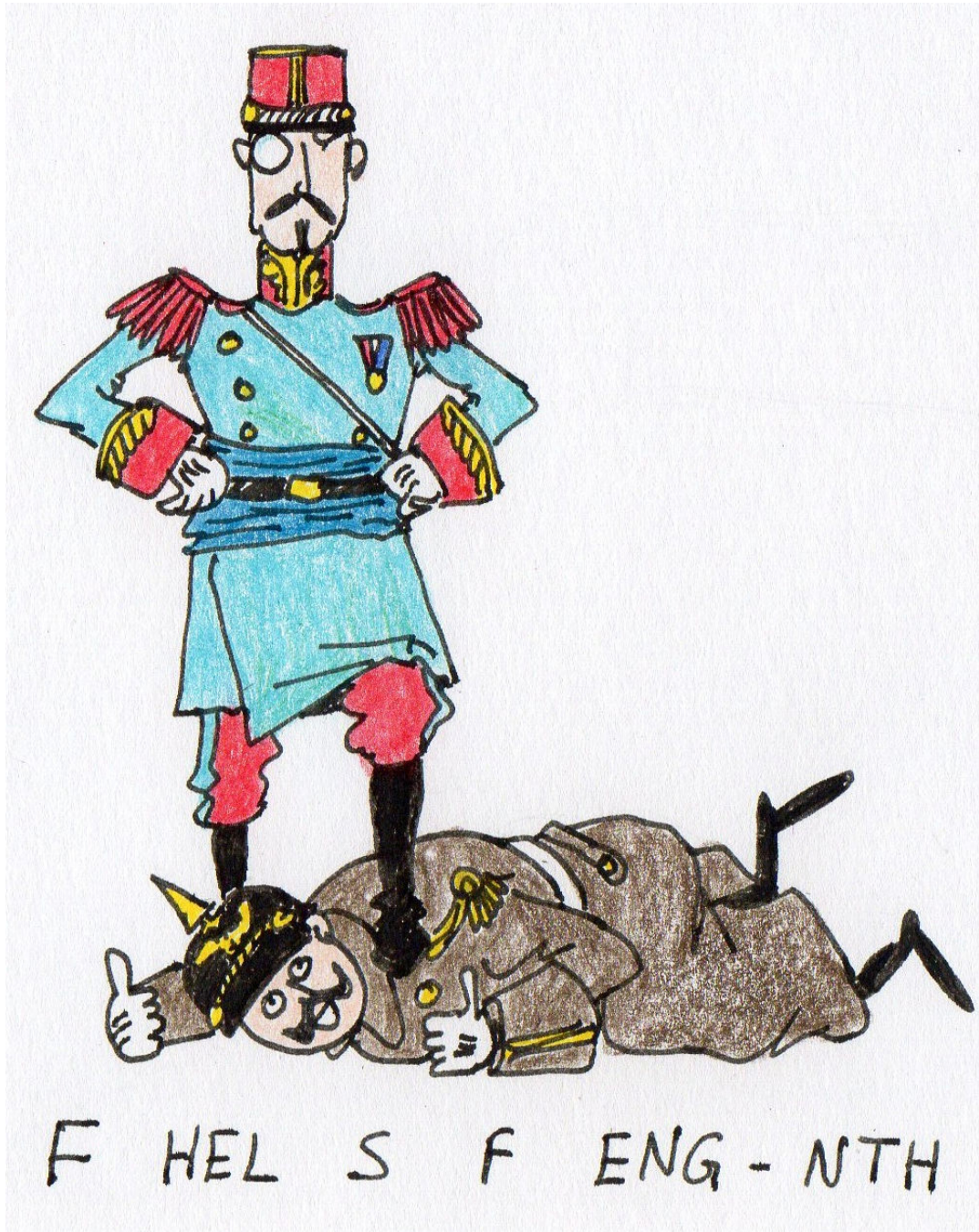


# Diplomacy World #157



**Spring 2022 Issue**  
**[www.diplomacyworld.net](http://www.diplomacyworld.net)**

# Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Spring 2022 issue. It seems each time a deadline approaches, I find myself thinking "maybe we're finally starting to get things back to normal in the hobby." And, inevitably (for the last two years, anyway), more stuff happens. But maybe this time it's safe to say? Crossing my fingers and toes.

With the new season of Diplomacy events upon us, we're seeing the resumption of actual face-to-face Diplomacy alongside the virtual tournaments. That's really the best of both worlds. The explosion in online events during the pandemic needs to be maintained and strengthened, while (hopefully) new players will give face-to-face events a try as well. Granted, some people will only enjoy one or the other, but I think most players will find positives in both styles, and at the very least will support their local face-to-face events.

Despite my usual fears, we've managed to put together a decent issue for you this quarter. There's a range of articles on a variety of topics. Among them:

- First-time contributor Paul Webb introducing a proposal for a slightly revised Standard Diplomacy map.
- David Hood, the Hobby Historian, drawing comparisons between the issues facing the hobby forty years ago to the ones that confront us today.
- Mal Arky discussing the Diplomacy Broadcast Network Invitational (DBNI).
- New Club and Tournament Editor Peter McNamara on his attempt to defend his DBNI title.
- And much, much more!

The last year or two, as we approach a **Diplomacy World** deadline, I frequently find myself wondering if there will actually be enough material to publish an issue at all? The vacancies on the DW Staff certainly contribute to that. I'm very happy to have Peter McNamara on staff now (and a *number* of the articles this issue came from him and his contacts), and I'm

hoping that somewhere out there we have a candidate at least willing to give the Strategy and Tactics Editor spot a whirl.

It's always best to have a good cross-section of articles in each issue, but lately it seems to always tilt one direction or another. Almost no tournament articles one issue, then multiple the next. A few Strategy & Tactics articles at once, and then none for six months. If nothing else, the randomness of specific topic should help illustrate that when you want to thank someone for each issue of **Diplomacy World**, almost *all* of the thanks deserve to go to the contributors. I'm simply a steward of the publication. I collect material. I harass people into helping. I ask, beg, and plead for articles. I do a minimum of layout and editing work. And finally, I put it all together and publish it on as close to a regular schedule as possible.

That last point is the one that I consider my primary mission as Lead Editor. If **Diplomacy World** can't be counted on to appear regularly every three months, a lot of the appear readership will soon forget and move on. And where's the incentive to contribute articles, or to put together a flyer for an upcoming event, when someone doesn't feel confident that it will see print anytime soon? I have many weaknesses and failings in my post, but staying on schedule is not one of them. Back in the old postal days we used to call that being a Turbofreak: publishing a Dipzine as soon after the deadline as possible, issue after issue. I've never seen it as a derogative term, no matter how it was meant.

As far as I am concerned, until I pass this on to the next Lead Editor (anybody interested?), the only thing that will keep **Diplomacy World** from being published will be an absolute lack of material and contributions. I leave that to you, the readers, to keep that from happening. Write. Send letters. And suggest to others that they do the same. Keep the zine alive, for as long as it serves a purpose.

*I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for **Diplomacy World** submissions is July 1, 2022.* Remember, besides articles (which are always prized and appreciated), we LOVE to get letters, feedback, input, ideas, and suggestions too. So, email me at [diplomacyworld@yahoo.com](mailto:diplomacyworld@yahoo.com)! See you in the summer, and happy stabbing!

# Diplomacy World Staff:

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**Contributors in 2022: Mal Arky, Eber Condrell, Chris Brand, Bob Durf, David Hood, Ben Kellman, Seren Kwok, Robert Lesco, Alex Maslow, Peter McNamara, Matt Pickard, Paul Webb. Add your name to the 2022 list by submitting something for the next issue!**

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



**Robert Lesco** – I found Hugh Polley's new variant interesting. It reminds me of a game from a number of years ago called "A Line In The Sand" published by TSR. Here, players can only communicate at the table in front of everyone else or by way of written notes, which are received the following turn. Once read, these notes are stored in a pouch. A player may elect to attempt espionage which allows a number of notes equal to a roll on a ten-sided die to be read from said pouch.

I have never managed to play the full six player game so I cannot attest but I think Hugh has something here. I don't see how we can play the espionage part. and maybe we don't want to, but the rest can be done and it likely will not require too much effort.

At one time awards were given out at CanCon. A favourite was the Bill Lafosse Award. Bill was a tall

police officer with cheery blue eyes and a reputation for rough around the edges publishing. The award consisted of a joke book, a copy of the rules for Diplomacy, some liquid paper (I think - it was a long time ago) and a banana to feed the typist. Mercifully, the CanCon Awards had fallen into disuse before I took over Northern Flame.

*[[I miss the joke Rusty Bolts Awards which Tom Nash created and I later took over. There were sarcastic and humorous categories, often using player's names and their play styles (or publishers') to define the awards. I'll have to look and see if I have any of the old voting pages. Sadly, these types of things require true crossover from various phases of the hobby to work, which is not anything like it was back in the postal zine days.]]*

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## Selected Upcoming Events

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

PoppyCon 2022 – April 23<sup>rd</sup> – April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – Melbourne, Australia – Email: Andrew Goff at [acgoff@hotmail.com](mailto:acgoff@hotmail.com)

Badass Whipping – April 20<sup>th</sup> – May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022 - Hotel de Anza, San Jose, California – Siobahn Nolen at [badassdiplomacy@gmail.com](mailto:badassdiplomacy@gmail.com)

Virtual Diplomacy League Even – May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

DixieCon 36 – May 27<sup>th</sup> – May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – Chapel Hill, North Carolina – [www.dixiecon.com](http://www.dixiecon.com)

Cascadia Open – July 9<sup>th</sup> – July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022 - Holiday Inn Express, 15808 104th Ave, Surrey, BC, Canada – Email: [Cascadia.open@gmail.com](mailto:Cascadia.open@gmail.com)

Boston Massacre – Summer 2022 (no finalized dates, still in discussions with possible locations) – Check for updates at <https://sites.google.com/site/bostonmassacrediplomacy/>

World DipCon at Carnage – November 3<sup>rd</sup> – November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022 – Mount Snow Resort, Vermont – Email: [dmaletsky0@gmail.com](mailto:dmaletsky0@gmail.com)

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



## Dixiecon Diplomacy Tournament

*The 36th Annual Event –Chapel Hill NC– May 27-29, 2022*

**Tournament Director:** David Hood

**Assistant TD:** Michael Lowrey

### Overview

Dixiecon is the longest-running Diplomacy tournament location in the world. It has hosted the World championships three times and the North American championships four times, as well as providing fun boardgaming experiences for Diplomacy hobbyists since 1987. The site is a college dormitory, with hotels also available nearby.

### This Year's Details

1. One round each on Friday, Saturday, Sunday – best two scores count using Dixiecon scoring
2. Speedboat (5 min. turn Gunboat) event, for both in person and online participants.
3. Side tournaments in Terraforming Mars and assorted other board games
4. Full tournament coverage on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network YouTube and Twitch channels
5. Inexpensive housing and registration fees.
6. BBQ Dinner on Saturday afternoon.

### For More Information

Email [davidhood@dixiecon](mailto:davidhood@dixiecon) or Visit [www.dixiecon.com](http://www.dixiecon.com)

# The Fourth Online Diplomacy Championship

By Mal Arky

When I started writing this article, I was writing about the **Playdiplomacy Classic Open** tournament. Within a week it had become a listed **Diplomacy Broadcast Network Invitational** event for 2023 (dependent on getting enough entrants) and **ODC IV**.

The **PCO / ODC IV** is a five-round tournament. There are four qualifying rounds, and a Medal Round. Finish in the top seven from qualifying and you're on the Championship Board. Simple.

