

Diplomacy World #159



Fall 2022 Issue

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Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Fall 2022 issue. I'm not sure how the weather is in your neck of the woods, but here in Texas we're finally cooling off. I'm looking forward to some actual fall weather. Having grown up in Connecticut and New Jersey, I miss the idea of a full-colored autumn. Heck, I miss the idea of having four seasons. In Texas we basically have two: summer and not-summer!

As I write this (one week before the October 1st deadline), it appears this will be a much shorter issue of **Diplomacy World** than usual. (Granted, I often get an article or two at the last minute, and this time around I got four or five...but allow me to proceed with what I wrote a week ago, it doesn't invalidate the sentiment even if the points aren't as sharp). And that's okay, in and of itself. Length does not mean quality, and in the end, this zine is only as good, or large, or successful, as the material that is submitted by you, the readers and hobby members. Sometimes people don't have the inspiration, or the time, or the interest in writing anything. It takes an effort – and some luck – to get all three at the same time. I do know of a number of articles being worked on at the moment which I am looking forward to. They just simply weren't ready by the deadline.

I know exactly how difficult writing material for submission can be. I've been messing around with the idea for a semi-regular column, one focusing on the zines in my Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive. (The Archive can be found at:

<http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/kent/diplomacyzinearchive.htm>)

What I thought about doing was choosing one old zine per column and doing a closer examination of some of the highlights contained in the issues I've posted. The problems in getting from the idea stage to the written column are numerous. First is inspiration and motivation. Would more than a handful of readers be interested in a look at old postal zines? Do I have enough issues available – and the time to look closely at them – to build an interesting article out the material? Is it really worth the trouble?

And, of course, there's time. Always a precious commodity. This past month I've been dealing with the relocation of our office for the second time in a year, as

well as dimming prospects for how much longer I can count on my position. So my focus on writing has been unreliable, to say the least. With the global economy slowing, and employment always a nervous subject for someone like myself, it's difficult to put my full energy into anything.

My point isn't to complain about my own circumstances. Rather, it's to explain that I understand why so many readers have intentions to write something that never actually come to pass. As I told one hobby member today (paraphrasing): while I bug and harass and whine and cajole and beg for articles from anyone I can think of, I don't actually want to put **pressure** on anyone. I just want to encourage the best I can. In the end, it's only a zine. Only a game. Only a hobby. It's a worthwhile one, an enjoyable one, and anything you send me to include in an upcoming issue is very much appreciated. But the world won't stop turning just because you can't get around to it.

Fortunately, even when Diplomacy World isn't as thorough or thick as I'd like it to be, there are plenty of other places you can still go for more hobby news, more articles, more immersion on Diplomacy. Among them are the Diplomacy Briefing (<https://www.diplomacybriefing.com/>) and the Diplomacy Broadcast Network (available on Youtube and Twitch, but with a homepage at <https://diplobn.com/>). Not to mention Discord, Reddit, Facebook...the hobby is everywhere, if you look deep enough.

So while I encourage (or urge, depending on how panicked you want to picture me) you to send articles, columns, convention reports, event flyers, letters, ideas, complaints, or anything else to me for inclusion in the next issue, I also strongly suggest you enjoy the wide variety of material that exists outside these pages. Do yourself – and the hobby – a favor: find one new way to participate over the next few months.

I'll close by reminding you the next deadline for Diplomacy World submissions is January 1, 2023. 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 winter, and happy stabbing!

Diplomacy World Staff:

Managing Lead Editor:	Douglas Kent, Email: diplomacyworld of yahoo.com or dougray30 of yahoo.com
Co-Editor:	Vacant!!
Strategy & Tactics Editor:	Vacant!!
Variant Editor:	Ben Durfee, Email: playdiplomacymoderator of gmail.com
Interview Editor:	Randy Lawrence-Hurt, Email: randy.lawrencehurt of gmail.com
Club and Tournament Editor:	Peter McNamara, Email me of petermc.net
Demo Game Editor:	Rick Desper, Email: rick_desper of yahoo.com
Technology Editor:	Vacant!!
Original Artwork	Original Artwork by Matt Pickard a.k.a. "Lady Razor"

Contributors in 2022: Sabrini Ahuja, Mal Arky, Chris Brand, Eber Condrell, Jonathan Dingess, Bob Durf, Jonathan Frank, Jon Hills, David Hood, Ben Kellman, Seren Kwok, Randy Lawrence-Hurt, Robert Lesco, Andy Lischett, Alex Maslow, Peter McNamara, Paul Milewski, M.F. Morrison, Matt Pickard, Hugh Polley, Lewis Pulsipher, Harold Reynolds, Nicolas Sahuget, 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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Strategy in Diplomacy

Part 2 of 3

(Reprinted from The General, vol. 18, #2)

by Lewis Pulsipher

In Part 1, we examined the art of negotiation. Where negotiation is a means of convincing other players to act as you desire, the art of strategy is choosing the combinations of countries and overall direction of movements (thrust east instead of west, by land instead of by sea) which, if executed as planned, will result in a win. It is the most neglected of the three aspects of Diplomacy play, the one in which the average player is most likely deficient, and the one which separates most experts from merely good players. The average player is content to let his negotiations determine his strategy rather than vice versa. Consequently he seldom looks beyond the next game year or the immediate identification of enemy and ally to decide what he ought to do later in the game.

I assume in the following that the player's objective is to win, or failing that, to draw. Those who eschew draws in favor of survival as someone else wins will approach some points of strategy differently, but until late in the game there is virtually no difference between the two approaches.

Fundamentals of Strategy

Strategy in Diplomacy is strongly influenced by the shape of the board. Spaces near the edge are larger than central spaces, so that movement around the perimeter is as fast as movement through the middle. More important, the board is divided into two strategic areas or spheres. The eastern sphere includes Austria, Russia, and Turkey, while the western is England, France, and Germany. Italy sits astride one of three avenues between the two spheres. The northern route through Scandinavia and the Barents Sea enables Russia to have some influence in the western sphere. The central route, between Germany on one side and Austria and Russia on the other, looks short but is rarely used early in the game.

Normally the game revolves around efforts to dominate the two spheres. Early in the game a country rarely moves out of its own sphere -- it can't afford the diversion of effort until the conflict in its own sphere is resolved. The country or alliance that gains control of its own sphere first, however, becomes the first power that can invade the other sphere and usually gains the upper hand in the game as a whole. A continuous tension exists between the need to completely control one's own

sphere and the need to beat the other sphere to the punch. Commonly, two countries in a sphere will attack the third, attempting at the same time to arrange a long, indecisive war in the other sphere so that it will be easy to invade later. Sometimes the two countries will fight for supremacy before the winner goes on to the other sphere; more often, the players of the other sphere, becoming aware of the threat from the other side of the board, will intervene and perhaps patch up their own differences.

Poor Italy is trapped in the middle. Naturally an alliance that endeavors to dominate a sphere wants Italy to move toward the other sphere, probably to establish a two vs. two stalemate. The odd man out in a sphere turns first to Italy to redress the balance of power. In either case Italy is stuck in a long war. An Italian win is usually a long game.

This discussion shows us the most important principle of strategy: everything that happens anywhere on the board affects every country. If you concern yourself only with two or three neighboring powers, you'll never become an expert player (though glib negotiation skill can go far to compensate for strategic deficiency). If you as Turkey can influence the move of one French or English unit, it could mean the difference between a win and a draw game years hence. If you can strongly affect the entire country's movements, even at that distance, you should go far along the road to victory. The expert strategic player knows where many foreign units will be ordered each season, and he tries to gain that information subtly by using misdirection and intermediaries; it doesn't do to attract too much attention.

One of the most important considerations of strategy is the attainment of a "stalemate line" by your country or alliance. Your long-range goal is to win, but unless you are a romantic player who prefers instability, your immediate objective is to be sure you can't lose. Once that's assured you can worry about going on to win. A stalemate line is a position that cannot possibly be breached or pushed back by the enemy. The area within or protected by the line includes supply centers sufficient to support all the units needed to form the line. There are many stalemate lines, and they have been discussed at length in books and fanzines about Diplomacy. I will describe the two major lines, which roughly coincide with the two spheres (and not by accident!). You can find

variations and other lines by studying the board. (U = unit, that is, either army or fleet.)

Eastern Line: A Vienna, A Budapest S Vienna, A Trieste S Vienna, U Venice, U Rome, U Naples S Rome, F Adriatic S Venice, U Apulia S Venice, F Ionian, F Eastern Med. S Ionian, U Sevastopol, U Rumania. U Bulgaria S Rumania, U Armenia S Sevastopol.

Western Line: U St. Petersburg, U Norway S St. Petersburg, U Kiel, A Ruhr S U Kiel, A Burgundy, U Marseilles, A Gascony S Marseilles, U Spain, U Portugal S Spain, F Mid-Atlantic, F English S Mid-Atlantic. (Note that this line is solid only if the enemy has no fleets in the Baltic Sea or Gulf of Bothnia and none are built in Berlin. This line can be expanded to hold Berlin and Munich. An alternative is to place nothing in Spain and Marseilles, F Portugal S Mid-Atlantic, A Brest S Gascony, A Paris S Burgundy.)

With 13 to 15 centers, or as many as 17, within a line, a player is almost certain of a draw. If he reaches the line soon enough and alone, he can move on to prevent any other player from conquering the rest of the board so that a draw or win is assured.

A drawback of reaching a stalemate line is that it can put other players on their guard against you. If they know they can't knock you down to size, they'll be reluctant to fight one another. This is a danger any strong country faces, however, and it must be noted that a perfectly played Diplomacy game should end in a draw, not a win. (This depends partly on the players' styles, of course -- a game among seven extreme "placers" as discussed in part 1 will never be a draw.)

You can win, then, only in an imperfect game, which means other players make mistakes. The better the players, the more likely a draw will be.

So much for the fundamental, strategic structure of the game.

Devising Strategy

When you devise a strategy, you plan the general direction of your movement, expected allies, expected enemies, and what you want countries not adjacent to yours to do. At each step you should have alternatives -- barring great good luck, things will go wrong. The styles and personalities of the players can strongly affect the strategy you choose, but for this example, let's assume that one player is as suitable (or unsuitable) to your purposes as another.

First, consider the nature of your country. Is it a natural land power, a sea power, or both? Is it on an outer edge of a sphere, an inner edge (Germany or Austria), or in

between (Italy)? Think about this, look at the board, and decide where you're going to get 18 supply centers to win the game. You must take several centers in one sphere, or in Italy, even if you control the other sphere entirely. Your plan must include 1) a means of gaining control of your sphere without hostile incursion from outside it, 2) attainment of a stalemate line in at least one part of the board, and 3) penetration into the other sphere (or Italy) to reach 18 centers. Note that Italy is within the eastern stalemate line, and that the western line is anchored in the eastern sphere at St. Petersburg. These seemingly minor points may have a strong effect on your plans.

You can plan to jointly control your sphere with an ally, but then the penetration must amount to eventual control of the other sphere as well. You must include a means of reacting to any attempt to disrupt your plan from outside your sphere. You must provide for other contingencies; for example, if someone dominates the other sphere before you dominate yours, you must be prepared to stop him. You must be flexible while trying to implement your original plan.

Under this approach, Italy is out in the cold. Italy must either be sure that neither sphere is dominated by any country or alliance early in the game, allowing Italy time to grow, or it must quickly dominate one sphere. From the strategic point of view, Italy is definitely the hardest country to play.

Here is a brief example of a strategic plan for England. Assume you don't like the Anglo-German alliance or the German player is notoriously unreliable, so you plan to offer a limited duration alliance to France for a joint attack on Germany. You'll offer Belgium, Munich, and Holland to France while you take Denmark, Kiel, and Berlin. You don't mind if Russia and Germany get into a fight over Sweden, but you want Russia to concentrate, with Austria, on attacking Turkey. This will leave Italy free to peck away, initially at Germany, later at France. When your alliance with France expires you will attack France with Italian help, and at the same time pick off Russia's northern centers (Germany should fall sooner than Turkey -- if necessary you'll give Turkey tactical advice). You want Austria to attack Russia after Turkey falls. This is important, because Austria-Russia would be a formidable alliance against you. It is possible but not likely that you could reach a stalemate line as Italy collapsed under an attack from Austria, but it is much better to have most of the eastern units fighting one another. In the end you should be grinding down an outnumbered Italy (England will gain more from attacks on Germany and France than Italy will, by nature of the positions) while Austria keeps Russia busy. For supply centers you want England, France, Germany, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, Iberia -- a total of 16 -- plus any

two from St. Petersburg, Warsaw, Moscow, Tunis, and Italy.

