

Diplomacy World #148



Winter 2019 Issue
www.diplomacyworld.net

Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Winter 2019 issue. With the seasonal holidays bunched together at the end of the year, I was beginning to doubt if there would be enough material on-hand for a legitimate issue. Submissions just a few days before the January 1st deadline were almost nothing, and my pessimistic nature meant assurances to the contrary did little to make me believe things might change for the better. For a moment there I thought this issue would consist nearly entirely of the opening comments and Spring 1901 results of the new Demo Game, plus a few one-page flyers for upcoming face-to-face events.

Fortunately, things weren't as dire as all that, but it does serve as yet another reminder of how many loyal and reliable contributors we've lost in the past two years. Jim Burgess was a steady driving force, with connections to multiple parts of the hobby. And Larry Peery? He generally submitted enough material to the point that I'd turn down an article and hold another back for the following issue. Granted, a lot of his writing was only peripherally Diplomacy-related, and he had a habit of block copy-and-pasting from Wikipedia, but at least he was trying!

I hope you remember that even if you don't have the urge to write an article for **Diplomacy World**, there is still something else nearly as important you can do to help. And that would be: solicit articles! When you are involved in an event, or a conversation about Diplomacy, or see something interesting...suggest that someone you're interacting with consider writing an article about it! You don't need to be a literary scholar to put together a decent submission. Worst case, send in a letter. Lately even something as minor as letters about the articles appearing in the zine has been scarce (or non-existent). I know from website statistics that each issue of Diplomacy World is still being downloaded (and

presumably read) thousands of times before the next issue is released. Somebody out there must have **some** thoughts about what they're seeing!

Every now and then I wonder if the time and place for Diplomacy World has come and gone. But until I determine that as a certainty, I'll do my best to keep plugging along...with your help, obviously.

I may as well take a moment to promote the return of my monthly Diplomacy zine Eternal Sunshine. I ran games in there (on a postal-style schedule) for a decade before I decided to close it down. And now the time has come for me to resurrect it, and offer games once again. To begin with I have openings in Diplomacy and the Balkan Wars VI variant, with some fun non-Diplomacy games like By Popular Demand and Kendo Nagasaki to follow once readership begins to get involved. If you would like to stay updated on Eternal Sunshine, you can email me directly, or simply add yourself to the Eternal Sunshine email list at:

<https://mailchi.mp/45376bbd05df/eternalsunshine>

That Mailchimp email list will keep you updated on game openings, release of new issues, and other zine news. There's also a Facebook group that you can join at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/270968112943024/>

I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for Diplomacy World submissions is April 1, 2020.

Remember, besides articles (which are always prized and appreciated), we LOVE to get letters, feedback, input, ideas, and suggestions too. So, email me at diplomacyworld@yahoo.com! See you in the spring, and happy stabbing!

Selected Upcoming Conventions

Find Conventions All Over the World at <http://diplomacy.world/> and at <http://petermc.net/diplomacy/>

Be Sure to Check Out the NADF Grand Prix Schedule on Page 4!

Cascadia Open – Saturday January 25th 2020 – Sunday January 26th 2020 – New Westminster BC, Canada – Cascadia.open@gmail.com

MaccCon3 – Saturday March 14th 2020 – Sunday March 15th 2020 – Macclesfield, UK – maccdiplomacy@outlook.com

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Contributions are welcomed and will earn you accolades and infinite thanks. Persons interested in the vacant staff positions may contact the managing editor for details or to submit their candidacy or both. The same goes for anyone interested in becoming a columnist or senior writer. Diplomacy is a game invented by Allan Calhamer. It is currently manufactured by Hasbro and the name is their trademark with all rights reserved.

In This Issue:

Editorial: <i>Notes from the Editor</i> by Douglas Kent	Page 2
Convention News: Selected Upcoming Conventions	Page 2
Convention News: 2020 NADF Grand Prix Schedule	Page 4
Feature: <i>Ask the Hobby Historian</i> by David Hood	Page 4
Face to Face: MaccCon 3 Flyer	Page 6
Feature: <i>The Briefing – A Weekly Diplomacy Newsletter</i> by umbletheheep	Page 7
Face to Face: Diplomacy Cascadia Open Flyer	Page 8
Feature: <i>2019 – Thoughts on a Year of Online Play</i> by Douglas Kent	Page 9
Interview: <i>An Interview with David Maletsky</i> by Randy Lawrence-Hurt	Page 11
Feature: <i>Electoral Bias in Airstrip One</i> by Jon Hills	Page 13
Technology: <i>DipNet – The AI That Aims to Be Human</i> by Markus Zijlstra	Page 15
Feature: <i>The Minnestoa Diplomacy Club – The First Year</i> by Zachary Moore	Page 21
Demo Game: <i>“Dirty Rotten Scoundrels” Game Start and 1901 Results and Commentary</i>	Page 24

NORTH AMERICAN DIPLOMACY FEDERATION

2020 Grand Prix Tournament Schedule

JAN	Cascadia Open cascadia.open@gmail.com	Vancouver, BC	Chris Brand
FEB 21-23	TotalCon randy.lawrencehurt@gmail.com	Marborough, MA	Alan Levin
APR	Whipping whipping@bayareadiplomacy.org	Bay Area, CA	Siobhan Nolen
APR	WeaselMoot warweasel@windycityweasels.org	Chicago, IL	Bryan Pravel moot.windycityweasels.org
MAY 22-24	DixieCon davidhood@dixiecon.com	Chapel Hill, NC	David Hood www.dixiecon.com 3 rounds + Carolina BBQ
JUNE	Boston Massacre randy.lawrencehurt@gmail.com	Boston, MA	Randy Lawrence-Hurt
AUG	Liberty Cup william.hackenbracht@gmail.com	Philadelphia, PA	Bill Hackenbracht
OCT	Tempest in a Teapot jimdozz@aol.com	Washington, DC ptks.org	Jim Yerkey
NOV	Carnage dmaletsky0@gmail.com	Vermont	David Maletsky 2020 World Championship & 2020 North American DipCon

Ask the Hobby Historian: The Hobby 30 Years Ago and Now By David Hood

Point the First: The Diplomacy World website has a great archive, not just of back issues but also collections of articles on particular subjects. Point the Second: this series of articles I am writing is called "Ask the Hobby Historian", which is itself a throwback to the past - when Mark Berch wrote a similarly-titled set of articles in the 1970s and 1980s. To combine those two points, I figured I would look at the DW collection of articles on hobby history, to see if one of them would make a good springboard for this issue's drivel from me.

I found that, almost exactly thirty years ago (in DW issue 57 for Winter 1990), Eric Brosius wrote a piece about the state of the 1990 hobby in relation to what it had looked like in 1980. I recommend it to you. Eric was a very active hobbyist back in those days, along with his wife Claire, and his writing is fun to read.

In addition, the topics he discussed are interesting in relation to the "state of the hobby" type discussions we now have in person at tournaments as well as in various online forums. In terms of issues facing the 1990 hobby, he identified: folk dropping out of games and folding their zines without notice, factions and feuding, expense to play in postal games, competing visions of what "doing well" means in a game without a solo, and folk who play for ratings versus for fun. As far as changes go (not necessarily issues to address but just things that had changed) he discussed: postal service slowness, graying of the hobby, advent of technology, presence or absence of Diplomacy variants and other games being played in addition to Dip, and the failure to create any lasting Diplomacy organization to help promote and "run" the hobby.

Some of these topics are relevant to us in the beginning of 2020, some not. (The concern about how slow the

mail was getting just seems downright weird in today's world, for example.) Others are things we really just don't worry about that much anymore, thankfully. I cannot tell you how harmful and bizarre the feuding was in the 1980s, and how awesome it is that we just really don't have anything like that in the hobby of today. It was so bad that folk published whole zines not to run the Dip games, but just to complain about and attack each other. So, yay, current us.

Do we have the "dropout" problem we used to have? Not exactly, but those who play in certain online forums obviously do still have the modern equivalent of the postal "NMR", or No Moves Received, which screws up a lot of games. The way around that has been to play not with unknowns, but with "hobby" people online. Back in the day plenty of "hobby" people missed deadlines all the time – not nearly as much of a thing now because of peer pressure, I think. It's also way easier to push a few buttons than it was to get one's orders in the mail on time, back in the day.

How about the expense issue? Eric was talking about PBM expense, which we really don't have much of anymore. We do have expense issues relating to tournaments, which is why it is good that we have some cheap options out there for some tournaments just to make it possible for the young players of today to attend. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, when the hobby population was younger as a whole, this was even more of a concern that it is now I believe.

Speaking of young versus old, the "graying of the hobby" that Eric mentioned in 1990 is still a relevant topic for today. While I do think the average age of the player has gone up over time, I also think we have had a pretty continuous influx of younger players as the tech has grown and diversified. There are now a bunch of ways for tech-savvy to play Dip online, and there are hobbyists who have really helped transition some of these younger players in the "hobby" by way of tournaments and the WebEx Teams app. In the old days we had a print-based community that was centered on the flagship publication, Diplomacy World, and extended through the games zines and the discussion zines. Now we have the Teams thing, and various sub-hobby websites and other things that help bind us together.

Which segues nicely into a discussion of hobby organizations. Eric mentions the TDA and IDA, which to be honest were both before my time (I joined the hobby in 1986) but the topic is still relevant today for sure. We have the North American Diplomacy Federation as a structure, but it still primarily a one-person shop such that the NADF head initiates projects with help, but

which otherwise does not have much organizational continuity. Would we benefit from having a NADF with a fully updated website, blog, etc. – you betcha. I think it could be very helpful in promoting events and fostering community, just to give two examples. The issue has always been, and will continue to be, who has the time and resources to expand what we have into what we need? I don't have the answer, to be sure, but we should continue to ask the question until the answer is developed.

Two other main subjects from Eric's article remain. First, the issue of variants and non-Dip gaming as a part of our hobby. Variants are cool, at least I think so. We don't have a lot played at tournaments these days, but online variants are everywhere. To that degree the variant sub-hobby is actually more vibrant now that it probably ever has been, but I think an interesting question will be whether we ever get back to having significant variant gaming at our Cons. We have had a fair amount at Dixiecon over the years, including recently, but this is something I'd like to see elsewhere. As far as non-Dip gaming goes, there is a lot of this at tournaments as everyone knows. The Terraforming Mars gaming got so prevalent that we have now had Terradipping scored events at both Dixiecon and Liberty, and I expect such side tournaments to continue whether in TM or some other game. Cause people like having things to do once they get elim'ed or otherwise their Dip is over, but the next Dip round is a ways off.

Finally, let's discuss the issue of what folk want when they sit down to play a game of Dip. Trying to figure out what outcomes and behavior to encourage or discourage at the board was a real question in 1990 (even when all the scoring was pretty much draw-size-based.) It's still an issue now, which was the subject of my hobby history article in the last DW. Some people wring their hands about this – my own feeling that is we may never have unanimity on what folk should play for if they can't get a solo. It is just in the nature of the game of Diplomacy itself. It can be interesting, and even productive at times, to debate scoring systems and other things. What we don't want to do is get to the point where we argue so forcefully that we start to factionalize and feud. Can we all just agree we ainna gonna do that? Great, thanks.

[[Editor's Note – I really need to add more individual articles to the collection by topic that David refers to in his first paragraph. I've let those lists stay stagnant for far too long.]]

MaccCon3



On 14th-15th March 2020

At the Copper Room, Charles Roe House,

Macclesfield, UK

Near Manchester Airport and on rail line to London

Entry fee £25 on arrival, including buffet lunch on both days and all-day bar.

Open Tournament

Round 1: 10am Sat 14th

Round 2: 3pm Sat 14th

Round 3: 10am Sun 15th

Scoring - C-Diplo. Prizes for Best Countries and 1st, 2nd, 3rd

TD: Garry Sturley

Contact: maccdiplomacy@outlook.com

<https://www.facebook.com/maccdiplomacy>

The Briefing – A Weekly Diplomacy Newsletter

By umbletheheep



I'm a little unique when it comes to Diplomacy. I've been a part of the hobby for over a decade and enjoy both online and face to face play. I love the fast-paced action of in person diplomacy both in house games and the tournament scene. Online diplomacy also is enjoyable as you can develop elaborate plans and meet over-the-top personalities from around the world. I believe we are a richer community because of both the online and local scene.

The Need of a Weekly Newsletter

Recently I was talking with a friend and mentioned that the hobby could use a weekly newsletter. Something like a cliff notes of what happened in diplomacy that week. On average, there should be 1-2 hobby announcements, a strategy article, and a running calendar of upcoming tournaments.

This was needed because of the many rich and diverse diplomacy communities. A cursory sketch yields groups such as:

- Local clubs
- Tournament players
- The Nexus Discord server
- webDiplomacy
- Play Diplomacy
- vDiplomacy
- Android platforms such as Diplicity and Conspiracy

- The Reddit diplomacy community

These all have unique strengths and strong players. A multitude of choices though has yielded a fractured community. Most of these users never venture from their preferred platforms and circle of friends

This lack of unity in the hobby is of course nothing new. Perhaps diplomacy by its very nature and the personalities it attracts makes such unity impossible. Nevertheless, I believe that our hobby is more fun and meaningful if we interact with one another. To do that though, we need to know what is going on within each of these groups.

The more I sketched out what I thought such a weekly email should entail the more excited I got until finally I said, "You know what; I'm just going to do it."

The Beginning

When I mentioned to another friend my plan, he responded somewhat incredulously on whether there was enough content to even produce such a newsletter. Since the start, I have never been at a loss for material. Diplomacy players are an incredibly productive bunch that invest into the game a lot time and creativity. A small sample of things I have written on are:

- Tournament results
- Past zine articles
- Current blog articles
- Diplomacy Podcasts
- Diplomacy World Issues
- New Variants
- webDip's artificial intelligence opponents
- The prolific output of Erik van Mechelen (learnpub books, udemy course, and a twitch channel)

I am incredibly thankful for how supportive the community has been. Over 200 people have subscribed in the 3 months I have been producing *The Briefing*. Going forward I hope to see us start to add some original content through serials with guest contributors. I also would like to see us reach 500 subscribers by the end of 2020. If you would like to help me realize the goal go to <http://www.diplomacybriefing.com> to subscribe and see past issues.

DIPLOMACY CASCADIA OPEN

WHEN

**January 25th-26th
2020**

WHERE

The Heritage Grill

447 Columbia St. New Westminster, BC, Canada.

The Heritage Grill offers food and drinks and is very close to public transport into Vancouver

ACCOMMODATIONS

The Met Hotel 411 Columbia St. New Westminster,
<http://www.themethotel.com/>

Arundel Mansion 48 Begbie St. New
Westminster, <http://www.arundelmansion.com/>

The Inn at the Quay 900 Quayside Dr. New
Westminster, <https://www.innatwestminsterquay.com/>



COST

\$25 dollars CDN

Paypal to

Cascadia.Open@gmail.com

SCORING

Sum-of-squares

TD

Chris Brand

Ask him questions @

Cascadia.open@gmail.com

PRIZES

"7 best countries" and
Overall winners

BOARDS

Round 1: 10am on Sat 25th

Round 2: 6pm on Sat 25th

Round 3: 10am on Sun 26th

2019 – Thoughts on a Year of Online Play

By Douglas Kent

As I sit here, hoping some material for this issue of **Diplomacy World** arrives, I decided to write up a few of my observations from my Diplomacy experiences in 2019. Primarily, those experiences are solely from online play. Because, let's face it...I barely leave the house. If I didn't have to go to work, and to the grocery store once a week, I don't know if I'd have put ten miles on my car this year. My social life is nonexistent; I'm a bachelor who hasn't had a date in over eighteen months, and with almost no friends locally. My attempts to organize a Dallas-area Diplomacy group or even a one-time game have been complete failures. So online is my primary outlet for Diplomacy. I do still play in a few postal zines (yes folks, there are still zines that come in the mail, albeit only a few). I play in a couple of games in Andy Lischett's **Cheesecake** and Robert Lesco's **Northern Flame**, and while I read (and participate in) Brendan Whyte's **Damn the Consequences** I don't think any of the games I play there are Diplomacy. With Brendan I focus more on guessing wrong in Where in the World is Kendo Nagasaki?

