

# Diplomacy World #160



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

# Notes from the Editor

Welcome to the latest issue of **Diplomacy World**, the Winter 2022 issue. Christmas and 2022 have now come and gone, finishing the year with what amounted to terribly cold weather for most parts of the United States. The northeast seems to have been particularly hard hit. I hope all of you made it through the last part of the year unscathed, and found some time to laugh and smile. Laughter is the universe's greatest tonic.

It actually feels like it's been six months since the last issue, which I suppose is a bad thing in a way. But the process for this issue has been very similar to recent ones: almost no material on hand a week before the deadline, followed by a miraculous stream of late entries turning a nearly-empty issue into an issue of high quality. You'll notice – of course – that my presence has very little to do with that. This issue, and every issue of **Diplomacy World**, owes all of its success to the wonderful hobby members who take the time and effort to submit material. And the Staff members who not only write but also encourage others to do so. **Diplomacy World** would have faded away LONG ago without all of your efforts. By comparison, my job is a rather simple one.

The big news in the hobby since last issue, at least in terms of national exposure, was the announcement of the development of an AI that was able to successfully beat human opponents in a tournament. This wasn't just about an AI that could determine the best movies; the bigger achievement was the ability of the AI to actually negotiate with the other powers! I imagine most of you have already seen plenty of articles covering this; major media outlets also reported on this, despite not really understanding what the game is or how it works. Still, if you missed it, I think the Science article gives the best overview for those who already play Diplomacy. (You'll see some familiar hobby names on the author list, if you look):

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.ade9097>

So, while we wait for Skynet to take over the globe and begin the inevitable annihilation of the human oppressors, how about we focus our attention back on this issue of Diplomacy World and what you can find inside?

Right off the bat, we have the third of three authorized reprints of classic Diplomacy articles by Lew Pulsipher, which originally appeared in the Avalon Hill magazine

The General (which is where, through their "opponents wanted" section, I first discovered the Diplomacy hobby). If you'd like to see the new introduction Lewis wrote for this series of articles, you can find it in Diplomacy World #158 here:

<https://www.diplomacyworld.net/pdf/dw158.pdf>

And remember, the Diplomacy World website has every issue ever published available for free download. That's almost 50 years of issues, including things like the "fake" Issues #31a and #40, and any special publication that took place along the way. They can all be found at <https://www.diplomacyworld.net/>.

Among the other articles this issue, we have two variant pieces. The first is a detailed look at the Empire City variant by Paul Webb. Now is your chance to battle for control of New York! And along with that, we have an excellent article on Ambition and Empire by B.M.Powell, and as a bonus Stephen Agar – a name long held in high regard in the Diplomacy hobby – shares a quick and easy variant using the classic Diplomacy map.

Speaking of Stephen Agar, if you haven't been in the hobby for decades and can appreciate a different perspective, I suggest you take a look at his article "Coming Back Again, Again – A Bit of a Rant." I find I share similar feelings about the game and hobby today versus the prior periods in our history. The question remains: does today's player need, or want, some of the expanded hobby cohesion we enjoyed back then? And is there a way to build a solid, middle ground between old and new?

Of course, there's *a lot more* for you to enjoy. (And with luck, a few articles that haven't even arrived yet as I write this). Remember, I need you – **yes YOU** – to think about writing something for Diplomacy World. Without all of you reading sharing, and most importantly writing, this zine would have faded away long ago. And only with your support will it continue.

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

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

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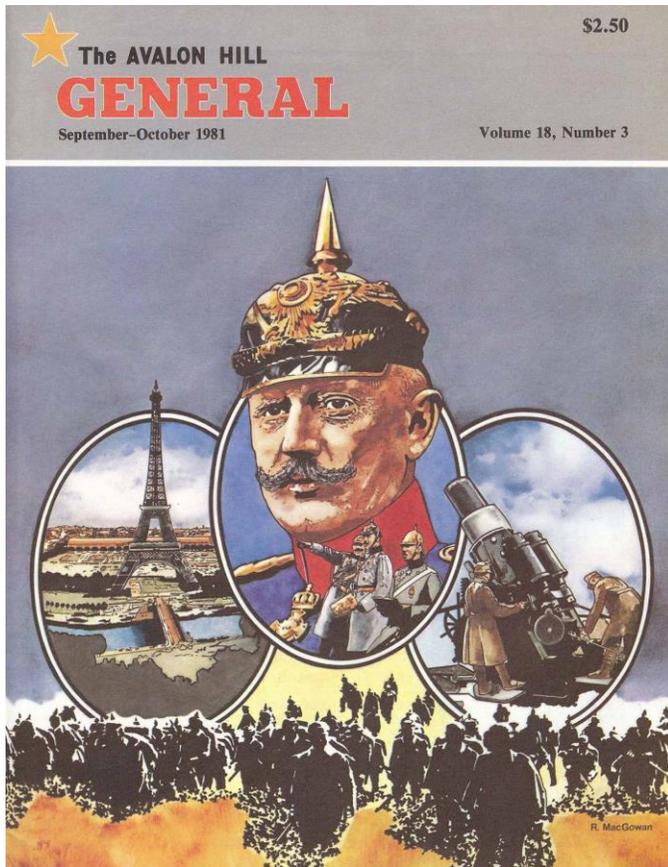
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# Tactics in Diplomacy

## Part 3 of 3

(Reprinted from *The General*, vol. 18, #3)

by Lewis Pulsipher



for a move that will make gains regardless of what your opponent does, but always remember that there is rarely a single best move. Outguessing the opponent, whether by intuition or by probability, is part of the game. A gain can be possession of a supply center, destruction of an enemy unit, or, especially in Spring, occupation of a non-center space which will lead to capture of a supply center in Fall. Spring is the season of maneuver, Fall the season of capture. When you outnumber the enemy, you're virtually certain to succeed if you don't make a mistake and if unit mix and positioning don't handicap you at the start of the war.

If you're outnumbered or desperately need a quick advance to prevent a third player from gaining the upper hand, then you must take chances. Try to figure out how the enemy will move and then order your units to take best advantage of that move. You'll probably get clobbered, but you might guess right and leave your enemy in all kinds of trouble and rather wary to boot.

Remember that in every case, tactics must be subordinated to strategy. A slow, delaying withdrawal in one area might be better than a flamboyant attempt to turn the tide if you're doing well elsewhere.

I mentioned unit mix and positioning above. Numbers are important in Diplomacy, but other factors can alter the balance. The ratio of fleets to armies can be vital. If you have too many of one and not enough of the other you could be beaten by a weaker enemy. Each country tends to have a natural or average mix of units, as explained in part 2, and areas have obvious, optimum mixes as well. The Mediterranean area, including the adjacent lands (Italy, Iberia, southern Balkans, Turkey, Africa) is an area where fleets are much more valuable than armies. Central Europe is an army area. While this seems self-evident, all too many players fail to plan ahead when building new units. Think about where you intend to be two or three game years hence, and build units that will help at that time. After you've expanded to about ten units, it will take one or two years for new units to reach the battle lines -- plan ahead for it. Moreover, think about where you will build a unit before the opportunity comes, to avoid hasty decisions when faced with a time limit.

When you are doing well you need to expand as rapidly as possible, getting units behind the enemy's defensive

Anyone who plays and studies Diplomacy can become a good tactician, for of the three elements of the game -- negotiation, strategy, and tactics -- the tactical element is the simplest and most predictable. Tactics is the ordering and arrangement of your units so as to accomplish your strategic objectives. The more numerous force usually succeeds and, if not pressed by time, never loses. Tactical problems can sometimes be solved with the help of mathematical game theory, but that is beyond the scope of this article. Little can be said about good tactics as a whole, but many individual points can be noted.

According to game theory, the best way to play a game is to maximize one's minimum gains -- assume that the enemy is a perfect player and move accordingly. When reduced to mathematics, this can involve a certain amount of probability, even in a game such as Diplomacy which uses no chance mechanism (dice). In terms of Diplomacy tactics, it means that you must look

stalemate lines before those lines form. I call this "headmanning," from the ice hockey term for moving the puck up to the most advanced attacker. In a sense the most advanced attacking unit "carries the puck" for the whole attack. If it is stopped, the entire attack will bunch up behind it. Get a few units out front as fast as possible, and let newly built units help destroy enemy resistance nearer your country. A single unit, leading a stream of units, can make the difference between success and failure of an attack which takes place several years hence. For example, when Turkey is expanding west it should headman a fleet into the Atlantic as soon as possible, probably before the last Italian center is captured, so that the western countries cannot seal Gibraltar (by F Portugal and F English S F Mid-Atlantic).

When the units to headman aren't available, a lone raider behind the enemy lines can cripple an enemy attack or defense for years. Most spaces in Diplomacy border with six other spaces. Although land/sea differences help, three to five units are needed to force a lone raider to disband for lack of a legal retreat. A common way to start a raid is to retreat after battle into enemy territory rather than toward home, but in many cases a wary opponent will make sure this isn't possible.

Another trick of retreating, the "fast retreat home," can be worked with an ally. One player dislodges a unit of the other, who disbands it rather than retreat. This allows him to rebuild the unit at home at the end of the year, barring loss of a supply center. He can change an army to a fleet in this way or bring a useless unit back home to defend the motherland or help eliminate a raider.

Whether attacking or defending, write your orders carefully. Several times in almost every game, an unintelligible or miswritten order ruins a brilliant plan. Double check. It's easy to write one thing when you mean another. Some players take advantage of this common failing by deliberately miswriting an order. This may confuse the enemy, but more often it's a means of double-crossing an ally while pretending innocence.

Defense is often a slow, boring affair, but imaginative use of attacks is sometimes the only means of successful defense. For example, if Russia has A Bohemia and A Galicia, and Austria has A Vienna and A Rumania, it appears that Russia has a sure two to one against Vienna because Rumania cannot support Vienna. However, if Austria orders A Vienna-Galicia S by A Rumania, then the Russian will be stood off if he attacks with Galicia S by Bohemia (two vs. two) as he is likely to do. (If he attacks with Bohemia S by Galicia then A Rumania-Galicia would cut the support and save Vienna.)

Here is a more complex example. Russia has F Aegean and Armies Bohemia, Galicia, Rumania, and Bulgaria.

Austria has Armies Vienna, Budapest, Serbia, and Greece. Outnumbered five to four, at first glance Austria seems certain to lose a center. Russia can concentrate two units on Vienna, two on Greece, and use Rumania to cut one support. If Austria merely "stonewalls" (Budapest and Vienna support each other, Serbia and Greece support each other) he is certain to lose either Vienna or Greece this season and another center next season. But if he attacks with all four units (Vienna-Galicia, Budapest-Galicia, Serbia-Bulgaria, Greece-Bulgaria) he may catch the Russian napping. If the Russian chooses to attack with Bohemia rather than Galicia, with Aegean rather than Bulgaria, his supports will be cut by Budapest and Serbia and his attacks will all fail.

Austria takes a chance, however, because he may lose two or even three centers rather than one to a cagey Russian player, as follows:

**Austria:** A Vienna-Galicia (dislodged), A Budapest-Galicia, A Serbia-Bulgaria, A Greece-Bulgaria (dislodged)

**Russia:** A Rumania-Budapest, A Galicia-Vienna, A Bohemia S A Galicia-Vienna, A Bulgaria-Greece, F Aegean S F Bulgaria-Greece

#### **Defense by Attack**

On the other hand, despite the losses, Austria finds himself behind the Russian lines in Galicia and Bulgaria with Warsaw and Sevastopol open. If the Russian is an unimaginative tactician the risk of all-out attack is sometimes worth the beautiful result.

Nonetheless, an attack is not always the best means of disarranging the enemy. First, you can stand when your opponent expects you to attack and moves to block it. This will leave his unit(s) out of position and could even cost him a center. For example, France moves A Marseilles-Spain in Spring 1901 while Italy moves A Venice-Piedmont. Now France wants to protect Marseilles, but he wants to end the Fall season in Spain in order to capture it (Spring occupation is not sufficient). If France orders A Spain-Marseilles and Italy orders A Piedmont-Marseilles, France will defend Marseilles, capture Spain, and leave Marseilles open for a possible build. But if Italy holds instead, France is left with an army in Marseilles, no captured center, and no place to build a Mediterranean fleet to resist Italy further. This is a classic guessing game. More often than not France moves to Marseilles because he can't afford to lose a home center.

Second, a nominally attacking unit can actually support a defender's move in order to disrupt the defense. For example, in Spring 1901 Russia moves A Warsaw-Galicia while Austria orders A Vienna hold, A Budapest-

Serbia. In Fall Austria wants to protect both Vienna and Budapest and capture Serbia, so he orders a self-standoff: A Vienna-Budapest, A Serbia-Budapest. This is the classic means of defending three spaces with two units. Russia, however, may order A Galicia S Austrian A Serbia-Budapest. Then Serbia-Budapest succeeds (two vs. one) and Austria does not capture Serbia. Later in the game a similar situation can occur, but with Serbia now owned by Austria and a Russian unit in Bulgaria as well. Russia could order Galicia S Serbia-Budapest and Bulgaria-Serbia, capturing Serbia. In either case the Austrian can outguess the Russian by standing where he is. In cases like this, luck, intuition, and knowledge of your opponent (and game theory, if you know how to use it) are your tools. Even so, there is no way to predict the "best" move.

Finally, avoid center grubbing. Position can be as important as possession of an additional supply center, especially in Spring. Don't disarrange a good position in order to immediately capture an invitingly vulnerable center. You may sacrifice so much that you'll soon lose that center and more besides. In particular, don't open a hole in your line unless you're sure you can close it before an enemy raider gets through. One enemy unit behind your lines can delay an entire offensive. Moreover, be wary of dislodging a defender where the defender can retreat through your lines into your rear. Don't be lulled by the apparent simplicity of a position. Every good tactician pays attention to details that the less skillful don't notice or don't bother about.

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## Hobby Awards Part Deux

By David Hood

Just this time last year, I wrote a Hobby History article about the awards that we used to give out in the World of Diplomacy. A new "service to the hobby" award to take the place of the old Don Miller award had been created by the Diplomacy Briefing folks, called the Ambassador of the Year, which was awarded to Zachary Moore. I had suggested in that article that we resurrect a few more of our old awards, like the Rod Walker literary one, and that perhaps the Diplomacy Broadcast Network could produce an awards show.

I'm pleased to announce that both of these things are going to happen in January 2023! The Briefing will not only be awarding its second annual Ambassador of the Year plaque, but will also be giving out a literary award. Committees were formed months ago representing a cross-section of the overall hobby, to narrow down potential nominees to a handful which are then to be voted on in the middle of January. It's VERY important to subscribe to their weekly newsletter at [DiplomacyBriefing.com](http://DiplomacyBriefing.com) because only subscribers are able to vote. Frankly, if you are reading this you should be subscribing anyway because weekly Dip news and featured content is a great companion to the quarterly schedule of Diplomacy World.

When the time comes to announce those winners, we'll do it on a DBN Awards Show later in January. The show will focus not just on those two awards, but will feature interviews and other content regarding the annual Virtual Diplomacy League awards given out by Commissioner Zachary Moore as well as some additional awards to be bestowed by DBN itself. If we're lucky, we'll also have some good awards-show type content and maybe even some gossipy crap from our hobby's gossipy types. More information will be released in the Briefing and in other hobby media as soon as the details are finalized.

In the meantime, get excited about the return of our hobby awards! It's healthy for the hobby, and with the new media now available to us as hobbyists, we can have even more silly fun with it than we ever did back in the old days.

***[[If this takes off, maybe it will be time to revive the Rusty Bolts Awards too?]]***



# Dipcon at Dixiecon - 52nd North American Diplomacy Championship

*The 37th Annual Dixiecon –Chapel Hill NC– May 26-28, 2023*

**Tournament Director:** David Hood

**Assistant TD:** Michael Lowrey

## Overview

Dixiecon is the longest-running Diplomacy tournament location in the world. Just like in 1990, 1994, 1998 and 2002, Dixiecon will serve as host location for the 2023 Dipcon, sponsored by the North American Diplomacy Federation.

