

[Indulgence]

GOD DOES PLAY DICE

From cards used in the board game Vatican: Unlock the Secrets of How Men Become Pope, created by Stephen Haliczzer, a professor at Northern Illinois University. The game, which purports to make "the electoral process clear," retails for \$39.95.

While rushing to board a train in order to substitute for the Pope at an important meeting, you lose your right hand in an accident. Your selfless devotion earns you great praise. Earn fifteen influence points.

Your auxiliary bishop is rumored to be having an affair with the wife of a wealthy industrialist. Lose five influence points.

After a sick cardinal passes out, you are able to carry him, despite his size and weight. This is noted favorably. Earn twenty influence points.

You are shot by the mother of a girl who accused you of ignoring her claim that she was sexually harassed by a priest in the diocese. Lose twenty influence points.

You are shot by a Muslim extremist but seize him in spite of your wound. You make a full recovery. Earn ten influence points.

Your chain-smoking causes comment among many cardinals. Lose ten influence points.

You are kidnapped by a left-wing paramilitary group. You are released, but you contract a fungal infection that causes you to lose an ear. Earn fifteen influence points.

You call on self-proclaimed visionaries to stop asserting that the Virgin Mary has been visiting them. Your stand alienates many devout people in your diocese and reduces pilgrimages and the number of visitors, thereby harming local businesses. Lose twenty influence points.

Other cardinals notice your left hand trembling and suspect you might have Parkinson's disease. Lose twenty influence points.

The Pope dies after contracting the Ebola virus during a trip to Africa. Your suggestion that he not eat a stew of monkey brains and cassava root is now seen as well founded. Earn twenty influence points.

The Pope dies when the Popemobile rolls over after hitting a truck carrying bananas. Your earlier warning that the Popemobile was unstable is now seen as evidence of your sound judgment. Earn twenty influence points.

You play a leading role in the general congregation's decision to perform an autopsy on the dead Pope's body and are credited with helping the Church avoid rumors of foul play. Earn twenty cardinal votes.

Your poor command of Latin is noted and com-

mented on by a number of cardinals. Lose ten cardinal votes.

Your strong support for the new Palestinian state, despite a growing number of reports of corruption and human-rights abuses, wins you many votes. Earn thirty cardinal votes.

The Holy Spirit intervenes in your favor by appearing to cardinals who had been wavering in their support of you. Earn forty cardinal votes.

[Resignation]

PAPER PUSHKIN

From two 1824 letters by Aleksandr Pushkin to Aleksandr Kaznacheev. The first is in response to an assignment to investigate the extermination of locusts that Pushkin refused to undertake; the second concerns his resignation from the Russian Foreign Ministry, where he worked for seven years. The letters are included in Pushkin: Documents Toward a Biography 1799–1829, published last year in Russia by Iskustvo. Count Woronzof, the deputy authority of the province of Bessarabia, was Pushkin's boss. Kaznacheev was the head of Woronzof's chancellery. Pushkin later admitted to a friend that he lied about his aneurysm in order to gain his freedom. Translated from the Russian and the French by Simona Schneider.

Esteemed Aleksandr Ivanovich,

Bureaucratic procedure is entirely foreign to me. I don't even know if I have the right to respond to His Highness's orders. Whatever may happen, I trust in your indulgence and must dare to give an honest explanation of my situation.

For seven years I was remiss in my duties: I did not author a single paper, I did not communicate with any superior. These seven years, as you well know, were totally wasted. Complaints would be inappropriate on my part. I set obstacles in my own path and chose a different goal. For God's sake, don't think that I looked upon poetic creation with the childish vanity of a rhymester or as a sensitive man's respite: it is simply my craft, an honest type of industry, which earns me my livelihood and independence. I think Count Woronzof won't wish to deprive me of either the former or the latter.

I'll be told that because I receive 700 rubles a year I am obliged to serve. You know that it is possible to be part of the book trade only in Moscow or Saint Petersburg, as the journalists, censors, and booksellers are there; I constantly have to decline the most advantageous offers for the sole reason that I am located far away from the capital. It suits the government to compensate me for my losses