Not to get off-subject, but thinking about this short article has me nostalgic for my zine Eternal Sunshine again, and the "postal style" of play despite that being an ezine. I've decided to start that thing again, with a game of Diplomacy and one of Balkan Wars, plus the usual By Popular Demand and Kendo fun when things get going. You can join the Mailchimp email list for updates at <https://mailchi.mp/45376bbd05df/eternalsunshine> or just email me for more info, or find new issues at <http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/> as they are released.

Anyway, I know some of what I describe here may fall into the old-man-syndrome category, but here are some thoughts about the kind of inline play I've encountered this year.

Interface

One thing online play offers that other forms do not is an interface for entering orders. I've played almost exclusively on a couple of websites, and the modern interfaces eliminate a lot of the potential for misorders. In some ways that's a good thing; it kind of kills a game when you see Turkey open F Con-Bla or Russia order F StP(sc)-Nwy in Spring 1901. Mistakees like that can potentially cripple a nation and tilt the board in favor of whoever was the most aggressive in their opening choices. I like the fact that there's some sense of protection built-in.

In these particular interfaces you can still make mistakes, and I prefer it that way. Orders are limited to legal possibilities, but that means a player with armies in Kie, Ruh, and Ber can still order A Ber-Mun but accidentally order Kie S Ruh-Mun. I've always felt players (including myself) should be rewarded for accuracy and punished for carelessness. An interface that warns you about mistakes in advance eliminates that aspect of the game.

There are two cases where I much prefer the standard written order to these automated interfaces I've been dealing with. The first occurs in Gunboat games. With no negotiation possible, sometimes players like to use the order of an inactive unit to suggest ideas or alliance to other nations. For example, France may have a fleet in the English Channel but be supporting it in place one season. With nothing for F Ech to do, they can order F Ech S Russian F Swe-Nwy; a less-than-subtle hint to Russia that you're hoping he moves on England. With these web-based interfaces, you can't order such a support because it cannot legally succeed. The option isn't listed in the drop-down menu.

The other part of the game which you lose from modern interfaces is the "accidental" disorder. You're Austria, allied with Russia, but wary of her desire to move Sil-Gal with your support as she has asked. In written orders you could choose to order something like A Vie S Russian A Pru-Gal, a "mistake" that can be explained away (at least the first time you use that strategy...misorder more than once in a game and you're just asking to be attacked). But with modern interfaces, since there isn't a Russian A Pru, you don't have the ability to do so. Even if you do try the strategy by ordering A Vie A Russian A Sil-Boh instead of Gal, such "mistakes" are rarely viewed as unintentional by the other player. No matter how much you may negotiate, online Russia is highly unlikely to believe it was an honest error. Which leads me to...

Negotiation

There are exceptions, but mostly I have found two kinds of games online: Gunboat and pseudo-Gunboat. There are the games where negotiation is blocked, and then there are the other games, where you might get a pre-game message saying "I hope we can be allies" and nothing else. Sure, you'll get the occasional "can you support Ser-Bud?" appearing out of the silence in 1903, but nothing else. In fact, there seems to actually be a suspicion of you if **you** are a reliable writer. I don't know if the messages are seen as an annoyance, or if it's just that some of the players are reminded you might be lying

to them versus when you don't write (and therefore don't actively lie).

An even more glaring example of the lack of negotiation I encounter online reveals itself when I take over an abandoned position (which is how I enter 90% of the games I play lately). It's a rare day when I take over a position and one of the other nations bothers to write me, or even to reply to my messages. Players need to realize that when someone takes over as a standby, that's the most opportune time to change the shape of the board. The new player will have no loyalty to previous agreements or alliances, no axes to grind, no revenge to seek. But nobody cares. I recently entered a game of the variant American Empire IV as the second-largest power, allied to a slightly larger power to my north. Not one of the other players bothered to write or respond to my messages or attempt to get me to change direction and move on the former ally. Only the neighbor to the north replied, saying he expected me to continue the alliance my predecessor had arranged. It wasn't a command; it wasn't even an assumption. Instead, he seemed to instantly realize that I would be given no other option because of the silence of the other players, and therefore the inertia of how the game had been going would compel me to move as expected. He was correct. What else could I do? Why would I turn and attack a willing ally when none of the other players even bothered to say hello?

As a matter of fact, negotiation had fallen so far in my experience, that in a brand-new game, players who want to attack you don't even hide it. I came into a game as Austria in Spring 1901 and never received a message from Italy. Not one. Russia and Turkey were both claiming they wanted to be potential allies, so the best I could do was protect myself from Italy's inevitable attack and hope to manage my eastern borders. As it happened, Russia and Turkey eventually half-heartedly attacked me while they attacked each other as well, and Italy bashed up into my defenses until France finally took him from his flank. Which reminds me...

Spring 1901

Both sites I've been playing on have no provision set up to avoid Spring 1901 NMR's. I've taken over countless positions in games where anywhere from one to three players failed to submit initial orders. The sites simply progress to Fall 1901 and **then** look for replacements. When a power (or – shudder – multiple powers) miss Spring 1901 the entire game becomes a feeding frenzy for the active powers, and the game is ruined. In postal play there has long been a general rule in most zines that if there's a Spring 1901 NMR, the game is halted **BEFORE** adjudication, the missing player replaced, and the whole thing starts fresh. And this leads me to my next focus...

Drop-Outs

Regardless of restrictions or punishments for doing so, the sites I play on experience a **tremendous** number of drop-outs as games move on. A portion of these happen because the games move faster than other formats. If you have a deadline every day or two, a player going away or getting busy and not asking a moderator to pause the game can sweep them right out of the system. But more often than not, it's deliberate. And I don't think a lot of it is players stimping their feet and storming off in a huff, either. No, this seems to be more players walking away from games unemotionally just because things aren't going their way. They get **bored** when they see things going against themselves, and so they just stop entering orders to focus on the games they're doing better in. If they get banned for habitually dropping, it is easy enough to create a new email address, and then a new account on the website. Which leads me to the final issue...

Anonymity

In nearly all my experience with website play, everyone is a nameless, faceless opponent. They're nothing more than a nickname. Some of the sites allow you to look at a player's history in that site's games, but it still doesn't tell you anything. Perhaps others can handle this better than I can. I find it nearly impossible to carry memory of how Grant76 and I worked together from one game to the next, or what kind of player they are. Everyone has tendencies, even if we break them both deliberately or just out of happenstance. I'm not even talking about the decades-long relationships I have built with some players, and how the HOBBY is the best part of Diplomacy for me. I just mean this anonymity turns every game into an experience where the players may as well be computer-generated. You don't know who they are, where they live, what they do for fun, what kind of work they do, what age they are...anything. The person playing England is "England" to me, and that's that. Oh, and one more thing...

Draws

Because of the constant player turnover (both on the site and within each game), there's very little incentive for players to see a game through, especially when sites use points or coins to reward draw participants. Standby players come in with no "risk" and approve any draw proposed (most sites only offer DIAS anyway). The goal is no longer to win a game, but to earn points or coins. I've even seen some conversations where players are confused why a 16-center power is continuing in their quest to get a solo win (a quest seemingly sure to succeed due to the inability of the other players to work together, communicate, or form stalemate lines) when "everyone else is willing to draw." Since new games can be opened and filled nearly at will, there's no investment in each game from a player standpoint.

My yearning to participate (and GM) "real" games again seems to have been whetted by my 2019 experiences, and by the start of the new Diplomacy World Demo Game. Just listening to the offhand comments some of the players send me with their orders has reminded me what a real game is like. And the players are **people**, who think and plan and play the game (despite some comments about a lack of negotiation from certain parties).

I'm glad I found a few reliable websites to play Diplomacy through, and for all their individual faults I still enjoy the experience. But the more time I spend online, the more I am reminded that I much prefer other forums for my Diplomacy fix. I'll continue to play there, without question, but the time has come for me to focus my time on the avenues I most enjoy.

An Interview with David Maletsky

By Randy Lawrence-Hurt

For anyone who doesn't know, WDC 2020 will be held at Carnage in Mt. Snow, VT, November 6-8. I sat down with David Maletsky, the TD of that event (well, I was sitting down, but the interview was conducted via email, so it's entirely possible David was standing) to get some information on the event, his vision for it, and some of his thoughts on the hobby in general.

Carnage will be the host location for WDC 2020, and you'll be the TD. Could you tell us a little about what you're doing to prep for such a large event, and what your vision for it is?

It's been years in the making, really; Carnage has been as small as one board in the distant past. It took a lot of time & word of mouth to convince the Diplomacy community that the experience they have at Carnage surpasses the significant distance to the venue from an airport. And there have been many people involved in the event's success; attendees first and foremost, Carnage staff, and other hobby members interested in innovation. All of that said, there have been two types of prep work: logistical, which is really only 20% myself, 80% Carnage staff; and marketing, which is 100% me. So while I have been involved in various planning for over a year, getting the word out and convincing people to come is really the bulk of the work, which I expect will be ongoing right up until the event.

My vision is to provide a fun environment, with as little stress as possible at one of these tournaments, where players from all over the world can experience the unique tournament structure at Carnage that has been built by years of crowdsourcing.

What are you planning on doing for WDC 2020 that's different from or hasn't been done at previous WDCs?

Much will be different from previous WDCs. In use will be Carnage scoring, a rank-based system with a center-

based tiebreaker where solos reign supreme; there will be four rounds, two Friday, two Saturday, all time-unlimited, no drop round; each board will keep its own time, as with no time limit on the rounds, there is little motivation to have a central clock; a standalone top board (accompanied by a bourse) will be held Sunday morning; and that's just the tip of the iceberg!

We have a unique board seeding system at Carnage, where players are permitted to play the same power more than once: the top priority of the software is to attempt to have each player see as many new faces each round as possible; and finally, players themselves influence what countries they receive via an automated power draft. And as mentioned above, all of these elements have been arrived at via years of testing, feedback & discourse, so I feel very good about all of them (assuming the software works!)

You mentioned Carnage scoring will be used at WDC; could you elaborate on why that particular system?

I don't really have an answer other than I've been using it for years, and that it has generated observably more positive player feedback than its main competitors in North America, particularly among players newer to tournament play. I will add that, having studied the vast majority of scoring systems, Australian-style center-based systems also seem strong to me; which is why I say I really don't have an answer, because we could easily be using one of those unobjectionably. We just aren't... habit is a powerful motivator!

What do you foresee as your greatest likely obstacle in hosting WDC?

Given the goals I have set for myself, the biggest obstacle for certain will be attendance. I very much would like to see 140+ players in the room, and for that to happen, we need online & international players to

show up in droves. 80% of what I will be doing once this holiday season passes will be trying to bring this about; fingers crossed!

What great ideas or things have you seen at other tournaments, and are you incorporating any of those into WDC 2020?

Frankly, most of the great ideas in our hobby come from Carnage; unsurprisingly, given that we test new ideas and have a dialogue, rather than blithely sailing along with what's always been done. As regards WDCs gone by, having a grand opening ceremony with dinner has been fun, and I will be borrowing that. I had no idea what a bourse was until Andrew Goff told me at WDC 2018, and I will be borrowing that. That's about it, for ideas borrowed from past WDCs, but I cannot stress enough that the entirety of Carnage structure is borrowed from all of the hobby members who have been generous, patient and thoughtful enough to provide me with input. Even (or maybe especially?) Adam Silverman.

What aspect of the upcoming Carnage WDC are you most excited about?

There are so many, it's a difficult choice, but if I only get one, it is the opening ceremonies. Planned socializing has been a notable high point in our hobby; the barbeque at DixieCon, for example, is glorious. The food is good, but the key of the experience is that everyone is taking a break to hang out with one another. Plus there are other elements in the works for Thursday evening; hopefully everyone will enjoy the calm before the storm.

There's been discussion on-and-off about the relative merits of DipCon, WDC, the Grand Prix, etc., and specifically about how effective they are at determining who the best Diplomacy player in a given region is; do you have any thoughts on that?

Let me lead with, I have recently discovered that DipCon is poorly defined; apparently the reason for this is ancient blood feuds that persist into today, where everyone involved is willing to die on a hill over unimportant considerations. So, to me, at this juncture, DipCon is an empty, purposeless label; hopefully that will eventually change.

WDC is emblematic of what I think the biggest, best event of the calendar year should be. The best example among those I've attended was the WDC in the Hague; over the course of five boards, I literally played against no weak competition. There was one Italian player who was struggling with English, and I believe that adversely affected his result on one board; but literally every player I saw was strong. This is the experience one would want and expect at a World Championship event, and I hope that Carnage delivers on that promise.

Finally, to answer your question, I think the Grand Prix, if it were better publicized, is the best method to drive hobby growth, among the three; the more players travel, the more they motivate others to travel, which is really important to establish and maintain the bonds of kinship that retain players. As regards determining the best player in a region, I would think that online ranking systems, such as those present on Laurent Joly's EDA website, are, while fallible, the most accurate measurement overall, since they take into account so many iterations of play.

Based on your experience running some very successful tournaments, what have you found to be the best means of bringing new players into the hobby? Is it the venue, the scoring system, the round timing, or other factors entirely?

I have to say, I am not the best recruiter of new players. Others like Edi Birsan, David Hood, and Jim O'Kelley, to name a few, are better sources of authority and experience regarding new player recruitment. That said, I think while recruitment is important, I find that in the face-to-face hobby, retention is at least as important. And this I can speak to: players return to Carnage not simply because Diplomacy was being played there. Nor do they return for the enormous and reasonably priced rooms, nor even the spectacular pool & spa. They return because friends they have made are also returning.

What builds a tournament, and by extension a hobby, is not the game itself, or the amenities of the venue; those are salient factors, but ultimately, players bonding off-board, seeing old friends and making new ones, is the soul of player retention. To this end, I have always attempted to provide a comfortable, safe, and minimally stressful environment in which to play a very stressful and competitive game. I have not been a perfect actor in this regard over the years, sad to say; but what mistakes I have made, I have learned from, and the hobby as a whole has taken a giant step forward recently in approving a general code of conduct. It is my fervent hope that everyone who attends WDC will feel the ease and warmth of a welcoming and safe environment, in which they can relax and form new bonds of friendship.

Do you have any advice for players new to either Diplomacy or tournaments who are thinking of making WDC their first event?

