

# Diplomacy World #155



**Fall 2021 Issue**

**[www.diplomacyworld.net](http://www.diplomacyworld.net)**

# Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Fall 2021 issue. In some ways it feels like close to a year since the last issue (rather than the normal three months it has been), and in other ways more like three weeks. Still, that's the number one priority I have when it comes to my time as Lead Editor: above all else, get issues out on time, every three months. My theory is that a dependable publication results in more consistent readership, while also encouraging more articles. After all, who wants to submit articles to a publication where they could sit around for nine months before actually seeing them in an issue...if ever?

Like the rest of the world, the Diplomacy hobby is doing its best to survive (and in some cases, thrive) during the continued challenges. Face-to-face Diplomacy events are no exception. The Liberty Cup event, for example, was forced to transition to a virtual tournament as the Delta variant surge has once again made large gatherings less than optimal. Virtual Diplomacy has clearly been a major area of growth during the pandemic.

I think the key now is to find ways to create more crossover play between the virtual and online communities and the face-to-face communities, as well as exerting more energy to tie smaller face-to-face clubs and groups together. Most Diplomacy players are going to have a favorite way to experience the game, a personal preference. But encouraging them to step out of that comfort zone and give some other form of Diplomacy a try can only help expand enjoyment. Plus, the more insulated any particular Diplomacy population is, the more likely they are to develop overall tendencies, foster undesirable things like metagaming/crossgaming, and limit participation. Just as the hobby as a whole needs new blood, so does each segment of the hobby.

By the way, off topic for a moment, if you're reading this issue and you are NOT on the **Diplomacy World** Mailing List already, why not sign up? You'll get a couple of emails every three months: one to remind you of the upcoming submission deadline, and then another to announce when a new issue is released. It's the easiest way to be notified, and will help you ensure you never miss an issue. I don't do anything else with the list, like share it with anyone. It's just there for notification purposes. Join now at:

<http://eepurl.com/dzKKtT>

There hasn't been any movement on the **Diplomacy World** Staff since last issue. In part that's because of some issues I've had to deal with at work (relocating our office twice in two months due to fire damage in the building), which has prevented me from focusing on the task. Still, the facts remain the same. The zine is only as good as the people who contribute, and those who have the most influence (and who generally are the biggest contributors) are the staff members.

Sometimes I feel like saying something like "I can't do this all by myself" but, while that's true, I certainly do **NOT** do this all by myself. During different periods of my two tenures as Lead Editor I've moved back and forth between doing more and doing less personally, but never have I been one of the people writing the best articles, creating the best content. My job is more of a facilitator, and an organizer. The real sweat, and the real brilliance, comes from each person who writes an article, promotes the zine, encourages someone else to contribute...on down to the player who downloads an issue and reads it. That means you. There have been hundreds upon hundreds of names that appeared in these pages through the years, and tens of thousands of readers. I'm just a caretaker, keeping the lights on and trying to maintain the structural soundness of **Diplomacy World** for future hobbyists. But if you'd like to help me succeed in that endeavor, continue to read. Try writing. Get others to do the same. Publicize your events in these pages (during the pandemic there have been very few event flyers in my mailbox, when it's a free way to reach players and promote events). And, of course, if you're interested in one of the vacant staff positions, email me and we can discuss it. If you think someone else would be a good fit, encourage them to contact me.

***I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for Diplomacy World submissions is January 1, 2022.*** 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](mailto:diplomacyworld@yahoo.com)! See you in the winter, and happy stabbing!

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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.

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# Ask the Hobby Historian: The Past is Not Really Past

By David Hood

When referring to the American South in one of his novels, William Faulkner said that the “past is never dead, it’s not even past.” I’d like to take that memorable line completely out of context and talk about how Diplomacy Hobby History is not just about some dead past but instead can tell us something about today. Indeed, some of the issues, concepts, and personalities of the past are not even, frankly, past.

This hit me the other day when I was taping my monthly news program on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network, Deadline, which was just released on YouTube September 10th. In reporting on the top seven finishers from the 2021 EuroDipcon, I was pleased to speak a name I had not seen in a long time, Davide Cleopadre. Davide, an Italian, was one of my earliest international contacts in Diplomacy, as I corresponded with him and read his English-language zine *Compendio Ars Diplomatica* back in the postal days. It occurred to me that he also has a DW connection - so I went to find submissions from him.

Over 28 years ago, in the Spring 1993 issue of *Diplomacy World*, number 70, I published a variant from Davide called Atlantis Time’s Diplomacy. His creation was set in 3010 B.C.E., involving mythical places which have since vanished - so Mu, Iota, Olympia, Selinunte, and Atlantis itself. Five player variants were very popular throughout most of Dip’s history, because the uneven number created diplomatic instability but the less-than-seven number made it more possible to get a game together. Fantastical variants were also popular because so many hobbyists came from sci-fi, fantasy, or history backgrounds - this variant also had secret, one-time special powers for each player like units vanishing from the board to reappear elsewhere, a Fear effect on opposing units, etc.

Putting the variant details aside, it’s just fun to see that folk like Davide Cleopadre can stay involved in the hobby long after they first entered it. Yes, the hobby has changed drastically since 1992, but it’s still a human community surrounding an awesome board game. If you are willing to change with the times, your Dip experience can evolve as the hobby does.

Issue 70 had not yet finished convincing me that the past is not even really past. Longtime Diplomacy zine publisher Andy Lischett wrote an article in that same DW entitled “forgeries.” He had literally faked a letter from one player in his game to another, copying the writing style and paper, and had a friend in the “author’s” hometown send the letter from there (so that the

postmark would be right.) The letter was supposed to be from the author to Andy, saying that the author intended to stab his ally. Then the letter was “mistakenly” mailed to the ally by Andy’s friend. You following this? Yes, in the old days we did a lot of crazy crap, like I mentioned in my Hobby History article in the last DW.

My point is that such chicanery is not really in the past. Another thing that used to happen is “letter-passing” when you would forward an incriminating letter from one player to a third party. In polite Diplomacy society, this was verboten and people who did it would be shunned (though it still happened some.) The idea was that Dip is only fun when the communications really stay secret as between players, like they would normally be in a FTF game. In the Nexus Season Six finals just completed as I write this article, one of the players was sending screenshots of negotiations with one player to one or more third parties. Is that as verboten as letter-passing and other shenanigans were in the past? I dunno, but it’s fascinating that some of these same issues will need to be resolved.

My final *deja vu* observation has to do with playing with the same players over and over in leagues, clubs, tournaments and online. In the past, there were sometimes issues with cliques forming, where newer or “outside” players were on the outside looking in trying to break into familiar or even pre-arranged alliance structures on a particular board. It happened, but when it did, the hobby leaders reacted by denouncing it through gentle persuasion or otherwise. It is a threat to the fun of each individual game, and thus anathema to the growth and development of the hobby.

In a recent edition of the *Diplomacy Briefing* Ed Sullivan suggested that we are back to having a clique problem, at least in recent virtual FTF play. I cannot emphasize how important it is to squish that genie back into the bottle. At least in non-league play, this type of metagaming is not appropriate in my very traditional opinion on how the game should be played, because it’s not really fair to everyone not to keep an open mind during 1901 negotiations. (I don’t even think it should play a role in league games, but we’ll discuss this whole issue more deeply in the panel discussion for the October Deadline broadcast.)

Playing like this is also a serious threat to hobby recruitment. If anything, I would argue, you should err on the other side of the equation - if you do not know a player next to you on the board, that is the person you should try to ally with if you can. Will this sometimes bite

you in the behind? Yes. Is that risk worth it? Yes. I can tell you that when we dealt with this issue in the hobby decades ago, we discovered not only that it did not threaten a good player's prospects overall, it simply made things more fun for everyone.

Now THERE's a goal from the past that is not dead, it should not even be IN the past!

## The Peloponnesian Key

By Mal Arky

I fell into this opening by mistake. I suppose this could be said for much of what I do when it comes to Diplomacy but, as that isn't a good way to start a Dip article, it's probably best to not read this sentence.

I was playing Austria. As usual, someone else was Italy.

We were discussing working together at the start of the game. We wrote a lot (it was on Backstabbr) about the Venice/Trieste border. Neither wanted to cross the River Soča initially, which was nice for me. And we were discussing whether we wanted to work with Turkey (*sorry, no*) or Russia (*better*).

And then Italy broke the rules: "Do you want to try the *Key Lepanto*?"

Now, I'm not a fan of things like: 'When you're playing [insert power name] you should always do/not do [insert advice],' but I think some of this advice is, generally, pretty solid.

One example of a pretty solid piece of generalized advice is: 'Italy should not ask Austria to play the *Key Lepanto*.' Why not? Because Italy sounds like they're looking to slide into Trieste and stay there.

Frankly, if Italy wants to get their hands on Trieste, they're better off looking at Andrew Goff's *Modern Borders* opening (see DW#139: 'The Italian Renaissance'[sic]). At least that's an honest opening!

The *Key Lepanto* is a problem for Austria because it often turns into the imaginatively named *Stab Lepanto*, when Italy sits in Trieste instead of moving A Tri-Ser as promised. In the meantime, in F01, Austria orders F Alb S Ser-Gre, A Ser-Gre and, in the worst of all worlds, Turkey orders A Bul-Ser. Pretty much game over.

For Italy to offer to play the *Key Lepanto*, then, is rude. Italy isn't giving anything up and Austria is laying themselves open. It really **should** be Austria who invites Italy to use the opening.