Now, here's the bad news. Depending on when this issue of *DW* has been published, the tournament may already have started. That's partly my fault: I've been playing with an idea for this kind of tournament for some time and it was only at the start of February 2022 that I decided to go with it. Too late for *DW#156*.

Online, these things tend to get off the ground quickly. Within one week I had 14 sign-ups; within 2 weeks 30+! Not bad for an online tournament. And I was going to be pushing it a lot: on Twitter (@thediplomaticon) and wherever I could. I'd named it 'Open' because I wanted it to attract people from other websites and the wider Hobby.

So, I'd missed *DW#156* and *Notes on a Napkin#1*. The anticipated start date was somewhere late March/early April 2023.

As usual, though, things get noticed when you're pushing the right buttons!

I'd put the idea out there on Playdiplomacy (and Twitter, obviously) and I was contacted by dib, a member of Playdiplomacy.com who has organized Playdip's "Super Pastis" tournament. He told me that another Playdip member had mentioned that the **PCO** could well be in consideration for the **DBNI 2023**.

## The Diplomacy Broadcast Network Invitational

I can't imagine that anything I write here about the *Diplomacy Broadcast Network* is going to be news to a lot of you. But, well, I wouldn't be doing anyone any favors by not talking a little about the **DBNI**.

This is an invitational tournament meaning that, to enter, you need to be invited. Yeh, duh, right? But how do you get invited?

Well, from my understanding, certain tournaments throughout 2022 are considered as listed

tournaments. These are a mixture of face-to-face (FTF) events, virtual (vFTF) events and what the *DBN* calls "Extended Deadline" - online or remote events.

To become a listed event, a tournament needs to have a reputation (e.g., Cascadia) or feature a certain number of entrants. I've not seen the specific number, I have to admit, and that might be a closely guarded secret; maybe there's some wiggle room? (Of course, it could simply be that my lazy research has left me short of facts again!)

Performance in each listed event is scored and the scoring weighted based on the number of entrants for the event. If the event is big enough, you may just get an invitation by winning it!

However, there is another qualifying condition for the **DBNI**: you need to have played in a minimum of two virtual Dip games as part of a tournament. This is controversial but understandable: if you haven't played vFTF Dip before, as prestigious a tournament as the **DBNI** is not the place to start!

If you want to enter the **POC / ODC IV** event, in the hopes of scoring towards the **DBNI**, you'll also have to play in a virtual tournament in 2022.

## The Online Diplomacy Championship

The **ODC** started in 2015, when webDiplomacy hosted the event. In 2017 it was hosted by Playdiplomacy, and went back to webDip in 2019. It should have been hosted in 2021 on Playdip but that never happened. I'm not sure there was anyone willing to organize it then and, frankly, the Playdip community has been a little lukewarm to too many tournaments.

Playdip has run two tournaments pretty successfully for the last few years. One is a true tournament, "Super Pastis". Two rounds and then a Medal Round. The other is better described as a league and is, indeed, called the "Playdip Diplomacy League".

I was wondering what had happened to the **ODC**. So when, in response to my advertising the **PCO** on Twitter, I was contacted by the person who had taken over running the **ODC** on webDip in 2019 and asked if I was willing to take the **ODC** name for 2022, I was surprised.

I resisted jumping on the invite for a few minutes. After all, simply taking the **ODC** name and applying it to my tournament seemed a little, well, rude... and potentially a

spark to ignite the long-simmering competitive grudge between Playdip and webDip.

But I was assured that webDip would be happy to go with it, so the **Playdiplomacy Classic Open** is now the host tournament for **ODC IV**.

## PCO / ODC IV

A little bit more about the tournament, then.

Rounds 1 and 2 will feature random draws. Round 3 will start when Round 1 is completed and be seeded based on Round 1 results; Round 4 will start when Round 2 is completed and will be seeded based on standings after results from that round.

The seedings will be based on multiples of seven, depending on how many entrants the tournament has. So, let's say there were 28 entrants. When the standings for Round 1 are found, Round 3 would have players split into groups of 4. Given that, after one round of games, there is likely to be a number of players tied on points, this may be modified to give a more flexible approach.

But let's also say that the standings split neatly into seven groups of four. A player from pool 1, the top seeds, will randomly be drawn against a player from pools 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7.

There is one modifier for this: no player will compete against any other player more than twice in qualifying. So, if you've played against someone else in both Rounds 1 and 2, you won't play them in Round 3 (or 4, for that matter).

In the qualifying rounds, you also won't play any power more than once. While power allocation in Round 1 will be random, in Rounds 2-4 it will be random but modified by this qualification. There's no promise that you won't play three central powers, though, sorry!

The scoring system is one of my own design: DC(C) scoring. It is based on draw-sized scoring principally.

If you solo, you score 700 points and everyone else scores nothing.

In a drawn game, the number of points awarded is a factor of 600 - the DC part - with additional points awarded from the remaining 100 - the (C).

600 points are shared between the players who drew the game. I'm sure you can work it out but...

- 2-way is 300 points each

- 3-way is 200 points
- 4-way = 150
- 5-way = 120
- 6-way = 100
- 7-way = 0
- Loss = 0

(Let's face it, if there's a 7-way draw in a tournament, you've gotta ask WHY!?!)

The final 100 points are assigned to anyone who survived the game with a Supply Centre and are awarded using good old Sum of Squares scoring.

Qualifying games may involve non-DIAS draws. In this case, anyone surviving the game, but not being involved in the draw, will score some points from the (C) element of scoring.

Because this tournament isn't meant to go on indefinitely, the qualifying games will feature a Game End Date. In other words, if the game reaches Winter 1912 (or Fall Adjustments 1912 if you prefer) the game will end and be scored as a DIAS draw. Medal Round games **won't** feature a GED.

The idea behind the scoring system is that the hierarchy:

1. Solo
2. Stop someone else soloing
3. Survive

is rewarded. Hopefully, pretty Calhamerian.

Medal Round games will decide the tournament. The top board in the Medal Round - the Championship Board - will feature the top seven players from qualifying (or, at least, they'll be invited to take part). Other boards will feature players in groups of seven who choose to take part.

The Championship Board will produce the winner. No player in this game will finish below 7th in the tournament. There will be no GED. If the game ends in a solo, the winner is the Online Diplomacy Champion!

If the Championship Board ends in a draw - DIAS only - then points will be scored for the game as normal, but doubled, emphasizing that this **should** be the best game in the tournament. Points for the Championship Board will be added to points from qualifying rounds and the player finishing first in the tournament table will be the Online Diplomacy Champion!

There are, of course, other rules. If you want to read them all, go to:

<https://www.playdiplomacy.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=35&t=62261>.

This is one place you can sign up.

To enter, you will need to register on Playdiplomacy.com; it's free although, if you want to get the most from the site, Premium membership is the way to go [<https://www.playdiplomacy.com/>]. The tournament will be run through Playdip's forum and my own forum, *The Diplomacy Hub* [<https://diplomaticon.freeforums.net/>] (for anyone who has a patholo... sorry, **stoic** dislike of Playdiplomacy).

**I said you might be unlucky...**

Right at the start of this article, I said you might find that you're too late to join the **POC / ODC IV**. If I find that there are a lot of non-Playdip community members entering the tournament, I might delay starting until mid-April. If you're reading *DW#157* and you want to join in, then sign up anyway, Online tournaments being as they are, you might get a place as a Replacement, or you just **might** be on time.

The intention is to make the **POC** an annual tournament on Playdip, though. It won't host the **ODC** every time, of course. And, if it establishes itself, then it may well be an annually listed event for the **DBNI**.

"Ifs and buts..." One tournament at a time, eh?

I intend to keep you up-to-date with progress through *DW* and my own zine *Notes on a Napkin*. I'm expecting results by *DW#161* at the absolute latest. In between, I'll let you know how it's going, although you can keep yourself updated on that by entering!

If you've joined, good luck!

**Links**

- Playdiplomacy: <https://www.playdiplomacy.com/>
- webDiplomacy: <https://webdiplomacy.net/>
- DBN: <https://www.youtube.com/c/DiplomacyBroadcastNetwork>

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## How NOT to Defend a Title

By Peter McNamara

Despite [winning](#) the [DBNI](#) last year, I was not given an automatic qualification to this year's edition. So, I had to go through the qualification slog. A lack of convenient tournaments, given the North American bias of the vFtF scene, and the cancellation of Cascadia meant that I had to rely on some PBEM results together with some players dropping out in order to make it back to the start list this February.

Given the title of this post, I guess I could just say the easy way to not defend my title would be to not qualify, but having qualified, I had to work harder to not defend it.

**Round 1: Germany.** ([backstabbr link](#))

I "chose" Germany under the auction system in place for the selection of powers. It's a secret bidding system, hence the quotation marks. I won't discuss it further except to ask that anyone who discovers the optimal solution please write to me with details.

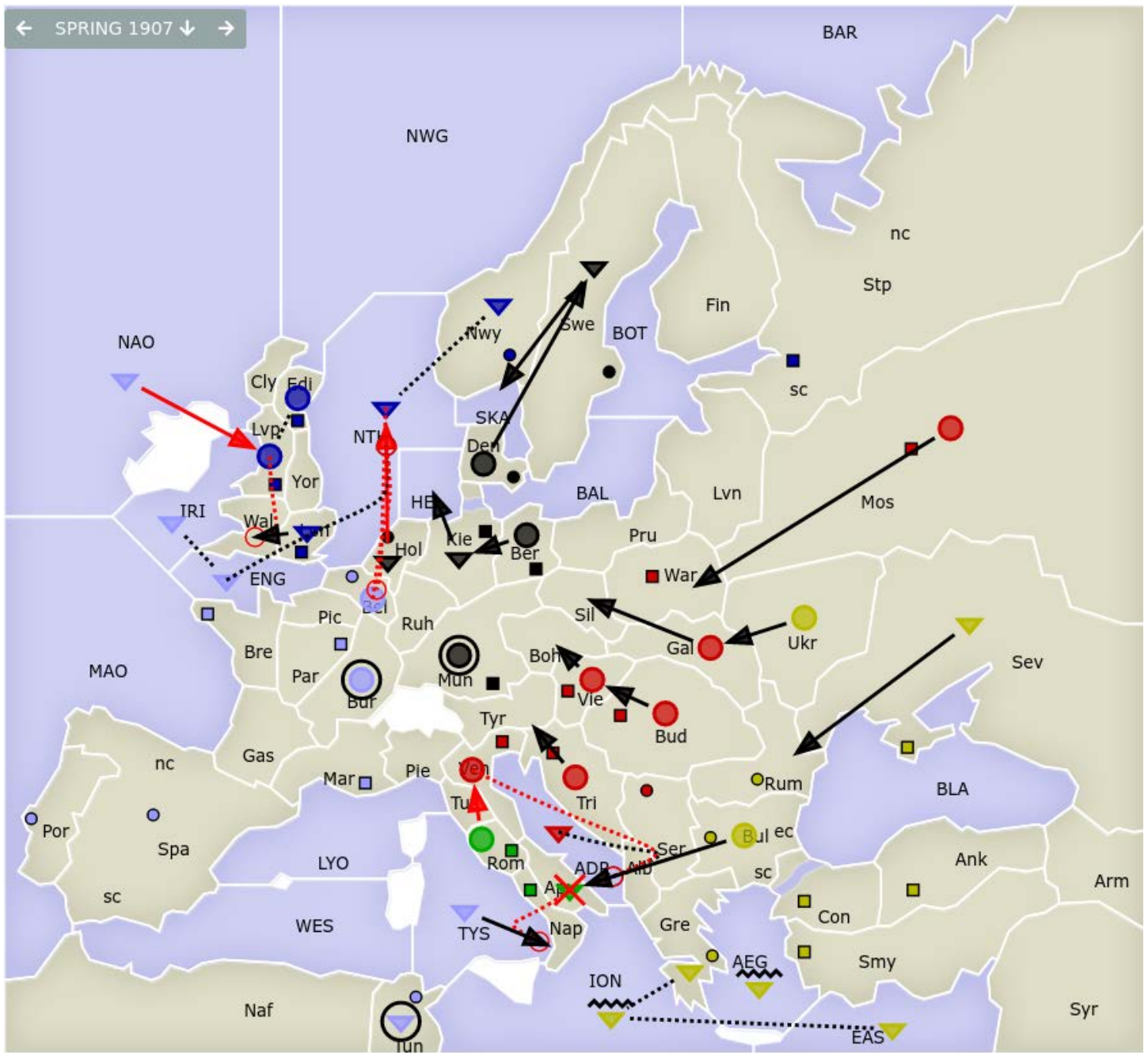
Evan was in France, with Ben in England. Surely, I could work with one of them, right? Matt was along for the ride beside me in Russia and one year ago when we were in

the same positions, he came much too close to comfort to a solo, an experience I'd rather not repeat. Rounding out the board were Liam in Italy, Katie in Austria, and the unstoppable Farren in Turkey. Interesting stat about Farren: Going in to this tournament, in games we've played together where we're not neighbors, her SC counts are 12, 11, 13 and 10. If that continues, it doesn't leave many centers for me to fight over.

