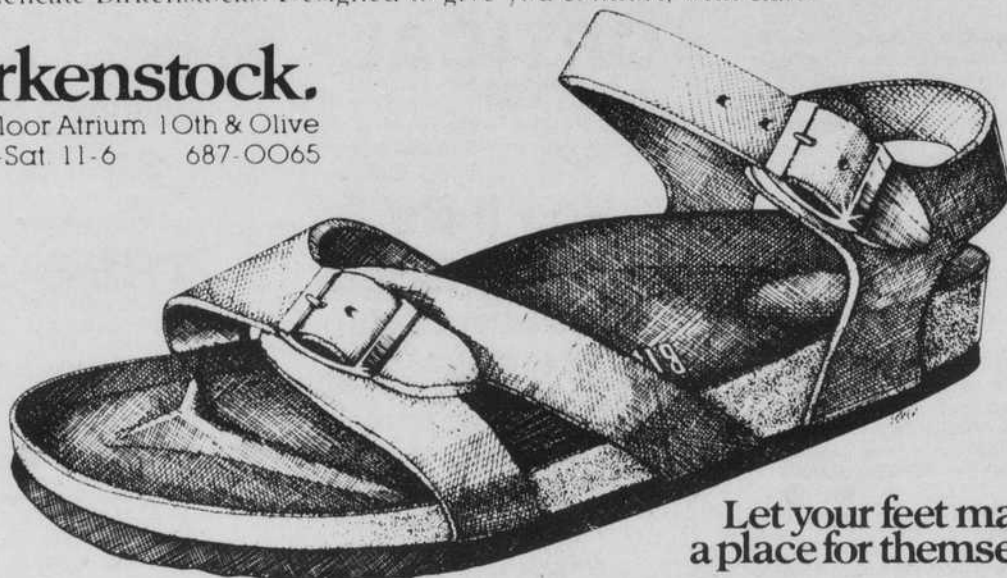
"Australia is worth only two armies a turn," he said. "But, boy, do those little suckers add up."

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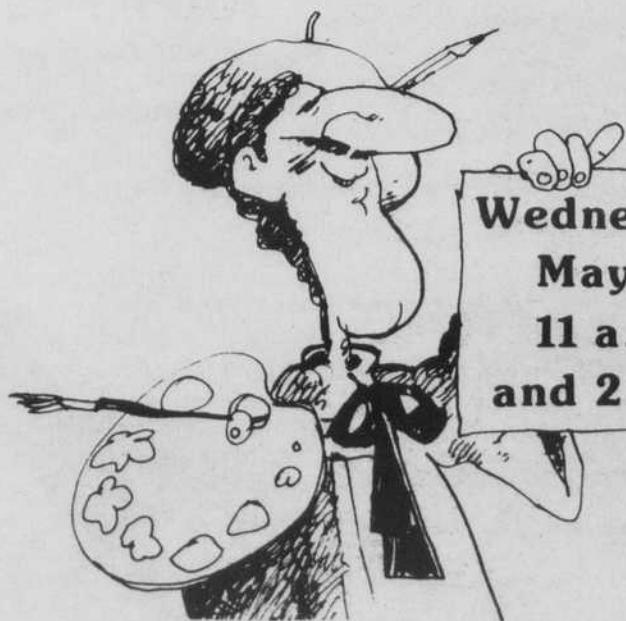


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