Still, I went with it... sort of. And Italy seemed to be open to it, too. In the end it didn't happen but, when we were discussing it, I suggested something a little different and, having done a little research, I think I came across an opening which wasn't previously named, so I named it the *Peloponnesian Key*.

### The Key Lepanto

OK, let's wind back a little; I'm making a number of assumptions here, mainly about you knowing what I'm going on about.

The *Key Lepanto* was named after Jeff Key<sup>1</sup>. It is usually categorized as an Italian opening, and I can see why. Austria doesn't usually do something **very** unusual and the main 'action' comes from Italy.

Italy can start with what is commonly called the *Austrian Attack* opening: A Ven-Tri, A Rom-Ven, F Nap-ION. Meanwhile, in the *Key Lepanto* opening, Austria classically opens with F Tri-Alb, A Bud-Rum, A Vie-Gal, the *Warthog* opening.

Now, I've got to admit, I don't **really** see the point of A Bud-Rum. For me, that's just pissing off Russia. Why do that when you're aiming to attack Turkey, not Russia? I know, I know - if you can sell A Bud-Rum to Russia, perhaps in conjunction with allying with Russia against Turkey, then it's fine. But you're combining it with A Vie-Gal, probably assuming a bounce with Russia who is moving A War-Gal.

From an Austrian point of view, it means Russia either gives up on Rumania in preference for moving on a Turkish SC, or that they have then to focus two units on taking Rumania. But unless A Vie-Gal succeeds (which **really** annoys Russia!) Austria only has the hope that Russia will order A Mos-StP in S01. So, if you use the *Warthog* opening, then you're aiming to be able to keep hold of Rumania and get a second build.

The problem is Serbia. Serbia is Austria's only guaranteed gain in 1901 and Austria really shouldn't be giving it up... except for playing the *Key Lepanto*, of course. Even **with** the *Key Lepanto*, A Bud-Ser in S01

is a better option. This is known, somewhat vaguely, as the *Balkan Gambit*. With A Vie-Gal it is the *Galician variation*; with A Vie-Bud, the *Budapest variation*. Say it as it is, I guess.

From what I've seen, the most common version today of Austria's openings as part of the *Key Lepanto* involves A Vie-Ser, which - to me - makes sense. The aim is to get Italy into Serbia in F01 - and out of Trieste!

Another controversial aspect of the *Key Lepanto* is Italy's order of A Rom-Ven. If this happens, with A Ven-Tri, it leaves Austria sweating. It is, simply, just too easy for Italy to stay in Trieste by simply ordering A Tri HOLD, A Ven S Tri HOLD. A more imaginative option is A Tri-Vie, A Ven-Tri: either Austria loses Vienna or Trieste and - if Austria's still sold on the *Key* - possibly both!

So, I've seen a *Key Lepanto* played **without** A Rom-Ven, usually A Rom-Apu. This allows a range of options for Italy's Apulian army and her fleet, although the most common version would be A Apu-Tun, F ION C Apu-Tun. The problem with this is that it's not **selling** an attack on Austria and the *Key* will only really work if Turkey, especially, believes Italy is attacking Austria. Why would they believe that unless Italy has ordered A Rom-Ven?

This is ideally illustrated by my (Austria's) correspondence with Turkey in this game. Turkey was a minimal communicator; I can't remember them ever sending more than a one sentence message, when they sent anything at all. One message was simply: "I always expect a *Lepanto*." This probably isn't common, and perhaps the better word would be "suspect" to generalize a Turkish attitude, but it shows that a decent enough player will be at least considering the option.

So, perhaps the more usual orders to begin a *Key Lepanto* are:

**Austria:** F Tri-Alb, A Bud-Ser, A Vie-Bud

**Italy:** F Nap-ION, A Rom-Ven, A Ven-Tri

In Fall 1901, you'll then see:

**Austria:** F Alb S Ser-Gre, A Ser-Gre, A Bud S Tri-Ser

**Italy:** F Nap-Tun/AEG, A Ven-Apu/HOLD, A Tri-Ser

This gives Austria Greece and a build, and Italy gains Serbia and either also gains Tunis (and two builds) or gets an advanced position against Turkey with the fleet in the Aegean Sea.

There are, as you can see, a number variations to this and, frankly, while you can probably 'variation' name

them all, there's no particular reason to do so - the aim is the same: get maximum pressure on Turkey.

### **The Peloponnesian Key**

As it happened, this **didn't** happen in this game. Italy wanted me to order A Bud-Rum and A Vie-Bud. I was more interested in honoring the deal with Russia by ordering A Vie-Gal while they ordered A War-Gal, and I wouldn't have ordered A Bud-Rum anyway. I wanted Russia onside, not wary. So, the *Key Lepanto* never actually happened. But, while I was discussing this with the back-and-forth Italy, I came up with a variation for which I blame Toby Harris, frankly.

Toby, following becoming World Champion in 1915, wrote a series of articles in *The Diplomatic Pouch*. His first article, 'Austria for Experts' (TDP F1915M)<sup>[2]</sup>, mentioned how important Albania is to Austria. Briefly, he advised Austria should get an army into Albania and keep it there.

Now, I wouldn't say this is ideal in **every** game, personally, but in the context of Toby's writing it makes sense. If Austria can achieve this, then the west Balkans - Albania, Greece and Serbia - are strongly defended and the possibility is that the whole of the Balkans can become Austro-Hungarian. In an ideal world, Austria is on seven SCs and, in the context of a tournament game, that's a decent enough result. As a springboard to the win it'll do, too!

My intention in this game, then, was to try this out. My aim was to play a different variation of the *Key Lepanto* that I decided to name the *Peloponnesian Key*, so named because it is a fleet that moves to Greece and, in my imagination, is on the Peloponnesian peninsula in southern Greece (the bit that looks like a cartoon hand).

Here are the moves:

#### **SPRING 1901**

**Austria:** F Tri-Alb, A Bud-Ser, A Vie-Bud

**Italy:** A Ven-Tri, A Rom-Ven, F Nap-ION

#### **FALL 1901**

**Austria:** F Alb-Gre, A Ser-Alb, A Bud S Tri-Ser

**Italy:** A Tri-Ser, A Ven-Apu, F ION-AEG/Tun OR S Alb-Gre

The position isn't much different with the only change being that Austria has a fleet in Greece rather than an army. This gives Austria/Italy an advantage for a

maritime attack on Turkey, which is ideal if Italy has her fleet in the Aegean.

Very often, the Austrian fleet is almost an after-thought. It gets into Albania and, from there, unless there's a *Lepanto* of some kind in play, it has to play the role of managing the Ionian Sea or attacking/defending Greece. This isn't to say it is useless, but it is a less offensive role. Assuming Italy doesn't simply let it into the Ionian, it needs to wait until 1902/3 before it can get anywhere more useful.

With the fleet in Greece, it can take part in a 3-unit attack on Bulgaria, with the Italian fleet moving there, supporting A Ser-Bul, or cutting support from a Turkish unit in Constantinople. More importantly, perhaps, it can maintain Italy's control of the Ionian or support an attack on the Aegean Sea.

In the meantime, Austria has that army in Albania Toby Harris is so keen on. That army borders Trieste, Serbia and Greece: ideal for defense, useful to attack. There's no need to wait until S02, following Austria building an army in Trieste, with a move of A Tri-Alb. Assuming Italy's continued alliance, Austria can focus on defending against Russia and attacking Turkey.

Is it a good opening? Well, as with any version of the *Key Lepanto*, Italy commonly stays in Trieste (or otherwise stabs Austria). Austria has no defense against this: even if you get a sniff that this is going to happen, and force the Italian army out of Trieste, the chances are you can't defend all your home SCs or that you're not going to get a Balkan SC; either way, you stick to three units at best.

Is it better than a successful *Key Lepanto*? Well, I think the fleet in Greece is potentially more useful than an army. I know an army in Greece has just as much impact on an attack on Bulgaria as a fleet does, but, if Italy has taken Tunis or moved to the Eastern Mediterranean in F01, that fleet can help a second Italian fleet into the Ionian and then the Aegean. An army can't do that!

The main advantage, if you buy into it, is having the Austrian army in Albania by F01. Probably only a turn earlier than otherwise but it means Austria doesn't have to build an army in Trieste. Tempo.

An alternative I haven't mentioned so far is the *Kendall Key*. This version of the *Key Lepanto* has the following orders:

#### **SPRING 1901**

**Austria:** F Tri-Alb, A Bud-Ser, A Vie-Bud

**Italy:** A Ven-Tri, A Rom-Ven/Apu, F Nap-ION

#### **FALL 1901**

**Austria:** A Bud S Ser-Rum, A Ser-Rum, F Alb-Gre or S ION-Gre or S Apu-Gre

**Italy:** A Tri-Ser, F ION-Gre or S Alb-Gre or C Apu-Gre, A Ven-Apu OR A Apu-Gre/HOLD

To be honest, I can't remember seeing this opening played out or even discussed so I'm a little vague on the *Kendall Key*. But that, in itself, tells you it probably isn't the **best** version of the *Key Lepanto*.

Does the *Peloponnesian Key* work? I don't know. Theoretically, it should - there's not **that** much difference to the *Key Lepanto* to make it a total failure. Does it work **better** than a *Key Lepanto*? Again, I don't know... we never actually played it out.

Disappointingly, I only played one more turn in this game and Italy's communication level dropped off in S02, meaning I felt I had to take some actions to defend against an Italian attack. At the start of F02 I broke my ankle, spent six days in hospital, and dropped from the game.<sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] Go to <http://uk.diplom.org/pouch/Online/Opening/interactive.htm> and select ITALY and LEPANTO, KEY VARIATION in the dropdown menus.