To go into all the alternatives where this plan might lead would require pages. As one example, the alliance with France could be extended if France appears about to be drawn into a protracted war with Italy. That time could instead be used to march into Russia and the Balkans.



Differences Between Countries

Now we come to individual countries. Reams of statistics are available about the success of each country in postal play, but the percentages have varied over the years, and statistics of American and British postal games show some differences.

Generally, each country has a good chance of success except for Italy, which is handicapped by its between-the-spheres position. (Pirated South American versions of Diplomacy give Italy a fleet instead of an army in Rome and add a supply center in North Africa. These changes strengthen Italy and probably make Diplomacy a better-balanced game.)

Russia tends to be an all-or-nothing country because of its extra unit, its long borders, and its connection with the

western sphere and stalemate line. Russia wins outright more than any other country. The inner countries, Germany, Austria, and Italy, are harder to play well.

The next seven sections briefly state what to look for when you play each country. "Natural neutrals" are neutral supply centers which are usually captured by the same Great Power during 1901. The most common opening move is also mentioned, but remember that tactics are subordinate to strategy. Even the most common openings are used less than half the time.

One other point remains to be made. Western countries can wait longer than eastern countries before committing themselves to agreements. The easterners are too close, with too many centers at stake, to wait.

Austria

Land power, natural neutrals Serbia and Greece.

Turkey and Austria are almost always enemies because Austria is at a great disadvantage when the two ally. Turkey usually owns territories on three sides (Mediterranean, Balkans, Russia) if the alliance is successful, and Austria is just too easy to stab. Russia and Italy are the best alliance prospects, especially the former. If Russia and Turkey ally, Italy can often be persuaded to aid Austria in order to avoid becoming the next victim of the eastern juggernaut. Germany virtually always agrees to a non-aggression pact, nor should Austria waste units in the western sphere. The early game is often a desperate struggle for survival, but a good player can hang on until events elsewhere and his own diplomacy improve his position. Unfortunately, normally Austria must eliminate Italy to win because the seas and crowded German plains halt expansion northward; this land power must become a sea power in order to grab the last few centers needed.

Commonly Austria opens with F Trieste-Albania and A Budapest-Serbia, followed in Fall by Serbia S Albania-Greece. A Vienna is used to block whichever neighbor, Russia or Italy, seems hostile, by Vienna-Galicia or Vienna-Trieste or Tyrolia.

England

Sea power, natural neutral Norway.

England has an excellent defensive position but poor expansion prospects. An Anglo-German alliance is not as hard to maintain as the AustroTurkish, but neither is it easy. England must go south when allied with Germany, but it can hardly avoid a presence in the north, facing Russia, which puts it all around the German rear. England-France is a fine alliance but it may favor France in the long run. Whichever is the ally, England may be

able to acquire Belgium by working at it. Patience is a necessity, however, unless Italy or Russia comes into the western sphere. If either does, to attack France or Germany, England must gain centers rapidly or be squeezed to death between its former ally and the interloper.

England can win by sweeping through Germany and Russia, but all too often the eastern stalemate line stops this advance short of victory. Similarly, a southern Mediterranean drive can founder in Italy, but this part of the defenders' stalemate line is harder to establish. If England can get up to six or seven centers, it has many alternatives to consider.

Usually England opens with F London-North, F Edinburgh-Norwegian, A Liverpool-Edinburgh. The army can be convoyed by either fleet while the other can intervene on the continent.

France

Balanced land and sea power, natural neutrals Spain and Portugal.

France may be the least restricted of all the countries, vying with Russia for that distinction. There are many options for good defensive and offensive play. Alliance with Germany or England is equally possible, but it is easier to cooperate with England. An astute French player can usually obtain Belgium regardless of which country he allies with. Italy's movements are important to France because penetration into the Mediterranean is usually necessary late in the game, if not sooner. Russia can be helpful against England or Germany. Even a French-Russian-Italian alliance is possible against the Anglo-Germans. At any rate, if France is attacked, there are several players to ask for help.

A common French opening is F Brest-Mid Atlantic (heading for Iberia), A Paris-Burgundy, A Marseilles-Spain.

Germany

Land power, natural neutrals Holland, Denmark

Like Austria, Germany must scramble early in the game, but its defensive position is better, alliance options are broader, and Italy isn't quite clawing at the back door.

Alliance with England is difficult because England usually commands the German rear as the game goes on. (As England I have been stabbed -- ineffectively -- several times by Germans who couldn't stand the strain, though I had no plans to attack them.) Germany-France is a better alliance, though France may gain more from it, and Germany can be left dangerously extended

between France and Russia. Either romantic methods or great patience is required. Fortunately, Austria rarely interferes early in the game (nor should Germany waste effort in the eastern sphere) and conflicts with Russia are rare if Germany concedes Sweden.

A common opening is F Kiel-Denmark, A Munich-Ruhr, A Berlin-Kiel. Kiel-Holland or Munich-Burgundy is also common.

Italy

Balanced land and sea power, natural neutral Tunis.

Italy needs more patience and luck to win than anyone else. Italy's defensive position is actually good, but immediate expansion possibilities are very poor. Don't be hypnotized by all those Austrian centers so near. If Russia and Turkey ally, Italy's lifespan isn't much longer than Austria's and full support of Austria is required. Italy tends to become involved in the eastern sphere more than the western. Unless England and Germany are attacking France, Italy stands to gain little in that direction. Although Turkey seems far away, Italy can attack her using the "Lepanto Opening" in Spring 1901 -- A Venice H, A Rome-Apulia, F Naples-Ionian (this is the most common Italian opening), followed in Fall by A Apulia-Tunis, F Ionian C Apulia-Tunis, build F Naples. In Spring 1902, F Ionian-Eastern Med. (or Aegean), F Naples-Ionian, followed in Fall by convoying the army in Tunis to Syria. This attack requires Austrian cooperation, of course.

Russia

Balanced land and sea power, natural neutrals Sweden, Rumania.

With a foot in the western sphere owing to its long border, Russia has an advantage in expansion. Its defensive position, however, is weak, despite the extra unit. Russia often feels like two separate countries, north and south, and it may prosper in one area while failing in the other. The eastern sphere is more important and usually gets three of Russia's starting four units.

Russia has no obvious enemy. Because the Austro-Turkish alliance is so rare, Russia can often choose its ally -- but mustn't become complacent! In the north, Germany can usually be persuaded not to interfere with Sweden. An Anglo-German attack will certainly take Sweden and threaten St. Petersburg, but Russia can lose its northern center and still remain a major power. A Franco-Russian alliance can be very successful provided Germany and England start the game fighting one another.

A common Russian opening is F St. Petersburg (sc)-Bothnia, F Sevastopol-Black, A Warsaw-Ukraine, A Moscow-Sevastopol. The move Moscow-St. Petersburg is rarely seen (and very anti-English). Warsaw-Galicia is anti-Austrian (with Moscow-Ukraine). Sevastopol-Rumania is very trusting of Turkey.

Turkey

Balanced land and sea power, natural neutral Bulgaria.

Turkey has the best defensive position on the board. Its immediate expansion prospects are not bad, and at one time it was notorious in postal circles for spreading like wildfire once it reached six or seven units. Now players realize that an Austro-Russian alliance, or the Italian Lepanto opening, can keep Turkey under control.

Austria is an unlikely ally -- see Austrian notes for why. Russia-Turkey can be an excellent alliance, but if Russia

does well in the north Turkey will find itself slipping behind. Nonetheless, beggars can't be choosers. The Italo-Turkish alliance is seldom seen, perhaps because Italy too often becomes the next victim for Russia and Turkey. A fight between Italy and Turkey on one side and Russia and Austria on the other is rare, because Italy prefers to go west and hope Austria will attack Russia after finishing with Turkey. Turkey has plenty of time to look for help from the other side of the board while fighting a dour defensive, but help usually comes too late.

A common Turkish opening is A Constantinople-Bulgaria, A Smyrna-Constantinople (or Armenia, to attack Russia), F Ankara-Black. The favored alternative if Russia is definitely friendly is Ankara-Constantinople, Smyrna H.

In Part 3, we'll turn to an examination of tactics in Diplomacy.

The Importance of Guessing Games

By Nicholas Sahuget

[[This is an English translation of an article that originally appeared in "La Gazette" on the now-defunct 18centres.com website.]]

Last season of the game, the map is colored blue and dark blue. England proudly dominates Scandinavia and part of Germany and leads the dance with 10 centers. But its fleets cannot take other supply centers inland. France has rushed into the Mediterranean and even if it has only 9 centers, it has possibilities. The amateur spectator naively asks the more seasoned observers: "So who wins?". And the Austrian player, a veteran of multiple games, but eliminated too early, looks at him as if the answer is obvious. "France get a tenth center for sure, the board top will be decided by a guessing game over Munich." The rookie looks at him a little amazed: "What's a guessing game?" and the other one answers: "Well, a guessing game, it is a 50-50, like a roll of the dice, it's a toss-up." And the beginner is even more surprised, he believed that Diplomacy was a game where chance played no role.

- Guessing games, definition and examples

Guessing games are found in almost all stages of a game of Diplomacy and their importance is even more felt in gunboats, or games without negotiations. Who hasn't experienced the horrors of the situation in which he can attack two centers but can only support one of these attacks? Conversely, his opponent has to choose. He has only defensive support to give.

An illustrative example occurs when Italy has fleets in MED and GLY and an army in PIE. France has armies in MAR and GAS and a fleet in SPA. Italy must choose: attack MAR or attack SPA. France must make the opposite choice, defend MAR or SPA.

Another example of a guessing game often occurs in F1901 when Italy has opened to PIE and France has moved to ENG, PIC and SPA. In the fall of 1901, France had to guess the Italian intentions. If he thinks that the PIE will go to MAR, SPA-MAR is then the right move. But if PIE does something else, then SPA-MAR is a very bad choice. It all depends on what you think the opponent is going to do. But as your opponent can make the same argument, one quickly finds oneself in the vicious circle of "I think that he thinks that I think that he thinks".

- Recipes and tricks

How to behave in this situation? Are there any secrets that good players know, tricks to win all your guessing games? What do the champions who hold a reputation for winning all their guessing games do? Here, everyone has their own method, everyone has their own tricks. For example, in such a situation, in the final of the 2005 Cup on 18centres.com, in F1907, DLD mentioned that he tossed a coin to decide whether to attack BRE or PAR. He chose BRE, Rostopchine had decided to cover PAR,

and DLD catches him to finish to share the board top at 7 centers.

Other tricks can come handy. Psychology and common sense can be helpful. The capital method can pay off. Many players, without realizing it, tend to favor the defense of their capital in a guessing game situation. So, it's better to attack BRE than PAR! Another trick, the coasts method, is to always choose an action that pushes the other one to write orders requiring the specification of a coast (SPAsc for example). Under the stress caused by the need to guess right, a little forgetfulness is so quick to occur, which improves the chances of success of this choice of move. As Diplomacy is a game of small margins, you can take advantage of any edge. This trick works as well in FTF games where forgetting to write coasts can happen as well as in backstabbr where clicking on the wrong coast can happen even to the best players.

Game theory

Is that all we can say about these guessing games? Is it just a bit of luck and grandmother's recipes? We will now analyze guessing games from a game theoretical perspective, in order to make you an exceptional diplomat or the Russell Crowe of 18 centers.

- Modeling guessing games

Let's start with a simple situation. Two players A and B are in a guessing game situation. A can attack either supply center X or supply center Y and B can defend either one but not both. Let's assume for the moment that the situation is such that the only thing at stake is these centers. Therefore, if the attack is successful, player A wins a center and player B loses one, whereas if the attack is blocked, there is a status quo.

