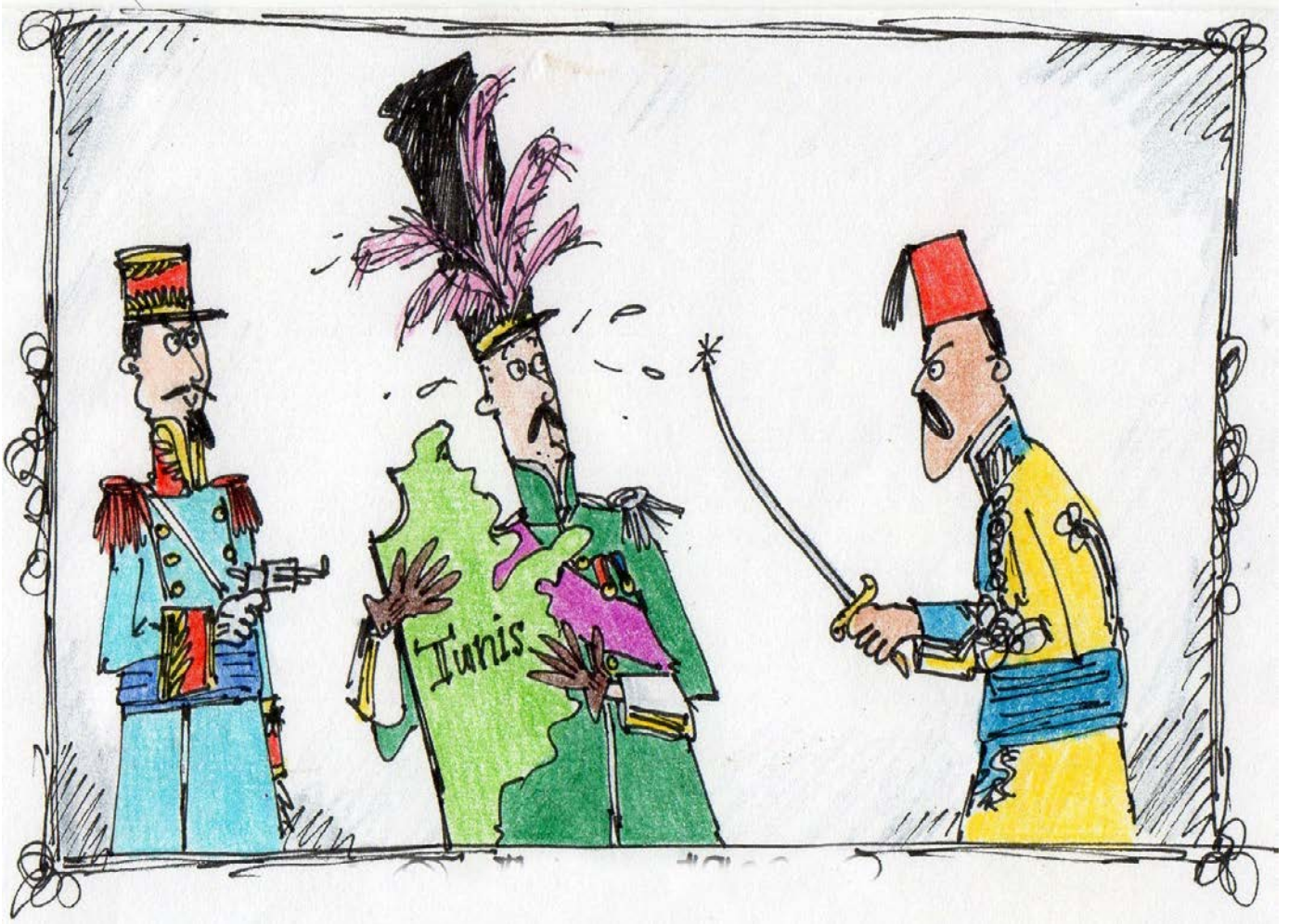


Diplomacy World #156



Winter 2021 Issue
www.diplomacyworld.net

Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Winter 2021 issue. By the time you read this, you'll be living in 2022. But I'm writing this paragraph in 2021. So, this is past me, talking to future you. What's the future like? Are we all flying around on jet packs like the 1950's comic books promised? I certainly hope so.

Back in 2021, things at **Diplomacy World** (and the Diplomacy hobby) continue to march forward. I know there are a lot of players hoping to see widespread resumption of face-to-face events around the globe. I was pleased to have so many events to add to the latest Upcoming Convention list this issue. I'm assuming that, if circumstances require, some of these events could morph into virtual ones...but let's hope the arrow points up and restrictions loosen before that has to happen. You can find the list on page 38.

I'm also happy to report that the framed, large Diplomacy map signed by numerous hobby luminaries that was offered as a prize in **Diplomacy World #151** has finally reached its new home safely. As I think I mentioned a few issues ago, the results of the contest were decided some time ago, but COVID restrictions had prevented physically moving the treasure from Canada into the United States (since a physical handoff seemed to be the best way to deal with it versus a complicated and expensive packing and shipping job). On page 7 you can read Russ Dennis' report on how everything was handled.

In sadder news, I learned recently that Giovanni Cesarini had died. Giovanni was well-known to European Diplomacy players, and to U.S. players who had traveled to European events. Giovanni was an important Italian hobby member, an occasional **Diplomacy World** contributor, and was regarded as one of the friendliest people in the hobby. Many U.S. players remarked about how warmly he greeted them when they made their way to events that he was attending as well. His was an unexpected and significant loss.

Another piece of news that arrived recently wasn't as unexpected, but it was still unwelcome. Conrad von Metzke, who has been a part of this hobby since it was

first formed in the 1960's, sent an email announcing that he was going to cease publication of his zine effective immediately, and that his days of participating in gaming was effectively at the end. You can see some of the text of his email on page 5, as well as comments and thoughts from many people who encountered Conrad through the years. Call it a bit of a celebration of his hobby legacy, if you will. There's also a full Conrad-themed article by Doug Beyerlein on page 9.

In other news, the Demo Game "Dirty Rotten Scoundrels" ended (in real life) a number of months ago, but in this issue, you can finally see the final game year, as well as all of the End of Game statements, commentary, and comments on comments. Check out page 42 for the full report. Hopefully this material will give you insight into why the players did what they did.

In terms of Diplomacy World material, we're still in discussions about whether or not to organize and begin a new Demo Game. There is some question as to – especially in light of all the live convention coverage by the capable DBN staff – whether or not readers still get enough from a slower, more in-depth dissection of a game of Diplomacy. Likewise, a few of the recent Demo Games have turned into very stalemate-line-centric battles, with a minimum of stabbing or changing sides.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on this dilemma, and possible solutions. For example, if we decide to continue with the Demo Game format, perhaps I should change the draw rules from Draws Include All Survivors to something like "only GM-enforced draws allowed" in order to encourage more aggressive play. Any ideas or suggestions are welcome, so please write in and tell us what you think!

I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for Diplomacy World submissions is April 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! See you in the spring, 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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Knives and Daggers - The Diplomacy World Letter Column



Hugh Polley – A new variant I came up with:

White Press Gunboat Diplomacy by Hugh Polley 2021

Each player is known only by their ruling Title, such as Czar. Press with the Title byline is reserved for the player; all other press can be black. You can send private messages to another player through the GM only after a player has proposed a deal in his White press. For example. Press: The Czar proposes Galicia be unoccupied by Austria and Russia. Austria could send a private reply which you forward to the Russian without any player identity information. For example, email to Russian player without Austrian player identifying information; The Emperor accepts the Czars generous proposal.

This is a modified Gunboat game. It may be a pain for the GM as he must deal with the messaging You could farm out this job to a trusted subscriber, or friend. You could create a separate email account for this part of the Game Masters job. This Gunboat may be more fun for game watchers as you can follow the diplomacy which is only 50% private.

Optional Rule: The GM may play one or more countries, but that country can never support an attack on another player's unit. He may also not send out messages to the other players in the game.

Cannot remember anyone else creating this variant, but a similar one may be out there. The key part is White press can be privately replied to without revealing any player identity information.



Mark Nelson - Since I last wrote a LoC on DW I have remembered another variant that is germane to the discussion of poorly designed variants. This variant was always playable from the perspective of the players, but potentially it was not GMable. (In fact, I feel a little mean even mentioning it as a 'bad' variant).

I don't remember the name of the variant, but it was designed by Steve Doubleday and appeared in his fanzine Gallimuafray. The map was the standard map and as were the rules. The only difference was how the orders were written. At the beginning of the game the players had to send the GM an algorithm that they would use to determine the orders for each player.

There was a mechanism to change the algorithm. Unfortunately, I don't remember what that was. It might

have been that there was a gap before the new algorithm was implemented. (Obviously there has to be a gap, if there is no gap then it's standard diplomacy!) Possibly the units stood in civil disorder whilst the new algorithm was being 'implemented'.

I don't remember when the variant was published. Possibly I already knew that people were writing computer programs to write orders. If not, the idea did not seem so foreign to me. My comment to Steve was along the lines of what he would do if one of the players sent him 30,000 lines of code or pseudo-code?

In the next issue along with my letter Steve printed a revised set of rules which set a cap on the size of the algorithm that could be sent.

I don't think this variant ever ran. If it were run, I suspect that it would eventually settle down into a gunboat game. They'd be little point engaging in diplomacy when you are unable to change your orders.



Conrad von Metzke - Hi Doug. Long time, etc. I've just run across the summer issue you published, in which you give me great big credits for all the good things I did in all my years in the hobby, without (thank you very much) listing all my screw-ups.

Thank you. It's just about the nicest thing I've ever read about myself, or at least the nicest thing not written by me.... I would correct one small error, the bit about San Francisco - it's true I was born there, but I left at the age of nine (several years before Diplomacy was even invented) and so played no part in whatever adherence to the game Frisco-people had. I was right here in San Diego, and had been for about six years when I first heard of Dip via an advertisement in "Saturday Review." Rod Walker (remember him?) had more money than I did, so he bought a game set and we started going at it the day it arrived, and the rest is, well, you know....

But apart from that, I am so utterly flattered that I cannot thank you enough. It's true that I'm not involved in the Dip hobby these days - though by purest coincidence I've recently been going through some 1970s British 'zines (Piggott and Walkerdine) because a friend found some old copies at a rummage sale in northern England, bought them, and sent them to me. I am having lots and lots of fun! Sadly, Richard Walkerdine is deceased now, as is John Piggott.

Anyway. Thank you again, ever so much, for your kind words and the recognition you gave me. It made me happy.

Conrad von Metzke – Off into the Sunset

By Numerous People

[[Recently, Conrad von Metzke sent a mass email to his zine's mailing list, announcing his immediate retirement from publishing his zine and adjudicating or playing in any more games. The text of the email pointed primarily to his declining ability to concentrate and remember things. *"It's obviously not overarching at the moment, but little by little I can see the signs.... and having just tried to adjudicate one of my games and found myself a gibbering idiot before I ever really got into it, I can say with certainty that my days of gaming - in any capacity - have come to an end."*

After the announcement of his retirement from the hobby, a number of friends and hobby members sent their thoughts and comments to be included in this issue of Diplomacy World. You'll find a full article from Doug Beyerlein elsewhere, but below are the shorter memories and well-wishes for Conrad.]]

Walt Buchanan: When I entered the hobby in 1970, Conrad - as one of the hobby's founders - was my inspiration. And **Costaguana** was such a good zine.

Edi Birsan: One of my favorite memories of Conrad was at one of the early DipCon's in Chicago when he and I believe John Smythe split a board 17-17.

I also was always overwhelmed with his Costaguana publications and between him and Larry Peery they would jam my weekends with reading.

He also had a very distinct smell to his ditto paper that he used and wondered if it was cut with something otherworldly.

Brendan Whyte: Dear Conrad, Thank YOU for all the fun and friendship so many of us have had playing with you, against you, or in your several zines during the more than half a century you have been publishing zines and GMing games. My records show we have been trading zines for almost 30 years, since DtC issue 54, way back in the early 1990s (and possibly earlier, but the page in my record book with the data for issues 46-53 is missing). Even then you had been published for a quarter of a century. My hat is off to you for that dedication to the postal hobby.

I remember when taking the train to San Diego for the American Public Health Association's annual conference there in November 1995. I got in touch, and you came down to meet me in town and showed me the Hotel del Coronado hotel where Prince Edward supposedly met

Mrs. Simpson in 1920, and we had a surreal time touring the Mormon Battalion historic site, which was a first visit for you too. 18 years later, Su and I came through San Diego again in 2013, and you and Jean kindly put us up, and again we revisited the Hotel del Coronado, Old Town San Diego, and the newly renovated Mormon Battalion site, still slightly surreal!

I have played on a number of Railway Rivals maps you designed (including the 'Wine Train' one of the Napa Valley); and you have played on mine, and you have been brave enough to take on the GMing of large RR games like the Benelux map, and most recently the combined Brandenburg North and South maps.

You long had a fascination for Pitcairn Island, due to a penpal you had there, and also a love of Geoffrey Household's books and stories (in both of which I join you). I recall staying in a seamen's hostel in London's East End in 2000, where I ran across several of his short stories in some issues of a British magazine floating around in the hostel lounge. I got them xeroxed and posted over to you, and was delighted to hear you hadn't come across them before.

Your zines have always been a delight to read, even when your love of experimenting with wingding fonts sometimes got in the way of readability, and it has been with much sadness that Zargonian will no longer fill my email in-box as Costaguana (founded 1965!) and WIMM once filled my letterbox back in the day. I am sure all of us who have played with you or under you are as sad as I am that you are finally bowing out, but it is not unexpected, for you seem to have been threatening to fold your zine for at least a decade! This time it is for real.

Our prayers are with you, and Jean, and your boys, and I will continue to send you DtC, for old times' sake, so you may still get tactile pleasure of receiving a postal zine (even if it is on that new-fangled foreign A4 sized paper), ripping open the envelope with its pretty marsupial-themed stamps, and carefully storing it in case there is another lockdown-and-loo-roll-shortage.

Thank you for the years of gaming pleasure you have given, and the friendship you have shared with so many of us for so long. You were there at the start of the postal hobby, long before I was even born, and you have been a mainstay, nay the mainmast, rudder and keel, of it ever since. We will miss your steady hand on the tiller of our postal pastime.

Jed Stone: I only came into the Conrad saga very recently though not so recently that I can remember how or why I came across 'Where is my mind'. According to the bits and pieces I have lying around, it was mid 2017 when I started playing in 'Barmy Battleships', 'Snakes and Ladders' and probably 'Bus Boss' and or 'Railway Rivals'. I suspect it was a recommendation or a game opening spotted in another zine but whatever it was Conrad's quirky style and humour made the zine attractive and I rocked along with it to the end. Conrad's style as a 'word smith' provided wonderful entertainment and the photographs that he popped into each edition were always a welcome addition. Conrad always gave value for money and though his GMing was not faultless he was always ready to apologize and correct errors with a humorous quip. I really enjoyed playing in his games and will miss them though I am sure the doggies will appreciate getting more of his time.

Fiona Campbell: I have always enjoyed Conrad's writing, eccentricity and sci-fi knowledge. Conrad was in the pages of my first zine, Arfle Barfle Gloop where he had written a game end report for a Diplomacy game and I always thought he'd be with me till I left the hobby, as until recently I have had no interest in playing games. I wish him and his family all the best.

Dane Maslen: It must be over 30 years ago now that a strange American started sending me unsolicited copies of his even stranger zine, but was it Costaguana or Disoriented Express? Either way I soon found myself playing Railway Rivals by airmail. Eventually I bought a stock of prepaid airmail letters, whereupon Conrad got an email address, so I still have half of them sat in my draw. Couldn't he have waited until I'd used up my investment?

Despite the thousands of miles between us I've had the good fortune to meet Conrad twice, once when I visited California in 2000 and once when he visited Europe some years ago. Well, I say the good fortune, but I must have come close to getting a crick in my neck through attempting to look him in the eyes rather than in the shoulders.

Somewhere along the way it emerged that we were both fond of classical music by 18th century composers. Suddenly I found myself receiving CDs by post from America, introducing me to various composers that I'd never heard of. This is either a reflection on Conrad's generosity or an indication that he's attempting to pay back everything he once earned from his employer.

Six Word "Stories" About Diplomacy

By Lewis Pulsipher

Some years ago, six-word stories were the rage on twitter. Originally (Ernest Hemingway on a bet): "For sale: Baby shoes. Never worn." They can be interesting exercises.

So, can anyone come up with some Diplomacy six-word stories? I don't claim to be very good at this, but how about:

Germany: stabbed by the accursed Frog!
I came, I cut, I conquered!
I would rather die than draw!
England-Turkey full game alliance wins!
Second place is the biggest loser.
A draw is like kissing sister.
Is England the most Wicked Witch?
Who wins with Kaiser in charge?
Austria: Doomed to be ground down.
Don't live by the stab, novice.
Superior strategy better than cut-throat negotiation.
I've drawn Italy! Just shoot me!
I'd rather be Outside, than In. (reference to Outer and Inner Powers)
Inner Powers Unite or Get Dead

(And don't worry too much if you use 5 or 7 words . . .)

Six words works for lots of game topics, should work for *Diplomacy*. If you've got some, submit to me at lewpuls <you know what goes in here> netzero.net . I'll compile them for the next *Diplomacy World*.

Two Knives Converged on a Snowy Evening: A Story of Diplomacy and Friendship

By Russ Dennis

It was February 2021 when I received an email from Doug Kent:

Robert, allow me to introduce Russ Dennis. He is the winner of the contest and will need to make arrangements with you directly to take possession of the map. Fortunately, he's also in a convenient location compared to others.

In Fall 2020, Diplomacy World ran a contest for Robert Correll's framed Diplomacy board from the 1975 DipCon. It's a standard 1961 map from the Games Research edition and was signed by hobby luminaries of the time. What made it stand out to me was that Allan Calhamer, Diplomacy's inventor, also signed it.

And apparently, somehow I'd won the contest! My mind flashed back to winning \$150 for a speech as a junior in high school...I was the only entrant. I went on to the state competition where I got second out of you probably can guess, two. I presume I faced pretty similar odds with USPS shipping rates giving me the edge.

The one issue was that even after a year of lockdown the Canadian border was still closed. In Robert's first email to me, he discussed the problems with meeting up and then ended with this phrase: "Tell me a bit about yourself."

Robert was very interested in World War I history as a teenager which naturally drew him to Diplomacy. He didn't really have any friends who were interested, but he found in the Diplomacy box a flyer for a play-by-mail zine. It was connected to Conrad von Metzke who ran *Saguenay* for the Canadians from his home in San Diego. Robert signed up and was hooked.

"Back then a move usually took a month to resolve and usually always had dropouts since people didn't know what they were getting into; come to think of it I never finished a postal game myself even though I ran my own zine."

During college, Robert started up a board game club at Toronto college to play Diplomacy and other games.

Over the next year, we exchanged several emails and got to know each other. We found common connection points including our faith. Robert came across as affable, kind, and engaging. Coincidentally, I've often felt this way about my ally right before they stab me. I wasn't too worried about that, as Robert had retired from the hobby long ago.

Finally in December 2021, the timing was right, and the prize was before me. As I walked up to the appropriately named "American Diner," I realized I had no way to identify Robert. When I walked through the door, I was immediately spotted and signaled with a friendly wave.

As I slid into the booth, I noticed that the map was already displayed. After a little small talk, Robert began to point out names on the board of people who had been friends as well as important hobby figures.

"Here's John Moot who used his company Games Research to help popularize the game, and here's Walt Buchanan who founded Diplomacy World."

I recognized some names from old zine articles, but most of them were unfamiliar. Everyone except Edi Birsan was now either dead or missing from the Diplomacy community. To me these names were just ink on paper, but to Robert they meant much, much, more.

While still in college, he attended 1974's DipCon and had such a great time that he decided he would travel with a group of Canadians the next year and bring an extra Diplomacy board for signatures.

Dipcon VIII was organized in Chicago by Gordy Anderson and the convention is [colorfully recapped](#) in the pages of *Diplomacy World*. There were many notable moments such as the brouhaha over one hobbyist deciding to trademark DipCon for himself as well as the introduction of Dungeons and Dragons (most people don't realize that D&D arose out of the Diplomacy hobby). Also, Allan Calhamer hilariously said during a game, "I'm not really sure of the rules; you'd better check the book."

There is one name on that board that stands out to Robert above the rest: Harry Drews. Robert had met him at a Diplomacy convention, and the two had become fast friends. They started a zine together and had many great memories being part of the hobby. After Diplomacy had run its course in their lives, the friendship continued. Harry stood as Robert's best man at his wedding and for over 40 years they have continued to meet up for monthly board game nights. Later when it came time for Robert to retire, a house was available on the same street as Harry's. Now they are neighbors.

As I reflected on my meeting with Robert on that sunny afternoon, I couldn't help but think about the friendships I have made through Diplomacy.¹ I have enjoyed many exciting games over the years, but the most meaningful and enduring aspect of Diplomacy has been the people. I've greatly appreciated working with the editor team of [the Briefing](#) as we've strived to help connect the hobby.

I've also been personally enriched by sharing life with many of you. For some, we've shared times of great joy and even sorrow. These are the moments that I continue to cherish.

This thing of ours is hard to describe to the uninitiated. Diplomacy brings together people from many different backgrounds who are clever, curious, and relentlessly competitive. Even though battles can be fierce on the board, there's a bond that forms from spending so much time writing and talking with one another.

Robert's Diplomacy board now hangs on my wall. Before we parted, he told me to be sure to pass this on to someone else in the next 40 years. In the meantime, I plan to add more signatures so I can pass on to that future recipient my own stories about the friends I have made.



¹ I should probably admit now that I met up with Robert on a perfectly pleasant afternoon for lunch. I used Robert Frost's poetry to pique your interest. Surely, you didn't expect that in

a Diplomacy article there wouldn't be some kind of deception?

Conrad von Metzke

by Doug Beyerlein

I have known Conrad since we were both in Cub Scouts together (he was the tallest kid in the troop) some one hundred years ago. Truthfully, we actually first met postally after I joined the Postal Diplomacy hobby in 1966 (which seems like a hundred years ago). During that early period of the hobby there were two types of Diplomacy participants: the wargamers (like myself) and the literary people (who mostly came from science fiction and fantasy fandom). Conrad was definitely a member of that second category. His zine, *Costaguana*, which was sometimes sporadic in its publication schedule, was far more focused on debating the topics of the day than it was on the playing of Diplomacy. And that was great because it gave Conrad an audience and a forum to really do what he does best: write.



Conrad and Jean von Metzke

Conrad is a great writer and conversationist. Combine those skills with a genuine ability to show warmth and

kindness and that makes Conrad a true friend right from the moment that you first meet him (or in today's language, a BFF). I found that to be true when I finally met Conrad in person when we both visited Walt Buchanan in Lebanon, Indiana, in 1974 before traveling together to the Chicago DipCon that summer. I remember he and I borrowing bicycles and riding into Lebanon from Walt's family farm just outside of town near Hazelrigg (Conrad later invented the Hazelrigg variant). Conrad, all 6 feet 11 inches, draped himself over a bike about a quarter of his size. His size 22 shoes overwhelmed the pedals. But he and I rode into town to the nearest drive-in as if this was just a normal summer day for us. Now that doesn't mean that Conrad is a pushover in any sense of the word. To use an off-repeated phrase, Conrad doesn't suffer fools gladly. Because of his imposing height he has been often asked "How is the weather up there?" He told me that on occasion and with sufficient provocation he has replied "It's raining" as he proceeded to spray out a mist of spittle.

In Conrad's early Postal Diplomacy career he had a real love for playing Austria. I am not sure why because Conrad was never really interested in winning (or maybe that is why he played Austria). His Austrias would get crushed in game after game. He played Austria so much in those early hobby years that when I was keeping track of game and player statistics it was quite evident that statistically Austria had the poorest win and survival record of any of the seven countries – and at the time this was almost solely due to Conrad's play.

Conrad's rebel streak also was evident in the 1963A game hoax. Conrad was part of the early San Diego Diplomacy group. That group included Larry Peery, Rod Walker, Hal Naus (all zine publishers) and others. Their claim to fame was that they independently started the postal hobby, separate from John Boardman and the New York crowd. Boardman started *Graustark* in 1964. In an attempt to tweak Boardman's nose as part of their ongoing rivalry/feud between the two cities, Conrad, Larry, and Rod decided to resurrect a half-finished face-to-face Diplomacy game and claim that it was a long-lost postal game from 1963 – thus predating Boardman's first 1964 game. To make the 1963 game official, Conrad, who at this time in the early 70s had taken over the job of Boardman Number Custodian from John Boardman, gave the long-lost game the official Boardman Number 1963A. The New York crowd was furious – all to the delight of San Diego. The San Diego ringleaders (Conrad included) refused to admit that 1963A was a hoax. I only got the real story after numerous in-person

conversations with both Conrad and Larry Peery years later.