[2] <http://uk.diplom.org/pouch/Zine/F2015M/Harris/austria.htm>

[3] <https://diplomaticon.com/2021/08/15/whatever-happened-to-my-backstabbr-game/>

## 2022 Cascadia Open



**Dates:** 29-30 January 2022

Three rounds – two on Saturday and one on Sunday. Exact timings TBD

**Venue:** Holiday Inn Express, 15808 104 Ave, Surrey, BC V4N 5L2 (that's in the Greater Vancouver area)

**TD:** Chris Brand

**Contact:** [Cascadia.open@gmail.com](mailto:Cascadia.open@gmail.com)

**Cost:** \$30

The small print: The plan is to have a face-to-face tournament, as in days gone. Obviously, this is dependent on the COVID situation, and on any restrictions that may be imposed by government. So do please book those plane tickets, but be aware that we may be forced to cancel. You will need to be fully vaccinated and you may have to wear a mask while playing (that will be determined closer to the date).

The hotel is a short Uber ride from Guildford Town Centre, where there are plenty of options for food. It's about an hour from downtown Vancouver by public transit. Alcohol will be allowed in the space that we have dedicated our use. As usual, we should be able to sort out rides from YVR. There will likely be an informal get-together on the Friday evening to give everyone an opportunity to size up the opposition.



# A Foreword of Sorts to The Art of the Stab

By R. Jamie Langa

One of the episodes of the second season of the Netflix series *Love, Death + Robots* is based on a short story by Harlan Ellison, "Life Hutch". There's a bit in the text that didn't make it into the animated film. You see, the narrator, when he susses out how to defeat his nemesis, wonders if a dumber man would have figured it out sooner than he did.



The Art of the Stab

Okay, keep that in mind for a little while. Douglas Kent asked me for a brief article about a novel I wrote and which came out a bit more than a month ago, *The Art of the Stab*. Now, you may have caught [the interview I did with David Hood](#) for the August 2021 edition of *Deadline News*. Or [FloridaMan Diplomacy's review](#).

If not, I'll give you a quick synopsis: it's a story about a game of Diplomacy played by seven recent high school graduates, told in the form of an oral history comprised of interviews with the players a few months later.

Now, if you watched one, or both, you have my and David's and/or FloridaMan's reasons as to why we think you'll enjoy it as a Diplomacy player. For this article, which Douglas graciously allowed me to pen myself, I wanted to give you the reason why *I* wanted *you* to read

the book. I mean, besides the money. I'll need people to buy another ninety or so copies of the paperback for me to break even, so if you haven't yet bought one, get cracking.

That other reason? Well, I'm curious when people managed to figure out the ultimate resolution of the game, if they did indeed guess at it before the end.

The book is a mystery with a throughline that starts with a quote from Jeremy Bentham's *The Theory of Legislation* and carries through to the final pages, and there are puzzles embedded in that mystery. FloridaMan likened my novel to *The Breakfast Club*, a reference that hopefully most of you will understand, in that it is, in part, a character study with various American high school archetypes. And there are aspects of some of these characters that are hinted at throughout and revealed at various points in the story.

Those are some of the puzzles. The game itself is another one, and as you might think, even without having read the book, it is the lynchpin of the novel. Now, obviously the gameplay had to be subordinate to the plot, and to that end, when I planned out the moves in advance, I threw in some misorders and flubs that skilled players would be unlikely to make in order to obtain the boards I needed. So, given that, I want to know: when did you figure out how the game would end, and what was the tipoff?

Remember that bit in the first paragraph? About the narrator wondering if a dumber man would've gotten to the solution sooner? My other question is similar to that: I want to know if Diplomacy players who read my book figured it out faster than those readers who haven't played the game all that much, if ever.

Because I'm actually thinking their very lack of experience might give them an advantage here.

***[[If you'd like to check out *The Art of the Stab*, it's as simple as marching over to Amazon by way of this link. Remember to post a review if you read it – reviews are the lifeblood of the independent author – and send a letter in here to Diplomacy World! [https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0578949512/ref=dbs\\_a\\_def\\_rwt\\_hsch\\_vapi\\_tpbk\\_p1\\_i0](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0578949512/ref=dbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_tpbk_p1_i0)]]***

# 22 Military Strategy Tips for Diplomacy

By Lewis Pulsipher

(This is adapted from a video I made about military strategy in general, in order to address *Diplomacy* specifically.)

Strategic thinking (in military terms) is nearly a lost art among younger adult game players. That's my experience from many years of having my game designs tested at college game clubs. Many young adults, when they play a game that requires (military) strategic thinking for success, fail pretty dismally. Strategic thinking in this sense is probably something that needs to be learned, like most of the various kinds of thinking. And usually, they haven't had much chance to learn it (it is **not** taught by video games).

I am going to provide tips for military style strategy in *Diplomacy*, but many of the tips apply to other military and some nonmilitary games as well. If something involves maneuver or placement, and geospatial relationships, and involves taking or destroying assets of other players, then it's military strategy or tactics. It doesn't necessarily have to be a game that is supposed to represent warfare, but it probably is.

Keep in mind, commercial conflict games don't have a lot to do with warfare, and often don't even have much to do with generalship. You're not killing people; you're manipulating assets within a set of constraints. Don't confuse attacking in a game with killing - they very rarely have much to do with one another. Games are separate from the real world. Yet real-world strategy best practices can be reflected in games.

Strategy is what you do long before the battles take place, and tactics is what you do in and during a battle. I'm not going to differentiate between those two as we talk about the various tips because it's not necessary in this context.

The essence of strategic thinking is to think long-term rather than short-term. Modern life encourages short-term thinking, particularly aided by smartphones. Planning is less necessary when you can (usually) rely on your cell/smartphone to bail you out. Googling/Wikipedia is another bailout route. You won't succeed that way in conflict games.

Part of strategic thinking is to recognize which relationships are most important, which least important, and so on. The number of relationships is not what counts.

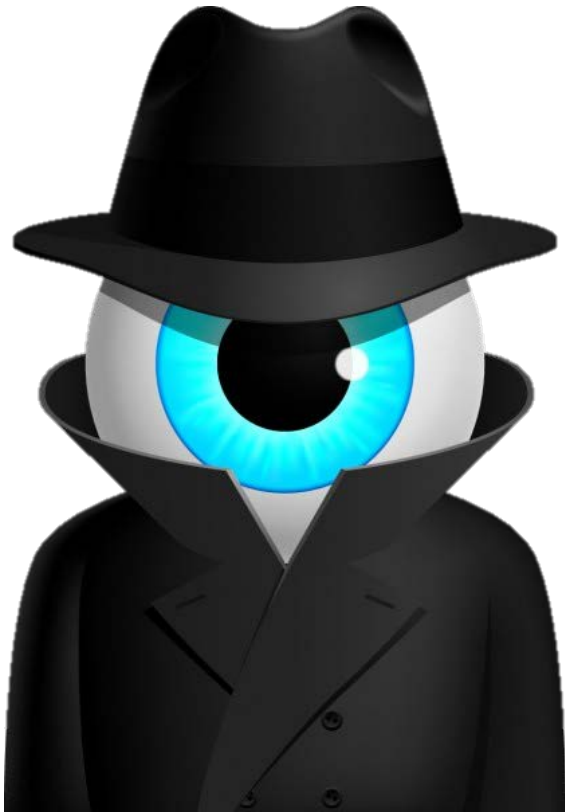
I should add when we talk about strategy in games, there's a strong supposition that the player wants to win. But lots of people don't care about winning when they play games, especially video game players. Some of the video hard-core, and certainly the casual players, want the "experience" first, whatever that is for them, and winning is somewhere between secondary and irrelevant. Of course, you can't actually lose a typical single player video game, nor a pure puzzle. Instead, persistence is rewarded. Persistence is not rewarded in military strategy games (as opposed to puzzles).

Here is a list of 22 tips in no particular order. 22 is an arbitrary number, some of these could be combined together, or split apart. I'll go through each below.

- **See the Whole Game**
- **Reconnaissance (Intelligence)**
- **Fair Fights are for Suckers**
- **Know When not to Fight**
- **Plans are Subject to Change, but you have to plan**
- **Never Fight for the Sake of Fighting**
- **He who lives by chance, dies by chance**
- **Combined Arms**
- **Be sure every unit is doing something useful**
- **A Strategy must have a definite goal/What's the real objective**
- **War is an Art, not doable by Rote**
- **Conservation of Forces**
- **Sun Tzu Style**
- **Strategy is not only about making choices, it is about creating choices**
- **Limits to Attack**
- **You don't have to hold everything everywhere**
- **"Don't Waste Your Shot"**
- **Overwhelm When You Attack**
- **Do something because it's useful, not because you CAN**
- **"When it gets to your turn you want to make an impact"**
- **You're not here for Adrenaline**
- **Patience**

The first one is **see the whole game**. This is especially important in a seven-player game such as *Diplomacy*. You have to see the whole game, that is, you have to not only pay attention to what's happening to you, but what's happening to everyone. And not only what's happening now, but what's going to happen, what you want to happen, five game-years from now or three hours from

now. Whatever it is, you've got to have in your mind what you want to happen. It may not happen that way, but you've got to have some sort of plan. (We'll talk about planning later.) Unfortunately, most people, especially in the "Age of Instant Gratification," focus too much on what's immediately affecting them. In games, and life, that tends to result in unnecessary losses. *You must learn to take the whole game into account from start to finish, not just what's happening to you right now.*



**Reconnaissance/Gathering Intelligence.** In *Diplomacy* there's no **military** reconnaissance, but a lot of **diplomatic** "reconnaissance". "Time spent in recce is never wasted" - said by a Belgian military instructor to Americans with a strong British accent. That's not entirely true, your recon can give away information to the enemy, but in general, *the more you know about enemy arrangements the better*. So, this could be expanded to "effort spent gathering intelligence is never wasted." Yet you must avoid letting it become an excuse for inaction, because that's what occasionally happens. People keep gathering intelligence because they're not sure what to do and it ends up causing inaction, leaving initiative to the enemy.