Such a situation can be represented with the following table in which the column represents the action of player A and the row represents the action of player B. The table reads as follows: when A attacks x and B defends x, the result is (0,0) the status quo. When A attacks x and B defends y, the result is (1,-1): A wins a center, B loses 1.

	Defend X	Defend Y
Attack X	0,0	1,-1
Attack Y	1,-1	0,0

- Best response and Nash Equilibrium

What can be expected in such a situation with two players looking to maximize their number of centers? A strategy in this context consists in a choice of action for each player. Game theory defines the concept of Nash equilibrium: a pair of strategies constitute a Nash equilibrium when each player's strategy is an optimal response to the other player's strategy.

Thus, it is easy to see that choosing X for sure cannot be optimal for player A, since then the best strategy for B is to choose to defend X. Choosing X is then clearly inferior for A and this pair of strategies is not an equilibrium. This kind of situation has no equilibrium in pure strategy, players must play each action with a positive probability.

This keeps their opponent confused. The same phenomenon appears in poker when players use bluffing or sandbagging strategies. Sometimes you have to bluff with a weak hand to get other players to agree to raise the stakes when you have a good hand. But, if you have to randomly choose which center to attack, the best strategy is the coin flip mentioned in a previous example. What have we learned?

Indeed, in this particular example, the 50%-50% is the equilibrium strategy for both players. To see this, we need to understand that if we are willing to attack X and Y with positive probabilities, we must get the same expected benefits from both orders. Suppose that player A anticipates that B will defend X with probability p and Y with probability $1-p$. By attacking X, he will win a center with probability $1-p$. By attacking Y, this probability is p . Player B must therefore defend each center with a 50% probability. The same reasoning applies to the other player.

- It gets complicated

So, should you make sure you have a coin in your pocket your next tournament? Does the coin flip answer all our questions? Nothing is less sure. Let's revisit the example of the guessing game on MAR in the fall of 1901. Let's first assume that the players reason only in terms of centers. We get the following table:

	PIE – MAR	PIE H
SPA-MAR	1,0	0,0
SPA H	0,1	1,0

But in this case, do we still have a guessing game? By playing PIE-MAR, the Italian player gets a chance to win a center while by staying at PIE, he never wins a center. The equilibrium of this game is then simply (SPA-MAR, PIE-MAR). No guessing game, and there should always

be a bounce in this situation. This is nonsense, this game theory stuff is nonsense! I've seen good players not playing PIE-MAR in this situation.

Let's think about it for a second. Wouldn't it be that in the fall of 1901, the number of centers is not the only thing to consider but that the position is also important? When France has 4 centers and can't build in MAR, this gives a much better position to the Italian player than if he had to face France with 5 centers, a little annoyed by the Italian moves, with the opportunity to build a fleet in MAR. It would therefore be more reasonable to give a value of 0.5 to the outcome with France at 4 centers with a unit in MAR and keep the value of 0 for the other outcome. We then end up with the following table and a real guessing game situation.

	PIE – MAR	PIE H
SPA-MAR	1 , 0	0 , 0.5
SPA H	0 , 1	1 , 0

Applying our previous reasoning, we can compute the Nash equilibrium.

For France, to play both moves with positive probability, the value of each order must be equalized. If Italy plays PIE - MAR with probability p , playing SPA-MAR leads to an expected payoff for France of $p \cdot 1$ and playing SPA H a payoff of $(1-p) \cdot 1$, so the Italian must play each action with probability 50% as before. But in order to make Italy indifferent, the value of each of his actions must also be the same. If France plays SPA-MAR with probability q , then playing PIE-MAR yields a payoff of $(1-q) \cdot 1$ while playing PIE H yields a payoff of $q \cdot 0.5$. We thus obtain $q = 2/3$. The probability with which France needs to cover MAR must increase.

- What's the point of all this?

What have we learned? First of all, that the theoretical solution of a guessing game is not always the heads or tails, that it depends in practice on the positional judgment of the players since the value of 0.5 we put on France getting his army back in MAR is not objective.

Some players will understand the importance for Italy to paralyze France at the beginning of the game, for others the center count will be more important. The second

important thing is that the theory doesn't really prescribe a strategy since at equilibrium each action has the same value. On the other hand, we have learned that anticipating the opponent's moves and thinking about his judgment of the final positions is very important. If, as an Italian player, you think that the France underestimates the value you put into the paralysis that an unblocked SPA-MAR implies, then you can take advantage of your superior understanding of the situation. For example, if France thinks that he is playing the second table and is therefore going to play SPA-MAR, for sure, then you choose to stay in PIE and win.

These few examples are here to illustrate how game theory can provide a framework to analyze guessing games. Obviously, Diplomacy is such a complex game that you could go on for hours. Just the last example could be improved by giving France the possibility to play SPA-POR and MAO-SPAsc, which would obviously change the value of the resulting positions. Likewise, the Italian has other choices such as PIE-TYR, a move that leads to a different position than the one resulting from PIE H.

- Rationality and skill of other players

Before concluding, one last remark. For a guessing situation to occur, both players must be aware of it. Very often, an experienced player is in a guessing game situation, but his less experienced opponent does not realize it; this is the case when an obscure rule or and advanced tactics is at stake. In this case, there is no question to ask, playing the attack or defense that the less experienced player will probably not have taken into consideration is the best. It is obviously less simple in anonymous games when the identity and the skill of players remain hidden. But trying to play your opponent's style remains a good strategy. When you've seen that a player always defends himself with simple supports and not by cutting supports and counterattacks, it often pays to bet that he will continue to use the same type of tactics. Again, the important thing is to anticipate. I hope this quick introduction to game theory will help you ask yourself the right questions, but at the end of the day, do as I do, light a candle in honor of the God of War and don't forget your lucky coin before your next tournament.

Ask the Hobby Historian: Feuding for Fun and Friends

By David Hood

Reality TV has nothing on what I saw when I first entered the wider Diplomacy hobby at the end of 1985.

I came into this as a starry-eyed dreamer, with visions of how awesome it must be to interact with other Diplomacy fans through voluminous fanzines filled with endless strategy articles, player profiles, demonstration games, and the occasional very-polite and respectful discussion about the political events of the day. It would be nothing but Nerd Rainbows and Gamer Unicorns for me and everyone else in this glorious Promised Land of Dipdom.

Yeah, no. There was, certainly, plenty of content in very voluminous Dipzines that I found extremely educational, diverting, and entertaining. There was, also though, a lot of caustic, vitriolic, and over-the-top feuding content as well. Folk attacking the motives, ethics, or behavior of other folk. Folk attacking folk for being friends with other folk, or at least not publicly distancing themselves from "bad" folk. That sort of thing. Hobbyists trying to stay out of the feuds would wring their hands a lot, worrying that all this wasted ink was not just a drag on hobby activity, but would itself drive off newbies or others who did not want to be in such an unpleasant hobby.

in the hobby because, instead of it turning everyone off, I think many found it just as educational, diverting and entertaining as I found the non-feud content. One only has to look at modern reality television to realize that people kinda enjoy watching the dysfunction of others, even when they realize the drama is being exaggerated for their viewing pleasure. Dude, there were like entire 50-page zines being published where ALL the content was character assassination, innuendo, and pure libelous trash. And some people just ate that up.

I was never a participant in the 1980s feuding, (although sometimes folk tried to drag me into it.) I have read enough to know the general history of Diplomacy feuding, though, so I thought it would be interesting to recount some of that here. It's possible I have some details wrong, but honestly who is left to correct me on any of this but Edi Birsan? And I'm pretty sure he was not much of a feudist himself. I should note - this will focus on North American feuding only because that's what I know. I am vaguely aware of some of the fissures in the UK hobby in the 70s and 80s, but not enough to recount any of that here.

1) The 60s

The early Diplomacy hobby was dominated by people who had gravitated into it from the world of sci-fi/fantasy fandom. These folk were very creative, very "fannish", and wrote a LOT. They also brought a tradition of feuding and controversy with them from their SF/Fantasy roots. There were fights about all sorts of things, but one very prominent feature of early feuds was the Vietnam War. There were publishers and other prominent hobbyists on each side of this, and other social/political issues of the day, so there was a lot of very hot discussion on these subjects in the zines. There were also some conflicts about transfer of hobby functions, how games should be run, and that sort of thing, but not the kind of open World War about hobby structure that would characterize later feuding.

2) The 70s

Interpersonal conflict is an understandable consequence of playing a game where players sometimes get backstabbed and betrayed. Emotions can run high. That certainly accounts for some of the feuding in our hobby throughout all of these decades. In the 70s, though, my perception is that the primary source of controversy among hobbyists was the rise and fall of hobby organizations. There was John Beshara's The Diplomacy Association, which fell apart because

HOBBY POSITIONS AVAILABLE
18 May 1986

Robert F Sacks
4561 Broadway 5-V
New York NY 10034

I have 4 positions to fill, maybe. I say maybe because there are quasi-incumbents in 3 positions, and the 4th is a vacant deputyship to a position which is quite controversial. The positions are:

MILLER NUMBER CUSTODIAN UNDER THE COVENANT
DIRECTOR OF ORPHAN GAMES
EDITOR, THE 1987 NYGB/KGO/OGP ZINE DIRECTORY

DEPUTY REGISTRAR OF PROJECTS
All the positions require ethical stature, judgement, competence, and rapid response to business.

"Karel Alaric", the incumbent MMC under the Covenant, has informed me that he will only serve 1 year, and if I want the position I can have it; as a past MMC, I really don't need those headaches again. The variant banks maintain their own pretend custodian; if he was willing to abide by the Covenant he would be the preferred candidate. The MMC assigns Miller Numbers, determines the Miller Number designators, and serves as an advocate for the variant hobby; he has to maintain the independence of his office, principally from Diplomacy World and the variant banks. (I am conducting this search as the Associate MMC, with his consent and approval.)

James Burgess, who I thought was Director of Orphan Games, has been conducting his office under the title of the "US Orphan Service" which was abolished by merger a number of years ago. Recently he has abandoned the guidelines of the Orphan Games Project, which require that a game be a bona fide orphan to be placed, and publicly suggested that NYGB funds for support of the OGP be diverted to a prohibited purpose: the MAYB's pretend custodian. Fundamentally, he does not admit he is Director of Orphan Games under the guidelines. The Director determines whether games have been orphaned, and places orphaned games with new gamesters and/or publishers. Burgess is the preferred candidate, followed by almost any of the past Directors; if necessary I will do the job myself. (I am conducting this search as the Chairman of the Orphan Games Project.)

Simon Billenness of the Zine Register was franchised to conduct it as the 1986 NYGB/KGO/OGP Zine Directory. He thereupon snubbed all three sponsors, obtained a subsidy from the NYGB, obtained a franchise from Diplomacy World to run projects in competition with KGO and share expenses which is prohibited: NYGB funds cannot be applied to Diplomacy World projects. The appointment is for a year at a time. The Editor gathers voluntary information and prepares the Zine Directory at least twice a year, and provides gathered information to the OGP. The incumbent would be the preferred candidate if he wasn't pushing for an irremedial breach; if necessary I will do the job again. (I am conducting this search as Registrar of Known Game Openings.)

The Registrar of Projects advises the New York Game Board (a funding agency) and other interested parties as to bona fide hobby projects and their holders, and maintains a registry of office holders and charters. The Deputy is a designated successor, handles cases the Registrar is a party to, and provides advice on policy and new projects at the request of the Registrar and the NYGB. (I am conducting this search as Registrar of Projects.)

I have no doubt that happened to some degree. I will say, though, that I believe feuding lasted as long as it did

apparently he was a crook (come on, someone feud with me about that.) And then came the International Diplomacy Association, which lasted until I think 1979 when it succumbed to several stresses, including interpersonal conflicts/feuds. Also, the guy who ran the three big Chicago Dipcons in the mid-70s was apparently quite the character, and that caused hobby political debates as well.