## This Year's Details

1. One round each on Friday, Saturday, Sunday – best two scores count, using Dixiecon scoring
2. Unlimited rounds except for Sunday round which has random end time 7 to 9 hours from the start
3. BBQ Dinner on Saturday afternoon
4. Diplomacy variant event Saturday night after BBQ
5. Open Gaming and Social Activities start Thursday night
6. Iron Man of Gaming tournament for non-Dip boardgaming also starts Thursday night
7. Full tournament coverage on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network YouTube and Twitch channels

**For More Information:** Email [davidhood@dixiecon](mailto:davidhood@dixiecon) or visit [www.dixiecon.com](http://www.dixiecon.com)

# When All Your Neighbors Attack You

By Luca Pazzaglia

## Premise

It is with great pleasure that I am about to comment on an interesting game played in November 2022 at the Italian NDC. The event was held in the splendid castle of Gambolò in Pavia (Northern Italy).

Unfortunately, it took a sad event - the death of Giovanni Cesarini in October 2021, a great friend and Italian player - to gather the national hobby around a tournament; 23 players participated. The Italian NDC 2022 was in fact dedicated to dear Giovanni. Almost all the strongest Italian players were present: the Italian-Russian Alex Lebedev, Davide Cleopadre, Marco Ferrari, Giuseppe Salerno, Matteo Anfossi, etc. In addition, there were also some foreign players: two Americans - Tomas Haver and Raymond Setzer - and the Swiss Christian Reichardt, who helped to raise the tournament to a very interesting level.



But let's get to the commentary on this interesting game I played.

## The Match

This was a game I will remember for the rest of my life. In the first game I got the country I least like to play: Germany. The table was made up of the best Italian players: Giuseppe Salerno in Italy, Matteo Anfossi in Austria, Marco Ferrari in Russia, Alex Lebedev in Turkey, Curzio Facoetti in England, and Carlo Selvetti in France. I was looking for an alliance with France in an anti-English perspective, but I didn't have time to set up a coordinated attack. Then in 1902 I found myself with a Russian army in Silesia, an Austrian army in Bohemia and an Italian army in Tyrol, all to great joy of England.

What to do when three nations attack you at the same time while you just started a war with the fourth? Well, in a situation like this, experience has taught me that there is only one solution: **DEFENSE! DEFENSE! DEFENSE!**

Which translated into practice means:

- 1) Try at all costs NOT TO LOSE vital CENTERS!
- 2) Don't make improbable or suicidal attacks that scatter your armies or fleets away from your centers.
- 3) Try to predict the attackers' moves based on their skill level (I know it's not easy but it's possible);
- 4) Incite neighboring powers (in my case France and Turkey) against your new enemies.

All this with one purpose, **TO BREAK THE ALLIANCE AGAINST YOU ASAP.**

Well, in this game everything worked out for me perfectly. Thanks to the good relations I had with France I managed to convince her to continue the attack on England, who was soon unable to join Austria, Italy and Russia in the anti-German war. After that I managed to parry an attack on Munich, which fell in the spring. But I managed to reconquer it in the autumn thanks to the correct prediction of the opponent's moves. I spent the following year defending my centers and cutting opposing supports. This allowed me to keep all six of my centers without leaving anything to the opponents. Some might consider my strategy at this point stale or boring, but I assure you that your opponents are the most bored after two or three seasons in which they don't see results in terms of centers taken. They get so bored that they begin to abandon the battlefield.

And that's what happened in my game. After England pulled back to defend its island against France, Matteo Anfossi's Austria withdrew first, followed by Giuseppe Salerno's Italy which found (thanks to my diplomatic work) a French army in Piedmont.

That left only Russia, but it didn't have enough forces to win the war against me.

With a clever move in 1905, I managed to conquer Sweden, a Russian center. When Austria proposed an unexpected draw I realized - to my amazement - that with seven centers I was actually the first nation! Everyone accepted, and I found myself having won a game played entirely in defense!

Semplicemente Bellissimo!! 😊

# Knives and Daggers - The Diplomacy World Letter Column



**Russ Dennis** – Hope you're doing well Doug. I was wondering if there was any record made in the early days of all the postal players for a particular year? Or perhaps a complete collection of all the Boardman numbers.

**[[Boardman numbers – as issued and as results were reported - can be found in zines like Graustark, Lonely Mountain, sTab, and Numenor. In 1972 Conrad von Metzke formed the zine Everything to report such, and each Boardman Number Custodian from then on reported them there. Tom Howell is the current BNC but he hasn't released an issue of Everything in years, probably because only a few of us still request numbers and report results. Issues of Everything (and the other zines) can be found in my very incomplete Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive at:**

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

**There also was an annual Diplomacy Census of what was meant to be as complete a list as possible of players names and mailing addresses. Ray Bowers published the first of these in 1972, and produced four more issues through 1973. Paul Boymel, Dick & Julie Martin, Fred Davis, and Larry Peery all did some in the 70's through the 90's at irregular intervals. Finally, my first wife Mara and myself did two or three starting in 1992 (meaning 1993 or 1994 would have been our last one). I don't think anyone compiled one since. Each Census was dependent on how many publishers submitted their subscriber list. Some did, some published those lists every issue anyway (and the data could be manually pulled if they didn't submit it), and others ignored the requests. I wonder who has copies of any of the old Census issues around? I believe in the last one Mara and I did (or maybe the last two), we included a cross-reference to analyze not just where players were located, but also who subscribed to which zines.]]**



**Mark Nelson** – To old timers it will be clear that a great deal could be said about the history of feuding within the Hobby. I even have a feeling that Mark Berch had at least one issue of Diplomacy Digest dedicated to feuds. Incidentally, are all of the issue of

Diplomacy Digest available online? If not, they should be since that would be a fantastic resource for anyone wanting to learn about many facets of diplomacy.

**[[I am missing a couple (like #13) but I have most of the run in my Postal Diplomacy Zine Archive at <http://www.whiningkentpigs.com/DW/kent/diplomacyzinearchive.htm> ]]**

Regarding The Great Feud. I will make one remark. Perhaps the saddest thing about this is that prior to it starting, Bruce Linsey and Kathy Caruso were on very friendly terms. (Or at least that is my understanding).

Quite a lot could be said about Robert Sacks, particular with regard to the diplomacy variant 'sub-hobby'. I will again make one remark. I did have some small dealings with Robert circa 1989, but mostly I observed him from afar.

He was clearly a man with a great deal of energy and a passion, and indeed talent, for organizing. In retrospect it is a great shame that events precluded him making a much more everlasting contribution to the greater hobby. That was the hobby's lost.

I enjoyed Andy Lischett's article. In theory, it would be possible to complete a much more detailed analysis of this. Back in the day when most PBEM games were being played on the judge software (is that still in use?) it was possible to have sent the complete record of a game that had been played on it. I imagine that you could write software to analysis the records of all the games ever played using this software. (I seem to remember asking one of my friends to write me code to do something similar). Hats off to Andy for doing this by hand - that was crazy!

PS - I don't know if Lewis Pulsipher has ever been interviewed for Diplomacy World, but it not he should be.

**[[Good question, I THINK he has but I need to go back and check. Lewis' contributions to the zine are treasured by me, he's a man of great talent and a good fellow to boot.]]**

# Ask the Hobby Historian: DW 40 Years Ago

By David Hood

For someone like me who at times enjoys looking up the history of the Diplomacy hobby, one fun way to do this is to look at Diplomacy World back issues from a certain time period ago and see what turns up. 40 years ago, California hobbyist Rod Walker had just released issue 33 of DW during the Spring of 1983. Rod was, himself, a well-known hobby writer who both penned the official Gamer's Guide to Diplomacy AND had the hobby's literary award named after him. (I believe we are on track to get that award back, which is awesome.)

## DIPLOMACY WORLD 33 SPRING 1983 \$2<sup>50</sup>



### BERCH WINS DEMO GAME!

Above: Mark Berch, winner of 1980AY, poses (with a smug mug) for DW's camera, displaying the tools of his trade. "Just a cross between Bill Faulkner and Lizzie Borden," he told our

I had seen this issue before, but looking back at it recently I noticed a couple of things. If you have watched me on DBN mention the Sev-Con Shuffle before, you may have wondered where that phrase came from. Frankly I had not remembered myself. But right there is issue 33 was the sixth of a series by Bob Bragdon of "unorthodox openings", with this piece entitled "The Sev-Con Shuffle", which for those who don't know involves Russia taking Con in Fall 1901 while Turkey takes Sev. The theory behind this is to get that Russian fleet somewhere useful, i.e., the Med, while also getting that second Turkish army somewhere useful

instead of fist-bumping or doing the Goffy Syria thing or whatever.

The article actually does a good job of explaining the downsides, including the likelihood of one or the other of the RT partners deciding to stab in 1902, but also discusses the possibilities unlocked by the Shuffle under the right circumstances. As someone who enjoys unorthodox openings myself on occasion, this article was a fun read...and now at least I know where the name of the opening comes from!

If you have spent much time at all looking at old Diplomacy variants you will know that a disproportionate number were based on Tolkien stories. Given the crossover between the SF/Fantasy and Dip hobbies in the past, this is not terribly surprising but it's always fun to see what next Tolkien variant folk came up with. In Issue 33, it was the War of the Great Jewels, based on First Age mythology (when Morgoth was the Big Bad instead of Sauron.) This was pretty unusual, to be honest, with the vast majority of these variants being based on the Third Age found in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, or at least the Second Age - the events recently depicted in Amazon Prime's Rings of Power series. I won't try to explain all the variant's rules and so forth here, but just as a fun tidbit, Morgoth's forces do not capture supply centers. They destroy them.

I've mentioned Greg Costikyan before in my hobby history series, a game designer at Avalon Hill's rival SPI who was also an active Diplomacy hobbyist back in the day. His article in this same issue 33 of DW is interesting for two reasons. The subject is SPI's game Empires of the Middle Ages, released in 1981 I believe, which is not a Diplomacy game or variant. First point here is that back in those days, Dip fans were often wargame fans in general, and thus his review of a totally non-Dip game made sense for the time period. I believe this has drastically changed now, with most Dip hobbyists not really being wargame fans per se. Second, this underlines just how revolutionary Diplomacy was back then as well - not just the simultaneous movement mechanic and so forth, but just the multiplayer interaction itself was relatively unique. Only a few games back then involved a historical simulation with that many totally independent players not wedded to historical alliances.

My final point about issue 33 has to do with a Code of Ethics. In the past several years, our hobby has seen the relatively universal adoption of Codes of Conduct to regulate how players behave towards each other, with

the goal of making this a welcoming and safe place for everyone. Back in the early 80s nothing so grandiose was in the offing, players were pretty raw with each other at times, but there was discussion of a Code to govern the behavior of gamemasters. This issue included editorials about formulating such a thing, and also published the Canadian Diplomacy Organization's Code

as a guide. Yes, as usual, Canadians led the way in being nice even back then. And frankly just the fact that they still HAD a Diplomacy organization by 1983 proved their get-along-ness given that those fractious Americans had feuded theirs out of business long before then.

## 2022 Virtual Diplomacy League Awards

By Zachary Moore

Season's greetings! At the Virtual Diplomacy League, we believe that it's better to give (a knife to the back) than to receive, and in that sense our top 7 players have been in the holiday spirit all year long. As you faithful readers of Jolly Old Saint Kent's publication ought to know by now, this preamble is leading into the 2022 VDL awards ceremony, where we recognize the most noteworthy accomplishments of VDLers both on and off the board, and I want to make sure that the first couple of awards give some shine to VDL regulars who had truly magnificent career accomplishments during the year 2022. VDL is a community first and foremost, and I am beyond proud of these first couple of players for their success in their respective fields. Let's get it started:

### Lawyer of the Year-- Andrei Gribakov

Congrats to Mr. Harvard Law himself on a downright spectacular year of arguing and lawyering and filing motions and the like. Andrei is a brilliant person who saw tremendous success in the courtroom this year, and in my opinion is right there at the pinnacle of the profession. Lawyers are a dime a dozen in the Diplomacy hobby, but in terms of accomplishments in the legal field in 2022, I can't think of a single Diplomacy player who can hold a candle to Andrei. Congrats to you sir, this one was a no-brainer.

### Artificial Intelligence Researcher of the Year -- Markus Zijlstra

This award goes to the member of the Diplomacy Hobby who contributed the most to the field of Artificial Intelligence research, and how could I pick anybody but the great and spectacular Markus Zijlstra. When you think of advancements in AI technology in the year 2022, what comes first to your mind as a Diplomacy player? If you're anything like me, it's the brilliant human-like communication of Chat GPT, and Markus was the first person who I saw post about Chat GPT on Discord. The man known as CaptainMeme has always been prolific at researching the cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence breakthroughs in our world, and I must say

he hit a home run with this discovery. I know I've had a lot of fun using it and I'm sure you have too. There are no honorable mentions for this award, just Markus and nobody else. Thanks Meme!

Alright, enough of the serious stuff, let's get to the fun awards:



### Student of the Year -- Jaxon Roberts

Congrats to Jaxon Roberts for his success in whatever PAC-12 institution he currently attends and is no doubt thriving in! This is a beautiful moment for the Roberts family because, if you recall and you really should recall this, his father Dave Roberts was the first ever recipient of the VDL Teacher of the Year award. Like father like son, except I would actually trust Dave to support me into Belgium. Like past Students of the Year, Jaxon got off to a roaring start during the summer months and then fell off the face of the earth entirely once the academic year started. Proud of him for knowing better than to spend his Saturdays arguing with Tim Crosby over Trieste, but still disappointed that we won't get to see him on the top board. Somebody give Jaxon a scholarship or something. That'd be fun, right? Somebody set that up.

### Insomniac of the year -- Cody Greene & Mohammed A

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a draw! For the first time in the history of this illustrious award, two players have put together impeccable enough resumés that I couldn't possibly give it to one over the other. Congrats

to both Cody Greene and Mohammed A, who both joined the VDL 3 game club in 2022 by participating in 3 consecutive rounds of Virtual Diplomacy League play, for a total of 21 consecutive hours. Cody Greene accomplished this by playing in two rounds and GMing a third, while Mohammed A pulled it off in the final month of play by getting a spot in all three rounds. Legend has it that Cody was playing Blitz Diplomacy *between* rounds in an unthinkable act of endurance. Very well deserved by both of you exhausted champions.

#### **GM of the Year -- Farren Jane**

A true and genuine thanks to Farren Jane for all of her help GMing Virtual Diplomacy League games this year, in particular the Round 1 games that take place when I am fast asleep and completely unavailable if something goes awry. Farren's GMing career got off to an anticlimactic start, as several last second drops and no-shows caused the game to fall apart entirely. Undeterred, Farren went on to GM the most games of any player in 2022 and did so masterfully. Playing games during a variety of time zones is what makes VDL the global league that it is, and it simply wouldn't be possible without Farren and our other GMs stepping up to make it run. Thank you Farren!

#### **The Queen Elizabeth Award: Mikalis Kamaritis**

As its name suggests, this award goes to the loyal British subject whose play and lifestyle most perfectly exemplifies the values and character of the late queen Elizabeth. But even more than that, it goes to the British player who had the best game as England in 2022, and that is Mikalis with an 11-center board top. On the board, Mikalis exhibits the strength, charisma and tenacity of the royal family, while off the board he truly shines as a flag-bearer of royal values. Thank you, Mikalis.

#### **Michigan Or Ohio State Alumnus of the Year: Ben Kellman (Michigan)**

This might be the most coveted award of them all. Other finalists were Hal Schild, who (probably) graduated from Ohio State University but only played in one VDL game this year, and Russ Dennis who excelled on the board and lives in Michigan but never attended the University at Ann Arbor and is therefore disqualified. That leaves us with one player standing atop the mountain: Ben Kellman. Ben managed to play in 6 VDL games this season despite being an active member of the UM Alumni Association and going to several home football games that conflicted with VDL dates. This award also comes with an auto-qualification to DBN's Big Ten Championship board to be played in April.

#### **8th Place Championship Belt: Jason Bennett**

What a close call it was down the stretch! 6 points shy of 7th place and only 10 points clear of 9th, Jason Bennett scratched and clawed and let the chips fall where they may, but those chips fell unfavorably to Jason as he found himself less than a dot outside of the Top Board when the dust had cleared. Last year's winner Tom de Greef will now graciously hand off our 8th place championship belt to its new rightful owner, Jason Bennett, who will surely wear it as a badge of pride and a chip on his shoulder as we move into 2023. Congrats Jason!

#### **Teacher of the Year: Peter McNamara**

Peter McNamara joins Dave Roberts and Johnny Gillam in the VDL Teacher of the Year club, an illustrious group consisting of individuals who give their time and effort to the art of instruction. Peter teaches university math, but more importantly he teaches Brandon Fogel and Dave Maletsky why their scoring systems stink. And if you try to attack him on the board, he'll probably teach you a thing or two about how to move pieces. Thank you, Peter, for all that you do!