Evan informed me he is ordering PAR-PIC, MAR-BUR so I bounce the latter and get "rewarded" for doing so by being bounced out of HOL by Ben. Not the best of starts, and when Italy walks into MUN in '02 and BER in '03, things are looking grim. But with Evan not fully committed to the EF, and Ben distracted in Scandinavia, I'm able to hold on until the French move into IRI gives me the diplomatic space to get back in the game.

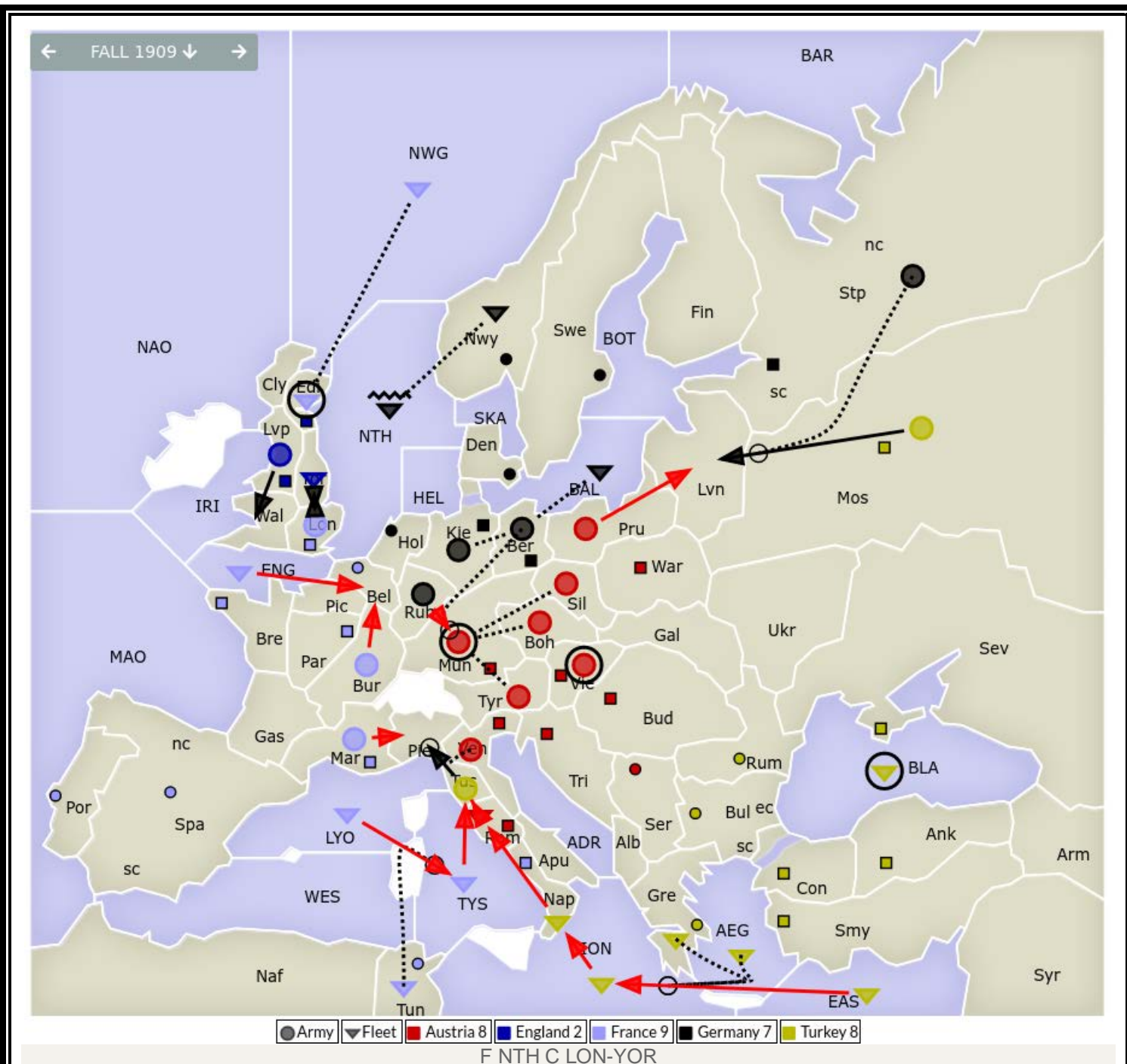
Now we arrive at a key moment in the game. I'm allied with France, and meanwhile a strong Austro-Turkish alliance has blossomed on the other side of the board. I recognize that my chances to top this board depend on not being the next Austrian target. So, I negotiate with Katie to give her the space to do absolutely anything except attack me and ...





Nope. Farren's hypnotic powers are total and I was unable to break them. I tried consoling myself with the fact that I was far from the only person unable to break them...but it doesn't work.

The FG goal now becomes to capture the remainder of the English centers while forming a line against AT. All is going according to plan (except, from my point of view, for Evan failing to order ENG-MAO) and then we see this piece of funkiness.



In all my time playing Diplomacy, I've never been in a game with a kidnapped convoy before, so part of me is happy this happened, even if it seriously jeopardized my chances in the game. I'm also happy that backstabbr allows kidnapped convoys – I've seen some fun-hating tournament directors have rules against kidnapping convoys in their tournament rules. The piece de resistance is that I didn't know that Evan was ordering LON-YOR, nor did I know that Ben would order YOR-LON. In fact, Ben and I didn't even talk that turn!

Some tense negotiation were needed to get from this new position to a draw, but we managed to stalemate the AT and I was left with a 7sc draw, second to a Farren's 10sc Turkey. A nice little secondary score to add to a good score, but not the board top I wanted – I would now have to find a way to pull that off in the next round.

**Round 3: Turkey.** ([backstabbr link](#))

[Not round 2. The tournament structure is play one of Rounds 1 and 2, and one of rounds 3 and 4].

Suffice to say that I did not want to play Turkey. The fundamental problem with playing Turkey is that your three neighbors covet your corner position, which creates a bias towards early attacks on Turkey.

At the start of the game as Turkey, the clock is ticking. You have three game years to make something happen, otherwise you're dead.

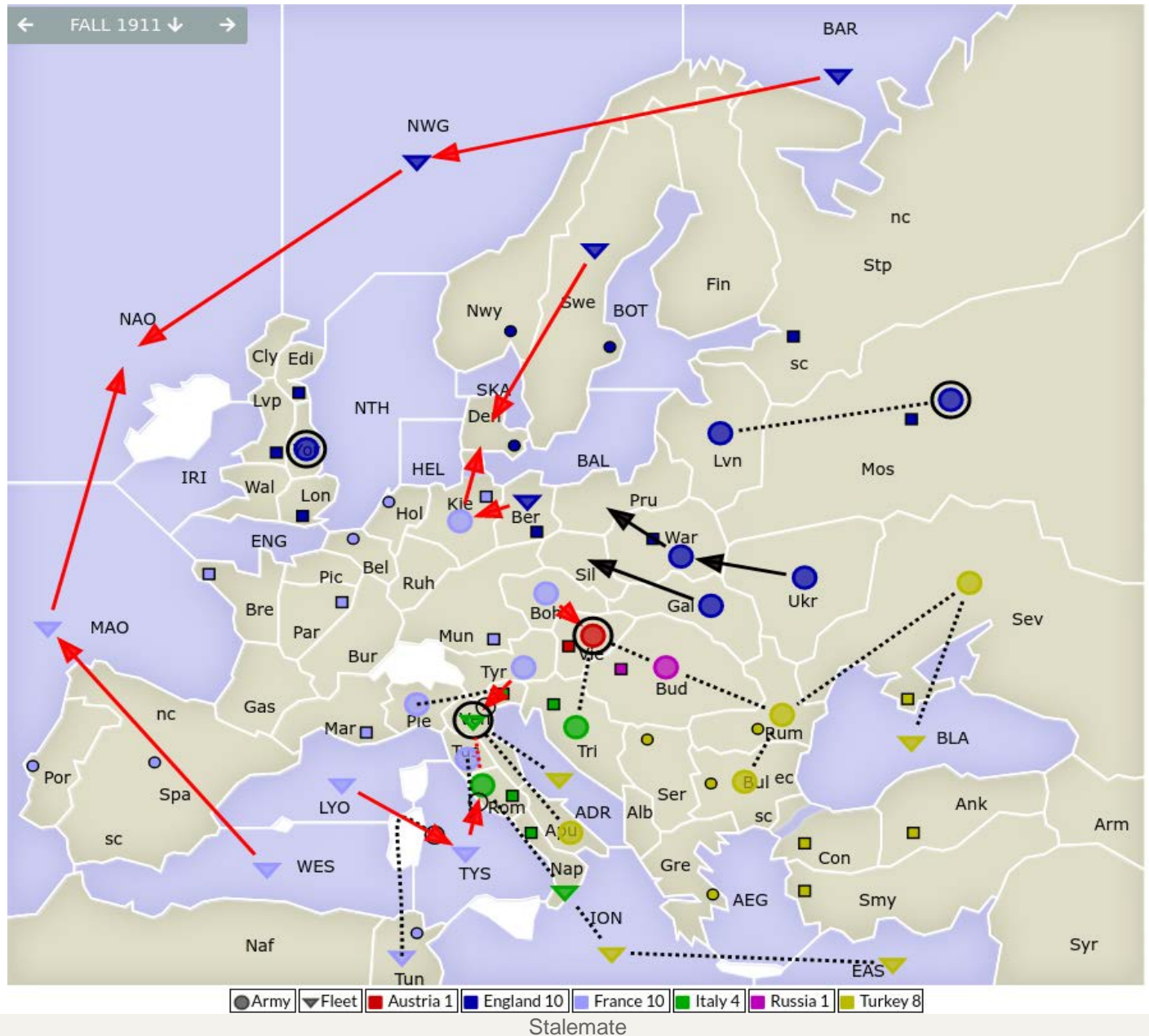
1901 came and went with no progress, only with Christophe in Austria lying to me about wanting an AT.

In 1902 I was able to hold Bulgaria due to Russian neutrality, but Greg wasn't interested in actively working

with me and turned down my offer of Serbia. The neutrality did buy me an extra year though.

1903 came, and still no progress. For some unknown reason Austria tried to take CON with the wrong unit, so I was able to keep it.