Conrad's interest in Diplomacy has waxed and waned over the years. Like most of us, life moved on and Diplomacy faded away. Yet, like the true friend that he is, Conrad has stayed in touch all of these many years. I was in San Diego about five years ago to teach a

stormwater computer modeling workshop and I contacted Conrad. He and his wife, Jean, invited me over to their home in San Diego for dinner and we spent a very enjoyable evening without once talking about Diplomacy. Conrad and Jean told me about their activities with a local repertory theatre: writing, acting, and directing. No surprise that once again Conrad is center-stage: exactly where he should be.

A New Dawn for Airstrip One

By Jon Hills

Hello. And welcome back to Airstrip One.

Regular readers will know that I was unsure whether this edition would get written. Even now, it is by no means certain. However, I'm pressing on in hope that I can get it down before the deadline!

You're probably reading this early in 2022, in which event I wish you and your families a very Happy New Year – and if you're reading it later, possibly as part of *Diplomacy World's* extensive back-catalogue, then that sentiment remains true. Whatever is in front of you, I sincerely hope that it is better than has gone on before.

As small part of that hope comes from the emerging news concerning the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

I am no scientist but those who are have been saying recently that they believe Omicron is a less potent strain of Coronavirus. This follows what I am told is the pattern of most virus mutations, that as strains become more virulent – i.e., easier to pass from one host to another – they also become less dangerous in their effect. Here in the UK, that certainly seems to be the case with the numbers of daily infections now regularly exceeding 100,000 but with the numbers of those requiring hospital treatment not increasing at the same rate.

Of course, there are lots of caveats to that. Firstly, this data is still 'young'. Omicron is now the dominant strain in the UK over Delta but only slightly. Although the number of cases is continuing to grow, there is always a time lag before these develop to require hospital attention. The same is true regarding fatalities. As such, it is not yet certain what proportion of new cases will result in such dire outcomes and so any optimism must be cautious.

Secondly, as Omicron is now proven to be more highly transmissible, we have to expect that more people will be infected by it, despite any precautionary measures being taken such as mask-wearing, home working or social-distancing – all of which are now in place.

Therefore, even should a lower proportion of individual cases require hospitalisation, if there are a very much larger number of infections – as is being seen in practice – overall hospital admissions will increase. That is a real concern for our beleaguered National Health Service and is the driving force being the massive campaign for everyone in the UK to receive either their first, second or booster vaccinations.

Thirdly, even Omicron remains potentially fatal to anyone, especially, the old and those with underlying health conditions. We have some way to go before Covid-19 becomes a trivial illness like the common cold – another, different type of coronavirus – if indeed it ever reaches that point.

Sadly, there is always the risk that the next variant changes the situation yet again. Thinking of it in *Diplomacy* terms, if Covid-19 is 'Classic', then Delta, Omicron etc. could be thought of as 'Youngstown' or 'Colonial' – different maps but with the same mechanics; basically the same game in a different setting. The next variant, however, might be 'Gunboat' – it might look similar but incorporates a fundamental change to how the game is played, meaning that established strategies and tactics don't work!

However, it's neither my place nor my intention to depress you all. If Christmas is a time for looking backwards – to the birth of a child who changed human history – New Year is a time for looking forwards.

All of us need something to look forward to and for me, right now, that will probably be my next face-to-face *Diplomacy* game.

You may remember from my last letter that I was hoping to meet up with some friends for a game. I say friends but at the time these were actually six complete strangers to me; the only connection was that we all knew our host, Lee, in varying degrees. My link was that we were both members of the same Facebook group (for

a local board games club), although we had never met in person. However, when Lee said that he was trying to get a game together, I felt honour-bound to answer the call.

So it was, on the 13 November 2021 – while others were battling through the final round of the Tour of Britain - a disparate band met up to play 'proper' Classic game; Lee (England), Josh (Austria), Daniel (Turkey), Claire (Italy), Martin (Germany), Trevor (Russia) and yours truly (France).

At this point, I should give a shout-out to our venue; 'Dice and a Slice' in Colchester
<http://diceandaslice.co.uk/>

As well as running a first-class café, D&S provides a friendly environment for playing board games of every style, with an on-site library of over 600 titles from which to choose from – as well as welcoming those who “bring their own”. If you can name it, the chances are that they have it on one of their shelves. Patrons pay a small cover charge for use of the space and can then play whichever game takes their fancy. I paid the weekend 'All Day' rate of £5 (about \$6.00) with the option then to buy drinks, cakes or something more substantial in addition, depending on your preference.

If you are ever in the area then I would thoroughly recommend a visit.

Returning to the game, though, of our seven brave souls only Lee and I had any real 'Dip' experience – Lee from Play-By-Mail games some years ago and myself online and via e-mail. We therefore took care of the adjudications between us and tried our best to guide the others in as even-handed manner as possible. Following the pattern of the London Diplomacy Club, we played up to 1908 with the usual 30 minutes first negotiation and 15-minute phases thereafter.

Daniel had, I think, previously played a few short-handed games with Lee (his dad) but the others were mainly relying on having seen a couple of Edi Birsan's instructional videos. Excellent though these are, they are no replacement for first-hand experience, which made for some interesting tactics and orders, especially at the start of the game.

It was certainly eye-opening to see how completely fresh players approached things. Indeed, as we were all playing our first full in-person game, it was a learning experience for everyone.

I was particularly intrigued by Josh & Daniels's highly novel and very successful Austro-Turk Alliance. I use that term advisedly as this is a notoriously difficult relationship to maintain and not something that is often

seen. (Their secret, incidentally, was for Austria to play as chaotically as possible – alternating his support between Turkey, Russia and Italy – thereby keeping the Balkans in a near-constant state of flux. As a result, neither Russia nor Italy could make any real headway as they could never be sure of Austria's true allegiance. Meanwhile, Turkey very patiently and slowly picked his way along the Mediterranean, picking up odd centres here and there, until eventually getting into position to dismiss Italy - the game's only elimination. Surprisingly, that sole elimination was not until 1906 or thereabouts.)



Trevor, the Great Bear, ponders the impenetrable

As you can probably tell, this was possibly not a game for the purists. That didn't matter, though as the priority was to ensure that everyone enjoyed themselves. And I'm happy to report that they did. Even being subjected to a devastating stab from Lee right at the death – which reduced me to an also-ran and secured for himself joint Board Top with Daniel – could not mar what was, frankly, my favourite six hours of 2021 (with apologies to any friends or family reading).

Most importantly, there was universal agreement to do this again, with a provisional arrangement to meet again in three months, with the intention of making this a regular quarterly fixture. Looking further forwards the aim is to invite a few more folks, both making it easier to ensure a full table and maybe even spread out to two boards.

If we can manage all that then we have the beginnings of the UK's newest *Diplomacy* club!

Of course, this won't be easy. It took almost one year (349 days to be precise) between Lee's initial call for players and our magnificent seven taking their places around the board but getting started is always the hardest part. Now that the first meet has been successful, the second will be simpler to arrange.



Four rookies getting to grips with a new challenge

Another challenge is also what to call ourselves. At present we communicate via Facebook Messenger, under a group entitled 'Colchester Diplomacy People'. Although quite descriptive, this isn't wholly accurate and is maybe also a little lacking in flair. My best effort so far is the 'North East Essex Diplomacy Legation' (aka *N.E.E.D.Le.*) but I'm sure there is something better out there. If you have any suggestions, please let me know at jon.airstip1@gmail.com

In what I can only describe as happy coincidence, I received an e-mail from Bill Hackenbracht this week, on behalf of the Diplomacy Club Growth Initiative (CGI). This was promoting various ways in which to engage with and increase the membership of our hobby. You probably got a copy too.

Our little venture originated outside of the CGI, which simply shows that there are lots of people all trying to expand our hobby in their own ways. However, all these efforts will have a common theme; like-minded people getting together, giving something a go and then encouraging their friends to join them.

Perhaps our new dawn will encourage you to take that first step and try to set something up locally to you. If so, I'm sure that the CGI will be happy to help. Certainly, *Diplomacy World* would love to hear about it so please share your experiences, good or bad.

And finally, Bill's e-mail included a link to the Diplomacy Face to Face Registry – a world map of players and clubs. [Check out the current Face-to-Face Registry map](#)

If you haven't already, please add your name and location as it will make it easier for you to find other players close to you.

The website '*Webdiplomacy*' manages a similar map too, specific to their clientele: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=zkg1OHicklqk.ky67Va8gNVi0>

You'll find me on either, so if you're reading this and live within a reasonable distance of Colchester, Essex, please get in touch.

I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Jon



The Magnificent Seven (l-r): Lee, Jon, Trevor, Claire, Martin, Josh & Daniel

Virtual Diplomacy League Awards

By Zachary Moore



Another year, another 83 players vying for glory in the Virtual Diplomacy League. Some jumped right into the den of vipers as inexperienced players, and many sharpened their skills as well as their knives en route to dazzling performances and solo victories. Still another contingent dulled their daggers, put on their best impression of what a smile probably looks like and sweet-talked their conniving selves to victory without spilling an ounce of blood.

And that's all well and good, but before we proceed with the pageantry and pedantries of top-board coverage, which will be available to you in spades this month via the Diplomacy Broadcast Network, let's take a moment to honor those who made this season memorable.

Without further ado, I present to you the 2021 Virtual Diplomacy League awards.

Student of the Year: JJ Raymond

Congrats to the Notre Dame freshman for winning this prestigious and honorable award! JJ played in three VDL games during the spring, topped a board as Italy, and appeared on his way to contention. Then he enrolled in a very good university and decided it was probably best to not spend 6-12 hours a month muttering into his mic about stalemate lines. Bad for me, but probably a good decision for your future! Well done, JJ. Please become successful and teach all your rich/powerful friends how to play Diplomacy.

GM of the Year: Sabi Ahuja

Saving the best for second, I narrowed down a very competitive 11-person GM pool down to just one finalist. And after extensive review and vetting of that finalist, I have declared Sabi Ahuja to be the VDL GM of the year. An incredible accomplishment for the budding hobby legend who also has a fair claim to the 'extended deadline GM of the year', 'tournament GM of the year' and 'have you ever slept for even one hour?' of the year awards which will be announced by Legendary Tactics in March. For now, though, they coast to eternal VDL glory. Sabi GM'd for me 5 months this year, maybe more because I ran out of fingers to count with in November. During those five months, Sabi GM'd all three rounds at least once. That's right, they stayed up through the night to handle round 1 so I could rest my pretty little eyes! Sabi also established the 'VDL Cookie Club' in which they send -- you guessed it -- cookies to players who agree to play as last-second fill-ins. Congratulations Sabi, and thank you for your work.

Insomniac of the Year Award: Tommy Anderson

I can't say enough about how hard Tommy fought to win this one. Insomniac of the Year is the 2nd-hardest award to win in the Diplomacy Hobby, right behind the 'Blood Alcohol Content Scoring Title' which is handed out through sideways glances rather than official ceremonies. Tommy belongs to a small, elite group of Diplomacy players who have participated in all three rounds of VDL in a single day. Good for your mental and physical health? Absolutely not! Convenient for me when I'm trying to fill boards? You betcha! He is a pleasure to play on the board with and a true wildcard's wildcard. Thank you for all you do, Tommy!

Trial By Fire Award Co-Champions: Peter LeBeau, Ed Sullivan

There are two things that I love doing in the Virtual Diplomacy League: convincing people to try GM'ing for the first time, and hosting an event on a day that I am completely unavailable to help out. On a rare day, such as July 10th, 2021, both of those habits collide in chaotic fashion. VDL in July was the month from hell. All three rounds were on the cusp of clean multiples of seven, several players were 'maybes' and first time GM's Ed Sullivan and Peter LeBeau were left to figure all that out while I spent the day holed up at work. Both of these

heroes had to wade through both on-board conflict and off-board confusion with no guidance from the absentee VDL commissioner, and I must say they handled it admirably. Thank you both for keeping the train on the rails!

8th Place Championship Belt: Tom de Greef

Talk about a knockdown, drag-out heavyweight clash for the ages. Last year's 8th place champion Ben Kellman was dead set on defending his title, expertly sliding his way into the front of the bubble and dipping out to a social gathering rather than taking his last opportunity to push for the top board. Not to be denied, Tom de Greef lied in wait, stalking Ben from the #7 spot and biding his time until the miraculous happened: Jason Mastbaum, entering the day in 33rd place or something, skyrocketed up the standings, propelling himself upward with a masterful 16(should have been 17)-center board top in round 2 and a not-so-hard-fought survival in round 3 to muscle his way into the 7th spot, bumping Tom de Greef into the coveted 8th position and Ben Kellman into despair. A lot of people say 8th place is way harder to get than 1st place, and I am one of those people. Well done, Tom!

Teacher of the Year: Johnny Gillam

Last year, we gave this award to High School teacher and Diplomacy father Dave Roberts for his work introducing our beloved game to his students. This year, it goes to Johnny Gillam, who teaches English in Morocco and still found a way to fly into Vermont for Carnage 2021. Much like our Student of the Year, Johnny was doing big things early in the VDL season before he was tragically forced to stop playing because he's just such a good teacher that throngs of students surround him and demand instruction from dusk till dawn every Saturday. Nobody said success was easy.

Fan of the Year: Chris Kelly

This award is given to the person who most consistently shows up in the League Night YouTube chat despite not having played that day. Chris Kelly is a real coach's son type -- first one into the chat, last one out -- and he showcased that month after month despite playing only once and scoring precisely zero points. VDL would be nothing without its many fans (they pay all of our salaries if you think about it) and Chris Kelly has been the most loyal spectator in our two years of existence. Well earned!

'Have We Ever Seen This Person and Santa Clause in The Same Room?' of the Year Award: Christopher Ward

He's jolly, he suddenly had no time to play Diplomacy once the holidays rolled around, and as soon as you start to believe in him, he brings his presence into your home centers. Something to think about.

Interview of the Year: Chris Hamam

Chris fought through a spotty connection to make his DBN debut on his phone from the beach. The beach! That's all I have to say about this one, they can't all be 300 words long. Congratulations to Chris for the most memorable interview of the season!

Zach Loves All of You Equally Award: Peter McNamara, Tanya Gill, David Maletsky, Matt Lynch, Markus Zijlstra, Tommy Anderson, Christopher Ward, Seren Kwok

Listen, you can't all win the GM of the Year or Trial By Fire award, but without your service VDL would have crashed and burned long ago. And if VDL crashed and burned, what would League Night have left to cover? And if League Night didn't have a show every month, how would poor Bryan Pravel fill his gobs of free time that he's always complaining about having? You all made this thing possible, and even more importantly, you made my life much, much easier. Thank you for stepping up!

Lawyer of the Year: Ed Sullivan

Obviously, I hate to give this guy one award, much less two. But you all forced my hand by letting him become the highest finishing lawyer in the VDL this season, so congratulations to noted UT alumnus and scotch drinker Ed Sullivan! This is the only award to come with an actual prize: I've called the dean of Cooley Law School, and we have arranged for all of your children to be accepted into that prestigious program when they are old enough (14). Well deserved!

This concludes the 2021 VDL awards ceremony! Congratulations to all our winners, and for those of you who did not compete in the Virtual Diplomacy League in 2021, I implore you to join us in 2022! The season will begin in March on the vWDC Discord server.

An Interview with Farren Jane

By Randy Lawrence-Hurt

Farren Jane won the 2021 Boston Massacre tournament (June 26-27) on the backs of two strong performances, and a conceded solo in the third round. The DW Interview Editor, Randy Lawrence-Hurt, sat down with Farren to discuss the win.

Randy

So, before we get into the details of your recent tournament win, could you tell me a bit about how and when you got into Diplomacy in the first place?

Farren

I first heard about Diplomacy around 5 years ago when I overheard a couple of friends talking about a strategy game they played over an app where they entered one move a day and spent the rest of the time negotiating throughout the day. It sounded interesting to me but I didn't look into it. A year or so later I stumbled across webDiplomacy and Vdip. I had some initial fun there but eventually I ran into a lot of people that were fairly toxic in how they communicated and I lost my desire to play. I forgot about Diplomacy until last Summer when I was sitting in my room due to lockdowns and YouTube randomly suggested a Diplomacy video to me. I watched it and then a DBNI video popped up in my suggestions so I watched that. From there I found out about the Discord servers and the virtual face to face tournaments, so I signed up for one.

Randy

Yeah, my impression has been that, for all the awfulness 2020 visited on the world as a whole, it was pretty good for bringing more people into the Diplomacy hobby - what tournaments had you played prior to Massacre this past weekend?

Farren

I should probably start keeping track of the tournaments I've played in and any prizes I've won. I played in Tempest in a Teapot, Carnage 2020, Virtual World Diplomacy Classic, and the DBN Invitational... I went back through and this is my record so far from the tournaments I've played in. And, actually, it turns out I started playing in October of last year, not last Summer. I think I started getting interested last Summer.

Tempest 2020 - 6th & Best England (Shared with Andrei Gribakov)

eCarnage 2020 - 4th & Nostradamus (Predicted my own doom in pre-game interview)

vWDC 2020 - 4th & Best England, America's Champion

DBNI 2020 - 6th

Boston Massacre 2021 - 1st & Best England & Best France

I feel like I'm forgetting a tournament where I didn't do very well but I can't find a record of me playing in any other tournaments. I might be thinking about my brief and disastrous showing in the VDL.

Randy

That is a pretty damn impressive record for someone new to the scene. What do you attribute your success to, what would you say is your biggest strength in the game?

Farren

I think a fair bit of it is serendipity, though I suppose there's enough consistency there that luck can't be the only answer. I try to be respectful and courteous to the people I play with whether I'm winning or losing. I think this helps me build decent relationships both on a board and between games that get carried into future games. At the end of the day, Diplomacy is a game about people. There's been more than one board where I was the beneficiary of relationships breaking down between other players. I also don't tell silly and obvious lies, if you stab someone and they understand why then they'll often look past it but if you stab someone in a way that's seemingly self-defeating it only generates resentment. Finally, I don't take things personally and I'm patient. If someone coordinates an attack against me and puts me down on two dots and then suddenly wants to work with me due to shifting board positions then I'll do it. I'm not the sort of person to go out of my way to seek revenge for past slights (unless your name is Bill Hackenbracht).

Randy

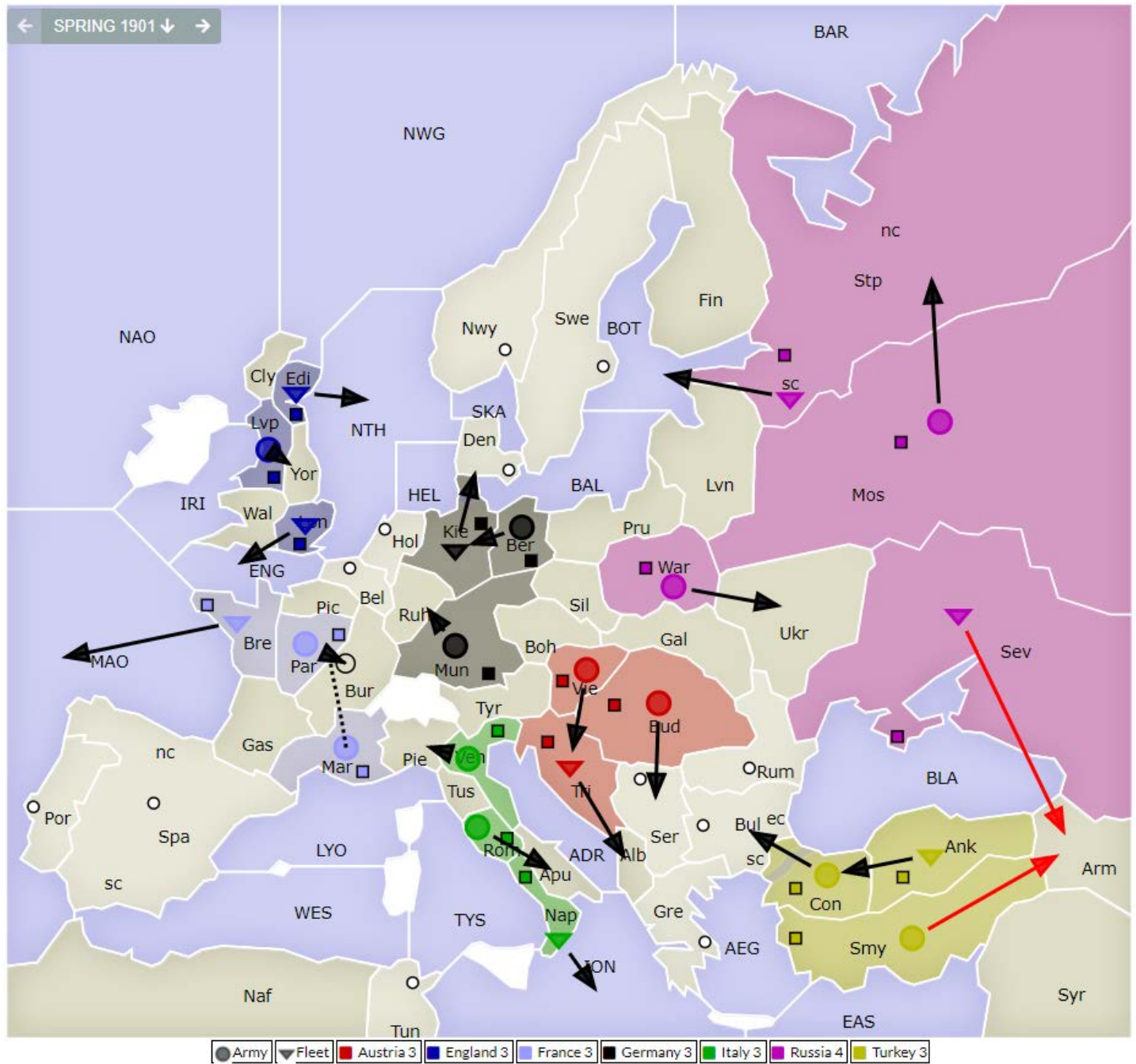
A wise exception. So, let's talk about Massacre. Obviously, the biggest story is your solo from round 3, which also guaranteed you the tournament win. Could you walk us through how that happened?