Into that history of conflict were sown the seeds of the coming Great Feud of the 1980s. In the late 70s, a hobbyist in New York City named Robert Sacks began to assemble a coterie of admirers as well as a train of detractors as he ran hobby functions either spectacularly (admirers) or poorly (detractors). Other prominent hobbyists of the day, such as game designer Greg Costikyan of Pax Britannica, Paranoia and (my fave of his) Swords & Sorcery fame, flocked to his banner and publicly fought with other hobby names who were anti-Sacks, such as Conrad von Metzke or Rod Walker. This conflict boiled and festered in the zine letter columns and editorials, but did not cause such a big divide that the hobby could not function normally.

3) The 80s

Nope, that was coming in the next decade. In the early part of the decade, the pro and anti-Sacks factions were basically subsumed into another conflict growing between the fans of hobby personalities Bruce Linsey and Kathy Byrne (Kathy Caruso once she married John Caruso, another well-known hobbyist.) The Robert Sacks issue was still one facet of this overall dispute, with the Caruso faction in his corner and the Linsey faction against, but there were also allegations of bad personal conduct thrown back and forth between the two sides. I am neither interested in nor qualified to adjudicate the merits of this dispute almost forty years later, and there was certainly no way to do it back then either. Though gosh, folk tried. I remember reading pages and pages of arguments back and forth, citing "evidence" which either mostly or completely was not publicly available. It was utterly insane.

Given the time period, Star Wars terminology was used, with the Linsey crowd called the "Dark Side" by the Caruso crowd, that sort of thing. As I wrote in a previous hobby history article, for several years in the 1980s, most hobby services had competing people doing the same job, because both sides contended that the other side's people had not gained their titles legally. Yes, it was like a dynastic succession crisis. The War of Hobby Succession went on and on, with two different people keeping up with game starts and finishes, two different people finding homes for postal games orphaned by folding zines, two different novice packets sent to newbies, etc. You get the idea.

Alright, you want to know who all was in which camp, no doubt. Honestly, I do not have a full roster of each team, and most of these people are long gone anyway. A few names though. Some of you may have heard of Mark Berch, a prolific hobby writer who published Diplomacy Digest and who was Strategy and Tactics editor for Diplomacy World for some time. He was pro-Linsey (or anti-Sacks, or Dark Side, or pick your poison.) Hobby variant designer and publisher Fred Davis was also in this camp. On the other hand, I just released an episode of my monthly news show Deadline, on DBN's YouTube channel, which features an interview with my longtime hobby friend Brad Wilson, a prominent hobbyist of that day who was on the pro-Caruso, pro-Sacks side of this Great Feud. Dick and Julie Martin, along with Jack McHugh, were also in that faction. There were scads of others on both sides.



Issue 19

This is Whitestonia, a game zine published every 3-4 weeks or so by John Caruso 42-34 34th St Flushing NY 11375. Within these pages you'll find WIM, Dip, AH, and Mastardip. We have some openings in Dip only at the present time, but will soon open up another game of either WIM or a tactical game of some sort. Yes that's right, the Mastardip game has started as well as the 2nd Dip game. Now on to the show.

SUB PER \$4.00 for 10 issues
 DIPLOMACY \$2.00 7 openings
 WIM \$2.00 no openings temporarily
 MASTARDIP \$1.00 no openings temporarily

The picture shown on the right is the official Coat of Arms for Whitestonia. This is the only issue which will bear it. So save the front page. It will become a collectors item and will be worth millions.

This is one of those issues that is going to everyone and their brother. I hope you all enjoy it. Requests for samples and my subscription number have gone up. So has my typing work. If things keep going like this I'll have to hire a secretary to do the typing and raise the sub to pay her, or him. Besides my typing is for the pits anyway. Now let me see, does anyone out there know of a secretary who will do this nonsense and put up with me for a token cost?

HOUSE RULES IN GENERAL: I felt it is now necessary to include some special house rules due to the fact there is a lot of controversy going on.

- 1- Can't lie or deceive GM or Pubber
- 2- Can't copy Whitestonia without my permission
- 3- Can't ask the same question twice
- 4- Can't take cheap shots at the GM or Pubber
- 5- You must be between the ages of 16 and 50 to play in Whitestonia
- 6- Not allowed to openly correct a GM mistake
- 7- Not allowed to comment on anything the Pubber prints
- 8- No collect calls will be accepted anymore
- 9- No post card moves will be accepted
- 10- No complaints about any of the rules changes
- 11- Each and everyone of you must submit an article a year, starting immed.
- 12- Can't complain about zine being late
- 13- Only allowed 2 lines of press per issue
- 14- No phoned in orders will be accepted after 4PM. I get home at 5PM
- 15- Can't write to a higher authority in the hobby about anything that happens
- 16- All your orders must include the following specifics;
 - a- signature, name, address, phone number
 - b- age, IQ, height, weight, measurements, sex
 - c- color of hair, eyes, skin, your religion, nationality
 - d- how many arms, legs, eyes, hands, feet, fingers, toes you have
 - e- game number, its original name, code word
 - f- the name of your spouse or mate and the names of all your pets
 - g- proper abbreviations and acronyms
- 17- No changes in orders or conditional orders will be accepted
- 18- Everyone must undergo the "I am not Oaklyn/Tretick" test
- 19- Everyone must pay their game fee and 40 issues of sub fee in advance
- 20- Can't use this zine for training paper or in place of toilet paper

Anyone caught breaking even 1 of these rules will be expelled from Whitestonia, forfeit all game and sub fees, and will be personally black listed from the hobby. So good luck and lets have fun.

Just like Brad was my friend, though, I also considered Mark Berch a friend. I met and liked Bruce Linsey very much in person. I had the same reaction to John Caruso, whom I met at a Sacks-run Dip tournament in Baltimore in 1988. (Unfortunately, I never got to meet Kathy Caruso in person.) The fairly bizarre thing about all this was that these folks were, mostly, pretty interesting, creative and good contributors to hobby society. The fact that they not only could not get along but spent a lot of their hobby time fighting like cats and dogs is kinda sad.

On the other hand, and I stand by this even though I know how it sounds, all this craziness was entertaining in its own way and probably attracted the notice of some hobbyists to get MORE involved in the zines. As I posited earlier, people enjoy watching dysfunctional nincompoops tear into each other for no good reason. (I am being facetious here about these Dip people, or course, as I have noted they were mostly smart and talented folk.)

There were some Dipfans towards the end of the decade that did all they could to keep the craziness going, even as the primary Feudists were wearing each other out and lessening their hobby activities. Bruce Geryk, whom I met at the Wisconsin Dipcon in 1987, published a zine called Blunt Instruments during that time period...which was a good publication that suddenly turned into an attack engine against almost everyone. Together with his buddies Steve Clark and Jeff Zarse, Bruce was throwing out a bunch of feudish content just because he thought it was fun to do and because he wanted to fan the dying embers of the Great Feud. The hobby branded them the "Bad Boys of Diplomacy", alternatively ignored them or gave too much attention to their stuff, and basically ran them off by about 1989 after much drama.

How did those of us who were non-feudists deal with all this? By just trying to keep the focus on the games, the Cons, the hobby activities as a whole. By the early 1990s, the Great Feud was over and frankly so began the decline of the organized hobby which accelerated through the end of that decade. This was not feud driven, but tech-driven, as Diplomacy became something played over the internet instead of through fanzines. The zines mostly vanished, as the new century dawned, and with it vanished the method by which fans had built their community. This is not to say that conflicts went

away during the next twenty years, but frankly the goal during that time was making sure the face-to-face conventions kept going even after the primary means of promoting them (the zines) were gone.

Do we have feuds in today's hobby? Yes, if you follow what has been happening lately regarding Nexus and Nexus Leagues. Yes, if you realize that we have lost some big names recently over differences of opinion on how to deal with explosive hobby personalities of the day. But no, in the sense that in today's hobby, whether because of prevalent Code of Conduct rules or for some other reason, we really don't have the invective, the meanness, the sheer crassness that used to be prevalent. The weird thing, I guess, is that this change in our hobby for the better has occurred while pretty much the exact opposite has happened in politics and society, as one can readily see by looking at Twitter for about five minutes or so.

I will conclude with this last comment from this here hobby veteran. I think we can actually do the funny, silly stuff that made some aspects of the feuding entertaining without enduring everything else that comes with it. For those who have been following that Nexus Feud I mentioned earlier, there is a YouTube series of videos by Cedric Williams where I think he is trying to do that. It's not that the conflict there is not real, it most certainly is, but let's not let the thing take over our hobby temperament. Let's be willing to laugh a little with each other, and at ourselves, but otherwise keep a healthy respect for everyone involved - and be willing to lend a supportive but not enabling ear to the feudists among us.

And, also, let's confront this Ed Sullivan jerk and ask him just who the hell he thinks he is all the time. I'll give him the Back Channel of my hand, is what I'll do. That no good blankety blank and his good-for-nothing cronies.

Knives and Daggers - The Diplomacy World Letter Column



Robert Lesco – I think a lot of us would like it if you did "fill this entire column [[Notes From the Editor]] with names and memories." I know I would be interested.

[[Your note illustrates one of the many challenges in producing this zine: trying to balance the material between the newer hobby members, or those who expressly play online and have zero interest in the old play-by-mail hobby, and old-timers who lived

and enjoyed multiple periods. Articles discussing events from long ago that still touch on strategy, tactics, variants, or other topics that can be translated to today's hobby are still of general interest. But those directed exclusively at people and methods that have left us are often of limited interest. That's one of the reasons – but not the only one - that I've never begun my Digging in the Dirt column examining one zine title from my Postal Diplomacy Zine Archives per issue.]]

2022 Cascadia Open Report

By Chris Brand

The 2022 iteration of the Cascadia Open was supposed to happen back in January, but COVID intervened and we had to switch to a virtual event. Not to be discouraged, we went ahead and held a second 2022 Cascadia Open the weekend of the 9-10th July. The Holiday Inn Express in Surrey, BC (near Vancouver) generously gave us the use of their huge basement conference room for the weekend, and a total of 20 players showed up to play three rounds of Diplomacy. In addition to the locals, California and Washington state were well represented, as usual, but we also attracted a couple of players from further afield in the US and even two from the UK! It was very nice to see people from a variety of Diplomacy backgrounds – some well-known online and virtual players were braving the face-to-face arena for the first time. Twenty is of course a somewhat awkward number, so I ended up playing to even things out.



At the near table, left-to-right, are Bradley Grace, Karthik Konath, Seren Kwok, Chris Brand, and Jason Mastbaum. Looking in the mirror you can see, left-to-right, Kyra Olson, Riaz Virani (standing, with camera), Johnny Gillam, and then Jason and Chris again



Left-to-right: Edi Birsan, Matt Crill, Liam Stokes, Sabi A, Jason Mastbaum, Dave Matthews, Heather Jamieson, Siobhan Nolen, John Jamieson, Evan Bouleris, Seren Kwok, Chris Brand, Matt Shield, Jaxon Roberts

The weekend started off with a Friday night get-together. Most of the attendees gathered at Chongqing for Chinese food and then went on to The Taphouse for drinks. This was a great opportunity for everyone to get to know each other, to renew old acquaintances, and to size up the opposition. The Taphouse seemed like a perfectly ordinary bar at first but as the evening progressed it mutated, and by the time we left it had turned itself into a nightclub, complete with a DJ and bouncers at the door searching people's bags.

Saturday morning was the first actual Diplomacy. Siobhan Nolen took an early lead with 41.43 points for a 12-centre board top as Russia in a game that ended in 1908 with just Austria (Riaz Virani) dead. A little behind her at 29.58 points were Seren Kwok, Karthik Konath, and Jason Mastbaum, who ended their game with 11 centers each as Austria, France, and England respectively, with Matt Shields as Russia holding the other center. Very slightly behind them with 27.71 points was Matt Crill who topped his game as France with 9 centers in a game that drew in 1905.

In the afternoon round, the best score again went to Russia, with Riaz Virani getting 34.94 points for his board top with 11-centres. Less than a point behind, though, was Siobhan, who managed a second board top, this time with 11 centers as Turkey, for 34.28 points. Another 11-centre Turkey board top, played by Evan Bouleris, who plays online as Tortelloni, rounded out the best three in the round with 33.52 points.