Fall 1904, with an Italian fleet already docked in Smyrna, and finally we see a crack with an Austrian swing at RUM. We've survived the onslaught and are back in the game. Let's go! Interestingly once this happened, I started getting much more nervous, believing I had a real chance again.



Meanwhile on the other side of the board, after some initial indications of an FG, Karthik (E) and Farren (F) had entered into a strong alliance, which quickly swept aside Timothy in Germany and was looking to roll the board. Not wanting to sit in the corner on 3 for the rest of the game, I played an aggressive game, cooperating with Greg to pick up a couple from Italy in a single year, before turning on Greg himself, all while the EF marched onwards.

This changed in Fall 1910, when Russ explained to the rest of the southern powers how we could form a 14-center stalemate line in two turns, assuming we made a couple of good guesses. I went for it, looking for something to break up the EF. One nervous wait for adjudication later to find out if my convoy to APU would be disrupted and we made it.

And went straight into the final phase of the game. Where nothing moved. I figured Karthik would stab, given he needed a strong board top to make it through to the final. And yet the stab never came. Meanwhile I was busy holding my line, with EF (together or separately) not offering me any inducements to stab that I felt I could take seriously.

However, despite nothing happening, Karthik would not agree to a draw. Now most tournaments have a rule along the lines of the Tournament Director being able to force a draw if there is no significant change in a certain amount of time. But the DBNI did not have such a rule, though now thanks to us, it does. At some point Zach (our TD) came in and told us that he was instigating this rule for this game, starting from when he announced it to us. And went straight into the final phase of the game.

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Still nothing of substance changed, with some turns going by quickly due to everyone clicking to adjudicate early and others being taken up with frantic negotiation between myself, Farren and Karthik. And so, with Karthik taking Kiel on the last turn for an 11sc board top, we were force drawn with me on 8 centers, ending my bid to defend my title.

I am pleased I got to fight in some good-spirited and well-fought tough games. I specifically enjoyed getting to play against two quality players I had never played before in Christophe and Greg in my last game and I hope to cross swords with them on a board again soon. Special mention and congratulations must go to Farren, who dominated both my games and thoroughly deserves her place on the top board.

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## Reflections On a Game: DBNI Top Board

by Seren Kwok

This board was something special because not only was it won and lost primarily on politics, which many virtual games including many of dubious quality are, but politics that all players were keenly aware of and sought to manipulate. Furthermore, even though the game was decided on politics, I would divorce that from any personal acrimony: I feel that I have a good relationship personally with all of the players on the board. I like them all as people; some I consider to be friends, which played a minimal role in the board politics. In a paradoxical way, even as I got the short end of the stick politically, this game reinforced my faith in Diplomacy as a fun and reasonably fair (not in the sense of everybody starting with an equal shot, which wasn't the case here and won't be on any board, but in the sense of board

success being a sufficiently tractable skill-based challenge that makes the game worth playing) social game.

Game politics doesn't have to mean the alleged cronyism and clientelism that have raised an outcry lately, and it doesn't have to mean negative personal relationships. Farren, the person with whom I faced the most tension with throughout this game, is somebody I liked and respected a lot already coming onto the board, and this sentiment has only been reinforced by the really tough and in many ways rewarding relationship we had on the board.

Anyway, this synopsis out of the way, here are my thoughts on the main themes of the game. I'm sure my point of view is biased. After all, it's funny how often in Diplomacy both people involved in an agreement agree it's a 55-45 deal, and each person is convinced they've got the 45. So don't take everything I say at face value, especially if my comments criticize anybody's play – again, I think this was a board of elite players without a weak link, absolutely the strongest single board I've yet played on.

***Diplomacy is fundamentally a game of negotiation, not deception:*** When there are large differentials in skill/experience levels between players, Diplomacy can indeed be played successfully as Mafia with a board. When there are no such differentials, especially when it's because everyone is very good, the only way you get forward is negotiation. You convince people that the desired distribution of gains in the scheme of mutual cooperation is worth it for them to want to work with you. There was very little 'going for the throat' in this top board. We went for 14 years and only Ed was eliminated, and only after having at one point gotten all the way into Ionian as Turkey. Nobody got zero play this game – some people got more than others, clearly, but nobody got none the way Markus Zijlstra might be said to have done in last year's DBNI, where conventional wisdom says he lost on power selection.

***Give trust to get trust:*** This is true at a beginner level and true at an elite level. When you show some vulnerability to somebody, you signal by deed several vital things: a) that you are willing to take the risks needed to make the alliance work; b) that you likely care about the same strategic objectives they care about; c) that your mind is not focused on thinking about how the two of you might screw each other, and you're therefore less likely to stab them. Played right, this accrues capital, the cornerstone of a social playstyle. Jason did this excellently, in my opinion. He placed trust boldly in his allies at the right times. Allowing me to disband his army in Rum to rebuild a fleet in Sev comes to mind; this gave me a sense of comfort and satisfaction with him winning if I couldn't win myself, which of course he eventually cashed in to secure his victory.

The key thing is that to do this kind of thing, Jason had to be convinced that the chance I would immediately take advantage of it was below some certain threshold for it to be worth it for him to make the play. After all, there is no point in making concessions to someone who will just take it as an invitation to grab as much stuff as they can from you while they have the upper hand. I'm not sure if it was a failure of imagination on my part or a failure of diplomacy on both our parts that I was not convinced Farren would treat me a similar way to how I eventually treated Jason. She promised that she would move west in force against Katie. At the time that I

decided to turn on Farren and work with Jason, I wasn't convinced she would. As I didn't hold up my end of the deal, I can't say if she would actually have done it or not. There's no getting certainty on these counterfactuals, and all you can do is make the best decision given the information you have. Orders such as getting Katie's Tyrolian army to support herself in Trieste on a turn when I technically could have taken Trieste, but the way I saw it had much better things to be doing, read to me as a painful lack of trust that would have resulted in Farren hanging around to prey on me had I gone full-throttled after Jason.

***If you don't ask you won't get:*** I wonder if I could have changed things by more assertively expressing my boundaries to Farren (a piece of advice given to me by Katie, who certainly has a track record of working with Farren better than mine and so probably somebody I should listen to). I have a habitual weakness in that I don't like asking for things. I'm a people pleaser, and if asked to do something I'm borderline on, I'm more likely to agree at first and look for a way to get around it if it starts weighing on me than to give a firm 'no'. This has hurt me various times in lower stakes games and I wouldn't be surprised if it had seriously hurt me this weekend.

On the bright side, I think that Diplomacy has been great practice for me in practicing how to make tough asks respectfully in general – one of many skills developed on the board that turns out to be useful in life.

***In WTA time unlimited, everything is different:*** Every game leading up to this board – even tournament-deciding games – was in a way a qualifying round for this one. The zone of potential agreement contracts severely when most people don't particularly value second place over a minor survival or even survival over elimination. Even if you do value these things, as I did, it's hard to convince people to enter agreements based on rewards other than a shot at victory. I wasn't used to having to negotiate this way – I'd qualified for the top board with my entire strategy being to exploit the value of second places, after all. The one previous top board I'd been on, there was much more room for second place as a reward because the VDC scoring system combined with DBNI AQ status meant that the 50 or so points from taking a strong second carried significant utility. There is no such space on the DBNI top board. Negotiating through the tension of 'OK, this time really only one of us can win, and we both know it but have to find a way to work together anyway' was a real weak point for me.

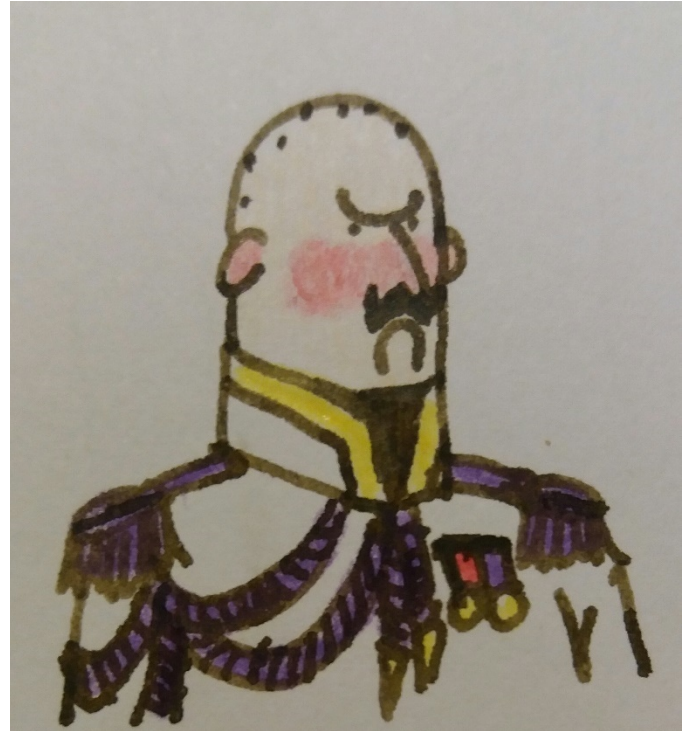
I think Katie and Farren played this really well with each other. All credit is due to them in this. They were able to create a situation where both of them would stand a realistic and fair chance of winning if their alliance

progressed successfully, and I was never anywhere close to convincing either to take that kind of plunge with me.

**Wow this game is pretty tiring:** I wasn't expected to be so tired so soon, in terms of game years, but I was. A combination of starting at 7pm local time instead of 3pm, not having game years go down to 10 minutes after 1908 (as was decided for the top board, unlike the qualifying rounds), and on-the-day personal factors made a massive difference in my psychological state. Again, as it didn't happen, I can't say whether I would have fought harder for the victory had the game been played during my daytime. I can say that I was surprised to feel so exhausted especially in light of having fought until 1922 on an adrenaline high just the previous weekend, seemingly without fatigue. It's unfortunate that I just wasn't feeling it the same way on the top board, but an important lesson in recognizing how much of a difference stamina or lack thereof makes.

Going on hiatus, I am now going to make an effort to be an open book. As I crashed immediately after the game, I didn't get the chance to AAR at the table, but if anybody wants to have a chat about the game, I would love to talk through it. Shoutout to the GM, DBN commentators and sideline team who did an amazing job with their coverage – having done these myself I feel

firsthand how challenging it is and it's a testament to their hard work that Zach, Bryan, David, Siobhan, Markus and Tanya made it look easy.



## The Nexus Leagues Server

By Eber Condrell

So, you're wondering about the Nexus Leagues discord server? Glad you asked! Nexus Leagues is a discord server dedicated to organizing high quality, competitive, low-pressure, year-round Diplomacy leagues. We offer leagues for full press, gunboat, speedboat and we are working on a five-minute press league. Players from all over the world can join in the fun of press and gunboat league waves starting every two weeks and speedboat games starting all the time. Backstabbr is the primary platform we use but the press league has games on conspiracy and occasionally webdiplomacy.

Well, that's the basics, but more than that NL is a community of players who have come together to enjoy the game we all love. There are spaces for discussing diplomacy strategy, organizing casual games on all platforms, and spectating the league action! If you want to play or just chat about the game, NL is definitely the place for you.

Lastly, I'd like to share a bit about the organization structure of NL. We are a moderation team staffed by volunteer members of the community, one of our calling cards is that every member of the mod team can participate on some level in the leagues. Me, Eber Condrell, Evan Swihart, and Sabi Ahuja are the three league directors in charge of the Speedboat, Gunboat, and Press leagues respectively. Keith Worstell (Superstition on discord) is our server owner, making us three equals. Helping us GM games and maintain spreadsheets are the League Staff, made up of a dozen plus of our most dedicated community members who volunteer their time to help the Leagues run smoothly for all of us.