First and foremost, I would say, send me an email: dmaletsky0@gmail.com. I am happy to personally answer any and all concerns, assist where I can with logistics, et cetera. Beyond that, I would say if you are new to the game of Diplomacy, the skills that will aid you the most in your young career are patience, attentiveness, and thoughtfulness. If you are an

experienced online player new to tournament play, be wary of the time constraints on both Diplomacy and order writing; I find writing down where my units are as the Diplomacy round begins is an important habit.

For all players, as I have said countless times, in game, be confident in yourself; be confident in your ability to

assess information and act, and if it doesn't go your way, Diplomacy is neither deterministic, nor a meritocracy, over a small sample size. Don't allow a poor result to shatter your mood or your confidence. And above all else, socialize with others, be as affable as you are able, and enjoy yourself!

Electoral Bias in Airstrip One

By John Hills

So there we have it: The die is cast; our course is set. The United Kingdom will be leaving the European Union at the end of January 2020.

On December 12th Boris Johnson won a convincing majority in our General Election and in fairly short order, secured backing in Parliament for his Withdrawal Agreement. We now face an anxious twelve months as he attempts to negotiate perhaps one of the most complicated and involved trade agreement that the world has seen in probably the shortest ever timescale.

Whether or not you agree with his policies, you have to admire his style.

Reaction to his victory has inevitably been quite mixed and fairly vocal. However, one commentary in particular caught my eye. It came, rather surprisingly, from The Washington Post. In a rather tongue-in-cheek piece, one of their columnists - Alexandra Petri – highlighted some things that the USA might learn from this election.

I'm not sure whether Ms Petri is a member of the Potomac Tea & Knife Society – and if not perhaps PTKS should extend her an invitation – but as this echoed the format of some of my own recent columns, I'm confident that she must be a *Diplomacy World* subscriber.

One of Alexandra's observations, or should that be admissions, was that she was unfamiliar with the UK electoral system. I found this surprising, until I remembered that there was no reason why she should be familiar with it. After all, the US system is a complete mystery to me. However, if a Washington Post columnist is unsure about how we do things, what chance would the average American have?

Welcome, then, to this latest edition of Airstrip One, in which I will attempt to demystify the impenetrable fog that is the UK's Electoral process.

Let's start with the basics.

The most important thing that you need to understand about British Democracy is that it isn't very democratic. The UK Parliament comprises of two legislative chambers, the House of Commons (the Commons) and the House of Lords (the Lords).

Historically, membership of the Lords comprised of Barons, Dukes, Earls etc – basically, all the people that owned the land – and passed down through the generations by accident of birth; what we called Hereditary Peers. Now though, they comprise what are called 'Life Peers'; individuals elevated to the status of nobility – i.e. given a posh title – in recognition of either significant public service, political clout or particular expertise in Business, Science or the Arts. The Lords, then is an appointed chamber full of valuable contributors to society or political cronies, depending on your point of view.

Either way, it has no democratic accountability

The Commons, on the other hand, is a directly elected chamber. When we hold General Election like the one last month, individual Members of Parliament (MPs) are voted in – one for each local district or 'constituency' – by a secret ballot of all eligible adults in that area. Anyone British citizen can vote provided that they are over the age of 18, have registered to do so ahead of time and they're not either insane or in prison. And if you can't get to a Polling Station to cast your vote - whether through age, infirmity or idleness - you can vote by post or by proxy. When all the constituencies have voted, the leader of the political party that has had the most MPs elected then becomes the Prime Minister.

Also, any eligible voter can put themselves forward for election. You have to pay a deposit of a few hundred pounds – just to stop frivolous timewasters – but you get that back after the election provided you secure at least 5% of the vote in the constituency in which you are standing for election. As a result, we have a far more varied political landscape than the US. Rather than just two large parties giving a simple choice between Left

and Right, we get independent candidates campaigning on very local issues, regional parties (e.g. The Scottish Nationalist Party, Plaid Cymru or Sinn Féin), religious groups, environmentalists and comedians. Literally anything goes

That all sounds very democratic. Except that it's not and the reason why is because of the way that the MPs are elected; what's called the First Past the Post system (FPTP).

Under FPTP, the winning candidate is the one that gets the single largest number of votes in that constituency rather than receiving an actual majority of all the votes cast.

So why do we do it this way? Well, FPTP has three main advantages. Firstly, it's easy to administer. Each constituency holds its own ballot and the highest number wins. Recounts are not usually needed – although they're not unheard of.

Secondly, it makes the voting process very local and personal. Voters are electing an individual to represent their area, rather than for a national leader and so have more chance of knowing that individual personally. Indeed, my own recently elected MP lives about three hundred yards away from my house. (I still didn't vote for him though; that honour went to a work colleague who was also standing!).

Thirdly, it makes majority governments more likely. There are about 650 constituencies in the UK and the larger political parties will put up candidates in all of them. As the party that returns the highest number of MPs will form the new Government, we usually find that one gets a clear majority. In fact, out of 58 elections since 1802, there have only been 12 when that has not been the case.

However, FPTP also has some major drawbacks, the most telling being that it is fundamentally undemocratic. Although Boris Johnson won an emphatic victory last month – gaining an 80-seat majority – he did so with only 43% of the national vote. In other words, less than half of the people that voted actually wanted his party to win. Of course, it is not just Boris and his Conservative Party that have benefited. For example, in 1997, Tony Blair's Labour Government was elected with a similar percentage of the overall votes cast.

Another problem is that it renders some votes more valuable than others. An MP with a large local majority (e.g. 20,000 votes) is much more secure in their seat than one with a majority of only a couple of hundred. Elections have come down to single votes on occasion. Voters in these marginal constituencies therefore have much more power in their vote. In that situation, only a

small change in voter preferences can change the actual result returned. Some of this can be countered by tactical voting – where you vote for someone other than your preferred candidate to try to keep another candidate out. However, this can be very haphazard as it is sometimes difficult to agree on who the 'next best' candidate would be!

Hopefully, this has helped to explain things for you. However, as usual, you'll be wondering what any of this has to do with *Diplomacy*. I mean, voting is hardly a significant feature of the game, is it?

Well, there I have to disagree.

Most games end in a draw and most draws are voted on rather than being enforced by a GM, for example due to an established stalemate line having been formed. Therefore, voting – or more particularly - the system used to agree the draw has to be important.

However, when one comes to consider the matter, it seems that there are marked discrepancies between online, face-to-face and PBEM play.

For example, in online play, there usually has to be complete unanimity before a draw can be called. However, in postal or PBEM games, it is the GM that defines the threshold for a successful draw vote and most seem to favour a simple majority vote. In face-to-face play the situation is even more uncertain. The original game rules are completely silent on the question of draws, save to say that a short game can be played to a time limit with the win going to the largest Power at that point.

By implication, therefore, draws are outside the rules of the game. However, it is known both in tournament and social play for draws to be proposed, voted on and agreed, with the threshold being set by the host or Tournament Director. There are still further variations inasmuch as whether the draw includes all survivors (DIAS) or only the larger players.

So, if we accept that draws are allowed – despite their absence from the official rules – which voting system is best – simple majority or unanimity, DIAS or not - and should we adopt the same standard in all formats?

Well, in my view, it would be helpful to have a definitive standard, and my preference would be for simple majority voting in all situations, even on line. Although I accept that it must be easier from a coding perspective to support unanimous decisions, we all know how obdurate and awkward the average *Dipper* can be. I appreciate that part of the skill in *Diplomacy* is persuasion, trying to secure the agreement of all parties can be decidedly difficult. This in turn leads to games

being kept alive longer than is probably good for them. And as one of the criticisms of our game is that it takes so long to play, anything that contributes to this should be challenged.

I also believe that DIAS is the only fair approach to take. If a player has managed to survive against the odds – I'm thinking of you here, Austria – that deserves recognition and they should not, in my view, be closed out of a draw.

However, I also want to throw in a curve ball. Should that majority be of players or of dots?

Usually, most draw votes follow the rule of 'one player-one vote'. However, that gives undue weight to the smaller Powers. Why should a single centre survivor have the same voice as a nine or ten dot Power. That just wouldn't happen in reality.

Instead, I would propose that votes are allocated for each dot held. Therefore, in Classic play, for a vote to succeed, at least 18 votes must be secured in favour. That could be three Powers on 7 dots each deciding the game or a wider spread of minor powers 'out-voting' someone on the cusp of a solo. The effect of this would be to incentivise more aggressive play and promote the faster elimination of weaker Powers, again reducing overall game time.

So what do you think? These are only my opinions and you may well disagree. If so, please let me know. Or, if you think that I've overlooked something, again, please tell me. You can reach me at jon.airstrip1@gmail.com

So, what else is happening in the UK *Diplomacy*-wise?

Well, since we are talking about elections, it is worth mentioning the result of Alex Richardson's Annual Zine

Poll. The winner was John Marsden with 'Ode', a most deserving recipient.

Having racked up more than 400 editions since October 1979, this makes Ode the UK's longest running *Diplomacy* 'zine. 'Ode' may not be quite as old as *Diplomacy World* but, frankly, that is an awesome achievement for a single editor and John deserves every congratulation.

The other significant event is the resurrection of the Tour of Britain for 2020.

Brought back into being by those ardent *Dippers* in Macclesfield, this will be a four-weekend series of tournaments across the UK. The provisional dates and venues being:

Macclesfield: 14/15 March

London: 27/28 June

York: 26/27 September

MidCon (Derby): November, exact date TBA.

It's great to have the Tour back and I hope that as many UK *Dippers* as possible will get to take part, even if it's only for one round.

I'll try to provide reports and updates as the year progresses but in the meantime, please check out the details on Facebook or www.webdiplomacy.net

That's all for now and I'll look forward to meeting some of you across a board or a computer screen in 2020.

In the meantime, have a Stabby New Year!

Jon Hills

DipNet - The AI That Aims to Be Human (Including an Interview with Philip Pacquette)

By Markus Zijlstra

This article extensively uses information from three sources - the research paper "No Press Diplomacy - Supervised Modelling of Multi-Agent Gameplay", an interview with the lead author of the paper, Philip Pacquette, and a post on webDiplomacy.net by administrator peterwiggin. The interview transcript is posted in full at the bottom of the article, and the paper and post are linked below that.

A lot of artificial intelligence research goes on behind the scenes and receives very little attention, but board game AIs have hit the headlines several times in recent years, most notably in 2016 with AlphaGo's infamous 4-1 victory over Go world champion Lee Sedol. This was a huge milestone in both board game AI and AI in general, as Go is a hugely complex game for a bot to handle.

Over the years we've seen several attempts to add Diplomacy to the list of games dominated by AI.

Meyer/Glass Interactive, who went on to develop hugely successful shooters such as F.E.A.R., and Paradox Interactive, the company behind Europa Universalis, have both thrown their hats into the ring in the past, but with very limited success. IGN described Paradox's AI (the more advanced of the two) as 'shoddy', and even on the hardest difficulty the average player could solo against it most of the time.

Surprisingly, the gold standard for diplomacy AI doesn't come from a large company at all, but rather programmer and hobbyist Jason van Hal, who created the Albert AI. Albert has to be downloaded along with the DAIDE (Diplomacy AI Development Environment) to run, but provides a solid challenge to even the most skilled Diplomacy player; I personally still have yet to solo against the level 100 version of Albert, and that's not for lack of trying. The AI generally makes solid moves and is capable of reading the board and forming alliances based on it, and is even able to collaborate to form stalemate lines with surprising speed and efficiency if any player is approaching a solo.

However, as good as it is at the game, Albert has its downsides. The biggest one is just how resource-intensive it is; at the start of the game, powers will decide their moves within a few seconds, but as the game progresses, it can start taking upwards of 5 minutes for a power to decide on its moves, and that's on a modern, fairly powerful PC. This is because of the way Albert works - the AI searches over many possible orders to see which is the strongest move for the power, which works well when there aren't many (i.e. in Spring, 1901), but when powers approach 18 centers, the number of possibilities for moves increases massively and the whole system grinds to a halt. Finishing a game against Level 100 Alberts is a slog not because they're unfun to play against, but because of the amount of time spent waiting for the AIs to put in their orders in the late game.

This is where DipNet comes in. In Autumn 2019, a paper by the name of "No Press Diplomacy: Modelling Multi-Agent Gameplay" was published by researchers at the University of Montreal, led by Philip Pacquette, describing the process of training a bot to play No Press Diplomacy by means of Machine Learning - basically, giving the AI a huge amount of test data (in this case, 150,000 games played by humans on various sites), and designing a program that lets it use this data to train itself. Not long after the publication of this paper, the bot was released on webDiplomacy.net, available to be played against by any member of the site - to my knowledge, the first Diplomacy AI to be playable in-browser. It had a huge impact on the site, with over 10,000 bot games having been played in the 3 months since its release. Unlike Albert, DipNet is able to decide on orders within a few seconds, even when playing a

large number of games simultaneously (although the sheer number of players trying to play in the first week of release crashed the website twice) - and the bots are incredibly competent. I personally have so far played 11 games against them, of which I successfully solo'd 4, achieved a draw in 5, was eliminated in 1, and was solo'd on by a bot in 1. Those results don't sound great for DipNet, but I did exploit the bots' weaknesses (which will be covered later) quite significantly in the games I solo'd, and in general the games were challenging, fun to play, and most of the time did not feel like I was playing against an AI.

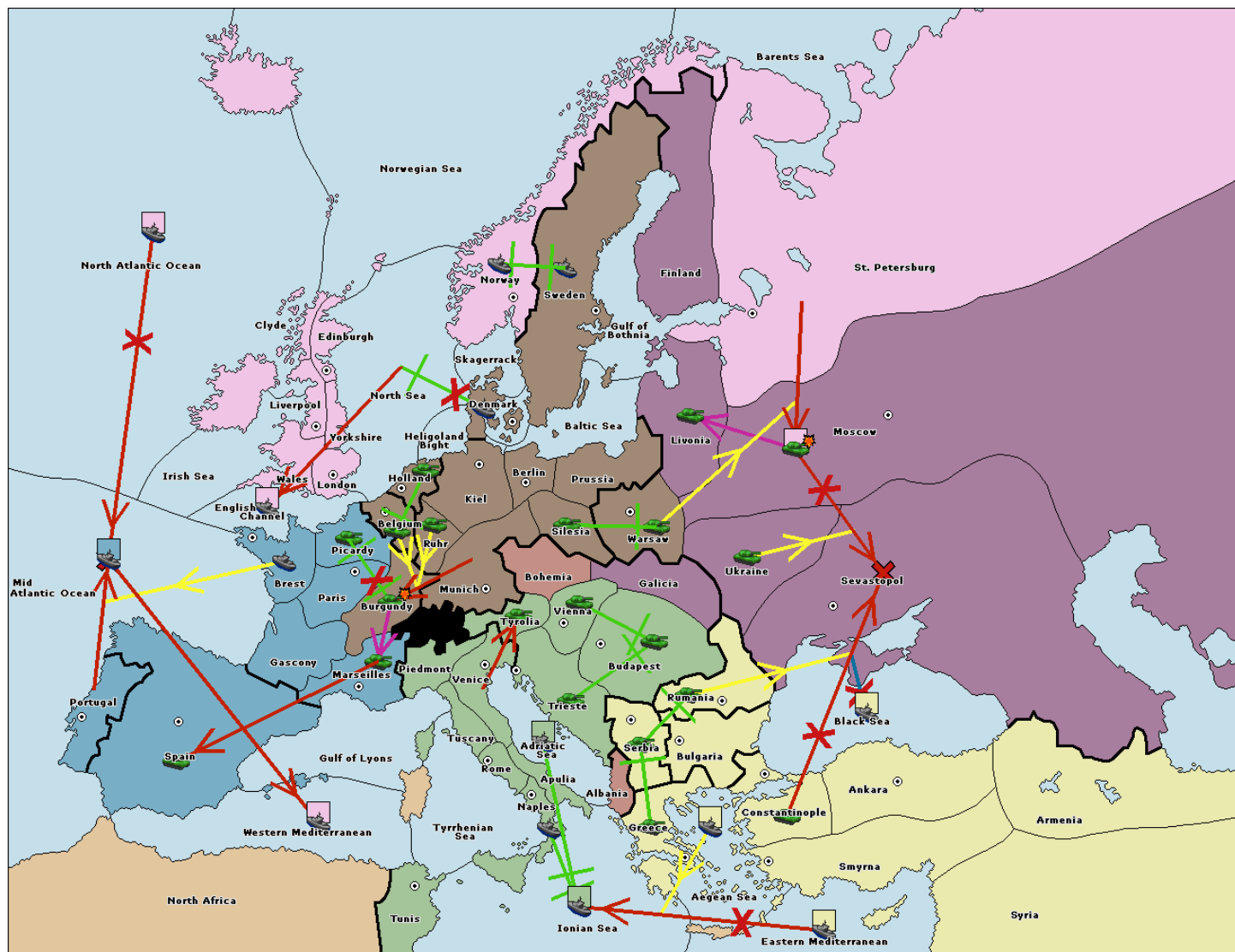
Perhaps the most stunning moment for me was the one you'll see on the following page, in the very first game I played against them.