Farren

Definitely. My initial goal in Spring 1901 was to avoid conflict with either England or Germany, at least for the first year or two. I particularly like E-F and I had pitched working together from the outset to England though I had extended a similar offer to Germany. Germany asked to DMZ Burgundy and I said I would consider it but I was leaning towards moving into Burgundy. I wasn't going to lie to one of my neighbors on turn 1 as that's a

great way to engender negativity. I only had a chance to talk to Germany and England in this turn and England warned me that Italy (Ed Sullivan) was trying to talk him into attacking me. Ed later denied this but the Spring

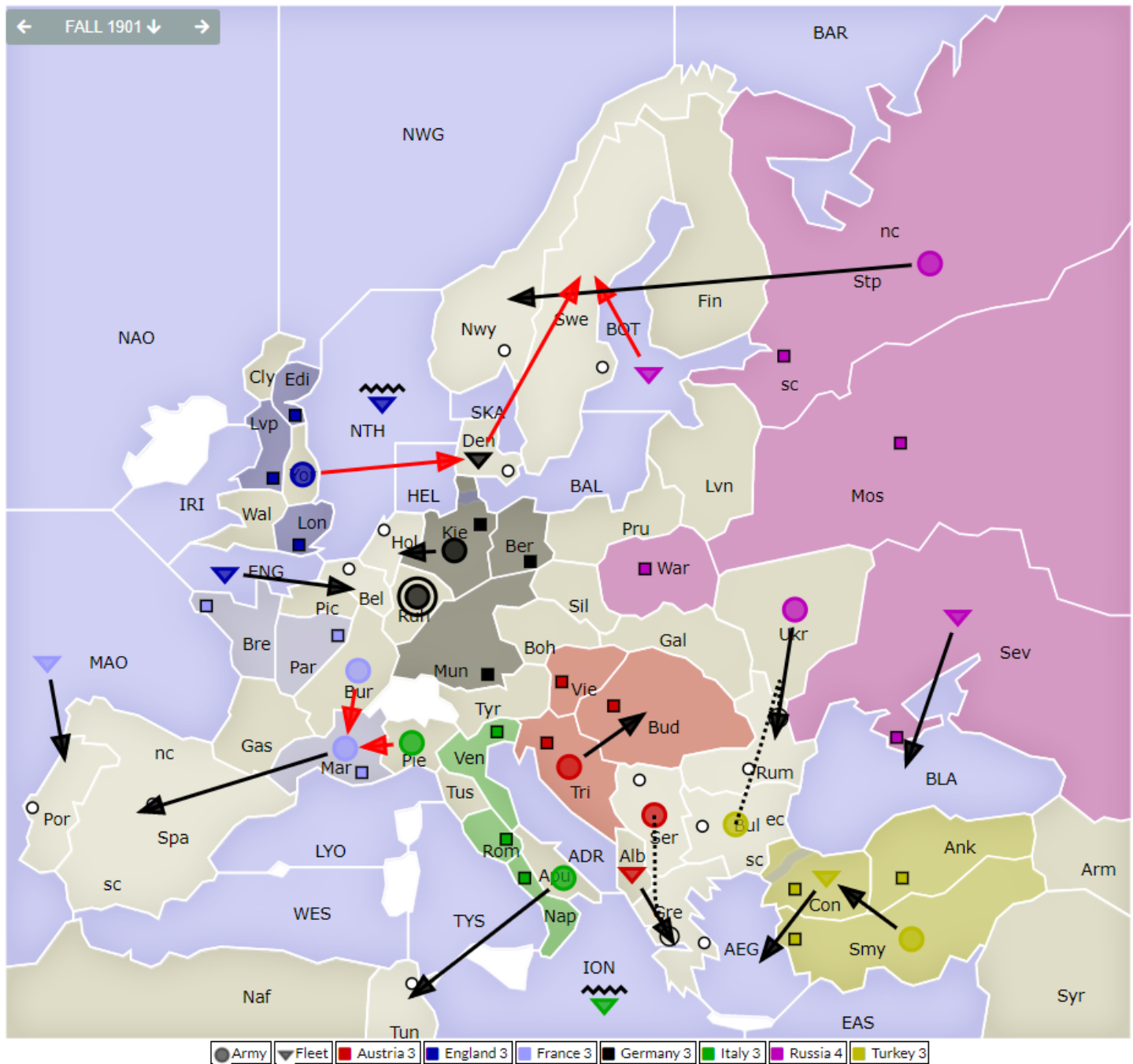
moves definitely set off some alarms for me with Italy moving towards me and the English fleet going to the channel. Here are the 1901 moves:



Farren

I told England that I didn't want to fight and that he had a free go at Belgium as I knew Germany wasn't going to go for it. I spoke with Ed at this point and he promised he was backing off but I've played with Ed enough times to know that he loves to take me out as soon as possible. I

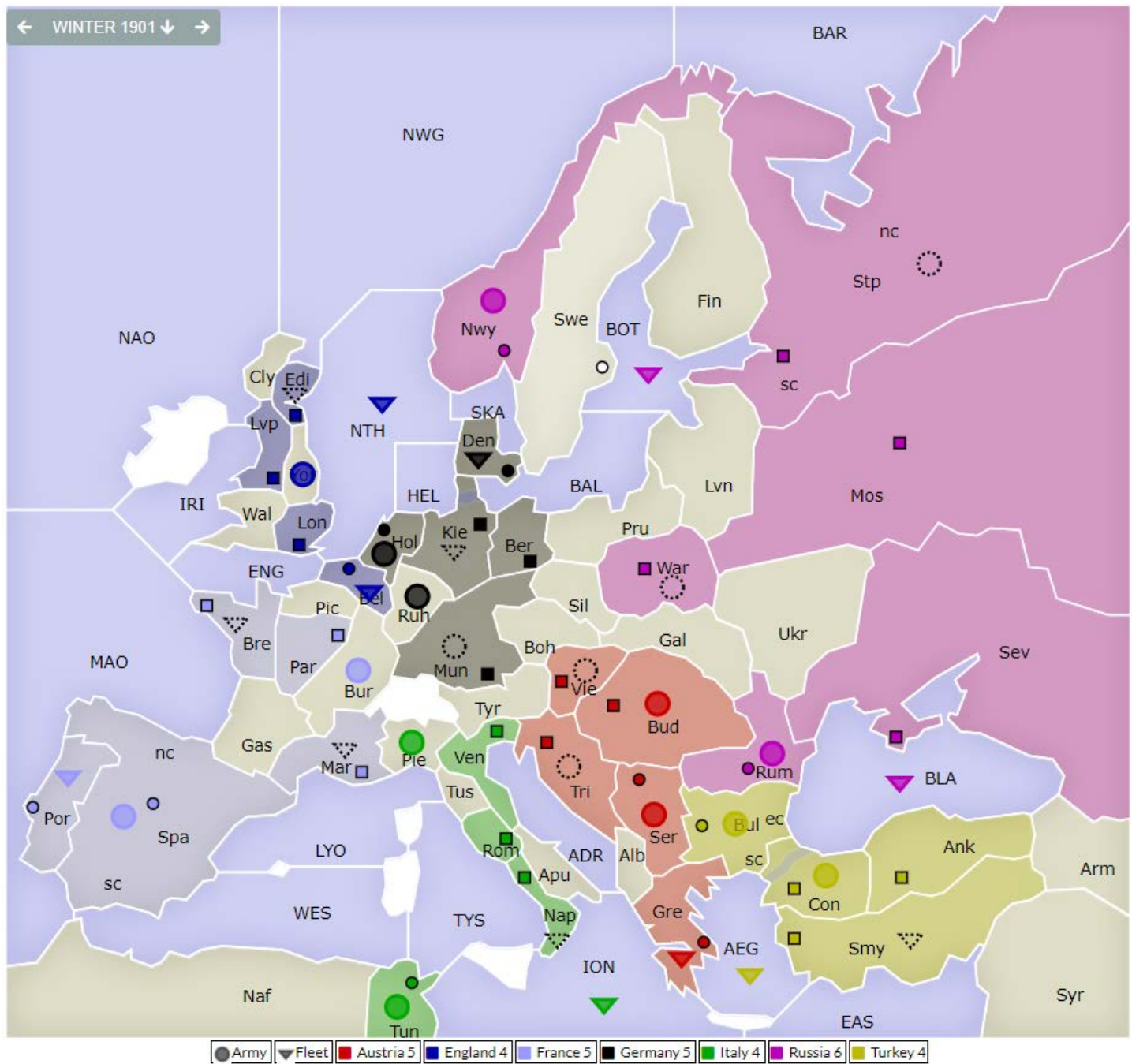
sent Bur to Mar expecting the bounce with the Italian army. I also gambled on losing Brest by sending my fleet to Portugal but I felt somewhat safe with that choice since at least he couldn't land an army there unless he used both of his fleets.



Farren

When I saw the English stab for Denmark, I knew that the two of them would be in conflict so I determined to play nice with both of them and try to be a mediator. When it came to the builds, I felt safe from Germany due to his conflict with England and the army that was still positioned in Burgundy. I felt fairly confident that

England was on board with the E-F (my preferred partnership) and built two fleets intending on sending them south to take out Ed as quickly as possible as I suspected it was either him or me. He and I were competing for the tournament win and it made sense to me that he wanted to knock me out. So, I decided to return the favor.



Randy

So, I'm a little surprised by two things there: that forcing Bur in 01 didn't incense the German player, and that building two fleets was ok with England. Did you clear either of those moves with the other player beforehand, or justify them after the fact?

Farren

I told England every single move and build I was making in 1901 before I made them so he trusted me with the two fleet builds. And for Bur I had given Germany advance warning that I was thinking of moving there and he and I had played in Round 1 with him as France and

me as England. In that round 1 game I never once stabbed him and we cooperated the entire game so there was some good will built up.

Randy

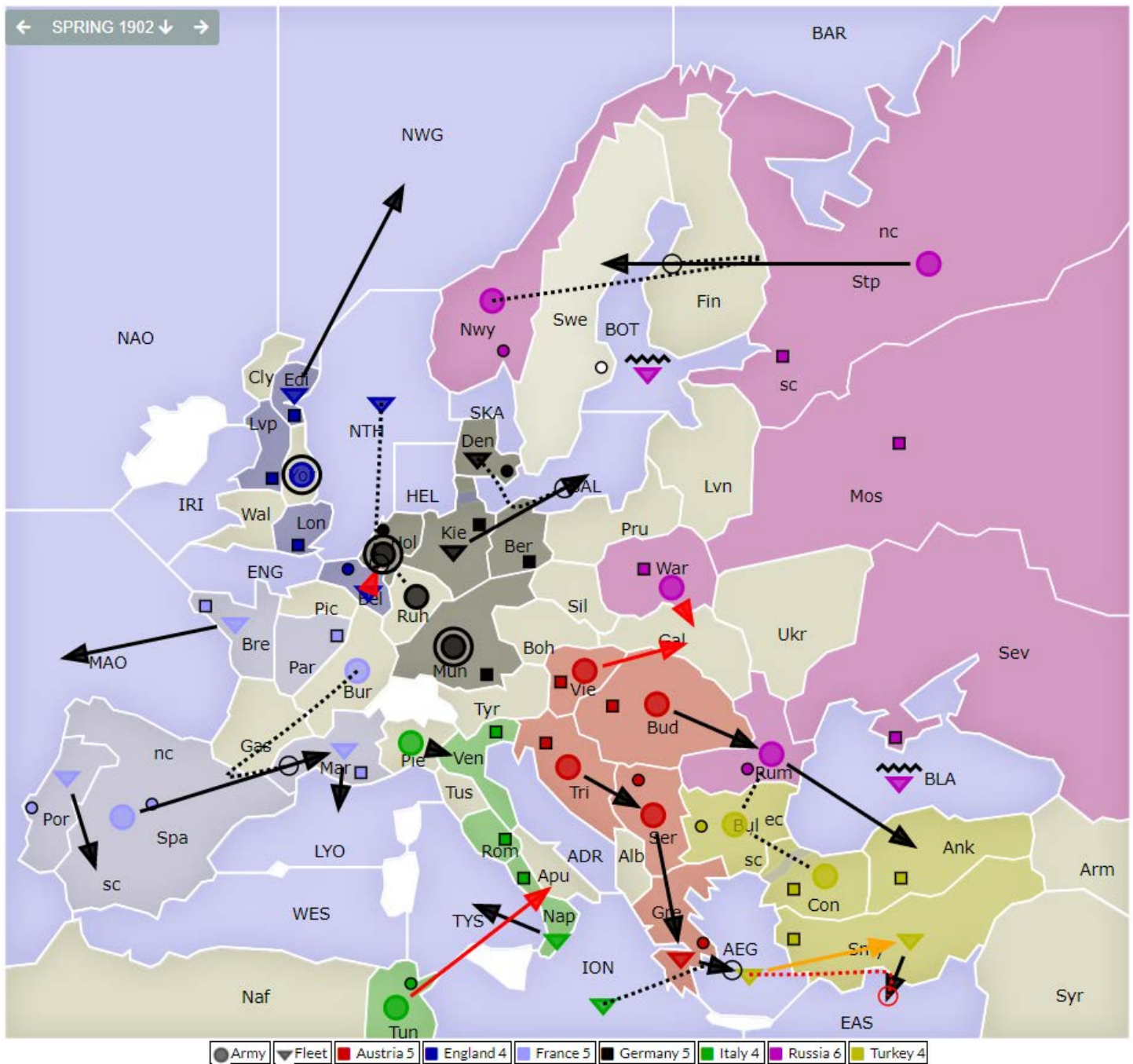
Makes sense. So, you built two fleets intending to head after Italy - is that what happened?

Farren

1902 went, for the most part, fairly well for me. I didn't realize that England was going to make a stab for Holland in Spring 1902 but I didn't mind seeing them fight each other a little bit. At least until I saw the

Russian move into Ankara. After the Spring moves were revealed, I immediately went to England and Germany and started arguing that there was an AIR happening and that we needed to cooperate because they were about to take out Turkey before turning west. Germany was opposed to the Western Triple while England was

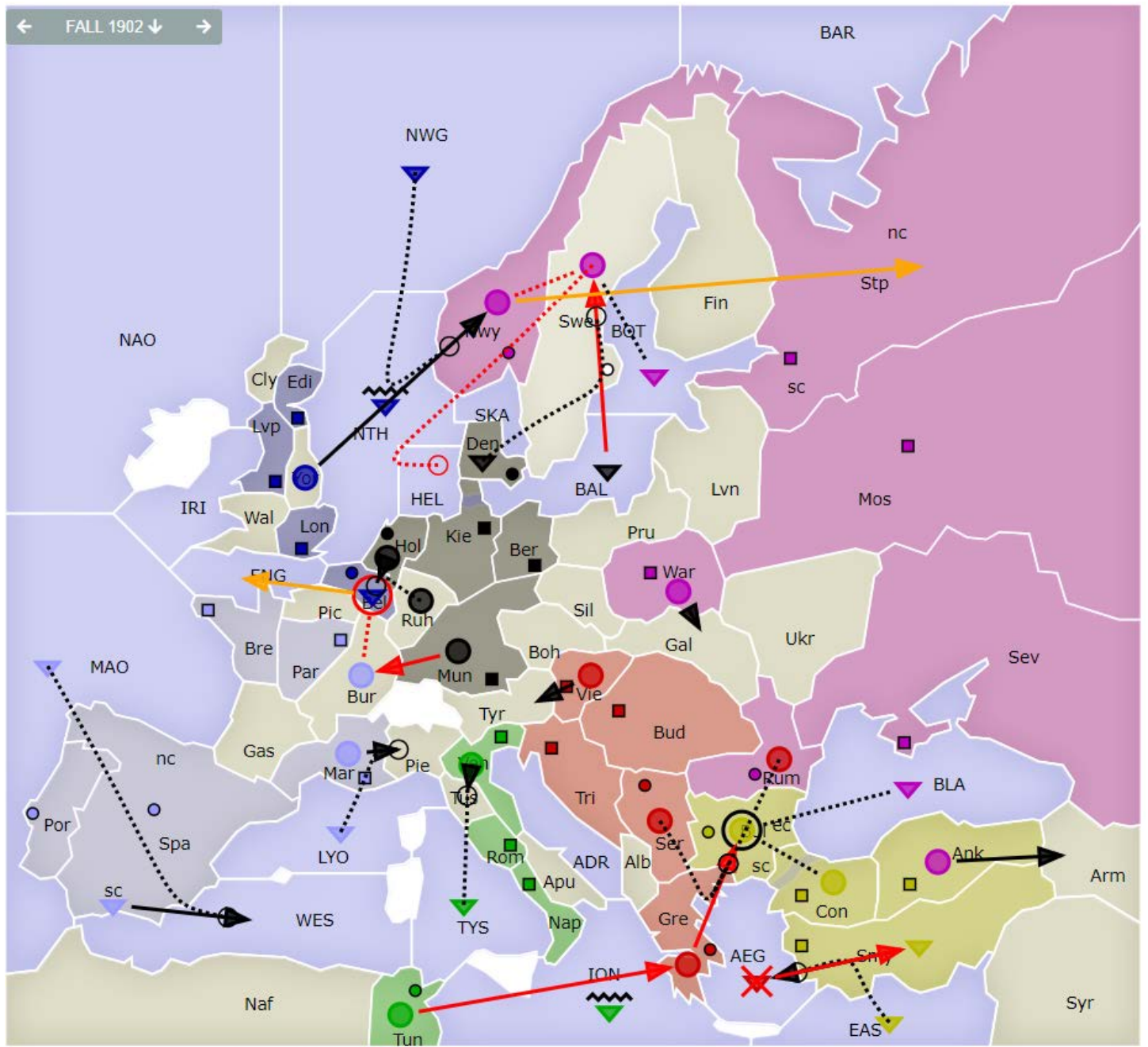
more open to it. Germany specifically asked me to help (or to at least not interfere) with him retaking Belgium and I initially agreed before telling him that I didn't want that to happen because it would end up with another German army close to my home centers and an English fleet retreating into the channel.



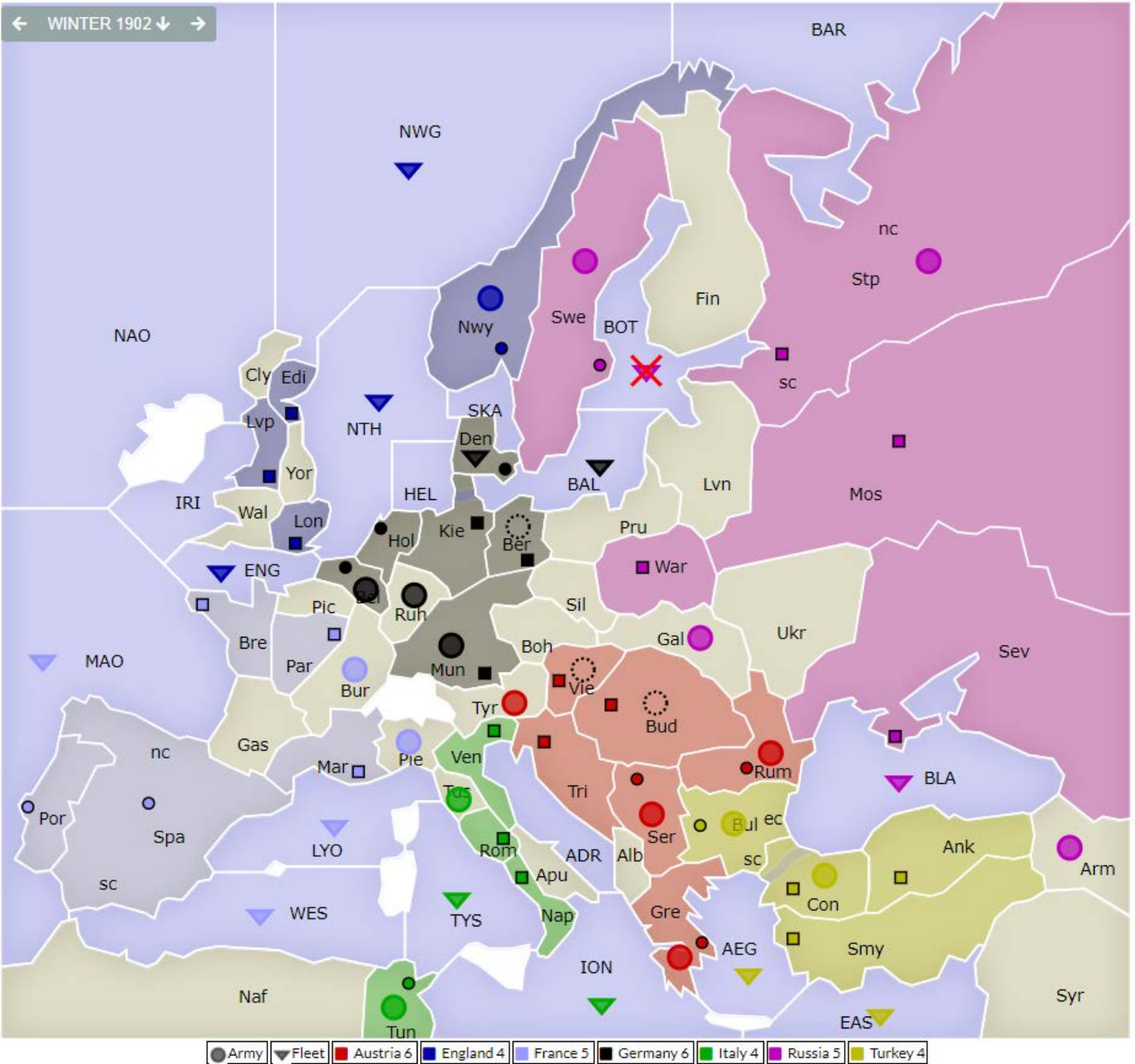
Farren

So, in Fall of 1902 I pushed towards Italy still but then the Belgium move happened and that English fleet did in fact retreat to the channel. On the Italian side I had

considered the convoy to Tuscany but I thought Ed would be expecting that so I instead just walked into Piedmont.



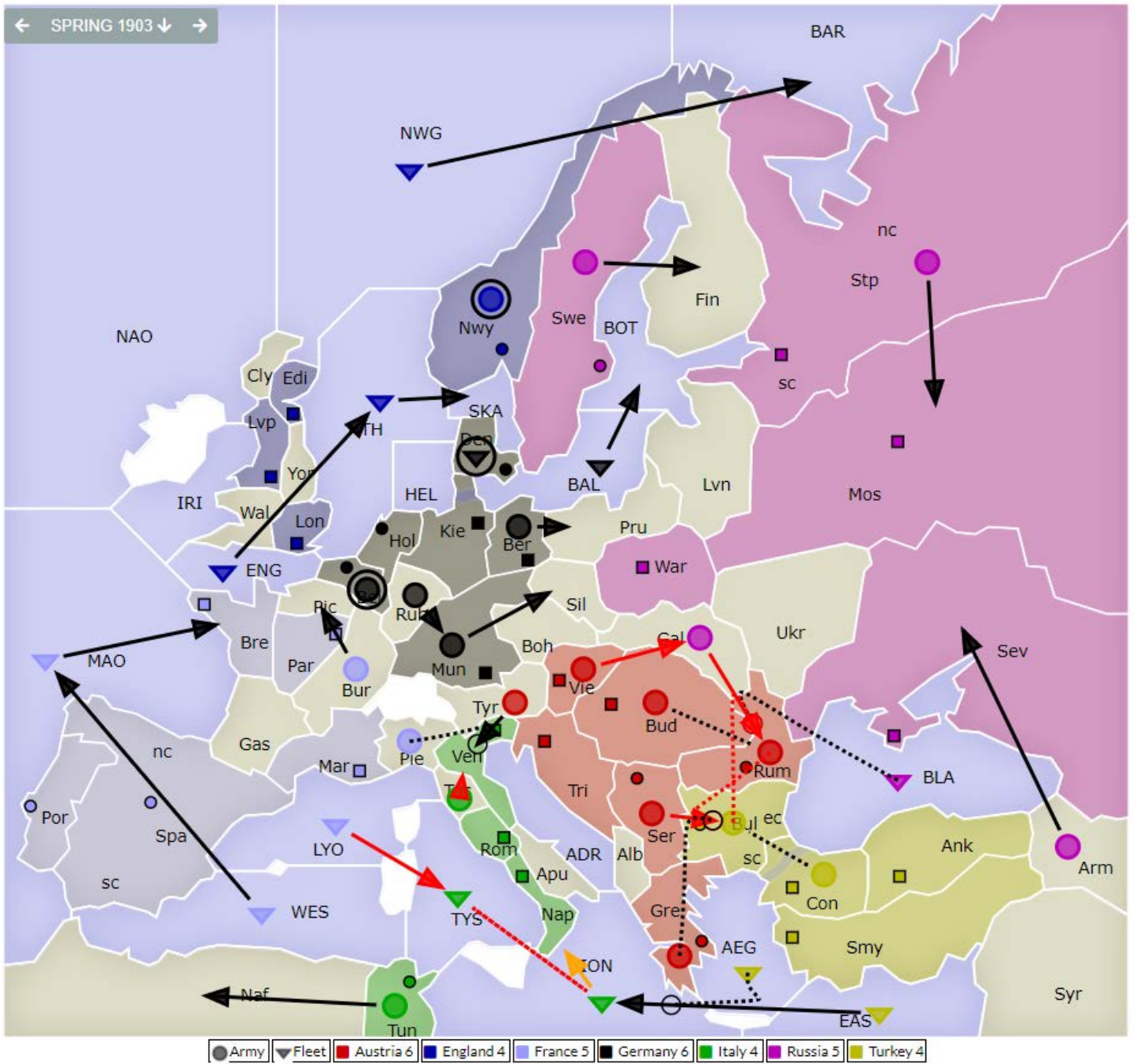
● Army | ▼ Fleet | ■ Austria 5 | ■ England 4 | ■ France 5 | ■ Germany 5 | ■ Italy 4 | ■ Russia 6 | ■ Turkey 4



Farren

So, in 1903, being suspicious about why England would retreat rather than just disband and rebuild (something that England apologized for at the time) I chose for a general retreat in order to play it safe. The LYO tapping TYS was coordinated with Turkey as I wanted to give

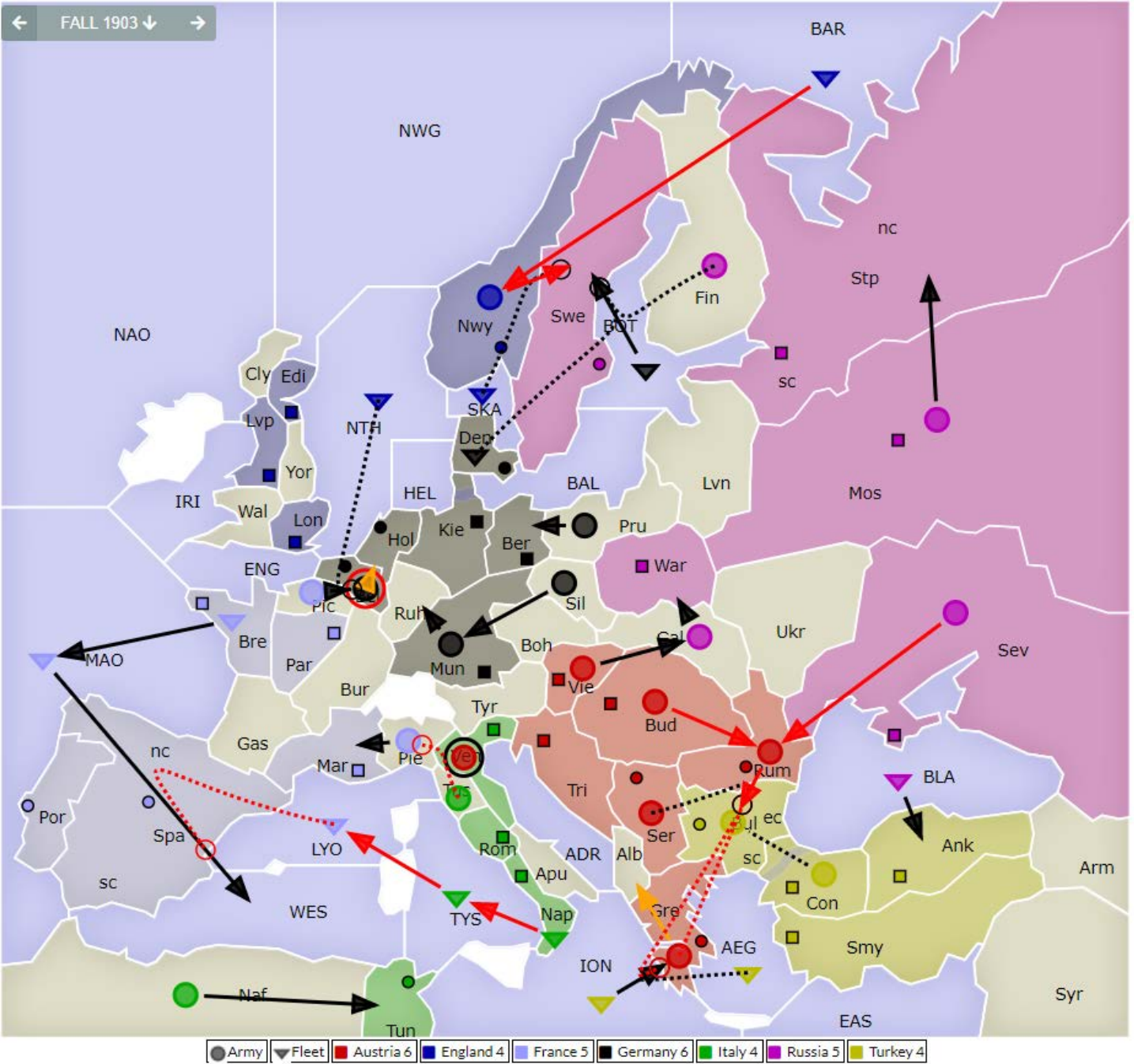
Sabi help to make sure that she survived. I also contacted Austria (Karthik) and offered him Venice with no strings attached. Germany started to move east, which was a good thing for me, but became agitated because the English fleet wasn't supposed to go to SKA, but to NWG.