#### **Jason Mastbaum of the Year Award: Christian Brown**

And last but certainly not least, the famed Jason Mastbaum of the Year award goes to the VDL player who played the most games and generally sowed chaos into all of them. Christian's star burned bright at times this year, while at others it crashed down into the earth in a fiery ball of glory. Both outcomes are acceptable and even preferred for our JMOTY candidates and Mr. Brown's free-wheeling play impressed the committee game in and game out. I expect Christian to be playing on VDL top boards in future years but for now he'll settle for the next best thing, and that is this honor.

That's all! Thanks to everybody who participated in the Virtual Diplomacy League in 2022. If you're reading this and interested in giving virtual Diplomacy a shot, head on over to the Virtual World Diplomacy Community server by following this link: <https://discord.gg/A6yy33cFqm>

P.S. - The VDL championship game will be played on Saturday, January 21st and aired on the Diplomacy Broadcast Network YouTube channel that same day. In addition to the championship game, we'll also be playing a Rookie Showcase game for players who have played < 1 year of Virtual Diplomacy. If you're looking to make your debut, that's a great opportunity to do it!

# Empire City Variant: The Battle for New York

By Paul Webb

In 2018, John Surico wrote an article for *Vice Magazine* titled, "Which New York City Borough Would Win an All-Out Civil War?" He imagined a Thunderdome-style conflict between the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island and asked, who would come out on top? He compared the geography and resources of each borough and even posed his question to dozens of writers, journalists, and historians in New York. This all sounds like an excellent Diplomacy scenario and Surico's query was the inspiration for this variant.

Scouring the archives, the only New York City Diplomacy variant I found was "Mobtown II," created by Stephen Agar in 1981. Mobtown II is a six-player variant set in New York City during the prohibition-era 1920s, but the map doesn't resemble anything like the city. So, I started from scratch, which was my preference anyway. New York City, it appears, is an ideal place for a Diplomacy variant with its mix of land masses, islands, rivers, and bodies of water. Also, a five-power variant has the benefit of requiring fewer players.

I determined this five-player variant should meet two criteria: (1) the strongest power should not score more than twice as much as the weakest power, and (2) each power should not use one opening in more than half of the test games. These criteria would ensure suitable power balance and opening move variation. Meeting the first criteria is about impossible for a seven-player variant, but should be feasible for a five-power variant. I didn't have any preference on which borough should be stronger or weaker. I'm not a New Yorker, so I have no dog in this fight.

Like in previous variants published in *Diplomacy World*, I'll test this variant with Jason van Hal's Albert (v 6.0.1). In their 2020 paper, "Learning to Play No-Press Diplomacy with Best Response Policy Iteration," DeepMind declares Albert as the "the strongest rule-based Diplomacy AI." However, in the past three years, DeepMind and Meta have developed more advanced Diplomacy AI, based on reinforcement learning (RL), that is superior to earlier rule-based bots like Albert. (Diplomacy has been a challenge for AI designers because the game is one player versus six players and each turn has more than  $10^{20}$  possible actions.) I look

forward to using these newer RL bots when compatible servers become available, but I'm satisfied with Albert's competence for now – my opinion formed by how Albert handled Standard Diplomacy during previous trials.

Once again, I'll perform these tests with no-press games. Diplomacy is a game normally conducted face-to-face with negotiations, but I contend there is direct correlation between both formats. If the variant works well under no-press conditions, it will perform even better with full diplomacy, as diplomacy further flattens, or evens out, performance ratings for each power.

I experimented with 93 different versions of the Empire City variant, "Empire City" a nickname coined by George Washington for the city. Finding power balance during these proceedings is trying. When you make a correction, the game wildly swings another way. Of the 93 versions, only two met the power balance criteria mentioned above. During playtesting, I tinkered with neutral supply centers in Governors Island, Highland Park, LaGuardia Airport, Rikers Island, and Roosevelt Island, but these centers did not make the final cut.

Empire City begins in Spring 2001 and each borough starts with two armies and a fleet. There are 53 total spaces, of which 24 are supply centers, for a space/center ratio of 2.21 (same as Standard). Unlike Standard Diplomacy, this variant features several bridges and tunnels (both function identically), which are prominent in New York City's landscape. Armies can use bridges and tunnels, but fleets cannot. For example, an army can move directly between Flushing and Parkchester, but a fleet cannot. Note that two tunnels, Lincoln Tunnel and Holland Tunnel, connect Jersey City to Midtown. The map features another oddity: Rockaways (Roc) in Queens is the same space in two locations, with two coasts. So, a fleet in Lower Bay can support the movement of an army from Jamaica to Rockaways: F(Low) s A(Jam) - Roc. Also, Nassau County (Nas) has three coasts: north coast (nc), south coast (sc), and west coast (wc).

Albert played 500 no-press games of the final version, as all five powers, with the following results:

	Solo	2-Way	3-Way	4-Way
<b>Bronx</b>	83	0	9	3
<b>Brooklyn</b>	104	0	9	5
<b>Manhattan</b>	99	0	3	4
<b>Queens</b>	113	1	3	3
<b>Staten Island</b>	84	1	9	5

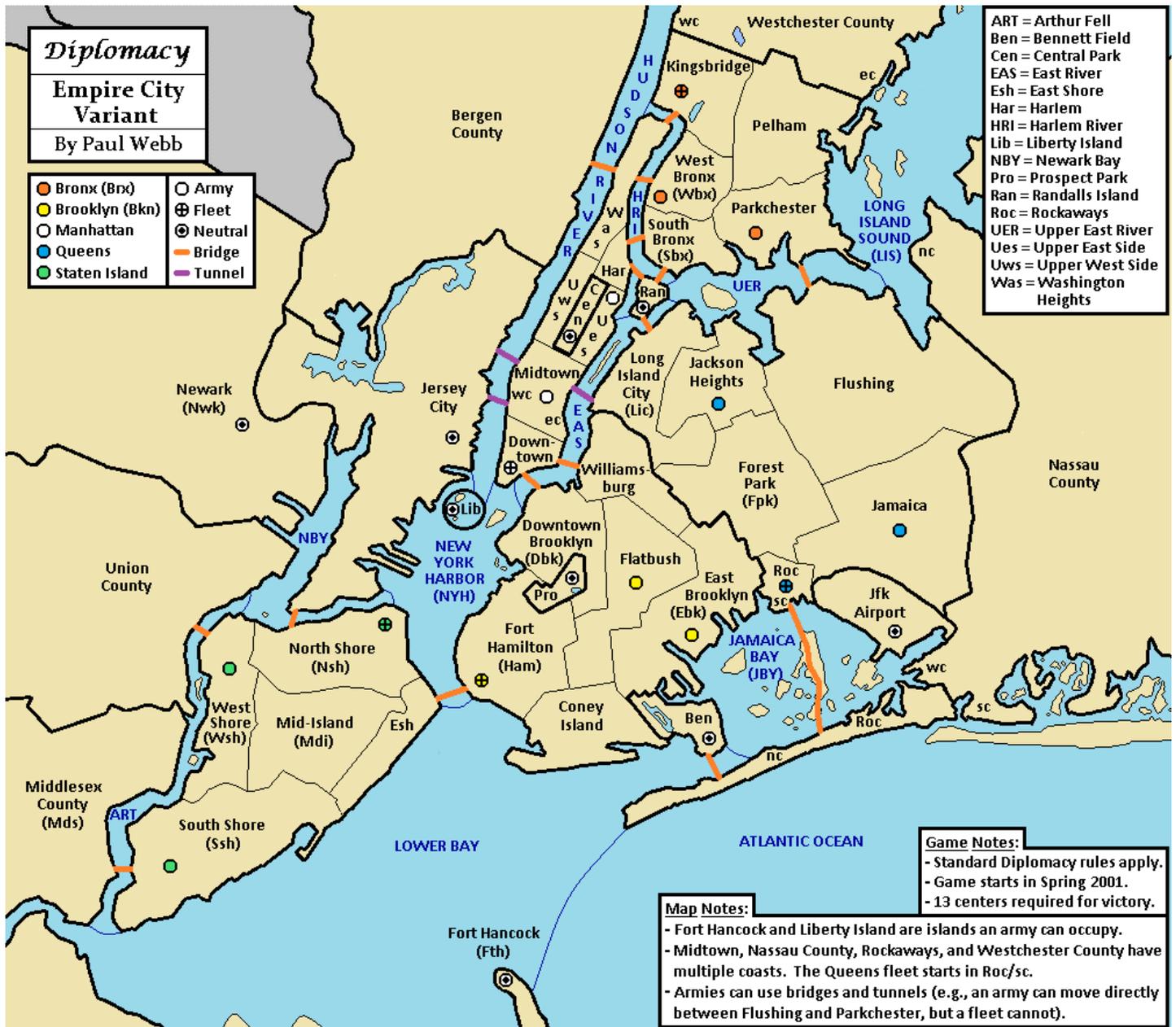
# Diplomacy

## Empire City Variant

By Paul Webb

- Bronx (Brx)
- Brooklyn (Bkn)
- Manhattan
- Queens
- Staten Island
- ⊕ Army
- ⊕ Fleet
- ⊕ Neutral
- Bridge
- Tunnel

- ART = Arthur Fell
- Ben = Bennett Field
- Cen = Central Park
- EAS = East River
- Esh = East Shore
- Har = Harlem
- HRI = Harlem River
- Lib = Liberty Island
- NBY = Newark Bay
- Pro = Prospect Park
- Ran = Randalls Island
- Roc = Rockaways
- UER = Upper East River
- Ues = Upper East Side
- Uws = Upper West Side
- Was = Washington Heights



- Game Notes:**
- Standard Diplomacy rules apply.
  - Game starts in Spring 2001.
  - 13 centers required for victory.

- Map Notes:**
- Fort Hancock and Liberty Island are islands an army can occupy.
  - Midtown, Nassau County, Rockaways, and Westchester County have multiple coasts. The Queens fleet starts in Roc/sc.
  - Armies can use bridges and tunnels (e.g., an army can move directly between Flushing and Parkchester, but a fleet cannot).

In these 500 test games, there were no 5-way draws. In fact, the map results were mostly decisive. Only 17 of 500 games resulted in draws (3.4 percent). To convert these results to a points system, a power receives 12

points for a solo win, 6 points for participation in a 2-way draw, 4 points for a 3-way draw, and 3 points for a 4-way draw:

	Points	Average
<b>Queens</b>	1383	2.77
<b>Brooklyn</b>	1299	2.60
<b>Manhattan</b>	1212	2.42
<b>Staten Island</b>	1065	2.13
<b>Bronx</b>	1041	2.08

Queens, the strongest power, scores 1.33 times the Bronx – meeting the first criteria I described above. This variant also meets the second criteria. Below is the

most-played opening by Albert for each power, to include the total number of unique openings for each power:

	<b>Most Common Opening</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Bronx</b>	F(Kin) - HRI, A(Par) - Flu, A(Wbx) - Sbx	87/500	17.4	12
<b>Brooklyn</b>	A(Fla) - Ebk, A(Ebk) - Ben, F(Ham) - LOW	237/500	47.4	16
<b>Manhattan</b>	F(Dow) - HUD, A(Ues) - Cen, A(Mid) - Jer	160/500	32.0	9
<b>Queens</b>	A(Jam) - Roc, A(Jac) - Lic, F(Roc/sc) - Jfk	193/500	38.6	15
<b>Staten Island</b>	F(Nsh) - NYH, A(Ssh) - Wsh, A(Wsh) - Uni	119/500	23.8	12

One interesting result was that the median end-date of the 500 test games was year 2021. When I ran 500 test games with Albert playing Standard, the median end date was year 1921. Though Empire City has 10 less supply centers than Standard (24 vs. 34), the length of games is about the same as Standard. My explanation for this is that the Empire City map lacks stalemate lines and the powers continue playing longer until a solo win.

**Bronx:**

“Bronx wins. The rest of us starve in just weeks as they cut off the food chain, and also blow up the system bringing water down.”  
 –Harry Siegel, senior editor of the Daily Beast and *Daily News* columnist

In his article, Surico highlights that the Bronx is best situated to expose New York’s fragile ecosystem. The borough controls much of the food distribution and all aqueducts to the city. Diplomacy doesn’t account for factors like food and water supply, but the Bronx does benefit from its edge position on the board. Bronx players generally have to make an immediate decision: attack Manhattan or Queens. Manhattan is the Bronx’s natural enemy and tensions run high between the two boroughs, though an alliance is surely playable. On the negative side, the Bronx lacks access to neutral supply centers in its immediate area. There are only two neutral supply centers within two spaces of a Bronx home center (Randalls Island and Liberty Island). A key question for the Bronx in the opening is whether to send its fleet in Kingsbridge to the Hudson River or Harlem River.

**Brooklyn:**

“I want to say Brooklyn, but we already lost a war.”  
 –Daniel Radosh, senior writer for *The Daily Show*

The Battle of Brooklyn in 1776 was the first and largest battle of the Revolutionary War. Washington lost 20 percent of his army in the fighting and afterwards, the British maintained control of New York City for the remainder of the war. The revolution almost ended as soon as it began, but the Americans were able to retreat to Manhattan and continue the cause. In this game, Brooklyn is a central power and probably has the most influence on the board. Brooklyn profits from its proximity to neutral supply centers. Six neutral supply centers are within two spaces of a Brooklyn home center, more than

any other borough. The main problem for Brooklyn is how to resolve the Queens question, its neighbor on Long Island. In the opening, Brooklyn must weigh risk and decide to make a dash for Prospect Park from Flatbush, or postpone this action.

**Manhattan:**

“I’ve given this a lot of thought in the last 30 seconds, so here you go: Manhattan would be the first to go. It’s indefensible, would suffer attacks from all sides.”  
 –Janos Martin, former lead organizer of the Close Rikers campaign

Manhattan, despite all its wealth and power, is in a precarious centralized position for the battle of New York. Scurio highlights the “four-front war” Manhattan has to contend with. This variant is no different. Manhattan can indeed see attacks on all its sides and in face-to-face play, Manhattan requires the most diplomatic skill. It’s vital that Manhattan doesn’t get caught in a Bronx-Staten Island pincer. But overall, Manhattan doesn’t fare too badly, settling for third, in the middle of the pack. In Spring 2001, Albert orders the Midtown army to Jersey City 98 percent of the time, but the Downtown fleet and the Upper East Side army have several options.

**Queens:**

“Their enormity – Queens is 108 square miles and Brooklyn is 69 square miles – only encourages further in-fighting along their long-shared border.”  
 –John Surico

A major opening and middlegame theme of Empire City is the struggle between Kings and Queens counties for Long Island supremacy. Surico predicts that Brooklyn and Queens “will be locked into combat with each other from the get-go.” In Empire City, this brawl is intensified by home centers that border each other (East Brooklyn and Rockaways). One reason Queens is the strongest power is that it has the upper hand against Brooklyn – facing less harassment than Brooklyn from the other boroughs. Another reason is that Queens can build fleets on both sides of the board, like Russia in Standard. Supply centers are arranged on this map so that all alliances are possible, but the Queens-Brooklyn alliance is probably the most difficult. If Brooklyn makes peace with Queens and moves units to the north and west, the King is vulnerable to a Queen stab in its rear

area. In the opening, Queens can choose an all-out attack on East Brooklyn by ordering A(Jam) - Roc, A(Jac) - Fpk, F(Roc/sc) – JBY, though Brooklyn has defensive moves to prevent this.

**Staten Island:**

“Obviously, Staten Island...All the other boroughs are so close to one another that they would have to protect many borders at once. Let the other boroughs destroy themselves first, then attack!”

–Augustin Pasquet, co-founder of Untapped Cities

Staten Island, New York’s “forgotten borough,” benefits in this game from relative isolation to the other boroughs. Scurio mentions that Staten Island’s distant location offers its own barrier and “there are a lot of New Yorkers who have never stepped foot onto the island.” Scurio also comments that despite Staten Island’s small population, as the conservative bastion of the great city,

it has the highest concentration of privately-owned firearms in New York. Staten Island, of the powers, enjoyed the highest survival rate during testing: Staten Island 82%, Queens 66%, Manhattan 63%, Brooklyn 61%, Bronx 52%. Early in the game, the Staten Island player has to decide to attack Manhattan or Brooklyn. Incidentally, the British in 1776 launched their attack on Brooklyn from Staten Island. In the opening phase, the critical move is the North Shore fleet. An order to Newark Bay aims toward New Jersey (sometimes known as New York’s “sixth borough”), or the fleet can sail to New York Harbor, a critical sea space.