If after having read this, you find yourself needing to join the server to join some games or just take a peak around, please feel free to join using this link:

<https://discord.gg/YP6vV2j9>

# 2022 Cascadia Open



**Surrey Library**

**Dates:** 9-10 July 2022

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

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

**TD:** Chris Brand

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

**Cost:** \$30

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

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

# Ask the Hobby Historian: Forty Years Ago Right Now

By David Hood

This article is appearing in the Spring 2022 issue of Diplomacy World #157. Forty years ago, DW was at issue 30, already functioning as the Hobby's flagship publication. There were articles on tournament news, player rankings, variants, and lots of other subjects - but looking at the issue now after four decades, one article particularly stands out to me.

When we did the Diplomacy Broadcast Network shows last month for the running of the second annual DBN Invitational tournament, many of you will have seen that we named those games after famous hobbyists of the past. One of those we honored this year was Jim Meinel, an accountant in Alaska who fundamentally strengthened our Hobby's knowledge of its own past by publishing the Encyclopedia of Diplomacy Zines. In 1982, though, that contribution from Jim was still ten years in the future. His focus in issue 30 was, instead, what he called "Hobby Stability: Pipe Dream or Workable Goal?"

In Jim's Hobby of 1982, there were some cracks and splinters among players and content creators regarding personalities, playing style, political debates, and other things (not all of which started with the letter P.) His call for unity and harmony was shared by many at the time - and would be needed in the next few years as the Great Feud began to tear through the world of Diplomacy in the mid 80s. I commend the article as a whole, it is easy to find on the DW website, but let me focus on a few of his points which I still find relevant to our Hobby today.

Do we have to all agree on every aspect of the game, tournament structures, etc. in order for us to have a cohesive hobby? Jim did not think so: "A major attitude necessary in creating a strong hobby infrastructure is toleration of legitimate differences in how a Diplomacy game can be played (or conducted.)" As our current hobby works through the integration of virtual FTF players, FTFers and online extended deadline players - as well as the inevitable contrasts in scoring systems, playing styles and preferences among these folks - we would be well to keep Jim's prophetic comments in mind. Change and reaction thereto are not a sign of trouble, they are instead a sign of healthy growth. As long as we resist the temptation to tell other folk what to do or how to think, but instead to welcome differences as opportunities, then this time can turn into one of the Hobby's true Renaissance periods.

Another sign of stability in Jim's view was the proliferation of "regional Cons" as opportunities for Dip players to meet each other and create community as opposed to assuming that all of that work would take place at that year's Dipcon only. Again, this seems very relevant to today as we are emerging from Covid hibernation to the flowering of new Diplomacy events forming, as I write this, for Montreal and Denver (which is actually a rebirth, but same principle.) Yes, I think it important to have one "big" event every year as Dipcon (sometimes two with World Dipcon), for championship and other purposes, but I also think it absolutely critical for us to have as many regional events as possible. The more Cons one could attend by car, the better for overall participation. Also, of course, a regional Con needs to establish itself before it would be ready to host Dipcon and/or World Dipcon. Certainly, I think my own Dixiecon, coming up in Chapel Hill NC next month, has served an important purpose or I would not have run it annually for coming up on 36 years.

A final concern that Jim had forty years ago was the difficulty in disseminating hobby news quickly and accurately so that folk would know what was going on. Diplomacy World itself served this function in 1982, but came out too infrequently to truly keep everyone up to date. Lucky for us, technology has largely solved this problem, as has ingenuity. Prior to Covid there were websites, electronic zines, Facebook pages and other ways to keep the Hobby tied together - but now coming out of Covid we have both a significant presence on Discord as well as the NADF webpage in addition to the online Diplomacy World and other resources. There is now essentially no excuse for any Diplomacy fan not knowing the news except for perhaps there being TOO MANY places where news happens, from WebDip and PlayDip Forums to Reddit to all the YouTube offerings on the game. My own attempt at amalgamating all this with my monthly news program Deadline on DBN's YouTube channel is a partial solution to that overload problem, although I am sure some folk out there have other ideas.

Which brings me to you, gentle reader. If you are on the sidelines, not really getting involved in today's Diplomacy hobby, there is no better time. Just like in 1982, we have challenges facing us, sure, but also there is tremendous opportunity. Write for DW. Subscribe to the channels or blogs of Diplomacy content creators. Attend FTF Diplomacy events. Come have fun with the rest of us.

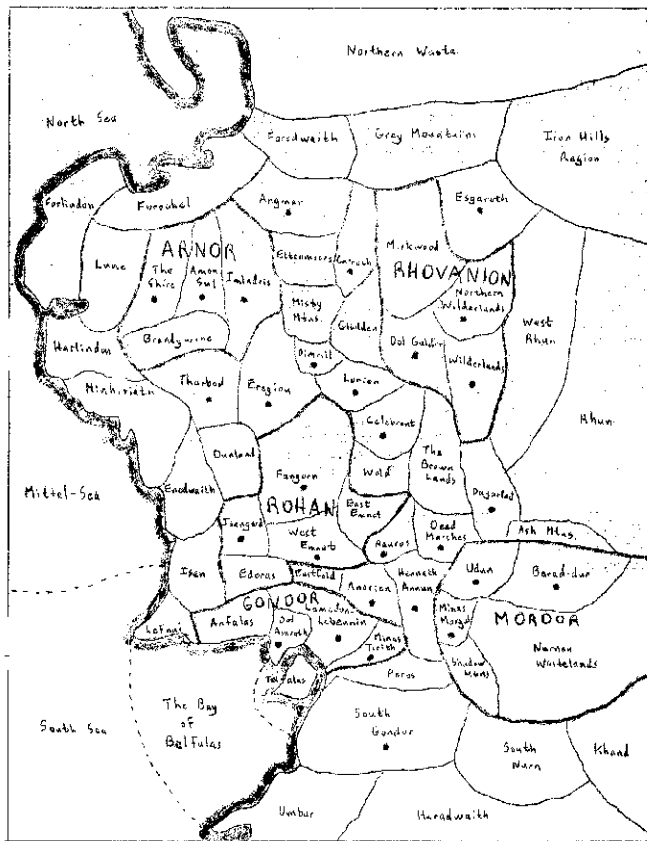


# Mega-Variants: Or How Bigger Isn't Always Better

By Bob Durf

Let's face it—probably the most interesting variants upon first approach are the bigger ones. Who doesn't want to play Diplomacy with a dozen other players? Or play to conquer the world? Or battle across Middle Earth or even the galaxy?

Now, usually the two main issues that are raised with bigger variants are quite easy to spot, and have been discussed extensively. First—the number of players can be unwieldy to organize into a game. Drop outs and constant potential delays or civil disorder are more likely, leading to a difficulty to ultimately completing a large game properly. Second—a larger map may lead to more chances for unforeseen stalemate lines or lengthy end-games.



MIDDLE-EARTH DIPLOMACY - II

This article turns to another issue that not only should be considered by designers, but also by the players who participate in these large games. Negotiation in larger games is going to be warped. Larger games indeed will be *always* warped because of the basic key to negotiating in Diplomacy: a) your opponent wants to win

and b) you can meaningfully affect that goal. Even in classic Diplomacy, draw-based play, especially in tournaments, will warp this basic negotiating key. Unlike in classic Diplomacy, where meta-gaming concerns (such as player philosophy and scoring systems) will warp this basic key; large variants will inherently warp negotiating (in addition to those issues already present in classic Diplomacy). In particular, the length and size of the game will make many forms of negotiation less effective. Let's discuss some of those methods and why they will be inherently less effective:

**Suicide Negotiation:** A very common form of negotiation late or mid game is the 'suicide' argument—that a player will sacrifice his supply centers to a third party should someone act as an aggressor against him. Often, this can allow a player to make his way into a draw if the threat is made in the mid or late game where supply center counts are already growing large and such an unbalanced influx of supply centers could disrupt the whole board. It is less effective in the early game, where there will be more time for players to correct a suicide-induced unbalance in supply centers.

In large games, a threat to throw supply centers to other players will be substantially less effective at all stages of the game. In a large game, the mid or late-games will see larger supply center counts among survivors with an often-larger spread of territories to consider. The threat to throw supply centers is lessened when it will take more tactical, not strategic, time and energy to capture those centers. In Diplomacy, players can usually shift units to different fronts in relatively short time-spans (there are outliers of course). The larger the map, the greater this time is to shift strategic goals. A threat to throw may thus be meaningless if it would take other opponents many turns to actually mount attacks against those same supply centers.

Second, in larger games, players may border more opponents. In Diplomacy, England may tell France he'll bolster his defenses so Germany takes all his centers; in a global variant, England may make that threat, but if England's also bordering seven other countries across the globe, the risk of huge imbalances will be less pressing on France's mind.

Third, thinking more "big picture" about larger games, the chances of a larger game coming down to a solo-victory are less than regular Diplomacy. The more players, the more chances of stalemate, of civil disorder, of games just grinding to a halt. The chances of draws have to be considered higher than regular Diplomacy

games. So, a threat to throw the game to another player is lessened further by the knowledge that any such throw will probably still not lead to a solo, giving your opponents strategic space to negotiate their way into a draw.

**Balance of Power Negotiation:** I'll give this name to the playstyle that eschews semi-permanent alliance-based play and instead focuses on shifting your allies and goals to build forwards towards slowly increasing your power while attempting to keep every other player at roughly equal level and in conflict. An older style of negotiation more in vogue before 2000, it seems to work much better in face-to-face games than in email games with longer negotiation cycles.

In Diplomacy, each power has some influence on the rest of the board. What Turkey does will influence Russia, will influence England on the other side of the board, which will influence France, and so on. There is a cascading amount of interactivity between all seven players. Now, even a global sized variant will, to an extent, have that kind of wonderful ripple effect. However, an individual player will have less of an impact in a larger game. Will you be able to play opponents off each other in a free-wheeling battle when there are fifteen of them? Or will you need to find meaningful allies, not just because that would be your preferred play-style, or because you'll need to do so.

**Stalemate Line Negotiating:** This blends a bit in with more on-the-board strategies and play, but in Diplomacy, players can't ever go long into a game without keeping at least a corner of their eyes out for rivals making sprints to a stalemate line. Stalemate lines in Diplomacy are often decried, but in my experience, they often lead to some rich negotiating both before and after they are reached or held. The standard Diplomacy board is so well explored that players looking out for stalemate lines can almost do such instinctively. Even new players will be well-alerted to others making plays for a stalemate.

In a larger global game, players have to be more cognizant (often without the experience or proper analysis of possible stalemate lines on a novel board) about when stalemate lines are being reached and how that may affect the game's progression. If stalemate lines are easy to reach, players may be frozen out of meaningful negotiating if others reach quick stalemate lines and then transition into an on-the-board tactical game. Now, what if there are no stalemate lines, or very difficult to reach ones? Ahh, that's good then! Or is it? No stalemate lines in a larger game may create a late game scenario where tactical on the board play is more important than negotiating with the rest of the board.

It sounds strange, but think about a regular Diplomacy late game scenario. England is doing very well on one side of the board. On the other side, Italy, Turkey, and Russia are still standing and are racing to a stalemate line. England now has to try to cause a breach in their alliance to try to get past a stalemate line and claim victory. This can lead to a lot of high stakes negotiating on the final lap of a late-game Diplomacy match. What about a variant late game with one large power hurtling at five smaller powers with no discernible stalemate lines? That large power, with no fear of a stalemate line, has a much smaller negotiating burden to carry, and can rely more on raw on-the-board tactics to force his way to a victory.