Going into the Sunday morning round, Siobhan was a full 20 points ahead of second-place Seren Kwok, which, while substantial, still meant that there were a number of people who could overtake her. The play got very intense with players frequently checking the "if all games ended now" scores that were being updated as the games progressed. Riaz Virani managed the best score of the round with 44.67 points for a 14-centre England, surprisingly with both France and Germany still alive at the end. Second best score of the round was from that

same game, for Liam Stokes who had 11 centers as Turkey. Seren topped her board with 9 centers as France, giving her 27.25 points and the third best score of the round. Timothy Jaxon and John Jamieson shared the board top on the third board with 8 centers as France and England, for 23.93 points each. Siobhan was on Riaz and Liam's board and finished with 5 centers as Italy, giving her 10.17 points and a total of 85.88, slightly ahead of Riaz's 80.11, making her the first ever two-time winner of the tournament.



Nearest table left-to-right is Matt Shields, Seren Kwok, Jason Mastbaum, Sabi A, and Karthik Konath. Heather Jamieson is standing at the table in the background on the right and in the far background there's Matt Crill, Chris Brand, Jaxon Roberts, and Edi Birsan.



Best Country winners with their prizes. Edi Birsan, Seren Kwok, Riaz Virani, Karthik Konath, Johnny Gillam, and Siobhan Nolen

So, First Place went to Siobhan Nolen with 85.88 points. Second was Riaz Virani with 80.11. Third was Seren Kwok with 77.57.

Best Country awards went to:

Seren Kwok for Austria
Riaz Virani for England
Karthik Konath for France and Italy
Edi Birsan for Germany
Siobhan Nolen for Russia and Turkey

The "Player's Choice" award went to Bradley Grace and the "I Got Mauled" award went to Heather Jamieson.

The full scores, and links to sandboxes capturing the games themselves, can all be found at <https://diplomacytv.com/tournaments/43/>

I'd like to thank the Holiday Inn Express for their hospitality, Riaz for all his help and support with the event as a whole, Liam for coordinating airport pick-ups, Sabi for coordinating the sandboxing of the games and backstabbr.com for actually hosting the sandboxes.

Next year's event, Cascadia Open 2023 will be back in its regular place on the calendar. It will take place the first weekend of February at the same venue, the Holiday Inn Express in Surrey, BC. For more information, the NADF discord server is the best place to go.



Nearest table left-to-right is Johnny Gillam, Dave Roberts, Heather Jamieson, and Siobhan Nolen. At the back table Kyra Olson, Dave Matthews, Matt Crill, and Jaxon Roberts

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>

Liberty Cup 2022 – October 7th – October 9th, 2022 – Philadelphia, PA - <https://liberty-cup.com/2022-liberty-cup/>

Virtual Diplomacy League Event – October 22nd, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

Virtual Tour of Britain – October 29th, 2022 – <https://maccdiplomacy.org.uk/>

World DipCon at Carnage – November 3rd – November 6th, 2022 – Mount Snow Resort, Vermont – www.carnagecon.com - Email: dmaletsky0@gmail.com

Virtual Diplomacy League Event – November 12th, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

Italian NDC 2022 – November 18th – November 20th, 2022 – Castello di Gambolò (Castello Litta), Gambolo, Italy – <https://www.facebook.com/events/766746451198143>

French NDC – November 25th – November 27th, 2022 - Hotel La Louisiane, Paris, France

Bangkok Diplomacy Open – November 26th – November 27th, 2022 - Battlefield Bangkok, 71 Sukhumvit 101/1, Bangkok, Thailand

Virtual Diplomacy League Event – December 3rd, 2022 - <https://diplobn.com/vdl/>

Virtual World Diplomacy Championship – December 16th – December 18th, 2022 - <https://discord.gg/jbdZtRFMTA>

Cascadia Open – February 4th – February 5th, 2023 – Vancouver, Canada - Cascadia.open@gmail.com

A Bunch of Numbers

By Andy Lischett

[[This originally appeared in *Cheesecake* #405.]]

A player in my zine *Cheesecake* speculated on what are the most- and least-used land spaces, and the most- and least used sea spaces in *Diplomacy*. Any guesses?

To investigate this, I compiled statistics on five completed games from Doug Kent's zine *Eternal Sunshine*, and ten from *Cheesecake*. It took a long time.

In addition to the most- and least-used spaces on the board at the end of a Spring or Fall, I counted how often each space was attacked, how often each Great Power's original home spaces were attacked, and how many attacks the player of each Great Power made. The average game lasted about 11 (10.97) years, or 22 seasons. Here are the results.

Over fifteen games, ranging from 5 to 15½ game-years in length, the average occupation rate for all spaces was 8.59 seasons per game, with Naples being close to normal at 8.46. The most-used land spaces were Munich

and Rumania, each occupied 15.13 seasons per game. The North Sea (15.8) was the most occupied sea space.

The third most-occupied land space was Venice (14.2), while Bulgaria, Sevastopol and Trieste each were occupied 14.07 out of 22 seasons.

At sea, second through fifth were the Ionian with 15.53, the Mid-Atlantic with 14.73, plus the Aegean (13.73) and the English Channel (at 11.53). I was surprised at the Mid-Atlantic.

The *least*-used spots on the *Diplomacy* board were Syria at 1.93 visits every 22 seasons, and Skagerrak at an even sleeper 1.4. Other quiet land spaces were Clyde (2.27), Wales (2.4), then North Africa (3.6) and Liverpool (4.27). Other calm seas were the Helgoland Bight (2.8), the Barents Sea (3.53), Irish Sea (4.2) and the Adriatic (5.2).

As for who gets attacked, the most fought-over land space was Rumania. Against an average of 4.93

(Bohemia had 4.8), Rumania had 9.67 beatings every 11 years. Then came Bulgaria with 9.46, Munich (9.4), Norway (8.53) and St. Petersburg (8.4). Apparently, Rumania, Sevastopol (6.47) and Bulgaria have issues. Ditto Munich and Burgundy, which gets slammed protecting peaceful Paris (2.87). Oddly, Burgundy is safer in *Eternal Sunshine* than in *Cheesecake*: 5.6 vs 9.2. Combined, Burgundy is at 8.0.

A couple of sea spaces were busier than the busiest supply centers: the Ionian Sea got hit 12.0 times, and the Mid-Atlantic 10.6. Then the English Channel 7.73, the North Sea 7.6 and the Tyrrhenian Sea only 6.47 times. In the 15 game-years of *Cheesecake*'s game *Wotan*, the English Channel was attacked 35 times (!), more than twice per year.

Who *doesn't* get attacked much? Syria (attacked 0.73 times per game), Clyde (1.0), Wales (2.0), Liverpool (2.33), plus Finland and Tuscany (both 2.4). Nor do Skagerrak (0.86), the Barents Sea (1.2), the North Atlantic (1.67), Helgoland Bight (1.8) or the Adriatic Sea (1.93). Syria, being attacked 0.067 times *per year*, might as well be Switzerland.

Tunis, on average, gets attacked 5.3 times per game but in *Holden Caulfield*, which ended after F'05 in a 3-way draw, Tunis was never attacked. I should have vetoed the draw and proclaimed Tunis the winner.

Overall, the safest country to live in on a *Diplomacy* board is easily England, being attacked 13.87 times per game. Close to three times more dangerous is Austria with 39.13. In between are Turkey (18.26), Italy (25.06), France (attacked 31.13 times), Germany (32.33) and Russia (36.73).

More fun than who gets attacked is who attacks. My guess for most belligerent Great Power was correct: Germany. From the middle of the board Germany averaged 7.29 attacks on Europe per game-year, and 71.4 attacks per game (the other six powers averaged 5.33 and 51.76). In the 14-year-long game *Thing #1*, Germany attacked 179 times (or 6.4 times per season). He won.

The least aggressive power, with 4.65 attacks per year (38.87 attacks per game), was Austria. In *Walkerdine*, Austria made just 2.25 attacks per year, less than Turkey's 3.33 and Turkey was in civil disorder for a third

of the game.

What does this all mean? Not a lot, I guess, but it was fun playing with a spreadsheet and revisiting some old games. Fifteen games are not a huge sample, but it's okay. Also, being based on games from only two zines, there may be patterns that don't hold hobby-wide.

Finally, I recorded ownership changes for each space in each game. The nominees for *Multiple Changes of Government in a Diplomacy Space* are: Rumania for ARARAR in *Thing #1*, St. Pete for RERERE in *Jerusalem*, the English Channel for GEGEG in 5 years in *Holden Caulfield*, Munich for GAG in *Milk & Trash*, and the Western Mediterranean for FIFI in *Dr. Pepper*.

And the winner is... Tyrolia! For GAIGAGRG in *Thing #1*.



Leaving the Board - Two Proposals for Reducing Frustration

By Jonathan Frank

How do we in the Diplomacy Hobby handle a player who no longer wishes to play? This is fundamentally the question that our choices about timing are seeking to answer. The American standard of unlimited play shrugs it off and demands players tough it out – or lose, of course. Tournaments featuring quick finishes – 1907 as I understand is often standard in Europe would be not far into the mid-game of a game with no limit – attempt to avoid the problem by figuring few players will wear down that quickly and even those who do have an end in sight. Longer year limits, or time limits, or the more recent practice of shortening the diplomatic period in later years, can be seen as compromise attempts. But whatever the decision, it has so far been one made beforehand and set out in tournament rules: unlike a “house game”, the players are not left with a choice. A really gripping game is done in 1907 like it or not; or a bedraggled few are held on the board at the mercy of the player trying to wheedle his way into two more centers.

One option is already given in the rule book, but has been quietly suppressed by the Hobby: I mean resigning the game. It is understandable that we want to discourage this behavior generally, both in an absolute sense and because of the difficulty finding – or scoring – substitutes in tournament play. Still, I don't know that it is reasonable to demand every Turkish player left with fleets in Smyrna and Ankara play out that final year – for instance. And in fact, as often as not the person in this position is hardly “playing”, although he remains at the table or even makes final desultory efforts to dissuade one attacker that the other will just have a new target next year. Is the formality worth it? I would argue not: I think officially allowing resignations would likely be a net benefit to the cordiality of the tournament scene.

At the same time, I admit the dangers. A despairing two-center victim awaiting the axe is one thing; the potential for a second-rate power – or a small one critical to a stalemate line – throwing in the towel and dramatically altering the course of the game for the remaining players is quite a different one. I think the vast majority of players could be trusted with this privilege. But even if it were taken advantage of, it would really be not much different than any number of throws, grudges, and assorted hijinks that occur at Diplomacy events anyway, merely provide a new avenue for them.

My second proposal is more radical still. The condition of unanimity for draws at tournaments has gone unquestioned, as far as I know. Yet it would be hard to

find an element in that atmosphere which is more different from that of the “house game”. It is simply not practicable for one or two players who would like to continue to force a continuation on three or four others who are ready to quit in a casual setting. Backed by a tournament director – especially with resignation practically disallowed – and the risk of a making a scene, the dynamic shifts heavily in favor of even unreasonable continuations.

Of course, in a tournament we must grant every player the privilege of attempting to win. What to do about this? A compromise between year limit and unlimited play that is left to the players seems possible. I envision two possibilities depending on the underlying assumptions of the event.

If a tournament is normally year-limited, it could be allowed that after that year limit is reached, a player can propose to play another year. The motion would carry on a majority vote, and so on after each year. If a simple majority is thought too easy to achieve for the requirements of the tournament organization, the condition might be that the extension is denied by more than one veto – assuming that in such a situation there will always be at least one veto from the current board leader.

In contrast, at a tournament where unlimited play is the default, I suggest that after a certain year – perhaps 1910 – a draw vote should carry on majority vote except in the case of a public veto. A player extending a game significantly – whether actually trying to win but especially for any another reason – owes it to the board to be honest about his intentions. The not-me-surely-that-guy games made possible by anonymous vetoes benefit no one. As for the previous policy, if a simple majority is thought too easy to attain, the standard might be that a draw carries unless vetoed publicly or by two players.