In his New York apocalypse, Surico picked the Bronx as the winner – considering its hilly terrain, significant population, and control of the water supply. In this variant, Queens, not Bronx, is the strongest power, but really, all boroughs are playable and have winning chances. And Brooklyn fares better than in 1776!

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## New Nation Diplomacy (rs58)

by Stephen Agar

1. All the usual rules of Diplomacy apply save where noted below.
2. Although there are seven players in this game, at the beginning no home centers are allocated to any player.
3. Initial construction of the Great Powers is as follows:
  - a. Each player submits a list of ten bids for their preferred home supply centers in order of preference. These can be ANY center on the regular board. The orders should be numbered, 1, 2, 3 etc. E.g., a player could submit: (1) Ven, (2) Mar, (3) Spa, (4) Nap, 5(Tri), 6(Gre), 7(Bre), 8(Lpl), 9(Tun), 10(Kie).
  - b. The GM allocates home centers to the players based on the preference lists. First the GM looks at the 1<sup>st</sup> preferences and allocates any centers only requested by a single player. If there was more than one bid for a home center, then neither player’s bid is successful and that center becomes a neutral (and can no longer be allocated).
  - c. The GM then considers the 2<sup>nd</sup> preferences and repeats the process. Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> preferences, 4<sup>th</sup> preferences etc. until every player has been allocated three home centers. Any center which is bid for by two or more players in the same position in their preference list similarly becomes a neutral. No player starts with 4 centers, unlike Russia in the regular game.
4. All supply centers that are not allocated by this process also become neutrals.
5. Players then submit their initial builds on their home centers as a “1900” move prior to the start of the game.
6. Each player must choose a new national identity for themselves – preferably relevant and/or amusing.
7. The game then proceeds as usual. Builds can only be made on the original home centers as chosen above.

# DIPLOMACY CASCADIA OPEN

## WHEN

**February 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>  
2023**

## WHERE

**Holiday Inn Express**

15808 104 Ave. Surrey, BC, Canada

## REGISTRATION

**<https://forms.gle/wY2cpgUfood7ALhdA>**



## COST

\$30 dollars CDN

Paypal to

[Cascadia.Open@gmail.com](mailto:Cascadia.Open@gmail.com)

## SCORING

ManorCon

## TD

Chris Brand

Ask him questions @

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

## PRIZES

7 "best countries" and

Overall winner

## BOARDS

Round 1: 9am on Sat 4<sup>th</sup>

Round 2: 5pm on Sat 4<sup>th</sup>

Round 3: 8:30am on Sun 5<sup>th</sup>

## 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>

Cascadia Open – February 4<sup>th</sup> – February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Vancouver, Canada - [Cascadia.open@gmail.com](mailto:Cascadia.open@gmail.com) or register at <https://forms.gle/wY2cpgUfood7ALhdA>

TotalCon – February 23<sup>rd</sup> – February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Marlborough, Massachusetts - <http://www.totalcon.com/>

San Marino Diplomacy Event – May 5<sup>th</sup> – May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – San Marino. Email: [lucapazzaglia@alice.it](mailto:lucapazzaglia@alice.it)

DixieCon 37 / DipCon 52 – May 26<sup>th</sup> – May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Chapel Hill, North Carolina - <https://www.dixiecon.com/>

World Dipcon – August 17<sup>th</sup> – August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Bangkok, Thailand – Check <http://www.wdcbangkok.com> (coming soon) or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/wdc2023>

Liberty Cup – October 6<sup>th</sup> – October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - <https://liberty-cup.com/2022-liberty-cup/>

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## Coming Back Again, Again – A Bit of a Rant

by Stephen Agar

Hobbies can ebb and flow. However, engrossing they may be, they often chime with a period in your life when you have the time and space to do whatever it is you are doing – train spotting, matchbox collecting, photographing the manholes of the UK, playing games and/or editing a zine (sport, music, games etc.) – whatever. That sort of thing. And then your life moves on and something else comes along to fill in your available spare time and the hobby fades away. It has always been thus.

I discovered postal Diplomacy in 1976. I started a zine in 1977. After I folded it in 1979, I missed the editing bug so much I started another one. And another after that. Then the usual happened – university and girls. The hobby was out of my life almost overnight, sometime around the beginning of 1980.

Twelve years later, I had a career, a house, a fiancée and everything was very stable. I had spare time. And I rediscovered Diplomacy. Soon I was editing a new zine, trading with 30+ other zines, GMing loads of games, writing articles and inventing variants. Bliss. I'd rediscovered something I really enjoyed and there was an even bigger postal community to interact with and bounce off. That was the 90s. The postal hobby was probably at its peak, there were lots of zines, well-attended national cons, national championships, a real sense of community. I spent a lot of time building the most complete UK Zine Archive I could, combining the existing archive with UK zines from the USA and all my trades. By the end of the 90s I had folded my zine, re-

started my zine, folded again, started another one (or two) etc. etc. But things were changing. CompuServe, rec.games.diplomacy, The Diplomatic Pouch and the beginnings of the move from postal to Internet. I was a part of it for a while, distributing some of my zines online, creating Diplomacy websites etc. until around 2003. And as I said before, then your life moves on and something else comes along to fill in your available spare time and the hobby fades away. It has always been thus.

And maybe that would have been it. By now it was 2022. I was substantially retired, my job a COVID casualty. But I still had all those Diplomacy zines. What to do with them? I talked to the British Library, who were quite encouraging, but the length of time it takes for them to decide is measured not in years but in eras. I read a few of the zines. I had a look at my old websites – they still existed but were in the main non-functional. I knew that Doug Kent was still bravely editing Diplomacy World and I also knew a small number of UK zines survived. So, I googled Diplomacy to find out what the hobby was really like today. And boy had it changed.

It is a function of getting old that you believe that many things used to be better than they are now. Take contemporary popular music for example. Don't get me started on rap music, the dominance of synthesizers and auto-tuned vocals. Shudder. Surely pop music used to be better than this? The 1960s were of course excellent and every successive decade has been a little worse than the previous one until we reach the nadir of today. Just as (for me) the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the peak of

classical music and every successive century has been a little bit worse as well. Progress is not always a good thing.

In the past 20 years or so when I have not been actively involved in the Diplomacy hobby it has also changed a lot. Just as young people now don't really listen to albums anymore, preferring to stream the odd track rather than invest the time in listening to an album, so today's Diplomacy players play their games via a server, where the players themselves use invented usernames (so you don't know who you are playing against), and all you get is a computer adjudication every day or so.

There is no context anymore. The pure function of playing the game is there, but the community is not. It is like as if over 20 years every zine has gone online and become a warehouse zine. Except now you don't even have to put up with the inconvenience of seeing the reports of games that you are not playing in.

International tournaments have to an extent prospered, but similarly they have gone online. Sites such as the Diplomatic Pouch and Diplomacy 2000 have fallen by the wayside. The odd institution exists, such as the excellent Diplomacy Briefing weekly newsletter, but at best it is a sort of Hobby News rather than an interactive community. Only Diplomacy World is still going (well done Doug).

Am I alone in thinking that the baby has been thrown out with the bath water? The Internet created an efficient, reasonably cheap means for written communication which could have been the ideal home for the old postal Diplomacy hobby. There could have been more zines, not fewer. The community could have become richer, there could have been a greater exchange of views and it could have become more diverse. But the opposite is true. Social media has killed the zines, the sort of people who would once have been editors are now posting blogs or are on Instagram, YouTube etc. The GMs have been replaced by servers, which have meant that every game can have its own deadline. And the hobby it has gone anonymous – who the hell is “vampirejoe262”? Anonymous games used to be called variants!

Sure, you can join a dedicated Discord server, where a dozen or so fans can discuss the development of version 2.7b of a new variant, but only that dozen or so will ever get to see it. Don't get me wrong, I have always loved Diplomacy variants – but some of them were created for the fun of it, for the pleasure of drawing a map, or sharing a novel idea. They weren't always intended to be perfectly balanced games and indeed most of them were never played at all. Nowadays, finding players is not the problem - for example the vDiplomacy website has already hosted 117 games of Aberration, whereas in the 90s I never managed to get a single waiting list filled! But I don't get the sense that all those players are part of an interactive community, they are active in their games

and that is it (and if they want to drop out, they can always create a new username). Whereas zine editors used to trade and share news and ideas from other zines, no one or thing can fulfil that function anymore. The Diplomacy hobby is divided into a myriad of micro-communities talking to themselves, but largely not talking to each other.

Fun and creativity seem in short supply to me, because for me it was never just about playing Diplomacy. It was about getting to know people and interacting with them as individuals on a broad set of topics. In a sense it was about making friends. And talking about friends, so many of the people I knew and regularly corresponded with are now gone. The likes of Richard Sharp, Richard Walkerdine, John Piggott, Tom Tweedy, Fred Davis, Jim Burgess, Larry Peery and others too numerous to mention.

So that is the Diplomacy hobby I have rediscovered in 2022 and I am not sure it is still for me. I have enjoyed sorting out my old Diplomacy websites – all under [www.diplomacyzines.co.uk](http://www.diplomacyzines.co.uk). There you can find the Variant Bank, a growing archive of UK Diplomacy Zines and lots of articles on various aspects of the game. Maybe I will content myself with curating the UK Zine Archive, so at least it will always exist out there somewhere when I am dead and buried (in case the British Library never actually do make their minds up).

But what I yearn to do is find a way, albeit on a small scale, to recreate some of what I feel has been lost. A way to find and debate with friends, while running the odd game of Diplomacy and a variant or two, where you know who you are playing against, and the deadline isn't always 24hrs away. In short, I would like to publish a zine again. But for that to be in any way sustainable you need to have at least seven people willing to play a game and a continuous trickle of new people to keep it refreshed – and that seems to be an issue for many of the zines which do still survive, if they are not to face the slow death of ever-decreasing circulations and a smaller and smaller pool of players. It would be great to find a way to connect with some of those new players out there, but I am not sure it is possible. These days, does anyone even want to be part of something which only comes out once a month? In the good old days if you wanted to start a zine, you asked another zine to send out a flyer for you. Or you relied on the flyer in the Diplomacy box to find new subbers for you. Or you advertised in likely places. The hobby now is so big, but so fragmented, that where on earth would you begin?

So maybe I'll give up. User forums are not for me. It would be great to publish a small Diplomacy zine and be part of a community again – but maybe the world has moved on and I'll have to accept I am an old analogue LP in a world of streaming mp3s.

# Repping the Locals – My Weasel Moot 2022 Experience

By Chris Kelly

In **Diplomacy World** #159 last fall, Randy Lawrence-Hurt, Jonathan Dingess, and Eber Condrell each wrote summaries of their experiences at the Weasel Moot tournament in late September. I was there, too, but I won't give you travelogues like Randy or Jonathan did, since I was there representing the local hobby -- I took a taxi/Lyft or walked to or from the venue each day.

Aside from the pleasure of playing in a face-to-face Diplomacy tournament for the first time since an annoying plague descended on all of our lives, I greatly looked forward to meeting and competing with the luminaries of the virtual hobby that arose during the pandemic. Although we didn't wind up on a board together, Ed Sullivan was the first person I encountered upon arriving, and over the weekend it was great to play sitting literally alongside such rising stars as Seren Kwok and Karthik Konath... even if both of them stabbed me. (We'll get to that later.)

## Round 1 -

As it happens, Randy, Jonathan, and Eber were all in this game with me, although only Randy wrote about it (and he focused mainly on his dealings with his immediate neighbors as Austria).

For my part as France, the round began awkwardly, as England (Dave Maletsky) immediately told me that he wanted a bounce in the English Channel in spring 1901. This was due to a misunderstanding that might be unique to face-to-face Diplomacy: he had seen me talking with Eber (Germany) and Jonathan (Russia) after the board assignments were announced, and feared we were planning his swift demise. (In fact, we were rehashing a past virtual game where Eber and I had been the same powers.)

Even worse, seeing England and France in conflict -- and probably tempted by my build of two fleets in winter 1901 -- Eber struck a tentative alliance with Russia in the north and moved from Munich into a vacant Burgundy.

During the subsequent negotiations, I happened to stroll past Andrei Gribakov (Italy) and Randy (Austria) sitting together at the board, plotting out tactics. Noting the Italian army in Bohemia, I not-so-casually told them I wouldn't be opposed if it went to Munich. Fortunately, they agreed, and its successful attack rescued me, completely changing the course of the game. Germany was forced to disband an army and withdraw from France; returning the favor from when Eber sensed my weakness, I pursued the retreating forces and would eventually own all of the German home centers.

Meanwhile, as Randy wrote, he was having substantial success against both Russia and Turkey. Apparently unwilling to watch passively and become a permanent junior partner in their alliance, Andrei stabbed Randy for Vienna in fall 1904. Frustrated at a likely victory being snatched away, Austria threw in the towel two years later, walking out of all its centers.

The ITA-AUS fight resuscitated both Russia and Turkey. At the same time in the north, Russia, England, and Germany decided to stop fighting each other and combine forces to resist further French advances. I abandoned my half-hearted attacks on the English homeland, but luckily drove a wedge into the unsteady partnership by continuing to wear down Germany. To avoid an individual loss of supply centers as I attacked Kiel and Berlin in 1906, Eber took Sweden from England. That self-interested choice turned out to be a deal-breaker for Dave in England, who sent all of his remaining units east (i.e., away from me) to help Russia eliminate Germany in 1907.

That left me atop the board with 10 centers, vulnerable to being pushed back by Italy (just behind with 9 centers) if he partnered with Russia... but that would mean sharing the spoils in the north, and having a resurgent Turkey (up to 6 centers) with nowhere to grow except through Italian-held territory. So, a draw was agreed to, and all of the remaining players retired to an excellent nearby restaurant I recommended to kibitz good-naturedly and rehash the decisions we made all game long.

## Round 2 -

Two rounds of face-to-face Diplomacy in a single day can be draining for all involved, and after a few years of inactivity I was no exception, even though I played in the earliest-ending game of the first round and should have had some adrenaline from being near the top of the standings.

This game featured relatively unfamiliar/inexperienced players in England, France, and Russia, with longtime Diplomacy legend Edi Birsan in Turkey, aforementioned rising star Seren Kwok in Austria, and fellow Chicago weasel Kevin O'Kelly and myself in Germany and Italy, respectively.

I can't say whether Seren was thinking about my place in the standings, but looking at the moves in retrospect she clearly banked on an AUS/RUS alliance from the start, and persuaded Russia (Caius Danley) to come along for

the ride. I didn't grasp this at the time -- I'm philosophically inclined as Italy to ally with Austria at the start in any event, and I knew Seren was an excellent player who would be good to develop a positive relationship with.

And so, it wound up that, to paraphrase Doug Moore, I joined an A/I/R alliance that was actually just an A/R, but I didn't know it yet. I found out after Jonathan Dingess (remember him?) as France sailed into the Mediterranean in force in 1902. In spring 1903, I rebuffed his attempts decently, forcing him to disband the army he'd convoyed to Tuscany. But in the fall, Austria supported him into Venice, causing me to remove two units (I'd already ceded Trieste back to Seren) and essentially ending my role as a significant competitor in the game.

With no remaining goal except to enjoy what was left of my probably short existence, I disbanded my armies and kept three fleets, hoping to slip one out into the Mid-Atlantic if possible as a rogue unit. And since I wasn't much in demand for negotiations, I got into the habit of writing out my moves very early, then holding on to my notebook for several minutes until they were due to be turned in. This worked fine until fall 1905, when I decided my game was sufficiently over that I could slip downstairs to buy a drink for myself and Kevin O'Kelly. When I came back with the drinks, I casually tossed my notebook into the box -- then realized too late that I hadn't written down any moves.

Seren, who had written orders supporting me back into Rome, gasped audibly in exasperation and disbelief. She wrote for Diplomacy Briefing that she then told Caius she wanted to draw, and in fact one was agreed to before the next turn.

She also suggested that her decision to stab me may have been premature, and though I'm clearly biased, I'll agree with her. If Seren's ultimate goal, per the Briefing piece, was to "evict France from the south," gifting him Venice (and in effect Rome, after I disbanded my armies) and moving Austrian units away from the front to guard against potential Italian revenge seems like a sub-optimal way to start.

If she had left me intact instead, I'd have been fully capable of taking the battle to France, especially since Jonathan chose to pull a couple of fleets north to attack England on the same fateful turn where I was stabbed. (Granted, he may have only done that because his new Austrian friend had promised to help him into Venice.) Then I would have been sufficiently extended that Seren could have taken centers from me later in the event she didn't get her fill from Russia, Turkey, and even Germany.