Farren

When the Spring moves were revealed and England moved away, I began positioning everything back towards Italy except the army in Piedmont which I brought back to Marseilles in case Germany retreated from Belgium into Burgundy. England, at this point,

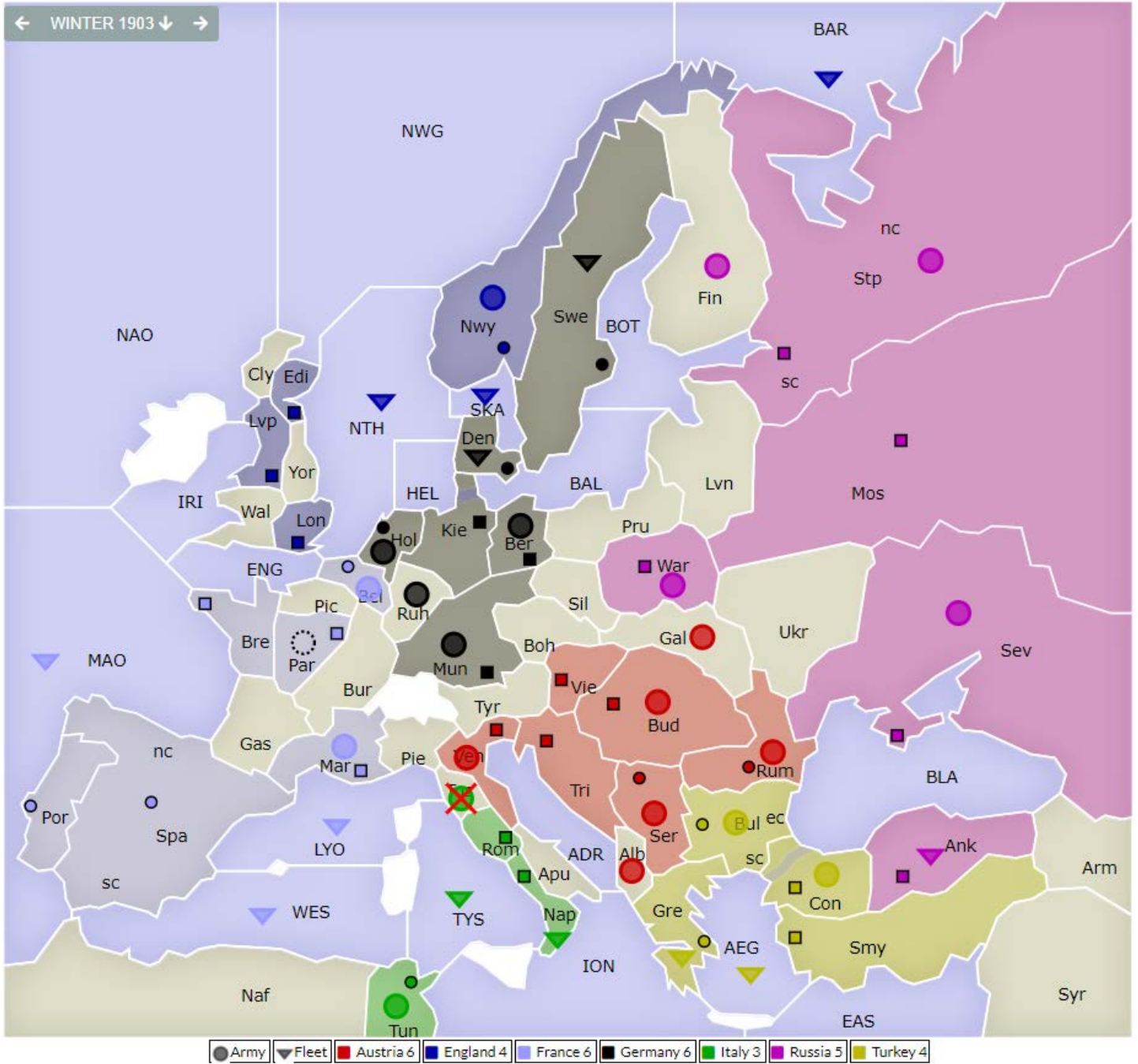
wanted to attack Germany and offered to give me support into Belgium which I happily accepted because I needed another build and I had communicated to Germany that I wanted Belgium back to balance out our positions.



Farren

I built Army Paris because I felt that England was tied up enough in the North to keep busy and I had sufficient fleets in the contested Med and my real threat was

Germany if he decided to take revenge for the Belgium move. Also, because he had moved a wall of armies back into place.

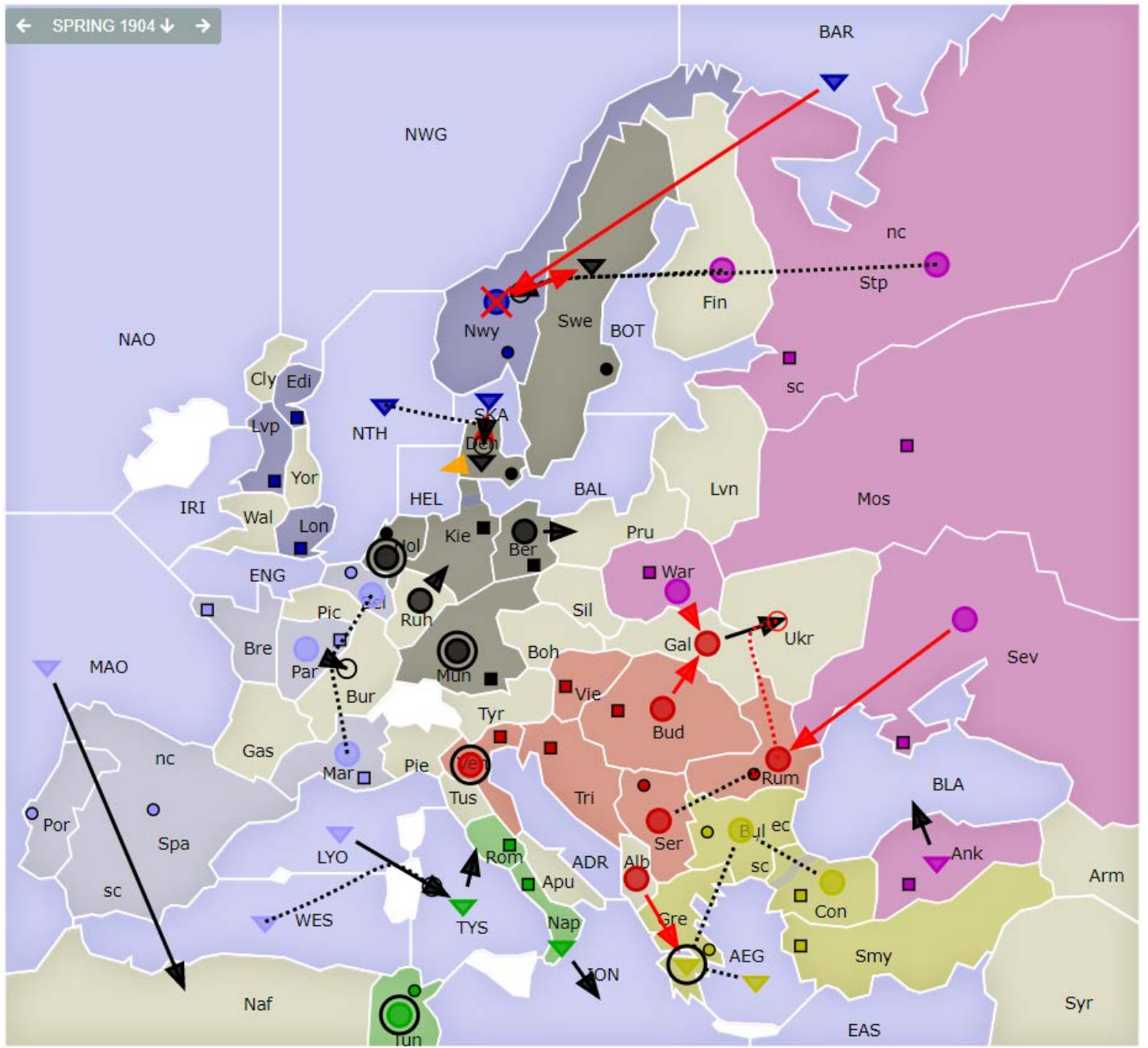


Farren

Italy came to me immediately in Spring 1904 and told me that he wanted to help me win because of Austria's betrayal of him. I wasn't going to look a gift horse in the mouth and immediately positioned myself to be able to

take Tunis and Rome in the fall. Ed had asked that I leave him with two dots so that he could keep two fleets in the Med but I felt that I could just as easily build those two fleets myself so I put him down to one dot.

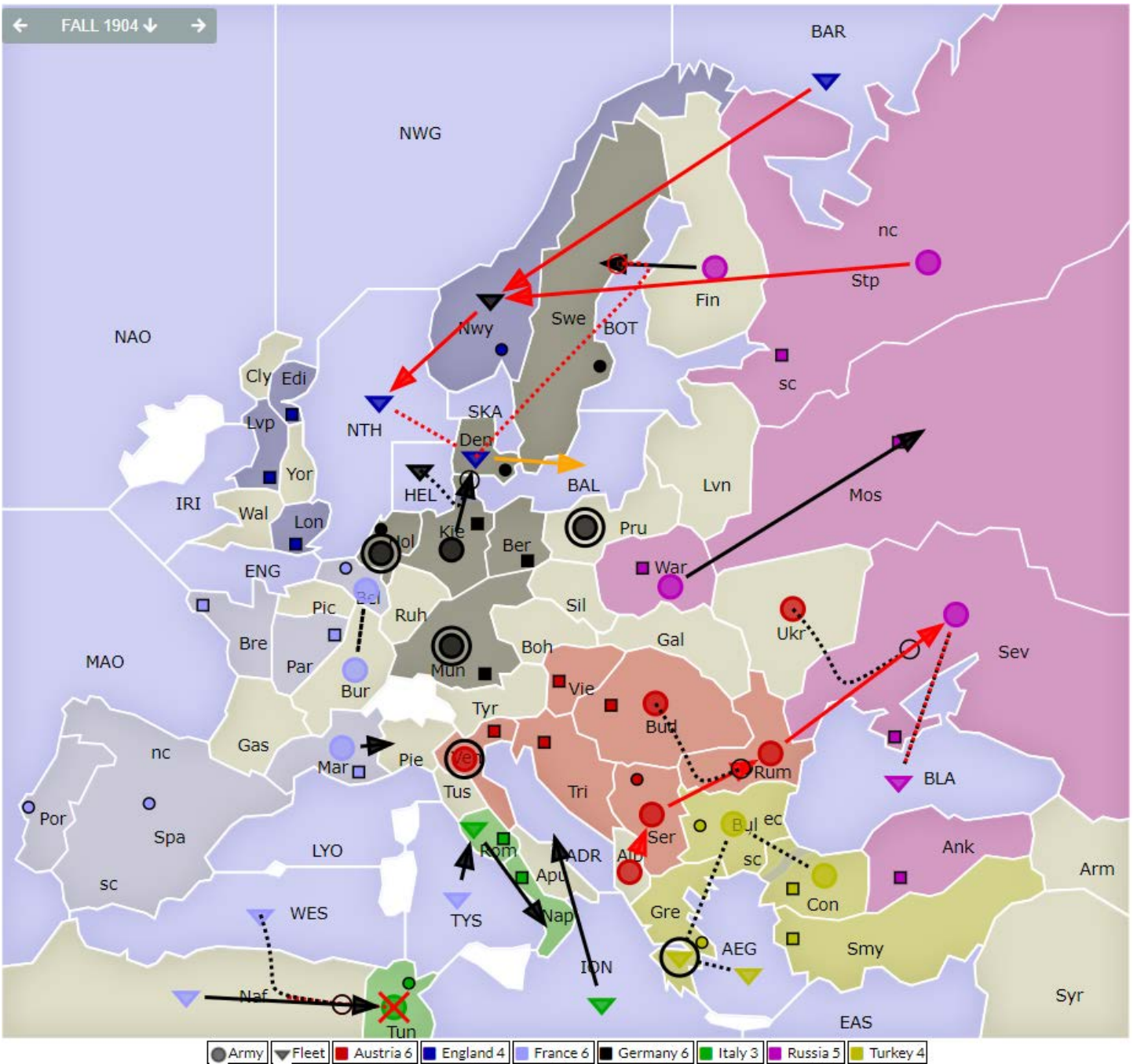
← SPRING 1904 ↓ →



Farren

In the north England came to me again and offered me Holland but I declined and instead just moved Paris up to form a solid defensive line. England was aware that his Norway Army was in danger and I had suggested conveying it to Denmark with support from NTH in order to prevent it from getting blown up but he thought that

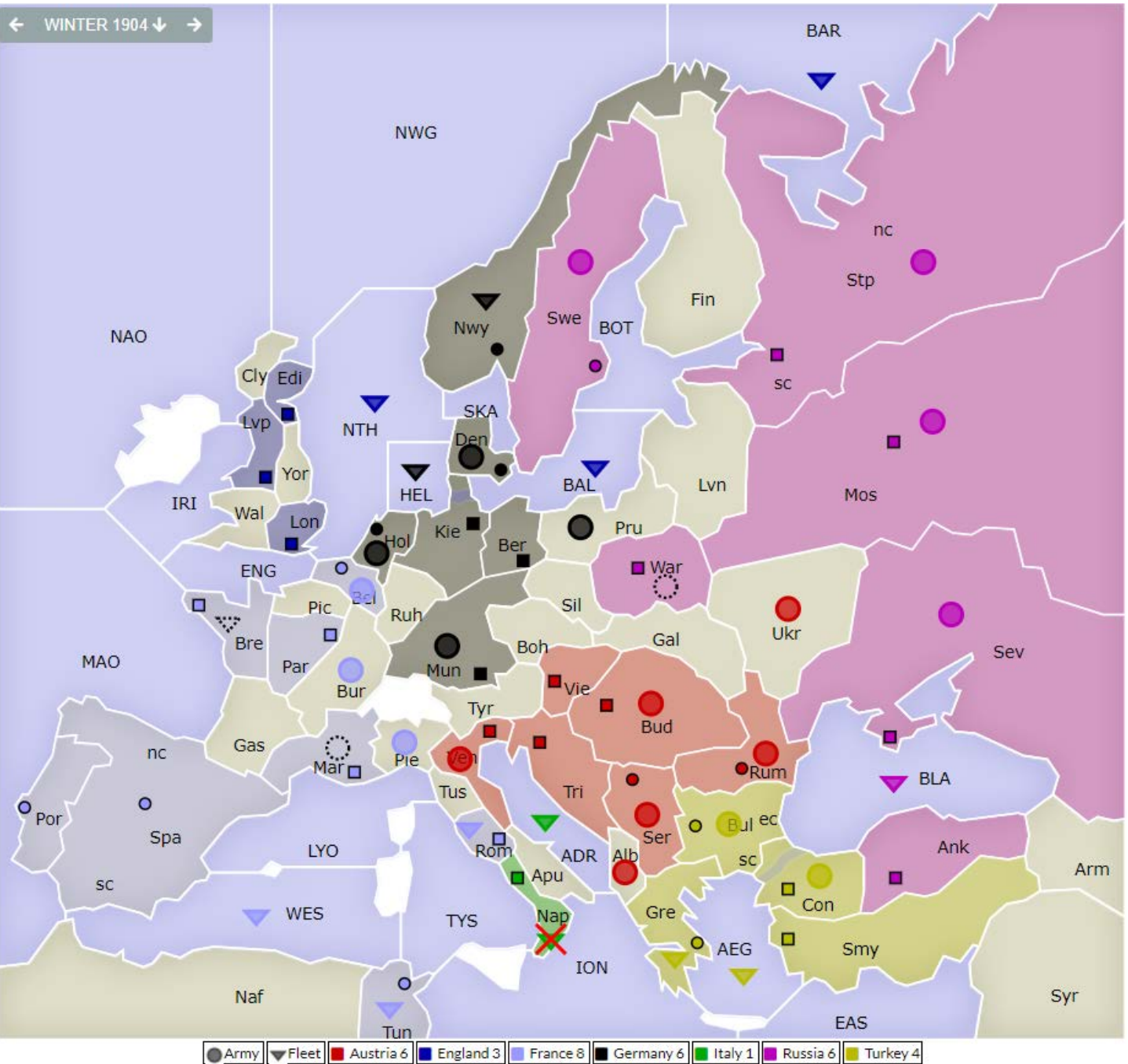
Norway tapping Sweden in order to guarantee Denmark was more important. At this point Turkey was asking what they could do for me and I just told them to stay alive as that was good enough help for me. I reassured Germany that I had no intention of coming after him as I was still somewhat worried about the East.



Farren

I knew that getting two builds here with obvious paths to even more growth would cause alarm on the rest of the

board so I built Fleet Brest to protect myself from England and army Marseilles to reinforce my line against Germany.



Farren

This is about the halfway point so I'll stop here for now if you have any questions.

Randy

So, it's 1904, you're sitting at 8 with no real enemies and one power actively helping you - are you starting to think about the solo?

Farren

At this point, no I wasn't. I felt I had a very likely board top and with Ed and Karthik both in contention to win the tournament before this round started it meant that a

decent board top would likely lock up the tournament win for me. I wanted an 11 or 12 center board top.

Randy

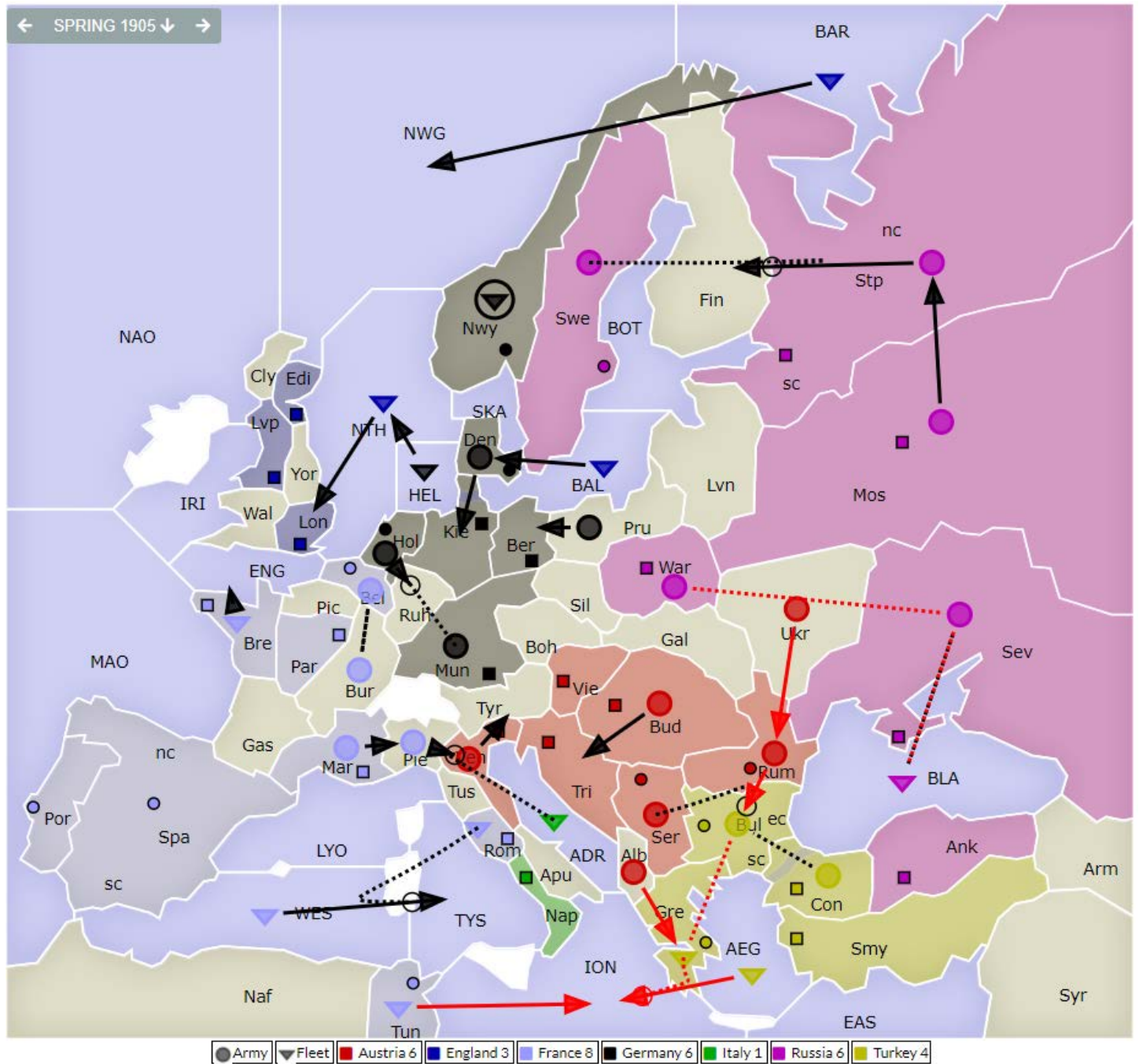
And I assume you figured your additional 3-4 centers would probably come from the remains of Italy and an Austrian or Balkan center? So, what happened next?