In recent years the Diplomacy Hobby has been making significant efforts to address the overall tone of the experience around the board. We know that the strain of hours focused on one game at a time contribute heavily to these tensions. At the same time, the game is designed to be played to a natural conclusion, not one imposed by time limits. Some kind of compromise along these lines of player preference is certainly in order.

Tournament Victors All-in-One

By David Hood

People ask me regularly who won such-and-such Diplomacy tournament, and then follow up by asking who won that event before. These questions can be researched a number of ways online, but I understand why people ask instead of doing that research. First, not everyone knows what resources are available online. Second, folk are used to just plugging a question into Google or some other search engine and getting an immediate response.

Third, people just think I know this stuff. I do probably have a better recall of what the Diplomacy events around the world are or have been, but no I cannot keep all the persons' names in my head at all times.

So I've decided to do two things with this article. A, I will identify sources of information so you can look up stuff your own self. B, I will provide a list of winners from what I call the "Virtual Era" starting in 2020, because those are the ones folk ask me about the most. I am limiting my list to face-to-face and virtual, just because I am not personally as familiar with online extended-deadline events, but would welcome a supplemental DW article next issue from someone who is.

Alright, the primary takeaway from this article should be that there is a thing called the World Diplomacy Database. <https://world-diplomacy-database.com/php/commun/index.php> It was started by a hobbyist in Europe, I believe, and has gone through various stages of updating and neglect. Right now it is being at least partially updated with tournament results. Not every board and every player is in for some recent events, including my own (because in my case I have to manually input data into a particular format I don't usually use and it takes bloody forever for tournaments with a lot of players and boards.) Nevertheless, this is an invaluable resource both for hobby historians and for players themselves.

The information in the WDD is searchable by event, player, national hobby, etc. For many tournaments every single board that was played is in there, along with lots of chrome like Best Country awards and the like. Importantly, the records here go back as far as anyone could remember, including for example North American Dipcon results starting in 1970 (the first year a winner was actually declared.) I have noticed a few mistaken entries here and there, but nothing important and nothing which takes away from the incomparable hobby history stored on that site.

A much more recent contribution to hobby infrastructure came from Brandon Fogel and the rest of the Diplomacy Broadcast Network team of Bryan Pravel and Zachary Moore. In the spring of 2020, when the pandemic lockdown occurred, these guys created not only a YouTube channel devoted to coverage of Diplomacy games, but also a structure tying together events from face-to-face, online, and the new virtual face-to-face format into a system to qualify for an invitational virtual event to take place every February. Two DBNI finals have occurred as of the time of this writing, with the 2022 DBNI season winding down to a conclusion a few months hence. (A recent edition of DBN's show Countdown was released recently which discusses the current standings in the race for the 28 spots in the February 2023 Invitational.)

As a consequence of the DBNI scoring process, Brandon has created a resource on the DBN website which provides specific information on every event, player, and board in the DBN database. <https://diplobn.com/invitational/> This is truly an amazing source of recent information, given that one can follow a link to the actual moves for each of these games! There has never been this level of detailed material available on the individual game and player level, and it is organized and presented in a very accessible format. So, check that out.

Now, as for recent tournament results, in no particular order, with location of FTF event or location of virtual tournament organizers. I have left off a few events which either were not classic Dip events or which had single digit participation. If I missed any, I apologize ahead of time:

Cascadia - British Columbia/Canada

2022	Siobhan Nolen (FTF event in July)
2022	Tommy Anderson (Virtual event in January)
2021	Ed Sullivan (Virtual)
2022	Siobhan Nolen (FTF)

Poppycon - Victoria/Australia

2022	Peter McNamara (FTF)
2021	Jamal Blakkarly (FTF)
2020	Peter McNamara (FTF)

Totalcon - Massachusetts/USA

2020	Brad Blitstein (FTF)
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Euro Dipcon - Rotating/Europe

2022	Christophe Borgeat (FTF)
2021	Alex Lebedev (FTF)

Boston Massacre - Massachusetts/USA

2022 Robert Schuppe (FTF)
2021 Farren Janes (Virtual)
2020 Tanya Gill (Virtual)

Carnage - Vermont/USA

2021 Adam Silverman (FTF event in November)
2021 Katie Gray (Virtual event in May)
2020 Bill Hackenbracht (Virtual)

CoronaCon - UK

2020 Conrad Woodring (Virtual)

Dixiecon - North Carolina/USA

2022 Brandon Fogel (FTF)
2021 Karthik Konath (Virtual)
2020 Christian Kline (Virtual)

Liberty Cup - Pennsylvania/USA

2020 Tommy Anderson (Virtual)

Tempest - DC Area/USA

2020 Andrei Gribakov (Virtual)

WeaselMoot - Illinois/USA

2022 Seren Kwok (FTF)
2021 Russ Dennis (Virtual)
2020 John Anderson (Virtual)

Whipping - California/USA

2022 Tanya Gill (FTF)
2021 Jason Mastbaum (Virtual)

GUDCon - DC/USA

2020 Bill Hackenbracht (FTF)

Spirecon - Chesterfield/UK

2022 Bradley Grace (FTF)

French Championship - Paris/France

2021 Brieuc Thibault (FTF event in November)
2021 Cyrille Sevin (Virtual event in March)

Bumble Weasel Moot

By Jonathan Dingess

A 9-hour drive to Chicago...

West Virginia (1.5 hours): S-tier state to drive through. If you see a traffic cop you should buy a lottery ticket. We are too poor to care about pulling people over and there's not many people on the roads anyway. Combine that with the mountains and the beautiful scenery, WV is the best state to drive through.

Ohio (~4 hours): Worst state to drive through. Go EXACTLY the speed limit or you WILL get pulled over. It's a common sight to see two traffic cops at one speed trap just chatting because Ohio has soo many traffic cops they can double up. The speed limits are also lower, normally at 55 with a few 70s. There are also a lot of people on the roads, and Ohio drivers are so conditioned to the insane number of traffic cops that instead of trying to get to their destination faster by speeding (normal, healthy), they become super-aggressive and weave in front of one another. On top of all of this, the state is flat and the surroundings uninteresting. Absolutely the worst state to drive in.

Indiana/Illinois (~3.5 hours): A-tier state to drive through. It's flat but I got to see some windmills, cornfields... it's overall a really beautiful state. There are cops about, but the amount where you know they're trying to keep people safe, not get in people's way. The speed limits are back to normal - usually at 70 with a few lower speed

areas. It's a lovely state. Maybe it was just the sense of relief after having to endure Ohio, or my mind numbing after driving a while, but I really enjoyed my drive through.

As for Weasel Moot itself, it was fun. It's my first time at a FTF event and...wow, a lot different. I am the kind of guy who just likes being liked (I guess we all are in one way or another) so I found myself being played over and over again by people in situations where I really should have known better. Online, you have a barrier of pseudo-anonymity and it is easy to very carefully craft what you say so you are understood in a specific manner. In real life, there is an extra step of acting which I am not as skilled in. Further, when talking online no one knows who you are speaking with. But in person, multiple times I had to deal with pressure knowing that my allies were seeing me talk to the enemy when trying to set something up.

Outside of the games, it was fun to chat with people with a common interest. Coming from DVC, I knew many of the other players in that community are teenagers but meeting them in real life really made me feel old despite being in my 20s. I felt much more comfortable hanging out with the FTF players who were more in my age range. Overall, the highlights of the weekend for me came from outside the games. Going to restaurants and hanging out at the bar were a lot of fun. Playing Coup

with others in-between games was great and a nice way to relax.

I'm not sure if this will be the case for others who also play mostly variants, but I cared very little about tournament rankings and everything else. I was just trying to do the best on my boards. I had sort of assumed everyone thought the same, and was surprised to find how much people were pushing for the overall win. It's a different perspective that only really came up in board three, but definitely caught me off-guard.

The drive back was much better. I think I had set my expectations properly this time. I had to pull off for a bit in the middle of Indiana after just a couple hours to rest my eyes, but after that I found myself awake and feeling refreshed. On the way up I had crashed a night at my sister's place in Columbus, Ohio in order to split the drive into a 3hr and 6hr portion. The plan was to do the same on the way back, but when I pulled into Columbus

at around 11pm, I found I was feeling great, still awake, and just ended up finish off the whole 9 hr. drive that night.

Driving at night is a bliss that I don't have reason to do often enough. It is the perfect mood for loud, angsty music. There are very few people on the road and you can usually relax and not worry about traffic cops (except in Ohio where there were still cops about even approaching 1am). The way headlights unveil the pitch-black void as you go around turns is exciting and makes the drive interesting, and there is just something in the air when you are out so late. You get into a real meditative focus, and everything else just sort of drains away. I was almost sad to arrive back home.

Glad I went, meeting people was cool. I wouldn't do it again anytime soon, but hey, maybe in a year? The games of Diplomacy themselves were 'eh'; it was more about meeting and hanging out with people for me

Blitz Diplomacy - It's Fast, It's Furious, and It's... Old?

By Markus Zijlstra

If you're looking for a fast-paced form of Diplomacy, you won't find anything better than Blitz. This is certainly a bold statement, but it's backed up by over 50 boards completed in the two-and-a-half months since its inception.

The Format

Blitz Press is a text-based format in which negotiation phases are just 5 minutes long, retreats and builds are 1 minute each, and the game ends in 1908. While text-based games are traditionally much longer than face to face and virtual face to face games, these settings make Blitz games max out at 2 hours, solving the age-old problem in Diplomacy of getting 7 players with enough availability to stick around for a full game. The format is short enough that a player can jump in without having to plan their day around it!

The Fast

So how does this speed work? FtF and vFtF set the clock at around 15min per phase, and players still end up rushing to write down orders at the end of the round. A few people I've spoken to about Blitz who haven't yet played it have the impression that it's essentially gunboat, because it seems impossible to get a good amount of negotiation in with that short of a timeframe.

The reason it works so well comes down primarily to the major difference between text communication and voice - asynchronicity. In FtF, when you talk to someone, you

have their complete, undivided attention for that entire conversation. If something comes up during the conversation that you need to run past another player, you can either invite them to converse three-way (not always ideal), or you wait until the conversation is over and then go talk to them. If someone is long-winded, you either risk irritating them by excusing yourself, or you waste valuable time waiting for them to get to the point.

Not so in Blitz! You can jump from conversation to conversation as you please. Everyone else is doing the same thing, so nobody will be expecting an instant response. It's incredible how much this speeds the process up; a conversation that takes a full five minutes in face to face might still take five minutes in Blitz, but during those five minutes you've also talked through everything you need to with every other one of your neighbors and perhaps even the powers across the board. If someone brings up some critical information, you can circulate that to those who need to know within seconds. And if someone is being long-winded, you can get plenty done while you wait for them to make their point!

Secondary to that, but also quite helpful, is the speed of order entry. Blitz games are played in webDiplomacy's new Beta mode, primarily because of the live updating chat, but also because of the point and click interface and autosave functionality. Where a FtF player might need to put aside a minute or two to write orders out, a

quick Blitz player only needs ten seconds. This means orders can quickly be entered and updated throughout the phase as the situation changes.

The Furious

The end year of 1908 in Blitz, combined with the center-and lead-based scoring system, has apparently had a substantial impact on the gameplay. Where many other formats tend to be dominated by long-term alliances, the current meta in Blitz appears to be exceptionally stab-heavy and back-and-forth.

Thankfully, this is accompanied by a generally fun atmosphere and a lack of emotional damage. Players don't take the stabs as seriously as in other formats, and the postgame chats tend to be people congratulating one another on the successful ones rather than getting angry at one another.

The speed is definitely a contributing factor in this, as it's more tough to form emotional bonds with other players under that kind of time pressure. However, my opinion is that the biggest contributing factor here is that Blitz games are anonymous. There is no concern about a stab having an impact on a future game, so you're free to stab with just the current game's result in mind, and likewise there are no pre-existing relationships coming into the game, so the only connections you have with other players are the ones you make as you play.

Is the stab-heavy atmosphere a good one? That very much depends on what style of game you prefer. Players who favor long-term alliance play are probably not going to enjoy Blitz. If you're a fan of more of a constant power struggle, a more chaotic game, or want to play in an environment where your stabs are more self-contained and won't get you put on a cross-game blacklist, Blitz is going to be right up your alley.