**Fair fights are for suckers.** John Steinbeck and likely many others have said, if you find yourself in a fair fight your tactics suck. War is not sport, the objective is to "crush my enemies, and see them driven before me," as Conan the Barbarian said in the movie. Ideally, you put

your enemy in a position where they know their cause is hopeless and they surrender (and join you!?), but if they don't surrender, you can crush them easily.

A great skill of military strategy and tactics is **knowing when not to fight**. Fighting when you don't have to is usually a waste. Fighting when it's not advantageous to you is a bad idea, obviously. You're not there to be heroic (remember, "a foolhardy act is a brave act which fails"), you're there to win.

**Plans are subject to change, but you have to plan.** Some people are not good at (military) strategy games because they deviate from their plan "because they can" even though they shouldn't. On the other hand, while planning is important, no plan survives first contact with the enemy, you must *adjust your plans to reality* as the game progresses. If you don't like to plan, you're in more and more trouble as you move upscale from tactical to strategic to a grand strategic game such as *Diplomacy*. If you don't like to plan, then you're just "fighting fires," and that's not a reliable way to win a game. You want to be in *control* of what happens as much as possible, not let the enemy cause all these fires that you're fighting. Further, "a plan of many branches always bears fruit." When one option is blocked, you can choose another.

**Never fight for the sake of fighting.** Have a reason to fight *other than* possibly killing an enemy. Killing enemies is rarely the actual objective. The best generals convince the enemy to give up, though there are limited opportunities for that in games because there's no fear of death. Because *Diplomacy* is a zero-sum game (you can only gain by taking from someone else) it's probably easier to see the real objective than in many other games.

**He who lives by chance, dies by chance.** There is sometimes guessing involved in *Diplomacy*, though not actual "RNG" (Random Number Generator). Relying on guessing is a big mistake that a great many players make. It's impossible to *always* avoid resorting to guessing in real warfare, and is impossible in most games, but you can recognize that the more often you guess the more often you'll fail, regardless of the odds. I try not to rely on guessing to "save my bacon."

**Combined arms.** When units of different capabilities combine their efforts, they are stronger than the sum of their parts. That's combined arms. For example, tanks are better when accompanied by infantry, infantry are better when accompanied by tanks. They're better than the sum of their parts. Artillery needs to be protected by other types of units. Airpower combines with land units, sea power combines with airpower, and so forth.

In *Diplomacy* there isn't much unit differentiation, but we can still see how fleets and armies can combine to

achieve effects that neither could achieve alone. Don't forget the Convoy order!

**Be sure every unit is doing something useful.** Often, I see players leaving units sitting around to no purpose: not guarding something that needs guarding, not threatening something worth threatening, not providing a reserve, they're just not doing anything useful. Don't do that. Ask yourself, *why is this unit/asset doing this?* If you can't answer that satisfactorily, have it do something else.

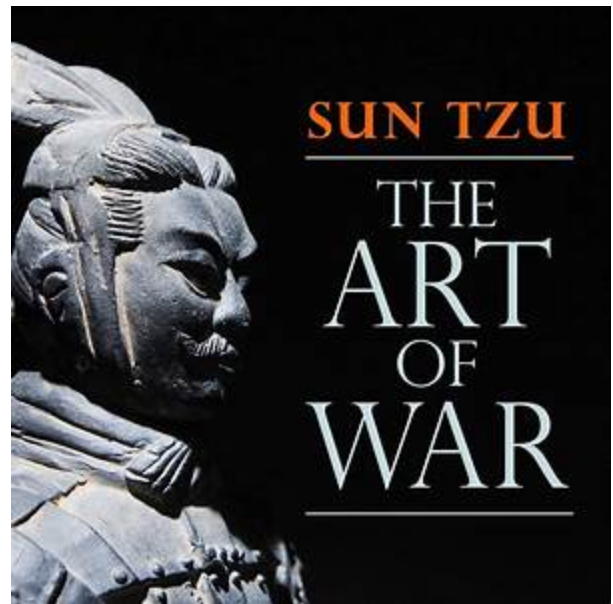
**A strategy must have a definite goal** that contributes to winning. **What's the real objective?** One of my *Duel Britannia* playtesters said "my daughter likes *Duel Britannia*, but she's 11 and her strategies are somewhat random like 'I want my Saxons to take over the Orkney Islands.'" (The Saxons are along the southern coast of Britain and the Orkney Islands are as far north as you can go.)

There can be intermediate goals that help you arrive at your ultimate goal, and it's acceptable to have those as your short-term goals. But *always keep in mind the real objective.*

**War is not doable by rote.** Quotations from famous generals: Ulysses S Grant: "*If men make war in slavish obedience to rules, they will fail.*" George Patton Jr.: "*War is an art and as such is not susceptible of explanation by fixed formula.*" So many people want to do things by rote, just following rules. That may be a failure of K-12 education and even college education now, but it can't be done effectively in warfare and can't be done in good games that depict warfare or generalship. THINK.

**Conservation of forces.** If the enemy is ineffective, why fight them and lose your own assets? I play an old video game called *Empire Deluxe Enhanced Edition*. If I'm having problems, if I'm outnumbered by the enemy, which often happens because I tend to switch sides and take over the weakest side, then sometimes I just hide in cities where, given the way the computer opponent plays, the enemy can't do much to me. Don't attack for the sake of attacking, you may be wasting your forces.

In a four-player wargame, a player was trying to persuade somebody not to attack him. He said "do you know who wins at even odds? - everybody else." You recall I said a fair fight is for suckers, and that's especially when there are more than two sides. **Do something because it's useful, not because you can,** "useful" meaning getting toward your goals. If you haven't figured out what your goals are then you've got big problems.



**Sun Tzu style.** Make the enemy make choices they don't want to make. Put them "on the horns of a dilemma." Retain **your** freedom of action. "The art of war is in the last result, the art of keeping one's freedom of action," which comes from Xenophon, a Greek historian who was involved in the March of the 10,000, advice that could just as easily come from Sun Tzu. In general, don't paint yourself into the corner. By the way, the famous *Art of War* is a short book, more philosophy than directly about warfare. I don't recommend that gamers read it (I have), but it is interesting in a philosophical way.

**"Strategy is not only about making choices, it is about creating choices."** This is another perspective on keeping your freedom of action. It's often difficult to make the best choice, but it's better to have a choice, than not have a choice.

There are **limits to your attacking**. In the real world you can't attack everywhere you want, even if you have units available, because you won't have sufficient supplies at the same time for all those attacks. Supplies are very important in a war, very important in strategy, not so much in tactics. In *Diplomacy* we don't have logistics/supplies, but we do have a limited number of units. Don't try to attack everywhere.

**You don't have to hold everything everywhere.** Especially if you're Russian! I say that because the Russians succeeded, against Napoleon in 1812 and against Hitler in World War II, by pulling back, and back, and back. In general, *there may be more important things to do than holding all of your territory/assets.* Those who refuse to retreat, may be choosing to die.

**Don't waste your shot.** I am paraphrasing Barbosa from *Pirates of the Caribbean*. (Captain Jack Sparrow

had only one shot.) This is another way of talking about force conservation. This is about your big effort. Your big attack. Make sure you're attacking a *vital* place or enemy formation or you'll waste your shot.

**Overwhelm When You Attack.** This especially applies to games (like *Diplomacy*) with shifting alliances. You need to take your opponent out of the game (for practical purposes) when you attack. Don't attack just because you can pick up a substantial gain, if you leave the enemy able to counterattack - because there's a good chance that he or she *will* counterattack.

**When it gets to my turn I want to make an impact.** That's perhaps a common attitude of some players, but isn't going to serve well if you play games that have deep gameplay. Desire to always do something to make an impact can lead to activity that is detrimental to success. (Assuming you want to succeed, some don't care as long as they get adrenaline surges.) "*Patience, grasshopper*" is an important phrase when playing games well.

Compare with the desire to throw the dice in *craps*. This is understandable, but the odds are against the shooter, so you shouldn't throw the dice, instead bet against the shooter. Don't worry about making an impact, worry about what will maximize your minimum gain or make it more likely that you succeed. Sometimes in games it's better to not do something.

To continue with that, you're not here for the rush - if you want to win. Some game players, not the really good ones in terms of winning, routinely make risky choices in a game because they **want the rush of adrenaline**. This is related to the gambling instinct that is much stronger in some people than others, and we know that most gamblers lose money, that many lose a **lot** of

money in the long run, but they keep gambling anyway.

Finally, we come back to **patience**, especially in higher game scales. As you go from individual to tactical, to strategic, to grand strategic you have less need to immediately react to every opposing move. A large proportion of good play depends on good timing. You can **control** your timing. If you can't be patient, that means you are losing control.

Now again, that's not the way some people want to play, but if so, they're probably not going to be good at military strategy. We'll quote Sun Tzu: "victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win." I think this refers to the fact that war is long-term and often economic, often something where you prepare ahead and **cannot make victory certain**, but make it a lot easier to win because you've done the better preparation.