In this game, I played England, and worked with Germany off the bat, supporting the German bot into Belgium in 1901. This was because bot games are No Press, so there is seemingly very little point in going for Belgium yourself as England - even if you could get in, it seems difficult to progress anywhere from there without assistance from another power. My hope was that Germany would see this as a prompt for some kind of non-aggression pact and I could focus on northern Scandinavia and France. In actuality, it worked better than I could ever have expected - Germany reciprocated by ordering unnecessary support holds purely for the purpose of telling me they wanted to work with me (a common tactic for communicating in No Press), as you can see in Denmark and Sweden in the 1905 map above, and pushed into areas you would expect Germany to in an E/G alliance. The huge moment for me came when Germany successfully predicted that I would move St Petersburg into Moscow, and supported that move, which again you can see on the above map - this is the kind of collaborative No Press play you would not expect a bot to pick up on, and most players don't even pick up on until they've become fairly experienced with the variant.

This becomes even more astonishing when you know that all the bot uses to decide its moves are the board positions and the orders from the last phase. The German AI didn't do this because it knew we'd been allied all game; it didn't know that! It saw just the board position and the previous moves, and from that decided that the best move from that position was to support me - essentially guessing that we were allied and deciding that continuing to work together was the best course of action. To me at least, the fact that it could not only decipher this from just one phase, but also predict what I would do from that (I had not made this move previously, that unit had only just arrived in St Petersburg), was incredible and completely unexpected.

It begs the question, how does it know to do this? The answer to that lies in the way it was trained. In order to be trained, machine learning AIs need to have some way to know how well they're doing - for example, in a game like Super Mario Bros, this might be how far to the right Mario was able to travel. At first glance, Diplomacy

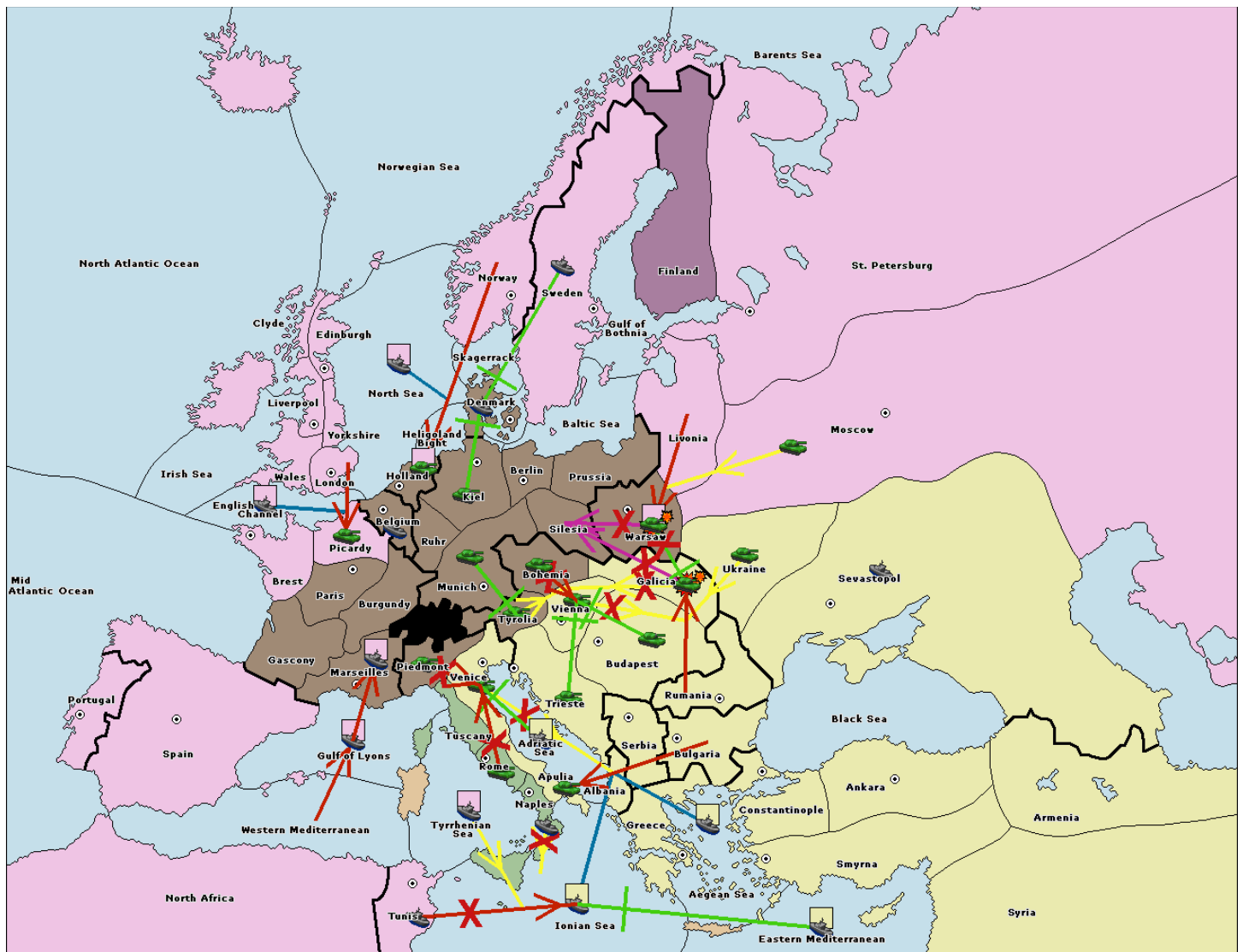
seems to have an easy metric that can be used in the number of Supply Centers the AI controls, but that's not how DipNet was trained. One of DipNet's most important metrics was how accurately it could predict the moves a human would make in those circumstances. This bot wasn't just trained to win; it was trained to *act human*.



This is what makes the bots so good, in my opinion at least. The reason DipNet supports STP-MOS in that boardstate is because a human player playing Germany in that position would likely do that, and by issuing that support order it really makes you feel like you're playing against/with other real players rather than an AI. I think there's a good chance Albert Level 100 is the better bot from a purely results-based standpoint (although tests published in the paper showed that 1 DipNet bot could

solo against 6 Albert Level 0s about 30% of the time), but it doesn't really matter - even putting aside the difference in time taken to decide on orders, DipNet feels better to play against for me because it both provides a reasonable challenge, and feels more like a real gunboat game.

At least, until the endgame.



As the end of the E/G alliance game shows, DipNet's main exploitable weakness is exactly the same as its main strength - how human it acts. It's far too trusting of allies, rarely stabs or positions to defend against stabs, and as such can be solo'd on fairly easily by simply allying with the bot, steamrolling the rest of the map together, and then taking undefended centers behind it once it has pushed far enough forward to not be able to react. Once the stab is made, the bot will usually turn around and start defending itself, but it isn't difficult to set up a stab that completely cripples your ally before they do anything to respond.

To players who usually stick to high level games, this might not seem very human, but as someone who has shamelessly dabbled in random games with newer players I can say this is also the easiest way to win there, and sometimes leaving the rear completely undefended and just carebearing to the end is a viable strategy as players refuse to stab an ally they've worked

all game with, even if it would result in a solo. This does sometimes even occur at a high level of play, although at that level people far more often take advantage of it to solo. My theory here is that this weakness is down to the general weakness of the dataset - the vast majority of those 150,000 games are not going to be high level, and so a bot trained from them is going to have the same type of exploitable behaviour that a less experienced player would.

This was improved in a patch later in the year, with half the bots in each game still having the old behaviour but half being made less reliable by more often picking moves they consider to be suboptimal. To some extent, this has successfully curbed the exploit, as if you ally one of the less reliable bots and just stick with them they are likely to stab you at some point - but if your ally happens to be a bot with the old algorithm, you can still very effectively win games this way.

The other major weakness of the bots is an inability to form stalemate lines. This is a huge downside and another reason that the endgame feels off with DipNet, but again probably relates to the fact that the dataset is majorly coming from games with inexperienced players who didn't set up stalemates in time, or went for draws that didn't involve stalemate lines in the first place. It's disappointing, but right now there doesn't seem to be a solid solution for it. What it does mean is that really, you play against DipNet for the experience of the early/midgame - by the end of the midgame, the game is usually decided one way or another and the endgame is just getting to that conclusion.

Making a bot seem human clearly has its downsides, but it also feels like the way forward for Diplomacy AI. I actually ran my own, very unscientific, test where I took the first four years of four bot games and asked 4 experienced players to rank the countries from 1-7, with 1 being the most likely to be human, and 7 being the

least likely to be human. The average placement of the human player across all the games and all the quizzed players was 3.5, which is slightly lower than the expected average of 4 if the human was completely indistinguishable, but still shows that these bots do a very, very good job of mimicking what a human would do (although the sample size was small enough that drawing any solid results from the data isn't possible).

As such, despite the downsides, I'd strongly recommend the experience of playing against DipNet. Diplomacy AI still has a long way to go, but it feels like a huge step forward, and the ease with which you play against it makes it a great way to play a real-feeling gunboat game without having to find other players to join, or wait for those other players to put in orders.

Huge thanks to Philip Pacquette for talking me through a lot of the more complicated aspects of DipNet. The full interview with him can be found below.

The Interview

1) Why did you choose Diplomacy as the subject for your AIs? How familiar were you with the game prior to designing the AI for it?

I was familiar with the rules of the game, but I'm not a great player. Diplomacy is interesting for several reasons:

- It's a multi-player game (as opposed to chess, and go which only have 2 players)
- It has a mix of cooperation and competition (whereas other games are mostly one or the other)
- It has imperfect information (because the moves are simultaneous)
- It has incomplete information (because you can't read the private messages between the other players)
- It is a multi-stage game (i.e. it has multiple turns)
- It has no element of chance (i.e. no dice)
- It has a strong online community
- It has natural language, so agents need to build a contextual understanding of the messages and act/respond accordingly
- It requires building trust, and using deception
- It has a very large action space (i.e. large number of possible moves)
- It can be used to teach ethics to bots
- It requires agents to think in multiple time scales (i.e. short-term move vs long-term strategy)
- It also requires some reasoning (and adaptation) about the intentions of others
- It's also a game that relatively easy to simulate

I think that an agent that can play the full press version of the game would need to have components of general

intelligence (reasoning, some common sense, understanding the consequences of one's actions, some understanding of what's right vs wrong, etc.). It is probably one of the games that can still be run in a limited environment that requires all the components we want the AI models to have.

2) I'm going to be using this post as a starting point for explaining how the bot works in my article (although I'll be boiling it down a lot): is there anything that you'd want to add to that post or do you think it does a good job of explaining everything?

I think it does a good job.

In simple terms, I'm feeding it 1) the board state, 2) the current player (e.g. 'FRANCE'), 3) the current season (e.g. 'Fall'), 4) the orders of the previous movement phase, 5) the list of locations I want orders for, 6) the list of possible orders for each of those locations. The model then outputs one order for each location, taking into account what it chose at previous locations. I update the weights to minimize the difference between what the model has outputted, and what the human has played for that power.

The model was trained using all powers (both winners and losers) on all games on the standard map (press, no press, wta, ppsc, 1v1, ...). We evaluated the model by holding out 5% of games, and checking the accuracy of the orders of the winners (i.e. powers ending the game with 7 or more SC).

We improved the model by using self-play (where the agent plays against itself). This basically increases the probability of actions that a winning agent took, and reduces the prob. of actions for a losing agent. The bot is not able to determine why it won or why it lost, so it just increases/decreases a tiny bit the probability of all its orders across all phases. It's a very inefficient method, especially for a game as complex as Diplomacy, and it takes millions of games to be able to learn a little bit. It's also limited by how well the agent plays (i.e. if it only plays a single strategy, it's only going to see that strategy in the self-play games).

3) The last news story everybody remembers in relation to Board Game AIs was the triumph of AlphaGo over Lee Sedol back in 2016 - am I correct in thinking this AI was trained in a similar way? Do you think there's potential for bots trained in this way to reach the same performance level as AlphaGo in the foreseeable future?

Yes, it's similar, but the original AlphaGo paper also used Monte Carlo tree search, which are very difficult to implement in Diplomacy. For AlphaGo, they trained, from expert human games, a policy network that can play the game (output where to put the stone based on the board state) and a value network (that, very roughly, approximates the probability of winning the game from a board state). They improved both networks by having the model play against itself (i.e. reinforcement learning). The final model was outputting the probability of where to put the stone for every position (~400), the updated probability of winning if the stone was placed in any of the ~400 positions, and then for the top positions, they were playing simulations starting from that place to get a better estimate of the probability of winning. The tree search was using a breadth of 250 positions, and a depth of 150 (i.e. there is in average 250 next possible moves, and it takes 150 moves in average to reach the end of the game).

We also trained a policy network that can play the game, from human games, and slightly improved the model using self-play (reinforcement learning). The issue with Diplomacy is that you can't output a probability for every possible move, because you need to consider the joint moves (i.e. the order for all units at once), rather than sampling each unit independently. If I remember correctly, I computed an average of 26 possible moves per unit, and there are up to 34 units on the board, so you get a breadth that is multiple orders of magnitude larger than Go. For the self-play, since the action space is so large, it takes a lot of games to be able to update the policy network, and even with that, it's not clear that there is a single winning strategy, because it is a multi-player game.