The... Old?

Blitz is brand new. The format began in the Nexus Leagues Discord (run by myself and Karthik Konath) in early July, taking advantage of the webDiplomacy Beta live chat updates. It moved to its own Discord Server and fully launched on July 17th, and since that full launch, the server has grown to over 200 members with over 50 Blitz games having been played.

But as much as I'd love to claim the concept of fast press, the ideas behind Blitz are nothing new. 5-minute press games with live updating chat have been played on the Conspiracy app for over five years now, although without moderation they tend to be littered with civil disorders. Going back further than that, webDiplomacy itself had a very strong 5min/phase 'Live Game' scene through the first half of the 2010s - it was so popular, in

fact, that the official site ranking system has a Live Press category. People seem to like getting a quick Diplomacy fix, and the internet has fantastic potential in that regard.

What's unique about Blitz is really just the 1908 end and the atmosphere that comes with it, alongside the center-based scoring system that encourages the back-and-forth game.

Except... that's not new either. While it may seem alien to some, it's very strongly based on the standard format used in most European Face to Face tournaments, which are renowned for being much more back-and-forth than their American counterparts. European games generally play to 1907, with lead-based scoring systems that can create a very stabby game.

So, what's new about Blitz? Nothing, really, except that we're pushing for a higher quality experience by eliminating NMRs/CDs, and that we're trying to run games on a regular schedule for anyone who wants to join. Outside of that, it builds on top of well-established formats - but, at least in my view, that's for the best. Making something great is much easier when you build on something you already know to be great.

The Finale

Three years ago, Virtual Face to Face didn't exist. Today, while it has lost some of the momentum it had over the pandemic, it still stands as one of the most popular ways to play Diplomacy. When people tried it, they realized it was a fun way to play with some significant advantages over other formats - it brought much of the Face-to-Face experience to an audience who couldn't travel for games.

I am strongly of the opinion that Blitz will have a similar trajectory. It solves what I see as the two biggest issues for getting new players into Diplomacy - the time requirement, and the disappointment of pouring said amount of time into getting a result which is often snatched away by a more experienced player later on. Blitz both makes playing a game easier, and makes losing significantly less crushing because of the lower time investment.

Will it take off? It certainly seems to be doing well right now, but only time will tell. Of course, more players would be fantastic; if you're interested in playing Blitz you can either check the webDip forum for game links (we tend to run games at 7pm UTC and 12pm UTC each day, so check ~15min before that) or you can join our Discord server at <https://discord.gg/XFf6UxQ77g>. All are welcome, and hopefully it'll be growing for a good while to come!

Weasel Moot – A Very One-Sided Recap

by Randy Lawrence-Hurt

I arrived at the Raleigh-Durham airport at 6:30am, to find that my 7:30am flight to O'Hare had been pushed to 11. Minutes thereafter, it was pushed again to noon.

"Mechanical difficulties" was the opaque excuse given. The two gentlemen at the ticket counter were self-admittedly brand-new hires, and unable to provide an assessment on how definite that new 12pm departure time was. Feeling fairly certain it was not particularly definite at all, I requested a rebooking, which would put me into our nation's capital at 9:30am, from whence I could fly to O'Hare at 12:40; additionally, I was placed on standby for two earlier flights out of DC, which theoretically and with a little luck would put me in Chicago as early as 11:30am, still in time to meet my fellow Weasel Moot attendees for lunch.

"Excellent," I thought. "A potential crisis averted. Surely, I'll have good luck, and perhaps that will even carry into the weekend and see me lifting the coveted Best Weasel stuffed animal trophy!"

I did not make lunch.

I did not lift the stuffed animal.

But other than that, I had an excellent time!

By the time I dragged myself and my luggage from the depths of the Chicago Transit System into my room at the hotel, it was a little after 3:30pm. I had eaten nothing all day but various flavors of pretzel (my favorite was garlic-parmesan), and one \$12 lemon loaf from the Starbucks in Raleigh. This would have distressed me more, but I had also only gotten five hours of sleep the previous night, due to both excitement and a regrettable decision to watch more than half of the Steelers/Browns game, and the only sensation I was truly capable of experiencing was exhaustion. I was determined to rally, however! After a brief but rewarding nap and a much-needed extremely hot shower, I discovered a group of Mooters had gathered at a restaurant down the street for libations. And if there was anyone in the city of Chicago who needed a libation at that hour, it was yours truly.

I have found over the years that I care less-and-less about the actual game of Diplomacy. I still enjoy playing it, but what actually draws me to tournaments is not the prospect of winning (which I do exceedingly rarely), or even the opportunity to play the game, but the prospect of spending time around like-minded board game nerds; and even more than that, seeing friends whom I only see once or twice a year at most, and over the past two years, for obvious reasons, not even that often. So, as

has become the case for the last several tournaments I've attended, my favorite moments in Chicago didn't occur during the actual rounds, but during the socializing on Friday night. And in this wonderful digital age we live in, many of those moments have been memorialized and published on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network's YouTube channel. So, if you feel like you may have missed out by not attending, you're free to watch the videos and enjoy some FOMO!

After libations, it was time for dinner. A reservation had been made (I believe by the Tournament Director, Sabi, who I must stress ran a truly excellent tournament and was a gracious and helpful host) at a Japanese/Korean restaurant with enough tables to fit our party of twenty or more, though they wisely placed us in the back corner where we would be least likely to disturb their fellow patrons. Though we tried our best. Dinner was delicious (Sabi ordered for the table; as I said, gracious and helpful), Edi Birsan regaled the several tournament newbies nearby with tales from DipCons Of Yore, and I understand the Diplomacy Broadcast Network went live as well, delivering their hot 'n' spicy player rankings to much boos and acclaim.

The party did not end at the restaurant for everyone, though. While one group went back to the hotel (presumably to play boardgames and wisely rest up before the tournament), another group of us headed to a karaoke bar, because if there's one thing Diplomacy players do better than lie, it's sing (Editor's note: that's definitely not true). I'll spare you, gentle reader, the gory details, but for the truly depraved, I understand there may be clips of some of the songs on the same aforementioned DBN YouTube channel. Listen at your own risk.

I suppose at some point I should discuss the tournament itself, though frankly the less said about my performance the better. The morning round was tough, and not just because after my late night I was running on about eight hours of sleep out of the previous thirty-six. I drew Austria, which is typically a very good country for me, and after a couple of turns I believed I had a solid carebear-ish ally in the Italian. Alas, my trust was misplaced. The Italian one-dotted me while Turkey and Russia were still alive, and though it didn't actually cost me any units (as I picked up Sevastopol simultaneously), it allowed him to grow by three, while my units were horribly out of position. Being unable to draw the Russian and Turkish players to my cause (for understandable reasons, as I had spent several years attacking them both, and quite successfully, I might add), I eventually made the

strategic decision to walk out of my remaining six centers all at once. This allowed Russia and Turkey both to grow by five in total, while Italy only got one additional out of me. It also allowed me to walk away from a frustrating game, which is an underrated move, and provided the best odds that my erstwhile Italian ally would be unable to top the board (which he did not). I considered that a satisfying-enough result.

After lunch, a nap, and a strong coffee, I waded into round two feeling more optimistic. Naturally, I got off to a poor start, as my England was promptly (in Fall '01) attacked by both France and Germany. With France in the Channel and Russia with an army in the north, my only true shot at survival was to hang on for dear life and hope the burgeoning Juggernaut was able to distract my aggressors. As it turned out, I was in luck! The Italian, hoping no doubt for quick gains, ran in on the Austrian (played by my treacherous Italian neighbor from round one, to my malicious delight), who promptly allowed Russia and Turkey to walk into all his dots. This, combined with some quick talking that convinced Russia not to kick me out of Norway ("You'll need someone in the West to slow down Germany!" I said), allowed me to stall my Western opponents for a year, at which point they decided they'd better go do something about the wave of Eastern units headed their way. Over the course of the next several years, I slowly accumulated dots and position, and managed to end the game on top with 9. I could have had 10, but (as would prove unfortunately detrimental to my tournament results later) decided it wasn't worth the additional thirty minutes or so of play time it would take to get there.

Another late night, another early morning, and round three began. I was Italy this time, one of my least favorite powers. Fortunately, though, I had Edi Birsan next to me in Austria! And as we all know, Edi is the quintessential care-bear. At least, that was my experience. We forged an alliance immediately, and never wavered the entire game. It was honestly one of the more pleasant experiences from my boards that weekend. Working with Russia, we methodically removed the unfortunate Turk from the game (my neighbor being who he was, I felt it incumbent upon me to convoy an army to Syria, which I did). Meanwhile, the tournament leader (at that time), Morgante Pell, was in France, and England and Germany seemed quite gung-ho about attacking him. Being an agreeable sort, I put an army in Piedmont and moved to Marseilles every turn for the next several years. Never did get in, but hope springs eternal. This is getting long-winded, so I'll summarize: England stabbed Germany and most of his dots, then started coming around Iberia with French

assistance; unfortunately for him, at that same time I got my two Turkish dots, and with Austrian help we had six fleets in the Med; some backroom negotiating saw me "take a risk" and push him out of Tunis instead of protecting the Tyrrhenian Sea; this allowed him to retreat to North Africa, at which point he promptly took the Mid-Atlantic and Portugal; unfortunately for him, it was around this point that I realized my only shot at silverware in the tournament was Best England, so with French help (Morgante being happy at pretty much any result so long as he survived), I began pushing through the Atlantic, while Russia and Austria held the line in Germany.

We got England down to 10, but that was still too many for my purposes (having, as you'll recall, only a 9-center England from round two). However, it was at this point that we discovered a tie for Best Country would result in both players receiving the award; so long as England ended on 9 centers, he and I could both be happy. So, we arranged for Russia to take a center off England, which he did, and we agreed we would draw the game once that fall turn processed.

Being a sneaky sort of fellow, and having a sense of humor as well, I decided to tap London from the Channel. It would never work, I figured. England would have to walk from London to Wales for literally no reason whatsoever, and fail to cover London from the North Sea at the same time. But of course, if it did work, he'd only have himself to blame.

It worked. He, also having a sense of humor, did blame himself. He went down to 8 and we called for a draw vote, England agreeing he had to vote for it, since it was his own fault he had fallen below my 9-center England.

The draw vote, however, failed. To this day, no one has confessed to vetoing it. Nonetheless, we were spared another year of shenanigans by the timed round ending. Morgante, despite hanging on quite effectively, was unable to secure his tournament victory, due to results on other boards. I shared some of his angst about this, as my Best England was also snatched away at the last minute, by a 10-center result on the board next door. Lesson learned; consider playing the extra 30 minutes, and securing that additional dot.

Farewells were said, a final dinner with a few friends was had, and my flight home was neither delayed nor canceled. Weasel Moot in Chicago was a resounding success. My heartfelt thanks to the organizers and participants. It's so, so good to have face-to-face events back.

A Changing of the Guard in Airstrip One

by Jon Hills

Hello and welcome back to Airstrip One.

I'm sorry to have been away for so long.

It can sometimes be helpful to take small step back from things for a time, ready to come back refreshed and re-invigorated, however, this break was quite unintentional.

Even so, there's a chance that it will have done me some good – I'll let you be the judges of that – and I'll hope to be a more faithful correspondent going forwards.

To say that a lot has happened in the UK recently is perhaps an understatement.

You'll probably be aware that we have seen some fairly significant happenings through 2022. Although I won't recap the headlines from entire last nine months, I will pick out a few notable events which I would probably have commented on in more detail had I not been Missing in Action.

For example, in June, we enjoyed the Platinum Jubilee, a four-day national holiday celebrating the 70-year reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. This started with the traditional Trooping of the Colour (an annual ceremonial event with horses and marching military bands) and finished with a massive pop concert.

I feel quite privileged to have seen all of her Majesty's Jubilees: Silver, Ruby, Golden, Diamond, Sapphire & Platinum, albeit the Ruby & Sapphire anniversaries were only low-key affairs.