But then, making decisions in the heat of the moment we might regret later is an inescapable feature of Diplomacy.

### Round 3 -

I was once again in the same neighborhood as several notable players -- I was Austria this time, with Karthik Konath in Turkey, Zachary Moore in Italy, and Christian Brown in Russia. (Edi Birsan wasn't far away, in Germany.) After being eliminated in the first round, a 13-center board top in the second had put Karthik in third place in the current Weasel Moot standings.

The first words Zach said to me in the initial negotiations were, "*Karthik wants to win the tournament, so he's going for a big score.*" I already had figured this to be the case. Even though I was in fourth place myself, only one point behind Karthik, I had no such ambitions. My hope was at best to slip into third (the top-3 plaques looked nice!), and at worst to hold on in the top seven.

So, I didn't particularly want to sabotage Karthik's chances of winning Moot, but for purely pragmatic reasons, if I could work out partnerships with Italy and Russia, Turkey would be the inevitable first victim. And that's how things seemed they might develop in spring 1901: Christian and I succeeded in both staying out of Galicia, and Zach verbally accepted a swap in the fall of Trieste for moving to Aegean or Eastern Mediterranean.

In the west, Grant Smith (England) and Maxim Popov (France) decided to ally from the start, and pitched both Zach and myself about ganging up to eliminate Edi Birsan immediately. I declined, although Zach agreed to go to Tyrolia and decide what to do from there.

What Zach decided to do was with his army in Tyrolia was to take Trieste from me, while also going to Tunis instead of living up to his part of the deal we'd made. And Christian seized Rumania with an army rather than F Sevastopol, as I'd hoped (and supported). Instead of allying with Christian and Zach against Karthik, they'd both chosen to work with him against me. (Turkey demonstrated what it had likely promised Italy for its loyalty by building an army in Smyrna, rather than the usual fleet.)

Having no friends, but merely a choice of who to punish/defend against, I went to Karthik to seek his cooperation as well. The result was a masterful Diplomacy moment on his part: I evicted the Italian army from Trieste, letting Turkey know I would attack from Serbia so it could fill in from behind with its army in Bulgaria... which was supported by both Italy \*and\* Russia. In a twist on the old parable, we were all frogs competing for the prize of giving the scorpion a ride.

The two years that followed in the east were a confused tangle of shifting alliances and deceit. In spring 1903, Christian persuaded me to join in an attack that let me recapture Serbia. But Russia's stockpile of southern armies (it had already ceded St. Petersburg to England) made me realize it had no realistic way to grow except through Austrian centers, so I re-allied with Turkey. In spring 1904, I supported Karthik into Rumania, and he was kind enough to let me walk into Bulgaria behind him... except that Zach was greedy enough to walk into Greece behind me.

(When someone at the board asked if Italy taking Greece was agreed to, I tersely replied, "*Zach amended the deal,*" to which Zach chimed in that he would "*submit the amendment for ratification*" during the upcoming negotiations. Even as the one who was stabbed, I had to laugh.)

In fall 1904, several minutes into the negotiation period, Karthik came to me confidently and said, "*I know what everyone's doing*" and recommended tactics to me... but Christian apparently (and understandably, based on their history in this game) misled Karthik about his intentions, enabling him to retake Rumania even as Turkey captured Sevastopol and I forced my way into Galicia. Notably, Turkey's army in Rumania could have retreated to Budapest, but Karthik opted to disband it instead, enabling him to replace it with a fleet in Smyrna.

Even as Karthik, Zach, and I were fumbling our way to a semi-functional A/I/T alliance and whittling down Russia, though, the duo of England and France was overcoming its own brief hiccups and advancing toward us. In particular, Zach as Italy was outguessed on multiple occasions, and I blundered by trying to support his army in Munich in fall 1906 when it was doomed to fail, but I could have used the unit to capture Warsaw instead. Meanwhile, Karthik went out of his way to demonstrate his good faith as an ally in 1905/06 by \*twice\* having an army in Constantinople pass through Bulgaria (which I owned) on its way to Rumania.

As late as spring 1907, the A/I/T continued to work together, but in the fall, Karthik decided it was time to make his move, and he stabbed me for both Bulgaria and Budapest -- reaping the benefit of his patience and trust-building in earlier years, just as I was loyally moving my armies to the stalemate line in Tyrolia/Bohemia/Silesia (and away from my home centers) to fend off the E/F tandem. Taking both Moscow and Greece as well, Turkey jumped in 1907 from 5 supply centers to 9, just behind England (which had 10).

Based on Zach's remark as the round started, I was fully aware that this would probably be the end result once I began working with Karthik, but since neither Christian nor Zach were willing to ally with me, I had no choice. And since their non-friendship in 1901 had me expecting to be eliminated within the next few turns, I almost felt like I was playing with house money after a while.

Karthik's stab happened in the knowledge that the game would end at a randomly determined time within the next hour or so. Unfortunately for him, the closing bell sounded sooner than he expected, during the fall 1908 negotiations. Grant Smith in England had been more proactive in his planning, both solidifying his defensive lines in the far north and stealing centers from his perhaps overly trusting (or submissive) French ally. Had 1908 been completed, Turkey might have gotten up to 10 or even 11 centers, but England had a solid hold on 12.

#### **Conclusion -**

Because of the early end to the final game, I was in fact able to hold on to a top-7 tournament finish, largely on the strength of my board top in the first round. Had the last round gone any longer, Grant Smith quite likely would have passed me, and perhaps other players would have as well. But as it was, I symbolically landed a spot on the (nonexistent) final board, and also finished higher than any other Chicago participant. I'll take it.

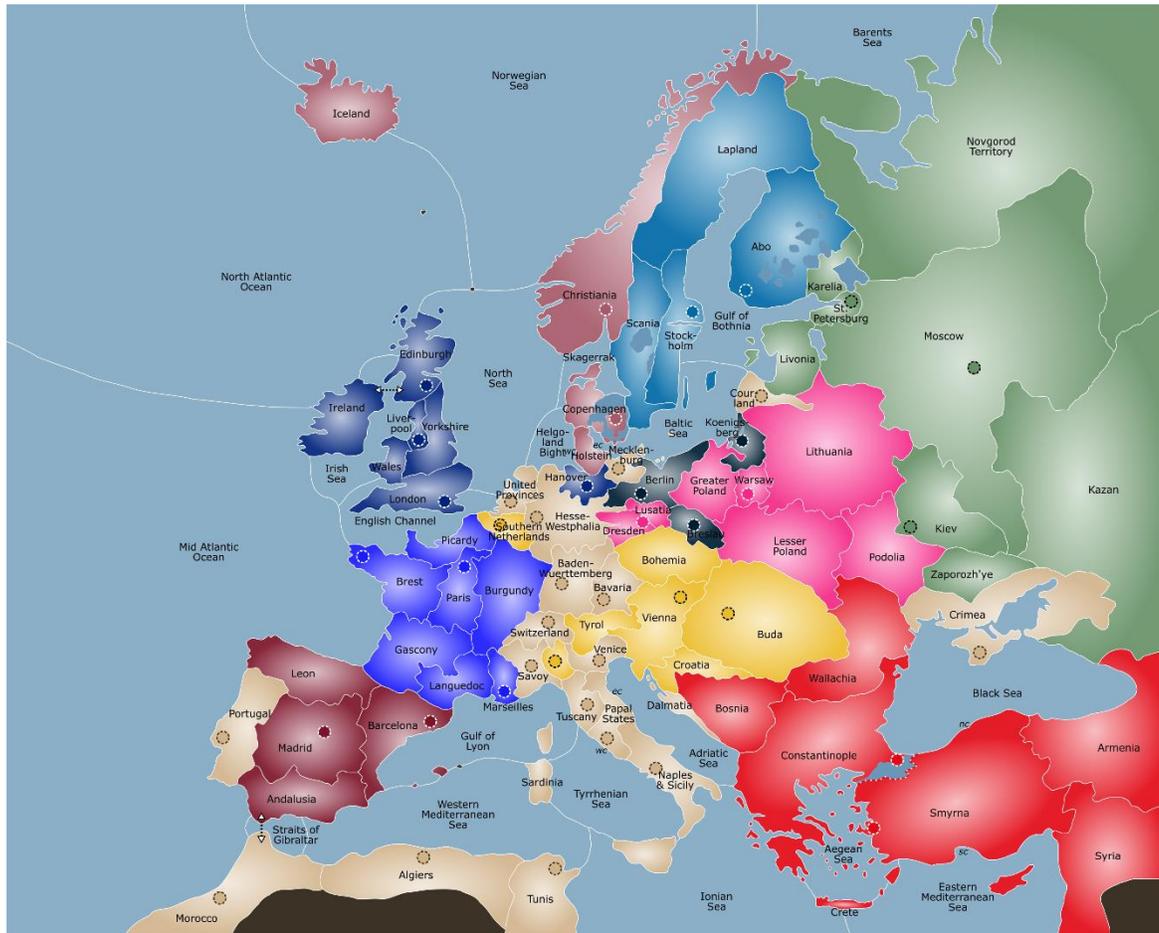
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## **(Re)Introducing Ambition & Empire**

by B.M. Powell

The year that just ended marked 22 years since Jeff Kase and I first introduced the **Ambition & Empire (A&E)** variant to the **Diplomacy** hobby. I suspect there are people reading this article that played **A&E** once or twice. The variant at one time had a small, but active following. I am sure even more of you have stumbled across **A&E** while skimming through old 'zine articles or letters to the editor, or browsing various forums that focus on variants. For those who have seen only the map, but have not played or read the rules, I can

imagine that **A&E** looked like the most hopelessly unbalanced variant ever created. Two thirds of the neutral supply centers (SCs) are clumped in the middle of the game-map and two SC positions go toe-to-toe with neighbors that start with three or even four SCs. Why even bother signing up for a game where you might get stuck with a dog position (we are looking squarely at you Poland-Lithuania & Saxony) and suffer elimination before mid-game?



## Ambition & Empire

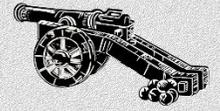
In the Year of Our Lord

1763

## Game Start

An Accurate Accounting of Supply Centres Controlled by the Great Powers of Europe & the Mediterranean:

Great Britain & Hanover		4
Denmark-Norway		2
France		3
Habsburg Empire (Austria)		4
Ottoman Empire (Turkey)		2
Prussia		3
Poland-Lithuania & Saxony		2
Russia		3
Spain		2
Sweden		2



Version 6.01

Original Variant Design by Jeffrey S. Kase & B.M. Powell  
2022 Rules & Map Update by W. Alex Ronke  
Jeffrey S. Kase, & B.M. Powell

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Ah, but that is what I am about to tell you. The situation is not necessarily as it might first appear. Before I get to that, though, I want to go over key points from the variant's history so that all readers are on roughly the same page.

### VARIANT DESIGN PHILOSOPHY.

Jeff and I were not sure what we were going to create when we started the design process. What we did know is that we wanted a Europe-based variant that had at least seven players and preferably more. We also wanted to base our variant on the historical realities of the scenario we chose without sacrificing "play balance," which we defined as each player having a reasonable expectation that good play on their part could lead to success in a game.

The mention of "historical realities" deserves a comment. I do not believe anyone will argue that classic *Diplomacy* only gives a cursory nod to history, yet we all agree that it is a wonderful game. No one is overly bothered by the fact that Italy and Turkey begin the game just as strong as Germany when, in fact, neither had armed forces that could compare to the military colossus that was the Second Reich. The *Diplomacy*

map does not accurately capture Europe in 1901, and the internal boundaries of the seven Great Powers are complete abstractions. So what? The map works fine. I sense that *Diplomacy's* success has led many players to believe that "history" has no place in the game. To this day, I recall a statement Steve Rennie made in Issue 80 of *Diplomacy World* ["New Improved Diplomacy?" by Stephen Agar, pp 13-17] when commenting on a variant design: "I should say that in considering options I think history matters not a jot, the game is all."

I want to say up front that I do believe history has a place in the Hobby. If this were not true, why is it that variants depicting historical scenarios are significantly more popular than their fiction-based or abstract counterparts? I believe it is because history provides us with countless scenarios in which variant designers and players can consider the question of what might have happened instead of what did happen. I also feel that players often enjoy diving headfirst into role-playing their position. In this regard, it might be easier for most players to relate better to real life characters and actual events, than fictional personalities or abstract situations. I would also ask who amongst you has not groaned even a little bit when they saw a map that was clearly factually

wrong? **Diplomacy** is emphatically not a simulation, so historical accuracy has its limits, but I believe that consideration of a scenario's historical framework can facilitate creation of a variant that is fun for all participants to play.

### **CHOOSING A SCENARIO AND THE PLAYED POSITIONS.**

After discussing options, Jeff and I decided to select a European scenario that begins in 1763 at the conclusion of the Seven Years War. Jeff and I chose this point in time because we believed the aftermath of the Seven Years War saw the type of political/military balance in Europe that makes for an ideal multi-player scenario.

Five of our played positions were obvious. The Habsburg Empire (hereafter Austria), Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia were the dominant powers in Europe at the end of the Seven Years War, and they would remain so into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The question was which of the other European states would we include. We quickly agreed on the Ottoman Empire (hereafter Turkey) and Spain. Turkey was no longer the feared powerhouse it had been a century earlier, but it remained a sought-after ally because of its strategic location and its still significant military capabilities. Spain too had fallen in stature from the heights it enjoyed during the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even so, it kept a formidable navy and controlled a vast colonial empire that was a source of tremendous wealth. [I will mention that Turkey and Spain were to constantly bedevil Jeff and me.]

This brought us to seven players, but we really wanted more. It did not take us long to add Sweden. Though Sweden had slipped to second tier status by 1763, it remained a respected military and economic entity. It was not long removed from its competition with Russia for dominance in the Baltic States, and it would take part in the Napoleonic Wars of the next generation. Having a Scandinavian power that could contest Russian expansion westward or threaten Prussia's long coastline appealed to us greatly.

As the map began to take shape, we saw the potential for two more players.

One was Denmark-Norway. We initially looked at Copenhagen and possibly Christiania as minor power SCs. The days when the mere rumor of Danish longboats struck terror into communities along Europe's coasts were centuries past. Though the Danes were on the winning side of the Great Northern War earlier in the century, their performance was unimpressive. By 1763, Denmark-Norway was primarily a commercial and shipping giant with one of the largest merchant navies in all of Europe. The more we thought about it, however, the more we came to believe that representing this

kingdom as a minor neutral might give the Swedes too much of a free hand. With a secure western border and no immediate concerns in the south, our fear was that Sweden would regularly plunge into Russia early on and place the hard-pressed Russians, who already had four other neighbors to worry about, at a disadvantage. We also liked the idea of Britain having a naval power as a neighbor. This would prevent mighty Albion from feeling too cozy at game-start.

We then came to a decision that we suspected (correctly, as it turned out) potential **A&E** players would greet with skepticism: we made Poland-Lithuania & Saxony a played power. As everyone knows, Poland-Lithuania was on the brink of anarchy in 1763. Austria, Prussia, and Russia would soon partition the hapless Commonwealth out of existence. Only its sheer size made it a factor. As for Saxony, European statesmen considered it the second state in Germany at the dawn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [Wikipedia: Electorate of Saxony]. When the Elector of Saxony became King of Poland/Grand Duke of Lithuania in 1697, many in Europe saw the unification of Saxony and Poland-Lithuania as the rise of a new dynastic power. It was not to be. Saxony declined markedly during the 66 years of unification. A low point came at the start of the Seven Years War when Prussia invaded Saxony, conscripted its army, and annexed all its territory. The Treaty of Hubertusburg restored Saxony's independence and territorial integrity, but the war left it shattered. All of this being true, why would we offer this albatross for anyone to play?

One answer was that we were intrigued by the idea of an independent player whose weight could tip the balance of power that existed between Austria and Prussia (known as "German Dualism") one way or the other. The Seven Years War ravaged Saxony, but it remained a German state of means and potential, as its dramatic economic recovery over the ten years 1763-1774 showed. Another answer, and probably the more accurate one, was nostalgia. Elder European statesmen could remember when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a power worthy of respect. We guessed (correctly again, as it turned out) that Poland-Lithuania would carry a certain fascination with many players who would revel in the opportunity to overcome a seemingly hopeless situation and restore the feeble behemoth to its former grandeur. By linking Poland-Lithuania with Saxony, which would probably be the driving force between the two, we felt we created a viable position.