If you roughly approximate that the value of a board state is the estimated number of SC the power will have at the end of the game, it's not obvious that a board state is a good indicator of the winner of a game. For instance, in a true ranked gunboat game where there might be a bot, if a power were to do a sub-optimal move that clearly indicates it is a bot, that move would likely have a material impact in the number of SC it will have at the end of the game. In Go and Chess, you can't really go back in time (i.e. in chess if a piece is taken, it's gone for good; in Go, you add stones, but can't remove them), vs in Diplomacy, units are moved around, so you can easily move from a high probability of winning to a low probability, depending on how the other players act. The dynamic of multi-agent games is very different from 2-player games.

You also can't easily do a tree search. There are more than a million things a power can do, but probably only a dozen that makes sense. If you were to run simulations to determine what you should do, you can't do it naively, because most of what you are going to compute is not going to help you. But to know where to look, you need to know how to play, so it is not obvious how to run simulations to improve the agent's performance.

4) Do you think Gunboat Diplomacy is the limit of an AI trained in this way, or could you see this research being adapted to cater to some kind of limited message interface?

You could always train a model, from human games, that learns to play based on the board state, the previous orders, and the messages received, but I see a major issue with this method. The learned model would either:

- Completely, or mostly, ignore the messages and play like a gunboat model
- Follow the messages and be easily manipulated, therefore playing worse than a gunboat model.

Humans would clearly tell the bot to do what it should not do, and the bot wouldn't be smart enough to see what was happening. To decide if a model should follow simple messages, it would need to understand what would happen if it does or doesn't follow the communications received. As mentioned above, understanding the next state based on some sort of search is far from obvious, given the complexity of the tree, and the low probability of each node.

5) Did you use any metrics aside from the final gamestate and how well it could predict human moves to evaluate how well the bots were doing as the game progressed? (Apologies if this was covered in the paper, a fair bit of Section 4 went over my head)

We used the accuracy (% of human orders predicted, split by order type, position, location, power, ...), the probability it assigned to the human order (i.e. cross-entropy), and whether it could win games (vs humans and other bots). It is extremely hard to measure how well a model is doing if you don't play against it, because the accuracy might be great, and the model might still play very poorly.

6) From experience, the initial bots tended to stick to alliances until they had almost no other option. Do you have any insight into why this might be?

The optimal human strategy is probably to keep its alliances, and backstab only when necessary. The bot probably assigns a greater probability to orders that reflect historical alliances, and rarely samples from the backstabbing orders. The initial model on the site was shifting almost all the probability to the most probable order, and therefore had close to 0% probability of backstabbing. It is a difficult balance, if you allow backstabbing moves to happen, you also increase the probability of sub-optimal moves.

7) Having played against the Albert AI and being used to waiting sometimes upwards of 5 minutes for it to make its move at the highest level, one of the things I really appreciated about DipNet is the

response time. Is that due to it running on the University of Montreal servers, or would it be just as quick were I to run it on your typical home computer?

It actually runs on my personal Google Cloud account (on a 1 cpu, 4GB instance), and not on any of the University's hardware. Albert was slow to compute orders, because it searched over the possible orders to compute a value for each order and/or province, depending on what it thought would happen. I'm not doing any simulations or search, so I can compute the orders for tens of games in parallel in under a second.

8) I also assume that the reason Level 0 Albert AI was used for the test was this response time - was that the case? Did you ever test it against higher level AI?

The response time was one issue. The other is the Albert has been compiled for Windows, and that most deep learning research is on Linux. I actually rewrote the DAIDE client to make it Linux-compatible, but Jason declined to share the Albert code, so I could compile it under Linux (so other researchers and I could use it). Albert level 0 was run with containers, and it was a fairly slow and complex process. If any of you know him, I still think having a linux version of Albert would greatly help future research, but I respect his decision.

The Links

No Press Diplomacy: Modelling Multi-Agent Gameplay paper: <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1909.02128.pdf>

webDiplomacy Forum Post by peterwiggins:

<https://webdiplomacy.net/contrib/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=1938&start=20#p102809>

The Minnestoa Diplomacy Club – The First Year

By Zachary Moore

Ben Johnson sends invitations effortlessly. Like a heartbeat or a blink or a breath, organizing people and forming plans is a natural function of his body. In 2013, he planned a Facebook event for a meetup at a local fast food chain *three years* in advance. In the meantime, he founded another page called "If This Page Gets 1,000,000 Likes, Michael Jackson Will Come Back to Life!" At some point between the fast food thing and the Michael Jackson thing, Ben kicked the tires on the Diplomacy thing:

"Zach, we need one more for my online Diplomacy game. Wanna play?"

"Diplomacy? The game that has been sitting unopened in my closet for 5 years? Count me in!"

And so it began. Like many alliances in this game, ours formed with fits and starts. A poorly played online game begat an unsightly 4-player face-to-face game, which led to a few more poorly played online games and finally -- another invite. This time, to a tournament at a gaming convention in Chicago. It was there, at CODCon 2015, in former Windy City Weasel Dan Burgess' basement, that MNDiplomacy club was conceived.

If You're Not On the Internet, You Don't Exist

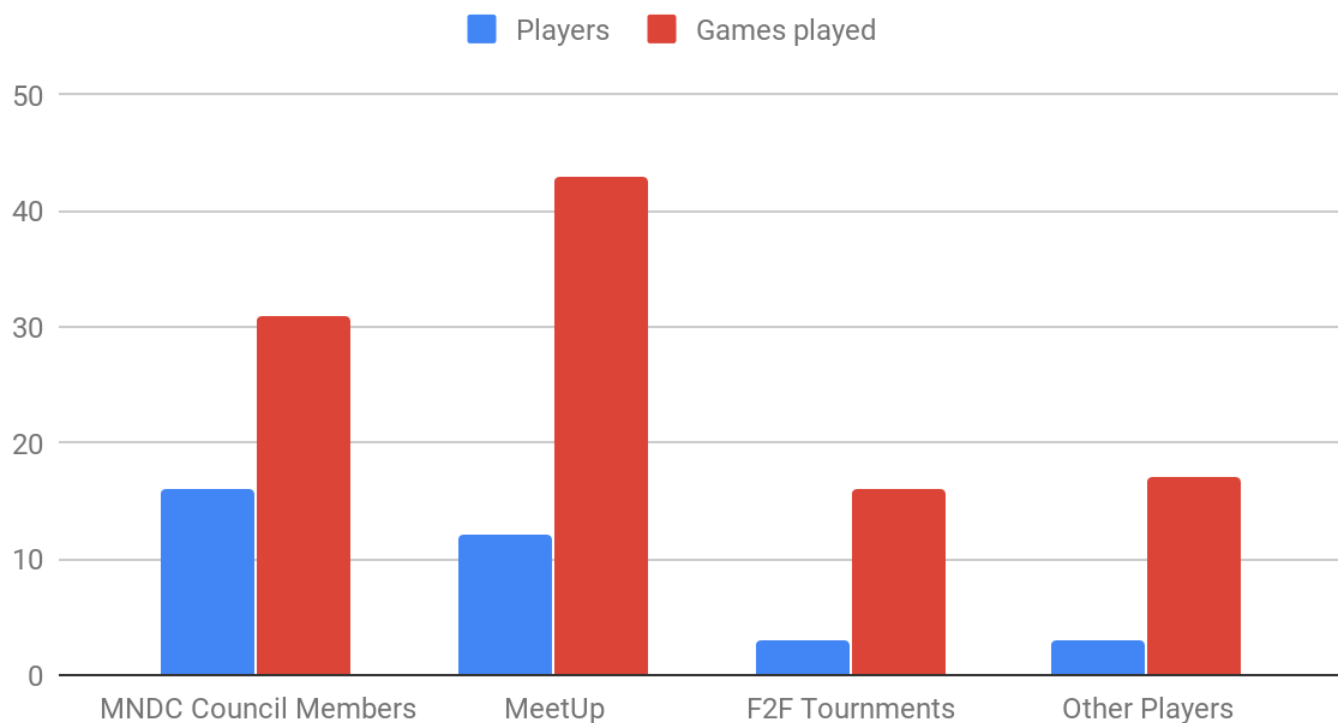
MNDC as we know it was really born in November of 2018. We decided to start a MeetUp so more people could find us. Erik, now a council member, found us on MeetUp and attended the first game in that month. He was enthusiastic in the MeetUp chat and hoped there might even be two boards. With one council member acting as GM and the others sitting out, several new players participated, including Erik. (This approach--where council members attend but are ready to sit out--increases the probability of full 7-player games.) He showed up to Fantasy Flight Games Center in Roseville, Minnesota with a simple goal, which he had expressed to his wife before he left home: play within himself, don't get too excited, take what the board gives him. In 1904, he stabbed Turkey, Germany and Austria at the same time to jump up to 9 centers and build three. By 1907, he was down to five, but saved by the bell -- our pre-arranged time limit had hit, ending the game. Not exactly according to plan.

Undeterred by his overzealous play, Erik kept showing up. At his next game, he offered to sit out as there were more than seven players. While that game was in progress, he and Ben discussed possibly adding him into the council leadership, a decision which Ben, Zach, and Jake ratified a few weeks later.

No Stone Unturned

Players like Erik who connected with our club via MeetUp have been the engine driving this league forward since that day in November. Eric Silverman -- one of the three players stabbed by Erik on that fateful day -- had already heard about us from his brother, but we hadn't been able to connect until he got a MeetUp notification for a new gaming group in the Twin Cities. Overall, the MeetUp page brought us 12 of our 36 players in 2019, and they combined for 43 games played, almost exactly a third of our activity. The following graph shows how every player of our 2019 season came to be invited to join our club:

MNDC Recruitment



Personal invitations from members of the MNDC Council was our biggest source of new players, but they were mostly one-and-done. The reason for this seems to be that our friends are willing to help us fill a game in a

pinch whether or not they are interested in trying Diplomacy. Success in their first game does not seem to move the needle at all. The two recruits from that category with the highest number of games played (6)

both average roughly 8.5 points per game (Sum of Squares), which is below average. Meanwhile, our most successful new player scored 59.5 points in his July debut, won Best France, and has not returned.



The most surprising source of new players for this club has been face-to-face tournaments in other U.S. cities, especially Chicago. At Weasel Moot 2018, we recruited *three* new players who combined for 16 games in 2019. In one case, I was connected to a Twin-Cities Diplomacy player by Hunter Katcher, who had traveled to Chicago from Connecticut! Traveling to tournaments keeps us connected with the national face-to-face community, so if anybody has a family member or friend move to our area who wants to play Diplomacy, they know where to go. Such was the case with MNDC Council member Jake Langenfeld, who dominated the Windy City Weasels for a couple of years until September 2018, when he moved to Saint Paul to dominate us.

Writing Orders

We knew we had the right guy when Jake Langenfeld, our shiny new import from Chicago, showed up to our first council meeting with a legal notepad and a handbook on parliamentary procedure. Recruiting is a glamorous job, but keeping a tight ship is essential when you're running a game that combines alcohol, double-dealing and seven different personalities debating each other for six hours. Jake believes that a successful club does three things well:

- First, the club is open to anyone who wants to join. Diplomacy is a game that rewards players solely on their merits. A player succeeds through their skill in negotiating with others and little else. Therefore, anyone with

even a modicum of interest in negotiation is welcome at the MNDC table.

- Second, our players have a competitive spirit. Our website and scoring system are top-of-mind for many of the players in the club, and I think a robust scoring system and ranking methodology help to add a lot of flavor to each game and the season-long metagame. Our club's challenge for the future is to get other players excited to rise in the rankings, ideally with their eyes on the end-of-year championship game.
- Third, our club's players respect one another. This is a tough ask in a game that rewards backstabbing. After all, what's the point of playing a great game like Diplomacy if we can't shake hands at the end?

Looking Ahead

In 2019, we set an ambitious goal, which turned into a mantra at our meetings: "20 games by 2020!" After stumbling through the holiday season, we came up short -- 18 games were held by our club this year. We didn't set a specific goal for number of players, but I consider 36 to be a resounding success. 6 months ago, I would have considered 40 players in 2020 a monumental milestone, but now it seems like it would be too modest a target. Our goals for the upcoming years are the following:

- **24 games:** we schedule two games -- one on a weekday and one on a weekend -- every month. Why not fill them all?
- **Improve our production:** Diplomacy exciting game, and it brings a type of drama that is already successfully represented via video by events like the World Series of Poker, and game shows like Big Brother or Survivor. We want to make Diplomacy fun to watch, and hope to experiment with some video projects this year, starting with our upcoming league championship game.
- **Develop world class players:** the national Diplomacy circuit is one of the great features of this hobby, and we hope to contribute players to that circuit who will be battle-tested and equipped to bring us some trophies. There are a lot of empty trophy cases in Minnesota, and if our sportsmen refuse to fill them, we will gladly step up.

Diplomacy World Demo Game

“Dirty Rotten Scoundrels” – 2019A

The Players:

Austria: Brad Wilson

England: Vick Hall

France: Steve Cooley

Germany: Dick Martin

Italy: Lance Anderson

Russia: Steve Nicewarner

Turkey: Stephen Agar

The Commentators:

David Hood

Rick Desper

Jack McHugh

Player Biographies:

Austria: Brad Wilson - I am 56, with 1 and 1/2 legs these days. Been playing Dip, mostly badly, for over 40 years. Still enjoy the game's tactics and give and take. I often play in Cheesecake, one of the last postal zones. I used to run a zine called Vertigo. I am a sportswriter with interests in cooking, wine, jazz, classical music, books and old movies. White Sox, Everton and Northwestern fan. Go 'Cats!

I've known Brad since the American Civil War when we both served in the Union army--he was an officer and I was his NCO...they made a movie about us called Glory only they killed us off in the movie--in actual fact we asked not to participate in the final attack as our constant pointing out our probable failure was considered a real bummer for morale. Anyway, after that I played for several years in Vertigo until, like Brad, it ran do to a stop and is still on hiatus, a 20 year hiatus, but still technically, like Brad himself, not folded. He also has this fetish with all things Chicago that I overlook because otherwise I do enjoy his company. His Diplomacy style is that of your favorite teacher trying to be your pal while giving you life lessons.

Brad and I go way back, although I have not seen him in many years. He was heavily involved in the hobby back in the 1980s and somewhat into the 1990s, probably more on the organizational side than the playing side. I did play some postal games with him back in those days, and probably a face-to-face game as well here and there, but have not had enough exposure to evaluate his

play prior to this game. It's great to see Brad back in the saddle again, as it were.

Don't know Brad.

England: Vick Hall - I bought two board games early on when I was a young kid. Diplomacy and Kingmaker. Both classic games and inside the diplomacy box was lots of information about a number of English diplomacy zines, where you could play dip by post. Yes you actually had to write letters in those days and actually not only did I really enjoy those early postal games, I began to make some lifelong hobby friends who I have known for over 40 years now. I had quite a good dip rep in those days. I even ranked 17th in the World at one point, but there has been an increasing decline in my play and rating over the years. I hate to think what my ranking is now! One classic postal dip game I remember was run by Iain Bowen. I even went so far in one of his games to travel to York where he lived to post out a fake re-adjudication of the game I was in. No-one checked so several players sadly mis-ordered to my advantage next turn and I went on to win the game. Of course, I am not so treacherous these days. You can rely on me.....honestly....