Farren

I intended for those dots to come from Italy, maybe one from Austria, and then the rest from England or Germany. In 1905 I knew I could finish off the Italian dots (with Italy's help no less) and block off the Ionian to

make sure Turkey didn't become a threat. I was trying to convince Turkey to attack Austria but they weren't quite ready yet. The movements from England and Germany in the Spring told me that they were now planning on

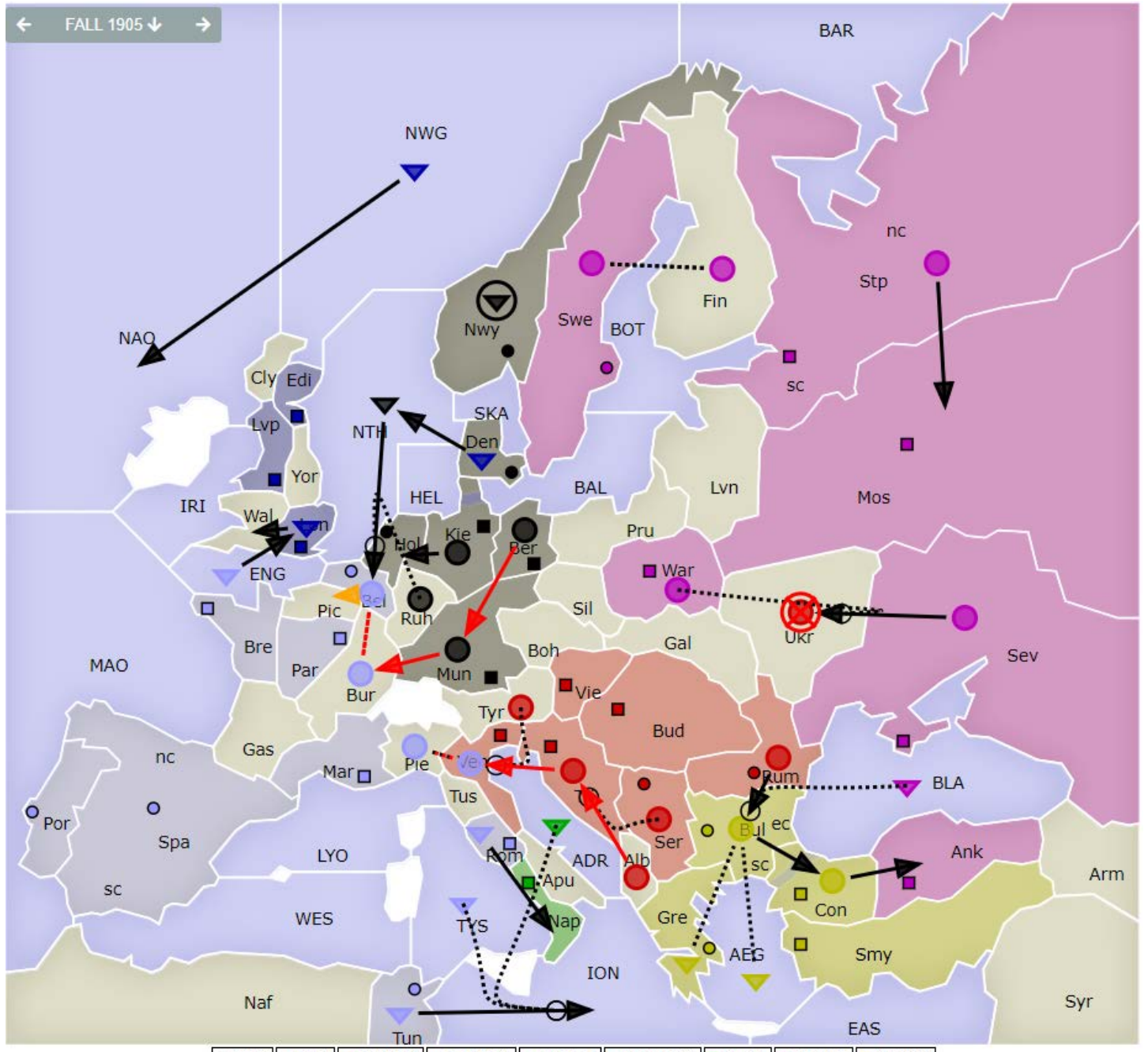
turning on me and, humorously, England tipped their hand in the Fall when they said they were trying to decide whether to guess at Wales or London.



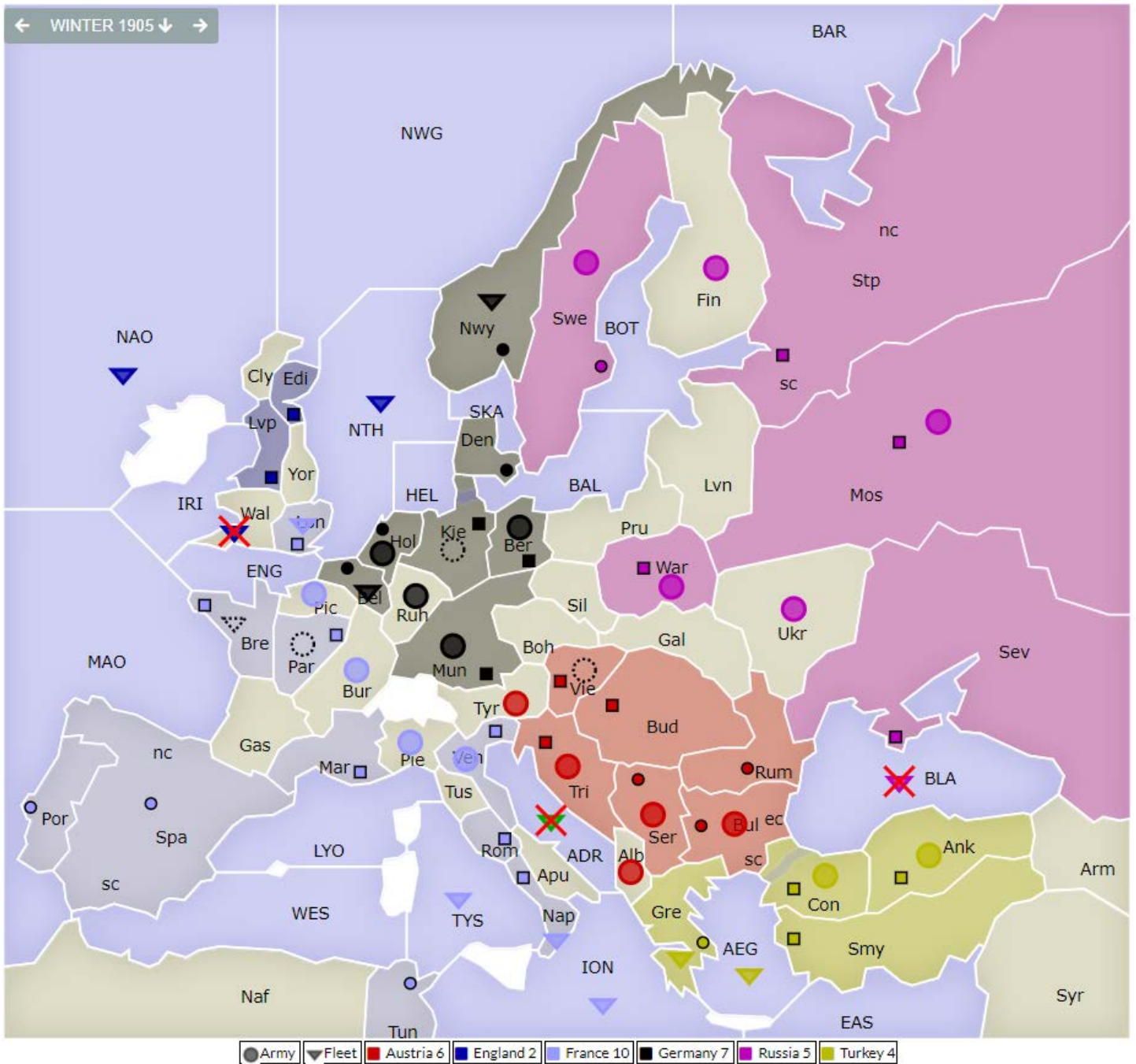
Farren

I originally wasn't going to make a stab for either but when he said that I figured, from his previous play, he'd be risky and try to cover Wales so I just slipped into

London. I lost Belgium but I had builds coming and the South was completely locked down so I wasn't too worried. We started discussing a draw seriously around this point.



● Army	▼ Fleet	■ Austria 6	■ England 3	■ France 8	■ Germany 6	■ Italy 1	■ Russia 6	■ Turkey 4
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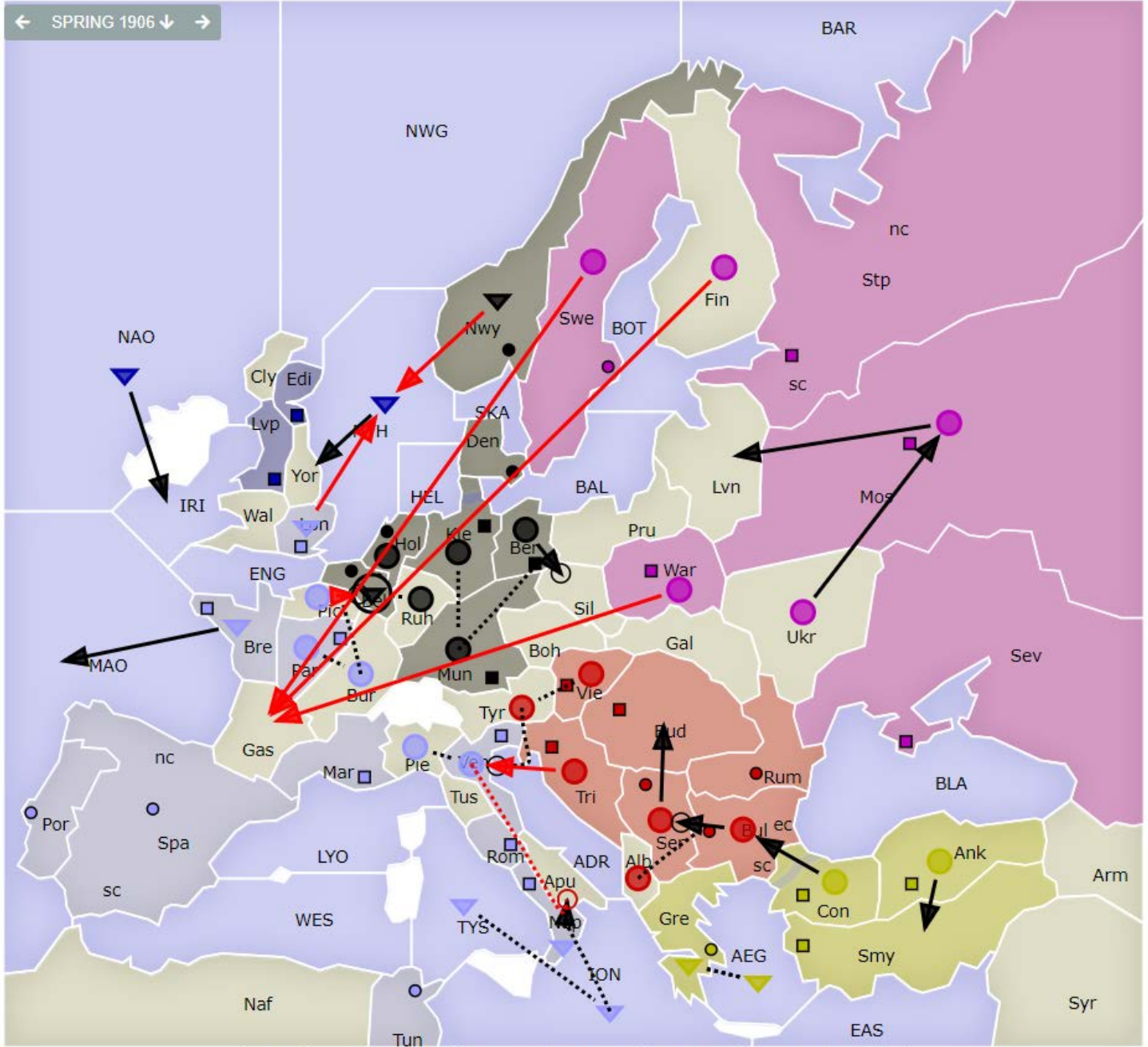


Farren

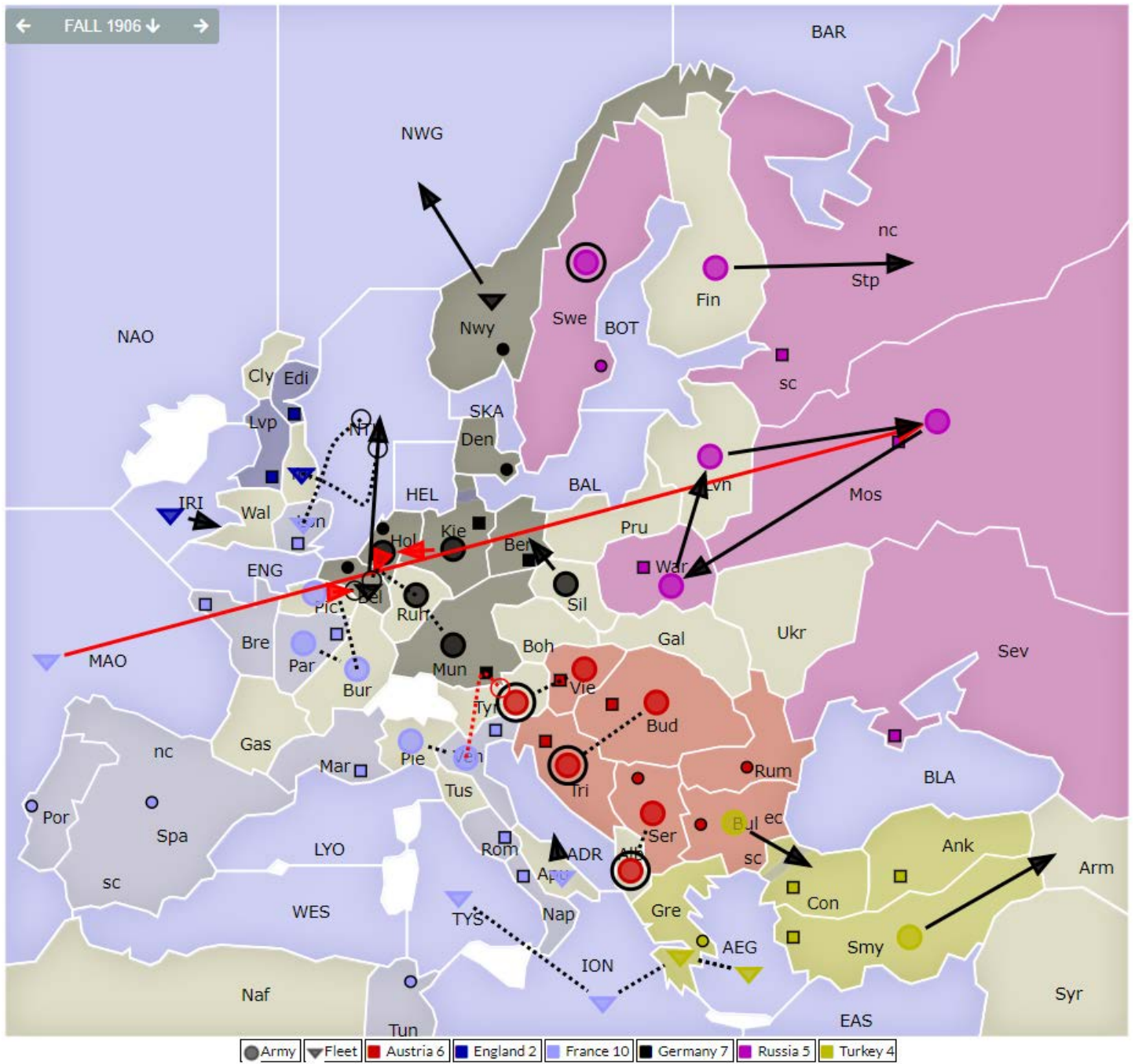
1906 came and the draw votes began. Each time a draw was suggested there was a lone veto that never revealed themselves, even after the game. I began positioning to protect my dots and put a fleet in the Adriatic so that I could help Turkey against Austria if

Sabi decided to make her move. It also freed up Piedmont to go back to Marseilles to help protect Burgundy if necessary. There were no builds or disbands this phase. Russia's moves indicated that he was very much done with the game at this point.

← SPRING 1906 ↓ →



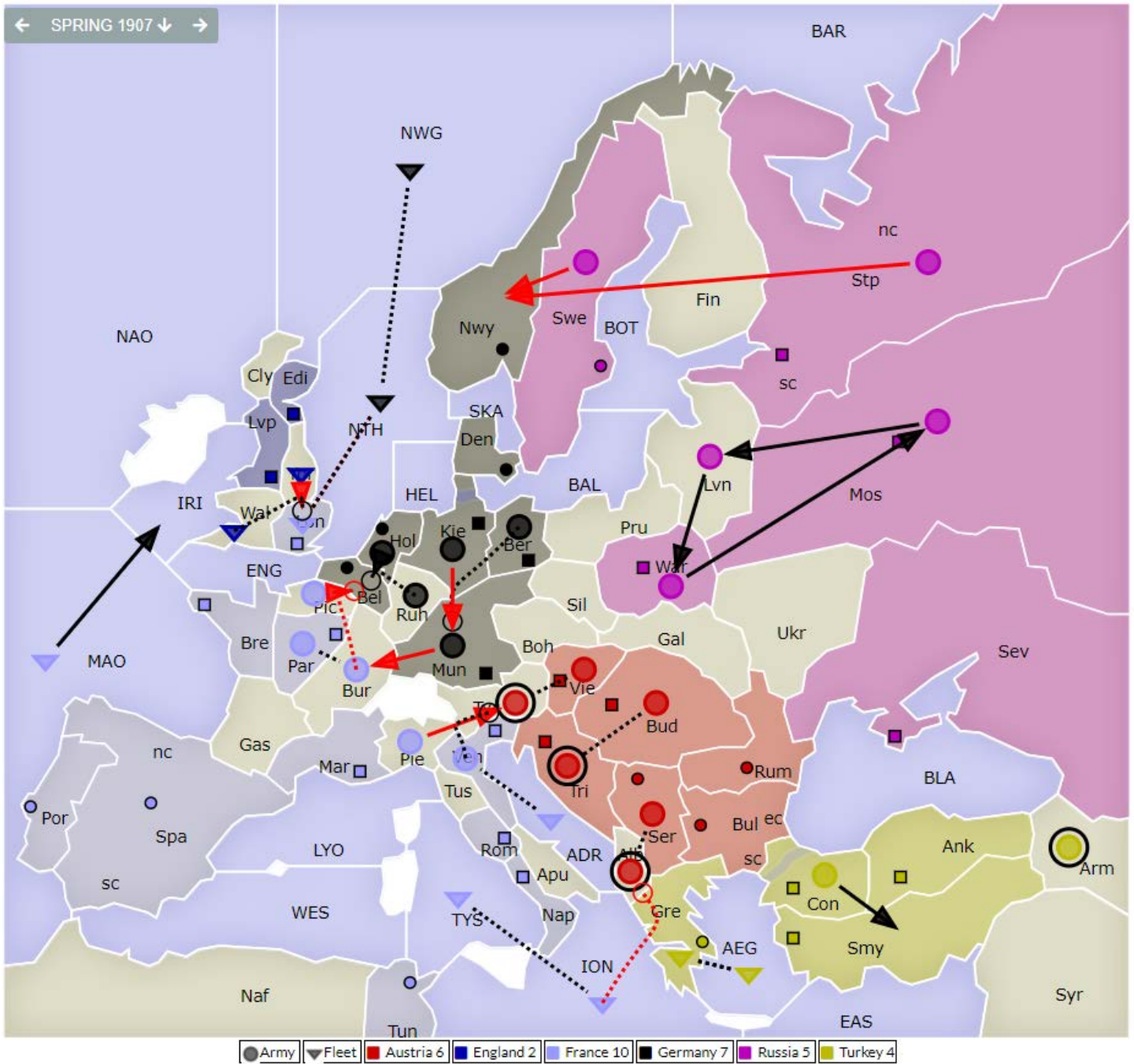
● Army ▼ Fleet ■ Austria 6 ■ England 2 ■ France 10 ■ Germany 7 ■ Russia 5 ■ Turkey 4



Farren

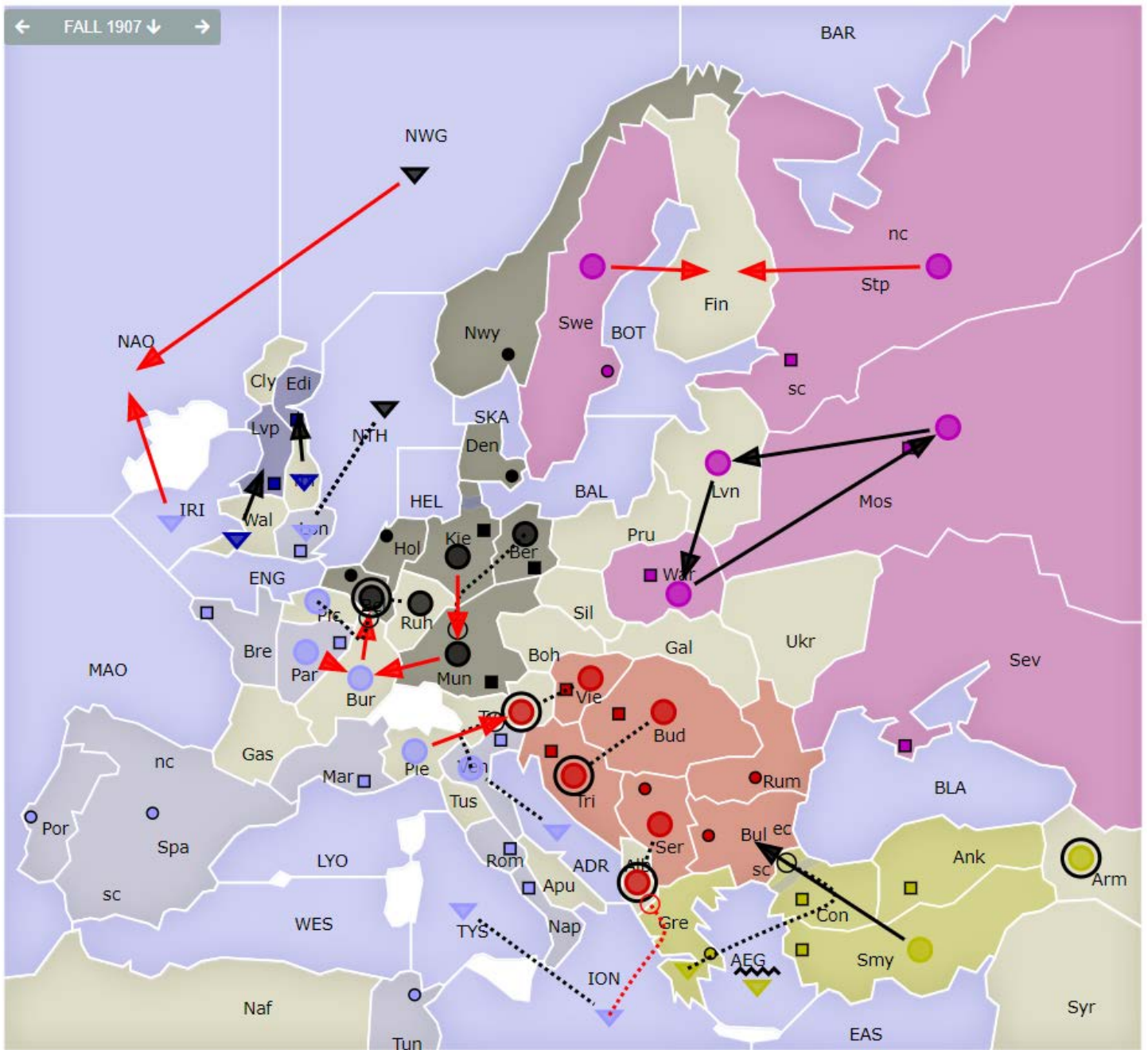
1907 was the decisive turn as Germany decided to support me in London so that I would stay at 10 centers,

what I told him I would want in order to secure the draw, which caused England to largely give up at that point and just cover his own centers.