The inclusion of Denmark-Norway and Poland-Lithuania & Saxony gave us the large, multi-player variant we craved. We believe the results of the games we have on record justify our decision to add them.

## GREAT POWER STARTING STRENGTH.

We resolved right away that we would consider the historical strength of our ten Great Powers compared to each other during the time-period in question rather than make them all equal. As mentioned earlier, five played positions represented “second tier” powers that were past their prime in 1763. Ultimately, we went with Austria and Britain starting with four SCs; France, Prussia, Russia, Turkey, starting with three SCs; and Denmark-Norway, Poland-Lithuania & Saxony, Spain, and Sweden starting with two SCs. We later changed Turkey so that it also started with two SCs.

The idea of unequal starting strengths might strike potential players as anathema. Why would anyone want to start with a two SC position when they could have one of the stronger positions? The answer to this question is multi-faceted.

First, we must remember that a conflict between a four SC Great Power and a two SC Great Power at game-start is not going to be a one-on-one contest. Other Great Powers are sure to be involved. The winner of the conflict is likely to be the Great Power that is part of the larger coalition.

Second, consider that two of the two SC Great Powers, Turkey and Spain, have relatively secure corner positions. As I implied earlier, Turkey and Spain went through several iterations over the life of the variant. We redrew the internal boundaries for both, changed their starting units, changed where those units began the game, and, in the case of Turkey, removed a SC. [With the new rules (v6.02.03 Dec 22), the starting location of Turkey’s two units have changed again, with the army now in Constantinople and the fleet in Smyrna.] These changes were necessary to allow these two “second tier” Great Powers to be viable without making them too powerful (a line that proved to be very thin). It is still to be seen whether **A&E**’s “corner witches” are in their final form.

Third, Austria and Britain both must deal with their units and SCs being dispersed across the map. Only two of Austria’s starting units and SCs are in Austria proper. The other two are in Milan and Southern Netherlands, the latter of which is not a true Austrian home SC because the Habsburgs cannot build there. Britain has one of its three starting fleets sitting in Gibraltar, which is not an SC space, while Liverpool, an SC space, is empty. Britain’s lone starting army is on the continent in Hanover, which touches the Berlin space and is squarely in the sites of both Denmark-Norway and Prussia. Yes, Austria and Britain have the most SCs and units in Winter 1762, but neither is likely to feel all that superior or comfortable when the game begins.

Fourth, we inserted a rule that grants the two SC Great Powers the ability to convert one SC they capture into a third home SC. The selected SC can be a conquered minor neutral SC or the home SC of another Great Power. [Note that the SC would remain a home SC for the Great Power that originally controlled it, and that Great Power could build in it again if it regained control of it.] Conquered SCs become home SCs when the controlling Great Powers build in them. After a Great Power identifies an additional home SC by building in that SC, that SC stays a home SC for that Great Power for the duration of the game.

## COMPARING THE NUMBERS.

Back in 1992, Stephen Agar authored an article for the Variant Bank entitled “Designing Maps for Diplomacy Variants.” In that article, Stephen offered suggestions for designers to consider. It is fair to say that Stephen used **Diplomacy** as his gold standard by which to measure variant map designs. So how does **A&E**’s map and starting force structure compare with **Diplomacy**’s map and starting force structure?

- Neutral Supply Centers: **Diplomacy** has 34 SCs of which 22 are home SCs and 12 are neutral SCs. This creates a ratio between home SCs and neutral SCs of 1 to 0.55. **A&E** has 27 home SCs and 17 neutral SCs, for a ratio of 1 to 0.63. The ratio was 1 to 0.54, almost identical to that of **Diplomacy**, for quite a while, but with the v4.0 map, Jeff and I converted two spaces, an open Baltic Sea coast space and a Turkish home SC, to minor neutrals (Samogitia to Courland and Bakhchisaray to Crimea). The intent of these changes was to spice up DP play in the east and curb Turkish power.

- Room to Move: **Diplomacy** has 75 spaces in which a maximum of 34 units move around. This creates a ratio of 2.21 spaces to each unit. The **A&E** map has 97 spaces and 44 units, which is a ratio of 2.20 spaces to each unit. Worth noting is that the **A&E** map covers the same geographic area as the **Diplomacy** map. The 19 sea spaces on the **Diplomacy** map are on the **A&E** map, which means there are 22 more land spaces. Thirteen of these new spaces appear in Germany, which went from six spaces to twelve (one British, one Danish, one Polish, three Prussian, two Saxon, and four minor neutrals), and Russia, which went from seven spaces to fourteen (eight Russian, three Polish, one Swedish, and two minor neutrals). **Diplomacy**’s Spain and Sweden spaces became four and three spaces respectively. Conversely, **Diplomacy**’s Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, Serbia, and six-space Turkey became **A&E**’s seven space Ottoman Empire, which includes a playable Crete as one of those seven spaces.

- Fleets versus Armies: Of **Diplomacy**’s 22 home SCs, fleets can take 16 and armies can take all 22. This ratio comes to 1 to 1.38. At the beginning of the game, there

are nine fleets and 13 armies, for a ratio of 1 to 1.44. In **A&E**, fleets can take 18 of 27 home SCs (ratio of 1 to 1.5) and the game starts with 18 fleets (nine for minor neutrals, which I will explain shortly) and 26 armies (eight for minor neutrals) (ratio of fleets to armies is 1 to 1.44). Clearly, the numbers between **Diplomacy** and **A&E** are similar. Whether they are significant to the “goodness” of either game is a question, but Stephen does offer that **Diplomacy**’s ratios might serve as “a guideline against which virgin variants can be compared.”

- **Stalemate Lines:** I think we all agree that too many stalemate lines in a variant can be a killer. **Diplomacy** has stalemate lines that run from the southwest, through impassable Switzerland, to the northeast. Does **A&E** have stalemate lines and, if so, how many? Almost certainly it does, and I do not know how many. My hope is that players can help find them so we can decide if the stalemate lines are a genuine problem and, if they are, how to fix them.

- **Play Balance.** Stephen defined play balance as each player having a “reasonable” (not “equal”) chance of success. Stephen believed the only way to figure out play balance is to play a few times “and see what happens.” I do believe gross miscalculations can be detected after a small number of games, but I would argue that a realistic assessment requires many games. Even then there will be questions. Allow me to again roll out my story of Germany’s performance in **Diplomacy** games played on AOL in the 90s. During a stretch of 100 games, Germany had 1 solo (as in **ONE!!!**), 23 draws, 26 survivals, and 50 eliminations. That is an underwhelming performance at best. If **Diplomacy** was a new variant, its

designer would invariably receive feedback that Germany needed fixing. Thousands of games have shown us just the opposite. Germany is about as close to the mean in terms of performance as any of the played positions. Such is the danger of drawing hasty conclusions on scant evidence.

Because we do know how **Diplomacy** plays, Stephen used the map to come up with two metrics. The first measures each Great Power’s distance to victory and is a sign of offensive potential. The second looks at how many of the SCs that are within three spaces of a Great Power’s home SCs are enemy home SCs. This is a measure of vulnerability. [Curiously, I came up with different numbers than Stephen for both metrics as they measure **Diplomacy**, so what you see below are my own calculations.]

- **Metric 1 – Distance to victory.** The victory standard in **A&E** is 15 SCs, not 18. To better compare the two sets of numbers (#), I converted the end results to a rating. The Great Powers in each column that have the lowest # and the highest rating (based on 10 as the high) have the shortest distance to travel to reach their victory threshold. The higher the # and the lower the rating, the more moves it will take that Great Power to reach its victory threshold. For the **A&E** numbers, I counted Southern Netherlands as an Austrian-controlled SC at game-start, but I did not use the army that starts there in the movement calculations because it is unlikely to control more than the single SC it occupies until reinforcements from Austria arrive to help. For similar reasons, I did not consider Britain’s fleet that starts in Gibraltar.

<b>Diplomacy</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Ambition &amp; Empire</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Rating</b>
Russia .....	27.....	10.00	Austria .....	17.....	10.00
Austria-Hungary .....	33.....	8.64	Britain & Hanover .....	19.....	9.41
Germany.....	33.....	8.64	Prussia.....	19.....	9.41
Italy.....	36.....	7.95	France .....	23.....	8.24
France .....	38.....	7.50	Poland-Lithuania & Saxony .....	23.....	8.24
England .....	44.....	6.14	Russia.....	28.....	6.76
Turkey .....	44.....	6.14	Denmark-Norway.....	29.....	6.47
			Spain .....	29.....	6.47
			Turkey.....	32.....	5.59
			Sweden.....	34.....	5.00

- **Metric 2 – Percentage of Home SCs with Three Spaces of Enemy Home SCs.** When calculating the **A&E**

number, I ignored the “additional home SC” provision for the two SC Great Powers.

	Total SCs in 3 Spaces	Enemy SCs in 3 Spaces	%
<b>Diplomacy</b>			
England .....	11 .....	4.....	36.38
Turkey .....	10 .....	5.....	50.00
Russia .....	21 .....	12.....	57.14
Italy.....	15 .....	9.....	60.00
France .....	18 .....	11.....	61.11
Germany.....	21 .....	13.....	61.90
Austria-Hungary .....	16 .....	11.....	68.75

	Total SCs in 3 Spaces	Enemy SCs in 3 Spaces	%
<b>Ambition &amp; Empire</b>			
Spain .....	16.....	5 .....	31.25
France .....	25.....	10 .....	40.00
Austria .....	23.....	11 .....	47.83
Britain & Hanover .....	20.....	10 .....	50.00
Turkey .....	14.....	7 .....	50.00
Poland-Lithuania & Saxony .....	24.....	14 .....	58.33
Prussia .....	25.....	15 .....	60.00
Denmark-Norway.....	15.....	10 .....	66.67
Sweden .....	10.....	7 .....	70.00
Russia .....	14.....	11 .....	78.57

Stephen cautioned his readers not to take too much out of the numbers like those shown above, particularly in terms of how the Great Powers rank. For Stephen, the more important thing to look at was the extremes they revealed. In **A&E**, the numbers would clearly seem to show that there are “haves” and “have nots.” Powers with easy access to the minor neutrals in the center of the map can race away from the Great Powers on the edges. Unlike **Diplomacy**, where the slower Great Powers are (generally) more secure, three of **A&E**'s slower Great Powers appear to be the most vulnerable. And everyone notices that the Saxon army cannot provide mutual support to its Polish-Lithuanian counterpart. Yikes!

#### THE SOLUTION: A HOBBY INNOVATION.

Numerous small states with little military or economic influence existed in the lands that would later become Germany and Italy. Few of these principalities, counties, duchies, dioceses, free cities, and such were large enough to be significant by themselves. To avoid “micro-spaces,” Jeff and I merged small entities into groups and named them after the larger states within the grouping. That worked fine, but it was impossible to ignore the fact that 11 the 17 minor neutrals sat squarely in the middle of the map. Those Great Powers next to the minor neutrals would have an advantage over those Great Powers that bordered the edges of the map.

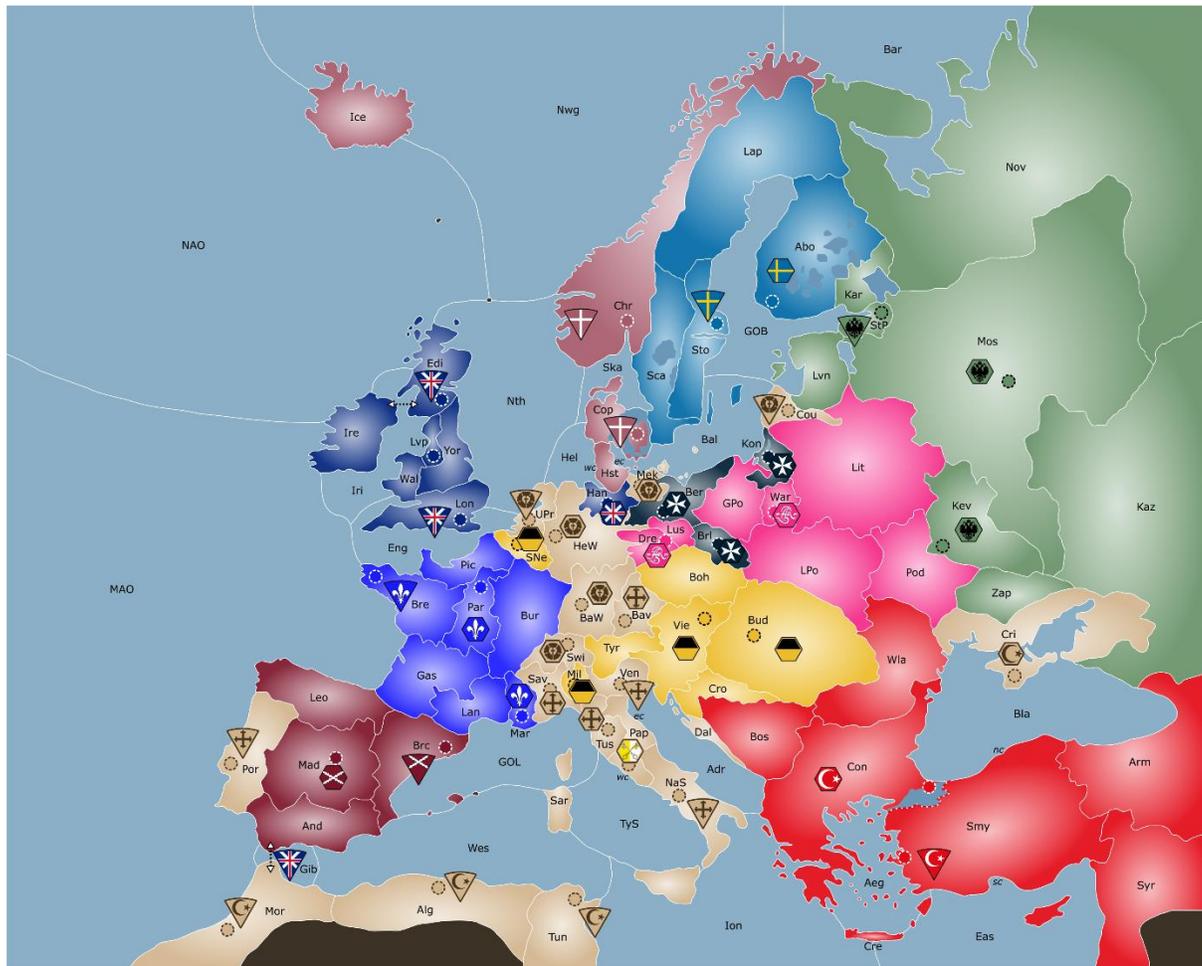
To prevent Great Powers from simply moving into adjacent minor neutral SCs like they can in **Diplomacy**, Jeff and I placed units in each of those SCs. We then gave the Great Powers the ability to influence what those minor neutral units do during each game-turn. Great Powers receive Diplomacy Points (DPs) each Spring and Fall turn on a basis of one for each controlled SC, up to a maximum of three. DPs represent the political and economic clout each Great Power wields. Players allocate DPs during Spring and Fall turns to get the minor neutral units to hold, support, or “sortie” (i.e., move to an adjacent space for the purpose of opposing another unit’s movement to that space or to cut support). Unlike normal orders, the GM does not publish how the Great Powers allocated their DPs until after the game ends. This allows players to engage in all manner of

duplicity, as well as influence events far across the map. To the best of our knowledge,

**A&E** was the first variant to use the armed neutrals/DPs mechanism. It succeeded in meeting all our expectations by encouraging communication between all the players, providing Great Powers ways to frustrate the plans of rivals anywhere on the map, and giving the smaller Great Powers value to potential coalition partners beyond that of their armed forces alone. Game play has shown that the coalition that best coordinates the use of their collective DPs early in play usually sets itself up for continued success as the game progresses. Armed neutrals/DPs worked so well in **A&E** that other Hobbyists have used it in their own creations to produce truly excellent variant designs.

We added other special rules that we felt contributed to play balance and the realities of the time. One was the additional home supply center rule for two SC Great Powers that I discussed earlier.