Why discuss these issues with large variants? It is not to argue that we shouldn't play or design large variants. There are great benefits to large variants—players get to be a part of a larger and potentially more epic story, players get many different opponents to negotiate with, and they get to exercise more tactical chops on a larger map than they might be able to on a classic Diplomacy map. Players should be aware that just as they have to change their on-the-board play when handling a large variant, they also need to consider that even their basic negotiating strategies may need adjustment—and that kind of shift is far harder to make than sending in different unit orders.

For designers, is there an ability to mitigate the effect large boards have on negotiating tactics? And are there other trade-offs that are worth the above negotiating tactics not being as effective? For example, in face-to-face Diplomacy (not tournament play, just casual games in-house), I really enjoy balance of power negotiating. But in a larger variant, there is something enjoyable about trying build and maintain a more stable coalition of allies.

Nevertheless, some tweaking in larger games' victory conditions should be made to at least try to bring game patterns of early, mid, and late more in line with regular Diplomacy. I have already discussed variable victory conditions in previous articles, but the key tweak that should always be made in larger variants is to remove the 50%+1 victory condition of standard Diplomacy. There is a two-fold key to negotiating in standard negotiating: that a) your opponent wants to win, and b) you can meaningfully affect that goal. In a large variant where the board may further warp either tenet of the negotiating key, making sure the threat of victory is closer will at least help keep this key valid.

# A New Standard? Revisiting Diplomacy

By Paul Webb

I was first introduced to the game of Diplomacy back in 2002. Over the past twenty years, I've played mostly no-press games online. Conventional wisdom says France is the game's superpower, while Austria and Italy are known as the "weak sisters." However, through playing and gamemaster experience, I've thought Austria is not as bad as its reputation, despite the power's tendency towards early eliminations. And I've suspected the Russian bear is not as intimidating as it appears.

In 2018, I put these theories to the test, running a series of Standard games with Jason van Hal's Albert, the best-playing Diplomacy bot not made by Google. Albert (v6.0.1) played 500 no-press games, as all seven powers, on David Norman's Server (v0.38) and Mapper (v0.41). Below are the results, in terms of the number solo victories and draws for each power:

	Solo	2-Way	3-Way	4-Way	5-Way	6-Way
<b>Austria</b>	45	0	27	33	10	2
<b>England</b>	39	0	63	34	16	1
<b>France</b>	92	0	67	33	14	1
<b>Germany</b>	31	0	21	19	11	2
<b>Italy</b>	9	0	17	20	10	2
<b>Russia</b>	20	0	22	30	13	2
<b>Turkey</b>	96	0	71	39	16	2

To convert the above results into points, I'll apply the scoring system I used when organizing no-press tournaments on the DPjudge, in which a power was awarded 60 points for a solo victory, 30 points for a 2-way draw, 20 points for a 3-way draw, 15 points for a 4-way draw, 12 points for 5-way draw, and 10 points for 6-way draw. Under this scoring system, the number of supply centers held at the end of the game by a power participating in the draw is irrelevant. Here are the total points, along with the average number of points per game, for each power:

	Points	Average
<b>Turkey</b>	7977	15.95
<b>France</b>	7533	15.02
<b>England</b>	4312	8.62
<b>Austria</b>	3875	7.75
<b>Germany</b>	2717	5.43
<b>Russia</b>	2266	4.53
<b>Italy</b>	1320	2.64

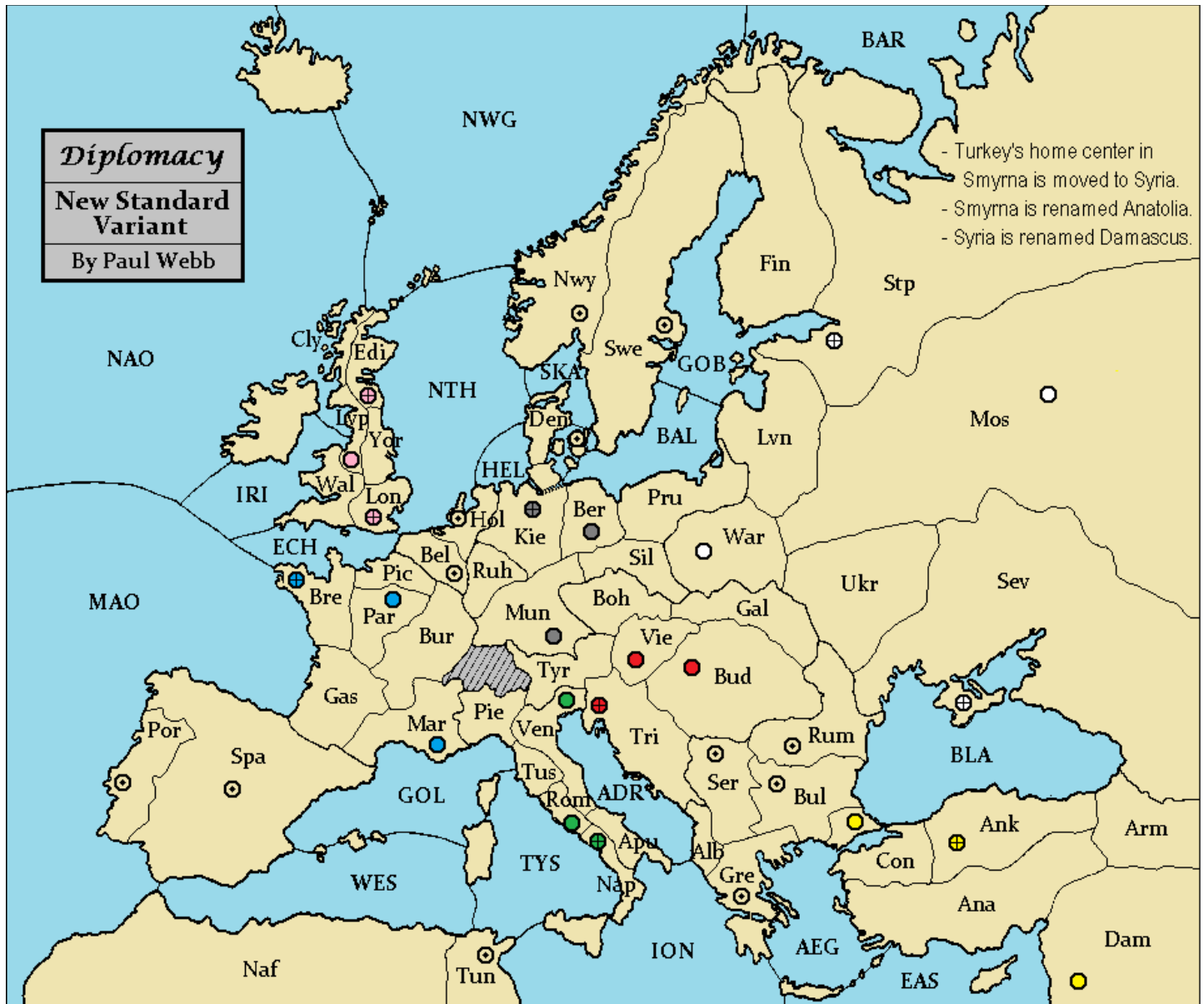
Under this simulation with the Albert bots, Turkey, not France, is the strongest power. This test also supports the assumption that Italy is the weakest power.

In his book, *The Game of Diplomacy*, Richard Sharp describes Italy as the one area "that the admirable balance of Diplomacy breaks down." To address this imbalance, Sharp proposes that Italy start the game with a fleet in Rome, rather than an army. Sharp's reasoning

is that Italy, now with two fleets, can improve its winning chances in the opening phase by using one fleet to grab the center in Tunisia, while using its other fleet to exert influence on Greece. This is known as the Fleet Rome variation. The problem with this suggestion is that Italy, with its rich repertoire of opening choices in 1901, suddenly only has two playable openings: F(Nap)-ION, F(Rom)-TYS, and A(Ven) either holds or attacks Austria by moving to Trieste. In Fleet Rome, the Italian army in Venice has no back-up army, so it can't wander to Piedmont, Tyrolia, or Apulia in Spring 1901 without exposing Venice, which is right next door to the Austrian fleet in Trieste.

Sharp commended the map of Diplomacy as very well thought-out, so he was only looking for a minor change to improve its power balance. But is there another method? I'm also not interested in making major changes such as altering borders. The game already plays well and too much time has been invested in figuring out and learning the stalemate lines! What about weakening Turkey? It's a little odd that the crumbling Ottoman Empire of 1900 could be the game's strongest power.

I propose this simple change to Diplomacy: move Turkey's home center from Smyrna to Syria and Turkey begins the game with an army in Syria. Also, in keeping with the naming conventions of Diplomacy in which home centers are named after cities, I have changed Syria to Damascus and Smyrna to Anatolia.



This change weakens Turkey in two ways: (1) Turkey's defensive position is more difficult as its home centers are no longer arranged in a tight three-center "cluster," and (2) Turkey can no longer use a second army to influence the Balkans in Fall 1901. Given Turkey's superior corner position on the board, I'm somewhat surprised that Turkey's home centers are not broken apart in Standard Diplomacy, like they are for England. In this variation, the army in Damascus has two choices: it can scare Russia by moving to Armenia or it can trek

towards the Balkans by moving to Anatolia (formerly Smyrna). In fact, if the Sultan wants the guarantee of a second unit to impact the Balkans in 1901, he will have to order F(Ank)-Con in the Spring and forgo the Black Sea.

Like in the original exercise described above, I tested this New Standard variant using Albert. The robots played another set of 500 no-press games that resulted in the following:

	<b>Solo</b>	<b>2-Way</b>	<b>3-Way</b>	<b>4-Way</b>	<b>5-Way</b>	<b>6-Way</b>
<b>Austria</b>	46	3	50	21	10	0
<b>England</b>	44	7	70	36	13	0
<b>France</b>	88	0	54	36	12	0
<b>Germany</b>	40	0	18	15	9	0
<b>Italy</b>	16	0	27	23	12	0
<b>Russia</b>	27	0	19	25	13	0
<b>Turkey</b>	72	4	50	36	11	0

Again, here is the raw data above converted to points:

	<b>Points</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>France</b>	7044	14.09
<b>Turkey</b>	6112	12.22
<b>England</b>	4946	9.89
<b>Austria</b>	4285	8.57
<b>Germany</b>	3093	6.19
<b>Russia</b>	2531	5.06
<b>Italy</b>	1989	3.98

When comparing the results from this simulation, New Standard is more balanced than Standard. In New

Standard, Turkey's win/draw shares drop by 23 percent and France replaces Turkey as the game's strongest country. All the other powers benefit from Turkey's regression, with the exception of, curiously, France, whose point total declined 6.5 percent. (My guess is that strengthening Austria, England, Germany, Italy, and Russia presents more resistance to the French juggernaut). Italy is still the weakest power, but its performance improves by 50 percent from Standard to New Standard.

Additionally, Albert played a greater variety of opening moves as Turkey on the revised map. These are the openings Albert played as Turkey in Standard:

<b>Opening</b>	<b>F(Ank)</b>	<b>A(Con)</b>	<b>A(Smy)</b>	<b># of Games</b>
Balkan Opening	BLA	Bul	Con	397
Russian Attack	BLA	Bul	Arm	83
Boston Strangler	Hold	Bul	Con	17
Bosphorus Opening	Con	Bul	Hold	3

And here are Albert's Turkish openings in New Standard:

<b>Opening</b>	<b>F(Ank)</b>	<b>A(Con)</b>	<b>A(Dam)</b>	<b># of Games</b>
Balkan Opening?	BLA	Bul	Ana	214
Russian Attack?	BLA	Bul	Arm	140
Boston Strangler?	Con	Bul	Arm	75
Bosphorus Opening?	Con	Bul	Ana	71

In Standard, Albert's favorite opening for Turkey was the Balkan Opening, F(Ank)-BLA, A(Con)-Bul, A(Smy), played in 79 percent of games. In New Standard, Albert's top preference was F(Ank)-BLA, A(Con)-Bul, A(Dam)-Ana, used in 43 percent of games. Also, Albert's choice of openings for Turkey are more dispersed in New Standard.