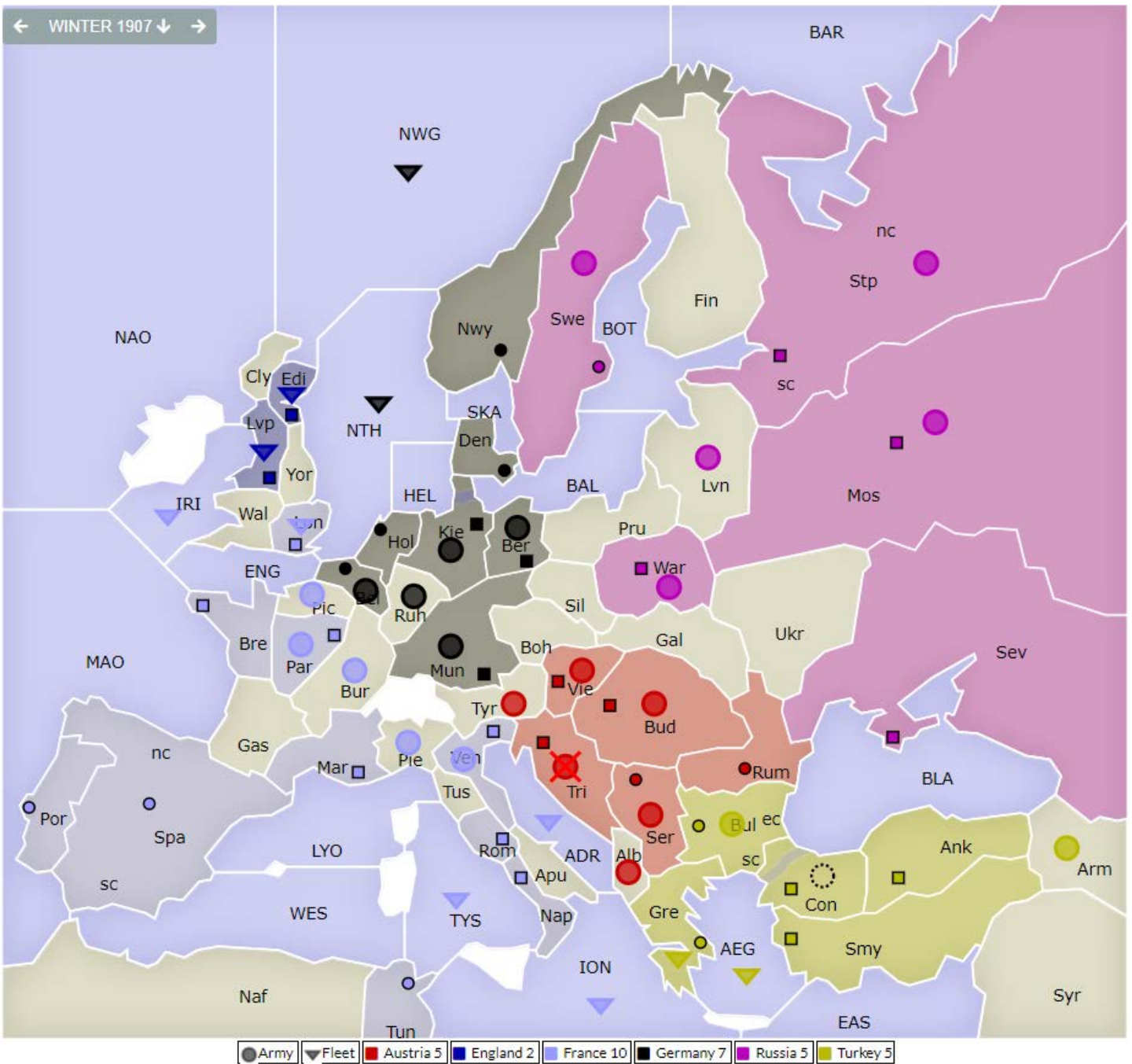


Farren

The move by Turkey in the Fall made Austria decide to make a point, and that point was that Turkey would get no points out of this game.



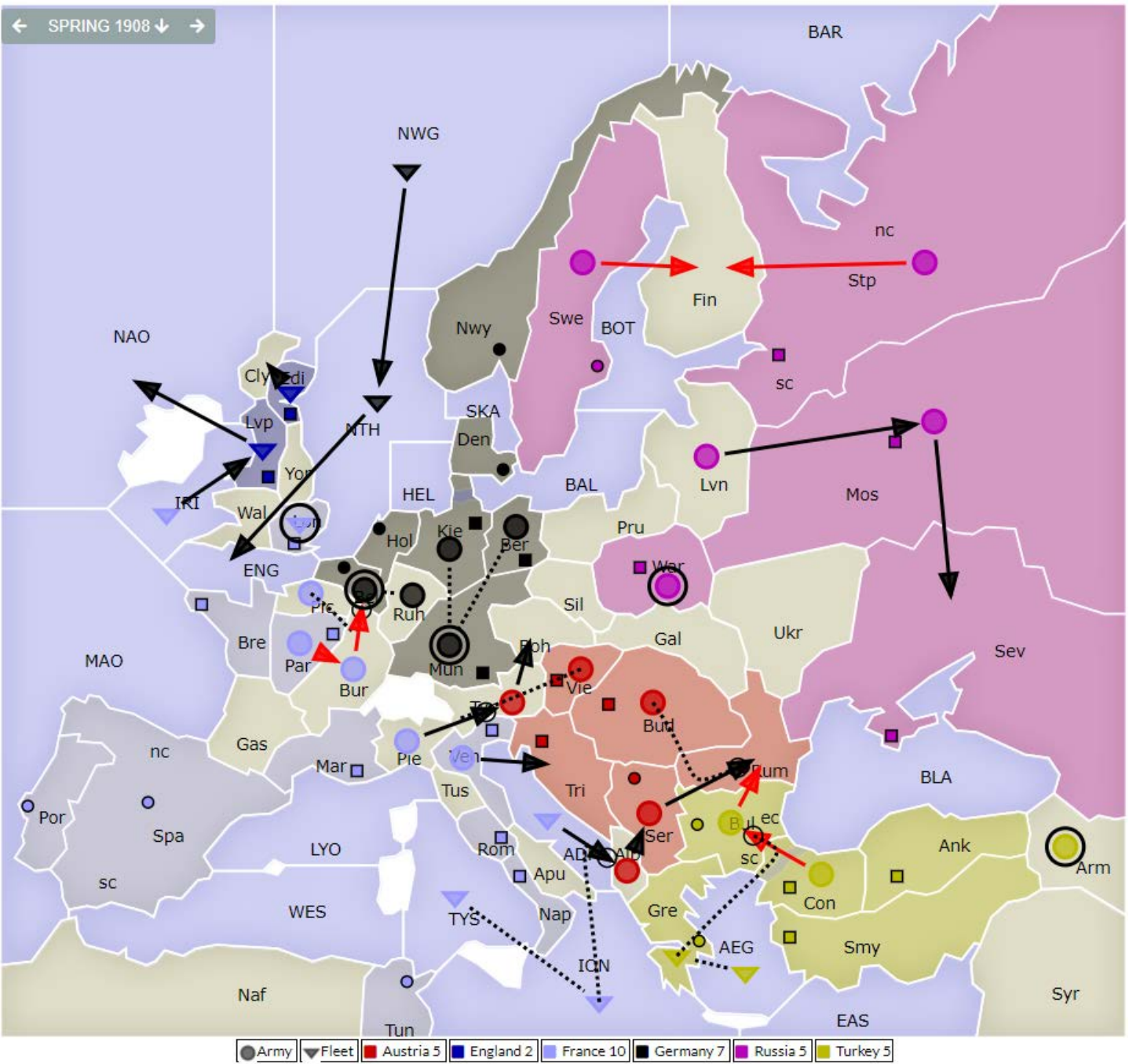
● Army ▼ Fleet ■ Austria 6 ■ England 2 ■ France 10 ■ Germany 7 ■ Russia 5 ■ Turkey 4



Farren

Spring 1908 was the real last turn of the game. Austria showed that he was going to completely abandon his dots to me and swore to work with me against anyone else to guarantee the solo to me. The rest of the board

felt that my solo was inevitable under those conditions and the particular rules of this tournament allowed conceded solos. Germany argued vehemently against it for most of the turn but eventually gave in and everyone conceded to me.



Randy

From looking at the board, and with 20/20 hindsight, it looks fairly clear your solo was far from guaranteed even with Austria's help - did you engage in much diplomacy to convince the other powers otherwise, do you think fatigue or irritation with other powers may have played a role on their decision to capitulate, or do you have any other insights on what might've occurred there?

Farren

Irritation and fatigue were the deciding factors. In the end only Germany had the desire to play on. I played up the futility of Germany resisting alone to get him to also concede as if everyone else had pulled together they could've stopped me, especially with Germany slipping into the channel.

Ask the Hobby Historian: Diplomacy Hobby Awards

By David Hood

Russ Dennis and the other fine folks at the Diplomacy Briefing newsletter decided to create a hobbywide award for 2021, which they called Ambassador of the Year. A committee of six was formed to come up with potential candidates, based on meaningful and impactful hobby activity over the past 12-18 months. This resulted in several dozen names for the long list. That was eventually culled down to four nominees for 2021: Bill Hackenbracht, Brother Bored, Flash from Legendary Tactics, and Zachary Moore.

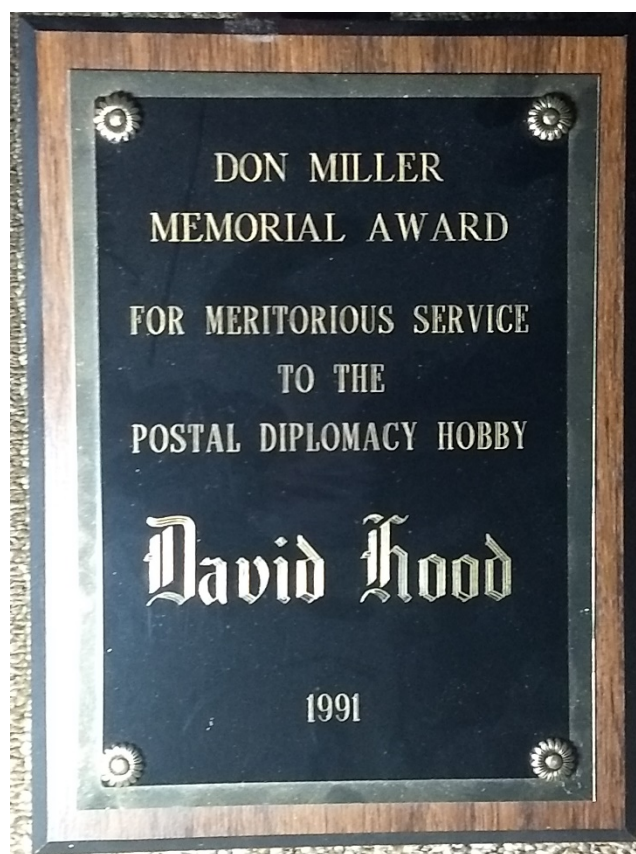
After a round of voting by Briefing subscribers, the winner Zachary Moore was recently announced, for his work in co-founding the Diplomacy Broadcast Network, the creation of the Virtual Diplomacy League (of which he serves as the Commissioner), his involvement with the Minnesota Diplomacy Club, and other hobby activities. Surely a well-deserved award, says me. Matthew Crill has created a beautiful wooden plaque for the winner, and the other three will be getting recognition as well.

It got me thinking, though, about the fact that at one time in our hobby, we had a number of yearly awards. It's great that we now have the Ambassador of the Year. Perhaps we should now consider resurrecting the idea more broadly.

For a look at the early days of hobby awards, you should consult Diplomacy World issue 66, in which old veteran Fred Davis outlined the various awards still being given as of the early 90s. This included the Don Miller Memorial Award for Hobby Service, the Rod Walker Literary Award (which was actually established by Diplomacy publisher Avalon Hill Game Company itself in 1983), the John Koning Best Player Award, and the Melinda Holley Award for...well...the point of this one changed over time, it has to be said.

Everyone in the late 80s agreed that we should have an award named after Melinda. We just did not agree on what it should represent. Let's just say that, eventually, it rewarded quality participation in the hobby while also factoring in the quantity of that hobbyist's participation as well. She was well known in those days for playing in scores of postal games, running her own Dip zine, and also running 7X7 gunboat tournaments in a separate zine ALL AT THE SAME TIME. It was literally impossible not to interact with her in some fashion, all the time. Melinda has been playing virtual Diplomacy regularly in the last couple of years, which as an old-timer in the hobby myself, I have to say warms my heart.

Why did we have hobby awards? It was part of the fabric of the Diplomacy community. It's sort of hard now to envision this, but in the pre-internet world it was even harder to build the kind of interpersonal relationships needed to maintain a stable and vibrant Diplomacy Hobby. Communication was mostly by mail, though Face to Face events also supplemented and enhanced the relationships formed largely in print. I have mentioned other aspects of the Dip fabric in Historian columns the last few issues, such as about hobby services and the like. Awards and Zine Polls (which I will discuss in the next Diplomacy World) were a fun way to recognize the otherwise often thankless volunteer efforts of the folks who literally make things go.



Why don't we have hobby awards anymore? When the postal hobby largely dissipated back about twenty years ago, the internet-based structures which replaced it were mostly lacking any community building function whatsoever to begin with. This would change, when websites developed with Forums and so forth, but during the era of PBEM and judge-based electronic play, the concept of talking about personalities, structures, etc. outside of a particular game became a thing of the past. Hobby Awards bit the dust shortly thereafter as well.



No longer. We have the Ambassador of the Year now, which is similar to the Miller award from ages past, for meritorious service to the hobby. So, I propose we go back to having a literary award at the very least. There

is excellent writing going on in multiple locations around the world of Diplomacy, and I think it is high time this content be recognized in a more organized fashion.

One threshold question, of course, is whether these are intended to be worldwide or whether North America, Europe and Australasia should have their own awards. There are pluses and minuses, but my own view is that the more awards the better. Some can be worldwide, others more regional. After all, hobby relationship building needs to occur at every level. So perhaps the NADF could give some, Diplomacy World itself could for the literary award, other groups may want to do the same.

Another thought, while I'm on the subject - given how technology has advanced, we can now have an Awards Show on DBN if we wish. Come on now, don't we wish? We could do red carpet interviews, gossipy snide remarks and cutdowns between the candidates, character assassination hits on Ed Sullivan's Backchannel, the whole nine yards. The awards can be announced on live YouTube Television. Those folk from back in the 80s would spin in their proverbial or literal graves. Which means we definitely should do this - so if you are interested, contact me and we'll scheme for an awards season to take place up to and including an early January of 2023 "Diplomacy Awards Show" (catchy name tbd).

Selected Upcoming Conventions

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

Cascadia Open – January 29th – January 30th, 2022 - Holiday Inn Express, 15808 104 Ave, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada – Email: Cascadia.open@gmail.com

Totalcon 2022 – February 25th – February 27th, 2022 – Marlborough, Massachusetts (but I believe this year it may be a virtual event?) – <http://www.totalcon.com>

2022 Regatta – March 11th – March 13th, 2022 – Denver, Colorado – Manus Hand at manus2hand@gmail.com

PoppyCon 2022 – April 23rd – April 24th, 2022 – Melbourne, Australia – Email: Andrew Goff at acgoff@hotmail.com

Badass Whipping – April 20th – May 1st, 2022 - Hotel de Anza, San Jose, California – Siobahn Nolen at badassdiplomacy@gmail.com

DixieCon 36 – May 27th – May 29th, 2022 – Chapel Hill, North Carolina – www.dixiecon.com

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

Search for the Worst #3

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 am still making my way through suggestions from dear readers of Search for the Worst. This variant came our way by recommendation of Chris Frindrich. Thank you to Chris!

This issue's submission: Empire, or Fall of the American Empire?, Designed by Vincent Mous

Overview: This one has been hanging around for quite a while. I recall a very old rather atrocious looking map that could have been an earlier version of Empire back about ten years ago, but many of those old maps have been lost to time as the databases they are on became unkempt and corrupted. The two versions I have been able to find appear to be version 3 and 4. To be fair to the designer, we'll study version 4.

Category One: Setting

You don't see too many variants taking place in North America specifically, and out of those variants, you don't see too many good ones. Out of all the well mapped portions of our planet, the Americas are probably the least utilized in Diplomacy variant design. We see the full title as something about the Fall of Empire—and indeed, flavor text that may have been the original sets a pretty fun stage:

"The country is in ruins and in a state of anarchy except 5 states where new 'Republics' have arisen. Florida, Texas and California maintain some semblance of order within their old borders. In the north-east, New York has formed a union with Pennsylvania and New Jersey to stand together in the coming wars. Chicago, Milwaukee and Minneapolis have done likewise, calling themselves the 'Heartland' of America...

Meanwhile, the events in the United States have caused Quebec to secede from Canada. Western Canada soon followed suit, under the leadership of British Columbia and joined with American renegades in Alaska. The

central Canadian government has fallen and is in disarray...

In the south, the increasingly strong drug lords and industrial mafia have rested control of northern Mexico away from the government, while the rebellion of Chiapas has spread to other southern Mexican states. Under siege, Mexico's government prepares to strike back...

Taking advantage of the chaos on the North American continent, Cuba invades Jamaica and prepares to spread its influence further abroad, while Peru takes control of Colombia and turns its eyes northwards..."

You could have a lot of role-playing fun with this one, particularly if you can play as California, Texas, or especially Florida being all independent powers.

Setting Score: 15 out of 20 for the relatively unusual setting. Who wouldn't want to play as a renegade post-apocalyptic Florida?

Category Two: Graphical Design

This map we're studying is fine....workmanlike I suppose. I wish I could find that old awful MS paint version that I am about 80% sure is an earlier version of this same variant to drag down the points some more. Taking the flavor text setting the stage, here could have been a chance to really spice up the setting a bit. Instead, we have a perfectly workable, albeit dull design

Graphical Design Score: This version uses a generic map design that in no way makes the setting feel anything unique. 3 out of 10.

Category Three: Feasibility

There are only a few special rules about rivers and canals, so no issues on that front. In terms of player count, 10 is just on the manageable side of organizing games easily without having too large a risk of drop outs. The setting is unusual enough that you would probably be able to entice any variant player to give it a go at least once. Easy to pick up and play, and I can't imagine GMing it would be overly difficult.

Feasibility Score: 10 out of 15. Only deductions here come from the relatively large size of the map and the player count.

Diplomacy (c) Hasbro, Inc.
Fall of the American Empire Variant
 by Vincent Mous 1996-1998

- BC
- California
- Cuba
- Florida
- Heartland
- Mexico
- New York
- Peru
- Quebec
- Texas



Category Four: Balance and Playability

The first thing that immediately sticks out to me is the size of the map. It is quite large, and players need 34 supply centers to win. The original map, with 7 players,

requires 18 to win. The ratio on the original map between the number of players and required SCs is about 2.5. On Empire, it jumps to 3.4. There is some of that classic big variant bloat involved then. This is

always the danger with large maps. Diplomacy has three distinct and separately enjoyable phases:

- a) Opening phase, where you are trying to scramble to avoid early elimination in your corner of the map.
- b) Middle phase, where you are re-assessing alliances and keeping a close watch on every corner of the map to try to keep everyone in check
- c) End phase, where you must tactically handle many more units and maneuver for a final stab or push to victory (or hold a line for a draw)

Most of us variant players love the concept of lots of players in a game. It makes the opening phase a lot of fun and can present more options later on in the game. But if you have too many required SCs to win, the end phase turns into a dull slog. Think about how regular Diplomacy ends—solos almost never feel like ‘mop-ups.’ If your variant has an ending that feels more like the end of an Axis and Allies game, where you are just steamrolling dully to the end, *don't think you have to remove player counts!* Just tighten up the map.

Or, add starting supply centers instead. If you want players to win with 34 supply centers, don't start them with 3 supply centers. See how starting them with 5 or 6 works instead. You'll increase that starting tempo a lot, and with that tempo increase, you may avoid an overly lengthy journey to the end game. This method may be more useful in big global games where large amount of

supply centers are unavoidable.

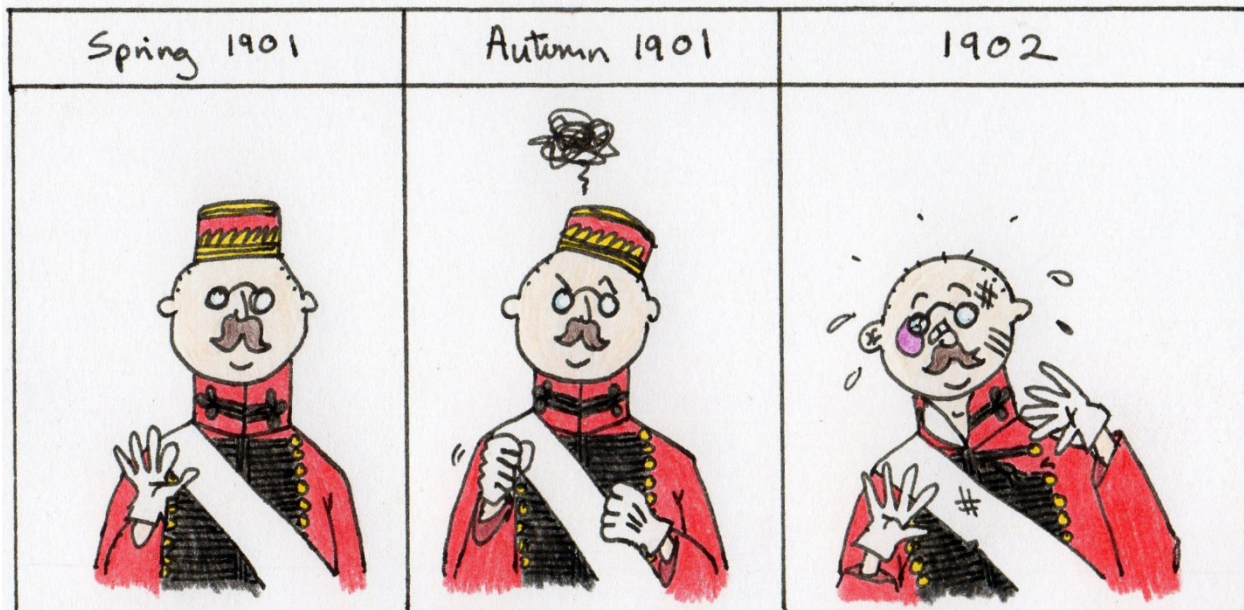
That was quite a long aside, so I'll try to avoid another rant here: only two of the powers can actually attack each other the opening year—Cuba and Florida. No one else can reach an opponent's home supply center with two moves. I'm sure this was intentionally done, and maybe some of you out there like relative safety year 1. To me, this takes a lot of the essential tension and gambling out of the start of a Diplomacy game (and if I'm going to be eliminated, I'd much prefer it happen early). This lack of early tension won't help the end-game slog at all either.

Balance and Playability Score: Nothing looks terribly out of whack between the powers, but the map is too big and removes a lot of first year tension for most of the powers. Its playable, but it needs to be tightened up. Too many spaces, too many supply centers, and a fear of early rushes makes it a bit bland and forgettable for what should be a relatively unique setting. 7 out of 15

Total Score: 35 out of 60.

No-where close to being the Worst! Unfortunately, with a score like that, Empire is no-where close to being memorable in the other direction either. Still, you could do worse than this variant.

Make your own submissions, because it is clear we are still on a search for the worst!