Another was the Religious Rule. This rule came about because of an unintended consequence of empowering minor neutrals to be able to provide support. Early in the variant’s life, it was standard practice for Britain or Spain to use support from one of the Barbary States to attack another Barbary State. Though the rivalry between the Barbary States was fierce, they were generally united in their antipathy towards Christian Europe. The idea that an Islamic regime would support a Christian invasion of another Islamic state seemed far-fetched. Worse still was the Ottoman use of Papal support to conquer Naples & Sicily. We could not imagine a world in which the Papacy would ever openly back a Turkish invasion of Italy. The Religious Rule basically prohibits a Christian minor neutral from supporting a Turkish attack into a space a Christian unit occupies at the start of the turn, and an Islamic minor neutral from supporting a Christian attack into a space an Islamic unit occupies at the start of the turn. Additionally, the Papal States will only support Catholic units. The Religious Rule still allows for considerable diplomatic shenanigans to thwart opponents (e.g., Turkey can allocate DPs to Papal States to support Venice against an Austrian attack), but it prohibits unlikely historical events from occurring.



# Ambition & Empire

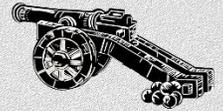
In the Year of Our Lord

1763

## Game Start

An Accurate Accounting of Supply Centres Controlled by the Great Powers of Europe & the Mediterranean:

Great Britain & Hanover		4
Denmark-Norway		2
France		3
Habsburg Empire (Austria)		4
Ottoman Empire (Turkey)		2
Prussia		3
Poland-Lithuania & Saxony		2
Russia		3
Spain		2
Sweden		2



Version 6.01

Original Variant Design by Jeffrey S. Kase & B.M. Powell  
2022 Rules & Map Update by W. Alex Ronke  
Jeffrey S. Kase, & B.M. Powell

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Lastly, we allowed Russia to build in Crimea if it gained control of that SC, we prohibited Austria from building in Southern Netherlands, and, more recently, we added special provisions on movement past Constantinople when a hostile power controls that city.

### WHY PLAY A&E?

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, **A&E** has been around for quite a while. I have records of 24 games, which is more contests than most variants are fortunate enough to experience. This means **A&E** has been through its paces. Early games revealed design flaws, which Jeff and I corrected. Over the years, some of our map or rule ideas did not work as well as we hoped, but we took note and adjusted.

The vast majority of those 24 games started between 2000 and 2011. Unfortunately, Jeff and I got involved in other endeavors, and we were unable to keep up the promising momentum **A&E** had generated. The variant languished until Alex Ronke contacted me in 2016. Alex wanted to exercise his artistic talents by redrawing the map and creating new unit icons. How could I say no? In coordination with Jeff, Alex and I redrew Poland-

Lithuania & Saxony to better capture internal boundaries, and we tweaked the rules. One of our ideas about build centers did not work out quite like we wanted, so we have gone back to something that worked in earlier rule versions.

This article heralds the introduction of the most current **A&E** map (v6.01) and rules (v6.02.03). My hope is that reading about the variant and seeing the beautiful map and unit icons that Alex created will generate interest in it. At this stage in its evolution, I am confident **A&E** is "reasonably" balanced in terms of every position being able to compete effectively. I am less certain that we are finished improving **A&E**, however. The way to find out is to play more games. I believe that those people willing to try **A&E** will enjoy the experience, as others have in the past.

Many of **A&E's** changes over the years resulted directly from thoughtful comments and suggestions we received from players. Perhaps someone reading this article will have something to contribute to the variant's betterment. If you have comments or questions on **A&E**, please contact me at [vonpowell@aol.com](mailto:vonpowell@aol.com). I would love to hear from you.



# VOTE

## 2022 Hobby Awards



Ambassador  
of the Year



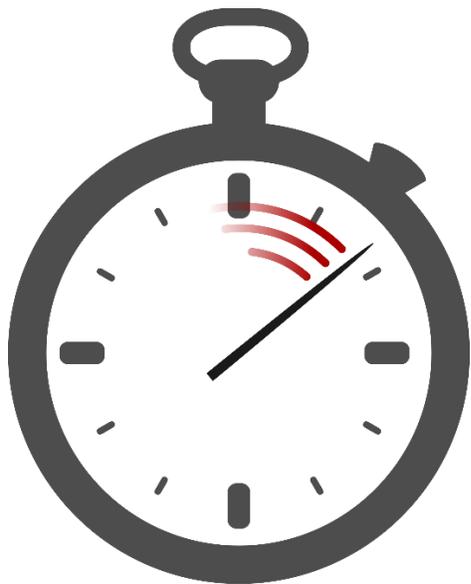
Diplomacy Literati  
of the Year

TO RECEIVE A BALLOT SUBSCRIBE BY JANUARY 9<sup>TH</sup>  
[WWW.DIPLOMACYBRIEFING.COM](http://WWW.DIPLOMACYBRIEFING.COM)

Awarded by:  
THE  
**BRIEFING**  
and the Diplomacy Community

# Tournament Diplomacy Should be Played with a Central Clock

By Peter McNamara



*that by far the most sensible way to play is using DipTimer.*

*Essentially this is because one wants to finish the game at as reasonable hour as possible - the later it gets, the more likely it is for the game to deteriorate with players getting irritable with each other, something that is a natural accompaniment to tiredness as a byproduct of human nature.*

*The worst occurs when dealing with players that show no willingness to keep the game moving, and one ends up with 15min/turn negotiating, 10min/yr. order writing (seriously, if you can't write orders in 15min, you don't deserve them) and 10min/yr. resolution with no impetus to keep the game moving and consequently a lot of dead time. So, a few calculations, even assuming that one gets underway on time at 7pm, a short game (1907) is finished at 12:50am, while a long game (1912 or more) takes at least until 5am. Comparing this to playing (at a slow pace) on the DipTimer at 19/17 Spring/Fall. Then 1907 is finished at 11:12pm, while 1912 finishes at 2:12am.*

*In summary, it should be clear which is preferable, so let's put night games on the clock.*

Back in 2008, after returning from Carnage and being frustrated that the slow pace of games not on a central clock was ruining enjoyment, I wrote to the sadly defunct MADip-L yahoo group. And to skip to the end of the story, in 2009 Bob Holt implemented a central clock at Carnage and there was much rejoicing. It has saddened me to learn that certain tournaments have regressed and in some parts of North America we're back to the playing conditions of the bad old days that were mostly before my time. Perhaps we need to form a players' union. I'll copy the message I wrote below in 2008, and provide the links to the necessary software at the end of the article.

## ***That Night Games Should be Played on the Clock (DipTimer):***

*After taking into consideration my experiences in night games in tournaments over the last year and a half, I've come to the conclusion*

Links:

<http://www.shelden-associates.com/download/> - David Norman's classic (windows) software, as well as Brian Shelden's Mac clone.

<https://github.com/bhickey/Diplomatic-Timekeeper> - Brendan Hickey's browser-based timer.

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## Variants I'd Like to See

By Bob Durf

Happy New Years! This new year, I'd like to, like last year, give some quick tips for injecting new flavor, new life, and new interests in your variant designs. While previously I've discussed interesting ideas to add to the mechanics of your variants-in-design, I'd like to list some

suggestions for time periods or geographic locations that have seen little love. Sure, Europe is probably the objectively best continent for a good Diplomacy game, but there are some other locations that could use some tender love this New Years.

## French and Indian War

It would be nice to have a North American Diplomacy map that made some sort of historical sense and focused more on a corner of the continent that could create a more interesting geographic location for a Diplomacy Variant. An interesting three player map with the Great Lakes tribes, the French and the British? Or have the colonials in the 13 colonies as an independent player(s) attempting to capture more territory for their separate colonies? Lots of possibilities, and the tighter area of North America puts fleets back into contention as useful units—especially if you allow France and Britain to build fleets off board and move them from the East.

## Middle Earth (Early to mid-Third Age)

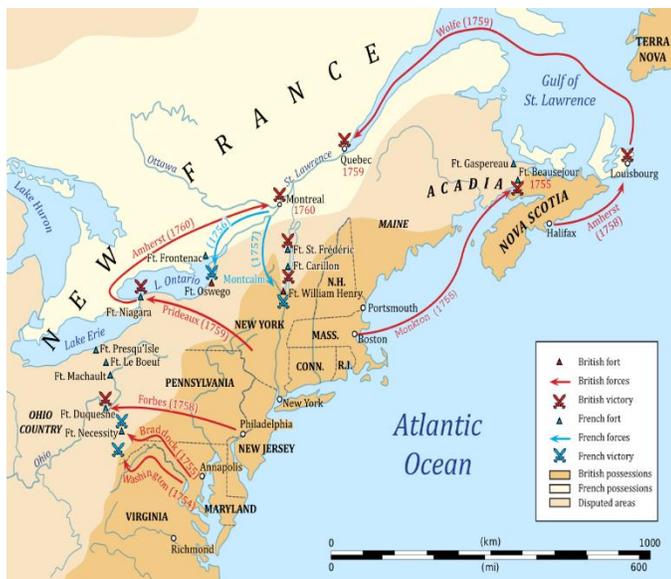
We have seen plenty of Lord of the Rings diplomacy variants. The fantasy world is, for many of us, deeply alluring and engaging as subject matter. Unfortunately, the climatic struggle between good and evil in the Lord of the Rings is a poor fit for a Diplomacy game. The game system is either fit into the plot in a way that makes it more faithful to the books but a poor fit for Diplomacy's wheeling and dealing, or is too 'Diplomacy' like to make sense as a Lord of the Rings game. Why not set the action back to earlier in the Third Age? Same map, recognizable locations, but now you have a lot more flexibility in creating an interesting Diplomacy game in Middle Earth. You have a North Kingdom divided into three warring factions with elves and dwarves nearby and the Witch King lurking, should you want to focus on that particular area of the world. Suddenly you can have Diplomacy style backstabbing and dealing with it also making thematic sense for that period of (fictional) time. Could be worth a thought!

*[[Just as Editor's notes, I'll mention some of the variants I have either played or seen that fit these categories. Some of these may already be available on Stephen Agar's updated website at [www.diplomacyzines.co.uk](http://www.diplomacyzines.co.uk) – and if not, they may be soon. South East Asia I first think of Phil Reynold's Asian Diplomacy II, but I don't recall the extent of the map at the moment. There's also the Vern Schaller variant Far East I (or the revised I-R that Fred C. Davis made a few changes to). French and Indian War? I can only think of Flintlock II by John Leeder, but I think it may cover an earlier period. As for Tolkien variants, the Angmar period is covered by Middle Earth IV through X, mostly done by Lewis Pulsipher and Mark Nelson. But certainly, new variants covering any of these ideas would be most welcome! And I don't know how balanced any of these variants I mentioned are. If anyone needs, I can possibly pull out any of these variants from my files, if I can find them.]]*



## South East Asia

I will assume, and forgo the argument establishing such, that Europe is the best location for a Diplomacy game. The European landmass is central but has variable sea spaces around it that makes fleets just as important. When looking at other continental boards, they often focus too much on land by virtue of the continent. That made me consider portions of the other continents, and I think an underdeveloped area Diplomacy wise is South-East Asia. China lurking in the north, Vietnam and Burma, and you could adjust the amount of island play you want in your game by trimming the game area as you please. Focus could be made on the continent itself or more islands included to create different areas of conflict. There are multiple time-periods making this a very interesting area at almost any point in history.



# Bangkok Diplomacy Open 2022

By Mario Huys



“Bangkok, oriental setting, and the city don’t know that the city is getting’, the crème de la crème of the Dip world in a show with everything but Bill Hacken”

Yes, we were off to Bangkok this year, capital of Thailand and incubator of the largest internationally recognized Diplomacy club in Asia. Also, supposedly the venue for last year’s and this year’s WDC, but they’re making another run at it next year. And this time it’s really going to happen, because the GOATs decided it. Their names: Lei Saarlainen and Andrew Geoff. (For those amongst you lucky enough to have missed out on the soccer/football World Cup in Qatar, GOAT = Greatest of all Time.)

Neither requires an introduction, Andrew being the three-time world champion from Down Under, and Lei the modern-day French missionary, preaching the Diplomacy gospel in Africa and Asia, creating small communities everywhere he goes. The idea of bringing the first non-Western WDC to Thailand is Lei’s, wagering on that same appeal that makes it attractive to so many tourists from all around the globe: year-round sun and shrines. Andrew brings in the experience of playing in and organizing top-notch face-to-face events. And then someone needs to report on it. I guess that’s my task.

This year’s tournament was a prelude to that, assembling not only locals, but also people traveling from abroad. This included me, of course, a Belgian living in Japan, Andrew from Australia, and none other than Farren Jane, American soldier currently stationed on this side of the Pacific. And then there was one more guy called Hari, a tall, black-bearded Czech from Kazakh decent, living in Kyoto, the old capital of Japan. He’s the embodiment of global mobility in both the modern and pre-modern era.

Why would these people be joining? Don’t ask me, ask them. I only knew why I was coming. I actually have a history with the Diplomacy Club of Bangkok, having been crowned the champion of the 2020-2021 season after moving up to the top spot on the leaderboard, and then browbeating Sascha and Lei (who were in second and third place) into dropping the idea of a top board to decide the champion. I’m no stranger to playing the meta-game when it matters.

Covid halted almost all in-person events, moving them to virtual formats, which is the only reason that I was participating in any of these games. The scoring system was also heavily tilted towards top finishes, limiting the

advantage that some of the locals had of playing in many games, some of these occurring before the Covid restrictions. It also had the effect of extending the season into a second year, a pattern that also appears to be followed for 2022-2023. All this to say that I arrived at this tournament as the defending champion, even though the season championship was not at stake. But a king needs to show his laurels.

This would be my first trip to Thailand, and as such I arrived a few days early to allow for some quality tourism time. There was a public holiday on Wednesday, that I could extend to bridge over to the weekend. It was November and already cold in Japan, but I only packed T-shirts and stuff, because we were going to the tropics. And sunny it was indeed, but also... rainy! Not torrential, just wet every other hour.

The first night I met Lei at my hotel. When we went out to find some dinner and enjoy the night scenery, he bought me a cheap plastic bag to put over my clothes to protect me from the rain. Not exactly the most effective, so I switched to my trusty foldable umbrella the next day, the staple of protection from the elements in summertime Japan.

The hotel was close to a park, so I decided to walk over there. Big mistake. As Lei explained, the streets in Bangkok are built in a fishbone pattern. Neighborhoods are not connected with each other except by the main roads. No exception for pedestrians. You can walk five hundred meters on a straight road only to end up at a gated property with a guard in front. There could be another road visible at the other side, but the guard wouldn't let you through, making you walk all the way back to where it connects with the main road.

Learning from this, I decided to try to use public transport for my next destination, a trip to one of the main temples. Tuktuks are notorious for trying to swindle their passengers, but a little price negotiation upfront avoided that. I said I wanted to take a boat upriver, so he drove me to a pier, where another guy sat me down and offered me an overpriced ride on a small boat for a trip on the canals, Venetian style. I refused and said I would find a ferry, which are ludicrously cheap, myself. In fact, I could see one leave a pier just a hundred meters further, but the quays were unfortunately not connected. As I walked back, the same tuktuk called on me and was friendly enough to drive me there for no extra cost.

By the time I got to the temple it was already closed. I took the obligatory picture and then headed for a mall to meet a real Thai person, who I had been chatting with in virtuality on a language exchange forum. For a real Thai he had conspicuously Chinese features, but given that the Chinese are historically a large minority in this region, dominating the trade as Jews would do in the

West, that wasn't all that much of a surprise. His interest was in Japanese and so he took me to a Japanese restaurant. Not difficult to find, since over half of the restaurants are either Chinese, Japanese or Korean. While I explained the literal meaning of the dishes on the menu, he told me some interesting stuff about the Thai language and the Thai alphabet. Language nerds, you know the lot. He knew I was there for a boardgame tournament and knew the venue where we would play. I said we could even give an initiation if he came early, but he seemed undecided.

The next day Lei, Andrew and I got together over lunch for a discussion on the next year's WDC. We were taken there by a small lorry, which are way cheaper than tuktuks, but they're more like a bus, as they only take you to fixed points. Finally, I could order some real Thai food. Snake head soup for one, thank you. The locals are sure to eat that every day, right? Dream on, you foolish tourist.



The plans for next year are ambitious and extensive, with not only a tournament, but an organized trip to some of the main attraction spots in South East Asia. You can come for just the weekend of course (and just stroll through Bangkok the way I did), but since few of us ever come to this part of the world and the date is set in August, better to block out a whole week on your calendar, if it's within your means. Don't forget your camera... and your umbrella.

With that in the back of our mind, we went back to the venue, a boardgame café called Battlefield Bangkok, for our first game that evening. Due to some last-minute cancellations, the format had been changed from three games over two days with multiple boards to four games over three days with a single board. Your best two games would count towards the standing. All in all, there were ten participants, meaning that some of us would have to play in all four games.