So, what are the drawbacks of this variant? Not many from my view. The arrangement of Turkey's home centers on the original map are more aesthetic and indeed what we're used to. Turkey's home center of Damascus, tucked away in the bottom-right corner, seems a little strange and it takes an extra move for this unit to get into the Continent. Turkey's defensive task is certainly more challenging – especially if Italy executes a Lepanto – but that's the point. The automated playing evidence over a large sample of games shows that the New Standard variant is a viable alternative for players

who are looking for a more balanced version of Standard, without altering the basic characteristics and mechanics of the original map.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Jason van Hal for his creation of the ingenious Albert bot and David Norman for developing the indispensable server and mapper tools. These efforts and insights would not have been possible without their contributions to the Diplomacy community.

Addendum:

I tried another variation which combined relocating Turkey's home center from Smyrna to Syria (as in New Standard) AND moving the neutral supply center from Portugal to North Africa. This was an attempt to shift power away from France and closer to Italy to further balance the game. Albert played 125 games of this

variant before I concluded the experiment was a failure. This is the average points per game earned by each power:

	Average
Turkey	15.88
France	12.54
England	10.44
Austria	8.78
Germany	6.14
Italy	4.46

Russia	1.78
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Turkey returns to superpower status in this "North African" variation, benefitting from the additional supply center in the Mediterranean and Russia, consequently, takes a beating for it. I think Turkey also gains from the transfer of a neutral supply center closer to the main stalemate line. During these practice games, I noticed Turkey had the upper hand against England in two-power races to 18 supply centers, though England, overall, profited from a diminished France.

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## Two Years of Virtual Face-to-Face Play

By Peter McNamara

Jason Mastbaum's victory in this year's Diplomacy Broadcast Network Invitational in February put the finishing touch on our second year of vFtF play.

For the uninitiated, vFtF (virtual Face to Face) play of Diplomacy is conducted online, but instead of the traditional play-by-email or equivalent, it is played at Face-to-Face speeds, with negotiations conducted via voice chat. For the Diplomacy community it has created a third major method of playing, the other two being Face-to-Face and the extended deadline community. And like the other two, it is something that every Diplomacy player ought to try out for themselves at least once.

Back in 2020, the Diplomacy community was quick to move online and explore new ways of playing the game when Covid restrictions kept many people indoors. Lentedip in Den Haag was the first tournament casualty of the restrictions, with the aptly named CoronaCon popping up in its place that same weekend. Meanwhile, word leaked out about the Minnesota group's online game they were planning, and that morphed into the successful and still running Virtual Diplomacy League. The movement of other tournaments like DixieCon online, together with the media work broadcasting the games put in by the folks at the Diplomacy Broadcasting Network really provided the impetus for a successful first season.

2021 was always going to struggle to top that. With more events happening in the real world, together with natural attrition from every man and his dog trying out the cool new thing in town in 2020, numbers were generally down across the board. Having said that, it was still a very successful year of play, with a whopping ten

tournaments taking place together with league play. Featuring new innovations like the Francophone championships and league, as well as what we now think of as staples of the genre like the VDL and December's virtual World Championship, a vFtF game was never far away in 2021.

Now as time marches on, we're fully into the third season of play, with the opening weekend of the VDL having already been played by the time any of you read this. At the start of the season, it is worth thinking about what the future holds for us. Reiterating what I've said on a previous occasion or two, the fine crew around the Diplomacy Broadcast Network have created something special, bringing together a wonderful and balanced mix of FtF players, online players and those new to the game. It is up to us as a community to take what they've created and nurture and grow it.

As more events return to the world of flesh and blood, we expect to see a reduction in the number of tournaments held in the vFtF form, as many of the ones we had were FtF events parking themselves in the online sphere while on hiatus. This will naturally help alleviate some of the concerns of burnout that have been floated in some fora. Meanwhile, league play continues to be available at an unreduced pace. No tournament calendar has been published yet, but we expect to see something pared back to a smaller list of major events spread throughout the year.

There is much to look forward to in the new season of vFtF play. Who knows where we will end up another year from now? Maybe you, dear reader, will be the one interviewed in February as the next overall champion. There's only one way to find out.

Links: vWDC discord server (for vFtF play): <https://discord.gg/jbdZtRFMTA>  
DBN Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/diplomacybroadcastnetwork>

# Search for the Worst #4

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.*

This one is a flash from the (very recent) past, a variant that made my brain itch a bit when I saw it years ago on Reddit. It was actually published in a 2017 article on the venerable Diplomatic Pouch.

**This issue's submission:** Retrofit, Designed by Tahseen Hasan (originally named Macedonia?)

**Overview:** Now, this one's development was interesting in that I actually first hand observed quite a bit of its growth on Reddit about five years ago now. I rarely use

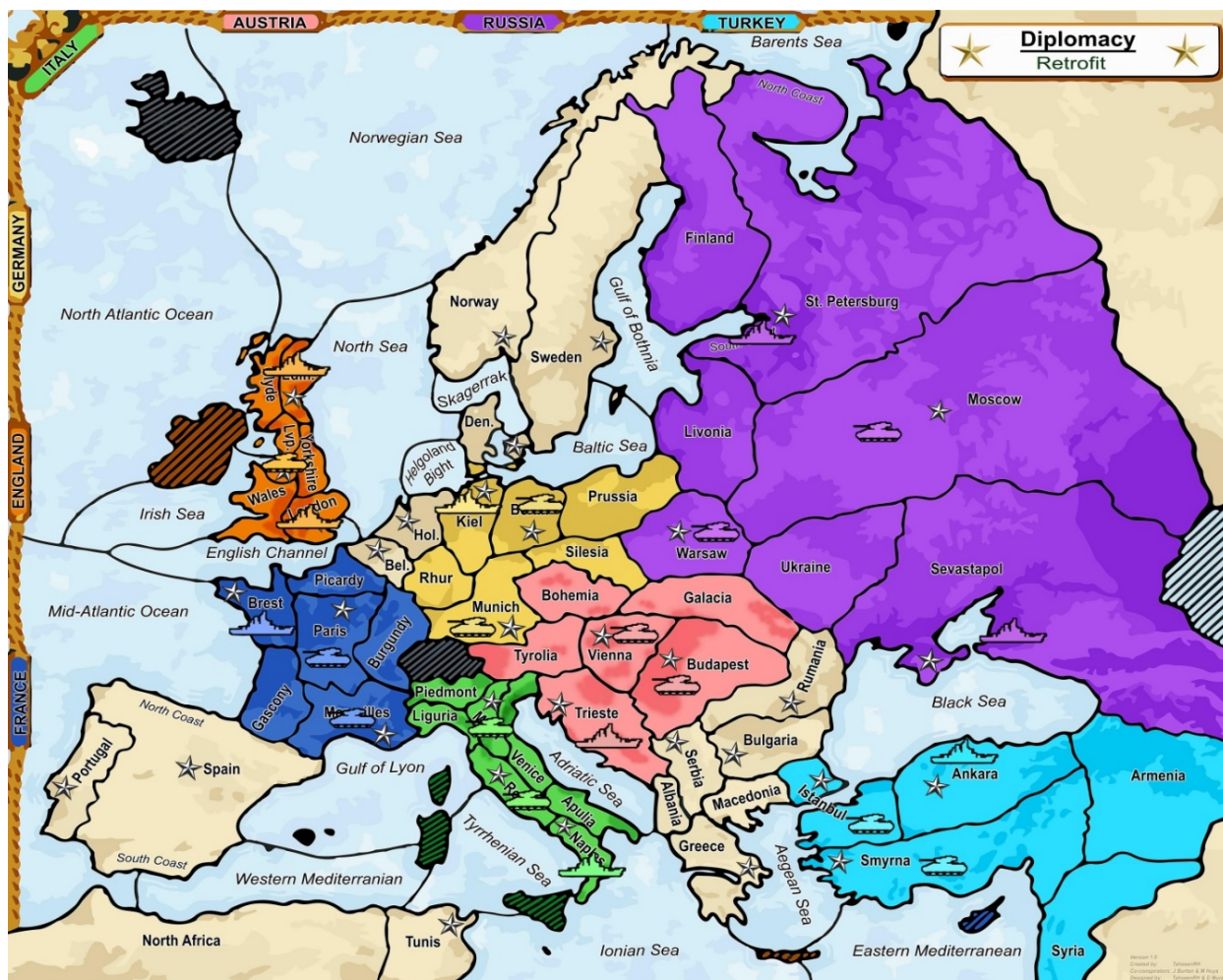
Reddit now post-schooling, but back then, fresh out of school with a lot more time on my hands, I was a bit more of a browser. I couldn't help but think of this variant when considering my next Search for the Worst contestant and was pleased to see that a version of it was 'officially' published in the Diplomatic Pouch as Retrofit, as there were many different maps being thrown around on Reddit associated with it.

This map was born of the great ambition to create a map that was more balanced than Classic Diplomacy. An heir to 1900 if you will. In both cases, big shoes to fill. Too big.

## Category One: Setting

A basically Classic setting. Yawn.

**Setting Score:** 10 out of 20. I have nothing to say about turn of the 20th century Europe, although I understand the decision here.



### **Category Two: Graphical Design**

I really dislike this map. It uses much of the graphics from the PlayDiplomacy site map. Now, as a base map, you could certainly do worse. Yet even as a PlayDiplomacy fan (and former member of the moderator staff), I will not stand before you and say it's a great map. It also isn't the best kind of graphical style to fiddle around with. The sea spaces have weird text stretching that is not as offensive in the original PlayDiplomacy map. Which is confusing, because this variant doesn't actually change any of the sea spaces.<sup>1</sup>

When you're using such a lackluster initial map, you'll get a lot of grief about graphical presentation that may not actually be your fault.<sup>2</sup> I dislike how every single territory east of France looks, but about two thirds of the offensive borders are in the original map this variant was borrowing from. Rumania and Galicia? They look just that hideous on the regular PlayDiplomacy map, like a couple of chicken nugget dinosaurs laying on a pastel plate of mediocrity. So, when you take an already unattractive base map and slap in some very rudimentary text and board editing around the new Macedonia space and the very awkward looking new spaces in Italy, you really have an unappealing meal. Check please?

**Graphical Design Score:** This version uses an unattractive PlayDiplomacy design and makes it worse. 1 out of 10.

### **Category Three: Feasibility**

It's basic Diplomacy, so you'd think that would help get the game played, and to an extent, you'd be right. But while you only need seven players who know the basic rules, there's also nothing here to pull anyone in. The 1900 map may have also been looking to balance out regular Diplomacy, but it has a lot that feels fresh and makes players want to jump in. This map really doesn't offer enough that would make anyone want to jump into it as opposed to regular Diplomacy.

**Feasibility Score:** 5 out of 15. I just don't see how you convince people to play this over classic Diplomacy.

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

With a regular Diplomacy variant, a designer sets themselves a tough mountain to climb. Convincing others to leave behind the regular map to jump into an unknown time, perhaps unknown rules, and all the while hoping that his variant is both fun and balanced enough to avoid player complaints and critiques (also known as bitching and moaning).

When you set out to make a variant explicitly meant to balance out regular Diplomacy, you don't just start hiking up any mountain. You look at Mount Everest and decide to start scaling it. You've now set your variant up in direct competition with Mr. Calhamer's baby boomer love child of a masterpiece, and those critiques and complaints you may expect in a regular variant? They will be coming in fast and furious if there is just a whiff of unfairness in your map design.