"Never surrender" sounds good, but only makes sense when you cannot "retreat and live to fight another day". The whole phrase from the movie (*Galaxy Quest*) is "never give up, never surrender". Never surrender doesn't mean fight to the death, it means to keep on fighting and don't give up. Remember those games where a one-center Power came back to win or draw. . .

There's a lot to absorb here. Being good at strategy is not for people who don't want to think. Being good at military strategy games isn't something to be learned in a short time. There are dimensions of space, of time, of capabilities, of intentions. Some people think you can learn to do something well without actually doing it. No, experience counts, especially here. But you must want to be good at this kind of game, and I suspect nowadays many people don't really care.

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## Dipcon is Important, So Get to Carnage 2021!

By David Hood

Although the Diplomacy hobby has been around a long time, with organized games being played postally since 1964, there are actually not that many hobby traditions still going after all that time. Technological and cultural changes have relegated many of the hobby's past institutions and offices into the dustbin of history (as I reported several issues ago in *DW*) while raising up others. Where we once had Boardman numbers for each game handed out by a custodian with game results published in print for all to see, now we have links to completed games on Backstabbr and other sites as well as statistics breaking down thousands of results. Where we once had only *DW* Demo Game commentary from experienced hobbyists to help teach the game to

newcomers, now we have in-depth YouTube analysis of every Diplomacy tournament and league on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network.

One thing we do still have, though, as we did in the old days - Dipcon. The North American Diplomacy Championship (or Convention, for those who want to argue about this) has been a mainstay of the hobby since 1967, giving players from hither to yon the opportunity to meet each other and thus to forge the relationships which sustain a strong Diplomacy community. Although Covid prevented a 2020 Dipcon, the thing is roaring back for 2021 - to be held in

conjunction with the Carnage tournament run by Dave Maletksy in Mt Snow, VT on November 5-7.

Alright now Hood, says you. What's the big deal? We have the DBN Invitational now, on YouTube. We have the World Dipcon (or will, when it returns in 2022, also to Carnage.) We will soon have the Virtual Diplomacy Championship this December. So why does Dipcon matter?

I hate to break it to you, but hobby growth and development depends not on players or individual games or even Diplomacy events per se. It requires human relationships. Strengthen connections between Diplomacy volunteers, and you strengthen the overall hobby. The best way to forge these needed relationships - face to face meeting between folk from all parts of North America. I'm not saying this is the only opportunity, this can certainly happen at WDC when it is located in North America, at regional events, and in other ways, but Dipcon has been performing this function for many decades now with much success. I'm also not saying that international contacts outside North America are not important, surely, but it's true that hobby health starts at home. Each local hobby needs a Dipcon or something like it - one particular event each year that everyone in that hobby who can travel will try to attend.

Of course, this year's event will be important for another extremely important reason - the online connections formed during the Covid era have been truly spectacular. In order for that to lead to permanent growth, however, those connections need to be deepened in the best way possible - face to face friendship. In addition, to be frank there are a number of face-to-face players who are not interested in participating in virtual or online extended deadline play. There is nothing wrong with that per se, but that does mean that for the health of the hobby we need the opportunity to integrate players from all modes of play - and one way to do that is at Dipcon.

If you are reading this and you have not yet signed up for the 2021 Carnage in November, please consider doing so right now. If you have any questions about anything, contact me at [davidhood@dixiecon.com](mailto:davidhood@dixiecon.com) and I will get you to the tournament director or otherwise get you what information you need.

Of course, the biggest reason to come this year will be because it will be fun as hell. Carnage is a well-established, successful event in any year - but this time there will be plenty of experienced players who are trying FTF for the very first time. And DBN will be live, onsite, doing game coverage, interviews and more. How could you possibly miss this! Answer - you can't.

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## Selected Upcoming Conventions

Find Conventions All Over the World at <http://petermc.net/diplomacy/> and <https://www.thenadf.org/play/>

Liberty Cup – October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Now virtual (in-person event cancelled) – [www.liberty-cup.com](http://www.liberty-cup.com)

Championnat de Bretagne – October 15<sup>th</sup> – October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Rennes, France - [https://tdfdiplo.fandom.com/fr/wiki/R%C3%A8glement\\_du\\_championnat\\_de\\_Bretagne](https://tdfdiplo.fandom.com/fr/wiki/R%C3%A8glement_du_championnat_de_Bretagne)

Carnage – November 5<sup>th</sup> – November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Mount Snow, Vermont - <http://carnagecon.com/>

Virtual World Diplomacy Classic – December 18<sup>th</sup> – December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 – Details can be found on the Discord server at <https://discord.gg/VFWzw4NVNK>

Cascadia Open – January 29<sup>th</sup> – January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022 - Holiday Inn Express, 15808 104 Ave, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada – Email: [Cascadia.open@gmail.com](mailto:Cascadia.open@gmail.com)

**A lot of upcoming events have been cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic; be sure to contact organizers for the latest updates**

# Last Call for Airstrip One?

By Jon Hills

So, how have the last three months treated you?

Sadly, that's not a question that gets asked very much – at least, not to me anyway.

I do recall our esteemed editor previously exhorting us all to be mindful of (and interested in) both our own mental health and that of our fellow players and correspondents. I have to admit, though, that this is not something that I'm terribly good at it. My natural tendency is rather to sit on the side lines and pass commentary instead of actually getting involved in the nitty-gritty of other people's lives.

(That may possibly explain why I'm not the most successful *Diplomacy* player ever to have graced a board. But I digress.)

One person for whom the last three months have been startlingly different has been one Emma Raducanu - or "Our Emma" as we are encouraging us to call her by the UK media. This is at the same time as quietly ignoring the fact that she was born in Canada, although, to be fair, she has lived in the UK for most of her 18 years.

I'm sure you'll have heard of her.

Three months or so ago, she had just finished sitting her A-Levels (which I guess is the equivalent of graduating High School?) before being given a wild card entry to debut at this summer's Wimbledon Ladies Singles tennis tournament.

This in itself was not particularly surprising. Raducanu has been (and still is) a promising young tennis player who had been competing well in junior tournaments – including both Wimbledon and the US Open – for about three years. What was a surprise, though, was the impact that she made in that competition – an extremely bright start only ending after she retired from her fourth-round match with breathing difficulties.

One can only speculate on the cause of that problem, whether that was physical or mental exhaustion, perhaps some form of stress reaction to the hype and expectation that was inexorably building or maybe just simple hay fever.

Now, all too often it seems, the Press takes such young heroes and heroines as Emma and - after placing them on some ridiculously high pedestal – proceeds to criticise and chastise them when they "fail to perform" or face some personal crisis.

Rather pleasingly, though, that didn't happen this time. Instead, Emma received a great deal of sympathy and support, due in no small part to the way in which she had conducted herself through the tournament and also in how she handled what must have been an extremely difficult exit.

Their reward - if that's the right word - for exercising such restraint and understanding was to watch this powerful and talented young woman, a matter of only a few weeks later, storm her way through US Open qualifying and all the way through to the Final. There she overcame another bright young talent in Leylah Fernandez, and all without dropping a set.

This truly is the sort of thing that movies are made of – although hopefully not something quite as cheesy as *Wimbledon* - the 2004 romantic comedy starring Paul Bettany and Kirsten Dunst.

Watch it if you dare!

Now, I'm not normally one for live tennis, especially if it means staying up late, but I do like a good final and the Raducanu-Fernandez match sounded like a very even contest. As well as being a potentially historic moment in British sporting history (which it was) it was being held on a Saturday night our time and was also available on free-to-air terrestrial television. Starting at a reasonable hour – only 21:00 hrs over here – and being a Ladies match, whichever way the result went there was every good chance that it would be all wrapped up before Midnight.

All in all, with such a happy conjunction of circumstances, it would have been rude not to tune in.

And I'm jolly glad that I did. It was a genuine privilege to watch the match and then an even greater privilege to listen to two articulate young people express some very real and raw emotions in a calm, dignified and sensitive manner in the post-match interviews.

Of course, around this point an inevitable question pops up: What on earth has this got to do with *Diplomacy*?

Well, possibly more than you think.

Watching Raducanu play I was struck by her very evident game plan. She - or more probably her coach - had clearly researched the Fernandez playing style and developed a strategy to combat it. Moreover, that

strategy also played to Emma's strengths – her big serve and powerful shot-making – even though the experts all recognised Leylah Fernandez to be the more complete tennis player.

(OK, admission time. I didn't spot these things for myself but they were helpfully pointed out by Martina Navratilova in commentary - although I did at least have to listen to what she was saying, comprehend their significance and then recognise them in the match itself!)

When it comes to our own game-play, these same techniques have a direct carry-over; do we play with have a clear strategy? Does that optimise our particular strengths (or those of the Power that we are playing)? Does it also attempt to neutralise the strengths and advantages of our opponents?

That is all well and good, but it's not where I'm going. Instead, I want to highlight something that happened earlier (and unseen) but that had visible effect during the game.

Even without the benefit of Navratilova's expertise, Raducanu's focus during that game plainly evident. Quite often people are described as "laser-focussed" but here it was palpable. It was quite unlike anything that I had seen before, especially from an eighteen-year-old playing her first Grand Slam Tennis Final. She was calmer and more controlled than anyone had any right to be in that situation.

Fernandez pushed and tested Raducanu far harder than anyone else had through the entire competition – quite rightly too, given that this was the Final – but yet she did not crack, despite suffering a minor (though undoubtedly painful) injury during the final game.

Raducanu was completely and utterly in the "now" – with no thought or concern for past or future.

Zen and the Art of Tennis Tournaments, if you will.