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

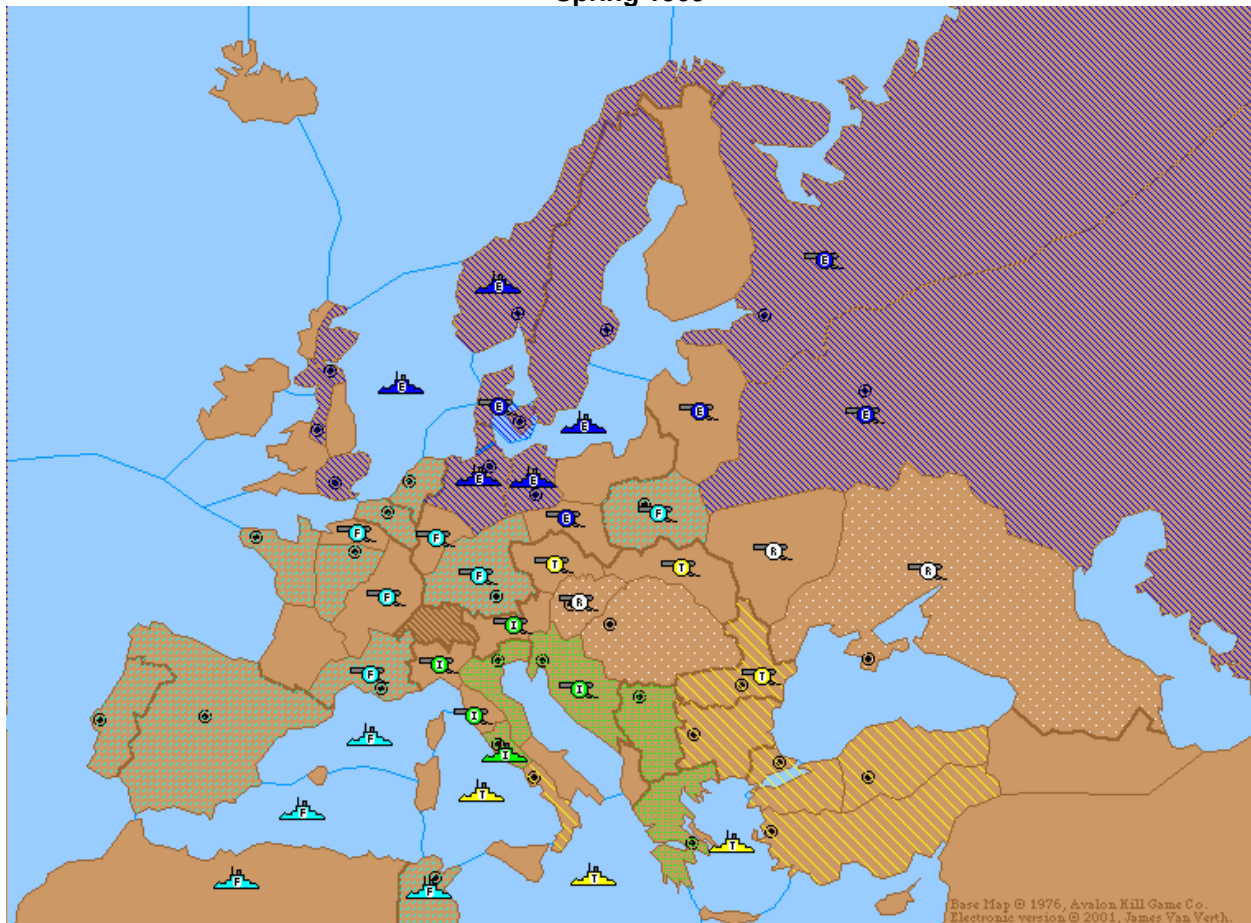
The Players:

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 1909



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

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

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.

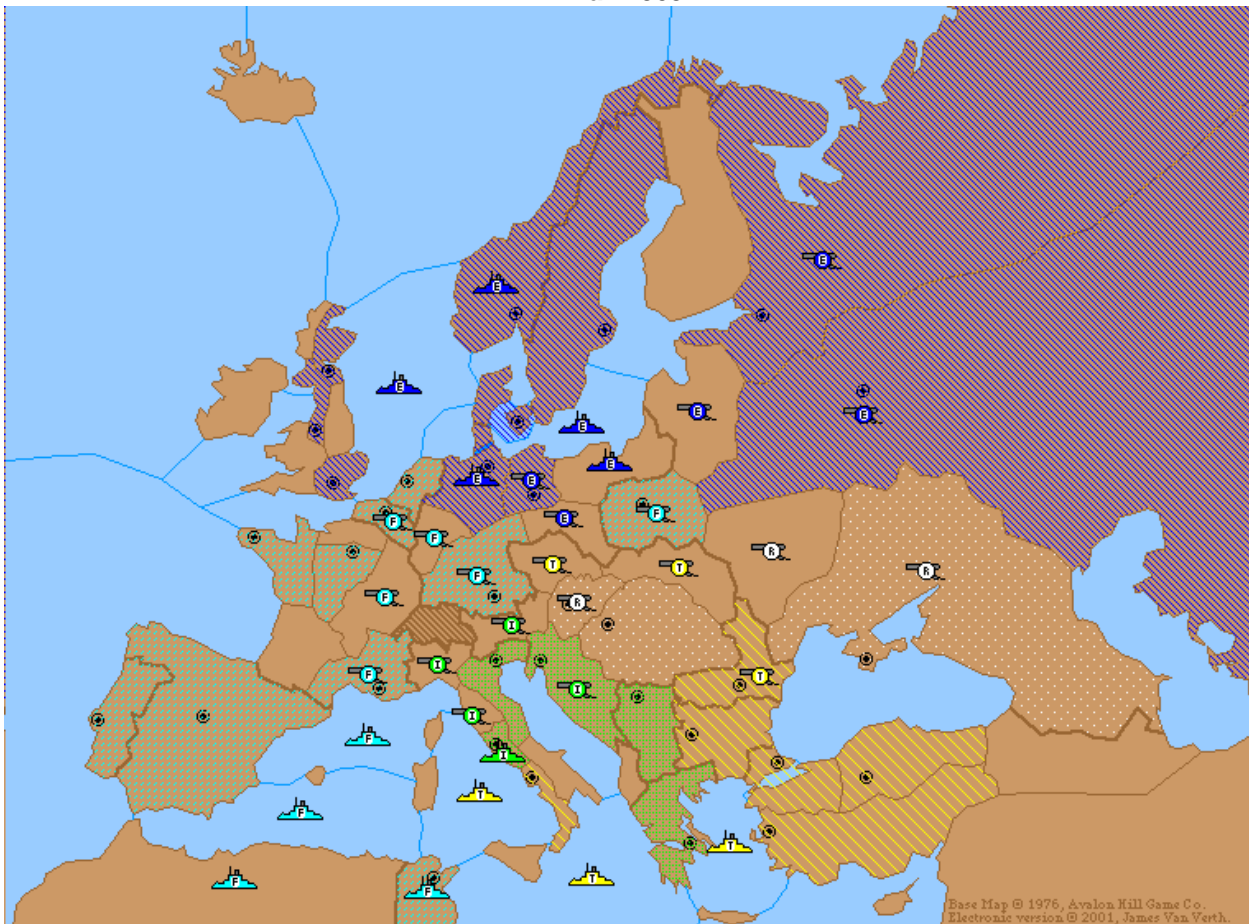
Now Proposed – DIAS Please vote – NVR=No

Spring 1909 Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper
Jack McHugh

Honestly there is still nothing to talk about here. No stabs, nothing will happen without a stab.

Fall 1909



England: F Baltic Sea Convoys A Denmark – Berlin, F Berlin – Prussia, A Denmark – Berlin, F Kiel Supports A Denmark – Berlin, A Livonia Supports A Warsaw, A Moscow Supports A Warsaw, F North Sea Hold, F Norway Supports A St Petersburg, A Silesia Supports A Warsaw, A St Petersburg Supports A Moscow.

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

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.

DIAS proposal fails

Supply Center Chart

England:	Berlin, Denmark, Edinburgh, Kiel, Liverpool, London, Moscow, Norway, St Petersburg, Sweden=10	Even
France:	Belgium, Brest, Holland, Marseilles, Munich, Paris, Portugal, Spain, Tunis, Warsaw=10	Even
Italy:	Greece, Rome, Serbia, Trieste, Venice=5	Even
Russia:	Budapest, Sevastopol, Vienna=3	Even
Turkey:	Ankara, Bulgaria, Constantinople, Naples, Rumania, Smyrna=6	Even

Fall 1909 Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper
Jack McHugh

Honestly, still nothing to say here. Not sure why the game is not drawing.

I agree with Rick and David--put a fork in this game, it's done.

This is a lockdown draw. I have nothing new to add.

Game Ends in E/F//R/T Draw in Winter 1909

End Game Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper
Jack McHugh

Right off the bat there were interesting things to talk about, including the unusual Austrian opening Bud-Gal and Tri-Ven. Coupled with the Turks not opening to the Black Sea, this Austro-Italian misunderstanding spelled certain doom for Brad. Of course, before he exited the stage, Brad had to do fun things like deny Con to the Turks and retreat to Sevastopol from Rumania. Could the West take advantage of this zaniness, was the immediate question.

By 1902 it was already obviously that EF was going against Germany – so then the question became how Nicewarner's Russia would react to that. The answer turned out to be, not to help Dick Martin's Germany. Eventually that led to Dick giving up on defense in the west and decamping east into Russian territory. The remnants of Austria also eventually ended up in Russia. The game fairly quickly turned into EF v. IT with little guys living in Russia or AS Russia, playing as vassals for one side or the other.

That was a fine setup for the Midgame, but now what? Turned out to be...nothing. The game just devolved into a slog where no one stabbed anyone else in those alliance structures. England and France both passed up opportunities to stab. It's hard without knowing the content of negotiations, but it seems to me that one or the other should have been able to make common cause with Turkey (or maybe Italy, then have the latter turn to slow Turkey down or something) but that just did not happen. Did Turkey have a shot for a bigger result? Probably not, with EF sticking together.

So the game ended in stalemate. Was this a failed game? As always, with Diplomacy, it depends. What were the motivations of the players? With "solo or bust" people, this was definitely a failed game because no one really took a shot. For players who just want to "top" the board, then maybe EF can both claim to have achieved their objectives – unless they are players who think a shared top is not worthwhile. If this had been played under a Dixiecon-type system, then complete failure would be the answer because a five-way draw ain't nuthin.

For a one-off Demo Game, it is possible the best way to look at it is – did the players have fun? My guess – Brad did, even given the situation he was in. Steve can have fun with a strong alliance, like he had with Vick's England in this game, so that's probably another yes. Not so sure about the others.

Any lessons to learn here? Well, there were a few tactical boo-boos made that allowed folk to retreat places they should not have. On the other hand, folk got up to the line pretty well eventually to prevent EF from breaching the eastern line so that's something to learn from. Overall, I just want to say that it was fun to watch these blast-from-the-past names play, and I hope they will play some more games. Maybe even join virtual Face to Face play!

OK, looking through the entire history of the game, I see an opening game and a midgame which settled into a massive draw. No endgame was forthcoming.

The early game featured a strong EF going after Germany while Austria kind of freaked out and got pummeled. Brad's position fell apart quickly, but the tripartite division of Austria didn't lead to any further intrigues or alliance switched.

It seemed that, by 1903, the game was settling into a structure of EF vs. IRT, with Germany and Austria racing to sit on dots at the stalemate line.

I was pretty critical at many points in the game. The object of the game is to get up to 18 SCs, but I didn't see any kinds of developments that would end with any player getting more than 10. And sure enough, England and France each ended on 10. Perhaps they thought they'd be able to crack the IRT position? Did they see the minority stalemate line that only needs 14 units to hold? I suspect that Steve and Vick did know a stalemate was possible, but gambled that IRT wouldn't get their act together.

I'd have liked to see the EF split earlier, when the board was a bit more fluid. Could either have worked with Turkey and pushed the game out of a midgame draw to at least an endgame where the positions had some fluidity.

If this were a chess game, I'd say a draw was agreed to before the 20th move, because the players put together a massive gridlock of pawns.

On the whole, not terribly entertaining.

**End Game Report and Statements
Player Comments on Each Other's Statements Shown in Italics**

Game 2019 A - Dirty Rotten Scoundrels - E/F/I/R/T Draw W09											
Zine: Diplomacy World, GM: Douglas Kent											
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09		
Austria	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	Brad Wilsom	OUT F08
England	5	5	7	8	8	9	9	10	10	Vick Hall	DRAW W09
France	5	5	7	8	9	9	9	10	10	Steve Cooley	DRAW W09
Germany	5	5	4	2	2	1	1	0	0	Dick Martin	OUT F08
Italy	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	Lance Anderson	DRAW W09
Russia	5	6	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	Steve Nicewarner	DRAW W09
Turkey	4	5	6	7	6	6	6	6	6	Stephen Agar	DRAW W09
Unowned	2	0									

Austria (Brad Wilson): It's pretty simple.

This game started at a bad time for me and I did not negotiate well, which is fatal for Austria-Hungary, which, when I can play it properly, is one of my favorite countries to play (with Germany, France and Turkey).

So, I decided to try the "Austrian Hedgehog" opening, striking Italy and Russia immediately, If it works, A-H can

really get on a roll quickly and take Russia (always the biggest threat to A-H) out of the game quickly.

But it did not work, I gained nothing from it and was promptly and deservedly crushed for it. I used an escaping-army to slink to Russia and survive for a while, but that ended too.

All around a poor effort on my part.

Steve Cooley – Austria: *I don't want to pile on, but I've played for 35 years, Austria is one of my favorite powers to play, and I have never seen an "Austrian Hedgehog" do anything other than end in disaster. Now, could it work? Sure, if two noobs are Italy and Russia.*

Hmm, why didn't it work?

Not Austria (Not Brad Wilson): *[[I received an EOG statement from someone claiming to be Brad Wilson, which I think may be a forgery. I include it here for posterity and in case this was the real one and the one I put under Brad's name is the actual forgery]]* I was not impressed by the players in this Demo game. I knew from the outset if there was going to be a "demonstration," it was going to have to be me. Even before Spring 1901, I began putting plans in motion to surprise these supposedly "demo-worthy" players.

My initial thought was to play the rarely-seen "Anschluss Sea Lion." For those of you who have not heard of it, the gist of it is Germany convoying an Austrian Army into Yor/Lon/Edi in Spring 1903. Even though I went into great detail with the German (Dick Martin), he declined, which was very disappointing and no doubt led to his poor finish in this game. I love this opening as it ends with Austria owning all of the English dots while Germany builds nothing but fleets. I've never seen it fail. But, as your readers know, if your plan depends on Dick Martin, well, good luck.

My second plan is known as "The Trieste Anchor." Sure, it's risky, but that's how Brad Wilson rolls! The key to the "Anchor," of course, is to piss Italy off. Some say that's fool-hardy. I say Brad Wilson is hardly a fool! I gave Turkey Greece and coerced Italy into convoying to Tunis. I had a perfect 1901. Think about it: I ended in Gal, retreated to Sev, *and* managed to hold my fleet in Trieste. How many players can do that? I'll tell you: one. That's right, Brad Wilson.

The Winter went very well. Russia was hamstrung. Turkey built a fleet in Ankara! Italy was so upset with me that he built an Army in Rome! I had these "demo" players right where I wanted them. My Italian dupe (Lance) was so predictable. Of course he tried to flank Trieste! The goal is to get Italy so fixated on Trieste that he stops paying attention to the rest of the map. It works better in a more rapidly paced game, but Lance was hooked.

However, Agar (Turkey) was such a poor tactician he couldn't grasp the strategy. He moved to Serbia. Bad move. Certainly not a move Brad Wilson would have made. And, failing to take the Black Sea? This is why

Agar didn't do better than he did. Under my strategy, he would have ended with 16 supply centers. It's possible he objected to me getting 18. I'm not sure, but I offered that because I was sure it would be his best finish in a game ever. He gave me no choice but to chuck him out of Serbia. Meanwhile, Lance had convoyed Tun-Albania and used that to take Trieste. Perfect. Now, I was in ADR and I was all set. 3 supply centers, Italy woefully out of position, and the West still a bit of a jumble. And, Lance built another army! Maybe he forgot Italy is a peninsula? I'll tell you one thing: Brad Wilson didn't forget.

So, now everything was in place. Russia was ready to explode. He could stab Turkey with my help and we would then sweep the board. There was only one problem—Brad Wilson's brilliance required Steve Nicewarner to do the right thing! Brad Wilson should never have to rely upon a chap named "Nice"warner. I deserve better than that, but it's the price I pay for being in a Demo game. Of course, I supported Italy into Ion. Why wouldn't I? I knew it would cost him a dot, but that's the price you pay when you go after the ol' BW. I think you know what I mean.

But yeah, Handwarmer. Instead of following the Wilson plan, he decided to freelance. Disaster. He's lucky he survived. I mean look at the end—he was alive by the sheer grace and mercy of Agar.

Sure, I was eliminated. Ultimately, could you say it was my fault? Sure, you could, but not Brad Wilson. I gave each of my neighbors a chance: Germany, Italy, Russia, and Turkey. I had four neighbors. I gave each of them a shot. None of them were good enough. I guess you could say Brad Wilson "demonstrated" that. In that respect, it was a "demo" game.

Anyway, thanks to Doug for running a flawed, but nearly-fun game. For the rest of you, dear readers, please google "Anschluss Sea Lion." You'll have to do some looking, but you'll find it is the singularly best way to play Austria. I, Brad Wilson, have declared it to be so.

France (Steve Cooley) - Not Austria: *I am impressed by his complete lack of humility. And, I think I'd try the "Anschluss Sea Lion" before I'd employ the "Austrian Hedgehog," so kudos to Not Brad Wilson!*

I have to say Not Austria put a lot more effort into his EOG than Austria did. He probably negotiated more effectively too. I was a bit saddened at his cheap shot at our beloved GM, but that's just how Not Brad Wilson rolls, I guess.

England (Vick Hall): On receiving the invite to this game I was feeling a bit nervous as I am extremely rusty at this game these days, especially face to face, but thought at least with an email game there would be less pressure on and it would be possible to make more thought out considerations without the panicky fff time pressure. That part proved largely true and I think at least I did not embarrass myself. I drew England, which has always been one of my favorite countries to play, but the lineup was largely unfamiliar especially my close neighbours. The only player I knew really well was Stephen Agar playing the other wicked witch in Turkey, which I thought might work to our advantage, but of course in fact proved the opposite!

Of the other players most of them I knew by reputation, but not that well in actuality. Oddly enough the person I knew least about was Steve Cooley and he ended up my main ally in the game! I do perhaps have to thank Steve Agar a little for that as it seems from the off he was trying to provoke trouble for me, by telling France I was heading for the Channel. As England I pretty much never order to the Channel, unless I am really worried that France is going there. In this game after chatting with Steve Cooley I was confident we could agree on keeping the Channel demilitarized and thus I felt there was as yet no rush to burn my boats in any direction as to allying with either France or Germany. France also seemed receptive to me taking Belgium in 1901, whilst Germany was being more cagey, but stating at least he would have his fleet in Denmark, which was positive for us working together against Russia. Not that I was committed against Russia either and did as much as I could to persuade Russia not to open North.

The Spring 1901 results were interesting Russia kept South and even took the Black Sea, although it was not clear if this was a breach of any Russo/Turkish protocols. Despite Austria standing Russia out of Gal and taking Rum, the Austrian position already looked precarious and the poke at Italy's Venice, weak strategically and diplomatically. Everything was set up for a very interesting fall 1901 in the South In the North it was all very open. (although i was also a little concerned on the advice I got from Brad on my neighbours. Steve Cooley is a superb player. dangerous and aggressive. I'm glad he is not on my border. Dick Martin can be trustworthy but wildly unpredictable). Autumn 1901 was where I began to make up my mind on my main ally though. Germany was still being uncommitted and evasive, whilst France was offering me support into Bel on the understanding it would become French at some indeterminate point in the future. Normally I would be happy to take Bel and let France move in behind me after taking Hol in 1902. So that all sounded good, plus we were taking the time to get to know each other a little privately in the mails and build up some rapport.

Autumn 1901 results saw the beginning of the Austrian meltdown as Russia took Rum from the Black Sea and cement the Russo Turkish alliance. This should have worried Germany as it was on the cards and an Austrian collapse is not generally good for the Kaiser, but still he let Russia into Sweden. So yet another area where potential Anglo German cooperation was being ignored. At this point I was now all in with France, who still had the opportunity to work with Germany against me. I worked my hardest to prevent that and was building up a good relationship with Russia to work together against Germany in Scandinavia. Germany was now already more or less doomed.

The next couple of years moved quickly as Germany and Austria collapsed. Austria though had an army behind Russian lines in the homeland and that effectively hamstrung Steve Nicewarner. Also I had no intention of sandwiching myself between a strong France and Russia, so when the opportunity arose I enlisted some German help and moved against Russia in the North. It was a bit naughty after the help he gave me, but heh that's the way the cookie crumbles sometimes. No one was talking much with Germany at this point so although I was the main instigator of his demise, he decided to work with me till the end. Turkey meanwhile was becoming the controlling player in the South. It was 1905 and I still had not heard from Turkey. I will give him the benefit of the doubt in that his emails were ending up in my junk email folder as they did in the later stages of the game, but it was frustrating at this point not to hear from him as there were options to be explored. My alliance with France was still going strong. I held up my end of the bargain and gave up Belgium and other ex-German holdings when France was in need of a centre or two. Maybe I was a little too generous, but truth be told I am a good alliance player with my main ally and Steve Cooley was my man. I was trying to push France into letting me help him out in the Med as I had spare fleets that we could have made use of down there as Turkey and Italy began to work on the Med stalemate line. I felt my presence down there might also help to destabilize any line they were drawing up, but France was having none of it and did not want my fleets anywhere near the Med. I'm not sure if this was a mistake or not and I suspect Steve thought some of my errors as my fleets dithered around the Irish sea and Wales were deliberate or not. They were genuine insignificant misorders though. I always said I would only move through MAO and the Med with his agreement, which was never forthcoming.

Steven was now trying to establish a stalemate line in the South and coordinating efforts to do so very well. The spare Austrian and German units were working with us and we managed to ensconce them in Moscow and Warsaw for a while until France and myself took them out to bump up our centre count. I did feel some remorse

in this, but at the same time I did not want to see the game end in a 7-way draw. Steve A knows how much I hate games getting stalemated and even a five-way draw is a bit of a miserable outcome but better than seven! I think Steve A was thinking this would push me into stabbing France, which would give him the chance to manipulate a win for himself. In a lot of past games in this situation I have stabbed my ally and gone on for the win, but this only works if the initial stab is a good one and Steve C had been doing very well to ensure that would not be easy and secondly if the rest of the board is in disarray but here with Turkey so strong and entirely untrustworthy, it was just not an option worth considering. I'm not sure why Steve A seems to have had it in for me from the start, as fellow Arsenal fans I thought we could have struck up a better rapport, but maybe there is still some hangover from our zine editing days!

For what it is worth I enjoyed the game. I guess games are more enjoyable when your winning after all. It was also a pleasure working with Steve C in the game. A very reliable and competent player and heh it may have ended in a five way, but I still see us both as the moral victors haha.

France (Steve Cooley) - England: *Vick's EOG was illuminating, particularly what he received from Brad. What does it mean that Dick "can be trustworthy but wildly unpredictable?" That seems a walking contradiction, doesn't it? And, to describe me as "superb . . . dangerous and aggressive . . ." when was that? I guess it was an attempt to get Vick to attack me off the bat? In that case, why not make Dick seem like the most loyal lapdog in history?*

I was shocked to find out that Agar, Hall, and I are all Arsenal fans. What are the odds of that?

I pretty much agree with Vick's assessment of the game. I think the three Arsenal fans could have had a 3-way, but, like the Gunners, we lacked the will to seal the deal. Okay, it was mostly Agar.

France (Steve Cooley): At my age, it's getting harder and harder to remember what I did a year ago. Thankfully, I kept the emails in a separate folder. As I read them, I think, "Was I actually in this game?"

1901: Stephen (T) was very good about letting me know how great Vick is. Wonderful. I knew his name, but I don't think I'd ever played against Vick until now. Then again, I knew Agar was some sort of tactical god. So, the witches would be difficult to manage. That made a solo seem remote. I decided to play Spring on "safe," meaning MAO and supporting Paris into Burgundy.

I figured Germany would not be happy about that. However, there is little worse than starting a game with Germany in Bur. Well sure, England in the Channel *and* Germany in Bur would be worse. Forcing Bur eliminates that as a possibility. It also gives me a say in Belgium while preserving my ability to get Spain and Por. As an additional plus, my fleet necessarily goes to Por, which leaves my direction ambiguous, which is my preference.

England and I seemed to communicate well initially. I liked the possibility of working with him. Then again, I also liked Germany. In fact, I knew of Dick going back to when I first started playing by snail-mail. We had some good mutual friends, in particular the late Don Williams. Any friend of Don's is likely to be someone I'm going to enjoy working with.

Lance (Italy) made me nervous. He said some things in our Spring negotiations that made no sense until he explained he hadn't played for 30 years. Hmm. Given what I thought of Turkey, this seemed problematic to me.

After Spring 1901, the West looked pretty vanilla. The East was far more interesting. Turkey had moved his fleet to Con. In the meantime, Russia moved to Bla and Austria (Brad) had gone to Rum while bouncing in Gal. Maybe an RT?

Even the Fall was not too unusual in the West. I supported England into Belgium. Germany successfully risked Munich, but that was okay with me. I had an ally. I hoped.