The problem with a variant like this is it is too alike the regular map, and sets itself an impossible task. 1900 set out to be a rebalanced Diplomacy. I have run several 1900 games, and I think it failed in that goal. I also don't particularly think it's an issue, because it stands on its own as a delightful experience. Retrofit is just too similar, and too obviously unbalanced in its own regard. Consider:

-France now can move units between Paris and Marseilles directly, allowing stronger defense and a stronger offense against Italy, should the Frenchman so choose. Rather than weaken France, this variant makes the French early game even more dynamic. To compare to 1900, France in 1900 is weaker for a variety of reasons, but one is that Italy is given more options and, with Switzerland and Africa, more reason to involve itself in the West, not East. Italy in this variant is still probably going to head East, for reasons below.

-Macedonia is a created territory to allegedly help out Austria at the expense of Turkey. But Austria not being able to capture Greece in Classic Diplomacy is not what makes Austria weak, and the new space doesn't change the uphill climb players have with a A-T alliance. With Italy's third home center now Milan, the Austrian is arguably weaker than ever vis-a-vis Italy. The fleet in Trieste makes any early stab of Italy impossible (in other balancing variants, the fleet in Trieste is changed to an army). On the other hand, a Milan-Tyrolia and Rome-Venice sets up Italy for a much easier attack on the poor Austrian player. Regardless of the Macedonian territory, the Italians in the Ionian can still potentially determine whether Austria gets into Greece or not.

**Balance and Playability Score:** No-one could deny this variant isn't playable. But it certainly looks no better balanced than regular Diplomacy. I'd argue it looks *less* balanced by buffing up already strong France and making the Austrian early game even weaker by strengthening Italian defenses to a stab while still allowing for a massive early game Italian invasion of Austria. I cut variants slack in the balance department, but when you explicitly are designing a game to be a

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in the past 5 years, PlayDiplomacy has updated their map. If so, I'll apologize for at least this dig.

<sup>2</sup> I still state I am a longtime PlayDiplomacy fan. Gripping about their maps is a treasured pastime for many of their fans.



superior version of the classic...well the slack just can't be cut. 5 out of 15.

**Total Score: 20 out of 60.**

Finally, we have a true contender for the Worst. Retrofit is only saved by using some of the regular Diplomacy theme and balance. Everything it changes, from the map to the alleged superior balance, is detrimental. Mr. Hasan is clearly a very thoughtful and careful Diplomacy thinker from his comments on his design, but I think variants like his are let down by the sheer amount of

playtesting needed to produce a better-balanced classic Diplomacy 'killer,' which no one can blame him for not being able to pull off. As for his map design...well, he can safely blame that on the PlayDiplomacy map.

So, sleep well Mr. Hasan, this is all in good fun, and with a score like that, I think we can safely conclude that there are deeper circles of Diplomacy Variant hell containing monstrous designs far more sinister than a well-meaning dud...and so we shall dig ever deeper on our Search for the Worst!

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## Carnage 2021 Recap

By Ben Kellman

Carnage 2021 marked the return to face-to-face tournament Diplomacy in North America after the COVID-19 pandemic forced a nearly two-year hiatus. The first DipCon since 2019 introduced or reunited dozens of players, and was a great time for all on and off the board. So, when I saw that no one had put together an after-action report for the subsequent issue of Diplomacy World, I decided to construct one from memory to memorialize the occasion.

The tournament was held as part of the Carnage Gaming Convention at Mt. Snow in Dover Vermont, November 5-7, 2021. The ski resort hotel that hosted the event was surprisingly easy to get to given its remote location. I took a flight into Albany and carpooled with Ed Sullivan for the hour plus drive; others made the slightly longer trip through Boston.

Most players gathered first at a Thursday night dinner in the hotel restaurant and bar. For players like me, who only became seriously involved in the hobby during the pandemic, this was a first opportunity to meet in person people who we had played many virtual face-to-face (vfff) games with and had gotten to know online on and off board over the course of the pandemic. It was also a reunion for many of the more experienced face to face players who had not had a tournament to attend since at least January 2020.

Everyone had a great time at the hotel restaurant bar meeting and catching up. Things were especially raucous because Meta (formerly Facebook) had agreed to sponsor the dinner as part of an ongoing AI research project to develop a Gunboat Diplomacy playing bot, and was paying for all the food and drink that night. As people met and chatted, the incomparable David Hood, and Ed Sullivan, always the showman, recorded some very fun pre-tournament interviews with the players and organizers, which were featured on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network's coverage of the tournament

alongside analysis of the games themselves (available here <https://youtu.be/xLJtqFMzWIA>).

Friday started with a brunch trip to the fortuitously named Dot's Diner with some fellow players and organizers, then after a bit of rest, it was time for the first round that afternoon. Those who gathered in the hotel ballroom for the round were a good mix of experienced face to face players, newer players drawn in from vfff or online communities during the pandemic, and local players. There were also three players who were part of the AI team at Meta, and an entire camera crew hired by Meta to film parts of the tournament.

I'll take a moment here to note the excellence of Tournament Director David Maletsky's work organizing the event and running it alongside assistant TD Sabi Ahuja - everything went off without a hitch. Before the round they went through the rules: three rounds over two days using the rank-based Carnage scoring system, 15-minute negotiating periods for spring and fall with an additional short order writing period. They then assigned the players to one of four boards, which were set up on adjacent tables. I drew England in my first game, one of my favorite powers. The board had four very good players I was familiar with from vfff all in the East, including Tanya Gill in Russia, who was popularly seen as a favorite entering the tournament. One of the Meta players was in Germany, and a local player with a long history of attending Carnage had drawn France. The East quickly formed into an RAT alliance, with the Austrian fleet slipping into the Ionian Sea behind the Italian's move to the Aegean in Fall 1901. Around the same time, the French desire to focus South and concerns about Eastern cooperation led to a triple forming in the West. Russia and Italy took some losses in the ensuing fighting, and both ended up down to only armies. As things began to bog down at the main stalemate line, I moved to take a few coastal centers off Germany. We then drew in 1906 with my England on 9

centers, France on 6 and everyone else between 5 and 2. It felt great and a little surprising to top my first in-person board in years. While I may have been able to push my center count a bit higher if I had attacked an ally again, I wasn't going to make it over the stalemate line with a united East, and felt good that I had been able to make up with Germany and hadn't needed to eliminate anyone. I was also already a little wary of how many people outside my game were commenting on my being near the tournament lead. Hunter Katcher finished that first round in first position with a ten-center top as Turkey, and four others split tops on the other two boards.

Saturday morning, I drew Austria and worked in a game long alliance with Jason Mastbaum's Italy. This game had tensions within each side of the board throughout, but wound up in a West vs Austria/Italy structure. Only Nicolas Sahuguet, former world champion and my pick to win the tournament going in, was able to push across the line from his Germany position and take Warsaw from a diminished Russia. Thus, the game ended on a less than thrilling 7-7-7 shared top between him, Jason, and me, with only Turkey eliminated. At the same time, Adam Silverman secured a 9-center board top as France on another board, taking the tournament lead.

Remarkably, one game this round lasted for the entire time between the start of the morning and afternoon rounds, about nine hours if I remember correctly. Karthik Konath topped that board on 11 centers as England. I was happy to have some time to relax, watch some college football with other players whose games had finished, have some dinner.

Going into the last round, I was in second place. For the first time I started feeling a bit nervous, as I had not expected much success and suddenly there was something to play for. As the boards were assigned and the last game started, the TV style cameras that Meta had hired were back, making it feel like we were actual diplomats negotiating something important, rather than a bunch of hobbyists playing a game for fun. Bringing myself to tell the legendary Edi Birsan that I did not have any more time to talk with him that turn and had to move on, while a camera was in our faces, was one of the hardest things I did all weekend. Still, I enjoyed the heightened pressure a bit and the last game proved to be a particularly interesting experience. I drew Turkey, while Edi had France, and three other longtime in-person tournament players who I had not played with previously were in Austria, Russia, and Germany. Katie Gray, an accomplished online player who I'd gotten to know previously through vfff play, was the only one on the board I knew and was playing Italy.

It was remarkable how much the style of play differed in a game with players from a segment of the hobby I had

not previously encountered, compared to the vfff style I'm more accustomed to. I have never bounced the Black Sea for six straight turns like I did in this game. I don't think I've ever been lied to and still continually pitched ideas as many times as I was by the Austrian player. It took a while to feel out the table and find the norms, which was really fun despite the relatively high stakes. Ultimately, this game was heavily influenced by England's very quick elimination, leaving Edi in control of a strong France and in an alliance with Germany. The East eliminated Austria eventually, but I was not able to make any further progress due to the danger of the EG. After Russia turned around on me to force the draw, I accepted while on 7 centers, behind France and Russia, who were both on 8.

Elsewhere in the round, Silverman topped his board with an 8 center Austria, securing the tournament win. Matthew Crill put together an 11-center board topping Turkey to jump into second place. I ended up tied for third with Nicolas Sahuguet, which I was certainly happy with. The tournament over, we all enjoyed some drinks and the ability to relax while we congratulated Adam on his DipCon Championship. Honestly, these experiences spending time talking about the games and whatever else with people were some of the best parts of the weekend. The following day some of us got brunch, everyone attended the awards ceremony, and people started to trickle out and away from Vermont.

As much as Adam and Maletsky's accomplishments at 2021 Carnage deserve to be celebrated, I write this in large part to remind all readers that tournaments are running in person again and to encourage them to attend. This was such a fun weekend of both playing Diplomacy and spending time with some great people, that I would encourage everyone reading to ensure they get to one or more events this year. Most notably, Carnage will be held again on November 4-6, 2022 and this iteration will serve as World DipCon, crowning a World Champion. It is my intention to be there, as well as to attend DixieCon in Chapel Hill, NC this Memorial Day weekend and Weasel Moot in Chicago in late summer. While I won't be making the trip, I also expect 2022 North American DipCon at Whipping in San Jose on April 29-May 1 to be a highly attended and enjoyable event.

I should also note that as we return to these tournaments in person, we will continue to hold virtual face to face leagues and tournaments on the Virtual World Diplomacy Community Discord server. It is my fervent hope that increased hobby participation will end up being a silver lining of the pandemic, and that we can have both a thriving in person and virtual tournament scene going forward.

# 2022 NADF Boston Massacre



## **THE BOSTON BACKBITERS ARE THRILLED TO ANNOUNCE THE IN-PERSON RETURN OF THEIR MARQUEE DIPLOMACY TOURNAMENT: BOSTON MASSACRE!**

**Date:** August 12-14, 2022

**Location:** Pandemonium Books and Games, 4 Pleasant Street, Cambridge, MA.

### **Registration:**

We have a tiered registration:

- Standard registration is \$40
- Supported registration is \$20 (Intended for students but available to others upon request)
- Supporting registration is \$50 (Support the community. This is one support that won't get cut!)
- Please pay @BostonBackbiters on PayPal or Venmo, or \$BostonBackbiters on Cash App

**Game 1:** Friday at 6:00pm

**Game 2:** Saturday at 1:00pm

**Game 3:** Sunday at 10:00AM

**Scoring:** [Carnage](#)

**Lodging:** As our venue is not a hotel all attendees are responsible for their own lodging. However, we will be organizing a room share to mitigate costs. Locals may also be willing to host travelers.

**Tournament Director:** Alex Maslow ([Armaslow@gmail.com](mailto:Armaslow@gmail.com))

Interested? Fill out [this form](#) to sign up or just stay in the loop!