This got me thinking about where such fortitude and resolve comes from. Sure, it must in part be temperament and personality but that only takes you so far. Even these are, to certain degrees, learned behaviours.

Clearly, then, this was a skill or ability that had been practiced. Mindfulness – which is how it is most often described – is definitely something that we can all hone and develop through use. In doing so, it can help to improve mental well-being and reduce symptoms of anxiety and stress.

Developing such resilience is a pre-requisite for elite sportspeople. And this is as just true for those of us that

play mental games rather than the physical variety. Such are the subtleties and complexities of *Diplomacy*, it does take a certain type of brain to appreciate and succeed at it. This isn't about 'IQ' or SAT scores but it is about intelligence – emotional intelligence. Can we identify and exploit the weaknesses of our opponents? Do we have sufficient understanding of the human psyche to know how best to influence, persuade and beguile?

As ever, such understanding begins at home. How can we hope to understand others if we are not ourselves self-aware? And this brings me back to Emma Raducanu. After the disappointment of Wimbledon, she had to re-focus, to process those emotions and make sure that she could come back stronger. Her victory in September was built on the experience she gained in July but that experience would have counted for nothing without taking the time to reflect on it, to understand and take lessons from it and then to apply those lessons in her future games.

She was only able to do this by first learning to focus on the 'now'.

Allowing some of the distracting chatter in our lives to fall away helps us to become self-aware. Only once we are self-aware can we then begin to recognise and understand both our weaknesses and our strengths. In time, this helps us to see these in others too. And the calmness and focus that mindfulness also trains us to can then be used in the white heat of competition.

Rudyard Kipling's famous poem "If" also expresses the same idea – and in an apt piece of symmetry, lines from it are displayed above the player's entrance to Wimbledon's Centre Court. When Kipling says "If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds-worth of distance run", he is talking about being in the 'now', of first dealing only with what is here and present without thought of what might be or what has gone.

If we can learn to do the same- and I confidently believe this to be the case even if I have not [yet] been able to demonstrate it - it can also improve our outcomes in games of *Diplomacy*.

Why not give it a go yourself and see how you get on? You could even share your experience here. Doug is always happy to accept contributions. After all, he's been publishing my twaddle for the last three years or so.

Of course, if you're going to accept that challenge there is one thing that you are going to need:

Time.

Time, and Commitment.



Ah! Ok.  
I'll start again.

You'll need two things:

Time, Commitment .... and Patience.

D'oh!

So, there are three things you're going to need.... what is this, the Spanish Inquisition?

But seriously, having the time for such reflections is a perennial problem.

Lots of people here in the UK have recently had to take time away from their main employment as a result of COVID - colloquially referred to as "Furlough". When the nation went into lockdown there was a real risk of mass redundancies and so the Chancellor stepped into provide a Government-backed job-retention scheme – which ended on 30 September. Under that arrangement, employers agreed not to lay off staff and instead paid 80% of salaries. Meanwhile, the Government provided business with loans to cover [most of] the cost. It has had its critics but furlough certainly saved thousands of jobs and prevented more serious damage to the economy.

Although I did not get "furloughed", I was lucky enough to enjoy a sabbatical from work earlier this year. I should emphasise that this was voluntary, taking advantage of an employee benefit, rather than being Covid-enforced.

As well as the chance to spend time with my family, this sabbatical did give me the chance to re-assess some of my priorities. As regular readers will have picked up, my Christian faith is important to me and part of who I am. However, faith without action is, frankly, rather pointless and action is often most effective when it is in concert with others. One of the questions that we have therefore wrestled with as a family was over our choice of church.

To put it in *Diplomacy* terms, where did we want to play? Were we Webdippers, Playdippers or – heaven forbid – Redscapers?

At the moment we may play online but one day we will play face-to-face!

So what was the outcome? Well, although that particular bout is as yet undecided, we have resolved to get more involved in our current church community and to see where that takes us.

Although we may have a sure and certain hope in our final destination, we don't know what route we'll be taking or what scenery we'll see along the way. But isn't that part of the fun?

What it does mean, however, is that my *Diplomacy* activities – and in particular my self-imposed commitment to this column, will sometimes have to take a back seat. So, although I hope that it won't be the case, if an edition of *Diplomacy World* passes without an update from Airstrip One – I hope you'll understand.

Of course, as is so often the case, as one door shuts (or at least is pushed towards the catch) another opens. Already in the diary for November is a date for an inaugural meeting of what I hope may eventually become a regular F2F *Diplomacy* club in my local area.

So, if you're in the North Essex/South Suffolk area of the UK and want to know more please get in touch - [jon.airstrip1@gmail.com](mailto:jon.airstrip1@gmail.com).

And to the rest of you, thanks for flying with me over these last few years and I'll try to keep you updated on how things work out the next time I write.

It just may not be in time for the Winter Edition.

Happy Stabbing!

Jon



# Search for the Worst #2

By Bob Durf

*Too long have we spent searching for what makes a great variant. Too often have we chided amateur designers for poor map design or obtrusive rules. It is time to sit back and search for the true champion of bad Diplomacy variants. Each submitted variant will be analyzed in a variety of categories and scored. Make no mistake, we are searching for the lowest score possible—we are Searching for the Worst.*

I received a slew of suggestions from my last Search for the Worst, and I greatly appreciate the suggestions. However, the first came from our very own Lead Editor Doug Kent (who managed to send his thoughts first by virtue of his position).



**This issue's submission:** Deviant Diplomacy II, Designed by Phil Reynolds

**Overview:** For any of y'all whom have played Nomic, this variant essentially grafts a Nomic rule proposal system onto the standard game of Diplomacy. Players may during the Winter and Spring seasons propose new rules to the standard game of Diplomacy. Players have as many votes as they have supply centers and may split their votes how they desire. The rule proposal with the most votes is enacted. The victory conditions are to control a majority of the existing supply centers.

The full rules for Deviant Diplomacy II used to be on one of the old variant bank websites, but since that site has slowly been crashing over the past 15 years a certainly active link to find the full rules is page 15 of issue 23 of [Doug's Diplomacy and Eternal Sunshine Page](#).

I am lucky to have a record of a game of Deviant Diplomacy II thanks to Doug Kent's zine records--the game starts at issue #28 of his Eternal Sunshine Zine for those interested at following the insanity along. It is an extremely enjoyable read, though how far you'll be able to read depends on your ability to follow along an ever increasing complexity of rules.

## Category One: Setting

Well, it is just played on the classic Diplomacy map. No effort is made to create a unique setting in any way, though as a rules only variant we must excuse some of that.

**Setting Score:** A very impressive 5 out of 20 for using the classic setting and map for an extremely unoriginal setting. I've added 4 points to the score to give it some credit as a rules only variant.

## Category Two: Graphical Design

The variant uses the classic map design, and thus wisely picks a map and design with a clean and classic design.

**Graphical Design Score:** Deviant Diplomacy just lazily piggybacks on the original game's design and therefore does us no favors in our search for the worst with a score of 9 out of 10.

## Category Three: Feasibility

Hooooooooooy Boy.

I really encourage y'all to look up Doug's zine records to see how quickly this sucker goes off the rails. You need several things to make this game work in practice, and each are *essential*.

a. You need a gamemaster who has the patience and ability to keep track of the slowly ratcheting up madness and keep the game running. This is easily a game I could see being quietly canned by a GM almost immediately.

b. You need a group that will keep up with everything and *play the game in good spirit*. Because I could really see how this could get nasty and lawyerly quick. (And Rules lawyers are the worst lawyers).

c. You need the group to stay mostly the same. I just don't see how a standby player would be able to make heads or tails of anything stepping in. The game in Doug's zine began at issue #28. If you go in blind at #38 it looks just zany. For example, a random rule pulled out from the dozens players and a GM must keep track of is:

"Rule #70 - Nasty Nussia Needs to be Neighborly (Proposed by Jason Bergmann): During this time of economic crisis, a populist backlash against Nussian executive bonuses has drastic consequences. As a result, each non-Nussian starting player casting at least two votes for this proposal may name (along with such votes) one Nussian controlled supply center that will immediately become a home supply center controlled by such player, along with any unit located within. In case of a conflict between two players who choose the same supply center, the player with the heaviest concentration of nearby units (as determined by the GM) will gain control. For each supply center so lost, Nussia may convert one non-home supply center into a home supply center in the forthcoming winter and may throw one snowball from each new home center named during that winter. [[Sardinia was the only center named by an eligible player – Turkey – so Sardinia is now a Turkish home and build center.]]"

Who is Nussia? How will the GM determine the 'heaviest concentration of nearby unites? Whats a snowball? Why is Sardinia a Supply Center? Good luck to any standby players.

So all three of those are already hard enough to come by when it comes to bringing *regular* Diplomacy games to completion. And now adding in all the extra madness?

**Feasibility Score:** Straight up 1 out of 15. You need a real unicorn of a group and a Saint of a GM to make this magic happen.

#### **Category Four: Balance and Playability**

Deviant Diplomacy of course makes balance a sort of irrelevant question--but it is true, that like Diplomacy, you

can make an argument that players can attempt to control and shape their own destinies through new rules and what not. But is it playable? Yes. And maybe I'm a glutton for confusion and punishment (like most Diplomacy players) but I'd be lying if Deviant Diplomacy (II) didn't look like something I'd want to try. If you had that perfect group and GM, this one could really give you a load of laughs and fun. My brothers and friends and I used to play short games of Nomic every now and then. Its the sort of game that is really irritating in the wrong hands, but when played as a bit of a laugh it ends up being a lot of fun. And from my experience with that, this would be the same way (if the group was right). With the sad decline of public press antics, is that sort of lighthearted enjoyment less than it once was in the hobby? I'm not sure. But personally, I'm going to stubbornly insist that Deviant Diplomacy looks playable, enjoyable, and whimsical.