I know Vick's reputation in the British hobby, but do not have any first-hand knowledge of him as a player. His story about faking a postal adjudication sure brings back memories from the old days - it was kinda a thing back then to put out fakes of other folks' zines. I bet that would not go over well in today's hobby!

Played with Vick a number of times at FTF tourneys in the US, UK, and perhaps elsewhere. Easy guy to get along with, good planner and negotiator.

I don't know Vick either but since he is English I will make the usual American assumptions about him, that I've cleaned from watching BBC TV shows and some English movies. His Diplomacy style is Steed from the Avengers combined with Alistar Cooke from Masterpiece Theater--again I don't know him but this my stereotyping of English people.

France: Steve Cooley - *I have been playing Diplomacy since 1984. I saw an ad or a listing for a game convention in Orange County, CA. I went and will never forget the first game. I was Italy and neither Russia or Turkey wanted to talk to me. The Austrian player knew what he was doing. He told me to stick with him and we'd "crush" them. He was right. We did.*

That started the descent into madness. I eventually became competent enough to do fairly well on my own. I won 9 Los Angeles (Strategicon) events in a row over three years in the mid/late 80's, even winning their first "Gamer of the Year" award (a plaque and a bunch of war games). Those were the salad days. I won the Jim Yerkey-run Avaloncon tournament one year and a Boston Massacre after I moved out to Massachusetts. But, I'm pretty much the quintessential also-ran these days. I've finished second, third, fourth, fifth, etc. at Dipcons. I can win best country awards.

Maybe I'm too nice for this game? (Laughs)

I'm now retired from my first profession (law enforcement—medical retirement) and am a pastor at a medium-sized church in MA. I have seven grandchildren who live within 3 miles of me. Frankly, it doesn't get better than that.

Steve Cooley I know very well. Started out playing postally with him in the 80s, and met him for the first time at the 1989 Dipcon in San Diego. Great guy, great negotiator, great mover of pieces, all round great guy! Also recently won the 2019 Seattle Dipcon, so there's that. He's interestingly one of two Demo Game players who have played basketball at a Dixiecon...

Steve was a noted player in California who's been living in Massachusetts the last several years. The first major con I attended - AvalonCon in Baltimore back in the late '90s - is the one he mentions above. A good ally and strategic thinker.

I know Steve by his reputation, playing a few games with him over the net, commentating on a few games here and he is one of the best Diplomacy players I've

ever seen. He always does well and I always try and take him out immediately in any game because if I don't he will do better than I will. Other than that he seems like a great guy, just don't let him survive or you'll be sorry. His Diplomacy style is a bunch of sharks that haven't eaten in days.

Germany: Dick Martin - *i first got into postal diplomacy upon graduation from high school in 1977, we organized a postal game among our high school group as a way to stay in touch. my memory is a bit vague, but i think i came in as a standby early on, though the game never finished. whether it was due to player indifference or the zeen folding, i don't remember. first real game start was as germany in 1978 in graustark, still just about the best run game i've ever been part of. over the years i've won a few, lost a lot, and met a whole bunch of cool people. by the early 90s i'd run out of steam diplomacy-wise and gone into hibernation, with doug's productions and the abyssinian prince as my sole contacts with dipdom. outside of a handful of ftf tournament games i haven't played diplomacy since then. tried running 1830 by mail for a while but that didn't work as smoothly as i'd hoped, and that fizzled. doug caught me at a vulnerable moment as i was leafing through the huge stack of old zeens i've been meaning to digitize, and so here i am again. can hardly wait to read flap jack's commentary. in the real world: married twice (one great, one horrendous), divorced twice, now happily single; two kids, now in their 20s; still living in maryland; three degrees (two bs, one ms); a 30+ year career in software development that i'm hoping to retire from "soon"; still playing games (pokemon go, civilization iv, league of legends, splendor & assorted other eurogames when we get an in-person quorum); still playing basketball 2-3 times per week; devout washington nationals fan (and less so for the wizards and maryland terps bball). i persistently fantasize about emigrating as the usa sinks further into madness. i hear that panama/costa rica/bali are nice this time of year.*

And here's the other guy who has played basketball at Dixiecon - Dick Martin! Like Brad, Dick is a guy with whom I had a fair amount of contact back in the late 80s/early 90s but not much since then. I remember Dick mostly from the zine (he says zeen, but he's wrong) he published that was basically a big letter column / debating thing involving Hobby politics and real-world politics, called House of Lords. Cannot speak to his playing ability, given the passage of time, but for somebody like me, having folk like Dick and Brad in this game is awesome from a nostalgia point of view.

I know Dick only slightly less than I know Brad, I met Dick while covering the Spanish American War as correspondent for Brad, I was supposed to be

covering high school baseball but took a wrong turn-- Dick was a conscious objector who served as field medic for the Spanish not realizing they were the enemy. Later started his zine in which he was a toady for Steve Jobs plan to take over the world with Apple/Mac product but that didn't work out although it was one of the better-looking zines of the 1980's. His style of Diplomacy play is that of a one-armed man trying to play cymbals.

Do not know Dick Martin.

Italy: *Lance Anderson - I was born on the island of Guam, where my mother was stationed as a pilot (she recently retired at the rank of Colonel). It was on the military base there where I was introduced to Diplomacy, although the gang hadn't fully grasped the rules. I still occasionally revert back to those "house rules" which included being able to convoy using a fleet that moved the same season. I was scouted by NBA teams during my Freshman year at college but a knee injury killed that dream for me, so I stuck it out and earned my degree in Elizabethan Poetry which I don't often get to use in my chosen profession of forklift repair. At 26 years old I am certainly the youngest player in this game, which I plan to use to my advantage as old people forget things and are easily confused.*

Lance had me going for about two seconds, until I realized that probably nothing in this bio is correct. Pretty sure this is the same guy I met at the San Diego Dipcon in '89 and who came to Dixiecon for the WDC in 1990. Long hobby history, and obviously also long on bullshism.

Lance needs to get off my lawn.

I've played in a couple of games with Lance and he's another player who continues to do well despite my advice on how to play Diplomacy. He is well known in Diplomacy circles for his ability to do Edi Birsan imitations as well as bird calls. His Diplomacy style is that of a cute puppy who is actual a wolf and will later grow up to kill you in your sleep.

Russia: *Steve Nicewarner - Look up "One Hit Diplomacy Wonder" in the dictionary and you will find a picture of Steve Nicewarner. Somehow he managed to parlay a 2nd place finish at DixieCon 7 into being the number 2 ranked player in N America for almost a decade. Not wanting to risk his success [he calls it "quitting while you're ahead"], Steve went into semi-retirement.*

When not masquerading as a competent Dip player, Steve lives in Bellevue, WA where he hones his Dip skills by negotiating with his two cats, lovely wife and two kids.

Steve is probably the one I know best of these seven, given that he was a Carolina Amateur Diplomat for many years before moving to Washington State. He also used to own and operate Chapel Hill's game store called Cerebral Hobbies, so obviously he knows a thing or two about a lot of games... Dip may possibly be on that list, not sure. He has played at many Dixiecons, and as he pointed out, did well at...the one.

I see Steve a lot on Facebook but have never played Dip with him to my knowledge. I may well have done so and forgotten. But I know Lance still needs to get off the lawn.

I've known Steve slightly less than Dick or Brad, I met him while delivering pizza to American forces waiting to deploy to France during World War I. Steve was a paratrooper who joined up about 25 years before the first American airborne forces were actual formed and spent his time trying to convince pilots to wear parachutes--which is why he is the great real estate mogul he is today. If you can convince pilots flying in paper machete machines with engines invited by two bicycle repairmen to take along something that lets them jump out of said plane, well you can sell ice to Eskimos. Anyway, we currently spend most of our time on Facebook yelling over each other about politics and bonding over our love of wargames. As far as a Diplomacy player goes, I have no idea although he was a member of David Hood's Chapel Hill Rat Pack so that will likely work against him. Steve Diplomacy style is that of you trying to pick up women after its late and you've had several beers.

Turkey: *Stephen Agar - I discovered postal Diplomacy in 1976, courtesy of Richard Sharp's Dolchstoss. As a teenager I edited Pigmy, Variants & Uncles and even a chat zine called Here We Go Again. University and discovering girls brought all that to an end. In 1991 I started publishing Spring Offensive (probably my most successful zine), and after that The Tangled Web We Weave and then Armistice Day. And there are probably other zines I published that I've forgotten. With the decline of the traditional zine and the passing of Richard Sharp (and others of that generation) my interest waned. But I still have the UK Zine Archive in my garage awaiting my retirement.*

Agar is another fella I only know by reputation, although it is a good one.

Steve's name is very recognizable to long time postal hobbyists, and even to those of us who have mostly lurked in the postal hobby while playing postal bike race games.

Commentator Biographies:

David Hood – I am a civil litigation lawyer and mediator in Hickory, North Carolina. I've been playing Diplomacy since our high school group found the game in 1984. First hobby participation was in 1985, when I used the box flyer to contact Pete Gaughan (I think) about the 1986 Dipcon in Virginia, which five of us from the Carolina Amateur Diplomats attended. There was a lot of postal and tournament Dip after that, including running my own tourney in Chapel Hill since 1987. I've been a big fan of Diplomacy World itself from my first intro in 1986 through today, including a stint as Editor/Publisher from 1992-94. I'm very interested in this Demo Game because it includes some hobby greats from my first years in the hobby - very nostalgic and fun for me. Let's go!

Rick Desper – *first discovered the game of Diplomacy as a freshman in college, where he learned to enjoy local games played either in one sitting or with daily deadlines. He became primarily an email player in the early '90s as the email hobby exploded, when play centered around such things as the Judge Adjudicator for email play, the Diplomatic Pouch webzine, and the development of various ratings systems. Rick particularly enjoyed exploring map variants and was in the habit of playing 10-15 no-press gunboat games online simultaneously.*

OK, I'm tired of this third person crap.

My FTF tournament play started slowly with the Boston-area Diplomatic Incident hosted by Dave Partridge in the mid-90s. The first "real" tournament was AvalonCon in Baltimore in 1997, run by Jim Yerkey, where I first met people like Chris Martin and Tim Richardson. In 1998 many of us met at World Dipcon at DixieCon, which Chris won and where Tim frustrated my shot at a solo as my Austria was stopped at 16 SC. This started the trend toward FTF tournament play, a trend helped by a position I had in Germany for two years, which made it relatively easy to attend WDC in Namur as well as go to my first Manorcon, where I was adopted by Team Sweden.

Stephen Agar is another shark from the UK who wins their version of DipCon every year and should be wiped out immediately as he is a great player. I've never met him but the guy does well in every game I do commentary, he once took an eliminated country and won a tournament...true story. Stephen's Diplomacy style is that of Austin Powers--who wants to shag baby?

(The same Avaloncon Steve Cooley won. And this is the same bio I used last time.)

As the millennium came, I moved to DC and met the Potomac Tea & Knife Society, a local club that started hosting tournaments and which eventually hosted DipCon and World DipCon. My activities started to move almost entirely towards FTF and away from email diplomacy at this point.

For about five years I became a regular tournament traveler, a period that included peaks (winning WBC!) and valleys (last place at Dipcon in Portland!) The last place was parlayed into a spot on the famous/infamous CruiseCon, aka Dipcon at Sea. We only had 14-15 players but the level of play was high and it was much fun, and somehow I convinced Edi Birsan to get behind the idea that I should top the final board and win the tournament. At that point I figured I'd peaked, and subsequent tournament play has reinforced that feeling, as I no longer feel a strong desire to endure the emotional commitment necessary for high level FTF play.

I still stay involved in the Diplomacy community, with occasional local gaming and rare trips to tournaments. I also stay interested in the hobby as an Editorial Board member of Diplomacy World. I am strongly interested in discussions about multi-player game theory and scoring systems, and have become convinced that a few minor tweaks to the game would vastly improve the experience (Bye bye, stalemate lines!) I enjoy providing commentary for Demo games but will badly miss Jim Burgess's presence in the current game.

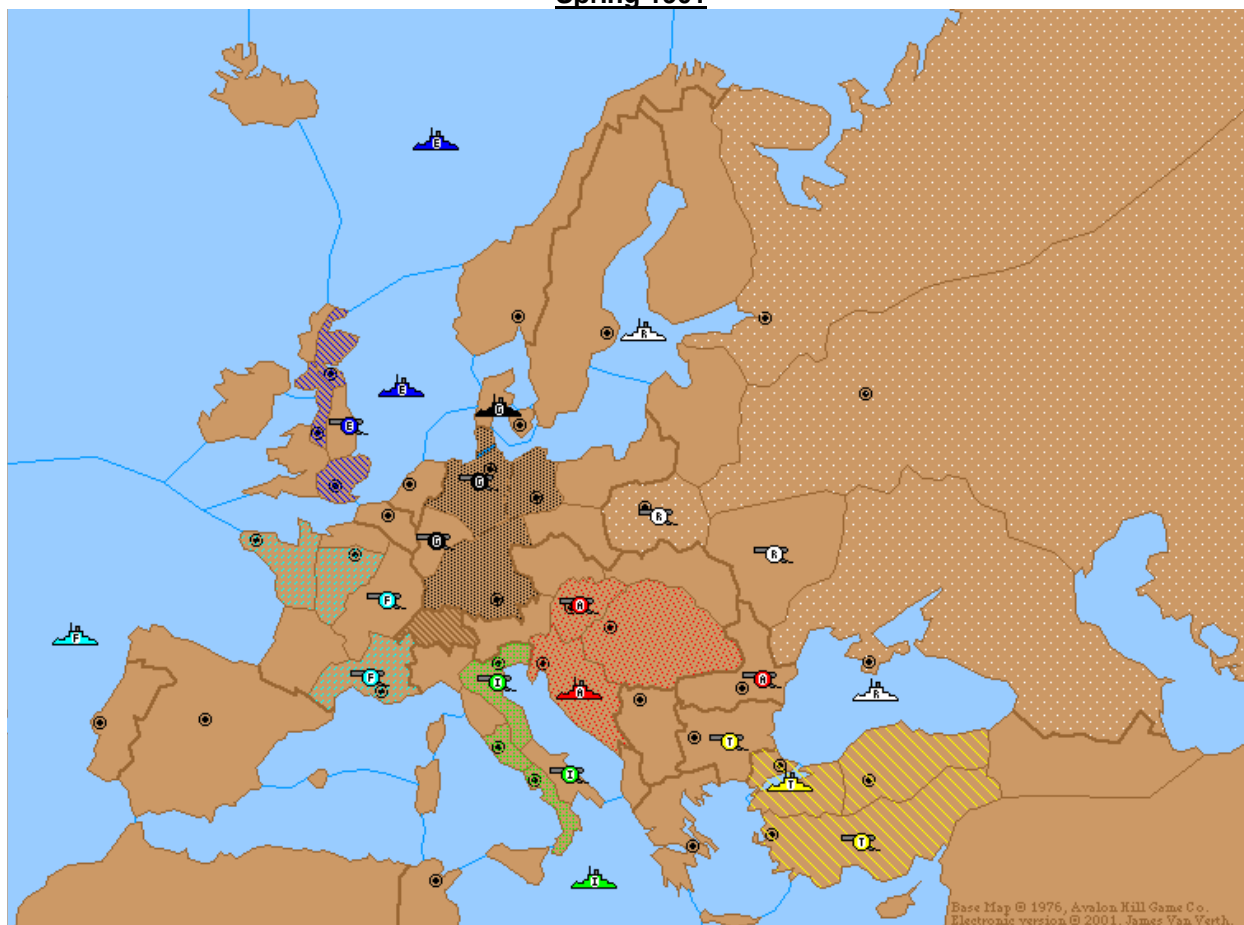
Jack McHugh – *is a well-known raconteur, Diplomacy player and man about town...as well as one of our least liked but most recognized commentators. An infamous player who can easily be bribed with a cheeseburger or a super-size package of Reese's peanut butter cups. He is known for his annoying style of whining, wheedling, and begging to get Belgium in 1901. He*

likes to brag about this since he is usually playing Italy or Austria.