A month later and July saw the England Ladies Soccer Team, the Lionesses, win the UEFA Ladies European Championship. They achieved this in quite sensational style, defeating Germany in the Final. This was probably the Nation's most significant sporting success since the Men's team won the FIFA World Cup – against the then West German team - in 1966.

Happy days indeed.

Whilst all that was quite jolly there have also been some darker events too, especially in the political sphere.

First there is the small matter of an ongoing war in Europe – a scenario that all *Diplomacy* players will be familiar with – courtesy of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Along with the US and our NATO Allies, the UK stands with Ukraine against Putin's aggression and to show our

support, Boris Johnson's Government arranged a fast-track visa system to help refugees fleeing the conflict. A call also went out for people willing and able to house these poor victims or such wanton violence with Boris providing financial support to those able to assist. More than 100,000 Ukrainians were granted sanctuary between March and August of this year.

It is remarkable what can be achieved with sufficient political will and it does makes me wonder why the Government and indeed the country could be so accommodating for these individuals and yet has such difficulty with the roughly 30,000 migrants who have attempted to cross the Channel in small boats so far this year. Admittedly some of these people are 'only' economic but many are also refugees fleeing war, hardship and persecution of different forms.

Normal service appears to be being resumed, though, as it is now being reported that some 50,000 of our Ukrainian visitors are now facing homelessness. The financial support was only offered for 6 months and it seems that some will only stand by Ukraine if they are being paid to do so.

Maybe Putin is right when he talks about western mercenaries – although perhaps not in the sense he means – or maybe I'm becoming increasingly cynical with my advancing years.

But I digress.

July also saw the functional end – although possibly only for the time being - of Boris Johnson's time as Prime Minister. Not long after winning a vote of confidence in his leadership from amongst his MPs, Boris Johnson's administration was rocked by a record 57 ministers resigning from his government in a single day.

What drove their changes in heart is probably not for these pages but can be simply summarised as Boris being caught out in one too many lies - and his colleagues getting fed up with having to lie themselves to protect him.

Regardless of one's personal politics, there's a lesson there for any *Diplomacy* player.

It was a number of weeks after resigning before Boris actually left office – being replaced by his former Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss. Most sadly, this foreshadowed a much more significant departure; the sudden and

unexpected death of Queen Elizabeth II on 8 September.

It is possibly twisting language beyond reasonable bounds to describe the loss of a 96-year-old in increasingly poor health as either sudden or unexpected - but that is how it felt. She had been pictured appointing Ms Truss as her 15th serving Prime Minister only two days prior, smiling and alert. The next day, she missed a scheduled meeting through tiredness and 24 hours later she had died. It was definitely a shock.

Again, regardless of one's views on our Constitutional Monarchy – I'm a fan but then I do have a faint familial interest – Her Majesty's death was such a global event that I should not let it pass without comment.

I could recount the detail of the Queen's life and achievements but I'm conscious of my audience and I do like to try to link these letters in some way to the art or practice of playing *Diplomacy*.

Despite being described as the world's longest serving diplomat, I face a problem in that there is no evidence, anecdotal or otherwise, of Queen Elizabeth ever having played our great game.

However, I'm inclined to say that this is our loss since I am sure that she would have been marvellous at it. This is because she was a natural born liar but because of precisely the opposite; she never had cause to dissemble or deceive. Instead, she was good at putting people at their ease, regardless of their situation, and of understanding an individual's interests and motivations.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

One of the many anecdotes shared during our period of national mourning, which ended with her funeral on 19 September, was the tale of a war veteran suffering from PTSD. Invited to take tea with the Queen, he was utterly overcome by the situation and started experiencing flashbacks.

The Queen saw his distress.

Completely unflustered and without making him feel awkward or uncomfortable in any way, she opened a box on a nearby table. The box contained dog biscuits and the pair then spent a happy half-hour chatting and feeding her ever present corgis. This informality and gentleness helped her guest to relax and regain his composure and with it his dignity. As the Queen observed, "Dogs always make things better!"

Another oft-reported story concerned the visit to the UK of a quite controversial leader – no, it wasn't Donald -

who was known to be 'difficult'. Any topic of conversation was a potential flashpoint.

The Prime Minister at the time, I forget which one, was unsure of how to handle these interactions so sought the Queen's advice. Without hesitation she recommended steering the conversation towards fly-fishing, about which the visiting leader was extremely passionate. The advice worked and difficulties were avoided.

A consummate professional at making small talk, Queen Elizabeth could work a room as well as the next person. Although much of this soft diplomacy came from her vast experience - having been Head of State for longer than most people in the world have been alive - that experience would be useless without her also being adept at understanding people, at recognising what interested them and finding common ground.

Imagine how awesome it would have been to see those skills in action across a board.

Having got matters firmly on to the topic of *Diplomacy* there is probably just time for a quick update on local matters – and a veritable feast of *Dip*-related activity.

Firstly, I'm pleased to say that the London Diplomacy Club returned to post-pandemic action on 17 September – albeit at a new location in Woking. (Does that make it the Woking Diplomacy Club?)

Unfortunately, I couldn't attend as it's a good couple of hours trek for me on the 'wrong' side of London, but hopefully you will see a report elsewhere in *Diplomacy World*.

Meanwhile, on the weekend just gone - 24-25th September - Spirecon was taking place in Chesterfield. That is even further away from me so I had even less chance of getting there. Again, though, there should hopefully be a report somewhere within these pages. Your Editor has been seen actively chasing both.

Despite feeling slightly guilty at not supporting either event, I do have more of an excuse for Spirecon since it coincided with the latest meeting of my own face-to-face group, currently going by the working title of the 'Colchester Diplomacy People'.

This was actually our third game session as we also met in March. However, as I didn't report it at the time, I trust you'll forgive a quick recap of both matches.

Regular readers will recall that I had fared poorly in our first game as France, suffering a devastating stab at the hand of England, my erstwhile ally. In our second game, I drew Germany and was looking to make a better showing. Our previous Austria was unavailable so we

had a new player – Iain – join our ranks. Iain had played before online some years ago but this was his first live match. He drew France and one of our rookie players from November, Martin, was England.



All new players should have a firm grasp of the rules!

Iain proposed a Western Triple, on the basis that he'd not tried one before. I was happy to oblige but was concerned at the risks that this can present for Germany. However, I regarded Iain as a reliable sort and reasoned that, as an inexperienced player, Martin was less likely to exploit the situation. And so it proved as we swept all before us. That was, until, about 1905 when, giddy with our progress and the success of our triumvirate, I got sloppy. Martin seized his chance like a veteran and I fell from I think, second place to nearly dead last. The game was called time with Martin securing board top by one dot from Turkey.

With hindsight, I had felt the stab coming but had allowed my units to get too strung out – just as I had done in our first game – and presenting Martin with a far too tempting target.

Memo to self: Must do better!

It was a long six months waiting for our next meet up but I was determined not to repeat the same mistake for a third time. This time we were joined by a new player,

Huw, making his *Diplomacy* debut and who drew Russia! Poor chap. The line up was Daniel (Germany), Claire (England), Lee (Italy), Trevor (Austria) and Martin (Turkey). I drew England – possibly my favourite country to play as I am sure it is for many of you.

An alliance with Germany against France was easily secured and I leapt to an early lead in the West as did Austria in the East. Russia & Turkey struggled to reach any real understanding; the Black Sea was bouncing like a spacehopper. Italy sat patiently, quietly supporting Austria.

Again, I felt that I started well but then made the mistake of trying to be too clever. Instead of moving aggressively against France as Daniel was expecting (and as I had promised), I tried to lure Claire into a false sense of security. My hope was that I could get into a better position to stab Claire more viciously and so gain a slight advantage over Daniel in the mid-game.

Although I think that I achieved my aims with Claire, I failed to manage Daniel's expectations. As a result, he grew frustrated and mistrustful. As Lee observed after the event, this instability in our alliance slowed progress until our agreement fell apart.

Meanwhile Trevor's Austria continued to grow without resistance, reaching 10 centres - and eventual board top - by 1906 and the point that the game was once again called. The last act of note was for Daniel to ally with Lee to all but eliminate Claire. With Huw down to one unit and Martin & Claire about to disband their last pieces, this left just me alone and aloof across the Channel and also about to lose units.

My England was in many ways a paragon of Brexit Britain, isolated, in recession and barely in control of her home waters. To be honest, I was relieved to have run out of time.

As ever, though, we all had a cracking time and are keen to meet up again – probably in early 2023.

So there we have it. Hopefully it's been of interest to get a different take on recent events and an update on the activities of our fledging group.

As ever, if you have any comments or criticism then please send them my way – jon.aistrip1@gmail.com – and if there's anything that you'd like to know more about our group or the UK generally, feel free to get in touch.

In the meantime, take care, stay safe and Happy Stabbing!

Weasel Moot After Action Report

By Eber Condrell

This isn't going to be a full recap of my tournament, as nothing really of note came out of it, instead I'm going to go over the happenings in the last few years of my third-round game.

Let's set up the situation. I was in England, Morgante Pell, the then tournament lead, was in France, Trevor Lindsay, a brand-new player, was in Germany. The East was made up of Kevin O'Kelly in Russia, Caius Dankey in Turkey, Edi Birsan in Austria, and Randy Lawrence-Hurt in Italy.



Edi Birsan

In 1901 I planned a quick rush of Morgante with Trevor. My reasoning was Trevor was a new player I could manipulate more easily and write all the moves for, where Morgante wouldn't be a pushover as he had shown the game before. Unfortunately for Trevor, he left Denmark in Fall 1901 ending up only getting a build from Holland while I snuck my way into Brest with an army. Morgante was now at my beck and call, I had the board top all but squared away, we even sent fleets for Tunis in 03. There was a strong AIR brewing in the East, Caius was quickly eliminated, and the others turned to the line. The game seemed to be headed for a screeching halt. Not generally being one for screeching halts, I opted to toss the balance of power in the air by retreating my fleet from North Africa and stabbing Morgante. I misplayed the moves, losing my southernmost fleet in the process. I also failed to understand Randy's true motivation for the game, namely, to stop me from getting best England.

His best England was sitting at 9 from the previous round, I was at 9 centers and grew to 10 soon after.

Luckily for me Kevin switched sides at this point in exchange for getting my fleet in St. Petersburg instead of an army. The game devolved into ER vs FIA. Randy pushed fleets up into the Channel to push me back. The game was about to lock up again. However, we were at an impasse about how to end it. For thirty minutes, Kevin, Edi, Randy, and Morgante argued about the draw conditions for the game, while I sat back content with my ally in Russia and my 10-center board top. The short of it is that Randy, Morgante, and Edi were unsatisfied with how the game was playing out. Randy wanted me below his best England, Morgante wanted another dot to get himself closer to winning the tournament, and Edi was annoyed by Kevin's stab on him. Kevin wanted the game to end quickly, and so did I. Without the votes of the other three we couldn't have ended it. Another factor in this was that the timed end was fast approaching. While these negotiations were ongoing, we approached the hour of 2:00. After 2:00 it was possible the game could end at any time.

Now, you might be asking, how did I end up on 8 centers? I had a stalemate in the seas around my island and Kevin was never going to turn on me. It is complicated. First of all, Randy and I had our own sidebar in which we asked Sabi (our most excellent TD) if a best country award could be shared. They said it could. So, I invited Kevin into Kiel and Randy agreed to end the game once I was down to nine. Morgante and Edi begrudgingly conceded that they would also vote for a draw if this exchange of centers was made. Kevin took Kiel in spring; the timing would end up being fatal for my topping hopes. As in the fall I produced some oxymoronic tactical magic to get Randy into London. I ordered Wales to English Channel to cut support and tried to execute a beleaguered garrison on Wales. Randy, completely by chance, or perhaps could guesswork, ordered English Channel to London. The final score for the game, after it ended in the following spring, was 8 for me and Kevin, 7 for Edi, 6 for Randy, and 5 for our friend Morgante.

The saga therefore concluded rather anticlimactically. Grant Smith ended on 10 as England on the next board over giving himself the best country award. Morgante missed winning the tournament by only a couple centers. Most importantly, Randy Lawrence-Hurt owes me a beer.