**Balance and Playability Score:** The game is obviously not balanced at all, but appears very playable and enjoyable. 10 out of 15.

**Total Score: 25 out of 60.**

Our esteemed Editor's submission did slightly better (worse) than 1600, but unfortunately it was too charming and enjoyable to read about to score in the truly low reaches of our score range. So once again, I must unfortunately continue my Search for the Worst next issue!

# Diplomacy World Demo Game “Dirty Rotten Scoundrels” – 2019A

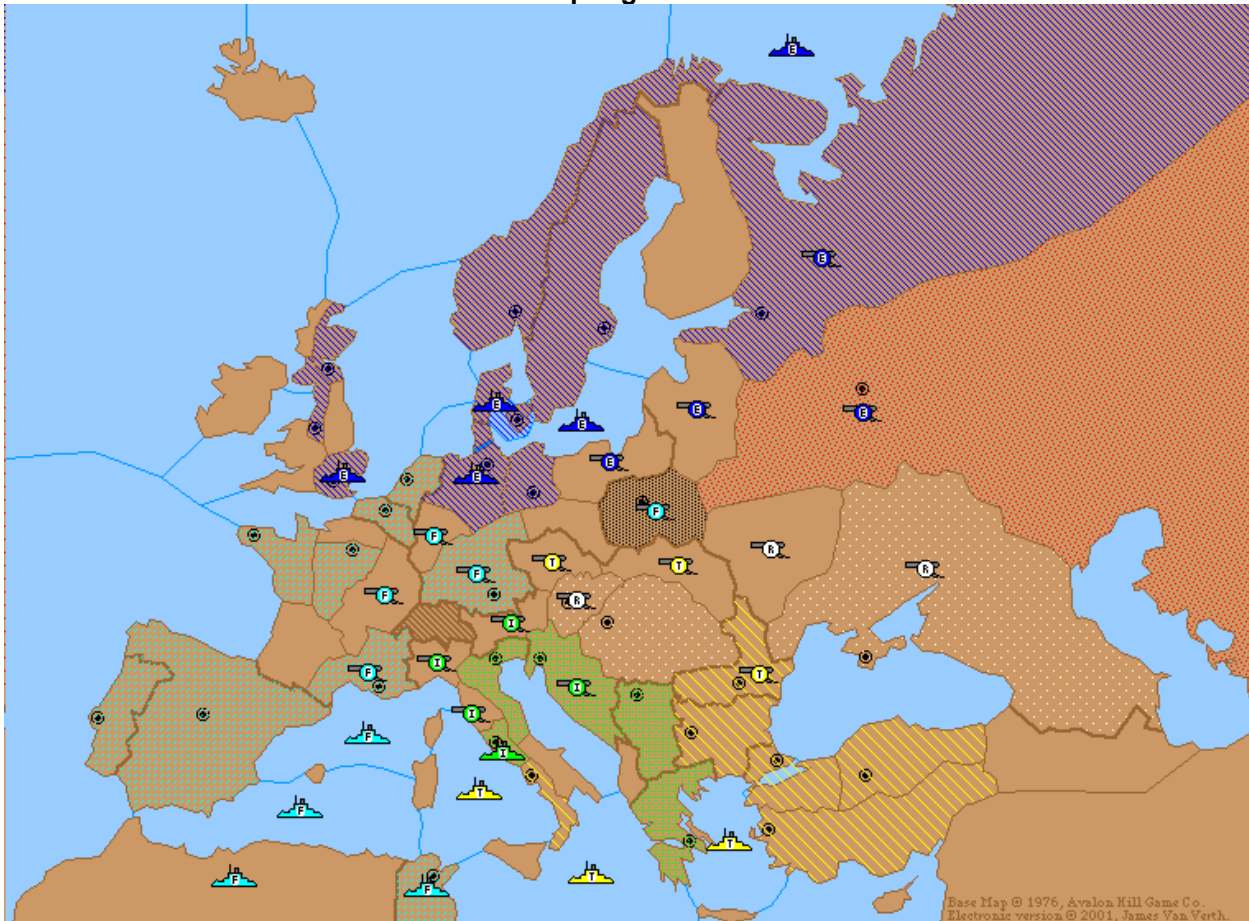
## The Players:

**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

Spring 1908



**Austria:** A Moscow Supports A Warsaw (\*Disbanded\*).

**England:** F Baltic Sea Convoys A Denmark – Livonia, F Barents Sea Supports A St Petersburg, A Denmark – Livonia, F Kiel Hold, A Livonia – Moscow, F North Sea – Denmark, A Prussia Supports A Silesia – Warsaw, A St Petersburg Supports A Livonia – Moscow, F Wales - London.

**France:** A Burgundy Supports A Munich, F Gulf of Lyon Supports F Western Mediterranean - Tyrrhenian Sea, A Holland – Ruhr, A Marseilles - Piedmont (\*Fails\*), A Munich Hold, F North Africa Supports F Tunis, A Silesia – Warsaw, F Tunis Supports F Western Mediterranean - Tyrrhenian Sea, F Western Mediterranean - Tyrrhenian Sea (\*Fails\*).

**Germany:** A Warsaw Supports A Moscow (\*Disbanded\*).

**Italy:** A Piedmont Supports A Tuscany (\*Cut\*), F Rome Supports F Tyrrhenian Sea, A Trieste Hold,

A Tuscany Supports A Piedmont, A Tyrolia Supports A Bohemia.

**Russia:** A Sevastopol Supports A Ukraine, A Ukraine Supports A Galicia, A Vienna Supports A Galicia.

**Turkey:** F Aegean Sea Supports F Ionian Sea, A Bohemia Supports A Galicia, A Galicia Supports A Bohemia, F Ionian Sea Supports F Tyrrhenian Sea, A Rumania Supports A Galicia, F Tyrrhenian Sea Hold.

**7-Way Draw Fails**  
**Now Proposed: 7-way Draw**  
**Please vote, NVR=No**

### PRESS

**FRANZ JOSEF at the Concert Hall:** What IS this racket? Where is my Lehar, Strauss, and Haydn? What is a Scriabin?? Help!

**HAPSBURGS to WORLD:** Several princesses available for marriage. Suitors need European territory for a dowry. Must speak Russian, these days.

**MOSCOW to WARSAW:** Our move east has been fairly successful.

**England to Germany and Austria:** apologies for the annexation. Turkey insisted upon it!

### Spring 1908 Commentary:

David Hood  
Rick Desper  
Jack McHugh

So...they all agreed to kill off Brad and Dick? What is this, the Feud all over again?

commentators, who are way better at stalemate lines than me.

Seriously though, this does highlight an issue with any "house game" like this without a scoring system or post-game consequence. What do you play for if 18 is not possible? Does eliminating players out of the draw achieve a better result for the rest? The answer to that traditionally was yes in the hobby - but nowadays most players don't even understand the question unless they are playing at Dixiecon.

**Anyway, this move doesn't change the stalemate situation any. It will make it easier for France to throw the game to England (or vice versa) if that's the plan.**

I'll leave this with a final question. Will this matter to the East-West position? I'll cede the answer to my fellow

**If that's not the plan, then what does this do? Germany and Austria are out so...it's more likely that IAT split up? No. Now if one of them had seriously attacked the other, maybe. But this move only makes the E/F look stronger.**

### Fall 1908

**Austria:** No Units.

**England:** F Baltic Sea – Berlin, F Barents Sea – Norway, F Denmark Supports F Kiel, F Kiel Supports F Baltic Sea – Berlin, A Livonia Supports A Warsaw, F London - North Sea, A Moscow Supports A Warsaw, A Prussia – Silesia, A St Petersburg Supports A Moscow.