Jack is also a known associate of the editor of Diplomacy World, Douglas Kent--although Doug will

deny this--and has been questioned by the police when large quantities of chocolate or peanut butter or both have gone missing, although to date he has successfully avoided being blamed for any missing food stuffs or supply centers.

Spring 1901



Austria: A Budapest – Rumania, F Trieste - Venice (*Fails*), A Vienna - Galicia (*Bounce*).

England: F Edinburgh - Norwegian Sea, A Liverpool – Yorkshire, F London - North Sea.

France: F Brest - Mid-Atlantic Ocean, A Marseilles Supports A Paris – Burgundy, A Paris - Burgundy.

Germany: A Berlin – Kiel, F Kiel – Denmark, A Munich - Ruhr.

Italy: F Naples - Ionian Sea, A Rome – Apulia, A Venice Hold.

Russia: A Moscow – Ukraine, F Sevastopol - Black Sea, F St Petersburg(sc) - Gulf of Bothnia, A Warsaw - Galicia (*Bounce*).

Turkey: F Ankara – Constantinople, A Constantinople – Bulgaria, A Smyrna Hold.

PRESS

dateline germany: i've created a discord server for this game. access it via <https://discord.gg/yn7vJuc> if you'd like to see (and add) table talk...or whatever. discord is what the cool kids use when they're planning government overthrows or trading kiddie porn, right before they get arrested. please don't fake being one of the players though!

dateline germany: DIAS? be still my beating heart!

Paris - World: Okay, so now that spring is over, I'm hoping some of you will start playing.

Paris - World: Oh, and good luck!

Rome to Vienna: Thank you for not even trying!

dateline germany: ach! i am so old! all i remember is that i must capture tro and hold it or all is lost.

Berlin to Moscow: Beware my armies, your Tsarness! I may not be able to stop them from seizing Moscow.

berlin: who signed me up for this diplomacy world demolition game, anyways?

LONDON to MOSCOW: If you move north, it's all over for you!!! Who am I kidding? It's all over for you anyways!

Zee Pope to Zee Kaiser: Can ye spare Munich for a year or two? Think of it as a kind of indulgence.

Turkish Taffy: Am I not delicious? Eat me!

Vienna — the Empire will be made whole again! Hapsburgs forever!

dateline germany: is it weird that the last non-fff diplomacy game i played involved paper and physical addresses?

berlin: whatever happened to mark lew? he changed my life with his contempt for capitalization...or maybe it was all those years of using unix & linux.

berlin to all my dear neighbors: thank you for not needlessly ruining this game for me!

Constantinople to Vienna and Budapest: Let's have a nice fair game, Archduke. In other words, none of your typical BS.

Budapest to Ankara: Bro, do you even?

Ankara to Budapest: Nah bro, I don't.

A Satisfied Customer: I'll be watching this game to see how long it takes Russia to go down in flames!

AUSTRIA to WORLD: Don't worry, I've got this!

dateline germany: i'm sorry that my old friend larry peery isn't around to offer commentary on the game. i'm sure that after regaling us with tales of cruises taken and operas enjoyed he would have made a remark or two on

the quality of play. maybe. ok, probably not. and to think, i'd just reconnected with him a few months ago telling him how happy i was to see that he was still around doing his thing. and then...well...you know. the world is a lesser place without larry's peeriblah.

Tuscany - Finland: Are you feeling the pressure yet?

dateline germany: if anybody has a copy of House Of Lords #12 (or is it #11, doug?) please contact me! it's the only issue i'm missing. i know it's from the dark ages (or dark days?) but one of you dinosaurs has to have it stashed in the back of a closet somewhere. pretty please? meanwhile i owe doug the scanned versions of retaliation (or whatever it was called that month) that i've had sitting around for years now. maybe by mentioning this in public i can shame myself into producing them. i started digitizing them a while back, after doing HOL. looking at the file dates....over five years ago. have i really had that stack of old zeens sitting by my desk for that long? yikes! at least i have data on how much dust collects on paper over a five year span.

GM – Germany: It's House of Lords #11 that is missing.

berlin: after we finish this dip game can we play 1830? maybe a quick game of titan? last time i was at a con i played titan with phyllis, easily one of the most memorable games i've ever played. but that was...i don't even remember the year. 2009 maybe?

Paris - London: I sure hope you told the truth.

Paris - Berlin: I sure hope you told the truth.

The World to Germany: Put down that Pokemon Go and write some press!

Germany to The World: You're not the boss of me!

On a farm outside of Liege, Belgium: Nicky hated these early mornings. In fact, he'd give just about anything to not have to get up two hours before the Sun rose. But really, who else could do it? Ideally, Nicky would make enough cheese in the next three months to corner the market. Of course, he might have to use some muscle to suppress the production of cheese elsewhere, but you know what they say—all is fair in love, war and cheese.

Spring 1901 Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper
Jack McHugh

Well, the big news in Spring 1901 is probably how Brad Wilson opened as Austria. I'm all for doing unusual openings when playing Austria, and I particularly do like fighting the Russians for Rumania under the right circumstances, but I'm not sure how this opening is going to turn out for the Red Guys given that the Turks are apparently going pro-Russia. The fleet move to Venice was intended, I assume, to prevent Lance from putting two units on Tri/Vie in the Fall, but goodness it sure does limit Brad's Fall options as well.

Good news for Brad that Nicewarner did not open to Sev (not saying he should have, I suspect he thought the Black sea move would bounce) because now Steve cannot force Rum without Brad retreating to Sev.

Of course, Turkey's position is pretty strong here – I assume he will take Greece and Bul both in the fall, although Brad could order to Bul perhaps to block the two builds. Lots of negotiation to ensue here, one would hope, since Serbia is also in the mix. For that matter, Brad could support the Russians into Bul and that might actually work, or he could back out into Serbia and let Steve take Rum. Hard to see the Russian position leading to AR rapprochement, but anything is possible in Dip, particular with these fellas.

The West seems a little more conventional, with France guaranteeing his two Iberian builds and a defensive position in Burgundy, as well as a role in the fate of Belgium. Given the interesting pickle that Russia is in down South (likely no build) I wonder if Dick will bounce Nicewarner out of Sweden, or if he will look for a potential Russian counterweight given the lack of any units in the English Channel after Spring 01. I don't get a vote, but I'd perhaps counsel letting the Russians in - because if there is no EF war, the Sweden bounce does Dick no good at all.

Similar question for Vick's English units – does he go whole hog into the North, putting his fleet into Barents while convoying to Norway, or does he negotiate regarding Belgium or Holland bounce or whatever? Cooley's France would be a reliable ally, or a dangerous foe either one, so Vick may well have some important choices to make here. Given the unusual Austrian move, the Italians are probably not in a position to put any pressure on the French from his side, which would be an argument for Vick to think about working with Cooley against Dick Martin. I bet there are some interesting negotiations going on!

Well I love the Austrian opening, even if it ends up poorly. Looks like negotiations with Russia went poorly, so he's moved to both Rumania and to Galicia. I've heard tale of this opening being used as a variant of a Key Lepanto (Italy orders Ven - Tri - Ser in 1901), but that doesn't appear to be in the

offing, as Brad is paranoid about his back door, and has opened Tri - Ven with his fleet. The immobile Italian A Ven is not amused.

David has covered the diplomatic possibilities on the Black Sea. I agree that this is a promising opening for Turkey (maybe too promising??) - it's very likely he'll take Greece or he could even walk into Serbia, though there is no way to bring a supporting army into Bulgaria.

We should consider the possibility of seeing Bul - Gre, Con - Bul(sc), Bla - Con. If there's a strong R/T, this would get three fleets on the med (presuming a Turkish fleet build) very quickly.

Italy will likely take Tunis, though anything is possible here. This coming move will depend a lot on who trusts whom.

In the west, we see pretty generic openings. All three Western powers do very generic openings. The supported move to Burgundy is considered the default opening in some circles, though it feels a bit over-hostile to me. Does Dick agree? Will he cover Munich? Inquiring minds want to know.

Going from West to East--England and France seem to have a detente if not an entente based on their moves. My guess is Vick is going for Norway his army rather than Belgium. If he does that would suggest a Western Triple in the making, especially if Steve and Dick pick up two builds each.

In the center, the Dick's Germany is going West with both armies doing the conventional moves into Kie and Ruhr. Meanwhile Italy has moved to pick up Tun with either a fleet from Ion or an army convoyed from Apu.

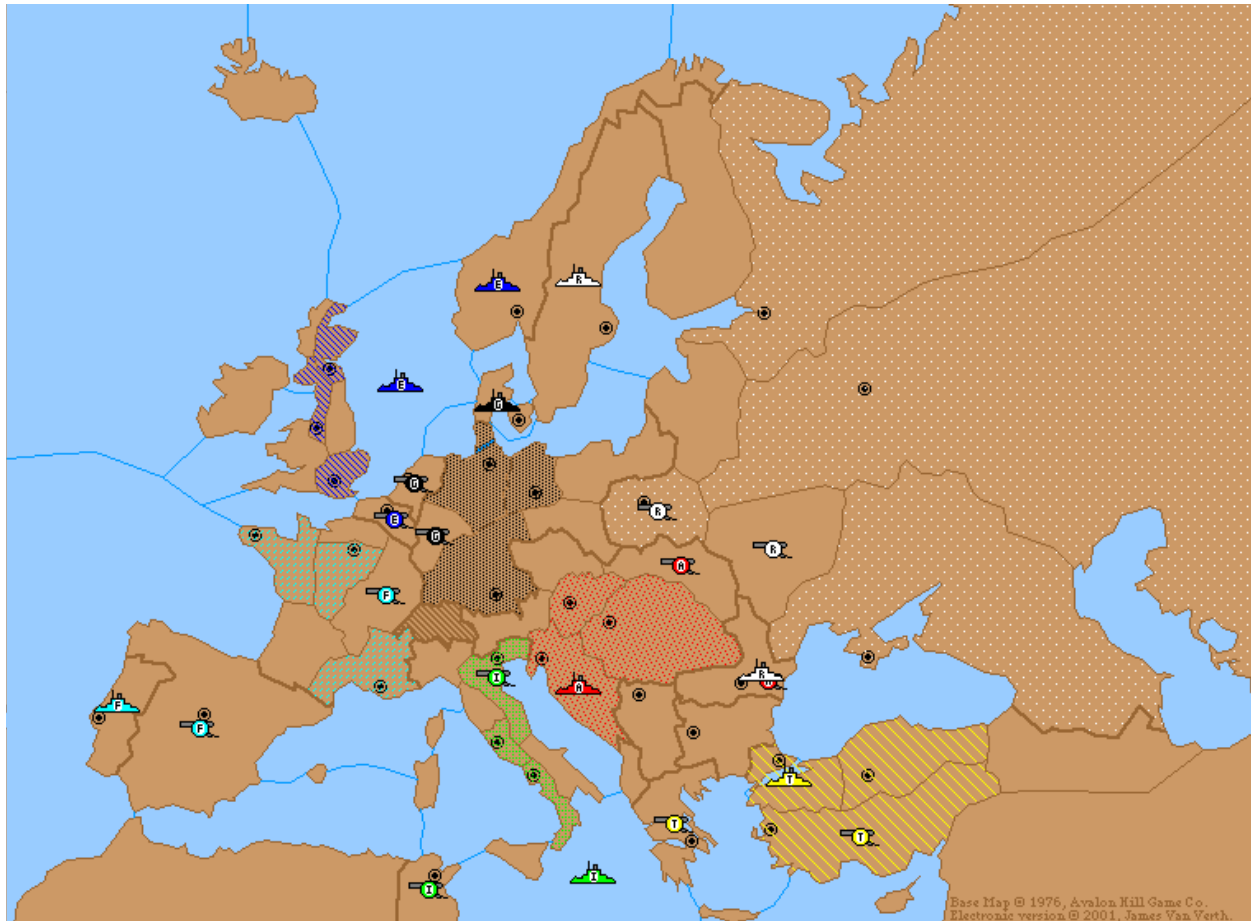
The East, as per the fact that Austria, Russia and Turkey start out brawling quickly over the mass of dots in the Balkans, develops quicker than in the West or the center of Europe. Brad and Dick did bounce over Gal but that is also rather conventional. As was Brad and Lance bouncing over Ven--its easier to just bounce than risk trusting your neighbor because its catastrophic if you're wrong.

Turkey's moves were not so much pro-Russian as not anti-Russian, e.g. Stephen didn't move Smy-Arm and to set up to put two units on Sev but he did move F

Ank-Bla so I'm not sure how thrilled Dick was with that move. A good Russian player will realize that he needs to let Turkey a fair amount of latitude in the early years 1901 to 1903 because if you want a viable

Turkish ally, then he or she needs room to grow and develop out of their opening corner position. This is also a good set up for Tur as no one can stop him from picking up Ser in the Fall.

Fall 1901



Austria: A Rumania—Bulgaria (*Dislodged*, can retreat to Sevastopol or Budapest or Serbia or OTB), F Trieste - Venice (*Fails*), A Vienna - Galicia.

England: F North Sea Convoys A Yorkshire – Belgium, F Norwegian Sea – Norway, A Yorkshire - Belgium.

France: A Burgundy Supports A Yorkshire – Belgium, A Marseilles – Spain, F Mid-Atlantic Ocean - Portugal.

Germany: F Denmark Supports A Kiel - Holland (*Fails*), A Kiel – Holland, A Ruhr - Belgium (*Fails*).

Italy: A Apulia – Tunis, F Ionian Sea Convoys A Apulia – Tunis, A Venice Hold.

Russia: F Black Sea – Rumania, F Gulf of Bothnia – Sweden, A Ukraine Supports F Black Sea – Rumania, A Warsaw Hold.

Turkey: A Bulgaria – Greece, F Constantinople - Bulgaria(sc) (*Bounce*), A Smyrna - Constantinople (*Fails*).

PRESS

Trieste to Venice: I really like you. Really A lot. Maybe we should just hang out for a while, take it slow, and see what happens.

Venice to Trieste: Great idea! I mean what's the worst that can happen? It will take several turns for both of us to get wiped out, right? So, we're cool.

berlin: waiting on one delinquent player? i see seven delinquent players. this is no help at all.

East side to West side: It may not look like we know what we're doing, but we are some of the best players in the world. Trust us . . . or don't, your call. Either way, please don't embarrass us.

dateline berlin: verrrrrry interesting. but stupid.

berlin: i'm told that good players don't cover munich in this situation. thanks for the flattery and enjoy your stay!