However, the East was a first-class hash. Russia used his fleet . . . to take Rumania??? That meant leaving Sev open for an Austrian retreat (and he went there). Italy was the only country in a kind of "normal" position. Turkey's only open home center was Ank. Realistically, Italy was in great shape. There would be no way to stop him from going to Eas/Ion with his two fleets. Russia was in disarray, but Germany did let him into Swe. The builds were going to be pivotal. As I looked at the Fall 1901 results, all I could think was, "We should have Tripled."

When the builds came out, I didn't really know what to say. A one-build Italy goes for A Rome? Rome??? That means he has to be looking at Tyl/Ven in the Spring. And, Austria built A Bud, so that seems a winning strategy. Even so, the Med is pretty wide open. F Nap would have made him master of the Med for the remainder of the game. Well, maybe he's going to use the Chris Martin "Austria is Italy's dot farm" strategy. Certainly, Austria holding his fleet in Tri was a problematic decision for a long-term AI. Where there is zero trust, cooperation rarely ensues. Russia's build of A

Mos was all but forced with Austria retreating to Sev. Turkey's build of F Ank? Hmm.

In the West, my builds were designed to be non-threatening. Had I known Italy was going to build an army, I would have built F Mar. That's how much I hate the Italian build. England wanted to build F Lon, but I nudged him into F Edi. It just made the stab less likely. He had to accept I would not go to Eng. Frankly, given the other builds, I had no interest in going after England. Germany told me he was making "standard" builds. I wondered if that might be two armies, but Dick was far too good for my own good.

As I'm looking through the game (again), it seems to me that maybe the most important decision of the game was Germany's decision to not go to Sweden in Fall 1901. If he had gone there, the entire balance of the East would have been thrown into chaos.

In Spring 1902, Lance (I) was floating the idea of there being an ART. That was so unbelievable he lost virtually all credibility with me. An alliance like that would never be predicated on Austria getting Sev. Plus, the Turkish build in Ank? I think I read that email and thought, "I want some of what Lance is smoking."

Agar (T) had such a reputation for being a tactical wizard that he was my concern. So, Italy not building a fleet all but wiped out the idea of Turkey being threatened. Maybe if I could get Austria to retreat to Arm?

The mess of the East made me want to firm things up with Vick (E) and sweep east. Maybe I would be the naval power in the Med? Of course, that would mean getting through Germany. I simultaneously regretted and not going to Mun and yet being thankful I didn't (because that probably would have meant EG against me).

A side note that isn't really a side note (It was during this time, just before Thanksgiving of 2019, when my wife (Janet) underwent surgery for lung cancer. It was our (her) second cancer. Thankfully, it did not involve chemo or radiation (or I would have quit the game). Everyone was very understanding and I appreciate that. For the record, she is doing very well. The only way anyone would really know anything happened is she has a bit less energy, but she is fastidious about getting her "steps" in every day—per the doctor's orders)

Spring 1902 was a bit of a "sitzkrieg" in the West. We were all a bit too clever. The only advance was made by England with Nwy-Ska. In the East, Italy seemed to make some real progress. However, the most shocking thing to me was Turkey being able to waltz into Serbia. If Italy and Turkey were working together, they were in great position to nearly wipe Brad (A) out. That said,

there was not *that* much trust, given Turkey could have forced Bla and instead shifted his fleets to the Med. Was this an RIT? How could that work with Turkish fleets heading toward Italy?

Stephen (T) asked if I would move MAO-Wes. I hate a center-less stab on a fall move. Dick (G) asked me to move north, against England. Now, I could have taken Belgium, but I was going to get that from England down the road (per our agreement) and Vick did have an army sitting on the island. If there was ever a turn to switch alliances, this was probably it. Then again, Dick was asking for Bel. If I was him, I would have pushed France to go north with the promise of Bel as a build. In fact, I hinted at that to Dick. I wrote, ". . . I have some (I think) good reasons for not being willing to potentially launch a zero-dot stab." If he had responded with something like, "Go ahead and take Bel," I might well have done it.

When '02 ended, Italy had 4 armies and one fleet. Sorry, but that's not good. Turkey, facing a Russian fleet in the Black, built A Con. Interesting. Russia built A War. Maybe he plans on seizing Austrian dots. Could RI end up fighting on relatively equal terms? How could Italy see two Turkish fleets on Ion and decide to build A Rom? Mind boggled.

My problem: I had not done much and A Ruh was in danger of being destroyed. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened. Germany was still at 5. Russia was at 6. Turkey was at 5—and had the potential to make a big move. In fact, an RT seemed a real possibility.

My patience was at an end. It was time to do something. Italy asked me to move into the Med to backstop him. Fine. I would move to Wes and NAF (which is probably not what he had in mind). I was going to build this year ('03) no matter what. And, guess what? Yup, A Ruh got puffed.

Meanwhile, Russia moved into Sil and took Den with English help. Now, that was, with all apologies to Steve, a bad move. It meant Germany would retreat to Bal, which gave him leverage. Plus, this was a spring move, which meant England held all the cards. If I were England, I'd take Stp, get Germany to support me into Swe, and make sure Germany took Denmark back—meaning Russia would be down two (at least). Of course, Russia did have Sil. If I was Germany, I would have agreed to all of England's asks and moved Hol-Kie, Kie-Ber, Ruh-Mun and asked for support for Hel-Den. In the East, it looked very much like RT were getting ready to sweep the board. Turkey took Ion (duh) and they seemed in place to scoop Austria up and keep on moving.

Germany came close to doing what I would have done. England indeed did take Swe and Stp. Russia also

supported himself from Rumania-Bud rather than from Galicia. That meant, of course, Austria could retreat to Rumania. Essentially, Steve ® shot himself in both feet this turn. He could have stabbed Turkey. He did not. He could have done a number of things and it seems to me that this turn could not have been planned more poorly.

I ended the year with Tunis and Bel. I build F/A. I tried to convince Vick to build F/A, but he insisted on two fleets, which made me (honestly) very nervous. It made no sense to me. He later would admit he erred.

In Spring 1904, Germany went “banzai” vs. Russia. He told me about it and I understood it. He was pretty upset. Russia’s strategy at this point was as incoherent as Austria’s had been from the outset. Meanwhile, Vick began trying to make me regret not stabbing him. I still have hair left, but less. He moved Lon-Wal, then Wal-Iri. For the love of Scotland—come on, man!

We started pushing into Germany and we probably were not aggressive enough. We should have just ignored what Dick was saying and had Hol-Kie, Ruh S Bur-Mun.

Candidly, the negotiating in this game, while never frenetic, all but died about this point. For whatever reason, Italy linked arms with Turkey. From that point, it was a slog. I did try, near the end of the game, to convince Agar to do a 3-way (EFT). It was a mild risk on my part and I reckon Vick was in a better position than I was. However, I think we both understood that a stab would result in a Turkey solo. I was disappointed that Stephen wouldn’t go for it. It would have been easy to eliminate Russia, then turn on Italy. I would have held, probably only taking either Rome or Ven.

Individual comments:

Austria: I know Brad is a fun/funny guy. I can only figure that rust and/or indifference caused his play here because I cannot sort it out. I actually look forward to his EOG so I can understand it.

England: Vick was good to work with, if a bit maddening. There were a few times I didn’t think we’d make it—like his wandering fleet and his insistence that he move to MAO. That’s a bit like me asking to go to Nth. He was cautious when I wanted risk and risky when I wanted caution. But, we made it work, I reckon.

Germany: Dick and I had the *best* conversations about music! I can tell we’d hit it off in person. Oh, I know our politics could not be more opposite, but we have music, which is of inestimable value! I wish we’d gone Triple or that he’d have said, “You know what? Take Belgium and go north.” Diplomacy is, in some measure, about people. In email games, that is even more axiomatic. With a tweak or two, we would have been great allies.

Italy: Lance, well, some guys don’t play some countries well. There really was not coherent strategy here. Sure, attack Austria, but who was his ally? Ever? Sorry, but I don’t know what he was doing.

Russia: Early on, I thought Steve was set to roll. It was a mirage. He made mistakes that are understandable in a ftf game, but in an email game with this “pace?” Again, I’ll just chalk it up to being rusty. He was lucky to have the ever-patient Agar on his side of the board.

Turkey: Stephen kept warning me about Vick. In some ways, he was right. And, even if he wasn’t, Vick certainly helped fulfill Agar’s prophecies with his odd requests to go to MAO and his insistence on putting a fleet at my throat. I wish Stephen had a bit more ambition in this. Yes, he established a stalemate line . . . and? Rooting him out of the corner would have been miserable and have offered Vick solo opportunities. No thanks.

Thanks to Doug for the invite and for GM’ing!

Germany (Dick Martin): i know i promised to provide a detailed endgame report, but i have a dilemma: what does a diplomacy endgame statement look like when there is practically zero actual diplomacy? from the german perspective, if you’d like to know what happened you have the game reports to review and it’s all out there in the open.

what little meaningful communication there was happened in 1901 with france over the disposition of belgium. i wanted it, of course! i was quite open to an alliance against england on general principles but i never got the vibe that france was all that into it. when he supported england into belgium in the fall it seemed obvious to me what the sides were going to be: e/f against me.

i permitted russia to take sweden in order not to annoy *all* my neighbors in 01, and tried to enlist his aid against england. hoping to hold them off long enough for france to switch sides but after an initial cordial couple messages i didn’t hear directly from russia again the rest of the game. there was a bit of sparring between myself and e/f but when england suckered the russians into taking denmark and blowing up any hope of defense, that was pretty much the end of the competitive portion of the game for me.

so i tried to find a creative way to get out of the game asap. suiciding against russia seemed to be the best bet as e/f were going to take me out sooner or later and the russians couldn’t seem to get their act together. england was going to hammer them up north because defending three centers with one fleet is just too tempting a target to pass up and they couldn’t nail down austria in the

south. to make it doubly suicidal i also announced that i was going madman - i'd let the other players order my units. surprisingly, only england proposed one move (a kie->ber) which i was going to do anyways, and only did it once. it says something about a game when you try to eliminate yourself and the other players don't take you up on it.

turkey tried to recruit me into his coalition but i was more interested in getting out than getting a draw at that point. besides, who gets a thrill out of being part of a seven way draw? yawn! glorious defeat had more appeal.

maybe it was just me, but what little communication happened in the game would come after doug put out his near-deadline warning. i typically wrote when i got the results, leaving long gaps of inactivity. from my perspective we could have gone to one week deadlines and nobody would have been pressed for negotiation time, it was a gunboat game for me. i don't know whether to be flattered or insulted that nobody had the decency to lie to me all game. :)

i wouldn't say this was exactly an unpleasant experience for me, more frustrating than anything else. my fellow players were unfailingly pleasant and all-around good guys. it was good dusting off the old dip maps after all this time, but i can't say i'm burning with desire for another go at it...especially since i've finally found a way to play 1830 over the web. i'd moved on from diplomacy because i just couldn't lie anymore. getting by on tactical skill and honesty alone in diplomacy is challenging - nobody believes you! 1830 doesn't have that same zero sum mechanic that i have so much trouble with.

France (Steve Cooley) - Germany: *I have only two points: 1) I think Dick's failure to negotiate Belgium away could have cost him this game. If he had offered it to England, I think Vick might have worked with him instead of me. It probably would have been a simpler game; 2) Dick is a classy player. No one should want to be part of a 7-way draw (says the man who was in a long game at Dixiecon that ended in a 6-way, coincidentally the turn after he was eliminated).*

Italy (Lance Anderson): This was an interesting game to, and for, me. I don't believe that I had played Diplomacy with any of the other players previously I did some basic research on my opponents to review strengths & weaknesses, if any. I was impressed by how accomplished some of my foes were at Diplomacy.

One the game started, I received *one* email the player sent to introduce himself. So I wrote to the other five players to introduce myself. The Discord server was a nice idea but seemed to be a bust by mid-game. I had a

fitful correspondence with France through 1903, many ideas exchanged.

1901 was standard moves and press other than A/H's unexpected attack on Venice! After S'01, Germany was my only correspondent for awhile. Once F'01 results published, I heard from both FRA & TUR.

1903 was spent trying to consolidate 'gains' in A/H, although Brad seemed determined to take down Italy by whatever means necessary. I was also sensing the Turkish strength while Russia meandered against E/G. Once E/F invaded GER, I thought about the T/R/I but Turkey couldn't or wouldn't call off A/H. I asked France to backstop me against the possible TUR fleet invasion. New correspondence from TUR re-opened the possibility of T/R/I again, so I took it after seeing Germany decimated by E/F & knowing France would most likely be headed east.

Fortunately, T/R/I got the stalemate line established in time to stop E/F from overwhelming us. TUR was waiting for E-F stab but we couldn't hold out hoping for one. I let TUR write orders for me from 1904 on as he is a far superior tactician & strategist than I. A most enjoyable game from the old fogies out of the hobby.

France (Steve Cooley) – Italy: *Lance is spot on concerning Discord. I never even considered it for this game. It was relatively new-ish to me and I prefer either FTF or email, not Discord. In retrospect, that was a mistake on my part. Maybe I could have kept Lance on the winning side.*

Russia (Steve Nicewarner): I entered this game with some anticipation. while I haven't played Dip in about 10 years [OK, I've played once]. I knew about half the board, so I was looking forward to reconnecting. As is my practice, I sent out emails to intro everyone - some with more details than others.

Then - silence. The defining characteristic about this game was that no one really talked to each other, especially in the early turns. In fact, the only player who engaged in substantive conversation was the Turn, which is why I allied with him. I, of course, then rewarded him with a misorder of F Sev - Bla instead of Rum. That not only damaged the one decent relationship I had, but it let Austria into Rumania. That army became a thorn in my side for the entire game.

That pretty much sums up the early game. I had a strong alliance with the Turks and a working relationship with the English. When we hit the point where England had to make a decision, they chose to stick with the French instead of working with me [and it was a *very* good stab]. That solidified the game into a strong EF in the

west and RTI in the east desperate to stop them. The rest is history.

France (Steve Cooley) – *Russia: That's a disappointing EOG. I learned nothing about the game. Why did he go from the largest power to hanging on? I don't know.*

Turkey (Stephen Agar): I genuinely think I have forgotten more about Diplomacy than I can now remember. The first Diplomacy zine (remember them?) I ever saw was Dolchstoss 39, way back in February 1976. It feels like an age ago. So it was probably pretty dumb to accept Doug's invitation to play in this game.

I thought let's keep things simple. My instinct was to get a totally secure alliance with one other player and then stab him at the appropriate moment. Looking around the players, Vick (England) was an obvious threat. I've known Vick since the early 90's, when he was publishing A Little Original Sin and I was in my Spring Offensive phase. He is a great face-to-face player. So obviously not to be trusted and had to be exterminated as soon as possible. With that logic, it meant that Steve Nicewarner (Russia) had to be an ally – so I thought, well, what the hell, I've never tried a Juggernaut alliance so let's have a go.

I really really wanted a secure alliance with Russia. Honest. I was prepared to give him a lot of leeway, provided he kept Vick in his place. Early signs were good. I kept friendly with Italy and proposed a quick demolition of Brad (Austria) – fully intending to stab Lance (Italy) at the first reasonable opportunity. Brad was a bit uncommunicative, so getting everyone to take him apart was not a problem.

However, the game was weird right from the beginning. After Spring 1901 I was already facing a Russian fleet in the Black Sea. I guess Russia hadn't totally believed me. Although we patched things up, 1901 ended with an Austrian army retreating to Sevastopol, while I managed to achieve the rare feat of playing Turkey and not taking Bulgaria in 1901 (although I did take Greece). However, the Austrian position was now pretty hopeless and Russia still had a build as he'd picked up Sweden. So all was not lost. But the signs of an E/F alliance were already there.

1902 saw more chaos in the East. Spring 1902 ended with Italian armies in Tyrolia and Albania, while I had marched into Serbia. Austria had managed to retake Rumania, but his home SC's were wide open. And it was all too easy for England and France – they faced little opposition – and the English fleet in the Norwegian Sea did not bode well for Russia.

Spring 1903 was the turning point of the whole game. Steve (Russia) made the mistake of listening to the smooth talk of Vick Hall (England). I guess it was proposed that England, France and Russia could divide Germany between them – so Russia was suckered into attacking Germany from Sweden, while leaving the north dangerously exposed. Big mistake. Germany could have held E/F up for ages while Russia sent more units north. But it was not to be. Autumn 1903 saw English armies in Sweden and StP, while Russia didn't even manage to keep Denmark. Although Austria was down to a solitary A(Rum), Russia was crippled by the English stab and my dream of a Juggernaut was well and truly dead. Even though I'd done quite well (securing Bul, Gre, Ser and getting a fleet into ION) there were now French fleets in TYS and Tun. Instead of my dream of Turkey and Russia moving across the board sweeping all before us, we now had England and France doing the same thing from the other side of the Board.

At this point I had to change plan. The E/F alliance seemed solid, so all efforts were put into a stop Vick and Steve campaign. But everyone around me was out of place to hold a stalemate line and there was a rogue (presumably hostile) Austrian army wandering around. So I tried to initiate a Grand Alliance against E/F. On the face of it Italy, Russia and Germany were all on board and it should have been easy. England and France only had 14 centres between them, so we could easily hold them back and turn the tide. Spring 1904 was a big disappointment as Germany appeared to sign his units over to England and basically conducted a suicide attack against Russia. Germany was doing his best to throw the game to England and France. And let's be honest – had it worked the only player who would have ended up winning was England. Vick would surely have stabbed France at some point.

The next few seasons were a little tricky. I had to engineer a minority southern stalemate line, with the French already in TYS/Tun, the likelihood that War and Mos were undefendable and a damned Austrian army floating around. I vaguely remembered that it was possible to hold 14 centres in the south, meaning that England or France would have to stab each other to get any further – but it required the right sort of unit in the right place and giving up centres to allies, so they could avoid disbanding. I didn't like giving up centres voluntarily, but there was no other way. It got quite complicated getting everything in place. But Italy and Russia stayed with me and by the end of 1905, the Austrian army had been pushed into Mos and the line was in place.

Although England and France could now take out the remaining German and Austrian centres, they could go no further unless the T/R/I Great Alliance cracked. And it didn't. They may have had 20 centres between them, but our 14 centres were secure.

My hope now was that Vick would get frustrated and attack France. In turn, Vick tried to get me to break the line, offering a 2-way E/T draw. But I was never going to trust Vick unless he moved first. I knew as soon as our stalemate line cracked, the E/F alliance would just sweep across the board. Vick and Steve also tried to get me to take out Russia and Italy, saying they would hold back to allow me to accomplish it. Yeah, right. The stalemate continued until 1909 when a 5-way draw was agreed.

I suspect some of the players in this game (and possibly the GM) think this was a poor game and unworthy to demonstrate anything. But I disagree. This game illustrated many points.

1. Do not trust Vick Hall. Russia was unwise to believe him and not to reinforce the north.
2. Trust Stephen Agar. I was always going to support Russia, but Vick persuaded him to be more wary of me than of himself.
3. Beware the revenge of those stabbed. Russia undermined Germany's position (albeit at Vick's suggestion) and so Germany preferred handing

End Game Statement Commentary:

David Hood
Rick Desper
Jack McHugh

These player statements are very interesting and, I think, largely speak for themselves. So let me give some bullet point reactions:

1. A primary issue in Diplomacy is not just the quality of communication between players, but the actual quantity. Particularly in extended deadline play, relationships sometimes get built simply because one player is way more communicative than another. You can tell from reading these statements that this was a real issue in this game. England wishes Turkey had corresponded more as the Midgame approached, Germany wanted more folk to at least try to lie to him, etc. A good takeaway – the first step to a successful negotiation is actually talking at all!
2. Some of these players were better than others about formulating a strategic plan. This is different from forming an opening alliance and then designing the right tactics to achieve early goals. Particularly in Cooley's EOG, you can see how he was trying to think several steps ahead in order to achieve a result better than the 5-way draw that resulted. He was ultimately

the game to Vick rather than joining in the Grand Alliance. If you stab someone, apologise profusely.

4. There are many stalemate lines on a Diplomacy board and it pays to understand them. Check out http://www.diplomacy-archive.com/resources/strategy/articles/stalemate_lines.htm
5. As we get older we compromise more. The Vick Hall of 1992 would have stabbed France and had a go. In old age the fires of youth are dimmed and we settle for a 5-way draw
6. And did I mention, do not trust Vick Hall?

France (Steve Cooley) - Turkey: *I wish he'd been a little more daring. Even the EOG displays caution. Sure, it's got a good flogging of Vick, but that's easy money! I don't remember if Steve told me about his stalemate line or if I just saw it (it doesn't matter). Vick and I knew it was a problem. We had some ideas on how to prevent it, but nothing worked. After the pieces were in place, we wanted Steve to work with us. Had I known of our mutual love of Arsenal football, I think we could have worked it out. COYG!*

unable to figure out how either to stab England successfully or to unhinge the Italo-Turkish alliance.

3. It is fun to see some of the old names in the hobby, folk who I remember from my early Diplomacy career in the 1980s, but you could tell that some of these guys had not played in a while. "Rust" was the term used in some of the EOGs. This can be a real issue if you don't play a lot. It can be an issue for me, honestly, in that I play Gunboat regularly but do not play the regular game much outside of tournaments. Dip skills are just like any other muscle – if you don't exercise, atrophy can ensue. My suggestion is to keep maybe just one game going, if you don't have time for more, because even just that regular discipline to negotiate, read the board, get orders in on time, etc. can help a lot if you want to show up in a FTF, virtual or online even and expect to compete.

Austria: EOG1 - The EOG from Brad Wilson explains the choice of the Hedgehog. I agree with Brad that Russia is the biggest threat to A-H, since it's very

hard for the large land frontier to stay peaceful. Not getting a feel for the negotiations, except that they didn't go well.

EOG2 - Feels like it's fake and a bit mocking. Or it's a double-bluff by Wilson in which he gets to insult everybody while claiming innocence. Well, that kind of mind-reading and speculation is beyond my abilities.

England: Vick's EOG is pretty comprehensive. Of course, his game was relatively reasonable and I don't view him as personally culpable for the grotesque stalemate.

France: What I find interesting here is the second-hand gossip. Agar is a "tactical god"? Well, certainly his tactics were superior to those of his neighbors. And Vick is rightly considered as a very good player. As with Vick, I find Steve's behavior in this game to be relatively sane. A very good EOG. His take on Italy is similar to mine.

Germany: Dick's EOG is good for recounting 1901. It also shows the risk of preferring a given alliance (in his case F/G) when the other person isn't as interested in it. I'm a bit disappointed in the choice to suicide against Russia. I'm not a fan of self-destruction - it's just too easy! Maybe I'll see Dick in

an 1830 game. David and I have been playing some of those recently.

Italy: I was looking for a better clue here about how the A/I relations went so far south so quickly. And how he decided to not build a second fleet in 1901.

Russia: This EOG describes what was apparently a widespread problem: a lack of communication. At least Steve seemed to have a good working relationship with the Turk, and eventually with the Italian. But if we want an interesting game, we need a lot more communication across the board.

Turkey: Well, obviously Stephen knows the stalemate lines as well as anybody. I am going to disagree with his paranoid attitude about Vick. In my games with Vick, I've found him to be eminently reasonable.

I guess the overall take-home here is that we need players to be more aggressively communicating with each other. I see a lot of players blaming the others for being uncommunicative, but it's a problem that feeds upon itself. Also, the play by the Central powers in this game was largely weird and ended up being wholly unproductive.

Anyway, that's my EOG EOG.

And...a final word from Germany (Dick Martin):

after going back through old dw issues to read the "expert" commentary (i mean...flap jack? but i digress...), which i did not do as the game was ongoing, i was struck by the amount of diplomacy that was assumed. the notion of a western triple was tossed around seemingly every season. but no, that was never remotely in the cards. the communication wasn't there.

unfortunately france was a bit too subtle with the hints that he could turn on england, and i missed that opportunity. oh well! we did end up talking about non-game stuff and steve got me hooked on rick beato's youtube channel. the game was worth it for that alone as rick b's always interesting even though i find him a lot narrower musically than i wish he was.

i wrote russia so often that my emails must have been going into the spam folder. would it have made a difference if he'd seen them? i don't know...but i do know that my spam folder was empty. i thought that letting russia into sweden in 01, and basically salvaging his position, would at least get me a bit of good will. but no.

it's been a long time since i've played diplomacy, and while this was a bit of fun initially it's really difficult to play properly when i just can't lie like i used to. it's still the game that's changed all games for me, though. i'd probably try to negotiate in a candyland game now. you up for that, jack? 😊