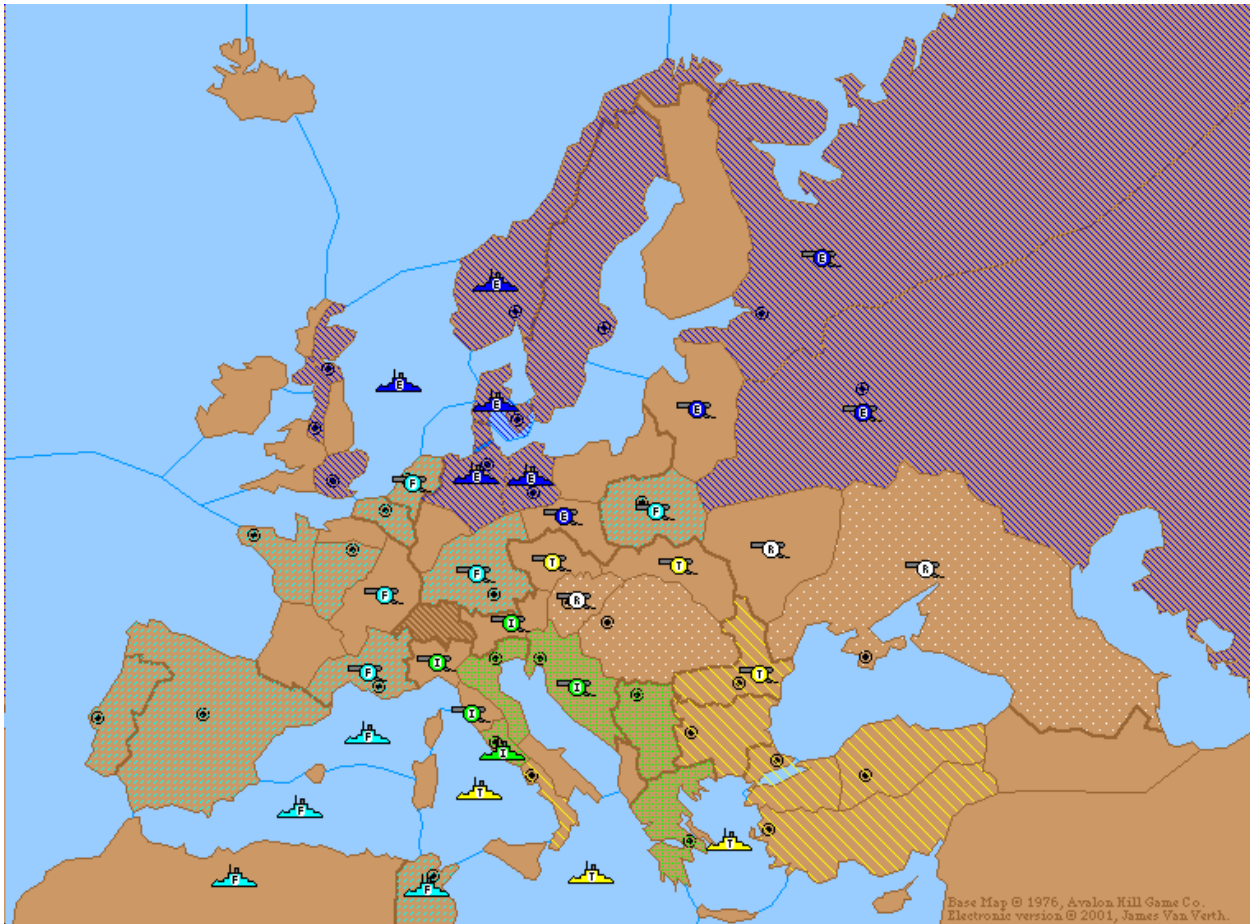
**France:** A Burgundy Supports A Munich, F Gulf of Lyon Supports A Marseilles – Piedmont, A Marseilles - Piedmont (\*Fails\*), A Munich Supports A Prussia – Silesia, F North Africa Supports F Tunis, A Ruhr – Holland, F Tunis Supports F Western Mediterranean - Tyrrhenian Sea, A Warsaw Supports A Prussia – Silesia, F Western Mediterranean - Tyrrhenian Sea (\*Fails\*).

**Germany:** No Units.

**Italy:** A Piedmont Supports A Tuscany (\*Cut\*), F Rome Supports F Tyrrhenian Sea, A Trieste Hold, A Tuscany Supports A Piedmont, A Tyrolia Supports A Bohemia.

**Russia:** A Sevastopol Supports A Ukraine, A Ukraine Supports A Galicia, A Vienna Supports A Galicia.

**Turkey:** F Aegean Sea Supports F Ionian Sea, A Bohemia Supports A Galicia, A Galicia Supports A Bohemia, F Ionian Sea Supports F Tyrrhenian Sea, A Rumania Supports A Galicia, F Tyrrhenian Sea Hold.



**7-Way Draw Fails**

**Supply Center Chart**

<b>Austria:</b>	None=0	OUT!!
<b>England:</b>	Berlin, Denmark, Edinburgh, Kiel, Liverpool, London, Moscow, Norway, St Petersburg, Sweden=10	Build 1
<b>France:</b>	Belgium, Brest, Holland, Marseilles, Munich, Paris, Portugal, Spain, Tunis, Warsaw=10	Build 1
<b>Germany:</b>	None=0	OUT!!
<b>Italy:</b>	Greece, Rome, Serbia, Trieste, Venice=5	Even
<b>Russia:</b>	Budapest, Sevastopol, Vienna=3	Even
<b>Turkey:</b>	Ankara, Bulgaria, Constantinople, Naples, Rumania, Smyrna=6	Even

**PRESS**

**was warsaw to was moscow:** this is another fine mess you've gotten us into, stanley.

**dateline warsaw:** well, \*that\* took you all long enough....

**Fall 1908 Commentary:**

David Hood  
**Rick Desper**  
 Jack McHugh

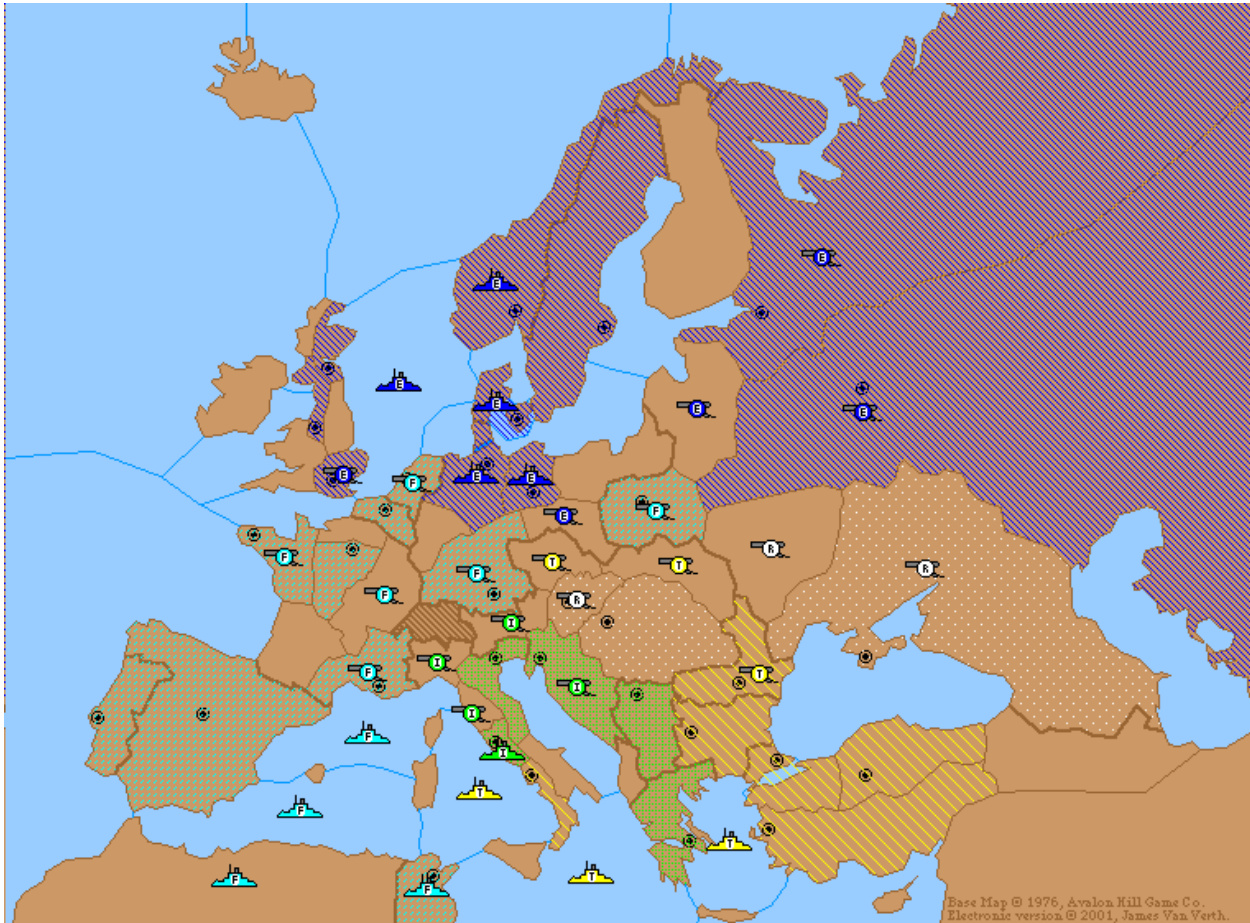
And...we still have a stalemate. We still have EF cooperation. We still have the Wicked Witch of Turkey

and her Italian and Russian flying monkeys. No real strategic changes that I can see.

What do we NOT have? An English fleet in English Channel. French fleets pulling back from the Med. Misorders. Unwilling Italian or Russian line-holders. Anything fascinating upon which to comment...

I agree with David--this game has settled into the groove of a slow grinding slog with EF gradually and remorselessly grounding down the Eastern powers.

### Winter 1908



**England:** Build A London..Has F Berlin, F Denmark, F Kiel, A Livonia, A London, A Moscow, F North Sea, F Norway, A Silesia, A St Petersburg.

**France:** Build A Brest..Has A Brest, A Burgundy, F Gulf of Lyon, A Holland, A Marseilles, A Munich, F North Africa, F Tunis, A Warsaw, F Western Mediterranean.

**Italy:** Has A Piedmont, F Rome, A Trieste, A Tuscany, A Tyrolia.

**Russia:** Has A Sevastopol, A Ukraine, A Vienna.

**Turkey:** Has F Aegean Sea, A Bohemia, A Galicia, F Ionian Sea, A Rumania, F Tyrrhenian Sea.

### Winter 1908 Commentary:

David Hood

Rick Desper

Jack McHugh

Two army builds? Ok, so this game is going nowhere.

Like David, I don't see anything noteworthy here. My general opinion of this game is that it's grinding to a halt. The eastern powers have a stalemate line, even though they don't have 17 SCs. The western powers

could flip a coin and give one of the two a solo, if that's what they wanted to do. I remember Jim Burgess did that once in a game like this. But Jim had an interesting approach to the game. Most people wouldn't bother.