On a farm, outside of Liege, Belgium: With his homeland under occupation, many of his countrymen were distraught. Nicky rolled his eyes. Belgians could be so weak. This was not a time for whining or sniveling. It was a time to make cheese—a lot of it. It was time to hire enforcers and shakedown artists. Nicky saw the opportunity to make the big time and he wasn't going to back down.

His first stop: the police station. He hired all the thugs and crooks recently turned out of jobs by the invaders. The police were overpaid hoodlums and Nicky needed their particular skills.

He ran a scenario by these 20 men. He asked them what they would think of working in the local marketplace. They looked at him oddly. Nicky laughed maniacally. "You're going to help me corner the cheese market. We'll start with Liege, but we're going all the way to Smyrna if we have to."

"Where's dat, boss?"

"Oh, you'll find out, Frenchie . You'll find out."

Munich-Burgundy: I'm counting on you to do the right thing.

Sevastopol-Rumania: I'm counting on you to do the right thing.

Holy See to Vienna: Highness, you really jacked this up. Say your prayers infidel!

Paris to London: Thanks for staying out of the French Channel!

Berlin to Paris: Tanks for nothing!

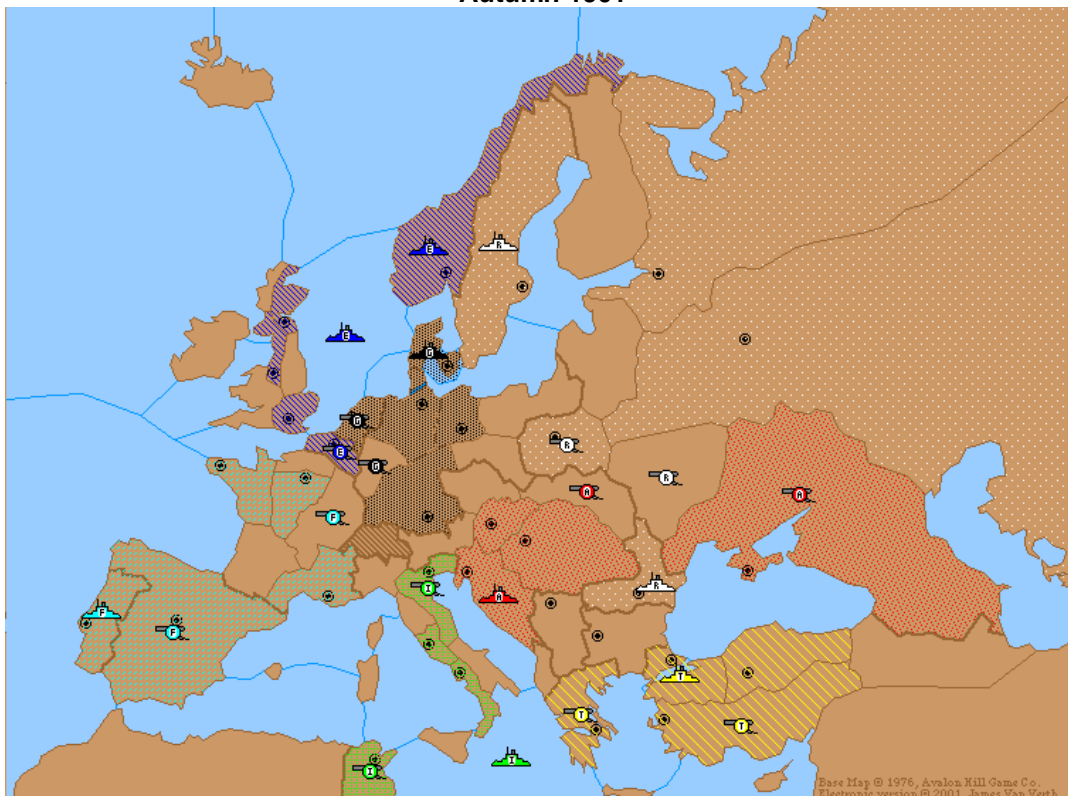
Paris to Rome, Budapest: See you both soon! Oh my! Try not to make it too easy for me!

West side to East side: Don't get too down. I once saw an Eastern Quadruple start like this and sweep the board.

East side to West side: Really?

West side to East side: Yes, but that was one of those "legendary" Maine games, wasn't it?

Autumn 1901



Austria: Ret A Rumania - Sevastopol..Has A Galicia, A Sevastopol, F Trieste.

England: Has A Belgium, F North Sea, F Norway.

France: Has A Burgundy, F Portugal, A Spain.
Germany: Has F Denmark, A Holland, A Ruhr.
Italy: Has F Ionian Sea, A Tunis, A Venice.
Russia: Has F Rumania, F Sweden, A Ukraine, A Warsaw.
Turkey: Has F Constantinople, A Greece, A Smyrna.

Supply Center Chart

Austria:	Budapest, Sevastopol, Trieste, Vienna=4	Build 1
England:	Belgium, Edinburgh, Liverpool, London, Norway=5	Build 2
France:	Brest, Marseilles, Paris, Portugal, Spain=5	Build 2
Germany:	Berlin, Denmark, Holland, Kiel, Munich=5	Build 2
Italy:	Naples, Rome, Tunis, Venice=4	Build 1
Russia:	Moscow, Rumania, St Petersburg, Sweden, Warsaw=5	Build 1
Turkey:	Ankara, Constantinople, Greece, Smyrna=4	Build 1
Unowned:	Bulgaria, Serbia=2	

Fall and Autumn 1901 Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper

Well, starting in the East, it turns out that an RT arrangement was the way to resolve the issue of the Russians being in the Black Sea. Steve apparently wanted to "placate by vacate" even though positionally it might have been a little better to support the army from Ukraine into Rumania, but there are arguments both ways on that I think. Brad did retreat to Sev, which makes sense, and which also gives us an interesting situation for Spring 1902 given that Austria will have three units on Rum (I assume a build in Bud.) The Italian and Turkish moves are not surprising, I don't think. Lance will probably assume he needs to build a fleet to counter potential Turkish advance by sea, even if his relationship with Brad is not great.

In the West, a typical parity situation where each of the three powers got two builds. Dick has let the Russians into Sweden, which I think is a good move for him given the clear signs of EF friendship, ending with the arranged convoy into Belgium. As many writers have pointed out in the past, of course, an English army in Belgium can certainly pivot and threaten the French in this situation. We also have the normal moment of truth coming up here with the French build – presumably there will be at least one fleet build, so do you antagonize the English with F Bre, or the Italians with F Mar? Or perhaps you build both and explain it away to

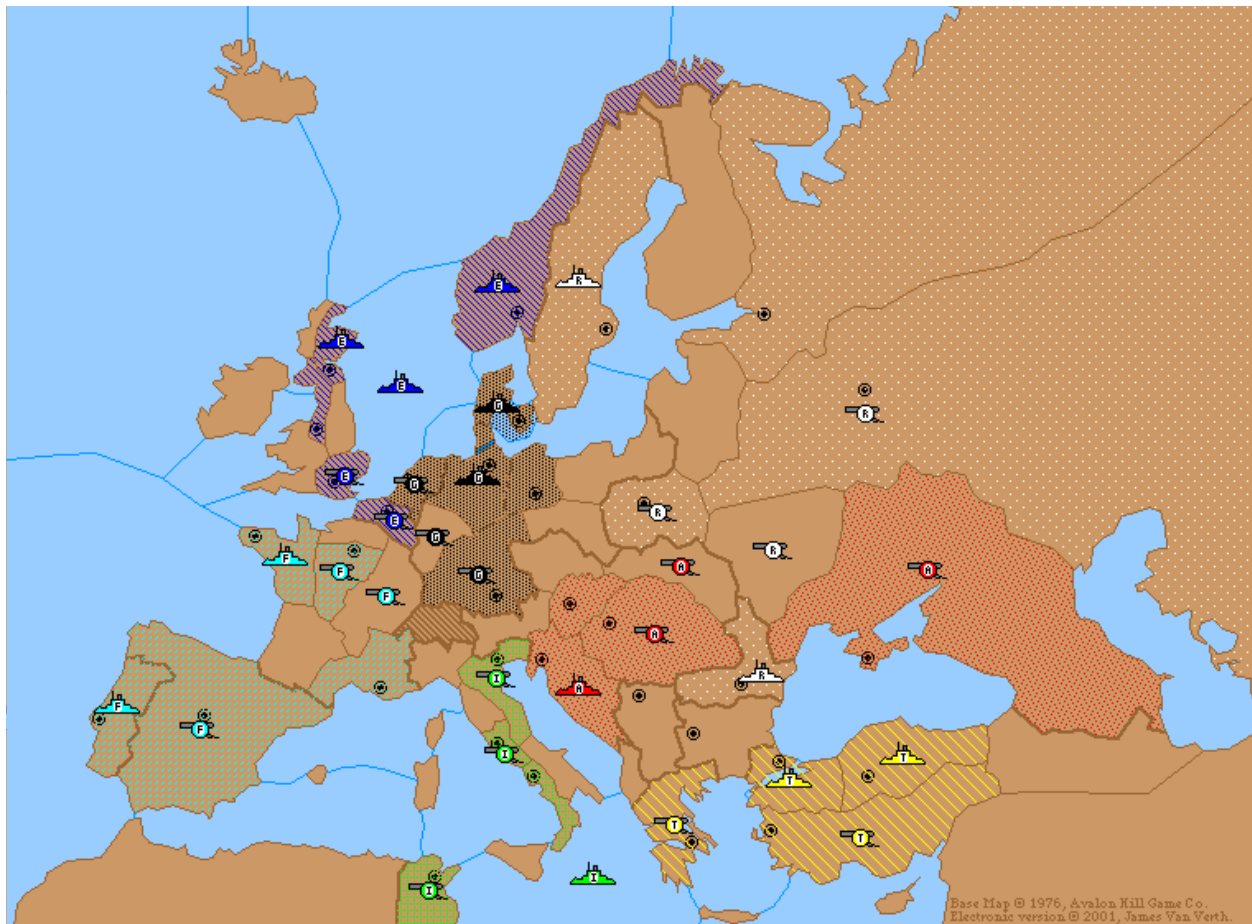
each of them with the argument that building an army here makes less sense and thus there was "no choice" but to build in both coastal home centers? That can be a decent way to cover one's intentions for 1902 as the French.

As far as other builds go, the Russians pretty much have to build A Mos, the Turks have to build something in Ank (yuck, and good move Brad to bounce that guy in Bul) while the Germans are likely to build F Kiel and A Mun. The English build should be interesting though – normally the early English builds are all fleets, to establish sea dominance, but given the possible invasion into Germany, do you build another army? I probably would not (still plenty of territory for fleets to attack) but an army could be a defensible build as well.

I cannot quite figure out the East. Is Brad trying to find any ally? I can see the logic of not letting Turkey get two builds, but he still has a major tactical problem. Somebody has to be his ally or he will never even get Serbia. If there ever was a board crying for an I/T alliance, this is it. Well, we'll see what Steve builds.

Of course, it's entirely possible that the next step of A/R will be Rum – Bla, Sev – Arm.

Winter 1901



Austria: Build A Budapest..Has A Budapest, A Galicia, A Sevastopol, F Trieste.

England: Build A London, Build F Edinburgh..Has A Belgium, F Edinburgh, A London, F North Sea, F Norway.

France: Build F Brest, Build A Paris..Has F Brest, A Burgundy, A Paris, F Portugal, A Spain.

Germany: Build A Munich, Build F Kiel..Has F Denmark, A Holland, F Kiel, A Munich, A Ruhr.

Italy: Build A Rome..Has F Ionian Sea, A Rome, A Tunis, A Venice.

Russia: Build A Moscow..Has A Moscow, F Rumania, F Sweden, A Ukraine, A Warsaw.

Turkey: Build F Ankara.. Has F Ankara, F Constantinople, A Greece, A Smyrna.

PRESS

berlin: ok this is officially the weirdest game i've ever played in. serbia untouched in 01? never, ever seen that happen before. turkey in greece but not bulgaria? ditto. can't recall the last time i saw france support england into belgium either - it must have been years ago. oh wait...i haven't seen any games for years. never mind!

Constantinople; Sultan Ali Baba looked worried. No sooner had he despatched Foreign Minister Ali Noballs (his favourite eunuch) to talk to the King of Bulgaria, then the chap had taken matters into his own hands and ran off with his military attaché to a love nest in Greece. Admiral Hashish hadn't done much better. He'd taken off

in pursuit of Noballs, but confused himself enjoying a smoke while rounding the Hellespont and ended up back where he started. And as for General Al-Arm in Smyrna – was he even awake? This wasn't going well. The Sultan felt sad. The old Archduke hadn't even invited him to the party in Sevastopol, so he was clearly no chum. Who could he turn to? Should he risk the embrace of the Russian bear? Perhaps overtures to the new Italian Prime Minister Eatamore Spaghetti might pay dividends? Perhaps not. He felt alone in the world, with only a harem of thirty four beautiful women and countless riches to give him some small degree of comfort.

Winter 1901 Commentary:

David Hood

Rick Desper

Hard to make predictions for 1902 when I don't have access to negotiations, so let's just discuss the significance of the builds per se.

The English army build at least appears to commit him against Germany. I suspect he is less than enthusiastic about the French fleet build in Brest although that A Lon can stay home and be defensive if needed.

Germany's two builds were almost automatic. Same for the Austrian in Bud and the Russian in Moscow.

The Italian army build is very interesting - yeah, maybe IT has come into being in response to Brad's moves kinda forcing the Turks into building the F Ank (not much choice there either, unless waiver was considered.). IT probably makes sense in this situation anyway, particularly now that the French have not pushed the envelope with a Marseilles fleet.

An interesting question I have about 1902 will be whether anybody moves against Russia, or will leave him alone to deal with those Austrian units.

England has built A Lon, F Edi. A Lon is a good unit for home defense should France get frisky. F Edi is a signal that he's either going after Germany or Russia. The chaos in Russia cannot help but please Vick.

The French builds are flexible: yes, F Bre can go after England, but I honestly think F Bre is a more useful build vs. Italy than F Mar would be. With Italy

building an army, it seems France is in good shape. Very good game so far for Steve.

Germany takes the typical builds of F Kie, A Mun. Now we need to see how his diplomacy is. It seems like an E/F, but there is plenty of room to maneuver here.

Russia had to build A Moscow with the Austrians in Sevastapol. He really needs to find a peaceful resolution with Austria-Hungary. Russia is not a power that can slug it out indefinitely the way some of the corner powers can. Also, he needs to figure out the North.

Turkey is not in bad shape: he can force the Black Sea and the Italian non-build makes the Med side fairly safe. I'll repeat my earlier comment about how this game is crying out for an I/T alliance.

I usually don't like an army build for Italy, but this is calling out for I/T. Italy can order Ven – Tyo, Rom – Ven, Tun – Alb. If Turkey orders Gre – Ser, that will put a lot of pressure on the Austrian southern flank. I expect Turkey to order Smy – Arm to make sure the Austrians don't backdoor him, and fleet moves to Black Sea and Bulgaria will seal things pretty well.

This Austrian situation is nightmarish. Is he really better off in Sevastapol than Serbia would have been? Well, this is a tactical mess. He'd better start sweet-talking somebody or his game will be short.