The fun thing with face-to-face is that you get to see everyone's face, obviously. As well as the rest of their anatomy. Most of the people that I battled in the Thailand cup had just been avatars and text messages. Even Bill Hackenbracht, who organizes the Virtual WDC, and who had joined one of those games, is mostly a blur to me, except for one picture and a number of appearances on the DBN broadcasts. Farren is also a regular there, participating in a lot of top boards and winning some, but she prefers never to show her face. If you want to get to know her, no need to contact your local KGB office, just attend a few of the more popular FTF events and you're bound to bump into her.

She topped the first board as Russia, with me coming in second as Austria on a board where Turkey was a lame duck due to one more person calling in sick. Too bad my Thai friend didn't show up. Moreover, I had aggravated Lei in Italy by insisting that his first season misorder would be played out, because "this was a tournament", and then roping in France, a relative newbie called Tristan, to get the maximum out of that blunder.

This dynamic would continue in the second game, where my France combined with Tristan's England to attack Lei's Germany with the Yser opening, popularized by Jorge Zhang (French fleet Eng convoys English army Wales to Belgium in Fall of 1901). Andrew's Italian army in Munich however conspired with Germany to stop the tide. I botched a late game attempt to top the board by stabbing England with a misorder of my own, seeing the game end on a joint top with Farren's Austria and Andrew's Italy.

In the third game Lei got his revenge, when with me in Russia his Turkey combined with Austria, played by JP Blanchet, who had cried wolf in front of the whole board during the turn that I stabbed England. I didn't really appreciate that kind of vocal whistleblowing, meaning Lei had an easy time bringing JP on his side. Hari in Italy however proved to be a great thorn in the side of Austria, preventing AT from moving past Sevastopol.

This third game was called early with all powers still in play. Most of us then headed to a bar, frequented by local expat Sascha from Germany. The style was definitively retro, with an old arcade game console and Nintendo style characters. Hari, the Czech from Japan, proved to be a great storyteller and drinker (who would have thought?). Long story short it was early morning by the time we were back at the hotel.

There was still one final game to play on Sunday, which would probably decide the tournament. Farren was currently in the lead, but she was already flying back.

Given the scoring, any single game top score could be sufficient to put someone else on top. I had a chance to win, but the alcohol and the lack of sleep had dulled my senses. I also had garnered quite a bit of bad will across the board. And with Lei in England, Andrew in France, and me in Germany, things didn't look great.

My play so far had been to work close with newer players and attack the old stalwarts. No one expected anything different. But with Farren not playing and Andrew in second and me in third place, it made sense for me to team up with Lei to take down Andrew. The thought occurred, but the numbed mind didn't follow through. I allied with Hari's Russia, bounced England out of the lowland centers, while France held back, and on top of that had Tristan's Italy stab me for Munich. Remember that stab on England in the second game? Yeah, that was Tristan. I might have forgotten, but he hadn't.

Russia and France joined in later to rip me apart, but the battle for the top and eventually the tournament was played elsewhere. Sascha as Turkey detoured through Sevastopol to attack Austria and gobble up all of the Balkans. It took an inspired Tristan in Italy from letting him go any further, but the gap with second placed England and France was wide enough to not only top the board, but also claim the tournament ahead of Farren and Andrew. I and Lei rounded out the top five.



Full results and standing can be found here:

[https://world-diplomacy-iki.fandom.com/wiki/Bangkok\\_Diplomacy\\_open\\_2022](https://world-diplomacy-iki.fandom.com/wiki/Bangkok_Diplomacy_open_2022)

I hope to meet you all there next year (or rather this year, as the year will have changed by the time you read this) for the WDC in Bangkok between 17 and 20 of August, 2023. Yes, you too, Bill!

# Open Tribute Scoring at Weasel Moot: Did It Work?

By Chris Kelly

I'm on record as of about six years ago (in an obscure YouTube video) as not caring about Diplomacy scoring systems. Three years ago, I contributed to designing one.

That system was the original Tribute scoring method, described by Brandon Fogel in Diplomacy World #149 (April 2020) and assessed by him as a work in progress in Diplomacy World #151 (October 2020). A revised version, called Open Tribute, was introduced in virtual play in 2021 and used at the Weasel Moot face-to-face tournament in September 2022. I've been completely uninvolved in the changes made since 2020, but my impression has been that Open Tribute succeeds in the goals I had in helping to develop the original system -- and I think that success was demonstrated in the 2022 Weasel Moot results.

## A Reluctant Realization: Scoring Systems Matter

I initially ignored Diplomacy scoring systems because, as I said in the 2016 video, I enjoyed playing the game for its own sake. What changed my mind a few years ago was the realization that the most-used scoring system at the time (Sum of Squares, or SoS) was preventing me from doing that, because it affected how everyone else was playing.

Especially in a complex multi-player game that demands intelligence and quick thinking, any frequently used method of scoring will be rigorously dissected over time for quirks that experienced competitors can use to their advantage. In the case of SoS, tied board-tops or strong 2nd-place finishes receive nearly as high a score as a single player topping the board. In tournament play, this feature had the presumably unintended consequence of encouraging players who knew each other to "play it safe" by forming game-long alliances that were essentially unbreakable -- because the partners knew they were guaranteed "good enough" scores to contend for winning the tournament. This was especially true if the immediate goal was to qualify for a top-7 final round.

When I traveled to San Jose for the Whipping tournament in 2019, each of my boards in the three qualifying rounds played out this way. It was frustrating because not only did I feel like there wasn't even a slight chance for me to compete, I also couldn't enjoy watching the famous names of the hobby going at each other to see who came out on top -- they simply allied together from 1901 on, operating with extreme trust as they coasted to comfortably high scores.

In short, although the people were nice and the bar was excellent, the games (and the overall tournament, to be honest) were boring. And I heard several comments from other participants that suggested they shared my opinion. This struck me as being dangerous for the overall hobby: the outcome may have seemed fine for the seven players who made the top board, but for the many people whose experience was similar to mine, why would they bother to travel to another tournament?

Of course, the veteran finalists were all good people, and certainly not trying to damage the hobby. They were simply following the incentives of the scoring system that was being used. And so, I began to immerse myself in a subject I'd never cared about before.

## The Birth of Tribute

Brandon was already exploring possibilities for a new scoring method, and his initial article on Tribute lays out all of the incentives he sought to balance in developing an ideal system: the value of having the most supply centers, how many more the leader has over other players, surviving to a draw versus being eliminated, and so on.

Being more focused on practical results than theory, my arguments during the design stage were simple, based on what I'd observed at Whipping and elsewhere: Although solos may be rare, the essence of Diplomacy is that seven people compete, and only one wins. So, second place should feel like losing, and a tie for first should *also* feel like losing

This is what brings the "*essential tension between cooperation and selfishness*," as Brandon put it in one of his articles, front and center. The central mathematical challenge of Diplomacy is that you start with 10% of the possible units/supply centers on the board, along with several other players, and somehow have to get to 50% (or as close as you can), even though the only way to gain new units/centers is by simple numerical superiority. So, you can't make any initial progress without forming alliances, but at the same time each of you is chasing a prize that only one of you will get.

That intentionally contradictory logic makes stabs inevitable - and perhaps more important, causes mistrust and doubt to complicate every attempt at an alliance, thereby making the alliances less efficient and more unstable. Eliminate that doubt and unpredictability through a prearranged draw or near-draw, and you kill the spirit of the game.

## Trial and Error, and Open Tribute

But in practice, the original Tribute scoring method turned out to have unintended consequences of its own. As Brandon noted in his 6-month follow-up piece, although the designers hoped to discourage shared board tops, the system actually seemed to inspire *\*more\** of them. Reading a bit between the lines, it appeared that the downside of finishing second on a board was so severe that players were more incentivized to avoid it (by agreeing to shared tops) than to strive for first place.

It's true that one of the quirks of the original Tribute was, by trying to reward both "winning" (an unshared board top) and survival, it awarded nearly the same number of points to second place and sixth, or any of the non-winning positions in between. Open Tribute -- no, I don't know why it's called that -- sought to fix this problem, specifically aiming (per the Windy City Weasels website) to *"increase differentiation among non-topping players relative to the board-topper, while maintaining good board-topping and survival incentives."*

That's a lot of tightropes to walk at once. But looking at the final standings of last September's Weasel Moot tournament, Open Tribute appears to have rewarded game results as intended. Board topping was highly valued: The player with the biggest board top (Seren Kwok, 15 centers) won the tournament, the one with the next-largest board (Morgante Pell, 14 centers) came in second, and in fact everyone in the top five had a board top of 11 centers or more. But survival mattered, too -- Karthik Konath had the tourney's third-largest board top (13 centers), but fell to fifth place because of a zero-point elimination in the first round.

There was one of the dreaded three-way draws (with 10 centers apiece) that smack of coordination among experienced players to score well without actually having to compete... but the Open Tribute scoring did not reward them for it. Each of the shared toppers received 68 points, barely better than second-place scores on other boards and less than the 80 points Zach Moore got for a weak 8-center unshared board top that same round.

Perhaps flaws of Open Tribute will become apparent given more time, but as of now it seems very well balanced, and to succeed in its multiple objectives: it rewards both sole board-tops and survival, with a modest but discernible difference among scores in between. It may even become more effective in discouraging shared board-tops as players become more used to its incentives. (Perhaps it's just my imagination, but I wonder if the projection of current standings on a large screen at Weasel Moot, and the mediocre scores for the three-way top in the first round, might have deterred players from attempting that strategy afterwards.)

The math is arguably complicated, but many years of different scoring systems in tournament play should have made clear that simplicity isn't the right goal. As someone whose longtime preference is to ignore scoring and play the game for its own sake, the ideal system is one I wouldn't *\*have\** to pay attention to, because it would encourage me to compete the same way I would if there was no scoring -- try to end the game with the most supply centers, and if that isn't possible, survive and do as well as I can while keeping the game alive in case a comeback opportunity arises.

That's the fundamental spirit of the game, I believe, and it seems to be the mindset that Open Tribute tries to support. And so far, I think it's working.

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## Signed and Sealed for Another 50 Years

By Russ Dennis

Almost 50 years ago, our hobby forefathers met in Chicago for the 1975 DipCon. Allan Calhmer the inventor of Diplomacy was there along with Diplomacy's own Ra's al Ghul: Edi Birsan. By all accounts, the tournament was a great success, and the comradery is colorfully recounted in the pages of [Diplomacy World #9](#).

This tournament also produced a piece of Diplomacy memorabilia. Robert Correll had brought a board that all the attenders signed. Those who are familiar with hobby history or have read articles at the Diplomacy Archive would recognize signees like Conrad von Metzke, John Moot, Walt Buchanan, and Lewis Pulsipher.

I come into the story as this map's current custodian. I was either the only entrant in [Diplomacy World's contest](#) or the one who lived the closest to Robert Correll. I found Robert to be a delightful individual and wrote a recap in [Issue #156](#) of his history in the hobby.

As I was leaving, Robert told me to continue the tradition and pass on the map to a future generation. I now had historical reasons to pitch to my wife so I could go to the World Diplomacy Championship in Killington, Vermont. To help the faithful understand those negotiations, let's just say I had to cede Belgium several times, not bounce

in Galicia, support Italy into Greece, and leave the Black Sea open throughout the game. As hard as it is to believe, who soloed that game is still a matter of perspective.



With my flight booked and my roommates secured (with their deposit!), I eagerly anticipated the time of my departure. The day began with last minute panic on how to bring the board when I discovered that it didn't fold as I took it out of the frame. I ended up packaging the whole frame in a giant box hoping against hope that the glass wouldn't shatter as it traveled 1,000 miles through 3 different airports. Thankfully, everything arrived intact.



First stop was meeting up with Matt Crill and Peter McNamara for lunch at a Peruvian restaurant and then it was off to ride 3 hours with father and son duo: Ed Sullivan and Liam Stokes. To say that the car wasn't big enough for all our personalities is an understatement. Thankfully, Ed had insurance.

I'd love to say that the social side of the tournament was amazing, but I'm in no position to make that judgment.

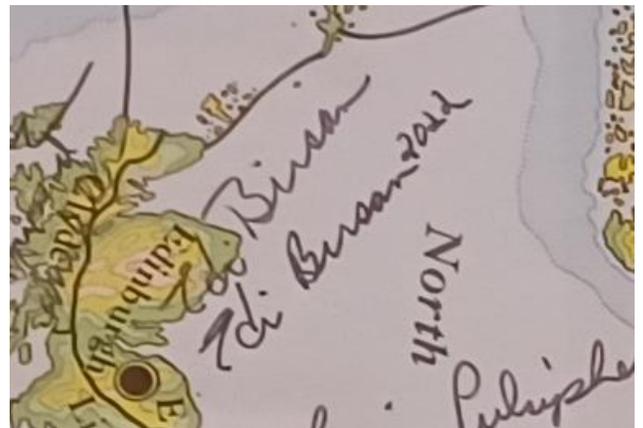
For me, that part consisted of the delicious dinner provided by Meta (thanks Dave Maletsky and Noam Brown!) and chatting at the table with current Ambassador of the Year Zach Moore. By the way, be sure to [subscribe to the Briefing](#) to vote for this year's winner.

The rest of the time, I played Diplomacy, barely ate, and slept little. My games averaged around 10 hours with my round 3 game achieving a new tournament record of 16+ hours played. A portion of that time was playing two boards simultaneously. Unfortunately, I checked in 3<sup>rd</sup> on that board and incidentally all my boards. Also, all the board toppers received Best Country awards. I have been told that shouldn't be thought of as a coincidence.

In summary, I was bad enough to not win the tournament or any awards but good enough to not get eliminated and get to hang out. I believe Dante wrote about such punishment though as a Diplomacy masochist I loved every minute of it. Each game was a dogfight against some of the best in the game and were an exhilarating grind.

My opponents included the top four of Dan Lester, Peter McNamara, Peter Yeargin, and Johnny Gillam. Other notable opponents were Matt Crill, Adam Sigal, Zachary Moore, Farren Jane, Morgante Pell, Ruben Sanchez, and some guy named Andrew Goff who came in 35<sup>th</sup>. Thankfully, I got to play him twice and boost my score.

Over the weekend, I heard several old timers mention that the field for this tournament was one of the strongest they'd ever seen. The influx of new players who had the opportunity to prepare by playing virtually has raised the level of the play, and some of the attendees who thought they'd pull fast ones on these online players, ended up getting wiped off the board. It's tough to gang up on the newbies at a world championship when over 15 of them show up. Those kind of things tend to throw off the meta.



Oh, and I got those signatures. Over the weekend, scores of people became a part of Diplomacy history themselves. Edi Birsan signed for a second time right next to Edinburg and under his signature from 50 years ago:

For those interested the worst signature easily goes to Ed Sullivan. I imagined he would have a grand flowing signature fitting of his station. Instead, I got Ed. That's right originally he didn't even put his last name. He claims he has a better signature, but being on a board with Allan Calhamer apparently didn't meet his standards. Ed let's bring your A game next time.



In my [article about Robert Correll](#), I centered it around the friendships he had made in Diplomacy. An enduring memory I have of this tournament is seeing in person all the friendships that have formed over the years. I saw people who got along online, get along face to face. I saw people who have decades of playing Diplomacy together laughing and reminiscing. This was an encouraging sight for any person who values the health of our hobby.



For me, Sunday morning was not the end of my weekend. Ed Sullivan and I went to watch my Colts play the Patriots. I had originally brought a snow hat with Colts emblazoned on it, but the weather was so warm that I left it in the car. The atmosphere and those around us were stereotypically Bostonian, and we had a blast. I must say though that the Colts' quarterback did not. He was sacked nine times and on the big screen they would zoom in on his terrified eyes every replay.

I can't help but wonder what those attendees in 1975 would have imagined about their Diplomacy progeny. The hobby looks greatly different than those times of writing letters cross country and waiting for a reply. Our negotiations now are instantaneous, and we have the ability to play whole tournaments only with voice chat. Circumstances are very different than their day, but yet still the same. Like the 1975 tournament, ours was filled with laughter, friendship, fierce competition, and Edi Birsan. In short, a Diplomacy tournament is still the same as it always has been.



Robert's Diplomacy board is nestled safely again in my home along with my extensive trophy collection. Well, at least my 4-year-old thinks it's extensive. That map is worth more though than any trophy I have or may obtain. It is more than a decoration or memento. That map is a reminder of the enduring legacy of Allan Calhamer: the friendships his game has forged.